

Introduction

Hypochondriasis (Illness Anxiety Disorder) is excessive worrying about your health, to the point where it causes great distress and affects your everyday life.

Some people with health anxiety have a medical condition, which they worry about excessively. Others have medically unexplained symptoms, such as chest pain or headaches, which they are concerned may be a sign of a serious illness, despite the doctor's reassurance.

They usually misinterpret their sensations or minor symptoms to fit with their feared illness.

Others may be permanently anxious about their future health, worrying about things like:

"What if I get cancer or heart disease?"



Is Medical Student Syndrome Real or Just A Myth?

Medical student syndrome is a well-documented phenomenon, a one- to two-year phase during which aspiring physicians think they've contracted whatever disease it is they're studying. A stomach gurgle becomes appendicitis. A mosquito bite heralds hemorrhagic fever. Everything is cancer.

There isn't much research on medical student syndrome: Though one study from the 1960s found that more than 70% of medical students develop phantom illnesses, another study in 2014 suggested that the effect was exaggerated—and that law students are just as neurotic about their health as their M.D.-seeking peers. (2)

Does Illness Anxiety Come in Different Types?

Constantly Seeking Information and Reassurance

For example, obsessively researching illnesses from the internet, booking frequent GP appointments, and having frequent tests that don't find any problems.

Avoidant Behaviour

Avoiding medical TV programmes, GP appointments and anything else that might trigger the anxiety, and avoiding activities such as exercise that are perceived to make the condition worse.

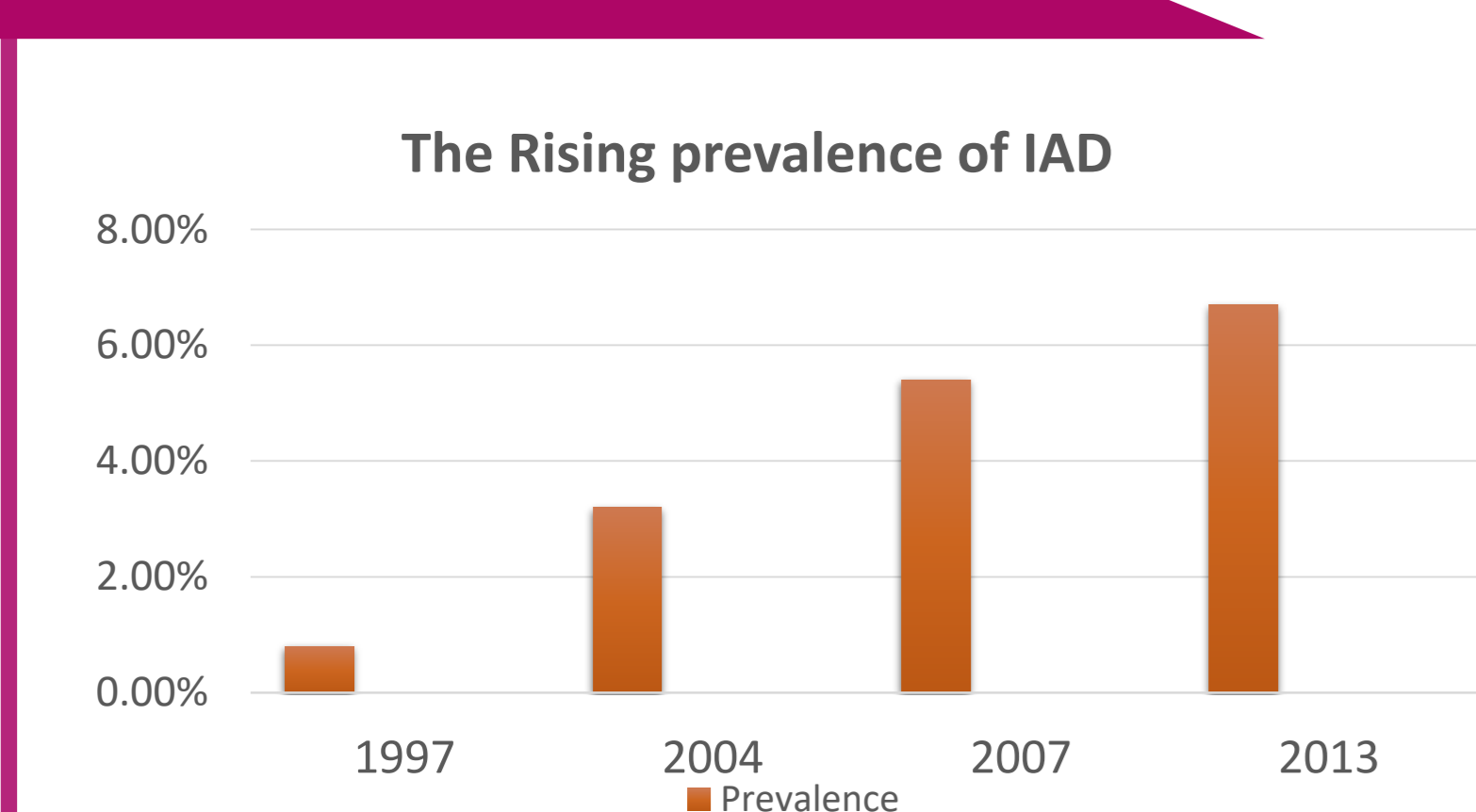
What Are The Causes of Illness Anxiety Disorder?

- ❖ You may be going through a particularly stressful period of your life.
- ❖ There may have been illness or death in your family.
- ❖ Another family member may have worried a lot about your health when you were young.

