



Quantitative Survey Report on “Mental Health of Young People”

Prepared by IMR/University of Nicosia™ for the Youth Board of Cyprus

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Research Specifications:

The research was conducted by IMR/University of Nicosia™, on behalf of the Youth Board of Cyprus, under the form of quantitative research and its main target was to investigate the mental health of young people.

The data collection process took place during November and December 2021, with nationwide coverage, both in urban and rural areas.

The sample size was 500 young people, aged 18-35.

The sample selection was carried out utilising the random sampling technique. The data collection was accomplished through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire.

Research Objectives:

The core aim of the Research is to study the issues of mental health of young people in Cyprus today, as a result of both the findings that have emerged through the third research of the Youth-barometer series as well as the absence of thorough research focusing on this issue.

The following were defined as specific objectives of the Research:

- Exploring aspects of life-related to the mental health of young people
- Surveying their emotional situation
- Detecting socio-demographic interrelationships
- Investigating knowledge and the evaluation of existing structures/State's programs of support
- Identifying young people's current needs to enhance support for mental health issues

Outcomes' Analysis

Surveying general situation

Life Satisfaction

In satisfactory contexts, the range of satisfaction of young people with their lives seems to fluctuate, as the average recorded is around seven out of ten. Few differences were found between the two genders, with men (7.15/10) showing a slightly higher level of satisfaction than women (7/10). Correspondingly little differentiation is detected between the two age groups.

Major problems

Regarding the most important issues, problems, or situations confronted by the young people of Cyprus today, it is highlighted that anxiety and pressure were two very significant feelings that overwhelm young people. More specifically, anxiety and uncertainty about the future were what prevailed (86%). The pressure and stress followed with a percentage of 75%, anxiety and insecurity for their professional rehabilitation with a percentage of 72%, anxiety and insecurity about financial issues with a percentage of 70%, oppression with 57%, the feeling of indifference, the feeling of withdrawal and depression with a percentage of 56%, while more than half of young people declared the feeling of bullying with a percentage of 54%. In addition, the feeling of loneliness was highlighted with a percentage of 48%, the experience of sexual harassment and the erotic frustration with a percentage of 47% respectively. Hereupon, despair with 45%, marginalization, and isolation with 42%, and suicidal tendencies with 37%. As revealed by the responses of young people, women scored higher percentages in all the above situations presented compared to men with the largest difference of 17 points being noted in the feeling of loneliness.

At the same time, anxiety and pressure remained as dominant feelings when asked by young people to declare whether they have experienced specific feelings/issues/problems or situations, with women having higher rates in all of the following cases. Stress and uncertainty about the future concern in a great measure the young people (76%), followed by pressure/stress with a rate of 70%.

Regarding the anxiety and the insecurity for the vocational rehabilitation and economic matters of young people were 58% and 50% respectively. In addition, young people said that they have experienced a fairly high degree of oppression (46%), followed by a feeling of indifference, a feeling of withdrawal, and depression with 41% for each case. In the same survey, it emerged that young people have experienced erotic frustration and a feeling of loneliness with percentages reaching 38% in both cases. They are followed by a feeling of despair with 32%, marginalization and isolation (social exclusion) with 23%, bullying with 23%, sexual harassment with 16%, and suicidal tendencies with 15%.

Health Conditions

Related to the question «how good do you feel that your condition of physical health is», 85% of young people described it as more than good, while only 12% said they possessed very good physical health. While regarding the corresponding question about their mental health condition, 77% of young people described it as more than good, yet only 7% described their mental health as very good.

Resilience

To evaluate the range of resilience of young people, the self-assessment tool of the European Union's Resilience project was utilised¹. To assess resilience, this tool consists of 21 sub-questions - 3 for each of the seven categories of investigation.

The seven categories concern the following:

- perception
- getting a grip of one's life
- forming relationships
- acceptance and optimistic thinking (confidence in future)
- orientation on solution and aims
- healthy lifestyle
- self-efficacy

More specifically, the most important findings of the questions that cover the parameters of resilience, show that the dominant perception for the majority of young people is that their life has meaning and is worth living, as an average evaluation of 8.13/10 was recorded for this statement.

