Turning Discovery into Healthier Communities

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Giving Voice to a Silent Epidemic:
Transforming Youth Mental Health in Singapore

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Content Warning:
Descriptions of Mental Health Challenges

A Little About Me

Why I Care About Mental Health and Wellbeing



Remarks : Rayner needs to learn to concentrate and to develop effective study habits.

Remarks : Rayner needs to learn to concentrate and to develop efficient study habits. He needs also to be more alert in class. With consistent effort, he can achieve better results.

Remarks : Rayner has done fairly well but is capable of producing better results if he is more serious in his work.

Remarks : Rayner is a pleasant boy. He is capable of producing better results if he puts in more effort. CIP: 6 hours

SCHOOL CODE : 5197 PSLE INDEX NO : 40134I
NAME : TAN KAY JIN RAYNER
(CHEN JIAJUN RAYNER)

2000 PSLE RESULT : PROMOTED TO SEC ONE AGG SCORE : 225

COURSE ELIGIBLE FOR : EXPRESS

SECONDARY SCHOOL POSTED TO :

BROADRICK SECONDARY (3202)

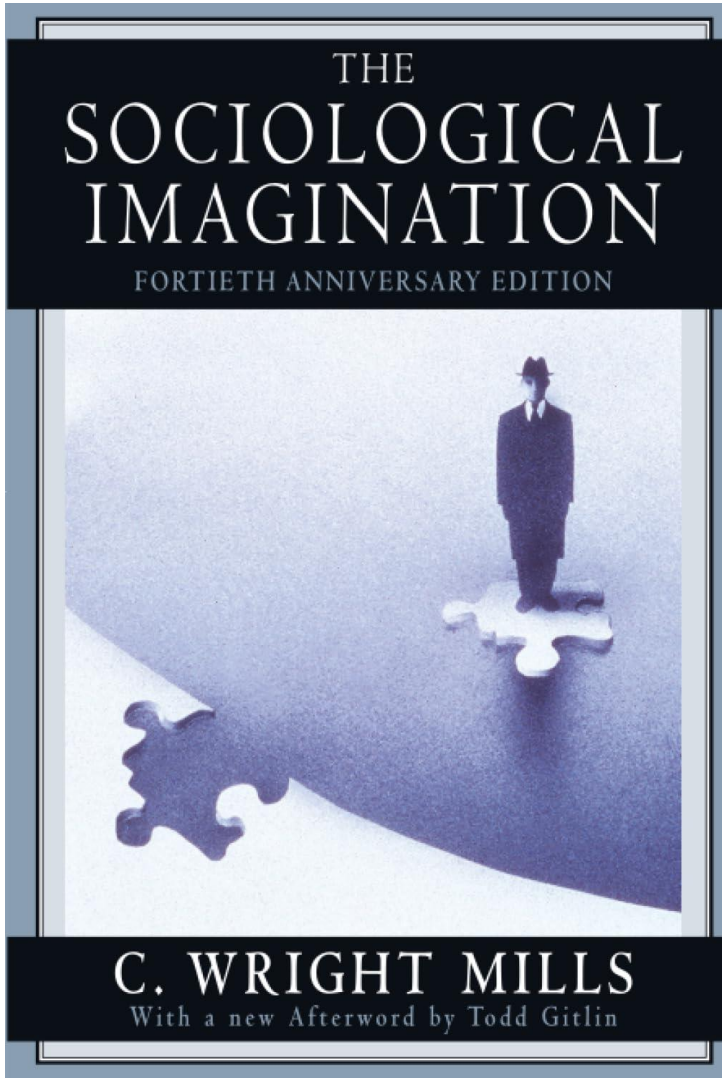
A Little About Me

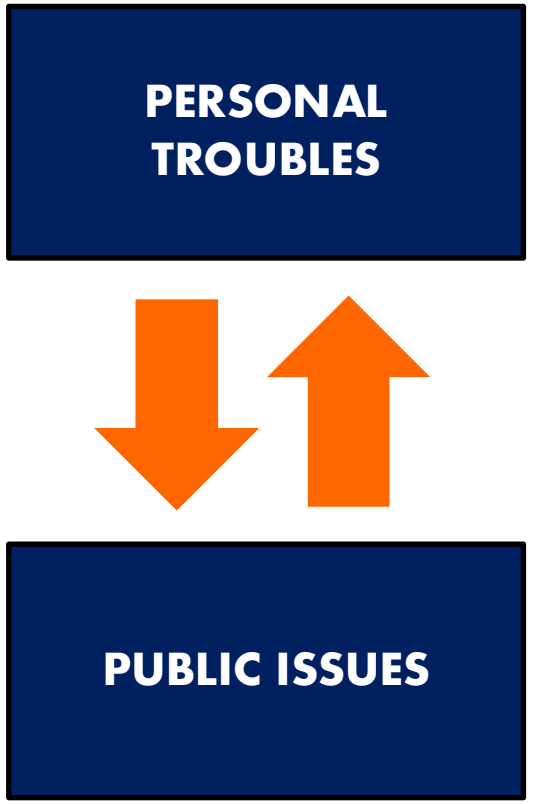
Why I Care About Mental Health and Wellbeing





The Sociological Imagination





Sociological Insight

"Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both."

Mills, C.W. (1959) The Sociological Imagination. Oxford University Press, New York.

