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Mental Health and Librarians

Understanding the Impact of Mental Health in the Library Profession

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Mental Health Awareness Month





ST. PAUL'S
UNIVERSITY

MAY- MH month

Your University of Choice



Mental Health Awareness Month





Holistic User support

- Truths about libraries:
 - Community hubs- academic, public, research,
 - Quiet places to recollect- Headspaces....
 - Meet people- ensure spaces are comfortable
 - Information provision
 - Social resources- job hunting, CV writing...





- A state where one realizes their potential to cope with normal life; stresses, work productivity and contribute to their communities.

(WHO)

Balance between emotional and mental wellness and have space for others.



Mental Health and Librarians



Purpose

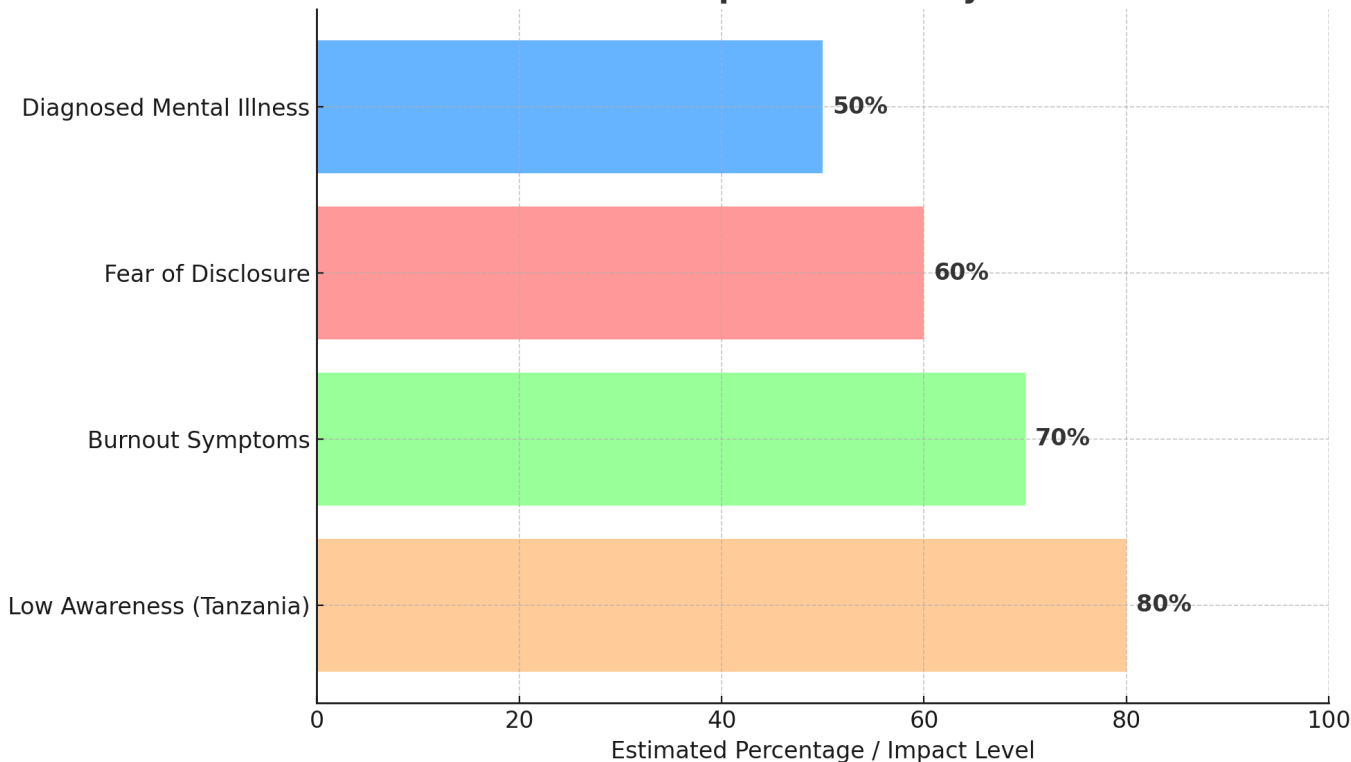
- To raise awareness about the importance of mental health among library professionals.
- To explore strategies for promoting well-being in the workplace.
- To understand the role librarians can play in supporting their mental health and that of their users and communities.





