WHO

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

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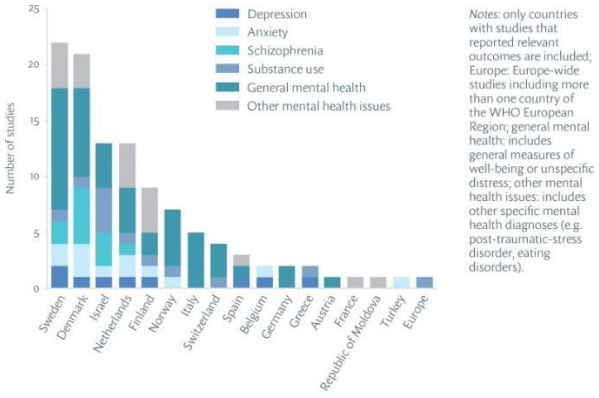
Introduction

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy life choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. The WHO constitution states: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This definition highlights that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities, it is something that has to exist within a person. It is also important to note that sadly in today's society mental health is often treated as vastly different from physical health, when in reality not only are they equally important and worthy of pursuit, but there is also a strong link between the two.

Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to their community.

As the World Health Organization highlights: "Mental health is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, make a living, and lead a productive and happy life. On this basis, the promotion, protection, and restoration of mental health can be regarded as a vital concern of individuals, communities, and societies throughout the world."



It is a concerning fact that the WHO has found that one in four people around the world will be directly affected by mental health issues sometime during their lives. This just further highlights the importance of dealing with mental health on a larger scale, especially considering that many people will also be affected indirectly.

Definition of Key Terms

Bipolar disorder: bipolar disorder, formerly called manic depression, is a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). Currently there is no known treatment, but medications can help alleviate the symptoms.

Schizophrenia: Schizophrenia is an umbrella term for numerous serious mental illnesses that affect how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. People with schizophrenia may seem like they have lost touch with reality, which causes significant distress for the individual, their family members, and friends. It is crucial to keep in mind that schizophrenics do not have several personalities, as opposed to the common misconception that schizophrenia is the equivalent of Multiple Personality Disorder

Suicidal ideation: Even though there is no exact agreed-upon definition, suicidal ideation could be defined a broad term used to describe a range of contemplations, wishes, and preoccupations with death and suicide. It often includes intrusive thoughts and does not always lead to a suicide attempt or completed suicide.

DSM-5: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is a book used in the United States as well as some other countries by professionals to classify mental disorders and efficiently diagnose their clients. Currently the fifth edition is in use, thus the "-5."

IDC: International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, currently on its 10th edition is an alternative to the DSM-5. It has existed for a longer time than the DSM-5, for more than a century, and in 1948, the year of the foundation of the World Health Organization it became WHO's responsibility.

General Overview

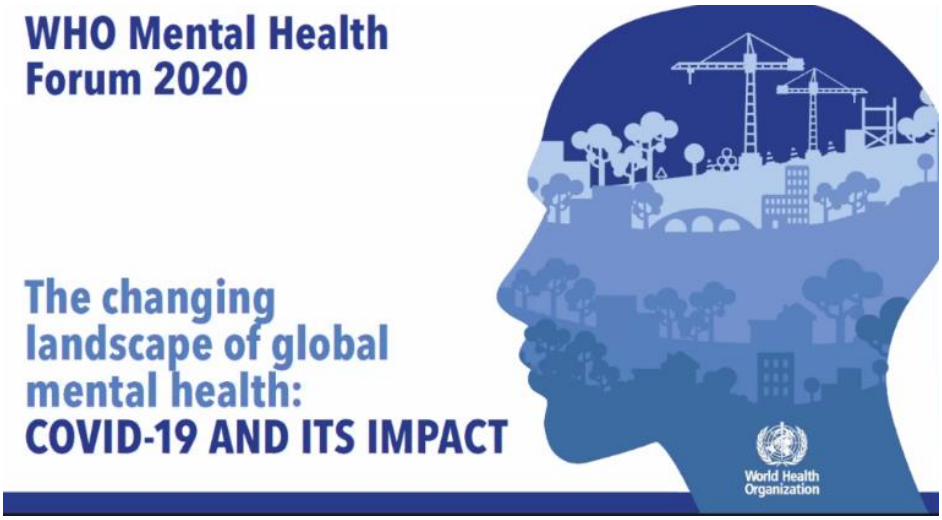
The mental well-being of a person is determined by several factors, whether that be social, psychological, or biological. According to WHO "violence and persistent socio-economic pressures are recognized risks to mental health. The clearest evidence is associated with sexual violence." This might come as no surprise to anyone, but it also calls our attention to the fact that when we aim to resolve larger-scale mental health crises there are often a multitude of factors that we must consider and try to remedy to reach the desired outcome. It is also true, however, that an organisation such as WHO only has the power to act within its own bounds, in other words

