
ProMenPol

Mental Health in Older People

Eija Stengård

National Research and Development Centre for Welfare
and Health STAKES

Promoting and Protecting Mental Health

Supporting **P**olicy through Integration of Research, Current
Approaches and Practices

Presentation overview

- Who is old?
- Policy context
- Trends
- Framework for action
- Old people in the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

Who is old?

There are no agreed definition of old age

- Older workers: 55-64 years
- Older people: 65-79 years
- Frail old people: 80+ years

Policy Context

- The number of older people in EU-population is increasing
- This change will have important implications on public health, social protection, labour markets and public finances in the member states as well as EU level
- Member states have responsibility to respond to these developments; EU's role is complementary
- In 2007 Commission presented White Paper "Together for Health. A strategic approach for the EU 2008-013."
- Fostering good health is the first objective of the health strategy
- Other initiatives at EU-level address e.g. the situation of frail older people

Trends

1. The challenge of the EU demographic change
2. Poor mental and physical health in old age
3. Socio-economic factors increasing the vulnerability to mental health problems in old people
4. Caregivers as a related group at risk
5. Structural implications of aging and mental health for society

1. The EU demographic change

- The proportion of the population over 65 years in 2050 will be around 30% and 11% will be over 80 years old

2. Poor mental and physical health in old age

- Mental disorders are common in older people and pose a large barrier to active and satisfying ageing
- Poor physical health and functional limitations are linked with mental disorders
- Elder abuse: a new mental health challenge to tackle

3. Socio-economic factors

- The pattern of socio-economic inequalities in health is consistent among old people
- Older people with low education or income have worse health
- Forgotten subpopulations: women, cultural minorities and those living in rural areas

4. Caregivers are a related group at risk

- 70% of people over 70 years are unable to perform at least 1-2 daily activities without help
- 50-80% of people with dementia are cared for at home
- Care at home brings with it physical, psychological, social and financial strains
- Caregivers show an increased risk for physical and psychological ill-health

5. Structural implications of aging and mental health for society

- Implications for social support structures in relation to mental health: loneliness, need for professional care, adapted housing, transport
- Implications for the labour market in relation to mental health: policy shift away from early retirement

Framework for action

1. Active ageing and social participation
2. Prevention of mental disorders and support to those mentally ill
3. Interventions for carers
4. Improving the knowledge base

1. Active ageing and social participation

- ▮ Participation in meaningful activities contributes to mental well-being in old age
- Exercise improves mental health and increases social participation
- Measures against social isolation can keep old people "engaged" with the community and reduce the risk of mental disorders
- Housing and outdoor environments are key factors for active lifestyles
- Employment of older adults promotes mental health and economic growth

2. Prevention of mental disorders and support to those mentally ill

- Prevention of depression and anxiety
- Prevention of suicide
- Prevention of elder abuse
- Improving physical health and the management of chronic illness can prevent mental disorders
- Intergrated services to support old people with mental disorders

3. Interventions for carers

- Effective interventions exist to alleviate the burden and depression and to increase the general well-being and ability and knowledge of caregivers
 - Psychoeducational interventions, respite/day care interventions, support programmes
 - Provision of assistive devices (e.g. electronic alarm systems)
 - Income security (e.g. social security coverage and pensions)
 - Help with housing adjustments

4. Improving the knowledge base

- Mental health indicators
- Evaluation of cost-effectiveness research
- Dissemination of information and evidence for effectiveness
- Capacity building and training

European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

- The EU-population is ageing. Old age can bring with it certain risk factors for mental health and well-being, such as the loss of social support from families and friends and the emergence of physical or neuropsychiatric illness, such as dementia. Suicide rates are high in older people. Promoting health and active ageing is one of the EU's key policy objectives.

European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

- Policy makers and stakeholders are invited to take action on mental health of older people including the following:
 - Promote the active participation of older people in community life, including the promotion of their physical activity and educational opportunities
 - Develop flexible retirement schemes which allow older people to remain at work longer on a full-time or part-time basis
 - Provide measures to promote mental health and well-being among older people receiving care (medical and / or social) on both community and institutional settings

Thank you for your attention!

More information:

Jané-Llopis, E., & Gabilondo, A. (Eds). (2008).

Mental Health in Older People. Consensus paper. Luxembourg: European Communities

<http://www.ec-mental-health-process.net/>

<http://www.supportproject.eu>