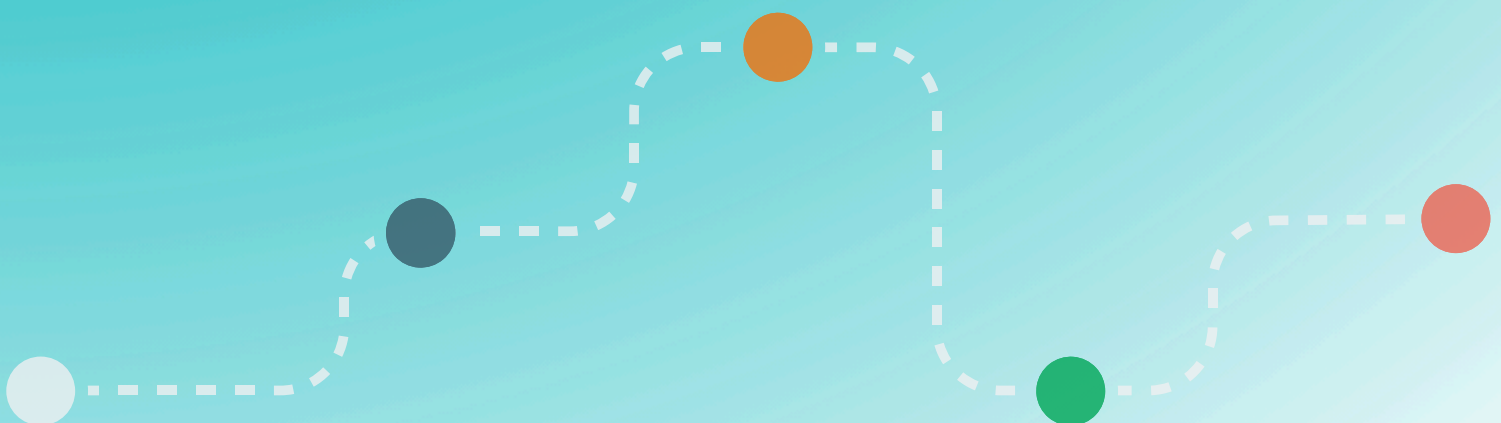


# Mental Health and Life-Defining Moments in Hong Kong

A Mind HK and Manulife Hong Kong  
Research Report

2025

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# Acknowledgements

## About Mind HK

Mind HK (Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited) is a registered charity under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance (91/16471), established in 2017. Our mission is to ensure that no one faces a mental health problem alone. Through our work, we hope to improve awareness of mental health and mental health conditions, remove the associated stigma, and provide free psychological support to achieve the best mental health for all in Hong Kong. Together with the existing collaboration and research efforts, we are here to support Hong Kong in becoming a global leader and regional model for public mental health.

For more information about our work, vision, and mission, please visit our website: <https://www.mind.org.hk/>.

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### Suggested Citation

Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited (2025). Mental Health and Life-Defining Moments in Hong Kong.

# Purpose

This report presents the findings of a collaborative research initiative between Mind HK and Manulife Hong Kong, conducted in 2025 to examine the mental health implications of significant life events among adults in Hong Kong.

This research was specifically commissioned to complement and inform our **Hong Kong International Mental Health Conference 2025**, which centred on the theme of "**Navigating Life's Defining Moments**." By exploring how pivotal shifts—such as career changes, family expansions, ageing, or loss—impact mental health and wellbeing, the study provided the evidence base for the conference's critical dialogues.

Our strategic partnership with Manulife is rooted in a shared commitment to building a healthier Hong Kong. By combining Mind HK's clinical and public health expertise with Manulife's reach and deep understanding of the community's personal health and financial security needs, we aim to connect people with the practical support they need to navigate life's stressors.

To provide a comprehensive perspective, this research report provides a summary of the findings from two separate studies conducted:

## 1. Big Picture Study (1,000 participants)

This population-representative, quantitative survey provides a broad view of mental health in Hong Kong; it seeks to help us understand the impact of life events on mental health and the prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms.

## 2. Exploratory Consumer Sentiment Survey (295 participants)

This survey delves deeper into the personal side. It uses structured survey with enhanced open-ended questionnaires to capture real-life stories, showing us exactly how people in Hong Kong cope and why they choose (or don't choose) to get help.

These insights fueled our conference discussions and continue to guide how we build targeted support systems to help our community navigate life's defining moments with confidence and care.

# Introduction

In Hong Kong, a high-tempo, densely populated city known for its intense work culture and economic pressures, mental health challenges are a significant concern. According to the Hong Kong Mental Morbidity Survey<sup>1</sup>, roughly 13.3% of the population experiences a common mental disorder at any given time, which translates to 1 in 7 people in Hong Kong.

Individuals can be most vulnerable **during major life transitions**<sup>2</sup>. These shifts—whether planned, such as entering the workforce, or unexpected, such as the onset of illness—can disrupt the delicate balance between external demands and internal coping mechanisms.

## Why Transitions Heighten Vulnerability

Though work and financial stressors are often prioritised, the psychological strain can extend into the pivotal moments that redefine an individual's role in society:

- 1 The "Double Burden" of Change:** Local research indicates that stressful life events, such as relationship breakdowns or the decline in one's or a loved one's health, are strongly associated with reduced life satisfaction<sup>3</sup>. In a fast-paced environment like Hong Kong, there is often little "buffer time" to process these changes.
- 2 The Loss of Social Scaffolding:** Transitions often involve changes in social circles (e.g., graduation or relocation). In a city where social support is a precious commodity, losing these connections during a period of transition can leave individuals uniquely exposed.
- 3 Compounded Stigma:** These vulnerabilities are further intensified by persistent stigma. When a person undergoing a major transition feels they can no longer "keep up" with Hong Kong's demands, they may view their distress as a personal failure rather than a natural reaction to change, creating significant barriers to seeking help.

