

DEMOS

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

WHY EMOTIONAL HEALTH
IS CRITICAL FOR MENTAL
HEALTH

ALICE DAWSON

PREVENTION
IN PRACTICE

DECEMBER 2023

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Any errors remain the author's responsibility.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper is part of a Demos project exploring the role that emotional health can play in promoting the foundations of good mental health. We will write two papers for this project - in this first paper, we will introduce the concept of emotional health and define the relationship between emotional health and mental health. In the second paper, we will set out our recommendations for the UK Government and stakeholders from across the public sector, private sector and civil society on how to deliver good emotional health for all.

This project is also part of Demos's '*prevention in practice*' series, which is a series of policy papers outlining how we can bring about a preventative state across different policy areas.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK is facing a serious mental health crisis that is having a significant impact on individuals' quality of life and our collective endeavours as a nation. The Mental Health Foundation estimates that every week one in six people in England will experience a common mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety. Furthermore, the mental health charity Mind says that one in four people in England will experience a mental health problem in any given year, including common problems like depression and anxiety and rarer conditions such as schizophrenia.

The problem is urgent - according to research by the LSE, mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £118 billion a year due to factors like lost productivity, economic inactivity and the costs incurred by unpaid informal carers. In addition, NHS mental health services in England received a record 4.6 million referrals during 2022, up 22% from 2019.

The existing research into the causes and risk factors for mental ill-health tell us that an individual's mental health can be heavily influenced by social and personal factors - that is, the conditions in which they are born, grow, study, live and work. This can include an individual's family environment as well as their workplaces, educational settings or neighbourhoods. Efforts to promote good mental health that address these circumstances therefore have the potential to save substantial costs and mitigate the adverse impact poor mental health is having on individuals, families and wider society.

While the UK Government has developed a number of strategies and approaches to improve mental health, these have mostly focused on increasing spending on mental health care. While investment in mental health care is welcomed and undoubtedly vital for those who are already suffering from severe mental health problems, more must be done to tackle the root causes of mental ill-health.

In this paper we will explore the concept of emotional health and the role it can play as a protective factor for mental health.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH AS A FOUNDATION FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

In *The Preventative State*, Demos called for a bold new approach which gets radically upstream; fixing the foundations, not always jumping to design a new service or intervention.

In a mental health context, these foundations are our emotional health: the skills and beliefs which shape our feelings, thoughts and behaviours in relation to our social and emotional functioning. The emotional health framework that has been developed by The Centre for Emotional Health outlines seven social and emotional competencies that can help us to understand and manage our own emotions and behaviours, as well as develop supportive and healthy relationships with those around us (the details of this framework can be found in Part 1 of this paper).

In doing this, emotional health shifts us from a deficit model of mental health that focuses on identifying and 'fixing' something that's wrong, to an asset-based one. This can help to promote the foundations of good mental health by strengthening our resilience, relationships and communities, rather than devising ever more services. The table below outlines the differences between a mental health and emotional health approach:

MENTAL HEALTH APPROACH	EMOTIONAL HEALTH APPROACH
Reactive - interventions typically take place when someone already has a mental health condition or is at a high risk of developing one.	Preventative - emotional health approaches equip individuals with the protective assets and skills to support both their own mental health, and support the mental health and wellbeing of others.
Deficit model - the focus is on identifying and fixing what is wrong.	Asset-based model - the focus is on growing and developing our emotional health assets.
Targeted - strategies are aimed at supporting people who have or are at risk of developing a mental health condition.	Universal - strategies and approaches that support positive emotional health are beneficial and relevant for everyone, at any time of their life.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH CAN HELP PROTECT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Having good emotional health has been associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing mental ill-health. For example, a 2015 study by the Early Intervention Foundation found that the strength of someone’s emotional skills during childhood can be a predictor of their mental health in adult life.

While the existing research on the relationship between mental and emotional health does not show a cause and effect relationship, it does show strong links between the two, even when factors like socioeconomic status and experiences of adversity are taken into account. It is therefore likely that a person’s emotional health does have a level of influence over their mental health.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH CAN HELP BUILD RESILIENCE

While emotional health refers to our ability to understand and manage the broad range of emotions we experience, resilience is specifically the ability to adapt to stressful or difficult situations and crises. The accumulation of the different emotional health assets, such as our ability to regulate our emotions and form strong relationships, can help individuals, families and communities to build their resilience.

