

## Closing the Empathy Gap: Addressing Men's Mental Health

By Elvis Misati, Journalist and Media Practitioner, Egerton Radio

In a society where strength is often equated with silence, the mental health struggles of men remain largely in the shadows. The phrase "man up" still echoes through households, classrooms, workplaces, and even places of worship — discouraging vulnerability and reinforcing the dangerous belief that emotional expression is a sign of weakness. As the world moves toward greater awareness and inclusion in mental health conversations, one glaring issue persists: the empathy gap in addressing men's mental health.

This empathy gap refers to the lack of understanding, support, and attention given to men who suffer emotionally. Men are socialized to suppress their emotions, with many taught from a young age to avoid showing pain, fear, or sadness. While women are often offered emotional support, societal expectations discourage men from seeking help. As a result, many suffer in silence.

Statistics paint a grim picture. According to the World Health Organization, men are significantly more likely to die by suicide than women, despite being less likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety. In Kenya, the situation mirrors global trends: more men than women succumb to mental illness-related issues, including substance abuse, violence, and suicide. The silence, denial, and isolation are costing lives.

But why does this empathy gap persist?

First, there's the cultural narrative that emotions are feminine. From boyhood, males are told to "toughen up," and emotional suppression is rewarded. Secondly, support systems and mental health campaigns often unintentionally exclude men, focusing heavily on women and children — which, while necessary, leaves men's struggles under-addressed.

To close the empathy gap, we must create safe spaces where men can open up without fear of judgment or ridicule. This begins with conversations at home, in schools, and in media. As journalists and content creators, we bear a responsibility to spotlight men's mental health as a mainstream issue, not a side note.

Programs targeted at mental health must deliberately include men, especially young men and fathers. Community leaders, teachers, coaches, and religious figures must be trained to recognize signs of mental distress and offer appropriate referrals or support. Workplaces must integrate mental health into their human resource strategies, encouraging male employees to take mental health days just as they would for physical illness.

At Egerton Radio, we've encountered firsthand the power of storytelling in bridging this

gap. When men come on air and share their struggles — whether it's battling depression, overcoming addiction, or navigating grief — listeners resonate. Empathy grows through stories, and in telling them, we chip away at the stigma.

Importantly, men must also learn that asking for help is not a betrayal of masculinity — it is an act of courage. Just as we care for our physical bodies, tending to our minds is essential for healthy, fulfilling lives.

Mental health is not a gendered issue. But empathy, or the lack of it, often is.

To close the empathy gap, we must break the silence. We must listen. And above all, we must allow our fathers, brothers, partners, and sons to be human — to feel, to cry, and to heal.

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