

**COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES
FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF MIDDLE-AGED
MALTESE WOMEN**

Veronica Debono

Master of Arts in Transcultural Counselling

Department of Counselling, Faculty for Social Wellbeing

University of Malta and University of New Orleans

June, 2018



L-Universit 
ta' Malta

University of Malta Library – Electronic Thesis & Dissertations (ETD) Repository

The copyright of this thesis/dissertation belongs to the author. The author's rights in respect of this work are as defined by the Copyright Act (Chapter 415) of the Laws of Malta or as modified by any successive legislation.

Users may access this full-text thesis/dissertation and can make use of the information contained in accordance with the Copyright Act provided that the author must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the prior permission of the copyright holder.

COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR EMOTIONAL
WELLBEING OF MIDDLE-AGED MALTESE WOMEN

Veronica Debono

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Master of Arts in Transcultural Counselling of the University of Malta and
the University of New Orleans

Research undertaken in the
Department of Counselling, Faculty for Social Wellbeing
University of Malta

June, 2018



FACULTY/INSTITUTE/CENTRE/SCHOOL SOCIAL WELLBEING

DECLARATIONS BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Student's I.D. /Code 508873(M)

Student's Name & Surname VERONICA DEBONO

Course MASTER OF ARTS IN TRANSCULTURAL COUNSELLING

Title of Dissertation

COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF MIDDLE AGED MALTESE WOMEN

(a) Authenticity of Dissertation

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Dissertation and that it is my original work.


No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher education.

I hold the University of Malta harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third party right infringement.

(b) Research Code of Practice and Ethics Review Procedures

I declare that I have abided by the University's Research Ethics Review Procedures.

As a Master's student, as per Regulation 58 of the General Regulations for University Postgraduate Awards, I accept that should my dissertation be awarded a Grade A, it will be made publicly available on the University of Malta Institutional Repository.


Signature of Student

VERONICA DEBONO
Name of Student (in Caps)

05/06/2018
Date

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to try to gain an understanding of counsellors' perceptions of the coping strategies utilised by middle-aged Maltese women for their emotional wellbeing. The study is an exploratory phenomenological study conducted using a qualitative approach and adopting the Theory of Personality of Carl Rogers as the theoretical framework. The data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with six counsellors and the method used for analysis of the interview transcripts is Thematic Analysis. The data illustrated the evolution in Maltese culture over the years and the corresponding change in the cultural narrative of middle-aged Maltese woman arriving at a description of contemporary woman. The most salient coping strategy for emotional wellbeing was perceived to be connectedness in various forms. Wellbeing, stigma towards seeking professional help, resistance to counselling and the importance of self-awareness and reflection were all explored. Coping strategies of older and younger age groups were referred to as were the perceptions of the various coping strategies utilised by non-Maltese people and by men. The findings show that there is still much confusion regarding the term 'counsellor' and what the profession of counselling actually entails thus highlighting a pressing need for an awareness and educational campaign explaining what counselling is and how it can be accessed. Recommendations as elicited from the data include future studies about coping strategies conducted directly with middle-aged Maltese women and also with non-Maltese women and also studies attempting to gauge and understand the misconceptions related to counselling as perceived by the general public.

Keywords: counselling, coping strategies, emotional wellbeing, middle-aged, Maltese, women

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
LIST OF DEFINITIONS	6
LIST OF FIGURES	7
DEDICATION.....	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	9
Chapter 1 Introduction	10
Rationale for the Research	11
Locating Myself in this Research Study	11
The Research Question, Aim and Objectives.....	12
Methodology and relevant theoretical underpinning	13
Conceptual Framework	13
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Conclusion	16
Chapter 2 Literature Review	17
Stress and Coping	19
Stress.....	19
Coping.....	20
Quantitative measurement of coping.....	24
Quantitative measurement of help-seeking.....	24
Current stress and coping research.....	25

Emotional Wellbeing	26
Middle-age	28
The Maltese Context.....	30
What it means to be Maltese.....	32
Languages spoken in Malta.....	32
Religion in Malta.....	33
Being a woman in Malta.....	35
Conclusion	36
Chapter 3 Methodology	37
Methodology	38
Method and Design of the Study.....	39
Purposive sample.....	39
Data collection.....	41
Memo writing.....	41
Data analysis.....	41
Limitations and critique of method.....	44
Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness.....	45
Ethical Considerations	46
Conclusion	47
Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion	48
Counsellors' Perceptions of the Evolution in the Narrative of Maltese culture and Middle-aged Maltese Women	50

State taking on role of family.	50
Change in identity.	53
Family oriented vs career oriented.	54
Counsellors' Perceptions of Connectedness.....	57
Connectedness as a coping strategy.....	60
Counselling stigma.	63
Counselling confusion.	65
A way of being with oneself.	68
Conclusion	75
Chapter 5 Conclusion	76
Outcome of the Research Study	77
Transcultural Element	78
Limitations of the Study.....	80
Implications for the Counselling Practice	80
Recommendations	81
Recommendations for Future Research.....	81
Recommendations for Awareness.....	82
Recommendations for Training.....	82
Concluding Remarks.....	82
Appendices.....	84
Appendix A: Information Letter.....	85

Appendix B: Consent Form	86
Appendix C: Request for MACP as gatekeeper for research	87
Appendix D: Request for UoM as gatekeeper for research.....	89
Appendix E: Interview Guide for counsellors (English Only)	101
Appendix F: UREC approval AappApproval.....	102
Appendix G: Elicited Themes, Subthemes and Examples of Supporting Quotes	103
Appendix H: Transcript Excerpt Joanna	105
Appendix I: Transcript Excerpt Betty	107
Appendix J: Transcript Excerpt John.....	109
Appendix K: Transcript Excerpt Maria	111
Appendix L: Transcript Excerpt Sara.....	113
Appendix M: Transcript Excerpt Bob	115
References	117

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Counsellors: Counsellors are professionals who use specific skills to build therapeutic relationships by means of which the clients understand the situations they are going through. The role of the counsellors is to understand the clients and help them find their inner skills to improve the situation they are in. (MACP, 2011).

Emotional wellbeing: based on Aristotle's Eudaimonia; the realisation of one's capabilities, also referred to as flourishing, (Nagel, 1972).

Perception: Perception is defined as "the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses," (Oxford, 2017).

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.1</i> Conceptual framework of study.	14
<i>Figure 2.1</i> Transactional model of stress and coping	22
<i>Figure 2.2</i> Core dimensions of psychological wellbeing and their theoretical foundations.....	27
<i>Figure 4.1</i> Overarching theme 1 and subthemes following analysis of transcripts. ...	50
<i>Figure 4.2</i> Overarching theme 2 and subthemes following analysis of transcripts. ...	57
<i>Figure 4.3</i> The circularity of connectedness.	58
<i>Figure 4.4</i> Human relationships referred to by counsellors interviewed.	59

DEDICATION

*To my mother and father,
my husband Franco and my children Sophie, Paula, Beppe*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Sharon Martinelli, for her guidance and encouragement and for being there when the going got tough. Thank you to Ruth Falzon, dissertations coordinator, especially, but not only, for her expertise in APA.

I am grateful to my participants for volunteering their time and sharing their perceptions with me. Without them this research study surely would not have been possible.

Truly heartfelt thanks to my husband, Franco and our children, Sophie, Paula and Beppe for supporting, encouraging and believing in me throughout this course and always.

Warm thanks to my parents who gave me the roots and foundations to be the person I am today.

Thank you to my friends (sisters) Angie and Christina who have travelled this journey with me from the beginning and believed in me when I did not think I could do it.

Thank you to my brothers, in-laws, Arianne, Guy and other family and friends who helped me in any way.

Thank you to the staff of the Department of Counselling and to the very special people who make up my cohort.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In 2011, my father suffered a major stroke leaving him wheelchair bound and suffering from aphasia. He had just turned 70. My mother was 61. In that one instant, her lifetime companion, best friend, partner, confidante and soul mate was changed forever. She became his primary carer; the only person who can anticipate his needs and understand his unuttered wants. Seven years have passed and my mother has not sought or received any kind of emotional support other than the well-meaning intentions of family and friends. When I suggested counselling, she was so upset, angry, hurt and affronted that I actually felt guilty, as though I had done something really offensive. Apparently, counselling is only for the mentally infirm. This story is the driving force and motivation to research this topic. Living this experience together with my family and witnessing first hand my mother's emotional struggle has inspired me to delve deeper into the 'why' of her resistance.

Rationale for the Research

I chose this topic because it holds significance for me. Some family members and a few friends who experienced a negative life altering event would not consider going to counselling in an effort to attempt to improve their emotional wellbeing. Reflecting upon this I came to wonder if this was representative of their stage in life or if maybe it was just a coincidence that the people I knew were so resistant to counselling and instead relied on other coping skills. I wanted to try to find out more; I wanted to endeavour to see their world as they see it in an effort to comprehend their reality as they were experiencing it.

Locating Myself in this Research Study

As a middle-aged Maltese woman myself, I am considered an insider researcher (Breen, 2007). My personal story motivated me to carry out research in this field. I was inspired after witnessing multiple incidences of family members and

friends shunning formal help-seeking. I wondered how they coped with everything life was throwing at them. I personally felt that counselling could be the ideal solution and was stunned at the acuteness of the hold that stigma seemed to have on counselling for them. This then was my bias, my underlying curiosity and guiding light. It was the viewpoint from which I approached this study: the recurring questions in my head were: 'Why don't they go to counselling? What do they do to help themselves find acceptance and peace?'

I identify with Carl Rogers who found himself: "in two camps: the training of a positivist, the experience of a postmodernist" (O'Hara, 1995, p. 48). I have a background in Accountancy which is pragmatic and empirical (Beams, 1969) but am so much more drawn to phenomenology, humanism, existentialism and feminism. My ontological belief leans towards the relativist and therefore logically my epistemology is emic which considers the researcher and the participants co-creators of the findings: research involves interaction between the researcher and participants. Relativism is the ontological perspective within the qualitative or constructivist paradigm of research. Constructivists believe that individuals or groups construct meaning or reality based on interactions with the social environment: knowledge is not found, it is constructed. It is therefore possible to have multiple, socially constructed realities that are all considered correct (Killam, 2013).

The Research Question, Aim and Objectives

This dissertation aims to research one main question which is the be-all and end-all of the study. It was motivated by "a strong personal need to learn" (McLeod, 2015, p. 35). The question, as evidenced by the self-explanatory title of this dissertation, is:

- What are counsellors' perceptions for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged

Maltese women?

The aim and objectives of this exploratory study are to understand counsellors' perceptions of:

- the coping strategies of a certain cohort of women
- emotional wellbeing
- the relationship between coping strategies and emotional wellbeing, if any.

Methodology and relevant theoretical underpinning. This want and need of mine to understand led me to discover descriptive phenomenological research, the major aim of which “is to generate a description of a phenomenon of everyday experience to achieve an understanding of its essential structure” (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010, p. 213). Husserl was the founder of phenomenology (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2008). The philosophical underpinnings of Husserlian phenomenology are that of the lived, human experience, and this fitted my purposes precisely.

I have specifically chosen *not* to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as my methodology because it is not my intention to interpret my findings but to present, describe and discuss them backed up with literature and therefore the selected methodology for my study is Transcendental Phenomenology. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 Methodology.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is ... primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why - a tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating. (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39)

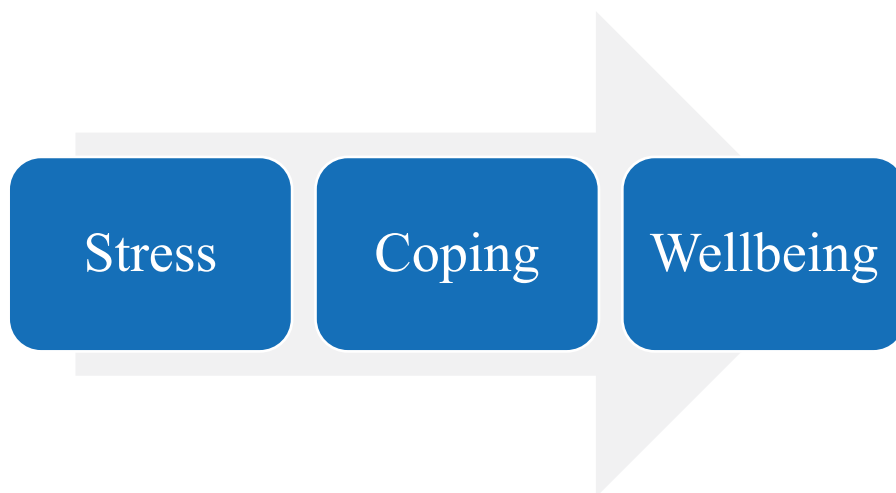


Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of study.

The coping strategies a person employs to deal with their stress will ultimately affect their wellbeing. In my quest for information on the topic I identified many research studies, mainly quantitative, conducted on stress, coping styles and attitudes towards help-seeking, (Brown, Evans-Lacko, Aschan, Henderson, Hatch, & Hotopf, 2014; Kessler, Agines, & Bowen, 2014; Li, 2014; Martínez Ortega, Gomà-i-Freixanet, & Fornieles Deu, 2016), very few qualitative studies (Scicluna S. , 2012; Stellini, 2008) and little to no research pertaining to coping conducted specifically on middle-aged women, let alone Maltese women. I also found abundant articles on stress and coping (Baqutayan, 2015; Cornwell, 2013; Firestone, 2015; Folkman S. , 2010) and numerous definitions of emotional wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schueller, 2013); these will be referred to in detail in the Literature Review in the next chapter.

Theoretical Framework. An eclectic method was adopted during the research so as to explore different dimensions of coping strategies and emotional wellbeing in relation to women's experiences. The most apt approaches for the purpose of the study were deemed to be: a feminist perspective valuing and validating women's experiences and narratives (Adichie, 2017) and the humanistic

approach of Carl Rogers (1961), particularly "The Theory of Personality," which is explained in the next paragraph. These then were my lenses which influenced the way in which the interviews were undertaken and also the way in which the resultant data was analysed.

Axiology, a theory of value, 'holds that: Human flourishing is intrinsically worthwhile: it is valuable as an end in itself' (Heron, 1996). I hold emotional wellbeing as synonymous with human flourishing. As a researcher, my values and opinions tie in with Carl Rogers' Theory of Personality. I am an avid believer that everyone has an inherent capacity and tendency to self-actualize, that is, drive towards becoming more fully functioning, if the six necessary and sufficient conditions, as outlined by Carl Rogers, for therapeutic process are present: these are: psychological contact between two persons, congruent counsellor, incongruent client, unconditional positive regard for the client, empathic understanding of the client and communication to the client of the counsellor's unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding (Rogers C. R., 1957; Rogers C. R., 1959). It was Carl Rogers' firm belief that within such a therapeutic relationship a person: 'will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably' (Rogers C. R., 1961, p. 38). His daughter, Natalie Rogers wrote that: "Self-awareness, understanding and insight are achieved by delving into our emotions. The feelings of grief, anger, pain, fear, joy, and ecstasy are the tunnel through which we must pass to get to the other side; to self-awareness, understanding, and wholeness" (Rogers N. , 1993, p. 3). Passing through the tunnel could be likened to coping.

The research study is informed by many other theories which touch upon different aspects of each step of the way, such as: Erikson Developmental Theory when considering the life stage being studied, Maslow in describing the essence of

wellbeing, Attribution theory in the research on coping, Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky when explaining the effects of culture on development and Piaget when talking about child development of language. Yet the theory of personality and a feminist stance are the standpoints that permeate the entire study from conception to conclusion.

Through my dissertation I hoped to uncover some stories about the coping strategies used by middle-aged Maltese women; I was especially interested in discovering if they use formal help-seeking, in particular, counselling. Coping theory has evolved over time and may also be culture specific. The same can be said of emotional wellbeing. I was looking for any relationship between the two and was guided by the concepts, beliefs and theories outlined in this paper.

Conclusion

This research study consists of 5 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the inspiration for the research study, its aims and objectives and the conceptual and theoretical framework. Chapter 2 presents a review of some of the more pertinent literature on the related concepts. Chapter 3 explains the rationale for the chosen methodology and method and design of the study. Chapter 4 discusses the findings in relevance to literature and Chapter 5 concludes with a summary, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research and implications for counselling.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to analyse the literature available on counsellors' perceptions of coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women with references to studies which have been carried out. Due to the proliferation of research on stress and coping and bearing in mind the limited word count of this dissertation, the literature review on stress and coping focuses mainly on The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping as proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). There are various other theories of stress and coping however more than thirty years later this seminal model is still the cornerstone for stress and coping research (Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017) and I felt that it was the best fit for this study because it incorporates cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects. It is followed by a review of literature on emotional wellbeing and an explanation of the term 'middle-aged' and its ramifications. Finally, the cultural meaning of being a Maltese woman is analysed. Since my research is set in Malta, I have intentionally chosen the Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP, 2011) definition of the term 'counsellors' for the purposes of this study. This definition, together with the Oxford (2017) definition of the word 'perception' which I have selected to use for this study, can be found in the List of Definitions on page 6.

A literature review using University of Malta's library resources, Google Scholar and internet yielded a wealth of studies centring on stress and coping but evidenced a gap in research pertaining specifically to the ways middle-aged Maltese women care for their emotional wellbeing. Further, little local research on this topic was available up to date of completion of this study. In her quantitative dissertation, Mifsud, (2014), studied the 'sandwich generation' of Maltese women: those women contemporarily caring for their offspring and their own elderly parents, and writes about their stress, wellbeing and coping and the use of counselling as a coping

strategy within this cohort. I refer to this study again in the section on Maltese women and in other chapters.

Stress and Coping

Stress and coping are inextricably intertwined (Baqtayan, 2015; Li, 2014; Folkman S. , 2010). Everyday hassles, such as missing a bus, are distinguished from negative life events such as the death of a loved one (Cornwell, 2013; De Coster, 2005; Vermeersch, T'Sjoen, Kaufman, Vincke, & Bracke, 2010). However, both types contribute to stress in varying proportions and consequently both can have an effect on emotional wellbeing.

Stress. Stress is a term borrowed from the field of physics by endocrinologist Hans Selye in the 1950s. Since the 18th and 19th century and maybe even before, the concept of stress has been used to refer to force applied to a material which produces a strain, that is, a change in the material (Everly & Lating, 2002). Selye brought this definition into the behavioural sciences to describe a 'force' applied to a person that causes a biological response (for example, increased heart rate and muscle tension) within the person; the 'force' being any stimulus which elicits a stress response and which he termed 'stressor'. (Hinkle, 1974; Krohne, 2001; Schneiderman, Ironson, & Siegel, 2005). Selye coined the terms 'distress' and 'eustress' to differentiate between negative or debilitating stress, such as that caused by the illness or death of a loved one (distress) and positive or facilitative stress, for example, moving or buying a house (eustress) (Baqtayan, 2015; Lazarus R. , 1993; Shu-Ping, Hui-Kai, & Shin-Da, 2012).

Lazarus further expanded the definition of stress to include cognitive and psychological factors and not only involuntary biological or physical responses; he defined stress to mean a relationship or transaction between the person and their

environment incorporating the person's interpretation of the stressor and their response to it (Krohne, 2001). A person's response to their environment is called coping; coping can be positive, like seeking support, or negative, such as avoidance or substance abuse (Aldwin, 2007; Folkman S. , 2010).

Coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) note that “[t]raditional approaches to coping emerged from two separate and distinct literatures, animal experimentation and psychoanalytic ego psychology” (p. 139). The coping approach emerging from the Darwinian literature is described as fight or flight (Mobbs, Hagan, Dalgleish, Silston, & Prévost, 2015). Fight or flight is a term coined by Walter Cannon in the early 1900s describing an animal's impulse to flee when afraid and its instinct to fight when angry (Cooper, 2008). Coping within psychoanalytic ego psychology relates to thoughts and actions that reduce problems and consequently decrease stress. Under the psychoanalytic ego psychology model people are categorized into “conformist or conscientious, obsessive-compulsive, or as a suppressor, repressor, or sublimator” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 p.120) in order to predict how they will consistently react under stress (Loevinger, 1980; Vaillant, 1977). One limitation of this theory is that once people are classified as having a particular trait or style it is assumed that they will always respond to stress in this fashion without the option of acting in different ways according to circumstance. In reality people do tend to have preferred ways of coping per psychoanalytic psychology but different stressors lead people to use different coping strategies in different times (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Baqutayan, 2015) and Aldwin (2007) reflects that “[c]oping is flexible and to some degree, learned” (p. 92).

