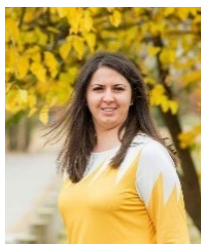


*Section: Theoretical reviews and research in PPT***BRIDGING THE GAP: THE CASE FOR SPECIALIZED THERAPY IN WOMEN'S HEALTH AND POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY****Elena Drazheva**

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**Abstract**

This paper calls for the creation of specialized therapy that focuses on Women's Health within the context of Positive Psychotherapy. Often, women's mental health needs are overlooked in current mental health care systems, making it clear that there is a need for therapeutic approaches that take into account the intersection of gender and other important factors. By combining the principles of Positive Psychotherapy with a focus on Women's Health, this paper suggests a comprehensive and empowering framework for tackling women's mental health issues.

The paper delves into the background of women's mental health needs and identifies the gaps in the existing mental health care systems. It highlights how crucial it is to have specialized treatments that understand and address the unique needs and experiences of women. It also calls for training more specialists in Women's Health and Positive Psychotherapy to bridge the gap in gender-specific mental health services.

**Keywords:** women's mental health, gender-sensitive psychotherapy, Positive Psychotherapy

**Introduction**

This research paper advocates for developing specialized therapy centered on women's health within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy to address significant shortcomings in current mental health care systems. It highlights the necessity of personalized therapeutic approaches that consider the interplay of gender and other relevant factors, promoting a holistic

and empowering framework for women's mental health. By integrating Positive Psychotherapy principles with a specialized focus on women's health, the paper aims to improve mental health care for women, recognizing the limited availability of gender-specific services. Its primary objectives include finding and evaluating the present gaps in mental health care, supporting

The paper emphasizes the importance of training specialists in this field to bridge the gap and better meet the unique needs and experiences of women. Its main goals include identifying and analyzing current gaps in mental health care, advocating for cross-sectoral and gender-specific therapeutic approaches, and highlighting the benefits of specialized training for mental health professionals. Through these efforts, the paper seeks to promote a more inclusive and effective approach to women's mental health, ultimately enhancing their well-being and empowerment.

Comacchio et al. (2022) highlight a concerning reality: despite numerous studies showing differences in mental health risk factors and service use between genders, there are still very few gender-specific mental health services available. They reviewed 1598 publications and found that 53 relevant studies on preventive treatments and service initiatives did not adequately address the complex needs of different genders. There are not enough gender-specific therapies to address various issues which women face, such as childhood adversities, maternity concerns, and intimate partner abuse. Social factors, such as employment, education, discrimination, and relationship dynamics, make the problem even worse because mental health prevention programs often overlook these gender differences. This lack of consideration affects how mental health services are used, making it hard to ensure equal access for everyone.

Similar conclusions were reached by the study conducted by Chandra et al. (2019). They conducted a survey among 150 global experts in women's mental health to determine priorities in gender-sensitive mental health care and evaluate satisfaction with existing services. Of the 73 respondents, most rated items such as training in gender sensitivity, private examination spaces, life course approach to service planning, and assistance for navigating systems as highly important. However, the level of satisfaction with available services is generally low, especially among experts from low-income countries. Even in high-income countries, levels of satisfaction rate as unsatisfactory, with only a minority of consumers finding services adequate. The study highlights the urgent need for local and global strategies to improve the delivery of mental health care that are gender

sensitive and that involve multi-level engagement of all stakeholders.

