

Review on Definitions of Mental Health and Related Concepts

Qijie Wang

Shandong Normal University

*Corresponding author. Email: 13256689527@163.com

ABSTRACT

Since the mid-20 century, the understanding of mental health went through a transformation that diverted people's focus from illness to wellness and from the simple requirement of getting rid of illness to the desire of comprehensive positive mental function. Followed this standard, the determinants of mental health and illness have been reevaluated and supplemented. In this article, some newfound valuable influence factors would be mentioned to discuss the definition of mental health in a more comprehensive way. With the analysis of their impact on mental health a more feasible conclusion is expected.

Keywords: *Mental health, Mental illness, Socioeconomic status, Lifestyle.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1948, the World Health Organization defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" [1]. It clearly draw a line between health and "the absence of disease" but also made it even harder to evaluate health. Currently, researches showed that all three elements of health should be considered as a whole even when we only focus on a single aspect of them. Physical and social life affect mental health while mental health affects both of them at the same time. In order to have a better evaluation of mental health, many unfamiliar elements now must be considered.

Illness and wellness are not a set of antonyms, instead, they are two separate individuals[2]. The world illness shows the wish of being absence of disease and can be easily defined according to objective physical conditions. However, wellness includes some complex elements. For example mental health is a state of well-being that also includes biological, psychological and social factors which contribute to an individual's mental state and ability to function within the environment[1,3-4]. Health is a continuum that extending into two ends and we have to manually set standards for it. Sadly the widespread use of the term "mental health" is still a way to give a euphemistic description of mental illness which shows the need and room for reform[5].

Currently researches bring new orientations for the study of mental health. A comprehensive system founded with people's physical health, lifestyle and socioeconomic status[SES] is considered as having potential to affect mental health.

2. DEFINITIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH

A significant development in mental health definition is the validated assessment of positive psychological function, based on the sense of hope and well-being. In the beginning, the quality of life was taken as an indicator and some studies tried to describe the connections between it and demographic character[6]. Under this backdrop, society got interested in the topic of subjective wellness with its components like rating of happiness and life satisfaction[7]. WHO defined mental health in 2001 which included the ability to handle normal life stresses, realising one's potential and the ability to integrate into the community in 2001[8]. However, there is little agreement on this definition. The lack of consensus on mental wellness is still a major obstacle for integrating mental health initiatives into global health programs and primary healthcare services[9 10]. Recently there are voices claiming mental health shouldn't be a state that has to be achieved. Instead, it could be "an ability to adapt and to self-manage" in response to challenges[11] which has shown a trend of changing the definition of mental health from a universal standard to a comprehensive ability that are strongly related to individual differences.

With the update of definitions of mental health, new empirical indicators such as life satisfaction, purpose, personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relationships are taken into consideration while doing studies[12]. The difference between mental health and the absence of mental illness became bigger as researches show. The indicators also revealed the functions of social determinants. For example in American society older adults and people lacking educational attainment be reported lower levels of purpose, mastery, and growth[13]. The predominant view emerged from these experimental results is that an individual's social and economic resources highly influence one's health[14-16] and no matter how socioeconomic status[SES] is measured, it can be seen as an influential factor of mental health. However SES never derelict affects people's health, instead, the mutual effect of SES and lifestyle eventually result in the change of mental and physical health.

New researches also offered proof of the idea that mental health and physical biological functions can interact with each other [17]. Positive emotional style was associated with a better endocrine function [lower levels of cortisol, epinephrine, norepinephrine] and better immune response [higher antibody production, greater resistance to illness] [18]. On the other hand physical health-promoting behaviors like physical exercises also contribute to mental health problems and have even been taken as an effective intervention to relieve depression [19]. However, the pathway from mental health to physical health is still unclear. Although the biological functions changes caused by both ways seem to be the direct effectors the lifestyle difference among individuals provided a more visualized research direction.

3. THE DEFINITION OF MENTAL ILLNESS

In order to further distinguish the idea of mental health and illness, enlightenment from another aspect provided by the explanation of some statements about mental illness could be a great help for this discussion. Although, in the twenty-first century, metaphysical topics like sprites and soul clearly has no market in the modern medical field, taking mental illness totally as some nervous system damage is not a completely convincing idea. But this is not what this article would talk about and those universal concept about mental illness would still be used in the following discussion. Let us start from the born of the term "illness", illness shows the need of being normal, the desire of calling for help. Medical born in the respond to patients' painful calling and aim to cure illness. To meet this demand, people had to figure out what cause the pains, the way to get away from pains and the possible development of the pains which now be called etiology, treatment and prognosis. When all three conditions can

be met, illness comes into exist. This definition is equally effective for the definition of mental illness.

Mental illness refers to conditions that affect cognition, emotion, and behavior. In the middle of last century mental disorders didn't have a broad classes and patients was defined only depend on diagnosis alone. After that, due to the violently increased number of patients, existing medical resources were not enough for the growth of treatment needing, new definitions were needed to identify patients and give corresponding treatment.

Nowadays, the definition of mental illness moved from a partial to a more holistic perspective and from a simple concept about diseases to a comprehensive health caring problem. The primary manuals that be most commonly used are the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM], and the World Health Organization's Manual of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death [ICD]. After revision, the DSM -V[35] and the 11th edition of ICD [36] reached a consensus on more aspect.

