

SOME ASPECTS OF SOCIAL PHOBIA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

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Social Phobia (SP) is one of the most prevalent anxiety disorder, characterized by overwhelming anxiety and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations. People with social phobia have an intense, persistent, and chronic fear of being watched and judged by others and of doing things that will embarrass them. This excessive anxiety usually leads to avoidance behavior that can severely affect normal daily living. SP usually begins in childhood or early adolescence. There is some evidence that genetic factors are involved.

A number of studies have emphasized the high co-morbidity of social phobia with a number of other psychiatric disorders, including substance use disorders. Though clearly elevated there is much debate as to the nature of this relationship. Substance abuse may develop if people try to self-medicate their anxiety and make themselves more comfortable in social situations. Anxiety may be a result of alcohol or drug abuse due to a substance's anxiogenic effects or through protracted withdrawal syndromes. Substance abusers incur more pathological and unstable life circumstances, making them more susceptible to future stress and anxiety; and there may be a genetic susceptibility in some people which makes them vulnerable to both disorders.

The purpose of this article is to summarize research findings on SP and its complex relationship with substance use disorder. Clinical anxiety and substance abuse both warrant treatment and in all likelihood, each helps perpetuate the other.