

**Breaking Social Stigma on Mental Health through Food and
Therapeutic Space: A Study on Kappiness Mental Health Café**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Kerala in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Social Work Degree
Examination**

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “**Breaking Social Stigma on Mental Health through Food and Therapeutic Space: A Study on Kappiness Mental Health Café**” is a record of genuine work done by Ms. Uma Maheswari S., a fourth-semester Master of Social Work student of this college under my supervision and guidance, and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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DECLARATION

I, Uma Maheswari S, do hereby declare that the Dissertation titled Breaking Social Stigma on Mental Health through Food and Therapeutic Space: A Study on Kappiness Mental Health Café is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the University of Kerala during the year 2024 -2026, toward partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree Examination. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, or another similar title of recognition before.

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ABSTRACT

Mental health stigma continues to impede help-seeking and access to care in India, necessitating innovative and community-oriented approaches to mental health promotion. In response to this challenge, Kappiness Mental Health Café was established as a pioneering initiative in the Indian context to create a stigma-free space for mental health support while introducing the use of food as a component of holistic mental health care. Despite its novelty, the model has received little scholarly attention.

This qualitative study explores how Kappiness promotes mental well-being through the integration of therapeutic environments, food-based interactions, and community-oriented mental health services, while also examining its role in reducing stigma. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the study employed an exploratory single-case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected mental health professionals affiliated with the café and analysed thematically.

The findings reveal that the café's multidisciplinary, non-clinical, and nature-inspired setting encourages openness, social connectedness, and timely help-seeking. Food serves as a medium for building rapport, fostering comfort, and strengthening community bonds, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of therapeutic interactions. The café's welcoming and inclusive atmosphere further normalizes conversations about mental health and contributes to the reduction of stigma. The study highlights the potential of mental health cafés as complementary, community-based models of care and offers valuable implications for social work practice, policy, and future research in India.

Key Words: *Mental Health Café, Social Stigma, Food, Therapeutic Environment, Community Mental Health*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

The introduction chapter serves as the introduction for the whole study. It consists of the statement of the research problem, the background which formed the study as well as the significance of the study. The background section discusses the importance of mental health, challenges related to mental health stigma, mental health promotion, and the emergence of mental health cafés as innovative spaces. It also highlights the role of food, supportive environments, and informal therapeutic spaces in promoting mental wellbeing. The statement of the problem establishes the research gap through a review of literature related to mental health stigma, therapeutic spaces, food and mental health, and community-based approaches. It highlights the limited research on mental health cafés as an integrated model of mental health support, particularly in the Indian context. The scope, relevance, and significance of the study are also discussed, focusing on Kappiness Mental Health Café as an emerging mental health initiative. The chapter also provides an outline to the research, understanding the chapters and their contents.

1.2 Introduction

Mental health represents a foundational pillar of human well-being, profoundly influencing an individual's cognitive processes, emotional responses, and social interactions in everyday life. It serves as the lens through which people interpret their experiences, react to stimuli, and effectively manage the complexities of personal and professional demands (WHO, 2022). According to the World Health Organization, mental health is defined as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO, 2022). This comprehensive definition underscores a critical shift in perspective: mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness or pathology but rather a dynamic, positive state of optimal functioning that enables personal growth and societal participation.

Over the past few decades, the global prevalence of mental health conditions has risen sharply, with disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders becoming alarmingly commonplace amid factors like urbanization, pandemics, and socioeconomic pressures (World Health Organization, 2022); (Santomauro, 2021). This escalation has spotlighted the urgent need for expanded interventions and resources in mental health

care. However, despite heightened awareness, equitable access to services remains elusive, hindered by systemic issues including resource shortages in low- and middle-income countries and, notably, pervasive stigma.

Stigma surrounding mental health acts as a formidable deterrent, instilling fears of being labelled as "weak," judged harshly by peers or family, or facing social exclusion and discrimination (Corrigan, 2002). Consequently, many individuals suffer in silence, postponing or entirely avoiding professional help, which can exacerbate conditions and lead to poorer long-term outcomes. Traditional mental health services, often delivered in sterile, institutional, or hospital-based clinical environments, can intensify these fears by evoking associations with severe illness or loss of autonomy, rendering them unapproachable for those already hesitant.

In response to these persistent challenges, a wave of alternative, community-oriented models of mental health care have gained traction, prioritizing accessibility, destigmatization, and integration into daily life. Among these, mental health cafés stand out as innovative spaces that merge casual social interaction—such as chatting over coffee—with subtle therapeutic support, creating non-clinical venues where people feel safe to share experiences and seek guidance (Goffman, 1963).

In the present study, a mental health café is understood as a community-based, non-clinical setting that combines informal social interaction with professional mental health support. Food is viewed not merely as a source of nourishment but also as a medium for promoting social connectedness and psychological well-being. The environment refers to the physical and social surroundings that shape individuals' experiences, behaviours, and emotional responses. Stigma, as conceptualised by (Goffman, 1963), denotes the process through which certain attributes become socially discrediting, leading to prejudice, discrimination, and barriers to help-seeking. Together, these concepts provide the foundation for understanding how the Mental Health Café model may foster mental well-being and reduce stigma through the integration of food, therapeutic environments, and community-based care.

The Kappiness Mental Health Café exemplifies this progressive model, thoughtfully integrating elements of food, thoughtfully designed environments, and professional psychological support to foster a holistic pathway to mental well-being. By cultivating a relaxed, non-judgmental atmosphere reminiscent of a neighbourhood hangout, it removes

psychological barriers, empowering visitors to voice their concerns openly and embrace support without the apprehension tied to formal therapy settings.

Contemporary research increasingly validates the pivotal role of food in mental health, revealing how dietary patterns and nutrients directly modulate brain function, neurotransmitter activity, and emotional regulation, ultimately shaping mood and resilience (Marx, 2017). Beyond biology, the communal ritual of social eating strengthens interpersonal bonds, cultivates a sense of belonging, and bolsters emotional support networks essential for recovery. Complementing this, the physical environment exerts a powerful influence on psychological states; spaces incorporating biophilic design—such as natural light, greenery, and ergonomic comfort—have been empirically linked to stress reduction, anxiety alleviation, and improved therapeutic outcomes (Ulrich & al, 1991); (Gifford, 2014).

Thus, the Kappiness Mental Health Café's synergistic blend of inviting environments, nourishing food, and informal therapeutic exchanges introduces a distinctive, stigma-reducing model for advancing mental well-being. The present study seeks to rigorously evaluate its contributions in promoting positive mental health outcomes and diminishing associated stigma.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Mental health stigma endures as a profound and multifaceted barrier impeding access to professional care across India, where cultural, social, and familial apprehensions profoundly shape help-seeking behaviours. Numerous individuals, particularly in diverse communities like those in Kerala, exhibit marked hesitation toward clinical environments—such as psychiatric wards or outpatient departments—stemming from visceral fears of social labelling (e.g., being deemed "mad" or unreliable), workplace discrimination, familial rejection, or enduring ostracism that could unravel personal and professional networks. This reluctance often manifests as self-imposed silence, reliance on informal supports like faith healers, or complete avoidance of intervention, exacerbating untreated conditions amid India's staggering 80-85% mental health treatment gap as of 2026. In low-resource settings, these dynamics are intensified by intersecting factors like low awareness (with only 15% of adults recognizing symptoms as treatable) and socioeconomic constraints, leading to delayed care that spans months or years and perpetuates cycles of suffering.

While mental health cafés represent a transformative, community-centric intervention model—offering informal, stigma-free spaces blending social interaction with therapeutic guidance—their empirical foundation remains conspicuously underdeveloped, especially within the Indian landscape. Initiatives like Kappiness Mental Health Café in Thiruvananthapuram, launched in 2021 under NADI Foundation, pioneer this approach by providing relaxed venues for awareness events, workshops, and therapy over coffee, yet peer-reviewed evaluations of their operational efficacy, user outcomes, or stigma-mitigation impacts are scarce or absent. National surveys highlight this void: despite rising prevalence (lifetime mental disorder rate at 13.7%), community innovations lag behind biomedical dominance, with minimal data on how such cafés influence well-being metrics or cultural attitudes in localized contexts like Kerala.

Therefore, the present study endeavours to bridge this evidentiary chasm by rigorously addressing the following research problem: To examine how the Kappiness Mental Health Café contributes to the improvement of mental well-being and reduction of stigma through its unique integration of environment (e.g., nature-inspired therapeutic spaces like garden oases and mud houses) and food (e.g., mindful social dining rituals).

1.4 Background of the Study

India's mental health care landscape has long been characterized by a predominance of clinical and institutional frameworks, encompassing psychiatric hospitals, outpatient clinics, and specialized treatment centres. These conventional approaches undoubtedly serve vital functions in accurate diagnosis, pharmacological management, and acute interventions for severe disorders (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2022). However, their effectiveness is often curtailed by inherent limitations in reach and acceptability, particularly among diverse socioeconomic groups. Rural populations, for instance, face geographic barriers, while urban dwellers grapple with long waiting times and high costs, rendering these services inaccessible to large swathes of society (Gururaj & al, 2016). Compounding these issues are deep-rooted social stigma, widespread lack of mental health literacy, and pervasive fears of discrimination—such as job loss or familial ostracism—which collectively discourage individuals from pursuing timely professional assistance (Srivastava et al., 2019).

Amid rapid socio-economic transformations—including urbanization, economic pressures, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and heightened psychological

stressors like work-life imbalance—there is an escalating demand for mental health support that transcends traditional models (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2022). This evolving context underscores the imperative for innovative, community-embedded strategies that democratize access, foster early intervention, and align with cultural sensitivities. In this vein, mental health cafés have surfaced as promising alternatives, functioning as hybrid spaces that seamlessly connect formal professional services with everyday community life. By demystifying therapy through informal gatherings, these venues help bridge critical gaps in awareness, engagement, and stigma reduction.

The Kappiness Mental Health Café exemplifies this emergent paradigm within the Indian setting, providing a distinctly non-clinical haven where therapeutic dialogues unfold amid a relaxed, café-like ambiance. Patrons can sip tea or coffee while engaging with trained facilitators, sharing personal narratives, or accessing light counselling without the intimidation of a hospital visit. A key strength lies in its deliberate incorporation of environmental psychology principles: nature-inspired designs featuring indoor plants, soft lighting, and cozy nooks promote tranquillity and openness (Ulrich & al, 1991); (Gifford, 2014). Complementing this, food-based interactions—such as communal meals or mindful snacking sessions—leverage the cultural significance of shared eating in India to nurture social bonds, alleviate isolation, and even support nutritional psychiatry goals that influence mood and cognition. Together, these elements cultivate a holistic, supportive ecosystem that feels welcoming rather than clinical.

Despite the conceptual promise of mental health cafés, their application remains nascent in India, where community-based innovations are still overshadowed by biomedical dominance. Existing literature on such models is sparse, with few empirical studies documenting their operational dynamics, user experiences, or measurable impacts on well-being and stigma. This evidentiary gap highlights the pressing need for targeted investigations into initiatives like Kappiness, to illuminate their potential in tackling India's mental health crisis—where an estimated 150 million people require care yet fewer than 10% receive it (Gururaj & al, 2016)—and to inform scalable, stigma-mitigating strategies.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study examining the Kappiness Mental Health Café's role in enhancing mental well-being and reducing stigma carries profound relevance within India's evolving mental

health landscape, particularly amid surging demand for community-centric interventions that transcend conventional clinical paradigms. By dissecting this innovative model—which fuses therapeutic dialogue with café ambiance, nature-inspired environments, and mindful food practices—the research directly advances medical and psychiatric social work, equipping practitioners with evidence-based strategies to destigmatize care in culturally sensitive contexts like Kerala. Much like analyses of localized disparities in Thiruvananthapuram communities, this inquiry spotlights scalable solutions for underserved populations, where traditional services falter due to stigma and inaccessibility.

The study holds critical importance for several interconnected reasons, each poised to catalyse practical and systemic change:

One primary benefit lies in illuminating alternative pathways to mental health care, moving beyond institutional silos to hybrid spaces that normalize support through everyday social rituals. By documenting how cafés like Kappiness facilitate organic engagement—via peer conversations over chai or group wellness sessions—this work empowers social workers to replicate such models in resource-scarce settings, potentially narrowing India's 80-85% treatment gap and fostering early intervention for anxiety, depression, and stress prevalent among youth and fisherfolk communities.

Additionally, it underscores the pivotal influence of environmental and social factors in therapeutic outcomes, revealing how biophilic designs (e.g., greenery, soft lighting) and communal dynamics lower cortisol levels and build trust. This insight equips practitioners to advocate for "healing spaces" in community health programs, aligning with evidence that natural elements accelerate recovery by 20-30% compared to sterile clinics, thus enriching social work curricula on holistic interventions.

Further, the research probes food's under-explored yet potent role in mental well-being, linking nutritional choices (e.g., omega-rich local dishes) to neurotransmitter balance and mood stabilization. In a nation where diet intersects with cultural traditions, these findings could spur community nutrition-therapy integrations, enhancing resilience against stressors like economic instability in coastal Kerala.

Moreover, by unpacking stigma-reduction mechanisms—such as narrative sharing in non-threatening venues—the study challenges entrenched fears of labelling, offering social workers tools to shift attitudes at familial and societal levels. This has direct

applicability in anti-stigma campaigns under the National Mental Health Programme, promoting help-seeking behaviours long suppressed by discrimination.

Finally, the findings promise robust policy-level and practice-based implications, informing guidelines for NMHP expansions, NGO partnerships, and MSW training modules. Targeted recommendations could guide funding for café-like hubs statewide, amplifying access for marginalized groups (e.g., women, low-income families) while evaluating ROI through well-being metrics—ultimately fostering inclusive mental health ecosystems that echo digital empowerment efforts in bridging divides.

1.6 Chapterization

The research is divided into six chapters. The chapterization of the research dissertation is as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction serves as the first chapter of the research. It includes the various concepts relating to the background of why the research is being conducted and states the problem addressed as a research paper, its intensity and later it explains significance of the study in the current scenario.

Chapter II: Review of literature

The Review of Literature chapter includes a comprehension of all the literatures reviewed in the context of the research, identifying various concepts and dimension and understanding the methodologies used in similar studies. Also, the review of literature helps researcher in structuring the research gap.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology researcher used in the research. It includes the research approach and research design adopted, universe, sampling method and size and method of data analysis.

Chapter IV: Case Description

This chapter provides the detailed reports of respondents, who provided data for the case study. It provides narrative and verbatim accounts of information described by each respondent.

Chapter V: Thematic Analysis and Discussion

Discussion of the case, thematic analysis and interpretations data collected for the study are discussed in this chapter in a detailed manner.

Chapter VI: Findings, Suggestions and Conclusions

This chapter deals with major findings followed by discussions, suggestions, and conclusions. The last pages of the dissertation will include the bibliography, appendix, and tools used for data collection in this study.

1.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter introduced the study by discussing the background of mental health, stigma, mental health promotion, and the emergence of mental health cafés as innovative support spaces. It established the research problem by identifying the gap in existing literature regarding the role of mental health cafés in promoting mental wellbeing and reducing stigma. The chapter also presented the significance, scope, objectives, and organization of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature relevant to the present study. The review was undertaken to examine existing theoretical and empirical knowledge related to the major concepts of the study, identify research trends, and establish the conceptual foundation for the present investigation.

The chapter begins with an introduction highlighting the significance of literature review in the research process. It then reviews literature under six major themes, namely mental health and mental well-being, mental health stigma, community mental health, food and mental well-being, therapeutic environment, and mental health café models. The review analyses previous studies from both national and international contexts to understand the evolution of community-based approaches to mental health promotion and the growing emphasis on holistic and recovery-oriented care.

Subsequently, the chapter presents the theoretical framework based on the Person-in-Environment Theory and Goffman's Stigma Theory, followed by the conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between the major concepts of the study. Finally, the chapter identifies the research gap that emerged from the reviewed literature, thereby providing the rationale for undertaking the present study.

2.2 Introduction

A review of literature is an essential component of any research study as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing body of knowledge related to the research problem. It involves the systematic identification, examination, analysis, and synthesis of published and unpublished scholarly works, including books, research articles, dissertations, reports, policy documents, and other credible sources. Through an extensive review of previous studies, the researcher gains insight into the evolution of concepts, theoretical perspectives, research methodologies, and empirical findings within a particular field. It also enables the researcher to critically evaluate existing evidence, identify inconsistencies and research gaps, and establish a strong academic foundation for the present study.

The literature review serves multiple purposes in the research process. It helps in refining the research problem, developing research objectives, selecting appropriate theoretical perspectives, and avoiding unnecessary duplication of previous research. Furthermore, it provides an understanding of how scholars have approached similar issues, the methodologies adopted, and the conclusions drawn from previous investigations. By synthesising diverse perspectives and findings, the literature review facilitates the development of a conceptual understanding of the research problem while identifying areas that require further scholarly attention. Thus, it acts as a bridge between existing knowledge and the new knowledge that the present study intends to contribute.

Mental health has increasingly become a significant area of research and public health concern due to its profound influence on individual well-being, family functioning, community development, and national productivity. Contemporary understandings of mental health extend beyond the mere absence of mental illness and emphasise positive mental well-being, resilience, social functioning, and quality of life. The growing burden of mental health disorders across the world, coupled with persistent stigma and limited accessibility to mental health services, has encouraged researchers and practitioners to explore innovative approaches that promote mental well-being within community settings rather than relying solely on institutional or hospital-based care.

Recent developments in the field of mental health have highlighted the importance of adopting holistic and multidisciplinary approaches to mental health promotion. In addition to psychological and psychiatric interventions, increasing attention has been given to factors such as social connectedness, nutrition, therapeutic environments, community participation, and recovery-oriented care in enhancing mental well-being. Research has demonstrated that supportive social relationships, healthy dietary practices, welcoming environments, and accessible community-based services contribute significantly to psychological well-being and encourage individuals to seek timely mental health support (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020); (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008). Similarly, efforts aimed at reducing stigma and creating non-judgemental spaces have become integral to contemporary mental health promotion strategies (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Kasturkar, Gawai, Gomase, & Sebastian, 2021).

In recent years, community-based initiatives have emerged as important alternatives to conventional mental health care by providing accessible, inclusive, and less intimidating

environments for individuals seeking emotional support. Among these innovations, mental health cafés have attracted increasing scholarly attention for their role in promoting mental health awareness, encouraging help-seeking behaviour, strengthening community engagement, and reducing stigma associated with mental illness. Studies have shown that such cafés provide informal spaces where individuals can engage in meaningful conversations, receive psychosocial support, and access mental health services without experiencing the fear or anxiety often associated with traditional clinical settings (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024) (Lodha & De Sousa, 2020); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025). These developments indicate a gradual shift towards more person-centred, community-oriented, and preventive approaches to mental healthcare.

Considering the multidisciplinary nature of the present study, it is essential to examine the available literature from diverse yet interconnected domains. An understanding of mental health and mental well-being provides the conceptual basis for the study, while literature on mental health stigma highlights the barriers that prevent individuals from accessing care. Community mental health literature offers insights into the evolution of community-based mental healthcare and recovery-oriented practices. Studies related to food and mental well-being demonstrate the emerging relationship between nutrition, social interaction, and psychological health. Similarly, literature on therapeutic environments explains how physical and social spaces influence emotional well-being, whereas research on mental health cafés provides an understanding of innovative community-based models that integrate psychosocial support within informal settings.

Accordingly, this chapter presents a thematic review of literature relevant to the study. The chapter begins with a review of literature on mental health and mental well-being, followed by mental health stigma, community mental health, food and mental well-being, therapeutic environments, and mental health café models from different countries. Subsequently, the conceptual framework underpinning the study is discussed, and the chapter concludes by identifying the research gap based on the reviewed literature, thereby establishing the rationale for undertaking the present research.

2.3 Review of Literature

2.3.1 Mental Health and Mental Well-being

Mental health is a fundamental component of overall health and well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, behave, cope with stress, establish relationships, and

contribute to society. Contemporary perspectives recognise mental health as a dynamic state that extends beyond the absence of mental illness, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Good mental health enables individuals to realise their abilities, manage everyday challenges, maintain productive relationships, and participate meaningfully in their communities. As awareness of mental health has grown globally, researchers have increasingly shifted their focus from treating mental illness alone to promoting positive mental well-being and improving quality of life through preventive and community-based approaches.

The concept of mental well-being has evolved considerably over the past few decades. Earlier approaches primarily viewed mental health from a pathological perspective, focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. However, recent scholarship has adopted a strengths-based perspective, emphasising resilience, life satisfaction, emotional regulation, optimism, purpose in life, and social connectedness as essential dimensions of mental well-being. This paradigm shift has encouraged researchers to examine the factors that promote psychological flourishing alongside those that contribute to mental illness. Consequently, mental well-being is now understood as a multidimensional concept shaped by biological, psychological, social, cultural, and environmental influences.

Research consistently demonstrates that mental well-being is closely associated with physical health, social relationships, economic stability, and environmental conditions. Positive mental health contributes to improved academic performance, workplace productivity, healthier interpersonal relationships, better physical health outcomes, and enhanced quality of life. Conversely, poor mental health is associated with emotional distress, impaired functioning, reduced social participation, and an increased burden on families and healthcare systems. These findings highlight the importance of promoting mental well-being through comprehensive strategies that address both individual and environmental determinants.

Recent literature has increasingly emphasised that mental well-being is influenced not only by clinical interventions but also by broader social determinants and lifestyle factors. Social support, meaningful interpersonal relationships, community participation, healthy dietary practices, physical activity, and supportive environments have all been identified as protective factors that enhance psychological well-being and resilience. Research in

nutritional psychiatry has further demonstrated that healthy dietary patterns are associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety, suggesting that mental health promotion requires an integrated and multidisciplinary approach (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020). Similarly, studies have highlighted the importance of social interaction and community engagement in fostering emotional well-being and reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation (Dunbar, 2017); (Clarke & Waring, 2018)

The promotion of positive mental health has also become a central objective of community mental health initiatives. Rather than focusing solely on illness prevention and treatment, contemporary mental health promotion seeks to empower individuals and communities by strengthening protective factors, reducing risk factors, and creating supportive environments that encourage emotional well-being. Community-based programmes, peer support initiatives, recovery-oriented services, and innovative psychosocial interventions have demonstrated considerable potential in improving mental well-being while enhancing accessibility to mental health services (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024). These approaches reflect a growing recognition that mental health is influenced by everyday social experiences and should therefore be promoted within natural community settings.

The reviewed literature indicates that mental health and mental well-being are multidimensional constructs shaped by a complex interaction of individual, social, and environmental factors. While traditional approaches largely focused on the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, contemporary perspectives emphasise the promotion of positive mental well-being through holistic, community-based, and preventive strategies. This evolving understanding provides an important conceptual foundation for examining innovative approaches to mental health promotion discussed in the subsequent sections of this review.

2.3.2 Mental Health Stigma

Mental health stigma remains one of the most significant barriers to the promotion of mental well-being and the effective utilisation of mental health services. Despite considerable advances in mental health research, treatment, and awareness, negative societal attitudes and discriminatory behaviours towards individuals experiencing mental health problems continue to persist across cultures and communities. Stigma not only influences how society perceives people with mental illness but also affects how

individuals perceive themselves, often resulting in shame, fear, social exclusion, and reluctance to seek professional help. Consequently, addressing stigma has become a central objective of contemporary mental health promotion and community mental healthcare initiatives (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Penn & M, 2002).

The term stigma refers to a socially constructed process through which certain characteristics or conditions are labelled as undesirable, leading to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion. Within the context of mental health, stigma arises when individuals experiencing mental illness are perceived as dangerous, unpredictable, incompetent, or incapable of fulfilling normal social roles. Such misconceptions contribute to negative public attitudes and create barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and community participation. Existing literature suggests that stigma operates not merely at the individual level but also within families, institutions, healthcare systems, and broader social structures, making it a multidimensional social phenomenon (Penn & M, 2002); (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Gartner & Asbrock, 2022).

Researchers have identified different forms of mental health stigma that influence the experiences of individuals living with mental illness. Public stigma refers to the negative stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes held by society towards people with mental health conditions. These attitudes often result in social rejection, reduced employment opportunities, and unequal access to resources. Self-stigma, on the other hand, develops when individuals internalise society's negative beliefs, leading to diminished self-esteem, hopelessness, and reduced confidence in their ability to recover. In addition, structural stigma reflects discriminatory policies, institutional practices, and systemic inequalities that restrict opportunities and reinforce social disadvantage. Families and caregivers may also experience courtesy stigma or affiliate stigma, wherein they face social judgement and discrimination due to their association with a person experiencing mental illness (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Penn & M, 2002); (Kasturkar, Gawai, Gomase, & Sebastian, 2021).

A substantial body of literature demonstrates that stigma significantly influences help-seeking behaviour. Individuals experiencing psychological distress frequently delay or avoid accessing mental health services because of fear of being labelled, judged, or socially rejected. Such delays often result in worsening symptoms, reduced treatment adherence, and poorer recovery outcomes. Research has consistently shown that

anticipated discrimination and concerns regarding confidentiality discourage individuals from openly discussing their mental health concerns, thereby limiting opportunities for early intervention and support (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Penn & M, 2002); (Gartner & Asbrock, 2022).

