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MODULE 6

Promoting Mental Health and Wellness

Introduction

Mental health has been defined by WHO (1999) as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and makes contributions to the community. Mental health is considered the foundation for well-being and effective functioning for an individual and for a community. A community of mentally healthy individuals is therefore empowered, productive, and resilient.



Promoting mental health covers a variety of strategies, which aims to have positive impact on mental health. It involves actions that create living conditions and environments to support mental health and allow people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles. This includes programs and policies that aim to foster individual and community mental health towards healthy living. The connection between chronic noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health problems has been shown to be bi-directional. Chronic NCDs can lead to certain mental health issues just as mental illness can also contribute to development of chronic NCDs.

Objectives

At the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Describe the magnitude of mental health problems related to NCDs
2. Explain the benefits of promoting mental health
3. Discuss principles and guidelines for promoting mental health across life span
4. Describe strategies to promote mental health among:
 - a. School-based population
 - b. Workplace population
 - c. Community-based population
5. Identify key areas for promotion of mental health among individuals with chronic conditions
6. Create a supportive environment for mental health promotion
7. Advocate for a supportive environment on physical activity



Epidemiology of Mental Health Problems Related to NCDs

Mental health problems are increasing and dramatically adding to the global burden of disease and disability worldwide. Mental disorders account for about 14% of global burden of disease: depression, alcohol/drug abuse, and psychoses (WHO, 2007). The public health impact of mental illness is that it can cause disability for prolonged periods. Mental illness has been found to be the third most common form of disability in the Philippines in 2000 after visual and hearing impairments, with a prevalence rate of 88 cases per 100,000 population (National Statistics Office, 2000). The region with the highest prevalence rate of mental illness is Southern Tagalog at 132.9 cases per 100,000 population, followed by NCR at 130.8 per 100,000 population and Central Luzon at 88.2 per 100,000 population (DOH National Objectives for Health, 2005-2010).

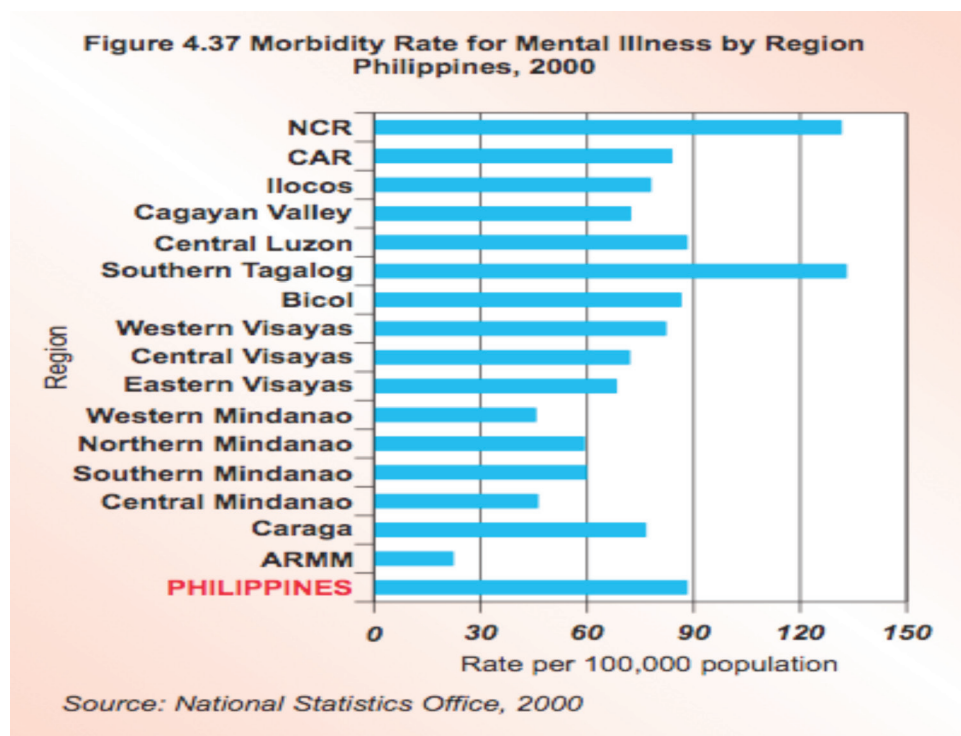


Figure 6.1 Morbidity Rate for Mental Illness by Region (2000)

WHO (2007) reports that about half of mental disorders begin before the age of fourteen. Around 20% of the world’s children and adolescents are estimated to have mental disorders or problems, with similar types of disorders being reported across cultures. In the Global School Health Survey (2007), 17% of students 13-15 years old with specific mental health problems described to be “feeling lonely most of the time or always during the last 12 months”, 16.7% “seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months” and 4.5% reported “having no close friends”.

WHO reports that about 50% of mental disorders begin before the age of fourteen.



A study in the workplace showed that 32% of government employees in 20 agencies in Metro Manila reported experiencing mental health problems at least once in their lifetime (DOH-NEC, 2006). The three most common diagnoses were specific phobias (15%), alcohol abuse (10%) and depression (6%).

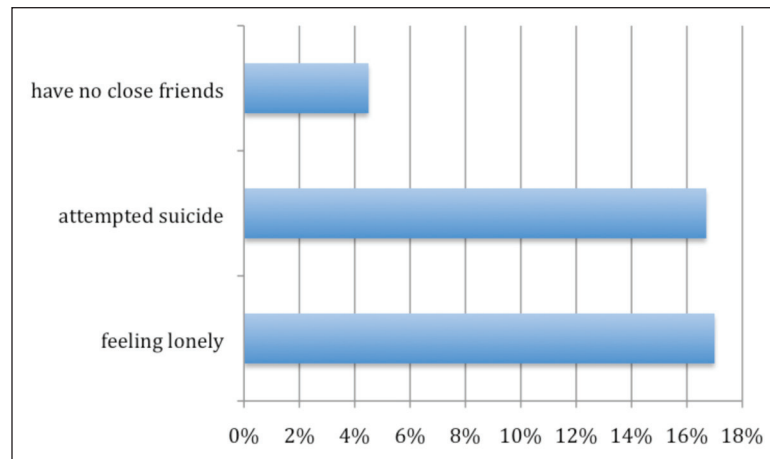


Figure 6.2 Mental Health Concerns among Adolescents 13-15 y/o (GSHS, 2007)

In a population survey (DOH, National Objectives for Health, 2005-2010), the more frequently reported symptoms of mental health problem were excessive sadness, confusion and forgetfulness, no control over the use of cigarettes and alcohol, and delusions. Excessive sadness, forgetfulness and confusion increase with age. Cigarette and alcohol abuse affect adults and adolescents more than they do the older persons. The prevalence of mental illness is reportedly highest among the older age groups.

