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THE ARCHITECTURE OF ISOLATION

HOW A LACK OF THIRD SPACES FOSTERED THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

by Saturn Palavar, BSocSci(Hons) Psychology Student



Third spaces were emphasized as being important for maintaining social interaction, as well as enhancing mental health and community cohesion. With rates of loneliness increasing internationally across generations, the loneliness epidemic has been a topic of interest for many scholars – particularly how to curb it. The issue at hand is not just one of an emotional experience, but also a structural issue influenced by urban planning, economic inequality, and digital communication trends, and therefore it requires a nuanced approach. I'd like to approach this topic through the lens of third spaces and their gradual decline in society.

Third spaces – public spaces, such as parks, places of worship, and libraries, as well as commercial spaces such as restaurants and cafes – provide informal social settings, away from home and the workplace, where people can connect. This reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation and helps foster friendships, community bonds, and a sense of belonging.

Urbanization

Previously, third spaces were a walkable distance away for most people, making it easy for them to access social spaces while spending little or no money. This not only improved their mental health through socialization, but also enhanced their physical health by keeping them active. An increase in urbanization has led to a decline in walkable communities and shared public spaces, which used to foster connection, therefore making it more difficult for people to interact informally. This urban design isolates individuals, leading to a decline in community participation and a rise in loneliness.



Online Spaces

Urbanization more specifically triggers an increase in loneliness in people from lower socioeconomic communities, as a lack of third spaces in these areas forces people to spend money at commercial establishments in order to meet others, making socialization less likely for them. With this in mind, online spaces have replaced many third places. People find community through social media, online forums such as discord or reddit, discourse on the internet surrounding fanbases, etc. This was viewed as a useful alternative to third spaces during the lockdown period of COVID-19, particularly among students. Many study websites were created to help students study with others, creating a sense of socialization without actually interacting with others.

The downside of online third spaces is that they are not always conducive to deeper connections or community building with those around us. One of the greatest advantages of physical third spaces is the sense of community they provide in times of crisis – public spaces have been used for shelter in times of emergencies, bringing the community together to take care of one another. With the internet, people are able to connect with others all over the world, but that is not always helpful when they need immediate support from those around them. In times of crisis, the support gained from the immediate community is invaluable, and that is lost with the decline of third spaces.



Technological Advancement

Technological advancements have reduced community connection as well. Services such as online shopping have reduced the need for people to leave the comfort of their homes, and as such, have minimised their socialization with others. Without the need to run errands to get groceries, many people spend more and more of their time at home if they are not at work. This especially impacts people who live alone. Excessive isolation of people who live alone can have negative impacts on their mental health as feelings of loneliness are likely to affect them more.



The decline of third spaces is not just a loss of physical spaces – it represents a deeper shift in how different generations experience and cope with loneliness. For older adults, the disappearance of libraries, community centers, and religious institutions means a loss of vital social lifelines, leaving them vulnerable to extreme isolation. In contrast, younger generations often substitute digital spaces for in-person interactions, yet these online connections often lack the depth and immediate support that physical communities provide.

While technology has helped bridge some gaps, it cannot fully replace the spontaneous, organic interactions that third spaces foster. Addressing the loneliness epidemic requires a multi-faceted approach that considers urban planning, economic accessibility, and intergenerational solutions to revive social spaces that serve all age groups. By prioritizing third spaces, we can create communities that are not only more connected but also more resilient in combating loneliness across generations.

SILENT SCARS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN SOUTH AFRICA

By: Anovuyo Ntebe
BA Psychology Graduate



Introduction

The heartbreaking #JusticeForCwecwe case has reignited national conversations regarding child protection, sexual violence, and systemic failure. In October 2024, a seven-year-old girl, affectionately known as Cwecwe, was allegedly raped on her school premises at Bergview College in Matatiele, Eastern Cape. The incident not only shattered the life of a child — it shook a nation. As outrage spreads across the country, this case demands more than legal justice; it calls for a deeper understanding of the psychological trauma caused by child sexual abuse and the mental health systems needed to support survivors.

