

Can Psychology Replace Psychiatry in Treatment of Mental Health Problems

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Abstract: There is strong opposition to Psychiatry in treatment of Mental Health problems on the grounds that it is coercive, inhumane and does not work and does more harm than good. There is considerable effort on part of Psychologists to treat Mental Health problems with substantial degree of success. There is need to explore if Psychology can replace Psychiatry in treatment of mental health problems, either significantly, substantially or completely.

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I. Introduction

There are various mental health problems that plague humanity.

It is estimated that as we speak in around 2020s, almost 1 in 8 person in world experiences a mental health problem or almost 10% of people of world have mental health problem Depression is the most common of them and is faced by almost 3-4% of people of the world are facing depression at any point in time. Bipolar disorder is faced by more than 0.5% of population. Schizophrenia is faced by almost 0.25% of world's population. Almost 1% of people of the world have OCD - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

So mental health problems are very significant portion of the health problems of the world and yet there is very little discussion on mental health problems, causes of mental health problems and reasons for increase in mental health problems.

There is also very little discussion in the mainstream on the effectiveness of mental health treatment regimens. The main mode of treatment consists of Psychiatry. There is very little discussion on effectiveness and efficiency of Psychiatry.

Now the method of psychiatry consists of few methods of treatment - Chemico-Pharmacological, as in drugs, Electroconvulsive treatment as in shocks and finally Institutionalization which means being confined to a mental hospital.

There is strong opposition to Psychiatry as a mode of treatment for mental health problems since at least past 70 years and before. This opposition has been marginalized however is present. But more important, than opposition to Psychiatry is the possibility of Psychology of Cognitive - Behavioral approach to treatment of mental health problems getting adequate and appreciable success.

Anti - Psychiatry - Opposition to Psychiatry

There is a strong opposition to psychiatry as a mode of treating mental health problems. The argument is that psychiatric treatment does more harm than good. That mental health problems are not actually mental health problems at all. Some question the unequal power relationship between doctor and patient in treatment of mental health problems. Others question the potential harm in electroconvulsive treatment through shock therapy. Compulsory and involuntary and mandatory confinement to a mental health institution that resembles and is no different from incarceration of criminals also demands ethical and moral scrutiny and examination.

In the 1960s there was a challenge to Psychiatry as a form of treatment and it was considered repressive and controlling. Psychiatrists involved with this movement were Thomas Szasz, Timothy Leary, Giorgio Antonucci, R D Liang, Franco Basaglia, Theodore Lidz and David Cooper. Others involved were Michel Foucault and Ervin Goffman. Cooper used the term anti psychiatry in 1967 and wrote the book 'Psychiatry and Anti Psychiatry' in 1971. Thomas Szasz introduced questioned the myth of mental illness in his book in 1961, 'The Myth of Mental Illness'. Giorgio Antonucci introduced Psychiatry as a Prejudice in his book 'I pregiudiziali e la conoscenza critica della psichiatria' in 1986.

The anti psychiatry movement was also driven by those who had adverse experience with psychiatric treatment. This includes those who felt they had been harmed by other approaches including those compulsorily confined to mental institutions or subjected to cruel procedures such as electroconvulsive shock therapy or made to take medications that had severe side effects with little benefit in long run.

Anti Psychiatry also continued to challenge bio medical focus of psychiatry including chemical drugs. There were questions on linkage between psychiatry and pharmaceutical companies who were having increased and unjustified influence on psychiatric research and practice. There was also opposition to codification of mental health problems into manuals such as Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders by American Psychiatric Association or APA.

Psychiatrists even question the mode of diagnosis of psychiatric illness as them being product of subjective opinion rather than objective method of analysis. Psychiatrists have also questioned how psychology, society and individuals interact to cause problems and the role of family in both resolving mental health problems and creating them in first place.

Psychiatrists have also begun the question the mental disorders as are classified by Psychiatrists. Some argue that these are created and indeed invented by Psychiatrists and disorders that did not exist few years ago begin to be invented as medical conditions requiring pharmacological treatment. Case in point being Internet Addiction.

Experiments were even conducted of sending healthy people to Psychiatric Hospitals. When earlier warned that healthy patients may be sent, the hospitals discharged healthy patients within few days. However when hospitals were not given prior warnings then some of the patients were presumed to be actors. Thus it is argued that psychiatrists cannot diagnose between healthy people and unhealthy people and the diagnosis of mental health problems is flawed upon which is based dangerous and long medications, with unproven benefits.

The influence of pharmaceutical companies is another big issue in anti psychiatry movement. There are many links from within and outside of psychiatry who have argued that there are many financial and professional links between pharmaceutical companies, psychiatrists and regulators. Drug companies fund psychiatric research, advertise in psychiatric journals and fund psychiatric organisations and lobby with politicians and many psychiatrists are share holders of pharmaceutical companies.

Many in Psychiatry see human right violation and use of state power to violate human right to freedom and liberty in which individuals are confined by state to involuntary and immoral incarceration against their wishes on the grounds of medical treatment. Psychiatry is legal method of violation of human rights enshrined within constitution.

Electroconvulsive therapy is particularly controversial. Apart from the lack of benefit the very pain and trauma of electric shock given to healthy awake individual very closely resembles torture in prisons or concentration camps of armies.

Some people have dismissed Psychiatry as a failed pseudoscience and point out to the increased prevalence of mental health illness. Other doctors contend that the failure in psychiatry is as high as failure in treatment of other physical conditions.

