

Module A

Understanding mental health
(Y/506/2880)

SAMPLE

Welcome

Welcome to Module A of your course. There is one unit in this module:

Understanding mental health (Y/506/2880)

Assessment

Each unit in this course is split into a number of sections. Within each section there are a number of learning **activities** for you to complete. These are intended to help you reflect upon certain issues or your own practice.

At the end of each section you will be asked to complete the **assessment** questions for that section. These questions can be found in a separate assessment booklet for the module you are working through.

When you have completed all the assessment questions for this module you should submit them to your tutor/assessor for marking and feedback.

Good luck with your studies!

Understanding mental health

Y/506/2880

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The background of the entire page is a warm, orange-toned sunset sky with scattered clouds. In the lower third of the image, a silhouette of a person stands on a rounded hill, with their arms outstretched horizontally. The word 'SAMPLE' is written in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters, slanted diagonally across the center of the image, overlapping the person's silhouette.

This unit is intended to give you an overview of mental health and the mental health system in this country. You will look at what the term ‘mental health’ actually means, and the factors that help us to maintain our sense of mental well-being. You will also examine the meaning of mental ill health and the risk factors that make people more prone to mental illness.

Later in this unit you will look at how the care of people with mental illness has changed over time. The traditional approach was one of institutionalisation. In other words, it was believed that the best option for people experiencing mental distress was to be segregated from society and placed in secure hospitals, often for many years. Today, people experiencing mental ill health will tend to be supported by a range of community-based professionals and services. You will examine how these changes have impacted upon those who either receive or provide mental health care.

You will also explore social and cultural attitudes to mental illness, and the impact of mass media on how mental health issues are perceived. Finally, you will learn about the legislation relating to people with mental health issues, the law in relation to mental capacity and the importance of confidentiality and data protection.

Content

This unit contains four sections:

Section 1: Background to mental health and mental ill health

Section 2: Understanding how mental health care has changed over time

Section 3: The social context of mental illness

Section 4: The legal context of mental illness

Section 1

Background to mental health and mental ill health

In this section you will learn about:

- What is 'mental health'?
- The key components of mental well-being
- Why do we need 'good' mental health?
- What is 'mental ill health'?
- Examples of mental health problems
- What may put people at risk of developing mental ill health?

What is 'mental health'?

Before you can look at mental health 'issues' or 'problems', you first need to spend a little time examining the basic concept of mental health. What does it mean to be 'mentally healthy'? Understanding this will, in turn, help you to understand mental ill health and the types of mental distress you may encounter in your work or daily life.

Activity A1

You may have heard or seen 'good' mental health presented in a number of different ways. 'Positive mental health', 'emotional well-being', 'emotional literacy' are just some of the possible examples. Jot down what you think the term 'good' mental health actually means.

Like many questions within the field of mental health, there is no definitive definition of mental health. Different professional theories and cultural beliefs, for example, all affect how it is defined. Nevertheless, there are a number of common themes.

The Health Education Authority (1997) describes mental health as:

“the emotional and spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own dignity and others’ dignity and worth.”

In a similar vein, the World Health Organization (www.who.int) describes 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.”

It is clear that positive mental health means much more than just being free of a mental illness.

Mental health includes the following factors:

- **Healthy cognition (thinking)** – Our ability to think clearly, to solve problems and to make sound decisions.
- **Positive emotional health** – Our ability to experience, understand and express our feelings and emotions.
- **Healthy perception** – Our ability to make sense of events and the world around us.
- **Being able to function in everyday society** – Our ability to make and sustain relationships and to participate in the wider society.
- **Being able to cope with the ordinary demands of life** – This is a key factor and is about our ‘resilience’. In other words, it is our ability to deal with set-backs, difficult experiences and stress.

Key point

Mental health is the ability to live life in a positive way. Good mental health includes a sense of well-being and control over one's life, allowing us to participate in society and to make sound decisions about different situations. Mental health means much more than just an absence of mental illness and is an issue for everybody.

The key components of mental well-being

How can people achieve or maintain a good state of mental health? In order to answer this adequately, we need to take into consideration a whole range of issues. In other words, we need to look at things **holistically**, taking into account the 'whole picture'. Good mental health is influenced by a combination of biological, social and psychological factors – what professionals like to call '**protective factors**'.

