

a holistic approach towards
mental health & youth



POLICY PAPER



Erasmus+



KUNSILL NAZZJONALI
TAŻ-ZGHAZAGH

Contents

1. Introduction
 - 1.1 Consultation
 - 1.1.1 Public Constitution
 - 1.1.2 Online Consultation
 - 1.2 Gaps in current policy
2. Health Services
 - 2.1 Youth services
 - 2.2 Hospitals
 - 2.2.1 Mental Health Hospital Services
 - 2.2.2 Mental Health Infrastructure
 - 2.2.3 Mater Dei
 - 2.3 Public Private Partnerships
 - 2.4 Mental Health Professions
 - 2.4.1 Cultural Mediators
 - 2.4.2 Standard Operations Procedure
 - 2.5 Community Service
 - 2.5.1 Mental Health Clinics
 - 2.5.2 Mental Health First Aid
 - 2.5.3 Online Services
3. Education
 - 3.1 Mental Health in educational Institutions
 - 3.1.1 Counselling
 - 3.1.2 Tertiary and ongoing education
 - 3.1.3 Innovative approaches to be implemented in schools
 - 3.2 Awareness Campaigns
 - 3.3 Research and Innovation
4. Work
 - 4.1 Assistance given to employers
 - 4.1.1 Counselling and training
 - 4.1.2 Assistance to SMEs
 - 4.1.3 Confidentiality
 - 4.2 Enforcement
5. Conclusion

1. Introduction

*"Mental health and behavioural problems (e.g. depression, anxiety and drug use) are reported to be the primary drivers of disability worldwide, causing over 40 million years of disability in 20 to 29-year-olds."*¹

The Burden of mental ill health in Malta is born primarily by the individual and the family, but additionally by the workplace, the health services and society at large. Mental health issues are unfortunately not being given as much importance as they deserve within our communities. Due to stigma, certain misconceptions and unawareness of what lies in the reality of individuals living with a mental illness, active recovery is more likely to be withheld for the individual.

This Policy Paper will call for an intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach involving all entities and through a life course approach while putting priority accessibility of rights for people who live with mental health difficulties. At present, those individuals who live with mental health difficulties feel discouraged to be heard and prefer to remain silent; knowing the risk of social exclusion hinders from exercising some of their basic rights². In fact, this reality was brought to the attention of the media in March 2018, when a man was dismissed from work because he lived with Bipolar Disorder; this is just one example amongst many which have been hidden from the public eye. Local policy makers are responsible for ensuring that the human rights of such individuals with similar experiences are safeguarded even against employers and private businesses. Therefore, the need for a wider policy framework has to be highlighted in order to address aspects of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities.

This Policy Paper is built on the fundamental idea towards more inclusion and integration of people living with mental health illness in our society. According to Dr M. Chan, WHO Director-General;

¹ Lozano, R. et al. (2012) Global and regional mortality from 235 causes of death for 20 age groups in 1990 and 2010. a systematic analysis for the global burden of disease study 2010. The Lancet. 380(9859), pp. 2095–2128.

² Basic rights include health care and other services, legal protections which will enable them to maximize their abilities and be fully integrated into all aspects of life as well as the preservation of liberty and personal autonomy, presumption of competency, freedom from seclusion and restraints, protection of privacy, as well as specific needs e.g employment, housing, benefits and ending discrimination.

“The inclusion of noncommunicable diseases under the health goal is a historical turning point. Finally, these diseases are getting the attention they deserve. Through their 169 interactive and synergistic targets, the SDGs seek to move the world towards greater fairness that leaves no one behind.”.

Inclusion and integration are the main objectives of such a policy. Both terms continue to remain essential to be put into action and implemented in the various sectors that concern the mental health of individuals. The sectors that have been identified are primarily the education sector, employment and health sector. Suggestions from these sectors were taken in order to create a holistic approach towards the creation of such policy paper. The latter will ensure that the rights of people who are mentally ill are still protected and have the same opportunities as other people in our society.

1.1 Consultation

To ensure that policy suggestions are truly representative, prior consultation with approximately 800 youths³ coming from different backgrounds on different topics was made. The consultation was completed using two different methodologies;

1. Public Consultation
2. Online Consultation

1.1.1 Public Consultation

The public consultation was carried out between August and December 2018, through six consultation sessions, whereby large focus groups were formed. The consultation sessions used to always follow the same format, the first workshop would always be an information session on the already existing services delivered by professionals themselves and the following workshop would focus on the collection of suggestions. Innovative and engaging methodologies were used to bring policy making closer to youths, making such consultations sessions appealing and accessible to younger audiences. In order to ensure that no suggestions were overlooked, members of the core group⁴ were present throughout the sessions, acting as rapporteurs to gather all the necessary information. The focus groups were composed of approximately 30 youths; most of whom were professionals working in the

³ For the purpose of this policy, youths vary from adolescents of 11 years of age to adults who are 30 years of age.

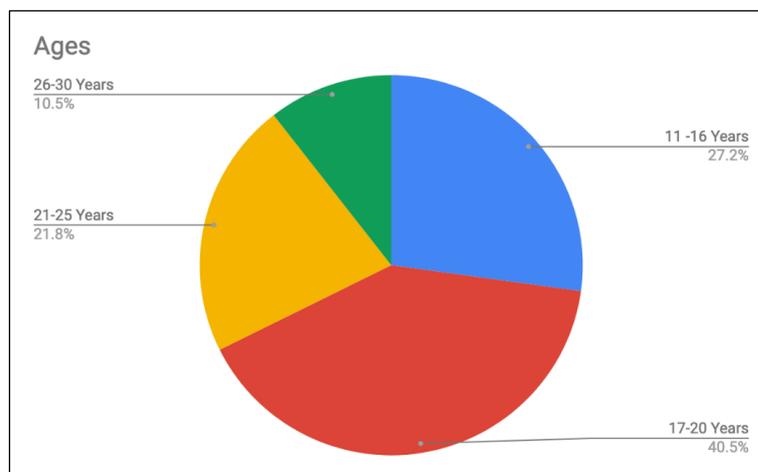
⁴ The core group is a group of young people made up of professionals in the social field, lawyers, social workers, a doctor, psychologist and a psychiatrist. Their help ensured that suggestions were listed, data was analysed and then presented for the formulation of such policy paper.

sector or people who have experienced mental distress at a point in their lives. Each dealt with a variety of topics such as mental health and health services, mental health at the workplace and mental health in educational institutions. The events were all open to the public via KNŻ's Facebook page, in addition for the events held in the educational institutions KNŻ collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Employment to target a specific audience, which significantly increased the attendance, going up to sixty (60) youths coming from 14 colleges in Malta.