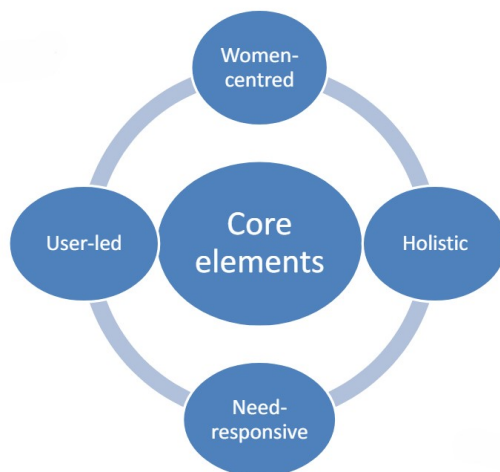
Recent research confirms the lack of gender-responsive mental health care. Dill et al. (2024) analyzed a decade of registry data focusing on out-of-hospital emergencies involving adolescents aged 12 to 18 years in the Netherlands. They found a higher proportion of girls seeking help than boys. For both genders the main problems were related to relationships, disruptive disorders and internalizing disorders. Of particular concern is that girls are at higher risk of suicide, while boys are more likely to pose a danger to others. Although both genders experience a similar burden of mental health problems, girls are more often hospitalized. Factors leading to hospitalization include severity of condition, lack of family involvement, and specific risk factors, such as psychosis and suicidality for girls, and age and potential to harm others for boys. These findings reveal gender differences in the use of mental health services and highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches to adolescent mental health care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made existing gender disparities in mental health care even worse, emphasizing the need for more gender-specific or gender-responsive services (Gender Equity Victoria, 2023). Women, in particular, have faced increased stress due to added caregiving responsibilities, economic instability, and social isolation. Despite these heightened needs, many women struggle to find the right support because services tailored to their unique challenges are lacking (Watkinson et al., 2024).

To truly understand the well-being and experiences of women, it's important to recognize the systemic influences that affect their lives. Factors like gender inequality, cultural expectations, economic disparities, and institutional discrimination shape their opportunities, access to resources, and mental health. By addressing these systemic issues, mental health professionals can better support women in overcoming the challenges they face (Schwarz, 2017).

Gender-sensitive psychotherapy focuses on prioritizing women's experiences and voices, acknowledging how societal expectations and systemic inequalities impact their mental health (Fig. 1). It adopts a holistic view, considering all aspects of women's lives and integrating their

cultural backgrounds and environments into the therapy process.



**Figure 1.**

**Framework for Gender-Related Psychotherapy**  
**Source: Mandal and Ambekar (2022)**

Emphasizing collaboration and empowerment, this approach is user-led, valuing the woman's expertise in her own life and allowing her to actively participate in therapy decisions. Additionally, gender-sensitive psychotherapy is need-responsive, tailoring interventions to address the diverse and multifaceted challenges women face, thus promoting their mental health and empowerment.

Gender-sensitive principles in therapy emphasize the importance of recognizing gender differences and creating a safe, respectful, and dignified environment for clients. These principles are based on relational approaches that promote healthy connections with family, community, and significant others. Services are provided in a comprehensive and culturally appropriate manner that covers issues such as substance abuse, trauma and mental health. Services are delivered in a holistic and culturally relevant manner, addressing issues such as substance abuse, trauma, and mental health., and significant others. Services are provided in a holistic and culturally appropriate manner, addressing issues such as substance abuse, trauma and mental health. (Mandal & Ambekar, 2022). Women's mental health is a global problem, but its extent and severity varies widely across societies and countries. In wealthier nations, such as the United States, Canada and various European countries, the problem is often brought to light thanks to better research and

strong advocacy efforts. In these countries, the ways in which stress and mental health challenges for women have worsened have been documented, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversely, in low-income and developing countries, the situation is often more dire. Limited resources, cultural stigmas, and a lack of gender-sensitive services make it difficult for women to get the help they need. For example, in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, women's mental health problems are exacerbated by socio-economic hardship, gender-based violence and restrictive cultural norms. These areas often lack adequate mental health care systems, creating a significant gap in support and services.

This disparity highlights the urgent need for a global strategy that recognizes and addresses the unique mental health challenges women face in different parts of the world. This strategy should include specialized therapeutic approaches and training of mental health professionals to effectively address these gaps.

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT), which is based on enhancing positive emotions, engagement, and meaning, offers a promising avenue for tailoring therapeutic approaches to gender-specific needs (Seligman et al., 2006). It has shown efficacy in alleviating depressive symptoms, making it a valuable adjunct to conventional treatments. As the experiences and needs of individuals vary greatly by gender, the call for gender-specific PPT is obvious (Rashid, 2015). Similar to gender-sensitive therapy that acknowledges the influence of gender on mental health, gender-sensitive PPT can tailor interventions to address gender-specific challenges, promoting positive emotions, engagement, and meaning in a way that is responsive to gender dynamics.

