

# Wellbeing in Academia: Early Career Researchers in East Africa



AuthorAID Webinar

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021, 3pm to 4pm EAT

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AuthorAID webinar

# Goals

***'Cura personalis'***

**Wellbeing in  
academia**

**Holistic and  
integrated focus**

**Intersectionality**

**Contextualized  
African personhood  
in academia**

**Afrofuturism in the  
academic mental  
health space**

**Putting wellbeing plan  
into action**

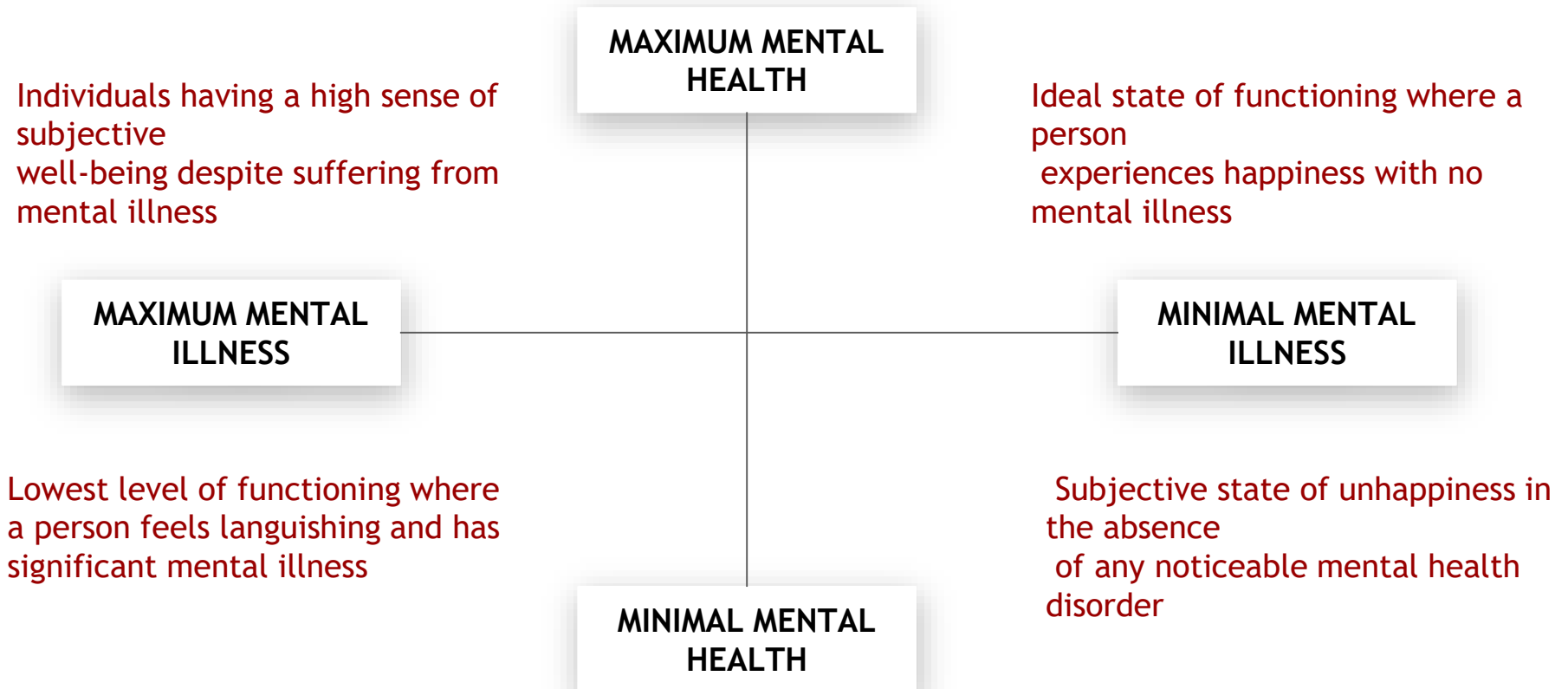
**Stigma-informed  
challenges**

**Trauma-informed  
strategies**

**Sustainability**

# Quadrants of Mental Health

Courtesy of PositivePsychology.com

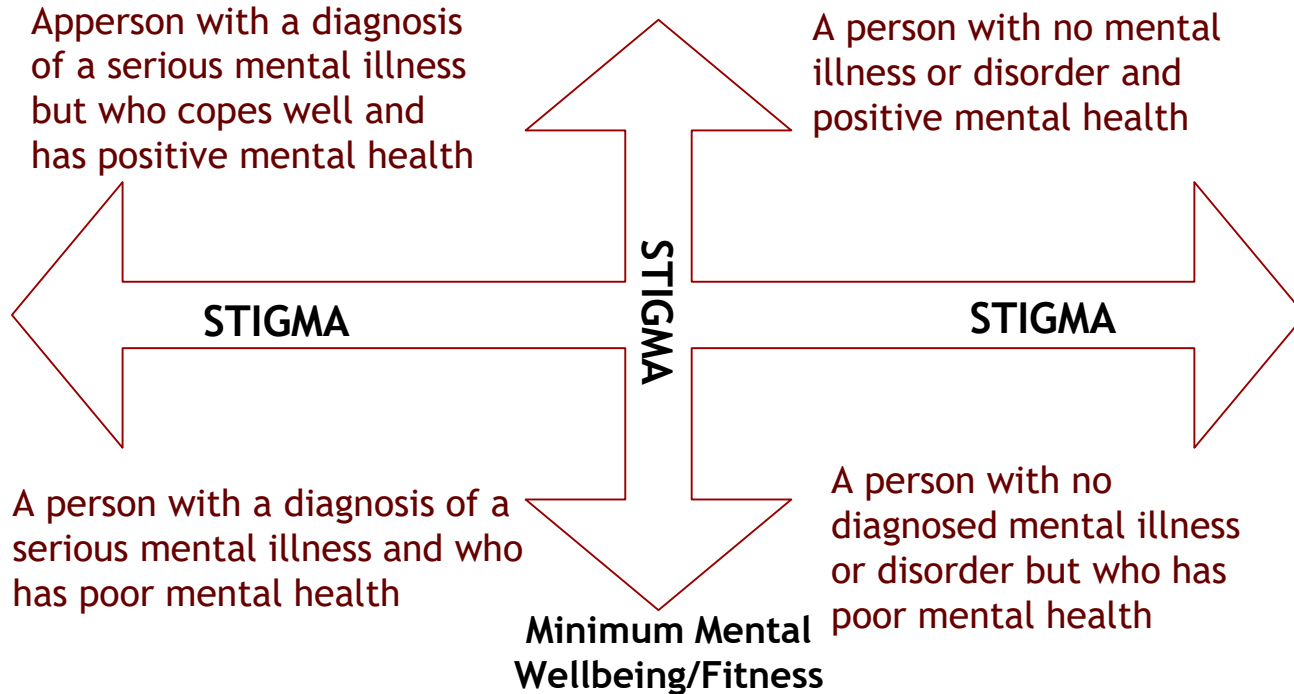


# What is wellbeing?

No absolutes

Maximum Mental Wellbeing/Fitness

The continuum



# Contextualized academic wellbeing

## Decolonizing academia: African personhood

- Peer-to-peer mentorship vis-à-vis boss-to-junior supervisory relationships
- Afrofuturism and academic mental health: Technology

## Centering the student/Early Career Researcher's experience

<https://www.tcc-africa.org/my-tcc-experience-joyce-wangari-ngugi/>

- Friendship bench analogy: Study Smart & Virtual Monthly Cocktail programs under Eider Africa

<https://youtu.be/A3PmRN9Fq10>



Photo credits: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55726054>

# Utu-Ubuntu philosophy



Radical and Afro-centric  
educational reforms

[https://www.amazon.com/  
Munthu-Ubuntu-Utu-  
Introduction-  
Philosophy/dp/613988456X](https://www.amazon.com/Munthu-Ubuntu-Utu-Introduction-Philosophy/dp/613988456X)

Utu/Ubuntu “Humanity”: I  
am because you are, (fast  
alone but) further together, I  
am only well if you are well

