

Depression is literally a heartbreaker for older men

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Getting the blues can be lethal to the male heart, according to a Tulane University researcher's new study that finds depression puts older men — but not women — at greater risk of dying from coronary heart disease.

“We found that older men who showed signs of depression had a 40 percent greater risk of death from heart disease than those who weren't depressed,” said principal investigator Wenjie Sun, a postdoctoral fellow in global health at [Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#). “We also found that depression increased stroke mortality for both genders.”

The [study](#), which used up to a decade of health records and surveys for almost 63,000 seniors in elderly health centers in Hong Kong, is the first comprehensive population study in China to find significantly higher mortality from heart disease for men who reported symptoms of depression. The results will be published in the November issue of [The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry](#).

Authors were surprised to find such a strong correlation between depression and heart disease deaths in only men because prior studies had found higher cardiovascular disease mortality in both genders but with women showing slightly higher risks. Sun's study covers a much larger population than previous studies and comparisons were adjusted for other risk factors such as smoking, physical inactivity, alcohol use and health status.

The study does not explore causes for the disparity, and authors say more research is needed to explain it. Sun speculates that men may be more likely to suffer from severe depression and less likely to seek help from doctors or support from their social networks. Genetic and hormonal differences may also play a role, Sun said.

Ultimately, the findings show that public health officials should screen older men for depression as a possible intervention to fight heart disease.