

Bad marriage, broken heart?

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The link between a bad marriage and heart disease is more pronounced for older couples and, in particular, women, finds a study led by Michigan State University. Credit: Michigan State University

Older couples in a bad marriage—particularly female spouses—have a higher risk for heart disease than those in a good marriage, finds the first nationally representative study of its kind.

The findings suggest the need for marriage counseling and programs aimed at promoting [marital quality](#) and well-being for couples into their 70s and 80s, said lead investigator Hui Liu, a Michigan State University sociologist.

"Marriage counseling is focused largely on younger couples," said Liu, associate professor of sociology. "But these results show that marital quality is just as important at older ages, even when the couple has been married 40 or 50 years."

The study, funded by the National Institute of Aging, an arm of the National Institutes of Health, is published online in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*.

Liu analyzed five years of data from about 1,200 [married men](#) and women who participated the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project. Respondents were aged 57-85 at the beginning of the study.

The project included survey questions about marital quality, and lab tests and self-reported measures of cardiovascular health such as heart attacks, strokes, hypertension and high levels of C-reactive protein in the blood.

Liu set out to learn how marital quality is related to risk of [heart disease](#) over time, and whether this relationship varies by gender and/or age. Among her findings:

More information: The study is titled "Bad marriage, broken heart? Age and gender differences in the link between marital quality and cardiovascular risks among older adults."

Provided by Michigan State University

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