
UNIT 1 HEALTH: CONCEPTS, DETERMINANTS AND DIMENSIONS

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the concept of health;
- enlist various determinants of health; and
- discuss the dimensions of health.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit tells about the health in antiquity. Further it also tells about the concept of health. It also offers the critique of the definition of health. Further, it presents the new philosophy of health. Health does not operate in isolation, it has its determinants. This unit tells about the health and its dimensions. Further it also tells about the dimensions of health. It also offers the various activities which are important for the different dimension for keeping the good health.

1.2 GENESIS OF HEALTH

Although concerns with health and disease have been a major pre-occupation of humans since antiquity, the use of the word ‘health’ to describe human ‘well being’ is relatively recent. The word ‘health’ was derived from the old English word ‘health’, which meant a state of being sound, and was generally used to infer a soundness of the body. Prior to the period of the somewhat enigmatic physician known as Hippocrates (c 460-377 BCE, or more appropriately, from around 5 BCE), health was perceived as a divine gift. Hippocrates was credited with pioneering the move away from divine notions of health, and using observation as a basis for acquiring health knowledge. He was credited with encouraging a focus on environmental sanitation, personal hygiene and, in particular, balanced diets – “let food be thy medicine; and let thy medicine be

food”. He theorized that what we currently regard as ‘health’ might be defined as the extent of a delicate balance of four fluids: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Ill health, he believed, resulted from an imbalance of these fluids. Nevertheless, a divine view of health persists to this era. For example, Prophet Mohammed view of health, sickness and death – followed by a high proportion of practicing Muslims – may be inferred from the following verse in the Holy Koran; “The Lord of the worlds; it is He who heals me when I am sick, and He who would cause me to die and live again” (Koran 26: 80).

With only simple technology, our ancestor could do little to improve health. Hunters and gatherers faced frequent food shortages, which sometimes forced mothers to abandon their children. Those lucky enough to survive infancy were still vulnerable to injury and illness, so half dies by the age of twenty and few lived to the age of forty (Nolan and Lenski: 1999). As societies developed, agriculture, food became more plentiful. Yet social inequality also increased, so that the elites enjoyed better health than the peasants and slaves, who lived in crowded, unsanitary shelters and often went hungry. In the growing cities of medieval Europe, human waste and other refuse piled up in the streets, spreading infectious diseases and plagues that periodically wiped out entire towns (Mumford: 1961).

1.3 CONCEPT OF HEALTH

Physicians have traditionally held a rough, commonsensical view of health as the absence of symptoms. Health, therefore becomes a residual category, the uninteresting opposite of disease. A radically different conception of health offered by one physician asserts that health is “compensated illness”. Here the usual assumption is turned inside-out. Instead of positing health as the unusual state of the human being and thinking of all illness as a deviation from some normal condition, this definition assumes that in a sense we are all ill and that our healthiness then represent an achievement in counteracting the incursion of disease. Among the attractive features of such as conception is its recognition of how pervasive illness, particularly chronic illness, is in cotemporary societies and its implication that health is a process of living rather than a static entity.

The concept of health as functional efficacy enables the analyst to invoke considerations of appropriateness, of fitness for specified activities. That is, it begins to answer the question, Health for What? The health of a housewife is presumably quite different in some ways from the health of an actress; what is normally healthy in a twenty-year-old sprinter may be a state of functioning both impossible and undesirable in the middle-aged executive. If normal health consists of the ability to perform adequately in the individual’s then criteria of healthiness still vary as do the styled rights and obligations that form the substance of roles. Health is cherished because of what it enables the person to do, and illness is feared primarily because of its interference with desired behaviours.

The notion that health reflects a dynamic patterns, changing with time and social circumstances, leads to conclusion that judgements of healthiness must be made many times as the life history unfolds. It also pushes the analyst to reiterate that most evaluations of health are relative, based on a series of perceptions and observations, rather than a unitary standard of measurement. Further, health comes in a dynamic framework to be seen as a continuum of functional ability-disability, finely graded, not as a matter of flat, mutually exclusively categories.

