

Brain surgeons analyze traumatic brain injuries in comic books

June 17 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

(Medical Xpress) -- Yes, you read that title correctly. In the European Journal of Neurosurgery, *Acta Neurochirurgica*, a group of neurosurgery researchers from the Heinrich Heine University of Dusseldorf in Germany have examined the famous French comic series Asterix and noted 704 distinct cases of traumatic brain injury.

In looking through all 34 books within the series, they noted that out of the 704 victims, 698 were male. 63.9 percent were [Romans](#) and the rest were Gauls, bandits, pirates, Normans, Vikings, Goths, Britons and even extraterrestrials. They did not however show just how they knew the extraterrestrials had suffered [traumatic brain injury](#).

The researchers, led by Marcel A. Kamp, said that while the majority of the injured were wearing [helmets](#), these helmets were lost in the battles. The Gauls were responsible for 87.1 percent of the injuries with the main characters Asterix and Obelix being responsible for more than half of those.

They noted the use of a 'magic potion' though they were unsure of its exact components. They did discover mistletoe. While mistletoe, which contains lectin, has been known to act on brain tumors, they believe more research needs to be done on its potential in the treatment of traumatic brain injuries.

In looking at the victims, researchers noted visible injuries such as 'raccoon eyes,' or periorbital ecchymoses and tongues that stuck out in a

sideways pointing fashion known as paresis of the hypoglossal nerve to identify the traumatic [brain injury](#). They also used the Glasgow coma scale to rate the seriousness of the brain injuries. According to their findings, 696 of the cases were a result of blunt force trauma while strangulation was responsible for the remaining eight.

However, despite the seriousness of the injuries, none of them resulted in death or permanent damage, with most actually recovering within a few minutes or hours. The researchers believe that this finding is astonishing given it has been believed that the results of brain injuries in the time of the Romans was worse than that of today, the recovery rate is unexpected.

While the researchers say the goal behind the study was to analyze the specific risk factors and epidemiology of traumatic brain injury in the [comic books](#), they also say it was not entirely serious. Dr. Daniel Haenggi believes that in looking at this and people from the past and their experiences we can learn from them.

However, you must wonder how learning from fictional cartoon characters will help in the treatment of traumatic brain injuries. If this is the case, researchers need to take a look at Wile E Coyote and the Road Runner and just how Coyote is able to survive explosions, severe burns and crushing injuries without any permanent damage.

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