

Mental Health: Public Health Perspectives Challenges and Interventions

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Abstract

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social functioning. Mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, contribute significantly to the global burden of disease and disability. This paper examines the prevalence, determinants, and consequences of mental health problems, along with strategies for prevention, management, and public health interventions. Emphasis is placed on integrating mental health services into primary healthcare, promoting awareness, reducing stigma, and implementing evidence-based policies to improve population mental health outcomes.

Keywords: Mental Health, Public Health, Depression, Anxiety, Mental Health Policy, Prevention, Interventions

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Introduction

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with normal stressors, work productively, and contribute to their communities. Mental disorders affect hundreds of millions globally, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent. Poor mental health not only impacts quality of life but also increases the risk of chronic physical diseases, disability, and premature mortality. Addressing mental health is a public health priority due to its high prevalence, societal impact, and the availability of effective interventions [1].

Prevalence and Epidemiology

Globally, approximately 1 in 8 people experience a mental disorder at any given time. Depression affects over 280 million people, while anxiety disorders impact around 301 million individuals worldwide. Mental health problems are rising due to urbanization, economic stressors, social isolation, and exposure to adverse life events. Low- and middle-income countries face higher treatment gaps due to limited mental health infrastructure and resources.

Determinants of Mental Health

Biological Factors- Genetics and family history of mental disorders, Neurochemical imbalances and hormonal influences, Brain injuries and neurological conditions. **Psychological Factors-** Early-life trauma and adverse childhood experiences, Chronic

stress and maladaptive coping mechanisms, Personality traits and cognitive patterns. **Social and Environmental Factors-** Poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, Exposure to violence, discrimination, and social exclusion, Urbanization and reduced social cohesion [2].

Common Mental Health Disorders

Depression- Characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest, fatigue, and cognitive impairments. Major contributor to disability and suicide risk. **Anxiety Disorder-** Include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and phobias, leading to excessive worry, restlessness, and physiological symptoms. **Bipolar Disorder-** Marked by alternating episodes of mania and depression, causing mood instability and functional impairment. **Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders,** Severe mental disorders involving hallucinations, delusions, and impaired social and occupational functioning.

Public Health Implications

Mental disorders contribute to substantial disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and economic costs. Co-occurrence with chronic diseases (e.g., cardiovascular disease, diabetes) exacerbates health outcomes. Stigma and discrimination prevent individuals from seeking care, worsening prognosis. Suicide prevention is a critical public health priority, with over 700,000 deaths globally each year [3].

Diagnosis and Assessment

Clinical interviews and structured diagnostic tools (DSM-5, ICD-11), Screening questionnaires (PHQ-9, GAD-7) for depression and anxiety, Functional and cognitive assessments for severe mental disorders, Community-based surveillance to identify at-risk populations.

Management and Intervention Strategies

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT), Mindfulness-based stress reduction and supportive counseling, Psychoeducation for patients and families, Antidepressants (SSRIs, SNRIs) for depression and anxiety, Mood stabilizers for bipolar disorder, Antipsychotics for schizophrenia and severe psychotic disorders. Integration of mental health services into primary care, School and workplace mental health programs, Public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking, Suicide prevention strategies and crisis intervention services [4].

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Challenges in Mental Health Care

Limited mental health workforce and infrastructure, particularly in low-resource settings, High treatment gap due to social stigma and lack of awareness, Cultural barriers and misconceptions about mental illness. Inequities in access to affordable and quality care [5].

Conclusion

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of public health, impacting individuals, families, and societies. Addressing mental health challenges requires a comprehensive approach that combines clinical treatment, psychosocial support, community engagement, and policy interventions. Integration of mental health into primary care, promotion of mental health literacy, reduction of stigma, and equitable access to services are essential for improving population mental health outcomes. Multisectoral collaboration among healthcare providers, policymakers, educators, and communities is critical to building resilient societies and enhancing overall well-being.

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