

Prevalence of Anxiety and Depressive Disorders Among Primary Health Care Attendees in Al-Nasiriyah, Iraq

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BACKGROUND

Anxiety and depressive disorders are among the most common psychiatric disorders seen in general practice in all regions of the world (Goldberg & Blackwell, 1970; Institute of Medicine, 2001). These disorders are significantly disabling, causing impairments to both social and physical functioning (Olfson et al., 1997). In the past 35 years, several studies have reported that mental and behavioral disorders are common among patients in primary care settings in different parts of the world. However, little is known about this issue in Iraq and, to our knowledge, there is no published study addressing it.

During the past three decades, Iraq has witnessed many internal and external conflicts, including three wars and years of sanctions. Since 2003, violence has been increasing throughout the country. These circumstances have affected the Iraqi population in every domain of life with varying degrees of repercussion.

Primary care is the cornerstone of health care services, providing an appropriate context for detection and management of mental disorders. Epidemiological studies in primary care settings have been based on three methods of identification of mental disorders: the use of screening instruments, clinical diagnosis by primary care professionals, or by psychiatric diagnostic interview.

Goldberg and Blackwell (1970), in one of the first studies based on more efficient research instruments than had been previously available, found the “conspicuous psychiatric morbidity” of a London general practice to be 20%. Since then, numerous studies of primary care patients have been conducted throughout the world with findings suggesting high rates of depression and

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