Mental health stigma extends beyond the individual and has profound consequences for families and communities. Family members often experience emotional distress, social isolation, guilt, and blame associated with caring for a person with mental illness. In many societies, misconceptions surrounding mental illness continue to influence marriage prospects, educational opportunities, employment, and social relationships, thereby reinforcing cycles of exclusion and marginalisation. Stigma also discourages communities from openly engaging in discussions about mental health, perpetuating myths and misinformation that hinder the development of supportive and inclusive environments (Kasturkar, Gawai, Gomase, & Sebastian, 2021); (Gartner & Asbrock, 2022).

Recent literature has increasingly recognised stigma as a major public health challenge requiring interventions beyond clinical treatment. Rather than focusing solely on individuals experiencing mental illness, contemporary anti-stigma initiatives emphasise changing societal attitudes through public awareness campaigns, mental health education, contact-based interventions, community participation, and inclusive policies. Studies suggest that opportunities for positive social interaction with individuals who have lived experience of mental illness significantly reduce stereotypes and improve public acceptance. Similarly, creating safe, welcoming, and non-judgemental environments encourages open conversations about mental health and normalises help-seeking behaviour (Penn & M, 2002); (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Gartner & Asbrock, 2022).

The reviewed literature consistently identifies mental health stigma as one of the greatest obstacles to achieving positive mental health outcomes and equitable access to care. Although considerable progress has been made in expanding mental health services, stigma continues to influence individual behaviour, family dynamics, healthcare utilisation, and community attitudes. Contemporary research therefore emphasises that reducing stigma requires a combination of education, community engagement, supportive environments, and opportunities for meaningful social interaction. These perspectives provide an important foundation for understanding community-based mental health

initiatives that seek to promote inclusion, improve accessibility, and encourage help-seeking behaviour.

2.3.3 Community Mental Health

Community mental health has emerged as a significant approach to mental healthcare by shifting the focus from institution-based treatment to comprehensive, community-oriented services that promote prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, and social inclusion. Traditional mental healthcare largely relied on psychiatric hospitals and specialised institutions, where treatment primarily focused on symptom management. However, increasing recognition of the social determinants of mental health and the limitations of institutional care led to the development of community mental health services that emphasise accessibility, continuity of care, recovery, and active community participation (Clarke & Waring, 2018).

The philosophy of community mental health is founded on the principle that mental health services should be accessible within the environments where people live, work, study, and interact. Rather than viewing individuals solely through a medical lens, community mental health adopts a holistic perspective that recognises the influence of family relationships, education, employment, culture, economic conditions, and social support on psychological well-being. This approach encourages collaboration among healthcare professionals, social workers, community organisations, families, and individuals with lived experiences to promote recovery and improve quality of life (Clarke & Waring, 2018).

Over the past few decades, mental health policies across many countries have increasingly prioritised deinstitutionalisation and the expansion of community-based services. This transition reflects the understanding that long-term institutional care often contributes to social isolation, dependency, and stigma, whereas community-based care enables individuals to maintain family relationships, participate in everyday social activities, and access support within familiar environments. Research suggests that community mental health services improve continuity of care, enhance treatment adherence, and encourage individuals to seek support at earlier stages of psychological distress (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024); (Clarke & Waring, 2018).

An important feature of community mental health is its emphasis on recovery-oriented practice. Unlike traditional approaches that primarily focus on symptom reduction,

recovery-oriented care promotes hope, self-determination, empowerment, and meaningful participation in society. Recovery is increasingly understood as a personal and social process through which individuals develop satisfying and productive lives despite the presence of mental health challenges. Community-based programmes facilitate this process by providing peer support, psychosocial rehabilitation, skill development, employment opportunities, and opportunities for social participation, thereby enabling individuals to regain confidence and independence (Clarke & Waring, 2018).

Community participation also plays a crucial role in promoting positive mental health and reducing stigma. Studies have demonstrated that supportive social networks, inclusive community environments, and opportunities for meaningful interaction contribute to emotional well-being and strengthen resilience. Contact-based interventions, peer-led programmes, support groups, and community awareness initiatives encourage open discussions about mental health while reducing misconceptions and discriminatory attitudes. Such initiatives not only benefit individuals experiencing mental health problems but also foster greater understanding and acceptance within society (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008); (Penn & M, 2002); (Gartner & Asbrock, 2022).

Recent research has highlighted the emergence of innovative community-based mental health initiatives that extend beyond conventional healthcare settings. Community cafés, peer-support spaces, creative arts programmes, nature-based interventions, and other informal psychosocial environments have demonstrated considerable potential in promoting mental well-being, strengthening social connectedness, and improving accessibility to mental health support. These initiatives are particularly valuable for individuals who may be reluctant to access traditional psychiatric services due to fear, stigma, or previous negative experiences. By providing welcoming and non-clinical environments, such models encourage help-seeking behaviour and facilitate early intervention before mental health problems become more severe (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025); (Clarke & Waring, 2018).

The literature further indicates that successful community mental health programmes require multidisciplinary collaboration. Psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, counsellors, nurses, occupational therapists, peer support workers, community organisations, and family members each contribute unique expertise in addressing the

diverse needs of individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Such collaborative approaches ensure that mental healthcare extends beyond clinical treatment to include psychosocial support, rehabilitation, advocacy, health promotion, and community reintegration.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that community mental health represents a progressive shift towards accessible, person-centred, and recovery-oriented mental healthcare. By emphasising prevention, community participation, multidisciplinary collaboration, and supportive environments, community mental health initiatives contribute to improved psychological well-being while reducing barriers associated with institutional care and mental health stigma. These developments have also created opportunities for innovative models of mental health promotion that integrate psychosocial support within everyday community settings.

2.3.4 Food and Mental Well-being

Food is a fundamental determinant of health and well-being, extending beyond its nutritional function to influence psychological, emotional, and social health. Traditionally, research on food primarily focused on its role in preventing physical illnesses and maintaining physiological functioning. However, recent advances in nutritional psychiatry have expanded this perspective by demonstrating that dietary habits, nutritional quality, and eating behaviours significantly influence mental well-being. As a result, food is increasingly recognised as an important component of holistic mental health promotion, contributing not only to physical health but also to emotional resilience, cognitive functioning, and overall quality of life (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020).

Emerging evidence suggests that dietary patterns have a significant association with the development and management of common mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. Diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, fish, and other nutrient-dense foods have been associated with improved mental well-being and lower risks of depressive symptoms. In contrast, excessive consumption of processed foods, refined sugars, and saturated fats has been linked to poorer psychological outcomes. These findings indicate that nutritional quality plays an important role in maintaining optimal brain function and emotional health (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020).

One of the major developments in nutritional psychiatry is the growing understanding of the gut-brain axis, which refers to the bidirectional communication between the gastrointestinal system and the central nervous system. Research has demonstrated that the gut microbiome influences neurotransmitter production, immune functioning, inflammatory responses, and stress regulation, all of which contribute to mental health. Consequently, diets that support a healthy gut microbiome, including those containing probiotic and fermented foods, have received increasing attention as complementary approaches to promoting psychological well-being. Although nutritional interventions should not replace conventional mental health treatment, they are increasingly recognised as valuable components of comprehensive mental healthcare (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020).

Beyond its nutritional value, food also performs an important social and psychological function. Throughout cultures, sharing meals has traditionally served as a means of strengthening interpersonal relationships, encouraging communication, fostering trust, and creating a sense of belonging. Social eating provides opportunities for emotional expression, mutual support, and meaningful interpersonal interaction, all of which contribute positively to mental well-being. (Dunbar, 2017) argued that communal eating strengthens social bonds, increases feelings of happiness, and promotes cooperation among individuals. Such findings suggest that food has the potential to facilitate social connectedness, an important protective factor for positive mental health.

The psychological experience associated with eating is influenced not only by the food itself but also by the environment in which it is consumed. Pleasant dining spaces, opportunities for informal conversations, and welcoming social environments can reduce stress, encourage relaxation, and facilitate positive interpersonal interactions. Studies examining therapeutic and community environments have similarly demonstrated that supportive physical settings enhance emotional comfort and social engagement, thereby contributing to overall psychological well-being (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008); (Clarke & Waring, 2018). These findings indicate that the mental health benefits associated with food may be enhanced when combined with positive environmental and social experiences.

Recent literature has also highlighted the importance of integrating lifestyle-based approaches into mental health promotion. Rather than viewing nutrition as an isolated

intervention, researchers increasingly advocate for multidisciplinary strategies that combine healthy eating, physical activity, social participation, and supportive community environments to improve mental well-being. Such holistic approaches acknowledge that mental health is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors and therefore requires comprehensive health promotion strategies rather than reliance on clinical treatment alone (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020).

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that food contributes to mental well-being through multiple pathways, including nutritional benefits, regulation of the gut-brain axis, enhancement of cognitive and emotional functioning, and promotion of social connectedness. Contemporary research increasingly supports the inclusion of nutritional and lifestyle factors within broader mental health promotion strategies. These perspectives provide an important foundation for understanding innovative community-based initiatives that incorporate food within supportive psychosocial environments while promoting positive mental well-being.

2.3.5 Therapeutic Environment

The therapeutic environment has become an increasingly important concept in contemporary mental healthcare, recognising that an individual's physical and social surroundings significantly influence psychological well-being, emotional recovery, and treatment outcomes. Traditionally, mental healthcare has focused primarily on clinical interventions; however, recent research highlights that the design of healthcare settings, opportunities for social interaction, exposure to nature, and the overall atmosphere of a space can substantially affect mental health. Consequently, therapeutic environments are now viewed as integral components of holistic mental health promotion rather than merely the physical locations where care is delivered (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008); (Clarke & Waring, 2018).

A therapeutic environment refers to a physical and psychosocial setting that promotes safety, comfort, dignity, trust, and emotional well-being. Such environments are intentionally designed to minimise stress, encourage positive social interaction, and support recovery through both environmental and interpersonal factors. Features such as natural lighting, greenery, aesthetically pleasing surroundings, privacy, comfortable seating, and welcoming spaces contribute to creating environments that foster emotional

stability and reduce psychological distress. Research suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in therapeutic activities and communicate openly when they feel safe, respected, and comfortable within their surroundings (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008).

The relationship between the physical environment and mental health has been widely explored in healthcare research. Evidence indicates that thoughtfully designed environments can reduce stress, improve mood, enhance emotional regulation, and support recovery among individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Therapeutic settings that incorporate natural elements, opportunities for relaxation, and calming sensory experiences have been associated with reduced anxiety and improved psychological well-being. Such findings demonstrate that the environment itself can function as a supportive element within the broader therapeutic process rather than serving merely as a backdrop for clinical interventions (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008); (Rodriguez- Labajos, Kinloch, & et. al, 2024).

Nature-based environments have received particular attention within recent literature on mental health promotion. Exposure to green spaces, gardens, and other natural settings has been associated with reduced psychological distress, improved concentration, enhanced emotional resilience, and increased feelings of well-being. Contact with nature encourages relaxation, restores cognitive functioning, and provides opportunities for reflection and social engagement. (Rodriguez- Labajos, Kinloch, & et. al, 2024) emphasised that integrating natural elements into community spaces can strengthen psychological well-being while supporting more sustainable and person-centred approaches to health promotion. These findings reinforce the growing recognition that environmental design contributes meaningfully to mental health outcomes.

Beyond the physical setting, the social environment also plays a vital role in creating therapeutic experiences. A welcoming atmosphere characterised by empathy, mutual respect, acceptance, and meaningful interpersonal relationships encourages individuals to express their concerns without fear of judgement. Informal interactions, peer support, collaborative activities, and opportunities for shared experiences contribute to developing trust and strengthening social connectedness. Research has shown that such psychosocial environments promote recovery, increase engagement with mental health services, and

reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008).

The significance of therapeutic environments extends beyond hospitals and clinical settings. Contemporary mental health promotion increasingly recognises that community spaces, cultural centres, creative arts programmes, recovery cafés, and other informal environments can also function as therapeutic settings when they foster inclusion, safety, and supportive social interaction. These community-based environments provide alternatives to conventional institutional care by reducing the anxiety often associated with formal healthcare facilities and encouraging individuals to seek support at an earlier stage. Studies suggest that informal therapeutic spaces complement professional mental healthcare by creating opportunities for community engagement, empowerment, and recovery-oriented practice (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025).

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that therapeutic environments influence mental health through the combined effects of physical design, natural surroundings, and supportive social interactions. Rather than functioning independently, these environmental factors interact with psychological and social processes to promote emotional well-being, reduce stress, and encourage meaningful engagement with mental health services. The growing emphasis on therapeutic environments reflects a broader shift towards holistic, person-centred, and community-based approaches to mental healthcare, providing an important context for understanding the development of mental health café models discussed in the following section.

2.3.6 Mental Health Café Models

The concept of mental health cafés has emerged as an innovative community-based approach that seeks to make mental health support more accessible, inclusive, and less intimidating than conventional psychiatric services. Unlike hospital-based settings, mental health cafés provide informal, welcoming environments where individuals can seek emotional support, engage in meaningful conversations, access professional guidance, and participate in community activities without the fear or stigma often associated with traditional mental healthcare. These cafés reflect the growing emphasis on recovery-oriented and person-centred mental health services that prioritise social

inclusion, early intervention, and community engagement (Lodha & De Sousa, 2020); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024).

The development of mental health cafés is closely associated with the broader movement towards community mental health and deinstitutionalisation. As mental healthcare increasingly shifted from psychiatric hospitals to community settings, researchers and practitioners recognised the need for alternative spaces that could bridge the gap between formal clinical services and everyday community life. Mental health cafés were established to create safe, non-judgemental environments where individuals could access support before their mental health concerns progressed to crisis situations. By reducing the formality traditionally associated with psychiatric care, these cafés encourage help-seeking behaviour, strengthen social support networks, and promote positive mental well-being (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of mental health cafés is their emphasis on informality and accessibility. Unlike conventional healthcare facilities that may appear clinical or intimidating, these cafés intentionally create welcoming spaces that resemble ordinary community cafés. Comfortable seating, opportunities for casual conversations, recreational activities, refreshments, and supportive staff contribute to an atmosphere where visitors feel respected and emotionally safe. Such environments reduce psychological barriers to accessing support and facilitate open discussions regarding mental health concerns (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025).

Another important feature of mental health cafés is the integration of professional and peer support. Depending on the service model, visitors may receive assistance from psychologists, counsellors, psychiatric nurses, social workers, trained volunteers, or peer support workers with lived experience of mental illness. This multidisciplinary and recovery-oriented approach enables individuals to receive emotional support, practical guidance, crisis intervention, or referral to specialised mental health services whenever necessary. Research indicates that combining professional expertise with peer support enhances trust, reduces power differences, and encourages sustained engagement with mental health services (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024).

2.3.6.1 Crisis Cafés in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been one of the pioneers in developing and evaluating **crisis cafés**, which are specialised community-based services designed to support individuals experiencing acute psychological distress. Crisis cafés function as alternatives to emergency departments and inpatient psychiatric services by providing immediate emotional support within safe and non-clinical environments. They are generally available during evenings and weekends, periods when conventional community mental health services are often limited, thereby addressing an important gap in mental healthcare accessibility (Dalton-Locke, Johnson, Courtney, Stuart, & Campbell, 2021).

Research evaluating crisis cafés in England has reported positive outcomes in terms of user satisfaction, accessibility, and emotional support. Visitors frequently describe these settings as welcoming, compassionate, and less intimidating than hospital emergency departments. Staff members are perceived as approachable, respectful, and supportive, enabling individuals to openly discuss their concerns without fear of judgement. Studies also indicate that crisis cafés contribute to reducing unnecessary hospital admissions, improving continuity of care, and facilitating timely referral to appropriate community mental health services (Dalton-Locke, Johnson, Courtney, Stuart, & Campbell, 2021); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024)).

Despite these positive findings, researchers have also identified several challenges associated with crisis café services. Variations in service models, inconsistent funding, limited operating hours, and differences in staffing patterns affect the quality and accessibility of care across different regions. Furthermore, many studies have emphasised the need for greater integration between crisis cafés and mainstream mental health services to ensure continuity of support following crisis intervention (Dalton-Locke, Johnson, Courtney, Stuart, & Campbell, 2021); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024).

2.3.6.2 International Mental Health Café Models

Beyond the United Kingdom, community-based mental health café models have gradually developed in countries such as Australia and Ireland, reflecting the growing international emphasis on accessible and recovery-oriented mental healthcare. Although these initiatives differ in organisational structure and service delivery, they share the common objective of creating supportive community spaces that encourage social inclusion, emotional well-being, and early access to mental health support (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025).

Australian community mental health cafés are primarily recovery-oriented and focus on psychosocial rehabilitation, peer support, and community participation. These cafés provide opportunities for individuals with lived experiences of mental illness to engage in meaningful social interactions, develop confidence, and strengthen their participation within the community. Similarly, community café initiatives reported in Ireland emphasise reducing loneliness, strengthening social connections, and improving mental well-being through informal community engagement and accessible support services (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025).

The international scoping review conducted by (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025)) found that successful mental health cafés consistently provide welcoming environments, encourage peer and professional support, facilitate early intervention, and reduce barriers to accessing mental healthcare. Service users commonly reported that the informal nature of these cafés reduced anxiety, promoted open conversations, and fostered a sense of belonging that was often lacking within traditional healthcare settings.

Although international literature demonstrates the effectiveness of mental health cafés in improving accessibility, reducing stigma, and promoting recovery, the primary focus of most published studies remains on crisis intervention, peer support, and community engagement. Comparatively fewer studies have examined the integration of nutrition, therapeutic environments, and multidisciplinary lifestyle-based approaches within mental health café settings. This indicates that while the mental health café concept has gained increasing international recognition, there remains considerable scope for exploring innovative community-based models that adopt broader approaches to mental health promotion (Lodha & De Sousa, 2020); (Staples, Cadorna, & Johnson, 2024); (Dhoibhilin, Doody, & et., 2025)

2.4 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the theoretical foundation that guides a research study by explaining the relationship between its major concepts and facilitating the interpretation of findings. It enables the researcher to examine the research problem from established theoretical perspectives while providing a systematic basis for data analysis and discussion. Considering the multidimensional nature of the present study, which explores mental health promotion through food, therapeutic environments, and de-stigmatization within a community-based setting, the study is guided by **Person-in-**

Environment Theory and Erving Goffman's **Stigma Theory**. These theories provide complementary perspectives for understanding how environmental factors influence mental well-being and how stigma associated with mental illness can be challenged through innovative community-based approaches.

2.4.1 Person-in-Environment Theory

The Person-in-Environment (PIE) Theory is one of the fundamental theoretical perspectives in social work that emphasises the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their surrounding environments. Rather than viewing human problems solely as individual deficiencies, the theory recognises that people's behaviour, well-being, and quality of life are shaped by continuous interactions with their physical, social, cultural, economic, and institutional environments. It argues that individuals cannot be fully understood without considering the contexts in which they live and interact.

According to the Person-in-Environment perspective, mental well-being is influenced by multiple environmental factors, including family relationships, community support, social interactions, access to services, physical surroundings, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Supportive and inclusive environments enhance resilience, emotional well-being, and social functioning, whereas stressful, isolating, or discriminatory environments may contribute to psychological distress and reduced quality of life. Consequently, the theory encourages holistic interventions that modify environmental conditions while strengthening individual capacities.

The Person-in-Environment perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides a framework for understanding how community-based mental health initiatives promote mental well-being beyond conventional clinical treatment. The study examines a mental health café that integrates supportive interpersonal relationships, informal social interactions, healthy food practices, and a therapeutic physical environment within a community setting. From the perspective of Person-in-Environment Theory, these environmental elements interact to influence visitors' experiences, encourage help-seeking behaviour, and contribute to positive mental well-being. Thus, the theory assists in understanding how the interaction between individuals and their surrounding environment can facilitate mental health promotion within an innovative community-based setting.

2.4.2 Goffman's Stigma Theory

Erving Goffman introduced the concept of stigma in his seminal work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), describing stigma as a socially constructed process through which certain characteristics or identities become negatively labelled and socially discredited. According to Goffman, individuals possessing attributes that society perceives as undesirable often experience stereotyping, discrimination, exclusion, and diminished social acceptance. Mental illness has historically been one of the conditions most strongly associated with social stigma, resulting in fear, prejudice, and barriers to social participation.

Goffman argued that stigma extends beyond the presence of a particular condition and is shaped by the meanings that society attaches to it. Consequently, individuals experiencing mental health problems may conceal their experiences, avoid seeking professional support, or withdraw from social interactions because of anticipated judgement and discrimination. Stigma therefore affects not only social identity but also access to healthcare, employment, education, and community participation.

The present study applies Goffman's Stigma Theory exclusively to understand the process of de-stigmatization within mental health café settings. The theory provides a useful framework for examining how informal, welcoming, and community-oriented spaces may challenge traditional stereotypes associated with mental illness by encouraging open conversations, increasing public engagement, and normalising discussions related to mental health. Through everyday social interaction within a non-clinical environment, such initiatives may reduce fear, prejudice, and social distance, thereby contributing to the de-stigmatization of mental health.

2.4.3 Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Present Study

The theoretical framework adopted for this study integrates the Person-in-Environment perspective and Goffman's Stigma Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. While the **Person-in-Environment Theory** explains how supportive community environments, social relationships, therapeutic spaces, and healthy lifestyle practices influence mental well-being, **Goffman's Stigma Theory** provides the theoretical basis for understanding how innovative community initiatives can contribute

to reducing mental health stigma. Together, these theories offer an appropriate conceptual foundation for examining the role of a mental health café in promoting mental well-being and understanding its contribution to the de-stigmatization of mental health within the community.

2.5 Research Gap

A review of the existing literature indicates that considerable research has been undertaken on mental health, mental well-being, stigma, community mental health, nutrition, and therapeutic environments. These studies have significantly contributed to understanding the multidimensional nature of mental health and have highlighted the importance of adopting holistic and community-oriented approaches to mental healthcare. Research has also demonstrated the positive influence of healthy dietary practices, supportive social relationships, and therapeutic environments on psychological well-being. Furthermore, several studies have explored innovative community mental health initiatives, including mental health cafés and crisis cafés, as alternatives to conventional clinical services (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020); (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008); (Clarke & Waring, 2018); (Hinshaw & Stiker, 2008).

Despite these valuable contributions, the available literature reveals several important gaps. Existing research on mental health cafés remains relatively limited compared to the broader literature on community mental health. Most published studies have been conducted in the United Kingdom, where mental health cafés have primarily been examined as crisis cafés providing short-term support to individuals experiencing acute psychological distress. Consequently, the literature largely focuses on crisis intervention, service accessibility, and diversion from emergency departments rather than broader models of mental health promotion, well-being, and stigma reduction.

Another significant gap concerns the integration of food within mental health promotion. Although research in nutritional psychiatry has established the relationship between dietary patterns and psychological well-being, and studies have independently explored community mental health initiatives and therapeutic environments, very limited research has examined how food functions within mental health café settings. Existing literature primarily discusses food from the perspective of nutrition and biological health, while comparatively little attention has been given to its potential role in facilitating social interaction, creating welcoming environments, promoting engagement, and supporting

community-based mental health initiatives (Jacka & O'Neil, 2018); (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020).

Similarly, while therapeutic environments have been widely recognised as important contributors to psychological well-being, there remains limited evidence regarding their combined influence within community-based mental health café models. Most studies examine environmental design within hospitals or healthcare settings, whereas comparatively fewer studies explore how informal community spaces integrating therapeutic environments, social interaction, and mental health support contribute to mental well-being (Daykin, Byrne, & O'Connor, 2008); (Rodriguez- Labajos, Kinloch, & et. al, 2024).

The review of literature further indicates a substantial geographical gap. The majority of available evidence originates from Western countries, particularly the United Kingdom, with very limited research examining mental health café models within the Indian context. Cultural beliefs, social attitudes towards mental illness, patterns of help-seeking, and community mental health systems differ considerably across countries, highlighting the need for context-specific research. Despite the emergence of innovative mental health initiatives in India, scholarly literature examining such models remains scarce.

Most importantly, no published qualitative case study was identified that comprehensively examines Kappiness Mental Health Café, India's first mental health café. Although Kappiness has gained recognition as an innovative initiative promoting mental health awareness through an informal and community-oriented approach, there is limited academic evidence exploring its functioning, multidisciplinary practices, therapeutic environment, role of food, and contribution to reducing mental health stigma. This represents a significant gap in the existing body of knowledge.

In addition, many previous studies have predominantly adopted quantitative or service evaluation approaches to assess community mental health initiatives. Comparatively fewer studies have explored the lived experiences and professional perspectives of stakeholders involved in mental health cafés through qualitative inquiry. A qualitative case study therefore provides an opportunity to generate an in-depth understanding of the functioning, strengths, challenges, and innovative practices of a mental health café within its real-life context.

The present study seeks to address these identified gaps by undertaking a qualitative case study of Kappiness Mental Health Café. It examines how the café promotes mental well-being through its therapeutic environment, community-based approach, and use of food within an informal setting, while also exploring its contribution to reducing mental health stigma. By documenting the experiences and perspectives of professionals associated with India's first mental health café, the study aims to contribute to the limited literature on innovative community mental health models in India and provide insights for future research, policy, and mental health practice.

2.6 Summary of the Chapter

The review of literature demonstrates that mental health is a multidimensional concept influenced by biological, psychological, social, environmental, and cultural factors. The reviewed studies consistently emphasise that positive mental well-being extends beyond the absence of mental illness and requires supportive community environments, healthy lifestyles, meaningful social relationships, and accessible mental health services.

