YOUTH.sg:
The State of Youth in Singapore

Youth & Their Enduring Bonds

2021

NYC
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YOUTH
COUNCIL
SINGAPORE

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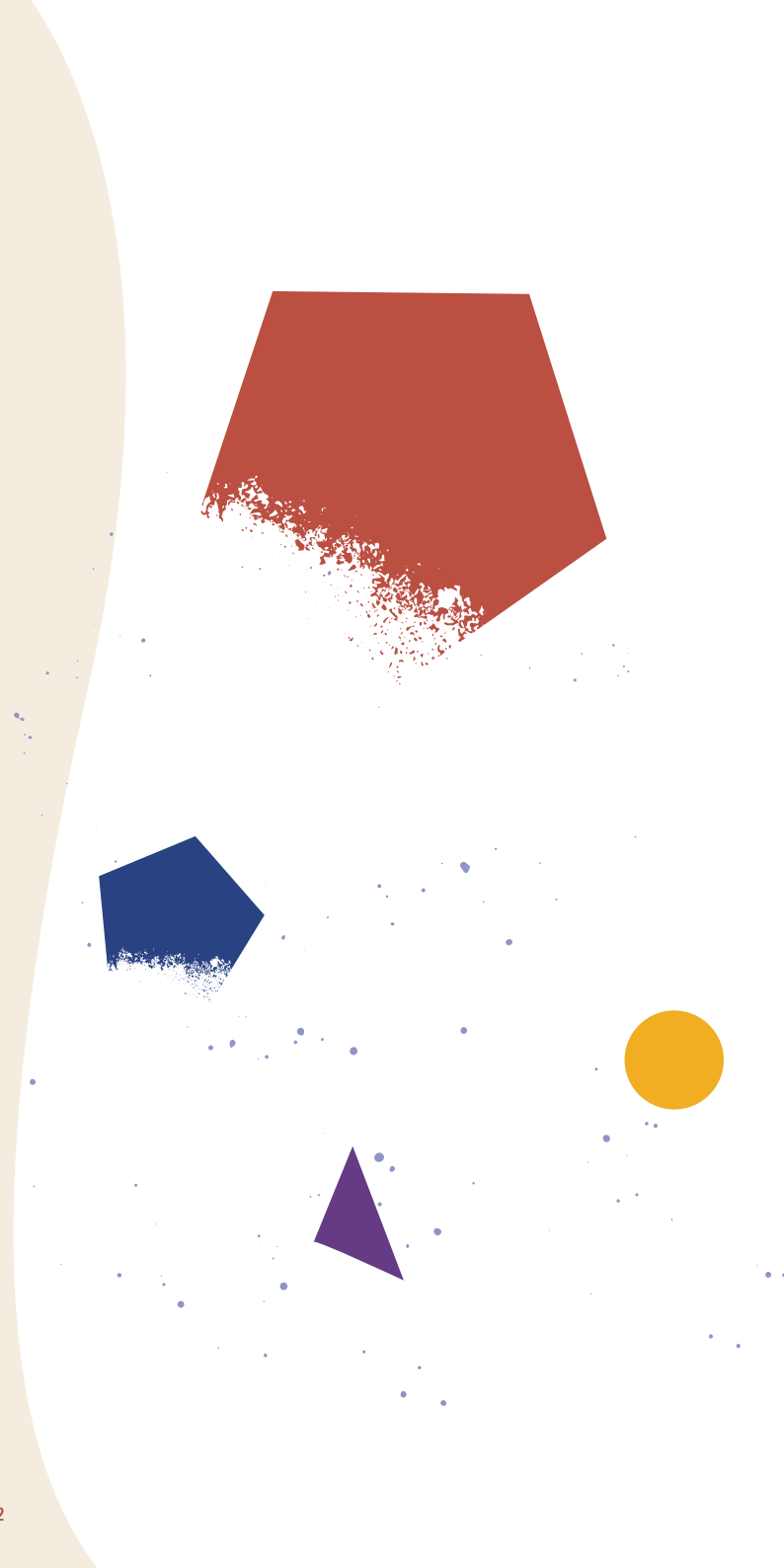
WE HEAR YOUTH
HERE FOR YOUTH

At NYC, we believe in a world where young people are respected and heard, and have the ability to influence and make a difference to the world. Together with our partners, we develop future-ready youth who are committed to Singapore by instilling in them a heart for service, resilience and an enterprising spirit.

Our Vision

Thriving youth who are **Future-Ready** and **Committed to Singapore**

Our Mission

Create **Opportunities for All Youths in Singapore**

To be **heard**, to be **empowered** and to be **the change**

Our Background

NYC was set up by the Singapore Government on 1 November 1989 as the national co-ordinating body for youth affairs in Singapore and the focal point of international youth affairs.

On 1 January 2015, NYC began its operations as an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and housed two key institutions: Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) and Youth Corps Singapore (YCS). Together, the agency drives youth development and broadens outreach to young Singaporeans and youth sector organisations.

Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law is the Chairperson of the 16th Council. The Council comprises members from diverse backgrounds such as the youth, media, arts, sports, corporate and government sectors.

Preface

The National Youth Survey (NYS) studies the major concerns and issues of schooling and working youths in Singapore. It is a time-series survey that tracks and provides updated analyses of national youth statistics and outcomes to inform policy and practice. To date, NYS has been conducted in 2002, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. Findings and analyses from each cycle of NYS are subsequently published as YOUTH.sg: The State of Youth in Singapore (YOUTH.sg).

This edition of YOUTH.sg consists of six separate issues covering the topics of

Values & Attitudes　**Education & Employment**　**Social Support**　**Social Cohesion**　**Wellbeing**　**COVID-19 (Special Edition)**
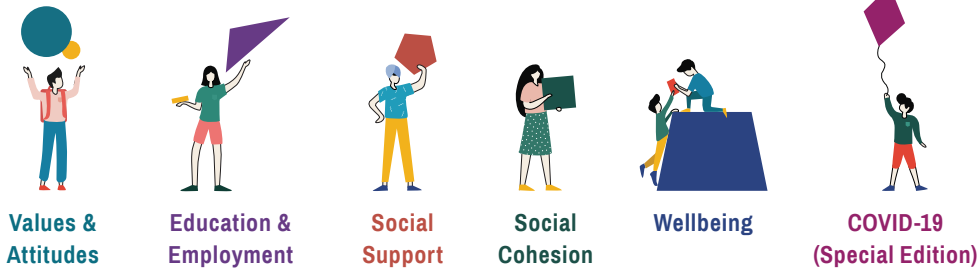
Each issue features youth statistics and insights from the NYS. Complementing the NYS insights are relevant studies and in-depth analyses by practitioners in youth research and development to provide readers with an overview of the state of youth in Singapore.

Contributors comprise NYS' academic collaborators (A/Ps Ho Kong Chong, Ho Kong Weng, and Irene Ng), NYC, Youth STEPS' academic collaborators (Dr Chew Han Ei, A/P Vincent Chua, and Dr Alex Tan) and other contributors (Ministry of Manpower, National Arts Council, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre, and Sport Singapore). Together, the YOUTH.sg intends to shed light on and explore specific emergent trends and issues of youths.

This publication has been put together by the Research team at the National Youth Council.

Notation
NA　　　　Not Available

Notes
Percentages may not total up to 100% due to rounding.
Survey figures may vary slightly due to sample weighting.

Social Support

Social support refers to the availability and perceived degree of support that youths receive from significant others (e.g., family, friends, partners) in their lives, and is especially salient during times of intense change and uncertainty. The support a young person receives from their family environment as well as the strength and diversity of their social networks are pivotal in influencing youth development, wellbeing, and their ability to thrive in the face of adversity (Southwick et al., 2016).
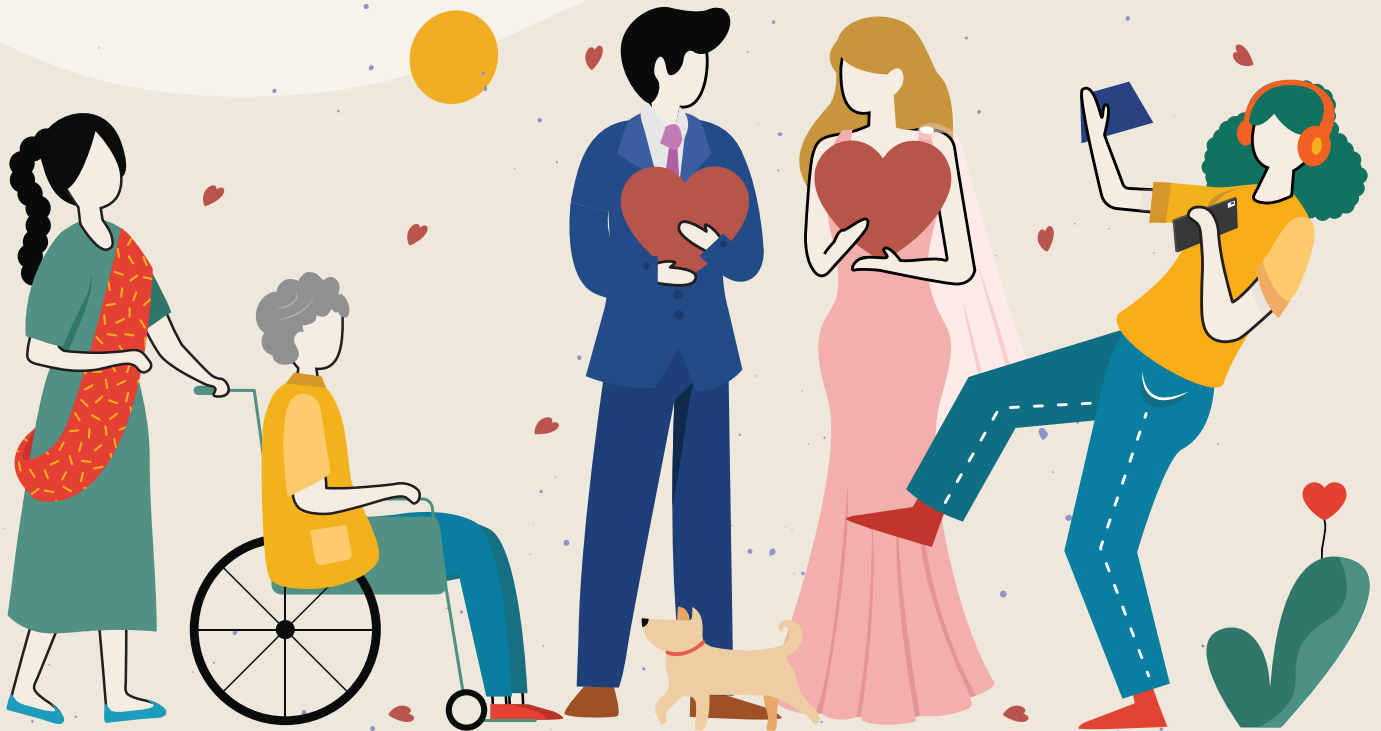
Social Support

As the saying goes, "no man is an island". Our social bonds and close-knit ties are important buffers against stressful events (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The presence of a supportive network shapes an individual's wellbeing as it provides a safe space to seek help and obtain encouragement as the world evolves in complexity and uncertainty.

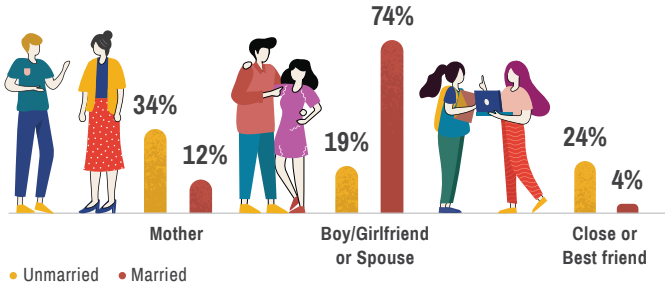For youths in Singapore, family and friends are the main sources of emotional and developmental support. Youths continue to list their family and friends as the first people they turn to when it comes to seeking advice for personal problems and important life decisions.
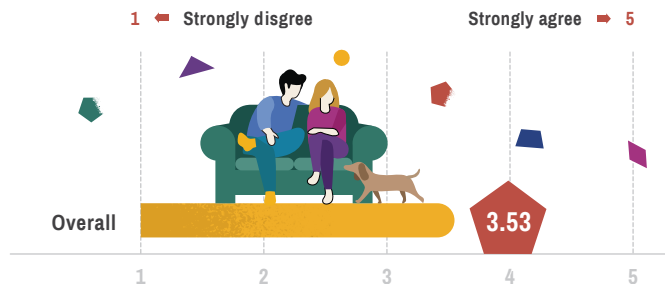
Committed to maintaining the strong bonds in their communities, young people are dedicating most of their leisure time to their immediate families and other relatives. They continue to enjoy a positive family environment as well as boast close and diverse friendships. This is reassuring, as both the quantity and quality of social interactions are instrumental in enhancing wellbeing and resilience (Ozbay et al., 2007).

Social ties can be likened to a safety net to catch our youths when they fall as well as a scaffold to help youths flourish. Strong communities will help foster confident youths who are able to surmount all obstacles and achieve their fullest potential.

Unmarried youths most commonly confide in their mothers, while married youths turn to their spouses.

74%

34%

12%

19%

24%

4%

| | Mother | Boy/Girlfriend or Spouse | Close or Best friend |

● Unmarried ● Married

Youths spend the most time with their immediate families and other relatives, on online activities, and with friends.

Activities with immediate family and other relatives — **32%**

Online Activities — **21%**

Activities with friends — **13%**

Despite a positive family environment, there is still room for families to provide greater emotional support to youths.

1 ← Strongly disagree   Strongly agree → 5

Overall   **3.53**

1   2   3   4   5

Youths in Singapore report having at least two to three close friends.