1.1.2 Online Consultation

The online consultation was carried out through a survey which was disseminated through the Facebook page of the National Youth Council (KNŻ) and with the help of its member organisations who assisted in the distribution of this survey amongst their members and followers. From all the means, 505 responses were recorded. This amount represents youth coming from different age groups (specified in image 1). The National Statistics Office considers this amount to be a good representative sample of all the youths living in Malta and Gozo. It could be easily stated that while the reach was varied, 17-20 year olds were the most predominant responses.

Image 1



1.2 Gaps in current policy

In order to assess the need for this policy paper, two fundamental questions were asked in the online cross-sectional survey. These questions concerned the need that youths have to seek professional help. In fact, two questions were intentionally posed after each other to be able to create a contrast. In image 2, one can clearly observe that approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents asserted the need to talk to a psychologist at a point in their life. However, the statistics described in image 3 show that only 58% sought help. This results in two possible

scenarios; either that the services are not within enough reach to youths or else the stigma surrounding mental health pressures to a great extent from a young age. This policy paper addresses both possibilities, as there are active measures taken to ensure services are within reach to our youths through more active discussions and better use of marketing; all contributing to lessening the stigma.

Image 2.

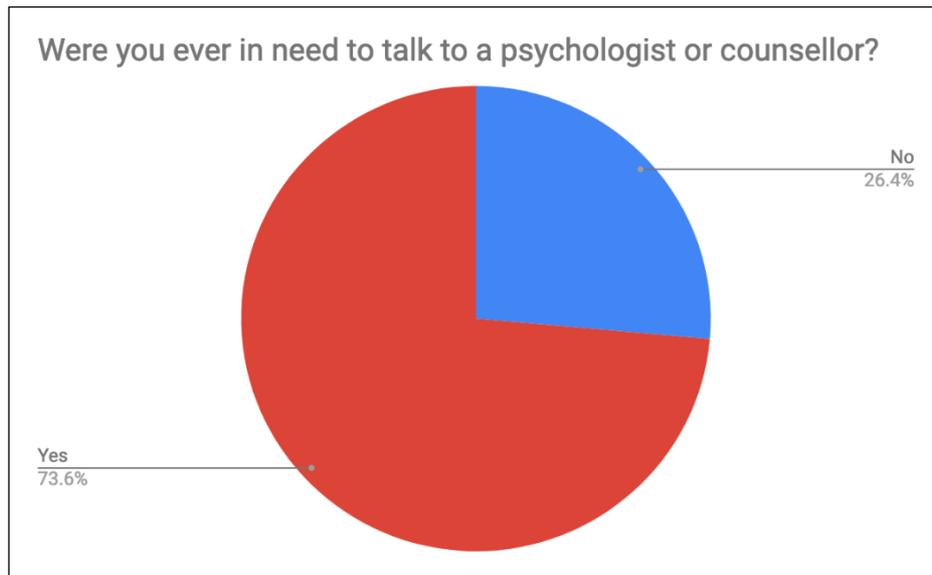
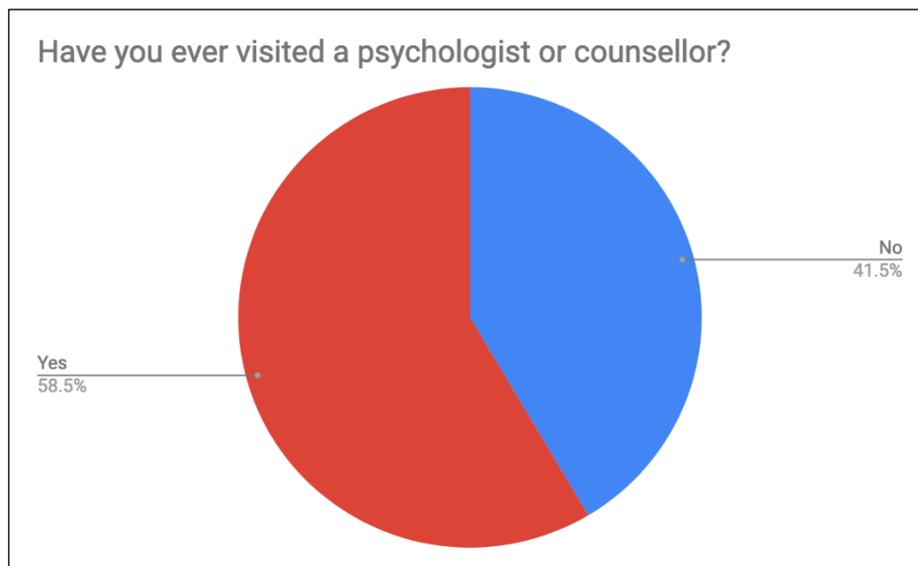


Image 3.



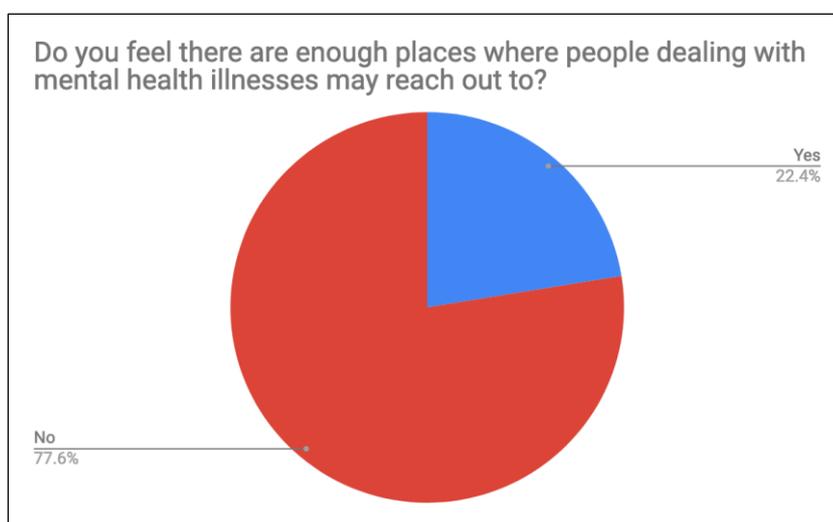
Another objective would be to create a better safety environment for people who live with a mental illness. In such a way that they would still be able to exercise all their rights while

fully function as independently as possible in a society that removes barriers. In order to be able to offer this opportunity, the subject of mental health should be put on an equal footing with the subject of physical health. In doing so, new approaches to the available services, service providers and also treatment in the community are considered.

