

Large-scale study confirms link between creativity and mental illness

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(Medical Xpress)—People in creative professions are treated more often for mental illness than the general population, there being a particularly salient connection between writing and schizophrenia. This according to researchers at Karolinska Institutet, whose large-scale Swedish registry study is the most comprehensive ever in its field.

Last year, the team showed that artists and scientists were more common amongst families where bipolar disorder and [schizophrenia](#) is present, compared to the population at large. They subsequently expanded their study to many more psychiatric diagnoses - such as schizoaffective disorder, depression, anxiety syndrome, [alcohol abuse](#), drug abuse, autism, ADHD, [anorexia nervosa](#) and suicide - and to include people in [outpatient care](#) rather than exclusively [hospital patients](#).

The present study tracked almost 1.2 million patients and their relatives, identified down to second-cousin level. Since all were matched with healthy controls, the study incorporated much of the Swedish population from the most recent decades. All data was anonymized and cannot be linked to any individuals.

The results confirmed those of their previous study: certain mental illness - bipolar disorder - is more prevalent in the entire group of people with artistic or scientific professions, such as dancers, researchers, photographers and authors. Authors specifically also were more common among most of the other psychiatric diseases (including schizophrenia, depression, anxiety syndrome and substance abuse) and were almost 50

per cent more likely to commit suicide than the general population.

The researchers also observed that creative professions were more common in the relatives of patients with schizophrenia, [bipolar disorder](#), anorexia nervosa and, to some extent, autism. According to Simon Kyaga, consultant in psychiatry and doctoral student at the Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, the results give cause to reconsider approaches to mental illness.

"If one takes the view that certain phenomena associated with the patients illness are beneficial, it opens the way for a new approach to treatment," he says. "In that case, the doctor and patient must come to an agreement on what is to be treated, and at what cost. In psychiatry and medicine generally there has been a tradition to see the disease in black-and-white terms and to endeavour to treat the patient by removing everything regarded as morbid."

More information: Kyaga, S. et al., Mental illness, suicide and creativity: 40-Year prospective total population study. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, corrected proof online 9 October 2012. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/qa ... &itool=pubmed_docsum](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/qa...&itool=pubmed_docsum)

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

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