Vol. 4, Issue 11 November 2026 ISSN: 2584-0142



A Study on Distress Disclosure, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Disclosure to AI among Female Young Adults

Avni, *University of Delhi*
avnivashisth9@gmail.com

Abstract: Now increasingly AI usage has woven into everyday lives. It has become more accessible and convenient for a wide range of tasks and seeking mental health advice and support are natural adaptations of technological advancement, where AI offers more anonymous reciprocity-based conversation which makes self-disclosure to AI more appealing. Although previous literature explored the various factors associated with self-disclosure to AI, insufficient attention has been given to the psychological dimension in particular how willingness to disclose stress and fear is negatively evaluated by others associated with how individuals disclose their personal information to AI. Females have consistently been reported to have a high level of distress disclosure as compared to men. However, they also demonstrated high concerns regarding being negatively evaluated by others, these differences highlight the relevance of females, one of the significant focused populations for the study. The present study aimed to examine How Distress disclosure and Fear of negative evaluation relates with Self- disclosure to AI and its four sub-dimensions (Breadth, depth, honesty and valence) using standardized self-report measures, including The Distress disclosure (DDI), Brief fear of negative evaluation scale (BFNE), self-disclosure to AI scale among female young adults. A correlation design was incorporated with 118 female participants ages between 18-30 and The findings showed positive correlation between Fear of negative evaluation and depth of self-disclosure to AI, significant negative correlation with Valence of self-disclosure to AI, and Breadth of self-disclosure to AI is negatively correlated with Distress disclosure. The results indicate that individuals' high fear of negative evaluation may be associated with more deep and intimate disclosure to AI, alongside valence refers to emotional tone while self-disclosure to AI its negative association with fear of negative evaluation indicate females with

high fear of negative evaluation are associated with sharing less positive emotional information with AI. The study also proposed future research directions while following potential considerations for mental health professionals regarding support accessibility, authenticity and taking consistent feedback in light of how clients are interacting with AI.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Distress Disclosure, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Self Disclosure To AI, Female Young Adults.*

1. Introduction

AI (artificial intelligence) has increasingly become an integral part of everyday life. From general tasks to mental health advice. An anonymous survey was conducted in 2025 among US citizens including 272 females and 239 males and in results AI appears as a significant component for mental health help-seeking behavior (Udea et al.,2026). Beyond its use for general tasks AI has also emerged as an accessible platform for seeking mental health support. Moreover Head, K.R. (2025) highlights the growing AI dependency in individuals' lives, describing it as a potential "mind crisis" because of increasing usage of AI and possibility of addictive patterns of behaviour. AI tools may offer convenience and easily accessible information and conversations; it also comes with potential risk factors and limitations.

Sharing personal experience and self-disclosure about emotional difficulties benefits in lowering mental health problems, studies show the significance of distress disclosure to others that help in lowering the stress and anxiety in individuals however people are hesitant to share their distress episodes due to the fear of being judged by others or not to be evaluated negatively. Whereas Individuals perceive interaction with AI very personalised and a space with privacy and anonymity, AI creates the conversation non-judgmental, non-threatening, that indicates increasingly share of more personal information hence self-disclosure to AI chatbots and conversational technologies which accelerate the self-disclosure to AI (Papneja & Yadav, 2024b).

To understand the self-disclosure to AI, it can be measured into different dimensions of disclosing personal information and expressing emotion to AI, the breadth of disclosure refers to the range and variety of topics discussed with AI, depth of self-disclosure, how an individual shares personal information and emotional expression deeply and intimately. How honestly an individual is disclosing as one of the dimensions, and at last valence the emotional tone an individual used while having AI-human interaction (Chu et al., 2023; Papneja & Yadav, 2025). Distress disclosure can be understood by the level of an individual disclosing their distressing thoughts, feelings and emotions (Kahn & Heslings, 2001) whereas fear of negative

evaluation is having concerns about being evaluated negatively by others (Watson & Friend, 1969).

