
The General Psychological Health of SM Practitioners

Robert Bienvenu, Ph.D.

H. Jack McGeorge

Public Safety Group

Trevor Jacques

Videlicet.com, web-based survey tools and hosting

Purpose

- To provide initial results profiling the general psychological health of an Sadomasochism (SM) practitioner sample (n=1,347), based on the General Health Questionnaire, 12 item version (GHQ-12)
- Compare this SM sample to other populations assessed in the GHQ-12 literature

Outline

- Background of the survey
- Sample Demographics
- The GHQ-12
- GHQ-12 results by gender, sexual orientation, BDSM orientation
- Comparisons of the SM sample to other populations cited in the literature
- Conclusions

Background

- A broad DSS relationship survey of the SM “community” was conceived by McGeorge, who conducted a pilot study through SM social organizations in 2000-2001
- The focus of the survey is to assess attributes that contribute to successful Domination, Submission, and Service (DSS) relationships within today’s SM/leather/fetish subcultures
- The GHQ-12 was included in the final survey as a general psychological health measure
- All respondents completed this survey using the world-wide web. Data were collected by Jacques at SexResearch.org between 5 November, 2001 and 17 February, 2002

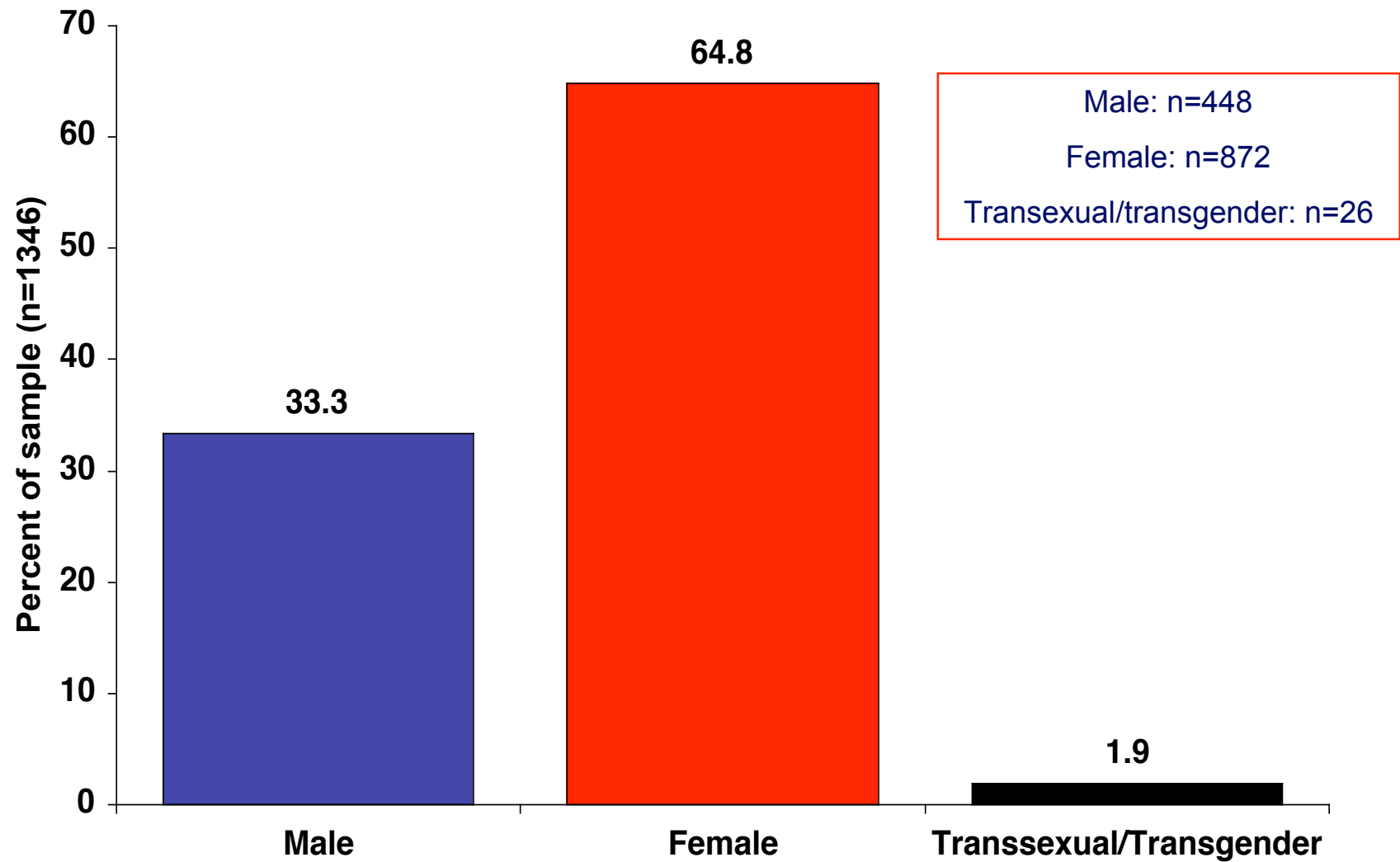
Sample Inclusion Criteria & Recruitment

- Inclusion criterion: All respondents report participation in a current or prior relationship that involved “domination, submission, or service.”
- Respondents were recruited through existing SM organizational and social networks, including posts on email lists used by member of the organized SM community and announcements at organizational events.

Caveats

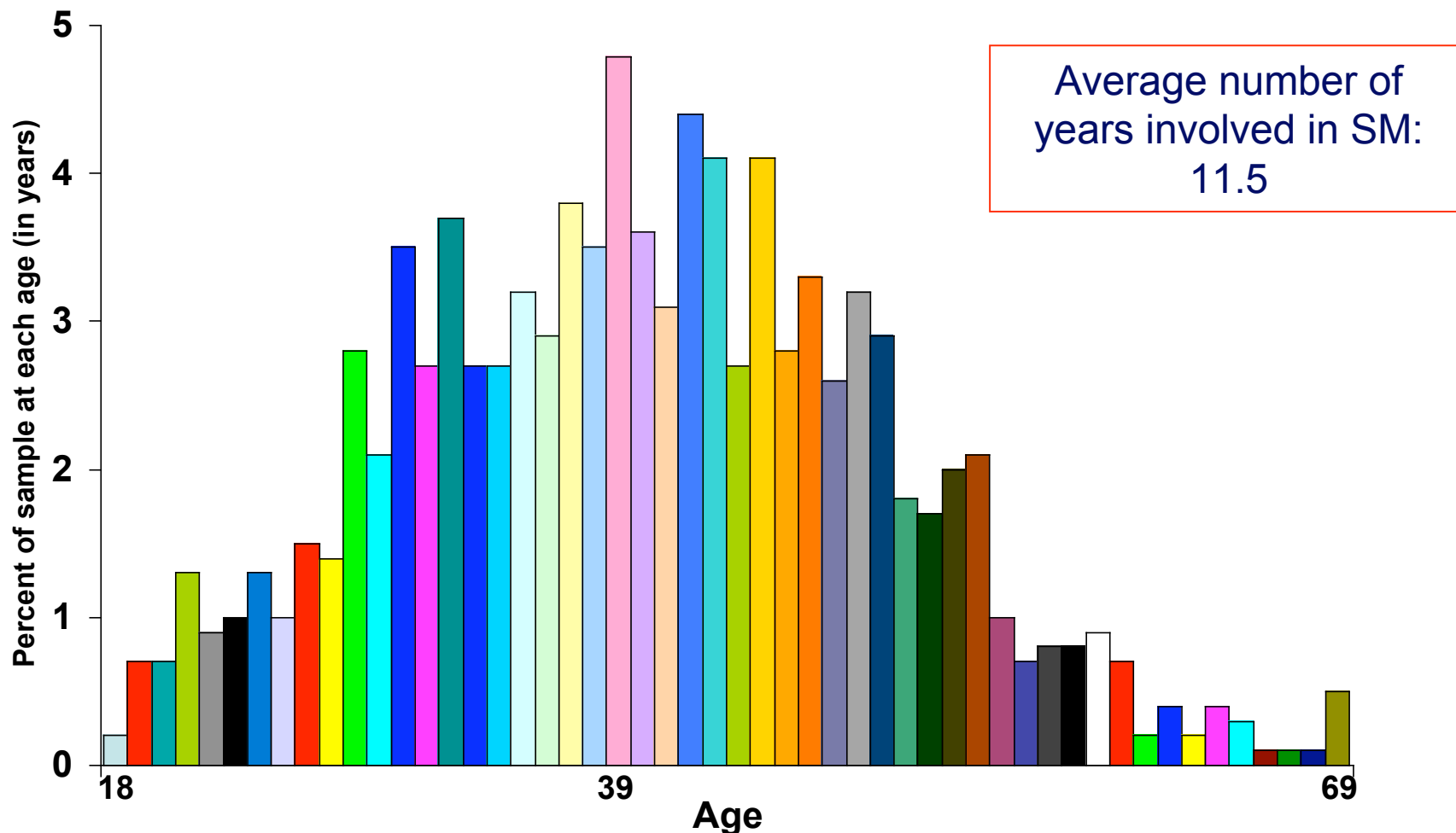
- “Caseness” rate estimates for this population are based on guidelines in the published GHQ literature. Unlike validation studies, where GHQ results have been compared to results of clinical evaluations to determine actual rates of psychiatric morbidity and appropriate scoring criteria for a given population, here we have only GHQ scores.
- Non-probability convenience sample. Generalizability of these data for the SM subcultures is unknown.
- Sample has low counts of gay, lesbian, and ethnic minority respondents.

