

RISK FACTORS

Short-term increase in CV risk among individuals mourning death of partner

A study from the UK indicates that the death of a partner is associated with a twofold increased risk of myocardial infarction (MI) or stroke in the first month of bereavement. Although previous studies have shown an association between bereavement and increased risk of cardiovascular-related death in various populations around the world, Carey *et al.* point out that a strength of their new study was that they were able to include both fatal and nonfatal cardiovascular outcomes.

Primary-care data for 30,447 individuals aged ≥ 60 years, whose different-sex partner had died between 2005 and 2012, were compared with data for 83,588 matched controls. Compared with the matched controls, the individuals whose partners had died were twice as likely to experience an MI or stroke during their first month of bereavement. The increased cardiovascular risk in the bereaved individuals diminished over time. Risk of MI or stroke was found to

be increased by 35% 1–3 months after the death of a partner, but similar to that of matched controls after 3 months to 1 year of bereavement.

The investigators suggest that their findings are “likely to be the result of adverse physiological responses associated with acute grief”. They speculate that “during the period around the death of a loved one, patients may neglect their own health care needs, which may place them at greater risk of adverse cardiovascular events.” Unfortunately, however, this particular study was underpowered to test whether the short-term increase in cardiovascular risk in the bereaved individuals might have been related to a lapse in medication use.

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Original article Carey, I. M. *et al.* Increased risk of acute cardiovascular events after partner bereavement: a matched cohort study. *JAMA Intern. Med.* doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.14558