

1 **Applying an established Exposure Response Prevention protocol for**  
2 **Young People with Tourette syndrome in an intensive, group format: a**  
3 **feasibility study**

4 **Dr Maria Hadji-Michael<sup>1,2†</sup>, Dr Matteo Catanzano<sup>1,2\*†</sup>, Dr Eve McAllister<sup>1,2</sup>, Dr Isobel**  
5 **Heyman<sup>1,2</sup>, Oliver Lack<sup>1</sup>, Dr Tara Murphy<sup>1,2</sup> & Dr Jane Gilmour<sup>1,2</sup>**

6  
7 †These authors have contributed equally to this work and share first authorship

8 <sup>1</sup>Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, United Kingdom

9 <sup>2</sup>UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, University College London, London, United  
10 Kingdom

11 **\* Correspondence:**

12 Matteo Catanzano

13 [matteo.catanzano@nhs.net](mailto:matteo.catanzano@nhs.net)

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25

26 **Conflicts of interest**

27 The Authors declares that there is no conflict of interest.

28

29 **Ethics statement**

30 The Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trusts' Clinical Audit Team  
31 approved this study as part of a service evaluation (audit reference number: 2420). Although it was  
32 decided that the collection and analysis of data did not require ethical review by an NHS research  
33 ethics committee, care was taken to ensure ethical standards were met. No personally identifiable  
34 information was described in this study.

35 **Keywords: Exposure Response Prevention<sup>1</sup>, Tourette syndrome<sup>2</sup>, Behaviour therapies<sup>3</sup>, Group**  
36 **Intervention<sup>4</sup>, Tics<sup>5</sup>**

37

38

39 **Abstract**

40 Background: The motor and vocal tics that characterise Tourette syndrome (TS) are stigmatizing and  
41 impact on quality of life (QOL). Behavioural interventions such as Exposure Response Prevention  
42 (ERP) or Comprehensive Behavioural Interventions for Tics (CBITs) are first line treatment for TS,  
43 but availability is limited. This study is the first to explore the impact of an established manualised  
44 ERP treatment protocol, developed for individual therapy, but here uniquely delivered intensively, to  
45 a group.

46 Methods: A naturalistic study comprised of a consecutive series of children (N=20), aged 8-16 years  
47 (M= 12, SD= 2.17) were offered ERP in one of two groups, delivered in series within a specialist  
48 clinic. Young people received the equivalent of 12 sessions (matching the manualised individual  
49 protocol).

50 Results: The YGTSS and Giles de la Tourette Syndrome Quality of Life Scale for Children and  
51 Adolescents (Satisfaction Scale) showed significant improvement following treatment with moderate  
52 to large effect sizes. Thirty-five percent of children demonstrated a reliable improvement on the  
53 YGTSS Global Tic Severity score.

54 Conclusions: These data suggest an established ERP protocol can be delivered in an intensive, group  
55 setting with a positive clinical outcome. Replication in a randomized controlled trial is an important  
56 next step.

## 57 1. Introduction

58 Tourette Syndrome (TS) characterised by motor and vocal tics (APA, 2013), has a prevalence of 0.77–  
59 1% (Knight et al., 2012). It is frequently associated with comorbidities such as Attention Deficit  
60 Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD; Abramovitch et al.,  
61 2015). Additionally, social and emotional difficulties (Cutler et al., 2009), impaired school functioning  
62 (Cubo et al., 2017) behavioural difficulties and a diminished quality of life (Eapen et al., 2016) are also  
63 frequently reported.

64 Behavioural therapy is the first-line intervention for TS delivered following psychoeducation (Andren  
65 et al., 2022). There are two broad behavioural approaches with an evidence base: first, Comprehensive  
66 Behavioural Intervention for Tics (CBITs; Woods et al., 2008) which incorporates Habit Reversal  
67 Training techniques (Azrin & Nunn, 1973) and second, Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP)  
68 originally developed by Meyer (1966) to treat obsessive-compulsive symptoms. Treatment effects of  
69 ERP for tics are comparable to those of HRT (Andren et al., 2021; Verdellen et al., 2004). The unique  
70 advantage of ERP is that it addresses multiple tics simultaneously in contrast to HRT/CBITs, which  
71 treats one tic at a time. Despite effect sizes in these studies being moderate to high (0.57-1.5) with  
72 significant reduction in tic severity (McGuire et al., 2014), behavioural treatments are not widely  
73 available (Hollis et al., 2016; McGuire et al., 2015).

