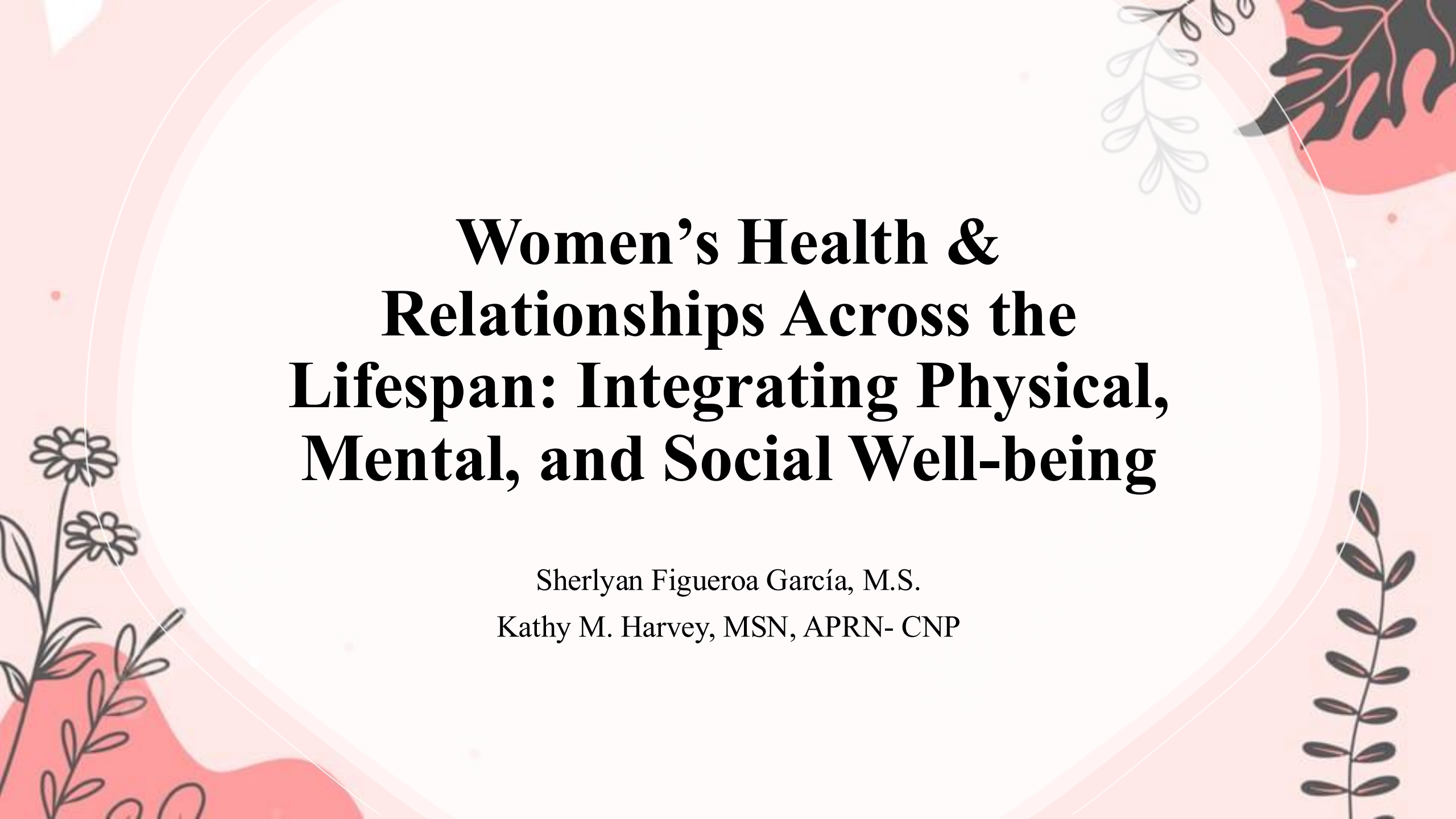




# **Women's Health & Relationships Across the Lifespan: Integrating Physical, Mental, and Social Well-being**

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# Learning Objectives:

