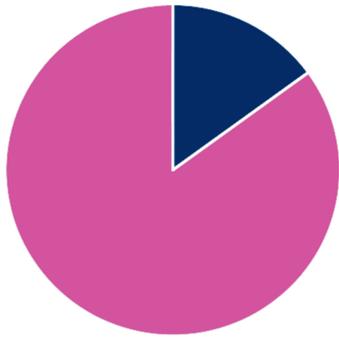


FINDING STRENGTH TOGETHER

Dr Hannah Griffin-James
Independent

Hong Kong's migrant domestic workers (MDWs) demonstrate remarkable resilience, yet they experience high rates of anxiety and depression (Sumerlin et al., 2024).



85% OF MDWS attending the group sharing sessions in 2024 reported symptoms of mild hopelessness, anxiety and depression.

The issues faced by MDWs aren't minor stress. They include **SUICIDAL IDEATION, PHYSICAL ABUSE, AND PROFOUND CHILDHOOD TRAUMA.**

PARADOX OF PEER SUPPORT

MDWs are visibly social on days off, but this network is superficial:



1. Shallow Friendships

"We're not there to have serious conversations or to support each other... it's only for fun" (Jaz)

2. Isolation

When struggling, MDWs isolate themselves to maintain a strong appearance: "I still have the feeling that I need to be strong in front of people who don't know me." (Tala) → This exacerbates loneliness and depression.

3. Mental Health Stigma

Mental health is often associated with "craziness." "I don't want them to think that I'm crazy... That's why I'm really trying to hide it." (Liesel)

4. Secrecy

Though attitudes are changing, secrecy remains. Even with best friends, she "never tells anything about myself or my life in details." (Hope)

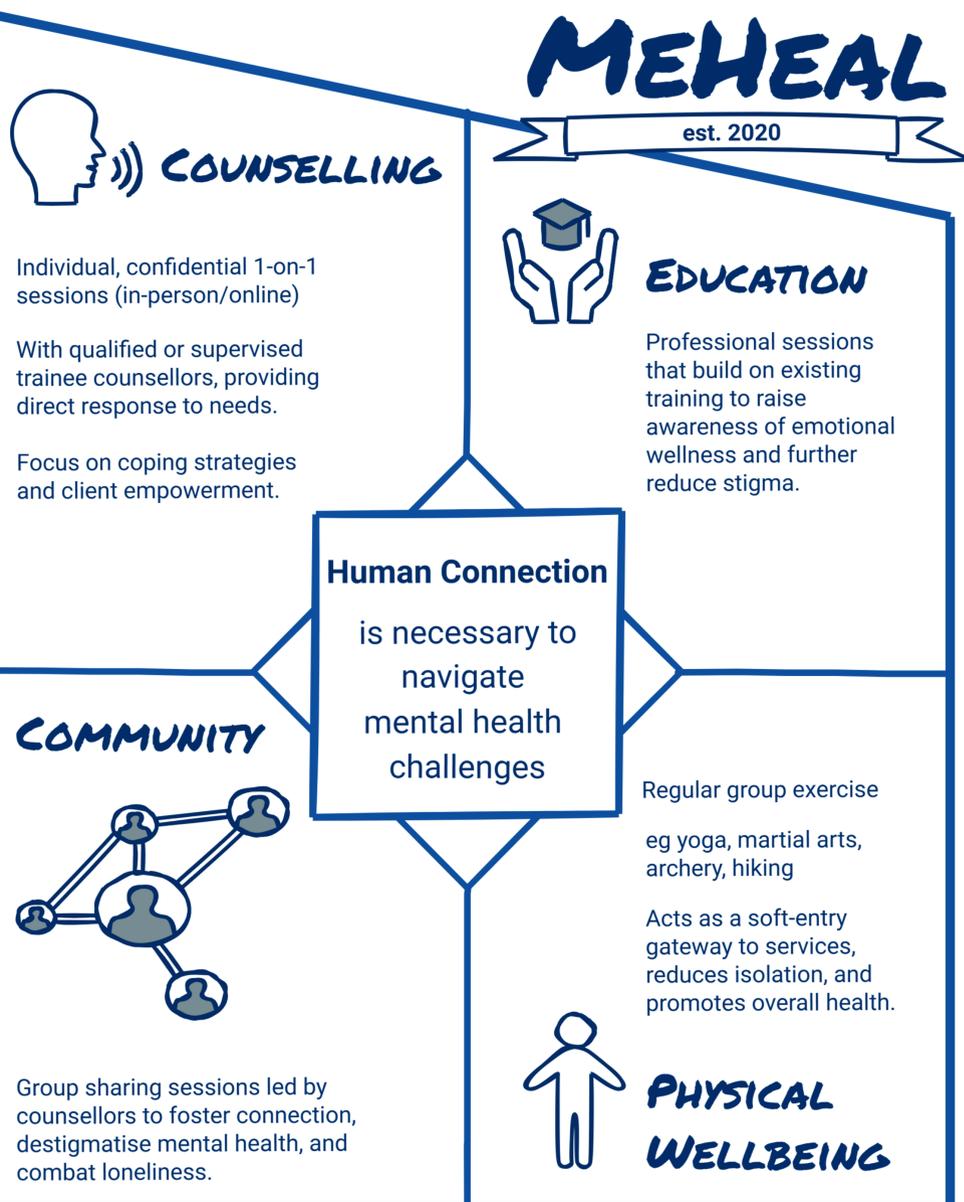
PERSONAL SUPPORT FUELS COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Counselling actively reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, providing immediate relief from emotional distress:

"After a session, I feel light with the burden that I have. The second session, the burden becomes lighter and then I feel happiness unlike before... I hope it will continue to become lighter." (Hope)

Counselling empowers participants to shift their behaviour, **moving from secrecy to support** within their community:

- Clients recognize their peers also need help: "I realized so many friends of mine, that also have the same experience and they don't know how to share." (Tala)
- Clients **commit to helping others**, often starting with the simple act of listening: "I feel like I need to be someone who can help they way they help me go through this." (Tala)
- By sharing openly, they normalize mental health challenges ("these are my problems, like your problems" (Jaz)), **directly tackling stigma and lowering feelings of isolation** for others.
- They also recommend MeHeal's professional help to those who need more support.



A mixed-methods research approach using surveys, observations, interviews and creative methods, explores the role of peer-support in MDWs mental health. So far we've heard from 19 MDWs and 18 trainers and stakeholders.

MEHEAL CREATES A SAFE SPACE FOR PEER SUPPORT

The core value of many programme elements is providing opportunities for human connection, which is essential for mental health resilience.

Periods of transition are often depicted in artistic reflections, where many MDWs share poignant scenes of their home countryside and beaches. These expressions through art and poetry create a space to process emotions tied to missing home and workplace stress.

- Sharing reduces the emotional load. Through art and poetry, participants create a safe space to process trauma and stress, allowing them to "let the emotions flow and **share the burden.**"
- Peer support fuels confidence and healing. This shared vulnerability directly uplifts the spirit: the activity "boosted my confidence and lightened my feelings."
- The program successfully combats isolation; MDWs report **feeling more supported, loved, and significantly less lonely**, which improves personal relationships.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT IS THE CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

When one person finds a safe space, they become the advocate who breaks the cycle of stigma and isolation for others.