Demographics: Gender



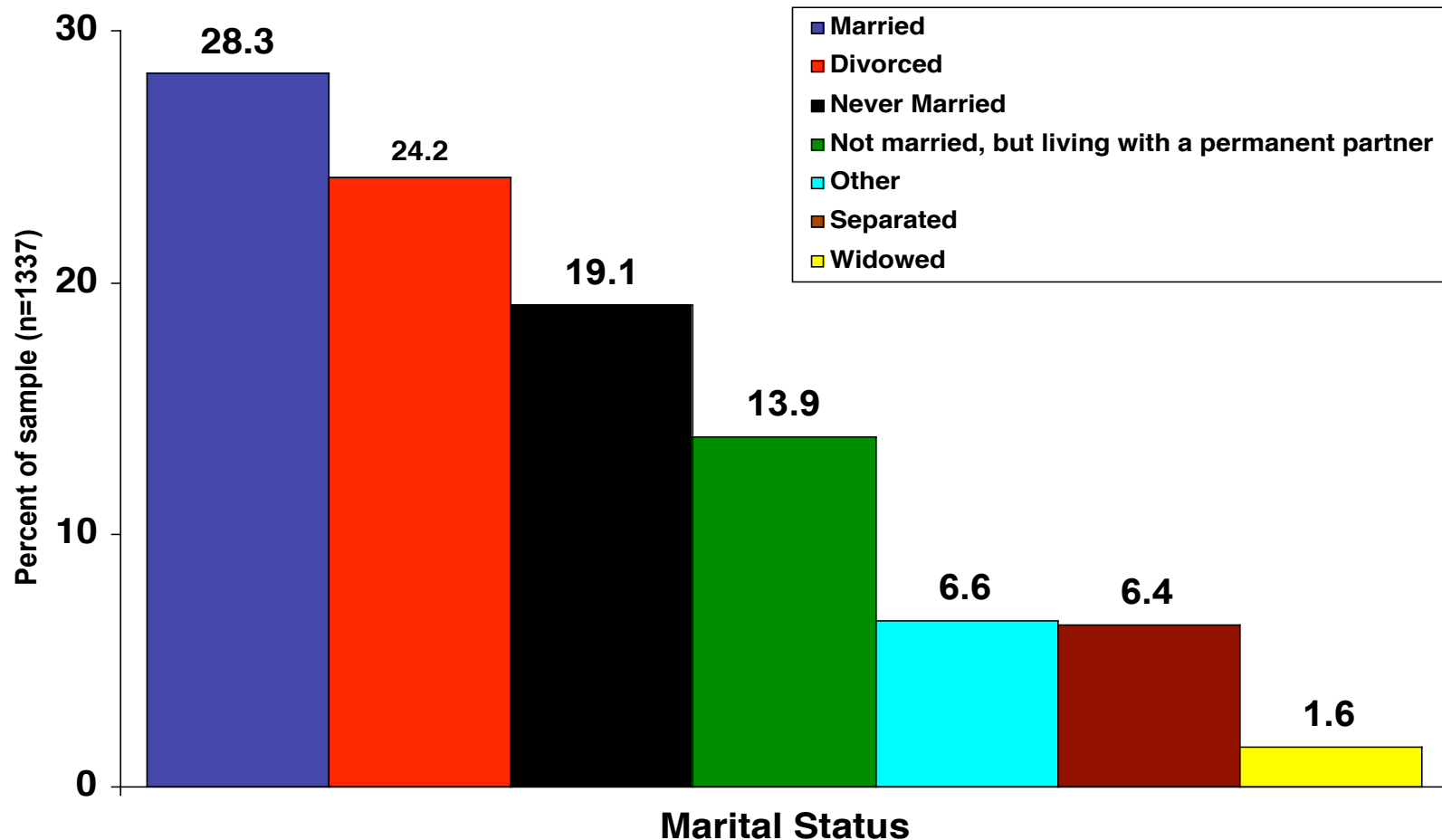
Demographics: Age

- Age range is 18-69; mean age is 40; median 40; mode 39 (n=1344)



