



JULY

2025

VOL. 43

The Psychology Couch Newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE:

Beyond the Buzz: Reclaiming the
Depth of Self-Care

Kholofelo Mashaba

BA(Hons) Psychology Student

Let's talk about Mental Illness
Awareness Month

Cassie Quiterres

BA(Hons) Psychology Graduate

The Power of friendship - celebrating
International friendship day

Khanyisile Msibi

BPsych Student, SACAP

The Couch Team Building Event

Coversations on The Couch

Mandela Day and Mental Health:
Celebrating Resilience, and Promoting
Well-being

Natola Msidi

BSocSci (Hons) in Psychology Graduate

Holding Space, Shifting Systems

Kholofelo Mashaba

BA(Hons) Psychology Student

Oh Baby, New Arrival at The Couch

BEYOND THE BUZZ: RECLAIMING THE DEPTH OF SELF-CARE

BY KHOLOFELO MASHABA

FROM A DEEP PRACTICE TO DAILY BUZZ

What comes to mind when you think about self-care? Face masks, bubble baths, treating yourself to something sweet? While these activities can be soothing, they don't always address the deeper reasons we turn to self-care in the first place. A bubble bath may feel great, but what led you to need that moment of pause?

Self-care has roots in community-based traditional practices and has evolved across disciplines, including mental health. Yet in mainstream spaces, it's often reduced to a buzzword. The wellness industry sells us self-care as materialistic and consumer-driven (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2021). We scroll endlessly through TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, absorbing curated self-care content, often without stopping to ask what we truly need.

What helps with burnout or stress? When was the last time you upheld the boundaries you set for yourself? How often do you check in with your body? That bath or sweet treat may offer temporary relief, but have you done the uncomfortable, sometimes challenging work of self-care? Is it an act of self-love, or a product sold to you by a corporation?

RETURNING TO INTENTION

While definitions vary, self-care can be understood as actions taken to improve one's wellbeing and promote overall health including mental health (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2021). These actions are deeply personal and undertaken voluntarily (Lucock et al., 2011). Choosing self-care requires self-awareness: an understanding of what we need physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

Self-care is not a modern invention, it's a culturally rooted practice that can be traced back to traditions of communal healing, responsibility, and balance (Aujla & Narasimhan, 2023). These traditions positioned care as a commitment to the body, the community, and the environment. Returning to intention means reconnecting with this depth—moving beyond trends to practices that are meaningful and sustaining.

WHY SELF-CARE ISN'T ALWAYS SIMPLE

Despite its popularity, self-care is often difficult to practice. For those with mental health conditions, barriers include limited access to services, lack of support, and internalised stigma (Lucock et al., 2011). But these challenges extend beyond clinical settings.

Self-care asks us to pause and listen inwardly which is something that's hard to do in a world that rewards constant output and external validation. For some, prioritising oneself evokes guilt, especially in cultures where care is expected to flow outward. Others may feel disconnected from their needs, having learned to suppress them to survive or belong.

Social inequalities also shape access to care. Economic hardship, lack of safe spaces, and systemic discrimination can make self-care feel inaccessible or indulgent (Aujla & Narasimhan, 2023). Often, it's practiced under constraint, not luxury.

Even within healthcare systems, self-care isn't always supported. Health professionals may lack training to promote and sustain person-centred care (Barber et al., 2025). These gaps reveal that self-care is not just a personal challenge but it's a structural one.

SELF-CARE AS PERSONAL, MESSY AND SOMETIMES UNCOMFORTABLE

When practiced with intention, self-care is rarely neat. It asks us to confront discomfort, sit with our contradictions, and make choices that aren't always easy. It's saying no when you're expected to say yes. It's resting when productivity is glorified. It's reaching out for help, even when independence is prized.

