

Women Health Issues and Wellbeing

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Abstract:

The health of women is linked to their status in the society, though the contribution of women in family is overlooked and they are viewed as economic burdens, yet they are important pillar of society and primary healthcare giver. There are large no. of physiological and physical issues like pregnancy, anemia, menopause, osteoporosis, infertility and perinatal loss, psychological issues like caring and supporting others, relationship breakdown, personality traits, etc. and social issues like discrimination based on sexuality and gender identity, violence, abuse, poor nutrition, employment, etc. which are directly related to health, happiness and wellbeing of a women. There are some suggestions to improve health and wellbeing of women.

Keywords: Women Health, Wellbeing.

It is very true that 'women's health is population health'. WHO defined it as a state of complete physical, psychological and social wellbeing and not only the absence of diseases. Women health either physical or psychological contributes to their wellbeing and happiness. Woman is an important pillar of society and primary care giver but they suffer from poor physical and mental health. The health of a woman is not a priority in our country although May 28th is observed as 'international day of action for women's health', where their health issues are at center place. Now society and government have finally started opening their eyes towards this issue.

The life cycle transition phases such as pregnancy, motherhood and menopause can create physical and emotional stresses for women. Negative life experiences like infertility, perinatal loss, poverty, discrimination, violence, unemployment and isolation also impact on women's mental health and wellbeing (D'souza et al. 2013).

Physiological and Physical Issues

Pregnancy

During pregnancy and after the birth of a baby women experience depression and anxiety. Up to 1 in 10 women experience depression while globally about 800 women die every day of preventable causes related to pregnancy and child birth and 20% of these women are from India.

Anemia

Anemia means low hemoglobin level. It is more common in developing countries where women lack sufficient nutrition and dietary requirements like iron and folic acid. A large no. of women go through phases of anemia during and after pregnancy (Friedman et al. 2012)

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Menopause and Osteoporosis

It is the leading cause of fractures among post-menopausal women worldwide. 1 in 2 women over the age of 50 suffer from an osteoporotic fracture. During menopause the hormone Estrogen takes a dip causing bone loss, risk of breast, urine and ovarian cancer.

Infertility and Perinatal Loss

Infertility and miscarriage is an experience which affects many women. Around 1 in 6 couples face infertility and 1 in 4 identified pregnancies end in miscarriage and 1 in 100 births result in new born death. These losses can have impact on emotional and mental wellbeing of women who have strong desire to be a mom.

Psychological Issues

Caring and Supporting Others

Over 2/3rd of primary care givers are women, caring for partners, parents and children. This brings joy to many, managing and completing paid and unpaid work can have an impact on physical and mental health of a woman.

Relationship Breakdown

When a relationship ends, it can bring losses in every area of life, financial insecurity, social connections and relationship with children can also be affected. As a result, women who are separated, divorced or widowed are more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Stebbins, 2004). It is normal to feel upset or sad following a relationship breakdown or to lose pleasure in usual activities.

Personality Traits

Women's mental health is often affected by personality traits and coping mechanism. Studies have shown that those who tend to be more anxious or self-critical may be at great risk for affective disorders like depression and anxiety.

Social Issues

Discrimination based on sexuality and gender identity

Women who are identified as lesbian, bisexual, or other sexualities experience higher anxiety and depression than heterosexual women. They have greater risk of suicide and self-harm. The risk of mental health issues can also increase if they don't have family or community support.

Violence and Abuse

To maintain good mental health and wellbeing, women need to feel safe and respected in their relationships. Women experience physical and sexual violence and emotional abuse by an intimate partner. Experiences of violence as well as emotional, physical and sexual abuse have devastating effects on women's health and wellbeing (Watts et al., 2002; Ellsberg, 2006). This can include

depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol misuse, suicidal thoughts and attempts and post-traumatic stress. Often due to fear and a believe that there is no other option, women stay in relationship that causes significant pain and distress. In a classic study by Brown & Harris (1978) depression was found more prevalent among working class than middle class women. This is evident that poor women experience more and more severe life events than does the general population (Brown et al., 1975; Makosky, 1982). They are more likely to deal with chronic sources of social stress such as low quality housing and dangerous neighborhood, they are at higher risk for becoming victims of violence (Marry, 1981; Belle, 1990).

