Annexure 4: Difference Between Poor Mental Health and Mental Disorders

Source: Mental Health Ireland, 2010

Poor mental health (or mental ill health) refers to the kind of general mental health problems we can all experience in certain stressful circumstances; for example, work pressures can cause us to experience poor concentration, mood swings and sleep disturbance.

Such problems are usually of temporary nature, are relative to the demands a particular situation, and generally respond to support and reassurance.

All of us suffer from mental health problems at times, and such temporary problems do not necessarily lead to mental illness. However, being mentally unhealthy limits our potential as human beings and may lead to more serious problems.

Mental disorders (or mental illness) can be defined as the experiencing of severe and distressing psychological symptoms to the extent that normal functioning is seriously impaired.

Some form of professional medical help is usually needed for recovery/management of both poor mental health and mental disorders. This help may take the form of counselling or psychotherapy, drug treatment and/or lifestyle change.
Classification of Mental Disorders

Source: University of Melbourne, 2009

Severe Mental Disorders

People with Severe Mental Disorders usually experience a mixture of physical, emotional, thought and behavioural symptoms, as well as imagining symptoms.

Severe Mental Disorders are rare and usually involve noticeable behavioural problems and the expression of strange or unusual ideas, often called psychosis. Psychosis is sometimes described as ‘losing touch with reality’.

People with Severe Mental Disorders are more easily identified as having a mental health problem than those with Common Mental Disorders, because they seem more obviously different from others in the way they think and behave. Most people in psychiatric hospitals suffer from Severe Mental Disorders.

The main types of Severe Mental Disorders are as given below.

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<th>Psychotic Episode</th>
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<td>The person displays severe behavioural problems and expresses strange or unusual ideas. It is caused by a combination of factors including genetics, brain chemistry, stress and other factors such as the use of drugs or intense depression.</td>
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<td>Psychotic episodes usually start suddenly and do not last for a long time.</td>
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<td>A psychotic episode may eventually become a more serious psychotic illness such as schizophrenia, or it may only occur once in a person’s lifetime.</td>
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<th>Schizophrenia</th>
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<td>Mainly affects young people before 30 years of age. Both men and women are affected equally by schizophrenia, and symptoms may develop rapidly over several weeks or more slowly over several months. Many people mistakenly believe that schizophrenia is the same as split-personality but this is not correct.</td>
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<td>Symptoms of schizophrenia include:</td>
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<td>- False beliefs e.g. thinking others are trying to harm her/him, or believing that her/his mind is being controlled by others.</td>
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<td>- False perceptions—seeing, smelling or tasting things that are not there, and most commonly hearing voices that are not there.</td>
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<td>- Strange behaviours e.g. talking to herself/himself.</td>
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<td>- Poor concentration and inability to think clearly.</td>
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<td>- Lack of motivation to do things.</td>
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<td>- Inappropriate emotions e.g. laughing at something sad.</td>
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<td>- Loss of social skills and social withdrawal.</td>
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<td>- Restlessness, walking up and down.</td>
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<td>- Poor personal hygiene.</td>
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<td>- Saying things that do not make sense to others.</td>
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<td>- Aggression.</td>
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## Bipolar Disorder

The person experiences extreme mood swings between low mood (depression), high mood (mania) and normal mood. The symptoms of the depressed stage of the illness are much the same as depression (described later), and the symptoms of the manic stage of the illness include:

- A very happy mood.
- Unrealistic plans or ideas.
- Inappropriate sexual behavior.
- Spending a lot of money.
- Not sleeping.
- Irritability.
- Rapid talking.
- Unable to be still and relax.
- Beliefs that she/he is special or superhuman.
- Limited understanding that she/he is behaving in an unusual way.
- Both men and women can be affected, usually in early adulthood.

## Common Mental Disorders

People with Common Mental Disorders usually experience physical, emotional, thinking and behavior symptoms, but not imagining symptoms. Some people may get treatment for physical problems associated with their illness (like poor sleep or appetite), but neglect the cause of these physical problems such as underlying depression or anxiety. People with Common Mental Disorders are often not treated because it is more difficult for family members and health workers to recognize that they are suffering from a mental disorder.

The main Common Mental Disorders are:

### Depression

Unusually sad mood that does not go away. Depression is a mental disorder when the symptoms last for at least two weeks and they affect the person's ability to carry out her/his work or have satisfying personal relationships. Everyone can feel sad when bad things happen, occasional sadness is not depression.

Events that contribute to the development of an unusually sad mood include:

- Distressing events that the person cannot do anything to control like the death of a loved one or the breakdown of a relationship.
- Stressful events such as ongoing family conflict.
- Chronic medical conditions like diabetes or stroke.
- Sometimes women can become depressed after they give birth.

The symptoms of depression include unusually sad mood, and all or some of the following:

- Loss of interest and enjoyment in activities.
- Tiredness and lack of energy.
- Loss of self-confidence.
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.
- Wishing they were dead.
- Difficulties in concentrating.
- Sleeping problems.
- Loss of interest in food and loss of weight.
- Experiencing a range of physical complaints that have no apparent medical cause e.g. weakness, aches and pains.
- Not every person who is depressed has all these symptoms, and the severity of depression is different for different people.
Anxiety

Excessive fear, nervousness and worry (anxiety) is a mental disorder that is more severe and long lasting than everyday worries. It interferes with a person’s ability to carry out his/ her work or have satisfying personal relationships. There are many types of anxiety disorders ranging from mild uneasiness to panic attacks.

Generalised Anxiety Disorder – when the person worries excessively about things, and experiences multiple physical and psychological symptoms that occur nearly every day for at least six months.

Panic Disorder – when the person experiences a sudden and severe anxiety attack. They feel intense fear or terror that is inappropriate for the setting. The symptoms are often physical and include dizziness, shaking, sweating, feeling of choking, rapid breathing, and rapid heartbeat.

Phobias – when a person feels very scared in particular situations e.g. when in closed spaces, crowded places like markets, or near lizards etc. The person generally avoids the fearful situation.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) – a condition where the person has repeated thoughts (obsessions) or does things repeatedly (compulsions) and is unable to stop the behaviour or the thoughts e.g. hand washing to the point where the skin is damaged.

Symptoms include unrealistic or excessive fear and worry, and one or all of the following.
- Irritability.
- Worrying a lot about things
- Feeling that something terrible is going to happen.
- Feeling scared (butterflies in the stomach).
- Avoiding certain situations e.g. social events.
- Disturbed sleep.
- Muscle tension.
- Restlessness.
- Physical symptoms like rapid heartbeat, dizziness and trembling.

Excessive Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs (Substance Abuse)

This is one of the most common mental disorders. Using alcohol or drugs does not mean that a person has a mental disorder, but it does become a disorder when the alcohol or drug use harms the person’s physical, mental or social health. Excessive use can result in.
- Dependence on alcohol or drugs, which makes it difficult for people to stop using the alcohol or drugs;
- Problems at work, school or home or legal problems due to use of alcohol or drugs; and
- Damage to physical or mental health secondary to the use of alcohol or drugs.

People with alcohol and drug problems often have other underlying mental health problems and use alcohol or drugs as a type of self medication for feelings of excessive worry or sadness.