New Genetic Risk Marker for Late-Life Depression

Discovered by new study in Biological Psychiatry

Philadelphia, PA, November 3, 2015 – One of the most powerful predictors in neuropsychiatry is the epsilon 4 (ε4) allele of the apolipoprotein gene (APOE).

Individuals who carry this ε4 variant of APOE are at increased risk for developing Alzheimer's disease, early age of Alzheimer's disease onset, and more rapid progression of Alzheimer's disease symptoms. APOE ε4 has also been associated with atherosclerosis as well as cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease.

A new study published in the current issue of Biological Psychiatry suggests that even when controlling for the risk for Alzheimer’s disease, the APOE ε4 allele also conveys an increased risk for late-life depression.

In this study, researchers examined the relationship between APOE ε4 and depression in a large population-based sample of 839 older Swedish adults followed over 5 years.

"In our study, the presence of the APOE ε4 predicted future depression, even after excluding individuals who later developed dementia," explained corresponding author Dr. Silke Kern at the University of Gothenburg. "It was also related to dementia. APOE ε4 might be a marker for identifying older persons at risk to develop depression or dementia, which could be important for prevention and early detection of these common disorders."

"Late-life depression is an under-appreciated source of distress and disability in older people," said Dr. John Krystal, Editor of Biological Psychiatry. "The current study suggests a new link to the biology of Alzheimer's disease, even among people who do not show signs of memory impairment."

About Biological Psychiatry

Biological Psychiatry is the official journal of the Society of Biological Psychiatry, whose purpose is to promote excellence in scientific research and education in fields that investigate the nature, causes, mechanisms and treatments of disorders of thought, emotion, or behavior. In accord with this mission, this peer-reviewed, rapid-publication, international journal publishes both basic and clinical contributions from all disciplines and research areas relevant to the pathophysiology and treatment of major psychiatric disorders.

The journal publishes novel results of original research which represent an important new lead or significant impact on the field, particularly those addressing genetic and environmental risk factors, neural circuitry and neurochemistry, and important new therapeutic approaches. Reviews and commentaries that focus on topics of current research and interest are also encouraged.

Biological Psychiatry is one of the most selective and highly cited journals in the field of psychiatric neuroscience. It is ranked 6th out of 140 Psychiatry titles and 10th out of 252 Neurosciences titles in the Journal Citations Reports® published by Thomson Reuters. The 2014 Impact Factor score for Biological Psychiatry is 10.255.

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