Factors Related to Mental Health Conditions

Predisposition to Mental Health Conditions

Predisposition is how vulnerable a person is to an illness. Some people are more vulnerable than others. Someone may be born this way. Life events that occur at important developmental stages may increase a person’s vulnerability later in life. An example is a child who experiences trauma or neglect. They may miss out on critical developmental steps. This could make a child more vulnerable to mental illness. The predisposition is so strong for some people that the illness can emerge even without any serious stress or trauma.

Life Events and Environmental Triggers

Life events are things that happen to us. Many people experience very serious and upsetting events. Some people are physically or emotionally abused. Some people live through car crashes, a natural disaster, or war. Events such as these are called traumatic events. They can create serious mental health problems for those who live through them.

Environmental triggers can include exposure to illness or toxins. An example is a woman who has influenza during the first three months of pregnancy. In this case the risk of her child having schizophrenia increases by 700%. The use of drugs or alcohol can trigger onset for some people. Some people living with a mental illness may also abuse drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism for the illness. This can lead to another set of related problems that make treating the illness more difficult. Everyday life stress can also sometimes spiral out of control. The ongoing demands of modern living can create significant stress for many of us. For some, these demands are too great. They may lead to mental illness and significantly diminished mental health.

Poverty is another factor. People who live in poverty experience more mental illness than those who do not. They may have a lack of control over many parts of their lives. They are more likely to be a victim of crime or see a serious crime committed than people with more wealth. They may experience stigma and prejudice when working with systems. They are more likely to have poor nutrition and unhealthy environments. All of these factors increase the risk of mental illness.

Coping Strategies and Social Support

Most people are taught how to cope with problems and issues. A person is less likely to experience serious mental illness if they learn healthy ways to cope. They are also more likely to enjoy better recovery and management of conditions that do occur.

Social support is important in prevention, recovery, and management of mental illness. People who are isolated are less likely to seek or find effective treatment. Wellness is as much social as it is physical. Studies show that people with healthy social networks and good relationships tend to have better health. Support and education for family members, friends, and communities can be a critical piece to recovery and management. So can the availability of productive roles for a person living with mental illness. Help for people living with mental illness to find and keep jobs or succeed in school can be critical.

Effective Treatment and Therapy

Some mental illnesses are easier to treat than others. Some have clear modes of therapy and intervention. This may include illness education and medication. It may include support to learn better coping skills or process trauma or life stress. A combination of treatments is usually best with the emphasis on the aspects that most contribute to the problem. Therapies and treatment will be reviewed in more depth later in the lesson and course.
Presence of Co-occurring Disorders

The presence of co-occurring disorders can make mental illness more likely. People who have ongoing pain from illness often experience anxiety or depression too. Physical changes in the body may change the chemistry in the brain. Illnesses or disorders with behavioral symptoms can affect the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. They can also create a set of circumstances that make illness more likely. These disorders include dementia, brain injury, substance abuse, and developmental or intellectual disabilities. This may make learning coping skills more challenging.