In the 1970s, the theory that coping had a trait or style approach was abandoned in favour of the theory that coping is a process (Lazarus R. S., 1993).

Lazarus and Folkman, (1984), in their seminal theory, “define coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141) and in (2004) Folkman and Moskowitz wrote that “[c]oping [is] defined as the thoughts and behaviours used to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful” (p. 745). There are various nuances between these definitions and the traditional approach to coping described above. ‘Cognitive and behavioural’ refers to both thoughts and actions rather than to automatic behavioural reactions only as in the animal fight or flight response (Baqtayan, 2015; Folkman S. , 2010; Lazarus R. S., 1993). ‘Constantly changing’ is contrary to the previous idea of rigidly categorizing people’s expected reactions and allows for fluidity - it indicates that coping is process oriented rather than trait or style focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus R. S., 1993; Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017). The phrase ‘taxing or exceeding the resources of the person’ implies determination is necessary on the part of the person and therefore does not include only instinctive behaviours. ‘Efforts’ refers to anything the person tries including behaviour and actions, whether this is positive, negative, successful or otherwise, in other words, it is independent of the outcome (Corr & Doka, 2001). Finally, “Managing can include minimizing, avoiding, tolerating, and accepting the stressful conditions as well as attempts to master the environment” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 142).

Roger’s theory of self-actualization underpins my conceptual framework as outlined in the previous chapter. The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping can be related to my conceptual framework in that by cognitively coping with their stress people are taking care of their emotional wellbeing and are moving in the direction of

being self-actualising.



Figure 2.1 Transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus and Folkman suggest that when faced with a stressor the person will assess the stressor; this is known as primary appraisal, and also what they can do about it; this is known as secondary appraisal. “Coping serves two major functions: regulating distressing emotions (emotion-focused coping) and changing the problem that is causing the discomfort (problem-focused coping)” (Stone, Kennedy-Moore, Newman, Greenberg, & Neale, 1992, p. 17). Diverse stage models attempt to explain the process of coping (Bowlby, 1961; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1988) and these vary according to whether the crisis has occurred without warning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and what the crisis actually entails (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004), among other variables. During the coping process people will cycle back and forth between the stages and gradually the cycling will reduce until the coping process is complete, anxiety diminishes and psychological growth occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2011; Shontz, 1975). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain that anticipating certain stages during the coping process can raise expectations of the person trying to cope and of those around them. This, in turn, just

like with any other stage model theories, for example, the stage model theory of grief, could put pressure on people to feel or act in a certain way according to which stage they 'should' be at and give rise to questions regarding their normality and health if they do not conform (Silver & Wortman, 2007). Other researchers refute the idea of stages and suggest instead that there are patterns which occur more often than others, maybe due to common cultural rituals (Maciejewski, Zhang, Block, & Prigerson, 2007; See & Essau, 2010; Silver & Wortman, 2007).

An individual's personality plays a role in that person's perception of events as stressful or otherwise and also affects the type of coping strategy they employ.

Lefcourt (1992) discusses that:

beliefs about one's ability to control the events in one's life play a major role in the way one confronts crises. The person who has retained faith in his or her capability to act will persist in the effort to deal with threats and stresses in his or her life. (p. 113-4)

"An internal locus of control refers to a generalized belief that events are contingent upon one's behaviour, whereas an external locus of control refers to a generalized belief that events are contingent upon external factors" (Park & Cohen, 1992, p. 193). This is Attribution Theory as explored by Fritz Heider (1958). In the 1970s Albert Bandura coined the term 'self-efficacy'. In his book 'Self-efficacy, the exercise of control' he described perceived self-efficacy as '...beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (1997, p. 3). In keeping with this, a study conducted on undergraduate college students in the Midwest, suggests that mindsets about anxiety are linked with mental health resilience (Schroder, Yalch, Dawood, Callahan, Brent Donellan, & Moser, 2017). It follows, therefore, that the coping strategies employed by middle-

aged Maltese women will be somewhat dependent on their personalities .Many studies have been undertaken in an attempt to measure how people cope with stress. The next section takes a brief look at this.

Quantitative measurement of coping. A number of questionnaires have evaluated coping with stress in a general way, such as Ways of Coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), the Coping Strategies Inventory (Tobin et al., 1984), the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (Endler and Parker, 1990) or the Coping Strategy Indicator (Amirkhan, 1990)... Currently, one of the most frequently used tools for assessing coping styles is the Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced inventory (COPE; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). (Martínez Ortega, Gomà-i-Freixanet, & Fornieles Deu, 2016, p. 80)

Respondents are asked to rate their use of a number of items such as active coping, planning, seeking instrumental social support (seeking advice from others i.e. help-seeking), seeking emotional social support, suppression of competing activities, religion, positive reinterpretation, restraint coping, acceptance, ventilation of emotions, denial, mental disengagement, behavioural disengagement, alcohol or drug abuse, and humour, (Zeidner, Matthews, & Shemesh, 2016).

Quantitative measurement of help-seeking. Help-seeking can be formal or informal, (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). Informal help can be sought from family, friends, community leaders, spiritual leaders, religious leaders and self-help groups among others, whilst formal help is that sought from professionals (Brown et al., 2014). Much research has been undertaken with various ethnicities or specific population groups, such as students, veterans, nurses, army pilots and teachers, using inventory scores such as the ones listed below (Choi & Doh, 2017; Elkins, Swift, & Campbell, 2017; Makilim & Zanon, 2017).

Fischer and Turner (1970) developed the 29-item Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH) scale, the most widely used contemporary assessment of help-seeking attitudes... there are a few similar measures, such as the Inventory of Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Health Services (Mackenzie et al., 2004) and the Willingness to Seek Help Questionnaire (Cohen, 1999)... [Fischer and Turner] subsequently developed a shortened uni-dimensional 10-item scale (ATSPPH-SF). (Picco, et al., 2016, p. 2)

Just like with any other quantitative study these inventory lists give quantifiable numerical results which are valid and enlightening yet they do not meet the objective which I set out to achieve with this study. My aim was to hear the stories. I wanted to listen, understand and see what new avenues open up.

Current stress and coping research. Stress and coping theory has evolved over time from trait and style models to transactional models which are process oriented and may also be culture specific (Kuo, 2011; Yeh, Hunter, Madan-Bahel, Chiang, & Arora, 2004). Later research shows that the coping function is not actually dichotomised into emotion or problem focused as originally thought but is a complex process involving the two (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). The theories have continuously evolved and developments in coping theory and research include transformational coping: growing and developing through stress (Aldwin, 2007), meaning-focused coping: drawing on one's beliefs in order to cope (Folkman S. , 2008) and appraisal-focused coping: modifying how you think (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010) and proactive coping: being aware of potential future stressors and how to prevent them, among others (Ouwehand, Ridder, & Bensing, 2008). Other research trends have focused on positive emotions and the appraisal and coping

strategies during stress which generate them (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2009). It was found that “positive emotions occur even under the most dire of circumstances” (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000, p. 115). These positive emotions can be brought about through using particular coping mechanisms, namely positive reappraisal, problem-focused coping and creating positive events.

Emotional Wellbeing

The essence of emotional wellbeing adopted for the purpose of this particular study is based on Aristotle’s Eudaimonia (350BC); meaning the realisation of one’s capabilities also referred to as flourishing, (Nagel, 1972), and on Maslow’s (1968) self-actualising ‘to achieve the subjective feeling of harmonious, uninhibited, satisfying functioning’ (p. 168). Research highlights numerous interpretations of the word Eudaimonia (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Lutter, 2001; Vittersø, 2016). The one deemed to be the best fit for this research is the following explanation by Ryff and Singer as cited in Huta and Waterman (2014) and represented below in (Figure 1):

Eudaimonia is conceptually defined in terms of trait psychological well-being, that is, to be fully functioning and to succeed in the face of life’s existential challenges (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Based on a broad survey of psychological theories, Ryff (1989) identified six characteristics as core to eudaimonia: (a) self-acceptance, (b) positive relations with others, (c) personal growth, (d) purpose in life, (e) environmental mastery, and (f) autonomy. (p. 1439)

She arrived at this pictorial representation after a lengthy process of extracting recurrent themes from numerous interpretations of the concept of positive functioning.

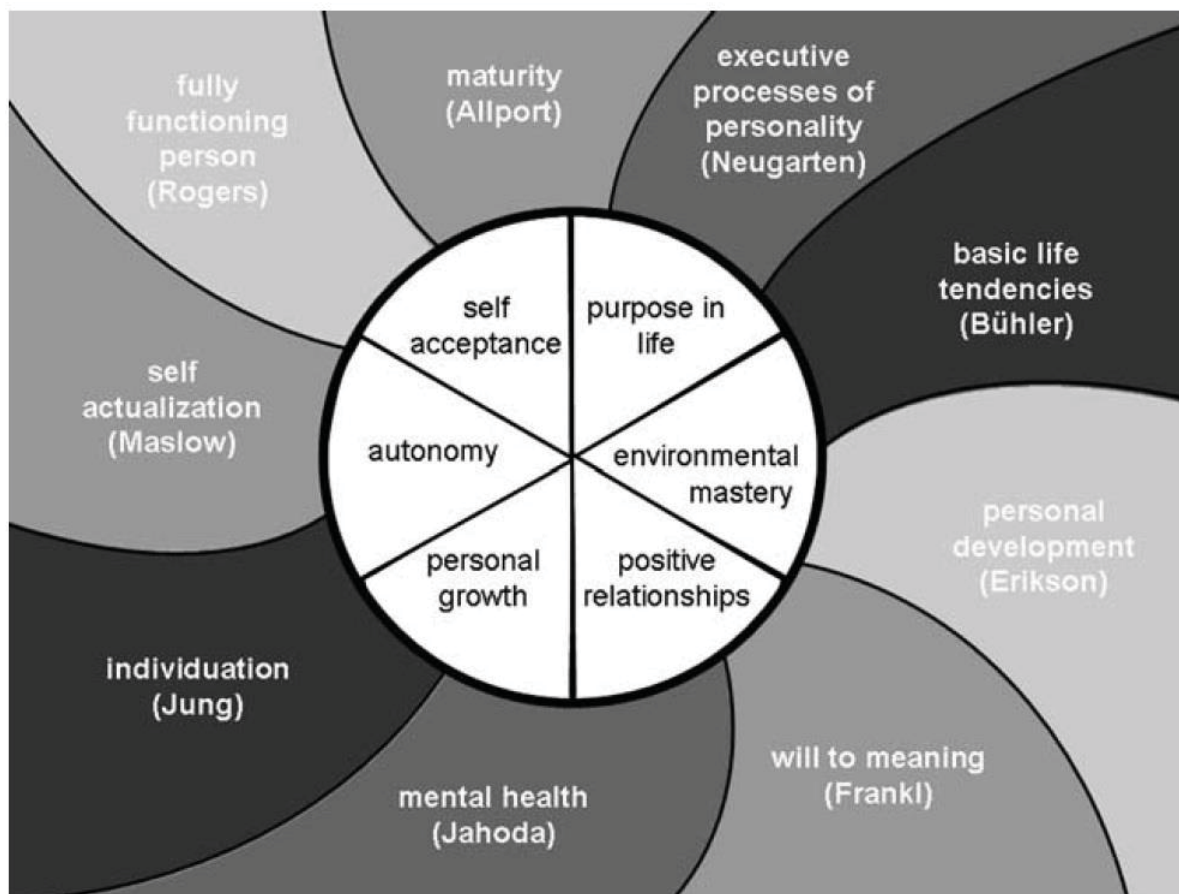


Figure 2.2 Core dimensions of psychological wellbeing and their theoretical foundations (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p. 20).

In accordance with these characteristics, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Mental Health Report (2005) states that:

Positive mental health is a state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. It is a global public good; it is an essential part of the health and well-being of the citizens of Europe and a fundamental human right; it is a prerequisite for a viable, socially responsible and productive Europe; it enhances social cohesion and social capital and improves safety in the living

environment (WHO, 2005, p. 49). And that:

Protective factors are related to emotional well-being; social integration through participation in sport, church associations, clubs, etc.; connectedness with family and friends; high self-esteem; physical and environmental aspects such as good sleep, a balanced diet, physical exercise and a drug-free environment; and various sources of rewarding pleasure. (WHO, 2005, p. 76)

The above statements link in perfectly with Roger's theory of personality. With this understanding of wellbeing in mind, the current study will be looking at the interviewed counsellors' understanding of the term wellbeing in the local context.

Middle-age

In 1959, developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, and his wife Joan, formulated a theory of human development in which they identified eight psychosocial stages. Erikson explains that at each stage the developing individual is faced with a challenge which they must overcome successfully in order to move onto the next stage in their development; this is called crisis resolution. The effective resolution of each conflict would give rise to a corresponding virtue which would become deeply internalized. (Erikson, 1968; Erikson, 1977; Sokol, 2009).

The seventh stage of Erikson's theory is middle adulthood or middle-age: the relatively long period of life between young adulthood and old age. Erikson explains that this age bracket pursues a variety of goals and takes on assorted roles such as bearing and raising children, taking care of and being part of a family, employment and leisure. The Eriksons struggled to find a word which precisely captures the gist of this particular stage. Finally, they coined the term 'generativity,' and the meaning they attributed to it incorporates caring and being productive. The relevant challenge identified was that of being generative or its polar opposite: stagnating (McAdams,

2006). Helping the next generation prepare for the future in this way gives rise to a corresponding virtue of care.

In the generativity versus stagnation stage people are at their most productive: they want to give back, contribute, be needed and leave something that will outlive them. If they are not able to accomplish this, development is arrested and stagnation will set in, implying routine repetition in vocational and social relationships and “Individuals, then, often begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own - or one another’s - one and only child” (Erikson, 1968, p. 138).

Middle-aged people cope with stress differently from the way people in other developmental stages cope, not simply as a direct function of age but due to having to deal with different stressors in that particular stage of life (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Moos, Brennan, Schutte, & Moos, 2006). For example, one interpretation of the results of a study carried out in the U.S. on a large sample of primarily white men, blue and white collar workers between the ages of 48 and 91, showed “that the nature of stress changes with age, from episodic to chronic, which in turn affects appraisal and coping processes” (Aldwin, Sutton, Chiara, & Spiro III, 1996). Some of the concerns that people may face in middle-age could be: infertility, adoption, anxiety about offspring, the realisation that life is half-finished, changes in life circumstances: death of a parent or loved one, divorce, remarriage, career change, relocation, continuing education, empty nest (Sokol, 2009) and existential issues “...such as: scope or meaning of life, professional identity, fear of death, solitude and loneliness, freedom of choice and liberty” (Popescu, 2015, p. 509). Various studies have been undertaken to explore existential issues faced in middle-age. A recurring theme which emerges is meaning of life and this is linked to wellbeing (Becker, 2006; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009; Weaver, 2009). As per the research question this

study focuses on Maltese women in their generativity versus stagnation stage set in the local context as described next.

The Maltese Context

In view of the fact that this research is focused within a Maltese context, it is essential to identify the country's culture as this has the potential to influence its population's worldview and behaviour and the way it perceives and experiences (Carter, 2005). Cultural norms have the power to determine what is acceptable and what is not. They can define wellness and mental health and how to go about achieving them. "Up to a few years ago 'counselling' was the exclusive realm of priests" (Mifsud D. , 2008, p. 19). "We [Maltese] had our *kappillan* (parish priest); marriage counsellor, expert on family affairs, sage and placatory adviser, comforter when needed and available round the clock at no cost to his entire parish" (Trevisan, 2016). Counselling in Malta has come a long way since then and is now widespread in private practice and is also available free of charge in various parishes and institutions. However, "the counselling profession only has the capacity to work with individuals who present for treatment" (Donoghue, 2014, p. 1).

Malta is a tiny independent European Union country comprised of an archipelago of islands contained in a mere 316km² with one of the densest populations in the world (Sciriha, 2005). Despite its insignificant size Malta has played a prominent part in history due to its particular geographical location: a stepping stone between Europe and North Africa. The Maltese people, their language, religion, beliefs and values, education, politics and culture have evolved over time with each subsequent ruler and ultimately with the acquisition of independence and currently with globalization and the influx of EU and non-EU citizens to Malta (Sciriha, 2005). Doublesin (2016) reflects "that the apprehension of

the Maltese people to embrace multiculturalism is rooted in their experience of being subjugated by foreign powers in the past and in the belief that embracing multiculturalism will be at the expense of traditional and moral values” (p.100).

Predominantly Roman Catholic, Malta values the traditional nuclear family yet has an individualistic culture. It can also have undertones of a collectivistic culture when it comes to family matters. Due to the tight-knit community and strong gossip networks (Bradford & Clark, 2011) anonymity and privacy are hard to come by and perceived social stigma is remarkably high, (Donoghue, 2014), resulting in many individuals not acknowledging that they need help, dealing with it alone or confiding solely in a close friend or relative rather than seeking formal help such as counselling.

The state of wellbeing and mental health awareness and care in Malta are still lacking according to the Mental Health Commissioner as reported in The Malta Independent (2018). Recently some initiatives have started being undertaken in line with the WHO's declaration that mental health problems affect at least one in four people at some time in their lives (WHO, 2005). The Government of Malta issued a new Mental Health Act (2012) and established a Commissioner for the Promotion of Rights of Persons with Mental Disorders. The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (PFWS) is continuously promoting the United Nation (UN)'s Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing (United Nations Development Programme, 2018) by striving to create awareness of the vital need for care of and investment in wellbeing and the elimination of stigma as outlined in its publication entitled: 'Mental Health in Malta. Wellbeing Through a Shared Strategy' (2017). There are also ongoing initiatives being evaluated to promote mental health in schools (Cefai, Askell-Williams, Skrzypiec, & Wyra, 2013) and workplaces in line with the WHO (2016) guidelines.

What it means to be Maltese. “People are socio-culturally shaped shapers of their environments” (Markus & Kitayama, 2010, p. 421). In other words, being Maltese shapes the Maltese people and the Maltese people also shape what it means to be Maltese. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory of Human Development which states that human development is a reciprocal interaction between individuals and their immediate environment with all that that entails (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory talks specifically about the effects of culture on personal development explaining that all human development occurs within a cultural context from infancy until adulthood (Vélez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, Vega-Molina, & Coll, 2017). What then are the effects of Maltese culture on Maltese people and specifically on Maltese women? During my research study I looked out for these socio-cultural effects.

Languages spoken in Malta. “Today, the Maltese language has taken centre stage and is intimately connected with what it means to be Maltese” (Thake Vassallo, 2009, p. 361). Language is a tool used to express oneself. Should middle-aged Maltese women choose to seek help by going to counselling they would need to feel that they are speaking the same language as their counsellor, not in the literal sense, but in the sense of being understood with the ultimate aim of achieving emotional wellbeing.

A language is not simply a channel useful for putting ideas and arguments across in transparent packaging...Language in general, and each language in particular, determines the manner in which the world is organized and understood. We enter a language and to some degree we are shaped by it. (Thake Vassallo, 2009, p. 352)

Piaget and Vygotsky regard a child's development of language as an elaborate interaction with their environment, influenced by social and cognitive development. They believe that through the acquisition of language the child constructs a sign system through which they could understand their world (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). "[T]he Maltese language is a fundamental element in the national identity of the Maltese people" (Badia i Capdevila, 2004, p. 5). The earliest written Maltese language dates back to the 15th century. Prior to that, it existed merely as a spoken language and was used mainly by peasants. The language has had as turbulent a past as the history of Malta. It was in danger of dying out as it had to compete with Italian and English. Yet it survived to become a co-official language of Malta, together with English and it is also an official language of the European Union. The majority of Maltese people speak Maltese as their first language with English being learned at school and through social media. There are pockets of the population which speak English as their first language with Maltese being learned formally at school and through contact with Maltese speakers in society. Many families use Maltese and English interchangeably although they may favour one language over the other (Angermann, 2001; Camilleri Grima, 2013; Cutajar, 2015; Petrova, 2013).

