Morphometry and gyrification in bipolar disorder and schizophrenia: A comparative MRI study

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ABSTRACT

Schizophrenia is believed to be a neurodevelopmental disease with high heritability. Differential diagnosis is often challenging, especially in early phases, namely with other psychotic disorders or even mood disorders, such as bipolar disorder with psychotic symptoms. Key pathophysiological changes separating these two classical psychoses remain poorly understood, and current evidence favors a more dimensional than categorical differentiation between schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. While established biomarkers like cortical thickness and grey matter volume are heavily influenced by post-onset changes and thus provide limited possibility of accessing early pathologies, gyrification is assumed to be more specifically determined by genetic and early developmental factors. The aim of our study was to compare both classical and novel morphometric features in these two archetypical psychiatric disorders. We included 20 schizophrenia patients, 20 bipolar disorder patients and 20 age- and gender-matched healthy controls. Data analyses were performed with CAT12/SPM12 applying general linear models for four morphometric measures: gyrification and cortical thickness (surface-based morphometry), and whole-brain grey matter/grey matter volume (voxel-based morphometry - VBM). Group effects were tested using age and gender as covariates (and total intracranial volume for VBM). Voxel-based morphometry analysis revealed a schizophrenia vs. control group effect on regional grey matter volume (\(p < 0.05\), familywise error correction) in the right globus pallidus. There was no group effect on white matter volume when correcting for multiple comparisons neither on cortical thickness. Gyrification changes in clinical samples were found in the left supramarginal gyrus (BA40) – increased and reduced gyrification, respectively, in BPD and SCZ patients – and in the right inferior frontal gyrus (BA47), with a reduction in gyrification of the SCZ group when compared with controls. The joint analysis of different morphometric features, namely measures such as gyrification, provides a promising strategy for the elucidation of distinct phenotypes in psychiatric disorders. Different morphological change patterns, highlighting specific disease trajectories, could potentially generate neuroimaging-derived biomarkers, helping to discriminate schizophrenia from bipolar disorder in early phases, such as first-episode psychosis patients.

1. Introduction

The classical dichotomy between schizophrenia (SCZ) and bipolar disorder (BPD) proposed by Kraepelin has dominated western psychiatry for over a century, and only recently has a distinction that could be more dimensional than categorical emerged (Cradock et al., 2009).

Several studies have documented a high genetic overlap between SCZ and BPD (Cross-Disorder Group of the Psychiatric Genomics, 2013; Hammerschlag et al., 2019). Clinically, early phases of SCZ and BPD can be hard to differentiate due to common presentations, especially when psychotic symptoms are prominent in BPD. In the AESOP-10 study, around 30% of patients who had a first-episode psychosis were
neuroimaging biomarkers might be more disease-specific than classical markers such as cortical thickness and GM volume, which may be influenced by post-onset pathological processes (Nenadic et al., 2015a). Cortical gyriﬁcation has been proposed as a novel schizophrenia endophenotype candidate, since it targets morphometric properties which are not captured by VBM or cortical thickness analyses, and is assumed to be more speciﬁcally determined by genetic and developmental factors (Nenadic et al., 2015a; Zilles et al., 2013, 1988). Accordingly, we have recently shown that a monogenetically determined neurodevelopmental disorder, Neuroﬁbro chromatosis Type 1 is characterized by abnormal gyriﬁcation which is consistent with patterns of cognitive dysfunction observed in this condition (Violante et al., 2013). This feature has also been explored in schizophrenia, modelled as a late neurodevelopmental disorder with high heritability (Matsuda and Ohi, 2018; Spaltho et al., 2018). While abnormal cortical gyriﬁcation has been reported in patients with SCZ, patient relatives and at-risk individuals, conﬂicting ﬁndings of hyper- and hypo-gyriﬁcation have been reported which may be explained by different estimation methods and other factors such as age, gender and illness stage and severity (Matsuda and Ohi, 2018). Cortical gyriﬁcation can be quantiﬁed as a gyriﬁcation index (GI), which in SCZ and BPD has been shown to decrease at a faster pace than in healthy controls during aging, especially after the age of 40 (Bo Cao et al., 2017). Evidence regarding gyriﬁcation changes in BPD is more scarce, but studies have shown reduced prefrontal gyriﬁcation and a signiﬁcant disease-stage effect on the GI of patients with BPD (B. Cao et al., 2017; McIntosh et al., 2009).

