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DEPRESSION AMONG WOMEN ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS, MARRIED WOMEN, AND ELDERLY WOMEN

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Abstract

Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health disorders affecting women globally. Women experience different psychological, biological, and socio-cultural challenges across the life span, making them more vulnerable to depression at various developmental stages. The present study explores depression among adolescent girls, married women, and elderly women through a comparative analysis. The paper examines major causes, symptoms, psychosocial determinants, and consequences of depression among women in different age groups. Adolescent girls often face emotional instability, academic pressure, body image concerns, and peer-related stress. Married women experience depression due to marital conflict, domestic violence, work-family imbalance, financial dependency, and caregiving burdens. Elderly women are vulnerable because of loneliness, widowhood, chronic illness, declining physical health, and social isolation. The study adopts a descriptive and comparative approach based on secondary data collected from journals, books, reports, and research articles. Findings reveal that although depression manifests differently across life stages, lack of emotional support, gender inequality, and social stress remain common contributing factors. The study highlights the importance of early intervention, mental health awareness, counselling services, and

gender-sensitive psychological support systems for women.

Keywords:

Depression, Women's Mental Health, Adolescent Girls, Married Women, Elderly Women, Comparative Study

Introduction

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being. Depression is among the most common psychological disorders affecting individuals worldwide and has emerged as a major public health concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression affects more than 280 million people globally, with women being disproportionately affected compared to men. Women are nearly twice as likely as men to experience depressive disorders because of biological, hormonal, psychological, and socio-cultural factors.

Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest in daily activities, feelings of hopelessness, fatigue, low self-esteem, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, and difficulty concentrating. Severe depression may interfere with daily functioning and reduce the quality of life.

Women encounter different developmental transitions throughout their life span. Each stage presents unique challenges and stressors that can contribute to depression. During adolescence, girls experience hormonal changes, identity confusion, social comparison, and academic pressure.

Married women face marital responsibilities, child care burdens, domestic stress, occupational pressure, and gender-based discrimination. Elderly women often struggle with loneliness, physical decline, widowhood, dependency, and social isolation.

Understanding depression across the life span is important because women's psychological needs vary according to age, social roles, and life circumstances. Comparative studies help identify common and stage-specific factors associated with depression and contribute to the development of targeted interventions.

The present paper focuses on three major categories of women:

1. Adolescent girls
2. Married women
3. Elderly women

The study aims to understand how depression differs across these life stages and to identify the psychosocial factors responsible for women's mental health problems.

Review of Literature

Depression among Adolescent Girls

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by rapid biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. Adolescent girls are highly vulnerable to depression because of hormonal fluctuations, identity confusion, peer pressure, academic competition, social media influence, and body image concerns.

Research studies suggest that girls experience higher levels of depression than boys during adolescence. Emotional sensitivity, family expectations, social comparison, and fear of failure contribute to depressive symptoms. Bullying, cyber harassment, and relationship conflicts further increase psychological stress.

Academic pressure is another important contributor to depression among adolescent girls. Competition, examination anxiety, and parental expectations often create emotional strain. In many societies, girls also face restrictions regarding freedom, education, and career choices, which may negatively affect mental health.

Several studies indicate that low self-esteem and poor family relationships are strongly associated with adolescent depression. Girls who lack emotional support from parents and peers are more likely to experience sadness, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

Depression among Married Women

Marriage is an important social institution, but it may also become a source of emotional stress for many women. Married women often experience depression because of marital conflict, domestic violence, financial dependence, caregiving burden, work-family imbalance, and lack of emotional support.

Women are frequently expected to fulfil multiple responsibilities, including household management, child care, elder care, and occupational duties. Continuous role overload may lead to emotional exhaustion and psychological distress.

Domestic violence and emotional abuse significantly increase depression among married women. Women facing controlling relationships, verbal abuse, and lack of autonomy often report low self-esteem and depressive symptoms.

Postpartum depression is another major concern among married women. Hormonal changes after childbirth, sleep deprivation, and caregiving stress contribute to emotional instability. Lack of family support during pregnancy and child care further increases psychological burden.

