

THE AGE IN BETWEEN

Understanding Emerging Adults' (18-29)
mental health in the Nordics

Next in Mind

Scaling wellbeing for emerging adults in the Nordics



Report developed by

Perspetivo

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Introduction

Emerging adults across the Nordic countries face unique and evolving mental health challenges that require inclusive, affordable and accessible solutions. In fact, no other age group reports as many challenges as 18-29 year-olds while also having a hard time accessing affordable and appropriate support. Many emerging adults have not been equipped with the skills to handle the transitions and critical life events that we all go through in the journey to full adulthood. This is one of the greatest challenges facing our Nordic societies today. If we continue down this path, we risk leaving a whole generation behind.

Why we developed this report

We developed this report to address the growing need to identify and acknowledge Emerging Adults (18-29) as a prioritized target group for mental health support in the Nordics. By providing a comprehensive overview of the challenges and differences in mental health experiences, our goal is to inform decision-makers, raise awareness, and advocate for improved access to mental health services that are attuned to the needs of this generation.

About the initiative Next in Mind

This report is a part of the collective impact initiative Next in Mind, co-founded by Reach for Change, The Inner Foundation and Tim Bergling Foundation. With Next in Mind, our mission is to empower social entrepreneurs with the innovative solutions we need in order to make mental health resources for emerging adults more accessible and effective. Social entrepreneurs are key to challenging and complementing traditional systems and approaches. They test and pilot innovative ideas, and build much-needed solutions based on direct target group involvement. With these approaches, social entrepreneurs have a remarkable ability to revolutionize mental health support, but they can't do it alone. To thrive and expand their impact, they require a nurturing ecosystem and the unwavering support of cross-sector partners.

Method: About the Survey

Methodology description

Perspetivo, on behalf of Next in Mind, conducted a digital survey targeting individuals aged 18 to 30 years to assess the mental health of emerging adults in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. The survey was carried out in full compliance with GDPR regulations, ensuring the privacy and anonymity of all respondents. The survey methodology was designed to be inclusive, randomized, and, most importantly, representative of the target population across the specified countries.

Sampling and recruitment approach

The survey employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure demographic and geographic representativeness across the target group. Respondents were recruited through Perspetivo's established and demographically balanced research panels in each country. In addition, to enhance the breadth of the sample and capture diverse behavioral patterns and mental health conditions, we utilized digital outreach methods via social media platforms. This supplementary recruitment strategy allowed us to reach over 62,000 individuals within the target age range (18–30 years) across Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark.

Inclusivity and language adaptation

The survey was accessible in five languages: Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, and English, allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire in their preferred language. This linguistic flexibility ensured inclusivity and enhanced respondent comfort, leading to higher quality responses. All survey materials were developed and validated in accordance with culturally relevant best practices for the Nordic context.

Data collection and processing

A total of 2,069 individuals initiated the survey. Of these, 1,110 respondents met the predefined eligibility criteria related to emerging adults' mental health, qualifying them for further participation. The final dataset consists of 1,046 completed responses, reflecting a high completion rate of 95%. Given the survey's design, not all respondents answered every question, and the number of responses per item is consistently noted in parentheses alongside relevant data visualizations throughout the report.

Statistical validity and confidence levels

The overall sample size provides a 99% confidence level with a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$ for the total sample (all countries), ensuring that the results are statistically robust and reflective of the broader target population. The survey was conducted over a period spanning June and July 2024.

Data integrity and ethical considerations

In line with GDPR and ESOMAR's ethical research standards, all respondent data was handled with strict confidentiality. The survey was technically fully anonymous, and no personally identifiable information was collected at any stage without consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, with respondents given clear information about the study's purpose and the option to withdraw at any time.

