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PREVALENCE OF COMMON PHOBIAS AND THEIR SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN A TRADITIONAL DEVELOPING SOCIETY

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Background: Epidemiological data indicate that anxiety disorders are the most common childhood disorders and phobias are the most common form of anxiety disorders.

Aim: To identify the most common phobias in children and adolescents and to determine the prevalence, age distribution, and socio-demographic correlates of phobias.

Design: A cross sectional study

Setting: Public and Private schools of the Ministry of Education, State of Qatar

Subjects: A total of 2188 children and adolescents aged 6 to 18 years were approached and 1703 (77.8%) students participated in this study.

Methods: The questionnaire included socio-demographic information, extra curricular activities and hobbies, behaviour at home and various phobic fears. Psychiatrists determined the definitive diagnosis for various phobias by checking and screening their symptoms.

Results: Of the studied subjects, 44% were males and 56% were females. The overall prevalence of phobia in children and adolescents was 19.7%. Among children with phobia, females had higher rates of phobias (62.4% vs 37.6%) than males. Social phobia (12.7%) was the commonest phobia found followed by Agoraphobia (8.6%). Secondary school children were highly afflicted with social phobia (14.9%), agoraphobia (11.7%) and specific phobia (9.6%), while preparatory students (8.3%) were more likely to have 'medical' phobia (fear of physical illness, medical tests and procedures). A significant difference was observed between the age groups in children with agoraphobia ( $p=0.002$ ).

Conclusion: The overall prevalence of phobia in children and adolescents in Qatar was higher, with the most common phobias observed being social phobia, agoraphobia and specific phobia.