Implications for Policy to Advance Mental Health & Wellbeing: What does Current Research tell us?

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Evidence-based Mental Health Practice

• Empirical evidence – data or information that is
  • Objectively observable and
  • Quantifiable in order to support
• Mental Health Services
• Program evaluation and
• Policy formulation

Evidence-based Mental Health Practice

Elements of Mental Health Policies

• Basic research findings in the relevant mental health issues
• Scientifically informed policy options
• Cost-effective consideration
• Social cultural value consideration
WHO Definition of Mental Health

• World Health Organization
• defines health as:
• ... a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence
• of disease or infirmity (WHO, 2001b, p.1).

Central Ideas of the New Mental Health Definition

Three ideas central to the improvement of health follow from this definition: mental health is
• an integral part of health;
• mental health is more than the absence of mental illness, and
• mental health is intimately connected with physical health and behavior.

Social Cultural Differences in the Expression of Mental Health

Differences in values across countries, cultures, classes and genders can appear too great to allow a consensus on a definition (WHO, 2001c).

However, just as age or wealth each have many different expressions across the world and yet have
• a core common-sense universal meaning.

So too can mental health be understood without restricting its interpretation across cultures.

Core Definition of Mental Health

WHO
has recently proposed that mental health is:
• ... a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities,
• can cope with the normal stresses of life,
• can work productively and fruitfully, and is
• able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2001d, p.1).

In this positive sense, mental health is the foundation for well-being and effective functioning for an individual and for a community.
Though the investigation of mental health has a very long history but only recently the researchers have reached a conceptual agreement as aforementioned that a comprehensive definition should incorporate both the:

- Positive aspect of mental health or mental wellbeing and
- Negative aspect of mental health or mental illness.

The conceptual separation of mental wellbeing from mental illness has been supported by empirical research studies in normal populations:

- Keyes & Ryff (2005) found that in a population level survey in the United States, psychological wellbeing, and mental illness symptoms were lowly correlated with each other suggesting that they represent two separate psychological processes.

Likewise Chang and colleagues (2012) also found that mental wellbeing and mental illness as assessed by the General Health Questionnaire should best be construed as two separate construct:

- THRIVE: Asian Mental Wellbeing Scale
- MD: Anxiety and Depression measured by GHQ
Policy and Practice Implications

- Mental illness and mental wellbeing should be treated and managed differently.
- Promoting mental wellbeing does not directly prevent mental illness, and
- Removal of mental illness symptoms does not necessarily improve mental wellbeing.

Mental Wellbeing

- Happiness
- Life satisfaction
- Positive affects
- Optimism
- Hope
- Positive attribution style

- Thriving/flourishing
- Self-actualization
- Positive functioning
- Resilience
- Intelligence

Hedonism

- Positive experiences:
- Positive cognition: Life satisfaction, “looking at the bright side of the life!” “Life is beautiful!”
- Positive emotions: happiness, elation, joy, peace of mind, feeling spiritual / transcendental etc.

Eudemonia

- Being the best as one can be.
- Self-actualization
- Pro-growth and development
- Pro-achievement/competence
- Positive functioning
- Effective coping with life’s challenges
- Resilience
- Intelligence
Mental Well-being in the Context of Culture

- Culture provides “meaning of life”, what is good and beautiful.
- Culture affords challenges and shapes effective coping responses in response to the challenges.
- Culture provides expressions of happiness and beliefs and practice of what is positive functioning.
- Though the core concept of mental wellbeing is universal its expressions in different cultures might differ from one culture to another.

Dimensions of Mental Wellbeing East and West

- Modern Asian Mental Wellbeing
  - Asian Self-esteem
  - Accepting and cultivating the self
  - Emotional intelligence
  - Social intelligence
  - Resilience
  - Cognitive efficacy

- American Mental Wellbeing
  - Self-acceptance
  - Positive relations with others
  - Autonomy
  - Environmental mastery
  - Purpose in life
  - Personal growth

Wellbeing and Brain Sciences

- It was found that positive and negative affects follow different neural pathways

- Executive functions found to be underlying self-control and management of emotional and social behaviors are found to be within the frontal lobe.

Positive & Negative Affects

Frontal Lobe and Executive Functions
Recent literature found that the psychological processes underlying mental wellbeing are executive functions—functions for self-control and regulation and positive and negative emotions are in the brain.

Positive and negative emotions are learned responses.

Positive and negative emotions follow different neural pathways in the brain.

The mind or executive functions of the brain is not fully developed.

The functions of controlling and regulating rapidly develop within the early years and within the social interactional network of the family, caretakers, peers and others who come into social interaction with the child.
Practice Implications

• Therefore, train the brain for appropriate recognition of emotions and for
• Appropriate responses to the social signals are essential in promoting
• Social and emotional intelligence
• Which are core elements of
• Mental Wellbeing

Policy Implications

• Promoting mental wellbeing can be achieved by providing programs which intend to provide
• environment in which the child is accepted and with appropriate social interaction with the parents/caretakers

Mental Wellbeing and Physical Health

• Recent literature has found that mental wellbeing is intimately related to physical wellbeing.
• Those with high mental wellbeing experience less stress and can cope better with life’s challenges, therefore are protected from stress related physical problems.

Mental Wellbeing and Economic Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing and economic development has been associated in the field of macro-economics.
This association has been fraught with conceptual confusions as to
• what exactly is mental wellbeing and
• other philosophical and political differences in terms of how wealth should be defined
• Is happiness wealth?
• Is achievement wealth?
• However, research at the individual level did indicate that given the same level of competence and other relevant conditions when one enjoys better mental wellbeing one can better actualize one’s potential and achieve more while experience more happiness.

• In this connection, perhaps promoting better mental wellbeing in its citizenry can help the country reach a higher level of civilization be it in material wellbeing or culture and arts and or spiritual wellbeing.

• Policies that provide the environment for its citizenry to develop and maintain mental wellbeing certainly is a step toward the right direction.

Thank You