

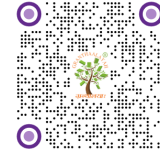


Original Article

MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN CAMEROON AMIDST SOCIETAL PRESSURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

In sub-Saharan Africa Men's mental health still remains one of the least addressed dimensions of public health in, despite its silent but rapidly growing burden on individuals, families, and communities. Through this study we explored how the myth of masculinity with its traditional expectations of emotional suppression and provision alongside socio-economic factors intersect to shape the psychological well-being of men in Cameroon. Pulling inspiration from some of the lyrical narratives of Daniel Nwosu Jr. (Dax)'s songs; particularly "From a man's perspective," "Lonely dirt road," and "To be a man", this paper conducts a thematic analysis that connects artistic expression and poetry with psychosocial constructs such as provider-role strain, internalized emotional control, and social isolation.

This conceptual analysis examines how societal expectations of strength, provision, and emotional stoicism contribute to or amplify stress, anxiety, and depressive tendencies among men, while being a barrier to open communication and help-seeking within the Cameroonian socio-cultural context. These lyrical insights are examined in relation to empirical research on emotional suppression and health consequences Chapman et al. (2013), Tyra (2024), economic stress Ridley et al. (2020), barriers to help seeking and traditional masculinity norms in African sociocultural contexts Ezeugwu (2020), Baranov et al. (2024). We integrate Cameroonian health-system data and suicide case series Keugoung Kongnyu et al. (2013), World Health Organization (2020) to highlight gaps in efficiency and masculine vulnerability. Findings underline that normative expectations of stoicism and financial provision amplify stress, inhibit help-seeking, and contribute to elevated risks of depression and suicide. Policy amendments include culturally sensitive mental health interventions, a re-evaluation of harmful masculine norms in the Cameroonian context, promoting gender-sensitive outreach, integrating mental-health care into primary care systems, and addressing economic determinants of distress. This study bridges art, psychology, and sociology as an interdisciplinary synthesis to illuminate men's lived mental-health struggles in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Traditional Masculinity Norms, Emotional Suppression, Men's Mental Health, Cameroon, Barriers to Help Seeking

INTRODUCTION

Across the Globe, opinions about mental health have grown prominence, yet men's struggles remain enveloped in silence. The idea that a "real man" must be strong, stoic, and self-reliant is still shared across cultures, often leaving men emotionally isolated and psychologically burdened. In sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in Cameroon, these expectations are even more complex combined

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to the economic instability, patriarchal traditions, and limited mental health infrastructure, thus placing Cameroonian men in a paradox where they are required on a daily basis to be pillars of strength for their families and communities, even when they themselves are collapsing within.

In the African sociocultural context, masculinity is traditionally equated with control, endurance, discipline, and resilience. Men are 'men' when they endure hardship without complaint and are criticized when they display emotional vulnerability. From a young age, boys are socialized into the ideal of toughness to be protectors and providers who suppress fear, sadness, and fatigue. While these expectations have deep historical and cultural roots, they often carry a psychological cost.

Research has increasingly recorded that emotional suppression; the deliberate inhibition of emotional expression is linked to adverse mental and physical health outcomes [Gross and Levenson \(1997\)](#), [Nyklíček and Denollet \(2009\)](#). For men, this suppression is not simply an individual choice but a cultural assignment; a means of maintaining social standing and fulfilling the moral obligations of manhood. However, its long-term effects include increased risk of anxiety, depression, drug and substance dependency, cardiovascular strain, and suicide [Chapman et al. \(2013\)](#), [Tyra \(2024\)](#).

Cameroon, with its diverse ethnic groups and socio-economic disparities, provides a unique lens for studying this phenomenon. The traditional expectations placed upon men, to lead, to provide, to endure and remain powerful social pillars. Caught up amidst these and the new economic and emotional demands of the modern world, men find themselves entangled between cultural pride and psychological exhaustion.

