UMH1 – Understanding mental health

LO1 Understand what is meant by mental health

Assessment criteria

1.1. Describe the difference between mental health, good mental health and mental ill-health

1.2. Outline a range of mental health conditions and the factors affecting mental health

Activity

Take a few minutes to write down what you think the following means to you:

- Mental health

- Mental ill health

What is mental health?

There are different ways of describing what is meant by mental health. Below are two definitions that help us to understand what mental health is.

The World Health Organisation defines health as:

- 'A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO 1948)

They further define mental health as:

- 'A state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, (WHO 2004)

- Both definitions identify that health or mental health are not just the absence of mental illness or disease but much more of a positive concept encompassing personal, social, psychological and physical components

What is good mental health?

Good mental health can be characterised by a person's ability to fulfil a number of key functions and activities, including:

- The ability to cope with the demands of life – cope with normal stresses of life

- Being able to function in society – forming and maintaining good relationships with others

- Having good emotional health – the ability to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions

- The ability to perceive the world more healthily – the ability to cope with and manage change and uncertainty. Making sense of everyday events

- The ability to think healthily – clarity of thought, problem solving, effective decision making

What is good mental health?

Good mental health is when you can:

• Cope with the normal stresses of life

• Work productively

• Realise your potential

• Contribute to the community

(WHO 2019)

What is mental ill-health?

The mental health continuum is a range with mental health and mental illness or ill-health at two extreme ends. It suggests that mental health is fluid and may change over time. Mental ill-health can affect anyone, of any background, at any time of their life.

Mental health   **Mental ill-health**

Mental health continuum

What is mental ill-health?

- Mental ill-health is a condition or group of conditions that affect a person's thinking, emotions, behaviours, the ability to carry out daily activities and the ability to interact and develop effective relationships

- Mental ill-health is also associated with other terms such as:

  - Mental illness – a condition diagnosed by a medical professional. It is a disorder that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities

  - Mental health conditions – a mental health problem also interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities, but may not meet the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness

  - Mental health disorders – mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems, with different symptoms. However, they are generally characterised by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviours and relationships with others

Mental health conditions

Examples of common mental health conditions include:

- Depression

- Anxiety

- Phobias

- Eating disorders

Examples of more severe mental illnesses include:

- Schizophrenia

- Bipolar disorder

Activity

Mental health conditions usually have a wide range of causes. Think of the following factors and try to identify examples of how these might affect mental health.

- Environmental factors

- Social factors

- Individual factors

Factors affecting mental health

Environmental factors, for example:

- Socio-economic – unemployment/economic recession/losing your job

- Negative physical environments – housing, workplace, urban vs rural, access to open spaces

- Exposure to trauma, (see other considerations below)

Individual factors, for example:

- The death of someone close to you

- Loneliness

- A long-term physical or chronic health condition

- Drug and alcohol misuse

- Work stress

- Unemployment/debt

Factors affecting mental health

Social circumstances, for example:

• Poor social cohesion/social fragmentation

• Childhood adversity – abuse, trauma, or neglect

• Social isolation or loneliness

• Experiencing discrimination and stigma

• Family conflict

• Low income/poverty/social disadvantages

• Domestic violence or other abuse as an adult

• Attitudes and perceptions of others – stigma and judgement

Factors affecting mental health

Other factors include:

- Significant trauma, such as military combat, being involved in a serious accident or being the victim of a violent crime, experiences of pandemics, for example, COVID-19

- Physical causes – for example, a head injury or a condition such as epilepsy can have an impact on behaviour and mood (it is important to rule out causes such as this before seeking further treatment for a mental health problem)

- Influence of the media – for example, social media and depression, anxiety and self-harm. Inadequacy about life or appearance. Negative portrayal of mental health in the media (Time to Change 2019)

- Genetic factors – there is some evidence to suggest there might be a genetic cause related to some mental health conditions (National Institute of Health 2013)