UNIT 2  POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

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2.0  INTRODUCTION

When we talk about the term mental health, various psychological disorders come to our mind. However, mental health is more than these psychological disorders. Thus it is important that we also discuss about positive mental health. Positive mental health in simple terms, can be described as a state of wellbeing, indicating overall positive psychological status, realization of our potentialities, adequate management of stress and being consistent and productive. The wellbeing has to be at various levels including psychological, spiritual, social, physical and so on.

In the previous unit we discussed about the promotion of mental health. In the present unit we will focus on the concept of positive mental health. We will also discuss various indicators of positive mental health, its need and how positive mental health can be promoted.

2.1  OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

• explain the concept of positive mental health;
• discuss the indicators of mental health;
• describe the scales used to measure positive mental health; and
• explain how positive mental health can be promoted at the community and individual level.

2.2  POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

In the book “Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health” by Marie Jahoda, which was published in 1958, the writer gives us a glimpse about the concept of positive mental health. In one of the Chapters of this book, the author has discussed
six major categories of mental health in general and positive mental health in particular. These are as follows:

a) Attitude of an individual towards the self as criteria for mental health. How one perceives oneself is of importance while determining higher or lower degrees of health. Mentally healthy attitude towards self is usually described by terms like self-acceptance, self-confidence or self-reliance.

b) Individual’s style and degree of growth, development and self-actualization as criteria for mental health. According to this and individual’s style and degree of growth, or self-actualization determines his mental health status and this criteria is concerned with what a person does over a period of time.

c) Integration as a criterion for mental health. It is generally believed to be integration of personality. This criteria emphasizes on a central synthesizing psychological function wherein even some of the features mentioned in the above two criteria may be integrated together. It refers to the relatedness of all processes and attributes in an individual.

d) Autonomy as a criterion for mental health. According to this, it is an individual’s degree of independence from social influences which determines his mental health.

e) Perception of reality as a criterion for mental health. This aspect dwells on how one perceives reality, that is to say how an individual perceives the world around him and a person is called mentally healthy when whatever the person sees around him is actually there.

f) Environmental mastery as a criterion for mental health. It involves a person’s reality orientation and his efforts at mastering the environment. It deals with:

i) Ability to love

ii) Adequacy in love, work and play

iii) Adequacy in interpersonal relationship

iv) Efficiency in meeting situational requirement

v) Capacity for adaptation and adjustment

vi) Efficiency in problem solving.

Jahoda’s concept was, however, not free from criticism. It was supposed to be comprising of values considered to be important by North Americans only (HB Murphy, 1978). Though it did give us a concept of positive mental health, over the years, lot of changes to this has evolved.

Leighton and Murphy (1987) based their concept on personality types and coping strategies used. They hypothesized that well people have different coping strategies.

Positive mental health has also been conceptualized as a subjective sense of well being and even scales to measure positive and negative aspects of psychological well being has been devised by Bradburn (1969).

Antonovosky (1979) proposed the so called ‘salutogenic’ approach which focused on coping skills used. Others like Scheier and Carver (1995), have added on to
this and have found better coping mechanisms in optimists and that optimism itself is the dominant cognition of the mentally healthy. In fact, numerous researchers have studied healthy mechanism of defense and coping, and, resilience as a protective has also been conceptualized to be a part of positive mental health.

Then, there is also a psychoanalytical concept of mental health which focuses on an individual’s internal energy for realization in emotional, intellectual and sexual domain.

The Public Health Agency of Canada delineates five components which seek to operationalize positive mental health. These are:

a) Ability to enjoy life
b) Dealing with life’s challenge
c) Emotional well being
d) Spiritual well being
e) Social connections and respect for culture, equity, social justice and personal dignity.

WHO (2004) conceptualizes positive mental health as a positive emotion or affect such as subjective sense of well being and a feeling of happiness, a personality trait encompassing concepts of self-esteem and sense of control, and resilience in the face of adversity and the capacity to cope with various stressors in life. Further, the term “mental health” as defined by WHO also encompasses certain aspects of positive mental health like the state of well-being, individual abilities, coping skills, productivity and contribution to the society. In fact ‘mental well being’ and ‘positive psychology’ are terms often used while describing positive mental health. Positive mental health is usually conceptualized as encompassing aspects of emotional, psychological, social, physical and spiritual well-being. At least two dimensions of positive mental health have been identified (Barry MM, 2009) and these are:

a) The hedonic component –refers to subjective well-being and satisfaction.
b) The eudaimonic component- comprising of positive functioning, engagement, fulfillment and social well-being.

This is an overview regarding the concept of positive mental health. Further on, in this unit, the indicators of positive mental health and its promotion at the individual and community level will be discussed.

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2) Explain the two dimensions of positive mental health as stated Barry (2009).

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2.3 INDICATORS AND MEASUREMENT OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

As we have understood the meaning of positive mental health, we will now discuss about the indicators and measurement of positive mental health.

**Indicators of positive mental health**

Indicators should be relevant to the context, stable over a period of time, easy to comprehend, be sensitive to changes and so on. Some of the important desirable properties that indicators should have are (Moor, 1995):

a) Community relevance and be easily and readily understood by the public

b) Relevance to the aims of the activities

c) Stable meaning over time

d) To be sensitive to changes over time

e) Anticipate the future and provide base-line data for subsequent trends

f) Provide complete coverage of the population or event being monitored

g) Assessment of dispersion across given measures of well-being

h) Measurement of progress in meeting the goals at the local state as well as national levels

i) Provide a measure of variability between religions and nations

j) Be available for relevant sub-groups.

**Macro-level indicators of positive mental health:** These are those indicators which encompass the entire spectrum of health and include positive mental health as well. The UN Development Programme (2002) have delineated eight goals in its list of “Millennium Development Goals” and these goals have a set of eighteen targets with a total subset of 48 indicators which may be considered as macro-level indicators. Some of these include poverty gap ratio, employment to population ratio, literacy rate, share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, infant mortality rate, women receiving antenatal care, incidence and death rates associated with malaria, proportion of total water used, market access, debt sustainability and so on. In addition the parameters used to measure Human Development Index (life expectancy at birth; adult literacy rate; combined gross primary secondary and tertiary enrolment ratio; gross domestic product
Future Direction

Future Direction (per capita) is a measure of achievement of a country and are examples of macro-level national indicators. In fact, characterizing populations by levels of income, availability and access to social benefits, and measure of unemployment are all measures of the social and economic macro-environment and important determinants of mental health.

**Individual indicators of positive mental health:** While the desirable properties indicate several features required for selecting an indicator, in the context of positive mental health, four indicators have been described by a report of WHO (Herrman, 2005). These are:

a) **Sense of Coherence:** Antonovsky (1987) defined “sense of coherence” as, “a global orientation that express the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement.

b) **Self-esteem:** It refers to a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards life (Rosenberg, 1965).

c) **Sense of control:** At times this is also referred to as “mastery” or “personal mastery” (Pearlin et al., 1981) and perceived control or, sense of control, over life in general and work in particular shows considerable association with health and well being (Karasek et al., 1981; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Marmot & Smith, 1991; Schnall, Landsbergis & Baker, 1994).

d) **Optimism:** A habitual tendency or a present disposition to take the most hopeful view of future events, and to expect a favorable outcome even when unfavorable outcomes are possible (http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/optimism). Individuals with optimistic dispositions are more likely to have stable, problem focused coping strategies (Carver et al., 1993).

In addition to these four indicators others also exist which are more or less similar to these and includes resilience, self-efficacy, social well being etc.

**Measuring positive mental health**

Different attempts have been made to operationalize positive mental health and measure it. Many of these seeks to assess indicators like resilience, self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, life satisfaction, hopefulness, perceptions and judgment about sense of coherence and meaning in life, and social integration, social well being, hedonic (positive affect) and eudaimonic (positive functioning) and so on. Of the different scales like the Psychological Wellbeing Scale, the Sense of Coherence Scale, the Affect Balance Scale and the Affectometer, used to measure positive aspects of mental health, mention must be made of the “European Social Survey Wave 3 questionnaire” and the 14-item “Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale”. These scales include both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of mental wellbeing (Barry MM, 2009).

Work by WHO, which describes the four indicators, also mentions some scales that can be used to measure these indicators. These are:
a) The Sense of Coherence (SOC) Scale (Antonovsky, 1987) has been widely used and promoted as a potential indicator of well-being.


c) The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories (CSEI: Coopersmith, 1982)


e) Pearlin and Schooler’s Personal Mastery Scale is frequently used to assess the extent to which “people see themselves as being in control of the forces that importantly affect their lives” (Pearlin et al, 1981, p. 340).

f) The Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT-R: Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994) is a 10-item self-report measure developed to assess dispositional optimism.

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<td>1) List the desirable properties of indicators for positive health.</td>
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<td>2) Discuss optimism as an individual indicator of positive mental health.</td>
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2.4 NEED FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Positive mental health, mental health and physical health are all inter related. Change in one may affect the other and vice versa. Positive mental health helps people to deal effectively with physical conditions and likewise promotion of good physical health has a positive impact on the mental health, for example in the older people (Li et al., 2002).

In the WHO’s report, “Positive Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice” it has been demonstrated that positive mental health, mental illness, physical illness and positive physical health are linked and related to each other. The components or the determinants of positive mental health are numerous (resilience, self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, life satisfaction, hopefulness, and social well being and so on) and positive mental health in itself is a huge domain. Nevertheless, there are ample findings that demonstrate the significance of
positive mental health. For example, higher positive mental health (using variables like life satisfaction, mood, subjective and psychological wellbeing) is associated with being a friend to others and being able to trust others (Araya et al, 2006), neighbours and police (Helliwell JF & Putnam RD (2004). Social support is related to social wellbeing which is also a component of positive mental health and research has consistently shown that having more social support increases life satisfaction and can reduce the negative effects of stress. Relation of positive mental health with physical health is well known and research has demonstrated that diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disorders are affected by the mental state of individuals (Raphael et al, 2005).

Thus the need for positive mental health is enormous and this is well amplified by following citation by WHO: “Positive mental health is linked to a range of development outcomes and is fundamental to coping with adversity. On the other hand, poor mental health impedes an individual’s capacity to realize their potential, work productively, and make a contribution to their community. In order to improve population mental health, countries need to implement effective treatment, prevention, and promotion programs that are available to all people who need them.”

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2.5 PROMOTION OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

We will now discuss how positive mental health is promoted at two main levels, communities and individual.

Community Level

Communities play an important role in promotion of positive mental health. A community comprises of several individuals who can directly or indirectly benefit from such promotion. A community has the advantage in the fact that they deal with groups of individuals (families, village panchayat etc.) as well as individual persons and both these two can be involved in strengthening community action in the promotion of positive mental health. Research has documented that empowering community members can play a role in mental health strategies. Likewise focusing on the development of ownership and social responsibility within a community also fosters the promotion of positive mental health. Community participation and social support provided by friends and family members during stressful life-events increase feeling of social well being in individuals, which then has a positive impact on the entire community, and this mutually benefitting activity in turns promotes positive mental health.
Community based interventions for children, youth and adults can be taken up to promote positive mental health. In this regard, school based programs focusing on skill development; building healthy coping styles, awareness about mental illness etc. can have impact on the overall wellbeing of children. Likewise, community involvement in programs like de-addiction for youth with substance abuse problems, prevention of domestic violence, activities like ‘yoga’ and exercises also directly or indirectly promote positive mental health among youth and adults. Communities and NGOs working together can also promote positive mental health by increasing public awareness on mental health issues, facilitating development of self-help group, encouraging capacity building and fostering employment, organizing skill and vocational based activities and other such mental health promotion activities.

Some community based programs that helped in promoting mental health in general and positive mental health in particular are:

a) Nobody’s perfect (Canada): This mainly focused on parenting skills. It resulted in stronger parenting skills in parents and more positive interactions with their children.

b) Friends for Life (Canada): This included school based and home based activities aimed to build resilience, promote self-esteem, problem solving skills and self-expression, prevent anxiety and build positive relationship. Result of this program showed significant increase in self-esteem and decrease in worry and depression among children who were not clinically anxious.

c) Comprehensive Rural Health Program (India): This is a program in a region of rural Maharashtra, called Jamkhed. The main objective of this program was not focused on mental health, but its effective community development measures resulted in improved mental health. Over all it resulted in better mental health and well-being of women and children, lesser illness, uncomplicated pregnancies, better nutrition and a cleaner village environment which all in turn reduced stress. Community development also created empowerment and community network reduced isolation and increased feelings of social support. Better coping skills were another positive outcome. The extent of empowerment in Jamkhed villages has also enabled the people to look beyond their own needs to the mental health needs of others in situation like sudden crisis. (Arole R, Fuller B & Deutschmann P, 2005).