This messiness is not a flaw but it reflects the deeply personal nature of care. What nourishes one person may feel hollow to another. What restores you today may not be what you need tomorrow. That's why self-care can't be reduced to a checklist or aesthetic. It's a dynamic, evolving practice rooted in self-awareness and compassion.

Traditions that honour complexity remind us: healing is communal, care is reciprocal, and discomfort is part of growth (Aujla & Narasimhan, 2023).

CRAFTING A CONSCIOUS SELF-CARE PRACTICE

Self-care isn't a checklist but it's a relationship with oneself. It asks for intention, not perfection. A conscious practice begins with listening: to our bodies, our histories, and our shifting needs. It means choosing care that aligns with our values, even when it's inconvenient or quiet.

In reclaiming self-care from its commercial gloss, we return to its roots as resistance, as healing, as a way to stay connected to ourselves and our communities. It's not always simple, but it's always worth making space for.

REFERENCES

Aujla, M., & Narasimhan, M. (2023). The cycling of self-care through history. *The Lancet*, 402(10417), 2066–2067. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)02645-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)02645-4)

Barber, S., Hayhoe, B., Richardson, S., Norton, J., Karki, M., & El-Osta, A. (2025). Drivers and barriers to promoting self-care in individuals living with multiple long-term health conditions: a cross-sectional online survey of health and care professionals. *BMC Public Health*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-21737-0>

Lucock, M., Gillard, S., Adams, K., Simons, L., White, R., & Edwards, C. (2011). Self-care in mental health services: a narrative review. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 19(6), 602–616. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2011.01014.x>

Wyatt, J. P., & Ampadu, G. G. (2021). Reclaiming Self-care: Self-care as a Social Justice Tool for Black Wellness. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 58(2), 213–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-021-00884-9>

LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS MONTH

CASSIE QUITERRES
BA(HONS) PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE

When we hear the term mental health, we often think about stress, self-care, or mindfulness but how often do we pause to understand the difference between mental health and mental illness?

Although these terms are often used in the same context due to their similarities, they represent different concepts. More than ever, people are aware of the importance of talking about mental health and mental illness. In honour of Mental Illness Awareness Month, this article aims to deepen our understanding of mental illness, offer insights to support greater awareness and education to help break the stigma.

Mental health is broadly something we all have and refers to our overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being. How we think, feel, and cope with life. It impacts how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Just like physical health, our mental health can be good, poor, or somewhere in between, and it fluctuates over time (Elmers, 2023).

Mental illness, on the other hand, refers to diagnosed conditions that affect mood, thinking, or behaviour. Conditions like depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, eating disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder (Elmers, 2023). These are medical conditions, not personal failures. Experiencing any of these illnesses can be very challenging, but there are treatments and support available.

Understanding the distinction between mental illness and mental health is crucial (Elmers, 2023). You can have poor mental health without a mental illness, and you can have a mental illness while still experiencing periods of strong mental health.

Why Mental Illness Awareness Matters

Millions of people live with mental illness, yet stigma and misunderstanding still surround it. Awareness isn't just about knowing the definitions but changing conversations, challenging stereotypes, and creating space for empathy and compassion.

The prevalence of mental illness in South Africa?

Raising awareness about mental illness is especially important in South Africa, where it remains highly prevalent. A 2022 study found that around 26% of South Africans are likely living with depression, with certain provinces showing even higher rates. In the Northern Cape, for example, the prevalence of probable depression reaches 39%, while probable anxiety affects 29% of the population (Craig et al., 2022).

Mental illness is more common than we think. The sooner someone reaches out, the sooner they can begin their journey toward healing and support. Whether you're struggling yourself or supporting someone who is, it is essential to remember that you are seen and help is available.

Where to get help:

LifeLine South Africa: 24/7 crisis support and counselling

0861 322 322

SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group):

Call 0800 567 567 or SMS 31393 for support

References available upon request.

