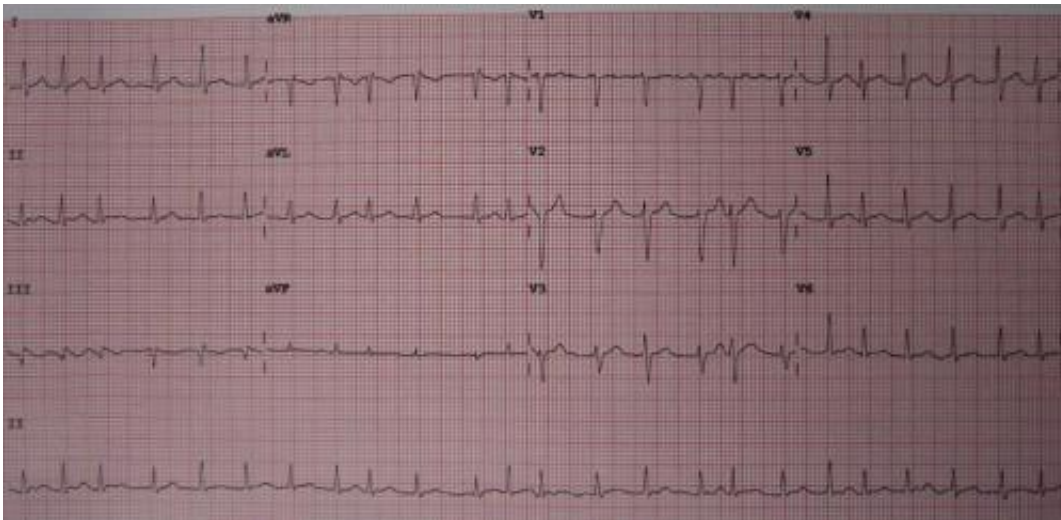


# Increased risk of atrial fibrillation among bereaved parents

March 4 2021, by Tabea Kemna

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A 12 lead ECG showing atrial fibrillation at approximately 150 beats per minute. Credit: James Heilman, MD/Wikipedia/CC BY-SA 3.0

Parents that experienced the death of a child had a 15 percent higher risk of atrial fibrillation, according to a study carried out by researchers at the Department of Global Public Health at Karolinska Institutet. The study was recently published in the *European Heart Journal*.

"In this large Swedish register and population-based study we found that parents who experienced the [death](#) of a [child](#) had a 15 percent increased risk of atrial [fibrillation](#) compared to non-bereaved parents. The association was present not only for cardiovascular or other natural

deaths, but also in case the child died due to unnatural causes, which are less likely to be affected by familial cardiovascular risk factors shared by family members. The risk of atrial fibrillation was highest in the first week after the loss but persisted throughout follow-up," says Dang Wei, first author and doctoral student at the Department of Global Public Health at Karolinska Institutet.

## More support needed for parents who lost a child

"Our findings regarding the association between child's unnatural death and an increased risk of atrial fibrillation and that bereaved parents had almost three times higher risk of atrial fibrillation than non-bereaved parents in the first week after the loss suggest that stress may have implications for the development of atrial fibrillation.

Our findings may call for more awareness about the potential health effects of bereavement and for increased [social support](#) for [parents](#) who lost a child. Further studies are needed to investigate whether, less severe but more frequent sources of stress may also increase the risk of atrial fibrillation," says Dang Wei.

**More information:** Dang Wei et al. Death of a child and the risk of atrial fibrillation: a nationwide cohort study in Sweden, *European Heart Journal* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/eurheartj/ehaa1084](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurheartj/ehaa1084)

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

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