

Men more vulnerable to developing depression from long-term stress

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

It's long been believed that women suffer more of the stresses of life, and research has shown that repeated stress can translate into depression.

So it might be logical to conclude that women who experience such stresses would suffer more [depressive symptoms](#) than men later in life, right? Wrong.

New research from the University of Michigan School of Public Health found that men are 50 percent more vulnerable to the effects of stress when the researchers examined how stressful events translated into depression 25 years later.

"The literature has historically argued that women are more depressed because they get more of the stress. None of that literature touches on role of gender as a vulnerability factor," said Dr. Shervin Assari of the School of Public Health Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture and Health, and the U-M Department of Psychiatry.

Assari's research focuses on how gender and race impact issues of health. In this case, he and colleagues found no association with race and depression over time. One explanation for what happens with men and depression is that they are less likely to talk about the emotions and stressors they encounter, compared with women, he said.

"In our society, as men, we learn to see this as a weakness, as suggested by gender role identity theorists," Assari said. "Hegemonic masculinity is a barrier to seek care and talk about emotions. This at least in part explains why men less frequently seek help, either professional or inside of their social networks. Our research suggests this may come with a price for men."

In addition to how men and women cope with stress, other distinctions may be due to gender differences in resilience, risk perception and general exposure, he said.

"Differential exposure to stress may help women better mobilize their psychological resources, which protect them when needed," he said.

It's also possible that [men](#) may underreport their stresses, and that those who do acknowledge them are the ones who are most affected by

depression later, Assari said.

"Men should improve the way they cope and the way they mobilize their resources when they face stressful events," he said. "They should learn from [women](#) on how to talk about emotions and use resources.

"Men exposed to a lot of stress should take it seriously. They should know being a man is not all about power. It also comes with vulnerabilities."

Assari and colleague Maryam Moghani Lankarani of the Medicine and Health Promotion Institute in Iran used data from the Americans' Changing Lives Study. They focused specifically on [stressful events](#) for the period of 1984-86, and then determined participants' risk for [depression](#) in 2011 by using a standardized survey instrument called the Composite International Diagnostic Interview.

More information: Shervin Assari et al. Stressful Life Events and Risk of Depression 25 Years Later: Race and Gender Differences, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2016.00049](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2016.00049)

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