

Abstract

Background: Comorbid anxiety disorder in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was found to have an average prevalence of 25%. The comorbidity between anxiety disorder and ADHD was supported by complex substantive explanations. There is a lack of local studies to investigate this common clinical condition.

Objectives: This study aimed to examine the prevalence and the correlates of anxiety disorders in local Chinese children studying at elementary school with ADHD.

Method: A total of 120 children aged 6-12 years old with ADHD were recruited and parent-version Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children-Version 4 (DISC-IV) was administered to primary care takers. Parental anxiety and depression level were also assessed by a self reported questionnaire, the Hospital Anxiety Depression Scale (HADS). The study defined the presence of anxiety disorder by two different definitions: 1) anxiety disorders excluding specific phobia meeting Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-4th Edition (DSM-IV) symptom criteria only; 2) any anxiety disorders meeting DSM-IV both symptom and impairment criteria.

Results: The prevalence rate of anxiety disorder under both definitions was the same as 27.5%. Among the children with ADHD and impaired anxiety disorders, over half of them also had comorbid oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder (ODD/CD), yielding an adjusted odds ratio of 3.0 in multivariate analysis for anxiety disorder, given comorbid ODD/CD. Anxiety disorder was also found to have positive association with children inattention symptoms. Although there was insignificant association between children's anxiety disorder and parental anxiety and depressive psychopathology, overall around half of the parents of children with ADHD scored above the cutoff in HADS, indicating significant psychopathology.

Conclusion: Clinicians are suggested to have screening and careful assessment of anxiety symptoms in children with ADHD, especially those suffering from comorbid ODD/CD. The high prevalence rate of parental internalizing psychopathology among children with ADHD should be properly addressed