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Low IQ second highest predictor for heart disease

10 February 2010

Low IQ is the second highest predictor of heart disease, according to research funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC).

The findings come from the West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study, a population study designed to investigate the influence of social and economic factors on health. The analysis was based on data collected by the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, from a large cohort study of 1,145 men and women aged around 55, originally recruited in 1987 and followed for 20 years until 2007. Height, weight, blood pressure, smoking habits, physical activity, education and occupation were examined as part of the study. Cognitive ability (IQ) was also assessed using a standard test of general intelligence.

Statistical analysis of risk factors showed that smoking was the strongest predictor of developing heart disease, followed by IQ. Researchers found that people with lower IQ were less likely to link unhealthy behaviour such as smoking or lack of exercise to increased health risks such as obesity and high blood pressure. Social environment factors accumulated throughout life, including illness and poor nutrition, could also play a big factor for those with low IQ.

Commenting on the public health implications of the findings, the study's principal investigator, Dr David Batty of the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, said:

> "In addition to the role that poverty, illness and poor nutrition in early and later life may have on 'lowering' intelligence, it may also be that a high IQ is associated with better overall physical and mental wellbeing. That is, many body systems, from brain to heart to liver to kidneys, function at a more efficient level.

> "It could therefore make sense for health promotion campaigns to be planned with consideration of individual IQ levels in the future.

Professor Ian Deary, Director of the Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology, added:

> "We cannot rule out at this stage the possibility that intelligence and cardiovascular disease share some genetic determinants."

Cardiovascular disease, and particularly coronary heart disease, is the leading cause of death in Europe, accounting for 38 per cent of all deaths in men and 45 per cent in women.

The Medical Research Council, through funding and delivering world class science, helps to develop our understanding of the social, biological and environmental risk factors surrounding disease. Its work is crucial in the fight to develop effective strategies for tackling the major health challenges of the 21st century.

The research was conducted by the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Science Unit in Glasgow and the Centre for Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh. "Does IQ predict

cardiovascular disease mortality as strongly as established risk factors? Comparison of effect estimates using the West of Scotland 'Twenty-07' cohort study" is published in The European Journal of Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation.

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