

Social phobia among secondary school students in Babil, Iraq

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Abstract:

Background: Social phobia is common among adolescents. It can have a negative impact on school achievement.

Objectives: to study prevalence of social phobia among secondary school students and its impact on school achievement.

Methods: A total of 500 secondary school students were included in the study. They were randomly chosen from 8 schools for boys and girls in Babil city. Social phobia inventory (SPIN) was used to assess the presence of social phobia, and success or failure in the past year was used as indicator for school achievement.

Results: Social phobia prevalence among students was 32.4%. It was more common among females and students from rural areas. Students with social phobia had failed more frequently than those without social phobia (38.4% vs. 30%).

Conclusion: Social phobia is common and has negative impact on school performance among secondary school students.

Key words: Social phobia, school performance, Babil, Iraq.

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Introduction:

Social phobia is a "marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others (1). Of the social situations or social interactions (having conversation, meeting unfamiliar meeting), being observed (eating or drinking) and performing in front of others (giving a speech, oral exam). All phobias were grouped together in DSM-I and DSM-II(2). Different age of onset and symptoms presentation were observed(3) which was the impetus to appearance of social phobia as a distinct disorder in DSM-III(4). Social phobia was a neglected disorder up to 1985 (5). Then, conceptualization, definition and classification of social phobia increased dramatically. Social anxiety disorder termed social phobia in ICD-10 (6) and first appeared 12 years after the appearance of the term in DSM-III(3). The ICD-10 criteria for social phobia are less detailed and more circumscribed than those in DSM-IV which is specifically requires excessive fear of humiliation or embarrassment in social or endurance with distress and impairment. In DSM-V, the age required for diagnosis extended to all ages. This change based on evidence that individual with social phobia often overestimate the danger of phobic situation(7).

Several articles on social phobia in Iraq were published (2-5). Different rates were reported (1.67% – 14.4% (10)). The wide variation in the prevalence rate was explained by using different instrument. This study was carried out to comment on social phobia among school children and its impact on school performance of the affected students.

Material and methods:

A total of 500 students were included in the study. Their age was 15.5 ± 1.9 years giving male to female ration of 1. They were selected by stratified random sampling from Babil (8 schools and 500 students). Arabic version of Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) was used. It is with determined reliability and validity(15-17). SPIN assesses the wide aspects of social phobia (fear, avoidance and physiological symptoms). Informed consents were obtained from the participants and their families and from their schools' administrations. Failure and success in the previous year was taken as an indicator for school performance. Chi square test was applied to examine the association between dependent variables (social phobia and school performance) and independent variables (sex and social phobia). Statistical significance was considered when the P value was equal or less than 0.05

Results:

Out of the total sample, 162 (32.4%) were with social phobia. The age of school children with social phobia was

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15.6 ± 2.03 years and those had not social phobia was 15.5 ± 1.9 years. There was no significant differences in age between school children with and without social phobia ($t = 0.6$, d.f.=498, $p = 0.5$) (table 1).

Seventy four (29.6%) of males and 88 (35.2%) of females had social phobia. Sex was not significantly associated with social phobia ($\chi^2 = 1.7$, d.f. =1, $p = 0.1$) (Table 2). Table 3 shows the distribution of school performance according to social phobia. Bad school performance was noticed in 44 (27.2%) and 63 (18.6%) of school children with and without social phobia, respectively. Significant negative impact for social phobia on school performance was observed ($\chi^2 = 4.7$, d.f. =1, $p = 0.03$).

Table 1: Age distribution of social phobia

Social phobia	Age (year)		
	No.	mean	SD
Positive	162	15.6	2.03
Negative	238	15.5	1.9
total			

$t = 0.6$, d.f.= 498, $p = 0.5$

Table 2: Sex distribution of social phobia

Sex	Social phobia			
	Positive		Negative	
	No.	%	No.	%
Male	74	29.6	176	70.4
Female	88	35.2	162	64.8
total	162	32.4	338	67.6

$\chi^2 = 1.7$, d.f.=1, $p = 0.1$

Table3: School performance of students with social phobia

Social phobia	School performance			
	Good		Bad	
	No.	%	No.	%
Positive	118	72.8	44	27.3
Negative	275	81.4	63	18.6
Total	393	78.6	107	21.4

$\chi^2 = 4.7$, d.f.= 1, $p = 0.03$

Discussion:

The observed prevalence of social phobia among students was 32.4%. It is much higher than that reported in literature (3% to 6.8%).^{12,13} This high difference might be attributed to the fact that Iraqi children were exposed to violence (wars and terrorism). Literature documented that exposure

to violence might result in social phobia⁽¹⁴⁾. This study revealed that 32.4% of school children had social phobia. It is lower than that recently reported in Baghdad (44%)⁽⁹⁾ using the same instrument (SPIN). The difference might be attributed to the time difference in carrying out the two studies. AlObaidi and Hummodi⁹ hold their study in 2003 just at beginning of schools after the end of 2003 war (April 2003) which might in turn reflect the situation of fear at that time. AlObaidi and Hummodi⁽⁹⁾ stated that the rate of social phobia fall to 1.67% when they used DSM-IV criteria on face to face interview of students included in their study (1080 students). Face to face interview of 1080 students consumes too much time which might be too difficult at that time for such a huge sample. The difference between the rate of social phobia by SPIN (44%) and rate using DSM-IV (1.67%) means that too much false positive of social phobia by SPIN which was negatively affecting SPIN as a screening tool. Several articles documented the potential diagnostic tool utility of SPIN as a screening tool⁽¹⁵⁾. The observed rate of social phobia (32.4%) is much higher than that reported in Duhok, Kurdistan region (14.4%).⁽¹⁰⁾ The difference might be to the lower exposure to violence in Kurdistan region than the exposure in Babil. Using ICD-10 criteria in Duhok might be contributed for this difference too, since this study used SPIN. The prevalence of social phobia in Babil (32.4%) is higher than that in Qatar (14.9%)⁽¹⁶⁾. It was mentioned that social phobia is highly prevalent in low financially income communities.⁽¹⁷⁾ Again exposure to violence in Iraq might be the explanation of the difference in prevalence of social phobia between Babil and Qatar. In the line of that of other articles in Iraq,⁽⁸⁻¹¹⁾ no significant differences in age between students with and without social phobia ($p=0.5$). No significant differences in social phobia between males and females ($p = 0.1$). It was mentioned that social phobia is more common in females.⁽⁹⁾ The difference might be explained by differences in sampling. The previous study was carried out in 2003, at the beginning of the change of the previous Iraqi regime where exposure to violence was minimal, in addition to difficulty in choosing sample in the right way, and this study was carried out after a long time of exposure to violence. Literature^(16,17) showed that social phobia affect the school achieving (performance). This study observed similar findings.

Conclusion: A high prevalence of social phobia was observed among secondary school students in Babil city. Social phobia was not associated with age and sex. Social phobia affects negatively school achievement.

Authors' contributions:

Ahmed H. Hussein: writing of the manuscript
Anwer N. Alnasrawi: collection of data

Nesif N. Al-Hemiary: study design, supervision of data collection and participation in writing of the manuscript
 Jawad K. Al-Diwan: data analysis and participation in writing of the manuscript

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