

Men and women use mental health services differently

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Women with chronic physical illnesses are more likely to use mental health services than men with similar illnesses; they also seek out mental health services six months earlier than those same men, according to new study from St. Michael's Hospital and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES).

"Chronic physical illness can lead to depression," said Dr. Flora Matheson, a [scientist](#) in the [hospital's](#) Centre for Research on Inner City Health. "We want to better understand who will seek mental health services when diagnosed with a chronic physical illness so we can best help those who need care."

The findings, published today in the *British Medical Journal's Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, looked at people diagnosed with at least one of four physical illnesses: diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Researchers found that among those with at least one of these four illnesses, women were 10 per cent more likely to use [mental health services](#) than men. Furthermore, within any three-year period, women with physical illness used medical services for mental health treatment six months earlier than men.

"Our results don't necessarily mean that more focus should be paid to women, however," said Dr. Matheson, who is also an adjunct scientist at ICES. "We still need more research to understand why this gender divide

exists."

The results may imply that women are more comfortable seeking mental health support than men. Alternatively, the gender discrepancy might mean that symptoms are worse among women, requiring more women to seek help and sooner, or that men defer seeking treatment for mental health concerns.

The study used data from the Canadian Community Health Survey, physician claims and inpatient medical records from ICES. Mental illness service use was defined as one visit to a physician or specialist for mental health reasons, such as depression, anxiety, smoking addiction or marital difficulties.

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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