74 To address the treatment bottleneck, various delivery methods have been developed. For example, an  
75 abbreviated CBITs program (Chen et al., 2020) and other case studies (Blount et al., 2014; Blount et  
76 al., 2018; Flancabaum et al., 2010) suggest intensive delivery offers a promising solution by reducing  
77 the number of appointments needed. However, much remains unknown about dose effects and  
78 optimum delivery formats (Chen et al., 2020).

79 Another viable option to the treatment shortage is group therapy. Learning in a social context has many  
80 unique benefits for young people (Lieberman, 2012), especially during adolescence where peer-to-  
81 peer learning is highly effective, often more so than adult didactic instruction (Yeager et al., 2018),  
82 potentially making carefully facilitated group work *the optimum* modality for psychoeducation, post  
83 puberty. For TS affected individuals, tics are suggestible (Tallur & Minns, 2010), so there has been  
84 some caution about offering group interventions to young people or adults with TS until relatively  
85 recently, however, existing data show a group setting for TS provides general benefits such as  
86 improved self-efficacy, reduced isolation (Murphy & Heyman, 2007) as well as augmenting TS  
87 specific treatment goals (Nussey et al., 2014).

88 Data are sparse, and while RCTs show some positive improvements, the pattern of change is variable,  
89 with weaker effects using the adapted CBITs intervention on vocal tics (Yates et al., 2016;  
90 Zimmerman-Brenner et al., 2021). Nissen et al. (2019) developed an HRT and ERP combined protocol  
91 in an RCT and found that group and individual delivery had equivalent efficacy, with large effect sizes  
92 reported in both cases. Beneficial effects were maintained at one-year follow-up in both individual and  
93 group formats (Nissen et al., 2021). The case for CBIT or a combination of CBIT/ERP behaviour  
94 treatment in group therapy is promising.

95 Though ERP group treatment is well established in other disorders (Whiteside et al., 2018) only one  
96 study to date has used a ‘pure’ ERP group intervention for TS (Heijerman-Holtgreffe et al., 2021)  
97 describing good outcomes, including improved tic profiles ( $d=.4$ ) and quality of life ( $d=.6$ ). This group  
98 (run by experts in tic behavioural treatment) used an innovative, intensive ERP protocol developed in  
99 consultation with service users included additional components, rather than strictly adhering to a  
100 published manualised ERP protocol. While patient involvement is a valid approach to service delivery

101 methods (and one we support), the current paper explores the value of offering an *existing* manualised  
102 tic management protocol developed for individual therapy, in an intense group format. Establishing the  
103 effectiveness of an established protocol in a group context means that professionals less experienced  
104 in tic treatment will be encouraged to offer them to client groups. The importance of treatment fidelity  
105 in delivery of evidence-based interventions is well described (Breitenstein et al., 2010; Carroll et al.,  
106 2007; Mihalic, 2004). No investigation to date has examined the feasibility of using an established  
107 evidence-based ERP protocol, maintaining procedural fidelity, in a group setting.

108 The current study aimed to determine if an established, evidence-based ERP protocol, delivered in an  
109 intensive group format, leads to significant improvements in tic severity and quality of life outcomes  
110 in children with TS.

## 111 **2. Methods**

112

### 113 *2.1 Design*

114 A consecutive series of twenty children were recruited for two groups (n=10 in each group) of identical  
115 format, run 4 months apart (July 2019 and November 2019).

116

### 117 *2.2 Recruitment*

118 Patients were recruited from a specialist TS clinic which accepts referrals from across the UK.  
119 Following a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) assessment, the details of which are described elsewhere  
120 (McFarlane et al., 2019), the group was offered to all patients who met the inclusion/exclusion criteria  
121 outlined below.

