

Is sensitive skin different when considering gender or ethnic groups?

SKIN SENSITIVITY

FOCUS

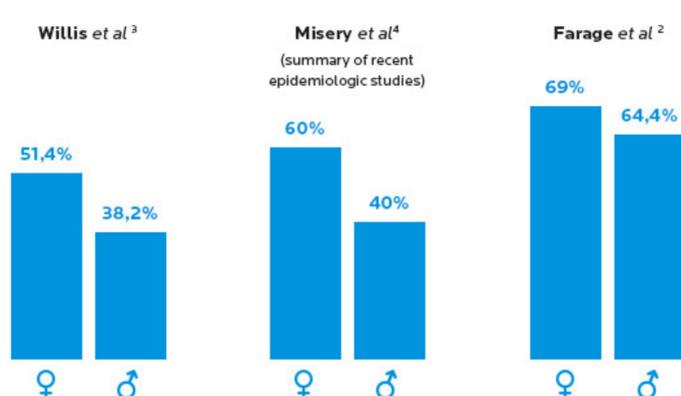
The term "sensitive skin" is being used with increasing frequency in the scientific literature. It is primarily a subjective complaint with as-yet-undefined etiology. It is likely that there are a number of contributing factors to sensitive skin:



Is sensitive skin only a woman condition?

Sensitive skin is generally thought of as a complaint of women. Earlier studies have reported a difference with regard to gender in the proportion of the population that perceives they have sensitive skin.

% of women and of men reported that they perceived sensitive skin



Epidemiology study on self-perceived sensitive skin in a large population of 1,039 individuals (without any selection based on any criteria related to sensitive skin) filled out with questionnaires.

In this study, there were no significant differences at any degree of sensitivity for the general question or for perceived sensitive skin of the body. With regard to sensitive skin of the face, there were a significantly higher proportion of men claiming their facial skin was not sensitive, and a significantly lower proportion claiming their facial skin was moderately sensitive. A significantly higher percentage of men claimed no sensitivity of the skin of the genital area, and a lower percentage claimed the skin of this area was moderately or very sensitive.²

Is there some ethnic differences in sensitive skin?

Studies that have assessed a possible influence of ethnic background on structural, biomechanical and physiological properties of the normal skin have focused primarily on differences between black and white skin but, in the past 30 years, have also considered Asian and Hispanic skin types. For instance, compared with Euro-Americans, Afro-Americans are reported to have an increased number of stratum corneum layers, a greater resistance to tape stripping, an increased lipid content and a more elastic skin on sun-exposed sites.⁵

In the previous epidemiology study, no ethnic differences when men or women were asked about sensitive skin in general or sensitive skin of the face and body was found.²

As shown in Figure 1, a significantly higher percentage of women than men responded that they look for skin claims when shopping for skin care products. When the ethnic groups were considered separately, a significantly higher percentage of white women looked for skin claims when compared with white men. The difference was also significant for the Asian population in spite of a low number of total Asian subjects. The difference did not reach significance for the African American or Hispanic populations.²

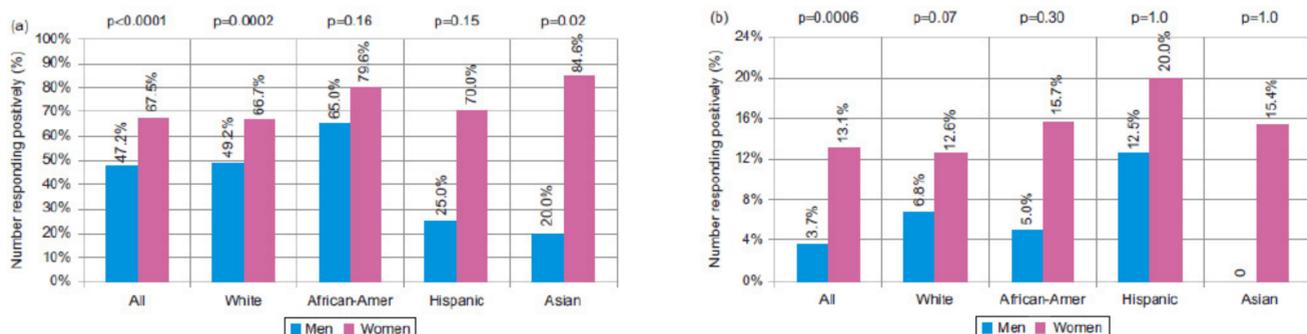


Figure 1. Shopping choices among men and women: (a) "When shopping for skin care products, do you look for claims such as 'safe for sensitive skin', 'hypoallergenic', etc.?" and (b) "Are there specific ingredients in skin care products that you avoid using because they irritate your skin?"²

To examine possible ethnic variations in perception of sensitive skin, an epidemiological survey was performed in 2009 in San Francisco area with approximately 800 telephone interviews.

Thirty-six percent of Afro-American women, 31% of the entire population, 28% of Asians and 27% of Euro-Americans reported to have sensitive skin, without statistical difference. Asians and Euro-Americans presented a higher prevalence of skin reactivity to wind and to sudden changes in temperature.⁶

Recurrent itching sensation on the face was reported by 42.6% of Asian women with sensitive skin compared to 33.8% of the sensitive skin population as a whole. Whereas 58.3% of the entire sensitive skin population reported not to suffer from recurrent facial redness, this frequency reached 70.8% of the Afro-American sensitive skin women.⁶

A comparison of the ethnic groups within the sensitive skin subpopulation (420 women) revealed that Afro-Americans reacted less to most environmental factors (wind, cold, sudden changes in temperature, air pollution, sun) and to alcoholic beverages. Fewer Euro-Americans avoided certain cosmetics due to skin reactivity but they reacted more to wind. Asians suffered more frequently from recurrent itching on the face and presented a greater reactivity to the wind and to food (spices, alcohol). Hispanics reacted less to alcohol.⁶

GOING FURTHER

The 5 key points of this 2010 epidemiological study

Similar proportions of the male and female responders claimed sensitive skin in general and sensitive skin of the body.

- A significantly lower proportion of the men claimed sensitive skin of the genital area.
- Responses to claims of sensitive skin of the face appeared to shift to less severe complaints among men compared with women.
- There were some differences in the reasons men and women chose for thinking they had sensitive skin, with a significantly lower proportion of men citing visual evidence of skin irritation due to products and a significantly higher proportion citing rubbing or friction from contact.
- In spite of the fact that similar percentages of men and women claimed some degree of skin sensitivity, men were less likely to claim to select products on this basis.

Ethnic variations in perception of sensitive skin

- There is no statistical difference between the ethnic groups in terms of sensitive skin prevalence.
- Euro-Americans are characterized by a higher skin reactivity to wind and tend to be less reactive to cosmetics.
- Afro-Americans present diminished skin reactivity to most environmental factors and a lower frequency of recurring facial redness.
- Asians appear to have greater skin reactivity to spicy food, to sudden changes in temperature and to wind, and tend to suffer from itching more frequently.
- Hispanics present a lower incidence of skin reactivity to alcohol.
- The differences in skin sensitivity between ethnic groups concerned mostly factors of skin reactivity and, to a lesser extent, its symptomatology.

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