



A Study on Psychological Distress due to Fear of Missing Out and Gaslighting among Young Adults

Suhani Sanghai, Undergraduate Student, MGM University, Aurangabad, India.

Email: suhanisanghai04@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

We live in a society that is always growing and modernizing, which makes everything competitive among individuals, particularly young adults who are still adjusting to new obligations. These are people between the age group of 18 and 25 years. This competition and the desire to stay on top and always be the best can lead to FOMO (fear of missing out), which can be fueled by social media and distorts reality and fuels inadequacy. Young adults may also feel gaslighted by others, which erodes self-esteem and trust, exacerbating anxiety. Together, these might induce psychological distress, eventually leading to the individual's demise. To measure FOMO, gaslighting and psychological distress standardized scales were used, and data was collected from a total sample of 55 people in the 18-25 age group. The purpose is to study psychological distress due to FOMO and gaslighting among young adults. The results found out that, there is a considerable positive correlation between psychological distress with gaslighting and FOMO and a significant positive correlation between gaslighting and FOMO. There are few measures that can

be taken to deal with FOMO, gaslighting and psychological distress that is to limit the usage of social media, practice mindfulness, engage in enjoyable activities and seeking professional help. These can help reduce the feeling of isolation, inadequacy, improve self-esteem, trust, and develop healthy coping mechanisms.

Keywords: Psychological Distress, Fear Of Missing Out, Gaslighting, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence gives way to a phase known as "young adulthood," which is defined as the age range between 18 and 25. Since young adulthood is often associated with the beginning of employment, responsibilities, and the fulfillment of social obligations, it can be difficult for certain people. These challenges might lead to psychological distress, FOMO (fear of missing out), or being gaslighted by others. The effects of these can be felt by the person, causing him to feel as though he is missing out on a lot in comparison to his peers, which can lead to lack of sleep, decreased life competency, emotional tension, negatively affecting physical well-being, anxiety, and a lack of emotional control. One may also experience emotional suffering marked by loss of interest, unhappiness, desperateness, restlessness, and feeling tense as symptoms of psychological distress. Based on information from the Hindustan Times (2023), approximately 50 percent of youngsters experience FOMO, or "fear of missing out." Additionally, according to a National Domestic Violence Hotline survey, 74% of female victims of domestic abuse reported that their spouse had gaslighted them (Conrad, 2023). Further, a study conducted on 51861 individuals found that the rate of distress has been steadily increasing by 46%, with young adults experiencing this increase the most (Jackson et al., 2023).

Psychological Distress

APA dictionary of psychology (2018) has defined psychological distress as, “a set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people. In some cases, however, psychological distress may indicate the beginning of major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, somatization disorder, or a variety of other clinical conditions. It is thought to be what is assessed by many putative self-report measures of depression and anxiety.” Health Euniversity (2023) describes it as, “the unpleasant feelings or emotions that you may have when you feel overwhelmed. These emotions and feelings can get in the way of your daily living and affect how you react to the people around you.”

Jackson and Finney (2002) conducted a study that looked at the relationship between the college stage, negative life events, and psychological distress in young adults discovered that negative experiences in peer relationships were the most predictive of distress. Compared to older pupils, younger children were more prone to exhibit animosity or rage and were more vulnerable to unpleasant life experiences in all areas. This implies that younger individuals might not have the emotional reserves or coping skills necessary to handle stressful circumstances well.

According to a study conducted by Roenigk et al. (2023) on 420 African American young adults, revealed associations between gender, age, resilient coping, fear of missing out (FOMO), and COVID-19 news exposure with anxiety and depression. Findings suggest a need for interventions focusing on younger individuals, women, promoting adaptive coping, and addressing FOMO to alleviate psychological distress.

