

Genome-wide association study of copy number variations in Parkinson's disease

Running title: Copy number variants impact on Parkinson's disease

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Abstract

Objective:

Our study investigates the impact of copy number variations (CNVs) on Parkinson's disease (PD) pathogenesis using genome-wide data, aiming to uncover novel genetic mechanisms and improve the understanding of the role of CNVs in sporadic PD.

Methods:

We applied a sliding window approach to perform CNV-GWAS and conducted genome-wide burden analyses on CNV data from 11,035 PD patients (including 2,731 early-onset PD (EOPD)) and 8,901 controls from the COURAGE-PD consortium.

Results:

We identified 14 genome-wide significant CNV loci associated with PD, including one deletion and 13 duplications. Among these, duplications in 7q22.1, 11q12.3 and 7q33 displayed the highest effect. Two significant duplications overlapped with PD-related genes *SNCA* and *VPS13C*, but none overlapped with recent significant SNP-based GWAS findings. Five duplications included genes associated with neurological disease, and four overlapping genes were dosage-sensitive and intolerant to loss-of-function variants. Enriched pathways included neurodegeneration, steroid hormone biosynthesis, and lipid metabolism. In early-onset cases, four loci were significantly associated with EOPD, including three known duplications and one novel deletion in *PRKN*. CNV burden analysis showed a higher prevalence of CNVs in PD-related genes in patients compared to controls (OR=1.56 [1.18-2.09], p=0.0013), with *PRKN* showing the highest burden (OR=1.47 [1.10-1.98], p=0.026). Patients with CNVs in *PRKN* had an earlier disease onset. Burden analysis with controls and EOPD patients showed similar results.

Interpretation:

This is the largest CNV-based GWAS in PD identifying novel CNV regions and confirming the significant CNV burden in EOPD, primarily driven by the *PRKN* gene, warranting further investigation.

Introduction

A global survey estimates that Parkinson's disease (PD) is the world's fastest-growing neurodegenerative disorder, surpassing even Alzheimer's disease¹. Concerted efforts are required to unravel the underlying complexity of a disease in which genetics and environmental factors appear to play an important role^{2,3}. To date, considerable progress has been made in understanding the genetic basis of PD by identifying families in which the disease segregates in Mendelian fashion and by applying array-based approaches (commonly used in genome-wide association studies (GWAS)) to identify risk factors for sporadic forms of PD^{4,5}.

GWAS have been successful in identifying a number of loci that are potentially relevant for PD^{6,7}. While this success has been remarkable, the genetic variability explained so far is between 19-39%⁶ indicating that the genetic variability in the form of chromosomal arrangements - duplications, deletions - commonly referred to as copy number variations (CNVs) - may be an important player in explaining the genetic variability in PD⁸⁻¹¹. Indeed, previously studies identified several CNVs in PD-related genes. For example, genomic multiplications in the *SNCA* gene were shown to cause familial¹² and sporadic¹³ forms of PD. Duplication or triplication of this gene can result in an excess of alpha-synuclein, which may then aggregate and form Lewy bodies, ultimately contributing to neurodegeneration observed in PD¹⁰. Furthermore, CNVs in *PRKN* are the most prevalent CNVs among known PD genes¹⁴⁻¹⁶, owing to its location in one of the most mutation-susceptible regions of the human genome¹⁷. Deletions in familial PD forms were previously described in *PINK1*^{18,19} and *PARK7*^{20,21}, but are less common than in *PRKN*. Unlike *SNCA*, deletions in homozygous-driven early-onset PD forms have demonstrated the role of loss of function genes in the etiology of the disease, while the pathogenic role of single heterozygous CNVs is still controversial.

The above examples support the role of CNVs in genes that are *bona-fide* loci for monogenetic PD. In contrast, the role and impact of CNVs on sporadic PD is still unclear. However, previous studies have suggested a potential role of CNVs in sporadic PD as well. For instance, a genome-wide CNV burden analysis in a Latin American cohort²² showed that PD patients were significantly enriched only for CNVs affecting known PD genes, but they could not identify any putative CNV in PD pathogenesis at the genome-wide level. Their failure to identify putative CNVs could be attributed to the small sample size. Similarly, another study could only validate that the CNV within the *PRKN* locus was significantly associated with PD susceptibility²³. Thus, a CNV-based GWAS in large, well-powered and well characterized PD cohorts may reveal novel molecular pathways associated with the disease, potentially advancing efforts to understand the role of CNVs in PD pathogenesis.

The Comprehensive Unbiased Risk Factor Assessment for Genetics and Environment in Parkinson's Disease (COURAGE-PD) is a worldwide collaboration consortium, aimed at understanding the roles of genetics and environment in PD^{7,24,25}. In the present study, we leveraged the genome-wide data to understand the impact of CNVs on PD in COURAGE-PD. Given the fact that there is no consensus on the best method for detecting or analyzing genome-wide significant CNVs⁹, we applied the sliding

window approach to perform CNV-GWAS, and employed genome-wide burden analyses to identify novel genome-wide significant CNV regions and to investigate their impact on the disease.

Subjects and Methods

Study cohort

The COURAGE-PD consortium includes data from 15,849 PD patients and 11,444 controls of predominantly European ancestry from 35 cohorts ⁷. In our study, we used genotyping data from 22,329 individuals from 25 European ancestry cohorts originating from 15 European countries. Genotyping quality control (QC) was conducted independently for each cohort, by following the standard procedure previously reported ⁷. Patients with early-onset PD (EOPD) were defined as those diagnosed before the age of 50 (age at onset (AAO) \leq 50 years) ²⁶.