1.4 DEFINING HEALTH

Health is a prerequisite of human development and is an essential component for the well being of the mankind. The health problems of the any community are influenced by interplay of various factors including social, economic and political ones. The concept of health has remained exclusive and difficult to define. Some people see health as normal condition of the individual while other view it as opposite to illness, while some consider health as well developed and adequately nourished muscular body capable of doing work and able to withstand physical strain. Thus, health can also be considered as the achievement of social and individual usefulness. The definition of health found in medical writings throughout the ages is broadly utopian. Giddens on health care in the 2nd Century, described health as a “condition of which we neither suffer pain nor are hindered in the function of daily life”, that is when we are “able to take part in government, bath and drink and eat, and do other things we want.” Health is a state in which one is able to work without any difficulty. When work is hampered, then one will be called or designated as sick. Lieban (1977) “Health and diseases are measures of the effectiveness with which human groups combining biological and cultural resource adopt to their environment. Variations in health are connected with the variations in social circumstances and habit patterns”. Leslie (1976) said that there are some universal perceptions of health and disease and at the same time there are also some perceptions unique to a particular society. When discussing health care it is important to realize that what people think as health can vary quite widely.

Health can be defined as the absence of diseases (i.e. negatively), or it can be simply as physical fitness. Another way to define health is in terms of what people are able to do (i.e. functionally), thus health may be seen as ‘optimal functioning’ or the ability to do things. It is customary to distinguish between both negative and positive definitions of health and functional and experimental definitions (Calnan: 1987). The medical view of health – the absence of disease – is clearly negative. By contrast, an example of a positive definition is that offered by the World Health Organization (WHO) (1971) has defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity”. However, comprehensive, this has rarely been practicable. Well-being is defined as a harmonious relationship between an individual or group and the physical, biological and socio-cultural environment, as also feeling of satisfaction that is associated with this. More recently, WHO (2001) has also indicated that health is a “cumulative state, to be promoted throughout life in order to ensure that the full benefits are enjoyed in later years”. Good health is vital for maintaining an acceptable quality of life.

A functional definition implies the ability to participate in normal social roles (Parsons: 1979), and this may be contrasted with an experiential definition which takes sense of self into account (Kelman: 1975). McKenzie (2008), define health as a dynamic state or condition of the human organism that is multidimensional (i.e. physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and occupational) in nature, a resource for living, and results from a person’s interactions with and adaptations to his or her environment. Therefore, it can exist in varying degrees and its specific to each individual and his or her situation. For example, a person can be healthy while dying, or a person who is a quadriplegic can be healthy in the sense that his or her mental and social well-being are high and physical health is as good as

it can be (Hancock and Minkler: 2005). It is widely accepted that health status is determined by the interaction of five domains: gestational endowments (i.e., genetic makeup), social circumstances (e.g., education, employment, income, poverty, housing, crime and social cohesion), environmental conditions where people live and work (i.e., toxic agents, microbial agents, and structural hazards), behavioural choices (e.g., diet, physical activity, substance use and abuse), and the available of quality of care (McGinnis: 2001). The nature and consequences of behavioural choices are affected by social circumstances affect the health care we receive. (McGinnis et al. : 2002).

1.4.1 Critique of Definition of Health

The definition of health given by World Health Organization is also not free from the critical evaluation. The critics argue that this definition is very idealistic and does provide space means not flexible. The critics are also uncomfortable with the word “complete” as they find it is an imaginative idea that one will be completely free from all worries and without any disease or infirmity. It is unlikely that anyone would be healthy throughout his life. It is also argued that a state of complete state of physical, mental and well-being is closer to the happiness than to health (Bircher: 2005). Bircher further argues that words health and happiness shows different life experiences, where the relationships are neither fixed or constant. It implies that if one is not able to distinguish between happiness and health and if happiness is not there, which means health problem. Bircher emphasis is on changing health needs, especially in relation to age, and personal responsibility.

1.4.2 New Philosophy of Health

In contemporary time, the new philosophy of health has surfaced. We are presenting it below: Health is regarded as a fundamental human right. It is regarded as an essence of productive life and minimizing the expenditure on medical care. Health is not in the isolation rather it is inter-sectoral and regarded as essential component of social development. Health is the focal point of quality of life. It is also regarded that health is not only the concern of the individual, but it is also the responsibility of State and international society. The investment in health is investment for society and its development. Health is a worldwide and global phenomenon.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Explain the concept of health.

