



MENTAL HEALTH

Introduction

Mental health refers to our cognitive, behaviour and emotional wellbeing - it is all about how we think, feel, and behave. The term 'mental health' is sometimes used to mean an absence of a mental disorder. Mental health includes our emotional and psychological. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Mental health can affect daily life, relationships, and even physical health. Mental health also includes a person's ability to enjoy life - to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

According to the **WHO** (World Health Organization), 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."

Over the course of your life, if you experience mental health problems, you're thinking, mood, and behavior could be affected. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

Mental health problems are common but help is available. People with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.



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Common Disorders

Most common types of mental illness are:

- Anxiety Disorders
- Mood Disorders
- Schizophrenia Disorders

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are the most common types of mental illness. The individual has a severe fear or anxiety, which is linked to certain objects or situations. Most people with an anxiety disorder will try to avoid exposure to whatever triggers their anxiety.

Examples of anxiety disorders include:

- **Panic disorder**
The person experiences sudden paralyzing terror or a sense of imminent disaster.
- **Phobias**
These may include simple phobias (a disproportionate fear of objects), social phobias (fear of being subject to the judgment of others), and agoraphobia (dread of situations where getting away or breaking free may be difficult).
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)**
The person has obsessions and compulsions. In other words, constant stressful thoughts (obsessions), and a powerful urge to perform repetitive acts, such as hand washing (compulsion).
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**
This can occur after somebody has been through a traumatic event - something horrible or frightening that they experienced or witnessed. During this type of event, the person thinks that their life or other people's lives are in danger. They may feel afraid or feel that they have no control over what is happening.

Mood Disorders

These are also known as affective disorders or depressive disorders. Patients with these conditions have significant changes in mood, generally involving either mania (elation) or depression. Examples of mood disorders include:

- **Major depression**
The individual is no longer interested in and does not enjoy activities and events that they previously liked. There are extreme or prolonged periods of sadness.

- **Bipolar disorder**
Previously known as manic-depressive illness, or manic depression. The individual switches from episodes of euphoria (mania) to depression (despair).
- **Persistent depressive disorder**
Previously known as dysthymia, this is mild chronic (long term) depression. The patient has similar symptoms to major depression but to a lesser extent.
- **SAD (seasonal affective disorder)**
A type of major depression that is triggered by lack of daylight. It is most common in countries far from the equator during late autumn, winter, and early spring.

Schizophrenia Disorders

Whether or not schizophrenia is a single disorder, or a group of related illnesses has yet to be fully determined. It is a highly complex condition. Schizophrenia normally begins between the ages of 15 and 25. The individual has thoughts that appear fragmented; they also find it hard to process information.

Schizophrenia has negative and positive symptoms. Positive symptoms include delusions, thought disorders, and hallucinations. Negative symptoms include withdrawal, lack of motivation, and a flat or inappropriate mood.

Treatment

There are various ways people with mental health problems might receive treatment. It is important to know that what works for one person may not work for another; this is especially the case with mental health.

Some strategies or treatments are more successful when combined with others. A patient with a chronic mental disorder may choose different options at different stages in their life. The experts say that a well-informed patient is probably the best judge of what treatment suits them best.

Work that is interesting and fulfilling is good for mental health, but a negative working environment or work-related stressors can lead to physical and mental health problems. It is important for employers and others in positions of responsibility in the workplace to put in place measures to promote the good mental health of their employees, and to have a plan for supporting employees and colleagues with mental health conditions or who may be at risk of suicide.

Signs to Look Out For

- Expression of thoughts or feelings about wanting to end their life, or talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live;
- Expression of feelings of isolation, loneliness, hopelessness or loss of self-esteem, or dwelling on problems;

- Withdrawal from colleagues, decrease in work performance or difficulty completing tasks;
- Changes in behaviour, such as restlessness, irritability, impulsivity, recklessness or aggression;
- Speaking about arranging end-of-life personal affairs such as making a will, or concrete plans for suicide;
- Abuse of alcohol or other substances;
- Depressed mood or mentioning of previous suicidal behaviour;
- Bullying or harassment.

What you can do if you are worried about a colleague

- Express empathy and concern encourage them to talk and listen without judgment.
- Ask if there is anyone they would like to call or have called.
- Encourage them to reach out to health or counselling services inside the organization, if available, or otherwise outside the organization, and offer to call or go there together.
- If your colleague has attempted to or indicates that they are about to intentionally harm themselves, remove access to means and do not leave them alone. Seek immediate support from staff health services, if available, or health services outside of the organization.

What you can do as an employer or a manager

- Provide information sessions for your staff on mental health and suicide prevention. Ensure all staff know what resources are available for support, both within the organization and in the local community.
- Foster a work environment in which colleagues feel comfortable talking about problems that have an impact on their ability to do their job effectively and supporting each other during difficult times.
- Become familiar with relevant legislation.
- Identify and reduce work-related stressors which can negatively impact mental health.
- Design and implement a plan for how to sensitively manage and communicate the suicide or suicide attempt of an employee in a way that minimizes further distress. Measures should include the availability of trained health workers and support services for staff.

