

Development of
self-awareness,
inner confidence and
the joy of life

the invisible pain



mental health

– an important part of our well-being

When we speak about health, we often think first and foremost about our physical state of health. Mental health, however, is not often associated with daily problems – as long as we are not talking about serious afflictions. This means that we overlook important processes that have to do with our total well-being, especially in regard to mental health. Our mental health is a vital and integrated part of our general health and the prevention of mental problems is something that the MiRA Centre is very concerned about.



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Through our work at the MiRA Centre we have become aware of several different forms of mental strain that women and young girls from minority groups are subject to in their daily lives. Among other things, we see that our mental health is closely associated with our experience of migration, social conditions and family relations. Migrating to a new country leads to the loss of social networks, and many lose the feeling of being in full control of their lives because they have to start anew. The younger generations begin to question their own identity and cultural belonging – and for some this is a great mental strain. It is important that women from minority groups that experience mental stress receive help at an early stage, so that this does not develop into more serious psychological problems.

We are also aware that talking about mental health is a taboo subject for many people, because it is associated with serious mental afflictions and psychiatry. Many are afraid to have some kind of stigma attached to them, that they are not normal, or are in some way, «crazy» or disabled when stresses and strains in life begin to affect their mental health. In reality, all societies have always had their own ways of dealing with this kind of strain. Sharing fears and concerns with friends and family, prayer, asking for help from the medicine man or visiting holy temples are all methods of relieving mental strain and for helping to cope with existential crises.



migration

– a journey to new challenges

Migration is a process in which we usually break away from our basic support networks, leave our familiar environment and people around us in order to establish ourselves in new surroundings. Throughout history people have migrated in search of a better life. However, exactly what this entails differs from person to person.

A strained financial situation or political persecution are important reasons as to why many people migrate. There are also those who are always moving on, also others who are migrating to join their families that are resident in other countries. Many women from minority groups have migrated to Norway through family reunions or as refugees. Whatever the reason for migration, it is a process that affects our lives in a profound way. The background for the migration can also affect our ability to deal with our new life situation and our experiences with the new society.



Migration and

mental health

It is important to be aware that migration affects a person's mental health in many different ways. Some may experience that they have to go against their own customs and values in order to adjust to their new surroundings. Many immigrants and refugees are constantly looking for a balance between the demands of the new society and the need to feel in touch with their own cultural background. The first phase, when the newly arrived migrants seek to adapt to the new society, is often a difficult period. A new language and unfamiliar cultural codes can lead to considerable communication problems, and it is easy to feel like a stranger and to feel lonely. In addition, a difficult work and housing situation, and problems in finding suitable schools for children can also lead to traumatic reactions in the initial stages.

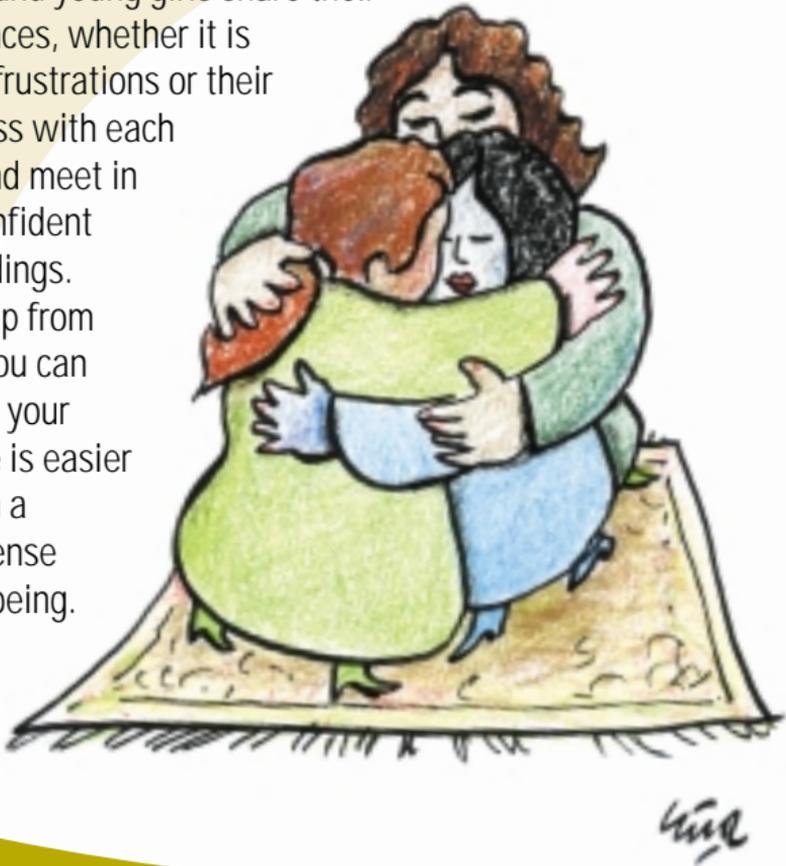
The consequences of the strain of the migration process can also be observed in families. In many situations we can see that the usual gender role patterns are altered and that the structure of the family is broken or brought into a state of imbalance. The background for this is not only that families are split over country borders, but also the new society's pressure upon the individual to adapt to new roles. All these things can lead to mental strain and psychosomatic symptoms such as muscle pain, difficulty in breathing, anxiety and depression etc.



seek help

As soon as you feel that the mental or emotional strain is causing you problems in your daily life, it is important that you seek help.

If you feel tired, listless, anxious or feel frightened or depressed, it is important that you ask a professional to help you. In Norwegian society it may be difficult to find help in the same way that you are used to in your homeland. In Norway however, we have psychologists, therapists and other public or private services with important competence. It is important that you seek help from these instead of carrying the mental stress and strain by yourself. At the MiRA Centre we can offer, among other things, therapy and advice and you can take part in conversation and support groups with other young girls and women. We believe that our daily lives are better if women and young girls share their experiences, whether it is sorrow, frustrations or their happiness with each other, and meet in safe, confident surroundings. With help from others you can feel that your daily life is easier and gain a better sense of well-being.



Psychotherapy and advice can help us to understand our feelings and the mental worries that we experience due to our life situation.

It can help us to be aware of our surroundings and our lives so that we are more easily able to deal with mental stress and strain. We can also become more aware of the challenges that arise in the migration process and learn to cope with them in a healthier way.

Contact the MiRA Centre if you:

- Feel lonely and wish to create a network.
- Feel that daily life is a struggle and want to talk to someone about your life situation.
- Wish to take part in activities that bring motivation and happiness.
- Wish to work on self-development on your own terms.
- Wish to acquire self-awareness and to find your own inner strength.
- Have difficulties in making your own decisions.
- Have difficulties in dealing with expectations.
- Have problems with your identity, sexuality or cultural belonging.

the mira centre

is run by – and for – women from minority backgrounds. We are an open organisation and our policy is to meet users on their own terms. The MiRA Centre has an obligation to full client confidentiality.

MiRA Centre Resource Centre for Black, Immigrant and Refugee Women

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