This study approaches this issue through an innovative lens: the music and poetry of Daniel Nwosu Jr. (Dax), a Canadian artist whose lyrical narratives of pain, resilience, and masculine struggle have resonated globally. Dax's songs being raw, confessional, and reflective, offer an artistic mirror to the emotional struggles of men navigating identity, pressure, and silence. By engaging with these lyrics as cultural texts, this research aims to reveal how men's mental health challenges are not isolated experiences but deeply embedded in the moral and social fabric of humanity and masculinity itself.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to humanize the conversation around men's mental health in Cameroon. It argues that understanding and addressing male distress requires both cultural sensitivity as well as psychological and emotional literacy through the willingness to see men not only as providers or leaders but as human beings with inner worlds that deserve care and understanding.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

THE UNDER-LOOKED SCOPE OF MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN AFRICA

In Africa just like several other countries across the Globe, discussions surrounding mental health have traditionally centered on women, children, and vulnerable groups. While these are critical domains, this emphasis has inadvertently overshadowed men's experiences particularly the quiet forms of suffering that often go unnoticed or unspoken. Across many African societies, men's pain is masked behind endurance, their exhaustion disguised as strength, and their silence mistaken for stability.

In Cameroon, this silence is particularly striking where men are the custodians of lineage, the economic pillars of families, and the moral figures of authority within both traditional and modern institutions. Yet these social roles rarely accommodate emotional openness. Instead, men are expected to absorb stress, maintain composure, and fulfill their obligations without visible strain or fragility. When mental distress happens to emerge, it is often externalized as irritability, substance use and abuse, depression or social withdrawal. These cultural masculine roles accompanied with stigma contribute to an underreporting of mental health problems and targeted policies and implementation gaps.

Studies from Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa echo similar findings: masculine norms built around emotional control and dominance are correlated with lower rates of help-seeking and higher rates of self-harm and suicide among men [Ssewanyana et al. \(2021\)](#), [Morrell \(2001\)](#). The existing belief that emotional vulnerability threatens one's masculine identity remains deeply entrenched across much of sub-Saharan Africa.

EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION AND TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY NORMS

Emotional suppression, defined as the conscious inhibition of emotional expression, has long been associated with poor mental health outcomes [Gross and Levenson \(1997\)](#), [Mauss and Gross \(2004\)](#). When emotions such as fear, sadness, or grief are consistently stifled, the body and mind bear the hidden cost. Over time, suppressed emotions may manifest as chronic stress, cardiovascular strain, or psychosomatic illness [Nyklíček and Denollet \(2009\)](#).

For many African men, emotional suppression is not simply a coping mechanism but rather a social obligation. To "be a man" means to portray strength and mastery, even when one feels vulnerable. A man who cries, hesitates, or admits to emotional struggle risks being seen as weak ("not man enough"). These perceptions are reinforced through proverbs, religious teachings, and community expectations that valorize stoicism.

In Cameroon, such cultural codes are vividly expressed in everyday language. Phrases like “un vrai ca homme ne pleure pas” (“a real man doesn’t cry”) or “les emotions c’est pour les femmes/filles” (“being emotional is for women/girls”) shape the emotional behavior of boys from a young age. Over time, these messages build emotional internalization which hinders healthy which can lead to social withdrawal and poor emotional processing. As [Chapman et al. \(2013\)](#) demonstrate, long-term emotion inhibition is associated with increased mortality risk due to physiological dysregulation. The burden of hiding pain often becomes unbearable amidst societal pressure and economic uncertainty in Cameroon.

THE BURDEN OF PROVISION AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE

In most Cameroonian communities, manhood is closely linked to financial capability. The traditional provider role is often a measure of a man’s social respect and self-esteem as this even extends to his contribution to community stability. Yet facing persistent unemployment, underemployment, and the rising cost of living, many men are expected to be financially resilient but find themselves unable to meet these expectations. The failure to fulfill the “provider role” can produce deep feelings of shame and self-doubt and lead to isolation.

[Ridley et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasize that economic hardship and poverty are not merely financial problems as they are stress factors that directly impact mental well-being. When a man internalizes his inability to provide as personal failure, the resulting emotional strain can lead to chronic anxiety or depression. This burden is amplified by limited access to mental health services, cultural stigma, and a lack of community dialogue around men’s emotional suffering.

This results to a silent cycle: distress in silence, loss of self-esteem, fearing judgment or loss of respect. Families and communities, unaware of the amplitude of that burden, interpret withdrawals as irresponsibility or pride.

MASCULINITY, MUSIC AND EMOTIONS.

Over the years music has been a mirror for human emotions as various genres significantly influence us and determine how we process our emotions as a non-verbal way of expressing the unspoken. Music and oral poetry have long served in Africa as they are deeply interwoven with social commentary and cultural reflection. Artists through songs do storytelling that exposes collective emotions, struggles, and desires.

Daniel Nwosu Jr. (Dax), a Canadian rapper and songwriter, offers a powerful example of this tradition in modern form. His songs “From a man’s perspective,” “Lonely dirt road,” and “To be a man” are lyrical expressions of male vulnerability portrayed in an explicitly raw, reflective, and unflinchingly honest manner. Through his music, Dax articulates the internal monologue of several men: strength vs responsibility, pride vs pain, losing the upper hand.

Although operating in another context, his themes resonate strongly within the African experience. His narratives: guilt, fear of failure, the weight of expectations, not being allowed to express feelings, are universal and familiar to Cameroonian men navigating social and economic uncertainty. Pulling across these artistic narratives, this paper repositions lyrical analysis as a valid entry point into understanding masculinity and mental health in African contexts.

This approach bridges disciplines, blending the interpretive richness of art with the analytical rigor of psychology and sociology. Arguing that arts, particularly music can serve as an ethnographic approach, to exploring the unspoken dimensions of masculinity and emotions.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

This research is guided by a socio-psychological framework that places men’s mental health within the crossroad influences of culture, economics, and gender performance. Masculinity being viewed here as a social notion; a role that men must continually enact and negotiate to satisfy cultural expectations [Morrell \(2001\)](#).

By blending this framework with Dax’s lyrical expressions, the study interprets masculinity as both a personal identity and a social performance that carries emotional consequences. This dual focus the sociocultural and silence breaking allows for a nuanced exploration of how artistic narratives can portray and summon real-life mental health struggles.

METHOD AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This study employs a systematic review and qualitative thematic analysis of lyrical content from Dax's specified songs and literature integration combining thematic coding with empirical data sources [World Health Organization \(2020\)](#), [Chapman et al. \(2013\)](#), [Keugoung et al. \(2013\)](#). The songs serve as primary artistic data, reflecting perceived male experiences with societal expectations. These themes are then extrapolated and discussed within the socio-cultural framework of Cameroon, considering common patterns in patriarchal societies and traditional provider roles in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is underlined that the lyrical themes presented by Dax resonate with a significant portion of male experiences regarding pressure and emotional expression. Therefore, discussions on data and statistics are based on general knowledge of mental health trends in Cameroon and similar contexts.

SELECTION OF LYRICAL NARRATIVES

Dax's three (03) songs; 'From a man's perspective', 'Lonely dirt road' and 'To be a man' were selected for their straightforward lyrical narratives on the internal silent experiences, pressures, and emotional scenery of men. These songs offer an extant, widely relatable perspective on the daily challenges of masculinity, resonating with themes prevalent in many patriarchal societies, including Cameroon. Though not an artistic work from a Cameroonian artist, the universality of the struggles depicted provides a vital lens through which to examine specific cultural manifestations.

APPROACH TO THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A qualitative thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns, ideas, and messages within the lyrics [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). The process involved:

- **Familiarization:** Repeated listening and transcription of the lyrics.
- **Initial coding:** Identification of specific phrases, lines, and verses portraying societal/cultural expectations, emotional states, responsibilities, and internal struggles.
- **Searching for themes:** Grouping initial codes into broader, overarching themes relevant to men's mental health.
- **Reviewing themes:** Refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and relate to the research question.
- **Defining and naming themes:** Clearly articulating the essence of each theme.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DAX'S LYRICS IN THE CAMEROONIAN CONTEXT

Dax's textual narratives often explore the internal struggles men experience faced with rigid societal conceptions of masculinity. Dax's music offers a modish voice to exploring the mental health ramifications of traditional norms of masculinity and societal pressures, resonating with global and localized experiences of masculinity.

TITLE: FROM A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

This song vividly describes the weight of responsibility and the expectation for men to be the 'rock' without cracks. Lyrical themes include:

- **Emotional isolation:** traditionally men cannot express vulnerability or seek help without being judged as weak. "pain sounds different when it's coming from a man. We are not allowed to feel, be real, explain. Express and when we do we lose the upper hand". With this men tend to internalize emotions and can't seek help openly.
- **The unseen burdens and sacrifices to fit into society:** narrative of men sacrificing their own well-being for their families, often in silence. The constant pressure to provide and protect, often without recognition or emotional support. "we only value based on what we can provide", "I spoke your love language you didn't understand mine"

In Cameroon, these themes are particularly striking. Amidst, challenging economic climates, men are frequently expected to be the sole breadwinners, with cultural norms discouraging open emotional expression and help seeking, leading to profound isolation when facing personal struggles.

TITLE: LONELY DIRT ROAD

This track explores the emotional and existential loneliness faced along the masculine journey, endeavoring on a difficult path. The metaphor, 'lonely dirt road' strongly reflects the reality of many Cameroonian men striving through a challenging socio-economic context, against significant odds, often feeling left alone. Key themes include:

- **Individual struggle:** the chorus and first verse explore the solitary nature of pursuing goals and facing setbacks, often without a clear support system. "I needed somewhere to take my mistakes. I didn't want my family to see me cry. They'll never know I'm carrying all of this weight, dealing with the pressure of trying to provide"
- **Strives vs. Reality:** The drive to achieve financial success contrasted with the harsh realities of limited opportunities and facing setbacks. "I tried my best to plant the seeds and I watered everything that was in my life".
- **Existential burden and recognition:** The internal antipathy and questioning of one's worth when faced with continuous struggles yet no recognition. "but as a man the only flowers you get is when you're 6feet under on the day you die"

TITLE: TO BE A MAN

Conceivably direct and raw in its articulation, this song explores the societal expectations and the hidden prize of 'being a man.' These themes profoundly echo Cameroonian cultural expectations where stoicism is often equated with masculinity, and public displays of emotion by men can be perceived as weakness, leading to a profound impact on their mental health.

Noteworthy themes include:

- **Maintaining stature:** men need to appear strong, fearless, and composed, regardless of internal uncertainty. *"you wanna scream but you won't make a sound. Got so much weight that you've been holding"*
- **Suppression of vulnerability:** society expects you to 'man up' and hide emotional pain. *"but you won't show any emotions because as a man it goes unspoken. The we can't cry when life gets hard"*
- **Feeling unappreciated:** The jeremiad of men expected to be pillars of support, but getting no consideration in return. *"unconditional love is for women, children and dogs," "as a man we gotta pave our way, our only function is to work and slave.....You're disregarded as a human and you can't complain"*

These themes are all grouped into four (04) Key themes identified which include:

- 1) **The unyielding burden of provision:** Lyrical narratives constantly highlight the pressure to be the sole financial provider, regardless of personal circumstances or emotional state. This has always considered as a fundamental requirement to being regarded as a measure one's manhood.
- 2) **Emotional suppression and stoicism:** most often, men aren't allowed or are unwilling to express vulnerability, sadness, fear or any other forms of emotions. They're expected to 'man up,' internalize emotion, endure hardship silently, and avoid emotional displays not to be seen as weak.
- 3) **The performance of masculinity:** There is an emphasis on maintaining a façade of strength and control, a constant performance to meet societal barometers of 'being a man' by achieving financial and material success, and not appearing dependent nor inferior.
- 4) **Isolation and internal struggles:** Conforming by suppressing emotions and enduring constant pressures can lead to profound feelings of isolation, unworthiness, and internal conflict between one's true feelings and expectations.

