Young women more affected than men by emotional stress after heart attack

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(Medical Xpress)—Younger women with a recent heart attack are more likely than men of the same age to experience myocardial ischemia, or inadequate blood flow to the heart, in response to emotional stress according to researchers at Emory's Rollins School of Public Health.

Led by Viola Vaccarino, MD, PhD, Wilton Looney Chair of Cardiovascular Research in the Department of Epidemiology at Emory's Rollins School of Public Health, the team studied standard exercise stress tests and cardiac responses to an acute emotional stressor among patients with recent heart attacks. The study included 49 men and 49 women between the ages of 38 to 60 years. All participants had heart attacks within the past six months of the study.

The study found that women ages 50 years or younger were twice as likely to experience ischemia during emotional stress compared to men of the same age. Ischemia with exercise stress did not differ between the groups.

Complete findings will be presented at the American Psychosomatic Society's Annual Meeting on March 15, 2014 in San Francisco, California.

"Factors such as poverty, minority race, and depression were more common among young women but did not explain the difference," says Vaccarino. "Our data show that women may be more vulnerable to the effects of psychological stress on the heart. Hopefully this will be a stimulus to the medical community to pay more attention to emotional factors in cardiac patients."

Provided by Emory University

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