Implicit emotional processing in fibromyalgia: an experimental study

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Title: Implicit emotional processing in fibromyalgia: an experimental study.

Authors: Federica Scarpina\textsuperscript{a}, Ada Ghiggia\textsuperscript{b}, Giorgia Varallo\textsuperscript{a,c}, Valentina Tesio\textsuperscript{b}, Alessandro Mauro\textsuperscript{d}, Marco Arreghini\textsuperscript{a}, Paolo Capodaglio\textsuperscript{a}, Enrico Molinari\textsuperscript{a,c}, Lorys Castelli\textsuperscript{b}, Gianluca Castelnuovo\textsuperscript{a,c}.

\textsuperscript{a} I.R.C.C.S. Istituto Auxologico Italiano, Ospedale San Giuseppe, Piancavallo, Italy
\textsuperscript{b} Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Turin, Italy
\textsuperscript{c} Department of Psychology, Catholic University, Milan, Italy
\textsuperscript{d} Department of Neuroscience, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Abstract (max 250 words):

\textbf{Background:} Aberrant emotional processing is reported in fibromyalgia. However, this capability is generally measured through explicit measures, like self-report questionnaires and facial emotion recognition task. Instead, no previous research has investigated the implicit emotional processing in fibromyalgia.

\textbf{Methods:} Individuals diagnosed with fibromyalgia and matched healthy controls were enrolled. Individuals’ capability to recognize the emotions of fear and anger was investigated through an implicit emotional recognition task grounding on the “redundant target effect”: individuals respond faster when two identical targets are presented simultaneously rather than when presented alone. Reaction Times (in ms) and Accuracy (in percentage) were measured. In addition, the level of alexithymia was measured by asking participants to judge explicitly their ability to identify and describe emotions (TAS – 20).

\textbf{Results:} Individuals with fibromyalgia were less accurate and slower in recognizing the emotion of fear, when compared to controls. About the emotion of anger, the results were more controversial. However, the relationship with the level of alexithymia, when measured using a standard questionnaire, was not significant.

\textbf{Conclusions:} Difficulties in the implicit component of emotional processing emerged in fibromyalgia. We discussed our results taking in account the meaning of the emotion of fear in this clinical condition. We also proposed that the individual’s capability to efficiently recognize an emotion might be more efficiently inferred studying the implicit behavior, rather than the subjective evaluation of one’s own emotional processing capability.

\textbf{Corresponding author}

\textbf{Name and Surname:} Federica Scarpina
\textbf{Affiliation:} U.O. of Neurology and Neurorehabilitation, I.R.C.C.S. Istituto Auxologico Italiano, Ospedale San Giuseppe, Piancavallo, Italy
\textbf{Address:} Str. L. Cadorna, 90, 28824 Piancavallo, VCO, Italy
\textbf{email:} f.scarpina@auxologico.it