

Women Suffer LOTS of Anxiety. Who's to Blame?

Newly published [research](#) shows that women are twice as likely to suffer from anxiety as men.

The findings, published in a review by researchers at the University of Cambridge in the journal *Brain and Behavior*, are causing a bit of a stir. (The topic is even trending on Facebook!)

First, here's an overview of what researchers found, [via](#) *New York* magazine:

[Researchers] looked at 48 previous studies and found that about 4 percent of people worldwide have an anxiety disorder. (It's the highest in North America, at nearly 8 in 100.)

Women and men under 35 were more likely to have anxiety – which can manifest as excessive worry, fear, and a tendency to avoid potentially stressful situations – than older people, but overall, women were nearly twice as likely to be affected as men were. Pregnant women and new moms were also found to have higher rates of obsessive-compulsive disorder than the general population.

Why is this a big deal, you ask?

Well, the findings could buttress the [controversial idea](#) that innate differences might exist between men and women.

That would be the case if women's anxiety is linked (even in part) to the biological makeup of women. As it happens, that is precisely what review author Olivia Remes suggests is the case.

Remes, who comes from the department of public health and primary care at the university, [told the BBC](#) the higher-rate

of anxiety in women could be the result of “hormonal fluctuations or because women are more prone to stress in general.”

Ms. Remo is apparently unaware that only external factors—patriarchy, sexism, the gender pay-gap, mother-shaming, etc.—are reasonable explanations as to why women appear to suffer from anxiety more than men.

Susan Rinkunas, the writer of *New York* magazine article, politely helps Remo out.

“Child care and other forms of [unpaid labor](#) can certainly stress a gal out, plus there’s the little fact that we get [paid less](#) than men for the same work... I’ll keep going. Other experts believe that, since women [tend to multitask](#) and ‘use more of their actual brain than men do,’ we need more sleep than men – but we don’t [sleep](#) as well as them thanks to said hormones and stresses.”

Now to be fair, regarding her final point, Rinkunas cites stress *and* hormones as explanations as to why women don’t sleep as well as men.

But, also to be fair, the article she links to makes it clear who is to blame: “Women Need More Sleep Than Men Because Fighting the Patriarchy Is Exhausting.”

Here’s an idea: Could both nature and nurture be responsible for the high levels of anxiety women are experiencing?

Women are increasingly juggling careers and motherhood, and [evidence shows](#) that women pick up the bulk of the work on the home front in households in which both spouses have careers. This is stressful work, and stressful work can lead to hyper-anxiety.

Still, is it not possible that non-external differences highlighted by the Cambridge scientist—hormones and an innate

susceptibility to stress—also could explain the higher rate of anxiety in women?

Should those factors not also be considered even if they do not fit the more tidy narrative that a patriarchal society is to blame for women's stress?

A final question: If women are found to be more prone to stress, could it partially explain why, say, women are less represented in certain [highly competitive fields](#) that require rigorous work and dedication?

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