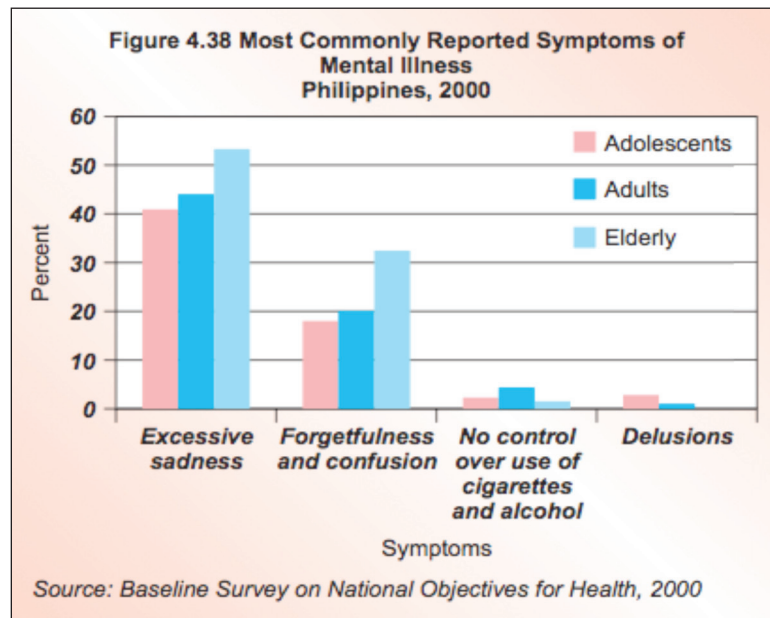


Figure 6.3 Most Commonly Reported Symptoms of Mental Illness (2000)



Mental disorders such as depression, alcohol, substance abuse, child/adolescent development problems are among the risk factors for some NCDs and can also contribute to unintentional and intentional injury. Comorbidity or the co-occurrence of physical and mental conditions is common. A community survey showed that those who report significant emotional distress reported high rates of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, asthma and diabetes (NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2003). Respondents also reported risk behaviours that potentially increase the incidence of poor health, such as lack of exercise, binge drinking, smoking and poor nutrition.

Several studies provide evidence linking mental health domains to physical conditions, particularly on the interactions between depression and related illnesses including anxiety, and heart disease (Kuper, Marmot & Hemingway, 2002), stroke (Carson et al., 2002), diabetes (Anderson et al., 2001), asthma (Goldney et al., 2003) and cancer (De Boer et al., 1999). Depression occurs in 16–23% of patients with coronary artery disease and may precede myocardial infarction in 33–50% of cases. Depression and anxiety have also been found in patients following coronary artery bypass graft and in patients with congestive heart failure. Local data show that almost half (47%) of those diagnosed to have long-standing physical illness in selected tertiary hospitals in the Philippines had anxiety and depression and other psychiatric illnesses (Perlas, et al., 1996).

Behaviours such as tobacco and alcohol use and other risk and protective factors such as exercise and overweight may influence onset, course and outcomes of cardiac pathology through complex causal and associative pathways. Depression and anxiety may worsen prognosis for stroke. Depression and anxiety can influence the course of diabetes and are associated with poor control of blood glucose levels and a range of complications. Increased rates of depression have also been found in people with asthma.



Mental disorders such as depression, alcohol and substance abuse are among the risk factors for some NCDs.

Several studies provide evidence linking mental health conditions particularly depression to physical conditions and illnesses including anxiety, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, asthma and cancer.



2. Benefits of promoting mental health

Given the association between mental health and physical conditions and the link between mental health problems and increased risk behaviors, promoting healthy lifestyle is incomplete without promoting mental health.

Promoting mental health involves looking beyond prevention. It means looking at the relationship between mental well-being and physical health; behavioral problems; violence; child abuse; domestic violence; drug and alcohol misuse; living and working conditions such as homelessness, poverty, and unemployment; and risk taking behavior such as smoking and unsafe sex. It means addressing the mental health impact of public policies, programs and plans.



Three Levels of Mental Health Promotion

- Strengthening Individuals
- Strengthening communities
- Reducing structural barriers to mental health

Mental health promotion emphasizes two key concepts: power and resilience. **Power** is defined as a person's, group's or community's sense of control over life and the ability to be resilient (Joubert & Raeburn, 1998). Building on one's existing capacities can increase power and control. **Resilience** has been defined as "the ability to manage or cope with significant adversity or stress in ways that are not only effective, but may result in an increased ability to respond to future adversity" (Health Canada, 2000). Resilience is influenced by risk factors and protective factors.

Mental health promotion works at three levels:

Strengthening individuals – or increasing emotional resilience through interventions to promote self-esteem, life and coping skills, e.g. communicating, negotiating, relationship and parenting skills. In the promotion of healthy lifestyle, strengthening individuals is very important for them to be able to make healthy choices; such as proper diet and nutrition, regular physical activity, being smoke-free and mentally healthy.

Strengthening communities – involves increasing social inclusion and participation, improving neighborhood environments, developing health and social services which support mental health, anti-bullying strategies at school, workplace health, community safety, child care and self-help networks. This has also implications in NCD prevention and control, specifically towards creating a supportive environment to promote healthy lifestyle

Reducing structural barriers to mental health - through initiatives to reduce discrimination and inequalities and to promote access to education, meaningful





employment, housing, services and support for those who are vulnerable. Promoting healthy lifestyle should also address inequities to ensure a healthy population.

3. Factors that contribute to mental health problems

Mental health is determined by socio-economic and environmental factors. The greater vulnerability of disadvantaged people to mental health disorders may be explained by such factors as the experience of insecurity and hopelessness, rapid social change, and the risks of violence and physical ill-health.



Factors that increase vulnerability to mental health problems
(WHO, 2004)

- Experience of insecurity and hopelessness
- Rapid social change
- Risks of violence
- Physical ill-health

Risk factors for mental health problems
(WHO, 2004)

- Drugs/alcohol
- Lack of education
- Poor nutrition
- Poverty
- Racial injustice
- Violence/delinquency
- War
- Work stress
- Unemployment

Mental, social, and behavioral health problems may interact to intensify their effects on behavior and well-being. Substance abuse, violence, and abuse of women and children on the one hand, and health problems such as depression and anxiety are more prevalent and more difficult to cope with in conditions of high unemployment, low income, limited education, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, unhealthy lifestyle, and human rights violation (WHO, 2004).

