



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

Education Towers, No.5 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad

# Response to the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

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Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public  
Administration on an Inquiry into Mental Health and Wellness Services and  
Facilities in Trinidad and Tobago

**Response to Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into Mental Health and Wellness Services and Facilities in Trinidad and Tobago**

Recommendations/Comments	Ministry of Education’s Response
<p><b>6.B. That MoE place greater focus on enlightening the school population on some of the negative stereotypes that are associated with mental health and how they can be dismantled. Consideration should be given to incorporating this type of content in the Health and Family Life Education curriculum of the Primary School System (p34);</b></p>	<p>One of the goals of the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Curriculum is to develop life skills in students to deal with the challenges of daily living. This includes their physical, social and emotional selves. The HFLE Curriculum covers four (4) themes, one of which is <i>Self and Interpersonal Relationships</i>. The aims of this theme include supporting students to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. develop an understanding of the principles that underlie personal and social well-being;</li> <li>2. develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that make for healthy family life; and</li> <li>3. demonstrate sound, health-related knowledge, attitudes and practices. One of the topics under this theme is Managing Emotions (details are outlined on pages 2 to 4 of the table).</li> </ol> <p>While Mental Health is not specifically listed under the theme/topic “<i>Self and Interpersonal Relationships</i>”, the areas of stress management, coping with bullying, conflict and high risk situations are associated with Mental Health. Additionally, through intended future curriculum review, ongoing teacher training and curriculum monitoring, consideration will be given by the Ministry of Education to the highlighting of this important issue of mental health among young persons.</p>

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<p><b>LEVEL</b></p> <p>I (Infant1 &amp; 11)</p>	<p><b>TOPICS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions, expressions and feelings: Happiness -Excitement -Sadness - Anger -Hatred -Jealousy - Possessiveness</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Coping with everyday situations</li> </ul>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise feelings and emotions.</li> <li>• Manage expressions of feelings and emotions</li> </ul> <p><u>Life Skills:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Interpersonal</li> <li>• Assertiveness</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Managing feelings</li> <li>• Managing stress</li> </ul>	

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	<p>11(Standard 1-3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger management.</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Coping with everyday situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify ways of appropriately dealing with anger</li> <li>• Accept personal responsibility for response to anger</li> <li>• Identify ways to deal with bullying</li> <li>• Identify conflict issues</li> <li>• Demonstrate ways to effectively deal with conflict</li> <li>• Demonstrate social and coping skill</li> </ul> <p><u>Life Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Negotiation</li> <li>▪ Interpersonal</li> <li>▪ Problem solving</li> <li>▪ Critical thinking</li> <li>▪ Managing stress</li> <li>▪ Managing feelings</li> <li>▪ Self-management</li> <li>▪ Self-monitoring</li> <li>▪ Refusal</li> </ul>

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<p><b>6.B. That MoE place greater focus on enlightening the school population on some of the negative stereotypes that are associated with mental health and how they can be dismantled. Consideration should be given to incorporating this type of content in the Health and Family Life Education curriculum of the Primary School System (p34);</b></p>	LEVEL	TOPICS	OBJECTIVES
	<p>III(Standard 4-5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal needs</li> <li>• Feelings and emotions: anger - hatred -fear -jealousy -love - possessiveness -sadness</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution</li> <li>• Appropriate behaviour</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Coping strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the capacity to use coping, social and cognitive skills to handle dilemmas</li> <li>• Resolve negative emotional states</li> <li>• Display emotional self control.</li> <li>• Identify appropriate and inappropriate behaviours with respect to conflict resolution</li> <li>• Exhibit behaviours that will display appropriate conduct</li> <li>• Demonstrate an understanding of coping skills to deal with adverse and high risk situations</li> <li>• Demonstrate an appreciation of a need to deal with adverse and high risk situations</li> <li>• Apply appropriate skills to cope with adverse and high risk situations</li> </ul> <p><u>Life Skills:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Negotiation</li> <li>• Managing stress</li> <li>• Self-management</li> <li>• Self-monitoring</li> </ul>

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<p><b>6. E The existing curriculum or course content for the MSc Clinical Psychology programme offered by the University of the West Indies (St. Augustine) should be assessed to ensure that the knowledge and training that is being provided to students are aligned with the needs of the society. Should major gaps be identified, a strategy should be developed to modify the programme to include additional training in areas such as Child Therapy in child therapy and Child Therapy Psychology. Alternatively, post-graduate scholarships may be awarded by the State for persons to pursue subspecialties at foreign universities on the condition that they return and work in the public health system (p.35);</b></p>	<p>It is noted that the MSc Clinical Psychology offered by the University of the West Indies is currently suspended and a review of the programme is being conducted. However, there is agreement that an assessment of the curriculum and content of the programme, should be considered for congruence with the needs of society. Additionally, in the absence of formal data supporting the identified gaps, the MoE, in its attempts to meet the increasing mental health needs, has initiated round table discussions with tertiary agencies that seek to increase the relevance of the curriculum in addressing identified societal needs. The Student Support Services Division (SSSD) of the MoE plans to continue such collaboration for the purpose of more effectively equipping the potential professionals and service providers with subspecialties that address critical mental health challenges faced by the student population. For example, there are increased incidences in suicidal ideation and attempts, and diagnoses of ADHD, depression and anxiety among a younger population. Training in areas such as “Maintaining Healthy Lifestyles”, Psychological First Aid: Pre- and Post-Suicide Interventions” are conducted by personnel of SSSD to meet such needs.</p> <p>There is also agreement in the benefit that postgraduate scholarships may provide. Such an investment can alleviate the deficits in qualified personnel, as well as, in the areas of training which exists within the MOE.</p>

