

Gender Differences

Women are twice as likely to be affected by depression compared to men. There don't seem to be major differences in depression until mid-adolescence. ^{[3][4]} Around the ages of 13 to 14, girls consistently begin to show higher rates of depression than boys, and differences become even greater by the later teen years. These differences continue for every adult age group except for the elderly. ^[4]

The onset of these differences in teenagers could be body image. As boys develop they grow taller and gain muscle mass, while girls gain body fat. This negative body image in girls is associated with increased levels of depression in girls compared to boys. ^[4] The hormonal changes for girls in adolescence and throughout a woman's lifetime may also influence women's susceptibility to depression. It is widely believed that hormonal fluctuations strongly affect moods in women. Women are believed to be more prone to depression during the premenstrual period, the postpartum period, and menopause, each of which is characterized by changes in the levels of a number of hormones. ^[3] Another possibility is the traumatic events in women's lives. Rape and sexual abuse are associated with a greatly increased risk for depression, both shortly after and long after the incident. One study found that more than half of a group of adult women seeking therapy for depression had a history of sexual abuse as children. ^[2]

Some believe there aren't major differences in depression, but instead men aren't as open and women seek help much more often. It has been suggested that the male equivalent of depression is alcoholism. Twice as many men are diagnosed as alcoholics than women. Also, many studies find high rates of depressive symptoms

among alcoholic men. ^[3] Alcohol could be used by men to self-medicate their own depression. It could be that an unknown proportion of depressed men appear to be alcoholics. ^[5]

Evidence is emerging from a number of studies that men and women show different patterns of responding to their own feelings of depression. There is evidence that male's response to stress and feelings of sadness tend to be active and often designed to distract themselves from their mood when they are depressed. Women tend to be inactive and more likely to focus their attention back on the mood and the self, which only deepens their depression. These sex differences in responses to one's own affective state contribute to the sex differences observed in rates of depression. ^[3] Males may have healthier responses to depression but it doesn't excuse them from the illness.

Preadolescent males are more likely to be depressed than preadolescent girls. ^[1] Also, while young women are most likely to attempt suicide, the elderly males are most likely to complete the act. The emotional health of men is more at risk when they lose a close relationship compared to women. ^[4] This helps explain why there isn't any differences found in the bereaved and elderly. ^[3] However, there is sufficient evidence sex differences are real and the high number of depressed women is not an artifact of reporting or healthcare behavior. ^[5]

References

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