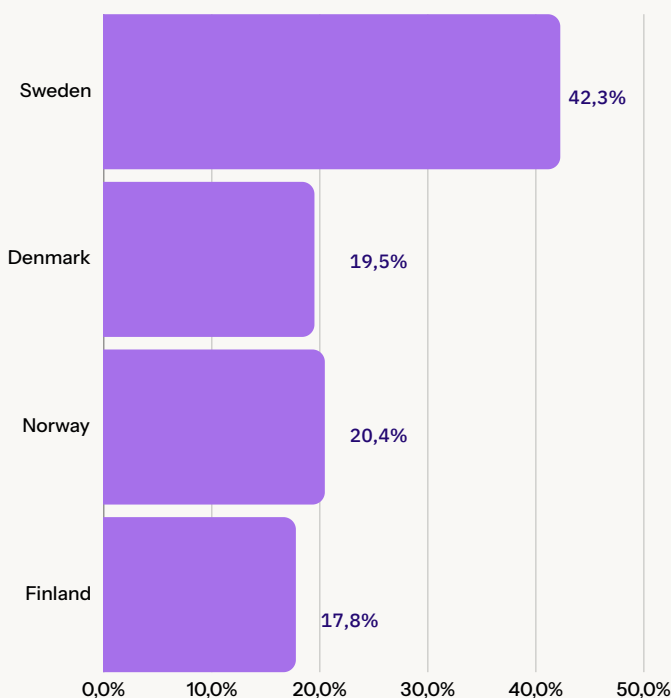
DEMOGRAPHY

Demography

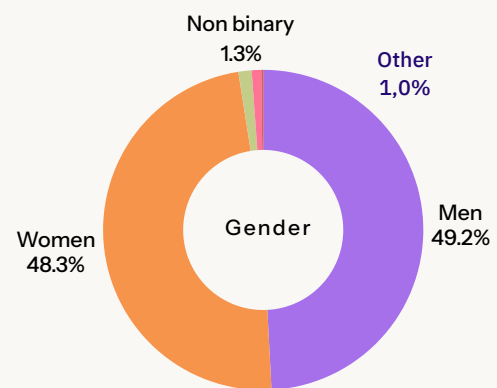
Emerging adulthood is a life stage between 18 and 29 years old. In the Nordic region there are about 3.8 million people in this age group, making up around 14 percent of the population.

This life stage is important and comes with a lot of opportunities, but also challenges. When we turn 18 we have the legal rights and responsibilities of adults. We have the freedom to make choices about our life and take advantage of the opportunities that come with being adults. But many of us find ourselves struggling to handle the big changes and uncertainties that we face during the transition to adulthood.

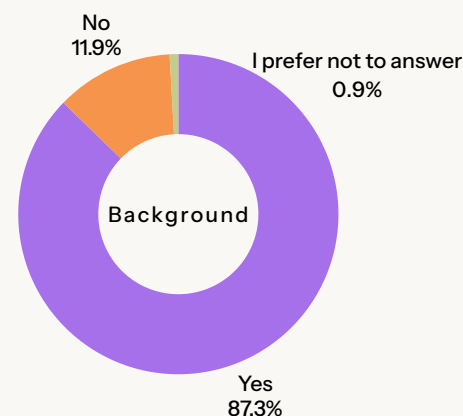
Where do you live? (1046)



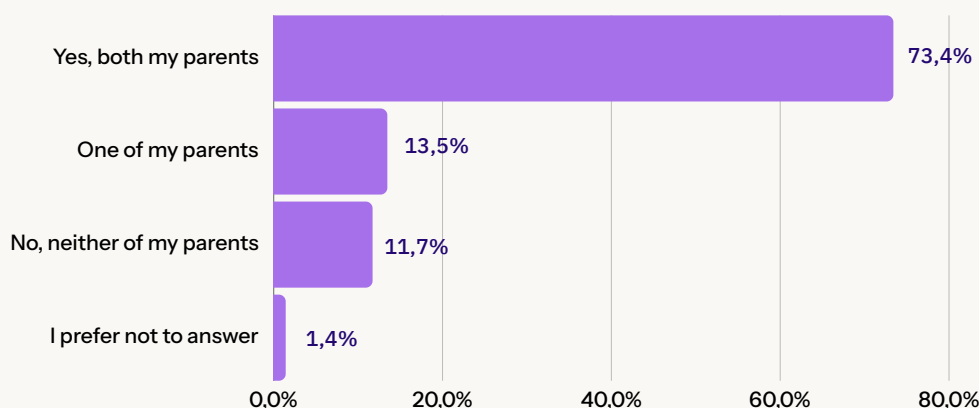
How do you identify yourself? (1046)



Are you born in Sweden/Norway/Denmark/Finland? (1046)



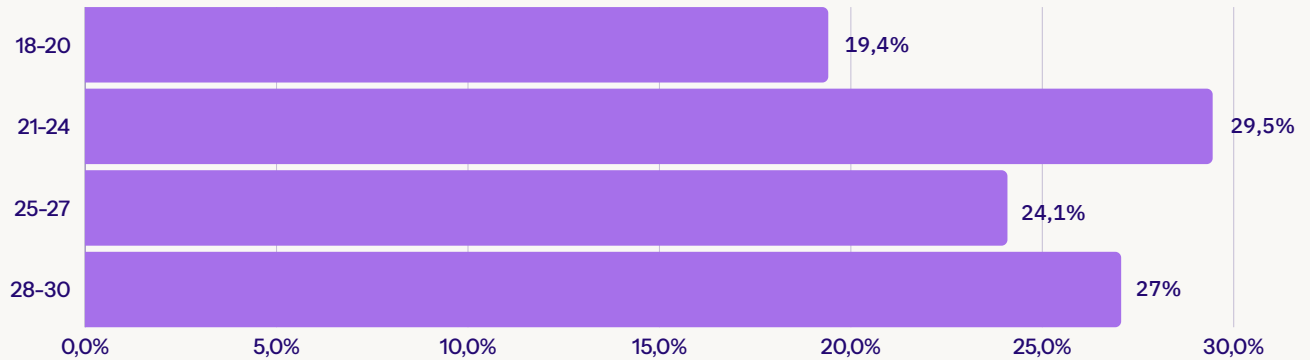
Are your parents born in Sweden/Norway/Denmark/Finland? (914)