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Youth Mental Health in Singapore:
The Bigger Picture

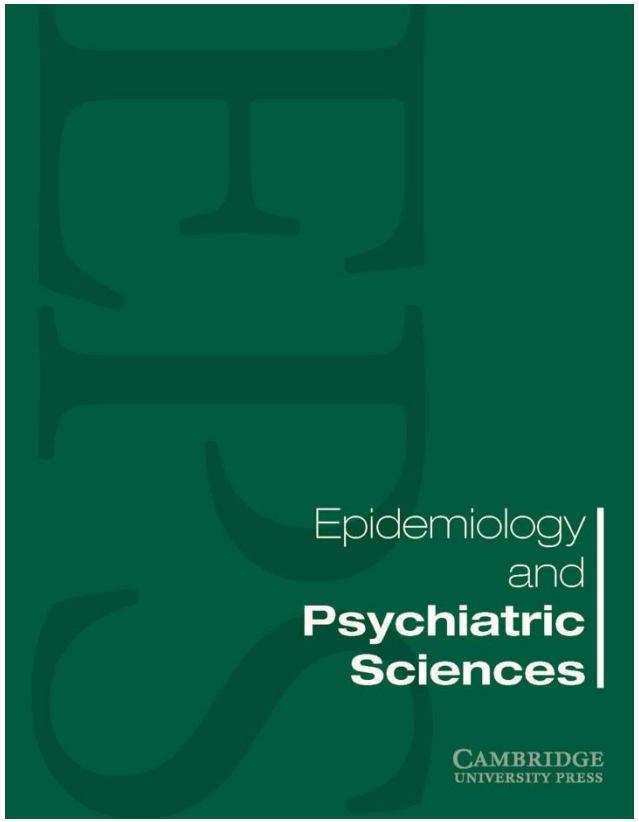
Singapore Mental Health Study

Prevalence of Mental Disorders (2016)

13.9% — Lifetime: At least one mood, anxiety, or alcohol use disorder

6.3% — Lifetime: Major Depressive Disorder

4.1% — Lifetime: Alcohol abuse



Subramaniam, M., Abdin, E., Vaingankar, J. A., Shafie, S., Chua, B. Y., Sambasivam, R., Zhang, Y. J., Shahwan, S., Chang, S., Chua, H. C., Verma, S., James, L., Kwok, K. W., Heng, D., & Chong, S. A. (2019). Tracking the mental health of a nation: prevalence and correlates of mental disorders in the second Singapore mental health study. Epidemiology and psychiatric sciences, 29, e29. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796019000179

Singapore Mental Health Study

Adverse Childhood Experiences

MOST PREVALENT **ACES IN SINGAPORE SOCIETY** ACCORDING TO THE SMHS 2016

*Percentage of Singapore's population aged 18 and older who have experienced:

46.5% Emotional neglect



21.8% Parental separation, divorce or death of a parent



8.2% Battered mother or female guardian



8.0% Emotional abuse



6.0% Living with household members who are mentally ill or suicidal

Source: Institute of Mental Health. https://www.imh.com.sg/Mental-Health-Resources/Conditions-and-Challenges/Pages/Adverse-Childhood-Experiences.aspx

National Youth Mental Health Study

Conducted among Singaporeans aged 15-35 in 2022 (n=2600)

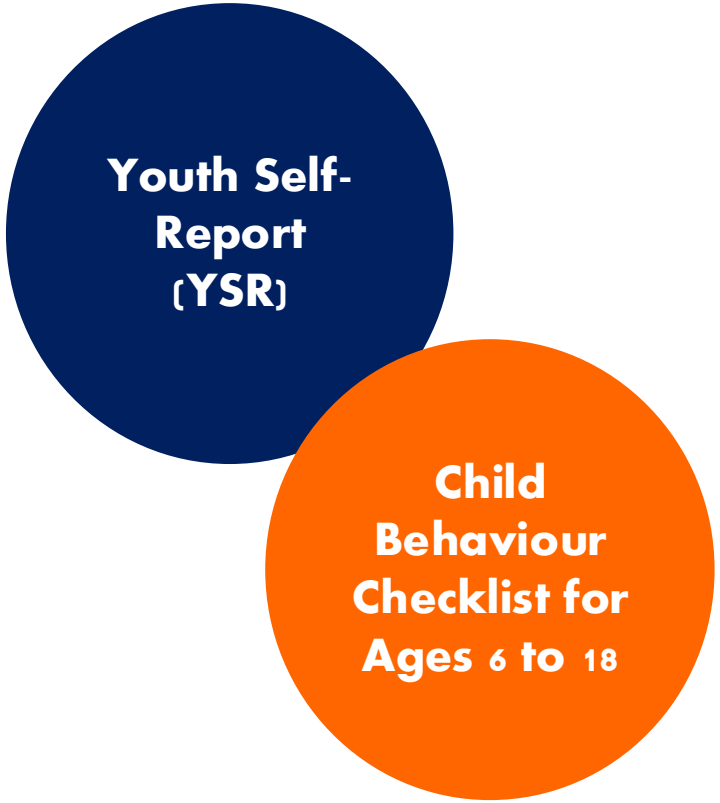
30.6%	**Severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or stress**
27.0%	**Severe to extremely severe symptoms of anxiety**
14.9%	**Severe to extremely severe symptoms of depression**

Source: Institute of Mental Health. (2024). Excessive social media use, body image concerns and being cyberbullied are significantly linked to mental health symptoms among youths. Retrieved from https://www.imh.com.sg/Newsroom/News-Releases/Documents/NYMHS_Press%20Release_FINAL19Sep2024.pdf

Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) Study

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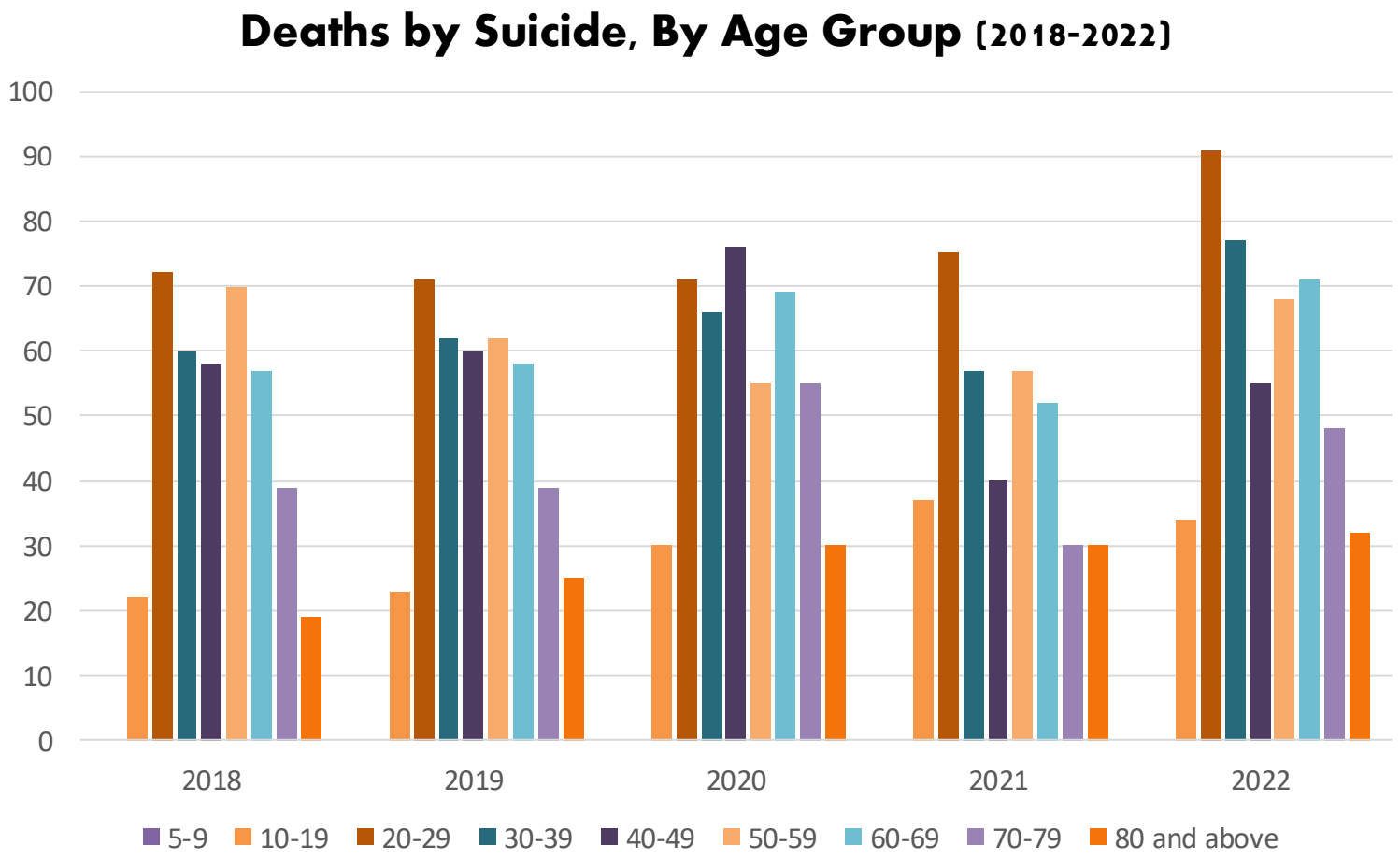
School-based adolescents aged 11-18 (n=3336) and parents (n=2475)



	Borderline	Clinical
Affective Problems (n=2245)	17.5%	15.1%
Anxiety Problems (n=1592)	10.5%	41.5%
Somatic Problems (n=2788)	10.6%	6.2%
ADHD Problems (n=2785)	10.6%	5.9%
Oppositional Defiant Problems (n=2900)	6.5%	6.5%
Conduct Problems (n=3001)	5.9%	4.2%

Wong, J. C. M., Lei, N. C. L., Kom, D. M. Y., Fee, V. H. F., Yap, N. H., Teoh, J. Y., Shen, L., Yap, Q. V., Wan, M. J. S., Du, R., Kroneman, L., Fung, D. S. S., Ong, S. H., Tian, C. S., Bin Sachiman, M. N. S., Sii, N. E., Teng, J. Y., Ng, T. P., & Verhulst, F. (2024). Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) in a student population: prevalence and predictors of mental health symptoms. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *15*, 1454484. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1454484

Suicide in Adolescents and Youth



Suicide remained the leading cause of death for Singaporeans aged 10–29 years in 2023

Total of 434 lives lost to suicide in 2023

Singapore Mental Health Matters. (2024). Project Hayat: White Paper on a National Suicide Prevention Strategy in Singapore.
Samaritans of Singapore. (2025). Suicide Numbers in Singapore Remain a Concern, A Notable Increase Among Adults Aged 30 to 39. https://www.sos.org.sg/pressroom/suicidestatistics2025/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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The Self as Embedded in Society: Pathways and 'Risk Factors'

National Youth Mental Health Study

Conducted among Singaporeans aged 15-35 in 2022 (n=2600)



The state of well-being of Singapore's youth

To assess the overall mental health of those aged 15 - 35 living in Singapore, the Institute of Mental Health carried out its first National Youth Mental Health Study in 2022. Here are the key findings:

Symptoms of depression

Nearly 15 per cent, or about one in seven youth,



had severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, such as feeling sad, empty and a lack of interest and pleasure in activities most of the time.

Those more likely to have had severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression were:

- **Aged 20 – 24** (versus those aged 30 – 35)
- **Single** (v married)
- **Unemployed** (v employed)
- **From vocational schools** (v universities)

Symptoms of anxiety

About 27 per cent, or more than one in four youth,



had severe or extremely severe symptoms of anxiety, such as feeling worried, tense and restless most of the time.

Those more likely to have had severe or extremely severe symptoms of anxiety were:

- **Aged 15 – 24** (v those aged 30 – 35)
- **Females** (v males)
- **Single** (v married)
- **From junior colleges or vocational schools** (v universities)
- **From families with a monthly household income of below $5,000** (v $10,000 – $19,999)

Symptoms of stress

Nearly 13 per cent, or about one in eight youth,



felt severe to extremely severe levels of stress, including being unable to relax or feeling upset or irritable most of the time.

Those more likely to have severe or extremely severe levels of stress were:

- **Aged 15 – 24** (v those aged 30 – 35)
- **Unemployed** (v employed)



- **Younger Age**
- **Single**
- **Unemployed**
- **Lower educational attainment**
- **Lower socioeconomic status**

Sources: Institute of Mental Health. (2024). Excessive social media use, body image concerns and being cyberbullied are significantly linked to mental health symptoms among youths. Retrieved from https://www.imh.com.sg/Newsroom/News-Releases/Documents/NYMHS_Press%20Release_FINAL19Sep2024.pdf
The Straits Times. (2024). https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/key-takeaways-from-imh-s-national-youth-mental-health-study

National Youth Mental Health Study

Conducted among Singaporeans aged 15-35 in 2022 (n=2600)

Examining psychological distress among youth in Singapore: Insights from the National Youth Mental Health Study

Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)

Table 3. Prevalence of severe and extremely severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, among youths serving National Service, in the first year of diploma/ degree, NEET, and working youth.

