


Examining Factors Contributing to Mental Disorders Among Grade 12 Male Learners in Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Male learners usually do not disclose easily about their problems, and this makes them to be more at risk of attempting suicide than adults. This also affects their relationships with their friends, family, colleagues, and community. This study aims to examine the factors that contribute to mental disorders among grade 12 male learners in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Methods and Materials: This study is qualitative in nature, and the thematic content analysis method is used to analyse and interpret data. The study used semi-structured interviews with 10 male learners about their perceptions on their mental health at schools. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used in order for the researcher to gather information from 10 male participants who are specifically in intimate relationships and data was collected using semi-structured interviews so to gather as much information as possible so to get more insight about men's perceptions and awareness on their mental well-being.

Findings: The findings of this study confirmed that learners are aware of their mental health. Majority of the participants believe that their mental health is often overlooked due to societal or cultural norms. For instance, toxic masculinity around male learners.

Conclusion: These norms have a great influence on help-seeking behaviour of learners, majority of male learners do not seek help because they fear that society will regard them as powerless, not man enough, or weak. Researcher recognised challenges that men face when trying to seek help, these include societal expectations, societal norms, and toxic masculinity (gender roles for men). Fear of being mocked, and fear of being rejected are some of the reasons that discourage men from seeking professional help.

Keywords: Grade 12 male learners, Help-seeking behaviour, mental health stigma, gender roles, Toxic masculinity, self-harm.

1. Introduction

Grade 12 learners' mental health is an important topic, particularly because of how pervasive the issue has recently become all over the world, particularly in South African news and media topics. Globally grade 12 learners are more than twice as likely to die by suicide than adults (Who, 2021, 2022). In South Africa, there are 23 estimated suicides per day, and grade 12 male learners are four times more likely to die by suicide than adults (Heywood, 2021). This is because society tends to overlook male learners' mental health. There are various factors contributing to poor mental health of male learners, and these factors include challenges that these learners experience in their schools. Through the view of societal expectations and traditional gender roles, male learners are expected to be the toughest in the family, show traditional masculine features, such as strength and control, depend on themselves and not seek help from others, and not to speak openly about their emotions (Reeves, 2022). Hence, most male learners tend to bottle things up; they do not talk about nor express their feelings or emotions. As a result, a learners would then start acting out and this involves an extremely high level of substance misuse, increased anger, and becoming impatient. Learners act in such ways to hide their pain and sadness. Therefore, it is now the time to implement new approaches to research, policy, and practice that respond to learners' styles of coping, vulnerability, and psychological suffering (Timothy, 2019). This study discussed the stigma around the grade 12 male learners' mental health, and how gender roles affect their mental health. Theories of mental health are also discussed to strengthen this study. The discussion is hereby touching on factors that contribute to poor mental health of learners. Hence, mental disorders that are most common in learners are important in this paper and they are not left out.

Grade 12 learners are most vulnerable in their schools due to societal expectations. A lot of learners fall prey to the false idea that they should be "tough enough" to fix their problems on their own. A learner would even worry that by showing vulnerability, even in the case of physical illness, he will be seen as weak or less of a human being (not human being enough). Learners often experience different types of mental health conditions such as depression, post-traumatic disorder, schizophrenia, anger and aggressiveness, substance induced disorders (due to substance abuse), engagement in high-risk activities, thoughts of suicide, and persistent feelings of worry (Timothy, 2019). Furthermore, several studies have been done on grade 12 learners mental

health including studies that focus on the stigmatisation around learners' mental health, masculinity, amongst others. The stigma associated with having a mental health condition or seeking treatment is often cited as a specific barrier to mental health care. Findings of a study conducted by Sagar-Ouriaghli et al (2020) in the university of London reveals that male students find seeking help for mental health issues from service providers intimidating and that makes them reluctant to seek help (Sagar-Ouriaghli et al., 2020a). Sagar-Ouriaghli et al., (2020) argue that the behaviour of not seeking help in male learners is influenced by the stigma attached to men's mental health, the authors indicated that male learners' mental health issues are more stigmatised compared to those of female learners (Sagar-Ouriaghli et al., 2020b). The study conducted at KwaZulu-Natal University by Mthethwa (2018), reveals that friends and peers are the great influencers of toxic masculinity (Mthethwa, 2018). In that very study, male students shared that it is not only women that overlook men's mental health but men themselves tend to overlook their mental health and promote masculine norms. However, perceptions and awareness of male learners about their mental health have not been addressed.

