

People identify symptoms of depression more readily in women than men

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The ability to correctly identify signs of depression depends on the gender of both the identifier and the person with depression, as well as individual psychological differences, according to research published November 14 by Viren Swami from the University of Westminster, UK.

The author presented [study participants](#) with one of two fictitious subjects, Kate and Jack. Both were described in non-clinical terms as having identical symptoms of [major depression](#), the only difference being their suggested gender. For example, a sample of the test reads, "For the past two weeks, Kate/Jack has been feeling really down. S/he wakes up in the morning with a flat, heavy feeling that stick with her/him all day. S/he isn't enjoying things the way s/he normally would. S/he finds it hard to concentrate on anything."

Respondents were asked to identify whether the individual described suffered a mental health disorder, and how likely they would be to recommend seeking professional help to the subject in the test.

Both men and women were equally likely to classify Kate as having a [mental health disorder](#), but men were less likely than women to indicate that Jack suffered from depression.

Men were also more likely to recommend that Kate seek professional help than women were, but both men and women were equally likely to make this suggestion for Jack. Respondents, particularly men, rated Kate's case as significantly more distressing, difficult to treat, and

deserving of sympathy than they did Jack's case.

The researcher also found that individual attitudes towards depression were associated with skepticism about psychiatry and anti-scientific attitudes. According to the author, their results are significant for initiatives aimed at enhancing mental [health literacy](#), which should consider the impact of [gender stereotypes](#) and attitudes towards help-seeking behaviors.

More information: Swami V (2012) Mental Health Literacy of Depression: Gender Differences and Attitudinal Antecedents in a Representative British Sample. PLoS ONE 7(11): e49779.
[doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0049779](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0049779)

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