35%

28%

21%
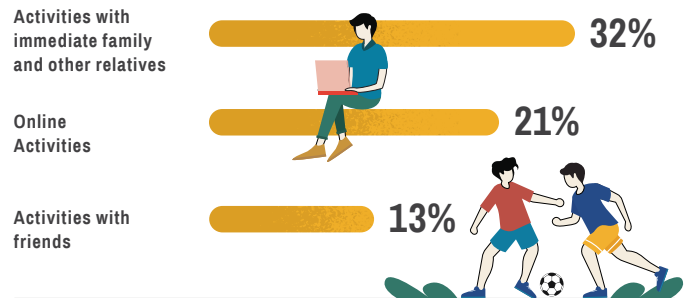
2 to 3 friends   4 to 5 friends   More than 5 friends

Part A: Family Environment

Section A1: Family Support & Challenge

A supportive and challenging family environment is linked to positive developmental outcomes in adolescence (Rathunde, 2001) and continues to influence health and wellbeing outcomes into young adulthood (Chen et al., 2019). Youths in Singapore continue to report high levels of support and challenge over the years **(Tables A1 and A2)**.

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your family of upbringing? In my family, (Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="strongly agree", 3="neither agree nor disagree", & 1="strongly disagree".)

TABLE A1: MEAN RATINGS OF YOUTHS' LEVEL OF FAMILY SUPPORT OVER TIME

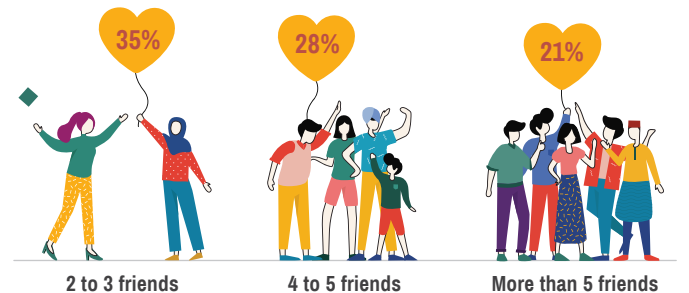(with standard deviations in parentheses)

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=1,268)	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Family Support (Aggregate)[a]	**4.29 (0.51)**	**4.29 (0.68)**	**4.28 (0.67)**	**4.12 (0.71)**
I feel appreciated for who I am	4.24 (0.60)	4.18 (0.84)	4.23 (0.79)	3.97 (0.90)
No matter what happens, I know I'll be loved and accepted	4.36 (0.63)	4.36 (0.77)	4.29 (0.79)	4.15 (0.87)
We are willing to help each other out when something needs to be done	4.26 (0.64)	4.35 (0.70)	4.32 (0.72)	4.25 (0.75)

Note
a. Calculation of aggregate score is based on shortened question barrel in NYS 2019.

- **TABLE A2: MEAN RATINGS OF YOUTHS' LEVEL OF FAMILY CHALLENGE OVER TIME**
  (with standard deviations in parentheses)

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=1,268)	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Family Challenge (Aggregate)[a]	**3.99 (0.55)**	**4.11 (0.64)**	**4.06 (0.65)**	**3.99 (0.61)**
I'm expected to do my best	4.10 (0.73)	4.22 (0.75)	4.14 (0.78)	4.12 (0.79)
I try to make other family members proud	4.08 (0.69)	4.20 (0.77)	4.17 (0.79)	4.10 (0.83)
I'm encouraged to get involved in activities outside school and work	3.70 (0.87)	3.89 (0.90)	3.83 (0.93)	3.71 (0.93)
I'm expected to use my time wisely	4.10 (0.65)	4.14 (0.76)	4.08 (0.79)	4.03 (0.79)

Note
a. Calculation of aggregate score is based on shortened question barrel in NYS 2019.

Section A2: Family Environment

Close relationships between youths and their parents promote and support positive youth development. Although family environment is generally positive, there is still room for the family to provide greater emotional support to youths **(Table A3)**.

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your family of upbringing?
(Based on a 5-pt scale, where 5="strongly agree", 3="neither agree nor disagree", & 1="strongly disagree".)

- **TABLE A3: MEAN RATINGS OF YOUTHS' LEVEL OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT 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)
Family Environment (Aggregate)	**3.58 (0.74)**	**3.50 (0.77)**	**3.52 (0.74)**	**3.52 (0.72)**	**3.53 (0.74)**
We cannot talk to each other about feeling sad[a]	2.58 (1.12)	2.64 (1.08)	2.59 (1.04)	2.55 (1.01)	2.59 (1.06)
We don't get along well with each other[a]	2.07 (0.98)	2.08 (0.95)	2.18 (0.96)	2.18 (0.94)	2.13 (0.96)
We avoid discussing our fears and concerns with each other[a]	2.84 (1.12)	2.89 (1.12)	2.85 (1.06)	2.90 (1.04)	2.87 (1.08)
We confide in each other	3.53 (1.00)	3.44 (1.04)	3.49 (1.00)	3.52 (0.97)	3.49 (1.00)
We express our feelings to each other	3.53 (1.04)	3.36 (1.08)	3.42 (1.00)	3.40 (1.01)	3.43 (1.03)
We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems	3.92 (0.82)	3.85 (0.84)	3.81 (0.84)	3.85 (0.81)	3.85 (0.83)

Notes
This is a new scale introduced in NYS 2019.
a. These items were reverse coded in the aggregated score.

Part B: Friendship

**Section B1:
Number Of
Close Friends**

Apart from family relationships, the presence of close friendships and the ability to turn to these friends for advice or help is associated with better life satisfaction over life stages (Gillespie et al., 2015). While most youths in Singapore report having at least two to three close friends **(Table B1)**, there is a small and consistent percentage of youths reporting no close friends. Similar to previous years, older youths tend to report relatively smaller groups of friends compared to younger youths **(Table B2)**.

Question: Close friends are people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters, or call on for help... how many close friends do you have?

TABLE B1: YOUTHS' NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS OVER TIME

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=1,268)	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
More than 5	19%	26%	20%	21%
4 to 5	27%	30%	29%	28%
2 to 3	45%	32%	36%	35%
1	9%	8%	9%	10%
None	1%	4%	6%	6%

TABLE B2: YOUTHS' NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS BY AGE

|	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=716)	(n=804)	(n=926)	(n=946)	(n=3,392)
More than 5	29%	23%	19%	15%	21%
4 to 5	30%	29%	27%	27%	28%
2 to 3	29%	35%	35%	37%	35%
1	7%	8%	11%	13%	10%
None	5%	5%	7%	8%	6%

Section B2:
Sources Of
Close Friends

Regardless of age, school remains the top source of close friends for youths over time. This is followed by workplaces among older youths and through other friends/social networks among younger youths **(Table B3)**.

Question: Select up to three ways in which you met your close friends.

• **TABLE B3:** YOUTHS' SOURCES OF CLOSE FRIENDS BY AGE

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=716)	(n=804)	(n=926)	(n=946)	(n=3,392)
School	91%	89%	79%	73%	82%
Workplace	5%	14%	35%	43%	26%
Through other friends/social networks	19%	15%	14%	13%	15%
National Service	2%	18%	15%	11%	12%
Hobby/interest groups	12%	9%	8%	6%	9%
Religious community	10%	11%	8%	8%	9%
Internet	13%	7%	5%	4%	7%
Neighbourhood	11%	6%	5%	5%	6%
Sports activities	11%	6%	5%	4%	6%
Public places/gatherings	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%
Through family members/relatives	5%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Others	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Notes
This is a multiple response item, hence figures will not sum to 100%.
The upper-bound survey population figures are reflected in this table.
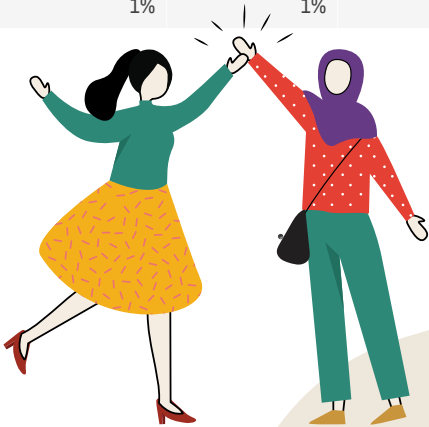
Section B3: Friendship Diversity Friendship diversity has continued to improve from 2013, with more youths reporting having close friends of a different race, nationality, and religion in 2019 **(Table B4)**. Younger youths are more likely to report having close friends from diverse backgrounds compared to older youths **(Table B5)**.

Question: Do you have close friends who are of a different race, nationality, religion, income group, or educational background?

◦ TABLE B4: FRIENDSHIP DIVERSITY OVER TIME

	2013	2016	2019
	(n=2,723)	(n=3,324)	(n=3,392)
Different race	53%	60%	62%
Different nationality	42%	45%	47%
Different religion	80%	80%	82%
Different income group[a]	NA	85%	84%
Different educational background[a]	NA	72%	69%

Note
a. Items are new to NYS 2016.

◦ TABLE B5: FRIENDSHIP DIVERSITY BY AGE

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	Overall
	(n=716)	(n=804)	(n=926)	(n=946)	(n=3,392)
Different race	77%	66%	57%	51%	62%
Different nationality	59%	47%	43%	42%	47%
Different religion	88%	85%	81%	75%	82%
Different income group	89%	86%	82%	79%	84%
Different educational background	71%	72%	69%	67%	69%

• TABLE B6: FRIENDSHIP DIVERSITY BY RACE

	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others	Overall
	(n=2,429)	(n=566)	(n=305)	(n=92)	(n=3,392)
Different race	53%	80%	85%	93%	62%
Different nationality	46%	43%	56%	68%	47%
Different religion	82%	77%	86%	87%	82%
Different income group	84%	81%	86%	87%	84%
Different educational background	65%	83%	77%	78%	69%

Part C: Living Arrangements & Behaviours

**Section C1:
Advice-Seeking
Behaviour**

Majority of youths continue to have someone to turn to for advice on personal problems or important life decisions **(Tables C1 and C3)**. When it comes to seeking advice on both personal problems and important life decisions, unmarried youths are most likely to turn to their mothers, whereas married youths are most likely to turn to their spouses **(Tables C2 and C4)**.

Question: Select up to three most important persons you would turn to when you are worried or troubled with a personal problem, with the 1st person being the most important person.

TABLE C1: FIRST PERSON YOUTHS TURN TO FOR ADVICE REGARDING A PERSONAL PROBLEM OVER TIME

	2013	2016	2019
	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Father	10%	9%	9%
Mother	28%	28%	28%
Boy/Girlfriend or Spouse	29%	31%	33%
Close or Best friend	21%	23%	19%
Others	9%	9%	8%
None	4%	1%	4%

TABLE C2: FIRST PERSON YOUTHS TURN TO FOR ADVICE REGARDING A PERSONAL PROBLEM BY MARITAL STATUS

	Unmarried Youths	Married Youths
	(n=2,500)	(n=851)
Father	11%	4%
Mother	34%	12%
Boy/Girlfriend or Spouse	19%	74%
Close or Best friend	24%	4%
Others	9%	4%
None	4%	2%

Question: Select up to three most important persons you would turn to for advice on important life decisions, with the 1st person being the most important person.

TABLE C3: FIRST PERSON YOUTHS TURN TO FOR ADVICE REGARDING A LIFE DECISION OVER TIME

	2013	2016	2019
	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Father	19%	19%	19%
Mother	32%	34%	30%
Boy/Girlfriend or Spouse	25%	24%	27%
Close or Best friend	10%	11%	9%
Others	10%	11%	12%
None	5%	1%	5%

TABLE C4: FIRST PERSON YOUTHS TURN TO FOR ADVICE REGARDING A LIFE DECISION BY MARITAL STATUS

	Unmarried Youths	Married Youths
	(n=2,500)	(n=851)
Father	22%	9%
Mother	36%	11%
Boy/Girlfriend or Spouse	12%	70%
Close or Best friend	11%	2%
Others	14%	5%
None	5%	3%

**Section C2:
Living Arrangements
Over Time**

Youths' household living arrangements have stayed consistent over time. The majority of unmarried youths live with their parents while the majority of married youths live with their spouses **(Tables C5 and C6)**.

Question: How many persons in each of the following categories currently live with you in your household?

• TABLE C5: LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF UNMARRIED YOUTHS OVER TIME

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=948)	(n=2,089)	(n=2,570)	(n=2,500)
Parent(s)	94%	97%	97%	95%
Sibling(s)	81%	72%	68%	66%
Grandparent(s)	11%	13%	10%	13%
Boy/Girlfriend	1%	1%	1%	1%
Child/Children	0%	1%	1%	1%
Relative(s)	6%	5%	5%	4%
Domestic helper(s)	13%	11%	10%	11%

Notes
This is a multiple response item, hence figures will not sum to 100%.
The overall unmarried survey population figures are reflected in this table.

• TABLE C6: LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF MARRIED YOUTHS OVER TIME

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=320)	(n=713)	(n=889)	(n=851)
Parent(s)	40%	37%	31%	24%
Sibling(s)	19%	18%	15%	9%
Grandparent(s)	4%	2%	2%	2%
Spouse	93%	89%	93%	92%
Child/Children	67%	61%	58%	54%
Relative(s)	4%	2%	2%	1%
Domestic helper(s)	13%	16%	13%	13%

Notes
This is a multiple response item, hence figures will not sum to 100%.
The overall married survey population figures are reflected in this table.

Part D: Non-School/Work Activities

Section D1: Time Spent On Non-School/ Work Activities

In their leisure time, youths continue to spend the most amount of time with their families. This is followed by online activities, learning activities, and activities with friends **(Table D1)**. Frequent and diverse participation in leisure activities can have a positive impact on one's wellbeing (Shin & You, 2013). Youths of all age groups are similarly likely to prioritise spending their leisure time with immediate families and relatives, on online activities, and friends **(Table D2)**. Reflecting differences in life stages, a greater proportion of younger youths report spending time online or on learning activities, while more older youths report spending time with family.

