Mood and Anxiety Disorders in Women

Mood and anxiety disorders in women represent an increasingly important area of research and treatment development. The authors take a broad biopsychosocial and developmental approach to the issues, beginning with anxiety disorders in adolescence and progressing through the life phases of women to menopause and old age. All the disorders are covered, from anxiety and borderline personality disorder to stress and late-life depression. Particular attention is paid to questions of vulnerability; epidemiological and clinical evidence showing gender differences in such disorders; aetiological explanations in terms of biological (including hormonal) as well as psychosocial parameters; and treatment implications.

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Preface

The particular mental health experiences of women have received great attention in recent years. This reflects growing concern about the burden of mental health problems on the lives of women and their families. The most common mental health disorders are anxiety and depression, and women are particularly prone to such disorders. “Mood and Anxiety Disorders in Women” uses a biopsychosocial framework to provide a broad contemporary perspective on mood and anxiety in the context of women’s lives. A developmental approach affords an overarching structure for the book, with each chapter examining a particular phase of women’s lives. Extensive cross-referencing allows a shared perspective across other developmental stages where appropriate.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the emotional hurdles facing adolescent girls, with particular reference to how these can contribute to the manifestation of psychological and psychiatric problems at this stage of development. Earlier developmental factors are also discussed.

Picking up on some of these themes, Chapter 2 is concerned with personality disorders and women, with a particular emphasis on why women tend to be more vulnerable to certain personality disorders (notably borderline), and less vulnerable than men to others (notably antisocial personality disorder). Aetiopathogenic parameters, including the role of childhood sexual abuse, as well as diagnostic issues, are addressed.

Chapter 3 turns to substance use disorders in women, covering epidemiological, clinical and therapeutic aspects. It asks why females are less likely than males to abuse alcohol and illicit substances, but places this against the profound impact of substance misuse in women compared to men and the potential impact on their children. The chapter also outlines the particular treatment needs of women who misuse substances, and details what substance use treatment services require, to become “female friendly”.

Chapter 4 is an overview of gender differences amongst the anxiety disorders, with special reference to why women seem differentially more prone to certain of these disorders. Women-centred assessment, diagnostic and treatment needs are addressed.
Chapter 5 tackles post-traumatic stress disorder. Gender differences in the exposure to, and the experience of stress are outlined, with an emphasis on those stressors that are more common in women (e.g., rape, childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence). The chapter also considers women’s responses to stress, both acutely and in the longer term. Treatment recommendations that are gender-sensitive are presented.

Chapter 6 considers the role of domestic violence in women’s lives and the potentially profound impact on women’s mental health. The factors associated with risk and disclosure of domestic violence are discussed. The role of mental health professionals in safely engaging women victims of violence are outlined, and potential therapeutic strategies are suggested.

Turning to more biological factors, Chapter 7 provides an overview of the evidence for a role of female gonadal hormones in mood disorders, encompassing basic science and clinical aspects. The aetiology and treatment of the premenstrual syndrome is specifically covered.

The important topic of anxiety and mood disorders during pregnancy and the postpartum period is covered in Chapter 8. There is a special emphasis on postpartum mood disorders. Guidelines for treatment and the role of mother–baby units are specifically covered.

Chapter 9 provides a comprehensive overview of the pharmacological treatment of anxiety and depression during pregnancy and lactation, including practical information and clinical guidelines.

Bipolar affective disorder in women is the topic of Chapter 10. The manifestations of mania in women, and particular risks and vulnerabilities for women during manic episodes, are addressed. Treatment implications, notably use of medications in pregnancy and during breast feeding, are covered, with cross-reference to Chapter 9.

Chapter 11 gives an overview of the biological aspects of the menopause, with reference to those parameters that might affect mental health. The complexity of the menopause and its potential impact on psychosocial functioning are detailed. Adaptive and non-adaptive responses to the menopause are covered, along with guidance for helping women to deal with the changes that occur at this time of life.

Finally, Chapter 12 addresses mood and anxiety disorders in women in late life, encompassing epidemiological and aetiopathological parameters. It considers the potential role of hormones, brain changes and the role of psychosocial parameters in the pathogenesis of depression and anxiety in this life stage. The particular treatment needs of older women are also outlined.
This volume provides a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of mood and anxiety in women taking particular account of the complexity of women's lives and the changes associated with different stages of development. We trust it will be of interest to women in general, as well as being a resource to clinicians, biologists, pharmacologists and all professionals striving to provide high quality, gender-sensitive mental health care to women.

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Depressive and anxiety disorders pose a major public health problem with substantial economic and social burden. As this volume discusses, women have an almost 2-fold risk of these disorders compared to men, a difference that starts in childhood or early adolescence and persists into adulthood. Further, depressive and anxiety disorders have been associated with the development and progression of various forms of physical disease, suggesting the associations of these psychiatric disorders with physical health in general. Thus, understanding the epidemiology and pathophysiology of these disorders, and particularly for women, has important implications for attenuation of suffering worldwide.

In this volume, Drs. Castle, Kulkarni and Abel have gathered multidisciplinary experts, along with themselves, to summarize the current literature on a broad spectrum of topics related to depressive and anxiety disorders in women. This ambitious work not only covers sex differences in mood and anxiety disorders per se, but also in disorders or conditions to which they are related, such as borderline personality disorder (Chanen), incidence and consequences of domestic violence (Warburton and Abel), and substance use disorders (Gerada and colleagues). It is very helpful for investigators in the field to have one volume into which all these data are gathered. Further, there is useful clinical information regarding treatments for these disorders and their interactions with hormonal status in women.

Several neuroendocrine systems have been implicated in the development, prognosis, natural history and treatment of mood and anxiety disorders, including the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA), -gonadal (HPG), and -thyroid (HPT) systems. This volume nicely integrates neuroendocrine factors and their associations with these disorders. This is important for the treatment of these disorders given the higher prevalence of endocrine disorders in mood and anxiety disorders than in the general population, particularly in women. Thus, an understanding of these relationships may promote further inquiry into the development of neuroendocrine modalities of treatment. This is discussed in several chapters in this volume, for example on depression and hormonal fluctuations (Abel and Kulkarni) and during pregnancy and lactation (Buist and colleagues) and the postpartum
period (Dodd and colleagues), mood and menopause (Dennerstein and Alexander) and anxiety and depression in older age women (Baldwin and Garner).

The strong international group of authors are well-qualified to present an integrated perspective on mood and anxiety disorders in women. From the epidemiology of sex differences to the psychopharmacology and hormonal clinical trials related to sex differences, their expertise is felt throughout the volume. Historically, this is an important time in which there is a recognized value of investigating sex effects in clinical medicine. The editors have capitalized on this moment and presented a volume that focuses on disorders that have a high prevalence in women and thus are a major public health problem for families and our society. Further, the book offers hope that the development of new treatment modalities will take into consideration sex-specific needs.

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