

Depressed men struggle more than depressed women

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A new wide-ranging study by the University of Otago, Wellington has shown that men with common mental disorders, such as depression or anxiety, are more likely than women with those disorders to have difficulties with social and role functioning. This is despite the common perception that women often have more problems with mental health and subsequent disabilities.

The study by Dr. Kate Scott and Associate Professor Sunny Collings has recently been published in the international *Journal of Affective Disorders* and breaks new ground in research in this area. It counters smaller and less robust studies which have suggested that women with [depression](#) have more disabilities than men.

"Our research confirms that women are more likely than men to experience mood and [anxiety](#) disorders, but what is new is our finding that among men and women with those disorders, it is actually men who experience greater difficulties in role, social and cognitive functioning," says Dr. Scott.

"This runs counter to most prior findings and needs to be noted by clinicians and policymakers."

She says a key result shows that men with a current mood disorder are ten times more likely to report role disability than men without a mood disorder, while women with a mood disorder are four times more likely to have role disability than women without a mood disorder. A similar

pattern is seen with social and cognitive functioning, and with anxiety disorders.

"What's happening here is that both men and women who suffer from depression or anxiety have problems functioning in their day-to-day roles, in social situations and with communicating, but men have more difficulty in these areas than women".

The study, funded by the Health Research Council, is based on data from *Te Rau Hinengaro: The New Zealand Mental Health Survey (2003/2004)*. 7435 people 16 years and over were interviewed using a standard diagnostic assessment of mental disorders; health-related disabilities were measured by the WHO Disability Assessment Schedule.

However Dr. Scott says the study does not point to exact reasons for the gender differences, and these differences did not happen with substance use disorders.

"One explanation for the difference may be that women are more willing to seek treatment than men. They also have greater intimate and emotional ties to family or friends, which may help offset the impact that depression and anxiety have on social functioning."

Dr. Scott says as most males are seen as the primary 'breadwinner' one might think that this is the reason for a higher rate of role disability. However, she found that among men and women who work, men still have greater problems in role function if they are experiencing depression or anxiety. In fact the gender difference is even greater for this group she says.

One of the key clinical implications of this study for GPs and other health professionals is that better assessment of a male patient's [mental health](#) may be achieved by questioning role and social functioning, rather

than focusing on depression and anxiety symptoms.

Dr. Scott also says that because men go to the doctor less frequently than women, more attention needs to be paid to raising the profile of common mental disorders and disabilities in the workplace, especially those that employ large numbers of males.

"The evidence from this study is that a more systematic and assertive focus on men in this area is overdue for humanitarian, social and economic reasons," she says.

Provided by University of Otago

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