

Scientists call for holistic care of mental health that combines physical and mental well-being

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Capoeira game played at the "Roda da Purificação 2023" by members of the "Grupo Cultural de Capoeira Angola Cativoiro", supervised by Master Adó.
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Clinicians often default to treating mental health conditions with a variety of medication. This approach, however, largely ignores the role of environment, lifestyle, and social factors. Mental Health professionals must work toward a more holistic management picture, Sidarta Ribeiro, Ana Paula Pimentel, Paulo Amarante and colleagues at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and FIOCRUZ in Brazil argue in the open-access journal *PLOS Mental Health* on June 4.

More people than ever are being diagnosed with [mental health conditions](#)—particularly children and young adults. The World Health Organization estimates that mental health conditions affect at least one in eight people around the world.

While pharmaceutical treatments are improving, Ribeiro and colleagues argue that psychiatry has become overmedicalized, focusing on using medicines to manage mental health. A better path, they say, involves integrating medication with a deeper understanding of all mental and physical factors that can affect mental health.

More holistic treatment, Ribeiro and colleagues note, starts with the rights and dignity of the individual. They note that peer support models and strengthening community can improve outcomes for people in acute mental crisis. In addition, they suggest that [psychiatric treatment](#) could integrate [lifestyle changes](#) to improve sleep, nutrition, and exercise (such as yoga and Capoeira).

Finally, holistic mental health management involves engaging with "inner dialogs," using approaches such as psychotherapy, art therapy and nature exposure. Psychiatry, the scientists argue, must engage not just with the individual's biology, but also with their social settings, their environments, and their lives as a whole.

The authors add, "Deficits in sleep, nutrition, exercise, introspection, and other pillars of good mental health do not occur in the vacuum, they are produced by how we live (...) It is time to strive towards a more naturalistic and benign approach to promoting mental well-being, by strengthening the connections to one's own body, nature, and community."

More information: Ribeiro S, Pimentel AP, Fernandes VR, Deslandes AC, Amarante P (2024) It is time for more holistic practices in mental health. *PLOS Mental Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmen.0000028](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmen.0000028)

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