At The Couch, TRE® (Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises®) group therapy is available to help individuals manage the effects of mental illness. TRE® is a simple, safe way to help your body release the tension it's been holding onto. Through easy movements, you tap into your body's natural ability to let go of stress, leaving you feeling calmer, lighter, and more resilient.

TRE® was developed by Dr. David Berceli and is based on how the body naturally heals itself. The exercises gently stretch and activate specific muscles, which trigger a natural shaking or tremoring process. This helps to release built-up tension in your body caused by stress, anxiety, or trauma.

It's helpful for anyone who feels weighed down by stress, tension, or trauma. For individuals who want to manage stress, anxiety or burnout, process trauma or tension stored in the body, reconnect with their physical and emotional well-being, and complement therapy or other self-care practices. While TRE® is an empowering and powerful self-care tool, it's not a replacement for therapy or medical advice. Think of it as a way to support your overall well-being alongside other care practices.

For more information on TRE® therapy or to book a session please contact admin@thepsychologycouch.co.za or call 011 234 0741/ 060 961 7882.

The Power of friendship - celebrating International friendship day

KHANYISILE MSIBI (BPSYCH 3RD YEAR STUDENT)

Friendship is described by many as a close and trusting relationship characterised by emotional support, affection, empathy, and mutual care. Friendship is a bond unlike any other—a chosen relationship that can bring joy, comfort, growth, and resilience to our lives. From childhood confidants to companions in adulthood, friends journey alongside us through triumphs and challenges.



While the pleasures of friendship are well known, its psychological benefits run even deeper than laughter and shared memories. Scientific research and countless personal narratives illuminate just how essential meaningful connections are for mental health and overall wellbeing. At its core, friendship is about belonging and acceptance. Having friends fosters a sense of security: we know that there are people who value us, who celebrate our achievements and support us in difficult times. This sense of social belonging reduces feelings of loneliness. Friends also become our sounding boards, listening without judgment and offering perspectives that challenge and expand our own thinking.

Conversely, lacking friendships imposes a heavy psychological toll. Persistent loneliness can lead to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and increased susceptibility to mental health struggles such as depression. Chronic loneliness has even been compared to the health risks of smoking or obesity—a stark reminder of how deeply interwoven social connection is with our wellbeing.



Cultivating Connection

Like any other relationship, friendships require work - requiring vulnerability, generosity, and a willingness to invest time. Small acts like reaching out to a colleague, rekindling an old connection, saying yes to an invitation can plant the seeds for lasting bonds. Despite the ability to connect and meet people online, in this increasingly digital world, meaningful person-to-person connections are more valuable than ever. For some, making friends may be daunting and some might have been hurt by a friend, our experiences will differ and that's okay. But do not give up on making meaningful connections - your BFF is somewhere out there too.





The Couch

Team Building

Holly Claase
BSocSci Hons Psychology Graduate (UP)
Marketing, Events, and Volunteer Program Manager

At our private practice, we know that caring for mental health begins with fostering strong, supportive relationships—not only with our clients, but also within our team. That's why our recent team-building day at Create, Lonehill was such a meaningful (and colorful!) success.

Colour, Connection, Creativity

Our team traded clinical notes for paintbrushes and spent the day painting pottery—mugs, pots, and pencil holders—each as unique as the hands that created them. Whether artistic or abstract, every piece became a symbol of the creativity and personality that make our team so special.

Alongside the painting, we shared laughter, relaxed conversation, and some seriously good food. It was a beautiful reminder of the joy that comes from stepping out of our usual roles and simply being together.

