

October 2023 Newsletter: Focus on Our Mental Health

A Note from Our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Despondent. Terrified. Enraged. Broken. These are some of the ways people describe their reactions to the horrific violence being unleashed this week in Israel/Palestine and last month in Armenia. The shocking violence in Israel/Palestine is front page news, as it should be, but the nightmare of **“ethnic cleansing” by Azerbaijan against Armenians** in the Nagorno–Karabakh region is mostly below the radar.



No one should have to say this, but killing and kidnapping civilians is never acceptable. Occupation and collective punishment are never acceptable. Genocide and “ethnic cleansing” are never acceptable. As someone with both Armenian and Jewish heritage, I know all too well how the reverberations of such violence echo through the generations of survivors, bystanders, and even perpetrators. The harms to our physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing proliferate. And women carry particular burdens.

In the midst of atrocities and war crimes, survival is of course a higher priority than mental health. But a humanitarian crisis is also a mental health crisis for the displaced, injured, widowed, orphaned, and otherwise traumatized. Mental health can certainly be included on the long, long list of reasons to work for peace and disarmament.

To state the obvious, the best way to support people’s mental health is to end the systemic oppression and violence that traumatizes us. Of course, we need effective treatment for our psychological injuries along with our physical ones. But societies that respect, protect, and fulfill *all* human rights are the best protectors of mental health, now and in the future.

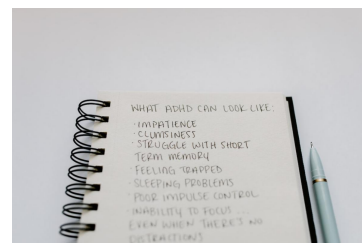
It’s easy to lose track of the truth that life is short, and every life is precious. We should be doing our utmost to support each other and ease one another’s burdens rather than multiplying them. Our Bodies Ourselves Today is one of thousands of organizations around the world working hard every day to help make this life a little less terrifying, chaotic, enraging, and heartbreaking. It’s an honor to be doing this work with you.

Onward!

Explore Our Resources

Understanding ADHD in Women

While everyone with ADHD experiences many of the same symptoms, factors such as gender norms and fluctuating hormones can result in different experiences for women and men. (Unfortunately, little research exists on ADHD in people beyond the gender binary.) Definitions of ADHD first developed through observing the hyperactive behavior of boys. Diagnosis still focuses on external behaviors, but women's symptoms often manifest internally and are thus misinterpreted. ADHD in women may show up as chronic anxiety, inattentiveness, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, perfectionist behavior, chronic restlessness, frequent irritability, and substance dependence. Women and health care providers alike need to better understand these gendered differences so that fewer women go undiagnosed, and fewer are misdiagnosed with a mood disorder such as anxiety or depression.



[Read More about ADHD in Women](#)

Meet Our Content Experts



Janie Victoria Ward, EDD, Mental Health panel chair

I had the honor of serving as the first Mental Health content expert chair, and if you're wondering what that is, I felt the same way when I received the initial invitation. As one of the content chairs, my task was to help move from the traditional print edition to a newly designed electronic version of the beloved and iconic *Our Bodies Ourselves* book. OBOS was a staple in my household, the go-to resource for answers to questions about women's health that I was either confused about or too embarrassed to ask. Generations of women relied on that book to self-educate and to be inspired. But times have changed. Many women today turn to the internet

for their information. And in the area of mental health, the internet is flooded with (sometimes dubious) advice. To pull together resources about women's mental health that are solid, up-to-date, and that reflect our commitment to being feminist and inclusive, even critical when needed, calls for a panel whose expertise is broad and boundless. Mental health overlaps with so many other health issues. Moreover, the challenges women face as a result of bias, discrimination and oppression can affect mental health and the ability to access the services they need. Our panel of experts endeavor to select resources that

speak to the diverse populations of women and gender-expansive people who will turn to our website for assistance. We seek to inform, provide answers to questions, challenge mainstream truths when needed, and positively contribute to the good health and healing so many of us seek.

[Learn More About Janie](#)

A Personal Story about Mental Health

Isabella: Searching for a Mental Health Professional Who Understands Me



In this short video, Isabella shares her experience of searching for a mental health professional who did not regard her with pity, but instead could understand her identity and "contextualize all the little pieces" of her life and behaviors. Isabella describes learning to advocate for herself. Eventually she found a counselor who was a person of color like herself. Their similar backgrounds enabled better interactions and restored her confidence in mental health care.

[Watch This Story](#)

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News and Updates



Our Bodies Ourselves founders honored by Black Women's Health Imperative!

In late September, Norma Swenson and Judy Norsigian traveled to Atlanta to help celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the [Black Women's Health Imperative](#).

There they accepted a Sentry Award from reproductive justice activist Byllye Avery, in recognition of how Our Bodies Ourselves supported the BWHI during its earliest years, when it was known as the National Black Women's Health Project.

Also among the New England delegation to the event were Sarah

Swenson, Hilary Salk, and Loretta Ross. The inspiring symposium featured speakers including Spelman College President Helene Gayle and longtime OBOS colleague Linda Villarosa, in a program that emphasized the crucial issue of Black maternal health. BWHI's Homecoming festivities will continue in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles in the weeks ahead.



Photos courtesy of Norma Swenson: [Belita Cowan](#), [Norma Swenson](#), [Byllye Avery](#), and [Judy Norsigian](#); [Loretta Ross](#) and Norma Swenson.

[Read more about the BWHI's 40th Anniversary](#)

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