1.1. Male learners' Mental Health (Societal or Cultural Aspects That Influence the Psychological Concept of Men)

Male learners are allegedly less susceptible to mental health problems because society views them as the most resilient people on the planet (Chatmon, 2020). Male learners' lives had become burdened by social expectations, and they are constantly constrained from doing things that society forbids which makes it difficult for them to live comfortably. Male learners' ability to seek professional assistance about their mental health is impacted by a variety of problems. These problems include masculinity, societal norms, traditional gender roles, and societal and cultural expectations (McKenzie et al., 2018). On one hand, male learners are more likely to experience stress, depression, and anxiety due to the aforementioned contributing factors than female learners. On the other hand, learners who experience these problems are not expected to show up their emotions or to even cry in front of the public (Lönn et al., 2023). Failure to comply with societal rules makes one be regarded as either too feminine or not being man enough, which could lead to them engaging in hazardous coping behaviours such as abusing substances or being addicted to gambling games. Male learners' mental health may be impacted by family

expectations of being strong, and dominant. As a result, it can be challenging for male learners to ask for help or discuss their problems.

1.2. *Help-Seeking Among Grade 12 Learners*

Society has channelled learners to think that seeking help is for the weak such that when they cry, they will be regarded as weak or not strong enough. Male learners feel that if they ask for help society will say they are not strong enough, yet most cases of people who died by committing suicide are learners. Gough and Novikova (2020) indicate that there are learners who show weakness or seek help from the people they are close to, but societal or cultural norms continue to be barriers between most learners and seeking help. Proverbs from different cultures including “*Indoda Ayikhali*” or “*Monna ke nku o lla kateng*” (Men do not cry) are some of barriers that prohibit them to seek help. Gough & Novikova (2020) further state that, awareness campaigns must be established to address toxic masculinity norms so to enable male learners to seek help without the fear of being labelled as weak men. Further studies about learners’ seeking help behaviour include studies that highlighted denial of emotions and lack of knowledge about mental health as some of the barriers to seeking help among young men. In their study Lynch et al (2018) mentioned that most learners, especially the male ones have difficulties when it comes to accepting anything that would be seen as a threat to their “manhood” or masculine traits. Most studies on barriers to seeking help among male learners have highlighted societal or cultural norms as some of the barriers that have a great influence on learners’ seeking help behaviour regarding their mental health. It is evident that more studies that would provide solutions towards eliminating barriers to seeking help among men with mental health issues must be conducted.

1.3. *Societal Expectations and Masculinity*

Societal expectations and masculinity are the result of male learners’ mental health issues. Learners are expected to be strong even when they are struggling because they need to hide emotions that toxic masculinity can have a psychological impact on. If they are not strong at the time of the struggle, society considers them weak. That is why it has some impact on seeking professional help on mental health issues. Male learners as a group seek professional psychological help less often than female learners for issues such as substance abuse, stress, and depression (Sagar-

Ouriaghli et al., 2020b). The societal and cultural expectations make male learners think of themselves as risk-takers, thus making them more prone to engage in risky behaviours that could lead to injury and death than women (Apalkova et al., 2018). Some environmental pressures have been proposed to be the major causes of male learners premature death and have predisposed them to engage in **unhealthy behaviours** (e.g. risky sexual behaviour, alcohol use and abuse, high-risk sports, reckless driving) detrimental to their mental. The purpose of this study is to conduct a literature review on the effects of overlooking learners’ mental health and factors that contribute; empowering and supporting all learners to improve the health and well-being of themselves and others at all stages of life by recognising and assessing the diversity of learners; reduce stigma associated with health-conscious behaviour. Finally, the goal is to recognise the impact of gender on health by addressing the gender gaps men face in accessing and using health services.

1.4. *The History of Grade 12 Learners’ Mental Health in South African Schools*

The history of grade 12 learners’ mental health in South Africa has reached a turning point where national strategies are required to address the growing number of grade 12 learners who are struggling with issues related to mental health. Stigmas related to mental health are pervasive and frequent in human societies. Learners also deal with the stigma that asking for mental health support is a sign of weakness, that “real person” do not do so, and that discussing issues like anxiety and depression is ineffective. Learners frequently encounter additional bias from their male peers due to the perception that males should be able to control and manage their own emotions as mental health issues makes them a burden on others. Regardless of the stigmas, communities must stop making male learners feel unworthy if they admit they need to address mental health issues. learners will continue to suffer in silence and face more severe difficulties with mental health disorders if they are not given support and empathy. In an article titled “*Why Society Should Talk About Learners’ Mental Health*” published on December 1, 2016, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre made the case that by working together, we can eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness and encourage people to openly discuss their struggles. Therefore, this article aims to clarify the factors that influence the need for help in learners with mental health problems. This study also seeks to answer; (a) why learners

do not seek help if they have mental health problems or are prone to suicide, and (b) how to make professional services accessible and attractive to learners. In addition, this study describes the theories or models used to study the mental health of grade 12 male learners in Limpopo Province in South Africa.

