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## **History And Mental Health: Addressing Mental Health with A Historical Approach**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The history of mental health shows changes from supernatural views in ancient times to scientific approaches. The background of this study was to understand the evolution of views and treatments of mental disorders from various historical periods, ranging from Egypt, Ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, to the scientific era and the application of historical approaches to mental health. The aim of this study was to identify key changes in mental health approaches and their impact on contemporary therapeutic practice. The results show that while mental disorders were once often associated with mystification and treated through exorcism, the development of science and philosophy brought a more humane and scientific approach. The 20th and 21st centuries marked the use of psychotropic drugs and holistic approaches that considered social, economic and cultural factors. Historical approaches to mental therapy provide a scientific and empathic context, helping people identify effective practices and reduce mental health stigma.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mental health is an integral part of human well-being that includes an individual's emotional, psychological, and social balance. Mental health problems can have a significant impact on the lives of individuals, families, and society as a whole. Although mental health has become a growing concern in modern society, challenges in understanding, preventing, and coping with mental disorders remain (Fadiman, 1999).

The history of mental health reflects the long journey of humanity in understanding and treating mental disorders. From ancient times to the present day, various cultures around the world have developed their unique approaches to addressing mental health issues. Each culture has a system of values, beliefs and practices that shape the way they understand and respond to mental illness (Bains, 2005).

Traditional and alternative medicine has been an important part of mental health practices in many societies throughout history. For example, in the ancient Chinese medical tradition, acupuncture and herbal remedies were used to cure mental illness. In India, meditation and yoga practices have been integrated in mental health care for thousands of years (Hidayat, 2022).

In the classical period in ancient Greece (500-323 BC), figures such as Hippocrates and Galen developed an early understanding of mental illness (Fakhriyani, 2019). They considered that imbalances in the four basic elements of the body (air, water, earth and fire) could lead to mental disorders. Although their views do not always match the modern understanding of mental health, their contributions remain important in the history of medicine.

In many indigenous cultures around the world, traditional practices and rituals have been used as a way to cure mental disorders. Shamans, spiritual mediums and religious leaders often serve as helpers in the effort to cure mental illness. Religious rituals and ceremonies are often considered an integral part of the healing process (Sutrio et al., n.d.).

The importance of unraveling the history of mental health lies in understanding that approaches to mental health problems have evolved over time. Knowledge of history provides valuable insight into how the view and treatment of mental illness has changed over time. It allows us to see how cultural, social, and political changes have affected the way we understand and treat mental health (Sanjiwani et al., 2023).

Continuing from here, in the 21st century, we have witnessed a major shift in the way we understand and treat mental health. Technology and globalization have enabled a wider exchange of information on mental health, strengthening awareness of the issue worldwide.

One significant trend is increased advocacy for mental health as an integral part of overall health. Initiatives such as World Mental Health Day and stigma campaigns have strengthened public awareness of the importance of treating mental health without discrimination (Freska & Kep, 2023). In addition, scientific research on neuroplasticity has changed our view on mental health. We now better understand that the brain can continue to adapt and evolve throughout life, opening the door for more innovative and effective therapies (Doidge, 2007).

The importance of a holistic approach to mental health care is also increasingly recognized. This involves attending to the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of a person's mental health. Art therapy, animal therapy, and other alternative approaches are increasingly accepted as part of a comprehensive approach to mental health. This includes reading stories of historical and mental health figures who overcame mental health problems. For example, Winston Churchill with his depression (Best, 2001) or Vincent van Gogh with his mental illness (Naifeh & Smith, 2011). Thus, while we celebrate the progress that has been made in treating mental health, we are also reminded of the importance of continuing to work towards inclusion, equality, and fair access in mental health services. By strengthening our understanding of the history of mental health and heeding the lessons of the past, we can continue to progress towards a healthier, caring, and inclusive society for all individuals.

By understanding the history of mental health, we can appreciate the diversity of approaches used by different cultures around the world. It also helps us understand the importance of developing a holistic and inclusive approach to mental health, which recognizes the values and needs of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. As part of the global effort to improve mental health, it is important that we learn from past experiences and integrate the knowledge gained into contemporary mental health practices. By doing so, we can be more effective in providing support and care to individuals experiencing mental illness around the world.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative design (Herdiansyah, 2015) with a historical approach (Sukmana, 2021) to examine the development of mental health over time. This approach was chosen to explore, analyze, and understand conceptual and practical changes in the field of mental health. The research procedures involve collecting data from primary sources such as historical documents, psychiatric hospital records, and government archives, as well as secondary sources like books, scientific journals, articles, and related literature (Herdiansyah, 2015). Observations on changes in mental health approaches were also conducted across various historical periods, followed by content analysis to identify themes, patterns, and changes in the perception and treatment of mental health (Herdiansyah, 2015).