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

TABLE D1: PROPORTION OF TIME SPENT PER WEEK ON NON-SCHOOL/WORK ACTIVITIES OVER TIME

	2013	2016	2019
	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Average Leisure Time[a]	**40**	**49**	**43**
Activities with immediate family and other relatives[b] (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[c] (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 and services online)	4%	3%	2%

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.

‹ TABLE D2: 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[a]	**53**	**49**	**37**	**35**	**43**
Activities with immediate family and other relatives[b] (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[c] (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 and services online)	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%

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.

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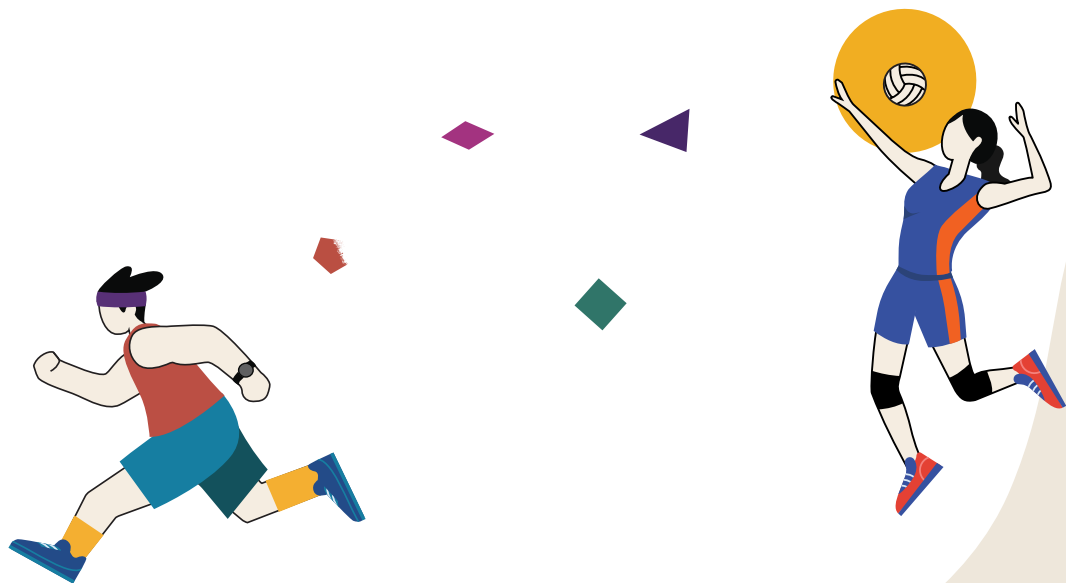
About the National Youth Survey

The NYS represents a milestone in Singapore's youth research with its resource-based approach that focuses on the support youths require for societal engagement (social capital) and individual development (human capital).

The National Youth Indicators Framework (NYIF) (Ho & Yip, 2003) was formulated to provide a comprehensive, systematic, and theoretically-grounded assessment of youths in Singapore. The NYIF draws from the existing research literature, policy-relevant indicators, and youth development models. It spans six domains of social and human capital. **Table I** summarises the framework.

• TABLE I: NATIONAL YOUTH INDICATORS FRAMEWORK

	Social Capital (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002; Putnam, 2000)	**Human Capital** (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001; World Economic Forum, 2017)
Definition	Social capital refers to the relationships within and between groups, and the shared norms and trust that govern these interactions.	Human capital refers to the skills, competencies, and attitudes of individuals, which in turn create personal, social, and economic wellbeing.
Domains	• Social support • Social participation • Values & attitudes	• Education • Employment • Wellbeing
Focus	The power of relationships	The human potential of young people

NYS 2019 adopted a random (i.e., probability-based) sampling method to ensure responses are representative of the resident youth population aged 15 to 34 years old.

The fieldwork period spanned from September to November 2019. A total of 3,392 youths were successfully surveyed, of which 227 were surveyed at their households. Demographic proportions of NYS respondents adhered closely to the youth population.

Table II presents the profile of respondents from NYS 2002, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. Figures referenced in all tables in the publication (with the exception of figures from NYS 2002[a]) were weighted according to interlocking matrices of age, gender, and race of the respective youth populations.

Note
a. Figures from NYS 2002 were not weighted due to the non-standard age bands used.

• **TABLE II: PROFILE OF NYS RESPONDENTS**

|		NYS 2002 (n=1,504)	NYS 2005 (n=1,504)	NYS 2010 (n=1,268)	NYS 2013 (n=2,843)	NYS 2016 (n=3,531)	NYS 2019 (n=3,392)	Latest Youth Population[a]
Age	15-19	NYS 2002 utilised non-standard age bands	33%	24%	24%	23%	21%	21%
	20-24		31%	23%	25%	25%	24%	24%
	25-29		36%	25%	24%	25%	27%	27%
	30-34[b]	NA	NA	28%	28%	27%	28%	28%
Gender	Male	50%	50%	49%	49%	49%	50%	50%
	Female	50%	50%	51%	51%	51%	50%	50%
Race	Chinese	77%	75%	72%	72%	72%	72%	72%
	Malay	15%	15%	15%	16%	16%	17%	17%
	Indian	7%	9%	10%	10%	9%	9%	9%
	Others	1%	1%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Nationality	Singaporean	93%	90%	86%	91%	94%	93%	86%
	Permanent Resident	7%	10%	14%	10%	6%	7%	14%
Marital Status	Single	83%	85%	74%	74%	74%	74%	74%
	Married	17%	14%	25%	25%	26%	25%	25%
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Religion	Buddhism	35%	32%	36%	25%	24%	22%	28%
	Islam	16%	17%	18%	19%	20%	21%	18%
	Christianity	16%	16%	15%	19%	19%	20%	18%
	Hinduism	5%	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%
	Taoism/Traditional Chinese Beliefs	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	7%
	Other Religions	2%	1%	3%	1%	0%	1%	0%
	No Religion	21%	21%	15%	23%	25%	27%	23%
Dwelling	HDB 1-2 rooms	5%	3%	5%	3%	5%	4%	3%
	HDB 3 rooms	26%	24%	24%	14%	14%	14%	12%
	HDB 4 rooms	33%	43%	34%	37%	38%	35%	35%
	HDB 5 rooms, executive, & above	24%	19%	26%	31%	29%	30%	29%
	Private flat & condominium	12%	11%	3%	10%	9%	12%	13%
	Private house & bungalow			9%	6%	4%	4%	6%
	Others	0%	NA	NA	0%	0%	1%	0%

Notes
a. Latest youth population refers to the most recent available data from the Department of Statistics (DOS) at the time of fieldwork – age, gender, race, and dwelling (DOS, 2019a) as well as nationality (DOS, 2019b), marital status, and religion (DOS, 2016).
b. The 30-34 age band was included from NYS 2010.

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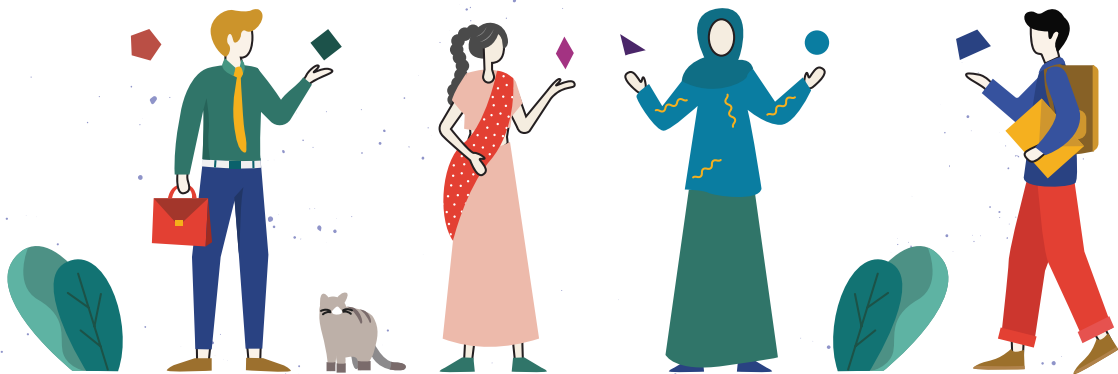
Research Takeaways

YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM LANDSCAPE IN SINGAPORE
BY NATIONAL VOLUNTEER & PHILANTHROPY CENTRE

1 Amongst youths aged 15 to 34 in Singapore, the volunteerism rate has generally increased over the past decade. Youths are more likely to participate in occasional volunteering with shorter volunteering hours, and they prefer volunteering for events-based activities (e.g., ushering, giving out food and drinks) and human services (e.g., befriending and mentoring).

2 Amidst diverse priorities, volunteering may not be a top-of-mind agenda for young people today. Seeking to identify the determinants of volunteerism among youths, a binary logistic regression conducted on the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's Individual Giving Study 2018 found that resources associated with human capital, social capital and psychological factors significantly predicted youth volunteerism.

3 Together, findings suggest that targeted interventions are integral to sustaining youth volunteerism. Supporting young working adults in their efforts to negotiate between family and work commitments and volunteering could facilitate the continuity of volunteerism during the youth's transition from school to the workforce, thereby enabling a lifelong transformative change within youths and our society at large.

SUPPORTS, CHALLENGES & CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH WELLBEING IN SINGAPORE
BY A/P HO KONG CHONG

1 Youth wellbeing is a reflection of successful transitions and requires the collective efforts of individuals, communities, and institutions to function as strong protective factors for wellbeing and to mitigate disruptive macro conditions. Having positive self-concept and drive, strong social ties as well as regular social participation indicates healthy youth wellbeing at the individual, relational, and communal level.

2 As youths in Singapore are exposed to a myriad of macro influences, increased precarity and complexity of our world has resulted in lower levels of wellbeing and heightened stresses in future uncertainty. Examining time trends from the National Youth Survey (NYS), analyses conducted by A/P Ho Kong Chong look at how youth wellbeing, and their associated risks and protective factors, can be traced back to the social ties of young people and their perceptions of changes in Singapore's society.

3 Findings from NYS 2019 show that having positive family relations, supportive friendships, and regular participation in youth-oriented social groups lead to greater happiness, life satisfaction, future confidence as well as physical and mental health. In times of growing tentativeness about the future amongst our youths, these insights signal the need to avoid social isolation and the rising importance of social support and nurturing relations to further our commitment towards healthy youth development.
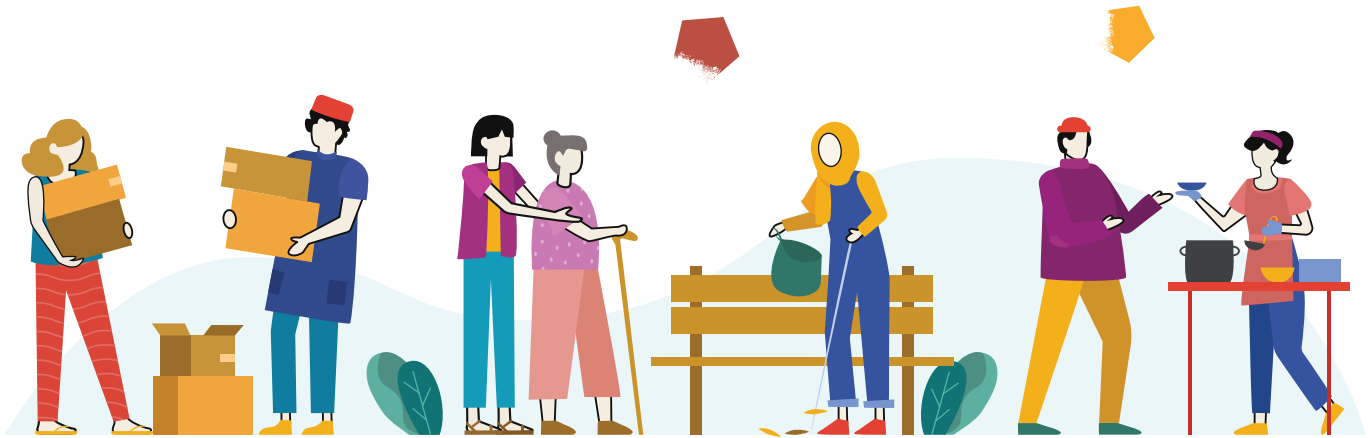
Youth Volunteerism Landscape in Singapore

BY NATIONAL VOLUNTEER & PHILANTHROPY CENTRE

Introduction

Volunteering is a significant contributor to the social development of a nation. It brings positive effects for both the society and the volunteering individual (Cemalcilar, 2009; Smith, 1994). At a national level, volunteerism could promote social cohesiveness of the community and the nation through the enhancement of civic engagement (Tan et al., 2020). Governments around the world have increasingly acknowledged the important role of civil society in helping to address social needs such as poverty and the impact of a global crisis (Wang & Graddy, 2008).

Furthermore, volunteering has been found to provide opportunities for individuals to contribute to society by making a positive impact and difference in the lives of others and their community (Yamashita et al., 2019). In the process, volunteers empower themselves through building social relationships and acquiring new skills and knowledge, resulting in various psychological and social gains (Cemalcilar, 2009; Wilson, 2000).

Studies have also shown that determinants of volunteerism are life-stage-specific (Oesterle et al., 2004). Late adolescence and young adulthood are key formative periods for personal and social identity (Harms, 2010; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980) when youths experience major cognitive, emotional, physiological, and social transformations. Young adulthood is also a crucial period to develop one's altruistic identity and to start working in and for the community (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008). In addition, prosocial behaviour and psychology crystallises and firms up during this period and would have long-term implications throughout one's life course of adulthood (Carlo et al., 1992; Carlo et al., 1999; Carlo & Randall, 2002; Marta & Pozzi, 2008). It is important to understand how the changes of roles and activities, perceived social conditions, and accumulation of experiences would affect youths' inclination and decision to volunteer as they transition to working adults.

