

## HOLISTIC APPROACH ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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**Abstract;** The holistic concept of health is contained in the expression of wholeness. Health is a relative state in which one is able to function well physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually to express the full range of one's unique potentialities within the environment in which one lives.

**Key Word:** Health, wellness, Holistic.

**Introduction:** Healthcare costs are escalating as people are living longer than ever before. Simultaneously, there is a growing interest and emphasis on wellness within Canadian, as well as other cultures, to examine the factors that make population's well. This article summarizes wellness constructs from a holistic perspective and reviews definitions and conceptualizations of holistic wellness within current literature.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Wellness from a holistic perspective:** In 2008, the World Health Organization stated that the dominant view of wellness is one that is holistic and includes both an absence of illness and a state of wellbeing. Traditionally wellness has considered only the absence of negative elements (illness and disease) whereas this newer holistic perspective strives to recognize the presence of positive elements. The most common definitions of wellness create a framework that views individuals within a holistic perspective and consists of many dimensions. Human wellness includes, among others things, mind, body, spirit, and community interactions, and the many dimensions of wellness are all interconnected, whereas the healthcare system still has a tendency to approach them separately.<sup>(2)</sup>

**Conceptualizing wellness :**The term 'wellness' has evolved over the past couple of decades, being initially ascribed to programmes and circumstances aimed at helping alleviate illness or reduce health risks; for example exercise programmes to reduce weight gain. As research has evolved, the psycho-social aspects of health have revealed broader wellness 'determinants' or 'assets' at play, and consequently the term 'wellbeing' as related to quality of life and life satisfaction has come to prominence.<sup>(2)</sup> Yet distinguishing between 'health', 'wellness', and 'wellbeing' is tricky, because too many these terms seem to mean the same thing, or at least are viewed as being very closely related. Health allows an ongoing process of living life

well, though of course what 'well' means could be related to income, relationships, coherence, fitness and adaptability. So though there may be little essential difference between health and wellness, there are nonetheless objective ways of testing for the absence of disease. But no tests can capture the uniquely personal, subjective experience of what 'wellness' feels like to an individual. So in their efforts to clarify the definition, theorists have argued that wellness has to be accepted as subjective and that an accurate, unambiguous definition and measurement of the construct is very difficult to conceive of. Therefore 'wellness' is an umbrella term under which we can gather the multidimensional biological, psychological and social facets of people's lives. It may even be that when these dimensions align, it produces a sense of 'harmony and balance', and that in order to enhance it, it would be necessary to promote wellbeing across all the different dimensions taking into consideration the socio-ecological factor values and behaviours they embrace.<sup>(3)</sup> Wellness in these terms can hardly be represented by a snapshot view but requires instead a 'whole of life view' involving ongoing processes of integration of awareness, learning and growth.<sup>(4)</sup> The literature suggests that wellbeing comes under the umbrella of wellness. The dimensions of wellbeing reflect the interconnectedness of the person within their environment/society and as such pertain to the mind, body, spirit, emotions, meaning, behaviour, and social relationships. Using a holistic approach, promoting wellbeing essentially serves to improve health and wellness and as such, needs to be considered carefully within any wellness model. For example, this includes the conscious choice involved in taking responsibility for improving the quality of one's life by adopting changes in various areas of lifestyle, resulting in a high level of wellbeing. The action of being well involves an ability to creatively adapt in all aspects of life resulting in an optimal level of functioning.<sup>(5,6)</sup>

### **Dimensions of wellness:**

**Physical wellness:** This dimension is particularly relevant where cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, and strength are concerned. Actions to improve physical wellness include maintaining a healthy exercise regime and diet and monitoring internal and external physical signs of the body's response to events, including stress. This includes seeking medical care when appropriate and taking action to prevent and avoiding harmful behaviours (e.g tobacco and excess alcohol use) and detect illnesses. Physical wellness, however, does not always correlate with one's sense of wellbeing: a person can have poor health but experience positive wellbeing, while conversely someone who is in objective terms physically healthy can nonetheless experience a poor sense of wellbeing.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Emotional/psychological wellness:** Explanations of emotional/psychological wellness primarily focus around attitudes and beliefs about self and life. They include the ability to develop a positive and realistic self concept and a sense of purpose in life. In this regard of course, work-life often impacts on this sense of identity, and self-esteem. A positive self-view and awareness of one's feelings will in turn shape actions, relationships and autonomy. So too will having a personal developmental focus that includes notions of self-actualization and a sense that aspects of the self develop as we mature. In addition, a capacity to cope with stress and maintain a positive attitude toward life and certain optimism about the future seem to have a powerful bearing on emotional/ psychological wellness. Conversely, feeling that life is out of control causes stress and impacts on social participation rates. Happiness is subjective. What makes one person happy may not have the same effect on another. Therefore self-rated scales are really the only way of conducting happiness studies because there is no objective way to measure how people feel<sup>(5)</sup>