Risk factors can be biological or psychosocial. Risk factors cited for mental health problems include: drugs, alcohol, lack of education, poor nutrition, poverty racial injustice, violence/delinquency, war, work stress, and unemployment (WHO, 2004). These risk factors may exist within a person, his or her family or social network, or the community/institutions that surround him/her. They occur in different contexts, such as perinatal influences, family relationships, schools and workplaces, interpersonal relationships, media influences, social and cultural activities, the physical health of the individual, and the physical, social and economic "health" of the community. These risk factors for mental health problems may also contribute to the development of chronic noncommunicable diseases.

Protective factors buffer a person "in the face of adversity and moderate . . . the impact of stress on social and emotional well-being, thereby reducing the likelihood disorders will develop" (CDHAC, 2000). Protective factors may be internal (e.g., temperament, cognitive abilities) or external (e.g., social, economic or environmental



supports). They enable a person to protect his or her emotional and social well-being and cope with everyday life events (whether positive or negative). Protective factors act as a buffer against stress and may be drawn



upon in dealing with stressful situations. Similar to risk factors, protective factors may contribute both to the development of mental health problems and NCDs.

4. Promoting mental health across the lifespan

Promoting mental health in the broad sense relates to creating social and physical environments that are nurturing, protective from violence and harm, enhance relating and empathic skills from early attachments and family life, enhance social and emotional as well as other intelligence, facilitate resilience in the face of adversity and facilitate development and progressive maturation. A range of effective promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies across the lifespan can address such issues (CDHAC, 2000).

Many interventions exist to promote mental health among different age groups and different settings. Some examples across the lifespan include:

- Early childhood interventions (e.g. home visiting for pregnant women, pre-school psycho-social interventions, combined nutritional and psycho-social interventions in disadvantaged populations)
- Support to children (e.g. skills building programs, child and youth development programs)
- Mental health promotion activities in schools (e.g. programs supporting ecological changes in schools, child-friendly schools)



Mental Health and Wellness Programs should build on the following principles:

- Consider the developmental tasks of a particular age group to enhance social, emotional as well as other intelligence
- Enhances the life skills to facilitate development and progressive maturation
- Facilitates effective coping mechanisms to facilitate resilience in the face of adversity
- Cost-effective



- Mental health interventions at work (e.g. stress prevention programs)
- Housing policies (e.g. housing improvement)
- Socio-economic empowerment of women (e.g. improving access to education, microcredit schemes)
- Programs targeted at vulnerable groups, including minorities, indigenous people, migrants and people affected by conflicts and disasters (e.g. psycho-social interventions after disasters);
- Social support to old age populations (e.g. befriending initiatives, community and day centers for the aged)
- Violence prevention programs (e.g. community policing initiatives); and
- Community development programs (e.g. 'Communities That Care' initiatives, integrated rural development)

5. Strategies for Promoting Mental Health in Different Settings

Promoting mental health in different settings addresses the mental health needs of specific groups of people; for example, school-based population for children and adolescents, workplace for adult population, and community-based for the elderly population and other vulnerable groups. The following paragraphs describe these different settings and provides examples of mental health activities for each population group.

5.1 School-Based Population

Childhood and adolescence serve as critical periods in human development. It is during this stage that the sense of self, as well as the identity, is established. School-based programs increase the likelihood of children and families to commit to positive life skills and effective coping mechanisms. Schools do incorporate the following teaching-learning strategies in their curriculum, which can help students to have a positive sense of self:

- **Physical education classes** promote physical activity and serve as a way to manage stress. This can also be seen as a way to expose children in the health benefits of exercise and engaging in physical activities.
- Provision of **opportunities for creative expression** in lessons such as the use of art, poetry, drama and music.
- Group work encourages **social interaction** and develops skills in teamwork.
- Use of a **system of recognition and appreciation** of efforts, talents, and accomplishments can facilitate development of self-esteem. However, educators must avoid criticism of those who are not doing well, and instead encourage them to discover their talents so as not to develop a child's feelings of inferiority.
- **Educational field trips**, such as *Lakbay-Aral*, provide exposure to nature, broaden their perspective of



School-based mental health and wellness activities contribute in developing student to:

- Have positive sense of self
- Help facilitate development of well-rounded personalities
- Build positive relationship with parents necessary to child's self-esteem
- Guide and support the student as he goes through various physical and psychosocial changes

School-based activities should involve:

- Parents/guardians
- Class advisers
- Guidance counselors



environments and systems outside their own. These excursions teach students that learning does not happen only in schools and not only from books and teachers. Field trips also provide a healthy break from the routines of schoolwork.

Another rich source of feelings of psychosocial wellbeing in schools are **extracurricular activities**. School tournaments provide venues for friendly competition and sportsmanship. Schools encourage their students to participate in these activities to help facilitate the development of well-rounded personalities. Organizations such as dance troupes, choirs and glee clubs not only help students discover but also hone their talents.

The student as a child is also largely dependent on his/her parents. They tend to seek approval from the parents, thus, a positive relationship is important to the child's self-esteem. A negative parental relationship (which occurs when the parent demands too much from the child, or when the parent neglects and/or abuses the child) jeopardizes the child's development. Thus, the school should include the parents in their strategies of promoting psychosocial wellbeing and mental health and wellness.

5.1.1 Strategies to promote mental health and wellness for school-children:

- Regular parent-teacher meetings, which will inform both parties of the child's activities in school and at home; suspicions of abuse (both in school and at home) should not be taken lightly.
- Inviting parents to school events such as foundation days, sports tournaments and recognition days in which the parents will be able to witness their children's performance in school, as it is important for the child to be approved by his parents and enjoy their support
- Most schools celebrate a Family Day once a year during which parents, children and/or other family



members participate in games, contests or put up booths to sell food and other products. As the child grows into an adolescent, he/she undergoes various physical and psychosocial changes. It is also the role of the school to guide and support the student as he/she goes through these changes. Unlike school-age children, the needs of adolescents begin to center on their identity. Issues such as body image, peer pressure, feelings of belonging and a sense of self begin to arise. Thus, the approach to adolescent students differs from that of school-age children.

