

PANTEION UNIVERSITY Centre for Gender Studies

134 Sygrou Avenue, 1st floor, GR 17671 ATHENS, Tel: +30- 210 9210177-8, fax: +30- 210 9210178

<http://www.genderpanteion.gr>, e-mail: gender@panteion.gr

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**'Changing Gender! Research, Theory and Policy
for Gendered Realities of the 21st century'**

**June 2-3, 2005
Panteion University
Athens, Greece**

ABSTRACT – ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ ΕΙΣΗΓΗΣΗΣ

Chryssoula Steka, Dr., School of Medicine, University of Athens, Pharmacist, Greece.

Women's depression: myth or reality?

Depression has been recognized as a clinical syndrome for more than 2000 years. In recent years it is widespread both in the developed and developing countries. According to recent accumulating evidence from the World Health Organization, one in twenty individuals suffer from severe depression. However, there still remain many questions regarding the definition, the aetiology, the nature and the classification of depression.

For many years, doctors and researchers have identified high rates of depression in women, roughly a 2:1 rate for women compared to men. Efforts have been devoted to examining these sex differences with more than one approaches. Biological, psychological, behavioral and sociological theories are used to explain gender differences in depression, some of them, being used in a controversial and uncritical way by experts. Very often doctors de-personalize mental disorders and tell us nothing about the patient and his/her history or experience in relation to the family, work-place or society in general. They overlook the social factors that shape the psychopathology of women at any given moment, invalidating the reliability of psychiatric diagnoses.

There raises a fundamental question: are the specific characteristics of women's depression determined, and to what extent, by the biological differences between men and women, or between young and elderly women, women in developed or developing countries? The relevant literature focuses exclusively on the characteristics of women's depression and overlooks distinctive characteristics of men's depression. The basic hypothesis that the female reproductive physiology may render women more vulnerable to depression is too simplistic. Also, the lack of sensitivity and awareness of gender issues in psychiatric conditions, has given a political dimension to feminist approaches on the prevalence of women's depression.

The aim of this paper is to underline all these factors- social, cultural-genetic that clearly play a role- in the emergence of depression in women, as well in men, leading eventually to a better understanding of this social phenomenon .