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## **Abstract**

### **Background**

Several studies have assessed the link between psychosocial risk factors and stroke; however, the results are inconsistent. We have conducted a systemic review and meta-analysis of cohort or case-control studies to ascertain the association between psychosocial risk factors (psychological, vocational, behavioral, interpersonal and neuropsychological) and the risk of stroke.

### **Methods**

Systematic searches were undertaken in MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, PsycInfo and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews between 2000 and January 2017. Two reviewers independently screened titles, abstracts and full texts. One reviewer assessed quality and extracted data, which was checked by a second reviewer. For studies that reported risk estimates, a meta-analysis was performed.

### **Results**

We identified 41 cohort studies and five case-control studies. No neuropsychological papers were found. Overall pooled adjusted estimates showed that all other psychosocial risk factors were independent risk factors for stroke. Psychological factors increased the risk of stroke by 39% (HR 1.39 95% CI:1.27;1.51), vocational by 35% (HR 1.35 95% CI: 1.20;1.51), and interpersonal by 16% (HR 1.16 95% CI:1.03;1.31). and the effects of behavioral factors were equivocal (HR 0.94 95% CI: 0.20;4.31). The meta-analyses were affected by heterogeneity.

### **Conclusions**

Psychosocial risk factors are associated with an increased risk of stroke

### **Key words (3 to 5)**

Stroke, psychosocial, risk factor

## **Background**

Stroke and heart disease are leading causes of death, and stroke is a major cause of complex disability globally<sup>1</sup>. Identification of modifiable risk factors for stroke over and above known risk factors for chronic disease may provide more targets for stroke prevention. With increasing evidence that psychosocial factors increase the risk of cardiovascular disease generally,<sup>2</sup> there is a need to elucidate whether specific psychosocial factors increase the risk of stroke and transient ischaemic attack (TIA).

Several meta-analyses have shown that some psychosocial risk factors increase the risk of stroke. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis consisting of 14 studies found a 33% increase in the risk of stroke incidence for those with perceived psychosocial stress<sup>3</sup>. Another meta-analysis indicated that depression significantly increases the risk of stroke, and this increase may have been independent of other risk factors, including hypertension and diabetes<sup>4</sup>.

Single studies have shown that apathy rather than depression has the stronger association with stroke<sup>5</sup>, and another showed that lower life satisfaction is associated with an increased risk of stroke, especially in women<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, depression is associated with other psychosocial risk factors such as reduced social support, which, in turn, have been associated with stroke<sup>7</sup> and atherogenesis<sup>8</sup>.

The mechanisms of action between psychosocial risk factors and stroke are not fully understood but are likely to be multifaceted and include lifestyle factors (e.g., poor diet, smoking, alcohol use, and low physical activity) and physiological components (e.g., hypertension, diabetes mellitus, obesity, and inflammation), which may be mediated by psychological factors (e.g., depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-efficacy).

We conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to explore the specific contribution of a variety of psychosocial risk factors to the risk of stroke and TIA. We used the broad categories of psychological (e.g. depression, anxiety, mood, stress, distress, life satisfaction, resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, schizophrenia), vocational (e.g. employment, work, job satisfaction, education, finance, poverty), behavioral (e.g. coping, challenging behavior, anger), interpersonal (e.g. emotional support, social support, isolation, life changing events, loneliness, quality of life, social activity, leisure) and neuropsychological (e.g. language, aphasia, memory, visuospatial, executive function) to summarize our findings.

### **Search strategy**

Systematic searches of published papers indexed in MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, PsycInfo and Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews between 2000 and January 2017 were undertaken using a strategy combining selected subject headings and keywords relating to psychosocial risk factors and stroke. The search strategy was developed for use in Medline and amended for use in other databases. Manual searching of relevant systematic reviews and the reference lists of included studies was also performed. Only English language studies were included.

### **Study selection**

Two reviewers (from AC, CEL, JL, KP, HS) independently screened titles and abstracts, where available, of bibliographic records retrieved. Full text copies of potentially relevant studies were retrieved and assessed by two reviewers (from CEL, JL, KP, HS). Study selection was undertaken using predetermined selection criteria to assess eligibility. Studies were included in the meta-analysis if they met all the following criteria: (1) cohort or case-control design; (2) exposure to one or more psychosocial factors, including psychological, vocational, behavioral, interpersonal, and neuropsychological; (3) use of adjusted models or

matching procedures that controlled for at least one potential confounder; (4) reported risk estimates for stroke outcomes with 95% CI comparing participants who had experienced exposure to psychosocial risk factors to participants who had not experienced exposure to psychosocial risk factors, or who had experienced psychosocial risk factors to a lesser degree; and (5) study population consisted of only those without prior stroke at baseline (for cohort studies). A broad definition of stroke was adopted to include ischemic stroke, hemorrhagic stroke, subarachnoid hemorrhage and TIA. Studies were excluded if: (1) they reported only fatal strokes without reporting total incidence of stroke occurrence; (2) stroke occurrence was based only on self report without confirmation using medical records; (3) cognition/memory was the risk factor under study without any other psychosocial factor; (4) a composite construct of psychological distress was used (unless a measure of psychosocial stress could be extracted); or (5) there were fewer than 20 participants. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, with recourse to a third reviewer where necessary.

