

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Singaporean youths hesitate to seek mental health support, fearing they might burden others**

*A nationwide survey reveals gaps in mental health education could be key to addressing Singaporean youths' hesitation in seeking support*



**SINGAPORE, 12 Nov** – A recent survey by CARE Singapore and global market research firm, Milieu Insight, has uncovered that Singaporean youths face a myriad of concerns or challenges regarding the prospect of seeking mental health support, primarily the fear of burdening others with their problems (49%). This hesitation is particularly pronounced among students showing moderately severe depressive symptoms, as reflected in PHQ-9 scores of 14 and above. The PHQ-9 scoring system categorises depression severity as follows: mild (0-9), moderate (10-14), and severe (15 and above). The survey, which polled 1,000 youths aged 16 to 35, utilised the PHQ-9 tool to assess the severity of depressive symptoms across various levels.

These findings closely mirror the results of the National Youth Mental Health Study conducted by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), where 16% of respondents had PHQ-9 scores of 15 (severe) or higher, closely matching the 15% reported in this survey.

## Key barriers to seeking help

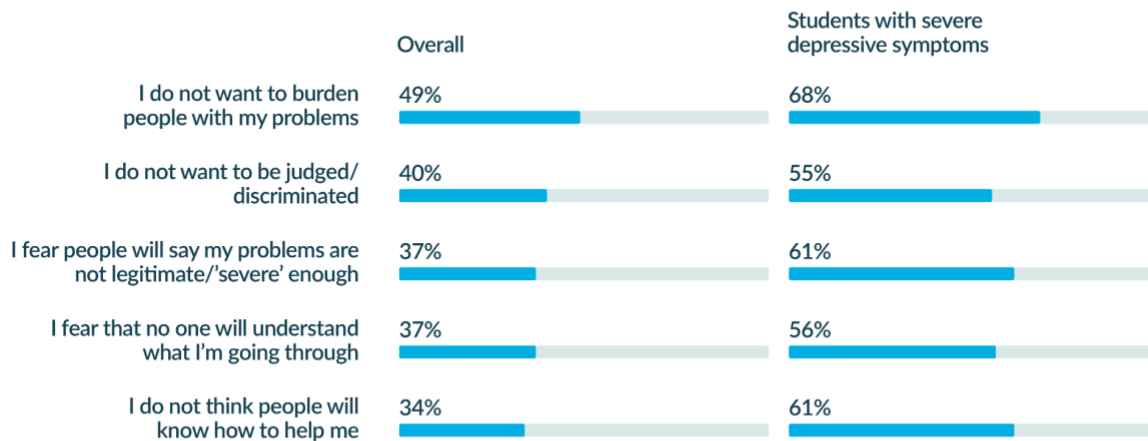
The survey identified several significant barriers preventing youths from seeking mental health support:

- **Academic pressure:** 70% of students reported that academic stress is a primary cause of negative emotions.
- **Discomfort discussing mental health:** 1 in 4 youths expressed discomfort talking about their mental health, with this sentiment particularly strong among students.

## Comfort levels by the severity of symptoms (PHQ-9 Scores):

- 26% for scores 0-9 (mild)
- 31% for scores 10-14 (moderate)
- 44% for scores above 15 (severe)

## What are your fears/challenges/worries when it comes to seeking help or support?



Insights were collected through two online surveys, one going out to the general population of youths, and the other going out to CARE Singapore's network of youths. The youth general population survey tapped into Milieu's proprietary online panel. Responses from N=830 youths aged 16-34YO were collected between 7-12 June 2024; nationally representative by Gender and Ethnicity. The Care youth network survey tapped into their community of youths through Milieu's Canvas 2.0 survey platform. Data from N=130 youths was collected in June-July 2024; on a natural fallout basis.