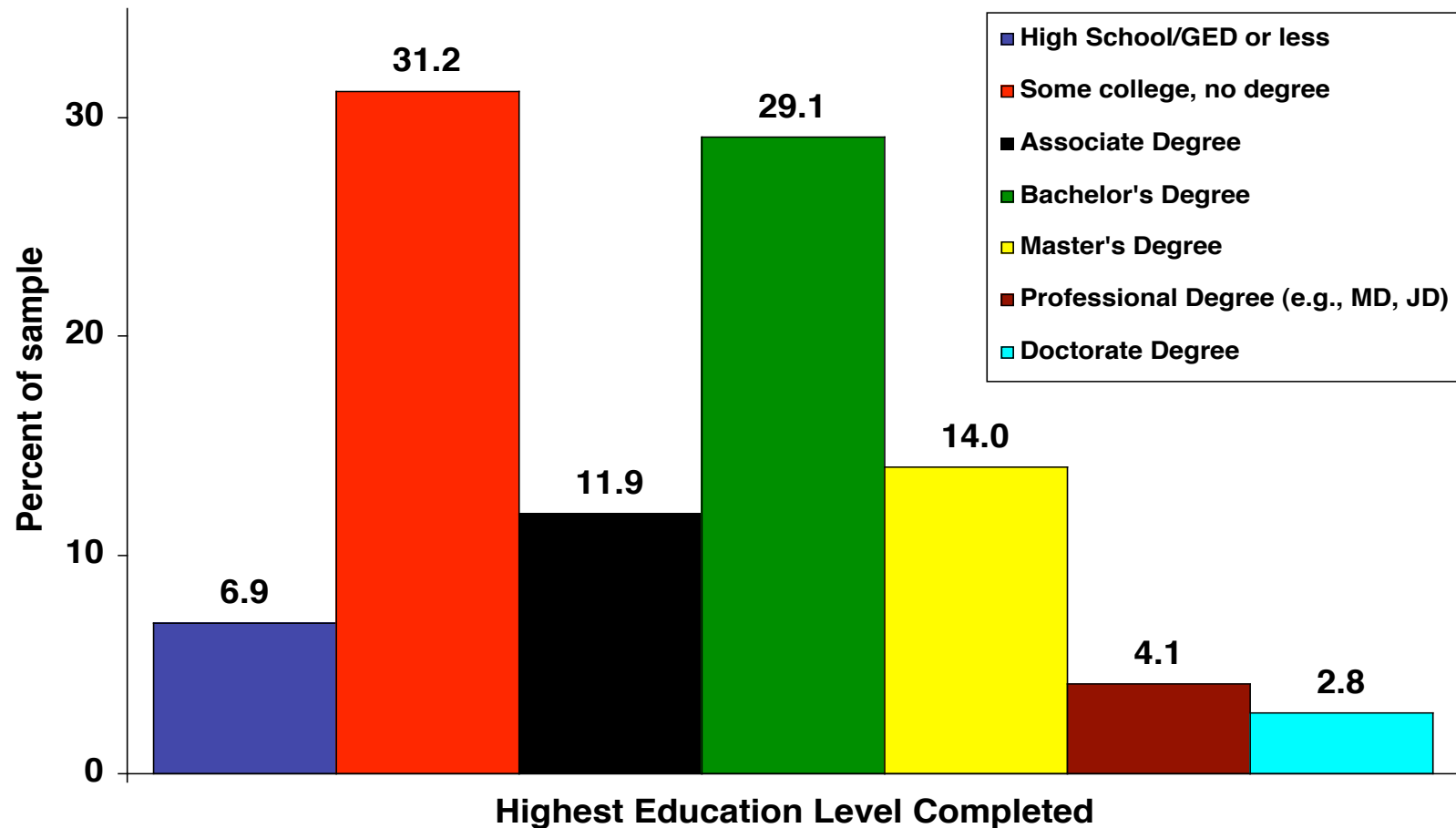
Demographics: Marital Status

- 42% report being married or living with a permanent partner



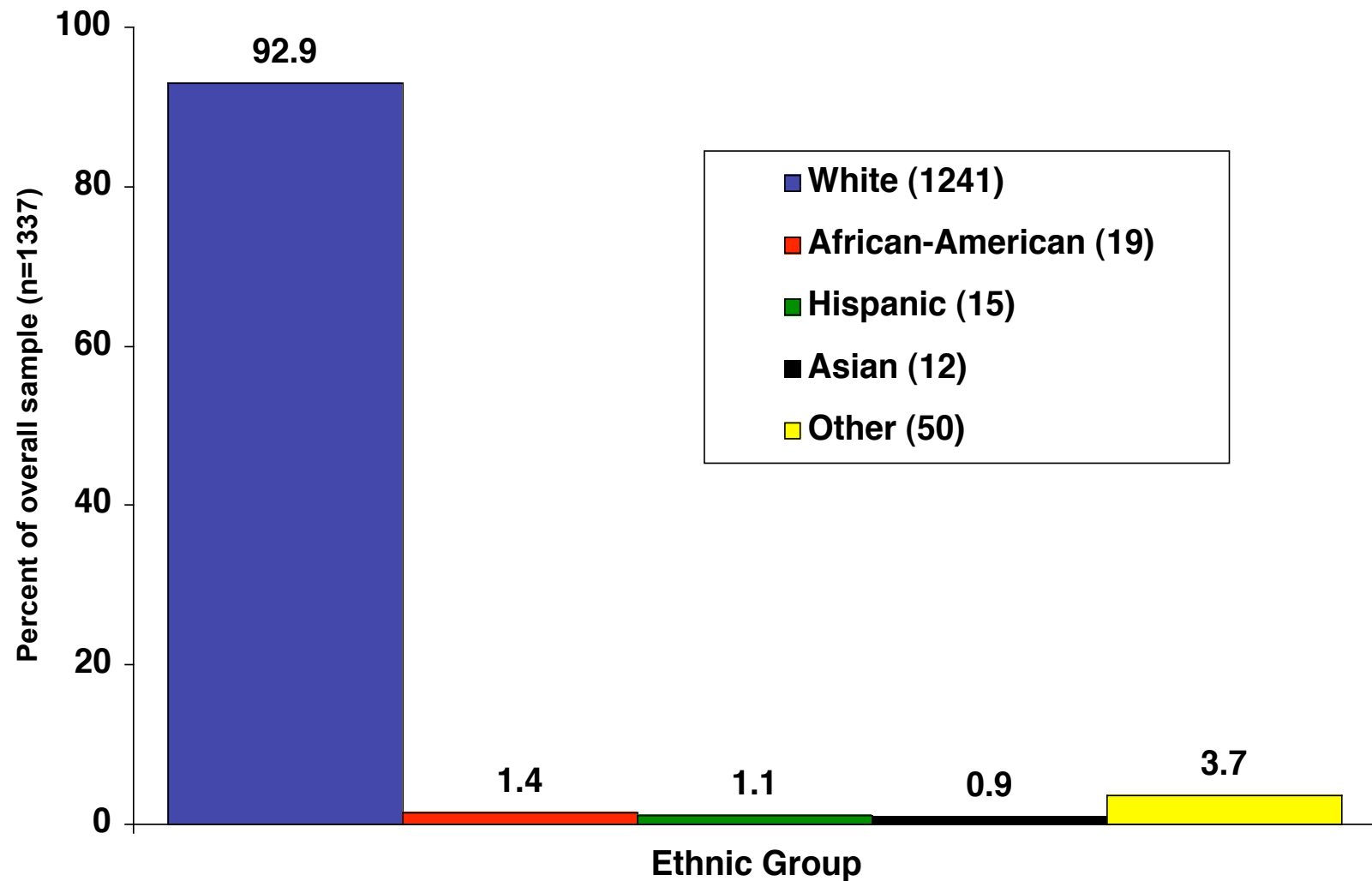
Demographics: Education

- Half (50.0%) of respondents report completion of a four-year college degree (n=1342)



