


Wounded Spirits, Ailing Hearts: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Cardiovascular Disease in Indians



Posttraumatic stress disorder is a unique psychiatric condition resulting from exposure to stressful traumatic events. It produces changes in the nervous system and the regulation of hormones, but little is known about the long-term consequences of posttraumatic stress disorder on the cardiovascular system. Both posttraumatic stress disorder and cardiovascular disease are very common health problems among American Indians living on reservations. Finding out more about the relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder and cardiovascular disease is important for improving the health of American Indian people.

The aims of this study are to

- ◆ *recruit American Indian men and women between the ages of 18 and 52 who have a history of posttraumatic stress disorder and do not have cardiovascular disease.*
- ◆ *compare them to American Indian participants who do not have posttraumatic stress disorder and cardiovascular disease.*
- ◆ *conduct a comprehensive lifestyle and clinical evaluation to identify risk factors for posttraumatic stress disorder, such as smoking, lack of exercise, obesity, high blood pressure, and elevated levels of cholesterol and lipids.*
- ◆ *measure risk factors and perform non-invasive tests to determine if participants have cardiovascular disease that does not yet cause symptoms.*

Findings from this study will help us know whether individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder have a higher risk of heart disease. Findings could also help determine the relative importance of lifestyle, cultural, and biological factors in developing cardiovascular disease.

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Sponsor: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Grant # R01HL073824
