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## THE IMPORTANCE OF MEN'S HEALTH CARE

### **Abstract:**

*It is evident, backed by research that men tend to avoid medical examinations much more frequently than women. Statistics show that women are more likely to visit medical professionals for preventive measures, health consultations, and examinations, with a probability of over 95%. Surprisingly, despite women having a significantly higher life expectancy, men need to recognize the importance of preventive health examinations. Timely consultations with healthcare providers can effectively prevent various diseases, including those with fatal consequences. Fortunately, many of these conditions can be prevented and treated. To achieve this, it is crucial to launch more proactive campaigns aimed at raising awareness among men on these critical topics.*

*This paper analyses the status of men's health and provides available data. Additionally, through a quantitative research study, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation in the Republic of North Macedonia.*

*The goal is to emphasize the significance of men's health care, encourage regular medical check-ups, and promote a proactive approach to preventive measures. By doing so, we can ensure better health outcomes for men and contribute to a healthier society overall.*

**Keywords:** men, health, diseases, care, risk factors, prevention.

## Introduction

It is well-known that men often disregard unusual symptoms and health issues, resulting in avoidance or delay of medical examinations. This behaviour can partly explain why women generally have longer life spans. Studies indicate that men are more prone to consuming alcohol, smoking and adopting generally unhealthy lifestyles (Williams & Steptoe, 2018). Consequently, these factors can contribute to the development of severe illnesses. To counteract this trend, it is crucial to develop and implement targeted campaigns that raise awareness of the factors and risks associated with men's health. Fortunately, early detection through timely examinations is key to effective prevention.

Defining what it means to be healthy can vary among individuals. Laypeople often view health as the absence of sickness, while healthcare professionals focus on the absence of medically defined diseases when referring to "health." Standards for defining health can vary and evolve, and individuals often subjectively evaluate their own health. By prioritizing awareness campaigns, timely medical examinations, and promoting healthier lifestyle choices, we can proactively address men's health concerns and work towards improving overall well-being.

The most acceptable definition of the term "health" is the one established by the World Health Organization (WHO). Namely, WHO defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and bodily infirmity"<sup>1</sup>. Health potential implies a good nutritional status, immune resistance to infectious agents, physical condition, emotional stability, appropriate knowledge, and approaches to health, as well as successful overcoming of psycho-social stress. Significant elements that affect the health potential are an adequate health policy, well-organized social protection, employment, adequate living and adequate health conditions, accessibility to health, educational and other public institutions, etc. (Радуловиќ, 2018). The increase of health resources, and the reduction of health risks of individuals, contribute to strengthening the health potential, and thereby maintaining the health balance, that is, to maintaining health (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021).

Modern society, like never before cultivates the passion to achieve a longer and more vital life. Such efforts are usually fulfilled through achievements in the field of medicine and science, but taking care of one's own health is also very important. Simply put, change begins personally with everyone. Longevity of life will remain something of an enigma, but what we can refer to are official life expectancy statistics.

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<sup>1</sup>This definition was adopted for the first time at the International Health Organization held in New York, from June 19, 1946, to July 22, 1946. It was signed by 61 representative states on July 22, 1946, and entered into force on April 7, 1948.

### **Life expectancy and life expectancy in men**

The length of life is influenced by many factors, such as: genetics, lifestyle, living conditions, working conditions and very importantly, the attitude of the individual himself towards his own health. Deeper medical research, however, says that one of the main reasons why men have a shorter lifespan compared to women is female hormones and their protective effect, especially estrogen. According to the latest research of the recognized website [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), which specializes in statistical analysis of various topics, the average life expectancy in 2020 is 70 years for man, while for women it is 75 years (Statista, 2022). Also, the data is shown by continent, which leads to the findings that men in North America and Australia have the longest average life expectancy - 77 years. The lowest average life expectancy for men is recorded in Africa and is 62 years.

As for the situation in North Macedonia, the situation is no different. Namely, according to the latest report from the State Statistics Office, made in 2020, the average life expectancy for men is 71.6 years, that is, 75.3 years for women. In other words, the average life expectancy for women is 3.7 years longer (Државен завод за статистика, 2020). More already mentioned, men are known to have a shorter lifespan than women. However, it must be noted that a lot of things depend on the individual himself. The causes of various diseases can be prevented if we are careful and responsible towards ourselves. We should strive to live longer, healthier, and better lives as possible, which will certainly improve the overall quality of our lives and the lives of our families.

