



# Social Cognition Across Eating Disorders: A Systematic Review



Western

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## Introduction

- Eating disorders (EDs) are serious psychiatric conditions with high rates of mortality.
- Although advances in research have increased the understanding of the pathophysiology of EDs, treatment outcomes are still poor (Bergh et al., 2013; Linardon et al., 2017).
- Further investigation of mechanisms contributing to the onset and maintenance of EDs is critical.
- One area of increasing focus is social cognition which refers to the cognitive processes involved in social interactions.
- The goal of this review was to examine the current literature on social cognition across eating disorders.

## Methods

- Keywords were identified using a framework of social cognition outlined by previous research (Caglar-Nazali et al., 2014; Savla et al., 2012) and subsequently used to search for relevant studies in three online databases.
- Studies were screened based on a priori inclusion/exclusion criteria.

**KEYWORDS:** “social cognition”, “theory of mind”, “social perception”, “social knowledge”, “attributional bias”, “emotion perception”, “emotion processing”, “eating disorder”, “anorex\*\*”, “bulim\*\*”, “binge eating disorder”

*Note:* asterisk indicates variable endings

## Results

- 79 studies were identified through the systematic search (see Figure 1).
- The findings were organized based on: ED (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder) and 6 themes of social cognition (see Figure 2). *Note:* each study can examine more than 1 theme.

