



Aisha Bubah

Nigeria

Psychologist & Founder, Idimma Health Initiative & The Sunshine Series.

Aisha's journey toward mental health advocacy began due to personal loss and trauma. Having grown up in Nigeria, a country affected by terrorism in some regions, Aisha witnessed first hand the devastating effects of violence, including losing a family member. During this period, Aisha found that individuals who had survived these traumatic experiences lacked access to psychosocial support, and this stood out to her.

"I noticed the absence of mental health care for survivors like me and many others," she recalls. This realisation sparked a calling within her to pursue a career in mental health to improve access to care for persons in need. It was in this line of work that she soon recognised an overlooked group in need of care—health workers themselves.

"We spend so much of our lives in the workplace," Aisha notes, "and if mental health is prioritised there, it becomes possible to reach so many people."

Aisha shares that health workers in Nigeria face a wide range of significant mental health challenges, including secondary trauma from

witnessing patient suffering, burnout from long hours, and the immense pressure of working in understaffed hospitals with limited resources.

"They struggle with stress, depression, and anxiety due to a lack of sufficient resources, heavy workloads, and societal stigma."

She also highlights a deeper cultural challenge. "Mental health issues are attributed to spiritual causes here and often seen as a sign of weakness," Aisha says. The existing stigma adds another layer of difficulty for health workers.

"There's a fear of being seen as weak," she says, pointing out that many avoid seeking support out of concern for their careers. "We worry about how asking for help might affect our professional reputations."

This cultural misconception, coupled with the lack of insurance coverage for mental health services, makes it even more difficult for health workers to access care. "The income is already low, and without insurance coverage, seeking mental health care becomes almost impossible."

Aisha shares a hypothetical yet very familiar story of *Ene, a clinical psychologist overwhelmed by the demands of her workplace. Chronic understaffing and inadequate resources had already taken a toll on *Ene's wellbeing, leading to emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, physical health issues, and negatively affecting her mental health. However, when Ene experienced a traumatic loss of a patient to suicide, the stress and emotional exhaustion became unbearable.

"It triggered a crisis of confidence," Aisha says. To support health professionals like Ene, Aisha stresses the need for workplace interventions that focus on mental health. "Increasing staffing, regular psychological care, and compulsory supervisory sessions can make a real difference," Aisha reflects.

Despite her passion for the work, Aisha admits that she is not immune to the pressures of her work. "I experience stress and burnout, too," she says candidly. "The nature of the work can be overwhelming at times." But she has developed her own methods for coping, which include engaging in sports, spending time with loved ones, and taking breaks to recharge. "Self-care is important, especially when you're in a profession that asks you to care for others."

If she could recommend one major policy change, Aisha says it would be the inclusion of mandatory mental health care packages in staff safety and welfare programs. "Making mental health support a core part of health workers' benefits would ensure they receive the care they need."