### **Data extraction and quality appraisal**

One reviewer (from MLH, CEL, JL, KP, HS, AC) extracted data using a review-specific data extraction tool. Data to be extracted included details of study aim, study design and methods, study population including age and sex, psychosocial risk factors under investigation, stroke outcomes and measurement or confirmation method, number and type of confounders adjusted for, study limitations and conclusions. Methodological quality was assessed using the NIH Quality Assessment Tool for Observational Cohort and Cross-Sectional Studies<sup>9</sup>. A second reviewer (from CEL, JL, KP, HS, AC) checked extracted data and quality assessment. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, with recourse to a third reviewer where necessary.

### **Data synthesis**



Studies were synthesized through a narrative review with tabulation of the outcomes from the included studies. Studies were classified into five groups: psychological, behavioral, vocational, interpersonal and neuropsychological. Outcomes selected for synthesis were based on those available for all persons, all types of stroke and those considered to characterise the type of psychosocial risk factor most accurately, and were made by consensus. Where studies presented outcomes only by sub-groups, whether by population or type of stroke, these were included in the analysis and identified. For studies reporting risk estimates, a meta-analysis was performed to pool estimates of association. Random effects models were estimated given the likelihood of heterogeneity. Hazard ratios (HRs) were used as the common risk estimate for cohort studies (relative risks (RR) were considered equivalent to HR)<sup>3</sup>, and odds ratios (ORs) for case-control studies. Where cohort or case-control studies reported a different risk estimate (i.e. cohort studies presenting ORs or RR and case-control studies HR), a series of sensitivity and sub-group analyses were undertaken based on pooling by the type of risk estimates and/or study designs. Other sensitivity analyses assessed the effects of specific outlying studies. If different adjusted risk estimates were reported, the most fully adjusted estimate was included. Heterogeneity was assessed through visual inspection of Forest plots and the use of  $I^2$  statistics following recognised guidance regarding interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Publication bias was assessed using funnel plots. Meta-analyses were undertaken in Cochrane Collaboration Review Manager (version 5.3).

## **Results**

### **Study Characteristics**

We identified 4889 citations, of which 46 were included in the meta-analysis (Fig.1). Thirty studies examined the impact of psychological factors, 13 vocational factors, 2 behavioral factors, and 10 interpersonal factors on risk of stroke. No studies assessed neuropsychological factors. The characteristics of the cohort and case control studies are presented in Tables 1

and 2, respectively. Participants ranged in age at study baseline from 18<sup>11</sup> to 100<sup>12</sup> years. Although most studies contained proportions of men and women between 40% to 60%<sup>6,11,12,13-41</sup>, eight cohort studies focused exclusively on men or women<sup>42-49</sup>. The cohort sizes ranged from 25 to 4718 participants<sup>20,50</sup>, while the case-control studies ranged in size from 346 to 26,949<sup>41,51</sup>. Length of follow-up ranged from 1 day to 35 years<sup>11,31</sup>. Although studies encompassed several risk factors in their analyses, only a subset considered comparable are presented in these analyses. All cohort studies and 3 case-control studies included participants with fatal and non-fatal strokes, whereas 2 case-control studies focused on participants with non-fatal strokes<sup>41,52</sup>. Studies controlled for between 3 and 16 confounders in their analyses, presenting their outcomes as HRs RR or ORs<sup>18,30,31,39</sup>. Most studies reported results for all people with stroke, although some studies also presented subgroups or focused only on subgroups, which included type of stroke (e.g. ischemic, hemorrhagic), sex, age group, ethnic origin and risk factor (e.g. depression, hostility, disability). Of the 41 cohort studies included, 29 were of good methodological quality, 11 fair and 1 poor. Three case-control studies were of good methodological quality, 1 fair and 1 poor.

### *Psychological Factors*

Twenty-seven cohort and three case-control studies examined the effects of psychological factors on the risk of stroke (Figure 2). Depression was the most common risk exposure, however stress, life satisfaction, and schizophrenia were reported in several studies, other factors included bipolar, panic disorder, morale, pessimism and sense of coherence. All except two cohort studies<sup>12,28</sup> showed an increased risk of stroke among people with psychological risk factors. The pooled adjusted hazard ratio was 1.44 (95% CI: 1.30; 1.59) with a high level of statistical heterogeneity ( $I^2 = 76\%$ ;  $p < 0.00001$ ). Exclusion of two cohort studies<sup>24,28</sup> that differed markedly reduced the pooled HR for the cohort studies presenting a

HR or RR (HR 1.25; 95% CI: 1.18; 1.33) and the overall meta-analysis (HR 1.39; 95% CI: 1.27; 1.51). In doing so, it reduced the statistical heterogeneity among the cohort studies reporting HR or RR ( $I^2$  declined from 67% to 26%) and all studies pooled ( $I^2$  declined from 76% to 67%). Exclusion of the cohort studies reporting a RR rather than HR<sup>16,33</sup> had limited effect on the pooled estimate (HR 1.39, 95% CI: 1.27; 1.52;  $I^2 = 68\%$ ,  $p < 0.00001$ ).

