



“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation.”
~Glenn Close

In Lebanon today, mental health is a medical field typically regarded with scorn and disdain, or not regarded at all, due to society’s negligence. In fact, despite the rising number of cases in mental illnesses, society still fails to see the problem and work upon it.



For this very reason, by conducting this awareness campaign, we hoped to give **mental health** the **attention** it deserves, as well as encourage the **pursuing and improvement of treatments** in Lebanon. Additionally, we planned on **weakening the common Lebanese thinking and mentality** concerning mental illnesses; that mental health isn’t crucial, and pursuing treatment is shameful, and a **social taboo**. However, we believe that mental illnesses aren’t unlike any other physical problem; they are **as important as ordinary physical illnesses** and must be cured.



Our campaign is based on the **third** Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): good health and well-being. Our project focuses on the idea that Mental Health is not unlike any other medical field, and is equally deserving of attention and treatment. Therefore, it falls into line with this SDG perfectly.

Once we chose our topic and SDG, we developed our **plan of action**. We wanted to start off with a simple mental health awareness conference at our high school in cooperation with *Embrace*, an NGO based in Lebanon that focuses on mental health. Moreover, we had prepared a special awareness campaign activity with them: The Talking Tree. The Talking Tree is a way for people to anonymously share their struggles with mental illnesses, notably anxiety and depression, so that others around them would realize that they are not alone, and that it isn't just all in their head; we hoped to establish a sense of normalcy in the hearts of the young to aid in demolishing the taboo for generations to come. Afterwards, we hoped to gather accurate and original statistics of Lebanon’s current situation using a survey, and use the results to create posters and online awareness ads to spread our message and information.

Despite our thorough preparation, we still needed **funding**. For that reason, we had planned to host a fundraiser along with other students from our school; a mini carnival featuring each group’s projects and explaining their cause. All the earnings were meant to be used to accomplish each of our projects and funding our campaigns (in our case, posters, websites, ads, and other awareness spreading platforms).

Once we finished brainstorming, did our research, and finalized the plan, we put things into motion. Our first step was to visit *Embrace*. There, we interviewed one of their members; Natalie Saadeh, and agreed on a date for an awareness conference to be held at school. Furthermore, we did a survey and sent it to as many of our contacts as we could. It allowed us to gather limited, but valuable, statistics about the causes and treatments of mental illness, as well as the demographics of the mentally ill in Lebanon.





However, due to **obstacles** on a national and international level (recurring riots and protests in the country, as well as economic regression and the outbreak of COVID-19 which caused temporary closures of schools and most NGOs), we were unable to fully go through with our plan. We never got the chance to host the fundraising event, nor did we have the awareness conference which we had prepared with *Embrace*. We also failed to implement The Talking Tree. Additionally, the results we received upon sending out the survey were very few (97), probably because of the population's worry and anxiety over the world's current situation.

But despite all of this, we continued to **research** and we came across some shocking numbers on the reality of mental health in Lebanon: 1 in 4 people have a mental illness of some sort, and only about 17% of these cases receive treatment. We've also uncovered the depth of the damage that these illnesses have had on our people; some of the older population still suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety because of the long-finished civil war, and have yet to identify their illness or cure it, not daring to voice their concerns because of the taboo.



(Please note that these numbers may be outdated (2007), *Source: World Health Organisation*).

On another note, after sharing our **survey**, the following **results** were obtained (though obviously not reflective of the entire Lebanese population):

According to statistics, the majority of the respondents were adolescents (57.3%). These results, although inaccurate, show that those with mental illnesses seem to suffer from several very similar symptoms. However, the causes of these vary from person to person. On another note, a noticeably large number of people suspect themselves to have a mental illness (21.9%), yet haven't followed up on their inkling; in fact, 43% of those who think they have a mental illness feel uncomfortable or ashamed talking about it. This shows that mental illness is present in our society, but many find shame in admitting it and seeking treatment. The results of the survey can be found [here](#).

Concerning **our social impact**, we had hoped to demolish the mentality that rules over our culture; to help this culture evolve and to encourage open-mindedness. Moreover, we planned to aid in the informing, enlightening, and preparing of the generation of the future regarding this subject, starting with ourselves. But despite hardships, we gained much on a personal level. We earned skills in leadership, teamwork, social and professional interaction, and research.

It takes great responsibility, patience, and initiative in order to make such a big change in our society. Although we couldn't truly fulfill our mission, after 30 hours of dedicated work, we took a step towards the future. So, despite our inability to implement our plan as an official project, we will continue to do so in our social lives in order to promote mental wellness. For we believe that hand in hand, all together, we can make a difference. All it takes is a little resolve, a colorful imagination, and a lot of passion!

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world" ~Mahatma Gandhi.