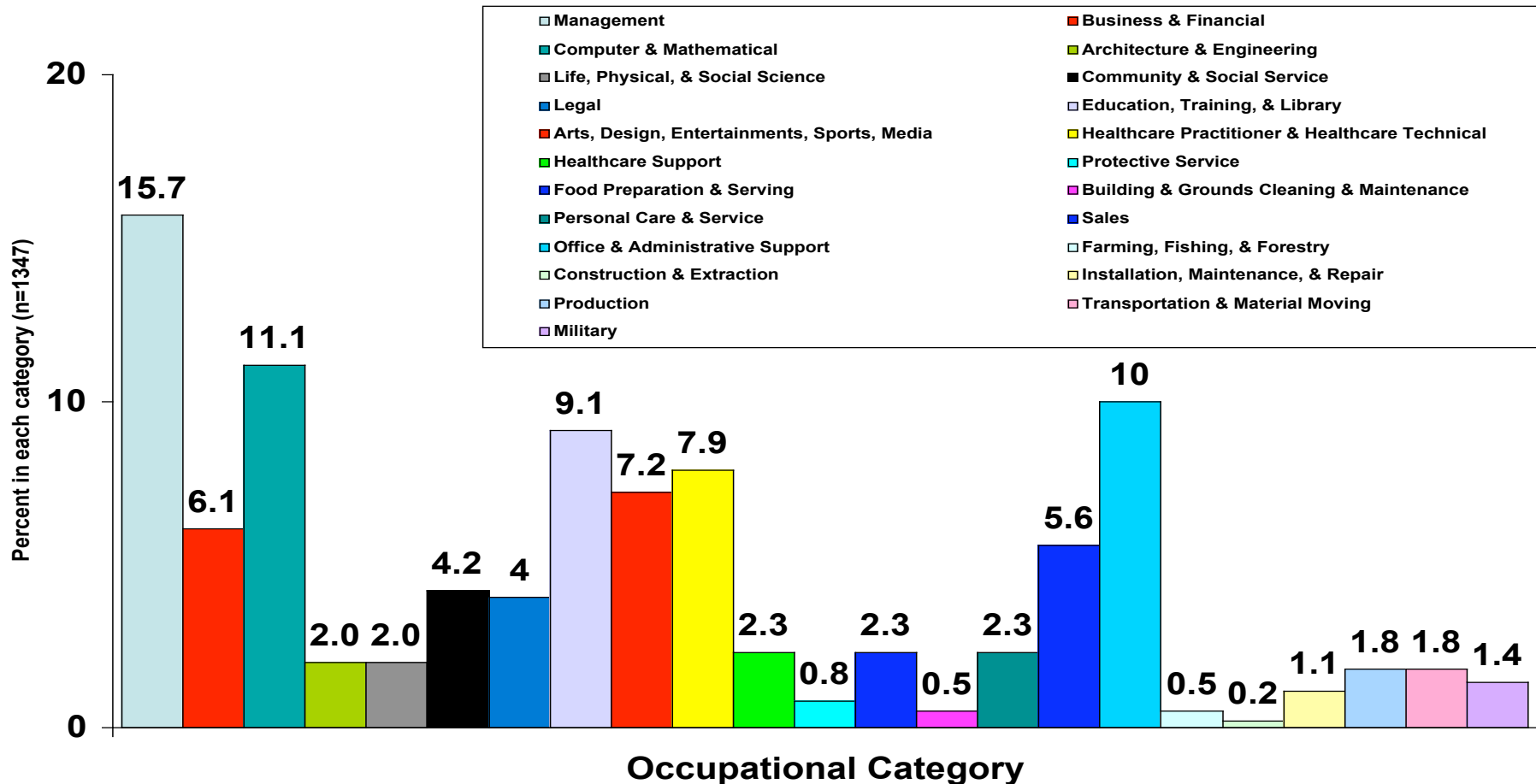
Demographics: Ethnicity

- The sample is predominately white (non-Hispanic)



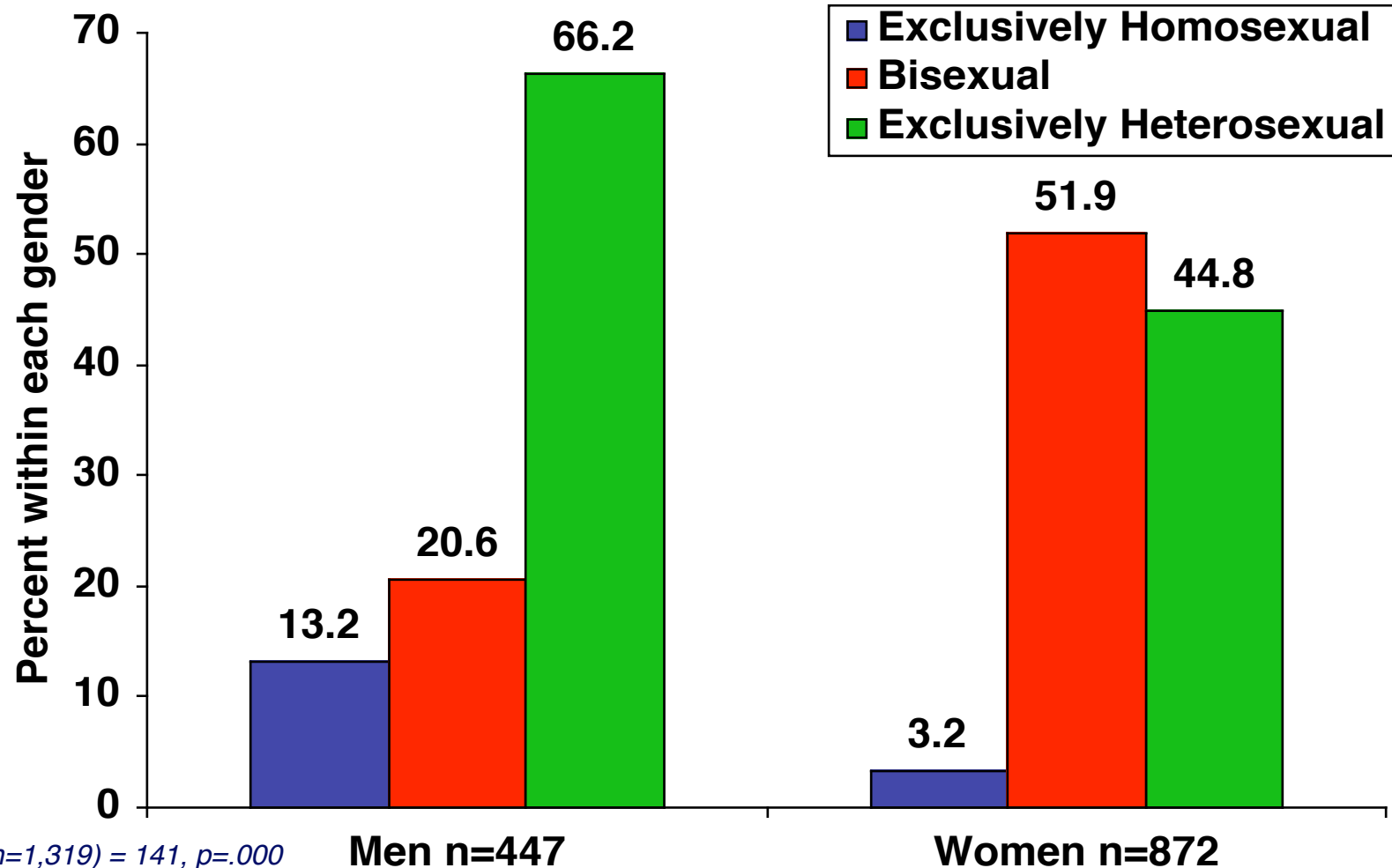
Demographics: Occupational Category

- The most common occupational categories are management (15.7%), computer and mathematical (11.1%), office and administrative support (10%), and education (9.1%)



Demographics: Sexual Practice

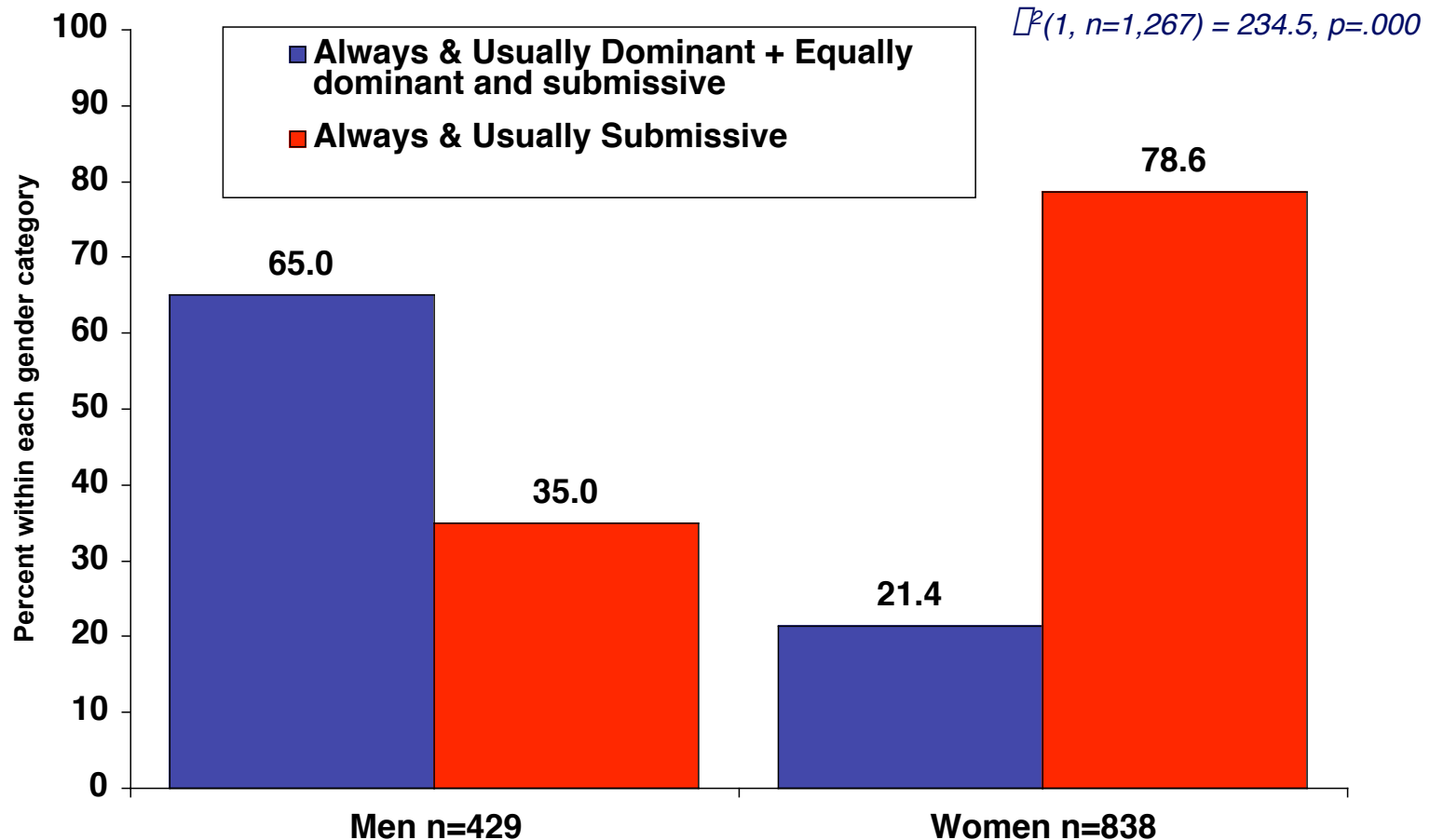
- There are significant gender differences in reported sexual practice.