The literature further establishes that stigma remains one of the greatest barriers to mental healthcare, influencing help-seeking behaviour, social participation, and recovery. Community mental health approaches have emerged as effective alternatives to institutional care by promoting accessibility, inclusion, recovery-oriented practice, and community participation.

Studies related to nutritional psychiatry indicate that healthy dietary practices contribute to mental well-being through both biological and psychosocial pathways, while research on therapeutic environments highlights the importance of safe, welcoming, and supportive physical and social spaces in promoting emotional well-being. The literature on mental health cafés further demonstrates that these innovative community-based models facilitate early intervention, improve accessibility, encourage help-seeking behaviour, and contribute to stigma reduction through informal and non-clinical settings.

The chapter also establishes the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study through the Person-in-Environment Theory and Goffman's Stigma Theory, explaining the relationship between environmental factors, mental well-being, and the process of de-stigmatization. Finally, the review identifies significant gaps in the existing literature, particularly the limited research on mental health cafés within the Indian context and the

absence of comprehensive qualitative studies on Kappiness Mental Health Café. These identified gaps provide the justification for undertaking the present study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the study. It presents the research questions and operational definitions of the key concepts. The chapter further describes the qualitative research approach and the case study design employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the functioning of Kappiness Mental Health Café. Details regarding the universe and unit of the study, data collection through in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis are also provided. In addition, the chapter discusses the ethical safeguards followed during the research process and acknowledges the limitations encountered during the study.

3.2 Title of the Study

“Breaking Social Stigma on Mental Health through Food: A Study on Kappiness Mental Health Café”

3.3 Research Questions

General Question:

How does a mental health café influence the improvement of mental health among its users?

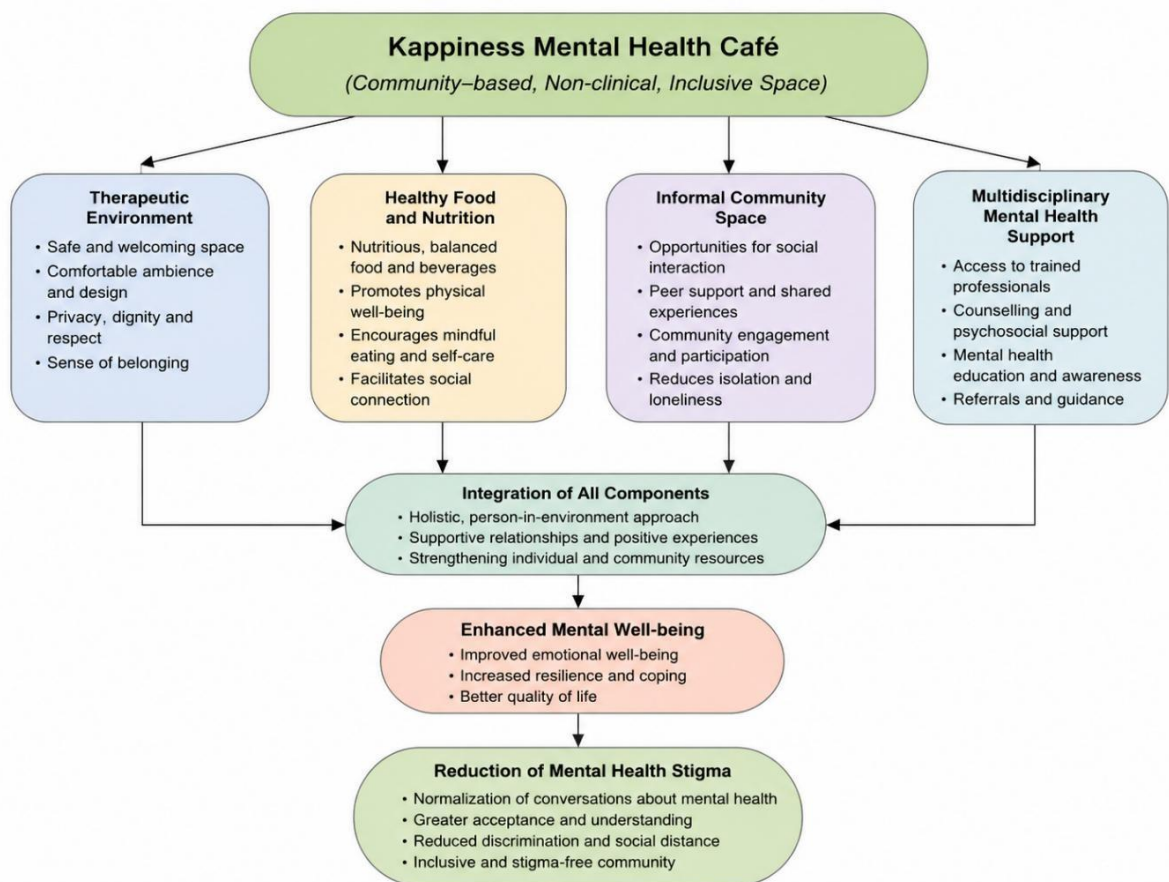
Specific Questions:

- What are the major types of mental health issues addressed within the café setting?
- How does the café environment contribute to the improvement of mental health among individuals?
- How does the food served in the café contribute to the mental well-being of its users?
- In what ways does the mental health café help in reducing stigma related to mental health?

3.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the Mental Health Café as a community-based and non-clinical model in which a therapeutic environment, healthy food practices, informal community interactions, and multidisciplinary mental health support function as interconnected components. Their integration promotes a holistic, person-in-environment approach that fosters supportive relationships, emotional well-being, resilience, and improved quality of life. Ultimately, these positive experiences contribute to the normalization of mental health discussions and the reduction of stigma within the community.

Figure 3.4.1: Conceptual Framework



3.5 Definition of Concepts

Table 3.4.1: Theoretical and Operational Definition

Concepts	Theoretical Definition	Operational Definition

Mental Health	Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community. (WHO, 2025)	Mental Health represents the conditions of mental illness and their treatment provided for the clients and the overall well-being of various beneficiaries of Kappiness Mental Health Café
Environment	The term "environment" refers to the surrounding conditions in which living organisms exist, encompassing both natural and human-made elements. It includes components such as air, water, soil, and biodiversity, which are essential for sustaining life. (UNESCO)	Environment includes the surroundings of the café building, which includes various spaces used for therapy, the plants and trees placed outside as well as the inner décor of the café building of Kappiness Mental Health Café.
Food	Food means any substance, whether processed, semi-processed or raw, which is intended for human consumption, and includes drink, chewing gum and any substance which has been used in the manufacture, preparation or treatment of “food” but does not include cosmetics or tobacco or substances used only as drugs. (FAQ, 2026)	Food refers to the different items of snacks and beverages provided to the clients and visitors of the Kappiness Mental Health Café.
Stigma	The negative social attitude attached to a characteristic of an individual that may be regarded as a mental, physical, or social	The negative attitude regarding a mental health condition or availing treatment for the same, possessed by

	deficiency. A stigma implies social disapproval and can lead unfairly to discrimination against and exclusion of the individual. (APA, 2018)	the beneficiaries of Kappiness Mental Health Café.
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3.5 Research Approach

The present study employs a qualitative research approach, meticulously selected to delve deeply into the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and lived perspectives of diverse stakeholders engaged with the Kappiness Mental Health Café in Thiruvananthapuram (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This paradigmatic choice aligns seamlessly with the exploratory imperatives of the research problem, which seeks not mere quantification of outcomes but a rich, interpretive understanding of how environmental-food integrations foster mental well-being and dismantle stigma barriers—phenomena inherently subjective and contextually embedded in Indian social work practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative approach is suitable for the present study because it seeks to understand the subjective dimensions of the mental health café model, including the experiences, perceptions, opinions, meanings, and interpretations of the professionals involved. The study aims to explore how participants perceive the influence of the café's environment, food, and practices on mental well-being and stigma reduction. Such complex and context-specific phenomena cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone; rather, they require detailed narratives and in-depth exploration within the natural setting in which they occur.

3.6 Philosophical Paradigm

The study is guided by the interpretivist (constructivist) paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed and understood through individuals' experiences and interactions. Knowledge is viewed as being co-created by the researcher and the participants through dialogue and interpretation. As the present study aims to understand how professionals perceive and assign meaning to the mental health café model and its

contribution to mental well-being and de-stigmatization, the interpretivist paradigm provides an appropriate philosophical foundation for the inquiry.

3.7 Research Design

The present study adopted a qualitative single case study design guided by the methodological framework proposed by (Yin, 2018). Kappiness Mental Health Café was selected as a single bounded case as it represents a distinctive and innovative community-based mental health initiative that integrates therapeutic services with a café environment, healthy food practices, and strategies aimed at reducing mental health stigma. The café is one of the first initiatives of its kind in India, and there is limited research on the use of food and informal therapeutic spaces in mental health promotion within the Indian context.

An exploratory single case study design was considered appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation is relatively new, existing literature is scarce, and the study seeks to answer questions concerning how the café environment and food practices contribute to mental well-being and how the initiative facilitates de-stigmatization. Furthermore, the study examines the phenomenon in its natural, real-life setting through the perspectives of professionals directly involved in the functioning of the café. The selection of Kappiness as the sole case thus enabled an in-depth and holistic understanding of a unique and emerging model of community mental health care.

The design follows clear steps: selecting the café as the bounded case, collecting multiple data sources for trustworthiness, and analyzing patterns to draw meaningful lessons (Yin, 2018). This provides practical insights for social workers to support or expand similar spaces under programs like India's National Mental Health Programme.

3.8 Universe and Unit of the Study

The universe comprised all professionals associated with Kappiness Mental Health Café, which includes psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric social workers working as project coordinators. The unit of study consisted of the individual professionals working at Kappiness Mental Health Café who participated in the study.

3.9 Sampling Technique:

The study employed purposive sampling to select the participants. This technique was considered appropriate because the selected professionals possessed rich and relevant

information regarding the functioning of Kappiness Mental Health Café and its role in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma. By intentionally including participants who were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and delivery of mental health services, the researcher was able to obtain in-depth and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under study.

3.10 Sampling Design (Inclusion- Exclusion Criteria)

Inclusion Criteria

- Professionals employed at Kappiness Mental Health Café and directly involved in the delivery, coordination, or management of mental health services at the time of the study.

Exclusion Criteria

- Trainees and interns doing their internship in the Kappiness Mental Health Café.
- Professionals with less than one month of work experience at Kappiness Mental Health Café.
- Non-mental-health staff members, such as accountants and other administrative personnel who are not directly involved in mental health service delivery.

3.11 Sample Size:

A total of five professionals associated with Kappiness Mental Health Café participated in the study. The sample size was determined by the principle of thematic saturation, whereby data collection was continued until no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews. The final sample was considered adequate to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation within the bounded case.

3.12 Data Collection:

Primary data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, which was chosen to provide a balance between consistency across interviews and the flexibility to explore participants' experiences and perspectives in depth. The guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the objectives of the study. Interviews were conducted in a combination of Malayalam and English, according to the participants' preference, and each interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes.

Prior to data collection, the researcher met with the Programme Coordinator of Kappiness Mental Health Café, who facilitated access to the respondents and scheduled interviews at times that did not interfere with their professional responsibilities or therapeutic sessions. After obtaining informed consent, the interviews were conducted and audio-recorded using electronic devices. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to seek clarification and probe further whenever necessary, thereby ensuring the collection of rich and contextually relevant data.

3.13 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, identifying major themes in the context of study from the literatures reviewed and objectives formulated. The qualitative data was classified and analysed under the themes, also analysing the major sub-theme. The major themes include exploring the mental health café model, influence of environment and therapeutic space, connection between food and mental health, role of the café in de-stigmatization of mental health, major challenges being faced in the implementation and future trajectories in plan and also the structural policies desired in the current mental health eco-system.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Prior permission to conduct the research was obtained from the authorities of Kappiness Mental Health Café. The purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation were clearly explained to all participants, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Participants were assured of their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using participant codes instead of names, and all audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. Care was taken to ensure that the interviews did not interfere with the participants' professional responsibilities or cause them any discomfort.

3.15 Assumptions of the Study

- The participants possess adequate knowledge and experience regarding the functioning of Kappiness Mental Health Café.

- The respondents provide honest and accurate information based on their professional experiences.
- The experiences and perspectives shared by the participants are sufficient to provide a meaningful understanding of the café's role in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma.

3.16 Limitations

The researcher has acquired only 5 responses from the subjects under a single study unit as primary data and the researcher have encountered major limitations in the process of the research:

- The study involved a small number of participants, which, although appropriate for an in-depth qualitative inquiry, may not capture the full range of professional perspectives.
- The perspectives and experiences of clients and other beneficiaries of the café were not included in the study.
- The transferability of the findings to other mental health cafés or community mental health settings should be made with caution, considering the unique context of the case under study.

3.17 Scope of the Study

The present study explores the functioning of Kappiness Mental Health Café as an innovative community-based mental health initiative. It examines the perspectives of professionals regarding the integration of therapeutic services, the café environment, and healthy food practices in promoting mental well-being and reducing mental health stigma. The study also contributes to the emerging body of knowledge on mental health cafés in India and offers insights that may inform future research, social work practice, and the development of similar community-based mental health interventions.

3.18 Summary of the Chapter

The study adopted a qualitative approach with a single-case study design to explore the role of Kappiness Mental Health Café in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma. Primary data were collected from five professionals associated with the café using an interview guide and audio recording, and the data were analysed thematically. Ethical

principles of informed participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. The chapter also acknowledges limitations arising from the small sample size, the absence of clients' perspectives, time constraints, and the possibility of participant bias.

CHAPTER 4

CASE DESCRIPTION

CHAPTER 4: CASE DESCRIPTION

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents detailed descriptions of the professionals who participated in the study, highlighting their experiences and perspectives regarding the functioning of Kappiness Mental Health Café. Through individual case narratives, the chapter explores how the respondents perceive the role of the café's environment, food practices, multidisciplinary approach, and community engagement in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma. The case descriptions provide a contextual understanding of the participants' lived experiences, thereby laying the foundation for the subsequent thematic analysis and interpretation of the findings.

4.2 Socio- Demographic Profile

Table 4.2.1: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Participants	Designation	Period working with Kappiness	Previous Experience in Mental Health
1- Mr. P	CEO		
2- Ms. A	Program Coordinator	1 year 2 months	Absent
3- Ms. K	Program Coordinator	3 months	Present
4- Ms. S	Psychologist	4 months	Present
5- Ms. AP	Psychologist	1 year	Present
6- Ms.V	Psychologist	3 months	Present

4.3 CASE A- Mr. P

Case A refers to the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Kappiness Mental Health Café. He is a trained social worker with approximately eight years of professional experience in the social development sector. Apart from Kappiness, he is also associated

with the Nadi Foundation, an organization working in various social development initiatives. His professional journey reflects a strong commitment towards addressing social issues through innovative and sustainable approaches.

During the interview, Case A described how the idea of establishing Kappiness emerged from identifying gaps within existing mental health service systems. Through his interactions with individuals experiencing psychological distress and his observations of conventional mental health institutions, he recognized that many people hesitated to seek professional help due to stigma, fear, and misconceptions associated with mental health care.

According to him, the concept of a Mental Health Café was developed as an alternative approach that could make mental health services more approachable and less intimidating. He explained that the very name "Kappiness" was carefully chosen to create positive associations and reduce apprehension among potential service users.

As he explained:

"Coffee plus happiness—that is how Kappiness came. We wanted people to feel comfortable and not afraid when they hear about mental health."

The respondent emphasized that traditional mental health institutions are often perceived as places meant only for individuals with severe mental illness. This perception discourages many people from seeking support during the early stages of emotional distress. Consequently, Kappiness was envisioned as a space where conversations about mental health could occur naturally and without judgment.

Case A highlighted that the physical environment plays a crucial role in promoting psychological well-being. The café was designed using principles inspired by a Zen Garden concept, incorporating natural elements, greenery, open spaces, and aesthetically pleasing surroundings. According to him, these environmental features contribute significantly to creating a sense of calmness and safety among visitors.

Reflecting on the influence of the environment, he stated:

"When people enter a hospital setting, they immediately become anxious. But when they enter a peaceful environment with plants, open spaces, and a cup of coffee, they start feeling relaxed."

He further explained that Kappiness consists of multiple therapeutic spaces such as the Garden, Retreat, Mud House, and Share Space. These spaces were intentionally developed to provide clients with opportunities to choose environments that best suit their comfort levels and emotional needs.

The respondent noted that allowing individuals to select their preferred setting enhances their sense of autonomy and control within the helping process.

According to him:

"Not everyone feels comfortable in the same space. Some people like open areas, some prefer privacy. Giving them a choice helps them feel more at ease."

A major theme emerging from the respondent's narrative was the role of stigma in preventing help-seeking behaviour. He observed that many individuals avoid counselling and psychiatric services because they fear social labelling and discrimination. The café model was therefore developed as a strategy to normalize mental health support and encourage early intervention.

Discussing this issue, he remarked:

"Many people come here because it doesn't look like a mental health centre. They feel less judged and more accepted."

The respondent estimated that a substantial proportion of visitors specifically choose Kappiness because of its non-clinical atmosphere. According to him, the environment enables individuals to access support without feeling that they are entering a medical institution.

Case A also discussed the significance of integrating food and beverages into the mental health care experience. He clarified that refreshments are not intended as therapeutic interventions in themselves. Rather, they function as tools for creating comfort, familiarity, and opportunities for meaningful interaction.

As he explained:

"Coffee is not the therapy. Coffee is a medium through which conversations begin."

He further observed that sharing food or beverages often reduces social barriers between professionals and clients. This facilitates more natural communication and contributes to the development of trust.

The respondent emphasized that Kappiness operates through a multidisciplinary approach involving psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical psychologists, and psychiatric social workers. He believed that mental health care should not be limited to a single professional discipline but should instead involve collaboration among various specialists to address diverse client needs.

According to him:

"Mental health cannot be handled by one profession alone. Every professional brings a different perspective, and together we can provide better support."

Another important aspect highlighted by the respondent was the role of mental health awareness and community engagement. Kappiness regularly organizes workshops, discussions, awareness programmes, movie screenings, and outreach initiatives aimed at improving mental health literacy within society. Through these activities, the organization seeks to challenge misconceptions and encourage open dialogue about mental health concerns.

The respondent also reflected on broader challenges within the mental health sector. He expressed concerns regarding the quality and regulation of mental health services, emphasizing the need for professional standards and ethical practices. He advocated for stronger policies to ensure the quality of counseling and psychotherapy services while promoting multidisciplinary collaboration.

Despite these challenges, Case A expressed optimism regarding the future of community-based mental health initiatives. He believed that innovative models such as Mental Health Cafés have the potential to transform public perceptions of mental health care and improve accessibility for diverse populations.

Summarizing his vision, he stated:

"Mental health support should be available in spaces where people feel comfortable, welcomed, and understood."

The narrative of Case A reveals a strong commitment to social innovation, accessibility, and stigma reduction. Case A's experiences demonstrate how entrepreneurial approaches can be utilized to reimagine mental health care and create supportive environments that promote psychological well-being. His account highlights the importance of integrating professional services, community engagement, environmental design, and client-centered values in developing inclusive mental health ecosystems.

4.4 CASE B- Ms. A

Case B refers to a Program Coordinator at Kappiness Mental Health Café. Having been associated with the organization since the early stages of its development, she plays a significant role in coordinating programmes, facilitating client engagement, organizing awareness initiatives, and supporting the overall functioning of the café. Her experiences provide valuable insights into the practical implementation of the Mental Health Café model and its impact on service users.

Case B described Kappiness as a space that was intentionally created to make mental health services more accessible, welcoming, and less intimidating. According to her, one of the most distinctive features of the café is its therapeutic environment, which differs considerably from traditional clinical settings. She explained that every area within the café has been thoughtfully designed to create a sense of comfort and belonging for visitors.

Reflecting on the uniqueness of the environment, she stated:

“Each space has its own feel and experience. Different people connect with different spaces, and that helps them feel comfortable.”

The respondent explained that the café consists of multiple spaces such as the Garden, Retreat, Mud House, and Share Space. These areas provide visitors with opportunities to choose settings that align with their emotional needs and personal preferences. According to her, allowing individuals to make such choices contributes to a greater sense of safety and autonomy.

She observed that many clients enter the café feeling anxious or uncertain about seeking mental health support. However, as they spend time within the environment, they gradually become more relaxed and open to communication.

As she explained:

“Many people come with hesitation in the beginning. But after sitting here for some time, they become more comfortable and willing to talk.”

A recurring theme throughout Case B's narrative was the influence of physical surroundings on emotional well-being. She believed that the natural elements incorporated into the café environment play a significant role in reducing stress and promoting relaxation.

According to her:

“The greenery, open spaces, and peaceful atmosphere create a feeling of calmness. People often say they feel relaxed even before the session starts.”

The respondent emphasized that the café setting allows clients to experience mental health support in a less formal manner. Unlike conventional clinics where individuals may feel like patients, Kappiness enables visitors to engage in conversations within an environment that resembles a social and community space.

She remarked:

“People don't feel like they are entering a hospital or a counseling centre. They feel like they are entering a comfortable space where they can simply be themselves.”

Case B further highlighted the importance of reducing stigma surrounding mental health. According to her, societal misconceptions continue to discourage many individuals from seeking professional support. She observed that the Mental Health Café model helps address this issue by normalizing discussions about mental health.

As she noted:

“There are still many people who are afraid of being judged if they seek counseling. The café helps make mental health conversations feel normal.”

The respondent described how some visitors initially come to the café out of curiosity or for social activities rather than counseling. Over time, these interactions often lead to greater awareness about mental health and an increased willingness to seek support when needed.

She explained:

“Sometimes people come just to spend time or attend an event. Later they begin to understand the services available and feel more confident about reaching out for help.”

Case B also discussed the role of food and beverages within the Kappiness model. She explained that refreshments contribute to creating a welcoming atmosphere and facilitate informal interactions between clients and professionals.

According to her:

“Sharing a cup of coffee creates a different feeling. It becomes more like a conversation and less like a formal appointment.”

She observed that food and beverages help visitors feel comfortable, particularly during initial visits. The familiar and casual setting often reduces anxiety and encourages engagement.

The respondent further highlighted the importance of community-based initiatives conducted by Kappiness. These programmes include awareness campaigns, workshops, support groups, discussions, and special projects designed to reach diverse sections of society. Through such activities, the organization aims to improve mental health literacy and promote social inclusion.

A significant aspect of her narrative focused on “*Project Ekathva*”, an initiative developed for the transgender community. She explained that the project addresses both mental health and livelihood concerns through counseling services, skill development programmes, and community engagement activities.

Discussing the initiative, she stated:

“Mental health and social well-being cannot be separated. People also need opportunities, acceptance, and support within society.”

The respondent emphasized that marginalized communities often face multiple forms of discrimination, which can negatively affect psychological well-being. Therefore, she believed that mental health interventions should address broader social realities alongside individual concerns.

Case B also reflected on areas where the organization could further improve. She suggested the development of more specialized spaces and programmes tailored to the

needs of children and older adults. According to her, creating age-specific environments could enhance the effectiveness of service delivery.

She observed:

“Different age groups have different needs. Dedicated spaces for children and elderly people could make the experience even more meaningful.”

Despite these challenges, the respondent expressed confidence in the potential of Mental Health Cafés to transform mental health service delivery. She believed that innovative and client-friendly approaches can significantly increase accessibility and encourage help-seeking behaviour among individuals who might otherwise avoid conventional services.

Summarizing her perspective, she stated:

“Mental health support should be available in spaces where people feel safe, accepted, and comfortable enough to share their experiences.”

The narrative of Case B demonstrates the importance of environmental design, client comfort, community engagement, and stigma reduction in promoting mental well-being. Case B's experiences illustrate how the Mental Health Café model creates opportunities for meaningful human connection while making mental health services more approachable and inclusive. Through her role as Program Coordinator, she contributes to fostering a supportive environment that bridges the gap between professional mental health care and everyday community life.

4.5 CASE C- Ms. K

Case C refers to one of the Program Coordinators at Kappiness Mental Health Café. Prior to joining Kappiness, she worked as a Student Counselor, which provided her with valuable experience in understanding the psychosocial concerns of individuals across different age groups. Her professional background has enabled her to compare traditional mental health service settings with the innovative approach adopted by Kappiness. Through her role as Program Coordinator, she contributes to programme management, client engagement, awareness activities, and the overall coordination of services within the organization.

During the interview, Case C described Kappiness as a unique initiative that seeks to redefine how mental health services are perceived and accessed. According to her, one of the most distinguishing features of the café is the emphasis placed on client choice and autonomy. Unlike conventional mental health settings, where clients are often expected to adapt to predetermined procedures and environments, Kappiness allows individuals to exercise greater control over their helping experience.

Explaining this aspect, she stated:

“The clients have the right to choose where they want to sit and even which psychologist they want to meet.”

The respondent believed that this freedom of choice significantly contributes to the development of trust and comfort. By allowing clients to make decisions regarding their environment and therapist preferences, the organization creates a sense of empowerment that positively influences therapeutic engagement.

According to her:

“When people feel that they have a choice, they become more comfortable and confident. They don't feel like something is being imposed on them.”

Case C emphasized that mental health support should be centered around the needs and preferences of the individual. She observed that many clients enter the helping process carrying fears, uncertainties, and preconceived notions about therapy. Providing opportunities for choice helps reduce these concerns and encourages active participation.

