

METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Probationer's Seminar – January 2024

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – COPING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

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Supervision (group & individual)
Spiritual Companionship | Retreats | Quiet Days

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What do you understand a mental health challenge to mean?

**What does the culture you are a part of
say about mental health challenges?**

**What are some of the mental health challenges
people in your communities are facing or experiencing?**

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Our Lenses for today

- The local knowledge we bring and that of our Communities
- The voice of history
- The voice of medical science
- Stories in Scripture

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The Voice of History

The history of mental illness goes back as far as written records and perhaps took its first major leap in 400 B.C thanks to Hippocrates...

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The Voice of History

... Naming and diagnosing mental illness started in the Northern hemisphere
in the 1950's

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Medical Science

The term *mental health challenges* covers a broad range of disorders from mild depression to schizophrenia,

For the purposes of today, we will define a *mental health challenges* as a condition that **impairs a person's ability to think, feel, process, and respond to life situations in appropriate or life-giving ways.**

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Our brains are physical organs like lungs and kidneys and are subject to illness and damage in the same way other organs are.

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What Contributes to Mental Health Challenges?

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Mental health symptoms

Depression

Sadness, hopelessness, loss of pleasure in activities,
Irritability, tiredness, appetite changes
thoughts of death or suicide

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Mental Illness symptoms

Bi-Polar Disorder

This disorder has two distinct phases:

The **Manic Phase** is characterized by:

Extreme happiness, hopefulness, and excitement
Irritability, anger, fits of rage and hostile behavior
Restlessness, Agitation, Rapid speech
Poor concentration and judgment
Increased energy, Less need for sleep
Unusually high sex drive
Setting unrealistic goals
Paranoia

The **Depressive Phase** is characterized by:

Sadness and crying
Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and guilt
Loss of energy
Loss of interest or pleasure in everyday activities
Trouble concentrating and making decisions
Irritability, Need for more sleep or sleeplessness
Change in appetite, Weight loss/gain
Suicidal thoughts and attempts at suicide

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Mental Illness symptoms

Anxiety

Excessive Worrying, Feeling Agitated, Restlessness, Fatigue

Difficulty Concentrating, Irritability, Tense Muscles

Trouble Falling or Staying Asleep

Panic Attacks, Avoiding Social Situations, Irrational Fears

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Mental Illness symptoms

Schizophrenia

The symptoms of Schizophrenia may vary depending on the individual and they usually include:

Delusion, Hallucinations and illusions, Disordered thinking, Disordered behaviour

Flat affect- lack of emotional expression, Agitation, Inappropriate reactions

Phobia, Lack of pleasure or interest in activities

Lack of motivation to do anything, Decreased speech output

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What in South Africa might be triggers?

Covid & Lockdown

Unemployment, Malnutrition, Poverty, Illness such as AIDS, HIV

Trauma caused by violence and aggravated assault

GBV, grief and loss, drugs and alcohol abuse

Can you think of others to add?

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What are Stigmas & Stereotypes?

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Stigmas & Stereotypes

Three types of Stigmas

Social and Public Stigmas

Self-Stigmas

Institutional Stigmas

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What is the effect of stigmas on people living with mental health challenges?

Avoidance

Isolation

Bullying

Public Shaming

Lack of support

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Lack of treatment

Suffering in silence

Self persecution

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What does Scripture say?

Uses words such as “downcast,” “broken-hearted,” “troubled,” “miserable,” “despairing,” and “mourning”, among others.

Throughout the Word, there are a number of stories about godly, influential men and women of faith, who struggled and battled through dark times of hopelessness and what we might call mental health challenges today.

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What does Scripture say?

David was troubled and battled deep despair.

In many of the Psalms, he writes of his anguish,

“My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.” Ps. 38:4

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?” Ps. 42:11

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What does Scripture say?

Elijah was discouraged, weary, and afraid.

“I have had enough Lord, he said. Take my life, I am not better than my ancestors.” 1 Kings 19:4

Jonah was angry and wanted to run away.

“Now O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” Jonah 4:3

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What does Scripture say?

Job suffered through great loss, devastation, and physical illness.

“Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?” Job 3:11

“I have no peace, no quietness, I have no rest, but only turmoil.” Job 3:26

“I loathe my very life; therefore, I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.” Job 10:1

“Terrors overwhelm me...my life ebbs away, days of suffering grip me. Night pierces my bones, my gnawing pains never rest.” Job 30:15-17

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What does Scripture say?

Jeremiah wrestled with great loneliness, feelings of defeat, and insecurity.

Also known as the weeping prophet, Jeremiah suffered from constant rejection by the people he loved and reached out to.

“Cursed be the day I was born...why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?” Jeremiah 20:14, Jeremiah 20:18

Even Jesus Himself was deeply anguished over what lay before Him.

Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* Isaiah 53:3

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**So, how do we/you foster meaningful
care & support in churches?**

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Are there any questions?

Please contact nickydickson@mweb.co.za

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