The Invisible Wounds of Childhood Sexual Trauma

Sexual abuse leaves behind more than physical scars, it inflicts deep, often lifelong psychological wounds. Children like Cwecwe and many others, exposed to traumatic experiences early in life, are at risk of:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Intrusive flashbacks, nightmares, and hyper-vigilance often follow sexual trauma. The child's brain becomes conditioned to expect danger, resulting in persistent anxiety and fear.

Shame, Guilt, and Identity Confusion: Children may internalise blame, especially when authority figures — like school staff — fail to believe or protect them. This internal conflict often distorts their sense of self.

Developmental Disruptions: Trauma at an early age disrupts emotional regulation, memory formation, and learning capacity. It can impair school performance, social interaction, and trust in adults.

The South African Mental Health Crisis for Survivors

South Africa's underfunded and overwhelmed mental health system leaves many survivors without proper support. According to SADAG, access to trauma-informed counselling remains limited, especially in rural and low-income areas like Matatiele. Survivors of sexual abuse, particularly children, often experience:

- Delayed intervention, increasing the risk of long-term mental health disorders.
- Stigmatization by communities or institutions, silencing victims rather than empowering them.
- Insufficient school-based support systems, including trained counsellors and safe reporting procedures.

Trauma-Informed Care: What Needs to Change

To truly honour survivors like Cwecwe, South Africa must prioritize trauma-informed systems in education, healthcare, and law enforcement. Key changes needed include:



- Mandatory Psychological First Aid for all child victims of sexual assault.
- School-based counsellors trained in child psychology and trauma response.
- Accountability training for school staff on handling disclosure with sensitivity and urgency.
- Community education to reduce stigma and support survivors' healing journeys.

The Role of Society in Healing

Healing from sexual trauma is not just a clinical process — it's a social one. When survivors are believed, validated, and supported, their healing is accelerated.

Movements like #JusticeForCwecwe demonstrate the power of collective advocacy. But emotional justice — the kind that rebuilds a child's sense of safety — depends on consistent support from caregivers, peers, institutions, and society at large.

Conclusion: Beyond Outrage, Toward Healing

The cry for justice in the Cwecwe case is more than a call for prosecution — it is a cry for healing, protection, and reform. As South Africans, we must channel our grief and anger into action: demand trauma-informed mental health care, education reform, and survivor-centered justice. Until every child is safe, none of us truly are.

Mental Health in Crisis

Navigating South Africa's Socio-economic Pressures Through a Psychological Lens

By Likeleli Mokoena



South Africa is currently grappling with a convergence of crises—high youth unemployment, persistent inequality, gender-based violence (GBV), substance abuse, and the lingering psychological impacts of COVID-19. Amid this backdrop, mental health concerns are no longer confined to private spaces; they manifest in classrooms, workplaces, clinics, and increasingly on street corners and on social media platforms.

The Psychological Cost of Surviving

Whether it's the anxiety of job insecurity or the intergenerational trauma that continues to echo through communities, South Africans are living in survival mode. We observe a generation of young people whose aspirations are stifled by economic exclusion. Their symptoms often present as “laziness,” “disrespect,” or “emotional instability”—when in reality, many are battling chronic stress, depression, and burnout before they've even embarked on their careers.

The burden is greater for those in informal settlements and rural areas, where access to mental health services is limited, if not nonexistent. Despite progressive policy documents such as the National Mental Health Policy Framework, implementation remains inconsistent and underfunded (Department of Health, 2013).

Cultural Complexity and Silence

Mental health in South Africa sits at a cultural crossroads. For many, psychological distress is still interpreted through spiritual or traditional lenses—not as an illness, but as a calling, a curse, or weakness. For instance, the practice of *ukuthwasa*, an initiation process for traditional healers, can be seen as a culturally accepted response to experiences that might otherwise be labeled as psychotic symptoms in Western psychiatry. Research suggests that successful completion of *ukuthwasa* can lead to both recovery and a respected role within the community (Niehaus et al., 2006). However, failure to complete the process may result in the individual being stigmatized as mentally ill.