## Results

Figure 1: Social Cognition Across EDs

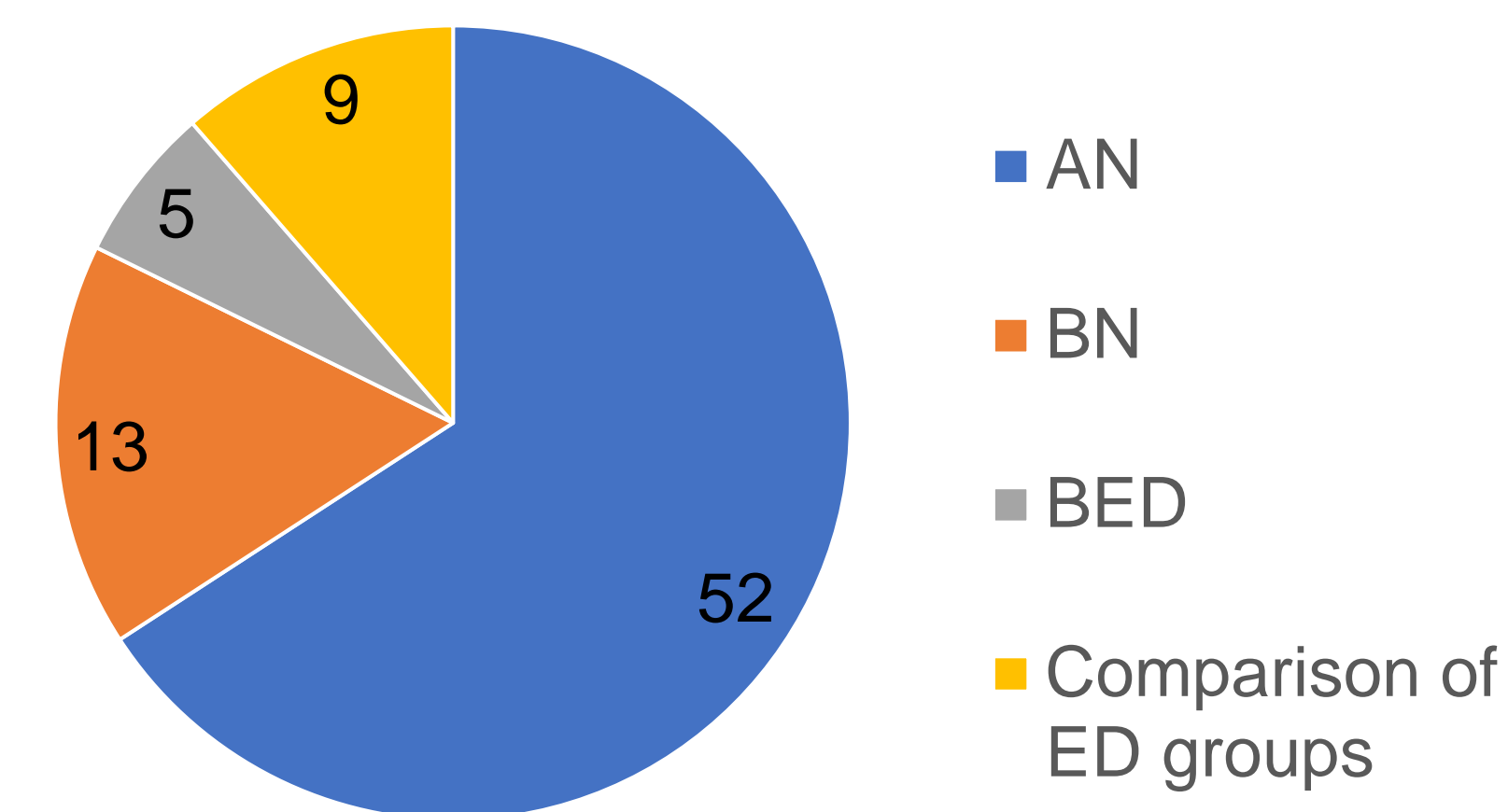


Figure 2: Social Cognition Themes

<b>Alexithymia</b>	Ability to understand, perceive oneself
<b>Theory of mind (ToM)</b>	Ability to understand the mental states of others
<b>Empathy</b>	Ability to understand others' experiences from their point of view
<b>Social processing (SP)</b>	Cognitive processing during social interactions
<b>Emotion recognition (ER)</b>	Ability to accurately identify emotions
<b>Emotion processing (EP)</b>	Cognitive processing during the management of emotional experiences

Figure 3: Social Cognition and Anorexia Nervosa (AN)