to deal with strictly health-related issues and it cannot be expected to address for example the socio-economic background of a certain phenomenon. Mental health crises are one of the many issues that must be resolved by many organisations and sectors together.

Some other underlying reasons for poor mental health might be rapid social change, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, unhealthy lifestyle, physical illness, and human rights violations.

There are specific psychological and personality factors that make people vulnerable to mental health problems. Biological risks include genetic factors, for instance the tendency for addiction or depression can run in a family, but that does not mean that all offspring in the family will necessarily exhibit the symptoms. Gene expression depends on many factors other than who the ancestors of a certain individual are.

There are certain adverse, emergency-like life situations such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, pandemics such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which the WHO Mental Health Forum specifically addressed in 2020. Naturally, most people who are affected by these kinds of situations will experience some kind of psychological distress, with one in five – according to other statistics one in four - likely to have a mental disorder such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. PTSS, formerly known as PTSD, is also common amongst the survivors or natural disasters, wars, or other traumatic events. People of advanced age and marginalised groups or communities are at an especially high risk of the above-mentioned conditions. Stressful events and common in emergencies that these people might experience include loss, as well as poverty, discrimination, overcrowding, and the scarcity of food can increase the risk of the those affected developing mental health conditions. People who already suffer from mental health conditions unsurprisingly tend to respond more negatively to such stress.



Major Parties Involved

American Psychological Association: It is the largest scientific and professional organization of psychologists in the United States, with over 133,000 members. One of their main initiatives is to establish a good relationship with the Police and through that they are aiming to reduce police brutality and help police officers to effectively handle encounters with individuals with mental health issues.

British Psychological Society: The British equivalent of the American Psychological Association. It is important to note here that a similar body in numerous countries.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the national public health agency of the United States. It is a United States federal agency, under the Department of Health and Human Services, and is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. The agency's main goal is the protection of public health, safety and also mental health through the control and prevention of disease, injury, and disability in the US and worldwide.

The People's Republic of China: China is one of the countries where mental health issues affect a large portion of the population, this number can be as high as 17.5%, according to the Journal of General Psychiatry.

The United States of America: Mental health issues are also very common in the USA. The situation is worsened by the fact that American society highly encourages competition. There is also a lot of stigma around the subject in the country, especially among older generation. Millennials seem to think differently about the topic and promote self-care and mental health more. Several American celebrities are also using their platforms to help in the resolution of this issue.

Brazil: The main problem of mental health care in Brazil is that there in an insufficient number of professionals in the country, meaning that many people are unable to receive necessary treatment.

India: According to the World Economic Forum: "India is currently home to a population of over one billion citizens. A study conducted by the Word Health Organization in 2015 shows that one in five Indians may suffer from depression in their lifetime, equivalent to 200 million people. Due to the stigma associated with mental illness, a lack of awareness, and limited access to professional help, only 10-12% of these sufferers will seek help."

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

WHO aims to support governments in the strengthening and the promotion of mental health by working on disseminating evaluated evidence and integrating effective strategies into their health care systems.

In 2013, the World Health Assembly approved a "Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan for 2013-2020". The Plan details and signifies a commitment to specific actions aiming to remedy mental health crises.