Copy number variant calling and quality control

We created a custom population B-allele frequency (BAF) and GC wave-adjusted log R ratio (LRR) intensity file using GenomeStudio (v2.0.5 Illumina) for all the samples that passed genotyping QC and employed PennCNV (v1.0.5, ²⁷) to detect CNVs in our dataset. The analysis was restricted to autosomal CNVs, as calls from the sex chromosomes are often of poor quality ²⁷. We used a post-CNV calling QC pipeline including standard parameters as previously described in studies on CNV calling from SNP array data for PD ²² or epilepsy ^{28,29}. As a first step, adjacent CNV calls were merged into a single call if the number of overlapping markers between them was less than 20% of the total number when both segments were combined. This was followed by intensity-based QC to exclude samples with low-quality data. Samples with a log R Ratio (LRR) standard deviation of less than 0.24, an absolute value of the waviness factor of less than 0.03, and a B-allele frequency (BAF) drift of less than 0.001 were retained. These thresholds correspond to the median plus 3 SDs. Furthermore, CNV calls with more than 50% overlap with known problematic genomic regions ²⁷, including centromeric, telomeric, and HLA regions, were also excluded before analysis. Next, we removed CNVs that met the following criteria: they spanned fewer than 20 SNPs, were less than 20 kilobases (kb) in length, and had an SNP density of less than 0.0001 (number of SNPs/length of CNV). For CNVs spanning at least 20 SNPs and longer than 1 Mb, SNP density was not considered. Finally, we applied a series of filters to identify rare CNVs. The first step was to assign a specific frequency count to each CNV call using PLINK v.1.07 ³⁰. This was followed by applying a filter to exclude common CNVs, retaining only rare variants that overlapped with CNVs in at least 1% of all samples. In the second step, CNVs with an overlap of at least 50% with reported common CNVs (allele frequency $>1\%$) in the Database of Genomic Variants (DGV Gold standard dataset ³¹) and DECIPHER population CNVs frequencies ³² were excluded. The filtered rare CNVs were annotated

for gene content using refGene, including the gene name and corresponding coordinates in the hg19 assembly with ANNOVAR (v 2020-06-08).

Sliding windows CNV analysis and assessment of genome-wide significance

A segment-based rare CNV burden analysis was performed to identify genomic regions with a significant increase in rare CNVs in PD cases compared to controls. This analysis was conducted separately for each type of CNV (deletion or duplication) using a sliding window approach³³. The sliding windows model allowed association testing of all autosomes through 267,237 sliding windows characterized by a window size of 200 kb and a step size of 10 kb, corresponding to 13,339.6 non-overlapping windows. The threshold for genome-wide significance was set to $\alpha = 3.74 \times 10^{-6}$ after Bonferroni correction for multiple testing. For each of the genomic regions, the number of overlapping CNVs was counted separately for cases and controls for deletions or duplications. We considered a minimum overlap of 10% between the CNV and the genomic window to identify the potential burden of small deletions or duplications (≥ 20 kb). The one-sided Fisher's exact test was used as a test statistic for the CNVs collapsed for each segment. The analysis was performed using the rCNV docker (<https://hub.docker.com/r/talkowski/rcnv>)³³, and custom Python (version 3.7.9) and R (version 4.3.1) scripts. To assess the impact of age at PD onset, the same analysis was subsequently stratified based on EOPD, encompassing all the control subjects and patients with EOPD.

Association fine-mapping

The observation that a considerable number of large rare CNVs involve the deletion or duplication of multiple adjacent genes, led us to hypothesize that the most associated genes were not causal, but rather gained significance due to proximity to true causal genes. This is analogous to the linkage disequilibrium effect observed in GWAS of common variants. To address this issue, Collins *et al.* employed a Bayesian fine-mapping algorithm to define the 95% credible set of causal elements or genes at each genome-wide significant locus for deletions and duplications³³. This method prioritizes the most probable causal genes based on their association statistics. The Bayesian algorithm was employed to calculate the approximate Bayes factor (ABF) for each window, as previously described by Wakefield³⁴. The ABF offers an alternative to the P-values for assessing the significance of association by providing a summary measure that ranks these associations. Bayesian model averaging was used to estimate the null variance of true causal loci across taking into account prior information regarding the mean of all significant windows and the most significant window per block. The minimal set of windows that constitutes the 95% credible set for each block was defined by ranking the windows in descending order according to their ABF.

Predictive scores and gene annotation

In order to assess the functional impact of CNVs, the spanned genes were annotated using three genetic constraint scores that are available in gnomAD (<https://gnomad.broadinstitute.org>): the Loss-of-function Observed/Expected Upper Bound Fraction (LOEUF), the Predicted Probability of Haploinsufficiency (pHaplo) and the Predicted Probability of Triplosensitivity (pTriplo). LOEUF is a quantitative measure of the observed depletion (or enrichment) of loss-of-function variants in gnomAD compared to a null mutation model. Values are ranked from 0 with no theoretical maximum. Genes with smaller values (closer to zero) are more intolerant to mutations³⁵. The two scores pHaplo and pTriplo reflect the likelihood that whole-copy deletion or duplication, respectively, of each gene would be enriched in a cohort of individuals affected by severe, early-onset diseases as compared to the general population³³. We considered genes in the most constrained decile, defined as those with a LOEUF score of 0.268 or below. A pHaplo score ≥ 0.86 and a pTriplo score ≥ 0.94 indicate that the average effect sizes of deletions/duplications are comparable to the loss-of-function of genes typically restricted against protein-truncating variants, with an odds ratio (OR) ≥ 2.7 . Similarly, a pHaplo score ≥ 0.55 and a pTriplo score ≥ 0.68 indicate an OR ≥ 2 .

Enriched biological pathways, diseases, and tissues expression

All genes within credible intervals underwent pathway enrichment using the EnrichR package³⁶ using Gene Ontology (GO) terms, Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG), Reactome and DisGeNET pathways³⁷ databases. The Functional Mapping and Annotation of GWAS (FUMA version 1.5.2; <https://fuma.ctglab.nl>) web server was used to investigate tissue expression enrichment based on the GTEx v8 54 tissue types database. The gene-set enrichment results were subjected to correction for multiple testing using the Bonferroni method.

Genome-wide burden and survival analysis

The burden of rare CNVs associated with PD was calculated using distinct categories to determine their relative impact on PD risk, as previously reported²². These categories included: (1) carrier status of genome-wide CNV burden, including CNVs in non-genic regions, for all CNVs, not distinguishing between deletions and duplications (2) carrier status of any exonic or intronic CNVs intersecting with 'any gene' except those associated with PD, (3) carrier status of CNVs intersecting with exonic or intronic regions of the six major 'PD-related genes' according to MDS gene classification (<https://www.mdsgene.org>): *LRRK2*, *SNCA*, *VPS35* for dominant forms of classical parkinsonism and *PRKN*, *PARK7*, and *PINK1* for recessive forms of early-onset parkinsonism, (4) carrier status of CNVs intersecting only with exonic regions of the 'PD-related genes', (5) carrier status of CNVs in *PRKN* only and (6) carrier status of large CNVs (≥ 1 Mb in length). To compare the CNV burden between PD patients and controls, we used the *glm* function in R (v4.3.1) to fit a logistic regression model. This allowed the calculation of the OR with a 95% confidence interval and p-values. We used

sex, age at assessment, and the first five principal components (PCs) from the population stratification as covariates for the regression model. Cox proportional hazards regression analyses and Kaplan–Meier curves were generated using the *survival* R package³⁸ with age defined as age at last visit for controls and AAO for cases. Controls were included as censored observations given that it was only known that they did not develop PD up to their last visit. Hazard ratios (HRs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) of PD were estimated by Cox proportional hazards models. Sex and the first five PCs were included as covariates. All the P-values underwent adjustment using the Bonferroni method to correct for multiple testing.

