



“Darpan” – A Self-Introspection on Women’s Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Women’s mental health is a crucial and important aspect in her overall well-being but neglected as it is often asymptomatic. It is interesting to reflect on mental health for a woman who has multiple responsibilities - Her own, family, career, and responsibilities to the community and the impact it has on women career continuity and career progression. The ideal situation would be all for all groups to be partners and stakeholders in the same so that women can balance career along with other responsibilities. The article throws light on how postponing the career opportunities of women become a hurdle for her to restart her career and pacify her passion and how it affects the mental wellbeing.



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1. Introduction

What is “Women’s Health”? Is it merely taking medicines when unwell? Hygiene & care during menstruation? Using contraceptives? Pre or post natal care? Nutrition care? Child care? Is it losing weight? Menopausal concern? Cancer? A wide range of answers comes to our mind to answer this question. Whereas in this list issues like getting upset, suddenly crying, dark circles under the eyes, getting angry, worries, anxiety, depression take a back seat. Holistic health for women is the need - then and now. Within mental health also, there is a wide range of concerns starting right from the adolescence for a girl child (Sharma & Pathak, 2015). The way physical health is receiving attention the same way attention to mental health is responsibility of an individual and of a state. The action plan should be made from family level up to national level. Symptoms of mental health are ignored or treated as physical symptoms e.g. in certain cases migraine headache is psychosomatic but is treated as a physical health concern. At times mental health issues are buried under stigma, negligence and gender. The mental health issues will not receive attention until the issue is severe especially for women (Wesley & Muthuswamy *et al.*, 2009). It is high time for women to

listen to their “mind” and to their “body” in order to keep healthy and especially healthy mentally. Women shouldn’t suffer mentally and they need to stand for themselves in order to keep up their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. The term double bind reflects the quandary women find themselves in for career continuity (Madaan & Pradhan, 2017).

The case study presented in this article is of a woman who is asymptomatic for mental health. It reflects the light on how women has been undergoing demotivating experiences at the time where she wants to stand for herself and to prove herself.

The article shares the case study which is one of the effective tools in the Qualitative Research. Qualitative methods comprise both structured and unstructured tools. Researchers can develop case study on the basis of key informant interviews or from in depth interview. Key informants interviews are in-depth, open ended interviews with persons who are especially knowledgeable about the aspects of the study population. (Manjiri & Sandhya, 2004). Case study involves studying individual cases, often in their natural environment and for a long period of time. The given case study can be considered as Situational case studies from the types of case studies (Ahuja, 2001).

The benefits of the case study are:

- a) Teacher/Facilitator/trainer can narrate in form of story (Storytelling) to make it interesting for an audience.
- b) Student's/participants/trainees might relate to the surroundings, character, and situations and challenges described in the case study which enables them to think and apply to their respective professional and personal life.
- c) Case study is one of the effective tools to generate the discussion.
- d) Case study creates platform for multidisciplinary discussions.
- e) Case studies help in studying unique situations, cases.

The given case study can be discussed in any class for bettering professional values or principles of management or communication skills or personality development programs.

2. Case presentation

Phone rings, eager to pick up but only to hear:

"We are sorry... Ma'am! I am impressed with your CV but due to your career gap, I mean you were freelancing and not in 9 to 5 category & your last drawn salary is so less. ...Ma'am and your age... I'm unable to offer you this job....."

The silence after the call was met with tears, anger, helplessness and thoughts of repentance. The feeling of regret and repentance overpowered all other feelings.

"Why I took a break? But I had no other option.... Why my age and career gap would matter if I am capable, eligible, skilled and can deliver my work on time and I am passionate..... Has my capacities, zeal of work, skill sets and talent has decreased just because I was a freelancer?"

It's a story of a 43-year-old woman who took a decision of opting out from a fulltime career oriented job for her nuclear family where she decided on the condition or circumstances forced her to decide to give priority to look after her family. Post-graduation from a reputed institute of India and wanted to pursue her career but all remain only dream.

