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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PREVALENCE OF SOMATOFORM DISORDERS IN PATIENTS VISITING PRIMARY CARE CENTERS

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Objective: The aim of this study was to examine the gender differences in the prevalence of somatoform disorders among a sample of Qatari patients who were visiting primary health care (PHC) centres and to investigate the severity of most frequent somatic symptoms in these patients.

Method: The first stage of the study was conducted with the help of general practitioners (GPs), using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). The second stage was carried out by a psychiatrist using the Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS). The survey was conducted among patients presenting to the primary health care centres over the period from January to July, 2007. 2320 subjects were approached and a total of 1689 patients agreed to participate and responded to the questionnaire. Among the screened Qatari patients, 404 patients, 211 males (52.2%) and 193 females (47.8%), were identified for clinical interview.

Results: The prevalence rate of somatoform disorders among the total screened sample was 23.9%. The prevalence rate was slightly higher in women (24.2%) than in men (23.7%). Prolonged depressive reaction was significantly higher in women compared to men ($p=0.003$). There was a significant gender difference in certain psychiatric diagnostic categories such as depressive episode, recurrent depressive disorder, dysthymia and brief depressive reaction. Backache was the most common reported symptom in men, while headache was more common in women.

Conclusion: Prevalence of somatoform disorders was slightly higher in Qatari women than in men. There was a significant difference found between men and women in certain diagnosis categories and somatic symptoms.