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/  
Ubuntu\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_philosophy)



# The place of self-care for the student or researcher



# Mental Health continuum

## IN CRISIS

- Very anxious
- Very low mood
- Absenteeism
- Exhausted
- Sickness, physical pains
- Isolation
- Very poor sleep
- Weight loss
- Psychotic phase
- Severe alcohol/drug abuse

## STRUGGLING

- Anxious
- Depressed, sad
- Low self-esteem
- Tired
- Poor work performance
- Presenteeism
- Poor concentration
- Poor sleep
- Poor appetite
- Drug/alcohol abuse

## UNSETTLED

- Worried, nervous
- Edgy
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Self-doubting
- Sad, gloomy
- Trouble sleeping
- Tired
- Distracted
- Decreased Social activity

## THRIVING

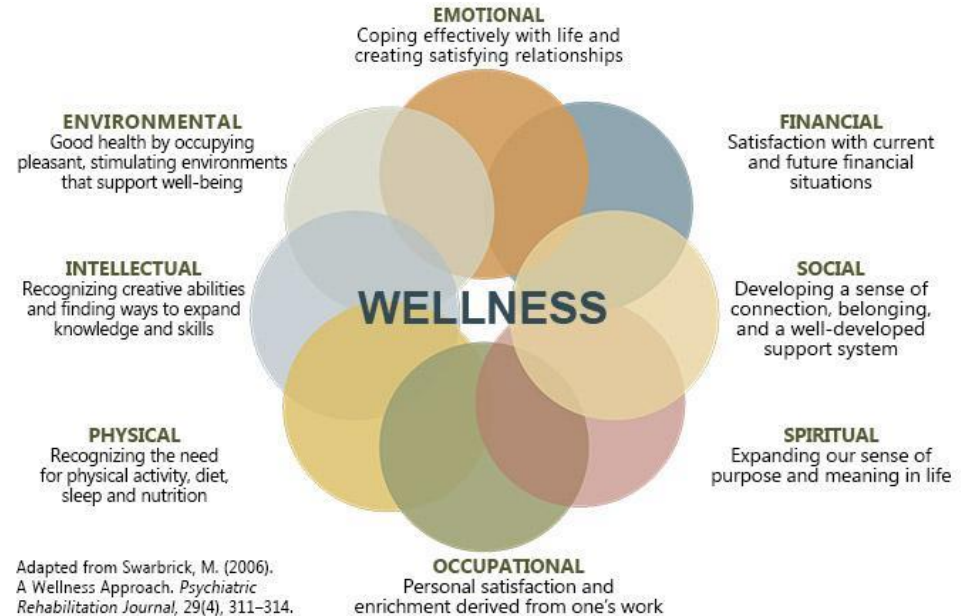
- Normal mood
- Some variations
- Calm
- Functioning well in job
- Sleeping well
- Focused
- Eating normally
- Normal social activity

## EXCELLING

- Cheerful, joyful
- Solution focused
- Energetic
- High job performance
- Prioritizing sleep and recovery
- Fully realizing potential
- Actively seeking connections



# Holistic and optimal wellbeing



Source: Swarbrick, M. (2006). A Wellness Approach. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 29(4), 311–314.

# Holistic self-care plan

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Relationships
- Workplace

- Overall balance
- What might get in the way
- What negative strategies do you need to avoid?
- If you implement your plan, how might you feel?

# Challenges of wellbeing in context

## ➤ Discuss

- “Exam season” focus: Longer hours, stressed cramming, fast-approaching deadlines, burnout
- Balancing personal and professional life with minimal support
- Struggle with lifestyle changes amidst daily stress
- Perception of research as difficult in itself
- Add...

# Solutions for sustainable wellbeing for long-term research/academic development

## ➤ Discuss

- Make time for your favorite people
- Plan something you can look forward to
- Challenge yourself physically
- Do nothing

- Practice the 20-20-20 method to avoid digital eye strain: Look at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes or so to cut down on eyestrain and give yourself a quick break.

Source: <https://rapidly.co/blog/self-care-for-accounting-and-tax-professionals/>

Add more solutions...



**Thank you to AuthorAID team.**

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