1.5. Common Risk Factors: Employment and Occupational Issues

One of the most important common risk factors is employment and career issues. Studies show that unemployment can be a chronic stressor, and unemployment or dismissal can be an acute stressor. Many studies have shown that unemployment after grade 12 has a greater impact on learner's mental health. For example, in a 2009 meta-analysis of data from 26 predominantly western countries from 1963 to 2004, the impact of unemployment on mental health was significantly greater for male learners than for female learners. This difference between men and women may be due to that work has traditionally been an area where men derive their self-identity, self-esteem, and self-worth. Jobs also provide status, income, and resources that can be used to support men and their families. Therefore, the joy and discontinuity of the work area can lead to significant psychological stress and significant financial burden. This in turn leads to the development of depression in men.

1.6. Common Risk Factors: Family Issues and Divorce

The family is another area of life in which learners derive important goals and meanings in life. There is evidence that divorce and romantic farewell are strong risk factors for mental illness and suicide. The negative effects of divorce on learners' mental health are due to several factors. An important factor is the loss of social support and emotional attachment. For example, one study found that 19% of divorced or separated male learners reported reduced social support compared to 11% of female learner. This is consistent with sociological studies, where women tend to have larger circles of family and friends after parting, and men tend to rely on partners and nuclear families for emotional support. Losing a parent can be especially difficult. Therefore, learners that come from divorced families are most likely to have suicidal ideas and substance abuse.

1.7. Traditional Gender Role

This may involve feeling under pressure to provide for others or societal expectations that prevent learners from discussing their emotions. Male learners frequently suffer negative effects because of society's expectations for them to be the family's primary provider, protector, and all-around strong members in the future. Male learners are expected to hold everything together, protect their families, and never appear weak. However, these stressors can seriously affect learners' mental health and occasionally trigger addiction. Therefore, conventional gender roles are considerably counterproductive and detrimental to the welfare of men rather than being beneficial.

1.8. Stigma

Male learners are typically raised to be strong, to take charge, and to believe that showing emotion is a sign of weakness. According to this theory, real young male learners don't ask for help, so people who conform to patriarchal stereotypes may be reluctant to seek therapy. There is a belief that discussing mental health disorders won't help and that doing nothing will not make them go away. For instance, when male learners are being physically, emotionally, financially abused by their parents, teachers and friends and when try to file a report of abuse against them, the police respond by laughing at them and treating them as weak and whiny cry-babies. Male learners should not publicly weep when they are subjected to abuse by their parents of any kind. A common saying among the Bapedi people of Limpopo Province is "Monna ke nku o llela teng," which means "a man is a sheep, he cries internally." As a result of the pressure society puts on them and because of issues with masculinity, learners are less likely to report cases of people abusing them. Because of this, male learners are more likely to experience stress and depression, which can lead to risky behaviour like alcohol abuse.

1.9. Issues with relationships

Male learners are less likely than female learners to react to situations involving challenges or problems in relationships, such as breakup, because they believe they should be man enough to act as if everything is fine even though this is essentially impossible. Male learners are expected to lead a lie-filled existence. Relationship breakup is a problem that affects both sexes. learners are put under pressure by things like having issues in schools because

society expects some learners to be the family's provider and breadwinner, which makes it difficult for them because everything in the family should come from them. Numerous issues arise in the relationships between learners and their parents as well as teachers. For instance, male learners might not disclose that they feel illtreated by their partners out of concern for how society will react to that.

2. Methods and Materials

This study used the qualitative approach with an exploratory research design because of its qualities, the fact that it focuses on people's experiences, view, and understanding about things and since the study intends to explore views and experiences of men about their mental well-being thereafter the qualitative method the best fit for

it. Thematic Content Analysis was used to analyse data. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used in order for the researcher to gather information from 10 male participants who are specifically in intimate relationships and data was collected using semi-structured interviews so to gather as much information as possible so to get more insight about men's perceptions and awareness on their mental well-being.

