


WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH NEWSLETTER

WOMEN IN MENTAL HEALTH

Aurelia Weickart, International Mental Health Association



Let's celebrate Women's History Month by learning about women who have shaped today's understanding of mental health and mental health services. In this newsletter, we will highlight women, who advocate for mental health, are mental health care providers and improve mental health of others daily. A social worker in Zimbabwe as well as the founder of a mental health NGO in South Africa took the time to talk with us about their work and experiences in the field of mental health. We are so excited to share these stories and celebrate women working in mental health!



A note about this newsletter...

Thanks for reading! Being a women-led mental health organization ourselves, we're constantly inspired by the amazing work our colleagues are doing around the world. We wanted to create this newsletter to highlight some of the incredible women we know who are making changes and having powerful impacts. Enjoy!



IMHA

EXPLORE AMAZING WORK



Dr. Victoria Ngo

Associate Professor and Director of the CUNY Center for Innovation in Mental Health

Dr. Victoria Ngo is a licensed clinical psychologist and behavioral scientist. Dr. Ngo's research focus has been on task-shifting mental health care and the development of implementation strategies to increase access to and the quality of mental health services in global low-resource settings.

She has worked in Vietnam to develop mental health research infrastructure and clinical capacity as well as help establish the first clinical psychology graduate program in Vietnam.

More information:

<https://sph.cuny.edu/about/people/faculty/victoria-ngo/>



Dr. Tatiana Taylor Salisbury

Lecturer in Global Mental Health at King's College London

Dr. Salisbury focuses on child and adolescent mental health, mental health systems and service delivery and evaluation in the global context. Since last year, she is the co-director for the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health.

She was recently awarded a

prestigious £1.2 million fellowship to develop innovative approaches to scalable and sustainable interventions to improve adolescent maternal mental health in Kenya and Mozambique.

More information:

<https://www.centreforglobalmentalhealth.org/dr-tatiana-salisbury>

Esme Weijun Wang

Author and Mental Health Advocate

Esme Weijun Wang is a *New York Times* bestselling author, who is open about living with schizoaffective disorder and chronic illness. Wang uses her platform to advocate for and brings awareness to people like herself. On her website she created The Unexpected Shape Community, where "people who are eager to write, and who deal with chronic conditions and disabilities" can come seek support, in order to foster resilience and achieve their goals despite their limitations.

Instagram: [@esmewwang](https://www.instagram.com/esmewwang) | **Website:** <https://esmewang.com>

More information: <https://www.girlboss.com/read/mental-health-instagram>

Elyse Fox

Filmmaker and Mental Health Activist

Fox launched Sad Girls Club in 2017 as an Instagram platform and a non profit. It was "founded to create community and diminish stigma around mental health. [They] strive to support women of color and the millennial & GenZ population." When the pandemic started, the Sad Girls Club adapted the in person get-togethers to online group counseling and yoga sessions. to continue fostering a sense of community. The Soul Sessions are described as following: "It's like group therapy but digitally, and with peers around the world. Led by accredited therapists of color, we provide a cozy space to vent, heal, and grow."

Instagram: [@elyse.fox](https://www.instagram.com/elyse.fox)

[@sadgirlsclub](https://www.instagram.com/sadgirlsclub)

Website: <https://sadgirlsclub.org>

More information:

<https://www.heremagazine.com/articles/sad-girls-club-packing-list>



GET TO KNOW JEAN MUTERO



Jean Mutero, Social Worker for SPANS

Goromonzi, Zimbabwe

March was not only Women's History Month, but also the Month of Social Work and so we are highlighting Jean Mutero's work. Jean works for our partner organization SPANS and is in her third year of her Social Work studies at the University of Zimbabwe. Since September of last year, she has been leading educational group sessions, counseling sessions and assisting with community awareness campaigns for SPANS and in this interview she tells us a bit about her experiences.

Q: What is something that you have learned about working as a woman in the field of social work and mental health?

A: My experience has been good so far. Usually, when we have groups with a lot of women, they are very responsive and I find that when you are working with people who want to listen to you it goes well, but sometimes it can be difficult to get through to people. Sometimes when you get men that come in who are a bit older they have that idea: "You are a woman and you are young - what could you tell me possibly?" There is always that aspect, but overall it hasn't been that bad - it really has been a great experience to be honest.

Q: What is some advice that you wish you had known before going into the field of mental health and social work?

A: When I first started working in the field coming from college, I realized that many of us have preconceived ideas: You expect certain challenges or to meet people that are a certain way. However, the most important thing is that you have to keep an open mind. You hear things that are out of this world sometimes - things that you can't even imagine are happening to people. You have to have a strong heart and be very open-minded, because things will shock you.

