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ANXIETY IN FRAGILE X SYNDROME: CLINICAL ASSESSMENT, CHARACTERIZATION AND PREVALENCE

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Background: Anxiety has long been recognized as one of the most prominent features of the fragile X syndrome (FXS) behavioral phenotype, and it is a source of considerable hardship for patients and their families. Typical anxiety symptoms observed in patients with FXS include social withdrawal and gaze avoidance, heightened physiological responses, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and stress and worry related to routine change. However, there is limited information regarding the prevalence of formal anxiety disorders in this population.

Methods: We conducted structured psychiatric interviews for anxiety disorders with the parents of 58 males (ages 5-27, M=13.2 years) and 35 females (ages 6-33, M=12.0 years) with the *FMR1* full mutation. The Diagnostic Manual-Intellectual Disability (DM-ID; DSM-IV criteria adapted for ID by the National Association for the Dually Diagnosed and the APA) was used for those with IQ <70.

Results: More than half (53.8%) of the participants were taking psychotropic medications, the most common of which were SSRI/SNRI (31.2%) and stimulants (24.7%). Eighty-four percent of individuals met criteria for at least one anxiety disorder, a rate approximately eight times more common than both the general population and general intellectual disability (ID). Specific phobia (60.4%) and social phobia (36.6%) were the most common anxiety disorders. More than half of the sample (59.1%) met criteria for multiple anxiety disorders. Except for agoraphobia, there was no significant difference in the rate of anxiety disorders among probands and non-probands. Only specific phobia occurred more frequently in participants with an ID compared to those without ID.

Conclusions: The results of this study emphasizes the pervasiveness, severity and impact of anxiety on individuals with FXS, even among non-probands and those actively treated for anxiety and mood symptoms, calling for controlled clinical studies to discover more effective interventions.

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