A major theme that emerged from her narrative was the importance of accessibility. The respondent explained that many individuals who require support often hesitate to approach mental health institutions because of the stigma associated with psychological services. However, the café environment creates a less intimidating pathway to care.

Reflecting on this issue, she remarked:

“People feel that they are entering a safe and welcoming space rather than a treatment centre. That makes a big difference.”

She further observed that visitors frequently describe the atmosphere of Kappiness as warm, friendly, and approachable. Such perceptions contribute to reducing anxiety and promoting openness during interactions with professionals.

Another significant area highlighted by the respondent was mental health awareness and community education. According to Case C, Kappiness regularly organizes programmes aimed at increasing public understanding of mental health issues and reducing misconceptions.

She explained:

“Many people still have very little understanding about mental health. Awareness programmes help people learn and ask questions without fear.”

The respondent discussed several initiatives conducted by the organization, including workshops, awareness sessions, movie screenings, and discussions on specific mental health conditions. These programmes serve as platforms for engaging the public in conversations about psychological well-being and mental illness.

Speaking about the impact of these activities, she stated:

“Sometimes people attend a programme just out of curiosity. By the end, they leave with a completely different understanding of mental health.”

Case C particularly highlighted the use of films and discussions as educational tools. According to her, movies provide relatable narratives that help participants understand complex mental health issues in an accessible manner.

She observed:

“Movies create opportunities for discussion. People connect with the characters and begin to understand experiences that they may not have understood before.”

The respondent noted that awareness programmes are beneficial not only for individuals experiencing mental health concerns but also for family members, caregivers, students, and members of the general public. Such initiatives contribute to the creation of a more informed and supportive community.

Despite the informal appearance of the café, Case C emphasized that professional standards remain central to service delivery. She clarified that all interventions are conducted according to ethical and professional guidelines.

As she explained:

“The environment may look casual, but the services are professional. Assessments, documentation, ethics, and therapeutic procedures are all followed.”

The respondent believed that combining professionalism with a welcoming atmosphere enables Kappiness to maintain service quality while enhancing client comfort.

Case C also discussed the role of food and beverages within the café environment. According to her, refreshments contribute to creating a relaxed atmosphere that facilitates communication and emotional expression.

She stated:

“When people sit with a cup of tea or coffee, they often feel more relaxed. It helps conversations happen naturally.”

However, she clarified that refreshments are not therapeutic interventions by themselves but rather supportive elements that enhance the overall experience of the space.

Another important aspect emerging from her narrative was the growing need for mental health-friendly environments within educational institutions and workplaces. Drawing from her previous experience as a Student Counselor, she observed that many individuals struggle to access support because of unsupportive organizational cultures.

According to her:

“People spend most of their time in schools, colleges, and workplaces. These spaces should also become more sensitive to mental health needs.”

The respondent advocated for greater awareness, acceptance, and integration of mental health services within everyday social settings. She believed that creating supportive environments would encourage individuals to seek help at earlier stages and reduce the burden of untreated psychological distress.

Reflecting on the future of mental health care, Case C expressed optimism regarding community-based and innovative service models. She viewed Mental Health Cafés as important alternatives that can complement conventional mental health institutions by making support more approachable and inclusive.

Summarizing her perspective, she stated:

“Mental health care should be available in ways that make people feel comfortable, respected, and understood.”

The narrative of Case C highlights the significance of client autonomy, accessibility, mental health awareness, and professional integrity in the delivery of mental health services. Case C's experiences demonstrate how innovative service models can challenge traditional barriers to care while promoting empowerment and community engagement. Her account further underscores the importance of creating environments that enable individuals to seek support with dignity, choice, and confidence.

4.6 CASE D- Ms. S

Case D refers to a Psychologist working at Kappiness Mental Health Café. As a mental health professional directly involved in providing psychological services, she possesses extensive experience in understanding the emotional, behavioural, and psychosocial concerns of individuals seeking support. Through her role at Kappiness, she engages in counseling, psychological assessments, therapeutic interventions, and mental health awareness activities. Her experiences provide valuable insights into the practical functioning of a Mental Health Café and its contribution to promoting psychological well-being.

During the interview, Case D described Kappiness as an innovative mental health initiative that combines professional psychological services with a welcoming and non-clinical environment. According to her, one of the major strengths of the café lies in its ability to reduce the fear and hesitation commonly associated with seeking mental health support.

Reflecting on the experiences of clients visiting the café, she observed:

“Many people feel nervous when they think about visiting a psychologist. But when they come here, they see a comfortable environment and gradually begin to relax.”

The respondent explained that the physical setting of Kappiness plays a significant role in facilitating therapeutic engagement. Unlike conventional clinical spaces, the café provides an atmosphere that encourages openness, comfort, and emotional expression.

According to her:

“The environment itself becomes a support system. People feel less pressured and more willing to talk about their experiences.”

Case D emphasized that establishing rapport is one of the most important components of the therapeutic process. She noted that the informal atmosphere of the café often helps clients feel more comfortable during initial interactions.

As she stated:

“Building trust is easier when people feel safe. When clients are comfortable, they are more likely to share their thoughts and feelings honestly.”

The respondent observed that many individuals who seek support at Kappiness are experiencing difficulties related to stress, anxiety, relationship conflicts, academic pressure, and emotional distress. She explained that modern lifestyles have contributed to increasing psychological challenges among various age groups, particularly young adults.

Discussing the concerns commonly presented by clients, she remarked:

“A lot of people are struggling with stress, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion. Many feel overwhelmed by expectations and responsibilities.”

She further noted that emotional difficulties are often influenced by multiple factors including family relationships, social pressures, educational demands, and occupational challenges.

According to her:

“Mental health cannot be understood separately from a person's life circumstances. Every individual's experiences are connected to their social environment.”

A recurring theme throughout her narrative was the importance of viewing clients holistically rather than focusing solely on symptoms or diagnoses. She believed that effective mental health care requires understanding the unique experiences, strengths, and challenges of each individual.

As she explained:

“Every person has a different story. We need to understand their experiences before we can truly help them.”

The respondent emphasized that psychological interventions should be tailored to the needs of each client. She observed that no single approach can be applied universally, as every individual's situation and coping mechanisms differ.

She stated:

“What works for one person may not work for another. Therapy should always be individualized.”

Case D also highlighted the significance of mental health awareness in reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking behaviour. According to her, many misconceptions regarding mental illness continue to exist within society, preventing individuals from accessing support when needed.

Reflecting on this issue, she remarked:

“There are still people who believe that seeking help means they are weak. Awareness is important because it helps change these beliefs.”

The respondent described how awareness programmes conducted by Kappiness create opportunities for community members to learn about mental health in a safe and non-judgmental environment. These initiatives encourage open discussions and contribute to greater acceptance of mental health concerns.

According to her:

“When people receive accurate information, they become more understanding and supportive towards themselves and others.”

Another significant aspect highlighted by Case D was the role of empathy in therapeutic practice. She believed that effective counseling requires more than professional knowledge; it also involves creating a relationship characterized by acceptance, understanding, and respect.

As she explained:

“Sometimes people simply need someone who listens without judging them. Feeling heard can be very powerful.”

The respondent emphasized that clients often arrive carrying feelings of guilt, shame, or fear. Providing a safe space where these emotions can be expressed contributes significantly to the healing process.

She observed:

“Many clients tell us that this is the first place where they feel comfortable talking about their struggles.”

Case D also discussed the collaborative nature of services provided at Kappiness. She highlighted the importance of multidisciplinary teamwork involving psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, and other mental health professionals.

According to her:

“Mental health care is most effective when professionals work together and support each other.”

She believed that collaboration enables clients to receive comprehensive and holistic care while ensuring that different aspects of their needs are addressed effectively.

Reflecting on the future of mental health care, the respondent expressed optimism regarding innovative community-based approaches. She viewed Mental Health Cafés as promising models that can bridge the gap between professional services and community accessibility.

As she stated:

“People should be able to access mental health support without fear. Spaces like Kappiness make that possible.”

The respondent further emphasized the need for greater public awareness, increased accessibility of services, and continued efforts to challenge stigma surrounding mental health concerns.

Summarizing her perspective, she remarked:

“Mental health support should be available to everyone in a way that feels welcoming, respectful, and accessible.”

The narrative of Case D highlights the importance of empathy, individualized care, stigma reduction, and holistic understanding in mental health practice. Case D's experiences

demonstrate how innovative environments can facilitate therapeutic engagement while promoting acceptance and accessibility. Her account reflects a strong commitment to creating supportive spaces where individuals can seek help with dignity and confidence.

4.7 CASE E- Ms. AP

Case E refers to a Psychologist at Kappiness Mental Health Café. As a mental health professional actively involved in counseling and therapeutic interventions, she works closely with individuals experiencing a wide range of psychological, emotional, and social concerns. Her experiences within the Mental Health Café setting provide valuable insights into the role of innovative and community-based approaches in enhancing mental health service accessibility and effectiveness.

During the interview, Case E described Kappiness as a unique space that challenges conventional perceptions of mental health care. According to her, many individuals associate mental health services with hospitals, clinics, and psychiatric institutions, which often creates fear, discomfort, and reluctance to seek support. The café model, however, offers an alternative environment that is more approachable and less intimidating.

Reflecting on the experiences of clients, she stated:

"Many people feel anxious when they think about meeting a psychologist. Here, the environment itself helps reduce that anxiety."

The respondent explained that the welcoming atmosphere of Kappiness enables individuals to approach mental health services without feeling labeled or judged. She observed that clients often enter the space with less apprehension compared to traditional clinical settings.

According to her:

"People don't feel like they are coming for treatment. They feel like they are entering a comfortable space where they can talk freely."

Case E emphasized that the therapeutic environment plays a significant role in facilitating emotional expression. She noted that factors such as natural surroundings, comfortable seating arrangements, and a relaxed atmosphere contribute positively to the counseling process.

As she explained:

"When people feel physically comfortable, they are often more willing to open up emotionally."

The respondent highlighted that establishing a strong therapeutic relationship is fundamental to effective psychological intervention. She believed that trust develops more naturally when individuals feel accepted and respected within their surroundings.

She remarked:

"The first step in therapy is creating a space where people feel safe enough to be themselves."

A recurring theme throughout Case E's narrative was the increasing prevalence of emotional and psychological difficulties in contemporary society. She observed that individuals across different age groups experience challenges related to stress, anxiety, loneliness, interpersonal conflicts, and self-esteem issues.

Discussing these concerns, she stated:

"People are dealing with many pressures today—academic expectations, work-related stress, family issues, and personal struggles."

According to the respondent, these challenges often affect multiple areas of an individual's life, influencing relationships, productivity, and overall well-being. She therefore emphasized the importance of early intervention and timely support.

She explained:

"Many problems become more difficult when people wait too long before seeking help."

Case E also discussed the significance of mental health awareness in reducing stigma and encouraging help-seeking behaviour. She noted that misconceptions about mental illness continue to exist within society, leading many individuals to suppress their concerns rather than seek professional assistance.

As she observed:

"There are still people who think mental health problems should simply be endured or hidden. That mindset prevents many from reaching out for support."

The respondent highlighted the various awareness programmes organized by Kappiness, including workshops, discussions, and community events. According to her, these

initiatives help create opportunities for learning, dialogue, and increased understanding of mental health issues.

Reflecting on their impact, she stated:

"When people gain knowledge about mental health, they become more accepting of themselves and others."

Another important aspect of her narrative concerned the role of empathy and active listening in therapeutic practice. Case E emphasized that many individuals seek counseling not only for solutions but also for validation and understanding.

According to her:

"People often need someone who can listen without criticism or judgment."

She further noted:

"Sometimes the opportunity to share one's experiences openly can itself be a meaningful step towards healing."

The respondent explained that many clients report feeling relieved after discussing concerns that they had previously kept hidden. Such experiences reinforce the importance of creating safe spaces for emotional expression.

Case E also emphasized the importance of adopting a holistic perspective when working with clients. She believed that mental health concerns are influenced by various social, cultural, familial, and personal factors.

As she explained:

"We cannot look at mental health in isolation. Every person's experiences are connected to their relationships, environment, and life circumstances."

This perspective aligns with the multidisciplinary approach practiced at Kappiness, where professionals collaborate to provide comprehensive support. The respondent highlighted the value of working alongside psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, and other mental health professionals.

She remarked:

"Different professionals bring different perspectives, and that helps us provide better care for clients."

Another significant theme emerging from Case E's narrative was the importance of community support. She observed that individuals often recover more effectively when they feel connected to supportive relationships and social networks.

According to her:

"Mental health is not only about individual treatment. Community understanding and support are equally important."

The respondent viewed initiatives such as Mental Health Cafés as important platforms for fostering such support systems. By creating opportunities for social interaction, awareness, and professional assistance, these spaces help bridge the gap between mental health services and the community.

Reflecting on the future of mental health care, Case E expressed optimism regarding the growing acceptance of conversations surrounding psychological well-being.

She stated:

"More people are beginning to recognize that mental health is just as important as physical health."

At the same time, she acknowledged the need for continued efforts to improve accessibility, awareness, and service availability. She emphasized that mental health support should be available to all individuals regardless of age, background, or social circumstances.

Summarizing her perspective, she remarked:

"Everyone deserves access to support, understanding, and opportunities to improve their well-being."

The narrative of Case E highlights the importance of empathy, therapeutic relationships, mental health awareness, and holistic care in promoting psychological well-being. Case E's experiences demonstrate how Mental Health Cafés can create supportive and accessible environments that encourage help-seeking behaviour while reducing stigma associated with mental health concerns. Her account underscores the significance of

combining professional expertise with compassion, community engagement, and client-centered approaches in mental health practice.

4.8 CASE F- Ms. V

Case F refers to a Psychologist at Kappiness Mental Health Café. As a mental health professional, she is actively involved in providing psychological support, counseling services, and therapeutic interventions to individuals experiencing various emotional and psychological concerns. Her experiences at Kappiness have enabled her to witness how innovative mental health spaces can contribute to improved accessibility, reduced stigma, and enhanced client engagement. Through her work, she has gained valuable insights into the mental health needs of diverse populations and the significance of creating supportive environments for psychological well-being.

During the interview, Case F described Kappiness as a space that goes beyond the conventional understanding of mental health service delivery. According to her, the café model creates opportunities for individuals to seek support in an environment that feels welcoming, non-threatening, and familiar. She observed that many people experience anxiety when approaching mental health professionals, often due to societal misconceptions and fears associated with mental illness.

Reflecting on this issue, she stated:

“People often hesitate to seek help because they are worried about being judged or misunderstood. Here, they feel more comfortable taking that first step.”

The respondent emphasized that the environment of Kappiness plays a significant role in facilitating the helping process. Unlike traditional clinical settings, the café creates an atmosphere that encourages openness and meaningful interaction. She noted that many clients report feeling relaxed shortly after entering the space.

According to her:

“The setting itself helps people feel at ease. When people are comfortable, conversations happen more naturally.”

Case F highlighted the importance of creating a safe and accepting space where individuals can express their emotions without fear of criticism. She believed that emotional safety is a crucial prerequisite for effective therapeutic engagement.

As she explained:

“People need to feel accepted before they can talk about their struggles. Creating that sense of acceptance is very important.”

A recurring theme in her narrative was the growing prevalence of emotional distress among individuals from different age groups. She observed that many clients experience challenges related to stress, anxiety, loneliness, interpersonal difficulties, and uncertainty about the future.

Discussing these concerns, she remarked:

“Many people are carrying emotional burdens that they have never shared with anyone. They often feel alone in their experiences.”

The respondent explained that contemporary social realities, including academic pressures, occupational demands, family expectations, and changing lifestyles, contribute significantly to psychological distress. According to her, these factors often interact in complex ways and influence an individual's overall well-being.

She stated:

“Mental health is affected by many aspects of life. We need to understand the whole person and not just the symptoms.”

Case F emphasized the importance of adopting a client-centered approach within therapeutic practice. She believed that every individual's experiences are unique and therefore require personalized understanding and intervention.

According to her:

“Each person's story is different. Listening to their experiences helps us understand what kind of support they need.”

The respondent highlighted the significance of empathy and active listening in building therapeutic relationships. She observed that many clients simply need a space where they can share their thoughts and feelings openly without fear of judgment.

As she explained:

“Sometimes people do not expect immediate solutions. They just want someone to genuinely listen and understand.”

She further noted:

“Being heard and understood can itself be a powerful experience for many clients.”

Another important aspect discussed by the respondent was the role of stigma in preventing help-seeking behaviour. Despite increasing awareness regarding mental health, she observed that negative attitudes and misconceptions continue to exist within society.

Reflecting on this challenge, she stated:

“There is still a lot of misunderstanding about mental health. Many people are afraid of what others might think if they seek support.”

According to Case F, initiatives such as Kappiness help address these barriers by normalizing mental health conversations and creating opportunities for community engagement.

She remarked:

“When mental health discussions become part of everyday life, people feel more comfortable reaching out for help.”

The respondent also discussed the importance of awareness programmes, workshops, and community activities conducted by Kappiness. She believed that such initiatives contribute significantly to improving mental health literacy and reducing stigma.

According to her:

“Awareness helps people recognize that mental health challenges are common and that support is available.”

Case F highlighted the value of multidisciplinary collaboration within the organization. She explained that psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, and other professionals work together to ensure comprehensive support for clients.

As she stated:

“No single professional can address every aspect of mental health. Working together allows us to provide better care.”

The respondent viewed collaboration as an essential component of holistic mental health practice. She believed that integrating different professional perspectives enhances the quality and effectiveness of services.

Another significant theme emerging from her narrative was the importance of community and social support. According to her, recovery and well-being are often strengthened when individuals feel connected to supportive relationships and social networks.

She observed:

“People heal better when they know they are not alone and when they have supportive people around them.”

The respondent emphasized that mental health should not be viewed solely as an individual responsibility. Instead, families, communities, educational institutions, workplaces, and society as a whole have important roles to play in promoting psychological well-being.

Reflecting on the future of mental health care, Case F expressed hope regarding the increasing openness surrounding discussions of mental health. She believed that innovative initiatives such as Mental Health Cafés can contribute significantly to making mental health support more accessible and acceptable.

According to her:

“The more we talk about mental health openly, the easier it becomes for people to seek help when they need it.”

She further stated:

“Mental health services should be available in spaces where people feel welcomed, respected, and understood.”

The narrative of Case F highlights the significance of empathy, acceptance, accessibility, and community engagement in mental health practice. Case F's experiences demonstrate how supportive environments can encourage help-seeking behaviour and facilitate meaningful therapeutic relationships. Her account underscores the importance of reducing stigma, promoting awareness, and adopting holistic approaches that recognize the interconnected nature of individual and social well-being.

4.9 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented detailed descriptions of the professionals who participated in the study, outlining their roles, experiences, and contributions within Kappiness Mental Health Café. The case narratives provided contextual insights into the participants' perspectives on the café's unique approach to mental healthcare, thereby establishing the foundation for understanding the themes that emerged during analysis.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data generated through the semi-structured interviews with the professionals of Kappiness Mental Health Café. Using thematic analysis, the participants' narratives were systematically examined to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and experiences related to the role of the Mental Health Café in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma. The findings are organised into major themes and subthemes corresponding to the objectives of the study, with verbatim quotations and relevant literature employed to deepen interpretation and situate the findings within existing knowledge

5.2 Discussion

Research Question 1: How does the café environment contribute to the improvement of mental health among individuals?

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the environment of Kappiness Mental Health Café plays a significant role in promoting psychological well-being and enhancing the therapeutic experience of its users. Unlike conventional mental health settings that often evoke anxiety and discomfort, the café has been intentionally designed to create a welcoming, calming, and person-centred environment that encourages individuals to engage comfortably with mental health services. The respondents consistently described the physical surroundings, therapeutic spaces, and informal atmosphere as important components that facilitate emotional expression, reduce psychological barriers, and strengthen therapeutic relationships. Rather than functioning merely as the backdrop for professional interventions, the environment itself emerged as an active therapeutic resource that supports healing, relaxation, and meaningful social interaction.

The findings related to the first research question are presented under the theme Environment and Therapeutic Spaces, comprising the following sub-themes: Specialized Therapeutic Spaces, Nature as a Therapeutic Tool, and Informal vs Formal Setting.

Theme 1: Environment and Therapeutic Spaces

The respondents unanimously perceived the environment of Kappiness Mental Health Café as a defining characteristic that distinguishes it from conventional mental health

institutions. Throughout the interviews, they explained that the organisation deliberately integrates architectural design, natural surroundings, specialised activity spaces, and an informal social atmosphere to create an environment that promotes emotional comfort and psychological well-being. Rather than limiting therapy to counselling rooms, the respondents described the entire café as a therapeutic space where individuals can relax, interact, reflect, and engage in activities that support mental health. Their narratives indicate that the environment contributes not only to reducing anxiety associated with seeking professional help but also to strengthening therapeutic engagement by making individuals feel welcomed, accepted, and emotionally safe.

1.1 Specialized Therapeutic Spaces

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that specialized therapeutic spaces constitute one of the most distinctive features of Kappiness Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently explained that the organisation has developed multiple purpose-built spaces to address the diverse emotional, psychological, and developmental needs of its users. Instead of relying solely on traditional counselling rooms, the café incorporates various therapeutic environments that encourage creativity, relaxation, emotional expression, mindfulness, and interpersonal interaction. These specialised spaces provide individuals with opportunities to engage in therapeutic activities according to their interests, comfort levels, and personal needs, thereby making mental health care more flexible and person-centred.

The respondents explained that each therapeutic space has been designed with a specific purpose while collectively contributing to the holistic philosophy of the organisation. The availability of different spaces allows professionals to tailor interventions based on clients' age, emotional state, presenting concerns, and therapeutic goals. According to the respondents, this flexibility is particularly beneficial because individuals respond differently to therapeutic environments. While some clients prefer quiet reflective spaces, others feel more comfortable engaging in expressive or activity-based interventions. The respondents emphasised that providing multiple therapeutic options enhances participation and enables individuals to experience therapy in ways that are meaningful to them.

The Founder (Case A) explained that the design of the café intentionally incorporates different therapeutic spaces to meet the varied needs of individuals seeking mental health support.

“We have four different spaces: the Garden , Retreat , Mud House , and Share Space . When a client arrives, we show them these areas, and they can choose the one they prefer for their therapy.”

Similarly, one of the Clinical Psychologists (Case D) highlighted how these specialised spaces support the therapeutic process by allowing interventions to be adapted according to the preferences and emotional needs of clients.

“We have the Mud House and the Garden Retreat outside in nature. In therapy, we use grounding techniques for those with panic attacks or anxiety. In the Mud House, we can ask them to take off their shoes and walk on the mud or just be in that ambiance. This environment is very helpful for those techniques.”

The remaining respondents expressed similar views, explaining that these therapeutic spaces enable clients to engage with mental health services in a manner that feels comfortable rather than intimidating. They observed that many individuals, particularly children, adolescents, and first-time visitors, find it easier to participate in activities conducted within these environments than to immediately engage in conventional face-to-face counselling. Several respondents further explained that the diversity of therapeutic spaces also supports multidisciplinary practice, allowing different professionals to conduct interventions appropriate to their respective disciplines while maintaining a cohesive therapeutic environment.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that specialised therapeutic spaces contribute to creating a sense of autonomy and personal agency among clients. Rather than directing every intervention within a single consultation room, professionals encourage individuals to engage with spaces that align with their comfort and therapeutic needs. This flexibility fosters greater participation, reduces resistance to therapy, and promotes a sense of ownership within the helping process. The respondents perceived this client-centred approach as one of the key strengths of the Mental Health Café model, distinguishing it from more rigid institutional settings.

The findings indicate that specialised therapeutic spaces represent far more than physical infrastructure within Kappiness Mental Health Café. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that these environments function as active therapeutic resources that facilitate emotional expression, enhance client engagement, and support personalised interventions. By integrating diverse therapeutic settings into everyday mental health practice, the café creates opportunities for individuals to experience healing in ways that extend beyond conventional counselling rooms. The analysis therefore suggests that specialised therapeutic spaces play a central role in promoting psychological well-being by fostering comfort, participation, and holistic therapeutic engagement.

1.2 Nature as a Therapeutic Tool

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that nature functions as an active therapeutic resource within Kappiness Mental Health Café rather than merely serving as an aesthetic element of the environment. The respondents consistently explained that the incorporation of natural surroundings, open spaces, greenery, and outdoor therapeutic settings was a deliberate strategy aimed at promoting emotional regulation, relaxation, and psychological well-being. Unlike conventional mental health settings that are often characterised by enclosed consultation rooms and institutional architecture, Kappiness intentionally integrates nature into the therapeutic process, enabling clients to experience counselling in environments that are calm, restorative, and emotionally comforting.

The respondents explained that exposure to natural surroundings contributes to reducing anxiety and emotional distress among individuals seeking mental health support. They observed that many clients enter the café carrying emotional burdens, stress, or apprehension about therapy. The presence of gardens, plants, fresh air, and open spaces creates an atmosphere that naturally encourages relaxation before therapeutic interventions begin. According to the respondents, this environmental design allows individuals to feel emotionally settled, making it easier for them to engage in conversations and therapeutic activities. Rather than functioning as a passive backdrop, nature becomes an integral component of the helping process by creating conditions that facilitate emotional openness and psychological comfort.

