

Understanding Emotional Health Vis-A-Vis Mental Health: Perspectives for a Holistic Approach to a Healthy Personality

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ABSTRACT

'Emotional health' is an emerging concept in the field of clinical and health psychology that focuses on the overall wellbeing of the person. However the concept of Emotional health, in itself, has not been much explored as most of the researches have focused on Mental Health and have presented strong emotional basis as that without which mental health is unattainable. This article explores Emotional health, in relation to Mental health, with an explanation of both, seeking to delineate the differences and lay emphasis on a perspective that understands the importance of Emotional health for a holistic well being. Thus this article intends to contribute in terms of understanding the concept of Emotional health, not merely as a sub domain in the field of mental health, but a perspective in itself towards overall well being of persons.

Keywords: *Emotional Health, Mental Health, Holistic Approach, Healthy Personality*

Humans are emotional beings and invariably every affair of their daily life is tinged with feelings and emotions (Morgan & King, 1993). Emotions are central to how we live and perceive life and its various events. Goleman (1996) refers to *Emotion* as a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and range of propensities to act. Emotion is a complex state of the organism, involving bodily changes of varied natures – in breathing, pulse rate, gland secretion, etc. – and, on the mental aspect a state of excitement or perturbation, marked by strong feelings, and usually an impulse towards a definite form of behaviour. An emotion is experienced as a feeling that motivates, organizes, and guides perception, thought, and action (Antony, 2005). There is no single definition of emotion. Besides, each definition given by psychologists differs in its approach and perspective, leaving no room for uniformity or singularity.

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Psychologists and Educationalists have worked to find out the role of emotions in the well being of human persons. The broaden and build theory of Fredrickson has proved that positive emotions encourage one to discover novel lines of thought or action thus increasing the likelihood that one will feel good and optimistic in the future (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Added to it, most of the researches on the determinants of health and well-being of the populations have focussed on physical health problems, particularly mortality and life expectancy (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999). Research evidence has been accumulating to support the idea that Emotional and physical health are directly and reciprocally related to one another. Emotional well being was considered an absolute necessary condition for good health (Stewart Brown, 1998) and emotional distress created susceptibility to physical illness (Cohen, Tyrrell & Smith, 1991). Those who repress their emotions simultaneously suppress their immune response, thus making them vulnerable to illnesses of all kinds from common cold to cancer (Pennebaker, 1997). Expressing one's true emotions, thus becomes fundamental to health and well being while avoidance constitutes a barrier to wellness (Topics in Integrative Medicine, 2007).

In recent years, a number of researches have been carried out on 'Mental Health'. Even those studies that offered programs to improve Emotional Health were invariably assessing the Mental Health measures (Attwood, Meadows, Stallard & Richardson, 2012). The terms Mental Health and Emotional Health were used interchangeably in assessing the levels of anxiety and depression (Hayes, Campbell, Buckby, Geia & Egan, 2010). An understanding of Mental Health of a community was done through Emotional Health cues like stress and distress as well as depression (Mitchell, Watkins, Shires, Chapman and Burnett, 2017). The World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH, 2005) seeks to promote the optimal social and emotional development of infant and children, that is, to reduce the social and emotional problems that arise in infancy, early childhood and early parenthood, which could have adverse effects on the child's mental health (Cummins & McMaster, 2006). Thus the terms Mental Health and Emotional Health is at times used interchangeably. However there is a notable difference between the two. Some committees and project teams and many researchers have taken up working on the concept of Emotional Health and its importance, as a factor crucial to mental health and overall well being of a person.

This paper intends to i) understand the concepts of Emotional Health and Mental Health and the remarkable differences between the two, ii) recognize that Emotional Health forms the basis of a good Mental Health, iii) comprehend how good Emotional Health pertains to an overall well being or holistic health of a person under all circumstances of one's life.

CONCEPT OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH

The World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1947). Precedence was given to promoting physical wellbeing by the National Health Services. The green paper, 'Our Healthier Nation' stressed upon the importance of emotional wellbeing for

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health and defined health as “being confident and positive and able to cope with the ups and downs of life” (Secretary of State for Health, 1998). Thus the concept of Resilience found its place. Tony Newman in his work of promoting resilience defines it to be the “capacity of the individual or community to resist or ‘bounce back’ in spite of significant stress or adversity” (Newman, 2002). Its importance notwithstanding, there are fewer researches done on emotional wellbeing and enhancing coping and promoting resilience. Strategies like Education, Home Visiting, Early Educational Child Care, Parenting Programs, Community Development and Advocacy when delivered in a multi-sectoral, proactive and population targeted manner, may reduce the incidence of emotional and behavioural problems in children and youth and promote resilience and emotional well being (Alperstein & Raman, 2003).

Researches pertaining to emotions were focussed much on Emotional Development and Emotional Adjustment in 1930’s to 1940’s (Odlum, 1948 and Punke, 1944). The concept of ‘Emotional Health’ was used by D.H. Stott in his study of Delinquency and Emotional Health (Stott, 1951). The concept of ‘Normality’ was also referred to as ‘Emotional Health’ and the various methods in which it could be evaluated were researched (Epstein, 1958). The later years found very few researches done on ‘Emotional Health’. With the emergence of the concept of ‘Emotional Intelligence’, as the ability to accurately identify and appropriately express one’s own feelings as well as being attuned to those of others, studies on Emotional Intelligence presented itself as absolutely essential for maintaining a healthy relationship with oneself and others (Goleman, 1995). Thus Emotional Intelligence was considered a key factor in health, well being and longevity.

Even those researches that were aimed at studying, improving Emotional Health or observing the effect of Emotional Health on various factors, have not given a solid definition to this concept. In his research on Emotional Health and the Big Five Personality factors, Stewart James Henry McCann considers Emotional Health domain as being based on a composite of a person’s daily experiences in regard to positive and negative affect (McCann, 2011). A practical definition of emotional wellbeing offered by the American Mental Health Foundation says, emotional health is ‘a positive sense of well being that enables an individual to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life; people in good mental health have the ability to recover effectively from illness, change or misfortune’ (American Mental Health Foundation, 2016).

In an unsigned article titled, “What is emotional health? And how to improve it?”, Emotional health is defined as a state of positive psychological functioning and an extension of mental health. It is considered as the ‘optimal functioning’ end of the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that make up one’s inner and outer world. It also includes an overall experience of wellness in what one thinks, feels or does through both the highs and lows of life (Healthy Place, 2016). The organization Belongto quotes the Mental Health Foundation defining emotional health as “a positive state of wellbeing which enables an individual to be able to

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function in society and meet the demands of everyday life” (as cited in Healthy Place, 2016). Doris Jeanette defines Emotional Health as the degree to which one feels emotionally secure and relaxed in everyday life. An emotionally healthy person has a relaxed body, an open mind and an open heart (Jeanette, 2018). Jenny Florence who has contributed an extensive work in the field of Emotional health, in her online library *a-z-of-emotionalhealth.com*, describes Emotional Health as the ability to understand and be responsive to one’s emotional experiences, to be able to feel the full range of one’s emotions and be at ease with it (Florence, 2017). The Help Guide (2016) states that emotionally healthy people are those who can control their emotions and behaviour, who show resilience in troubling situations and can build strong, lasting relationships (as cited in Positive Psychology Program, 2016). Positive psychologists have been studying emotional health for over four decades now and have come to believe that emotional health is more than just optimism. It is an authentic understanding of what truly makes us happier (Vann 2009, as cited in Positive Psychology Program, 2016). Additionally, research has shown that job stress and non work stress are associated with poor physical health, poor emotional health and high job dissatisfaction (Dua, 1994).

Thus an understanding of the concept of Emotional Health has always been related to self esteem, self awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, building resilience and relationship skills. It also consists of social and emotional competencies which helps one to deal with challenge and stress. Researchers have proved that socially and emotionally healthy children tend to demonstrate, and continue to develop several important behaviours and skills (adapted from McClellan & Katz, 2001; Bilmes, 2012 as cited in Ho & Funk, 2018). Children who exhibit social and emotional difficulties tend to have trouble following directions and participating in learning activities. Compared with healthier peers, they may be more likely to suffer rejection by classmates, have low self-esteem, do poorly in school, and be suspended (Hyson 2004; Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, Rupiper & Gregory, 2015). Hence, the social and emotional health of a child can affect the child's capacity to lead a fulfilling life.

With all the aforesaid descriptions of Emotional Health, it needs to be drawn too, that Emotional Health is more than mere high levels of self confidence or self esteem. It is a capacity to accept oneself even when one encounters setbacks in life.

Being aware of the crucial role played by Emotional health in the overall well being of a person and the limited literature available in this promising field, the National Institutes of Health Project on Cognitive and Emotional Health was established in September 2003, in response to the recommendation of a workshop on ‘Cognitive and Emotional Health: The Healthy Brain Workshop’ held in July 2001. The workshop set off to identify the demographic, social and biological determinants of cognitive and emotional health in older adults. A critical evaluation study committee was formed to critically analyse existing scientific literature pertaining to factors involved in the maintenance of cognitive and emotional health in the adults. 96 papers were reviewed on topics such as the presence of

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depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, positive and negative affect, mastery and resilience rather than the clinical syndromes like Major Depressive Disorders, Anxiety disorders etc. and factors that affected emotion were identified. At its conclusion, the workshop laid emphasis on the need to analyse non-disease outcomes since most of the studies reviewed were disease oriented (Hendrie, Albert, Butters, Gao, Knopman, Launer, Yaffe, Cuthbert, Edwards & Wagster, 2006).

Child Mental and Emotional Health Project Team, established by the former HSE Programme of Action for Children, has brought out interventions to foster resilience and positive mental and emotional health by promoting self esteem, coping and life skills across the entire population. However here too, the terms 'Emotional Health' and 'Mental Health' have been used interchangeably (Cummins & McMaster, 2006).

The Centre for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), a results based public policy, developed strategies for promoting social, emotional and behavioural health of children, pertaining to i) early childhood social and emotional development, ii) preventing social, emotional and behavioural disorders, iii) connecting the specialized needs of children with appropriate services (Promoting children's social, emotional and behavioural health, 2012).

Quite recently, on July 4, 2016, a workshop on 'What is Emotional Health?' was conducted by 'Living with Feeling' project at Queen Mary University of London. Based on the workshop, an interdisciplinary research had been started to explore the history of Emotional Health from 1600 till date. This research is still open to interpretation as it works on perfecting the three overlapping meanings of Emotional Health – i) the emotional dimensions of the medical encounter focusing on the emotional well being of doctors and patients, ii) the emotional factors influencing physical and mental health focusing on emotions as contributory factors to both illness and wellness, iii) emotional flourishing which is a state of healthy balance in an individual's emotions (Lemmens, 2016).

Thus the concept of Emotional Health is still being explored, and further researches shall improve its understanding and aid in the promotion of overall wellbeing of humanity.

CONCEPT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Psychologists and health professionals have long emphasized the concept of Mental Health and numerous researches have been carried out on this area, to aid in furthering the psychological well being of individuals.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Mental Health as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, and feels capable of coping with the normal stresses of life, working productively and fruitfully and being able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization, 2014). This definition of Mental Health lays emphasis on self realization, stress management and optimal functioning. It is a state of good mental functioning.

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The World Health Organization highlights ten facts on Mental Health which are interesting and worth noting here.

1. Around 20% of the world's children and adolescents have mental disorders or problems
2. Mental and Substance use disorders are the leading cause of disability worldwide
3. About 800, 000 people commit suicide every year
4. War and disasters have a large impact on mental health and psychosocial well-being
5. Mental disorders are important risk factors for other diseases, as well as unintentional and intentional injury
6. Stigma and discrimination against patients and families prevent people from seeking mental health care
7. Human rights violations of people with mental and psychosocial disability are routinely reported in most countries
8. Globally, there is huge inequity in the distribution of skilled human resources for mental health
9. There are five key barriers to increasing availability of mental health services
10. Financial resources to increase services are relatively modest (WHO, 2014)

Mental Health consists of both emotional components as well as behavioural components. Therefore it is a catalyst of thinking and communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience and self esteem. The different views on Mental Health, its importance in psychological well being and the social stigma attached to this term have prompted psychologists and health professionals to study this field more seriously and point out ways and means of improving it and factors that become detrimental to mental health.

However an exploration into the roots of the concept of Mental Health points to the fact that Mental Health is still viewed by many as a discipline, either as a synonym of psychiatry, or as one of its complementary fields (Bertolote, 2008).

A mental disorder, also called a mental illness or psychiatric disorder, is a behavioural or mental pattern that causes significant distress or impairment of personal functioning. And mental disorder is one aspect of Mental Health.

Mental Health is more seen as a continuum ranging from less severe emotional states to more severe clinically diagnosed mental health problems. So there is a need to understand mental health cues through emotional health cues (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Research indicates that children who are mentally healthy tend to be happier, show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than less mentally healthy peers (Hyson 2004; Kostelnik et al. 2015). Those with social and emotional difficulties have trouble and suffer rejection. And Mental health problems in children and young people are seen as abnormalities of emotion, behaviour or social relationships that cause a risk to

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optimal development in the child or distress or disturbance in the family or community (Denyer, Pelly & Thornton, 1999 cited in Child Mental and Emotional Health, 2006). Additionally, researches in this field of mental health have also pointed out the importance of a trusting relationship between the patients and their doctors who can get to the root of their problems and treat mind and body together (Brennan, 2014).

As one of the limitations to the concept of Mental Health, it can be noted that most of the studies that work on indicating factors of good mental health have seen the absence of mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders with reference to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM - V) produced by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) since 1952 or the International Classification of Diseases ICD – 10 Chapter V: Mental and behavioural disorders, produced by the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1949, as indicators of good mental health.

Some thinkers of Mental Health proposed to form a new definition of Mental Health in terms of mental health as "a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium" (Galderisi, Heinz, Kastrup, Beezhold & Sartorius, 2015). Here, there is a shift from a state of wellbeing to a state of internal equilibrium in defining mental health. There are thinkers who criticize this idea as moving from one idealism to another. Christopher Lane adds in his view that the new definition of mental health in its idealism about psychical functioning, is destined to increase the very suffering of those it is seeking to assist (Lane, 2016).

Nevertheless, referring to researches carried out by Argyle, Diener, Kahneman, Ryff, Singer, Seligman and others, Huppert (2009) observes that the field of mental health has shifted its focus from disorder and dysfunction to a positive well being and mental health. Here, emotions play a major role as every experience of the individual on a daily basis, matters.

A considerable progress in Community Mental Health research has been done in India and in the treatment of mental illness, families too have been involved thus aiding in the care of treating individuals with mental health problems (Chadda, Patra & Gupta, 2015). Notwithstanding the many new ideas and researches made in the promotion of Mental Health, special focus on the emotional aspect of Mental Health is still a need in researches.

There are many evidences to the fact that Mental illnesses can have a physical cause (Simon, 2014; Prince, Patel, Saxena, Maj, Masekko, Phillips & Rahman, 2007). This could be a chemical imbalance in the brain. Or, stress or problems with family, or at school or workplace can trigger mental health problems. If one learns to become aware and get hold of

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their emotions and handle them carefully and proactively, he or she can work productively and cope with the stressors of everyday life. This contributes to good emotional health which is basically necessary for a good mental health.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH VERSUS MENTAL HEALTH

A comparison of Emotional Health and Mental Health can throw light on how Emotional Health makes an even better contribution to an individual's overall well being.

