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Evaluation of Protective, Global Risk Factors and Health-Promotion Strategies on Mental and Emotional Health in Contemporary Society: A Review

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Abstract

Mental and emotional health has become an increasingly important global public-health concern because psychological well-being is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by social, economic, environmental and structural conditions. Poverty, unemployment, insecure housing, discrimination, violence, childhood adversity, social isolation, armed conflict, climate change and rapidly changing digital environments can increase vulnerability to psychological distress and mental-health conditions. Conversely, supportive relationships, social connectedness, quality education, meaningful employment, community participation, emotional and social skills and access to appropriate health and social services can promote resilience and well-being. This narrative review examines major risk and protective factors affecting mental and emotional health in contemporary society and discusses evidence-informed health-promotion and prevention strategies. Literature published predominantly from 2019 to 2026 was considered, with emphasis on World Health Organization publications and recent peer-reviewed systematic reviews, umbrella reviews and major scholarly literature. The evidence demonstrates that mental-health promotion requires a shift from an exclusively individual and clinical orientation towards population-based approaches that address social determinants across the life course. Health education has an important role in improving mental-health literacy, strengthening emotional and social skills, reducing stigma, promoting healthy coping and encouraging appropriate help-seeking. However, individual education alone cannot overcome structural conditions that generate mental-health inequalities. Effective action therefore requires collaboration across health, education, employment, housing, social protection, environmental and community sectors. The review concludes that improving mental and emotional health requires integrated, preventive, culturally responsive and rights-based approaches that combine individual-level interventions with action on the wider conditions in which people live, learn, work and age.

Keywords: Mental Health, Emotional Health, Mental-Health Promotion, Social Determinants, Mental-Health Literacy, Psychological Well-Being

Introduction

Mental health is an essential part of overall health and well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, behave, cope with challenges, relate to others, and function in their daily lives. It is not simply the absence of mental illness but a state of well-being that enables individuals to manage everyday stresses, develop their abilities, work effectively, and contribute to their communities. In contemporary society, mental health has become an important global health concern because individuals are increasingly exposed to social, economic, environmental, and technological changes that can influence their psychological and emotional well-being. The World Health Organization (2025) describes mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work effectively and contribute to their communities. Mental health exists along a continuum and can change over time according to the interaction of individual, family, community and structural circumstances. The global importance of mental health is increasingly recognized. World Health Organization (2022) reported that mental-health needs remain high worldwide while responses in many settings remain inadequate. The organization therefore calls for transformation of mental-health systems, including greater attention to prevention, promotion, community-based care and the environments that shape mental health. Mental health is influenced by a wide range of determinants. These include biological characteristics, emotional and social skills, family relationships, educational opportunities, employment, income, housing, neighborhood conditions, discrimination, violence and access to health and social services. World Health Organization (2025) specifically identifies poverty, violence, inequality and environmental deprivation as social and environmental risks, while supportive relationships, quality education, decent work, safe neighborhoods and strong community ties can serve protective functions. Recent scholarship has strengthened the argument that mental health should be addressed through a social-determinants framework. Kirkbride et al. (2024) demonstrated that socioeconomic disadvantage, early-life adversity, discrimination, social isolation, neighborhood conditions and other social circumstances influence mental health and mental disorders.

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They argue that these determinants provide important opportunities for population-level prevention because many are potentially modifiable. The contemporary environment has also introduced new and increasingly complex challenges. Digital technology and social media have transformed social interaction and access to information. Climate change is generating environmental disruption, displacement and uncertainty with implications for psychological well-being. Workplaces can provide purpose, income and social connection but can also expose workers to excessive workloads, insecurity, discrimination and other psychosocial risks. Conflict and forced migration can produce trauma, social disruption and difficulties accessing essential services. These developments indicate that mental-health promotion cannot be restricted to psychiatric services. It requires action in the places where people live, learn, work and interact. The World Health Organization Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030 identifies four major objectives: effective leadership and governance; comprehensive and integrated community-based mental-health and social services; implementation of promotion and prevention strategies; and strengthened information, evidence and research (World Health Organization, 2021). Against this background, this review examines the major risk factors affecting mental and emotional health in contemporary society, discusses protective factors, reviews approaches to promotion and prevention, and highlights the role of health education in improving mental-health outcomes.