1: [Lam et al., 2015](#)

2: [Sundqvist et al., 2024](#)

3: [Suen et al., 2021](#)

# Introduction

While the topic of mental health has become more prominent in public discourse, including on social media and news platforms, **62% of individuals diagnosed with a mental health condition did not disclose it to anyone else**, including close family members<sup>4</sup>, highlighting a potential gap between public awareness of mental health and individuals' willingness to disclose their own conditions. This suggests that many people may not feel able to seek or receive support from their loved ones when navigating major life changes, such as serious illness, relationship breakdown, or job loss.

Despite growing public discourse, stigma and non-disclosure persist. Understanding how individuals navigate major life changes is essential for moving beyond awareness, allowing us to develop effective, accessible formal and informal mental health support systems, including both clinical services and community-based resources<sup>4</sup>.

## Key Objectives

1

To identify the impact of major life changes on people in Hong Kong, including on their mental health and wellbeing

2

To understand how life events impact people's mental health and wellbeing and how they seek help

3

To identify gaps in current mental health support and ways to improve support relating to life changes

# **Big Picture Study**

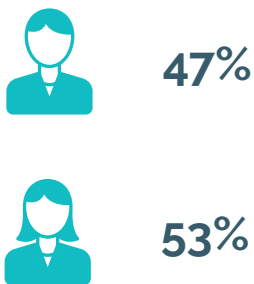
**The Impact of Life Events on Mental Health**

# Methodology & Sampling

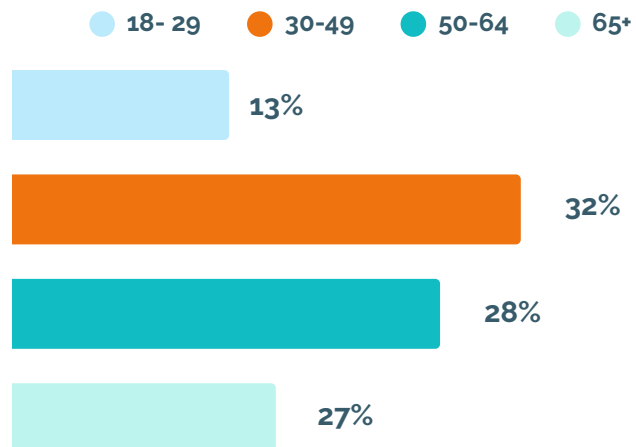
The study titled "The Big Picture Study" utilised a cross-sectional telephone survey design to examine mental health status, the impact of major life events, and help-seeking behaviours among adults in Hong Kong. Data collection was conducted between April and May 2025. A representative community sample was achieved through random telephone interviews with 1,000 respondents. In order to make our results more representable to the Hong Kong population, post-stratification weighting was used based on the age and gender distribution of the Hong Kong population. Eligible respondents were adults aged 18 years or older residing in Hong Kong. To ensure inclusivity, interviews were offered in Cantonese, English, or Mandarin.