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2) Define Health.

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3) Discuss the critique of definition of health.

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4) What is the new philosophy of health?

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1.5 DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Health is often viewed as an individual attribute, to be experienced at personal level. It means, here the health becomes the individual responsibility and the role of society's economic, social and political system is undermined in shaping the health of the population. However, the reality is different. The role of biology, beliefs, behaviour pattern, living habits and physical environment do influences the health of the individual and in turn the health of the society. The personal attributes of the individual operate at the family and community levels. Perception of health is culturally determined or shaped by media and marketing. Financial capabilities, purchasing power of healthy food does impact the health of the individual.

Gender bias in feeding or seeking healthcare is another manifestation of prejudiced priorities at the household level. Lack of open space in terms of greenery for playing, walking, and other physical activity, poses the danger for pollution and in turn determines the health at community level. Pathways for accessing healthcare in the neighbourhood, smoke-free-public spaces, green environments and safe pedestrian or cycling lanes or crowded roads are also factors that determine good health at community level (See Figure 1.1).

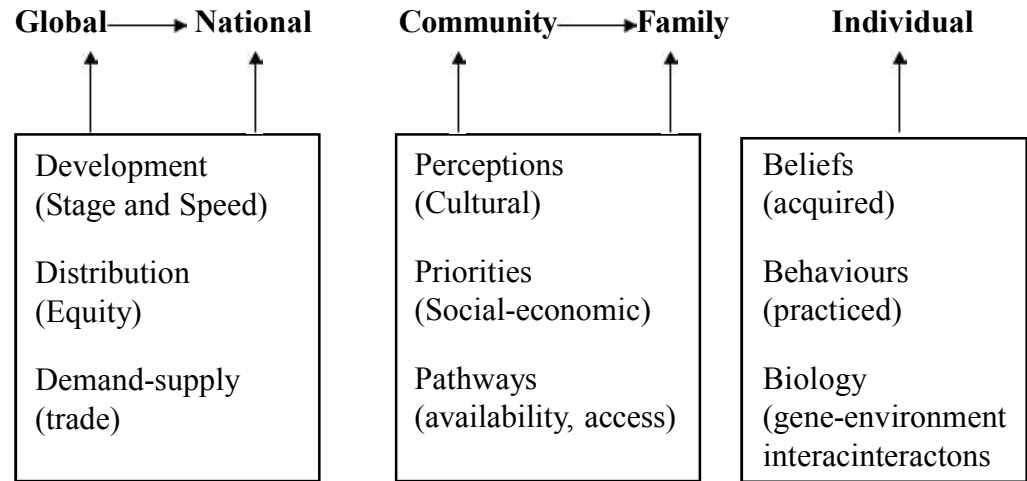


Fig. 1.1: Cascade of Health Determinants

Source: Reddy, K.Srinath (2019), *Make Health in India: Reaching a Billion Plus*, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, p.2.

Further upstream are the determinants that act at the national and global levels. They involve the level of economic development and the rate at which the economy is being governed (Preston:1975). Of greater importance is how the fruits of that development are distributed across different sections of society, since inequality militates against a healthy society (Wilkinson and Pickett: 2009). Such inequality is reflected in many forms of discrimination, as society is stratified by income, gender, age, religion, caste, ethnicity, and social status, but inevitably leads to poor health outcomes, whatever the form.

At the global level, transnational trade and transport act as vectors of disease-causing agents like tobacco, and unhealthy foods and beverages, apart from pathogenic microbes (Kickbusch, Allen and Franz: 2016). Trade also influences access to medicines, health technologies and availability of nutritious foods.

