Social phobia in medical college students

Md Faruk Hossain,1 Mekhala Sarkar,2 Ahsan Uddin Ahmed,3 Nasim Jahan,4 Muhammad Zillur Rahman Khan,5 Md Waziul Alam Chowdhury6

1Associate Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry, Khwaja Yunus Ali Medical College, Sirajganj, Bangladesh; 2Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka, Bangladesh; 3Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, Dhaka, Bangladesh; 4Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders General Hospital (BIRDEM), Dhaka, Bangladesh; 5Assistant Professor, Department of Child, Adolescent and Family Psychiatry, NIMH, Dhaka, Bangladesh; 6Professor of Psychiatry, Consultant, Square Hospital Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Summary
Social phobia is a common psychiatric condition. Disability in diverse functional areas and impaired quality of life are the two important domains of consequences of social phobia. This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in a purposively selected private medical college in Sirajganj, Bangladesh from October 2014 to March 2015 to determine the proportion of social phobia among the undergraduate students. A total of 178 students both male and female were selected through stratified random sampling. A self-administered semi-structured socio-demographic questionnaire and the English version of Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) were applied to assess social phobia. Results showed that 53.9% of the respondents were found to have social phobia and 46.1% respondents did not have social phobia. In terms of severity, forty six respondents (25.8%) had mild social phobia (SPIN score=21-30), whereas thirty nine respondents (21.9%) had moderate social phobia (SPIN score=31-40) and nine respondents (5.1%) had severe social phobia (SPIN score=41-50). Only 1.1% was found to have very severe social phobia (SPIN score=51 or more). The presence of social phobia was slightly higher among the younger age group (aged 22 years or below) (55%) than the older age group aged 23 years or above (51.7%). Social phobia was more among female respondents (54.2% vs. 53.7%). The high level of social phobia as found in this study warranted proper attention of the educationists and further studies to address the issue.


Introduction
Social phobia, even though being a common psychiatric disorder, is under recognized and under treated. It is more common in youth, is associated with lower educational achievements, unstable employment, higher frequency of being absent to work, individuals are less likely to marry, more likely to get divorced, and have reduced productivity that could lead to dependence from family, state and country.1

They may have specific fears about performing certain activities, such as writing, eating, or speaking in front of others, or they may experience a vague, nonspecific fear of *embarrassing oneself.2* By leaving anxiety-provoking situations (escape) or by foregoing them entirely (avoidance), individuals with social phobia may reduce or prevent the immediate experience of anxiety, but this relief may also reinforce their belief in their inadequacies. This cycle may serve to maintain the person’s social anxiety in the absence of objective threat.3,4

There is paucity of information on the epidemiology of this disorder in the developing world, especially among college and university students. A cross-sectional survey of students at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) using the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) revealed prevalence of social phobia at 8.5%.5 Another study of 523 Swedish University students with Social Phobia Screening Questionnaire (SPSQ) reported prevalence to be as high as 16.1%.6 Izgic et al. from Turkey found the prevalence of social phobia 7.9% among a stratified sample of 1003 university students.7 In India, there has been only one study on social phobia (among high school adolescents) which mentions a prevalence of 12.8% and also an association with impairment in academic functioning.8

So far revealed, no work has been done in the field of social anxiety among college or university students in Bangladesh. Medical personnel are subjected to significant social interaction in course of delivering their professional services. Presence of
social anxiety during the student life will necessarily jeopardize their learning process and acquiring competency as a physician. So this study, aimed at finding out the proportion of social anxiety disorder among the undergraduate medical students in a private medical college. This base line study might pave the way for further research and help the policy makers and the psychiatrists to address the issue and also sorting the ways of helping those in need.

Materials and methods
This was a descriptive cross sectional study conducted among the undergraduate students of Khwaja Yunus Ali Medical College, Sirajganj, Bangladesh. The duration of study was six months, starting from October, 2014 to March, 2015. A total of 178 students were selected through stratified random sampling from all the students studying MBBS in Khwaja Yunus Ali Medical College. Both male and female students were included and informed written consent was taken from each respondent. During data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire designed by the researcher containing socio-demographic and other variables was distributed to all of the respondents. The English version of Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) was applied to estimate social phobia among the respondents. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16.0 for windows.

