

Theme: Understanding Mental Health in the Society

Activity: Mental Health Panel Discussion Report

Date: 22nd June 2018

Panellists:

Dr Bukusi David (Head of Unit – [KNH Youth Centre](#) and head KNH VCT and HIV prevention programme), Susan Catherine Keter (Director – [Reason to Hope](#)), Siloma Stephen (Mental Health Ambassador – Nijali Foundation), Valerie Namaemba (Student Counsellor [JKUAT Hospital](#)), Nyawira Gitari (Mental Health Advocate – Nijali Foundation) and Gakuo Kelvin (Founder – [MindYourMind JKUAT](#)).

Moderator:

Odhiambo David (Co-founder, [Ryculture Health and Social Innovation](#)).



The banner features a central title "Ryculture Mental Health Panel Discussion" flanked by two icons: a teal hand holding a head and a purple head with gears. Below the title, it lists the date (22nd June 2018) and venue (JKUAT Main Campus). It identifies the organizer as Ryculture Ltd. and lists partners: nijali.org, M3M (www.mindyourmind.co.ke), and KEPHSA. Contact information for Ryculture Health and Social Innovation is provided at the bottom.

Background

As Ryculture Health and Social Innovation we held our second panel discussion in accordance with our mission of inculcating a culture of active citizenship and social responsibility on matters pertaining to health through organization of panel discussions, workshops, sensitization and awareness creation campaigns on medical conditions, concerns and innovations towards the optimization of the healthcare sector for a healthy and productive populace. The panel discussion took place at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) Lecture Theater 1 on 22nd June 2018 from 3pm to 5:30pm.

Ryculture Health and Social Innovation

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Scope

The panel discussion covered key areas of importance in relation to mental health i.e.

- i. Drivers, determinants and predisposing factors to mental health concerns
- ii. Influence of family socialization, upbringing, and social structures in mental health
- iii. Depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD)
- iv. Attachment disorders
- v. Drug use and considerations in relation to mental health
- vi. Stigmas on mental health

Proceedings

Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community. The key indicators of being mentally healthy include: ability to cope with normal stresses, ability to work productively, stable relationships, ability to contribute positively to the society. In deficiency of these key aspects, one is considered mentally unhealthy and support systems should be instituted to help them recover and lead healthy and productive lives. Poverty, genetic factors, and stress also contribute to mental illnesses. Social pressure has been an important trigger in most mental health cases especially depression where the society has a set of expectations on individuals and with the advent of social media certain captions by friends and colleagues may pile pressure on one not to be doing as well as they envisioned. These ultimately build on the pressure they put themselves to which derails them lowering productivity, affecting their relationships and ultimately, they spiral into depression. Individuals should strive and be supported to be stable by first understanding themselves and being cognizant that life is not linear, and the most important aspect is to be happy and content at whatever phase they are in their lives.



Mental health has not been paid attention to and in most instances, individuals diagnosed with mental conditions such as depression, anxiety etc. are perceived to portray weakness and the society fails to provide them with the necessary support. In these cases, the afflicted individuals may withdraw from the society making their condition to worsen. Critical care is needed for those with mental illnesses and of major importance, advocacy should be bolstered to create awareness on mental health and to champion for reforms in care to support the afflicted.

Early life experiences may predispose individuals to mental illnesses and these can be violent which encompasses physical, emotional and psychological violence. The key condition attributed to these early childhood experiences is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is characterized by phobias and certain tendencies which are linked to a response mechanism learnt from earlier experiences in life e.g. individuals who in their childhood missed parental affection and care may later in life long for that kind of attachment making them extremely dependent on their spouses in relationships. For individuals with violent childhood experiences studies have demonstrated that they may take up violent tendencies in their relationships or all together distant themselves from forging relationships out of fear of violence they attribute to such attachments.

There are four (4) main attachment styles i.e. healthy, jaded, clingy and distant relationships. These are based on the demand levels of the partners in a relationship and in most cases, these may be attributed to some early life experiences which may push them to act in specific

patterns and thus affect the relationship all together. There is need to understand individual needs and demands in every kind of relationship which will influence how to cope with each other without putting much pressure on the other partner. Another key coping mechanism in the unhealthy relationships is communication and this applies even in the healthy relationships. With effective communication there is room for understanding between the partners, addressing the shortfalls in the relationships and meeting each partner's demands and needs in the relationship. Unless this is fostered the number of break-ups, separations, and divorces will keep being in the rise with each partner getting into another relationship which in most cases end up going around in the same cycle as there is no room for evaluation and coming to an agreement instead there are unmatched demands from either party.

Family socialization, upbringing and social structures that individuals have contribute greatly to their mental health status. To be mentally healthy, we long for support systems and this includes access to a stable family that one can speak to and get support in any situations they are going through as well as friends who will grant the needed support. The family relationships determine how healthy an individual will forge relations and should be nurtured well. Individuals from families that are not finely knit end up harbouring most of their concerns and the piling may end up causing mental illnesses in these individuals and thus care should be taken to support them from the early stages and promote the tendency to speak out. Elder siblings some of whom missed on family nurturing and support early in life should take up the mantle and support by providing a haven to their younger siblings to be at ease sharing their stories with them to lead healthy lives and have a support system in place. This can serve to cushion them from the hurt the world has to inflict on them in terms of the impact on their mental status.

