Promotion and protection of mental health and human rights: a challenge for sustainable development

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Mental health, sustainable development and the social determinants of health

1. What influences mental health and well-being (for good or for bad)?

2. Who might be particularly exposed or vulnerable to mental health problems?

3. What is the link between mental health and sustainable development?

4. What are key strategies for promoting and protecting mental health and well-being in the context of sustainable development?
What influences mental health and well-being?

- **Individual attributes:**
  - Genetic & biological characteristics
  - Emotional intelligence
  - Social intelligence

- **Social & economic circumstances:**
  - Socio-economic status of household
  - Living / educational / working conditions and opportunities

- **Environmental factors:**
  - Access to basic amenities / services
  - Cultural beliefs, attitudes & practices
  - Social and economic policies

*Source: WHO (2012)  *Risks to mental health*
## Risks to mental health over the life course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Home / family</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Media / information</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Community / home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>Low socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Adverse learning environment</td>
<td>Adverse media influences</td>
<td>Discrimination / social inequalities</td>
<td>Social exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>Poor housing / living conditions</td>
<td>Parental mental illness</td>
<td>Neighbourhood violence / crime</td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>Poor civic amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Substance use in pregnancy</td>
<td>Malnutrition</td>
<td>Family violence or conflict</td>
<td>Psychoactive substance use</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td>Insecure attachment</td>
<td>Poor nutrition</td>
<td>Trauma or abuse</td>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>Debt / poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:**
WHO (2012)

**Risks to mental health**
Determinants can risk or protect a person's mental health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of determinant</th>
<th>Risk factors</th>
<th>Protective factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual attributes</strong></td>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
<td>↔ Self-esteem, confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional immaturity</td>
<td>↔ Ability to manage stress &amp; adversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulties in communicating</td>
<td>↔ Communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical illness, substance use</td>
<td>↔ Physical health, fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social circumstances</strong></td>
<td>Loneliness, bereavement</td>
<td>↔ Social support of family &amp; friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neglect, family conflict</td>
<td>↔ Good parenting / family interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure to violence/abuse</td>
<td>↔ Physical security and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low income and poverty</td>
<td>↔ Economic security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulties or failure at school</td>
<td>↔ Scholastic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work stress, unemployment</td>
<td>↔ Satisfaction and success at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental factors</strong></td>
<td>Poor access to basic services</td>
<td>↔ Equality of access to basic services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Injustice and discrimination</td>
<td>↔ Social justice, tolerance, integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social and gender inequalities</td>
<td>↔ Social and gender equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure to war or disaster</td>
<td>↔ Physical security and safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for mental health promotion & protection over the life course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic direction</th>
<th>Key interventions / target groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Developing and protecting individual attributes          | - **Mothers and infants**: Enable early attachment; provide appropriate ante-natal and post-natal care  
- **Children and adolescents**: Ensure sufficient nutrition and stimulation  
- **Older adults**: Healthy ageing policies and community activities  
- **All age groups**: Regular physical activity / healthy diet; restrict tobacco, alcohol and other drug use |
| Supporting households and communities                    | - **Families with children and adolescents**: Ensure secure living conditions; target prevention on those with behavioural disorders and those with a mentally ill parent  
- **Workers / employees**: Promote safe /supportive working conditions (including stress management)  
- **Low-income households**: Ensure basic living conditions; provide social and financial protection  
- **Communities**: Neighbourhood safety; enhance civic assets / networks; restrict alcohol /tobacco use |
| Supporting vulnerable groups in society                  | - **Women**: Promote women’s rights and freedoms; enact gender-equity policies  
- **Refugees and migrants**: Provide early intervention to those exposed to trauma / caught up in conflicts  
- **Social inclusion and anti-discrimination**: Develop and implement appropriate laws / policies  
- **Media**: Conduct awareness raising campaigns and foster responsible reporting in the media |

WHO European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020

Overarching aims

• Improve the mental well-being of the population and reduce the burden of mental disorders, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, exposure to determinants and risk behaviours.

• Respect the rights of people with mental health problems and offer equitable opportunities to attain the highest quality of life, addressing stigma and discrimination.