### **The most common diseases that men suffer from**

In the middle of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) publishes a report from the research conducted in the period from 2000 to 2019, which refers to the most common diseases that people suffer from. 185 countries are included in the research, including the Republic of Macedonia<sup>2</sup>. They are:

#### **1. Cardiovascular diseases**

Cardiovascular diseases are chronic diseases that represent a group of the most common diseases of men in all developed countries in the world, both in terms of morbidity and mortality. These include diseases of the heart and blood vessels. In most cases, they remain undiagnosed for a long time, so when the first symptoms appear, they occur in the form of urgent and acute coronary conditions (in the form of an infarction, i.e., heart attack) or a stroke. Such manifestations occur unexpectedly quickly and unfortunately, in many cases, end with a fatal outcome, before any medical treatment is even applied. Data from the research of the World Health Organization show that in 2019,

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<sup>2</sup>Global Health Estimates 2019: Disease and Mortality Outcomes by Symptom, Annual Age and Sex, Disaggregated by Country and by region, 2000-2019, Geneva, World Health Organization; 2020. All states with more than 90,000 inhabitants are included in the survey.

9,323,254 men fell ill with cardiovascular diseases, which ended with a fatal outcome, i.e., death. Of these, ischemic heart disease (insufficient blood supply) and heart attack stand out the most, from which nearly 8 million men suffered death in 2019.

## 2. Malignant diseases

The symptoms caused by certain types of cancer vary in many ways and are often not specific to a particular type of cancer. A particular difficulty is that the symptoms, especially in malignant diseases of the internal organs, are often felt when the disease is already advanced, when the therapy is more complicated, and the possibility of treatment is more uncertain. Therefore, a balanced and healthy lifestyle is necessary, in combination with regular blood tests and regular check-ups with a family doctor. It is the style and way of life, together with the nature of men who are generally resistant to regular medical examinations that contribute to the fact that in 2019, 1,200,000 more men die from these diseases, compared to women (Smith, Braunack-Mayer & Wittert, 2006). According to a report from the World Health Organization, most men get sick and die from lung cancer, with a figure of over 1,200,000. Stomach and colon cancer are next.

## 3. Infectious and parasitic diseases

Infectious diseases and parasitic diseases are found as the third category of diseases that most often affect men. Above all, tuberculosis, diarrheal diseases, HIV virus and malaria are mentioned as the most common diseases in this area. Of course, these diseases have a particular impact on the surroundings, that is, geographical areas, where certain types of diseases are more prevalent. Also, many men suffer from sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, human papilloma virus, etc. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

## 4. Respiratory diseases

According to the World Health Organization, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma are among the most important health problems facing men globally. Suffice it to say that in 2019, more than 2,300,000 men lost their lives because of these diseases. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is most common in this section and refers to a group of diseases that cause blockage of the air flow and create various problems related to breathing.

## 6. Digestive diseases

In general, the digestive system consists of the digestive tract, which includes parts such as: the oral cavity, esophagus, stomach, intestines, and adnexal glands (liver and pancreas) (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019). According to the World Health Organization, in 2019, 1,461,298 men died because of the diseases that fall into this category, and here, above all, the problem with cirrhosis of the liver and pancreatitis stands out.

## 7. Respiratory infections

According to the World Health Organization, respiratory diseases, with an emphasis on lower respiratory infections, have a really big impact

on men's health, globally. In 2019, 1,376,941 men died from these diseases (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, 2021). Lower respiratory tract infections are any infections in the lungs or below the "voice box". First, we are talking about diseases such as pneumonia and bronchitis, and today it is also the COVID virus. Since official data on the corona virus is not included in this research period, it is missing, but its impact is unquestionable. If the consequences on men's health from the corona virus are calculated, these diseases will get a much higher position than the seventh place. However, the data is not yet an official part of such research, as it changes daily.