There are six key elements of the health system, mainly from the perspective of a health ministry's mandate of designing, delivering and evaluating health services. These are: infrastructure of healthcare facilities; the health workforce needed; availability of essential drugs and technologies; level and use of health financing; health information systems; and overall governance of the health services. Community health focuses on people and their role as determinants of their own and other people's health in contrast to environment health which focuses on the physical environment and its impact on people's health. There are certain drivers of health in society which are delivered through health policy of the country. Social determinants are important for the health policy. At the societal level, water, sanitation, food system, physical environment, social stability and economic development determines the health status of the population. Those that operate at the individual level, although shaped by social forces, include income, education, occupation, social status, gender and participation in social networks (See Figure 1.2)

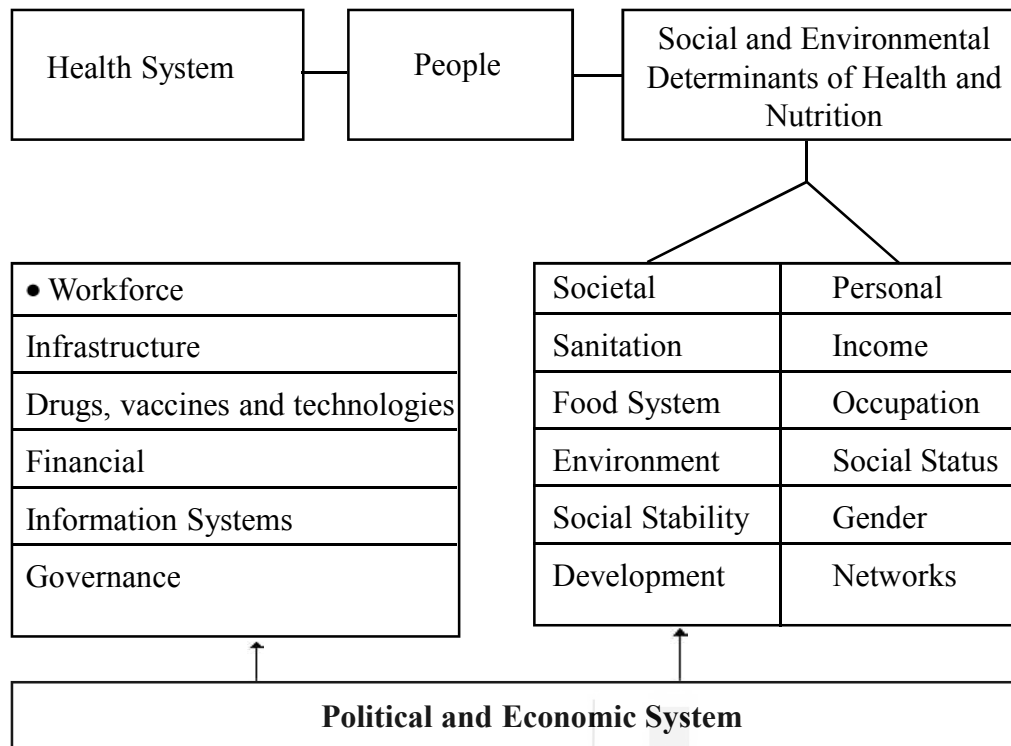


Fig. 1.2: Drivers of Health in a Society

Source: Reddy, K.Srinath (2019), *Make Health in India: Reaching a Billion Plus*, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, p.4

Economic development and personal incomes exemplify the profound impact social determinism on health. The economic development of a country has a double relationship with the health of the population, with a prospering economy improving the health indicators and better health of the people, accelerating economic growth through increased productivity. Poor more likely to become sick and less likely to access or afford healthcare, while ill health pushes persons into poverty because of lost of wages and high cost of healthcare (Jamison, Summers, Aleyne et al.: 2013).

Equity becomes a very important factor when we examine the nature of economic growth or social determinants influence the health of a population. The countries with low levels of per capital Gross Domestic Product (GDP) experience a sharp rise in life expectancy when that value rises, tail an inflection point where that effect plateaus (Preston: 1975). At the same level of per capita, GDP, countries with higher income inequality have lower life expectancy and worse health indicators than countries with lower levels of income inequality within their population.

Inequality in social determinants like education, nutrition, access to safe water, sanitation and clean energy affects the health of the individuals even if health services are free available to them. An undernourished child of uneducated parents from a poor family cannot row as healthy as a child who is the well-nourished offspring of affluent and literate parents. Unfortunately, this effect can go to several generations. If pregnant is malnourished, not only will the female foetus in her womb be undernourished, but the ova of that baby, too, will experience epigenetic changes in gene expression that will manifest when that baby rows up to bear children. Both the child yet to be born and the child yet to be conceived

become the victims of an intergenerational transmission of the effects of inequity (Reddy: 2016).

