Promoting Mental Health in the Face of Crises and Epidemic Risks

1- Mohammed Lazhar Belkacemi, University of Mohammed Bachir El Ibrahimi - Bordj Bou Arreridj

Mohammedlazhar.Belkacemi@Univ-Bba.Dz

2- Abdelhamid Maouche, University of Mohammed Bachir El Ibrahimi - Bordj Bou Arreridj

Abdelhamid.Maouche@Univ-Bba.Dz

3- Salim Amroune, University of Mohammed Bachir El Ibrahimi - Bordj Bou Arreridj

Amroune.Salim@Gmail.Com

4- Salim Hammi, University of Mohammed Bachir El Ibrahimi - Bordj Bou Arreridj

Salim.Hammi@Univ-Bba.Dz

Abstract:

The subject of mental health is one of the important topics in psychology, and it has received great attention from experts in psychology, medical and educational sciences. A person seeks in his life to achieve the highest degree of mental health, peace of mind, and adaptation, and achieving this goal is not an easy matter, and it may not always be the case, especially in times of epidemics. Where society faces crises and emergencies, such as the spread of epidemics that pose a real danger, which increases the emergence of psychological problems that affect the general performance of the mental health of the individual and this is reflected in his behavior, thoughts and feelings in times of crisis. Also, the spread of diseases or the fear of getting sick is one of the reasons that cause mental health problems. Hence, this research paper sheds light on mental health in times of epidemics.

Keywords: Mental Health, Crises and Epidemic Risks.

Introduction:

This era has become known as the era of crises, as a result of the rapid developments taking place in the world today and the resulting problems, crises, and sudden disasters that have significantly and directly affected the social, economic, cultural, and health conditions, which threaten the security and stability of societies (Lazhar et al., 2022). Mental health is one of the most interesting and studied human sciences. A person's mental health is no less important than his physical health. It is considered an important element in people's lives in general. Achieving it helps a person to face the hardships and difficulties of life, to reach a happy life, and contributes to achieving goals in life and its ends.

Mental health has always existed before the pandemic. According to a WHO survey in 2018, of the estimated 792 million people worldwide living with mental health issues (roughly 10.7% of the global population), 20 million were diagnosed with schizophrenia, and 264 million suffered from depression.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global prevalence of mental health problems was estimated at 28.0% for depression, 26.9% for anxiety, 24.1% for posttraumatic stress symptoms, 36.5% for stress, 50.0% for psychological distress, and 27.6% for sleep problems. Thus, the population of those impacted by mental health is rising dramatically (Tabianan et al., 2022, p. 5764).

The practices and outcomes have shown that there is an urgent need to enhance mental health in order to manage crises and pandemic risks in a scientific manner, despite the substantial efforts made by nations and other pertinent health organizations to combat this epidemic. In this intervention, we will present the concept of mental health, its importance to the individual and society, its relativity, levels, and goals.

1. Mental health:

The concept of **mental health** is one of the most common terms in the field of psychology and one of the most interesting to researchers and scientists. A difference has emerged between scholars according to their intellectual tendencies and psychological schools, and this will be clarified through the following definitions:

-Negative Trend to Mental Health: Those who adhere to this approach believe that mental health is "the absence of pathological symptoms." The difficulty in this definition There is disagreement among scholars on the types of activities that an individual performs that are considered inconsistent with good mental health. However, those who support this definition defend it by saying that the psychological state does not become abnormal unless it reaches a severe degree of deviation (El-Shadly, 2001, p. 15).

-**Positive Trend to Mental Health:** The saying of the owners (the proponents) of this trend is that: Mental health is that psychological state that is characterized by relative stability, in which the individual enjoys personal and social compatibility and emotional balance, is free from aggravation and disorder, is full of enthusiasm, is original and creative, feels happy and satisfied, is able to assert himself and achieve his ambitions, is aware of his true potential, and is able to use it in the best possible **way** (Hadia, 2019, p. 42).

In the Dictionary of **Psychology and Psychiatry, mental health** is defined as: A mental state characterized by safety, emotional health, relative freedom from anxiety and symptoms of disability, the ability to establish positive relationships, and a balanced confrontation of the normal demands and pressures of life **(Zabat, 2018, p. 15).**

The **Arabic dictionary** defines **psychological terms** as "a relatively permanent compound emotional mental state of feeling with oneself and with others, a sense of contentment, tranquility, security, sanity, and appetite for life with a sense of activity, strength, and wellness" (Salah, 2014, p. 199).

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines mental health as a state of physical, psychological, and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease (Al-Tamimi, 2013, p. 15).

