



STUDENTS' NEEDS

GREEK REPORT

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Students' needs: Greek Report

2022

ERASMUS+ Project

POSITIVE: Prevention Of Stress by exploitING an Innovative Virtual Environment
KA220-SCH - Cooperation partnerships in school education

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VšĮ "eMundus"

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this national report is to characterize the school stress of Greek adolescents. Firstly, a brief review will be presented, about the state of mental health of Greek students. Additionally, the report includes a description of Greece current measures to promote mental health in secondary education. Moreover, the data collected from the student's needs assessment questionnaire will also be presented. Finally, this report presents the results from the focus group from the Greek partners.



2. DESK RESEARCH

a) The background, expertise and role of Arsakeio in Positive project

Arsakeio Lyceum of Patras is one of many schools which belong to the Society for the Promotion of Education and Learning (called Filekpedeftiki Etaireia) and they are situated in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra, Ioannina and also Tirana (Albania). Filekpedeftiki Etaireia, founded in 1836 is a public non-profitable welfare foundation. It is the oldest educational foundation in Greece which through the years, despite all the external changes and adjustments to any varied situations, achieved to maintain its educational character following the main ideals since its foundation: the cultural provision to the Greek children. The "Upper Schools" of The Society for the Promotion of Education and Learning (Filekpedeftiki Etaireia) were recognized as equivalent to the State Schools for the first time in 1861 and in 1936 were incorporated in the workforce of the State education into Teaching Academies. Moreover, the degrees of each grade issued by the Arsakeia Schools are equivalent to those of the State Schools. The educational and the administrative personnel of the institution have the same benefits with those who work in the public education sector and receive state pensions.

The premises of Arsakeio Lyceum of Patra combine the very best of environmental and building specifications. The lessons take place in modern classrooms equipped with interactive whiteboards. There are also three laboratories of Physics, Chemistry and Biology fully equipped with the most contemporary arrangements, instruments, teaching visual aids, computers connected to the Internet, slides, projectors, printers etc. The interactive e-arsakeio educational platform has an important role to play in the educational process. Teachers and students have the opportunity to use e-arsakeio, with rich digital support material for all courses. Students participate in national and international competitions related to science, philosophy, information, technology and others with significant distinctions. Students and teachers can also use a library, a Computer laboratory and also "The Sciences Centre". "The Sciences Centre", after its official inauguration in December 2009, addresses

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a) The background, expertise and role of Arsakeio in Positive project

students, teachers, as well as anyone wishing to be informed about a variety of scientific and educational issues. It provides motivation as it leads the way to deeper insight and understanding of scientific terms and natural phenomena. Students of Secondary Education have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Sciences through educational activities of CES, which are complementary to the educational process. Last but not least, it offers teachers the opportunity to be acquainted with methods of immediate approach of the scientific notions taught in class. The exceptional successes of its students sitting for the General Exams prove the high standard of the education offered by the Arsakeia Schools.

The goal of the POSITIVE project is to create the 3D Virtual World Learning Environment (3DWLE) in-world content (game scenarios and educational content) by allowing experts in software development, game-based learning, gamification, and interaction design (UPatras) and expert psychologists (ISMAI) to work together with school educators from Arsakeio and other participating schools (Rates, eMundus, and LosPinos). The conceptual design, system architecture, and development of the 3D VWLE be done by UPatras, guided by ISMAI (incorporation of stress-related content), and monitored by the partner responsible for the scenarios (eMundus) and all the partners that supported the scenario development (Rates, Arsakeio and LosPinos).

Arsakeio has participated in several similar projects and organises important international student conferences, such as ATSMUN and conferences in collaboration with departments of the University of Patras and others. The school uses the e-arsakeio educational platform which has an important role in the educational process. The lessons take place in 33 modern classrooms equipped with interactive whiteboards. In contrast to Rates, Arsakeio is a school that its students are accustomed to educational technologies and this enhances the diversity of the students participating in the project.

Arsakeio as well as, all the schools participating in the POSITIVE project (Rates, eMundus and LosPinos) were carefully chosen because of their cultural diversity and wealth of experience in similar projects.

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a) The background, expertise and role of Arsakeio in Positive project

All the schools participating in the POSITIVE project will capture the experiences, needs, and preferences of their school students providing invaluable data that will prove highly beneficial to the development of the scenarios and the 3D Virtual World Learning Environment. Furthermore, Arsakeio as the other three schools that participate in the proposal (Rates, LosPinos, and eMundus) have a lot to gain from the project results since they will be the first to use them, and they will contribute towards the development of the 3D VW with their teachers and students. Arsakeio lyceum of Patras like the other schools of the project (Rates, eMundus and LosPinos) will provide the students' feedback that will then be analyzed (both statistically and qualitatively) by ISMAI, which might lead to revealing cultural or social differences between the students that participated in the piloting.

Arsakeio will host the 1st multiplier event of the project in order to: 1) inform local stakeholders of the project goals, 2) increase the project impact, and 3) involve stakeholders from the early stages of the project. The 1st multiplier event is very important to facilitate the early collection of feedback that will be valuable to the following steps of the project.

Also, Arsakeio as the leading partner for "Project promotion Plan" will be responsible for the promotional activities within the partnership. Arsakeio will create a dissemination log where all partners will be required to add dissemination events regularly (updated daily and evaluated every 4 months). Nevertheless, some members of the consortium, due to specialisation, have connections to many diverse organisations and entities that are directly or indirectly interested in the specific project outcomes. The challenge for Arsakeio is to sustain a high profile in terms of competitiveness and innovation, something that is crucial for its current and future plans.

2. DESK RESEARCH

b) Country level data on secondary education students' stress

Students on secondary education are particularly susceptible to psychological distress as result of accelerated developmental changes and increased academic demands that affect their psychosocial well-being (Pascoe *et al.*, 2020).

The latest results from the PISA survey (2015), which takes place every three years under the auspices of the OECD, indicated that Greece has one of the lowest ranking (32/35) in science performance of 15- year-olds among 35 OECD countries. Similar findings were found with regards to Greek pupils' performance in mathematics, reading comprehension and collaborative problem solving. At the same time, Greek pupils' life satisfaction is one of the lowest among OECD countries. The latest results from the pan-Hellenic research study conducted by the University Mental Health Research Institute (UMHRI), which takes place every four years under the auspices of the World Organization Health with regards to adolescents' health-related behaviours, revealed that one in three pupils (32%) report being highly stressed by school work pressure, with girls outnumbering boys (36.1% vs. 27.8%); the proportion of pupils drawing satisfaction from school attendance drops significantly with their age: from 83.9% (11 years) to 57.1% (13 years) and 48.9% (15 years) Fig. 1 (Kokkevi *et al.* 2015).

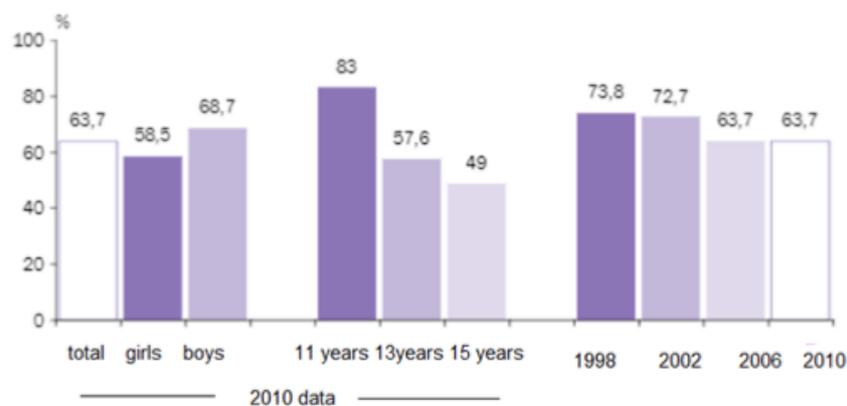


Fig 1. Adolescents' satisfaction from Greek school.