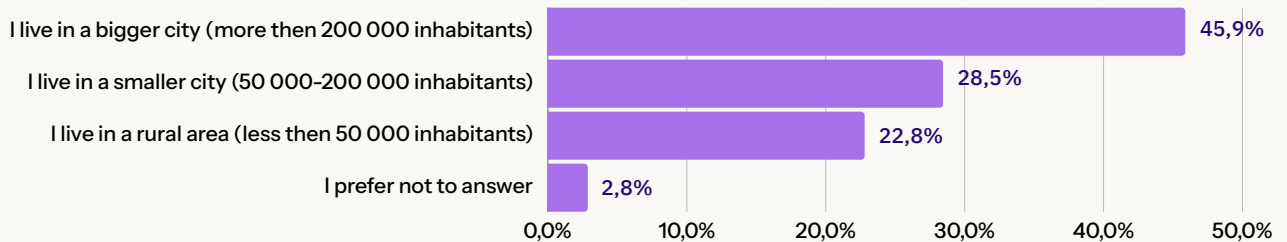
The representation across the Nordic countries is well-aligned with the population size of each country, ensuring a balanced reflection of the demographic. This alignment extends to the representation of foreign-born individuals and gender, indicating that the data effectively captures the diverse composition of the region.

Demography

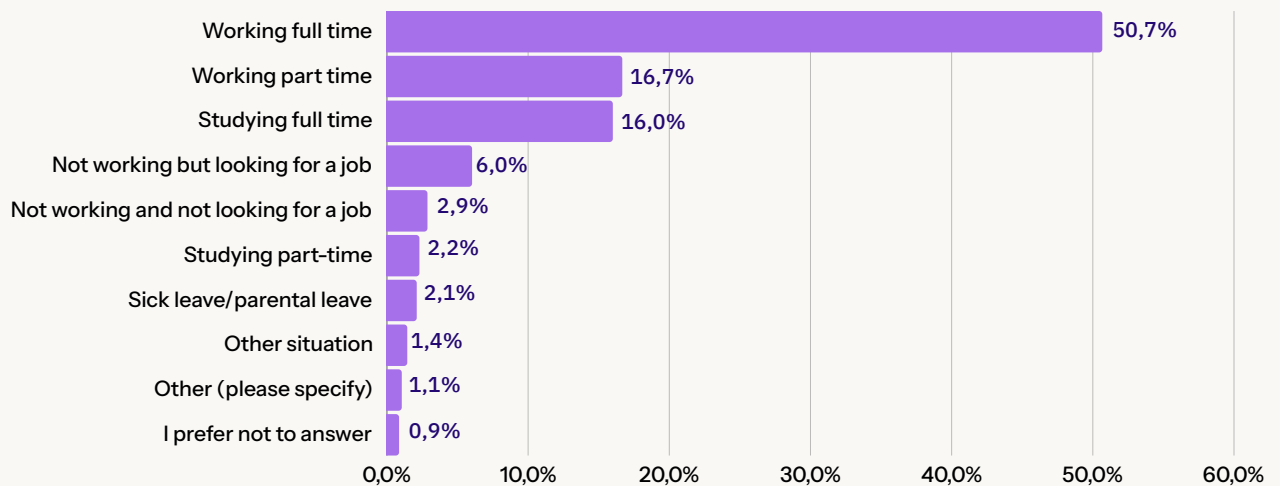
How old are you? (1046)



How would you describe the area you live in? (1044)



What is your current situation? (1044)

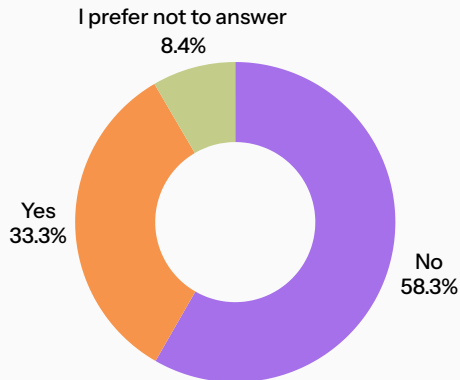


The representation is well-distributed across various demographics, including age, living area, and employment status, ensuring a comprehensive view of the population. Notably, the majority of respondents are actively engaged in either work or studies, reflecting the prevalent life stages and economic participation among young adults.

