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Letter to the Editor: A previously undescribed specific phobia

We wish to draw the readers' attention to a specific phobia that is previously undescribed in the literature. Since it has not yet been described, the following is anecdotal and is based on personal experience and a grey literature from an online community of sufferers. It is the fear of falling up into the sky. The name *Casadastraphobia* has been adopted by the community of sufferers; the etymology of which comes from the Latin *cas* (to fall) *ad astra* (to the stars). There seems to be some similarity to Agoraphobia, with experience of anxiety in open spaces, however this anxiety is specifically related to the feeling that the individual might fall up into the sky. Moreover, the other four criteria for agoraphobia provided in DSM-5 – anxiety around using public transportation, being in enclosed places, standing in line or being in a crowd, and being outside of the home alone (APA, 2013) – do not seem to consistently match the experiences of people who identify as Casadastraphobic. The DSM-5 criteria for Specific Phobia seem to fit better, with the phobic situation being exposure to a large area of open sky above the individual, which provokes anxiety and is avoided. The severity of Casadastraphobia seems to be subject to considerable individual differences; many seem to live relatively normal lives but will tend to avoid wide open spaces, while others experience severe anxiety and find it difficult to leave their homes for work or social events, leading to a substantial impact on quality of life. We believe that there are a number of core research questions that need to be addressed by the academic and clinical communities, including qualitative research describing the experiences of sufferers; an attempt to describe the phobia in greater detail, to establish the prevalence and aetiology, and finally the development of a treatment, perhaps an exposure therapy. It is possible that the readership has come into contact with people experiencing Casadastraphobia, and it may have been diagnosed as Agoraphobia or another anxiety disorder. We suggest that Casadastraphobia fits well within the existing diagnostic and treatment framework for specific phobia, but with a recognised name, some primary research related to

properly defining it, and by developing a targeted treatment, the lives of people with this phobia may be improved.

We welcome any thoughts on this – please contact the lead author.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Reference

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