



Original Article

Prevalence of social phobia disorder in high school students in Abhar city, Iran

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Abstract

Introduction: Social phobia is one of the most prevalent anxiety disorders in adolescence years. This disorder owns negative effects on overall health and performance of this group of society people. The aim of this study is determination the prevalence of social phobia disorder among high school students in Abhar city.

Materials and Methods: In this cross-sectional/descriptive study, numbers of 5526 high school students during academic year of 2011-2012 in both of two genders were selected. Participants were studied by using Liebowitz questionnaire through anonymity principle. In addition, the information related to their demographic features was also collected. SPSS software (version 17) was used for statistical analyses. Absolute and relative frequency distribution was applied to describe data and chi-square test was used to determine and compare the ratio of social phobia disorder according to field variables.

Results: Total prevalence of social phobia disorder was 17.2% in the population. The study showed that female gender ($P=0.000$), age ($P=0.001$), single marital status ($P=0.001$), low population of family ($P=0.003$), parents' elementary and middle education ($P=0.001$), mother's house maker being ($P=0.012$), father's free job ($P=0.002$), urbanism ($P=0.000$) and family's average income ($P=0.000$) have relation with higher prevalence of disorder.

Conclusion: The prevalence of social phobia disorder is high among high school students in Abhar city. Findings can help the decision-makers of health and hygiene in implementing a kind of comprehensive strategy in population regarding interference of mental health promotion arena and preventing from infecting into social phobia disorder.

Keywords: Adolescents, Prevalence, Social phobia Disorder

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Introduction

Regardless of age, the most prevalent disorder in the mental diseases category is anxiety disorders that leads to thought confusion and loss of personal and social functioning through affecting on thought, understanding and learning(1). Anxiety among children and adolescents is also one of the common annoying events that it is sometimes considered normal during child's growth and development and it may happen during any stage of child's growth in a special shape. In any way, this anxiety can turn into to social phobia in adolescence (2). Social phobia in adolescence years is introduced as one of the most prevalent anxiety disorder for this age period according to fourth printing of mental diagnostic and

statistical manual with revised text (DMS-IV-TR) respecting the age of prevalence (10-20 years) (3). Of course it should not be forgotten that this disorder's start has been reported in the years younger than 5 years old and older than even 35 years old (4).

According to definition, social phobia is an obvious and continuous fear from one or several situations or social performance in which person is faced with stranger people or he may be subject of judgment or curiosity. Infected person has high sensitivity toward being under attention and being considered by others. The others' curiosity regarding him and doing some actions like this can cause him anxious and concerned (5). The anxiety intensity in some ones will be very high during presence in social situation so that he will be strongly anxious even during predicting the facing with these situations and he may show some physiological, cognitive and

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emotional signs (6). This anxiety or in the better definition, fear is considered abnormal when it happens in the situations that they are resolvable for the most of the people with the minimum difficulty (1).

The person suffering from social phobia has no desire to initiate communication with others and he prevents from any situation in which he may be subject of others' judgment with a sense of unordinary fear and instability (7). The patients suffering from this disorder experience more worthless following negative social events and they have more negative self-critical documents, self-assessments and views compared with normal people (8). Accordingly, some ones have concluded that social phobia can lead to infected persons' life quality reduction (9). In addition, some hostile and disorder impulses are seen in the patients suffering from social phobia in interpersonal relations and sexual pleasure reductions, orgasm frequency reduction, unhealthy sexual function and disorder in decision-making (10).

