



# International Women's Day

## Inspire Workplaces Calendar, March 2021

International Women's Day is marked annually on the 8th March. This global campaign celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women and raises awareness of issues relating to gender parity.

It also provides an opportunity to consider our differing lived experience of mental health issues, and the specific challenges women face to their wellbeing.

### MENTAL HEALTH AND GENDER

Around 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health issue at some point in our lives – and while they can affect both men and women equally, some will be more common among women (and vice versa).

Some of those more common in women include:

depression, eating disorders, perinatal mental health, self-harm and posttraumatic stress disorder.

(Ref. A Briefing on Women's Mental Health in Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland 2020)

### THE WORKPLACE

While 3 out of 5 employees have experienced mental health issues at work (BITC Mental Health at Work Report 2017), its incidence will vary between men and women – with one study suggesting that women in full-time employment are nearly twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time men.

(Ref. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-mental-health-work](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-mental-health-work))

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## SOCIAL FACTORS

According to the **Mental Health Foundation**, various social factors put women at a greater risk than men of developing poor mental health. They also suggest, however, that women's stronger social networks and greater likelihood to talk about how they feel can help protect their mental health.

Further to this, where women are more likely to have been treated for a mental health issue than men (29% vs 17%) – this may be reflective of a greater willingness to acknowledge issues and seek help when they need it.

(Ref. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/women-and-mental-health](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/women-and-mental-health))

The **National Women's Council of Ireland's Women's Health Taskforce** have explored gender-related differences in experiences of mental health and in how women and men express mental distress.

This, they say is, "in the prevalence of particular mental health conditions among women"; as well as...pathways into treatment and therapeutic preferences".

They suggest, for example, that women more typically prefer to use talking therapies or counselling – reporting that mental health services generally tend to rely more on medication.

(Ref. National Women's Council of Ireland. (2018). *Out of Silence - Women's mental health in their own words*. Dublin: NWCI.)

## RISK FACTORS

The NWCI also say that many associated mental health risk factors fall disproportionately on women. For example, in Ireland, women are more likely to: provide the majority of care for children and older people, do the majority of work in the home, parent alone, experience violence and sexual assault, to be in unstable or part-time employment, earn less and be less financially secure.

(Ref. [www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/FINAL\\_A\\_Briefing\\_on\\_Womens\\_Mental\\_Health\\_in\\_Ireland.pdf](http://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/FINAL_A_Briefing_on_Womens_Mental_Health_in_Ireland.pdf))

## COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

Considering these social and associated risk factors in the context of COVID-19 – recent media reports have suggested that women have been hit disproportionately hard by COVID, with women bearing the "emotional brunt of lockdown measures."

With many of us working from home and with schools and nurseries closed, research has suggested that the additional responsibilities women are taking on in the home will have impacted on their wellbeing and work performance and that a greater number of women than men are finding it difficult to stay positive at this time.

Another significant factor highlighted is that the majority of frontline health workers are women – further adding to the strain when "having to working closely with patients during a pandemic."

(Ref. [www.kcl.ac.uk/news/why-has-covid-19-impacted-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-of-women-the-most](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/why-has-covid-19-impacted-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-of-women-the-most))

## OUR WELLBEING

Mental health issues can affect all of us at different times, in different ways and for different reasons. We may be more or less inclined to seek help, and more disposed to look for it in different places. Here are some simple steps we can all take, regardless of who we are, to look after our mental health and wellbeing at this time:

**Connect** – reach out to those around you, talk when you need to and let others know it's OK to do the same;

**Be Active** – get regular exercise if you can, and be sure to maintain a healthy, balanced diet;

**Take notice** – stop and look around you, switch off from social media and make time to relax;

**Keep learning** – try something new, find something stimulating or rediscover an old hobby;

**Give** – do something positive for a friend, a relative or a neighbour, be thankful and compassionate to others.

The Inspire Support Hub contains a range of information tailored to support your wellbeing, including a page dedicated to wellbeing and COVID-19. Visit: [inspiresupporthub.org](http://inspiresupporthub.org)

You can also speak with a member of our specially trained support team via your Employee Assistance Programme. Speak to your HR or wellbeing team for details.

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If you are in distress or despair you can call Lifeline in NI on: 0808 808 8000 or Pieta House in ROI on: 1800 247 247.

### Refs and further reading:

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/women-and-mental-health](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/women-and-mental-health)

[www.nwci.ie/](http://www.nwci.ie/)

[www.nwci.ie/discover/what\\_we\\_do/womens\\_right\\_to\\_health/join\\_the\\_womens\\_mental\\_health\\_network](http://www.nwci.ie/discover/what_we_do/womens_right_to_health/join_the_womens_mental_health_network)

[www.mindingyourhead.info/](http://www.mindingyourhead.info/)

[www.mind.org.uk/](http://www.mind.org.uk/)

[www.mentalhealthireland.ie/](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/)

[www2.hse.ie/mental-health/](http://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/)