

South Africa faces a mental health crisis - don't be a statistic

With October being Mental Health Awareness Month and 10 October World Mental Health Awareness Day, Kena Health is highlighting the importance of being able to identify the signs of mental-health issues and the importance of seeking help.



Source: [Pexels](#)

“South Africans are particularly susceptible to poor mental health because we live in a violent society with high levels of unemployment, as well as the legacy of racism, which includes familial breakdown caused in large part by the migrant labour system,” says Lyanda Nyoni, registered counsellor at Kena Health.

“The result of these societal pressures is high levels of psychological distress, manifesting as an inability to cope with daily stressors, depression, and anxiety, even escalating to suicide.”

South Africa has a high prevalence of common mental health disorders, with almost a third of the population having experienced a common mental disorder at some point. A Wits study suggests that South Africans suffer higher rates of depression and anxiety than other countries—25% compared to 6.9% in the United States or 10% in Australia and more than double that of Brazil (7.9%).

South Africa is one of the bottom five countries globally regarding mental health, according to *The Mental State of the World in 2022* report. The Wits study also notes that, despite their prevalence in South Africa, primary healthcare facilities

typically lack mental-health services, making it hard for people to find help. In addition, mental health is frequently stigmatised in many South African communities.

Unaddressed mental conditions cost the economy R161bn annually if not treated. Depression and anxiety are the most common forms of mental illness and can often trigger more serious conditions. For that reason, says Nyoni, South Africans must understand what to look out for in themselves and their loved ones and colleagues.



Cotton On Foundation partners with Born This Way Foundation to support mental health in SA

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Recognising depression

According to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag), the classic symptoms of depression include:

- Depressed mood and feeling down and sad all the time. This can often present as irritability, agitation or anger (in children, adolescents and men).
- Inability to enjoy activities or hobbies previously found to be enjoyable.
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
- Feelings of guilt or low self-worth.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Restless or irritable.
- Changes in eating habits and/or weight.
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleepiness.
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating.
- Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

Depression is often triggered by stressful events, illness, drug and alcohol abuse, and genetic factors. Sadag points out that everybody reacts to stress differently, and a combination of factors can be involved.

“The most important thing is to identify the signs of depression and then seek help,” Lyanda says. “If left untreated, mental-health conditions can escalate with dire consequences for the individual concerned, his or her family and colleagues, society and the economy.

“Kena Health’s app offers everybody a way to access professional health therapy and mental-health support affordably and conveniently from the comfort of your smartphone—and in total privacy. “Many of our consultations are text-based, as we find that patients enjoy the relative anonymity that this offers and the ability to consult from a comfortable space.”

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