The Action Plan's agenda is to improve mental health by promoting mental well-being, providing care and enhancing recovery. It also aspires to prevent mental disorders and reduce the mortality, morbidity and disability of people affected by mental health issues while also being an advocate for human rights.

Its key objectives are:

- strengthening effective leadership and governance for mental health
- providing comprehensive and responsive mental and social care services in community-based settings
- implementing strategies for the promotion of mental health and prevention of mental disorders
- improving information systems, evidence, and research for mental health.

For the Action Plan to be realised joint action will be required - as mentioned before - by governments, international partners, and the World Health Organisation itself. WHO intends to work together with all partners, including civil society, to bring about the plan which also requires Ministries of Health to take a leadership role. When considering large-scale crises it is always crucial to consider societal, linguistic and cultural differences and go about improving the situation accordingly. This issue is no different, so each government will need to shape the Action Plan to its specific national circumstances.

In addition, the American Congress passed legislation in 2020 to establish a speciality behavioural health crisis line called 988. The line is intended to go live in July 2022 and will be implemented at both state and local levels. 988 aims to build our existing suicide prevention lifelines that have been operational in some parts of America to provide 24/7 call response and connection to mental health services. In many places, fundamental aspects of completion will be coordination with 911 as well as other call lines used for crisis response and ensuring appropriate service dispatch.

Ensuring adequate financing both for the initial call response and connecting people to mental health services will be a vital determinant of the availability and effectiveness of crisis response services. Federal law provided modest start-up money of about $35 million and allowed states to finance call centre operations and services through a fee on cell carriers. The Pew Charitable Trusts reports that as of October 12, four states have enacted legislation that either authorises or imposes a surcharge on telecommunication firms to support 988. State and local governments can also finance 988 using their own funding; the State of California, for example, has designated $20 million in state general funds to support the crisis line. In December, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) announced to award $282 million in grants which would be distributed to crisis centres and other entities to support 988 operations, infrastructure, and staffing.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

- ✓ Supporting children and ensuring a nurturing environment for them: countless mental health issues stem from early childhood, so it is crucial to create a nurturing, positive environment for them. It is also important to promote mental health care for children as well thus lessening the stigma and teaching younger generations the importance of this type of self-care.
- ✓ social support for elderly populations: when we think about promotion of mental health the teen- and middle-aged population comes to mind first. It is also important, however, to have initiatives in all countries that support the elderly in all ways, including mental health care.
- ✓ programmes targeted at vulnerable people: these people can include marginalised communities as well as victims of large-scale natural disasters, armed conflicts, political attacks, etc.

- ✓ education and awareness-raising: educating the population of all countries and raising awareness should always be one of the first steps when it comes to solving a global issue. If people are more aware about how common mental health issues are, they may be more likely to ask for help when faced with such a situation, and in this case they will have a better knowledge about where to turn exactly as well. It is also important to incorporate this topic into curricula as many such problems arise around school age, so it is important for students to recognise signs in each other and themselves, which will lead to an earlier intervention and better results. Education about the issue would also decrease the surrounding stigma.
- ✓ mental health interventions at work: these could be stress prevention programs, extra paid leave for dealing with mental health problems, psychologists for more workplaces, etc. It is crucial for employers to recognise that the mental well-being of their employees is also in their best interest, as it will increase job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity.
- ✓ community development programmes (e.g. integrated rural development): we must keep in mind that mental health or mental illness is not a phenomenon limited strictly to individuals, thus it might be beneficial to approach the solution from a community point of view.
- ✓ "Promotion of the rights, opportunities, and care of individuals with mental disorders." (WHO)

Bibliography/Some useful links:

Some basics about mental health:

https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm

About the difference between DSM-5 and IDC:

https://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/10/icd-dsm

Mental health around the world:

https://synergyhealthprograms.com/a-look-at-mental-health-around-the-world/

Possible responses to mental health crises:

https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/07/emergency-responses

https://www.who.int/activities/ensuring-a-coordinated-and-effective-mental-health-response-in-emergencies

https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2022/02/16/data-collection-and-analysis-are-key-to-improving-emergency-responses-to-behavioral-health-crises