

# Policy Digest 2021



## Shifting Paradigms

Moving Forward in Times of Change







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## **MENDAKI Policy Digest 2021**

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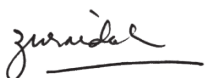
# CEO's Foreword

As we emerge and recover steadily from COVID-19, we also draw many lessons from the continued challenges posed from the pandemic. By keeping abreast of the different global approaches to dealing with COVID-19, Singapore continually refined our strategies to stabilise the COVID-19 situation in our country. This had allowed most of us to stay safe and resilient throughout the pandemic. Schools, businesses, and communities have been actively adapting and coping with the changes that the pandemic has brought into our lives. Home-based learning, telecommuting for work and observing social distancing measures are some examples of how our daily lives had transformed in the past two years.

Despite these challenges, it is heartening to see Singaporeans from all walks of life coming together in a short span of time to learn new skills, venture into new careers and supporting each other emotionally, physically, and financially. With the theme **'Shifting Paradigms – Moving Forward in Times of Change'**, MENDAKI Policy Digest 2021 serves to provide relevant and varied perspectives within the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore. The uncertainties brought upon by the pandemic has highlighted the importance to review, reframe and respond in these changing times. There has also been a growing need for policymakers to comprehend the issues from different perspectives and redefine programmes to have a more targeted approach to effectively address the current issues and concerns faced by the community. We hope that the articles in this year's Policy Digest would give readers a better appreciation and context of the challenges faced by Singaporeans and reflect upon their tenacity to address complex and new issues which arose from the pandemic.

We must remember that change is a natural and necessary part of innovation and growth. As such, we must learn to cope with the changes brought about by COVID-19, and seize the opportunities that it presents to emerge stronger. There are many opportunities available for our community such as reskilling and upskilling in this economic landscape. In MENDAKI, we will continue our efforts to empower and navigate our community towards success.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the authors for their insightful contributions to the MENDAKI Policy Digest 2021.



**Zuraidah Abdullah**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Yayasan MENDAKI

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# Editor's Note

This year's Policy Digest seeks to improve on the accessibility of information to the community by providing a more comprehensive perceptivity of current issues through the lenses of policymakers, implementers, and individuals. The Policy Digest's collaborative platform facilitates insightful discussions on the important issues currently faced by the Malay/Muslim community. The theme of MENDAKI Policy Digest 2021 is **'Shifting Paradigms - Moving Forward in Times of Change'**. The continuous spread of the virus has impacted every aspect of our everyday lives. The ripple effect has not only changed the way we work, but it has also affected the underlying mechanism behind the fabric of society, as far as the social and economic sectors are concerned. As momentum has shifted in the race to normalcy in the post COVID-19 era, the focus has shifted from sustaining the efforts our nation has implemented over the past two years to positioning ourselves better in uplifting the economic and social welfare of our community.

The scale of change that the pandemic has engendered reflects the need to strengthen Singapore's social compact. In Budget 2021, the government plans to address the challenges faced by the more vulnerable members of our community. Thus, for policymakers, the priority has been to reflect upon the inequalities present within the community and mitigate its effect as we ensure accessibility of the necessary resources vital in this transformative change of digital growth. Therefore, the medium to mitigate the effects of inequalities lies on the implementers to effectively collaborate with various institutions to directly provide these resources to address the concerns of Singaporeans. It is crucial for us to hear every Singaporeans' concerns as these issues may not be straightforward as they first seem. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure a circulatory feedback system across policymakers, implementers, and individuals.

MENDAKI, the pioneer Self-Help Group, has led numerous programmes and supportive measures to empower the communities by ensuring equal opportunities and accessibility. In the thick of the pandemic, we reflected upon the significant impact COVID-19 could have within the Malay/Muslim community and promptly provided assistance to the community. Our efforts have since shifted to building a more sustainable blueprint. As most of our programmes were established prior to COVID-19, we have shifted the focus to ensure continuity of our programmes by moving onto digital platforms (e.g. eKelasMateMatika (eKMM), eMENDAKI Tuition Scheme (eMTS) and eMentoring@MTS). In addition, it is paramount that we alleviate the effects of social isolation due to restrictions of COVID-19. Family Excellence Circle (FEC) was crucial in providing our Malay/Muslim community the networking opportunity to share feelings of positivity in terms of their knowledge, ideas, and expertise in parenting practices throughout the pandemic. This will increase social connectedness between families and promote confidence in parenting skills.

As the pandemic continues, it is dependent on us as a community now to take back control to reconstruct a new normalcy and a new narrative of hope in our daily lives. This is evident in the various articles contributed by our authors as they reflected on the solutions and strategies implemented as they journeyed through the uncertainties of a post COVID-19 world. Hence, the Policy Digest aims to provide shared experiences of Singaporeans, learnt from best practices as well as to glean insights to navigate existing and future issues.

**Muhammad Faisal Aman**  
Editor

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A photograph of a classroom with students in blue uniforms and face masks. Some students are seated at desks, one is using a tablet. In the background, three adults are standing near whiteboards. A large 'STOP' sign is on the wall.

# Education

Digital Learning

Mentoring & Guidance

Educational Environment





## Digital learning:

### Mediating the social divide in children's digital media experiences



MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS) Commencement, Unity Secondary School, January 2021. Tutors and students interact on the first day of MTS 2021 in line with safe-distancing measures.

**F**ei Victor Lim is an Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is interested in how and what we should teach learners in today's digital age. As an educator and educational researcher, he researches and teaches on multiliteracies, multimodal discourse analyses, and digital learning. Victor has experience as Principal Investigator and Co-Principal Investigator of several research grants amounting to more than USD 1.5 million. He serves as a consultant for the World Bank on digital literacy projects in Africa and has been invited as a speaker across the continents of Asia, Africa, Australia, North America and Europe.



By Assistant Professor Fei Victor Lim  
National Institute of Education  
Nanyang Technological University  
Singapore



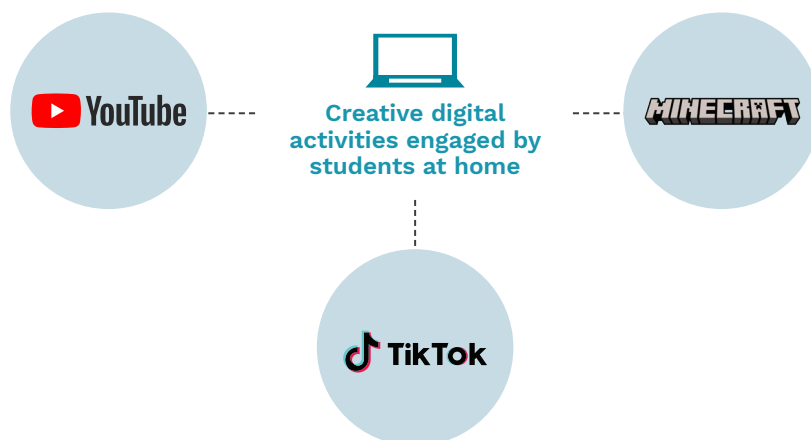
The Smart Nation vision in Singapore involves transforming the country through technology and helping everyone to benefit from digitalisation. One of the silver linings in the current COVID-19 health crisis is our increasing appreciation of how digital technology can be used to support work, learning, and play at a time when social interactions are constrained.

Children's use of digital devices has often caused concern amongst parents because of the widely-reported negative effect of screen-time on children's physical and social well-being. Screen-time, hence, has been the constant source of much conflict between parents and children. While moderation of use is of fundamental importance, it can also be productive to shift the attention from screen-time to the nature of their digital media experiences, that is the content and activities which they engage with on their devices.

Not all engagements with digital devices are detrimental and some digital media experiences can be positive. In a paper I published in *Learning, Media and Technology*<sup>1</sup>, we examined *YouTube* video productions by children around the world, including Singapore. Our analysis of their artefacts revealed aspects of the children's creativity, critical thinking, and their sensitivity to the ways meanings are expressed multimodally.

<sup>1</sup> Lim, F. V., & Toh, W. (2020). Children's digital multimodal composing: Implications for learning and teaching. *Learning, Media, and Technology*. 45(4). 422-432.





In an Education Research Funding Programme project on multiliteracies which led at the National Institute of Education, we interviewed primary school students on their digital experiences at home. We were suitably impressed by the creative activities in which the students were engaged independently. These activities include the creation of *YouTube* videos on slime-making and *TikTok* dance videos as well as the impressive design of virtual worlds in *Minecraft*.

What was noteworthy that emerged from our interviews was the disparate experiences of children in their digital media engagement. Some children had powerful devices and easy access to premium subscription content and services, and were self-directed in their creative use of editing tools to make digital artefacts. On the other hand, other children had to deal with a more constrained digital media experience involving either playing freemium games with (sometimes age-inappropriate) advertisements or passively watching countless of *YouTube* videos on their

digital devices. It was clear from our data that there was a disparity in the children's digital media experiences.

As the sudden shift towards home-based learning during the pandemic had revealed, the basic availability of a laptop for every student to use at home cannot be assumed. Social enterprises and charities, such as Engineering Good, had to scramble and plug the gap to provide devices for students in need. The Singapore Ministry of Education also responded by accelerating the roll-out of its plan to provide a personal learning device for all secondary school students this year (2021) - the plan for primary school students is yet to be announced.

However, devices are only part of the answer.

**After all, the digital divide is not just about access, but it is also about the differences in the digital literacies of children**

## to navigate the digital environment.

Such knowledge and skills can be developed when parents use digital devices together with their children to guide them in their engagement. In another paper I published in the journal *Interactive Learning Environments*<sup>2</sup>, we analysed cases of parent-child co-play of digital games at home and showed how such experiences could develop the child's digital literacies.

Digital co-play requires guidance and support from educators as well as parents. However, many parents understandably may not have the time and knowledge to guide their children in this. Data from the Singapore Longitudinal Early Development Study (SG Leads), conducted by the National University of Singapore<sup>3</sup>, reported that almost two thirds of parents having higher economic status (SES) frequently engage with digital co-play with their children whereas less than half of parents of lower SES do so.

Parents who frequently engage with digital co-play with their children	
Higher SES	Lower SES
Almost 2/3	Less than 1/2

*Data from the Singapore Longitudinal Early Development Study (SG Leads), conducted by the National University of Singapore*

This is where the digital divide can be mediated by community

<sup>2</sup> Toh, W., & Lim, F.V. (2021). Let's play together: Ways of parent-child digital co-play for learning. *Interactive Learning Environments*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1951768>

<sup>3</sup> Wei-Jun Jean Yeung & Lim Sun Sun, "Mind the gap - income divide in children's use of digital devices," *The Straits Times*, September 17, 2021.

initiatives, such as providing support in access, mentoring, and resources for parents and children in need. I echo a good recommendation from the researchers of SG Leads, who suggested a device loan programme where devices are pre-loaded with curated apps that have good educational quality and cognitively stimulating content.

In addition to this, social service agencies could also implement a digital buddy programme, where older youth can serve as a mentor to guide underprivileged children in their digital engagement. The digital buddy, being a more senior peer, can join their partner in digital co-play, model positive cyber wellness, as well as provide advice and guidance for the partner in navigating the digital environment.



### Digital Buddy Programme

Older youth can serve as a mentor to guide underprivileged children in their digital engagement

Other ways to mediate the digital divide include providing resources

for parents to support them in their digital co-play with their children. For example, as an output from a research project, I developed a website offering resources for caregivers in the form of conversational prompts for learning presented on a deck of cards that parents can use with their children during their digital media experiences. The aim is to bridge the knowledge gap of parents on how they can help their child to learn from the digital co-play experience.

Such ground-up community efforts can complement the systemic education initiatives, such as the National Digital Literacy Programme, which was launched by the Singapore Ministry of Education in 2020 to make digital learning inclusive by equipping students with the digital literacies to be future-ready.

### Research studies to understand the impact of SES on the digital literacies of children in Singapore could

**also provide policy makers with a deeper understanding and effective monitoring of equity issues that could exacerbate the digital divide.**

An example is the ongoing Temasek Singapore Millennium Foundation research project at the Centre of Research on Child Development, National Institute of Education, led by Dr. Sun He and myself. The project seeks to understand young children's digital practice and its impact on their bilingual learning, socio-emotional wellbeing, and brain development across SES groups.

**Temasek Singapore Millennium Foundation research project**



Objective: To understand young children's digital practice and its impact on their bilingual learning, socio-emotional wellbeing, and brain development across SES groups.



*MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS) Commencement, Unity Secondary School, January 2021. Deputy Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI, Senior Minister of State for Ministry of Defence & Ministry of Manpower, Mr Zaqy Mohamad, visited the commencement of MTS 2021.*

As Singapore advances in its efforts towards the Smart Nation vision, it is important to ensure digital equity and inclusivity. We hope that in highlighting the different aspects of the digital divide in our children's experience and proposing some possible solutions to tackle the issues, we can contribute to the national agenda of reducing social stratification and ensure a continuous intergenerational mobility in Singapore. ■

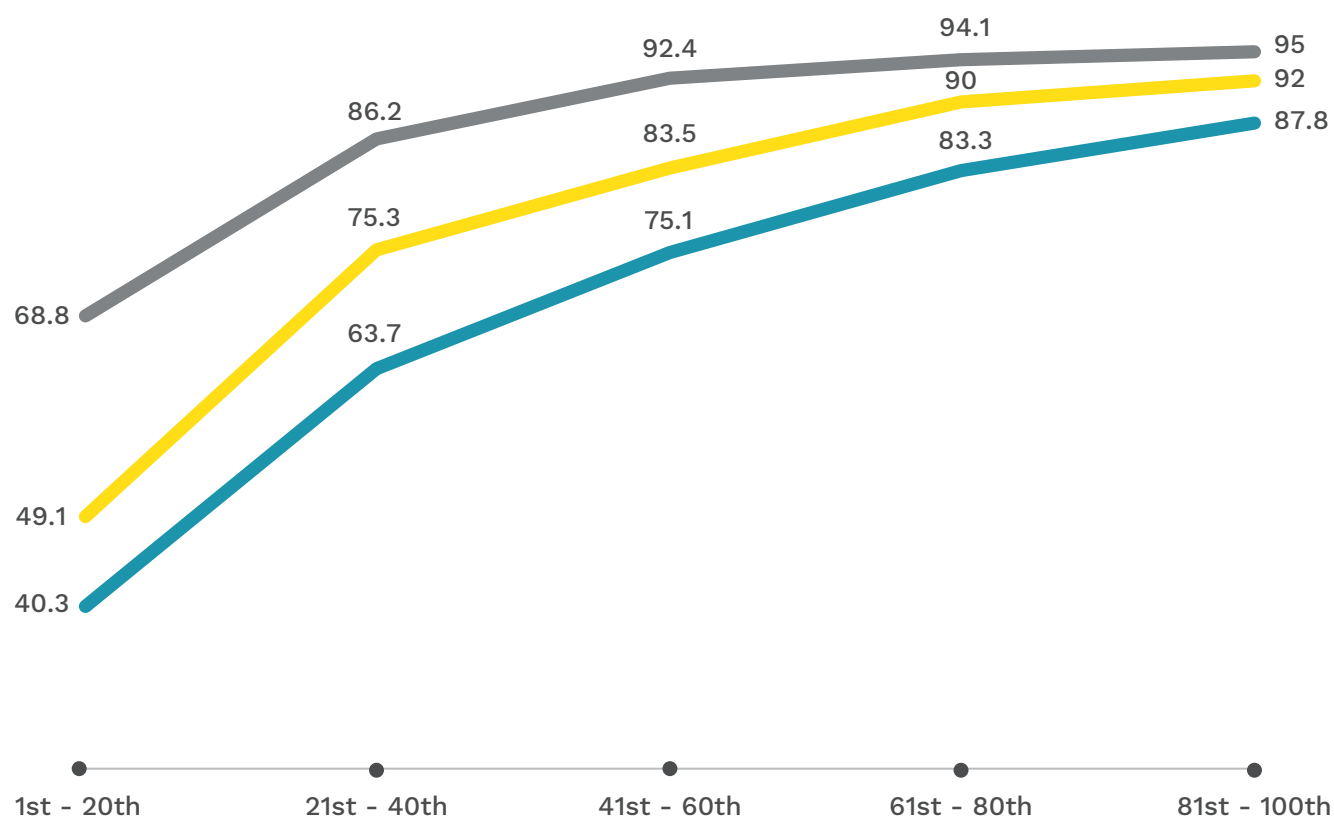
## Did you know?

## Households with Internet Subscription/Access



Households with Internet Subscription/Access by Income Quintile<sup>1</sup>, 2007/08 - 2017/18

● 2007/08 ● 2012/13 ● 2017/18



The proportion of households with an Internet subscription increased steadily over the past decade. In 2017/18, almost nine in ten households had access to the Internet.

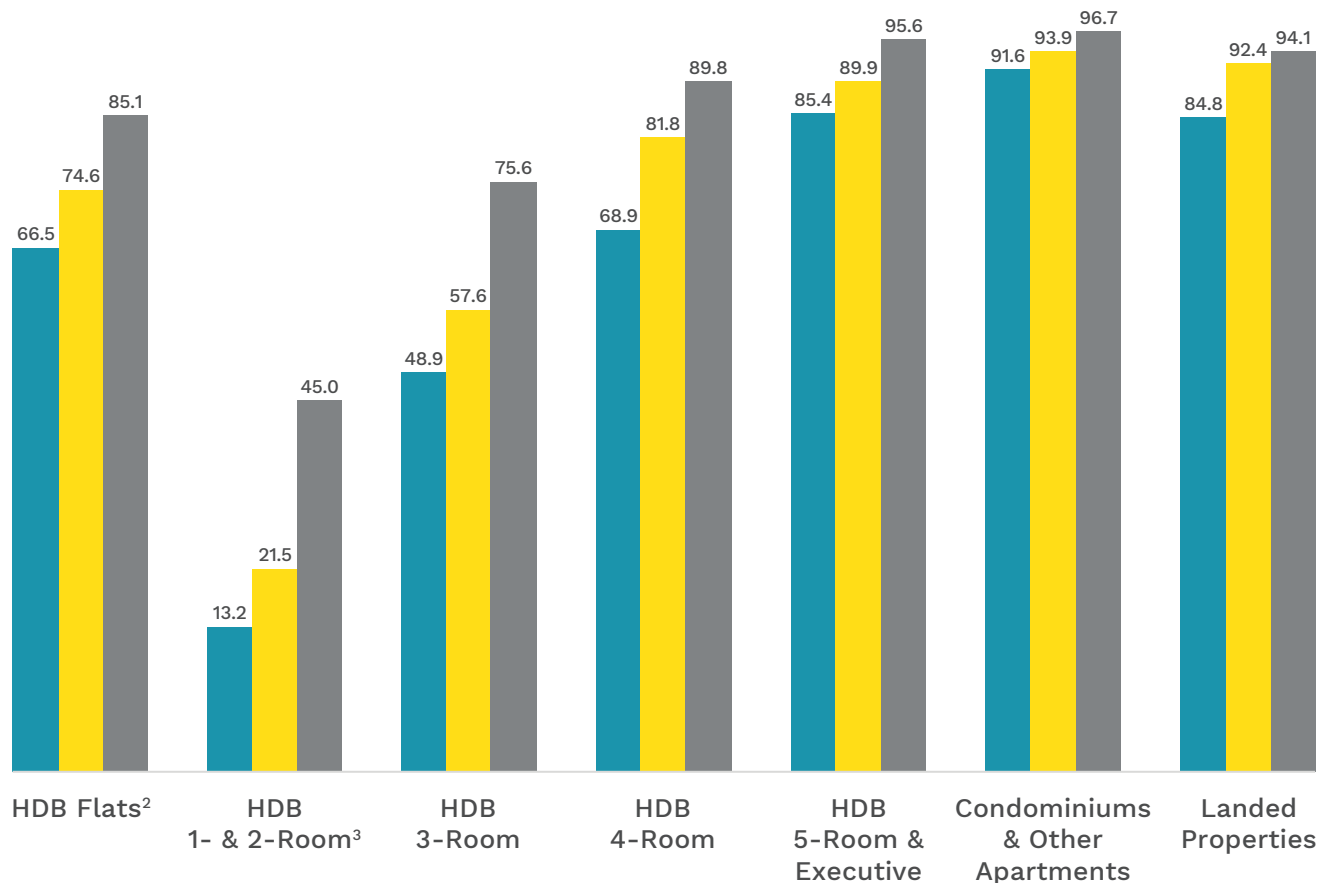
<sup>1</sup> Based on ranking of all resident households by their monthly household income from all sources per household member (including employer CPF contributions).

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Report on the household expenditure survey 2017/18*. Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore.

## Households with Internet Subscription/Access

Households with Internet Subscription/Access  
by Type of Dwelling, 2007/08 - 2017/18

● 2007/08 ● 2012/13 ● 2017/18



The increase was observed among households across all income groups and housing types. Households in HDB 1- and 2-room flats saw the most significant increase, with their Internet subscription rate more than doubling from 22 per cent in 2012/13 to 45 per cent in 2017/18.

<sup>2</sup> Data prior to 2017/18 include non-privatised HUDC flats. As at 2017/18, all HUDC flats had been privatised and are grouped with Condominiums and Other Apartments.

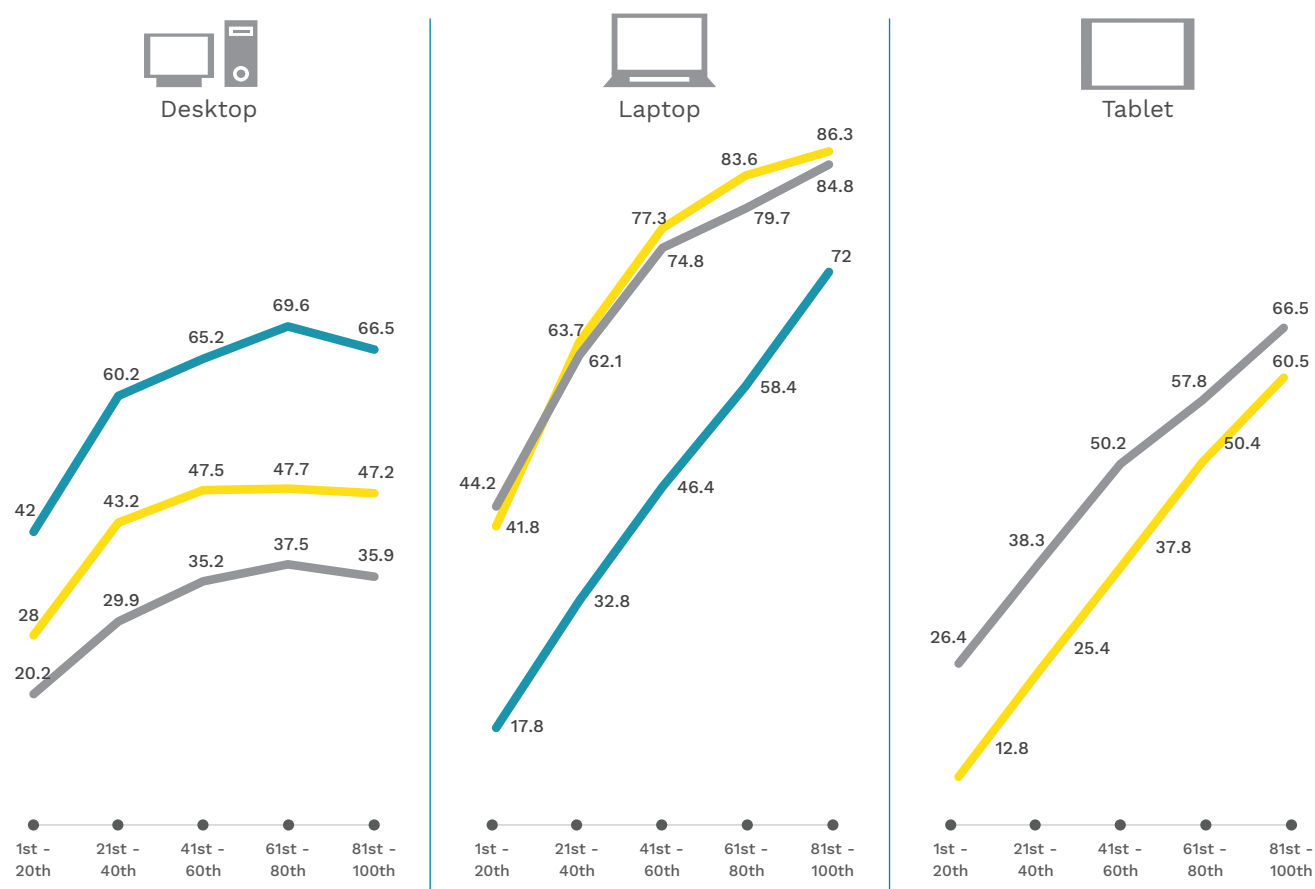
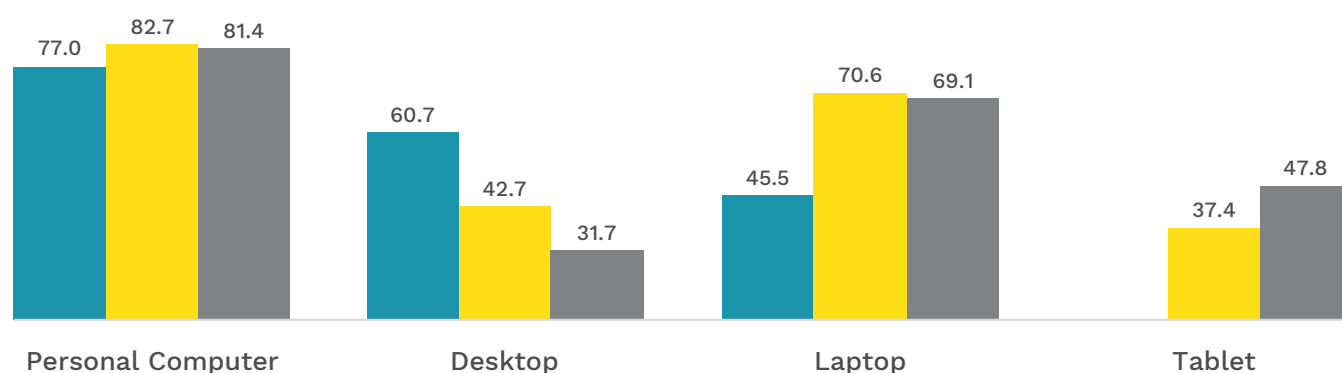
<sup>3</sup> Includes HDB Studio Apartments.

