

MEDIA RELEASE

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IMH Launches the Third Singapore Mental Health Study

This edition broadens the scope to look beyond illness and includes younger cohorts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Singapore residents' mental health in the post-pandemic era.

1. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH), NHG Health's specialty centre for psychiatric care in Singapore, is embarking on its most comprehensive assessment of the nation's mental health to date with the third Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS).
2. First conducted in 2010 and subsequently in 2016, the SMHS is a landmark epidemiological study that has provided crucial population-based data to inform and shape national mental health policies. It established the prevalence of common mental disorders, the factors associated with them, treatment gap, and help-seeking behaviour.
3. The latest edition of the study builds on this foundation, while significantly expanding its scope to better understand the mental health challenges Singapore residents face in the post-pandemic era.
4. "The SMHS is a cornerstone of our national mental health surveillance," says Associate Professor Mythily Subramaniam, Assistant Chairman, Medical Board (Research), IMH and Principal Investigator of the study. "As the first and only nationwide study in Singapore to use internationally validated measures to assess the prevalence of mental health conditions, it provides robust, population-level evidence to guide mental health policy and service planning. Each wave of the study has applied the same rigorous methodology, enabling us to make meaningful comparisons over time and track trends. It's also significant that this latest edition is the first since COVID-19 hit. It will give us insights into the pandemic's longer-term impact on mental health – whether individuals and communities have bounced back, how people are coping in a post-pandemic environment, and which groups may still be struggling."

Key updates to the third SMHS

5. One of the main changes in this edition is the inclusion of younger participants. While the first two editions surveyed participants aged 18 and above, the third edition has lowered the age threshold to include Singapore residents aged 15 and above to capture the mental health experiences of younger teens during critical developmental periods.
6. "This third iteration further expands our understanding of Singapore's mental health landscape by including those aged 15 to 17 years. From what we have learnt from

IMH's National Youth Mental Health Study (NYMHS), about 1 in 3 young people here reported experiencing severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. Adolescence is when many mental health conditions first emerge, and by capturing data from this age range, we have a critical window for early identification and intervention. This also allows us to build a more complete picture of mental health across the lifespan," she adds.

7. In addition to the mental disorders examined in the previous two studies – Major Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Psychosis, General Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Alcohol Use Disorder – the third SMHS will include Eating Disorders as a new condition. This addition is driven by findings from the NYMHS, where body image concerns emerged as an issue among young people in Singapore. Globally, Eating Disorders are recognised as a growing public health concern, with higher prevalence reported during the pandemic.
8. The study will examine the prevalence of these conditions, identify their associated risk and protective factors, as well as the economic burden they impose on Singapore, including direct and indirect medical costs and productivity losses.
9. The researchers will investigate a range of factors affecting mental health today. These include physical health conditions, lifestyle behaviours like smoking, sleep, and physical activity, and social relationships. They will also look at emerging challenges across different life stages, from adverse childhood experiences, academic stress, workplace stress and burnout, cyberbullying, loneliness, and technology and social media use to build a clearer picture of how personal experiences and environments shape mental health.
10. Another key focus is mental well-being. Going beyond mental disorders, the study will examine what positive mental health looks like in the local population, how resilient people are, and the broader social and environmental factors (for example, social support, a sense of connection, quality of life, and attitudes towards help-seeking) that promote mental well-being.
11. "This study looks at the entire mental health continuum – from good to poor mental health, and from the absence to presence of mental illness," says A/Prof Mythily. "We want to understand how Singapore residents are coping and what helps them stay well. Mental health is shaped by many factors, and it exists along a spectrum. If we only focus on illness, we're reacting too late. By looking at positive mental health and protective factors, we can go further upstream, strengthen what keeps people well, and put in place programmes to address issues early. We hope that will help us build a healthier, more resilient population."
12. "Data from the SMHS doesn't just measure the extent of need – it tells us where to act: where the care gaps are, and where our interventions can make the biggest difference. IMH's findings will equip NHG Health and our partners not just to treat

mental illness, but to shape integrated care pathways across our primary care networks, specialty centres and hospitals and community partners so that together, we can build mental resilience across Singapore,” says Professor Lim Tock Han, Group Chairman Medical Board (Clinical), NHG Health.

13. The three-year study is led by IMH, in collaboration with KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), and funded by the Ministry of Health. "Our team at KKH is delighted to be a collaborator in the third SMHS, which marks a pivotal moment – for the first time, it comprehensively integrates the mental health profiles of adolescents from 15 years of age. This is very timely given the growing emphasis on youth mental wellness in the Singapore population. With KKH's specialised expertise in paediatric and adolescent health, we aim to provide insights into the unique developmental considerations and emerging health challenges of this distinct group, and to work with IMH to help shape targeted interventions and support systems that address the needs of our younger generation," says Dr Courtney Davis, Senior Staff Physician, Adolescent Medicine Service at KKH and Site-Principal Investigator.

14. Collection of data is slated to begin in May 2026 and will continue through August 2027. It will involve approximately 6,000 residents aged 15 years and above randomly selected from a national database. They will participate in this study through face-to-face and online surveys, which will employ validated diagnostic instruments, including the World Health Organization Composite International Diagnostic Interview (WHO-CIDI), along with questionnaires assessing various aspects of mental health and well-being. Selected participants will also be re-contacted after six months to understand help-seeking behaviours and overall well-being over time. An authorised survey firm will manage fieldwork operations, with data collection conducted by trained interviewers.

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About the Institute of Mental Health (IMH)

The Institute of Mental Health (IMH), a member of NHG Health, is the only tertiary psychiatric care institution in Singapore. Located on the sprawling 23-hectare campus of Buangkok Green Medical Park in the north-eastern part of Singapore, IMH offers a multidisciplinary and comprehensive range of psychiatric, rehabilitative and therapy services in hospital-based and community-based settings. The 2,000-bedded hospital aims to meet the needs of three groups of patients – children and adolescents (aged below 19 years), adults and the elderly. Besides providing clinical services, IMH

dedicates resources to carry out mental health promotion and raise mental health literacy. IMH also leads in mental health research and training the next generation of mental health professionals in Singapore. For more information, please visit www.imh.com.sg

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Annex A

Researchers involved in the third Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS 2026)

Principal Investigator

- Associate Professor Mythily Subramaniam, Institute of Mental Health

Site-Principal Investigator

- Dr Courtney Davis, KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Co-Investigators

- Professor Chong Siow Ann, Institute of Mental Health
- Dr Janhavi Vaingankar, Institute of Mental Health
- Dr Asharani Pezhummoottil Vasudevan Nair, Institute of Mental Health
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- Mr Chua Boon Yiang, Institute of Mental Health
- Mr Bernard Tan, Institute of Mental Health
- Associate Professor Swapna Verma, Institute of Mental Health
- Ms Madhumitha Ramu, Institute of Mental Health
- Dr Elaine Chew Chu Shan, KK Women's and Children's Hospital
- Dr Harold Tan, Ministry of Health
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