	Depression		Anxiety	
	N	%	N	%
Currently serving National Service	45	15.3	90	33.4
First year of diploma/degree	44	16.2	63	24.3
*NEET	51	29.8	68	38.4
Currently working	213	11.8	407	24.1

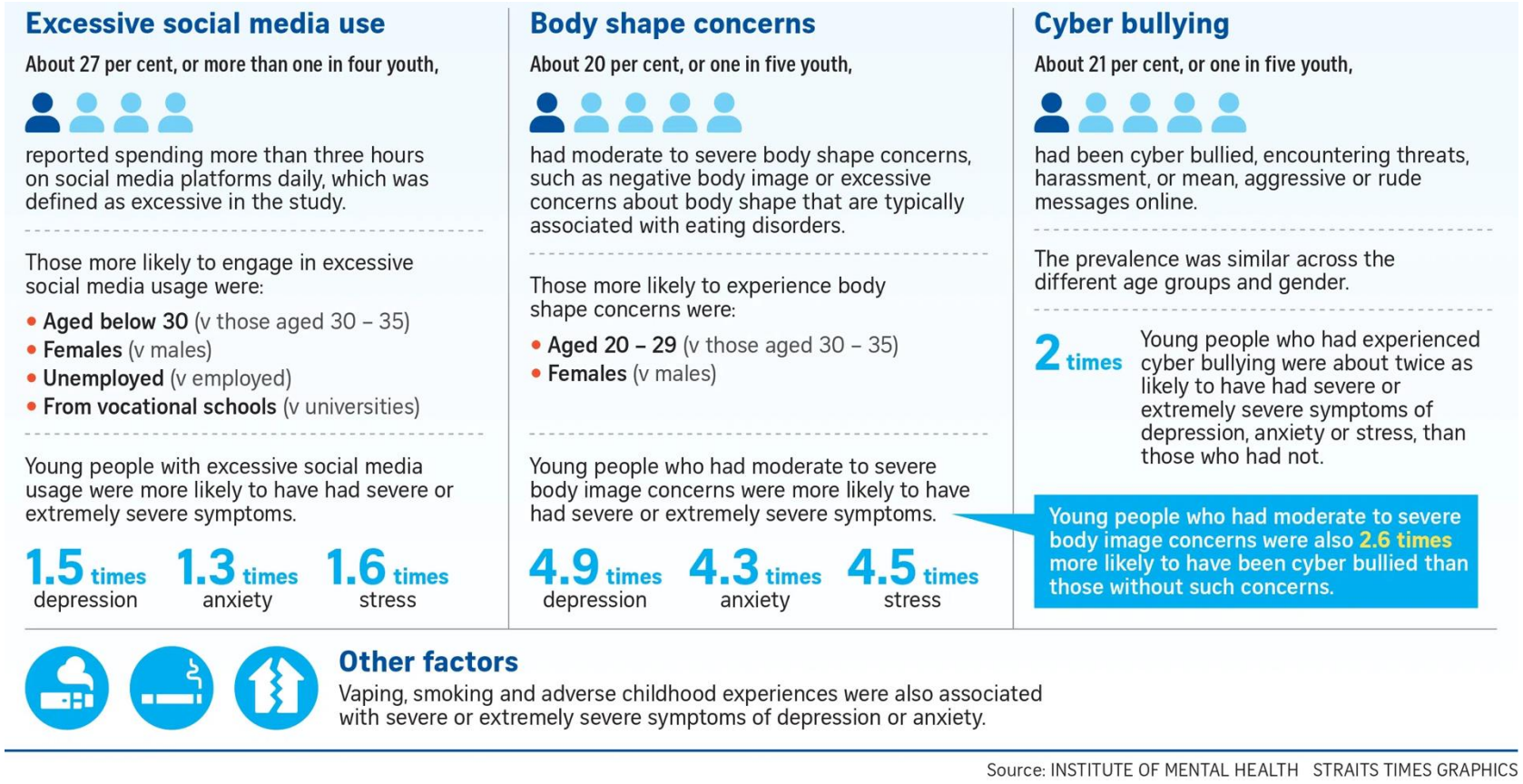


Subramaniam M, Vaingankar JA, Tan B, Abdin E, Chang S, Tan Y, Samari E, Archana S, Chua YC, Lee JK, Tang C, Lee YP, Chong SA, Verma SK. Examining psychological distress among youth in Singapore: Insights from the National Youth Mental Health Study. Asian J Psychiatr. 2025 Mar;105:104405. doi: 10.1016/j.ajp.2025.104405. Epub 2025 Feb 17. PMID: 39987652.

National Youth Mental Health Study

Conducted among Singaporeans aged 15-35 in 2022 (n=2600)

Factors linked to severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or stress



- **Excessive Social Media Use**
- **Body Shape Concerns**
- **Cyber Bullying**
- **Substance Use**
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Sources: Institute of Mental Health. (2024). Excessive social media use, body image concerns and being cyberbullied are significantly linked to mental health symptoms among youths. Retrieved from https://www.imh.com.sg/Newsroom/News-Releases/Documents/NYMHS_Press%20Release_FINAL19Sep2024.pdf
The Straits Times. (2024). https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/key-takeaways-from-imh-s-national-youth-mental-health-study

Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) Study

School-based adolescents aged 11-18 (n=3336) and parents (n=2475)

Identity

(AIDA – Assessment of Identity Development in Adolescents)

Identity Diffusion is a lack of integration of the concept of self and significant others (Goth et al., 2012), viewed as the basis for personality psychopathology.

