ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY (ECT) IN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

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OBJECTIVE

Clinical case report concerning a patient with autism and theme review on the available evidence regarding ECT as a therapeutic approach. The authors aim to illustrate the challenge of managing these challenging behaviors.

BACKGROUND AND AIMS

The **core symptoms** of autism tend to show **improvement over time**. However, during **adolescence**, some individuals with ASD engage in **severe challenging behaviors**, such as aggression, self-injury, disruption and agitation. They may persist in some patients despite interdisciplinary interventions (symptomatic psychotropic drugs and behavioral interventions). Considering the **significant injury risk** for the patient and caregiver, **ECT** may be a therapeutic approach.

RESULTS

A 29 years-old male patient was diagnosed with **ASD** and **focal epilepsy** at the age of 2 years-old. History of ulcerative colitis.

ENVIRONNMENT: family support, attend Association for Intellectual Disability (ID) patients, no stressors

SOMATIC: medical conditions controlled, no genetic condition

PSYCHIATRIC: no other comorbid psychiatric disorder

DISCUSSION

- The **onset of puberty was temporally associated with clinical deterioration** and the occurrence of severe challenging disorders (according to the literature.)
- We did not find any environmental, psychiatric and organic cases for behavioural deterioration.** Even though this patient had organic comorbidities (epilepsy and ulcerative colitis) that may contribute to behavioural impairments in ASD, they have been very well controlled with targeted medication. Comorbid psychopathology is frequent, but can be difficult to recognize in patients with ASD with ID and poor communication skills.
- On the other hand, he has **intellectual disability, absense of communication skills, comorbid epilepsy** and a **severe ASD at age 5**, that are well-known factors leading to a **poor prognosis**, being key factors of deterioration during adolescence.

CONCLUSION

ECT carries therapeutic potential for patients with ASD and severe challenging behaviors associated not responding to standard treatments. Self-injury is one of the emerging autism-specific indications for ECT.