

**THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND OTHER PATIENT CHARACTERISTICS
ON HEALTH CARE-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR: A QUALICOPC STUDY
(PUBLICATION)**



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CONTEXT

In Canada, the provincial Ministries of Health cover most primary care services provided by physicians in their respective provinces. Given the structure of the health care system, patients seeking physical and mental health care often present initially to their primary care provider. Health care-seeking behaviour is influenced by characteristics such as socio-economic status, gender, and age. Other issues such as knowledge of health maintenance, trust in physicians, and the presence of chronic conditions have also been demonstrated to impact health care-seeking behaviour, including frequency and length of visits, satisfaction, and willingness to seek care.

OBJECTIVES

The current research aimed to examine whether there are gender differences in the extent to which patients seek health care in response to physical and mental health concerns, and the types of patient characteristics that predict the extent to which women and men seek help.

METHODS

This study used the cross-sectional Patient Experiences Survey collected from 7260 patients in 759 practices across 10 Canadian provinces as part of the QUALICOPC study. Provincial research teams in each province administered the surveys. A Responsive Care Scale (RCS) was constructed to reflect the degree of health care-seeking behaviour across 11 health conditions organized into two subscales, the Physical Subscale (e.g., blood in stool, stomach pain, deteriorated vision) and the Mental Subscale (e.g., anxiety, sexual problems, domestic violence). After analyzing the descriptive statistics of the sample, a 2 x 2 mixed-design ANOVA was conducted to investigate gender differences in the extent of participants' health care-seeking for both physical and mental health concerns. In addition, four multiple linear regression analyses were conducted (run separately for men and women) to identify what patient characteristics (age, illness prevention, health maintenance, trust in physicians and chronic conditions) were associated with health care-seeking behaviours for physical and mental health concerns.

FINDINGS

Overall, patients were less likely to seek care for mental as compared to physical health concerns. Furthermore, women indicated visiting their primary care provider to a greater extent than did men for both physical and mental health concerns. For both women and men, the patient characteristics were more effective at predicting mental health care-seeking as compared to physical health care-seeking. In particular, those who were younger, had greater confidence in their ability to prevent illness, had greater trust in physicians, and had chronic conditions reported that they would visit their primary care physician for mental health concerns to a greater extent than those who were older, had less confidence in their ability to prevent illness, had lower trust in physicians, and no chronic conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms the gender differences in health care-seeking behaviour, particularly that women engage in health care-seeking to a greater extent than do men. The patient characteristics were better predictors of health care-seeking behaviour in response to mental health concerns than physical health concerns, likely reflecting greater variation among those seeking mental health care. This study has implications for those working to improve barriers to health care access by identifying those more likely to engage in health care-seeking behaviours and the variables predicting health care-seeking. Consequently, those who are not accessing primary care can be targeted and policies can be developed and put in place to promote their health care-seeking behaviour.

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