

Researcher finds increased dementia risk in older adults with a criminal background

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Using national registry data, Carmen Solares Canal identified individuals over 50 and collected data on their criminal convictions and health. The [doctoral thesis](#) involves just over 3.5 million people, of whom 800,000 have a criminal background.

Older adults who have committed serious crimes, been convicted multiple times, or received long prison sentences were found to have a significantly higher risk of developing both dementia and mild cognitive impairment (MCI).

"It's likely because people who commit serious crimes often live under difficult circumstances. Their physical and [mental health](#) is often worse than the general population, and their level of education is low. All these factors increase the risk of developing dementia later in life," says Solares Canal.

Genes play a role

In a sub-study, Solares Canal investigated how [genetic factors](#) and family-related environmental factors influence the connection between so-called externalizing behavior and Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Externalizing behavior includes criminality, drug abuse, and aggressiveness.

"We could show that relatives of people with a criminal background have a higher risk of developing dementia. Although the risk is significantly higher for parents compared to relatives like grandparents, aunts and uncles," says Solares Canal, and continues:

"The increased risk of dementia is influenced by a combination of genetic factors, home environment factors, as well as health and

[psychosocial problems](#) throughout life," says Solares Canal.

Health problems more common in older criminals

The thesis also shows that older criminals overall suffer from several health problems, both physical and mental, compared to other adults of the same age. These health problems may include alcohol and drug abuse, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, stroke, and cancer.

"This provides us with an increased understanding of how a criminal lifestyle affects an individual's health as they age. This knowledge may also be used to develop preventive strategies within the [public sector](#) and could benefit everyone working with [older adults](#)."

More information: The impact of criminal and externalizing behaviors on aging: Long-term associations with health and dementia. oru.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1832703&dswid=1931

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