**Social wellness:** Social wellness is broad in scope because it includes the interaction of the individual with others, the community, and nature. It includes the interaction (quality and extent) with, and support of, others, the community, and the social and natural environment. Besides the interactions of the individual, society, and nature, social wellness includes the motivation, action, intent, and perception of interactions. The importance of the social determinants when assessing health inequalities has been stressed in a recent report from the World Health Organization. This report stated that 'being included in the society in which one lives is vital to the material, psychosocial, and political empowerment that underpins social wellbeing and equitable health'<sup>(4)</sup>

**Intellectual/cognitive wellness:** Intellectual/cognitive wellness is the perception of, and motivation for, an individual's optimal level of stimulating intellectual activity by the continual acquisition, use, sharing, and application of knowledge in a creative and critical fashion. This is for both personal growth and the betterment of society. Realizing one's personal potential involves cognitive processes and comprehension of life's purpose. Education increases opportunities for income and job security, and gives people a sense of control over life circumstances. Low levels of educational attainment are less likely to lead to high levels of employment security and thus quality of life may be reduced. Functional literacy is also an indicator of health. Those with low levels of literacy are more likely to experience smoking, inactivity, obesity and poor diet. Some studies find a positive relationship between each additional level of education and subjective wellbeing, while others find that middle level education is related to the highest life satisfaction. However, there is evidence that higher levels of education have a more positive impact in low income countries<sup>(2)</sup>

**Occupational wellness:** Occupational wellness has been defined as the level of satisfaction and enrichment gained from one's work, whether paid or unpaid, and the extent one's occupation allows for the expression of one's values. Occupational wellness includes the contribution of one's unique skills, talents and services to the community and the level to which the individual views their work as rewarding and meaningful. Achieving a balance between occupational responsibilities and other commitments is indicative of the level of occupational wellness.

**Environmental wellness:** Environmental wellness includes the balance between home and work life, as well as the individual's relationship with nature and community resources, i.e. involvement in a recycling or community clean-up effort. Further, the importance of safety of food and water supply, infectious diseases, violence, ultraviolet radiation, air and water pollution, and second hand tobacco smoke also fall under this dimension<sup>(6)</sup> City planning can have an effect on human wellness. For example, green space in cities can have a positive effect on health by increasing opportunities for physical activity and also create feelings of relaxation and wellbeing. In addition, vegetation can improve air quality by removing particulates and pollutants. Many modern western urban environments have been referred to as 'obesogenic' as they discourage walking and the exercise and social interaction that come with that activity<sup>(3)</sup>

**Economic wellness:** An analysis of wellness in relation to social capital within approximately 50 countries, examined income, employment, government effectiveness, family structure and social relations in order to assess effects of institutions and policies. Increased income inequality is associated with lower rates of economic growth and poorer health. Individuals attaching high subjective values to financial success have lower values for subjective wellbeing, even when their financial aspirations were met. Higher levels of subjective wellbeing are found not in the richest countries but among those who live where social and political institutions are effective, where mutual trust is high and corruption is low. Studies consistently show a large negative effect of individual unemployment on subjective wellbeing. Models which treat life satisfaction scales as a continuous variable tend to find that the unemployed have significantly lower scores than the employed even when controlling for psychological variables<sup>(7)</sup>

**Cultural wellness:** Examination of cultural differences in wellness across a number of nations confirms that the cultural environment is an important factor, because there are substantial differences in subjective wellbeing between cultures. Also, differences in goals and values between individuals, and between cultures, seem to act as specific predictors of subjective wellbeing. Our wellbeing, while it obviously depends to a degree on numerous life circumstances, is also greatly influenced by cultural factors and individual

differences in attitude and temperament. However, the relationship between wealth and wellbeing is far from direct, once people are above the poverty line, being richer does not mean being happier<sup>(5)</sup>

**Climate wellness:** It is hardly surprising that extreme weather (whether or not it is caused by climate change), is detrimental to subjective wellbeing whether directly or at the community level from disruptions to social and economic activities. Not only have environmental determinants been shown to negatively affect mental health, but the implications of climate change is also now causing emotional distress, for instance among Australian children 25% of those surveyed believed the world might end in the next few years. But there are less direct (and rather curious) examples of links between climate change and wellbeing: caring about the ozone layer is negatively associated with subjective wellbeing while caring about species extinction is positively associated with subjective wellbeing. It would appear that people who worry about ozone holes are less happy than people who worry about wildlife<sup>(1)</sup>

*‘Research has shown that developing countries have lower levels of personal wellbeing’*

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