$\chi^2(2, n=1,319) = 141, p=.000$

Demographics: BDSM Practice

- Women are far more likely to indicate a submissive SM role than men, with 78.6% of women vs. 35% of men indicating an SM Orientation of always and usually submissive



General Health Questionnaire-12

- Derived from the GHQ-60 (Goldberg, 1972), the GHQ-12 is a stand-alone questionnaire designed to measure non-psychotic psychological distress.
- Factors assessed in the GHQ-12 are anxiety and depression, social dysfunction, loss of confidence and self-esteem (Goldberg 2000).
- Typical use is in clinical settings as a psychological screening tool. Also extensively used as a research instrument.

General Health Questionnaire-12

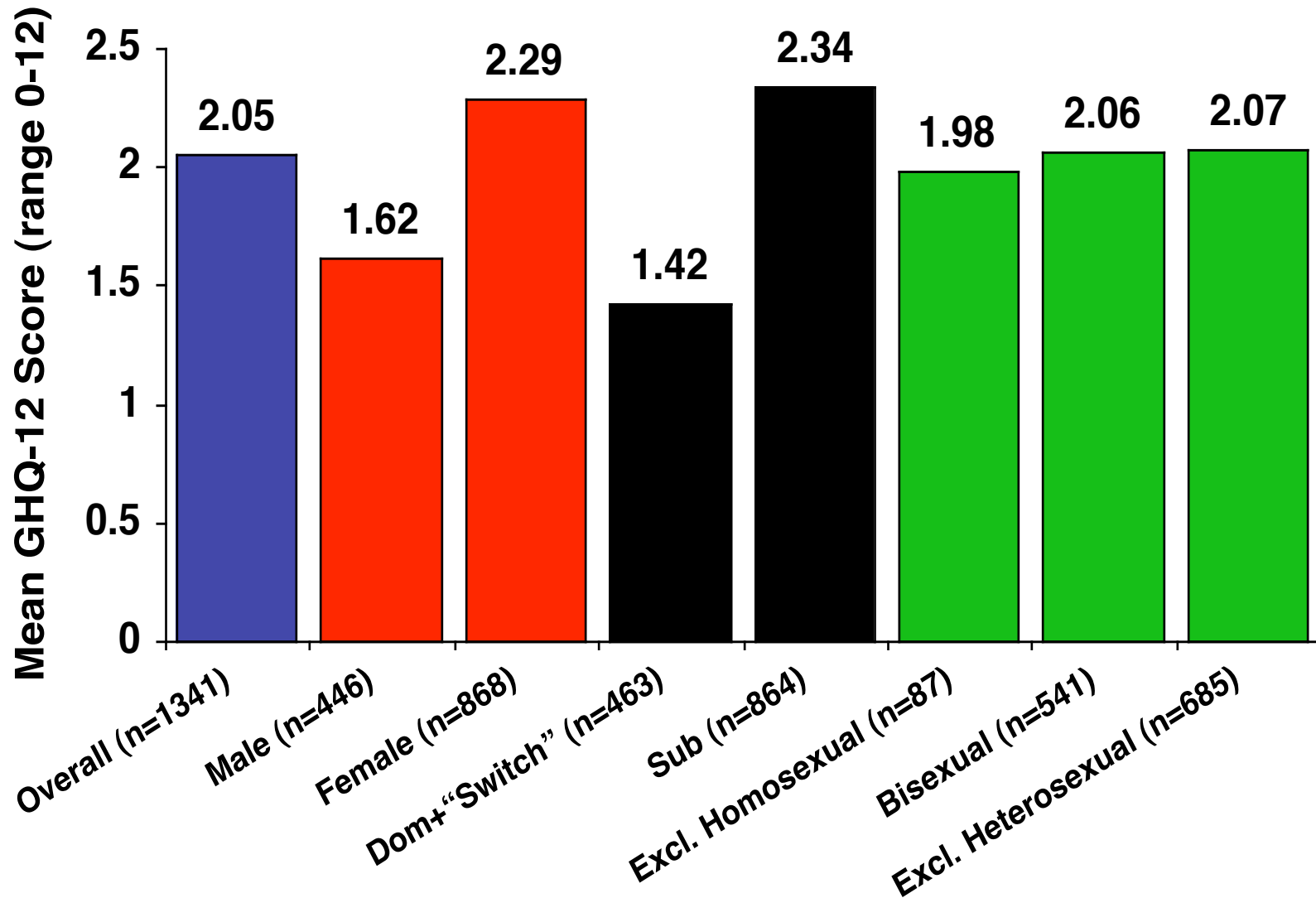
- Several scoring methods exist for the GHQ-12. Goldberg et al. (1997) recommend the “binary” scoring method used here, with varying thresholds to indicate individual “caseness” depending on sample mean.
- Recommended threshold for individual caseness for this sample, with GHQ-12 mean score of 2.1, is 2/3 (Goldberg et al. 1998).
- Sensitivity and specificity vary with site and scoring method. Representative sensitivity range (1/2 threshold) is 70.2 to 86.1%; specificity is 65.3 to 85.9% (Goldberg et al. 1997).

Overview of GHQ-12 results

- Overview of GHQ-12 mean scores by gender, DS role practice, and sexual practice.