Review Approach

This article adopted a narrative review approach. Literature published primarily between 2019 and 2026 was considered, with particular emphasis on recent systematic reviews, umbrella reviews, meta-analyses, peer-reviewed articles and authoritative World Health Organization publications. Relevant literature was identified using combinations of search terms including mental health, emotional health, mental-health promotion, social determinants of mental health, mental-health prevention, mental-health literacy, social isolation, digital technology, social media, climate change, workplace mental health, health education and community mental health. Priority was given to publications that provided evidence relevant to population health and prevention across different geographical and socioeconomic contexts. The review does not claim to be a systematic review with a formal risk-of-bias assessment. Rather, it synthesizes recent evidence to develop an integrated public-health perspective on mental and emotional health in contemporary society.

Conceptual Understanding of Mental and Emotional Health

Mental health

Mental health is a multidimensional state of well-being involving psychological functioning, emotional experiences, relationships and the ability to participate in everyday life. It is not static. An individual's mental health can improve or deteriorate depending on changing personal circumstances and exposure to protective or adverse conditions. Importantly, experiencing emotional distress does not automatically mean that a person has a mental disorder. Mental disorders represent clinically significant disturbances in cognition, emotional regulation or behaviour that are generally associated with substantial distress or impairment in functioning (WHO, 2025). This distinction is important for health promotion because populations require interventions that support positive mental health even when individuals do not meet diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder.

Emotional health

Emotional health can be understood as an individual's ability to recognize, understand, express, and manage emotions in a healthy and appropriate manner. It enables people to cope with stress, respond to difficult situations, maintain positive relationships, and function effectively in their daily lives. Emotional health does not mean the absence of negative emotions; rather, it involves the ability to experience and regulate different emotions while maintaining overall well-being. This concept is closely related to mental health, which the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) describes as a state of well-being that enables individuals to cope with the normal stresses of life and function effectively. Emotional health is an important part of mental and psychological well-being. Difficulties in understanding or regulating emotions may contribute to psychological distress and reduced well-being, while effective emotional regulation can support healthy functioning and adaptation to life challenges (Kraiss et al., 2020). Emotional health is also influenced by wider social and environmental conditions. Factors such as poverty, discrimination, childhood adversity, social isolation, employment, housing, and social support can either strengthen or undermine mental and emotional well-being (Kirkbride et al., 2024). Therefore, promoting emotional health requires attention to both individual abilities and the environments in which people

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live. Strengthening emotional and coping skills, supportive relationships, safe environments, mental-health literacy, and access to appropriate services can contribute to better mental and emotional well-being. Emotional health should consequently be considered an important component of comprehensive mental-health promotion.

Interrelationship between mental and emotional health

Mental and emotional health are closely interconnected aspects of overall well-being. Mental health influences how individuals think, cope, behave, and function, while emotional health relates particularly to the ability to recognize, understand, express, and regulate emotions. These processes influence one another; difficulties in managing emotions may contribute to psychological distress, while poor mental health may reduce an individual's capacity to cope with and regulate emotions (Kraiss et al., 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). Their interrelationship is also shaped by wider social and environmental conditions. Poverty, childhood adversity, discrimination, social isolation, unemployment, poor housing, and limited social support can increase vulnerability to poor mental and emotional health. Conversely, supportive relationships, education, decent employment, social connectedness, and safe environments can strengthen resilience and well-being (Kirkbride et al., 2024; WHO, 2025). Therefore, mental and emotional health should be addressed together within a broader health-promotion framework. Interventions that strengthen emotional regulation and coping skills, improve mental-health literacy, reduce stigma, promote social support, and address adverse social conditions can contribute to better psychological and emotional well-being. This integrated understanding provides a foundation for examining the global risk factors, protective factors, and health-promotion strategies considered in this review.

