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MODERN LIFE AND MENTAL HEALTH

INTRODUCTION:

Modern society and mental health are a topic which many across the UK and the globe are currently troubled by. With the rise of fast food, social media and long periods of inactivity, there are a plethora of reasons in modern day life as to why many are faced with mental health issues. This is a topic that not only resonates with me, but many people also feel this globally, struggling with mental health issues daily such as: anxiety, depression, stress, and many more.

A survey of mental health found that 1 in 6 individuals aged 16 and over had experienced mental health issues in their lifetime (Baker, 2021). Women were found to be more common than men in experiencing common mental health issues. The prevalence of mental health issues has increased in number since 1993 (Baker, 2021). A 2021 survey on children's mental health found that 17.4% of children aged 6-16 had a probable mental health disorder (Baker, 2021).

4 in 100 people experience PTSD, 6 in 100 people experience generalised anxiety disorder with individuals across the UK experiencing a plethora of mental health disorders (mental health resource, 2019). These statistics all display statistics in recent years, these facts are highly disturbing and worrying. As a member of modern society, it is difficult to digest what many individuals go through daily. It is therefore, up to us to act against the issues that individuals are facing and find the root causes to these problems. The root causes may give us a better insight into why these issues are happening. If over 17% of our youth are currently experiencing a form of mental health disorders, then it should trouble us and be a

wakeup call for modern society to come together and combat alongside their comrades, against an enemy we may not see however is very real.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

MODERN DIET:

Many individuals in modern times have started to consume more food which have less nutritional value. Junk food is now being consumed more widely and abundantly. Poor food has been highlighted in research to negatively impact not just our physical health but our mental health, for example junk food can be a factor for depression as it interferes with the signalling of neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin (Szmerling, 2022).

Unhealthy eating patterns have also been linked to anxiety and stress, food high in fat can lead to inflammation, whilst refined carbohydrates can lead to fluctuations in an individual's blood sugar levels (Szmerling, 2022). 63 % of adults aged 18+ are overweight or obese with a Body mass index of 25+, this equates to 35 million individuals in the UK (Cancer Research UK, 2015). These statistics are extremely concerning as a resident of the UK, as our society is failing with physical health on an astronomical level. This is relevant as physical health is directly linked to our mental health and so it is imperative that we together act against bad foods and promote a healthy living.

There are also countless statistics highlighting how bad diet can negatively impact our mental health as well as our physical health. Studies have shown that poor diet can worsen our mood (News, 2020), on the contrary foods which are better for our health can improve symptoms of anxiety and depression, diets such as the Mediterranean diet which is rich in vegetables and oil. If we formulate a plan as a nation to promote a nutrient rich diet, this will not only benefit individuals physically as they will live longer, but they will also benefit mentally. This will also have a snowball effect as more social issues will be tackled leading to an overall better society.

WORK IN MODERN SOCIETY:

Another reason as to why I chose this topic is the way the modern individual works and how work plays an integral part of our lives and daily structure. Many individuals in modern

society often work in shifts, most typically a 9-5, however individuals also work night shifts and endless hours to afford their living costs. Shift work has shown to have a negative effect on individuals mental health's, many individuals have ruined sleeping patterns and feel that they are unable to keep up with the high demands of their jobs.

Shift work is associated with higher rates of depression, one study found that the risk of depressive symptoms was higher in shift workers than non-shift workers, with depressive symptoms being 33% higher in shift workers (Partners, 2022). Shift work has also been shown to have higher risks of substance use, impairment in cognition and suicidal thoughts (Partners, 2022). There are also other reasons as to why shift work may negatively impact an individual's mental health, such as individuals being unable to have regular schedules and being unable to balance work and home-life, this can also lead to an increase in conflict at home (Partners, 2022).

This topic is applicable to millions across the UK, who must undergo shift work, it is therefore more of more importance that we raise awareness and tackle this issue, as the statistics emphasize just how problematic work can be on the mental health's of individuals. The ways in which we can tackle this issue are tailoring work more towards employees, offer more solutions to shift work, being proactive and checking on employees, giving clear transparent instructions, and finding ways to be more flexible. This highlights why we should consider how employees feel rather than just focusing on the revenue they can bring to a company, as they aren't robots, they are humans with feelings who need to be cared for and looked after.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Social media also plays a large part of modern life and has shown to have detrimental effects on our mental health. From our dopamine system to how we spend our time social media usage can cause mental health issues. Excessive time on social media can fuel anxiety and depression (Robinson and Smith, 2021).

