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Para-counsellors: The soldiers in resolving women mental health problems

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Statement of the Problem: Bangladeshi women garment worker starts at 4 am, cooks food in a common kitchen available for 4-5 families, goes to work at 7 am, and has a long work day till 7 pm, then is back to take care of her family and goes to bed between 10-11pm. She has no time of her own, a victim of violence and work, her pain.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A lot of mental distress affect their work life, productivity and end up having a poor quality of life. There structures within the address this issue. The management should start realizing that when psychosocial challenges and issues go unaddressed, they impact workers' effectiveness in the workplace. Fourteen welfare officers, who are the first contact point for workers in the factory, were trained and mentored by certified trainers in counseling; and, 14 trained para-counselors were institutionalized inside factory from December 2016.

Findings: Interestingly, women center in the factory, on being referred to by the para-counselors. The latest record collected as of 5th Jan 2017 reflects, 3 women came with anxiety and one of them had 4 sessions with the counsellor for mental relief; 3 women reported work stress and took 3 separate counselling sessions, others include conflict with supervisor, family conflict, financial crisis, relationship issue and the resulted anxiety.

Conclusion & Significance: The incidence report within this short duration of less than a month itself is the evidence for counseling need and the vacuum in services. Still, in a factory where 600+ workers are employed this number is just minimal, and the paraprofessionals have an important role to play to facilitate the workers them to the counselors.

Biography

Ms Farhtheeba Rahat Khan is a development professional with experience backed up by private sector interventions and development sector working realities and challenges. As the lead of 'Private Sector Health project', Ms Khan undertook studies to understand private sector healthcare market dynamics and simultaneously worked on the policy front with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and its directorates in addressing the supply side issues of the healthcare market. She provided technical assistance for the formulation of the policy framework, guidelines, and accreditation systems in the health training, and emphasized on avenues for women employed in the health sector. Currently, Ms Khan is the Team Leader for the 'Working with Women' project implemented by SNV where she is facilitating interventions in garment factories, following a gender sensitive and gender-specific approach to ensure equity in healthcare service provision for female garment workers.

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