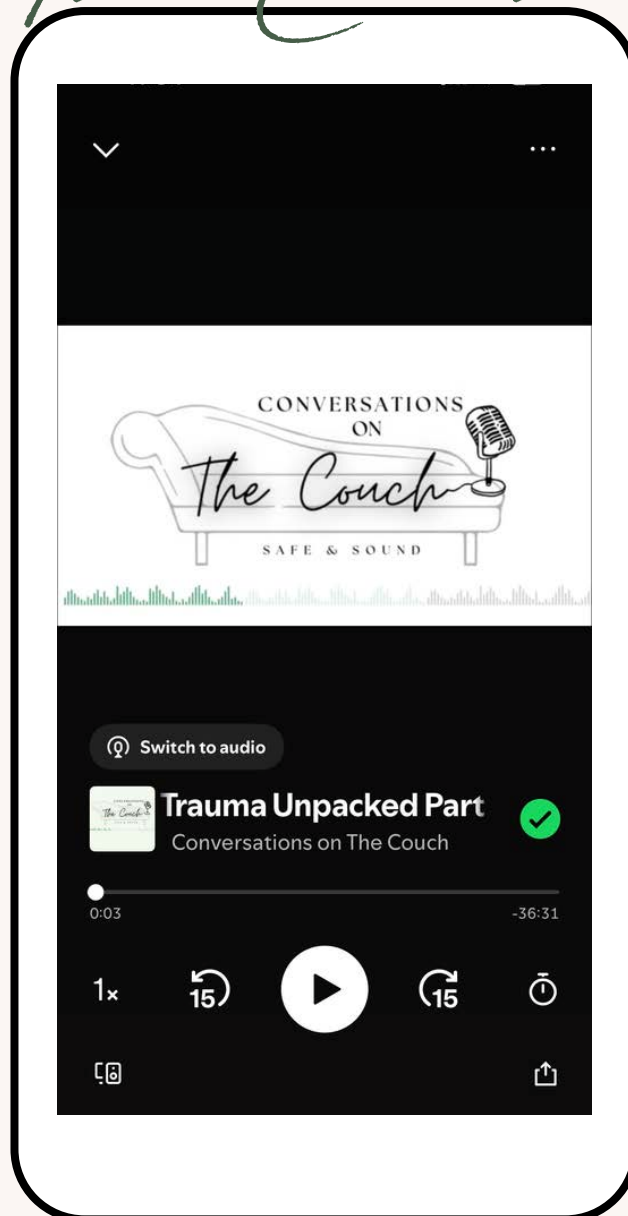
This fun, hands-on experience not only sparked creativity but also strengthened our bonds. We left feeling recharged and more connected than ever—ready to continue our important work with renewed energy and unity.



Here's to many more moments of connection and creativity!

Tune into our latest episode of Conversations on

The Couch



In this episode clinical psychologist Deborah Olusola and occupational therapist Emily Makhlof explore the crucial role of occupational therapy (OT) in understanding and addressing trauma. They discuss how OT helps individuals navigate the effects of trauma on daily life, and practical strategies for fostering resilience.

MANDELA DAY AND MENTAL HEALTH



Celebrating Resilience, and Promoting Well- being

By Natola Msidi



Each year, July 18, people in South Africa and around the world honour his legacy by supporting causes that follow from Mandela's examples of courage and compassion to help change the world for the better. The premise is straightforward: use 67 minutes doing something positive for others, one minute for each year Mandela dedicated to serving humanity.

We generally think of Mandela Day as a day of giving back in the form of volunteering, donating, or doing community service, and that is all great. But something that is also worthy of attention, much more so at this time, is mental health. Mental health is something that touches everyone. It's the way we deal with stress. The way we get along with people. The way we make choices. The way we view ourselves. Mental health determines how we operate. How we feel. But to so many, mental health is something they quietly endure.

Still, for many, mental health is something they suffer in silence. Shame, underrepresentation, and peer pressure make potential witnesses stay quiet or ask for help. And which is why Mandela Day brings it up in such a good way; one of the best ways we can pay forward to our communities is by fighting for mental health.

Mandela's Own Mental Strength

Consider what Mandela endured: 27 years in prison, a lot of it in brutal and isolationist settings. He suffered injustice after injustice. Yet out of it, not vengeful hatred. Resilience of this kind, the ability to be so touched by something but not break or shatter with dignity intact, is the building block of sound mental health. Mandela showed us we can decide how we react, how we heal, and how we can assist others in doing the same.