## Demographics

### Gender



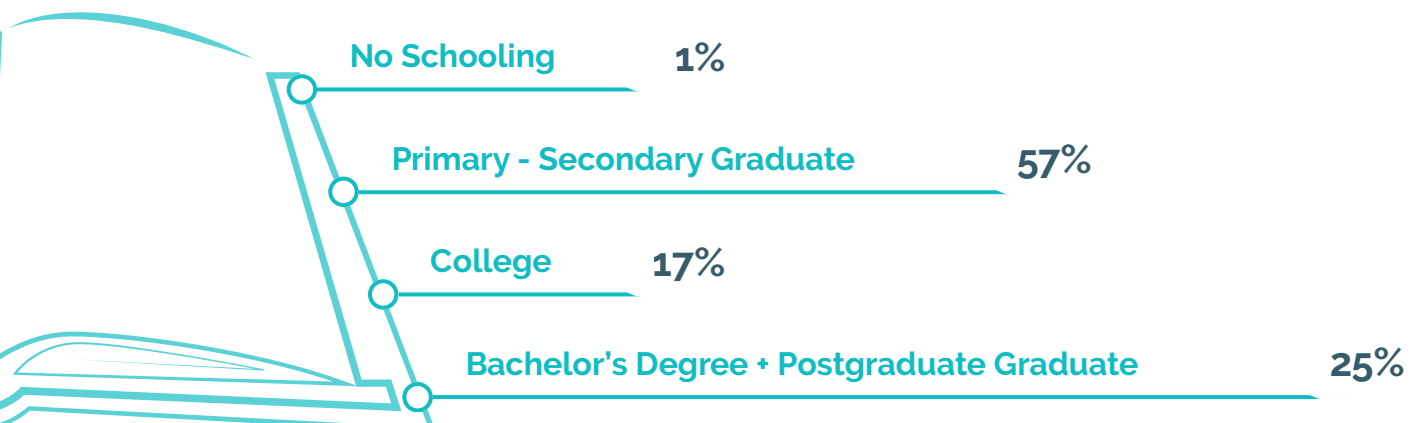
### Age Distribution



### Ethnicity

99% Chinese

### Education Background

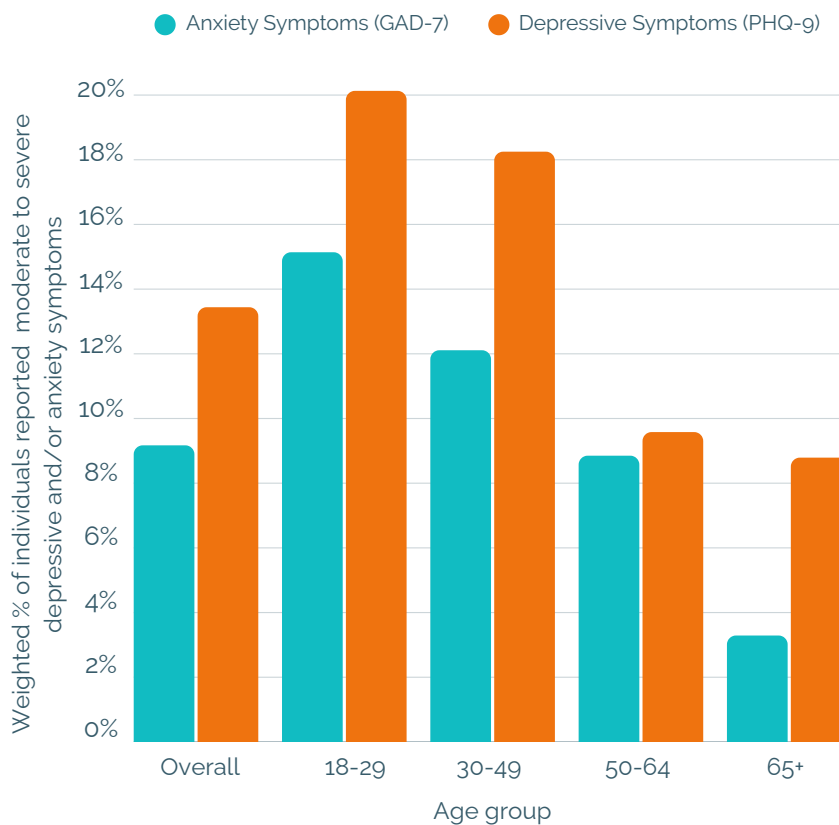


# Key Findings

## 1. The current reality

Nearly 1 in 6 adults (16.1%) in Hong Kong are estimated to be currently experiencing moderate to severe depressive and/or anxiety symptoms.

Figure 1. Prevalence of anxiety/depression among participants



## 2. The "pressure cooker" for young adults

Young people aged 18–29 are the hardest hit, reporting the highest proportion of moderate to severe depressive and anxiety symptoms. This may be largely driven by:



High academic pressure<sup>5</sup>



Career uncertainty<sup>6</sup>



The lingering aftermath of global events like the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>7</sup>

5: [Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups \[HKFYG\], 2025](#)

6: [Tang, et.al., 2024](#).

7: [Li et al., 2025](#).

Note: All percentages shown are weighted.

# Key Findings

## 3. Life changes and mental health

This table indicates how 15 major life-changing events — from moving homes to facing a breakup — impact our mental health. By looking at **the numbers and the stories** together, we can see which events are most common and which ones carry the heaviest emotional weight.

**Table 1. A list of surveyed life events, measured by prevalence, related help-seeking behaviour, and their correlation with depressive and anxiety symptoms**

	Experienced Event	Impacted Mental Health Severely/ Extremely	Actively sought mental health support	Correlation with PHQ-9	Correlation with GAD-7
Major financial difficulties	12%	40%	31%	0.26	0.24
Serious illness or injury of a close relative	12%	20%	16%	0.16	0.14
Death of a close relative	12%	25%	17%	0.12	0.08
Caring for a chronically ill loved one	9%	23%	24%	0.15	0.16
Job loss or redundancy	9%	33%	21%	0.20	0.22
Long-term job-seeking without success	8%	27%	25%	0.22	0.26
Serious illness or injury of a friend	8%	6%	11%	0.13	0.12
Moving to a new home or neighbourhood	7%	4%	15%	0.11	0.12
Serious conflict with a close friend or family member	6%	23%	25%	0.28	0.25
Break-up or separation from a steady relationship	6%	35%	37%	0.17	0.16
Personal serious illness or injury	5%	27%	28%	0.18	0.11
Death of a Close friend	5%	32%	14%	0.06 (ns)	0.03 (ns)
End-of-life care for a close relative	4%	13%	13%	0.09	0.04 (ns)
Serious problems with a close friend or relative	3%	20%	13%	0.15	0.16
End-of-life care for a friend	1%	6%	31%	0.19	0.13

**Highlighted cells indicate the top three highest percentages within each column.**

Note: All percentages shown are weighted.

# Key Findings

## 3.1. Most common life events among respondents

Figure 2. Top 3 most prevalent life events in Hong Kong

from the survey question: "In the past 12 months, have you and/or your partner experienced: [life events]"



## 3.2. Top 3 life events with the highest reported mental health impact

Figure 3. Top 3 life events with the highest percentage of "severe/extreme" impact

from the survey question: "To what extent did the following events impact your mental health?"



# Key Findings

## 3.3. Clinical connection

The strongest connection with poor depression and anxiety scale scores was found for serious interpersonal conflicts, long-term unemployment and financial difficulties.

**Table 2. Top 3 life events with the highest correlation with PHQ-9 or GAD-7 scores**

Life Events	Correlation with PHQ-9 (depressive symptoms)	Correlation with GAD-7 (anxiety symptoms)
Major financial difficulties	0.26	0.24
Long-term job-seeking without success	0.22	0.26

## 3.4. Help-seeking behaviour

Relationship breakups also prompted the highest rate of active mental health support-seeking, while end-of-life care for friends, despite being rare, led to notable help-seeking.

