

Mental Health & Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Mental Health was added to sustainable development growth in 2015. Mental health is strongly linked to other sustainable development factors like poverty, economic growth, peace, justice, equality, social inclusion and human rights. Economic development and safe settlements depend on overall mentally healthy society. Kofi Annan, former UN secretary, once stressed significance of human rights violations related to people with mental disorders and pointed out the importance of mental health for global development. This article explore link between mental health and related issues and achieving sustainable development by enhancing community mental health.

Key Words: *Mental Health, Sustainable development, Community mental health, Economic Growth*

Introduction

Health as defined by WHO, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." As the definition states mental health is more than just absence of mental disorders and an integral part of health. It's a state of well-being where the person interacts with others, realizes one's abilities, deals effectively with daily life stressors, work productively and makes contribute to community. This shows why we should promote and preserve mental health as a vital concern for individual, community and the world.

The Sustainable Development Goals are designed to be a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future". The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the UN Sustainable Development Summit held in September, 2015 at New York. It includes 17 Goals to be accomplished by 2030. They are:

THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development



The purpose of introducing these sustainable goals is to meet the need of people without damaging the environment, damaging health or communities as whole. They assure quality of life for every living organism on this planet and realize the interdependency of various systems in the nature for surviving together.

In this context mental health becomes crucial factor to achieve these sustainable development goals. A healthy mind is the core healthy community and ultimately the world. The current paper tries to understand how sustainable development goals helps in promoting mental health and mental health in turn contributes in achieving these sustainable development goals.

The current study tries to connect these 17 SDG's to mental health and how mental health in turn contributes in achieving these goals.

1. Goal 1, 2 & 6: Eradicating poverty, hunger and poor sanitation

Poverty is the most significant determinants of physical and mental health. It intervenes with other determinants like education, community, race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, access to health care and built in environments. The mental health effects of poverty are wide ranging and reach across the lifespan (Simon, Beder, & Manseau, 2018).

Poverty affects mental health through an array of social and biological mechanisms acting at multiple levels, including individuals, families, local communities, and nations. Individual-level mediators in the relationship between poverty and mental health include financial stress, chronic and acute stressful life events exposure, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis changes, other brain circuit changes (ex-, language processing, executive functioning), poor prenatal health and birth outcomes, inadequate nutrition, and toxin exposure (ex- lead). Family-level mediators include parental relationship stress, parental psychopathology (especially depression), low parental warmth or investment, hostile and inconsistent parenting, low-stimulation home environments, and child abuse and neglect (Simon, Beder, & Manseau, 2018).

Higher rates of malnutrition are found in areas with chronic poverty (Etboonsarng, 2005) Poverty leads to malnutrition, as risk of food insecurity and impairs brain development. It results in tissue damage, growth retardation, reduction in synapses and synaptic neurotransmitters, delayed myelination and reduced overall development of dendrite network of the developing brain. The imbalanced Neuro-chemistry leads various mental health issues.

People who experience poverty, particularly early in life or for an extended period, are at risk of a host of adverse health and developmental outcomes through their life. Poverty in childhood is associated with lower school achievement; deteriorated cognitive, behavioral, and attention-related outcomes; higher rates of delinquency, depressive and anxiety disorders; and higher rates of almost every psychiatric disorder in adulthood. Poverty in adulthood is linked to depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, psychological distress, and suicide (Simon, Beder, & Manseau, 2018).

Constantly worrying about where your next meal will come from can cause mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and even posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Hunger cause children to be cranky, hyperactive, and aggressive. These behavioral issues can distract children from school, leading to developmental delays and learning disabilities. Poor personal hygiene, such as failing to regularly wash, use deodorant, change clothes, and brush teeth, can be one of the first signs a person has a mental illness. This deterioration can stem from a general apathy or lack of motivation and disorganization—symptoms of the illness.

There is now growing evidence of a link between certain air pollutants and mental illnesses such as depression, dementia, anxiety and suicide (Roberts, et al., 2019). Even very low levels of lead concentration in blood may be associated with decreased intelligence, behavioral difficulties and learning problems in children.

2. Goal 3 & 4: Good health & Education

The components of health include physical, mental and social side. As one of the leading mental illness in the world, depression alone has been estimated to affect 280 million persons all over the world (Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019) and more than 75% of people in Low & Middle Incomes Countries (LMIC's) does not get treated for depression (Evans-Lacko S, Aguilar-Gaxiola S, Al-Hamzawi A, et al., 2018) The economic loss due to mental health conditions, between 2012-2030, is estimated at USD 1.03 trillion (WHO).

Determinants of mental health include individual attributes such as the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, behaviors and interactions with others in addition to social, cultural, economic, political and educational factors to play a role.

Mental health and psychological wellbeing are important for children's education and school attendance. Mental illness among children impacts school going behavior negatively and reduce their ability to learn. Quality education can promote and protect mental health through knowledge, life skills, sense of safety, meaningful activities and social networks.

Early childhood development is the integral part of reaching SDG's. Early childhood deprivation and toxic stress can impair physical and mental health, education and other important developmental areas. Poor parenting can change brain chemistry among children. Early childhood

development interventions are essential in setting a trajectory for good life long health. Education has been an indicator of life outcomes such as employment, income, and social status. It is a strong predictor for improved health and well-being. It has been linked to a lack of a sense of control and resilience. Lower education is associated with "a lack of psychosocial resources"—such as a sense of control, resilience, the ability to delay gratification, and access to cultural activities—and exposure to more day-to-day stressors. These negative factors have been strongly correlated with the onset of depression (Neimeyer, H. et al., 2020).