The importance of social phobia in adolescence period compared with other disorders is this that adolescents with this disorder will experience more serious damages in educational performance, social skills and also with their peers and family life (11). Biedel and Turner found that the adolescents with social phobia have high level of unhappiness, isolationism, general fear and weak social skill compared with healthy sample. Kessler and Nelson also understood that girl adolescents who suffered from this disorder have less possibility to finish the high school stage and both gender have less possibility to enter to university or finish it successfully (12). Respecting this fact that persons in adolescence period spend their most of time with their peers and this relationship plays a main role in their roles and responsibilities learning, so phobia interferes in establishing interpersonal communication and among adolescents (13). It has been even reported that it can prevent marriage and family-building in patient (14). Meanwhile, if social phobia is detected on time and the treatment regarding it taken place, the patients suffering from it will be safe of the problems due to this disorder (15). But unfortunately only one third of patients suffering from social phobia is detected and treated (16).

The results of searching in information banks indicate that remarkable studies have been done regarding the prevalence of this disorder over the world (6,9,17-21). Such as other mental disorders, different statistics have also been reported such as: it

was specified in a study which has been done by World Health Organization in overall population of Paris that this disorder's prevalence is 14.4% for all the lifetime (17). America's psychology assembly in 1996 has also reported this disorder's prevalence in United States between 3 up to 13 percent (18) and it has been reported 10-20 percent at the outpatients clinics (6). Carta et al. have reported the 12 month social phobia prevalence equal to 2.2 percent in the study which was done on the whole population of Italy (19). Acarturk et al. have also reported its prevalence in overall population of Netherland equal to 4.8% (9). Gren-Landell et al. have also reported its prevalence among Swedish adolescents equal to 4.4% (20) and Bella et al. have reported its prevalence among Nigerian students equal to 9.4% (21).

In Iran, There is no detailed statistics regarding this disorder prevalence; however some studies have stated some statistics in this regard (22-24). For example: Qaffari Nejad has reported this disorder prevalence among Kerman adolescents equal to 14.6% (22). Palahang et al. (1978) have reported one-month prevalence of this disorder in overall population of Kashan equal to 4.8% (23). Momeni et al. have also reported this figure among the students of nursing midwifery of Qazvin as 28.6% (24). With respect to the subjects mentioned and respecting this fact that those suffering from social phobia need help to effectively deal with this disorder, it seems that having a statistic regarding this disorder prevalence can be helpful in the route of health strategic planning. Unfortunately, according to present plan's researchers searching, there was no information regarding this disorder prevalence in Zanjan province, therefore the present research aimed to determine the prevalence of social phobia among high school students of Abhar to be a step toward society health promotion especially Islamic Iran's future-maker class.

Materials and Methods

This research was a descriptive-sectional study which was done in order to determine the amount of prevalence social phobia in students at the high school in Abhar during educational years 2010-2011. This research's environment constitutes of all the girl's and boy's high schools of city and subsidiaries of Abhar. Research population also included all the high school students which included 5526 numbers (3008 boys and 2518 girls) at the time of study. The research sample was that research population that was 5526 students who got education at the educational years 2011-2012 and

entered study.

Research instruments

Two-part questionnaire was used to collect data and achieve the goal of study. The first part had been designed regarding demographic features determination of research's units and its second part was Liebowitz standard scale which has been designed with the purpose of identifying the persons suffering from social phobia in the 1987 by Michael Liebowitz who was a psychologist and author. The reliability and validity of English form of Liebowitz questionnaire have been confirmed in 2009 by Olivaes et al. (26). This questionnaire's Persian form has been normalized in 2007 in order to be applied by Iranians by Dadsetan et al. (27). Liebowitz questionnaire has 48 numbers of question that 24 numbers of them assess the anxiety level and 24 numbers else assess avoidance level. Each question of this questionnaire has 4 level respecting scoring which includes zero level (Lack of anxiety and avoidance), 1 (Low anxiety and avoidance), 2 (Moderate) and 3 (Severe). According to this scale manual, acquiring 55 score and higher is considered as infection to social phobia. In fact, each one's score consists of his score in 24 numbers of question regarding anxiety plus with acquiring score in 24 numbers of questions regarding avoidance, that if this score is more than 55, it will indicate infection to social phobia. However this scale can determine the intensity of disorder, acquiring the 55-65 score indicates moderate social phobia, 65-80 indicates marked social phobia, 80-95 indicates severe social phobia and more than 95 indicates Very severe social phobia. It should be mentioned that according to Liebowitz questionnaire's manual, this scale do not assess low level (25).

