

Detecting mental health conditions in women veterans assists in identifying risk for CAD

October 10 2017

Women Veterans exhibit a high degree of mental health issues that are associated with an increased risk for coronary artery disease (CAD).

The study, which appears in the *Journal of Women's Health*, also found that with each additional mental health condition (depression, anxiety and psychotic disorders), the odds of CAD increase by at least 40 percent.

A research team from Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) and the VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS), studied the data of 157,000 women Veterans over the age of 45 to examine the statistical relationship between CAD and the presence of one or more mental health conditions.

They found women Veterans with depression had a 60 percent greater chance of having CAD than those without depression regardless of whether they smoked or not. They also found that with each additional mental health diagnosis a 44 percent greater risk of having heart disease resulted.

"This study suggests that, for women Veterans, mental health diagnoses act as potentially modifiable risk factors for [coronary artery disease](#)," explained corresponding author Megan Gerber, MD, MPH, associate professor of medicine at BUSM and Medical Director of Women's Health at VABHS. "Our findings indicate that interventions for reduction of heart disease risk in women Veterans should focus on

detection and treatment of mental health disorders, particularly depression."

The researchers believe this is the first study that examines the relationship between [heart disease](#) and the presence of multiple [mental health](#) diagnoses in women Veterans who get care at the VA. "Because many women Veterans seek care outside VA, these findings are relevant for community providers who may treat women Veterans," added Gerber.

Provided by Boston University School of Medicine

Citation: Detecting mental health conditions in women veterans assists in identifying risk for CAD (2017, October 10) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-10-mental-health-conditions-women-veterans.html>

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