122

### 123 *2.3 Participants*

124 Inclusion criteria for the group were: (a) children aged 8 – 16 years old (b) diagnosed with Tourette  
125 syndrome (TS) or chronic tic disorder (CTD), according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of  
126 Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (APA, 2013), (c) with at least moderate tic severity indicated by Yale  
127 Global Tic Severity Scale (YGTSS; Leckman et al., 1989) Total Score of > 13 (or > 9 for children with  
128 motor or vocal tics only) and (d) able to participate in all three days of the intensive group and the  
129 “booster day” scheduled 4 weeks after the group ended. None of the children offered the group  
130 intervention declined. Children with co-occurring ADHD, OCD, other anxiety or mood disorders were  
131 included (Table S1 in supplementary materials), unless the disorder required immediate treatment or  
132 was severe and would interfere with group participation. No children were excluded based on this  
133 criterion.

134 Exclusion criteria were: (a) insufficient spoken English to participate in the group (b) participation in  
135 ERP or CBITS/HRT sessions in the last year (c) substance abuse, (d) suicidality, (e) psychotic  
136 disorders, (f) severe autism spectrum disorders (ASD) or ADHD, which could interfere with a child’s  
137 ability to participate in the group. No children were excluded based on these criteria.

138 Gender, age, ethnicity and co-occurring conditions were derived from hospital records. Participants all  
139 had a diagnosis of Tourette Syndrome and were predominantly white males with a mean age of 12  
140 years (SD = 2.17). High levels of comorbidity were present, consistent with TS populations (Hirschtritt  
141 et al., 2015) with 17 children (85%) diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric diagnosis (see Table  
142 S2 in the supplementary materials). Co-morbid neurodevelopmental conditions were common, 40%

143 had ADHD and 25% had ASD. Children with ASD (10%) or ADHD *traits* (40%) were also identified  
144 during MDT assessment and required further assessment in order to make a formal diagnosis (see  
145 supplementary materials 1.1 and Table S3 for additional details on baseline characteristics of the  
146 sample).

## 147 *2.4 Intervention*

148 The Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) protocol (Verdellen et al., 2011) comprised 12 weekly  
149 individual sessions (12 × 60 mins sessions = total 720 mins). In the present study the same protocol  
150 was offered in a group, intensive setting consisting of 9 sessions (720mins). See supplementary  
151 materials (Table S4) for a breakdown of sessions and (Section 3.2) for intervention details. A booster  
152 day was offered 4 weeks post completion to consolidate learning and review progress (120 mins).

## 153 154 *2.5 Procedure*

155 Sessions were conducted at the hospital, according to the manualised protocol with minor adaptations  
156 for the group context (Verdellen et al., 2011). A schedule of the intervention and assessments of  
157 outcome measures is shown in Table S5 (see supplementary materials). Within 2 weeks of starting the  
158 group, the YGTSS was carried out by an experienced clinician who was part of the team, but not part  
159 of the treatment group, over the telephone. Children and their families completed all other baseline  
160 measures at the start of the first group session (time zero; t0) and the 4 week ‘booster day’ (time two;  
161 t2). Goal based outcome measures and feedback forms were additionally completed at the end of the  
162 intensive three-day group (time one; t1). ERP exercises as per the protocol, were offered in small  
163 subgroups of 2 or 3 children with peer-to-peer learning (timing, counting tics and encouragement).  
164 Therapists rotated around the small groups and offered support. Sessions were delivered by two  
165 experienced Clinical Psychologists and an assistant psychologist.

## 166 167 *2.6 Outcome Measures*

### 168 169 *2.6.1 Primary outcome measure*

#### 170 171 *2.6.1.1 Yale Global Tic Severity Scale (YGTSS)*

172 The YGTSS (Leckman et al., 1989), is the gold standard measure of tic severity and impairment. The  
173 Global severity score (range 0–100) is composed of an Impairment score (0–50) and a Total Tic score  
174 (0–50), which sums total motor (0–25) and total vocal (0–25) tic scores. We defined a 25% tic reduction  
175 as a positive response on the Total Tic Severity scale (Jeon et al., 2013). The YGTSS has good inter-  
176 rater reliability (Leckman et al., 1989) and test re-test reliability is high at 0.94 (Storch et al., 2005).

