HERE IS A great deal of factual information on the correlation between leisure/leisure activities and on the promotion and maintenance of physical health, but relatively little on their relationships with mental health. This is probably because physical health is relatively easy to define, whereas mental health is a much more abstract and subjective concept, implying causes and risk factors that are often difficult to identify. There is one area in which a rapidly-growing body of knowledge does exist i.e. the impact of therapeutic recreation on certain forms of mental illness. This topic, however, falls outside the scope of this paper.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate, on the basis of the existing literature, if, and if so under which circumstances, leisure and leisure activities can make a contribution to the maintenance and promotion of people's mental health. While realising the interrelationships between mental health and the other aspects of people's total health (social, physical, spiritual and intellectual) and appreciating the limitations of taking a segmented approach to human behaviour and development, I believe that in order to identify cause-and-effect relationships with leisure and leisure activities, it will be necessary in this paper to concentrate on the mental health aspect.

Based on this premise, I propose to deal with the subject in the following manner:

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Leisure**

The leisure concept I use throughout this paper is based on the one developed by John Neulinger (1974) who defines it as the "condition of perceived freedom". This means that one has leisure when one feels free and able to do what one wants to do. The aspect of the individual's perception is crucial to the leisure notion, which is a subjective and psychological one. As Wippler (1968) indicated, there is a considerable discrepancy between a subjective perception and an objective measure of "free time".

The second central element of this definition is that of freedom; freedom in the sense of freedom from constraints but more importantly, freedom to choose from a variety of options, to pursue hobbies, develop one's talents and live one's humanness to the fullest. Freedom in this context means being able to do something else, to have real options from which to choose. It is very important to realise this because it means that someone who is preoccupied with concerns for his/her basic physiological and safety needs cannot 'do something else' and is, therefore, not free. This applies to many of our elders, the unemployed, handicapped and members of ethnic minorities who may have many hours of free time in the objective sense, but whose waking hours are often filled with worries about food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their families.

I, therefore, believe that we can only talk about leisure with people whose basic physiological and safety needs have been met, realising the significant individual variances this implies. We must also consider the growing number of people who do not have real options because they lack the financial resources, skills or capacity to choose. These are some of the main reasons why there is an ever-widening gap between free time measured in an objective sense, and free time perceived by the individual.

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Based on the above, I believe leisure to be free time, perceived as such by the individual concerned. This "time related" definition also makes the rapidly increasing international dialogue less cumbersome. "Leisure" is an anglo-saxon word, unknown in most other languages. For instance, the Spanish use tiempo libre, the Scandinavians fritid, the Germans freizeit (musze, the German equivalent for leisure, has virtually become extinct), and the Dutch vrijjetijd - all time-related definitions.

Leisure Activities
These are self-determined activities, engaged in during leisure, for the satisfaction one expects to derive from them. Intrinsic motivation and the fact that the activity is chosen for its own sake are important. Furthermore, the concept of 'satisfaction' needs to be seen in its widest context, including enjoyment, relaxation and personal development. It is a fallacy to think that leisure activities are limited to "fun and games". Effort, perseverance and devotion are just as much a part of leisure as they are of work.

Leisure activities cover a broad range from listening to music, reading a good book or watching a movie, to meeting friends, going cross country skiing, hiking, camping or swimming. The choice is the individual's, guided by his/her mood, preference, specific skills and opportunities.

The terms 'recreation' and 'leisure activities' can be used interchangeably.

Mental Health
As is the case with leisure, mental health too is a subjective concept and is, therefore, difficult to define in an objective sense. In Mental Health for Canadians (1988), Health and Welfare Canada has defined it as

the capacity of the individual, the group and environment to interact with one another in ways that promote subjective well-being, the optimal development and use of mental abilities (cognitive, affective and relational), the achievement of individual and collective goals consistent with justice and the attainment and preservation of conditions of fundamental equality.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF LEISURE AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES TO MENTAL HEALTH
When attempting to identify the beneficial effects of leisure and leisure activities, one must guard against broad generalisations and highly subjective statements. Leisure and recreation are not and cannot be the cure-all for the collective problems facing humanity. The absence of good indicators, difficulties with control groups and other methodological problems make it extremely difficult to objectively measure leisure's contribution to, for instance, restoring one's optimal physical and mental capacity, fostering personality growth or harmonious personal development (Czikszentmihalyi, 1979).

This does not mean, however, that all discussion on the impact of leisure and leisure activities is impressionistic and ideological. A rapidly growing number of empirical studies support the hypothesis that their impact on many aspects of life can be significant with respect to mental health, as I hope to show in the following paragraphs.

A brief analysis of the definition of mental health suggests that leisure and leisure activities might play a role in the following areas:

Capacity of the individual, the group and the environment to interact with one another. For instance, Turner (1974) has shown that experiences which in the past took place in ritual frameworks, are now to be found mainly in leisure settings in which the community regenerates itself by abolishing temporarily the status-role network that ordinarily confines the behaviour of individuals.

