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Gender Differences in Stroke Prevalence and Outcomes

Amber Comer*

Department of Clinical Neurosciences, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada

Corresponding author: Amber Comer, Department of Clinical Neurosciences, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada, E-mail: calgary@gmail.com

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Description

Stroke is a leading cause of death and long-term disability worldwide, with its prevalence and outcomes significantly influenced by gender differences. Understanding these variations is critical for improving stroke prevention, diagnosis and management strategies tailored to the unique needs of men and women. This article search into the intricate of biological, social and healthcare factors contributing to gender differences in stroke prevalence and outcomes. The prevalence of stroke shows marked gender differences across different age groups. Men generally experience strokes at younger ages compared to women. This discrepancy can be attributed to a higher prevalence of traditional risk factors like hypertension, diabetes, smoking and heavy alcohol consumption among men during their earlier years. Women, on the other hand, have unique risk factors linked to hormonal changes and reproductive health, such as pregnancy, preeclampsia and the use of oral contraceptives. Postmenopausal women are also at an increased risk due to the decline in estrogen levels, which offers a protective effect against cardiovascular diseases during their reproductive years. Atrial fibrillation, a significant risk factor for ischemic stroke, is more common in women, particularly in older age groups. Women with Atrial fibrillation are also at a higher risk of developing strokes compared to men, even when anticoagulant therapy is administered. This may be due to differences in vascular biology and blood coagulation patterns between genders. Additionally, socioeconomic and lifestyle factors, such as access to healthcare, physical activity levels and dietary habits, further influence the prevalence of stroke differently in men and women. Gender differences are also evident in the subtypes of strokes. Men are more likely to experience ischemic strokes caused by atherosclerotic plaques or large artery stenosis. In contrast, women tend to have a higher incidence of cardioembolic strokes, often linked to conditions like atrial fibrillation. Hemorrhagic strokes, though less common, also show gender differences; women may have a slightly higher risk of subarachnoid hemorrhage, often associated with aneurysms.

Atrial fibrillation

These differences underscore the importance of recognizing gender-specific stroke patterns during diagnosis. Misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis can have severe implications, especially for women, who often present with non-traditional stroke symptoms such as confusion, general weakness, or fatigue, in contrast to the classic symptoms like hemiparesis or facial droop that are more common in men. Gender disparities extend to acute stroke care and treatment outcomes. Research suggests that men are more likely to receive timely interventions like thrombolysis or endovascular therapy compared to women. This discrepancy may arise from differences in symptom recognition, both by patients and healthcare providers. Women are more likely to delay seeking medical attention for stroke symptoms, often attributing them to less serious conditions. Furthermore, healthcare professionals may be less likely to recognize atypical symptoms in women as indicative of a stroke, leading to delayed treatment. The underrepresentation of women in clinical trials for stroke treatments also contributes to these disparities. Many therapies are designed and tested predominantly on male populations, leading to potential biases in efficacy and safety when applied to women. This highlights the urgent need for gender-specific research to optimize treatment protocols for both men and women. Stroke outcomes and recovery trajectories also differ significantly between genders. Women generally have poorer functional outcomes and higher mortality rates after a stroke compared to men. Several factors contribute to this disparity. Women are more likely to be older at the time of their first stroke, often living alone or without immediate support, which can delay the initiation of rehabilitation. Additionally, the higher prevalence of comorbidities like hypertension and atrial fibrillation in older women complicates recovery.

Biological and genetic factors

Biological and genetic differences play a crucial role in shaping gender-specific stroke outcomes. Hormonal influences, particularly the protective effects of estrogen, contribute to the lower stroke risk observed in premenopausal women. Estrogen has been shown to have anti-inflammatory and vasodilatory effects, which help maintain vascular health. However, this protective advantage diminishes after menopause, aligning women's stroke risk with that of men. Genetic predispositions also vary between genders. Specific genetic markers linked to stroke risk and recovery may exhibit differential expression in men and women, influencing susceptibility and resilience. Understanding these genetic nuances can prepare for personalized medicine approaches, tailoring preventive and

therapeutic strategies based on individual genetic profiles.

Gender differences in stroke prevalence and outcomes are also shaped by socioeconomic and cultural factors. Women, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, often face barriers to healthcare access due to economic constraints, gender-based discrimination and limited health literacy. These challenges can delay the diagnosis and management of stroke risk factors, magnify disparities in outcomes. Cultural norms and expectations may also influence gender differences in stroke care. For e.g, women may prioritize family responsibilities over their own health, delaying medical attention for stroke symptoms. Similarly, societal perceptions of aging and disability may affect the quality of post-stroke care and rehabilitation services available to women. To mitigate gender disparities in stroke prevalence and outcomes, a multifaceted approach is essential. Public health initiatives should focus on raising awareness about gender-specific stroke risk factors and symptoms, empowering individuals to seek timely medical attention. Healthcare providers should be trained to recognize and address gender differences in stroke presentation and treatment response, ensuring equitable care for men and women.