

2. INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF GERONTOLOGY

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2. INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF GERONTOLOGY

Neşe AYKUT Nuray BİNGÖL	NEUROLOGICAL CHANGES IN OLD AGE AND NURSING MANAGEMENT	85
Gülşen ULAŞ KARAAHMETOĞLU Zeynep ARABACI	EXAMINATION OF ELDERLY' KNOWLEDGE AND BEHAVIORS ABOUT DRUG USE	89
Merve AKPINAR YILMAZ Güler BALCI ALPARSLAN	SEXUAL HEALTH IN OLD AGE	95
Yassine EL ALLOUCHE Said EL RHABORI Hicham ZAITAN Fouad KHALIL	IN SILICO EXAMINATION AND NOVEL COMPOUND DESIGN: EVALUATING 3,5- DISUBSTITUTED INDOLE DERIVATIVES AS INHIBITORS OF PIM1 KINASE IN HEMATOLOGICAL CANCER TREATMENT	100
Khaoula Mkhayar Souad El khattabi	CYCLOHEXANE-1,3-DIONE DERIVATIVES FOR PROSPECTIVE ANTI- NSCLC CANCER EFFICACY THROUGH INTEGRATED QSAR AND DOCKING EXPLORATIONS	101
Shashwati Ghosh BC Spoorthi Priyajit Banerjee Ishita Saha Ranabir Sahu Tarun Kumar Dua Arpan Kumar Maiti	MITOCHONDRIA-TARGETED ANTIOXIDANT Mito-TEMPO AMELIORATES COLONIC MITOCHONDRIAL DYSFUNCTION BY VIRTUE OF ITS FREE RADICAL SCAVENGING ACTIVITY IN MICE INDUCED BY DEXTRAN SULFATE SODIUM: IMPLICATIONS IN ULCERATIVE COLITIS	102
Fatemeh Ghaffarifar Hermineh Gholizadeh Abdolhossein Deilami Leila Zaki	A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF EXTRACT OF HENNA WITH HONEY ON LEISHMANIA MAJOR IN VITRO AND IN VIVO	103
Leila Zaki Fatemeh Ghaffarifar	EVALUATION OF THE APOPTOSIS EFFECT OF MORPHINE WITH IMIQUIMOD ON TACHYZOITES OF TOXOPLASMA GONDII IN VITRO	104
Nataliia Maryenko Oleksandr Stepanenko	FRACTAL ANALYSIS OF THE CEREBRAL CORTEX AND WHITE MATTER FOR QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF AGE-RELATED BRAIN ATROPHY IN MEN AND WOMEN	105
Maurilio D'Angelo Marco Seracchiani Rodolfo Reda Alessio Zanza Dario Di Nardo Luca Testarelli	SEM EVALUATION OF THE GAP OF AN ENDODONTIC BIOCERAMIC SEALER WITH DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES OF USE	107
Khalda Ahmed Mohammed Mohammedahmed	USE OF HERBAL MEDICINE IN PSYCHIATRIC CLIENT	108
Se-Kwon Kim	HEALTHCARE USING MARINE ORGANISMS	109
Ghanshyam Barman	EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION ON AGEING	110
Elochukwu A. Nwankwo	GERONTOLOGICAL AND HEALTH DISPOSITIONS FOR REGENERATIVE TOURISM IN NIGERIA	111
Muhammad Faisal Sabeeha Hamza Dehham	NO PAKISTANI HEAD OF THE STATE HAS FINISHED A FULL TERM IN OFFICE A CURE SURVEY	112
Neera Jain	CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY	116
Edward Iı F. Dolfo John Erwin Pedroso	WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL COOPERATIVES: A FEMINIST INQUIRY	117
Saniyah PUTRININGSIH Hendri Hermawan ADİNUGRAHA Muhammad SHULTHONİ	THE EFFECT OF AIR POLLUTION ON HUMAN HEALTH	118

