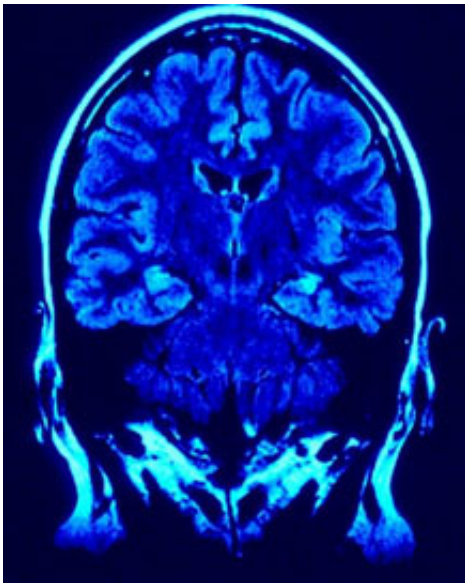


Traumatic brain injury costs £15 billion a year in the UK, says new research

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An estimated 60% of adult offenders in the UK have had a traumatic brain injury. Credit: University of Exeter

Traumatic brain injury costs a total of £15 billion nationally every year and puts young people at higher risk of poor mental health and offending, according to research published today by Centre for Mental Health, involving a University of Exeter expert.

"Traumatic Brain Injury and offending: an [economic analysis](#)" finds that head injuries (in which the brain is damaged by impact, such as from a fall, a [road accident](#) or violence) double a person's risk of later mental

illness. These injuries dramatically increase the risk of earlier death, and can play a significant role in increasing the risk of future offending - by up to 50% according to some studies.

The report is funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, which also supported an evaluation of the Disabilities Trust's brain injury linkworker service at a young offender institution as part of its Transition to Adulthood (T2A) programme, also launched today.

Traumatic brain injuries cause about 160,000 people to be admitted to hospital in the UK each year, and about 1.3 million people are living with disabilities resulting from these injuries. Injuries at a young age can result in serious and long-term impairments in brain development.

The economic cost of head injuries is £15 billion a year. This figure includes the costs of lost work, of health and social care and of premature mortality.

An estimated 60% of adult offenders in the UK have had a [traumatic brain injury](#), six times higher than the rate among the wider population.

Traumatic Brain Injury and offending finds that the long-term cost of head injury in a young offender is some £440,000.

Prof Huw Williams, of the University of Exeter, adds: "Across the world children and young people with traumatic brain injuries are failed by their societies and end up in prisons - at very high cost. But imprisoning young people with traumatic brain injuries seems to make matters worse, putting them at a higher risk of suicide and [violence](#). There are many practical, low cost, ways to manage the effects of a head injury. It's vital that children and young people affected are helped to mature, and take their place in society. Any government that seeks a humane approach towards vulnerable people, and fiscally sound policies, should take

notice, and act in all our best interests".

Lord Ramsbotham, a Vice President of Centre for Mental Health, said: "Head injuries are very common, very serious, and can cause persistent problems. They are the biggest cause of death and disability in young people today worldwide. The costs of head injuries are too high to be ignored and the consequences too serious to be neglected."

The evaluation of the Brain Injury Linkworker Service identifies ways in which young people in custody can be helped to rehabilitate more effectively. The linkworker scheme was found to help young people in custody who have sustained head injuries, as well as families and staff members. It finds that young people valued having someone to talk to, help understanding their condition and practical support from avoiding fights to getting work.

Deborah Fortescue from the Disabilities Trust said: "The prevalence of brain injury within the criminal justice system should no longer be ignored. We have a great opportunity to think differently; we must screen for brain injury throughout the criminal justice system, train staff to address their needs and embed specialist services. Ultimately we need to understand the pathways to crime, so that we can learn which of the multiple factors and circumstances appear to support positive outcomes for those people who have a brain injury, but never come into contact with the criminal justice system."

Dr Debbie Pippard, Head of Programmes at the Barrow Cadbury Trust and Vice-Chair of the T2A Alliance, said: "Barrow Cadbury Trust is pleased to support these important contributions to the evidence base. It's clear that brain injury is a major factor in the lives of many [young people](#) who commit crime, and that, with the right support, they can turn their lives around. In order to protect the public and make best use of public money, it's in the interest of all criminal justice agencies to

become more proficient at identifying [brain injury](#) and findings ways to support rehabilitation."

Ash's story

Ash was referred to the Linkworker service in December 2014 upon his arrival to custody.

He had been charged with a number of offences including wounding with intent.

It emerged that Ash had sustained multiple [head injuries](#), the first occurring when he was six months old and the most recent occurring in 2013. As a result of these injuries Ash suffered seizures and struggled with memory problems, processing information and dealing with multiple tasks. In addition, Ash reported episodes of uncontrollable anger during which he was unaware of what he was doing.

The Linkworker secured a referral to neurology and attended the appointment with Ash and shared information with the consultant. The Linkworker contributed to a pre-sentence report, explaining Ash's cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems following his brain injuries and provided advice and guidance to his family on how to support Ash day-to-day.

As a result Ash received support and strategies to manage his anger and memory problems. Ash now independently uses the techniques learnt to improve his memory; he writes lists of things he needs to do and leaves these lists on his shoes so that he remembers to take them when he leaves the house.

Ash is now attending college and believes these new skills have improved his ability to independently manage his memory impairments

on a day-to-day basis. To date, he has not re-offended.

Provided by University of Exeter

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