- Describe how relationships influence women's physical and mental health across the lifespan.
- Understand the role of social support in health outcomes.
- Explore the impact of life transitions on relationships and well-being.
- Analyze the effects of health challenges on women's relationships.
- Discuss how chronic illness, reproductive health issues, and mental health conditions can affect communication, intimacy, and family dynamics.
- Identify strategies for strengthening relationships and support networks.
- Highlight evidence-based approaches for building resilience, fostering open communication, and seeking help when needed.
- Promote equitable, patient-centered care that addresses the relational context of women's health.
- Emphasize the importance of culturally competent care and community resources in supporting women and their relationships.





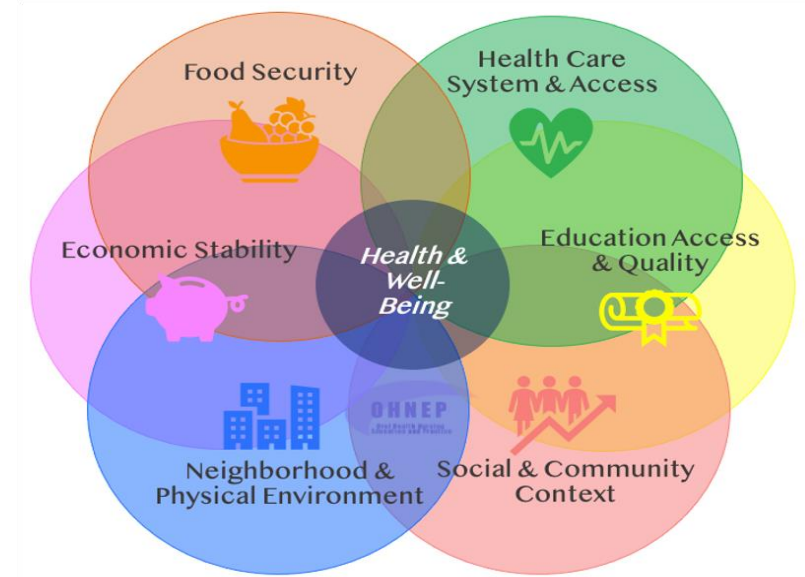
# Relationships Across the Lifespan

| Life Stage                                               | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Adolescence</b><br>- Identity vs. Role Confusion      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who am I in relation to peers, family, culture, and society.</li><li>• Exploration of values, roles, sexuality, and beliefs.</li><li>• Desire to belong and create an own identity.</li></ul> |
| <b>Early Adulthood</b><br>- Intimacy vs. Isolation       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developing deep and meaningful relationships with others and self.</li><li>• Balancing independency with connection.</li></ul>                                                                |
| <b>Middle adulthood</b><br>- Generativity vs. Stagnation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is my legacy?; What am I giving back?</li><li>• Desire of impact, usefulness, and guiding others as a leader, parent, mentor, etc.</li><li>• Sense of purpose.</li></ul>                 |
| <b>Late adulthood</b><br>- Integrity vs. Despair         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reflecting on life and its meaning.</li><li>• Desire for fulfillment, acceptance, and satisfaction.</li></ul>                                                                                 |

# Why Does it Matter?

- Strong social ties protect women's physical and mental health.
- Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk of chronic conditions and mortality, comparable to smoking, obesity and physical inactivity.
- Women with more healthy relationship indicators are:
  - Less likely to report chronic health conditions
  - Less likely to report poor mental health
  - More likely to report positive mental health and good general health
  - Less likely to experience intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Socioeconomic resources (education, income, food security) increase likelihood of healthy relationships.
- Key supportive relationship behaviors: conflict resolution, openness, comfort with partner, appreciation, and communication.
- Women experience broader health advantages when having multiple healthy relationship indicators.

(National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020; Fanslow et al., 2025)



# Supportive Relationships in Life Transitions

| Life Stage                         | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Motherhood</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increases quality of life, adjustment, self-esteem, self-image, connectedness, and informed decision making.</li><li>• Validates identity as a mother.</li><li>• Reduces postpartum distress, loneliness, anxiety, self-harm, and depression.</li><li>• Family, migration, and economic factors highly influence access to support.</li></ul>                                                                     |
| <b>Perimenopause and Menopause</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fosters normalization, openness, and understanding.</li><li>• Improves quality of life and attitudes towards menopause.</li><li>• Reduces severity of psychological and urogenital symptoms.</li><li>• Cultural background and living status has a strong impact on source of support.</li></ul>                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Aging</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Declining health/endurance, bereavement, and transition to retirement.</li><li>• Protective factors: Active lifestyle, regular social interactions, healthy sleep and diet, and fostering autonomy. Women benefit more from active and engagement activities.</li><li>• Housing, access to transportation/resources, digital literacy, mobility, and closure to family significantly influence support.</li></ul> |

(Bedaso et al., 2021; Cowell et al., 2024; Khademi & Kaveh, 2024; Puyan  et al., 2025)

# Practice Case:

A woman in her late 30s presents to you reporting that she feels “stuck and overwhelmed.” She has multiple chronic medical conditions and was recently diagnosed with anxiety and depression. She describes poor sleep, low appetite, fatigue, irritability, and difficulty functioning at work. She worries about her health due to recent abnormal lab results. At home, she feels out of control (“my place is a mess”) and emotionally unsupported (“no one really hears me”). She is the primary support for her grandmother and wants to continue caregiving, but says, “I don’t feel like myself anymore.” She avoids asking for help because she fears it will backfire, so she keeps pushing through despite feeling emotionally drained.

# Practice Case:

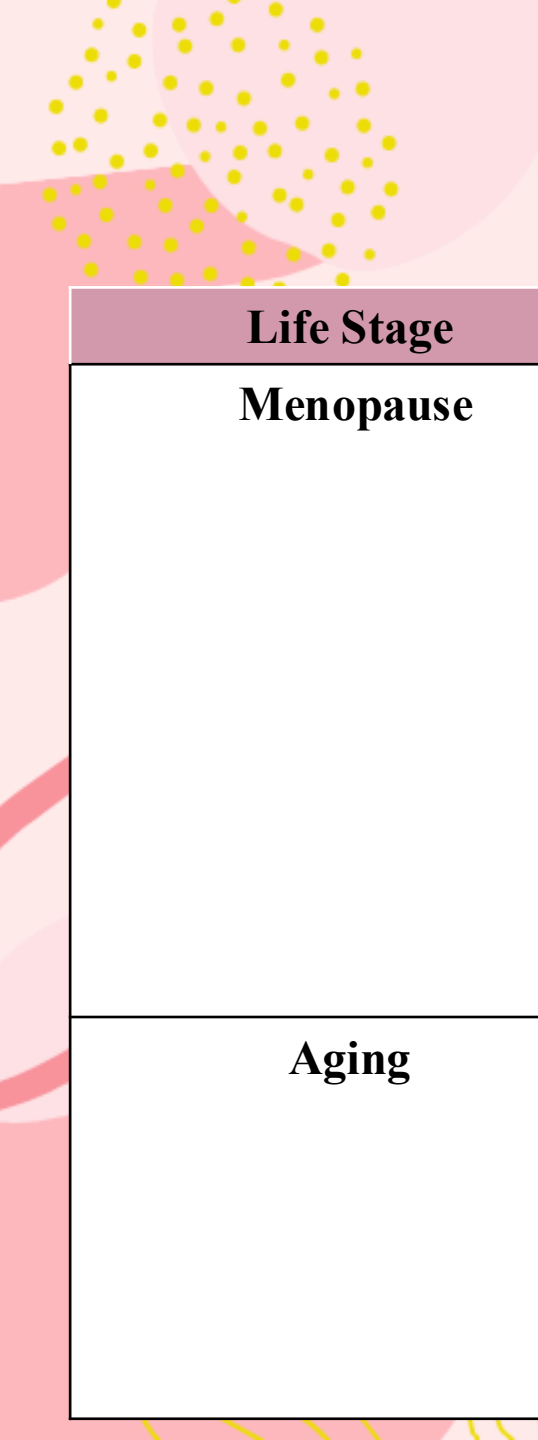
Where would you start?

Do you notice any feelings of “stuckness” too? How might that influence your next steps?

How would you approach this conversation to build trust and reduce her fear of being vulnerable?

# Life Transitions and Wellbeing

| Life Stage           | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Motherhood</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Postpartum often mimics a perimenopausal state with significant shift in estrogen and progesterone levels post-delivery. Can result in symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety, brain fog, night sweats and vaginal dryness. In most cases, postpartum hormone levels stabilize in 6-12 months but perimenopausal symptoms typically last longer.</li><li>• Progesterone is known as the happy hormone of pregnancy. The decline in progesterone levels can lead to postpartum depression.</li><li>• Giving love and caring for a baby releases Oxytocin that regulates HPA axis, vagus nerve, and immune system.</li><li>• Reduces postpartum stress.</li></ul> |
| <b>Perimenopause</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Declining hormone levels often lead to changes in mood, sleep, libido, vaginal tissues and may result in vasoactive symptoms and weight gain.</li><li>• Patients need to feel heard during this time as many may feel depressed, anxious, frustrated, and lonely secondary to changes in relationship and issues with libido.</li><li>• Hormone balance reduces severity of physical, psychological, and urogenital symptoms and promotes health.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                |



# Life Transitions and Wellbeing

| Life Stage       | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Menopause</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduced hormone levels often leads to changes in health. While hot flashes and night sweats often decline, women still struggle with anxiety, depression, sleep, labido, vaginal dryness, and dyspareunia.</li><li>• Declining estrogen levels results in impaired mitochondrial function leading to reduced ATP (energy) production, increased oxidative stress, and accelerated cellular aging.</li><li>• As estrogen declines, the brain faces a "starvation response" and a 20-25% reduction in glucose metabolism, which can impact cognitive function and cause brain fog.</li><li>• Patients need to feel heard during this time as many may feel depressed, anxious, frustrated, and lonely secondary to changes in relationship and issues with labido.</li><li>• Hormone replacement reduces severity of physical, psychological, and urogenital symptoms and promotes health.</li></ul> |
| <b>Aging</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Declining health/endurance, decline in muscle mass, osteopenia and osteoporosis increases concerns for falls secondary to balance issues and possible fractures.</li><li>• Loneliness – Strong social connections increase longevity by 50%, more than smoking cessation, drinking cessation, weight loss, or exercise</li><li>• Protective factors include regular social interactions, active lifestyle, healthy sleep and diet, and fostering autonomy.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |



# The Power of Social Support in Health Outcomes

- Promotes healthy behaviors:
  - Perimenopausal women: Better nutrition, physical activity, and overall health-promoting lifestyles.
  - Psychological resilience strengthens this effect, helping women cope with stress and maintain healthy habits.
- Mitigates negative effects of IPV:
  - Women experiencing IPV face physical discomfort, psychological trauma, and challenges in parenting.
  - Social support helps meet informational, emotional, and practical needs.
- Connection aids recovery:
  - Support from family, friends, peers, or professionals improves mental health, safety, and recovery.
  - Group interventions (support groups, talking circles) reduce shame, mobilize networks, and provide comfort, especially for marginalized and/or older women.
- Healthcare implications:
  - Integrating social support and resilience-building into tailored programs can enhance women's health outcomes.

