

Depression and mental health services usage

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More than half the people in Ontario who reported they had major depression did not use physician-based mental health services in the following year, a new study has found.

"It's concerning to us that many Ontarians with [mental health](#) needs are not accessing clinician-based care," said Katherine Smith, the lead author and epidemiologist in the Centre for Research on Inner City Health of St. Michael's Hospital.

"Some people may seek non-medical types of support or care, such as clergy, alternative medicine, psychologists or social workers. But we don't know for sure, so the gap remains of concern."

The study used OHIP data from the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences. The findings appear in the journal *Health*.

An estimated one in four people suffer at some point in their lives from depression, which reduces quality of life, is associated with increased disability and lower productivity at work. Women are diagnosed with depression more than twice as often as men.

Smith had set out to see whether gender plays a role in seeking mental health care. In general, [women](#) use mental [health services](#) about 10 per cent more than men, reflecting the fact they use health care services overall more than men.

More than half – 55.3 per cent – of people in Ontario with self-reported

[major depression](#) had no contact with physicians for mental health reasons in the following year. Smith said additional research is needed to understand why.

She said some ethnic groups may not be comfortable accessing physician-based [mental health services](#) or may prefer to use non-medical services. Stigma around mental illness may also deter some people, she said.

Men may be more likely than women to delay seeing a doctor for minor mental health concerns, but will seek help once a mental health problem reaches a certain threshold.

She found the gender gap was small among those with depression, only five percentage points. Women were slightly more likely than men to see a primary care provider for depression – 30.4 per cent vs. 24.6 per cent, but there was little gender difference in who sought speciality care, such as from a psychiatrist.

In comparison, among people without major [depression](#) (who could have had other mental health concerns), there was a significant gender difference: 21 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men had a mental health visit, a [gender](#) gap of 8 percentage points.

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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