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Report on the household expenditure survey 2017/18*. Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore.

## Households with Personal Computer

Households with Personal Computer by Type and Income Quintile<sup>1</sup>, 2007/08 – 2017/18

● 2007/08 ● 2012/13 ● 2017/18



<sup>1</sup> Based on ranking of all resident households by their monthly household income from all sources per household member (including employer CPF contributions).

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Report on the household expenditure survey 2017/18*. Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore.

## Households with Personal Computer

Households with Personal Computer by Type of Dwelling, 2007/08 - 2017/18

● 2007/08 ● 2012/13 ● 2017/18



The proportion of households with personal computers (PC, including desktop, laptop and tablet) remained stable at 81 per cent in 2017/18. With people increasingly accessing information on-the-go, the proportion of households with tablet PCs rose from 37 per cent in 2012/13 to 48 per cent in 2017/18<sup>4</sup>, while those with desktop PCs fell from 43 per cent to 32 per cent over the same period. Similar trends could be observed across all income groups and housing types.

<sup>2</sup> Data prior to 2017/18 include non-privatised HUDC flats. As at 2017/18, all HUDC flats had been privatised and are grouped with Condominiums and Other Apartments.

<sup>3</sup> Includes HDB Studio Apartments.

<sup>4</sup> Data on tablet were first captured in HES 2012/13. Hence, data from 2007/08 are not available for comparison.

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Report on the household expenditure survey 2017/18*. Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore.



# Life is incomplete without masks, hand sanitisers and remote everything:

Reflections on lifelong learning and everyday urban life during COVID-19



MENDAKI SENSE Jump Career Fair, Marsiling Community Centre, October 2020. Virtual interviews at the launch of M<sup>3</sup> fourth focus area on Employment and Employability in conjunction with MENDAKI SENSE's first JUMP Career Fair.

**I**rna Nurlina Masron is currently a doctoral student at the Department of Geography, Birkbeck College, University of London. Her research interests include the intersections of urban politics, postcolonial heritage, and housing issues in Southeast Asia. She holds a PhD scholarship from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. Irna was previously a researcher at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design. She completed her Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Political Science from the National University of Singapore.



By Irna Nurlina Masron  
 Doctoral student  
 Department of Geography, Birkbeck College, University of London

Of late, the Malay proverb "*jauh perjalanan, luas pemandangan*" (the further one travels, the more extensive one's knowledge becomes) came to mind repeatedly. I was reminded of the literal and metaphorical meanings of this universal phrase as I reflected on being 7000 miles away from home during a pandemic. I wondered how taking up residence in a non-Malay-speaking and hyper-diverse part of the world to pursue further studies is reshaping my sense of time and space as I step outside my proverbial bubble. One sees more when travelling outside of one's home or familiar surroundings. Through reflection, it will help us gain perspective of the larger picture rather than just the sum of its parts.

There is, however, more to be said. If we take the proverb literally and use the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel as a way to widen one's horizons in encountering foreignness and novelty is no longer as easily accessible to many people.

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**Paradoxically, the pandemic brings about a kind of forced familiarisation with our local environment which arguably has positive effects, such as a stronger sense of community and support for local social life and neighbourhood economies.**

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But the multiple and changing socio-spatial constraints may also

lead to narrow views, not least in dealing with a public health crisis at hand. This is not to downplay the unexpectedly harsh realities of many people's lives since the pandemic began, in particular in the Malay community<sup>1</sup>, but to focus on the broader changes in our social situation that deserve more attention and address growing silos, inequalities, and isolation. But all is not lost, as there is much to hope if we look at the myriad efforts of individuals and communities to evolve in ways that embody lifelong learning.

We witnessed how Singaporeans have quickly embraced a more widespread and intensified use of online and digital platforms to meet essential and non-essential needs.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic, for better or for worse, has strengthened connections between society and technology, perhaps furthering the goal of a Smart Nation.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, while considering the difficult impact COVID-19 had on local businesses, it must be said that the pandemic forced residents to limit their in-person interactions to their immediate surroundings.

People had to adapt to circumscribed allowances of getting their necessities (including fresh air and exercise) and their digital replacements were not always easily found or even desirable (such as health services which require person-to-person interaction). The growing interest in 'localism', where we focus more on our local communities and surroundings as lockdowns and remote working and schooling shaped our everyday lives, may help societies recover in the aftermath of COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

A renewed focus on the local, both by circumstance and design, showed us more clearly the inequalities which exist in our society during the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Adaptations that were accessible to some were not as easily accessible to others. There are various forms of inequalities: job security, stable income, digital literacies, social networks, spatial and technological limitations, which have compounding effects on each other.

For school going children, one of the key interventions was home-based learning (HBL), which illustrated the various inequalities across

households where students lacked the equipment, space and support necessary to continue with their education as much as possible.<sup>6</sup> Prior to this nationwide experiment with HBL, it was easy to assume that such disparities in home environments and resources would not be so stark in modern and tech-savvy Singapore. It requires that we not only focus on technological solutions as measures of progress and learning, but also consider the different conditions in which people live and their varied relationships with technology.

For the elderly, they may already be experiencing isolation in rapidly digitalising societies, let alone during a pandemic.

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### **Inequality exists in every society, and one of its causes is unequal access to social connections.**

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It is particularly challenging when the crucial spatial element of social capital is removed. One such example is when people were confined to their homes and nearby

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<sup>1</sup> Hariz Baharudin, "Lower-income folk worst hit by S'pore's COVID-19 circuit breaker: Study," *The Straits Times*, August 24, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Janice Lim, "The Big Read: Live streaming, gamification spur rise of 'retailtainment' amid e-commerce's pandemic boom," *CNA*, November 22, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/big-read-live-streaming-e-commerce-retail-covid-19-online-shopping-2328556>.

<sup>3</sup> Mercedes Ruehl, "COVID-19 accelerates Singapore's digital push," *Financial Times*, September 29, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Myriam Ertz et al., "How online markets are helping local stores survive COVID-19," *The Conversation*, February 1, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/how-online-markets-are-helping-local-stores-survive-covid-19-153060>; "A new form of localism?" *Future of London*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.futureoflondon.org.uk/2020/11/12/a-new-form-of-localism/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ng Jun Sen and Natasha Meah, "The Big Read: How COVID-19, dubbed the 'inequality virus', has further widened the rich-poor gap," *CNA*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-inequality-virus-further-widened-rich-poor-gap-2127951>.

<sup>6</sup> Venessa Lee and Stephanie Yeo, "How home-based learning shows up inequality in Singapore – a look at three homes," *The Straits Times*, April 18, 2020.



surroundings. Although it affects people differently, there has been a lot of attention on the elderly who feel isolated and unable to tap into the wide array of digital technologies of connection, with some reported to have flouted social distancing rules to go about their daily routines.<sup>7</sup>

The young ('Gen Z') were born into and are in general the most comfortable with the online world. My generation (the 'Millennials') lived through the transition, so while the switch to *remote* everything was not smooth, it was arguably not as daunting as it was for the older generation (Gen X) for whom the internet and gadgets came into their lives much later. These loosely defined groups do not have the same connections with and through technology. Yet connections, whether mediated by spaces or technology or both, can also help mitigate effects of inequality on individuals and communities, if we capitalise on this 'local' moment to do so.

My own encounters since the beginning of the pandemic, and my research on urban communities in Southeast Asia, indicate that despite constraints beyond our immediate control, there is much to hope for and work towards keeping our *pemandangan luas* (sights ahead). I started my doctoral studies at

Birkbeck College in October 2020 remotely from Singapore. It was only then that I realised that a sizeable number of my peers in seminars and modules were part-time and mature UK students who were pursuing their bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees often alongside a full-time job, caregiving responsibilities, or purely out of interest at a later stage in life. Their enthusiasm and perseverance in the pursuit of lifelong learning are exemplary and inspiring. Excellent teachers understood and supported their students' needs and recognised their potential. The students brought their life experiences to bear on the often critical and challenging materials we read for class.

A few months later, I was on the other side as an instructor to part-time undergraduates in Singapore for a module on cities. It was generally already a challenging time during a pandemic. Attending a weekly three-hour evening intensive seminar on Zoom for a group of over 100 students (many of whom came after a full day of work) required a very different level of commitment to learning. The diverse student population did not disappoint. It is not every day that you meet an 80-year-old Singaporean student pursuing an undergraduate degree in Sociology, working earnestly on the assignments and participating

in class discussions. In addition, he had to navigate for the first time the myriad online platforms and digital tools which have become commonplace in a COVID world. It was heartening to see students extend help to and learn from each other.

Outside of institutional learning, there is a lot to be learned from everyday life that does not require such a large investment, rather, just a keen eye and a curious mind. I was taken by Lai Ah Eng's 2012 chapter titled "A Neighbourhood in Singapore", in which she writes about everyday life in Marine Parade, an HDB estate in Singapore where she conducted her PhD research and later resided. She explored the vibrant diversity of cultures and the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural issues that one can only discern by learning about the activities and experiences of ordinary people.<sup>8</sup> They told stories about their life and personal histories, providing opportunities for "mutual learning and exchange" that enable others to better understand and appreciate diverse ethnic individuals and groups. In the process they often discover differences and similarities, as well as the larger picture about unwritten rules, social relationships, and Singapore's history.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Goh Yan Han, "Seniors felt less socially satisfied, more isolated during COVID-19 circuit breaker period: Survey," *The Straits Times*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/lower-satisfaction-levels-higher-social-isolation-for-senior-citizens-during-circuit>; Charlotte Chong and Natalie Tan, "More than 600 fines issued for COVID-19 safety breaches in first quarter," *The Straits Times*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/lower-satisfaction-levels-higher-social-isolation-for-senior-citizens-during-circuit>.

<sup>8</sup> Lai Ah Eng, "A Neighborhood in Singapore: Ordinary People's Lives 'Downstairs,'" in *Future Asian Space: Projecting the Urban Space of New East Asia*, eds. Hee Limin with Davisi Boontharm and Erwin Viray (Singapore: NUS Press), 2012, 115-37.

<sup>9</sup> Lai, "A Neighborhood in Singapore," 121.

On one of my walks in my own neighbourhood, I saw two women picking leaves off from some bushes that I did not recognise (I have a long way to go in recognising local flora). Curious, I approached them to ask about the leaves and what they were going to do with them. Needless to say, this particular experience introduced me to the wonderful world of traditional Kerala snacks and a glimpse into the personal histories of these two women who were picking leaves on their day off to make highly requested delicacies for their family. Much more can be said about 'everyday' learning since the pandemic has forced us to slow down and pay more attention to our immediate surroundings.

It is crucial to sustain our *pemandangan luas* (abroad and forward-looking stance) by continually seeking knowledge. We should be able to adapt regardless of time (often measured in age) and learn in different spaces (through formal institutions or everyday life). Learning requires a lifelong commitment, and understanding the motivations behind why people learn, how people learn, and that learning might look different for everyone is important. The ultimate goal cannot be economic gains alone, for these are transient and constantly changing in their nature. Work needs to continue to shift the individual and society's paradigms of learning and to understand what valuable knowledge is and how it can be applied. ■



MENDAKI SENSE Jump Career Fair, Marsiling Community Centre, October 2020. Connecting jobseekers to employment and training opportunities at the JUMP Career Fair.

## Did you know?

### The Critical Core Skills Framework



#### Introducing the Critical Core Skills

The Critical Core Skills Framework developed by SSG outlines three vital clusters of critical core skills:

#### Thinking Critically

These are cognitive abilities required to think broadly and creatively in order to recognize connections and opportunities in the midst of change. Cognitive skills are the foundation for the development and progression of technical skills.

#### Interacting with Others

One of the most effective ways to acquire new skills and ideas is to learn from others. Being effective at interacting with others entails considering other people's needs as well as being able to exchange ideas and develop a shared understanding of a problem or situation. To succeed, people must increasingly be able to combine their technical skills with those of others.

#### Staying Relevant

Effective self-management and close attention to trends affecting work and life provide strategies, direction, and motivation for technical skill development.

Source: SkillsFuture Singapore. (n.d.). *Critical Core Skills*. SSG.



## Mentoring:

Finding oneself through experiential learning



Youth Mentoring Office (YMO) Training Session, Yayasan MENDAKI Hall, March 2020. Mr Syed Salleh, Head Trainer in MENDAKI's YMO, training volunteer mentors.

**F**ahrur Razi Yusoff is a youth mentor and volunteer at Yayasan MENDAKI. He is committed in helping students acquire life skills, build their confidence, and connect them to career opportunities to grow their potential. He is currently under the MaritimeONE Scholarship and pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Maritime Studies at Nanyang Technological University.



By Fahrur Razi Yusoff  
Youth mentor and volunteer  
Yayasan MENDAKI



## Life's Crossroads: To Thrive Amidst Changes

Shouldered with financial responsibilities, I felt lost and unsure when I was unable to secure any loans to further my studies after my foundational programme in Malaysia ended in 2011. Instead, I decided to enlist and successfully completed my- full-time National Service in 2014. I then decided to start anew and search for alternative future pathways.

My search began online. I assumed that I was unlikely to be accepted into any local polytechnic programme with my Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) certificate so I decided to sit for the GCE O' Level as a private candidate and enrolled myself in a preparatory course with a private learning institute. The learning experience was not what I had imagined it to be. It was indeed tough and lonely.

Although getting there was a challenge, I managed to pass my O-Levels and was accepted to the polytechnic course of my choice after an interview. I developed a deep interest in the maritime industry and began to enjoy every aspect of learning. I decided to learn as much as I could to be a navigation officer, from the laws of the sea to handling emergencies onboard ships. I focused on my small victories such as receiving a navigation watchkeeper's standard competency certificate.

Apart from exploring the various parts of the world, the bigger victories were the valuable working relationships with different nationalities during my time working onboard. Adaptability, teamwork

and clear communications were the skillsets needed daily and for extended periods at sea. The tricks of the trade were often shared willingly by colleagues and our captains to motivate us and improve our work.

After graduation, my instinct was to quickly search for a job. I had expected to be offered one within the industry but it did not work out the way I had hoped for. After many months and much reflection, I realised that I was perhaps in a niche sector and had limited my career options. It was also unfortunate and disheartening to receive rejection emails from many prospective employers.

Once again, I decided to line up my options carefully. Of the many solutions that I had planned, I had a wild and far-fetched idea. It was not my first choice but regardless, I decided to apply for a university place and a scholarship. To my surprise, I was called for an interview. I had nothing much to offer but just shared my life stories with the panellists. A second miracle came a month later when I received my acceptance letter to a local university and the third, unexpectedly a few days after – an invitation to enrol in the MaritimeONE scholarship programme, an initiative spearheaded by the Singapore Maritime Foundation (SMF) and its maritime partners. In addition, I am humbled by the opportunity to be a mentee under their mentoring programme.

I often reminded myself to draw upon and embody life values such as resilience, adaptability and patience. It was indeed a lonely journey for

me as I had to go through full-time studies at a much older age compared to my peers. Despite these personal challenges, I am thankful for this learning journey of ten years which I felt inevitably contributed to building my character and worldview.

### **Mentoring is a Two-way Process**

Mentoring provides a great way to identify the learning gaps in individuals. Interestingly, it builds situational and self-awareness by taking into consideration interactions and views that we have with others. Mentoring allowed me to strengthen my communications skills and exercise empathy towards others.

MENDAKI's Gift Centred Approach (GCA) to mentoring is an innovative way to empower youths by identifying their strengths and utilising them to achieve their desired goals in the future. I am inspired by CEO and Founder of *Youth Mentoring Connection*, Tony Lore's approach which he shared during the Gift-Centred Mentoring (GCM) Masterclass. He highlighted that

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**“Rather than asking what’s wrong with you, ask what’s right with you instead.”**

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Using this approach can help youths build confidence and resilience by focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses to create career paths that could lead to life fulfilment. Mentors could

help mentees identify strengths by building relationships based on trust. Mentors are trained by the MENDAKI's Future Ready team to best utilise this approach through various dedicated training programmes.

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### **The advantage of mentoring is that it is a two-way process.**

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It not only helps the mentees, but the mentors as well. One benefit that I had learnt is to build bridges to address generational gaps.

The younger generation places importance on social media and how they relate and identify with those they feel close to. Online social platforms such as TikTok redefines how they interact with their circle of personal friends and fans online. My conversation starters often relate to the latest TikTok trends and stories on influencers. These unrelated and inconsequential interactions will likely open to deeper discussions about oneself, interests, and world views. Being able to connect and bond, have made me feel that I have aided someone and contributed to their growth.

To conclude, I am deeply grateful for the experience and the opportunity to volunteer with MENDAKI's Youth Mentoring programme. I wished I had such guidance in my early years to decide on my future career paths. I hope that greater student engagement will provide youths the career guidance and options they need in their journey towards their desired future.

To be a mentor and a mentee at the same time has made me realise the importance of having a growth mindset. Every individual's journey is different, and some will reach their destination sooner than others. I have gathered insightful knowledge from my mentors on how to better equip myself with the relevant skills and knowledge as I 'gear-up' to graduate in a few years' time.

With a growth mindset, we will be able to improve at our own pace and adapt to the constant changes in our environment. As we journey through these uncertain times, it is crucial to be open and embody the right values and draw upon different skills sets and past experiences to embrace new opportunities. ■



*Youth Mentoring Office (YMO) Training Session, Yayasan MENDAKI Hall, March 2020. Volunteer mentors sharing expertise and skills in building a successful mentoring relationship with their mentees.*

## Did you know?

### Youths' Future Preparedness & Competencies

**Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

(Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="strongly agree", 3="neither agree nor disagree", & 1="strongly disagree".)

#### Mean Ratings of Youths' Perceived Preparedness by Age (with standard deviations in parentheses)

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=716)	(n=804)	(n=926)	(n=946)	(n=3,392)
I have what it takes to succeed in the future	3.61 (0.82)	3.60 (0.87)	3.64 (0.80)	3.63 (0.81)	3.62 (0.83)
I have the knowledge and skills required in the future economy	3.45 (0.84)	3.49 (0.86)	3.50 (0.83)	3.54 (0.86)	3.50 (0.85)

#### Mean Ratings of Youths' Perceived Preparedness by Schooling Status (with standard deviations in parentheses)

	Schooling	Non-Schooling	Overall
	(n=1,116)	(n=2,276)	(n=3,392)
I have what it takes to succeed in the future	3.61 (0.83)	3.63 (0.82)	3.62 (0.83)
I have the knowledge and skills required in the future economy	3.48 (0.84)	3.51 (0.86)	3.50 (0.85)



Regardless of age and schooling status, youths' self-reported preparedness for the future is moderate.

Note: This is a new question introduced in National Youth Survey 2019.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and the future of work*. NYC.



**Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

(Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="strongly agree", 3="neither agree nor disagree", & 1="strongly disagree".)

**Mean Ratings Of Youths' Competencies Over Time**  
 (with standard deviations in parentheses)

		2010	2013	2016	2019
		(n=1,268)	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
<b>Work Competencies</b>	Working well with other people	3.91 (0.70)	3.95 (0.86)	3.94 (0.84)	3.78 (0.87)
	Learning and applying new knowledge/skills <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA	NA	3.65 (0.93)
	Analysing and evaluating issues objectively <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA	NA	3.63 (0.97)
	Being good at planning ahead	3.68 (0.83)	3.70 (1.01)	3.77 (0.98)	3.49 (1.05)
	Taking initiative <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA	NA	3.42 (1.01)
	Leading a team of people	3.44 (0.97)	3.41 (1.13)	3.42 (1.11)	3.13 (1.16)
	Being innovative <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA	NA	3.11 (1.07)
<b>Social Emotional Competencies</b>	Caring about other people's feelings	4.01 (0.73)	4.19 (0.84)	4.15 (0.85)	3.92 (0.96)
	Staying away from people who might get me in trouble	3.65 (1.02)	3.74 (1.06)	3.77 (1.03)	3.67 (1.08)
	Adapting to change	3.85 (0.78)	3.86 (0.91)	3.89 (0.91)	3.59 (0.97)
	Being able to manage my thoughts and feelings <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA	NA	3.51 (0.98)
	Being good at making friends	3.96 (0.73)	3.68 (1.05)	3.62 (1.06)	3.36 (1.08)
	Speaking publicly	3.12 (1.01)	2.75 (1.25)	2.88 (1.23)	2.67 (1.23)
<b>Global &amp; Cultural Competencies</b>	Respecting the values and beliefs of people who are of different race or culture than I am	3.91 (0.74)	4.23 (0.81)	4.20 (0.77)	4.02 (0.92)
	Understanding the impact of global forces on local issues <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA	NA	3.27 (1.12)
	Knowing a lot about people of other races and cultures	3.41 (0.95)	3.36 (1.08)	3.39 (1.05)	3.24 (1.07)



In line with their modest assessment of having the requisite knowledge and skills for the future economy, 2019 saw a decline in reported levels of work, social and cultural competencies.

<sup>a</sup> Items are new to National Youth Survey 2019.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and the future of work*. NYC.



**Question:** We would like to know about your opinions on your prospects regarding work. Below are some statements that you may agree or disagree with.

(Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="strongly agree", 3="neither agree nor disagree", & 1="strongly disagree".)

### Mean Ratings Of Youths' Perceived Employability By Employment Status (with standard deviations in parentheses)

	Full-time Students	Unemployed	Overall
	(n=1,328)	(n=199)	(n=1,527)
I am confident there is a market for the job that I am intending to pursue	3.53 (0.87)	3.58 (0.88)	3.54 (0.87)
I know what I need to do to get the job that I want	3.53 (0.88)	3.45 (0.92)	3.52 (0.89)
I am confident that my educational qualifications can secure me a job in my chosen field	3.39 (0.95)	3.38 (1.01)	3.39 (0.96)
People in the career I am aiming for are in high demand in the labour market	3.36 (0.88)	3.51 (0.92)	3.38 (0.89)
The skills and abilities that I possess allow me to be employed in any organisation	3.30 (0.92)	3.25 (0.96)	3.29 (0.92)
There are plenty of job vacancies where I am looking	2.86 (0.85)	2.94 (0.94)	2.87 (0.86)



While recognising that there are opportunities available in the labour market, schooling and unemployed youths are only moderately confident in their employability. In particular, they may be less assured of having the right skillsets to get a job. Working youths are more confident in their employability, particularly if they perceive themselves as having the relevant skills and experience.

Note: Full-time Students comprise – (1) Full-time Students and not working and (2) Full-time Students and working part-time.  
Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and the future of work*. NYC.

## Learning from champions:

Enhancing academic success through mindfulness



mBOT, Library @ ITE College West, April 2019. Mentors and mentees bond during an mBOT event at one of MENDAKI's Future Ready Department's programmes.