**Table 3. Top 3 life events with the highest percentage of help-seeking behaviour**  
from the survey question: "Have you actively sought emotional support while dealing with [life events]?"

Life Events	Experienced Event	Actively sought mental health support
Break-up or separation from a steady relationship	6%	37%
End-of-life care for a friend	1%	31%
Major financial difficulties	12%	31%

# Key Findings

## 3.5. The heavy toll of financial hardship

In Hong Kong's high-pressure environment, money worries are both common and deeply impactful. Financial difficulties affected over 12% of people surveyed, and they carried the heaviest emotional toll, with **40% of those affected reporting severe or extreme distress**. This transition isn't just a logistical hurdle; it can be a potent "tipping point" for clinical anxiety and depression in our community.

## 3.6. Relationships

### The Impact:

Relationship breakups and serious conflicts with loved ones are among the top life events negatively impacting mental health.

### The silver lining:

Heartbreak can be a strong motivator for healing. People navigating a breakup were the most likely to proactively seek professional support (37%), turning a painful transition into an opportunity for growth and recovery.

## 3.7. The "invisible" burden of care

The data reveals that we don't just suffer from our own problems, but from the struggles of those we love. While "big" events like the death of a relative are common, the quiet act of caring for a dying loved one leads to a significant need for mental health support. It reminds us that being a primary support system for others often requires a safety net for ourselves.

*Note: All percentages shown are weighted.*

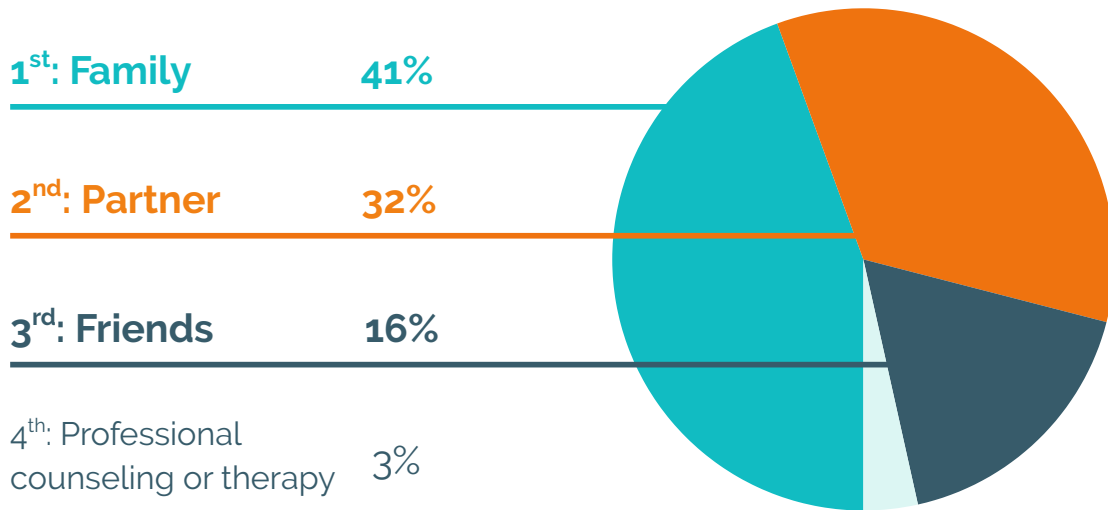
# Key Findings

## 4. Social conflict and support systems

Since family, partners, and friends are considered primary supports, a conflict with them doesn't just cause stress—it can actually cut off a "lifeline." When you fight with the people you usually turn to for help, the psychological impact can be much more severe. Our personal network is, to many, the preferred support source.

**Figure 4. Top support sources during life transition**

from the survey question: "Please rank your top 3-5 sources of support you used when going through difficult life transition events (e.g. break ups, dealing with grief, career changes, moving countries or homes)"

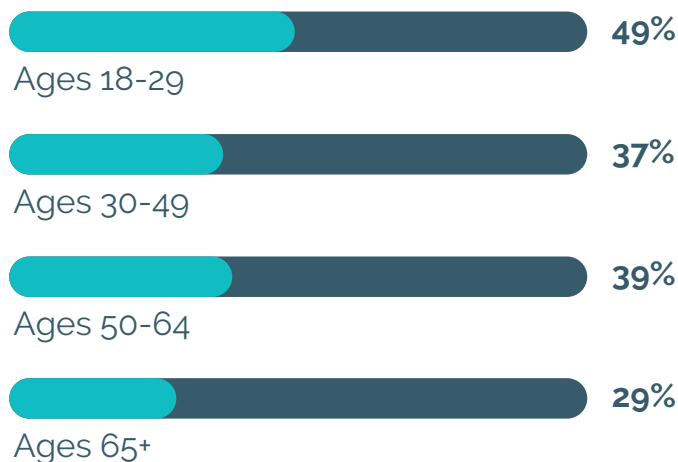


## 5. Confidence is growing, but silence still lingers

Nearly 4 out of 10 respondents reported feeling "very" or "extremely" comfortable discussing mental health, with younger groups generally feeling more comfortable on average.

**Figure 5. Percentages of respondents reported feeling "very" or "extremely" comfortable in mental health discussions**

from the survey question: "How comfortable are you with openly discussing mental health/emotional challenges?"



Note: All percentages shown are weighted.

