

research snapshot

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Men Are More Likely to Be Homeless than Women

What is this research about?

Little is known about how gender impacts a person with mental illness. In the past two decades, however, researchers have started to become aware of the role that gender plays in mental health. Being male or female can shape a person's response to treatment. It can also affect how he or she is treated and even impede a person's ability to get access to mental health services.

But how do the experiences of men and women with mental health issues differ? And how can social supports better meet their respective needs?

What did the researchers do?

Ontario researchers in London, Toronto, and Sudbury took a second look at data from a five-year study on housing for people with mental illness. They searched for differences between men and women when it comes to their:

- Psychiatric history
- Ability to function
- Personal strengths and resources

What you need to know:

Gender has an impact on people with mental illnesses. Men are more likely to be homeless than women. More social support needs to be provided to members of both genders.

- Illness severity.

The average participant was in his or her early forties and living in London, Ontario.

What did the researchers find?

Supporting the findings of earlier studies, the researchers found that women are more likely than men to have a mood disorder and experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Men are more likely to suffer from schizophrenia and addictions.

In addition, women with mental illnesses tend to have more social supports than their male counterparts. Women are more likely to be housed than men, and men, more likely to be homeless and living alone.

How can you use this research?

Although the researchers discovered some significant differences between Canadian men and women, more research is needed on how gender influences mental health. An increased understanding will enable Canadian health communities to adjust their treatments and services to meet the different needs of men and women.

More specifically, Canadian service providers need to pay close attention to substance abuse issues when treating men with a history of mental illness. In general, health care professionals should be sensitive to this population's need to develop interpersonal skills and social circles.

Since women are more likely than men to have a history of abuse and trauma, the establishment of safe, private women-only shelters is a must. Specialized programs, for women with PTSD, can help reduce the harmful effects of trauma. More research needs to be done, however, to explore whether strong support systems have helped women to stay housed.

About the Researchers

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