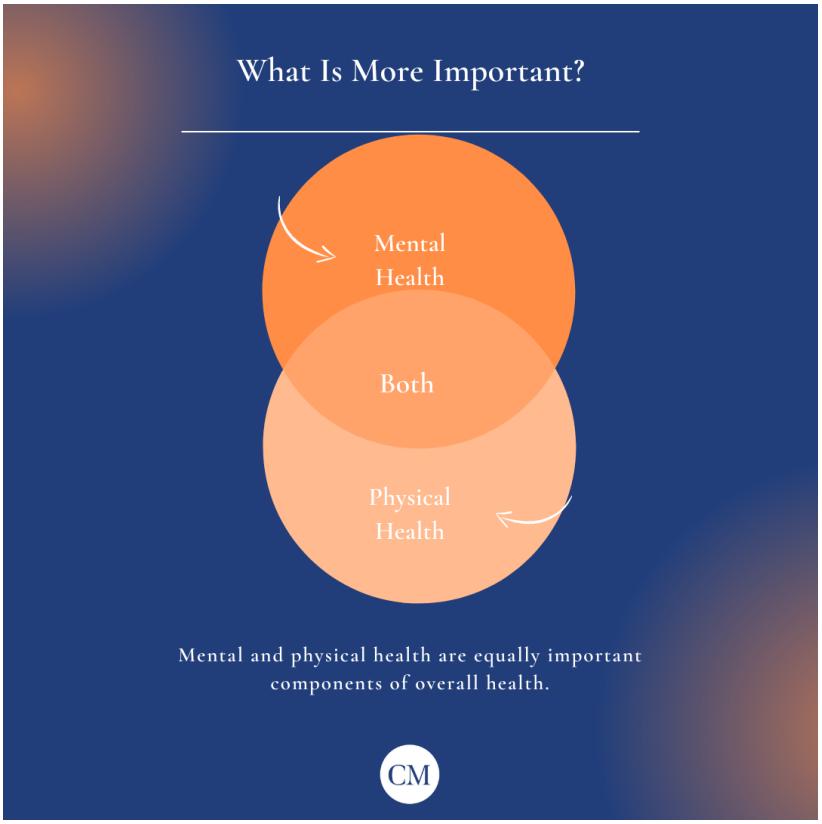
GMH TOOLKIT
Kai A D Morgan, PsyD, Jamaican Psychological Society



MENTAL HEALTH = PHYSICAL HEALTH



Mental health is an indispensable facet of holistic well-being, and it stands on an equal footing with physical health in terms of importance. The objective of this lesson is to not only increase awareness regarding the pivotal role of mental health but also to delve into the intricate connections it shares with physical health. Moreover, it seeks to provide a comprehensive array of practical strategies, geared towards not just sustaining but also enhancing mental well-being. In essence, this lesson aspires to illuminate multifaceted significance of mental health by exploring its intricate interplay with physical health, while concurrently presenting an extensive repertoire of practical techniques and insights for nurturing and elevating mental well-being.

1. Understanding the Importance of Mental Health

1.1. The Global Burden of Mental Illness

Mental disorders account for a substantial portion of the global burden of disease. For instance, depression, which affects millions worldwide, is the leading cause of disability (WHO, 2017).

Mental illnesses are not rare, and they can have a profound impact on individuals and society as a whole. Recognizing their prevalence is crucial in understanding the importance of mental health.

1.2. Mental Health and Quality of Life

According to Plumptre (2023), Good mental health offers numerous advantages, including enhanced coping abilities, a positive self-image, healthier relationships, improved productivity, and an enriched quality of life. It plays a vital role in fostering a fulfilling and satisfying life.

It's essential to understand that mental health is not just the absence of mental illness but a positive state in which individuals can thrive and enjoy their lives to the fullest.

2. The Connection Between Mental and Physical Health

2.1. Biopsychosocial Model

The model established a holistic and empathetic approach in psychiatric practice, explaining that a person does not suffer as isolated organisms but rather as a whole, with the emotional tone of a person, his or her personality, the surrounding environment, and other social parameters influencing the manifestation of illness (Tripathi et al., 2019).

