


COVID-19 & Mental Health

A snapshot of the effects of **COVID-19** on mental well-being across Malta and Gozo.

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Intro



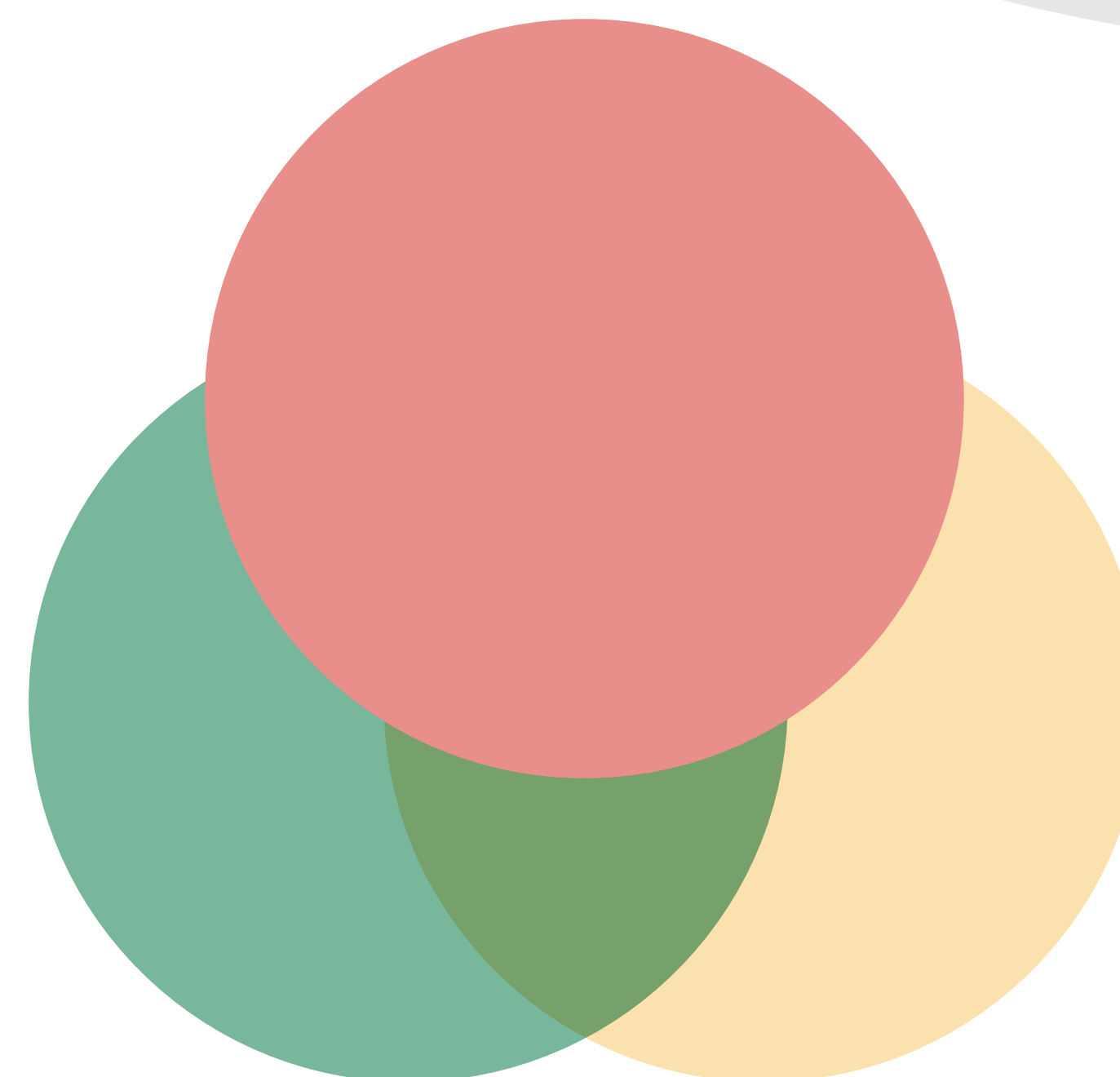
COVID-19 has led to an elevated awareness of threat in the environment and to people's livelihoods. Through social distancing, school closures, work layoffs, and a partial and mandatory lockdown to some – people from all walks of life are suddenly facing major disruptions to their lives, leaving a large chunk of individuals feeling anxious or worried about the outbreak and the trail of negative consequences that come with it.