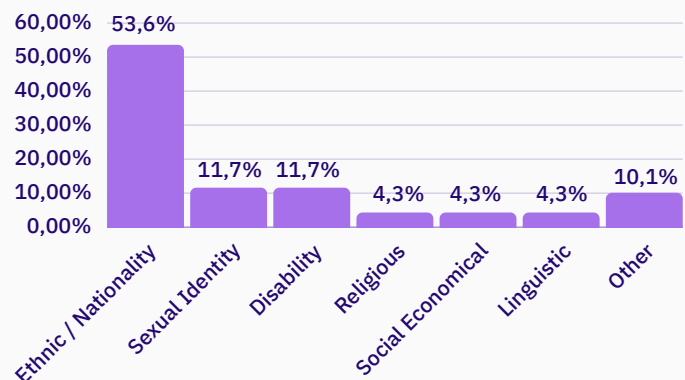
Demography

33%
Consider themselves to be a part of a minority group.

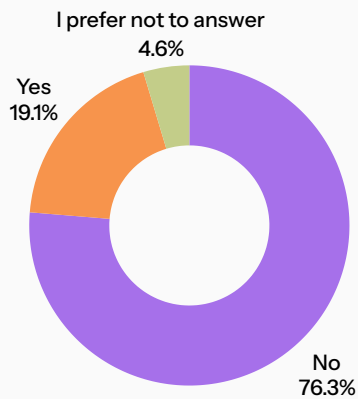
Would you say that you are a part of a minority group? (1044)



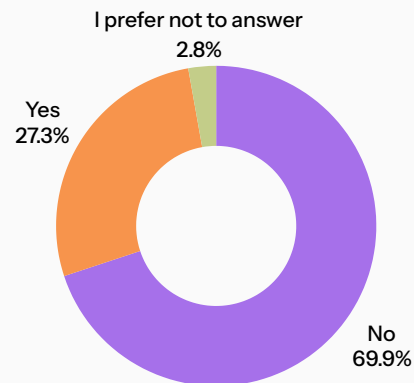
What type of minority? (71)*
Open answer



Do you have a disability? (1034)



Do you have a neuropsychiatric disorder? (1034)



Among all respondents, 33% identify as part of a minority group, with ethnicity or nationality being the most commonly mentioned factors in open-ended responses. This aligns closely with the demographic profile, particularly among those who are either foreign-born or have a foreign background.

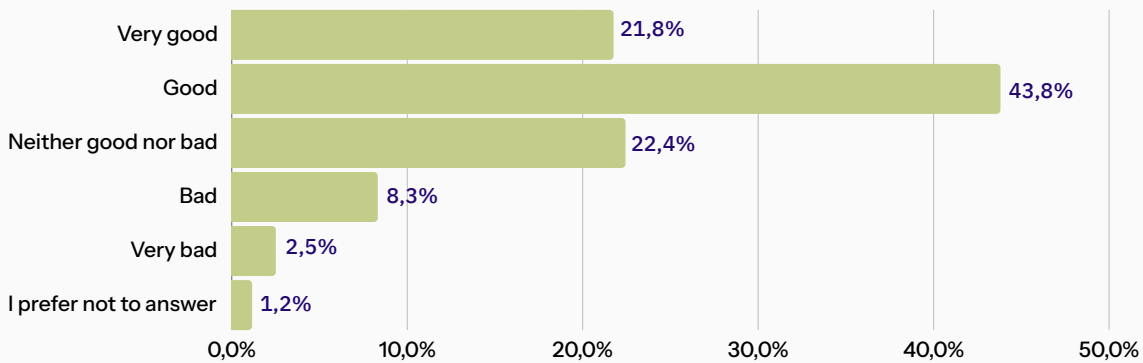
Additionally, 19% of respondents report having a disability, and 27% indicate they have a neuropsychiatric disorder. These figures suggest a significant presence of individuals with diverse needs, highlighting the importance of considering these factors when addressing mental health and support services.

*Please note that this question was not mandatory.