One of the psychologists described how the Garden Retreat provides clients with an opportunity to choose a space that aligns with their personal preferences. She explained:

"As humans, we each have preferences. For example, I am a nature lover. So, many people who are nature lovers choose the Garden Retreat. It's a place to be calm; there is nature and greenery, it's filled with plants and things like that, so you can talk very peacefully... It's a space where you can talk openly to a friend without any barriers... The atmosphere is very helpful."

This narrative illustrates that nature is not incorporated merely for visual appeal but is intentionally utilised to create an emotionally safe environment where clients can communicate freely without fear of judgement.

The respondents further explained that natural environments are also incorporated into therapeutic interventions themselves. Rather than restricting counselling sessions to indoor consultation rooms, professionals utilise outdoor spaces to conduct mindfulness exercises, grounding techniques, relaxation activities, and movement-based interventions whenever appropriate. Such flexibility enables therapists to adapt interventions according to the emotional state and attention span of clients. One psychologist illustrated this practice while describing work with individuals diagnosed with bipolar disorder:

"In the beginning, a client could only sit for 20 minutes before getting irritable. So, after 15 minutes, we would walk to the Retreat space, do mindfulness, and engage them again. This way, the client is more likely to stay for a longer session, and we can properly use our techniques."

This account demonstrates that nature is actively integrated into the therapeutic process to enhance clients' emotional regulation, sustain engagement, and improve the effectiveness of psychological interventions. The respondents perceived such flexibility as particularly beneficial for clients experiencing emotional dysregulation, anxiety, agitation, or difficulty maintaining attention during conventional counselling sessions.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that natural surroundings contribute to reducing the institutional character traditionally associated with mental health services. The respondents explained that conducting sessions within gardens and other open spaces transforms counselling into a more informal and human-centred experience. Clients are therefore less likely to associate therapy with illness or hospitalisation and more likely to perceive it as a supportive conversation occurring within a peaceful environment. This shift in perception strengthens therapeutic rapport while simultaneously reducing anxiety related to professional mental health services.

The findings indicate that nature constitutes an essential therapeutic component within the Mental Health Café model. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that natural environments promote emotional relaxation, enhance therapeutic participation, facilitate mindfulness-based interventions, and strengthen psychological comfort throughout the helping process. The analysis therefore suggests that the intentional integration of nature extends the scope of therapeutic practice beyond conventional counselling rooms and contributes significantly to creating a restorative environment that supports mental health recovery and emotional well-being.

1.3 Informal vs Formal Setting

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the informal setting of Kappiness Mental Health Café constitutes one of the most distinctive characteristics contributing to the therapeutic experience of its users. The respondents consistently explained that the café intentionally departs from the conventional hospital-based model of mental healthcare by creating a relaxed, welcoming, and socially familiar environment. Rather than interacting within highly structured clinical spaces that may evoke fear or anxiety, individuals engage with professionals in settings that resemble everyday social environments. The respondents perceived this informal atmosphere as instrumental in reducing psychological barriers, fostering trust, and facilitating meaningful therapeutic relationships.

The respondents explained that conventional mental health settings often create feelings of apprehension among individuals seeking psychological support. Hospital environments, consultation cabins, waiting areas, and institutional procedures may reinforce the perception that seeking mental healthcare is associated with severe illness or social stigma. In contrast, the Mental Health Café provides an environment where clients can converse naturally over coffee, choose spaces according to their preferences, and engage with professionals without experiencing the formalities typically associated with clinical consultations. According to the respondents, this approach allows therapy to begin in a manner that feels comfortable, familiar, and emotionally safe.

One of the psychologists contrasted the Mental Health Café with conventional clinical settings by stating:

"What do we get elsewhere? A hospital setting, or talking inside a cabin. This is different; we have included coffee as well. It's a space where you can talk openly to a friend without any barriers—without thinking if they will judge you."

This narrative illustrates how the informal setting enables clients to perceive counselling as a supportive conversation rather than an intimidating clinical encounter. The respondents consistently emphasised that such an environment encourages individuals to express their emotions more openly and honestly.

Another psychologist further explained that the friendly atmosphere transforms the traditional therapist–client relationship into one characterised by greater openness and mutual comfort. She observed:

"Many people here don't call me 'Ma'am'; they say 'Chechi' (sister) or 'Chettan' (brother)... That proper friendly atmosphere allows them to share anything freely."

The respondents clarified that this informality does not compromise professional ethics or the quality of therapeutic interventions. Instead, it reduces unnecessary hierarchical barriers while maintaining professional boundaries. Clients feel comfortable communicating their preferences, expressing discomfort with particular therapeutic techniques, and collaboratively participating in treatment planning. As one respondent explained, when clients encounter difficulties with an intervention, they openly communicate their concerns, allowing professionals to modify or introduce alternative therapeutic approaches rather than expecting unquestioning compliance.

The respondents also highlighted that the informal setting contributes significantly to enhancing client autonomy and therapeutic engagement. Individuals are not confined to rigid consultation schedules or predetermined therapeutic environments. Instead, they are encouraged to select spaces that align with their comfort levels, choose therapists according to their preferences whenever possible, and participate actively in decisions related to their care. Such flexibility promotes collaborative therapeutic relationships while reducing the power imbalance often experienced within institutional mental healthcare settings.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the informal environment contributes to normalising mental healthcare within the community. Since the café resembles a familiar social space rather than a psychiatric facility, individuals

experience less anxiety about entering the premises or being associated with mental health services. The respondents explained that this shift in perception encourages first-time visitors, reduces hesitation in seeking professional support, and facilitates earlier engagement with mental healthcare services. Consequently, the café environment functions not only as a therapeutic setting but also as an important strategy for reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking behaviour.

The findings indicate that the informal setting of Kappiness Mental Health Café extends beyond creating a pleasant atmosphere and represents a deliberate therapeutic philosophy. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that reducing environmental formality strengthens rapport, encourages authentic emotional expression, enhances collaborative therapeutic relationships, and promotes sustained engagement with mental healthcare. The analysis therefore suggests that the integration of an informal, community-oriented environment enables the Mental Health Café to provide psychologically safe and person-centred care while challenging many of the limitations associated with conventional clinical settings.

Discussion with Literature

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the physical environment of Kappiness Mental Health Café functions as an active therapeutic component that extends beyond the conventional understanding of treatment settings. The respondents consistently perceived the environment not merely as a location where counselling occurs but as an integral element of the therapeutic process itself. The integration of specialised therapeutic spaces, natural surroundings, and an informal atmosphere creates an environment that promotes emotional comfort, psychological safety, and active engagement with mental health services. Rather than relying exclusively on traditional consultation rooms, the Mental Health Café adopts a holistic environmental approach that enables therapy to occur across multiple physical and social settings.

One of the major findings of the study relates to the role of specialized therapeutic spaces in facilitating person-centred mental healthcare. The respondents explained that the availability of diverse therapeutic environments allows professionals to adapt interventions according to the unique needs, preferences, and emotional readiness of clients. Such flexibility supports the principles of person-centred care, which emphasise respect for individuality, client autonomy, and collaborative decision-making throughout

the helping process. The findings indicate that therapeutic spaces themselves become resources that encourage participation, emotional expression, and sustained engagement in therapy.

The study further revealed that nature serves as an important therapeutic resource within the Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently highlighted that gardens, greenery, open spaces, and natural surroundings contribute to reducing emotional distress and promoting relaxation before and during counselling sessions. Nature was also utilised as part of therapeutic interventions such as mindfulness exercises, grounding techniques, and relaxation activities. These findings support environmental psychology perspectives, particularly the concept of restorative environments, which propose that exposure to natural settings reduces psychological stress, enhances emotional regulation, and improves overall psychological well-being. The intentional incorporation of natural elements within the therapeutic environment therefore strengthens both emotional recovery and therapeutic effectiveness.

Another significant finding concerns the role of the informal setting in transforming the experience of seeking mental healthcare. The respondents explained that replacing the conventional hospital atmosphere with a familiar café environment reduces fear, anxiety, and the hierarchical barriers traditionally associated with mental health services. The opportunity to engage with professionals in relaxed surroundings encourages authentic communication and strengthens therapeutic rapport without compromising professional standards. This observation aligns with recovery-oriented mental health practice, which emphasises collaboration, mutual respect, and the development of trusting relationships as essential components of effective psychosocial intervention. By creating a socially familiar environment, the Mental Health Café successfully integrates therapeutic care into everyday community life.

Collectively, the findings suggest that the environment of Kappiness Mental Health Café functions as a multidimensional therapeutic intervention rather than merely providing physical infrastructure for counselling services. The integration of specialised therapeutic spaces, nature-based environments, and informal social settings contributes to emotional comfort, client autonomy, therapeutic engagement, and psychological well-being. The findings therefore indicate that environmental design can significantly influence the accessibility, effectiveness, and overall experience of mental healthcare. The Mental

Health Café model expands conventional approaches to service delivery by demonstrating that healing can be facilitated not only through professional interventions but also through thoughtfully designed environments that promote comfort, connectedness, and human interaction.

Research Question 2: What are the major types of mental health issues addressed within the café setting?

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that Kappiness Mental Health Café addresses a wide spectrum of mental health concerns through a collaborative and multidisciplinary model of care. The respondents consistently explained that the café caters to individuals experiencing diverse psychological, emotional, behavioural, and psychosocial difficulties across different age groups. Rather than restricting services to the treatment of severe mental illnesses, the organisation adopts a holistic approach that addresses both clinical disorders and everyday mental health concerns, including stress, relationship conflicts, emotional dysregulation, and adjustment difficulties. The respondents further emphasised that effective intervention is facilitated through collaboration among professionals from different disciplines, flexible service delivery, and referral systems that ensure continuity of care whenever specialised treatment is required.

The findings related to the second research question are presented under the theme Mental Health Café Model, comprising the following sub-themes: Collaborative Team Approach, Major Mental Health Issues Addressed, Sessions and Timings, and External Referral and Consultations.

Theme 2: Mental Health Café Model

The respondents unanimously described the Mental Health Café as an innovative service delivery model that integrates hospitality, community participation, and multidisciplinary mental healthcare within a single setting. Throughout the interviews, they explained that the organisation functions through close collaboration among psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, counsellors, nutritionists, and other professionals who collectively address the diverse needs of individuals seeking support. The respondents emphasised that the flexibility of service delivery, collaborative decision-making, and continuity of care distinguish the Mental Health Café from conventional mental healthcare institutions. Their narratives indicate that the

effectiveness of the café lies not only in the variety of mental health services provided but also in the manner in which these services are organised around the individual needs of clients rather than institutional routines.

2.1 Collaborative Team Approach

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the collaborative team approach forms the foundation of service delivery within Kappiness Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently explained that the organisation adopts a multidisciplinary model in which professionals from different disciplines work together to provide comprehensive and holistic mental healthcare. Rather than functioning independently within separate professional boundaries, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, counsellors, nutritionists, and other team members collaborate in assessment, intervention, referral, and follow-up according to the unique needs of each client. This integrated approach enables the organisation to address the complex biological, psychological, and social dimensions of mental health.

The respondents explained that multidisciplinary collaboration enhances the quality of assessment and intervention by allowing professionals to contribute their specialised knowledge while working towards common therapeutic goals. Clients presenting with complex or multiple concerns are not managed by a single professional alone; instead, they receive coordinated support from different members of the team whenever necessary. According to the respondents, this collaborative model ensures that interventions are comprehensive, person-centred, and responsive to the changing needs of individuals throughout the therapeutic process.

One of the respondents explained that the Mental Health Café functions through continuous interaction among different professionals, enabling appropriate referrals and collaborative planning whenever specialised expertise is required.

“We have a multidisciplinary team consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical psychologists, and psychiatric social workers.”

Similarly, one of the psychologists highlighted that collaboration extends beyond internal teamwork and includes identifying the most appropriate professional according to clients' preferences and therapeutic requirements.

“We can ask if they have a preference for a male or female therapist. I understood that difference after coming here. We offer many options they can opt for according to their preferences”.

The remaining respondents shared similar perspectives, explaining that multidisciplinary practice also strengthens continuity of care. They observed that clients requiring psychiatric consultation, nutritional guidance, family intervention, psychosocial rehabilitation, or specialised counselling can access these services through coordinated internal referrals without experiencing fragmentation in care. The respondents further explained that professionals regularly communicate regarding client progress while maintaining ethical standards of confidentiality, thereby ensuring that interventions remain integrated and goal-oriented.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that collaborative practice contributes to greater flexibility within service delivery. Rather than adhering to rigid institutional procedures, professionals jointly determine appropriate interventions based on clients' presenting concerns, personal preferences, and therapeutic goals. This flexibility enables the organisation to respond effectively to diverse mental health needs while maintaining continuity and consistency in care.

The findings indicate that the collaborative team approach represents one of the defining characteristics of the Mental Health Café model. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that multidisciplinary collaboration enhances comprehensive assessment, coordinated intervention, continuity of care, and person-centred service delivery. The analysis therefore suggests that integrating professionals from diverse disciplines enables the Mental Health Café to address mental health concerns more holistically than traditional single-provider models, thereby strengthening both therapeutic outcomes and the overall quality of care.

2.2 Major Mental Health Issues Addressed

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that Kappiness Mental Health Café addresses a broad spectrum of mental health concerns, ranging from common psychological difficulties to severe psychiatric disorders. The respondents consistently explained that the café was established with the philosophy that mental healthcare should not be restricted to the treatment of diagnosed mental illnesses but should also support individuals experiencing emotional distress, interpersonal conflicts, life transitions, and

psychosocial challenges. Consequently, the services provided within the café extend across preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative dimensions of mental healthcare, allowing individuals to seek support irrespective of the severity of their concerns.

The respondents observed that a significant proportion of individuals approaching the café present with emotional and behavioural concerns associated with contemporary lifestyles. Anxiety, stress, depression, relationship conflicts, academic pressure, occupational stress, emotional dysregulation, and adjustment difficulties emerged as some of the most frequently encountered concerns. The respondents explained that these issues are particularly common among adolescents, young adults, and working professionals, who often seek support while navigating academic expectations, career demands, interpersonal relationships, and major life transitions. Unlike conventional psychiatric settings, where individuals frequently seek treatment only after symptoms become severe, the Mental Health Café encourages people to access support at earlier stages of emotional distress, thereby facilitating timely intervention.

One of the clinical psychologists described the range of concerns commonly encountered within the café:

"Here, the clients I am most engaged with have various mental disorders, like OCD. What we see most in youth now is BPD (Borderline- Personality Disorder). Mostly BPD, and people with emotional dysregulation. We have divorce cases and breakup cases. We do couple counselling here. Also Bipolar, Schizophrenia... I think cases from all areas of mental disorders, except for eating disorders."

This narrative illustrates that the clientele of the Mental Health Café is characterised by considerable diversity, encompassing both clinical psychiatric conditions and psychosocial issues affecting everyday functioning.

The respondents further explained that many individuals seek support not only for diagnosed psychiatric disorders but also for difficulties that significantly affect their quality of life and emotional well-being. Family conflicts, marital discord, parenting concerns, grief, loneliness, occupational burnout, and problems related to emotional regulation were frequently identified as reasons for approaching the café. The respondents emphasised that these concerns, although not always meeting the criteria for psychiatric diagnoses, require timely psychosocial intervention to prevent further deterioration in

mental health. This reflects the organisation's preventive orientation, which recognises mental health as a continuum rather than a dichotomous distinction between illness and wellness.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is the café's commitment to providing services across different stages of mental healthcare. The respondents explained that while individuals with mild and moderate psychological concerns are often managed within the organisation through counselling, psychotherapy, and psychosocial interventions, clients presenting with severe psychiatric conditions continue to receive integrated care through psychiatric consultation, medication management, and coordinated multidisciplinary support. This enables the organisation to address diverse mental health needs while ensuring that individuals receive interventions appropriate to the nature and severity of their condition.

The respondents also highlighted that the increasing number of young people seeking support reflects changing patterns of mental health concerns within contemporary society. They observed that emotional dysregulation, relationship difficulties, identity-related concerns, and stress associated with academic and occupational demands are becoming increasingly prevalent among younger populations. Consequently, the Mental Health Café has adapted its services to respond to these emerging psychosocial needs through flexible, person-centred interventions delivered within a non-threatening environment.

The findings indicate that the Mental Health Café addresses mental health from a comprehensive biopsychosocial perspective, recognising that psychological well-being is influenced by clinical, emotional, interpersonal, and social factors. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that the organisation does not restrict its services to specific diagnostic categories but instead responds to the diverse and evolving mental health needs of the community. The analysis therefore suggests that the Mental Health Café represents an inclusive model of mental healthcare that integrates prevention, early intervention, treatment, and psychosocial support within a single community-based setting.

2.3 Sessions and Timings

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that flexibility in sessions and timings is a defining feature of the Mental Health Café model, distinguishing it from conventional mental healthcare services. The respondents consistently explained that the organisation adopts a client-centred approach by allowing individuals greater autonomy in scheduling

appointments, selecting suitable timings, and determining the pace of therapeutic engagement. Unlike traditional clinical settings, where consultations are often restricted by rigid appointment schedules and institutional routines, the Mental Health Café prioritises the convenience, preferences, and emotional readiness of its clients. This flexibility was perceived as contributing significantly to improved accessibility, sustained therapeutic engagement, and continuity of care.

The respondents explained that many individuals seeking mental health support struggle to attend therapy because of academic commitments, employment responsibilities, family obligations, or personal circumstances. Strict appointment systems often become an additional barrier, particularly for working professionals, students, and caregivers. In response to these challenges, the café adopts a flexible scheduling system that accommodates the varying lifestyles and responsibilities of its users. According to the respondents, such flexibility reduces stress associated with attending therapy and enables clients to seek support without significantly disrupting their daily routines.

One of the clinical psychologists described this flexibility by explaining:

"Here, we offer them a space of their choice according to their preference and time. Usually, if an appointment is given, only that specific slot is allowed. But here, there is flexibility—if it didn't work today, we can move it to tomorrow. Or we can ask if they have a preference for a male or female therapist. I understood that difference after coming here. We offer many options they can opt for according to their preferences."

This narrative illustrates that flexibility extends beyond appointment timings to include broader aspects of service delivery, allowing clients to exercise choice over how and when they engage with mental healthcare.

The respondents further explained that flexibility also enhances the quality of therapeutic relationships. Rather than expecting clients to adapt to institutional procedures, professionals adjust interventions according to the emotional state, availability, and readiness of individuals. Several respondents observed that when clients experience increased stress, fatigue, or emotional discomfort, sessions may be modified, rescheduled, or conducted in alternative therapeutic spaces within the café. Such responsiveness enables professionals to maintain continuity of care while respecting clients' personal circumstances and emotional needs.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that flexibility contributes to improved treatment adherence. The respondents explained that clients are more likely to attend follow-up sessions when mental healthcare services accommodate their schedules and individual preferences. This is particularly beneficial for individuals who require long-term psychological support, as consistent attendance is essential for achieving positive therapeutic outcomes. The respondents perceived the organisation's willingness to negotiate appointment timings and therapeutic arrangements as strengthening trust, reducing dropout rates, and encouraging sustained participation in the helping process.

The respondents also highlighted that flexibility should not be interpreted as a relaxation of professional standards. Although the café provides greater freedom in scheduling and therapeutic engagement, ethical principles, confidentiality, clinical documentation, and evidence-based interventions continue to guide professional practice. Instead, flexibility is viewed as an extension of person-centred care, where services are organised around the needs of individuals rather than the convenience of the institution.

The findings indicate that flexibility in sessions and timings represents a significant innovation within the Mental Health Café model. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that accommodating clients' preferences, availability, and emotional readiness enhances accessibility, strengthens therapeutic relationships, and promotes continuity of care. The analysis therefore suggests that flexible service delivery contributes to a more responsive and person-centred model of mental healthcare, enabling individuals to engage with therapeutic services in ways that are compatible with their everyday lives.

2.4 External Referral and Consultations

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that external referral and consultation constitute an important component of the Mental Health Café model, ensuring continuity of care for individuals requiring specialised interventions beyond the scope of the organisation. The respondents consistently explained that although Kappiness provides a comprehensive range of mental health services through its multidisciplinary team, it also recognises the importance of timely referrals to external professionals and institutions whenever clients require specialised psychiatric care, medical management, rehabilitation services, or interventions that cannot be adequately provided within the café. This collaborative referral system reflects the organisation's commitment to providing ethical,

client-centred, and comprehensive mental healthcare rather than functioning as an isolated service provider.

The respondents explained that mental health concerns often vary considerably in their nature, severity, and complexity. While many individuals benefit from counselling, psychotherapy, psychosocial interventions, and community-based support available within the café, certain situations necessitate consultation with psychiatrists, physicians, specialised rehabilitation centres, or other healthcare professionals. According to the respondents, recognising these limitations and facilitating appropriate referrals ensures that clients receive the most suitable interventions without unnecessary delays in treatment.

The respondents further explained that referral decisions are made following careful professional assessment and multidisciplinary discussions. Rather than transferring responsibility abruptly, professionals continue to guide clients throughout the referral process by explaining the reasons for referral, addressing their concerns, and maintaining follow-up whenever appropriate. This approach minimises anxiety associated with seeking specialised care and enables clients to experience continuity throughout their treatment journey. The respondents emphasised that referrals are viewed as a continuation of care rather than a termination of the therapeutic relationship.

One of the respondents explained that collaboration with external professionals enables the organisation to provide holistic support while ensuring that individuals receive specialised interventions whenever necessary.

“If a client is struggling with something like insomnia or self-harm, we refer them to a psychiatrist for medication help alongside their sessions.”

Similarly, another respondent highlighted that the multidisciplinary nature of the organisation allows professionals to identify when clients require services beyond their own area of expertise, ensuring that referrals are based on clinical need rather than organisational limitations.

“We also look at thyroid, PCOD, and PMS fluctuations. For specific physical issues, we refer them to the appropriate external doctors, though we have a psychiatrist and psychologists on-site to provide overall services.”

The respondents also observed that external consultations strengthen the overall quality of mental healthcare by integrating community-based services with specialised clinical interventions. Individuals receiving psychiatric medication, specialised diagnostic assessments, or medical treatment continue to benefit from counselling, psychosocial support, family interventions, and rehabilitation services available within the café. Such coordinated care prevents fragmentation of services and promotes a holistic approach to mental health by addressing biological, psychological, and social dimensions simultaneously.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the referral system reflects the ethical responsibility of professionals to recognise the limits of their practice. The respondents explained that not all mental health concerns can or should be managed within a single organisation. By maintaining collaborative relationships with psychiatrists, hospitals, and other specialised agencies, the Mental Health Café ensures that clients receive timely, appropriate, and evidence-based interventions while preserving continuity in psychosocial support. This collaborative model enhances both client safety and the overall effectiveness of service delivery.

The findings indicate that external referral and consultation represent essential components of the Mental Health Café model rather than supplementary services. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that coordinated referral systems strengthen continuity of care, promote multidisciplinary collaboration, and ensure that individuals receive interventions appropriate to the complexity of their mental health needs. The analysis therefore suggests that the organisation's willingness to collaborate with external professionals reflects a comprehensive and client-centred approach to mental healthcare, where the primary focus remains the well-being of the individual rather than the boundaries of the institution.

Discussion with Literature

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the Mental Health Café model extends beyond the provision of conventional psychological services by adopting a holistic and collaborative approach to mental healthcare. The respondents consistently described the café as a multidisciplinary community-based setting that addresses a wide range of psychological, emotional, behavioural, and psychosocial concerns through coordinated professional practice. Rather than focusing exclusively on the treatment of psychiatric

disorders, the organisation integrates preventive, promotive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative interventions within a flexible service delivery model that responds to the diverse needs of individuals across different stages of life.

One of the major findings relates to the collaborative team approach adopted within the café. The respondents explained that psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, counsellors, nutritionists, and other professionals work together to provide comprehensive mental healthcare. This collaborative practice enables clients to benefit from multiple professional perspectives while ensuring continuity and coordination throughout the helping process. The multidisciplinary nature of the organisation also facilitates holistic assessment and intervention by addressing the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of mental health rather than viewing clients solely through a diagnostic perspective.

The findings further reveal that the Mental Health Café addresses a broad spectrum of mental health concerns, including common psychological difficulties such as anxiety, stress, emotional dysregulation, relationship conflicts, occupational stress, and adjustment problems, alongside severe psychiatric disorders requiring specialised intervention. The respondents consistently emphasised that mental healthcare should not be restricted to individuals with clinically diagnosed mental illnesses but should remain accessible to anyone experiencing emotional or psychosocial distress. This finding reflects the organisation's preventive orientation, encouraging individuals to seek support during the early stages of psychological difficulty rather than waiting until symptoms become severe.

Another significant finding concerns the flexibility of sessions and service delivery. The respondents explained that accommodating clients' preferences regarding appointment timings, therapeutic spaces, and professional choice strengthens accessibility and improves engagement with mental healthcare. Rather than requiring clients to adapt to rigid institutional schedules, the organisation modifies its services according to individual needs and personal circumstances. Such flexibility promotes sustained participation, strengthens therapeutic relationships, and contributes to continuity of care without compromising professional standards.

The study also highlights the importance of external referral and consultation within the Mental Health Café model. The respondents explained that although the organisation

provides comprehensive community-based mental healthcare, it also recognises the necessity of referring clients for specialised psychiatric, medical, or rehabilitation services whenever required. The referral process is integrated within ongoing therapeutic support, ensuring continuity of care and preventing fragmentation of services. This collaborative approach enables individuals to receive comprehensive interventions while maintaining supportive relationships with professionals within the café.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Mental Health Café model represents an innovative and comprehensive approach to mental healthcare by integrating multidisciplinary collaboration, flexible service delivery, community-based intervention, and coordinated referral systems within a single organisation. Rather than functioning solely as a counselling centre or psychiatric service, the café creates an inclusive environment where individuals can access holistic mental healthcare according to their unique needs and circumstances. The findings therefore suggest that the Mental Health Café model expands conventional approaches to service delivery by promoting accessibility, continuity of care, and person-centred practice while responding to the evolving mental health needs of the community.

