Navigating Life's Defining Moments: Understanding Mental Health Support Pathways During Critical Life Transitions

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Introduction

This poster specifically maps the Manulife Dialogue community's consumer navigation journey to analyse their pathway and the barriers to effective personal and professional mental health support. Life's defining moments – health challenges (19%), relationship changes (18%), loss and grief (18%), and work and financial issues (14%) – have impacted around three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents over the last three years. However, there is a critical gap between those who begin seeking support and those who reach professional care.

Aim

To map how Manulife's Dialogue online community in Hong Kong navigates mental health support during life's defining moments and identify barriers that prevent timely access to professional care.

Objectives

- Map the support-seeking journey from initial distress to professional help
- Identify barriers in the navigation process for mental health support (both personal and professional)
- Examine the gap between informal and professional support utilisation

Methods, Sampling, and Measures

Study Design

An online quantitative and qualitative survey was conducted by Human8 for the Manulife Dialogue online community. All members were invited to complete the survey.

Fieldwork Period

Data collection took place between

17–23 July 2025

Sample

295 participants

The sample size of this survey was **295** participants (53% response rate), recruited through Human8 and Manulife

Eligibility Criteria

Adults 18+

who are members of the Manulife Dialogue online community

Measures

- **Life event experiences and emotional impact**
- **Support-seeking pathways and decision-making**
- **Barriers during navigation**
- **Benefits of different support types**

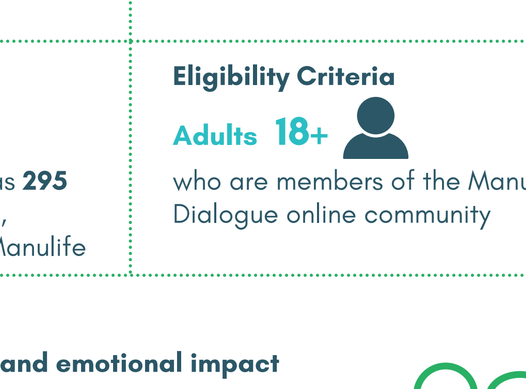
Respondents Profile Overview

Gender

42%

58%

Age Distribution (%)



Average Monthly Personal Income

HK$49,773*

*Excludes those who refused to answer

With children 44%

Without children 56%

Working 86%

Non-working 14%

Results

> *Family-wise, emotional difficulties* ***may cause conflicts within a family since family members do not understand / the person in question refuses to disclose what challenges he is facing.*** *Some strange behaviours at home may be seen as disobedience, etc. Health-wise, mood affects appetite, metabolism and lots of things which may deter health. Overall, s/he can't effectively function and live a purposeful life. –* ***Male, 30-34***

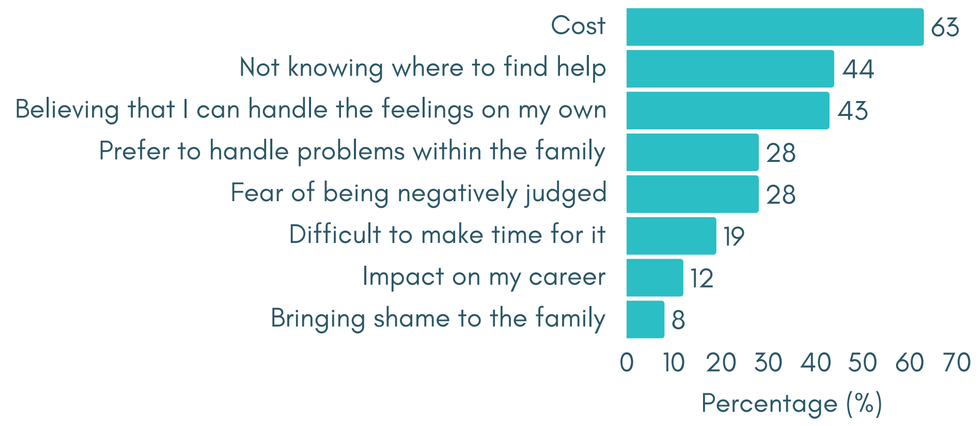
Results - Top Sources of Support

Did you reach out to anyone or do anything to support your emotional wellbeing during this time? / Imagine that you are going through a difficult, life-changing event. Who would you turn to, or what would you do to support your emotional wellbeing?

Any personal support	66%
• Family members	46%
• Close friends	37%
• Colleagues or acquaintances	22%
Alternative support (e.g. religious guidance, meditation)	38%
Digital & Online support (e.g. self-help resources, support communities)	31%
Traditional/Cultural support (e.g. health supplements, Chinese medicine practitioner)	22%
Professional Support	21%
• Medical doctor	14%
• Mental health professional	6%
• Crisis helpline or support hotline	4%
Prefer to manage feelings on my own	24%

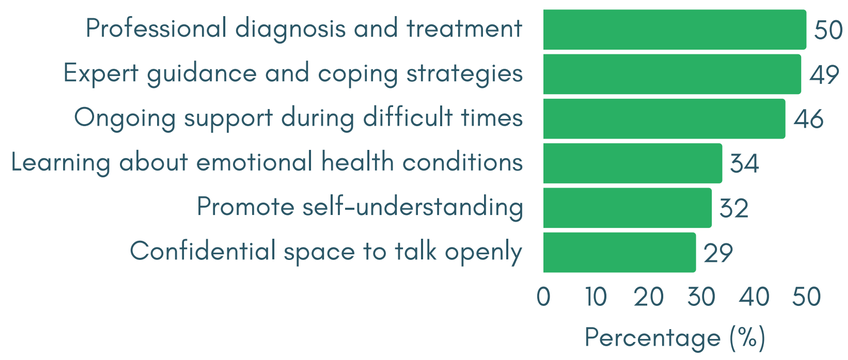
Results - Barriers to Professional Support

What do you think are major barriers preventing people from seeking professional emotional health support even if they need it? (Respondents selected up to 3)



Results - Benefits of seeking professional support

What do you think are the main benefits for seeking professional emotional health support when there is a need to do so? (Respondents selected up to 3)



Discussion

- Both informal and professional support play complementary roles in the Hong Kong context during challenging times. Although only 21% of respondents accessed/would access professional help, 66% sought/will seek support from their personal networks—predominantly from family (46%) and friends (37%)—indicating that informal support serves as an essential first-line resource during times of significant change.
- Hong Kong residents navigate emotional challenges through layered support systems, but also recognise barriers to professional care, e.g., cost concerns (63%), uncertainty about services (44%), and cultural preferences for family-based problem-solving (28%). However, delayed professional intervention risks condition deterioration for some cases, as respondents noted worsening mental and physical health outcomes.
- Community-wide and clinical interventions must work synergistically—strengthening personal support networks through psychoeducation and other tools and skills, whilst reducing barriers to professional care. A stepped-care approach that bridges both informal and formal support, rather than replacing one with the other, may prove most effective for improving mental health outcomes during life's defining moments in Hong Kong.