Global Risk Factors and Social Determinants of Mental and Emotional Health

Mental and emotional health are shaped by a wide range of individual, family, social, economic, environmental, and structural conditions. These factors do not operate independently; rather, they interact across the life course to either increase vulnerability to poor mental health or strengthen resilience and well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) emphasizes that mental health is influenced by factors operating at individual, family, community, and structural levels. Adverse conditions such as poverty, violence, inequality, discrimination, social isolation, and environmental deprivation can increase the risk of mental health problems, while supportive relationships, education, decent work, safe communities, and social connectedness can provide protection. Social determinants are particularly important because they influence the circumstances in which people are born, grow, learn, work, live, and age. Kirkbride et al. (2024) identified socioeconomic disadvantage, discrimination, social isolation and loneliness, childhood adversity, neighbourhood disadvantage, housing, education, employment, social support, and the physical environment as important determinants of mental health across the life course. Their review further emphasizes that exposure to these conditions is strongly influenced by the distribution of resources, power, and opportunities within society.

Poverty and Socioeconomic Disadvantages

Economic circumstances are among the most important determinants of mental health. Individuals living in poverty may experience persistent concerns about food, housing, education, employment, debt and access to health services. These conditions can create chronic stress and reduce the resources available for coping. Kirkbride et al. (2024) identify socioeconomic disadvantage as a major determinant of mental health and mental disorders. Socioeconomic conditions influence mental health through pathways involving education, employment, income, neighbourhood conditions, material deprivation and exposure to stressful environments. Economic disadvantage can also create a cycle in which poor mental health reduces educational and employment opportunities, which can subsequently worsen financial circumstances. Oswald et al. (2024), reviewing 101 reviews of interventions targeting social determinants of mental disorders, found evidence across economic, environmental, demographic, neighbourhood and sociocultural domains.

Housing and Living Conditions

Safe and stable housing provides physical security, privacy and a foundation for social and family functioning. In contrast, homelessness, overcrowding, housing insecurity and unsafe neighbourhoods can create chronic stress and undermine well-being. Housing conditions are particularly important because they interact with other determinants. People experiencing housing insecurity may simultaneously experience unemployment, food insecurity, social exclusion and barriers to health-care access. Addressing mental-health inequalities therefore requires policies that recognize housing as part of the broader mental-health environment.

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Education

Education contributes to mental health through knowledge, social participation, skill development and improved opportunities for employment and socioeconomic security. Supportive educational environments can strengthen emotional and social development. However, schools and universities can also become sources of psychological stress when students experience bullying, discrimination, social exclusion, academic pressure or unsafe learning environments. Health education and counselling services should therefore be integrated into educational institutions.

Employment and working conditions

Employment may protect mental health by providing income, social interaction, structure, purpose and a sense of identity. Nevertheless, poor working conditions can produce psychological harm. WHO (2022a) emphasizes that organizational factors such as excessive workload, inadequate support, discrimination and other psychosocial hazards can affect mental health. Its guidelines recommend organizational interventions, manager and worker training, individual interventions, return-to-work support and assistance with gaining employment. Lancman et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate that the relationship between mental health and work is complex, involving both the potential protective value of employment and the harmful effects of adverse working conditions.

Childhood adversity

Childhood is a particularly sensitive period for mental and emotional development. Experiences such as abuse, neglect, harsh parenting, household violence, poverty and family instability can have long-term consequences. WHO (2025) identifies adverse experiences during sensitive developmental periods, especially early childhood, as particularly important mental-health risks. Preventive strategies should consequently include positive parenting, protection from violence, supportive school environments, early identification of difficulties and accessible family and community services.