Results
The study identified socio demographic characteristics of the respondents including age, sex, religion, habitat, family type, monthly family income, education and occupation of the parents and marital status of the parents. The age range of the participants was 17-25 years and the mean (±SD) age was 21.37 (±1.752) years (Table 1). Among them 82 (46.1%) were male and 96 (53.9%) were female (Figure 1). Regarding religion, 153 (86%) were Muslims and 24 (13.5%) were Hindus. In terms of family types, 82% came from nuclear family and 18% from extended family. More than half (55.1%) came from urban areas, 16.9% were from semi-urban areas and the rest (28.1%) from rural areas (Table 2). Monthly family income ranged from 50000 BDT to 900000 BDT and the mean (±SD) income was 45994.38 (±70504.357) BDT (Table 3).

Table 1: Age distribution of the respondents (n=178)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤22</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥23</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean (±SD): 21.37 (±1.752) years, Median: 22.00 years, Mode: 23 years
In the study, ninety six (53.9%) respondents were found to have social phobia and eighty two (46.1%) respondents did not have social phobia. In terms of severity, forty six respondents (25.8%) had mild social phobia (SPIN score=21-30). Whereas, thirty nine respondents (21.9%) had moderate social phobia (SPIN score=31-40) and nine respondents (5.1%) had severe social phobia (SPIN score=41-50). Only 1.1% was found to have very severe social phobia (SPIN score=51 or more) (Figure 4, Table 6).

Table 4: Education of the respondents' parents (n=178)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education of the father</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to degree (14 years)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above degree</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Marital status and relationship of the respondents parents (n=178)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status of the parents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living together</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The lifetime prevalence estimates for social phobia vary greatly across the countries and range from 0.4 to 20.4 in different studies. Social phobia is the most common anxiety disorder and the third most common psychiatric disorder, after major depressive disorder and alcohol dependence. In this study, the proportion of social phobia was found as being 53.9%. Among 178 respondents ninety six were found to have social phobia and eighty two of them did not have social phobia. The proportion was much higher than other similar studies conducted among undergraduate students of college and universities in different countries. Previously, when prevalence estimates were based on the examination of psychiatric clinic samples, social anxiety disorder (i.e. social phobia) was thought to be a relatively rare disorder. The opposite was instead true; social anxiety was common but many were afraid to seek psychiatric help, leading to an under-statement of the problem. Prevalence rates may vary widely because of overlapping symptoms with other disorders. Because of the difficulty in separating social phobia from poor social skills or shyness developmentally, some
studies have a large range of prevalence. In community epidemiological surveys, the prevalence of social phobia depends heavily on where the diagnostic threshold is set. In this study SPIN17 (Social Phobia Inventory) was used to determine the presence of social phobia. As SPIN has a specificity of 69-84%, it is likely that between 15-20% of those scoring above cut-off on the SPIN may not satisfy the diagnostic criteria for the disorder. So it can be inferred that the proportion may be somewhat lower than identified. Even after this consideration, the proportion found in the study appears quite high. In terms of severity, forty six respondents (25.8%) had mild social phobia (SPIN score=21-30). Whereas, thirty nine respondents (21.9%) had moderate social phobia (SPIN score=31-40) and nine respondents (5.1%) had severe social phobia (SPIN score=41-50). Only two of the one hundred and seventy eight respondents (1.1%) were found to have very severe social phobia (SPIN score=51 or more).

Conclusion
The study suggests that social phobia is a very common psychiatric condition among undergraduate medical students in Bangladesh. Further in-depth and large-scale research on social phobia among college and university level students should be conducted for better understanding of the condition and its overall impact on the students in terms of their interpersonal, social, academic and subsequent professional life.

Reference