

Sound Mental Health : Key Predictor for Ecologically Sustainable Development of Society

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Abstract: The term mental health is commonly used in relation to mental illness or mental health problems. However, mental health is a universal experience that is fundamental to personal well being and social functioning. The natural environment is fundamentally connected to our psychological well being in many ways. It is increasingly recognized that people and the natural environment do not exist as independent entities, but are part of a complex, inter connected ecosystem. Evidence suggests that not only people are dependent on the natural environment for material needs such as food and water, etc, but also that the natural environment is equally essential for them to fulfill their psychological, spiritual and emotional needs. In this paper the author has made an attempt to make a connection between promotion of sustainable environment and positive mental health.

Sustainability and mental health promotion have many common goals, so health promoters need to be engaged in promoting and protecting the natural environment and cultivating practices such as mindfulness, which can increase both flourishing and sustainability.

The increasing prominence is given to well-being and sustainable development in recent academic and policy debates. This paper sets out the various accounts of these concepts and considers the possible synergies and tensions between them. An attempt has also been made to explain why mental health is important at many levels to individuals, to whole communities and to wider society.

1. Introduction

Humanity stands at a cross roads. Depending on the choices we make now, future generations will either look back at our time with anger or with gratitude. Sustainable development is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come (HM Government, 2005).

The natural environment is fundamentally important to both our physical and psychological well being, so actions that promote and protect our natural environment help to increase our ability to flourish in life. In turn, people and communities that are

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flourishing i.e. high levels of well being tend to be environmentally responsible in their behaviour and can therefore, contribute to environmental sustainability.

Despite large increases in the wealth and social circumstances of people in developed and developing countries over the last 50 years, there has been no substantial improvement and may even have been a deterioration, in psychological well being (Diener & Seligman, 2004, Huppert & so, 2009). There are also now many more stressors in general as a result of the increased pace and complexity of life, and the breakdown of stable communities (New Economics Foundation, 2004) Adding to this is generalised fear and anxiety (Mental Health Foundation UK, 2009) including the fear for our future. There are currently global threats to positive human progress, including climate change and the depletion of natural resources. To address these issues we will need to find innovative solutions to these human created problems and will need to reconsider both our relationship with the rest of the environment and with other people.

The Mental Health Foundation believes that such an approach will require the integration of a variety of knowledge sources, including indigenous wisdom and conventional thinking on environmental sustainability and the promotion of positive mental health.

This paper analyses the links between sustainable development and mental health promotion, as we believe that both areas, if brought together can lead to flourishing environment communities and individuals in all then highlight some goals of sustainable development and how working towards these goals will contribute not only to sustainability, but also to positive mental health.

2. What is positive Mental Health

WHO (2001) defined 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, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.

In this positive sense mental health is the foundation for well being and effective functioning for an individual and for a community. This core concept of mental health is consistent with its wide and varied interpretation across cultures.

3. What is Sustainable Development

“Development is sustainable when it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, New Zealand Government, 2003. It is increasingly recognised that people and the natural environment do not exist as independent entities, but are part of a complex, interconnected ecosystem.

Evidence suggests that not only are people dependent on the natural environment for material needs such as food and water, but also that the natural environment is equally essential for fulfilling psychological, spiritual and emotional needs (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown & St Leger 2006). Therefore, it seems crucial that mental health promotion should acknowledge the importance of ensuring access to natural environments and protecting these areas for our well being. In other words sustainable development can be best expressed as the human ascent the ascent of all men in their integral humanity, including the economic, biological, psychological, social, cultural and transcendental dimensions.

