

## Poor mental health in middle age may raise the risk of developing dementia.

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### Introduction

To better understand the connection between dementia symptoms and psychological discomfort, researchers studied 67,688 people for an average of 25 years (stress, depressive mood, exhaustion, and nervousness). The researchers discovered that signs of psychological distress are linked to a higher incidence of dementia. It may be possible to prevent dementia if dementia risk factors are well understood. Over 10 million new cases of dementia are diagnosed each year, and there are already 55 million individuals living with it globally, according to the World Health Organization [1]. Researchers must comprehend the causes of dementia in order to reduce the risk of dementia in a population. Many studies have examined the relationship between psychological distress, which is a catch-all phrase for symptoms of stress, worry, and depression, and dementia. The connection between the two is still not evident. Prior research found that individuals with dementia had a higher risk of dementia compared to those without dementia or with declining dementia symptoms. These individuals had depression levels that were becoming increasingly severe, chronically high, or chronically low. Anxiety, physical weariness, and psychological stress have been linked to a later onset of dementia, according to other studies. Nevertheless, a 28-year follow-up study on the connection between depression and dementia discovered that dementia, not sadness, was the primary cause of depression [2].

### Alzheimer's disease and mental health

Although psychological anguish is frequent in the early stages of dementia, research that determines risk must have a substantial time lag between measuring psychological distress and the prevalence of dementia for the findings to be regarded as accurate. Studies with an aged population and brief follow-up times are unable to distinguish between causal risk variables and early (prodromal) dementia symptoms [3]. The competing risk of death should be taken into consideration in investigations on psychological discomfort and dementia. Some authors claim that research should consider the possibility that participants with mental health issues tend to pass away earlier and might not survive long enough to develop dementia. Using one of the largest population data sets, extensive follow-up, and detailed modelling of deaths from other causes, we could explain that association [4].

### The risk of dementia is increasing by up to 24%

The researchers discovered that signs of psychological distress were linked to an increased risk of dementia of 17–24% in an etiological Poisson model and an increased incidence of dementia of 8–12% in a Fine-Gray model, after accounting for the competing risk of death and other factors that affect the risk of dementia. The early influence of mental health on later dementia was another finding made by my team in 2022. We studied national medical records for 1.7 million New Zealanders over a 30-year period and discovered that a mental problem in adolescence predicted a four-fold higher risk of dementia in old age [5].

### Study limitations

The researchers point out that people who did not complete the FINRISK survey or whose responses were incomplete also had more risk factors, a higher chance of dementia, and a higher risk of death, and that this selective participation and non-responsiveness may have skewed the study's findings. The researchers also admitted that they did not use a validated multi-item questionnaire to measure psychological distress, instead using a variety of single-item measures for various symptoms of psychological distress. These measurements do, however, significantly correlate and exhibit a pattern of connection with dementia. Furthermore, the researchers admitted that there was no information on dementia risk factors such as hearing loss, traumatic brain injury, and minimal social contact. There is no "longitudinal perspective" for the symptoms because study participants were only asked to report their current psychological distress symptoms once. When the researchers excluded those with a follow-up of less than 10 years from one of the models used to calculate dementia risk, the sensitivity analyses revealed no significant relationships between psychological distress and Alzheimer's disease.

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