Mental Health overview

Mental Health Impact on Library Professionals



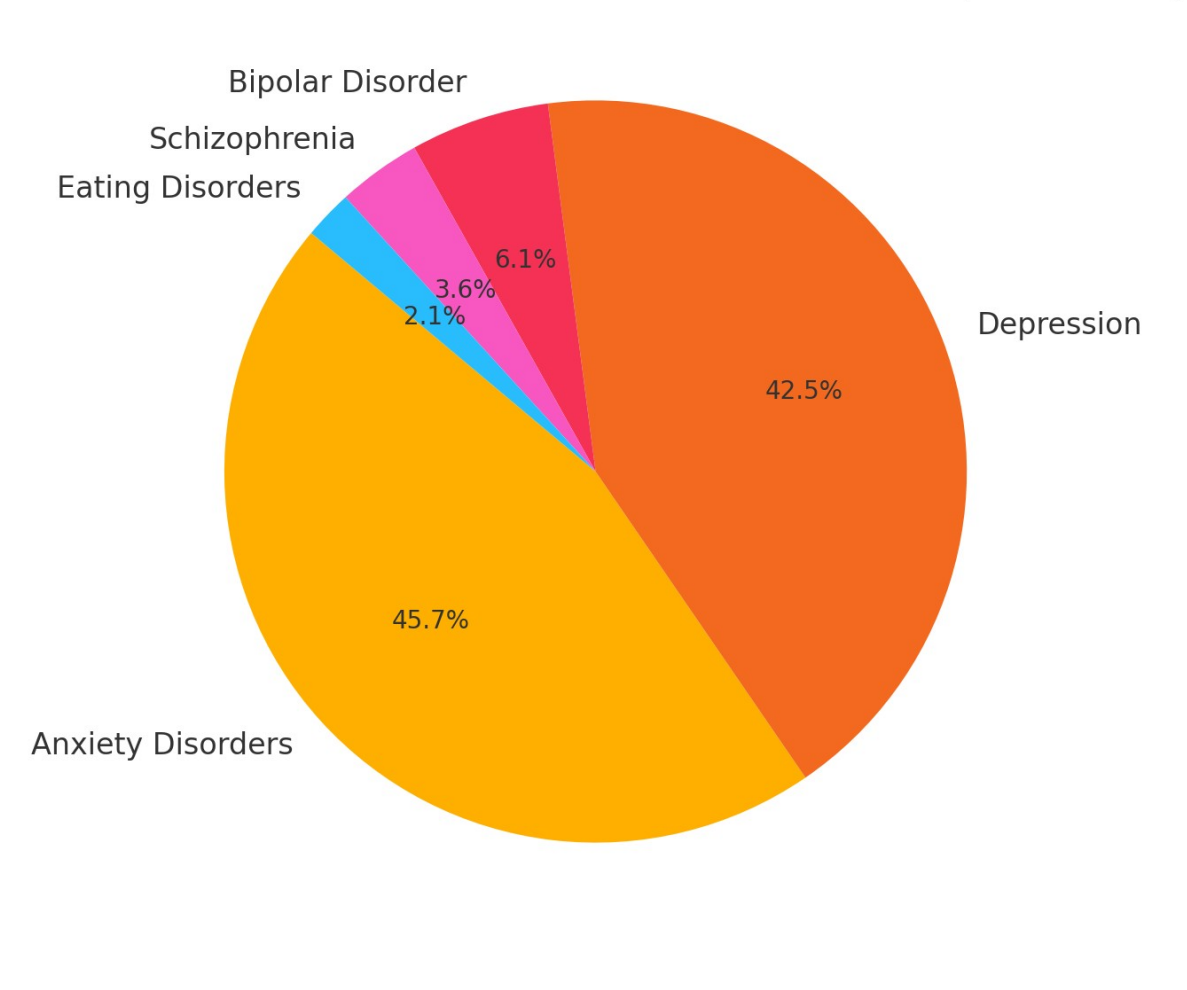
- **Definition:** MH refers to emotional, psychological, and social well-being of people and affects how they think, feel, and act.
- **Statistics:** Includes relevant statistics on MH disorders and their prevalence.
- **Importance:** MH is essential for overall well-being and quality of life of librarians, users and wider community



