

Speak Our Minds Global Social Leaders Final Progress Report



The Aim of our Project

The aim of our project is to gain more insight into the mental health needs of student members of our one-year boarding school community and find ways to benefit and support them in our environment. Our project addressed SDG 3.4: Good Health and Well-being; Reduce mortality from non-communicable diseases and promote mental health.

Learning and Knowledge gained

To truly understand another person's perspective, we have to spend time with them and put ourselves in their shoes. Since our project is about student mental health, it was crucial for us to communicate with students, and be able to empathize with their feelings.

The great breadth and quality of our findings shows that we were very successful in developing a clear understanding of the issues our peers face, and this success was based on several factors. For example, we dedicated large amounts of time to building connections with people, beginning with casual conversations about relatively innocuous things and then easing into our interview. We also opened up about our own experiences in the hopes of making them feel less alone. Whilst developing an understanding of their perspectives, we learned just how important it is to be "listeners" to those who are expressing their emotions.

Throughout our project, we gained valuable insight about the mental health needs of students and the factors that contribute towards their stress and pressure. As academically-driven students, most of our classmates' stress stem from school. Students tend to spend most of their time outside of class completing homework and studying for assessments, stuck in "an endless race". Additionally, we were able to prove through our interviews and questionnaires that there are social/interpersonal factors that connect with stress.

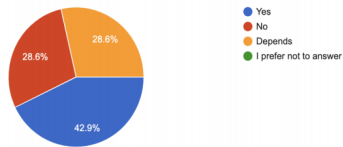
We also gained more detailed insight into the personal feelings, stereotypes, societal expectations that students in our community face. By spending time outside of class doing activities such as sports, hobbies and passions, students relieve their stresses, take breaks and spend alone time. One important finding is that even though all of the students are aware that there is a school counselor available, most of them do not actively seek their support. A few of our interviewees expressed that they feel that they are capable of "dealing with their emotions themselves" and that "only when things reach a point where its unbearable, I will see the school counselor". Because we are living in a boarding school environment, we have supervision teachers and coach mentors that live with us. Some students also feel that they aren't too comfortable with expressing their emotions to their teachers as they see them as guardians/authoritative figures. We found that despite the accessibility of resources, most students are reluctant to see the school counselor because of external and internal stigmatization.

Your Impact on others and the community

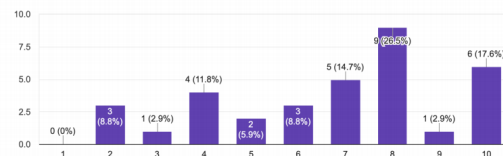
There are 70 students on our campus. We conducted 20 qualitative interviews with HZ9 students and sent out a questionnaire (acquiring 34 student responses). With the data collected, we created a report of students' mental health needs (separated into two sections: *Analysis* and *proposal*, that provides suggestions to be implemented in the future.

In our analysis, we used graphs and data tables to draw conclusions from the students' responses.

Do you prefer sharing your thoughts with your friends than with a counsellor?
7 responses



Rate your stress levels from 1 - 10 (1: Rarely; 10: Always)
34 responses



We sent the report to the school leadership team and requested a meeting to discuss the contents of our report, which will happen on Tuesday, May 3.

We spent 5 months working on the project. The first two months were used to plan our qualitative interview questions and questionnaire, while the remaining time was spent collecting data (including interviewing students and sending out surveys via email) and analyzing the data (hence the report).

One of our main suggestions is to increase student voice in our community. We proposed including a student representative body that will communicate with staff members in regards to academic matters (involving school rules, programs and activities) so that students can have more autonomy over their daily schedule and lifestyle. Our project will affect generations of students that will be coming to HZCIS.

Even though we will return to the main campus and will not be physically present next year we can monitor and measure our success by keeping in contact with the staff members in the HZ campus, to see whether the suggestions in our proposal were implemented.

Special Recognition and Sustainability

From our project, we have learnt that mental health is not a linear process and there is still much to be done in regards to the topic of mental health. Back in our Hong Kong campus, we can still work closely with the school counselors to discuss the results of our report, and find ways to destigmatise the topic of mental health. Natalie has also joined Body Banter, a Hong Kong-based non-profit organization that empowers people to find their voices in conversations about body image and mental health.

We started this project because student mental health should not be neglected. We're very proud of the accomplishments that we have made, by including students' perspectives and concluding them with graphs to reflect our feelings about our academic and social lives. Our biggest takeaway is that students must be understanding of one another. Students' internal emotions and feelings should be expressed, not repressed. We should not feel as though we are burdens, that our basic emotions and feelings are unimportant or something to be ashamed about. If we show each other simple gestures of kindness and words of concern, the world may become a more accepting and kinder place.

Together, let us be heard. Together, let us **speak our minds**.