The same study shows that adolescents whose parents are interested in school issues are significantly more satisfied with school (Fig. 2).

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b) Country level data on secondary education students' stress

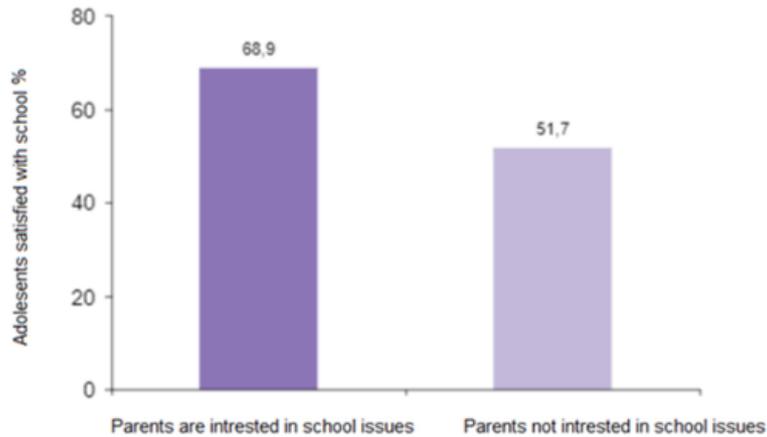


Fig 2. Adolescents satisfied (%) with school in relation to parents' interest in school issues.

Kokkevi et al. 2015 reported that three in 5 teens (60.3%) are satisfied with the relationships with their classmates, boys (66%) significantly higher than girls (55%). The degree of satisfaction from the relationship with classmates decreases with age, and for two sexes. Thus, the 11-year-olds are satisfied with relationship with their classmates at a rate of 69.3%, while the 13-year-olds at a rate of 56% and 15-year-olds at a rate of 55.2% (Fig. 3).

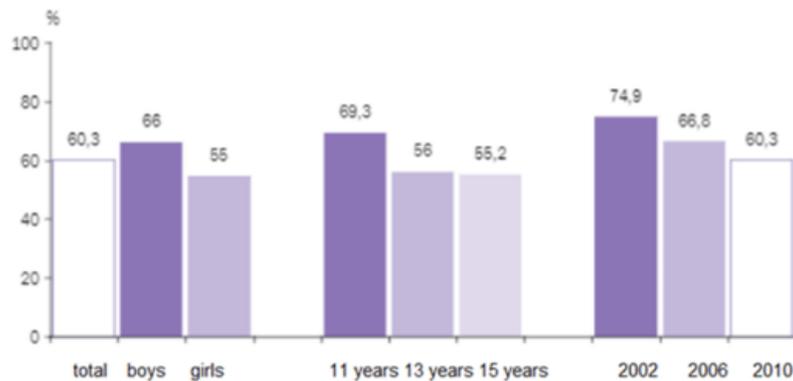


Fig 3. Teenagers who are satisfied with relationships with their classmates.

At the same study adolescent students also determined the degree in which agree or disagree with a number of proposals concerning their relationship with them their teachers. The proposals concerned whether students believe that their teachers care and are interested in them, accept them as they are whether they have confidence in their teachers. According to the data collected, one in 2 students (50%) states that they are satisfied from relationships with his teachers in similar rates boys and girls.

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b) Country level data on secondary education students' stress

The rate of satisfaction with relationships with teachers decreases with age, from 71% in 11-year-olds, to 42.2% and 35.2% respectively in 13-year-olds and 15-year-olds (Fig. 4).



Fig 4. Teenagers who are satisfied with relationships with their teachers (%)

It is important to emphasize that Greek society places a high value on tertiary education, and psychological pressure for success in university entrance exams is great given that it is perceived as having major consequences for determining the young person's future life and career prospects (OECD, 2018). The two-year preparation for the Panhellenic university entrance exams is one of the most trying periods in a young person's life, physically and emotionally. Successful admission to a higher education institution in Greece is determined through the combination of: (a) the candidate's score on the National Higher Education entrance exams, known as Panhellenic exams, administered by the Ministry of Education, (b) the candidate's choices (by order of preference) of desired degree courses and academic institutions, and (c) the number of places available in each academic department. Almost every student is overburdened by a considerable workload and long hours of study due to enrollment in two parallel educational systems - regular school and private coursework delivered by a cram school, so called "frontistirio" and/or individual tutoring (Giannopoulou, 2019; Liodaki & Liodakis, 2016). The pressure to score high in these exams in combination with the Greek society's view that every student should obtain a University degree makes the Panhellenic exams a highly stressful and often traumatic event for many Greek youngsters, and particularly for those who wish to be admitted to a highly ranked academic institution.

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b) Country level data on secondary education students' stress

The money invested by parents in their child's extra private institution adds more financial strain to the family, raises parental expectations and puts some young people under enormous stress to succeed. Research in countries with similar educational structures (e.g. Turkey) has reported comparable depression rates in this population group (Yildirim et al., 2007).

Especially due to the covid -19 pandemic students were faced with abrupt coronavirus-related disruption adjustment in their daily life and new challenges, including the adaptation to the sudden switch to online learning, combined with uncertainty about the timing of the exams, the conditions under which these will take place, the exact material they will be tested on, and the date of any return to school. Giannopoulou et al. 2021 reported the results from 442 last year senior high school students who completed an online survey (16-30 April 2020) concerning the lockdown impact on their mental health. The unexpectedly high rates of anxiety and depression warrant an urgent call to action aiming at mitigating and managing mental health risks of senior high school students in future waves of pandemic. The results indicate a substantial and worrying increase in anxiety and depression symptoms from before the COVID-19 outbreak to the period of nationwide lockdown. The high rate of 48.5% of positive screen for depression before the pandemic found in our sample is unprecedented in Greece and may reflect heightened exam-related academic pressure linked to uncertainty about securing a university placement, and pressure relating to family and social expectations, as the exams approach.

Previous field studies in Greece that have looked at the epidemiology of depressive symptoms among senior high school students reported prevalence rates of depression ranging from 17.4% (Magklara et al, 2015) to 26.2% (Lazaratou et al., 2010). Lazaratou et al. in 2010 in order to clarify the prevalence of depressive symptomatology in high school students in Athens and to evaluate risk factors for depressive symptomatology collected demographic, school performance and extracurricular activities data from 713 students (age 15–18). A high prevalence (26.2%) of depressive symptomatology was found.

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b) Country level data on secondary education students' stress

Regression analysis showed depressive symptomatology to be associated to gender (girls had higher scores than boys), school record (students with a better record had lower scores) and the interaction of gender and grade (males were found to have higher depressive symptomatology scores as they grew older).

During the academic year 2020–2021, students were faced for the second time with the enactment of strict control measures aimed to contain virus spread, resulting once again in abrupt disruption of their daily routines and need to adjust to exclusively to online education. Giannopoulou et al. 2022 reported the results of the analysis of the responses regarding mental health in a sample of 187 final-year high-school students who aimed to sit, for the first time, the Panhellenic exams (June 2021) and who lived in Athens, where six-months lockdown was implemented. It is worth noting, that the depression and anxiety rates are elevated compared to previous field studies of senior high school students in Greece (Magklara et al., 2015), as well as to the pre-pandemic rates of final year high school students (Giannopoulou et al., 2021), and comparable to those reported in studies from countries with similar to Greece educational system and settings (AlAzzam et al., 2021), thus highlighting increased psychological burden experienced by students as a result of heightened family and social expectations in securing a university placement.