Associate Professor Kee is a faculty member in the Physical Education and Sports Science Academic Group at NIE, an autonomous institute of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). His expertise is in mindfulness, especially in relation to applications in sports and human movements. Currently, he serves as one of the Co-Editors in the International Journal of Sport Psychology. He is also an active member of the Motivation in Educational Research Laboratory (MERL). He can be reached via Twitter handle @keefellow.



By Associate Professor KEE Ying Hwa  
National Institute of Education  
Singapore



Imagine that this is the final minute of an important football match and the score is tied. Your team is awarded a penalty kick and your captain asks you to take the shot. You hear the roar of the crowd cheering you on. Two of your teammates pat you on your shoulder to show their support. You catch a glimpse of your coach. He gives you a thumbs-up from a distance. You get nervous as you realise that your next action will determine the outcome of the game. Only you can bring home the victory for your team.

As you step up to take the kick, the pressure mounts. You can literally taste victory. You are just one goal away from the championship. But then, negative thoughts keep popping into your head. *What if I miss the shot completely? What if the goalkeeper saves it? What if it hits the crossbar? What if...*

These mentally challenging moments are common in sports. The success or failure of the athlete hinge on how one performs at that crucial moment. Champions and those who succeeded were those who could fend off the unproductive thoughts and remained focused in executing the task at hand to the best of their abilities.

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**In short, achieving peak performance goes hand in hand with the ability to pay attention and focus on the task at hand<sup>1</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> Stavrou, N. A. M., Psychountaki, M., Georgiadis, E., Karaterliotis, K., & Zervas, Y. (2015). Flow theory - goal orientation theory: Positive experience is related to athlete's goal orientation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1499.

The expectation to be focused on a task is also a requirement in many other situations that require attention, and of course, that includes academic learning environments<sup>2</sup>. Students are expected to focus on the tasks at hand, whether it is in the classroom or during a test. However, fear of failure and general test anxiety are stressors that could distract students from attempting to learn and answering examination questions to their best ability.

Insights into how successful athletes overcome mental challenges could help us instill the necessary qualities in our students. A quality that has been associated with peak performance is the tendency to adopt a process-oriented approach<sup>3</sup>. Simply put, this approach entails focusing on the task at hand rather than projecting one's thoughts to the past or to the future. For example, the penalty kicker would most likely not perform well if he allowed himself to be distracted by negative thoughts such as a past failure. Instead, he should be clear in his mind as to what needs to be done by focusing on the processes of executing a good kick. The same is true for the student who is faced with anxious thoughts during the exam or who becomes distracted while preparing for the exam. Instead of attending to these distractions, the student should focus on answering

the questions rather than being distracted by self-doubt.

Students can take a more process-oriented approach by re-shaping their learning environment to focus on skill mastery rather than results. They should also develop the skill of becoming increasingly mindful of the present moment, such that it becomes the default mode of operation. Both strategies work hand in hand to achieve better performance.

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**In education psychology literature, pursuing task-involved (mastery) goals are often recommended to help students focus on what they can control, rather than worrying about the outcome.**

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An analogy of an archer shooting arrows at a target is useful. At any time before the arrow is shot, the archer can make any necessary adjustments to ensure that the body form and movements are correct. Once the arrow is released, there is nothing he can do to control the arrow's destination. This illustrates the importance of focusing on

getting the process right, and this also applies to students' learning and examination preparations.

While educators play a part in creating the learning climate that encourages students to strive for skills and knowledge mastery rather than worrying about outcomes, it is ultimately up to the student to embody this process-oriented approach. As suggested earlier, elite athletes who can cope with highly pressured situations have a stronger tendency to fend off distractions and focus on the task at hand. However, this tendency may not be naturally occurring and requires one to train one's mind.

One way of developing such tendency is through practicing mindfulness. In recent years, sport psychologists have explored the use of mindfulness-related strategies to help athletes perform better<sup>4</sup>. One way to understand mindfulness, following Kabat-Zinn, is to refer to mindfulness as the ability to be continuously and be purposefully attentive in the present moment without judgement<sup>5</sup>. We are probably capable of paying attention to the here and now to some degree. Right now, as you read this, you can pause and focus on this moment. However, it is difficult to maintain this level of awareness and attention

<sup>2</sup> Amato-Zech, N. A., Hoff, K. E., & Doepke, K. J. (2006). Increasing on-task behavior in the classroom: Extension of self-monitoring strategies. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(2), 211–221.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, S. A., & Roberts, G. C. (1992). Positive performance states of athletes: Toward a conceptual understanding of peak performance. *Sport Psychologist*, 6(2), 156–171.

<sup>4</sup> Birrer, D., Röthlin, P., & Morgan, G. (2012). Mindfulness to enhance athletic performance: Theoretical considerations and possible impact mechanisms. *Mindfulness*, 3(3), 235–246.

<sup>5</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living (revised edition): Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Random House Publishing Group.

all the time. It can also be difficult not to judge whatever is happening, internally or externally, whenever you notice it.

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**Nonetheless, mindfulness can be seen as a skill that can be honed over time, where becoming aware of the present moment without judgement becomes a habit after regular practice<sup>6</sup>.**

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One common way to practise mindfulness is through mindful breathing exercises<sup>7</sup>. The instructions are simple in that all you need to do is pay attention to breathing in and out while sitting still. As we breathe in, simply be mindful that we are breathing in. As we breathe out, be mindful that we are breathing out. The challenge is to perform this task over a long period of time in a single sitting without losing patience. This devoted attention paid to the breathing task is akin to being focused on the process of the action. It is inevitable that distractions will arise during the practice. This is then the opportunity to bring the mindful attention back to the breath and



*Empowerment Programme, ITE College West, December 2019. A sharing session for youths by a speaker from Jazari Engineering Network during an event organised by MENDAKI's Future Ready Department.*

focus on the process of enacting the task without beating ourselves up with judgmental thoughts. Regularly pursuing mindfulness practice allows one to become familiar in focusing on the process as a coping strategy.

Finally, evidence shows that sustained efforts to practise mindfulness can alter one's brain to be adaptive in terms of learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the habit of focusing on the task at hand can be developed. By adopting a mastery approach

and mindfulness, such approaches adopted by champions in sports could benefit students in developing healthier attitudes towards learning and examinations too. ■

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<sup>6</sup> Kee, Y. H. (2019). Reflections on athletes' mindfulness skills development: Fitts and Posner's (1967) three stages of learning. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 10(4), 214-219.

<sup>7</sup> Clinton, V., Swenseth, M., & Carlson, S. E. (2018). Do mindful breathing exercises benefit reading comprehension? A brief report. *Journal of Cognitive Enhancement*, 2(3), 305-310.; Quek, F. Y. X., Majeed, N. M., Kothari, M., Lua, V. Y. Q., Ong, H. S., & Hartanto, A. (2021). Brief mindfulness breathing exercises and working memory capacity: Findings from two experimental approaches. *Brain Sciences*, 11(2), 1-12.


<sup>8</sup> Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramsetti, S. M., Gard, T., & Lazar, S. W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Research*, 191(1), 36-43.

## Did you know?

### Impact of COVID-19 on Students' Mental Health

#### Suicide rates among young people aged 10 to 19



 Suicide rates among young people aged 10 to 19 increased from 4.0 per 100,000 persons in 2019 to 5.5 per 100,000 persons in 2020, according to ICA data. This increase is part of a broader national increase in suicide rates as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 38% increase in the suicide incidence rate among young people aged 10 to 19 between 2019 and 2020 indicates a deterioration in youth mental health.

Source: Pillai, M. (2021, July 27). *Impact of COVID-19 on students' mental health*. Ministry of Education Singapore.

#### Question:


All in all, how would you describe your state of physical health these days?

All in all, how would you describe your state of mental health these days?

(Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="very good", 3="fair", & 1="very poor".)

#### Mean Ratings of Youths' Perceived Physical and Mental Health by Age (with standard deviations in parentheses)

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=716)	(n=804)	(n=926)	(n=946)	(n=3,392)
Perceived physical health	3.60 (0.85)	3.48 (0.87)	3.52 (0.81)	3.48 (0.79)	3.52 (0.83)
Perceived mental health	3.43 (1.01)	3.38 (0.98)	3.50 (0.88)	3.59 (0.82)	3.48 (0.92)

 Younger youths report higher levels of physical health yet lower levels of mental health.

Note: This is a new question introduced in National Youth Survey 2019, replacing the existing question on perceived general health.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and their strides towards flourishing*. NYC.



**Question: To what extent do you find the following areas of your life to be stressful?**

(Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="extremely stressful", 3="moderately stressful", & 1="not at all stressful".)

**Mean Ratings Of Youths' Life Stressors Over Time  
(with standard deviations in parentheses)**

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=1,259)	(n=2,791)	(n=3,493)	(n=3,354)
Future uncertainty	2.37 (1.13)	3.46 (1.15)	3.46 (1.17)	3.33 (1.15)
Emerging adult responsibility	2.25 (1.15)	3.22 (1.12)	3.30 (1.15)	3.25 (1.12)
Finances	2.28 (1.10)	3.23 (1.27)	3.07 (1.20)	3.21 (1.18)
Studies	2.81 (1.10)	3.49 (1.16)	3.36 (1.22)	3.16 (1.22)
Health of family member	2.14 (1.14)	3.04 (1.18)	3.13 (1.21)	3.00 (1.18)
Work	2.52 (1.04)	3.10 (1.09)	2.99 (1.06)	3.00 (1.05)
Personal health	1.88 (1.04)	2.68 (1.18)	2.74 (1.22)	2.62 (1.13)
Family relationships	1.82 (0.93)	2.45 (1.26)	2.26 (1.10)	2.40 (1.15)
Friendships (including peer pressure, romantic relationships)	1.80 (0.90)	2.40 (1.16)	2.20 (1.03)	2.38 (1.11)

Note: The upper-bound survey population figures are reflected in this table.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and their strides towards flourishing*. NYC.

### Mean Ratings Of Youths' Life Stressors by Age (with standard deviations in parentheses)

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=705)	(n=798)	(n=915)	(n=940)	(n=3,354)
Future uncertainty	3.41 (1.22)	3.61 (1.15)	3.27 (1.11)	3.09 (1.09)	3.33 (1.15)
Emerging adult responsibility	3.20 (1.13)	3.59 (1.11)	3.22 (1.10)	3.02 (1.07)	3.25 (1.12)
Finances	3.10 (1.21)	3.42 (1.18)	3.22 (1.16)	3.10 (1.16)	3.21 (1.18)
Studies	3.70 (1.17)	3.46 (1.10)	2.76 (1.13)	2.65 (1.14)	3.16 (1.22)
Health of family member	3.03 (1.22)	3.10 (1.19)	2.93 (1.16)	2.98 (1.16)	3.00 (1.18)
Work	2.77 (1.09)	2.95 (1.09)	3.09 (1.01)	3.08 (1.02)	3.00 (1.05)
Personal health	2.62 (1.22)	2.66 (1.13)	2.59 (1.07)	2.63 (1.11)	2.62 (1.13)
Family relationships	2.41 (1.22)	2.44 (1.19)	2.36 (1.13)	2.39 (1.10)	2.40 (1.15)
Friendships (including peer pressure, romantic relationships)	2.70 (1.17)	2.53 (1.09)	2.25 (1.07)	2.13 (1.04)	2.38 (1.11)



Over the years, future uncertainty has risen to be the top stressor for youths. Concerns over the future are compounded by life stage-related worries, with greater worries about studies and emerging adult responsibilities observed among younger youths. Comparatively, older youths are more preoccupied by work and finances.

Note: The upper-bound survey population figures are reflected in this table.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and their strides towards flourishing*. NYC.

## Learning on the job:

### The importance of self-directed learning in social policymaking



IHL Engagement Session, Marsiling Yew-Tee, October 2020. SMS Zaqy Mohamed engaged with youths from various tertiary institutions.

Dr Ting Ming Hwa, PhD, is a Principal Research Specialist who oversees the evaluation of programmes run by M<sup>3</sup> agencies. He has a diverse publication record ranging from the inter-generational transmission of criminality, the use of machine learning in predicting recidivism, geopolitical competition for rare earth elements to international relations theories.



By Dr Ting Ming Hwa  
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In *Sensemaking*, Christian Madsbjerg makes the case for the enduring relevance of people and culture, as opposed to data and algorithms, in shaping our current worldview.<sup>1</sup> Having a perspective on human behaviour is crucial in social policy making. As noted by Neil deGrasse Tyson, “In science, when human behavior enters the equation, things go non-linear. That’s why Physics is easy and Sociology is hard”.<sup>2</sup>

A frequent criticism of policymakers and researchers is that they tend to be in an ivory tower, sequestered from the masses. At 10,000 feet, the helicopter view is different from the view on the ground. Having worked at a ministry, a statutory board, and now, a Malay-Muslim self-help group, I am in a unique and privileged position to make a claim that I have been involved in social policymaking in varying degrees at different vantage points.

More importantly, I believe that my various professional postings in the social sector have taught me that there are always things to learn, and that perspectives matter in understanding the worldviews of people from different segments of society. A ray of light, from a certain angle, is just that, a ray of light. From a different angle, a diffracted ray of light can be a Floydian kaleidoscope.

<sup>1</sup> Christian Madsbjerg, *Sensemaking: The Power of Humanities in the Age of Algorithm*, (New York and Boston, Hachette Books, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson on Twitter: "In science, when human behavior enters the equation, things go nonlinear. That's why Physics is easy and Sociology is hard." / Twitter, 6 February 2016.



Working at a ministry, I conducted social research through the analysis of linked administrative data. At a macro-level, population administrative data provide breadth, and they are helpful in providing an overview. The various statistical models look polished when presented, but what this role has taught me is that models provide a *ceteris paribus* view of the world, one that can be both “idiosyncratic and subjective”.<sup>3</sup>

Models are not error-free and should not be perceived as 100 percent accurate. It is therefore important for policymakers to consider the costs of misclassifications when making decisions. In addition, in disciplines such as psychology, outliers are typically removed from the analysis in an attempt to make results statistically significant.<sup>4</sup>

**However, one key learning point gained from working with social data is that sometimes the outliers in datasets really do represent the experiences of the truly**

**vulnerable individuals who are not conveniently located in the middle of the bell curve.**<sup>5</sup>

Instead of removing these outliers, it would be more efficacious to regard them as valuable data points illustrating the breadth of experiences people go through.<sup>6</sup>

Another key learning point is that varied ways of processing data, such as recoding data may possibly lead to quite different, and unexpected, model outputs.

Working at a statutory board, I was involved in the translational aspects of research. In broad strokes, it encompasses communicating research findings to social work practitioners. The longer-term goal is to influence them to augment their professional judgement with data-driven evidence.

To engage these individuals, it is necessary to go beyond the confines of academic publishing and conferences since practitioners are unlikely to have the time or access to such resources. Hence,

we have to be intentional in efforts to disseminate research findings through mainstream media such as the *Straits Times*.<sup>7</sup>

**Doing so has taught me important communication skills in tailoring my messages to the intended audience. Although the message that I want to put across may appear straightforward, it is most likely to be regarded as inaccessible or complex by the proverbial man and woman on the street.**

Working at a self-help group, I oversee the evaluation of various M<sup>3</sup> programmes to establish whether families and individuals have changed as a result of receiving a particular intervention. Initiated in 2018, M<sup>3</sup> is a collaborative effort drawing together three key community institutions – MUIS, MENDAKI & MESRA, to

<sup>3</sup> John Kay, “Obliquity: Why our Best Goals are Best Achieved Indirectly”, (London, Profile Books, 2011), p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Marjan Bakker and Jelte M. Wicherts, “Outlier Removal and the Relation with Reporting Errors and Quality of Psychological Research”, *PLoS ONE*, Vol.9, no.7, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For a popular account on musing about things not in the middle of the bell curve, see Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, (New York, Random House, 2007). For a more academic take on randomness and chaos, see Tien-Yien Li and James A. Yorke, “Period Three Implies Chaos”, *The American Mathematical Monthly*, Vol.82, No, 10, Dec 1975, pp. 985-992.

<sup>6</sup> For an insightful discussion, see Leo Breiman, “Statistical Modeling”, *Statistical Science*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (August 2001), pp. 199-215.

<sup>7</sup> Malavika Menon, “More help for family violence victims in reporting incidents”, *Straits Times*, 24 September 2021, A8, Theresea Tan, “Task force proposes moves to help family violence victims”, 24 September 2021, A1, Theresea Tan, “Can ex-inmate’s sons avoid her fate?”, *Straits Times*, 5 April 2021, B4, Theresea Tan, “Kids of convicted offenders more likely to break law”, *Straits Times*, 22 March 2021, B2, Goh Yan Han, “Trying to break the cycle of family violence”, *Straits Times*, 8 February 2021, B2.

harness one another's strengths and resources to address community issues. The essential difference in this role is that I work directly, not at arm's length, with the individual implementors who are delivering the actual services on the ground. In the short time I have been in this role, I have learnt the importance of returning information to the end-user, as well as communicating the rationale and context in which the requested data are to be used.

Research and evaluation matters are unlikely to be anywhere at the top of their priority list or things to do for operational staff. However, they are responsible for entering and extracting the data necessary for research and evaluation purposes. Getting their buy-in is therefore crucial in ensuring that such seemingly backend and esoteric activities can be carried out smoothly, and in a timely fashion.

**If research and evaluation were not conducted, then there would be no way of knowing whether social policies and programmes have achieved their intended outcomes, apart from solely relying on experts' views. The limitations and pitfalls of such over-reliance are well documented.<sup>8</sup>**

Incidentally, this leads me full circle, and back to the point of using administrative data - which highlights the end-to-end nature of social research and policymaking, as well as the importance of self-directed learning to ensure rigour in the process. For both activities to be successful, good data are crucial. When the research findings and implications of the findings are communicated to stakeholders in a way that resonates with them, they are then more likely to see the important role they play in collecting and sharing data. ■



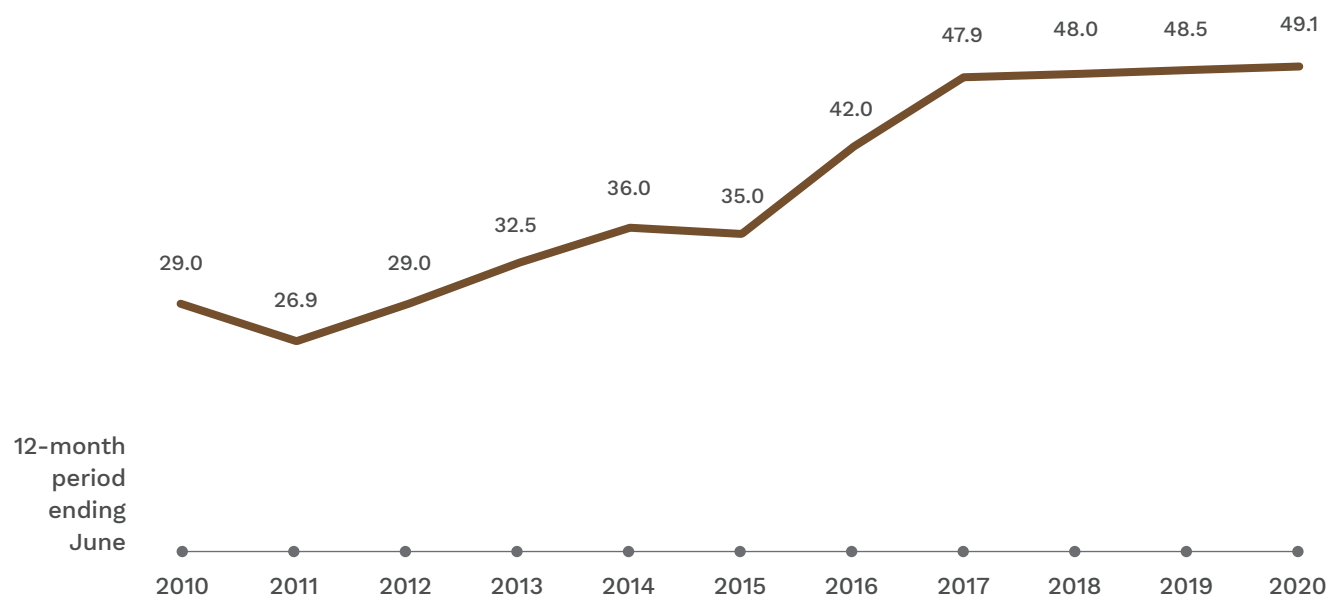
IHL Engagement Session, Marsiling Yew-Tee, October 2020. SMS Zaqy Mohamed addressing the attendees during the engagement session.


<sup>8</sup> For instance, see Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgement: How Good is it? How can we Know?* (New Edition), (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005).

## Did you know?

### Training participation held up in 2020

#### Training participation rate of resident labour force aged 15 to 64



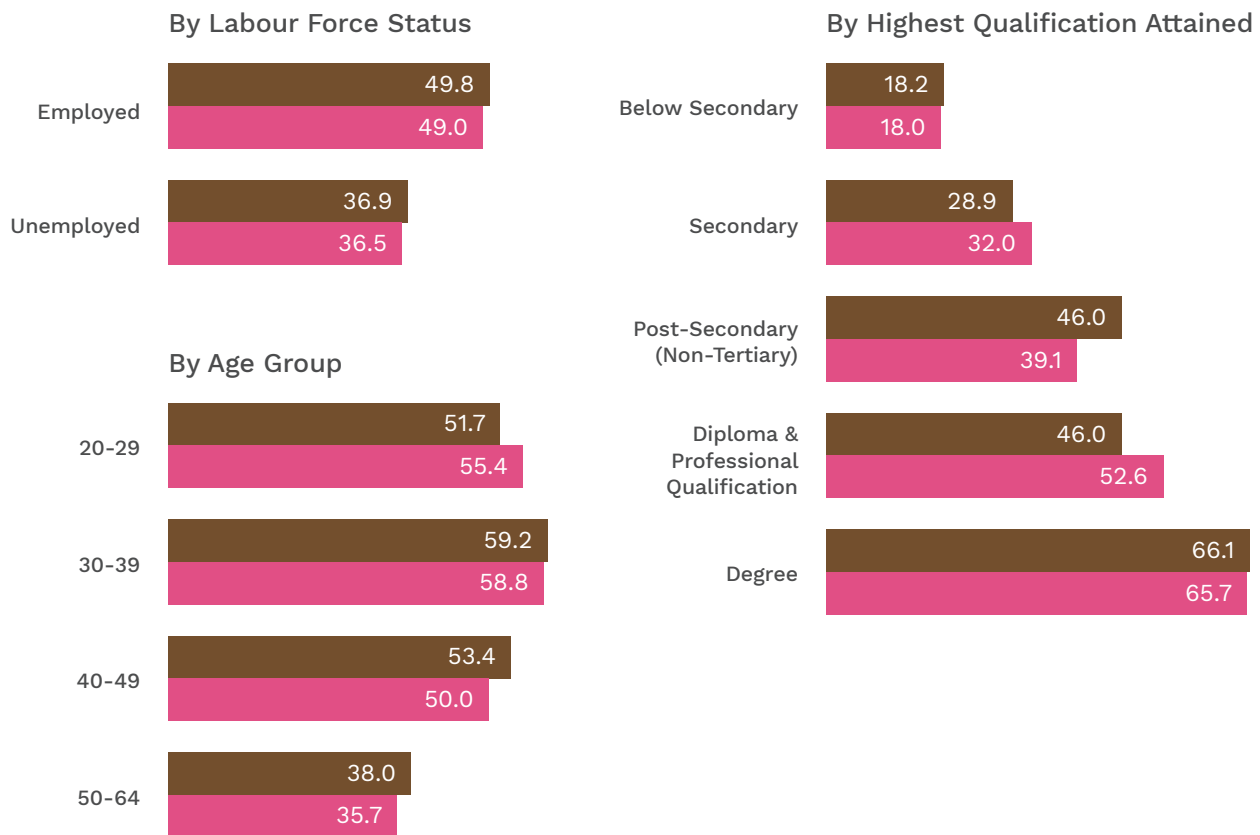
 The training participation rate for the resident labour force aged 15 to 64 was 49% in 2020, similar to a year ago. The rate held up despite restrictions placed on in-person training due to the COVID-19 situation, as more residents turned to online learning. Among non-trainees, only a minority (6.6%) deferred training plans due to COVID-19.

Note: Training participant rate is defined as the proportion of residents aged 15 to 64 in the labour force who had engaged in some form of job-related structured training or education activities over the 12-month period ending June.

Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on adult training*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

## Training participation rate of resident labour force aged 15 to 64

● 2020 ● 2019



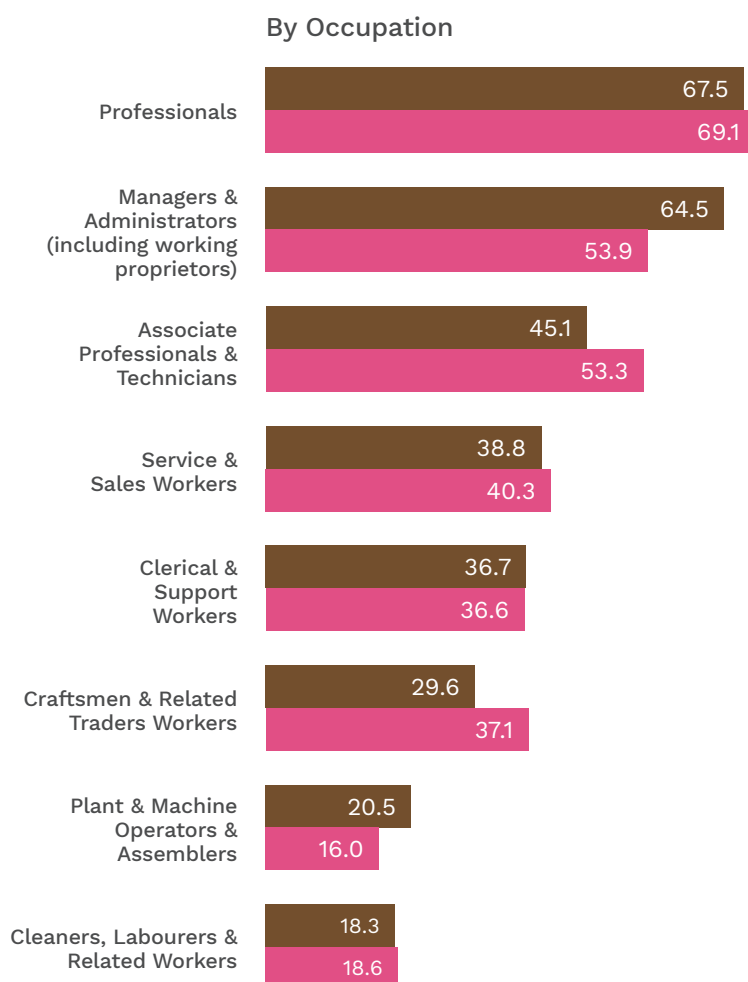
The incidence of training was broadly unchanged for the employed (50%) and unemployed (37%). However, among the employed, there was an increase in training participation for the self-employed, from 27% in 2019 to 37% in 2020. This reflected the prevalence of training support programmes for the self-employed to encourage them to upgrade their skills. On the other hand, training participation among employees declined slightly from 53% to 52%, though their training participation rate is still higher than the self-employed.

Across age groups, the training participation rate either rose or held steady in 2020, except for those aged 20 to 29. Among non-trainees in their 20s, there was an increase in the share who cited that they were either satisfied with the skills/knowledge they possessed, or that the training schedule would have conflicted with their work demands as the main reasons for not participating in training. Younger resident trainees who participated in online learning also indicated juggling work and online learning as their top challenge. As majority of those aged 20 to 29 were tertiary educated, the decline in training participation for this age group also weighed on the training participation rate for the tertiary educated in 2020. However, they remained more likely than the non-tertiary educated to attend training.

Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on adult training*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

## Training participation rate of employed residents aged 15 to 64

● 2020 ● 2019



The training participation rate was largely unchanged from a year ago for PMETs (59%), clerical, sales & service workers (38%) and production & transport operators, cleaners & labourers (24%). However, training participation rates were mixed at the detailed occupation level. Within the production & transport operators, cleaners & labourers group, the slight increase in training participation rate for plant & machine operators & assemblers was largely offset by the pronounced decline in training incidence for a smaller pool of craftsmen & related trades workers as remote training may be less viable for them due to the nature of their work. Associate professionals & technicians also saw a decline in training participation over the year, but they remained more likely than non-PMETs to undergo training in 2020.

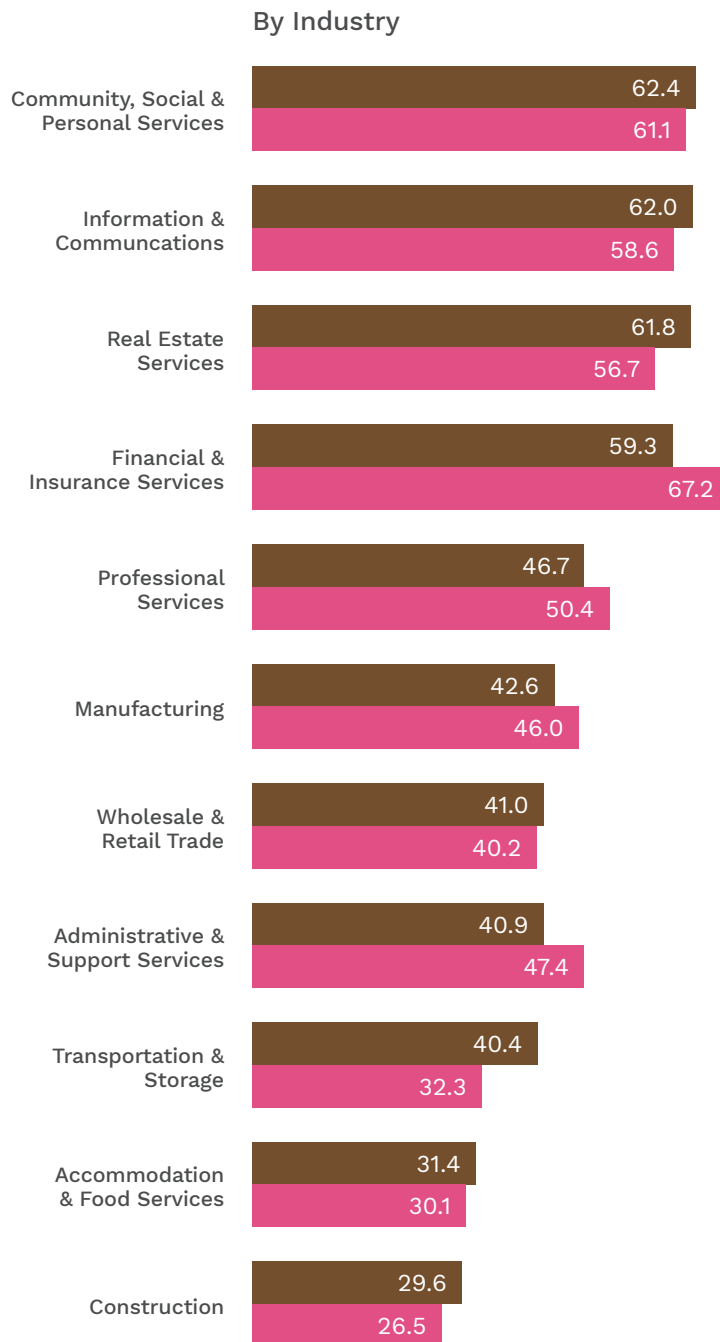
Note: Data are classified based on Singapore Standard Occupational Classification (SSOC) 2020 and Singapore Standard Industrial Classification (SSIC) 2020. Data before year 2020 which were coded based on earlier versions of the SSOC and SSIC were mapped to SSOC 2020 and SSIC 2020 as far as possible to facilitate data comparability.

Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on adult training*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.



## Training participation rate of employed residents aged 15 to 64

● 2020 ● 2019



Reflecting the higher concentration of PMETs in these industries, workers in Financial & Insurance Services (59%), Information & Communications (62%) and Community, Social & Personal Services (62%) continued to post higher than average training participation rates.

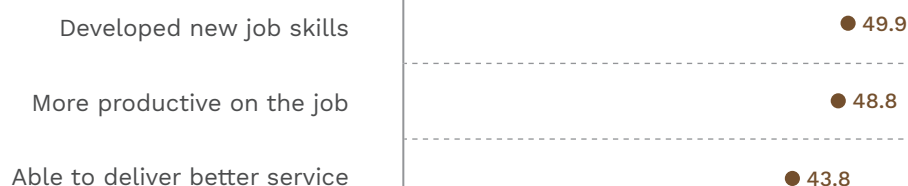
Note: Data are classified based on Singapore Standard Occupational Classification (SSOC) 2020 and Singapore Standard Industrial Classification (SSIC) 2020. Data before year 2020 which were coded based on earlier versions of the SSOC and SSIC were mapped to SSOC 2020 and SSIC 2020 as far as possible to facilitate data comparability.

Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on adult training*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

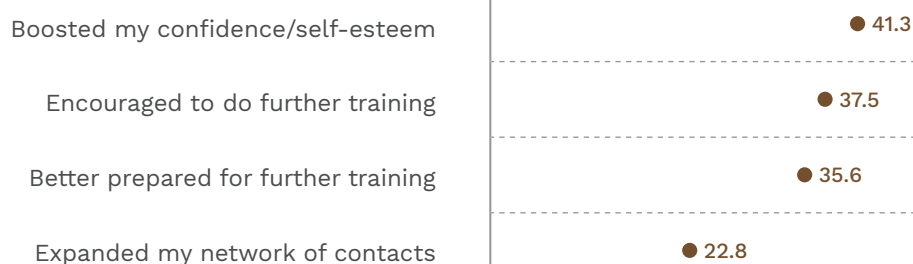
## Training outcomes of employed residents aged 15 to 64, 2020



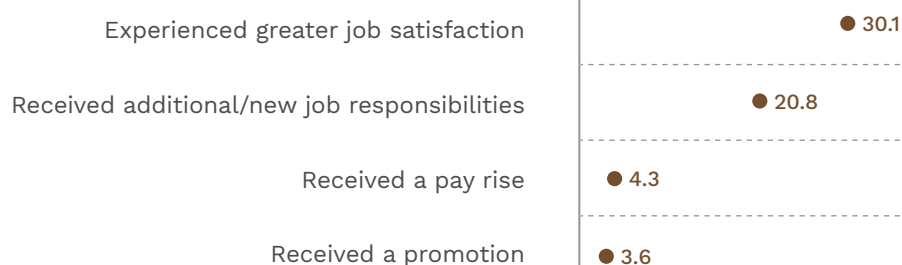
## Enhanced Work-Related Skills



## Personal Development



## Career Development

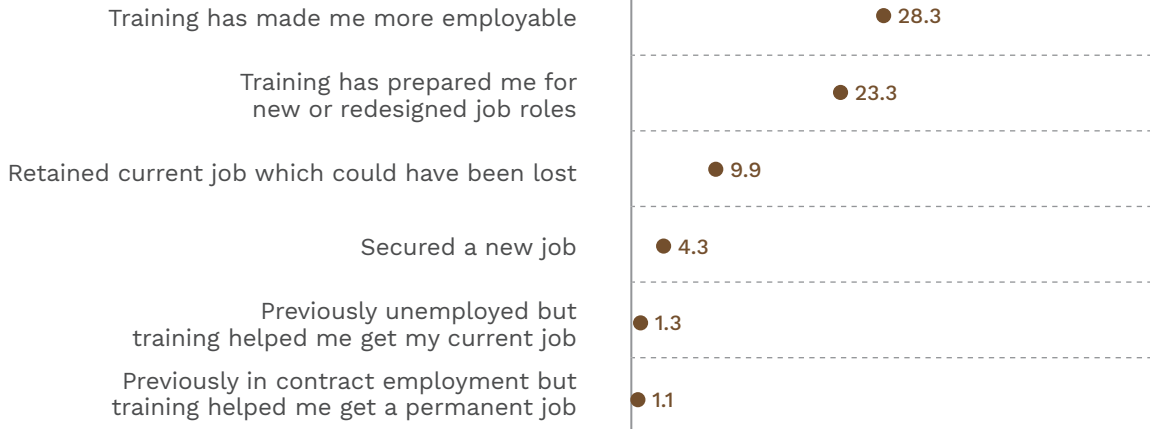


Notes: (1) Figures are based on employed trainees aged 15 to 64. (2) Respondents can indicate more than one training outcome.  
Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on adult training*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

## Training outcomes of employed residents aged 15 to 64, 2020



## Enhanced Employability



## Others



Overall, most of the employed trainees were satisfied with the training undertaken in 2020. Training tends to lead to enhanced workforce skills such as having new job-related skillsets (50%), being more productive on the job (49%), and better service delivery at work (44%). Having greater confidence and self-esteem (41%), as well as being encouraged (37%) and prepared (36%) for further training were also common favourable outcomes for trainees. An immediate boost in pay (4.3%) or career opportunities (promotion, 3.6%; new job, 4.3%) post training was uncommon as these tend to follow with better work performance after trainees hone their skills.

Source: Manpower Research & Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on adult training*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

## Reflections:

### How COVID-19 impacted the learning of physical education and sports in schools



*Dragonboating with Empowerment Programme for boys, Kallang River, June 2019. Malay/Muslim youths participated in one of MENDAKI's Future Ready Programmes.*

**M**uhammad Nasiruddin Bin Jumari is a student teacher at the National Institute of Education (NIE) pursuing a diploma in physical education. He is a national high jump athlete and represented Singapore in Athletics at the 2015 Southeast Asian Games. He is passionate in motivating his students to lead an active and healthy lifestyle.



By Muhammad Nasiruddin Bin Jumari  
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It has been close to two years since the COVID-19 pandemic took over. While such global phenomenon shifts are rare in history, it has brought about waves of unprecedented events and reactions. As human beings are social creatures, we require varied interactions and exhibit socialisation and behavioural patterns to achieve specific objectives or perform daily tasks.

My personal experience as a primary school Physical Education (PE) teacher in early 2021, as well as being an athlete and sports enthusiast supports this observation. In the education and school contexts, social interactions are particularly crucial especially during Physical Education (PE) lessons. PE teachers represent the constant reference point of contact and interaction with students for play and sports.

However, PE teachers face a monumental task when we engage our out-of-the-classroom lessons. We prioritise students' safety, especially adhering to the stringent Safe Measurement Measures (SMM) that are in place. This is understandable as most of our lessons comprise vigorous individual or group physical activities often using shared sports equipment such as balls or rackets.

For example, students are required to remain in their assigned groups, and they must avoid intermingling with other group members. After every lesson, we ensure that all shared equipment is sanitised thoroughly. We were pleasantly surprised to discover that the students were very diligent and cooperative with the



new safety measures. They knew the gravity of the situation and ensured that it was a safe environment for everyone to play.

Most of us would fondly remember our annual Sports Day in school, where classes or houses competed in athletic events such as running, long and high jumps, and the throws. In this pandemic, such events had to be scaled down. A point system was implemented during PE classes to ensure students remain motivated to participate in these events and to stay active and healthy. For every attempt a student made to register and participate in an event, a point would be channelled to their House that they represented. Awards were presented to the best performing student at every level and the House with the most points would win. It was such a surprise that almost every student in the school was part of a sport event as they wanted to contribute to the overall score of his/her House.

When Home-Based Learning (HBL) was implemented, PE lessons were conducted via the Ministry of Education's Student Learning Space. My PE colleagues and I had to be creative in designing safe yet practical physical activities to be carried out at home. Students were encouraged to be innovative when substituting sports equipment with household items. For example, no one could have thought that a floorball stick and ball could be replaced with an umbrella and a sock ball. They then uploaded a video recording of some of their best performances at home. I had noticed that exercising their creativity filled my students with an innate sense of joy and pride.

As part of lifelong learning and professional development, I enrolled myself in a teacher training programme in physical education at the National Institute of Education (NIE) as I wanted to broaden my horizons to upgrade my technical and pedagogical knowledge.

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### **Specifically, I wanted to enhance my students' motivation and promote an active and effective learning posture.**

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While I was taught game concepts and rules through sports and gameplay, I used that practical knowledge in real game situations. Learning human psychology has allowed me to understand students' behaviours and perspectives while empowering them to build resilience and confidence. The new student

management skills I mastered allowed me to be an effective planner in developing a safe learning environment.

The pandemic affected me personally as my training regime as a national high jump athlete was affected. With venues capped to certain capacities, there were instances where I was denied entry to my training grounds. I then adapted to a flexible training regime, where I would work out around my neighbourhood, nearby fitness corners and any available open space. I even started exploring running trails around the island with family and friends, such as Seletar Park Connector, Aerospace Drive and MacRitchie Reservoir Park.

Training on different terrains have pushed my body to adapt to unfamiliar and uncertain conditions. At the same time, I had the opportunity to explore several lovely sceneries around the island. This also



*Futsal with Empowerment Programme for boys, The Cage, December 2019. Our Malay/Muslim youths participated in a futsal match at one of MENDAKI's Future Ready programmes.*



challenged my innate motivation to keep pushing forward regardless of the circumstances that I am faced with. I had to persevere to achieve my training objectives. However, I had to be mindful to continually monitor my health and fitness level and avoid overtraining. Sustaining any major injury would halt my training to a couple of months. Being involuntarily immobile is one of the worst experiences an athlete could face.

Lately, numerous sporting events and competitions were postponed or cancelled due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases. Event organisers had to react quickly to the newly introduced SMM guidelines and modify their events accordingly. A case in point is a recent virtual marathon that I competed in. Participants had to form a virtual group to clock a certain distance mileage at their own pace and time,

tracked by a smartphone application. The event organisers had come up with a fresh concept and innovative idea. I felt that it was very effective in promoting camaraderie amongst runners.

As the world experienced many waves of change brought about by this pandemic, paradigm shifts are constantly needed to ensure we carry on with our daily activities and continue with what we believe in.

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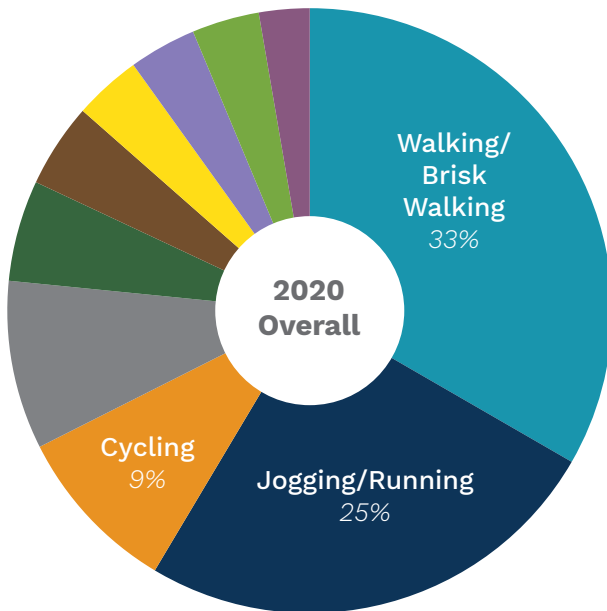
**These memorable experiences have definitely moulded my mindset and strengthened my philosophy to teach my students in creative ways and to encourage all of us to learn differently each day. ■**

## Did you know?

### Top Sport & Physical Activity by Singapore Residents (2020)

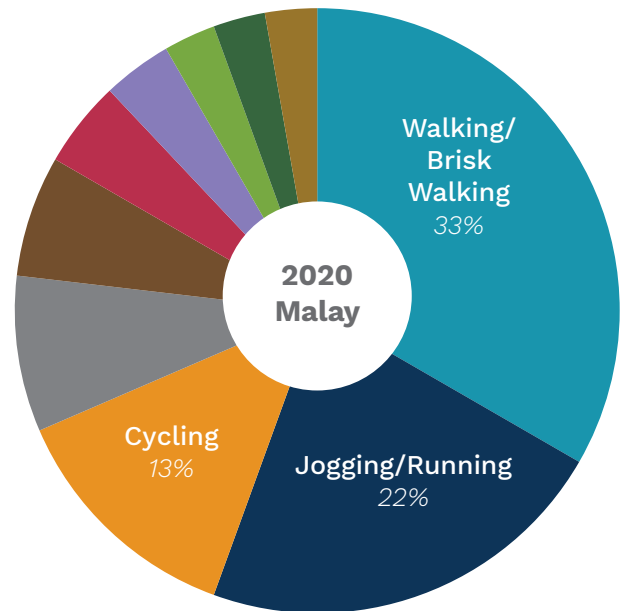
- Walking/Brisk Walking
- Jogging/Running
- Cycling
- Calisthenics
- Swimming
- Badminton
- Yoga
- Other Workout with Equipment
- Weightlifting/Weight training
- Basketball
- Football
- Bowling

Top Sports & Physical Activities  
(Overall)



Walking/Brisk walking had the highest overall percentage of 33% in 2020. Jogging/running (25%) and cycling are the next most popular activities (9%).

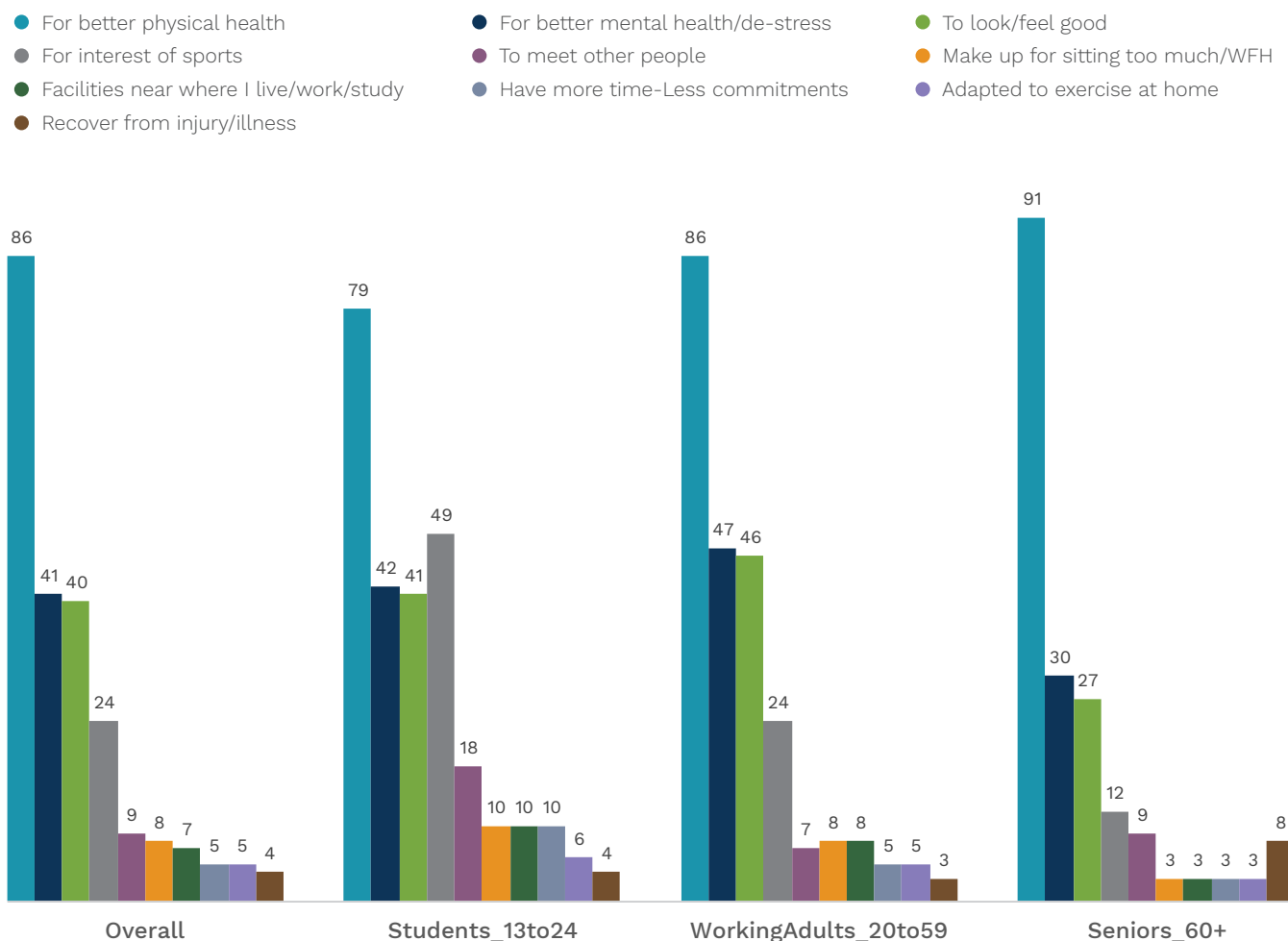
Top Sports & Physical Activities  
(Malay)



Similarly, the majority of Malays (33%) prefer walking/brisk walking, followed by jogging/running (22%). However, a greater proportion of Malay people prefer cycling (13%).