An important caveat of case-control studies, which dominate the ﬁeld of neuroimaging in psychiatry, is that patients are enrolled based on a speciﬁc clinical diagnosis and are compared with healthy individuals, but typically not to another clinical group (Etkin, 2019). Taking into account other previous limitations in studying brain structural differences between SCZ and BPD, our main purpose was to directly compare carefully deﬁned matched-groups of bipolar disorder (BPD) vs. schizophrenia (SCZ) patients and healthy controls using both conventional (GM volume and cortical thickness) and novel (gyriﬁcation index) morphometric features of these archetypal psychiatric disorders. We hypothesize that analyzing well-matched disease populations will allow the isolation of disease-speciﬁc morphometric markers which may inform and guide future research.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

We included outpatients with schizophrenia (SCZ) and bipolar disorder (BPD) from a major university hospital, besides healthy controls (CNT), matched for age, gender and education. Inclusion criteria for clinical groups were: (1) ICD-10 criteria for SCZ or BPD using a semi-structured interview (Martins et al., 2019); (2) age between 18–54; (3) capacity to consent; (4) right-handedness through evaluation with the Edinburgh Handedness Inventory (Espirito-Santo et al., 2017); (5) clinical stability in the last 12 weeks prior to enrolment. General exclusion criteria were: (1) medical or neurological comorbidity (e.g. epilepsy, head trauma, neurodevelopmental disorders); (2) substance abuse/dependence; (3) contra-indications to magnetic resonance imaging. Patients’ clinical assessment included instruments such as the Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale – BPRS (Lukoff et al., 1986) for general psychopathology, and the Personal and Social Performance Scale – PSP (Brissos et al., 2012) addressing functioning; insight was measured through the Insight and Treatment Attitudes Questionnaire, ITAQ (McEvoy et al., 1989). The Schizo-Bipolar Scale (Keshavan et al., 2011), developed to capture the dimensional interaction between psychosis and affective symptoms, was also administered. Current antipsychotic exposure in patient groups (SCZ and BPD) was calculated through chlorpromazine equivalents – CPZE (Atkins et al., 1997). Control individuals were recruited from the institution’s workers and their relatives, and a brief interview excluded a personal or family history of mental disorders, namely SCZ or BPD, in addition to general exclusion criteria. All participants provided written informed consent to a study approved by the local Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Coimbra (ref. CE-010/2014) and in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) acquisition

Data were collected with a Siemens Magnetom TIM Trio 3 Tesla scanner (Siemens, Munich, Germany) with a phased array 12-channel birdcage head coil. We acquired a 3D anatomical TI-weighted MPRAGE (magnetization-prepared rapid gradient echo) magnetic resonance imaging pulse sequence (TR 2530 ms; TE 3.42 ms; TI = 1100 ms; flip angle 7°; 176 single-shot interleaved slices with no gap with isotropic voxel size 1 x 1 x 1 mm; FOV 256 mm) of all 60 participants.
2.3. Pre-processing

