IMPAIRED REFLECTIVE FUNCTION PREDICTS SEVERITY OF BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

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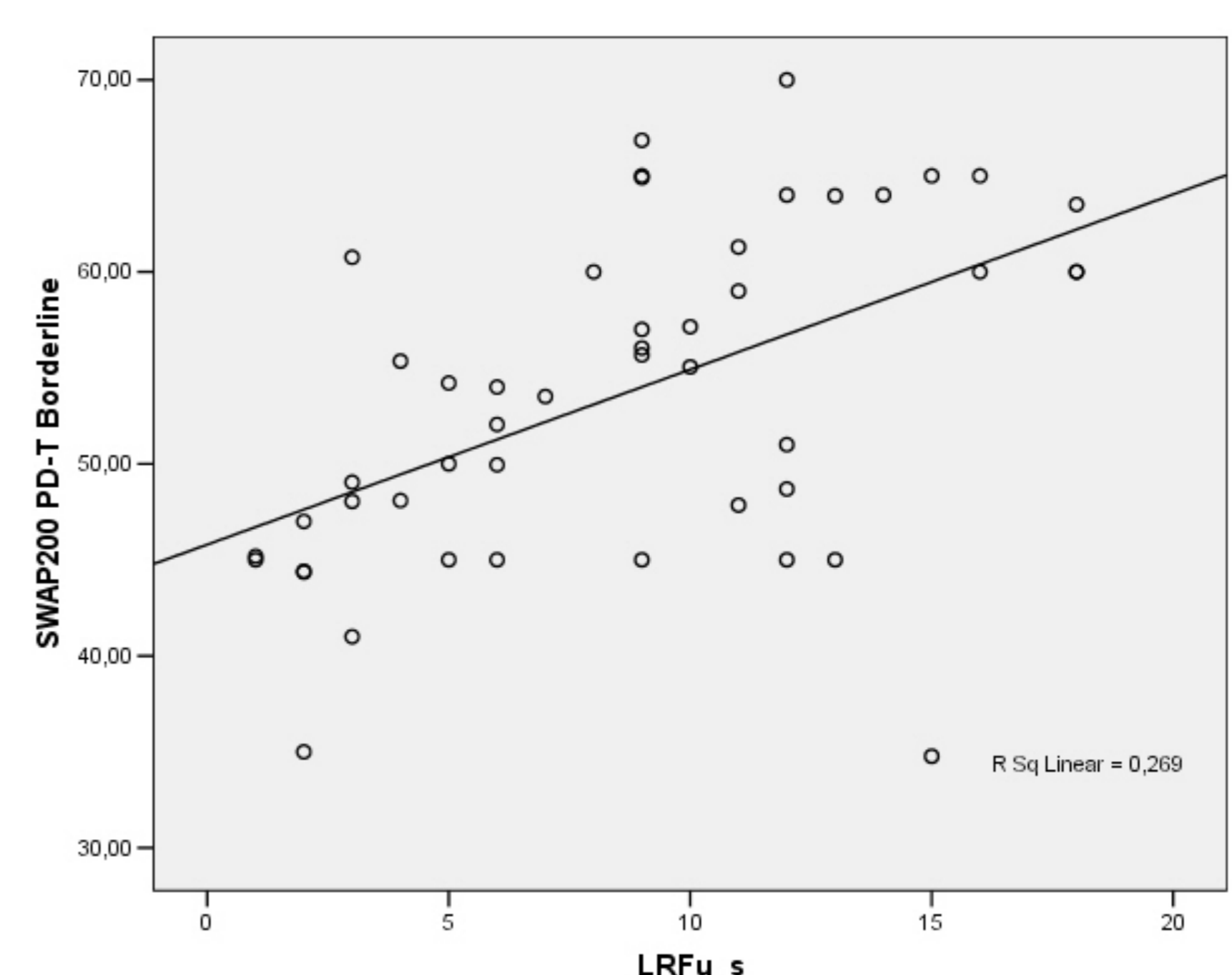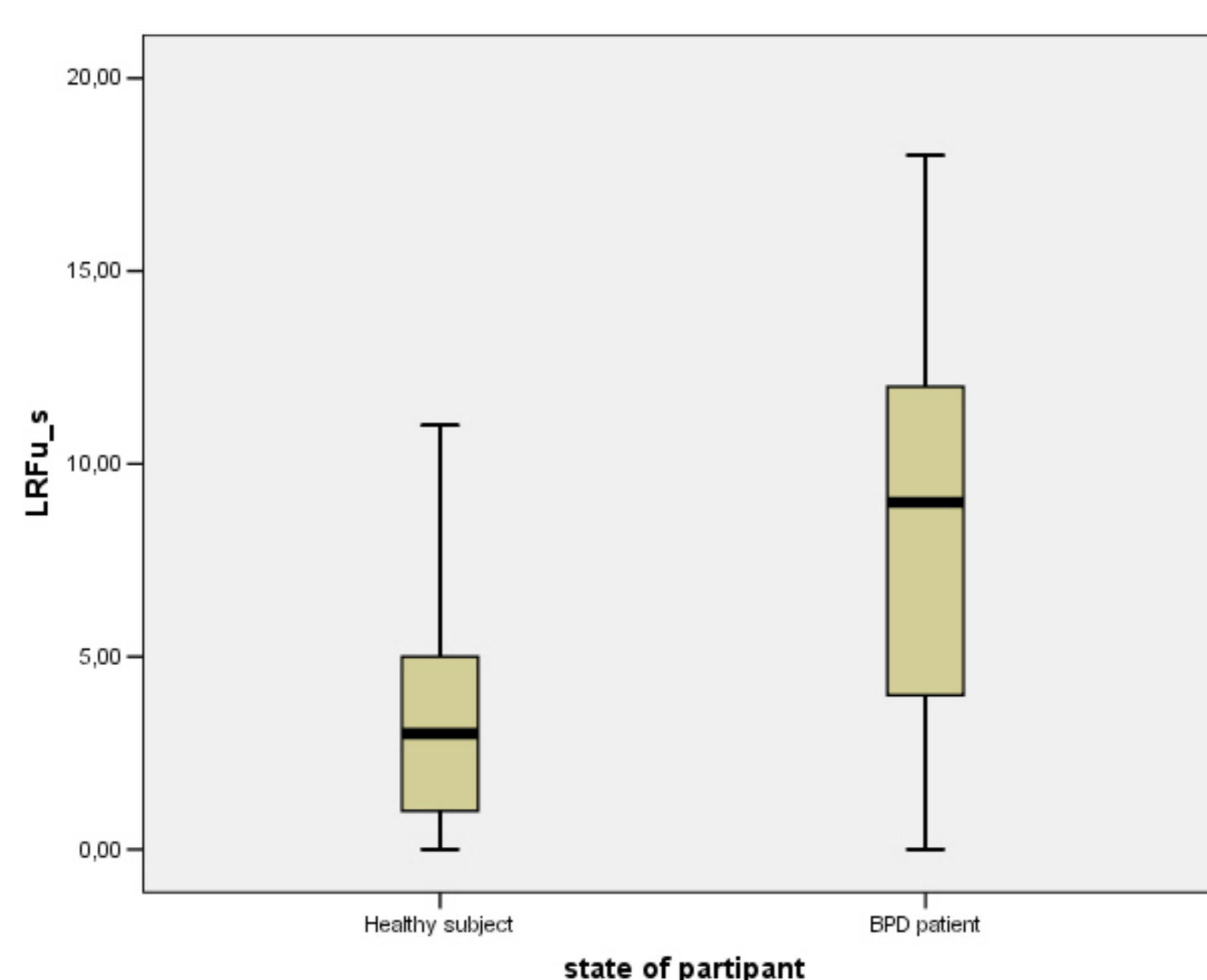
AIMS