One of the key factors to initiation and sustainability of volunteerism is to identify its determinants across various structural, situational, and dispositional factors. Amongst some of the prominent approaches to exploring such determinants include undertaking a resource perspective in terms of, one's individual capacity *(human capital)*, social relations and support *(social capital)*, moral and ethical values *(cultural capital)* as well as, examining one's psychological disposition.

In this study, we will explore the predictors of youth volunteerism in Singapore by investigating the influence of individuals' availability of resources in relation to their social, cultural, and human capitals alongside psychological factors such as one's personality disposition and self-efficacy.

Youth Volunteerism Landscape in Singapore

Volunteerism is an activity in which "time is provided freely to benefit another person, group, or organisation" entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance (Wilson, 2000). In Singapore, volunteerism has been central to our civic narrative and culture for which the aim is to build a caring and cohesive society (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2020).

According to the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's (NVPC) biennial Individual Giving Study (IGS) 2018, the national volunteerism rate[1] in Singapore has been on an upward trajectory, having seen an increase from 17% to 29% from 2008 to 2018.

Amongst youths aged 15-34, the volunteerism rate has also increased over the decade, with 31% of youths having volunteered in 2018, as compared to 18% in 2008. School-going children and young people are introduced to volunteerism at a young age through programmes such as the Values in Action (VIA) to provide a holistic educational journey and development of socially responsible citizens who contribute meaningfully to the community (Ministry of Education, 2021). At tertiary education, community service plays an integral role to build socially responsible leaders and is also considered to be an admission and graduation criteria or requirement.

Nonetheless, volunteering may not be a top-of-mind agenda amidst the backdrop of pressures of entering university, working for a prestigious company, and staying competitive in a fast-paced economy (Chan, 2018). Hence, although the desire to do good may be universal and volunteerism makes substantial contribution to society, it is contingent on and influenced by individuals' availability of resources such as time, finances, human effort, and social relations (Bekkers, 2005; Penner, 2002, 2004).

Recent events have exemplified youths contributing back to society through selfless acts of volunteerism in their own ways and means, and not necessarily to pursue material goals. Although the rise in youth involvement in the community has been observed even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic has shown an increase in youths' involvement in social and civic participation. Amidst the health crisis, youths sprung to action to be of service to those in need and contributed to shaping the nation's immediate response to the crisis. From developing information portals, starting initiatives to help the homeless as well as providing virtual tuition lessons for households living in rental blocks, youths in Singapore have stepped up to blunt the blow of the coronavirus.

To this end, cultivating transformative volunteerism[2] amongst youths is key to driving a lifelong volunteerism spirit. Sustainable volunteerism would require youths to move beyond transactional acts of reciprocity. In this context, understanding what drives and influences volunteerism amongst youths in Singapore beyond the mandated institutional requirements is critical in informing our understanding and efforts to galvanise more youths and sustain youth volunteerism efforts in the future — to ultimately build a caring and cohesive society.

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[1]Volunteering refers to activities done out of one's own free will, without expecting financial payment, to help others outside your household, family, relatives or friends. It may be formal (through registered organisations) or informal (helping directly, without going through any registered organisation). Volunteering excludes compulsory community work such as Values In Action (VIA), Community Involvement Programme (CIP) in schools and Corrective Work Order (CWO), UNLESS served more than the compulsory hours.

[2]Transformative volunteerism refers to volunteerism that focuses on cultivating the volunteer into an agent of social change who identifies with humanistic values.

Method

SAMPLE

The Individual Giving Survey (IGS) studies the giving behaviours and sentiments of people living, studying, and working in Singapore. In the IGS 2018, a stratified random sampling method was applied to a sampling frame of dwellings representative of geographic spread and housing types in Singapore, which achieved a nationally representative (+/- 4%) demographic distribution of age, gender, race, and housing type in Singapore. The final sample consisted of 2,100 individuals aged 15 years and above who are Singapore residents, permanent residents, and foreigners residing in Singapore[3]. As this study focuses on youth volunteerism, only responses from youths aged 15-34 (n=625) were used for the analyses.

MEASURES

The survey reveals the participation of youths in volunteering activities and explores factors affecting volunteerism. The questionnaire is composed of items such as human, cultural, and financial capital, psychological and personality traits as well as demographic variables.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyse the predictors of youth volunteerism in Singapore, we first conducted a descriptive analysis to understand the youth volunteerism landscape in Singapore. A binary logistic regression was then conducted with the IBM SPSS 27 statistical analysis package to investigate the factors which predicted youth volunteerism.

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[3]Excluding tourists, foreign domestic helpers, and foreign construction workers.

Volunteerism Rate in Singapore

Overall, volunteerism rate in Singapore has been on an upward trajectory. Specifically, 31% of youths volunteered in 2018, as compared to 18% in 2008. The volunteerism rate across the years shows that youth volunteerism rates were consistently higher compared to the national rate and those 35 years old and above **(Chart 1)**.

Amongst youths, school-age youths (aged 15-24) has constantly been more active than young working adults (aged 25-34), with 40% of school-age youths volunteering in 2018 **(Chart 2)**.

CHART 1: VOLUNTEERISM RATE OVER TIME (COMPARING NATIONAL RATE, YOUTHS & THOSE ABOVE 35 YEARS OLD)

- National rate (aged 15+)
- Overall youths (aged 15-34)
- Overall adults (aged 35+)
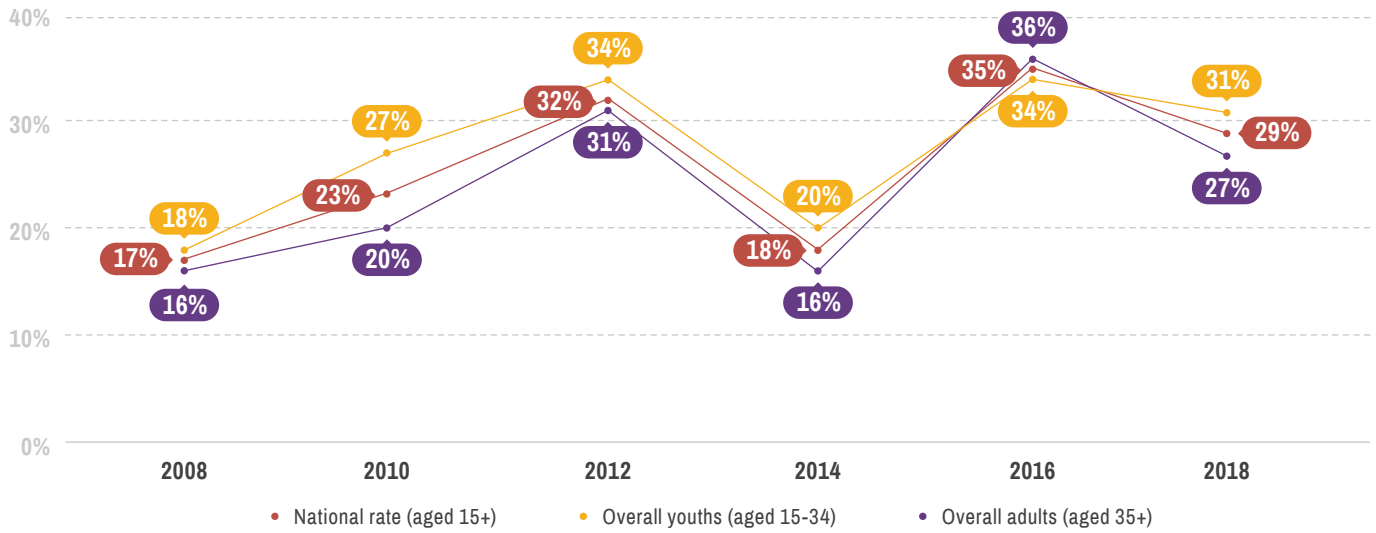
CHART 2: VOLUNTEERISM RATE OVER TIME (COMPARING YOUTHS, 15-24 & 25-34 YEARS OLD)

- Youths (aged 15-34)
- School-age youths (aged 15-24)
- Young working adults (aged 25-34)
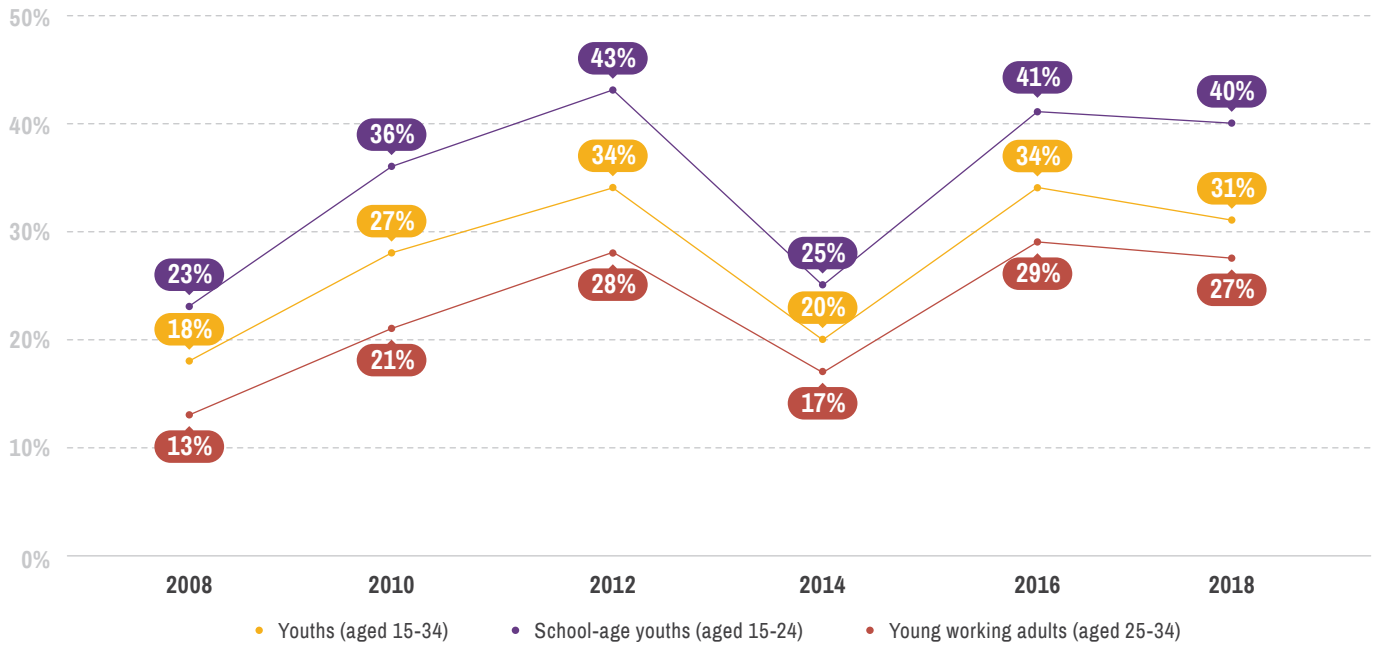
# Frequency & hours spent volunteering

Despite the high rate of youth volunteerism, it tends to be done occasionally. In 2018, 76% of youths who volunteered did so occasionally **(Table 1)**. The irregularity is more evident among school-age youths (aged 15-24) and this pattern is consistent across the years, with 80% of school-age youths volunteering occasionally in 2018.

The average number of volunteer hours contributed by youths in a year has also been on a decline. In 2018, the average number of volunteer hours for youths was 48 hours, compared to 63 hours in 2008 **(Chart 3)**. This reflects the preference among youths for occasional volunteering and hence shorter volunteering hours in a year.

TABLE 1: FREQUENCY OF VOLUNTEERING OVER TIME FOR YOUTHS

		2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Youths (aged 15-34)	Regular (Weekly & Monthly)	40%	41%	23%	26%	26%	24%
	Occasionally	60%	59%	77%	74%	74%	76%
School-age youths (aged 15-24)	Regular (Weekly & Monthly)	40%	34%	24%	22%	14%	20%
	Occasionally	61%	66%	77%	78%	86%	80%
Young working adults (aged 25-34)	Regular (Weekly & Monthly)	44%	50%	23%	30%	39%	27%
	Occasionally	57%	50%	77%	70%	61%	73%

CHART 3: AVERAGE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER HOURS OVER TIME FOR YOUTHS

- Youths (aged 15-34)
- School-aged youths (aged 15-24)
- Young working adults (aged 25-34)
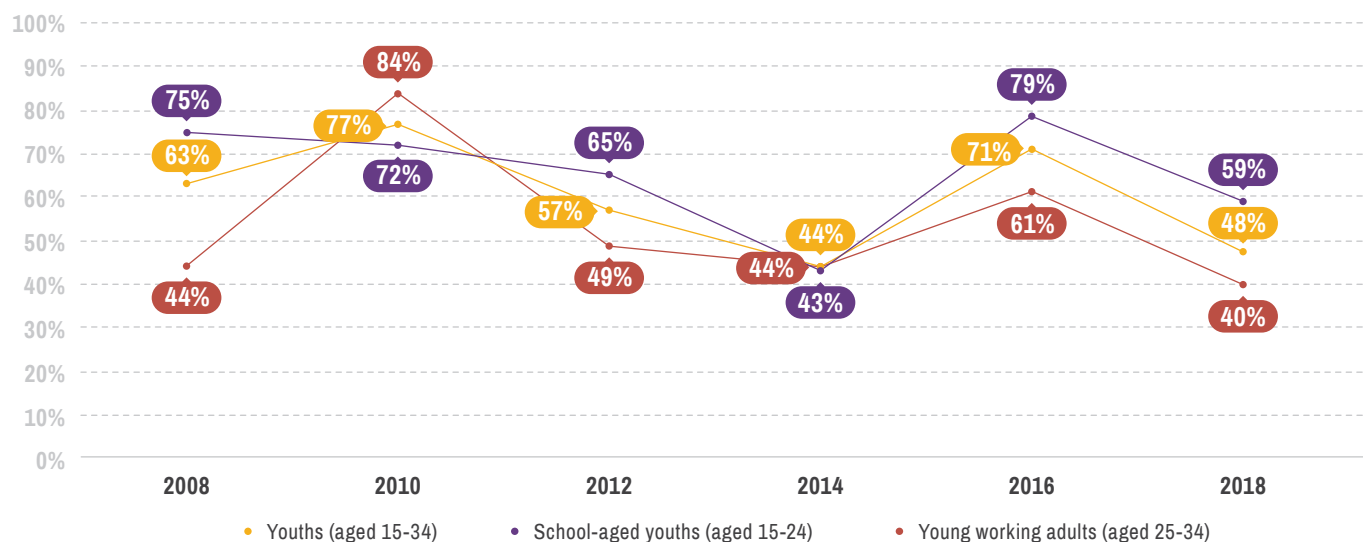
Youths prefer volunteering for events-based activities (42%) such as ushering and giving out food and drinks and human services (38%) such as befriending and mentoring **(Table 2)**.

