

## Agoraphobia

*Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Health*

### Why in News?

In the popular psychological thriller *The Woman in the Window*, Amy Adams plays Anna Fox, a woman who spends her days watching life outside, but the idea of stepping out herself feels terrifying.

- **Agoraphobia** - It is an *anxiety disorder* in which a person fears situations where escape may be difficult or help unavailable, if they experience panic or intense anxiety.
- These fears commonly involve crowded places, shopping centres, public transport, or leaving home alone.
- **Close Link** - The condition is closely linked to panic disorder, although the two are considered distinct diagnoses.
- **Prevalence** - Globally, it has an estimated lifetime prevalence of *1.2% to 1.3%*, with a 12-month prevalence rate hovering between 0.8% and 1.7%.
- **Symptoms** - It can vary widely in severity.
  - **Physical** - Rapid heartbeat, sweating, hyperventilation, dizziness, nausea, chest pain, trembling, diarrhoea, and feeling faint.
  - **Cognitive** - Fear of losing control, embarrassment, inability to escape, or dying during a panic attack; Some fear being left alone, they cannot function independently without support.
  - **Behavioural** - Avoidance of public spaces, reliance on companions, or complete housebound lifestyle.
- **Causes** - It develops through a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors.
  - **Biological** - Genetic predisposition, neurotransmitter imbalances.
  - **Psychological** - Panic attacks, trauma, existing anxiety disorders.
  - **Environmental** - Stressful life events, prolonged isolation.
- **Risk** - It can affect anyone, but it usually begins in late teens or early adulthood - *women are diagnosed more often than men*.
- People with panic disorder, anxiety, depression, or past trauma face higher risk.
- **Diagnosis** - There is *no single medical test* for agoraphobia.
- Doctors diagnose it by discussing symptoms, their severity, and how much they affect daily life.
- They check if it is linked to panic disorder or another mental health issue.
- Sometimes physical exams are done to rule out other illnesses that look like anxiety.
- **Treatment** - It depends on the severity of the condition, but both psychotherapy and medication have been shown to be effective.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** - It is one of the most effective methods, teaching patients to face and challenge their fears.
- **Medication** - For severe cases, doctors often prescribe selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) (e.g., sertraline, escitalopram)
- Other medications, including serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), tricyclic antidepressants, benzodiazepines (short-term use only).

- **Combination Therapy** - CBT & medication often most effective.

## Reference

[The Hindu | Agoraphobia](#)