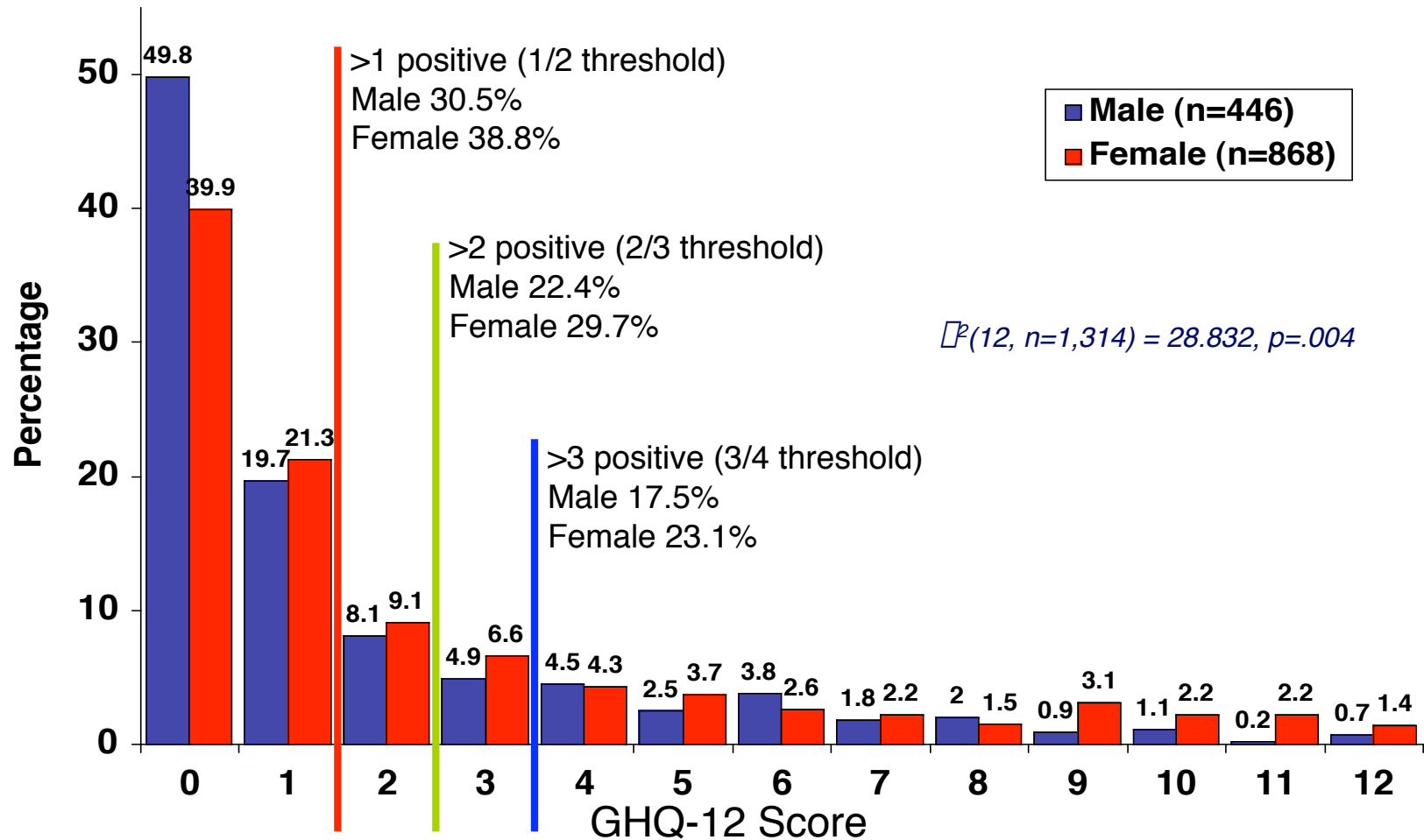
			DS Role practice in two categories			
			1 Always and Usually Dominant, equally DS		2 Always and Usually Submissive	
			Count	Mean	Count	Mean
Male	1.00 Homosexual	GHQ Total Score (Range 1-12)	29	1.31	26	2.19
	2.00 Bisexual	GHQ Total Score (Range 1-12)	46	.87	43	1.74
	3.00 Heterosexual	GHQ Total Score (Range 1-12)	203	1.43	81	2.14
Female	1.00 Homosexual	GHQ Total Score (Range 1-12)	11	2.18	16	1.50
	2.00 Bisexual	GHQ Total Score (Range 1-12)	108	1.73	332	2.33
	3.00 Heterosexual	GHQ Total Score (Range 1-12)	60	1.35	311	2.51

GHQ-12 Mean Scores by Subgroup



SM Sample: GHQ-12 Score by Gender

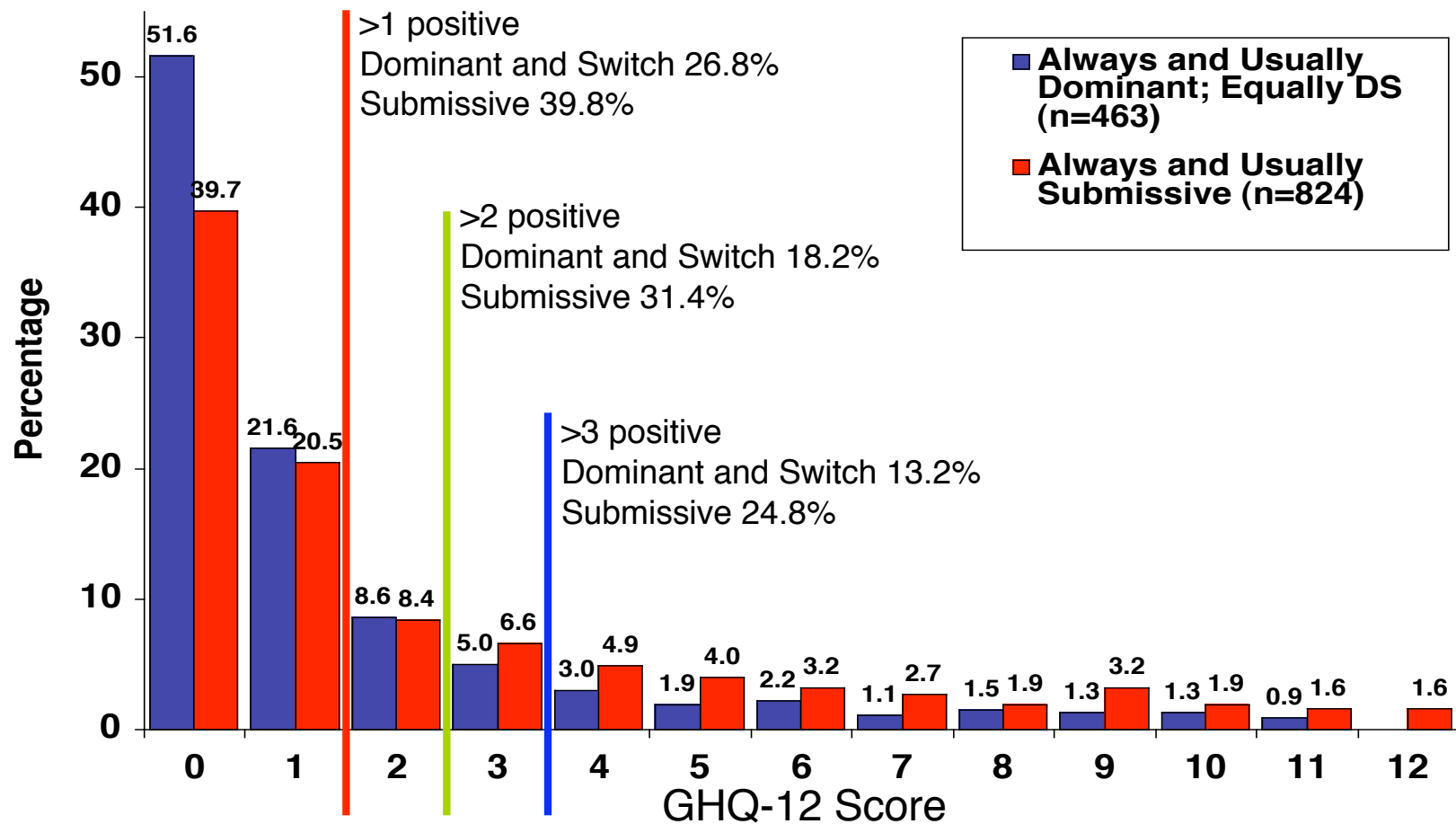
- There were significant gender differences in GHQ-12 outcome: women report higher levels of psychological distress than men.