Source: Sport Singapore. (2020). *National Sports Participation Survey*. Data.gov.sg.

## Motivations to Participate in Sport / Physical Activity (2020)



Overall, 86% of respondents engage in sports for the purpose of improving their physical health.

49% of students between the ages of 13 and 24 years old participate in sports out of interest. However, only 24% and 12% of working adults aged 20 to 59, and senior citizens aged 60 and over, respectively, are interested in sports.

# Youth Empowerment

Lifelong Learning

Entrepreneurship

Employment & Employability









# Lifelong learning:

## Importance of empathy in policymaking



YM-IPS Policy Dialogue, Lifelong Learning Institute, October 2021. SMS Zaqy Mohamad addressing the attendees as part of the Raikan Ilmu finale.

**S**iti Khadijah Binte Setyo RS is a social service professional with eight years of demonstrated experience in research, planning and strategy development. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Public Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. She is passionate about social justice issues pertaining to social mobility and how the role of education policies and reforms promote educational equity.



By Siti Khadijah Binte Setyo RS  
Master's degree in Public Policy  
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy  
National University of Singapore



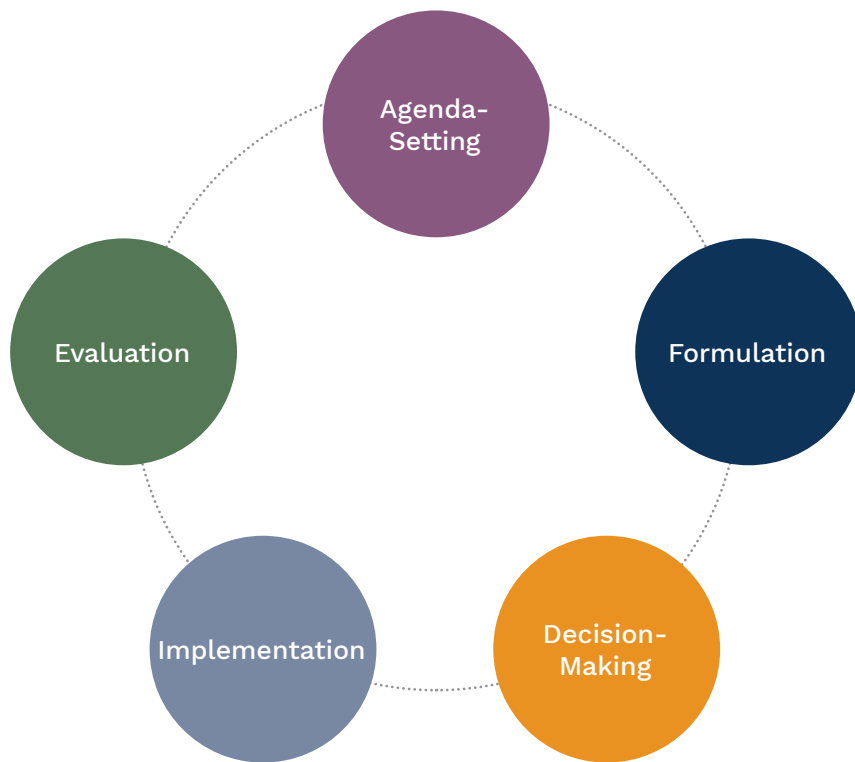
**I often wonder how policies are being studied in depth and applied by policy makers.**

An important task for any government official is to take timely and effective policy action to address the social, economic, and political challenges faced by society. Harold Lasswell famously defined politics as “who gets what, when, and how”<sup>1</sup>. However, attempts to improve policymaking have generally suffered from gaps between theory and practice. They have either presented unrealistic models of policymaking or failed to translate the desired practice into reality. It is important to note that policymaking is usually not as straightforward as it seems. There can be many factors influencing the development and implementation of policies, especially as there are multiple policy actors involved and that there could not be a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

One way that I have learnt is to examine policies and policymaking processes through the policy cycle model<sup>2</sup>. It involves the “performance of five vital activities”<sup>3</sup> namely agenda-setting, formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation. It is a series of five stages that explains how policies are drafted from identifying and framing the policy issue to policy implementation and evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> Lasswell, H. (2018). *Politics; Who gets what, when, how*. Pickle Partners Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> Howlett, M., & Ramesh, M. (1995). *Studying public policy: Policy cycles and policy subsystems*. Oxford University Press.



Source: *The Public Policy Primer: Managing the Policy Process*<sup>3</sup>

Through policymaking, we attempt to make sense of and address “wicked problems”<sup>4</sup>.

**The aim is to design and implement policies that would meet the needs of the different members of society.**

As society evolves and changes, policy issues get more complex and there will be new emerging issues that needs to be addressed through public policy. For example, the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how essential it was to quickly adapt and pivot to changes. Lockdowns led to disruption and the pandemic had rendered some jobs at-risk of being obsolete. Thus, it is imperative to respond to these complex issues and implement policies that would help jobseekers get better jobs or be prepared to embark on a career switch.

I was first introduced to the realm of public policy during my stint in the Research and Policy department in a social service agency (SSA). Amongst others, my job scope was to analyse national policies,

particularly relating to education, and its implications on the Malay/Muslim community. By making sense of evidence-based research and valuable data, the organisation was able to make informed decisions to improve its programmes and services to meet the education needs of the community. This highlighted the importance of a dyadic relationship between the engagement of research and policymaking as I was exposed to valuable opportunities to work and interact with policymakers regarding the data analysed.

Being in the Research and Policy department has also taught me the need for a more robust policy planning cycle through evidence-based research.

**Information gathering is key in policymaking as it is essential in identifying emerging issues within the society and is also equally important in evaluating the framework and policies implemented.**

In addition to the necessary skills required for policymaking such as problem-solving skills, critical thinking, negotiation skills and data analysis capabilities, it is equally important for policymakers to be socially empathetic.

<sup>3</sup> Wu, X., Ramesh, M., Howlett, M., & Fritzen, S. (2018). *The public policy primer: Managing the policy process*. Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Rittel, H. W., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155–169.

**Empathetic policymaking allows us to comprehend and appreciate the intricacies of the lived experiences of people which would subsequently guide us to design and implement policies that address their real needs<sup>5</sup>.**

Therefore, policymaking is dependent on the social compact of the community as it is the product of the joint efforts of the government and people to shape the growth of the nation in present time and in the future. For example, in a Ministerial broadcast in 2020, Senior Minister Tharman relayed the importance of collective responsibility of the government and its people to bounce back from COVID-19. With the government's targeted approach to subsidise job opportunities and training, the people are also responsible in striving to achieve their fullest potential as "no amount of unemployment allowances can compensate for the demoralisation of being out of work for long"<sup>6</sup>. Policymakers must navigate through delicate paths wherein they take into account and address the concerns of the individuals without diminishing the people's responsibilities in being independent in the long run.

The importance of achieving one's fullest potential resonated deeply with me as my parents had instilled in me the value of education at a young age. They often encouraged me to pursue my interests and have always supported me in my learning journey. I attribute my inquisitiveness to my upbringing as my parents have always been supportive of my curious mind. We are a family of readers and I remember reading a lot growing up and making frequent trips to public libraries all over the island. With an inquisitive mind, I decided to immerse myself in the social service sector, in the hopes of listening to stories and making a difference in people's lives. Working in a SSA has been very enriching

and only cemented my interest in exploring further the intricacies of policymaking. Hence, I endeavour to overcome a common challenge found in empathetic policymaking — not knowing how to help without the personal experiences or insights that people faced.

**Experience in the Master's in Public Policy Programme**

The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy's focus on Asia is what attracted me to the school. As a continent, Asia is so big and diverse. Its diversity means that each Asian country faces a different set of complex issues.



YM-IPS Policy Dialogue, Lifelong Learning Institute, October 2021. Guests at YM-IPS 2021 had a fruitful discussion on gearing the workforce for the future.

<sup>5</sup> Segal, A. (2011). Social empathy: A model built on empathy, contextual understanding, and social responsibility that promotes social justice. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 37(3), 266-277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2011.564040>

<sup>6</sup> Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, "A stronger and more cohesive society: Full text of Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam's national broadcast," *The Straits Times*, June 17, 2020.



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**But its diversity is also a strength as it provides us a wide pool of resources, ideas, and talents that we can leverage on and collaborate with to solve society's complex issues.**

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The school's diverse student population is also a huge pull factor for me to enrol into the Master's in Public Policy (MPP) programme as I get to learn and collaborate with peers with diverse experience and knowledge in public policy.

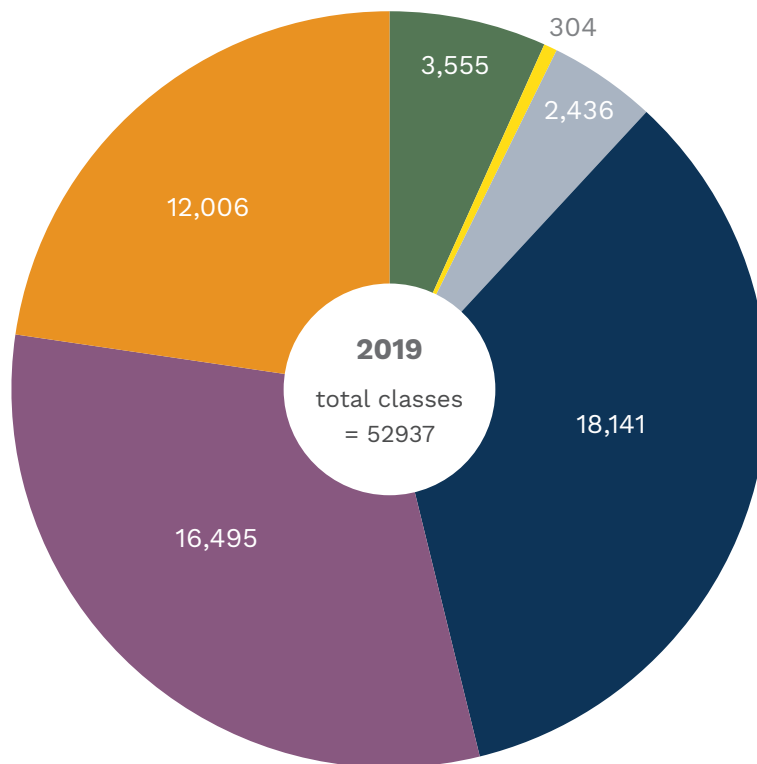
The two-year full-time Master programme focuses on theoretical and practical aspects of policymaking. The programme will culminate in the Policy Analysis Exercise (PAE) where I will get to apply what I have learnt to solve real world policy issues through collaboration with client organisations. My classmates are from all over the world – India, Japan, Peru, Belarus, etc. with diverse experiences in public policy. Similarly, faculty members and teaching assistants are of diverse backgrounds – from all over the world and experts in their respective fields. It has been a privilege interacting and learning from them. Due to border restrictions that arose from the pandemic, some of my classmates only managed to enter

Singapore recently. After months of online learning and Zoom meetings, it was such a joy to meet most of them in person. It has also been a fulfilling experience to learn from my classmates on how public policies are designed and implemented in their home countries. Upon graduation, I hope to work in the people or public sector and apply what I have learnt through the MPP programme to social policies such as education and labour policies. As I build my experience and capabilities in policymaking, I hope to also offer consultancy services to my organisations and other non-profits, and value-add to their efforts in policy analysis. ■

## Did you know?

### People Association (PA) Courses

- Arts, Crafts & Hobbies
- Beauty & Wellness
- Cooking & Food Culture
- Music, Drama & Dance
- Personal & Career Skills
- Sports & Fitness



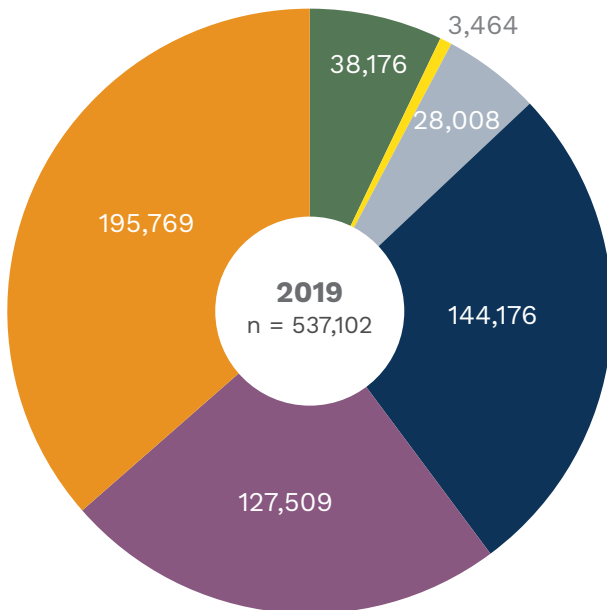
People Association offers six distinct types of courses (PA). Specifically, “Arts, Crafts and Hobbies”, “Beauty and Wellness”, “Cooking and Food Culture”, “Music, Drama and Dance”, “Personal and Career Skills” and “Sports and Fitness”.

The most conducted courses in 2019 are “Music, Drama and Dance” (18,141), followed by “Personal and Career Skills” (16,495) and “Sports and Fitness” (12,006).

Source: People’s Association. (2021). *PA courses*. Data.gov.sg



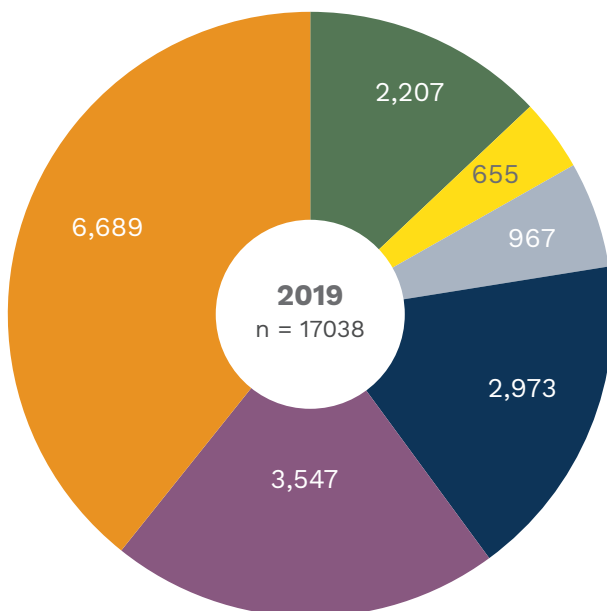
## People Association (PA) Courses Participants



There were a total of 537,102 participants in 2019. The highest participation are found in “Sports and Fitness” (195,769), “Music, Drama, and Dance” (144,176), and “Personal and Career Skills” (127,509).

Source: People’s Association. (2021). *PA participants*. Data.gov.sg

## People Association (PA) Courses Interest Groups



Similarly for course types, interest groups are classified into six categories. Around 17,038 interest groups existed in 2019. 39% of interest groups (6689) are related to “Sports and Fitness,” while another 21% (3547) are related to “Personal and Career Skills.”

Source: People’s Association. (2021). *PA interest groups*. Data.gov.sg

- Arts, Crafts & Hobbies
- Beauty & Wellness
- Cooking & Food Culture
- Music, Drama & Dance
- Personal & Career Skills
- Sports & Fitness

# “I want to be an entrepreneur”:

## Recommendations for youths, educators and school leaders



"Future of ..." Series, SCAPE, June 2019. Mr Saktiandi Supaat and speakers discussed the importance of creativity and grit in MENDAKI's "Future of..." Series.

**K**hairul Rusydi is the co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Reactor School, where he and his team provide avenues for students across Asia to immerse themselves in a start-up environment that would empower them and build their resilience for the future. Rusydi is also heavily involved in youth development work, through his contributions as the National Youth Delegate at the Commonwealth Youth Council and as an SG Youth Action Plan panellist.



By Khairul Rusydi  
Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer  
Reactor School

In this article, Rusydi outlines what Entrepreneurship Education (EntreEd) entails, and his observations from working with students and educators from 200+ high schools and universities. We explore the 5 Stages of Entrepreneurial Development, and identify the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) that Singaporean youths need to develop to succeed. Finally, Rusydi gives readers, educators and parents some practical tips on how youths can better prepare themselves to continuously design and redesign their career pathways.

## Hackathons & Entrepreneurship Education

The buzzword “hackathon” has been going around in school campuses worldwide. A hackathon is an event, usually hosted by a technology company or organisation, where programmers come together for a short period of time to collaborate on a project. Participants would often work rapidly and without sleep to achieve their task, as the events generally only last 24 hours or take place over a weekend.

A version that is popular with senior high school and college students, is the Start-up Weekend. Start-up or tech competitions are held in most major cities, where students and teams can network and develop their ideas further by interacting with experienced co-founders. In the case of Start-up Weekend, it is a less technical event and more of an *ideathon* where teams validate their ideas and try to create a proof of concept. For most students or first-time entrepreneurs, their start-up journey begins in such a format, usually referred to as a facilitated

hackathon. Students and first-time entrepreneurs work as a team on a business idea when they attend a start-up bootcamp.

In such programmes, the capstone activity would involve presenting a business pitch or a mini-demo day, where teams would pitch their start-ups ideas to a panel of investors. This is an opportunity for them to get feedback from real-life industry experts which is critical in helping them solidify their learning. So why are hackathons popular with high schools and universities?

### How are hackathons part of Entrepreneurship Education (EntreEd), and why has it become so important in the 21st century?

In formal education, students are typically taught to use a specific type of reasoning called Causal Reasoning, or  $1+1=2$ .

However, when they graduate into the real world, they use a different type of reasoning called Effectual Reasoning, or  $1+1=1$ .

There are laws and frameworks to follow, you know where you want to get to, but there is no one right

answer. Working in a start-up environment is full of uncertainty, and Entrepreneurship Education helps students make this change in mindset.

In Reactor School, instilling this mindset in our students is mainly through the 5 stages of entrepreneurial development.



Source: *The Entrepreneurial Process*<sup>1</sup>

At junior high school level, a student might just be aware about an idea and concept for a potential business or entrepreneurship. Over time, they will explore various career options, discover their strengths and areas of improvement as they start the planning phase. For those who are keen to take the plunge, most undergraduates would immerse themselves in an internship at a technology start-up or might embark on building a start-up of their own. Upon graduation, a small percentage of students might decide to grow their ideas further and apply to join an incubator or accelerator programme.

### What Should Educators & School Leaders Do?

The most important question that any school leader or educator should ask themselves before setting up an EntreEd programme or hackathon would be to understand the intent. Are you trying to get your students to be more entrepreneurial? Or are you trying to develop entrepreneurs?

**The key difference here is whether there is an emphasis on mindset and skill development, or if there is a need to achieve commercial outcomes.**

Not every student would want to become an entrepreneur, co-founder or business owner. But as educators, we believe that every student should be entrepreneurial.

<sup>1</sup> van Gelderen, M., Kautonen, T., Wincent, J., & Biniari, M. (2018). Implementation intentions in the entrepreneurial process: concept, empirical findings, and research agenda. *Small Business Economics*, 51, 923–941.



This is one of the key questions we ask ourselves when working with a high school or university, as it has implications on the duration, learning objectives and resources required. Are we looking to develop entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes? Or are we interested in developing investible profiles? Entrepreneurship itself is a discipline and there are methods, techniques and attitudes that students can practise to develop themselves further.

## How to Design an EntreEd Programme: The Training Needs Analysis

The first part of the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is to profile the learner. As educators, it is important to weigh the benefits between creating a one-off standalone programme or a multi-year programme with progressive learning outcomes. It is key for us to balance the needs of our students as well. Have they already

been actively working on an idea or are they entering as individuals looking to form a team thereafter? Our recommendation is to have 3 students per team, and no more than 5.

The second consideration is in the details of the programme itself. It is important to monitor the progress of our student's learning and if there should be focus on the professional development of our teachers through train-the-teacher programmes. It



"Future of ..." Series, SCAPE, June 2019. An infographic summarising key views for MENDAKI's "Future of ..." Series.



is equally important to consider the future outlook of our students thus, identifying key partners the school could work with is one way to procure potential placements for students upon graduation. This could include private companies that are keen and passionate to mentor students, or even parents who are part of the start-up ecosystem.

Finally, the third part of the training needs analysis would be considerations around logistics. This

includes whether the programme should be delivered online or in-person, and whether the programme should be funded directly by the school, parents, or a co-payment between the two. Our experience has shown that there are a variety of funding options, from 100% subsidy by schools for cohort-wide programmes, to a co-funding scheme with parents, to micro study loans and corporate sponsorships. Working with high schools, we have found that collaboration with

foundations or alumni donations works for with all parties. With universities, corporate organisations typically sponsor a hackathon to recruit new talent, or to solve a particular pre-existing challenge statement.

## How to Design an EntreEd Programme: Additional Recommendations for Educators

Another way to encourage and develop students would be to organise a form of entrepreneurship award that recognises student entrepreneurs, as well as student leaders on campus who exemplify entrepreneurial qualities. For example, the Action Community for Entrepreneurship in Singapore has a youth wing called EDGE. Every year they would scout for students who are role models for their peers and juniors on campus. Schools could develop a mini award just for their individual campus, to recognise their own students in a meaningful way.

A useful resource we recommend to all schools would be to maintain a list of mentors that students can turn to during or after their entrepreneurship programme. This could be done with a simple Google Sheet. Mentors could include alumni of the school, parents of current students, and corporate partners from tech companies, social enterprises, and small and medium enterprises.

Schools could also work with co-working spaces to request for corporate visits, excursions or even subsidised rental for hot desks and meeting rooms. Most universities





these days have decided to set up their own co-working spaces on campus for students to use rent-free for 3 to 12 months. High schools can also re-purpose makerspaces or student clubhouses into a collaborative space for their students.

Every year, Reactor School also organises a signature event for educators. In one particular example, we organised the Reactor Start-up Immersion for Educators (RSIE). As part of RSIE, educators from various high schools and junior colleges were attached to 6 tech start-ups from fields like HR, marketing, travel and edutech during the summer holiday. During the summer break, these educators had the opportunity to work with the founders on start-up projects, experience what it is like to work in a co-working space and try to learn and apply new skills. All this was done to introduce educators to the future of work, as most of them were not familiar with start-up and technology concepts. We also managed to perform reverse mentoring where one of the educators interned in his former student's start-up.

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**Schools can consider working with start-ups in their network to design such learning experiences for their staff and educators, as part of upskilling and professional development.**

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### **How to Better Prepare for the Future of Work: Recommendations for Students**

Fostering an entrepreneurial mindset in students is quintessential in today's economic landscape as the global economy is rapidly changing, with technological transformations dominating almost every industry. With entrepreneurship education, schools and universities can prepare students for the unmapped road ahead of us. This would not only be of great benefit to the future careers of our youths but would also boost their confidence in public speaking and their collaborative and teamwork skills as they progress through the five stages of entrepreneurial development.

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**The aim and focus of Reactor School is to cultivate and promote these critical life skills, in the hope that it will motivate students to explore their own education beyond the classroom walls.**

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By acquiring these skills, students can take charge of their own learning and hopefully acquire the necessary skills that will propel their ideas and abilities in the real world.

As a parting note, the following are easy-to-use tools that students can use to better prepare themselves for the future of work. These tools have been developed for the Singaporean

context and may also be useful for Education & Career Guidance (ECG) counsellors.



The first is Skilio (<https://skilio.co/>), which has developed pathways and career simulations for students. This includes simulations for local companies and start-ups, to give students an understanding of what it's like to work in a start-up environment.



The second is Kinobi (<https://app.kinobi.asia/>) which has developed tools to help students build resumes and cover letters. Kinobi has an algorithm that will score a student's resume compared to their peers, so that they have a better understanding of their chances.



The final one is EntrePlanner (<https://entreplanner.reactor.school/>) which helps students to plan their start-up career, including introducing them to start-ups and tech companies that are hiring. EntrePlanner uses a reverse headhunter mechanism, wherein students input what types of roles and industries they are interested in, and a bot will go out and hunt for internship opportunities for them. ■

## Did you know?

### Youths' Non-School/Work Activities

Question: On average, how many hours a week do you spend on the following activities outside of school and work? (Please provide your estimate.)

