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Generalized Anxiety Disorder Publications: So Where Do We Stand?

MICHEL J. DUGAS, PH.D.

Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Abstract—Although generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) has traditionally been understudied, several authors have stated that interest in GAD has recently increased. However, no data exist to confirm or refute this assertion. The present study investigates publication rates for the anxiety disorders from 1980 to 1997 in two extensive databases: PsycLIT and MEDLINE. GAD publications were examined in two ways. First, the annual percentage of anxiety disorder publications devoted to GAD was calculated. Second, GAD publications were classified into one of four categories: descriptive, process, treatment, and review. The results show that GAD is considerably less studied than panic disorder/agoraphobia, posttraumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Though the percentage of anxiety disorder publications devoted to GAD increased considerably during the 1980s, it has generally remained stable in the 1990s. The results also show that descriptive and treatment issues account for the vast majority of GAD publications. The author concludes that the paucity of research into process issues is unfortunate because intensified investigation of the specific processes involved in GAD may lead to new breakthroughs in our understanding and treatment of this anxiety disorder. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is one of the most commonly diagnosed anxiety disorders, with a lifetime prevalence of 4.1–6.6% in the general population (Blazer, Hughes, George, Swartz, & Boyer, 1991; Kessler et al., 1994). Further, the principal feature of GAD (i.e., worry) may be a process fundamental to other anxiety and mood disorders (Barlow, 1988), suggesting that increased knowledge of GAD would lead to a better understanding of other disorders. Despite prevalence of GAD, presence of worry in many other

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Michel J. Dugas, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H4B 1R6.

clinical disorders, and the importance of worry as a fundamental coping process, it is widely acknowledged that GAD has been understudied (e.g., Barlow, Rapee, & Brown, 1992; Butler & Booth, 1991; Sanderson, Beck, & McGinn, 1994). However, there exist recent conflicting reports indicating that interest in GAD has begun to increase (e.g., Borkovec & Newman, 1999; Butler, 1994; Tallis & Eysenck, 1994).

No data exist at this time to confirm or refute this assertion, above and beyond showing that interest in the anxiety disorders in general has increased. For example, Norton, Cox, Asmundsun, and Maser (1995) assessed number of anxiety disorder publications from 1981 to 1990 by searching two well-known databases: PsycLIT and MEDLINE. Their results reveal a dramatic increase in the number and proportion of anxiety disorder publications during that time period. In 1981, anxiety disorder publications made up only 0.19% of PsycLIT ($n = 42$) and 0.06% of MEDLINE ($n = 157$) abstracts. By comparison, in 1990, anxiety disorder articles accounted for 2.10% of PsycLIT ($n = 797$) and 0.21% of MEDLINE ($n = 803$) abstracts. Thus, there has been a marked increase of interest in the anxiety disorders in the 1980s.

Norton and colleagues (1995) also examined individual anxiety disorder publications. They found that panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder were the most frequently referenced anxiety disorders, whereas GAD, social phobia, and specific phobia were considerably less mentioned. In a similar study, Cox, Wessel, Norton, Swinson, and Dorenfeld (1995) identified anxiety disorder publications in 14 mental health journals from 1990 to 1992. Their results revealed a similar pattern: panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder were targeted most frequently in anxiety disorder publications. GAD, social phobia, and specific phobia, once again, received much lower rates of publication. Taking into account the distribution of anxiety disorder publications from 1981 to 1992, it appears that GAD has been understudied.

The present study examines publication rates for the anxiety disorders from 1980, the year GAD was officially recognized (in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM-III]*; American Psychiatric Association, 1980), to 1997. By examining publication rates over a more prolonged time period, this study will extend upon the work of Norton and colleagues (1995). Because GAD publications are of particular interest in the present study, they will be examined in two ways. First, the annual percentage of anxiety disorder publications devoted to GAD will be calculated. Second, the nature of GAD publications will be examined. To accomplish this, GAD publications will be classified into one of four categories: descriptive, process, treatment, and review. In this manner, the present study addresses the following questions: (a) Has the relative interest in GAD increased over the past few years? and (b) What factors associated with GAD are most commonly studied?

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