

Well-Youth!

Mental Health



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INTRODUCTION

Mental health refers to a person's **emotional, psychological, and social well-being**. It encompasses our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and influences how we cope with stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is a vital component of overall health and contributes to our ability to lead fulfilling lives. Maintaining good mental health is crucial because it affects various aspects of our lives.

It is important to note at this point that psychological processes which accompany our mental health are put in place for the specific reason of making survival easier for the human being. Our emotions, our drives, our instincts, are put in place to **ensure our survival**. Even the ones which might seem unpleasant, uncomfortable, or difficult to endure, are usually there in order to enhance our survival, to warn, to teach, or to provide information.

Sometimes, these processes become **maladaptive**. This means that emotions might become too strong or weak, or even directed at the wrong target, and become overwhelming. Sometimes, our behaviour becomes erratic or self-harmful, our thoughts get confused and might overwhelm us, and our logic and perception of the natural world might become distorted. These changes can happen to all people, and we have accepted them as part of our daily life. However, when these changes are too big, or if they happen for extended periods of time, and they become a serious hindrance to our daily life, then there might be an indication that a **mental disorder** is there. Before arriving to this point, it is important that we take care of our mental health. As we are very cautious with our physical health, we should be equally cautious when we take care of our mental health. Maintaining a good mental health is important for many reasons.

☺ Emotional well-being

Good mental health allows us to experience and manage a range of emotions in a healthy way. It promotes a sense of contentment, happiness, and inner peace.

☺ Physical health

Mental health and physical health are interconnected. Poor mental health can contribute to physical problems like chronic pain, sleep disturbances, weakened immune system, and increased risk of developing certain illnesses. Psychosomatic issues might manifest when our mental health is not at its best.



☺ **Productivity and functioning**

When our mental health is optimal, we are better able to concentrate, think clearly, and perform effectively in our daily activities, whether at work, school, or home.

☺ **Relationships**

Strong mental health enables us to develop and maintain healthy relationships. It enhances our ability to communicate, empathize, and connect with others on a deeper level. When people maintain a good quality of mental health, they can build more and more meaningful connections with people in their daily lives. This network acts as a protective mechanism for future adversity, enhancing resilience and adaptability.

☺ **Coping with stress**

Life is full of challenges, and good mental health equips us with the resilience and coping mechanisms to handle stress, adversity, and change. It helps us bounce back from setbacks and adapt to new situations.



☺ Overall quality of life

Mental health significantly influences our overall well-being and quality of life. It affects our satisfaction with life, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and fulfillment.

☺ Prevention and early intervention

Prioritizing mental health can help prevent the onset of mental health conditions or detect them early. Timely intervention and treatment can lead to better outcomes and recovery.



It is important to note that mental health is a spectrum, and everyone's experiences and needs vary. Taking care of mental health involves self-care practices, seeking support from loved ones, and, if necessary, reaching out to mental health professionals for guidance and treatment.



EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Recognizing early warning signs of decreasing mental health can help individuals take proactive steps to address their well-being. According to mental health professionals, before a mental health disorder can be identified and diagnosed, four themes need to be evaluated. These themes are the **4 d's: Deviance, Distress, Dysfunction, and Danger**.

Deviance	Distress	Dysfunction	Danger
Refers to the amount that the behaviour of a person deviates, or, is different, from the behaviour of what is considered a norm in society. For example, if a person with a normal 9-5 job behaves as if the government or some alien gang is stalking them, there might be an indication of a mental disorder.	Refers to the range and intensity of negative feelings (such as intense, long-lasting sadness) that a person (or a person in their close circle) might feel because of their disorder.	Refers to the degree that a mental health disorder interferes with the normal functioning of a person in the society. For example, if a person is unable to go to work, or enjoy time with a partner due to negative feelings, this is an indication that a mental disorder is present.	Refers to behaviour which might put at risk a person's (self or others') safety, health, or even life.

