

## Study: Panic Disorder linked to Heart Disease

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Adults who have panic disorder or panic attacks have an increased risk of heart attacks and heart disease, but not heart-related deaths, a new study shows.

British researchers analysed the medical records of almost 58,000 adults diagnosed with panic disorder/attacks and more than 347,000 adults without the condition.

People who were younger than 50 when first diagnosed with panic disorder/attacks were 38 per cent more likely to have a heart attack and 44 per cent more likely to develop heart disease than those in the general population. People who were over age 50 when diagnosed with panic disorder/attacks had an 11 per cent increased risk of heart disease.

The study appears in the Dec. 11 issue of the European Heart Journal.

“Not much is known about the relationship between panic disorder and cardiac disease. The symptoms of panic attacks can closely mimic those of a heart attack or acute cardiac disease, and it seems there may be a complex relationship between them,” lead researcher Dr. Kate Walters, a senior lecturer in primary care at University College London, said in a European Society of Cardiology news release.

“Our findings have significant implications for clinicians. Panic attacks were associated with a significant increased risk of a subsequent diagnosis of CHD [coronary heart disease] and acute MI [myocardial infarction, or heart attack] in those aged younger than 50. This may be due to initial misdiagnosis of CHD as panic attacks, or a true underlying increased risk of CHD with panic attacks. Clinicians should be vigilant for this possibility when diagnosing and treating people presenting with symptoms of panic.”

The study also found that adults of all ages diagnosed with panic disorder/attacks had a 24 per cent lower risk of death from heart disease than those in the general population.

“This might be because the higher risk of coronary heart disease and heart attacks occurred amongst younger people who have fewer heart-related deaths generally, or it might be because people with panic disorders go to their doctors earlier and more frequently, and, therefore, are more likely to have their heart disease identified and treated early, thus reducing the likelihood of dying from it,” Walters said.

She and her colleagues also found that women younger than 40 with panic disorder/attacks had higher increases in incidence of CHD and heart attack than men. But this finding needs to be viewed with caution because the actual number of events was low and could be due to chance, Walters said.

