

Opinion, knowledge, and clinical experiences with functional neurological disorders among Italian psychiatrists: results from a national survey

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Introduction: Functional neurological disorder (FND) is characterized by motor, sensory, and cognitive symptoms that are incongruent with abnormalities due to a known organic cause [1]. A novel multidisciplinary approach to the diagnosis and treatment of FND has been recently proposed, with a growing body of evidence suggesting its efficacy [2]. Psychiatrists can play an essential role in managing FND, from establishing a diagnosis to developing tailored therapeutic plans for patients [3]. Thus, understanding their knowledge, opinion, and clinical approach to FND in light of the new approach to the illness is of utmost importance to highlight potential educational needs and improve patient care.

Objective: We surveyed Italian psychiatrists to explore their knowledge, opinion, and clinical experiences with FND.

Methods: Members of the Italian Society of Psychiatry (SIP) were invited via e-mail to complete an ad hoc 14-item web-based survey.

Results: 179 questionnaires were completed. “Conversion disorders” was the term most frequently used by Italian psychiatrists to refer to FND, thus conveying a psychological etiology of FND. Congruently with this view, many respondents stated that psychotherapy associated with pharmacological therapy was the most appropriate treatment for patients, while very few considered physiotherapy a useful approach to FND.

Conclusions: Our main findings suggest that Italian psychiatrists still have a psychogenetic conceptualization of FND. This could be due to poor knowledge about novel advances in the pathophysiology of these disorders. Professional education about novel approaches to FND would be an advantageous way to optimize psychiatrists’ management of FND and to enhance diagnosis, explanation, and management across health professionals, in line with a multidisciplinary approach to FND.

References:

- [1] Hallett, 2018. *Parkinsonism Relat Disord*; 46 (Suppl 1): S80–S82.
- [2] Gilmour et al., 2020. *J Neurol*; 267(7):2164-2172.
- [3] Bègue I et al., 2021. *Psychol Med*; 51(12):1961-1963.