It is important to also raise awareness on social media usage as it is something we use every day, over excessive amounts of social media daily can be a major contributor to poor mental

health, it is therefore important for individuals to bear in mind just how social media impacts them daily and how much they are using it.

METHODS/METHODOLOGY:

I included a study which overlooked the mental health of society. I have included the following: materials and methods, objective of the study, research questions, search strategy and more.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

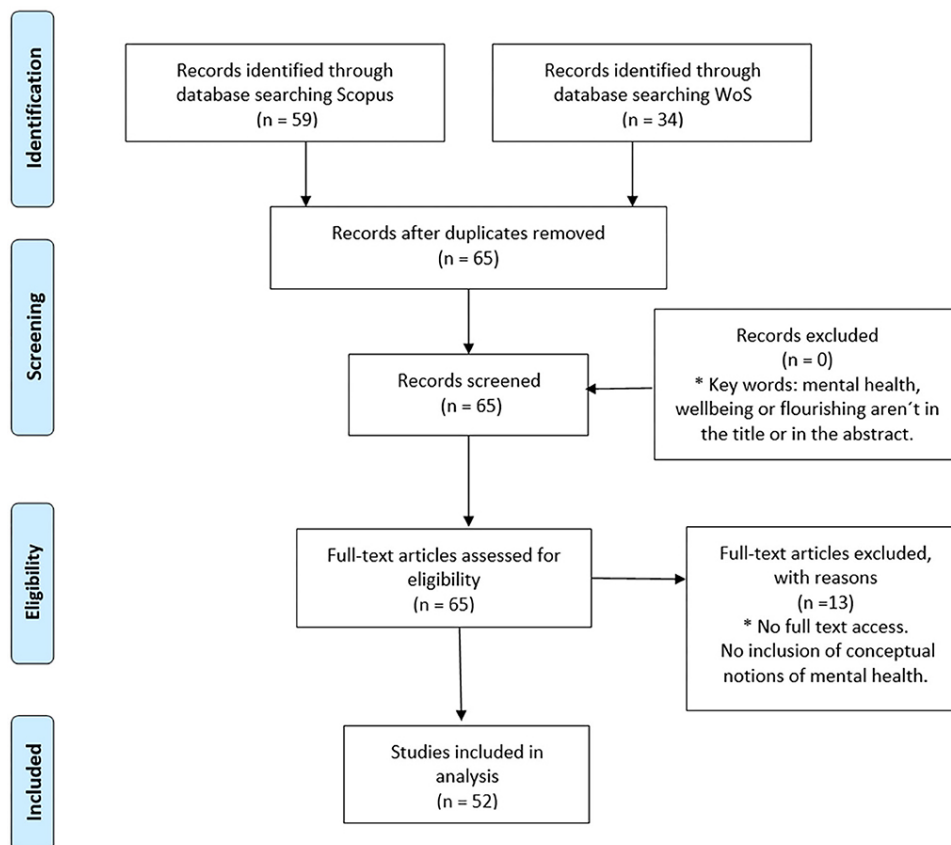
This research was conducted using a qualitative approach focusing on grounded theory. Through analysing different research and comparing them a model of mental health was produced identifying different paradigms. The process was inspired by SLR done by Kitchenham and Charters (2007).

OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The main objective of this study was to form a basis of what mental health is, producing a definition of mental health. Another objective was to also form a conceptual model of mental health based on deep analysis of theoretical work in articles related to mental health. The research questions were: what are the errors identified in what is thought to be mental health? What are dominant paradigms when it comes to the field of mental health? What are theoretical references which are accepted regarding mental health historically?

SEARCH STRATEGY:

The databases used for research were Scopus and Web of science.



(Frontiers, 2022).

This is a flow chart following PRISMA approach (Moher et al, 2009), highlighting the selection process of which articles were included and selected.

LIMITATIONS:

The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or economic relationships and so therefore, it could be seen as a potential conflict of interest.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Mental health is seen as a positive state of well-being. Although Aristotle came up with Eudemonian Ethics, in which he proposed mental well-being being based off acting on reason, later theorists begged to differ. For example, Sigerist identified that mental-well-being is greater than just the absence of mental illness (Sigerist, 1941), also Jahoda proposed the idea of mental health being positive due to factors such as: autonomy, self-actualisation and

mastery of environments (Jahoda,1959). These themes identify mental well-being as a state of happiness.

Other theorists have also added their view on what mental health is, for example Diener stated that mental health is an individual's perception of themselves concerning morals and their standards (Diener, 1984). According to these multiple theories there are different perspectives as to what positive mental health is, however, many of them indicate that individuals must be perspicacious and aware of themselves to have a positive mindset and well-being.

