

## Can we Have a Word with You?

why it's time to

### DITCH

the term

'mental health'

Words by Rachel Adjekukor

### RECOMMENDATION ONE FROM OUR RESEARCH IN 2025 FOR AUTHORIZING OUR OWN STORIES...

There is still persistent stigma and misinterpretation around what we mean by 'mental health'. The term carries negative connotations for many individuals, especially in Black and Brown communities. Despite years of campaigning, the term 'mental health' is often associated with instability and disorder. This discourages people from seeking support and discussing their feelings openly.

Feedback from our focus groups, in the summer of 2025, suggest that being socialised with the underlying expectation to be resilient and meet external expectations, can create emotional struggles for many Black and Brown women. For example, one focus group participant said not sharing difficult emotions for fear of judgement or not being listened to...

*'encourages hyper independence from early, which contributes to the formation and expression of the strong black women because from young you've realised that vocalising certain thoughts won't get you the response that you genuinely find helpful. So, in*

<sup>1</sup> YMCA (2020) *Young and black: the young black experience of institutional racism in the UK*

Available at: [Young and Black: the young Black experience of institutional racism in the UK \(ymca.org.uk\)](https://ymca.org.uk/young-and-black-the-young-black-experience-of-institutional-racism-in-the-uk)

*that case it's best to just keep quiet about it. You end up internalising everything - which for some people - they can keep it all in and internalise it and it comes out in a range of ways... for others they keep it all in and eventually it does come out but it can come out in a range of different forms, and I genuinely believe it stays with them into adulthood. It does impact them, and it can even affect the way that choose to treat their children' (focus group participant, Authoring Our Own Stories, 2025).*

Another young woman expressed her frustration at issues relating to emotional wellbeing not always being addressed in our communities. She said -

*'often it (the subject of mental health) just gets swept under the rug and you're told 'you just need to go outside', or something like that" (focus group participant, Authoring Our Own Stories, 2025).*

We recognise fully that there are complex and justifiable reasons surrounding young people of African and Asian heritage being more open about their health needs. A report published by the YMCA (2020) about young Black British people's experiences of institutional racism found that

*'27% of young Black people report a lack of trust in the NHS as a barrier to maintaining good physical health. They also felt health professionals invalidate their need for mental health support as a result of the racism they encounter' (YMCA (2020) Young and black: the young black experience of institutional racism in the UK)*

### MY PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE



If we could change the term mental health, I would feel more comfortable and confident to talk about my mental and emotional wellbeing with my family, which would be a good way for us to bond. Our research suggests this may also be the case for other people too. Using different language could make it easier to approach discussions that are of a sensitive nature, without so much fear of judgement or, in some cases, being socially ostracised.

These issues are complex, and entrenched attitudes take time to change but change **can happen** if collectively we play our part. Expanding our language, from simply 'mental health' to a more positive umbrella term like **emotional wellbeing** would be a brave step towards shifting attitudes and behaviour and really encouraging people to express how they're **really** feeling.

(Accessed February 2023)