

HER VISION

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HANGING WITH THE GIRLS

SCIENCE SAYS REDUCES STRESS, PROTECTS MENTAL HEALTH

GIRLS' GET-TOGETHERS ARE MORE THAN LAUGHTER OVER DRINKS OR LATE-NIGHT CATCHUPS. THEY ARE EMOTIONAL LIFELINES. AS WORK PRESSURE, SILENT BURNOUT AND DIGITAL CONNECTIONS LEAVE MANY WOMEN FEELING ISOLATED, EXPERTS SAY REGULAR TIME WITH TRUSTED FRIENDS IS NOT INDULGENCE, BUT ESSENTIAL THERAPY. **DALLEN NAMUGGA** BRINGS US THE SCIENCE AND STORY BEHIND WHY WOMEN NEED EACH OTHER MORE THAN EVER

Shanita Abaho, 26, a professional at dfcu Bank, says her last girls' night happened a few weeks ago, after a long stretch of work pressure. She explains that it's often hard to align schedules, but she's learnt not to postpone those moments for too long. "Life gets busy, especially with work, but I try not to go more than two months without seeing my girls because I start feeling off when too much time passes," Abaho says. For her, the excitement of a girls' get-together isn't about where they go or what they do, it's about emotional release. She says what she looks forward to most is the freedom to talk without filtering herself.



Shanita Abaho, banker

"I just want to laugh, vent and be myself without explaining or pretending I'm okay," Abaho says, adding that being around her friends

reminds her that she's not alone in what she's going through.

She admits that when she goes too long without seeing her girlfriends, her mood subtly shifts. She becomes more irritable, withdrawn and emotionally heavy, even if nothing dramatic has happened.

"I start feeling low and more stressed, and I don't even realise why until I meet them and feel lighter again," Abaho says.

What she values most about her friendships, she explains, is the emotional safety they offer. Abaho says her girlfriends understand her in ways few other people do, and that makes all the difference.

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WOMEN NEED GIRLS' GET-TOGETHER EVERY 22 DAYS – STUDY

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"With them, I feel seen, supported and understood. They remind me who I am outside of work and responsibilities," she says, adding that spending time with them leaves her calmer, happier and more grounded.

THE SCIENCE-BACKED ARGUMENT

According to research commissioned by Bezel Wines and conducted by Talker Research in August last year, women report needing a girls' get-together or night out roughly every 22 days to feel emotionally balanced and recharged.

The study of 2,000 women found that about 78% view these gatherings as essential to their well-being, highlighting that consistent time with close friends helps protect mental health and prevent emotional overload.

For many women, exhaustion is not caused by one thing, but by everything. Beyond paid work, there is the emotional labour of remembering, anticipating, checking in, smoothing over tension and holding other people's feelings alongside their own.

There are care-giving roles that don't pause, expectations within relationships to remain patient, supportive and emotionally available, and the constant pressure to appear capable even when overwhelmed.

Much of this work is invisible, unacknowledged and unpaid, yet it accumulates daily. Over time, the demand to "hold it together" becomes so normal that women stop recognising it as strain, until the body and mind begin to protest.

Counselling psychologist Dr Walubita Siyanga notes that many women communicate emotional distress through silence rather than words. He explains that when a woman becomes unusually quiet, it is often not a sign of peace, but of unexpressed pain or anger.

"According to research, 80% of women use silence to express pain," he says, adding that emotional withdrawal is frequently a coping response when women feel overwhelmed or unheard.

Siyanga contrasts this with women's typical emotional expressions when they are well, noting that happiness is often accompanied by openness and conversation.

"When she is happy, she is bubbly and chatty," he explains.

As a result, Siyanga cautions that prolonged or unusual silence should not be ignored.

"If there is too much silence from her, she could be in pain about many things she is not being open about," he says,

emphasising the importance of close friendships, where women can speak freely and release emotional weight.

Mental health specialists



When burnout deepens, what once felt manageable begins to feel heavy and isolating. Keeping in touch with friends over social media only deepens that isolation

note that limited social support worsens these outcomes, while regular connection with peers acts as a protective factor.

