A PILOT STUDY OF AT-RISK CRITERIA FOR BIPOLAR DISORDERS IN HELP SEEKING ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS

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Introduction: We have developed ultra-high risk criteria for bipolar affective disorder (bipolar at-risk - BAR) which include general criteria such as being in the peak age range of the onset of the disorder and a combination of specific criteria including sub-threshold mania, depressive symptoms, cyclothymic features and genetic risk. In the current study, the predictive and discriminant validity of these criteria were tested in help seeking adolescents and young adults.

Method: This medical file-audit study was conducted at ORYGEN Youth Health (OYH), a public mental health program for young people aged between 15 and 24 years and living in metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. BAR criteria were applied to the intake assessments of all non-psychotic patients who were being treated in OYH on 31 January 08. All entries were then checked for conversion criteria. Hypomania/mania related additions or alterations to existing treatments or initiation of new treatment by the treating psychiatrist served as conversion criteria to mania.

Results: The BAR criteria were applied to 173 intake assessments. Of these, 22 patients (12.7%) met BAR criteria. The follow-up period of the sample was 265.5 days on average (SD 214.7). There were significantly more cases in the BAR group (22.7%, n = 5) than in the non-BAR group (0.7%, n = 1) who met conversion criteria (p < .001).

Conclusions: These findings support the notion that people who develop a first episode of mania can be identified during the prodromal phase. The proposed criteria need further evaluation in prospective clinical trials.

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