As governments all over the world try to tackle this global emergency, we teamed up with Richmond Foundation, Malta's leading NGO in the provision of community services for persons with mental health issues, to carry out a series of public sentiment surveys and assess the toll that the novel coronavirus is taking on the national population's mental well-being.

Looking Ahead



The public sentiment surveys are intended to provide a snapshot of the mental health conditions across Malta and Gozo during different time intervals throughout the outbreak to identify what advice, support and help can be provided to the general public during these difficult times.



Gauging People's Response

To better gauge how different situations are impacting mental health in Malta and Gozo, we dugged deep into:

- People's perception of the virus
- Type and frequency of information used to stay informed
- Actions taken to combat the virus
- Activities engaged in in response to the threat of contagion
- Coping mechanisms adapted to deal with COVID-19
- Behavioural changes in people as a result of COVID-19

4.2

On a 5-grade scale

The average score given by the vast majority when asked whether they believed that the government in Malta is doing a good job of handling the outbreak and spreading the correct information about COVID-19.

Perceptions

When asked to rate specific places on the basis of whether respondents thought that they carry a risk of infection, interestingly enough we found out that some places such as hospitals, which under normal circumstances would be perceived as the most safe, are now amongst those feared as carrying high risks of infection and transmission. From a Likert scale of 1 to 5, 5 carrying the highest risk of infection, respondents gave an average rating of 4.2 to hospitals and 4.0 to their place of work with home believed to be the safest place with a rating of 1.9.



Buses (4.8) followed by public toilets (4.6) are seen as places with very high risk of infection



Hospitals (4.2) and work (4.0) are seen as places with high risk of infection



Home (1.9) is perceived as the place with the lowest risk of infection

How are people responding to the virus?



We've all had to re-set our daily life the moment COVID-19 hit local shores – but what actions have people specifically been taking to avoid going out and getting sick? The study shows that in the past week, over 90% of respondents have taken some form of proactive action to **AVOID** getting COVID-19 and at least 80% have done something to PREPARE for the disease. Interestingly, the least popular action undertaken to avoid getting sick was wearing a face mask.