¹ http://www.resilience-project.eu/uploads/media/self_evaluation_gr.pdf

During the overall evaluation of the resistance range to perception matters, it emerged that around half of young people possess a high degree of resilience.

At the same time, the findings highlight the presence of a supportive environment, with the vast majority stating that they have at least one person in their life to share what is happening to them (average 8.58/10). Simultaneously, a high average rating (8.35/10) was also recorded in the parameter declaring that young people find time for people who are significant to them. This specific category of resilience, as a whole, seems to be of particular importance for the mental health of young people. Particular emphasis should be given to the fact that seven out of ten young people have a high degree of resilience to relationship issues, a finding that validates the existence of strong and supportive relationships within the society of Cyprus.

Related to the evaluation of the parameters concerning the degree of self-efficacy, the averages of the evaluations ranged to 7.5/10. Similarly, close to 7.5/10, were the average evaluations recorded for the parameters that make up the degree of orientation on solutions and aims. For specific categories, a high degree of resilience is recorded for 65% and 64% of young people respectively.

For the healthy lifestyle category, a high degree of resilience was reflected in the percentage of 63% of young people. While for the categories of acquisition of life control (getting a grip of one's life) and acceptance and optimistic thinking, high degrees of resilience were recorded between 60% and 58% of young people respectively.

A comprehensive review of the findings related to the degree of mental resilience of young people presents that about six out of ten, have a high levels of resilience in the majority of the under-investigation categories, suggesting that they can recover from difficulties and adversities that may arise in their lives.

Mental Health

Visits to mental health professionals

One in two young people (50%) were found to know people who have turned to a mental health professional in their close family circle. The percentage increased by 12 points when young people were asked if they were aware of people who have turned to a mental health professional in their close circle of friends (62%). This percentage also remained at similar levels (59%) when young people were asked if they have other acquaintances who have turned to a mental health professional.

The survey has shown that more than half of young people (57%) have felt the need to visit a mental health professional. When asked whether young people believe that mental health is taboo, the results are mixed as 17% said they «totally agree», 24% that they «probably agree», 27% that they «neither agree nor disagree», 10% that they «probably disagree» and 20% that they «totally disagree». The percentage of 33% of young people «totally agree» that there are days when they feel they need psychological support, while the same percentage (33%) said they «probably agree». Almost 6% of young people «totally agreed» that they would not feel comfortable visiting a mental health professional, while 11% said they «probably agreed». At the same time, a very small percentage of young people (2%) believed that people who visit mental health professionals suffer from a serious mental disorder, while a small increase of 3 points was observed for the option «I probably agree». The vast majority of 86% completely disagree with the statement «I would not like to have friends of people who visit a psychiatrist/psychologist». When asked whether people with mental health problems should be treated with tolerance, 27% said they «totally agree», 24% «I probably agree», 29% «neither agree nor disagree», 9% «I probably disagree», and 11% «I totally disagree».

As revealed by the responses of both genders, the percentage of women who totally agreed with the statement «I believe that mental health is a taboo matter» was almost double (20%) compared to men (11%). The same phenomenon is observed in the statement «There are days when I feel that I need psychological support», where 40% of women totally agreed in contrast to 20% of men. In contrast, only 3% of women said they probably agree with the statement «People who visit mental health professionals suffer from a serious mental disorder», while the percentage of men who said they probably agree reached 10%.

When asked if young people have ever visited any mental health professional, 32% said they have visited a psychologist, 8% psychiatrist, 2% another Mental Health professional, and only 1% have visited a Life Coach. In addition to the young people who participated in the survey, 58% said that it was their choice to visit a mental health professional, 27% decided to visit a professional after encouraging other people, while 11% said they were forced to go. Comparing the two age groups, it was found that a greater proportion of young people aged 18-24 needed encouragement to decide to visit a mental health professional (33%) compared to young people aged 25-35 (18%). The average, with which people who have visited a psychologist evaluate whether his visit has contributed to him is around 6.94/10. There is a differentiation between the two age groups, with the older age group showing a higher average in terms of the help they have received from their visit (7.32/10), compared to the younger ones (6.7/10).

