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## Promoting emotional well-being among men

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# Promoting emotional well-being among men

**COMMENT**  
by Dr Sheikh Ali Azzran

IN the post-pandemic era, the social order, patterns and behaviour have unequivocally changed.

This is undeniably affecting people's emotions, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, education, marital status or age group.

One issue that is the most cringe-worthy and embarrassing to discuss is the relationship between men and emotional well-being.

While the topic can be highly uncomfortable, many myths are yet to be debunked in the modern world.

Traditionally, men have learnt to act "cool" and hide their fears as an unwritten law of masculinity.

This is one reason why men often show a straight face and women find them "emotionally challenged".

Often perceived as a weakness, the notion of expressing emotion is reserved for women and children.

Men are often told to "keep it together", "brush it off" or "move on, buddy".

Men are often associated with being strong, courageous and independent.

They grow up enduring pressure, suppressing fear and pain to conceal their softer emotions, as well as confidently withstanding challenges.

This is often perceived as cold-hearted, less empathetic and egotistical.

More often than not, as humans, men crave closeness and

cuddling just as much as women.

As a consequence, they are often misjudged by other men and women as being soft or weak.

Without proper understanding and awareness of the context of men and emotions, we might easily stereotype men in a negative light.

Without the promotion of emotional well-being for men, they risk poor mental health and may become even more reluctant to seek mental health support and intervention.

This is a result of normative masculinities and deep stigmatisation by society.

Focus group data revealed that men's mental health is primarily centred on social factors such as the lack of psychological safety, negative perceptions and the risk of being ridiculed or judged, or recourse, which has created uncomfortable positions for men in general.

In "The Male Brain", neuropsychiatrist Louann Brezending asserts that men are prone to expressing anger and aggression due to their biological nature since birth and the hormonal reinforcement they experience through to adulthood.

Scientists call this autocatalytic or self-reinforcing anger.

When men get angry, they find it hard to stop due to changes in the testosterone, vasopression and cortisol hormones.

Anger can cause flawed thinking but also be useful to prompt a more careful and rational analysis of another person's reasoning.

Anger is also associated with aggression.

A male tendency to violence can be dialled either up or down by social conditions.

The male brain is hardwired for protection and territorial defence, which explains why males instinctively fight for hierarchical status and fight to the death to defend their loved ones.

When their loved ones are in distress, this immediately sparks the area of the male brain used for problem-solving.

Men tend to restrain negative emotions, which results in worse mental health and increased symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Over time, this leads to cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease and substance abuse in response to emotionally arousing stressors.

Therefore, men need to be supported to seek help in managing their emotional well-being at the workplace, as well as among family and friends.

The open discussion of men and emotions is taboo as men are often perceived as responsible for their families and need to appear masculine, not weak.

However, in the modern world, emotion-related psychological disorders and physical health problems among men are often overlooked, especially in the age of information technology.

**The writer** is a senior lecturer at the School of Construction and Quantity Surveying, College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam.

Comments:  
letters@thesundaily.com



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### SUMMARIES

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