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

Mental Health

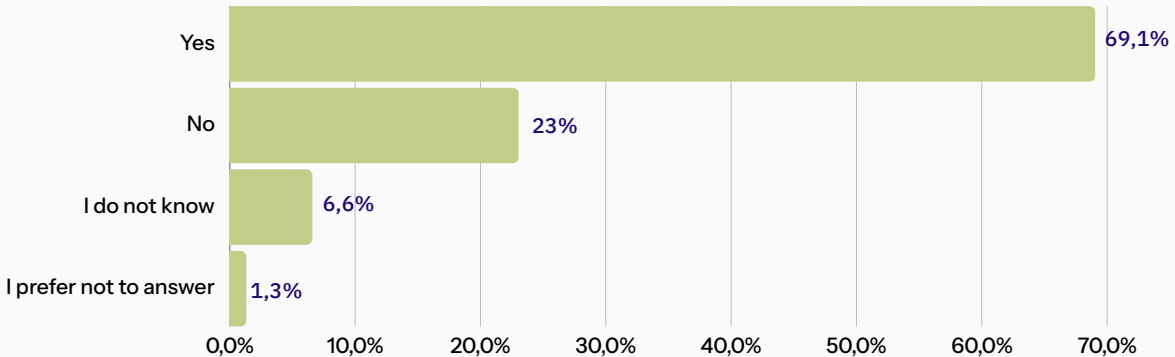
How are you feeling right now in general? (1034)



69%

Have felt unwell
sometime in the past.

Have you been feeling unwell in the past? (911)

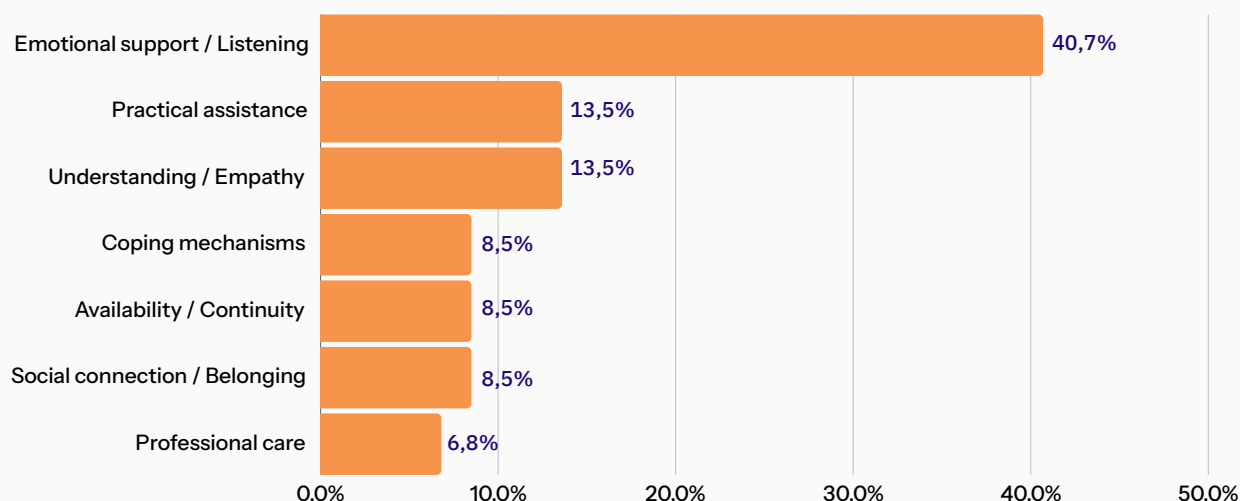


A majority of respondents currently report feeling "very good" or "good," yet 69% have experienced periods of feeling unwell in the past. This contrast highlights a concerning prevalence of mental health issues among young adults, indicating that while many are in a positive state now, a significant portion has struggled with mental illness or emotional distress at some point. This also reveals critical insights into the factors that have either contributed to their recovery or failed to improve their well-being, underscoring the importance of understanding what works and what doesn't in fostering lasting mental health.