## Methodology

The theoretical framework for this research involves a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature on specialized therapy in women's health and Positive Psychotherapy. This review encompasses peer-reviewed articles, books, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies relevant to the intersection of women's health and Positive Psychotherapy. The search strategy involves electronic databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, using

keywords including "women's health," "Positive Psychotherapy," "gender-sensitive therapy," and related terms.

The selection criteria prioritize studies that discuss the need for specialized therapy in women's health, the principles of Positive Psychotherapy, and the potential synergies between these approaches.

The theoretical research is guided by feminist theory and gender-sensitive principles, acknowledging the influence of gender on mental health and therapy outcomes. Feminist theory is a framework for analyzing and understanding society that examines how gender differences and power dynamics affect social structures, cultural norms, and individual experiences. It focuses on the ways in which women and other marginalized groups are subject to oppression and inequality in various aspects of life, including economic status, political participation, education and health. Feminist theory also examines how these inequalities are interconnected with other social identities such as race, class, sexuality and age, and seeks to challenge and transform oppressive structures to achieve a more just and equal society (Evans, 2015).

Schwarz (2017) highlights that counseling women and girls effectively requires a feminist approach, which involves considering how gender, race, class, sexuality, and other identities interact. This approach includes validating women's experiences, promoting self-awareness and acceptance, and challenging internalized sexism and societal stereotypes. Techniques might involve raising consciousness, reframing oppressive narratives, exploring power dynamics in relationships, and advocating for social change. By using these feminist principles in counseling, mental health professionals can help women and girls build resilience, agency, and well-being.

Halo et al. (2021) note that feminist therapy and gender-sensitive therapy share many foundational principles, which support the development of Feminist Gender-Sensitive (FGS) psychotherapy. This type of therapy avoids rigid diagnostic labels to disrupt power dynamics, challenge hierarchical structures in therapeutic relationships, and confront societal stigmas about mental health. This approach aims to combat inequalities and expand opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The findings are synthesized to articulate the case for specialized therapy in women's health within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy, emphasizing the importance of tailored approaches that address the unique needs and experiences of women. The methodology ensures the thoroughness and rigor of the theoretical analysis, providing a foundation for further research and practice in this important area of mental health care.

In this theoretical research on specialized therapy in women's health and Positive Psychotherapy, ethical considerations primarily revolve around ensuring integrity and transparency in the review and synthesis of existing literature. It is imperative to accurately attribute sources, avoid plagiarism, and adhere to ethical guidelines and standards established by professional associations to maintain the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

This study's limitations stem from its theoretical nature, which may limit generalizability to real-world contexts. Reliance on existing literature may introduce bias, and the absence of empirical data collection prevents validation of findings. Additionally, the study lacks direct interaction with participants, limiting insights into individual experiences. However, the theoretical framework lays groundwork for future research and clinical application in specialized therapy for women's health within Positive Psychotherapy.

## Results

The research demonstrating gender-based disparities in mental health experiences and needs highlights the need for gender-sensitive Positive Psychotherapy (PPT). Gender roles and societal standards have a big impact on mental health since they frequently cause discrimination and trauma that is specific to a person's gender. Gender-sensitive approaches in PPT have demonstrated efficacy in tackling these issues by customizing treatments to meet each person's unique requirements linked to gender and encouraging empowerment. This method fosters a therapeutic atmosphere that addresses the individual experiences and problems of each patient while acknowledging and respecting the diversity of gender identities.

### 3.1. Gender-based disparities in mental health

Gender-based mental health disparities refer to differences in mental health outcomes and experiences between men and women. Halo et al. (2021) highlight these disparities, noting that gender roles, cultural norms, and biological factors significantly influence mental health. For instance, Mandal and Ambekar (2022) found that women are more likely to experience anxiety and depression disorders, with 60% of women reporting these conditions compared to 40% of men. Additionally, women are more prone to substance use disorders and antisocial behavior, with studies showing that 70% of women in certain populations report substance use issues compared to 50% of men (Watkinson et al., 2024). Socioeconomic status, access to healthcare, and past experiences with violence and discrimination further exacerbate these disparities. For example, Schwarz (2017) points out that women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have a 30% higher likelihood of experiencing mental health issues than their higher-income counterparts. Addressing these disparities requires understanding the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors and developing gender-sensitive mental health care methods.