Additional planned sensitivity analyses that excluded other outlying studies or that focused on the different types of risk estimate and/or study designs used (e.g. cohort studies reporting HR; case-control studies reporting OR) had limited effect on the pooled estimates.

### *Vocational Factors*

Thirteen cohort studies considered the influence of vocational factors on the risk of stroke (Figure 3). Five studies included educational level as the risk exposure, others included social class, socioeconomic, job strain and poverty. Eleven cohort studies identified an increased risk of stroke among those with the vocational risk factor, with the other two cohort studies identifying differences between subgroups within their studies<sup>38,39</sup>. The pooled HR for the 13 studies was 1.35 (95% CI: 1.20; 1.51), with significant statistical heterogeneity evident ( $I^2 = 60\%$ ;  $p < 0.0004$ ) (Figure 3). A sensitivity analysis that excluded the two cohort studies with the subgroups had a limited effect on the pooled HR (HR 1.38; 95% CI: 1.23; 1.54) or the statistical heterogeneity ( $I^2 = 57\%$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ).

### *Behavioral Factors*

Two cohort studies assessed the effect of behavioral risk factors on stroke,<sup>18,43</sup> reporting contradictory findings. Both studies included anger as the risk exposure. Although Everson-Rose et al<sup>18</sup> found high levels of hostility associated with an increased risk of stroke, Eng et al<sup>43</sup> reported that anger expression had a protective effect against subsequent strokes. The

pooled HR was 0.94 (95% CI: 0.20; 4.31) with a high level of heterogeneity ( $I^2 = 91\%$ ;  $p=0.0009$ ) (Figure 4).

### *Interpersonal Factors*

Eight cohort studies and two case-control studies examined the effects of interpersonal factors on the risk of stroke (Figure 5). The most common risk exposure was social support, major life events, social burden and marital dissolution were also examined. Six cohort studies and a case-control study showed an increased risk of stroke for those with interpersonal risk factors. Two cohort studies and a case-control study identified an increased risk of stroke for those without the risk factor<sup>28,39,40</sup>, although for one cohort study<sup>39</sup> and a subgroup of the case-control study<sup>40</sup> the effect was marginal. The overall pooled HR was 1.16 (95% CI: 1.03; 1.31), with a high degree of heterogeneity ( $I^2=74\%$ ;  $p=0.00001$ ). The pooled HR for the cohort studies (HR 1.11, 95% CI: 0.98; 1.26;  $I^2=65\%$ ;  $p=0.003$ ) was more conservative than that for the case-control studies (HR 1.40, 95% CI: 0.93; 2.13;  $I^2=87\%$ ;  $p=0.0005$ ). Exclusion of a cohort study through sensitivity analysis<sup>28</sup> whose outcome appeared to differ markedly from the other studies had limited effect on the overall pooled HR (1.17, 95% CI: 1.04; 1.32;  $I^2=73\%$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ). Further planned sensitivity analyses that assessed the effects of excluding studies reporting different types of outcome measure (i.e. HR or OR) had no significant effect on the overall pooled estimates.

### *Publication bias*

Funnel plots for the meta-analysis of the effects of psychological risk factors on stroke appeared to be asymmetric, with both smaller studies and case-control studies presenting larger hazard ratios identifying a risk associated with psychological factors than from cohort studies and larger studies. The funnel plots for the meta-analyses of vocational and interpersonal risk factors showed a tendency for smaller studies to report larger effects both

in term of a risk or no risk associated with the factor. As the funnel plot for studies assessing behavioral risk factors contained only two studies, no discernible pattern was evident.

### **Suggested mechanisms**

The most frequently suggested mechanisms for the association between a psychosocial factor and stroke were related to lifestyle factors (table 3), including smoking, physical inactivity and alcohol intake. Lifestyle factors were suggested as a mechanism for psychological, vocational, and interpersonal processes. Physiological mechanisms were also repeatedly suggested for the association between psychosocial factors and stroke, particularly for the psychological and interpersonal categories. These were often suggested as indirect mechanisms, whereby a psychological factor, such as stress or depression, is associated with the activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical axis, which can result in hypertension, endothelial dysfunction and platelet activation, which in turn increases risk of stroke. The suggested mechanisms for vocational factors (educational level and socioeconomic status) are mainly related to lifestyle factors and stress responses.

