

Sensitivity to social reputation motivates prosocial engagement in behavioural-variant frontotemporal dementia

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State of the Art: Apathy is a diagnostic feature of behavioural-variant frontotemporal dementia (bvFTD) that may manifest as reduced motivation to engage in prosocial behaviours necessary to maintain social relationships. Formal assessment of prosocial motivation in bvFTD has previously only been explored as a function of empathy; however, prosocial behaviour is also influenced by sensitivity to social reputation (egoistic motivation). The current study explored whether sensitivity to social reputation motivates prosocial behaviour in bvFTD.

Methodology: Eleven people with bvFTD and eighteen healthy controls completed a donation task for charity. The task was completed twice – once in the presence of an observer and once unobserved. Participants completed the Dimensional Apathy Scale and the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale.

Results: Irrespective of group, participants donated significantly more when their choices were observed than when they were alone ($p = .049$). Planned within group contrasts revealed that while the control group donated similarly when observed and alone ($p = .424$), there was a trend for bvFTD to donate more when observed ($p = .058$). No associations were found between the number of observed donations and emotional apathy or social desirability.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that prosocial behaviour in people with bvFTD may be motivated by sensitivity to social reputation. This suggests that people with bvFTD are influenced by the presence of others, which provides important information for interventions that aim to increase prosocial engagement and social well-being in people living with bvFTD, in real-world contexts.

Conflicts of interest

Nothing to disclose