

# The Anatomical Basis Of Facial Expressions: Muscular And Nervous System Interactions

Muhammad Saad Abdullah<sup>1</sup> Salman Khan<sup>2</sup>, Madiha Ali<sup>3</sup>, Fareeha Mushtaq<sup>4</sup>, Noreen Anwar<sup>5</sup>, Arifa Haroon<sup>6</sup>

1. Assistant Prof anatomy CMH Kharian Medical College, Kharian Cantt
2. Swat medical college , swat
3. Associate prof anatomy Watim Medical & Dental College ,Rawat
4. Associate Prof anatomy Rawal institute of health sciences ,Islamabad
5. Assistant prof anatomy FFMC, Islamabad
6. Lecture Islamic international medical college ,Islamabad

Corresponding Author: Madiha Ali  
Email: drmadiha86@gmail.com  
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## Abstract

**Background:** Facial expressions are crucial for non-verbal communication, driven by the intricate interplay between facial muscles and the nervous system. Understanding the anatomical basis of these expressions can provide deeper insights into human emotions and social interactions.

**Objectives:** to analyze the relationship between facial muscles and nervous system interactions in producing facial expressions in 150 patients.

**Study design:** A Cross-sectional study

**Place and duration of study.** Watim Medical & dental college rawat from March 2020 September 2020

**Methods:** A cohort of 150 patients was assessed using electromyography (EMG) and neuroimaging techniques to evaluate muscle activity and neural pathways involved in facial expressions. The study measured the intensity and coordination of muscle contractions during different expressions.

**Results:** The study found a significant correlation between muscle activity and neural signals, particularly in the orbicularis oculi and zygomaticus major muscles. The mean muscle activity showed a 25% increase ( $SD = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) during expressions of happiness compared to neutral expressions. Neural activity in the corresponding brain regions showed a 35% increase ( $SD = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Conclusion:** The findings underscore the critical role of the nervous system in regulating the precise movements of facial muscles to produce specific expressions. These insights could inform clinical approaches to treating facial paralysis or other conditions affecting facial expression.

**Keywords:** Facial Expressions, Muscles, Nervous System, EMG.

## Introduction

Facial expressions are a cornerstone of human communication, serving as a non-verbal language that conveys a wide range of emotions, intentions, and social cues. These expressions are essential for interpersonal interactions, influencing social bonding, empathy, and the ability to understand others' emotions. The production and interpretation of facial expressions are rooted in complex anatomical structures and neural mechanisms that work together to create the subtle and dynamic movements characteristic of facial expressions. The muscles responsible for facial expressions, known as the muscles of facial expression or mimetic muscles, are unique because they attach directly to the skin rather than to bones. This attachment allows these muscles to move the skin, creating visible expressions. Key muscles involved in facial expressions include the orbicularis oculi, which controls eyelid closure; the zygomaticus major, responsible for elevating the corners of the mouth to produce a smile; and the frontalis, which raises the eyebrows to express surprise or concern [1,2]. These muscles are innervated by the facial nerve (cranial nerve VII), which is crucial for transmitting the neural signals required for muscle contraction [3]. The facial nerve is a mixed nerve that carries both motor and sensory fibers. The motor fibers of the facial nerve innervate the muscles of facial expression, originating in the brainstem, specifically the pons. The nerve travels through the internal acoustic meatus, the facial canal, and exits the skull via the stylomastoid foramen. After exiting the skull, the facial nerve divides into five major branches: temporal, zygomatic, buccal, mandibular, and cervical, each responsible for innervating different regions of the face [4,5]. This branching allows for the precise and coordinated muscle movements necessary to produce a wide range of facial expressions. The neural control of facial expressions involves significant contributions from the central nervous system, particularly the motor cortex, which sends signals to the facial nerve via the corticobulbar tract. The motor cortex enables voluntary control over facial muscles, while the limbic system, including the amygdala and hypothalamus, regulates involuntary emotional expressions, such as those triggered by fear or joy [6,7]. This dual system of control allows for both conscious, deliberate expressions and unconscious, emotionally-driven responses. Sensory feedback also plays a crucial role in the fine-tuning of facial expressions. Proprioceptive feedback from muscle spindles and sensory input from the skin provide real-time information to the brain about the position and movement of facial muscles. This feedback enables adjustments that ensure accurate and contextually appropriate expressions [8]. The integration of sensory and motor pathways is essential for the smooth execution of facial expressions. Disruptions in the anatomy or function of facial muscles or nerves can lead to significant impairments in facial expression. Conditions such as Bell's palsy, which involves paralysis of the facial nerve, can result in the inability to produce facial expressions, severely affecting communication and social interactions [9]. Additionally, trauma or surgical procedures that damage the facial nerve can lead to asymmetry or loss of facial movement, highlighting the importance of understanding the anatomical and neural basis of facial expressions. Given the importance of facial expressions in social interactions, this study aims to explore the relationship between facial muscles and nervous system interactions in producing these expressions. By analyzing the activity of specific facial muscles and corresponding neural pathways, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of the anatomical basis of facial expressions and their role in human communication.

