

Patients with both schizophrenia and epilepsy die alarmingly early

May 16 2019



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More than one in four patients with schizophrenia and epilepsy die before reaching the age of fifty. This is shown by research from Aarhus

University and Aarhus University Hospital. The results, which have been published in the journal *Epilepsia*, aim to contribute to ensuring patients will receive the correct treatment in time.

Patients who suffer from schizophrenia and epilepsy are particularly vulnerable. In the study, the researchers followed more than 1.5 million people and classified them according to whether they were diagnosed with epilepsy, schizophrenia or the combination of epilepsy and schizophrenia on their twenty-fifth birthday.

"There was an exceedingly [high mortality rate](#) among people with these disorders, particularly those who suffer from the combination of epilepsy and schizophrenia. More than 25 per cent of them die between the ages of 25-50," says Jakob Christensen, who is one of the researchers behind the study.

He is clinical associate professor and DMSc at the Department of Clinical Medicine at Aarhus University and consultant at the Department of Neurology at Aarhus University Hospital. He is also a member of the national psychiatric project iPSYCH and the epilepsy project EpiPsych which carries out research into the correlation between epilepsy and mental disorders.

Patients fall between two chairs

The researchers hope to see the results raise awareness about the difficulties of living with epilepsy and schizophrenia.

"The results are really intended to help healthcare professionals develop new working processes so that this group of patients can get the right treatment. We already know from previous studies, that this group of [patients](#) die from a wide range of lifestyle diseases, and that some of these are preventable," says Jakob Christensen, who continues:

"With the way things are now, this patient group can easily fall between two chairs and end up being sent back and forth between different medical specialists or between hospitals and their general practitioner. It appears that people with epilepsy and schizophrenia are particularly vulnerable—and there is certainly room for improvement in the way the healthcare system deals with them and their treatment."

Studies have identified a clear association between epilepsy and mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and psychosis. A Danish study has shown that people with epilepsy have a risk of developing schizophrenia that is two-and-a-half times higher than those without epilepsy.

The study

Among the subjects in the study, 18,943 were diagnosed with epilepsy, 10,208 were diagnosed with schizophrenia, and 471 were diagnosed with both epilepsy and schizophrenia before they turned twenty-five. The mortality rate for these subjects at age fifty was 3.1 per cent for people who did not suffer from epilepsy and schizophrenia; 10.7 per cent for people with epilepsy; 17.4 per cent for people with schizophrenia; and 27.2 per cent for people with both [epilepsy](#) and [schizophrenia](#).

Background for the results:

The study is a population-based nationwide cohort study of people born in Denmark between 1960-87 who were resident in Denmark on their twenty-fifth birthday.

More information: Katrine M. Andersen et al. Premature mortality in persons with epilepsy and schizophrenia: A population-based nationwide cohort study, *Epilepsia* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/epi.15158](https://doi.org/10.1111/epi.15158)

Provided by Aarhus University

Citation: Patients with both schizophrenia and epilepsy die alarmingly early (2019, May 16)
retrieved 19 September 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-patients-schizophrenia-epilepsy-die-alarmingly.html>

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