
Mental Health & Stress Management

Interactive readings “Men’s health situation: addressing men’s lack of understanding of their health problems”

➤ Explanation of topic: definitions

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) as a state of mental well-being that enables people to manage the stresses of life. It has been declared a basic human right by the United Nations and is considered integral to our well-being. The promotion of mental health can therefore be a powerful instrument not only for addressing the threats and challenges of life, but also in the fulfilment of our work, learning, and potential in society.

Stress itself is defined as a state of worry or mental tension, and characterised as a natural human response. It motivates us to face challenges, and affects both the mind and the body, producing emotions such as anxiety and irritability, as well as physical symptoms like trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, changes in appetite, an upset stomach, headaches, or other body pains. How we respond to this makes an important difference for our overall health and can negatively impact our day-to-day experiences if left unmanaged (WHO, 2023).

Events such as economic crises, disease outbreaks, natural disasters, war, and community violence tend to cause widespread stress. Yet, a state of stress can result from something as common as an argument with another person or a work deadline (WHO, 2023).

Often stigmatised as a “women’s health problem” mental health disorders and stress also affect men. In fact, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality, about 34.1 million adult men in the EU were living with mental disorders in 2019, representing around 18% of the adult male population.

Research links unemployment, job insecurity, and financial pressure to poorer mental health outcomes among men.

➤ The consequences of stress and bad mental health for men

Although **we all react to stress differently**, persistent stress can cause or worsen already-existing mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, leading in the worse-cases, to suicide or intentional self-harm.

In the EU, women are more likely to experience those common mental health disorders. However, men are more likely to die by suicide (WHO, 2025). Men in the EU are experiencing death rates 3.6 times higher than women for intentional self-harm (Eurostat, 2022). According to a report from WHO from 2024, suicide is even the leading cause of death among people aged 15–29 years, and the rate is four times higher in men than in women.

These statistics can be explained by the stigma surrounding men's mental health and the approaches they use to manage stress.

➤ The stigma around men's mental health

Despite being aware of the existence of mental health trouble, traditional masculinity values often push men to “tough it out” and to not let themselves being vulnerable when talking about their mental health. Seeking help is seen as an act of weakness when it is in fact a healthy coping mechanism and an act of bravery.

The WHO European review (2020) identified barriers such as difficulty expressing emotions and fear of appearing weak as major contributors to untreated mental health problems in men, thus explaining the terrible consequences of poor mental health for men.

Men's mental health disorders often go undiagnosed because of those social biases and it is necessary to overcome those biases in order to ensure men's health.

➤ Stress management strategies

In order to prevent the deterioration of men's mental health because of stress, it is important to know how to manage it. Two kinds of stress management strategies exist: the positive ones and the negative ones.

The **negative stress management strategies** regroup different behaviours which are often used by men to manage their stress but end up being detrimental to their physical and mental health. Amongst those strategies, we can find:

- Substance abuse (alcohol, smoking, drugs, excessive medication), which can create long-term addiction and worsen mental health. In fact, men have higher rates of alcohol and substance-use disorders in many countries, which are closely linked with depression and suicide risk.
- Suppressing or distancing oneself from emotions, or the “bottling-up” technique, which often leads to isolation and damages one's mental health in the long term.
- Aggression and anger as an avoidance mechanism
- Overeating or starvation, used in an attempt to give the body a sense of control, but they can quickly become an overwhelming eating disorder.

To those unhealthy coping mechanisms, men should prioritize positive stress management strategies.

The WHO (2023) considers that among the best ways to manage stress are:

- Keeping a daily routine with regular meals, regular exercise, chores, and recreational activities;
- Time with friends, family, or community;
- Consistent quality sleep;
- Maintaining a balanced diet, inclusive of fresh fruits, vegetables, and enough fluids;
- Limiting time on the news, social media, and television.

The Eurostat (n.d.) additionally points out that a supportive social environment plays a key role in managing stress and difficult situations. This can be understood as having

enough people to depend on when life gets difficult, being able to easily get practical help from neighbours or others when necessary, and feeling that others truly care about what happens in one's everyday life. All of these forms of social support help us to cope with stressful circumstances and ultimately acts as a protective factor against health problems.

Another important strategy is a problem focused approach, which consists in analysing the roots and effects of the problem creating stress, and establishing a step-by-step way of solving it. If the problem itself cannot be solved, the focus should shift to restoring emotional balance, by talking it out, reframing thoughts or keeping a stress journal.

This process could benefit from relaxation techniques including deep-breathing exercises, meditation or muscle relaxation. These methods allow the body to suppress the feeling of danger and stress should feel more manageable, allowing the mind to think more clearly.

The choice of a healthy coping mechanism isn't universal, and each individual should choose the one they are more comfortable with.

Questions

Question 1: When facing stress, one should:

- a) Surround themselves by supportive friends and family.
- b) Stop talking about it and move on.
- c) Try deep-breathing exercises.

Correct answer: a) and b)

Explanation: To manage stress, individuals should avoid negative strategies like ignoring their problems and keeping their feelings to themselves. Instead, they should try enforcing positive strategies, such as surrounding themselves with a supportive social environment and using relaxation techniques.

Question 2: Mental health issues affect:

- a) More women than men
- b) More men than women
- c) Men and women equally

Correct answer: c)

Explanation: Even though women are more likely to experience mental health disorders, men are also suffering to depression and anxiety, leading to a higher suicide rate for men than for women.

Video

YouTube video : “Managing Stress-Brainsmart-BBC”

‘Managing Stress - Brainsmart - BBC’

References

World Health Organization. (2023). *Stress: Questions and answers*. Retrieved from Stress

World Health Organization. (2025). *Mental health: Strengthening our response* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from Mental health

Eurostat. (n.d.). *Mental well-being and social support statistics*. Statistics Explained. Retrieved from Mental well-being and social support statistics

World Health Organization. (2018). *Men's health and well-being in the WHO European Region: fact sheet*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2018-3022-42780-59695?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Affleck, W., Carmichael, V., & Whitley, R. (2018). *Men's mental health: Social determinants and implications for services*. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 63(9), 581–589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743718762388>

European Institute for Gender Equality. Gender Equality Index 2021: Health. Retrived from Gender Equality Index 2021

The Live Laugh Love foundation
<https://www.thelivelovelaughfoundation.org/blog/stress/stress-burnout-in-men-coping-mechanisms-that-actually-work>