4. Consanguinity between Mental Health and Sustainable Development

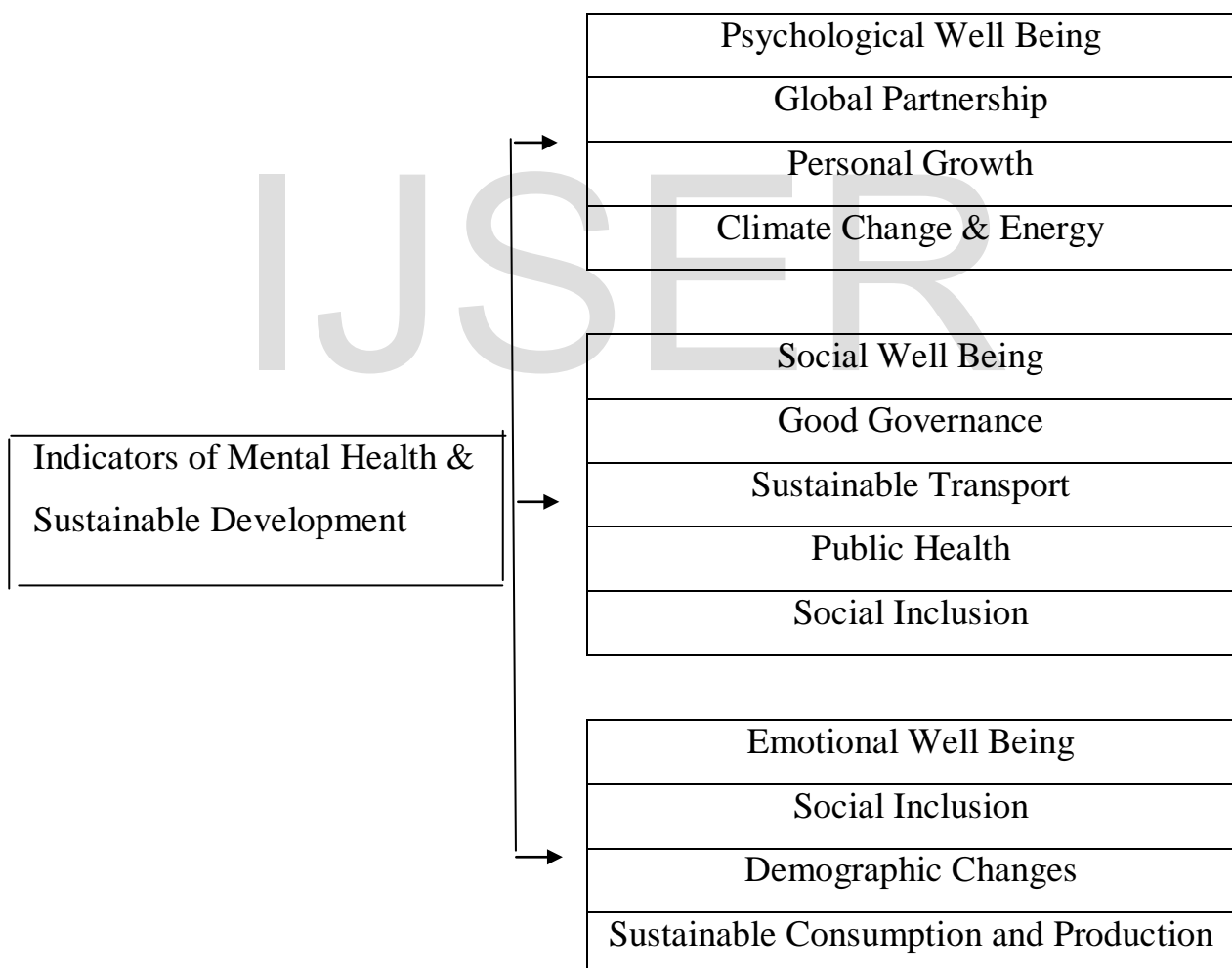
Sustainable development ensures the well being of the human person by intergrating social development, economic development and environment conversation and protection.

An ecologically sustainable environment is fundamentally connected to our physical and mental well being. An influential 2009 report by The Lancet, the UK medical journal and university college London, said that even though climate change was “the biggest global health threat”, these was ignorance and apathy about its impact. The natural environment is fundamentally important to both our physical and

psychological wellbeing, so actions that promote and protect our natural environment help to increase our ability to flourish in life. In turn, people and communities that are flourishing i.e. have high levels of well being responsible in their behaviour and can, therefore contribute to environment sustainability.

5. Indicators of Mental Health and Sustainable Development

There are important connections between sustainable development and positive mental health and these are a mutually beneficial relationship between individual and ecological well being. In this paper researcher has made an attempt to relate the indicators of mental health and sustainable Development.



The diagram reflects the three main indices of mental health i.e. Psychological Well Being, Emotional Well Being and Social Well Being Incorporating at the indicators of sustainable development. The diagram strongly advocates that mental health and

sustainable development are the two sides of the same coin. If the society comprises of people with sound mental health, then it would be much easier to achieve sustainable development.

The high Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015 Development Agenda in its report published on 30 May 2013, determined that “We must go beyond the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals). They did not focus enough on reaching the very forest and most excluded people”.

Addressing mental health is a human rights issue and the overall goal of sustainable development can only be achieved with proper consideration for the mental health dimension. The social and economic costs of failure to attend to mental health will render activities aimed at achieving the post-2015 development agenda less effective. The High-level Panel concluded that the post-2015 agenda "needs to be driven by five big, transformative shifts". Mental health is highly pertinent to all of these:

Transformative shifts	Mental health
1. Leave no one behind	Focus on the very poorest and most vulnerable groups *Even within global co-operation for development, people with mental illness and psychosocial disability have often been left behind. Mental health services and psychosocial care must be mainstreamed into development programmes, which will be stronger if there is meaningful participation of those they affect in their design, implementation and evaluation
2. Put sustainable development at the core	Sustainable and inclusive economic growth *There is strong evidence to show that poverty and mental ill health form a vicious cycle, and that mental health and psychosocial support interventions can break this cycle, leading to improved economic welfare in individual, household, community and national life
3. Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth	Ensure that all people can contribute to the economy • *People with mental disorder and psychosocial disability, who are most commonly at the most productive age of economic life, face barriers and