Results

COURAGE-PD cohort

The final dataset for the COURAGE-PD cohort comprised 11,035 patients with PD and 8,901 control, all of European descent, following the QC steps for the genotyping data. The demographic characteristics of each cohort are presented in Supplementary Table 1. A total of 2,731 PD patients (24.7% of the total patients) were identified as having EOPD (mean AAO 43.1±6.1 and mean age at assessment 54.4±9.3 years). We initially detected 1,098,221 CNVs in a total of 10,877 PD patients and 8,534 controls. After all QC and filtering steps (see Methods), the final number of rare CNVs was 28,263, including 7,843 duplications and 20,420 deletions in 3,896 PD patients and 3,299 controls. CNV analysis showed that 36.0% of the samples carried at least one QC-passed CNV. The characteristics of our CNV analysis are shown in Supplementary Table 2.

Identification of 14 genome-wide significant PD-associated CNV regions

A total of 267,237 genomic segments of 200 kb size in a 10 kb sliding window approach were scanned³³. After adjusting for the multiple testing and applying the fine-mapping approach, we identified 14 genome-wide significant CNV loci associated with PD. The 14 loci comprised one deletion (210 kb) and 13 duplications (size range: 220 to 560 kb, Fig 1 and Table 1). The genome-wide deletion identified in this study was a single-copy loss and spanned two genes *COL18A1*, and *POFUT2* (Table 1, Supplementary Table 5). All duplications, except for the two-copy gain in 8q23.3, were single-copy gains. They spanned a total of 68 genes, with three duplications in 7q22.1, 11q12.3, and 7q33 showing the highest ORs (Table 1, Supplementary Table 5). Of note, a nearly significant deletion locus in 5q32 was observed, with an adjusted p-value of 3.76e-06 (slightly higher than the adjusted p-value threshold of $\leq 3.7410e-06$). This locus encompasses the *STK32A*, *DPYSL3*, and *JAKMIP2* genes.

Of the 14 genome-wide significant CNV regions identified in this study, none overlapped with the most recent SNP-based GWAS study⁶. However, two genome-wide significant CNV regions overlapped with two PD-related genes, namely *SNCA* and *VPSI3C* (Table 1). The 4q22.1 duplication

interval encompasses exons 1 to 4 of *SNCA* and the 15q22.2 duplication interval overlapped with the entire coding region of *VPS13C*. These two rare duplication events did not overlap with the common significant GWAS SNPs identified in *SNCA* and *VPS13C*⁶. Furthermore, the correlation between these SNPs and the closest duplication SNP demonstrated that these loci are in complete linkage equilibrium ($r^2 = 0$).

Interestingly, five of the identified duplication regions encompass genes associated with neurological diseases (Table 1). For instance, the 1q42.12 region, which includes the *DNAH14* gene, is associated with neurodevelopmental disorder. The 6q21 duplication region encompasses the *FIG4* gene, which has been linked to Charcot-Marie-Tooth (CMT) and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Similarly, the *ATXN2* gene at 12q24.12 is associated with spinocerebellar ataxia and may also be linked to ALS and late-onset PD. Furthermore, *CLN5* at 13q22.3 is responsible for neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis, while *FBXL3* is linked to a form of intellectual developmental disorder. Additionally, the 19p13.11 duplication region contains two genes associated with immunodeficiency: *FCHO1* and *JAK3*.

The next step was to assess the susceptibility of these genes to be dosage sensitive and their intolerance to loss-of-function variants. The LOEUF score for five genes located in duplication intervals was less than 0.268, including *ATXN2* (12q24.12), *MYCBP2* (13q22.3), *FCHO1* (19p13.11), *UNC13A* (19p13.11) and *ATRN* (20p13). This indicates a greater likelihood of dosage sensitivity (see Methods section and Supplementary Table 5). Among duplications, 14 genes are likely to be located in a region of the genome that is intolerant to duplication, with a pTriplo score greater than 0.68 (of which seven genes have a pTriplo score greater than 0.94, as detailed in the Methods section and Supplementary Table 5). The 20p13 interval was found to span the majority of these genes ($n = 6$), with two genes located in the 13q22.3 interval. In total, four genes were predicted to be dosage sensitive, either with LOEUF or pTriplo score: *ATXN2* (12q24.12), *MYCBP2* (13q22.3), *UNC13A* (19p13.11) and *ATRN* (20p13). In the nearly-significant 5q32 deletion locus, the *DPYSL3* and *JAKMIP2* genes are annotated as highly dose sensitive (LOEUF scores of 0.22 and 0.18, pHaplo of 0.97 and 0.92 respectively).

Identification of four genome-wide significant EOPD-associated CNV regions

To gain further insight into the genome-wide landscape of EOPD, we conducted a subset analysis comparing 2,731 PD patients with an AAO less than 50 years old and controls. We identified four genome-wide loci that were significantly associated with EOPD (Fig 2 and Table 2). Of note, three of these (1q42.12, 6q21, and 11q12.3, Fig 1 and Table 1) were already identified as duplications in all the patients. Furthermore, a new deletion region (590 kb in 6q21) was identified, covering the exon 2-6 of the PD-related *PRKN* gene.

Enrichment analysis

We applied enrichment analysis to identify significantly enriched pathways in the GO, KEGG, and Reactome databases considering all CNVs overlapping genes within the credible intervals (70 genes overlapping duplications and two genes overlapping deletions, as detailed in Table 1). The top 10 most significant enriched pathways for each database are shown in Figure 3. Our analysis identified several significantly enriched pathways, which can be classified into the following categories: (i) steroid hormone biosynthesis (Estrogen 16-Alpha-Hydroxylase Activity, (GO:0101020), Steroid Hydroxylase Activity (GO:0008395)), (ii) several metabolic processes including lipid and phospholipid, (iii) enzymatic activities (Phospholipase and N-acetyltransferase), (iv) drug metabolism and (v) others. Among the other terms, two KEGG pathways are worthy of particular mention: ‘Pathways of Neurodegeneration’ and ‘Lysosome’ (Fig 3B). Neurological disorders, particularly movement disorders (e.g., restless legs syndrome and fatigable weakness of respiratory/swallowing muscles), were among the significant enriched diseases and traits from DisGeNET (Fig 3D). The DisGeNet term “Parkinsonian tremor” was also found to be significant, with the two PD-related genes *SNCA* and *VPS13C* being the only ones to emerge. We noted that the removal of the two deletion genes (*COL18A1*, *POFUT2*) did not affect the enrichment result displayed in Figure 3, indicating that the enrichment result is influenced mainly by duplicated genes. Next, we used FUMA to test whether the candidate genes were enriched for expression in 54 tissues. We did not find any significant expression levels in tissues after multiple-testing correction (Supplementary Fig 1). The top-ranked three tissues were the liver, adipose subcutaneous tissue, and the adrenal gland.

