

The fact that an article about the psychiatric aspects of triple X syndrome is being published can be disturbing for (expecting) parents. I am therefore grateful for the opportunity to write a short Introduction.

This article is not the first to be published on the psychiatric aspects of triple X syndrome. The Swedish psychiatrist Staffan Olanders was one of the most important forerunners in this area. In 1973 he wrote a thesis about women with an extra X chromosome. One of the chapters of his thesis was on the psychiatric aspects of this phenomenon. Although researchers sometimes overestimate their results, Dr. Olanders did not. He stressed time after time that his results should be viewed with great care. Because he recruited the women for his research in psychiatric hospitals, they all had a psychiatric disease. However, the fact that there are women with triple X who also have psychiatric problems is not that special. All people, including women, can become ill, also in a psychiatric sense.

In 1977 another researcher, Prof. Paul E. Polani, an Italian pediatrician who worked in London, summarized all of the research done on triple X syndrome in women inside and outside of psychiatric hospitals. At that time it was already known that triple X syndrome is found in approximately 1 out of 1000 women outside of psychiatric hospitals. He concluded that within psychiatric hospitals triple X syndrome occurs 4 or 5 times more often. (In addition, triple x syndrome also occurs 4 to 5 times more often in institutes for people with intellectual disabilities.) Polani discovered that the chances of a psychiatric disorder with psychotic features is 1% for the general population and about 4% in women with triple X syndrome.

In the article we are presenting here, we focus on women with a psychiatric disease. We have also described these women to demonstrate what might be relevant to future research. We want to know what makes women with triple X syndrome vulnerable to psychiatric diseases. Perhaps we will be able to help prevent these women from developing a psychiatric disorder and hopefully we will learn to treat them better than we do now.

The women that we have described in this article have had a difficult life. Because their parents did not know that their daughter had an extra X chromosome, the parents raised these daughters without being aware of their special handicaps, such as learning difficulties or shyness. Furthermore, these women are traumatized, and we know that women who are traumatized more frequently develop a psychotic illness. Is this more of a burden to triple X women than to other women? Are they more vulnerable? That is what we want to explore further in the future.

We do not wish to frighten people but rather to draw attention to an issue that is still not easy to talk about in the hope that it might become easier to find and get the right help. Please send an email to the corresponding author if you have any questions.