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Exploring Gender Differences in Mental Health: Attitudes Towards Help-Seeking and Service Utilization

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Abstract

Mental health is a complex topic that requires understanding of gender disparities in the use of mental health services and the behavior of seeking assistance. Development of legislation and initiatives aiming at raising awareness and availability of mental health care depends on this knowledge. Maintaining healthy relationships, limiting disease development, managing symptoms, increasing production, and fighting cultural prejudice all depend on mental health therapies. Gender expectations, socialising, stigma, and the belief that women are inferior are among the elements influencing these variances. Development of mental health treatments, policies, and initiatives responsive to gender variations was guided by a secondary research assessment of fifty studies on gender discrepancies in attitudes towards getting assistance for mental health disorders. A literature review from 50 established studies ranging from 2014-2024 was done with the help of PubMed, Google Scholar, Science Direct, Frontiers. While males showed obvious trends, women in western nations used more healthcare facilities and showed higher understanding of mental health. Because of low reading skills, poor education, and gender-based discrimination, women in India were stigmatised and so deprived of access to sufficient healthcare services. Particularly for women, mobile clinics can provide mental health treatments and education in far-off areas, therefore optimising access to medical facilities. Enhancing financial support for mental health research and promoting policy reforms can help close the gender gap, ensuring fairer access to mental health services worldwide.

Keywords: Gender differences, healthcare access, help-seeking attitude, mental health, service utilization patterns

INTRODUCTION

Men and women view mental health policies and services differently, which results in gendered instrumentality in using services and following medication adherence. Gender norms, socialising, stigma, cultural expectations, resource availability, and view of mental health treatments are among the elements influencing this discrepancy. Men could be reluctant to seek treatment because of preconceptions and fear of being labelled as mentally ill; women might be kept away from utilisation of adequate health care services because of societal stigma and prejudice. Overall well-being and productivity depend on mental health treatment; addressing conditions include depression, anxiety, and PTSD; also, it helps to lower social stigma.

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While lately the situation has enhanced, it is apparent that even in the current era, men and women do not share a similar perception or use of mental health policies, care, and services equally. In some of the studies by the authors, they have described how some mental health care interventions brought about gendered instrumentality for utilizing the services and

adherence to prescribed medication. Hence, the study should stress on the prescriptive nature of the intervention that was implemented and the establishment of new policies and laws which should stimulate the citizens' uptake of the same irrespective of its diverse population. Susukida R et al. (2015) also pinpointed the findings of a study according to which, women have a higher tendency to ask for help in mental ailment than men [1]. However, the described tendency picture depends on some characteristics, age, cultural background, as well as having mental disorders, and others. The study conducted by notes that this conclusion was made regarding the fact that structural masculinity makes it hard for the men to ask for help where asking for help was considered as a sign of weakness Seidler et al. (2016) [2]. The expected culture, paired with the concept of averting one's mental state, impacted the chance of the person regardless of gender to seek assistance.

Theories Explaining the Gender Differences

This study employs a variety of theoretical approaches to investigate how gender disparities impact the ways in which individuals seek and utilize mental health services.

The Gender Role Theory **s**ays that the way men and women deal with mental health care is influenced by what society expects of them. Men are taught to be independent, which might make them less likely to get help (Eagly and Wood., 2013) [3]. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to talk about their thoughts and ask for help.

Stigma Theory focuses on how internalised mental health shame makes it harder to get help, especially for men who might be afraid that getting help could be seen as a sign of weakness (Corrigan et al., 2002) [4].

Cultural Expectancy Theory looks at how these actions are affected by cultural norms that connect feminism with being emotionally open and manhood with being strong (Mahalik et al., 2007) [5].

The Health Belief Model says that people decide whether to get care based on how vulnerable they think they are, how bad their illness is, and what the pros and cons of therapy are. These thoughts are affected by gender; men tend to see fewer rewards and more problems (Rosenstock., 1974) [6]. Putting these ideas together helps the study come up with targeted treatments that will make it easier for both men and women to get mental health care.

