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Social Anxiety in Adolescents: the Role of Early Negative Memories and Fear of Compassion

M. Cunha¹, C. Pereira², A. Galhardo¹, M. Couto², I. Massano-Cardoso¹

¹Psychology, Miguel Torga Institute CINEICC- Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal ; ²Psychology, Miguel Torga Institute, Coimbra, Portugal

Introduction: Social anxiety refers to the discomfort felt in situations of social interaction or performance and may be an especially intense emotion in adolescence due to characteristics and developmental tasks of this age group. Although it is a common emotion and has an adaptive function, it can also develop as a negative experience raising serious difficulties in school and social life of young people.

Objectives: This study analyses the contribution of childhood negative memories and fear of compassion in social anxiety in adolescence.

Method: Three hundred and twenty adolescents (186 boys and 134 girls) with ages ranging from 12 to 19 years old took part in the study. Participants completed the following self-report measures: Early Life Experiences Scale for Adolescents, Fear of Compassion Scale (FCS-A) and the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A).

Results: Significant gender differences were found regarding social anxiety, empathy and early unvalued experiences within the family. Age was only correlated with social anxiety. Social anxiety showed a significant and expected correlation with the study variables. The model including fear of compassionate feelings (from other and from oneself) and early unvalued experiences showed to be the best predictor of social anxiety.

Conclusions: This study integrates the contribution of less explored variables, as the fear of compassion and early negative memories, in the understanding of social anxiety in adolescents. Results suggest that these variables may have an important role and should be incorporated in psychological interventions for social anxiety in adolescence.