2.1. Population of this study

Population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristics (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). In this study, the target population was the male learners of age 16-19 years of age who are currently enrolled in grade 12.

Table 1

Age of participants

Age group	Number of participants	Percentage
16-17	2	20%
18-19	8	80%
TOTAL	10	100%

Table 1 shows that majority of participants ranged from age 18-19 years and have made up 80% of the sample representation whereas participants between ages of 16-17 were 20% less than majority.

Moreover, all participants were males and have made a sample presentation of 100%.

Table 2

Ethnic groups of participants

Ethnic group	Number of participants	Percentage
Pedi	09	90%
Venda	0	0%
Tsonga	01	10%
Swati	0	0%
Zulu	0	0%
Xhosa	0	0%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	10	100%

Table 2 shows that majority of the participants were Pedi speaking people with a percentage of 90% sample representation, and 10% of the sample was a participant who belonged to the Tsonga ethnic group. Other ethnic groups with 0% sample representation. The explanation for the above figures might be the fact that, Capricorn district in

Limpopo Province, South Africa, is an area that is made up of most people who belong to the Pedi ethnic group. This means that most of the students that enrolled in the schools come from neighbouring areas that are composed of Pedi speaking people.

Table 3

Study Level of Participants

Study level	Number of participants	Percentage
Grade 12	10	100%
Total	10	100%

Table 3 shows that majority of participants are students that are currently doing sciences of 50% followed by a participant who is currently doing commerce of 30%, and a

participant who is doing general studies of 10% sample representation.

Table 4

Faculty of Study of participants

Streams	Number of participants	Percentage
General studies	2	20%
commerce	3	30%
sciences	5	50%
TOTAL	10	100%

Table 4 illustrates that most of the participants are under the faculty of sciences, with a sample representation of 50%, followed by number of participants who study under the faculty of commerce with a percentage of 30%, and lastly a participant that is under the faculty of general studies with a 20% sample representation.

of how the construct is viewed generally in the society they come from (Ezeugwu, 2020).

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted social construction theory. The social construction theory was developed by two sociologists in the late 1960s Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, who then introduced the theory in the book titled: *The Social Construction of Reality* published in 1966 (Vinney, 2019). The work of the two sociologists was influenced by few thinkers, including Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and George Herbert Mead among others stated Vinney (2019) (Vinney, 2019). The social construction theory argues that what we see as reality is created socially. Talanquer & Kelly (2024) argued that knowledge does not come from the mind instead it is constructed from interactions of individuals within a society, meaning that people become knowledgeable through sharing of ideas, opinions, or perceptions (Talanquer & Kelly, 2024). Basically, the focus of this theory is around beliefs that how individuals think and view the world results from shared meanings between them and the people around them. In society individuals embrace beliefs, meanings, perceptions about a construct on the basis

3.1. Social Construction Theory on Mental Health

According to Chika Remigious Ezeugwu & Olunyika Ojedokun (2020), masculine norms are socially constructed (Ezeugwu, 2020). Every individual has beliefs, things that they think are right, ways in which they believe things must be done. In their article, Ezeugwu & Ojedokun (2020) refer to such beliefs as gender expectations (masculine norms) that shape the psychological concept of male individuals, they based their argument in relation to African learners' mental health (Ezeugwu, 2020). The authors stated that, these gender expectations are what society believe learners should be like in terms of characteristics and strengths. Now that society have expectations from learners automatically learners start to act or behave in a certain way that would confirm or satisfy the normative. Social constructivist argues that male learners are not born with masculine characteristics, they do not possess dominant trait naturally, but they then grow up and adapt to what society considers as normative, gender expectations and acquire such traits. For instance, in some African cultures, male learners are expected to be strong and not to shed a tear "indoda ayikhali" they say nor express their feelings, these grade 12 male learners are not naturally born immune to pain but they adapt to these perceived societal ideas that they are strong and therefore they start behaving in such a way. These African

young men or learners are channelled to be strong, to acquire masculine traits. How individuals embrace societal norms depends on what society stipulates, thus men will behave in a way that satisfies the societal expectations even if the behaviour is healthy or unhealthy (Ezeugwu, 2020). This article shed light on how societal masculine norms have influenced the psychology of African men and their behaviour in society, however the article did not discuss the effects of these societal expectations on men's perceptions and awareness about their mental health. In other words, the article did not discuss how society has made grade 12 male learners to become ignorant when it comes to them taking care of their mental health and being aware of their mental health not because they want to, or they do it intentionally but because they have been conditioned to think that they are strong, and they can overcome any challenge or obstacle they come across on their own.

