IMPACT OF DEPRESSION ON SEMANTIC PROCESSING IN ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE: RESULTS FROM AN AFFECTIVE PRIMING PARADIGM

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Target. Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is a neurodegenerative disease characterized by an early breakdown of memory including a semantic memory (SM) impairment. Moreover, AD may be associated to mood disorders that are known to impact memory, such as depression. However, few studies have been conducted to clarify the links between SM and depression in AD. Accordingly, this study aimed to clarify the effect of depression in SM in AD. Material and method. An affective priming paradigm was administered to 36 participants (mean age = 83.4 SD = 6.2): a control group of 20 healthy elderly and an experimental group of 16 mild AD. In the experimental AD group, half of the subjects presented symptoms of depression (D-AD) and half did not (ND-AD). The priming protocol contained 3 different conditions which manipulated the relation between the prime and the target: positive affective valence (V+) (e.g. joke-laughs), negative affective valence (V-) (e.g. army-soldier) and neutral (semantic but not affective relations) (Vn) (e.g. school-student). Results. A repeated-measures ANOVA showed two main effects, of group (F=41.526 ; p=.001) and condition (F=5.453, p=.008). Moreover, a significant group*condition interaction effect (F=3.082 ; p=.025) revealed an hyperpriming effect in the V- condition in D-AD whereas control subjects and ND-AD presented on the contrary a more important priming effect for V+. To sum up, a specific hyperpriming effect was observable for the negative affective valence in AD patients with depression. Discussion and conclusions. These results suggest that mood disorders in AD can negatively impact the processing of semantic knowledge. This highlights the importance of assessing mood disorders in AD as well as to manage these symptoms.

Topic: Neuropsychology
References:

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