**Research Proposal**

**Background**

According to Manwell et al. (2015), mental health is better explained as the condition wherein the psychological, biological or the communal aspects facilitate an individual to perform actions within an environment. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental health as ‘a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community’ (OECD, 2010, p. 6). Mental health is perceived as an essential constituent of human health, as it develops social, mental, and emotional comfort (Galderisi, Heinz, Kastrup, Beezhold & Sartorius, 2015). Based on the observation made by Galderisi et al. (2015), the significance of mental health research focuses on identifying the ways in which it supports humans to develop their individual social roles. Additionally, it also facilitates individuals to partake in community interactions. The problems relating to mental health are widespread among all populations including children, young people, and older adults as well. It is also essential to further identify the ways or strategies for managing poor mental health (Crown, 2017).

**Research Aims**

• To determine whether there exists a relationship between mental health and social contact.

**Research Objectives**

• To identify potential ways in which social contact for people with poor mental health can be enhanced.

**Study Design**

A correlation study will be used to direct this proposal. According to Schneider & Whitehead (2016 p.168), a correlation study is one of the research procedures used to ‘quantify the strength of the relationship between two variables’. In the context of this research, the relationship described is between mental health and social contact.

**Data Collection Methods**

Both primary and secondary data will be collected for drawing out valid inferences for this research. Primary data will be gathered by conducting a questionnaire, via SurveyMonkey, which is an online tool used to gather data from respondents. This type of method has been chosen as it is cost effective and for its scalability (Schneider & Whitehead, 2016). On the other hand, secondary information will be retrieved by accessing various scholarly journals, books, articles, and authentic websites. Secondary data will be used to check that the primary research is correct and is used to save time (Parahoo, 2014).

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical practices will be considered for this research. This will help in enhancing its reliability along with validity, maintain generalisability of the obtained results, and to meet ethical guidelines so that it is safe for participants (Creswell, 2014). The participants will be provided with information regarding the topic of the study prior to my research to allow them to make an informed decision about whether they wish to participate. The consent forms will be done in writing, which will have to be signed to ensure that participants are willing to take part. It is important to ensure the participants are aware of their involvement, understand expectations, and can 'ask questions and indeed to refuse to participate at any stage' (Creswell, 2014).

**Literature review**

**Introduction**

This part of the research proposal involves a critical analysis of literature, which has been extracted for the use of addressing the research problem. Detailed discussion of various themes, evidence, and concepts related to the research problem will be carried forth with the help of relevant literature. This will further assist in identifying the literature or knowledge gaps. According to Parahoo (2014), the literature review is an essential section of a research paper that has the potential to explore various aspects of a single phenomenon. This section is highly important in the nursing practice, as it enables nursing professionals to enhance their understanding of the research problem related to the phenomenon (Parahoo, 2014). Moreover, as suggested by Sines (2013), most researchers are guided by the literature, in order to develop ideas at the time of the study, as well as prior to the study, so that relevant knowledge can be gathered.

Recognising the importance of a literature review, a search strategy has been implemented in this proposal to derive a detailed understanding of the research topic by using keywords to find relevant literature. The key words used for this purpose were ‘Mental Health’, ‘Social Contact’, and ‘Relationship’. These key words were input into the Google scholar database. This method was used to access authentic, reliable, and viable literature, such as peer reviewed journals and empirical journals, for the research proposal. Considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria, only literature dated within the last ten years were taken into consideration, and the rest of the literature were excluded from the research, which is better illustrated in the table below.

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| Inclusion | Exclusion Criteria | Scholarly articles, books, and journals dated within the last ten years were considered in this research proposal, while the others were excluded.  For ESRC paper, the data was also collected from social networking online sites considering 12,000 people. |

**Discussion**

**Mental Health**

According to Galderisi et al (2015), mental health has been considered to be a crucial aspect to the maintenance of the social well-being of a person.  The research used a systematic review study that focussed on gathering qualitative information using the qualitative methods. The systematic review approach is appropriate because it seeks to respond to the key research questions through the gathering of empirical information and evidence. The integration of the qualitative research method into the systematic review methods helps to gather information from the various journal sources on the factors affecting mental health relying on studies conducted in the past. Galderisi et al (2015) found that the positive functioning of a person is closely related to his/her social contribution. According to Sines (2013), the main focus is placed on research things such as characteristics of mental health patients rather than the influence of social contact.

According to the research findings by Sines (2013), people who develop feelings are a part of society and they believe that the community has been favourable for everyone, which has enhanced their mental well-being. It can be inferred that social coherence and actualisation is equally important in a society. This is mainly because the mental health of every person is well-managed during difficult situations. Psychological and emotional well-being is also considered by the authors of this scholarly research. Therefore, considering all of these interrelationships, social as well as cognitive skills have been identified as the most important aspects relating to mental well-being in daily life (Galderisi et al., 2015).

