

Women's Mental Health: A Comprehensive Textbook

Susan G. Kornstein and Anita H. Clayton (Eds.). New York: Guilford Press (www.guilford.com). 2002, 638 pp., \$75.00 (hard cover).

Women's Mental Health: A Comprehensive Textbook is true to its' title. This is an extremely comprehensive and thoughtful reference volume. The editors, each of who have extensive experience in women's mental and reproductive health, have assembled seventy-two contributors from diverse personal and educational backgrounds, which gives this single volume both breadth and depth. The book particularly emphasizes gender differences in the epidemiology, diagnosis and treatment responses and sociological issues that serve as barriers to psychological care in women. This is a "blue state" book in its' stance on issues germane to women – but it neither oversimplifies nor preaches as it educates.

The volume is divided into five sections. The first, Women's Psychobiology and Reproductive Life Cycle, contains seven chapters that review the state of our knowledge about the effects of reproductive hormones on mental health. Included are excellent algorithms to evaluate PMDD and detailed reviews of the risks and benefits of using psychotropic medications during pregnancy and lactation that would be of particular value to a practitioner. There is an outstanding chapter on contraception, and a section on postpartum hormone replacement therapy that raises as many questions as it answers.

The second section of the book, Assessment and Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders in Women, is twelve chapters in length. This section is remarkable for the detail reviewing the differential responses in women to treatment of psychiatric disorders, gender differences in presentation, and the complexity in treating substance abuse in women. This section also includes a chapter describing the uses of Complementary and Alternative Medicine. A common thread that links the first two sections is how little is known about women's response to treatments, how much about normal reproductive physiology and its' effects on psychology is unresearched, and how most of the empirical studies on biological treatments, pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetics have been performed on men. The chapter on sexual dysfunction is no exception, stating, "sexuality remains mysterious". That might add to the romance, but it certainly makes it tough to treat. The authors address these concerns in the fifth section, Research and Health Policy Issues, which thoughtfully presents remedies to rectify an enormous gap in our understanding of women's mental health and to address barriers to service delivery.

The middle two sections address psychiatric consultation in women and socio-cultural issues for women. I was particularly struck by the addition of three particular sections in the nine chapter consultation section – HIV/AIDS, Neurological Disorders of Increased Prevalence in Women: Migraine, Multiple Sclerosis and Alzheimer's Disease, and Cosmetic Surgery. Each is thought provoking, particularly sensitive and balanced. The seven chapters on socio-cultural issues take a measured and data-based view of the social and cultural issues critical to women and practitioners. I found the chapters on gender, women of color, and aging and elderly women to be particularly valuable.

Women's Mental Health: A Comprehensive Textbook is a worthy reference for clinicians. Comprehensive texts in psychiatry rarely consider what differences exist in women in the presentation of psychiatric disorders and response to treatment, except as an afterthought or chapter on "women's issues". Biology may not be destiny, but it certainly can make a difference

– and this excellent reference lets us know how little we understand about women’s physiology and mental health.

Donna M. Sudak, M.D.
Drexel University College of Medicine
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania