






Managing Stress & Optimising Mental Wellbeing in the Workplace

ICTAM Annual Conference
Sunbird Nkopola, Mangochi
Saturday 25th November 2023
Professor Chiwoza Bandawe






1



Outline of Presentation

- What is Mental Health?
- Mental Disorders
- Depression
- Suicidality
- Alcohol
- Practical Steps to maintaining good mental health


2

What is Mental Health?

- “The capacity of thought, emotion, and behaviour that enables every individual to realise their own potential in relation to their developmental stage, to cope with the normal stresses of life, to study or work productively and fruitfully, and to contribute to their community”. (World Health Organization, 2004)


3



Key Components of Mental Health

- Key component of mental health:
- What you **think**. Thinking is the cognitive component of mental health.
- What you **feel**: Emotions
- How you **act**. Action is the behavioural component of mental health.
- How you **relate** with others


4



Why Pay Attention to Mental Health?

- Poor mental health is strongly related to other health and development concerns, notably lower educational achievements, substance use and violence.
- Most mental disorders begin in the 15-24 year age group and go unrecognised. Mental disorders amongst the youth lead to tremendous morbidity and early death
- Those with severe mental illness e.g. schizophrenia die 10-20 years earlier than general population
- For every \$1 investment in MH, there is a \$5 return

5



Issues Faced by I.T Specialists

- Essentially every company is a tech company. The reliance and need for tech - whether it's mobile devices or impressive new AI models - has driven up demand for the skills IT and tech employees have.
- An IT Skills and Salary survey revealed that over half of IT professionals say they're either somewhat likely (27.64%) or extremely likely (25.21%) to leave their post in the next year.
- Heavy workload leading to stress and burnout
- Lack of confidence in local IT skills and ability, no dept of its own
- Unclear job roles and expectations
- Skills gap and hunger to learn, no training

6

Mental Health Continuum



7

Mental Disorders



- **1 billion** people are living with a mental disorder,
- **3 million** people die every year from the harmful use of alcohol
- **1 person dies every 40 seconds** by suicide” (WHO, WFMH, UGMH,2020)



8

Mental Disorders



- Mental health conditions are increasing worldwide; there has been a **13%** rise in MH conditions in the last decade
- **25%** of people globally will suffer from mental disorder in their lifetime
- **76 - 85% in LMICs** no treatment



9

Common Mental Disorders



- Most common mental disorders:
- **Anxiety Disorders:** 301 million people: General, panic, social
- **Depression** 280 million people world wide (5% adults)
- Other Disorders:
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Alcohol Use Disorders
- Mental Illness (Schizophrenia)



10

Symptoms of Depression



Emotional	Sadness (deep unrelenting pain), depressed mood, anhedonia (loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities), irritability
Physiological and Behavioural	Sleep or appetite disturbances, psychomotor problems, fatigue, significant weight loss/gain, Physical complaints e.g. pain
Cognitive	Poor concentration, indecisiveness, loss of memory, poor self-esteem, hopelessness, worthlessness, inappropriate guilt, suicidal thoughts, delusions

11

Causes of Depression



- Combination of factors:
- Genetic
- Biochemical factors
- Stressful Life Events: Poverty, unemployment, Loss
- Physical Illness: Stroke, cancers
- Personality: Anxious, Shyness, Perfectionism
- Gender: Women > Men
- Treatment: Medication, Psychotherapy, Exercise

12

Suicidality



- Close to 800 000 people die due to suicide every year.
- For every suicide death there may be 20 people who attempt suicide every year.
- A prior suicide attempt is the single most important risk factor for suicide in the general population.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds.

13

Suicidality in Malawi



- January to August 2019: 116 suicides
- January to August 2020: 182 suicides
- January to December 2021: 160 suicides
- January to August 2022: 208 suicides
- January to August 2023: 256 suicides
- Majority of cases are Males (226/256)
- Family disputes: Financial and relationship challenges are the leading cause



14

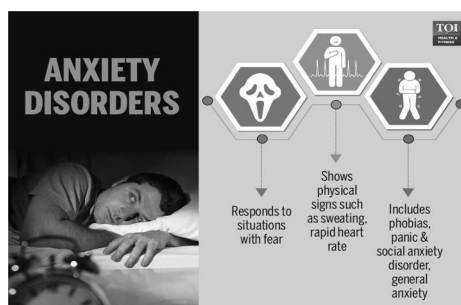
Who is at Risk? Everyone!!!



- “Many suicides happen impulsively in moments of crisis with a breakdown in the ability to deal with life stresses, such as financial problems, relationship break-up or chronic pain and illness” WHO



15



16

Alcohol Use Disorder



- 18.3% of world adult population is addicted to alcohol
- Alcohol use disorder can be mild, moderate or severe, based on the number of symptoms you experience. Being unable to limit the amount of alcohol you drink
- Wanting to cut down on how much you drink or making unsuccessful attempts to do so
- Failing to fulfill major obligations at work, school or home due to repeated alcohol use
- Continuing to drink alcohol even though you know it's causing physical, social or interpersonal problems
- Giving up or reducing social and work activities and hobbies

17

Alcohol Use Disorder Indicators



- Spending a lot of time drinking, getting alcohol or recovering from alcohol use
- Feeling a strong craving or urge to drink alcohol (chibaba)
- Using alcohol in situations where it's not safe, such as when driving or swimming
- Developing a tolerance to alcohol so you need more to feel its effect or you have a reduced effect from the same amount
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms — such as nausea, sweating and shaking (manjenje)— when you don't drink, or drinking to avoid these symptoms

18

Risk Factors of Alcohol Consumption



- Steady Drinking over time
- Starting at an earlier age (esp. binge drinking)
- Family history
- Depression and other mental health problems



19

Health Impact / Mowa ungapangitse...



- Liver disease.
- Digestive problems.
- Heart problems.
- Mental illness (misala)
- Sexual function and menstruation issues.
- Eye problems.
- Birth Defects
- Bone Damage

- Misala- kumva mau palibe munthu
- Bvuto lokumbukira zinthu
- Mabvuto a kuubongo
- Mabvuto a thupi monga kuonongeka kwa ziwalo e.g. chiwindi

20

Quick Screening Tool (CAGE-AID)



- The CAGE-AID is a sensitive screen for alcohol and drug problems. CAGE is an acronym for
- **C** - Ever try to **Cut back** on your drinking or drug use?
- **A** - Ever been **Annoyed** by anyone about your drinking or drug use?
- **G** - Ever felt **Guilty** or ashamed about your drinking or drug use?
- **E** - Ever had an **"Eye-opener"** or used alcohol or drugs in the morning?

21

Treatment



- Support Groups such as AA 0884002101
- or Malawi Addiction Help 0888787777
- Rehabilitation @ St John of God in Lilongwe
- Addiction counsellors e.g. Nunga Kamau Tel 0999317529 Area 18 hACTS

22

Other Addictions to be aware of...



- **Gambling:** 1.6 billion people gamble. 66 million Nigerians (18-40) daily spend \$5million on sports betting. Kenya 76%
- **Pornography:** 5-8% world adult population: 11-12 hours per week. 40 million persons in USA watch. Phillipines highest traffic.
- **Social media:** Comparing selves to others, inadequacy
- Loss of social interaction quality time, social phobia, FOMO
- Increased anxiety and depression (being blue ticked)
- Relationships compromised (Exs)
- Loss of empathy (Selfies of accidents)

23

Criteria for Behavioural Addiction



- Psychological: craving, loss of control, and mood modification
- Physical dependence: tolerance and withdrawal symptoms
- Impulsivity
- Relapse

24

Signs of Smartphone Addiction



- Smartphone addiction comprises four properties: compulsion, withdrawal, and tolerance, and functional Impairment
- obsessive thoughts about mobile telephones (craving)
- Spending extra time on smartphones (tolerance)
- Experiencing anxiousness when smartphone is unavailable (withdrawal)

25

Smartphone addiction is typically characterized by:



- Anxiety
- Impaired attention (Wacks and Weinstein, 2021),
- Impaired function (Alageel et al., 2021), and
- Reduced decision-making ability.
- Excessive smartphone use can lead to severe distractions (Liu et al., 2019).

26

What is Stress?



27

What is Stress? Definitions



- "Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives" World Health Organization
- "Stress, in essence, is a feeling of doubt about being able to cope, a perception that the resources available do not match the demands made". Bonn & Bonn 2000
- Stress is a mental, emotional or physical response to a stressor (pressure).

28

What is Stress? Positive Stress



- Stress is not necessarily bad for you. It can provide momentum to get things going and increase productivity:
- Short Term
- Motivates
- Can be Exciting
- Focuses energy
- Improves Performance
- Its not about not having stress but managing it



29

Effects of Stress on the person



- **Physical changes** in the body - These may be tension, headaches or high blood pressure, fatigue, reduced immunity, sexual difficulties
- **Emotional changes** - Such as feeling angry or animosity.
- **Mental changes** - Where there is a decreased ability to concentrate or make decisions. Forgetfulness. Depression and insomnia
- **Behavioural changes** - These include becoming withdrawn, aggressive or irritable. Increased alcohol or substance usage

30

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations:



- Feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others
- Feel nervous, uncertain and angry.
- Feeling a lack of motivation
- Having trouble concentrating
- Being tired, overwhelmed
- Headaches, insomnia



31

What is Burnout?