This model highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to health, addressing not just the body but also the mind and the social environment in which an individual exists.

2.2. Physical Health Outcomes

The two are inextricably linked, and both mental health and physical health are equally important. Depression holds the top position as the primary cause of disability worldwide and plays a significant role in the overall global burden of disease (Mahindru et al., 2023). Poor mental health can contribute to the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, cancer, and cardiovascular issues, while also increasing the risk of sleep disorders like insomnia and sleep apnea. Additionally, mental health conditions like depression can worsen the management and outcomes of chronic illnesses, leading to higher mortality rates from conditions such as cancer and heart disease (Robinson, 2021). According to Green (2023), mental illnesses may accelerate biological aging, contributing to increased rates of cardiovascular and other age-related diseases, with individuals diagnosed with Schizophrenia experiencing a significantly reduced lifespan of up to 10-20 years compared to the general population. Based on an article written by Brody (2021) stress causes the brain to release cortisol to prepare the body for potential threats, triggering heightened bodily responses like increased heart rate and breathing. Long-term stress can result in physical symptoms such as digestive issues and a heightened risk of heart problems. This information highlights the interconnectedness of mental and physical health, showcasing depression's significant role in

global disability and disease burden, as well as the adverse effects of poor mental health on chronic illness management and the physiological impact of stress.

3. **Why is Mental Health not perceived or treated the same as Physical Health?**

There are many reasons why mental health is not perceived or treated the same as physical health. According to UNC Health (2022), the stigma attached to mental illness is one of the main reasons it is still widely disregarded. Misunderstandings and negative stereotypes around mental health can lead to people being reluctant to seek help for mental health concerns. Another reason mental health issues are frequently disregarded is that, in contrast to physical illnesses, which frequently exhibit outward signs, mental illnesses can be more difficult to identify (UNC Health, 2022). We can actually see physical ill health and we value what we can see with our own eyes. Unlike physical symptoms that may present themselves through pain, swelling, or rashes, mental health issues may not have obvious physical signs. This invisibility can lead to a tendency to underestimate the seriousness of mental health challenges. Cultural and societal factors also play a role in this issue. In some cultures, it may be the norm to perceive mental issues as a weakness which may cause individuals to feel ashamed of their circumstance, encouraging them to eliminate the option of seeking help. Due to these societal and cultural norms, there may be a lack of mental health awareness. Mental health would oftentimes receive insufficient attention in school curricula and public discourse, unlike physical health which would be taught within science subjects or physical education or even encouraged by promoting running, walking, or cycling marathons.

The differences in how mental health is perceived and treated compared to physical health are complex. Stigma, negative stereotypes, and the lack of visible symptoms contribute to the underestimation of mental health challenges. Cultural norms that stigmatize mental health issues have also hindered awareness and inclusion in educational curricula. Bridging this contrast necessitates efforts to reduce stigma, promote awareness, and integrate mental health into healthcare, recognizing their equal importance for overall well-being.

4. **Reasons why Mental Health is as Important as Physical Health**

- **To create and maintain healthy relationships** - Good mental health fosters effective communication, conflict resolution, and empathy, enhancing relationships. These skills reduce stress, provide social support, and may lower the risk of physical health problems, such as heart issues.

- **To attain better physical health** - Mental and physical health are interlinked. Poor mental health, like depression and anxiety, can worsen physical health, while good mental health reduces chronic disease risk, boosts immunity, and promotes healthy lifestyles.

- **To attain a positive self-image** - Having good mental health is tied to a favorable self-image. Those with good mental health tend to engage in healthier behaviors like exercise, nutrition, and seeking medical care, improving physical health outcomes.

- **To enhance productivity** - Improved mental health leads to higher productivity through enhanced concentration, being able to make sound decisions, and it allows you to sustain a consistent work performance. Your mental health influences your professional achievements and, in turn, your capacity to invest in your physical health.

