

## Fear of Rejection: Scale Development and Validation

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### Abstract

*The present article tries to define the construct of fear of rejection and describes the development of the fear of rejection scale. Fear of rejection can be defined as an irrational fear of being rejected before making any actual attempt. It may be the result of continuous rejection in the past. Fear of rejection can hamper the daily functioning of the person and hence affecting the overall physical and psychological health. It is a grave social problem getting its roots deepening in the lives of adolescents and young adults to be dealt with. The scale so developed was administered to 400 adolescents to determine its factor structure and the data collected were subjected to factor analysis by using SPSS 20. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was carried out and varimax rotation technique was used for rotating the factors. PCA yielded simple three-factor structure. The three factors accounted for 52.38% of the variance. The present scale can be used for further research and for development programs in school/universities and organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Rejection, Fear of rejection, Social Anxiety, Adolescents.*

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### Fear of Rejection

Rejection has been defined as the action of rejecting or the state of being rejected (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). The word rejection was first used in psychology in 1931 by the students of Smith College and by P. M. Symonds in 1939 in the study of the parent-child relationship. The terms rejection and overprotection seem to have emerged as a result of child guidance movement. Rejection is a looming threat in everyone's life; with every attempt at something new or difficult, there is always the possibility that one will be rejected. Schrier (2012) reported that 'Fear of rejection is an irrational belief that no one will accept you for the person you are, what you stand for and how you behave', and this may be the result of continuous rejection in the past. It is a kind of extreme stress felt in response to a number of factors in a person's environment. These factors can be rejection from a particular community,

prejudice, ethnic discrimination, biases and others, so fear of rejection can be considered as a multifaceted construct that may result in many severe malfunctionings such as rejection sensitivity, social distancing, exclusion, identity conflict, insecurity, and even violence.

Concerns or fear of rejection can make individuals to avoid the clear and direct overtures that would leave them vulnerable to rejection and humiliation (Vorauer et. al., 2003). Leary and Kowalsky, 1995 in their research show that stressed individuals have a tendency to withdraw or disaffiliate themselves from situations that evoke evaluative concerns. Fear of rejection also found to impede interest in intergroup interactions (Shapiro et. al., 2011).

Acceptance and rejection both are extremely important events in an individual's life; both can rouse him/her emotionally and psychologically. On being rejected a person can develop a number of negative feelings that may

eventually result in lower self-esteem, aggression and other antisocial behaviors. On the other hand, being accepted tends to increase the self-esteem and confidence of a person. In their study, Buckley, Winkel, and Leary (2004) found that the effects of rejection are stronger than the effects of acceptance because negative experiences tend to generate more feelings of hurt and pain leading to aggressive and negative behaviors. A meta-analysis of studies on rejection showed that self-esteem is lowered by rejection and it also exacerbates the mood and makes a person feel bad about himself as a person; he/she is more prone to feel worthless and incompetent after encountering rejection (Gerber & Wheeler, 2009).

Studies have found that children's course of normal and healthy social development is highly affected by the negative experiences of rejection and exclusion from social groups they face in their lives (Rubin et al., 1998). For example, children who are rejected from social groups are at risk for poor academic achievement, increased depression, and adolescent delinquency (Asher & Coie, 1990; Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Graham and Taylor, 2002). This is further pointed out by research on interpersonal rejection in adult interactions, which, also states that interpersonal rejection often leads to depression, anxiety, feelings of nervousness and a reduced positive motivation to join groups (Leary, 2015).

Fear of rejection has been studied earlier in the light of religious exclusion from the church members or rejection by God (Eduard H. Schludermann et al., 2001) and fear of rejection in romantic relationships (Jacquie D. Varauer et al., 2003). But it is not studied in the context of majority and minority community perspective. Research has shown that people belonging to ethnic minority groups often assume that people of another group will reject them; be unwilling to accept them on the basis of their group membership, whether it is because of unfair

treatment i.e. discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), or lack of respect i.e. devaluation (Huo & Molina, 2006), so the new test measuring fear of rejection among adolescent will be proved very useful tool in assessing the problems and then providing probable solution to eradicate them.

Fear of rejection may lead to a number of behavioral, cognitive and affective problems among adolescents. Behavioral, cognitive and affective impairments are all interwoven with each other. Fear of rejection may have such strong effect on one's health involving each and every aspect of his life. Person with fear of rejection, whether by personal or vicarious experience, strongly assumes that they will be treated the same way every time they encounter certain situation and this irrational expectation of being rejected may deeply scar them, they may have never been exposed to healthy way of dealing with conflict or disagreement or they may lack healthy self concept, sense of self worth or positive self esteem.

