

QC aims to 'break the silence' about mental health among men

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BEFORE, almost everyone believed that the popular line about mental health “it’s okay not to be okay” applies only to women, that they are the ones most vulnerable to mental health issues. Mental health is often associated with women and does not apply to the stoic, resilient Filipino male, a mindset deeply rooted in the “macho” culture. Emotional restraint is seen as a good trait while vulnerability is a flaw.

But what happens when strength turns into silence, and silence into suffering? Many men are thought to live with unspoken anxiety, depression, or trauma, unaware that their mental well-being matters just as much as their physical health.

In observance of Men’s Mental Health Awareness Month, the **Quezon City government** is calling on all men in the city to “break the silence” about mental health and seek help when in need—reminding them that “it’s okay not to be okay.”

Sad emotional state

IT is taboo even until now to see men cry when in a sad emotional state. The “man of the house” is considered the family’s emotional rock: undeterred, unperturbed, the provider and protector. Starting childhood, boys are conditioned to be strong-willed, are not supposed to cry, and must not show weakness.

While women are more likely to suffer from mental health conditions, men are most possibly likely to die by suicide. The World Health Organization say men often underreport their struggles and are less likely to seek professional help.

In the Philippines, cultural expectations only worsen the problem. Men are raised to believe that expressing sadness or fear is unmanly and thus, creates an internal pressure to endure everything alone. Over time, that kind of emotional suppression becomes dangerous. Despite the dangers, Filipino men struggle to accept that they are undergoing emotional distress and need professional support.

Based on a national assessment conducted by the Department of Health (DOH) and Idinsight last year, it revealed certain gaps in mental health literacy among Filipino men. About 33.9 percent identified signs of anxiety while only 32.6 percent recognized eating disorders, 38.4 percent knew what bipolar disorder is, and just 49.6 percent could identify symptoms of depression. However, despite recognizing symptoms, only 27 percent said they would recommend seeking professional help for depression.

The **Quezon City Health Department (QCHD)** said this situation nationwide mirrors what’s happening in the city, the so-called “City of the Stars.” The local government’s **Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO)** revealed that only one out of five patients who access mental health services is male, and that 84 percent of the city’s total suicide cases involved men. Also, 21,156 persons have recorded mental or psycho-social disabilities and unfortunately, 53.5 percent or 11,310 were men, based on PDAO data.

According to QCHD Officer-in-charge Dr. Ramona Abarquez, these figures have deeply rooted cultural expectations. “Denial, lack of self-awareness, and stigma often discourage men from

seeking care. For many, asking for help is wrongly perceived as weakness. But true strength lies in vulnerability and self-care.”

As for Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte, she said that men are often expected to be tough and unyielding, but this narrative must be challenged.

“We’re only human. There’s nothing wrong in crying, in becoming emotional, or seeking help. These are not signs of weakness, but of courage and resilience. Every man deserves to be heard, supported, and healed.”

Bridging the gap

IN order to bridge the gap in access and awareness, the local government has scaled up its gender-inclusive mental health services. Abarquez said all 67 city health centers now offer free mental health consultations and screenings. She said the city operates six Mental Wellness Access Hubs, which provide assessment, diagnosis, and free prescription medication to qualified patients.

Qcitizens (or Quezon City citizens) can also dial the city’s Helpline 122 emergency contact number for immediate psychosocial support and crisis intervention. Call agents are trained in suicide response, psychological first aid, and trauma-informed support.

Also, barangay officials across the city were trained to assist residents facing trauma—especially survivors of violence, disaster, or loss.

“With only 20 percent of men seeking help, systemic reforms are urgently needed,” explains Dr. Abarquez.

“Expanded services, targeted awareness campaigns, and the de-stigmatization of emotional vulnerability are essential if we are to save lives and promote true well-being,” she added.

In the end, strength is not about how much men can carry on their own. It’s about knowing when to set down the weight and seek support. For Filipino men, acknowledging mental health struggles is not a betrayal of masculinity, but a bold, necessary act of self-preservation. And perhaps the bravest thing any man can say is: “I need help.”

The local government of Quezon City reaffirms its commitment to creating a mental health system where no one regardless of gender is left behind. It believes that when it comes to men’s mental health, “Asking for Help is Strength.”