#### 8. Neurological diseases

Neurological diseases are mentioned as the eighth most prevalent category of diseases from which men suffer most often. Men often fight Alzheimer's disease and dementia, with Parkinson's disease. In 2019, nearly 946,000 men lost their battle for life because of neurological diseases, and most of them were 70 years old or older. There is no specific cure for Parkinson's disease, and treatment is mainly aimed at improving symptoms. It occurs especially in people who are more than 60 years old.

#### 9. Intentional injuries

The category of intentional injuries includes all those actions that a person deliberately carries out to his own detriment or to the detriment of others. Self-injury is a procedure when a person deliberately causes harm to himself, and a classic example is suicide. According to the WHO, in 2019, 913,532 men died due to these causes, and self-harm and suicide stand out with over 50%, that is, with a figure of 486,881 men. Just for comparison, in the same year 216,340 women decided to take their own lives. Even more worrying is the fact that mostly young and middle-aged people are involved. 328,363 men who decided to commit suicide were aged between 30 and 49 years, and right behind them are the men who belong to the age limit of 15 to 29 years, with a number of 267,177. Mental illness (depression), alcohol, various abuses and violence, loss of loved ones, access to firearms, poverty, etc., are considered primary factors which lead to the greatest risk of self-harm and suicide.

The World Health Organization has been expanding its research since 2019 in a more specific direction. Namely, for each of the countries, the WHO singles out the top 10 diseases that men suffer from, and which end in death. The research is based on a sample of 100,000 men.

In 2019, in Macedonia, these are the first 10 diseases that men suffer from, and they end in death, i.e., fatal outcome (Светска здравствена организација, 2019):

- Heart attack (242.6 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Ischemic heart diseases (230.7 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Cardiomyopathy, myocarditis and endocarditis (183.6 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Lung cancer (82.7 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (48.3 deaths per 100,000 men)

- Diabetes (42.2 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Colon cancer (30 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Stomach cancer (28.4 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Kidney diseases (27.7 deaths per 100,000 men)
- Hypertensive heart disease (25.3 deaths per 100,000 men)<sup>3</sup>

### **Risk factors affecting men's health**

Many of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in men are preventable. It is important to note that many of these deaths are preventable through early detection, effective treatment, and lifestyle modifications. Therefore, efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, improve access to health care, and address environmental factors that contribute to disease are important strategies to reduce the global burden of disease and death. Most common are:

- Consumption i.e., smoking cigarettes
- Unhealthy and unbalanced
- Overweight
- Lack of sports
- Alcohol
- Constant and uncontrollable stress
- Avoiding a doctor's visit

### **Men's health awareness campaigns**

To raise awareness about the health problems that men can face, as well as to encourage timely detection and treatment of diseases, various campaigns are organized at the global level. In the following, we will look at three of the most famous campaigns to raise awareness about men's health: International Men's Health Week, Movember and International Men's Mental Health Awareness Day.

- International Men's Health Week

Every year, in the month of June, the International Men's Health Week is marked. Led by the Men's Health Network, representatives from six leading men's health organizations around the world are meeting in Vienna, Austria, for the Second World Congress on Men's Health<sup>4</sup>. On Friday, which is within the week dedicated to men's health, the Day of wearing blue<sup>5</sup> is celebrated.

- Movember

Movember is an annual event that aims to raise awareness of men's health issues, primarily diseases such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and suicide. This campaign is celebrated during the month of November, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Who, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Men's Health Network

<sup>5</sup> Wear Blue Day

rules are simple: On November 1st, men must shave their beards completely; during the entire month of November, men must grow and care for their Moustaches; Only the Moustache is kept and maintained, not the beard!

By encouraging men to get involved in this campaign, Movember aims to emphasize the importance of early detection of the before mentioned diseases, and thus timely diagnosis and effective treatment that will prevent fatal outcomes. In doing so, the Moustache is used as a symbol of the movement.

- International Men's Mental Health Awareness Day

On Tuesday, within the week dedicated to men's health, the International Men's Mental Health Awareness Day is specially marked. It gets up word for a relatively new campaign, officially launched in 2014, which aims to raise awareness of mental illness and prevent its fatal consequences.