GHQ-12 by *BDSM Practice (Switch w. Dom)*

- GHQ-12 by BDSM practice (“equally DS” merged with “dominants”) is significant

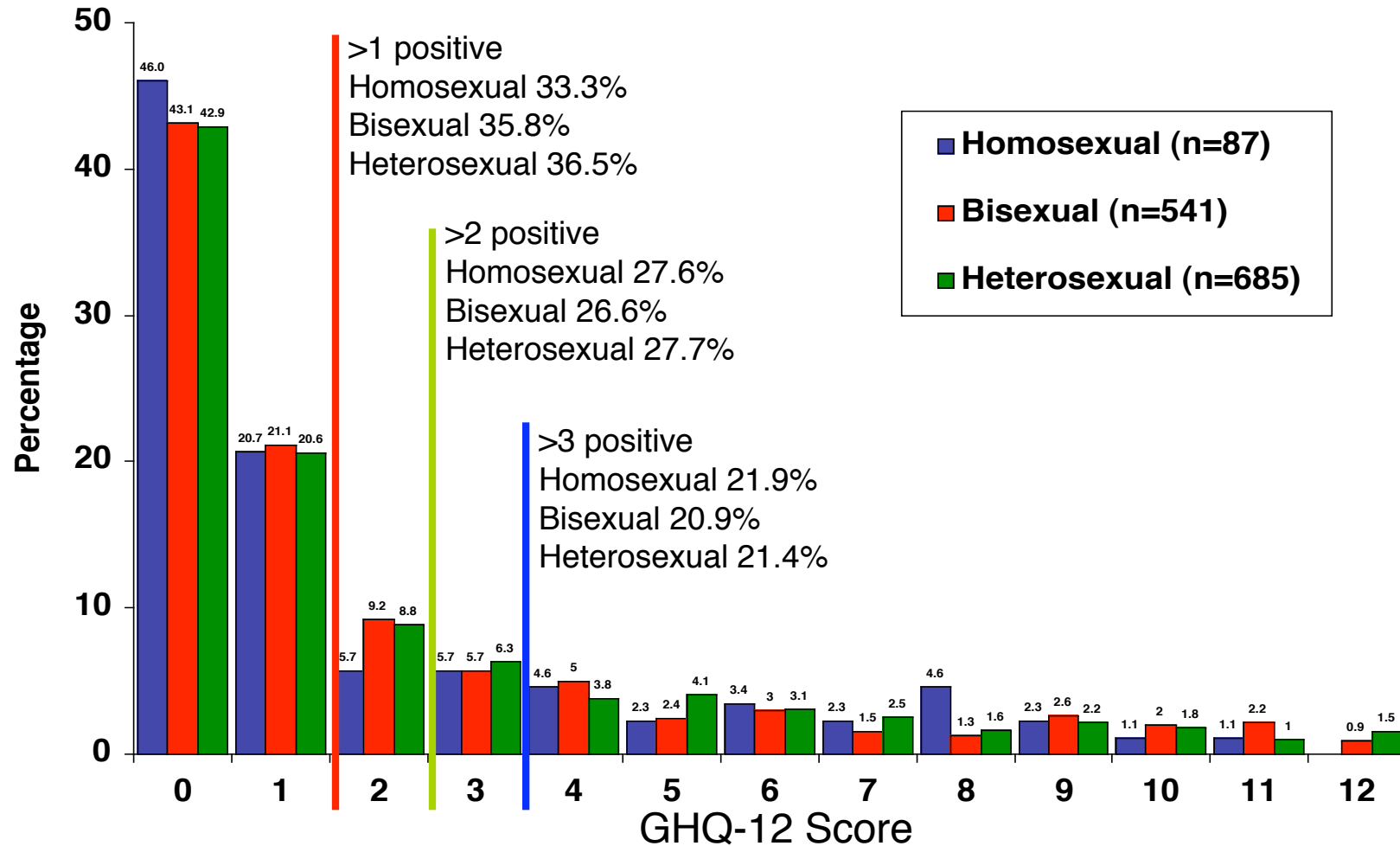
$\chi^2(12, n=1,287) = 35.489, p=0.000$



GHQ-12 by *Sexual Practice*

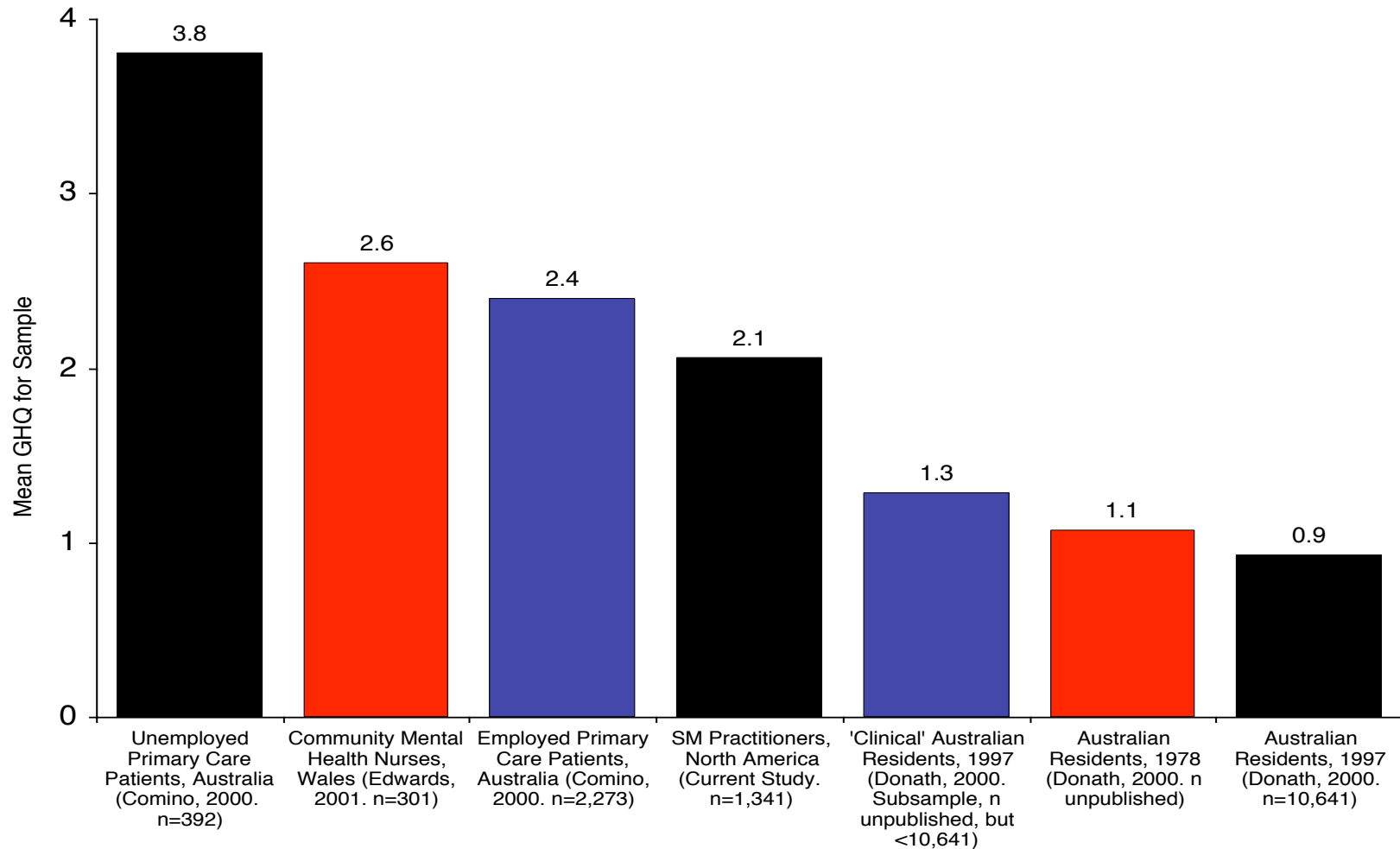
- Sexual practice is not associated with GHQ-12 outcome