#### Proportion of Time Spent per Week on Non-School/Work Activities Overtime

	2013	2016	2019
	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Average Leisure Time <sup>a</sup>	40	49	43
Activities with immediate family and other relatives <sup>b</sup> (e.g., going out, having dinner together)	26%	33%	32%
Online activities (e.g., gaming, chatting, social networking, reading blogs)	25%	23%	21%
Activities with friends (e.g., movies, hanging out, concerts)	19%	16%	13%
Learning activities (e.g., reading, studying or doing homework, excluding school hours)	19%	14%	13%
Activities with boyfriend/girlfriend <sup>c</sup> (e.g., dating, hanging out)	NA	NA	10%
Physical activities (e.g., exercising or playing sports)	11%	9%	8%
Volunteer activities and/or community projects (e.g., helping in a welfare home or a place of worship, voluntary welfare, organisations, grassroots activities)	4%	2%	2%
Entrepreneurship activities (e.g., business planning, running stalls, selling items & services online)	4%	3%	2%



The percentage of time spent by youths on entrepreneurial activities has decreased over time. In 2013, 4% was spent on activities such as business planning, running stalls, and selling items and services online. However, time spent has decreased by 2% in 2019.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and their enduring bonds*. NYC.

## Proportion of Time Spent per Week on Non-School/Work Activities by Age

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=716)	(n=804)	(n=926)	(n=946)	(n=3,392)
Average Leisure Time <sup>a</sup>	53	49	37	35	43
Activities with immediate family and other relatives <sup>b</sup> (e.g., going out, having dinner together)	25%	25%	32%	44%	32%
Online activities (e.g., gaming, chatting, social networking, reading blogs)	24%	23%	19%	18%	21%
Activities with friends (e.g., movies, hanging out, concerts)	14%	14%	13%	10%	13%
Learning activities (e.g., reading, studying or doing homework, excluding school hours)	21%	16%	9%	7%	13%
Activities with boyfriend/girlfriend <sup>c</sup> (e.g., dating, hanging out)	4%	10%	14%	9%	10%
Physical activities (e.g., exercising or playing sports)	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Volunteer activities and/or community projects (e.g., helping in a welfare home or a place of worship, voluntary welfare, organisations, grassroots activities)	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Entrepreneurship activities (e.g., business planning, running stalls, selling items & services online)	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%



Furthermore, these activities pique the interest of a greater proportion of youth aged 25 to 34. They spend 2% of their time on entrepreneurial activities, compared to youths aged 15 to 24, who spend only 1% of their time on entrepreneurial activities.

Notes: The upper-bound survey population figures are reflected in this table.

a. Proportion of time spent is calculated by taking the number of hours reported for each activity over the total number of hours reported for all non-school/work activities.

b. In NYS 2010 and 2013, family was captured as parents and other relatives. NYS 2016 rephrased the example used to more accurately capture activities with immediate family including

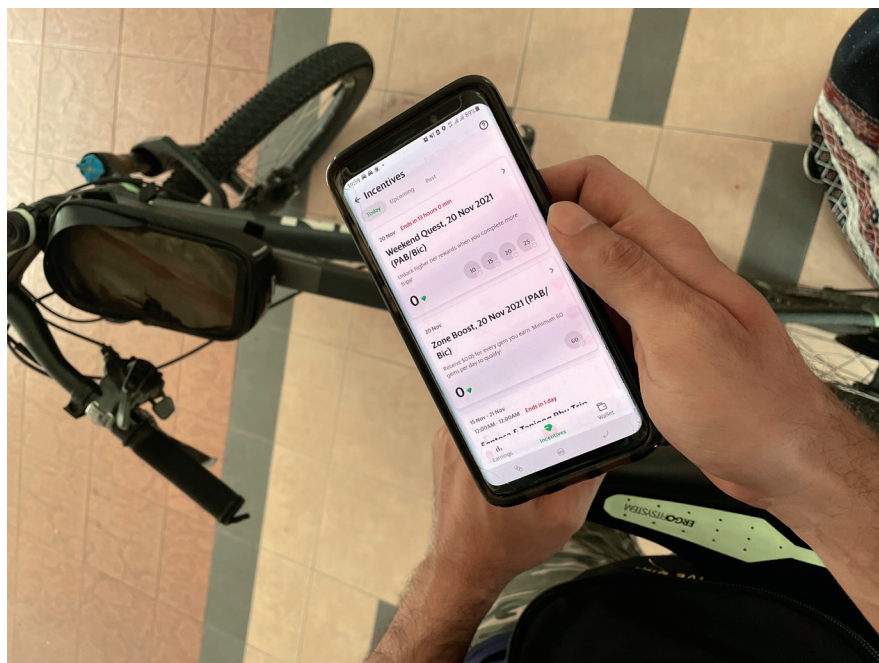
one's siblings and spouse, and separately measured activities with other relatives.

c. Item is new to NYS 2019.

Source: National Youth Council, Singapore. (2021). *Youth.sg: The state of youth in Singapore 2021. Youth and their enduring bonds*. NYC.

# The new normal:

## Stability in the gig economy



Snapshot of Grab Delivery Rider App, November 2021. First-person view of gig economy's incentives to take up more orders.

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By Arwa D/O Izzuddin  
Research & Design Department  
Yayasan MENDAKI

\* Names and details have been changed to protect the identities of individuals featured in this article.

Weekends are usually a respite from the exhausting forty hours of the work week. As the COVID-19 restrictions ease, it is not surprising to see families planning a trip to the Mandai Zoo, groups of friends enjoying the nature with a kayaking adventure or a relaxing lunch at a nearby café. These activities are a welcome break as not only is it a change of pace from the monotonous work week, but it is also seen as an excuse for us to breathe in the fresh air as we socialise with our loved ones. Unfortunately, this was not the case for Anwar\*, a 22-year-old who had just graduated from ITE earlier this year. On a hot Saturday morning, he was getting ready to accept his first delivery order.

**In these uncertain times, the food delivery sector is seen as a promising alternative to those who did not have the privilege of retaining their jobs or simply needed to earn extra income to make ends meet.**

It attracted a diverse demographic of workers who saw the merits of employment in this fast-growing sector. According to Channel News Asia, food delivery platforms saw a spike in rider signups as Singapore moved into the circuit breaker period<sup>1</sup> and the momentum

<sup>1</sup> Ang Hwee Min, "COVID-19: Food delivery platforms see a spike in rider signups following start of circuit breaker," *Channel News Asia*, April 17, 2020.

continued throughout these past two years. I decided to interview Anwar to gain his perspective on being in this industry during the current pandemic.

He welcomed me with a huge smile as he handed me a tall glass of iced water. I gladly accepted and apologised for taking up his time. “It’s okay! The peak hours start at 11am anyway. I gain more commission then,” he reassured me with a twinkle in his eye. With the ice broken, we made ourselves comfortable and began to talk.

### The Inspiration

He started working for Grab when he was in ITE because a friend recommended him. In the beginning, the stifling heat was an annoyance, and he began to wonder if an air-conditioned workplace would have been a better choice. However, work gradually ceased to be a chore when he focused on the positives of the job. He saw work as an opportunity to stay active and make new friends.

He had previously tried his hand in the retail industry but the stringent working hours of a nine to five proved to be too monotonous. He soon realised that an office job was not a good fit for him. The lack of incentives and flexibility in earnings was a limitation as well. As a delivery rider, he could earn commissions based on the number of orders he could fulfil.

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**The freedom in “own time, own target” was alluring.**

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### Maintaining a Reputation

Since the pandemic resulted in a large number of individuals being quarantined, it was not surprising for customers to include special requests when placing their orders. Whenever Anwar encounters any such cases, he has always stressed the need to be accommodating and courteous, as they are usually simple requests such as helping to buy an extra bottle of soda.

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**“Simple, just be respectful,” he said with a shrug.**

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He does not see it as a chore to go the extra mile for his customers, especially since his service puts a smile on their faces. This happened quite frequently during COVID-19, as many customers were unable to head out on their own to purchase any necessities.

### Alluring Incentives and Benefits

Most food delivery platforms follow a business model that offers attractive incentives to their delivery partners based on the number of orders delivered. Anwar shared that he chose to work for Grab, primarily because of its gem system. Gems are

earned through orders. The more orders he accepts and completes, the higher his commission.

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**“It’s almost like a treasure hunt! The idea of collecting gems makes work more exciting,” he explained.**

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With any job, there are bound to be challenges. Collecting gems goes hand in hand with hard work and the grit to continue persevering even when faced with obstacles. Anwar lamented on the few instances when he unfortunately had to reject an order due to unforeseen circumstances, such as a long wait-time at restaurants or bad weather. Anwar, however, was not deterred as he looks forward to the protection measures that the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) would implement in addition to the newly expanded insurance policy that Grab has introduced for its riders<sup>2</sup>. Starting from 1 July 2021, the Grabfood Emerald Circle programme will award the most loyal drivers with increased insurance coverage, including extended medical leave, among other enhancements<sup>3</sup>. These enhancements and insurance coverages are free for the riders and provide all riders with the assurance that the union is working with the government and partnering delivery companies to ensure better working conditions for delivery riders.

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<sup>2</sup> Charmaine Ng, “NTUC to push for law change to better represent freelancers,” The Straits Times, February 18, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Grabfood Emerald Circle. (n.d.). Grab. <https://www.grab.com/sg/gfdp-emeraldcircle/>



## **Moving Forward - Future Plans**

It is hard not to notice the opportunity cost of being a delivery rider. The convenience of flexible working hours and attractive incentives make it difficult for Anwar to move on from his job as a delivery rider. Even though Anwar has educational aspirations, he acknowledged that working on a delivery platform has been extremely beneficial in providing extra income for his family. However, the question he keeps asking himself is,

**“Is there stability in this job?”**

This coincides with the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s National Day speech, in which he highlighted the growing concerns of individuals employed by gig-economy companies. Due to the prolonged effects of the pandemic, there has been an influx of new riders, thus there is more competition for orders and as a result, delivery riders may only be earning a modest income<sup>4</sup>. Recently, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has been exploring various strategies, such as setting up an advisory committee to ensure a more secure future for delivery riders by working closely with the gig-economy companies<sup>5</sup>. Manpower

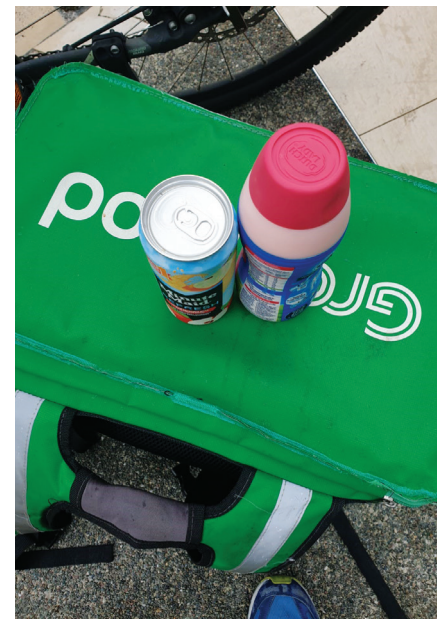
Minister Tan See Leng said his ministry will strengthen protections for self-employed persons who work for online platforms, and an advisory committee has been set up to look into ensuring a more balanced relationship between platforms and their workers.

**One way is to encourage delivery riders to find opportunities in fast-growing industries such as information and technology, personal services and financial and insurance sectors.**

The Census data showed that the number of Malay/Muslim individuals pursuing professional, managerial, executive, and technical (PMET) occupations has increased from 28 percent in 2010 to 39 percent in 2020. Senior Minister of State Zaqy Mohamad highlighted that the increase in the number of individuals in PMET jobs will lead to better outcomes as the Malay/Muslim individuals are earning higher incomes than in 2010<sup>6</sup>.

The current pandemic has resulted in a shift in the economic landscape with more individuals being self-employed as they work for online platforms. It is imperative that

the pressing concerns and future outlook of these employees are addressed by the appropriate committees and organisations. It is important to balance these concerns while still uplifting and encouraging individuals to be independent in the long run through the spirit of lifelong learning in our community. With increased assistance from the government such as SkillsFuture Credit, delivery riders may consider tapping on these opportunities to be able to enter emerging industries. ■



*Snapshot of mid-day break for Grab Delivery riders, November 2021. Our gig workers tend to take quick breaks in between orders to recharge.*

<sup>4</sup> Hidayah Iskandar, “As demand for delivery surges, food deliverers are not seeing returns,” The Straits Times, April 15, 2020.

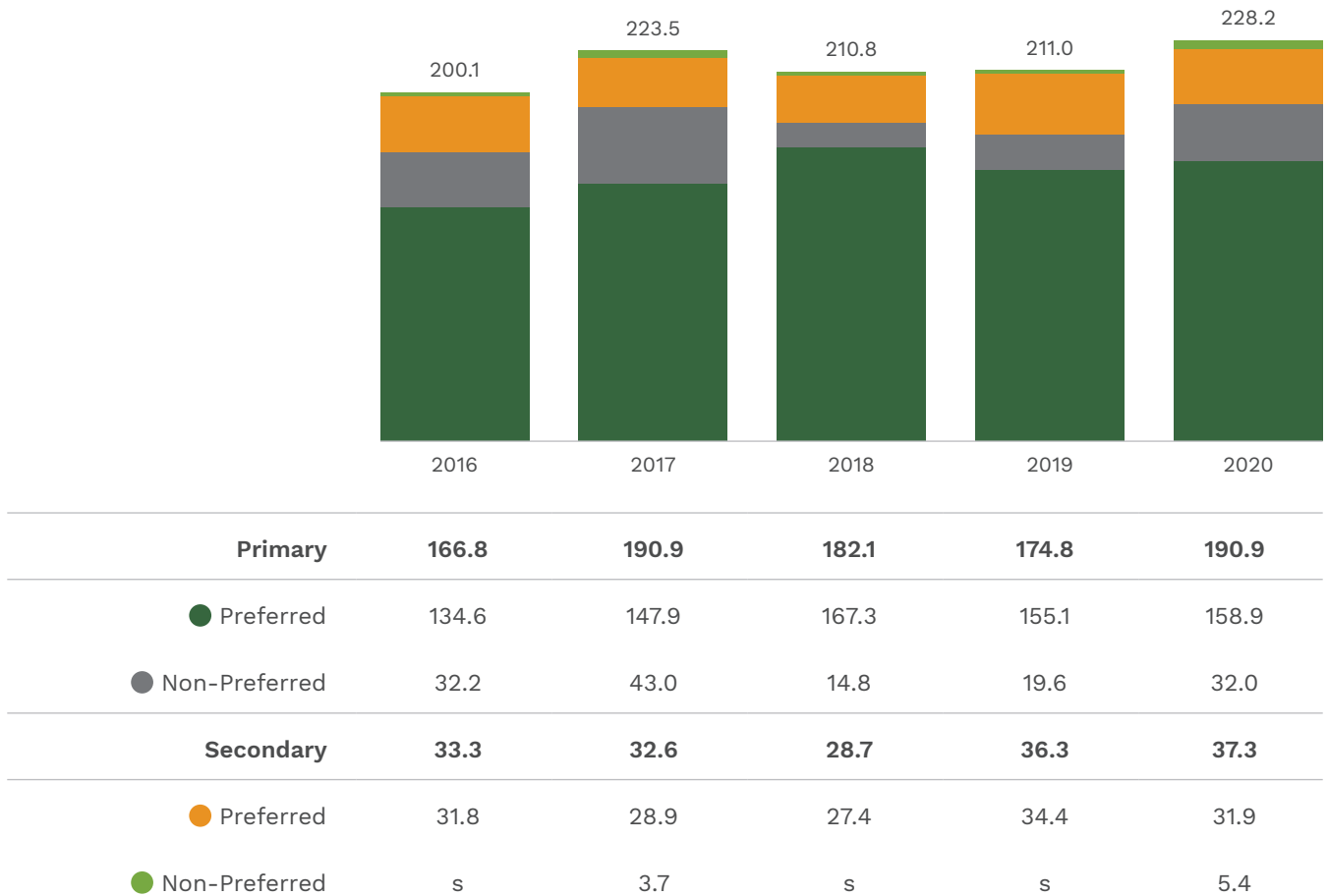
<sup>5</sup> Tham Yuen-C, “NDR 2021: MOM looking into issue of work benefits and welfare needs of delivery workers,” The Straits Times, August 30, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Hariz Baharudin, “Census 2020: Malays making strides in education, fare well in global education test, says Masagos,” The Straits Times, June 19, 2021.

## Did you know?

## Regular Own Account Workers (2020)

## Resident Regular Own Account Workers



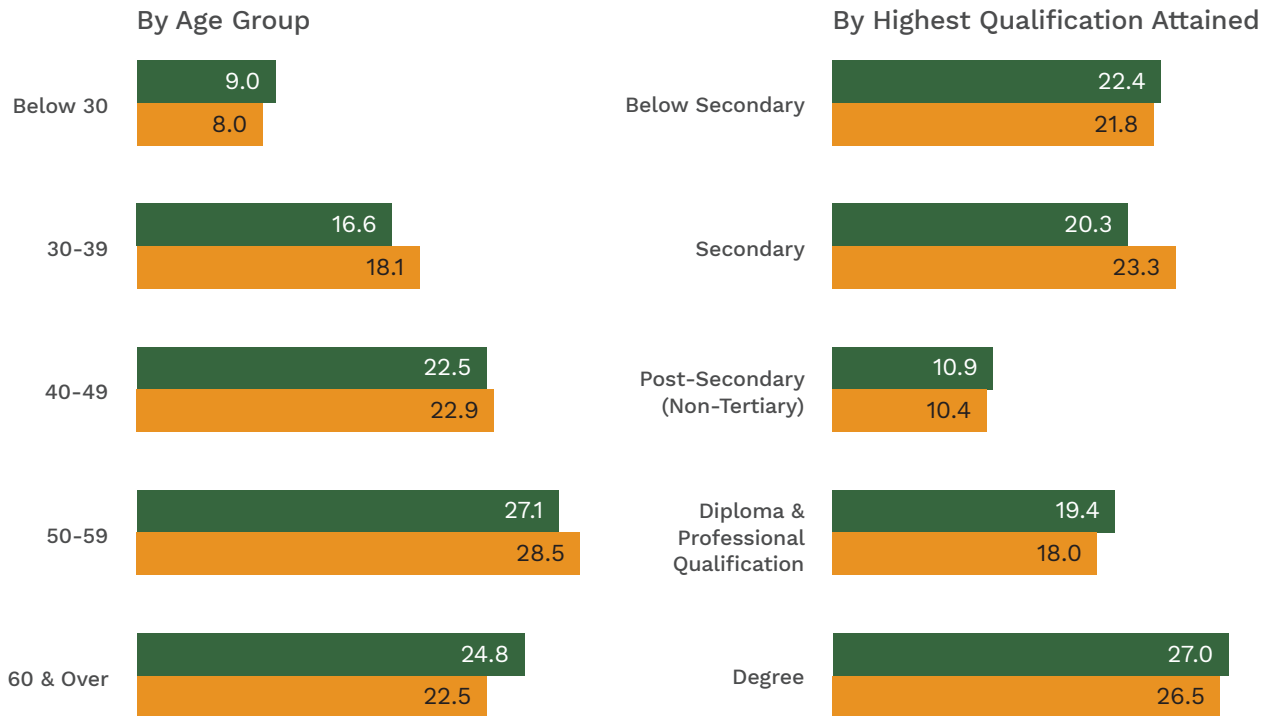
More residents were engaged in own account work as a regular form of employment over the one year period ending mid-2020 (228,200), up from 211,000 in 2019.

Note: (1) Data refer to residents in own account work as a regular form of employment for the 12-month period ending the middle of the year. (2) "s": Data suppressed due to small number covered. (3) Data may not add up due to rounding.

Source: Manpower Research and Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on own account workers*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

## Resident Regular Primary Own Account Workers

● 2020 ● 2019



Among regular primary own account workers, majority were residents aged 40 & over (74%) and had non-tertiary qualifications (54%). The age profile has shifted slightly over the year towards the older ages of 60 & over (from 22% to 25%) as well as younger workers aged below 30 (8.0% to 9.0%).

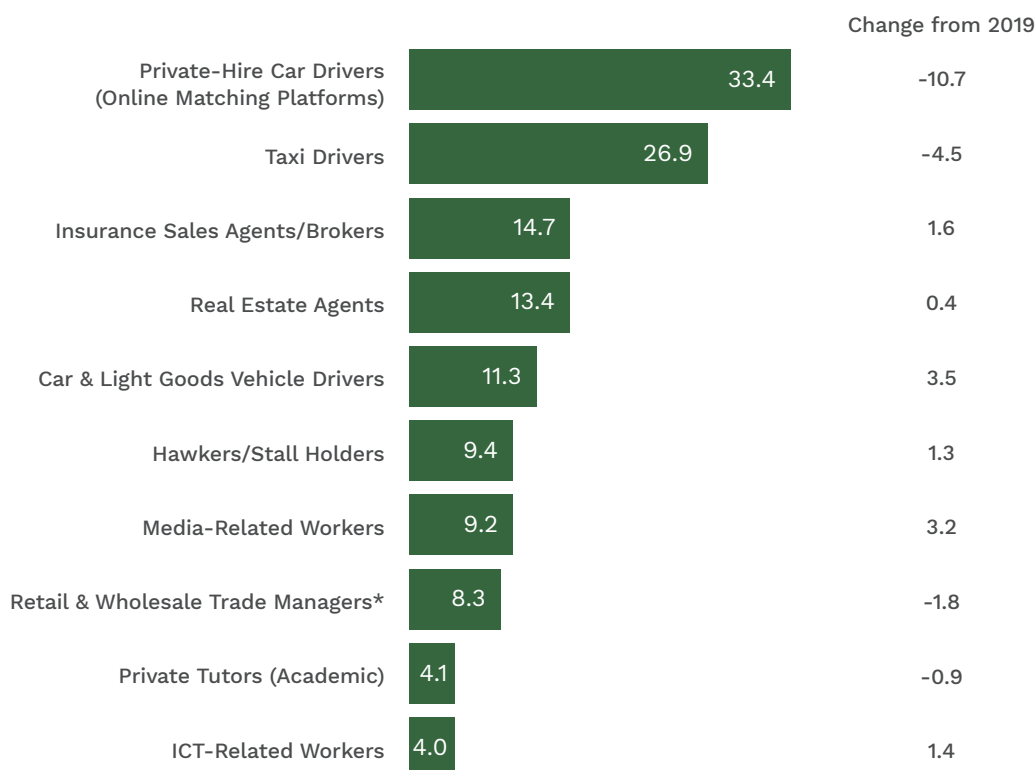
On the other hand, the share of those aged 30 to 59 fell, though fewer among them were doing own account work by choice.


In line with the increase in the share of own account workers who were younger, the share who were tertiary educated also edged up in 2020 (44% to 46%, mostly among those with diploma & professional qualifications).

Note: Data may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Manpower Research and Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on own account workers*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

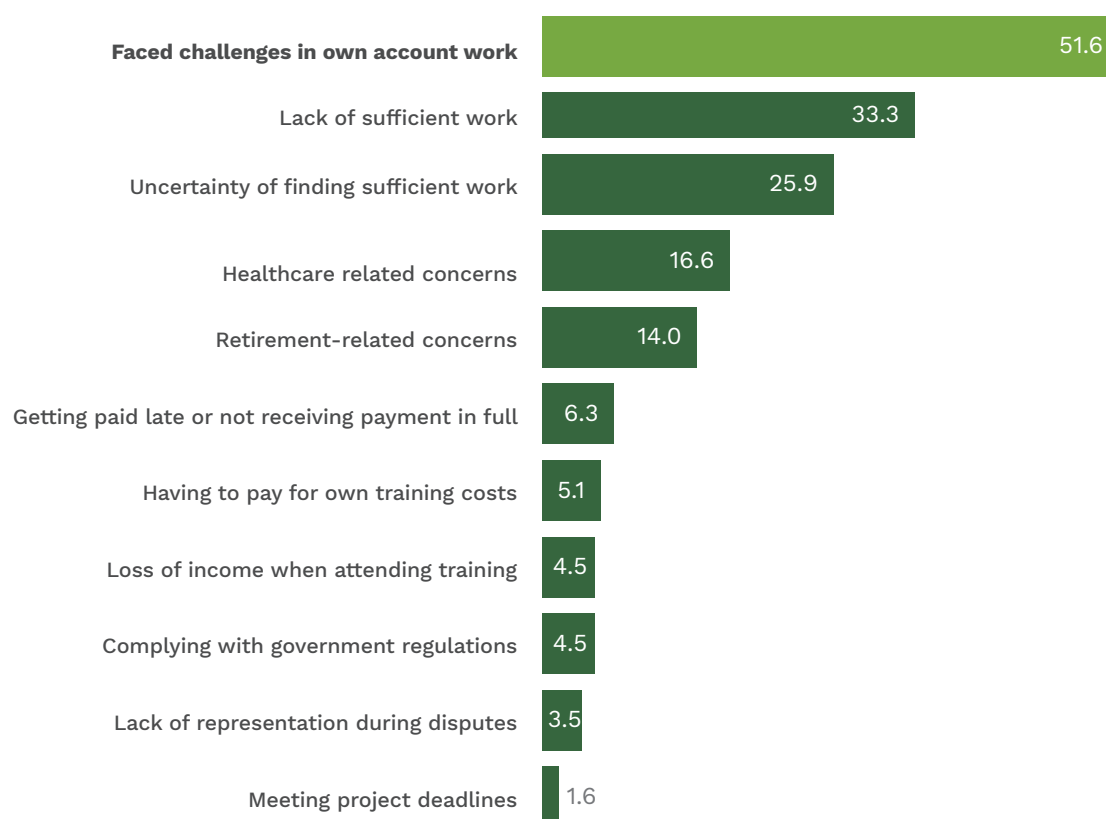
## Top Occupations Among Resident Regular Primary Own Account Workers, 2020



 In 2020, there was a significant increase in the number of regular primary own account workers in occupations which usually utilised online matching platforms to obtain work, in particular private-hire car drivers. The number of residents working as private-hire car drivers rose in 2020 to become the most common occupation among regular primary own account workers. There was also an increase in car & light goods vehicle drivers, as the suspension of dine-in services during the circuit breaker period and other safe distancing measures led to heightened demand for delivery services. Other common occupations include insurance sales agents/brokers, real estate agents and hawkers/stall holders.

