

BEWARE OF *BURNOUT!* Why women need to have 'me' time

By Maika Eysselein

Are you a woman who is employed, and also has a family? Do you struggle to balance your life as a worker, a wife, a girlfriend and a mother? Rest assured you are not alone, as many women in Namibia face similar stresses.

Recent studies suggest that women, more than men, are under pressure to be all things for all people. Gone are the days when a woman's place was thought only to be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. We direct operations in companies, and clean cafeterias. We are special advisors and secretaries, nurses, teachers, truck drivers and diamond miners. Women today do it all. In addition to that, some women choose to get married or have children. This adds significantly to society's expectations of women's roles not only as working women, but as mothers and wives.

Many women feel pressured to be perfect in everything they do. You can't just be a mother, you have to be a great mother. You can't be just an employee, you have to be an above- average employee. This leaves women very little room for error and human imperfection, which can and does place a heavy weight on women's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

While this pressure largely comes from society and community, a lot of the pressure is self imposed. For women who grew up being taught that there is only so much they can do or become, the opportunity to prove society and culture wrong often is not taken lightly. Women then take and create opportunities to not only participate in what is seen as male dominated jobs or careers, but to excel in them as well.

When 'enough' is enough and 'more' becomes too much

Mental health is a balancing act that may be affected by a number of factors, including by the stress of working. Many women suffer from stress to be perfect at everything they do or are. Some experts think that more women than men want to be perfectionist, because – they say – women tend to be 'people pleasers,' who ignore or forget their own needs. This is reinforced by society giving special recognition to 'hard workers.' As a result, women are more at risk of developing mental-health issues such as anxiety, depression and burnout.

Even though the symptoms of burnout might be similar to depression, medication won't cure it. Instead, you need to be able to spot the warning signs. For many, the downward spiral begins when they start believing they have to be stressed to get anything done. It is important that you understand the difference between positive and negative stress. Productivity rises with stress, but only to a certain point, Burnout sets in when you are working harder, but getting less work done. Women close to burn-out often put themselves last on their own list.

Women need to ask themselves the following questions to determine whether they are taking enough time out for themselves:

- Do I tend to forget about my overall wellbeing?
- Do I feel like I am not coping with the load? Do I view this as realistic or do I beat myself up about not managing it well enough?
- What does it mean to be a mentally healthy woman?
- How are the boundaries of what a healthy woman is supposed to achieve defined in my society/community?
- Which roles are included in my definition of the healthy and successful woman?
- What influences my definition of my own success and health?

Wishing you the peace of mind to introspect and care for yourself!