4. Ethical Considerations

For the study to be valid and reliable, it needs to be carried out within the ethical parameters. If the research ethics are not observed, the participants may withhold the necessary information if they are forced to participate or if they feel like the information, they give will not be kept confidential or their anonymity will not be ensured they will protect themselves by providing falsified information (Gragg et al., 2024). Before the researcher could collect data from the participants, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC). The project number is TREC/1001/2024: PG.

5. Significance of this study

The significance of this study is to reduce the stigma that male learners in grade 12 face when seeking help when they are experiencing difficulties at schools. This study will have an impact because it will help male learners realise that they too are humans and must cry out for help and express their emotions. The notion that learners do not cry must be abandoned. This study will benefit young adults in the sense that they will stop repressing their emotions when they are expressed and will begin talking about their problems and seeking outside help. The study was qualitative in nature, with semi-structured interviews conducted with mostly male learners about their perceptions on their mental health at schools. The data was analysed to determine which resources should be made available to prevent the stigma around male learners' mental illness. This study will play a

role in the development of preventive strategies and the promotion of learner's mental health for instance, establishing more campaigns about grade 12 male learners' mental health to change help-seeking behaviour among themselves.

6. Presentation of themes and sub-themes

Participants acknowledged that learners' mental health is often overlooked. Some of them specified that they had experienced or observed factors that contribute to learners' mental issues in their childhood. The following are themes and subthemes that emerged from the study about perceptions and awareness of young-adult males regarding their mental health in their schools.

Theme 1: Learners' Views About Their Mental Health in Schools

Data collected shows that grade 12 learners are aware about their mental health and determinants of their mental health in schools. During interviews participants were able to explain mental health to show that they understand the concept. Most participants said that mental health has to do with emotional and psychological wellness of an individual and that it can affect one's feelings or behaviour. To strengthen their discussions, participants mentioned examples of mental health issues for instance, depression, bipolar, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), et cetera. These findings are supported by (WHO, WHO International News-room, 2022), who stated that mental health is an emotional, psychological, or social condition of mental wellness that help an individual manage life stressors. Participants further shared that they are aware of the stigma around their mental health and that society including intimate partners, family, and friends, and community members often overlook learners' mental health. Most responses from participants indicated that mental health issues in male learners are often overlooked, society fails to notice male learners' mental health because of societal or cultural norms that have influenced how members of society view mental health issues of male learners.

The following are some of the responses, researcher got from respondents:

"No one cares about the mental well-being of male learners" (R3)

"Yes, I think it is overlooked because in relationships, male learners are not expected to show emotions. In fact, we are expected to suffer in silence" (R7).

"It is not only overlooked by women, even us as male learners, we tend to expect things from each other that are sometimes too unrealistic" (R7).

50% of the entire sample argued that they do not think that learners' mental health is overlooked but believe that learners do not seek help because they do not want to, they always bottle things up. Whitworth & Pharmacy (2021) supported this by saying that over the years till date mental health in learners progresses to be considered as "taboo", grade 12 learners don't share their feelings or emotions even if they struggle with certain mental health issues (Whitworth & Pharmacy, 2021).

The following is the response the researcher got from the participant.

"I do not think it is, I think male learners just like to deal with their emotions on their own" (R6).

From the findings of the study, it is clear 30% of the participants believe that mental health of male learners is often overlooked compared to those of female learners and 20% believe that learners mental health is not overlooked learners just choose not to talk about things that hurt them.

Sub-theme 2: Stigma

This subtheme talks about the stigma attached to their mental health. learners expressed that they are unable to talk about their mental health issues because mental issues are often associated with vulnerability and being vulnerable is a threat to their masculine traits. The following are some of the responses, researcher got from respondents

"Any cry from a male learner is associated with weakness as opposed to a female learner" (R1).

"That is how it is supposed to be, if you showed your emotions, they would say you are weak and be taken for granted. We are just in a selfish society, every man for himself" (R8).

"If male learners try to reach out for help, they are told that Indoda Ayikhali or Monna ke nku o llela teng such societal norms affect men to an extent that they would start acting out" (R3).

The data shows that majority of the participants believe that male learners mental health is more stigmatised compared to that of a female learner. With these findings, researcher can conclude that stigma attached to mental health of grade 12 male learners is a barrier to seeking help for mental health issues in learners.

