

# Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence and Subsequent Depression and Anxiety Symptoms among Swedish University Students: A Cohort Study

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## Conclusion

Several forms of sexual harassment and sexual violence (SHV) were associated with higher subsequent depression and/or anxiety symptoms among women students. Trends indicate that the potential mental health impact could differ between different forms of SHV exposures, both in strength and in their effect over time.

## Introduction

Sexual harassment and sexual violence (SHV) are common experiences among university students. SHV include a range of negative sexual experiences of varying severity, ranging from sexualized jargon and jokes to sexual abuse and rape. The many meanings of SHV pose a challenge when attempting to determine its mental health consequences.

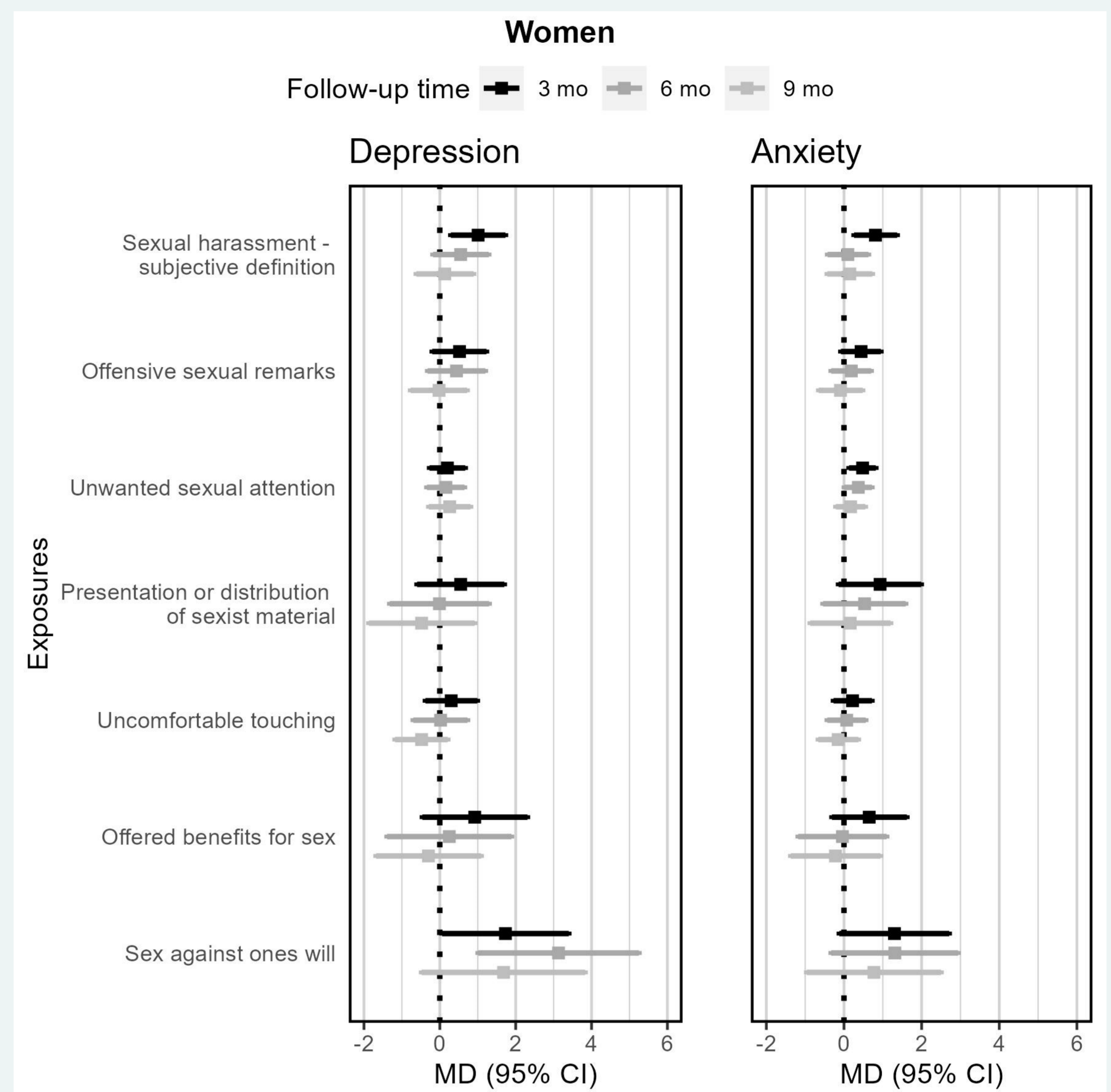
We aimed to determine the gender-specific impact of recent exposure to six specific forms of SHV and one wide definition of SHV on depression and anxiety symptoms three, six, and nine months later.

## Methods

We followed 2229 women and 1274 men studying at Swedish universities over one year. Mean differences (MDs) of depression and anxiety symptoms between exposed and unexposed were estimated at each 3-month follow-up, adjusting for prior SHV, prior depression and anxiety symptoms and potential confounders.

## Results

For women, exposure to sexual harassment (wide subjective definition), unwanted sexual attention and sex against ones will was associated with higher subsequent depression and/or anxiety symptoms (Figure 1). For men, we refrain from interpreting the results since they showed high variability and were not robust to sensitivity analyses



**Figure 1.** Forest plot of adjusted mean differences of depression (left) and anxiety (right) between exposed and unexposed women at 3, 6 and 9 months

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Fred Johansson is a post-doc in psychiatric epidemiology currently focusing on environmental and genetic risk factors for suicide