

SSE20-03

Increased Gray Matter Volume of Emotional Circuits in Children without Direct Parental Care

Monday 3:20-3:30 PM | SSE20-03 | NA

PURPOSE

With the economic boom, hundreds of millions of laborers are migrating away from their children to pursue a better job. This international parental migration has resulted in millions of left-behind children (LBC) and has raised widespread concern. However, it is still unclear where and how the brain is affected in these children who lack parental care. Therefore, we aimed to explore the gray matter volume alteration in LBC in relative to those with parental care.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study was IRB approved and written informed consent was obtained from guardians. Thirty-eight LBC (age=9.6±1.8yrs, 21boys) and 30 comparison children (age=10.0±1.95yrs, 19boys) were included and performed a 3.0T MR scan. The LBC is defined as children who living with the absence of both of their biological parents for a period over six months. Image preprocessing and statistical analyses were performed with optimized voxel-based morphometry in SPM8. IQ of all participants was measured to quantify cognitive function.

RESULTS

Compared to controls, LBC showed significantly greater gray matter volume in bilateral fusiform gyri, bilateral parahippocampus, right superior parietal lobe, right thalamus, right superior occipital gyrus, left cuneus, right superior temporal gyrus, right superior medial frontal gyrus, left postcentral gyrus, left middle occipital gyrus and left putamen ($p < 0.05$, FDR corrected). The mean value of IQ scores in LBC was not significantly different from that in controls. Furthermore, gray matter volume in bilateral parahippocampus gyri in LBC was negatively correlated with IQ score ($p < 0.05$).

CONCLUSION

This study provided the first empirical evidence of larger gray matter volumes, especially in emotional circuits in LBC than children living with their parents, suggesting the parental care affects the brain development. Since the larger gray matter volume may reflect insufficient pruning and mature of brain, the negative correlation between the gray matter volume and IQ scores suggest that growing without parental care may delay the development of brain.

CLINICAL RELEVANCE/APPLICATION

To our knowledge, this study provides the first empirical evidence of larger gray matter volumes in emotional circuits in LBC, suggesting that parental care affects brain development. From a public health perspective, the study highlighted the importance of parental care in children and indicated early intervention and stimulation are needed to LBC.

FIGURE (OPTIONAL)

http://abstract.rsna.org/uploads/2015/15008346/15008346_15wq.jpg