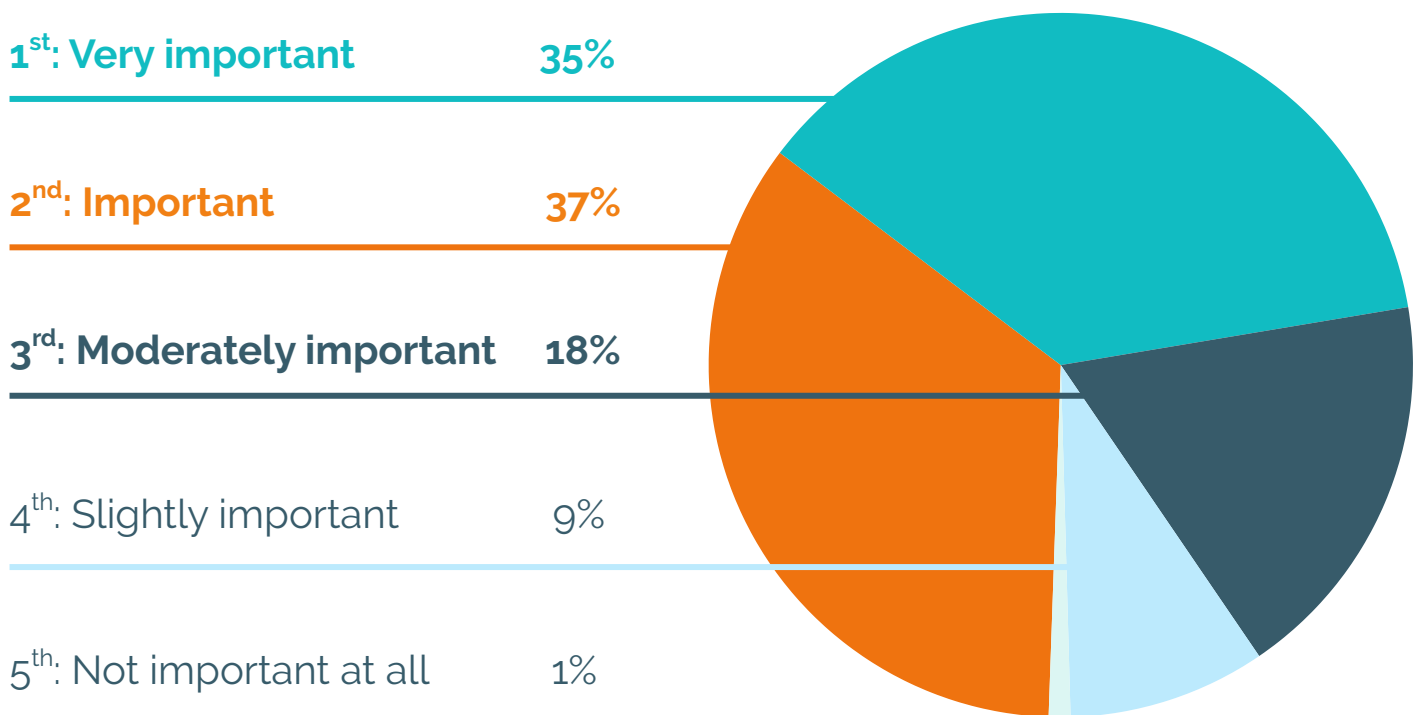
# Key Findings

## 6. People think mental health support is important

Our data reveals a rare, near-universal consensus: **72% of people identify emotional support as a critical factor** in navigating major life transitions like bereavement, job loss, or relationship breakdowns. Perhaps even more telling is that less than 1% of respondents dismissed emotional support as unimportant.

This highlights a fundamental truth, **connection isn't a "nice-to-have"; it's our survival mechanism**. No matter how much we prize independence, 99% of us admit that we cannot navigate life's hardest shifts alone.

**Figure 6. Perceived importance of mental health support during major life transitions**  
from the survey question: "How important do you think emotional support is during major life transitions (e.g. career changes, divorce, deaths of loved ones)?"



# Key Takeaway



While professional mental health services remain vital, the findings also emphasise the role and importance of social connectedness and mutual care in our day-to-day lives.

Friends, family, and partners often serve as the first preferred line of support in Hong Kong, helping individuals navigate periods of transition and uncertainty. Encouraging individuals not only to seek professional help when needed but also to care for themselves and support others during life's changes may foster and strengthen community wellbeing in Hong Kong.

# **Exploratory Consumer Sentiment Survey**

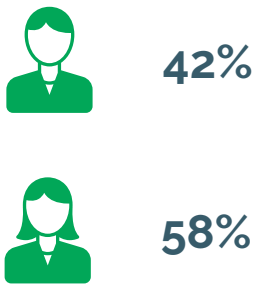
## **Help-Seeking Behaviours and Barriers**

# Methodology & Sampling

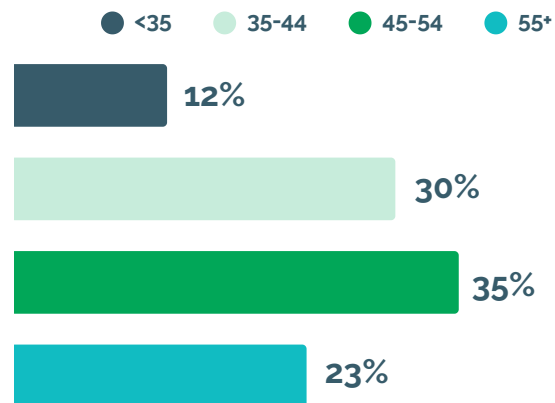
An online self-completed survey was conducted by Human8. Available in both Chinese and English, the survey was distributed to all members of the exclusive, branded online community (Manulife Dialogue), comprising existing Manulife customers. A total of 295 participants completed the survey. Data collection took place between 17 - 23 July, 2025. To complement the quantitative findings, the survey included open-ended questions, providing a deeper insight into participants' personal experiences.

