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Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam- Approaches to Health and Well-being in Higher Education What is Health?

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The WHO constitution states: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

An important implication of this definition is that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders.

Mental health is an integral part of health; indeed, there is no health without mental health.

Mental health is determined by a range of socioeconomic, biological and environmental factors.

Cost-effective public health and intersectoral strategies and interventions exist to promote, protect and restore mental health.

Mental health is an integral and essential component of health.

Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community.

Mental health is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life. On this basis, the promotion, protection and restoration of mental health can be regarded as a vital concern of individuals, communities and societies throughout the world. (WHO)

What is Well-being?

Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. (WHO)

Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.

Focusing on well-being supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving and sustainability.

A society's well-being can be determined by the extent to which it is resilient, builds capacity for action, and is prepared to transcend challenges (Glossary of Terms 2021).

WHO works with Member States and partners to advance well-being as it pertains to global health and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Well-being is a major underlying driver of policy coherence across sectors and encourages galvanized action.

Advancing societal well-being helps create active, resilient and sustainable communities at local, national and global levels, enabling them to respond to current and emerging health threats such as COVID-19 and environmental disasters.

WHO coordinated the 10th Global Conference on Health Promotion in December 2021, where the Geneva Charter for Well-being was endorsed by participants. It outlines 5 key action areas:

design an equitable economy that serves human development within planetary boundaries;

create public policy for the common good;

achieve universal health coverage;

address the digital transformation to counteract harm and disempowerment and to strengthen the benefits; and

value and preserve the planet. (WHO)

What is well-being of student?

Despite significant attention to the well-being of students in educational settings, there is limited consensus about how student well-being should be defined. Similar to general well-being, well-being of students in higher education is defined in various ways. For instance, one definition is “the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community” (Fraillon, Citation2004, p24). Others define student well-being as “a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school” (Noble et al., Citation2008, p21).

Why is well-being of student in higher education at risk?

The well-being of students in higher education is under attention. Students' age in full time higher education generally ranges between 17–24 years. This is also the critical age for the onset of psychological problems (Lipson & Eisenberg, Citation2018). (Khatri, P., et al. 2024) Student well-being (SWB) encompasses the physical, psychological, and social wellness of students, aspects increasingly at risk in the high-pressure environment of higher education.

Marked by intense workloads, unmet expectations, and uncertainties around degree completion and employment, the higher education sector faces a growing challenge in maintaining and enhancing SWB. (Douwes, R., et al., 2023)

Studies report that a substantial number of students in higher education are dealing with well-being issues such as psychological and emotional distress, feelings of anxiety and depression, and an increased risk of burnout (Backhaus et al., Citation2020; Baik et al., Citation2019; Dopmeijer, Citation2021). Such numbers, combined with research indicating that well-being plays an important role in students' academic performance and drop-out rates (Lipson & Eisenberg, Citation2018), lead to increasing attention on student well-being in higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, such as social distancing, lockdowns, and online education, have further boosted this attention because of the negative impact on the well-being of students in higher education (Doolan, Citation2021).

Approach towards well-being of students of higher education:

A holistic focus on the development of the student, rather than simply focusing on the cognitive development of a student as measured by educational achievement, has become significant in policy making in higher education (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation CESE, Citation2015).

Under this holistic perspective, educational institutions are recognised to play a key role in supporting and promoting the well-being of their students. There is optimal mental health and well-being when someone has no or only minimal psychological complaints and also functions positively. (Khatri, P., et al. 2024)

Higher education has a responsibility to support students' mental health in alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 of Good health and Well-being.

Governments have the responsibility to facilitate this support through policies and mainly funding.

Students' access to mental health services is hindered by insufficient institutional capacity to provide mental healthcare, financial barriers and perceptions about mental health.

Students must be provided with access to free mental healthcare services in diverse modalities and sufficient qualified staff who understand diverse backgrounds and identities.

HEIs and governments must also collaborate to raise mental health literacy among students, staff and the public, combating mental health misconceptions and stigma.

Through training, faculty can identify students with mental health challenges, orientate them towards relevant resources and, under clear policies, consider academic accommodations.

Systematic data collection and monitoring enables HEIs and governments to identify gaps, improve mental healthcare service quality, and shape evidence-based policies. (UNESCO)

Provision of in-campus and virtual mental healthcare services

HEIs offer [mental healthcare] services for free in different languages, (...) 24 hours free hotlines for students experiencing suicidal ideation(...) and counselling services both in person and virtually.

National governments directly provide or fund these services, (...) including mobile clinics(...) and one-on-one text and web chat support for university students

Physical infrastructure as a mental health resource

Academic flexibility and accommodations

Student mental health leave policies

Screenings allow students to assess their mental health status, identify potential issues or disorders, and seek guidance on next steps, facilitating earlier intervention.

Conclusion:

Though there are well-being issues in students of higher education like academic stress, financial stress, vocational stress, etc. It can be treated in college or university campus. By various on campus initiatives well-being of students can be increased effectively like raising awareness regarding mental health among students, providing counselling services, 24 hours helpline, etc. Government can facilitate by providing policy and funds for the same. The attention must be provided by the HEIs towards well-being of students in order to improve their academic as well as overall performance. Also to develop their personality.

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