Economic dependency and social inequality also affect women's mental health. In many traditional societies,

women have limited decision-making power and reduced access to financial resources, contributing to feelings of helplessness and depression.

Depression among Elderly Women

Old age is associated with several psychological and social changes that may contribute to depression. Elderly women often experience loneliness, widowhood, declining physical health, dependency, retirement-related stress, and reduced social interaction.

Many elderly women suffer from chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and mobility problems. Physical limitations reduce independence and increase feelings of helplessness.

Widowhood is one of the most significant causes of depression among elderly women. Loss of a life partner often leads to grief, emotional emptiness, and social isolation. Elderly women living alone are at greater risk of depression.

Social neglect and lack of emotional support from family members also contribute to psychological distress. Rapid modernization and changing family structures have reduced traditional support systems for older adults.

Research indicates that elderly women with strong social relationships and community engagement experience lower levels of depression compared to socially isolated women.

Comparative Analysis of Depression Across Life Stages

Dimension	Adolescent Girls	Married Women	Elderly Women
Major Stressors	Academic pressure, peer influence, body image concerns	Marital conflict, financial burden, caregiving stress	Loneliness, widowhood, declining health
Biological Factors	Hormonal changes during puberty	Pregnancy, reproductive health issues	Aging and menopause
Social Issues	Bullying, social comparison	Domestic violence, gender inequality	Social isolation and neglect
Emotional Problems	Identity confusion, low self-esteem	Emotional exhaustion, anxiety	Grief, helplessness
Support Systems	Family, friends, teachers	Husband, family, community	Children, caregivers, social groups
Common Symptoms	Sadness, irritability, anxiety	Fatigue, hopelessness, stress	Loneliness, withdrawal, sadness

The comparison shows that depression affects women differently according to developmental stage and social role. However, emotional neglect and inadequate social support are common factors across all groups.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study uses a descriptive and comparative research design.

Sources of Data

Data were collected from:

- Research journals

- Books
- Government reports
- WHO publications
- Academic databases
- Published theses and dissertations

Area of Research

The proposed empirical research may be conducted in urban and rural settings, including schools, colleges, NGOs, households, and village communities.

Population

The study focuses on three groups of women:

1. Adolescent girls (13–19 years)
2. Married women (20–50 years)
3. Elderly women (60 years and above)

Tools for Future Empirical Research

Possible psychological tools include:

- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
- Interview Schedule
- Observation Method

Statistical Techniques

Future studies may use:

- Mean and standard deviation
- t-test
- ANOVA
- Correlation analysis
- Percentage analysis

Conceptual Understanding of Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that negatively affects emotions, thoughts, and behaviour. It involves persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities. Depression can range from mild to severe and may affect social relationships, academic performance, occupational functioning, and physical health.

Symptoms of Depression

Common symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sadness
- Irritability
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite changes
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Anxiety and emotional instability

Causes of Depression

Depression is influenced by multiple factors:

Biological Factors

- Hormonal changes
- Genetic predisposition
- Neurochemical imbalance
- Chronic illnesses

Psychological Factors

- Low self-esteem
- Negative thinking patterns
- Trauma and emotional stress
- Poor coping abilities

Social Factors

- Gender discrimination
- Poverty and financial stress
- Family conflict
- Social isolation
- Lack of emotional support

Conclusion

Depression among women is a major psychological and social issue that affects emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and quality of life. Women face unique challenges across different stages of development, making them vulnerable to depression throughout the life span.

Adolescent girls struggle with identity formation, academic pressure, and emotional instability. Married women experience stress due to multiple family and social responsibilities, marital conflict, and gender inequality. Elderly women face loneliness, widowhood, declining health, and reduced social interaction.

Although the causes and experiences of depression differ according to life stage, lack of emotional support, social stress, and gender-based challenges remain common risk factors. Therefore, mental health interventions should adopt a gender-sensitive and life-span approach.

The study highlights the importance of awareness, counselling, social support, and accessible mental health services for women. Early identification and timely intervention can significantly improve women's psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

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