
An Examination of Depression's Association with Cardiovascular Health Behaviors and Disease Risk among Urban Young Adults

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BACKGROUND: Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of mortality for all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Depression is thought to be a risk factor for cardiac events. Despite findings linking depression to chronic conditions, few studies have examined the role depression plays in the development of CVD risk in young adults.

OBJECTIVE: To investigate depression's association with level of engagement in selected cardiovascular health behaviors and level of disease risk among urban young adults and to explore the role of social support and social network density as moderators of the relationship between depression and CVD outcome measures.

METHODS: This cross-sectional study involved a secondary data analysis of 194 young adults' ages 18-29. Bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted to compare individuals' depression status with demographic and cardiovascular health behavior and risk factor variables.

RESULTS: The study sample depression rate was 36% as measured by the CES-D. Seventeen percent of the sample was categorized as having metabolic syndrome. Depressed individuals were significantly more likely to smoke cigarettes, consume more servings of dairy products, and less likely to engage in strenuous physical activity and weight loss/control efforts. Race, sex, income, marital status and education were associated with many of the CVD health behavior outcome measures. Multiple logistic regression modeling illustrated statistically significant associations between depression and the use of cigarettes and consumption of dairy products and fried foods. Sex, income and age were associated with many CVD risk factors of interest. Logistic regression modeling illustrated depression to be significantly related to elevated HDL cholesterol levels among women. Moderation did not occur in any of the regression models.

CONCLUSION: These findings provide evidence for the linkage between CVD and depression and highlight the need for longitudinal studies that will elucidate the relationships between depression and CVD risk in a young, high risk population. Special attention to environmental factors and the specific challenges that are posed to those living in urban communities is warranted.