177

### 178 *2.6.2 Secondary outcome measures*

179

#### 180 *2.6.2.1 Goal Based Outcomes (GBOs)*

181 GBOs (Law & Wolpert, 2014) are routinely used to evaluate progress towards a patient's treatment  
182 goals. Each parent and child completed the appropriate version and rated how close they felt they were  
183 to achieving their goal on a Likert Scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Goal reached). Participants were  
184 invited to establish up to three goals (i.e. GBO 1, GBO 2, GBO 3; parent/ child rating separately), but  
185 some chose to create one or two. Goals were typically about finding successful ways to manage tics.

186 GBOs have acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.7; Edbrooke-Childs et al., 2015). We  
187 considered a reliable change index for GBOs at 2.45 points (Edbrooke-Childs et al., 2015).

188 *2.6.2.2 The Gilles de la Tourette Syndrome Quality of Life Scale for Children and Adolescents*  
189 *(C&A- GTS-QOL).*

190 Quality of life was measured using the C&A-GTS-QOL (Su et al., 2017), a 27-item patient-reported  
191 scale with good acceptability, reliability ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ) and validity. It comprises four subscales describing  
192 Psychological, Physical, Obsessive compulsive and Cognitive aspects of life. Scores for the subscales  
193 are generated by summing items and normalising total scores to a 0-100 range. Lower scores indicate  
194 better QOL. A life satisfaction subscale (GTS QOL satisfaction score) presented on a visual analogue  
195 scale (0-100 range) is scored in the opposite direction, so higher scores indicate greater satisfaction.

196 Additional measures taken at baseline to characterise the sample are described in Section 3.1.

197  
198 *2.7 Statistical analyses*

199 Measures were collected and where relevant analysed at three time points: t0, t1 and t2. The YGTSS  
200 showed one outlier on all subscales apart from the Motor subscale (using inspection of a boxplot).  
201 Difference scores were not normally distributed for the Vocal (Shapiro-Wilk's test = 0.002) and  
202 Impairment (Shapiro-Wilk's test = 0.016) subscales. Therefore, difference scores were based on the  
203 median change in scores; these changes were tested using Wilcoxon signed rank test/Sign test as  
204 appropriate and converted into effect sizes (r value; Fritz et al., 2012). The GTS QOL C&A, showed  
205 no outliers (assessed by inspection of a boxplot) and difference scores were normally distributed  
206 (lowest p value on Shapiro-Wilk's test > .281), so difference scores were based on the mean change in  
207 scores; these changes were tested using paired samples t-tests and converted into effect sizes (Cohen's  
208 d; Cohen, 2013). GBO scores had outliers and were not normally distributed (Shapiro Wilk's < 0.05).  
209 Here difference scores were based on the median change in scores. To maintain a conservative  
210 approach, we limited analysis of GBO data to a descriptive comparison of change against benchmark  
211 data i.e. the UK Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies program for children and young people  
212 - CYP IAPT - data set from 2011 to June 2015, which includes data from 75 separate services (Law &  
213 Wolpert, 2014). Results on the YGTSS Global severity score, GTS QOL Total, GTS Satisfaction and  
214 GBOs were analysed at the individual level by reliable change analysis, which determines whether the  
215 degree of change on each measure was statistically reliable, and not due to measurement-error  
216 (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). This allows for classification of participants as either (i) reliably improved,  
217 (ii) reliably deteriorated, or (iii) not changed. Differences in patient characteristics/outcome measures  
218 between the first and second ERP groups were tested using independent t-tests/Mann-Whitney U tests  
219 for continuous variables and chi-square/fisher's exact tests for categorical variables (results are  
220 presented in supplementary materials sections 1.2 and 1.3 and Figures S1, S3 and S5).