### **Research on the importance of men's health care in North Macedonia**

Building upon the existing knowledge, statistics, and analyses surrounding men's health, we conducted a study titled "The Importance of Men's Health Care in Macedonian Men." The research sample consisted of 50 male respondents aged between 18 and 60+ years. Most respondents fell within the 26-35 age group. Among the participants, 26 had completed higher education, 15 had secondary education, 5 had completed vocational education, and 4 held master's degrees. None of the respondents reported having primary education or a doctorate degree.

Regarding employment status, 43 respondents (86%) declared themselves as employed, while only 7 (14%) were currently classified as unemployed. Out of the 50 respondents, 45 had health insurance coverage (90%), while 5 did not have health insurance (10%). The research questionnaire comprised 24 questions, which will be analysed in detail below. The study was formulated with two hypotheses:

General Hypothesis: Men in Macedonia do not prioritize their health adequately due to an overemphasis on hedonism at the expense of physical activity, such as engaging in sports. Specific Hypothesis: Factors like the fear of social stigma and a perceived threat to their masculinity directly influence men to delay seeking medical help until symptoms worsen.

Through this research, we aim to shed light on the importance of men's health care in North Macedonia and evaluate the extent to which these hypotheses hold true. By understanding the factors influencing men's health behaviours, we can develop targeted interventions and strategies to improve overall well-being and encourage men to prioritize their health proactively.

### **Research results**

The research findings highlight important aspects of men's health care based on the responses received from the participants. Most respondents

were employed and had access to adequate health insurance. However, several concerning patterns emerged from the data.

Firstly, it was observed that a significant proportion of respondents (60%) waited over a year to have a blood test, and as a result, 22 respondents (44%) were unaware of their general health condition. Furthermore, more than half of the men (62% of respondents) sought health care primarily within state clinics. This initial data points to a lack of proactive care and delayed medical attention among men.

Another significant finding is that 56% of respondents admitted to waiting as long as possible during a health problem, hoping it would resolve on its own before seeking medical assistance. Additionally, 36% of the respondents expressed a low level of trust (rating of 1) in the healthcare system, while 32% rated it as a 2, 26% as a 3, and only 6% as a 4. Consequently, a significant proportion (56%) of the respondents lack trust in their family doctor, and a staggering 92% felt the need to seek a second opinion from another doctor. It is noteworthy that 72% of the respondents also relied on the internet as a health advisor, seeking alternative treatment options and sharing experiences.

When asked about the reasons for not undergoing regular examinations, 29 respondents mentioned that they only visited a doctor when they felt extremely ill. Similarly, 22 respondents expressed fear that a health issue would be detected. These responses highlight the presence of male stubbornness, a factor frequently mentioned in global statistics as a significant contributor to higher mortality rates among men compared to women. Paradoxically, more than half of the respondents avoided regular examinations due to their fear of receiving a negative diagnosis. Timely medical check-ups can play a crucial role in alleviating this problem.

Based on these research findings, it becomes evident that efforts are needed to address the prevailing attitudes and behaviours related to men's health care. By promoting regular examinations, increasing trust in healthcare providers, and providing education on the importance of early intervention, it is possible to encourage men to take proactive steps towards maintaining their health and well-being.

During the survey, participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the difficulty they experienced in openly discussing their problems with their doctor. Surprisingly, 18 respondents rated it as "very difficult" (rating of 1), while 12 respondents rated it as a 2. This highlights a concerning trend where discussing health issues openly seems to be a taboo subject for men. To address this issue, it is crucial to develop campaigns that promote the importance of men's health care and encourage open conversations between men and their healthcare providers.

When it comes to mental health, which is a significant concern in modern times, depression and anxiety were reported as the most common problems for which respondents sought medical consultation. A total of 23 men identified these conditions as their primary concern. Following closely behind, 20 respondents mentioned issues related to nutrition and body weight. It is

imperative to prioritize campaigns that raise awareness about mental health care, as the development of such symptoms and subsequent illnesses can have severe consequences. It is crucial to eliminate the fear of stigma and labels associated with mental health problems, encouraging men to seek professional help from psychologists or suitable healthcare professionals without hesitation.

