



## Cardiovascular Health channel

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### A Job That's Hard on the Heart

(Ivanhoe Newswire) -- It's well known police officers suffer from a higher risk of developing heart disease than the general public: The question is why?

The University of Buffalo research team says the chronic stress of police work may be the main cause of subclinical atherosclerosis -- arterial thickening that precedes a heart attack or stroke.

"We took lifestyle factors that generally are associated with atherosclerosis, such as exercise, smoking, diet, etc., into account in our comparison between citizens and the police officers," John Violanti, Ph.D, UB associate professor of social and preventive medicine was quoted as saying. "These lifestyle factors were statistically controlled for in the analysis. This led to the conclusion that it is not the 'usual' heart-disease-related risk factors that increase the risk in police officers. It is something else. We believe that 'something else' is the occupation of policing."

Researchers are also studying the role of cortisol, known as the "stress hormone." Violanti found female police officers had higher levels of cortisol when they awoke, and the levels remained high throughout the day. Cortisol normally is highest in the morning and decreases to its lowest point in the evening.

"When cortisol becomes dysregulated due to chronic stress, it opens a person to disease," Violanti was quoted as saying.

Researchers compared 322 healthy policemen with 318 similarly aged civilians, taking account for lifestyle factors such as exercise, smoking, and diet.

SOURCE: *Journal of Occupational and Environment Medicine*, June 2009

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