

The conflict between culture and mental health

Time is the ultimate luxury that we often cannot afford. We are all running a race and charging towards the end, which is ultimately success. Hence, time is limited, and we keep making the mistake of prioritising the wrong things.

Mental distress has always been a hushed subject in my home, as it was looked down upon to show weakness in my Korean family.

In Korean culture, mental disorders are severely negatively stigmatised because there is an emphasis on the importance of individual will and self-discipline.

The clash between our determination to succeed as a nation and our late economic development forced us to throw ourselves over high societal barriers, despite the bruises and scars that would be present when we got on the other side.

Growing up in this mindset, during the late nineteen nineties, as immigrants from Korea, my parents were forced to adopt a metal hard mindset so they could mentally bear through the racism prevalent in New Zealand for their children.

Achieving success is like running an exhausting and sweltering marathon, and my parents, with myself on their backs and clenching my brother's hand, were forced to sprint to the end line.

Time to consider mental health was a luxury amidst the war that was their lives, and 'free time' was no longer a concept of leisure. It was finding work in areas with low salary and long working hours; it was finding ways to somehow provide food on the table; it was assimilating into a society that seemed to subtly but aggressively push them away.

Mental health was a low priority. There was simply no time to look back and feel sorry for ourselves.

Growing up within this culture and bearing the pressures that came from expectations to meet as a second-generation in New Zealand, I also inherited this mindset of prioritising success over my own mental health.

Inevitably, I found myself throwing my mental health at challenges and stress, and I never once considered that there was a limit to what my mentality could bear.

I learned that our mentality is like a thin sheet of glass. Even when struck with the smallest amount of force, it will crack, shatter and crash with no mercy, all at once.

Studying was my priority, but there was no end.

The illuminating light at the end of the tunnel no longer seemed so bright anymore, hence my tunnel vision broke down and darkness swallowed me.

The burden of meeting my parent's expectations was like a dagger pointed at my chest, and with every day that passed, I felt it driving deeper into my heart.

Success certainly followed, but it was at the cost of everything I had.

Mental health is the foundation of one's whare tapawha and thus our Hauora, so as it slowly crumbles, each dimension: taha tinana, taha hinengaro, taha whanau and taha wairua, all falls with it.

After battling with the instability of these walls, I have become stronger and threw myself and breaking the negative stigma on mental disorders in Korean culture by openly talking about it with my family and friends. I live with confidence and am still growing towards completely overcoming the darkness that once spread over me.

Through prioritising the time to find the importance of balancing my goals towards success and learning how to consider my tūrangawaewae (a sense of identity), I have strengthened my personal identity and self-worth, and I have finally realised that my ultimate success is for my own happiness. I am still learning how to prioritise myself in my given restricted time so I can overcome and conquer the life I have ahead of me.