

Clinical and demographic characteristics of patients with functional neurologic disorders (FNDs): the experience of the University of Trieste

Tiziana Maria Isabella Lombardo, P. Caruso, S. Pavan, P. Manganotti

Neurology Unit, Department of Medical, Surgical and Health Sciences, Cattinara University Hospital, ASUGI, University of Trieste, Trieste, Italy

Introduction: Functional neurologic disorders (FNDs) are a common cause of disability and distress, especially in neurological practice.

Objective: Aim of the study is to report the clinical and demographic characteristics of FNDs patients that were evaluated in Neurological Clinic of Trieste during the last 7 years, considering the main neurological symptoms at disease onset.

Methods: We retrospectively collected data from consecutive patients who were referred to our centre, between January 1st 2016 and December 31st 2022, and who received a diagnose of FND.

Results: 75 patients were included. The majority of them (75%) were female and mean age at symptom onset was 43,41 yo. More than one-third (31%) had an upper educational level; 33% of them were working at the time of diagnosis, while 16% were still studying. Among all patients, 40% had psychiatric comorbidities: depression (44%), anxiety (26%) or both (12%), post-traumatic-stress-disorder (9%), and bipolar disorder (9%). In 44% of cases organic neurological co-pathologies were found (migraine, seizures, previous stroke). In half of the patients, symptoms at onset were characterized as pure motor weakness (24%), sensory-motor impairment (14,6%), pure sensory disturbances (6%), and pure speech impairment (9,3%). The other half presented with a combination of the symptoms above, associated, in small percentages, with instability (12%), impaired consciousness (7%), pain (7%) and visual disturbances (5%). Three main categories of FNDs were identified: stroke mimics (50,6%), movement disorders (29,4%) and PNES (20%). During the neurological examination, incoherence, variability, distractibility, and Hoover's sign were observed in almost half (49,3%) of the patients.

Conclusions: In this study, we describe the demographic and clinical characteristics of 75 consecutive patients with FNDs specifically referred to our centre between 2016 and 2022. Like previous studies, we found that women were clearly overrepresented. This series will contribute to better characterize FNDs.