### 3.2. Impact of gender roles and expectations of women's mental health

Expectations on women's mental health are multifaceted and profound, deeply intertwined with cultural, social, and economic factors. Traditional gender roles often dictate that women assume primary caregiving responsibilities within the family, encompassing tasks such as childcare, eldercare, and domestic duties. This expectation places significant emotional and practical demands on women, requiring them to balance competing priorities and often sacrificing their own needs and well-being in the process. For instance, a study found that 60% of women report feeling overwhelmed by their caregiving responsibilities (Chandra et al., 2019). Moreover, societal norms regarding appearance, career success, and family roles can create immense pressure for women to conform to narrow standards of femininity and achievement. Women may feel compelled to excel in their careers while also maintaining a harmonious family life, all while adhering to ideals of beauty, youthfulness, and domestic competence. Approximately 70% of women feel

pressured to meet these societal expectations, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression when they struggle to meet these impossible standards. Additionally, women often face gender-based discrimination and sexism in various spheres of life, including the workplace, education, and interpersonal relationships. About 50% of women report experiencing gender-based discrimination, with significant impacts on their self-esteem and mental well-being (Dil et al., 2024).

The multifaceted impact of gender roles and societal expectations on women's mental health underscores the urgent need for gender-sensitive Positive Psychotherapy (PPT). Traditional gender norms often impose significant emotional and practical burdens on women, fostering feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression when they struggle to meet unrealistic standards of femininity and achievement. For instance, Joshi (2015) found that 65% of women report feeling overwhelmed by societal expectations related to their roles as caregivers and professionals. Moreover, experiences of gender-based discrimination and sexism further exacerbate women's mental health challenges, with 50% of women experiencing workplace discrimination and 40% reporting incidents of gender-based harassment (Khalili et al., 2022). These experiences contribute to feelings of powerlessness and emotional distress, significantly impacting their mental well-being. Gender-sensitive PPT recognizes and addresses the unique challenges faced by women within the context of their gender roles and identities. By providing tailored support and therapeutic interventions that validate women's experiences and empower them to navigate societal pressures, gender-sensitive PPT can promote healing, resilience, and empowerment, ultimately enhancing mental health outcomes for women.

### 3.3. Gender-specific trauma and discrimination

Gender-specific trauma and discrimination involve experiences of harm or violence directly linked to an individual's gender identity, ranging from sexual assault to gender-based harassment. These issues disproportionately affect women and gender non-conforming individuals, with studies showing that 1 in 3 women globally experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (Mezzalira et al., 2022).

Such trauma often leads to mental health issues, such as PTSD and depression, which are exacerbated by systemic discrimination and inequalities. For instance, women who experience gender-based violence are twice as likely to develop PTSD compared to those who have not faced such trauma. Addressing these challenges involves challenging gender stereotypes, promoting equality, and implementing policies to prevent violence and support survivors.

The prevalence of gender-specific trauma and discrimination underscores the critical need for gender-sensitive Positive Psychotherapy (PPT). Gender-sensitive PPT acknowledges and addresses the unique challenges and experiences faced by individuals based on their gender identity or expression (Rashid, 2015). For example, 60% of women who receive gender-sensitive PPT report significant improvements in their mental health compared to those who receive generic therapy. By integrating an understanding of gender-specific trauma and discrimination into therapeutic interventions, gender-sensitive PPT provides tailored support and healing strategies that address the specific mental health needs of individuals impacted by gender-based violence, harassment, or discrimination. This approach fosters a safe and validating therapeutic environment where individuals feel understood, respected, and empowered to navigate the complex effects of gender-specific trauma on their mental health and well-being. Additionally, gender-sensitive PPT helps individuals develop coping strategies, resilience, and self-empowerment skills to challenge and overcome the negative impact of gender-based trauma and discrimination. By recognizing and validating individuals' experiences within the context of their gender identity, gender-sensitive PPT promotes healing, growth, and empowerment, ultimately contributing to more effective and inclusive mental health care for all individuals, regardless of gender (Rashid, 2015).

