

Violence linked to early signs of blood vessel disease in women

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Experiencing physical violence in adulthood may increase the risk of women developing heart and blood-vessel disease, according to research presented at the American Heart Association's Epidemiology/Lifestyle 2016 Scientific Sessions.

"Both society and the healthcare sector need to be aware of the importance of exposure to [violence](#) and its impact, not only on social well-being, but also on [women's](#) long-term health," said Mario Flores, M.D., study lead author and research assistant at the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico City, Mexico.

Worldwide, violence against women is a critical problem. It is established that experiencing violence can cause depression, substance abuse and other disorders in women, its possible effects on heart and [blood vessel disease](#) are a new area of research.

In this study from Mexico, researchers found that women who had experienced physical violence as adults were more than one and a half times more likely to have narrowing of the main blood vessels in the neck that carry blood to the brain, compared to women who had not experienced violence. This narrowing is an early sign of increased risk for stroke. A leading cause of death and disability, a stroke occurs when the blood vessels to the brain either become blocked by fatty substances or burst, preventing blood flow to the brain.

Study participants included 634 healthy women from Southern Mexico

from the Mexican Teachers' Cohort, a national study of health and lifestyle among female teachers throughout Mexico. Their average age was 49 years, and almost one-fifth were natives.

In 2012-2013, study participants answered a questionnaire about exposure to different types of violence such as observed violence, physical or emotional neglect, and physical and/or sexual violence both in childhood and adulthood. All participants also underwent imaging tests with sound waves to measure the thickness of the [blood vessels](#) in the neck.

"Although our findings support the theory that exposure to certain types of violence may have an impact on women's health, further analysis and studies must be performed in order to generate solid data to be able to change clinical practice and guide public health interventions," Flores said.

Provided by American Heart Association

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