Promotion of subjective well-being. London (1977) is one of the many researchers who stressed the importance of leisure to life satisfaction. Hillyer and Mitchell (1979) studied the effects of physical exercise on self concept and body image and found that college students with a low self concept increased their fitness level as well as their self esteem. Koocher (1971) reported that learning new skills improved one's self esteem because of an increase in the sense of competence.

Optimal development and use of mental abilities. Piaget (1972) stressed the importance of play in increasing cognitive performance; others, for instance, Bruner (1975), Sutton-Smith (1967), Lieberman (1965) and Bishop (1971) provide additional evidence about cognitively beneficial effects of play through their studies on play and creativity.

Preservation of conditions of fundamental equality. The study by Turner mentioned above reinforces this aspect. Furthermore, virtually all play situations provide ample testimony to the fact that once the game starts, social distinctions disappear and the "status" of the participants is determined by their ability to play the game.

Although most leisure activities have the potential to contribute to a person's well being, Kornhauser (1965) found that passive forms of leisure activities are not likely to do so. His research showed that workers with high mental health scores were active in their non-work behaviours, whereas workers with the lowest mental health scores tended to be passive in their free time engagements.

A study by Yankelovich (1978) on the relative importance of work and leisure to mental health is interesting for this discussion. He reported that when Swedish men between the ages of 18 and 44 were asked in 1955, "What gives your life the most meaning - your family, your work or your leisure?" 13% rated leisure first, 33% work and 45% their family. When the same question was asked to a new cross section of Swedish men 22 years later, 27% answered leisure, 17% work and 41% their family. Thus, the proportion of men who indicated leisure as the main source of meaning in life had doubled during the 22 years and the number who regarded work as the main source had been cut in half.

...there is an ever-widening gap between free time measured in an objective sense, and free time perceived by the individual.
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I would like to close this part with two quotes which provide eloquent testimonies to what we have been talking about. The first one is from Dr. P.A. Martin (1967):

*There are almost as many ways of experiencing leisure as there are people. But all the positive ways seem to have one thing in common and that is that they contribute to mental health, which I will define as a subjective sense of well being and a capacity for enjoyment and happiness.*

The second quote comes from Dr. William Menninger (1960): *(has been the privilege of many of us practicing medicine in psychiatry to have some very rewarding experiences in the use of recreation as an adjunctive method of treatment...Recreation has not only played an important part in the treatment program of mental illnesses, but it has been a considerable factor in enabling former patients to remain well Therefore, psychiatrists believe that recreation activity can also be a valuable preventive of mental and emotional ill health.*

MAJOR CHALLENGES TO MENTAL HEALTH

The material of this section is based on *Mental Health for Canadians* (1988).

Reducing Inequities

Poverty is a classic example of a social condition that contributes to mental health problems. However, poverty is by no means the only factor that is associated with inequities in mental health. Education, age, sex, physical or mental disability, geographic location and ethnic background are others.

Increasing Prevention

In the mental health field, prevention is not nearly as well developed as in that of physical health and is still subject to some controversy. Needless to say, although the main task of Mental Health Promotion is to move towards specific goals, the identification and prevention of mental health problems need to receive a much higher priority than they have at the present time. Health and Welfare Canada defines a mental health problem as "a stressful imbalance among the respective demands and resources of the individual, the group and the environment." Enhancing Coping

From a mental health perspective, and for the purpose of this paper, enhancing coping has three dimensions. The first has to do with equipping individuals, families and communities to cope effectively with the various tasks and transitions that will face them during their lives. The second dimension deals with strengthening people's individual and collective capacity to handle physical disorders and disabilities, and the third relates to people's ability to come to grips with problems such as chronic anxiety, heavy alcohol or drug use and family violence.

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF LEISURE AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES TO MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF MENTAL HEALTH

Reducing Inequities

POVERTY

This is an area in which leisure and leisure activities have the potential to make an extremely signifi-
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cant contribution. There are many examples of public and/or privately initiated projects that resulted in a markedly improved quality of life for people living under extremely difficult circumstances. However, realisation of this potential presupposes a body politic conscious of the problems, aware of the possibilities and prepared to devote the necessary resources towards it. Unfortunately, the political, emotional and economic realities foster developments in the opposite direction.

Leisure is in danger of becoming an upper middle class phenomenon and is, in most cases, in the process of changing from a social concern to an economic resource. 'Pay as you go' policies, faddism and escalating equipment costs have put participation in leisure activities out of the reach of the marginal income earners and the gap between those who can afford to participate and those who cannot is widening rather than narrowing.

Society is in danger of creating large groups of 'outsiders', of people who, through no fault of their own, have been placed outside the accepted norms and behaviour patterns: people for whom the current social values have no meaning, who have developed behaviour patterns all their own and who, in order to obtain the recognition they need, resort to activities we classify as deviant.

