- Mental health

Caring for the body, mind and spirit

Zululand Observer - Weekender · 22 May 2026 · Dr Stanley Arumugam is a counselling, community psychologist & leadership coach working with churches and global NGOs. Email infodrstanleyarumugam. co.za

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental health is something we all live with, whether we speak about it or not. In many of our communities, people are carrying heavy burdens, including financial pressure, family stress, loss, violence, and uncertainty about the future.

Yet, despite how common these struggles are, mental health is often misunderstood or kept silent. Some people believe that talking about mental health is a sign of weakness, or that one should simply 'push through'. Others fear being judged or labelled. This stigma keeps many from reaching out, even when they are overwhelmed, anxious or depressed.

The cost of ignoring mental health is high. It can affect our physical health, relationships, work, and even lead to crisis situations such as substance misuse or suicide. When we do not attend to our emotional well-being, problems often grow quietly until they become harder to manage. Mental health is not only about illness. It is about wellbeing: how we cope, connect and live meaningful lives.

By starting these conversations, we take an important step toward healthier individuals, families and communities. Our well-being is not just about physical health. It includes our body, mind and spirit; three parts that are deeply connected.

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When one area is out of balance, it often affects the others.

Stress

We may not notice at first. It can show up as fatigue, headaches, sleep problems or illness.

The mind holds our thoughts and emotions, including worry, sadness or fear.

The spirit speaks to our sense of meaning, purpose and connection to others, to faith, or to something greater than ourselves. Then life becomes overwhelming, people often focus only on 'getting through the day', ignoring these deeper needs. Over time, this can lead to burnout, emotional exhaustion, or feeling disconnected from oneself and others. Caring for your whole being does not require major changes. Small, consistent actions can make a difference. Getting enough rest, eating regularly, and moving your body supports physical health. Talking about your feelings and managing stress supports mental health. Spending time in prayer, reflection or meaningful connection supports spiritual well-being.

It is also important to notice when something feels 'off'. Persistent tiredness, loss of motivation, or feeling empty may be signs that your whole being needs attention. Well-being is not about perfection. It is about balance and awareness. By caring for all parts of ourselves, we build resilience and a stronger foundation for facing life's challenges. If you feel over whelmed, reach out to a local clinic, counsellor, faith leader or support group. You do not have to manage alone.