(Paphitis et al., 2022; Wen et al., 2025; Lu et al, 2026)

# The Power of Social Support in Health Outcomes

- We are designed for connection even down to the cellular level.
- At every moment, our biological systems are interpreting signals from our environment & social interactions. All relationships are translated into safety or danger.
- Our relationships are either building our energy or draining it.
- Coherent thoughts and constructive communication maintain cellular order and health. How we communicate affects our emotions and relationships.
- Relationships either create safety and order or generate entropy and disorder in our biology. Chronic stress, threat, or trauma creates dis-ease leading to disease.
- We don't typically correlate relationship with mitochondria and energy, but mitochondria typically known for energy production are actually social organelles that also act as stress sensors determining if we feel safe or unsafe.
- Mitochondria produce sex hormones determining if we can survive and reproduce. They also produce precursors for neurotransmitters, hormones, RNA, DNA, lipids, and proteins connecting energy and metabolism to cellular growth and endocrine function.

# Health Challenges and Women's Relationships

- Health challenges can greatly impact woman's relationships.
- Women experience higher levels of chronic illness, 80% of autoimmune conditions occur in females.
- Chronic Illness may reduce a female's ability to socialize resulting in loneliness and a feeling of being left out.
- Chronic Illness may result in the female needing someone to care for her resulting in role reversal causing strain in marriages and family dynamics.
- Persistent health issues can isolate women from friends and family and can lead to higher rates of anxiety and depression.
- Lack of social support and increased isolation can, in turn, hinder a woman's ability to manage her illness, creating a cycle of declining health.
- Female partners often experience higher psychological distress and caregiver burden when supporting ill family members.

(Golics et al., 2013)

# When Health Disrupts Connection: The Relational Impact of Illness

- Chronic illness can often affect every area of a person's life including personal relationships. This can often lead to isolation.
- According to the literature, many people with a chronic condition even withdraw from their spouse or intimate partner to avoid the person's efforts to be affectionate and shield themselves from their partner's reaction to the chronic condition.
- Reproductive health issues can have serious implications for the mental and social well-being of those involved. The literature indicates, male factor infertility did not have a negative marital impact. However, infertile females had significantly less stable marital relationship compared to fertile females. This was worse among females of women over 30 and failed IVF-ICSI.
- Isolation can be prevalent in both situations. Isolation has a negative impact on an individual's well-being. 1 in 2 adults experience loneliness. Chronic loneliness is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Chronic loneliness activates the stress response system elevating cortisol and inflammatory cytokines while reducing serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin levels.

(Tao et al., 2012)

# Practice Case:

A woman in her late 30's presents to you reporting that she has started having issues with sleep. She has started having panic attacks and feels depressed and tearful at times for no apparent reason. She states she has lost desire for an intimate relationship with her husband and this is straining their relationship. She also notes feeling more fatigued lately and is having difficulty functioning at work and just wants to sleep on the couch when she gets home.

# Practice Case:

Where would you start?

What labs would you consider checking?

What treatments would you consider ?



# Building Supportive Networks: Online Support

- **YouthLine (up to age 24)**
  - Call: 877-968-8491
  - Text: “teen2teen” to 839863
  - Email: [teen2teen@linesforlife.org](mailto:teen2teen@linesforlife.org)
  - Chat: <https://www.theyouthline.org/>
  - Youth available from 4-10pm
- **Crisis Text Line**
  - Chat: <https://www.crisistextline.org/>
  - Text HOME or HOLA: 741741
- **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**
  - Call/ text/ videophone: 988
  - 1-800-273-8255
  - Live Chat: <https://chat.988lifeline.org/>
- **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline**
  - Support and referrals
  - Chat
  - Call (multiple languages available)/ text (ESP/EN): 833-852-6262
- **Postpartum Support International Warmline:**
  - Support and referrals: 8am- 11pm
  - Call/ Text (Help #1 for ESP, #2 for EN): 1-800-944-4773
  - Free app available: PSI
- **Physician Support Line**
  - Call: 888-409-0141.
  - Monday- Friday 8am- 11pm
    - (Except federal holidays)

# Building Supportive Networks: Online Support



## Find your community

During May, NAMI is celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month by disrupting stigma, sharing stories, and building connections. Check out NAMI resources and learn how you can heal alongside your local NAMI community.

Get started



## Specialized Postpartum Depression Support Groups

Getting support for postpartum depression from people who are facing similar struggles can help mothers feel seen, supported, and heard.

