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Are men generally unable to take care of their health? An inquiry into men's perceptions on reporting and subsequently seeking treatment for prostate cancer

Munatswa, Elvis T

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Are men generally unable to take care of their health? An inquiry into men's perceptions on reporting and subsequently seeking treatment for prostate cancer

A dissertation presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters of Social Work by

Elvis T. Munatswa

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree Masters of Social Work by Research. The research has not been submitted before any degree or examination in any other universities and all references have been duly acknowledged.

_____

Elvis Tichaona Munatswa

_____

Date

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late brother Irvine. Your passing away was a great pain to me and a source of inspiration to do this thesis, regardless of the numerous setbacks.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to:

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Abstract

Men are often characterised by a general unwillingness to seek help when experiencing problems in life. Popular stereotypes portray men's reluctance to ask for direction when they are lost, having difficulty sharing vulnerable feelings with friends, and avoiding seeking help from professionals. These stereotypes raise an important question of whether men are able to take care of their health; that is, reporting and subsequently seeking early treatment for chronic diseases. This study therefore inquired into men's perceptions on reporting and getting treated for prostate cancer as well as the change in their identities upon treatment. The study adopted a qualitative approach and explored men's health help-seeking practices through in-depth interviews. Twenty male participants in Gauteng were recruited for the study via purposive sampling. The data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis. Findings from this study point out the complexities in men's health practices and the eminent threat to manliness that often goes unabated, reducing men's choices to disregard their sexuality over surgery. Findings from the study continue to point out other things that have somewhat been ignored in literature. For instance, the type of disease or condition influences whether it is to be reported or not. In this case, diseases of a sexual nature carry a lot of stigma, compounded by the attitude of nursing staff in public health facilities, men choose to only seek help when they have no choice. The ramifications often go beyond personal into interpersonal relationships and therefore it is useful for social work professionals to integrate understanding of masculine norms and stereotypes into an analysis of men's use of health services.

Key words: Masculinities, men's health, health-seeking behaviour, prostate cancer

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