These different patterns of language acquisition and use, and the different language environments in which Maltese children grow (with either Maltese or English or a hybrid mixture of the two serving as primary language) have a significant impact on the ways in which young Maltese people understand and define their national and cultural identities. (Grixti, 2008, p. 3)

Religion in Malta. "The Maltese language and the Catholic religion lie at the very roots of our country's identity" (Ellul, 2009, p. 194). From the arrival of St Paul to

the Maltese Islands in around 60 A.D, Christianity has played a very big part in Maltese culture; in the recent past notoriously more so than in the current present (DeGiovanni, 1997). The Catholic religion imposes strict values and beliefs rejecting co-habitation, sex before marriage and adultery, birth control, abortion, divorce, same-sex relationships and marriages, adoption by same-sex couples and euthanasia, among others. However, the influence of the government in the seventies, served to decrease the involvement of the Church in the political and social affairs of Malta. "In many ways Maltese society is in a state of constant flux on both the social and the religious level" (Ellul, 2009, p. 191). Many significant changes have taken place in the past few years (Abela A. M., 2000). In 1964 Malta gained Independence and became a republic in 1974. In the 70s civil union and gender equality in salary pay were introduced and adultery and sodomy decriminalized. In 2004 Malta joined the EU. In 2011 a referendum in Malta voted in favour of divorce. In 2015 the Civil Union law awarded gay couples the same rights and privileges as married couples, including the right to adopt. In 2017 same-sex marriages became legal. (Ellul, 2009) says that "There are many young people who have lost their faith as well as their trust in the Church partly because of... perceived intransigence on the part of ecclesiastical authorities regarding moral and ethical issues" (p. 192). This shift results in a change in the religious fabric of Maltese culture and this is having a corresponding effect on the development of the Maltese people. In the past much of Maltese culture was motivated by guilt (Hansen Pace, 2011; Scicluna M. , 2016). I wonder if this very same guilt is a factor contributing to why many middle-aged Maltese people would choose not to seek help? And by the same token, I wonder if their choice of confiding in a priest stems from this guilt? Talking to a priest is similar to going to confession and can have the same reassuring effects of absolution. In

contemporary times there is a surge towards an individualistic, pluralistic and secular society (Abela A. M., 2014). This study also considers that these changes may have had a corresponding change on the emotional fabric of the middle-aged Maltese women who are the focus of this study.

Being a woman in Malta. Researching men would have told a different story from the one I wanted to explore. Adichie (2017) notes that “[g]ender matters. Men and women experience the world differently” (2017, 25:27). Moreover, literature denotes that men are less likely to seek counselling than women because of constraints imposed by their alleged masculinity (Freed & Freed, 2013). For example, a study on college students in Taiwan showed that women were more likely to seek help than men when facing stressful situations (Li, 2014).

Malta has traditionally had a patriarchal society with men being the main breadwinners and women typically the homemakers (Abela, Frosh, & Dowling, 2005). Although employment of women outside the home has increased of late and the gender employment gap is very small between the ages of 15 and 24, the pre-child-rearing age, it sky rockets after that (Sciriha, 2005). According to the National Statistics Office (2014), there are 73,115 women in the 40 to 65-year-old age range residing in Malta and less than half of these are registered as employed. Many of those women who are unemployed may be very tentatively believed to be engaged in childcare, care of elderly relatives and/or housekeeping rendering them economically dependent (Bugeja, 2009). Malta has an ageing population - 74,209 estimated women in the 40 to 65 bracket for 2020, 75,615 by 2025 and 78,560 by 2030 (Eurostat, 2017) - which is even more reason to invest in the emotional wellbeing of this cohort.

With the passage of time the Maltese woman's cultural narrative of sacrificing

herself to look after her husband and raise her children (Abela A. M., 2003; Abela, Frosh, & Dowling, 2005; Spiteri & Xuereb, 2012), with those previously being her principal mission and objective in life, is transforming to encompass a different role. This change is gradual and continuous. Years ago, anthropologist Sibyl O'Reilly Mizzi, (1977) refers to changing patterns in mate selection and fertility patterns in Malta. The contemporary Maltese woman pursues further education and a career - six out of ten students starting University of Malta for the academic year 2017/8 were women (Times of Malta, 2018). This contrasts greatly with the custom forty or so years ago, where a woman was asked and expected to resign from work when she got married as it was the norm that her role was in the home. While there are still many women who choose to stop work for a while when they have children, many others try to juggle career and family (Mifsud J. , 2014) as: "Society still seems to expect that the idea of balancing work and family life is principally a women's issue as traditional gender roles still appear to prevail" (Spiteri & Xuereb, 2012).

Conclusion

This literature review offers a brief look into the vast history and evolution of the theory of stress and coping pursued in the quest for human flourishing. The proliferation of literature and studies related to the topic is immense and continually evolving and it was difficult to limit it to its essence without omitting significant aspects. Emotional wellbeing, being middle-aged and the changing cultural narrative in the local context with all its corresponding ramifications on Maltese society were explored next. In the following chapter I outline the methodology used to carry out this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the rationale for the chosen research strategy and the design of the study used to conduct a phenomenological exploration of counsellors' perceptions of coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women. Phenomenology is explained, followed by a description of the process of locating the research participants, an account of the data collection method and the data analysis process using Thematic Analysis. The limitations and critique of the method are explained and the measures used for ensuring trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations are presented.

Methodology

“A phenomenological stance views a person’s own perception of the world as primary. This view...underpins Carl Roger’s approach of humanism and client-centred therapy” (Coolican, 2014, p. 233). Therefore, in alignment with my conceptual framework, a phenomenological approach was deemed to be the best fit between Carl Rogers’ theory, the purpose of this study and the researcher’s personal positioning. Manen (1990) writes: “Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience” (p. 9). I wanted to discover what particular ways the counsellors observe their clients taking care of themselves and their emotional wellbeing. Therefore descriptive phenomenology was deemed to be ideal for my study. “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 98).

Phenomenology is a philosophy which is increasingly being applied as a research approach. There are various branches of phenomenology which vary slightly and are overlapping but all are ultimately focused on people’s lived experience. As this study is an exploratory study, Transcendental Phenomenological research appeared to best meet its needs as previously referred to in Chapter 1, as:

'It is useful to use when the researcher has identified a phenomenon to understand, and has individuals who can provide a description of what they have experienced' (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). I would like to reiterate that although IPA was considered, as was Grounded Theory, it was not selected for this research study as Transcendental Phenomenology was determined to be the best fit for my purpose since it does not go beyond description. The method chosen for this research study is for the researcher to be immersed in the world of the participants and to be a co-researcher with them, trying to understand their world as they experience it and then attempting to present the quintessence of their perceptions in a way that can build awareness and knowledge and hopefully provide a basis for further research.

Method and Design of the Study

I was not searching for statistics or facts; I wanted to attempt to comprehend a particular concept from the viewpoint of those living it (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).It was my intention to try to elicit and understand personal stories. In order to achieve this end a qualitative study using interviews was deemed to be the best approach and so qualitative research was selected to study a specific group of people to identify variables that cannot easily be measured, (Creswell, 2013).

Purposive sample. My initial desire for this research project was to interview women in Erikson's seventh stage of life, who have an emotional concern and explore why they do not go to counselling. I was interested in researching Maltese women rather than women living in Malta because my inclination was to research women indigenous to our tight-knit community with all the corresponding impacts of our culture, religious, political and social influences and proximity to family and friend support networks. Researching the experiences of women who are not Maltese may have yielded different results therefore focusing specifically on Maltese women

would help to minimise the variables within the researched group. However, attempting to recruit women who would be willing to share their story, when they specifically do not go to counselling, was thought to be unlikely to yield positive results and therefore the focus of the study was changed to counsellors' perceptions of coping strategies and help-seeking attitudes. My interest was in finding out more about coping strategies utilised by middle-aged Maltese women and therefore I had no motive to limit the participant sample to only female counsellors so male counsellors were eligible to volunteer to participate in the research study and relate their own perspective.

In order to ensure an opt-in informed decision-making procedure for participants, a purposive sample was recruited through a request for volunteers sent via email by two gatekeepers: the Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP), (Appendix C) and the Department of Counselling (Appendix D). The email included an Information Letter (Appendix A) and a Consent Form (Appendix B). In order to be eligible to opt in to the research study the participants needed to have a minimum of two years experience practising as a counsellor working with older clients, in other words, not solely play therapists or school counsellors. They also needed to be able to communicate in Maltese and English.

Recruiting participants was expected to be straightforward. In reality it proved more complicated than had been foreseen. Despite recruitment emails disseminated by MACP and the Department of Counselling, not many participants were forthcoming. During an MACP meeting for school counsellors, on the suggestion of the MACP President, I made an appeal for participants to any counsellors present who also worked in private practice. Luckily a number came forward and volunteered. Some of them did not have two years experience practising as a counsellor after

obtaining their degree but all had more than two years experience considering that they had also been practising for almost four years prior as part of their practicum requirement and therefore they were deemed eligible to participate in the study.

Data collection. The data collection exercise was conducted through semi-structured recorded interviews lasting between 45 minutes and an hour, with six counsellors as per Langdrige (2007) at a location and time of their choice. The first interview was initially intended to be a pilot study. However, only six counsellors opted in to my research. After discussing the issue with my supervisor, it was decided to proceed without a pilot interview. A copy of the question guide used during the interviews can be found in Appendix E. As outlined in Chapter 1, Carl Rogers' Theory of Personality is the theory underpinning this research study and Carl Rogers describes various core conditions which are necessary and sufficient in a therapeutic relationship. During the interviews, I strove to achieve these core conditions to the best of my ability by being genuine, attempting to put the interviewees at ease, valuing their opinions and listening deeply to anything they had to say. At the end of each interview the interviewees were asked if there was anything else they felt it was pertinent to add (McLeod, 2015).

Memo writing. All the interviews were recorded. I also wrote my own notes of what I felt, thought and observed during the interviews (McLeod, 2015). As this is a qualitative study I was the main tool in the research and the purpose of my reflexivity was to help me to gain a deeper understanding of what was being triggered in me, and to keep this foremost in my awareness as I went through the data analysis process.

Data analysis. Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to analyse the data. I have chosen to use (TA) as my method since I feel that it is the best fit for my purpose. I

considered other methods, for example, IPA as it seemed that it could work well too however on closer inspection, I understood that, as Braun and Clarke (n.d.) wrote, IPA is “like a piece of ready-made furniture – all the design choices (colour-scheme, dimensions, materials etc.) have been made for you” whereas TA “... allows the researcher a great deal of freedom to analyse qualitative data in a form that is appropriate to their own purposes” (McLeod, 2015, p. 147). “TA is like the piece of furniture you build yourself, where you choose your colour scheme, the dimensions of the piece, the materials, etc. ... the hallmark of TA is its flexibility” (Braun & Clarke, n.d.).

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. It can also be a ‘contextualist’ method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

This flexibility fits well for the purposes of my study because in undertaking this research from an essentialist/realist perspective I wanted to look for the experiences of the individuals interviewed while from a constructionist perspective I also wanted to find out about their meaning within the discourses of Maltese culture (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Based on both these perspectives the study has been conducted within a contextualist paradigm: an approach which assumes meaning to be related to the context in which it is produced.

“Thematic analysis is an approach that enables researchers to identify, code

and cluster themes emerging from the research” (Bright, 2013, p. 66). Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases of thematic analysis after the data collection, including familiarising oneself with the data, transcribing, if necessary, and taking down notes, generating some initial codes across the entire data set and then seeking out themes, reviewing them and creating a thematic map, defining and naming the themes and finally producing the report.

Per the phases listed above, and in accordance with my theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed in keeping with “Rogers [who] was one of the first counsellors to regularly audiotape his sessions for later transcription and analysis” (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2008, p. 456). The transcripts were emailed to the counsellors to read, verify and make amendments as necessary to ensure the accurate reflection of their perceptions.

Coding in TA can be inductive, meaning the codes are extracted from the data and give rise to a rich description of the overall data, or deductive; the codes are derived from the philosophical framework underpinning the study and may provide a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Inductive approaches are valuable when conducting a study where there is a dearth of prior research (Clarke & Braun, 2017) such as in the case of this particular study and therefore why TA was used here inductively: the themes were identified and clustered from the scrutiny of the transcripts and not from the underpinning theory.

Although the primary concern ... is the lived experience of the participant and the meaning which the participant makes of that lived experience, the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking

– this is the double hermeneutic. (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 80)

In the case of this particular study, the hermeneutic is being extended to triple because I, the researcher, will be trying to make sense of the experience of the counsellor who is trying to make sense of the experience of the client who is trying to make sense of their lived experience (Mare, 2011). For this reason, I have chosen a semantic rather than a latent Thematic Analysis approach, reflecting the explicit content of the data because I wanted to stay as close as possible to the participants' meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

The analysis and findings were written up, sent to the participants for review and presented in a report prepared by adopting a thematic approach per Langdrige (2007) and Miles and Huberman (1994) and guided by the fifteen point checklist of Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher's own reflections recorded in memo writing were incorporated in the findings which are presented in the next chapter.

Limitations and critique of method. The counsellors who opted to participate in my study have small private practices and limited years of counselling experience and therefore they have not been exposed to large volumes of middle-aged Maltese women clients. There is the possibility that had the counsellor interviewees had more years of experience their perceptions may have been different.

Finlay (2011) and Clarke and Braun (2013) express caution when undertaking qualitative research. They state that the use of the word "emerging" implies passivity on the part of the researcher when in actual fact it is the researcher who actively seeks out and extracts the themes. Bearing in mind my stance as an insider researcher and my bias outlined above, I am aware that another researcher,

analysing the same transcripts, may have highlighted themes which maybe I have not.

When using TA there are some potential pitfalls I needed to be aware of and attempt to avoid (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The questions used in the interview are not synonymous with the themes; if these were used as such then evidently no analytic work would have been done to identify patterns across the data sets. In the findings it is not enough to merely list the themes; some analysis of the content needed to be undertaken. Weak analysis is another possible failing in TA as is disparity between the data and the analytic claims pertaining to it or discrepancy between the theory and analytic claims or between the research question and the form of TA used. I have endeavoured to avoid these pitfalls to the best of my ability by frequently referring back to this list of pitfalls and constantly re-checking my work and discussing with my supervisor and peers.

In the design of a research study there are several variables which, if altered, would give rise to completely different results. If a quantitative design had been chosen the number of participants would have been much higher and the data gathered would have been statistical and indicative of trends and of cause and effect but would not have been profound nor depict a complete detailed story as experienced by the participants.

Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Credibility or lack thereof, is often an issue with qualitative research as it is perceived to lack the methodological rigour associated with quantitative studies (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*, 2014). It is criticised for being anecdotal incorporating personal impressions and influenced by researcher bias and for lacking

reproducibility and generalisability (Pope, Mays, & Popay, 2007). The scope of this particular study was not to discover data which can be generalised across populations but to come in touch with the experiences of each individual participant. Neither was the concept of transferability intended as this study is researching a very specific population so the motivation for the study was not for the results to be transferred to another population.

In an attempt to inspire trust in my study I have emailed the transcripts to each of the six participants asking for their verification or otherwise, of the content. During the write up of the findings I have continuously referred back to the transcripts and I have included many direct quotes in order to attempt to preserve my participants' voices as much as possible. I have backed up my findings and discussion with literature whenever possible and I have always kept aware of my own bias as a middle-aged woman who is also a daughter, a mother and a counsellor, through writing reflexively in memo form and having frequent meetings and discussions with my supervisor. I have carefully selected and outlined my chosen methodology and relevant rationale and the specific method selected: namely the kind of thematic analysis that I have undertaken; to reiterate, it is an inductive, semantic thematic analysis undertaken within a contextualist perspective. I have emailed a copy of the Findings and Discussion chapter to each of the participants to read and amend as necessary in order to avoid misrepresentation and remain faithful to their perceptions. All these precautions were undertaken so as to establish an audit trail which a reader may follow to trace the course of the research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty and University Research Ethics Committees prior to the commencement of the research study (Appendix F).

In accordance with Ellis (2007) who writes about relational ethics, I obtained permission and consent from my mother to use our family's personal story in the Introduction chapter of this study. As mentioned earlier, an information letter (Appendix A) was sent to all the participants before the interview and it was also read through and explained at the beginning of the interview. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B) and advised that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants were invited to choose their own pseudonym and their anonymity has been respected throughout the research process. In order to ensure their privacy and anonymity, other than the pseudonyms which they themselves have chosen, no personal information about them has been included in this study in order to prevent them from potentially being identified. Given that the participants are all qualified counsellors and that the MACP code of ethics states that counsellors should have ongoing supervision throughout their counselling career, (MACP, 2011), no significant risk of distress was envisaged. In the unlikely event that the interview would have evoked emotional issues, a list of warranted counsellors who are members of MACP would have been provided for support. A year after this dissertation is complete the recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.

Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to explain the methodology and relevant rationale for this research study. It attempts to clarify each step of the method utilised in arriving at the findings and discussion which are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

This chapter attempts to critically highlight significant themes identified in this research study which explores counsellors' perceptions of coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women through the lenses of the theory of personality and feminism. The data collected was rich and detailed and it was not an easy task to eke out the themes yet not omit anything of significance. The following discussion also incorporates my personal thoughts, feelings and reflections with respect to each of the themes and subthemes. Bearing in mind that this study is an inductive (rich description of the overall data), semantic (reflecting the explicit content of the data) thematic analysis, two main themes seem to dominate this research: Evolution in the narrative of Maltese culture and middle-aged Maltese woman which includes three subthemes: State taking on the role of the family, Changes in identity and Family oriented vs career oriented and Connectedness which includes four subthemes: Coping strategy, Counselling stigma, Counselling confusion and A way of being with oneself. Appendix G presents these themes supported by relevant quotes.

Below is a list of the pseudonyms of the counsellors who were interviewed as research participants. No other information is given about them in order to protect their anonymity and avoid the possibility of them being identified.

- Joanna
- Betty
- John
- Maria
- Sara
- Bob

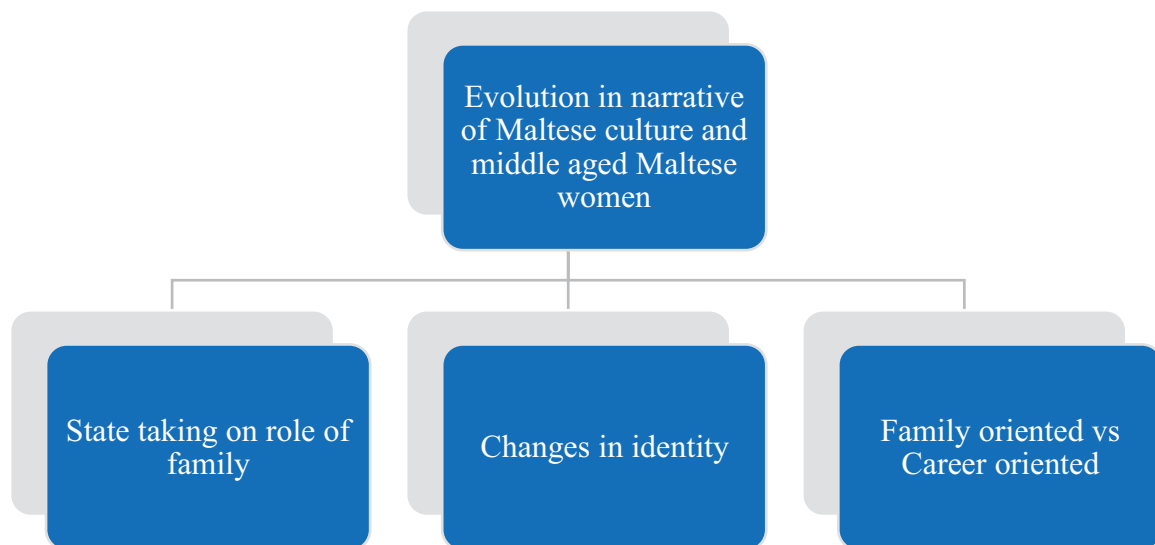


Figure 4.1 Overarching theme 1 and subthemes following analysis of transcripts.

Counsellors' Perceptions of the Evolution in the Narrative of Maltese culture and Middle-aged Maltese Women

The world is continuously changing. It may sound like a cliché but it is undeniable. With this ongoing change in the world the roles that people play in it change too. Not so long ago women were very feminine and wore corsets, explained Maria. It was accepted that they would knit and crochet and they would do tapestry. They were expected to sacrifice themselves and their lives for their husband and their children. Fast forward a few years and some women started to enter the workforce yet they were obliged to resign as soon as they got married as it was the norm that their place was at home taking care of their husband's every need and their primary role was producing and raising offspring (Vella, 2013). Nowadays, in Malta, it is becoming the norm for younger couples to both be working and raising a family (Abela, Farrugia, Vella, & DeGiovanni, 2016).

