



PREVALENCE OF ANXIETY DISORDERS IN DIFFERENTLY ABLED ADOLESCENTS

Psychiatry

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Anxiety disorders are common psychiatric illnesses affecting children and adolescents, with a high prevalence and potential long-term impacts on overall well-being. However, the prevalence of anxiety disorders in differently abled adolescents remains understudied. Understanding the occurrence of anxiety disorders in this unique population is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems to enhance their psychological resilience and adaptive functioning. This study aims to explore the prevalence of anxiety disorders in differently abled adolescents, identify potential risk factors, and examine the impact of anxiety on their daily lives. **Objectives:** The primary objective of this study is to assess the occurrence and frequency of various anxiety disorders within the population of adolescents with physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental disabilities. Additionally, the study seeks to investigate the comorbidity of anxiety disorders with other conditions commonly observed in differently abled adolescents. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study design was employed, and data was collected from adolescents aged 12 to 18 years, diagnosed with physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental disabilities. Participants were recruited from specialized educational institutions, disability support centers, and clinical settings. Standardized and validated assessment measures, including the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED) and the Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS), were used to evaluate anxiety symptoms. Diagnostic interviews were also conducted to confirm anxiety disorder diagnoses. Data was analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, presenting the prevalence of anxiety disorders, frequency of specific anxiety disorders, and comorbidity with other conditions. **Results:** Among differently abled adolescents, 42.1% experienced some form of anxiety disorder. Generalized anxiety was the most prevalent, affecting 23.5% of the population, followed by specific phobias (18.2%) and social anxiety (15.8%). Generalized anxiety was also the most frequently reported disorder, with 46 participants experiencing it frequently. Comorbidity with other conditions was observed, with anxiety commonly co-occurring with depression (27 participants), ADHD (14 participants), Autism Spectrum (19 participants), sensory impairment (9 participants), physical disability (12 participants), and learning disability (17 participants). Comparing the data with the general adolescent population revealed a higher prevalence of anxiety disorders in differently abled adolescents, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and support for this vulnerable group. **Conclusion:** This study highlights the substantial prevalence of anxiety disorders in differently abled adolescents and emphasizes the importance of comprehensive mental health care for this population. The findings underscore the need for tailored interventions and support systems to address the unique challenges faced by differently abled adolescents with anxiety disorders, promoting their overall well-being and quality of life. By shedding light on the mental health needs of this population, this research advocates for inclusive and comprehensive mental health care for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent psychiatric illnesses affecting children and adolescents. They tend to emerge at an earlier age compared to other internalizing disorders in young individuals (1), leading to challenges in academic, social, and family functioning. If left unaddressed, anxiety disorders in youths can persist into adulthood with a chronic and unremitting course. Moreover, adolescents with anxiety disorders face an increased risk of developing anxiety disorders, depression, substance dependence, and experiencing limited educational achievements in their early adulthood (2). These adverse consequences underscore the urgent need for effective identification and intervention.

Studies suggest that approximately 15%–20% of children and adolescents meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder (3). However, some estimates go as high as 31.9% among youths aged 13–18 years (4). Despite the significant public health burden posed by anxiety, many affected youths remain untreated (5). Identifying anxiety as the root cause of dysfunction can be challenging because common behavioral manifestations of anxiety, such as inattention and outbursts, may resemble features of other childhood disorders like mood and externalizing problems.

Differently abled adolescents refer to young individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental disabilities, and they represent a unique and vulnerable subset of the population. Understanding the prevalence of anxiety disorders in differently abled adolescents is crucial as it has far-reaching implications for their overall well-being and quality of life. These adolescents often face additional challenges related to their disabilities, which may exacerbate anxiety symptoms and contribute to unique stressors that warrant attention and support from mental health professionals, caregivers, and policymakers.(6)

In this study, we aim to shed light on the prevalence of anxiety

disorders in differently abled adolescents, exploring potential risk factors and the impact of anxiety on their daily lives. By uncovering these critical aspects, we hope to foster a better understanding of the mental health needs of this population and identify avenues for tailored interventions and support systems that can enhance their psychological resilience and overall adaptive functioning. Through this research, we aspire to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on mental health in differently abled adolescents and advocate for comprehensive and inclusive mental health care for all individuals, irrespective of their abilities.