To study levels of reflective function (RF) of Borderline Personality Disorder patients (BPD) compared to healthy subjects and its correlation with levels of borderline pathology.

METHODS

59 subjects diagnosed with BPD through a broad psychopathological assessment were recruited at the Personality Disorder unit of University of Pavia. BPD severity was measured with the Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure (SWAP200). 59 matched healthy controls were recruited. Reflective Function was measured with the trans-culturally validated Italian version of the Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ) which measures certainty (LRFc_s) and uncertainty (LRFu_s) levels about self/ other mental states. Standard Multiple regression was used to assess how levels of certainty and uncertainty predict severity of BPD by entering Swap 200 Borderline score as dependent variable and age, measures of anxiety and depression, RFQ certainty and uncertainty as independent variables.

RESULTS

BPD patients, compared to controls, showed higher levels of uncertainty ($p<0.001$) and lower of certainty ($p<0.05$) about mental states. Within the patients group, regression analyses showed uncertainty about mental states to make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of BPD severity ($p < 0.05$) and explained 12% of the variance.

CONCLUSIONS

Impaired RF was found within relatives of BPD users. In this sample of BPD patients, levels of uncertainty about self/others mental states predict severity of BPD pathology. Uncertainty is always maladaptive, unlike certainty that is adaptive unless it becomes extreme, reflecting hypermentalizing. These findings sustain how poor mentalizing mediates BPD clinical features and reinforces the rational for offering Mentalization Based Interventions to users suffering from this disorder.