

## Psychosocial Stress Puts Women at Higher Risk of CHD



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Findings from a new study show that psychosocial stress that usually results from difficulty coping with challenging environments may work synergistically to put women at significantly higher risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD).

Study findings suggest that the effects of job strain (when a woman has inadequate power in the workplace to respond to the demands and expectations of their job) and social strain (the negative aspect of social relationships) on women is a powerful one-two punch. Together, they are associated with a 21% higher risk of developing coronary heart disease.

The study also found that high-stress life events, such as a spouse's death, divorce/separation or physical or verbal abuse, and social strain, were independently linked with a 12% and 9% higher risk of coronary heart disease, respectively.

Data from a nationally representative sample of 80,825 postmenopausal women from the Women's Health Initiative Observational Study were used for the purpose of this analysis. The researchers evaluated the effect of psychosocial stress from job strain, stressful life events and social strain (through a survey), and associations among these forms of stress on coronary heart disease.

Nearly 5% of the women developed coronary heart disease during the 14-year, seven-month study. Adjusting for age, time at a job, and socioeconomic characteristics, high-stress life events were associated with a 12% increased coronary heart disease risk, and high social strain was associated with a 9% increased risk of coronary heart disease. Work strain was not independently associated with coronary heart disease.

Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. These new findings build on earlier studies linking psychosocial stress to coronary heart disease by finding out how job strain and social strain work together to compound disease risk.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted ongoing stresses for women in balancing paid work and social stressors. We know from other studies that work strain may play a role in developing CHD, but now we can better pinpoint the combined impact of stress at work and at home on these poor health outcomes," said senior author Yvonne Michael, ScD, SM, an associate professor in the Dornsife School of Public Health. "My hope is that these findings are a call for better methods of monitoring stress in the workplace and remind us of the dual-burden working women face as a result of their unpaid work as caregivers at home ."

The study's authors say that future studies should look at the effects of shift work on coronary heart disease and explore the effects of job demands according to gender.

Source: [Drexel University](#)

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