This cultural framing can delay or prevent access to psychological support, especially when symptoms are severe. Silence remains a form of coping—particularly among men, who are often socialized to hide emotional vulnerability. This silence contributes to the country's high suicide rate, especially among males between 15 and 29 years old (Maseko & Grundlingh, 2024).

Moreover, studies have highlighted that in collectivist cultures prevalent in South Africa, there is a reluctance to use talk therapy due to fears it may lead to more suffering. The shame associated with mental illness further discourages individuals from seeking professional help (Pillay & Bowman, 2024).



Moving Toward Community-Based Healing

In a country where one psychologist may serve tens of thousands of people, the solution must be both innovative and localized. South Africa needs more than just clinical interventions; we need mental health to be decolonized, democratized, and woven into everyday spaces—from schools and churches to soccer fields and social media platforms.

Programs like community wellness hubs, school-based mental health screenings, and peer-led support groups are beginning to bridge the gap. One notable example is Phola, a community-based organization that reaches over 10 000 individuals annually through culturally sensitive therapeutic tools. Their group counselling sessions, such as the "Tree of Life" program, empower participants to reframe traumatic experiences as stories of survival and strength (Graham, 2024). In addition, NGOs such as Heal SA provide free mental health services, including individual counseling, support groups, and community wellness programs. They focus on bridging mental health disparities, particularly among Black women and youth, and advocate for integrating mental health into broader development paradigms (Heal SA, 2023).

The South African government has also taken steps to promote mental health awareness and combat stigma regarding mental health. The National Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2013–2020 outlines a comprehensive approach to mental health care, aiming to promote equity, accessibility, and quality in service delivery. Efforts have been made to decentralize mental health services and integrate them into primary health care settings, making it easier for individuals to receive treatment closer to home (Department of Health, 2013).

A Call to Action for Psychologists

Psychologists in South Africa face a unique responsibility. We are not just mental health professionals—we are cultural translators, advocates, and sometimes even first responders. It's time we take up that mantle more boldly.

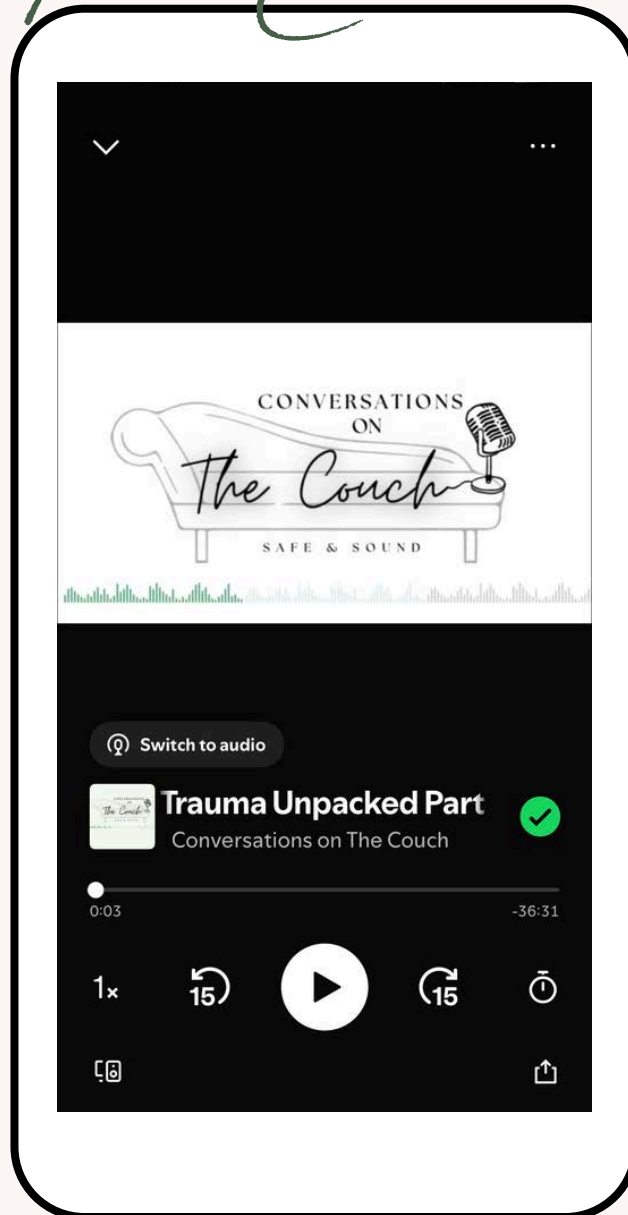
We must advocate for systemic change, train lay counselors, and tailor our interventions to fit the realities of township life, farm life, and urban burnout. Mental health work must become as much about structural transformation as it is about individual healing.

Mental health in South Africa is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Until we treat it as such—not just in theory, but in practice—we will continue to lose lives, talent, and potential. But there is hope. Every community-led conversation, every culturally sensitive intervention, and every young person who learns to name their pain is a step forward.

**References can be provided upon
request**

Tune into our latest episode of Conversations on

The Couch



In this episode clinical psychologist Deborah Olusola and occupational therapist Emily Makhlouf explore the crucial role of occupational therapy (OT) in understanding and addressing trauma. They discuss how OT helps individuals navigate the effects of trauma on daily life, and practical strategies for fostering resilience.

The Importance Of Grief Counselling



Everyone deserves to heal.

BY ZANDILE TSHUMA
BA PSYCHOLOGY (HONS), UNISA

Losing a loved one is a painful experience that can change one's life forever. Furthermore, it is a paralysing event where the bereaved person does not know how or when it will end. Thus, grief is defined as the reaction to a loss in which one exhibits physical, emotional and cognitive symptoms. People often enter a long period of grieving which can manifest in intense longing for the deceased, emotional instability, losing the will to live, and social

isolation. However, it is important to understand that grief is a subjective reaction that is different for everyone.

South African is a diverse country with 11 official languages and different cultures. These cultures create diverse sets of rules that determine who, when, how, and how long people should grieve. There may also be judgement regarding the way a person died, that determines whether it is seen as appropriate to grieve them or not. Unfortunately, these set of rules can hinder people from opening up about how the death is affecting them.

"There is no right way to grieve; there is only your way."

*- Megan Devine,
psychotherapist
and grief advocate*

Consequently, we see social control constrains the grieving process, which discourages people from openly discussing death. Moreover, it promotes emotional suppression and false civility which has made it difficult to understand the impact of bereavement on the psychological wellbeing of South Africans.

It is crucial for people who want help to receive grief counselling because it allows people to openly talk about the deceased if they need to. Furthermore, it uses emotionally focused strategies

for people who exhibit avoidance of their grief. This strategy helps patients recognise and confront suppressed feelings.

Many people cope well without grief counselling - not everyone needs it. However, coping is an essential feature in grief counselling because it creates a healthy mental state that assists in managing with the loss and the ability to re-adjust to life without the deceased.



For children and young adults who have lost parents or caregivers, grief counselling can help them process how the death has changed their lives without fear of judgment. It provides a safe space for them to explore their feelings during this time and validates their emotions during bereavement—which cultural norms may often inhibit.

Therefore, grief counselling is important because it provides individuals with coping strategies that assists them to form a new identity, adjust to changes and the emotions that come with such change. In addition, it allows an individual to move between the states of grief and acceptance which enables them to acknowledge the loss, but also accept the changes that come with it.

"Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity."