Research Question 3: How does the food served in the café contribute to the mental well-being of its users?

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that food constitutes an integral component of the therapeutic philosophy of Kappiness Mental Health Café. Rather than functioning merely as refreshments offered within a café setting, food is intentionally incorporated into the mental healthcare process to promote physical well-being, facilitate interpersonal interaction, and strengthen therapeutic engagement. The respondents consistently explained that the organisation recognises the close relationship between nutrition, emotional well-being, and mental health. Consequently, the food served within the café is carefully selected to complement its holistic approach to mental healthcare while creating opportunities for meaningful social interaction and rapport building between clients and professionals.

The respondents further explained that the inclusion of healthy food and beverages contributes to creating a welcoming environment where therapy begins through ordinary human experiences rather than immediately focusing on psychological concerns. Sharing food and beverages encourages relaxation, reduces initial anxiety, and enables

conversations to develop naturally before formal therapeutic discussions commence. Their narratives suggest that food serves both physiological and psychosocial functions, supporting healthy lifestyles while simultaneously facilitating emotional comfort and therapeutic relationships.

The findings related to the third research question are presented under the theme Food and Mental Health, comprising the following sub-themes: Kombucha and Probiotics, Healthy Menu Policy, and Food as a Rapport Builder.

Theme 3: Food and Mental Health

The respondents unanimously described food as an important therapeutic resource within the Mental Health Café rather than simply a commercial service provided alongside counselling. Throughout the interviews, they explained that the organisation intentionally integrates nutrition into its philosophy of holistic mental healthcare by promoting healthy eating habits, encouraging mindful consumption, and creating opportunities for interpersonal interaction through shared food experiences. The respondents perceived food as contributing not only to physical health but also to emotional comfort, stress reduction, therapeutic engagement, and social connectedness. Their narratives indicate that the Mental Health Café uses food as a medium through which hospitality and mental healthcare become closely interconnected, thereby creating an environment that supports overall well-being.

3.1 Kombucha and Probiotics

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the inclusion of kombucha and probiotic-based beverages represents an important aspect of the café's holistic approach to mental health promotion. The respondents consistently explained that these beverages are incorporated into the menu not merely as unique food products but as part of a broader philosophy that recognises the relationship between physical health, gut health, and psychological well-being. They emphasised that nutrition is considered an essential component of overall wellness, and the café seeks to introduce individuals to healthier dietary alternatives that may contribute to both physical and mental health.

The respondents explained that kombucha, a fermented probiotic beverage, was introduced as part of the organisation's commitment to promoting preventive health practices and encouraging healthier lifestyle choices. They observed that many visitors

are initially unfamiliar with kombucha and its potential health benefits. Consequently, the café serves as a space where individuals can explore healthier food options while simultaneously engaging in conversations about wellness and self-care. According to the respondents, this educational aspect complements the organisation's broader objective of promoting holistic mental health by encouraging individuals to view nutrition as one component of overall well-being.

The Founder explained that the inclusion of kombucha reflects the café's philosophy of integrating nutrition with mental health promotion.

“We prioritize a healthy menu, including items like Kombucha , because of the established connection between gut health and mental health. We also offer cut fruits, salads, and tea”.

The remaining respondents shared similar perspectives, explaining that introducing probiotic beverages often creates opportunities to educate visitors about the relationship between nutrition and mental well-being. They observed that discussions surrounding food frequently extend into broader conversations about self-care, healthy routines, stress management, and lifestyle modification. Several respondents further explained that many visitors become interested in adopting healthier eating habits after learning about the rationale behind the café's menu, demonstrating how food itself becomes a medium for health promotion.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the inclusion of kombucha reflects the café's commitment to preventive rather than purely curative mental healthcare. By encouraging healthier lifestyle practices within an informal community setting, the organisation promotes mental well-being beyond the boundaries of conventional therapeutic interventions. This approach broadens public understanding of mental health by recognising the interconnectedness of physical health, nutrition, and emotional functioning.

The findings indicate that kombucha and probiotic beverages represent more than distinctive menu items within the Mental Health Café. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that these beverages symbolise the organisation's holistic philosophy by integrating nutritional awareness, preventive healthcare, and mental well-being within everyday community experiences. The analysis therefore suggests that promoting probiotic-based nutrition contributes to the café's broader objective of fostering healthy

lifestyles while reinforcing the relationship between physical wellness and psychological health.

3.2 Healthy Menu Policy

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the healthy menu policy adopted by Kappiness Mental Health Café reflects the organisation's commitment to promoting holistic well-being through nutritious and mindful food choices. The respondents consistently explained that the café intentionally departs from conventional commercial café practices by prioritising food items that support physical health while complementing the broader objectives of mental health promotion. Rather than offering highly processed or nutritionally poor food options solely based on consumer demand, the organisation has developed a menu that aligns with its philosophy of preventive healthcare, healthy living, and overall wellness.

The respondents explained that the café recognises the close relationship between dietary habits, physical health, and psychological well-being. Consequently, considerable attention is given to the nutritional value of the food served, ensuring that menu items promote healthier lifestyles without compromising taste or accessibility. According to the respondents, this approach encourages visitors to make conscious dietary choices while simultaneously reinforcing the message that mental health extends beyond psychological interventions alone. Nutrition is therefore viewed as an important component of self-care and long-term well-being.

One of the respondents explained that the menu was carefully designed to reflect the values of the organisation by incorporating healthier alternatives instead of conventional fast-food options.

“We prioritize a healthy menu, including items like Kombucha , because of the established connection between gut health and mental health. We also offer cut fruits, salads, and tea. The idea is that having a coffee or a snack makes the session feel "cool" and casual.”

Another respondent similarly observed that the food served within the café complements the therapeutic philosophy by encouraging individuals to adopt healthier lifestyle practices rather than simply satisfying hunger.

“In counselling, we usually tell people to avoid soft drinks or excessive caffeine because it can go against clinical standards by increasing anxiety. To make them health-conscious while also calming them down, we promote Kombucha and other probiotic drinks”.

The respondents further explained that the healthy menu also serves an educational function by creating awareness regarding the importance of nutrition in maintaining mental and physical health. Many visitors become curious about the ingredients, preparation methods, and nutritional benefits of the food and beverages offered at the café. These interactions provide opportunities for professionals and staff to engage in informal discussions about healthy eating habits, preventive healthcare, and lifestyle modification. The respondents perceived these conversations as valuable because they extend mental health promotion beyond counselling sessions and encourage individuals to integrate healthier practices into their daily lives.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the healthy menu policy contributes to maintaining consistency between the organisation's philosophy and its day-to-day practices. The respondents explained that promoting mental well-being while simultaneously offering unhealthy food choices would contradict the café's holistic approach to healthcare. By ensuring that the menu reflects the principles of wellness, the organisation creates an environment where every aspect of the service—including food—supports its therapeutic mission. This consistency strengthens the credibility of the Mental Health Café model and reinforces its identity as a space dedicated to comprehensive well-being.

The respondents also highlighted that the healthy menu encourages visitors to perceive food as an element of self-care rather than merely a source of temporary satisfaction. By introducing nutritious meals and beverages in an enjoyable and non-prescriptive manner, the café normalises healthy eating without imposing rigid dietary restrictions. This positive approach enables individuals to associate healthy food with comfort, hospitality, and social connection rather than obligation or medical advice.

The findings indicate that the healthy menu policy extends beyond nutritional planning and represents an integral component of the Mental Health Café's holistic philosophy. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that the deliberate selection of nutritious food items promotes health awareness, reinforces preventive healthcare, and supports the integration of physical and mental well-being. The analysis therefore suggests that the

café's healthy menu contributes to creating an environment where nutrition becomes a meaningful aspect of mental health promotion, reflecting the organisation's commitment to fostering healthier lifestyles within the community.

3.3 Food as a Rapport Builder

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that food functions as an important medium for building rapport and strengthening therapeutic relationships within Kappiness Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently explained that sharing food and beverages creates opportunities for informal interaction between clients and mental health professionals, thereby reducing the social distance that is often experienced in conventional therapeutic settings. Rather than initiating therapy through structured clinical conversations, the café allows relationships to develop naturally through everyday social experiences, making clients feel more relaxed, accepted, and emotionally comfortable before engaging in deeper therapeutic discussions.

The respondents explained that the simple act of offering coffee or sharing a meal transforms the initial interaction between clients and professionals into a more familiar and welcoming experience. Individuals entering the café are not immediately identified as patients seeking treatment but as visitors entering a community space where hospitality forms an essential part of the service experience. According to the respondents, this approach reduces the anxiety commonly associated with first consultations and creates an atmosphere where conversations emerge spontaneously rather than feeling forced or clinical.

One of the respondents explained that coffee itself often becomes the starting point for therapeutic conversations, enabling clients to settle into the environment before discussing emotionally sensitive issues.

“In a cafe, we concentrate on making people feel like they are talking to a friend. Coming for a cup of coffee helps completely remove that mental health stigma. Usually, people go to a cafe to relax, and food is a kind of therapy in itself. To calm people down, we might say, “Let’s have a tea or coffee,” and they get into that mood. Their minds become more relaxed, and they can talk more openly. That is why we integrate food and the cafe style.”

The respondents further explained that food creates a neutral and non-threatening context in which therapeutic relationships can gradually develop. Rather than beginning with formal questioning, professionals frequently engage clients in casual conversations while sharing refreshments, allowing trust to emerge organically. They observed that many clients who initially appear anxious or hesitant gradually become more relaxed during these informal interactions, enabling them to discuss personal experiences with greater openness and confidence. This gradual transition from ordinary conversation to therapeutic dialogue was perceived as one of the distinctive strengths of the Mental Health Café model.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that sharing food contributes to reducing the hierarchical relationship traditionally associated with mental healthcare. In conventional clinical settings, interactions often reinforce professional authority through consultation rooms, desks, and formal procedures. Within the café, however, professionals and clients frequently share the same space, enjoy refreshments together, and engage in conversations within a socially familiar environment. The respondents explained that this setting fosters equality, mutual respect, and emotional safety while preserving appropriate professional boundaries. Consequently, clients perceive professionals as approachable and supportive, facilitating stronger therapeutic alliances.

The respondents also highlighted that food promotes opportunities for social interaction beyond the therapist–client relationship. Individuals visiting the café often interact with other visitors, participate in community activities, and experience a sense of belonging that extends beyond formal counselling sessions. These shared experiences reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, which are common among individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. The café therefore functions not only as a therapeutic service but also as a community space that encourages interpersonal connection through everyday social practices centred around food and hospitality.

The findings indicate that food serves a significant psychosocial function within the Mental Health Café by facilitating rapport, trust, and meaningful interpersonal relationships. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that sharing food and beverages creates emotionally safe opportunities for communication, reduces hierarchical barriers, and supports therapeutic engagement in a natural and person-centred manner. The

analysis therefore suggests that food represents much more than nutritional support within the café; it becomes a therapeutic medium through which relationships are initiated, strengthened, and sustained, ultimately contributing to improved mental well-being and a more accessible experience of mental healthcare.

Discussion with Literature

The findings of the present study demonstrate that food within Kappiness Mental Health Café serves purposes that extend beyond nutrition and hospitality, emerging as an important component of the therapeutic environment. The respondents consistently perceived food as contributing to mental well-being through its nutritional value, its role in promoting healthy lifestyle practices, and its ability to facilitate interpersonal relationships within the café setting. Rather than functioning as an independent service, food is integrated into the organisation's holistic philosophy of mental healthcare, complementing psychological interventions while creating opportunities for emotional comfort, social interaction, and health promotion.

One of the major findings relates to the incorporation of kombucha and probiotic-based beverages as part of the café's commitment to holistic wellness. The respondents explained that these beverages are intentionally included to encourage healthier lifestyle practices and to create awareness regarding the relationship between nutrition and overall well-being. The findings suggest that the café promotes preventive approaches to mental health by encouraging visitors to recognise the importance of healthy dietary habits alongside psychological care. In doing so, the organisation broadens public understanding of mental health beyond clinical treatment and emphasises the interconnectedness of physical and psychological well-being.

The study further revealed that the healthy menu policy reflects the organisation's philosophy of integrating nutrition into mental health promotion. The respondents consistently highlighted that food choices within the café are guided by considerations of nutritional value rather than commercial popularity alone. By promoting balanced meals and healthier alternatives, the café reinforces positive lifestyle behaviours and encourages visitors to adopt sustainable health practices. The findings indicate that the menu itself becomes an educational resource, providing opportunities for informal discussions regarding nutrition, self-care, and preventive health within a relaxed community setting.

Another significant finding concerns the role of food as a rapport builder. The respondents explained that sharing coffee and meals facilitates natural conversation between professionals and clients, reducing the formality often associated with therapeutic encounters. Food creates a socially familiar atmosphere where trust develops gradually, enabling clients to communicate more openly and comfortably. The café environment therefore transforms routine social practices such as eating and drinking into opportunities for strengthening therapeutic relationships and reducing anxiety associated with seeking professional mental healthcare.

Collectively, the findings indicate that food functions as both a nutritional and psychosocial resource within the Mental Health Café model. The deliberate integration of healthy food practices with therapeutic engagement contributes to creating an environment that supports emotional comfort, interpersonal connection, and holistic well-being. Rather than treating nutrition as separate from mental healthcare, the organisation incorporates food into its overall philosophy of promoting healthier lifestyles, strengthening therapeutic relationships, and fostering community participation. The findings therefore suggest that the integration of food within mental healthcare settings has the potential to enhance both individual well-being and the overall experience of accessing mental health services.

Research Question 4: In what ways does the Mental Health Café help in reducing stigma related to mental health?

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that Kappiness Mental Health Café adopts multiple innovative strategies to reduce stigma associated with mental health and help-seeking behaviour. Unlike conventional mental healthcare settings, where the physical environment, organisational identity, and treatment processes may unintentionally reinforce negative stereotypes, the café intentionally creates a welcoming, community-oriented space that normalises conversations surrounding mental health. The respondents consistently explained that reducing stigma is not approached as a single intervention but as a continuous process embedded within the organisation's philosophy, physical environment, community engagement activities, and service delivery model. Through strategic design, inclusive practices, and public awareness initiatives, the café seeks to transform public perceptions of mental healthcare from one of fear and discrimination to one of acceptance, support, and well-being.

The respondents further explained that stigma often prevents individuals from accessing mental health services during the early stages of psychological distress. Fear of being labelled, concerns regarding social judgement, and negative perceptions of psychiatric institutions frequently discourage help-seeking behaviour. In response, the Mental Health Café deliberately removes many of the symbolic and structural barriers associated with conventional mental healthcare, enabling individuals to approach services in a manner that feels safe, familiar, and socially acceptable.

The findings related to the fourth research question are presented under the theme De-stigmatization of Mental Healthcare, comprising the following sub-themes: Strategic Naming, Removal of Visible Triggers, Reducing Entry Barriers, and Outreach Activities.

Theme 4: De-stigmatization of Mental Healthcare

The respondents unanimously described stigma reduction as one of the central objectives of Kappiness Mental Health Café. Throughout the interviews, they explained that every aspect of the organisation—from its name and physical appearance to its programmes and community activities—has been consciously designed to challenge prevailing misconceptions regarding mental illness and psychological treatment. Rather than expecting individuals to overcome stigma independently, the organisation modifies its services and environment to create conditions that encourage help-seeking, foster inclusion, and promote positive attitudes towards mental health. The respondents perceived this proactive approach as one of the defining characteristics distinguishing the Mental Health Café from conventional mental healthcare institutions.

4.1 Strategic Naming

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the strategic naming of Kappiness Mental Health Café represents an important initiative in challenging societal stigma surrounding mental health. The respondents consistently explained that the name "Kappiness" was deliberately chosen to create curiosity, positivity, and emotional warmth rather than immediately evoking images of illness, hospitals, or psychiatric treatment. By avoiding terminology commonly associated with mental disorders or clinical institutions, the organisation encourages individuals to approach the café without experiencing the fear, anxiety, or social discomfort often associated with seeking mental healthcare.

The respondents explained that language plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of mental health services. Traditional institutional names frequently reinforce stereotypes by emphasising illness, psychiatric treatment, or medicalisation. In contrast, the name "Kappiness" conveys a sense of happiness, hope, and emotional well-being while subtly introducing conversations about mental health within a positive and approachable context. According to the respondents, many visitors initially enter the café out of curiosity regarding its name and concept, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement that might not have occurred if the organisation had adopted a conventional clinical identity.

One of the respondents explained that the organisation intentionally selected a name capable of attracting individuals who might otherwise hesitate to visit a mental health service.

“Even the name was chosen to combat stigma; it stands for Coffee + Happiness. Our main policy is to educate people at the grass-roots level about why professional help is important and who should seek it”.

The respondents further observed that the name serves as an effective conversation starter within the community. Visitors frequently inquire about its meaning, allowing staff members to introduce discussions regarding mental health in an informal and non-threatening manner. This process gradually shifts attention away from illness-centred narratives towards broader conversations about emotional well-being, self-care, and psychological wellness. The respondents perceived this subtle approach as particularly valuable because it enables mental health awareness to develop naturally without creating feelings of intimidation or defensiveness.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the strategic naming contributes to normalising mental healthcare by presenting it within the context of everyday community life. Individuals visiting the café do not feel that they are entering a psychiatric institution or publicly identifying themselves as mental health patients. Instead, they experience the organisation as a welcoming social space that happens to provide professional mental health services. This distinction significantly reduces anticipatory anxiety and encourages individuals to seek support during the early stages of emotional distress.

The respondents also highlighted that the positive identity created through the name aligns closely with the overall philosophy of the organisation. Rather than defining people by their diagnoses or psychological difficulties, the café promotes strengths, hope, resilience, and recovery. The name therefore functions not merely as a branding strategy but as a reflection of the organisation's commitment to person-centred and recovery-oriented mental healthcare.

The findings indicate that strategic naming constitutes a simple yet highly effective mechanism for reducing stigma associated with mental healthcare. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that the deliberate use of positive and approachable language encourages curiosity, reduces fear, promotes early help-seeking, and facilitates community engagement with mental health services. The analysis therefore suggests that organisational identity itself can function as an important tool for challenging stigma and fostering greater public acceptance of mental healthcare.

4.2 Removal of Visible Triggers

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the removal of visible triggers constitutes another significant strategy adopted by Kappiness Mental Health Café to reduce stigma and improve individuals' willingness to seek mental healthcare. The respondents consistently explained that the organisation intentionally avoids many of the physical and symbolic elements commonly associated with hospitals and psychiatric institutions. Instead, the café has been designed to create a warm, welcoming, and non-threatening atmosphere where individuals can access professional mental health services without experiencing fear, anxiety, or the emotional discomfort often triggered by conventional clinical environments.

The respondents explained that traditional mental healthcare settings frequently contain environmental cues that unintentionally reinforce feelings of illness, vulnerability, and social stigma. Hospital buildings, consultation cabins, medical equipment, white coats, waiting areas, and institutional procedures often create an impression that individuals entering such spaces are seriously ill or socially labelled. According to the respondents, these visible cues discourage many people from seeking timely psychological support, particularly those experiencing mild or moderate emotional distress who fear being identified as psychiatric patients. Consequently, the Mental Health Café consciously

removes or minimises such environmental triggers to create an atmosphere that feels familiar, safe, and emotionally comforting.

One of the respondents explained that the café was intentionally designed so that visitors would not experience the psychological discomfort commonly associated with entering a psychiatric facility.

" About 90% of our clients come to us because they want a space where they won't be judged by a "hospital board" or a clinical environment. We see it in the high participation in our programs and the genuine feedback we get ."

The respondents further explained that the physical appearance of the café contributes significantly to changing clients' initial perceptions of mental healthcare. Comfortable seating arrangements, natural lighting, artwork, greenery, open spaces, and café-style interiors replace the sterile appearance commonly associated with healthcare institutions. Rather than immediately confronting individuals with clinical procedures, the environment encourages them to relax, have a conversation, or simply spend time within the space before engaging in therapeutic interventions. This gradual and non-threatening introduction to mental healthcare enables clients to experience greater emotional comfort during their initial visits.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the removal of visible triggers extends beyond physical infrastructure to include the overall manner in which services are delivered. The respondents explained that professionals avoid unnecessary formality during interactions and encourage natural conversations that reduce clients' apprehension. Individuals are welcomed as visitors rather than patients, and the emphasis is placed on emotional well-being rather than illness. Such practices help challenge the traditional image of mental healthcare as something reserved only for individuals with severe psychiatric conditions.

The respondents also highlighted that this approach benefits not only first-time visitors but also family members accompanying clients. Parents, spouses, and caregivers often express greater comfort entering the café because the environment resembles a familiar community space rather than a psychiatric institution. This positive first impression encourages supportive family involvement and reduces resistance towards continued engagement with mental health services. Consequently, the respondents perceived the

physical environment as playing an important role in influencing both individual and family attitudes towards mental healthcare.

The findings indicate that the removal of visible triggers represents an effective environmental strategy for reducing stigma associated with mental health services. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that replacing institutional symbols with welcoming and familiar surroundings reduces fear, normalises help-seeking behaviour, and creates emotionally safe conditions for therapeutic engagement. The analysis therefore suggests that environmental design can significantly influence public perceptions of mental healthcare by transforming the experience of seeking psychological support from one associated with illness and stigma to one characterised by comfort, dignity, and acceptance.

4.3 Reducing Entry Barriers

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that reducing entry barriers is one of the core strategies through which Kappiness Mental Health Café promotes access to mental healthcare and challenges stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour. The respondents consistently explained that the organisation recognises that many individuals delay or avoid seeking professional support not because services are unavailable, but because they perceive mental healthcare as inaccessible, intimidating, or socially unacceptable. Consequently, the café has intentionally designed its services to minimise the psychological, social, and structural barriers that commonly prevent individuals from accessing timely mental health support.

The respondents explained that fear of being judged, concerns regarding confidentiality, uncertainty about therapeutic procedures, and the perception that mental health services are meant only for individuals with severe psychiatric illnesses often discourage people from seeking professional help. Such misconceptions contribute to delayed intervention, allowing emotional distress to intensify before individuals approach mental health professionals. According to the respondents, the Mental Health Café addresses these concerns by creating a service model that is approachable, flexible, and integrated into a familiar community environment, thereby encouraging individuals to seek assistance during the early stages of psychological distress.

One of the respondents explained that many first-time visitors enter the café simply to have coffee or explore the space, gradually becoming comfortable enough to engage with mental health professionals without feeling pressured or labelled.

"People don't always come here saying they need therapy. Sometimes they come just to see the place or have a coffee. They slowly become comfortable with the environment, and then they begin asking questions or seeking help. That transition happens very naturally."

The respondents further explained that flexibility in service delivery significantly contributes to reducing barriers to care. Individuals are provided with choices regarding appointment timings, therapeutic spaces, and, where possible, the professional with whom they feel most comfortable. This autonomy enables clients to participate actively in their own care rather than adapting to rigid institutional procedures. The respondents observed that such flexibility is particularly beneficial for adolescents, working professionals, and individuals who may initially feel hesitant about engaging in formal psychological services.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that the café reduces barriers by normalising conversations about mental health within everyday social settings. Since visitors are not immediately identified as patients entering a psychiatric facility, they experience less anxiety regarding public perception or social judgement. The café environment enables individuals to seek support discreetly while participating in ordinary social activities such as having coffee, attending community programmes, or interacting with others. This integration of mental healthcare into a familiar social context reduces the visibility traditionally associated with accessing psychological services and encourages earlier help-seeking behaviour.

The respondents also highlighted that the organisation adopts a non-judgemental and welcoming approach towards every individual regardless of age, gender, occupation, socioeconomic background, or the nature of their concerns. Rather than requiring individuals to present with a formal psychiatric diagnosis, professionals encourage anyone experiencing emotional distress or psychosocial difficulties to access support. This inclusive philosophy broadens the scope of mental healthcare and reinforces the message that seeking psychological support is a normal and responsible aspect of maintaining overall well-being.

The findings indicate that reducing entry barriers represents a fundamental principle of the Mental Health Café model. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that creating an approachable environment, offering flexible services, promoting client autonomy, and normalising help-seeking behaviour collectively enhance the accessibility of mental healthcare. The analysis therefore suggests that addressing psychological and social barriers to service utilisation is equally as important as expanding the availability of mental health services. By making support easier to access, the Mental Health Café encourages early intervention, strengthens community participation, and contributes significantly to reducing the stigma associated with mental healthcare.

4.4 Outreach Activities

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that outreach activities constitute a significant strategy adopted by Kappiness Mental Health Café to reduce stigma and promote mental health awareness beyond the boundaries of the organisation. The respondents consistently explained that stigma cannot be addressed solely through individual counselling or clinical intervention; rather, it requires sustained community engagement, education, and public participation. Consequently, the café actively conducts outreach programmes in educational institutions, workplaces, community organisations, and public spaces to increase mental health literacy, encourage early help-seeking, and normalise conversations surrounding mental well-being.

