The Correlation Between Gender And Longevity

Gender plays an enormous role in the way males and females perceive their illness and symptoms. Women tend to have more symptoms than men and have been shown to outlive men by an average of three years (Ogden, 2017). There are many factors that can contribute to this.

From a biological standpoint, females, in general, have been shown to be stronger than males. This is evident in the case of male neonates having a much lower survival rate than female neonates (Ogden, 2017). This weakness is further extended to the fetal stage as Britt, R (2006) highlights in a study which showed that during times of increased stress and hardship, women's bodies naturally expels male fetuses. However, this was not the case with the females.

From an evolutionary perspective, women's bodies may be better able to handle stressful situations. This is necessary since women have to be able to handle the stress of carrying a baby and giving birth (Ogden, 2017). There are so many physiological changes that occur in a woman's body during this time. Apart from the heart having to pump 50% more blood around the body, the internal organs are also re-positioned to make space for the growing fetus plus additional strength is needed for the stress of the actual delivery of the baby (Soma-Pillay, P., Nelson-Piercy, C., Tolppanen, H., & Mebazaa, A., 2016). This ability to cope with stress may be a factor in explaining why more men die from heart disease than women, as Ogden, (2017) stated.

Ogden 2017 also states that a major reason for gender differences in health outcomes is the fact that men refrain from visiting their doctors for health checkups. This results in late diagnosis of illnesses and treatment, therefore, men may be more likely to succumb to illnesses than women. This delayed help seeking behavior may stem from a number of different factors such as social norms where men are expected to be tough and invincible. This toughness may also contribute to men feeling that they are less at risk of becoming ill (Ogden, 2017). They may, therefore, not be very strict in trying to maintain a healthy diet, visiting their doctor or paying attention to symptoms. Men's inattention to their bodies and their reliance on avoidance coping plays a part in them perceiving less symptoms whereas women perceive much more. Women, such as myself, who exhibit approach coping, are always listening to their bodies and can recognize when something is different. They can then act on this information by going to the doctor and so on resulting in early diagnosis and treatment and a longer life expectancy.

Ogden, (2017) also stated that men are more likely to exhibit a lack of perceived risk which is evident in their unhealthy behaviors. Drinking to excess, having multiple sex partners etc. are all behaviors that can contribute to them having a lower life expectancy than women but they believe they are immune to the risk of becoming ill due to these behaviors. A study done by Olson, J. S., Hummer, R. A., & Harris, K. M. (2017) found that young men exhibited high levels of unhealthy behaviors compared to women. Additionally, the study indicated that women tend to discontinue unhealthy behaviors as they get older but men continue these behaviors which can contribute to them contracting sexually transmitted diseases and other infections which can prove to be fatal.

In my opinion, the lack of perceived risk is the explanation that is most likely to result in the differences in longevity between males and females because if men believe that they are strong and will not get sick, then they will not be motivated to take care of their bodies. They will be more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as unsafe sex, drinking to excess and so on. Due to this belief, they will see no need to visit the doctor regularly and as a result, they will not be able to catch any potential issues early and initiate lifesaving treatment.It is therefore of paramount importance that educational campaigns be initiated which can seek to educate families and men, in particular, on the importance of reducing unhealthy behaviors, importance of medical screenings and general help seeking behavior so that they can live a healthier life.