



MENTAL HEALTH EUROPE – SANTE MENTALE EUROPE aisbl
Boulevard Clovis 7, B-1000 Brussels
Tel +32 2 280 04 68 - Fax +32 2 280 16 04
E-Mail: info@mhe-sme.org
www.mhe-sme.org

PRESS RELEASE

On the occasion of the International Women's Day – 8 March 2007

Annually, on 8th March, many events are held throughout the world to celebrate women and their rights in all different spheres of life.

Throughout the European Union significant changes and shifts in views and attitudes towards women's emancipation and equal role in society have taken place. The needs of women in education, at the work place, in family life and in the area of health care have been increasingly taken into consideration and tackled. However, although recent years have seen efforts to improve the health care for women, the **mental health needs of women are still a matter of worry**.

Several issues continue to be of particular concern. The Mental Health Europe (MHE) Committee on Women and Mental Health has been actively engaged in raising awareness of these issues to improve women's mental health and well-being:

- ➔ **Hunger:** Women's complaints of "nervousness" are explained less as symptomatic of psychological distress and more as an expression of chronic hunger and hunger anxiety.
- ➔ **Work:** Many women spend more hours working than do men of the same social status because they earn a living while also being fully responsible for domestic chores such as child care and the care for ageing relatives. This burden of work is expressed through symptoms of "nerves" and a lack of rest.
- ➔ **Sexual and reproductive violence:** Emotional trauma and depression result from rape (especially prevalent in situations of societal breakdown and political violence), involuntary prostitution, women not being in a position to refuse sexual relations, involuntary abortions, and forced sterilisations.
- ➔ **Domestic violence:** It is estimated that domestic violence and rape account for approximately 5% of the global health burden for women in the reproductive years. Major depression, alcohol and drug dependency and post-traumatic stress syndromes are linked with a history of domestic violence. In many parts of Europe, wife beating is directly related to depression and suicide. Female infanticide not only kills girl children, but brings grief, remorse, and other forms of mental distress to mothers and family members.
- ➔ **Economic development:** Women's control over their labour and earnings directly contributes to their mental health. Yet although women have always been economically productive, their contributions have been underestimated, ignored or rendered invisible by economic development policies that do not consider women's work. Many such initiatives have rendered women poorer, more dependent and with less decision-making power in the family.

In the context of this particular year 2007, which is both the year of Equal Opportunities for All and the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, **MHE pleads for the International Women's Day to be an opportunity to think about ways to address the well-being of women and to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to their mental health.**

For more information contact the MHE Secretariat: Tel +32 2 280 04 68, E-mail info@mhe-sme.org

Mental Health Europe - Santé Mentale Europe is a European non-governmental organisation committed to the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of mental distress, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of human rights for (ex)users of mental health services, their families and carers.