Furthermore, a research study by Iqbal and Ajmal (2018) reported that female participants have a high level of fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety as compared to male participants. Snell Jr. et al. (1989) conducted a research study to find out the gender difference to know the different level of willingness to share emotional distress with others and the result showed that females are more willing to disclose their emotional experiences than men. Despite adapting AI as an alternative for disclosing personal information and emotional expression there is a critical gap within the literature that addresses the level of distress disclosure and concerns regarding being evaluated negatively by others relates with the different type of self-disclosure to AI. Another gap under the consideration is to study the relationship of concerns and apprehension of perceived negatively by others, tendency to disclose distressing personal information and self-disclosure to AI among the female population.

Distress Disclosure

According to Kahn and Heslings (2001) Distress disclosure refers to the tendency of an individual to share personal distressing thoughts, feelings and emotions to others rather than conceal within. A research study conducted by Ward et al. (2007) to understand the distress disclosure level among the general population, exploring its relationship with psychological wellbeing and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age. The study employed the DDI distress disclosure index to measure the distress disclosure level; findings also validated the unidimensional element of the scale. The study highlights the significant difference with level of distress disclosure and socio- demographic characteristics, women and young adults showed greater willingness to disclose distress experience. Moreover, higher levels of distress disclosure were reported to be significant in association with greater psychological wellbeing. The results also show the importance of individuals' willingness to express their distress with help seeking behaviors and mental wellbeing. Another study by Klunk (2014) titled “Distress disclosure and Personality in College students”, researcher examined the distress disclosure, gender and personality factors to know the length, depth and breadth of the disclosure by hypotheses of their responses if they are confiding their unpleasant feelings, researcher also asked the identity of the person participants disclose their confide feelings. The distress disclosure index and Neo five factor personality scales were used, and other demographic details were also collected. The finding shows positive association between depth and openness, neuroticism and length, gender with length. The study highlights that males were

more likely to have longer disclosure. It also mentions that the disclosure target, personality factor, gender may act as a predictor to the tendency of disclosure. Furthermore, research on distress disclosure on social media and its potential influencing factors and examining how platform features are related to distress disclosure, conducted by Zhang et al. (2021) during the covid-19 pandemic. 470 American adults participated in the survey. The findings highlight the importance of perceived anonymity, persistent, visual control, and relational closeness to the audience interactively influence the depth of disclosure. The Study also significantly mentions the role of both individuals' perception and communication context when examining online disclosure.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation refers to the concerns being judged, evaluated by others or perceived negatively (Watson & Friend, 1969). Iqbal and Ajmal (2018) studied Fear of negative evaluation and its relationship with social anxiety among young adults. The study used Leary's Brief fear of negative evaluation and Liebowitz's social anxiety scale to measure the variable. The study includes 230 young adults 110 males and 120 females, the results showed significant positive relationship among fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety. It also highlights that female students reported higher levels of fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety than male students. Another study by Sebastian et al. (2022) explores the relationship of fear of negative evaluation and self-efficacy. A quantitative correlational method was used. The study employed young adults from different colleges in Kerala. the random sampling method was used where an equal number of male and female samples were taken. The findings show a significant positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and self-efficacy among the samples. A study by Singh et al. (2026) conducted the research to understand the fear of negative evaluation and its relationship with loneliness among young adults aged 18 to 25. The finding showed that the high level of fear of negative evaluation leads to social avoidance, withdrawal, and increases the feeling of loneliness. The study also highlights the bidirectional relationship of fear of negative evaluation and loneliness. The relationship may contribute to depression, anxiety, reduced psychological well-being, low academic engagement among students and its suggested more longitudinal research and interventions should be incorporated to understand the role of social judgement and mental health among young adults.

Self-Disclosure to AI

Self-disclosure to AI can be defined as to the extent an individual willingly communicates personal information, feelings, thoughts, private concerns and experience while