DISCUSSION

The lyrical narratives of Dax's songs provide a powerful, albeit artistic lens through which to view the mental health challenges faced by men in contexts like Cameroon. The emphasis on stoicism, the relentless pressure to provide, and the fear of appearing weak are not merely artistic expressions but reflections of deeply ingrained societal expectations that can have detrimental effects on psychological well-being. Men are often caught in a paradox: expected to be strong and self-sufficient, yet facing immense pressures that require emotional resilience and support, which they are discouraged from seeking or expressing. The Cameroonian context, with its economic realities and traditional gender roles, often intensifies these pressures. This creates a silent epidemic where mental health struggles remain unacknowledged and untreated, leading to a cascade of negative outcomes.

The lyrical analysis of Dax's songs reveals three primary thematic areas that strongly align with the reviewed psychological and sociological literature on men's mental health, particularly pertinent to the Cameroonian context.

Theme 1: The burden of responsibility and provision

Lyrics from 'To be a man' and 'From a man's perspective' frequently articulate the overwhelming pressure to provide and succeed financially. Phrases like *"I gotta work hard, gotta make a lot of money, gotta feed my family"* (paraphrased from 'To be a man') reflect the primary role assigned to men as economic providers. This responsibility is often a non-negotiable duty, regardless of personal cost. In Cameroon, where economic disparities are significant, this pressure can be crushing, leading to chronic stress and anxiety.

Theme 2: Emotional suppression and stoicism

All three songs powerfully convey the expectation for men to be emotionally resilient and to suppress vulnerability. Lines like *"I can't cry, I can't break down, I gotta be strong"* ('from a man's perspective') and the overall narrative of internal struggle in 'Lonely dirt road' highlight the psychological cost of this stoicism. The lyrics reflect a pervasive cultural norm where outward displays of pain, sadness, or fear aren't manly. This correlates directly with research on emotional suppression, which demonstrates its detrimental effects on psychological and physical health. The 'lonely dirt road' metaphor vividly portrays the isolation that results when men feel they cannot share their burdens.

Table 1

Table 1 Traditional Masculine Norms and Emotional Expression in Cameroonian Men	
Masculine norm	Common consequence for emotional expression
“real men don't cry”	internalized sadness
“Be strong, your family counts on you”	Suppression of fear, pain and fatigue
“Everybody has problems. Handle yours”	Isolation; reluctance to seek help

Theme 3: Isolation and Lack of Support

The song 'lonely dirt road' summarizes the deep sense of isolation many men experience daily. The lyrics describe a lonely journey; no genuine companionship or understanding, matching the reality or rare emotional support networks for men. This theme is particularly common in contexts where traditionally, masculine interactions and friendships never evolve beyond superficial interactions, nor where discuss about personal struggles. The absence of emotional support networks further exacerbates men's mental health challenges in Cameroon.

Societal Pressures in Cameroon and mental health implications

In Cameroon, traditional cultural norms often reinforce these lyrical themes:

- **Provider role:** Men are predominantly expected to be the sole breadwinners, bearing the financial well-being of their families, often including extended relatives. Economic instability, high unemployment rates, and poverty can amplify this pressure, leading to immense stress.
- **Masculinity ideals:** Strength, resilience, and dominance traits are traditionally imposed on Cameroonian men. Outward display of emotions is discouraged, leading men to internalize their struggles.
- **Family and community expectations:** Men are expected to be leaders within their families and communities, capable of solving problems and providing security. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to social stigma and a perceived loss of respect.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

The convergence of these societal pressures and the internal conflict depicted in Dax's lyrics can have significant mental health consequences for men in Cameroon:

- 1) **Heightened stress and anxiety:** The constant pressure to provide and succeed can lead to chronic stress and generalized anxiety disorders.