221  
222 *2.8 Qualitative Feedback*

223 Patient feedback is an important part of the acceptability and feasibility assessment. We developed an  
224 8-item questionnaire (see 'Feedback form' in supplementary materials). Questions 1-5 were answered  
225 using a set of predefined categorical answers, 6 to 8 were open-ended, in which participants could  
226 provide free text responses. For the open-text questions only, responses were grouped into categories  
227 based on the principles of content analysis (Cole, 1988).

228  
229

230 **3. Results**

231  
232 *3.1 Feasibility*

233 There were no patient dropouts or missing data on the primary outcome measure.

234  
235 *3.2 Outcomes*

236 *3.2.1 Primary – tic severity (YGTSS)*

237 Results for the primary outcome are presented in Table 1, Figure 1 and Figure S1 (see supplementary  
238 materials). Improvements in Global, Total and Motor YGTSS scores were statistically significant  
239 ( $p < .05$ ) with moderate to large effect sizes. Reliable improvement on the YGTSS Global score was  
240 seen in 7/20 (35%) of the sample. 2/20 (10%) showed reliable deterioration. One of these children is  
241 described in supplementary materials 1.4 (case 2). The other experienced a significant life event  
242 between the last session and the booster, which may have contributed to his deterioration. At follow-  
243 up, 9/20 (45%) of participants were classed as ‘treatment responders’ (defined as 25% reduction in tics  
244 on YGTSS Total Tic Severity scale).

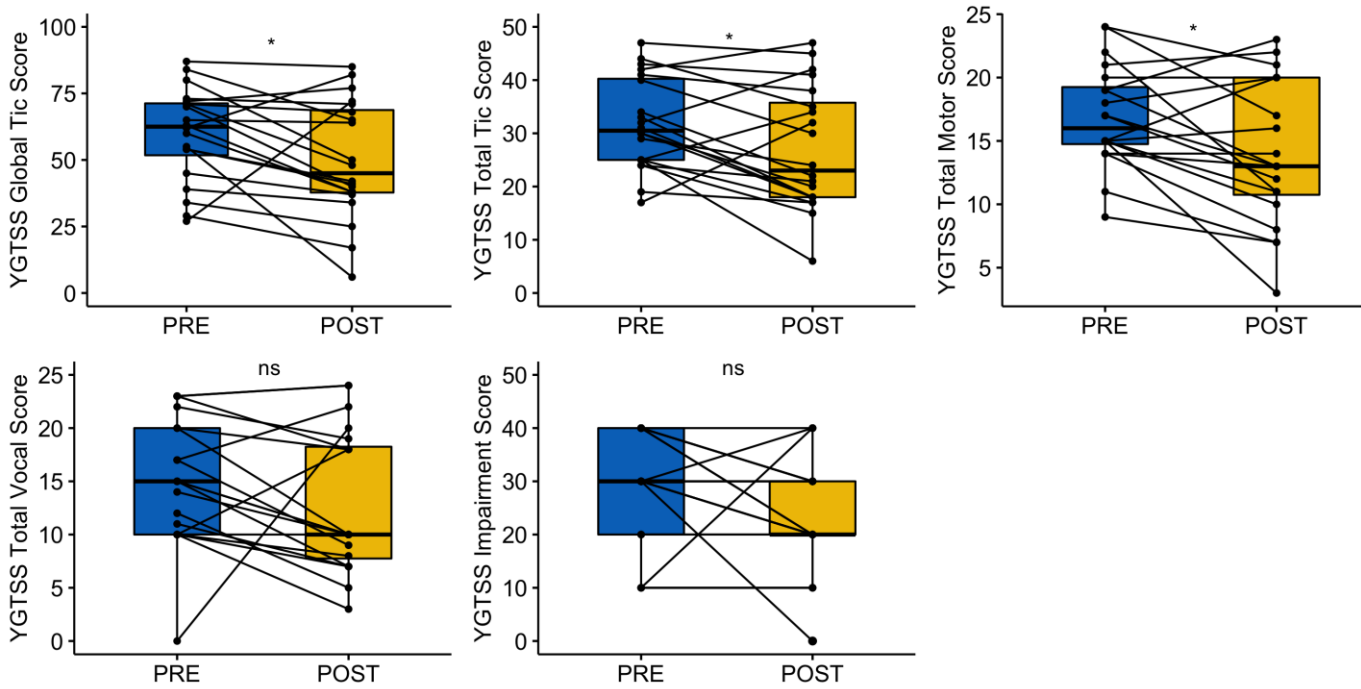
245 *3.2.2 Secondary – quality of life (GTS QOL) and patient rated goal-based outcomes (GBO)*

