

Exploring Hidden Anxiety in Adolescents: A Case Study of Abdullah

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Abstract

Anxiety disorders are among the most prevalent yet frequently overlooked mental health conditions in adolescents. This case study examines Abdullah, an 18-year-old male living in a joint family system, who exhibits symptoms of severe anxiety, including persistent worry, physical tension, and social withdrawal. Using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) tool, his anxiety was categorized as severe, emphasizing the need for intervention. This study highlights how societal stigma and cultural expectations contribute to the concealment of anxiety symptoms, delaying diagnosis and treatment. Recommendations include Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation (JPMR), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and family-based interventions. The findings underscore the need for greater mental health awareness and timely support systems for adolescents experiencing hidden anxiety.

Keywords: adolescent anxiety, hidden anxiety, social stigma, mental health intervention, case study

Introduction

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health issues affecting adolescents, yet they often remain undiagnosed due to stigma and a lack of awareness. Hidden anxiety, particularly in cultures where mental health discussions are limited, presents a significant challenge in early diagnosis and intervention. This case study explores the experience of Abdullah, an 18-year-old male struggling with severe anxiety, emphasizing the need for recognition and appropriate management strategies.

Case Presentation

Abdullah, an 18-year-old male, resides in a joint family setting with his parents, elder sister, and extended relatives. As the younger sibling, he often feels overshadowed by his sister's academic and personal achievements, leading to self-doubt and performance-related stress. His family holds high expectations for him, contributing to increased pressure to excel academically and socially. Despite his struggles, Abdullah hesitates to express his emotions due to societal stigma surrounding mental health, further exacerbating his anxiety.

Symptoms and Manifestations

Physical Symptoms:- Excessive shaking and fidgeting, particularly in stressful situations. Persistent sweating, especially in social interactions. Sleep disturbances, including difficulty falling asleep and frequent awakenings due to intrusive thoughts.

Psychological Symptoms:- Persistent intrusive thoughts leading to cognitive distress. Excessive self-monitoring and heightened self-consciousness. Avoidance of group activities, public speaking, and unfamiliar social settings. These symptoms significantly impact Abdullah's daily functioning, affecting his academic performance, social life, and overall well-being.

Assessment of Anxiety

To assess Abdullah's condition, the "Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) Scale" was used. This widely recognized screening tool evaluates anxiety severity based on self-reported symptoms. Abdullah scored above 15, indicating "severe anxiety", necessitating timely intervention. The results reinforce the need for structured management approaches to address his psychological distress and improve coping mechanisms.

Analysis

Several interrelated factors contribute to Abdullah's anxiety, including familial expectations, self-esteem issues, and societal stigma. As the younger sibling, he frequently compares himself to his academically successful elder sister, fostering feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, cultural norms often discourage open discussions about mental

health, making it difficult for Abdullah to seek emotional support. These factors create a cycle of stress, reinforcing his avoidance behaviors and increasing his social withdrawal.

Interventions

1. Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation (JPMR): A structured relaxation technique that involves systematic tensing and relaxing of muscle groups to alleviate physical symptoms of anxiety.
2. Breathing Exercises: Simple deep-breathing techniques to help manage acute stress episodes and reduce physiological distress
3. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): A structured psychotherapeutic approach aimed at addressing negative thought patterns, improving emotional regulation, and enhancing coping strategies.
4. Family Counseling: Encouraging Abdullah's family to engage in supportive discussions and reduce pressure related to academic and social expectations.

Discussion

This case study highlights the significant role that societal and familial expectations play in exacerbating adolescent anxiety. Research suggests that cultural stigma surrounding mental health prevents many adolescents from seeking professional help, prolonging their distress (Kendler et al., 2019). Addressing hidden anxiety requires a multi-level intervention strategy, including education campaigns to reduce stigma, early screening in schools, and accessible mental health resources. In Abdullah's case, a combination of CBT, relaxation techniques, and family-based interventions can contribute to long-term emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Abdullah's case underscores the hidden nature of adolescent anxiety and the critical importance of early intervention. While his symptoms remain largely unnoticed by those around him, his self-reported distress highlights the urgent need for structured support. With appropriate interventions, including JPMR, CBT, and family counseling, adolescents like Abdullah can develop effective coping mechanisms and regain control over their mental well-being. This study calls for a collective effort to promote mental

health awareness, destigmatize anxiety disorders, and ensure accessible support systems for adolescents experiencing psychological distress.

Recommendations

1. Expanding School-Based Mental Health Services: Implementing early screening programs in educational institutions.
2. Parental Awareness Programs: Educating parents on recognizing hidden anxiety symptoms in adolescents.
3. Promoting Open Conversations About Mental Health: Encouraging adolescent-friendly support groups to normalize discussions about anxiety.
4. Encouraging Professional Therapy: Increasing accessibility to structured therapeutic interventions, including CBT and relaxation techniques.
5. Reducing Cultural Stigma: Implementing community-based awareness campaigns to foster a supportive mental health environment.

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