Resilience can positively impact our mental health - a study by public health researchers at Bangor University found that both children and adults with high resilience resources, which included emotional and social skills, are less likely to have a diagnosable mental health condition, including those who had experienced adversity during childhood.

GOOD EMOTIONAL HEALTH CAN HELP PEOPLE TO BUILD HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Having good emotional health can help us develop and maintain positive relationships by enabling us to be aware of and manage the beliefs we hold about others, our social awareness and our relationship skills.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, studies have shown that negative social interactions and relationships, especially with partners and spouses, have been found to increase the risk of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. On the other hand, positive interactions reduce the risk of these negative mental health outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health problems are a significant and growing health challenge facing the UK. The Mental Health Foundation estimates that every week, one in six people in the UK experience a common mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety.¹ Further, the mental health charity Mind says that one in four people in England will experience a mental health problem in any given year, including common problems like depression and anxiety and rarer conditions such as schizophrenia.² Between 2017 and 2022, rates of probable mental disorder in young people increased from around 1 in 8 in those aged 7-16 to more than 1 in 6 while for those aged 17-19, rates increased from 1 in 10 to 1 in 4.³

Not only can mental health problems adversely impact the quality of life of those who have them, the current challenges we face also have serious implications for the economy and put increasing pressure on the NHS. According to research by the LSE, mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £118 billion a year due to factors like lost productivity, economic inactivity and the costs incurred by unpaid informal carers.⁴ NHS mental health services in England received a record 4.6 million referrals during 2022, up 22% from 2019.⁵

In response to these challenges, the UK Government has developed a number of strategies and approaches to improve mental health. Particularly this has focused on spending - in 2021/22, the NHS spent £14.9 billion on mental health services in England which made up 13.8% of local NHS funding allocations.⁶

However, despite more spending being welcomed, such approaches often fail to tackle the root causes of mental health problems effectively. A range of societal interventions including reducing loneliness, protecting children from trauma and educating young people to understand and manage their emotions can help prevent mental ill-health.⁷ However, current interventions often happen when mental health problems have already arisen and are expensive to address. As described in *The Preventative State*, a recent Demos essay, this is a challenge across public services. That essay called for a bold new approach which gets radically upstream; fixing the foundations and not always jumping to design a new service or intervention.

In a mental health context, these foundations are our emotional health: the skills and beliefs which shape our feelings, thoughts and behaviours. The emotional health framework outlines seven social and emotional competencies; assets which form the foundations of good emotional health. These competencies, and the interactions between them, can help us to understand and manage our own emotions and behaviours, as well as develop supportive and healthy relationships with those around us. In doing this, emotional health shifts us from a deficit model of mental health that focuses on identifying and 'fixing' something that's wrong, to an asset-based one. This can help promote the foundations of good mental health by building our resilience, relationships and communities, rather than devising ever more services.

1 Kousoulis, A. Prevention and mental health: Understanding the evidence so that we can address the greatest health challenge of our times. The Mental Health Foundation, 2019. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Prevention-report-2019.pdf> [accessed 01/12/2023]

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3 British Medical Association (BMA). Mental Health Pressures in England. BMA, 2023. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/mental-health-pressures-data-analysis#:~:text=Between%202017%20and%202022%2C%20rates,10%20to%201%20in%204> [accessed 01/12/2023]

4 McDaid, D and Park, A. The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK. Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, LSE and the Mental Health Foundation, February 2022. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Investing-in-Prevention-Report-Summary.pdf> [accessed 01/12/2023]

5 British Medical Association (BMA). Mental Health Pressures in England. BMA, 2023. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/mental-health-pressures-data-analysis#:~:text=Between%202017%20and%202022%2C%20rates,10%20to%201%20in%204> [accessed 01/12/2023]

6 Baker, C and Kirk-Wade, E. Mental health statistics: prevalence, services and funding in England. The House of Commons Library, March 2023. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06988/SN06988.pdf> [accessed 01/12/2023]

7 Mental Health Foundation. Prevention and mental health. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/prevention-and-mental-health> [accessed 01/12/2023]

PART 1

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL HEALTH?

Emotional health refers to the underlying skills and beliefs we have that impact our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. These skills enable us to be aware of, understand and manage both the positive and difficult emotions we experience throughout our lives, and also the way we respond to and interact with the people around us.⁸

There are a range of skills, or “assets”, that make up our emotional health. Importantly, these assets do not work in isolation, they compliment and influence one another.⁹ Table 1 outlines the different assets that make up someone’s emotional health. This model has been developed by The Centre for Emotional Health alongside key stakeholders associated with emotional health.

