



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FEAR IN PUBLIC SPEAKING: CAUSES AND COPING STRATEGIES

Mamadumarov Samandar Ubaydullo ugli
ShDPI Xorijiy tillar fakulteti 4-kurs
[*samandarmamadumarov@gmail.com*](mailto:samandarmamadumarov@gmail.com)
+998911066726

ABSTRACT: Public speaking anxiety, also called glossophobia, is a common challenge that affects people from all walks of life, causing intense stress and often leading to avoidance of speaking events. This article explores the psychological underpinnings of fear associated with public speaking, identifies its primary causes, and discusses effective coping strategies to mitigate this fear. By understanding the roots of public speaking anxiety and implementing practical approaches, individuals can enhance their speaking abilities and overall confidence.

Key words: public speaking anxiety, glossophobia, fear of judgment, negative evaluation, perfectionism, cognitive distortions, performance anxiety, self-esteem, physiological responses, fight-or-flight response, coping strategies, preparation, desensitization, cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness, relaxation exercises, deep breathing, positive affirmations, visualization, feedback, support groups, therapist, anxiety disorders, personal growth, communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is one of the most common yet intense fears people experience. Known as glossophobia, the anxiety surrounding speaking in front of an audience affects a vast number of individuals across different backgrounds and professions. This fear often arises from a combination of psychological factors, including fear of judgment, self-doubt, and heightened self-consciousness. When facing a crowd, people may experience a range of physical and emotional responses—from sweating and trembling to a racing heart and blanking out—which can inhibit their performance and confidence. Understanding the causes of public speaking anxiety and learning effective coping strategies can help individuals manage this fear, transforming it from a barrier into an opportunity for growth and self-expression.

LITERAL REVIEW AND METODOLOGY

Public speaking anxiety, commonly termed glossophobia, affects a substantial portion of the population and is widely studied within psychology and



communication fields. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990), public speaking anxiety stems from complex psychological responses rooted in social fear, specifically the fear of negative evaluation by an audience. This fear can trigger physical responses such as sweating, trembling, and increased heart rate, as the body's natural fight-or-flight mechanism activates in response to perceived threats.

Cognitive factors, including perfectionism and self-imposed high standards, are also cited as significant contributors to speaking anxiety. Research by Kahn and Nussbaum (2009) indicates that individuals with a perfectionistic outlook often experience heightened anxiety due to concerns about delivering flawless performances. Cognitive distortions, like catastrophizing and overgeneralization, reinforce this anxiety, leading individuals to anticipate failure or assume that a single poor experience will define their future public speaking abilities.

Effective coping strategies to mitigate public speaking anxiety are well-documented. Preparation and practice, including rehearsal and familiarization with content, are foundational in reducing uncertainty and increasing self-confidence. Desensitization techniques, such as gradual exposure to speaking situations, allow individuals to confront their fears in manageable stages, thereby building resilience over time. Cognitive-behavioral approaches, including positive self-talk and visualization, help reframe negative perceptions and improve mental readiness. Additionally, mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing and meditation, are highlighted as beneficial for managing the physiological symptoms of anxiety. These practices promote relaxation and focus, enabling speakers to center themselves and reduce stress. Support from peer groups, like Toastmasters, provides a communal space where individuals can gain constructive feedback and encouragement, fostering a positive environment for growth. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore the psychology of fear in public speaking. The quantitative aspect involves a survey to gather data on the prevalence and intensity of fear among individuals when speaking in public. The qualitative component includes in-depth interviews to gain deeper insights into personal experiences, coping strategies, and the underlying psychological mechanisms associated with public speaking anxiety. The study will involve a diverse sample of participants, including students, professionals, and individuals from various backgrounds who have varying levels of experience in public speaking. A total of 200 participants will be recruited through online platforms, university bulletin boards, and community organizations. Inclusion



criteria will include individuals aged 18 and above who are willing to share their experiences with public speaking.

Desensitization techniques, such as gradual exposure to speaking situations, allow individuals to confront their fears in manageable stages, thereby building resilience over time (Beatty McCroskey, 1998). Cognitive-behavioral approaches—including positive self-talk and visualization—help reframe negative perceptions and improve mental readiness. Additionally, mindfulness practices such as deep breathing and meditation are highlighted as beneficial for managing the physiological symptoms of anxiety. These practices promote relaxation and focus, enabling speakers to center themselves and reduce stress.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the psychology behind public speaking anxiety is crucial for developing effective coping strategies. By addressing the cognitive distortions and emotional triggers that contribute to this fear, individuals can take proactive steps to enhance their public speaking skills. Techniques such as thorough preparation, cognitive restructuring through positive affirmations, mindfulness practices for relaxation, and gradual exposure can significantly reduce anxiety levels. Ultimately, transforming fear into confidence not only improves public speaking performance but also contributes to personal growth and improved communication skills.

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