246 Results for the secondary outcomes are presented in Tables 2 and 3 and Figures S2-S5(see  
247 supplementary materials). Patient-reported life satisfaction, (GTS QOL satisfaction score),  
248 demonstrated an improvement from a mean score of 64.7 (25.55) pre-intervention (t0) to 76.8 (15.63)  
249 at follow-up (t2), a statistically significant increase of 12.1, 95% CI [2.37; 21.83],  $t(19) = 4.99$ ,  $p = .017$ ,  
250  $d = 0.58$ . Improvements on all other subscales did not reach statistical significance, with effect sizes  
251 mostly in the ‘small’ range. Reliable improvement on the GTS QOL Total score was seen in 3/20  
252 (15%) of the sample. 1/20 (5%) showed reliable deterioration.

253 All child and parent-reported GBO scores showed median increases (implying patients reported being  
254 closer to their therapeutic goal following treatment) from t0 – t1 and t0 – t2. All child GBOs and parent  
255 GBO 3 showed a small decrease from t1 – t2, the period post the group ending to follow-up. The mean  
256 increases in goal ratings from t0 – t2 were 3.72 (self-reported) and 3.51 (parent-reported). This  
257 compares to a mean increase in goal ratings of 3.73 (self-reported) and 3.7 (parent-reported) in the  
258 CYP-IAPT study (Wolpert et al., 2016; median increases in GBOs were not available for  
259 benchmarking, which is why mean difference scores are reported here). Reliable improvement between  
260 t0 and t2, was seen in 14/20 (70%) for child-rated GBOs and 15/20 (75%) for parent-rated GBOs (using  
261 averaged GBO 1, GBO 2 and GBO 3 scores where available for each rater). None showed reliable  
262 deterioration between t0 and t2.

263

# Intensive group ERP feasibility study



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**Figure 1.** Change in tic severity pre and post-intervention on the Yale Global Tic Severity Scale's (YGTS) Global Severity Score and YGTS Subscales (Total Tic, Motor, Vocal and Impairment Scores)

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269



270 **Table 1.** Median score (interquartile range) by time point and effect sizes for YGTSS subscales.

	<b>t0</b>	<b>t2</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>r (CI)</b>
	<b>All (n=20)</b>	<b>All (n=20)</b>		
	<b>median (IQR)</b>	<b>median (IQR)</b>		
YGTSS - Motor	16 (14.25 - 19.75)	13 (10.25 - 20)	.010*	0.54 (0.16, 0.80)
YGTSS - Vocal	15 (10 - 20)	10 (7.25 - 18.75)	.064	0.43 (0.05, 0.83)
YGTSS - Total	30.5 (25 - 30.75)	23 (18 - 37.25)	.033*	0.48 (0.10, 0.82)
YGTSS - Impairment	30 (20 - 40)	20 (20 - 30)	.065	0.44 (0.07, 0.76)
YGTSS - Global	62.5 (47.25 - 71.75)	45 (37.25 - 70.25)	.012*	0.56 (0.23, 0.88)

271 Note: \* p<.05;

272 Effect sizes were computed using the r value; 0.1 - <0.3 (small effect), 0.3 - <0.5 (moderate effect) and ≥ 0.5 (large effect).

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276 **Table 2.** Mean difference scores (time 0 – time 2), paired samples t-tests results and effect sizes (Cohen’s d) for GTS QOL subscales.