Evaluation of depression symptoms

To evaluate the depression symptoms was utilised the evaluation scale, called PHQ-9². This scale evaluates the following nine parameters:

- Loss of interest and pleasure
- The feeling of depression or despair
- Difficulty in the sleep
- The feeling of weariness or lack of energy
- Overconsumption or loss of appetite
- The feeling of failure or frustration
- Difficulty in concentration
- Rate of execution of activities
- Self-destructive / Suicidal idealizations

In particular, it investigated how young people felt in the last two weeks from the moment they filled out the questionnaire. Under the statement "Decreased your interest or the pleasure you acquire from your daily activities", 14% answered «almost every day», 24% «more than half the days», 48% «some days» and 12% «never».

² Kroenke, K. and Spitzer, R.L., 2002. The PHQ-9: a new depression diagnostic and severity measure. *Psychiatric annals*, 32(9), pp.509-515.

At the same time, in the statement «Did you feel sadness or grief or melancholy or disappointment?», 21% replied «almost every day», 20% «more than half the days», 47% «some days» and 9% «never». In the statement «Have you had problems with your sleep, for example, being slow to fall asleep, or waking up in between or earlier than you wish or sleeping longer hours than usual?», 29% said «almost every day», 21% «more than half the days», 30% «some days» and 18% «never». Similar percentages were recorded for the statement « Did you feel tired or exhausted or deafened or lack of energy?», where 30% declared «almost every day», 25% «more than half the days», 36% «somedays» and 6% «never». Percentages of 17% and 14% respectively were recorded for whether young people had problems with their food almost every day and whether they felt almost every day bad about themselves or thought that they were not worth it or that they were inadequate or that they had disappointed themselves or their loved ones.

Related to the statement «Did you have difficulty in concentration on doing various things, such as reading something or watching TV?», 22% replied «almost every day», 22% «more than half the days», 39% «some days» and 16% «never». Also, in the statement «Have you perceived moving or talking more slowly than usual so much that it can be perceived by others? Or on the contrary, be so anxious and upset that you turn around much more than usual?» the percentage of 7% said «almost every day», 14% «more than half the days», 27% «some days» and 50% «never». Finally, in the statement «Did you think it would be better for you if you had died or thought of harming yourself in any way?», the percentage of 5% replied «almost every day», 5% «more than half the days», 12% «some days» and 75% «never». In all the above statements, the percentage of young people who chose «I do not wish to respond» ranged to low levels (1%-4%).

It is worth noting that there were small differences in the above-mentioned gender situations. Nonetheless, it ascertained that the percentages of women who experienced these conditions were higher than the men. For example, 25.2% of women said that almost every day in the last two weeks from the day they participated in the survey, they felt sadness or grief or melancholy or disappointment compared to men (14.6%). The same situation was observed for this statement for the age groups (18-24 & 25-35), where 23.6% of the younger age group said they experienced this condition almost every day, while only 16.8% aged 25-35 experienced it at the same level.

According to the data derived from the overall analysis of the data on depression symptoms, it appears that 62% of young people may have mild forms of depression or symptoms of depression. The alarm bells are sounded by evidence suggesting that about one in four young people may have significant or severe symptoms. It is emphasized that these elements should be interpreted with caution, as in no way substitute for clinical evaluation.

Evaluation of anxiety symptoms

To evaluate the anxiety symptoms was utilised the evaluation scale, called GAD-7³. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale consists of 7 questions answered through a 4-point Likert scale which indicates the frequency with which the person has experienced what each sentence describes, within the past 2 weeks, where 0 (never) to 3 (almost every day).

It was found that more often young people felt mainly nervousness, anxiety, tension, but also were overly concerned about various things. More specifically, 31% of young people said they felt nervous «almost every day», 25% answered «more than half the days», 37% «some days», and 6% «never». At the same time, 28% of young people were overly concerned about various issues, 25% said they were concerned «more than half the days», 33% «some days», and 12% «never».

Also, 17% of young people said they could not control their anxiety almost every day. Similarly, 22% answered «more than half the days», 37% answered «some days», 22% said they never felt that way in the last two weeks. Similar percentages were recorded in the statement «You had difficulty relaxing», where 23% answered that they had difficulty «almost every day», 24% replied «more than half the days», 37% answered «some days», 15% said they never felt that way in the last two weeks. The largest percentage of young people (45%) said that never during the two weeks did they feel much anxiety that they could not sit still. It is followed by 28% who answered «some days», 16% «more than half the days», while only 10% answered «almost every day». In addition, 22% of young people easily felt discomfort or irritation in the last two weeks from the day the survey was conducted either «almost every day» or «more than half the days». They are followed by the 41% who answered «somedays», and

³ Spitzer, R.L., Kroenke, K., Williams, J.B. and Löwe, B., 2006. A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder: the GAD-7. *Archives of internal medicine*, 166(10), pp.1092-1097.

