

Sickness and health between men and women

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Gender and personality matter in how people cope with physical and mental illness, according to a paper by a Washington State University scientist and colleagues at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce.

Men are less affected by a single-symptom illness than [women](#), but are more affected when more than one symptom is present. The number of symptoms doesn't change how women are affected, according to Robert Rosenman, WSU professor in the Department of Economic Sciences.

Rosenman worked with Dusanee Kesavayuth and Vasileios Zikos, both at UTCC in Bangkok, Thailand, on the study.

"Women are more impacted by illness than men, unless more than one symptom is present," said Rosenman. "Then men are more impacted than women. And perhaps more importantly, personality affects how women handle becoming sick, while men of all types react the same."

The research is based on data collected in the British Household Panel Survey, a national [longitudinal data](#) set from the United Kingdom. Longitudinal data tracks the same people at several points in time asking the same questions. The panel included 2,859 people: 1,471 men and 1,388 women.

Two types of women resist mental illness

The survey asked people about their happiness and satisfaction with

aspects of their life. It also asked about their physical and mental health and about their personalities, among other things. Rosenman and his colleagues analyzed the data to see how personality and gender affected the way people coped with becoming ill.

The researchers found that women with one of two distinct [personality types](#) are less affected by [mental illness](#) than all other personality types.

The first personality type, high levels of agreeableness, experience high quality relationships in their lives. The second type, women with low levels of conscientiousness, have little need for achievement, order or persistence.

Rosenman said women with high agreeableness likely have better social networks and therefore more support for coping with mental illness. Women with low levels of conscientiousness are more apt to feel out of control on a daily basis, so they likely don't see any impact from a mental illness, he said.

"They didn't feel in control to begin with," he said. "So they aren't affected the way other women are."

The study finds no correlation between personality type and the impact of a mental illness in men.

Economics of happiness

Rosenman and his colleagues primarily focused on one question in the British survey: How satisfied are you with your health? Then they broke that down based on other questions about gender and personality type. The study is part of the growing field on the economics of happiness.

"Many people think economics only has to do with money," Rosenman

said. "But it's much more than that. We're starting to look at what makes people happy and how that affects different aspects of their lives."

Provided by Washington State University

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