- Being burned out means feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often don't see any hope of positive change in their situations.
- If excessive stress is like drowning in responsibilities, burnout is being all dried up.
- This leads to cynicism, detachment, hopelessness

32

Causes of Burnout



- Setting unrealistic goals for yourself or having them imposed upon you.
- Being expected to be too many things to too many people.
- Working under rules that seem unreasonably coercive or punitive.
- Doing work that frequently causes you to violate your personal values.
- Boredom from doing work that never changes or doesn't challenge you.

33

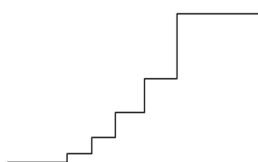
Strategies for preventing burnout



- **Accept your feelings**
- **Talk**
- **Acknowledge your needs**
- **Know your limits.** Be realistic about how much of your time and yourself you can give, set limits, and communicate those limits to bosses, colleagues, family members, and other people involved.

34

Practical Steps to Optimising Your Mental Wellbeing



35

Stress Management



- We can't always control the sources of stress in our life, but we can control how we deal with them. By learning positive ways to manage stress, you'll feel in charge of your life once again—the very opposite of burned out.



36

Know your own stress warning signs



- Everyone reacts differently to stress. You may experience some of the following:
- **Physical symptoms:** headaches, difficulty sleeping and eating
- **Behavioural symptoms:** low motivation to work, increased use of alcohol or drugs, disengaging from religious/spiritual practices
- **Emotional symptoms:** fear, sadness, anger.



37

Helpful Stress Coping Techniques



- Cleaning and organising your house
- Gardening
- Walking in nature
- Writing in a journal
- Sewing
- Talking about your stressors—even if you don't solve them—releases hormones in your body that reduce the negative feelings associated with stress.

38

Stress Coping Techniques



- Focus on completing quick tasks first. Having too many “to-dos” can be stressful, even if none of them are very big. Quickly knocking out the small tasks will clear up your mind to focus on larger responsibilities.
- Stress can start a harmful cycle where basic needs are neglected, which leads to more stress. Make a point to focus on your basic needs, such as eating well, keeping a healthy sleep schedule, exercising, and other forms of self-care.

39

Stress Coping Techniques



- In the heat of the moment, little problems can feel bigger than they are. Take a step back, and think about how important your stressors are in a broader context. Will they matter in a week? In a year?
- Balance your time and energy between several areas, such as your career, family, friendships, and personal hobbies.
- Set aside “Me” time to relax and have fun every day, without interruptions.



40

Physical activity



- 75 - 150 minutes of exercise a week.
- Moderate intensity: walking, hiking or riding a bike
- Vigorous activities: running, swimming fast, aerobics or skipping with a rope.
- Activity that raises your heart rate, breathe faster, and makes you feel warmer
- **Benefits:** Strengthens heart, bones, muscles. Increases our mental alertness, energy and positive mood. Depression reduced

41

Healthy eating



42

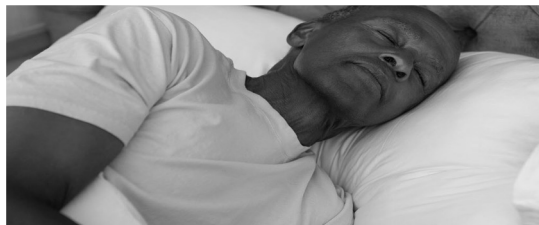
Healthy Eating Tips



- Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start.
- Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day.
- Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks, and alcohol.
- It's recommended that you drink between 6–8 glasses of fluid a day. Water is the most healthy option. Tea, coffee, juices and smoothies all count towards your intake (but be aware that these may also contain caffeine or sugar)
- Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.
- Eating a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables every day means you'll get a good range of nutrients.

43

Sleep



44

Sleep Hygiene Tips



- 1/3 of life asleep. Quality important for productivity
- Make the bedroom comfortable and solely for 2 things.
- Excess light exposure can throw off your sleep and circadian rhythm.
- Pre-sleep Schedule: Wind Down. Disconnect from devices. Avoid rigorous exercise
- Keep a regular sleep and awakening schedule.
- Avoid heavy meals, caffeine and alcohol

45

Managing Your THOUGHTS Imagine This.....



46

Faulty Thinking Patterns



- **Jumping to conclusions** Being convinced of something with little to no evidence to support it.
- **Catastrophising**
Assuming the worst case scenario, magnifying the negative and minimizing the positive.
- **Filtering**
Focusing solely on the negative and ignoring all the positive.
- **Overgeneralisation** Assuming all experiences and people are the same, based on one negative experience.