13% «never». Finally, only 12% of young people said they feared that something horrible might happen "almost every day", 15% answered «more than half the days», 29% «some days», while the largest percentage of young people (44%) said they never felt feared. The percentage of young people who did not wish to answer these statements was very small (1%-2%).

Through the comparison of the two genders, it was also transparent in this case that women felt the above feelings to a more frequent extent than men. These differences were observed to be greater than previous survey questions. By a margin of 20 points, women (39%) have felt nervousness, anxiety or have been in tension almost daily in the last two weeks more often than men (18%). A similar difference was noted in the statement "You could not stop or control your anxiety" where 24% of women experienced this condition almost daily as opposed to men (7%). At the same time, 34.6% of women expressed almost daily excessive concern about various things compared to men (17%). There was a smaller gender gap in whether young people in the last two weeks from the day the survey was conducted found finding it difficult to relax, with 27% of women saying they experienced this situation almost daily compared to men (15%). The smaller gender differences (3-4 points) were noted in the statements «You had so much concern that you couldn't sit still» and «You were afraid that something horrible might happen».

Comparing the two age groups of young people (18-24 & 25-35) there were no great differences in how often I expressed specific emotions in the last two weeks from the moment they participated in the survey. However, in this question, it was found that the younger age group experienced the above-mentioned situations to a more frequent extent.

Evaluating the overall data related to the investigation of anxiety symptoms, it appears that one in three young people may have mild symptoms of anxiety. At the same time, moderate stress is around 27%, while severe stress reaches 21%. These elements, again, should be interpreted with caution, as they are in no way a substitute for clinical evaluation.

Mental health/Support Services

The range of knowledge of Services

The most popular services that provide mental health services or psychological support seem to be mental health services of the State Health Services Organisation (55%). Afterward, follows the 1410 Line, which is known by 42% of respondents, while 38% say they are aware of online counseling. The percentage (23%) of young people know the Multi-purpose Centres. The percentages of 18% and 14%, respectively, stated that they are aware of the Youth Psychosocial Empowerment Program «Micri Arktos», and the Consulting Services «Protasi» of the Youth Board of Cyprus, and 11% said they are aware of the mental health and psychological support services offered by the Center for Therapy, Training & Research (KESY).

Level of satisfaction by the provided services

Young people's views on the level of satisfaction with mental health services provided, seems to be divided. Specifically, the percentage of 47% declare that they are very or a lot satisfied, while 43% of them are a little or not at all satisfied. It is striking that one in ten young people was unable to answer the question.

Moreover, as basic deficiencies in the provision of psychological support to young people (18-35), it appeared that 45% responded that there are no free facilities to which a young person can turn for psychological support and 43% said that there is limited coverage of visits to a psychologist by the General Healthcare System (GESY). The fact that there are no support groups(30%), youth hostels (25%), and several self-help lines (24%) are additional shortcomings highlighted by young people.

Implications of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly provoked significant modifications in the daily lives of young people that have affected and continue to worsen their mental health. During the pandemic period, possible modifications that prompted the young people to act, in a specific way were the termination of employment, the termination of the curriculum, and the suspension of military service, which were included in the survey. For about one in three young people (29%) as a result of the pandemic was the termination of their professional employment. The percentage of 14% of young people declare they were forced to interrupt

their studies during the pandemic while considering the men of the survey only 2% declared they had suspended their military service.

The outbreak of the pandemic has significantly affected the lives of young people. Almost one in two young people said their mental health condition has deteriorated (46%). The percentage (32%) of young people declared that their mental health status remains the same, while just one in five (17%) declared that their mental health had improved.

As the responses of young people demonstrate, the cost to citizens' mental health is great. Taking into consideration the entire Republic of Cyprus, four out of five respondents believed that the mental health of citizens has worsened during the pandemic (78%). The rest percentage declared that the mental health citizens' status remains at the same level (11%) and only 2% declared said that the mental health status has improved.