RESULTS:

The definition of mental health has evolved over time. The idea was initially explored from philosophical currents based on studies of happiness, however; years later from the perspective of medicine, positive mental health was thought to be the absence of illness, this was codified by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Diseases (American Psychiatric Association, 1952). Later, from the perspective of positive psychology, the philosophical understanding of mental well-being was reconsidered, and so mental health was provided with a new definition, this being general well-being and happiness of the individual. This also highlights that definitions may change in the future with regards to what mental health is, as psychology is a relatively new field and so therefore, finds itself changing regularly.

PARADIGMS FOUND:

One of the common themes and patterns found was that mental health is usually defined as the absence of illness. This theory was found to have begun in 1729, from an English medical doctor who stated that mental disorders were because of a change in the body and could be treated with medicine (Frontiers, 2022). It was years later that this ideology shifted in 1793 France, where psychology was emerging, and the view that was being perpetuated was that the study of mental health should be based off observation and medical treatment should be provided for each problem based on facts.

A mental disorder is defined as a “syndrome characterised by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a

dysfunction in the psychological, biological or development processes underlying mental functioning” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to this paradigm an individual presents mental health if they display an absence of illness.

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH:

Another common theme which was found was positive mental health (Frontiers, 2022), this approach was based off the hedonism and eudemonism intellectual tenets serve as the foundation for this strategy. On the one hand, the philosopher Aristippus established the Cyrenaic school in the fourth century BC, which promoted ethical hedonism based on the notion that pleasure was the highest good (Alonso, 2017). Aristotle, on the other hand, developed the Eudemian Ethics, in which he critiqued the hedonistic approach and claimed that true happiness consisted in living logically and carrying out the things that were worthwhile (Castelló, 1993). The development of this worldview did not start, nevertheless, until Sigerist and Jahoda made their contributions. Sigerist observed in 1941 that mental health goes beyond the absence of mental illness, and Jahoda proposed the following in 1958: Jahoda proposed the idea of positive mental health and the ideas that influenced it, including autonomy, self-realization, and environmental mastery (Jahoda, 1959). As a result, according to this paradigm, mental health is a condition of happiness or wellbeing.

According to the articles examined, 86% of them used research on positive mental health as a conceptual referent, using interdisciplinary methods from the fields of psychology (41 articles), philosophy (28 articles), sociology (22 articles), economics (11 articles), medicine (9 articles), psychiatry (6 articles), biology (5 articles), education (5 articles), environmental sciences (1 article), and neuroscience (1 article). The Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, the United Kingdom, Slovenia, France, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, and Slovenia accounted for 39% of these articles' countries of origin, followed by 33% by Asia (Frontiers, 2022), 22% by America (Argentina, Canada, Brazil, United States, Mexico, and Suriname), 4% by Africa (South Africa), and 2% by Australia.

DISCUSSION

According to these studies done there are a plethora of views as to what mental health is, it is therefore important for us to bear in mind that mental health is an extremely complex

topic and must be examined by experts in the field of mental health. Many studies however have commonalities between them, for example they all understand the importance of positive mental health and positive thinking, they also identify the importance of evolving and always searching for new answers, diverging from archaic explanations to mental health, as the more answers we have to the calamity that is mental health the more solutions we will also have to combat poor mental well-being.

There are also many scientific studies which highlight multiple factors which I have listed earlier that are detrimental to our mental health. For example, social media is one of the things I listed as a factor for poorer mental health, it has been shown in studies that taking breaks from social media can have positive impacts on our mental health, a study was carried out by the university of Bath, where researchers allocated 154 participants aged 18-72 that used social media every day, they were asked to not use social media for a week, baseline scores for anxiety and depression, a week later these individuals displayed significant benefit from their break in depression, anxiety and well-being (University of Bath, 2022), suggesting an overall positive benefit.

However modern society isn't all bad for mental health, for example a thing like social media can be utilised for positive things such as conversing with friends and family that may be long distances away. A Harvard study found that routine use of social media may not be so bad if the social media use is mindful, having a strong social network could be beneficial for individuals' mental health, social media provides a platform which removes the need for face-to-face interactions in individual's hectic lives (Roeder, 2020). Social media also aids individuals in overcoming the barriers of distance and time, which will positively impact them as they no longer must travel large distances to meet individuals. Therefore, social media doesn't always result in poorer mental health it may in fact boost an individual's confidence and conversational skills through practicing online, without having to make mistakes and face embarrassment in real life.