Figure 2

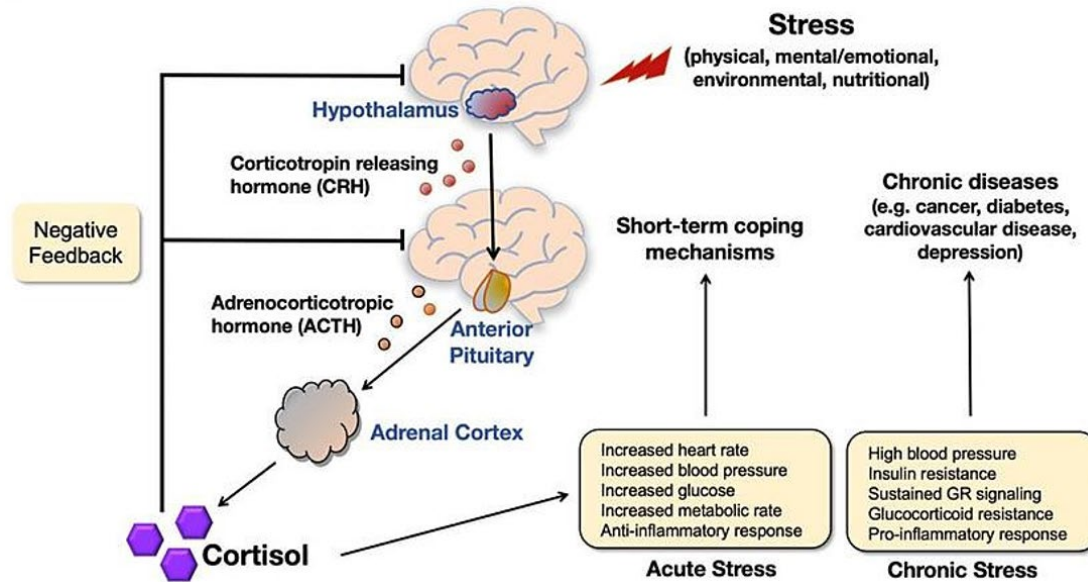


Table 2 Physiological Response to Stress

- 2) **Depression and suicidal tendencies:** Unexpressed emotions, feelings of hopelessness, and the inability to seek help due to stigma can contribute to depression and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation. While specific data for Cameroon is scarce, global trends indicate that men are less likely to seek mental health support.

Figure 3

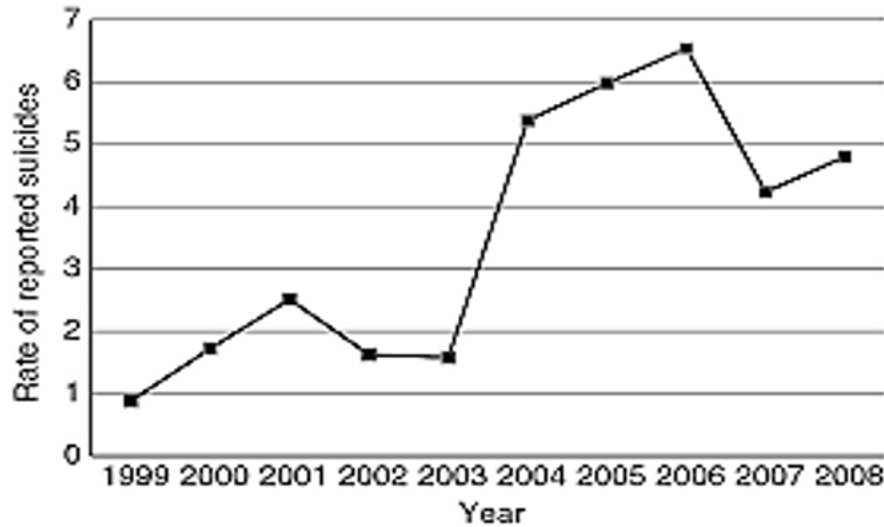


Table 3 Rates of Reported Suicides from 1999 to 2008 in Guidiguis Health District- Cameroon