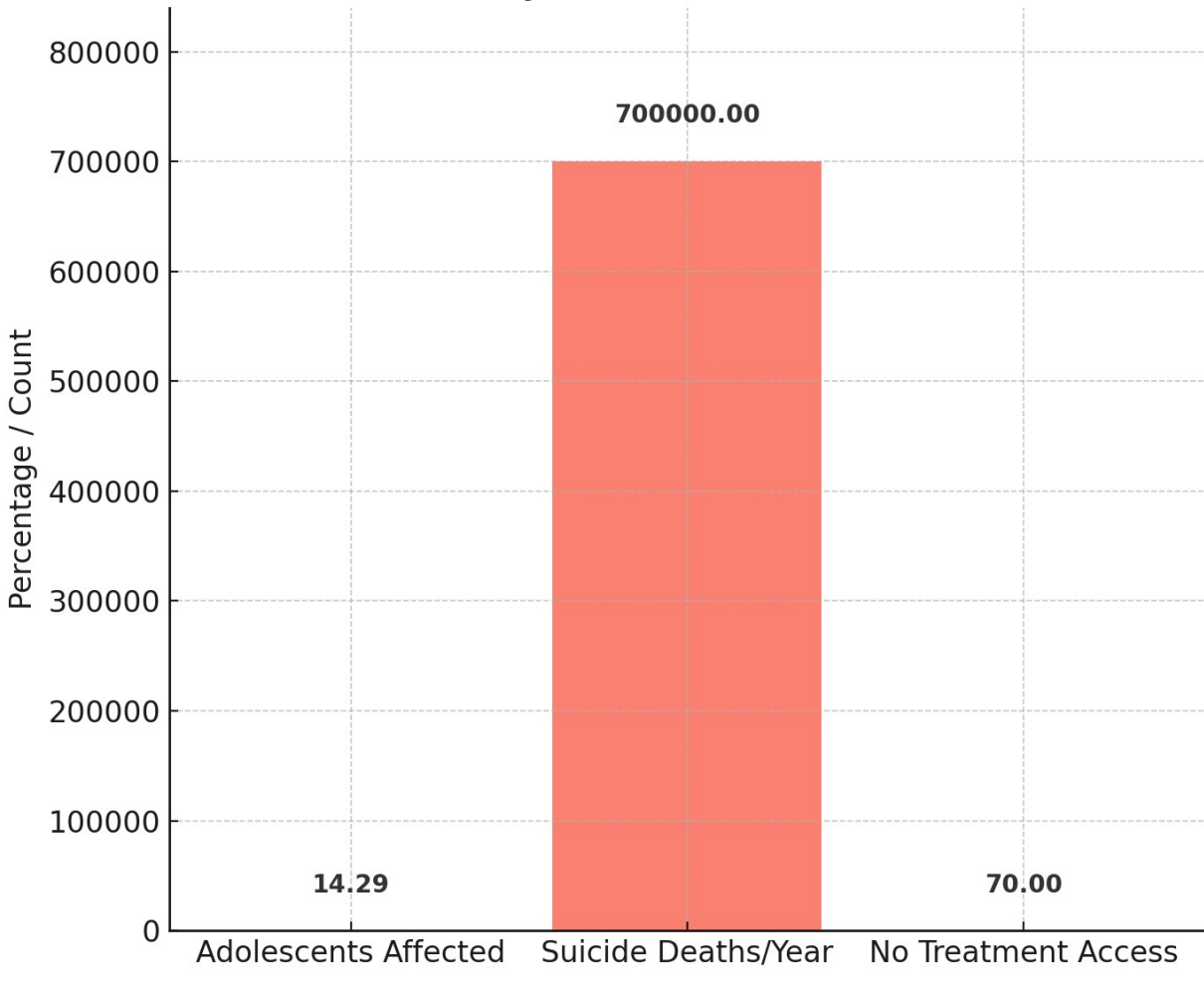


Mental Health overview

Global Prevalence of Common Mental Disorders (in millions)



Other Key Mental Health Statistics





MH causes among Library Professionals



- **Workplace Stressors:**

- High workloads, long hours, and dealing with challenging clients / patrons
- Emotional labour of assisting patrons with personal issues or emotional needs.
- Limited resources/skills for MH support.
- Personal/family issues

- **Impact on Librarians:**

- Increased rates of burnout, stress, and MH issues.
- High stress work environments-limited resources vs user demands.

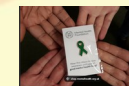




Common MH Challenges among Librarians



- **Burnout:** A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress.
- **Depression & Anxiety:** Common issues faced by librarians, exacerbated by stress and isolation.
- **Compassion Fatigue:** Emotional strain from helping others, particularly those facing personal or MH challenges.

