

Y UTHMINDS

YOUTHMINDS

*Promotion of Youth Mental Health through Awareness,
Prevention & Resilience Building*

FOCUS GROUPS REPORT GREECE

Author:



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PROJECT INFORMATION**Project acronym:**

YOUTHMINDS

Project title:

Promotion of Youth Mental Health through Awareness, Prevention & Resilience Building

Project Number:

2021-1-BG01-KA220-YOU-000028603

Sub-programme or KA:

KA220-YOU - Cooperation partnerships in youth

KA2: YOUTH: Increasing quality, innovation and recognition of youth work

Website:<http://youthminds.eu/>**CONSORTIUM:**

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FOCUS GROUPS REPORT

The focus group in Greece was organised and implemented by Hellas for Us NGO on the 5th of May 2022. In total there were 32 participants, 1 facilitator and 1 observer who participated virtually via google meet platform.

Agenda

A general agenda for all three focus groups is provided below, please adapt it in case of deviations:

1. Welcoming. Introduction of moderator and observers.
2. Asking participants for consent to record the discussion.
3. Hellas for Us and YOUTHMINDS' presentation & focus group presentation.
4. Participants' introducing themselves shortly.
5. Discussion based on proposed questions and focus group guidelines.
6. Closing session, wrap-up and summary.
7. Final words and a "thank you" note by the Hellas for Us organisation.

Focus groups details

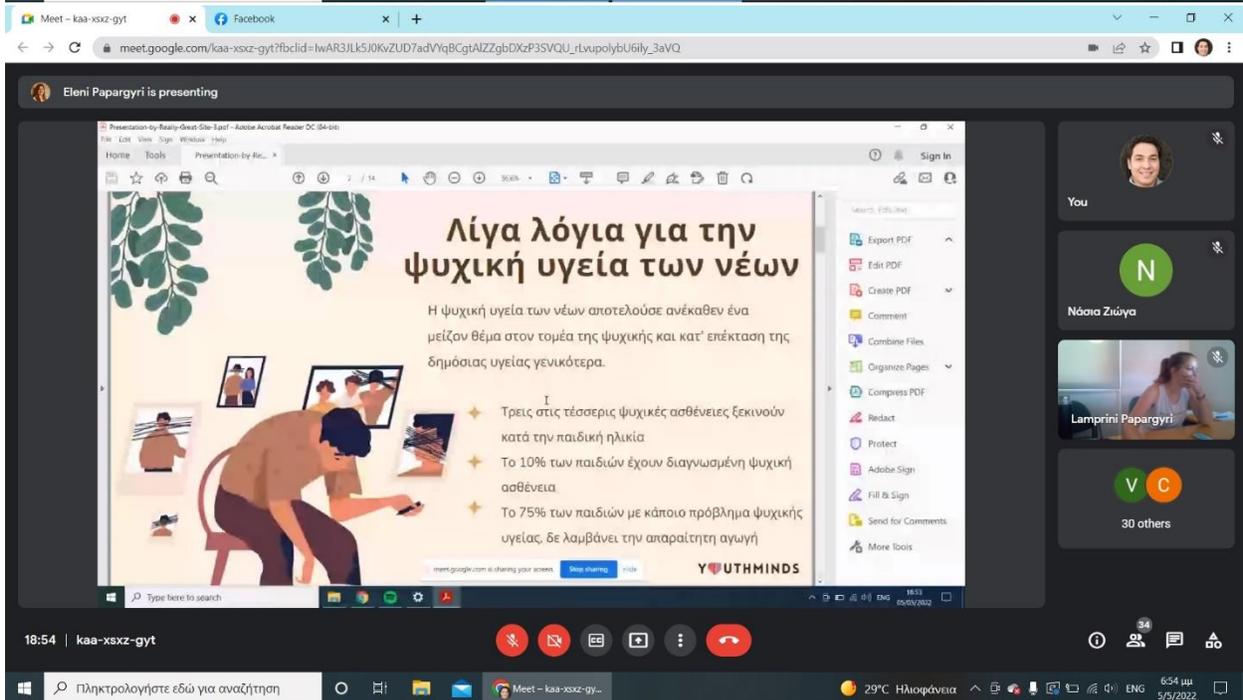
Table 1:

FOCUS GROUP	
HOSTED ON	5 th of May 2022 (18:30-20:00)
FORMAT	Virtual
FACILITATOR	Eleni Papargyri, Director at Hellas for Us
OBSERVER(S)	Alexandros Makrigiannis, Project Manager at Hellas for Us
ACTUAL DURATION	1h 30m
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	34
PARTICIPANTS AVERAGE AGE	21
PARTICIPANTS PROFILE	All the participants that attended this focus group are permanent residents of Greece with the majority living in Thessaloniki and Kozani. Moreover, almost all the participants are university students and some of them have part-time jobs. The gender balance was kept, to have a more fruitful and productive focus group.
MINUTES	The focus group was conducted via Google Meet on May 5, 2022 at 18:30 and was scheduled to last approximately for 1,5 hour (18:30-20:00).

	<p>All the questions were presented in the Greek language in order to enhance the active participation of all members in the focus group.</p> <p>Firstly, an introduction on the topic, the YouthMinds project and the Hellas for Us organisation was made and then each participant was invited to present himself/herself to create a concrete group. This helped the participants to express themselves for the first time and it made their participation easier.</p> <p>The questions were asked in a specific order and each participant was welcome to give his/her opinion on the matter. While someone was speaking, the microphones and cameras of the others were closed to avoid lag problems.</p> <p>All the answers and the comments were noted on a tablet and will be presented afterwards.</p>
<p>COMMENTS / OBSERVATIONS</p>	<p>The participants in this focus group, were young people, while keeping the gender balance, the different social and educational backgrounds, living in either small or big cities of Greece to ensure the variety in the answers and have a fruitful conversation.</p>



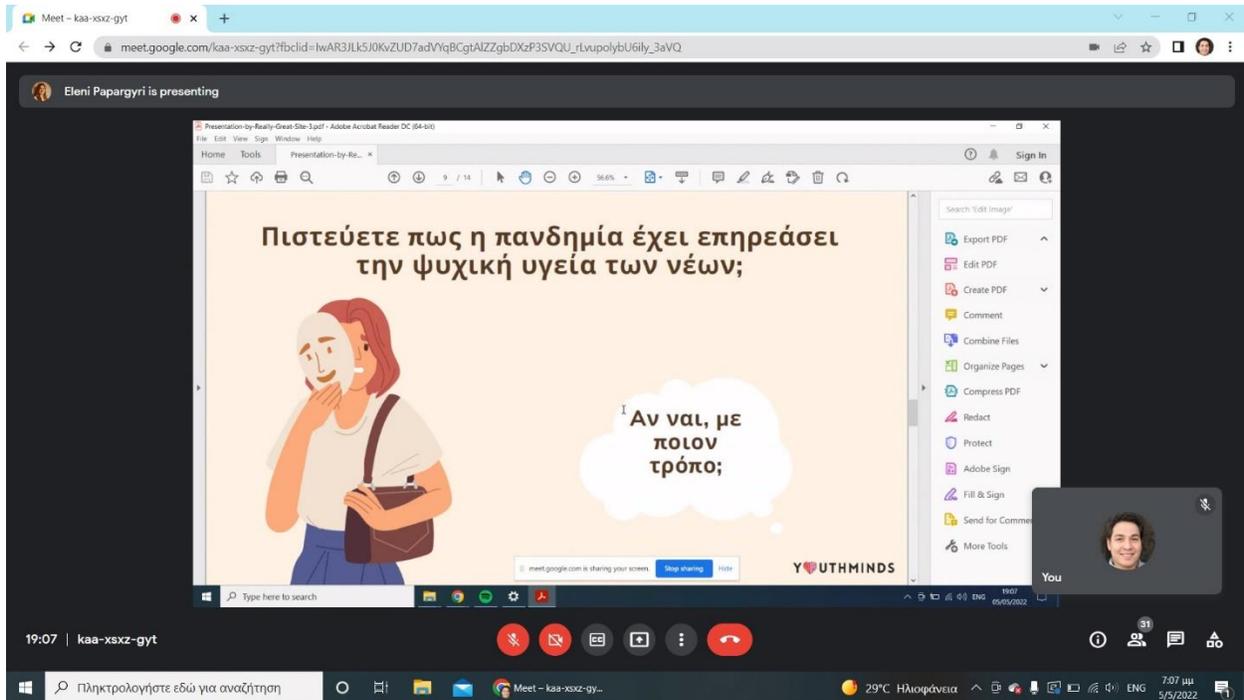
Pictures and/or screenshots



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Discussion outcomes

KNOWLEDGE - MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

QUESTION 1. *In your opinion, what is Mental Health and wellness?*

Summary of feedback:

In the question what is mental health the participants gave answers related to how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Since this was an introductory question, the majority of the participants more or less agreed that good mental health is when the individual is at peace with himself/herself, being calm and able to be productive in everyday life. On the factors that help us preserve good mental health, the participants mentioned free time, holidays, low-stress everyday life, physical exercise, quality time with friends etc. All the participants agreed that mental wellness is vital and that self-care is an important part of it. However, since life is unpredictable it is very easy to have problems with mental health.

a. What do you think a Mental Illness is?

Summary of feedback:

The participants were free to express their views on mental illness. The answers are below:

- Extreme mood changes and strange behaviour
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Problem with alcohol or drug use as a way to feel better
- Feeling all the time sad
- Need to self-harm or suicide

b. Which mental health disorders or illnesses do you know?

Summary of feedback:

- All of the participants were aware of depression and most of them were about bipolar disorder and a minority knew about other mental disorders.
- Some participants included eating disorders that come as a way to overcome anxiety and leads to eating little (anorexia) or too much (bulimia).
- Many participants mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) mainly due to the movies that they have seen with soldiers coming home after the war. However, after the discussion, most of them realised that PTSD can happen in everyday life situations due to a stressful experience that is difficult to overcome.

- One participant was diagnosed 10 years ago with borderline personality disorder (BPD) and expressed her difficulties in every day life. The rest of the participants were listening carefully and agreed that if they would meet her on a random occasion they wouldn't have guessed that she has a mental disorder, which shows the necessity for a better understanding of the mental health topic.

Main conclusions: First of all the participants brainstormed on what can boost or mental wellness and what are the factors that affect it. Daily exercise, time with friends, holidays etc were answered that have been repeated by many participants. All of them, that self-care is a vital element of mental health. The second question made them realise that mental health and mental illness are opposite terms and found what can boost mental health or cause mental illnesses. Finally, the participants were asked about their knowledge on mental health problems or disorders and the majority said depression as well as other disorders. One participant was diagnosed 10 years ago with borderline personality disorder (BPD) and expressed her difficulties in everyday life.

QUESTION 2. For you, *what does it mean to be mentally healthy or have good mental health?*

Summary of feedback:

The participants summarized the answers from the previous discussion on mental health and said that the good family and interpersonal relations, good balanced diet and regular exercise as part of self-care are helping the individual have a good mental health. Free time and relaxed everyday life are also playing a vital role.

Main conclusions: All of the participants stated that for them the definition of being mentally healthy, was the same response they provided in the first question.

QUESTION 3. *In your opinion, what factors might cause mental health problems?*

Summary of feedback:

- It can be passed from generation to generation
- High-stress experiences such as death
- Experiencing discrimination or judgement
- Exhausting everyday life with high intensity and pressure
- Social media pressure and comparison with others
- Covid-19 and loneliness
- School/work pressure



Main conclusions: Among many factors that might cause mental health problems, young people mostly indicated: constant stress and pressure at work/school, judgement and discrimination, social media pressure to be perfect and Covid-19.

QUESTION 4. *What do you think, are the most important mental health issues faced by youth nowadays?*

Summary of feedback:

- All the participants expressed that the major mental health issue that they face is the enormous pressure experienced due to school/university workload.
- All the participants emphasized the factor of economical and job-related insecurity, indicating how stressful it is for youth today, to become independent. Moreover, as it was found, the majority of the participants are living with their parents even those at an age higher than 18 years old, mostly due to the economical obstacles that Greek youth face nowadays.
- Some of the participants answered that they feel insecure and have self-esteem problems due to social media. They mentioned that the constant comparison with others who seem perfect and happy, is exhausting. However, at the same time they feel the peer pressure for social media presence.

Main conclusions: The main conclusion from the focus group was that school/university and extracurricular activities are a huge sources of stress that can lead to mental health problems. In addition, the participants mentioned that financial insecurity and the fear of unemployment is a vital factor that can deteriorate an individual's mental health. Finally, social media are making youth more insecure about themselves.

ATTITUDES – SOCIAL STIGMA:

QUESTION 5. *Have you ever encountered a peer or another individual who had mental health problems or psychological distress?*

All the participants have experienced at least once psychological distress and have multiple examples from relatives/friends that have experienced it as well.

a. *How did you realize they were in distress and what did you do?*

Summary of feedback:

The participants realised that they or someone else was in distress while observing uncommon behaviours. For example the majority mentioned that extreme mood swings from normal-happy to extremely angry and aggressive, and then coming back to normal real quick. Others, realised that they or someone else has

lost contact with their close ones after a long time of period of isolation due to Covid-19. Almost, all participants mentioned that they completely lost someone and its impossible to keep communication as in the past. Moreover, signs of self-harm including drugs/alcohol usage is an indicator that someone is an a psychic distress. Some people mentioned, that they have increased a lot their smoking habits while distressed.

Then, the participants were asked how they helped themselves or others in such situations. 14 participants mentioned that they regularly visit a mental health expert (e.g. psychologist) to have the ability to discuss without judgement and be able to monitor their lives. All of them started visiting an expert after a stressful experience such as a breakup, difficulties in work etc. The rest of the participants said that they would visit a psychologist if they need it a lot but one of the factors that keep them is the high repetitive cost (30-50 euros per hour in Greece). In general, the participants said that when someone is in distress (and that could last a month), we should be patient, give space, be calm and available when they need and try not to push or press them more.

b. *In your opinion, is it treatable? If yes, why yes? If not, why not?*

Summary of feedback:

The participants agreed that the mental state of an individual is something very difficult to monitor and depends on many factors. Some cases are treatable and some are not and this depends on the pressure/support that this person has from his/her environment and the possible support from a mental health expert. However, the individual is prone to traumas, which can cause a relapse of the mental illness due to a trigger that may occur and it's very difficult to recognise and avoid.

Main conclusions: All participants responded without hesitation that they had a close friend/ relative that was suffering from a mental health problem, but in regards to the second sub-question of this question, the participants concluded that personality and severity of the disorder, were the factors determining whether a condition was treatable.

QUESTION 6. *When you think on a person with mental health problems,*

- a. *what characteristics or traits do you attribute to him/her?***
- b. *In your opinion, should they speak out loud about their problems?***
- c. *In what ways can stigma be reduced?***

Summary of feedback:



This was a very interesting question since the majority of the participants hesitated to reply at first since we had a participant with a mental disorder in the group. They were afraid that they will insult her and this is a sign of the stigma that currently exists around mental illness. The participant with the mental disorder is a person that due to the very healthy and beautiful appearance, none could imagine that she would struggle like that. So, this question was firstly targeted at her so she can help the others open up a little bit. She first mentioned that when not feeling well she gets distant from the closed ones even disappearing for long periods. Moreover, at these times she stops exercising and eating well or even not eating at all. The rest of the participants added the possible mood changes which were also confirmed.

Someone said, that he believed that people with mental health are incompetent and not productive. Then the second round of discussion started since the participant has already 2 Master degrees and a really good paid job. Therefore, this shows the society's perspective on people with mental health problems especially in difficult situations like this. Stigma often involves inaccurate stereotypes.

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All participants were positive about the concept of speaking out loud about problems. Being open and honest is part of being self-aware which is one of the most important things, especially when struggling with mental health issues. Some of the participants mentioned that for all people is very important to have guidance and support from a mental health expert even when is mostly needed so we can work things on ourselves and be prepared for more difficult situations. Finally, all agreed that it would be preferable to inform friends and close ones about psychological distress that we face so we can get the required space for recovery. However, this is in most cases very difficult.

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One of the most important outcomes of this focus group is that mental health stigma can not be overcome when people haven't met anyone with a mental disorder. People have prejudices and are discriminative towards people with mental health issues and this is primarily due to the movies etc. The participants discussed on statistics for several mental health issues and realised that the percentage of people who have something is huge and possibly more people in this focus group would be diagnosed with a disorder or issue if would go to visit a psychiatrist. Moreover, people with mental health should be more visible and society should help them with that. If everyone is more welcome, then people with mental health issues would accept themselves more easily and they would be more open to discuss it.

Main conclusions:

- Having a "successful" person with mental disorder (Borderline Personality Disorder – BPD) in the focus group significantly helped the participants realise how prejudiced they were.
- Participants believe that a person with mental health is not productive, but this is not always the case.



- Everyone agreed that psychological support from expert would be very helpful even when not needing it right away.
- The need for a governmental system on mental health is required to help people visit experts and talk about their problems especially when this service is so expensive (e.g. for young people with low or no income at all).
- Society should help people with mental health issues to feel more welcome so they can be open and more visible. This would help their recovery since they will accept themselves and at the same time reduce the stigma.

SKILLS – DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS.

QUESTION 7. *Do you see mental illness as a stressor for youth today? YES or NO*

All the participants responded YES to this question.

a. If yes, do you think stigma influences a young individual's willingness to seek help?

Summary of feedback:

- The stigma that currently exists around mental health prevents many young people from realising that they have a problem and therefore seeking help. Ofcourse, the situation is much better that 20 years ago, but stigma is a driving factor for people not being visible. However, when a person realises that has a problem and needs help, is possible to seek for help and later on work on the willigness of the person to discuss about his/her problem with his/her environment.

Main conclusions: All of the participants agreed that the mental health stigma prevents young people from seeking help in terms of not accepting their situation.

QUESTION 8. *Do you believe Covid-19 has impacted your Mental Health? YES or NO*

All the participants responded YES to this question.

a. If yes, in what way?

Summary of feedback:

- Participants mentioned that everyone enjoyed the first lockdown period since it was a good opportunity to relax at home. However, as the Covid 19 completed 2 years in our lives, the participants agreed that the measures and the excessive isolation felt like jail.



- Moreover, some participants mentioned that the fact they had to send messages to go for a walk at a certain distance and time was very stressful to them.
- All of the participants mentioned that they have lost contact with many loved persons and friends and that Covid-19 created a gap of 2 years that its almost impossible to reconstruct.
- In the focus group, 3 participants were not vaccinated at all and they mentioned that they felt very discriminated against and restricted due to their choice. The rest of the participants mentioned that they felt very stressed when had to select whether they will be vaccinated, when with what and what are the side effects.

Main conclusions: All of the participants mentioned that the last 2 years were very different from the previous ones and brought a strange kind of stress in their lives e.g. need to send a message/ask for approval to go for a walk, select to be vaccinated or not etc.

QUESTION 9. *What stressors undermine your mental wellness?*

Summary of feedback:

- The participants mentioned that they feel very stressed due to school/university/work obligations and are always under pressure. This in combination with the fact that salaries for young people are very low in Greece, brings extra insecurity about the future. Moreover, all of the participants agreed that unstable interpersonal relationships can undermine their mental health. E.g. a possible breakup, parents' divorce, death etc.

a. *What strengthens or supports your mental health and resilience?*

Summary of feedback:

Participants summarized the answers that have always been asked in a previous questions:

- Free time, holidays and quality time with friends
- A good relationship with family and friends
- Financial stability and security
- Self-care including regular physical exercise and proper nutrition
- Sense of purpose and of a goal
- Being part of a team

Main conclusions: The participants responded that having a cause/goal and being part of a team helps their mental health. Of course, having free time and relaxed life and good interpersonal relationships further improved their resilience.



QUESTION 10. *When you become overwhelmed or the circumstances are too much for you to handle on your own, what kind of support, coping mechanisms or resources do you use to face it?*

Summary of feedback:

- Talking with friends was an answer from many participants
- Psychological support from an expert was the answer of the half of the group
- Some participants (especially females), said that taking care of themselves such as going for a manicure or a coiffure, during stressful periods helps them relax
- In contrast, the males focused mostly on playing sports (eg basketball with friends) or video games.
- Some mentioned that going out helps them see new things and feel better.
- Moreover, activities such as driving, doing sports, cooking, going for jogging, drawing etc were added from individuals

Main conclusions: After this question, we realised that each person has completely different coping mechanisms. For example, some people want to spend time with friends, doing team activities, being out of home etc. Whereas, others want to stay alone, go for jogging, draw, play video games etc. Moreover, the coping mechanisms also differ based on the gender e.g. female tend to need self-care solutions where males need more experience-based solutions.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION.

QUESTION 11. *Is there something else that we did not mention and you would like to discuss?*

Summary of feedback:

- n/a

Main conclusions: n/a



Attachments

Legal representative's declaration of participants' list (if virtual format):

YOUTHMINDS – Focus Group Participation list						
No	Name & Surname	Form of interview (Face-to-face, online, telephone, other)	Occupation	E-mail	Signature (if face-to-face)	Age
1	Eleni Papargyri	Online	Project Manager	elenipapargyri2@gmail.com		25
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It is ensured that the above information will only be used for the purposes of your participation in the above series of seminars.)

- ✓ I do not object to taking photos for the promotion of European Programs.
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Declaration:

I Eleni Papargyri, President, confirm the participation of the above participants during the online focus groups for the Erasmus+ Project titled: "YOUTHMINDS: **Promotion of Youth Mental Health through Awareness, Prevention & Resilience Building**", on the 05/05/2022.

Signature of authoritative individual


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