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Social commentary: Horrible truth behind the lives of mentally challenged women: A follow up

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Abstract

The following work is a follow up of my social commentary *Rehabilitation of Mentally Ill Women in India* published September 2016 in the *International Journal for Intersectional Feminist Studies*. The social commentary discussed the conditions of and chances of rehabilitation of mentally ill women who were being treated in government mental health hospitals. Sexual harassment and ill-treatment of mentally ill women were the main issues in my commentary. Interestingly, news surfaced the Indian media in the month of February 2017 which highlighted the ill treatment of mentally ill women by the institution's staff. The news reported that eleven patients died due to negligence. Naked female patients, when they were waiting in queue for their turn for the shower, were recorded in the security cameras by a male employee. In this social documentary, I will discuss some of the reasons behind these incidences happened and some solutions to resolve them.

Keywords: destitute, homeless, mental health, care, sexual harassment

Introduction

This social commentary is in continuation of my previous social commentary *Rehabilitation of Mentally Ill Women in India* which was published in the September 2016 issue of the *International Journal for Intersectional Feminist Studies*. Mental illness is a very serious condition and which not only affects the patients but also their families get emotionally affected. When a mentally ill patient is a woman, many socio-cultural factors influence the process of recovery. Some of these factors are shame, stigma, and honour because of which not many families are willing to take back their female patients. Therefore, mentally ill female patients in India tend to stay longer in the mental health hospital in comparison to the male patients (Ramavat, 2016).

Horrible truth behind the lives of mentally challenged women

In my last visit to the mental Hospital in Delhi, India, I observed there were a couple of female patients who were staying there from past 40 years. When I visited the mental health hospital, it was portrayed that patients are looked after very well, and they reside in hygienic surroundings.

I thought about their recovery options and asked myself whether these patients are a burden on the mental hospital. Recent news of deaths of 11 mentally challenged women in Asha Kiran, a

mental health illness facility, run by Delhi government has emotionally shook me. And, my question got answered from the recent news published on February 08, 2017 in a daily newspaper *The Times of India* in India's capital Delhi's one of the mental hospitals where 11 women died in 2 months. However, after discovering about the death of these 11 mentally challenged patients, I realised that there are high chances that this might not be true and patients are not looked very well on a regular basis.

Further, the female patients in Asha Kiran were treated badly by the staff and patients were made to strip before bathing, after which they wandered the corridors naked, and were filmed by CCTV cameras monitored by male staff. Bedridden women were urinating on beds; the floors were covered in faecal matter and blood since the women were not provided sanitary materials, and up to four women were sharing a bed.

Even Delhi High Court intervened in 2015 and Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) asked for report over the mistreatment of the inmates (Dabas,2017) but it seems Delhi govt didn't take the report of High court serious and let the situation get worse which led to 11 deaths in 2 months. Since the government did not hire more doctors as per the requirement of the hospital.

Who will question Delhi Govt for not following the High Court order? Women are not safe inside the institutions, and they undergo different forms of sexual and physical assaults (Patil,2017). If not government who will take responsibility and ensure the safety of the mental health patients.

Conclusion

Problems like these can be handled carefully if those who are involved in the mental health sectors are genuinely passionate about the work whether its doctors, nurses or government. The question is how to find passionate people? Apart from finding the passionate people and keeping their passion up intact by providing enough resources. The surprise visits to such hospitals should be done by third parties to access the real situation of the Mental Health Hospitals.

One more point got noticed that even though under the Mental Health Act -1987, laws around protection of human rights of Person with a mental disorder in place, but these rules are given a blind eye by the administration and staff. Culprits responsible for deaths, different forms of harassment and negligence of the mentally ill women should be punished. The solution doesn't

end at bringing stricter punishments and laws, but awareness regarding stigma around mental health patients also need to be done.

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Suman Ramavat, 2017

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