5.1.2 Strategies to promote mental health and wellness for adolescents:

- Adolescents have more strength and excess energy. Thus, provision of sports and recreational facilities, such as gyms, basketball/volleyball courts, track field/oval and the like encourage them to spend their free/spare time constructively. This way, the school helps in keeping them away from risk taking behaviors such as substance abuse, engaging in gambling and other illegal activities.
- Organizations such as dance troupes, choirs and glee clubs become more important to adolescents not only because they enjoy doing these activities but also it caters to their need to belong. Likewise, forming book/ film lovers, stamp collectors and other interest groups not only provide a venue for sharing passions and resources but more so because they are with people who are like them.
- Sports tournaments become more competitive in high school. Coaches and advisers can take the opportunity to heighten team building.



- Field trips and outings become special activities for adolescents, which are often done outside of school premises. Unobtrusive supervision and monitoring become critical in order to preserve the benefits and avoid possible abuse of these gatherings.

Since students spend at least one third of their day in schools, class advisers and guidance counselors play great roles in mental health promotion. They should serve as role models and work with the parents and guardians for the development of the students.



5.1.3 The following approaches can be utilized by the schoolteachers and counselors:

- Guidance counselors can provide psychosocial information material for parents and teachers. These materials should include the developmental needs of children and adolescents, so as to guide them in their expectations of their children. Seminars in parenting techniques can also be offered.
- Class advisers should be made aware of the signs of abuse, drug use, depression and potential suicide, and must initiate investigation of suspected cases for appropriate action.
- Individual and/or family counseling can also be conducted by the guidance counselor for vulnerable those needing assistance (i.e. those suspected of abuse, drug use, depression and potential suicide)
- The guidance counselor can also coordinate with the school to hold seminars and talks regarding issues of adolescents, such as the following:
 - Body changes during puberty
 - Body image issues, including eating disorders
 - Substance abuse (tobacco/cigarette, alcohol and prohibited drugs)
 - Responsible sexuality

5.2 Workplace Population

Mental health should not only be limited to children and adolescents, but to adults as well. Adults need good coping mechanisms as they gain more tasks and responsibilities. Just like students spending a huge portion of their time in school, adults spend a third of their day in their workplace. Work holds potential stressors for an individual, as he needs to establish himself/herself at his/her work. Failure in work tends to devalue an individual's self-esteem.

A healthy workplace considers the importance of psychosocial well-being and mental health wellness of workers and provides policies, facilities, and environment that support programs to maintain overall health



Workplace-based mental health and wellness activities should:

- Enhance the adult's good coping mechanisms as they gain more tasks and responsibilities
- Maintain overall health and work efficiency of workers
- Facilitate good interpersonal relations among workers
- Provide for a stress-free physical environment

I ♥ my job



and work efficiency. Employers must see to it that enforcing efficiency does not jeopardize the worker's health, including his/her mental wellness. There are some sources of stress in the workplace that must be minimized if not removed.

5.2.1 Work policies

One of the biggest sources of stress in the workplace is the policies and how these are implemented. Policies that usually cause stress pertain to those that concern production such as quotas and deadlines as well as those that concern personnel such as performance evaluation, discipline, promotion and termination. Strategies to improve mental health of workers through work policies include:

- Formulation and implementation of fair and just policies
- Employee participation in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of policies

Some policies in the employee's compensation programs such as leave credits for vacation and sickness, free annual physical examination, special loans, team-building activities, and general assemblies are examples of how the workplace can address mental health needs of its employees.

5.2.2 Interpersonal relations

The other threat to a worker's feeling of wellbeing is difficult interpersonal relations with or among co-workers. Managers need to employ several tools to facilitate good interpersonal relations among workers, between supervisors and subordinates, and maintain open communications between management and rank and file to promote mental health in the workplace. Some strategies to improve interpersonal relations:

- Monthly meetings by unit supervisors/managers can be used to clarify issues and concerns including ventilation of grievances from the staff.
- Team – building seminars and workshops are conducted to build good interpersonal relations and create a feeling of oneness among the employees.
- Staff outings, often including some members of the worker's family, may be held to provide employees with respite from routines. The brief change in environment provides stress relief.
- Physical fitness activities (for about 30 minutes) such as aerobics and tai chi can be held once a week not only to promote physical activity among employees but also provide a venue for doing things together and nurturing a sense of belonging.



5.2.3 Work environment

The physical environment of the workplace can be a source of stress and adverse to the mental health of workers. Attention to workplace ventilation, lighting, temperature as well as air and noise pollution is also very important. Other interventions to promote mental health through improvement of physical environment include:

- The space allotted for each workers should be adequate, that is, he/she is able to move freely as demanded by the tasks to be done
- Screens on doors and windows are installed when necessary, adequate lighting, electric fans and/or air conditioning units are provided.
- Piped-in music has been proven to increase worker satisfaction as well as their feeling of wellbeing.

5.3 Community-based Population

Communities are critical areas for the promotion of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. These are where people spend at least half of their time. Since they live near each other, community members affect each other's life, whether they like it or not. Thus, the community should be a focal point in the promotion of healthy lifestyle among all population groups living in it – families, children, adolescents, young adults, middle age adults and older people.

Healthy individuals make up a healthy community, and in turn a healthy community should ensure the health of its various populations. Strategies for promotion of mental health in the community must be relevant, sustainable and caters/responsive to the needs of its members.



Community-based mental health and wellness activities:

- ✓ Must be relevant, sustainable, and responsive to the need of its members
- ✓ Should lead to establishment of support groups for each of the population group in the community
- ✓ Should provide adequate attention to psychosocial needs of children
- ✓ Include provision of sports and recreation facilities to encourage interpersonal relations and foster camaraderie
- ✓ Must include teaching of stress management techniques to community groups.



5.3.1 Building support groups

The establishment of support groups for each of the population groups in the community is an important approach in community organizing which community leaders can adopt. Each of these population groups can then take the lead in the promotion of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing that best suits their needs and realities.

- Parenting seminars can focus on the strengthening of the family as the basic unit of society. It is in families where individuals are born and grow. Healthy families are in a better position to produce healthy children who would later compose a healthy community. Families are also considered to be a person’s primary support group. Promotion of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing should necessarily involve the family.
- A necessary component of parenting seminars should be lectures on human growth and development through which the participants will broaden their knowledge not only about children, but also about themselves and their parents.
- Workshops on the developmental milestones of children will help parents better appreciate the behaviors of their children in various stages of development. When integrated with good child – rearing practices these could then translate into enabling them to better help their children achieve developmental tasks at each stage of development. It would help them become not only good parents but also best friends of their children.
- A host of other topics that could be beneficial to parents such as nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, exercise, prevention of communicable diseases, management of common illnesses, and home management. Planning the specifics of these workshops and seminars should be done together with the end users, the community members themselves.