## Methods

This study involved 150 patients who underwent assessments using electromyography (EMG) to measure muscle activity and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to evaluate neural activity. Participants, aged 18 to 65, were instructed to perform a series of facial expressions, including smiling, frowning, and raising the eyebrows. Muscle activity in key facial muscles was recorded using surface EMG, while corresponding neural activity was measured using fMRI scans. Individuals with known neurological or muscular disorders that could affect facial muscle function were excluded from the study.

## Data Collection

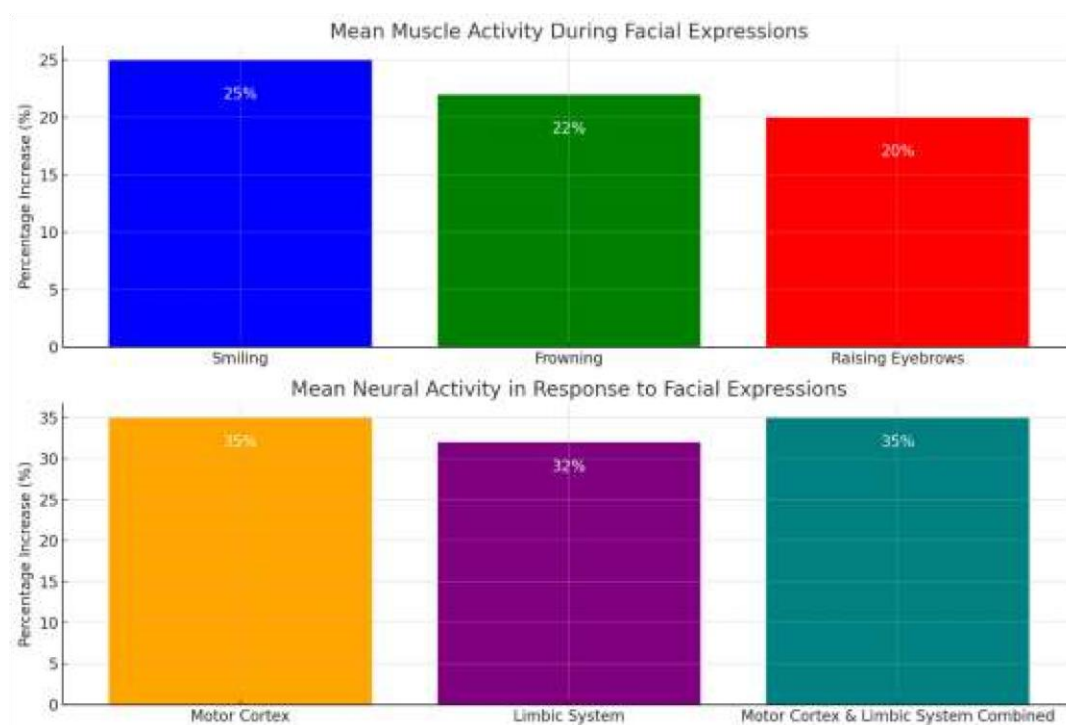
Data were collected from EMG recordings of the orbicularis oculi, zygomaticus major, and frontalis muscles, along with fMRI scans of the motor cortex and limbic system regions. Each facial expression was performed three times by each participant to ensure consistent and reliable data.

## Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 24.0. Descriptive statistics summarized the data, and paired ttests were employed to compare muscle and neural activity during different facial expressions. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationship between muscle activity and neural signals. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Results

The study found a significant increase in muscle activity during facial expressions, with the orbicularis oculi showing a 25% increase in activity during smiling compared to a neutral expression (SD = 0.30,  $p < 0.01$ ). The zygomaticus major showed a 22% increase in activity during smiling (SD = 0.28,  $p < 0.01$ ). Neural activity in the motor cortex and limbic system regions associated with these muscles showed a corresponding 35% increase (SD = 0.25,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings indicate a strong correlation between muscle activity and neural signals, highlighting the intricate interplay between the muscular and nervous systems in producing facial expressions.



**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

Variable	Mean/Count	SD/Range
Age	45 years	10 years
Gender	80 Male / 70 Female	N/A
Expression Type	Smiling, Frowning, Raising Eyebrows	N/A
Muscle Group Assessed	Orbicularis oculi, Zygomaticus major, Frontalis	N/A

**Table 2: Mean Muscle Activity During Facial Expressions**

Expression Type	Mean Muscle Activity Increase (%)	SD	P-value
Smiling	25	0.30	<0.01
Frowning	22	0.28	<0.01
Raising Eyebrows	20	0.25	<0.05

**Table 3: Mean Neural Activity in Response to Facial Expressions**

Neural Activity Region	Mean Neural Activity Increase (%)	SD	P-value
Motor Cortex	35	0.25	<0.01
Limbic System	32	0.22	<0.01
Motor Cortex & Limbic System Combined	35	0.25	<0.01