2. Health Services

There have been substantial improvements on the part of the government with regards to the Mental Health sector in Malta, in relation to both the Mental Health clinics and the Psychiatric Unit at Mater Dei. Nonetheless, there is still space for several improvements in relation to the standards of care of the mental health hospital and most especially the foundations set for best practices in the mental health field in Malta. The best approach that should be taken is to bring the mental health services at par with the services given to people who live with physical illnesses. Consequently, it is paramount to allocate a greater investment in mental health systems.

Image 4.



Nonetheless, through the survey we conducted, the majority of respondents still believe that there are not enough places for people living with mental illness can reach out to. This can be looked at from two aspects, either there is not enough awareness of the existing services, or else it is because there is a greater need for it and what is being done is not enough to match the demand. Both will be addressed throughout this policy.

In addition, the government should invest in both a preventative approach and also in early intervention ensuring that the community services are given all the necessary tools to tackle early stages of mental illness before requiring hospitalisation. Psychological interventions such as expressive therapies and sports therapy should also be given more importance when developing services, rather than solely focusing on medication.

2.1 Youth Services

A grave concern found in the national mental health sector is the inability to promote an appropriate transition between YPU (Young People's Unit) and the adult services. It is imperative that psychiatric services are targeted around the needs of the specific age groups being treated. It is highly recommended that gradual and effective processes are put in place between the ages of 18 years and 21 years to ease the transition process from child and adolescent psychiatry to adult psychiatric services. Such systems include a liaison team, family support and an adequate electronic filing system.

It is also highly recommended that psychoeducational campaigns promote these child and adolescent psychiatric services, and more resources are invested to increase the quantity and quality of mental health departments.

2.2 Hospitals

It is imperative that at this day and age, with the huge technological advancements that have been made, there is also an introduction of an electronic system encompassing treatment plans and patient's notes, facilitating the continuity of care from one department to the other. Moreover, this would eliminate the never-ending problems with filing, and ensure efficiency.

It is also highly recommended that there would be a thorough rebranding of Mount Carmel Hospital, not solely of the infrastructure but even how it is being delivered to the community; including the name and the delivery of certain services. This will be of the essence in diminishing as much as possible the stigma and taboo surrounding the subject.

2.2.1 Mental Health Hospital Services

It is evident that the treatments used by the hospital focus a lot on medication, which although it is beneficial it is not enough to rehabilitate inpatients in the community. This approach does not incorporate other aspects of how people who live with mental illnesses can cope with life stressors or give them additional skills to help people become more resilient.

It is imperative that more services are introduced to make the mental health hospital a truly rehabilitative one, whereby people are taught skills to be able to adapt more comfortably to society once they are discharged. This does not necessarily have to be limited to traditional therapies, but more emphasis should be made on alternative forms of therapies such as artistic

and sports activities. These and multidisciplinary teams have to be accessible for all patients, on a daily basis in order to assist recovery and therapy for each patient.

2.2.2 Mental Health Hospital Infrastructure

It is a well-established fact that the current state of Mount Carmel Hospital is disgraceful, however, this is bound to change. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health in early December made a public statement affirming that a new mental health hospital will be built adjacent to Mater Dei.⁵ Nonetheless, one should keep in mind past mistakes, to ensure these do not repeat themselves.

Security needs to be a priority and should be incorporated in this hospital, both inside the wards and also outside upon entrance, using machines which detect tobacco, illicit substances and also any other material which could be of danger to patients.

It is further recommended that the wards are divided according to various age groups. In addition, the privacy and dignity of individuals should be safeguarded and catered for, unlike the present situation in Mount Carmel Hospital, showers or access to any other amenities should not be shared.

Patients should have access to psychological therapies by means of sports through the creation of a Multipurpose Course on the hospital grounds, or close to them, including but not limited to a football court, basketball court and a running track. Moreover, there should also be unlimited access to multisensory rooms equipped with *“specialist sensory equipment which can either stimulate the user's mental activity, provide a relaxing environment or promote interaction”*.⁶

2.2.3 Mater Dei

Mater Dei is essential in providing health services, as it is considered to be the hub and this should not be any different when it comes to mental health services. In fact, it is of essence to ensure that there is more liaison between departments in hospital most especially in the case of the maternity department and psychiatry. In fact, screening should become a standard

⁵ <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20181205/local/new-mental-health-hospital-completion-date-set-for-2025.695951>

⁶ ‘The Benefits of a Multisensory Room’, <https://www.experia-usa.com/blog/benefits-multisensory-room/>

procedure after a woman has just given birth due to the possibility of post-natal depression. Better liaison between departments would ease the possibility to catch problems at an early stage whilst also promoting perinatal mental health which at this point is not given its due importance.

Another important service, which is of paramount importance in mental health intervention is the 24/7 crisis team. From the survey, we carried out, as seen in image 4 it resulted that the majority do not know of any crisis or emergency team. Whilst, as displayed in image 5, those who answered ‘yes’ mentioned various stakeholders causing confusion on which is the appropriate one to consult in such situations or they left it vacant.

Image 4.