State taking on role of family. Looking at contemporary times in Malta, we see the drive for women to go out to work and the incentives put into place by

Maltese governments in an attempt to increase the statistics of working women and women in leadership roles. To further endorse this, the state provides various incentives as outlined by Apap (2017), such as, tax benefits for women returning to work, free childcare; it has proposed extra sick leave for the mother when her child is sick and her school leaving aged children are entitled to free revision classes for Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) exams. Nowadays the roles of the traditional stay-at-home mother and housewife are sometimes looked down upon as alluded to in *The Economist* (2014) and by Martin (2015). John perceives this change in culture as disheartening, almost like the breakdown of the family. He talked nostalgically of the days when parishes were small and everybody knew everybody and wishing peace to the people around you during the celebration of mass was truly meaningful. He feels that society today has become individualistic and he lamented that our:

Lifestyle is getting busier and busier, we have less time to stop and think about the implications of life, decisions we're taking, the effect it's having on our children and families and I think it keeps on putting people in separate cells and everybody goes their own way. John

He feels that the state is taking on more of the role of the family in various ways, for example: "the state taking more the role of the educator, the state taking the role of providing nurseries for the children, so taking the role of the parents." He gave another example of old people's homes: nowadays residences have become so small and people so busy that it is not possible to look after the elderly of the family at home. Instead they "are being stashed away in old people's homes" where they are only visited monthly. No wonder it's not possible to get advice from them anymore. "Do you wait for a month until you see them in the old people's home?" he mused.

He spoke of the long hours that parents spend at work plus the lengthy travelling times to get to work and back. When they are finally home they are tired and preoccupied which is not conducive to an open confiding sharing relationship with their offspring who may intuitively pick up on their parents' anxiety and choose not to add on to their troubles with their own worries. He reminisced that in the past families were so much closer and everyone turned to the elders of the family when they had concerns. Counsellors were nonexistent.

It seems that more time passes, the more people seem to need attention on a psychological level, at least, or else there's more awareness could be that, could be that too cos you wouldn't hear of this, I don't know, in my grandfather's generation. Nobody would mention I'm going to a counsellor boq unheard of. Probably they would refer to the elders of the family, of society and get the wisdom from there and, and act accordingly. Now it seems that people refer to professionals for this kind of therapy, for this kind of talk. John He feels that this is another instance of the state taking on more of the role of the family: going to outside help like counselling rather than talking to family. John's perception is mirrored in literature as stated below:

The move away from the traditional to the modern is also reflected in both existing structures of, and attitudes towards, care services provision for psychosocial problems. Abela and Sammut Scerri (2003; 2010) describe how help for such difficulties was provided by and sought from the Church in the past until the mid-eighties when the advent of psychosocial/psychological services heralded a change in culture. (Abela, Casha, Xuereb, Clark, Inguanez, & Sammut Scerri, 2012)

I feel that this piece of research holds particular significance for my study: it was a

revelation to me that the church provided this kind of help because there was no other choice, no other option available. Psychosocial/psychological services started to become available in the mid-eighties, therefore, women currently in the later years of the middle-aged generation were already in their thirties at that point. So they had no experience of these services when they were younger and they probably grew up witnessing older family and friends going to talk to a priest when they had some kind of difficulty. I wonder if, just like some of the older generation have difficulty adjusting to new technology, holding onto the old ways and claiming that their way was best, if resisting services like counselling is another manifestation of resistance to change? This advent of psychosocial/psychological services is another example of the evolution in the narrative of Maltese culture. Regarding going to talk to a priest about issues Betty said:

There have actually been quite a lot of, of people who have mentioned that aha they do go but then again it is an age bracket that are still active re actively engaging in in in, say, in the, in their spiritual aspect. I see it less nowadays in the younger people. It's something that they don't mention at all actually.

Change in identity. Along with these changes in woman's role there necessitated corresponding changes in her identity. Maria explained that to survive in the man's world of work, women have had to take on characteristics which were traditionally more typically associated with men, for example; assertion, responsibility for taking care of themselves and not being dependent on others and responsibility for being and enjoying being, sexual. Cruea talks about this in her description of the metamorphosis of woman from True Woman to Real Woman to Public Woman to New Woman (2005). Commensurately, there are also changes in the obstacles that

the woman faces in her new daily life and these issues constitute an increased need for counselling services. Whereas previously her issues may have been mainly domestic, now she also faces challenges in the world of work; discrimination, sexism, harassment, failure to achieve, work-related anxiety, guilt about not spending more time with her children, not enough time to take care of ailing elderly parents and many more (Mifsud J. , 2014).

Maria explained how these changes affect a woman's identity:

This is the difference between the narratives, the difference between the different elements that em would contribute to change in the cultural narrative. Of course, there is media, there is, you know, there is more job opportunities. There is everything, you know, there is the em eh the world becoming a very small, you know, place, like you know em but all these things then affect em, how women think and affect the expectations of society.

Family oriented vs career oriented. It often all comes down to juggling career and family; the notorious work-life balance (Rizzo, 2006). The crux of it is that woman has added on the role of career woman but she has not relinquished her role of homemaker, nurturer and emotional and primary caregiver (Abela, Farrugia, Vella, & DeGiovanni, 2016). This has been coined the 'triple shift' (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995). She cannot win. She sometimes faces criticism from all sides, even from other women. If she is a housewife then she may be considered lazy or not intelligent enough to hold down a job. "The low level of societal value placed on the work of stay-at-home parents" is referred to by Bean Softas-Nall, Eberle and Paul (2016, p. 23). If she is a career woman then there may be the perception that her children may suffer "potential negative consequences" (Hsin & Felfe, 2014, p. 1867). She may have delayed motherhood; as Bob said: "before at the age of 40 they had

18 year old children, maybe 15, nowadays 40 year olds have 5 year old children.” He went on to explain that if she takes a career break to raise children at around the age of 40 she can potentially face difficulties when attempting to re-enter the workforce.

Bob suggested that being career focused or family driven is a free choice:

For some women it's like in their instinct, it's obvious for them that once they've kids, they look after the children and they don't, em, they don't mind what people say about them, it's not about the career, it's not about anything, just nurturing and giving the best childhood for their children.... But others are not like that... it's about the individual and about, about the way that they look at life and the way they look at, em the nurturing of their children. Some believe that they cannot do it without working, without having a job and some believe that they *shouldn't* work in order to give the, not they shouldn't work, you know, it's not an obligation. They don't *want* to work. Bob

This resonates so much with me. Carl Rogers talks about “freedom of choice” (1961) and I truly believe that all people should be free to consider carefully, weigh the pros and cons, and arrive at a choice which works for them without being influenced by the pressures, demands and expectations of society at large, even if it means going against the flow sometimes. Baldacchino as cited in Abela, Frosh and Dowling (2005) states “the main reasons for women not working was to look after their families and because they are happy taking care of the family.”

A woman's partner or husband may be content for her to work in order for her to contribute to the family income. But is he ready and willing to share the household chores and burdens associated with raising a family? This culture change has not left men unaffected; they have had to adjust to the woman's new role. As Maria said: “tell me of the man, very few of them who used to change the nappies of their sons,

who are now 70 you know? But 25 year olds do, it's expected that they do it, you know?" In a phenomenological qualitative study conducted on stay-at-home mothers in North West America, the working husband's role and contribution to the household are looked at too (Bean, Softas-Nall, Eberle, & Paul, 2016). With all these changes in the world, in roles and in identity, in the narrative of being a woman in Malta, the concept of guilt has changed too. "A 60 year old would be guilty if she didn't cook, a 40 year old would be, a 25 year old would tell her her partner, *you* cook, you know?" Maria.

In order to cope with the ever increasing demands on her time, the woman has had to hone and fine tune her organisation and management skills: for example; from shopping daily and cooking twice daily she may have turned to other options such as online grocery shopping with delivery or monthly grocery shopping sprees topping up the perishable items once or twice a week. She may plan the meals for a week or even two or more and sometimes resort to leftovers, TV dinners or fast food take outs and potentially face criticism once more.

All the counsellors had the perception, although not scientifically based, that along with this change in the cultural narrative of the Maltese woman there has also been a positive change in the general views and attitudes and openness towards counselling. This will be discussed in further detail in the themes called Counselling Stigma and Counselling Confusion.

So where do middle-aged Maltese women stand today? As stated in the literature review, less than half the Maltese women in the 40 – 65 year age range are currently registered as employed but this figure is on the increase and Malta is slowly moving away from the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker role (Abela, Casha, Xuereb, Clark, Inguanez, & Sammut Scerri, 2012). Maria feels that many

contemporary middle-aged Maltese women pertain to the old narrative while at the same time also pertaining to the new narrative as also expressed in Abela, Frosh and Dowling (2005). She said that they have “one foot in the old generation and one foot in the new,” with all that that entails and “the stressors then would take a woman to counselling.”

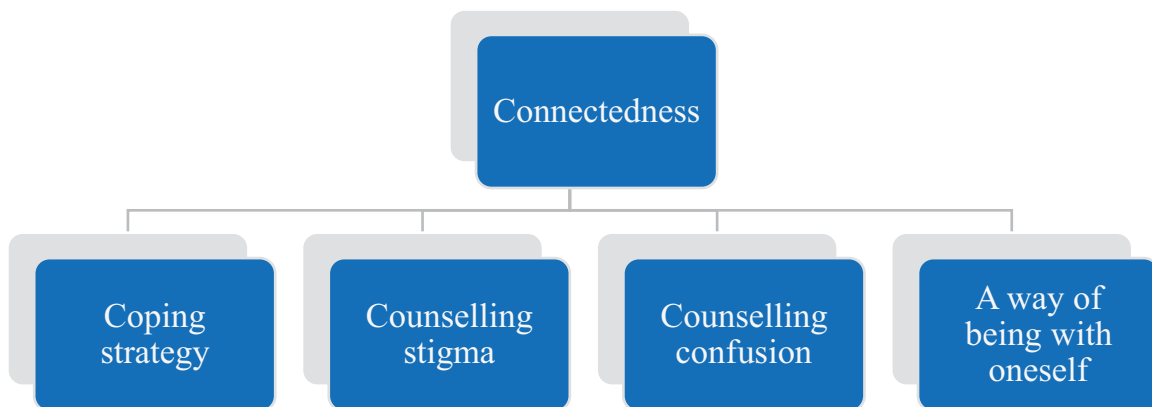


Figure 4.2 Overarching theme 2 and subthemes following analysis of transcripts.

Counsellors' Perceptions of Connectedness

We human beings are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others. Dalai Lama (Ferrazzi & Raz, 2005)

Connectedness is a theme which stands out loud and clear, bright and bold. It is pervasive in each and every transcript even though it is referred to unobtrusively without always being named and pinpointed specifically. Here I attempt to explain

the complexity and intertwined parts of this connectedness by using a diagram (as seen in Figure 4.3 below).

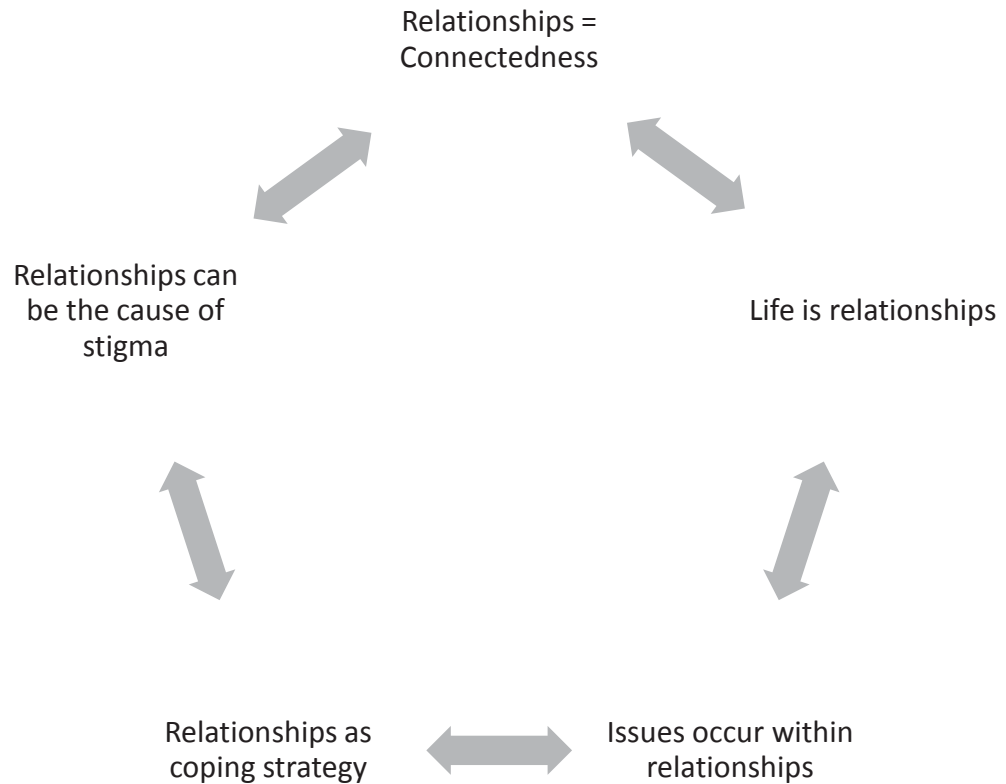


Figure 4.3 The circularity of connectedness.

We are born into connectedness. We need connectedness to survive. Issues occur within connectedness and we turn to connectedness to deal with these issues. Sometimes, this very same connectedness ends up being a detriment to our reaching out for help to deal with issues. The interdependence of each of the parts has an element of systems theory. Circularity is explained in systems theory as “repetitive patterns of interaction” (Dallos & Draper, 2015).

Life is relationships. As John Donne had said: No man is an island. Connectedness in the form of relationships is a pervasive theme which permeates subtly and not so subtly throughout each interview. We all came into being because of two elements connecting (Satici, Uysal, & Deniz, 2016). Before birth we were

physically connected to the mother who bore us. We are born into a community and into society. Babies need people in order to survive. We cannot survive alone. So connectedness, even though we may take it for granted, oblivious to its very presence, is an essential fundamental part of life. It is infused in our entire existence. "Connecting is that rare thing that lets us have our cake and eat it too" (Ferrazzi & Raz, 2005, p. 289).

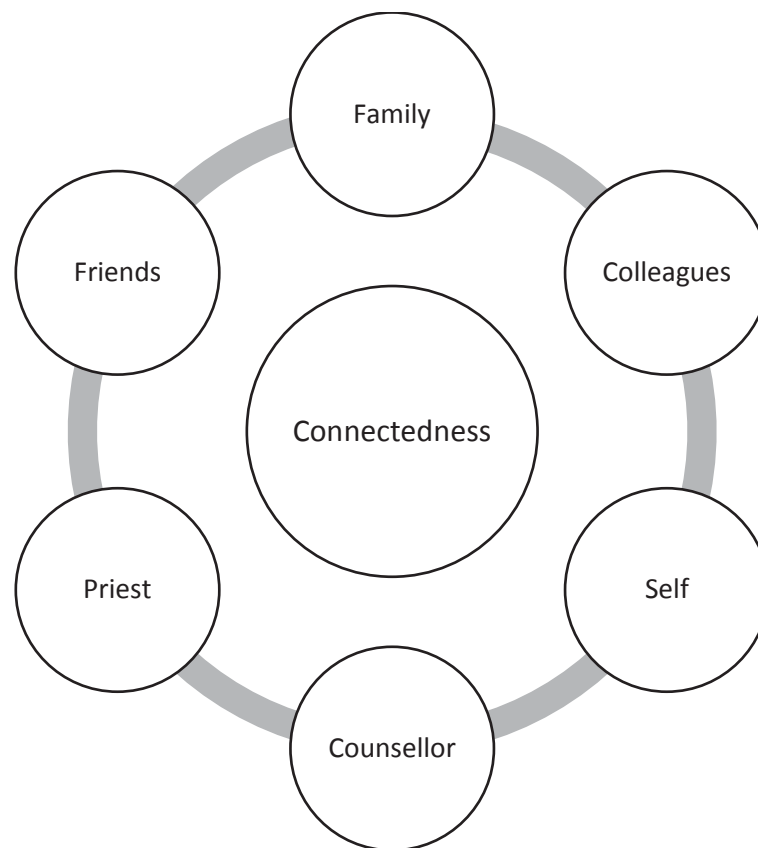


Figure 4.4 Human relationships referred to by counsellors interviewed.

The relationships portrayed in the diagram above share many similarities with The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), specifically the microsystem and the exosystem, in that each person has connections with differing degrees of proximity with each of their affiliated groups and that these all affect and are affected

by the individual. The theme of connectedness confirms and links back in to the protective factors outlined by WHO (2005) cited in the literature review.

John explained that:

God would not have created us to be born in a family had he not wanted it to be like that so the design itself points to how God wants things to be. If he wanted us to live individually he would have made us come down from the sky on our own without having the need for a mother and a father like each one of us has. But the fact that he wants us to be born in a family shows that the man needs to be connected. John

Everything and anything that happens in our lives happens within connectedness. Even if something is happening within us, in our thoughts and feelings, it is within our connection with our self. The issues that humans face are almost all related to connectedness in one way or another. Within our community we may sometimes have problems with our family members, neighbours, friends or work colleagues. These issues are occurring within our connectedness to other people. Bob believes that: "our culture is based mainly em on the dynamics that we have with our relatives and em the dynam, the relationships that we have with our colleagues." Regarding issues faced in middle-age he said: "I'm not generalising, but I'm, it's like it's something universal, but sort of, the major issues are related to work and family members, I mean the so, work dynamics, the relationship with colleagues and the relationship with with relatives."

Connectedness as a coping strategy. "I think at the basis of the coping strategy is, is a relationships, feeling that you belong somewhere and feeling that there is someone for you" explained John. Most of the counsellors explained that it is their perception that a major coping strategy employed by middle-aged Maltese

women is utilising the relationships that they have with friends, colleagues and family including with their own children. Only Sara said that the three middle-aged women she has had privately as clients were all very secretive and did not talk to anyone other than her as their counsellor, about their issues. Their coping relationship, she felt, was their connectedness with her.

Connectedness is vital, more so for women than for men according to Carol Gilligan who "...asserted that concern for connectedness is central to women's development" (Herlihy & Park, 2016, p. 374). Taylor et al in (2000) suggest that when faced with stress women tend to seek out and utilise social networks. This phenomenon of "that group of friends that they would meet up with and grumble about everything" was referred to by Betty, who noted that it is a relatively new coping strategy among middle-aged and older Maltese women.

We may try to cope with our issues, either alone by working on ourselves or by turning to someone or something else for help. When we reach out to other people for help, either formally e.g. a counsellor, or informally, such as a friend, we are trying to build a bridge from ourselves to the other; we are trying to connect. Within this connection we are hoping for deep listening, unconditional positive regard, empathy and non-judgemental understanding (Rogers C. R., 1957). All from another human being or human beings. Connection. We can also choose relationships as coping strategies with, for example; alcohol, drugs, food, sports, fitness, pets, work, electronic games consoles, TV, mobiles, social media, religion... Some of these can be negative coping connections because in the long run (and even the not so very long run) they can cause a lot of intrapersonal and even bodily harm. These relationships can all also be a form of escapism: a way of masking the underlying issue and not working on accepting or coming to terms with it or questioning if it can

be changed or viewed in a different way. Switching off and escapism are two sides of the same coin yet one is healthy and vital while the other is not. This is discussed in more detail in the theme: A Way of Being with Oneself.

During the interviews the counsellors talked about many different ways of coping. Yet despite the fact that dealing with the actual problem is considered part of coping, only two of the counsellors mentioned it and talked about it when I asked specifically what coping strategies middle-aged Maltese women employ. Those who did talked about it in depth and it was the very first thing that they mentioned when I asked what their perceptions of coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women were.

Bob clarified it as:

the most important coping strategy in my opinion is empowering the client to stay with what she's got, whatever that is, whatever mess she is feeling, if she's going through you know. You have to stay there. For some time so that is a very important strategy. Coping strategy.

The other counsellors mentioned various things the clients use to make themselves feel better, such as spending time with friends or family, shopping, eating, listening to music, but they did not specifically mention 'staying with the problem.' However, it came up in the other interviews called various names such as: insight, awareness, recognising the triggers, learning through experience and the need to work on themselves. All these terms line up with what Carl Rogers calls Openness to Experience (1961). Through the process of therapy, under the right conditions, the clients can become aware of feelings, thoughts, beliefs that they were not even aware that they were experiencing. They will become less defensive and more able to listen to themselves and accept even the negative aspects of themselves. Staying

with the issue that is manifesting in the here and now is a parallel to Rogers' openness to experience.

