

COMMENTARY

DANCE WITH ME!
A dancer entertains fans before an NFL football game between the Miami Dolphins and the Washington Commanders in Madrid, Spain, Sunday.
AP PHOTO



Technology is good, but justice must include in-person human interaction.

— Chief Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh on plans to reopen magistrates' courts to the public.



Men's Mental Health Month

Equality conversation we need to have



NOVEMBER IS often called Movember, a month dedicated to raising awareness about men's health, especially mental health, suicide prevention, and prostate and testicular cancer. It's a time to remind ourselves that men's well-being is not just a personal issue; it's a social one that affects families, workplaces, and entire communities.

Around the world, men face unique mental health challenges, often in silence. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that men are about three times more likely to die by suicide than women, yet are far less likely to seek therapy or emotional support.

In TT, the situation is just as concerning. Ministry of Health data shows that between 2020 and 2023, 83 per cent of all sui-

cide deaths were men, four out of every five cases. While women are generally more likely to seek help, men often struggle quietly, weighed down by the pressure to appear strong.

Where equality fits in

At the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), our work centres on fairness, dignity, and inclusion. The Equal Opportunity Act protects people from discrimination in employment, education, accommodation, and access to goods and services.

Importantly, it also recognises mental health conditions as a disability, meaning that those living with depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder are entitled to fair treatment.

When men hide their struggles because they fear being judged, sidelined, or labelled as weak, that's not just stigma, it's a barrier to equality. And when workplaces fail to support employees with mental health challenges, they reinforce that inequality.

Addressing men's mental health,

then, isn't only about awareness. It's about ensuring that systems, policies, and social attitudes give men the same freedom to seek help and healing as anyone else.

A shared responsibility

Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, in her message for International Women's Day 2025 in March, made a point worth repeating: "Men are not our enemy...there is no gender domination in Trinidad and Tobago." She encouraged women and men to work together toward national progress.

That sentiment matters here. Promoting gender equality doesn't mean focusing on one group over another; it means recognising that everyone benefits when both men and women are supported. True equality calls for empathy on both sides, and part of that empathy is acknowledging men's mental health as a legitimate and urgent issue.

Breaking the silence

For generations, men have been

told to "man up" or "don't cry." These messages teach boys to bury their emotions and equate vulnerability with failure. Over time, this emotional bottling-up can lead to aggression, substance abuse, depression, and even suicide.

We have to change that culture. Men should feel safe expressing their emotions and accessing mental health resources without fear of ridicule or rejection. Equality means recognising that emotional openness is a human right, not a gendered one.

Creating supportive workplaces

Employers play a key role in promoting mental wellness. Encouraging the use of mental health days, providing access to employee assistance programmes and fostering a culture of empathy make a real difference.

At the EOC, we continue to advocate for workplaces that treat mental wellness as part of employees' rights. When staff feel supported, productivity rises and the organisation as a whole becomes

healthier.

Mental health awareness should be built into equality policies, not treated as an afterthought. No one should fear losing a job, promotion, or credibility for admitting they need help.

Moving forward

A truly equal society is one that values mental health as much as physical health. This Movember, let's make space for men to speak, seek help, and heal without shame. Strength is not silence; it's honesty, courage, and self-awareness.

Because equality isn't just about balancing genders; it's about creating a TT where everyone, including men, can live and work with dignity, understanding, and support.

If you or someone you know needs help, contact the National Suicide Prevention hotline at 800-5588, or reach out to the Equal Opportunity Commission at communications@eoc.gov.tt or 672-0926 for information on your rights or to request a sensitisation session.

Battle to save nation needs a joint effort

THE EDITOR: I was prompted to write this letter in the wake of the riots that killed 31 prisoners in Ecuador, a country sandwiched between two alleged drug-producing nations, Peru and Colombia.

The gangs involved in the prison violence were Los Cheneros and Los Lobos. So severe were the riots that guns, knives and explosives were discovered in the aftermath.

Daniel Noboa, the 37-year-old president of Ecuador, has aligned his country with US President Donald Trump and has cemented plans to erect a prominent American presence in the town of Manta with a US military base. The base once existed but was removed by a former president.

Some similarities exist between Ecuador and TT. For instance, TT is used as a hub for

drugs export, gangs are fighting for turf and dominance, and the Prime Minister has aligned herself with Trump on drug interdiction.

TT also has prison gangs, equipped with sophisticated cell phones that are purportedly used to instruct gang members on the outside to deal with anyone who stands in their way.

Hayden Forde, the new person in charge of prisons, may be able

to tell us why his jails permit internet connections and when he plans to discontinue it? I think the onus lies on both the homeland security minister and the acting prisons commissioner to be more proactive.

The Prime Minister is squarely standing in the line of fire since she has declared that she is hell-bent on preventing the flow of drugs into TT. She stands firm on her partnership with the US

and, for all those naysayers, I believe it would be ludicrous for her to appease Caricom and neglect the welfare of her citizens.

The battle to save this nation is deemed of utmost importance. It appears to require a concerted effort of the homeland security minister, the police commissioner, and the acting prisons commissioner.

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