TABLE 1
THE EMOTIONAL HEALTH ASSETS

ASSET	DEFINITION
Self beliefs	The set of beliefs we hold about our self identity, including our skills, abilities, and sense of value and worth.
Self agency	The set of beliefs we hold about our capacity to influence our lives and wider environment.
Beliefs about others	The set of beliefs we hold about others, informed by our experiences, our environment and who we are.
Self awareness	Our awareness of our own thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
Social awareness	Our awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others, and the impact our behaviour may have.
Self regulation	Our ability to manage our thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
Relationship skills	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

⁸ Taylor, M. Emotional Health. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/emotional-health> [accessed 01/12/2023]

⁹ The Centre for Emotional Health. What is emotional health? The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/what-is-emotional-health> [accessed 01/12/2023]

It's important to note that a lot of the existing research on emotional health, including some of the work we cite in this report, references skills that are not in this model, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, the assets in this model can be considered to be 'umbrella terms' that encompass these more specific qualities. For example, self-esteem would fall into the category of self-beliefs.

Some of these assets are interpersonal, meaning they relate to the 'self' and the way we understand and manage the thoughts we have about ourselves. On the other hand, the beliefs we have about others, our social awareness and relationship skills are intrapersonal and focus on the way we think about and interact with others. Using this model allows us to assess the link between having good emotional health and being able to develop and maintain healthy relationships. In turn, we can explore the impact of this on a person's mental health.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH HELPS BUILD RESILIENCE, IT DOES NOT GUARANTEE THAT SOMEONE WILL BE HAPPY ALL THE TIME

Having good emotional health means that we have the skills we need to successfully cope with both major life events and day to day ups and downs. For example, if someone has good self-awareness then they can more quickly recognise how they are feeling and potentially reach out for support at an earlier stage.¹⁰

Being emotionally healthy does not mean someone will be happy all the time.¹¹ It's normal to feel difficult emotions in response to adverse life events, like losing a job or the death of a loved one. This does not mean our emotional health is 'bad'.

The way someone is feeling at any given time, whether happy or sad or stressed, can more accurately be referred to as their emotional wellbeing.¹² If someone has positive wellbeing it means they are free from any difficult emotions. While having good emotional health does not mean someone will always have positive wellbeing, as we

will see, emotional health competencies can support positive wellbeing.^{13,14}

EMOTIONAL HEALTH IS ABOUT CREATING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, NOT JUST INDIVIDUALS

An individual's emotional health can be shaped by the different environmental contexts they are immersed in. These environmental contexts, which can include families, schools, communities and workplaces, can either support the development of someone's emotional health competencies, or they can undermine and disable them.¹⁵ For instance, if the people in someone's social environment are not responsive or empathic, this can impact a person's beliefs about others and in turn their ability to form strong relationships. Taking a collective approach to supporting people's emotional health should therefore be an imperative.

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15 The Centre for Emotional Health. *What is emotional health?* The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/what-is-emotional-health> [accessed 01/12/2023]

PART 2

HOW EMOTIONAL HEALTH IS DIFFERENT FROM MENTAL HEALTH

Having explained what emotional health is, we will now look at how it is different from mental health. Fundamentally, emotional health is universal while mental health is typically used in the context of a 'medical model' which refers to diagnosable mental health conditions.

TABLE 2
THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EMOTIONAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

EMOTIONAL HEALTH	MENTAL HEALTH	EMOTIONAL WELLBEING
The underlying skills and beliefs we have that impact our thoughts, feelings and behaviours in relation to our social and emotional functioning.	Encompasses cognitive and neurological functioning, as well as social and emotional functioning. Typically used in the context of a 'medical model' which refers to diagnosable mental illnesses.	A person's emotional state at any given time. For example, feelings of happiness, stress or sadness reflect the state of someone's emotional wellbeing.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health encompasses cognitive and neurological functioning, as well as social and emotional functioning.¹⁶ Cognitive functions refers to mental processes like decision making, memory and learning while neurological functions refers to how the brain works. Additionally, the term mental health is typically used in the context of a 'medical model' which refers to diagnosable mental illnesses such as anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder and bipolar.^{17,18} Emotional health on the other hand, refers purely to our social and emotional functioning and is not part of a 'medical model'.¹⁹

Mental health or mental ill-health can also sometimes be conflated with emotional wellbeing - someone might say they have poor mental health when they're experiencing difficult emotions like stress, for example. While both wellbeing and mental health relate to our emotional functioning, emotional wellbeing is not referring to a particular medical problem. It is possible for someone to have low levels of wellbeing without having a mental health condition.²⁰ Negative emotional wellbeing does not necessarily need to be prevented as feeling uncomfortable or experiencing difficult emotions at times is 'normal' and healthy. However, severe and long-term negative emotional wellbeing can still have an adverse impact on a person's life, including their mental health,²¹ meaning it's important people have the support they need to manage difficult emotions and prevent them from escalating into something more severe.