Bonfanti et al. (2022) conducted a study that investigates the relationship between Problematic Facebook Use (PFU) and changes in psychological distress and well-being during the Italian second wave. Three PFU levels (healthy, moderate, and high) were found in 493 subjects. The findings show a persistent, substantial correlation between PFU and psychological discomfort and well-being, pointing to trait-like differences rather than transient alterations. The study emphasizes how PFU continued to influence people's mental health throughout the pandemic.

A quantitative correlational study by Savitri (2019) investigated how social media users in their emerging adult years deal with the psychological effects of FOMO. Through accidental sampling, 400 participants were selected from the online questionnaire. Two measures were used: the modified psychological well-being scale ($\alpha = 0.941$) and the FOMO scale ($\alpha = 0.849$). Simple linear regression analysis results showed that FOMO explained 9.99% of the variance and substantially predicted psychological well-being ($F=43.753$; $p=0.000 < \alpha 0.05$). The formula for the regression was $Y = 154.264 - 0.633X$. The study explores the topic of how rising adult social media users' psychological health is affected by FOMO.

Fear of Missing Out

According to TechTarget (2019), it is defined as, “an emotional response to the belief that other people are living better, more satisfying lives or that important opportunities are being missed. FOMO often leads to feelings of unease, dissatisfaction, depression, and stress.” PsychCentral describes it as, “Fear of missing out, or FOMO, is the anxiety or apprehension surrounding missing out on things like social events, gatherings, the latest gossip or news.” AK et al. (2013) describes FOMO as, “scientific literature as involving two specific primary components: a) apprehension

that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, and b) the persistent desire to stay connected with people in one's social network. The first component maps onto the cognitive aspect of anxiety (e.g., worry, rumination, etc.). The latter component involves a behavioral strategy aimed at relieving such anxiety analogous to how compulsions aim (though maladaptively) to relieve anxiety in obsessive compulsive disorder. Currently, this behavioral component of FOMO most often involves frequent checking of SNS and messaging services to maintain social connections and avoid missing out on rewarding experiences.”

A study by Kacker and Saurav (2020) looked at the connections between social media addiction, fear of missing out (FOMO), and several psychological traits like anxiety, aggressiveness, and interpersonal interactions. Social media usage may exacerbate psychological suffering, according to the data, which showed a strong positive association between FOMO, social media addiction, and these psychological variables.

Riordan et al. (2015) studied the relationship between FOMO, alcohol use, and alcohol-related consequences in college students in which was conducted on 182 participants found out that Without necessarily drinking more alcohol overall, college students who have greater levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) are more likely to suffer from hangovers, blackouts, and injuries because of alcohol use. This implies that students' drinking habits may be influenced by FOMO, resulting in higher alcohol consumption on each occasion. Taking social issues like FOMO into consideration may help lower the harm that alcohol causes to college students.

According to a study by Ibrahim et al. (2022), a cross-sectional study found that higher levels of anxiety and despair are associated with FOMO (fear of missing out). A noteworthy positive correlation was found between FOMO and psychological factors, even though the majority of subjects reported low FOMO and usual depression-anxiety ratings. There were also significant gender disparities in the prevalence of FOMO. These results provide light on FOMO by demonstrating how it helps with relatedness demands while also causing psychological discomfort.

Gaslighting

Psychology Today (2023) defines gaslighting as, “an insidious form of manipulation and psychological control. Victims of gaslighting are deliberately and systematically fed false information that leads them to question what they know to be true, often about themselves. They may end up doubting their memory, their perception, and even their sanity.” It is defined by MedicalNewsToday (2023) as, “a form of psychological abuse where a person causes someone to question their sanity, memories, or perception of reality. People who experience gaslighting may feel confused, anxious, or unable to trust themselves.”

A study conducted by Miana et al. (2021) studied how personality correlates of gaslighting behaviors in young adults on a group of 250 young adults. The findings demonstrated that gaslighting behaviors were more common among abusers who had higher levels of disinhibition, psychopathy, and detachedness. Victims of gaslighting were more likely to be aggressive, disinhibited, and psychotic survivors.