The respondents explained that misconceptions regarding mental illness continue to persist within society, often resulting in discrimination, delayed treatment, and reluctance to seek professional support. Many individuals continue to associate mental healthcare exclusively with severe psychiatric disorders, leading them to ignore or minimise early signs of emotional distress. According to the respondents, outreach programmes provide opportunities to challenge these misconceptions by presenting mental health as an integral component of overall health and well-being. Through awareness sessions, workshops, interactive discussions, and community campaigns, the organisation encourages individuals to understand mental health from a preventive and promotive perspective rather than only through the lens of illness.

One of the respondents explained that the Mental Health Café regularly organises awareness programmes across different community settings to make mental health information more accessible to the public.

“Definitely. Many clients come by after their work hours just to talk to the people here and then leave. We also have a set of youngsters, like psychology or social work students, who visit frequently after attending our outreach programs.”

The respondents further explained that outreach activities serve as an important bridge between professional mental healthcare and the wider community. By conducting programmes outside conventional healthcare settings, the organisation reaches individuals who may never voluntarily visit a counselling centre or psychiatric clinic. These programmes provide participants with accurate information regarding common mental health concerns, available support services, coping strategies, and the importance of seeking timely professional assistance. The respondents observed that many individuals who initially attended awareness programmes later approached the café for counselling or referred family members and friends for mental health support.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that outreach initiatives encourage community participation in mental health promotion. Rather than viewing mental health as the sole responsibility of healthcare professionals, the café actively involves students, teachers, parents, employers, community leaders, and local organisations in creating supportive environments that promote psychological well-being. The respondents perceived this collaborative approach as particularly effective because it addresses stigma at both the individual and societal levels. Community members become active participants in promoting mental health awareness, thereby fostering greater acceptance and reducing discrimination towards individuals experiencing psychological difficulties.

The respondents also highlighted that outreach activities contribute to strengthening the public identity of the Mental Health Café as a community resource rather than merely a treatment facility. Regular engagement with diverse population groups increases the visibility of the organisation while reinforcing the message that mental healthcare is accessible, inclusive, and relevant to everyone. By maintaining a consistent presence within the community, the café gradually shifts public attitudes from fear and misunderstanding towards acceptance, openness, and proactive engagement with mental health services.

The findings indicate that outreach activities represent an essential extension of the Mental Health Café's stigma reduction strategy. The respondents' narratives demonstrate

that community-based awareness programmes improve mental health literacy, encourage early help-seeking, challenge prevailing misconceptions, and strengthen public participation in mental health promotion. The analysis therefore suggests that stigma reduction is most effective when mental healthcare extends beyond clinical settings and becomes integrated within everyday community life through sustained education, dialogue, and collaborative action.

Discussion with Literature

The findings of the present study demonstrate that Kappiness Mental Health Café adopts a comprehensive and multidimensional approach towards reducing stigma associated with mental health and help-seeking behaviour. The respondents consistently perceived stigma reduction not as an isolated awareness activity but as a principle embedded within the identity, physical environment, service delivery model, and community engagement strategies of the organisation. Through deliberate modifications in language, environmental design, accessibility, and outreach initiatives, the Mental Health Café creates opportunities for individuals to engage with mental health services in a manner that is socially acceptable, emotionally safe, and free from many of the barriers traditionally associated with psychiatric care.

One of the major findings relates to the role of strategic naming in shaping public perceptions of mental healthcare. The respondents explained that the name *Kappiness* was intentionally chosen to evoke positive emotions and curiosity rather than fear or illness. By avoiding terminology commonly associated with psychiatric institutions, the organisation encourages individuals to approach mental health services without experiencing the social discomfort or negative labelling frequently attached to conventional mental healthcare settings. The findings indicate that organisational identity itself can influence public attitudes and contribute to normalising conversations surrounding mental health.

The study further revealed that the removal of visible triggers plays a significant role in reducing anticipatory anxiety among individuals seeking psychological support. The respondents consistently highlighted that replacing hospital-like environments with café-style interiors, natural surroundings, and informal therapeutic spaces enables visitors to feel comfortable and emotionally secure. This transformation of the physical environment changes the experience of seeking mental healthcare from one associated with illness and

institutionalisation to one characterised by hospitality, comfort, and acceptance. The findings therefore demonstrate that environmental design can significantly influence both help-seeking behaviour and perceptions of mental health services.

Another significant finding concerns the café's efforts towards reducing entry barriers. The respondents explained that flexibility in appointments, client choice, non-judgemental interactions, and the integration of mental healthcare within an everyday community setting collectively encourage individuals to seek professional support at earlier stages of emotional distress. Rather than requiring individuals to overcome fear and stigma before accessing services, the organisation proactively removes many of the psychological and structural obstacles that discourage help-seeking. This inclusive and person-centred approach broadens access to mental healthcare and promotes early intervention within the community.

The findings also highlight the importance of outreach activities in extending stigma reduction beyond the physical boundaries of the café. The respondents described regular awareness programmes, educational workshops, and community engagement initiatives conducted in schools, colleges, workplaces, and other public settings. These programmes increase mental health literacy, challenge prevailing misconceptions, and encourage open discussions regarding emotional well-being. By actively engaging with diverse sections of society, the Mental Health Café contributes to creating a community environment where mental health is recognised as an essential aspect of overall health rather than a source of shame or discrimination.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Mental Health Café addresses stigma through a combination of environmental, organisational, interpersonal, and community-based strategies rather than relying solely on awareness campaigns. The integration of positive organisational identity, welcoming therapeutic spaces, accessible services, and sustained community outreach creates an ecosystem that encourages acceptance, facilitates early help-seeking, and promotes positive attitudes towards mental healthcare. The findings therefore suggest that reducing stigma requires interventions operating simultaneously at individual, institutional, and community levels, all of which are reflected within the Mental Health Café model.

ADDITIONAL EMERGING THEMES

Although the preceding themes directly address the research questions, the analysis of the respondents' narratives also revealed additional findings that extend beyond the original scope of the study. These findings emerged inductively during the interviews and provide important insights into the practical challenges experienced by the organisation, its future aspirations, and recommendations for strengthening the Mental Health Café model. While these themes do not directly answer the research questions, they contribute to a broader understanding of the sustainability, scalability, and future development of community-based mental healthcare initiatives.

The additional findings are presented under two themes:

- Theme 5: Challenges and Future Trajectories
- Theme 6: Structural Policy Changes and Suggestions

Theme 5: Challenges and Future Trajectories

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that despite the innovative and holistic nature of the Mental Health Café model, the organisation continues to encounter several operational, infrastructural, and service-related challenges that influence its capacity to meet the increasing mental health needs of the community. At the same time, the respondents demonstrated a strong commitment towards continuous improvement by proposing future directions aimed at expanding the scope, accessibility, and effectiveness of the café. Their narratives indicate that the future of the Mental Health Café extends beyond maintaining existing services and focuses on creating a more inclusive, comprehensive, and sustainable community mental health model.

5.1 Diverse Demographics

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that serving a highly diverse demographic population presents both a strength and a challenge for Kappiness Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently explained that individuals visiting the café differ considerably with respect to age, occupation, educational background, socioeconomic status, cultural experiences, and the nature and severity of their mental health concerns. While this diversity reflects the accessibility and inclusiveness of the organisation, it simultaneously requires professionals to continuously adapt therapeutic

approaches, communication styles, and intervention strategies to meet the unique needs of each individual.

The respondents explained that the café provides services to children, adolescents, adults, older persons, students, working professionals, couples, families, and individuals living with severe mental illnesses. Such diversity necessitates multidisciplinary collaboration and considerable professional flexibility. Interventions that are effective for one client group may not necessarily be appropriate for another. Consequently, professionals are required to modify therapeutic techniques, communication methods, and activity-based interventions according to developmental stage, emotional readiness, and psychosocial circumstances.

The respondents further observed that increasing awareness regarding mental health has resulted in a steady rise in the number of individuals seeking services from varied backgrounds. While this demonstrates growing public acceptance of the Mental Health Café model, it also places greater demands on available human resources, infrastructure, and specialised services. They emphasised that sustaining personalised and high-quality care becomes increasingly challenging as the diversity of client needs continues to expand.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that demographic diversity requires continuous professional learning and innovation. The respondents highlighted that mental health concerns are constantly evolving alongside changing social realities, requiring professionals to remain updated regarding contemporary therapeutic practices and emerging psychosocial issues. They therefore viewed diversity not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to strengthen multidisciplinary practice and enhance the responsiveness of community-based mental healthcare.

The findings indicate that demographic diversity significantly shapes both the opportunities and operational demands of the Mental Health Café. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that while serving heterogeneous populations enhances inclusivity and community relevance, it also necessitates greater flexibility, professional competence, and organisational preparedness to ensure equitable and person-centred mental healthcare for all individuals.

5.2 New Space for More Amenities

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the need for expanded physical infrastructure emerged as one of the most frequently discussed aspirations for the future development of the Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently explained that although the existing environment successfully supports therapeutic interventions, the growing demand for services has highlighted the need for larger spaces capable of accommodating additional therapeutic facilities, community programmes, and recreational amenities.

The respondents explained that expanding the physical infrastructure would enable the organisation to conduct multiple interventions simultaneously without compromising the quality of therapeutic engagement. They envisioned larger counselling spaces, dedicated activity rooms, improved group therapy facilities, enhanced recreational areas, and additional spaces for families and caregivers. Such developments were perceived as essential for supporting the increasing number of individuals accessing services while maintaining the welcoming and person-centred atmosphere that characterises the café.

The respondents further observed that additional amenities would strengthen the holistic nature of the organisation by creating opportunities for more diverse therapeutic experiences. They emphasised that expanded infrastructure would facilitate community events, support groups, wellness programmes, and interdisciplinary activities capable of addressing a broader range of mental health needs within a single integrated setting.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that physical expansion should not compromise the café's identity as a comfortable and non-clinical environment. The respondents consistently emphasised that future development should preserve the warmth, accessibility, and community-oriented atmosphere that distinguishes the organisation from conventional mental healthcare institutions.

The findings indicate that expanding physical infrastructure is viewed not merely as organisational growth but as an opportunity to enhance therapeutic quality, improve accessibility, and strengthen holistic service delivery while preserving the unique philosophy of the Mental Health Café model.

5.3 Alternative Therapies

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that the expansion of alternative and complementary therapeutic interventions emerged as an important future direction for

Kappiness Mental Health Café. The respondents consistently explained that while conventional psychological interventions such as counselling and psychotherapy remain central to service delivery, there is considerable scope to diversify therapeutic approaches by incorporating creative, experiential, and nature-based interventions that cater to the varying needs and preferences of clients. Such diversification was perceived as essential for strengthening holistic mental healthcare and enhancing client engagement.

The respondents explained that individuals respond differently to therapeutic interventions depending on their personality, developmental stage, emotional readiness, and presenting concerns. Consequently, relying exclusively on traditional counselling may not always produce optimal outcomes for every individual. They therefore expressed the need to expand interventions such as art therapy, music therapy, dance and movement therapy, mindfulness-based practices, horticultural therapy, recreational activities, and other experiential approaches capable of complementing conventional psychological treatment. These interventions were viewed as particularly beneficial for children, adolescents, individuals experiencing emotional dysregulation, and clients who find verbal expression difficult.

One of the respondents explained that expanding alternative therapeutic modalities would provide clients with greater opportunities to participate actively in their own healing process rather than depending solely on verbal counselling.

“We have just started the process. To call it "therapy," the dog also needs to be trained. It can help people get over their fears. We have a puppy named Coffee who is getting bigger now and is currently undergoing training with a professional to learn to sit and stand. We have another small one named Candy as well.”

The respondents further highlighted that alternative therapies not only support emotional expression but also contribute to stress reduction, self-awareness, creativity, interpersonal communication, and overall psychological well-being. Integrating such interventions within the Mental Health Café would further strengthen its identity as a holistic community mental health centre where healing extends beyond conventional clinical practice.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that introducing alternative therapies would encourage greater community participation and increase the attractiveness of the Mental Health Café for individuals who may initially hesitate to seek

formal counselling. Activity-based interventions create opportunities for engagement through shared experiences, thereby reducing anxiety and facilitating gradual entry into therapeutic relationships.

The findings indicate that expanding alternative therapeutic interventions represents an important future trajectory for the Mental Health Café model. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that integrating creative, experiential, and complementary therapies has the potential to strengthen holistic care, improve client engagement, and broaden the range of interventions available within community-based mental healthcare.

5.4 Project Ekathuva

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that Project Ekathuva represents one of the most significant future initiatives envisioned by Kappiness Mental Health Café to strengthen community-based mental healthcare. The respondents consistently described the project as an extension of the organisation's philosophy of inclusion, community participation, and psychosocial rehabilitation. Rather than limiting services to individuals who actively seek support, the project aims to create stronger community networks capable of promoting mental well-being, social inclusion, and collective responsibility towards mental health.

The respondents explained that Project Ekathuva has been conceptualised to expand the reach of mental healthcare beyond the physical boundaries of the café by fostering partnerships with educational institutions, community organisations, local self-government institutions, and other stakeholders. Such collaboration would enable the organisation to address mental health concerns at the community level through preventive interventions, awareness programmes, peer support initiatives, and community participation.

The respondents further observed that sustainable improvements in mental health require collective social action rather than isolated clinical interventions. Project Ekathuva therefore seeks to empower communities to recognise mental health concerns early, provide supportive environments, and facilitate timely access to professional services whenever necessary. The respondents perceived this initiative as reflecting the broader social work principle that communities themselves possess the potential to become active agents in promoting mental well-being.

One respondent explained the long-term vision of Project Ekathuva by highlighting its emphasis on community ownership and collaborative action.

“Ekathva is a project specifically focused on the Transgender community , currently running in Ernakulam and Trivandrum. We focus on both skill development and mental health . We provide training in driving (with license) and beautician courses. Our goal is to lead them to a stable income, which in turn improves their mental health. Alongside these courses, we provide continuous counseling, group sessions, and outreach programs. We started in October and will complete the current courses by March or April”

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that Project Ekathuva represents the organisation's aspiration to move beyond individual treatment towards building mentally healthy communities. By strengthening partnerships, promoting participation, and encouraging collective responsibility, the project has the potential to create sustainable improvements in mental health awareness and psychosocial support at the grassroots level.

The findings indicate that Project Ekathuva reflects the future vision of the Mental Health Café model by expanding its role from a service provider to a community mental health movement. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that the project has the potential to strengthen community participation, improve accessibility to mental healthcare, and promote long-term psychosocial well-being through collaborative social action.

Discussion with Literature

The findings of the present study indicate that the future development of the Mental Health Café extends beyond organisational expansion and reflects a broader commitment towards strengthening community-based mental healthcare. The respondents consistently emphasised the need to respond to changing demographic patterns, increasing service demands, and emerging mental health concerns through continuous innovation and organisational development.

The study revealed that serving diverse demographic groups requires flexible, person-centred interventions capable of addressing the varying psychosocial needs of individuals across different stages of life. The respondents further highlighted that expanding physical infrastructure and introducing additional therapeutic amenities would enhance

the organisation's ability to deliver comprehensive services without compromising the welcoming and therapeutic atmosphere that characterises the café.

Another significant finding relates to the proposed expansion of alternative therapeutic interventions. The respondents perceived experiential, creative, and activity-based therapies as valuable complements to conventional psychological treatment, particularly in promoting emotional expression, client engagement, and holistic well-being. Similarly, Project Ekathuva emerged as an important future initiative aimed at extending the principles of community participation, inclusion, and mental health promotion beyond the physical boundaries of the organisation.

Overall, the findings suggest that the future trajectory of the Mental Health Café lies in balancing organisational growth with its existing philosophy of person-centred, community-oriented, and holistic mental healthcare. The respondents' recommendations demonstrate a commitment to continuous innovation while preserving the values that distinguish the Mental Health Café from conventional models of mental health service delivery.

Theme 6: Structural Policy Changes and Suggestions

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that, alongside improvements within the Mental Health Café itself, the respondents identified the need for broader structural and policy-level changes to strengthen mental healthcare delivery. They consistently explained that many challenges encountered by individuals seeking mental health support originate not only from personal or organisational factors but also from systemic issues within the existing healthcare system. Consequently, the respondents proposed several policy recommendations aimed at improving the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of mental healthcare services. These recommendations primarily focused on ensuring quality standards, promoting work-life balance, and reforming conventional hospital-based mental healthcare.

6.1 Quality Control

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that maintaining quality standards emerged as a significant recommendation for strengthening community-based mental healthcare. The respondents consistently explained that as mental health services continue to expand, ensuring the quality, consistency, and ethical delivery of interventions

becomes increasingly important. They emphasised that mental healthcare should not merely be accessible but should also adhere to professional standards that safeguard the well-being and dignity of service users.

The respondents explained that quality mental healthcare requires continuous professional development, evidence-based practice, multidisciplinary collaboration, and regular monitoring of service delivery. They observed that increasing public awareness has resulted in the emergence of numerous organisations providing mental health services. While this expansion improves accessibility, it also creates the need for mechanisms that ensure accountability, ethical practice, and competent professional care across different settings.

One respondent explained that maintaining quality standards is essential for preserving public trust in mental healthcare services.

“Quality control is a major issue. Currently, people become "counselors" after just a two-month or six-month course, and that quality needs to be regulated. Also, the roles of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers need to be clearly specified at the policy level. Many people aren't aware that mental health care should be a teamwork-based, multidisciplinary process.”

The respondents further highlighted that organisations should continuously evaluate their services based on client feedback, professional supervision, and evolving best practices. Such evaluation enables institutions to identify areas requiring improvement while ensuring that interventions remain responsive to the changing needs of the community.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that quality should extend beyond clinical competence to include respect, empathy, accessibility, confidentiality, and person-centred service delivery. According to the respondents, these values collectively determine the overall effectiveness of mental healthcare and contribute to positive client experiences.

The findings indicate that maintaining quality control is essential for ensuring sustainable and trustworthy mental healthcare services. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that continuous evaluation, ethical practice, professional competence, and client-centred care are fundamental components of quality mental healthcare.

6.2 Work-Life Balance

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that promoting work-life balance is an important policy recommendation for improving the mental well-being of the wider population. The respondents consistently explained that many individuals approaching the Mental Health Café experience psychological distress arising from occupational stress, academic pressure, excessive workloads, and difficulties in balancing personal and professional responsibilities. These observations led the respondents to emphasise the importance of preventive policies that support healthier lifestyles and reduce chronic stress before it develops into more serious mental health concerns.

The respondents explained that contemporary work environments often prioritise productivity while neglecting employees' psychological well-being. Long working hours, unrealistic expectations, job insecurity, and inadequate opportunities for rest and recreation contribute significantly to stress, anxiety, burnout, and interpersonal difficulties. According to the respondents, promoting healthier work environments should therefore become an important public health priority rather than being viewed solely as an organisational responsibility.

One respondent explained that many clients seeking counselling identify occupational stress as a major contributing factor to their emotional difficulties.

“Mental health issues are increasing rapidly, and people aren't maintaining a work-life balance. Many of our clients come in with work-related stress. In foreign countries, they have strict work timings, but we don't have that structure here. I wish there was a policy that makes everyone prioritize their mental health.”

The respondents further suggested that employers, educational institutions, and policymakers should actively promote mental health by encouraging flexible work arrangements, adequate leave, supportive organisational cultures, and employee assistance programmes. Such initiatives would not only improve individual well-being but also contribute to healthier families, workplaces, and communities.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that work-life balance should be understood as a preventive mental health strategy. By enabling individuals to maintain healthy relationships, engage in recreational activities, and prioritise self-care, society can reduce the long-term burden of mental health problems and improve overall quality of life.

The findings indicate that promoting work-life balance extends beyond improving workplace satisfaction and represents an important strategy for strengthening mental health at the societal level. The respondents' narratives suggest that preventive approaches addressing occupational stress have the potential to reduce psychological distress while promoting healthier and more resilient communities.

6.3 Reforming Hospital Structure

The analysis of the respondents' narratives revealed that reforming conventional hospital structures emerged as one of the most significant policy recommendations for improving mental healthcare delivery. The respondents consistently explained that many individuals continue to associate psychiatric hospitals with fear, stigma, institutionalisation, and social isolation. These perceptions often discourage early help-seeking and reinforce negative attitudes towards mental illness. Consequently, the respondents advocated for mental healthcare environments that are more humane, community-oriented, and person-centred.

The respondents explained that conventional hospital settings frequently emphasise illness and treatment while paying comparatively less attention to emotional comfort, social interaction, and therapeutic environments. In contrast, the Mental Health Café demonstrates that physical spaces can themselves become therapeutic resources by promoting relaxation, dignity, inclusion, and meaningful human interaction. According to the respondents, future mental healthcare institutions should incorporate environmental features that reduce fear and encourage active participation in treatment.

One respondent explained that mental healthcare facilities should be redesigned to make individuals feel welcomed rather than institutionalised.

“I think if more mental health clinics started using a nature-based or cafe-related setup, it would be much more approachable for clients. It would significantly help in reducing stigma. If there was a policy to encourage such accessible and affordable settings, it would be better.”

The respondents further suggested that hospitals should integrate community spaces, recreational facilities, natural environments, and multidisciplinary services capable of supporting recovery in a holistic manner. Such reforms would help bridge the gap

between institutional care and community-based mental health services while reducing the stigma associated with psychiatric treatment.

Another important finding emerging from the respondents' narratives is that structural reform should include changes in organisational culture in addition to physical infrastructure. The respondents emphasised that professionals should adopt collaborative, respectful, and person-centred approaches that recognise individuals as active participants in their recovery rather than passive recipients of treatment. Such cultural transformation would complement environmental reforms and contribute to more compassionate mental healthcare.

The findings indicate that reforming conventional hospital structures has the potential to transform public experiences of mental healthcare by creating environments that promote dignity, inclusion, and recovery. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that the principles embodied within the Mental Health Café model may provide valuable insights for future developments in institutional mental healthcare.

Discussion with Literature

The findings of the present study indicate that improving mental healthcare requires changes not only at the organisational level but also within broader healthcare systems and public policy. The respondents consistently emphasised that sustainable improvements in mental health depend upon maintaining high standards of professional practice, addressing social determinants of psychological well-being, and reforming conventional approaches to mental healthcare delivery.

The study revealed that maintaining quality standards is essential for ensuring ethical, competent, and person-centred mental healthcare. The respondents further highlighted that promoting work-life balance represents an important preventive strategy capable of reducing stress, burnout, and other common mental health concerns associated with contemporary lifestyles. In addition, the recommendation to reform conventional hospital structures reflects the need to create mental healthcare environments that are welcoming, community-oriented, and conducive to recovery rather than reinforcing fear and stigma.

Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening mental healthcare requires coordinated action across organisational, community, and policy levels. The respondents' recommendations indicate that future mental health systems should integrate quality

assurance, preventive mental health strategies, and person-centred environmental design while preserving dignity, accessibility, and community participation. These recommendations extend the significance of the Mental Health Café beyond an individual organisation and position it as a model capable of informing broader mental health policy and service development.

5.3 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of data collected from the respondents to understand the functioning of the Mental Health Café model and its contribution to mental health promotion. The findings were organised under four research questions and six themes with their respective sub-themes. The analysis revealed that the Mental Health Café adopts a holistic, community-oriented, and person-centred approach to mental healthcare by integrating multidisciplinary services, therapeutic environments, healthy nutrition, and innovative stigma reduction strategies.

The study found that the café environment contributes significantly to mental well-being through specialised therapeutic spaces, nature-based interventions, and an informal setting that promotes emotional comfort and therapeutic engagement. The Mental Health Café model was found to function through a collaborative multidisciplinary team, addressing a wide range of mental health concerns while ensuring flexible service delivery and continuity of care through external referrals. The findings further highlighted that food serves both nutritional and therapeutic purposes by promoting healthy lifestyles, supporting holistic well-being, and facilitating rapport between clients and professionals.

The study also revealed that the organisation actively reduces stigma through strategic naming, removal of visible institutional triggers, minimising barriers to accessing services, and conducting extensive community outreach programmes. In addition to addressing the research questions, the respondents identified several challenges and future directions, including the need to accommodate increasingly diverse populations, expand infrastructure, introduce alternative therapeutic approaches, and implement initiatives such as Project Ekathuva. Furthermore, recommendations were made for strengthening quality standards, promoting work-life balance, and reforming conventional hospital-based mental healthcare to create more inclusive, accessible, and person-centred services.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Mental Health Café model represents an innovative approach to community mental healthcare by integrating therapeutic interventions with hospitality, nutrition, environmental design, and community participation. The study demonstrates that such a model has considerable potential to improve accessibility, reduce stigma, promote early help-seeking, and contribute to the development of holistic and community-oriented mental health services.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter synthesises the major findings of the study and presents recommendations derived from the analysis. It discusses the implications of the findings for mental health practice, social work education, administration, policy, and future research, while offering practical suggestions for strengthening the Mental Health Café model. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the significance of the study in demonstrating the potential of community-based, person-centred, and stigma-reducing approaches to mental healthcare.

6.2 Findings

Research Question 1: How does the café environment contribute to the improvement of mental health among individuals?

The major findings of the study in relation to the first research question are as follows:

1. The Mental Health Café provides a therapeutic environment that promotes emotional comfort and psychological well-being.

The study found that the environment of the Mental Health Café plays a significant role in enhancing the mental well-being of individuals. Unlike conventional mental healthcare settings, the café provides a welcoming, non-clinical, and community-oriented atmosphere that encourages clients to feel emotionally safe and comfortable while seeking professional support. The respondents explained that the therapeutic environment reduces anxiety, facilitates openness, and enables individuals to engage more actively in the helping process. The informal ambience of the café transforms the experience of seeking mental healthcare into a more positive and less intimidating one.