Against this backdrop of decreasing volunteering hours, it calls into question the influential factors that inform youths to start and sustain their contributions to the common good through the act of volunteerism. The following section sets out to understand factors that predict volunteerism. The theoretical conceptual framework as illustrated in **Figure 1** was derived from literature and used as a basis for this study.

- **TABLE 2: TOP 5 VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES AMONG VOLUNTEERS**

	Youths (aged 15-34)		School-aged youths (aged 15-24)		Young working adults (aged 25-34)	
1st	Events-based activities	(42%)	Events-based activities	(49%)	Events-based activities	(36%)
2nd	Human services (e.g., befriending, mentoring)	(38%)	Human services (e.g., befriending, mentoring)	(45%)	Human services (e.g., befriending, mentoring)	(32%)
3rd	Fundraising	(28%)	Fundraising	(41%)	Education-relatedservices (e.g., tuition & reading)	(24%)
4th	Education-related services (e.g., tuition)	(27%)	Education-related services (e.g., tuition)	(32%)	Co-ordinating volunteers (e.g., train/lead volunteers)	(20%)
5th	General/administrative services (e.g., cooking)	(21%)	General/administrative services (e.g., cooking)	(22%)	General/administrative services (e.g., cooking)	(20%)

Understanding Youth Volunteer Participation

FIGURE 1: PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON PREDICTORS OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Social Capital
• Social network & support

Personality & Psychological Factors
• Extraversion
• Self-efficacy:
 - Locus of control
 - Perceived ability
   to volunteer

Demographics
• Gender

Human capital
• Age
• Education level
• Housing type
• Perceived Health status
• Perceived Financial status

Cultural capital
• Race
• Religion

ACT OF VOLUNTEERISM

The driving and motivating factors for volunteerism could vary according to an individual's needs (Choi, 2003). From a holistic and integrative resource perspective, researchers have posited that volunteering is a productive activity requiring human capital, a collective action requiring social capital, and an ethical behaviour requiring cultural capital (Wilson & Musick, 1997).

CAPITALS

Capital is defined as "antecedent resources to production that are not consumed by or otherwise used up in production" and as a collective, human capital, social capital, and cultural capital are said to enhance agency, health, social connectedness, material resources, and goods (Coleman, 1994, as cited in McNamara & Gonzales, 2011, p. 491). It is argued that such participatory resources that increase the capacity for action serve as precursors of both volunteering

and civic participation (Oesterle et al., 2004). Past researches have studied the extent to which availability of human, social, and cultural resources have influenced youths to volunteer (Bennett & Parameshwaran, 2013; Bryant et al., 2003; Oesterle et al., 2004), but such understanding is limited in Singapore's context.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital refers to resources – such as education, income, and health status – that allow an individual to perform productive activities (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Past researches have found that an individual's age, experience, and resources, such as the availability of time, education, and income are pre-requisites for volunteering (Choi & DiNitto, 2012; Mesch et al., 2006). Much of empirical research has shown a positive association between human capital and volunteer involvement (Kim et al., 2007; Wilson & Musick, 1998). A person's income, education, and homeownership have been found to be positively associated with more volunteer requests and opportunities (Choi & DiNitto, 2012; Wilson & Musick, 1997). In the present study, age, education level, housing type, perceived health status[4], and perceived financial status[5] were included as indicators of human capital.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital refers to the social networks and connections that an individual possesses. It includes the wide range of social relationships, the quality of those relationships, their prior social participation within the family, paid work, and the community realms (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011; Mesch et al., 2006). Social capital inherently has the potential for the transference of knowledge and resources that may benefit or advance members in the network (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011).

To this end, the social capital perspective posits that greater social connections increase volunteer opportunities through the provision of information, pooled labour, and trust which serve as integral conduits to volunteering. Young adults who are transitioning into the workforce and beginning family life would require time to adjust to new roles and grapple with the potential role conflict and stress, which may indicate the need for social support to sustain volunteer performance (Tang, 2006).

Thus, the present study aims to investigate youths' social network and support as indicators of social capital. The indicators assessed included their living arrangements (living with others versus living alone). Respondents were also asked if they had someone to confide with or reach out to in times of need, had regular meet-ups and phone calls with family and friends, and had someone to help them when needed, to assess their level of social network and support (Schwingel et al., 2009). A score was given based on the number of statements selected, with 0 being no statements were selected and 5 being all statements were selected. Those who scored 0-3 were categorised as having low social network and support and those who scored 4-5 were categorised as having high social network and support.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Whilst resources derived from human and social capital enable participation through the provision of necessary skills and opportunities to volunteer, altruistic values and moral or ethical orientation too provide a psychological impetus for volunteerism (Oesterle et al., 2004). Cultural capital refers to value or ethical resources (Wilson & Musick, 1997) which encompasses routinely practiced shared values, attitudes, and behaviours as a group, and as a member of that group. These serve as an indicator of the moral incentives for volunteerism and of the value placed on helping others (Forbes & Zampelli, 2014). These cultural resources are acquired via social institutions including family, educational institutions, and religion (Oesterle et al., 2004).

Past studies of volunteering have used membership in a religious organisation as a proxy for cultural capital. These studies have also found a positive association between membership and formal volunteering (Wilson & Musick, 1997). This is due to the integral role that religious organisations play in integrating people into a community with a shared moral system, which may reinforce the

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[4]Perceived health status was measured by asking participants to rate on their own health status on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being 'serious medical condition' to 5 being 'did not fall sick in the past 12 months'.

[5]Perceived financial status was measured by asking participants to rate on their own financial status on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being 'I have no financial assets' to 5 being 'I have an abundance of financial assets'. Financial assets include cash-at-hand, car, property and/or stocks.

decision to volunteer (Graham & Haidt, 2010). Likewise, educational institutions promote the development of prosocial and civic orientations (Oesterle et al., 2004).

Against the backdrop of 82% of Singapore residents aged 15 and above having religious affiliation, and with only 23% and 22% of younger residents aged 15-24 and 25-34 reporting no religious affiliation (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2016), the data reflects that religious sentiments are still prevalent among youths in Singapore. To this end, religious affiliation has been included in this study's conceptual framework to explore its relation to the act of volunteerism amongst youths.

Personality & psychological factors

Whilst volunteering has been mostly described using socio-demographic, socio-economic, and contextual factors, this approach solely may not help unveil why some individuals volunteer whilst others do not, even when in identical social contexts or socio-economic positions. For instance, although education is a sound predictor of volunteerism, there exist individuals from low educational background who volunteer whilst highly-educated people who do not. Thus, social psychologists and personality theorists have argued for a possible explanation via understanding one's psychological basis and disposition to volunteering and different forms of volunteering (Ackermann, 2019).

EXTRAVERSION

Personality is one of the psychological aspects of an individual's subjective disposition with which people interpret and react to their external environment (Aboramadan, 2019). Researchers have broadly identified 5 common personality traits; agreeableness, extraversion, openness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness (Pytlik Zillig, 2002). Amongst them, extraversion has garnered much attention and evidence in relation to volunteerism (Aboramadan, 2019). Extraversion was found to be positively related with volunteer work (Aboramadan, 2019; Brown & Taylor, 2015; Carlo et al., 2005) wherein it is much

associated with the personality of an individual who volunteers than someone who does not (Okun et al., 2007).

Hence, the above findings reflect the importance of considering personality as an unobservable driver behind the heterogeneity of individuals' volunteerism. The study had included a single-item assessment on the extent to which respondents perceive themselves to be outgoing and sociable. Extraversion was measured with the statement 'I am an extrovert (outgoing and sociable)'. Participants were asked to rate the statement on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

SELF-EFFICACY

A personal sense of control over the nature and quality of life constitute to "humanness" (Bandura, 2001) and facilitates human functioning whereby an individual's belief in their ability to overcome problems through their actions provisions them with the inclination to do so and makes them feel committed to such accomplishment (Schwarzer et al., 1997). In this context, it has been argued that an inherent sense of confidence is needed by volunteers when performing their duties, in order to overcome any obstacles in helping communities (Husnina et al., 2018). Volunteer participation is higher for individuals with greater self-efficacy which can be characterised by having a strong internal locus of control – the belief that one can influence the outcome of pertinent events (Finkelstein, 2012). In turn, the level of self-efficacy one has is influenced by their personality traits, ability to perform a task, or display of effort (Smith, 1994).

Taking into consideration the influential aspect of one's perceived self-efficacy towards volunteer participation, the study assessed respondents in terms of the extent to which they perceive being able to change much in life and their ability to volunteer (time or skills) to help others in the community. Locus of control was measured with the statement 'I am unable to change much in my life'. Participants were asked to rate the statement on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Scores were reverse coded for analysis. Ability to volunteer was measured with the statement 'I have the ability to volunteer (my time or skills) to help others in the community'. Participants were asked if they agree with the statement.

In summary, while past researches have elucidated on predictors of volunteerism and in relation to the youth demography, there is still a lack of empirical literature and evidence regarding the predictors of volunteering among the youth demographic in Singapore. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by describing the predictors of youth volunteerism through the validation of the above conceptual framework whose findings will be discussed in depth in the upcoming sections.

Predictors to Volunteerism

A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of gender, age, education level, housing type, perceived health status, perceived financial status, race, religion, social network and support, extraversion, locus of control, and perceived ability to volunteer on the likelihood of youths' acts of volunteerism.

Age was found to significantly predict acts of volunteerism, p < 0.05. Specifically, youths aged 15-19 were 2.38 times more likely to volunteer than youths aged 20-24, 2.33 times more likely to volunteer than youths aged 25-29 and 4.35 times more likely to volunteer than youths aged 30-34.

Youths living in 5 room HDB and above and private housing were 2.0 times and 2.8 times more likely to volunteer than youths living in 1-3 room HDB housing respectively.

Extraversion significantly predicted acts of volunteerism. Specifically, youths who rated themselves as being an extrovert were 1.75 times more likely to volunteer than those who rated themselves as being an introvert.

Lastly, perceived ability to volunteer significantly predicted acts of volunteerism. Specifically, youths who perceived themselves as having the ability to volunteer were 5.51 times more likely to volunteer than those who perceived themselves as not having the ability to do so.

In the analysis, gender, race, religion, perceived financial status and health status, education and locus of control, did not significantly predict acts of volunteerism amongst youths.

• **TABLE 3: REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PREDICTING YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM (n=625)**

Variable	95% Confidence Interval	Odds Ratio
(Constant)		0.18
Age group		
15-19 years old	-	1
20-24 years old	[0.22,0.80]	0.42**
25-29 years old	[0.21,0.85]	0.43*
30-34 years old	[0.11,0.48]	0.23**
Gender		
Male	-	1
Female	[0.66,1.37]	0.95
Education		
Secondary & below	-	1
Pre-university	[0.43,1.42]	0.78
University & above	[0.71,2.85]	1.42
Housing type		
1–3 room HDB	-	1
4 room HDB	[0.79,2.45]	1.39
5 room HDB, Exec	[1.14,3.82]	2.01*
Private	[1.49,5.64]	2.82*
Health status	[0.29,1.20]	0.59
Financial status	[0.82,1.95]	1.27
Race		
Chinese	-	1
Malay	[0.78,2.24]	1.30
Indian	[0.27,1.11]	0.54
Others	[0.19,1.40]	0.52
Religion		
No Religion	-	1
Religious	[0.78,1.83]	1.19
Social network	[0.78,1.83]	1.19*
Extraversion	[1.20,2.57]	1.75*
Locus of Control	[0.77,1.20]	1.13
Ability to volunteer	[3.37,9.02]	5.51**

Note
* p < .05, ** p < .001

Discussion

The present research contributes to our understanding of youth volunteerism by examining the predictors of volunteer participation amongst youths in Singapore from both a resource perspective and psychological disposition.

LIFE-STAGE CONCERNS

Contrary to previous research, the results showed differential relationship between certain components of human capital, in particular for age and education. In fact, this study found that older youths (young working adults) were less likely to volunteer as compared to school-age youths, and youths from lower educational background were more likely to volunteer. These results are consistent with Chan's (2018) proposition that life-stage transitions hinder volunteerism among youths with higher human capital. Young working adults may just be beginning their full-time career, family life or parenthood hence needing time to adjust to their new roles and to handle potential role conflict and stress, leaving little bandwidth for volunteer participation (Oesterle et al., 2004; Tang, 2006).