	<b>t0</b>	<b>t2</b>	<b>mean difference (CI)</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>d (CI)</b>
	<b>All (n=20)</b>	<b>All (n=20)</b>				
	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>				
GTS QOL Satisfaction <sup>1</sup>	64.7 (25.55)	76.8 (15.63)	-12.1 (-21.83 ; -2.37)	-2.60	.017*	0.58 (0.09, 1.07)
GTS QOL Psychological	22.25 (11.39)	19.5 (11.48)	2.75 (-0.81 ; 6.31)	1.62	.123	0.36 (-0.11, 0.83)
GTS QOL Physical	13.55 (7.49)	12.15 (7.48)	1.4 (-0.31 ; 3.11)	1.72	.102	0.38 (-0.09, 0.85)
GTS QOL OCD	8.15 (5.08)	7.6 (4.63)	0.55 (-1.4 ; 2.5)	0.59	.563	0.13 (-0.32, 0.59)
GTS QOL Cog	8 (4.23)	7.15 (3.94)	0.85 (-0.66 ; 2.36)	1.18	.252	0.26 (-0.20, 0.72)
GTS QOL Total	51.95 (26.13)	46.85 (25.79)	5.1 (-1.94 ; 12.14)	1.52	.146	0.34 (-0.13, 0.81)

277 Note: \* p<.05;

278 Effect sizes were computed using Cohen’s d; 0.2 - <0.5 (small effect), 0.5 - <0.8 (moderate effect) and ≥ 0.8 (large effect).

<sup>1</sup> Scored in the opposite direction to the specific subscales, where a higher score indicates greater satisfaction

279 **Table 3.** Descriptive statistics by time point for parent and child GBOs.

280

<b>Measure</b>	<b>t0</b>		<b>t1</b>		<b>t2</b>	
	<b>All (n=20)</b>		<b>All (n=20)</b>		<b>All (n=20)</b>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>median (IQR)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>median (IQR)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>median (IQR)</b>
Child GBO 1	20	5 (1-6)	20	8 (6-9)	20	7 (6-9)
Child GBO 2	19	4 (2-5)	19	9 (8-10)	19	8 (5-10)
Child GBO 3	13	4 (1-5)	13	10 (9-10)	13	9 (7-10)
Parent GBO 1	20	2 (1-4)	20	7 (4-9)	20	7 (5-7)
Parent GBO 2	19	2 (1-4)	19	6 (4-8)	19	6 (3-7)
Parent GBO 3	14	3 (2-3)	14	7 (3-8)	14	5 (3-6)

281 *3.3 Qualitative Feedback*

282 Overall, responses from the feedback questionnaire suggested high levels of acceptability (see Figures  
283 S6 and S7 in the supplementary material). The majority of young people described the group as  
284 enjoyable, useful and effective and stated they would recommend it to a friend. 80% of young people  
285 had no suggestions for future improvements according to free text questions.

286

287 **4. Discussion**

288 The current study is unique in examining whether an established manualised evidence-based ERP  
289 protocol, developed for individual therapy, maintains efficacy when delivered in an intensive group  
290 format. We found positive treatment outcomes with an overall large effect size ( $r = 0.56$ ) for the  
291 YGTSS Global severity score. Thirty-five percent of participants achieved reliable improvement with  
292 45% showing clinically meaningful change overall. These findings align with previous trials using a  
293 clinically developed ERP group treatment, which showed positive effects of a similar magnitude  
294 (Heijerman-Holtgreffe et al., 2021). Our data show an adapted group intensive delivery of an evidence-  
295 based manualised ERP intervention for tics is effective and feasible. ERP has potential advantages over  
296 the CBITs protocol as all tics are treated simultaneously rather than one by one as in the CBITs  
297 approach. Therefore, an ERP group could offer efficiencies on a number of dimensions. Clinicians less  
298 experienced in tic treatment delivery may find these data useful as it suggests an existing ERP  
299 manualised treatment can be used ‘off the shelf’ in intensive treatment groups, an important  
300 consideration given the current treatment bottleneck.

