



PODCAST 5

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND MENTAL HEALTH IN IRELAND



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In today's episode we will dive into the topic of Mental Health and how it is connected to social solidarity in Ireland.

Let's start with Mental Health. We are hearing the words Mental Health more and more as the significance of it increases in today's world. Many people give Mental Health a negative connotation and associate it with Mental Health Disorders such as Anxiety and Depression.

Mental Health is not all about fighting personal battles and being diagnosed with disorders. It refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences how people think, feel, and act, as well as how they handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Key aspects of mental health include:

Emotional well-being which focuses on the ability to manage and express a wide range of emotions, cope with challenges, and bounce back from setbacks.

Focusing on our Psychological well-being and the capacity to think clearly, make decisions, and understand yourself. It also involves having a sense of purpose, identity, and self-worth.



Good mental health helps people cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities. It's a dynamic state, which can fluctuate depending on factors such as life experiences, relationships, physical health, and external circumstances.

Mental health issues or disorders occur when a person's mental well-being is negatively affected by factors like trauma, stress, genetics, or substance abuse. Common mental health challenges include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, but everyone's experience with mental health is unique.

Why is maintaining good Mental Health important?

Good mental health supports overall well-being and helps individuals lead fulfilling, productive lives. It also plays a critical role in physical health where mental and physical health are closely connected. For example, chronic stress or untreated mental health disorders can lead to physical health problems such as heart disease or weakened immune systems.

Taking care of mental health through self-care, social support, therapy, and healthy lifestyle habits is key to maintaining overall well-being.

The connection between social solidarity and mental health in Irish communities reflects both the cultural and social dynamics of Irish society.



Social solidarity refers to the sense of unity, mutual support, and collective responsibility within a community. It plays a crucial role in mental health, influencing individual well-being, coping strategies, and the resilience of the community as a whole.

The connection between mental health and social solidarity in Ireland is deeply rooted in the country's cultural values, social structures, and community-based support systems. Social solidarity refers to the sense of unity, mutual responsibility, and collective support within a community, and it plays a significant role in promoting and maintaining mental health. In Ireland, this connection is especially strong due to the country's traditional values of family, community, and shared cultural experiences.

How does Ireland help people maintain good mental health?

In recent years, the government has placed a stronger emphasis on mental health care that is accessible, inclusive, and community-focused. Ireland has taken significant steps to improve mental health care with mental health policy and services becoming a priority area. The government's strategic framework, *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone (2020)*, aims to improve mental health services, ensuring that mental health is treated as a whole-community issue.

The *Sharing the Vision* mental health policy advocates for mental health care that involves family, community, and public services working together to support individuals. This approach reflects the belief that mental health is a collective responsibility, where individuals, communities, and institutions all play a role in promoting well-being.



The Mental Health Act of 2001 established guidelines for involuntary treatment, but there have been calls for reforms in areas such as patient rights, access to services, and the implementation of community-based mental health care. Recent policies focus on mental health recovery, community care, and integrating mental health into general healthcare settings.

The move toward community-based care has been central to improving mental health services. This model encourages support systems outside of institutional settings, offering services in community centers, through primary care, and local organizations. Mental Health Ireland and other NGOs provide vital services like helplines, peer support, and information on mental health challenges.

Additionally, Counseling and Psychotherapy services, psychiatric care, and mental health awareness programs are becoming more widely available in communities across the country.

One of the most important shifts in Ireland over the last decade has been the increasing focus on mental health education. Public campaigns like Let's Talk About Mental Health and Jigsaw - a national organization dedicated to supporting young people's mental health aim to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and encourage people to seek help when they need it. As a result, the stigma surrounding mental health has decreased significantly in Ireland, although challenges remain.