Regarding diagnosed diseases, respondents had the option to provide multiple answers. The most mentioned health problem was stomach issues, including bacteria and ulcers, with 27 respondents reporting it. Hypertension (high blood pressure) was the second most common problem, mentioned by 25 respondents. Additionally, 22 respondents identified a lack of physical activity as a problem. These findings emphasize the need for interventions aimed at addressing common health issues and promoting healthier lifestyles.

By addressing the barriers to open communication, raising awareness about mental health care, and addressing common health problems, we can work towards improving men's overall health and well-being. It is essential to create an environment where men feel comfortable seeking help and engaging in conversations about their health.

The results of the survey raise concerns and strongly support the general hypothesis that men are more focused on hedonism, indulging in unhealthy food and drinks, which ultimately make them more vulnerable to certain diseases and contribute to higher mortality rates compared to women. The findings shed light on the respondents' behaviours:

Alcohol consumption is prevalent among the participants, with 31 respondents reporting regular consumption, 15 consuming it moderately, and only 4 abstaining completely. Cigarette smoking is also common, with 30 respondents reporting regular use. Additionally, carbonated drink consumption is regular for 32 respondents. Surprisingly, a significant number of participants, 38 in total, consume fast food regularly, while 12 do so moderately. None of the respondents claimed to completely avoid fast food. Furthermore, 30 respondents reported regular consumption of cakes and sweets, while 18 indulged moderately, and only 2 refrained from such foods entirely.

The survey also revealed that 90% of the respondents (45 men) expressed a desire for better information regarding the risks associated with men's health. However, only 48% of the total respondents (24 men) expressed a willingness to actively participate in campaigns related to men's health. For the remaining 26 respondents (52%), engagement in such campaigns remains a taboo subject. Encouragingly, there is hope that more aggressive marketing campaigns and the expansion of social networks can lead to significant changes and greater awareness of these important issues.

Lastly, when asked if they believe they take sufficient care of their health, most respondents gave an honest assessment. A total of 40 respondents (80%) acknowledged that they do not adequately prioritize their health, while 10 respondents (20%) believed that they do pay sufficient attention to their well-being.

Based on the comprehensive questionnaire, we can confidently conclude that both the general and special hypotheses put forth at the beginning of the research are valid and accepted. The unhealthy and hedonistic lifestyles adopted by men contribute to a wider range of potential diseases. If left unchecked, these conditions can have fatal consequences. Moreover, the fear of stigma and the societal belief that men must exhibit toughness and not easily show weakness, even in terms of health, contribute to insufficient care, the rapid progression of symptoms, and ultimately, more dire consequences that could have been easily prevented.

These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions, comprehensive health campaigns, and increased awareness to address the unique health challenges faced by men. By promoting healthier lifestyles, encouraging open discussions, and combating societal expectations, we can strive towards better men's health outcomes and prevent unnecessary suffering and loss of life.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the research on the importance of men's health care in North Macedonia has provided valuable insights into the current state of men's health and their attitudes towards healthcare practices. The findings indicate several key points:

1. Men's tendency to ignore or delay medical examinations and avoid discussions about their health problems is evident. This behaviour is influenced by factors such as fear of stigma, concerns about masculinity, and a focus on hedonistic lifestyles.
2. The research highlights the need for increased awareness campaigns to educate men about the importance of preventive health measures, regular check-ups, and early detection of diseases. It is crucial to dispel the taboo surrounding men's health discussions and encourage them to seek professional help when needed.
3. Mental health, particularly depression and anxiety, emerged as significant concerns among the respondents. There is a need for targeted campaigns to raise awareness about mental health issues, eliminate stigmatization, and promote access to mental health services.
4. Unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, including alcohol consumption, smoking, poor dietary habits, and sedentary lifestyles, were prevalent among the respondents. Addressing these behaviours through comprehensive health campaigns can contribute to better overall health outcomes for men.
5. The research underscores the importance of providing easily accessible and trustworthy healthcare services. Building trust in the healthcare system and ensuring that men have confidence in their healthcare providers are essential for promoting regular check-ups and seeking timely medical assistance.

Overall, the research highlights the urgent need for tailored interventions, education, and awareness campaigns to improve men's health outcomes. By addressing the specific challenges faced by men, promoting healthier lifestyles, and encouraging proactive healthcare practices, we can work towards a healthier future for men in North Macedonia.

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