Self reporting anxiety among adolescents in Iraq

Anxiety is a universal phenomenon essential for the effective functioning of human behaviour and sensibility. Pathological or morbid anxiety can be a relative term, but is generally recognised as when a person complains of anxiety which is more frequent, more severe or more persistent than he has been used to or can tolerate. Anxiety symptoms commonly reported in clinical setting are usually distinguished as psychological or somatic. Psychological symptoms include malaise, insecurity and irritability, and more cognitive and imminent loss of control. Somatic symptoms are headaches, tremors, fatigue, sweating, palpitations, flushes and a dry mouth. There are wide individual and culturally related variations of normal and morbid anxiety. Anxiety disorders may develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events. Although anxiety disorders were described as early as the fourth century B.C., psychiatrists' interest in them would remain limited throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The realization that anxiety disorders could be successfully treated by pharmacological means (drugs), development of diagnostic criteria and modern psychiatric nosology set the stage of magnitude of anxiety disorders in communities.

Jawad K. Al-Diwan 1 MB ChB, MSc, Dept. of Community Medicine, College of Medicine, Al-Anbar University
Correspondence: Dr. Jawad K. Al-Diwan, jawadkdiwan@yahoo.com, mobile: +964-7910673894, P.O. Box 17007, Al-Kudhima, Baghdad, Iraq

A review of epidemiological studies in different countries shows that grossly differing prevalence rates have been obtained when different tools, sampling methods, interview techniques and diagnostic classifications have been employed* (mood disorders, psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders... etc.).

No population-based studies on psychiatric morbidity have been carried out in Iraq before now. This investigation has been designed to highlight the prevalence of anxiety among adolescents in Iraq.

Materials and methods:

A total of 8807 adolescents were included in this study. Their average age was 17.8 ± 1.9 years with a male to female ratio of 1:1.1. The sample was derived from the Youth National Household Survey on Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Youth for the year 2004. A sample of adolescents (aged 12-21 years) was selected from survey files. In this survey trained teams (a general practitioner and paramedical staff) visited each household and distributed a specially designed form for young members of the family. Selected young adults were asked to complete the questionnaire themselves. They had different educational levels, were from different family types (extend versus nuclear), with different religions and from different
Abstract – Self reporting anxiety among adolescents

Background: Reports have been published about the effect of war on mental health and psychological development of children in different countries. However, few reports have been from Iraq and no population-based studies on psychiatric morbidity had been carried out. Therefore, this paper was drawn up to highlight the prevalence of anxiety among adolescents in Iraq.

Methods: A total of 8807 adolescents were included in the study. Their age mean was 17.8 ± 1.9 years with a male to female ratio of 1:0.1:1. In this survey teams visited each household and distributed specially designed forms (Spence Children Anxiety Scale) to young members of each family, asking them to complete the questionnaire by themselves.

Results: Out of the total, 8012 (91.9%) adolescents felt anxiety. Prevalence of anxiety was significantly associated with sex, residency (at governorate level) and war, failure in school, getting a disease, the economic situation, the political situation, insecurity and future.

Conclusion: The prevalence of anxiety in Iraq is high as the country has been exposed to the Gulf Wars and economic sanctions; there is a need for implementation of mental health services.

Factors in inconsistencies with respect to results. Our high figure of anxiety symptoms among Iraqi adolescents is not farfetched, as it was based on a large national household survey. The high figure may reflect the effects of the Gulf Wars on the psychological development of Iraqi children and adolescents. Reports have been published about the effect of war on mental health and psychological development of children in different countries especially Israel, Kuwait, Rwanda, Lebanon and Croatia. However, few reports from Iraq are available. Although the image that has been perpetuated in the West is that the Gulf wars were clean and fought with surgical precision in a manner that minimized civilian causalities in all sectors of society, the impact of these wars is calculable. The highly distressed child population continues to experience sadness over time. Generally, the adult culture does not seem to stimulate the expression of feelings and thoughts about events at the wars. The common procedure followed by parents in Iraq was to tell the children to forget, put what happened behind them and disregard what they had experienced. Discussions, open expressions and providing facts about the war event were seldom stimulated.

The finding that the prevalence of anxiety was significantly associated with sex is consistent with other studies. This finding may be due to the influence of biological and psychosocial factors on females. Others stated that men in Oriental cultures tend to somatise their psychological symptoms as the latter may lower their prestige.

Residency at governorate level was significantly associated with the prevalence of anxiety, which could reveal the heterogeneous effect of the Gulf Wars on Iraq as there were variations in the burden of wars on different areas on Iraq.

The finding that a war, a painful accident, failure in school, economic and political situations and the future were significantly associated with anxiety reflects the effect of stressful situations. Socio-cultural constraints experienced by adolescents are interfering with their coping styles in the face of stress due to limited social relations and a monotonous life style.

This survey was conducted as Iraq entered the new world of globalization – a process in which the traditional boundaries separating individuals and societies gradually and increasingly recede and which is likely to influence idioms of distress and pathways to care in a way that is difficult to predict.

In conclusion, the prevalence of anxiety in Iraq is high as the country has been exposed to the Gulf Wars and economic sanctions and the provision and implementing of mental health services are much needed.

Association of studied variables with anxiety

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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Educational level</td>
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<td>War</td>
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<td>Painful stress</td>
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<td>Failure in school</td>
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<td>Getting a divorce</td>
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Salim Matar
Herausgeber der Zeitschrift Mesopotamia


Beitrag über Armeauschaffung


Kein Kino ohne Pistole