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DIVISION OF FAMILY HEALTH  
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# Psychosocial and Mental Health Aspects of Women's Health



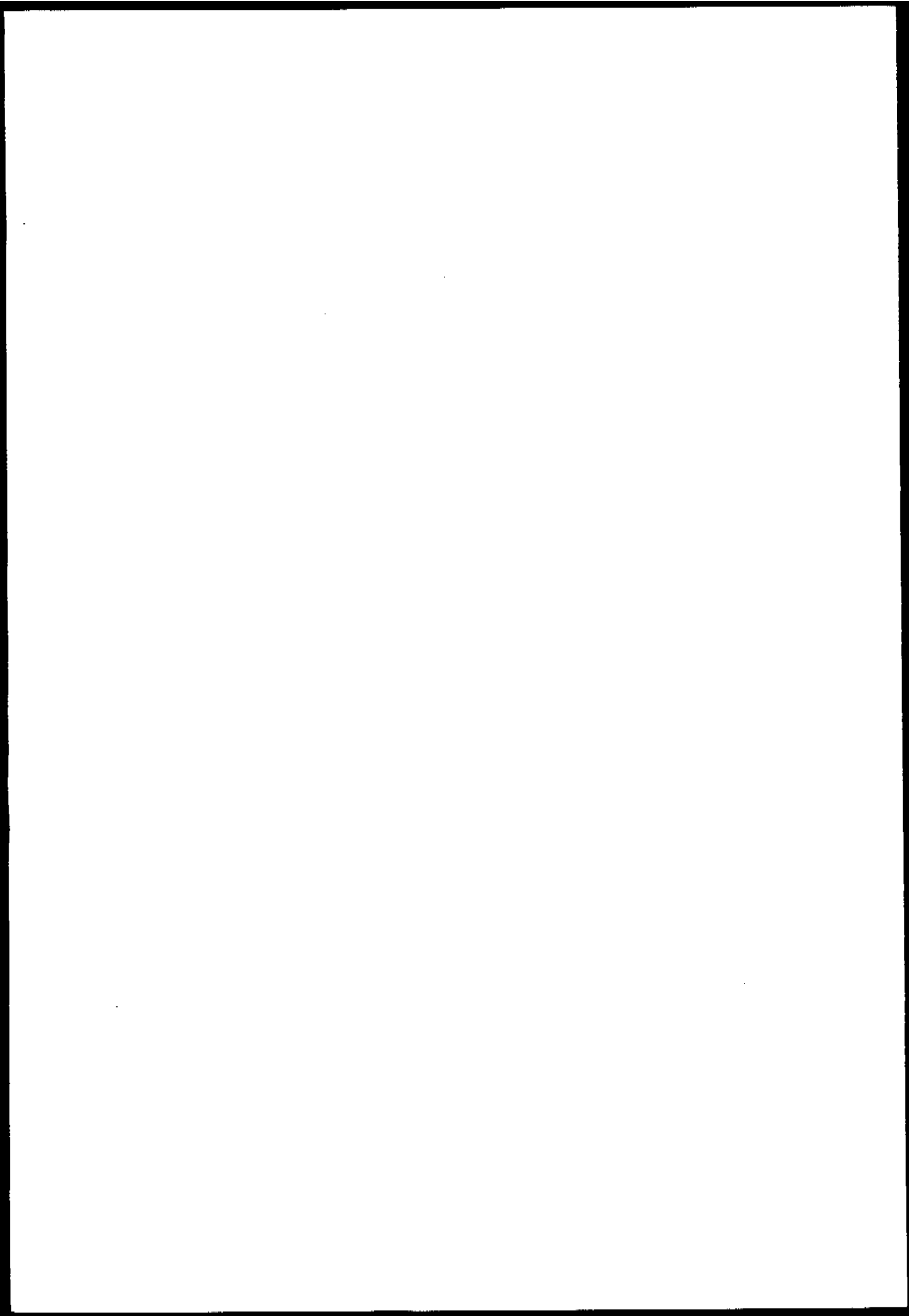
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## **PSYCHOSOCIAL AND MENTAL HEALTH ASPECTS OF WOMEN'S HEALTH**

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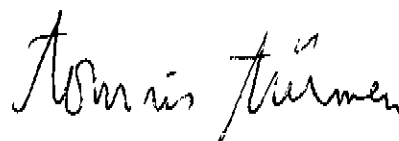
## PREFACE

Women are drawers of water, hewers of wood, labourers, preparers of food, bearers of children, educators, health care providers, producers, and decision-makers. Although they are central to caring for families and communities, to production and reproduction, they are accorded unequal status. Throughout the world they are overworked and undervalued. Their subordination makes it more difficult for them to cope with the many demands made upon them whether of a physical, social or emotional nature. Women are more vulnerable than men to sex exploitation and violence, to poverty and malnutrition, to environmental degradation, to chronic diseases which are often exacerbated by pregnancy and lactation, and to the debilitating effects of harmful traditional practices.

There is, however, a growing recognition that the stresses imposed on women affect their physical, emotional and mental well-being. Epidemiologic evidence is accumulating that links mental disorders with alienation, powerlessness and poverty, conditions most frequently experienced by women. Significant changes are taking place in beliefs and expectations about women's roles and identities in the context of community, family and work. Increasingly, attempts are made to define, understand and explain the female experience. Women's groups around the world are taking the issue into their own hands and searching for their own culturally appropriate solutions to the issue of women's mental health.

This document is the first in a series jointly produced by WHO's Division of Family Health and the Division of Mental Health around the general theme of women and mental health. The aim of the series is to create a forum to debate issues related to women's mental health and to their contribution to mental health care. This debate will contribute to the general reappraisal of women's health problems, giving long overdue recognition to their strength and steadfastness in coping with the myriad problems that assail them, and pointing out future directions for research and action to address women's needs.

The Division of Family Health is proud to be associated with the development of this document together with colleagues in the Division of Mental Health and will continue to strive to improve the health and well-being of the world's women.



by Director, Division of Family Health

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the first issue of a series of publications dealing with women and mental health. The need for an adequate review of knowledge in this area has been repeatedly stressed. Its availability should facilitate and stimulate action programmes. The volume prepared by Dr Dennerstein and her colleagues springs from a joint initiative by the Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood Programme and the Division of Mental Health. We hope that the production of other volumes will also involve our colleagues in the Division of Family Health and in other Divisions of WHO.

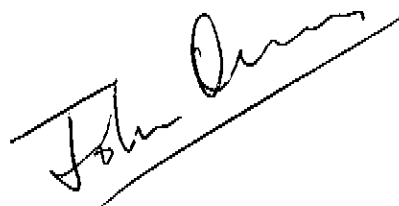
Several among these are already prepared. The second issue prepared in consultation with AMRO will present the bibliography of publications dealing with women and mental health and include publications which appeared in the Spanish and Portuguese languages in Latin American countries.

A third issue will present the situation concerning mental health and women in Spain. It was prepared by members of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Spain. It is expected that other requests describing the situation in Japan, Brazil and Italy will be prepared by collaborating centres in those countries.

The authors of the current volume have every reason to be proud of their work. They have produced an excellent appraisal of the situation concerning mental health and psychosocial aspects of women's health. Their review is based on literature in English and it deals mainly with developed countries. This, however, is a logical consequence of the scarcity of publications from developing countries and of difficulties accessing literature in languages other than English.

We are hoping that this series will stimulate work in countries and that it will help to draw attention to the importance of promoting mental health in women worldwide.

by Director, Division of Mental Health

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Dennerstein", is written over a horizontal line.

