



## **Strengthening Response to Violence Against Women and Girls** **Session 6- Violence Against Women and Mental Health**

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‘Mental health is the capacity of the individual, the group and the environment to interact with one another in ways that promote subjective well-being, optimal development and use of mental abilities (cognitive, affective and relational), the achievement of individual and collective goals consistent with justice and the attainment and preservation of conditions of fundamental equality.’ (WHO, 1981).

### **What is optimal mental health?**

Optimal mental health is characterised as a state of well-being in which an individual realises his/ her own abilities, can cope with the normal stress of life, work productively fully, think clearly, solve problems in life, enjoy good relationships with other people, feel spiritually at ease and make a contribution to the community.

### **How is mental health linked to violence against women?**

- Violence and mental health have a bi-directional relationship
- Violence against women leads to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and sometimes substance abuse
- Makes survivors vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and/or self-harm.
- Precipitates mental health crises making it difficult for survivors to access resources
- Conversely, increase in violence may also often be a consequence of existing mental health conditions. Women who have pre-existing mental health issues are more likely to be targets for domestic abusers.

#### **Remember!**

- Do not diagnose her
- Do not label her
- Do not prescribe medications

### **What Can Counsellors do**

- Assess mental health impact of violence on women
- Include mental health as an essential component in assessment
- Identify signs and symptoms of mental distress (emotions, negative thinking, unhelpful behaviours, physical symptoms, etc.) and illness in women
- Know a bit about medications and side effects and Inform women about side effects of medicines they are having
- Provide necessary support
- Psycho-educate the client and the family

[www.icallhelpline.org](http://www.icallhelpline.org)

- Familiarize yourself with mental health services in your area. Know who are the different mental health professionals (psychiatrist, psychologist, counsellor, social workers, community workers, etc.)
- Know when and who to refer
- Maintains confidentiality in referrals and reports
- Advocate for women and their rights