# Chapter 1

**The Context of Mental Health Social Work Practice in Canada**

## Learning Objectives

* To outline the nature of mental health and mental illness in Canada.
* To outline the role of social work in mental health.
* To discuss ethical guidelines for social work practice in mental health.
* To outline the recovery model for mental health practice.
* To consider the application of evidence-based practice to mental health social work.
* To consider possible impacts of mental health practice on social workers.

# Lecture Outline

## Introduction

* Two definitions of mental health provided:

1. CASW
2. WHO

## The Role of Social Work in Mental Health

* The three areas of focus for social work practice in mental health, according to CASW:

1. Prevention
2. Treatment
3. Rehabilitation

* Specific aspects of social work practice in mental health:

1. Direct services
2. Case management
3. Community development
4. Supervision and consultation
5. Program management/administration
6. Teaching
7. Program, policy, and resource development
8. Research and evaluation
9. Social action

**An Ethical Framework for Social Work in Mental Health**

* Social work practice in Canada must be conducted in accordance with the Canadian Association of Social Workers’ *Code of Ethics*. There are six core areas:

1. Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons
2. Pursuit of social justice
3. Service to humanity
4. Integrity in professional practice
5. Confidentiality
6. Competence in professional practice

### A Recovery Model for Mental Health and Social Work Values

* The shift in the vision and model of mental health practice:
* From chronicity to recovery
* Working in partnership with clients and families
* Three core principles:
  1. Hope
  2. Dignity
  3. Inclusion
* Six tenets of recovery-oriented practice:
  1. Creating a culture and language of hope
  2. Recovery is personal
  3. Recovery occurs in the context of one’s life
  4. Responding to diverse needs
  5. Working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis
  6. Transforming services and systems

## Psychiatric Medications and Social Work Practice

* The role of the social worker regarding psychiatric medications
  + Explore with clients and their families the meanings they ascribe to medications
  + Ensure that clients and families have access to information about medications
  + Assist clients in making informed decisions about their own treatment and recovery plan
  + Assist clients and families to advocate for themselves with respect to questions or concerns around medications

## Evidence-Based Social Work: An Ethical Responsibility?

* Benefits and critiques of evidence-based practice
* Three assertions of evidence-based practice:
  1. Intervention decisions should be based on empirical research
  2. Critical assessment of empirically supported interventions must be conducted to determine their fit to and appropriateness for the practice situation at hand
  3. Interventions should be subject to regular monitoring and the course of treatment revised based on outcome evaluation
* Steps in evidence-based decision-making:
  1. Evaluate the problem to be addressed and formulate answerable questions
  2. Gather and critically evaluate the evidence available
  3. Decide which intervention strategy is the best approach
  4. Monitor and evaluate the outcome of the intervention
* When deciding which intervention to implement, consider
* Client wishes
* Practitioner expertise
* Agency mandate and constraints
* The broader ecological context

## Multiple Levels of Influence: A Social Work Perspective in Mental Health Practice

* Social workers
* Assist others in understanding the social and community context in which mental illness occurs
* Assist families to deal with grief and loss, manage change, and support affected family members
* Facilitate the processes of making choices, dealing with adversity, and recovering from illness
* Participate in the modification and development of programs, service systems, and policies
* Address biological factors; individual cognitive and psychodynamic factors; family system issues; racial, cultural, religious, and community considerations; and the socio-political and legislative environment

## Impacts of Mental Health Practice on Social Workers: Rewards, Challenges, and Mitigation

* The nature of the work can lead to situations that are difficult and even threatening to the safety of the social worker
* Social workers may experience acute stress, posttraumatic stress, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma
* Addressing stress and trauma in social workers is a shared responsibility between
  + Social workers themselves
  + The schools that educate them
  + The organizations that employ them

# Ideas for the Classroom

1. Have students consider the difference between mental health and mental illness. As a large group, assess how the definitions can vary and how they can have an impact on the way we identify and discuss all aspects of care in mental health.
2. In small groups, have students choose and discuss one of the statistics in the introductory section of the text, such as the percentage of students experiencing depression and anxiety. Have them consider the following questions: Are these statistics what you expected them to be? Did you expect that they would be higher or lower? Why?
3. Have students create a list of social work roles in mental health, individually or in small groups, and then compare lists in the large group. How do they compare to the OASW roles? How do the historical roles of social work still apply today?
4. Divide students into groups of two or three. Have one person be the social worker and another the individual with mental illness. The third person can be the observer and recorder if in groups of three.

Imagine that this is a first meeting between the social worker and the client. Take a few minutes to get to know each other. The social worker should ask the individual what diagnosis they have and how it impacts them. Monitor the interview for a language of hope and recovery.

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The social worker is meeting with the individual with mental illness for a regular case management meeting. The individual lives with schizophrenia and when not taking their medications, they end up in hospital. They want to stop taking their medications. How should the social worker respond?

# Ideas for Discussion and Debate

1. Identify some ways to incorporate the recovery model into case management in mental health.
2. Discuss the ethical framework and areas where ethical conflicts may arise in mental health.
3. How could you create a culture and language of hope within your social work practice?
4. Discuss the term “avoidable ignorance” as it applies to evidence-based social work practice in mental health.
5. Is evidence-based practice in the best interest of the individual who receives services? Discuss in the context of oppression, risks to funding, and racial bias.

# Supplemental Resources

1. Fronek, P. and R. Bland. 2012. “The Recovery Model and Mental Health: In conversation with Robert Bland. [Episode 19].” *Podsocs*. <http://www.podsocs.com/podcast/the-recovery-model-and-mental-health/>
2. Cohen, D. 2013. “Meaning of Medications.” *Madness Radio.* <http://www.madnessradio.net/madness-radio-meaning-medications-david-cohen>
3. Khoury, E. and L. Rodrigquez del Barrio. 2015. “Recovery-oriented mental health practice: A social work perspective.” *The British Journal of Social Work, 45*(1), i27-i44.
4. Slade, M. 2013. *100 Ways to Support Recovery,* 2nd edition. London, UK: Rethink Mental Illness. <https://www.rethink.org/media/704895/100_ways_to_support_recovery_2nd_edition.pdf>
5. More Feet on the Ground. 2013. “Understand: The Impact of Mental Illness.” *Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health.* <https://morefeetontheground.ca/mental-health/>
6. Media co-op. 2015. “What Is Mental Health Recovery?” *Scottish Recovery Network.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK0RBWixPNE>
7. Manitoba Schizophrenia Society.2015. “Recovery: Hope Changes Everything.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Q2zkeirxK4>
8. Canadian Mental Health Association. 2015. “What’s the difference between mental health and mental illness?” *HeretoHelp.* <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/ask-us/whats-the-difference-between-mental-health-and-mental-illness>