



Police officers have higher heart risk

Published: Sept. 29, 2008 at 7:17 PM

BUFFALO, N.Y., Sept. 29 (UPI) -- Policing is a psychologically stressful work filled with danger, high demands, ambiguity, human misery and exposure to death, U.S. researchers said.

John M. Violanti of the University of Buffalo's School of Public Health and Health Professions said more more than 400 police officers have participated in the study to date, completing questionnaires on lifestyle and psychological factors such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, in addition to measures of bone density and body composition, ultrasounds of brachial and carotid arteries, salivary cortisol samples and blood samples. The officers also wear a small electronic device to measure the quantity and quality of sleep throughout a typical police shift cycle.

Violanti's pilot studies have shown, among other findings, that officers over age 40 had a higher 10-year risk of a coronary event compared to average national standards; 72 percent of female officers and 43 percent of male officers, had higher-than-recommended cholesterol levels; and police officers as a group had higher-than-average pulse rates and diastolic blood pressure.

Violanti and colleagues are using measures of cortisol, the "stress hormone," to determine if stress is associated with physiological risk factors that can lead to serious health problems. When cortisol becomes dysregulated due to chronic stress, it opens a person to disease, Violanti said.