

Women and mental health

Abstract

Issues related to the mental health of women are a priority these days. Many international organisations working in the field of psychiatry are having sections on it now. This approach can go a long way in the improvement of the available mental health services for this population.

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Women's mental health has grown rapidly as a sub-specialty over the last few decades including research in gender specific illnesses, differences in psychotropic drugs use in different phases of women's life cycles, especially the reproductive phases of life, besides gender specific differences in onset, presentations, and prognosis of psychiatric illnesses, fertility issues, etc.

Most of the international psychiatric organisations have realised the importance of women's mental health, its scope and importance in psychiatry. Therefore to improve the mental health of women globally, most of the international mental health organisations as the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCP), the World Federation of Mental Health (WFMH) have formed sections of women's mental health.

Founding a section on mental health of women is valuable and crucial in improving the mental health of women globally. Goals include promotion of mental health education and information on women's mental health: promotion of gender-sensitive and autonomy-enhancing mental health services for women. For instance, work on violence against women, which has a major toll on mental health of women (which overall deteriorates the socioeconomic status of their nations).

These women's mental health sections, primarily advocate for the rights of women, protection of vulnerable groups in the community (vulnerable groups of refugees, internally displaced persons [IDPs], and migrants), the special needs of migrant and refugee women. Women researchers have identified the gender specific needs of women in psycho-trauma related to wars, insurgencies, and terrorist attacks. The primary task of the leaders in the field of women's mental health is to develop partnerships with the refugee organisations. At the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women, 9-20 March 2015, the panel at the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Forum, "Integrating Mental Health into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): An imperative for Women and Girls", the discussions concluded that women's mental health is vital for the national and global improvement of mental health with remarkable improvements in the socioeconomic status of nations.

These groups also focus on issues pertaining to working/professional women, which must be another priority safeguarding women's mental health at workplace. Women's interpersonal and intrapersonal issues and conflicts are the major stressors in the lives of working women. Hence, in depth analysis of what feminine psyche is today and what is changing with globalisation must also be tackled by the women's mental health sections. Mentoring junior colleagues

and support of members in personal crises should also be of the major priority. RCP and APA's Women's Network are the pioneers in this context.

Having psychiatric conferences with the theme as women's mental health issues will go a long way in the development of this sub-specialty of psychiatry!

Note: Prof Niaz has a leadership position in the field of Women's Mental Health and she is the Founding Member

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