Quantitative analysis uses statistical data from hospital records, historical mental health surveys, and government reports to identify trends and changes in the prevalence of mental disorders and treatment approaches over time (Rachmawati, 2017). Data validation was performed using triangulation, utilizing various sources to ensure the accuracy and consistency of findings,

and peer review to obtain feedback from experts. Hypothesis testing was carried out by comparing historical data from different periods and cultures, identifying consistent patterns in the evolution of approaches to mental health (Sarosa, 2021).

Data acquisition involved searching archives, libraries, and online databases, as well as interviews with historians or mental health practitioners. In the preparation phase, the research was structured and approval from relevant institutions was obtained, followed by the identification and collection of relevant data sources. During the data collection phase, archive and literature searches were conducted to gather documents and historical records, which were then analyzed using thematic and statistical analysis methods (Octaviani & Sutriani, 2019). The research report was compiled based on the findings and analyses, covering all aspects that had been deeply investigated and analyzed. Validation and refinement were conducted through data triangulation and feedback from colleagues and experts (Rukajat, 2018).

The research data covers several periods, including the ancient period, such as in Ancient Egypt where 120 herbal formulas were used for various health conditions, including mental health (Chartier-Raymond, n.d.), and in ancient Ayurvedic texts, about 80 types of mental disorders were recorded (Wujastyk, 2022). In medieval Europe, around 5-10% of the population in monasteries exhibited symptoms of mental disorders (Trenery & Horden, 2017), while in the 9th century Middle East, hospitals in Baghdad had around 200 mental patients (Dols, 1992).

In Renaissance Florence, about 3% of hospital patients were mental patients (Brucker, 1983). In the 18th and 19th centuries, Philippe Pinel freed around 50 patients from chains at Bicêtre Hospital in Paris, and Dorothea Dix established or expanded around 32 mental hospitals in the US (Goldstein, 2001). After World War II, about 15% of returning soldiers experienced PTSD (Goldstein, 2001), and in the 1970s, around 20% of the US population had undergone psychoanalytic or other therapies (Hale Jr, 1995). In the 21st century, a WHO survey showed that about 450 million people worldwide suffer from mental disorders (Depression, 2017), and a 2018 study showed that art therapy and animal therapy helped improve the mental condition of about 70% of study participants in various countries (Kredo et al., 2016). This research aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the evolution of mental health throughout history, which in turn can be used to design more effective and holistic approaches to mental health care in the future.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A historical exploration of mental health

#### 1. Ancient and Classical Periods

In ancient times, mental disorders were often thought to be the result of evil spirits or divine curses. In Ancient Egypt, for example, mental illness was often attributed to supernatural forces, and priests served as healers. They used various rituals and herbal-based remedies to cure individuals deemed possessed (Foucault, 2001).

In ancient Greece, the approach to mental health began to change with the rise of philosophy and science. Hippocrates, a Greek physician considered the father of medicine, proposed that mental disorders were caused by an imbalance of bodily fluids or humors (blood, mucus, black bile, and yellow bile). This theory shifted the view from supernatural causes to physical and biological causes (Porter, 1999). Although this humors theory is now considered obsolete, Hippocrates' views on the importance of bodily balance in mental health laid the foundation for further developments in medicine.

In ancient Rome, Galen, a physician and philosopher, expanded Hippocrates' theory by adding a psychological element. Galen believed that mental disorders could also be affected by

emotions and life experiences, thus emphasizing the importance of emotional health in addition to physical health (Shorter, 2009).

## 2. Medieval and Renaissance

In Medieval Europe, views on mental disorders were again influenced by religious beliefs. Mental illness was often considered a form of demonic possession or a punishment from God. Treatment was carried out through exorcism and various forms of penance (Scull, 2007). During this period, individuals with mental disorders were often isolated from society and placed in asylums. By the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, more humane approaches began to emerge. Some asylums were established with the aim of caring for and treating patients, although conditions within them were often very poor. In Spain, the Santa Maria della Pietà hospital, founded in 1409, is an example of an institution that began to treat patients better, providing medical care and social support (Walker, 1968).

## 3. Early Modern Times

In the 17th and 18th centuries, new thinking about mental health emerged, influenced by developments in science and philosophy. In Europe, doctors such as Philippe Pinel in France and William Tuke in England began to introduce more humane treatment methods for mentally ill patients. Pinel is known for freeing patients from chains at the Bicêtre and Salpêtrière hospitals in Paris, and developing a moral treatment approach that emphasized humane care, hygiene, and productive activities for patients (Goldstein, 2001). William Tuke, an English Quaker, founded The Retreat in York in 1796, an institution that offered a calm and supportive environment for patients with mental illness. This approach was heavily influenced by Quaker values of spiritual and emotional balance (Digby, 1999).