Work is also seen as a negative regarding mental health, work and financial stress can be a major contributor to poor mental health with many studies and articles backing this. We have experienced periods of financial hardship as a country and witnessed the mental

health of individuals depleting on a mass scale. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Anxiety and depression increased by a staggering 25% during the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2022).

However, work can also be a force for good and positive for individuals, for example having a steady income, individuals know exactly how much is going into their bank account and can budget accordingly, jobs also provide a fixed schedule consistently waking up early and finishing late afternoon allows individuals to plan their days ahead (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). These factors can be extremely beneficial for an individual's mental health, as it gives them structure and preparation in their life which is a commodity that is taken for granted however, has multiple benefits for us as individuals. Individuals can also structure and plan how they go about other things in their life.

In this way we can see that although modern society has many aspects which are not beneficial for our mental health, modern society has also opened many doorways which wouldn't have been available for common people many years ago. Through utilising online mechanisms individuals are now able to find employment within minutes, there are now more opportunities which have arisen due to modern society and so there are multiple benefits for individuals' mental health. Assignments and work can be done online making life much easier. So, it therefore seems that modern society is of great benefit, however, individuals must be cautious of how they use their time and be more wary of overindulgence into anything as it could diminish their mental health.

As mentioned earlier diet also has been a negative to mental health. Modern day foods increase the risk of cancer, obesity and many other diseases. They are high in sugar, fats and many unnecessary chemicals just so that they can taste good and addictive as these aids big companies in generating larger profits. However, it is now easier for individuals to attain food due to trade and so it is more convenient to get food. However modern-day food lacks nutrients and can be more negative for both our physical and mental health than positive, therefore the negatives outweigh the benefits.

There are many other disadvantages to living in modern society for example society is very time pressured due to the fact that information is available online all the time there are high expectations to be doing things on a 24/7 rota which can cause anxiety and depression (Kurdieh, 2020). Humans live in very prosthetic environments away from nature, whereas in the past humans would spend the majority of their days in nature which was extremely beneficial both physically and mentally. Due to mass productions and globalisation there is also now an accelerated destruction of the world and the environment, there is mass deforestation, pollution and many animals going extinct, if we aren't careful with the way we navigate the earth we will not be able to continue and may perish (Kurdieh, 2020).

Despite this there are also many benefits to living in modern society which give us a plethora of advantages over our past counterparts. In modern society we have unlimited clean water and access to food which is a luxury that individuals in the past never had in fact individuals would rather consume alcohol as water wasn't as clean (Kurdieh, 2020). There is astronomical convenience now as there are machines developed which help us in doing practically anything from cleaning our house to aiding us with taxes (Kurdieh, 2020). With modern medicine we are also able to live longer than we would have done in the past, allowing us to enjoy life for longer.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS:

In conclusion modern society has many negatives which are detrimental for our mental health as well as our physical well-being. Although we are connected through things like the internet we are disconnected at the same time as we sometimes lack real human communication, which has an impact on our hearts that online interactions could never have. Many individuals are now unable to face reality due to them dwelling too deep into their facades and fake personas they exhibit online, and this is having destructive effects on our youth and society.

Individuals are exposed to fake lifestyles online and compare it to their own, however, they don't understand the individuals that they are watching could be displaying a fake life or only showing the happy moments in their life, this doesn't however mean that they life that individual is living is happy in fact it could be the complete opposite.

Therefore, it can be concluded that modern society is good when individuals are living in balance and not in excess, too much social media can be negative for mental health, too many unhealthy foods can be negative for mental health, not relaxing and working too much can also be negative for our mental health it is imperative for the modern individual to portion their time into the right things for an overall better mental health.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE:

Schools should educate children on the dangers of too much processed food and foods which are high in sugar and fats. There have also been government policies which have been implemented such as the sugar tax to reduce sugar intake, however if a culture is created of eating healthy and positive well-being then surely this will have a positive impact on society.

We should also educate individuals on the dangers of social media, promoting videos on individuals feeds to put down their phones and do something productive with their time such as meditating or going for a walk. Children should also be educated on how to utilise their time as the education system is archaic and the world has evolved exponentially, it is therefore important that newer lessons are taught or current school policies change.

Also, if individuals are genuinely struggling with their mental health, it is important that they seek some form of counselling or aid from a professional as this can be quite dangerous if not treated. Even talking to a trusted friend or family member about their issues can alleviate a lot of stress, asking for advice from trusted people can also be beneficial. Taking control of our physical health can also be of great benefit as our physical health is directly tied with our mental health.

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