

Vanderbilt doctor finds link between criminal behavior and brain trauma

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NASHVILLE, TN (WSMV) -

People often wonder why some people commit violent crimes, and the answer is more than a nature of good versus evil.

A Vanderbilt University professor found a connection between criminal behavior and brain trauma.

Defense attorneys said they could establish in court how a person behaved normally then started to commit crimes and arguably link that to brain trauma.

Brain scans, which people usually see in hospitals, are showing up in defense tactics.

"These tests might be available in court to help explain a person's behavior. Not only in the question of guilt or innocence, but also on the question of punishment," said David Raybin, a Nashville criminal defense attorney.

One author of the [criminal behavior study published last month](#) is Vanderbilt University Assistant Professor of Neurology Dr. Ryan Darby.

"Dating back to the 1960s, the Texas Tower shooter, he had a brain tumor on autopsy," Darby said. "So, the question of whether the brain lesion could have contributed to his criminal behavior came up."

Darby said his study focused on people with not just tumors but those who had a stroke or a brain bleed. Authorities question a similar connection in the Las Vegas shooting. Doctors are currently looking for anything abnormal in the shooter's brain.

"If there is a change in behavior that doesn't have an explanation, then it's important to kind of what the reason for that is," Darby said.

If it's something people can see on a scan, defense attorneys said it's more likely that a jury would believe it.

"People can accept a broken arm. They have a hard time accepting a broken brain," Raybin said.

To catch that change can be a challenge, Darby said.

"If someone has really been normal for 40 years of their life and then has a change that's consistent, in addition to a psychiatric evaluation, a neurological evaluation may be appropriate," Darby said.

Raybin said those studies can be useful for defense or prosecution. Darby said it can be controversial because it's possible a person's brain trauma may not be the reason behind the crime.