A number of researchers have developed measures that are available to measure ethnic discrimination (Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire PEDQ; Brondolo et al., 2001), security-insecurity (Maslow, 1952), threat perception and prejudice, but there is no such scale that can measure fear of rejection which is becoming the most common trait among the youths and adolescents who are leading a stressful life with new challenges and hurdles in their day to day life and ultimately hampering their overall health.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the present study was to develop a scale on fear of rejection. Further, to examine the psychometric properties of Fear of Rejection scale and to conduct the factor analyses necessary to identify content based sub-dimensions of Fear of Rejection scale.

### The significance of the new measure

To evaluate the effects of fear of rejection within the stress model, it is necessary to have reliable and valid measures of exposure to fear of rejection. A number of investigators have developed measures for other dimensions but a recent review has pointed out that there are still limited published data on this dimension. Specifically, an instrument that can be used to assess it.

Though several previous studies support the notion that various determinants of fear of rejection viz. Exclusion, rejection sensitivity, social stigma, devaluation, stereotype threat and others, prevent from having sound mental wellbeing; fear of rejection has not yet been studied empirically. Further, in the present article, the results of an attempt to create a scale that measures fear of rejection have been reported.

The paper describes a new instrument, the fear of rejection scale. The scale is a new work towards dealing with the important social problem, especially among adolescents, prevailing in present society. The actual items of the scale inquired about a varied number of everyday experiences, especially related to intergroup interaction. The scale can be used with any ethnic group.

The minimum and maximum possible score of the scale varies from 15 to 105. A higher score indicates a higher level of fear of rejection.

### Participants and procedure

The final draft of the questionnaire with seventeen items was administered to a large sample consisting adolescents of various schools of Aligarh Muslim University. A total of 400 adolescent participants (243 female, 60.75%; 157 male, 39.25%) completed the Fear

of Rejection scale. The participants were selected from class 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Development of Fear of Rejection Scale

To develop the Fear of Rejection scale (FOR Scale), items were first selected on the basis of literature review available on the subject. Specifically, a preliminary version of the questionnaire with twenty-two items was introduced to five experts from the department of psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. Expert's feedback was sought to filter the phrasing of presented items, to provide feedback about the meaning and acceptability of the questions, to generate new items reflecting their understanding of the construct, to delete or remove inept items and to gain assistance on the practicability of administration in large group setting and to suggest other measurement strategies. The draft version of the questionnaire included items and methods suggested by the experts. Five items were deleted from the original scale.

The fear of rejection scale with twenty items was finalized with 7-point Likert type responses, viz. 'Always', 'Very often', 'Often', 'Sometimes', 'Seldom', 'Very Seldom', 'Never'

### Scoring System

#### Table 1 Scoring System

Always	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Very Seldom	Never
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Participants' average age was 16 years (14-18 years). The majority of participants self-identified as Muslims (258; 64.5% while 138 Participants; 34.5% self-identified as Hindus, 4; 1% others. 335; 83.7% participants were from an urban background and 62; 15.5% participants from a rural background and 3 participants did not record their area of living.

The measure was administered to students in groups; class wise. Participants were helped if they could not understand any term in

the scale; researcher was available to assist as necessary. Instructions for the participants were provided at the beginning of the scale. The subjects were assured that their responses will be kept confidential and will be used for the research purpose only. Participants were asked to give information regarding basic demographic details i.e. gender, age, religion, SES, an area they live in, parents' education and their level of education.

## Results

### Factor Structure of the Fear of Rejection Scale

Content validity of the scale was verified by some experts of the field and academicians. There are various methods to establish construct validity of the tool. Factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to establish the construct validity of the tool. Data screening was carried out to overcome existence of multicollinearity and singularity in the scale. For testing multicollinearity and singularity 'determinant' of R matrix was estimated and it

was greater than .00001. Sample adequacy was also carried out and found to be greater than .50 as required in both cases.

The principal component analysis was performed on responses to the 20 item fear of rejection scale to condense the data. Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted and subjected to varimax rotation. The three factors defined by three or more items were interpretable and together accounted for 52.38% of total variance.

Two items having factor loading below than .4 were removed as a result of the principal component analysis. 15 of the original seventeen items designed to assess the various facets of fear of rejection were selected as the final version of the scale. The percentage of variance accounted by factors varies from 23.23 to 13.48. The factorial validity of the sale was found high. The factor loadings, the percentage of variance and cumulative percent of variance for each factor are shown in the table given.

