Over the years, besides the focus on mental disorders, the focus has shifted to mental health and well-being. In contrast to mental disorders, the concept of mental health and mental well-being is important for everyone in society. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as *“a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease”* (WHO, 2020).[[1](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R1)] Accordingly, it can be said that since the beginning the WHO has integrated the concept of well-being into its definition of health.

Three core concepts crucial to enhancing health emerge from the definition of health as per the WHO.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)] Mental health is an intrinsic component of overall health, mental health encompasses more than just the absence of illness, and mental health is intricately intertwined with physical health and behavior.

Defining mental health is crucial, but it is not necessarily required for its improvement. Value differences between countries, cultures, classes, and genders may appear to be too significant to allow for agreement on a definition. However, just as age and wealth have many diverse manifestations worldwide while maintaining a basic common-sense universal meaning, mental health can be defined without limiting its interpretation across cultures.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)]

The WHO defines mental health as follows:

**A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her community. It is a crucial element of health and well-being that supports both our individual and group capacity to decide, form connections, and influence the world we live in.**[[3](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R3)]

These WHO definitions differentiate between subjective happiness or life satisfaction (hedonic well-being) and positive psychological functioning (eudaimonic well-being).[[4](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R4)]

The American Psychological Association describes the concept of mental health as follows:[[5](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R5)]

**Mental health is a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioural adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life.**[[5](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R5)]

While this definition represents significant progress in moving away from the conceptualization of mental health as the absence of mental illness, it raises several concerns and lends itself to potential misunderstandings by identifying positive feelings and positive functioning as key factors for mental health.[[6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R6)]

Researchers and health organizations acknowledged the difficulty in reaching a consensus on mental health due to cultural variations and sought to construct an inclusive definition while avoiding restrictive assertions. While it was commonly understood that mental health is more than the absence of mental disease, there was no universal agreement on equating mental health with well-being or functioning, resulting in a definition that includes a wide range of emotional states and “imperfect functioning.”[[6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R6)]

The proposed new definition by Galderisi *et al*.[[6](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R6)] states that “***Mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium that enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with the universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium.”***

[Go to:](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/)

CONCEPT OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

It has been conceptualized as a positive emotion that leads to a feeling of happiness. The personality traits of people with positive mental health include psychological resources of self-esteem, mastery, and resilience, which is the capacity to cope with adversity and avoid a breakdown when confronted by stressors. Such people have the capacity to master their environments, and they have the ability to identify, confront, and solve problems. Mental health is clearly influenced by cultural, socioeconomic, and political situations.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)]

Mental health has intrinsic values, as described as follows.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)]

* Mental health is critical for an individual's well-being and functioning.
* Good mental health is a valuable resource for individuals, families, communities, and nations.
* Mental health, as an integral component of overall health, contributes to societal functions and has an impact on overall productivity.
* Everyone is concerned about mental health because it is generated in our daily lives in our homes, schools, workplaces, and leisure activities.
* Good mental health contributes to a society's social, human, and economic capital.
* Spirituality can contribute significantly to the development of mental health, and mental health influences spiritual life.[[7](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R7)]

Culture and mental health

Each culture has an impact on how people perceive and comprehend mental health. Understanding and sensitivity to culturally valued characteristics will boost the relevance and success of prospective treatments.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)]

Race, ethnicity and genetic- its influence on mental health and mental well-being

Race and ethnicity, along with genetic factors, play complex roles in shaping mental health and well-being. Social determinants linked to race and ethnicity can contribute to disparities in access to mental health care and resources, impacting mental well-being. Genetic factors influence vulnerability to certain conditions, but interactions with the environment and experiences are vital. For instance, the “diathesis-stress” model highlights how genetic predisposition interacts with stressors.[[8](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R8)] These intertwined factors underscore the need for culturally sensitive care and a comprehensive understanding of mental health influences. Culture significantly shapes perceptions of well-being, influencing emotional expression, social support systems, and coping strategies, ultimately impacting an individual's mental well-being.

Mental health and social capital

The idea of “social capital” has been central to the recent renaissance in thinking about social connectivity and health promotion. According to Putnam (1995), social capital “refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”[[9](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R9)] Social capital is also impacted by economic and social conditions. Research over the previous two decades has shown relationships between social capital and economic development and the efficiency of human service systems and neighborhood improvement.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)] According to Woolcock (1998), having more social capital can protect individuals from social isolation, create a sense of social security, lower crime, enhance education and societal functioning, and enhance job performance.[[10](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R10)]

There are continuous research and discussion on the connections between social capital, physical health, and mental health and the viability of promoting mental health to boost social capital. The strength of social capital lies in its capacity to view the world from a fresh perspective, considering both environmental and social factors and associated social groups. In contrast to aggregated individual health outcomes, this perspective on networks of people interacting with their environments offers the potential to explain a wider range of collective outcomes.[[2](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R2)]

Mental well-being

The concept of mental well-being has developed over time in response to advances in domains, such as psychology, medicine, sociology, and public health.

Initially, a focus on mental illness, with an emphasis on diagnosing and treating problems, typically overshadowed mental well-being.

However, in recent decades, there has been a paradigm shift toward a more holistic and positive perspective on mental health.

However, the term “mental well-being” can be ambiguous at times, as it may or may not indicate the absence of mental illness or distress. Well-being has been highlighted as an indicator of national prosperity and has been associated with enhanced physical and mental health.[[3](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R3)]

Mental well-being is characterized by the following:

* Optimal physical and behavioral health
* Life's purpose
* Active participation in enjoyable work and play
* Pleasant relationships
* Contentment

Mental health and mental well-being are different phenomena. Ill mental health or mental disorders are characterized by abnormal psychological patterns, emotional distress, and impaired functioning. The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2007 showed that mental well-being has relatively independent associations with symptoms of mental illness.[[11](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R11)] It is possible for mental well-being to persist even when experiencing mental suffering.[[11](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10911315/#R11)]