RESPONDENTS SUGGESTIONS

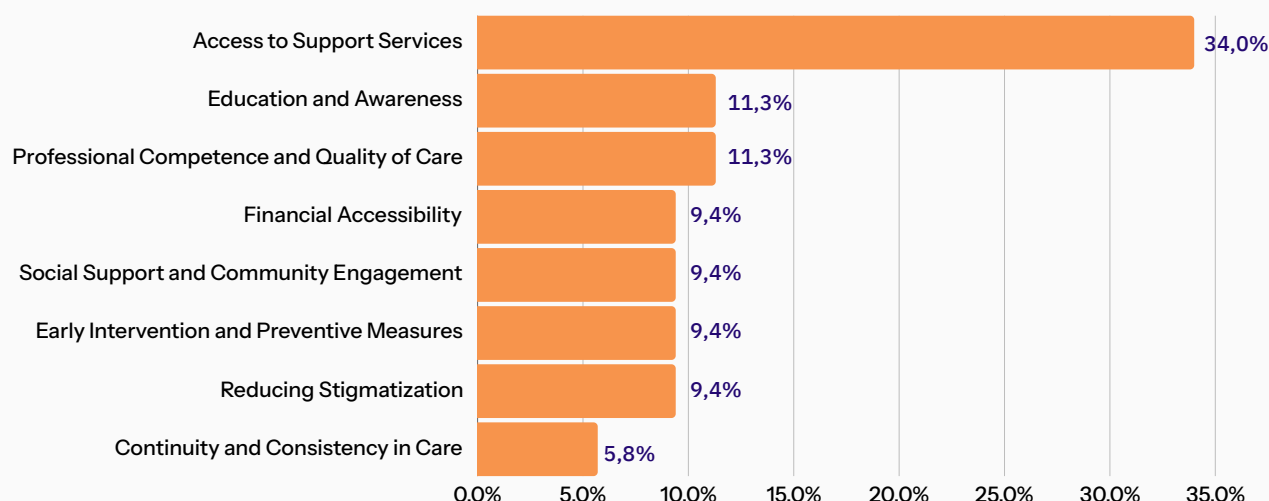
Respondents Suggestions

Briefly describe what good support means to you in order to better manage life mentally when it is tough and difficult. *
Open answer (64)



When asked to describe what constitutes good support during difficult times, 40,7% of respondents emphasize the importance of emotional support and having someone who listens. Additionally, 13,6% highlight the need for practical assistance and understanding or empathy, reflecting a desire for both emotional and tangible help. These responses suggest that effective support, according to respondents, involves a balance of emotional, practical, and social elements that help individuals navigate mental challenges.

What measures do you consider necessary to create good, functioning and inclusive support for young adults' mental health in Sweden/Norway/Finland/Denmark? (57)*
Open answer



In response to what is necessary for improving mental health support for young adults in the Nordics, 34% of respondents suggest better access to services as a top priority. Their suggestions also highlight the importance of enhanced education, awareness, and professional competence in mental health care. These insights reflect a nuanced understanding among respondents of the multifaceted barriers that need to be addressed to create a more inclusive and effective mental health system.

*Please note that these questions were not mandatory.

INSIGHTS

Key insights

Mental Health State for Emerging Adults in the Nordics

How do young adults that are feeling unwell or has been feeling unwell in the past primarily describe the state of their mental health?

Mental health today is profoundly influenced by a range of factors, with anxiety, depression, uncertainty about the future, and loneliness standing out as the most significant challenges people face. These emotional and psychological stressors are not only prevalent but also persist over time, underscoring the ongoing need for effective support systems.

When diving deeper into the specifics, clear differences emerge between various demographic groups. Women, for instance, tend to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression, often tied to relational and emotional stressors. They are also significantly concerned about loneliness and future uncertainty. Men, while also affected by anxiety and depression, show a stronger focus on their future security, particularly in terms of career and life direction.

Individuals born outside of the Nordic countries often struggle more with loneliness, likely due to challenges in social integration. In contrast, those born within the Nordic countries are more likely to cite anxiety and depression as their primary concerns.

Neuropsychiatric diagnoses significantly impact mental health, with a higher percentage of individuals with such diagnoses currently feeling unwell and having experienced mental health challenges in the past.

We can see that anxiety and depression are the most significant mental health challenges in Sweden, Finland, and Norway. However, in Denmark, uncertainty about the future and career is the leading concern, with nearly half of the respondents identifying it as their primary issue.

Key Factors Influencing Mental Health

What are the key factors and challenges in an emerging adults life with potential to influence mental health?

Stress at work or school and conflicts with family or friends are the most prominent challenges that significantly impact individuals' moods and overall well-being. Personal losses, like the death of a loved one or breakups, further exacerbate emotional distress, while financial difficulties and examination stress also contribute to the pressures people face in their daily lives. These factors collectively highlight the deep connection between community influences and mental health.

The impact of these community factors varies notably between different demographic groups. Women, for example, are particularly vulnerable to interpersonal and emotional stressors. They are more likely to be affected by conflicts with family or friends, financial difficulties, and examination stress. Additionally, women report a higher impact from trauma or violence, reflecting a greater sensitivity to relational and emotional challenges.

Men, on the other hand, are more affected by physical challenges and social discrimination. They tend to be more impacted by incidents such as accidents or injuries, as well as by experiences of discrimination or racism. Social or political events also have a more pronounced effect on men's mental health, suggesting that they are more influenced by external, situational factors. Cultural background further diversifies these experiences.

Those not born in Nordic countries face higher levels of stress related to unemployment and discrimination, pointing to the challenges of integrating into a new society and facing potential bias. Conversely, individuals born in Nordic countries are more significantly affected by trauma or violence and personal losses, such as the death of a loved one, indicating that their mental health struggles may be more tied to personal and relational events rather than societal issues.