Higher Identity Diffusion scores

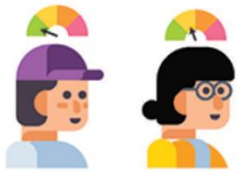


strongly positively associated

Higher YSR Internalizing factors Externalizing factors scores

Stress

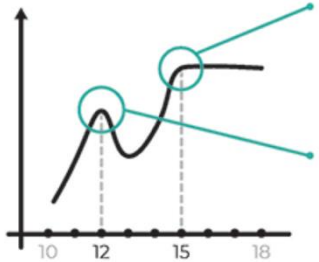
(PSS – Perceived Stress Scale; AESI – Academic Expectation Stress Inventory – Self & Others)



In general, boys had **lower perceived stress** levels than girls

Perceived stress levels peak at age





Academic expectation stress levels **peaked and plateaued** from ages 15 - 18

There was a **peak** in academic expectation – self & others stress levels at age 12, compared to ages 11, 13, and 14

Ethnicity: Malay adolescents more likely to experience clinical mental health issues

Housing Type: Higher levels of anxiety for adolescents in larger housing types

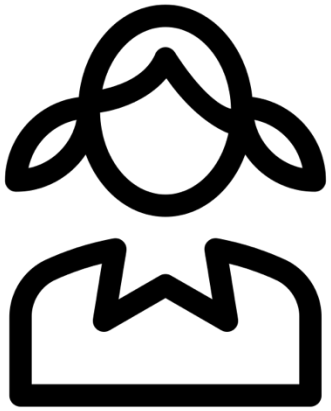
Wong, J. C. M., Lei, N. C. L., Kom, D. M. Y., Fee, V. H. F., Yap, N. H., Teoh, J. Y., Shen, L., Yap, Q. V., Wan, M. J. S., Du, R., Kroneman, L., Fung, D. S. S., Ong, S. H., Tian, C. S., Bin Sachiman, M. N. S., Sii, N. E., Teng, J. Y., Ng, T. P., & Verhulst, F. (2024). Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) in a student population: prevalence and predictors of mental health symptoms. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *15*, 1454484. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1454484

Suicide in Adolescents and Youth

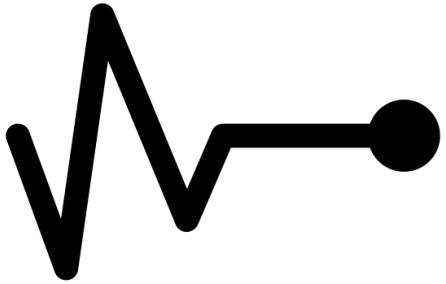
Adolescents Aged 10-19 Presenting to Emergency Department (n=221)

Adolescent self-harm and suicide attempts: An analysis of emergency department presentations in Singapore

Darren Kai Siang Chong[1], Vicknesan Jeyan Marimuttu[2] *MRC Psych (UK)*, Pei Shan Hoe[3] *MD*, Chu Shan Elaine Chew[4] *MMed (Paeds)*, Angelina Su Yin Ang[5] *MRCP (UK) (Paeds)*



Gender: Females Eight out of Ten Cases



Method: Drug overdose (female; 46.6%) and jumping from height (male; 18.8%)



Mental Health: Stress and Coping (50.7%), Mood and anxiety (53.4%)



Socio-Behavioural: Past attempts (17.2%); Substance use (17.6%); Gender identity issues (16.7%)

Chong DKS, Marimuttu VJ, Hoe PS, Chew CSE, Ang ASY. Adolescent self-harm and suicide attempts: An analysis of emergency department presentations in Singapore. Ann Acad Med Singap. 2025 Feb 27;54(2):78-86. doi: 10.47102/annals-acadmedsg.2024334. PMID: 40071456.

Icon Attribution (L-R): Icon Fair, Doodle Icons, Hanbai, Mangunkarsa

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Next Steps in Youth Mental Health
Gaps and Opportunities

