

Cost of anxiety and depression in Singapore runs into the billions

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Symptoms of anxiety and depression in the post-peak pandemic era could be costing Singapore 2.9% of its gross domestic product (GDP)—or nearly S\$16 billion—suggests a study conducted by Duke-

NUS Medical School and the Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

Published in the journal *BMC Psychiatry*, the study estimated the total economic burden of lost productivity due to anxiety and depression in Singapore to be S\$15.7 billion (US\$11.72 billion) annually, based on [survey data](#) from 5,725 Singaporean adults collected via an online panel between April and June 2022.

Using a short questionnaire to identify the subset with current symptoms of anxiety or depression, they found 14% of respondents had symptoms consistent with depression and 15%, including many of the same individuals, had symptoms consistent with anxiety. Results further revealed that, among those who were identified as having these conditions, only 32% reported seeking health care to treat their [mental health](#) conditions and only 24% consulted a mental health provider.

"This is concerning as it suggests these individuals are not benefitting from effective treatments," said senior author Professor Eric Finkelstein, a [health economist](#) with Duke-NUS' Health Services & Systems Research Program.

To this point, 13% of those suffering from these conditions made at least one visit to the Emergency Department and 9% were admitted into the hospital. This increased health care costs by an average of S\$1,050 per year for these individuals.

Further results revealed the affected respondents reported missing an extra 17.7 days of work per year and being 40% less productive while at work, bringing the total value of lost productivity attributable to anxiety and depression in Singapore to S\$15.7 billion. Prof Finkelstein said, "These findings reveal that successful efforts to improve mental health will have both health and productivity benefits."

These estimates are consistent with global findings. The World Health Organization estimates that COVID-19 has directly or indirectly contributed to an increased prevalence of depression and anxiety of 28% and 26%, respectively. Other estimates put the global economic burden of [mental health conditions](#) at \$1 trillion per year.

Recognizing the growing mental health crisis, the Singapore government has created a multiagency task force to address the growing mental health pandemic. However, more can be done.

"Greater efforts to encourage undiagnosed cases to seek treatment, expanded access to peer support programs, increased efforts to improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma, and greater training among community resources such as [general practitioners](#) (GPs) and allied [health professionals](#) to diagnose and treat mental health symptoms are all part of a successful recovery strategy for the whole population," said Associate Professor Daniel Fung, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Mental Health, and a co-author of the study.

The research was conducted using an internal grant from Duke-NUS. The research team is conducting a similar study focusing on Singapore's youth and also looking at strategies to increase access to peer support programs.

More information: Parth Chodavadia et al, Prevalence and economic burden of depression and anxiety symptoms among Singaporean adults: results from a 2022 web panel, *BMC Psychiatry* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12888-023-04581-7](#)

Provided by Duke-NUS Medical School

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