Mental Health Is a Human Right

Mandela truly believed in justice and equality, not economic or political, but human dignity. And that has to include mental health today. There are far too many people, particularly in underserved or minority groups, struggling with nothing to hold on to. Mental health care is still a luxury when it needs to become an integral part of healthcare.

And so when we're speaking of justice, when we're speaking of creating healthier, more just communities, we have to bring mental and emotional health into the conversation as well.



Beginning With Just 67 Minutes

Call a friend: A co-worker, family member or friend could be struggling; give them a call. Just saying you care can mean the world.

Educated: Take a few minutes to educate yourself on common mental disorders, such as anxiety, depression or trauma. Learning dispels stigma.

Support local efforts: Volunteer for or donate to agencies that provide counselling, crisis service, or wellness supports.

Establish safe zones. Allow employees, students, friends or family to talk about what they are going through without the fear of being judged.

Self-care mindset: Mandela believed in service, but also moderation. If you are empty, you cannot give. Go for your mental health too.

A Legacy of Healing

Mandela Day is not all about service, though. It's about healing, too. Healing systems. Healing communities. Healing ourselves. As we celebrate Mandela's legacy, we remember that freedom is not just legislation, it's living in a world where human beings are safe, valued, and mentally well.

"It always seems impossible until it's done." ~Nelson Mandela

Initiating sincere conversations about mental wellness may feel uncomfortable or daunting. But it begins with someone, with something, at some point. So, on Mandela Day, let's act to be the change.

HOLDING SPACE, SHIFTING SYSTEMS

By Kholofelo Mashaba

Mental health professionals, as advocates for social change, carry the responsibility of driving transformation beyond traditional therapeutic spaces. Advocating for mental health must also mean advocating for structural change. Our mental wellbeing isn't shaped solely by our internal world. It's deeply influenced by the systems and structures around us. These systems have the power to nurture, but also to wound. If that's true, then it's not far-fetched to believe that justice, advocacy, and social transformation can also heal. If we don't actively challenge the historically oppressive, often exclusionary systems that keep the privileged in power and the marginalised at the margins, what does support truly look like?

Social Determinants of Mental Health

Social determinants refer to the structural conditions that people are or have been exposed to which have a significant impact on mental health outcomes (Kirkbride et al., 2024). These determinants contribute to the mental health disparities we see across different communities and populations. (Kirkbride et al., 2024). They include socioeconomic status, healthcare access, discrimination, housing, education, food security, and more (Kirkbride et al., 2024).

Crucially, these conditions aren't distributed equally as they're maintained by systems that disproportionately disadvantage already marginalised groups (Kirkbride et al., 2024).

The environments people grow up and live in are inextricably tied to their mental health. For instance, adverse childhood experiences like abuse are known to increase the risk of long-term emotional and cognitive impairments, which may lead to conditions such as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Gnanapragasam et al., 2021). Discrimination, such as racism or homophobia, can contribute to social exclusion, isolation, and low self-esteem (Gnanapragasam et al., 2021).

These experiences are not just background noise. They directly shape our sense of safety, self, and belonging. People bring these burdens with them into the therapy space. What happens out there inevitably impacts what happens in here. That's why addressing mental health requires more than one-on-one interventions. It requires structural change.

The Limits of Clinical Practice Alone

This isn't to say that the therapeutic space doesn't matter, it does, deeply. It is often one of the few spaces where people feel truly seen, heard, and supported. It can offer relief, understanding, tools for coping, and opportunities for self-discovery and growth. Therapy holds space for people to process trauma, build emotional resilience, and begin to heal. Over the years, there have been meaningful advances in treatment and approaches that have genuinely changed lives.