interacting with artificial intelligence based conversational agents. (Papneja & Yadav, 2025; Ho, 2018). A study by Ryan et al. (2026) conducted a research survey among Young US citizens to know their use of AI chatbots for taking mental health advice; the survey includes around 42 million US youth. The findings showed that every fifth of adolescents and young adults reported uses of AI chatbots for mental health advice. Another study (Ali & Reghu, 2026) which explores the rapid adoption of AI chatbots for mental health care among Indian youth, the study employed semi-structured interview a qualitative method to understand the use of AI for mental health support, results showed that ai mediated mental health support for at least once in the preceding six months, Due to the barriers in seeking professional help for mental health support Youth find AI more convenient and accessible however study also described some potential risk and imitations while using AI chatbots such as privacy protection, confidentiality, inconsistency, abrupt tonal shift and interrupting emotional disclosure which suggested to be improved to satisfactory adoption of AI to disclosure. Furthermore, Papnega and Yadav (2024) did the Literature review to understand the self-disclosure to conversational AI and its future research directions, the authors reviewed 26 empirical studies, the findings showed that perceived anonymity, conversational responsiveness, reciprocity and perceived benefits could be facilitating self-disclosure to AI, the review also highlighted that concerns about social judgement and impression management may influence individuals willingness to share personal information with AI, whereas privacy concerned and perceived risk could be the limitations.

1.1 *Purpose*

The purpose is to study distress disclosure, fear of negative evaluation and self-disclosure to AI.

1.2 *Hypothesis*

H1: There will be a significant relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and self-disclosure to AI among female young adults.

H2: There will be a significant relationship between Distress disclosure and self-disclosure to AI among female young adults.

H3: There will be a significant relationship between Distress disclosure and fear of negative evaluation among female young adults.

2. Methodology

2.1 *Sample*

The study used a sample of female young adults, specifically Indian populations,

between the ages of 18 to 30. The study has a sample size of 118 females.

2.2 ***Measures***

Distress Disclosure Index (DDI): The Distress disclosure index is a standardized unidimensional measure developed by Kahn & Hesling (2001), It was used to measure the level of distress disclosure among young adults. The scale consisted of 12 items and included response scale as 1- Strongly Disagree. 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree.

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE): The Brief fear of negative evaluation scale as developed by Leary (1983) was used to measure fear of negative evaluation among young adults. The scale consisted of 12 items and included response scale as 1- Not at all characteristics of me, 2- Slightly characteristic to me, 3-Moderately characteristic to me, 4- Very characteristic to me, 5-Extremely characteristic to me.

Self-disclosure to AI scale: Self-disclosure to AI measure was adapted from Huang (2016); Tschersich and Botha (2013) it was used to measure the level of self-disclosure to AI among young adults. The scale consisted of 12 items and included the response scale as 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Somewhat disagree, 4-Neutral, 5-Somewhat agree, 6-Agree, 7-Strongly agree. It is evaluated into 4 dimensions: disclosure breadth, disclosure depth, disclosure honesty, disclosure valence.

2.3 ***Procedures***

The data was collected through Google form by sharing links of created forms on online platforms. The standardized self-report questionnaires, including Brief fear of negative evaluation (BFNE), Distress disclosure index (DDI) and Self disclosure to AI scale were used to measure variables; Fear of negative evaluation, distress disclosure and self-disclosure to AI. Before data collection participant's voluntary participation was ensured through informed consent. The data was analysed using Pearson's correlation to understand the relationship between Fear of negative evaluation, distress disclosure and self-disclosure to AI among female young adults.

3. Results

Table 1: *Descriptives*

	Fear of negative evaluation	Self-disclosure to AI	Breadth	Depth	Honesty	Valence	Distress disclosure
N	118	118	118	118	118	118	118

Mean	36.7	37.7	8.93	7.58	10.2	11.0	36.2
Standard deviation	8.34	13.0	5.73	4.85	3.57	3.00	3.51

Table 2: *Correlation Matrix*

	Fear of Negative Evaluation	**Self-Disclosure To AI**	**Breadth**	**Depth**	**Honesty**	**Valence**	**Distress Disclosure**
Fear of Negative Evaluation	—						
Self-Disclosure To AI	0.111	—					
Breadth	0.116	0.887***	—				
Depth	0.198*	0.867***	0.741***	—			
Honesty	0.103	0.752***	0.523***	0.566***	—		
Valence	-0.183*	0.348***	0.118	0.058	0.160	—	
Distress Disclosure	0.062	-0.167	-0.183*	-0.140	-0.136	0.015	—

