

Mental Health and Wellbeing: Models and Modifications

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ABSTRACT

Mental health conceptualization has transformed from pathology oriented to growth oriented. The current research paper highlights the literature on the concept of mental health and wellbeing from various perspectives. The psychoanalytic, cognitive and behavioral school made significant contributions to the understanding of mental health and well being. The preventive aspects in mental health were underemphasized. The recent years have seen emergence of positive psychology school giving more importance to concepts of wellbeing from the perspective of growth. The optimism is examined in the context of mental and physical health. The optimism is a protective factor against mental health problems particularly depression and anxiety. Optimism is also associated with increased immune functioning in general and faster recovery from certain physical conditions.

Key Words: Mental health, Psychological wellbeing, Optimism

Background

Health and Wellbeing are in inextricably linked and therefore cannot be construed as separate entities. The mental health and wellbeing have a positive relationship with quality of life. Quality of life may be conceptualized in terms of world health organization's definition of health which considers health as not only the absence of disease and infirmity but also a positive state of physical, mental and social wellbeing (WHO, 1948). The Quality of life has multi-factorial dimensions which includes alterations in physical performance, level of comfort with the surroundings, psychological well being and social satisfaction which help to describe the quality of life (Mulhern, et al., 1989). The concepts of 'mental health' and 'wellbeing' are examined from various approaches and witnessed changes with the research developments. There is a transition from pathology orientation to free will.

Review

From the psychoanalytic perspective, psychological wellbeing is understood from the perspective of deep rooted conflicts which has origins in childhood. Therefore, the aim of psychoanalytic therapy is to release repressed emotions and experiences, i.e. make the unconscious, conscious. A basic psychoanalytic approach to enable a therapeutic process is to generate and foster a patient's insight into and understanding of these pre-conscious or unconscious aspects and parts of him- or herself (Boeker et al , 2013). However, the model was

criticized by the researchers for its lack of persuasive evidence. The analyst's favorite theory may become a belief system that shapes his or her understanding of the patient leading to an imposition of the theory on the data (Horner, 2006). The research trends necessitated development of techniques having strong empirical basis and more comprehensive definition of wellness. A general psychoanalytic model of mind, if it is to be credible, should be aligned with the wider knowledge of mind gained from a range of disciplines (Fonagy, 2003). Nevertheless, the psychoanalytic model facilitated the understanding of psychopathology and its various aspects are relevant in psychological health and wellbeing. The cognitive behavioural model provided with alternative explanation of psychopathology with strong empirical support. The approach has gained much popularity amongst clinicians. There was a growing recognition of the fact that psychological health is more than mere absence of symptoms. The deliberate struggle in cognitive behavioural therapy to be rational and to suppress desires is hard work and leads to frequent drop outs, relapses, and recurrence of illness, because the underlying perspectives on life that make a person vulnerable to ill-health have not been transformed (Cloninger, 2008). The researchers suggested that the concepts of wellbeing and health are dynamic and are complex interplay of biopsychosocial factors. The important aspects of wellbeing are purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships and self acceptance (Ryff, 2014). Similarly, Seligman (2012) proposed that positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and acceptance are important elements of wellbeing. The interventions based on pleasure, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment are effective strategies for increasing well-being and ameliorating depressive symptoms (Gander, Proyer & Ruch, 2016). Current research on well-being has been derived from two general perspectives: the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and the eudaimonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2011). The concept of optimism is also integral to the health and wellbeing. Optimism may be understood as positive expectations regarding the future outcome which facilitates psychological adjustments. Optimism is an important psychological construct which affect individual's health, well being and immune functioning (Banerjee, 2018). The level of optimism is therefore an important determinant of physical and mental health.

Optimism and Mental Health

Optimism may be understood as positive expectations regarding the future outcome which facilitates psychological adjustments. Optimism is an important psychological construct which affect individual's health, well being and immune functioning (Banerjee, 2018). Alternatively, Segerstrom (2005) proposed that optimism may actually lead to reduction in immunity by utilizing disappointment hypothesis and engagement hypothesis. The disappointment hypothesis suggests that prolonged and persistent stressors lead to decreased positive expectations which are commonly associated with optimists. This has an adverse impact on immunity. According to engagement hypothesis, optimistic individuals make continuous efforts to overcome stress and

difficulties while pessimists withdraw and accept the situation. Therefore, the optimists are more likely to experience stressors. Systematic attempts have been made to study optimism related to psychological and physical well being (e.g., Scheier and Carver, 1992), well being in cancer (Wimberly, Carver and Antoni, 2008) and as a risk factor for depression (Peterson and Seligman, 1984). Researchers have also examined optimism with respect to immune functioning. The optimism is associated with better immune functioning, cardiovascular health and overall health status (Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009).

In a correlational study conducted by Ghalibaf (2017), the researcher studied optimism and various domains of mental health in college going students (n=400). The results demonstrated that level of depression and optimism were negatively related. The significant relationship with depression indicates that the optimism is an important study variable in mental health problems, particularly depression. In a similar study, Jahanara (2017) conducted a correlational study to examine the relationships between hope, optimism and mental health in university students (n=222). Positive relationship were found between hope and optimism ($r=0.23$); psychological well being ($r=0.28$); psychological distress ($r= -0.13$), optimism and psychological well being ($r=0.24$); psychological distress ($r= - 0.20$). The findings indicate the better coping abilities in optimistic individuals which facilitate resilience to psychological problems. Rezaei et al., 2015 studied mental health of university students with respect to optimism, pessimism and coping strategies (n=367). The researcher utilized correlational design and performed stepwise regression analysis. The results indicated significant relationship between optimism and problem focused coping. The emotion focused coping and avoidance strategies correlated significantly with pessimism.

Alternatively, the optimism may be viewed from the perspective of health promoting behaviours. The behavior patterns of individuals may make them more or less prone to mental health problems. In this regard, Klimusová et al 2016 investigated the relationship between mental health and dispositional optimism on health related behaviours among adolescents (n=1376). Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed. The predictors in the study were age and gender, optimism and pessimism scores and health related behaviours. The dispositional optimism explained the maximum variance (25%) and therefore was the strongest predictor of mental health in adolescents.

SUMMARY

The concept of well being is integral to mental health. The understanding of mental health and wellbeing from positive psychology point of view has added richness to its conceptualization. Optimism is associated with health related positive behaviors and resilience. The traditional treatment models may be integrated with the current emphasis on wellbeing. This will have a positive impact on overall quality of life and reduce the impact of stressors on mental health and

wellbeing. More research studies incorporating the positive psychology concepts in intervention models may be conducted for empirical support.

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