

# **Social anxiety: prevalence, Gender and age differences**

القلق الاجتماعي: أنتشاره والاختلافات بين الجنسين والعمر

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#### المستخلص:

**الهدف:** معرفة مدى انتشار القلق الاجتماعي واختلافه بين الجنسين والعمر بين طلبة الكلية.  
**المنهجية:** أجريت دراسة مقطعية مستعرضة على ٣٧٨ طالباً جامعياً تم اختيارهم بطريقة العينة العشوائية البسيطة لاختيار الكليات داخل جامعة ديالى ثم استخدمت الطريقة الملائمة أو المريحة لاختيار المشاركين في الدراسة في كل كلية. تم جمع البيانات الخاصة بهذه الدراسة باستخدام استبيان يتكون من جزأين (أ) الخصائص الاجتماعية والديموغرافية تشمل العمر والجنس والحالة الاجتماعية والحالة الاقتصادية للأسرة، مع من تعيش، ونوع الكلية، والمستوى التعليمي، والمستوى التعليمي. الأم، ووظيفة الأم، المستوى التعليمي للأب، ووظيفة الأب (ب) مقياس لبيوفيتز لتقييم مستوى القلق الاجتماعي بين الطلاب.

**النتائج:** أظهرت النتائج أن حوالي ٣٥.٧٪ من المشاركين كانوا من الذكور و ٦٤.٣٪ من الإناث. ٤٣.٢٪ من الطلاب مرتبطون بمستوى قلق اجتماعي معتدل ( $M \pm SD = 29.43 \pm 16.837$ ) و ١٦.١٪ مرتبطون بمستوى معتدل من القلق الاجتماعي.

**التوصيات:** مراعاة المتطلبات النفسية والاجتماعية للطلاب لأنها مهمة جداً لنجاحهم في المستقبل، وتزويد الطلاب القادمين بورش عمل وندوات في بداية كل عام دراسي يساعدهم على الشعور بقدر أقل من التوتر والقلق.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اضطراب القلق الاجتماعي، الانتشار.

#### Abstract

**Objectives:** To find out prevalence, Gender and age differences of social anxiety among college students.

**Methods:** The cross-sectional study was conducted on 378 college students who were selected by simple random sampling method to select colleges within Diyala university and then used convenient sampling method to select study participants in each college. The data for this study were collected using questionnaire which consist two parts (a) socio-demographic characteristics' included age, gender, marital status, economic status of family, with whom do you

live, type of college, educational level, educational level of mother, job of mother, educational level of father, job of father (b) Leibowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) to assess level of social anxiety among students.

**Results:** The result show that about 35.7% of participants were male, and 64.3% were female. 43.2% of the students are associated with mild social anxiety level ( $M \pm SD = 29.43 \pm 16.837$ ) and 16.1% are associated with moderate level of social anxiety.

**Recommendation:** Taking into account students' psychological and social requirements because they are so important to their future success, providing incoming students with workshops and seminars at the start of each academic year helps them feel less stressed and anxious.

**Keywords:** Social Anxiety Disorder, prevalence.

### Introduction

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) One of the most prevalent mental diseases, encompasses both social phobia and traditional forms of social anxiety. (1) People with social anxiety feel fear and anxiousness in social performance and interpersonal communication situations, which has a significant negative impact on a variety of aspects of their lives. (2,3) Moreover, Social anxiety increases the risk of developing major depressive disorder (4) and has a high comorbidity rate with other mental disorders. (1) social anxiety is the third most prevalent mental illness in the world, develops when a person must connect with others as needed. (5) typically starts in the early to mid-teens, but it can also start in younger children or adults and includes fear, anxiety, and avoidance that interferes with daily tasks, such as working or attending university, as well as other activities. (6,7)

Social anxiety is the continuous worry that a person may behave shamefully or exhibit anxiety symptoms in one or more performance settings in which they are with unknown individuals (8). Moreover, research show that younger people are more likely to have social anxiety than older adults; rates of prevalence are

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around 10% by the end of adolescence, and 90% of instances start by age 23 (9).