CNV burden analysis

We used logistic regression to compare the rare CNV burden on a genome-wide level in PD patients and controls across the predefined categories (see Methods). No significant difference was observed for genome-wide CNV burden (OR=1.04 [0.98-1.11], adjusted p-value (p_{adj})=0.3), duplications (OR=1.09 [1.01-1.17], p_{adj} = 0.46), or deletions (OR=1.00 [0.93-1.08], p_{adj} =0.89, Fig 4A), implicating that cumulative burden of CNVs does not alter the risk of getting PD. The same results were observed for the CNVs burden for all the genes excluding PD-related ones (OR=1.02 [0.96-1.09], p_{adj} =0.56) and large CNVs exceeding 1Mb in length (OR=0.97 [0.81-1.17], p_{adj} =0.89, Fig 4A).

In contrast, we observed a significant CNV burden for PD-related genes when considering all CNVs (OR=1.56 [1.18-2.09], p_{adj} =0.0013) with a slightly more pronounced association for CNVs overlapping exonic regions (OR=1.64 [1.18-2.30], p_{adj} =0.013, Fig 4A). CNVs in *PRKN* were the primary contributors to this finding (OR=1.47 [1.10-1.98], p_{adj} =0.026, Fig 4A). Indeed, among the 229 individuals carrying CNVs in PD-related genes, 91.7% were carriers of *PRKN* CNVs (summarised in Supplementary Table 3 and detailed in Supplementary Table 4). All these *PRKN* CNVs mostly consisted of one-copy duplications or duplications, except for seven homozygous deletions in PD patients (Table S3-4). CNVs in *PRKN* were identified in 135 PD patients (115 exonic and 36 intronic, representing 1.2% of the total patients) and 75 controls (56 exonic and 22 intronic,

representing 0.8% of controls, Table S3-4). The AAO for patients with CNVs in *PRKN* was significantly earlier than that of patients without CNVs in *PRKN* (52.8 ± 11.5 vs. 58.7 ± 15.0 years, Mann-Whitney test p -value = 2.5×10^{-5}). Moreover, patients carrying exonic *PRKN* variants exhibited a significantly earlier AAO (50.8 ± 15.5 years) compared to those carrying intronic variants (58.0 ± 12.2 years, Mann-Whitney test p -value = 0.02).

A subset of samples from one of the COURAGE-PD sites (Gasser/Sharma study, see Supplementary table 1) were previously screened for CNVs in *PRKN* and *SNCA* using the multiplex ligation-dependent probe amplification (MLPA) assay³⁹. Out of 26 individuals with *PRKN* CNVs (21 patients and 5 controls), MLPA confirmed the CNVs in 22 individuals, and one patient with *SNCA* CNV was confirmed by MLPA (Supplementary Table S4), yielding a confirmation rate of 85%.

EOPD CNV burden analysis

We also performed a subset analysis comparing only the 2,731 cases with AAO ≤ 50 years with controls to evaluate the rare CNV burden in patients with EOPD. Again, our findings revealed a significant increase in CNVs in PD-related genes ($OR=2.43$ [1.64-3.59], $p_{adj}=2.8 \times 10^{-5}$) with a slightly stronger association when examining CNVs that intersected with exonic regions ($OR=3.10$ [2.00-4.81], $p_{adj}=3.2 \times 10^{-6}$, Fig 4A). Among the EOPD cohort, 62 patients (2.2% of EOPD patients) were identified as carriers of CNVs in PD-related genes, with *PRKN* being the most common ($OR=2.32$ [1.54-3.46], $p_{value_{adj}}=1.1 \times 10^{-4}$, Fig 4 A), found in 57 patients (2.1% of EOPD patients), encompassing 48 exonic and 7 intronic CNVs. Carriers of the seven homozygous *PRKN* deletions mentioned above were EOPD patients.

Survival analysis

Kaplan–Meier analysis revealed that individuals with a CNV in PD-related genes had significantly earlier symptom onset compared to those carrying CNVs in other genes or non-carriers (log-rank test, p -value = 7.0×10^{-6} ; Fig. 4. B). Additionally, a Cox proportional hazards regression, adjusted for sex, and the first five ancestry PCs, indicated that having a CNV in PD-related genes was associated with a significantly increased hazard of earlier AAO (HR=1.48 [0.1-4.8]; p -value = 1.2×10^{-6} , Fig 4B). We further evaluated AAO exclusively in PD patients, comparing those with a CNV in PD-related genes to patients with other or no CNVs. The analysis also indicated that carrying at least one CNV leads to an earlier onset of symptoms (HR=1.39 [0.1-4.0]; p -value = 4.4×10^{-5} , Fig 4C).

Discussion

CNVs have long been established as a major contributor to disease risk in a wide range of complex diseases including epilepsy, neuropsychiatric and neurodegenerative disorders^{10,22,28,29}. However, no large-scale study has been conducted at the genome-wide level to decipher the role of CNVs in