– DR. EARL GROLLMAN

➡ *Heal*
➡ *Learn*
➡ *Grow*

-The Psychology Couch

Rest is Resistance:

Reframing Burnout in a Hustle Culture

Tumi Manana (BSociSciHons-Psychology student)

In today's hyper productive society, where worth is often measured by output and constant busyness is glorified, burnout has become a normalized experience. Being busy has become a badge of honour for many, indicating that one is driven, ambitious, and successful. A disturbing fact, however, is hidden beneath the surface of this hustling culture: a widespread epidemic of fatigue and alienation. New cultural narratives and academic voices are calling for a paradigm change, arguing that rest is a powerful form of resistance rather than a weakness.



Burnout is a condition of extreme physical, mental, and emotional tiredness brought on by ongoing stress, frequently at work. Fatigue, lack of motivation, headaches, and emotional detachment are some of the symptoms that it presents with (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

The hustle culture, made popular by expressions such as "rise and grind" and "no days off," exalts relentless activity and financial aspirations, frequently at the cost of wellbeing. Participation in hustle culture is strongly associated with greater levels of psychological discomfort and burnout, particularly

among students and young professionals, according to a recent study by Yuningsih et al. (2023). Our ability to relax, heal, and take care of ourselves and others is compromised by the continual pressure to be "productive." The effects of hustle culture go beyond personal welfare. Moss (2020) explains how excessive workloads and technology's encroachment on personal time have made burnout worse, resulting in poor performance and health problems.



Burnout is more than just a feeling of exhaustion; it's an indication of a larger cultural problem. Resting turns into a potent act of resistance in a culture that makes productivity the measure of one's value. We must reframe success as balance, well-being, and caring rather than as a never-ending hustle if we are to effectively combat burnout. Reconnecting with others and ourselves is made possible by rest. It is something we all deserve rather than something that has to be earned. We also start to see a world based on compassion rather than exhaustion when we embrace rest.



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THE OUTSIDE RESET

by Kirsten Mynhardt (BSocSci Psych Hons -UP)

Though a tropical getaway might sound like the perfect escape from life's daily stressors, it's a luxury few of us can realistically afford. Between work deadlines, school runs, and endless social commitments, even five minutes of calm can feel like a myth. But here's the thing: peace isn't always about plane rides or road trips. **Sometimes, it's as simple as stepping outside.**

Spending time in natural spaces - even if it's just for a few minutes - can be incredibly grounding. It helps us step out of the mental noise and reconnect with something steady and quiet. You don't need to "do" anything in particular. Just being in nature - walking, sitting, breathing - can create space for your nervous system to settle and your thoughts to slow down.

Everyday Moments Make a Difference

Nature is everywhere and its available even in small moments. So, allow yourself to notice it.

Peaceful, mindful moments are possible in small, everyday ways:

- A morning cup of tea on your patio while watching the sunrise.
- A short walk through your neighbourhood without your phone.
- Sitting under a tree during your lunch break.
- Noticing the colours in your garden, the shape of clouds, or the sounds of birds.

A Mindful Moment

Here's a simple exercise you can try anytime you're outside - even if it's just in the garden:

- Look for five things you can see - maybe the clouds, a butterfly, or a weirdly shaped tree.
- Notice four things you can feel - the breeze, your shoes on the ground, the sun on your face.
- Listen for three things you can hear - birds, distant traffic, leaves rustling.
- Find two things you can smell - fresh grass, flowers, or just the fresh air.
- Then, focus on one thing you can taste - even if it's just your delicious lunch!

It sounds so simple (and it is!), but this brief check-in can help you reconnect with your body and calm your mind.

Making Nature Part of Your Routine

Building a habit of connecting with nature doesn't need to be complicated. It's about being intentional, even if it's only for a few minutes each day. You might:

- Schedule a short walk at the end of your workday to mentally "clock out."
- Take a weekly visit to a local botanical garden or nature reserve.
- Bring a bit of nature into your home or workspace—plants, flowers, even natural light.

These small shifts all add up. Over time, they help support emotional regulation, reduce stress, and create space for reflection and calm.