The results also reflect that volunteering programmes conducted by educational institutions in the schooling context may serve as an initial fertile ground for exposure to volunteering. Volunteering is a journey and these volunteering programmes, mandatory or otherwise, enable the youth to explore a wide array of causes to which they can give their time and skills. However, this may not be sufficient in ensuring sustained volunteerism amongst school-going youths during their transition to becoming young working adults. The likelihood to volunteer may fall when transiting from adolescence to young adulthood as the structure of school-related activities may give way to "social freedoms of the single and childless life" (Wilson, 2002, p. 226).

It is important for interventions to be targeted at ensuring continuity of volunteerism *(beyond mandated institutional requirements)* during the transition from school settings to workforce. Past research suggests that prior volunteer experience during adolescence and early motivations to participate would be essential for later volunteering (Oesterle et al., 2004). Hence, schools and non-profit organisations (NPOs) could collaborate to facilitate and ensure such continuity through maintaining school-going youths' connections with NPOs when they transition onto Institutes of Higher Learning and/or upon their entrance into the workforce.

NPOs could also play an integral role in the sustainment of volunteering amongst school-going youths by looking beyond just recruitment. They need to provide adolescents with a satisfactory volunteer experience, namely through ensuring a conducive and favourable climate in the organisation that develops the individual's role within the organisation whilst facilitating social integration and connections amongst volunteers. This could help with building a sense of belongingness with the organisation and increasing one's sense of self-efficacy, thereby helping them to boost their confidence when performing their duties, aiding them in overcoming any obstacles whilst helping communities. Overall, this would help with the development of volunteer identity and commitment to volunteer amongst the youth.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

The study found that youths living in 5 room HDB, executive condominium and private housing were more likely to volunteer than those living in public housing. This likely reflects the differences in existing resources available to individuals which suggests that socio-economic status may provide the economic means and personal bandwidth that influences and facilitates an individual's decision to volunteer amidst other life priorities which affects how they spend their time. NPOs would have to focus on ways to reach out to and encourage youths from a greater socio-economic diversity. This way, organisations may also benefit from previously untapped youth communities who differ widely in socio-economic status and other characteristics and recruit youth volunteers who may closely resonate with service users of the NPOs who may better understand the situations that an agency's service users may face.

PERSONALITY & PERCEIVED ABILITY OF AN INDIVIDUAL

The study also found that youths who perceived themselves to be higher in extraversion were more likely to volunteer. Volunteers who are extraverted may naturally be inclined and attuned to functioning within wider social networks and social settings which volunteering opportunities provide them to further engage in. This finding supports existing literature which suggest extraversion to have a positive association with and to be a consistent driver of volunteerism (Ackermann, 2019; Bekkers, 2005). As the persons scoring high on extraversion are characterised as being outgoing and sociable, volunteering presents itself to be an optimal opportunity to get in contact and meet others striving towards a common goal. They will prefer to have face-to-face interactions and hence are likely to volunteer offline, both formally and informally (Ackermann, 2019). In contrast, NPOs could avail online digital volunteering as an alternative mode of engagement, or tailor their volunteering outreach and opportunities for youths who are introverted.

Lastly, perceived ability to volunteer significantly predicts acts of volunteerism. Specifically, youths who perceive themselves as having the ability to volunteer are more likely to volunteer than those who perceive themselves as not having the ability to do so. This aligns with existing literature that confidence and self-efficacy are required when performing their volunteer duties which may entail overcoming obstacles during their experience of helping communities (Finkelstein, 2012; Husnina et al., 2018; Smith, 1994). Hence, youths could be exposed to and given opportunities during their early schooling years to be engaged in different kinds of volunteering opportunities to boost their confidence, instilling in them that they possess the ability to volunteer and make a difference.

Conclusion

In this study, resources associated with human and social capitals have been found to be integral in informing youths' volunteer participation, alongside one's psychological dispositions in terms of perceived self-efficacy and extent of extraversion.

These findings highlight that to inculcate lifelong volunteerism, the transition from school to work is crucial. Ensuring that adequate resources are provided to avail volunteering opportunities congruent with life stages can facilitate the continued high rate of volunteerism among youths beyond school-going age and into their working lives. This entails undertaking a whole of community approach through the availability of social and other enabling and supportive participatory resources right from educational institutional settings to employment.

As the current research is a cross-sectional study which does not capture changes over a life course perspective, future research could be dedicated towards conducting a longitudinal study to explore factors facilitating sustained volunteerism from school-going age to their subsequent life stages. Also, researchers alongside relevant agencies could explore possible approaches to support young working adults who are negotiating between their situational circumstances of family and work commitments with volunteering, as the findings suggest that young working adults and those with higher educational levels were less likely to volunteer as compared to school-going youths.

In conclusion, volunteerism can serve as an avenue to shape youths, who are the seeds for national development. Through sustaining their engagement with volunteer activities during the formative years of their lives, it can create a lifelong transformative change within youths and our society at large.
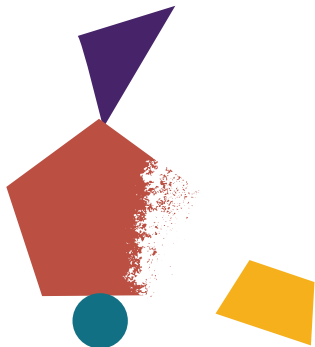
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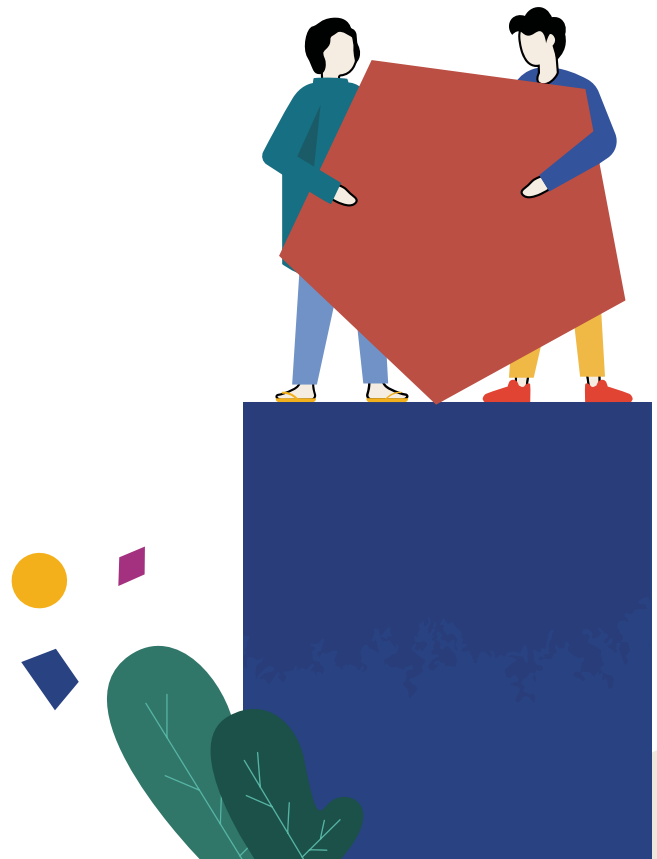
Supports, Challenges & Consequences of Youth Wellbeing in Singapore

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Introduction

> "Young people are not quite 'finished humans' and are therefore subject to developmental scrutiny and targeted interventions to ensure 'proper growth'."
> (Wexler & Eglinton, 2015, p. 128).

> "Youth, as a prefix, gives a particular meaning, focus and urgency to wellbeing – an unassailable warrant to enhance the lives of not only young people but also of future generation."
> (McLeod & Wright, 2015, p. 4)

The issue of youth wellbeing should be seen within the larger framework of ensuring a successful transition to adulthood. A successful youth transition bodes well for the nation.

These quotes point out why, in this compilation on youths in Singapore, we should be thinking about as well as working to ensure the wellbeing of our young Singaporeans. Many of the problems any society faces – juvenile delinquency issues and its link to adult crime, economic marginalisation, drugs, suicides, dysfunctional families – have some associations with poor youth transitions.

Much of the literature on transition to adulthood focuses on school-to-work transitions, in part because a stable job is tied to other indicators of adulthood like getting married and starting a new household, and becoming parents (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016, p. 130). However, inserting wellbeing into this process is important because we need to understand (a) the social supports that keep wellbeing of young people on an even keel in order to ensure a successful transition; and (b) the possibility of disruptions to youth wellbeing as Singapore's society and its economy change. This understanding enables us to think about risks at two different levels when ensuring wellbeing in the transition to adulthood. At the level of individual risks, we want to see how social supports act as a protective factor. At the level of societal risks, we want to understand how the rapid economic and technological changes can possibly enter as a risk factor in youth wellbeing. In this manner,

youth wellbeing is a reflection of successful transitions with the presence of strong protective factors and mitigation of disruptive conditions.

There are also disciplinary approaches to research on wellbeing. Cahill (2014) notes that psychologists and public health experts tend to focus on models of risk and resilience. Sociologists on the other hand "tend to locate risk in the society surrounding youth rather than in the youth themselves" (p.103). In this chapter, we will take the latter approach to look at how youth wellbeing and their associated risks as well as protective factors can be traced back to the social groups which they are embedded in, and related to perceived changes in Singapore society.

Our task at hand is far from simple. A number of researchers have noted that the concept of wellbeing is not clearly defined (Huppert, 2017, p. 164; Petrova & Schwartz, 2017, p. 8). Petrova and Schwartz's (2017) elaboration of the three levels of wellbeing is a useful introduction. Wellbeing at the individual level points to high self-esteem and an orientation of the pursuit of clear goals. At the relational level, close supportive relations are associated to wellbeing. Finally, community wellbeing is proposed as the third level of wellbeing. Petrova and Schwartz (2017) suggest that this level includes both an integrative element in terms of an appreciation for diversity as well as a civil activism element in terms of the propensity of the community for positive action (p. 8). Introducing this third attribute of wellbeing enables us to better consider the relationship between youths and community. Firstly, we can consider how the wider community can sustain the wellbeing of youths located within the community through various programmes as well as personal relations. Secondly, we can also see how young people can contribute to community wellbeing. In this light, healthy community wellbeing involves members of all age groups and backgrounds, and is also an outcome of strong youth wellbeing.

What follows in the main section of the chapter is a discussion of the key components of youth wellbeing using the data collected from the National Youth Survey (NYS) 2019. We begin with a measurement of youth wellbeing, noting the difficulties of arriving at a universally accepted concept. Next, we examine the relational basis of wellbeing and look at how family and friends provide important supports for the wellbeing of young people. For community wellbeing, youths' social group participation is used as a proxy to relate with measures of wellbeing. While it is challenging to identify an appropriate measure due to the many communities which can be implicated in youth development, this proxy is best suited to capture participation across diverse groups that youths are involved in (e.g., sports, voluntary work, etc.). The third and last section is a change of scale from the community to society, and to see the types of stresses young people face as well as their confidence in the future.

Measuring Wellbeing

An examination of the literature on the definition of wellbeing highlights a number of elements. First, the meaning of wellbeing is tied to a more common understanding of health status, both physical as well as emotional (Cahill, 2014). A more hedonic view of wellbeing focuses on positive emotions such as happiness (Huppert, 2017, p. 164). The hedonic approach contrasts with a capacity framework which looks at wellbeing as the ability to develop (Wexler & Eglinton, 2015). Other approaches combine the elements of happiness with the ability to function well, since both these elements are important for life satisfaction (Huppert, 2017, p. 164).

Four wellbeing indicators are identified from the NYS, two on health (physical and emotional), and other two which are proxies for wellbeing outcomes (happiness and life satisfaction). To these four indicators, we add a fifth indicator on future confidence. Hirsch and Busse (2020) noted that the wellbeing of youths is not just a property of their current status but also of the future (pp. 11, 19-20). Accordingly, they (2020) include confidence about the future as an indicator (p. 17). As will be elaborated later, the future confidence indicator is useful for a sensing of what youths think about Singapore's future.

These five indicators of wellbeing and their mean scores are displayed in **Table 1**. With the exception of the mental health indicator, the other four indicators are present in the NYS since 2010. Aside from the physical health indicator whose question was slightly modified, all the other indicators have the same question wording. Physical health and mental health are measured on a five-point scale, happiness on a seven-point scale. Life satisfaction and future confidence are items measured on a ten-point scale.

When examining the indicators of wellbeing from 2010 to 2019, 2019 represents a year where all indicators of physical health, happiness, life satisfaction, and future confidence, while still positive, have seen a gradual decline over time and are at its lowest point. Although mental health is measured for the first time in 2019, the mean score is slightly lower than physical health.

These indicators are likely a signal of a more mature Singaporean society which has enjoyed increasing wealth, where the population is increasingly better educated and at the same time caught in a more volatile world with rapid social changes and uncertain world order. Career goals, for example for both men and women are increasingly mixed with family goals, even as new lifestyle goals offer alternative routes for satisfaction. Future confidence is being shaped by an increasingly volatile economy and more precarious work while international and regional relations are increasingly complex with new rivalries and sporadic conflicts. And even as Singapore's health infrastructure has significantly improved, increased sedentary behaviour, along with lifestyle diseases, and greater stresses may have led to a decline in physical and mental health. The reduction across different measures of wellbeing signals the need to pay more attention to youth wellbeing in terms of (a) developing a better understanding of the triggers of changes in wellbeing, whether these are at the level of the individual, peer group, family or societal contexts, (b) better understanding the supports for wellbeing, and (c) starting to think about the interventions that can mitigate wellbeing risks as well as promote better wellbeing.

• TABLE 1: INDICATORS OF WELLBEING OVER TIME

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=1,268)	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
Happiness Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?	5.45	4.92	5.07	4.79
Life Satisfaction Having considered all things in life, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?	7.64	6.79	6.89	6.44
Future Confidence How confident do you feel about your future as a whole?	7.57	6.49	6.54	6.12
Physical Health All in all, how would you describe your state of physical health these days?[a]	4.12	3.70	3.75	3.52
Mental Health All in all, how would you describe your state of mental health these days?				3.48

Note

a. Question wording changed in NYS 2019, it was previously "All in all, how would you describe your state of health these days?".