Other population groups in the community have their own mental health and psychosocial needs. Next to parents, communities should provide adequate attention to children. While good parenting is important, children have psychosocial needs, which only the community can provide.

- *Safety and security.* Children must be able to eat, play, sleep and pursue activities needed for their growth and development in environments that do not pose danger to their health and wellbeing.
- *Caring and attention.* The home and the school should not be the only places where children are cared for and given adequate attention. Other institutions in the community must be child friendly – churches, groceries and stores.



- *Building personal competence and self-esteem* among children is a concern where the community can help parents. Allowing children to participate in community projects and recognizing their contributions, however small, will go a long way in building a sense of responsibility and achievement.
- *Child-to-child approaches* recognize the value of children in influencing their peers. Thus, whenever possible, these approaches should be utilized. Encouraging them to become models of good manners and right conduct can foster conscientiousness and dependability.

There can also be support groups for people with specific chronic conditions; for example, cancer support groups, diabetes clubs, etc. These support groups can be a valuable resource for patients and their families to cope with specific chronic conditions. For example, cancer patients and their families can find emotional support as well as other important information and physical resources from cancer support groups.



Senior Citizens' Group

5.3.2 Providing facilities for sports and recreation

The provision of facilities for sports and recreation is likewise an important approach in the promotion of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in the community. These can also provide venues to encourage interpersonal relations and foster camaraderie among neighbors.

- This is especially significant among the adolescents and young adults, they who have a lot of excess energy to spend. Its role in keeping them away from risk taking behaviors such as substance abuse, gambling and has been well documented.



- Communities may also hold community events such as sports tournaments, neighborhood outings, bingo socials, beauty and popularity for various age groups in the community.
- Weekly exercise programs such as aerobics and dance classes can promote physical activity as well as a form of stress management. Tai Chi, a meditative Chinese exercise is more appropriate for older persons as well as those who cannot participate in fast exercise routines. Timing these activities on weekends tend to attract more participants.



Basketball Courts in Communities

6. Promoting Mental Health Among Individuals with Chronic Conditions

Chronic conditions like the major noncommunicable diseases – cancer, heart diseases, diabetes mellitus, and chronic respiratory diseases – can cause patients and their families to suffer from anxiety, depression, anger and helplessness. These mental health concerns might be due to the diagnoses, long period and side effects of medical treatment, and/or poor prognosis. It is important that patients and families are provided with mental health services



Strategies to Promote Mental Health and Wellness

- ✓ Stress Management
- ✓ Assertive Communication
- ✓ Anger Management
- ✓ Work-life balance
- ✓ Positive thinking
- ✓ Spirituality
- ✓ Social Support
- ✓ Meditation



which could range from techniques on stress management, assertive communication, anger management, finding work-life balance, positive thinking, spirituality and social support.

Interventions should start with the measurement of an individual's source of stress and coping mechanism. (*See Module 2 for the risk assessment on mental health and coping mechanism*). Additional questions can be added to explore how patients and families can best be supported. Following are some strategies that have been proven to help maintain psychosocial wellbeing and mental health wellness. Guided by the results of assessments, a program to maintain mental health for an individual with chronic condition can be designed.

6.1 Stress Management

Prolonged or excessive stress may be detrimental to an individual, especially on mental health. When a person is constantly exposed to stressors, or when he/she stays longer in the stress response, the body remains under increased levels of stress hormones. Overexposure to these hormones has negative effects on an individual's health, and places him/her at risk for diseases such as hypertension and heart disease. Also, stress can worsen an existing disease or diseases. Since it has far reaching and potentially fatal outcomes, stress management is very important in the promotion of psychosocial wellbeing and mental health wellness. Some ways of coping with stress include:

- Identify stress triggers

Coping with stress is easier when one knows what triggers his/her stress. One's response to the demands of the world determines his/her stress level. One should take time to consider common stressors and how they may be affecting him/her. Job loss, failed relationships, and death of a loved one are some obvious causes of stress. Studies have shown that small, daily hassles and demands such as a long commute, being caught in heavy traffic, trouble finding house help or child care also contribute to stress level. Over time, small, persistent stressors can wreak more havoc than sudden, devastating events do. Only when these stressors are known can the appropriate way to handle each one can be identified.

- Improve time management

Effective time management skills can help identify goals, set priorities and minimize stress in life. The following tips can improve time management skills and lower stress level.

- o Create realistic expectations and deadlines and set regular progress reviews.
- o Throw away unimportant papers on desk.
- o Prepare a master list of tasks. Throughout the day, scan master list and work on tasks in priority order.



- o Use a planner. Store addresses and telephone numbers there. Evaluate and prioritize daily.
- o For especially important or difficult projects, reserve an interruption-free block of time.

- Extinguish job burnout

Nowhere is stress more likely than in the workplace. Twenty-five percent of people say that their job is the primary stressor in their lives. Job stress can affect professional and personal relationships, job effectiveness and health. Here are some strategies to handle job burnout:

- Identify the source of the problem. Whether it is an unrealistic workload, job insecurity, inadequate compensation, office politics or a hostile work environment, figure out what's making work difficult and take steps to deal with it.
- Develop friendships at work and outside the office. Sharing unsettling feelings with trusted people is the first step toward resolving them. Minimize activities with "negative" people who only reinforce bad feelings.
- Take time off. Take a vacation or a long weekend. During the workday, take short breaks.
- Set limits. When necessary, learn to say no in a friendly but firm manner.
- Choose battles wisely. Don't rush to argue every time someone disagrees. Keep a cool head, and save argument for things that really matter.
- Have an outlet. Read, enjoy a hobby, exercise or get involved in some other activity that is relaxing and gets mind off work.
- Seek help. If none of these things relieves feelings of stress or burnout, ask a health care professional for advice.

6.2 Assertive Communication

Assertiveness can help control stress and anger and improve coping skills for mental illnesses. Assertive communication is based on respect, that is, respect for one's self and respect for the other person. Thus, assertiveness is an effective and diplomatic communication style. Being assertive shows one fighting for his/her rights and expressing thoughts and feelings. It also demonstrates cognizance of the rights of others and willing to work on resolving conflicts.

Assertive communication considers both what is said and how it is said. Assertive communication is direct and respectful, gives one the best chance of successfully delivering the message. On the other hand, in passive or aggressive communication, the content of the message may get lost because people are too busy reacting to the manner in which message was delivered.