This phenomenon is not peculiar to Canada but is world wide. Unless we collectively manage to reverse this trend, society may well have to face social upheavals, i.e. the soccer riots in Europe may only be the beginning.

This is a major challenge for leisure as well as for mental health. Although income is not the only composing factor, I do believe that an important step towards improving this situation would be to raise the economic floor (below which nobody in Canada would go), and/or ensure reasonable access to leisure activities for those who lack the required resources. Both solutions require active and effective lobbying efforts at all levels of government. It seems to me that this can best be done by a concerted effort on the part of all groups, organisations and agencies involved in the two fields.

LACK OF AWARENESS

The ultimate goal of these efforts must be a change in the attitude of Canadians towards leisure, leisure activities and mental health. One of the roads to success is to raise public awareness of the importance of leisure and mental health issues.

Politicians at all levels aim to do what they believe the electorate wants them to do. Leisure and mental health combined have a sufficiently large constituency to effect change, providing Canadians' awareness of the issues has been raised. History is replete with examples showing that 'if something has to happen, it will happen'. But the effort must be vigorous and continuous. A one-week campaign can, at best, only be a start. Awareness actions and activities must be planned on a year-round basis and continued until the goal has been reached. An awareness campaign of the type conducted by PARTICIPACTION is an excellent example of how this can be done at a relatively low cost to the taxpayer.

However, there is more. Awareness is not limited to the Canadian public at large. Many professionals in both fields still need to be convinced of the valuable support leisure and mental health can give one another. Past experience has taught that the most effective way to raise reciprocal awareness, to remove stereotypes and prejudices, and to lay the foundation for effective cooperation is a national conference at which professionals from all involved disciplines have the occasion to discuss the issues in multidisciplinary workshops.

Leisure is in danger of becoming an upper middle class phenomenon and is in the process of changing from a social concern to an economic resource.

EDUCATION

Once the required level of awareness has been reached, the issue of educating the Canadian public must be addressed. The emphasis here must be on conveying knowledge which in turn will become an instrument of change. Here too, the main purpose must be attitude change. People must be given a clear understanding of what is meant by mental health and by leisure. They have to learn to see these concepts in respect to others in Canadian society and they have to know and understand the goals and objectives of each.

INCREASING PREVENTION

The following studies may serve as examples of the potential for leisure and leisure activities to contribute to the prevention of mental health problems.

We saw from Kornhauser's study that active leisure pursuits have a much greater impact on optimal mental health than passive ones. DeCarlo (1974) confirmed this. His research indicated that active leisure participation throughout life correlates positively with high satisfaction and happiness and furthermore, that lack of opportunity results in decreased psychological well-being. Isa Ahola (1980), while reporting studies on children's play, stated that "optimal change and variety in play situations is essential in maintaining optimal mental health throughout the life cycle."

Erikson (1943) carried out a follow-up study of persons who had been tested as children and found that individuals who were able to keep a "sense of playfulness at the centre of things" when they were children, had the most interesting and fulfilling times as adults 30 years later.

These and many other studies underline the importance of varied activity patterns. Furthermore, they indicate that the basis for prevention of mental health problems needs to be laid in early childhood, a fact that must be stressed much more forcefully with the educational authorities.

ENHANCING COPING

According to Isa Ahola (1980), there is some evidence to suggest that leisure participation plays an important role in solving problems which appear during transition from one
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life stage to another. He concludes that continued participation in recreation activities throughout the entire life cycle is characteristic of those who live long and age successfully. It is, for our purpose, important to note that involvement in motor, cognitive and affective activities was positively related to mental health. Further, the more extensive the leisure repertoire, the better the psychological state and the better the individual's capacity to cope.

Gordon (1973) indicates that active lifestyles tend to produce more pleasure and reduce loneliness, depression and the anxiety of isolation and Wilson, Morley and Bird (1980) found that high levels of fitness were strongly correlated with the ability to cope with stress. As a matter of fact, the literature is unequivocal in its endorsement of physical fitness as an effective medium for stress management.

The second dimension of Health and Welfare's coping challenge deals with people's individual and collective capacity to handle physical disorders and disabilities. This aspect is being dealt with extensively by therapeutic recreation specialists and falls outside the scope of this paper. Studies show, for instance, that severely disabled individuals can learn high quality leisure skill in normalised environments, when provided with systematic instruction (Crawford, 1986).

My observation relative to the second dimension of coping applies equally to the third. These are aspects that are very much at the centre of attention of therapeutic recreation specialists in Canada and the United States and merit a much more extensive and thorough treatment than I would be able to give.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this brief overview with the two major objectives that the Commission on Leisure Time and Its Uses of the American Psychiatric Association (1967) has set for itself: a. To educate the APA membership about our place and purpose in psychiatry and in the Association, and b. To educate agencies and organisations devoted exclusively to leisure time activities, about psychiatry's interest in the field and the mutual advantages to be gained from closer cooperation.

It is my hope that this paper may prove to be a modest contribution towards the achievement of those objectives.

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