Theme 2: Social Expectations or Cultural Naunces that Influences Men's Mental Health

Data collected shows that most participants have knowledge about societal expectations that influence their

reaction to their mental health. Some participants mentioned toxic masculinity (gender roles for male learners). Male learners are expected to be head of the family or being financially stable in the future so they can provide for their families. If male learners fail to be bread earners of their family in the future, they end up experiencing psychological stress because the society will start labelling them with names that may affect their mental health. These findings are confirmed by Chacin & McBeath (2023), that young fathers may experience gender role strain and associated psychological distress when they struggle to meet the demands of traditional fathering roles, such as the expectation that they will provide for their families (Chacin & McBeath, 2023). Abbarov (2024) validated that male learners are often socialised to be the "breadwinners" and family providers in the future and face psychological consequences when removed from this role. Captured voices of participants are as follows:

"When I was growing up, I had to experience seeing my father working all-day and night trying to make money so he can provide for his children and wife. This had showed me that it is not good for my father's mental health because he could not get enough sleep of which it stresses him. But I had realized that this is how we should live because the society expects you to do so. There is nothing we could do, "it's a norm" (R10).

"Men are providers, and this puts pressure to the unemployed. Men are more muscular than their partners. Unemployed men are useless. Societal standards are what a man should be having at/by what age" (R1).

Theme 3: Learners' views on seeking help

Through the subthemes listed below, this subject emphasises learners' thoughts on obtaining assistance from experts in the helping field. Perceived stigma is one of the most often stated barriers to obtaining professional care (Phelan et al., 2023).

Sub-theme: Fear of ridicule from helping professionals

Few participants do not consider seeking help from professionals because they fear to be being judged or avoid being mocked. According to several studies, learners may feel uneasy, ashamed, afraid, or embarrassed when they seek assistance (Nugroho et al., 2023). Following is some of the participants' comments:

"My biggest fear for seeking help is that they will laugh at me" (R5).

"I had never experience this, I am stating this from my own perspective. Let's talk about a grade 12 learner who is being abused by grade 10 learner, this grade 12 learner will

not report the case because the police will undermine him and that they will regard him as being less of man and a crybaby, they will say how can a grade 12 learner be abused by a grade 10 learner, that is highly impossible. Hence, I say most of grade 12 learners who are being illtreated by their lower classes learners tend to fear to disclose their problems and fear of being rejected with necessary services" (R7).

"I think disclosing your problems as a grade 12 learner to your family or close friends will better the situation rather than seeking professional help where you will be called with names" (R4).

"I do not think it is a good thing to seek professional help because a grade 12 learner once appeared on social media trying to seek support and his problems turned into a joke. After that I had gained no strength in seeking help, I rather stick to the proverb that "monna ke nku o llela teng" (R5).

"I personally disclose my problems to my friends, and families rather than seeking outside help" (R2).

Data collected from participants shows that most of them are reluctant to seek help due to societal expectations and a notion of traditional gender roles. This study has found that grade 12 learners' pain remains invisible because they are perceived to be strong. However, researchers cannot conclude that all students are hesitant to seek help because of masculinity being associated.

Sub-theme: Confidentiality

Participants stated that the concern about confidentiality prevents them from seeking assistance because they are afraid that experts or helping professionals would reveal their issues to the community. According to certain research (Weinberger et al., 2023), young males have a larger need for anonymity and frequently feel out of control while exposing personal information. Participants stated the following:

"The issue with getting assistance is that the secrecy rule is not upheld, which makes it difficult for me to keep a positive mental state because eventually, my issues would be shared with the entire society. I'll be afraid to hang out with friends outside since they'll know what I'm already going through, which is something that will make me not to be comfortable around them" (R7).

The study found that grade 12 male learners do not seek assistance because those who help do not uphold the confidentiality concept. They detest the idea that everyone will be aware of their issues.

Theme 4: Ways to Address Learners' Mental Health

Data collected illustrate that grade 12 learners want to seek help. Participants suggested several ways that can be

utilised to address or promote mental health in men, these ways included, cancelling culture of toxic masculinity, encourage learners to seek help, establish platforms that that will best address issues associated with mental health in learners. Some participants stated that nothing can be done.

Sub-theme 1: Cancel culture of toxic masculinity

During the interviews, participants mentioned that cancelling culture of toxic masculinity can be one of the ways that can be utilised to address issues of mental health in grade 12 male learners.

