

The Patient Majority version 1.4 23 March 2022

Gerrand, Valerie, et al. *The Patient Majority: Mental Health Policy and Services for Women*. Geelong, Victoria, Centre For Applied Social Research, Deakin University With The Assistance Of The Victorian Council Of The Royal Institute Of Public Administration Australia, 1993. ISBN 0730020371

Availability

Scanned copy available here. (*Button as is*)

Hardcopy available at the State Library of Victoria, (SLV) Australia.

Link to SLV Catalogue (*Button to Link to Source*)

http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/f/1cl35st/SLV_VOYAGER833081

Why is this publication significant?

Subjects in the SLV (Australia) catalogue

[Women -- Mental health -- Australia](#); [Mental health policy -- Australia](#); [Women -- Mental health services -- Australia](#); [Sexism in mental health services -- Australia](#)

Statement of Significance (By Sue E. Armstrong)

In the PREFACE page v, Valerie Gerrand wrote: “Obviously the monograph draws extensively on relevant research, available statistical data, reports on service initiatives and policy documents. It is also influenced by my experiences as a practitioner, researcher and manager in the mental health field, **not all of which I remember with pride.** (*My emphasis*) For example, I was one of those who accepted the move to integrate wards in psychiatric hospitals in the late 1960s. This change was largely justified on the grounds that it would improve the social behaviour of the male patients, but was one which exposed the female patients to a much greater risk of sexual harassment and exploitation, let alone the usual difficulties women face in having their needs recognized in mixed sex environments.”

From *Zero Tolerance for Sexual Assault: A safe admission for women*. VMIAC.

“In 1993, Valerie Gerrand published ‘The Patient Majority: Mental Health Policy and Services for Women’. Gerrand focussed her research and recommendations upon the State of Victoria, as the Australian State ‘...at the forefront of policy and service development in the mental health field’ and detailed ‘...the issues which need to be taken into account to ensure that mental health policy is sensitive to the special needs of women.’

Gerrand reviewed Mental Health Policy in Australia and Victoria, and researched a wide range of issues experienced by female consumers, including patterns of psychiatric diagnosis, psychiatric treatment, interaction with clinicians, housing considerations and rehabilitation services.

In specific relation to sexual assault within psychiatric wards, Gerrand recommended that:

‘Tackling the threat and actual experience by women of sexual harassment and abuse when using treatment services should be a high priority, and an imperative under equal opportunity legislation. Government departments with responsibility for public psychiatric services should be taking a lead role in such developments, especially given that their women clients include the most disabled and hence the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Creating hospital environments which are safe for women in-patients may mean physical re-arrangements in integrated wards. Policy which proscribes sexual harassment and abuse explicitly endorsed and well-publicised within each facility, and accompanied by reporting procedures which take account of women’s difficulties in making such complaints. The current Burdekin Inquiry into the Rights of the Mentally Ill could well provide the impetus for changes, with submissions being made on the way women’s rights to protection from sexual harassment and assault are abrogated in psychiatric institutions.’
(Gerrand: 1993).

‘The Patient Majority’ remains a foundational document in the field of gender-sensitive mental health care. Most of the recommendations made by Gerrand two decades ago remain as recommendations and have not been implemented into practice, however, subsequent government literature continually circle the 1993 ‘high priority’ research findings of Gerrand.“

Source: Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council. *Zero Tolerance for Sexual Assault: A safe admission for women*. Brunswick, Victoria, Australia, 2012. Literature search page 7.