

COGNITIVE, STRUCTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF LATE-LIFE AFFECTIVE DISORDERS

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Background: The presence of cognitive and structural deficits in euthymic elderly patients with affective disorders remains a matter of debate. Integrative models assessing concomitantly these parameters as well as markers of psychological vulnerability such as persistent personality traits are still lacking for this age group. Methods: Cross-sectional comparisons of 38 elderly remitted patients with early-onset depression (EOD), 17 patients with long-standing bipolar disorder (BD) and 62 healthy controls included detailed neuropsychological assessment of working memory, episodic memory, attention, processing speed, and executive functions, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) estimates of brain volumes in limbic areas and white matter hyperintensities, as well as evaluation of the Five Factor personality dimensions. Results: Compared to healthy individuals, BD patients showed significantly reduced performances in processing speed, working memory and episodic memory but not in executive functions. MRI data and personality dimension scores did not differ between the two groups. Both cognitive performances and MRI parameters were similar in euthymic EOD patients and controls. In contrast, EOD was associated with significant increase of Neuroticism and decrease of Extraversion facet scores. Conclusions: Our results revealed impairment in verbal memory, working memory and processing speed in euthymic older adults with BD. The stability of the neuropsychological deficits and paucity of structural imaging changes in the present series do not support a progressively evolving neurotoxic effect in BD. Further clinical investigations on EOD patterns of vulnerability in old age will gain from focusing on psychological features such as personality traits rather than neurocognitive clues.