To sum up, adolescents facing national entrance university exams experience high levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms. Anxiety and depressive symptoms increased during the COVID-19 lockdown. Distress experienced during the lockdown predicts the severity of anxiety and depression symptoms. Targeted interventions are imperative to address the needs of young people in future waves of pandemic.

2. DESK RESEARCH

c) Country's current measures to tackle stress in secondary education

Adolescents' good mental health promotes learning and in a future stage their employment and participation in a healthy way in society and the commons. Mental health promotion includes every practice integrated into school policy that helps to develop optimal mental health and at the same time prevents the development of mental health problems, by enhancing the factors that promote pupils' psychosocial adaptation and reducing risk factors that hinder the psychosocial adjustment and learning. Considering the information presented on the "Mental Health Atlas 2020" (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021), Europe is above the global average in terms of policies or plans aimed to promoting mental health in children and adolescents.

Schools represent the most common entry point for young people to access mental health support, as it has been observed that they are twenty-one times more likely to visit a school-based psychological support service than a community-based mental health care clinic, and students are more likely to ask for help, if available, at school. Without doubt, school psychological services offer a security framework in which young people learn that seeking help and support, when needed, is normal and accepted, and thus they can receive continuous support. Regarding the tasks that a psychologist undertakes at school, the National Association of School Psychology in the USA reported that these professionals help students to succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. For that reason, they collaborate with teachers, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen the connections between home, school, and the community for all students.

Although school psychology as a science and a profession has recently been significantly expanded worldwide, (Eklund et al. 2017), in Greece the profession is still in the process of development, and steps have been taken towards its institutionalization. The institution of the school psychologist in Greek public schools was established by law 1566/85 on the structure and operation of primary and secondary education. In the Greek educational system, the roles of school psychologists and the extent to which they fulfill modern educational and social requirements have not been extensively investigated.

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c) Country's current measures to tackle stress in secondary education

Nevertheless, a series of studies have confirmed the positive views of stakeholders in the school community regarding the role of school psychologists and the recognition of their multidimensional roles (Hatzichristou, 2011).

In an international survey on teachers' perceptions of the roles of school psychologists, Greek teachers reported that the most common activities performed by psychologists in their schools were assessments of students with special educational needs, parent counseling, teacher counseling for students' behavioral disorders, and intensive collaboration and consultation with the whole school to create ideal learning conditions (Farrell et al. 2005). Similarly, the findings of a longitudinal, international study argued that the main activities of Greek psychologists, based on the time devoted to them, are psychoeducational assessments and student and parent counseling (Jimerson et al. 2009).

The findings from a recent study in Greece demonstrates the positive view and recognition of the importance of the role of the school psychologist in Greece Teachers seem to support the institution of the school psychologist, as they consider it helpful or very helpful, thus highlighting its necessity in the school context. Also, the results of this study show that there are significant differences in teachers' and psychologists' perceptions regarding the role of the latter at schools. Specifically, there are different expectations regarding the desirable and actual roles that school psychologists assume and are called upon to perform. Research indicates that many school psychologists wish to expand their role from traditional client-centered tasks to more systemic interventions such as consultation. The psychologists who participated in this study declared that they spent most of their time on student counseling, dealing with learning, behavioral, and social difficulties. This finding is in line with previous studies, which revealed a tendency to continue using the client-centered model (Panteri et al. 2021).

Notwithstanding, this study's outcomes can be considered by the Greek Ministry of Education for the long-term design of a system of school

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c) Country's current measures to tackle stress in secondary education

psychological services in the Greek educational system, through a holistic consideration of school needs. In a similar vein, we could say that the perceptions of the stakeholders themselves, (teachers, administrators, school psychologists, and students) can reinforce the institutionalization of psychological services within school units, under specific conditions, as they know and can empirically convey the needs of their schools to policymakers. Therefore, there is a need for continuous advocacy, on the part of school psychologists, as well as their professional associations, their role, and professional identity within the school context, to be able to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to the constantly changing socio-psychological conditions.

As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains in our lives, school psychology has to adapt across all aspects of training and practice. Indeed, assessment, intervention, consultation, and other forms of school psychological services have begun to be adapted and will likely look significantly different in the foreseeable future (Song et al. 2020).

The belief that the presence of a school psychologist or counselor or itself will effectively help in dealing with pupils' psychosocial adaptation difficulties is rather misleading, as his/her intervention alone is not sufficient to ensure the holistic approached systemic changes required in the field of education. Health promotion school programs in Greece, usually, obey the logic of fragmenting the problems of the school community and facing each problem separately. Specific programs aiming at prevention of drug use and abuse, school violence, emerging mental health related disorders are the usual topics of currently implemented health promotion programs in schools. What has been observed in the operation of the above mentioned actions is the fragmentation and lack of their interconnection. Even though these health programs constitute a worthwhile effort, they lack evaluation of their long-term effectiveness. In addition, they usually do not aim at systemic changes of the school community's dynamics, since they are not directed to all members of the school community. Therefore, an important objective of interventions in schools should be to rebuild the school community (Giannopoulou 2019).

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c) Country's current measures to tackle stress in secondary education

Especially, to mitigate the mental health impact of potential future restrictions measures in response to the ongoing pandemic, the Ministry of Education, the community primary health services, the educators, and parents need to be aware of the downsides of the home confinement situation in order to address more effectively the issues related to added stress experienced by already stressed young people preparing for highly competitive university entrance exams. The COVID-19 outbreak in Greece may be an opportunity to look for new models to manage more effective education and to tackle the many flaws underpinning the system of the Panhellenic university entrance exams.

3. NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT'S AND STUDENTS' WELLBEING PROMOTION

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE					
NAME OF THE PROJECT /COURSE	Program for the promotion of mental health and learning (PPMHL)				
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT/COURSE	The Program for the promotion of mental health and learning (PPMHL) integrates empirical data with recent theoretical approaches in school mental health. The program's particular characteristics include linking current relevant theory and research with practice, adjusting to the needs of students in the Greek cultural and educational setting, emphasizing "typical" instead of atypical behaviour, and using multi-dimensional and multi-method assessment (evidence-based intervention).				
TARGET GROUP	Children and teachers				
GENERAL AIM	The program's purpose is to promote children's mental health and learning, and to create a positive climate in the school environment				
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	To promote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Social skills • Expression, and dealing with feelings • Self-concept and self-esteem • Coping strategies 				
LEARNING MODULES/ OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>Promoting children's mental health learning and learning</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>Create a positive climate in the school environment</td> </tr> </table>	1	Promoting children's mental health learning and learning	2	Create a positive climate in the school environment
1	Promoting children's mental health learning and learning				
2	Create a positive climate in the school environment				
SOURCES/ REFERENCES	Chatzechrestou C.G. (Ed.). Social and Emotional Education in school: Programme for the promotion of mental health and learning in the school community. Training Materials I, II, III. Publishers Tipothito, Athens, 2011. (in Greek) http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/2014-10-22-10-29-54/2016-05-05-17-58-24/142-blog-article-49				

3. NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT'S AND STUDENTS' WELLBEING PROMOTION

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE	
NAME OF THE PROJECT /COURSE	Feeling CARED in School: A Journey Around the World
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT/COURSE	Feeling CARED in School is an international school project organized by the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the ISPA School Psychology Trainers Task Force, and the ISPA Student Organizing Committee that encourages students attending elementary and secondary schools in countries around the world to demonstrate how their school can function as a place of care for them.
TARGET GROUP	Students attending elementary and secondary schools
GENERAL AIM	The school as a system encompasses elements that can facilitate its members' adjustment and development; it has a protective role; and it provides opportunities for students to grow, develop skills, and psychologically strengthen even during challenging times.
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To highlight the role of class/school as a place that promotes and fosters children's resilience especially during trying and exceptional times. To inspire other school communities internationally to demonstrate how students can feel cared for in their school communities.
LEARNING MODULES/ OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED	1 Psychologically strengthen
	2 Acceptance by accounting for our different needs
	3 Contribute to identifying and developing our strengths
SOURCES/ REFERENCES	http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/International-Project-SCHOOL-WELL-BEING.pdf

3. NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT'S AND STUDENTS' WELLBEING PROMOTION

		GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE
NAME OF THE PROJECT /COURSE	Connecting for Caring (C4C)	
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT/COURSE	Connecting for Caring (C4C) is a multi-level prevention, awareness-building, education, and intervention project that was developed by the Center for Research and Practice in School Psychology of the University of Athens in cooperation with the Society for School and Family Consultation and Research and is implemented with the generous donation of Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Scientific project leader is Chryse (Sissy) Hatzichristou, Professor of School Psychology in the University of Athens, Greece.	
TARGET GROUP	teachers, parents, administrators, children and adolescents, mental health professionals	
GENERAL AIM	This project is based on a holistic approach to foster positive development, adjustment and support of children and adolescents in the school and in the family. It is a scientific-based project from current international and Greek literature that aims to combine scientific knowledge, research, and practice <u>in order to</u> provide useful knowledge and promote best practices for teachers, parents, administrators, mental health professionals, but also for school age and adolescent children.	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make accessible current theoretical and practical knowledge to many people utilizing the opportunities offered by modern technology. • Especially in stressful times, like the one that we are facing, it is highly important to empower all those who are important to children's lives to be able support children appropriately. 	
LEARNING MODULES/ OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED	1	Awareness-building
	2	Education and intervention
SOURCES/ REFERENCES	http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/2014-10-22-10-29-54/2016-05-05-17-58-23/163-project-connecting-for-caring-c4c	

3. NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT'S AND STUDENTS' WELLBEING PROMOTION

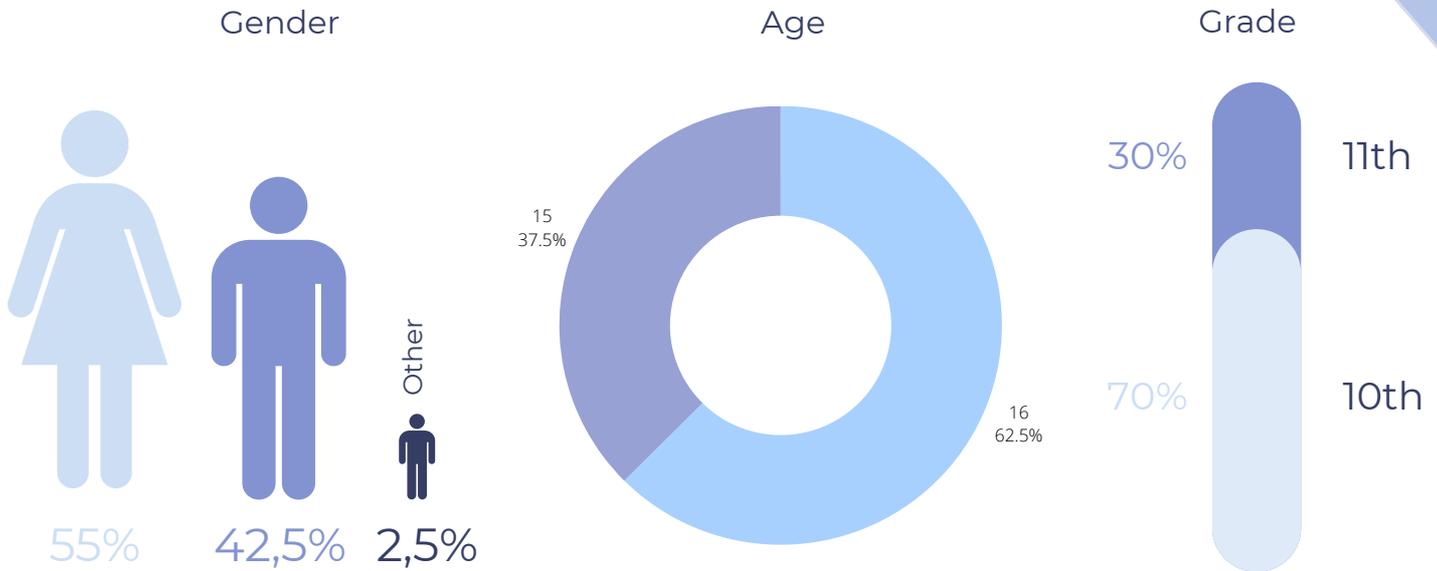
GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE	
NAME OF THE PROJECT /COURSE	"E.M.E.I.S" Program
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT/COURSE	"E.M.E.I.S" Program promotes the reinforcement of protective factors while at the same time tries to reduce the risk factors; the final outcome is to enhance the academic and psycho-social competence and well-being.
TARGET GROUP	Educators
GENERAL AIM	The aim of the program is the development of a positive climate in the school environment to reinforce the individual and group resilience as well as the promotion and development of internal strengths, motivation, and skills in the school environment.
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To offer to the educators an opportunity to strengthen their own resilience and, To offer to the educators a proposal for student support and empowerment in the classroom as well as the development of a supportive network for the school community (at large) by covering the intense needs for psychological support which have emerged from the current economic crisis.
LEARNING MODULES/ OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED	1 Promote coping and stress management
	2 Develop an intervention program that promotes positive school climate and resilience in the school environment
	3 Identify and strengthen the values pertaining the classroom and the school unit
	4 Encourage the development of self-improvement strategies in children
	5 Comprehend and manage the patterns of aggressive behaviour in the school environment during difficult times
SOURCES/ REFERENCES	http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/2014-10-22-10-29-54/2016-05-05-17-58-24/118-e-m-e-i-s-program

3. NATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT'S AND STUDENTS' WELLBEING PROMOTION

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE							
NAME OF THE PROJECT /COURSE	"We.C.A.R.E" 2012-2016						
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT/COURSE	International "WeC.A.R.E." Program is part of the wider multilevel awareness building, prevention and intervention program «Connecting for Caring-C4C» that was developed by the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology, University of Athens (CRPSP), (www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr) and the Society for School and Family Consultation and Research (SSFCR) (www.esose.gr).						
TARGET GROUP	school psychologists, teachers, and students						
GENERAL AIM	International "WeC.A.R.E." Program is a long-distance Teachers' Specialized Training and Intervention Program that was developed to promote positive school climate and to strengthen resilience in the school community and to create cultural bridges and interconnection between schools with the participation of teachers, school psychologists and students.						
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support children, teachers, and schools, especially during the difficult times of economic hardship and other unsettling events. • To create bridges that will promote cultural understanding, collaboration, and collective action. • To build resilience and foster positive attitude in the classroom. • To build an international network of schools as caring communities, in collaboration with university faculty members and psychological associations in Greece, USA and other countries. • To raise teachers' awareness and provide them training upon building resilience and children's psychosocial adjustment and enhancing positive climate. 						
LEARNING MODULES/ OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">1</td> <td>Promote positive school climate</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td>Strengthen resilience in the school community</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td>Create cultural bridges and interconnection between schools with the participation of teachers, school psychologists and students</td> </tr> </table>	1	Promote positive school climate	2	Strengthen resilience in the school community	3	Create cultural bridges and interconnection between schools with the participation of teachers, school psychologists and students
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2	Strengthen resilience in the school community						
3	Create cultural bridges and interconnection between schools with the participation of teachers, school psychologists and students						
SOURCES/ REFERENCES	http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/newslettereng.pdf						

