

Men's Struggles with Mental Health

By Tengovandu Kandetu

The Silent Struggles in Men's Minds

As men, our mental health is greatly determined by how we navigate through the invisible battles in our minds. These battles are mostly waged silently and often from a place of vulnerability and loneliness. Some have vowed to never share these battles but to rather take them with to their graves.

We are expected to be forever strong, to "*kukut*" (men don't show weakness), to be unyielding and unbreakable. Cultural expectations and our upbringing drive us to bury our vulnerabilities and rejections, fearing that to show weakness is to admit failure. For many men, acknowledging our mental health struggles feels like a betrayal of this unwritten rule of masculine strength.

Proverbs 24:10 reminds us that, "*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.*" This is not a call to weakness, but an invitation to recognize that true strength is rooted in our ability to acknowledge our limitations. Without admitting our struggles, we cannot begin the journey towards mental wellness.

Truth be told, the yoke is increasingly becoming heavy for men, and this – day by day.

The Fear of Vulnerability

As men, we perceive vulnerability as a threat to our masculinity—an idea that we are conditioned to suppress from a young age. Being vulnerable is one of our greatest fears. We tend to guard our hearts by shielding ourselves from any emotional exposure. This fear of vulnerability often leads to self-isolation, as we retreat into our shells, unwilling to seek any help for fear of being seen as weak or broken.

It is important that we connect and support one another in overcoming mental health challenges. A burden shared becomes lighter to the carrier. Let us not be afraid to share our struggles to avoid crushing under the load. The crushing is usually noted in the form of suicide, gender-based violence (GBV), depression, substance abuse, amongst others orchestrated by men.

We are admonished to sharpen one another and share our yokes.

What are some root causes of mental issues among men?

Our mental health issues often stem from external pressures such as career stress, societal expectations, and family responsibilities that we deem too much and beyond our control. Matters we don't have answers to defer our hope. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. Consequently, these pressures, combined with the fear of vulnerability, create an emotional chokehold.

Usually, we tend to suppress our feelings in the hope that things will get better on their own. When this waiting for time to fix things becomes protracted and the hope is deferred, our mental health deteriorates. The damage is not always visible on the outside, but it wreaks havoc on our mental faculty.

When mental wellness is not checked

When we continue to neglect our mental health it may result in our physical deterioration, emotional withdrawal, and strained relationships. Chronic stress and depression will weigh heavily on our bodies, leading to illness. On the other hand, suppressed emotions will erode our marriages and negatively affect family dynamics. A joyful spirit brings vitality, but a heart burdened by unresolved struggles dries up the soul, emphasizing the need for internal healing.

When our struggles are left unchecked, they foster destructive behaviours like aggression, addiction, makes us prone to take unreasonable decisions. As fathers, we need to avoid generational harm and have those uncomfortable discussions with those around us for wise guidance and intentional nurturing. Doing so is essential to breaking cycles of emotional neglect.

It is not safe to be vulnerable

It is crucial that we create environments where men feel safe to express our emotions, where we be authentic, vulnerable and real. We need the counsel of trusted friends, mentors, or counsellors, etc. who will listen to us without judgement. It is only within these safe spaces that we can begin to address our fears and begin to heal.

By fostering relationships that encourage open communication, we can learn that vulnerability is not a threat, but a path toward strength. It is through genuine relationships that we can break free from isolation and find healing.

Redefining Our Masculinity

Our true masculinity is not in our silence and withdrawal in the face of life's struggles but it is in us gathering courage to confront these struggles. We must cultivate a resolute will, rooted in righteousness, to confront our fears, our struggles, our issues and be vulnerable on our way to healing. It is this type of courage that leads to our healing and transformation.

Conclusion and Way Ahead

We cannot continue to relegate our mental wellness. The fear of vulnerability and rejection, combined with societal expectations, creates a perfect storm for self-neglect and many forms of isolation and hurt. Assuredly, we can overcome these challenges. Men, let's embark upon this journey to mental wellness and take the requisite responsibilities. Our societies need us to be mentally well and sound.

To address this crisis, we must embrace the wisdom of shared counsel and support. Just as iron sharpens iron, connection and understanding fortify the spirit, enabling us to rise above our fears and vulnerabilities. A firm foundation of openness and care can restore strength, balance, and resilience in our lives.

Through the course of time, we will create platforms to move the needle towards mental wellness among men. You can reach us at tkandetu@thekingdomschool.life to receive related information.

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