The Importance of Social Ties

At the risk of some simplification and to provide some clarity in this chapter without over burdening the reader with a lengthy review, the large literature on social support can be summarised with four areas of interest.

First, many of the social support studies focus on intimate relations such as the family, close friends and intimate partners. There are good reasons for doing so. Perhaps the most illustrative study comes from Walker, Curren and Jones' (2016) study of friendships among children. Walker et al. (2016) introduced a eudaimonic conception of friendship which is defined by three qualities: (a) a basic moral respect for the other that is based on honesty instead of deception, manipulation, and coercion, (b) appreciation and regard for the other in seeing our positive qualities and accepting us for who we are, and (c) a willingness to support, promote, and help the other (pp. 290-291). Walker and his colleagues (2016) point out that eudaimonic qualities are learnt as children enter into friendly relations and that there is a fair amount of mutual learning within peer groups (p. 293). As children have more friends, the qualities of good friendships (i.e., forms of goodness and virtue required of friends) become easily identifiable to them. And from here, it is possible to think of eudaimonic qualities as underlying the culture of close friendships. There is also a developmental character to friendships. Within the positive environment of such relations, there is an aspirational quality in self-improvement in order to be a better friend and in terms of seeking a positive evaluation of a good friend.

Feeney and Collins (2015a) further note that mutuality is an important characteristic defining close supportive relations (p. 132). The eudaimonic nature of friendships can easily be extended to family members and intimate partners in the sense that such relationships are also defined by care and concern. One difference is, of course, that family relationships are differentiated by an authority structure between parents and children and we will say more about parenting styles later in this section.

The second point is about dysfunction and delinquent relations. The literature on youth delinquency contains many studies which focus on the drift towards delinquency and substance abuse and part of that drift involves influence from youth gangs and other delinquents. This drift and influence is in part due to a weakening of ties to social groups like the family, which is replaced by "care" of the person provided by gangs. While we acknowledge the presence and detriment of dysfunctional and delinquent relations, the reverse process may also operate in that the persons in such relations may be directed to counselling and other rehabilitative measures. Such attempts, when successful, enable the person to redirect their energies towards more positive and mutually supportive relations.

Third, the duration of such relations should also be considered. Crosnoe (2000) drew on "social convoy", a term created by Kahn and Antonucci (1980), to refer to "networks of people that surround individuals as they move through life" (p. 386). While specific friendships may change because individuals move to other locations (e.g., schools, jobs, etc.), friends play an important role in guidance and support. This is all the more so for family members and intimate partnerships, which are long-term committed relations supported by law and custom.

Lastly, we need to consider how the social support provided by close relations work for young people. While there are clearly a variety of benefits, Feeney and Collins' (2015a) useful framework starts with two sources: life adversity and life opportunity (see Figure 1, p. 117). Life adversity refers to the types of threats and temptations which starts the slow drift of a young person into delinquency and crime. At the same time, intimate relations can have a protective function in keeping young people from harm. As suggested in the literature review by Feeney and Collins (2015b), life opportunities could take the form of supportive relations which possess a mentoring function to foster accumulation of material resources (education and job opportunities) or building emotional resources such as developing more focus in purpose and meaning in life (p. 24).

The NYS 2019 data does support the idea of intimate relationships' influence upon wellbeing.

Beginning with **Chart 1**, youths who have no close friends reported significantly lower scores on all five indicators, compared to youths with at least one close friend.
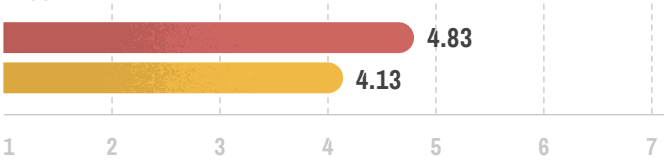
The NYS 2019 also shows the importance of parenting style in cultivating the wellbeing of our youths. Derived from items drawn from the support and challenge scale (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000), the family support measure comprises three items, "I feel appreciated for who I am", "No matter what happens, I know I'll be loved and accepted", and "We are willing to help each other out when something needs to be done". The family challenge measure comprises four items: "I'm expected to do my best", "I try to make other family members proud", "I'm encouraged to get involved in activities outside

school and work", and "I'm expected to use my time wisely". Both family support and family challenge are measured on a five-point scale.
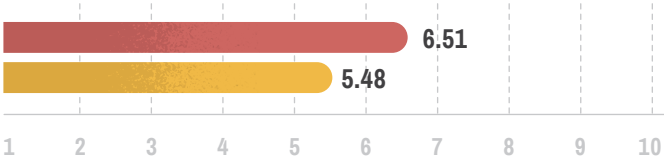
We note from **Table 2** (Family Support) and **Table 3** (Family Challenge) that family support and family challenge are both significantly correlated with all five measures of youth wellbeing. This suggests that both styles of parenting are important: parents who are supportive of their children and parents who set rules and objectives for their children to follow. This finding follows closely with what Calafat and his colleagues (2014) found. They (2014) note that authoritative (warmth with strictness) and indulgent (warmth without strictness) parents are more likely to have adolescents who had lower frequencies of substance abuse (use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs) compared to neglectful (neither warm nor strict) and authoritarian (strict but not warm) parents (p. 189). Thus, some forms of parenting have protective functions against adolescent risk-taking behaviours.

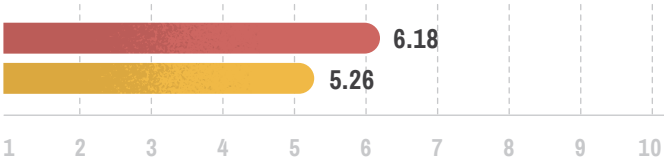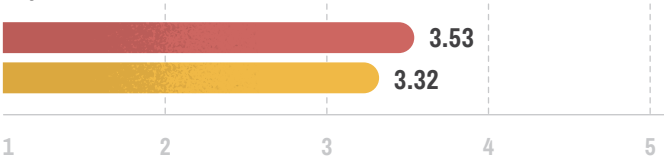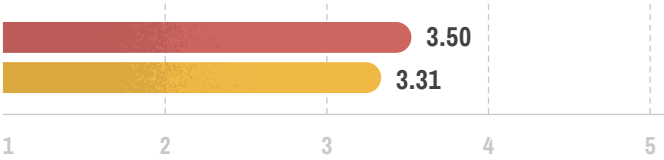### ◆ CHART 1: CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS & WELLBEING

Happiness*

Red bar	4.83
Yellow bar	4.13

(scale 1–7)

Physical Health*

Red bar	3.53
Yellow bar	3.32

(scale 1–5)

Life Satisfaction*

Red bar	6.51
Yellow bar	5.48

(scale 1–10)

Mental Health*

Red bar	3.50
Yellow bar	3.31

(scale 1–5)

Future Confidence*

Red bar	6.18
Yellow bar	5.26

(scale 1–10)

● Youths with at least 1 close friend (n=3,172)   ● Youths with no close friends (n=220)

Note
*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

TABLE 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN FAMILY SUPPORT & MEASURES OF WELLBEING

	n	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	r
Family Support[a]		4.12	0.71	-
Happiness		4.79	1.24	.35***
Life Satisfaction	3,392	6.44	1.93	.34***
Future Confidence		6.12	1.97	.30***
Physical Health		3.52	0.83	.21***
Mental Health		3.48	0.92	.29***

Notes
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
a. Family Support is a composite of 3 items (α = 0.80).
  • I feel appreciated for who I am.
  • No matter what happens, I know I'll be loved and accepted.
  • We are willing to help each other out when something needs to be done.

TABLE 3: CORRELATION BETWEEN FAMILY CHALLENGE & MEASURES OF WELLBEING

	n	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	r
Family Challenge[a]		3.99	0.61	-
Happiness		4.79	1.24	.18***
Life Satisfaction	3,392	6.44	1.93	.17***
Future Confidence		6.12	1.97	.18***
Physical Health		3.52	0.83	.12***
Mental Health		3.48	0.92	.12***

Notes
***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
a. Family Challenge is a composite of 4 items (α = 0.71).
  • I'm expected to do my best.
  • I try to make other family members proud.
  • I'm encouraged to get involved in activities outside school and work.
  • I'm expected to use my time wisely.

The study by Chan and Koo (2011) is noteworthy in that they found that social class has no net association with teenagers' subjective wellbeing and self-esteem, or with their health and risky behaviour (p. 396). Their results show that it is parenting style that matters. Like the study by Calafat et al. (2014), authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting produced better results as protection against risk factors for substance abuse. They (2011) conclude that too much attention is paid on parental monitoring and supervision and not enough on acceptance and involvement in parent child relations (p. 396).

The following quote from Cahill (2014) is an appropriate summary of this section: "longitudinal research into the individual, family, and school factors associated with resiliency in youth shows that the most significant of the protective factors, providing protection against negative health and learning outcomes, is the feeling of connectedness or belonging to family and/or school" (p. 6). And to the set of ingredients for successful life course journeys, we add the presence and mutual support of close friends.

Participation & its Rewards

We have previously (NYC, 2010) pointed out that in contrast to the classroom and peer group involvement, the participation of youths in social groups (e.g., Co-Curricular Activities or CCAs, a range of voluntary activities[1] such as sports, arts, culture, hobbies, etc.) creates learning which is significant in three ways.

First, in contrast to a classroom-based participation, participation in CCA is entirely by choice. In the 2006 YOUTH.sg monograph, we had a focus group comprising teachers and one of them recounted an episode about how the principal wanted to close down a particular CCA and the reaction from the student body took the teachers by surprise. He believed that this was because CCAs were selected as a matter of conscious choice and passion. And it is this interest and passion which enables bonding and effective learning. The fact that membership is optional and dropping out is a possibility means that those who stay will be motivated. Secondly, CCAs and social involvements in a range of activities beyond the school typically come with a range of responsibilities and leadership positions.
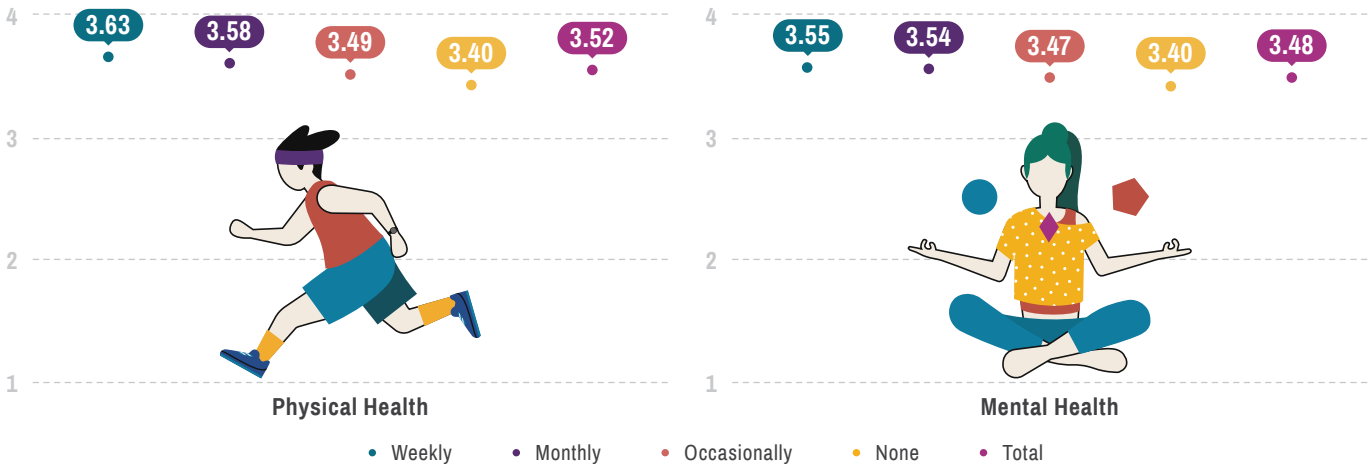
Thus, such group situations do not just involve the key activity but a range of organisational activities which require leadership and teamwork. These set of activities provide important learning opportunities. Thirdly, in contrast to peer groups, social groups which are organised along activities typically have members of different ages as well as adults. This creates opportunities for adult mentoring as well as learning from "seniors", as youths who have been at the activity for a longer period of time may have also grown into senior positions with the responsibility to watch out for juniors.