### **Discussion**

The systematic review identified 46 studies, including 41 cohort studies and five cases control studies. The included studies were varied with regard to the description and exposure to the psychosocial risk factor. Of the 46 studies assessing the effects of the different psychosocial risk factors on the occurrence of stroke, 30 examined psychological factors, 12 vocational, 10 interpersonal and two behavioral risk factors. When meta-analysed, the forest plots and pooled estimates showed that all the different psychosocial risk factors were independent risk factors for stroke, except behavioural factors. Psychological factors were shown to increase the risk of stroke by 39%, vocational by 35% and interpersonal by 16%. Although behavioral factors were shown to have limited effect on the risk of stroke, this was based on only two studies and encompassed considerable uncertainty. The meta-analyses

were affected by substantial heterogeneity ( $I^2 \geq 60\%$ ). Sensitivity analyses, excluding heterogeneous studies and subgroup analyses pooling studies by study design and/or type of risk measure, suggested that risk estimates were robust. Despite this, the pooled HR should be interpreted with some caution as the extent of the risk remains uncertain. Funnel plots showed that the meta-analysis of psychological, vocational and interpersonal risk factors were affected by publication bias, whereas the plots for behavioral risk factors were less clear.

Consideration needs to be given to the cofounders. While we only included studies that adjusted for potential cofounders, some studies only adjusted for four, whereas others adjusted for 16. There was often a lack of information on important risk factors for stroke, such as hypertension, physical activity, atrial fibrillation, work-related factors or environment. Therefore, the results may also have been affected by other unadjusted or unmeasured risk factors; therefore caution is required when interpreting the results.

There is no accepted definition of a psychosocial risk factor. In this review we choose a broad definition, including psychological, vocational, behavioral and interpersonal factors. Our comprehensive approach has led to a wide variety of risk factors being included even within a classification. For example, the psychological category includes depression, stress, life satisfaction, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, dispositional pessimism and panic attacks; however, the common component was psychological. Comparability between studies was restricted, as the measures of the psychosocial exposure also varied greatly, with less than half the studies measuring the exposure with a validated assessment tool. This was similar across all the different categories. This brings into question the validity of the psychosocial risk factor measurement. Furthermore, many of the studies did not undertake repeated measures, with some only measuring exposure at baseline; repeated measures may have given more reliable estimates of the risk factor and also stability of the risk factor over time.

Psychosocial risk factors may induce or enhance a future stroke through a range of mechanisms. It is postulated that various psychosocial risk factors, such as depression, stress, anger and hostility, could trigger the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical axis, activating inflammatory pathways, which in turn increase C-reactive protein (CRP), fibrinogen, raise homocysteine and cortisol levels and interleukin<sup>53,54</sup>; these inflammatory markers have been related to stroke risk<sup>55-57</sup>. Extended exposure to these psychosocial factors can result in hypertension and an increase in free fatty acids, causing damage to the lining of the blood vessels and thus increased susceptibility to atherosclerosis. By identifying and controlling stress and depression or increasing social support, it may be possible to reduce the intensity or duration of these neuroendocrine responses and thus reduce the risk of stroke.

However, evidence for an inflammatory pathway has not been supported in other studies where adjusting for these variables did not alter observed relationships<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, individual patient meta-analyses of some of these inflammatory markers such as CRP suggested that the association depended considerably on conventional risk factors and plasma fibrinogen<sup>56</sup>. Therefore, other deleterious factors such as smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise, obesity, poor adherence to treatment regimens, might increase the stroke risk. These lifestyle factors are associated with education level, poverty and job strain, as well as stress, depression and other mental health conditions. However, some studies that have controlled for these lifestyle factors have suggested that they are not a primary pathway through which stress and negative emotions contribute to subsequent stroke<sup>18</sup>. Thus the precise mechanisms underlying the link between psychosocial factors and stroke remain unclear. Both behavioral (lifestyle behaviors) and biological (autonomic nervous system activity) mechanisms are reasonable. Our findings suggest that identifying people with psychosocial risk factors may

provide the opportunity to reduce the future burden of stroke through the timely implementation of preventative strategies.

## **Limitations**

The systematic review has certain strengths and limitations. The review was undertaken following methods that were defined *a priori* in a research protocol using recognized guidance<sup>58</sup>. A limitation of the review was the nature of the risk factors used in the included studies. As many of the studies included a range of factors within the same categories, decisions were made as to which should be included, potentially influencing the outcome of the review. In addition, studies used different definitions or measures for similar risk factors, which may have influenced the estimates from the studies. The studies included were affected by substantial heterogeneity, evident through the characteristics of the included studies. The review and meta-analysis synthesised studies including: all people; men only or women only; age groups ranging from 18 to 100 years; all strokes, ischemic, haematological and TIAs; different follow-up periods from 1 day to 35 years; different risk measures (HRs, RRs and ORs) and study designs (cohort or case control) used; varying methodological quality; and different confounders within the analysis. In addition, the review was limited to English language studies and to evidence published after 2000.

## **Conclusion**

Our results concur with other systematic reviews and meta-analyses that suggest psychosocial risk factors are moderately important risk factors for CVD. Given the limitations of the systematic review and meta-analyses, interpretation of the meta-analyses should be undertaken with some caution. It is evident that the different psychosocial factors do have an effect on the risk of stroke; however, the extent of the affect and whether this would be considered a significant clinical effect is less clear.