301 There was a marked improvement in motor tics and though there was a moderate effect size  
302 improvement in vocal tics, it did not reach statistical significance, reflecting a pattern in previous  
303 CBITs (Yates et al., 2016) and ERP TS groups (Heijerman-Holtgreffe et al., 2021), but this may be a  
304 reflection of the group tic profile (Yates et al., 2016). While impairment and most QoL scores did not  
305 improve significantly as a result of the group, this may be due to the complexity of the group recruited.  
306 The population of children recruited had high levels of co-occurring conditions alongside tics, which  
307 are commonly described as more impactful on QoL than tics themselves (Atkinson-Clement et al.,  
308 2022) and may have impacted impairment ratings. Although the samples were too small to test for  
309 statistical difference, on visual inspection of the data, the first group appeared to have better outcomes  
310 (see Figures S1 and S3 in supplementary materials). Similar differences comparing children  
311 participating in a group intervention at different times of the year were found by Yates and colleagues  
312 (2016), who hypothesised this was due to one group coinciding with the return to school, which some  
313 participants found stressful and may have impacted on QoL. Similarly, in our study the first group was  
314 carried out in July, during the summer, whereas the second was carried out in November, where young  
315 people were in school and may have been experiencing additional stressors. Though tics are suggestible  
316 for young people with existing tics, there was no clear evidence participants’ tics increased following  
317 exposure to other young people’s tics in the group, providing reassurance to families who might be  
318 concerned about this (Woods et al., 2010). Overall QOL ‘satisfaction’ improved following treatment  
319 and, while physical aspects on the QOL measure improved they did not reach significance. Heijerman-  
320 Holtgreffe et al. (2021) reported an improvement on the summed QOL subscales of the same QOL  
321 measure but neither individual subscale nor ‘satisfaction’ scores were reported. In broad terms, the  
322 message is similar across both studies: improvements in both tic profile and QoL following treatment.  
323 These outcomes might be considered cornerstones of viable treatment for the TS population.

324 All participants described getting closer to reaching their therapeutic goal following the group, and  
325 70% reached threshold for a reliable change on GBOs. The magnitude of change was similar to reports  
326 from CAMHS nationwide studies (CYP-IAPT study; Wolpert et al., 2016). The study's low attrition  
327 and high attendance rates also suggest acceptability and feasibility of the group intervention. As is true  
328 for any TS behavioural treatment (Capriotti et al., 2014) intensive group treatment was not universally  
329 effective (55% did not show clinically meaningful change), and for some children, may not be  
330 appropriate. Possible reasons for this are discussed in more detail by Heijerman-Holtgreffe and  
331 colleagues (2021) and include reduced time to practise in between sessions compared to individual  
332 treatment and less flexibility/time to address a child's individual difficulties.

333 The results on the primary outcome measure are promising, nonetheless, it is important to consider the  
334 study's limitations. This is a small study with no control group, randomisation or blinding. Participants  
335 were all children and adolescents with mild to severe TS symptoms and complex comorbidities typical  
336 of the wider TS population (Eapen et al., 2004). Still, our centre is more likely to manage relatively  
337 complex cases given its tertiary referral status. Showing a positive response in a relatively complex  
338 group, is likely to indicate the treatment protocol will be effective (and possibly more so) in TS  
339 populations in community services. The 4 week follow-up period may inadvertently capture natural  
340 course fluctuations (Roessner et al., 2011), and longer follow-up studies are needed. While careful  
341 attention was paid to the treatment protocol described by (Verdellen et al., 2011), we did not use a  
342 fidelity checklist, similar to those used in previous studies (Sukhodolsky et al., 2009).

343 Replication of the study with a larger sample as an RCT - including a health economic analysis - is  
344 warranted. It is possible non-specific group factors such as social support, feeling accepted or reducing  
345 stigma had a generalised positive effect on well-being which could theoretically indirectly impact on  
346 tic profiles. These non-specific group effects are important to explore as "fitting in with peers" is a key  
347 factor influencing QOL in children with TS (Cutler et al., 2009). Such effects are discussed elsewhere  
348 in an RCT comparing psychoeducation and HRT treatment groups in a TS population (Yates et al.,  
349 2016).

350 This study provides promising indications that a manualised ERP tic treatment developed for individual  
351 therapy can be delivered in an intensive group format as an acceptable, feasible and effective option,  
352 offering increased accessibility to treatment, reducing tic severity and improving quality of life for  
353 young people with TS.

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