

U.S. study: social isolation increases mortality in heart failure patients



Among heart failure patients, feelings of social isolation are associated with increased risk of hospitalisation or death, according to new research published online in *Journal of the American Heart Association*. Researchers say screening heart failure patients for social isolation could help identify those at risk of poor outcomes.

In the U.S., more than six million adults are estimated to have heart failure and that number continues to rise. A previous study by these researchers indicated that social isolation may increase the risk of depression and anxiety. However, little is known about the possible connection between patients' feelings of social isolation, risk of death and use of medical care.

In the current study, researchers surveyed 1,681 patients (average age 73, mostly white, 53 percent men) about their sense of loneliness or isolation. All the patients – residents of 11 counties in southeastern Minnesota – had been diagnosed with heart failure between January 2013 and March 2015.

About six percent of the heart failure patients reported a high level of perceived social isolation. Compared to heart failure patients who felt less socially isolated, those reporting high perceived social isolation had:

- 3.7 times or more increased risk of death;
- 1.7 times increased risk of hospitalisation; and
- 1.6 times higher risk of emergency department visits.

"Our study found a patient's sense of feelings of loneliness or isolation may contribute to poor prognosis in heart failure," said study senior author Lila Rutten, PhD, professor of health services research at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. "Healthcare providers may aid their heart failure patients by implementing a valid, reliable and brief screening tool to help identify those who are experiencing social isolation."

However, as the study lacks racial and geographic diversity, the data may not apply to other populations. There was also limited follow-up and patients who felt less socially isolated may have been more likely to respond, according to the research team.

Source: [American Heart Association](#)
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