

MEDIA RELEASE

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IMH launches its first comprehensive nationwide study to assess the state of mental health among youth in Singapore

1. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) is embarking on its first national psychiatric epidemiological study to investigate a wide range of factors affecting the mental health of young people aged 15 – 35 years old in Singapore.
2. The National Youth Mental Health Study (NYMHS) aims to establish the prevalence of key mental health conditions among youth here, as well as identify personal and social factors associated with these conditions and the level of unmet treatment needs. IMH researchers will also examine how young people in this age group experience major transitions in life – from moving across various education stages to joining the workforce and starting a family. This is to assess the impact on mental health and identify risk and protective factors of adverse mental health outcomes that are unique to these stages.
3. “The Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS) focuses largely on the adult population here, but findings from SMHS 2010 and 2016 showed that most mental disorders occurred during teenage to early adulthood years. Young people aged 18 – 34 years also had the highest proportion of mental disorders, and were more vulnerable to developing mood and anxiety disorders. In fact, we found that about 21.6% (1 in 5) of our youth have experienced at least one mental health condition,” says Dr Mythily Subramaniam, Assistant Chairman, Medical Board (Research), IMH. “We think it is important to do a more comprehensive, in-depth study to identify specific issues, challenges and common psychological problems that affect young people today. It will give us an opportunity to intervene early to support them as well as design appropriate mental health promotion measures. This study will also allow us to better understand how young people seek help, which may be different from the general population, to better allocate relevant resources. Since this is the first time we are conducting a study of this magnitude on this population, the data will also serve as a baseline for tracking future trends and changes in youth mental health in Singapore.”
4. The scope of the study is extensive. It will zoom into a wide range of youth-centric aspects and behaviours that are linked to mental health and well-being. These include bullying, self-harm, alcohol use, smoking, social media use, smartphone addiction, burnout, academic stress, insomnia, resilience, body image and self-esteem. In addition, the study will gather views on how satisfied young people are with their living environment, for example, trust in government, sense of safety in their neighbourhood and social inclusivity.
5. “Our emphasis is on the transitional phases in a young person’s life. We know that mental health is affected as we experience transitions in life. For young people, this may be more pronounced because they go through several major life changes in a relatively short period of time – for

example, moving from school to tertiary education or National Service, or starting their first job and taking on more responsibilities,” says Dr Swapna Verma, Chairman Medical Board, IMH, and co-principal investigator of the study. “These changes are also now taking place against a more challenging backdrop of global upheavals like the COVID-19 pandemic, wars and climate change. We are also reaching out to youth who are not in education or training (NEETs) as we do not have much insight into this group’s mental health needs. With the surge in psychosocial challenges faced by today’s youth, there is a need to identify immediate priorities and take appropriate steps to improve their mental well-being. As part of this study, we will not only be looking at risk factors but also protective factors, such as resilience and social support, in this age group.”

6. About 2,600 youth aged 15 - 35 years old will be interviewed for this study. They will complete a set of questionnaires using tablets provided by the interviewer. The questionnaires will collect information on the respondents’ socio-demographic background as well as information related to mental health, feelings, experiences in school or workplace, social support, and lifestyle behaviours. Collection of data for the study will begin in October 2022 and will continue through till June 2023.
7. This three-year study is funded by the Ministry of Health. The project is led by Dr Swapna Verma, Chairman Medical Board and Dr Mythily Subramaniam, Assistant Chairman, Medical Board (Research) from IMH, in collaboration with the national youth mental health outreach and assessment service CHAT, and the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore.

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About the Institute of Mental Health (IMH)

The Institute of Mental Health (IMH), a member of the National Healthcare Group, 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 or www.facebook.com/imh.singapore.

Annex A

Researchers involved in the National Youth Mental Health Study

Co-Principal Investigators

- Dr Swapna Verma, Institute of Mental Health
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Co-Investigators

- Prof Chong Siow Ann, Institute of Mental Health
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