HOW IS AN EMOTIONAL HEALTH APPROACH DIFFERENT TO A MENTAL HEALTH APPROACH?

Emotional health is a preventative approach which can help protect and promote good mental health. On the other hand, a mental health approach is often reactive, with interventions typically taking place when someone already has a mental health problem or is at a high risk of developing one.

There are two key aspects of an emotional health approach that make it preventative. First, emotional health adopts an asset-based model.²² This means that the focus is on growing and developing the different competencies or skills that make up our emotional health, rather than trying to identify what's wrong. On the other hand, mental health, particularly in a medical context, adopts a deficit model where the focus is on identifying a mental health issue once it has already arisen.

The assets or skills that emotional health strategies aim to build can support people to protect both their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Further, being in an emotionally healthy environment can also be a source of support for individuals who do have poor emotional wellbeing or mental ill-health, which can help prevent these issues from worsening.²³

Second, emotional health is universal. Strategies and approaches that support good emotional health are beneficial and relevant for everyone, at any time of their life.²⁴ On the other hand, a mental health approach is typically targeted, with strategies aimed at supporting people who have or are at risk of developing a mental health condition.²⁵

16 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

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18 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

19 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

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24 The Centre for Emotional Health. *What is emotional health?* The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/what-is-emotional-health> [accessed 01/12/2023]

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PART 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Having identified the differences between emotional health and mental health, we will now explore the synergies between them. Particularly we will look at the role emotional health can play in supporting good mental health.

CAN EMOTIONAL HEALTH PLAY A ROLE IN LOWERING THE RISK OF MENTAL ILLNESS?

Having good emotional health has been associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing a mental health problem. For example, a 2015 study found that the strength of someone's emotional skills during childhood can be a predictor of their mental health in adult life.²⁶ Particularly the study found self-

regulation, self-control, self-esteem and social skills matter most for mental health outcomes in adult life.²⁷ In addition, a 2021 study found that having high self-esteem can help protect against common mental health problems in adolescence, such as anxiety and depression.²⁸

Furthermore, experiencing difficulties with our emotional health competencies can be a risk factor for mental ill-health. For example, difficulties in emotional regulation have been shown to be a risk factor for developing mental health problems in the future among people who have experienced adversity in childhood.²⁹

Resilience can be an important factor in reducing the risk of someone experiencing a mental health problem. Resilience is specifically the ability to adapt

²⁶ Early Intervention Foundation. *Social and emotional learning: Skills for life and work*. Early Intervention Foundation, 2015. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/social-and-emotional-learning-skills-for-life-and-work> [accessed 03/12/2023]

²⁷ Early Intervention Foundation. *Social and emotional learning: Skills for life and work*. Early Intervention Foundation, 2015. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/social-and-emotional-learning-skills-for-life-and-work> [accessed 03/12/2023]

²⁸ Liu, Q et al. *Social support, resilience, and self-esteem protect against common mental health problems in early adolescence*. *Medicine*, January, 2021. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7850671/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

²⁹ Gerin, M et al. *A review of childhood maltreatment, latent vulnerability and the brain: Implications for clinical practice and prevention*. *Adoption and Fostering*, 2019. Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10084922/5/McCrory_A%20review%20of%20childhood%20maltreatment%2C%20latent%20vulnerability%20and%20the%20brain.%20Implications%20for%20clinical%20practice%20and%20prevention_AAM2.pdf [accessed 03/12/2023]

to stressful or difficult situations and crises.³⁰ While the emotional health model we have used does not include resilience as a specific competency, the accumulation of these different assets are what help to build resilience. Studies have found that resilience can help protect someone against developing a mental health disorder.³¹ For example, a 2021 systematic review found that high resilience in adolescents and children who had experienced adversity and trauma was associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety.³² A study by Bangor University found that both children and adults with high resilience resources, which included emotional and social skills, are less likely to have a diagnosable mental health condition, including those who had experienced adversity during childhood, like parental divorce or neglect.³³

Despite the strong links between emotional health and mental health, the existing research does not show a cause and effect relationship. This means that we cannot say that having good emotional health will guarantee immunity from mental illness for everyone, particularly when other risk factors for mental illness are present. For example, the study on resilience resources found that having both high resilience and low experience of adversity during childhood provide better protection against mental illness than high resilience alone.³⁴ Undoubtedly, the absence of risk factors, such as experiences of trauma, are just as important for preventing and protecting against mental illness as our emotional health competencies are.