In social work, we speak of controlled emotional involvement or purposeful expression of feeling, but when I got into the field and you are really dealing with real people with real issues - this is not your text book. When you are interacting face-to-face with clients, it is really going to be difficult. Maybe you are counseling a person and they are telling you something that is really disturbing and you are thinking: "I have to control my emotions." But you are forgetting that you are also human. To be honest, the first days I would get shocked to an extent where I would have to go outside and take a few minutes to really adjust what the real issues on the ground are. So you really have to be strong and very open-minded, but with time it only gets better.



SPANS is our partner organization in Goromonzi, Zimbabwe. Their mission is to improve mental health through raising awareness and educating about mental health, as well as providing access to counseling sessions. If you would like to learn more, please check out January's Partner Spotlight here: <https://imha.ngo/spotlight-series>

LEARN ABOUT INALA

Inala Mental Health Foundation

The Inala Mental Health Foundation based **Cape Town, South Africa**, that offer programs to support mental health and well-being of at-risk youth, women and individuals who have experienced trauma.



Inala was founded by Siddeeqa Gierdien, a social worker with over a decade of experience. Siddeeqa is passionate about shifting individuals perspectives, as well as empowering the most vulnerable communities and aims to ensure that all human beings have their truest life's potential realized and actualized.

Let's hear from Siddeeqa herself:

Q: What kind of work have you done and how did it influence Inala's mission?

A: I am a qualified social worker specializing in mental health. I've worked with women and children in prisons and shelters as well as youth empowerment and gang prevention. While I can't change the homes [these children] came from, the area which I have the most impact on is their mind. With the lack of resources, the best way to empower children is through education. Unfortunately, a child cannot learn if there is abuse, neglect or poverty, so we provide psychosocial support alongside educational support creating a holistic and ecosystems approach.

I have a very strong passion for gender-based violence. Through my work I have seen how sexual assault can shackle a girl at a very young age, essentially affecting their trajectory. Through finding a safe place to process, deal with, and find healing in a therapeutic way, their experience doesn't need to define the rest of their life. Internalizing [these impacts] affects their sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and identity. At Inala, we try to create a family basis and a strong supportive sense of belonging where kids can unpack the trauma and pain they experience. [This way] they can figure out their dreams, goals and aspirations, without the barriers that are there because of the homes they come from.

Q: What is something that you learned as a women leading a mental health organization?

A: Leading an mental health NGO is very interesting often and sometimes really hard. Trying to balance my work, that I'm so passionate about with my family life and my personal time is really hard and it can feel so overwhelming, but having a phenomenal team that is equally passionate about the work that we do is key.

There is something deeply magical about being able to be part of another human beings transformation for the better. I also enjoy being able to mentor other women in this organization and for them to find their personal passion and how that aligns with the work that we do.



If you are interested in getting involved, supporting or learning more about Inala, please check out:

- <https://www.inala.org.za>
- Follow Inala on Instagram: [@inalamentalhealthfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/inalamentalhealthfoundation)
- Reach out to Siddeeqa Gierdien: siddeeqa@inala.org.za

STAYING INVOLVED

Women's History Month is a great opportunity to bring attention to women, but it is also a reminder that we should celebrate these women not only one month a year, but always. Below are some ideas of ways to stay involved and keep celebrating women's accomplishments!

LINKS AND RESOURCES

- For a list of 100 Innovative (Women) Leaders in Global Mental Health – Compiled by Dr. Kathleen Pike: <https://www.cugmhp.org/five-on-friday-posts/innovative-women-leaders-in-global-mental-health/?sfw=pass1615066029>

PODCASTS

The Lavendaire Lifestyle

Hosted by Aileen Xu, this podcast approaches mental wellbeing from various angles – inspiring personal growth and achieving your goals.

More information:

<https://www.lavendaire.com/category/podcast/>



Celeste The Therapist

Celeste Viciere is a therapist from Boston and through her podcast, she aims to help shift her listeners' perspective on their mental and emotional struggles. She gives advice and invites guests to empower listeners by sharing their experiences.

More information:

<https://www.celestethetherapist.com/podcast>



READING CORNER

One way of learning more and supporting women in mental health, is by buying and reading their books. Since there are so many amazing books to choose from, please feel free to explore these links for a few suggestions:

5 Books Written by Women that Get Real About Mental Health

<https://bookriot.com/new-books-about-mental-health/>

6 Honest (And Humorous) Mental Health Memoirs By Women

<https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/mental-health-memoirs>

CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

To learn more and participate in the exchange of knowledge surrounding Women's Mental Health, check out the following conference:

"15. International Conference on Women's Mental Health"

May 24-25, 2021 in Montreal, Canada

<https://waset.org/womens-mental-health-conference-in-may-2021-in-montreal>

