

WEEKLY
NEWSLETTER

Editorial Note

Dear Readers,

We are thrilled to welcome you to this week's edition of our newsletter!

This edition confronts a painful yet necessary truth: in many African communities, mental illness is still shrouded in stigma, often mislabeled as “madness” and met with fear instead of empathy. Through our theme, “**Mental Illness is Not Madness - Debunking Myths in African Society**,” we aim to challenge these harmful narratives and open hearts and minds to the reality that mental illness is medical, manageable, and deeply human. Miss Amina Shaibu led this eye-opening session.

This campaign resonated deeply in real-life stories and heartfelt conversations shared by participants during our **Mental Health Week on WhatsApp**. One truth stood out: real change begins with real conversations.

Meanwhile, our esteemed Director, Dr. Stephanie Okolo, attended a transformative retreat on cognitive therapy for couples in Austin, Texas. We'll be sharing an exclusive pictorial glimpse into her experience.

We are deeply humbled by the energy, resources, emotions, and solidarity invested in building a mentally aware society. This edition is not just a recap—it is a call to keep listening, keep learning, and keep speaking out!

Warm regards,
Ese Ogheneovo
for ICTMH

Weekly Webinar Training

Theme: Mental Illness is Not Madness : Debunking Myths in African Society

The Initiative for Cognitive Therapy and Mental Health (ICTMH) convened a highly impactful webinar on the 6th of June 2025, featuring Miss Amina Shaibu, an experienced educator and dedicated mental health advocate. The presentation, titled “*Mental Illness is Not Madness: Debunking Myths in African Society*”, addressed prevalent misconceptions surrounding mental illness, particularly within African sociocultural contexts.

Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout are often invisible and can affect individuals who appear outwardly well-adjusted. Hence, mental illnesses should be recognized as legitimate medical concerns, not spiritual afflictions, curses, or evidence of moral failing. Drawing from personal experience, the speaker highlighted the tragic consequences of untreated mental illness due to ignorance and cultural stigma.

To mitigate this, it is important to apply a multifaceted approach to mental health advocacy, one that integrates education, policy reform, professional care, and community involvement.



Key recommendations and calls to action derived from breakout group discussions include:

I. Engage and educate spiritual and traditional leaders to recognize the signs of mental distress and refer individuals to qualified mental health professionals.

II. Promote the use of appropriate and respectful language when discussing mental health, replacing derogatory terms with clinically accurate and non-stigmatizing expressions.

III. Facilitate community-based education and awareness campaigns to dispel myths linking mental illness to witchcraft, curses, or ancestral punishment.

IV .Encourage the establishment of safe, non-judgmental spaces in religious institutions, schools, and workplaces for mental health dialogue and support.

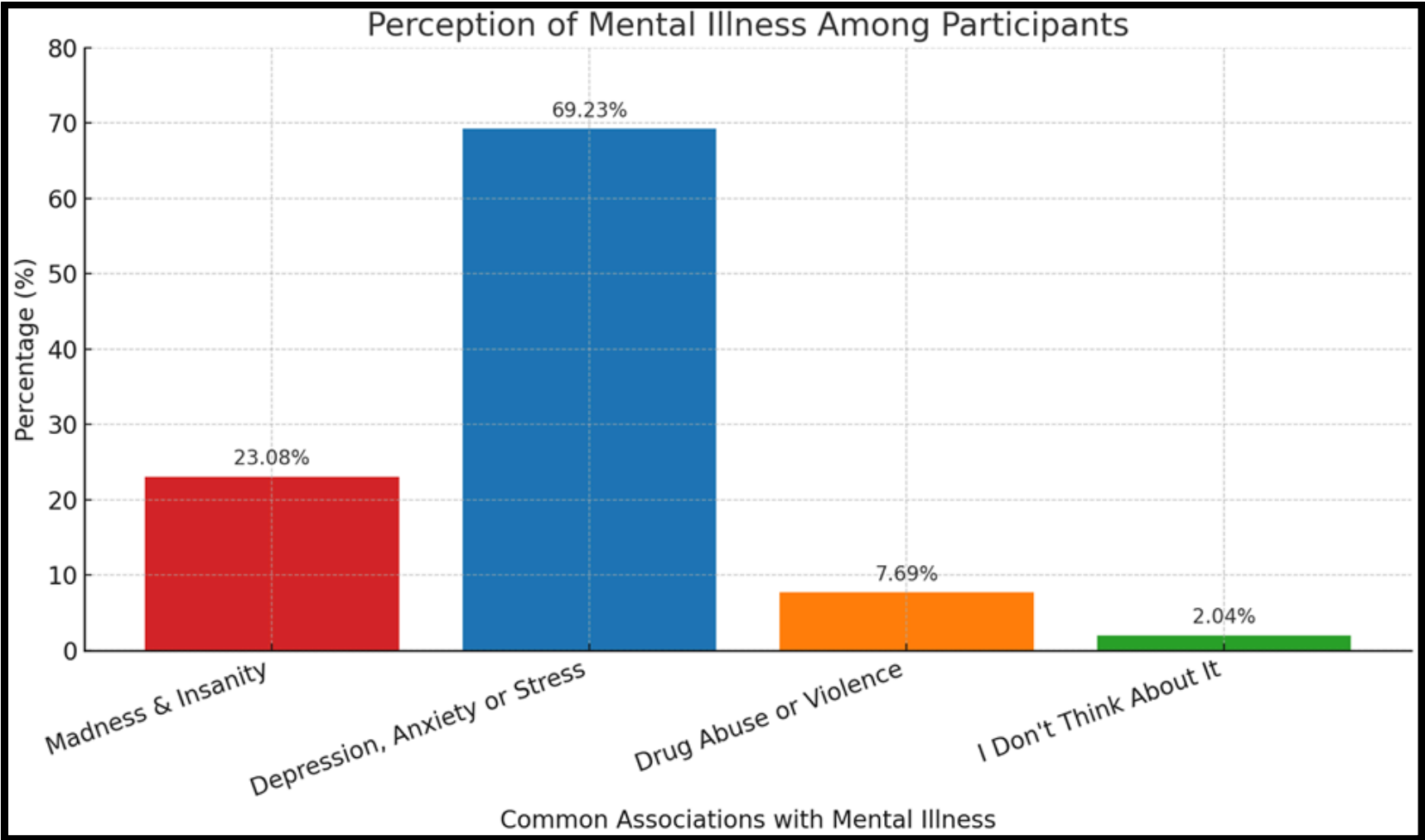
V. Document and disseminate recovery stories to humanize mental illness and inspire those in need of support.