Note: (1) Private-hire car drivers in this chart refer to those on online matching platforms (e.g. ride-hailing platforms). Private-hire car drivers who are not on online matching platforms are covered in the category 'Car & Light Goods Vehicle Drivers', together with drivers of other modes of transport (vans, motorcycles, bicycles, etc). (2) Data are classified based on Singapore Standard Occupational Classification (SSOC) 2020. Data before year 2020 which were coded based on earlier versions of the SSOC were mapped to SSOC 2020 as far as possible to facilitate data comparability. (3) \* - this refers to persons who operate and manage their own wholesale/retail trade businesses without any paid employees. Source: Manpower Research and Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on own account workers*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

## Challenges Faced by Resident Regular Own Account Workers, 2020



Own account workers were most concerned about having sufficient work amid the pandemic. About one in two (52%) regular own account workers faced challenges at work in 2020. This was significantly higher compared to the preceding year (35%). They were most concerned about the lack of (33%) or uncertainty of finding sufficient work (26%), possibly due to a fall in demand for services, and increased competition for available freelance work. The proportions who have healthcare-related concerns (17%, e.g. insufficient savings for healthcare, lack of medical benefits and paid sick leave), as well as retirement-related concerns (14%), were broadly similar to a year ago.

Majority (90%) of those who faced challenges in the course of own account work felt that the difficulties faced were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To cope, regular own account workers tend to put in longer hours (37%) or defer large ticket purchases (34%). It was less common for them to take up multiple jobs (20%) or find employee work (12%).

Note: (1) Data are based on all regular own account workers (primary and secondary own account workers). (2) Data do not add up to the total as each worker may indicate multiple concerns.

Source: Manpower Research and Statistics Department. (2020). *Supplementary survey on own account workers*. Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.



# **Families & Familial Relations**

A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled branches and dense green foliage, serving as a background for the title. The tree's trunk is massive and splits into several large branches that spread out in all directions. The leaves are a vibrant green, and the overall scene is dappled with sunlight and shadow. In the background, a multi-story building is visible through the branches, and a few people can be seen walking on a path at the bottom of the frame.







# Championing Family Excellence Circle:

## Drawing upon life lessons of ups and downs



Family Excellence Circle Engagement, MENDAKI@Woodlands, December 2020. A counselor sharing her experiences with Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim during the engagement session.

**N**ur Iryani Halip is currently a Senior Research Officer at Yayasan MENDAKI. Iryani completed her Bachelor's in Mathematical Science at Nanyang Technological University specialising in Business Analytics. Her research interests primarily focus on the behavioural insights affecting employment and employability of youth and adults.

**S**ri Khairanee Ahmad is a Care Advisor and facilitator for Family Excellence Circle. She is currently completing her Bachelor of Counselling. She is passionate about reaching out to the community to empower and help them achieve their dreams.



By Nur Iryani Halip  
Research & Design Department  
Yayasan MENDAKI



By Sri Khairanee Ahmad  
Engagement Group  
Yayasan MENDAKI

*"Berat mata memandang, berat lagi bahu yang memikul"* (As heavy as it looks, it is heavier for the shoulder carrying the load) is a phrase that Mdm Sri Khairanee Ahmad, also affectionately known as Mdm Ani, carries with her as a Family Excellence Circle (FEC) facilitator.

The FEC group was curated by MENDAKI specifically for caregivers of children, whose parents have been incarcerated. They provide the necessary resources and support to the various family members who have willingly taken on the caregiver duties of these children. FEC's pilot group, which commenced in July 2019, had 12 members from nine families.

As part of the FEC programme, groups of similarly profiled participants attend group sessions with a trained facilitator to talk about the issues faced and learn from each other on how they can best deal with the situation. For sustainability, the participants are encouraged to keep in touch after the programme to continue being a pillar of support for each other.

There are various rehabilitation and reintegration programmes available, but not many are aware of the programmes made accessible for these vulnerable family members. Parents, spouses and even children of incarcerated persons are facing just as many issues, if not more. Family and Inmates Throughcare Assistance Haven (FITRAH) by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and Family Excellence Circle (FEC) Group by MENDAKI, under the M<sup>3</sup> Focus Area 2, are some programmes that were developed to help inmates

and their caregivers through this arduous phase in their lives.

Most recently, a network of 25 Malay/Muslim organisations was launched at the end of November 2021, to provide services such as counselling, rehabilitation and aftercare aid, to support offenders, ex-offenders and their families. The network was launched by M<sup>3</sup> – MENDAKI, Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and MESRA.

**Singapore faces a significant prevalence of caregiver burden, with many caregivers experiencing reduced quality of life and increased depressive symptoms.<sup>1</sup>**

Having been a facilitator for close to three years, Mdm Ani has seen more than her fair share of the struggles caregivers have faced – financially, mentally, and emotionally. Being a wife and mother herself, she is empathic to the situations faced by the women and initially had some trouble keeping work at the workplace as emotions may get carried home.

She has been most affected by caregivers who have been through so much that they have lost their

confidence and are unable to recognise their own strengths – leaving them with only self-doubt and anxiety over their situation. Mdm Ani, on the other hand, is amazed by their strength to be cognisant of their situation and seek outside help.

**Her very first takeaway from being a facilitator is identifying your own strength.**

This was something she struggled with when she looked back on her journey which began after her GCE 'A' Levels.

Mdm Ani sought work at the age of eighteen years old. Unlike her friends who went to further their studies in university, Mdm Ani did not have the luxury to do

so and found herself working in the logistics industry, where she remained over 30 years. She found solace in her work and was confident that she was doing well until tragedy struck – the passing of her beloved mother. The loss was so great, that she began feeling like a lifeless shell, going through life on a daily basis. A very understanding boss offered her a three-month break to allow her to grieve in earnest, before returning to work to figure out what they could do together. She agreed, and a three-month break turned into a two-year sabbatical.

During her break, she went hiking and even volunteered for MENDAKI, where she was eventually offered the position of a facilitator. She was doubtful of her ability to be a facilitator and her ability to return to the workplace. Before deciding to return to the workplace, she utilised her SkillsFuture Credit to learn Microsoft Excel and Word. She



*Family Excellence Circle Engagement, MENDAKI@Woodlands, December 2020. A member of MENDAKI's FEC - Cohort 1 interacting with Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim.*

<sup>1</sup> Loo, Y. X., Yan, S., & Low, L. L. (2021). Caregiver burden and its prevalence, measurement scales, predictive factors and impact: A review with an Asian perspective. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 1-29.

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knew that she had a lot to catch up on with her peers who had remained in the workforce. She was confident that education and lifelong learning were the most effective ways to shut out the doubts in her head.

Mdm Ani was a warm facilitator, and her friendly disposition made her a crowd favourite. She used her own experience dealing with loss and grief to help the caregivers deal with their issues, but she still felt ill-equipped. Her lack of relevant education often made her wonder if the help she was providing was sufficient and right. This doubt was further perpetuated when an understandably angry caregiver told her that she could not possibly relate to what she was expressing.

Her resolve was strong. To be a better facilitator, and provide the families with the right help, she needed to pick up where she left off over 30 years ago and further her

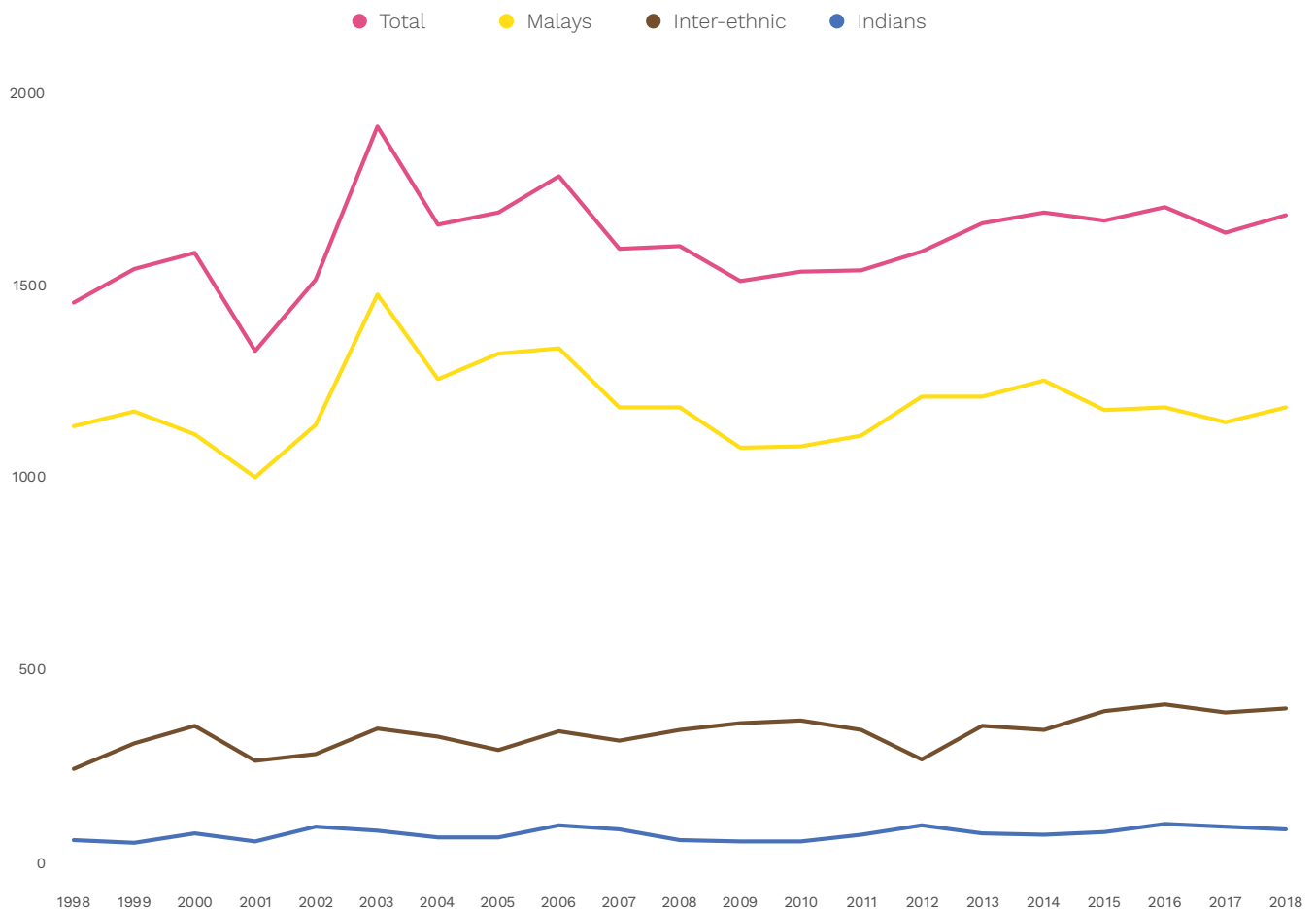
education. However, the decision to go back to school was not an easy one. After dealing with a long bout of unemployment, and not having been in a classroom in over a decade, she was unsure if she could go back to being a student, at her age, nonetheless. After much convincing and strong support from her family, friends and colleagues, she is now a student in the Singapore University of Social Sciences, completing her Bachelor's Degree in Counselling.

Ultimately, Mdm Ani hopes that her efforts to further her studies can be seen as an inspiration as she becomes better able to facilitate the sessions and impart skills to caregivers to gradually be more competent and independent. She has seen the progress the families have made and hopes to provide continuous support to more families in need. ■



## Did you know?

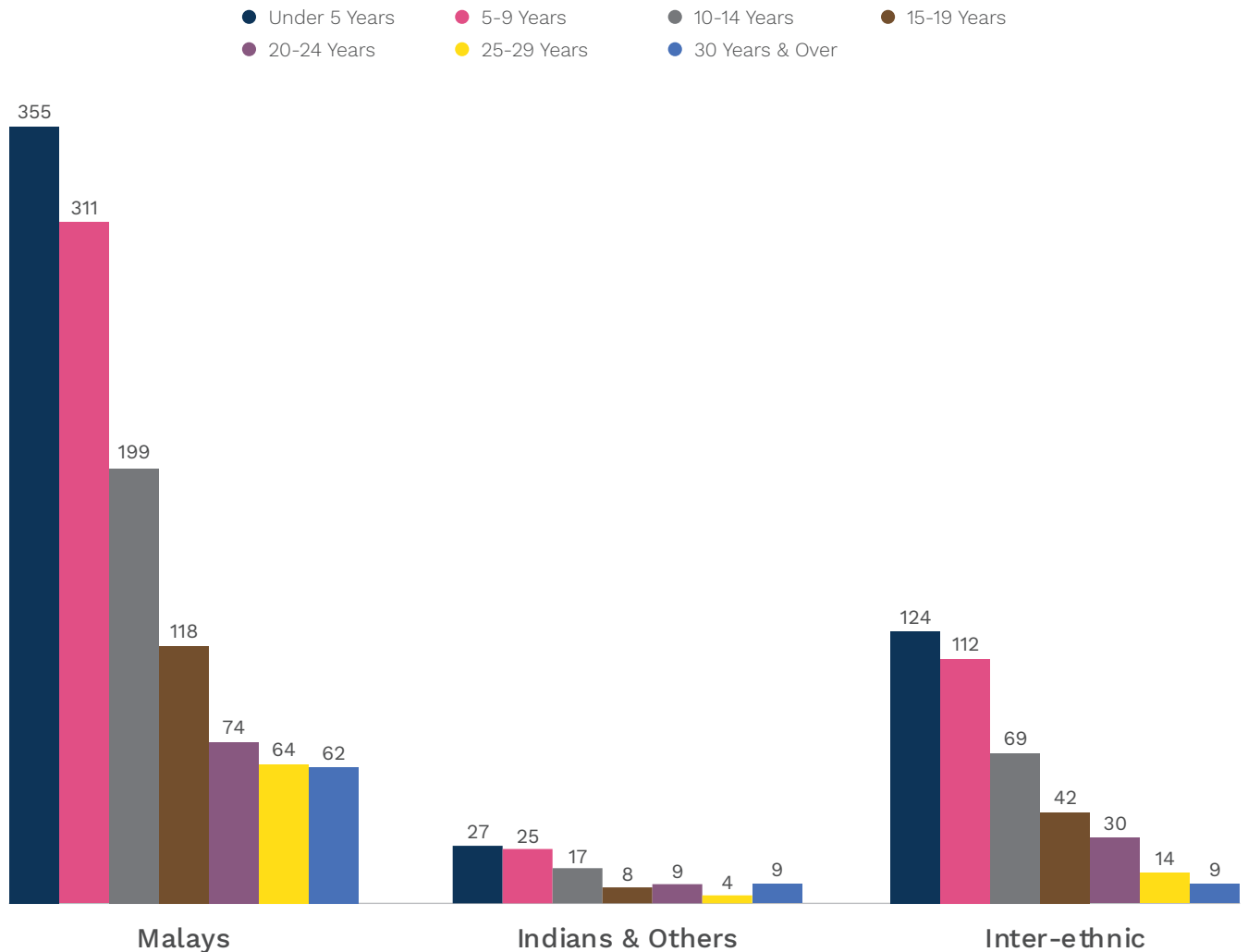
### Divorces under the Administration of Muslim Law Act by Ethnic Group of Couple, Annual



The total number of divorces in the Muslim community has increased by 11.3% when compared between 2018 and 2008.

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Statistics on divorces under the Administration of Muslim Law Act*. Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore.

## Muslim Divorces by Ethnic Group of Couple and Duration of Marriage



In 2018, 30% of divorces (506) were filed by Muslim couples who had been married for less than five years. Another 27% (448) of divorces are from Muslim couples who were married for 5 to 9 years.

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Statistics on divorces under the Administration of Muslim Law Act*. Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore.

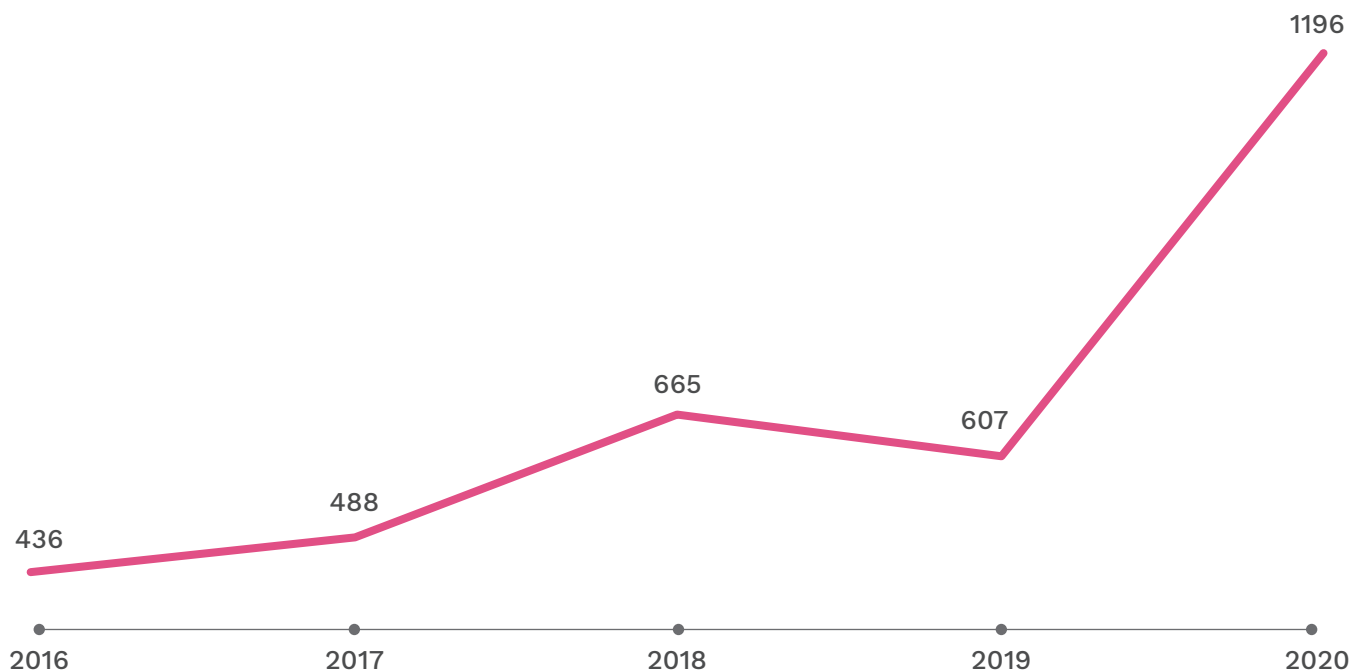
### Median Duration of Marriage Among Muslim Divorces



Overall, the median length of marriage among Muslim divorces was 9.4 years in 2015, up from 8.1 years in 1995.

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore. (2019). *Statistics on divorces under the Administration of Muslim Law Act*. Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore.

### Adult Protection Enquiries



The number of adult protection inquiries has increased over time. These inquiries range from actual cases of abuse and violence to general inquiries by a concerned member of the public, and include those related to vulnerable adult abuse and other types of family violence. There are 1196 enquiries in 2020, which is 97% more than in 2019.

Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development. (2021). *Number of enquiries received by MSF Adult Protective Service*. MSF.

# In the eyes of a caregiver:

## How incarceration affects the ones we love



*Re-enactment of Mr Ahmad's\* sharing session, November 2021. Mr Ahmad\* sharing his struggles and willingness to get back on his feet through M<sup>3</sup> programmes.*

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By Nur Nadiah Zailani and  
Siti Syafiqah Abdul Rashid  
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When his wife was first incarcerated, Mr Ahmad\* was faced with the responsibility of being primary caregiver to his young children. Concerns surrounding childcare, finances, as well as his children's educational and emotional well-being came into immediate focus. Seeking assistance from social and welfare organisations also meant having to follow through several administrative processes and forms, as well as conditions to the aid his family could receive. These had largely convinced him to manage his family's upkeep himself, compounded by his own fears of discrimination from those close to him and the society. In our conversation with him, Mr Ahmad shared how he had found it difficult to openly express his frustrations and feelings of isolation – especially in his roles as both father and mother to his children, while his wife was detained.

Mr Ahmad expressed his gratitude to his family members who had taken care of his children while he worked. However, at the back of his mind, he knew that such arrangements were not sustainable. Thus, he felt that he had no choice but to depend on his oldest child, Sarah, to help care for his younger children. Sarah was serving her internship at an institute of higher learning when the incarceration happened. She had to stop her internship halfway to take care of her younger siblings, while also working part-time. Mr Ahmad mentioned that her teacher was aware of their situation when deferment was inquired. To facilitate the deferment, Mr Ahmad and Sarah were sent for counselling and were held accountable on the family's situation.

\* Names and details have been changed to protect the identities of individuals featured in this article.



Mr Ahmad's experience is one of the many accounts detailing caregiver anxieties and apprehensions as they navigate the system for assistance. "Caregivers" here may refer to spouses of incarcerated individuals who have taken on main responsibility over a family unit, or extended family members who have assumed this role (for example, if both parents are in detainment). In the long-term, however, their concerns can revolve around the rehabilitation of ex-offenders to minimise recidivism, and the reintegration of ex-offenders back into society. Additionally, they may also be concerned about the impact their spouse's incarceration may have on their young children in the future. Mr Ahmad mentioned in our conversation, "I felt that

**Sarah was disappointed and angry at the situation where she was held accountable for a situation she was not responsible for.**

I could tell that Sarah was frustrated that she could not graduate with her classmates. Nonetheless, despite the internship being postponed, she managed to complete it later."

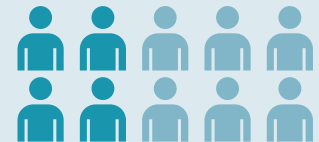
Yayasan MENDAKI, as part of M<sup>3</sup> and the National Committee on Prevention, Rehabilitation and Recidivism (NCPR), has partnered with relevant ministries and organisations to offer comprehensive support and programmes for incarcerated individuals, caregivers and families. These programmes focus on providing reintegration opportunities, in addition to religious guidance as well as welfare and financial assistance, to mitigate the impact parental incarceration may have on families and society.

### Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children and Families

Data in 2020 showed that 4 in 10 of the convicted penal population in Singapore have at least one child under 18 years of age.<sup>1</sup> More starkly, 1 in 10 of the convicted penal population have at least one child under the age of seven.<sup>2</sup> While there are substantially more fathers than mothers being incarcerated (approximately 4:1), this does not discount the significant role each parent plays within a family unit. The absence of either parent – or both – may lead to long-lasting effects on children, especially if they experience family criminality and/or family disruptions from young.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, parental incarceration suggests that their children are more vulnerable and susceptible

to delinquency, youth offending and recidivism. This is due to, for example, their increased exposure to crime,<sup>4</sup> and absence of parent(s) in their formative years.