More on My Journey

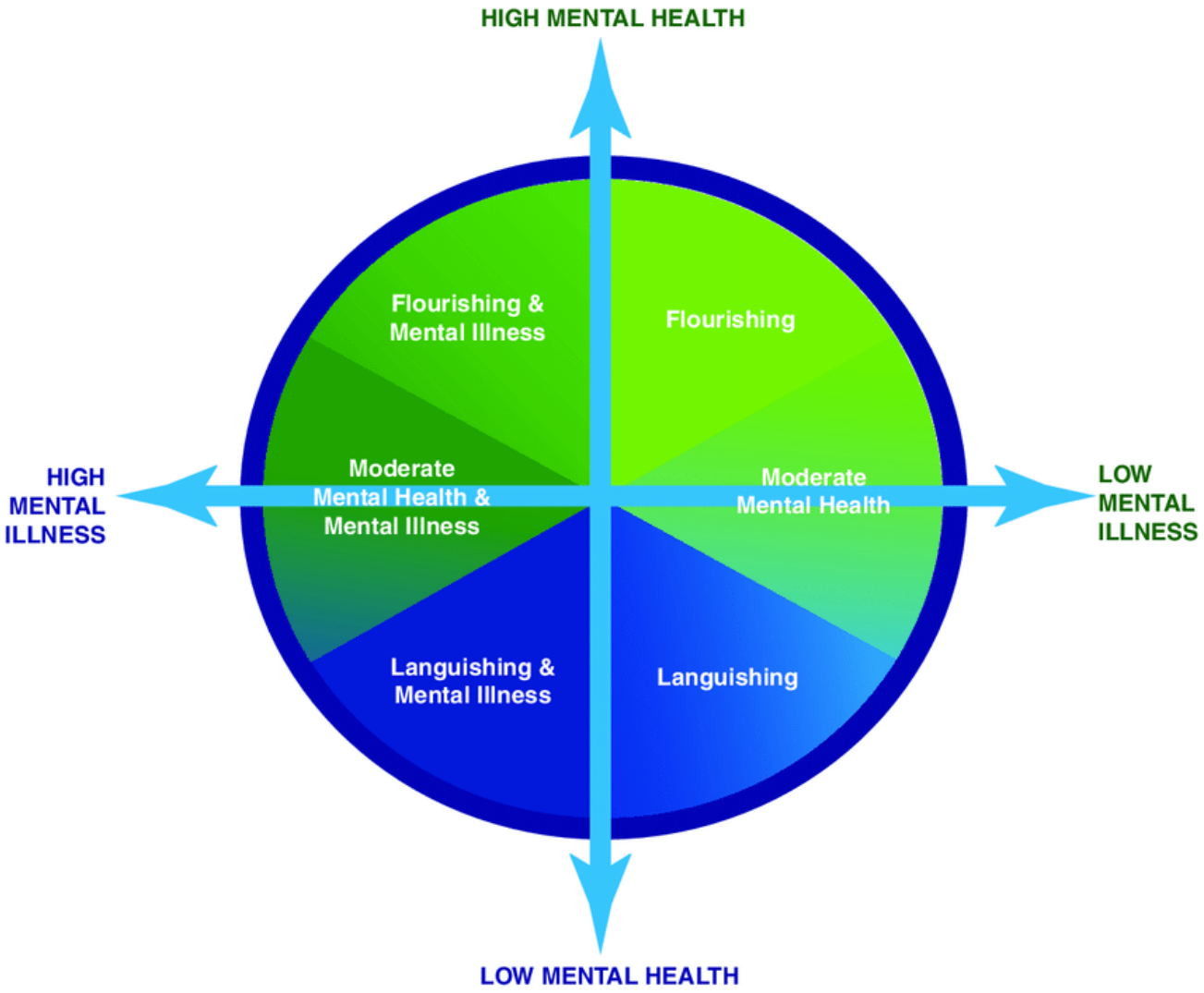
Moving Beyond Labels

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- Tourette
- Survivor of Sexual & Physical Abuse
- Addict
- HIV
- ADHD
- Trauma Survivor
- Anxiety Disorder
- Lived Experience of Suicide
- Neurodivergent

Dual-Continua Model of Mental Health

Mental Health and Wellbeing are Distinct, but Interrelated



***Pathos*: Pathogenic**

***Salus*: Salutogenic**

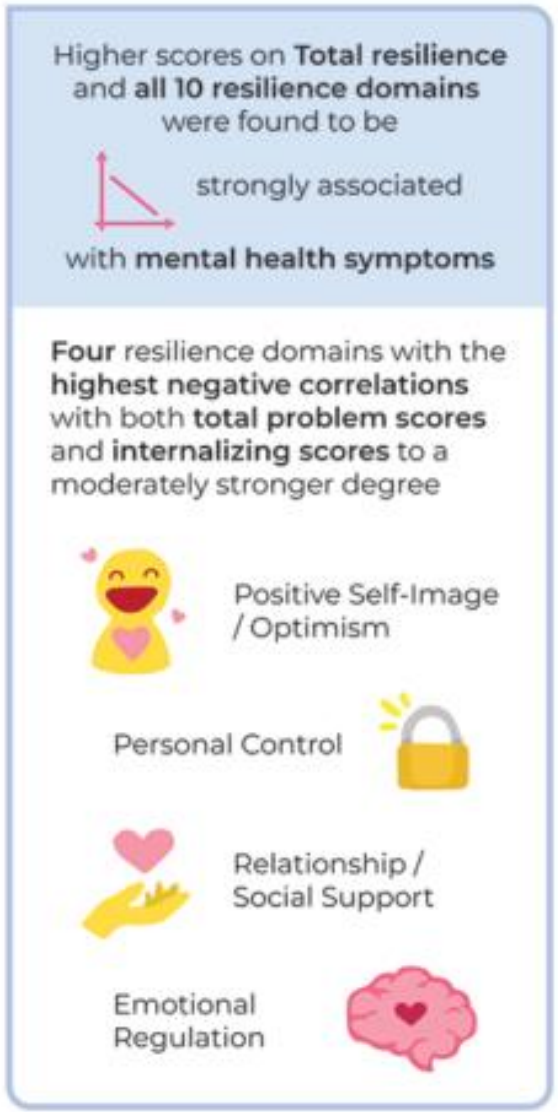
***Hale*: Complete State**

Keyes, C. L. M. (2017). The dual continua model: The foundation of the sociology of mental health and mental illness. In T. L. Scheid & E. R. Wright (Eds.), *A handbook for the study of mental health: Social contexts, theories, and systems* (3rd ed., pp. 66–81). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316471289.007

Mjøsund NH. A Salutogenic Mental Health Model: Flourishing as a Metaphor for Good Mental Health. 2021 Mar 12. In: Haugan G, Eriksson M, editors. Health Promotion in Health Care – Vital Theories and Research [Internet]. Cham (CH): Springer; 2021. Chapter 5. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK585669/ doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-63135-2_5

Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) Study





YEO BOON KHIM
MIND SCIENCE CENTRE

A research centre of:

NUS National University of Singapore

NUHS National University Health System

Wong, J. C. M., Lei, N. C. L., Kom, D. M. Y., Fee, V. H. F., Yap, N. H., Teoh, J. Y., Shen, L., Yap, Q. V., Wan, M. J. S., Du, R., Kroneman, L., Fung, D. S. S., Ong, S. H., Tian, C. S., Bin Sachiman, M. N. S., Sii, N. E., Teng, J. Y., Ng, T. P., & Verhulst, F. (2024). Youth Epidemiology and Resilience (YEAR) in a student population: prevalence and predictors of mental health symptoms. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *15*, 1454484. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1454484

A History of Medicalisation

Insights from Project Hayat: National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

