

Osteoporosis and fragility fractures as a priority for women's health

Osteoporosis and fragility fractures affect millions of women in Europe but have been consistently under-prioritised in health policy. Policymakers must recognise the importance of prioritising osteoporosis and fragility fractures for addressing gender equality and improving women's health.

Women often live longer than men, but in many cases in poor health, suffering disproportionately from chronic conditions such as osteoporosis.¹ Women in Europe spend more of their lives in ill health than men, living with a range of chronic conditions as they age.² This includes osteoporosis, which was estimated to affect around four times as many women as men in EU in 2010.³

Despite their significant impact, osteoporosis and other conditions that disproportionately affect women rarely feature in national health policies and strategies.² Osteoporosis, and conditions including depression, eating disorders and disabilities stemming from domestic violence, are often 'invisible', being insufficiently recognised by health systems.² This lack of prioritisation leads to significant underdiagnosis and low levels of treatment among women.^{4,5}

Even among the few countries with a strategic focus on women's health, osteoporosis is often absent.⁶⁻⁸ Where women's health is a strategic priority, services tend to focus on reproductive health^{6,7} while other conditions affecting women, including chronic diseases that begin later in life, receive less attention.⁸

Osteoporosis has been similarly under-prioritised at the European level.^{1,8} The World Health Organization's efforts to address women's health and wellbeing in Europe^{1,8} discuss the

importance of addressing women's health needs beyond the maternal role. However, osteoporosis and fragility fractures are not addressed,^{1,8} demonstrating a lack of recognition of these conditions as important women's health issues.

Policies that aim to improve population health and wellbeing must recognise and address the healthcare needs of women across the life course. By improving osteoporosis and fragility fracture prevention and management, policymakers can reduce current disparities in health and wellbeing and support greater gender equality.



Osteoporosis mostly affects older women. It is an invisible disease among an invisible group. We must give it a face and demand that policymakers stop ignoring it.



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