## Demographic characteristics

### Gender



### Age Distribution

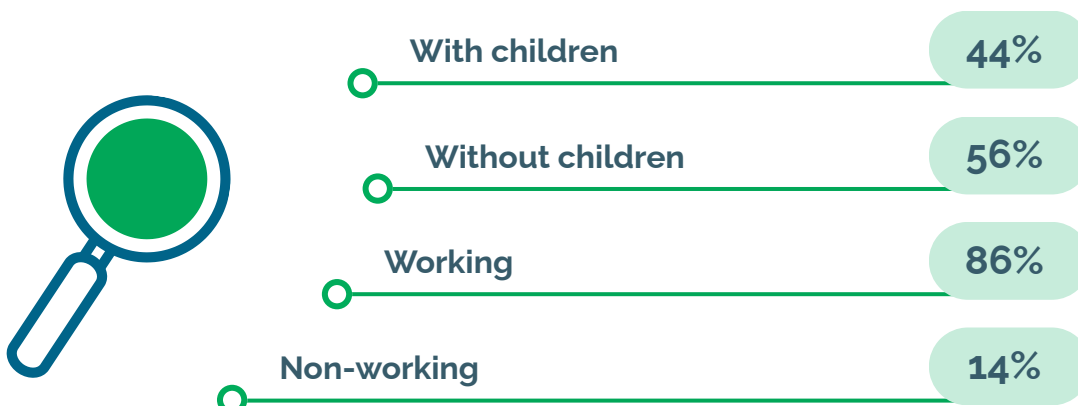


### Average Monthly Personal Income

HK\$49,773\*

\*Excludes those who refused to answer

## Employment and Family Status



# Key Findings

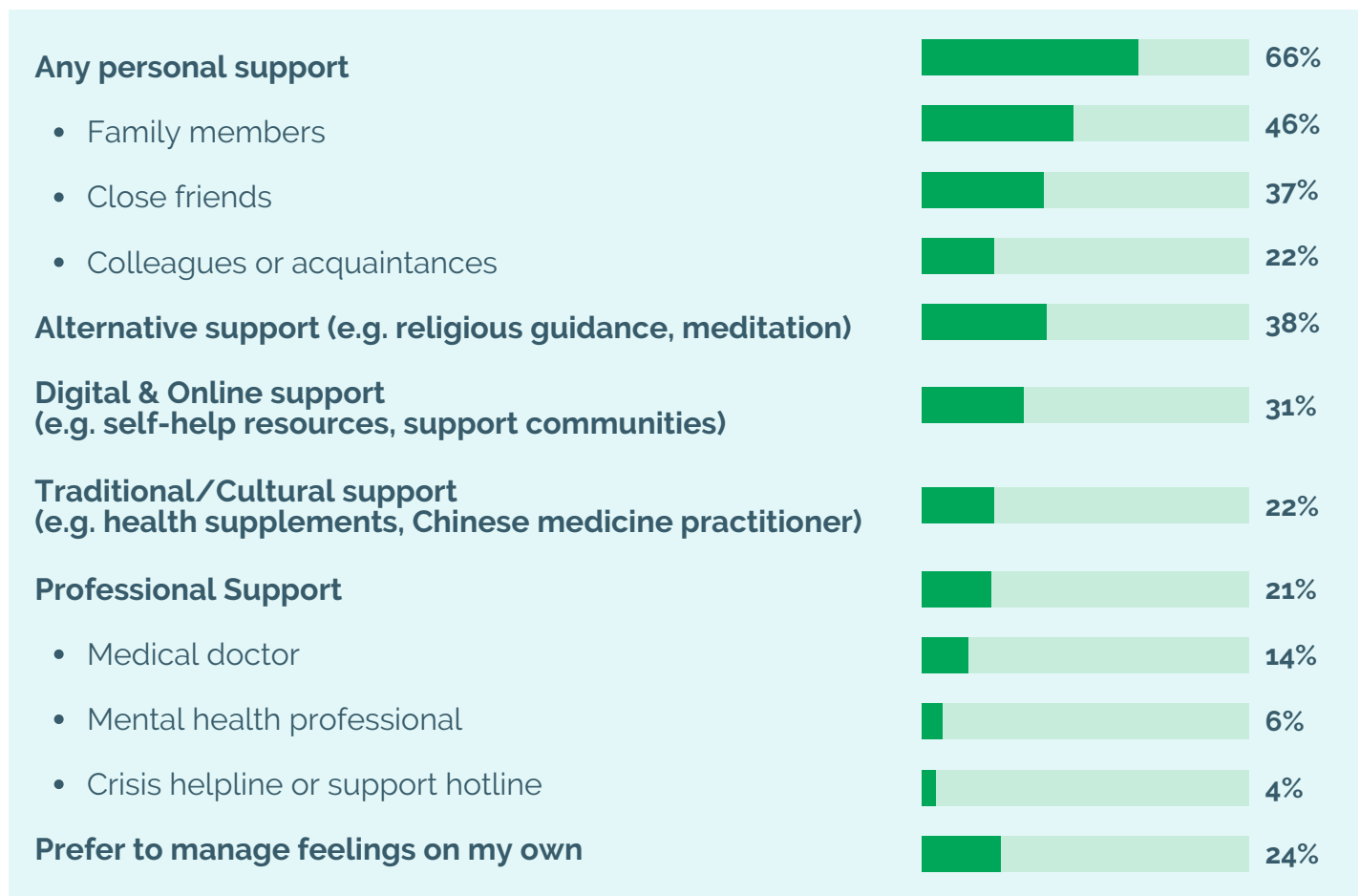
## 1. How do we seek help?

