

Project 1: Understanding and optimising treatment outcomes for autistic children and adolescents with obsessive compulsive disorder.

Proposed supervisory team

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Background and rationale

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) has a peak age of onset during adolescence and affects up to 4% of children and adolescents. OCD is a common mental health difficulty among autistic young people, with clinical samples suggesting that up to 25% of children with OCD are also autistic (or likely to be autistic). Experiencing OCD in childhood/adolescence is associated with significantly impaired home, school, and social functioning and research has shown that OCD often persists into adulthood without effective treatment.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is the recommended psychological treatment for autistic children with OCD; however, published studies to date have shown that autistic children with OCD have poorer treatment outcomes than their non-autistic peers. The factors associated with poorer treatment outcomes are largely unknown. This DPhil proposal therefore aims to quantitatively and qualitatively explore the factors that may mediate and moderate CBT outcomes for autistic children with OCD and identify possible evidence-informed adaptations for CBT treatments.

Proposed research aims

- To identify potential moderators and mediators of CBT treatment outcomes for autistic children and adolescents with OCD, and map existing adaptations to CBT treatments for autistic young people.
- Explore treatment outcomes from CBT based treatments for autistic young people compared to their non-autistic peers.
- To identify perceived mediators and moderators of treatment outcomes for autistic young people with OCD.

Potential methodologies

- Systematic review
- Secondary data analysis using routine clinical outcome data from the NHS-commissioned Anxiety and Depression in Young People (AnDY) Oxford and Reading clinics.
- Qualitative interview studies with autistic children/young people, their parents/carers and clinicians