

“Your Words. Your Power: Writing as a Self-Empowering Tool For Women’s Mental Health In Developing Countries”

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ABSTRACT: *It has been seen that women in developing countries face many challenges that can stop them from fulfilling their potential, but also increase the risk of mental illness. Therefore it is very important to put in place effective strategies that can help these women improve their mental well-being as well as increase their inner strength and resilience. Considering the financial constraints these strategies need to be also cost-efficient. Here we would like to discuss the potential of writing as a tool for womens’ mental health in developing countries, where writing is not well known as a therapeutic method. The method has been however already used for psycho-emotional development with positive results in the western world. Here we show how by implementing writing as a self-empowering tool for womens’ mental health in developing countries a significant contribution to womens’ empowerment can be made.*

INTRODUCTION

Women in developing countries face several disadvantages including limited access to education, fewer chances for professional development, domestic violence and societal abuse. Each and all of them can have serious consequences for the quality of womens’ lives and increase the risk of depression. Since women are more vulnerable to experiencing mental problems related to psychological and physical challenges, a high prevalence of depression among females

promoting mental well-being and psychological self-counselling can be seen as an effective way for empowerment. Indeed, psychological

proven promising approach to sustainably promote subjective well-being and objective change in communities and society (Christens, 2012). There are several methods that have received attention for its potential to empower women, especially in the communities where hardship and inequality is gender embedded. These methods include cognitive-behavioral interventions, coping strategies, problem solving approaches, hope therapy and psychosocial interventions. Here we would like to explore empowering potential of writing.

Writing as a Therapy Method

While discussing writing as a therapy method we will use two terms “therapeutic” and “expressive” writing, which describe the “simultaneous participation in and observation of life and its journeys, traumas, lessons, quests, disappointments, joys and foibles” in a way that leads to understanding, insight, acceptance, and growth (Adams, 1999). According to Sandy Grason, writer and journal facilitator, writing is a window to whatever is important to someone. It can bring clarity in a very confusing world (Grason, 2010). It can be used as a therapy method or as a complementary tool to psychotherapy. For instance journal therapy describes the purposeful and intentional

therapeutic goals (Adams, 1999). Depending on the goal in each case, certain techniques are given. But sometimes it is not enough just to open our diaries and write, it can even become overwhelming.

Therefore the technique is more successful when it has structure and is being facilitated by the expert, as opposed by free writing which is “unboundaried, unstructured, open-ended, non-directed” (Adams, 1998).

understand their problems and their reactions to them (Rogers, 1992). Expressive writing can be very useful for this aim, because when someone writes about their experiences, they see them from a distance and change their point of view. Another expert in the

more power, tenderness, sensitivity, capacity for insight and harmony within them than expected, when they use writing. When someone is working intensively on their life, they activate energies that they

adaptation will be. Writing was proven to be valuable tool for this process while working with AIDS and cancer patients, sexual abuse

or more stressful days. It can be used by children, adolescents, adults or elderly people. It can also be used for addictions, aging, HIV/AIDS, anger, anxiety disorders, bipolar illness, depression, mania, chronic or life – threatening illness, co-dependency, dis-associative disorders,

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eating disorders, dream interpretation, dysfunctional families, family relationships, grief or loss, guilt or shame, incest or sexual abuse, psychosis, schizophrenia and thought disorders (Adams, 1998) also during life transitions and trauma recovery.

longer term health effects and as such is now frequently referred

analyses of expressive writing randomized clinical trials. However there has been also some criticism suggesting that possible reasons

to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention has been recognized based on the considerable number of new randomized control trials which will be used to answer the question whether therapeutic

Why Women's Mental Health is Important for Their Empowerment

Globally women may sometimes be the weaker gender from a physical and emotional perspective and are therefore still very often subjected to mental and physical abuse in their families and communities. Firstly, limited access to education and fewer chances for professional development and secondly, traumatization due to abuse, can have serious consequences on the quality of womens' lives in developing countries. This includes a serious medical burden including depression, which has been linked to risk factors such as

levels of which vary and are the highest in developing countries (Ferrari et al., 2013). A high prevalence of depression can hinder the development in these countries, creating social and economic burdens from disability and decreased productivity. The direct and indirect costs of mental ill-health worsen the economic condition,

Kleinman, 2003).

Since women are considered more vulnerable to experiencing mental problems related to psychological and physical challenges,