

New study shows how multimorbidity restricts life in the elderly

March 7 2018

Multiple neuropsychiatric diseases are major predisposing factors for functional decline in older people and may play a greater role in this age-related phenomenon than cardiovascular diseases, according to a new study by researchers at Karolinska Institutet published in *PLOS Medicine*.

A progressive decline in physical function, commonly referred to as [functional decline](#), is a strong health determinant in [older people](#). The accumulation of chronic diseases, multimorbidity, plays a major role in functional decline and has a negative impact on quality of life.

Cardiovascular and neuropsychiatric diseases are common in older people and tend to cluster in the same individuals. Understanding the associations between cardiovascular and neuropsychiatric multimorbidity and functional decline may assist in managing the health and care of people with multimorbidity.

In a new study, researchers at Karolinska Institutet aimed to find out how the increasing number and the combination of cardiovascular and neuropsychiatric diseases are associated with two important measures of physical function in older people: walking [speed](#) and activities of daily living (ADL). Using data from the Swedish National study on Aging and Care in Kungsholmen (SNAC-K), they examined how these functions were affected in 2,385 older people with and without cardiovascular [disease](#) (such as [ischemic heart disease](#), heart failure, and atrial fibrillation) and neuropsychiatric disease (such as mood disorders, dementia, and stroke).

Neuropsychiatric diseases may play a greater role

During the 9-year follow-up, individuals with multiple cardiovascular and neuropsychiatric diseases had the steepest declines in walking speed and ADL independence. The researchers observed significant declines over time for both walking speed and ADL in older people with one or more neuropsychiatric diseases, but only for walking speed in those with cardiovascular multimorbidity.

"Our findings suggest that the presence of multiple neuropsychiatric diseases may play a greater role in functional decline in older people than multiple cardiovascular diseases. Both patients and physicians should be aware that [neuropsychiatric diseases](#) are major predisposing factors for functional decline", says Davide Vetrano, Ph.D. student at Karolinska Institutet's Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society.

More information: Davide L. Vetrano et al. Trajectories of functional decline in older adults with neuropsychiatric and cardiovascular multimorbidity: A Swedish cohort study, *PLOS Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1002503](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002503)

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

Citation: New study shows how multimorbidity restricts life in the elderly (2018, March 7) retrieved 19 September 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-03-multimorbidity-restricts-life-elderly.html>

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