Through the looking glass: Intimate partner violence is associated with poorer cognitive performance in mid-life
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What is Intimate Partner Violence?

Definition: Any behaviour intended to gain power or control of an intimate partner.

Types:
- Financial control
- Verbal abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse

Brain health outcomes:
- 90% report traumatic brain injuries.

IPV is a significant risk for traumatic brain injury.

National prevalence

- 24% of women in the UK will experience physical or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

WHO European region
- The UK has the 4th highest prevalence of IPV from 49 countries in the WHO European region.

COVID UK
- 25% police reports
- 49% calls to helplines

Are there differences in memory and thinking between people with and without IPV related brain injury?

Who participated in the study?

Sample size: 632 participants
Location: 5 sites across U.K and Ireland
Age: 40.59
Criteria: No history of neurodegenerative disease.

What did we do?

Memory and thinking: Participants undertook 11 tests of memory and thinking skills (cognitive performance) on a touch screen computer. These included tests of:

- Attention skills
- Verbal memory (like learning and remembering lists of words)
- Executive function skills (which measure things like planning, decision making, switching tasks and staying focused)
- Visuospatial skills (which measure things like navigation, visual problem solving, or spatial awareness)

Results: What is through the looking glass?

Average age: 51.2 years
Female %: 81% IPV
61% No Exposure
60% PTSD+

IPV
No Exposure
PTSD+

Visuospatial reasoning
Visuospatial recognition
Visuospatial associative learning

A
- There were no differences between people with and without an history of IPV in verbal memory, attention or executive function tests.
- Visuospatial tests were different.

B
- There were no differences between people with a history of IPV and people with PTSD in verbal memory or attention tests.
- Visuospatial tests were different.
- Executive function was also different. People with traumatic brain injuries are often worse at these types of test.

What is the bottom line?

- We know that contact sports players who are exposed to repeated traumatic brain injuries have a higher risk of neurodegenerative disease, like Alzheimer’s disease, compared to the general population.
- Despite a high prevalence of brain injury, there is hardly any research in intimate partner violence. We are NOT LOOKING.
- This research shows, for the first time, long-term brain health consequences of traumatic brain injury from IPV.

IPV related brain injuries ➤ Contact sports + Military

- Alzheimer’s disease is the most common neurodegenerative disease.
- It can be seen in the brain decades before the onset of symptoms.
- It starts in and near an area of the brain called the hippocampus.
- The hippocampus is important for visuospatial tasks, these are tasks that help us identify, integrate, and analyse space and visual cues around us.
- Visuospatial memory is thought to be an early marker of Alzheimer’s disease.

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2. Livingston et al (2020), The Lancet, 396, 413-446;

What happens to Alice?