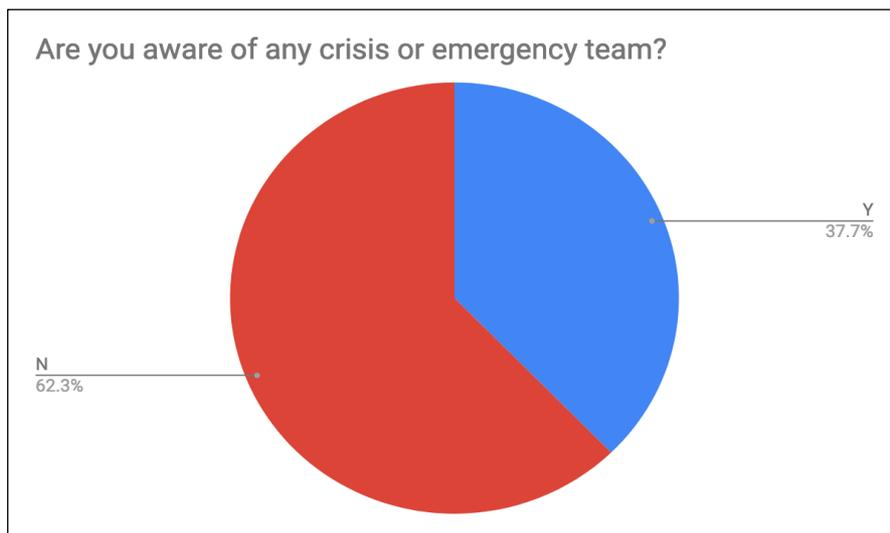
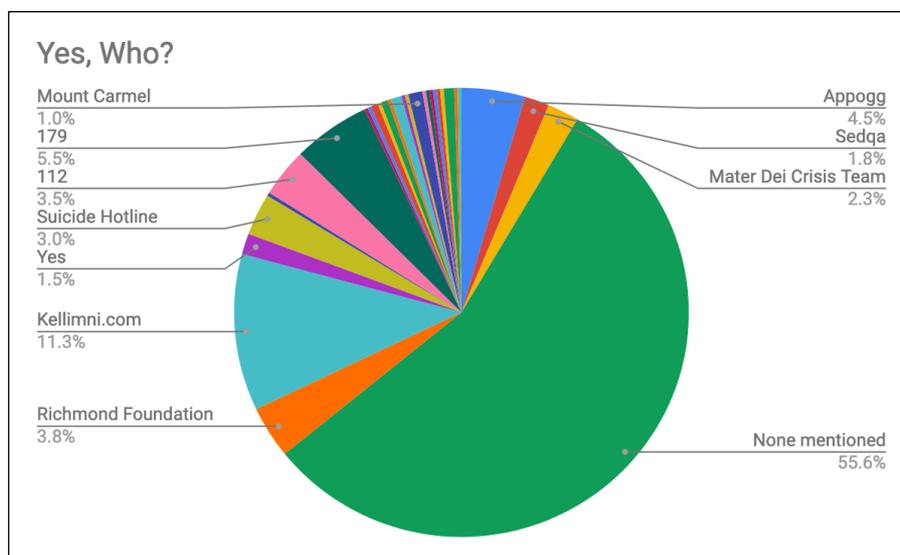


Image 5.



Following these statistics, one should emphasise on the need to create a National Suicide Helpline, which would forward the emergency according to need. Therefore, we would eliminate the need to have one crises emergency team, but the burden would be distributed amongst various stakeholders according to the specific case. Currently there are various versions of such helpline, however, there is no specific one dealing solely with mental health. Hence a suggestion would be to pool in the various scattered services given by NGOs to form one standard service, ensuring professionals are all equipped with the necessary tools to offer a safe and efficient service. A National Suicide Helpline has been implemented by a lot of countries around the world⁷ making it a standard in the mental health sector, which makes it easier even for foreigners to identify in case of a mental health emergency.

2.3 Public Private Partnerships

These types of partnerships are not prominent in our society, however, as time progresses these are becoming more common. At this point the mental health sector seems like a never-ending competition between; the public sector, various foundations, and other private entities, each offering various services but which few people know of. In addition, it is also making it extremely complicated for people to find the service they need, and when they do such services have an endless waiting list or else are extremely expensive.

A solution which could be proposed is to set up public-private partnerships, whereby the private sector would be able to provide the services and the government would subsidise the expenses making it within reach to the general community. Hence, this would be a way of decreasing the waiting lists as more entities would be providing certain services, whilst there would also be streamlining of services being offered to ensure the rights of mentally ill people are safeguarded. In addition, this would also breach the gap between the public and private sectors in mental health.

Through these opportunities, the government by buying the services of NGOs would be supporting the work already existing and will provide such organisations with the necessary tools to continue their work and expand. This results in the engagement of more people in

⁷ This is the international bipolar foundation which made a list of suicide hotlines from all around the world; <http://ibpf.org/resource/list-international-suicide-hotlines>

our society raising more awareness on mental health, whilst minimising as much as possible the duplication of services.

2.4 Mental Health Professions

The service is given by people and this makes them a determining factor in the wellbeing of the patient. In the case of the mental health sector, people are an even bigger challenge as the multidisciplinary team is made up of various professions. Therefore, the government must ensure there is adequate funding in the education of qualified people in every sector. The graduation of more students in this field would result in easier access to mental health services and less waiting lists. Currently, it is a well-known fact that there is an overload of work on those counsellors and social workers who are employed by the government. Hence, this is one of those professions which need to be encouraged at the university level, to incentivise the prospect of having more counsellors in Malta.

Another concerning profession is that of a psychologist, whereby there is an evident need for more people in this profession, especially in governmentally provided services. This is worrying considering the course at the University of Malta on psychology is one of the most populated. Therefore, one must question why these graduates are not being fully utilised and they are getting lost to other sectors such as the business one. The government has to ensure to put up an attractive package for these psychologists to offer their services in governmental institutions.

2.4.1 Cultural Mediators

Another aspect which should be taken into consideration with regards to the various professions should be the need for cultural mediators and interpreters in the various departments and community clinics. This should be especially relevant in our day and age, whereby a substantial part of our population is made up of foreigners who have little to no support systems in place. These people have a greater risk to fall victims to mental illnesses, requiring us to adapt our services to be able to cater for these new realities.

2.4.2 Standard Operation Procedure

Another recommendation when it comes to having various professions working in one sector would be to have a Standard Operation Procedure, which could be easily linked to key performance indicators. This would ensure that patients are given due attention, whereby

there would be minimum criteria set to ensure a certain standard is kept in all the departments related to mental health. Hence, it should not be considered as a limitation or a one size fits all approach but rather a safety precaution ensuring patients get good service. Further emphasis should also be put on the communication between both professionals and patients, and also professionals between themselves. It is of utmost importance that the hospital staff is trained in communication and listening skills, especially when it comes to prescribing medicine.

2.5 Community Services

The mental health community services given in Malta have improved substantially, as the approach has changed towards integration rather than segregation. Nowadays, people who live with a mental illness are more empowered to be able to function in society compared to the situation 50 years ago. However, no man is an island and it is of utmost importance that help is also given to family members or people surrounding the person living with mental illness in order to be able to recognise certain symptoms and offer help when the person is in need. In addition, dealing with certain circumstances on a daily basis can get draining, therefore it is important for family members to be given the relevant support needed.