- 3) **Substance abuse:** some men turn to alcohol or drugs, as a coping mechanism for stress and emotional pain, leading to substance abuse disorders and dependency.
- 4) The inability to express emotions can hinder healthy communication and emotional intimacy within families and relationships.

LIMITATIONS

This methodology, while insightful, is based on artistic expression rather than empirical data from the specific population of interest. It serves as a qualitative exploration to inform and guide future empirical research rather than providing generalizable quantitative findings. The interpretations are subjective and reflect the analyst's understanding of the lyrics within the broader academic framework

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Men's mental health in Cameroon is a critical area requiring greater attention. The pressures of societal expectations, as poetically highlighted in Daniel Nwosu Jr aka Dax's music, particularly 'from a man's perspective,' 'lonely dirt road,' and 'to be a man,' contribute significantly to psychological distress. These lyrical narratives offer a compelling and relatable window into the mental health struggles faced by men; struggles that are amplified by societal pressures and traditional responsibilities in contexts like Cameroon. The thematic analysis reveals that the burden of economic provision, the imperative of emotional suppression, and the resulting isolation are critical factors undermining men's mental well-being. These artistic insights are strongly corroborated by existing psychological and sociological research on emotional suppression, economic stress, and traditional masculinity in African cultures.

This study underscores the urgent need for a paradigm shift in how men's mental health is addressed in Cameroon and similar Sub-Saharan African contexts. Reversing this trend requires more than clinical intervention; it calls for culturally sensitive dialogue. Masculinity must be redefined not as a silent struggle but as integrity that allows emotional transparency. Public discourse, education, and media representation should challenge the myth that resilience requires silence while creating safe spaces for men to express vulnerability and seek help without fear of stigma.

Addressing this requires a multi-faceted approach:

- **Deconstructing masculinity norms:** Promoting healthier, more flexible definitions of masculinity that allow for emotional expression and vulnerability.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Initiating public health campaigns to destigmatize mental health issues among men and encourage help-seeking.

- **Accessible support services:** Developing culturally sensitive and accessible mental health services tailored to men's needs.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should empirically document the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicide among men in both urban and rural Cameroon. Mixed-method designs combining surveys, clinical assessments, and narrative interviews would yield more comprehensive insight. Comparative studies between genders and cultural groups could further clarify how social norms influence emotional coping.

Researchers might equally explore the role of creative expression music, poetry, theatre as therapeutic interventions for men. Such work would bridge academic inquiry with community healing, continuing the dialogue between art and science that inspired this study.

AUTHOR'S REFLECTION

This study was born from observation and empathy; from seeing how often men around us smile through fatigue, provide through struggle, and carry invisible weight in silence. The project is not only an academic contribution but a human one: a call to acknowledge that behind every act of strength lays a need for understanding.

As a Cameroonian scholar and family man, I have witnessed how social expectations of masculinity can both inspire and injure. My hope is that this work sparks dialogue across generations, that it helps fathers, sons, and brothers realize that vulnerability does not diminish manhood; it dignifies it. In confronting silence, we rediscover humanity.

DECLARATION STATEMENTS

Originality: I confirm that this manuscript is my original work and has not been published, in whole or in part, in any other journal or publication. It is not currently under consideration elsewhere.

Ethical considerations: This research involved no human or animal participants. It is based on secondary data sources and literary/lyrical analysis. Therefore, no ethics committee approval was required.

Data availability: All data, sources, and materials used in this article are publicly accessible and duly referenced.

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