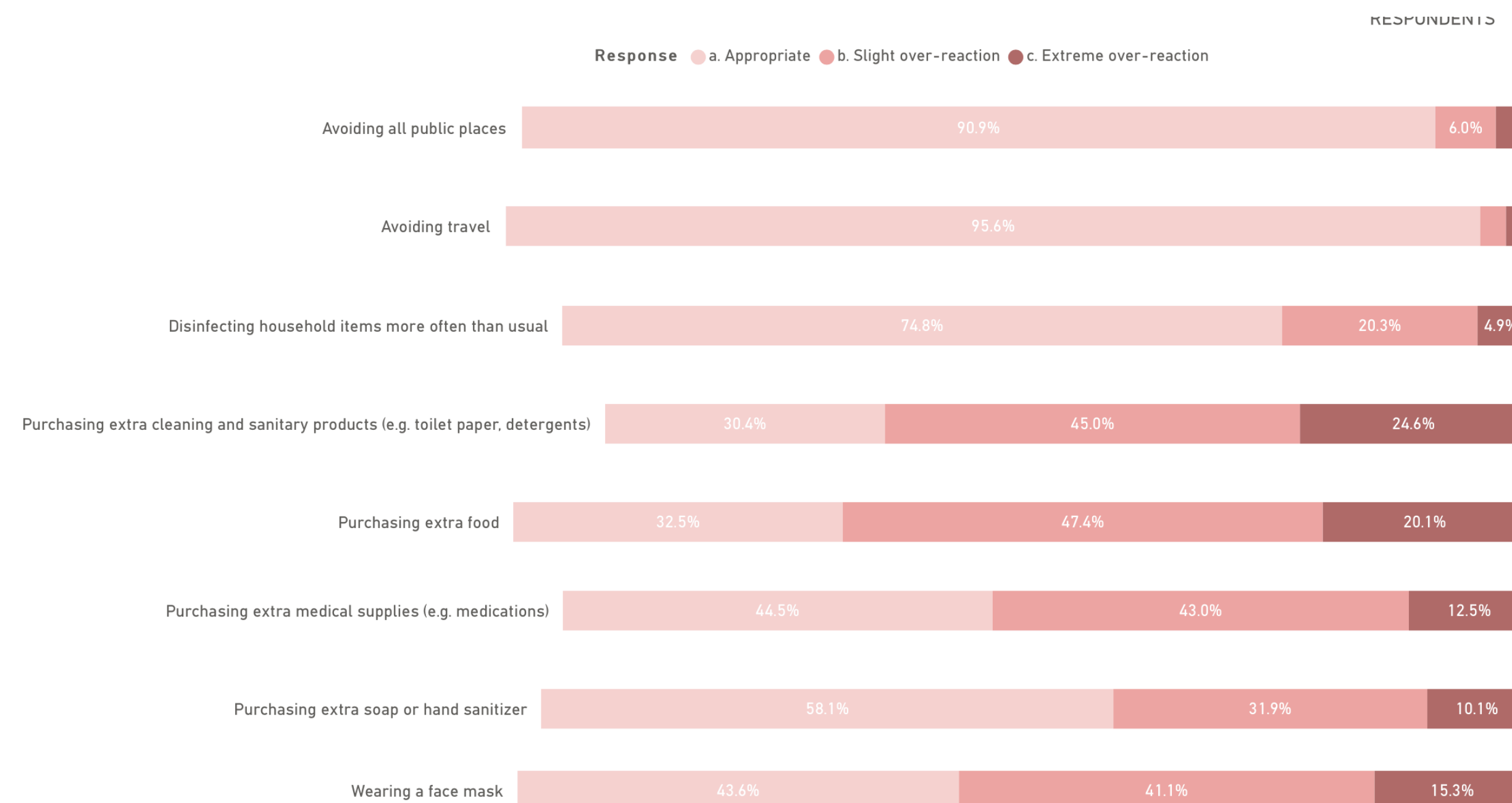
Action	Female	Male	X	Total
Avoided public places	91.3%	92.0%	100.0%	91.7%
Washed my hands more often than usual	90.3%	91.6%	85.7%	90.9%
Avoided contact with people	89.4%	87.4%	100.0%	88.6%
Minimized or avoided social contact	87.2%	87.6%	100.0%	87.5%
Avoided public transport	85.3%	81.3%	85.7%	83.5%
Used disinfectants	83.2%	76.3%	42.9%	79.8%
Took more care about cleanliness	79.1%	72.9%	57.1%	76.2%
Avoided touching my face	59.5%	56.1%	42.9%	57.9%
Cancelled or avoided travel	56.7%	56.5%	42.9%	56.6%
Did not attend work/school	48.6%	51.3%	42.9%	49.8%
Taken herbal supplements or vitamins	32.0%	30.0%	28.6%	31.1%
Made sure I got sufficient sleep	28.5%	27.9%		28.1%
Wore a face mask	10.2%	8.6%		9.4%

Action	Female	Male	X	Total ▼
Took extra precautions to avoid tracking germs inside my home	84.6%	73.3%	71.4%	79.5%
Paid close attention to potential symptoms	71.5%	70.2%	42.9%	70.8%
Disinfected household items more often than usual	74.0%	58.0%	28.6%	66.6%
Shopped for extra cleaning, disinfectant, and/or sanitizing products	62.9%	45.1%	42.9%	54.9%
Purchased extra non-perishable food	55.6%	42.5%	57.1%	49.8%
Did research online	45.3%	54.0%	57.1%	49.2%
Purchased extra medical supplies (e.g. medications)	35.1%	24.3%	28.6%	30.3%
Shopped for extra non-medical household supplies (e.g. toilet paper)	36.2%	22.5%	28.6%	30.1%
Called a health hotline (111)	13.8%	9.6%	14.3%	12.0%
Contacted a doctor	8.0%	6.3%	14.3%	7.3%

High on the list of actions carried out to **PREPARE** for COVID-19 were: taking extra precaution to avoid tracking germs inside one's home (80%), paying attention to symptoms (71%), disinfecting household items (67%) and shopping for extra cleaning products (55%) –showing that people have been closely following the advice and instructions of the authorities on how to minimise the risk of infection and transmission of the COVID-19 disease

What have people been doing to combat the virus?

We've all reacted to the news of COVID-19 in some way or another and this reaction has led many of us to engage in certain activities. When asked about the perceived appropriateness of certain activities done in response to the threat of COVID-19, results from the study showed that the vast majority of respondents believed avoiding public spaces (91%) and travel (96%), and disinfecting households items (75%) to be appropriate, with the remaining activities such as purchasing extra cleaning products, food, medical supplies and wearing a mask to be over-reactions to some extent or another.



70%

Believe purchasing extra cleaning and sanitary products such as toilet paper and detergents to be over-reactions to some extent or another.

How have people been coping?

