

Women more likely to defer health care for financial reasons

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(Medical Xpress) -- Women are more likely to put off going to their GP, buying prescriptions or going to the dentist for financial reasons than men according to a new University of Otago study.

This is despite the fact that [women](#) suffer from more [chronic conditions](#) than men, resulting in them going to the doctor more often.

The study by Professor Peter Crampton and Dr Santosh Jatrana looked at 18,320 [adults](#) who took part in an add-on [health survey](#) to [Statistics New Zealand](#)'s Survey of Family Income and Employment (SoFIE). It examined the financial barriers to doctor visits, the collection of [prescriptions](#) and dental care over one year (2004/05).

The just-published study in the *Journal of Primary [Health Care](#)* shows that women are more likely to report they had deferred seeing their doctor/dentist or collecting a prescription at least once during the previous year because they could not afford it. Deferral still occurred amongst women even when controlling for other factors likely to affect the result.

Women were more likely to defer going to a doctor than men (19.9% and 11.4% respectively), buying a prescription (8.2% and 4.2%) and going to the dentist (26.4% and 18.5%).

“The results of this study are of concern not just because women are not accessing care when they need it, but also because women are frequently

responsible for ensuring that children and elders also receive care,” says Professor Crampton.

The study revealed other factors which affected women’s access to primary health care. Being young, in the middle third of income, being more deprived, current smokers and having two other illnesses were strongly associated with deferral of primary health care.

While Māori and Pacific ethnicity also increased the likelihood of deferral for buying prescriptions, for Māori and Asian women it did not affect their visiting a doctor in this study.

Professor Crampton says this research increases our understanding of the importance of gender in the addressing inequalities in accessing health care, particularly for those women who have less money than men.

He says providing free or very low-cost primary health care would help solve these issues. If cost barriers cannot be overcome, many women will remain at risk of receiving less timely health care.

The authors say that more detailed studies are needed to determine the precise reasons behind the gender differences in deferral of health care because of financial issues. Similarly they say that these fundamental reasons need to be addressed through such measures as the provision of specific child or elder care services on-site aimed at reducing the level of deferral of health care by women and young mothers.

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Provided by University of Otago

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