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Finding balance in life

The Sun (Malaysia) · 1 Sep 2022 · 8 · Dr Praveena Rajendra is a Certified Mental Health and Awareness Practitioner, specialised in Narcissistic Abuse Recovery. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

THE term mental health covers a wide range of issues including anxiety, depression, stress and trauma. But what do we mean when we talk about well-being? How does it differ from mental health? And why are some people considered to be mentally healthy while others are not? This article explores the differences between well-being and mental health, and looks at how both concepts relate to well-being. Mental health and well-being are often used interchangeably, even though they mean different things. Mental health refers to how you feel about yourself and your life, it includes everything from anxiety and depression to confidence and self-esteem.

Many people casually use mental illness terminology to describe certain situations. However, mental illness is a medical diagnosis used to identify specific disorders that affect how you think, feel, behave and relate to others.

There are many different types of mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar, etc., each with unique symptoms and causes. On the flip side, well-being describes what makes us happy and fulfilled – our relationships, work, physical health, etc.

Emotional well-being is defined as both having an awareness of your emotions, and being able to manage and express those emotions in a healthy and ageappropriate manner. It includes having both good physical and mental health, high-life satisfaction and a sense of purpose.

Some people mistakenly refer to mental illnesses as diseases because the word “illness” implies a permanent state of suffering. While mental illness is a chronic condition, it does not mean you will always be mentally ill. Some people recover completely from one episode of mental illness, while others struggle with recurring episodes throughout their lives. While both concepts overlap, they each play distinct roles in our lives.

If we want to improve our overall quality of life, it is essential to look beyond our mental health as one affects our daily lives, whereas wellbeing impacts our long-term happiness and success.

While mental health is important, it does not necessarily translate into a better quality of life. Conversely, well-being is something that we can actively cultivate, making it easier to achieve goals like financial stability and personal fulfilment.

The determinants of mental health include both individual and societal factors. They range from individual characteristics, such as personality traits, genetic predisposition and previous experiences to external influences, such as family history, socioeconomic status and neighbourhood safety.

As well as influencing mental health directly, these factors also shape our attitudes towards mental illness and help us understand why some individuals experience mental health issues while others do not. This understanding helps us identify the causes of mental ill health and develop effective prevention strategies.

Promotion and prevention interventions work by addressing the individual, social and environmental factors that influence people’s mental wellbeing. They are based on three key principles:

Identifying the determinants of mental illness and promoting positive mental health;

Reducing risk factors and building protective factors;

Developing strategies to prevent mental ill-health.

Positive mental health is essential to our well-being. When we are mentally healthy, we feel happy, motivated, confident and productive. We realise our full potential, cope effectively with stress, work productively, make meaningful contributions to our communities, and contribute positively to society. For many people around the world, mental health problems remain largely unaddressed. In many cases, people suffering from mental illness are stigmatised and isolated.

Mental illnesses are stigmatised because people do not understand them. They associate mental illness with violent behaviour, dangerousness, unpredictability and weakness – not with love, creativity and productivity.

While mental health literacy may seem like common sense, it actually requires a lot of education and effort.

The following list provides some tips to help you achieve positive mental health and well-being.

Eat nutritious foods

Exercise regularly Get enough sleep Engage in activities that provide social support

Practice mindfulness

Connect with others

Learn about yourself

Develop coping

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strategies

Manage emotions

Seeking help is a sign of resilience and strength, not a sign of weakness. You do not have to suffer alone.

People who get appropriate care can fully recover and live productive, fulfilling lives. Treatment works.