Varied Factors Contributing to the Gender Differences in Help Seeking Attitude

Some of the reasons that can be associated with gender differences include the following: Several factors can predispose gender differences related to the attitudes towards seeking help and utilization of services for mental health issues. These disparities are significantly influenced by the following factors:

Gender Norms and Socialisation

Sex stereotype perception and expectations associated with patterning of emotions and help-seeking also tend to reflect gender norms. Dependence on women and emotional unavailability may be indirect byproducts of defeated masculine norms, which men cannot seek mental health assistance if they demonstrate emotional frailty **(**Qiu L et al. 2024**)** [7]. On the other hand, society may encourage women to seek help when there is a need and share feelings and a need for social support.

The Impact of Stigma and Weakness Perception

It may also be important to note that there could be a gender disparity in the stigma of seeking help and the one in mental health. The way males engage with mental health assistance may be deemed as a sign of weakness or a lack of ability to impose the prevailing stereotypical masculinity. Men could be reluctant to seek professional help because they fear the identification of them as mentally ill or that they would be given substandard service. Actually, stigma related to mental health can be issued in

females; but due to the nature of social roles and expectation about mothering and carer including the attitude of women who prioritize the request of help for them and other.

Expectations Within Culture and Society

Attitudes towards mental health and the act of requesting assistance are divergently influenced by cultural and societal factors between the sexes. Anxieties concerning mental health care can be influenced by cultural beliefs concerning masculinity and femininity, as well as societal expectations concerning the functions and obligations of the family. Certain cultural contexts may place a disproportionate amount of importance on the familial responsibilities of women, potentially influencing their inclination or capability to prioritise their personal mental health requirements (Wendt et al., 2016) [8].

Resource Accessibility

Differences in service utilisation patterns and help-seeking behaviours may result from gender-based disparities in mental health resources, including financial support, healthcare coverage, and the availability of culturally competent care**.** Geographic obstacles, financial constraints, or lack of insurance coverage are a few examples of the disparities in access to mental health services between men and women.

The Perception of Services Provided for Mental Health

Different genders may have distinct perspectives regarding mental health services and treatment approaches. Mental health services may be underutilised by males due to their perception that such services are less pertinent or efficacious in addressing their concerns. Females may be more receptive to talk therapy or interpersonal interventions, whereas males may exhibit a preference for treatment approaches that adhere to conventional masculine ideals, such as problem-solving or action-oriented therapies**.**

Need for Mental Health Care

Mental health can be described as a state where people are fulfilled, resourceful, resilient and are able to capitalize on strengths, gain knowledge and skills for productive functioning and contribute to society. It has intrinsic and extrinsic value and is a means of our total health and being.

The approach to seek assistance with mental health issues has received a lot of focus in the current day culture because of the possibly transformative change that it may portend to the general wellness of individuals in present culture. Most of the individuals struggling with mental health disorders never get the chance to seek professional assistance or have their conditions exacerbated as they fear stigma from their community and peers. Hence, it is imperative that such attitudes be examined, in order for policies and interventions to be implemented with the aim of raising the awareness of mental health and subsequently improve the accessibility of mental health services.

Numerous factors make it imperative that people with mental health issues have access to treatment, including but not limited to enhancing and promoting physical and mental well-being, diminishing manifestations of its signs, halting further deterioration of conditions, fostering more effective personal and social interactions, increasing efficiency and output, and eradicating prejudices.

Some important ideas about how masculinities (and larger community- and society-level factors) can help or hinder men from getting help for mental health issues are:

- Stigma
- Tailored support
- Community-level interventions
- Reframing help-seeking within traditional masculinity norms
- Rethinking masculinity, challenging traditional concepts and depictions

Table 1. WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale: Criteria for Assessing Programmes and Policies

Level	Criteria
1. Gender Unequal	Perpetuates gender inequality by reinforcing unbalanced norms, roles and relations. Privileges men over women (or vice versa). Often leads to one sex enjoying more rights or opportunities than the other.
2. Gender Blind	Ignores gender norms, roles and relations. Very often reinforces gender-based discrimination. Ignores differences in opportunities and resource allocation for women and men. Often constructed based on the principle of being "fair" by treating everyone the same.
3. Gender Sensitive	Considers gender norms, roles and relations. Does not address inequality generated by unequal norms, roles or relations Indicates gender awareness, although often no remedial action is developed.
4. Gender Specific	Considers gender norms, roles and relations for women and men and how they affect access to and control over resources. Considers women's and men's specific needs Intentionally targets and benefits a specific group of women or men to achieve certain policy or programme goals or meet certain needs. Makes it easier for women and men to fulfil duties that are ascribed to them based on their gender roles.

