

MENTAL HEALTH OF WOMEN

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Abstract

Gender is a critical determinant of Mental Health and mental illness. The patterns of psychological distress and psychiatric disorder among women are different from those seen among men. women have a higher mean level of internalizing disorders while men show a higher mean level of externalization disorders. Girls from nuclear families and women who married at a very young age are at a higher risk for attempted suicide and self-harm. Social factors and gender-specific factors determine the prevalence and course of mental disorders in female sufferers. Women are often socialized to hide their real emotions, which can create inner conflict and introduce increased anxiety and chronic stress, both disorder. Around two-thirds of married women in India were victims of domestic violence. Concerted efforts at social, political, economic and legal levels can bring change in the lives of Indian women and continue to the improvement of the mental health of these women.

Keywords

Externalization, attempted, prevalence, anxiety, violence, mental disorder.

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Introduction

Women's health is different from Men's Health. Women have poorer overall health, they have a higher number of chronic conditions, higher levels of cognitive impairment, and a higher prevalence of severe pain and physical disability. However, if there is one area of health where gender-based differences in the prevalence of disorders are particularly significant, that is mental health, where the prevalence of mental health problems is twice as high in women as in men. In fact, even though women have a longer life expectancy, engage in greater number of preventive behaviors and have fewer addictions, they paradoxically have poorer health, well-being and quality of life than men. They also use more health services and psychotropic drugs and have a higher prevalence of numerous psychiatric disorders (Hartung & Lefler, 2019; Leal, 2006). This has been termed 'the mortality/morbidity paradox': women live longer than men but are in poorer health (Case & Paxson, 2005; Sanchez-Lopez & Liminava, 2017). Due to the multiple roles women play and the various responsibilities handle, women may be more susceptible to mental health problems and disorders that required special care and concern to identify and manage it effectively. For example, women entering into a marriage in the Indian cultural system face a unique set of roles and responsibilities that have an impact on their mental health. Women may also suffer from depression and other mental health problems during pregnancy and the postpartum period, violence against women also has a negative impact on the mental health of women. Around two-thirds of married women in India were victims of domestic violence. Concerted efforts at social, political, economic, and legal levels can bring change in the lives of Indian women and contribute to the improvement of the mental health of these women.

❖ Mental Health and Mental Disorders

Mental health is a term used to describe either a level of cognitive or emotional well-being or an absence of a mental disorder. Mental illness is an involuntary psychological or behavioral pattern that occurs in an individual and is thought to cause distress or disability that is not expected as part of normal development or culture.

The morbidity associated with mental illness has received substantially more attention than the gender-specific determinants and mechanisms that promote and protect mental health and foster resilience to stress and adversity.

Analysis of mental health indices and data reveals that the pattern of psychiatric disorder and psychological distress among women are different from

those sim among men. Symptoms of depression, anxiety and specified psychological distress are 2-3 times more common among women than among men, whereas addictions, substance use disorders and psychopathic personality disorders are more common among men.

❖ **The Mental Health of Women : The Facts (WHO Report 2001)**

- a) Depressive disorders account for close to 41.9% of the disability from neuropsychiatric disorders among women compared to 29.3% among men.
- b) Leading mental health problems of the elderly are depression, organic brain symptoms and dementia. A majority are women.
- c) An estimated 80% to 50 million people affected by violence, conflict civil wars, disasters and displacement are women and children.
- d) Lifetime prevalence rate of violence against women ranges from 60% to 50%.
- e) At least one in 5 women suffers rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.

❖ **Promotion of Women's Mental Health**

Promotion of women's mental health is very crucial to ensure effective contribution from one-half of the human resource. Women play in a multitude of roles that puts a lot of burden on them. The society also has a lot of expectations from women who are bound by sociocultural demands and responsibilities. Hence it is a necessary to undertake appropriate intervention strategies to promote and improve the mental health of women.

According to WHO research, there are three main factors that are highly protective against the development of mood disorders, especially depression in women. These are:

1. Having sufficient autonomy to exercise some control in response to service events.
2. Access to some material resources that allow the possibility of making choices in the face of service events.
3. Psychological support from family, friends, or health providers is powerfully protective.

World Health Organisation (WHO-a focus on women,1997) advocates the following things for the promotion of women's mental health and protect them against violence:

- Build evidence on the prevalence and causes of mental health problems in women as well as on the mediating and protective factors.

- Promote the formulation and implementation of health policies that address women's needs and concerns from childhood to old age.
- Enhance the competence of Primary Health Care providers to recognize and treat mental health consequences of domestic violence, sexual abuse and acute and chronic stress in women.
- Building the evidence based on the scope and types of intimate partner and sexual violence in different settings and supporting countries efforts to document and measure this violence and its consequences.
- Collaborating with international agencies and organizations to reduce our eliminate intimate partner and sexual violence globally.

Gender-sensitive services are essential in enhancing the status and offering of mental health care and service to women. It is important to understand the unique need and requirements of women in relation to the different roles they play. Accordingly, services must be designed and rendered .This will help reduce the gender disparities in Mental Health diagnosis care access and treatment.

A three-pronged approach can be adopted for the protection and promotion of women's mental health such as prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. A Comprehensive plan to improve women's mental health required action at a number of labels such as: the development of policies and legislations, intervention through population-based settings ensuring that community service and supports are adequate and accessible, supporting and promoting grassroots activities and utilizing media base strategies to promote community Awareness of the problem and the means available for its management.The following areas can be outlined to address the issue of a promotions of women's mental health.

Policies and Legislation

A key area of action is development and implementation of policies and legislation to overcome gender inequities for women in health education and employment and to recognize acts such as physical and sexual abuse as criminal offences.In some cases policies and legislation may need to be revised and in other cases it may be necessary to increase community awareness.

The mental health of women needs to be emphasized as a policy matter. It can be included in the district mental health program so that in it can reach to a larger population of women and benefit their mental health. Gender disparities in Mental Health will not be reduced until women can have mental health concerns and life priorities are taken into account in program design and implementation.

Education and Training

Education and training can be crucial components in bringing in attitudinal and behavioral changes at the individual and social levels. Understanding the unique role played by women is important.

Women themselves also need to be aware of the various legal provisions and facilities available to them. They need to know about the Domestic Violence Act 2005.

Awareness and training of health professionals, health workers, and community workers at the grassroots level focusing on women's mental health are necessary.

Primary Health Care

Primary care is by definition the most accessible form of healthcare for the population. Primary Health Care settings play an important role in the health care of the population. Detection and appropriate diagnosis of psychological disorders and proper treatment and appropriate referral of it, wherever required, will contribute in a major way to meeting the mental health care needs of the people. Women and mental health can be an important agenda of the district mental health program (under National Mental Health Programme). The Government of India has launched the national-level health program (NMHP) in 1982, keeping in view the heavy burden of mental illness in the community, and the absolute inadequacy of Mental Health Care infrastructure in the country to deal with it.

Conclusion

Women represent 48% of the Indian population and they are the pillar of the family. Yet women's mental health is a neglected area. Women not only have a higher risk of developing many psychiatric disorders, especially depression, but their access to treatment is also undermined by their subordinate position in a society. This has highlighted the mental health problems of women and the gender disparity in mental health problems and treatment access.

Hence a comprehensive approach is required to understand the mental health of women and promote it for the benefit of the entire nation.

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