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Mindfulness, attachment theory and human resilience for increasing mental wellbeing and longevity

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Individuals with varying mental health diagnosis from more common neurosis to complex psychosis report one commonality, a sense of extreme “loneliness”. Researchers in the UK have uncovered an alarming national trend in suicide rates with it being at its highest rate since 2011. Men, however remain three times more likely to take their own lives, according to “Samaritans Suicide statistics report”: 2016. The link between social isolation and suicidal ideation is prevalent, the city of Leeds has one of the highest rates of male suicide with males being five times more likely to commit suicide than females. A recent suicide audit conducted by Professor Alan White, the Founder of the Centre for Men’s Health at Leeds Beckett University said, “There are a range of factors which can undermine men’s sense of worth, such as facing employment difficulties; divorce and loss of contact with children; long term health conditions and these negative events result in low resilience that can culminate in suicide”. Repeatedly, researchers have demonstrated a link between low resilience and poor mental health, suicidal ideation and the act of suicide. Yet professionals and researchers are still exploring theories on what makes an individual “resilient”. Curiosity about what factors make one individual more resilient than another is leading to continued research into the concept of resilience. The psychological definition of resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats and significant sources of stress. There are questions which are still being investigated about resilience, as to it a personality trait which is naturally occurring or is it learned. If it is learned, does that mean resilience individuals can train themselves to become more psychologically robust, overcome adversity, and have deeper mental stamina that enhances their chances of longevity. I will explore how mindfulness improves emotional intimacy between humans by building the individual’s capacity for “mentalization”. A theory of mind discussed in many areas of study and research psychology, psychotherapy and philosophy can be connected to the mindfulness concept of raising awareness, becoming aware of one’s own thoughts. It is also a core component in the development of empathy. Researchers have found that mental health conditions like depression, low mood and stress are in part caused by a failure in the capacity to mentalize. Mentalization originated as a concept in psychoanalytic literature in the 1960’s and such theories of mind are still topic of debate by researchers. The argument by researchers in attachment theories has been that securely attached individuals tend to have developed more robust ability for mentalization and therefore are more protected from psychosocial adversity.

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Transforming mental health care of children in child-headed households through application of positive psychology and psychotherapy

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Child-headed households (CHH) are increasingly becoming a characteristic of society in South Africa and various parts of Africa. Given the rising number of CHH, it is inevitable that the socialization of children within the context of families emerges as an area of great concern. An understanding of children’s lives and their positions within African families in South Africa is a critical research need. The author attempts to fill the knowledge gap on the experiences of children from child-headed families by integrating several studies that were either conducted or supervised by him over the last decade. The intention is to present a holistic picture on the mental health of children from CHH within their homes, schools and communities as construed through the lens of bio-ecological systems theory and positive psychology. The findings reveal the struggles of the children with their living conditions, changing roles of family members, fears of the community and school experiences, all of which affect their mental health. A poignant feature of the studies is the resilient nature of some of the children from CHH. Taking the socio-cultural context of the children into consideration the author argues that positive psychology and psychotherapy could be instrumental in transforming the mental health care of children from CHH as manifested in their adaptations, adjustments and survival mechanisms. The findings and recommendations made in this paper have global value since there are CHH throughout the world.

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