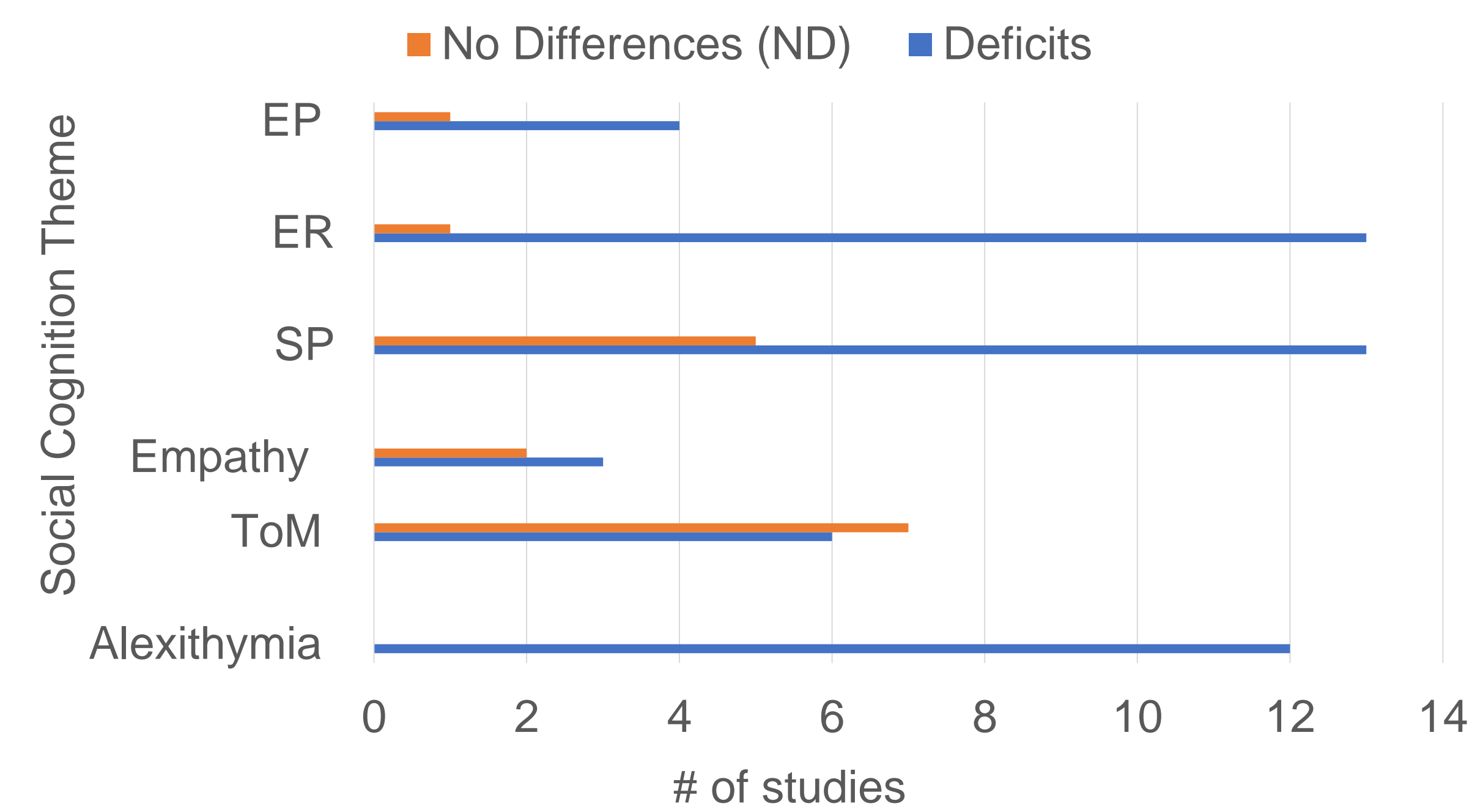


Figure 4: Social Cognition and Bulimia Nervosa (BN)

