
NO ONE EVER ASKED ABOUT IT! BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR WOMEN ACCESSING TREATMENT FROM PRIMARY CARE IN KARACHI

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Purpose: Studies conducted in Pakistan reveal a high prevalence of depression, particularly in women. Evidence based and effective treatments are available, yet there is a significant gap between the numbers of women in need of treatment and those who receive services. This qualitative study identifies the barriers in access to mental health services for women screened for depression from primary care clinics in Karachi.

Methods: In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 women screened for depression from three purpose fully selected primary care sites in Karachi.

Results: Interviewees reported that they mostly did not share their depressive symptoms and suicidal attempts with health care providers due to perception of these being their personal problems and health care providers also not asking about it. Interviewees perceived health care providers too busy, overburdened and not interested in their emotional problems. Those who shared their symptoms also did not receive proper diagnoses, treatment or referral from their health care providers.

Conclusion: The study highlights the need to increase mental health literacy about depression through mass media, community engagement, and educational institutions so that women can recognize the depression in themselves and other women around them and be able to share their symptoms with their health care providers. Religious scholars needs to be involved in raising awareness on depression as an illness for which women should seek medical treatment besides taking support from religion. It also indicates the need for a referral system to help women reach to the required mental health services.