On the contrary, Manwell et al (2015) found out that social injustice was one of the key reasons for disturbed mental health. This mental state occurred due to poverty and other social problems. There were 50 respondents reported that the ‘problems of living’, such as vices and social injustice, highly contributed in generating moral issues. However, the sample was not adequate to represent the entire population.  Therefore, it must not be treated as medical problem. This is true across multi studies. After reviewing past literature studies, Bethel et al (2014) noted that adverse childhood experience (ACEs) increases the risk of poor health-related outcomes in later life. The respondents for this study were mental health experts eight different countries, and the researchers decided to use the online survey.

The research decided to use experts as they were knowledgeable and an in-depth understanding of the mental health issues. The advantage of this approach is that it is flexible in nature and cost effective, as well as being easy for the researcher to collect data from the respondents (Manwell, et al., 2015). This resulted in increased arguments. This not only affected the person himself, but also the environment he was in, and the other people associated with him. Furthermore, themes such as positionality, environmental, social factors, core concepts, and paradigms, as well as theories related to mental health were highlighted. This was mainly to understand the relationship between mental health and social situations. Core concepts such as self-realisation, empowerment, connectedness, stability, optimism, and the belief of being free from burdens were also examined to create a better understanding (Manwell et al., 2015).

**Social Relationships**

The ESRC (2013) focused on collecting data from online social networking sites regarding mental health. By unpicking the evidence that was present in the journals, it can be stated that the issue of mental health has been associated with both negative and positive consequences of social relationships. However, an observational study conducted by Goodman (2013) in New York involving 100 mental health patients found out that overall health and social connections had a positive influence on the psychology of an individual. This was in turn associated with attachment theory, which links with positive childhood relationships. On the other hand, negative relationships and less social exchanges have created adverse effects on one’s ‘quality of life’, which can sometimes influence one’s mental health. The key reason identified for this is that people can become isolated from their friends and neighbours, thereby developing diagnosable mental health problems (ESRC, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to enhance social connectivity in people who suffer from poor mental health.

Nationwide mental health strategies must be developed in such a way that people with poor health can increase their connection to the society and the community. Moreover, mutual learning opportunities must be available to all the healthcare professionals and nursing staff, to enable them to improve their knowledge and foster better nursing practices in healthcare settings. Through observing the mental health services offered by facilities in London, Thomas, et al (2016) determined that offering mutual learning opportunities could further help in improving the overall health of the patients. These practices must support early interventions at all ages for anyone identified as having such an illness. Health practitioners must manage, organise, and lead these practices intended to outline risk factors (Thomas, et al, 2016). This also requires resources to be available, thereby supporting improvements to the entire community.

**Recommendations**

Building an understanding from the literature various recommendations can be made so that their conditions can be enhanced. According to the Sines (2013), a patient and public involvement (PPI) approach has been observed to help in understanding that mental health can be improved if social connections are positive. Another approach that can be implemented in order to improve the conditions is the strengthening of the mental as well as physical health of the patients. This can be done with the help of a constructive infrastructure, co-ordination between the associated people, support of data and nursing informatics, flexible funding, capacity building, and increased engagement. These aspects can significantly help in assisting to manage situations.

For further improvements to occur, governance, ethical considerations, and regulations must also be considered when supporting these types of initiatives (Department of Health, 2017). On the other hand, much of the research stated that social participation and connectivity was the main priority when conducting interventions such as social participation and psychosocial interventions. According to the narrative synthesis of Newlin et al. (2015), both the social participation and psychosocial interventions have the potential to improve the social skills of the people, thereby improving their overall health. The psychosocial interventions will help to improve the mental health of the patients through improving their overall social skills.

**Literature Gaps**

All the above literature suggests that early interventions, PPI, and life-course approaches must be conducted to address the mental health issues and the social problems faced by people of all ages. More effective approaches will be created in order to achieve an overall improvement, although these are yet to be identified. This implies that there are literature gaps that must be covered in future research.

**Conclusion**

It can be concluded that this literature review identified a direct relationship between mental health and social connections, in the sense that good relationships can effectively strengthen mental health and vice versa. Thus, it is essential that mental health patients be encouraged to increase their social relationships, developing friendships and connections within their society and communities. Moreover, various recommendations were made, such as implementing early interventions to maintain the mental health condition of the patients. The identified literature gaps will be useful in the structuring of the research work through using new approaches rather than the limited interventions used in the current literature studies. Limited interventions were implemented in the clinical practice, such as PPI and life-course approach.  The future research proposal will seek to use comprehensive interventions such as the psychosocial interventions to determine their impact on improving mental health. However, it has been effective in dealing with all the issues related to the research problem. All of this information can assist future researchers to enhance and manage mentally affected people over their lives. This can be done by considering all the emerging concepts, themes, and research evidence that mental well-being is associated with; not only the social aspects, but also the physical, psychological, and emotional health of a person. Moreover, they are associated with other people in their respective environments.

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