sporadic PD. Thus, the current study aimed to extend the knowledge of potential role and impact of CNVs on PD. To achieve this, we employed a well-characterized multinational PD controls cohort from the COURAGE-PD consortium, leveraging a cohort of 19,936 individuals of European descent. Employing a rigorous CNV calling, quality control, and filtering pipeline, we systematically screened the genome to identify potential novel significant CNV regions for PD using the sliding window approach³³. This was followed by an unbiased assessment to evaluate the CNV burden across various categories. Given the lack of consensus on optimal methods for detecting and analysing genome-wide significant CNVs⁹, we employed the recently developed sliding window method already used to generate a genome-wide dosage sensitivity catalogue across 54 disorders, identifying 163 dosage-sensitive segments³³. Application of such a method to research in epilepsy identified seizure-associated loci that had previously been demonstrated to be genome-wide significant in a previous study²⁹. The GWAS-based CNV analysis led for the first time to the identification of novel CNV regions including one deletion and 13 duplication regions associated with PD risk. Importantly, our analysis identified two CNV regions that overlapped with previously reported PD-related genes, namely *SNCA* and *VPS13C*, demonstrating the robustness of our sliding window approach. Duplication or triplication of *SNCA* can result in an excess of alpha-synuclein, which may then aggregate and form Lewy bodies, ultimately contributing to neurodegeneration observed in PD^{12,40,41}. A few rare homozygous variants in *VPS13C* have been identified as a cause of familial autosomal-recessive EOPD⁴². Furthermore, one locus in this gene has been identified as a genome-wide risk in European⁴³ and East Asian populations⁴⁴. However, no duplications in *VPS13C* have been associated to PD so far. This gene encodes a protein that regulates lysosomal homeostasis and controls mitophagy by modulating the Pink1/Parkin pathway in cellular models⁴⁵. Further in-depth assessment of this locus is highly warranted to tease out the potential role of duplications in this CNV segment. Among the top CNV regions identified in our study, several regions overlapped with genes previously implicated in neurological disorders. For example, the 1q42.12 duplication includes the *DNAH14* gene, which is associated with neurodevelopmental disorders⁴⁶. The 6q21 duplication region encompasses the *FIG4* gene, which has been linked to both CMT⁴⁷ and ALS⁴⁸. PD typically affects different parts of the nervous system than either CMT or ALS and has a different underlying pathophysiological mechanism and clinical phenotype. Although there have been rare reported cases of individuals with PD and either CMT or ALS, suggesting a possible association, the evidence for a solid link between the two conditions is limited and remains controversial⁴⁹. Nonetheless, the present study has expanded the genomic search to identify potential genes that could clarify the complex relationship between PD and these disorders, shedding light on partially convergent pathways leading to distinct classes of neurological disorders. The 12q24.12 duplication region contains the *ATXN2* gene, which encodes a protein with expanded trinucleotide repeats responsible for spinocerebellar ataxia type 2 (SCA2). These expanded repeats have been associated with other neurological disorders and may confer susceptibility to ALS⁵⁰ and late-onset PD⁵¹. Several families with *ATXN2*

heterozygous expansions were previously described with predominant Parkinsonian symptoms^{52,53}. However, the findings of a comprehensive analysis of polyglutamine repeat expansions conducted by the GEPD consortium indicate that *ATXN2* does not play a significant role in the development of idiopathic Parkinson's disease⁵⁴. The 19p13.11 duplication region harbours two genes linked to immunodeficiency: *FCHO1* and *JAK3*. Previous studies have identified shared genetic variants between PD and autoimmune/inflammatory disorders, highlighting the involvement of the immune system in the pathogenesis of PD⁵⁵. In the prodromal phase of PD, a combination of factors including aging-related changes in the immune system and genetic/environmental influences contribute to the onset and progression of the disease, which is characterized by immunosenescence, inflammaging, and impaired adaptive immune functions⁵⁶.

Four genes within significant duplication regions showed a high degree of intolerance to loss of function and gene dosage. These genes include *ATXN2*, which is associated with susceptibility to PD⁵¹, and *UNC13A*, a genome-wide risk locus for ALS and frontotemporal dementia⁵⁷. *UNC13A*, identified as a potential contributor to PD, interacts with *RAB3A* to prevent alpha-synuclein-induced dopaminergic neuron degeneration^{58,59}.

The genes overlapping with PD-associated duplications are enriched in many pathways related to lipid (phospholipases) and steroid (estrogens) enzymatic activity and metabolism. Phospholipases have been implicated in the pathogenesis of PD through their involvement in lipid metabolism, cell signalling, and inflammatory processes⁶⁰. Mutations in *PLA2G6*, encoding a form of phospholipase A2 enzyme, cause autosomal recessive neuroaxonal dystrophy and early-onset parkinsonism⁶¹. Estrogen has been shown to reduce neuroinflammation by inhibiting the NLRP3 inflammasome, thereby exerting a beneficial effect on Parkinson's disease⁶². Moreover, estrogen upregulates the expression of an anti-oxidative stress factor through estrogen receptors. Exercise has been shown to activate the anti-oxidative signalling pathway, which reduces oxidative stress and improves symptoms associated with PD, by directly activating estrogen receptors. Estrogen levels are particularly reduced in menopausal women, which increases the risk of PD due to the compromised protective effect of estrogens on dopaminergic neurons. Additionally, estrogens maintain normal mitochondrial function and dopaminergic neuron activity through the activation of estrogen-related receptors⁶³.

It has been established that the AAO of PD plays a pivotal role in the observed clinical heterogeneity among patients^{7,64,65}. Our study shed new light on the role of CNV on the AAO with the identification of four loci with genome-wide significance for EOPD, including one deletion and three duplication regions. Of note, the three duplications were also identified in our PD GWAS (1q42.12, 6q21 and 11q12.3), while the deletion spanned the EOPD-related *PRKN* gene.

This finding aligns with the results of our burden analysis. *PRKN* homozygous or compound heterozygous deletions and duplications were identified as the most prevalent cause of EOPD and familial forms of PD⁶⁶⁻⁶⁸. As compared to our CNV-based GWAS analyses, we did not identify any significant differences in the overall genome-wide CNV burden, similar to the previously published

study²². An increased burden of CNVs overlapping PD-related genes was observed in PD patients, primarily attributed to CNVs within the *PRKN* gene. This burden was even more pronounced in EOPD patients. Our observation is aligned with the published literature, in which it was shown that deletions and duplications accounted for 43.6% of all variants¹⁴. The presence of these variants was found to be significantly associated with an earlier onset of PD. Furthermore, PD patients with a CNV in PD-related genes manifested a significantly earlier onset of symptoms compared to those with CNVs in other genes or non-carriers.

The majority of CNVs identified in the *PRKN* gene were heterozygous, but the presence of another pathogenic variant on the other allele cannot be ruled out. Heterozygous loss of *PRKN* function may elevate the risk of developing PD⁶⁹⁻⁷¹ and lead to an earlier AAO⁷². However, the impact of heterozygous *PRKN* CNVs on PD susceptibility remains controversial. Some studies have indicated that carrying a heterozygous *PRKN* CNV may contribute to the development of PD, potentially through haploinsufficiency⁷⁰. Nevertheless, a study in subjects of European ancestry demonstrated no association between heterozygous *PRKN* CNVs and EOPD⁷³.

