



BACKGROUND NOTE

Gender and Wellness

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GENDER AND WELLNESS

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When it comes to health and wellness, men and women are not equal. Anatomy, genetics, physiology, hormones, behavioral patterns, and life experiences all make wellness particularly sensitive to gender differences. They affect the manifestation and path of diseases and conditions over the life span. This risk factor should influence prevention, management, and therapeutic treatments of the different groups. Yet, gendered determinants of wellness are less understood (Manandhar, Hawkes, Buse, et al. 2018). In many countries, there is disparity in health-related expenditure (Saikia and Moradkhaj 2016). Gender also determines access to and use of health care, including mental health, and wellness services. In some societies, they are influenced by several factors, such as the family's socioeconomic status, women's limited financial resources, lack of decision-making autonomy, restrictions in mobility and other freedoms, cultural norms related to dress and behavior, and threat of violence or harassment (Fikree and Pasha 2004; Ghose, Feng, Tang, et al. 2017; and He, Cheng, Bishwajit, and Zou 2018). The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted again that disasters and crises exacerbate and worsen gender inequalities, including in wellness aspects (UNICEF, 2020).

Caregiving is an under-resourced, often unpaid activity that falls disproportionately on women and girls worldwide. Within the home, more women care for children, spouses, elders, friends, and neighbors; and, outside the home, work as nannies, old age assistants, health professionals, fitness teachers, therapists, and providers of various wellness services. Caregiving has implications on women's financial resources and can also result in severe emotional and physical stresses. Seventy percent of workers in the health and social sectors are women. The rapid expansion of the wellness industry must address the challenges and specific needs of its women employees because the health and wellness sectors are big employers of women (Boniol, Mclsaac, Xu, et al. 2019). Gender-informed approaches in Asia's societies can bring more women into the formal workforce; eliminate unsafe and inflexible work environments; reduce inequities, pay gaps, and barriers to full time employment and leadership positions; and support the psychological and physical well-being of the dominant workforce.

The wellness industry is heavily dominated by women—from entrepreneurs to practitioners to consumers—and therein lies an opportunity. Women are major consumers of spas, fitness services, diets, and other wellness products and services. While privilege plays a role in determining the rise of this industrial complex, it also reflects a deep limitation in mainstream medical systems that leave women feeling isolated, dismissed, and dehumanized. Asia anyway has a rich tradition of alternate care, fitness, and medicine systems, which are often passed down through generations within families and communities, including to female members. Jobs in this industry can be more varied, flexible, and fulfilling. There is a tremendous business opportunity for the burgeoning wellness industry if it can improve women's access to all types of wellness

services, including mainstream medicine, on the one hand, and provide opportunities for employment, innovation, and expression to women pioneers and workers, on the other hand.

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