

# Women's mental health improves Post 23.7.81

By Rochelle Semmel Albin of the "New York Times" through NZPA

NEW YORK. — In some recent research suggests, has already had a beneficial effect on the mental health of women.

That observation has been made repeatedly as scientists take on the difficult job of assessing how an improving job market for women has affected their emotional well-being. The conclusion persists, despite criticism, that it is premature and that the elements in the issue are too vague to define rigorously.

Among those who see a clear relationship between feminism and mental health is Dr Grace Baruch, a Wellesley College psychologist.

Following her new study, she declared: "The mental health of women has improved with the women's movement. Feminism leads to equality and equality to mental health."

In 1978, Dr Baruch and Dr Rosalind Barnett began to study almost 300 women aged 35 to 55. Interviewers asked the women about their work and family life, their expectations and satisfactions.

They found, reports Dr Baruch, that "women who work enjoy greater self-esteem and suffer less anxiety and depression than women who do not work."

The prestige of a woman's work, as one might expect, had an added impact: those in high status occupations showed a greater sense of mastery — a feeling of control over what is important to them — than other women.

"Marriage and children did not affect feelings of mastery," comments Dr Baruch. "Nor did the presumed strain of multiple roles. The women with the highest rates of life satisfaction had both families and high prestige jobs."

The sense that good jobs may serve as a kind of preventive medicine emerged from a National Institute of Mental Health study of 2300 Chicago adults.

Dr Frederic Ifield, a psychiatrist at the University of California at Davis, found that high status occupations tended to protect women from psychiatric symptoms.

The research showed, Dr Ifield explained, that "women suffered twice as many symptoms as men," and that "only among women with high status jobs were symptoms as infrequent as among men."

Dr Ifield speculated that this select group of women perceived themselves as having more control over their lives and enjoyed a greater sense of self-esteem and self-sufficiency.

"It makes clinical sense that equality and mental health are related," he said. "When there is not equality, self-image suffers."

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