

Depression associated with elevated risk for physical diseases

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Those suffering from depressive symptoms have an increased risk for physical diseases, especially for arthrosis and arthritis. These findings were reported by researchers from the University of Basel and the Ruhr-University Bochum. Their results, based on data from 14,300 people living in Switzerland, have been published in the scientific journal "*Frontiers in Public Health*".

Depression is one of the leading health risks and affects 350 million people worldwide. In Switzerland, around 400,000 people individuals suffer from it each year. Several studies in countries around the globe have shown that depression is associated with an elevated risk for a variety of physical diseases. However, for Switzerland, a country ranked as one of the wealthiest and with one of the best and most expensive health care systems worldwide, the association between depressive symptoms and physical diseases had yet been unclear.

A research group led by Prof. Gunther Meinlschmidt from the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Basel and the Faculty of Medicine at the Ruhr-University Bochum has now attempted to close this gap. They conducted analyses, using data from the Swiss Health Survey, comprising of 14,348 subjects aged 15 years and older.

Risk for arthrosis and arthritis

The psychologists report that participants with depressive symptoms have a higher risk of suffering from a physical disease. Roughly one third of the participants suffering from depression also suffer from at least one physical disease. This association was evident especially with arthrosis and arthritis that are degenerative and inflammatory diseases of the joints.

More studies are now needed to further scrutinize the association between depression and joint diseases. According to the study, it can be speculated that depressive symptoms result in a lack of interest in physical activity, which may then lead to joint diseases. However, it could also be the other way around: People with joint diseases may be impaired in their daily activities negatively affecting their mental health and ultimately resulting in depressive symptoms. Or: Joint diseases are often caused by inflammatory processes, which have also been speculated for certain types of depressive disorders. Therefore, inflammatory processes may represent the link between depressive symptoms and physical diseases.

Improving health care

"A better understanding of the association between depressive symptoms and physical diseases in Switzerland is the basis for a better health care provision for people suffering from mental disorders as well as physical diseases", says Gunther Meinlschmidt, author of the study. In addition, these findings are also important for health care policy, for example by improving the precision of future estimates of societal burden and costs related to depression.

Source:
University of Basel
