

Alzheimer's disease -- crosses boundaries of education and gender

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A postgraduate researcher at the University of Hertfordshire has found that Alzheimer's Disease (AD) results in greater language impairments in more highly-educated than less learned patients.

The research also revealed that women with the disease fare worse on language tasks, which have been traditionally associated with better performance in healthy women.

Amy Duncan, who will graduate on Thursday (17 September) at the University of Hertfordshire's Postgraduate Awards Ceremonies, completed an MSc in Research Methods in Cognitive Neuropsychology during which she reviewed studies of verbal retrieval in over 6000 patients with AD.

Her paper entitled *'Normal' semantic-phonemic fluency discrepancy in Alzheimer's disease? A meta-analytic study*, which was recently published in the international journal [Cortex](#), describes her analysis of 135 studies examining [verbal fluency](#) and name retrieval in 6,000 AD patients and over 6,000 healthy controls. Her work was supervised by Professor Keith Laws from the University's School of Psychology.

The researchers looked at the degree of verbal impairment in AD patients and whether the severity of impairment relates to patient sex and education.

“Our analyses revealed some intriguing sex differences in people with

Alzheimer's Disease - with women surprisingly showing worse naming ability than men; and perhaps even more surprisingly, the more highly educated patients displayed deficits that were more severe than those seen in the less well-educated patients," said Professor Laws "The latter suggests that being better educated, rather than protecting you against Alzheimer's disease, may in fact lead to worse outcomes on some measures."

Amy, who has gone on to do a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire added: "These surprising results perhaps give rationale for further research into the effects that sex and educational background have on different cognitive abilities in Alzheimer's Disease. It was a very interesting project to be involved in, and relevant for understanding the impairments people with this disease face. This is particularly significant as Alzheimer's Disease currently affects over 700,000 people in the UK and that two-thirds of these are women."

More information: [Cortex Journal paper](#).

Provided by University of Hertfordshire ([news](#) : [web](#))

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