Why Do Women Experience Depression More Often Than Men Do Essay, Research Paper

Researchers have known for years that women experience depression more often than men do, but the reason for this gender difference has not been clear. A new study, published in the November 1999 issue of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, provides some answers by showing how social conditions and personality characteristics affect each other and contribute to the gender differences in depressive symptoms. In the study, psychologists Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, Ph.D., and Carla Grayson, Ph.D., of the University of Michigan and Judith Larson, Ph.D., of Atherton, CA, interviewed 1,100 adults between the ages of 25 and 75 years old from three ethnically diverse California cities. Results suggest that women may more often than men get caught in a cycle of despair and passivity because of the interaction of lower mastery (lower sense of control) over important areas of life and more chronic strain and rumination (chronically and passively thinking about feelings). For these women, more chronic strain led to more rumination over time, and more rumination led to more chronic strain over time. The study’s authors say the chronic strain the women in the study reported were “the grinding annoyances and burdens that come with women’s lower social power. Women carried a greater load of the housework and child care and more of the strain of parenting than did men.” The authors also found women felt less appreciated by their partners than men did. “Rumination may maintain chronic strain because it drains people of the motivation, persistence, and problem-solving skills to change their situations,” said the authors. “Failing to do what one can to overcome stressful situations such as an unfulfilling marriage or an inequitable distribution of labor at home perpetuates these situations.” While this study cannot answer the question of which comes first, rumination or chronic strain, the researchers say the interaction of the two makes it more difficult to overcome either one. So what is a depressed woman, under chronic strain and ruminating or lacking a belief that she can control her life, to do? The authors conclude “helping women achieve a greater sense of control over their circumstances and engage in problem solving rather than ruminating should be useful. Changing the social circumstances that many women face so that they do not have so much to ruminate about is equally important.”