The following are some of the responses the researcher got from respondents

"Let's first deal with culture, let's erase history and create our own history because whatever the influence of history has on current life no longer fits. So, if we kill history, men will be able to live freely and go to see a psychologist without having to fear of what people might say" (R6).

"I think society should expect same things from a female learner and a male learner" (R2).

"Before we help male learners, we need to help our female learners first, teach them what it means to be independent, what relationship mean earlier. But as long as women have this seed that a man should look after them, I don't think the circle will ever break" (R1).

Sub-theme 2: Encourage men to seek help

Participants believed that encouraging learners to seek help regarding their mental health can help in reduction of high rates of suicide cases by grade 12 male learners. If learners were to start talking a lot could be avoided in society including gender-based violence.

The following are some of the responses, researcher got from respondents

"Us learners don't talk about these emotions; society needs to be more supportive towards learners" (R8).

"It is always advantageous to speak out to prevent suicide, because there are many grades 12 male learners who commit suicide compared to female learners. Maybe we can make awareness campaigns and advise male learners to speak out and that it is okay to be hurt, it is okay to express your emotions because after all we have to get help" (R9).

"We need to develop platforms that learners will be able to go to and express themselves freely without the fear of being judged" (R2.)

The above findings show that grade 12 male learners have an idea about things that need to be done to help them with emotional and mental health struggles. Researcher is of the opinion that if the above suggested measures may be implemented learners will be saved from the silent killer

“mental health”. There might be a reduction in the rates of grade 12 male learners committing suicide, and that learners will finally live freely without the fear of being labelled as this and that when they fail to live to the expectations of society.

7. Discussions of Findings

The study intended to examine the factors that contribute to mental disorder among grade 12 learners in Capricorn district in Limpopo Province, South Africa. In this section, the researcher examines major findings of this study.

7.1. *Learners' views about their mental health in schools*

The results of this study discovered that grade 12 male learners are aware of their mental health and the elements that can lead to mental health problems in their schools. These elements come with societal expectations and gender roles repercussions. learners are not expected to show up their emotions when they feel overwhelmed, instead they should suppress their emotions. The study proves that most participants constantly desire to project a powerful image so that they won't be mistaken for being weak. According to Weinberger et al., (2023), males are taught to act like men and refrain from sobbing to convey misery. Majority of participants indicated that they believe that their mental health is overlooked in schools. Findings of the study revealed that society cares about the mental well-being of adults only. Participants indicated that adults do things to learners without considering their feelings, they tend to be negligent when it comes to their mental health, and they expect a lot from them and if they fail to live to their expectations, they end the relationship, forgetting that learners are also human they do not have superpowers to get everything right. It is not only everyone else who overlook learners' mental health, but also learners themselves. These findings are confirmed by Venable, 2022, who stated that people always talk about adult mental health as if they are the only ones who suffer from mental health issues which is not true (Venable, 2022).

The findings further revealed that, participants are aware of the stigma around learners' mental health and that they believe that their mental health as learners is more stigmatised compared adults mental health. Adults can express their emotions or feelings freely without being labelled as weak, but learners cannot, they are not allowed to be vulnerable because if they do, they will be classified as weak. Society has channelled human beings to view young

adults as strong creatures These findings are supported by {Chatmon, 2020 #60414} who argues that social stigma is the root of the issue of not seeking help among men, it involves negative thoughts or perceptions towards learners mental health for instance, learners who disclose their mental issues are considered to having a weak characteristic.

7.2. *Social expectations or cultural nuances that influence male learners' mental health*

The findings of this study unequivocally showed that societal expectations play a role in men's mental health. According to O'Connor (2020), men believe that society holds unfavourable opinions of them. The study found that toxic masculinity affected the likelihood that men would seek assistance. Because they worry that society would call them names, they avoid asking for help when they need it or talking to someone close to them. Men believe that there are gender inequities. These disparities resulted from societal expectations of gender roles. Men are seen as strong and manly in our culture; thus, their suffering goes unnoticed. This is interpreted as a demand that they cover up the suffering they've experienced. In addition, social constructivist argues that male learners are not born with masculine characteristics, they do not possess dominant trait naturally, but they then grow up and adapt to what society considers as normative, gender expectations and acquire such traits.

7.3. *Men's views on seeking help*

The study revealed that most men are reluctant to seek help because some fear of being judged by professionals who are service providers or by the society. It was evident that seeking help is difficult among men due the societal norms that were developed by society itself. Men in this study talked about the issue of confidentiality to say that service providers do not respect the principle of confidentiality and as a result, men fear that if they share their feelings with them, they will tell other people including their colleagues or people who are close to men without their consent.