Violence, discrimination and social exclusion

Violence threatens psychological and physical safety and can produce persistent fear, distress and trauma. Discrimination and social exclusion may similarly undermine self-worth, belonging and access to social resources. These experiences can also operate structurally. Discrimination may restrict opportunities for education, employment, housing and health care, thereby creating pathways through which social inequality becomes mental-health inequality. World Health Organization's recent work on social determinants emphasizes that health inequities cannot be adequately addressed without action on economic inequality, structural discrimination, and conflict and climate disruption.

Conflict, forced displacement and migration

Armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and forced displacement can expose individuals and communities to violence, bereavement, loss of livelihoods, separation from family and uncertainty about the future. Refugees and migrants may subsequently experience poor housing, unemployment, discrimination, language barriers, uncertain legal status and limited access to services. WHO identifies community support, basic needs and security, stigma, adversity and trauma, and access to services as important factors affecting refugee and migrant mental health. Mental-health responses in humanitarian settings should therefore combine psychological support with protection, housing, food security, education, livelihoods and access to essential health services.

Social isolation and loneliness

Social relationships provide emotional support, practical assistance and a sense of belonging. Persistent social isolation or loneliness may therefore undermine psychological well-being. Health-promotion programmes should deliberately create opportunities for social participation, particularly for populations at increased risk of isolation, including older adults, displaced populations, unemployed persons and individuals experiencing social exclusion.

Digital technology and social media

Digital technology has both beneficial and potentially harmful implications for mental health. Social media can facilitate communication, information sharing and social support, but problematic patterns of use may be associated with psychological difficulties. Keles et al. (2020) systematically reviewed research concerning social media use and depression, anxiety and psychological distress among adolescents. Their review identified associations across several dimensions of social-media use, although much of the available evidence was observational. However, the relationship should not be presented as universally harmful. Valkenburg et al. (2022), in an umbrella review of 25 reviews, reported that most reviews

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characterized associations between social-media use and adolescent mental health as weak or inconsistent. Digital environments can also provide social support. Zhou and Cheng (2022), reviewing 14 studies involving 11,616 adolescents, found evidence that online social support may be beneficial, particularly for self-esteem, although causal relationships require further investigation. Health promotion should therefore focus on digital literacy, balanced technology use, online safety, and healthy sleep, critical evaluation of information and recognition of problematic use rather than treating all technology use as harmful.

Climate change and environmental disruption

Climate change is emerging as an important determinant of mental health. Extreme weather events, displacement, loss of livelihoods, environmental degradation and uncertainty can affect psychological well-being. Burrows et al. (2024) systematically reviewed evidence on chronic, slow-onset climate change and mental health and identified associations with depression, anxiety, psychological distress and other adverse outcomes. Cosh et al. (2024) similarly examined eco-anxiety, psychological distress and symptoms of major affective disorders and identified relationships between climate-related distress and several mental-health outcomes. Climate-related risks are also socially unequal. Communities with fewer economic and social resources may have less capacity to prepare for or recover from climate-related disruptions. WHO therefore emphasizes the effects of climate change on both environmental and social determinants of health.

Protective Factors for Mental and Emotional Health

Protective factors are individual, interpersonal, social, and environmental conditions that help people maintain good mental and emotional health and cope with life challenges. They can reduce vulnerability to psychological distress and strengthen resilience, particularly when individuals are exposed to stressful or adverse circumstances. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) identifies positive social interactions, supportive relationships, social and emotional skills, quality education, decent work, safe neighborhoods, and strong community connections as important factors that can support mental health.

Supportive relationships are particularly important because family, friends, peers, and community networks can provide emotional support, belonging, practical assistance, and opportunities for social connection. These resources can help individuals cope with stressful experiences and reduce the harmful effects of social isolation. Similarly, the development of social and emotional skills can improve individuals' ability to understand and manage emotions, communicate effectively, solve problems, and adapt to challenges (WHO, 2025). Education and meaningful employment can also protect mental and emotional health by providing knowledge, skills, social participation, purpose, and economic security. However, the quality of these environments is important; unsafe schools, workplace discrimination, excessive workload, and job insecurity may instead create psychological stress. WHO (2022) therefore recommends organizational and individual interventions to promote mental health in the workplace. At the community and societal levels, safe living environments, social inclusion, access to health and social services, and policies that reduce poverty and inequality can strengthen population mental health. Kirkbride et al. (2024) emphasize that protective factors should be considered alongside the wider social determinants of mental health because individual resilience is influenced by the social and structural conditions in which people live.

Mental-Health Promotion and Prevention

Mental-health promotion and prevention are important approaches for improving mental and emotional well-being and reducing the burden of mental disorders. Mental-health promotion focuses on strengthening positive mental well-being, resilience, coping skills, supportive relationships, and healthy social environments, whereas prevention aims to reduce exposure to factors that increase the risk of mental-health problems. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) emphasizes that mental-health promotion and prevention should be integrated into public health and should address individual, social, economic, and environmental conditions that influence well-being. Effective promotion and prevention require action at multiple levels. At the individual level, interventions can strengthen emotional regulation, coping skills, problem-solving, resilience, and mental-health literacy. At the family and school levels, supportive relationships, positive parenting, social and emotional learning, and early identification of emotional difficulties can help protect children and young people from later mental-health problems. Evidence from a systematic review of reviews indicates that preventive interventions can reduce mental-health problems among children and young people who are exposed to increased risk (McGovern et al., 2024).

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Community-based approaches are also important because mental health is influenced by social relationships and living conditions. Community education, peer support, social participation, stigma reduction, and accessible mental-health services can improve awareness and encourage appropriate help-seeking. In addition, addressing social determinants such as poverty, housing insecurity, discrimination, unemployment, and social exclusion is necessary because psychological interventions alone may not adequately address the conditions that contribute to poor mental health (Kirkbride et al., 2024; Oswald et al., 2024).

Role of Health Education in Mental and Emotional Health Promotion

Health education is an important component of mental and emotional health promotion because it equips individuals and communities with knowledge and practical skills for maintaining well-being, recognizing mental-health difficulties, and seeking appropriate support. Its role extends beyond the provision of information to include the development of emotional and coping skills, reduction of stigma, promotion of supportive relationships, and creation of environments that encourage healthy responses to psychological challenges (World Health Organization, 2022). A major contribution of health education is the improvement of mental-health literacy. Accurate and accessible information can help people understand mental health, recognize early signs of distress, distinguish between common emotional difficulties and conditions requiring professional attention, and become aware of available sources of support. Improved knowledge can also challenge misconceptions and negative attitudes that contribute to stigma and discourage help-seeking. World Health Organization (2022) emphasizes the need to strengthen mental-health promotion and prevention as part of a broader public-health response. Health education can also strengthen emotional regulation and coping skills. Education that develops emotional awareness, stress management, problem-solving, communication, resilience, and healthy coping can improve individuals' ability to respond to everyday challenges. This is particularly relevant for children and young people, as evidence from a systematic review of reviews shows that preventive interventions can reduce mental-health problems among those at increased risk (McGovern et al., 2024). Another important role is stigma reduction and promotion of appropriate help-seeking. Through schools, workplaces, health facilities, media, and community programmes, health education can challenge harmful beliefs about mental illness and encourage people to seek support when needed. However, education alone cannot overcome barriers created by poverty, discrimination, unemployment, social isolation, poor housing, or inadequate access to services. Mental-health promotion must therefore be combined with interventions that address these wider social determinants (Kirkbride et al., 2024). Health education is consequently most effective when it forms part of a multilevel health-promotion strategy. Individual education and skills development should be supported by healthy families, schools, workplaces, communities, accessible mental-health services, and policies that reduce social and economic inequalities. Evidence that interventions addressing social determinants can contribute to the prevention of mental disorders further supports the need for health education to be integrated with broader social and structural action (Oswald et al., 2024).

Mental Health in the Workplace

The workplace is an important social environment that can either support or undermine mental and emotional health. Work can provide income, social connection, purpose, routine, self-esteem, and opportunities for personal development. Conversely, poor working conditions, excessive demands, job insecurity, discrimination, violence, harassment, inadequate support, and limited control over work can create psychosocial risks that negatively affect mental well-being (World Health Organization, 2024). Therefore, mental health in the workplace should be considered within the broader social and environmental determinants of mental and emotional health discussed in this review. Work-related stress and other psychosocial risks may contribute to emotional distress and mental-health problems. The World Health Organization (2022) identifies factors such as excessive workloads, long or inflexible working hours, low job control, job insecurity, discrimination, violence, bullying, and poor organizational support as important workplace risks. These risks may be particularly significant for workers who experience prolonged exposure to stressful working conditions. A systematic review of 341 studies further demonstrated that employees' mental health and well-being are influenced by interconnected factors operating at macro-, organizational, and individual levels (Fan et al., 2024). This supports the view that workplace mental health cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics or coping abilities. The consequences of poor mental health extend beyond the individual worker. Psychological distress may affect concentration, motivation, relationships,

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work performance, attendance, and job retention. At the organizational level, poor mental health may contribute to absenteeism, reduced productivity, staff turnover, and difficulties in maintaining a healthy workforce. Globally, the World Health Organization (2022) estimates that approximately 15% of working-age adults have a mental disorder at any point in time, while depression and anxiety are associated with substantial productivity losses. Thus, protecting workers' mental health is important not only for individual well-being but also for organizational effectiveness and wider social and economic development. At the same time, employment can function as a protective factor for mental and emotional health when work is safe, decent, meaningful, and supportive. According to the World Health Organization (2024), decent work can contribute to recovery and social inclusion among people living with mental-health conditions and can improve confidence and social functioning. Supportive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, reasonable workloads, job security, opportunities for participation, work-life balance, and fair treatment can therefore strengthen workers' psychological well-being. This illustrates the importance of protective factors in reducing the effects of workplace stress. Mental-health promotion in the workplace requires attention to both the individual and the organization. Individual-level approaches may include stress-management training, psychological interventions, emotional and coping-skills development, and opportunities for physical activity. However, interventions directed only at individual workers may be insufficient when the major sources of distress arise from working conditions. The World Health Organization (2022) therefore recommends combining individual interventions with organizational measures that identify and address psychosocial risks.

Organizational interventions may involve modifying workloads, improving work schedules, increasing workers' participation in decisions, strengthening communication, preventing violence and harassment, and providing flexible working arrangements. Evidence from a systematic review among healthcare workers found that organizational interventions, particularly job and task modifications, flexible work and scheduling, and changes to the physical work environment, can improve aspects of mental health and well-being (Aust et al., 2024). These findings support a broader health-promotion approach in which workplace environments are modified to reduce risks rather than placing the responsibility for mental health entirely on individual workers. Health education is another important component of workplace mental-health promotion. Workers can be educated about mental health, common signs of psychological distress, healthy coping strategies, available support services, and appropriate help-seeking. Mental-health literacy can also challenge misconceptions and reduce negative attitudes towards people experiencing mental-health conditions. A systematic review by Tóth et al. (2023) found evidence supporting workplace interventions aimed at reducing mental-health-related stigma, although the effectiveness varied across intervention approaches. Health education should therefore be combined with supportive workplace policies and accessible services rather than being treated as a stand-alone solution. Managers and supervisors also have an important responsibility in creating psychologically healthy workplaces. Training managers to recognize signs of emotional distress, communicate effectively, listen actively, and respond appropriately can strengthen organizational support for workers. The World Health Organization (2022) specifically recommends manager training and worker training as components of a comprehensive workplace mental-health strategy. Such training can help create an environment in which workers feel safer discussing mental-health concerns and seeking assistance when necessary. Workplace mental-health promotion should also include protection and support for workers who already have mental-health conditions. Reasonable accommodations, flexible work arrangements, modified duties, supportive supervision, and return-to-work programmes can help affected workers remain in employment or return to work following periods of illness. The World Health Organization (2022) emphasizes that workers with mental-health conditions should be protected from discrimination and supported to participate and thrive in employment.

Climate Change and Mental-Health Promotion

Climate change is an important contemporary environmental determinant of mental and emotional health. Rising temperatures, floods, droughts, storms, wildfires, food and water insecurity, displacement, and loss of livelihoods can create conditions that increase psychological distress and reduce well-being. Climate change can also worsen existing social and economic determinants of mental health, including poverty, housing insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to health and social services (World Health Organization, 2022). Thus, its mental-health consequences should be

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considered within the broader social, environmental, and structural factors examined in this review. Climate-related effects on mental health can occur through both sudden and gradual pathways. Disasters may result in fear, trauma, bereavement, displacement, and loss of property, while prolonged drought, increasing temperatures, environmental degradation, and loss of livelihoods may produce continuing worry, grief, frustration, and uncertainty. Burrows et al. (2024), in a systematic review of 57 studies, found evidence linking chronic, slow-onset climate change with depression and anxiety symptoms, suicide, psychological distress, worry, grief, and frustration. However, the authors noted that findings were not uniform across studies, indicating that the relationship between climate change and mental health is influenced by individual, community, and societal circumstances. Climate change may also generate emotional responses such as climate-related anxiety, grief, fear, and feelings of helplessness. Although such responses may be understandable reactions to genuine environmental threats and should not automatically be regarded as mental disorders, persistent distress may affect psychological well-being.

Community-Based and Rights-Based Mental-Health Services

Community-based services can improve accessibility and help individuals remain connected to families and communities. World Health Organization (2022) argues that mental-health transformation should involve strengthening community-based services and reshaping environments that influence mental health. World Health Organzation's community mental-health guidance emphasizes person-centred and rights-based approaches. Such services should respect autonomy, dignity and participation while providing appropriate psychological, social and clinical support. Integrating mental health into primary health care is particularly important because primary-care settings can provide opportunities for early identification, health education, referral and continuing support.

Whole-of-Society Approach

Mental health cannot be improved by the health sector alone. Its determinants extend into education, employment, housing, social protection, justice, environment, transportation and community development. The WHO World Mental Health Report calls for stakeholders to deepen commitment to mental health, reshape environments and strengthen mental-health systems. A whole-of-society approach should therefore involve:

1. governments developing and financing effective mental-health policies;
2. health systems integrating mental health into primary and community care;
3. schools and universities promoting social and emotional well-being;
4. employers addressing psychosocial risks;
5. communities strengthening social connection and inclusion;
6. media organizations providing accurate mental-health information;
7. digital platforms supporting safer online environments; and
8. Researchers generating context-specific evidence. This approach is particularly important because interventions addressing only one determinant are unlikely to eliminate complex mental-health inequalities.

Challenges to Mental-Health Promotion

Several challenges continue to limit progress in global mental-health promotion. These include inadequate financing, shortages of trained personnel, unequal distribution of services, stigma, and insufficient integration of mental health into primary care and limited availability of community-based services. Another major challenge is unequal research representation. Although the evidence base is growing, research remains concentrated in particular geographical and socioeconomic settings. This creates difficulties in determining whether interventions developed in high-income countries are equally effective in low- and middle-income contexts. Digital inequality is another concern. Technology may improve access to information and services for some populations while excluding people without reliable internet access, digital devices or adequate digital literacy. Climate change, conflict, economic instability and forced displacement may further increase mental-health needs while simultaneously disrupting health systems. These challenges reinforce the need for context-sensitive interventions that combine mental-health promotion with broader social and economic policies.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Future research should move beyond documenting mental-health problems and increasingly investigate how modifiable social and environmental conditions can be changed. More longitudinal studies are needed to clarify causal relationships

