

# Mental Health in African Perspective, Kiiza Hussein, Africa Lead.

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You will be amused by what mental health is in African traditional lenses. Factually we know mental health to be the mental and psychological well-being of a human being, however applying it in the African context, historically mental health in African understanding was something that was connected to supernatural powers more so when it related to bipolar disorder.

The victims of bipolar disease would be subjected to local shrines for treatment by local herbalists or supper natural spiritual healers would be invoked to help in treating victims of bipolar disorders.

If the disorders reached a pint of running round villages while speaking alone or doing anything that was out of normality at least to the common understanding of layman test, then you would basically be declared cursed person who has run mad and that declaration attracted serious consequences such as being beaten by anyone with or without cause while on streets or anywhere, being taken into

incarceration in a very isolated places by police as mitigation to violence and assault he or she would normally have to put up while living in public.

Then if you talk about depression, it was and still remains a foreign mental illness, in Africa diseases that don't show real body signs that can directly affect other people or change your body physic then that illness does not warrant wearisome neither does it require attention or treatment to that effect. So talking about mental health in Africa is like walking on ocean waters. Then one would ask, is it that people in Africa are not affected by mental health, of course they are many reported and unreported cases of mental health in children, youth and old people but the real problem is how our societies have attached denigrating status to these mental illnesses.

While World health organization's reports that around 300 million people around the world are living with mental health challenges with around 60 million people being depressed, it is a point of concern that some countries are not doing enough to reverser the cases of mental health.

### **What should be done?**

Well there are a number of concerted actions that can be taken. For example it's imperative that families support fellow family member who faces mental health illness, by giving them the right support such as love, treatment and early warning signs detection and change of attitudes that perpetuate stigma and discrimination that have always left many mental health victim stay in isolation.

Like family also communities can extend similar support to people living in their communities.

The government on the other hand has a bigger role to play, constructing health facilities equipped with medical equipment's and staff that are responsive to mental health cases and promoting social care services in community-based settings can be the biggest contribution by the local government, Regards promoting awareness, its everyone's responsibility to promote awareness about the existence of mental health and how people can seek treatment from right institutions with right professional doctors.