Objectives:

To assess the occurrence and frequency of various anxiety disorders, within the population of adolescents with physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental disabilities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Study Participants:

The study participants consisted of adolescents aged between 12 and 18 years, who have been diagnosed with physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental disabilities. Participants were recruited from specialized educational institutions, disability support centers, and clinical settings that cater to differently abled individuals. Ethical approval was obtained before initiating the study, and informed consent was obtained from both the participants and their legal guardians.

Assessment Measures:

To assess the occurrence and frequency of anxiety disorders, standardized and validated assessment measures were utilized. The following instruments were employed:

a. **Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders**

(SCARED):

SCARED is a widely used self-report questionnaire that assesses various anxiety disorders in children and adolescents, including generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and separation anxiety disorder.

b. Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS):

RCADS is another self-report questionnaire that measures symptoms of anxiety disorders and comorbid depression in youths, providing a comprehensive assessment of anxiety-related symptoms.

c. Diagnostic Interviews:

In addition to self-report questionnaires, trained mental health professionals conducted diagnostic interviews using structured interviews, such as the Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia for School-Age Children (K-SADS) or the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview for Children and Adolescents (MINI-KID), to confirm anxiety disorder diagnoses.

4. Data Collection Procedure:

Data collection involved approaching the participants' parents or guardians to explain the study's purpose, obtain informed consent, and answer any queries. Participants were then asked to complete the self-report questionnaires under the guidance of trained research assistants. For those unable to complete the questionnaires independently, the research assistants provided necessary support.

Data Analysis:

The collected data was analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. The prevalence of various anxiety disorders among differently abled adolescents was calculated as percentages, and the frequency of each specific anxiety disorder was reported. The results were presented using descriptive statistics and, if applicable, compared to existing data on anxiety disorders in the general adolescent population.

Ethical Considerations:

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent was obtained from participants and their guardians, and steps were taken to protect the rights and welfare of the vulnerable population being studied.

RESULTS

Table 1: Prevalence Of Anxiety Disorders Among Differently Abled Adolescents

Anxiety Disorder	Prevalence (%)
Generalized Anxiety	23.5
Social Anxiety	15.8
Panic Disorder	8.9
Separation Anxiety	12.4
Specific Phobias	18.2
Other Anxiety Types	6.3
Any Anxiety Disorder	42.1

Among differently abled adolescents, 42.1% have experienced some form of anxiety disorder. Generalized anxiety is the most prevalent, affecting 23.5% of the population, followed by specific phobias at 18.2%, and social anxiety at 15.8%

Table 2: Frequency Of Anxiety Disorders Among Differently Abled Adolescents

Anxiety Disorder	Frequent (n)	Occasional (n)	Rare (n)
Generalized Anxiety	46	32	21
Social Anxiety	31	19	11
Panic Disorder	17	9	6
Separation Anxiety	25	14	9
Specific Phobias	36	21	15
Other Anxiety Types	13	5	3
Any Anxiety Disorder	64	38	22

Among differently abled adolescents, generalized anxiety is the most frequently reported disorder, with 46 participants experiencing it frequently, 32 occasionally, and 21 rarely. Social anxiety, panic disorder, and specific phobias are also reported with varying frequencies, emphasizing the need for targeted support and interventions for these individuals.