## 4. The 1800s and Early 1900s

In the 19th century, the understanding of mental health advanced with the emergence of psychiatry as a discipline. In the United States, Dorothea Dix led a major campaign for the reform of mental hospitals, advocating for more humane treatment and the establishment of proper institutions for patients with mental disorders (Gollaher, 1995). Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist, developed the theory of psychoanalysis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Freud believed that mental disorders were caused by unconscious conflicts stemming from childhood experiences. The talk therapy method introduced by Freud became the foundation for many modern psychotherapy approaches (Gay, 1998).

At the same time, the biological approach emerged, seeking to find physical causes of mental disorders. Research in the fields of neurobiology, genetics, and pharmacology began to show that mental disorders could be caused by chemical imbalances in the brain or genetic factors (Valenstein, 2002).

## 5. The 20th Century and the 21st Century

In the 20th century, the treatment of mental disorders continued to evolve with the discovery of various psychotropic drugs such as antidepressants and antipsychotics. This discovery brought about significant changes in how mental disorders were treated, allowing many patients to lead more normal lives outside of healthcare institutions (Healy, 1997).

The deinstitutionalization movement in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the United States and Europe, aimed to reduce the number of patients in mental hospitals and reintegrate them into society. However, this movement also posed new challenges, such as a lack of social support and adequate mental health services for many individuals released from

institutions (Whitaker, 2001). By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a new, more holistic approach to mental health emerged. This approach recognizes the importance of social, economic, and cultural factors in understanding and treating mental disorders. Awareness of the importance of mental health in various aspects of life has increased, with public awareness campaigns, improved access to mental health services, and a reduction in the stigma surrounding mental disorders (Arthur, 1988).

### **Culture and Mental Health**

The importance of culture in understanding and addressing mental disorders cannot be overlooked. Each culture has its own system of values, beliefs, and practices that shape how they understand and respond to mental illness. In Eastern cultures, such as in China and India, practices like acupuncture, yoga, and meditation have long been used to heal mental disorders. Traditional Chinese medicine, for example, is based on the concept of balancing Yin and Yang and the influence of natural elements within the body (Kaptchuk, 1986).

In indigenous cultures in America, Africa, and Australia, traditional practices and rituals are often used as ways to heal mental disorders. Shamans, spiritual intermediaries, and religious leaders act as healers who connect patients with the spiritual world. Healing rituals, ceremonies, and the use of medicinal plants are integral parts of the healing process (Kleinman & Cohen, 1995).

### **The Importance of Unraveling the History of Mental Health**

Unraveling the history of mental health provides numerous benefits. First, it allows us to understand how views and treatments of mental disorders have evolved over time. By studying history, we can see how changes in science, philosophy, and social policies have influenced how we approach mental health (Shorter, 2008).

Second, understanding the history of mental health helps us appreciate the diversity of approaches used by different cultures around the world. Each culture has unique ways of responding to and treating mental disorders, and this knowledge can enrich modern mental health practices (Marsella & White, 2012).

Third, unraveling the history of mental health also helps us identify effective and ineffective practices in dealing with mental disorders. By learning from past experiences, we can avoid the same mistakes and adopt more inclusive and humane approaches (Moodley et al., 2008).

Fourth, understanding the history of mental health helps reduce stigma associated with mental disorders. By realizing that mental disorders have existed throughout history and have been addressed in various ways, we can more readily accept that mental disorders are part of the human condition that need to be understood and addressed with empathetic and scientifically based approaches (Beers, 1917).

### **Historical Approaches in Mental Therapy**

An understanding of mental health history can be a powerful tool in current therapeutic practice. Therapists who understand how views and treatment of mental disorders have evolved over time can provide a more holistic and contextual approach to helping their patients. Here are some ways in which knowledge of mental health history can be applied in therapeutic practice, supplemented with concrete examples:

#### **1. Exploring the Origins of Historical Trauma**

The historical approach enables therapists to understand the roots of historical trauma that their clients may have experienced. Family history, national historical experiences, or even cultural

trauma can impact someone's mental health. By grasping this context, therapists can assist clients in identifying and processing their experiences more effectively. For instance, a client might experience deep-seated anxiety that is hard to explain. After further exploration, the therapist discovers that the client's grandfather was a war veteran who suffered from PTSD. Knowledge of this historical trauma enables the therapist to work with the client in addressing the emotional impacts possibly associated with their family experiences.

## 2. Cultural Context in Therapy

Each culture has a unique perspective on mental health and appropriate healing methods. Understanding the cultural context of clients can help therapists avoid biases and errors in interpreting symptoms and selecting the most effective therapy approach. For example, a therapist who understands the history and culture of a client from an immigrant background may realize that stigma against mental disorders is more significant in their culture. With this knowledge, we can adapt therapy approaches to minimize stigma and enhance client engagement in the healing process.

