



Women's Mental Health Challenges



One's mental wellness has been the subject of many especially during the pandemic-ridden year of 2020 up to the present.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines "mental health" as the foundation for well-being and effective functioning of an individual and a community. As mental issues encompasses everyone, what makes discussion pertinent to mental wellness specific to women?

In celebration of International Women's Month this year, the DILG launched a series of webinars that run every Monday this March. The second session on March 8, led by the Office of the Undersecretary for Mindanao Affairs and Special Concerns and the Department's Administrative Service (AS)-Human Resource Management Division (HRMD), tackled the intricacies of mental wellness as the public health concern that it is.

One of the resource speakers during the online meeting, Department of Health (DOH) representative Dr. Agnes Joy Casiño, underscored how gender is a critical determinant of mental health and mental illness.

She said, *"Women's concerns with psychological wellbeing extend across the life cycle and cannot be confined to reproductive functioning."*

Casiño added that it extends beyond specific conditions or problems. They encompass structures that govern the provision of a healthcare information system and delivery.

When it comes down to it, mental health disorders affect women and men differently. She lists several gender-specific causes that affect women's mental health which are:

- Gender-based violence
- Low income and income inequality
- Socio-economic disadvantage
- Low or subordinate social status and rank
- Unremitting responsibility for others

According to a study shared by Casiño, 41.9% of people who are diagnosed with neuropsychiatric disorders are women compared to 29.3% of men. In terms of the lifetime prevalence rate of violence, the rate goes against women ranging from 16% to 50%. Also, victims of wars, natural disasters, and displacement logged at 80% of 50 million affected by such causalities.

Pandemic Effect on Mental Health

In the country, mental health often goes untreated as many Filipinos are unaware of such health concerns or worse, dismisses the prevalence of it. The common description would mistakenly fall on people who have gone amok or someone having fits of screams and rage.

In a data collected by the National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) under the Department of Health (DOH), before the pandemic, the agency received 4,238 calls[1] between the periods of May 2019 to February 2020, of which 1,632 reported calls were from women. Comparatively, calls received from February 28 of the same year to

the present have now ballooned to 12,204, and 8,078 calls were made by women.

During the lockdown in the country, Casiño shared that women reported lower work productivity and job satisfaction compared to men. Women also experience pandemic-related stressors specific to reproductive functioning and stages. Women who are pregnant, postpartum, miscarrying, or experience are at high risk of depression.

Partly because due to varying responsibilities of women, who in most circumstances wear different hats throughout the day, it affects some of them when those responsibilities are condensed all in the space of the home.

Moving Forward

The most important part to have good mental wellness is the acknowledgment of it and the need to take action. This is not a manifestation of weakness but a courageous step in getting better, not for others but one's self.

To this, Casiño left the participants with some quick tips and how to follow through with this plan:

Actions items for a healthy work-life balance:

- Adapt your attitude
- Acknowledge your feelings
- Be okay with just doing your best
- Practice self-compassion
- Engage in self-care
- Establish boundaries
- Prioritize relaxation or self-care activity
- Seek therapy or counseling if desired and available

If you know someone who needs immediate medical attention for their mental health wellness, do not hesitate to contact the NCMH at their crisis hotline and dial 1553, a toll-free number in the entire Luzon area. You may also call 0917-899-USAP (8727); (02) 7-989-USAP. ■ **Kimani Franco**

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We commit to continually improve the effectiveness of our Quality Management System compliant with applicable statutory and regulatory requirements and international standards gearing towards organizational efficiency in pursuing our mandate and achieving our client's satisfaction.

We commit to consistently demonstrate a "Matino, Mahusay at Maasahang Kagawaran Para sa Mapagkalinga at Maunlad na Pamahalaang Lokal".