Power estimation for CNV-based studies remains an interesting area to explore for future work, with the identification of CNVs in *bona fide* PD loci highlighting the robustness of our cohort to delineate CNV signals. However, certain caveats need to be considered. First, CNV identification was based on best practices applied to large-scale genotyping data, with breakpoint estimation relying on genotyped SNPs. Consequently, the resolution of the genotyping platform may have limited the accuracy of these estimates. One limitation of our study is that not all CNVs were validated using techniques such as MLPA or qPCR. Nonetheless, validation of CNVs in PD patients carrying *PRKN* and *SNCA* in one study showed a high confirmation rate, indicating the accuracy of our CNV analysis pipeline. To mitigate resolution issues, we applied a sliding window approach, nominating loci known to harbour CNVs. However, unlike traditional SNP-based GWASs, CNV-GWASs face significant challenges in identifying the causal gene(s) affected by CNVs. In our study, we identified 14 CNV regions spanning a total of 70 genes, ranging from 210 to 560 kb, exclusively in individuals of European descent. Therefore, in-depth future studies are warranted to elucidate the role of these regions in PD pathogenesis among Europeans and to replicate these findings in ethnically diverse populations.

To our knowledge, this study was the largest CNV-based GWAS performed in PD to date. Our study was able to nominate novel CNV regions for PD and confirmed that the CNV burden in EOPD was primarily driven by the *PRKN* gene. The loci nominated herein require further in-depth evaluation to define the role of these loci in the aetiopathogenesis of PD.

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Author contributions

ZL, PM, MS, RK contributed to the conception and design of the study.

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All the authors contributed to revise the manuscript and approved the submitted version.

Data and code availability

Individual-level CNVs and genotyping data are available on request from the COURAGE-PD consortium. Relevant scripts used in the present work are available on GitHub (https://gitlab.lcsb.uni.lu/genomeanalysis/cnv_gwas_courage-pd). For the sliding window association method, we used the code available under the Talkowski Laboratory (Massachusetts General Hospital & The Broad Institute) repository in Zenodo (<https://github.com/talkowski-lab/rCNV2/tree/v1.0>, with <https://zenodo.org/records/6647918>).

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figure legends

Figure 1: Genome-wide meta-analysis of PD. Miami plot of the CNV genome-wide association analyses illustrating the $-\log_{10}$ transformed Bonferroni-corrected p-values (DEL and DUP for deletions at the top and duplications at the bottom, mirrored respectively) of the Fisher's exact tests for the enrichment of CNVs in cases vs. controls for each 200 kb sliding window. Adjacent chromosomes are shown in alternating light and dark colors. Genomic regions that exceeded the Bonferroni-corrected significance threshold (blue line, $\alpha = 3.74 \times 10^{-6}$) were annotated with the genomic band containing the signal.

Figure 2: Genome-wide meta-analysis of EOPD. Miami plot of the CNV genome-wide association analyses illustrating the $-\log_{10}$ transformed Bonferroni-corrected p-values (DEL and DUP for deletions at the top and duplications at the bottom, mirrored respectively) of the Fisher's exact tests for the enrichment of CNVs in cases vs. controls for each 200 kb sliding window. Adjacent chromosomes are shown in alternating light and dark colors. Genomic regions that exceeded the Bonferroni-corrected significance threshold (blue line, $\alpha = 3.74 \times 10^{-6}$) were annotated with the genomic band containing the signal.

Figure 3: Enrichment analysis. Barplots of gene-set enrichment analysis for GO (A), KEGG (B), Reactome (C), and DisGeNet (D) using CNV- overlapping genes within the credible intervals. BP (biological process) and MF (molecular function).

Figure 4: Rare CNV burden in PD and Early-onset PD patients compared to controls for different categories. **A.** Logistic regression was used to calculate odds ratios (ORs) and Bonferroni-adjusted p-values for each CNV category, and were adjusted for age, sex, and the first five components of PCAs. Protein-coding gene categories were defined as all coding genes except PD-related genes. * Bonferroni adjusted p-values surpassing the multiple testing cut-off. **B-C.** Kaplan-Meier estimates of individuals (PD patients and controls in **B** and PD patients only in **C**) carrying a CNV in a PD-related gene and individuals with other or no CNVs. Probability: the probability of not having PD symptoms. Age: age at last visit for controls or age at onset for cases. Highlighting around curves indicates 95% confidence intervals.

Tables

Table 1: Genome-wide significant CNV regions in Parkinson's disease. Column 1: Cytoband localization of the CNV. Column 2: Credible interval showing the genomic coordinates (start and end position) of the credible CNVs region supported by genome-wide association signals containing the causal element/gene with 95%. Column 3: CNV types with DEL and DUP indicate deletions and duplications. Columns 4 and 5: the lowest p-values in each CNV region and corresponding odds ratio (OR) with a 95% confidence interval. Columns 6 and 7: list of genes overlapping the genome-wide significant CNVs regions and known disease genes in these regions with causal genes between brackets.

Cytoband	Credible interval	CNV type	Lowest p-value (neg log ₁₀ p)	OR [95% CI]	CNV overlapping genes	Known disease genes
1q42.12	chr1:224960000-225410000	DUP	23.85	21.18 [8.24-54.42]	<i>DNAH14</i>	Neurodevelopmental disorders (<i>DNAH14</i>)
4q22.1	chr4:90700000-90930000	DUP	5.47	7.68 [2.55-23.18]	<i>MMRN1, SNCA</i>	Parkinson's disease (<i>SNCA</i>)
6p21.2	chr6:38620000-39000000	DUP	5.8	5.98 [2.45-14.63]	<i>DNAH8, GLO1</i>	Spermatogenic failure (<i>DNAH8</i>)
6q21	chr6:109680000-110220000	DUP	18.9	13.01 [5.87-28.81]	<i>AK9, CD164, FIG4, MICAL1, PPIL6, SMPD2, ZBTB24</i>	Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type 4J (<i>FIG4</i>), Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis type 11 (<i>FIG4</i>)
7q22.1	chr7:99080000-99560000	DUP	7.48	48.62 [2.97-796.61]	<i>CYP3A4, CYP3A43, CYP3A5, CYP3A7, CYP3A7-CYP3A51P, FAM200A, GJC3, OR2AE1, TMEM225B, TRIM4, ZKSCAN5, ZNF394, ZNF655, ZNF789, ZSCAN25</i>	-
7q33	chr7:134750000-134980000	DUP	6.41	41.75 [2.54-686.79]	<i>AGBL3, CYREN, STRA8, TMEM140, WDR91</i>	-
8q23.3	chr8:113780000-114340000	DUP	8.45	3.24 [2.11-4.99]	<i>CSMD3</i>	-
11q12.3	chr11:62910000-63350000	DUP	7.48	48.62 [2.97-796.61]	<i>LGALS12, PLAAT2, PLAAT3, PLAAT4, PLAAT5, SLC22A10, SLC22A24, SLC22A25, SLC22A9</i>	-
12q24.12	chr12:111790000-112010000	DUP	5.97	3.46 [1.98-6.04]	<i>ATXN2, PHETA1, SH2B3</i>	Spinocerebellar ataxia type 2 (<i>ATXN2</i>), Susceptibility to: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis type 13 (<i>ATXN2</i>) and Late-onset Parkinson's disease (<i>ATXN2</i>),