All images were processed and analyzed using the CAT12 toolbox (C. Gaser, Structural Brain Mapping Group, Jena University Hospital, Jena, Germany; http://dbm.neuro.uni-jena.de/cat/) implemented in SPM12 (Wellcome Trust center for Neuroimaging, London, UK; http://www.fil.ion.ucl.ac.uk/spm/software/SPM12/). CAT12 served as the platform for all the analyses, as it offers processing pipelines for both voxel-based morphometry as well as surface-based morphometry (including cortical thickness and gyri- fication), allowing us to perform all analyses with this software package. For processing- and analysis-steps, pre-set parameters in accordance with standard protocol (http://www.neuro.uni-jena.de/cat12/CAT12-Manual.pdf) were used, applying default settings unless indicated otherwise. This tool has been previously used and validated in morphometric studies in schizophrenia (Spalthoff et al., 2018), as well as in other neurologic and neurodegenerative diseases (Righart et al., 2017; Seiger et al., 2018). Processing also included a two-step quality assurance: first, all images were visually inspected for artefacts (prior to pre-processing); secondly, all underwent a statistical quality control for inter-subject homogeneity and overall image quality as included in the CAT12 toolbox (‘check homogeneity’ function) after segmentation. This second step again included a visual inspection procedure for potential newly introduced artefacts.

We used a volume-based tool (CAT12) which offers an alternative that allows for faster processing (1 h per subject) and rapid learning by the user while at the same time maintaining a high quality, when compared to the well-established surface-based tool FreeSurfer. FreeSurfer’s steep learning curve for beginner users and high processing time might demand considerable computational and time effort, particularly in larger studies. On the one hand, spherical and brain phan- toms have confirmed that CAT accurately measures features of cortical thickness and folding (Dahnke et al., 2013). On the other hand, CAT12 has been validated in clinical populations, and there is evidence that CAT12 can be considered a fast and reliable alternative to FreeSurfer (Righart et al., 2017; Seiger et al., 2018).

2.4. Gyrification analysis

We calculated local (vertex-wise) gyrification index (GI) maps based on the absolute mean curvature approach (Luders et al., 2006). Extraction of the cortical surface (using CAT12 routines) resulted in the construction of a mesh of the central surface, i.e. the surface between the grey matter/CSF border and the grey matter/white matter boundary (Dahnke et al., 2013). We then calculated the local absolute mean curvature of this central surface by averaging the mean curvature values from each vertex point within 3 mm from a given point. In a second step, we applied 15 mm full-width at half maximum (FWHM) smoothing to the GI maps. This method has been applied in previous studies, also with other processing pipelines for cortical surface ex- traction (Luders et al., 2012; Nenadic et al., 2015b).

2.5. Cortical thickness analysis

We analyzed cortical thickness based on the same algorithm for extraction of the cortical surface implemented in CAT12, as given above for GI analyses. Here, the central surface as well as cortical thickness are estimated in one step using a projection-based distance measure (Dahnke et al., 2013). The vertex-wise cortical thickness measures were resampled and smoothed using a 15 mm FWHM Gaussian kernel.

2.6. Voxel-based morphometry (VBM)

We applied spatial normalization and segmentation into three voxel classes: grey matter (GM), white matter (WM) and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) using partial volume segmentation with adaptive maximum a posteriori (MAP) approach. We also determined total intracranial vol- ume (TIV) for all scans. Using modulated normalized GM maps, we tested the hypothesis of regional grey matter volume (GMV) differ- ences. The extracted GM maps were smoothed using a 12 mm FWHM kernel and used for further analysis. We applied a 0.1 absolute masking threshold to the VBM data.

2.7. Statistical analysis

We performed statistical analyses of imaging data in the CAT12/ SPM12 statistical module applying ANOVA to each of the three mor- phometric measures (gyrification and cortical thickness with SBM, and GM volume with VBM). Using age and gender as covariates (and for VBM analyses, additionally, total intracranial volume, TIV), we tested group differences applying thresholds of p < 0.05 with FWE correction for multiple comparisons. When the FWE was too stringent, and not to miss an exploratory interesting effect, we thresholded the statistical map at voxel level with p < 0.001 and then corrected at the cluster level with non-stationary cluster extent correction. In addition, when there was a significant group effect, we did post-hoc pairwise com- parisons with t-test to detect differences between every pair of groups, using Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

Demographic and clinical data analysis was performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 23 (IBM Corporation, New York, EUA). Normality of the data was tested using the Shapiro–Wilks test. When data were normally distributed, parametric ANOVA and t-tests were used to test differences between groups, and Pearson correlation was used to calculate corre- lation between imaging and clinical data. If the assumption of nor- mality was not met, non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis H test and Mann–Whitney U tests were used to assess between-group differences, while Spearman correlation was used to assess the relationship between morphometric measures and clinical scores.

