

Study finds sex differences in mental illness

August 18 2011

When it comes to mental illness, the sexes are different: Women are more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety or depression, while men tend toward substance abuse or antisocial disorders, according to a new study published by the American Psychological Association.

Published online in APA's [Journal of Abnormal Psychology](#), the study looked at the prevalence by gender of different types of common mental illnesses. The researchers also found that women with [anxiety disorders](#) are more likely to internalize emotions, which typically results in withdrawal, loneliness and depression. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to externalize emotions, which leads to aggressive, impulsive, coercive and noncompliant behavior, according to the study. The researchers demonstrated that it was differences in these liabilities to internalize and to externalize that accounted for [gender differences](#) in prevalence rates of many [mental disorders](#).

Researchers analyzed data collected in 2001 and 2002 by a National Institutes of Health survey of 43,093 U.S. residents 18 and older who were civilians and not institutionalized. Of those, 57 percent were women and 56.9 percent were white; 19.3 percent were Hispanic or Latino; 19.1 percent were African-American; 3.1 percent Asian, native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; and 1.6 percent were American Indian or native Alaskan. The data were representative of the age, race/ethnicity and gender distributions of the U.S. population in the 2000 Census. Participants answered interview questions. The analysis examined their lifetime mental health history as well as over the prior 12 months.

The authors cited previous research that found women suffer more than men from depression, because "women ruminate more frequently than men, focusing repetitively on their [negative emotions](#) and problems rather than engaging in more active problem solving."

The findings support gender-focused prevention and treatment efforts, the study said. "In women, treatment might focus on coping and cognitive skills to help prevent rumination from developing into clinically significant depression or anxiety," said lead author Nicholas R. Eaton, MA, of the University of Minnesota. "In men, treatment for impulsive behaviors might focus on rewarding planned actions and shaping aggressive tendencies into non-destructive behavior."

Past research also indicated that [women](#) report more neuroticism and more frequent stressful life events than men do before the onset of a disorder, indicating that environmental stressors may also contribute to internalizing, the report said.

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: Study finds sex differences in mental illness (2011, August 18) retrieved 7 February 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-08-sex-differences-mental-illness.html>

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