- **To cope with stress** - Effective stress management, linked to mental health, reduces physical health risks, such as high blood pressure and digestive problems. Techniques like meditation reduce stress and promote better physical health.

- **To increase retentivity** - Strong mental health enhances memory and cognitive function, aiding understanding and retention. Having a strong cognitive function supports physical health by enhancing medication adherence, promoting preventive care, guiding healthier lifestyle choices, managing stress, and preventing accidents and injuries.

- **To live life to the fullest** - Mental health plays a vital role in enjoying life, pursuing passions, and engaging in physical activities. A positive mental state motivates individuals to lead active and fulfilling lives, crucial for maintaining good physical health.



5. Strategies for Promoting Mental Health

In the same way that we have to do things to maintain our physical health, so we must do so for our mental health. In fact, exercise, eating nutritiously all are considered parts of essential physical health but are also clearly things that enhance and support good mental health.

5.1. Self-Care

Self-care is a cornerstone of mental well-being. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is essential to promoting mental well-being. Regular exercise, such as a daily 10-minute walk, improves both physical fitness and mood. Prioritizing 7-9 hours of quality sleep and considering a short daytime nap for improved alertness. Maintaining a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, while minimizing processed sugars and fats (Robinson, 2021).

5.2. Stress Management

Effective stress management encompasses various strategies, including promoting mindfulness and meditation for emotional regulation and resilience, teaching deep breathing techniques to alleviate physical stress symptoms, and encouraging stress-reducing hobbies and nature-based activities. These practices collectively aid individuals in coping with and reducing stress, enhancing their overall well-being.

5.3. Social Support

Having a strong support system would be beneficial. According to Cherry (2023), Psychologists and other mental health experts frequently emphasize the significance of maintaining a robust social support network. Whether striving to achieve personal goals or navigating challenging situations, professionals often recommend turning to friends and family for assistance. Extensive research has revealed a substantial connection between social relationships and various dimensions of well-being and health. In contrast, inadequate social support has been associated with conditions like depression, feelings of isolation, and even alterations in brain function.



6. Access to Mental Healthcare

6.1. Stigma Reduction

The impact of stigma on help-seeking behavior. Use of campaigns aimed at stigma reduction could minimize the barrier to seeking help for your mental well-being.

6.2. Increasing Accessibility

People with mental health conditions are less likely to have access to adequate health care (Robinson, 2021). Enhancing mental health service accessibility requires expanding telehealth, integrating mental health into primary care, early intervention programs, offering affordable options, and advocating for legislative changes. This ensures that individuals do not face unnecessary barriers when seeking support.

Mental health should not be viewed in isolation from physical health; both are equally important components of overall well-being. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these dimensions and promoting strategies for mental health care, we can contribute to a healthier and more resilient society. The lesson also highlights the importance of early intervention, diverse sources of support, and a comprehensive approach to mental health to create a more inclusive and effective mental health support system.

Evaluation Tools

Tips and Strategies to Help Others to Understand the Equity

When we begin to look at and respect mental health like we do for physical health, then the closer we are to adopting the population health framework in full force and where we begin to recognize the inextricable link between them both. One does not go without the other. The social determinants of health are clear.

- **When speaking, begin to use the word "health" to include mental health**
- **Promote physical activity as a mental health strategy**
- **Develop awareness and educate oneself on the interconnectedness of mental and physical health**
- **Encourage open and non-judgmental conversations within the classroom.**
- **Teach students that seeking help for mental health issues is as valid as seeking help for physical health problems. To encourage this, stories of individuals who have benefited from seeking support can be shared with the students.**
- **Speak to the parents and guardians of students on the importance of mental and physical health equity**
- **Encourage the parents and guardians to incorporate mental health practices in the home.**
- **Engage in discussions that break down the barriers of stigmas and stereotypes.**
- **Have brief mental health sessions with students to have an understanding of how they are feeling or what they are currently going through.**

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