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EDUCATION DOES NOT PROTECT AGAINST AGE-RELATED MEMORY LOSS
USC RESEARCHERS FIND BETTER-EDUCATED OLDER ADULTS
HAD GREATER DECLINES IN WORD MEMORY THAN THEIR LESS-EDUCATED PEERS

Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore (January 17, 2007) – Adults over 70 with higher levels of education forgot words at a greater rate than less educated adults, according to a new study from the University of Southern California. The findings, published in the January issue of *Research on Aging*, published by SAGE, suggest that educated adults may lose the ability to use their schooling to compensate for normal, age-related memory loss.

“We are starting to find evidence of how the brain works over the entire lifecycle,” said study director Eileen Crimmins of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. “The study clarifies that while cognitive performance in old age is related to early life education; not all aspects of cognitive performance relate to education in the same way.”

“Even though we found that those with higher education do better on mental status tests that look for dementia-like symptoms,” said lead author Dawn Alley of the University of Pennsylvania, who conducted the research along with Kristen Sellers of the National Women’s Health Action Network, “education does not protect against more normal, age-related declines, like those seen on memory tests.”

The verbal memory of participants, born in 1923 or earlier, was tested by immediate and delayed recall four times over a seven-year period. Researchers found that, while individuals with higher levels of education had higher abilities at any given age, it was those same participants whose performance dropped the most. The decline was small but significant. Other factors could account for the difference, they caution, such as the possibility that less educated adults had a greater rate of decline earlier in life, and they wouldn’t recommend limiting schooling based on the results.

The article, “Education and Cognitive Decline in Older Americans, Results From the AHEAD Sample” published by SAGE in the January issue of *Research on Aging*, is freely available for a limited time at <http://roa.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/29/1/73>.

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For more than 25 years, scholars, researchers, and health-care professionals have turned to Research on Aging for the latest analyses on the critical issues facing today’s elderly population. This outstanding journal is an international forum on the aged and the aging process, exploring important issues, questions, and controversies, such as Alzheimer’s disease, caregiving, age discrimination, social stress, demographics, retirement satisfaction, and social support.

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