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<p><b>6.I That the training of School Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers be augmented to assist in the early detection of at-risk children(p.36);</b></p>	<p>There is need for investment in on-going professional development to further develop the skillset of all officers of the Student Support Services Division to build capacity in addressing the mental health challenges of the school aged population. A proposal for participation of personnel in a “<i>Train the Trainer in Mental Health in Education Programme</i>” offered through the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has been submitted for consideration and approval. The training of all service providers of the MoE therefore, is of great relevance.</p> <p>Policies have been implemented by SSSD to support the early detection of at-risk learners and to provide early intervention for those experiencing challenges to their mental health and well-being.</p>
<p><b>6.J That the Ministry of Education and the MoH collaborate to design a digital manual/guidebook for teaching staff to aide them to effectively identify and provide a basic response to children and adolescents with mental illnesses. A digitalized manual/guidebook narrated by an appropriate mental health professional along with instructive videos would allow teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge (and perhaps skills) without having to host formal seminars or workshops (p.36);</b></p>	<p>The development of an indigenous digital manual is encouraged. However, this should serve as an additional resource and not diminish the value of face to face training in these specific areas, which allow for greater supervision in the appropriate application of interventions..</p>

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<p><b>4.2.65</b></p> <p><b>E. To reduce the probability of replication of efforts and/or the inefficient allocation of resources, the management of the Student Support Services Division (MoE) and the managers of Child Guidance Clinics should collaborate on a continuous basis with respect to delivering mental health services to children in a more expeditious manner (p.57);</b></p>	<p>There is full agreement that greater collaboration is required. In this regard, the SSSD and Child Guidance already collaborate significantly in providing intervention to the student population. There is an informal agreement that the responsibility for PsychoEducational Assessments will be facilitated by SSSD and psychiatric evaluation conducted by Child Guidance.</p> <p>There is need however, for policies that govern the appropriate practice of sharing information, as there are concerns of insufficient information being communicated on a continuous basis. Additionally, it is accepted that both agencies are faced with significant challenges in both human and other resources that affect the delivery of services.</p>
<p><b>4.3.36</b></p> <p><b>A. The Committee is cognisant that there is a shortage of specialist medical doctors in various aspects of medicine within the public health care system, including psychiatry. The award of scholarships through collaboration between the MoH, the MoE and the Ministry of Public Administration appears to be</b></p>	<p>To complement the service provision of MoH and acknowledgement of the support they provide to SSSD, there is agreement regarding the need for many more scholarships to be awarded to fulfill specialised capacities. Specifically, SSSD suggests the award of scholarships in areas such as Child Developmental Psychologists, Child Psychiatrists and Child Behavioral Therapists, as these are fields under serviced and promotes limitations in interventions.</p>



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<p><b>the most potent method of filling these human resource gaps. In the Ministerial Response, the MoH must advise the Parliament on the number of post-graduate government scholarships that were awarded in the areas of psychiatry and psychology in fiscal 2017/2018 and the number of scholarships proposed to be awarded in the next fiscal (p.71);</b></p>	

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<p><b>B. Given the relatively low enrolment rate into the Mental Health Nurse programmes, the Committee recommends that an incentive scheme be developed to induce persons to select this specialist area of Nursing as a career (p.71);</b></p>	<p>An incentive scheme to induce persons to select Mental Health Nurse Programmes as a specialist area of Nursing as a career, the following are suggested:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Advertisements for Mental Health Nurse Programmes marketed separately and at different times of the year from advertisements for General Nurse Programmes;</li> <li>ii. Advertisements for Mental Health Nurse Programmes being offered at least twice per year;</li> <li>iii. A small stipend is being considered to be offered for the duration of the programme as an incentive for ONLY Mental Health Nurse Programme participants OR alternatively a grant to assist new participants to purchase uniforms and books at the commencement of training;</li> <li>iv. Target mature applicants as well as male applicants for Mental Health Nurse Programmes;</li> <li>v. Use a point system, as an advantage, to persons who would have completed courses related to nursing; and</li> <li>vi. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Nursing Council of Trinidad and Tobago, discussions could be undertaken for two (2) groups of applicants who would have achieved at least four (4) CXC O'Levels subjects with English Language and a Science subject being compulsory and Mathematics being completed at the Secondary School level, to enter the programme.</li> </ol>