

Emotional neglect in children linked to increased stroke risk later in life

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New research suggests that people who were emotionally neglected as children may have a higher risk of stroke in adulthood. The study is published in the September 19, 2012, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Emotional neglect is defined as failing to provide for a child's needs emotionally.

The results from a new study by neurological researchers from the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center at Rush University Medical Center suggest that people who were emotionally neglected as children may have a higher risk of [stroke](#) in later adulthood.

"Studies have shown that children who were neglected emotionally in childhood are at an increased risk of a slew of [psychiatric disorders](#). However, our study is one of few that looked at an association between [emotional neglect](#) and stroke," said study author Robert S. Wilson, PhD, a [neuropsychologist](#) at Rush.

The findings are published in the September 19, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

For the study, 1,040 participants in the Memory and Aging Project who did not have dementia and were 55 years of age or older took a survey measuring physical and [emotional abuse](#) before the age of 18. The retrospective survey questions focused on whether the participant felt loved by their parents or [caregiver](#) when they were younger, were made to feel afraid or intimidated and whether they were punished with a belt

or other object. Questions about [parental divorce](#) and the family's financial needs were also included.

Over a period of three and a half years, 257 people in the study died, of which 192 had a brain autopsy to look for signs of stroke. Forty of the participants had evidence of a stroke based on their [medical history](#) or an examination. A total of 89 people had signs of a stroke based on the autopsy results.

The study found that the risk of stroke was nearly three times higher in those people who reported a moderately high level of childhood emotional neglect than those who reported a moderately low level. The results stayed the same after considering factors such as diabetes, physical activity, smoking, anxiety and heart problems.

"Interestingly, the autopsy showed emotional neglect was associated with the presence of cerebral infarctions," said Dr. David A. Bennett, director of the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center and co-author of the study. "The results add to a growing body of evidence suggesting that early life factors such as traumatic childhood experiences influence the development of physical illness and common chronic conditions of old age."

Wilson noted that a limitation of the study is that neglect was reported from memory many years after occurrence, so participants may not have remembered events accurately.

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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