Another innovative approach would be to grant free access to sports facilities or provide a discount for such services to people who live with mental illnesses. Hence, this would result in forming better coping mechanisms, instead of recurring to other non-recommended substances like alcohol or drugs, whilst it can also be considered as having therapeutic value.

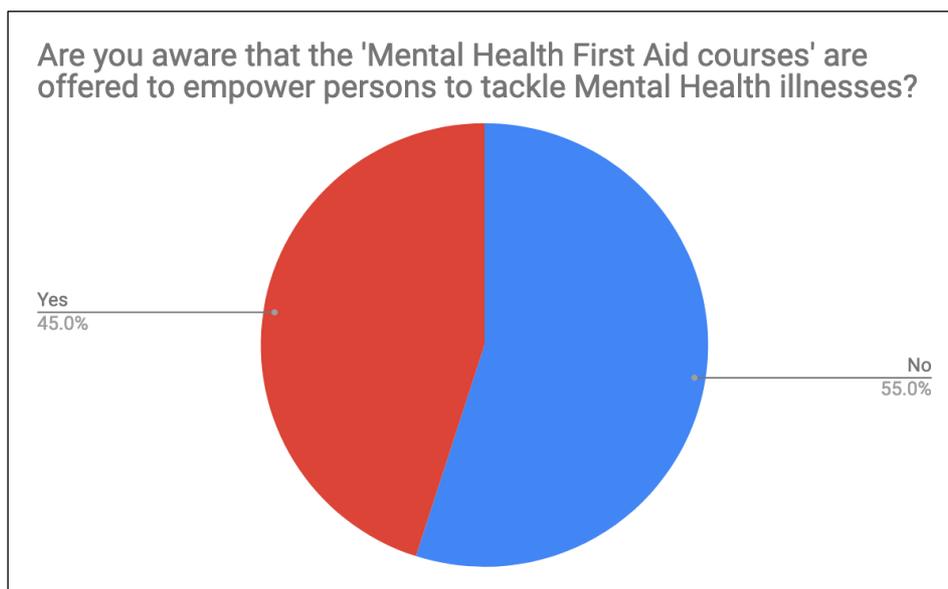
2.5.1 Mental Health Clinics

The Mental Health clinics are amongst the most efficient in the treatment of mental health illnesses, as these enable and empower people who live with mental illnesses. These should be re-enforced and given more tools to broaden their services and reach more people. A recommendation would be to open a new clinic in the north of Malta in order to widen the services. This area needs to be invested upon as it has a high concentration of foreigners, who exhibit higher risks when it comes to mental health illnesses and should receive the aid needed. In fact, this was also proposed in the budget proposals of KNŽ, which was taken up and included in the budget speech.

2.5.2 Mental Health First Aid

The Mental Health First Aid was an initiative taken by Richmond Foundation; a non-governmental organisation, which is a pioneer in the mental health sector in Malta. This course entails a lot of information on various mental illnesses, whilst it also equips the person on how to deal with certain crisis. However, since it is provided by a non-governmental organisation, for the purpose of sustainability of the organisation, these are provided at a cost and the marketing spent on these courses is limited. In fact, through the survey which was carried out, it resulted that half of the youths who responded didn't know of this course even though Richmond Foundation created a specific one catered for youths. This is worrying since there are opportunities, but they are not reaching the target audience.

Image 6.



Therefore, it should be the role of the government to ensure that this course is provided to professionals working both directly and indirectly in the mental health field, caregivers who are either family members or people living with a person who lives with a mental illness and schools; to both educators and students alike. If the effort put on mental health education starts at a young age, then we have hope that our society will grow to become more aware of the importance of mental health.

2.6 Online Services

It is a fact, that one of the best ways to get in touch with youths is through the world wide web, as our generations are considered to be living in the digital era. Lately, the government has started using this to his advantage paying for adverts on various platforms. Another innovative idea would be to use the same method or else create a video including various services with relation to mental health in order to disseminate it through Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and any other platform.

Another method which can follow up on Suicide Helpline would be to synchronise the line to a Whatsapp Account. It is a renowned fact, that Whatsapp encrypts data making it more secure, and youths would probably feel more comfortable using this rather than a normal chat synchronised with Facebook which has more information about them listed. In addition, no person would be confused as the same number would be used.

3. Education

Education should always be at the forefront when it comes to defeating the stigma surrounding mental health and building resilience. However, the word education is vast and the more innovative one is with their approach, the more effective the outcome will be. No matter the medium, the main outcome should remain the same; that of delivering the message that mental health is equal and should be given the same importance as physical health.

Education should be delivered to the community to understand more about mental illness, however, education should target the needs of various groups differently. There is education granted to people who are unaffected by the reality of mental illnesses, which normally is more general, whilst the education received by people who are affected directly or indirectly tends to be more hands-on, including coping mechanisms and various therapies. In fact, it is important to acknowledge that even those people who know what mental illness is, as they live with this reality, they still have the right to receive education about their rights and the available services they can make use of.

Youths are always at an advantage when it comes to education, as they are more susceptible to search on the internet to inform themselves, even though they risk being misinformed. Through image 7 one can observe that youths are more open to discuss the topic of mental health; whereby 75% of our respondents feel comfortable to speak about it with either family or peers and a substantial part forming part of the 37% are comfortable to speak with both. This shows that gradually, the stigma which seemed to be an indestructible wall is slowly being brought down.

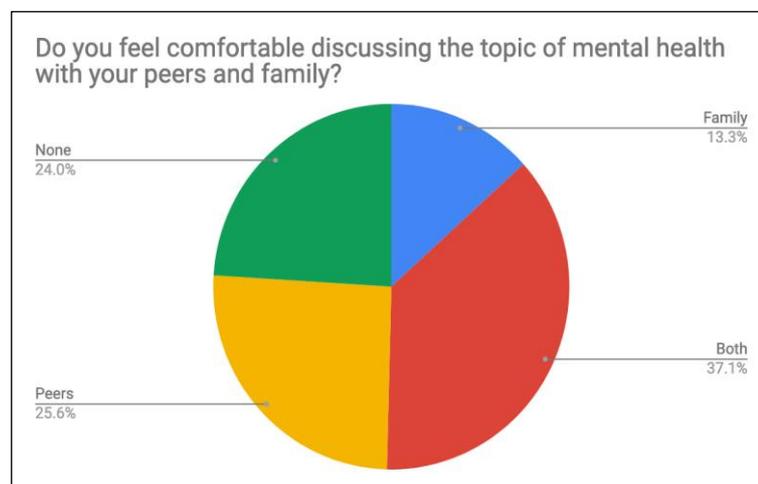


Image 7.