This finding is supported by the Person-in-Environment Theory, which emphasises that an individual's behaviour and well-being are shaped by continuous interactions with their surrounding physical and social environment. The theory proposes that creating supportive environments enhances individuals' ability to cope with psychological difficulties. The therapeutic atmosphere of the Mental Health Café therefore illustrates how environmental modifications can positively influence emotional well-being and facilitate recovery.

2. Specialised therapeutic spaces enhance the effectiveness of mental health interventions.

The study revealed that specialised therapeutic spaces, including counselling rooms, play therapy spaces, sensory rooms, and activity areas, enable professionals to provide interventions that are tailored to the diverse needs of clients. The respondents explained that these dedicated spaces create privacy, comfort, and emotional security, allowing individuals to express themselves freely and participate more effectively in therapeutic activities. The availability of different therapeutic environments also enables professionals to select intervention settings appropriate to the client's age, psychological condition, and therapeutic goals.

The Person-in-Environment Theory explains that the quality of environmental resources directly influences an individual's functioning and adaptation. The specialised therapeutic spaces available within the Mental Health Café strengthen the interaction between the individual and the helping environment, thereby enhancing therapeutic engagement and improving overall mental well-being.

3. Nature functions as a therapeutic resource within the Mental Health Café.

The findings indicate that natural surroundings constitute an important component of the therapeutic environment. The respondents highlighted that greenery, open spaces, natural lighting, and opportunities for interaction with nature contribute to relaxation, emotional regulation, stress reduction, and mindfulness. Nature-based experiences were perceived as complementing formal therapeutic interventions by creating a calm and restorative atmosphere that supports emotional healing.

This finding is consistent with the Person-in-Environment Theory, which recognises that environmental factors extend beyond interpersonal relationships to include the physical surroundings in which individuals live and interact. By integrating nature into the therapeutic setting, the Mental Health Café demonstrates that positive physical environments can enhance coping capacities, reduce psychological distress, and promote holistic well-being.

4. The informal café setting strengthens therapeutic relationships by reducing formality and encouraging open communication.

The study found that the informal café environment encourages natural interaction between professionals and clients. Unlike traditional clinical settings that often create hierarchical relationships, the café promotes casual conversations and shared experiences that help establish trust and rapport. The respondents explained that this informal atmosphere enables clients to feel accepted rather than judged, thereby improving communication and strengthening therapeutic relationships.

From the perspective of the Person-in-Environment Theory, supportive social environments positively influence individual behaviour and emotional functioning. The Mental Health Café creates a social environment characterised by acceptance, participation, and interpersonal connection, thereby fostering stronger therapeutic alliances and facilitating better mental health outcomes.

Research Question 2: What are the major types of mental health issues addressed within the café setting?

The major findings of the study in relation to the second research question are as follows:

1. The Mental Health Café adopts a multidisciplinary team approach to address diverse mental health needs.

The study found that the Mental Health Café functions through a collaborative multidisciplinary team comprising clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, nutritionists, occupational therapists, and other mental health professionals. The respondents explained that this collaborative model enables comprehensive assessment and intervention by integrating expertise from different professional disciplines. Rather than addressing mental health concerns from a single professional perspective, the team collectively plans and delivers interventions that respond to the complex needs of each individual.

This finding is supported by the Person-in-Environment Theory, which views individuals as functioning within multiple interconnected systems. The theory emphasises that effective intervention should address biological, psychological, social, familial, and environmental factors simultaneously. The multidisciplinary approach adopted by the Mental Health Café reflects this holistic perspective by ensuring that clients receive coordinated services that address multiple dimensions of their lives rather than focusing solely on psychological symptoms.

2. The Mental Health Café addresses a broad spectrum of mental health concerns across different population groups.

The study revealed that the café provides services to individuals experiencing a wide range of mental health concerns, including anxiety disorders, depression, stress-related problems, relationship conflicts, behavioural difficulties, neurodevelopmental conditions, emotional disturbances, and severe mental illnesses requiring specialised care. The respondents explained that services are not restricted to individuals with diagnosed psychiatric disorders but are equally accessible to those experiencing everyday psychological distress, adjustment issues, or emotional challenges.

The Person-in-Environment Theory explains that mental health is influenced by continuous interactions between individuals and their surrounding environments. Emotional distress often arises from family relationships, occupational pressures, educational demands, financial difficulties, and social circumstances rather than solely from individual pathology. The findings demonstrate that the Mental Health Café adopts this ecological perspective by addressing diverse mental health concerns while recognising the influence of environmental and social factors on psychological well-being.

3. Flexible sessions and service delivery enhance accessibility to mental healthcare.

The study found that flexibility in scheduling appointments, selecting therapeutic spaces, and adapting interventions according to individual needs significantly improves accessibility and client participation. The respondents explained that services are designed around the convenience and preferences of clients rather than rigid institutional procedures. This flexibility encourages individuals from different age groups and occupational backgrounds to seek professional support without disrupting their daily responsibilities.

This finding aligns with the Person-in-Environment Theory, which emphasises the importance of adapting services to suit the individual's environmental context. By recognising clients' occupational commitments, family responsibilities, educational schedules, and personal circumstances, the Mental Health Café demonstrates an ecological approach to practice that strengthens engagement and promotes person-centred care.

4. External referral and consultation ensure continuity of comprehensive mental healthcare.

The study revealed that the Mental Health Café maintains collaborative relationships with psychiatrists, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and other specialised professionals to ensure continuity of care whenever clients require interventions beyond the scope of the organisation. The respondents explained that referrals are based on professional assessment and are viewed as a continuation of the therapeutic process rather than a transfer of responsibility. Continuous follow-up and multidisciplinary coordination enable individuals to receive specialised services while maintaining psychosocial support within the café.

This finding is explained by the Person-in-Environment Theory, which recognises that individuals require support from multiple social systems to achieve optimal well-being. Effective mental healthcare therefore involves coordination among different institutions and professionals working within the individual's environment. The referral network established by the Mental Health Café illustrates this systems-oriented approach by integrating community-based services with specialised healthcare, thereby ensuring holistic and continuous care.

Research Question 3: How does the food served in the café contribute to the mental well-being of its users?

The major findings of the study in relation to the third research question are as follows:

1. The Mental Health Café promotes mental well-being through a healthy menu policy.

The study found that the Mental Health Café follows a consciously designed healthy menu policy that complements its holistic approach to mental healthcare. The respondents explained that the café intentionally avoids serving highly processed and unhealthy food items and instead offers nutritious alternatives that support both physical and psychological well-being. The menu reflects the organisation's philosophy that mental health cannot be separated from overall health and that healthy dietary practices form an essential component of wellness. By integrating nutrition into everyday mental health practice, the café encourages individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles that contribute to long-term psychological well-being.

This finding supports the Person-in-Environment Theory, which views individuals as functioning within interconnected biological, psychological, and environmental systems. The theory recognises that nutrition forms an important environmental factor influencing physical functioning, emotional regulation, and overall quality of life. The healthy food policy adopted by the Mental Health Café demonstrates that promoting positive environmental conditions, including healthy dietary practices, contributes to holistic mental well-being.

2. Kombucha and probiotic-based food items are incorporated as part of a holistic wellness approach.

The study revealed that the café incorporates kombucha and other probiotic-based food products into its menu as part of its commitment to promoting holistic health. The respondents explained that these food items are selected not merely for their nutritional value but also because of increasing evidence regarding the relationship between gut health and mental well-being. Although these products are not presented as medical treatments, they form part of a broader wellness-oriented environment that encourages healthier lifestyle choices among visitors.

The Person-in-Environment Theory emphasises that individual well-being is influenced by multiple environmental factors, including health behaviours and lifestyle practices. The inclusion of probiotic-rich food demonstrates how the café addresses biological and environmental aspects of mental health simultaneously, thereby reinforcing the holistic perspective advocated by the theory.

3. Food serves as a medium for building rapport and strengthening therapeutic relationships.

The study found that food within the Mental Health Café performs an important psychosocial function beyond meeting nutritional needs. The respondents explained that sharing food and beverages creates a relaxed and informal atmosphere that facilitates conversation between professionals and clients. This informal interaction helps reduce anxiety, establish trust, and strengthen therapeutic relationships, particularly among individuals who may initially feel hesitant to engage in formal counselling sessions.

This finding aligns with the Person-in-Environment Theory, which recognises that supportive social environments positively influence individual behaviour and emotional

well-being. Shared meals and informal interactions create opportunities for meaningful social engagement, allowing individuals to experience acceptance, belonging, and emotional support. The café therefore utilises food as an environmental resource that promotes both interpersonal connection and psychological well-being.

4. Food contributes to the normalisation of mental healthcare by integrating therapy into everyday social experiences.

The study revealed that the café successfully integrates food and mental healthcare within a familiar social setting. The respondents explained that individuals visiting the café often begin their experience by having a meal or beverage before engaging in therapeutic conversations. This integration reduces the formality commonly associated with mental health services and enables visitors to perceive help-seeking as a normal part of everyday life rather than an indication of illness.

This finding is explained through the Person-in-Environment Theory, which highlights the influence of everyday social environments on individual experiences and behaviour. By combining healthy food, social interaction, and therapeutic engagement within a single environment, the Mental Health Café creates a setting that promotes psychological comfort, encourages social participation, and supports holistic well-being. The findings therefore demonstrate that food can function not only as a nutritional resource but also as an important environmental and social intervention that contributes to improved mental health.

Research Question 4: In what ways does the Mental Health Café help in reducing stigma related to mental health?

The major findings of the study in relation to the fourth research question are as follows:

1. The strategic naming of the Mental Health Café contributes to reducing stigma associated with mental healthcare.

The study found that the name *Kappiness* was deliberately chosen to avoid the negative connotations commonly associated with psychiatric institutions and mental illness. The respondents explained that the positive and welcoming identity created through the name generates curiosity, encourages public engagement, and enables individuals to approach mental health services without fear of being labelled or judged. Rather than presenting itself as a clinical institution, the café projects an image of happiness, well-being, and

community, thereby making mental healthcare more approachable and socially acceptable.

This finding is explained by Erving Goffman's Stigma Theory, which proposes that individuals experiencing mental illness often acquire a "spoiled identity" because society labels them based on negative stereotypes and prejudices. Goffman argues that stigma arises through social interactions where individuals are categorised and discriminated against because of perceived differences. By avoiding medicalised terminology and adopting a positive identity, the Mental Health Café challenges these social labels and weakens the association between mental healthcare and social stigma. The strategic naming therefore contributes to reconstructing public perceptions of mental health and encourages individuals to seek support without fear of social judgement.

2. The removal of visible institutional triggers reduces fear and encourages help-seeking behaviour.

The study revealed that the Mental Health Café intentionally avoids many of the physical characteristics traditionally associated with hospitals and psychiatric institutions. The respondents explained that the absence of clinical interiors, hospital-like waiting areas, and other institutional symbols creates a welcoming environment that feels safe and familiar. This enables individuals to approach mental health services without experiencing the anxiety or discomfort often associated with conventional psychiatric settings.

According to Goffman's Stigma Theory, visible symbols associated with mental illness often reinforce social labelling and strengthen the stigma attached to those seeking psychiatric care. The Mental Health Café disrupts these symbolic representations by replacing institutional environments with a comfortable café setting that promotes dignity and normalcy. Consequently, individuals are less likely to perceive themselves—or be perceived by others—as psychiatric patients, thereby reducing the impact of stigma on help-seeking behaviour.

3. The Mental Health Café reduces psychological and social barriers to accessing mental healthcare.

The study found that the café adopts a highly accessible and person-centred approach that minimises the barriers commonly preventing individuals from seeking professional

support. The respondents explained that visitors are able to enter the café without experiencing the fear of being identified as mental health patients. The informal environment, flexible service delivery, and welcoming atmosphere encourage individuals to seek help at an earlier stage of emotional distress, thereby promoting timely intervention and continuity of care.

This finding supports Goffman's Stigma Theory, which suggests that fear of social judgement often discourages individuals from disclosing mental health concerns or accessing psychiatric services. The Mental Health Café reduces opportunities for labelling by integrating mental healthcare into an ordinary social environment. By making help-seeking appear as a normal everyday activity rather than an indication of illness, the organisation weakens the influence of stigma on individual behaviour and promotes greater acceptance of mental healthcare.

4. Community outreach activities promote mental health awareness and challenge societal stigma.

The study revealed that the Mental Health Café actively conducts awareness programmes, workshops, and community outreach activities in schools, colleges, workplaces, and other community settings. The respondents explained that these initiatives aim to improve mental health literacy, correct misconceptions regarding mental illness, and encourage open discussions about emotional well-being. Through continuous engagement with diverse population groups, the organisation promotes early help-seeking and creates greater public acceptance of mental healthcare.

This finding is closely aligned with Goffman's Stigma Theory, which emphasises that stigma is socially constructed through cultural beliefs, stereotypes, and interactions within society. By engaging directly with communities, providing accurate information, and normalising conversations about mental health, the Mental Health Café actively challenges these socially constructed stereotypes. The outreach activities therefore contribute to transforming public attitudes towards mental illness, reducing discrimination, and fostering a more inclusive environment for individuals experiencing mental health concerns.

6.3 Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are proposed:

Suggestions for Kappiness Mental Health Café

- Expand the physical infrastructure to accommodate the increasing number of service users while preserving the therapeutic and non-clinical atmosphere.
- Establish additional specialised therapeutic spaces for children, adolescents, older adults, and individuals with diverse mental health needs.
- Strengthen the multidisciplinary team by recruiting professionals from different mental health disciplines and promoting continuous professional development.
- Introduce a wider range of alternative therapeutic interventions, including art therapy, music therapy, dance and movement therapy, horticultural therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, and animal-assisted therapy.
- Expand nutrition-based mental health interventions through structured nutritional counselling, psychoeducation, and food-based wellness programmes.
- Strengthen and expand Project Ekathuva to promote greater community participation and psychosocial support.
- Increase outreach programmes in schools, colleges, workplaces, and rural communities to improve mental health awareness and reduce stigma.
- Develop structured monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and quality of services provided by the Mental Health Café.

Suggestions for Mental Health Professionals

- Adopt a holistic and person-centred approach while addressing mental health concerns.
- Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration to provide comprehensive and coordinated mental healthcare.
- Integrate environmental and nature-based therapeutic approaches into routine mental health practice wherever feasible.
- Promote the role of nutrition and healthy lifestyle practices as supportive components of mental healthcare.

- Encourage early intervention through community awareness programmes, psychoeducation, and preventive mental health initiatives.
- Engage in continuous professional development to remain updated on emerging therapeutic approaches and evidence-based practices.

Suggestions for Policymakers and Government

- Promote the establishment of Mental Health Café models in different districts as community-based mental health initiatives.
- Develop policy guidelines and quality assurance standards for community mental health centres.
- Allocate financial assistance through government schemes and CSR partnerships to support innovative mental health programmes.
- Strengthen the implementation of community-based mental health services under the existing public mental health system.
- Formulate policies that promote work-life balance and workplace mental health as preventive mental health strategies.
- Encourage the transformation of conventional psychiatric hospitals into more therapeutic, recovery-oriented, and person-centred environments.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Conduct comparative studies between Mental Health Cafés and conventional mental healthcare settings.
- Undertake longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the Mental Health Café model.
- Explore the relationship between nutrition, gut health, and mental well-being within community mental health settings.
- Examine the effectiveness of alternative therapeutic interventions adopted by Mental Health Cafés.
- Conduct similar studies in different geographical, cultural, and organisational contexts to improve the generalisability of findings.

- Include the perspectives of service users and caregivers to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the Mental Health Café model.

6.4 Implications for Social Work

The findings of the present study have significant implications for the social work profession across different domains of practice. The innovative Mental Health Café model demonstrates how holistic, community-based, and person-centred approaches can strengthen mental healthcare by integrating therapeutic environments, multidisciplinary collaboration, healthy lifestyle practices, and stigma reduction initiatives. The study reinforces the importance of adopting ecological and recovery-oriented approaches while addressing mental health concerns and highlights the expanding role of social workers in promoting mental well-being beyond conventional institutional settings. The implications of the study are discussed under the following areas.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings of the study reinforce the importance of adopting a holistic and person-centred approach in social work practice. The Mental Health Café model demonstrates that effective mental healthcare extends beyond clinical interventions and includes the therapeutic use of the physical environment, social relationships, nutrition, and community participation. Social workers can utilise these findings to strengthen psychosocial interventions by creating supportive environments that promote emotional safety, trust, and active client participation.

The study also highlights the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration in addressing complex mental health concerns. Psychiatric social workers can play a vital role in coordinating services, facilitating referrals, strengthening family support systems, and linking individuals with community resources. Furthermore, the findings encourage social workers to actively engage in preventive mental health programmes, community awareness initiatives, and stigma reduction campaigns that promote early intervention and improve access to mental healthcare.

Implications for Social Work Education

The study emphasises the need for social work education to provide greater exposure to innovative and community-based models of mental healthcare. Schools of social work

should encourage students to understand emerging approaches such as Mental Health Cafés, recovery-oriented practice, and multidisciplinary interventions alongside conventional psychiatric social work.

The findings also highlight the importance of strengthening practical training in therapeutic communication, community mental health, psychosocial rehabilitation, interdisciplinary teamwork, and mental health promotion. Fieldwork opportunities in innovative mental health settings can help students develop competencies in holistic assessment, community engagement, advocacy, and recovery-oriented practice, thereby preparing future social workers to respond effectively to evolving mental health needs.

Implications for Social Work Administration

The study demonstrates the importance of effective organisational management in ensuring the sustainability of innovative mental health programmes. Social work administrators can utilise the findings to develop integrated service delivery models that promote multidisciplinary collaboration, community participation, and person-centred care.

The findings also indicate the need for strengthening resource mobilisation, infrastructure development, programme planning, monitoring, and evaluation within community-based mental health organisations. Social work administrators can play a significant role in establishing partnerships with government agencies, non-governmental organisations, healthcare institutions, and corporate social responsibility initiatives to ensure the long-term sustainability and expansion of Mental Health Café models.

Implications for Social Work Policy

The findings of the study highlight the need for policies that promote accessible, inclusive, and community-based mental healthcare. The Mental Health Café model demonstrates that mental health services can be delivered effectively through non-clinical and community-oriented settings that reduce stigma and encourage early help-seeking behaviour.

The study suggests that social workers should actively advocate for policies supporting community mental health initiatives, preventive mental health programmes, workplace mental health promotion, and recovery-oriented service delivery. The findings also emphasise the need for policy reforms that strengthen multidisciplinary mental

healthcare, improve quality standards, and encourage the establishment of similar Mental Health Café models in different regions as complementary services within the public mental health system.

Implications for Social Work Research

The present study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on innovative community-based mental healthcare models within the field of social work. As Mental Health Cafés remain relatively unexplored in the Indian context, the findings provide a foundation for future research examining their effectiveness, sustainability, and applicability across diverse communities.

The study also opens avenues for further research on therapeutic environments, nutritional interventions, stigma reduction strategies, multidisciplinary collaboration, and community participation in mental healthcare. Future social work researchers may undertake comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method studies involving service users, caregivers, and professionals to generate stronger evidence for policy formulation and professional practice.

6.5 Conclusion

The present study explored the role of the Mental Health Café model in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma associated with mental healthcare through an in-depth qualitative inquiry at Kappiness Mental Health Café. The findings revealed that the café represents an innovative and holistic approach to mental healthcare by integrating a therapeutic environment, multidisciplinary collaboration, healthy nutritional practices, and community-based stigma reduction initiatives. Unlike conventional mental healthcare settings, the Mental Health Café creates an accessible, welcoming, and person-centred space that encourages individuals to seek support without fear of judgement or discrimination.

The study further established that the café environment itself functions as a therapeutic resource. The integration of specialised therapeutic spaces, nature-based interventions, informal interactions, and healthy food practices contributes to emotional well-being and strengthens therapeutic engagement. The multidisciplinary team approach ensures that individuals receive comprehensive and coordinated care, while community outreach

activities and innovative service delivery strategies enhance mental health awareness and promote early help-seeking behaviour.

The findings of the study also reinforce the relevance of the Person-in-Environment Theory, which emphasises that an individual's well-being is shaped by the continuous interaction between personal and environmental factors. The Mental Health Café demonstrates how supportive physical, social, and nutritional environments can positively influence mental health outcomes. Similarly, the findings validate Erving Goffman's Stigma Theory by illustrating how the café challenges social labelling and negative stereotypes through strategic naming, the removal of institutional characteristics, and community engagement, thereby reducing stigma and making mental healthcare more approachable.

Overall, the study concludes that the Mental Health Café model represents a promising community-based innovation in mental healthcare. By combining psychosocial interventions with therapeutic environments, healthy lifestyle practices, and stigma reduction strategies, the model complements conventional mental health services and promotes a more inclusive, recovery-oriented, and person-centred approach to mental healthcare. The findings of the study contribute to the existing body of knowledge in psychiatric social work and highlight the potential of Mental Health Cafés as effective community-based mental health interventions. It is hoped that the insights generated from this study will inform future social work practice, education, policy formulation, and research, ultimately contributing to the development of accessible, holistic, and stigma-free mental healthcare services.

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ANNEXURE

In-Depth Qualitative Interview Guide

Study Context: Experiences and Perceptions of Clients and Professionals at Kappiness Mental Health Café

Ethical and Introductory Notes

Narrative: Begin with rapport building:

“Thank you for taking part in this interview. This discussion aims to understand experiences and perspectives related to the Mental Health Café model and how it supports mental well-being.”

Consent:

Confirm voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the participant’s right to skip questions or stop the interview at any time.

Interviewer Guidelines:

Use empathetic listening, note non-verbal cues, and audio record only with permission.

Approximate duration: 30–60 minutes.

Part 1: Participant Profile (Quantitative Metadata)

Socio-Demographic Details

- Age
- Gender
- Educational qualification
- Professional designation

Professional Background

- Years of experience in the mental health field
- Current role in the café
- Duration of association with the café
- Type of clients commonly engaged with

Theme 1: Conceptualization of the Mental Health Café

Narrative:

“To begin, we would like to understand your perspective on the mental health café concept.”

1.1 Definition

- **Core Question:** How do you define a mental health café?

1.2 Background

- **Core Question:** Explain the background for starting a mental health café.

1.3 Core Idea

- **Core Question:** What was the core idea or inspiration behind integrating mental health services into a café model?

1.4 Difference from Conventional Settings

- **Core Question:** How is this model different from conventional mental health service settings?

1.5 Addressing Mental Health Gaps

- **Core Question:** What mental health gaps in society does this café aim to address?

1.6 Accessibility

- **Core Question:** How do you ensure accessibility and approachability for clients?

Theme 2: Environment as a Therapeutic Space

Narrative:

“The environment plays an important role in therapeutic engagement. Let’s explore this aspect.”

Core Questions and Probes

- How was the café environment designed to support mental well-being?
- What elements of the physical environment do you consider therapeutic?

- How does an informal setting influence client engagement and openness?
- Do you think that the environment affects the therapeutic relationship?
- Do clients respond differently here compared to hospitals or clinics? Please elaborate based on previous work experience.
- How do you view the café environment from a Person-in-Environment perspective?

Theme 3: Role of Food in Mental Health Intervention

Narrative:

“Food is an integral component of the café model. We would like to understand its role in mental health intervention.”

Core Questions

- What is the rationale behind incorporating food into mental health care?
- Is there any psychological or nutritional basis guiding the food choices?
- How does food function as a medium for engagement or therapy?
- Have you observed any emotional or behavioral changes linked to food experiences?
- Did you find that social eating influences client comfort and communication?
- Do you see food as a therapeutic tool or supportive element? Why?

Theme 4: Mental Health Issues Addressed in the Café

Narrative:

“Now we will discuss the type of mental health concerns addressed in this setting.”

Core Questions

- What are the most common mental health concerns presented by clients?
- Are these concerns clinical, subclinical, or preventive in nature?
- How do you assess client needs in an informal café setting?
- What type of interventions are commonly used here?

- How do you maintain ethical standards and professional boundaries?

Theme 5: Stigma Reduction and Help-Seeking Behavior

Narrative:

“One aim of this model is to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking.”

Core Questions

- How does the café model contribute to reducing mental health stigma?
- Have you noticed changes in clients’ attitudes toward therapy?
- Do clients express relief in accessing mental health support in this setting?
- How does the café help normalize mental health conversations?
- What role do professionals play in stigma reduction in such spaces?

Theme 6: Outcomes, Challenges, and Sustainability

Narrative:

“Let’s discuss the outcomes and practical challenges involved in running such a model.”

Core Questions

- What positive outcomes have you observed among clients?
- How do you evaluate the impact of the café on mental well-being?
- What challenges do you face in running a mental health café?
- How do you balance business sustainability with ethical mental health practice?
- What strategies are used to maintain confidentiality and professionalism?

Theme 7: Future Scope and Recommendations

Narrative:

“Finally, we would like to understand your views on the future of this model.”

Core Questions

- What is your vision for the future of mental health cafés in India?
- Do you think this model should be replicated elsewhere? Why or why not?

- What policy or institutional support would strengthen such initiatives?
- What recommendations would you give to social workers interested in this model?
- Any additional reflections on integrating food, environment, and mental health?