Personality

You may be vulnerable to health anxiety because you are a worrier generally. You may find it difficult to handle emotions and conflict, and tend to "catastrophize" when faced with problems in your life. (1)

The Prevalence of IAD



A study of the Australian population found that illness anxiety is experienced by approximately 1 in 20 over their lifetime. (2)



Why is The Prevalence of IAD Rising?

❖ Media Overload:

Health campaigns & TV programmes have increased IAD by raising awareness to diseases. The fact that nearly every day on the calendar is an awareness day for some sort of disease only adds fire to the flame.



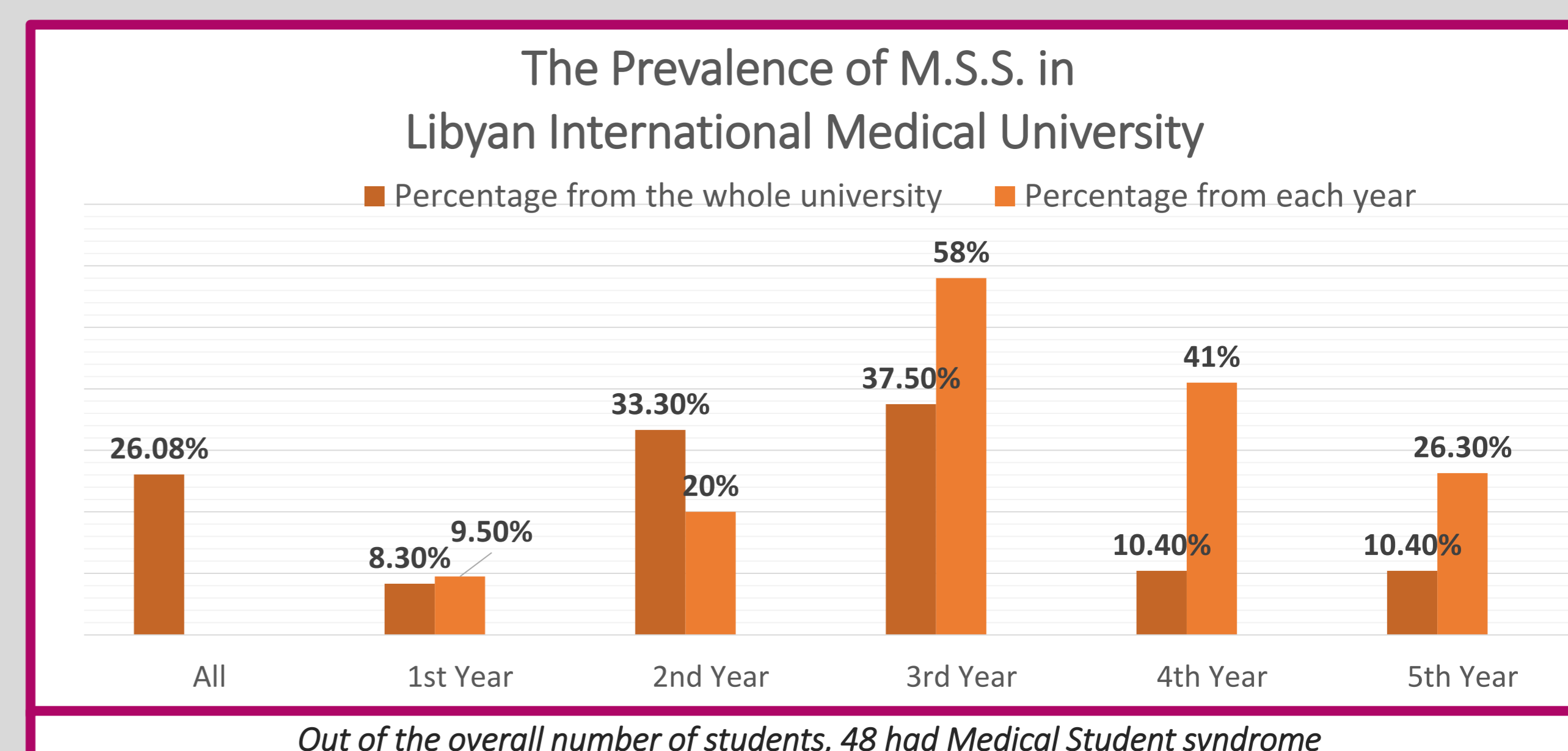
❖ The Internet (Cyberchondria):

The Web has inflamed all of our worst hypochondriac tendencies by making data on far-fetched syndromes readily available. In reality, most of this information is wrong and only increase your health concerns. (3)

The Prevalence of MSS Among LIMU Students

Due to the conflict about whether or not MSS exists, I decided to do a survey inside LIMU university. The survey was based on the DSM-IV's diagnostic criteria for hypochondriasis.

184 students (from Year 1 to Year 5, majoring in dentistry and medicine) participated and the results were as following:



In 1st year the prevalence was very low, this is due to them not being oriented with any major diseases. In 2nd year it starts rising and reaches its peak in 3rd year; this is due to them being well-oriented with diseases but still not knowing their clinical correlation. Due to the high prevalence in 3rd year, MSS is also usually known as "Third-Year Syndrome". In the clinical years, students start seeing real patients with diseases and start realizing how unlikely it is for them to contract them, so the prevalence decreases.

The prevalence of MSS in LIMU is relatively high in comparison to the prevalence in King Saud University in Saudi Arabia which was only 3.8%. (4)

Conclusion

- ❖ Illness Anxiety Disorder (previously known as Hypochondria) has been rising dramatically during the past few years due to the general population having easy access to medical information.
- ❖ Medical Student Syndrome is real and is a subtype of IAD that is found in medical students. It's prevalence among the students of Libyan International Medical University is relatively high.

References

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