

Emotional stress may trigger heart attack

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(Medical Xpress)—Heart attack survivors who live alone and people exposed to extreme stress from events such as natural disasters or sporting events are at greater risk of heart attack, according to a Heart Foundation study led by the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Research Institute (BMRI).

Sudden [emotional stress](#), such as the death of a loved one, may also trigger [heart](#) attacks, [sudden cardiac death](#) or so-called Takotsubo or stress cardiomyopathy, commonly known as [broken heart syndrome](#).

The update to the Heart Foundation's 2003 [consensus statement](#), 'Psychosocial risk factors for [coronary heart disease](#)', is being presented at a Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand conference held in Queensland on Friday.

But the BMRI-led review of 10-year data, also busted one popular myth: that chronic job stress sharply increases the likelihood of having a heart attack.

"Contrary to popular belief, the effect of job stress on heart disease is limited," study lead author Nick Glozier said.

"This is good news - our jobs are not necessarily killing us. If anything, what we really need to focus on is what we can control; that is, standard heart disease risks such as higher blood pressure and smoking, tackled through better workplace programs.

"From the evidence review, of greater concern is for heart attack survivors living alone.

"Social isolation and lack of quality support can lead to another attack in situations where no friends or relatives would be aware until it's too late.

"Measures to reduce [social isolation](#) among heart attack survivors could have positive psychological effects but we don't yet know if they improve heart disease outcomes."

The Heart Foundation study also found the potential for increased cardiovascular risk among populations exposed to natural disasters and other conditions of [extreme stress](#), such as tense sporting events.

In the 1996 European football championship quarter-final in which the Netherlands narrowly lost to France, Dutch men had an increased risk of death from heart attack or stroke.

Similarly, in the 60 days after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, there was a 49 percent increase in heart attack patients admitted to New York hospitals, compared with the 60 days before the attacks.

"Awareness of the potential for increased cardiovascular risk among populations exposed to natural disasters and other conditions of extreme stress may be useful for emergency services response planning," Professor James Tatoulis, Chief Medical Adviser at the Heart Foundation said.

"Wider public access to defibrillators should be made available where large populations gather, such as sporting venues, and as part of the response to natural and other disasters."

The study is published in this week's *Medical Journal of Australia*

(MJA).

Provided by University of Sydney

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