



21 June 2006

Losing your job late in your career doubles the chance of suffering a heart attack or stroke, a study says.

Yale University researchers studied 4,301 people aged 51 to 61 who were working in 1992, the Occupational and Environmental Medicine journal said.



Over 10 years, there were 23 heart attacks and 13 strokes among the group of 582 who were forced out of a job.

The team said stress was to blame for the findings, while campaigners said workers needed proper support.

Lead researcher Dr William Gallo said: "For many individuals, late career job loss is an exceptionally stressful experience, with the potential for provoking numerous undesirable outcomes.

Losing a job late in life can be stressful, researchers said

"Based on our results, the true costs of unemployment exceed the obvious economic costs and include substantial health consequences as well."

In total, 202 had heart attacks and 140 had strokes from all the groups studied, which included those who had lost their jobs involuntarily, retired, taken a temporary break from work or were still employed.

Once risk factors such as diabetes, smoking, obesity and high blood pressure were taken into account, the risk of the involuntary job loss group having a heart attack after losing their job was 2.5% and a stroke 2.4%.

Hugh Robertson, a health expert at the Trades Union Congress, said it was unsurprising that losing a job late in life had such an effect.

Ageism

But he added: "I don't think it is necessarily because of the age, but rather related to the problems people over 50 have finding jobs of equivalent standard because of the ageism in the workplace.

"There is also the risk to their pensions as they are not always transferable. These are the sort of issues that need to be addressed if the impact to health is to be minimised."

Ellen Mason, a cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, agreed involuntary redundancy was a stressful experience because it took away control from an employee.

But she said: "As there is a great deal we do not know about the respondents we have to be cautious about the conclusions drawn.

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Hugh Robertson, of the Trade Union Congress



"For example, other distressing situations such as family bereavement may have also contributed to the heart disease risk."

And she added stress was still not yet a proven major risk factor for heart attacks and strokes.