Individual Level

There are various means by which positive mental health can be promoted at the individual level. Such promotion helps both the individual and the community to which he belongs. Interventions focusing on an individual’s personal skills, strengths and resiliency can be planned (Lahtinen E. et al, 2005) by providing information, education and facilitating enhancement of life skills. Individuals can be encouraged to introspect and make self-evaluation regarding their state of well-being, how they are enjoying life, how they deal with the day to day challenges. Strategies like reframing negative thoughts (Folkman S & Moskowitz JT, 2000), writing or thinking about positive thoughts (Burton CM & King LA, 2004), seeking other’s support and devoting one’s time to meaningful causes (Lyubomirsky S, Sheldon KM & Schkade D, 2005) can be employed in promotion of positive mental health. Mental health programme suitable for individuals can
be planned wherein the positive aspects of mental health like self-efficacy, sense of wellbeing, problem solving, developing a sense of purpose, effective communication skill, better coping skills etc. can be addressed.

Few examples of individual level activities that deals with the promotion of positive mental health are:

a) Live Life Stress Free (Scotland): It aimed to provide opportunities for stress management, inclusion and community development among adults. So far it has resulted in increasing self-esteem and reducing stress in participants.

b) Ardler Walking Group (Scotland): It aimed to promote physical activity and mental well being among adults through walking. So far benefits to emotional health, well being and physical well being have been reported by participants.

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<td>1) List the community and individual based programs to promote positive mental health.</td>
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2.6 LET US SUM UP

We have seen how the concept of positive mental health has evolved after Marie Jahoda first tried to describe it. Self-esteem, sense of control, sense of coherence and optimism are some of the components of positive mental health and scales have been devised to measure these components. Promotion of positive mental health is useful and evidence exists to support this. There is no doubt that for the overall well being of an individual and the community, there is indeed a need to promote positive mental health.

2.7 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

1) WHO (2004) conceptualizes positive mental health as a positive emotion or affect such as subjective sense of well being and a feeling of happiness, a personality trait encompassing concepts of self-esteem and sense of control, and resilience in the face of adversity and the capacity to cope with life stressors.

The two dimensions of positive mental health as stated by Barry (2009) are:

- The hedonic component –refers to subjective well-being and satisfaction.
- The eudaimonic component- comprising of positive functioning, engagement, fulfillment and social well-being.
Self Assessment Questions 2

1) The desirable properties that indicators should have are:
   • Community relevance and be easily and readily understood by the public
   • Relevance to the aims of the activities
   • Stable meaning over time
   • To be sensitive to changes over time
   • Anticipate the future and provide base-line data for subsequent trends
   • Provide complete coverage of the population or event being monitored
   • Assess dispersion across given measures of well-being
   • Measure progress in meeting goals at the national, state and local levels
   • Provide a measure of variability between religions and nations
   • Be available for relevant sub-groups.

2) Optimism can be described as an habitual tendency or present disposition to take the most hopeful view of future events, and expect a favourable outcome even when unfavourable outcomes are possible.

Self Assessment Question 3

1) There is a need for positive mental health because
   • It will help people to deal effectively with physical conditions.
   • It promotes good physical health
   • It has a positive impact on the mental health
   • It is related to development outcomes
   • It forms basis to coping with adversity.
   • It is related to social support.

Self Assessment Questions 4

1) The community based programmes are:
   • Nobody’s perfect (Canada with its focus on parenting skills.
   • Friends for Life (Canada) that includes school based and home based activities aimed to build resilience, promote self-esteem, problem solving skills and self-expression, prevent anxiety and build positive relationship.
   • Comprehensive Rural Health Program (India) with an objective of this program was not focused on mental health, but its effective community development measures resulted in improved mental health.

The individual based programmes are:
   • Live Life Stress Free (Scotland) that is aimed to provide opportunities for stress management, inclusion and community development among adults.
   • Ardler Walking Group (Scotland) that is aimed to promote physical activity and mental well being among adults through walking.
2.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Essay type questions
   a) What do you understand about the concept of positive mental health? Describe in detail about the components of positive mental health?
   b) How would you promote positive mental health among individuals and the community members?

2) Short Notes:
   a) Indicators of mental health
   b) Measurement of positive mental health
   c) Resilience
   d) Optimism

2.9 REFERENCES

Canadian Institute for Health Information, Improving the Health of Canadians: Exploring Positive Mental Health (Ottawa: CIHI, 2009).


Future Direction


www.in.undp.org/content/india/en/home.mdgoverview/
www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/optimism.

2.9 SUGGESTED READING