Study design and data analysis were aligned with the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) consenus (Vandenbroucke et al., 2007).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive analysis

Demographic and clinical data are summarized in Table 1. Re- garding inpatient admissions of BPD participants, most (58%) were due to manic episodes; all admissions of patients with SCZ involved psy- chotic relapses. All patients with SCZ (n = 20) were on stable anti- psychotic (AP) medication, predominantly atypical APs: one second- generation AP (n = 16), a combination of two second-generation AP (n = 2) or a first-generation AP (n = 2). In the BPD group (n = 20), two patients were stable without any medication; most individuals (n = 18) were on regular mood-stabilizing medication: mood-stabilizer monotherapy (n = 7), mood-stabilizers in association (n = 1), a mood- stabilizer and atypical AP combination (n = 4), and atypical AP, either in monotherapy (n = 4) or combination (n = 2). Only one individual was medicated with lithium.

Patient groups (SCZ and BPD) had no relevant demographic or clinical differences besides antipsychotic exposure, greater in SCZ pa- tients (p = 0.032). Regarding psychopathological evaluation, patients with SCZ had greater (p < 0.001) general psychopathology scores, and worse (p = 0.001) functioning than BPD patients. Individuals in the BPD group had higher (p = 0.044) insight than SCZ patients. As ex- pected, the SCZ group had much higher scores (p < 0.001) on the Schizo-Bipolar Scale than BPD individuals: higher scores are associated with prototypical SCZ syndromes, while paradigmatic BPD cases score lower (Keshavan et al., 2011).

Groups were balanced for gender, exactly the same within-group distribution (χ2(2) = 0.000, p = 1.000), and age. The data on estimated total intracranial volume (TIV) and total grey matter (GM) distribution
were normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro–Wilk tests ($p > 0.05$ for all tests). There was no statistically significant difference in mean age between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(2,57) = 0.710, p = 0.496$). Adjusting the estimates of TIV and total GM for age, there was also no statistically significant difference in mean TIV between groups ($F(2,57) = 0.008, p = 0.992$). Duration of disease was normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk tests ($p > 0.05$ for all tests). There was no statistically significant difference between groups ($F(2,57) = 1.471, p = 0.238$) between groups (Fig. 1).

### 3.2. Voxel-based morphometry

#### 3.2.1. Grey matter volume

VBM analysis revealed a group effect on regional GM volume ($F = 10.17; p < 0.001$, with Bonferroni correction) on the right globus pallidus at MNI coordinates $[44, 45, 41]$ and right inferior frontal gyrus - BA47 ($F = 8.41; p = 0.001$) at MNI coordinates $[32, 40, -11]$. Post-hoc analyses revealed increased gyriﬁcation in patients with BPD compared to SCZ in the left supramarginal gyrus - BA40 ($t = 4.13; p < 0.001$, Bonferroni corrected), while local gyriﬁcation index (LGI) of healthy controls was in between the clinical groups. SCZ patients had signiﬁcantly decreased gyriﬁcation compared to controls ($t = 3.37; p = 0.005$, Bonferroni corrected). In what regards the right inferior frontal gyrus – BA47, the SCZ group had lower gyriﬁcation compared to controls as well, although not signiﬁcantly. Results are shown in Fig. 3.

### 3.3. Gyrification analysis

Gyriﬁcation analysis revealed a group effect on the gyriﬁcation index in left supramarginal gyrus - BA40 ($t = 6.62; p < 0.001$, with Bonferroni correction) GM volume in the right globus pallidus of SCZ patients compared to CNT (Fig. 2, bottom). We did not observe significant correlation between the volume of globus pallidus and age, TIV, total GM volume, disease duration or medication in any group (all $p > 0.05$).

