

Ignored risk factors for heart attack

Emotional stress at work or in your private life causes psychological stress and ups the risk of heart disease.

DEPRESSION, anxiety and stress at work are all neglected factors that increase the risk a heart attack, according to new research tying the number of cardiovascular disease deaths to the rate of sick days from mental health problems.

Previous research has suggested that long-term stress can lead to increased blood cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure – all risk factors for heart disease.

A new study in Germany has now concluded that, based on health insurance data, almost one in five employees in the country have an increased risk of heart attack due to psychological problems.

According to health insurance company DAK, which published its health report earlier this month, 715,000 people of the 7.9 million population of the state of Lower Saxony are at risk of heart disease due to their level of stress.

The research, while based on

German data, underlines for stressed employees around the world the influence of anxiety and poor mental health on the heart and, thereby, the risk of an early death.

Those affected in the study also showed increased physical risk factors for a heart attack, including smoking, high blood pressure or obesity.

The study evaluated around 232,000 employed people in a region of Germany where workers are increasingly on sick leave due to depression or anxiety disorders.

Every year in the state of Lower Saxony, more than 35,000 people die of cardiovascular disease, while the number of days of absence due to mental illness has increased by 43% from 2011 to 2021.

"There is a striking interaction between psyche and heart," said DAK's Lower Saxony head Dirk Vennekold.

"Doctors, medical professionals

and employers should keep this in mind in prevention and health programmes."

The role of stress and mental illness as a risk for heart attacks is often underestimated, he said.

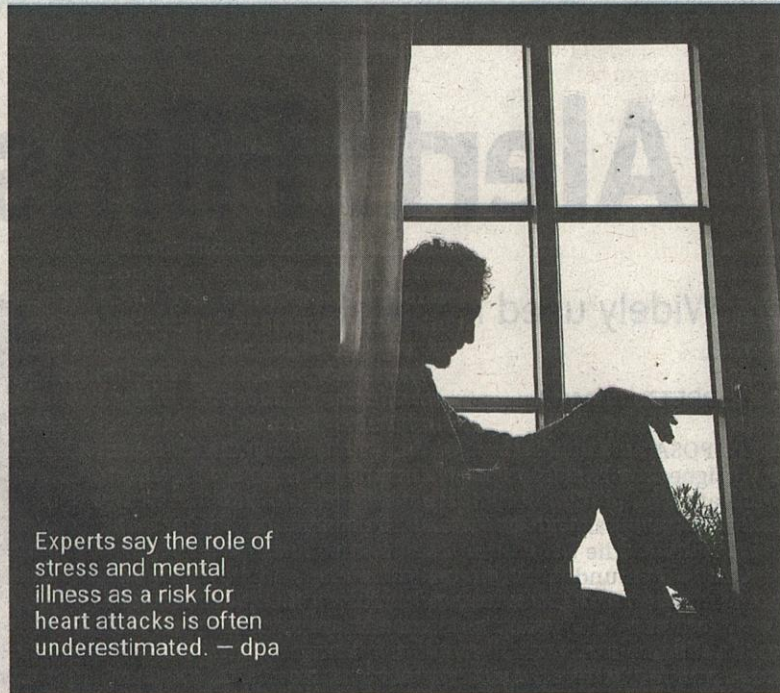
According to the study, a problematic situation at work can fuel stress and anxiety.

For example, 16% of the workers surveyed did not consider pay to be adequate, while 13% felt that recognition from their superiors is too meagre.

"Stress alone doesn't cause a heart attack," the British Heart Foundation says in its guidelines on heart health.

"But if you cope with stress by turning to unhealthy habits like smoking or eating junk food, your risk increases."

Experts say you can try to cope with stress by avoiding alcohol and unhealthy food as well as going for walks, trying yoga, meditating or chatting to family and friends. – dpa



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