Definition of "**Adolphe Meyer**": He was the first to use the term mental health, as he used it to refer to the development of both personal and social behavior and to the prevention of mental disorders. Mental health means a person's adaptation to the external world surrounding him in a way that ensures a feeling of satisfaction and also makes the individual able to face various **problems (Al-Dahiry, 2010, p. 25).**

Definition of "**Hamid Abdel Salam Zahran**": Mental health is a relatively permanent state in which the individual is psychologically compatible, feels happy with himself and with others, is able to achieve himself and exploit his capabilities and potentials to the maximum extent possible, and is able to face the demands of life (Khoj, 2010, p. 38).

Definition of "**Abdul Salam Abdul Ghaffar**" Mental health is the integration of the various energies of the individual, which leads to the realization of his existence, which is, the realization of his humanity (Al-Khalidi, 2009, p. 35).

1.2. Some concepts related to mental health:

- **Psychological adjustment:** It is a continuous, dynamic process that deals with behavior and the natural and social environment with change and modification until there is a balance between the individual and his environment (Al-Khawaja, 2010, p. 38).

Adjustment is defined as a person's relationship with the environment surrounding him, and this compatibility has two wings: fit and fit. Fit is related to the material environment and the

demands of reality, and fit is not achieved unless this fit is accompanied by human satisfaction, his sense of happiness, and psychological acceptance (Al-Obeidi, 2009, p. 21).

- **Psychological adaptation:** It is the continuous process by which the individual seeks to make a change in his life in order to create a positive relationship between him and his surrounding environment so that he can reduce the stress that bothers him. The individual must face the obstacles he encounters in appropriate ways in order to maintain his psychological balance and maintain a level of positive adaptation. Mental health is an expression of adaptation, and adaptation, in turn, is an indicator of it. They are two complementary concepts that refer to the same manifestations, because when an individual possesses an adaptive personality, he has a great deal of mental health.

In fact, **Adaptation** is one of the most important indicators of mental health and is not a synonymous expression for it. The term mental health is more comprehensive and broad. Also, for proper adaptation to be positive, it must be followed by conditions (Daily, 2018, p. 178).

-**Psychological conflict:** It is the exposure of the individual to equal forces that push him in multiple directions, which makes him unable to choose a specific trend and results in a feeling of distress and discomfort, as well as anxiety. This results from the difficulty of choosing it or making a decision about the trend it takes (Al-Khaldi, 2009, p. 38).

The process of Adjustment is reflected in many areas that expand with the expansion of the individual's activities and relationships. These areas are: (Al-Tamimi, 2013, pp. 37–38).

- **Self (personal) Adjustment:** the compatibility of the individual with himself.

- **Social Adjustment:** It refers to good compatibility with society and its system, laws, customs, institutions, traditions, sects, groups, and individuals.

- **Family Adjustment:** Refers to the extent of harmony between the individual and the members of his family.

- **Academic Adjustment:** the extent of harmony and good adaptation of the individual to his studies and his academic environment.

3. Mental health goals:

Mental health seeks to bring the individual to satisfaction and psychological, social, and spiritual harmony to achieve high levels of science and knowledge, and therefore science cannot achieve its goals without mental health, and the goals of mental health cannot be achieved without science and knowledge.

Hamed Zahran summarizes the goals of mental health as follows:

- The scientific study of mental health and psychological adaptation and researching its factors and conditions.

- Supporting mental health through physical, psychological, and educational awareness programs.

- Prevention of mental disorders and emotional and behavioral problems.

- Treatment of disorders and problems when they occur by following various psychotherapy techniques (Kaddoura, 2018, pp. 47–48).

- Confronting pathological and behavioral phenomena in society, as good mental health helps its members confront pathological and behavioral phenomena that society is exposed to, such as addiction to warnings, drug abuse, and sexual perversions (Ayyash, 2017, p. 50).

Mental health aims mainly at building a normal personality capable of enduring life's difficulties and avoiding maladjustment or disease as much as possible. Therefore, there are three basic methods to achieving mental health, namely:

- **The preventive method:** Prevention in general means the total efforts exerted to control the occurrence of disorders, i.e., disease and its control, or to reduce the severity of an undesirable phenomenon such as mental illness, delinquency, crime, drug addiction, accidents, etc (Radwan, 2007, p. 22).

He cares about normal and healthy people before he cares about patients in order to protect them from the causes of mental illness by introducing them to them and removing them as soon as possible, and he takes care of their normal psychological development and creates conditions that achieve mental health (Kaddoura, 2018, p. 48).