### Where we turn: The community safety net

When life's transitions affect individuals, where do Hong Kongers actually go for help? The data reveal a strong preference for familiar faces and personal resilience over professional clinical care.

**Figure 7. Types of mental health support utilised by respondents**

from the survey question: "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?"



## 2. The power of personal networks

The vast majority of people—**two out of every three (66%)—turn to their friends, family, or colleagues first.** This illustrates that our personal "inner circle" remains a primary support system for many. This highlights how vital our close social connections are; they are the front line of mental health support in our community.

# Key Findings

## 3. A diverse toolkit for wellbeing

While only 21% of people currently use professional services like counselling, individuals are actively seeking different ways to support their wellbeing. This diverse toolkit includes:

**38%**

### Alternative Support

Many find strength in religious and spiritual practices or meditation to navigate life's shifts.

**31%**

### Digital and Online Support

Digital support, including online communities and self-help resources, is becoming a go-to option for those seeking privacy and immediate connection.

**22%**

### Traditional and Cultural Support

A significant number of people still see traditional or cultural support, such as Chinese medicine and health supplements, as a preferred support system. This reflects a holistic approach to "wellness" that is deeply embedded in the Hong Kong culture.

## 4. The "Do-It-Yourself" mindset

Notably, nearly 1 in 4 people (24%) prefer to manage their feelings on their own. This high rate of self-reliance — often driven by a "can-do" spirit or a desire to avoid the stigma of asking for help — suggests that while we are a resilient city, many are carrying their heaviest burdens in isolation.



This data reveals that personal circles and diverse toolkits form the primary safety net for most Hong Kongers, with only a small minority seeking professional services. This reflects a culture deeply rooted in self-reliance and social connection, though it also suggests that many may still be navigating their heaviest transitions alone.

# Key Findings

## 5. In their own words: how do we seek help?

### The Power of Trust:

Some may prefer talking to loved ones because it feels more private and trustworthy.



*Selected qualitative responses to the survey:*

"Beyond my family, I feel there is no one else I can fully trust."

「因為除了家人其實沒有人是百分百可信的。」

*Male, 40-44*

"I feel like only my family truly understands what's happening; they can face this with me and we can solve the problems together."

「我覺得家人才了解發生咩事，家人可以和我共同面對，解決問題。」

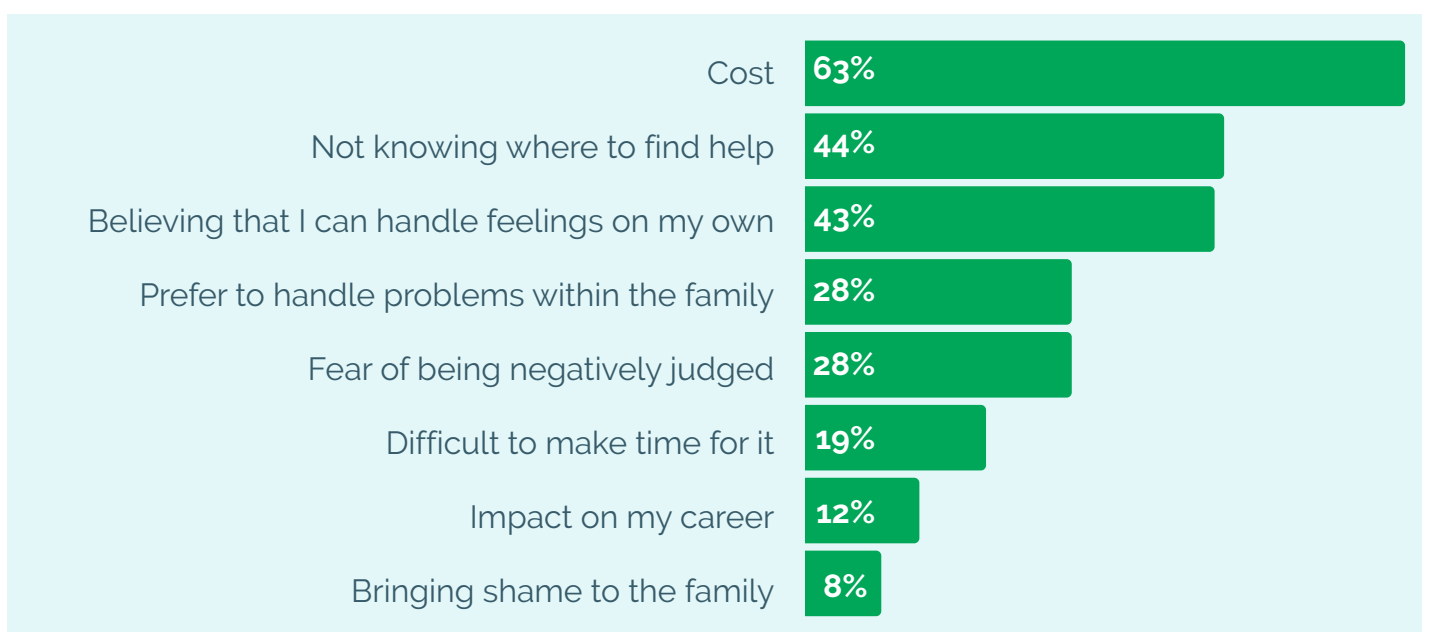
*Female, 55+*

## 6. What stops us from getting professional help?

- **Cost:** 63% find it too expensive.
- **Confusion:** 44% aren't sure where to go or what services exist.
- **Self-Reliance:** 43% believe they can handle feelings on their own.