But even the most skilled and compassionate practitioner cannot singlehandedly undo the harm caused by unjust systems. True care must extend beyond the therapy space and be met with systemic change because healing, in its fullest sense, cannot happen in isolation from the conditions that shape our lives.

Psychologists as Social Actors

We need to widen the focus from treatment to prevention (Shim & Compton, 2018). Prevention isn't just a clinical matter; it's a political one. It requires advocacy and a willingness to step beyond the traditional role of the practitioner (Shim & Compton, 2018). This includes:

- Advocating for research informed policies that seek to address the social determinants of mental health (Shim & Compton, 2018): This can look like supporting policies that aim to promote employment opportunities amongst the youth, or calling for the implementation of policies that aim to empower disenfranchised groups.
- Participating in research and knowledge production (Shim & Compton, 2018): This involves challenging dominant narratives, filling knowledge gaps which can lead to more equitable treatment approaches.
- Promoting social norms that value inclusion as well as supporting all members of society (Shim & Compton, 2018): This requires speaking out against exclusionary and discriminatory social norms. Practitioners must play a part in shaping a society where all people feel seen and supported.

Thankfully, this work has already begun. Community Psychology, Liberation Psychology, and the movement to decolonise psychological knowledge and practice all reflect a growing commitment to challenging the status quo.

These approaches push us to ask better questions, build better systems, and offer care that is contextually grounded and justice-oriented.

Healing Is a Collective Act

Healing is both relational and political. It cannot be reduced to individual interventions alone. Lasting, meaningful change requires a collective effort to dismantle the systems that keep people unwell. It requires all, especially those working in mental health, to call for better policy, build community-rooted prevention strategies, stay open to new ways of knowing, and imagine a society that gives people a fair chance at wellbeing from the start.

The journey toward mental wellness is never just individual. It's communal. And it's in that collective space, where care meets justice, that real healing begins.

References

- Gnanapragasam, S. N., Wright, L. A., Pemberton, M., & Bhugra, D. (2021). Outside/inside: social determinants of mental health. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 40(1), 63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipm.2021.49>
- Kirkbride, J. B., Anglin, D. M., Colman, I., Dykxhoorn, J., Jones, P. B., Patalay, P., Pitman, A., Soneson, E., Steare, T., Wright, T., & Griffiths, S. L. (2024). The social determinants of mental health and disorder: evidence, prevention and recommendations. *World Psychiatry*, 23(1), 58–90. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21160>
- Shim, R. S., & Compton, M. T. (2018). Addressing the social determinants of mental health: if not now, when? if not us, who? *Psychiatric Services*, 69(8), 844–846. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201800060>



PAIGE'S BABY SHOWER!

WE RECENTLY GATHERED AT THE COUCH TO HOST A JOYFUL BABY SHOWER FOR OUR PAIGE, AS SHE PREPARES TO WELCOME A NEW ADDITION TO HER FAMILY. IT WAS A SPECIAL MOMENT SHARED AMONG COLLEAGUES REFLECTING THE WARMTH AND CARE THAT DEFINE OUR PRACTICE.

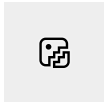


AS PAIGE BEGINS HER MATERNITY LEAVE FROM AUGUST, WE WISH HER ALL THE JOY AND LOVE! DURING THIS TIME, CLIENTS WILL BE SUPPORTED BY OUR WIDER TEAM OF PSYCHOLOGISTS TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF CARE AND TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THE SAME COMPASSIONATE CARE YOU'VE COME TO EXPECT.

Thank you for being a part of our Couch Community. Stay tuned for our next newsletter - the August 2025 edition of the Psychology Couch Newsletter.

Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn, and grow.

Get involved and stay in touch via our social media platforms:

 @the_psychology_couch	 @The Psychology Couch	 The Couch	 @The Couch (Practice of Psychology and Psychiatry)
 @the_psychology_couch	 011 234 0741	 admin@thepsychologycouch.com	 www.thepsychologycouch.com