**4 in 10 of the convicted penal population in Singapore**



**have at least one child under 18 years of age.<sup>1</sup>**



**1 in 10 of the convicted penal population in Singapore**



**have at least one child under 7 years of age.<sup>2</sup>**



*Data in 2020*

In this regard, parental incarceration can affect children's academic achievement and emotional wellbeing, potentially leading to felonious attitudes and intergenerational offending. Studies have shown that children with incarcerated parents between 7 and 13 years of age tend to show more offending behaviours, compared to children of other ages with parents who have

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development, "Family Intervention for Incarcerated Parents and their Children" September 9, 2021, pg 3. <https://www.msf.gov.sg/Events/Documents/COY2021/NCPR-SPS-Family-Intervention-for-Incarcerated-Parents-and-their-Children.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development, "Report on Youth Delinquency" 2021, pg 61. [https://www.msf.gov.sg/NCPR/Our Initiatives/Documents/FA\\_MSF\\_Report\\_on\\_Youth\\_Delinquency\\_2021.pdf](https://www.msf.gov.sg/NCPR/Our%20Initiatives/Documents/FA_MSF_Report_on_Youth_Delinquency_2021.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Besemer, Syske & Farrington, David, "Intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour: Conviction trajectories of fathers and their children" European Journal of Criminology, 2012, 9, 120-141.

been incarcerated.<sup>5</sup> In Singapore, parental incarceration is considered an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), akin to violence, abuse and substance abuse. A 2019 Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) study on ACE showed that 46.5% of youths in the criminal justice system had incarcerated parents.<sup>6</sup> MSF researchers also found that youth offenders with household members having a history of incarceration were 1.5 times more likely to join gangs, while those with household members having a history of substance abuse were 2.2 times more likely.<sup>7</sup> Poorer parenting practices,<sup>8</sup> together with the lack of bonding with the offending parent and an antisocial environment with limited supervision,<sup>9</sup> were found to exacerbate the possibility for these children's offending behaviours. Additionally, adverse family backgrounds such as non-intact family structures or marital conflict between parents, only compounds the

social and behavioural issues facing children of incarcerated parents.

### **Programmes supporting Caregivers, Families and Children of Incarcerated Parents**

Intervention and targeted programmes are therefore necessary to strengthen these families and provide suitable support to the caregivers. The objective is to interrupt the social reproduction of offending within families,<sup>10</sup> and prevent youths from assuming criminal stereotypes and behaviours.<sup>11</sup>

For example, Singapore Prison Services' (SPS) Family Intervention and Reintegration efforts include early referrals of newly admitted inmates' families to Family Service Centres (FSCs). This allows for smoother coordination between SPS and FSCs to better support inmates and their families. Other initiatives

include facilitating regular contact between incarcerated parents and their children; support groups and info-handbooks for caregivers as well as inmates; parenting and marital workshops; and structured family visits and interaction.<sup>12</sup>

Specific to the Malay-Muslim community, the FITRAH (Family and Inmates Throughcare Assistance Haven) programme headed by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) has benefitted a total of 385 families. Services extended under FITRAH include referrals for financial aids, befriending, Islamic education at local mosques, as well as coordination with MENDAKI for employment opportunities, and tuition for the children. At least 330 volunteers (including religious counsellors) are involved in FITRAH, to better support inmates, caregivers and their families.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Rakt M van de, Murray J, Nieuwbeerta P, "The Long-Term Effects of Paternal Imprisonment on Criminal Trajectories of Children" in Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development, "Family Intervention for Incarcerated Parents and their Children" September 9, 2021, pg 4. <https://www.msf.gov.sg/Events/Documents/COY2021/NCPR-SPS-Family-Intervention-for-Incarcerated-Parents-and-their-Children.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Oei, A., Li, D., Chu, C. M., Chng, G. S., & Ruby, K, "Factors associated with gang affiliation in offending youths [Conference presentation]" in National Committee on Prevention, Rehabilitation and Recidivism, Singapore, Feb 14, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Menard, J., Knezevic, B., Miller, S. R., Edelstein, D., Thompson, K., & Miller, C. J., "Intergenerational transmission of antisocial behaviour and age at primiparity" in Journal of Child and Family Studies, 2015, 24, 798-808.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development, "Family Intervention for Incarcerated Parents and their Children" September 9, 2021, pg 6. <https://www.msf.gov.sg/Events/Documents/COY2021/NCPR-SPS-Family-Intervention-for-Incarcerated-Parents-and-their-Children.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Hagan, John & Palloni, Alberto, "The Social Reproduction of a Criminal Class in Working-Class London, Circa 1950-1980" in American Journal of Sociology, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Bernburg, J. G., Krohn, M. D., & Rivera, C. (2006), "Official labeling, criminal embeddedness, and subsequent delinquency: A longitudinal test of labeling theory" in Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 2006, 43(1), 67-88.; Besemer, S., Farrington, D. P., & Bijleveld, C. C. J. H., "Labeling and intergenerational transmission of crime: The interaction between criminal justice intervention and a convicted parent" in PLOS ONE, 2017, 12(3), Article e0172419.

<sup>12</sup> This may also take place virtually, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>13</sup> M<sup>3</sup>, "Vulnerable Individuals and Families", retrieved from <https://www.m3.gov.sg/focus-areas/vulnerable-individuals-and-families/>, 2021.



Additionally, MENDAKI's Family Excellence Circle (FEC) group specifically caters to the needs of caregivers to school-going children whose parents have a history of incarceration.<sup>14</sup> Caregivers are encouraged to engage with each other and share their experiences within a protected and non-judgmental setting. The children also participate in art therapy sessions as a means to express their emotions, as the caregivers partake in the FEC. Through this group, caregivers and children of incarcerated parents are referred to other MENDAKI services and programmes,<sup>15</sup> to provide comprehensive support to their needs.

### Supporting Caregivers and Families into the Future

For families like Mr Ahmad's, these programmes may offer some recourse. Initiatives available at present focus on guiding and redirecting families with incarcerated parents towards opportunities for future progress. They also seek to alleviate the immediate social, financial and emotional concerns caregivers may have while caring for the children. More importantly, these programmes allow caregivers to plan their next course of action once the incarcerated parents are discharged. Continued support and assistance should be rendered to these affected families and children – especially during the parents' rehabilitation and reintegration back into society. ■



"Kuat akar kerana tunjang, kuat tunjang kerana akar" - The community's strength relies on us helping one another.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> This includes the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS), Mentoring @ MTS and other programmes at MENDAKI's satellite centres.

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## Helplines



### Ministry of Social and Family Development

☎ 1800 111 2222

🌐 <https://www.msf.gov.sg/Pages/Contact-Us.aspx>



### Yayasan MENDAKI

🌐 <https://my.mendaki.org.sg/Home/ContactUs>



### Family Service Centres (FSCs)

☎ 1800 222 0000

🌐 <https://www.msf.gov.sg/dfcs/familyservice/default.aspx>



### Family and Inmates Throughcare Assistance Haven (FITRAH)

☎ 6911 8153

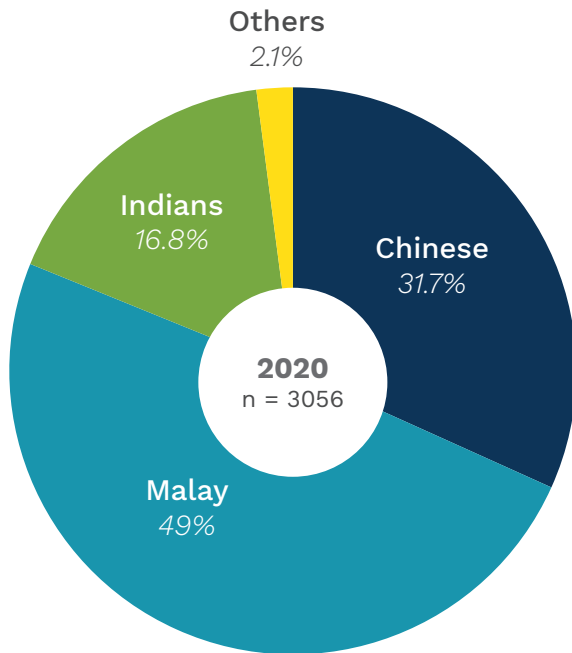
☎ 6911 8154

🌐 <https://www.m3.gov.sg/media-centre/speeches-and-press-releases/fitrah-at-masjid-en-naeem>



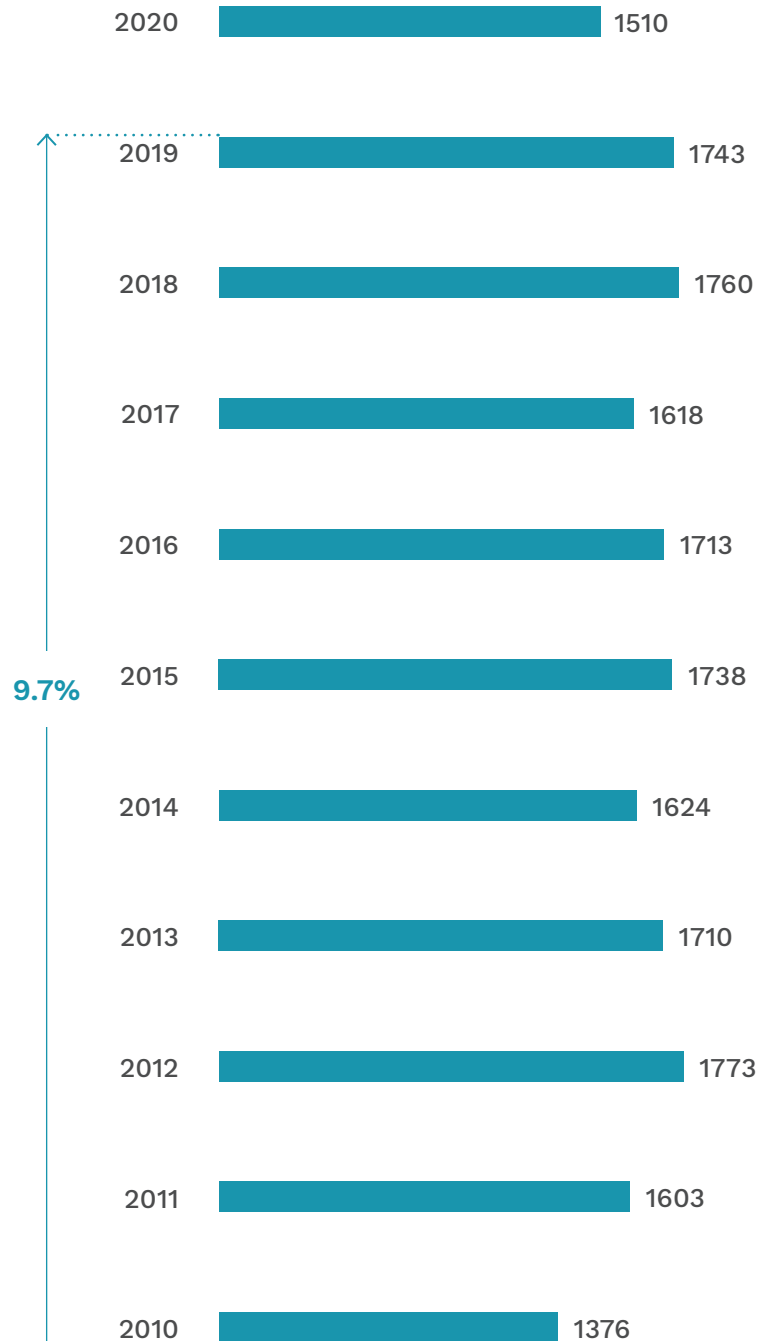
## Did you know?

## No. of Drug Abusers by Ethnic Groups



There were 1510 Malay drug users in 2020. They accounted for 49.4 % of all drug abusers, followed by the Chinese (31.7%), the Indians (16.8%), and Others (2.1%).

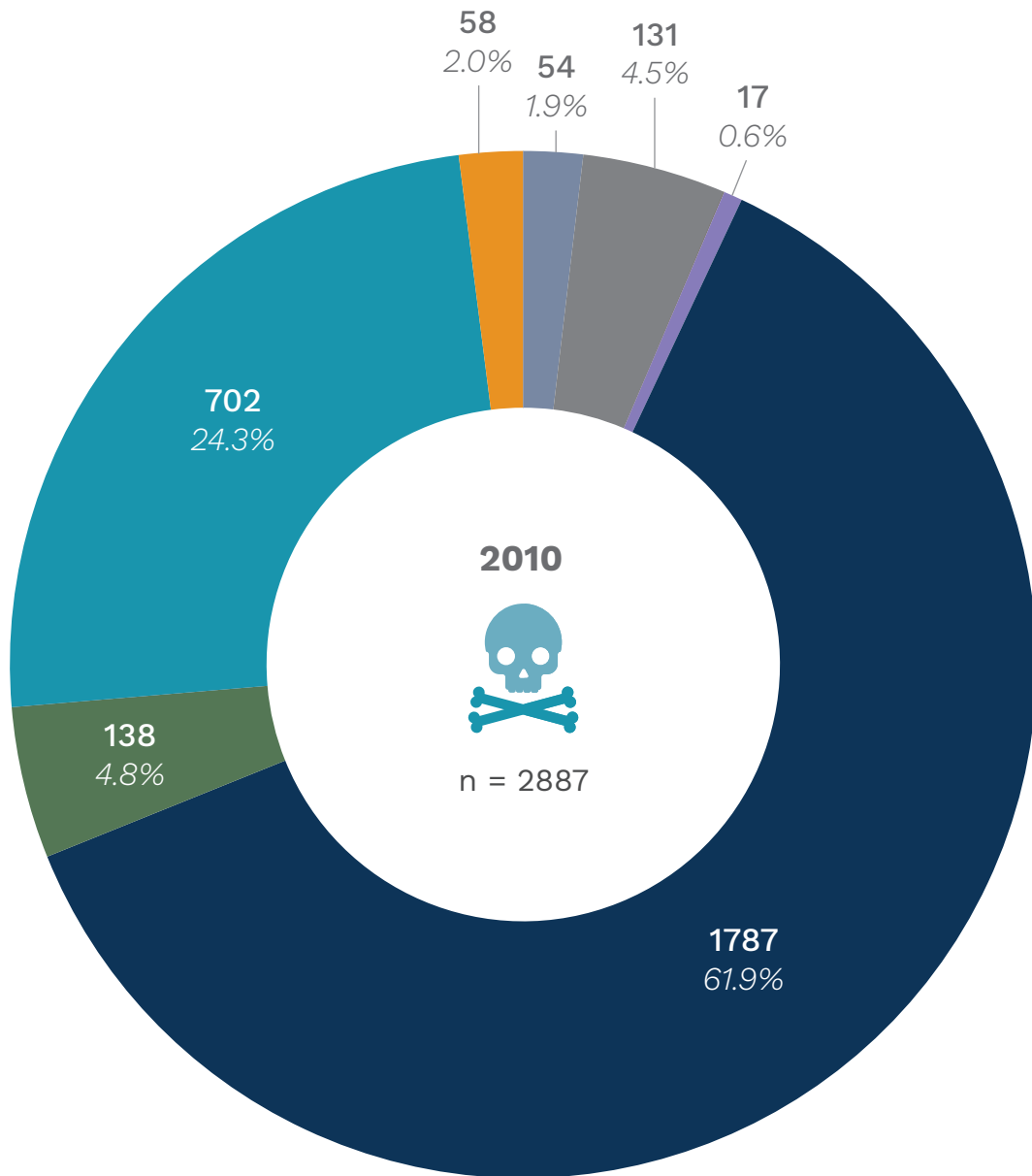
Despite a decrease in the number of Malay drug abusers from 1743 in 2019, the number of Malay drug abusers increased from 1376 in 2010. This represents a 9.7% increase.




Source: Central Narcotics Bureau. (2021). *Breakdown of drug abusers by demographic factors*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore.

## No. of Drug Abusers by Major Drugs of Abuse

Buprenorphine   Heroin   Nimetazepam   Cannabis   Methamphetamine   Methadone  
 NPS   Cocaine   LSD   Ecstasy   Ketamine

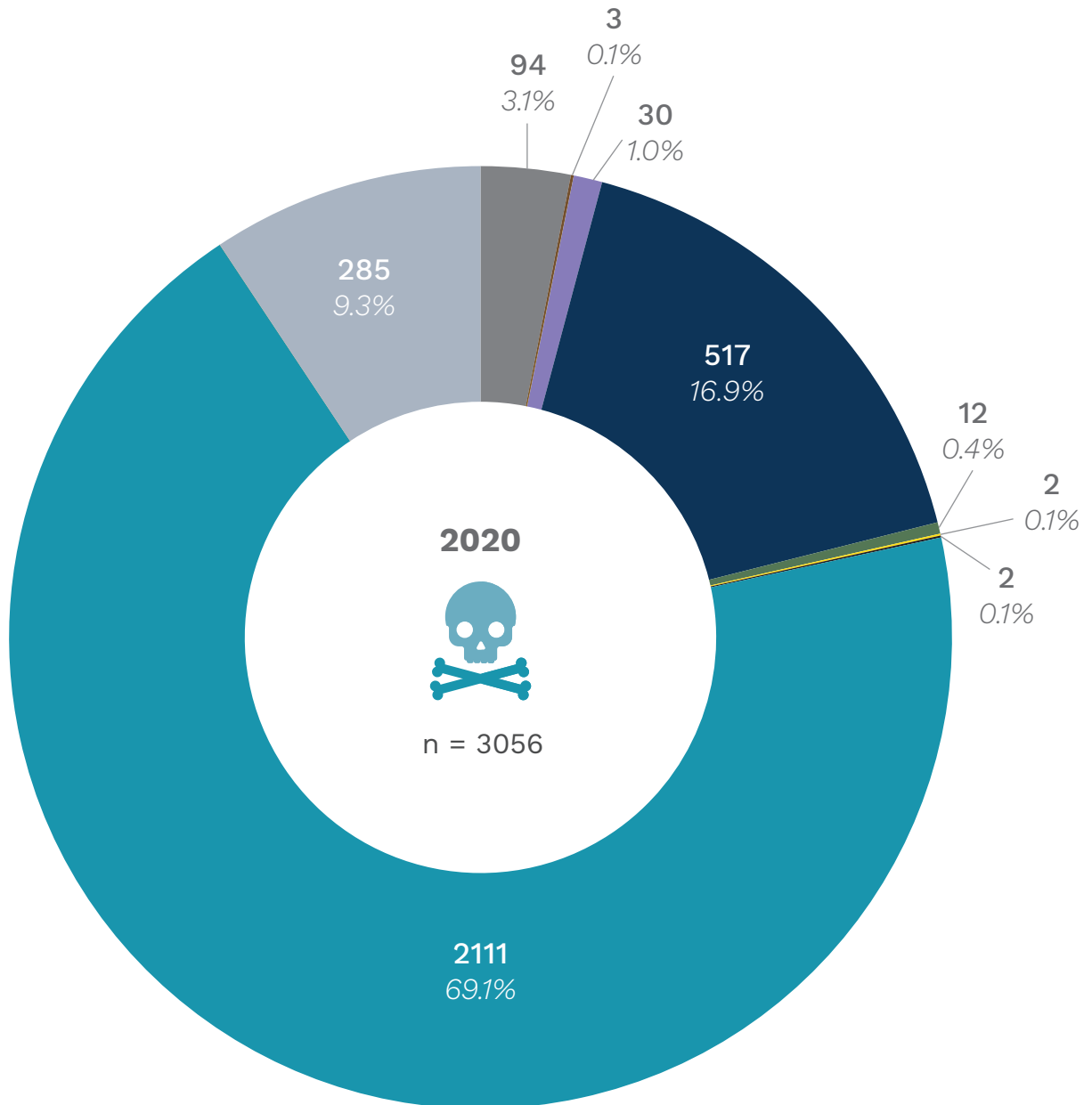


 In 2010, Heroin was the most abused substance (61.9%), followed by Methamphetamine (24.3%). 4.5% of drug abusers consumed Cannabis.

Source: Central Narcotics Bureau. (2021). *Breakdown of drug abusers by demographic factors*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore.

## No. of Drug Abusers by Major Drugs of Abuse

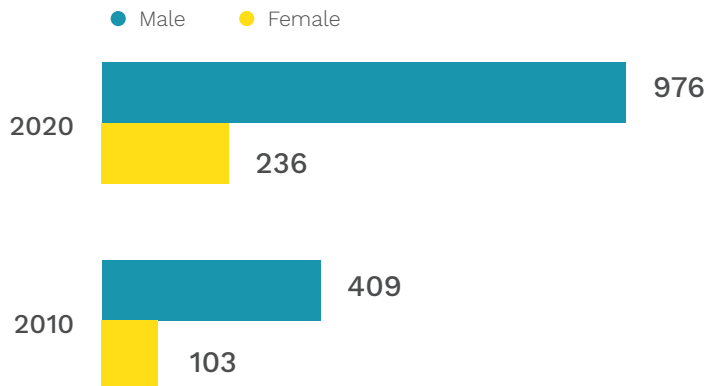
Buprenorphine   Heroin   Nimetazepam   Cannabis   Methamphetamine   Methadone  
 NPS   Cocaine   LSD   Ecstasy   Ketamine



2020 saw the rise of Methamphetamine as the most abused substance (69.1%) while the abuse of Heroin was greatly reduced (16.9%). There was a slight decrease in consumption of Cannabis (3.1%) from 2010.

Source: Central Narcotics Bureau. (2021). *Breakdown of drug abusers by demographic factors*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore.

## No. of Inmates released from Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) by Gender



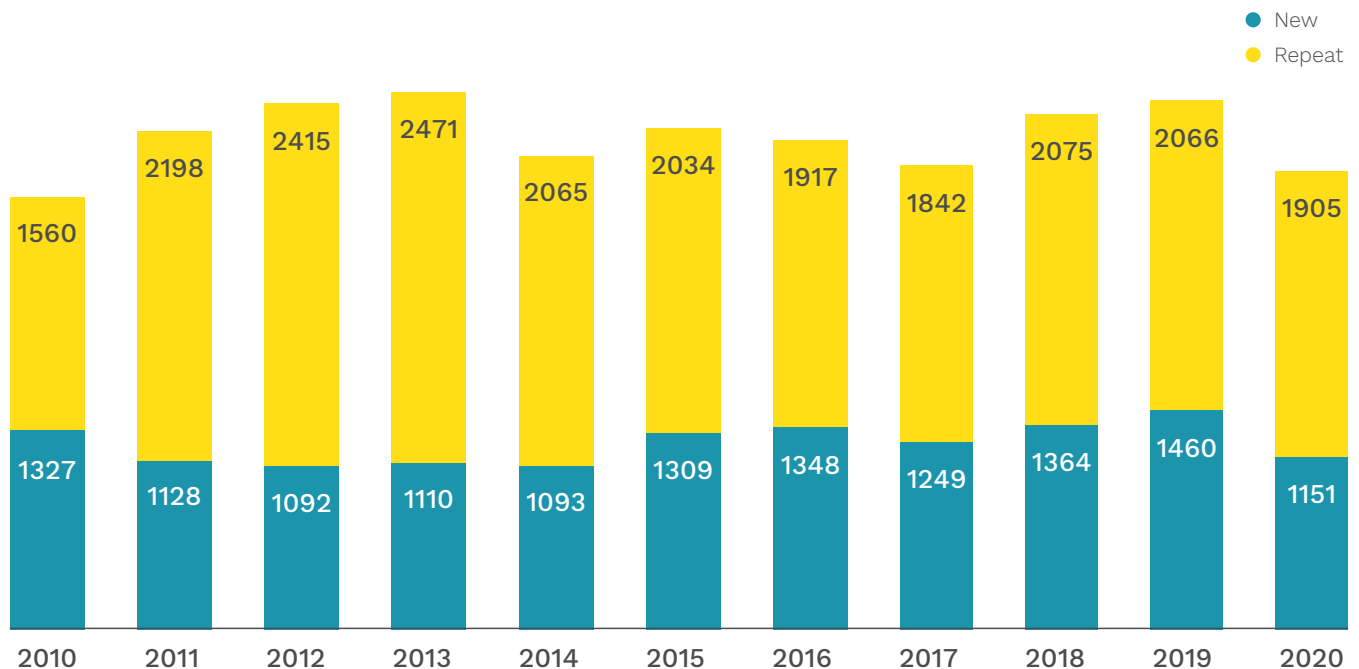
In 2010, DRC released 512 inmates (103 females and 409 males).

In 2020, the DRC released a total of 1,212 inmates (236 females and 976 males).

This demonstrates that the total number released has more than doubled for both genders.

Source: Singapore Prison Service. (2021). *Inmates released after undergoing treatment and rehabilitation in Drug Rehabilitation Centre from 2006 to 2020*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore.

## No. of Drug Abusers by Status



In 2010, there were 1560 repeat offenders, or 54%.

In 2020, 1905 offenders (or 62% of all offenders) were repeat offenders, increase by 345.

Source: Central Narcotics Bureau. (2021). *Breakdown of drug abusers by demographic factors*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore.







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