While the specific signs may vary depending on the person and the particular mental health condition, there are some common indicators to be aware of:

☹️ Changes in mood

Persistent feelings of sadness, irritability, anxiety, hopelessness, or mood swings that seem out of character may be an early sign of declining mental health. It is important to note here that mood swings are normal for all people, so it should be a matter of concern only if they are frequent.

☹️ Social withdrawal

Withdrawing from social activities, isolating oneself, or avoiding interactions with friends, family, or colleagues could indicate a decrease in mental well-being.





☹️ **Changes in sleep patterns**

Significant changes in sleep, such as insomnia or oversleeping, disruptions in sleep routines, or difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, can be a red flag for deteriorating mental health.

☹️ **Loss of interest or pleasure**

Losing interest in activities or hobbies that used to bring joy or a general decrease in motivation may indicate a decline in mental well-being.

☹️ **Changes in appetite or weight**

Noticeable changes in appetite, such as significant weight loss or gain, can be associated with mental health issues, particularly conditions like depression or eating disorders.

☹️ **Fatigue or low energy**

Persistent feelings of fatigue, lack of energy, or difficulty completing daily tasks or responsibilities can be an early warning sign of declining mental health.



☺ **Difficulty concentrating or making decisions**

Problems with concentration, memory, decision-making, or a decline in productivity can be indicators of mental health concerns.

☺ **Physical symptoms**

Unexplained physical complaints like headaches, stomachaches, frequent aches and pains, or worsening of pre-existing medical conditions may be linked to declining mental health.

☺ **Increased irritability or agitation**

Feeling easily agitated, restless, or having a shorter temper than usual can be indicative of underlying mental health issues.

☺ **Thoughts of self-harm or suicide**

Persistent thoughts of self-harm, suicide, or feelings of hopelessness require immediate attention and support. If you or someone you know is experiencing these thoughts, seek help from a mental health professional or a helpline immediately.



Remember that everyone's experiences are unique, and these signs may not apply to everyone or every situation. However, if you notice on yourself, or on one of your loved ones several of these signs lasting for an extended period and interfering with daily life, it's essential to reach out for professional help or support from a trusted person in your life.

Mental health professionals such as psychologists are trained to evaluate and provide appropriate guidance and treatment.



SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

There are numerous mental health issues that can affect individuals, each with its specific characteristics, symptoms, and treatment approaches. It is difficult to identify a mental disorder, but here we can use the terminology used in the DSM-5, the manual for mental health practitioners:

“A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above.”

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20).

Of course, the above definition creates some ambiguity, in terms such as “clinically significant disturbance”. For example, what is the degree of disturbance that can be considered significant? However, this definition puts in the foundations in order to start categorizing mental health disorders in order to consequently address them. Here are some common mental health issues:

☺ Depressive disorders

Depressive disorders include major depression and dysthymia (or persistent depressive disorder). Depression is characterized mainly by protracted sadness, frequent self-blame, a sense of being worthless, and anhedonia (absence of pleasure). Other common symptoms include decreased or increased sleep, decreased or increased appetite, and either slowed or agitated motor symptoms. Slowed motor symptoms include slowed speech and slowed body movements. Agitated symptoms, which are less common, include repetitive, aimless movements such as hand gesturing and increased pacing. To arrive to a diagnosis of a depressive disorder,



the symptoms must be either very severe or very prolonged and not tied just to a negative life experience, though they may be triggered or worsened by such an experience.

☺ **Anxiety disorders**

Anxiety disorders encompass a range of conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias. These disorders involve excessive and persistent worry, fear, and anxiety that can interfere with daily life. As mentioned earlier, stress and anxiety are functions which usually serve survival, but when they appear in excessive frequency and intensity, they are considered dysfunctional to the daily life of a person.

