

Family 'disconnect' drives young Singaporeans to suicide: charity

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Singapore's youth suicide rate showed little sign of dropping in 2013 as a charity group Wednesday blamed a widening "disconnect" with family members in the prosperous, hi-tech city state.

The number of people below the age of 30 who took their own lives held steady at 100, from 101 in 2012, the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) said in a statement—still nearly double the figure of 58 in 2011.

Suicides in general dipped by 10 percent to 422 in 2013, after hitting an all-time high of 467 the year before prompting rising concern.

People under 30 account for an average 20 percent of the total number of those who committed suicide in the past decade, the charity said.

"Suicide is tragic, and for the youths who died by suicide, it is a disturbing indicator of the level of distress they were experiencing," said SOS, which aims to prevent suicides by providing emotional support through private counselling and a 24-hour telephone hotline.

Overall Singapore's suicide rate of 9.29 per 100,000 people in 2013 is lower than 24 per 100,000 in Japan and 12.7 in Hong Kong.

But Christine Wong, SOS's executive director, said interactions with suicidal youth have shown "a general disconnect between them and their families".

"There appears to be a lack of effective communication and understanding between [family members](#)," she added.

The group said communication within families may be encumbered by young people being "generally more comfortable using online or virtual interfaces rather than conversing face-to-face".

"They also often use a lingo which their parents may not be familiar with."

Singapore is one of the world's most wired societies, with nearly 90 percent of households having access to the Internet and a mobile phone penetration rate of 154 percent.

SOS urged families to lend support to youths facing difficulties with life's challenges.

"The lack of it can increase the sense of isolation and helplessness when the youths are experiencing some problems," it said.

Suicide cases have consistently hovered around two percent of total deaths in Singapore, an affluent city-state of 5.4 million residents known for its pressure-laden school system.

Despite a virtually full employment rate, Singapore also has a highly competitive work environment.

Suicide is an offence in the compact island-state, and anyone who survives an attempt faces a jail term of up to a year, a fine or both.

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