

Uncovering Health Disparities in the Prevalence and Presentation of Tourette Syndrome between Caucasians and African-Americans

Background

Tourette Syndrome is a neurological disorder that is present in all ethnic groups, and has an international prevalence of about 1% worldwide.¹ In the United States alone, Tourette Syndrome affects more than 200,000 people.² Though this prevalence may appear to be small, there is some discussion that Tourette Syndrome may be under-diagnosed or present itself differently in certain communities. This discussion of under-diagnosis most often pertains to African-American communities.

Methods

To examine these differences in presentation of Tourette Syndrome, I analyzed the results of a study done by Dr. Catherine Striley that took place in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Striley and her team developed a screening tool for Tourette Syndrome, known as the Video-Integrated Screen Instrument for Tics and Tourette Syndrome (VISIT-TS).³ This tool allowed participants to watch a short video with examples of what tics look and sound like while answering questions on whether or not they have experienced these tics. For my special project, I compared the answers to the VISIT-TS between African-American and Caucasian participants and analyzed possible explanations for these differences.

Results

In the St. Louis, Missouri study of Tourette Syndrome, African-American participants reported more movement tics than Caucasian participants. Vocal tics were found to be common among both groups, but affected each group differently. African-Americans more commonly experienced longer-lasting, transitory tics.

Conclusion

It is difficult to discern the health disparities of Tourette Syndrome between African-Americans and Caucasians as the condition is dramatically understudied, especially among minority populations. Future studies need to focus on high recruitment of minority participants. By uncovering health disparities among different populations, public health professionals can better understand how to spread awareness about the condition of Tourette Syndrome and can more effectively connect individuals to necessary treatment.

¹ Robertson MM, Eapen V, Cavanna AE. The international prevalence, epidemiology, and clinical phenomenology of Tourette syndrome: A cross-cultural prospective. *J Psychosom Res* 2009;67:475-483.

² National Tourette Syndrome Association. Facts about Tourette syndrome. http://www.tsa-usa.org/aPeople/LivingWithTS/Images/Fact_Sheet.pdf. Updated Jan. 2012. Accessed Jan. 25, 2012.

³ Striley, CW (PI). Uncovering disparities in TS prevalence and identification between Caucasians and African-Americans. Tourette Syndrome Association 2010-2012.

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