The components of mental well-being include the following factors.

Genetic inheritance

Many mental health professionals believe that just as our physical health is linked to our genes, so too is our mental health. For example, there is evidence – though hotly debated – that through their genes some people may be more susceptible to certain mental health problems, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression.

Positive childhood experiences

A positive family environment and pleasant childhood memories can lay the foundations of 'good' mental health throughout life.

Positive life events

The things that happen to us during our life – our life events and experiences – play a huge role in our mental well-being. Generally speaking, positive experiences of childhood, education, relationships and work can all shape a similarly positive view of the world and our approach to life.

Individual ability to cope

As you learned earlier, mental health has a lot to do with our 'resilience', or our ability to cope with the pressures of life. Some people cope very well, whilst others lack important coping skills.

Good levels of social support

Strong social networks can have a positive effect upon mental well-being and can help to counter the effects of negative events or experiences. For example, when someone is feeling vulnerable the support of family and friends can help to provide a sense of strength and security. Similarly, when someone is feeling isolated the local community can be a source of stimulation, interaction and support.

Rewarding employment

Being in work has all sorts of potential benefits. It can promote a feeling of self-worth, satisfaction and inclusion. Employment provides five types of psychological experience that promote mental well-being: **time structure; collective effort and purpose; social identity; regular activity; and social contact.**

This is not to say that all people in employment are free from the risk of mental health problems, or that all jobs give job satisfaction and a sense of worth. What it does mean is that being in meaningful employment (with a good work-life balance) is generally a protective factor in a person's mental well-being.

Financial security

Being financially secure does not necessarily mean being rich. Someone may be earning a relatively modest wage, but feel confident about their financial situation based upon their ability to manage their outgoings.

Adequate housing

Access to good-quality and stable housing is very important to an individual's sense of mental well-being.

Access to appropriate health care

Should we experience physical or mental ill health during our life, the access we have to appropriate health care services is obviously important. If we receive timely and effective treatment, and if we feel that we are being listened to by health professionals, we are more likely to retain (or recover) our sense of well-being. The longer we have to put up with our difficulties, the more likely it is that we will experience mental as well as physical distress.

The factors listed here are just some of the components of mental well-being. It is important to remember that they are all inter-connected and should not be viewed in isolation.

For example, if someone experiences a tragic life event it does not automatically follow that they will develop a mental illness. They may possess a number of protective factors that help them recover from such an event – such as a strong family network, high levels of resilience and strong social support. Therefore, when assessing mental well-being you should look at each person individually and assess the strength or weakness of each component part.

Why do we need ‘good’ mental health?

When we stop to think about questions such as this, it is often interesting to reflect on how much we take for granted and how much of our daily life depends upon good mental health.

Activity A2

Make a list of the things that you are able to do if you have ‘good’ mental health. If you find this question difficult, try looking at it from the opposite point of view – what you may not be able to do if you have a mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression.

Module A assessment

After completing your assessment please return it to your tutor/assessor

CHECKLIST FOR ALL CANDIDATES

Tick the check box when you have completed the following:

- Please complete your details in the 'Personal details' box below.
- Fill in and sign the 'Candidate statement' box below.
- Complete all questions in this assessment. Write your answers in the space provided.
- Add any additional work for any of the questions on plain A4 paper and staple them to the back of this assessment. Write the assessment number and question number (eg Assessment 1.2, question 4) and your name on each additional sheet.
- Take a copy of your work before you return it to your tutor/assessor.

You do not need to return your completed activities for the units – just this assessment. If you require any assistance or guidance please contact your tutor/assessor.

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name

Contact address

Postcode

Telephone no. (evening) (day)

Email (home) (work)

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

I certify that I began the learning materials for Module A on _____* and have completed all sections in this assessment. I confirm that this is my own work.

Signature Date

*Please insert the date you started working through the course materials for the module.

Assessment 1.1: Background to mental health and mental ill health

(The reference in brackets at the end of each task refers to the assessment criteria for the learning outcomes of this qualification and is for your tutor's/assessor's use.)

1. Define the term 'mental health'. (1.1)

2. Describe five components of mental well-being. (1.2)

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

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3. Define the term 'mental ill health'. (1.1)

4. Identify examples of mental health problems. (1.4)

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5. Describe five risk factors associated with developing mental health problems. (1.3)

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

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