



# Misconceptions that mental health practitioners fight to correct

FROM A5

“Take depression, for example. Some parents I work with do not believe in a diagnosis, or they may say things like ‘this didn’t exist in my time.’”

These reactions can lead to conflict and impede effective support, and getting everyone on the same page to help those in need may be as difficult as the issues themselves.

Another myth that mental health professionals fight to correct is the idea of quick fixes.

Many people, they tell ST, expect immediate results from therapy or counselling, but real change takes time.

Mr Chng, the counselling psychologist, says patience and trust in the process are crucial. “You won’t see overnight miracles, but working with a mental health professional can help you navigate your challenges.”

Another widespread misconception is that psychological trauma is rare and confined only to catastrophic events like wars or natural disasters.

In reality, it lurks in the shadows of everyday experiences.

“Trauma is more common than people think, and the experience of trauma can be highly subjective,” Dr Ho explains. “Harassment, bullying or emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical threats.”

The practitioners tell ST that real progress in mental healthcare requires a collective shift in perspective here – one that acknowledges the intricate nature of mental health struggles and the necessity for sustained, compassionate support.

## MORE RECOGNITION FOR THE PROFESSIONALS

Mental health professionals play a crucial role as psychological well-being becomes an increasingly important focus in society, and the Government is looking to grow their numbers as well as take steps to ensure standards in the quality of care provided.

Nearly half, or 49 per cent, of adults surveyed said they felt depressed to the point of hopelessness for extended periods, according to an Ipsos World Mental Health Day survey published in October 2023.

The survey of 1,001 people aged 21 to 74 also found that 27 per cent have seriously contemplated suicide or self-harm.

And in a recently released nationwide survey on youth mental health by the Institute of Mental Health, one in four youth reported having severe or extremely severe symptoms of anxiety.

Singapore aims to increase the number of public-sector psychologists by 40 per cent by 2030. Additionally, 28,000 front-line personnel and volunteers serving at community and social service touchpoints will be trained to help identify those struggling with mental health issues.

While psychiatrists, who are medically trained doctors, are regulated under the Medical Registration Act, counsellors and psychologists are currently self-regulated and do not require licences to practise.

MPs and professional associations, including the Singapore Psychological Society (SPS) and Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC), have called for a regulatory



framework that would raise the standards and safeguards of the profession, which involves working with vulnerable individuals.

SPS president Adrian Toh said there are currently 692 psychologists registered with the society. They are governed by its code of professional ethics.

Registration is not mandatory, but requirements include a postgraduate degree in applied psychology with coursework in psychological assessment, intervention and ethics, as well as 1,000 practicum hours, including 400 hours of supervised practical training.

Practitioners registered or licensed in other recognised countries can also be SPS-registered.

SAC-registered counsellors must hold a postgraduate degree in counselling from an institution recognised by the association, and need to clock 600 hours of face-to-

face counselling and 60 hours of clinical supervision.

The association has more than 1,900 members, of whom over 620 are registered counsellors and 731 are working towards full registration.

The Association of Psychotherapists and Counsellors Singapore recognises practitioners’ qualifications and experience on a five-level framework, which are published in the members directory alongside each practitioner’s professional specialities.

This starts with certified professionals holding a relevant degree or postgraduate degree, and having at least 150 hours of supervised practicum.

The highest level, Certified Master Practitioner or Supervisor, requires a relevant master’s degree, 500 hours of supervised practicum, and supervisor certification from approved institutions.

Correctional rehabilitation senior psychologist Georgina Tay says she seldom feels unsafe even though her clients are mostly high-risk offenders.  
ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

A regulatory framework that recognises mental health professionals’ qualifications and expertise could help demystify the field, and provide clarity on who one should approach for specific issues, practitioners say.

Ms Tay, the correctional rehabilitation senior psychologist, supports the call for better regulation and recognition of mental health professionals, but says it is equally important to have standardised training and development in place, and to ensure that rates are affordable and access to care is increased.

“In a way, this also ensures mental health practitioners receive proper training and are equipped with the necessary skills for the job,” she says, adding that the main ethical consideration is to “do no harm to the clients”.

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## Helplines

### MENTAL WELL-BEING

- Institute of Mental Health’s Mental Health Helpline: 6389-2222 (24 hours)
- Samaritans of Singapore: 1767 (24 hours)/ 9151-1767 (24-hour CareText via WhatsApp)
- Singapore Association for Mental Health: 1800-283-7019
- Silver Ribbon Singapore: 6386-1928
- Tinkle Friend: 1800-274-4788
- Chat, Centre of Excellence for Youth Mental Health: 6493-6500/1
- Women’s Helpline (Aware): 1800-777-5555 (weekdays, 10am to 6pm)

### COUNSELLING

- TOUCHline (Counselling): 1800-377-2252
- TOUCH Care Line (for caregivers): 6804-6555
- Care Corner Counselling Centre: 6353-1180
- Counselling and Care Centre: 6536-6366
- We Care Community Services: 3165-8017

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- mindline.sg
- eC2.sg
- tinklefriend.sg
- chat.mentalhealth.sg
- carey.carecorner.org.sg (for those aged 13 to 25)
- limitless.sg/talk (for those aged 12 to 25)