

Adults with migraines have triple the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder

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Credit: Sasha Wolff/Wikipedia

Generalized anxiety disorder is much more common among adults who have migraines than those without migraine (6% vs. 2%), according to a new study from researchers at the University of Toronto.

The study, published this month in the journal *Headache*, pinpointed a number of possible factors linking [migraine](#) and generalized anxiety [disorders](#). First author Professor Esme Fuller-Thomson, Sandra Rotman Endowed Chair at University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and Director of the Institute for Life Course & Aging explains, "this link between migraine and generalized anxiety disorders in the past year was partially explained by the disturbingly high prevalence of debilitating [chronic pain](#) (30%) and problems in managing household responsibilities (28%) among those with migraine."

Co-author and recent MSW graduate from the University of Toronto, Janany Jayanthikumar added, "we were not surprised that chronic pain played a strong role in the link between migraines and generalized anxiety disorders. The unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of [migraine pain](#) can be extremely anxiety producing as it often interferes with family and work responsibilities with little or no warning".

Interestingly, the study found that men with migraine had almost double the odds of [generalized anxiety disorder](#) compared with women with migraine.

"This was a surprising finding because in the general population, women are more likely than men to develop generalized anxiety disorder. Our results may be due to the fact that men are less likely than women to take medication to treat their migraine and therefore the disorder may be more painful and less controllable, which could result in anxiety" said co-author Senyo Agbeyaka, a recently graduated MSW student.

What's more, migraineurs who did not have a confidant had five times the odds of [generalized anxiety](#) disorder compared to those with at least one person to confide in; with social support being shown to play an important protective role in the mental health consequences of other chronic pain disorders.

"It is important for health professionals to be monitoring for the presence of [mental health problems](#), including anxiety disorders, in their patients with migraine. Of particular concern are men with migraines, those who experience chronic and debilitating pain, those who are struggling to cope with their daily responsibilities and those who are socially isolated" suggested Fuller-Thomson.

More information: E. Fuller-Thomson, J. Jayanthikumar, S.K. Agbeyaka. Untangling the

Association Between Migraine, Pain, and Anxiety:
Examining Migraine and Generalized Anxiety
Disorders in a Canadian Population Based Study.
Headache. Volume 57, Issue 3, March 2017, Pages
375-390.

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