Poor Nutrition

In all phases of life poor nutrition impacts their own growth and development and have babies with low birth rate.

Employment

In the world of work employment may bring self-esteem and independence. But in present conditions working women are facing so many health challenges because of imbalance between work and family, lack of affordable care for children. At workplace they face unfair treatment, harassment and discrimination. Sometimes family members don't satisfy their need for approval. Underemployment is prevalent among women. Working women manage both their household and work at their workplace. Stress related illness are twice higher for women than men. Job stress has been linked with heart disease, muscle and bone disorder and depression.

Most Prevalent Health Issues Impacting Women

Heart Disease

It is no. 1 cause of death for women. Heart Attack includes chest pain, shortness of breath and weakness in arms. Women are also likely to experience shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting. However women may not recognize their symptoms as a heart attack. Menopause protects them from heart disease. Certain risk factors are more common after menopause.

Diabetes

Diabetes increases the risk of heart disease 4 times more in women. They are prone to diabetes related complications like blindness, kidney disease and depression. It can also cause difficulties during pregnancy, miscarriage and birth defects.

Breast Cancer

It typically originates in the milk ducts, can spread to other organs and is the most aggressive cancer affecting the global female population. This condition is present more in developed in female population of developed nations due to their extended life span. Initially women with breast cancer may develop breast lumps. Most breast lumps are non-threatening but it is important for women not to overlook them.

Alzheimer's Disease

It is a form of brain de-generation in which abnormal particles called neurofibrillary tangles and plaques form in the brain and destroy healthy brain cells.

Ovarian and Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer originates in the lower uterus while ovarian cancer starts in the fallopian tubes. Both conditions cause similar pain.

Autoimmune Diseases

They occur when body cells declare war on themselves producing antibodies that attack healthy cells. As this condition continues to escalate among the population, researchers remain rattled as to why the condition affects mostly women. While many distinct autoimmune diseases exist, most common symptoms are exhaustion, mild fever, pain, skin irritation and vertigo.

Depression and Anxiety

Natural hormonal fluctuations can lead to depression or anxiety. Premenstrual syndrome occurs commonly among women while premenstrual dysmorphic disorder presents similar. After birth of a baby, many mothers acquire a form of depression called the “baby blues”. Perinatal depression causes stronger emotional shifts, sadness and tiredness.

Stroke

A Stroke is usually caused by a clot that stops the flow of blood in an area of the brain. Stroke can cause paralysis, loss of speech and poor memory. Stroke kills more than twice as many women each year as breast cancer.

Violence

A CDC report found that among victims of contact sexual violence, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner, nearly 26% of females and 15% of males 1st experienced some form of violence by that partner before the age of 18 (Smith Etal, 2018).

How to Improve mental health and wellbeing of women?

- Providing employment opportunities for women will create a positive impact on their health concern.
- Empowering women at all levels would help them to serve as productive members of society and develop healthy generations.
- The government must focus on the implementation and execution of health programmes at all levels.
- Seeking the help of counselors and psychiatrists is the best way to overcome mental health issues.
- Anemia can be avoided by taking sufficient iron in the diet.
- Eating a balanced and nutritious diet along with sufficient exercise and cutting back on alcohol and smoking.
- Stay positive and connected to family and friends.

- An organization must develop a culture that is respectful for women. Workplace wellbeing is built on a culture that does not tolerate bullying. Mental health training must also be imparted from time to time.
- Attention must also be given on physical health of women as people with good physical health are happier than those who do not.
- Domestic & interpersonal violence screening & counselling for all women.
- HIV screening & counselling for everyone aged between 15 to 65 and other ages at increased risk.
- Expanded tobacco intervention and counseling for pregnant tobacco users.

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