• Establish accessible, safe and effective services that meet people’s mental, physical and social needs and the expectations of people with mental health problems and their families.
WHO’s health policy framework: Health 2020

**Strategic objectives**

- Improve health for all and reducing health inequalities
- Improving leadership and participatory governance for health

**Priority areas**

- Invest in health through a life-course approach
- Tackle major disease burdens, including NCDs
- Strengthen people-centred health systems
- Create supportive environments and resilient communities
THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life on Land
16. Peace and Justice, Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals
SDGs: what are they about and what’s different?

- Global and universally applicable
- All key sectors of government and development
- Interlinked and interdependent, whole-of-government working
- Focus on equity and inclusion: “leaving no one behind”
Mental health and substance abuse ... are **in** the SDGs

- **Target 3.4** By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and **promote mental health and well-being**

- **Target 3.5** Strengthen the **prevention and treatment of substance abuse**, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

- **Target 3.8** **Achieve universal health coverage**, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all
But what about the social determinants of mental health?
Social determinants of mental health: Increasing international recognition

- WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2010)
- WHO/Gulbenkian Report on Social Determinants of Mental Health (2014)
- Lancet Commission on mental health and sustainable development (2018)
1. Demographic domain

**Age**

- Most mental disorders start early in life
- Early intervention essential
- Key risk periods:
  - Pregnancy
  - Early childhood
  - Adolescence
  - Old age

**Gender**

- **Females**: increased risk for depression, anxiety, eating disorders
- **Males**: increased risk for substance abuse, childhood behavioural & developmental disorders, and suicide
2. Economic domain

- Income & expenditure
- Financial strain & debt
- Food security
- Employment
- Housing
- Income inequality
- Macroeconomic trends, e.g. recession
Cycle of poverty and mental illness

**Poverty**
- Economic deprivation
- Indebtedness
- Low education
- Unemployment
- Lack of amenities
- Poor housing
- Overcrowding

**Social causation:**
- Social exclusion
- High stressors
- Reduced access to social capital/safety net
- Malnutrition
- Obstetric risks
- Violence and trauma

**Social drift:**
- Increased health expenditure
- Loss of employment
- Reduced Productivity
- Stigma

**Mental ill-health**
- Higher prevalence
- Poor/lack of care
- More severe course
Breaking the cycle of poverty and mental illness: the evidence so far...

3. Neighbourhood domain

- Constellations of area-level environmental risk factors:
  \((\text{neighbourhood level deprivation; relatively poor access to recreational facilities and service availability})\)

- Neighbourhood socioeconomic deprivation associated with psychosis, depression and other common mental disorders (incl. young people), worse cognitive function in older adults

- **In short**: more life stressors, & fewer resources with which to cope
4. Environmental events

- Disasters and hazards:
  - PTSD, depression and anxiety
  - 3-4 times higher prevalence

- War and conflict:
  - Behavioural & emotional symptoms, sleep problems and psychosomatic symptoms common among exposed children
  - Meta-analysis of prevalence of child PTSD in conflict: 47%
5. Social domain

• Examples:
  – Education
  – Family and peer relationships
  – Social capital
  – Social networks
  – Cultural identity

• Low education: increased risk for dementia, common mental disorders, chronic stress

• Social capital and social support: protection against common mental disorders
The SDG challenge

• How do we (better) demonstrate the mental health benefits of attaining “upstream” SDGs (e.g. relating to poverty)?

• Can we (better) show that providing quality mental health care yields social, economic and environmental benefits (e.g. reduced inequality, social exclusion, lost production)?

• In other words, can or should mental health be seen both as a means to and an end of (sustainable) development?
Vulnerabilities, mental health & development outcomes
(Source: WHO, 2010)

Mental Health Conditions
- Increased Vulnerability (Criteria)
  - Stigma and discrimination
  - Violence and abuse
  - Restrictions in exercising civil and political rights
  - Exclusion from participating fully in society
  - Reduced access to health and social services
  - Reduced access to emergency relief services
  - Lack of educational opportunities
  - Exclusion from income generation and employment opportunities
  - Increased disability and premature death

Reduced Development
- Poverty for affected individuals and families
- Inequality between different population groups
- Reduced social capital
- Hindered economic development at societal level

Worsened Mental Health
- Sadness, tiredness
- Hopelessness and helplessness
- Fear about the future
- Social withdrawal and interpersonal problems
- Sleep and eating problems
- Difficulty concentrating and problem solving