

# Research to tackle the triple challenge of dementia, hearing and vision impairment

March 9 2016

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The combined impact of dementia, age-related hearing and vision impairment is to be investigated by a new multi-million European research consortium led by The University of Manchester.

Seven in ten Europeans over the age of 65 suffer from either sight or [hearing problems](#) and over two thirds suffer from depression or dementia. When combined together the cumulative impact of these dual or triple impairments is far greater than the individual conditions. The scale of combined sensory and cognitive problems is substantial but poorly understood.

The five year [SENSE-Cog](#) project, led by The University of Manchester, has been funded with €6.5m from the European Commission's [Horizon 2020](#) research programme. The project aims to investigate this combined impact and develop new tools that could improve quality of life and optimise health and social care budgets across Europe.

Dr Iracema Leroi, an academic psychiatrist from The University of Manchester, who is the lead researcher on the project, said: "In combination these problems have a much greater effect than each one individually. Imagine if you have dementia which affects your memory or interferes with your recognition of familiar people. When you add visual impairment to that, you can understand why those affected may experience even greater cognitive difficulty or even experience altered behaviour such as agitation or hallucinations.

"The burden on carers – often family members – is also increased as they are required to do much more on a daily basis and we see a greater number of these suffering from burn-out."

The project seeks to define the scale of the challenges so that authorities across the continent can allocate resources more optimally. At the same time, researchers will also develop online tests, guides and multi-lingual training manuals to help medical professionals diagnose and treat the combined problems more effectively.

Minority groups are particularly disadvantaged with respect to diagnosis

and treatment of mental and sensory problems, so researchers will be seeking out people from these groups to participate in the research.

The programme will also trial an intervention of at-home support for people with dual- and triple-impairments. This will be supported by specialist sensory therapists based at Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and will focus around pragmatic solutions to support both the affected person and their carer.

Dr Piers Dawes, a University of Manchester audiologist and co-lead of the SENSE-Cog project said: "Millions of people in the UK and wider EU are affected by this combination of [problems](#) and it's only going to get more prevalent as the population ages. That's why we have to understand the scale of the problem and then equip the public, carers and [health care workers](#) with the tools they need to deal with it. If we could reduce disability due to hearing and [vision impairment](#), there is huge potential to improve mental well-being and even delay the deterioration of dementia."

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Research to tackle the triple challenge of dementia, hearing and vision impairment (2016, March 9) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-03-tackle-triple-dementia-vision-impairment.html>

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