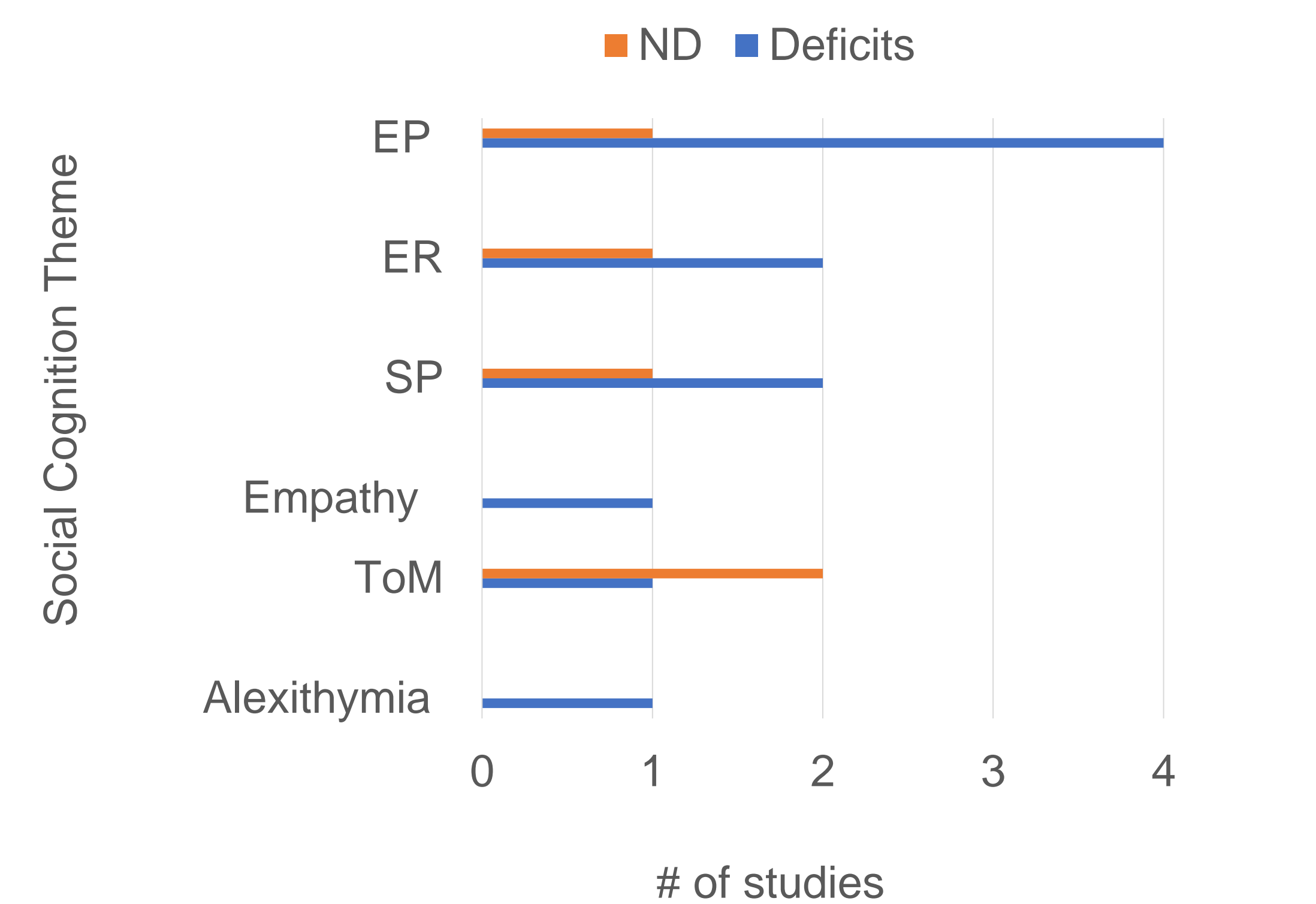


Figure 5: Social Cognition and BED

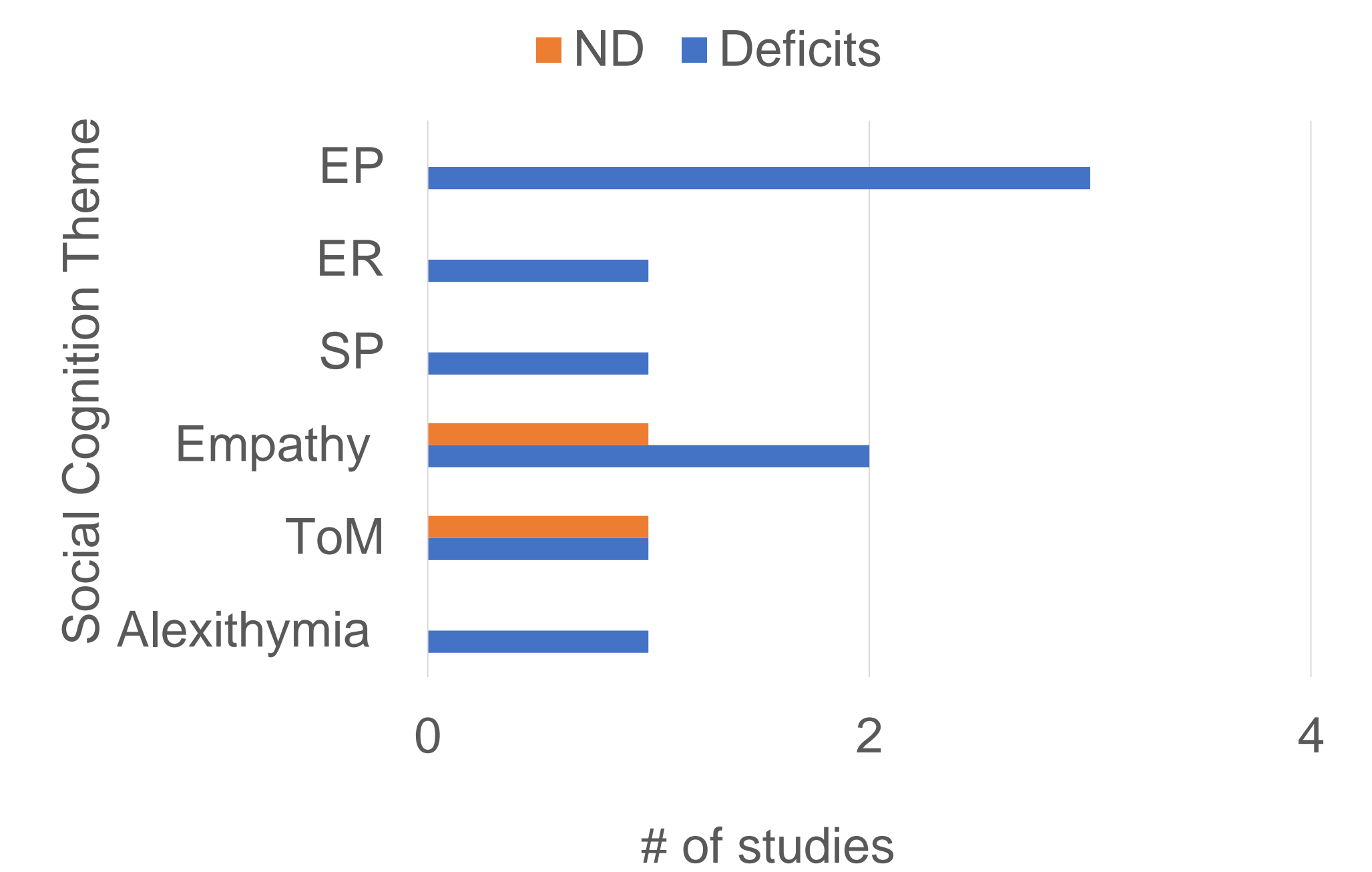
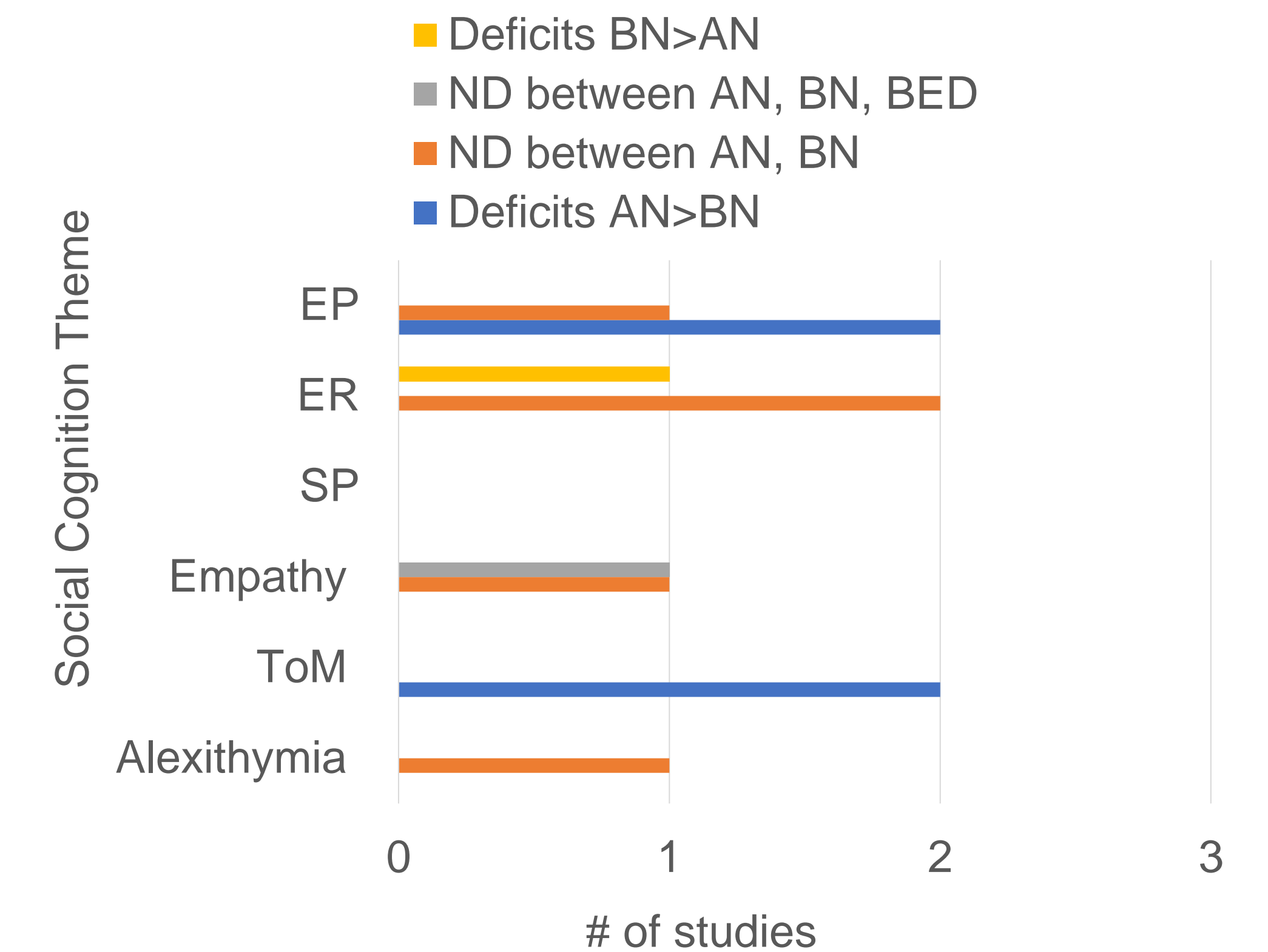


Figure 6: Social Cognition and ED Comparisons



## Discussion

- Most studies investigated social cognition in individuals with AN.
- Across EDs, elevated alexithymia and deficits in emotion processing were observed most consistently.
- Findings for other aspects of social cognition were inconsistent across studies.
- Future studies should examine the specific role of alexithymia in EDs as well as consider greater coverage of the various themes of social cognition across all types of EDs.

## Selected References

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