The importance of the study lies in shedding light on this segment of university students they are the chosen elite for building and reconstructing society, and they are the aspired hope for all developed societies that aim for development., due to the frequent incidence of this disease and the psychological disorders they may suffer from that may affect the extent of their acceptance of society and the extent of their ability to control their emotions due to their disturbed psychological states. He cannot communicate in society and resorts to introversion, fear of confrontation and distance from others, with a tendency to loneliness.

Globally, there are little study examine prevalence, Gender and age differences of social anxiety among college student. in addition, In Iraq not fond study to examine this topic, for this reason, the current study, in this way, filled this gap and based on these gaps, the researcher decided to conduct this study to find out prevalence, gender and age differences of social anxiety among college students.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive study, this type of design comprises the gathering of information on the existence or amount of one or more variables of interest through application of questionnaire demographic characteristic, social anxiety scale (22 items). This study was conducted at university of Diyala in Iraq. The sample of this study comprised students in university of Diyala. The minimum sample size is 378 participants according to the target population 21284 university student's and margin of errors 5 % and confidence level 95 %.

The data for this study were collected using questionnaire which consist two parts (a) socio-demographic characteristics' included age, gender, marital status, economic status of family, with whom do you live, type of college, educational level, educational level of mother, job of mother, educational level of father, job of father (b) Leibowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS). The researcher reassured participants that their data would be kept secure and secret. Participants in the sample were also informed that their

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names would remain confidential. According to the researcher, the participants were also informed that their identification would stay private during the study's initiation, publication, and/or after publishing. All participants gave the researcher permission to record their replies, which are then stored for data analysis. The data collection started from November 1, 2022 till March 1, 2023.

### Results:

**Table (1): Sample Distribution Based on Demographic Data of college students.**

List	Characteristics	F	%	
1	Age M±SD= 20.5 ± 2	18 – less than 21 year	202	53.4
		21 – less than 24 year	144	38.1
		24 – less than 27 year	32	8.5
		Total	378	100
2	Gender	Male	135	35.7
		Female	243	64.3
		Total	378	100
3	Residency	Urban	297	78.6
		Rural	81	21.4
		Total	378	100
4	Marital status	Unmarried	342	90.4
		Married	34	9
		Divorced	1	0.3
		Widowed/er	1	0.3
		Total	378	100
5	Living with	Both parent	275	72.8
		One parent	42	11.1
		Student's apartment	40	10.5
		Husband's/wife's family	21	5.6
		Total	378	100
6	College specialty	Scientific	259	68.5
		Humanity	119	31.5
		Total	378	100
7	Academic stage	First	166	67
		Second	67	17.7
		Third	76	20.1

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		Fourth	40	10.6
		Fifth	29	7.6
		Total	378	100
8	Monthly income (Iraqi Dinar)	Less than 300000	106	28
		300000 – 600000	119	31.5
		601000 – 900000	79	20.9
		901000 – 1200000	22	5.8
		1201000 – 1500000	27	7.1
		More than 1500000	25	6.7
		Total	378	100

**Table 2.** Assessment the Levels of Social Anxiety among University Students.

Social anxiety	F	%	M	SD
Not clinical	143	37.7	29.43	16.837
Mild	163	43.2		
Moderate	61	16.1		
Severe	11	2.9		
Total	378	100		

f: Frequency, %: Percentage: Mean for total score, SD: Standard Deviation  
 Not clinical= 0 – 22, Mild= 22.1 – 44, Moderate= 44.1 – 66, Severe= 66.1 – 88  
 (Table 2) illustrates that 43.2% of the students are associated with mild social anxiety level ( $M \pm SD = 29.43 \pm 16.837$ ) and 16.1% are associated with moderate level of social anxiety

### Discussion

The data analysis finding showed the distribution of the sample according to socio-demographic characteristics, which revealed that the mean age of study sample was  $20.5 \pm 2$  years. This finding was consistent with (10) According to a study that examined the prevalence of social anxiety disorder among medical students which found mean of age was  $21.4 \pm 1$  years. Another study conducts (11), were founded (98%) of study sample were (21-30) years old.