### 3.4. Correlational analysis between morphometric and psychopathological measures

We explored the relation between psychopathological data and right GP regional GM volume, namely in subgroups BPD, SCZ and controls. In BPD patients there was a negative association between GP volume and functioning – higher PSP score (Spearman $r = -0.503$, $p = 0.024$), and also with insight – higher ITAQ score (Spearman $r = -0.462$, $p = 0.040$). Similar correlations were found when analyzing both BPD and SCZ subgroups. In summary, the following associations were found:

- A negative correlation between GP volume and worse functioning (Spearman $r = -0.359$, $p = 0.023$) and insight (Spearman $r = -0.420$, $p = 0.007$); a positive association between GM volume and better insight (Spearman $r = 0.503$, $p = 0.005$) in SCZ patients compared to BPD.

### Table 1

Demographic and clinical data of study groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=</th>
<th>Schizophrenia 20</th>
<th>Bipolar disorder 20</th>
<th>Healthy controls 20</th>
<th>test statistics</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender distribution (female/male)</td>
<td>7/13</td>
<td>7/13</td>
<td>7/13</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - years (SD)</td>
<td>31.5 (10.3)</td>
<td>31.65 (10.0)</td>
<td>31.5 (10.3)</td>
<td>F 0.001</td>
<td>.992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education - years (SD)</td>
<td>13.6 (3.7)</td>
<td>13.85 (2.64)</td>
<td>14.9 (4.52)</td>
<td>F 0.756</td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total intracranial volume - ml (SD)</td>
<td>1469.31 (27.18)</td>
<td>1484.58 (37.73)</td>
<td>1523.80 (33.44)</td>
<td>F 0.710</td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of disease onset – years (SD)</td>
<td>25.6 (6.9)</td>
<td>26.5 (8.8)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t −0.276</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of disease – years (SD)</td>
<td>6.0 (7.9)</td>
<td>5.2 (4.3)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t 0.297</td>
<td>.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inpatient admissions (min-max)</td>
<td>1.25 (0–7)</td>
<td>1.25 (0–4)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t 0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antipsychotic exposure (CPZE) – mg (SD)</td>
<td>380.0 (337.3)</td>
<td>160.8 (272.3)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t 2.226</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of psychotic symptoms</td>
<td>20/20</td>
<td>16/20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 0.035</td>
<td>.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of substance abuse</td>
<td>5/20</td>
<td>7/20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 0.557</td>
<td>.731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of suicidal behaviors</td>
<td>4/20</td>
<td>4/20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ 0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychopathology - BPRS (SD)</td>
<td>35.65 (6.41)</td>
<td>29.11 (2.61)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t 3.991</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functioning – PSP (SD)</td>
<td>80.22 (12.36)</td>
<td>92.00 (4.00)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t −3.845</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight – ITAQ (SD)</td>
<td>17.12 (3.16)</td>
<td>19.13 (2.22)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t −2.100</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizo-Bipolar Scale (min-max)</td>
<td>8.00 (7–9)</td>
<td>0.94 (0–2)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>t 28.356</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BPRS = Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale; CPZE = chlorpromazine equivalents; ITAQ = Insight and Treatment Attitudes Questionnaire; PSP = Personal and Social Performance Scale; SD = standard deviation.;
with more severe general psychopathology – BPRS – was also found (Pearson $r = 0.314$, $p = 0.048$) - results are shown in Fig. 4. Having explored the relation of gyriﬁcation with clinical data, we found a positive association between gyriﬁcation in the left BA40 and higher antipsychotic dosage – chlorpromazine equivalents – in BPD patients as a group (Spearman rho = 0.486, $p = 0.030$). Analyzing both SCZ and BPD as a whole, higher gyriﬁcation in the left BA40 was associated with lower scores in the Schizo-Bipolar Scale (Spearman rho = −0.535, $p < 0.001$) and higher functioning (Spearman rho = 0.358, $p = 0.023$); gyriﬁcation in the right BA47 correlated negatively with CPZE – antipsychotics mean dosage (Spearman rho = −0.313, $p = 0.049$). Results are presented in Fig. 4.