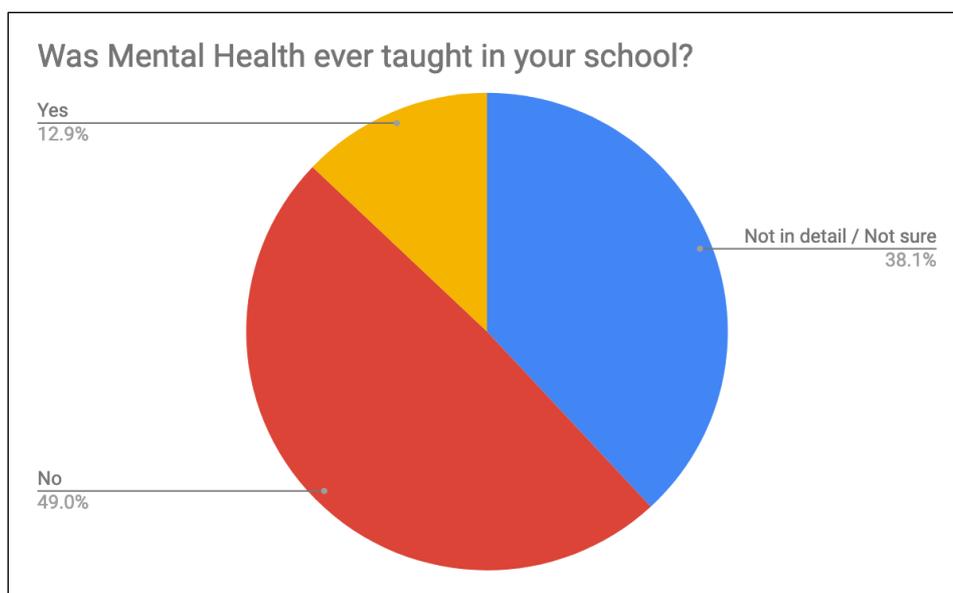
Nonetheless, it is also a reality that one of the major challenges faced by various educators is the difficulty in reaching middle-aged people and seniors. Perhaps, one way to target these difficult audiences is to create more public discussions which are more accessible; either through local councils with initiatives in small communities or else through specific existing groups.

It is imperative we reach those stakeholders which have a determining effect on our youths. Hence, more resources should be invested in the training of those influencers who our youths might turn onto for their help, such as parents, teachers and even religious guidance.

3.1 Mental Health in Educational Institutions

The educational institutions are amongst the most easily accessible venues to educate, making them ideal amongst educators who want a grouped and streamed readily available target audience. In fact, these institutions are equipped to teach a variety of subjects and material. Despite this, little importance is given to educate on the importance of well-being, including mental health. It is a worrying, factual result that was extracted from our questionnaire stating that 49% of all respondents were never taught mental health at school, excluding another 38% who are either not sure or mental health was not explained to them in detail.

Image 8.



It is of utmost importance that we make use of such accessible venues to reach out to our youth about the importance of taking care of one's mental health and the risks if not. Schools should first and foremost focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of students and developing a supportive school climate. Most institutions have an obligatory, non-examinable subject known as 'Personal and Social Development' (PCSD), which needs to be revamped addressing the needs and problems youths are facing at this day and age. Mental wellbeing should take priority in a fast-paced world, whereby basic coping mechanisms and therapies should be taught to deal effectively with teenage hood and other difficulties whilst growing up. Meditation and yoga should also be introduced as mandatory activities in schools to help youths to cope with stressors and ground their emotions, as well as to be able to separate themselves from their thoughts and emotions whilst recognising their power over both.

Another innovative approach would be to expand the section of science in the Systems of Knowledge in tertiary institutions to include psychology. Therefore, enabling youths to gather a better understanding of the functioning of the brain.

3.1.1 Counselling

Bullying is a contributing factor to mental illness, in fact, Dr Jean-Baptiste Pingault and his team at UCL found that bullying causes many mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, years later. These findings highlight the harmful impact bullying has on mental health, demonstrating the need to intervene early to tackle the issue.⁸ Nonetheless, these difficulties are not solely being faced by the victims of bullying but even by bullies themselves. Another study out of Brown University, which was also presented at the American Academy of Paediatrics annual meeting, on the 8th of July 2018, illustrates that those who were considered bullies were more than twice as likely to experience depression, anxiety and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD). However, researchers couldn't say whether the mental health problems might be a contributing causal factor of bullying, or whether such disorders are a result of someone who engages in bullying behaviour.⁹

When it comes to counselling, it is of utmost importance that the approach of the schools to help should include both the victim and the bully, so that the chance of the latter doing the

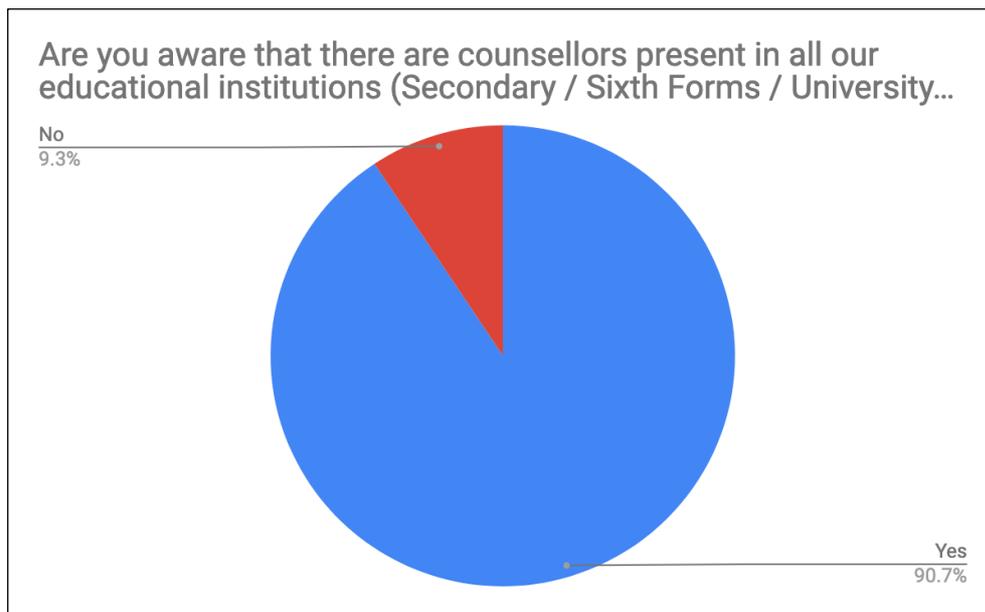
⁸ New research shows direct impact of bullying on mental health
<https://www.mqmentalhealth.org/posts/new-research-shows-direct-impact-of-bullying-on-mental-health>

⁹ <https://psychcentral.com/blog/bullies-more-likely-to-have-mental-disorder/>

same will be reduced and the effect on the victim will also be mitigated. Earlier intervention can reduce the risk of both to develop problems at an older age.