Dickson et al. (2023) conducted a study on gaslighting and its application to interpersonal violence. Using a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), the researchers initially sought to ascertain the scholarly understanding of gaslighting. After that, they created a measure of gaslighting behavior and used it in an adult online survey. The findings demonstrated a general correlation between emotional abuse and both gaslighting perpetration and victimization. The association with trait aggressiveness was narrow and mostly restricted to victims who showed greater levels of trait aggression, which captured more emotional elements (such as hostility or fury).

PURPOSE

The purpose is to study psychological distress due to FOMO and gaslighting among young adults.

HYPOTHESIS

- There will be significant relationship between psychological distress and FOMO.
- There will be significant relationship between psychological distress and gaslighting.
- There will be significant relationship between FOMO and gaslighting.

METHODS

Sample

A total sample of 55 in the age range 18-25 was collected from Aurangabad.

Measures

- **Fear of Missing Out Scale**, FOMO as developed by Przybylski et al. (2013), consists of 10 questions, each rated on a five-point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree.’ Used as an instrument for the assessment of fear of missing out.
- **Gaslighting Inventory Scale**, (GSI) as developed by Evans (2022), consists of 10 questions, each rated on a five-point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree.’ Used as an instrument for the assessment of gaslighting.
- **Kessler Psychological Distress Scale**, (K10) as developed by Kessler et al. (2003), consists of 10 questions, each rated on a five-point scale from ‘none of the time’ to ‘all of the time.’ Used as an instrument for the assessment of psychological distress.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms; each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized Psychological Tests were administered to the participants.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Result

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Fomo	Gaslighting	Psychological distress
N	55	55	55
Mean	28.0	24.9	25.2
Standard deviation	8.14	10.8	10.8

Table 2

Correlation among psychological distress, fear of missing out and gaslighting

	FOMO		Gaslighting		psychological distress
FOMO	—				
gaslighting	0.559	***	—		
psychological distress	0.377	**	0.711	***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings of the correlational statistical study clearly suggest that there is a considerable positive correlation between psychological distress with FOMO ($r = 0.377$, $p < .01$); and psychological distress with gaslighting ($r=0.711$, $p < .001$). A significant positive correlation between gaslighting and FOMO ($r = 0.559$, $p < .001$). The present study's results are consistent with the prediction that psychological distress is positively correlated with FOMO and gaslighting and gaslighting is positively correlated with fomo. The current study's findings are in line with earlier research by Malik et al. (2023) which found that there is a a strong positive correlation between social media addiction, psychological discomfort, FOMO, and boredom propensity. It was shown that a strong predictor of social media addiction was psychological suffering. Furthermore, the associations between psychological discomfort and social media addiction were partially mediated by boredom proneness and fear of missing out. It also aligns with research conducted by Mukhtar (2023) which looked at the effect of gaslighting on mental health symptoms in victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) and found that gaslighting was linked to increased levels of anxiety, despair, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among IPV victims. The researchers also discovered that gaslighting was a better predictor of PTSD symptoms than other types of IPV abuse. Thus, the findings bolster the notion that there is a significant positive correlation between psychological distress with gaslighting and fomo and positive correlation between gaslighting and FOMO.

CONCLUSION

In the evolving world where everyone wants to be better than each other it's common for human beings to experience psychological distress caused due to fear of missing out and gaslighting.

Through this research the results confirms that psychological distress is correlated with both FOMO and gaslighting and there is also correlation between gaslighting and FOMO. There are three potential limitations concerning the results of this study. The first limitation concerns the taken age of the participants that is 18 to 25, focusing only on young adults. The second potential limitation is that the survey was done only in Aurangabad city and the final limitation is that it only focuses on gaslighting and fomo in young adults. In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current finding by examining the factors causing fomo and gaslighting by others. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the prevalence of psychological distress, fomo and gaslighting among young adults. Future research should address these limitations and expand on these findings to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies.