**Table 2 Items and Factor Loadings of Fear of Rejection Scale**

	Exclusion	Rejection Sensitivity	People Pleasing
I avoid people from other groups	.862		
I become anxious when people make rude gestures	.824		
I am critical of people from other groups	.806		
It makes me feel anxious when others do not trust me	.789		
I am comfortable with people from different background	.768		
I am basically shy and unsocial	.694		
I become depressed when someone criticizes me		.758	
It bothers me when someone from other religious group calls me bad names		.748	
When I sense that I might be rejected by others, I become nervous and anxious		.690	
I become anxious when people make rude gestures		.622	
It bothers me when someone ignores me		.570	

I find myself trying to impress others			.772
I make adjustments according to the wishes of others			.756
I put extra efforts in pleasing people			.715
I feel like an outsider because of my religious affiliation			.450
<b>Percentage of variance</b>	23.23	15.66	13.48
<b>Cumulative percentage of Variance</b>	23.23	38.89	52.38

### Inter-Factorial Validity

The Inter-Factorial Validity of the scale was calculated to test the construct validity of the scale. Pearson's correlations coefficients were calculated between the factors, measuring the similar construct, fear of rejection. Analyses confirm that all the factors as correlated to each

other. All the factors were found to have a significant positive correlation with each other at .01 level (exclusion and rejection sensitivity,  $r=.30$   $p<.01$ ; exclusion and people pleasing,  $r=.130$   $p<.01$ ; rejection sensitivity and people pleasing,  $r=.327$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

**Table 3 Inter Correlations between Factors**

Factors	F1	F2	F3
<b>Exclusion (F1)</b>	1		
<b>Rejection Sensitivity (F2)</b>	.300**	1	
<b>People Pleasing (F3)</b>	.130**	.327**	1

\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Inter-factorial correlations indicate that all the factors are significantly correlated with each other and measuring the same construct. Low correlations between the factors show that each dimension independently measures the construct.

### Reliability

The psychometric properties of fear of rejection scale have been shown and Cronbach's alpha of each factor has also been calculated and shown in the table given.

**Table 4 Psychometric Properties of Fear of Rejection Scale**

Full group (n=400)		Subscale			Item	
Factors	No. of items	Coefficient alpha(?)	M	SD	M	SD
Exclusion	6	.890	23.29	11.01	3.88	1.8
Rejection sensitivity	5	.756	17.75	6.86	3.5	1.3
People pleasing	3	.688	14.66	6.06	3.73	1.7
<b>Total Scale</b>	17	.796	62.70	17.68	3.6	1.04

The Cronbach's Alpha for each of the four factors varies from .68 to .89, which indicates that the internal consistency of the factors of the scale was adequate.

The Cronbach's Alpha for the total fear of rejection scale was found .79 which is significant at .01 levels. The internal consistency of the scale has been found to be

high that supports the notion that the scale has excellent reliability.

### Discussion

The objective of the study was to develop and determine the psychometric characteristics, i.e. reliability and validity of the Fear of Rejection scale developed for adolescents of the Indian population (especially for minority community). Using principal component analysis, we determine the internal factorial/construct validity of the scale, which is highly satisfactory. As a result of the principal component analysis, three factors namely, exclusion, rejection sensitivity and people pleasing emerged naturally measuring the fear of rejection in adolescents of the Indian population. Two items namely '**I don't understand what people of other group expect from me**' and '**I try not to look different from others**', were deleted from the scale as a result of factor analysis. These items yielded low factor loadings and thus removed from the scale to form the final version of the fear of rejection scale with fifteen items. Total scale coefficient alpha was found to be .79, based on 400 adolescents confirmed that the fear of rejection scale has quite satisfactory psychometric properties.

Jessica L Lakin et. al. (2008) found in their study that exclusion is linked with heightened mimicry behavior in order to look like others which he called a direct threat to belongingness. Nuran Bayram (2012) also found that the lack or absence of social participation may negatively affect the overall quality of life of a person and rejection concerns may lead to stressful intergroup interaction (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). The present study presents a scale incorporating all these variables which directly or indirectly affects the overall quality of life of people and we expect that development of the fear of rejection scale will

help set off a new line of research that explores the relationship between fear of rejection and other significant psychological processes. Because fear of rejection may have deleterious psychological effects, it is important to study this variable with other social factors too so that remedial steps can be taken to reduce this fear among the adolescents and young.

In future research, the scale may be standardized on the different population as it is limited only to adolescents and some other means of measuring fear of rejection should also be devised in order to understand the phenomenon more clearly.

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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