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Define Food Safety. Mention the social determinants of health.

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- 2) How social inequality affects health?

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- 3) How drivers of health work in a society?

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1.6 DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH

The good health or healthy life is composed of five dimensions and these dimensions are: physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual. With the passage of time many more dimensions have been added in understanding the composite nature of health. The additional dimensions are emotional, vocational, intellectual and political.

Physical Dimension

The physical dimension of the health is directly related with the perfect functioning of the body. It is related with the functioning of the body cells and organs at the optimum level. However, there is a ambiguity at the level of defining the optimum level of functioning. Some people view physical health in terms of colour of the skin, height and body weight and other physical features.

The conception of health is reflected in the form of fair colour, bright eyes, long, black and silky hair, not to fat, a good appetite, sound sleep, capacity to do hard work and no tiredness even after doing hard work. The health is also viewed in

terms of well functioning of the different organs of the body and proper working of sense organs. Physical dimension of health also includes the normal pulse rate, required level of blood pressure according to age and sex of individual. Thus, we conclude that physical health refers to the state of the body, its composition, development, functions and maintenance of its vital organs. Since health is related with the functioning and maintenance of the body organs therefore, it is necessary to keep oneself healthy by doing physical exercises, eating nutritious food to keep the body and mind energized.

Mental Dimension

Mental health is not mere absence of mental illness. Good mental health is the ability to respond to the many varied experiences of life with flexibility and a sense of purpose. More recently, mental health has been defined as a state of balance between oneself and others, a coexistence between the realities of the self and that of other people and of the environment. A few short decades ago, the mind and body were considered independent entities. Recently, however, researchers have discovered that psychological factors can induce all kinds of illness, not simply mental ones. They include conditions such as essential hypertension, peptic ulcer and bronchial asthma. Some major illnesses such as depression and schizophrenia have a biological component. The underlying inference is that there is behavioural, psychological or biological dysfunction and that the disturbance in the mental equilibrium is not merely in the relationship between the individual and society. Although mental health is an essential component of health, the scientific foundations of mental health are not yet clear. Therefore, we do not have precise tools to assess the state of mental health unlike physical health. Psychologists have mentioned the following characteristics as attributes of a merely healthy person. A mentally healthy person is free from internal conflicts; he is not at “war” with himself; He is well adjusted, i.e. he is able to get along well with others. He accepts criticism and is not easily upset. He searches for identity; He has a strong sense of self-esteem; He knows his needs, problems and goals (this is known as self actualization); He has good self-control- balance rationality and emotionally; He faces problems and tries to solve them intelligently i.e. coping with stress and anxiety.

Social Dimension of Health

Man is a social animal. He is surrounded by network of social relationships. These relationships are reciprocal and satisfy various needs in the society. Various ideas and interactions take places and therefore, we also share our emotions. There are diverse cultures in the society and these cultures are regulated by various forms of norms and practices. Although, these cultures are different by they are shared and by community people and cultural diffusion also takes place. The normal individual is a part of all these function and he is capable of sharing the traits of culture and maintains the harmony. This sharing process builds the positive image and enhances the interpersonal communicational skills. This is utmost necessary to be involved in the community as well as in the society at large. The more the personal is involved in the process of integration, more he is regarded as the healthy person. Thus, the social dimension of the health includes the level of social skills, social functioning of the individual and one’s ability to see one self as a member of whole society. Overall the social dimension of health is primary related with individual as a family member, he is part of society and above all he is member of larger group. It also focuses on social and economic

conditions and well-being of the society which is ultimately related with the network of social relationships. There is a importance of positive human environment and positive material environment which in turn related with the social network and financial and material conditions of the individual.

Spiritual Dimension

Besides being a social being spiritualism is also necessary part of healthy life. Spiritual life makes you to turn to you goals in the life and to achieve these goals one strives for them. A spiritual person sets his own meanings, personal beliefs, his own acceptance or rejection of the creation. Spiritualism is related with one's inner self, therefore, there are no objective meanings attached to it. There are no universal laws which define the meaning to attain the goals, rather it is one's own understanding of existence and creation. To get released from these complexity one needs to have spiritualism which in turn affect the health. The thought of spiritualism directs the mind to think or reaches out for the constructive meaning of the life. Without considering the meaning of life one is worthless. The worth in the life ultimately transcends into good physical well-being and healthy life. This is not a old philosophy of health, rather it has emerged in the contemporary time looking to the complexity in the life. In sum, spiritualism includes integrity, principles, ethics and the purpose in life. It also includes commitment to some higher being.