Talk Therapies may not be the most suitable – other therapeutic arts

Lack of meaningful accommodations

Neurodivergent Youth
Exclusion and alienation

Older adults
Health expectancy

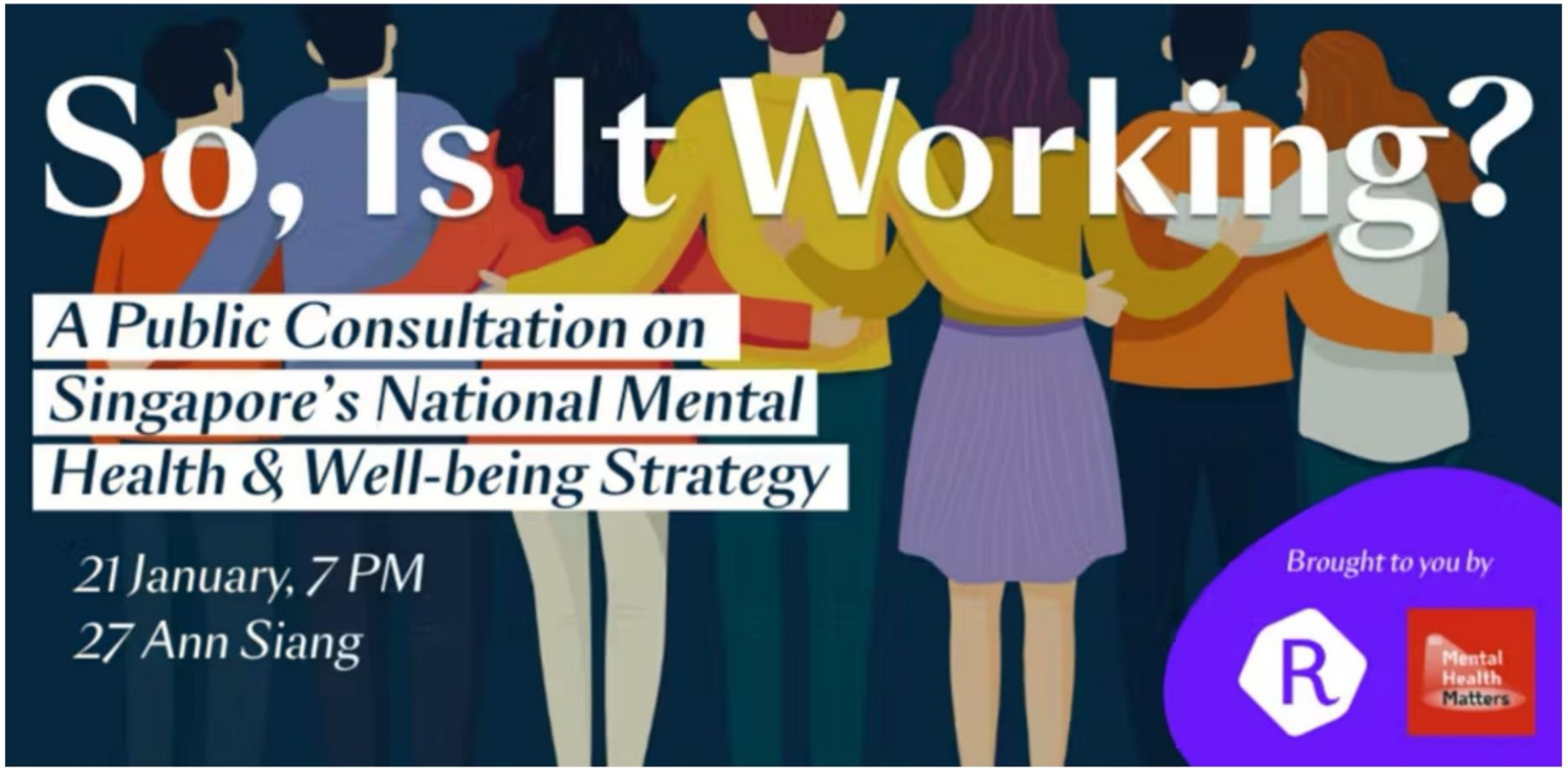
LGBTQIA+ Individuals
Discrimination and Exclusion

Caregivers
Caregiver Stress and Stigma

Low-Income Migrant Workers
Loss of Emotional Support and Finances

A History of Medicalisation

Insights from SG Mental Health Matters 2026 Public Consultations



A History of Medicalisation

Insights from SG Mental Health Matters 2026 Public Consultations

FOCUS AREAS



Ministry of Health Singapore. (2023). National Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Retrieved from https://www.moh.gov.sg/others/resources-and-statistics/national-mental-health-and-well-being-strategy--2023-/

A History of Medicalisation

Insights from SG Mental Health Matters 2026 Public Consultation on National Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

"There's strategy —
— and there's reality." (Participant)

Not tailored to the needs of diverse vulnerabilities

"Doesn't address the root cause issues of mental health challenges"