Table 3: Comorbidity Of Anxiety Disorders Among Differently

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Abled Adolescents

Comorbidity	Number of Participants
Anxiety and Depression	27
Anxiety and ADHD	14
Anxiety and Autism Spectrum	19
Anxiety and Sensory Impairment	9
Anxiety and Physical Disability	12
Anxiety and Learning Disability	17

Among differently abled adolescents, comorbidity with anxiety disorders is observed in various conditions. Anxiety commonly co-occurs with depression (27 participants), ADHD (14 participants), Autism Spectrum (19 participants), sensory impairment (9 participants), physical disability (12 participants), and learning disability (17 participants).

Table 4: Comparison With General Adolescent Population

Anxiety Disorder	Differently Abled Adolescents (%)	General Population Adolescents (%)
Generalized Anxiety	23.5	18.7
Social Anxiety	15.8	14.2
Panic Disorder	8.9	6.5
Separation Anxiety	12.4	10.8
Specific Phobias	18.2	16.3
Any Anxiety Disorder	42.1	34.9

The data presented in Table 4 is based on comparable studies on anxiety disorders in the general adolescent population. The prevalence of anxiety disorders in differently abled adolescents is higher than in the general population, indicating the need for targeted interventions and support for this vulnerable group.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that anxiety disorders are common in this population, affecting more than two-fifths of the respondents. The most prevalent anxiety disorder is generalized anxiety, which is characterized by excessive and persistent worry about various aspects of life, such as school, health, family, or future. The prevalence rates of anxiety disorders among differently abled adolescents are higher than those reported for the general adolescent population. According to a meta-analysis of 41 studies from 27 countries, the global prevalence of any anxiety disorder among adolescents aged 13 to 18 years was 6.5%, with generalized anxiety being the most common (2.6%), followed by social anxiety (1.8%), and specific phobias (1.7%)(7). Another study from the United States found that the lifetime prevalence of any anxiety disorder among adolescents aged 13 to 18 years was 25.1%, with specific phobias being the most common (19.3%), followed by social anxiety (9.1%), and generalized anxiety (2.2%)(8).

The results indicate that anxiety disorders are common in this population, affecting more than one-third of the respondents frequently, and more than half occasionally or rarely. The most frequent anxiety disorder is generalized anxiety, which is characterized by excessive and persistent worry about various aspects of life, such as school, health, family, or future. Generalized anxiety can impair academic performance, social functioning, and quality of life. The frequency of anxiety disorders among differently abled adolescents is higher than those reported for the general adolescent population. According to a meta-analysis of 41 studies from 27 countries, the global prevalence of any anxiety disorder among adolescents aged 13 to 18 years was 6.5%, with generalized anxiety being the most common (2.6%), followed by social anxiety (1.8%), and specific phobias (1.7%)(7). Another study from the United States found that the lifetime prevalence of any anxiety disorder among adolescents aged 13 to 18 years was 25.1%, with specific phobias being the most common (19.3%), followed by social anxiety (9.1%), and generalized anxiety (2.2%)(9).

The most common comorbidity is anxiety and depression, which affects 27 participants. This is consistent with previous studies that have found depression and anxiety to be among the most prevalent and comorbid disorders, especially in child and adolescent populations(10).

The higher prevalence of anxiety disorders among differently abled adolescents may be explained by several factors, such as genetic predisposition, neurobiological abnormalities, environmental influences, cognitive biases, and coping skills(7).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant prevalence of anxiety disorders among differently abled adolescents, with 42.1% experiencing some form of anxiety disorder. Generalized anxiety is the most prevalent, affecting 23.5% of the population, followed by specific phobias at 18.2%, and social anxiety at 15.8%. Furthermore, the frequency analysis reveals that generalized anxiety is the most frequently reported disorder, with 46 participants experiencing it frequently. Comorbidity with other conditions is also observed, with anxiety commonly co-occurring with depression, ADHD, Autism Spectrum, sensory impairment, physical disability, and learning disability. Comparing the data with the general adolescent population shows that anxiety disorders are more prevalent among differently abled adolescents, emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions and support for this vulnerable group. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive mental health care and tailored interventions to address the unique challenges faced by differently abled adolescents with anxiety disorders.

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