The preventive method has three stages, which are as follows:

- Primary prevention: It is the first and most important preventive stage, as it aims in advance to prevent the occurrence of psychological disorders and other types of negative psychological abnormalities through several means, including knowing and discovering the causes, identifying the pressures that lead to personality disorders, and reducing them in order to reach emotional balance while providing the appropriate healthy environment **(Hadia, 2019, p. 55)**.

- Secondary prevention: At this stage, the mental illness is in its infancy, so attention must be paid at this stage to early detection, as this stage aims to stop the mental disorder at an early stage, which facilitates the treatment of the disease or disorder (Al-Matiri, 2005, p. 55).

- Prevention in the third stage: This stage aims to reduce the disability resulting from mental illness, the existence of work and its compatibility with it, and an attempt to reduce the problems resulting from mental illness and the use of means that qualify the work that aims to prevent relapse.

- **The therapeutic method**: includes the treatment of mental problems, disorders, and diseases until a return to a state of harmony and mental health is achieved. This approach is concerned with the causes of mental illness, its symptoms, its diagnosis, methods of treatment, and the provision of therapists, clinics, and psychiatric hospitals (Bakhush, 2016, p. 52).

4. Epidemics:

The word **epidemiology** derives from the word epidemic (meaning epidemic), which in turn derives from the Greek words epi (meaning between) and demos (meaning people). Epidemics such as SARS, which attack a population in an unusual manifestation of a disease, require immediate research. However, the research method used in this case is the same as that applied to all diseases in general, whether they are unusual in their pattern or frequency of infection or present in a common way. permanent in a given population; any "endemic" in it. In fact, the same methods are used in the study of normal physiological events such as procreation and pregnancy as well as physical and mental development within populations. In short, it can be said that "epidemiology is the science that studies health and disease within populations" (Rodolfo, 2015, p. 12).

5. Mental health in times of epidemics:

Attention to mental health in difficult circumstances is extremely important, as the necessary measures must be taken to preserve the mental health of communities affected by epidemics, and concerns about the transmission of disease from one person to another can affect social cohesion. Changes and reactions begin to appear in the behavior of individuals, such as feelings of fear and anxiety, depression, feelings of isolation and loneliness, drug and tobacco use, sleep disorders, and other reactions. The groups most at risk and affected more than others during the Corona pandemic can be limited to: the elderly, people who suffer from chronic diseases, children, first responders to deal with epidemics such as doctors and health care providers, and people who suffer from chronic mental disorders. Among the symptoms that **Mashreqi and Al-Jishi (2020)** confirm appear as a result of the spread of epidemics is the feeling of anxiety and depression about things that are happening or are about to happen. When the outbreak of emerging diseases is accompanied by a general state of uncertainty, it is natural for people to be concerned about the possibility of being diagnosed with the virus, in addition to the concern that a close person may be infected and the concern that oneself or loved ones will be exposed to social isolation or confinement. It is common for there to be an association between anxiety and depression, and there is an overlap between some of their symptoms. Symptoms of anxiety may include difficulty sleeping, a constant feeling of tension, a loss of concentration, a loss of appetite, general discontent, shortness of breath, tremors, sensitivity to information or constant checking of social media, overthinking, and Symptoms of depression include loss of interest, feelings of sadness and anger, frequent crying, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, disturbed sleep, memory loss, loss of concentration, lack of confidence, and self-neglect as a result of isolation, confinement,

deprivation, or physical malaise. There are some factors that may increase the risk of depression, including suffering from depression in the past, social isolation, physical pain, and other ongoing life stresses, and in order to cope with isolation and loneliness, most people feel the need for social interactions and connection with others. In the event that the individual does not have the opportunity for social interaction, he will have a feeling of loneliness, and loneliness and social isolation can lead to the emergence of symptoms of anxiety and depression in individuals (Djomaa, 2021, p. 5).

6. Suggestions and guidelines that promote mental health in times of epidemics:

The recent survey shows a 20% increase in mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic. In another study conducted in China, 54% of respondents rated their mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak as moderate to severe. In a nutshell, the COVID-19 pandemic will be the major issue that led to mental health (Tabianan et al., 2022, p. 57-64).

Bahri Saber (2020), in his study "Managing the COVID-19 Crisis by Promoting Mental Health", referred to a set of suggestions that can be summarized as follows:

- Acceptance of confinement: The first step toward mental health lies in accepting confinement, so it is important to accept confinement and get used to it by simplifying it.

- Avoid getting addicted to news about the virus: During this period, many people set up news channels and follow them around the clock, which causes a kind of anxiety and tension, especially since most news channels focus on the number of infections and negative things instead of positive news, such as the number of those who have been cured and who have passed the danger stage of this virus.

