

Emotional and Mental Health

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The Institute for Women's Health recognizes the critical role of emotional and psychological health in people's overall well-being. The Women's Optimal Health Framework addresses several, often overlooked, aspects of mental health and advocates for comprehensive, accessible, and culturally sensitive mental health support and services. Early identification of substance use disorder and mental health screening is a positive strategy. The prevention and management of significant mental health issues on a global scale requires policy, healthcare, community, individual, and family collaboration.

Developing Healthy Habits

Promoting emotional and mental wellness starts with helping people develop habits of self-care throughout their lifespan, such as prioritizing sleep, eating well, and staying active.

Mindfulness and relaxation techniques reduce anxiety, increase self-awareness, and improve overall mental wellbeing. An effective low-cost strategy is to encourage good sleep habits.

Sleep is critical to mental wellness. Ensuring that all people develop a consistent bedtime routine with at least 7 - 9 hours of sleep supports mental health. Other wellness strategies include developing a wellness plan with favorite activities. Staying physically active through walking, games, and creative activities releases endorphins and reduces stress. These are just a few of the many wellness strategies promoting Optimal Health for women. When wellness plans are neglected, the likelihood of experiencing a mental health challenge increases.



Mental health challenges frequently occur at the same time as substance use disorders. Co-morbid mental health and substance use disorders require early identification to increase Optimal Health outcomes. Genetic and environmental risk factors determine the likelihood of someone experiencing a mental health crisis. People with genetic risk factors may try to cope with environmental stress by using substances. Significant research has linked highly potent THC in cannabis products with early onset of psychosis in people with genetic risk factors, including schizophrenia in both men and women. Strong health policy discourages the legalization of highly potent THC products and discourages the use of substances, especially in adolescent populations.

Over the past two to three decades, there has been an increased awareness of situations associated with physical and mental health problems. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) studies have highlighted the increased risks of youth and adult depression, substance abuse, relationship failures, physical illness, self-harm, suicide attempts, and chronic diseases when children are exposed to violence, instability, and abuse. The first goal of interventions for mental health should incorporate efforts to prevent experiences that trigger serious mental health problems. Safety, caring, family support, faith, community resources, good schools, delayed dating, and available healthcare can support Optimal Health.

Individual

An individual suffering from poor mental health can cause various problems that have unintended effects on the family, community, and country. Access to early interventions such as counseling, community or faith support groups, online resources, and, if available, pharmacotherapy can drastically improve outcomes for people with these challenges.

Family

Prevention and management of post-partum depression (PPD) is important for women and girls. Early recognition of the mental well-being of an individual often affects the entire family unit. Parental mental health issues can have long-lasting impacts on children, affecting their academic performance, social interactions, neurodevelopment, and unhealthy attachment patterns. Resources like family therapy, teletherapy services, online resources, and primary healthcare models that include mental health services can significantly reduce treatment costs, medications, and strain on families.



Community

A community's ability to thrive is closely tied to the mental health of its members. Consequently, communities must decrease the negative stigma of seeking help. Untreated mental health issues can also lead to decreased work performance, affecting businesses and services, and increased healthcare costs for emergency, long-term care, and other mental health services. Prevention interventions make communities safer by reducing homelessness, strains on welfare systems, availability of dangerous drugs and alcohol, and crime rates. “Mental Health First Aid” training can help teachers, community health workers, faith leaders, law enforcement workers, and others identify and respond compassionately to distressed individuals and families. Communities with robust mental health support interventions such as community and faith-based support groups, workplace wellness programs, and school programs are better equipped to handle crises and challenges. Public awareness campaigns on mental health help educate the public, reduce the stigma, and promote help-seeking behaviors that foster a more resilient and harmonious community.

Policy

Policy-level interventions for mental health include implementing laws that protect the rights of individuals with mental health issues and developing treatment options. Community health workers can prevent increasing costs and serve as a bridge between the community and healthcare services by providing screenings, basic counseling, referrals, and more. A more holistic and effective mental health support system strengthens all community members through collaboration.



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