Emotional Dimension

Emotional dimension of health is the domain under psychology. Since human being is not only a social being but at the same time he is also a emotional being. Therefore, emotional elements are indispensable from a healthy human being. Emotional well-being is the ability in the human being to adjust and cope with our own and others feelings. Emotions are present in all human beings in different periods of time, in different situations. At various times emotions are visible, but at times in the situation of hopelessness, depression, anxiety etc. they are not easily and therefore, can lead to the mental illness and ultimately affect the health. Therefore, one should be aware of one's weaknesses and strength which can be helpful in the coping situation of emotional disturbing situations. It will caution before hand and one can seek help so that situation can be altered. Further, it can be altered by building strong cushion of relationships with the family, peer groups and community. Emotional health is related to ones feeling whereas mental health can be seen as "knowing" or "cognition". Thus, in the present time, the mental and emotional aspects of human being should be viewed separately particularly in the context of human health.

Vocational Dimension

Vocational dimension is related with the work one does. Every human being who has come in the world is supposed to do some or other type of work for human existence. It may vary from person to person, but should be adaptable according to human capacity. Work also depends on ones capacity and limitations to perform. The performance of work is directly elated with the physical and mental health of the individual. Physical work is related with one's capacity to perform work, while its goal is associated with self realization of satisfaction and enhanced self-esteem. Its actual potential is realized only when the person is without work or he is out of work or may be retired. This situation immediately

affects his health. As people think that vocational dimension is related with the economic aspects or it is values in the form of source of incomes, but it represents the persons' ability in the form of success to prove his worth in the society and does not become burden on others.

Intellectual Dimension

Intellectual dimension is related with one's ability to develop skills and knowledge to make life more meaningful. Intellectual capacity gives ability to think rationality and in turn it translates into the idea of creativity and insight in decision making. Intellectual leanings gives ability to plan the things in such a manner that will go long way and will make life successful. The mind is able to think with openness and act accordingly. It will not be influenced by any subjectivity or other external pressure to influence your decision. Additionally, positive intellectual thinking will automatically contribute to the good health. It is also helpful in the conflicting situation for arriving at the rational arguments.

A few other dimensions are also important while discussing the health. These are: philosophical, cultural, socio-economic, environmental, educational, nutritional, curative and preventive. A glance on these dimensions shows that there are many non-medical dimensions of health which are equally important for the purpose of health.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) Mention the various dimensions of health?

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- 2) What are the social dimensions of health?

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- 3) Mention the importance of mental dimension in health.

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

Health is not a new phenomenon. The concept of health is a dynamic concept and therefore, its conception also gets changed. Earlier the health was viewed only in terms of biomedical approach. Over a passage of time many more dimensions have been added in defining the health. Social and preventive concept of health has expanded its boundaries to the community and environmental conditions. Health is defined as a complete fitness and away from disease. However this definition has been challenged by the critics and they view that complete health is a utopian concept and away from the reality. Health is a larger whole and is an aggregate of several dimensions like, physical, mental, social, cultural, emotional, spiritual, and vocational. It requires a harmonious balance of all these dimensions or in a way perfect is a balance of mind, body and spirit. Ideally, it is difficult to achieve, but efforts are needed to maximize it. In the contemporary society, the life has become so complex that one requires mental and emotional peace to counter the ill effects of complexities. Thus, to conclude we can say that health is a holistic concept and it requires a balance of all other aspects for reaming healthy.

1.8 KEY WORDS

Health: Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.

Community Health: Community health focuses on people and their role as determinants of their own and other people's health in contrast to environment health which focuses on the physical environment and its impact n people's health.

Social Well-being: Well-being is defined as a harmonious relationship between an individual or group and the physical, biological and socio-cultural environment, as also feeling of satisfaction that is associated with this.

Mental Health: Mental health is a state of balance between oneself and others, coexistence between the realities of the self and that of other people and of the environment

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