4. Discussion

The present work used a combined approach of conventional and novel brain morphometric measures to compare individuals with archetypal SCZ or BPD syndromes in early years of disease. We found an increased volume of the right globus pallidus in patients with SCZ, divergent gyriﬁcation of the left supramarginal gyrus in BPD vs. SCZ, and decreased gyriﬁcation of the right inferior frontal gyrus in SCZ. Relevant associations between the imaging ﬁndings and psychopathological measures were also identiﬁed.

In line with previous studies, we observed an increase in the volume of the globus pallidus (GP) in SCZ patients even at early stages of disease. The design of our study allowed a relatively reduced time of exposure to possible confounding factors, such as disease duration and antipsychotic treatment (van Erp et al., 2014). There is conflicting evidence on the impact of disease duration on the volume of deep grey matter, with some studies showing no effect (Fusar-Poli et al., 2013) whilst others demonstrated a positive association with bilateral GP volumes (Hashimoto et al., 2018). Although causality is uncertain, it might be hypothesized that such morphological changes were acquired rather than reﬂecting a neurodevelopmental nature.

Unlike atypical antipsychotics, classical antipsychotics have been associated with generalized reductions in GM volume but with an enlargement of the basal ganglia (Lang et al., 2004; Lieberman et al., 2005). This has been corroborated by a recent meta-analysis reporting that a daily dose of antipsychotics was positively associated with left GP volume and negatively with right hippocampus volume (Hashimoto et al., 2018). It was also associated positively with laterality index of globus pallidus, while the class of antipsychotics did not seem to modulate the effect on subcortical volume. Womer and colleagues also found increased GP and caudate volumes in psychotic patients (both SCZ and psychotic BPD), while non-psychotic BPD patients had the smallest volumes, even when compared with healthy controls (Womer et al., 2014). Findings of a larger globus pallidus and leftward asymmetry in globus pallidus volume were also reported by the ENIGMA Schizophrenia working group (van Erp et al., 2014), and the Japanese consortium (COCORO - Cognitive Genetic Collaborative Research Organization), respectively (Okada et al., 2016).

In BPD patients, subcortical volumetric abnormalities have been
assessed in the ENIGMA Consortium, demonstrating the presence of enlarged lateral ventricles, and volume loss of the hippocampus and the thalamus. For all other subcortical structures, including the globus pallidus, no significant differences were identified vs. controls (Hibar et al., 2016). In summary, as demonstrated in our study, relatively well-controlled for confounding factors, the increased GP volume documented in SCZ is not consistently found in BPD patients adjusted for age and disease length.

Changes in gyriﬁcation found in our study should be interpreted in light of the currently limited knowledge on this innovative biomarker, in particular in populations with BPD. In SCZ, although more data are available, conﬂicting ﬁndings have been reported as evidenced by the presence of either hypo- or hyper-gyriﬁcation involving mostly pre-frontal and temporal areas (Nanda et al., 2014; Spalthoﬀ et al., 2018). It has been hypothesized that gyriﬁcation rests on early developmental disturbances, based on a smaller subset of brain areas showing developmental delay, while volumetric changes emerge only at later stages, such as prodromes or clinical onset (Spalthoﬀ et al., 2018; Zilles et al., 2013).