One of the researchers went to Zanjan's research-deputy of Education Department by having letter of introduction of Islamic Azad University of Tehran medical branch and he went to this province's high schools and vocational schools following acquiring license and he attended at the students' classroom following introducing himself and stating research's objectives to students and required explanations regarding the method of completing questionnaires were offered to students following written satisfaction and the questionnaires were distributed among all the present samples through announcing this issue that the responses are secret and creating a calm environment and author gave the other questionnaire to the absents in the other day. So, the total number of 5526 questionnaires was analyzed.

SPSS software copied 17 was used for statistical analyses. Absolute and relative frequency

distribution tables were applied in this study to describe data and K square statistical test was used for some statistical analyses and in order to determine and compare the ratio of social phobia prevalence according to field variables.

Results

Data analysis according to demographic variables of research units showed that 2518 number of them were female (45%) and 3008 number of them were male (55%). Age range of samples was between 13 up to 19. 5355 number single (96.9%) and 172 number married (3.1%), 4381 numbers (79.2%) lived in city and 1145 numbers (20.7%) lived in rural. In addition, 3677 number of students at high school stage and 1849 numbers of students at vocational school stage of training part of Abhar participated in this study. The education level of father and mother of most of the research's units (respectively 68.1% and 77.7%) was placed at the elementary and middle educational level. Regarding family size, the most of them (52.5%) were 3 and 4 numbers. The mother's job of majority of samples (85.2%) was house holding and father's job of most of them (49.7%) was free and most of them (39.9%) were the families with the average level of income.

Data analysis in line with the study's goal showed that: 948 numbers of students (17.2%) at the high school stage of Abhar are suffered from social phobia. In addition, chi-square test showed that the ratio of those who suffered from social phobia is more among daughters compared with boys (11.7% compared with 5.5% and $P=0.000$) and it is more among singles compared with married ones (16.3% compared with 0.9% and $P=0.001$). Regarding age, the infected persons in age range of 15 years with 5.8 % is more than other ages. ($P=0.001$). Regarding the number of family members, the ration of infection is more among small size families ($P=0.003$). In addition, statistical test showed that the ratio of infected ones is significantly more ($P<0.05$) in the fields of mother's education level, place of living, father's and mother's job (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency and compares the ratio of Developing research unit to social phobia according to some demographic variables

P	X ²	Without social phobia		Social phobia		Demographic features
		Number (percent)		Number (percent)		
0.000	134.40	2168	39.2	645	11.7	Gender
		2410	43.6	303	5.5	Female
						Male
0.001	28.54	486	8.8	154	2.8	Age
						14≥

		1676	30.3	320	5.8	15 year
		1455	26.3	308	5.6	16 year
		739	13.4	128	2.3	17 year
			4	38	0.7	≥18
0.001	12.920					Marital status
		4453	80.5	901	16.3	Single
		125	2.3	47	0.9	Married
0.001	78.58					Education of mother
		904	16.3	296	5.4	Illiterate
		2584	46.8	14	9.3	Primary and secondary
		806	14.6	102	1.8	Diploma
0.6	74.97	284	5.1	36	0.7	Higher education
						Education of father
		648	11.6	149	2.7	Illiterate
		2365	42.8	606	11	Primary and secondary
						Diploma
0.012	10.99	1037	18.8	110	2	Higher education
		528	9.6	83	1.5	Mother's job
		285	55.1	39	0.7	Employee
		170	3.1	27	0.5	Worker
		254	4.6	42	0.8	Freed
0.002	22.90	3869	70	840	15.2	Housewife
						Father's job
			16.4	129	2.3	Employee
			23.5	268	5	Worker
			20.4	516	9.3	Freed
			2.1	29	0.5	Unemployed
			0.4	6	0.1	Retired
0.000	44.26					Place of living
		3705	67	676	12.2	City
		873	15.8	272	5	Rural
0.003	7.76					Household population
		2366	42.8	537	9.7	1 to 4 people
		2212	40	411	7.5	5 Up
0.000	17.30					Monthly income
		1561	28.2	373	6.7	Weak
		1823	33	384	7	Average
		1194	21.6	191	3.5	Good