VI. Utilize both traditional and digital media platforms to expand public knowledge and counter misinformation.

VII. Advocate for increased mental health funding and legislative support, ensuring access to essential services across all communities.

VIII .Establish peer support networks and referral pathways to strengthen early intervention and rehabilitation efforts.

Weekly WhatsApp Interactive Session



Data sourced from ICTMH June 2025 Event Log and compiled by Elizabeth Idowu

ICTMH Mental Health Week Report

Theme: Mental Illness Is Not Madness: Debunking the Myths in African Society

Date: June 2nd–June 8th, 2025

Overview

The Initiative for Cognitive Therapies and Mental Health (ICTMH) successfully hosted its Mental Health Week from June 2nd–8th, 2025, conducted virtually via WhatsApp. The event created a safe and vibrant space for conversations, shared experiences, and education centered on mental well-being.

Each day, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Idowu sparked reflections through heartfelt, honest posts. Her consistency and openness cultivated a strong sense of community, emotional safety, and mutual support.

Motivational Monday

Handling Workplace Bullying and Toxic Leadership

The week opened with the compelling story of Tunde, a quiet employee who silently endured toxic leadership until he found his voice. His journey encouraged others to speak up and seek support.

Key Takeaways:

- Silent suffering is common but not necessary.
- Seeking help is a strength, not a weakness.
- Support systems (family, HR, trusted colleagues) are crucial.

Participant Voices:

- Hafsat: “There is power in our voice... Give yourself reasons to be sane and happy.”
- Uzo: “Tundes are everywhere. A simple act like dancing brought someone joy. Healing started there.”
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Talk-It-Out Tuesday:

Mental Illness Is Not Madness

Tuesday focused on demystifying mental illness. A mini-survey assessed group beliefs, followed by an open discussion clarifying that mental health conditions are medical, not mystical.

Highlights:

- Encouraged honest dialogue around stigma.
- Reinforced that mental health deserves the same attention as physical health.



Wellness Wednesday

Deep Breathing and Grounding

Participants learned and practiced the 5–4–3–2–1 grounding technique and deep breathing exercises. Many reported immediate relief and clarity. Key Insights:

- Deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system for calm and relief.
- It’s an accessible and powerful tool for anxiety and pain management.

Reflections:

- Bar Dave: Shared a touching story of using breathing techniques to comfort a child in pain.
- Dr. Okolo: Explained the physiological benefits of mindful breathing.
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Thankful Thursday

Gratitude and Mental Clarity

Participants reflected on their mental health journeys and expressed gratitude for growth and support.

Participant Highlights:

- Uzo:“Even in my darkest times, somehow I pick up again. It’s a lot to be thankful for.”
- Latifat:“Clarity and connection with others have made my journey meaningful.”

Fun Friday

Laughter as Therapy

Humor took center stage as participants shared funny content to boost collective joy and reduce stress. The session highlighted how laughter can be a healing balm.

Self-Care Saturday

“Self-Care is Not Selfish”

The story of Eno, a hardworking caterer who rediscovered herself through intentional rest, helped dismantle the myth that self-care is indulgent.

Key Message:

Self-care is not a luxury it’s a necessity for mental wellness.

Participant Insight:

- Uzo:“If being selfish is what I need to stay sane, then I embrace it wholeheartedly!”

ICTMH’s Mental Health Week was a meaningful, energizing experience. Through virtual storytelling, practical tools, and myth-busting education. Participants left better informed, more connected, and more empowered to challenge stigma and foster healing in their communities.

Event of the Week (Picture Collage)



Staphanie Okolo, Founder of the Initiative for Cognitive Therapy and Mental Health with friends and colleagues at a Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy Retreat in Austin, Texas

RESOURCE & ANNOUNCEMENTS



INITIATIVE FOR COGNITIVE THERAPIES AND MENTAL HEALTH

ONLINE TRAINING

HANDLING WORKPLACE BULLYING AND TOXIC LEADERSHIP



Prof. Elizabeth Andrew
SPEAKER

FRI, 13 JUNE

8:00PM (WAT)

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8cyfdMjAQsev4NIWNslzsg>

REGISTER NOW

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Call for Journal Articles - ICTMH

ICTMH invites submissions of journal articles focused on mental health and cognitive behavioural therapies, especially those offering African-based solutions.

A list of suggested topics is available, but you're welcome to propose your own. Writing guidelines, including word counts and tips, are also provided.

Interested?

Contact Ese (07068487474) or Latifa (07064269139) on WhatsApp.

We're happy to support you through the process.

Thank you!

To get feedback or stories? Email us at enquiry@cognitiveng.org

For volunteering opportunities, join our team via social media

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