

# Wartime Stress Exposure and Cardiovascular Disease in Later Life: An Analysis of War Survivors in the Vietnam Health and Aging Study

Reference:

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Abstract:

Background: The physical health correlates of war exposure in post-conflict populations of the global south are largely unknown. Low-middle income populations are disproportionately exposed to the stressors of development, disaster and armed conflict, stressors which heighten CVD risk. We consider how war-related stress exposures exert a lasting influence upon population health, in particular the cardiovascular health of Vietnam War survivors now entering older adulthood. Methods: Data come from the Vietnam Health and Aging Study (VHAS) conducted among 2,447 northern Vietnamese adults age 60 and older in 2018. We conduct logistic and Poisson regression analyses of 4 CVD conditions (Hypertension; self-reported Heart Disease, Stroke and High Cholesterol). Our key explanatory variables include measures of respondents' wartime exposure to combat and physical threat, wartime malevolent environment conditions, and recent life event stressors. Results: We find that having been exposed to wartime stressors, in particular stressors indicative of direct exposure to death, danger and life threat, have a statistically significant, positive association with current CVD conditions, in particular high cholesterol and stroke. We also observe a significant association with malevolent environment stressors during war and CVD as measured by self-reported heart conditions. Conclusions. The stressors of war, widespread in this cohort of Vietnamese older adults who endured myriad forms of exposure to war during their young adulthood, exhibit significant associations with cardiovascular conditions in late adulthood. Building upon research conducted disproportionately among western military veteran populations, our findings suggest a vast, understudied global burden of armed conflict upon CVD and CVD mortality.