Counselling has proven to be amongst one of the most effective tools in reaching out to youths experiencing difficult situations in schools. According to image 9 from our total respondents, 90.7% know about the counsellors present at their institution.

Image 9.



However, due to shortages in counsellors till now students are only able to book a session and sometimes they are even put on a waiting list like in the case of the counselling services at university. It is a must that demand and supply meet resulting in the improvement of the counselling services as a whole, it was noted that the university services have a waiting list because of the increase in high demand while JC services are used by very few students. Therefore, these could easily merge or share the burden to balance each other out.

The ideal situation would be to implement walk-in clinics in our institutions, whereby there would be professionals available for our youths at the time of need without the need of booking or unnecessary waiting.

3.1.2 Tertiary and Ongoing Education

In tertiary education, there should be courses on mental health accessible to older youths who are no longer qualified for PCSD but would still want to learn. Hence, standards should be in place and created for continuous and updated training in the field; including various workshops, seminars and courses. These could be delivered in conjunction with NGOs, but the said standards will ensure there is uniformity and the content delivered would be verified by professionals.

In addition, specific modules should be created for educators learning at university to be able to identify certain predominant symptoms and cater to certain situations commonly seen in students like panic attacks. Through these opportunities, entities working with youth will gather a better understanding of student's mental health needs and how they can be of help. Additional support should also be given to university students following courses in the field of mental health, most especially those reading for a degree in psychology. As of yet, these students are only offered the opportunity to do some practice, if they choose a particular elective. Hence, there is no form of induction or practice to learn more as it is completely optional.

3.1.3 Innovative Approaches to be implemented in Schools

One of the most innovative approaches suggested as of yet is to actually have check-ups at every institution. This check-up would include a fixed allocated time given to each and every student attending an institution, to ensure a general check-up is conducted and if the counsellor sees the need to follow up with certain students, they make an additional appointment. The effect of this initiative will be twofold since this would normalise counselling and therefore destigmatizing it, whilst serious problems can be caught up earlier. Nonetheless, students should still have a chance to opt out, if they feel uncomfortable but the norm would be to attend not the other way around.

Another innovative suggestion would be to install a Multi-sensory room for students to be able to access a safe space at any point in time during the day. There are good tools to cater to those students who fall on the autism spectrum and those who have learning difficulties. In fact, a sensory room can provide a unique and stimulating learning environment that allows many children to thrive, as they develop at their own pace. Nonetheless, this needs to be

furnished with the right equipment such as mirrors, bean bags, cushions, mats, lights and tactile toys. a sensory room.¹⁰

3.2 Awareness Campaigns

A campaign is probably one of those measures which was mostly mentioned throughout our consultations. This is probably because of its natural effect, which is that of creating more public awareness on the topic of mental health. However, different people suggested various ideas on what this campaign should consist of.

The main theme which was mentioned was to raise awareness and educate the general public on the various mental health conditions that exist and on what should be done to help a friend or relative. In addition, it was emphasised upon that more awareness is needed regarding the less known mental illnesses such as personality disorders, Identity disorders and many others.

Another topic which was suggested to build a campaign upon is about the dangers of social media. It is becoming evident that social media is not helping people who are going through mental health difficulties. However, being on social media has become a need to live in this day and age, in fact, it seems like society itself has formed a dependency on it.

It is important that during the campaigns, irrelevant of the topic chosen, all the services providing mental health care are advertised, including also the service providers. Suggestions were also pushed forward with regard to the means that can be used to carry out such campaign, ensuring it reaches people of all ages. These suggestions varied from fliers, newspaper adverts, TV adverts and also radio.

3.3 Research and Innovation

Lately, research and innovation are given much more importance in Malta, considering certain restrictions Malta has with regards to raw materials. Taking into consideration the prevalence of pharmaceutical companies in Malta, it would be ideal to fund research concerning psychological health issues. This could be distributed between both qualitative and quantitative research and it could also be an encouraging factor for those pharmaceutical companies who were still undecided whether to invest in Malta or not.

¹⁰ How sensory rooms in schools can help students' <https://www.green-modular.com/blog/sensory-rooms-schools/>

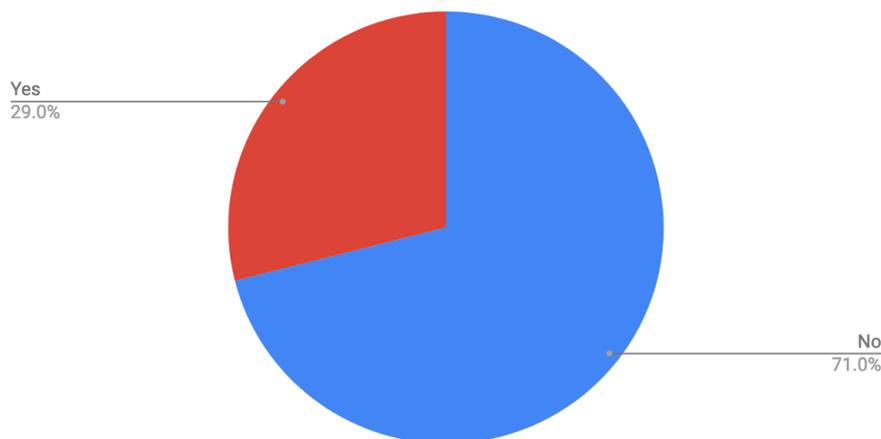
In addition, with the Commissioner of Mental Health report, it would be interesting to carry out research creating various focus groups, to identify what current patients are lacking. This data would be used to further improve the services available or any other issue which is affecting negatively the rights of those who live with a mental health condition.