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

4. Discussion of Results

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between Fear of negative evaluation, Self-disclosure to AI and distress disclosure among female adults. The result found out that there is a significant positive relationship between Fear of negative evaluation and depth, subdimension of self-disclosure to AI ($r = .198$, $p < .05$) participants. One of the possible explanations indicate that participants with high concerns of negatively evaluated by others, reported disclosure to AI more deeply this can be explained through literature review conducted by Papneja and Yadav (2024) who highlighted that perceived anonymity, conversational responsiveness and reciprocity facilitates more deep disclosure to AI. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2021) highlighted the role of perceived anonymity and context of communication

influence the depth of online self-disclosure. This finding possibly explains the behavior of self-disclosure to AI who has been more concerned about being evaluated negatively among interpersonal relationships.

Whereas a significant negative relationship between fear of negative evaluation and valence, the sub-dimension of self-disclosure to AI ($r = -.183$, $p < .05$) indicated females with higher concerns of negative evaluation associated with lower valence self-disclosure to AI. One possible explanation to these findings is that individuals with greater concern of social judgement became more sensitive while interacting with an AI, this can be understood through Papneja and Yadav (2024) who identifies the concerns of social judgement and impression formation as an influencing factor of disclosing personal information to AI. However, this relationship of fear of negative evaluation and valence dimension of self-disclosure to AI requires further investigation to understand it more deeply with the directions. Another significant negative correlation found between Breadth, sub-dimension of self-disclosure to AI and Distress disclosure suggested that participants with higher breadth of self-disclosure to AI associated with lower willingness to distress disclosure one possible explanation is that individuals talking about a broader range of topics with AI are less likely to share emotional or distressing thoughts with AI, they may more inclined towards seeking general information or taking help in general tasks rather sharing emotional experiences this finding supported by Zhang et al. (2021) explanation of individuals online self-disclosure distinction depends on the conversational context and audience's characteristics. Therefore, the breadth of self-disclosure to AI and distress disclosure may represent different aspects of disclosure experience.

Moreover, the findings indicated no significant relationship between overall self-disclosure to AI with Fear of negative evaluation and distress disclosure, findings of present study also showed no significant relationship between Distress disclosure and fear of negative evaluation. this suggested with present sample the individuals tendency to share personal information with AI does not significantly associated with their concerns about being negatively evaluated by others and willingness to disclose distressing thoughts and feelings one possible explanation of this finding is that there are several influencing factors which are governing the self-disclosure to AI beyond fear of negative evaluation and distress disclosure, such as perceived anonymity, convenience, reciprocity, responsiveness, privacy concerns, this context can be understood by Papneja and Yadav (2024) who mentioned about the influence of perceived anonymity and responsiveness for online self-disclosure and it also highlighted the role of privacy concerns and perceived risk in restricting the disclosure. Similarly, Ali and Reghu (2018) reported accessibility and convenience as facilitating factors in AI disclosure

more appealing but there are considering factors of association than fear of negative evaluation and willingness to disclose distressing thoughts or their general tendency to disclose.

Overall findings of present study highlighted the fear of negative evaluation and distress disclosure may have different associations with specific dimensions of self-disclosure to AI. The study contributed to understand the different association of sub-dimensions of self-disclosure to AI with different psychological aspects among young female adults The present study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. The sample size is considered to be not sufficient to be generalized results of the greater population, the study involved self-reported measures which can contribute to biases such as social desirability, personal biases and difficulty in expressing their experience accurately. It has only female specific samples which limit the application of findings to specific populations. Therefore, future research may benefit from larger and diverse samples, with more specific methods of data collection which helps to overcome the biases and can explore more association of psychological aspects with self-disclosure to AI.

5. Conclusion

AI usage made seeking mental health support more accessible and convenient, many researchers reported AI as more influential because of perceived anonymity and conversational responsiveness whereas existing literature showed females more inclined towards higher fear of negative evaluation and higher distress disclosure. So, the present study contributed to understanding the relationship between self-disclosure to AI, distress disclosure and fear of negative evaluation using correlational analysis among female young adults. The findings showed significant correlation between different dimensions of self-disclosure to AI and fear of negative evaluation, depth and valence whereas breadth was significantly correlated with distress disclosure. Results indicated depth of the self-disclosure to AI, significant association among females with higher concerns of being negatively evaluated, and presence of emotional tone however there are other contributing factors that could be related to self-disclosure to AI and willingness of distressing thoughts among young female adults.