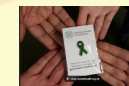




Factors Contributing to MH issues



- **Public Interaction:** Dealing with patrons who may be stressed or dealing with MH issues.
- **Isolation:** Working in a profession where staff may be working alone or with minimal human interaction.
- **Lack of Resources:** Limited resources/skills for MH support and coping strategies.
- **Expectations:** High expectations from management and patrons, with few resources to manage them.





Signs of MH issues



- Irritability or difficulty concentrating
- **Behavioural Changes:**
 - Increased absenteeism or presenteeism (showing up but not fully engaged).
 - Changes in work performance, mood, or attitude.
 - Withdrawal or disengagement from colleagues and tasks.
- **Physical Signs:**
 - Exhaustion, headaches, or chronic fatigue.
 - Sleep disturbances.





Supporting staff with MH issues



- **Self-Care Strategies:**

- Setting boundaries between work and personal life.
- Practicing mindfulness, speaking/listening to personal!!!
- Seeking professional counseling when needed.
- Simple group therapy sessions
- Training on basic MH handling
- Creating awareness among staff & users





Supporting staff with MH issues



- **Promoting a Healthy Work Environment:**
 - Encouraging open conversations about mental health.
 - Providing resources such as mental health days, access to counselors, or stress-relief activities.
 - Fostering a supportive team culture.





Resources for Librarians' Mental Health



- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Confidential resources available through employers- Institutional Counselors
- **Professional Support Groups:** Connecting with peers for advice and emotional support.
- **MH Apps & Resources:** Tools like Headspace, Calm, or therapy apps.
- **Library Associations:** Some offer wellness programs, support, and resources (e.g., ALA's WELLNESS initiative.....KLA???).





Librarians Supporting Patron on MH



- **MH Resources for Patrons:**

- Libraries as safe spaces for individuals facing mental health issues.
- Providing access to books, online resources, and local MH organizations.
- Offering programs/space for support groups, workshops, or stress-relief activities.





Librarians Supporting Patron MH



Training for Library Staff:

- MH first aid training . Provide conducive, relaxing, friendly and Interactive spaces
- Creating an inclusive environment for patrons with mental health challenges.





Best Practices for Libraries Supporting MH

- **Developing Policies & Training:**
 - Providing staff training on MH awareness and sensitivity.
 - Ensuring libraries have policies in place for responding to MH crises.
- **Creating Safe Spaces:**
 - Offering quiet spaces for people in distress or to relax.
 - Organizing wellness programs and mindfulness workshops.
- **Collaborating with Local Resources:**
 - Partnering with MH professionals or organizations to offer workshops or services.





How Librarians Can Take Care of Their MH

- **Creating Healthy Boundaries:**
 - Avoiding overworking and ensuring adequate downtime.
- **Peer Support:**
 - Building a network of support with colleagues.
 - Discussing MH in a non-judgmental and open manner.
- **Accessing Professional Help:**
 - Seeking support when feeling overwhelmed or stressed.





Conclusion

Key take aways;

- MH is a critical issue that affects both librarians and library patrons.
- There is prevalence- Libraries are MH hubs for communities
- Through fostering a supportive work environment and practicing self-care, librarians can protect their MH.
- Acceptance and seeking processing help
- Libraries can be a resource for supporting the MH of the institution/community by providing information, safe spaces, and support services.





Questions and discussion



- Experiential sharing- personal (be vulnerable)
- Silence/ignorance killing a lot of people
- Select service point staff based on their people skills
- Share ideas and strategies best placed for use to maintain MH libraries as workplace and as patrons.





Mentally Healthy Librarian



“It takes courage to say
yes to REST and PLAY in a
culture where exhaustion
is seen as a status”

Brene' Brown





Way Forward



- What role can Librarians play in contributing to the MH sphere for the Kenyan population?
- Who will support the top managers of libraries as they help their teams?
- Do we include handling of MH issues in our staff orientation manuals/awareness for support,,,,??
- We are all vulnerable and can be victims of MH- be aware!!!
- **#Be mindful of your MH to be able to help others.**





Mental Health Improvement Activities

- Gratitude Journaling (list 3 three things grateful for daily as tangible positivity records)
- Attend Mental Health Workshops (online or physical)
- Listen to Music (it is therapy that makes you better)
- Outdoor Activities (group walks, any fun activities)
- Prioritize self wellbeing and support others
- Reach to an MH by 31-05-2025





References & Acknowledgements

- American Psychological Association- Monitor on Psychology. Vol.51, No.3- April/May 2020
- SPU- Library team- Thomas Oluoch
- SPU Counselling team
- Trevor B. & Lucy M.





Thank you