- Avoid believing rumors: In such crises, we notice the emergence of many rumors, which confuses many individuals and increases tension among many of them, especially since the majority of these rumors are negative, which leads to them affecting the mental health of the individual as it is one of the factors contributing to frustration.

- Focusing on information issued by official bodies: as a lot of news and information about the virus is circulated on many sites, it is important to draw information from its official sources, whether it is related to statistics on the development of the virus, the number of new infections, or methods of prevention and health care in such circumstances.

- Avoid excessive use of social networking sites because they are a direct cause of depression: Despite the importance of social networking sites at this stage to reduce stress in light of the confinement, excessive use of them will lead the individual to feel boredom, routine, and anxiety, which leads to a feeling of psychological frustration that may be exacerbated. to reach the stage of depression.

- Diversifying household activities: Although it is difficult, it is necessary to create a variety of activities to carry out at home, whether these activities are individual or with family members, in order to eliminate routine and boredom and avoid psychological frustration, and these activities must be according to the hobbies and inclinations of each individual.

- Time management: exploiting time is important at this stage, the duration of which is still unknown, so it is necessary to divide the time between rest and doing daily activities, especially since time can be used to accomplish a lot of outstanding work.

- Enhancing the mental health of children: It is not easy for children who are used to going out to play outside the house to stay inside the house, which is very difficult for them. As adults, we are well aware of the value and importance of confinement; the children don't know that. As a result, it is critical to be explicit with them about the matter and inform them of the importance and necessity of confinement in their language by simplifying things for them, which makes them somewhat accept the home confinement. and the mental health of children can be enhanced by programming daily activities for them that they do to eliminate boredom and routine, and here the responsibility lies on parents to do this by diversifying activities throughout the week, which allows them to play in their home, where time can be divided between TV, playing, and purposeful activities such as drawing and singing.

- Positive talk inside the home: It is important to avoid negative conversations inside the home. It is important to know the development of our health situation, the development of the virus, and its extent. Talking by focusing on the positive things in our lives enhances our mental health and stabilizes it at an acceptable level in light of the crisis we are living through.

- Social interaction: Social interaction is a prerequisite for achieving mental health, and today it is not possible under these circumstances. But with the developments taking place today, modern technologies can be used for social interaction, with a focus on the talk in those interactions being positive and not just talking about negative things. Where do we notice that many focus their speeches on the virus, forgetting that there are positive things in our lives that we can talk about and that social interaction can be exploited to strengthen relationships through the various means available to us, with the need not to overuse them.

- Sleeping a lot: Many of us behave wrongly by sleeping excessively during these days, which is unacceptable. Therefore, it is important to avoid excessive sleep, which causes a kind of physical lethargy and routine and may be the beginning of depression. Therefore, it is important to avoid excessive sleep, as the body has to perform the usual movements in order to preserve its readiness and usual activity in order to avoid any psychological frustration that would complicate mental health.

- Learning new skills: It is the right time for us to learn new skills, especially since there are many opportunities available today through what modern technologies provide, and it is very possible

if we want to. All we have to do is define the new skills that we want to learn and know what is available to us, and then start using the time to learn new skills that will help us in the future in our work, in our daily lives, or in developing our professional path.

There is a set of public health measures, guidelines, and social measures advocated by the World Health Organization: (WHO, 2020).

- Adequate capacity of the health system should be available to detect new cases, conduct the necessary tests, and manage them.

- The risk of infection spreading in places where susceptible people are present should be minimized. This requires identifying all major drivers of COVID-19 infection (e.g, different types of indoor spaces) in the local context and taking appropriate measures to maximize physical distancing measures and minimize the risk of new infections.

- Measures must be taken to reduce the risk of nosocomial infection and disease outbreaks in places such as nursing homes for the elderly.

- A good understanding of the main drivers of infection in the local area being assessed must be obtained using local surveillance data, with rapid re-implementation of measures in the event of an increase in the incidence of the disease.

- Particular emphasis should be placed on the prevention and early detection of potentially hyper-spreading events.

Conclusion:

From the aforementioned, it is clear that mental health has an important role in times of epidemics by taking preventive and therapeutic measures to overcome all psychological and social disorders, and the Corona pandemic crisis is one of the most complex health crises that have passed in human history due to the nature of the pandemic and what it bears. A virus of unknown origin that is rapidly spreading and therefore rapidly contagious It was known as the worst health crisis affecting all areas of life in all countries, especially with regard to human health and life. In light of the search for a way out and an appropriate treatment for this epidemic, all individual and collective efforts must be combined at the level of health institutions, systems, and countries in order to control it and limit its spread.

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