8. Limitations and Suggestions

The present study was conducted only in grade 12 learners in Limpopo Province in South Africa which limits the generalisation of the results. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a study using qualitative interviews with teachers to examine the factors that

contribute to mental disorders among grade 12 male learners in Capricorn District in South Africa. Furthermore, this study should be repeated in other provinces in South Africa with a larger sample size.

8.1. *Cancel culture of toxic masculinity*

Some participants mentioned that society must deal with culture that promote toxic societal norms that are detrimental to the well-being of men. The culture that influences society including men themselves to think that men are strong, immune to pain, cannot express their emotions because if they do, they will be seen as weak. They further added that by cancelling these toxic norms women will stop thinking that they are the only ones that are vulnerable, or that need to be saved, society will start to see men as equal as women, they will start expecting same things from all genders without oppressing the other gender. These findings are supported by (Rogier & Rasmussen, 2022) who discussed ways to combat toxic masculinity, and these included, breaking stigmas, combatting gender roles, and seeking out opportunities to help and heal.

8.2. *Encourage men to speak*

Some of the participants talked about encouraging men to seek help. They mentioned that men are unable to talk about the things that hurt them or try to seek help because no one supports them including their intimate partners. Strategies that will help encourage men to seek help regarding their mental health struggles should be created and used to help men help themselves. These strategies may include the establishment of men's mental health awareness campaigns where society including men will be taught about the importance of seeking help when you are a man, speaking out. Establish campaigns that will say it is okay not to be okay, campaigns that will support men with mental health struggles. Society can also establish platforms that can best address mental health or encourage them to seek help for instance, a social media platform where men will be taught about their mental health, effects of overlooking mental health in men and advantages of seeking help. Such initiatives may help reduce the rate of male suicide cases because men commit suicide more compared to women.

These findings are confirmed by Stuart (2006) who argue that media can be one of platforms that will help in encouraging men to seek help, as it has great influence in shaping a person's behaviour and perceptions (Stuart, 2006). She added that most young people spend a lot of time on

social media nowadays, therefore getting attention from young people can be through where they spend most of their time and which is social media.

9. Summary of Findings

In summarising the whole research, the following outcomes were discovered:

- Most participants prefer dealing with their private issues alone.
- Majority of them fear that their machismo will diminish if they fail to obey the societal and cultural expectations.
- Adages normally used by Pedi society and cultural norms promote silence in men who suffer from mental health concerns in their intimate partner relationships.
- Men are scared of being mocked when they try to seek help.
- Men fear exclusion and rejection from helping professionals when they seek help.
- Men are scared to disclose their problems to helping professional due to lack of maintaining confidentiality hence they fear that their adversities will be known by all.

10. Conclusion

Researcher of this study confirmed that men are aware of their mental health issues and that they do not consider seeking help because of the societal and cultural history they grew up in. Researcher had recognised challenges that men face when trying to seek out for help, these include societal expectations, societal norms, and toxic masculinity (gender roles for men). Fear of being mocked, and fear of being rejected of being offered services are also the reasons that discourage men from seeking professional help. The collaborative effort from all stakeholders such as Departments of Basic Education and Health will thus assist these grade 12 male learners to psychologically and emotionally deal with societal expectations, societal norms and toxic masculinity.

11. Recommendations

- Findings of the study indicated that societal expectations have an influence on society with overlooking mens' mental health and therefore,

toxic masculinity, or societal norms, or gender roles must be addressed on a societal level.

- Provincial Departments of Basic Education and Health should establish and implement workshops where families or female partners can be educated about mental health in men. Discussions and presentations can include, signs or symptoms of mental health, causes of mental in men, importance of support (caring for men), and ways to help men with mental health issues.
- More research must be conducted on mens' mental health to address social determinants that have an influence on their health, together with studies that will recommend new effective ways to better address these social issues.
- National Department of Basic Education should develop new policies that will portray men as one of the vulnerable groups rather than perpetrators, policies or structures that will protect men from secondary victimisation when they try seeking help.

Provincial Government working with Departments of Basic Education and Health should create more awareness campaigns on various social media platforms to address mens' mental health. Furthermore, they should encourage men to seek help. Raise awareness about this social problem and create a safe space for men to vent.

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Declaration of Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

The datasets during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Authors' Contributions

The author contributed to the study design, collected the data and conducted the analysis and interpretation. The author critically revised the paper and contributed to the revision of the manuscript. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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