Among students with severe depressive symptoms (scores above 15), the main obstacles to seeking help include:

- Not wanting to burden others (68%)
- Doubting the legitimacy or severity of their condition (61%)
- Believing others wouldn't know how to help (61%)
- Feeling misunderstood (56%)
- Fearing judgement (55%)

Among those with moderate depressive symptoms (scores from 10-14), similar concerns were present:

- Not wanting to burden others (57%)
- Doubting the legitimacy or severity of their condition (52%)
- Fearing judgement (50%)

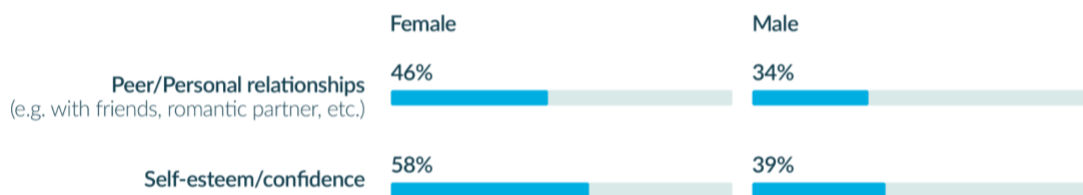
This suggests that as depressive symptoms intensify, these barriers become more pronounced, making it increasingly difficult for youths to open up about their mental health struggles.

These barriers create significant challenges for young people trying to open up about their struggles. Despite these hurdles, youths primarily turn to those closest to them for support, with friends (54%), romantic partners (27%), siblings (26%), and parents (22%) being their primary sources of comfort. This trend mirrors findings from the IMH study, which also highlighted family and friends as key pillars of support. These findings suggest that while youths may be reluctant to seek professional help, they feel more comfortable reaching out to those within their immediate social circles.

“We recognise the struggles that youths face, especially those who wish to help to support their friends. CARE Singapore piloted Hear4U WhatsApp helpline in 2020 to make it easier to seek help, as the use of an accessible text messaging tool creates a safe environment for the youth to reach out, especially when they are trying to help a friend,” said Dr John Tan, Executive Director at CARE Singapore.

### Gender differences in mental health experiences

#### What do you believe is the primary cause of such negative feelings in your life?



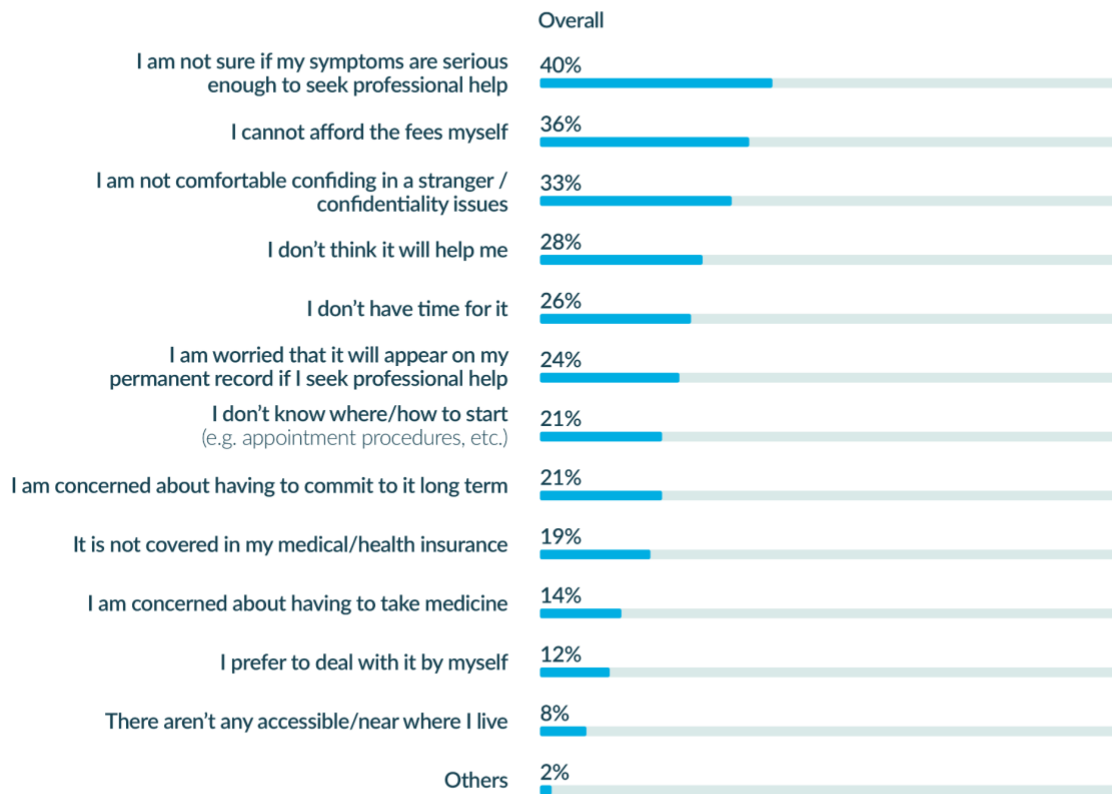
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The survey also revealed striking gender disparities in how mental health issues are experienced. Female youths reported higher levels of distress related to peer relationships (46%) and self-esteem (58%) compared to their male counterparts (34% and 39%). Females were also more likely to experience anxiety (65%), emotional instability (56%), and irritability (58%).

