

## **Media Release**

**For immediate release**

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### **IMH spearheads world class national epidemiological study on mental health**

1. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) is spearheading a nationwide epidemiological study to establish the mental health status of the adult Singapore resident population. The study will establish the prevalence of mental disorders, identify barriers to mental healthcare in Singapore and investigate the socio-cultural and economic impact of major mental disorders here – these include the association with physical illnesses, the effect of mental illness on work productivity, and the help-seeking pattern of the local population.

2. The survey, known as the Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS), is a collaborative effort between four centres – IMH, Ministry of Health (MOH), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and RAND Health, a research division within RAND Corporation, an American nonprofit research organisation. The Principal Investigator of this study is A/Prof Chong Siow Ann, Vice Chairman Medical Board (Research) IMH, and Senior Clinician-Scientist Investigator, National Medical Research Council, and the research team comprises members from the four agencies. Other than A/Prof Chong, the team is also led by Assistant Director, Dr Mythily Subramaniam and Assistant Manager, Ms Janhavi Vaingankar from the Research Division in IMH. This project brings together international and local experts in this field for an extensive and comprehensive assessment of the nation's mental health.

3. Some 15,000 households have been randomly identified for this household/door-to-door, face-to-face survey. The target is to achieve at least 6,500 completed interviews.

4. A/Prof Chong said: “This is a world-class population-based epidemiological study that will serve as a model for designing similar research into other diseases in future, and provide a wealth of actionable data for the formulation of policies, implementation of programs, and traction for further research.”
5. “Mental disorders have an immense impact on individuals and their families and pose an escalating challenge to healthcare systems throughout the world. Each year up to 25 per cent of the world's population experience some form of mental disorder,” he added.
6. In Singapore, the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) conducted in 2004 reported a lifetime prevalence of depression to be 5.6% and that of anxiety disorders to be 3.4% among the general population in Singapore.
7. The last survey, which focused on depression and anxiety disorders, highlighted the importance of mental health interventions in Singapore and a 5-year National Mental Health Blueprint was initiated by MOH.
8. The Singapore Mental Health Study is a more in-depth and comprehensive assessment of the state of mental health of Singapore residents. It will screen and establish diagnosis of multiple illnesses such as depression, mania, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, alcohol use, pathological gambling and nicotine dependence in the population aged 18 years and older.
9. Another important aspect of this study is the assessment of positive mental health - what makes us resilient and gives us a sense of mental well being.
10. “We will develop an instrument to measure the positive mental health of Singapore residents. This instrument will be culturally and locally relevant and will be pilot tested as part of this study,” said Ms Ms Janhavi.
11. Dr Mythily said: “Mental health is also closely linked with physical illness and is also a cause and consequence of injury and violence. Studies have shown that at least

two-thirds of those with mental illness receive no treatment, even in highly developed countries. With the aging population and ongoing social changes such as increasing divorce rates, changing family structures and economic pressures, challenges to the mental well-being of Singapore residents will continue to grow.”

12. The Singapore Millennium Foundation (SMF) and MOH fund this three-year \$6.9 million project, which started in April 2008. The initial phase involved undertaking of the various multiple tasks that led to this actual survey. These tasks have included the refining of the study design, the development and validation of the various instruments, focus groups discussion, and training of the field interviewers.

13. The survey will last for about one year from its launch and the expected completion date is October 2010.

**For media queries, please contact:**

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**About the Institute of Mental Health**

The Institute of Mental Health is the only tertiary mental health centre in Singapore. It offers a multi-faceted and comprehensive range of psychiatric, rehabilitative and counseling services to meet the needs of three groups of patients – children and adolescents, adults and the elderly. IMH also runs mental health education programmes for the general public. These programmes aim to promote mental wellness and raise awareness of the importance and benefits of prevention, early detection and treatment of mental disorders.