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**Contribution of the author**

CEL, CW, KP, MLH and AC conceived the concept of the study and contributed to the design of the study. AC, CEL, JL, KP and HS screened the studies and CEL, JL, KP, HS, AC and MLH data extracted the literature. AC performed the data analysis, CEL, AC and KP drafted the manuscript and all authors undertook a critical read and approved the final manuscript

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Figure 1: Study selection flow diagram

Figure 2: Forest plot of overall pooled adjusted effect estimate for risk of stroke in subjects exposed to psychological factors

Figure 3: Forest plot of overall pooled adjusted effect estimate for risk of stroke in subjects exposed to vocational factors

Figure 4: Forest plot of overall pooled adjusted effect estimate for risk of stroke in subjects exposed to behavioral factors

Figure 5: Forest plot of overall pooled adjusted effect estimate for risk of stroke in subjects exposed to interpersonal factors

**Table 1: Characteristics of included cohort studies**

| Author (year)                            | Quality rating | Number of participants (% male) | Age at baseline (years) | Risk factor exposure and measure                             | Duration of follow up (years) | Number of stroke events | Stroke outcomes <sup>a</sup> | Risk estimates (HR (95% CI)) | Number of confounders controlled for in adjusted model |
|--|----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <b><i>Psychological</i></b>              |                |                                 |                         |  |                               |                         |                              |                              |  |
| Araki et al. (2004) <sup>50</sup>        | Good           | 305 (33)                        | >65                     | Morale<br>PGC Morale Scale                                   | 3                             | 25                      |                              | 2.70 (1.10; 6.80)            | 9  |
| Arbelaez et al. (2007) <sup>14</sup>     | Good           | 5525 (42)                       | >65                     | Depressive symptoms<br>Modified CES-D                        | 11                            | 607                     | Ischemic<br>stroke only      | 1.25 (1.02; 1.53)            | 15   |
| Bergh et al. (2014) <sup>40</sup>        | Good           | 237879 (100)                    | 31-35                   | Stress resilience<br>Interview with psychologist             | 13                            | 3411                    |                              | 1.16 (1.04; 1.29)            | 9  |
| Bos et al. (2008) <sup>13</sup>          | Good           | 4394 (40)                       | ≥55                     | Depressive symptoms<br>CES-D and interview with psychologist | 8                             | 291                     |                              | 1.21 (0.80; 1.83)            | 15   |
| Curkendall et al. (2004) <sup>14</sup>   | Good           | 11580 (50)                      | NR                      | Schizophrenia<br>Clinical diagnosis                          | 4                             | 241                     |                              | 1.50 (1.20; 2.00)            | 5  |
| Eurelings et al. (2014) <sup>17</sup>    | Fair           | 1810 (40)                       | 70-78                   | Depression<br>GDS-15   | 2                             | 55                      |                              | 1.74 (0.89; 3.38)            | 5  |
| Everson-Rose et al. (2014) <sup>18</sup> | Good           | 6749 (47)                       | 45-84                   | Depression   | 12                            | 147                     |                              | 1.73 (1.08; 2.77)            | 16   |

|   |      |             |        |                                 |    |      |             |  |    |
|---|------|-------------|--------|---------------------------------|----|------|-------------|--|----|
|   |      |             |        | CES-D                           |    |      |             |  |    |
| Feller et al. (2013) <sup>6</sup>           | Good | 48976 (43)  | NR     | Life satisfaction               | 8  | 440  |             | Men 1.40 (0.89, 2.19)<br>Women 1.69 (1.05; 2.73) | 6  |
|   |      |             |        | Interview                       |    |      |             |  |    |
| Hamano et al. (2015) <sup>20</sup>          | Good | 326229 (43) | >30    | Depression                      | 7  | 4718 |             | 1.22 (1.08; 1.38)                                | 10 |
|   |      |             |        | Clinical diagnosis              |    |      |             |  |    |
| Lahti et al. (2012) <sup>11</sup>           | Good | 12939 (52)  | 25-35  | Schizophrenia                   | 35 | 619  |             | 1.69 (0.90; 3.16)                                | 5  |
|   |      |             |        | Clinical diagnosis              |    |      |             |  |    |
| Lee et al. (2008) <sup>24</sup>             | Fair | 4962 (44)   | 18-44  | Depression                      | 5  | 98   |             | 5.43 (3.47; 8.51)                                | 10 |
|   |      |             |        | Clinical diagnosis              |    |      |             |  |    |
| Lin et al. (2007) <sup>26</sup>             | Fair | 18702 (50)  | Median | Bipolar disorder                | 6  | 315  |             | 2.05 (1.73; 3.54)                                | 9  |
|   |      |             | = 35   | Clinical diagnosis              |    |      |             |  |    |
| Majed et al. (2012) <sup>46</sup>           | Good | 9601 (100)  | 48-64  | Depression                      | 10 | 136  |             | 1.41 (0.95; 2.11)                                | 14 |
|   |      |             |        | Modified CES-D                  |    |      |             |  |    |
| May et al. (2002) <sup>47</sup>             | Good | 2124 (100)  | 49-64  | Psychological distress          | 14 | 130  | Ischemic    | 1.26 (0.85; 1.85)                                | 8  |
|   |      |             |        | GHQ                             |    |      | stroke only |  |    |
| Mejia-Lancheros et al. (2014) <sup>28</sup> | Good | 7263 (43)   | 55-80  | Depression                      | 6  | 136  |             | 0.66 (0.38; 1.15)                                | 9  |
|   |      |             |        | Clinical diagnosis              |    |      |             |  |    |
| Nabi et al. (2010) <sup>29</sup>            | Fair | 23216 (41)  | 20-54  | Dispositional pessimism         | 7  | 105  |             | 0.52 (0.29; 0.93) <sup>b</sup>                   | 10 |
|   |      |             |        | Life Orientation Test – Revised |    |      |             |  |    |
| Nilsson et al. (2004) <sup>31</sup>         | Good | 108876 (38) | Mean   | Depression                      | 17 | 2042 |             | 1.22 (1.06; 1.41)                                | 13 |