The impact of the pandemic on the mental health of young people is also distinguished by the way they expressed their feelings. According to the survey, young people said that during the pandemic, the feeling of boredom dominated with 37% almost daily. Also, anxiety/stress (29% and uncertainty (24%) were the next two dominant feelings, followed respectively by anger (23%), loneliness (19%), depression (19%), despair (17%), fear (15%) and withdrawal (12%).

Almost one in three women (36%) declared they experienced a feeling of anxiety more than men (16%). An even greater difference is observed between the two genders taking into consideration the feeling of depression. Almost 25% of women declared that the feeling of depression burdened their daily lives compared to men with the percentage rising to 9%. At the same time, women felt harmless to a greater extent (29%) than men (16%). A similar condition was recorded for the rest of the feelings with women developing to a greater extent the feeling of withdrawal, anger, despair, fear, and loneliness during the pandemic.

Similarly, respondents belonging to the younger age group (18-24) experienced the above feelings to a more intense extent than in the older group (25-35). A characteristic example is the manifestation of anxiety/stress that pervades daily in the younger age group (33%) compared to young people aged 25-35 (22.5%).

The same situation was observed taking into consideration the feeling of depression with 23% of respondents in the younger age group declaring that they experienced the feeling of depression almost daily compared to 13.6% of young people in the older age group. The COVID-19 pandemic

has turned everyday life upside down with young people stating their concerns about the effects of the pandemic on their lives. The biggest concerns of young people recorded are restrictions on movement/travel (68%), the possibility of a new economic crisis (68%), restrictions on amusement and entertainment (67%), and the insertion of a new modus vivendi (with restrictive measures) (67%).

This is followed by negative learning outcomes (63%), rising youth unemployment rates (63%), worsening mental health (62%), and career prospects (37%) with a significant proportion of young people pointing them out. It is important to note that the predominant concern of men was the possibility of a new economic crisis (68%), while women declared that restrictions on travel (75%) and amusement and entertainment (74%) were two of their biggest concerns. Young people in both age groups (18-24 & 25-35) declared that restrictions on movement/travel are a major concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on their lives with the percentage reaching 69%. For the younger age group, it was found that equally big concerns were the restrictions on amusement and entertainment as well as the insertion of a new modus vivendi (with restrictive measures) with the percentage rising to 68% in each case. In the 25-35 age, the predominant concern of young people was the possibility of a new economic crisis (71%).

The 10 most significant findings

1. Stress and uncertainty about the future are, both in general and in personal terms, the most basic problem of the young people of Cyprus today (86%).
2. Despite the overburdened – due to the pandemic – prevailing situation, the majority of young people are highly qualified on all resilience evaluation parameters, finding suggesting that they can recover from difficulties and adversities that may arise in their lives.
3. More than half of young people (57%) declared they have felt the need to visit a mental health professional. In addition, 32% say that they have visited a psychologist, 8% a psychiatrist, and 3% another Mental Health professional.
4. According to the parameters for the counting of symptoms of depression, it appears that 62% of young people may have mild forms of depression or symptoms of depression. At the same time, alarming are the outcomes to suggest that about one in four young people may have significant or severe symptoms.
5. Symptoms of anxiety appear in the vast majority of young people, which fluctuate in percentages of 33% in mild, 27% in moderate, and 21% in severe.
6. Significant differences between the two genders were recorded in terms of feelings of anxiety, with women recording much higher rates compared to men.
7. The knowledge of health services has fluctuated at low levels, while young people seem to be divided in terms of their satisfaction with the services provided.
8. The impact of the pandemic on mental health seems to be significant according to young people. The prevailing perception among young people about the condition in Cypriot society is that the mental health of citizens has worsened during the pandemic (78%). However, on a personal level, 46% declare that their mental health condition has worsened.
9. The main feelings they had experienced during the pandemic were boredom, uncertainty, and anxiety/stress.
10. The main concern of men regarding the effects of the pandemic was the possibility of a new economic crisis (68%), while for women it was the restrictions on travel /travel (75%) and amusement and entertainment (74%). For the 25-35 age group, the dominant concern was the possibility of a new economic crisis (71%).

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