Formal education in school and other learning opportunities outside the classroom build life skills and foster traits that are important important to health, such as conscientiousness, perseverance, a sense of personal control, flexibility, the capacity for negotiation, and the ability to form relationships and establish social networks. These skills can help with a variety of life's challenges and with managing one's health and navigating the health care system.

3. Goal 5, 10 & 16: Promoting equality, peace and justice

Discrimination, inequality and stigma are salient features when it comes to mental illness. One of the challenges in implementing mental health services is the stigma. Stigma is community's negative perceptions towards people with mental illness. It negatively impacts the lives of people with mental illness and increases burden of diseases. Stigma influences all areas of life- life expectancy, learning, working and social relations in addition to the scarcity of resources for preventions care and treatment, and access to treatment. Negative attitudes are coinciding with negative practices such as hiding or punishing people with mental health problems.

Humanitarian crisis such as war, are associated with prevalence of mental disorders and distress. During war, people are exposed to various traumatic events. That raises the chances of developing mental health problems like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression and poorer life outcomes as adults. WHO estimated that, in the situations of armed conflicts throughout the world, "10% of the people who experience traumatic events will have serious mental health problems and another 10% will develop behavior that will hinder their ability to function effectively. The common conditions are depression, anxiety and psychosomatic problems such as insomnia, or back and stomach aches (Cooper & Stewart, 2013). Women have an increased vulnerability to the psychological consequences of war. There is evidence of a high correlation between mothers' and children's distress in a war situation. It is now known that maternal depression in the prenatal and postnatal period predicts poorer growth of infants.

Violence is a major threat to mental health. Reduced substance abuse contributes to reduced violence and psychosocial interventions are a way to break the cycle of violence. Psychosocial support is often included in rehabilitation following atrocities. Human rights violations such as torture and displacement negatively affect mental health. The UNHRC helps Member States and others promote and protect the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (right to health).

Being treated with respect and dignity enhances people's feeling that they are worthwhile and are valued, useful and important as fellow human beings. This will lead to the person gaining confidence in their self worth, self respect, ability and contribution to society.

4. Goal 8, 9 & 11: Economic prosperity, sustainable communities and Jobs

Mental health is important for people's ability to work and therefore for productivity and economy. Work also plays crucial role for mental health. Work places provide opportunities of promoting dignity, quality of life, and health. Strengthening people's ability to work also promotes economic growth and inclusion of sustainable cities and communities.

The economic consequence of mental health problems is mainly in loss of productivity. Work changes increase the cognitive and emotional demands of work (Macintyre, Ferris, Goncalves, & Quinn, 2018). Absenteeism and turnover have increased because of stress, anxiety and depression (Mental Health Foundation, 2020). Population with mental health contributes to economic productivity and prosperity, making it crucial for economic growth (Macintyre, Ferris, Goncalves, & Quinn, 2018). Poor mental health and substance abuse threatens economic prosperity. The global cost of mental disorders was estimated to be approximately 2.5 \$ trillion in 2010. Maternal depression can affect poverty and also have negative consequences for children for ex- higher risk for not being vaccinated or improper treatment for childhood diseases.

5. Goal 7, 12, 13, 14 & 15: Protecting the plant and natural resources

Natural and climate change related disasters impact global mental health. People in low and middle income countries are at particular risk. Climate change has lead to floods, tsunami, drought, wild fire, green house effect etc., which further leads to loss of life and property. People witnessing such scenario tend suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, Anxiety, Loss of hope in life, Suicidal thoughts etc. As coping mechanism protecting our planet is crucial in reducing the stress caused by natural disasters. Developing individual and communities resilience is an important step towards disaster risk reduction and protecting mental health.

Nature generates positive emotions like calmness, joy, creativity and enhances concentration and reduces anxiety and depression. Being in natural light reduces the prevalence of 'Seasonal Affective Disorder'. The emergence Eco Therapy- therapeutic approaches in which activities are held in natural setting. Studies have found that being exposed to natural environments improves working memory, cognitive flexibility and Attentional control, while exposure to urban environments is linked to attention deficits (Schertz & Berman, 2019).

According to Batman & colleagues (2019), with nature is associated with increases in happiness, subjective well-being, positive affect, positive social interactions and a sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as decreases in mental distress. The positive mental health values engaging with nature and providing "psychological ecosystem services." In a study Pollack, Weiss, & Trung, (2016) examined the mental health and functioning of people living in an area of Vietnam characterized by high risk for natural disasters and poverty. The results showed elevated rates of PTSD, somatic problems, and functional impairment but not depression or anxiety. It is interesting that financial stress was the strongest predictor of mental health problems, illustrating the complexity of the issues, and why the SDGs are interlinked, and that the solutions will require widespread partnerships and cooperation (Pollack, Weiss, & Trung, 2016).

Conclusion

The SDG's address the root causes of humanitarian crisis such as poverty, natural disaster and conflicts often representing critical threats to the health and safety of a community and the world. Emergencies

often occur at LMIC's; they account for 88% of the global disaster mortality. Almost all people affected by emergencies will experience psychological distress, which for most people will improve over time. Both from human rights perspective and economic perspective it is clear that mental health must be prioritized. If we are to reach the SDG's we will need to develop the human potential so that more people can contribute to the work and changes needed. To achieve this increased resilience is central. Resilience points towards promoting mental health in communities, families, schools and workplaces. Also to prevent and treat mental health disorder and substance abuse. Both must be global priorities.

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