Two Types of Workplace Stress Fatality File

TRAVELLING through New York on a train, Catherine Plano suddenly felt as though the carriage was caving in. She couldn't breathe, her hands felt numb and she lost all sensation in her legs. The high-flying Melbourne executive and mother was convinced she was dying.

Catherine feels ridiculous recounting her visceral fear now, but while she wasn't having a heart attack, that moment changed things for her forever.

"Everything was closing down, the sound was muffled," she said everything was drawing in on me, I couldn't get my breath in. You don't get enough oxygen."

The panic attacks continued for another six months, to the point where she couldn't leave the house. "It was probably one of the darkest times of my life," she said.

"I was very depressed. I didn't want to leave the house or my husband.

"I'd be waking in the middle of the night with a panic attack. I'd be crawling on the floor.

"There's a stigma attached. I was really scared it would happen in public. It was shame. It cripples you."

Catherine had brought her son Jordan up alone, so to have to rely on new husband Andoni was a shock. "I was a single mum, independent, to have someone look after me, I was really embarrassed. And he saw me in a different light, he didn't see me as a strong woman, he saw me as a weak, frail thing."

Catherine was a victim of Australia's workplace stress crisis, putting in longer and longer hours at the expense of her mental health, pushing herself to the point that she had developed

chronic anxiety.