

# Stress and neck pain more common in women than men

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Neck pain is more common in women than men, irrespective of occupation or age. Stressed young women develop more neck pain than their male counterparts. Women also perceive everyday life to be more stressful, reveals a thesis from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

"There is an ongoing debate amongst researchers as to why muscle and joint pain, such as [neck pain](#), are so common, and why this seems to be more prevalent among women than men," says Anna Grimby-Ekman, postdoctoral student and statistician at the Sahlgrenska Academy's Department of Public Health and Community Medicine. "We know that physical work with heavy lifting or assembly work that involves a lot of arm-raising above shoulder height can lead to neck pain. By looking at a group whose work is less physically demanding, we can more readily identify other factors that could be implicated and perhaps explain the generally high incidence of neck pain."

A questionnaire distributed to university students in Sweden – 627 women and 573 men – showed that neck pain is more common in women than men, and that more women than men developed neck pain during the four years of the study. These results were something of a surprise as the researchers had expected that roughly the same number of women as men would develop neck pain in a young group like this, where the majority had yet to start a family and studying meant that the women and men shared a similar working environment.

Questionnaires were distributed to a second group, this time 870 women

and 834 men who constituted a representative selection of computer users from the Swedish workforce. Women reported more neck and upper back pain across the range of occupations covered. It was evident in both the computer users and the students that neck pain is affected by psychosocial factors, including the demands of work/studying.

"Perceived stress was more common among the women students than the men, and appeared to play more of a role in the development of neck pain in young women than in men," says Anna Grimby-Ekman.

Although the results would suggest that more female university students develop neck pain as a result of the factors examined, the studies also indicate that when it comes to young men there may be other factors behind the huge variations in the incidence of neck pain over time.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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