However, the survey found no major gender differences in comfort levels when it came to seeking help or accessing support services. These findings highlight the need for targeted programmes that build self-esteem and resilience, particularly for young females, as social support and self-confidence can play a crucial role in mitigating severe mental health symptoms.

### Urgent call for increased mental health education and awareness

## What are the reasons why you would NOT want to seek professional help for your mental health?



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The findings highlight the pressing need for comprehensive mental health education aimed at breaking down the barriers preventing youths from seeking help. For instance, 28% expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of professional help, reflecting a lack of awareness regarding available treatments.

"With many youths holding back from seeking professional help due to concerns such as fear of being misunderstood (37%), having their concerns dismissed (40%), financial barriers (36%), and discomfort speaking to a stranger (33%), education is more crucial than ever. By raising



awareness of the signs of mental health issues and the benefits of seeking support, we can break down misconceptions and foster a more open, understanding culture among Singaporean youths," said Juda Kanaprach, Chief Commercial Officer at Milieu Insight.

"CARE Singapore is grateful to partner with Milieu Insight and applaud them for supporting our work in the area of Youths and Youth Mental Health. The survey highlights the needs and points to the benefits of programmes like our Girl Power! Programme, which was designed to provide targeted support to female youths who reported higher levels of distress related to peer relationships (46%) and self-esteem (58%) compared to their male counterparts (34% and 39%).

CARE's Girl Power! engages the participants over a period of 12 months, allowing trust to be built as the nurturing relationship develops so that they feel safe to confide in our CARE Teachers and not feel that they are a burden," said Dr John Tan, Executive Director at CARE Singapore.

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### **About CARE Singapore**

Established in 1997, CARE Singapore (Children-At-Risk Empowerment Association) is a social service agency dedicated to empowering at-risk youths and their families through comprehensive support programmes that promote mental well-being, resilience, and growth. By offering services such as counselling, mentorship, and life skills training, CARE Singapore seeks to address the emotional and social needs of young people, helping them overcome challenges and reach their full potential. CARE also operates Hear4U, a WhatsApp-based helpline, CREST-Youth and the SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Pasir Ris. For more information, visit [www.care.sg](http://www.care.sg)

### **About Milieu Insight**

Milieu Insight is a global market research and data analytics company, headquartered in Singapore, dedicated to helping brands and businesses build consumer engagement ecosystems that deliver agile and actionable business insights. The company has garnered accolades such as Campaign Asia's Tech MVP and Market Research Agency of the Year (GOLD) and is renowned for its award-winning research expertise. At the core of its offerings is its powerful survey and data analytics software platform, Canvas, which provides intuitive tools for survey design and distribution, data analysis, visualisation, and reporting business insights across various topics and sectors - This empowers businesses to make informed, impactful decisions and develop effective strategies. For more information about Milieu Insight visit: [www.mili.eu](http://www.mili.eu)

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