

Nagging could cost the lives of hundreds of men

Henpecked and argumentative couples more than twice as likely to die within ten years due to higher levels of stress and anxiety



Researchers have said that the effect of nagging is so strong it could account for hundreds of deaths a year Photo: Alamy

By Rebecca Smith, Medical Editor

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For most men a nagging wife can be little more than an irritation, but the arguments and worries that stem from a demanding partner may actually be a health hazard.

New research has found that the burden of a demanding partner is linked to hundreds of extra deaths each year.

Men who were subjected to 'nagging', constant demands and worries from their partners, were 2.5 as likely to die within ten years than those with less stressful relationships.

The effect is so strong it could account for hundreds of deaths a year, the researchers suggested.

However women may be more immune to nagging as there was little effect on their death rates, it was

found.

The researchers calculated that around 315 extra deaths per 100,000 people per year could be caused by spousal demands and worries, they said.

Stress is known to have physical effects on health, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke while it also encourages poor habits such as eating junk food and lack of exercise which exacerbate the problem.

The researchers said men tend to respond to stress with higher levels of the hormone cortisol which is known to be linked to poor health.

Study author, Dr Rikke Lund, Section of Social Medicine, Department of Public Health, at University of Copenhagen, said: "Men also have fewer people in their social network than women who tend to share their problems and worries with more people.

"Their partner is more important to them in a relatively small social network.

"It is interesting that we have identified that males who are exposed to worries and demands by their partners have higher mortality and are the ones we should focus on. We tend to struggle to reach this group with public health interventions and maybe we should be focused less on the individual and more on social networks as a whole."

The study suggested that going to work could provide relief and mitigate the effects of a stressful relationship with a partner as men who were unemployed and frequently nagged were even more likely to die.

The combined effect of frequent demands and worries from a partner and being out of work could account for an extra 462 deaths per 100,000 people per year, it was calculated.

The findings were published in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*.

Previous studies have found that strong emotional support from family and friends is good for health and this is one of the first studies to look at the reverse.

Danish researchers questioned almost 10,000 men and women aged 36 to 52 about their everyday social relationships, asking who made excessive demands, prompted worries or was a source of conflict and how often these situations occurred.

The participants were tracked for ten years during which time 196 women, four per cent, died along with 226 men, six per cent.

Almost half of the deaths were from cancer, followed by heart disease and stroke, liver disease, accidents and suicide.

Around one in 10 study participants said that their partner or children were a frequent or constant source of excess demands and worries.

Similarly, six per cent had frequent arguments with their partner or children.

As any parent can attest to, constant demands and worries from children seemed to increase the risk of early death by around 50 per cent. But worries and demands from other relatives, friends and neighbours had no effect.

Constant arguments and conflicts were the most dangerous, it was found, regardless of who was the source.

Those who always or often fought with their partner were twice as likely to die, those who fought with friends were 2.5 times more likely to die and frequent fights with neighbours was linked with a three-fold increased chance of death within ten years.

Similarly, frequent arguments with a partner and being unemployed may produce an extra 830 deaths per 100,000 people per year, it was suggested.

The researchers said personality traits probably played a role in how people cope with stress and this in turn may affect their choice of partner and friends.

They said that teaching conflict management may help reduce premature deaths.

Prof Carmine Pariante, prof of biological psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry King's College London said women are better at recognising they are stressed and seek help amongst their wider circle of social support they have.

"This study shows the assumption that men are more resilient to stress is incorrect.

"Conflict is at the clearer end of the stressful event spectrum and is probably recognised by men and women alike as being difficult so they seek help and talk to their friends about it.

"But a chronic level of low stress, like this nagging, is not enough for men to seek help. This low level of stress is enough to affect mortality because it can impact on cortisol levels and the immune system, you do not need to have an earthquake or terror attack for stress to have an effect on physical health."

He added that men also have a cultural role to play as the breadwinner and must be seen by society as manly and coping with life which exacerbates the problem when they are unemployed.

How we moderate

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