4. Work

Work provides a structured routine to one's life, whilst also giving sense of purpose to the person. Therefore, it is no surprise that people living with mental illnesses want the same healthy workplace environments as everyone else. Ignoring mental health in the workplace will result in massive losses for the employer, whilst creating hardships for employees. Till now there are few measures in place for people living with mental illness, most especially in the private sector. In fact, through our data collected from the survey, it became evident that many youths do not know of any benefits, people who live with a mental health condition can enjoy.

Image 10.

Are you aware of any benefits at work that are existent for people who are suffering from Mental Health illnesses?



Two measures which exist and can easily be used by people who are living with a mental illness are Flexitime and Job Sharing. These offer flexibility, giving the possibility for one to schedule their working time and take care of their mental wellbeing more. Flexitime is especially useful in cases where the person has frequent medical appointments or in case the person is finding it really hard to make it out of bed early. Therefore, one can work from the comfort of their home or else schedule their working times differently. On the other hand, job sharing lessens the stress of work for the person as it distributes certain responsibilities onto two people. This also reduces significantly the workload making it easier for them to cope. Therefore, employers and employees should work hand in hand to ensure both can benefit through the following schemes and try to find a compromise to suit the needs of both.

4.1 Assistance given to employers

Unfortunately, in our society stigma is still a prevailing problem when it comes to mental health. Hence it is of utmost importance that we protect those people who would want to speak up, either by ensuring their privacy is protected or else by offering all the support that is needed.

4.1.1 Counselling and Training

In cases where employees would need help at their place of work, it should be the duty of the employer to offer counselling services, or else provide time off for free so that the employees can get the help they need. It is not feasible for a small business to offer counselling services, however, there should be a quota establishing that with a minimum number of employees one would have one counsellor visiting at the place of work. Then it would be up to the employees to decide if they use the service or not, but it would be obligatory by law. The government has this already into place, whereby there is a service being offered directly from the Office of the Prime Minister, however, this should also be applicable to the private sector.

Recently, the Mental Health First Aid was also developed which is similar to the First Aid but as the name indicates instead of covering physical emergencies it covers mental ones. Currently there, is subsidiary legislation regarding the health and safety precautions which state that with every 100 people there should be one first aider¹¹. To ensure mental health and physical health are put at par, both should be a requirement at the place of work and a similar practice should be put in place to cater to mental health at work.

In addition, during the induction period to an entity, the employer should have the responsibility to promote mental health services in case of need and include them in the employee handbooks if existing or any place which is easily accessible to the employees. This is especially the case if the employer offers the services itself like in the case of the government. It should be its role to ensure all its employees know of the existing service.

¹¹ Work Place (First Aid Regulations), Subsidiary Legislation 424.13, 22nd January 2002

4.1.2 Assistance to SMEs

Improvement always comes at a price, and in this case, implementing these proposals can bring about financial burdens causing a toll on small and medium enterprises. Therefore, it is of essence that the government aids small companies by for example entering into an agreement with Richmond to subsidise the price of the Mental Health First Aid for SMEs. In addition, a similar proposal would be for the government to employ a rotating counsellor which is called specifically by employers at no operating cost in case the employees have that need. Therefore, these would be effective measures ensuring that the employees truly get the help they need without putting a lot of additional financial burdens on both the employers or the government.

4.1.3 Confidentiality

An aspect which surely needs to be emphasised upon in sensitive matters is confidentiality. In order for workers to feel comfortable to disclose sensitive matters, the employers have to guarantee that they will not take advantage of their honesty to use it against them either by not respecting their privacy or else do any discriminatory act. All staff should be educated on the importance of confidentiality and there should be internal regulations in governmental departments to regulate this.

4.2 Enforcement

For enforcement to be possible, there needs to be material one can enforce upon. Hence, Unions and employers alike should take a more active role in ensuring there are effective working conditions protecting workers suffering from mental illnesses. These should be clear for both the employer and employee whereby they should be incorporated in the collective agreement.

Hence, this would facilitate better law enforcement, as the employee, the employer and the Trade Unions would have all the rights outlined. This would also result in outlining better what constitutes discrimination and also lessening it, as all employees would know their rights and employers would be held easily accountable in case of such breach. In parallel, the government should also incentivise NCPE to monitor cases of discrimination and promote the rights of employees suffering through mental health problems at work.

5. Conclusion

This policy paper focuses on the role of various entities in the mental health field, including the public sector, the private sector and NGOs. It ensures to suggest new initiatives on how these can interact to offer a more effective service, whilst keeping in mind sustainability, long term plans and also certain financial limitations. Not every entity has the resources; including man-made and also financial means to be able to cater for all the proposals. However, if all the sectors partner together Malta will surely have a more sustainable mental health system.

When it comes to rehabilitation, the approach that is being promoted to the general public, especially in hospital services, is focused on medication. It is imperative that more services are incorporated in treatment, such as alternative forms of therapy to encourage skills for a more comfortable adaptation into society. These therapies could include sports facilities, art and multisensory rooms. A 24/7 crisis team is of paramount importance in mental health intervention, which is not being promoted well. One should emphasise on the need to create a National Suicide Helpline, eliminating the need to have one crisis emergency team. This could also be done through online services such as Whatsapp, making it more youth friendly. It is also highly recommended that a new mental health clinic is opened in the north of Malta. The government should ensure that the mental health first aid course is provided to professionals working both directly and indirectly in the mental health field, caregivers, educators and students alike. Education is imperative to defeat the stigma and this should be specific to different age groups. Schools should focus on teaching the importance of wellbeing and create a supportive school climate, by teaching basic coping mechanisms and therapies. Schools should also be introducing check-ups for all students. There is a need to fund more research regarding psychological health issues, as to encourage pharmaceutical companies to invest in Malta, as well as assess the national state with regards to these issues.

When it comes to issues relating mental health and the labour market, this policy document focuses on the promotion and support of enterprises to support their workers by ensuring their privacy whilst also providing mental health training for their employees. Another proposal mentioned in this document is to employ a rotating counsellor to aid employees in their time of need. This policy also mentions the introduction of flexitime and job sharing in cases of mental health illnesses.

The objective of this policy paper was to expose the intersectionality of mental health issues in everyday life. This was achieved by undertaking a holistic approach and describing the current situation people with mental health face in the education, healthcare and labour sectors. The Council firmly believes that these proposals would lead to a better standard of living for people suffering from issues of mental health.