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

a) The respondents' profile



b) Collected data about stress and stressful situations

40%

of the students have moderate to high levels of stress daily

47,5%

of the students feel confident to deal with stress

Main sources of students' stress



Study issues



Future perspectives



Difficulties in leisure management



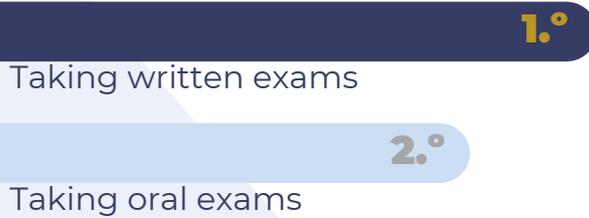
Failure in sports

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

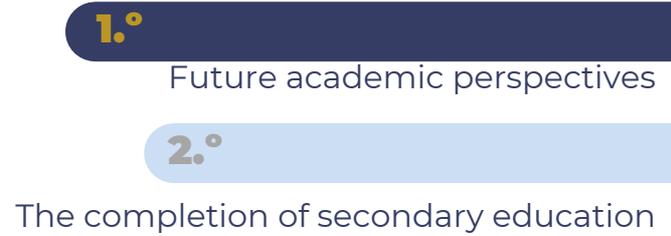
b) Collected data about stress and stressful situations

TOP situations in which students feel stressed inside each main source

Study issues



Future perspectives



Family issues



Interactions with teachers

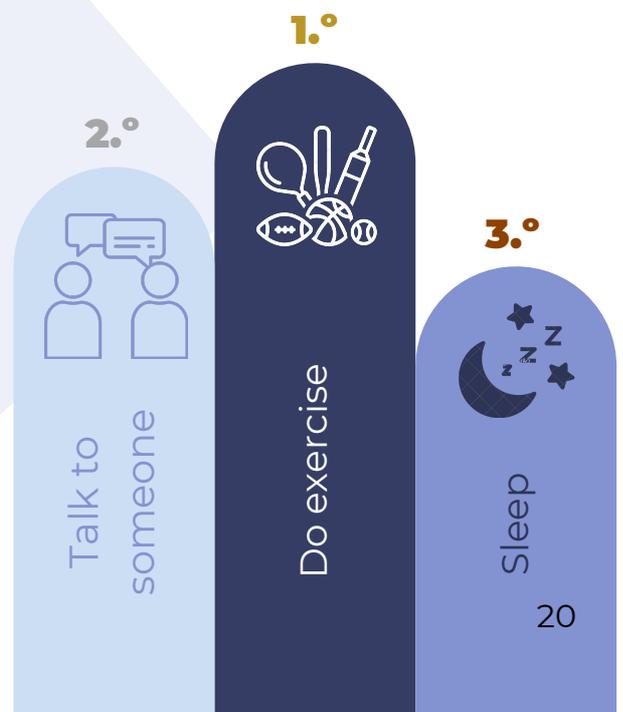


Emotional effects of stress

Our students revealed that when they are stressed, they feel **insecurity** about your abilities (67,5%), **pessimism** about their future (50%), **irritability** or anger towards others (42,5%) and **feeling isolated** or misunderstood (40%)



Students' personal methods to relieve stress



4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

c) Collected data about the “3D Virtual World Learning Environment” (3D VWLE)

55,5% of the Greek students plays video - games less than once a week or never. 12,5% plays at list once a week and 45 % plays more than once a week or every day. Regarding the possible features and functionalities that the POSITIVE 3D Virtual Learning Environment (3D VLE) might have, the gamified mechanism that the Greek students most wanted to see are “Open world map with multiple locations”, “Awards and points” and “Avatar personalization (e.g., clothes, items, physical aspect, etc.)”. About the cooperative play and social interactions, all the items (“Chat”, “Voice communication”, “Virtual items and media sharing” and “Cooperative tasks and missions”) was equally high in the desires of the Greek students.

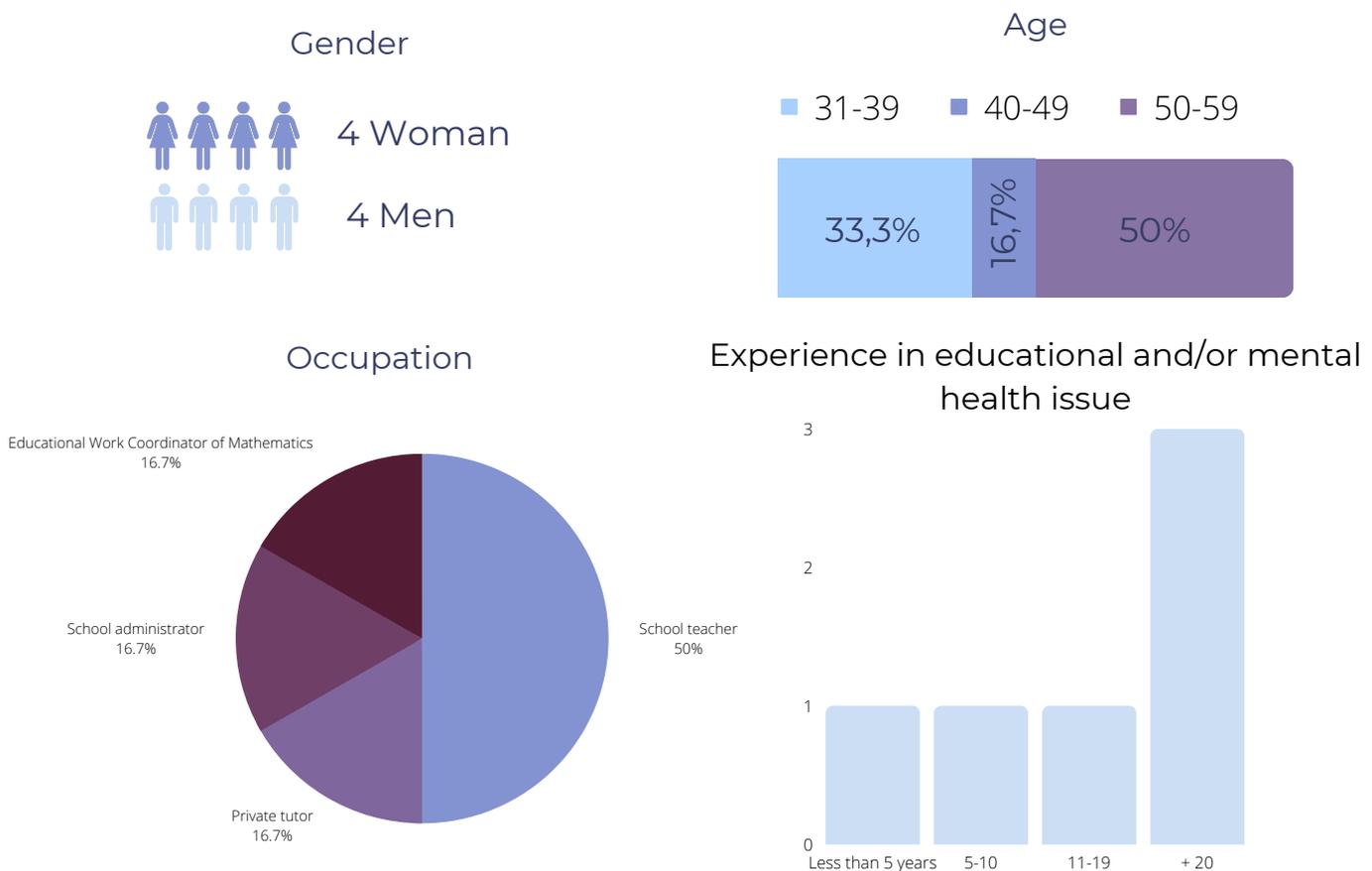
d) Insights and main findings

Almost half of the Greek students participated in the questionnaire experience high levels of stress but also also feel capable to deal with it. Taking exams seems to be the main stressful causes for the students. According to the bibliography adolescents facing national entrance university exams experience high levels of anxiety symptoms. Additionally, the time that students have available to complete schoolwork and the family's pressure also seems to be causes of high stress in students.