Whereas women face a whole different level of challenges as shown in table 1. Because of this, it is important to remember that stress buffering, mood management, and physiological balance have all been shown by science to improve people's overall health and success in both their personal and professional lives. Research has shown that coping with stress, controlling your mood, and keeping your body in balance all help your overall health and success in your personal and professional life. Managing stress in a healthy way can improve your thinking, ability to make decisions, and ability to deal with problems. Mental health care services offer counselling and medicine to help people with diseases like sadness, anxiety, and PTSD deal with their conditions. Early detection can stop problems that could be life-threatening or cause disease. Including mental health in important areas makes sure that important goals are met, which leads to better success in daily life and at work. Accepting sick people and their mental health patients can help get rid of the social shame that comes with these conditions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A thorough analysis of 50 studies on gender differences in mental health, help-seeking behaviours, and service utilisation revealed a consistent finding: women were more inclined to seek help and have better knowledge of mental health, while they were less likely to use services due to associated stigma. On the other hand, men appeared to lack the necessary knowledge and awareness about mental health, and they exhibited a strong reluctance to seek treatment due to their perceived weakness. Researchers primarily utilised a variety of surveys and questionnaires. Despite this, the literature implied a need for further study on these differences and proposed various suggestions.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

1. To delve into the factors affecting gender differences in inclination to ask for treatment with mental health problems.
2. To understand if males have more difficulties than women seeking mental health treatment.
3. To learn how attitudes of mental health in both genders are affected by socioeconomic factors, race and ethnicity.
4. To suggest interventions meant to increase access to mental health care and assistance for various communities.

Method: The study employed a supplementary analysis of 50 peer-reviewed research to comprehend disparities in gender attitudes around seeking mental health assistance and utilising mental health services and devoted to comprehending the ways in which these views are shaped by variables such as socioeconomic position, race, and ethnicity.

Literature Selection

- Employed prominent scholarly databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar.
- Focused on keywords such as "gender differences," "mental health help-seeking," "mental health service utilisation," "socioeconomic factors," "race," and "ethnicity."
- The search is restricted to items that were published between 2010 to 2023.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- *Inclusion criteria:* Studies that particularly investigate gender disparities in mental health help-seeking behaviours and treatment utilisation among adult populations aged 18 years and older.
- *Exclusion criteria:* Studies that specifically target individuals below the age of 18, articles that do not differentiate between genders, papers that have not undergone peer review, and publications that are not in the English language.

Using a quality evaluation instrument designed for observational and qualitative research, every one of the 50 papers underwent rigorous review for methodological rigour.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to investigate gender differences in mental health, specifically in terms of attitudes towards getting assistance and patterns of service usage. Comprehending these distinctions is crucial for formulating efficient mental health policies and programs that address the varied requirements of distinct gender groups. The study emphasises that help-seeking behaviours are affected by variables such as gender role conflict and self-stigma, which have a substantial impact on how individuals address their mental health issues and their desire to participate in treatment (Cole and Ingram 2020) [9].

Policy and Program Development Implications: The gender disparities discovered in this study have significant ramifications for the formulation of mental health policies and the establishment of programs. Gender role conflict, characterised by cultural norms prescribing distinct responsibilities for males and females, frequently deters men from asking assistance owing to the apprehension of being perceived as feeble. This internalised social stigma might result in the adoption of avoidant behaviours, which have negative consequences for mental well-being. In order to tackle these problems, mental health policies should include gender-sensitive strategies that acknowledge and tackle the distinct obstacles experienced by various genders (Buffel et al., 2014) [10]. Programs should strive to diminish self-stigma and foster a broader comprehension of mental health that questions conventional gender norms (Booth et al., 2019) [11].