REFERENCES

- APA Dictionary of Psychology*. (n.d.). <https://dictionary.apa.org/psychological-distress>
- Brush, K. (2019, July 8). FOMO (fear of missing out). WhatIs.com.
<https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/FOMO-fear-of-missing-out>
- Bonfanti, R.C., Salerno, L., Brugnera, A. et al. A longitudinal investigation on problematic Facebook use, psychological distress and well-being during the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic. *Sci Rep* 12, 21828 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-26281-0>
- Conrad, M. (2023, August 23). What Is Gaslighting? Definition, Examples And Support. *Forbes Health*. <https://www.forbes.com/health/mind/what-is-gaslighting/#:~:text=In%20a%20survey%%20conducted%20by,their%20partner%20or%20ex%2Dpartner>
- Dickson, P., Ireland, J. L., & Birch, P. (2023). Gaslighting and its application to interpersonal violence. *Journal of criminological research, policy and practice*, 9(1), 31-46.
- Huizen, J. (2023, October 30). What is gaslighting?
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/gaslighting>
- Jackson, P. B., & Finney, M. (2002). Negative life events and psychological distress among young adults. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 186-201.
- Kacker, P., & Saurav, S. (2020). Correlation of missing out (fomo), anxiety and aggression of young adults. *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah*, 8(5), 132-138.
- Malik, L., Shahnawaz, M., Rehman, U., P., Uniyal, R., & Griffiths, M. D. (2023, June 6). Mediating Roles of Fear of Missing Out and Boredom Proneness on Psychological

- Distress and Social Media Addiction Among Indian Adolescents. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-023-00323-4>
- Miano, P., Bellomare, M., & Genova, V. G. (2021). Personality correlates of gaslighting behaviours in young adults. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 27(3), 285-298.
- Miller-Roenigk, B. D., Jester, J. K., Stevens-Watkins, D. J., & Francis, D. B. (2023). Correlates of Psychological Distress Among African American Young Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984231191851>
- Mukhtar, S. (2023, April 7). Public Health Aspects of Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Abuse and Trauma (DIVAT) during COVID-19 Quarantine: Imbalanced Power Dynamic and Sexual, Emotional, and Psychological Abuse. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, 35(4), 301–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10105395231164439>
- P. (2023, October 6). How FOMO might lurk behind teen social media anxiety. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/health/how-fomo-might-lurk-behind-teen-social-media-anxiety-101696598418140.html>
- Psychological distress. Psychological Distress | Cardiac College. (n.d.).
https://www.healthuniversity.ca/EN/CardiacCollege/Wellbeing/Stress_And_Sense_Of_Control/Pages/psychological-distress.aspx
- Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848.

- PsyD, J. M. G. (2022, March 31). All About FOMO: Overcoming Your Fear of Missing Out. Psych Central. <https://psychcentral.com/health/what-is-fomo-the-fear-of-missing-out#definition>
- Riordan, B. C., Flett, J. A., Hunter, J. A., Scarf, D., & Conner, T. S. (2015). Fear of missing out (FoMO): The relationship between FoMO, alcohol use, and alcohol-related consequences in college students. *Annals of Neuroscience and Psychology*, 2(7), 1-7.
- Savitri, J. A. (2019). Impact of fear of missing out on psychological well-being among emerging adulthood aged social media users. *Psychological Research and Intervention*, 2(2), 65-72.
- Sultan Ibrahim, S. A., Nur Wahida Mahmud Pauzi, Dahlan, A. ., & Vetrayan, J. . (2022). Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and its relationship with Depression and Anxiety among University Students. *Environment-Behavior Proceedings Journal*, 7(20), 233–238. <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7i20.3358>
- Sussex Publishers. (n.d.). Gaslighting. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/gaslighting#:~:text=Gaslighting%20is%20a%20insidious%20form,perception%2C%20and%20even%20their%20sanity.>