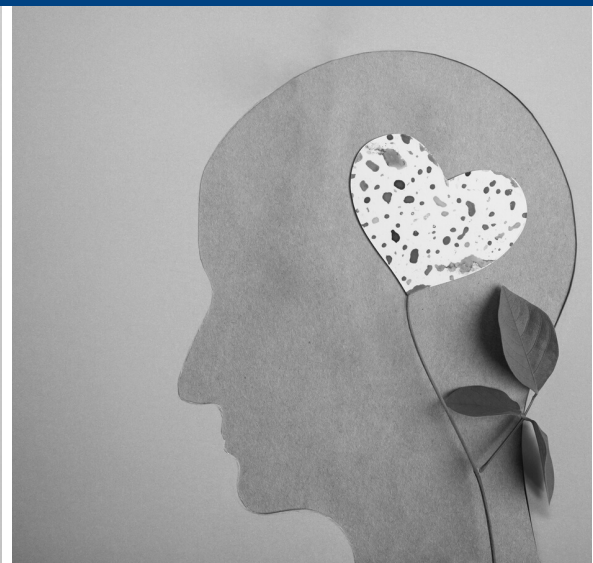


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Research Skills for Social Services Mentoring Programme

PROJECT ABSTRACTS



CONTENTS

Mental Health Landscape in Singapore

pg 3

Carol Lee (Tan Chin Tuan Foundation)

Searching for Child-Centric Practice Assessment Tools

pg 4

Clarissa Wong (Care Corner Woodlands Family Service Centre)

Bittersweet Fostering: How Foster Parents in Singapore Experience and Cope With Stress

pg 5

Benedict Tan and Krystin Foo (Epworth Community Services)

Mental Health Landscape in Singapore

Carol Lee, Head, Philanthropy and Grants (Tan Chin Tuan Foundation)

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), globally, one in seven 10-19-year-olds experiences a mental disorder. Depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.

In Singapore, one in three youths reported internalising mental health symptoms, such as sadness, anxiety and loneliness, based on a national study launched in 2019 by NUS, in collaboration with MOE and IMH. In addition, the suicide rate recorded in 2021 among youths aged 10-19 was the highest in 20 years, at 112 cases.

My seminar presentation looks at the resources available in Singapore to help youths with their mental health issues, covering government initiatives and programmes offered by social service agencies (SSAs). I will also highlight potential gaps in the programmes and services offered.

A review of the literature shows that stigma is still the top prevalent factor as to why youths do not seek help when they have mental health struggles. Other deterring factors include lack of financial resources and the long wait-time for psychiatric treatment and counselling. For SSAs, there seems to be a gap in the rehabilitation programmes, especially in step-down sheltered facilities for youths who are in recovery. Manpower crunch and burnout of counsellors are also possible reasons for the long wait-time for services offered by SSAs, as cases have been increasing significantly in the past few years.

With more government and ground-up initiatives to eradicate the stigma of seeking help, there is likely to be an increase in demand for mental health resources in the future. It would be a challenge to meet the increased demands, especially the need to provide adequate support for SSAs, a key player in the mental health field.

Searching for Child-Centric Practice Assessment Tools

Clarissa Wong (Care Corner Woodlands Family Service Centre)

At Care Corner Woodlands FSC, a community agency that works with vulnerable families and their children, a Child-Centric practice Taskforce (CCT) was developed in 2020. It aims to assess the impacts of adverse childhood experiences and social adversity on children while the main caseworkers continue to engage their caregivers. CCT workers will then collaborate with main caseworkers to formulate suitable interventions with the child and/or caregivers respectively.

Since its pilot implementation in 2020, the CCT has been relying on engagement tools such as cards and worksheets, obtained from various online sources to facilitate assessment. However, these tools might not be evidence-based. Thus, this research study aimed to find suitable assessment tools, through literature review, that have evidence-based utility and validity. Due to time constraint, the research study focused on tools that can be used with children impacted by family violence as it is one of the top casework presenting issues.

Despite searching through websites and journal articles, no specific assessment tool to assess the impact of family violence could be found. However, there are short-term effects of family violence on children witnessing or experiencing family violence that CCT could look out for, when engaging in play with such children. Moreover, a search of child protective agencies showed that they utilise or recommended the use of selected engagement tools to facilitate conversations on safety, problem-solving skills, and emotion regulation for assessment. Moving ahead, CCT can consider using these child-centric tools to formulate appropriate assessments when engaging with the children.

Bittersweet Fostering: How Foster Parents in Singapore Experience and Cope With Stress

Benedict Tan and Krystin Foo (Epworth Community Services)

Parenting stress describes the stress that parents experience from perceiving that they do not have sufficient resources to meet the demands of parenting. Existing literature reports that parenting stress contributes to poorer foster child mental health outcomes, poorer foster parent well-being, and less effective parenting. Foster parents' parenting stress is also associated with foster placement disruptions – where foster parents are no longer willing or able to care for their foster child. These disruptions may then detrimentally impact a foster child's socioemotional well-being. As such, key concerns in foster care are the parenting stress experienced by foster parents and the factors that buffer foster parents from parenting stress, and how these two interact.

The objective of this study is to understand the stressors experienced by foster parents in Singapore. Specifically, it aims to examine (a) factors contributing to foster parents' parenting stress, (b) the mechanisms through which these factors impact foster parents' parenting stress, and (c) how foster parents cope with the stressors of fostering. This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, using a standardised questionnaire and semi-structured interview with foster parents from a local fostering agency, Epworth Foster Care. Findings from this study will help to inform professionals so that they can better support and understand foster parents.



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