**FRACTAL ANALYSIS OF THE CEREBRAL CORTEX AND WHITE MATTER FOR
QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF AGE-RELATED BRAIN ATROPHY IN MEN AND
WOMEN**

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Abstract

The development of new and the refinement of existing algorithms for morphometric assessment of age-related atrophic changes in brain structures remains a relevant scientific endeavor in modern neuromorphology. Across an individual's lifespan, the presence of atrophic modifications can be detected in diverse brain structures, offering insights into the intricacies of the aging process. Among the relatively recent morphometric techniques, fractal analysis emerges as a noteworthy approach, enabling the assessment of spatial configuration attributes within examined structures, as well as gauging their level of structural and spatial intricacy. Consequently, fractal analysis serves as a robust and effective tool for identifying atrophic changes within brain structures.

The aim of this study was to determine the fractal dimension (FD) values in both the cerebral cortex and white matter and discern the features associated with FD changes throughout the lifespan in men and women.

For the investigation, magnetic resonance (MR) brain scans from 100 apparently healthy individuals aged 18 to 86 were employed (comprising 44 males and 56 females). For each brain, four coronal tomographic sections were selected (located at the levels of the most anterior points of the temporal lobes, mammillary bodies, quadrigeminal plate, and splenium of corpus callosum), along with one axial section (located at the level of the thalamus). MR images were segmented, resulting in creation of binary images of the cortex and white matter. Fractal analysis was conducted using the ImageJ software, employing the box-counting method. Mean FD values were calculated for all five tomographic sections (FD-5) and for the four coronal sections (FD-4).

As a result of morphometric analysis, it was determined that the average FD-5 value of the cerebral cortex was 1.694 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.663 to 1.736) in males and 1.694 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.659 to 1.747) in females. The average FD-4 value of the cerebral cortex was 1.693 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.659 to 1.738) in males and 1.694 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.660 to 1.739) in females. The difference in FD-5 and FD-4 values of the cerebral cortex between males and females was not statistically significant ($P > 0.8$ for both FD values). Both FD values of the cortex exhibited strong negative statistically significant correlations with age: FD-5: $r = -0.726$, $p < 0.001$ (males) and $r = -0.687$, $p < 0.001$ (females); FD-4: $r = -0.753$, $p < 0.001$ (males) and $r = -0.734$, $p < 0.001$ (females).

The average FD-5 value of the cerebral white matter was 1.732 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.654 to 1.774) in males and 1.731 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.674 to 1.772) in females. The average FD-4 value of the cerebral white matter was 1.715 ± 0.004 (ranging from 1.635 to 1.766) in males and 1.714 ± 0.003 (ranging from 1.660 to 1.765) in females. The difference in FD-5 and FD-4 values of the white matter between males and females was not statistically significant ($P > 0.9$ for both FD values). In contrast to cortical FD, white matter FD displayed weak negative correlations with age that were not statistically significant: FD-5: $r = -0.247$, $p > 0.05$ (males) and $r = -0.047$, $p > 0.05$ (females); FD-4: $r = -0.154$, $p > 0.05$ (males) and $r = 0.033$, $p > 0.05$ (females).

In the investigation of the relationships between cortical and white matter FD values, it was observed that these FD values exhibited negative correlations of weak to moderate strength: FD-5: $r = -0.154$, $p > 0.05$ (males) and $r = -0.423$, $p < 0.001$ (females); FD-4: $r = -0.230$, $p > 0.05$ (males) and $r = -0.497$, $p < 0.001$ (females).

In this study, it was found that cortical FD values had stronger correlations with age compared to white matter FD values. There were no statistically significant differences in cortical and white matter FD values between males and females, but age-related changes in white matter were more pronounced in males, while in females, these changes were negligible. Thus, fractal analysis can be used for the

2. INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF GERONTOLOGY

detection and quantitative characterization of age-related atrophic changes in brain structures, and the results of this study may serve as normative criteria for differentiating normal and pathological brain aging.

Keywords: aging, cerebral cortex, cerebral white matter, fractal analysis, fractal dimension, magnetic resonance imaging.