SELF-REPORTED DEPRESSION AND PRESCRIPTION OF ANTIDEPRESSANTS; DOES GENDER MATTER?

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OBJECTIVES: Women are diagnosed with depression twice as often as men. Concerning self-reported depression though, gender differences are not that distinct. Prescription of antidepressants (ADs) has increased considerably the past decades, especially for women. This study aimed to examine gender differences in self-reported depression and the relation to prescribed ADs and also in the prescription of various types of ADs.

METHODS: Data from the population-based cross-sectional survey “Public Health in Sweden 2012” was used (n=16,000 aged 18-84 years, response rate 49.3%). Symptoms of depression were measured with the Hospital Anxiety Depression Scale (HADS, cut-off score ≥8). Self-reported use of ADs two weeks prior to receiving the questionnaire was supplemented with prescription data (ATC-codes) from the national Swedish Prescribed Drug Register.

RESULTS: Men and women reported depression to similar extent (men 12.3%, women 11.2%). However, women were more often prescribed ADs compared to men (men 3.7%, women 6.8%; p<0.001). Nine percent of all women in the study population reported depression but had no AD treatment, 2.1% reporting depression and used ADs, and 4.7% used ADs but reported no depression. The corresponding figures for men were 10.8%, 1.5% and 2.2% (p<0.0001). Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs, N06AB) were the most commonly prescribed ADs for both men (74.8%) and women (79.2%). As for the SSRIs, no statistical significant gender difference was found for the tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs, N06AA; men 9.5%, women 6.7%). However, men were prescribed “Other ADs” (N06AX) significantly more often than women (men 43.3%, women 29.2%; p<0.005).

CONCLUSIONS: Although women and men reported depression to similar extent, women were prescribed ADs almost twice as often as men. Also, women used ADs without being currently depressed more often than men. Further, men were prescribed “Other ADs” more frequently than women.