While a strong cause-effect relationship has not been established, much of the existing research has still found a link between emotional health skills and positive mental health outcomes even when other factors, like socioeconomic status, have been

accounted for.^{35,36} It is likely then that emotional health does have a level of influence over people's mental health outcomes. Emotional health should therefore be looked at as one of a number of factors, rather than a sole remedy, that can help protect and promote good mental health.

WHAT IMPACT CAN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS HAVE ON MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING?

Having good emotional health can help people develop and maintain positive relationships. This is because our self-agency, the beliefs we hold about others, our social awareness and our relationship skills can all impact the quality of our relationships. For example, an evaluation of the Nurturing Programme, a course that aims to boost individual and collective emotional health, found that after taking part in the programme, people reported that the quality of their family relationships and environments at home had improved and become more supportive.³⁷

The quality of a person's relationships can impact their mental health and their emotional wellbeing, with unhealthy relationships having a negative impact and healthy relationships having a positive impact.³⁸ For example, a 2022 study found that social connectedness (defined as having social support, networks and the absence of perceived social isolation) can protect adults from depressive symptoms and disorders.³⁹ Furthermore, negative social interactions and relationships, especially with partners and spouses, have been found to increase the risk of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. On the other hand, positive interactions reduce the risk of these negative mental health outcomes and

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35 Early Intervention Foundation. *Social and emotional learning: Skills for life and work*. Early Intervention Foundation, 2015. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/social-and-emotional-learning-skills-for-life-and-work> [accessed 03/12/2023]

36 Loades, M. *The overlap between low self-esteem and anxiety/depression in CAMHS*. The Association for Child and Adult Mental Health, January 2022. Available at: <https://www.acamh.org/research-digest/self-esteem-anxiety-depression/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

37 Ghate D. *The Family Links Nurturing Programme - Findings and recommendations from a strategic review and development project*. Family Links and The Colebrook Centre for Evidence and Implementation, August 2015. Available at: https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/64e5fc_4b58698f035f400abbc5dbfaf28c6d50.pdf [accessed 03.12.2023]

38 Mental Health Foundation. *Relationships and community: statistics*. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/relationships-community-statistics#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20from%20Ireland%20and,the%20risk%20of%20these%20issues.> [accessed 03/12/2023]

39 Wickramaratne PJ et al. *Social connectedness as a determinant of mental health: A scoping review*. PLoS One, October 2022. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9560615/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

can enhance someone's emotional wellbeing.⁴⁰

Relationships can also help build resilience which, as discussed earlier, can protect against mental ill-health. According to the Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.⁴¹

As well as personal relationships, people's relationships with their communities can also positively impact mental health. For example, a 2011 study found that greater social cohesion is associated with a reduction in depressive symptoms in older people.⁴² Further, a 2022 study found that high neighbourhood social cohesion was associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety symptoms in teenagers, and can help mitigate the impact of stressful life events on people's mental health.⁴³ This is partly because socially cohesive neighbourhoods can enhance people's social support networks and also reduce loneliness and isolation, which is a notable risk factor for some mental health conditions, including depression.^{44,45,46}

It's apparent that healthy relationships and strong communities can contribute to positive mental health outcomes. Equipping people with the skills and resources they need to build and maintain healthy relationships should therefore be an imperative part of any approach to promoting good mental health. With the focus on relationship skills and creating supportive and emotionally healthy environments,

strategies to develop people's emotional health can play an important role in doing this.

HOW CAN MENTAL ILL-HEALTH IMPACT A PERSON'S EMOTIONAL HEALTH?