Discussion

This research aimed to determine social phobia prevalence among high school students in Abhar. The results showed that 17.2 percent of high school students are infected to some degree of social phobia according to Liebowitz scale that this amount is more than offered statistics by researchers from other points of the world such as: United States 3-13% (18), overall population of Italia 2.2% (19), Netherlands population 4.8% (9), among Swedish adolescents 4.4% (20), and in Iran in Kerman 14.8%(22) and in Kashan 4.8% (23). It may be possible to know the reason of such differences in prevalence which it sometimes is remarkable because of applied questionnaire and tools in different studies in order to screening, diagnosis and also social-cultural context of populations under study in different researches which they have been previously emphasized by some of the authors such

as: Mohammadi et al. (28). These findings are important because they may cause some serious problems and negative effects on social, educational and job development of infected people and strongly influence individual's life quality (13); and they may accompany the infected persons with most other clinical status (physical or psychological) which they mostly can lead to anonymity of this disorder (29). The results of present study showed that social phobia is more prevalent in girls compared with boys that it confirms the obtained findings from accomplished evaluations by Gren-Landellin (20). The conducted studies in this regard by Brook et al. indicate that restriction in social-cultural activities has connected with social phobia (30).

Our study also such as other conducted studies (for instance: 31,32) in the past showed that social phobia prevalence is significantly more in single ones compared with married ones. The reason of this difference may be known as the presence of accessible emotional support and existing emotional interaction among couples. In addition, study results indicated that this disorder in the elementary years of adolescence is more prevalent. This important issue is confirmed by the results of conducted studies by Goldin and Fink (33,34).

It was specified in our study that the amount of social phobia frequency is more among the adolescents who the level of their mother's education is low. However these findings are consistent with the conducted studies by Qaffari Nejad and Acarturk but conducted studies by Zamani confirm this point that father's education is more effective factor on social phobia occurrence (29). In addition, the study showed that this disorder is more prevalent in the students that their family's income is Moderate. These findings are consistent with conducted study by Zamani (29). However Stansfield and Acarturk know just the low economic status as the effective factor on social phobia (31,35). It may be possible to attribute the difference among the Stansfield and Acarturk with the present research and Zamani's Study in the kind of people's view and definition from the economic-social welfare level which it may need some social studies in this regard.

According to present study results, this disorder was more prevalent in the students whose parents were employed. These findings are inconsistent with the conducted studies by Qaffari Najad that it is required to perform more studies for this difference explanation. The last finding was this that social phobia prevalence in adolescents in the families less

than 5 number was more common compared with others and the level of this disorder frequency was more in urban area compared with villagers. Unfortunately, there was no study which evaluated these two dimensions in the field of social phobia to compare and discuss regarding these two important points. It should be finally said that since psychiatric disorders have different ground and incident factors and social-cultural factors is one of the effective factor in their forming. Therefore, the present study's results cannot be generalized for other research communities and it requires that some other studies will be done with the same goal to achieve the reliable results in other place of the country.

Conclusion

Regarding high prevalence of social phobia among the high school students of Abhar compared with other point of the world and some demographic factor which are different and related with this disorder, it can be said that creating awareness in

society under study and their parents regarding problem's nature and signs and also disease prevalence can prevent its progress. In addition, study's findings can be helpful for health and hygiene decision-makers in implementing a kind of comprehensive strategy in population under study in line with intervention of mental health promotion arena and preventing being infected to social phobia.

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