WHY ISOLATION IS BECOMING NORMAL FOR WOMEN

Isolation has crept into women's lives quietly, disguised as busyness. Long workdays spill into evenings, weekends are swallowed by responsibilities, and rest is often postponed in favour of getting one more thing done.

As careers grow, families expand or relationships deepen, friendships are frequently pushed to the margins – not because they matter less – but because they feel less urgent. Over time, meeting up becomes something that requires planning rather than something that happens naturally.

At the same time, digital connection has replaced physical presence. Group chats stay active, reactions are sent, voice notes exchanged, yet many women admit to feeling lonelier than before. Online interaction keeps friendships alive, but rarely provides the emotional release that comes from sitting together.

Clinical counselling psychologist Norah Mirembe Namei, the founder of Haven of Hope Therapy Centre, explains that what looks like constant connection today is often emotionally hollow.

She notes: "While women are always online, this interaction is on a shallow level and more of a performance rather than emotionally nourishing."

Namei adds that many women are overwhelmed by comparison, pressure to appear perfect and fear of vulnerability.

THE COST OF HAVING ZERO FRIENDS

When women consistently skip spaces of genuine connection, the cost often shows up quietly but steadily. Burnout deepens and what once felt manageable begins to feel heavy and isolating.

Mental health experts warn that prolonged social isolation is closely linked to depression, heightened anxiety and emotional numbness, while everyday frustrations are more likely to spill into conflict at home or at work.

Without trusted friendships to reflect, validate and release emotional weight, many women report feeling unseen, surrounded by people, yet deeply alone.

Research consistently shows that strong, supportive friendships act as a protective buffer against mental distress, making regular connection not just comforting, but essential.



Norah Namei, counsellor

According to her, busy schedules, economic stress, caregiving burdens and unresolved emotional wounds are quietly driving women into emotional withdrawal and what she calls "silent loneliness".

"Digital connection cannot replace the psychological safety that comes from face-to-face profound relationships," Namei emphasises.

She further explains that the invisible emotional labour women carry daily has serious long-term mental health consequences.

"Chronic emotional labour is the ongoing responsibility to manage

others' emotions while suppressing one's own," Namei says, noting that many women are socialised to be caregivers, peacemakers and emotional managers at home, church and work.

However, over time, this leads to emotional exhaustion, resentment, anxiety and burnout. Clinically, Namei says, many women appear fine on the surface, but are "deeply depleted inside", often struggling with self-neglect, guilt around rest and erosion of personal identity.

HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS FOR EMOTIONAL VENTILATION

Namei also warns against women narrowing their emotional world to only partners or family.

"No single relationship can meet all emotional needs," she says, explaining that when friendships are deprioritised, women lose spaces where they can exist outside roles such as wife, mother or caregiver.

This, Namei adds, increases vulnerability to loneliness, relationship distress and loss of identity, while healthy friendships provide emotional ventilation and balance that even strong marriages cannot replace.

GIRLS' GET-TOGETHER AS EMOTIONAL REGULATORS

On the value of girls' nights, Namei is unequivocal.

"They are not a luxury, but are a preventative mental health care," she says, explaining that consistent informal social connection helps regulate the nervous system by lowering cortisol and increasing oxytocin.

"Laughter, shared stories and relaxed presence provide emotional release and psychological safety. From a clinical perspective, these gatherings act as a protective factor against depression, anxiety and burnout."

When women begin to prioritise friendships consistently, Namei says the changes are visible. She lists improved mood, reduced anxiety, stronger emotional regulation and clearer identity, adding that many women experience renewed joy, better stress coping and healthier boundaries.

"Women begin to feel seen, supported and emotionally replenished," she says, noting that this positive shift often spills into their parenting, relationships, productivity and overall well-being.

WHAT A GIRLS' GET-TOGETHER REALLY LOOKS LIKE

According to Namei, a real girls' get-together rarely looks like what social media suggests. It doesn't require themed outfits, curated playlists or perfectly arranged tables. Sometimes it's women sitting on the floor of a living room, sharing simple food, talking freely or sitting in comfortable silence after a long week.

"There is venting without judgment, laughter and no pressure to look a certain way or have the right words. What matters is not the setting, but the safety, a space where women can show up as they are, without explanation or expectation."