You don't have to escape your life to find peace. Sometimes it's waiting for you right outside your front door - in the sound of birds, the feel of the earth, the warmth of the sun.

So go on. Step outside. Breathe.

Nature's not in a rush - and maybe, for a few minutes, you don't have to be either.

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF LOADSHEDDING ON MENTAL HEALTH IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Raeesah Vahab (Psychology Honours Graduate)

'Loadshedding' is not an unfamiliar term when it comes to South Africa. For several years, South Africans have been confronted with continuous power outages. While the economic and infrastructure impacts are often prioritised, we frequently overlook a more urgent and arising issue: the adverse effects of loadshedding on mental health. Some of the prominent impacts of loadshedding that South Africans face include the challenges of unpredictability, disrupted routines, and ongoing stress, which have led to a more noticeable psychological deterioration across the nation.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF POWER INSTABILITY

Loadshedding presents a significant inconvenience that disrupts daily functioning by interrupting routines, traffic, work, and school productivity, as well as safety. As a result, people experience a sense of helplessness, lacking control over their daily planning and facing constant unpredictability. This can create a sense of insecurity at home and make it difficult for people to stay productive. The uncertainty adds to ongoing stress and anxiety, especially for people residing in lower-income areas where finding alternative power sources can be challenging due to limited resources.

KEY MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Sleep Disruptions: Evening power cuts disrupt sleeping patterns, leading to low energy levels, fatigue, irritability, and mood swings.

Increased Anxiety: When essential tasks like cooking, studying, or working from home are interrupted by power cuts, it can heighten stress levels and add pressure to perform well.

Social isolation: In today's digital age, social media plays a crucial role in facilitating connections with others. Power outages can increase loneliness by reducing social interaction.

Safety concerns: Blackouts caused by loadshedding increase high crime rates and therefore contribute to chronic stress and worry, especially amongst vulnerable groups and communities.

ACADEMIC AND LOCAL INSIGHTS

A recent investigation conducted by Tladi in 2024 focused on small business owners in Alexandra township, Johannesburg, South Africa, revealing that loadshedding triggered anxiety, feelings of helplessness, and emotional turmoil. These business owners expressed difficulties in concentrating, managing everyday stress, and maintaining hope, which in turn affected their interactions with their families and communities.

In another academic study, Fourie and Kaminer (2024) explored the wider psychological effects of ongoing loadshedding, emphasising the risk of continuous traumatic stress (CTS) in areas where blackouts exacerbate already present social stressors. The diminished sense of safety and autonomy, combined with constant exposure to disruptive and potentially dangerous situations, could trigger trauma responses.

COPING MECHANISMS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

It is crucial for South Africans to adopt adaptive strategies to mitigate the ongoing crisis of loadshedding. Some of these strategies include:

Adjusting Routines: Being aware of the loadshedding schedule is essential to alleviate the stress of uncertainty and for individuals to restructure their routine to work around the loadshedding times.

Collective Support: Communities can get together to share resources and offer emotional and social support, especially in underserved areas.

Increased Mental Health Dialogue: Public awareness campaigns, particularly those initiated by organisations such as SADAG, have created opportunities for discussions regarding mental well-being amid current national stressors.

While it is essential to understand the structural context of loadshedding in South Africa, we should also emphasise the important implications for mental health. The ongoing stress, anxiety, and social disruption it brings can truly have lasting effects if we don't address them. It's crucial to recognise the psychological toll and to weave mental health support into our disaster planning and community outreach. By nurturing awareness, empathy, and resilience, South Africans can tackle this challenge together with strength and solidarity.

REFERENCES PROVIDED UPON REQUEST



Baby Blanket Drive

Help us warm tiny hearts this winter! Many newborns in maternity wards go home without a warm blanket. Let's change that – one stitch at a time.

Donate new or gently used baby blankets to help maternity wards in need during the coldest months.



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Rivonia, Sandton (Block F)

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Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn, and grow.

Get involved and stay in touch via our social media platforms:

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