

Functional Neurological Symptoms Disorder; Diagnosis And Management in Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

Functional neurological disorder (FND) are neurological symptoms that cannot be explained by standard neurological disorders or diagnostic tests. It refers to any medical complaint that has no organic basis or known pathophysiological explanation. FND is known by many synonyms, such as psychogenic, pseudo- or hysterical symptoms. It is a common disorder in neurology outpatient clinics. Carson and colleague reported that one-third of neurology outpatient visitors present with complaints of neurological symptoms that are only 'somewhat' or 'completely' unexplained by organic disease^[1]. In a large systematic meta-analysis involving 24 studies, Gelauff and his colleagues reported a mean of 39% of patients disclosing 'same' or 'worse' symptoms after an average follow up period of 7.4 years^[2]. The disability and distress experienced by FND patients is greater than that of patients diagnosed with symptoms explained by disease. Furthermore, the prognosis is poor. At the beginning of recognizing these symptoms, the disorder was mainly treated by a psychiatrist (when it was known as Hysteria). Soon after, a global shift towards neurological based management emerged. The pendulum still swings back and forth between the two specialities until today.

Aim

To evaluate the perspective of today's neurologists and psychiatrists in Saudi Arabia with regards to FND pathogenesis, diagnosis, treatment and outcome in a replication of the Dutch study "Diagnosis and management of functional neurological symptoms: The Dutch experience^[3]".

Method

A cross-sectional study was carried out in Saudi Arabia from November 2019 and is ongoing. The target population was defined as qualified psychiatrists or neurologists currently practicing in Saudi Arabia. Response to the questionnaire was taken to indicate consent. Data was collected through a convenience sampling electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the Dutch study survey.

Results

- There were 97 participants, 36 (37.1%) were female and 61 (62.9%) male. 50 (51%) of them were neurologists, while 47 (49%) were psychiatrists.

- Most physicians thought that FND is a disorder of functioning of the nervous system together with psychogenic factors (46% of the neurologists and 61% of the psychiatrists) Fig. 1

- Almost all neurologists and psychiatrists answered that stress precedes FND : a psychogenic stressor (76% of neurologists, 98% of psychiatrists) or a physical stressor (58% of neurologists, 57.4% of psychiatrists).

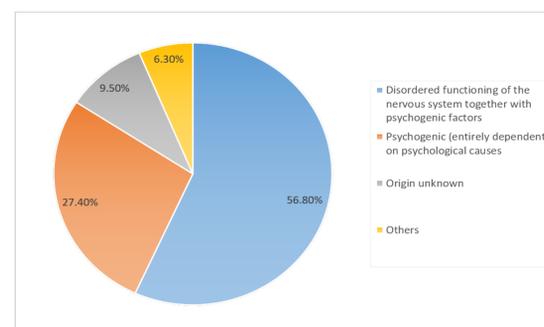


Figure.1: Participants opinions toward the aetiology of FND.

- 72% of the neurologists and 68% of psychiatrists reported that patients usually or always develop FND because of psychiatric comorbidity or their personality traits.
- Most of the neurologists and the psychiatrists would explain FND as a functional disorder of the nervous system under the influence of external factors (psychological or physical). Fig 2.

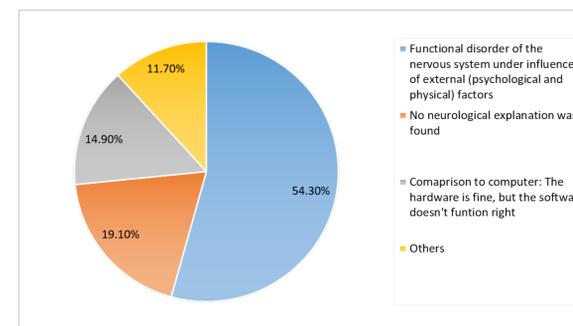


Figure.2: Participants preferred way of explaining FND.

- Despite most of the participants would diagnose the patients suspected to have FND as having conversion disorder (30% of the neurologists and 55.3% of the psychiatrists), 22% of the neurologists reported no diagnosis. Fig 3.

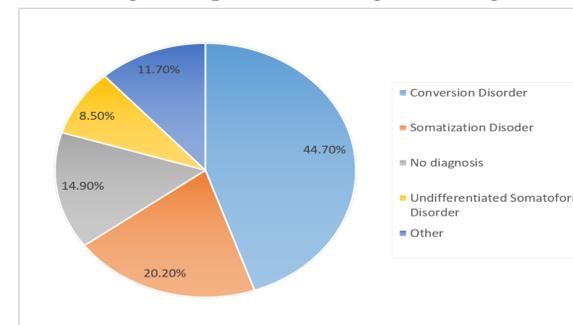


Figure.3: Participants preferred diagnosis terminology

- All the psychiatrists and the neurologists considered a multidisciplinary team to treat FND patients. Fig 4.

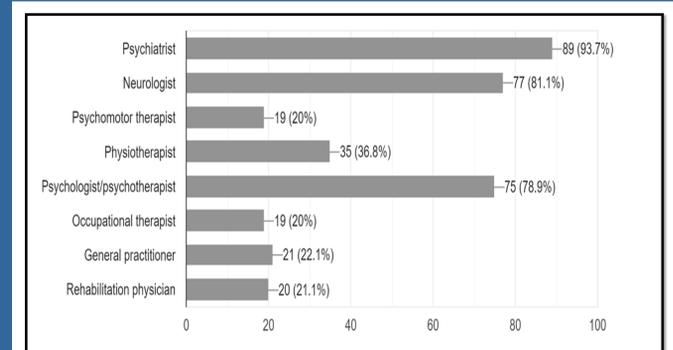


Figure.4: The participants opinion for the multidisciplinary team required for the diagnosis and treatment of FND which agreed for the inclusion of psychiatrists, neurologists and psychologists.

Conclusion

- Most neurologists and psychiatrists in Saudi Arabia believed FND is a disorder of functioning of the nervous system together with psychogenic factors. Although all of the participating psychiatrists believe that a prior psychological stress is a cause of the disorder (among other causes), the DSM-5 has this requirement component removed. This could influence the diagnosis, and the treatment of the FND patients whom getting treated and diagnosed by either psychiatrists or neurologists. Therefore, these results could help in increase awareness of the disorder and to help formulate treatment strategy.

Next step

- To collect data from other middle eastern countries to analyse and compare the results with international data.

References

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