The relationship between emotional health and mental health is bidirectional - a person's mental health can also impact their emotional health. For example, having low-self-esteem can result from having a mental illness as well as being a risk factor for developing a mental health problem.⁴⁷ Likewise, struggling with self-regulation can be a symptom of a mental health problem, as well as a potential risk factor for it.⁴⁸

Further, poor mental health can impact a person's ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships. Studies have shown that depressive symptoms can predict lower relationship satisfaction and decreases in relationship quality with peers, for example.⁴⁹ This could partly be because having a mental health condition can impact people's social and relationship skills, for example, by leading to social isolation and disrupting a person's communication and interactions with others.⁵⁰ Social isolation and difficulties with relationships can also result from the stigma associated with having a mental illness and a lack of understanding from others, as well as the condition itself.^{51,52} Bangor University's study on resilience resources also found that poor mental health may reduce opportunities for community engagement, a key source of resilience.⁵³

40 Mental Health Foundation. *Relationships in the 21st century: the forgotten foundation of mental health and well-being*. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Relationships-21st-Century-Summary-Report.pdf> [accessed 03/12/2023]

41 Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University. *Resilience*. Harvard University. Available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

42 Stafford, M, McMunn, A and De Vogli, R. *Neighbourhood social environment and depressive symptoms in mid-life and beyond*. Ageing & Society, January 2011. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/abs/neighbourhood-social-environment-and-depressive-symptoms-in-midlife-and-beyond/BEF753F67BD707AA44F7F238BCDFC9BE> [accessed 03/12/2023]

43 Kingsbury M et al. *The protective effect of neighbourhood social cohesion on adolescent mental health following stressful life events*. Psychol Med, June 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7322549/> [accessed 04/12/2023]

44 Kingsbury M et al. *The protective effect of neighbourhood social cohesion on adolescent mental health following stressful life events*. Psychol Med, June 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7322549/> [accessed 04/12/2023]

45 National Institute on Aging. *Depression and Older Adults*. National Institute on Aging. Available at: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/depression-and-older-adults> [accessed 04/12/2023]

46 Mental Health Foundation. *Relationships in the 21st century: the forgotten foundation of mental health and well-being*. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Relationships-21st-Century-Summary-Report.pdf> [accessed 03/12/2023]

47 Loades, M. *The overlap between low self-esteem and anxiety/depression in CAMHS*. The Association for Child and Adult Mental Health, January 2022. Available at: <https://www.acamh.org/research-digest/self-esteem-anxiety-depression/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

48 Menefee DS, Ledoux T and Johnston CA. *The Importance of Emotional Regulation in Mental Health*. Am J Lifestyle Med, January 2022. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8848120/>

49 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666915323001695>

50 Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. *Understanding Mental Health as a Public Health Issue*. Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, January 2021. Available: <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/mental-health-public-health/#:~:text=Mental%20Health%20and%20Social%20Relationships,communication%20and%20interactions%20with%20others> [accessed 04/12/2023]

51 Prizeman, K., Weinstein, N. and McCabe, C. *Effects of mental health stigma on loneliness, social isolation, and relationships in young people with depression symptoms*. BMC Psychiatry, 2023. Available at: <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/112513/> [accessed 04/12/2023]

52 Harvey, C and Brophy, L. *Social isolation in people with mental illness*. Medicine Today, 2011. Available at: <https://medicinetoday.com.au/mt/2011/october/regular-series/social-isolation-people-mental-illness> [accessed 04/12/2023]

53 Hughes, K, Ford, K, Davies et al. *Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences*. Bangor University, 2018. Available at: https://common.bangor.ac.uk/system/files/uploaded_files/news/School%20of%20Healthcare%20Sciences/2018/01/ace_resilience_report_en_pdf_11162.pdf [accessed 03/12/2023]

This suggests that people with mental health problems can face barriers to building their emotional health assets. As emotional health assets can play an important role in helping people with mental-ill health to manage their conditions and prevent them from worsening, it is important that the bi-directional relationship between emotional and mental health is considered in strategies to support people's emotional health.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the growing significance of mental health challenges in the UK and the need for effective preventative measures. While the government has increased spending on mental health services, it is vital that we do more to address the root causes of mental health problems.

We have explored the concept of emotional health as a foundation for good mental health. This matters for policy-makers because it creates scope for a different approach to preventing mental ill-health. By equipping individuals, families and communities with the skills and resources they need to build resilience, foster healthy relationships and create supportive environments, emotional health initiatives can play a crucial role in protecting good mental health.

Importantly, we have identified the need for a collective approach to emotional health, acknowledging that emotional health is not solely an individual responsibility but is significantly influenced by the environmental contexts we are immersed in such as families, schools, communities, and workplaces.

In the next stage of our work, we will write a final report setting out what the government can do to deliver better emotional health for all. To support this, we will conduct two roundtables with relevant stakeholders from across policy, academia, the public sector and civil society to discuss how this vision can be achieved across a wide range of sectors and debate and identify policy solutions.

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