

# Dental Anxiety as a Risk Factor for Facebook Intrusion

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**Objective:** To investigate the relationships between dental anxiety, Facebook intrusion, and shame. **Methods:** A sample of 498 adults aged 16–69 years completed an online questionnaire comprising the Modified Dental Anxiety Scale, the Facebook Intrusion Scale, and the Shame scale from the Test of Self-Conscious Affect. **Results:** Dental anxiety was positively associated with Facebook intrusion. There were also indirect effects of dental anxiety on Facebook intrusion through shame. **Conclusions:** The results highlight the problem of dental anxiety in the context of Facebook intrusion risk. The findings may be applicable in Internet dependency prevention and treatment, focused on help in coping with the anxiety related to doctors' appointments.

**Keywords:** dental anxiety, shame, Facebook intrusion

## Introduction

It is estimated that nearly 80% of all adults in industrialized countries feel discomfort before a dental appointment, 20% experience anxiety, and 5% avoid treatment due to very strong anxiety (Zinke *et al.*, 2018). Dental anxiety (DA) is understood as the emotional response and cognitive evaluation to stimuli or experiences associated with dental procedures (Lin *et al.*, 2017). This anxiety is a complex phenomenon, comprising somatic, psychological, and social dimensions. The consequences of DA include avoiding dental appointments, oral neglect, and a decrease in general quality of life. This type of anxiety is also often linked with pain, the experience of which it takes to induce a person to seek dental help (Armfield and Ketting, 2015). Moore *et al.* (2004) found that DA was significantly positively associated with embarrassment.

Berggren *et al.* (2000) found that the most frequent response to DA was avoidance. They proposed the vicious circle model of DA (Figure 1) with circular relations between DA, avoidance of dental care, deterioration of oral health, and feelings of shame and inferiority, which in turn increase DA. Berggren *et al.* (2000) stressed that interpersonal relations are an important aspect of human life. External appearance is very important in interpersonal relations and a poor oral condition can worsen the external appearance.

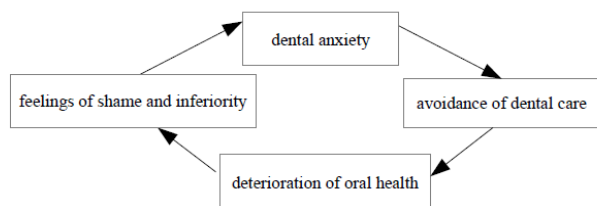


Figure 1. Berggren's model of dental anxiety

Avoiding confrontation with daily life problems often leads to behaviors that give a temporary sense of distraction from the difficult reality. Such behaviors include substance use and Facebook intrusion. Although problematic internet use is not listed in DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), it has been discussed in the literature for many years due to the commonness of the problem. It is not so much internet use that is addictive as engagement in specific online activities, such as gaming, messaging, or using social media. One of the most popular social media is Facebook. With the growing interest in this communication platform, there appeared the phenomenon of excessive Facebook use, which has several negative consequences (Blachnio *et al.*, 2016). This phenomenon (referred to as Facebook intrusion) is a disorder that encompasses constantly thinking about Facebook, improving one's mood by means of Facebook, unsuccessful attempts to reduce the time spent using it, experiencing negative emotions when it is impossible to use it, and interpersonal problems caused by excessive use (Elphinston and Noller, 2011).

The aim of the study was to analyze the relations between DA (Humphris *et al.*, 2009), Facebook intrusion (Elphinston and Noller, 2011) and shame (Tangney *et al.*, 1989). We formulated the following general hypothesis: Levels of DA and shame are positively related to Facebook intrusion. The proposed model of relations is based on Berggren *et al.*'s (2000) circular model of DA and on the view of addiction as a way of escaping from reality (Benschop *et al.*, 2020). The understanding of addiction as avoidance of and escape from reality is based on the concept of experiential avoidance. Experiential avoidance consists in excessively negative evaluations of unwanted thoughts, feelings, and sensations, reluctance to experience them, and intentionally controlling them or escaping from them (Kashdan and Rottenberg, 2010).