

## Heart Attack Patients More Depressed, Get Fewer Antidepressants



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Research presented at EuroHeartCare 2016 reveals that heart attack patients are more depressed but are prescribed antidepressants less often as compared to people who have not had a heart attack.

Dr Barbro Kjellström, a researcher at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden said, "stress related disorders such as depression and exhaustion are increasingly common and have been the main reason for long-term sick leave in Sweden for more than a decade. We know that stress and depression are big risk factors for heart attack and we confirmed this connection in our study. But what was new and astonishing was that heart attack patients less often receive treatment for depression."

The study was conducted with 805 patients under the age of 75 years and who had experienced a first myocardial infarction and 805 patients without a myocardial infarction. Information about patient levels of stress, depression and exhaustion were collected and participants were asked to grade the level of stress they felt at home and at work, about their economical situation and about any stressful events during the past year. They were also asked about their feeling of control in their life, both at work and at home.

Findings showed that 14% of patients in the MI group had symptoms of depression as compared to 7 percent in the control group. Symptoms of depression and exhaustion were associated with a doubled risk of heart attack. The study also found that patients in the MI group experienced more stress at home and at work and even moderate levels of stress at home were associated with a doubled risk of heart attack.

Dr Kjellström said: "Patients who had a heart attack had more stress both at work and at home but interestingly there was no difference between the two groups as regards to financial stress. Patients also reported that they had less control of their work situation. In addition, those who had a heart attack were more likely to be divorced whereas people in the control group more often lived with a partner."

Only 16 percent of heart attack patients with depression received antidepressants as compared to 42 percent in the control group with depression. This shows that heart attack patients were undertreated for depression as the findings show that more than twice as many patients in the control group were prescribed antidepressants.

"It appears that patients who had a heart attack did not seek help for their depression, or if they did, their symptoms were not accurately recognised and managed. An important take home message is for clinicians to ask patients 'How do you feel?' and listen to the reply, rather than zoning out because they are stressed themselves," explained Dr. Kjellström.

Dr Kjellström concluded: "People today have stresses that did not exist before which may explain some of our findings. We're always connected - people check their phones constantly during the day and even in the middle of the night. We don't switch off and relax. The effects of this on our health need to be investigated further."

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