People develop different styles of communication based on their life experiences. These styles usually become so ingrained that the person is not even aware of it. Although people tend to stick to the same communication style over time, one can learn to be more flexible in how he/she communicates.



Table 6.1. Tips to become more assertive

- *Assess your style.* Do you voice your opinions or remain silent? Do you say yes to additional work even when you are already loaded? Are you quick to judge or blame? Do people seem to dread or fear talking to you?
- *Use “I” statements.* Using “I” statements lets others know what you’re thinking without sounding accusatory. For instance, say, “I disagree,” rather than, “You’re wrong.”
- *Practice saying no.* If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, “No, I can’t do that now.” Don’t beat around the bush — be direct. If an explanation is appropriate, keep it brief.
- *Rehearse what you want to say.* If it’s challenging to say what you want or think, practice typical scenarios you encounter. For instance, if you want to ask for a raise, practice what you want to say. Say it out loud. It may help to write it out first. Consider role-playing with a friend or colleague and ask for blunt feedback.
- *Use body language.* Communication is not just verbal. Act confident even if you aren’t feeling it. You may find that your body convinces your brain! Keep an upright posture but lean forward a bit. Make regular eye contact. Maintain a neutral or positive facial expression. Don’t wring your hands or use dramatic gestures. It can help to practice in front of a mirror.
- *Keep emotions in check.* Conflict is hard for most people. Maybe you get angry or frustrated, or maybe you feel like crying. Although these feelings are normal, they can get in the way of resolving conflict. If you feel too emotional going into a situation, wait a bit if possible. Then, work on remaining calm. Breathe slowly. Keep your voice even and firm.
- *Start small.* At first, practice your new skills in situations that are low risk. For instance, try out your assertiveness on a partner or friend before tackling a difficult situation at work. Evaluate yourself afterward and tweak your approach as necessary.

6.3 Anger management

Anger is not always bad. But if anger is handled poorly, it can be harmful. Anger is a feeling of displeasure or hostility that indicates something is wrong in a situation. Anger is an unpleasant emotion, but it is also a normal, healthy emotion. Anger is a natural response to perceived threats. Anger becomes a problem only when it is not managed in a healthy way.



Anger involves three components:

- *Emotions.* This component of anger involves feelings such as sadness, disappointment or frustration.
- *The Body.* Anger can cause physical signs and symptoms, such as muscle tension, increased heart rate and increased blood pressure as one's body releases adrenaline — the fight-or-flight hormone.
- *Thinking.* How one thinks can cause or worsen anger, or it can help one cope in a healthy way. A healthy response is to acknowledge that it is OK to be frustrated, and look for solutions instead of focusing only on what's wrong.

There is some evidence that inappropriately expressing anger can be harmful to health. Whether one is overly passive and keeps anger pent up, whether one is prone to violent outbursts, or whether one is quietly seething with rage, headaches, sleep difficulties, high blood pressure or digestive problems may occur. There is even some evidence that stress and hostility related to anger can lead to heart attacks.

Being angry is not always a bad or negative thing. Being angry can motivate people to listen to one's concerns. It can prevent others from walking all over a person. And it can motivate a person to get involved with causes. It is the not knowing how to manage anger in a healthy way that is a problem.

Expressing oneself in an assertive - not an aggressive - manner is the healthiest approach to handling anger. Being assertive means stating one's concerns and needs clearly and directly, without hurting others or trying to control them.



Table 6.2. Ten tips to help get anger under control

1. *Take a 'timeout.'* Although it may seem cliché, counting to 10 before reacting really can defuse your temper.
2. *Get some space.* Take a break from the person you're angry with until your frustrations subside a bit.
3. *Once you're calm, express your anger.* It's healthy to express your frustration in a non-confrontational way. Stewing about it can make the situation worse.
4. *Get some exercise.* Physical activity can provide an outlet for your emotions, especially if you're about to erupt. Go for a brisk walk or a run, swim, lift weights or shoot baskets
5. *Think carefully before you say anything.* Otherwise, you're likely to say something you'll regret. It can be helpful to write down what you want to say so that you can stick to the issues. When you're angry, it's easy to get sidetracked.
6. *Identify solutions to the situation.* Instead of focusing on what made you mad, work with the person who angered you to resolve the issue at hand.
7. *Use 'I' statements when describing the problem.* This will help to avoid criticizing or placing blame, which can make the other person angry or resentful — and increase tension. For instance, say, "I'm upset you didn't help with the housework this evening," instead of, "You should have helped with the housework."
8. *Don't hold a grudge.* If you can forgive the other person, it will help you both. It's unrealistic to expect everyone to behave exactly as you want.
9. *Use humor to release tensions.* Lightening up can help diffuse tension. Don't use sarcasm — it can hurt feelings and make things worse.
10. *Practice relaxation skills.* Learning skills to relax and de-stress can also help control your temper when it may flare up. Practice deep-breathing exercises, visualize a relaxing scene, or repeat a calming word or phrase to yourself, such as "Take it easy." Other proven ways to ease anger include listening to music, writing in a journal and doing yoga.

6.4 Work-life balance

If work life and personal life are out of balance, a person's stress may be running high. Here are some tips to help balance work and life.



Table 6.3. Tips to balance work and life

- *Keep a log.* Track everything you do for one week. Include work-related and non-work-related activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy and don't have time for. If you don't have the authority to make certain decisions, talk to your supervisor.
- *Take advantage of your options.* Find out if your employer offers flex hours, a compressed workweek, job-sharing or telecommuting for your role. The flexibility may alleviate some of your stress and free up some time.
- *Learn to say no.* Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to manage the class play, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit doing the things you only do out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll make more room in your life for the activities that are meaningful to you and bring you joy.
- *Leave work at work.* With today's global business mentality and the technology to connect to anyone at any time from virtually anywhere, there's no boundary between work and home — unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to separate work time from personal time. When with your family, for instance, turn off your cell phone and put away your laptop computer.
- *Manage your time.* Organize household tasks efficiently. Doing one or two loads of laundry every day, rather than saving it all for your day off, and running errands in batches are good places to begin. A weekly family calendar of important dates and a daily list of to-dos will help you avoid deadline panic. If your employer offers a course in time management, sign up for it.
- *Rethink your cleaning standards.* An unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes won't impact the quality of your life. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. If you can afford it, pay someone else to clean your house.
- *Communicate clearly.* Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if necessary.
- *Fight the guilt.* Remember, having a family and a job is OK — for both men and women
- *Nurture yourself.* Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as walking, working out or listening to music. Unwind after a hectic workday by reading, practicing yoga, or taking a bath or shower.
- *Set aside one night each week for recreation.* Take the phone off the hook, power down the computer and turn off the TV. Discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends, such as playing golf, fishing or canoeing. Making time for activities you enjoy will rejuvenate you.
- *Protect your day off.* Try to schedule some of your routine chores on workdays so that your days off are more relaxing.
- *Get enough sleep.* There's nothing as stressful and potentially dangerous as working when you're sleep-deprived. Not only is your productivity affected, but also you can make costly mistakes. You may then have to work even more hours to make up for these mistakes.
- *Bolster your support system.* Give yourself the gift of a trusted friend or co-worker to talk with during times of stress or hardship. Ensure you have trusted friends and relatives who can assist you when you need to work overtime or travel for your job.