5. THE FOCUS GROUP FOR TEACHERS AND MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS

a) The participants' profile



b) Topics addressed, insights and main findings

During the focus group an extensive discussion took place. The main topic was the secondary education students' stress and how gamification (more precisely 3D VWLE) could support them in relieving and managing stress. More specifically, the following aspects were analysed:

- Secondary education students stress
- Strategies to cope with students' stress
- Gamification for relieving students' stress

The main points that emerged from the discussion regarding "Secondary education students stress" are described below.

5. THE FOCUS GROUP FOR TEACHERS AND MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS

b) Topics addressed, insights and main findings

According to the participants of the Focus Group the sources of stress for students can be detected in the following three areas:

- Social acceptance: Students seem to struggle a lot to gain the social acceptance of their peers. They want to feel accepted and liked by others. In this context, students must cope with puberty stress, and their efforts to form friendships and relationships.
- Learning process: Students seem to have great stress when it comes to exams and especially exams for entering the university. However, they also cope with stress caused by everyday homework and their duty to be ready for school every day.
- Family: Many students have stress because of problems within their families; economic problems, bad relationships between parents, etc.

In the school context, excess stress causes opposite results from the expected. For example, it is widely observed that students who stress excessively – and is not a productive way – for their learning performance, finally tend to have relatively low grades, especially in written exams. Additionally, it is observed that students who are seeking social acceptance among their peers without response are so much stressed they self-isolate and, in some cases, they neither want to go to school nor participate in school activities like excursions, etc. Additionally, the overwhelming effort deprives them of the opportunity to have personal time.

Sometimes cultural and family background and gender are factors that affect students seeking help—for example, female students tend to approach female teachers when they are struggling with something, and accordingly, male students approach male teachers. Additionally, students that are not part of a majority group may be less likely to seek help, especially if they feel isolated and “different.”

The main points that emerged from the discussion regarding “**Strategies to cope with students’ stress**” are described below.

5. THE FOCUS GROUP FOR TEACHERS AND MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS

b) Topics addressed, insights and main findings

Arsakeio lyceum of Patras to help pupils relieve their stress, has a permanent psychologist available for the community of the school. The psychologist is reachable every day, especially for students seeking help, but also for teachers. Her contribution is useful in many ways as she can coordinate useful training for the teachers aiming to help them cope better with everyday issues.

In addition, in Arsakeio school there is also a School Counselor who is handling everyday issues, and in some cases is responsible for appointing certain students to Diagnostic Assessment Centers for Counseling and Support (KEDASI). Those centers are decentralized public services of the Ministry of Education, and they are responsible for helping people with special educational needs.

Moreover, students seek help when they get positive information about help opportunities. In this context, teachers should observe kids' behaviour; they should listen, see, and feel their students, get in touch with them; and of course, they should have empathy and discretion to create a relationship based on trust. In this way, students will feel loved, and accepted and that school is a safe place surrounded by people who care about them. It is important to create an environment of security and acceptance as some students don't have this even in their homes, along with a supportive, positive classroom environment. In some cases, when teachers fruitfully cooperate with caring parents, kids seem to have less stress and be happier. Both the teachers from Arsakeio and the experts of the focus group suggest that students should be asked 'Why are you stressed?' and not told 'Do not stress!'. They also believe that every teacher or professor needs more training regarding stress management issues.

Students should develop communicational skills to be able to communicate their needs and ask for help. Additionally, students should develop confidence and critical thinking, which also helps them in communicating their needs. Teachers can help them develop those skills through the learning process.

5. THE FOCUS GROUP FOR TEACHERS AND MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS

b) Topics addressed, insights and main findings

Finally, the main points that emerged from the discussion regarding “Gamification for relieving students’ stress” are described below.

Discussing the role of gamification and simulation in relieving students’ stress the participants agreed that gamification improve students’ attention, engagement, and learning through the following:

- *Empowering students:* Gamification entails recognizing students using various game elements such as awarding students with badges, certificates, and trophies for their efforts. This gives a student confidence and encourages him to believe in himself.
- *Trying is fun:* It is no longer exhausting to solve and try new problems every day. Trying now is more enjoyable than intimidating.
- *Focusing on meaningful learning tasks:* By making a subject easier to understand, gamification encourages students to pay attention to real-world problems.
- *Taking Initiative:* Gamification empowers students to solve problems by earning more rewards and points. This boosts students’ confidence, preparing them for difficult challenges and problems.
- *Free from judgment:* Many teachers continue to shame students for poor grades and poor performance. Gamification has altered the game of learning by allowing students to learn while having fun without being judged.
- *Self-Evaluation:* The most important evaluation is self-evaluation. Students learn about their own strengths and weaknesses and how to improve them.

The focus group agreed that a 3D Virtual Learning Environment (3D VLE), defined as a computer-based simulated 3D platform populated by many users who can interact and create content inside it, not only, helps students deal with their stress, but also will engage students in the learning process even more.

The focus group had experience in using a MOOC learning environment, through a previous Erasmus+ project (CHOICE: <https://www.euchoice.eu/>),

5. THE FOCUS GROUP FOR TEACHERS AND MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS

b) Topics addressed, insights and main findings

where students engaged with great success, so they believe that this effort will have great success and engagement by the learning community. Additionally, teachers have observed that students tend to engage in different learning practices and embrace new challenges. For example, when the teaching method of flipped classrooms was used in some classes, the interest of the students was significantly raised, and they were very enthusiastic.

The participants concluded that the design of a 3D Virtual Learning Environment should be created carefully to effectively help young students relieve stress and to avoid the opposite results. Students should not be stressed within the 3D VWLE to achieve their goals.

c) Evaluation of the focus group and feedback received

After the discussion, the participants completed a questionnaire for evaluating the results of the Focus Group. According to the data received from the answers of the questionnaire, the participants seemed to be highly satisfied of the organisation of the focus group and their involvement in the topics discussed.

6. GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE “3D VIRTUAL WORLD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT” (3D VWLE)

Main stressors for students:

- School demands: especially exams, lack of leisure time
- Expectations and pressure to do well at school from parents and family
- Problems due to adolescence: changes in their bodies etc.
- Family issues: divorce of parents, Family financial problems etc.
- Problems with friends and/or peers at school
- life challenges, such as leaving school or getting into tertiary studies
- Stress due to pandemic: Death of a loved one

Main characteristics of the 3D VWLE

- Functionalities:
 - Awards and points
 - Avatar personalization
 - Mini games
 - Role-play
 - Missions and tasks
 - Cooperative challenges and social interactions
 - Storyline
- Scenarios:
 - Classroom
 - Natural environment
- Situations:
 - Bullying
 - Socialization
 - Addictions
 - LGBT

7. CONCLUSIONS

Research shows that high levels of mental health are associated with increased learning, creativity and productivity, more pro-social behaviour and positive social relationships, and with improved physical health and life expectancy. According to mental health research conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in four students has a diagnosable mental illness. Anxiety and stress related to the dissatisfaction with school, stress from exams, pressure from peers and family - are still reported.