Counselling stigma. People exist within relationships. These same relationships are what sustain and nurture us yet can also be the root source of our grief. To help us cope with the issues that we are experiencing within one or more of our relationships, we could turn to other relationships that we may have. However, sometimes in reality, it is some of our very relationships which may actually prevent us from seeking and receiving the help we may so dearly need due to our fear of stigma.

Abela, Frosh and Dowling (2005) refer to Malta as having the “characteristics of a face-to-face community.” Familiarity is even more salient in a small dense island population like ours where everyone knows everything about everyone all the time and as soon as something happens the news spreads around the island like wildfire, by word of mouth and now, aided by social media. We are a curious nation. We want to know what is going on with everyone. Yet we do not want anyone to know what is going on with us. So we tend to be very private about our personal lives, some of us preferring to carry the burden alone, buried deep inside ourselves, rather than opening up and sharing it with someone else, because then they will know. Formal help is not yet rid of its stigma in the Maltese Islands (Bajada, 2016; Carabott, 2017). All the counsellors interviewed feel that things are better and are continuing to improve, with initiatives such as the #StopStigma campaign endorsed by the President of Malta (2017), Eurovision song entries like Taboo (2018) and even the help of social media (the very same social media which spreads the gossip) and American TV series watched by local youth in which many protagonists openly declare that they are going to therapy, thus rendering it acceptable, commonplace;

even trendy. Yet the counsellors also feel that a lot more could be done to continue to create more awareness of mental health (Demarco, 2018), what counselling is and its benefits and to deconstruct the narrative that going to counselling is always connected with a medical issue. Maria spoke a lot about this pointing out that counselling takes place in pharmacies and clinics, that is, medical settings, and yet we want people to forget the association with medical and pathology.

Stigma has a lot to do also with, with how again with the narrative, with the cultural narrative. So as counsellors, now ok what are we doing to deconstruct this stigma and to construct an image of counselling which em would is much like the American type like it's trendy to go to your counsellor you know, as counsellors are there to help you to achieve your potential, as counsellors are there em because they help you cope with stress, as if you go to a mental health beautician ok so em and the stigma then gets rubbed off. Maria

Despite all the pros associated with being connected to others, connectedness itself can also give rise to stigma. The very same relationships that we may have with family, friends and colleagues, which could be a vital source of solace in times of need, could also be a detriment when seeking formal help.

According to Betty many of us do not want to be seen going to counselling by people we know, or by people who know people we know or by people who could potentially know us or someone related to us or even someone from our own village. This was highlighted also by Sara who spoke of her experience of having to move her clinic as far away as possible from her home in order for clients to be reassured that they couldn't possibly know *her* and also of having another clinic 'in the middle of nowhere' with no sign outside so that there was no chance that passersby could know what is going on in there. She also had to leave an hour free in between

appointments so as to reassure the clients that they were not going to meet anyone on their way in or out. What are we so afraid of? Why do we not want anyone to know that we are going to counselling? The main reasons the counsellors perceived were that the clients do not want to be thought of as being weak, as though they cannot deal with their own problems themselves, and also that they do not want people to think that they have a mental illness. Betty suggested that actually this extreme privacy could be their own issue, that maybe *they* have this feeling about themselves: that they are not strong enough and then they project it onto others saying that others will think that they are not strong enough.

Betty said:

Some clients have had issues coming to certain places because you don't know who you're going to see and you know if you see someone who knows my uncle through that place and works over there and knows... people are going to talk, you cannot stop that so automatically somehow it's going to spread, the word, so that is why this whole *intertwinedness* kind of comes as a pro and a con in itself so to speak.

Counselling confusion. Counselling confusion refers to what the counselling profession actually entails and confusion with the actual term 'counsellor'. Stigma is not the only issue associated with counselling, however. All the counsellors interviewed agreed that although on the increase, there is still not enough awareness of counselling and that the majority of middle-aged people still do not really know what counselling actually is. Many middle-aged people mainly associate counselling with a Guidance Teacher's role of aiding school children to choose which subjects they would like to study until SEC level.

Joanna said that middle-aged Maltese people: "even through lack of

awareness or education you know that they don't fully understand what a therapist does, what a counsellor does, you know which might contribute to the stigma." Betty said: "There is this common misconception that counselling is social work," as also highlighted by Pellicano (2016). Sara also felt that even other professionals are not truly aware of what a counsellor does and she complained that psychiatrists often refer clients to psychologists and not to counsellors. She pointed out also the confusion with the specific term 'counsellor,' saying:

<p>The name counsellor is em connotation with other, per eżempju, breast counselling, qisni, anybody anka per eżempju em nies li mhumieq counsellors, li m'ghandhomx il warrant, li m'ghandomx it-training taghna, they are called, they call themselves counsellors. Illum il gurnata qed, ha tinqata u qeghdha tinqata minhabba l warrant.... Jiena kont nahdem djar tax- xjuh, em giet il- counsellor, minn liema partit hi? Kunsil. For them it was a partit tal kunsill.</p>	<p>The name counsellor has connotations with other, for example, breast[feeding] counselling, it's like, anybody, even for example, people who aren't counsellors, who don't have a warrant, who don't have our training, they are called, they call themselves counsellors. Nowadays this won't be happening anymore because of the warrant... I used to work in an old people's home. 'The counsellor came.' 'From which party?' Council. For them it was a Council party.</p>
---	--

Betty spoke about the general public's confusion regarding the work done by psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors. People do not seem to be aware that they are professions which are all connected but are separate professions in their own right. Maria said: "All kindred professions seem to be looped up into mental health." Betty has heard comments like: "I am not going to counselling

because I'm not crazy," and "Listen, I don't want any pills so I'm not coming."

They, for example would call me like, listen you're a psychotherapist right like, like no I'm a counsellor. So I explain that there isn't that much of a difference really but it's just a different name so to speak I would say. Like oh ok and but you would notice that there is that little bit of disappointment, that listen it's not, cos they think that there is that difference but which is not the case. Betty

Bob said:

The first session of counselling you have to explain what counselling is, what is not counselling, so it's like em there's always a an exercise, not an exercise, it's like em part of the sessions but it's quite skilful how to inform the client what counselling is and what it's not so that they realise whether it's what they're looking for and if the objectives that they have is em em makes sense basically em with counselling. And once they're, they're fine with counselling they start disclosing, I mean it's a process, it's a journey.

Joanna explained:

Some people might have different expectations of counselling, they might think that you're going to go there and you're going to wave a magic wand and everything or you're going to give lot of advice or or tell them what to do to get out of a mess for example and of course you can't do that, so they might be disappointed and feel let down that you didn't wave your magic wand. You know, so em they lose hope.

Each in their own way the counsellors explained that counselling too is all about connectedness.

Sara mused:

In all the sessions it's the relationship which is the most important... you build

a good relationship with them and you show them that you really care, you show them that you understand, you show them that you're walking in their shoes.

Bob elaborated: "Going to counselling does not solve ... the problem. I mean it's the way that you look at it which changes; the perspective of it changes. Basically the main tool of the counselling is the relationship."

This is firmly in keeping with Carl Rogers underlying fundamental tenet that it is the six core conditions which are necessary and sufficient for a therapeutic relationship and these core conditions can lead client change to take place.

A way of being with oneself. The counsellors' perceptions of emotional wellbeing is another aspect of connectedness: connecting with the self. Each counsellor described wellbeing in a similar but different way, for example:

Betty: "How a person finds a way of being with oneself."

Joanna: "Knowing how to handle the good and the bad...being able to keep the balance."

John: "Knowing how to handle your your emotions and using them to the best to the best possible, I don't know, use for yourself."

The counsellors' perceptions of wellbeing were similar to various definitions in the literature: wellness "a balance that you can handle within yourself" (Burck, Bruneau, Baker, & Ellison, 2014, p. 43) and 'wellbeing consists in a subject's balance of pleasant over unpleasant experience, (Haybron, 2008, p. 34)'.

A statement of the counsellors' combined perceptions of emotional wellbeing is the following: it is an inner feeling state of peace which is constantly in flux and is affected by the person's ability to regulate it and also by the effect of external environmental factors. Just as the literature review revealed that stress and coping

are inextricably intertwined, the interviews highlighted that the counsellors perceive emotional wellbeing and coping to also be dependent on each other. Initially, Sara found it very difficult to capture the essence of emotional wellbeing in words. "You can't really explain it, because for me it's how you emotionally, it's, it's more than feeling; it's how you feel deep down." After some reflecting she concluded that emotional wellbeing corresponds with coping skills. "You have good coping skills, things are bad, you're going to get over them. If the coping skills are bad, the emotions, you're going to remain stuck."

All the counsellors believe that a person can make choices about courses of action that they can take which will affect their emotional wellbeing. Joanna spoke about a person's insight or life experience as being a key factor in bringing awareness to why one is feeling whatever one is feeling at the time and what one can do to change that feeling. Betty said that for her, the way to emotional wellbeing is by staying with the feeling, focusing on it, trying to bring to awareness when it started and what set it off. Bob said exactly the same thing when he was explaining his perception about coping strategy. He added that the person also needs to be aware of what he is learning from the actual *experiencing* of what he is going through. For example, if faced with a potential separation, the person can try to become aware of what the separation process itself is teaching them about themselves and about their perspective on life. Bob ruminated that albeit painful, the experience of suffering is somehow beautiful in itself: he likened it to the effort exerted in going to train at a gym and the ensuing satisfaction felt at the results reaped.

Personal and Social development (PSD) is a subject that was introduced in schools in Malta around thirty five years ago (Camilleri, Caruana, Falzon, & Muscat,

2012) therefore only the Maltese women currently at the younger end of Erikson's 40 – 65 year age bracket were fortunate enough to have been exposed to it. The main aim of PSD is to cultivate children's emotional development and a major focus centres on self-awareness. Although not entirely impossible, it is not easy to role model for others that which was not modelled for you when you were growing up. Most of the women in the cohort that the researched counsellors are describing, were not exposed to the promotion self-awareness in school and were unlikely to have been exposed to it in their families of origin, since, as already described, our culture has historically been loath to even admit to having problems let alone seek out help for them. If the women have not gained awareness later on, possibly through furthering their studies or simply through life experience, as referred to previously by Joanna, then it would be difficult for them to model it for their own offspring. Hopefully, with the introduction of PSD in schools and the continual improvement, advancement and progression in the area, this cycle will be broken and younger generations will be self-aware and reflexive and will grow into adults who are much more emotionally literate thus being able to pass on this legacy to their own children and so on. This lack of self-awareness in the current middle-aged generation is an issue because as Sara pointed out: "they think that they have nothing, nothing wrong with them." So sometimes the reason that people do not deal with their issues is not because of stigma, confusion, resistance, avoidance or escapism, but may actually be something deeper and more profound: pure oblivion; a complete lack of awareness. For them this is the way life is, has always been and will always be: they do not consider that there is a possibility that there could be another way. How could they?

Ultimately the perception of the counsellors is that emotional wellbeing is

brought about by connecting with the self: reflecting, feeling, understanding, cultivating awareness, recognizing triggers, coming to terms with the reasons for feeling the way we do and knowing what to do to feel better. This is what the counsellors work towards and try to achieve during their counselling sessions. Bob talked about trying to work with the client using the manifesting issue as a starting point to try to uncover the underlying personal issue beneath it. His reasoning is that once the client gains the awareness of the root cause, she is much better equipped to avoid unwittingly repeating the issue all over again in the future. However, counsellors often encounter resistance (Firestone, 2015); Bob explained that once a client has come to counselling it means that she has overcome the first hurdle of getting there, and she has done it without the support of her counsellor. Many clients are afraid to trust a stranger, albeit a counsellor, with their deep rooted secrets, and trust needs to be built up first. Another reason for resistance to counselling is the mere thought of opening up a scabbed over wound with all the ensuing emotional pain that will gush forth can be disheartening to say the very least. Clients may be in an emotional space in their lives where they are getting by and talking about painful issues might set them back for days, even weeks, before they start to heal and move forward, and they might not be ready for that.

All the interviewees spoke about self-care as being vital in regulating emotional wellbeing. Betty referred to it as 'Golden Time'; the time we take for ourselves to switch off and recharge. "A person actually finds a way to kind of press pause, rewind and start again... you kind of need to find a reset button every once in a while."

The examples the counsellors suggested of things we can do to bring about our own emotional wellbeing were very similar to many of the coping strategies that

had been mentioned, for instance:

Joanna: "Going for a coffee with a friend or, I don't know, staying in bed reading or eating something nice, whatever, little things that make you feel better to help you to cope."

Betty: "As little as say, once a week, you have an hour having a coffee with a friend; it can be something as little as having a 15 minute bath or it can be something like going for a weekend break somewhere or going for a long walk... driving from one place to another and at that time switching off and letting everything....over your head."

John said: "People have no problem going to the hairdresser and having their nails done and going to the gym ... so why should they have a problem taking care of their mental health?"

Maria referred to counselling as going to a mental health beautician.

Bob reiterated that we need to deal directly with the self. "The person is not the house, not the job. The person is the person, so deal with the person. Don't buy a boat to feel happy, you know, deal with yourself to feel, to feel happy."

John spoke about the difference between escapism and detaching. He explained the distinction clearly when he said that in his opinion with escapism we don't return to the problem afterwards whereas with switching off temporarily we do and we come back refreshed, invigorated and better able to cope.

For me, escaping is like running away forever. Perhaps that's my understanding of the word escape, but if you leave and come back, do it. I think it's great, do it. It's the rhythm of the human being. Even sleeping at night is a form of escapism if you want, because you switch off and you leave everything as it is. John

Bob also described the importance for emotional wellbeing of healthy living, drinking water and exercise, not only because of the physical and psychological benefits of the exercise itself but also because it creates routine and gives the person space and time and gives us the message that we need to take care of ourselves. This is in keeping with the statement by WHO (2005) quoted in Chapter 2. "Taking care of yourself is not a selfish attitude, actually it is, you are, just because you are the main tool of your system, I mean you are taking care of the tool, you are maintaining the tool" Bob.

Rogers wrote about 'The Good Life'; a process and a direction towards being 'Fully Functioning'. He believed that humans have one basic motive and that is to self-actualize; in other words, to continually evolve towards being the best self that they can possibly be. He believed that people are inherently good and that they already possess within themselves all the resources that they need to achieve this aim. A therapeutic relationship with the right conditions will enable people to tap into their inner strengths and resources and proceed in the direction of being fully functioning. Being fully functioning means being able to live the present moment to the fullest, being in the here and now and being open to all experience: good and not so good (1961). The counsellors' perceptions as described above of wellbeing brought about by taking care of the self, "maintaining the tool," regulating and maintaining a balance over the good and the bad, and connecting with the self fit in perfectly with Carl Rogers' humanistic outlook.

This, then, is the interconnected convoluted theme of connectedness. At the outset the literature review revealed that stress and coping are connected. The research showed that coping and emotional wellbeing are connected as are coping strategies and self-care initiatives; physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing, positive

coping strategies and negative coping strategies; escapism and detaching, the term 'counsellor' is connected to other things and also the general public's perception of counselling is connected to other mental health professions. You cannot always live peacefully with connectedness yet you cannot live without it. Although this connectedness may also be evident in other countries, some of the counsellors felt that it was more prevalent in Malta because of the small size of our island and our proximity to family and friends. Overseas, with larger populations and so much more geographical space, anonymity may be easier to come by. Another difference between Malta and other countries could potentially be the attitude towards counselling. In Malta counselling still seems to be associated with mental illness. Betty suggested that in other countries the attitude towards counselling is that the person is investing in personal care and is to be commended. Overseas, and this may have to do with the anonymity and the attitude towards counselling, people seem to be less affected by other people's opinions than Maltese middle-aged women appear to be. Maybe they have experienced counselling and they know that they are doing a good thing for themselves and they are proud to be taking care of themselves. Or maybe they don't put weight on other people's opinions. Maybe they have an internal locus of evaluation (Rogers C. R., 1961) and higher self-esteem than that typically associated with contemporary middle-aged Maltese women in our small community steeped in Catholic guilt (Scicluna M. , 2016). A locus of control refers to the source of their choices and decisions and judgements. Does that source reside outside of them? Or within themselves? Rogers talks about the process of "becoming" a person and he firmly believes that during this process the locus increasingly moves from an external position to becoming located within the individual and thus the person's need for outside approval dwindles more and more.

Most of the counsellors thought that older women would still nowadays confide in a priest, especially in the smaller more traditional villages and this was confirmed by Gozo Bishop, Mario Grech in an interview (Micallef, 2018). Only one counsellor had never heard of it and found the concept quite amusing. Men were thought to also use connectedness as a coping strategy, however in their case it was presumed to be more likely that they would use non-verbal, non-human connectedness. Connecting with work, digital games, drugs and alcohol were thought to be the most likely coping strategies employed by men, with the concept of the man needing to appear macho still being prevalent according to Betty and also referred to by Bob.

Younger people were perceived to connect more with friends as a coping strategy and also with a romantic partner, whereas Betty found that the older people grew, the less likely they were to confide in their partner and the more likely to confide in their friends or their own grown up children.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the salient themes from the interviewed counsellors' perceptions of the coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women have been explored. Two overarching themes were highlighted, explained, discussed and compared with literature. These are Evolution in the narrative of Maltese culture and middle-aged Maltese women together with all the corresponding ramifications, and the umbrella theme of Connectedness. This latter theme seemed like a thread running right through all the interviews, joining all the parts together and forming an interconnected cohesive whole.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes this research study. The aim of the study was to try to gain an understanding of counsellors' perceptions of the coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women. The outcome of the research study is presented next, followed by a look at the transcultural element, the limitations of the study, implications for the counselling practice and recommendations for future studies. The study will end with some concluding remarks.

Outcome of the Research Study

The research study first explored some changes in Maltese culture over time with the corresponding change in woman's status in society and the consequent changes in her roles and responsibilities. It referred to the complexities of the triple shift.

The interviewed counsellors had the perception that middle-aged Maltese women make use of a myriad of coping strategies for emotional wellbeing. The most prominent of these was seeking out a connection with others; either to vent out and discuss or simply for company and support. The key finding seems to be that often the majority of the women seek human connection, whether formally through professional help or informally through family and friends. When connecting formally via the attempt to build a relationship with a counsellor, the main coping strategy, guided by the counsellor, is dealing with the actual problem by staying with it, reflecting on it, trying to understand its root cause, exploring how they got to where they are today and what they are learning and understanding by the whole process of this journey of exploration. It can be a long slow painful process and the pace is set by the client, who is the expert on their own life (Rogers C. R., 1959). The client may experience resistance to embark on this journey primarily because of the

widespread stigma associated with seeking help for mental health issues. Once they have overcome the stigma and presented themselves for counselling they may initially be hesitant to trust a stranger, no matter their years of professional experience or how highly recommended they may be. Further, they may fear experiencing the turmoil of emotions which might accompany this process of self-discovery. When connecting informally, the coping strategy may be used, intentionally or unintentionally, to serve the purpose of escapism, avoidance, distraction or detachment with the ultimate goal of self-preservation or self-care.

The counsellors also mentioned other coping strategies which some people make use of. These include doing nothing, which in and of itself is also a coping strategy. Sometimes people are not ready to face their demons and they may prefer to grin and bear it or to simply go with the flow for the time being (Evans-Lacko, Brohan, Mojtabai, & Thornicroft, 2012). The participants also spoke about maladaptive coping strategies like verbally abusing a partner and nagging and addictions including excessive eating. More positive ways of coping mentioned were exercise, journaling, taking a timeout, being well nourished, well rested and spending time with and caring for animals, among others.

Transcultural Element

“In common use, the term 'culture' has come to mean any difference between one group of people and another. Some researchers refer to differences in family role, gender, lifestyle, religion or politics as 'cultural' differences” (d'Ardenne & Mahtani, 1999). The research study tried to identify if there were particular ways of coping that middle-aged Maltese women use in contrast to other cultures, namely, age ranges, non-Maltese people and the opposite sex. The following are some perceptions of a few nuances found.

Adolescents and younger adults were perceived to use also connectedness as a coping strategy. Yet although they also connect with friends, family and partners, it was thought that they rely more on friends than on family and that they rely on a partner more than a middle-aged person would. Given their younger age they were also perceived to be more flexible, open to change and resilient. Older Maltese women were thought to confide in their adult children or maybe a priest.

The majority of middle-aged Maltese men were thought to be possibly still holding on to the stereotypical macho maxim of 'boys don't cry' which they may have been traditionally brought up with (Freed & Freed, 2013). Although they were perceived to use connectedness as a coping strategy as well, the perception seems to be that it is a non-verbal connection, such as excess work, alcohol, drugs and electronic games. However, the counsellor-participants also felt that a very slow shift is starting to happen here too, and that more men are coming to counselling, and when they do, they are open to trusting, sharing and exploring, at times at a faster pace than women.

