

Incidence of Phobias in Iranian Psychiatric Patients

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INTRODUCTION

The word phobia comes from the Greek word phobos, which means flight, fear, dread or panic; or fear such as that which cause flight. Dislike or aversion is often implied, some authors, (H Laughlin 1967), define the phobia as a specific pathologic fear which is out of proportion to the apparent stimulus. The painful affect has been automatically and unconsciously displaced from its original internal object, to become attached to a specific external object or situation. The phobia is an obsessively persistent kind of unrealistic fear which is inappropriate and unreasoning. The phobia seeks to defend the unconscious and the repressed. It is a defense against anxiety which is thereby displaced externally. When the psychodynamics are uncovered, however, one finds that the reaction is exactly appropriate for the actual hidden inner threat, so far as the particular person is concerned. When the level of fear and dread for the external object is severe, the level of the internal threat is severe. The degree of the phobic reaction is thus a gauge of the degree of the internal threat. Phobic reaction and the phobic fear is beyond the individual's voluntary control. He can usually recognize that it is disproportionate, illogical, and non-rational in degree. He cannot adequately explain to others or to himself, the real basis for, or the level

and strenght of his fear response to his phobic object.

In this study attempt has been made to find out the incidence and proportion of phobias in mental disorders in general, different kinds, according to prevalence, and its relation to cultural, social and economic factors, in particular.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study reported herein, was conducted in Roozbeh Hospital of Tehran University during 1972. For each patient admitted to the hospital, a questionnaire was completed in which the items shown in table (1) were recorded. The Roozbeh mental hospital has 80 beds and a staff of 11 psychiatrists.

Table No. 1 - The type of data collected.

A- Personal Data:

- 1- Name and Surname:
- 2- Age
- 3- Sex
- 4- Marital status
- 5- Occupation
- 6- Education
- 7- Income
- 8- Number of dependents
- 9- Number of rooms in which the patient's family lives.

B- Presence of phobia Yes/No

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- C- Type of phobia
- 1- Darkness phobia
 - 2- Acrophobia
 - 3- Animal phobia
 - 4- Due to particular disorder
 - 5- Agoraphobia
 - 6- Travelling phobia
 - 7- Crowd phobia
 - 8- Claustrophobia
 - 9- Other kinds of phobias

D- Phobia with other ailments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During 1972, a total of 655 cases were recorded as suffering from different types of mental disorders. On the basis of data collected in table (1), it was found that, 70 patients out of the total of 655 had distinct symptoms of phobia. i.e. about 10 per cent of all those patients who consulted the hospital's medical staff were suffering from phobia. Table (2) shows the prevalent associated disorder with phobia among the patients.

Table No. 2 Concurrent mental disorders associated with phobias.

Type of illness	Number	Presence of Phobia	Percent
Schizophrenia	201	14	7
Epilepsy	149	9	6
Depression	155	29	18.7
Neuroses	85	17	20
Mania	10	-	-
Organic Psychoses	38	1	2.7
Symptomatic Psychoses	12	-	-
Psychopath and Perversions	4	-	-
Psychosomatic Disorders	1	-	-
Total	655	70	10.7

From 655 cases 306 were female and 349 were male. The 70 cases of phobia were divided among 39 females, and 31 males, with 40 of them married. The questionnaire also revealed that 60 percent of all the admitted patients were illetrate, and only 1 percent had a university education. Moreover the 70 phobic cases had families, with a total dependents of 387 percent living in 130 rooms. It is evident that the average size of the family was 5.5, with a density of 2.7 occupants per room. The per capita income distribution among the phobic cases showed that about 80 percent of them had a monthly income less than 10.000 Rials. (130 dollars per months. As to the distribution of the different types of phobia, table 3 was compiled from 1972 investigations.

Table No. 3 The distribution of the different types of phobia

Types of Phobias:	Percent
Darkness	24
Corpse	16
Crowrd	14
Pet animals	16
Cancer and Syphilis	9
Loneliness	5
Claustrophobia	4
Acrophobia	4
Policeman	2
Fire and Power	1
Cemetry	1
Burglar	1
Blood	1
Agoraphobia	1
Cutting devices	1

It is interesting to note that among the patients suffering from symptomatic psychoses, psychosomatic disorders, psychopaths and perversions, phobia was absent.

It is concluded from this study that the descending order of phobias in mental disorders are as follows:

- A- Schizophrenia: darkness, corpse, crowd, animals and loneliness.
- B- Depressions: darkness, corpse, crowd, acrophobia, and claustrophobia.
- C- Epilepsy: cat, darkness, crowd, animals, and blood.
- D- Neuroses-crowd, darkness, corpse, loneliness and animals.

SUMMARY

During 1972 a study was undertaken in Roozbeh Mental Hospital of Tehran University to investigate the prevalence of phobias among the patients suffering from one type or another of mental disorders. It was found that about 10 percent of the total patients visited in the hospital were suffering from phobia. Moreover, darkness, corpse, crowd, pet animals, fear from cancer and syphilis accounted for 79 % of the most common phobias, among the 655 recorded cases.

RESUMÉ

Pendant l'année 1972, nous avons fait une étude à l'hôpital universitaire Rouzbeh (Tehran) pour apprécier l'incidence de phobies chez les patients qui souffrent des maladies mentales.

Les résultats montrent que 10 pourcent des malades étaient atteints de phobies.

79 % de phobies les plus répandues chez 665 sujets enregistrés sont: l'obscurité, cadavre, animaux.

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