Fears and concerns about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in a lot of people. In this part of the survey we wanted to understand how people are coping with COVID-19. When asked about what they have been doing to cope with concerns and fears they have about the disease, results from the study showed that a large proportion of people were more worried about their loved one's physical and mental health, and the impact of COVID-19 on Malta as a nation, than they were about their own physical and mental well-being. When asked about how often they thought about the disease, from a Likert scale of 1 to 5 – 5 indicating constant thoughts about the disease, all of the respondents gave an average score rating of 3 or higher with those aged 16 to 24 reporting the lowest frequency.



On a 5-grade scale

The average score given to how often respondents thought about the disease

Respondents were also presented with a list of statements and were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated this was not at all true and 5 indicated that the statement was true, how true or untrue certain statements were about them and the average scores were as follows:

3.9

Had their daily routine disrupted
because of COVID-19

3.8

Get feelings of nervousness
because of COVID-19

3.6

Consider COVID-19 to be a
threat to their health

How has people's behaviour changed?

The constant feeling of threat can have a disruptive effect on our psychological response to ordinary interactions, leading us to behave in new and unexpected ways. In this section of the survey, we put this theory to test and measured how often people felt or behaved in a certain way over a period of a week.

How often respondent felt or behaved this way during the past week

Questions	<1 day	On 1-2 days	On 3-4 days	On 5-7 days
My sleep was restless	34%	25%	24%	17%
I was happy	17%	41%	35%	7%
I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me	19%	29%	34%	18%
I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing	22%	27%	32%	19%
I had feelings of self harm/suicide	89%	6%	4%	1%
I felt that everything I did was an effort	30%	30%	25%	15%
I felt lonely	35%	29%	23%	13%
I felt hopeful about the future	13%	33%	38%	16%
I felt fearful	17%	30%	31%	23%
I felt depressed	27%	26%	27%	20%
I didn't feel like doing anything	22%	30%	29%	19%

1 out of 100

Thought of self-harm or suicide

1 out of 100 thought of self-harm or suicide, 47% reported feeling depressed most of the time and 48% reported that they did not feel like doing anything. Students and unemployed people were among the highest groups of individuals who reported having feelings of self-harm/suicide. We also found that people on the frontline of the crisis, particularly those employed in healthcare, public safety, national security and food and necessary goods were amongst those that reported feeling the most fearful.

Support



When asked about how easy it is to find support, worryingly, 26% of respondents stated that they had no one that they could share their worries and fears with, with 3 in 10 reporting that it would be difficult for them to find someone who could give them advice if a family crisis were to arise. On the contrary, 9 out of 10 reported having someone they could call or seek help from when asked about whether they had someone they could turn to for help if they were sick.

26%

*Have no one to share
their worries and
fears with*

COVID-19 Measures

The strict measures that have been taken by authorities to limit transmission has put impending pressures on the lives of many people, with many having to get accustomed to new environments and ways of living and doing things. When asked what the hardest thing they had to deal with since the implementation of measures announced by the government because of the outbreak, 45% said that the hardest thing was staying away from other loved ones, followed by not being able to engage in activities that they normally enjoy to engage in (15%) and not being able to enjoy the outdoors (12%), among others.

72% of respondents believed that the current measures that have been implemented are adequate. Respondents were also asked to predict whether a total lock-down is to be expected in Malta on a scale of 1 to 5, where a score of 5 would indicate a very high likelihood of total lockdown, the average score was that of 3.78. When asked about how worried respondents would be about specific aspects tied to a nationwide lockdown, respondents reported feeling the most worried about the well-being of loved ones who do not live with them, followed by their own mental well-being and their financial situation. .

Conclusion



We understand that mental health is vital for everyday life and that many people might be suffering and require help. We are thankful that so many respondents flocked to participate in this survey thus capturing a true pulse of Malta and Gozo. In this unprecedented situation, as business leaders, we must do all that we can to help. For this reason, our series of COVID-19 market research services are being offered to Richmond Foundation on a not-for-profit basis. We are doing this with love, with the objective that we create actionable insights that help Richmond Foundation offer relevant services to the community. The findings are public because we believe that the insights derived from this general population survey should be tapped by all stakeholders.

The ESOMAR member logo consists of the word 'ESOMAR' in a bold, dark grey, sans-serif font, followed by the word 'member' in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. A thin blue horizontal line is positioned below 'member'.

Morgan Parnis
CEO

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH IN MALTA

BASED ON A SAMPLE OF 1000+ RESPONSES



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