47

Question Your Thoughts



- How true is this thought?
- What is the evidence for this thought?
- What is the evidence against this thought?
- Is the thought based on fact or feeling?
- Is it logical? Is it exaggerated?
- Is it healthy?; Is helpful?
- How else could one look at the situation?

48

Questions Are the Answer!!!



- What am I grateful for in my life right now?
- What excites me in my life right now?
- What are my strengths?
- What are the key lessons in my life?
- Do I have control over this situation?

49

Imagery

Your thoughts have the power to change how you feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. The opposite is also true: When you think of something positive and calming, you feel relaxed. The imagery technique harnesses this power to reduce anxiety.

Think of a place that you find comforting. It could be a secluded beach, your bedroom, a quiet mountaintop, or even a loud concert. For 5 to 10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this setting in great detail. Don't just think fleetingly about this place—really imagine it.



What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance? Look all around to take in all your surroundings. Look for small details you would usually miss.



What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen closely to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any distant sounds.



Are you eating or drinking something enjoyable? What is the flavor like? How does it taste? Savor all the tastes of the food or drink.

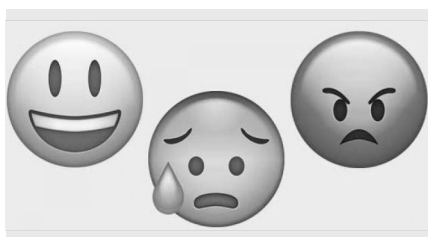


What can you feel? What is the temperature like? Think of how the air feels on your skin, and how your clothes feel on your body. Soak in all these sensations.



What scents are present? Are they strong or faint? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

50



51

What is Emotional Intelligence?



- “The ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others” Salovey & Meyer
- “Managing feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly towards a common goal” Daniel Goleman *Working with Emotional Intelligence*

52

E – Motion



Living things: Energy in **motion**

Emotions Need to be expressed, not kept in e.g toilet.

The particular emotion we feel in a given situation is determined by our appraisal of the event.

Emotions seek validation and recognition



53

The Message of Emotions



- Emotions are allies, not enemies
- Don't ignore the message:
- Fear: Prepare yourself
- Anger: Your standards held of life have not been met
- Respect the emotion, accept it. Appreciate the message, don't deny or ignore it.

54

Deep Breaths Exercise



Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s). Practice for 3 to 5 minutes.



55

Your Homework Exercise



- For the next seven nights, just before going to bed ask yourself:
 - *What three things went well today?*
 - *Why did they go well?*
- Study found 6 months later those who had done this exercise were less likely to be depressed and anxious

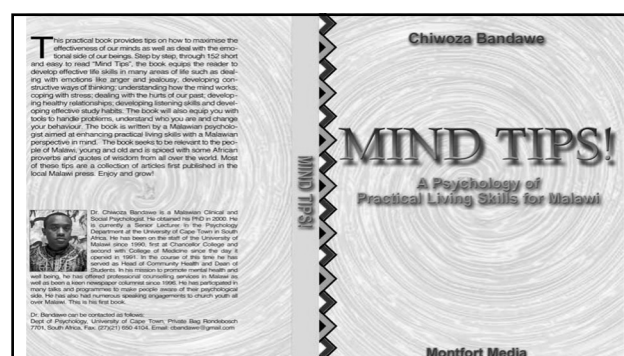
56

Professional Help Available

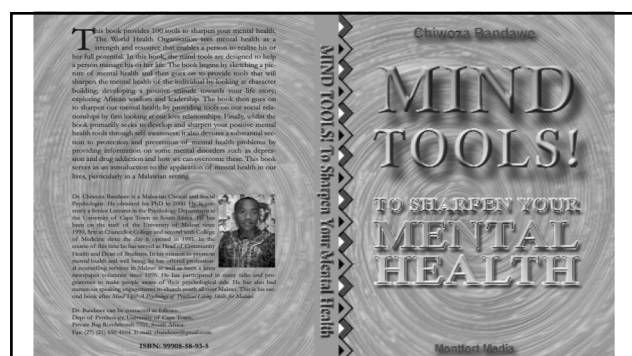


- Clinical Psychologist: Harmony Mental Wellness Solutions Tel: 0888200222
- KUHES Clinic Tel: 0888002284
- Psychotherapists and Counsellors: Malawi Association in Counselling
- QECH OPD 2 Room 6: Psychiatrists, Mental Health Professionals
- St. John of God, Lilongwe & Mzuzu
- Your GP

57



58



59

My Contact Details



Professor Chiwoza Bandawe
Ph.D.; MA (Clin. Psych)

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
(Registration: MCM/CLINPSYCH/002)

P.O. Box 31038
Chichiri,
BLANTYRE 3

Tel: 0888200222
Email: cbandawe@harmonymw.org

60