Great intention but lack of focus on on-the-ground awareness and implementation

Lack of intentional feedback loops and adaptation



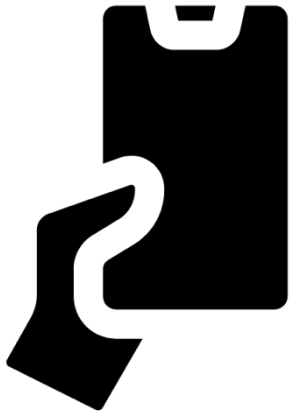
Youth Mental Health in Context

PERSONAL TROUBLES

PUBLIC ISSUES



Intergenerational Mental Health



The Anxious Generation



Socioeconomic Stressors



Diverse Lived Experiences of Health and Wellbeing

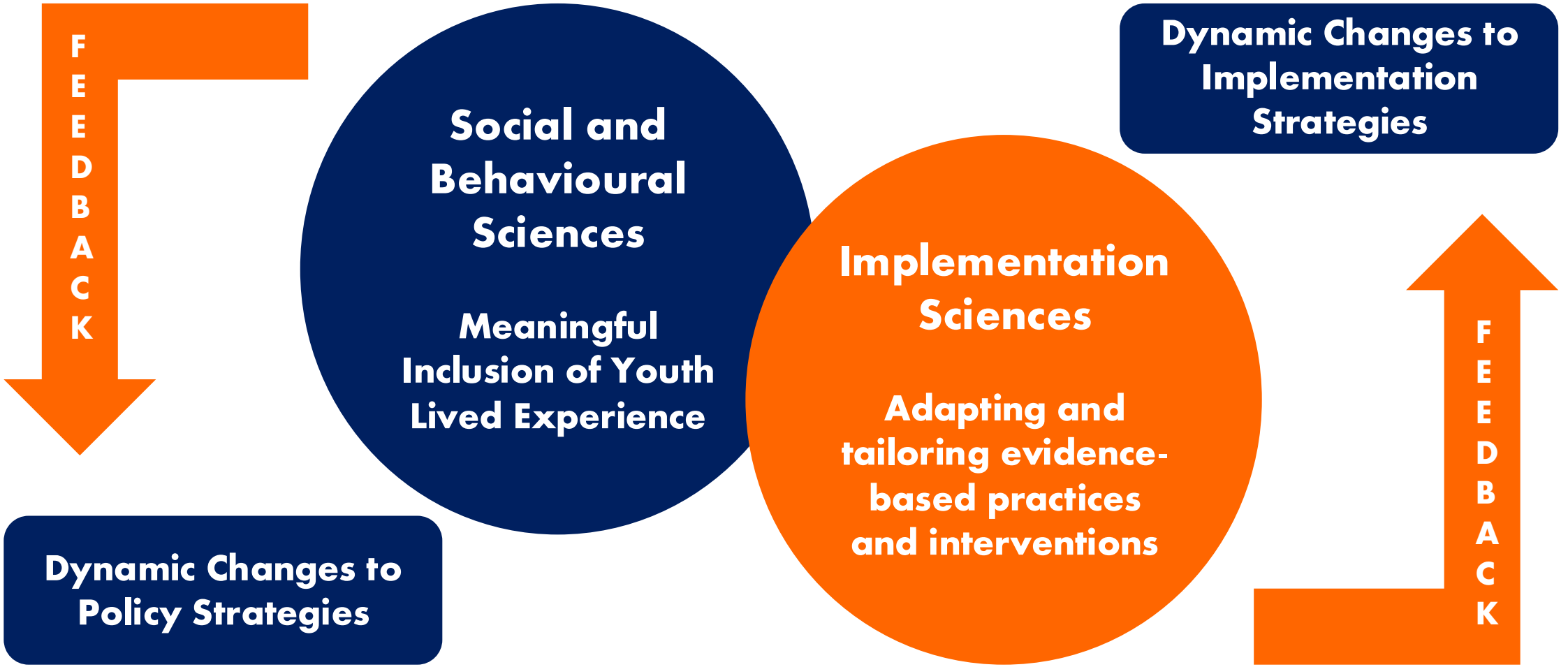
Mills, C.W. (1959) The Sociological Imagination. Oxford University Press, New York.
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Transforming Youth Mental Health
Promoting Health as a Complete State

Dynamic Sustainability

Fundamental Changes for Sustainability and Accountability



Meaningful Engagement of Lived Experience

Inclusion of Youth: Letting Lived Experience Lead



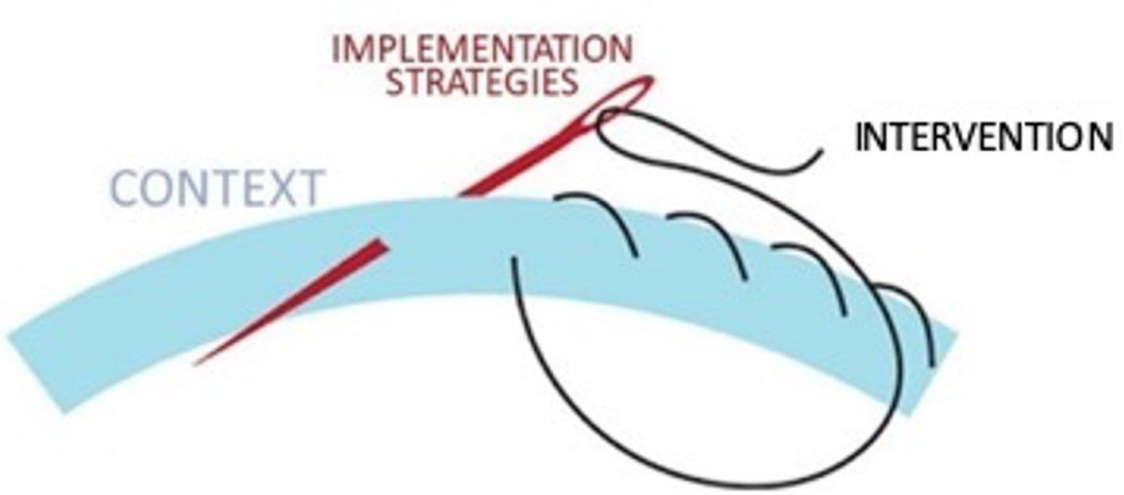
Chan Chan Li Shan, L. S. (2026). Singapore's Mental Health Peer Movement. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 13634615251409682.

Tailoring 'Mental Health and Wellbeing'

Tailoring Interventions: The Role of Implementation Science

Context is a central feature of implementation science, yet it is frequently poorly defined or goes unreported (Brownson, 2021)

"Threading the needle" requires designing EBPs and implementation strategies that are aligned with key features of context (Haines, 2021)



Brownson, R.C., Kumanyika, S.K., Kreuter, M.W. et al. Implementation science should give higher priority to health equity. Implementation Sci 16, 28 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-021-01097-0

Haines, E.R., Dopp, A., Lyon, A.R. *et al.* Harmonizing evidence-based practice, implementation context, and implementation strategies with user-centered design: a case example in young adult cancer care. *Implement Sci Commun* **2**, 45 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1186/s43058-021-00147-4

Example: Suicide Prevention

Insights from Project Hayat: National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

Talk Therapies may not be the most suitable – other therapeutic arts

Neurodivergent Youth
Exclusion and alienation

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Health expectancy

LGBTQIA+ Individuals
Discrimination and Exclusion

Lack of meaningful accommodations

Caregivers
Caregiver Stress and Stigma

Low-Income Migrant Workers
Loss of Emotional Support and Finances

A Complete State of Wellness

"Mental health policy can no longer proclaim to promote the mental health of the population while investing only in treatment and the study of mental illness.

[…]

Public health cannot promote mental health solely by reducing mental illness, and no amount of wishful thinking will make this fact disappear."

Keyes, C. L. M. (2017). The dual continua model: The foundation of the sociology of mental health and mental illness. In T. L. Scheid & E. R. Wright (Eds.), *A handbook for the study of mental health: Social contexts, theories, and systems* (3rd ed., pp. 66–81). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316471289.007

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