	<p>discrimination to employment, even though many are able to contribute skills to economic growth. There is need to ensure equal opportunities for a dignified livelihood.</p>
<p>4. Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all</p>	<p>The effect of conflict and violence: *With respect to national and international public policy, there is clear evidence that poverty, income inequality, economic shocks, conflict and complex emergencies, and high per capita alcohol consumption are all important contextual factors that erode mental capital. Conversely, peace, economic, physical and social security, and social justice are conditions that allow mental capacity to flourish. A long term perspective is needed in order to contribute to individual and communal well-being and the promotion of peace and stability</p>
<p>5. Forge a new global partnership</p>	<p>Inclusive global partnership More global funds for development need to be devoted to mental health and psychosocial support, reflecting the contribution of mental illnesses to the global burden of disease and the negative impact on individual and communal wellbeing. An approach to improve mental health and psychosocial wellbeing needs to be integrated as a cross-cutting issue in the health sector (including child and maternal health care, HIV, and NCDs) and in community development strategies. Psychosocial disability should be fully integrated into the global and national agenda for the rights of persons with disabilities, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)</p>

6. Specific interventions to achieve these transformative shifts

- **Education:** Half of all adult mental ill health starts before the age of 16. Early recognition and intervention significantly reduces subsequent, potentially lifelong, disability, Consideration of mental wellbeing in education systems,

including educating children about protecting their own health, should be part of education programmes. Gender-based violence and child abuse have profound psychological consequences and should be addressed as a major cause of mental ill health. Targeted approaches to reduce domestic and gender-based violence and child abuse are essential to reduce the long-term effects on mental health.

- **Healthcare:** A huge treatment gap currently exists. Up to 90% of people with mental ill health worldwide do not receive any treatment or care. Cost-effective models for provision of high quality mental health care have been shown to be effective, and are able to bridge this gap, giving people with mental health care needs choices that do not currently exist for most. Care must be taken to ensure that such interventions meet local needs and are culturally appropriate. Families and carers who currently carry a significant burden should be supported
- **Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs)** will increasingly contribute to the burden of disease in the future. Mental and substance use disorders constitute the single largest burden of disease group among the NCDs, and fit extremely well into systems for health promotion, as well as treatment models developed for NCDs. They are similar in often being persistent, requiring long-term treatment in decentralized locations such district and primary health care units. Mental health conditions often co-exist with other NCDs such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. The effective treatment of mental ill health can substantially reduce the severity and health burden due to the other NCDs, and improve long-term outcomes. We propose to work closely with those in the field of NCDs so as to provide access to comprehensive and integrated services that have been shown to support better recovery.
- **A data revolution for sustainable development.** In the last 10 years to strengthen the integrity of global data systems for mental health (particularly for health systems and human rights) have resulted in a greater understanding of availability and gaps in resources, and the reality of lives of people with mental health needs. Specific indicators and targets for mental health are needed in the

post-2015 framework (for example within NCDs) to ensure that mental illness is not neglected in future as it has been in the past.

The Movement for Global Mental Health (MGMH) is a network of about 3,000 individual and institutional members from more than 60 countries, which brings together service users, carers, policymakers, academics, professionals, service providers, civil society organizations and disabled peoples' organizations, from low- and middle- and high-income countries, to promote mental health as an integral part of overall global Development.

7. Conclusion

There are important connections between the natural environment and positive mental health, and there is a mutually beneficial relationship between individual and ecological wellbeing. Consequently, sustainability and mental health promotion have many common goals, so health promoters need to be engaged in promoting and protecting the natural environment and cultivating practices such as mindfulness, which can increase both flourishing and sustainability.

The Mental Health Foundation is committed to environmental sustainability, and suggests that this commitment could be demonstrated by:

- Developing organizational policy and practices that promote environmental sustainability within the Foundation, including making events carbon zero.
- Building and strengthening relationships with a range of sustainable development organizations.
- Providing information and resources on the wellbeing benefits of sustainability.
- Supporting events that promote activities that strengthen environmentally responsible behaviors.
- Inviting sustainable development workers to speak at seminars to increase understanding of sustainable development in the health promotion sector.

- Advocating for sustainable policies and practices in submissions to local and regional government.
- Promoting environmentally sustainable initiatives and their wellbeing benefits through social marketing and public education.
- Incorporating the wellbeing benefits of sustainability into relevant presentations and workshops.

By placing sustainability on the agenda of public mental health, whilst simultaneously placing wellbeing at the heart of sustainable development, we present an innovative vision about the sort of society in which we hope to live. This paper is not the final word, but the start of a conversation about how we move towards the path of prosperity where current and future generations are able to flourish, and where the needs of the planet are valued and respected.

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