Finns report the highest impact from the loss of a loved one and trauma or violence, indicating that grief and traumatic experiences are particularly significant stressors in Finland. In contrast, Norwegians are more affected by conflicts with family or friends and feelings of alienation, suggesting that interpersonal relationships and social disconnection are more pressing concerns in Norway. Danes experience a higher impact from social media, highlighting the influence of digital environments on mental health in Denmark. Meanwhile, Swedes report the highest impact from stress related to work and education.

Key insights

Impactful Life Events for Young Adults

What are the pivotal moments in an emerging adults life when mental health is determined?

For young adults, the most impactful life events revolve around the journey of self-discovery and understanding their identity. These experiences are pivotal in shaping personal development and overall well-being as they navigate the complexities of adulthood. Alongside self-discovery, forming social connections, such as finding friends and engaging in romantic relationships or cohabitation, plays a crucial role in their transition to adulthood. These milestones highlight the importance of both personal growth and social integration during this formative stage of life.

The impact of these life events varies significantly across gender and cultural backgrounds. Women tend to place a stronger emphasis on self-discovery and managing everyday life, indicating that their transition to adulthood is deeply intertwined with personal growth and the responsibilities of daily living. Men, in contrast, prioritize more practical concerns, such as finding housing and moving out of their parental home.

Cultural background further shapes these experiences. Young adults born outside of Nordic countries are more affected by starting studies and finding housing. On the other hand, individuals born in Nordic countries place a greater emphasis on relationships, viewing romantic and social connections as significant life events. This focus suggests that for Nordic-born young adults, the social aspects of their lives play a more central role in their transition to adulthood, with less immediate concern for the practicalities of housing and more emphasis on building and maintaining personal relationships.

Norwegians and Swedes are most impacted by the journey of understanding what they want and can do, highlighting the importance of self-discovery in these countries. In contrast, Finns place a strong emphasis on starting studies after high school, indicating that education is a primary concern. Additionally, Finns are significantly affected by dating or cohabitation, reflecting the importance of romantic relationships in their lives. Meanwhile, Danes focus more on finding friends, which is a more prominent concern for them compared to Swedes.

Coping Mechanisms When Feeling Down

What are the most common ways of dealing with mental health issues?

When individuals feel down, they commonly turn to their family and friends for support, underscoring the crucial role that social connections play in managing emotional distress. Talking to loved ones is the most frequent coping mechanism, followed closely by engaging in physical activity, which highlights the importance of maintaining physical well-being as a way to navigate negative emotions.

Coping strategies for dealing with emotional distress differ notably across gender and cultural backgrounds. Women tend to prefer solitary and comforting activities like sleep, rest, or watching movies and series, indicating a greater reliance on personal time for emotional recovery. This suggests that women often seek comfort in activities that allow them to unwind and process their feelings privately. Men, on the other hand, are more inclined to engage in social activities, reflecting a preference for interactive and communal methods of coping. This approach suggests that men may find relief and distraction from their troubles through social engagement and collective experiences.

Cultural background also plays a significant role in shaping coping strategies. Individuals born outside the Nordic countries show a preference for social activities, aligning with the communal coping style observed in men. In contrast, Nordic-born individuals are more likely to engage in physical and solitary activities, such as exercising or spending time alone.

Cultural and religious traditions play a varied role in mental health, a majority of respondents indicating no impact at all, while more find these traditions supportive rather than negative. The gender differences here are notable, with a higher percentage of women reporting a negative impact compared to men.

Finns and Norwegians find solace in being out in nature, with significantly more people in these countries finding it helpful compared to Danes and Swedes. In contrast, Swedes prefer coping through cleaning and organizing, a strategy far more common in Sweden than in Denmark, where it is rarely used. Danes, on the other hand, rely heavily on family support, much more so than their Finnish counterparts.

Key insights

Mental Health Support Preferences

Which support system will be needed or can make a difference?

A significant majority of individuals prefer psychological support when dealing with mental health issues, highlighting the crucial role that professional mental health services play in addressing emotional and psychological challenges. This preference underscores the value people place on accessing expert help to manage their mental well-being.

The approach to seeking mental health support varies across gender and cultural backgrounds. Women are more inclined to turn to family and general practitioners for help, emphasizing the importance of personal connections and trusted healthcare professionals in their coping strategies. This suggests that women often seek comfort and guidance from those they know well and trust, combining professional advice with emotional support from loved ones. Men, on the other hand, show a preference for digital and group support. This reflects a growing trend towards using technology-based and collective approaches in managing mental health, where men might find anonymity, accessibility, and a sense of community in digital platforms and group settings.

