

TICS IN THE TIME OF COVID: A retrospective comparison of clinical characteristics of tic disorders before & during the pandemic in a CAMHS outpatient setting

Dr Roopa Gopalakrishnan*, Dr Sharada Deepak**

*ST4 Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Thames Valley School of Psychiatry
Reading CAMHS, Berkshire Health Care NHS Foundation Trust

**Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, Reading

INTRODUCTION

Covid 19, lockdowns and school closure have caused an increase in mental health problems in young population. There is also a noted 'explosion' in tic referrals in young population during this pandemic.¹

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the trends in the number of tic referrals before and during the pandemic
- To compare the clinical characteristics of the two groups

METHODOLOGY



We conducted a retrospective analysis of all referrals for the assessment of tics received from October 2019 to March 2020 and then from October 2020 to March 2021



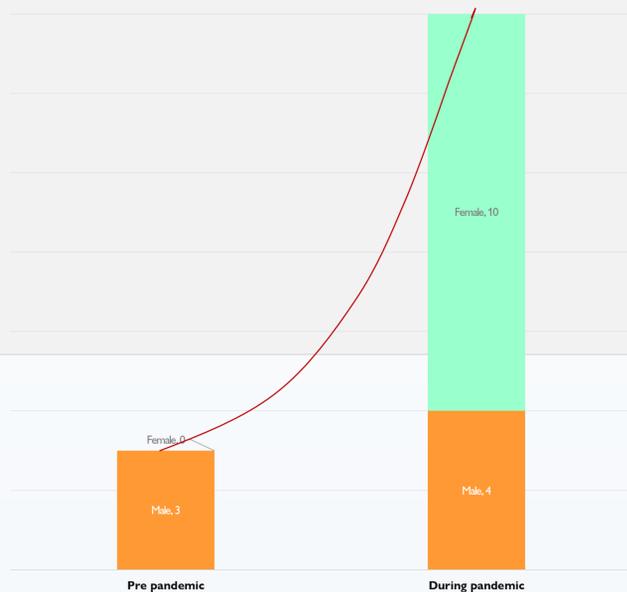
Data from 17 referrals were retrieved in total from electronic notes



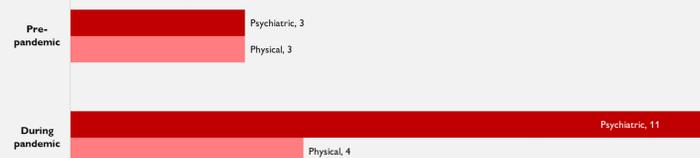
Age, demographic details and clinical characteristics were extrapolated and analyzed using Excel

RESULTS

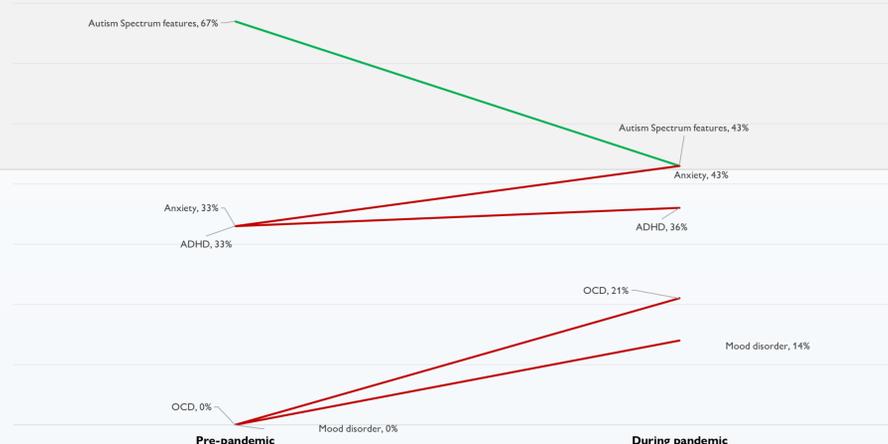
Referrals Table 1



Comorbidities table 2



Psychiatric comorbidities table 3



DISCUSSION

- Referrals for mental health problems in children & young people in a UK mental health survey² showed an increase from 10% in 2017 to 16% in July 2020. The results of our study suggest that the 390% increase in tic referrals is higher than may be expected from the national average figures, with a greater representation amongst girls than boys.
- Previous studies have shown that onset or the exacerbation may have an overlap of an organic element along with a functional component associated with it³.
- We speculate that disproportionate increase in tics could be due to the impact of lock down, increase in stress and the sudden popularity of social media applications such as Tik Tok where there was increased consumption of tic related videos before the onset of symptoms⁴.
- Psychiatric comorbidities are commonly associated with tics⁵. Our study showed that there is a greater increase in symptoms of anxiety amongst those with tic disorders and a decreasing trend in physical health comorbidities. This probably suggests that we may be seeing a different subset of population with tic-like illness during the pandemic where non organic causes may have exacerbated or contributed equally to existing clinical presentation.

CONCLUSION

- This was the first study in the UK which compared the clinical features of tics before and during the pandemic
- Fewer number of participants and retrospective evaluation were some of the limitations of the study.
- Future research is under way involving more sites across the borough so as to understand the clinical picture and generalise the findings

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