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THE INDEPENDENT

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Stay in school longer to avoid dementia

By Relaxnews

Researchers have found that individuals with 'more' education are better equipped to stave off dementia.

These findings published in the *Advanced Access* online edition of the journal *Brain* on July 26 confirm a decade of past studies that have also concluded more schooling equals a decreased risk of suffering from dementia, defined as the "loss of intellectual functions" including memory, orientation, calculation, language, attention and thinking.

Carol Brayne, MSc, MD, MRCP, MFPHM, a professor of epidemiology and principal investigator at the University of Cambridge, led the study and discovered higher education and loss of intellectual functions is not reserved solely for the upwardly mobile or those with healthier lifestyles.

"People with different levels of education have similar brain pathology but ... those with more education are better able to compensate for the effects of dementia," noted the researchers.

According to a July 24 University of Cambridge announcement, "each additional year of education" decreases your risk of developing dementia by 11 percent.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates over 29 million suffer from dementia globally and projects "Africa, Asia and Latin America together could have more than 80 million people with dementia by the year 2025."

Co-author of the study, Hannah Keage, PhD, a research associate at Cambridge funded by the Marie Curie International Incoming Research Fellowship, explained "education in early life appears to enable some people to cope with a lot of changes in their brain before showing dementia symptoms."

Brayne underscored the point saying, "Education is known to be good for population health and equity. This study provides strong support for investment in early life factors which should have an impact on society and the whole lifespan."

Additionally, Lon White, MD, MPH, a research scientist and neuroepidemiologist at the Kuakini Medical Center in Hawaii, told Relaxnews on July 25, "both low educational attainment (reflecting childhood experiences) and stress during middle adult life appear to be legitimate risk factors for late onset dementia.

"Everybody sees the phenomenon, and no one really understand it."

The WHO explains, "Global population ageing will inevitably result in huge increases in the number of cases of dementia. The risk of developing the condition rises steeply with age in people over 60; the possibilities for prevention and treatment are limited. "

"It is particularly interesting because most of our education occurs in childhood, but the dementia is at the end of life," said White.

White noted, "prevalence of dementia doubles every 5-7 years after the age of 60-65 years, affecting approximately 50% of the population aged around 90 years."

"My best guess is that a major part of the phenomenon is related to greater education in childhood stimulating the brain to develop redundant and backup 'software' for dealing with just about every challenge... but we all hope that however that stimulation works, that it will still be operative in adult life, providing opportunity to keep building our

cognitive ('software') reserves, perhaps with some allied effect on the numbers of neurons and connections we hold onto into late life.

"But that's not much more than a guess and a hope," added White.

He was not involved with the Brayne et al research but independently published, also in *Brain*, on July 17 a scientific commentary on "mid-life stress" factors and "educational attainment" as risk factors for developing dementia.

Full study, " Education, the brain and dementia: neuroprotection or compensation" accessible via Advanced Access after July 26: <http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/papbyrecent.dtl>

[<http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/papbyrecent.dtl>]Full study, "Educational attainment and mid-life stress as risk factors for dementia in late life": <http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/extract/awq201v1>

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