

To research the view of mental health amongst the youth in Suriname. We decided to do two things.

1. We did an online survey. Our target audience is youth between the ages of 14 till 24. In this survey, we asked questions about (our target audience) their own mental health and their view on mental health.
2. We also did polls on social media. We did this so we can see what the public (not our target audience) knows about mental health. In these polls, we had various statements about the topic, and people could vote fact or cap. Fact if they agree and cap if they disagree.

This data showed us what the obstacles there are when it comes to talking about your feelings and where we need to focus on when it comes to mental health awareness.

Our survey results showed that 29.6% of our respondents are young men, 69.8% young women and 0.5% were non-binary. In total, we had 199 respondents.

Depression and anxiety are the two most common mental health issues in this age group. The most common depressive symptoms that we found are:

1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things.
2. Feeling, down, depressed, or hopeless.
3. Feeling tired or having little energy.
4. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television.
5. Trouble falling asleep, sleeping too much, or staying asleep

The most common symptoms that were found when looking at anxiety were:

1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge.
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying.
3. Worrying too much about different things.
4. Having trouble relaxing.
5. Becoming easily restless that it is hard to sit still.
6. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen.

In our survey, we also had general questions & statements on mental health.

- Is there enough information available about mental health in Suriname?
71.2% of our respondents said no.
- Do you think that mental health is a stigma in our community?
88.7% of our respondents said yes.
- The government is not doing enough with the subject of mental health.
93.9% of our respondents agreed.
- How often do you talk about your feelings?
60.6% said not very often, 20.2% said never and 19.2% said often.

- Do you feel safe in your environment to talk about your mental health? Also, indicate why or why not? 55% said no, 37% said yes and 8% talks vaguely about their feelings.

The most recurring reasons from the people that voted yes, they do feel safe in their environment to talk about their mental health is that:

- They have supportive family, friends, or partner.
- The subject of mental health is not taboo so if they trust someone they will talk about their feelings.
- Talking about their feelings is normalized by their parents so they can be their selves.

The responses from the people that voted no, they don't feel safe in their environment to talk about their mental health said:

- People don't understand what I'm feeling, and they just tell me that it's going to be okay.
- I don't trust people because they laugh at you and tell other people.
- People mostly tell you that you're being dramatic.
- The generational gap: older people or parents don't understand what you are feeling and look down on you.
- I do not want to be a burden.
- I get blamed for feeling this way.

- With whom do you talk about your feelings?

The number one response with 58.6% is talking to friends, the second response with 26.8% is I do not talk about my feelings, the third response with 24% is with family, and the last option with 23.7% is talking with a psychologist or counselor.

- How do you cope when you are sad?

The most common answer with 61.1% is listening to music, number two with 34.3% is resting, number three with 30.8% chooses to talk to someone, number four with 25.3% chooses to journal/write, and lastly 19.2% exercises.

- Have you ever seen a doctor, consultant, or other health professional about your mental health? Also indicate why or why not.

12% said yes and 88% said no.

The reasons from the people that answered yes:

- To not let it get any worse.
- Because I was suicidal.
- I wanted to understand my negative thoughts and emotions and gain control over my life again.
- I was depressed or experienced something traumatic.

The reasons from the people that answered no:

- I am afraid of confrontation, and I am not ready for that.
- It is too expensive.
- People in my family will say that I am crazy.
- I am afraid to take the step.
- People will talk about me and tell the whole world about what I am dealing with.
- I am afraid that my parents will know what I am dealing with because the professional will tell them.

- The most common mental health platforms are:
123 Hulplijn and Social & Mental health Suriname.

Like I mentioned before we also did a social media poll where people could vote fact or cap on short mental health statements

These are the results:

1. The public voted fact on the youth does not make mental health a priority
2. The public voted fact on mental health and physical health should be both equally important.
3. The public voted fact on there is not enough information about mental health available.
4. The public voted fact on social media has more negative than positive effects on our mental health.
5. The public voted fact on there is a lack of mental health education in our school system.

On social media, we also asked the public for solutions. This is what they came up with

- Spread awareness every day and not only for a short period.
- People-centered policy and laws.
- Make mental health a priority.
- Mental Health awareness campaigns and affordable therapy for all.
- Monthly mentoring session starting from primary school.
- Students need to learn about their emotions (what they are and how they work), critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and how to become resilient which will help improve mental health.
- Youth counselors in different communities. So, the youth that is struggling with mental health can go to them.
- School counseling & maybe a program talking or anything to start the process of normalizing mental health.
- Student rates/ discounts for therapy.
- Prioritize mental health checks at schools and hosts campaigns.

Before looking at the data we already knew that the youth was struggling with their mental health. I can say that because I am part of this age group and I see what my friends and I are going through.

But, looking at the results and reading how many young people don't feel safe to talk about their feelings and how many are struggling with some sort of mental health issues is quite shocking. But what is important now is that we have the data, there is no more questioning.

It's time to act and find solutions.