☺ **Bipolar disorder**

Bipolar disorder involves extreme mood swings, including episodes of mania (elevated mood, increased energy) and depression. People with bipolar disorder may experience periods of increased creativity, impulsive behaviour, and powerful emotions during their manic phase. Bipolar I disorder is the classic category, characterized by at least one manic episode and at least one depressive episode in a period of time. Bipolar II disorder is similar to bipolar I disorder except that its high phase is less extreme and is characterised as hypomania rather than mania.

☺ **Schizophrenia**

Schizophrenia is a chronic and severe mental disorder characterized by distorted thoughts, hallucinations, delusions, disorganized speech and behavior, and reduced emotional expression and motivation. Schizophrenia is a very serious, debilitating disorder that is found in roughly 0.7 percent of people at some time in their lives. The person who suffers from schizophrenia has a serious decline in their ability to work, to connect with other people, and to take care of themselves. The person must also show, for at least 1 month, two or more of the following five categories of symptoms: disorganized thought and speech, delusions, hallucinations, greatly disorganized or catatonic behavior, and negative symptoms. These symptoms are usually not present at all times; the person who suffers from schizophrenia typically goes through episodes of activity of the disorder, which last for weeks or months, and which are separated by periods of relative normal behaviour.





☹️ **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

PTSD can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, avoidance of triggers, emotional numbness, and hyperarousal.

☹️ **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

OCD involves recurring intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions) performed to alleviate anxiety. Common obsessions include fears of contamination, symmetry, or intrusive thoughts, while compulsions involve rituals or repetitive actions.

☹️ **Eating disorders**

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder are characterized by problematic eating behaviors and distorted body image. They can have severe physical and psychological consequences.



☺ **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties with attention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. It often begins in childhood but can persist into adulthood.

☺ **Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)**

BPD is a condition characterized by intense mood swings, unstable self-image, turbulent relationships, impulsive behaviors, and a fear of abandonment.

☺ **Substance use disorders**

Substance use disorders involve the excessive and problematic use of substances, such as alcohol, drugs, or medications, leading to impaired functioning and negative consequences on physical and mental health.



IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION

Preventing mental health issues is crucial for several reasons:

☺ **Personal well-being**

As mentioned earlier, mental health problems can significantly impact an individual's overall well-being and quality of life. Prevention efforts aim to promote positive mental health and reduce the risk of developing mental health conditions, allowing individuals to lead happier, more fulfilling lives.

☺ **Reduced suffering**

Mental health issues can cause significant distress and suffering for individuals experiencing them and their loved ones. Preventing these conditions reduces the burden of suffering and promotes emotional well-being.

☺ **Improved physical health**

Mental health and physical health are interconnected. Certain mental health conditions, when left untreated, can contribute to physical health problems. Preventing mental health issues can help maintain or improve overall physical well-being.



☺ **Enhanced productivity**

Mental health problems can significantly impact an individual's ability to function effectively in various domains, including work, education, and relationships. Prevention efforts help individuals maintain optimal mental health, promoting productivity, performance, and engagement.

☺ **Social and interpersonal benefits**

Mental health issues can strain relationships and social interactions. By preventing mental health conditions, individuals are more likely to develop and maintain healthy relationships, have stronger social support networks, and experience greater social connectedness.

☺ **Reduced healthcare costs**

Mental health issues have substantial economic implications due to healthcare utilization, productivity losses, and other associated costs. Preventing mental health problems can help reduce the burden on healthcare systems and minimize healthcare costs.



☺ Early intervention

Prevention efforts also involve early identification and intervention for individuals at risk of developing mental health conditions. Early intervention can lead to better treatment outcomes, improved prognosis, and reduced long-term impact of mental health issues.

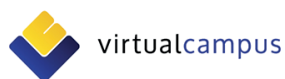
☺ Breaking the stigma

Focusing on prevention helps break down the stigma surrounding mental health. By promoting awareness, education, and proactive steps towards maintaining mental well-being, we can create a culture that values mental health and encourages open dialogue.

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