Positron emission tomography in female patients with Borderline personality disorder

F.D. Juenglinga,1, C. Schmahlb,1, B. Heßlingerb, D. Ebertb, J.D. Bremnerc, J. Gostomzykd, M. Bohusb,*, K. Liebb

aDepartment of Nuclear Medicine, PET group, University of Freiburg Medical School, Hugstetterstr. 55, D-79106 Freiburg, Germany
bDepartment of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University of Freiburg Medical School, Hauptstr. 5, D-79104 Freiburg, Germany
cDepartments of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and Radiology, and Center for Positron Emission Tomography, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA, and Atlanta VAMC, Decatur, GA, USA
dDepartment of Psychiatry, University Hospital Ulm, Leimgrubenweg 12-14, 89075 Ulm, Germany

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Abstract

The pathology of Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is poorly understood and its biological basis remains largely unknown. One functional brain imaging study using \([18F]\)Deoxyglucose-PET previously reported frontal and prefrontal hypometabolism. We studied brain metabolism at baseline in 12 medication-free female patients with BPD without current substance abuse or depression and 12 healthy female controls by \([18F]\)Deoxyglucose-PET and statistical parametric mapping. We found significant frontal and prefrontal hypermetabolism in patients with BPD relative to controls as well as significant hypometabolism in the hippocampus and cuneus. This study demonstrated limbic and prefrontal dysfunction under resting conditions in patients with BPD by FDG-PET. Dysfunction in this network of brain regions, which has been implicated in the regulation of emotion, may underlie symptoms of BPD.

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1. Introduction

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a persistent and severe mental disorder characterized by patterns of instable interpersonal relationships, self-image, affects, and marked impulsivity that begins in early adulthood and is present in a variety of different contexts throughout adult life (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Most researchers currently agree that a dysfunction of the emotional regulation system is a core component of the disorder (Linehan, 1993; Silk, 2000; Corrigan et al., 2000; Herpertz et al., 1999; Stiglmayr et al., 2001). Currently, the etiology of BPD is poorly understood and its biological basis remains largely unknown. Preclinical research has revealed a network of regions involved in emotional regulation including prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala (Davidson et al., 1999). The amygdala play a decisive role in the regulation of fear (Davis, 2001) and the hippocampus is involved in fear responses to the context of a stressful situation (Phillips and Le Doux 1992). Prefrontal cortex also regulates emotion and stress responses, including impulse control, inhibition of responses to external stimuli, and extinction of fear responses.

The crucial function of these brain regions in the expression and modulation of emotion and impulsivity in both animals and humans has led to the hypothesis that dysfunctions in these regions may underlie some of the psychopathological symptoms seen in patients with BPD. One functional brain imaging study employing \([18F]\)Deoxyglucose positron emission tomography (FDG-PET) under resting conditions revealed decreased metabolism in premotor and prefrontal areas, the anterior part of the cingulate cortex, and the thalamic, caudate and
Solfet al. (2000) found greater FDG uptake in trols (De la Fuente et al., 1997). In a pilot fenfluramine lenticular nuclei, in BPD patients as compared to con-

regional uptake than controls. Herpertz et al. (2001) areas in which patients with BPD had greater relative body in the control participants. There were no areas in which patients with BPD had greater relative regional uptake than controls. The PET procedure was performed according to previously defined standards (Juengling et al., 1999; Juen-
gling et al., 2000). In brief, the patients were allowed to rest for at least 10 min before injection of 200±20 MBq 18-FDG and during the uptake period for another 20 min in an acoustically isolated and dimmed room. The patients were then transferred to the scanner (Siemens CTI ECAT EXACT tomograph, 10.8 cm FOV, 6.8 mm FWHM), where the patients’ heads were positioned according to the orbitomeatal line. The control group was measured on the same type and model of the named PET-scanner at a later time point.

Image acquisition was started 30 min after injection. Six dynamic frames of 5 min duration each were acquired. Images were then reconstructed using filtered back-projection by Shepp-Logan filter (cut-off 0.35 cycles/pixel). Attenuation correction was performed using the standard mathematical algorithm implemented in ECAT software. The dynamic frames were then checked for motion artifacts and summed up to generate a single dataset of 31 transaxial planes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypometabolic areas in patients with BPD as compared to controls</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatomical structure</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Hippocampus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuneus (BA 19)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Given are the anatomical structure, the putative areas of Brodm-an, the Talairach coordinates of the localization of the maximum Z-score of each cluster (in x-, y-, z-direction) and the values of the maximum Z-scores and percentage of difference in regional activity as compared to the normal data base.

* Image orientation is according to radiological convention, i.e. negative x-coordinates correspond to the right hemisphere.
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