4. SES WORKING AS A DETERMINANT OF MENTAL HEALTH

No matter we discuss this topic from what aspects, the definition of socioeconomic status has to be declared first. Sadly, we are facing the same problem we met during defining mental health, society did not have the same answer to this question. Though we find it's hard to resolve SES into single elements, this concept exists in our daily life. Individuals would certainly find they "live a better or worse life" in neighborhoods and customarily those who occupy more social resources are regarded as having affluence in their life. In fact, the occupation of resources is an important factor of people's living quality, but SES is much more than that. Although a famous artist may earn less than an office worker, we can still hear the poet's self-deprecating lyrics and the endless complaints from your neighbors. In brief, SES is a combination of social and economic factors and the connections between them, the factors are generally but imperfectly correlated with each other. As shown in surveys, some unavoidable topics in our daily life like education, income, neighborhood quality and occupational status only had moderate correlations in the range of 0.2 to 0.7 and generally below 0.5[20-22].

Although SES is a broad conception there are some elements that clearly not a part of it. However, researches clearly showed the negative effects of domestic violence on children's mental and physical development, they cannot be considered as a parcel of SES. Most of the family differences are also not a part of this concept. The same is true for a harmful living environment that may cause physical damages like an alimentary deficiency.

When SES is considered as a part of a study, researchers have to choose the components of it wisely, the relevance between different measured should be taken into account too. Economic factors are usually be seen as playing a significant part in the evaluation of SES, but in practice is more complicated. Attentions should always be paid to individual differences.

Comprehensive researches have been done about the relation between SES and health [23-27] and evidences have been provided to prove the stability of this relation. Lower SES could not only cause more both mental and physical health problems but also cause a reduction of health behaviors [16]. The mechanism behind those phenomenons led to some arguments, two main hypotheses, social causation theory and health selective theory [28], are made to explain. The first one believed social environment formed one's mental health conditions. For example low-SES neighborhood has fewer resources and services, residents have fewer chances to do physical activities which have been provided to have a positive effect on mental health. On the contrary, the other one claimed that individuals with good health show a tendency to elevate one's social status and get higher SES. WHO's definition of mental health claimed that a healthy person can join society and cooperate with others easily and seen these abilities as the basis of moving upward. Different from the controversy, a growing number of researchers found a common ground that the influence on mental health caused by SES is closely related to lifestyle [29]. Lifestyle was considered as the bridge between SES and mental health.

5. LIFESTYLE WORKING AS A DETERMINANT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Lifestyle could be generalized as the sum of all living activities that people have. It includes both behaviors that can cause health risks like smoking, intemperance, sedentaryness and health-promoting behaviors like physical activity, healthy diet. There is mounting evidence suggesting that lifestyle is closely related to health. The European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition [EPIC] found that improvements in lifestyle could prevent 93% of diabetes, 81% of heart attacks, 50% of strokes and 36% of all cancers[30]. This result has not taken mental health in consideration, but when we combined the data provided by another research, patients with severe mental illness are 2–3 times more likely to have cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, diabetes and osteoporosis[31], it is quite possible that some influences caused by lifestyle actually took effect by changing mental health level. On the other hand, lifestyle has also been noticed that have effects on mental health. As reported, health-risk behaviors like smoking could lead to poor mental health[32].

It is true that lifestyle could be chosen by individuals in society but the options are different due to one's SES.

Some theories took lifestyle as the extension of mods of production and mods of production, to a great extent, is a way for individuals to express their life. No-matter what kinds of relationship between lifestyle and SES, they have to cooperate to affect health. A study indicated that without the effect of lifestyle, the effect of SES on physical health would reduce sharply[33]. People with a higher level of socioeconomic status seem to have better physical health due to their career, income and education. Those careers favored by high SES groups are usually need less physical labor and are far away from danger. At the same time, their payments are enough to support a better nutritional status, education level and living environment. People with high education are more likely to have knowledge about health[34], which can help them live a healthy life. The correlation between SES and mental health is still uncertain, but it has a strong possibility that it is entirely different from the linear relationship presented by socioeconomic status and physical health. High payoff job often company with higher risk which brought extra stress while the unstable social position produced additional anxiety.

6. DISCUSSION

Our view aims at making suggestions for future supplements for mental health care. First, the importance of distinguishing mental health and the disease absence state had been revisited. Being free from illness is the foundation of being healthy. On top of this, we emphasized the potential impact that lifestyle and socioeconomic status have on healthcare and curing disease. Research showed that mental health has a strong relationship with physical health, lifestyle and SES. When facing chronic diseases, mild diseases and “not sick” state, instead of clinical treatment, the correction of lifestyle according to personal conditions may have a better curative effect. With this end in view, a specific analysis about patients' comprehensive health level including their socioeconomic status is needed. Secondly, the definition of mental health still has room for further expansion and refinement. The expansion aims to include more mental health factors like lifestyle and SES and build a complex with better guiding significance. On the other hand, the refinement means individual differences could be considered more in diagnosis and change mental health from a universal standard to a variable interval that based on personal comprehensive conditions. Thirdly, the revision of the definition could lead to the redistribution of medical resources. If we could prevent mental disease timely with behavioral intervention more resources would be saved and the mental health level of society would be improved. It is not just about providing more community mental health services, a detailed guidance of mental health based on the new definition which involved economic and sociology factors could help people in different SES build mental health concepts and get the appropriate advice about how to live a healthy life.

Finally, mental health is always a part of the concept of health, which means discussions limited to a certain field would unavoidably fall into confusion. Physical, mental and social well-being interacts with each other and without any part health is incomplete.

7. CONCLUSION

This article made a comparative analysis of some recent research results and data on mental health and tried to make a further clarification of some relevant concepts. The difference between mental health and the state of anosis were pointed out in a more direct way by elaborating some authoritative statements. Some studies showed SES and lifestyle could be main influencing factors of mental health and lifestyle usually acts as a bridge between SES and mental health. Based on this idea medical care for mental health could be more effective with consideration of personal social status which shows a possible way for the reform of medical services. The limitation of this article is that the articles we referred to are mainly published in the last decade and the latest research results had not been widely involved, some newly discovered factors may not be taken into account.

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