

# Men's Health : A Different Perspective

**B. G. Ponnappa**

Department of General Surgery, KVG Medical College and Hospital, Sullia, Karnataka, India

**Abstract:** Men's health is a neglected topic. I have presented here the various aspects like alcoholism, smoking, certain diseases and conditions unique to men, the impact of relationship issues on men's health and also the expectations of the society from men and its impact on men's health. I have also made an attempt to suggest a few solutions for the overall improvement of men's health.

The WHO defines health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity and also includes the ability to lead a socially and economically productive life"<sup>1</sup>. The reason why we need to stress on men's health is because men do not consult a doctor till he falls sick and also because it involves expenditure. The entire family's health in India is centered on men's health also. If he is healthy his dependents can be healthy. Women have PAP screening, mammograms, maternal and child health care programs and institutions and there are several schemes launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development for empowerment of women, which has the health and welfare elements embedded, like 'The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)', 'Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)', 'The Priyadarshini Scheme', 'National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)', 'Support to Training and Employment Program (STEP)' for which Crores of rupees are released<sup>2</sup>.

There are no such projects for men except 'Vasectomy'. The life expectancy for Men in India is 63.90 and that for females is 66.90<sup>3</sup>. Smoking accounts for 1 in 5 deaths among men as against 1 in 20 deaths among women<sup>4</sup>. About 15 to 20% of traumatic brain injuries, 37% of injuries in a public hospital, 17.6% of psychiatric emergencies, 34% of those who attempted suicide, 20% of absenteeism and 40% of accidents at work is due to alcohol which causes an annual loss to the tune of Rs.70,000 to 80,000 million<sup>5</sup>.

Relationship issues like divorce, alimony, maintenance, false dowry cases, false domestic violence cases, consensual sex being labeled as rape, child custody issues etc, to name a few also have their impact on men's health. All the laws pertaining to the above are biased against men. Separation of children from their fathers is "the engine driving our most urgent social problems, from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence against women"<sup>6</sup>.

In an interview with The Guardian, Ms. Diane Abbott, the Labour party's most senior female politician in England and the party's public health spokesperson, said 'some of the biggest public health issues stem from family breakdown'<sup>7</sup>. There are a disproportionate number of men being murdered and maimed due to fights, road traffic accidents, and occupational injuries as compared to women (table-1)<sup>8</sup>. The injuries sustained, in addition to directly affecting health will also indirectly affect in the form of expenses for treatment, loss of potential income and by affecting the quality of life after injury.

When it comes to employment, men are always the expendable sex. All the hazardous and strenuous jobs are always for the men. Where loss of life and risk is involved again it becomes the domain of men only. We don't have a section of the community crying inequality here. Even where jobs are gender neutral and pay equal, men end up doing the extra work and off duty work. This takes a toll on their health.

Men are also being sexually harassed by women at work place in various forms which goes un-noticed and un-reported; they are harassed by allegations of false complaints also. An allegation is enough to ruin the reputation of the man and there is no accountability on the part of the complainant. We will never be able to assess the impact of such allegation on men's health and well being.

We need to look into drug issues, erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation, low testosterone and its effects and other aspects of mental health of men. We do not have any regular screening programs to address those issues. Warren Farrell, says "One search of the 3,000 medical journals that are listed in Medline showed 23 articles are written on women's health for each one written on men's health"<sup>9</sup>.

We need to understand that men and women are different and we should start looking into needs of men to be better citizens with better health and not just as

**Correspondence:** Dr. B. G. Ponnappa, Assistant professor, Department of General Surgery, KVG Medical College and Hospital, Sullia, Karnataka  
Phone: 09591909096, e-mail: bgonnappa@gmail.com

Age-wise distribution of Accidental Deaths by Un-natural Causes – 2011 (All India)			
Sl. No.	Cause	Males	Females
1	Un-natural causes	284458	82736
2	Sudden deaths	22345	4304
Incidence of Suicides Categorized Cause wise – 2011 (All India)			
3	Suicide(Total)	87839	47746
4	Due to family problems	20345	12564
5	Suspected illicit relationship	724	671
6	Due to illness	17057	9513
Age Group Wise Victims Of Murder (Section 302 IPC) During 2011			
7	Murder	25746	9377

"the protectors and providers". People who advocate the politically right statement, that men and women are equal need to study the scientific truths also. The scientific truth most of the times is not compatible with the political correctness of an issue. It is inappropriate to pamper one sex with all the benefits and burden the other.

In some countries there are exclusive men's clinics and similar clinics have to be set up in India too. We need a forum to redress men's problems, undertake research into men's issues and funds needs to be demarcated for the welfare of men. Policy strategies in the form of having 'National Commission for Men', 'Ministry for Men's affairs' and 'Gender Neutral Laws' must be promulgated. Medical professionals also have to take a dynamic role in promoting men's health. The International Society of Men's Health (ISMH) is the only international organization dedicated to the rapidly growing field of men's health. The reason for their great interest in men's health is the overwhelming irrefutable evidence from many scientific studies of the significant disparity in gender health<sup>10</sup>.

India also has taken an interest in men's health and "Men's health society of India" has come into existence and "ISMH India - First national conference on men's health" was held in Delhi, last year with the theme "Why Men Die Earlier and Suffer More". It also stated, "When the administrators of Indian Government admit that for decades India has been struggling to achieve the National Health Program target related to women, children and communicable and non-communicable diseases, men's health was inadvertently ignored<sup>11</sup>.

In his book *The Myth of Male Power's*, William Farrell, confronts the belief that patriarchal societies make rules to benefit men at the expense of women by citing hundreds of examples to the contrary. He contends that nothing is more telling about who has benefited from "men's rules" than life expectancy and suicide rates - and men lose in both these categories<sup>12</sup>.

This article is not meant to support or criticize any particular gender but to stimulate further thoughts and studies in a new perspective.

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