In the NYS, social group participation is captured as the involvement in any group activity (e.g., sports, drama groups, community groups, etc.) and respondents in the survey reported their frequency of involvement (weekly, monthly, occasionally, and none). In the following **Charts 2 to 4**, we take the highest frequency of involvement across all social groups which respondents reported participating in and correlate this with the different wellbeing outcomes.
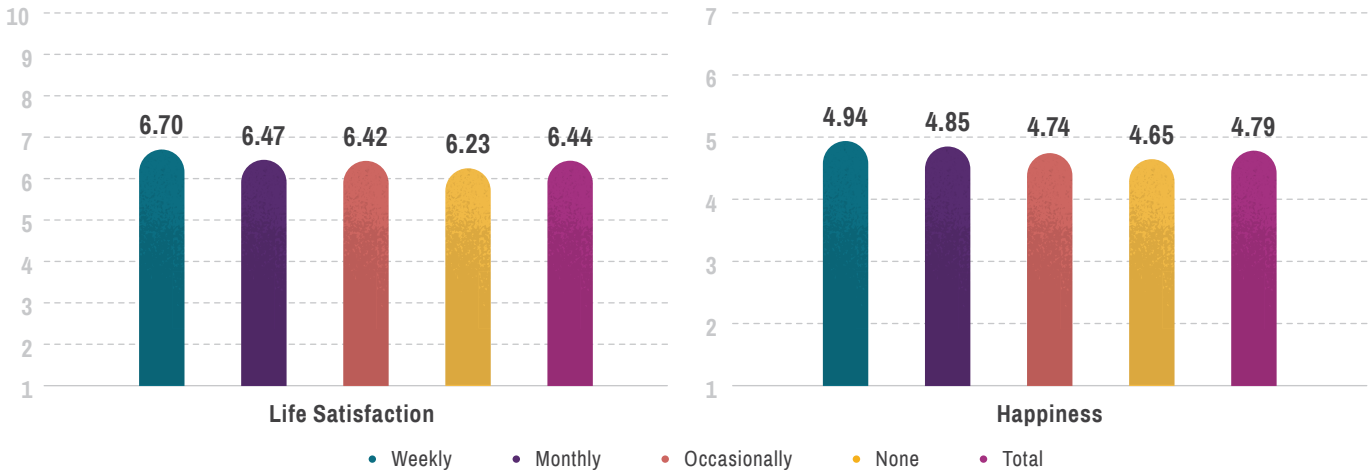
Charts 2 and 3 show that youths who participated in a group activity more regularly (weekly and monthly) showed higher mean levels of wellbeing in terms of their physical and mental health (**Chart 2**), as well as life satisfaction and happiness (**Chart 3**). Thus, correlation between regular participation and wellbeing suggests two possible causes of social participation. Firstly, that the activities which drive interest, purpose, and passion will in turn affect wellbeing. Secondly, the group dynamics within participating groups (friendly cordial relations, mentoring, teamwork towards a shared objective [in some cases competitive], mutual support in the activity) also provide the active ingredients for wellbeing.

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[1]From a policy-relevant perspective, we decided to highlight an illustrative example of schools and CCAs, while acknowledging that many other non-school groups like religious groups do have positive influences on youth development.

CHART 2: SOCIAL GROUP PARTICIPATION & PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Physical Health: 3.63, 3.58, 3.49, 3.40, 3.52

Mental Health: 3.55, 3.54, 3.47, 3.40, 3.48

• Weekly   • Monthly   • Occasionally   • None   • Total

CHART 3: SOCIAL GROUP PARTICIPATION & LIFE SATISFACTION & HAPPINESS

Life Satisfaction: 6.70, 6.47, 6.42, 6.23, 6.44

Happiness: 4.94, 4.85, 4.74, 4.65, 4.79

• Weekly   • Monthly   • Occasionally   • None   • Total

This line of analysis is in keeping with the findings of Sung and his team (2014) in their study of Scouts, where they found that activities "enhance subjective wellbeing because people build relationships of social support as well as feeling positive emotions and acquiring skills and knowledge through participation in the activities" (p. 240). Other studies of group activities (Larson et al., 2006; Schaefer et al., 2011) also found positive supporting relations as a by-product of participation. Eccles et al. (2003) in particular argued that extracurricular activities provide both promotive and protective roles for its participants, while noting some team sports are associated with increased alcohol consumption (p. 871-872, 875).

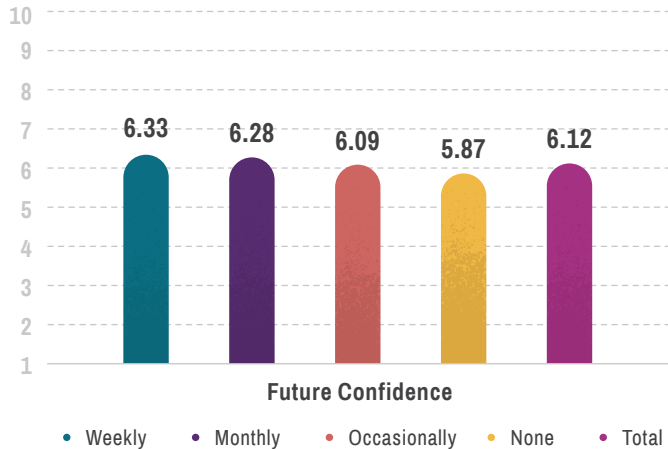**CHART 4: SOCIAL GROUP PARTICIPATION & FUTURE CONFIDENCE**

Future Confidence

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally
- None
- Total

Chart 4 shows that respondents who reported weekly and monthly participation also had significantly higher scores for future confidence than those who had none. A plausible explanation for this relationship may be that members of social group act as an antidote or a counter against the more anxiety-driven views of the future. Some support for this view comes from Oldenburg (1989) who argued that the regular congregations in social places, a term he described as "good places", result in the filtering of more extreme and negative sentiments because these are subjected to scrutiny and discussion by the regulars in these places. This is likely to be true if the social participant group has a certain diversity where members are in a position to offer counterbalancing views.

Future Confidence & Wellbeing

Confidence about a country's future is an important component of youth wellbeing in several ways. As suggested by Hirsch and Busse (2020) it represents a link between current and future states of wellbeing and connects individual wellbeing to societal conditions (p 11). The examination of this variable also takes a more sociological approach in connecting risk and opportunity to societal conditions (Cahill, 2014, p. 7).

"The 20- to 34-year-olds are entering the labor market or are in the early stages of their careers and most often are not yet restricted by family obligations. This cohort has grown up during what has come to be called Japan's two "lost decades." For them, the transition into the labor market is more difficult than for earlier cohorts. They have lower chances of entering regular employment and are oftentimes forced to take on precarious jobs, which makes it difficult to achieve financial independence or plan a future." (Hommerich, 2017, p. 76)

"There is growing concern that a generational rift in the labour market has emerged, making young people 'outsiders' in terms of work opportunities compared to older adults...The long-term effects of the social conditions of the 1980s and 1990s in Australia, in which the changing nexus between education and work was central, meant that key life decisions also changed." (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016, pp. 127, 130)

"While Singapore has not experienced a decline in the share of permanent employment, workers may see a gradual shift away from the traditional model of lifetime employment. In future, we expect more transitions in and out of employment and learning during adulthood. Workers may move between different jobs, work arrangements, and even careers, punctuated by periods of unemployment or training." (Lee, 2018, p. 59)

Our analyses can be used to show two outcomes about youth wellbeing and perceptions. The first, as reflected by **Tables 4 and 5**, indicates how youths' perceptions of their own opportunities are correlated with their views of the future. When our youths assess that our society contains different pathways for them to realise their dreams and goals, they are more likely to have a more positive view of the future. The second outcome is to see future confidence in terms of the different cohorts of youths, where shared experiences and circumstances in their formative years may have accounted for

their perspectives. For this analysis, we used the birth year as a way to divide the youths in our combined sample. The results in **Table 6** show that adolescents (those born in 2000-2009) are less likely to say that there are sufficient opportunities to fulfil their personal aspirations compared to those born in the 1970s and 1980s. There are two ways to interpret this perceived decline. The first is to locate the source of this perception in the material changes in Singapore's economy. And this is the focus of the three quotations featured at the beginning of this section for Japan, Australia as well as the changes in

the Singapore economy. Structural changes in the country's economy as a result of global competition and technological changes (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Lee, 2018) have led to changes in job opportunities with its attendant effect of financial precarity as observed by Hommerich (2017) and noted by Lee (2018).

However, we should not preclude the possibility that the youngest age group (those whose birth years are in the 2000 decade) are also those who are most anxious about the future.

TABLE 4: CORRELATION BETWEEN PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS & FUTURE CONFIDENCE, FUTURE UNCERTAINTY AS A STRESSOR

	n	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	r
Perceived Opportunities for Aspirations	3,392	3.28	0.93	-
Future Confidence	3,392	6.12	1.97	.40***
Future Uncertainty	3,354	3.33	1.15	-.27***

Note
*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

TABLE 5: CORRELATION BETWEEN PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOOD CAREER & FUTURE CONFIDENCE, FUTURE UNCERTAINTY AS A STRESSOR

	n	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	r
Perceived Opportunities for Good Career	3,392	3.39	0.91	-
Future Confidence	3,392	6.12	1.97	.41***
Future Uncertainty	3,354	3.33	1.15	-.25***

Note
*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

TABLE 6: PERCEPTION OF FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES BY YOUTH COHORTS

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Total
There are enough opportunities in Singapore for me to achieve my personal aspirations in life	3.50	3.62	3.33	3.34	3.47

Note
Data is aggregated from NYS 2005 to NYS 2019.

These adolescents are most likely to be schooling and are therefore most uncertain about the future. It is likely that with their transition to work, they will experience progression in their career, have some measure of financial stability and experience achievements that go some way in meeting their aspirations. The key is in a better understanding of the nature of the economy, and whether this is capable to deliver the opportunities to new generations of young people for successful transitions into adulthood. Besides the economy, we should also be looking at other aspirational avenues for young people, such as in political and social participation.

Discussion & Conclusion

Policy, as McLeod and Wright (2015) reminds us, points to what needs fixing and how we seem to be obliged to think in certain ways (p. 5). In closing this chapter, it is useful to have a systematic understanding of what youths find stressful in their lives and which affects their wellbeing. **Table 7** displays the responses to the question "To what extent do you find the following areas of your life to be stressful?" for four waves of the NYS.

Table 7 shows that the ranking of the different stressors over four waves of the NYS have changed. From an expected youth preoccupation over studies as the top ranked stressor in 2010 and 2013, the top stressor in 2019 is a more general concern about future uncertainty. This climb of the future uncertainty stressor is tied to the worry about the changing nature of the economy and job security discussed earlier. The second discernible pattern is the growing importance of emergent adult responsibility as a youth stressor. Over the four waves of surveys, this stressor has moved from the fifth spot in 2010, to the fourth in 2013, third in 2016, and second in 2019. This is most likely to reflect the effect of an aging society and how the health concerns of the elderly are increasingly shouldered by their children, along with managing the finances of the household. This said, family member health as a stressor actually reduced between 2016 and 2019.

We have, in this article, shown the reader, that wellbeing among youths will continue to be a challenge. The different indicators of wellbeing (happiness, life satisfaction, future confidence, physical health) while positive, have shown a decline between 2010 and 2019 (see **Table 1**). The fifth indicator, mental health, was recorded for

the first time in 2019 and recorded a mean that is lower than that of physical health. Singapore being a small and open society is exposed to multiple influences, such as more volatile economy and precarious work, along with international and regional political tensions. These societal, regional, and international factors work to influence youth happiness, life satisfaction, and future confidence. And while Singapore has invested in an increasingly well-developed health infrastructure, the lower reported physical and mental health levels in recent years are in part due to increased sedentary behaviour among youths, lifestyle diseases, and greater stresses. **Table 7** shows that future uncertainty has emerged as the highest-ranked stressor having increased steadily from 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. **Tables 4 and 5** show that youths who perceive lower future confidence and greater future uncertainty are more likely to report lower perceived opportunities for aspirations and good careers.

While these figures may paint a grim picture, this article has also pointed the way forward by documenting the importance of social relations as supports for wellbeing. There are two broad ways in which social relations perform a promotive and protective function in ensuring wellbeing. First is the role of intimate relations such as friendships and family relations. We see from the NYS data that youths who have at least one close friend reported significantly higher scores on all five measures of wellbeing than youths who do not have a close friend (see **Chart 1**). Similarly, in family relations, youths who reported stronger scores for family support (**Table 2**) and family challenge (**Table 3**) reported significantly higher scores on all five measures. This suggests that positive family involvement in the lives of their children contributes significantly in their wellbeing. The second way in which social relations work on wellbeing is through the social groups which youths participate in.

The data reported in **Charts 2** (on physical and mental health), **3** (on life satisfaction and happiness) **and 4** (on future confidence) show that youths who regularly meet (weekly, monthly) in social groups score significantly higher in all five measures of wellbeing.

From the data reported in this article, the directions we should take in ensuring the wellbeing in our young people are fairly clear. This will have to include measures to support family relations (especially families at risk), the development of supportive friendships (identifying and helping social isolates, young people with no close

friends) and the promotion of positive youth-oriented social groups (building on the work done in schools to develop CCAs, the Peoples Association programmes, and on the excellent work by the NYC in youth development).

Mills and Blossfeld (2003) remind us that the "extent to which youth experience the consequences of globalisation differs largely upon the nation-specific institutions that exist to shield, or conversely, funnel uncertainty to them" (p. 211). This requires us to pay greater attention to changing societal conditions as well as the institutions and its programmes that function to shape opportunities for its youths while sharing their burdens. Growing opportunities and sharing burdens should not solely be the government's responsibility. There is much that large and smaller companies can do in terms of their corporate social responsibility practices as well as civil society and youths themselves in growing social enterprises that go some way in reducing youth stresses and in increasing wellbeing and growing future confidence.

• TABLE 7: MEAN SCORES & RANKING OF YOUTH STRESSORS OVER TIME

	2010		2013		2016		2019	
1	Studies (for current students)	2.81	Studies (for current students)	3.49	Future Uncertainty	3.46	Future Uncertainty	3.33
2	Work (include part-time work)	2.52	Future Uncertainty	3.46	Studies (for current students)	3.36	Emerging Adult Responsiblity	3.25
3	Future Uncertainty	2.37	Finances	3.23	Emerging Adult Responsiblity	3.30	Finances	3.21
4	Finances	2.28	Emerging Adult Responsiblity	3.22	Health of Family Member	3.13	Studies (for current students)	3.16
5	Emerging Adult Responsiblity	2.25	Work (include part-time work)	3.10	Finances	3.07	Work (include part-time work)	3.00
6	Health of Family Member	2.14	Health of Family Member	3.04	Work (include part-time work)	2.99	Health of Family Member	3.00
7	Personal Health	1.88	Personal Health	2.68	Personal Health	2.74	Personal Health	2.62
8	Family Relationships	1.82	Family Relationships	2.45	Family Relationships	2.26	Family Relationships	2.40
9	Friendships	1.80	Friendships	2.40	Friendships	2.20	Friendships	2.38

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