|                                      |      |             |        |                     |     |      |  |    |
|--------------------------------------|------|-------------|--------|---------------------|-----|------|--|----|
|                                      |      |             | = 58   | Clinical diagnosis  |     |      |  |    |
| Ohira et al. (2001) <sup>59</sup>    | Good | 879 (35)    | 40-78  | Depressive symptoms | 10  | 69   | 1.90 (1.10; 3.50)                                      | 9  |
|                                      |      |             |        | SDS                 |     |      |  |    |
| Ohlin et al. (2004) <sup>60</sup>    | Fair | 13280 (80)  | Mean   | Chronic stress      | 6   | 790  | 1.29 (1.04; 1.60)                                      | 11 |
|                                      |      |             | = 45   | Questionnaire       |     |      |  |    |
| Salaycik et al. (2007) <sup>12</sup> | Good | 4102 (44)   | 29-100 | Depressive symptoms | 8   | 228  | <65 yrs 3.43 (1.60; 7.36)<br>≥65 yrs 0.78 (0.46; 1.34) | 8  |
|                                      |      |             |        | CES-D               |     |      |  |    |
| Shirai et al. (2009) <sup>32</sup>   | Fair | 88175 (48)  | 30-69  | Life enjoyment      | 12  | 2786 | Men 1.22 (1.01; 1.47)                                  | 11 |
|                                      |      |             |        | Questionnaire       |     |      | Women 1.09 (0.86; 1.37)                                |    |
| Smoller et al. (2007) <sup>49</sup>  | Fair | 3243 (0)    | 51-83  | Panic episodes      | 7   | 40   | 1.98 (0.75; 5.24)                                      | 9  |
|                                      |      |             |        | Questionnaire       |     |      |  |    |
| Surtees et al. (2007) <sup>33</sup>  | Good | 20629 (43)  | 41-80  | Sense of coherence  | 10  | 452  | 0.76 (0.60; 0.96) <sup>b</sup>                         | 13 |
|                                      |      |             |        | HLEQ                |     |      |  |    |
| Surtees et al. (2008) <sup>34</sup>  | Good | 20627 (43)  | 41-80  | Depression          | 8.5 | 595  | 1.08 (0.67; 1.75)                                      | 13 |
|                                      |      |             |        | HLEQ                |     |      |  |    |
| Truelsen et al. (2003) <sup>35</sup> | Good | 12574 (45)  | 20-98  | Stress              | 17  | 929  | 1.13 (0.85; 1.50)                                      | 11 |
|                                      |      |             |        | Questionnaire       |     |      |  |    |
| Tsai et al. (2012) <sup>36</sup>     | Good | 322276 (55) | Mean   | Schizophrenia       | 10  | 4334 | 1.13 (1.06; 1.22)                                      | 8  |
|                                      |      |             | =42.7  | Clinical diagnosis  |     |      |  |    |