6.5 Positive thinking

Positive thinking helps with stress management and can even improve health. Overcome negative self-talk by recognizing it and practicing with some examples provided. Self-talk is the endless stream of thoughts that run through our head every day. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. Sources of self-talk include logic and reason or from misconceptions created because of lack of information. It can also be influenced by life experiences. Continuing studies on the effects of positive thinking and optimism on health have shown the following health benefits of positive thinking:

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

It is not clear why people who engage in positive thinking experience these health benefits. One theory is that having a positive outlook enables one to cope better with stressful situations, which reduces the harmful health effects of stress on the body. It is also thought that positive and optimistic people live healthier lifestyles — they get more physical activity, follow a healthier diet, and have reduced rates of smoking and alcohol consumption.

6.6 Spirituality

Another tool for helping manage difficult times that can be just as beneficial, although harder to pin down, is embracing spirituality. Spirituality is something that helps to give meaning or context to life. It is not necessarily connected to a specific belief system or even religious worship. Instead, it comes from one's connection with his or her inner self with others and with the world. For many, this takes the form of religious observance, prayer, meditation or a belief in a higher power. For others, it can be found in nature, music, art or a secular community. Spirituality is different for everyone.



Table 6.4. Benefits of spirituality



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Focus on personal goals.</i> Cultivating your spirituality may help uncover what’s most meaningful in your life. By clarifying what’s most important, you can focus less on the unimportant things and eliminate stress. • <i>Connect to the world.</i> The more you feel you have a purpose in the world, the less solitary you feel — even when you’re alone. This can lead to a valuable inner peace during difficult times • <i>Release control.</i> When you feel part of a greater whole, you realize that you aren’t responsible for everything that happens in life. You can share the burden of tough times as well as the joys of life’s blessings with those around you. • <i>Expand your support network.</i> Whether you find spirituality in a church, mosque or synagogue, in your family, or in walks with a friend through nature, this sharing of spiritual expression can help build relationships. • <i>Lead a healthier life.</i> People who consider themselves spiritual are usually better able to cope with stress and heal from illness faster.
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Nurture relationships with others:

- Develop effective listening and communication skills.
- Make relationships with friends and family a priority and stay in touch.
- Share spiritual journey with loved ones and let them know what’s important to you.
- Seek out others with similar spiritual beliefs and engage in conversation to learn from each other
- Volunteer within community.
- See the good in people and in oneself.

Staying connected to one’s inner spirit and the lives of those around can enhance the quality of life, both mentally and physically. Spirituality is a dynamic process and a constantly evolving internal journey. A person’s concept of spirituality may change with one’s age and life experiences, but it always forms the basis of one’s well-being, help one maintain a reasonable stress level and affirms one’s purpose in life.

6.7 Social support

Having close friends and family one can count on has far-reaching benefits for health. There is plenty of research to confirm that surrounding oneself with supportive family, friends and co-workers can have a positive effect on mental health. A social support network is made up of friends, family and peers. A coffee break with a friend at work, a quick chat with a neighbor, a phone call to a sister, even a visit to church are all ways to reduce stress while fostering lasting relationships with the people close to someone.





The positive effects of a support network include:

- *Sense of belonging.* Spending time with people helps ward off loneliness. Whether it's other new moms, dog lovers, fishing buddies or siblings, just knowing one is not alone can go a long way toward coping with stress.
- *Increased sense of self-worth.* Having people who call one a friend reinforces the idea that he/she is a good person to be around.
- *Feeling of security.* By reaching out and sharing oneself with others, a person has the added security of knowing that if he/she start to show signs of depression or exhibit unhealthy lifestyle habits, his/her friends can help alert him/her to the problem.

The first step toward developing a strong support network is an evaluation of one's own behavior as it relates to building and maintaining friendships. Relationships are a two-way street. The better a friend one is, the better his/her friends will be. Here are some suggestions for nurturing relationships.



Table 6.5. Tips for nurturing relationships

- *Stay in touch.* Answering phone calls, returning e-mails and reciprocating invitations let people know you care.
- *Be proactive.* Don't wait for someone else to make the first move. If you meet someone you think could be a good friend, invite him or her for coffee. Or be the one to strike up a conversation while in line at the grocery store.
- *Know when to say "no" and when to say "yes."* Spending time with people who aren't supportive can add stress and take away valuable time. On the other hand, don't decline an invitation because you feel shy or insecure.
- *Don't compete.* Be happy instead of jealous when your friends succeed, and they'll celebrate your accomplishments in return.
- *Be a good listener.* Find out what's important to your friends — you might find you have even more in common than you think.
- *Challenge yourself.* Keep looking for ways to improve. Maybe it's by complaining less, being more generous or forgiving others' faults.
- *Don't overdo it.* In your zeal to extend your social network, be careful not to overwhelm friends and family with phone calls and e-mails. Save those high-demand times for when you really need them.
- *Appreciate your friends and family.* Take time to say thank you and express how important they are to you.

It's always a good time to make more friends or improve on the relationships one already has. Whether a person is the one getting the support or the one doling out the encouragement, both will reap the rewards of comfort and compassion.



6.8 Meditation

Meditation, considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine, produces a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, one focuses attention and eliminates the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding the mind and causing stress. This process results in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.

