

# Female mental health different—study

## Researchers find women more likely than men to suffer from mood disorders

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News Writer

It might seem obvious to men that women can have the occasional mood swing, but according to a study done by two University of Alberta nursing professors, women are in fact more likely than men to suffer from serious mood disorders.

The research paper, written by Gerri Lasiuk and Kathy Hegadoren and published in the journal *Biological Research for Nursing*, explains that whereas men have a 12.7 per cent chance of having a major depressive disorder (MDD) in their lifetime, the probability in women is 21.3 per cent. Although causes for MDD, which range from dysthymia to bipolar II disorder, include genetic predisposition and a history of depressive disorders, the researchers found that cultural and social factors are especially important contributors to MDD in women.

"Gender is consistently cited as a risk factor for mood disorders," the

new paper states. "A recent review of twelve studies conducted in nine different countries confirms that women demonstrate higher lifetime prevalence for affective disorders than do their male counterparts."

Despite what the statistics reveal, the fact that previous studies on mood disorders haven't dealt with gender-specific research is most surprising, Hegadoren and Lasiuk said via email.

"Until the last 10–15 years, it was presumed that disease [or] illness was experienced and expressed similarly in men and women. Based on that premise, most of the existing basic research was done on male lab animals or male humans," Hegadoren said.

Hegadoren went on to explain that because most of the research excluded female test subjects, female-related variables such as the menstrual cycle and other hormonal differences could not be ruled out from affecting mood. This medical issue can now prove to be an equality issue as well.

"Prior to the Second-wave feminism

of the 1960s, women's experience was generally not acknowledged as distinct or important. This has changed gradually over the ensuing years, but there are still many instances of gender inequality," she said.

To learn about the basic health differences of men and women, Hegadoren stressed the importance of repeating previously done experiments to consider gender-specific issues.

"The recent recognition that disease [and] illness manifests and is experienced differently in females and males calls into question the applicability of existing basic health research to women."

Although specific research on female mood disorders has been a slow process, Hegadoren said that this paper is the beginning of a change in how researchers consider gender as a health factor.

Both researchers acknowledge that, as with any new and different view, it will inevitably be met with some resistance. But for now they maintain that the advancements made concerning



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**SERENITY NOW** Female mental health differs greatly from male say researchers.

women's health warrant attention.

"The Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) [...] is the major federal agency responsible for funding health research in Canada," Lasiuk said, referring to the organization that was created by the federal government in 2000. "Within the CIHR, there are 13 virtual institutes, one of which is the Institute of Gender and Health, so

things are continuing to change."

Hegadoren is positive that work with MDD in women will create a change in the scientific community and generally rid society of the myth that women's moodiness can be considered a joke.

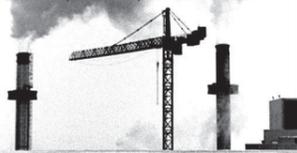
"Hopefully we can continue to bring attention to women's health issues and to the importance of gendered health research."

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