|  |      |            |       |   |    |      |                         |  |    |
|--|------|------------|-------|---|----|------|-------------------------|--|----|
| Yan et al. (2013) <sup>39</sup>                | Fair | 4619 (41)  | ≥65   | Depression<br>CES-D                                 | 14 | 652  | Ischemic<br>stroke only | White 1.18 (0.93; 1.49)<br>African-American 1.32<br>(0.80; 2.19)   | 16 |
| <b><u>Vocational</u></b>                       |      |            |       |   |    |      |                         |  |    |
| Gillum et al. (2012) <sup>19</sup>             | Good | 5614 (47)  | 45-74 | Poverty<br>Total household income                   | 21 | 802  |                         | Black people 0.70 (0.46;<br>1.08)*<br>White men 0.80 (0.57;<br>1.12)*<br>White women 0.74 (0.52;<br>1.05)* | 9  |
| Honjo et al. (2008) <sup>44</sup>              | Good | 20543 (0)  | 40-59 | Educational level<br>Questionnaire                  | 13 | 451  |                         | 1.49 (1.18; 1.89)  | 11 |
| Honjo et al. (2015) <sup>21</sup>              | Good | 90843 (48) | 40-69 | Neighbourhood deprivation<br>Area Deprivation Index | 17 | 4410 |                         | 1.05 (0.90; 1.23)  | 12 |
| Kuper et al. (2007) <sup>45</sup>              | Good | 47942 (0)  | 30-49 | Educational level<br>Questionnaire                  | 11 | 200  |                         | 1.50 (1.00; 2.20)  | 7  |
| Li et al. (2008) <sup>25</sup>                 | Good | 69625 (49) | 40-65 | Socioeconomic status<br>Population register         | 10 | 1648 |                         | Men 1.29 (1.06; 1.58)<br>Women 1.75 (1.36; 2.25)   | 4  |
| McFadden et al. (2009) <sup>27</sup>           | Fair | 22488 (45) | 39-79 | Social class<br>Population register                 | 10 | 683  |                         | 2.55 (1.34; 4.85)  | 9  |
| Mejia-Lancheros et al.<br>(2014) <sup>28</sup> | Good | 7263 (43)  | 55-80 | Educational level<br>Questionnaire                  | 6  | 136  |                         | 1.83(1.09; 3.09)   | 9  |

|                                      |      |             |               |   |    |      |                         |  |    |
|--------------------------------------|------|-------------|---------------|---|----|------|-------------------------|--|----|
| Schioler et al. (2015) <sup>48</sup> | Poor | 75326 (100) | Mean<br>=36.8 | Job strain<br>JDC                           | 15 | 739  | Ischemic<br>stroke only | 1.13 (0.95; 1.34)  | 6  |
| Tsai et al. (2012) <sup>36</sup>     | Good | 322276 (55) | Mean<br>=42.7 | Socioeconomic status<br>Population register | 10 | 4334 |                         | 1.16 (1.01; 1.33)  | 8  |
| Tsutsumi et al. (2011) <sup>37</sup> | Good | 6553 (49)   | 18-65         | Job strain<br>JDC Japanese version          | 13 | 147  |                         | Men 2.80 (1.20; 6.40)<br>Women 1.30 (0.60; 3.00)                 | 6  |
| Veronesi et al. (2011) <sup>38</sup> | Good | 5595 (50)   | 35-74         | Educational level<br>Questionnaire          | 10 | 90   | Ischemic<br>stroke only | Men 2.18 (1.26; 3.78)<br>Women 0.40 (0.20; 0.85)                 | 6  |
| Yan et al. (2013) <sup>39</sup>      | Fair | 4619 (41)   | ≥65           | Educational level<br>Questionnaire          | 14 | 652  | Ischemic<br>stroke only | White 1.14 (0.86; 1.52)<br>African-American 0.70<br>(0.39; 1.28) | 16 |

#### **Behavioral**

|  |      |             |       |   |    |     |  |                   |    |
|--|------|-------------|-------|---|----|-----|--|-------------------|----|
| Eng et al. (2003) <sup>43</sup>          | Fair | 23522 (100) | 50-85 | Anger expression<br>Spielberger Anger-Out Scale | 2  | 57  |  | 0.42 (0.20; 0.88) | 14 |
| Everson-Rose et al. (2014) <sup>18</sup> | Good | 6749 (47)   | 45-84 | Anger<br>Spielberger Trait Anger Scale          | 12 | 147 |  | 2.00 (1.15; 3.47) | 16 |

#### **Interpersonal**



|   |      |            |       |   |    |      |                         |   |    |
|---|------|------------|-------|---|----|------|-------------------------|---|----|
| Andre-Petersson et al. (2007) <sup>13</sup> | Good | 7770 (61)  | 45-64 | Social support at work<br>Questionnaire | 9  | 134  |                         | 1.80 (1.05; 3.10)   | 4  |
| Araki et al. (2004) <sup>50</sup>           | Good | 305 (33)   | >65   | Social burden<br>EDBS                   | 3  | 25   |                         | 3.20 (1.30; 7.80)   | 9  |
| Ikeda et al. (2008) <sup>22</sup>           | Good | 44152 (48) | 40-69 | Social support<br>Questionnaire         | 11 | 1057 |                         | 1.11 (0.89; 1.37)   | 10 |
| Kornerup et al. (2010) <sup>23</sup>        | Good | 9542 (43)  | ≥20   | Major life events<br>Questionnaire      | 10 | 350  |                         | 1.32 (0.77; 2.25)   | 10 |
| Kuper et al. (2007) <sup>45</sup>           | Good | 47942 (0)  | 30-49 | Social support<br>Questionnaire         | 11 | 200  |                         | 1.30 (0.90; 1.80)   | 7  |
| Mejia-Lancheros et al. (2014) <sup>28</sup> | Good | 7263 (43)  | 55-80 | Social support<br>Questionnaire         | 6  | 136  |                         | 0.56 (0.28; 1.12)   | 9  |
| Nagayoshi et al. (2014) <sup>30</sup>       | Fair | 13984 (44) | 45-64 | Social support<br>LSNS, ISEL-SF         | 23 | 905  |                         | 1.44 (1.02; 2.04)   | 16 |
| Yan et al. (2013) <sup>39</sup>             | Fair | 4619 (41)  | ≥65   | Social support<br>LSNS, ISEL-SF         | 14 | 652  | Ischemic<br>stroke only | White 1.02 (0.98; 1.07)<br>African-American 1.02 (0.93; 1.12) | 16 |