**Here are some resources to help you find specialized PPD support groups and resources:**

- **[Black Moms Connect](#)**: This support group is for black mothers who are pregnant or postpartum up to 2 years. They can connect, share experiences, and learn tools and resources here.
- **[Connecting Rainbows](#)**: an organization that offers support for LGBTQ people who need postpartum support, legal help, help with fertility issues, and more
- **[Perinatal Support for Latinx Moms](#)**: This group provides support for Latina or Latinx women. While the group is led in English, it can also connect participants to Spanish-speaking support groups.



POSTPARTUM SUPPORT  
INTERNATIONAL

# Peer Support Groups

PSI Peer Support Groups offer compassionate peer support for pregnancy loss, infant loss, fertility challenges, and parenting after loss. All groups are 100% free forever, held via Zoom on the **Sharewell Platform**, and facilitated by trained peer supporters who understand your journey. Please note that each support group has a limit of 25 participants. Attendance is granted on a first-come, first-served basis, and only the first 16 group members to join the session will be admitted.

[Spanish/Encuentros de apoyo >](#)



EN ^



**100%**

Free Forever



**Zoom**

Online Groups



**90min**

Group Sessions



**Confidential**



Parenting After Loss

Pregnancy & Infant  
Loss

ADHD

Autism

Bipolar Disorder

Birth and Medical  
Trauma

Fathers

ASL

Eating Disorders

Fertility Challenges

Military Mothers

**MANY** more!

# Building Supportive Networks: Community Support

- **Crime and Victim Services**

- Chat: [HelplineSoftware.com](https://www.helplinesoftware.com) (M-F 8an- 4pm)
- Call/text: 877-867-7273 (24/7)
- Programs: [PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES | Crime Victim Services](#)

- **Crossroads Crisis Center**

- Population: domestic violence, SA, and human trafficking (directly with the patient)
- Call: 419-228-4357 (24/7)
- Emergency shelter (45 days+), support, court advocacy/education, and empowerment. Includes non- residents. Safe exchange center for cases with shared custody.

- **Samaritan House**

- Call: 419- 222-4663
- Emergency shelter and case management up to 90 days for women with no permanent residence.

- **Guiding Light**

- Email: [Guidinglight@gmail.com](mailto:Guidinglight@gmail.com)
- Call: 419-236-7935
- Housing, resources, transportation to appointments/interviews, goal setting, and life skills.

- **YMCA**

- Multiple Programs and child zones available.

- **Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities**

- Employment, education, housing independency, and evaluations.

- **Allen County Council of Aging**

- Call: 419-228-5135

- **Area Agency on Aging 3**

- Call: 419-222-7773
- Programs: [70a613\\_23af88c1239e4a3e97c13b9e75a6e22e.pdf](#)

# Building Supportive Networks: Community Support

- **Andrew's House of Hope**
  - Call: 419-339-0082
  - Website: <https://www.ahoh.org/about>
  - Residential Program
  - Garden of hope, chicken coop, bible studies, and classes.
- **Local Churches – Shawnee Alliance**
  - Wednesday Night groups – Grief Share
  - Life Groups, Sports, and Exercise Groups
  - Call: 419-991-6546
- **Pathways - Ottawa**
  - Call: 419- 222-4663
  - Crisis Line: 1-800-567-4673
  - Multiple services, mental health, community support, prehospital screening .
- **Lighthouse- Lima**
  - Multiple Programs
  - Call: 419-423-5682
  - Addiction treatment available
- **PASS – Prevention Awareness Support Services**
  - Multiple Programs
  - Mental Wellness
  - Suicide Prevention
  - Call: 419-549-8530

# Building Supportive Networks: Community Support



**The Village You Needed**  
MUTUAL AID. REAL SUPPORT. STRONGER TOGETHER.

I created this space because I know what it feels like to do life without a village. This group is for moms and women in the Lima/Allen County area who are navigating motherhood, healing, and everyday life—sometimes without the support they deserve.