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between social determinants, digital technology and mental-health outcomes. This is particularly important because much of the social-media literature remains observational. Research should also increase representation from low- and middle-income countries. Local evidence is needed to understand how poverty, unemployment, culture, family structures, gender, social networks, climate change and health-service accessibility interact in different settings. Intervention research should evaluate integrated approaches that combine psychological prevention with social protection, education, livelihood support, housing and community development. Evidence from Prina et al. (2025) provides an important foundation for this direction. Future studies should also evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of health-education interventions designed to improve mental-health literacy, reduce stigma and strengthen emotional and social skills.

Implications for Health-Promotion Practice

The evidence reviewed has several implications for health educators and public-health professionals.

1. Mental-health education should be integrated into existing health-promotion programmes rather than treated exclusively as a specialist activity.
2. Health educators should emphasize practical skills, including emotional regulation, communication, coping, problem-solving and help-seeking.
3. Mental-health promotion should occur across multiple settings, including schools, universities, workplaces, primary health-care facilities and communities.
4. Educational interventions should address stigma and misinformation using culturally appropriate and evidence-based communication.
5. Health-promotion professionals should recognize that individual behaviour is influenced by structural circumstances. Effective health promotion therefore requires both education and advocacy for healthier social environments.

Conclusion

Mental and emotional health is a fundamental component of individual and population well-being. Contemporary evidence demonstrates that psychological health is shaped by complex interactions among individual characteristics, family relationships, socioeconomic circumstances, community conditions and wider structural and environmental forces. Poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment, childhood adversity, violence, discrimination, social isolation, conflict, forced displacement, climate change and problematic patterns of digital engagement can increase vulnerability to poor mental health. At the same time, supportive relationships, emotional and social skills, quality education, decent employment, safe communities, social participation and accessible services can promote resilience. The evidence indicates that mental-health promotion cannot depend exclusively on clinical treatment or individual behaviour change. Social determinants must be addressed alongside individual and community-level interventions. World Health Organization's global mental-health framework similarly emphasizes prevention, promotion, community-based services and action on the environments that shape mental health (World Health Organization, 2021, & 2022). Health education has an important role in this process by improving mental-health literacy, reducing stigma, strengthening emotional and social skills, promoting healthy coping and encouraging appropriate help-seeking. Nevertheless, education is most effective when supported by healthy families, schools, workplaces, communities and public policies. Ultimately, improving mental and emotional health requires a coordinated whole-of-society response that combines health promotion, prevention, social protection, community development, accessible services and action on inequality. Such an approach offers a stronger foundation for healthier, more resilient and socially inclusive populations.

Recommendations

1. Governments should strengthen national mental-health promotion and prevention policies and integrate mental health into broader health, education, employment, housing and social-protection programmes.
2. Mental-health services should be integrated into primary and community health care to improve accessibility, early identification, referral and continuity of care.
3. Health education programmes should incorporate mental-health literacy, emotional skills, coping strategies, stigma reduction and appropriate help-seeking.
4. Schools and universities should develop supportive environments that address bullying, discrimination, social isolation and excessive academic pressure.

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5. Workplaces should implement evidence-informed organizational strategies that reduce psychosocial hazards and promote supportive working environments.
6. Community programmes should strengthen social connection, inclusion, peer support and participation, particularly among vulnerable populations.
7. Governments and development partners should address social determinants such as poverty, unemployment, housing insecurity and discrimination as components of mental-health policy.
8. Digital-health initiatives should promote safe and responsible technology use while expanding access to reliable mental-health information and support.
9. Mental-health considerations should be incorporated into climate-change adaptation, disaster preparedness and humanitarian-response planning.
10. Research institutions should increase high-quality longitudinal and intervention research, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, to identify culturally appropriate and sustainable mental-health promotion strategies.

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