Depression, anxiety, psychological distress, sexual violence, domestic violence and escalating rates of substance use affect women to a greater extent than men across different countries and settings. Pressures created by their multiple roles, gender discrimination and associated factors of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, overwork, domestic violence and sexual abuse, combine to account for women’s poor mental health. There is a positive relationship between the frequency and severity of such social factors and the frequency and severity of mental health problems in women. Severe life events that cause a sense of loss, inferiority, humiliation or entrapment can predict depression.

Up to 20% of those attending primary health care in developing countries suffer from anxiety and/or depressive disorders. In most centres, these patients are not recognized and therefore not treated. Communication between health workers and women patients is extremely authoritarian in many countries, making a woman’s disclosure of psychological and emotional distress difficult, and often stigmatized. When women dare to disclose their problems, many health workers tend to have gender biases which lead them to either over-treat or under-treat women.

Research shows that there are 3 main factors which are highly protective against the development of mental problems especially depression. These are:
- having sufficient autonomy to exercise some control in response to severe events
- access to some material resources that allow the possibility of making choices in the face of severe events
- psychological support from family, friends, or health providers is powerfully protective.

Depressive disorders account for close to 41.9% of the disability from neuropsychiatric disorders among women compared to 29.3% among men.

WHO’s Focus
- Build evidence on the prevalence and causes of mental health problems in women as well as on the mediating and protective factors.
- Promote the formulation and implementation of health policies that address women’s needs and concerns from childhood to old age.
- Enhance the competence of primary health care providers to recognize and treat mental health consequences of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and acute and chronic stress in women.

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http://www.who.int/mental_health/topics.html