2.1 What happened in all these years?

It is the story of a happy nuclear family. Well educated couple with two children. Couple sharing good relationship & understanding. She was working full time till the birth of their second child. She was unable to continue to work since she decided to devote full time to nurture her children. She

along with her children used to accompany her husband on his long-term onsite projects which used to be for a year or so. Her sense of accountability towards her children overpowered her wish of taking up full time job. Nonetheless she kept on working as a freelancer, consultant with primary responsibility as her children and their education and overall development. She was part of a theater group too which she would manage between her consultancy. It has been a long gap and children are grown up and are independent, so she decided to go back to full time job.

There are many women who have managed both the end extremely well, so why blame the society, employer, others? This case study is a representation of many such SHE's that have kept their career, passion aside and have taken care of their families and children. Such choices are individual and personal at times. Then the question arises that what is the need of discussion. The discussion is important for many such SHE's to bring back their Self-confidence, self-esteem, self-identity and dignity along with the thought that such SHE's can contribute to the society back with their qualities, skills and employable capacities in the respective field.

It also implies to Emotional Quotient of the society where "SHE" is not seeking sympathy but Empathy. If each one of us as part of the community can be empathic towards the issue then our perception would change towards the situation. This would also help and promote mental health of many women. Her emotional journey of dilemma, frustration, and feeling of rejection and lack of identity can turn into the depression. Unfortunately now a day's Depression has become very inexpensive word in everyone's dictionary.....but one need to address at early stage and in a professional manner.

3. Discussion

Keeping these views in mind can we answer and discuss following questions:

- Who will decide the yardstick of your success?
- Can she mention the success of her children in her bio-data?
- How important is vertical growth in person's life than horizontal growth?
- How one can justify the gap/ invisibility from professional life for betterment of family life?

A career break in women's life will bring her moral and confidence so low that she will feel, demotivated. It is the need of the hour that the career gap in a life of women needs "respect", from all spheres. The respect shouldn't stop at community level, it should reflect in every company policies and planning. If any woman has capacity, required set of

skills and zeal and passion to work then her age & last drawn salary should not impact her further plan to pursue her working plans and career. It's time to discuss and reflect on the question: **“Is it possible to postpone the age and salary earned in the previous job in the career for a woman in the job market?”**

“SHE” is asking many questions to herself:

- a) Was the decision wrong of taking a break for the family where she buried her aspiration?
- b) Why can't women equally love and do justice to her profession, passion and family?
- c) Are women in this situation in need of sympathy?
- d) Is the woman in the case study is in self-pity mode?
- e) What is the solution for reproduction related responsibilities; career age and maintaining healthy family life - in the same phase for a woman?

Aren't other women working by managing families? Yes, there are many Indian women from all strata of the community who are managing their job, career and family very well. The concern raised here is for those women who took a career break and wants to restart the work. Apart from having capacity when women getting rejections, low salary than she deserves in the job market, it is bound to impact her mental health. The working women, successful women, women at high position, great leaders might be facing different set of challenges. Issues, challenges might be different at different levels but one common thread should be there which is “She should get her respect and space”.

Indian community has experienced and crossed different milestones by different segments, starting from the diarrhea, hand washing habits, personal toilet construction, TB early detection, polio eradication, cancer screening till HIV/AIDS. One common thread one can observe in these is stigma related to each health concern, gender bias and impact on mental health for each (Kermode & Herrman *et al.*, 2007). The way physical health received attention, the same way mental health is also receiving attention but since symptoms of mental health are ignored or treated as physical symptoms e.g. in certain cases migraine headache is psychosomatic but is treated as a physical health concern (Malhotra & Shah, 2015). At times mental health issues are buried under stigma, negligence, gender bias. The mental health will not receive an attention until the issue is severe especially for women.

4. Expected Outcome

It is high time for women to listen to their “mind” and to their “body” in order to keep healthy and to keep healthy mentally also. Women shouldn't suffer mentally and they

need to stand for themselves in order to keep up their self-esteem and self-respect. It is high time for women to listen to their “mind” and to their “body” in order to keep healthy and to keep healthy mentally also. Women shouldn't suffer mentally and they need to stand for themselves in order to keep up their self-esteem and self-respect.

The COVID 19 pandemic has refocused the spotlight on mental health. It is important this is taken forward also addressing the issue of women's health issues which are connected to career as an important determinant of her mental health (Madaan & Pradhan, 2017).

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