**Figure 8. Barriers to seeking professional support**

from the survey question: "What do you think are the major barriers preventing people from seeking professional emotional health support even if they need it?"



# Key Findings



“Keeping these discussions within the family is actually a form of protection and trust. It’s not that I’m unwilling to be open; I just prefer to process my emotions and hardships in a safe, familiar environment. My family understands my context—they know my boundaries and how to support me, even in silence. This is the kind of companionship I choose to lean on.

To me, a problem doesn't need to be shared widely to be taken seriously. In a private space, I can face myself more honestly, without the fear of being misunderstood or labelled”

「把問題只留在家人之間討論，其實是一種保護與信任的體現。不是我不願意公開，而是我更傾向於在熟悉的、安全的環境下處理情緒與困境。家人了解我的脈絡，知道我的底線，也懂得如何在不說話的時候給我支持。這樣的陪伴，是我願意依賴的依靠。

對我而言，問題不一定要擴散出去才算被重視。反而，在更私密的空間裏，我能更真實地面對自己，也比較不會擔心被誤解或貼上標籤。」

*Male, 40-44*

# Key Takeaway



An extended wait time and cost burden of professional help can cause mental and physical health to worsen. To better support our city, we need to empower families with mental health knowledge and training, while making professional services more affordable and easier to access.

# Recommendations

## Support the "First Responders" (Family & Friends)

Since the majority of us turn to friends and family during life's hardest transitions, our personal networks have become the "first responders" of mental health. However, a safety net is only as strong as the people holding it. To ensure this support is effective and sustainable, we must focus on two key areas:

### 1. Moving from "Silence" to "Skill"

While loved ones are willing to help, they often lack the tools to navigate a loved one facing a mental health challenge, especially during significant life transitions. We need to bridge this gap by providing basic mental health education for the general public.

### 2. Protecting the "Compassion buffer"

Providing support can be emotionally exhausting. We must offer support for the supporters to prevent caregiver burnout.

## Focus on Young Adults

### 1. Targeted support for the "Transition generation" (ages 18–29)

While mental health affects everyone, the 18–29-year-old demographic in Hong Kong is possibly facing a "perfect storm" of life hurdles. Our data shows that this group experiences the highest rates of anxiety and depressive symptoms as they navigate life's major transitions, which is of concern. To address this, we need programmes that meet them where they are at.

### 2. Digital outreach

Gen Z (14–29 age group) is the most likely to use digital tools for mental health support, with adoption rates 50% higher than those of Gen X or baby boomers<sup>8</sup>. They may often prefer the anonymity and immediacy of a screen over a traditional clinic. This means exploring the best tech, including AI-driven solutions, to complement in-person support.

<sup>8</sup>: *McKinsey Health Institute, 2023*

# Recommendations

## Mainstream Mental Health

If we want to change how Hong Kong views mental health, we must shift the conversation from the clinic to the community. This requires a two-pronged approach: making the struggle relatable and the solutions reliable.

### **1. The power of "Lived Experience"**

When people from our own community share their experiences of navigating and supporting their mental health during life events, such as a breakup or a career shift, it strips away the "otherness" of mental health during times of transition.

### **2. Creating clearer pathways**

With 31% of Hong Kongers already seeking support online, we must bridge the gap between "information overload" and actual support by providing the public with a clear roadmap of vetted, evidence-based digital resources. By transforming the online space from a confusing maze into a reliable gateway, we empower individuals to access high-quality help on their own terms.

# Recommendations

## Address Cost and Access

### **Moving toward "proactive" care: The stepped care model**

In Hong Kong, mental health care has traditionally been "crisis-led" — meaning people often only receive help when they reach a breaking point. To change this, we must move toward a Stepped Care Model, which treats mental health like physical health: you don't wait for a heart attack to start exercising.

#### **1. Prioritising low-friction, early support**

Mental health support shouldn't require a crisis to access. By providing easily reachable, "low-intensity" solutions—such as peer support, guided self-help, or community-based coaching—we can address life's stressors before they escalate. This creates a more accessible entry point for care, ensuring that support is available the moment someone feels the first signs of a struggle.

#### **2. "Mental health maintenance" vs. "Crisis management"**

By normalising the use of low-cost and easily accessible supports, we shift the cultural narrative. Addressing serious life stressors, like interpersonal conflict or job-related stress, now will likely cost less and have a higher success rate than treating more severe conditions which may arise later.

# Conclusion



Ultimately, mental health in Hong Kong is not a static condition, but a reflection of how we navigate the city's fast pace during life's most vulnerable "tipping points." Whether it is the jarring transition into a first career, the heavy emotional weight of a relationship breakdown, or the quiet strain of caring for a loved one, these shifts are when our resilience is tested most and when our mental health and wellbeing can be impacted substantially.

By recognising that major life challenges are a primary driver of distress, we can move away from a culture of crisis management and toward a proactive mindset. By educating the community, strengthening personal networks, and expanding affordable and accessible early-intervention support, we can help these inevitable life transitions become opportunities for growth rather than breaking points.

In a city that never stops moving, our goal is to ensure that no one has to navigate life's defining moments alone.

**Thank you to the Mind HK Team—Carol Liang, Michael Chiu, Nancy Ng, and Odile Thiang—as well as Manulife Hong Kong for their support in developing, analysing, and writing up this research data.**