There is consistency of evidence on the link between school environment and student mental health. So, schools play a vital role in promoting students' mental. There is no doubt that Greece still needs more state measures that act in the prevention of problems related to students' mental health. Therefore, an important objective of interventions in schools should be to rebuild the school community. Given the increased accessibility and practicality of virtual reality it becomes paramount to extend the utility of VR to guide students to effectively address any mental health challenges. The Positive Project is an innovation for the data of our country with many expected benefits.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. PARTICIPANTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

This short questionnaire aims at collecting some general data (age, gender, occupation, motivation/expectations) related to you and your participation in the focus group.

1 - Age range:

- 25 – 30 years old
- 31 – 39 years old
- 40 – 49 years old
- 50 – 59 years old
- + 60 years old

2 - Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

3 - Occupation:

- School teacher
- Psychologist
- School administrator
- Mental Health Expert
- Other _____

4 - Experience in educational and/or mental health issue:

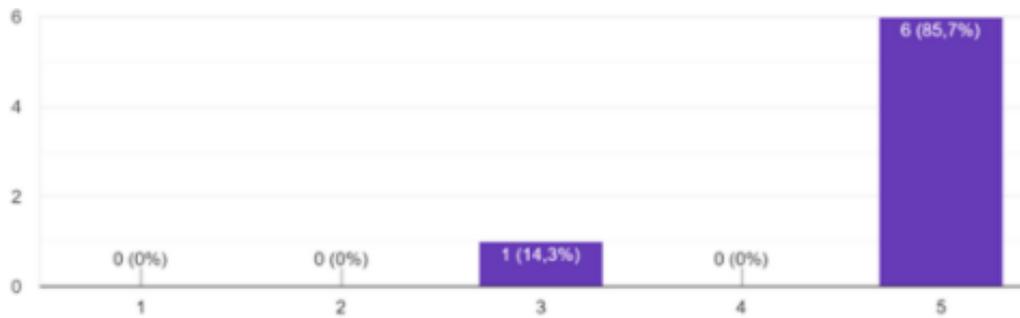
- Less than 5 years
- 5 – 10 years
- 11 – 19 years
- + 20 years

5 - Motivation for participating in the focus group:

ANNEX 2. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE'S RESULTS

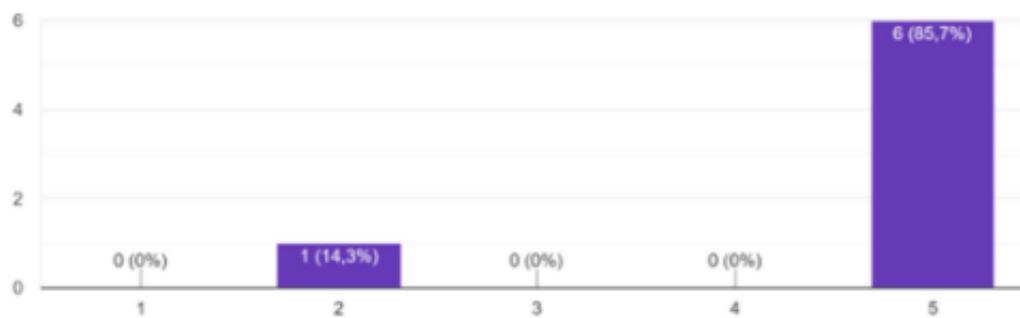
1. The information you received before the focus group were exhaustive and facilitated your participation.

7 απαντήσεις



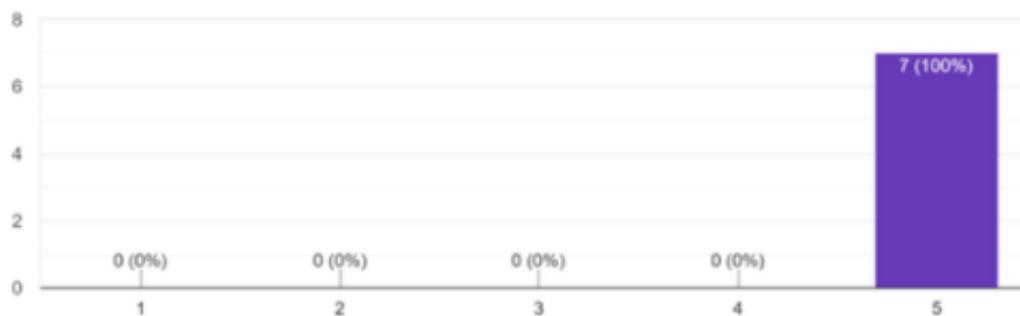
2. The duration of the focus group was adequate.

7 απαντήσεις



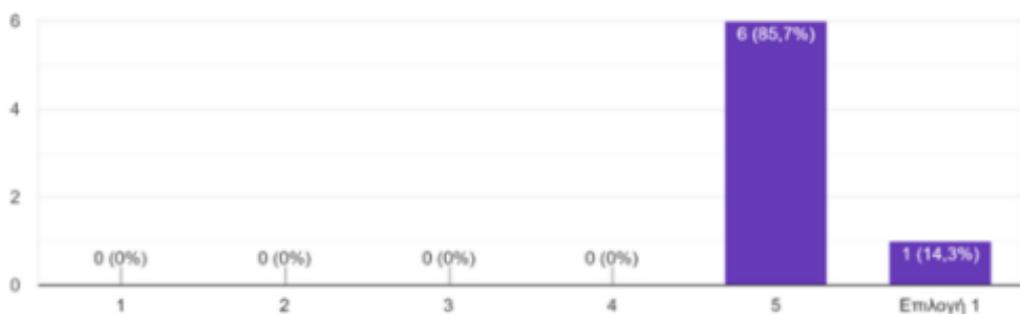
3. The rooms used for the focus group were adequate (I could hear and see well) and the digital/technological tools worked properly (e.g. projector, internet).

7 απαντήσεις



4. The focus group was well structured.

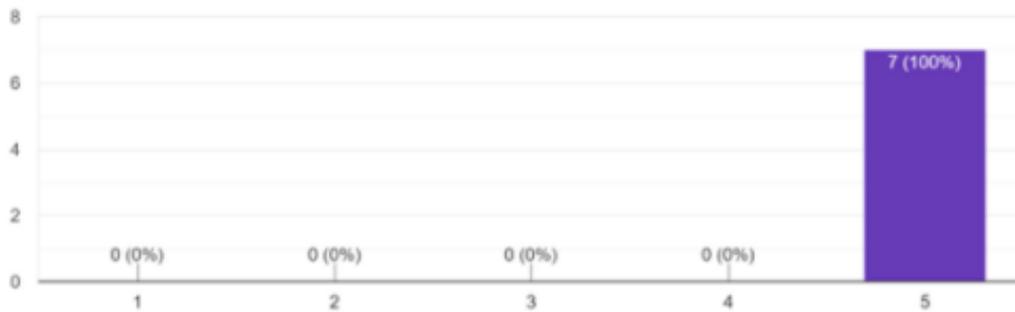
7 απαντήσεις



ANNEX 2. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE'S RESULTS

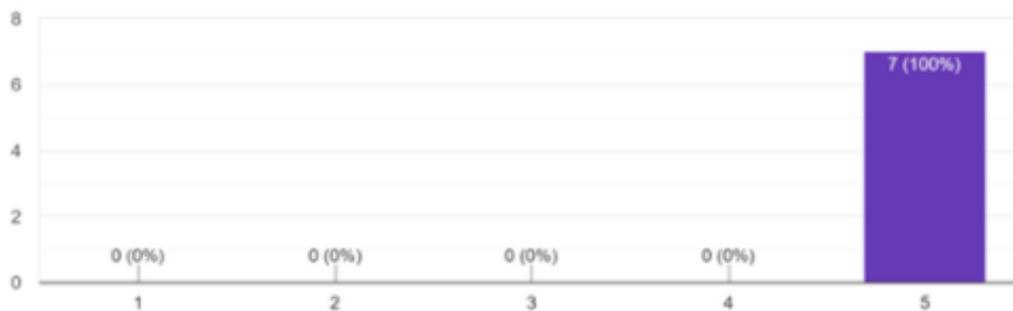
5. The participation of all people was active.