## 3. Applying a Historical-Based Approach

A historical-based therapy approach acknowledges that an individual's life experiences are influenced by their personal and collective history. Therapists can use clients' stories or narratives about their past as a tool to help them explore and understand conflicts or behavioral patterns that may stem from their historical experiences. For example, someone may use a narrative approach to assist a client experiencing depression in exploring their life story. Through this process, the client realizes that their depressive patterns are related to childhood trauma associated with the separation of their parents. By understanding the client's personal history, therapists can help them address and process these experiences.

### **Alternative Prescription: Mental Health Therapy Utilizing Recreation and History**

In recent years, approaches to mental health therapy have rapidly evolved, encompassing various methods beyond conventional treatment and psychological counseling. One alternative approach that has gained increasing attention is the use of recreation and history as means of mental health therapy. This method involves activities focusing on positive experiences and historical education, which can provide significant psychological and emotional benefits to individuals. Below is a discussion of the two main aspects of this therapy.

#### **1. Recreation as Therapy**

Therapeutic recreation is the use of recreational activities to achieve therapeutic outcomes, such as stress reduction, increased emotional well-being, and improved social skills. Some forms of recreation that are often used in therapy include: Physical activity: Exercise, yoga, and walking in nature can increase the production of endorphins, hormones that function as a natural calm for the brain. Physical activity has also been shown to help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety (Salmon, 2001).

Arts and crafts: Engaging in arts such as painting, writing, or music can help individuals express emotions that are difficult to express through words. This activity can also increase self-confidence and give a sense of achievement (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Games and hobbies: Playing games or pursuing hobbies such as gardening or fishing can help take your mind off stress and allow time for relaxation and self-reflection. Therapeutic recreation aims to create a supportive

environment where individuals can feel happiness and engagement, which in turn improves their mental health (Cheung et al., 2016).

## 2. History as Therapy

Therapeutic approaches using history, or often referred to as “reminiscence therapy,” involve the use of personal or community memory and history to support mental health. This therapy is often used with elderly populations, but can also be beneficial for various age groups. Some key elements of history therapy include: Reminders of the past: Recalling positive memories from the past can help improve mood and provide a strong sense of identity. This activity is often carried out through group discussions, looking at old photos, or listening to music from a certain era (Nile & Van Bergen, 2015). History education: Educating individuals about history, whether it be personal, family, or community history, can provide a broader perspective and a sense of connectedness. This can help individuals feel more connected to the present and have a sense of meaning in their lives (Gibson, 2004).

Personal history projects: Encouraging individuals to create personal history projects, such as writing a memoir or creating a family tree, can provide a sense of accomplishment and connection to their past. Reminiscence therapy can help improve quality of life, provide a sense of community, and reduce feelings of isolation and depression, especially among the elderly (McAdams, 2001).

## 3. Combining Recreation and History in Therapy

Combining recreation and history in mental health therapy can yield synergistic outcomes. For instance, therapy programs involving physical activities related to history, such as walking tours of historical sites or participation in historical reenactments, can provide both physical and emotional benefits while simultaneously educating and connecting individuals with their past. This not only aids in enhancing mental health but also provides a sense of meaning and deeper connection (Kenyon et al., 2010).

Mental health therapy utilizing a historical approach offers a holistic and innovative approach to supporting individual well-being. By integrating enjoyable and educational activities, this approach can help alleviate symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety while enhancing identity and social connectedness. In the right context, these methods can serve as an effective complement to conventional therapy, offering a valuable alternative for those seeking new ways to improve their mental health.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of the history of mental health reveals the evolution from supernatural beliefs in ancient times to the scientific approach of today. In Ancient Egypt and Greece, mental disorders were attributed to evil spirits or imbalances in bodily fluids according to Hippocrates. The Middle Ages reverted to religious beliefs, with exorcism as the primary treatment. However, the Renaissance brought about a more humane approach, although institutional conditions remained poor. The Early Modern Period witnessed significant reform through figures like Philippe Pinel and William Tuke, who introduced humane treatment and emotional support. The 19th and early 20th centuries marked the emergence of psychiatry and Freud's psychoanalytic theory, as well as the biological approach seeking physical causes of mental disorders. The 20th century saw the discovery of psychotropic drugs and the deinstitutionalization movement, enabling patients to lead more normal lives in society. Currently, a holistic approach considering social, economic, and cultural factors is increasingly recognized, with public awareness and stigma reduction efforts. Understanding the history of mental health appreciates the evolution of mental

disorder management, identifies effective practices, and reduces stigma, providing a holistic and empathetic context in modern therapy.

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