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Anatomical correlates of social cognition in patients with the behavioral variant frontotemporal dementia

Social cognition impairments have been extensively described in patients with behavioral variant frontotemporal dementia (bvFTD). Empathy, moral judgment, and moral emotions have emerged as a potentially sensitive domains to characterize and discriminate bvFTD patients from other types of dementia. Here I will present relevant evidence from structural neuroimaging and functional connectivity studies assessing social cognition in patients with bvFTD, in comparison to clinical (Alzheimer's disease, vascular frontal lesions, Parkinson's disease) and healthy control groups. These results show that empathy, moral judgment and moral emotions measures are useful to characterize bvFTD social cognition deficits and discriminate bvFTD from other neurodegenerative conditions. Impairments in these domains are associated with gray matter volumes and functional connectivity in fronto-temporo-insular networks relevant for social cognition. Finally, I will discuss how these findings contribute to a better understanding of the structural and functional connectivity correlates of social cognition deficits in bvFTD patients while highlighting the potential benefits of integrating these domains into the standard assessment for a more accurate differential diagnosis.