Cultural background further influences these preferences. Non-Nordic-born individuals are more likely to rely on friends and social media, highlighting the importance of peer networks and online resources in their mental health care. In contrast, Nordic-born individuals demonstrate a stronger preference for psychologists, indicating a higher reliance on formal psychological services. This preference may reflect a greater trust in professional mental health care.

The data indicates that individuals with a neuropsychiatric diagnosis are more inclined to seek support from others in similar situations and from digital or social support groups compared to those without an NPF diagnosis.

The survey also reveals significant differences in mental health support preferences across the Nordic countries. Swedes are most likely to seek help from psychologists, indicating a strong preference for professional mental health services. In contrast, Danes heavily rely on family support, highlighting the importance of close familial connections in their mental health care. Norwegians show the lowest preference for turning to friends and the highest for consulting general practitioners, suggesting a reliance on medical professionals for mental health issues. Meanwhile, Finns make greater use of school counselors and youth reception services, indicating a focus on school-based and youth-oriented support systems.

Additionally, those who have felt unwell in the past are more likely to rely on psychologists and others in similar situations for support. This indicates that past difficulties lead to a greater reliance on professional and peer support.

Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Support

What obstacles have individuals faced when seeking the help they need?

A significant portion of respondents face substantial challenges in accessing mental health support, with nearly half reporting long wait times and many finding the cost of help prohibitive or the quality of care inadequate. These widespread issues highlight the difficulties in obtaining effective and timely mental health services across the Nordic region, underscoring the need for systemic improvements.

The difficulties in accessing mental health support vary notably across gender, country, and cultural background. Women are particularly impacted by long wait times and often feel their concerns are not taken seriously, suggesting that they face more significant barriers in accessing quality care. This disparity points to a gendered experience in navigating mental health services, where women may struggle more to receive timely and adequate support. Men, conversely, are more likely to report not encountering any issues when seeking help, indicating a relatively smoother experience. This suggests that men might either face fewer barriers in accessing services or perhaps have different expectations that align more closely with the available support.

Cultural background further influences these experiences. Nordic-born individuals are more likely to face long wait times and inadequate care, indicating that even within the region, native-born individuals encounter significant challenges in the healthcare system. In contrast, those not born in Nordic countries report fewer problems overall, potentially due to different expectations or comparative experiences with healthcare systems in their countries of origin.

Country-specific differences also emerge, with Danes and Finns experiencing the longest wait times, and Norwegians feeling less taken seriously when seeking help. The cost of mental health services is a particular challenge in Denmark, while Swedes express the highest dissatisfaction with the quality of care received. These variations reflect the differing healthcare landscapes across the Nordic countries, where systemic issues in one country may differ significantly from those in another.

Key insights

Knowledge and Fear of Seeking Help

How aware are young adults of how to get help, and how are they affected by stigma?

Awareness of where to seek help for mental health issues varies significantly across different demographic groups. Additionally, a substantial number of individuals avoid seeking help due to the fear of being judged by others, highlighting the pervasive stigma associated with mental health support.

Men are more likely than women to be unaware of where to find help, which suggests a gap in knowledge or engagement with mental health resources among men. Despite this, women are more likely to avoid seeking help due to fear of judgment, indicating that while they may know where to get support, societal stigma plays a stronger role in deterring them from doing so. This contrast reveals a complex dynamic where men may struggle with access or awareness, while women battle with societal perceptions.

Individuals born outside the Nordic countries are more likely to be unsure of where to seek assistance compared to those born within the region. On the other hand, Nordic-born individuals, while generally more informed, are more likely to avoid seeking help due to fear of judgment. This suggests that even in societies with better access to mental health resources, cultural stigmas around mental health remain a significant barrier.

Younger individuals, especially those aged 18-20, are particularly at risk of lacking knowledge about where to find mental health support. This age group, often in the midst of significant life transitions, may not yet be fully aware of the resources available to them, pointing to a need for better education and outreach targeted at young adults.

Norwegians and Danes are more likely to avoid seeking mental health help due to fear of judgment, indicating higher stigma in these countries compared to Finland and Sweden. In contrast, Swedes are more likely to seek help, reflecting lower stigma. Meanwhile, Finns experience greater uncertainty about where to seek help, highlighting the need for better awareness. Youth reception services are notably more utilized in Norway and Sweden, while they are less used in Denmark.

These insights emphasize the need for tailored mental health strategies: reducing stigma and promoting professional help in Norway and Denmark, improving awareness in Finland, and continuing to support accessible services in Sweden.

Next in Mind

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nextinmind.org

Report developed by

Perspetivo