Improving Mental Health Services: Enhancing the efficacy, availability, and inclusivity of mental health care for individuals of all genders is of utmost importance. This involves formulating solutions that precisely address the distinct requirements and inclinations of both males and females. Women may exhibit a greater inclination towards talk therapy or interpersonal treatments, whereas males may exhibit a preference for problem-solving or action-oriented therapies that accord with conventional masculine norms. It is important for mental health services to take into account the influence of cultural and societal norms on individuals' tendencies to seek care. To improve the situation, they can more effectively tackle the obstacles that hinder persons from obtaining care (Pattyn et al., 2015) [12].

Exploring Cultural and Societal Expectations: Cultural and cultural norms exert a substantial influence on the formation of attitudes about mental health and the act of seeking treatment. Across various societies, men are commonly conditioned to personify physical and emotional fortitude, but women are often anticipated to depend on assistance from others. This contrast might result in men being hesitant to request assistance, whereas women may feel more at ease in doing so. Nevertheless, this implies that women, particularly in conservative communities, may have supplementary obstacles in obtaining mental health care as a result of social disapproval and prejudice (Kulesza et al., 2014)

[13]. In order to tackle these inequalities, it is crucial to formulate policies that advocate for gender parity in mental health services and confront the societal norms that sustain these discrepancies (Das et al., 2018) [14].

Effects of Education and Socioeconomic Factors: Studies suggest that women have a higher propensity to seek mental health treatments compared to males, and this difference is influenced by factors such as education and financial level. Women who have attained greater levels of education are more inclined to seek assistance, but males frequently have difficulties due to the societal perception of masculinity, which might hinder their willingness to seek support. These findings indicate that efforts to improve mental health should not just concentrate on diminishing social disapproval but should also prioritise enhancing knowledge and availability of treatments across various socioeconomic strata (Gesselman et al., 2024; Li and Gal., 2022) [15, 16].

Global and National Standpoints: Multiple international research have repeatedly demonstrated that women have a greater propensity to seek assistance for mental health concerns in comparison to males. Nevertheless, in nations such as India, where conventional gender norms are firmly established, there exists a substantial requirement to enhance consciousness regarding the significance of mental well-being and the accessibility of treatments (Kulesza et al., 2014). The paucity of research on the intersection of gender and mental health in non-Western nations underscores the necessity for more studies to get a deeper comprehension of the distinctive obstacles encountered by these groups. In addition, a study on sexual orientation revealed that persons belonging to sexual minority groups seek mental health care services at a greater frequency compared to heterosexual individuals Platt (2018) [17]. This suggests that the utilisation of mental health care is influenced by the combined effects of gender and sexual orientation.

Suggestions for the Formulation and Implementation of Policies and Programs: In order to tackle the gender discrepancies in mental health treatment, it is crucial to design policies that are sensitive to gender and culturally appropriate. This involves developing additional programs that are specifically designed to support women and enable them to make well-informed choices regarding their mental well-being. Furthermore, there is a necessity for initiatives that explicitly cater to males, urging them to seek assistance and questioning the societal expectations that link masculinity with power and independence. In order to alleviate the strain on formal healthcare systems, mental health services should prioritise the promotion of self-care and community assistance, especially for less severe mental health problems (Oliver et al., 2018; Patel and Chauhan, 2019) [18, 19].

It is essential to comprehend gender discrepancies in mental health in order to create successful policies and programs that cater to the distinct requirements of various gender groups. By acknowledging the influence of gender role conflict, self-stigma, and cultural expectations on the decision to seek treatment, mental health services can enhance their inclusivity and availability. Ultimately, this will result in improved mental health results for all persons, irrespective of gender (Harris et al., 2015; Jena et al., 2020; Liddle et al., 2021) [20-22].

CONCLUSION

Gender discrepancies in mental health show that men and women seek and use services differently. This study portrays that gender role conflict, self-stigma, and societal norms strongly influence these behaviours. Men, driven by societal standards that link masculinity with strength, are frequently unwilling to seek treatment, whereas women, though more likely to seek mental health care, may encounter stigma and limited access in particular cultural situations. The findings imply gender-sensitive measures to overcome these barriers and improve mental health care equity are needed. Mental health treatments should be more accessible and effective for all genders and reduce stigma, especially among males. The paper also recommends mental health education, especially in non-Western nations with more established gender norms. By addressing these cultural norms and supporting an inclusive

mental health approach, we may reduce treatment gaps and improve mental health outcomes for everybody.

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