Irish society has historically been built on close-knit communities where family and neighbours provide strong social support. This sense of solidarity can have a direct positive impact on mental health. People are often more likely to seek help from those around them, whether it's emotional support during a difficult time or practical assistance when facing a mental health challenge. Having a strong support system can reduce feelings of isolation and stress, which are common factors contributing to mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

Family is a cornerstone of Irish social life, often providing a solid foundation for mental well-being. Extended family structures mean that individuals often have access to multiple sources of emotional and social support. When someone is facing a mental health challenge, the family may step in to offer care, encouragement, and even financial support, which can alleviate the burden of illness. This familial solidarity plays a critical role in helping individuals cope with mental health struggles, especially in situations where formal mental health services may be less accessible.

Does Mental Health come with stigma?

Traditionally, mental health issues in Ireland have been stigmatised, particularly in rural or more conservative communities. However, in recent years, there has been a significant shift in public attitudes, with a growing sense of solidarity around mental health awareness. Campaigns like Let's Talk Mental Health have encouraged open dialogue, reduced stigma, and promoted collective responsibility for mental well-being.



Irish culture has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on solidarity, particularly in terms of community participation and support in times of need. The extended family network, often involving close relationships between multiple generations, encourages a shared sense of responsibility. In times of difficulty, these cultural norms offer a social safety net, which can contribute to better mental health outcomes by promoting social engagement, reducing isolation, and encouraging collective coping.

You might wonder what social solidarity has in common with Mental Health?

In Ireland, social solidarity and mental health are intrinsically linked. Strong social bonds, family ties, community participation, and evolving cultural attitudes towards mental health all contribute to fostering resilience and reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Communities with strong social solidarity tend to have more effective networks of support, which help individuals cope with mental health challenges. However, as social structures change, maintaining these bonds becomes increasingly important, especially in urban areas where isolation can lead to mental health concerns. Public policy and community-based interventions that prioritise social solidarity are vital in promoting mental health at a societal level.

Social solidarity, in this context, also involves collective action, such as mental health advocacy, which promotes understanding and access to services. These initiatives reflect the broader role of society in promoting positive mental health, not just through individual relationships but also through public policies and national conversations.



The sense of belonging within a community can be a powerful buffer against mental health problems. In Ireland, community-based activities such as local festivals, religious gatherings, and sports clubs create opportunities for social interaction and solidarity. These shared experiences foster social cohesion, which is important for mental health. Having a sense of purpose and being involved in a community reduces the feeling of isolation, which is often linked to mental health challenges.

Additionally, volunteering and mutual support groups in Irish communities are expressions of solidarity that can enhance mental well-being by giving individuals a sense of contribution and connection.

In larger cities, where people may be more transient and less connected to family or local communities, individuals may face challenges related to loneliness, anxiety, or depression. In this sense, the loss of social solidarity can have detrimental effects on mental health, as the lack of connection and support can exacerbate feelings of helplessness or despair.

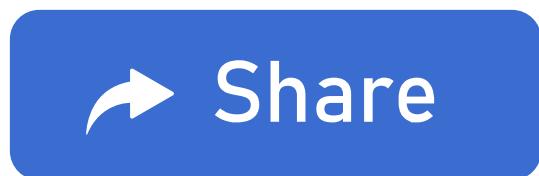
Economic inequality and poverty can have a profound impact on mental health. In Ireland, social solidarity is often expressed through support systems that provide financial assistance, healthcare, and other resources to those in need. Addressing social inequalities and providing social safety nets help to alleviate stress and anxiety, improving mental health outcomes for individuals facing financial challenges. By promoting economic solidarity, communities work to reduce the disparities that can contribute to mental health problems.



In summary, the connection between social solidarity and mental health in Irish communities is integral. Strong, supportive relationships and a collective sense of responsibility can act as protective factors against mental health issues, fostering resilience and well-being. However, the erosion of these social bonds in certain areas, along with the rise of social isolation, poses a risk to mental health, especially in urbanised spaces.

Thus, both informal social networks and formal mental health services that build on the cultural value of solidarity are essential to supporting mental health in Irish communities.

We hope you enjoyed this episode. If you would like to carry on exploring social solidarity, please like and subscribe! Let's look after ourselves and take time to relax.



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