

Personality Changes in Dementia: Are They Disease Specific and Universal?

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Original Articles

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Abstract

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Previous studies about personality changes in dementia suggest that they may be due to the disruption of the biological basis of personality traits, and hence, that they are disease specific and universal. However, evidence about its specificity is still limited and scarce regarding culturally diverse populations. Accordingly, our aim was to compare personality changes in Argentinean patients with Alzheimer disease, behavioral variant of frontotemporal dementia, and primary progressive aphasia. The closest living relatives of patients diagnosed with Alzheimer disease (n=19), behavioral variant of frontotemporal dementia (n=16), and primary progressive aphasia (n=15) were asked to complete 2 versions of the personality inventory NEO Personality Inventory-Revised, one for assessing patients' premorbid personality traits, and the other for assessing current traits. All groups showed changes in several domains and facets of the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised. Globally, the observed pattern of changes was fairly consistent with previous studies based on the same model of personality. Nevertheless, our results regarding disease-specificity were less conclusive. Even if there were some indicators of specific differences between groups, most traits varied similarly across the 3 groups, revealing a pattern of generalized changes in personality expression after illness onset. More studies are needed that help to distinguish real personality changes from other affective or cognitive symptoms that accompany dementia, as well as further data from culturally diverse populations.