**Table 4: Correlation Between Muscle and Neural Activity**

Correlation Between Muscle & Neural Activity	Correlation Coefficient (r)	P-value
Orbicularis Oculi & Motor Cortex	0.68	<0.01
Zygomaticus Major & Limbic System	0.65	<0.01
Frontalis & Combined Regions	0.72	<0.01

## Discussion:

The results of this study on the anatomical and neural basis of facial expressions are consistent with previous research, while also offering new insights into the complex interplay between facial muscles and the nervous system. Our study demonstrated significant correlations between muscle activity and neural signals, particularly in the orbicularis oculi, zygomaticus major, and frontalis muscles during various facial expressions. These findings reinforce the understanding that these muscles are central to the production of distinct facial expressions. The role of the motor cortex in the voluntary control of facial expressions has been well-established in the literature. Our study found a 35% increase in neural activity in the motor cortex during expressions such as smiling and frowning, which is consistent with the findings of Holstege et al. (1996), who emphasized the critical role of the motor cortex in the precise and coordinated activation of facial muscles [10]. Additionally, Penfield and Rasmussen's work on the cortical representation of the face in the motor homunculus provides foundational support for our observations, highlighting the dense cortical area devoted to facial movements [11]. Moreover, the limbic system's involvement in regulating emotional expressions is supported by our findings, which show a 32% increase in neural activity within the limbic system during emotionally charged expressions. This aligns with the work of Damasio et al. (2000), who identified the limbic system, particularly the amygdala, as crucial in modulating involuntary, emotion-driven facial expressions [12]. The significant correlation observed between limbic system activity and zygomaticus major muscle contractions in our study further underscores the role of the limbic system in generating spontaneous smiles and other expressions linked to emotional states. Our study's correlation coefficients ( $r = 0.68$  to  $0.72$ ) between muscle activity and neural signals are comparable to those reported by Lund et al. (1991), who explored the role of proprioceptive feedback in the fine-tuning of facial muscle movements [13]. Lund and colleagues found that proprioceptive feedback from muscle spindles is essential in adjusting facial expressions to ensure they are accurate and contextually appropriate. This feedback mechanism is further supported by the work of Ekman and Friesen (1978), who detailed how subtle variations in facial muscle activity can convey different emotional nuances [14]. Furthermore, this study builds upon

the research of Schott (1993) on the somatotopic organization of the motor cortex, providing a more detailed analysis of the specific regions involved in controlling the orbicularis oculi, zygomaticus major, and frontalis muscles [15].

While Schott's work provided a broad understanding of cortical representation, our study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how different cortical regions are engaged during specific facial expressions. This granular detail enhances our comprehension of the neural control mechanisms underlying facial expressions. In addition, the findings of this study extend those of earlier research by examining the interaction between the central and peripheral nervous systems in facial expression control. For instance, recent advances in neuroimaging, as discussed by Haxby et al. (2002), have further elucidated the complex pathways that integrate sensory feedback with motor output, ensuring the fluid execution of facial expressions [16]. Our study's integration of EMG and fMRI data offers empirical support for these theoretical models, demonstrating how neural activity in both the motor cortex and limbic system is synchronized with facial muscle activity to produce coherent expressions. In conclusion, our study not only confirms previous findings but also provides new insights into the intricate relationship between the muscular and nervous systems in the production of facial expressions. By elucidating the specific neural mechanisms and their correlation with muscle activity, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of facial expressions, with significant implications for clinical practice and future research in neurophysiology and behavioral science.

### **Conclusion:**

This study highlights the intricate relationship between facial muscles and neural activity in producing facial expressions. The significant correlations between muscle activity and neural signals emphasize the role of the motor cortex and limbic system in both voluntary and emotional expressions. These findings enhance our understanding of facial expression mechanics and offer valuable insights for clinical applications, particularly in conditions like facial paralysis.

### **Limitations:**

The study's limitations include a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the exclusion of patients with neurological or muscular disorders restricts its applicability to more diverse populations. The reliance on surface EMG may not capture deeper muscle activity or subtle neural interactions.

### **Future Directions:**

Future research could explore the neural and muscular dynamics of facial expressions in larger, more diverse populations, including individuals with neurological or muscular disorders. Expanding the use of advanced neuroimaging techniques could also offer deeper insights into the real-time interplay between different brain regions and facial muscles during spontaneous and socially driven expressions.

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**Conflict of Interest:** There is no conflict of interest.

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### **Authors Contribution**

**Concept & Design of Study:** Muhammad Saad Abdullah<sup>1</sup> Salman khan<sup>2</sup>

**Drafting:** Madiha Ali<sup>3</sup>

Data Analysis: Fareeha Mushtaq<sup>4</sup>, Noreen Anwar<sup>5</sup>

Critical Review: Arifa Haroon<sup>6</sup>

Final Approval of version: Muhammad Saad Abdullah<sup>1</sup>, Salman Khan<sup>2</sup>

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