In terms of coping strategies used by non-Maltese people, those residing in Malta were thought to connect with new local friends more than with family or old friends out of sheer necessity, due to the proximity of the new friends and the overseas location of the family. Also, some other nationalities may not be as close knit with their family as the Maltese culture often is. Regarding other nationalities living outside Malta in larger geographical spaces, the general perception was that stigma towards counselling is not as rife there as it is in Malta and that people are by and large more aware of the counselling service, what it is and its benefits and therefore they may be more open to utilising this service.

Limitations of the Study

- This study is based on traditional gender roles and traditional male female partnerships. I would have liked to open the study out to include all genders but word count and time constraints did not permit.
- Counsellors who opted to participate had limited years of experience working as counsellors and limited exposure to middle-aged Maltese women as clients.
- I did not run a pilot study due to having only six counsellors opting into the study.
- I am a trainee counsellor who conducted research interviews with counsellors and “it is inevitable that the person of the researcher will exert some kind of influence” (McLeod, 2015, p. 96).
- As an insider-researcher, mother, daughter and counsellor, my personal biases could have influenced the research process and therefore I took extra care to ensure that all my findings were illustrated by extensive quotes from the transcripts and backed up by literature. I also used reflexivity, personal therapy and regular discussions with my dissertation supervisor.
- Since the approach used was an exploratory phenomenological study with thematic analysis, the findings are only pertinent to this limited sample of six counsellors and are personal perceptions and not facts, though grounded in literature. The aim of the research was to discover and not to generalise. This is not a limitation but merely an observation.

Implications for the Counselling Practice

When counselling middle-aged Maltese women it may be pertinent to keep in mind that many people currently in that age range may have never been exposed to

self-reflective awareness skills and therefore they may need more guidance in this area. Of course, this is a generalisation and “each client and each counselling situation are unique” (Carol, 2002, p. 48) and as always, the client will lead the way.

Many PSD teachers in schools are also school counsellors. Understanding the weight of the impact that PSD may have on their students' adult emotional lives could be an incentive for them to focus even more on self-awareness and reflective skills during their lessons. This would help to build the foundation for well-adjusted adults who are emotionally literate and have good coping skills throughout their lives.

A large proportion of a counsellor's role is advocacy. The spotlight in the form of laws, policies and public funds is often on young persons and the elderly. Counsellors could lobby for and form an integral part of a policy for care focused on middle-aged people.

As already noted in previous research undertaken within The Faculty for Social Wellbeing, there is still a widespread lack of awareness, a general gap in knowledge and much confusion shrouding the counselling profession. Many middle-aged people still do not seem to know that counselling exists, what it is or how to access it. The counselling associations urgently need to create and run an integrated awareness and educational campaign hand in hand with the backing of the Maltese government's Ministry for Health. I am sentient of the fact that this is easier said than done and that it is the wish of many counsellors.

Recommendations

During my quest for information, while attempting to answer one question, more and more questions kept occurring to me. Based on these questions, the following are a list of recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Research. Further studies could research

middle-aged Maltese women themselves to gain first hand understanding of their preferred coping strategies. Given the current multicultural component of the local population it would also be interesting to have another study which is not limited to Maltese participants, to learn about their coping strategies and to compare and contrast with those used by the Maltese people. This could be a platform for cross-cultural learning.

Recommendations for Awareness. A vital area in which research would benefit the counselling profession greatly is to attempt to understand the current awareness of the general population as to what counselling is, how it differs from other professions, how it can be accessed, how counsellors are perceived and how best to educate the public about counselling.

Recommendations for Training. As referred to previously, statistics show that Malta has an ageing population (Formosa, 2014). A post-graduate course focusing specifically on counselling for the middle-aged bracket could be highly beneficial for the emotional wellbeing of the population.

A course targeting the particular needs of the middle-aged cohort could be undertaken as part of counsellors' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and may potentially be offered by the counselling association together with other professions as an integrated multidisciplinary approach.

Concluding Remarks

A couple of times in the study I have referred to counselling as a journey. Writing this dissertation has truly been a journey for me, at times a tough one where I was travelling weighed down by heavy luggage; at other times a very enjoyable one where I felt I was lightly hopping and skipping along. Now that I have arrived at my destination I feel a sense of relief, pride and also a little bittersweet nostalgia. During

my journey I feel as though I have passed through the tunnel referred to by Carl Rogers' daughter, Natalie Rogers, (1993), as quoted in Chapter 1, and emerged a different person. As Bob said: "it's a hard journey but even the hardship of the journey is somehow beautiful."

Appendices

Appendix A: Information Letter

COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF MIDDLE-AGED MALTESE WOMEN Information letter to prospective participants

I am a trainee counsellor reading a graduate degree at the University of Malta. Part of my Master in Transcultural Counselling degree coursework includes a dissertation, which I will be carrying out under the supervision of Sharon Martinelli. I will be exploring the coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women from the perspective of counsellors. Counsellors who agree to participate would need to be qualified counsellors who have been trained to a Master with at least two years' experience working in the community and are able to speak in English and Maltese.

I will be using individual interviews as the research tool to collect data for this study. The interview will last approximately an hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews will be carried out at a time and place convenient to participants. A year after I have analysed all the information and the dissertation process is complete, I will destroy the recordings. Please note that:

- Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate
- All the raw data will only be seen by my supervisor and me
- Anonymity will be respected and identities will not be disclosed at any point. You will be given the option to choose your own pseudonym
- Participants have the right not to answer any questions they would not like to answer
- Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide an explanation for withdrawal in which case their data would not be used
- Participants will be given their transcripts and the results chapter to review, as well as a copy of the study once the correction process is complete

Should you have any queries, please contact me on veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt or 79370902 and I will be very happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Veronica Debono

Researcher
Veronica Debono
ID 508873(M)
Mobile number: 79370902
Email:
veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt

Research Supervisor
Sharon Martinelli
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Malta
Mobile number: 99719071
Email:
sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

Appendix B: Consent Form

Name of Researcher: Veronica Debono (ID 508873M)
Address: Villa Medina, Triq il-Merill, Kappara
Phone No: 79370902
Email: veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt

Title of dissertation: Counsellors' perceptions of coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women

Statement of purpose of the study: I will be exploring the coping strategies, including formal and informal help-seeking behaviour, for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women from the perspective of counsellors. I would like to undertake this study because my personal experience has suggested that there may be a gap in the utilisation of counselling services within this cohort and I would like to gather information which proves or disproves my perception.

Methods of data collection: Individual audio-recorded semi-structured interviews
Use made of the information: For dissertation research purposes only

With this Consent Form I, Veronica Debono, promise to keep to the following conditions throughout the whole research process. I will abide by the following conditions:

- i. Your real name/identity will not be used at any point in the study and you have the option to choose your own pseudonym.
- ii. You are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time and for whatever reason without there being any consequences. If you withdraw, all records and information collected will be destroyed.
- iii. There will be no deception in the data collection process of any form.
- iv. The interview will be audio-recorded.
- v. You will be given a copy of your transcript, as well as the results chapter, for your feedback and verification,
- vi. The recording will be destroyed one year after the research process has come to an end.
- vii. A copy of the research will be handed to you on CD or as a hard copy at your request.

Participant

I, _____ agree to the conditions:
 Name of participant

 Signature of participant

 Date

Researcher

I, _____ agree to the conditions.

Date: _____

Signature of researcher

Veronica Debono (veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt mob. 7937 0902)

 Date: _____

Signature of supervisor

Sharon Martinelli (sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt mob. 9971 9071)

Appendix C: Request for MACP as gatekeeper for research

2017-6-5

University of Malta Mail - Request for MACP as gatekeeper for research

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
L-Università ta' Malta

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

Request for MACP as gatekeeper for research

3 messages

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

21 May 2017 at 13:25

To: president@macpmalta.org
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

Dear Ms Galea,

I am about to embark on a research project as part requirement for my Master in Transcultural counselling. I am writing this email to gain preliminary permission via email from the Malta Association of Counselling Profession (MACP) to support me in the selection of participants by forwarding a request to all registered MACP counsellors. An official letter will be sent to your association once approval is received from UREC.

My research project intends to explore counsellors' perceptions of the coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women. Participants for this study are to be qualified counsellors with a minimum of two years counselling experience. A qualitative design using a phenomenological approach shall guide this research project. It is envisaged that the first 6-8 counsellors who respond to request and who fit eligibility criteria shall be chosen as participants for this study. Data shall be gathered using face to face interviews. All ethical considerations shall be adhered to when conducting this project:

- Opt-in participants will be asked to sign a consent form and advised that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- Their anonymity will be respected.
- They will be invited to choose their own pseudonym and will be given the transcripts to read and verify and make amendments as necessary to ensure the accurate reflection of their perceptions.
- Given that the participants will all be qualified counsellors and that the MACP code of ethics states that counsellors should have ongoing supervision throughout their counselling career, no significant risk of distress is envisaged. In the unlikely event that the interview evokes emotional issues, a list of resources will be provided for support.

2017-6-5

University of Malta Mail - Request for MACP as gatekeeper for research

Once approval is received from UREC, a detailed information letter and the relevant consent form shall be forwarded to MACP for your perusal and dissemination. It would be greatly appreciated if you could kindly confirm your approval in supporting me in dissemination to all registered members for the selection of participants. Your reply, if positive will be attached to the form as an appendix.

Thank you,

Veronica Debono (ID 508873M)

C.C. Sharon Martinelli

(Faculty of Health Sciences)

Silvia Galea <president@macpmalta.org>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

21 May 2017 at 15:23

Dear Ms Debono,
MACP will be pleased to assist you in any way once you obtain the necessary EUREC and FREC approvals,
We would also need your membership number.

Regards

Silvia Galea
[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Silvia Galea <president@macpmalta.org>
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

21 May 2017 at 15:50

Thank you and thanks for your prompt reply.

My membership number is MACP193.

Regards,
Veronica
[Quoted text hidden]

Appendix D: Request for UoM as gatekeeper for research

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Request for gatekeeper for research

**L-Università
ta' Malta**

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

Request for gatekeeper for research

5 messages

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: registrar@um.edu.mt
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

21 May 2017 at 14:14

Dear Ms Grech,

I am about to embark on a research project as part requirement for my Master in Transcultural counselling. I am writing this email to gain preliminary permission via email from the University to support me in the selection of participants by forwarding a request to all counsellors who have graduated from the Department of Counselling prior to 2015. An official letter will be sent to your association once approval is received from UREC.

My research project intends to explore counsellors' perceptions of the coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women. Participants for this study are to be qualified counsellors with a minimum of two years counselling experience. A qualitative design using a phenomenological approach shall guide this research project. It is envisaged that the first 6-8 counsellors who respond to the information letter and who fit eligibility criteria shall be chosen as participants for this study. Data shall be gathered using face to face interviews. All ethical considerations shall be adhered to when conducting this project:

- Opt-in participants will be asked to sign a consent form and advised that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- Their anonymity will be respected.
- They will be invited to choose their own pseudonym and will be given the transcripts to read and verify and make amendments as necessary to ensure the accurate reflection of their perceptions.
- Given that the participants will all be qualified counsellors and that the MACP code of ethics states that counsellors should have ongoing supervision throughout their counselling career, no

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Request for gatekeeper for research

significant risk of distress is envisaged. In the unlikely event that the interview evokes emotional issues, a list of resources will be provided for support.

Once approval is received from UREC, a detailed information letter and the relevant consent form shall be forwarded to you for your perusal and dissemination. It would be greatly appreciated if you could kindly confirm your approval in supporting me in dissemination to all registered members for the selection of participants. Your reply, if positive will be attached to the form as an appendix.

Thank you,

Veronica Debono (ID 508873M)

C.C. Sharon Martinelli

(Faculty of Health Sciences)

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>, info.registrar@um.edu.mt
Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

6 December 2017 at 13:55

Dear Ms Filletti,

Per the email below I kindly ask that my recruitment letter be sent to: all counsellors who have graduated from the Department of Counselling prior to 2015.

Thanks and regards,
Veronica Debono
Mob. 79370902

[Quoted text hidden]

Office of the Registrar <info.registrar@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>, "Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office" <info@um.edu.mt>
Cc: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>, Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>, "elisa.vella@um.edu.mt" <elisa.vella@um.edu.mt>

11 December 2017 at 12:49

Dear Ms Debono,
Thank you for your email. Since you require to contact a portion of our Alumni community, it is recommended that you forward the relevant text to the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Relations office on: info@um.edu.mt for the required assistance.

Regards,
Elisa Vella.
[Quoted text hidden]

—
Regards,
Office of the Registrar
University of Malta,
Msida, MSD 2080.
Malta.

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ui=2&ik=82a4141234&jsver=1kWWW5u7QU.en_GB.&cbl=gmail_fe_180506.06_p7&view=pt&q=maria.filletti%40um.edu.mt&qs=true

5/20/2018 University of Malta Mail - Re: COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF MIDDLE-AGED MALTESE WOMEN



Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

Re: COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF MIDDLE AGED MALTESE WOMEN

1 message

Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

5 December 2017 at 12:48

Dear Ms Debono

I refer to your email on the above subject addressed to the Registrar.

Kindly send your recruitment letter, together with a copy of UREC approval and a statement by the supervisor to info.registrar@um.edu.mt. Also kindly indicate to which sections of the student population you would like to target.

Thanks

—

Maria Filletti
Administrative Officer
Office of the Registrar
Room 207, Administration Building



t: +356 2340 2386
w: www.um.edu.mt/registrar

Kindly consider your environmental responsibility before printing this e-mail

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Request for gatekeeper for research

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

15 December 2017 at 07:31

To: Office of the Registrar <info.registrar@um.edu.mt>

Cc: "Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office" <info@um.edu.mt>, Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>, Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>, "elisa.vella@um.edu.mt" <elisa.vella@um.edu.mt>

Dear Ms Vella,

Thank you for your email. I will contact the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Relations office.

Regards,
Veronica Debono

[Quoted text hidden]

Office of the Registrar <info.registrar@um.edu.mt>

15 December 2017 at 07:31

To: veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt

Thank you for your email communication.
Your query will be answered as soon as possible.Regards,
Office of the Registrar.

[Quoted text hidden]

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research



Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research

17 messages

Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
To: veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt

23 May 2017 at 11:11

Dear Ms Debono

I refer to your email on the above subject addressed to the Registrar.

It would be appreciated if your supervisor sends me a statement (an email is enough) confirming that this research is being carried out in connection with your dissertation and I will be able to prepare the requested letter.

Thank you and regards,

—
Maria Filletti
Administrative Officer
Office of the Registrar
Room 207, Administration Building
Tel: 2340 2386

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

23 May 2017 at 21:44

Dear Ms Filletti,

I am forwarding your request to my supervisor who reads in copy.

Thanks and regards,
Veronica Debono
Mob. 79370902
[Quoted text hidden]

Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
Cc: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

24 May 2017 at 07:58

Dear Ms. Filetti,

This is to confirm that Ms. Veronica Debono's request for permission to University of Malta is related to research for her dissertation as part requirement for the Transcultural Counselling Master's Degree she is pursuing.

Thanks and regards,

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research

Sharon Martinelli

Assistant Lecturer

Mater Dei Hospital

Faculty of Health Sciences

Department of Nursing

Level II, Room 59

Tel: 23401832

From: Veronica Debono [mailto:veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt]

Sent: Tuesday, May 23, 2017 9:44 PM

To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>

Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

Subject: Re: Request for gatekeeper for research

[Quoted text hidden]

Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

24 May 2017 at 08:50

Dear Ms Debono

We have received the confirmation from your supervisor, so I can now proceed with the preparation of the letter.

Regards,

[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

24 May 2017 at 18:37

Thank you

[Quoted text hidden]

Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

25 May 2017 at 16:19

Dear Ms Debono

Attached please find requested letter.

Kindly let me know whether you would like to collect the original from my office (Room 207, Administration Building) or whether you would like me to send it by mail.

Good luck with your studies

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ui=2&ik=82a4141234&jsver=1kWWW5u7lQU.en_GB.&cbl=gmail_fe_180506.06_p7&view=pt&q=maria.filletti%40um.edu.mt&qs=true

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research

Regards,

Maria

[Quoted text hidden]

 **Veronica Debono.pdf**
127K

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

27 May 2017 at 08:04

Good morning,

Thank you very much.

Would it be possible to mail it? This is my address:

Villa Medina
Triq il-Merill
Kappara SGN4420

Thank you,
Veronica

[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>

6 December 2017 at 13:47

Dear Ms Filletti,

Thank you for your email dated 5th December. I am forwarding the below communication to you as it seems there may have been some misunderstanding.

Veronica Debono
Mob. 79370902

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Veronica Debono** <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
Date: 27 May 2017 at 08:04
Subject: Re: Request for gatekeeper for research
To: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

[Quoted text hidden]

Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

6 December 2017 at 13:56

Dear Ms Debono

I was referring to the email sent to the Registrar regarding the distribution of your email to students. The communication you sent me referred to the letter requested by UREC for approval of your study. When you send your email to be distributed to students you need to attach both the statement and UREC approval as these emails are seen by another person.

I hope this clarifies matters.

Thank you.

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ui=2&ik=82a4141234&jsver=1kWWW5u7lQU.en_GB.&cbl=gmail_fe_180506.06_p7&view=pt&q=maria.filletti%40um.edu.mt&qs=true

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research

Regards,

Maria

[Quoted text hidden]

[Quoted text hidden]

L-Università
ta' Malta

t: +356 2340 2386

w: www.um.edu.mt/registrar

Kindly consider your environmental responsibility before printing this e-mail

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt
Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

5 January 2018 at 10:14

Dear Ms Tabone,

Please find the letter attached as per our telephone conversation this morning.

Thanks and regards,
Veronica Debono
Mob. 79370902

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Maria Filletti <maria.filletti@um.edu.mt>
Date: 25 May 2017 at 16:19
Subject: Re: Request for gatekeeper for research
[Quoted text hidden]

 **Veronica Debono.pdf**
127K

Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

5 January 2018 at 10:37

Dear Veronica,

There are some 15 students who graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in School Counselling. Do you want to send it to these as well?

regards
Dorianne

Dorianne Tabone
Administrative Assistant

Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office
University of Malta
Room 132, Administration Building
Tel. +356 2340 3029

Follow the University of Malta on:

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ui=2&ik=82a4141234&jsver=1kWWW5u7lQU.en_GB.&cbl=gmail_fe_180506.06_p7&view=pt&q=maria.filletti%40um.edu.mt&qs=true

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research

[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
 To: Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
 Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

5 January 2018 at 10:53

No thank you as I would like to interview counsellors who work in the community as opposed to in schools.

Thanks and regards,
 Veronica

[Quoted text hidden]

Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
 To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
 Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

5 January 2018 at 11:01

Fine. Am sending the email now.

Please confirm receipt of email.

regards
 Dorianne

Dorianne Tabone
 Administrative Assistant

[Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office](#)
 University of Malta
 Room 132, Administration Building
 Tel. +356 2340 3029

Follow the University of Malta on:



[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
 To: Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
 Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

5 January 2018 at 11:43

Received with thanks.

[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
 To: Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
 Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

8 January 2018 at 16:47

Dear Dorianne,

Was the email information letter sent to the alumni's university email address?

Thank you,
 Veronica

[Quoted text hidden]

5/20/2018

University of Malta Mail - Fwd: Request for gatekeeper for research

Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
To: Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

9 January 2018 at 08:20

Dear Veronica,

Yes it was. It is our policy to contact alumni through their university email address.

regards
Dorianne

Dorianne Tabone
Administrative Assistant

Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office
University of Malta
Room 132, Administration Building
Tel. +356 2340 3029

Follow the University of Malta on:



[Quoted text hidden]

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: Dorianne Tabone <dorianne.tabone@um.edu.mt>
Cc: Sharon Martinelli <sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt>

10 January 2018 at 21:04

Thank you for your reply.

Regards,
Veronica
[Quoted text hidden]

2017-6-5

University of Malta Mail - Request for gatekeeper for research



Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>

Request for gatekeeper for research

1 message

Veronica Debono <veronica.debono.94@um.edu.mt>
To: registrar@um.edu.mt
Cc: sharon.martinelli@um.edu.mt

21 May 2017 at 14:14

Dear Ms Grech,

I am about to embark on a research project as part requirement for my Master in Transcultural counselling. I am writing this email to gain preliminary permission via email from the University to support me in the selection of participants by forwarding a request to all counsellors who have graduated from the Department of Counselling prior to 2015. An official letter will be sent to your association once approval is received from UREC.