All in all psychiatry is not a benign science with marvellous record of success such as has met some areas of other medical interventions such as eradication of leprosy or greater cure rates in cancer, or successful treatment of tuberculosis or adequate control of diabetes or almost successful cataract operations.

The record of psychiatry leaves much to be desired and the continued questioning of efficacy of psychiatry in treatment of mental health problems causes concern and induces one to explore other avenues of treatment of mental health problems.

Can Psychology Treat Mental Health Problems

There is considerable evidence that psychology can treat mental health problems. Psychology involves better understanding person and talking to a professional about your problems such as:

1. better understand thinking and behaviour
2. understand and resolve your problems.
3. recognize symptoms
4. reduce symptoms
5. change behaviour
6. improve quality of life

Evidence shows that psychology works well for mental, behavioral issues.

Psychology is useful treatment of

1. Depression
2. Bipolar Disorder
3. Schizophrenia
4. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
5. Personality Disorders

Psychology can treat Schizophrenia through following approaches:

1. cognitive behavioural therapy
2. family therapy

3. art therapy

Cognitive Behavioral therapy helps one to identify thoughts that cause unwanted behaviour and feelings. One may be taught to identify delusional thinking and taught how to stop acting on these thoughts. One may require CBT therapy over months.

Family Therapy trains the family of people with Schizophrenia and coaches them on how to help Schizophrenia patients.

Art Therapy are used to promote creative expression. Working with an art therapist helps can allow one to express oneself. Art therapy can reduce symptoms of schizophrenia.

Psychological Treatment is also useful for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder(Ocd)

Psychological treatment for OCD involves Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Exposure and Response Prevention(ERP).

Working to separate thoughts, emotions and actions.

Encouraging people to face fears and obsessive thoughts without neutralising behavior - start with easier thoughts then with more complex thoughts.

People with mild OCD requires few hours of treatment and those with severe OCD require long treatment to work through their OCD.

Some people find psychological treatment to be useful along with medicines to treat Bipolar disorder.

This includes

- a. Psychoeducation : to inform people about depression or bipolar disorder.
- b. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: This is most useful for treating depression.
- c. Family Therapy : This is useful in focusing on family relationships in treating depression.

Clearly Psychology has a great role in treatment of Mental Health problems. Of course, most psychologists agree that Psychiatry has to accompany Psychological Treatment, but it is almost universally agreed that psychology can reduce the amount of medication required to treat psychiatric problems.

Number of Psychiatrists in Various Countries

While number of doctors per 100,000 population varies between countries, the variation is not that acute and the variation in number of medical doctors for physical problems even between most developed nations and most underdeveloped nations varies by factor of 2 to 4.

However number of psychiatrists between nations varies a lot.

For instance the table below gives the number of Psychiatrists in various nations per 100,000 population.

Nation	Psychiatrists per 100,000 population
Monaco	41
Norway	30
Belgium	20
United Kingdom	14
France	14
Greece	14
United States	12
Russia	11
Italy	11
Australia	9
Spain	8
Brazil	4
Turkey	1
India	0.3
Source : WHO	

Clearly number of Psychiatrists even in developed countries vary by factor of 5 and between underdeveloped country like India to developed country like Norway can vary by factor of 100. One wants to question why is it that some nations require so many psychiatrists whereas other nations require so few psychiatrists.

May be family and friends in some nations make psychiatrists unnecessary, whereas in other nations family and friends or rather the lack of it, make psychiatrists mandatory.

Hence a greater role for psychology in treating mental health problems.

Increasing number of Psychologists and Decreasing number of Psychiatrists

In United States there are almost 30,000 Psychiatrists and 100,000 Psychologists. The number of Psychiatrists per 100,000 population declined by almost 10% between 2002 to 2012. The number of psychologists is increasing at rate of 5% per decade.

Already the ratio of Psychologists to Psychiatrists in USA is 3 : 1. This ratio of Psychologists to Psychiatrists will soon become 5 : 1 and even approach 10 : 1 over decades.

Clearly the role of Psychology in treating mental health problems is increasing even as role of Psychiatry in treating mental health problems is decreasing.

This clearly proves an increasing disillusionment with Psychiatry and increasing recourse to Psychology in treatment of mental health problems.

While Psychiatry is found to be coercive and harmful, Psychology is being found to be gentle and helpful. It is little wonder that Psychology is supplementing and complementing Psychiatry in treatment of mental health problems.

II. Conclusion

Psychiatry cannot be replaced but reduced by Psychology

Despite strong opposition to Psychiatry, the medical discipline has survived for almost a century. However there is increasing disillusionment with regards to Psychiatry in its ability to not only provide permanent cure for mental health conditions but even to reduce the symptoms of mental health conditions satisfactorily.

Also the effectiveness of Psychology in treatment of Mental health Problems is encouraging and there is increased reliance on hybrid treatment consisting of Psychiatry and Psychology for treatment of mental health conditions.

There is no doubt that Psychology will significantly displace Psychiatry in treatment of Mental Health Problems. However Psychology may not be able to replace Psychiatry in treatment of mental health problems. But even if Psychology is able to reduce dependence on Psychiatry by as much as 80% the battle against mental health problems will be solved.

Finally family and friends have a lot to contribute in mitigation and minimisation of mental health problems. Perhaps Family and Friends can replace or at least displace psychiatrists and psychologists.

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