**HERE, YOU CAN:**

-  **Ask for help without shame** (diapers, clothes, essentials, advice)
-  **Give when you have extra—** no pressure, just love
-  **Connect with other women** who truly understand
-  **Build real friendships** through meetups, playdates, and community events

**WE BELIEVE IN:**

-  No judgment
-  No shame
-  No pressure to explain your situation
-  Real support from real people

**You don't have to do this life alone.**

**You were never meant to do this alone.**

**We rise better together.**

**You belong here.** Join The Village You Needed on Facebook and be part of a community that shows up, lifts up, and walks alongside you—one day at a time.



**The Village You Needed**  
SUPPORT. UPLIFT. RESTORE.

The Village You Needed exists to support, uplift, and restore women—especially mothers—by creating a safe, nurturing community where no one has to navigate life, pregnancy, or postpartum alone.

**You were never meant to do this alone.**

**For You. With You.**

**YOUR DONATION HELPS PROVIDE:**

-  **COMMUNITY MEETUPS**  
Safe spaces for mothers and children to connect, build friendships, and feel supported.
-  **POSTPARTUM MEAL SUPPORT**  
Nourishing meals for mothers during one of the most vulnerable times of their lives.
-  **ESSENTIAL ITEM DONATIONS**  
Diapers, wipes, and other essentials for families in need.
-  **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**  
A judgment-free community where women are seen, heard, and uplifted.

**Every act of support HELPS BUILD THE VILLAGE.**

Together, we can make sure no mother walks alone.

**SCAN TO DONATE**

Every contribution, big or small, helps us continue showing up for mothers in our community. Thank you! Your support changes lives.



**DONATE**  
Every dollar makes a difference.

**SHARE**  
Help spread the word.

**GET INVOLVED**  
Volunteer, partner, or connect us with resources.

**Thank you for being part of our village!**

**SUPPORT TODAY. IMPACT TOMORROW. CHANGE GENERATIONS.**

Women & Moms in Lima  
Lorin Bradford (Facebook)

# Strengthening & Building Resilient Relationships: Mental Health Concerns

Anxiety

Depression

PTSD

Eating Disorders

Chronic Illness

Grief and Loss

Self-esteem and Body  
Image

Life Transitions and  
Life Stages

Caregiver Burnout

# Strengthening & Building Resilient Relationships: Mental Health Interventions

Cognitive  
Behavioral Therapy  
(CBT)

Trauma- Focused/  
Informed

Problem Solving

Behavioral  
Activation (BA)

Mindfulness- Based

Acceptance and  
Commitment  
Therapy (ACT)

Dialectical  
Behavioral Therapy  
(DBT)

Interpersonal  
Psychotherapy (IPT)

Motivational  
Interviewing and  
Lifestyle

Support Groups

Volunteering

Family- integrated  
approaches

# Strengthening & Building Resilient Relationships: Medical Interventions

Start the Healing  
Cycle -Teach the  
Body Safety

Address Underlying  
Health issue  
/imbalances

Hormone Balance

Address underlying  
inflammation

Eliminate Toxins

Treating Infection

Nutrition planning -  
Dietician

Improve Sleep

Sunlight, Clean  
water

Breathing

Reconnection restore  
energy flow



Final Thoughts:

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# Key Takeaways:

- Intimacy & Connection or Stress & Conflict play a role in physiology & create health or disease
- Socialization is a biological principal not just a human preference. Social isolation is not a preference; it is a fundamental threat to health.
- We thrive when we are in contact and communication. When disconnected we dysregulate. When seen, heard and touched in a healthy way we heal.
- High quality social relationships promote physical and mental health while reducing morbidity and mortality
- Strong social connections increase longevity by 50%, more than smoking cessation, drinking cessation, weight loss, or exercise
  - In the Body - Oxytocin calms inflammation, regulates vagus nerve, turns off stress response
  - In Love - Trust releases oxytocin, quiets fear, opens empathy, reawakens play and laughter
  - In Community - Caregiving, touch, compassion lengthen lifespan through healing chemistry

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