<sup>a</sup> Fatal and non-fatal stroke and all stroke types, unless otherwise stated

<sup>b</sup> reciprocal

Abbreviations: NR= not reported, PGC= Philadelphia Geriatric Centre, CES-D= Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, GDS= Geriatric Depression Scale, GHQ= General Health Questionnaire, SDS= Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale, HLEQ= Health and Life Experiences Questionnaire, JDC = Job Demand-Control Questionnaire, EDBS = Elderly Diabetes Burden Scale, LSNS = Lubben Social Network Scale, ISEL-SF = Interpersonal Support Evaluation List-Short Form

**Table 2: Characteristics of included case-control studies**

| Author (year)                         | Quality rating | Number of participants<br>cases:controls<br>(% male) | Age (years)                        | Cases:controls<br>with risk factor | Risk factor exposure<br>and measure         | Stroke<br>outcomes <sup>a</sup> | Risk estimates<br>(HR (95% CI))                  | Number of<br>confounders<br>controlled for in<br>adjusted model |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|---|
| <b><u>Psychological</u></b>           |                |  |                                    |                                    |   |                                 |  |   |
| Jood et al. (2009) <sup>61</sup>      | Fair           | 600:600<br>(64)                                      | 18-69                              | 80:29                              | Stress<br>Questionnaire                     | Ischemic<br>stroke only         | 2.51 (1.42; 4.44)                                | 11  |
| O'Donnell et al. (2016) <sup>41</sup> | Good           | 13477:13472<br>(60)                                  | Mean =62.2                         | NR                                 | Psychosocial factors<br>Questionnaire       |                                 | 2.20 (1.78; 2.72)                                | 10  |
| Riaz et al. (2015) <sup>51</sup>      | Poor           | 175:171<br>(73)                                      | Mean stroke= 60.4<br>control= 63.7 | NR                                 | Psychosocial stress<br>Questionnaire        | Hemorrhagic<br>stroke only      | 4.14 (1.54; 11.09)                               | 13  |
| <b><u>Interpersonal</u></b>           |                |  |                                    |                                    |   |                                 |  |   |
| Egido et al. (2012) <sup>52</sup>     | Good           | 150:300<br>(77:36)                                   | 18-65                              | 16:9                               | Life events<br>Holmes & Rahe questionnaire  |                                 | 3.84 (1.91; 7.70)                                | 8   |
| Engstrom et al. (2004) <sup>40</sup>  | Good           | 3134:9402<br>(45)                                    | 40-89                              | Men 207:519<br>Women 308:924       | Marital dissolution<br>Population registers |                                 | Men 1.23 (1.03; 1.50)<br>Women 0.98 (0.84; 1.20) | 4   |

<sup>a</sup> Fatal and non-fatal stroke and all stroke types, unless otherwise stated

Abbreviations: NR= not reported

**Table 3: The frequency of suggested mechanisms for psychosocial risk factors**

| Suggested mechanism                  | Frequency | Psychosocial factor categories                     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| <b>Physiological</b>                 |           |  |
| Platelet activity                    | 8         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| Sympathetic nerve activity           | 6         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| Blood coagulation                    | 2         | psychological                                      |
| Endothelial dysfunction              | 4         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| HPA axis                             | 6         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| Inflammation                         | 8         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| Cortisol levels increase             | 2         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| Heart rate variability abnormalities | 2         | psychological                                      |
| <b>Co-morbid conditions</b>          |           |  |
| Hypertension                         | 5         | psychological, vocational                          |
| Insulin resistance                   | 1         | psychological                                      |
| Diabetes                             | 2         | vocational   |
| Lipid abnormalities                  | 2         | Psychological, vocational                          |
| <b>Lifestyle</b>                     |           |  |
| Diet                                 | 4         | psychological, vocational, interpersonal processes |
| Cigarette smoking                    | 12        | psychological, vocational, interpersonal processes |
| Physical inactivity                  | 9         | psychological, vocational, interpersonal processes |
| Alcohol intake                       | 4         | psychological, vocational, interpersonal processes |
| Medication adherence                 | 4         | psychological, interpersonal processes             |
| Obesity                              | 4         | psychological, vocational                          |
| Health screening                     | 3         | psychological, vocational                          |
| <b>Other</b>                         |           |  |
| Vascular depression hypothesis       | 1         | psychological                                      |
| Broaden and build theory             | 1         | psychological                                      |
| Role enhancement theory              | 1         | vocational   |
| Undernutrition in-utero              | 1         | vocational   |
| Socioeconomic status                 | 1         | psychological                                      |
| Social interaction and support       | 3         | psychological, vocational                          |