

Mental Health of Farm women in Agriculture

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Agriculture is the prime source of livelihood in most developing countries. India is a developing country; most of the population earns its livelihood from agriculture and it plays a vital role in India's economy. In India, 57.8% of rural households are engaged in agriculture. Women farmers have been the backbone and play a significant role in the agricultural sector, including contributing to the production of major crops, livestock, horticulture, postharvest activities, agro/social forestry, fisheries, etc. In India, 30.33% of total cultivators, 40.67% of agriculture labour are women, and 13.95% of total operational holdings are operated by women (Annual Report 2020-21).

Women in agriculture are balancing multiple responsibilities both on and off the farm. Farm women might experience additional stressors. Multiple responsibilities at home and on the farm could lead to stress and depressive symptoms. The health and wellness of female farmers is an ongoing issue. Women often talk about their family members' health while ignoring their own health. Some studies show that women farmers experience more psychological distress than men. Stress can negatively affect physical, mental, and spiritual health and well-being. Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, act and how we handle stress. Several studies reported that chronic stress among farming communities might lead to physical problems (e.g., headaches, sleep problems), mental problems (e.g., anxiety, anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, an increase in isolation), and cognitive issues (e.g., memory loss, inability to make decisions) (Williams, Kacie Hulshof). These could lead to tiredness, irritability, problems sleeping, fatigue, loss of control, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, withdrawal from social activity, relationship breakdown, forgetfulness, loss of temper, relaxation problems, feeling blue, less interest in pleasure, less concentration, loss of appetite, weight change, and substance abuse, etc. Mental health problems and services are often neglected in rural areas, particularly in farming communities. Multiple responsibilities, crop failure, natural calamities (drought and



flood), economic crisis, unemployment, lack of social support and increasing insecurity are some of the mental health problems among farmers (men and women) in India. Additionally, stereotypes in agriculture, gender roles at home, farm and public, lack of access to farm products, farm management, etc., general stresses that women farmers are experiencing.

Stress management

Every individual responds to stress in a unique way at any given time, as is clear. There are many ways that individuals deal with stress in their lives, ranging from individual self-care to peer-based support networks. Some constructive ways to deal with stress are given below (Kristin Reynolds).

- Recognize the symptoms of stress.
- Recognize any destructive behaviours that you may engage in to deal with stress.
- Recognize what has worked for you in the past in terms of stress management, and try to use those strategies when needed.
- Locate the source of stress, and address the source, in addition to the symptoms.
- Learn to accept what is realistically beyond your control.
- Delegate tasks to others, as appropriate.
- Include aerobic, physical activity as a part of your weekly routine.
- Take care of yourself (eating regular, healthful meals; sleeping; resting; exercising; etc.)
- Make time for fun.
- Make time for relaxation (meditation).

Conclusion

Mental health is neglected in rural areas. Farm women have multiple responsibilities at home and on the farm, as well as environmental and socio-economic factors. This leads to depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Knowledge and counseling on risk factors that affect mental health issues should be provided to farm women to reduce the burden of mental illness.

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