My research project intends to explore counsellors' perceptions of the coping strategies for emotional wellbeing of middle-aged Maltese women. Participants for this study are to be qualified counsellors with a minimum of two years counselling experience. A qualitative design using a phenomenological approach shall guide this research project. It is envisaged that the first 6-8 counsellors who respond to the information letter and who fit eligibility criteria shall be chosen as participants for this study. Data shall be gathered using face to face interviews. All ethical considerations shall be adhered to when conducting this project:

- Opt-in participants will be asked to sign a consent form and advised that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- Their anonymity will be respected.
- They will be invited to choose their own pseudonym and will be given the transcripts to read and verify and make amendments as necessary to ensure the accurate reflection of their perceptions.
- Given that the participants will all be qualified counsellors and that the MACP code of ethics states that counsellors should have ongoing supervision throughout their counselling career, no significant risk of distress is envisaged. In the unlikely event that the interview evokes emotional issues, a list of resources will be provided for support.

2017-6-5

University of Malta Mail - Request for gatekeeper for research

Once approval is received from UREC, a detailed information letter and the relevant consent form shall be forwarded to you for your perusal and dissemination. It would be greatly appreciated if you could kindly confirm your approval in supporting me in dissemination to all registered members for the selection of participants. Your reply, if positive will be attached to the form as an appendix.

Thank you,

Veronica Debono (ID 508873M)

C.C. Sharon Martinelli
(Faculty of Health Sciences)

Appendix E: Interview Guide for counsellors (English Only)

1. What age range would you say you have most Maltese women as clients in?
 - a. 12-18
 - b. 18-40
 - c. 40-65
 - d. 65+
2. What age range would you say you have least Maltese women as clients in?
 - a. 12-18
 - b. 18-40
 - c. 40-65
 - d. 65+
3. Do you currently have Maltese women in the 40-65-year age bracket as clients?
4. Would you say that Maltese middle-aged women clients are increasing in number, decreasing or staying the same?
5. What would you attribute this to?
6. What are the main difficulties, emotions and beliefs that these women present with?
7. In your perception what are the coping strategies used by Maltese middle-aged women?
8. How would you define formal help-seeking behaviour?
9. How would you define informal help-seeking behaviour?
10. What comes to mind when you hear the term emotional wellbeing?
11. Did you ever have an experience of 40-65-year old Maltese female clients who were extremely resistant to counselling but did ultimately come for counselling?
12. What were their reasons for their resistance to counselling?

Appendix F: UREC approval

<p>APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE: <i>I hereby declare that I will not start my research on human subjects before UREC approval</i></p> <p><i>J. DeLo.</i></p> <p>DATE 6th June 2017</p>	<p>FACULTY SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE I have reviewed this completed application and I am satisfied with the adequacy of the proposed research design and the measures proposed for the protection of human subjects.</p> <p><i>J. Powell.</i></p> <p>DATE 6th June 2017.</p>
---	---

Return the completed application to your faculty Research Ethics Committee To be completed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and advise

Acceptance **Refusal** **Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature *[Signature]* Date 16/6/17

To be completed by University Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and grant

Acceptance **Refusal** **Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature *[Signature]* Date 27/7/2017

*J. DeLo.*⁶

Appendix G: Elicited Themes, Subthemes and Examples of Supporting Quotes

Overarching Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
Evolution in narrative of Maltese culture and of middle-aged Maltese women	State taking on role of family	“you see also the state taking more the role of the family you know, so the state taking more the role of the educator, the state taking the role of providing nurseries for the children, so taking the role of the parents” John
	Career oriented vs Family oriented	“Some believe that they cannot do it without working, without having a job and some believe that they shouldn't work in order to give the, not they shouldn't work ta it's not an obligation. They don't <i>want</i> to work” Bob
	Changes in identity	“women had to embrace em masculine traits for example, assertion at the place of work, em take more responsibility for being sexual beings and even enjoy being sexual beings, take responsibility for caring for themselves and not depending on others” Maria

Overarching Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
Connectedness	Coping strategy	“at the basis of the coping strategy is, is a relationships, feeling that you belong somewhere and feeling that there is someone for you” John
	Counselling confusion	“most of the time it it's a matter, a matter of explaining what's the difference between a psychologist, sorry a psychiatric, a psychiatrist and counselling” Betty
	Counselling stigma	“I think the Maltese culture is still you're going to a counsellor because you have problems. you don't want to be seen that you have problems” Sara
	A way of being with oneself	“being able to recognise when when you're going through the bad times and knowing what to do to make yourself feel better” Joanna

Appendix H: Transcript Excerpt Joanna

<p>Joanna: formal would be going to counselling, that's something formal. Informal would be talking to a friend, I would imagine that's that's the difference.</p>	<p>Formal: counselling</p> <p>Informal: friend</p>
<p>Researcher: yes yes</p>	
<p>Joanna: Formal is like in in a setting at a, at a decided time you know with someone who's got the professional qualification, whereas informal would be going out for a coffee with a friend or someone who is good at listening.</p>	<p>Formal vs informal</p> <p>Professional relationship</p> <p>Relationship with a friend</p>
<p>Researcher: mhm ok and what comes to mind when you hear the term emotional wellbeing?</p>	
<p>Joanna: Emotional wellbeing means that someone obviously we we all have problems everybody has problems but I think being emotionally well means knowing how to handle the good and the bad. Recognizing that you you can't be happy all the time. That's part of it. We can't be happy all the time. It's impossible and it wouldn't even be healthy to be happy all the time so being healthily emotionally ok would mean that, being able to recognise when when you're going through the bad times and knowing what to do to make yourself feel</p>	<p>Emotional wellbeing</p> <p>knowing how to handle the good and the bad</p> <p>Self-awareness</p> <p>Reflection</p>

<p>better, you know whether it's going for a coffee with a friend or jien naf staying in bed reading or eating something nice, whatever, little things that make you feel better to help you to cope. Em and being able to keep the balance. knowing what it is that makes you feel ok and also knowing what kind of things are going to make you feel bad you know, so it's the balance, that's emotional wellbeing.</p>	<p>Connectedness Self-care Balance Self-awareness Balance</p>
<p>Researcher: The triggers in a way I suppose</p>	
<p>Joanna: You need to know, it's useful but I think you tend to recognise your your triggers the older you get, sometimes when you're young you don't always recognise why you get angry when you see something but then as you grow older you start to realise that there's reasons for it. You know, so obviously you have to come to terms with whatever the reasons are so you'll be able to control the anger or anxiety or whatever...</p>	<p>Self-awareness due to maturity Young don't always recognise</p>
<p>Researcher: and you think that in this age bracket in the 40 - 65 would they fall into that age where they would recognise the triggers?</p>	
<p>Joanna: those who have developed some kind of an insight yes but not everybody has insight</p>	<p>Awareness</p>

Appendix I: Transcript Excerpt Betty

<p>Researcher: Ok. (pause). What's your opinion of stigma towards counselling?</p>	
<p>Betty: Hmmm Well most of the time it it's a matter, a matter of explaining what's the difference between a psychologist, sorry a psychiatric, a psychiatrist and counselling. So very often they would see it as I am not going to counselling because I'm not crazy aamme, I've heard situations where they say that listen I don't want any pills so I'm not coming (laughs) so unfortunately it's a matter of educating people on what is the difference. Eeem, then again there is the stigma you know how people are, tend to be that listen if I've seen you going into that building it means a b c and whatnot. Say I used to work in a particular institution where it had a particular stigma and so obviously, so obviously then that would carry a certain stigma in itself so people were actually shy to come to the place because they would say I don't want to be associated with that kind of stigma, so in itself would mean that listen em unfortunately it's not the counselling itself perhaps that has the stigma. As well, with</p>	<p>Education</p> <p>Counselling confusion</p> <p>What is counselling?</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Stigma</p> <p>Familiarity</p>

<p>certain situations, it might even be just the place where you're seeing the person. Then, again there is a lot of people who don't understand what counselling is, they would think that it's social work, so in itself they would think listen I need the counsellor because I have problems. It doesn't necessarily have to be that, so I see that there is still that, the misconception of what counselling is. Whereas, for example, say, there is a bit less of that stigma when it comes to a psychologist in that sense. I see that there is still a big difference between people going to a psychologist and going to a counsellor. I don't know why.</p>	<p>Stigma associated with the place</p> <p>Counselling confusion</p> <p>Less stigma with psychologist</p>
<p>Researcher: Ok...I didn't know that.</p>	
<p>Betty: It's something that here and there you start hearing things from one person to another that because if they have an an issue they would say I need to go and talk to a psychologist or a psychotherapist, rather than a counsellor so there is till that need for educating people like listen, you can talk to a counsellor as well about certain issues.</p>	<p>Counselling confusion</p>

<p>wait for a month until you see them in the old people's home? Jien naf. I think there is this it's a bit disconnected nowadays, that's what I would think, by why we don't refer to elders perhaps.</p>	<p>Disconnected</p>
<p>Researcher: and so this this goes further and deeper cos it's like the breakdown of the family</p>	
<p>John: mhm yeah</p>	
<p>Researcher: for want of of of a better word so people are maybe turning more to outside help because they're not finding it possible to get it, to get the help inside</p>	
<p>John: definitely definitely I mean you see also the state taking more the role of the family you know, so the state taking more the role of the educator, the state taking the role of providing nurseries for the children, so taking the role of the parents. I would say it's a bit worrying at this stage em but yes the state does take more and more on to it itself things that should be of the family, you know so perhaps no wonder we don't feel that we should go to the parents anymore because there are services that children nowadays...</p>	<p>State taking on role of family, State taking on role of educator, State taking on role of parents State taking on role of family</p>

Appendix K: Transcript Excerpt Maria

<p>Maria: Em, I mean like there is research that says that shows that women would more likely ask for help than men so I think it has always been that women, more than men, would seek help. Em and it is my belief that em women aha of a, of a particular age, yes, em, aha, because the older generation still have an idea that counselling or you know, is related to psychiatry. You have to be mentally sick, mentally ill em so it there, there is still a taboo with older women but em the younger generation em apart from the fact that em some of them have been exposed to counsellors in schools themselves and to guidance teachers in schools themselves, so they would have been familiarised with the counsellor's environment and the counsellor's role in, within the school context themselves. Em apart from that I believe that em women are now em the women, the women's role has changed in such a way that it has become more stressful and women have a lot of roles and they have to cope with the role of a mother, the role of a housewife, the role of a wife, the role of an an employee em you know</p>	<p>Women more open to seeking help than men</p> <p>Counselling confusion</p> <p>Stigma</p> <p>Awareness</p> <p>What counselling is</p> <p>Evolution in narrative of woman</p> <p>More stress, lot of roles:</p> <p>Mother</p> <p>Housewife, employee</p>
---	--

<p>and they still, it's still embedded within themselves that they're the primary carers for their children you know em, it's still embedded even though the culture is changing, but it's still embedded within them that it is their role to make sure that they have clean houses de de de it's the narrative, the the cultural narrative, it's still that, you know, that yes of course, em the stressors then would, would take a woman to counselling. Em most of my clients who are women come to me in private practice because of issues of separation or of relationship issues rather than anything else.</p>	<p>Primary carer</p> <p>Culture is changing</p> <p>Triple shift</p> <p>Stressors would take a woman to counselling</p> <p>Relationship issues</p>
<p>Researcher: ok</p>	
<p>Maria: Or else it will be a mental health issue, borderline clients, you know, who need stability, who need an anchor, em and they would have again been accustomed because these are the ones I have, they would have, they would have been accustomed, for example, to their client at MCAST, sorry to their counsellor at MCAST or at university so when that counsellor is no longer present they would seek em another anchor, sort of you know, so yes that's the typology.</p>	<p>Mental health issue</p>

Appendix L: Transcript Excerpt Sara

<p>Sara: Mhm yes I agree, I do agree with that igifieri. Em I have 3 clinics like I, I that I can go to, strangely enough like the clinic which is close to my house, I had told her tell them that I am from this area and I never got an appointment from there. I go to a clinic which is really on the other side of the island, because I think people, and I told this clinic where I go to listen I am not from this area because I think that people will not go to a counsellor who is from the same locality, you know, em I think yes it does work. In fact, a friend of mine comes from this same locality and she has never had a client where I go to. Because we talk about it I mean (laughs) and you know I tell her you got any and she told me no, because we tell them we're from where we come and I've had all my appointments from there, which is on the other side of the island but someone who comes from the same village has not had any appointments. Aha, which is yes, because the shame because people might know you, they'd rather come to me, em that's, I've had people from my area like, not my village, but my area and they still do</p>	<p>Stigma</p> <p>Small geographical location</p> <p>Familiarity</p> <p>Shame</p>
---	--

<p>the appointments, igifieri t-tnejn l-ahna mmorru n-naha l-ohra em for them not to be seen going in to counselling.</p>	<p>Anonymity</p>
<p>Researcher: So, so the shame is being seen going in?</p>	
<p>Sara: The shame is being seen going in, yes, yes because over there no one knows them, they don't know me, so no one knows that they are coming to a counsellor, it could be a doctor.</p>	<p>Anonymity</p>
<p>Researcher: Mhm ezatt ezatt</p>	
<p>Sara: Em in fact em qisni I have people coming very close to my area and they still go very far away u qisni qatt ma ppruvajt insaqsihom jekk x'ismu em nahseb shame, I do believe in it.</p>	<p>Shame</p>
<p>Researcher: There were two things that you mentioned em shame one (pause) one shame about cos you said they wouldn't ma jmurx they know me but they would know someone and two is that they would be seen so qishom they're two things. Em what what in your opinion is it that they are ashamed of? ok I know that cos they would be seen or maybe they know someone then what does that mean to them? Let's say somebody sees them going to counselling, what does it mean?</p>	

Appendix M: Transcript Excerpt Bob

<p>Bob: I've got both, I've got both. I, I never actually em (pause) tackled the gender issue, I mean it's not about the gender, but the clients that I have and had were mostly women. Issa, I don't know if that is because women are more likely to accept the fact that it's ok to deal with your issues and maybe there's a macho thing. I don't know. But men who came to counselling were quite open to it. Em I don't know what helps or what hinders but... Em it could be that that the younger generation are more pro I mean they are more open to counselling, it could be yes because nowadays it's ok to go to to counsellors at school and to guidance teacher, you know there's a lot of professionals working with them, so it's like it's ok, yet there's still the resistance, ta, to go to disclose. It's not just because you're exposed to counselling now it's ok you are, you can disclose everything sort of. There's that. Em but I think I, I think those who come to counselling at the age of 40, 50, the fact that they came to counselling, I think most often is the last resort, so once they came to counselling they are aware they, they it's like</p>	<p>Mostly women clients</p> <p>Women more open?</p> <p>Men macho?</p> <p>Men who came were open</p> <p>Maybe younger generation more open due to exposure</p> <p>Resistance to disclose</p> <p>Counselling - last resort</p>
---	--

<p>that they have to use counselling, well because ultimately they wouldn't have come, em so as a counsellor, I would not I think be able to see the process that they've been through to come to counselling because once they come to counselling, em once they came, it's like and I mean the first session of counselling you have to explain what counselling is, what is not counselling, so it's like em there's always a an exercise, not an exercise, it's like em part of the sessions but it's quite skilful how to inform the client what counselling is and what it's not so that they realise whether it's what they're looking for and if the objectives that they have is em em makes sense basically em with counselling. And once they're they're fine with counselling they start disclosing, I mean it's a process, it's a journey. Em but yes I've had I've had clients whose who found it very hard to come to counselling as if they're going to em do something which is I don't know, huge, and in fact it is huge hu, dealing with a 40 year old journey is quite a chunk hu to deal with so I can understand that. I I don't know but if it is related to the fact that they've never been exposed to...</p>	<p>What is counselling?</p> <p>Process, journey</p> <p>Journey</p>
---	--

References

- Abela, A. M. (2003). *Family values and social policy in Europe*. Cross-national research papers.
- Abela, A. M. (2014). Shaping a national identity. Malta in the European union. *International Journal of Sociology* , 10-27.
- Abela, A. M. (2000). *Values of women and men in the Maltese islands: A comparative European perspective*. Valletta: Commission for the Advancement of Women, Ministry for Social Policy.
- Abela, A., Casha, C., Xuereb, R. B., Clark, M., Inguanez, J., & Sammut Scerri, C. (2012). The needs of Maltese families with dependent children: a focus group study among professionals. *Bank of Valletta Review* , 55-86.
- Abela, A., Farrugia, R., Vella, A. M., & DeGiovanni, K. (2016). Familialistic countries need a family-inclusive service when caring for people with mental health problems – the case of Malta. *Families, Relationships and Societies* , 313–31 .
- Abela, A., Frosh, S., & Dowling, E. (2005). Uncovering beliefs embedded in the culture and its implications for practice: the case of Maltese married couples. *Journal of Family Therapy* , 3–23.
- Adichie, C. (2017). *We should all be feminists*. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists/transcript
- Aldwin, C. M. (2007). *Stress, coping, and development: An integrative perspective*. New York, NY: The Guildford Press.
- Aldwin, C. M., Sutton, K. J., Chiara, G., & Spiro III, A. (1996). Age differences in stress, coping and appraisal: Findings from the normative aging study. *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences* , 179-188.

- Angermann, N. (2001). *English and Maltese in Malta: History, language usage and attitudes*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). TU Chemnitz Zwickau: Germany.
- Apap, L. (2017). *Facilitating the retention of mothers in the gaming sector*. (Unpublished dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.
- Aristotle. (350BC). *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- Badia i Capdevila, I. (2004). A view of the linguistic situation in Malta. *Noves SL. Revista de Sociolingüística* , 1-8.
- Bajada, J. (2016). *Perceptions of counselling in a small island community context: A Gozitan perspective*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Baqtayan, D. S. (2015). Stress and coping mechanisms: A historical overview. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* , 479-488.
- Beams, F. A. (1969). Indications of pragmatism and empiricism in accounting thought. *The Accounting Review* , 382-388.
- Bean, H., Softas-Nall, L., Eberle, K. M., & Paul, J. A. (2016). Can we talk about stay-at-home moms? Empirical findings and implications for counseling. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families* , 23-30.
- Becker, D. M. (2006). Therapy for the middle-aged: The relevance of existential issues. *American Journal of Psychotherapy* , 87-99.
- Biggs, A., Brough, P., & Drummond, S. (2017). Lazarus and Folkman's psychological stress and coping theory. In C. L. Cooper, & J. C. Quick (Eds), *The handbook*

of stress and health: A guide to research and practice. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

Bowlby, J. (1961). Processes of mourning. *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* , 317-339.

Bradford, S., & Clark, M. (2011). Stigma narratives: LGBT transitions and identities. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* , 179-200.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (n.d.). *Questions about thematic analysis*. Retrieved May 19, 2018, from <https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis/frequently-asked-questions-8.html#dd355b01912d6a98deccacd260ec3e7a>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* , 77-101.

Breen, L. J. (2007). The researcher 'in the middle': Negotiating the insider/outsider dichotomy. *The Australian Community Psychologist* , 163-174.

Bright, G. (2013). Making sense of 'ologies'. In G. Bright, & G. Harrison (Eds), *Understanding research in counselling* (pp. 55-94). London: Sage.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21st century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings. *Social Development* , 115-125.

Brown, J. J., Evans-Lacko, S., Aschan, L., Henderson, M. J., Hatch, S. L., & Hotopf, M. (2014). Seeking informal and formal help for mental health problems in the community: a secondary analysis from a psychiatric morbidity survey in South London. *BMC Psychiatry* .

Bugeja, S. (2009). *Values, citizenship and 'ownership' of our identity in Europe*.

Retrieved Jan 24, 2017, from

http://www.um.edu.mt/europeanstudies/books/CD_CSP5/pdf/sbugeja.pdf

Burck, A. M., Bruneau, L., Baker, L., & Ellison, L. (2014). Emerging counselors' perception of wellness: Implications for counselor development. *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* , 39-51.

Camilleri Grima, A. (2013). A select review of bilingualism in education in Malta. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* , 553-569.

Camilleri, S., Caruana, A., Falzon, R., & Muscat, M. (2012). The promotion of emotional literacy through personal and social development: The Maltese experience. *Pastoral Care in Education* , 19–37.

Carabott, S. (2017, Dec 3). *Watch: 'I am not a mental illness. I am Flora Tanti' A mental health nurse-in-training describes her road to recovery*. Retrieved May 29, 2018, from <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20171203/local/watch-i-am-not-a-mental-illness-i-am-flora-tanti.664692>

Carol, M. (2002). Roger's person-centered approach: Consideration for use in multicultural counseling. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* , 48-65.