13q22.3	chr13:77490000-77780000	DUP	5.73	6.74 [2.53-17.98]	<i>ACOD1, CLN5, FBXL3, MYCBP2</i>	Neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis (<i>CLN5</i>), Intellectual developmental disorder with short stature, facial anomalies, and speech defects (<i>FBXL3</i>)
15q22.2	chr15:62070000-62360000	DUP	7.95	5.03 [2.61-9.69]	<i>C2CD4A, VPS13C</i>	Parkinson's disease (<i>VPS13C</i>)
19p13.11	chr19:17580000-17960000	DUP	6.64	7.5 [2.83-19.91]	<i>B3GNT3, COLGALT1, FCHO1, INSL3, JAK3, MAP1S, NIBAN3, PGLS, SLC27A1, UNC13A</i>	Immunodeficiency 76 (<i>FCHO1</i>), T-B+ severe combined immunodeficiency (<i>JAK3</i>) Brain small vessel disease 3 (<i>COLGALT1</i>)
20p13	chr20:3380000-3740000	DUP	7.81	3.43 [2.13-5.51]	<i>ADAM33, ATRN, DNAAF9, ADISSP, GFRA4, HSPA12B, SIGLEC1</i>	-
21q22.3	chr21:46650000-46860000	DEL	6.64	3.46 [2.05-5.85]	<i>COL18A1, POFUT2</i>	Knobloch syndrome type 1 (<i>COL18A1</i>), Glaucoma, primary closed-angle (<i>COL18A1</i>)

Table 2: Genome-wide significant CNV regions in Early-onset Parkinson’s disease.

Column 1: Cytoband localization of the CNV. Column 2: Credible interval showing the genomic coordinates (start and end position) of the credible CNVs region supported by genome-wide association signals containing the causal element/gene with 95%. Column 3: CNV types with DEL and DUP indicate deletions and duplications. Columns 4 and 5: the lowest p-values in each CNV region and corresponding odds ratio (OR) with 95% confidence interval. Columns 6 and 7: list of genes overlapping the genome-wide significant CNVs regions and known disease genes in these regions with causal genes between brackets.

Cytoband	Credible interval	CNV type	Lowest p-value (neg log ₁₀ p)	OR [95% CI]	CNV overlapping genes	Known disease genes
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6q21	chr6:109710000-110220000	DUP	18.9	13.01 [5.87-28.81]	<i>AK9, CD164, FIG4, MICAL1, PPIL6, SMPD2, ZBTB24</i>	Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type 4J (<i>FIG4</i>), Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis type 11 (<i>FIG4</i>)
6q26	chr6:162340000-162930000	DEL	8.26	6.8 [3.52-13.14]	<i>PRKN</i>	Parkinson's disease (<i>PRKN</i>)
11q12.3	chr11:62920000-63340000	DUP	7.48	48.62 [2.97-796.61]	<i>LGALS12, PLAAT2, PLAAT4, PLAAT5, SLC22A10, SLC22A25, SLC22A9</i>	-

Figures:
Figure 1:

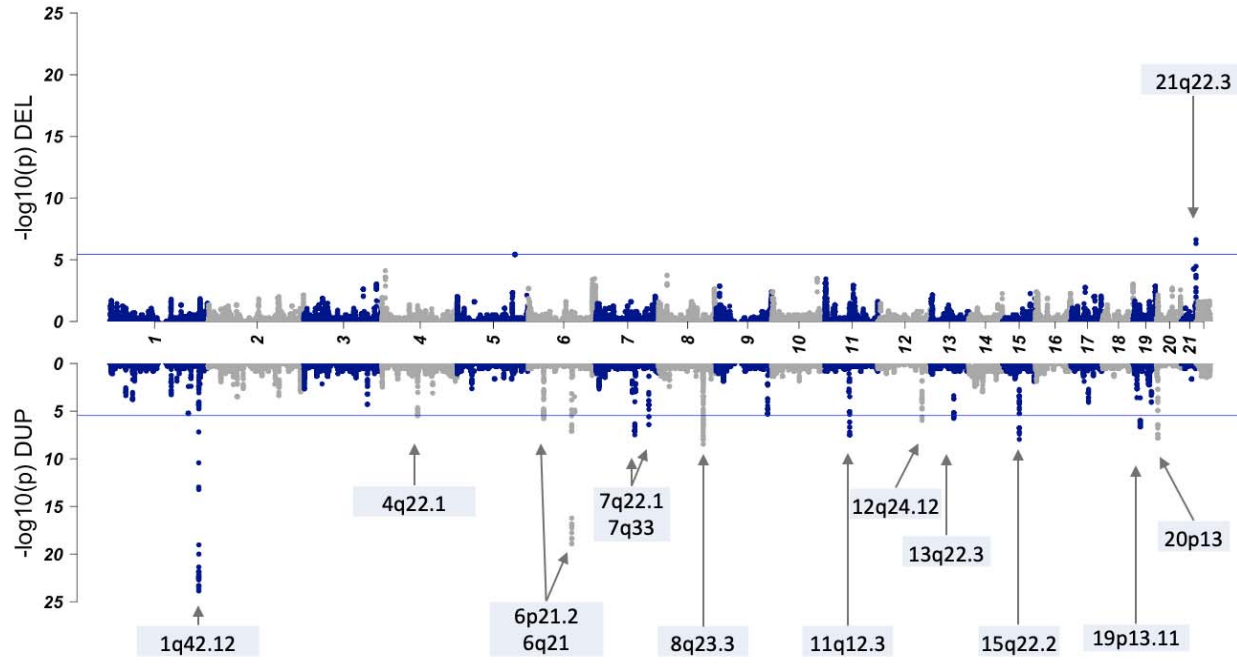


Figure 2:

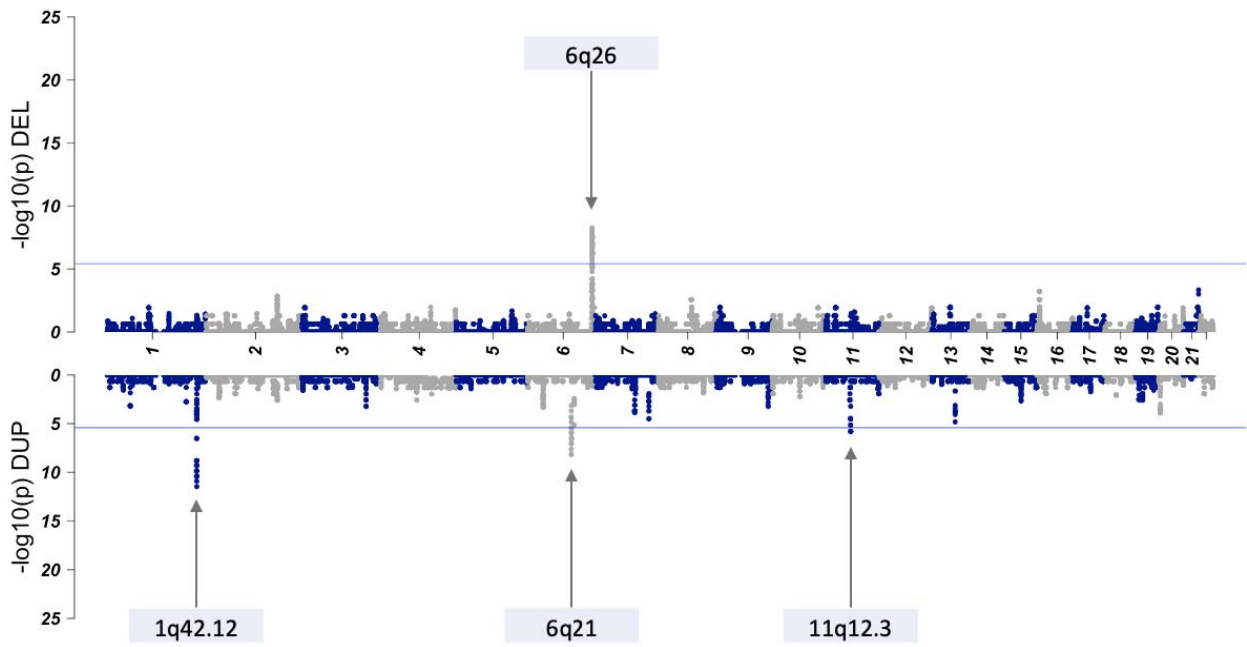


Figure 3:

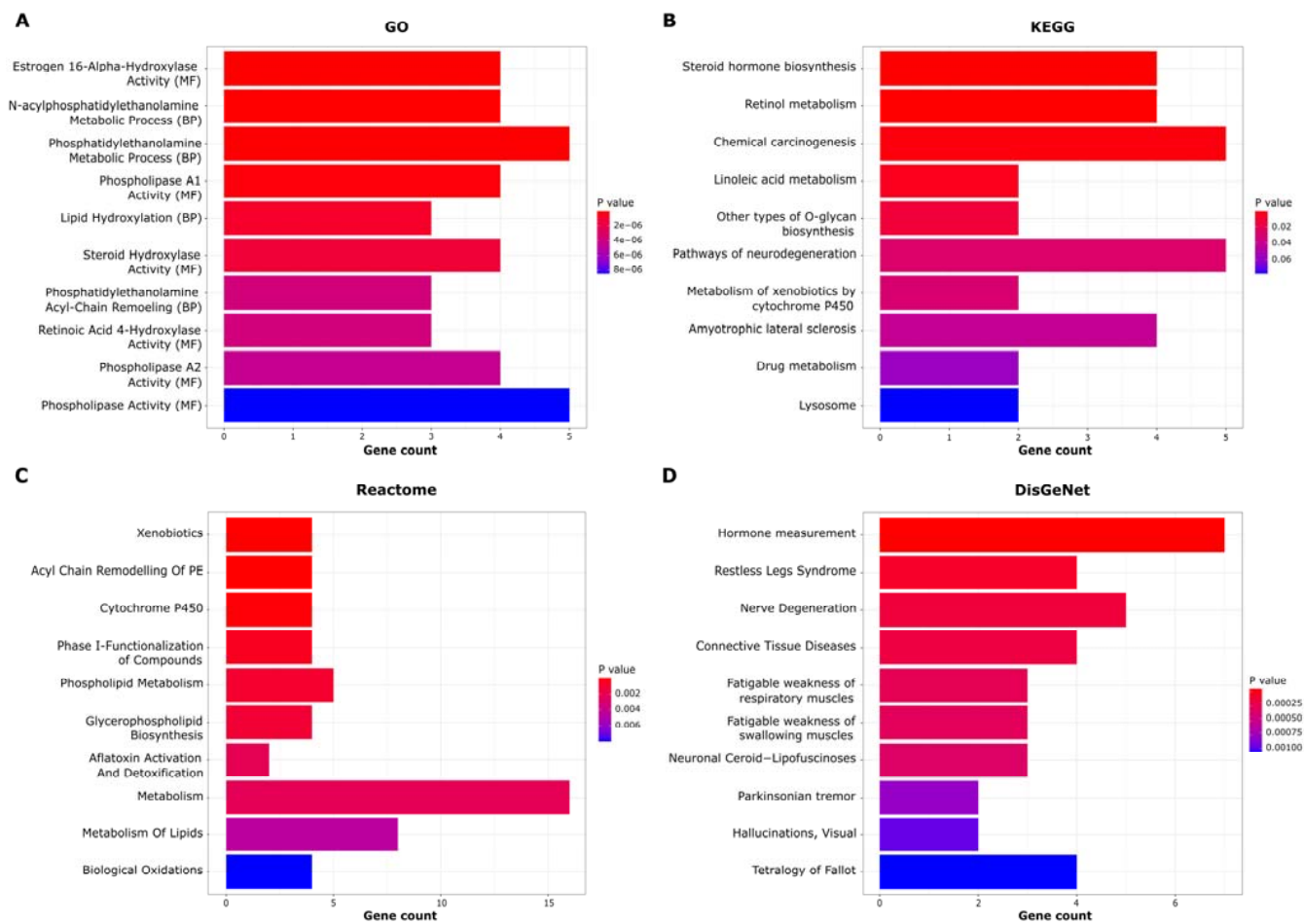


Figure 4:

