Health and its Dimensions

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The concept of Health was proposed at the beginning of 20th Century. Health was confined to the study of ‘Health of the Public’ and thus ‘Individual Health’ was neglected. Soon after this, a new concept, “health promotion” took shape with an aim that the State had a direct responsibility for the health of the individual. Health promotion includes the personal health services such as mother and child health, school health services, mental health services and rehabilitation services in addition to the disease control activities.

The idea of health centres was initiated in England which was recommended by Bhore Committee in India for the establishment of health centres providing curative and preventive services (Park, 2008). With the advancement of preventive services, many acute problems were brought under control, but new health problems in the form of chronic diseases started emerging such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, alcoholism and drug abuse, etc. These problems gave a turn to the aspects of “disease and health” in the form of “social and behavioural health.”

Gradually challenges of inequalities in health were noticed in developing and developed countries, large number of world’s population perhaps more than half, have no access to health care. Seeing this, WHO members in 1981 pledged themselves to an ambition target to provide “Health for All” by the year 2000, so that

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people can lead socially and economically productive life. Despite the advances in medicine, only 10 to 20 percent of the population in developing countries enjoy ready access to health. Death claims 50-250 of every 1000 lives births within the first year of life, and the life expectancy is 30% lower than in developed countries (UNICEF, 2008). Thus health has become an important issue of the day.

The concept of health is perceived differently by biomedical scientists, social scientists, health administrators and psychologists. Today the viewpoint of health is changed with the new thoughts coming right from individual concern to worldwide which focuses on quality of life.

**Changing Conceptions of Health**

**Biomedical Concept:** Health has been viewed as ‘absence of disease’. If a person is away from disease, he is considered healthy. This concept is based upon ‘germ theory of disease’ in which medical thought is prevailed. Human body is considered as a machine and disease is the result of some fault in the machine for which the doctor is to repair. (Ahmed and Coelho, 1979). This viewpoint is not open and is restricted to medical goal only. Biomedical concept is criticised because it does not talk about psychological, environment, social and cultural determinants of health. It include diseases, accidents, drug abuse, mental illness, environmental pollution, etc.

**Psychosocial Concept:** The fast and parallel development in social sciences suggest that health should not only be explained by biomedical thought, but it is also concerned with social, cultural, psychological and economic factors of people. World Health Organization stated that these factors should be considered in defining health. Health means the psychological, social and physical well being of an individual.

**Ecological Concept:** Some other viewpoints emerged when the biomedical and psychosocial concepts could not explain health, the ecologists gave a new hypothesis that health is an equilibrium between man and his environment and disease is a maladjustment of the human organism to the environment. Health explains the perfect adjustment of human beings with environment (Dubos, 1965).
Thus health is defined as an overall concept, that it is a complete social, economic and psychological multidimensional process. It includes the well-being and the promotion as well as the protection of health. Health covers the broad range of physical, social and psychological perspectives. There is an active involvement of individual, society and culture in defining health.

**Definitions of Health**

- Health is the condition of being sound in body, mind or spirit, especially freedom from physical disease or pain (Park, 2008).

- Health is a condition or quality of the human organism expressing the adequate functioning of the organism in given condition, genetic and environment.

- WHO defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity.

- Health is explained as a process not as a state. It is a dynamic process, which helps people live well, work well and enjoy well.

Another thought defines health as an idealism not as realism because all people are well all the time and there is a perfect biological, psychological and social functioning. It means we are all sick if there is no perfect functioning in the body. In a broader sense, health is defined as a quality of the human organism which explains the adequate functioning of the organism in given conditions and presents no obvious evidence of disease. Recently health is taken as a fundamental human right. It is an integral part of development. It involves individual, state and international responsibility.

The above mentioned definitions of health suggest that it is a condition when human body functions adequately, without any pain or disease. So health is the complete and clear state of physical and emotional well-being which helps oneself leading an enjoyable life away from sickness/stress. To explain health either a process or a state independently would not be justified because individual first
undergoes some process then he gets into the state of being healthy or sick. Then he is identified as physically, socially or psychologically healthy. Health includes a wide range of states as positive health, well-being and quality of life.

**Positive Health:** Health is explained not only as the absence of disease or providing preventive, causative and curative services but also a rhythmic balance that is maintained between the human being and his environment. Thus positive health may be defined as a complete and perfect equilibrium. Twaddle and Hassler (1977) have defined positive health as an individual’s capabilities to adjust physically, psychologically and socially to the environment. It can never be attained if the individual is not able to adapt himself completely to the environment. It is taken as a mirage because everything in our life is subject to change. Health in this context is defined as an ability to adapt himself with his environment.

**Well-Being:** The concept of well-being is introduced in the definition of WHO. No single definition is able to explain this concept. Psychologists have owned the responsibility to explain well being of an individual or group of individuals in an objective and subjective manner. The objective way includes the components such as ‘standard of living’ or ‘level of living’. The subjective component defines the “quality of life” in well being.

The standard of living expresses the general parameters of our expenditure as well as the services we enjoy. It is assessed with the level of education, employment, food, clothing, house and comforts of modern living (Nagpal and Sell, 1985). There is a major in equilibrium in the standard of living in different people. Level of living is the term used in limited nations which is a substitute of standard of living. It includes health, food, education, occupation, work conditions, housing, clothing, social security and human rights.

**Quality of Life:** Recently the term quality of life has been defined by World Health Organization as a condition resulting from the combination of the effects of complete range of factors which determine health, happiness, education, social and intellectual attainment, freedom of action, justice and expression. The definition
of quality of life reflects physical, mental and social well-being as perceived by each individual’s happiness and satisfaction achieved by health, marriage, family work, financial situations, self-esteem, belongingness and trust in others. Thus it would be sufficient to say that providing physical, mental and social health and standard of life is not enough to achieve satisfaction, improvement of quality of life must be added along with the physical quality of life.

**Dimensions of Health**

Health is not a single phenomena, it is multi dimensional. The definition of WHO specifies the physical, mental and social dimensions. Spiritual, emotional, vocational and political dimensions also exist. All these dimensions function and interact with one another. There are six fundamental dimensions (figure 1) explaining health. The key to good health is maintaining a balance in each of the dimensions.

![Figure 1: Dimensions of Health](image-url)
Physical Dimension: The physical dimension focuses on the functioning of body in a balanced and adjusted manner (Crew, 1965). But the balanced word can not be explained, as the function of body in perfect adjustment with other parts is not definable. The good physical health can be seen on the basis of good skin, eyes and complexion with a firm flesh and good appetite with smooth and easy bodily movement. The basis of physical dimension is that all the organs of the body function normally. Normality includes pulse rate, blood pressure and exercise all within the range of person’s age and sex. Physical dimension can best be defined on the bases of complete physical profile of an individual and the observation made on the large number of normal people, who are free from apparent disease.

Assessment of physical health can be made by various methods:
- an enquiry can be made about the symptoms of ill health and risk factors.
- observation and enquiry into the medications and medical services can be made.
- clinical examination to be done.
- biochemical and laboratory investigations should be done (Park, 2008).

Mental Dimension: The mental health is not only defined as absence of mental illness, Good mental health is the potential of how an individual reacts in different life situations that too with a specific goal. In other words mental health is the state of equilibrium of an individual with the environment of oneself with the existing surroundings of the environment (Sartorius, 1983).

Like physical health, mental health is also an essential dimension but scientific tools to measure mental health are not clear. Mentally healthy person has good sense of self esteem and self control. He accepts criticism and is not easily upset. He knows himself, his problems and solves them intelligently. He is free from internal conflicts. He searches for self identity. A mentally healthy person maintains a balance rationally and emotionally. Researchers have recently discovered that psychological factors can induce all kinds
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of illnesses, not only mental one. They include conditions such as peptic ulcer, hypertension and bronchial asthma, etc. Some major mental illnesses such as depression and schizophrenia have biological component. Mental health at individual as well as population level can be measured by mental status examination by trained interviewers. The most commonly used questionnaires seek to determine the presence of organic disease and of symptoms indicating psychiatric disorder. The most important thing in assessment of mental health is whether to assess the mental functioning i.e., how cognitive or affective disturbance is reflected in the form of the poor quality of life and the overall well-being of the individual.

**Social Dimension**: Social dimension is defined as the individual’s relationship with other individuals, his quantitative and qualitative relationships with other individuals, group and society (Cmich, 1984). As a member of society what skills individual uses to adjust himself in the community. Social dimension includes the social well-being in reference to the society and the environment. Social health of an individual is determined on the basis of social skills, social role functioning and the capacity to see oneself as a skilled and efficient member of the larger society. Social dimension include the well being of a ‘whole person’ in reference to the social network. Social health of a person focuses on financial matters and positive human environment which is concerned with social network of the individual.

**Spiritual Dimension**: Spirituality is a new concept which refers to some meaning and purpose in life. It includes integrity, ethics and commitment to some higher beliefs which are not yet explained. Spiritual dimension includes the health which goes beyond the range of physiology and psychology. The proponents of holistic health argue that time has come when we have to accept the importance of spiritual health. Psychologists have incorporated spirituality as a domain of mental health and constructed various questionnaires for measuring it. At individual and community level mental health professionals are also taking the help of spirituality as an integrated tool of psychotherapy.
**Emotional Dimension:** The ‘oneness’ and ‘togetherness’ of emotional and mental health is replaced by the new dimension ‘Emotion’ as an independent concept. Mental health is known as ‘knowing’ or ‘cognition’ while emotional health refers the ‘feelings’. Psychologists have defined emotional component as a separate dimension of health (Eberst, 1984). Especially psychobiologists have been successful in separating emotional dimension as an independent component of health. Emotional health can better be understood as illness and is a subjective state of the person who ‘feels’ aware of not being well and no illness means feeling healthy. So feeling of ‘wellness’ or ‘unwellness’ can better be described on the basis of emotionality.

**Vocational Dimension:** Vocational is a novel dimension which includes the work done by individual with full capacity and aim that promotes mental and physical health. The physical capacity and realization leads to psychological satisfaction that enhances the self-esteem of an individual (WHO, 1986). The importance of this dimension is exposed when individual suddenly loses job or forces to retirement/recession in jobs which leads to dissatisfaction, lack of success and thus poor mental health.

Recently the concept “wellness” is used in place of ‘health dimension’. Wellness includes the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual and occupational dimensions. The intellectual dimension has substituted mental dimension which focuses on educational and human resource to enhance one’s skill and knowledge-base, decision-making and cognitive processes (Wellness Centre, 2009).

After throwing light on different dimensions, health is explained psychologically in relation to positive health which includes happiness and hope. Emotional well-being and psychological awareness determines the wellness which explain the well-being as an important and integral component of health (Straub, 2007). Thus, while understanding the health and/or wellness of an individual we must consider health, taking various dimensions into account. It is important to note that all these dimensions are not exclusive.
REFERENCES