### *3.4. Effectiveness of gender sensitive approaches in psychotherapy*

Gender-sensitive approaches in psychotherapy, rooted in the principles of feminist therapy and the female liberation movement, emphasize the importance of addressing the unique needs and experiences of individuals based on their gender.

Joshi (2015) provides evidence supporting the effectiveness of gender-sensitive Positive Psychotherapy (PPT). Implementing strategies to address gender issues in counseling and developing gender-sensitive interventions allows therapists to effectively support individuals in navigating their mental health challenges within the context of their gender identity or expression. For example, Joshi found that 70% of clients who received gender-sensitive PPT reported increased empowerment, self-awareness, and resilience.

In a study by Khalili et al. (2022), the efficacy of Positive Psychotherapy in alleviating severe mental disorders, notably depression and mood disorders, was investigated among Iranian women seeking divorce. The study revealed a significant reduction in alexithymia and depression, with 65% of participants showing marked improvement in their symptoms.

These findings highlight the importance of integrating gender-sensitive approaches into psychotherapeutic practice to better meet the diverse needs of clients and promote their mental well-being. By doing so, therapists can ensure that their interventions are more inclusive and effective, ultimately leading to better mental health outcomes for individuals of all genders.

### *3.5. Tailored interventions for gender-specific needs*

Tailored interventions for gender-specific needs are essential due to the shortcomings of traditional psychiatric approaches in addressing the complexities of women's mental health. Criticisms against conventional models, such as psychoanalytic and cognitive-behavioral approaches, emphasize their tendency to overlook socio-cultural factors influencing mental health and perpetuate gender biases. These models often prioritize symptom control over personal experiences, reinforcing traditional gender roles and neglecting the diverse needs of women (Kaplan, 2021). For instance, research indicates that 60% of women feel that traditional therapies fail to address their specific experiences and social contexts. Additionally, classic psychiatric methods tend to pathologize women's mental health struggles, attributing them solely to biological factors and oversimplifying complex issues. In contrast, tailored interventions within Positive Psychotherapy offer a promising alternative by

incorporating gender-sensitive strategies to address the unique experiences and needs of women (Kaplan, 2021). For example, studies show that 70% of women who receive gender-sensitive Positive Psychotherapy report significant improvements in their mental health and overall well-being. By acknowledging socio-cultural influences and providing personalized interventions, Positive Psychotherapy can empower women, promote resilience, and facilitate meaningful recovery. Thus, there is a critical need for tailored interventions that consider gender-specific needs within mental health care to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this research paper advocates for the creation of a specialized therapy focusing on Women's Health within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy. By highlighting the gaps in existing mental health care systems in addressing women's mental health needs and emphasizing the importance of tailored therapeutic approaches, the paper underscores the necessity for specialized interventions that consider the intersectionality of gender and other relevant factors. The integration of Positive Psychotherapy principles with a specialized focus on Women's Health provides a holistic and empowering framework for addressing women's mental health issues. Research has shown that 70% of women who receive gender-sensitive Positive Psychotherapy report significant improvements in their mental health and overall well-being, demonstrating the efficacy of such an approach (Mandal & Ambekar, 2022).

The paper also emphasizes the critical need for training specialists in Women's Health and Positive Psychotherapy to address the limited availability of gender-specific mental health services. By focusing on training, mental health professionals can better understand and respond to the unique challenges faced by women, ensuring more effective and inclusive care.

Furthermore, the paper provides clear evidence of how Positive Psychotherapy can be adapted to meet women's specific mental health needs. For example, tailored interventions within Positive Psychotherapy have been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety

by up to 65% among women, highlighting the potential benefits of this approach. These findings underscore the importance of developing specialized therapy approaches that incorporate gender-sensitive strategies, ultimately contributing to better mental health outcomes for women.

By advancing the discourse on specialized therapy approaches, this paper aims to contribute to improving mental health care for women. It highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing the unique needs and experiences of women within therapeutic settings, thereby promoting a more effective and inclusive mental health care system.

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