7 απαντήσεις



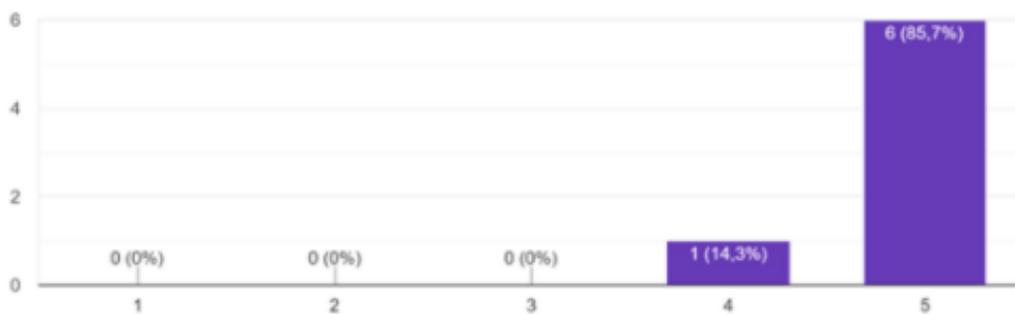
6. You felt heard during the focus group.

7 απαντήσεις



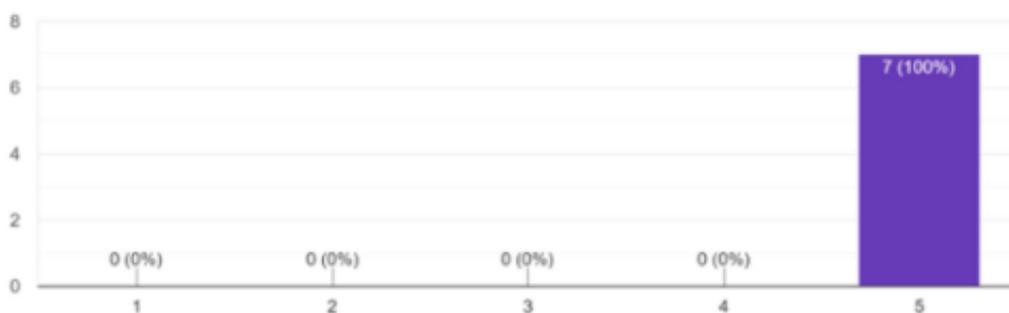
7. By participating in the training, I deepened my knowledge about workshops' topics.

7 απαντήσεις



8. The topics addressed during the focus group were in line with your expectations.

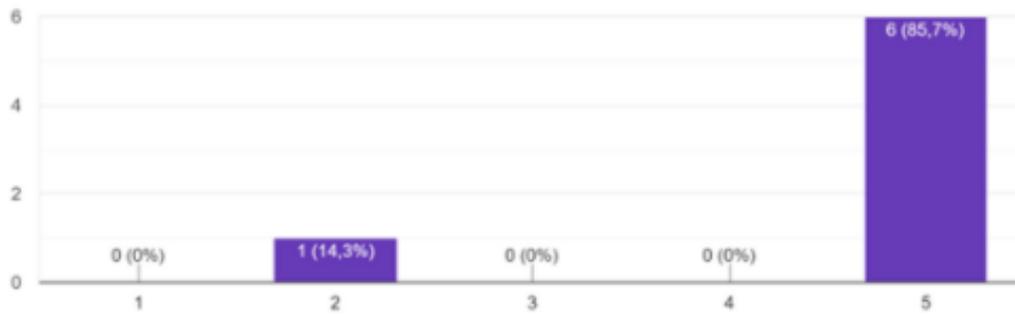
7 απαντήσεις



ANNEX 2. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE'S RESULTS

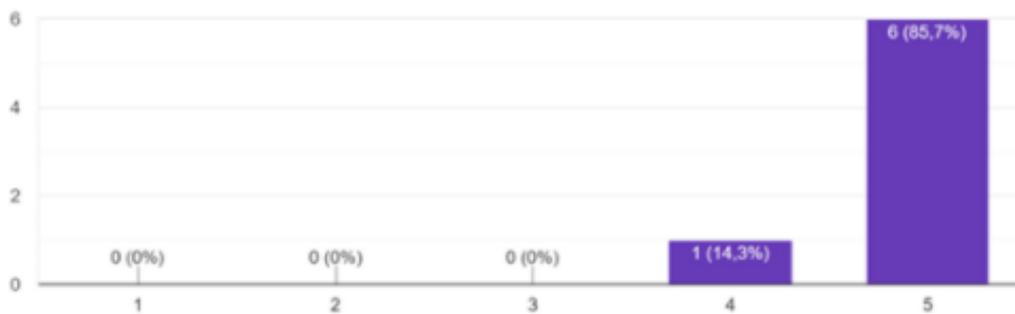
9. An adequate amount of time and attention was dedicated to each topic.

7 απαντήσεις



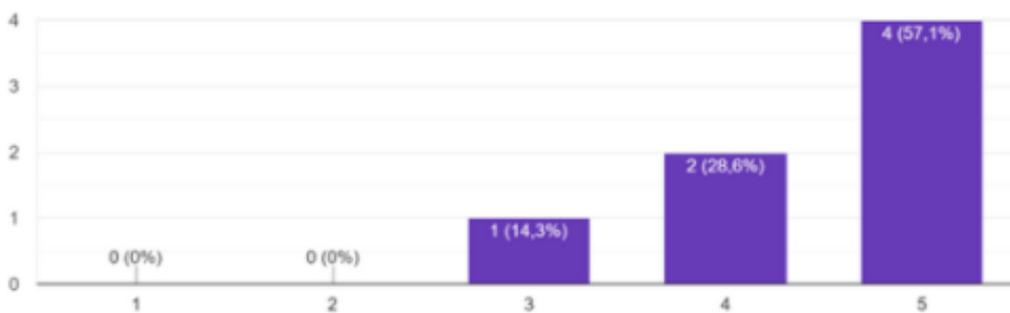
10. The focus group help makes you reflect on student's stress topic.

7 απαντήσεις



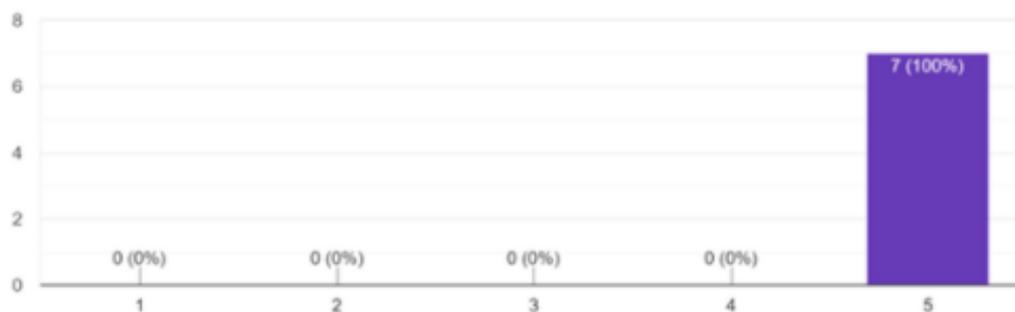
11. You learn something new about students' stress in school setting during the focus group.

7 απαντήσεις



12. The topics addressed were interesting and engaging.

7 απαντήσεις



ANNEX 2. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE'S RESULTS

13. The topics addressed during the focus group were innovative.

7 απαντήσεις