The present study's findings show that about 35.7% of participants were male, and 64.3% were female. This result agrees with (12) A female participant was selected for this study (82.1%) in

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order to evaluate social anxiety among nursing students at Hawler medical university in Erbil city. No consistent with (13) 72% of male and 28% of female who participated in the study to examine social anxiety and related characteristics among university students in Ethiopia were male.

Regarding residency, 78.6% of students are reported they are resident in urban and remaining are resident in rural. This result supported by (14) The study sample (86.7%) is from an urban residential region to determine how social anxiety affects nursing college students' self-esteem. This outcome might be explained by the fact that students who live in urban areas are more likely to complete their education than those who do so in rural areas, as well as the fact that urban areas have higher population densities than rural areas do.

Concerning marital status, that majority of students are still unmarried as seen among 90.4% and only 9% of students are married that consisted with study conducted by (15) their founded only 13.7% of student were married. Due to the fact that in Iraqi cultures, marriage is

typically arranged after completing collage and obtaining a career.

Regarding living arrangement, the result show 72.8% of students reported that they are living with both parent at their own house. This result consistent (14) 54% percent of the study group, according to the research, are members of their immediate family. And supported by (10) in Northwest Ethiopia, among high school student, in 2021, to determine the incidence of social anxiety and its contributing factors. According to reports, 682(77.9%) children are raised by both parents.

Regarding college specialty, clarifies that 68.5 of students are studying at scientific colleges while 31.5% of them are studying at humanity colleges that consisted with study conducted in Jordan to investigate the impact of depression and anxiety on college students' academic performance, more than half of study sample attended scientific institutions (2).



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In this study show the academic stage for students reports that 67% of students are from first stage, 20.1% from third stage, 17.7% from second stage, 10.6% from fourth stage, and only 7.6% from fifth stage. This result supported by Ahmed et al. (2017) to look at the incidence of social anxiety disorder and contributing factors among educational science for the academic year 2016-2017. Reports that 53.9% of student fourth year, 18.2% of student second year, 20.2% of student third year, and 53.9% of student first year, regarding monthly income, 31.5% of students reported not satisfied monthly income of 300000 – 600000 Iraqi. This result consistent with (16) their findings indicate that the study samples socioeconomic position is low in half.

Another research that was done in Irbil to evaluate social anxiety in nursing students revealed that the majority of the study sample was from a low-income background (19). About the self-esteem level that more than half of university students are associated with high self-esteem as seen among 57.1% of them ( $M \pm SD = 30.82 \pm 3.884$ ). This result supported by (17) to determine the level of self-esteem among college students in the Bankura district with respect to different demographic factors, such as gender and caste, that students, the overall rate of prevalence of self-esteem was found to be -65.71% students having high level.

In this result show 43.2% of the students are associated with mild social anxiety level ( $M \pm SD = 29.43 \pm 16.837$ ) and 16.1% are associated with moderate level of social anxiety. This result agrees with (18) The prevalence of social phobia in this study ranged from mild to severe, with 7.9% of the participants reporting no social phobia, 29% reporting mild or moderate social phobia, 24.3% reporting moderate or severe social phobia, and 19.1% reporting extremely severe social anxiety. Other study supported this result by (12) The prevalence of mild social anxiety is 25.7%, moderate social anxiety is 19.9%, and severe social anxiety is just 8.1% among the sample.

### Conclusions

Researcher designed to determine the prevalence, Gender and age differences of social anxiety among college students. The study concluded that the incidence of social anxiety among students is common in the early stages of college and it occurs in female students at a greater rate than male students.

### Recommendations

Giving students social anxiety exams at various ages to treat social anxiety concerns in their early phases, providing incoming students with workshops and seminars at the start of each academic year helps them feel less stressed and anxious.

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