Emotion is defined as a complex psychological event that involves a mixture of reactions: (1) a physiological response (usually arousal), (2) an expressive reaction (distinctive facial expression, body posture, or vocalization), and (3) some kind of subjective experience (internal thoughts and feelings) (Nairne, 2000). Emotions influence one's thoughts.

The mind is a set of cognitive faculties including consciousness, perception, thinking, judgement, language and memory. It is usually defined as the faculty of an entity's thoughts and consciousness. It holds the power of imagination, recognition, and appreciation, and is responsible for processing feelings and emotions, resulting in attitudes and actions (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018).

When emotions influence one's thoughts, it also becomes clear how emotional and mental aspects of one's behaviour are interconnected. Thus the mind and emotion relationship is crucial. The relationship one has with one's own emotion determines the psychological and social dimensions of behaviour. In this, an insight into the concept of emotional health and its basic yet strong influence on Mental Health is evident.

Various mechanisms of Mindfulness have been proposed for the treatment of mental illness and addiction (Shonin & Gordon, 2016). Sometimes contemplative techniques are used in order to induce action that is reflective and thoughtful and to enable our mind to take charge and channel the emotional energy within, which is precisely done to improve emotional health, which further enables good mental health.

Mental health is seen as a state of psychological well being, related to the brain/ mind, thoughts, feelings and behaviours and is functioning on a continuum from optimal functioning to intense mental illness. But emotional health goes a step further in understanding how individuals view themselves, their lives and the other people in their lives; evaluate their challenges and problems; and explores choices for handling stress, relating to other people, and making decisions (Nemours Health and Prevention Services, 2006). Thus it is evident that Emotional Health forms the basis for sound Mental Health and it is more comprehensive.

Emotional Health is not merely about feeling happy all the time. It is to experience, understand and make sense of one's emotions more fully, be it joy, sadness, anger or fear,

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and take responsibility for one's own emotional experiences. Thus even in the face of stressful events, an individual learns how to cope, realizes one's full potential and lives life productively. On the other hand, Mental Health deals with managing one's feelings and dealing with everyday situation too (Harteneck, 2015). But the difference lies in the fact that without a good Emotional Health, Mental Health becomes unfeasible.

As regards the mental disorders which have an emotional basis like anxiety and mood disorders, improving Emotional Health can serve as a benefit. Additionally, receiving Emotional Health support is beneficial for everyone whether the individual has a Mental Health condition or not.

Emotional health helps one to understand why he or she undergoes a peculiar feeling which might seem absurd although it is normal in those particular situations. This understanding makes the person feel at ease with oneself at all circumstances and display healthy emotions, feeling safe and secure, creating an emotionally healthy atmosphere around oneself.

Mental health issues concern not only the way one thinks but the way one feels which affects one's physical health. Studies have proved that emotional distress creates susceptibility to physical illness (Cohen, Tyrrell & Smith, 1991). Therefore a healthy emotional state is inevitable for a healthy mind which in turn leads to good physical health and well being. Both Mental Health and Physical Health are reliant upon one's emotional well being which is underpinned by one's emotional health (Florence, 2017). Further research has indicated that positive emotions lead to positive cognitions, positive behaviours and increased cognitive capability and that positive cognitions, behaviour and capabilities in turn fuel positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

Some Mental Health conditions like depression or anxiety have a strong social and emotional basis. Another exploratory cross-sectional study reports that the normal feeling of downheartedness or bit low in mood should not be reported as depression or anxiety disorder which has a negative impact on oneself. It merely serves to remember that individuals should be able to look at their emotional health, not merely in terms of mental disorder, to have a better way of dealing and coping with it (Mitchell et al., 2017). Thus emotional health proves a better term for dealing with one's emotional problems than to use the term mental health which has a social stigma attached to it.

Additionally, the quality of care a child receives in earlier life has important implications for future psychological health, well being and personality development (Cummins & McMaster, 2006).

“In a society where death rates are low, the rate of employment high, and social welfare schemes adequate, it is the emotional instability and the inability of parents to make effective family relationships which are the outstanding cause of children becoming deprived of a

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normal family life” (Bowlby, 1952; cited in CMEH, 2006). The emotional well being of the parents, in terms of their balance or imbalance, does affect the children and their future. From all these cases, it can clearly be observed that Emotional Health forms the basis for a good mental health, personality development and overall well being.

A CHANGE IN THE PERSPECTIVE

One of the prominent invitations of this paper is to initiate a change in the perspective of how we view a person's emotional and psychological well being. Emotional health is essential for a holistic personality, which includes physical, psychological, mental and emotional health, apart from interpersonal and social health aspects. When a person develops good and balanced Emotional Health, he or she is able to cope with life's stressors and bounce back from setbacks. A good Emotional Health does not mean experiencing positive emotions all the time. Anger, stress, sadness etc. are inevitable in the life of any normal person. Nevertheless, when a person enjoys good Emotional Health, he or she is able to deal with those challenging emotions and be able to understand, accept and motivate oneself towards right responses, thus being able to view oneself and the situation around in a healthy and non judgmental manner. Such persons are able to create and sustain better relationships and secure atmosphere for themselves and those around. As per many of the researches done, it is evident that Mental Health has a strong emotional basis. Therefore developing good Emotional Health is crucial for a good Mental Health. The perspective of Emotional Health is more than a problem-perspective as seen in the perspective of Mental Health. Mental Health looks for psychological symptoms to detect the presence of Mental illness in order to determine a good Mental Health. In comparison, the Emotional Health perspective is more holistic and aims at holistic well being of a person. Emotionally Healthy people will have a sense of contentment, meaning and purpose in life, positive self esteem and balanced self confidence. This is what the Emotional Health perspective proposes to be determined in any person by counsellors or psychotherapists. Emotional Health in fact, has an overarching perspective within which Mental Health can be addressed too, for without Emotional Health, Mental Health is beyond one's reach. Emotional health facilitates a positive life style, an overall feeling of wellness and a healthy personality. Despite setbacks in life, people with healthy personality face life with curiosity and relish, a splendid combination of scepticism and romanticism and a childlike ability to live life to the full.

Studies have revealed that positive emotional style is strongly associated with the extraversion dimension of personality while negative emotional style is associated with the neuroticism dimension of personality (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively in spite of the painful emotions like disappointment, failure and grief which are normal part of life (Huppert, 2009).

Though Mental Health has a great role to play in helping people cope with problems, Emotional Health can be seen to positively aid persons in their holistic well being, and enables them to develop a healthy personality.

CONCLUSION

Emotional health and mental health are both critical elements within a person's experience to achieve a balanced state of living ultimately leading to the well being of the person. Emotional health, however goes a step further in dealing with the events of everyday life towards optimal functioning, balanced living, self acceptance and enhanced interpersonal relationships. Since humans are emotional beings, a sound emotional health helps holistic well being of the person covering all walks of life namely social, physical and mental functioning. Thus helping an individual focus on emotional health is to have a person-centered approach rather than a problem-centered vision, influencing proactively the way the individual encounters everyday events and experiences. An individual who develops good emotional health does not experience just high self confidence or boosted self esteem but is ready to accept oneself despite all the difficulties and setbacks, limitations and blocks in life and to work the situation towards a better end.

Focusing on the basic emotional health can help remove the stigma attached to mental health and mental illness. If children, adolescents, youth and everyone are equipped with the ways and means to enhance their emotional health, it can have an enormous effect in their holistic well being. A study in this direction, more focussed and grounded, can enhance the process of enabling growth, both in terms of accepting oneself as well as others, viewing one's life in a more positive light, being ready to accept events as they come and face them courageously and handle them proactively. There is a great scope for further research in this field, making emotional health a crucial element of consideration towards enhancing a healthy personality, holistic well being and peaceful humanity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear no conflict of interests

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