Compared with healthy controls, we found increased gyriﬁcation of the left supramarginal gyrus (SMG - BA40) in patients with BPD and a decreased gyriﬁcation of the SMG in patients with SCZ. Given that BPD and SCZ frequently share brain morphometric features (Ivleva et al., 2010), these contrasting ﬁndings are relevant, but appear to corroborate the results of other morphologic and functional imaging studies using classical volumetric and microstructural measures. In the EN-PACT study (European Network on Psychosis, Aﬀective disorders and Cognitive Trajectory), the left SMG was one of the areas where grey matter volume loss was most signiﬁcant in clinical samples of BPD and SCZ (Maggioni et al., 2017). In other studies it was observed a volume reduction of the right SMG in SCZ (Amann et al., 2016) or in both SCZ and, although at uncorrected level, BPD patients (Nenadic et al., 2015b). Concerning structural connectivity, reduced and increased fractional anisotropy were found in SCZ and BPD, respectively, with increased mean GM diﬀusion in both clinical samples (Anderson et al., 2013). A negative correlation was further identiﬁed between alexithymia and reduced volume of the left SMG in SCZ patients (Kubota et al., 2011). The SMG has been functionally associated with social cognition and Theory of Mind, namely its more early developing neural components (Saxe and Powell, 2006; Silani et al., 2013), and social cognition deﬁcits have been proposed as the most signiﬁcant predictors of functionality in patients with SCZ (Couture et al., 2006;
Our study showed decreased gyriﬁcation of the right inferior frontal gyrus in schizophrenia, a ﬁnding that is corroborated by several functional neuroimaging studies. In a fMRI study of BPD and SCZ patients using a language-associated activation task, BPD patients engaged emotion processing brain areas more than healthy controls and individuals with SCZ, recruiting the right BA47 to a greater extent (McIntosh et al., 2008). Another fMRI study of euthymic BPD patients, performing an affective task paradigm involving matching and labeling of emotional facial expressions, reported reduced activation relative to healthy controls in the right BA47 (Foland-Ross et al., 2012). Irrespective of structural thinning in BPD patients, it has been hypothesized that the lateral section of the orbitofrontal cortex might suppress amygdala output via a projection from the medial section (Foland-Ross et al., 2013; Nenadic et al., 2015b). Hemispheric lateralization of mood regulation has also been reported, suggesting that positive or appetitive-related emotions are lateralized towards the left, while negative or aversive-related emotions are right-hemisphere biased (Foland-Ross et al., 2011; Rotenberg, 2004). Our study groups were gender-matched, which is particularly relevant when considering the hypothesis formulated by Timothy Crow that gender, interacting with Laterality, might explain some of the structural variance between BPD and SCZ patients; this is supported by a recent meta-analysis (Bora et al., 2012; Crow et al., 2013; Nenadic et al., 2015b). Hemispheric lateralization of mood regulation has also been reported, suggesting that positive or appetitive-related emotions are lateralized towards the left, while negative or aversive-related emotions are right-hemisphere biased (Foland-Ross et al., 2011; Rotenberg, 2004).
finding was that the normal left > right pattern of prefrontal gyri- 
fication was reversed in SCZ patients.

Long term challenges in differentiating schizophrenia from classi- 
manic-depressive psychosis, now considered as type I Bipolar Disorder 
with psychotic features, suggest that common psychotic symptoms 
could be a unifying feature for biomarker research (Ivleva et al., 2017; 
Reininghaus et al., 2019). In fact, it has been hypothesized that gyr- 
ification changes, namely in frontal regions, could be a phenotypic core 
function of psychotic disorders (Nenadic et al., 2015a). A study origi- 
nated from the Bipolar-Schizophrenia Network on Intermediate 
Phenotypes (B-SNIP) consortium addressed gyri- 

cation in a sample of BPD, 
SCZ, schizoaffective (SZA) patients, patient relatives and healthy 
controls, using local gyri- 

cation index (Nanda et al., 2014). Significant 
regionally localized hypogyria was reported in psychotic patients, 
particularly in the cingulate cortex. Interestingly, direct BPD-SCZ 
comparison yielded no significant results and SZA patients, a hypothetic 
intermediate disorder to SCZ and BPD, appeared to exhibit a pro- 
nounced profile of hypogyria. Study strengths, besides the availability of 
unaffected patient relatives, included assessment of current medi- 
cation, not only antipsychotic, but also lithium usage; lithium has been 
shown to influence the structure of the human brain, namely increasing 
GM volume (Lyoo et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2000). Of notice, only one 
of our study’s BPD patients was medicated with lithium. Nonetheless, 
once again age and gender might have been limiting factors in the B- 