Meditation can give one a sense of calm, peace and balance that benefits both emotional well-being and overall health. And these benefits do not end when the meditation session ends. Meditation can help carry a person more calmly through a day and improve certain medical conditions. When a person meditates, one clears away the information overload that builds up every day and contributes to stress. This paves the way for:

- Gaining a new perspective on stressful situations
- Building skills to manage stress
- Increased self-awareness
- Focusing on the present
- Reducing negative emotions

Different types of meditation may include different features depending on who is guiding or teaching the meditation. Some of the most common features in meditation include:

- *Focusing attention.* This is one of the most important elements of meditation. Focusing attention is what helps free the mind from the many distractions that cause stress and worry. Focus attention on such things as a specific object, an image, a mantra, or even breathing. If the mind wanders, just return to focus of attention.
- *Relaxed breathing.* This technique involves deep, even-paced breathing using the diaphragm muscle to expand lungs. The purpose is to slow breathing, take in more oxygen, and reduce the use of shoulder, neck and upper chest muscles while breathing so that breathing becomes more efficient.
- *A quiet location.* Practicing meditation may be easier if done in a quiet spot with few distractions – no television, radios or cell phones. As one gets more skilled at meditation, it can be done anywhere, especially in high-stress situations, such as a traffic jam, a stressful work meeting or a long line at the grocery store.
- *A comfortable position.* Practice meditation whether sitting, lying down, walking or in other positions or activities. Just try to be comfortable to get the most out of meditation.

One does not have to attend a meditation class and be guided by a meditation “guru” in order to learn to meditate. One can practice meditation that will suit lifestyle and situation. Some people build meditation into their daily routine. For example, they may start and end each day with an hour of meditation. But all one really needs is a few minutes of quality time for meditation.



Table 6.6. Some meditation methods

- *Breathe deeply.* This technique is good for beginners because breathing is a natural function. Focus all attention on your breathing. Concentrate on feeling and listening as you inhale and exhale through your nostrils. Breathe deeply and slowly. When your attention wanders, gently return your focus to your breathing.
- *Scan your body.* When using this technique, focus attention on different parts of your body. Become aware of your body's various sensations, whether that's pain, tension, warmth or relaxation. Combine body scanning with breathing exercises and imagine breathing heat or relaxation into and out of different parts of your body.
- *Repeat a mantra.* You can create your own mantra, whether it's religious or secular. Examples of religious mantras include the Jesus Prayer in the Christian tradition, the holy name of God in Judaism, or the om mantra of Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern religions.
- *Walking meditation.* Combining a walk with meditation is an efficient and healthy way to relax. You can use this technique anywhere you're walking — in a tranquil forest, on a city sidewalk or at the mall. When you use this method, slow down the pace of walking so that you can focus on each movement of your legs or feet. Don't focus on a particular destination. Concentrate on your legs and feet, repeating action words in your mind such as lifting, moving and placing as you lift each foot, move your leg forward and place your foot on the ground.
- *Engage in prayer.* Prayer is the best known and most widely practiced example of meditation. Spoken and written prayers are found in most faith traditions. You can pray using your own words or read prayers written by others. Check the self-help or 12-step-recovery section of your local bookstore for examples. Talk with your rabbi, priest, pastor or other spiritual leader about resources.
- *Read or listen and take time to reflect.* Many people report that they benefit from reading poems or sacred texts silently or aloud, and taking a few moments to quietly reflect on the meaning that the words bring to mind. You can listen to sacred music, spoken words or any music you find relaxing or inspiring. You may want to write your reflections in a journal or discuss them with a friend or spiritual leader.
- *Focus your love and gratitude.* In this type of meditation, you focus your attention on a sacred object or being, weaving feelings of love and gratitude into your thoughts. You can also close your eyes and use your imagination or gaze at representations of the object.

7. Creating for supportive environment to promote mental health

The aim of advocacy is to generate public demand for mental health, place mental health issues high up on the political and community agenda and effectively convince all stakeholders to act in support of mental health. Advocacy may be directed to a variety of stakeholders, including politicians, religious leaders, professionals and community.



7.2 Raising mental health literacy

Raising awareness may help improve understanding about the risks to mental health and methods of coping with these risks, and thus promote mental health in the community. An example from Pakistan showed that delivering education regarding mental health and illness to secondary school students is effective in raising awareness in the wider community and may thus help raise mental health literacy and promote mental health at large (Rahman et al., 1998).

7.2 Life skills education

Life skills education is a model of health promotion that seeks to teach adolescents to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1997). Life skills include decision-making, problem-solving, creative and critical thinking, effective communication and interpersonal skills, self-awareness and coping with emotions and stress. Studies have shown life skills education is effective in the prevention of substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy and bullying; improved academic performance and school attendance; and the promotion of mental well-being and health behaviours (WHO, 1997).

7.3 Mental health advocacy and policy

An example of a community-based approach to combating alcoholism and promoting the mental health of families has been described in rural India where prevention and promotion strategies included education and awareness building, action against drunken men, advocacy to politicians to limit the sale and distribution of alcohol in bars and shops, and mass oaths for abstinence. This led to a marked reduction in the number of alcohol outlets in the area and a 60% reduction in alcohol consumption; and there was more money for food, clothing and welfare and a reduction in domestic violence (Bang & Bang, 1995).

7.4 Intersectoral alliances

Intersectoral alliances, such as schools and the community can help promote mental health of children and youth through life skills education, women's groups and trade sector can plan for livelihood projects, senior citizens or elderly groups and social welfare to address social isolation problems and elderly abuse. It is likely that intersectoral alliances and programs will have a powerful impact on promoting mental health.



Summary

Promoting mental health is major concern in the prevention and control of major NCDs. Depression, alcohol, substance abuse, child/adolescent development problems are some of the mental health concerns that have been shown to contribute to the development of major NCDs. Depression, anxiety and powerlessness can also affect the onset, course and outcome of medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes mellitus and cancer.

Given that there mental health concerns can be contributing factors to the development of major NCDs, there should be different mental health interventions throughout the lifespan and specific strategies in schools, workplaces and communities. Schools are important venues of many mental health promotion activities that strengthen individual students' protective factors and lifes kills. The workplace should also have mental health activities that promote worker's resilience and power through positive work policies, work environment and interpersonal relations. Communities must also be a venue for supporting community members through support groups and supportive environment.

Chronic NCDs also lead to the development of mental health problems. Diagnosis, medical treatment and prognosis can lead to anxiety, depression anger, and other range of mental health concerns. Patients and families need the support they can get to cope with the chronic NCDs. Mental health services could include techniques on stress management, assertive communication, anger management, finding work-life balance, positive thinking, spirituality and social support.

Creating a supportive environment to promote mental health means raising mental health literacy, life skills education, mental health advocacy and policy, and intersectional alliances.



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