

Creative Title: #Metoo and Mental health: The pandora's box re-opened

SEO TITLE: #Metoo and Mental health: How to win against stress and mental health problems

Hashtags: #Metoo #mentalhealth #mentaltrauma #Metoomovement #MetooIndia #Womenpower #sexualabuse #sexualharassment #womenofindia

One brave step from actress Tanushree Dutta and the ripples it created, continues to persist against all odds, hitting hard at patriarchy, one revelation at a time.

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If you're anywhere in India, chances are you have been seeing the hashtag #Metoo everywhere. From social media to conversations with friends, the #Metoo movement has managed to make its presence feel in every nook and corner of the country thanks to brave women who shared their stories of sexual harassment and abuse to bring attention to sexual violence widely prevalent in the country.

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However, the movement, like an earthquake, not just cracked open the ground; but also set destruction in motion for many, in particular for those who decided to come forward and shared their personal accounts of abuse and molestation. One common repercussion was the onset of mental health problems, triggered by the incidents they had to relive in their minds for the world to know.

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How mental health is affected

6 days have elapsed since World Mental Health day was celebrated across the world. But India saw a different side to the celebrations where women began recounting their

disturbing tales of abuse by men and how it tore apart their mental peace and inner engineering.

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The narratives being shared across all platforms, as many survivors claimed, lead to re-traumatization or a re-experiencing of the dark event in their minds. What becomes even more triggering is if it is found that the perpetrator is blamed by another person, creating a circle of viciousness that affected many.

Worse, if someone close is called out for their behaviour, the mind goes into a state of shock and unbounded disbelief, creating the backdrop for heartache, stress and anxiety to creep into one's life.

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“The #MeToo movement has been very helpful to sexual abuse victims in terms of validation, giving them enough courage to go and talk to someone about it,” Steven Gold, a professor of psychology and director of Nova Southwestern University's Trauma Resolution Integration Program, told Moneyish. But the flip side to the movement speaks a more profound story. “Victims who are going public are being confronted with a lot of doubt and hostility that can discourage them from seeking help or opening up to someone,” he added further. He went on to describe the common prevalence of despair and rage among survivors...

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...And when the perpetrator gets away with it, à la Brett Kavanaugh, Nana Patekar and so many more, the mental trauma manifests. “That's incredibly invalidating and hurtful to people who have been through this,” Gold stated.

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Case in point – Dutta herself, who was subjected to threats and public harassment from various supporters of Nana Patekar, that put her life in jeopardy back when she had decided to take a stand against the actor.

“These people (people on the set of the film) called goons on me while I was shooting for *Horn 'Ok' Pleassss*. They broke my car. They were called by Nana Patekar because that time he was trying to get into politics and he was associated with the MNS party,” Dutta was quoted as saying by [News18](#).

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According to Dr. Era Dutta, consultant neuropsychiatrist and therapist, Mind wellness and Fortis Healthcare, Kolkata, the psychological impact of sexual abuse on mental health can differ case-to-case which possibly leads to a host of short and long-term effects like sleep disturbance, clinging behaviour, recurrent traumatic dreams and depression, PTSD, anxiety, paranoia, respectively. Collectively, these after-effects can accumulate and negatively impair the victim’s self confidence, directly impacting their future relationships with self and the world, among other psychological and emotional problems.

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Finding light in the darkness of the mind

According to clinical social worker Marianne Silva, the best solution to tackle the onset of any mental issue, is by seeking company that allows you to share your deepest thoughts. “Talking to someone you trust or a good therapist, (and) really exploring those beliefs and being able to start putting blame where it belongs – not on the victim of the abuse, but on the perpetrator and the systems that allowed it to happen, can help,” she told Moneyish.

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Putting a check on social media use and ‘limiting your notification-watching-habit’ in favour of pursuing all those things that make you happy, is beneficial too. “It’s OK to turn off your notifications and check out of social media for a few days,” she added further.

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But what about the anger, shame and guilt that comes hand-in hand with sexual abuse? Affecting not just victims but loved ones too? Clinical and forensic psychologist Dawn Hughes has a word of advice to offer. “Let go off the shame as it does not belong to you. Maybe, because people feel shame, they don’t talk about it and they don’t tell someone,” she told Moneyish. It does not have to be New York Times or New York Magazine. It can be talking to trusted confidante; someone you know will hear you and believe you.”

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It is important that the victim puts self-care and emotional healing top priority over everything else happening. Taking time off to heal and recuperate. Travel, journalling Do whatever it takes to keep the head sane and recover from the thoughts that gnaw at your existence.

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Internationally, treatments like Cognitive Processing Therapy or prolonged exposure therapy, is available for survivors of sexual abuse and mental stress, grappling with long-term effects. Sadly, India does not have anything similar to offer in the name of treatment, despite being rated as THE most dangerous country for women in the world. “It’s still a stigma in society, and it continues to be a topic of taboo despite efforts to normalise it,” Nikita Gupta, a psychologist with Mpower, was quoted by DNA India.

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It is clear to see that there is lot to be done to change the way our country tackles sexual harassment against women. But the #Metoo movement is a start.

“If the victims have an opportunity because of this movement to see that help is available, and they don’t have to suffer In silence, and that their stories will be heard and believed, no matter how unbelievable it sounds, then I think that it is a positive,” Hughes added further.

That said, the pandora’s box may have been opened again for many victims, but with the help of our community’s support and care, can the victims put the lid back on and walk away from it all.

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