

Activity 7.1

Why Are Women Twice as Likely as Men to be Diagnosed with Major Depression?

The prevalence rate for Major Depression is between 10-25% for women and only 5-12% for men, so what accounts for this major sex difference? You might like to begin a group discussion by asking males and females in your group to say how their experiences as a male or female might influence their susceptibility to developing episodes of depression.

Prior to your group discussion, you might find it useful to read [Volume 74, Issue 1, of the Journal of Affective Disorders \(2003\)](#) that is a dedicated special issue on Women and Depression.

Your discussion may want to take into account the following facts:

- There is no sex difference in the rate of experienced depression prior to age 14-15 years ([Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001](#)).
- Women are more likely to ruminate about their depressive symptoms, whereas men tend to try and distract themselves or express their depression as anger (Mirowsky & Ross, 1995; [Just & Alloy, 1997](#)).
- After puberty, females tend to be less at ease with the physical changes occurring with their body than do males ([Harter, 1999](#)).
- After puberty, women experience more life stressors than men ([Hankin & Abramson, 2001](#)).
- Being married and having children increases the risk of Major Depression in women, but not in men ([Lucht, Schaub, Meyer, Hapke et al., 2003](#)).

Think about the following possibilities:

- Do women get more depressed than men because they feel they have less control over their lives?
- Are women more likely to blame themselves for failures than men?
- Do Western societies set higher cultural standards for women than men (e.g. body shape standards are more defined for women than men), and do women get depressed when they fail to meet these relatively high standards?
- Are men simply less likely to admit that they are depressed than women?

Researchers are far from agreed as to the reasons why twice as many women as men suffer from depression, so there are no right or wrong answers and your group discussion will add to this ongoing debate.