Can PTSD With Depression Raise Premature Mortality Among Women?

Women with both conditions are more likely to die prematurely from almost every major cause of death.

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Women who suffer from both depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are at a greater risk of dying early from health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease as well as suicide and accidents, suggests a new study published in JAMA Network Open by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

For the investigation, researchers studied more than 50,000 women between ages 43 and 64.

Results showed that compared with women who didn't experience depression or PTSD, over a nine-year period, those with both severe PTSD and symptoms of depression were almost four times more likely to die early from nearly every major cause of death, including cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, type 2 diabetes, suicide and accidents.

Scientists found that risks such as smoking, exercise and obesity played only a small part in the association between these mental health conditions and early death, meaning that other factors —for example, the effect of stress hormones on the body—play a more significant role.

Researchers suggest that treating both PTSD and depression in women may help substantially reduce their increased risk of death.

"These findings provide further evidence that mental health is fundamental to physical health—and to our very survival," said Karestan Koenen, PhD, a professor of psychiatric epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health and the senior author of the study. "We ignore our emotional well-being at our peril."

For related coverage, read "Mental Disorders Increase Risk of Early Death, Study Says."

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