SNIP consortium study, with higher mean-ages, and dramatic differ- 
ences in the latter variable: 64% male patients in the SCZ group, 
compared with 31% in the BPD sample, 47% of healthy controls and 
29% of patient-relatives (Nanda et al., 2014).

Finally, when evaluating findings from different studies using a 
novel parameter such as gyri- 

cation measures, methodological ques- 
tions are obviously relevant. Although gyri- 

cation is thought to be a 
stable marker, available open-source tools differ regarding labor in- 
tensity and computational demands. We used a solid option that has 
been validated in clinical settings – CAT12 – and is considered both fast 
and reliable (Rigbhart et al., 2017; Seiger et al., 2018). Furthermore, 
gyri- 

cation values estimated with the commonly used FreeSurfer have 
higher rater-dependency than those estimated with the curvature 
approach in CAT12, making this an easy-to-use alternative approach.

Despite our study’s stringent design, namely inclusion/exclusion 
criteria and matching for relevant variables such as age and gender, 
some limitations should be discussed. The study’s cross-sectional nature 
hinders the investigation of specific disease trajectories, that only 
longitudinal data might clarify (Cao et al., 2017). The relatively small 

sample size, namely of particular subgroups such as non-psychotic BPD 
patients (only 20% of the BPD group), precludes the assessment of some 
variables, e.g. the influence of psychotic symptoms on BPD morpho- 
metric changes. While we assessed and controlled for current medica- 
tion use, namely antipsychotics, its possible effect as a confounder (e.g. 
cumulative usage of antipsychotics) cannot be entirely ruled out.

5. Conclusions

A perceived feature of psychiatric neuroimaging research over the 
past two decades has been its relative disconnection from real-world 
clinical care and its unmet needs (Etkin, 2019). While MRI classifica- 
tion studies using traditional GM measures have shown some promising 
results in accurately separating individuals suffering from SCZ and BPD 
(Schnack et al., 2014), brain imaging biomarkers would be more 
clinically useful in earlier phases of disease, where these two disorders 
can be hard to differentiate.

In this brain MRI comparison study of individuals with SCZ or BPD 
in their first years of disease, we found an increased volume of the right 
globus pallidus as a consistent marker in SCZ, but not BPD, when 

evaluating traditional MRI measures. On the other hand, gyri- 

cation was found to be differentially changed between clinical groups, diver-
ging from healthy controls in different directions in the left SMG gyrus, 

and in the same direction, but with different strength, in the right in-
ferior frontal gyrus. The findings involving the left SMG gyrus are of 

particular interest, given this contrasting pattern found in two disorders 

that frequently share morphometric and genetic features (Ivleva et al., 2010).

Gyri- 

cation analysis, an innovative and biologically plausible ap- 

proach, could aid identification of biomarkers relevant to different as-
pects of pathophysiology in SCZ and BPD. Studies using these in-

novative morphometric features in early stage patients’ data could 
enlighten specific disease trajectories, identifying distinct psycho-

pathological phenotypes and its core neurobiological processes, per-
haps generating helpful biomarkers for clinical practice, favoring ear-
lier diagnosis and improving treatment selection.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Nuno Madeira: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - 

oiginal draft, Project administration. João Valente Duarte: 

Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal anal-
ysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing - original draft, 
Visualization. Ricardo Martins: Validation, Formal analysis, 
Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - review & editing. 
Gabriel Nascimento Costa: Investigation, Resources, Writing - review & editing. António Macedo: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing 

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Declarations of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

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