Drugs recommended for various mental health conditions should be used as per the prescription which is to be made by a licensed psychiatrist or neurologist who will do due diligence in ascertaining the need, appropriateness of the medication and the dosing that is meant to achieve desired outcomes. This helps to ensure that individuals get the best management option of their condition at every stage of care and normally the institution of drugs is often after and alongside other management options such as counselling, yoga, exercises, and psychotherapy. Discontinuation of medication or tapering down of the dose should be as advised by a specialist after assessment of the clinical condition of the individual and any contrary opinion or suggestion by others apart from one's specialist should be considered only upon consultation with the specialist. Abrupt discontinuation of medication can worsen some of the conditions and ultimately can lead the individual to a tipping point

which may be detrimental to their health and life. Certain drugs should be avoided in women who are in childbearing age or expectant mothers due to the evidence of their effect on fetal development especially regarding their predisposition to mental health concerns and brain development. Drugs to be avoided include alcohol, opioids, amphetamines, methamphetamines, benzodiazepines etc. and in case of use for the medicinal substances, care must be taken to ensure serum level monitoring is done to curb potential of causing congenital or foetal developmental problems.

We are living in a world where many people live with mental conditions either unknowingly, undiagnosed and without access to the support systems and programs. The few who know of their mental status are relatively unable to cope as the discussions on mental health have been hushed down with little weight as they are not considered as illnesses but as a weakness of the afflicted in the society. This is not the case and will never be the case and unless we come to terms that mental conditions are normal illnesses that impair our ability to function and lead productive lives same as other conditions like diabetes, cancers, malaria etc. we will be sending our parents, siblings, partners, colleagues and relatives to the abyss. Mental illness is not a sign of weakness, it's a deficit in the bodies' response mechanisms to stresses of life, genetics influence factors and related drivers that need a support system to address thus a need for everybody to join in and champion for #EndStigmaAgainstMentalIllness and support for #MentalHealth in all our spheres of involvement.

It is alarming that little attention is being paid to mental health yet by relative proportion it is one of the most prevalent conditions in the medical sector. As Dr Bukusi put it, *"If one claims to come from a family that is free of mental illness, he/she doesn't know his/her relatives"*, we are all affected in one way either directly or indirectly and this calls for concerted efforts in addressing the menace.

Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Nijali Foundation (www.nijali.org), MindYourMind-JKUAT (www.mindyourmindjkuat.org), Kenyatta National Hospital Youth Center, JKUAT Hospital Health Counselling and Testing Center, Reason To Hope (www.reasontohope.or.ke/), www.susancatherineketer.com), Pharmacy Students' Association of Kenya (KEPhSA), and JKUAT Pharmacy Students' Association (JPSA) for their contribution in championing for and advocating for mental health in their respective spheres of influence.

Resources:

1. Man's search for Meaning by Victor Frankl:
 - i. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj5oMey9vbAhVEuBQKHSKMDNkQFggn>

- [MAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fedisciplinas.usp.br%2Fmod%2Fresource%2Fview.php%3Fid%3D1751031&usg=AOvVaw3MwxcRIEvEPtWX0C9ko5Jy](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5111395/)
- ii. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5111395/>
 - iii. <http://benjaminmcevoy.com/7-lessons-learned-mans-search-meaning-viktor-e-frankl-book-review/>
2. Adverse Childhood Events (ACE) Studies:
- i. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj82tO1_uvbAhVGC8AKHf-XBo8QFghyMAU&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ih.gov%2Ftelebehavioral%2Fincludes%2Fthemes%2Fnewihstheme%2Fdisplay_objects%2Fdocuments%2Fslides%2Fnationalchildandadolescent%2Facestudies0216.pdf&usg=AOvVaw17p-Pdctx9rJxDHLhcm1Xk
 - ii. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>
3. Ghosts from the Nursery:
- i. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwil7ru5_vbAhXLAsAKHTAGDboQFgg_MAM&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcommunitypact.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2014%2F04%2Fghosts_from_nursery-the-roots-of-violence.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1CaUO62NTyXe_gbyemwqK5
 - ii. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4022568/>
 - iii. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/first/k/karr-morse-ghosts.html>
4. Love languages and attachment disorders:
- i. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/learn-to-speak-your-spouses-love-language/understanding-the-five-love-languages>
 - ii. <https://verilymag.com/2013/04/dr-gary-chapman-explains-the-5-love-languages>
 - iii. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/compassion-matters/201307/how-your-attachment-style-impacts-your-relationship>
 - iv. <https://www.verywellmind.com/attachment-styles-2795344>
5. The Triumph of Experience:
- i. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiGk8uChuzbAhVMDMAKHT4DBycQFggNMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Farchive.wilsonquarterly.com%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffile>

[s%2Farticles%2F27_CBTriumphsofExperience.pdf&usg=AOvVaw20TOZM5K4yDB7VDAOyqzj4](#) (Review)

6. The Power of Vulnerability: Brene' Brown TED Talks;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

"Don't forget to check on your strong friends, the strongest maybe the weakest."

~ Siloma Stephen, Founder – Nijali Foundation