Based on the study of present findings highlighted the need to study more diverse and large samples for better understanding of the present variables. Future researchers should consider more complex psychological contributors that help to understand self-disclosure to AI. whereas awareness regarding AI advantages and limitations, literacy of artificial intelligence should be one of the priorities which help the individual to understand the risk factors associated with self-disclosure to AI. It also suggested that mental health professionals

should overview the AI usage of their clients for emotional disclosure which would help them to navigate the modern AI based interventions clients are using for their concerns and also consistent feedback would help to know more about their client reciprocity that AI chatbots are providing.

References

Ali, R., & Reghu, A. (2026). Exploring Indian Youth's Use of AI Chatbots for Mental Health Support: A Qualitative Study. Indian Journal of Health Studies, 8(1), 38-76.

Chu, T. H., Sun, M., & Crystal Jiang, L. (2023). Self-disclosure in social media and psychological well-being: A meta-analysis. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 40(2), 576-599.

Head, K. R. (2025). Minds in Crisis: How the AI Revolution is Impacting Mental Health. JOURNAL OF MENTAL HEALTH AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, 9(3), 34–44. https://doi.org/10.29245/2578-2959/2025/3.1352

Ho, A., Hancock, J., & Miner, A. S. (2018). Psychological, relational, and emotional effects of self-disclosure after conversations with a chatbot. Journal of Communication, 68(4), 712-733.

Iqbal, A., & Ajmal, A. (2018). Fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety in young adults. Peshawar Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (PJPBS), 4(1), 45.

Kahn, J. H., & Hessling, R. M. (2001). Measuring the tendency to conceal versus disclose psychological distress. Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 20(1), 41–65. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.20.1.41.22254

Klunk, E. R. (2014). Distress Disclosure and Personality in College Students.

McBain, R. K., Cantor, J. H., Breslau, J., Diliberti, M., Zhang, L. A., Zhang, F., Burnett, A., Kofner, A., Rader, B., Pataranutaporn, P., Stein, B. D., Mehrotra, A., & Yu, H. (2026). AI chatbot use and disclosure for mental health among US adolescents and young adults. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 180(8), 884. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2026.2015

Papneja, H., & Yadav, N. (2024). Self-disclosure to conversational AI: a literature review, emergent framework, and directions for future research. Personal and Ubiquitous Computing, 29(2), 119–151. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00779-024-01823-7

Sebastian, M., Latheef, F., Kurian, K. M., Thomas, T. E., & Joseph, I. (2022). Self efficacy and fear of negative evaluation in college students. International Journal of Engineering Technology and Management Sciences, 6(5), 544-547.

Singh, P., & Arora, S. (2026). Fear of Negative Evaluation and Loneliness in Young Adults. Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing, 17(2), 341.

Snell Jr, W. E., Miller, R. S., Belk, S. S., Garcia-Falconi, R., & Hernandez-Sanchez, J. E. (1989). Men's and women's emotional disclosures: The impact of disclosure recipient, culture, and the masculine role. Sex Roles, 21(7), 467-486.

Taniguchi, E., & Thompson, C. M. (2021). Mental illness self-disclosure among college students: a pre-requisite of social support or a booster of social support benefits? Journal of Mental Health, 30(3), 323–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2021.1922626

Ueda, M., Birnbaum, M. L., Liu, Y., Yu, Q., Tian, X., Mirer, A., Ramanathan, S., & Sinyor, M. (2026). Help-Seeking in the Age of AI: Cross-Sectional survey of the use and perceptions of AI-Based mental health support among US adults. JMIR Mental Health, 13, e88196. https://doi.org/10.2196/88196

Ward, M., Doherty, D. T., & Moran, R. (2007). It's good to talk: Distress disclosure and psychological wellbeing. Dublin, Ireland: Health Research Board.

Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969). Measurement of social-evaluative anxiety. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 33(4), 448–457. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027806

Zhang, R., N. Bazarova, N., & Reddy, M. (2021, May). Distress disclosure across social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic: Untangling the effects of platforms, affordances, and audiences. In Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-15).