$\chi^2(24, n=1,313) = 17.120, p=0.843$



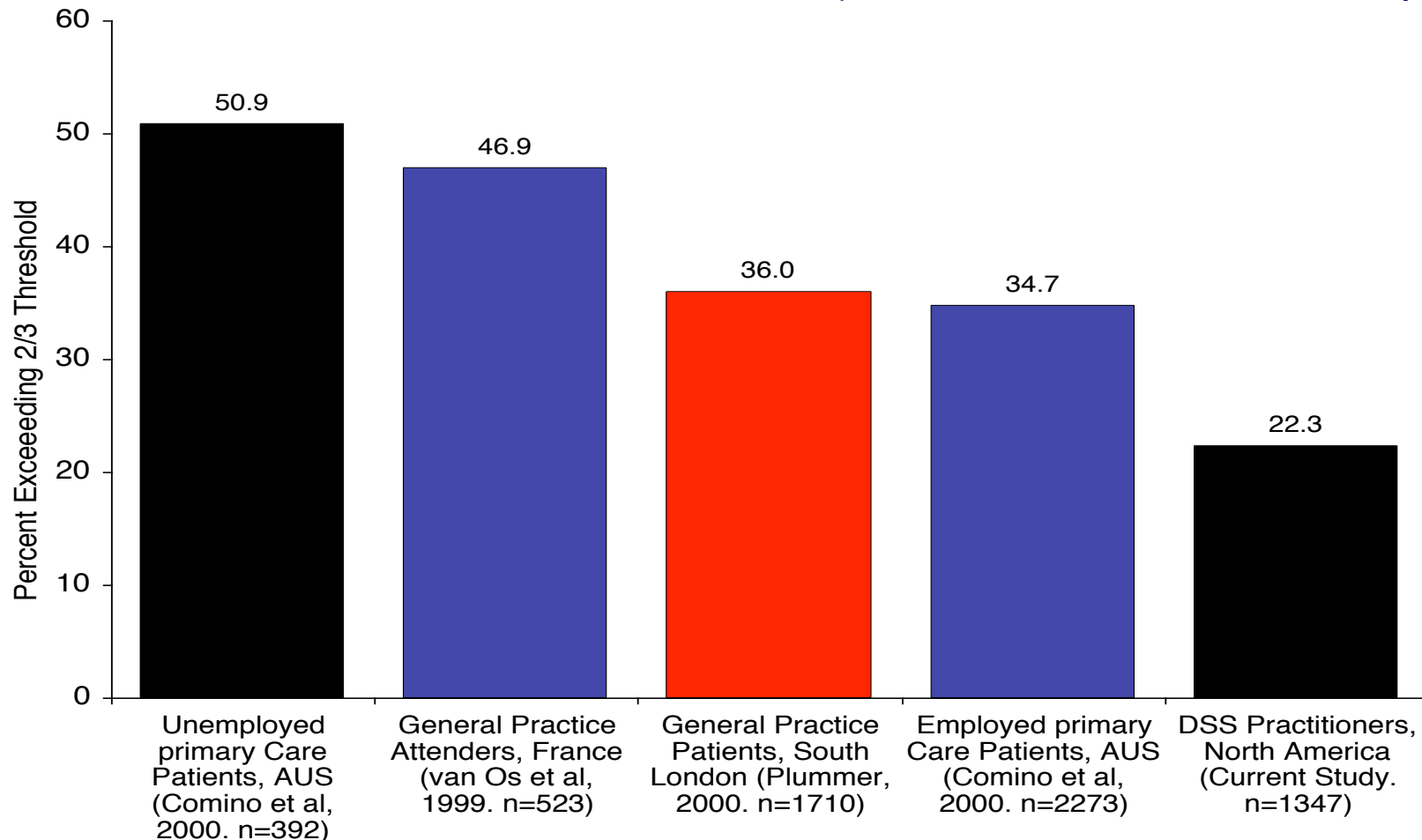
Comparisons: Mean GHQ-12

- Overall mean GHQ-12 scores for studies using the binary scoring method.



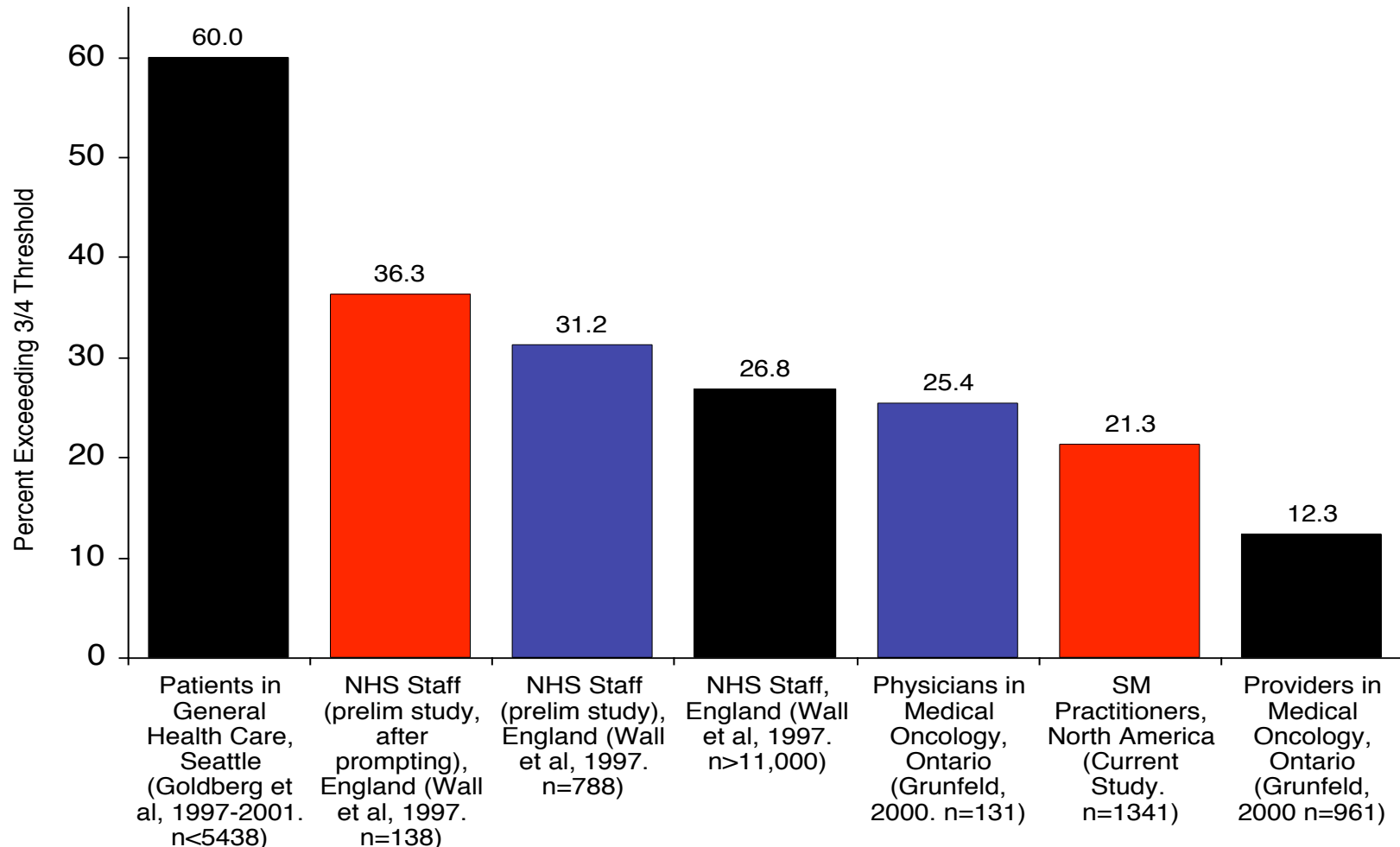
Caseness Comparisons: 2/3 threshold

- SM sample caseness prediction compared with other published studies that use 2/3 threshold criterion (recommended for this sample)



Caseness Comparisons: 3/4 cutoff

- SM sample caseness prediction compared with other published studies that use 3/4 cutoff criterion



Conclusions

- Female gender and submissive BDSM role orientation are associated with higher scores on the GHQ-12, suggesting higher levels of psychological distress for these sub-groups.
- Sexual orientation is not associated with differences in GHQ-12 outcome.

Conclusions—2

- When compared with other studies in the literature, GHQ-12 scores for this SM practitioner sample are generally lower, suggesting a lower level of psychological distress.
- Data in this survey suggest that SM practitioners, as a group, have a lower incidence of psychological difficulties than other “non-deviant” groups that have been assessed with the GHQ-12.

Points of Contact

Robert V. Bienvenu II, Ph.D.

Email: Rob@BienGroup.net

<http://SexResearch.BienGroup.net>

H. Jack McGeorge

Email: JackMcG@ix.netcom.com

Trevor Jacques:

Email: Trevor@Videlicet.com

<http://Videlicet.com>; <http://SexResearch.org>

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