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THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MENTAL HEALTH, A PANACEA FOR THE 21st CENTURY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

By

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Abstract

The biblical perspective of mental health has brought tremendous healing to Christians struggling with mental health disorders from Bible time till now. This study explains what mental health is all about. It makes clarity in words interchangeably used and their difference. The study further exposes the readers to the relationship between the Bible and mental health and with examples of personalities faced with mental disorder. The study uses a descriptive and analytical forms of research with the secondary sources to convincingly explain to Christian communities to stop disbelieving in the existence of mental health disorder, and that no one is immune to it: Christians or non-Christians alike. The study provides Biblical solutions to mental health disorders. Many scriptural passages proffer Christ-healing solutions to prevent or heal a mental disorder.

The study arguably tells the church not to downplay its incredible role towards Christians struggling with a mental disorder. The church has a tremendous role to restore Christians suffering from mental sickness to normal health. The study makes practical recommendations for Christians struggling with mental health disorders to recover. The paper concludes by reinstating that all Christians struggling with mental health disorders should look unto Christ Jesus for their healing.

Keywords: Christian, Mental, Health, Sickness

Introduction

Mental health has become a menace to humanity. It cuts across religious boundaries which are found in every community and country. With the onset of Covid-19, its presence has increased. Rates of excessive anxiety, depression, and drug addiction have all been on since the start of the pandemic. The hardship being inflicted on the human race with severity varying from one country to other has contributed to mental health disorders globally. Many are not able to cater for family members and sickness, and loss of loved ones, are all factors militating on our mental health.

The Concept of Mental Health

Mental health includes psychological, emotional and social well-being. It affects how we feel, act and think. It also helps us to assess how we handle stress, make healthy choices and relate with others, (Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2022). In addition to the above definition, World Health Organization defines Mental Health as a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his community” (Encyclopedia of Public Health, 2017).

Mental health is germane at every stage of life, from childhood to adulthood. Often time, the terms are used interchangeably. Mental illness and poor mental health are not the same. Someone can experience poor mental health and not be diagnosed with mental illness. Also, someone diagnosed with a mental illness can experience a period of physical, mental, and social well-being, (Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2022).

Importance of Mental Health on Overall Health

When determining the overall health of an individual, mental and physical health are important components.

For instance, depression can increase the risk for many types of physical health problems particularly chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Also, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk of mental health (Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2022).

Bible and Mental Health

Mental health from a Biblical worldview starts from the opening chapters of Genesis. There, we have the idea of being human and being healthy. The Bible starts by saying that God created everything-humanity inclusive. From a scriptural understanding of the characteristics of God, He created humans in love and designed us for relationships. The book of Genesis highlights the three relationships that all humans have; their relationship to God, to each other and to their environment. This is reflected in God's creative acts of creating humans in his image (Genesis 1: 26-27), and of making companions for each other (1:28-30).

As regards mental health specifically, the Bible does not contain any word for mental illness. This is so because Old Testament writers chose different Biblical Hebrew words to express personhood. For example, the Hebrew word for soul is also used in the Old Testament to mean an

individual (Numbers 31:28) or their inner being (Psalm 10:31). The Hebrew word for a heart can also be translated as mind (Deuteronomy 29:4). If the meaning de-emphasizes focus on the physical and emphasizes more on the mental aspects of these words are both used to describe the condition of a person and also the means through which they interact with God. When someone falls sick in the Old Testament, their whole person is affected, not just their mind. This should well be taken into consideration today. Though the Bible may not have a word on mental illness, looking at Old Testament as a whole contains much evidence of deep pain on individual and community levels. Cook and Hamley (2020) note that “the Old Testament is a collection of old texts shaped by pain and trauma: struggles for survival, war, slavery, exile, and political oppression are everywhere present, and these texts weave together accounts for personal pain and trauma. The Old Testament, therefore, is both a story of trauma and a theological and spiritual response to it.”

Hamley and Cook (2020) note that the Bible gives an overview of Biblical writers' struggles with psychological pain. Job expresses his faith in the face of extreme personal loss. The psalmist often explains anxiety and reframes personal experiences in the light of God's character. Jeremiah in his case deals with the