

PROMOTION OF
MENTAL WELL-BEING



World Health
Organization

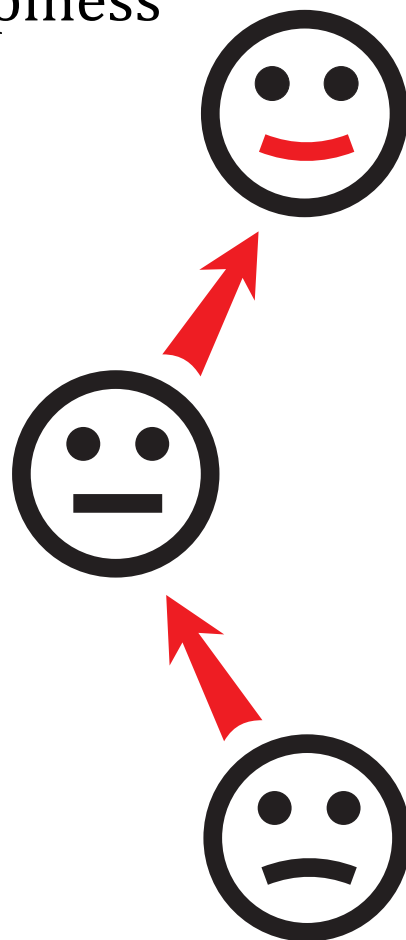
Regional Office for South-East Asia



pursuit of happiness

Promotion of Mental Well-being

Pursuit of Happiness



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Preface



The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a 'state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. In addition, WHO qualifies mental well-being as 'a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

WHO's definition of health clearly emphasizes well-being; however, the mental well-being component of the definition has not been operationalized widely as a public health strategy. To address this, the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia has taken the initiative to develop programmes to promote mental well-being as summarized in this document.

Mental well-being should be interpreted in the sociocultural context of individuals, families and communities. It should be considered as a continuum or spectrum, rather than a state that is either present or absent. Clearly, multiple sectors of government and civil society must work together if we wish to assure the mental well-being of our society.

In programmes on promotion of mental well-being, the concept of 'primordial prevention' should be used; that is, preventing the penetration of risk factors into populations. For example, if we implement a programme on stress management, it implies that stress has already occurred, and may lead to mental illness. Through primordial prevention, we wish to prevent stress from occurring in the first place and enable people to be happy and content in their daily lives.

Although the promotion of mental well-being seems to focus on the individual, it should be noted that an individual's well-being contributes to family well-being which, in turn, influences community well-being. The reverse is also true – community and family well-being translate to individual well-being. Evidence from the WHO South-East Asia Region suggests that such public health approaches to promoting the well-being of populations can be implemented through practical community-based programmes, with community participation.

This publication, it is hoped, will be found useful by those interested in promoting the mental well-being of people in the South-East Asia Region.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samlee Plianbangchang".

Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director



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