Carter, R. T. (2005). *Handbook of racial-cultural psychology and counselling*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Carver, C. S., & Connor-Smith, J. (2010). Personality and coping. *Annual Review of Psychology* , 679-704.

Cefai, C., Askeel-Williams, H., Skrzypiec, G., & Wyrta, M. (2013). Educational community stakeholders' perspectives about teachers' responsibilities

formental health promotion in Maltese schools. *Malta review of educational research* .

Choi, S.-I., & Doh, N. (2017). An exploratory study about Koreans' attitudes towards counselling services. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* , 1-21.

Christabelle wins Malta Eurovision Song Contest with 'Taboo'. (2018, Feb 4).

Retrieved May 29, 2018, from <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-02-04/local-news/Christabelle-wins-Malta-Eurovision-Song-Contest-with-Taboo-6736184432>

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis . *Psychologist* , 120-123.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* , 297-298.

Clarke, V., Braun, V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 222-248). London: Sage.

Coolican, H. (2014). *Research methods and statistics in psychology*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Cooper, S. J. (2008). From Claude Bernard to Walter Cannon. Emergence of the concept of homeostasis. *Appetite* , 419-427.

Cornwell, B. (2013). Switching dynamics and the stress process. *Social Psychology Quarterly* , 99-124.

Corr, C. A., & Doka, K. J. (2001). Master concepts in the field of death, dying, and bereavement: Coping versus adaptive strategies. *OMEGA* , 183-199.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Cruea, S. M. (2005). Changing ideals of womanhood during the nineteenth-century woman movement . *General Studies Writing Faculty Publications* , 187-204.
- Cutajar, M. (2015). Secondary students' attitudes towards code-switching and their relevant lexical knowledge: A sociolinguistic study. *International conference on bilingualism - Malta*, (p. 49). Malta.
- Dallos, R., & Draper, R. (2015). *An introduction to family therapy. Systemic theory and practice*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- d'Ardenne, P., & Mahtani, A. (1999). *Transcultural counseling in action*. London: Sage Counselling in Action.
- De Coster, S. (2005). Depression and law violation: Gendered responses to gendered stresses. *Sociological Perspectives* , 155-187.
- Deci, E. I., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: an introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies* , 1–11 .
- DeGiovanni, J. P. (1997). A brief history of the development of guidance and counselling in Malta; 1968-1987. In E. B. Sammut, *Careers education and guidance in Malta: Issues and Challenges*. Malta: PEG.
- Demarco, J. (2018, May 28). *New psychiatry association board warns mental health sector is seriously lagging behind*. Retrieved May 29, 2018, from <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-05-28/local-news/New-Psychiatry-Association-board-warns-mental-health-sector-is-seriously-lagging-behind-6736190592>
- Donoghue, N. P. (2014). *Stigma a barrier to wellness and the counselling process : an ecological approach to familiarity and proximity*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.

- Doublesin, M. G. (2016). *The impact of multicultural exposure on Maltese society in the late 20th and early 21st century and its challenge for counsellors: a narrative ethnographic approach*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.
- Duncombe, J., & Marsden, D. (1995). 'Workaholics' and 'whingeing women': theorising intimacy and emotion work the last frontier of gender inequality? . *The Editorial Board of The Sociological Review* , 150-169.
- Elkins, A. L., Swift, J. K., & Campbell, K. (2017). Clients' perceptions of personal psychotherapy or counselling for therapists. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* , 211-224.
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives. *Qualitative Inquiry* , 3-29.
- Ellul, J. P. (2009). *The catholic church in malta and membership of the European union fears - challenges - hopes*. Retrieved Jan 24, 2017, from www.um.edu.mt/europeanstudies/books/CD_CSP5/pdf/jpellul.pdf
- Erikson, E. H. (1977). *Childhood and society*. London: Paladin Grafton Books.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Eurostat*. (2017). Retrieved May 5, 2017, from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
- Evans-Lacko, S., Brohan, E., Mojtabai, R., & Thornicroft, G. (2012). Association between public views of mental illness and self-stigma among individuals with mental illness in 14 European countries. *Psychological Medicine* , 1741-52.
- Everly, J. G., & Lating, J. M. (2002). *A clinical guide to the treatment of the human stress response*. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* , 1-11.
- Ferrazzi, K., & Raz, T. (2005). *Never eat alone. And other secrets to success, one relationship at a time*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Finlay, L. (2011). *Phenomenology for therapists. Researching the lived world*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Firestone, R. W. (2015). The ultimate resistance. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* , 77-101.
- Folkman, S. (2010). Stress, coping, and hope. *Psycho-Oncology* , 901-8.
- Folkman, S. (2008). The case for positive emotions in the stress process. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping* , 3-14.
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1980). An analysis of coping in a middle aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* , 219-239.
- Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2009). Cognitive appraisal. In J. L. Shane (Ed), *The encyclopedia of positive psychology*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2004). Coping: Pitfalls and promise. *Annual Review of Psychology* , 745-774.
- Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2000). Stress, positive emotion, and coping. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* , 115 - 118.
- Formosa, M. (2014). Socio-economic implications of population ageing in malta: Risks and opportunities. *Bank of Valletta Review* , 79-98.
- Freed, B. B., & Freed, D. (2013). Why won't men get help? *Pacific Standard* , 34-40.
- Giorgi, A., Giorgi, B., & Morley, J. (2008). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton Rogers, *The SAGE*

handbook of qualitative research in psychology. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.

- Grixti, J. (2008). 'Glocalised' youth culture as linguistic performance: Media globalisation and the construction of hybrid identities. *Noves SL. Revista de Sociolingüística* , 1-8.
- Hansen Pace, P. (2011, April 3). *That dreaded guilt trip*. Retrieved June 2, 2018, from <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2011-04-03/newspaper-opinions/That-Dreaded-guilt-trip-290210>
- Haybron, D. M. (2008). *The pursuit of unhappiness. The elusive psychology of well-being*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Herlihy, B., & Park, C. (2016). Feminist theory. In D. Capuzzi, & M. D. (Eds.), *Counseling and psychotherapy theories and interventions* (pp. 367-390). American Counseling Association.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. London, UK: Sage.
- Hinkle, L. E. (1974). The concept of "stress" in the biological and social sciences. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* , 335-357.
- Holloway, I., & Wheeler, S. (2010). *Qualitative research in nursing and healthcare*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hsin, A., & Felfe, C. (2014). When does time matter? Maternal employment, children's time with parents, and child development. *Demography* , 1867–1894.

- Huta, V., & Waterman, A. S. (2014). Eudaimonia and its distinction from Hedonia: Developing a classification and terminology for understanding conceptual and operational definitions. *Journal of Happiness Studies* , 1425–1456.
- Kessler, E.-M., Agines, S., & Bowen, C. E. (2014). Attitudes towards seeking mental health services among older adults: personal and contextual correlates. *Aging & Mental Health* , 182-191.
- Killam, L. (2013). *Complex research terminology simplified: Paradigms, ontology, epistemology and methodology*. Retrieved Jun 4, 2017, from <http://youstudynursing.com/>
- Krohne, H. W. (2001). Stress and coping theories. In N. J. Smelser, & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 15163-15170). Elsevier Science.
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Kuo, B. (2011). Culture's consequences on coping: Theories, evidence and dimensionalities. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* , 1084-1100.
- Langdrige, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology theory, research and method*. Essex, UK: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Launch of the #STOPSTIGMA campaign for mental health awareness*. (2017, Dec 2). Retrieved May 29, 2018, from <https://maphm.org/2017/12/02/launch-of-the-stopstigma-campaign-for-mental-health-awareness/>
- Lazarus, R. (1993). From psychological stress to the emotions: A history of changing outlooks . *Annual Review Of Psychology* , 1-21.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1993). Coping theory and research: Past, present, and future. *Psychosomatic Medicine* , 234-247.

- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Lefcourt, H. M. (1992). Perceived control, personal effectiveness and emotional states. In B. N. Carpenter (Ed.), *Personal coping theory, research and application* (pp. 111-131). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Li, M.-h. (2014). Effect of stress, perception-related traits, and motivation on different coping strategies . *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* , 7-16.
- Li, M.-h. (2014). *The pathway linking stress to active coping: Motivation and the trait of resilience*. Retrieved Feb 14, 2018, from <https://www.counseling.org>: https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/article_16.pdf?sfvrsn=71c885e5_12
- Loevinger, J. (1980). Some thoughts on ego development and counseling. *Personnel & Guidance Journal* , 389-390.
- Lutter, L. D. (2001). Eudaimonia. *Foot and Ankle International* , 367-368.
- Maciejewski, P. K., Zhang, B., Block, S., & Prigerson, H. (2007). An empirical examination of the stage theory of grief. *JAMA* , 716-23.
- MACP. (2011). *MACP Code of Ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.macpmalta.org>.
- Makilim, N. B., & Zanon, C. (2017). Why not seek therapy? The role of stigma and psychological symptoms in college students. *Paideía* , 76-83.
- Manen, M. v. (1990). *Researching lived experience. Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario: State University of New York Press.
- Mare, E. C. (2011). *Book Report – Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Retrieved from www.villagedesign.org/vdi_writings/Phenomen_Analysis.pdf

- Martin, W. (2015, Jul 15). *The captivity of motherhood*. Retrieved May 26, 2018, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/07/the-captivity-of-motherhood/398525/>
- Martínez Ortega, Y., Gomà-i-Freixanet, M., & Fornieles Deu, A. (2016). The COPE-48: An adapted version of the COPE inventory for use in clinical settings. *Psychiatry Research*, 808–814.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- McAdams, D. P. (2006). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- McLeod, J. (2015). *Doing research in counselling and psychotherapy*. London, UK: Sage.
- (2012). Mental Health Act.
- Micallef, K. (2018, April 2). *Interview: Good Friday processions have 'gone overboard' - Gozo Bishop*. Retrieved May 26, 2018, from <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180402/local/interview-good-friday-processions-have-gone-overboard-gozo-bishop.674998>
- Mifsud, D. (2008). *Inside the oracle's chamber: The experience of counselling supervision in a Maltese context*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation) University of Bristol.
- Mifsud, J. (2014). *Juggling balls and skittles: Issues and dilemmas faced by sandwich generation Maltese women*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.
- Miles, B. M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis : an expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

- Miles, B. M., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Mizzi, S. O. (1977). *The changing status of women in Malta*. Retrieved Jan 31, 2018, from [http://melitensiawth.com/incoming/Index/Journal%20of%20the%20Faculty%20of%20Arts/Journal%20of%20the%20Faculty%20of%20Arts.%206\(1977\)4/23.pdf](http://melitensiawth.com/incoming/Index/Journal%20of%20the%20Faculty%20of%20Arts/Journal%20of%20the%20Faculty%20of%20Arts.%206(1977)4/23.pdf)
- Mobbs, D., Hagan, C. C., Dalgleish, T., Silston, B., & Prévost, C. (2015). The ecology of human fear: survival optimization and the nervous system. *Frontiers in Neuroscience* , 1-22.
- Moerer-Urdahl, T., & Creswell, J. (2004). Using transcendental phenomenology to explore the “Ripple Effect” in a leadership mentoring program. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* , 1-28.
- Moos, R. H., Brennan, P. L., Schutte, K. K., & Moos, B. S. (2006). Older adults' coping with negative life events: Common processes of managing health, interpersonal, and financial/work stressors. *Int J Aging Hum Dev* , 39-59.
- Nagel, T. (1972). Aristotle on Eudaimonia. *Phronesis*, 17(3) , 252-259.
- Norcross, J. C., Krebs, P. M., & Prochaska, J. O. (2011). Stages of change. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* , 143–154.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* , 1–13 .
- NSO. (2014). www.nso.gov.mt. Retrieved from https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Publications_by_Unit/Documents/C3_Population_and_Tourism_Statistics/Demographic_Review_2014.pdf

- O'Hara, M. (1995). Carl Rogers: Scientist and mystic. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* , 40-53.
- Ouwehand, C., Ridder, D. T., & Bensing, J. M. (2008). Individual differences in the use of proactive coping strategies by middle-aged and older adults. *Personality and Individual Differences* , 28-33.
- Oxford, U. P. (2017). <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/perception>. Retrieved Nov 15, 2017
- Park, C., & Cohen, L. H. (1992). Religious beliefs and practices and the coping process. In B. N. Carpenter (Ed.), *Personal coping theory, research and application* (pp. 185-198). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Parkes, C. M. (1988). Research: Bereavement. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* , 365 - 377.
- Pellicano, M. (2016). *The perceptions of Maltese social workers regarding the counselling profession*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.
- Petrova, R. V. (2013). *Children's language preferences in a bilingual context: A case study in two Maltese schools*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology and University of Malta.
- PFWS, & Office of the Commissioner of Mental Health. (2017). *Mental health in Malta. Wellbeing through a shared strategy*. The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.
- Picco, L., Abidin, E., Chong, S. A., Pang, S., Shafie, S., Yiang Chua, B., et al. (2016). Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help: Factor structure and socio-demographic predictors. *Frontiers in Psychology* , 1-10.


- Pope, C., Mays, N., & Popay, J. (2007). *Synthesizing qualitative and quantitative health research: A guide to methods*. Berkshire, UK: McGraw Hill.
- Popescu, B. A. (2015). Moral dilemmas and existential issues encountered both in psychotherapy and philosophical counseling practices. *Europe's Journal of Psychology* , 509–521.
- Rickwood, D., Deane, F. P., Wilson, C. J., & Ciarrochi, J. (2005). Young people's help-seeking for mental health. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 4 (3), 1-34. , 4.
- Rizzo, S. (2006). *The dual worker family in Malta*. Centre for Labour Studies. University of Malta.
- Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centred framework. *Psychology: A Study of a Science* , 184-256.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology* , 95–103.
- Rogers, N. (1993). *The creative connection: Expressive arts as healing*. Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behavior Books.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A Eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies* , 13–39.
- Satici, S. A., Uysal, R., & Deniz, M. E. (2016). Linking social connectedness to loneliness: The mediating role of subjective happiness. *Personality and Individual Differences* , 306-310.

- Schneiderman, N., Ironson, G., & Siegel, S. D. (2005). Stress and health: Psychological, behavioral, and biological determinants. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* , 607–628.
- Schroder, H. S., Yalch, M. M., Dawood, S., Callahan, C. P., Brent Donellan, M., & Moser, J. S. (2017). Growth mindset of anxiety buffers the link between stressful life events and psychological distress and coping strategies. *Personality and Individual Differences* , 23-26.
- Schueller, S. M. (2013). Understanding our best: Eudaimonia's growing influence in psychology. *Quality of Life Research* , 2661–2662 .
- Scicluna, M. (2016, April 27). *Malta's Catholic roots*. Retrieved May 26, 2018, from <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20160427/opinion/Malta-s-Catholic-roots.610174>
- Scicluna, S. (2012). *The stresses encountered by prison wardens and their coping strategies used*. Unpublished Bachelor Dissertation. University of Malta: Msida.
- Sciriha, I. (2005). *'Lisbon' and gender-gaps in employment*. Retrieved January 12, 2018, from <http://aei.pitt.edu/6026/1/17.pdf>
- See, C., & Essau, C. (2010). Coping strategies in cross-cultural comparison. In K. H. Mayer B., *Psychologie – Kultur – Gesellschaft* (pp. 161-173). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Shontz, F. C. (1975). *The psychological aspects of physical illness and disability*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Shu-Ping, L., Hui-Kai, S., & Shin-Da, L. (2012). Effects of computer-based immediate feedback on foreign language listening comprehension and test-associated anxiety. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* , 995-1006.

- Silver, R., & Wortman, C. (2007). The stage theory of grief. *JAMA* , 2692–2694.
- Skinner, E. A., Edge, K., Altman, J., & Sherwood, H. (2003). Searching for the structure of coping: A review and critique of category systems for classifying ways of coping. *Psychological Bulletin* , 216–269.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Sokol, J. T. (2009). Identity development throughout the lifetime: An examination of Eriksonian theory. *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology* , 138-148.
- Spiteri, G., & Xuereb, R. B. (2012). Going back to work after childbirth: women's lived experiences. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* , 201-216.
- Steger, M. F., Oishi, S., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Meaning in life across the life span: Levels and correlates of meaning in life from emerging adulthood to older adulthood. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* , 43-52.
- Stellini, R. (2008). *Stress in correctional officers' work*. Unpublished Bachelor Dissertation. University of Malta: Msida.
- Taylor, S. E., Klein, L. C., Lewis, B. P., & Gruenewald, T. L. (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-Befriend, not fight-or flight. *Psychological Review* , 411-429.
- Thake Vassallo, C. (2009). Identity and instruction: Issues of choice between the Maltese language and its others. In S. B. Barthet, *A sea for encounters* (pp. 359-364). Rodopi.
- The return of the stay-at-home mother; Women, work and children. (2014). *The Economist* , 23-24.

- Times of Malta*. (2018, Jan 30). Retrieved Jan 31, 2018, from <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180130/local/six-of-every-10-new-students-are-female.669321>
- TMID Editorial: Mental health - More than just a new hospital is needed*. (2018, January 27). Retrieved March 11, 2018, from <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-01-27/newspaper-leader/TMID-Editorial-Mental-health-More-than-just-a-new-hospital-is-needed-6736184118>
- Trevisan, T. (2016, Nov 23). *Bittersweet nostalgia*. Retrieved 5 1, 2017, from <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20161123/opinion/Bittersweet-nostalgia.631806>
- United Nations Development Programme*. (2018). Retrieved January 12, 2018, from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-3-good-health-and-well-being.html>
- Vaillant, G. E. (1977). *Adaptation to life*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing and Health Sciences* , 398–405.
- Vélez-Agosto, N. M., Soto-Crespo, J. G., Vizcarrondo-Opppenheimer, M., Vega-Molina, S., & Coll, C. G. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory revision: moving culture from the macro into the micro. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* , 900-910.
- Vella, S. J. (2013). *Damsels in distress: How the social representations of the female role are changing in the 21st century*. (Unpublished dissertation). University of Malta: Msida.

- Vermeersch, H., T'Sjoen, G., Kaufman, J.-M., Vincke, J., & Bracke, P. (2010). The experience of daily hassles, cardiovascular reactivity and adolescent risk taking and self-esteem. *Social Forces* , 63-88.
- Vittersø, J. (2016). *Handbook of eudaimonic well-being*. Switzerland: Springer.
- Weaver, Y. (2009). Mid-Life – A time of crisis or new possibilities? *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis* , 69-78.
- Wertsch, J. V., & Tulviste, P. (1992). L. S. Vygotsky and contemporary developmental psychology. *Developmental Psychology* , 548-557.
- WHO. (2016, April). Retrieved January 12, 2018, from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>
- WHO. (2005). *Mental health: facing the challenges, building solutions*. Europe: WHO Regional Office .
- Willig, C., & Stainton Rogers, W. (2008). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Yeh, C. J., Hunter, C. D., Madan-Bahel, A., Chiang, L., & Arora, A. K. (2004). Indigenous and interdependent perspectives of healing: Implications for counseling and research. *Journal of Counseling & Development* , 410-419.
- Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Shemesh, D. O. (2016). Cognitive-Social sources of wellbeing: Differentiating the roles of coping style, social support and emotional intelligence. *Journal of Happiness Studies* , 2481–2501.

	<p style="text-align: center;">UNIVERSITY OF MALTA Faculty of Social Wellbeing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Master of Arts in Transcultural Counselling Dissertation Committee</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FORM C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Completed Dissertation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Copyright Release Form</p>
---	---	--

NAME AND SURNAME: VERONICA DEBONO

THESIS WORKING TITLE:

COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF MIDDLE
AGED MALTESE WOMEN

YEAR AND SEMESTER OF SUBMISSION: 2018 LAST SEMESTER

DECLARATION:

I, the undersigned, hereby authorise the academic or administrative staff of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta and the University of Malta's Librarian and their staff and to make photocopies or electronic copies of my dissertation, or parts, thereof for educational and study purposes.

I agree to make my completed dissertation available for inspection and lending as decreed by the Faculty for Social Wellbeing and the University Library.

I agree that in such cases I would not be entitled to receive any form of remuneration and that the final version of the hardbound and electronic copies of the theses submitted for examination become the property of the University.

I confirm that a copy of this signed copyright release form shall be included as the last page of the hard bound dissertation that I shall submit to the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, when the dissertation is successfully completed

V. Debono
Student

05/06/2018

Date