

## Letter to the Editor

### Psychological stress in an urban squatter settlement

Madam, stress in the modern world encompasses a myriad of definitions that are related to tensions of modern life. Such tensions can often translate life threatening diseases as well as to many mental disorders, including depression and psychoses.<sup>1</sup> Psychological stress, common stressors, and modes of uplifts were assessed and compared between genders in the inhabitants of Rehri Goth. The significance of this study lays in the fact that research in Karachi is limited to well resourced centers and subsequently little empirical data is available on the mental health of the residents of squatter settlement.

A community based cross-sectional pilot survey was conducted by learning researchers with limited resources, in

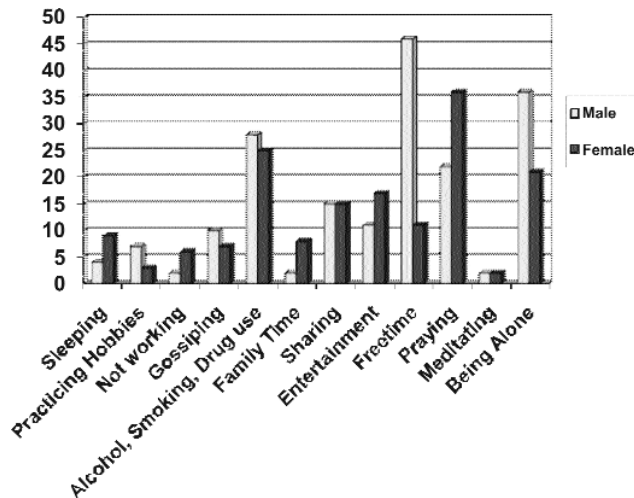


Figure: Distribution of uplifts practiced by the Rehri Community.

May 2008 in an urban squatter Rehri-Goth of Karachi. The 150 residents were conveniently surveyed by a self-reporting questionnaire. Socio-demographic data, the level of stress, common stressors and commonly used modes of uplifts were recorded. Our results demonstrated that females tend to be significantly more stressed in comparison to males (mean stress score of  $4.57 \pm 2.05$  and  $6.05 \pm 2.23$  for males and females

respectively).

Environmental stressors were found to be most frequent; in contrast, a majority of studies illustrate work as the most common stressor in both developed and developing countries.<sup>2</sup> The discrepancy between literature and the findings of this study can be attributed to the lack of research conducted in urban squatter settlements where the main cause of sickness and frustration is the severe lack of necessary environmental facilities.<sup>3</sup> Our results supported by current research on stress coping mechanism suggest the use of drugs as a very common method to alleviate stress<sup>4</sup> (see figure).

Females were found to have a significantly higher level of stress than males ( $p < 0.05$ ). This is due to the severe hardships experienced by women in underdeveloped regions and the strong patriarchal influence on the society.<sup>5</sup> Strong implementation of policies in remote areas of developing countries pertaining to the emancipation of women is required. Due to the detrimental effects of stress, mental health should be recognized as an essential component of the primary health care centre and as such training and treatment options should be made available.

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### References

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4. Shafiq M, Shah Z, Saleem A, Siddiqi MT, Salahuddin FF, et al. Perceptions of Pakistani medical students about drugs and alcohol: a questionnaire-based survey. *Subst Abuse Treat Prev Policy* 2006; 1: 31.
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### Errata

In JPMA May 2008, volume 58, page 258, in the section of Original article, titled 'Vitamin B12 deficiency common in primary hypothyroidism.'

The author's name was cited as Sabeha Wasim. It should be read as "Sabiha Waseem."