

# YOUTH-AT-RISK

## in Singapore

In Singapore, the official definition of "youth" are those 15-35, but charities tend to use "youth" for 12-21.

Youth- at-risk are:  
 "Those who have been subjected to a combination of interrelated biological, psychological, and social factors that result in a greater likelihood for the development of delinquency, substance abuse, or other related anti-social and self-destructive behaviours"  
 -Singapore's definition as of 2017  
 (from Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime, 2002)



## WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES?

### 1 Increased difficulty in detecting YAR

- "Nowadays, it is not as easy to identify youth-at-risk, because they may come from affluent families and not show troubled behaviour at school!"<sup>1</sup>
- An increase in number of divorces, smaller family sizes, more non-nuclear structures, more remarriages and reconstituted families increase the challenges faced by youth. These changing family trends tend to be the deeper root cause of issues.

### 2 Increase in mental health issues among youths

- Number of suicides for teens reached all-time high in 2015 (27 teens, up from 2011-2014 average of 14/year)<sup>3</sup>
  - Nurture SG (committee to enhance health outcomes in children and youth) identified mental health (self-harm and suicide) as a growing concern<sup>4</sup>.
- > Singapore Association for Mental Health<sup>5</sup> is one of the charities providing counselling and rehabilitative services for people with mental health issues.

### 3 Increase in cyber related issues

- 10-30% of teens experience cyber-bullying<sup>6,7</sup>
- Up to 40% of victims also cyber-bully other
- 9% of Singaporean children age 9-13 have been identified as "pathological gamers"<sup>8</sup>

---> While the MOE has incorporated cyber-wellness into schools' curriculum, more can be done in preventive and remedial work, especially for vulnerable children and youth.

### 4 Increase in youth crime, particularly drugs

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of youths <sup>9</sup> arrested	3031	3120	3265	
No. of drug abusers <20 years <sup>10</sup>		190	283	277

- More than 1 in 10 youths aged 13 to 21 years agree with the statement "It is alright to try drugs for a new experience".<sup>11</sup>
- "The overall drug abuse situation in Singapore is under control... But there are areas of concern...We are also seeing more cases of students abusing drugs."<sup>12</sup> (Parliamentary Secretary Amrin Amin for the Ministry of Home Affairs in his speech on 3 March 2017).
- "The profile of young drug users is no longer pigeonholed to a particular stereotype of children from broken families or those who join gangs. Some of them also come from good schools"<sup>13</sup>

## HOW CAN DONORS HELP?

There are approximately 110 charities in Singapore running programmes for youth, ranging from mentoring to professional counselling, through to residential rehabilitation, reaching about 70,000 youth each year.

Several experts that we spoke to said that there are in fact "too many" organisations doing similar work in this sector. In this context, the government is consolidating its support.

New needs are also emerging, meaning that charities need to adapt and develop new programmes.

In addition to continuing mainstream funding, we believe that donors can help meet these new challenges by:

1. Funding programmes that address changing needs, e.g. outreach efforts that help identify youth-at-risk (cyber or otherwise); school social work programmes (*not pure afterschool, but programmes that give social workers a larger and presence in schools*); and vocational programmes for out-of-school youth.
2. Funding research and evaluation i.e. support charities to carry out programme evaluation and impact measurement, as these are resource heavy efforts that may fall outside of government funding. Some youth-related charities we came across that invest heavily in research and evaluation are Students Care Service and Singapore Children's Society (*note: there many charities that want to carry out research and evaluation but lack resources*)
3. Funding capability building- i.e. support charities in increasing their ability to adapt to emerging trends. This could mean charities that have innovative mindsets or invest systematically in training their staff.

#### SOURCES

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