

National Youth Council (NYC) x Singapore Polytechnic (SP) Webinar Series 2024

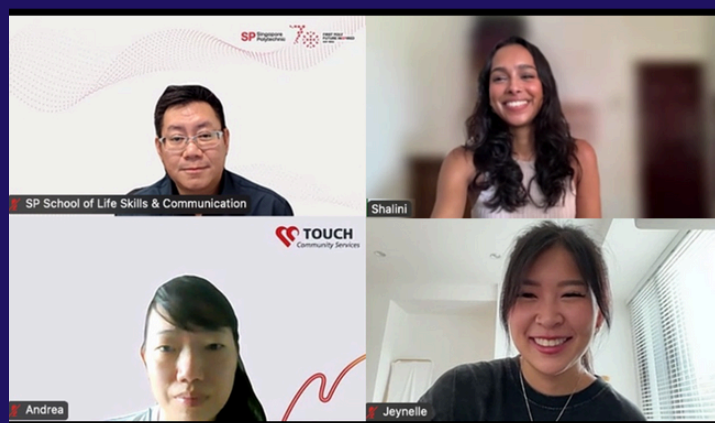
Webinar #1 - ONLINE OR OUT OF LINE: NAVIGATING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE HARMS ON MENTAL WELLNESS

13 September 2024 | Online (Zoom)

On 6 November 2024, 118 youths from Singapore Polytechnic (SP) gathered for a webinar on digital mental well-being which discussed: (i) the rising prevalence of online harms on social media and its resultant impact on the mental wellness of youths, (ii) the resources and support systems available to ensure secure and responsible online interactions, and (iii) ways youth could partner with respective stakeholders to ensure a safer and more supportive digital world.

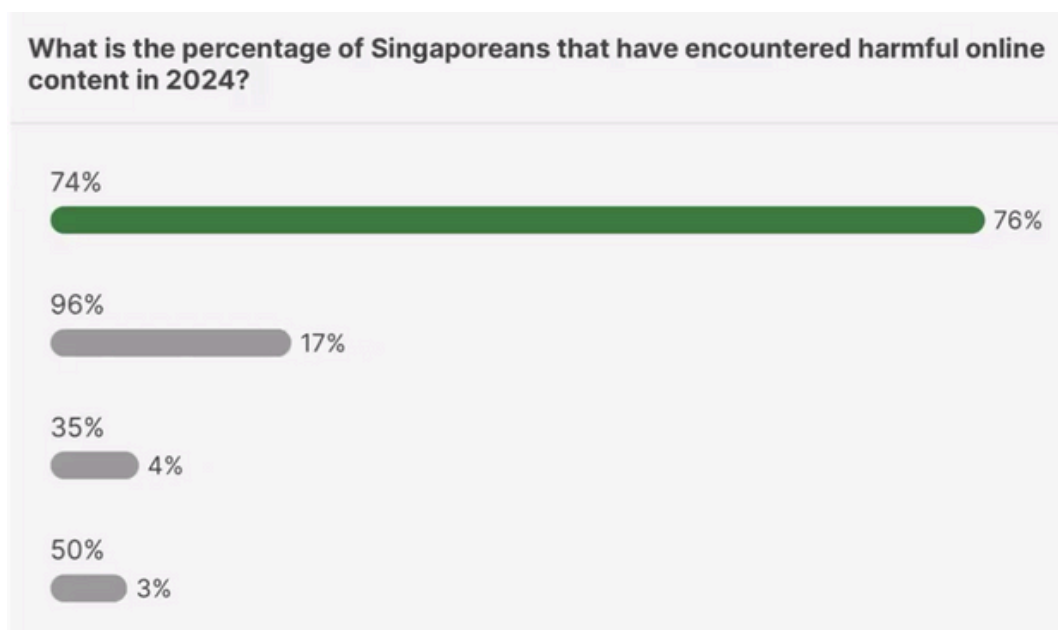
This session was co-organised by Singapore Polytechnic (SP) and the National Youth Council (NYC), and involved the following panellists:

- Ms Jeynelle Ng, Freelance Content Creator
- Ms Andrea Chan, Deputy Director, TOUCH Community Services
- [Moderator] Ms Shalini Kumar, #Techhacks Youth Panel Member and Associate at Allen & Gledhill LLP



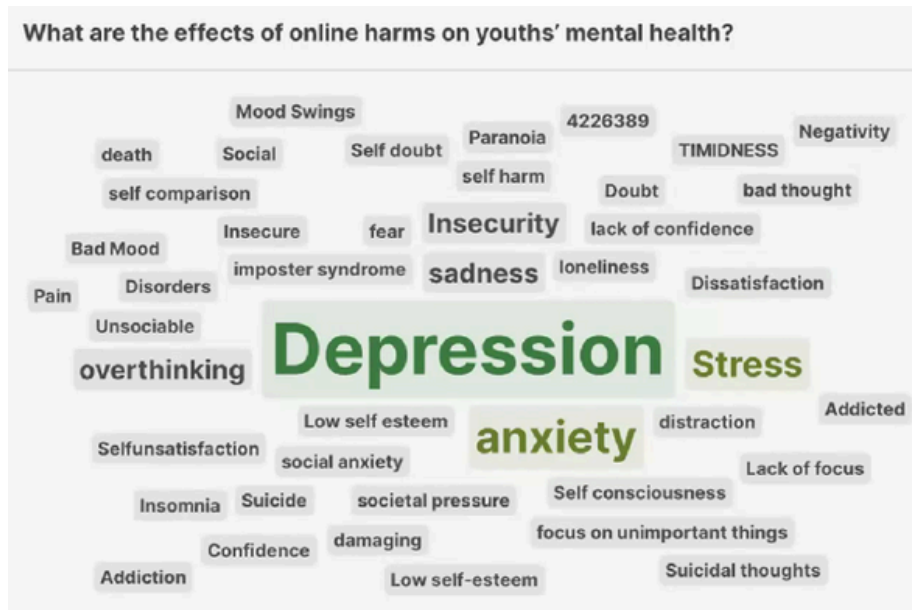
(i) Types of Online Harms and their Impact on Mental Well-being

The session started with an ice-breaker poll - “What is the percentage of Singaporeans that have encountered harmful online content in 2024?”:



- The top answer selected was 74%. The correct answer is 74%, and Ms Kumar said that the percentage of Singaporeans who had encountered harmful material online had increased from 65% in 2023.

Participants were asked (via Slido) what were the effects of online harms on youths' mental health.



- The most common responses included depression, stress and anxiety among others.

Ms Kumar invited panellists to share their insights on cyberbullying, social comparisons, and online scams/harassment, which students had identified as the biggest dangers faced by youths online in a pre-engagement survey.

- Ms Chan said that cyberbullying was prevalent and noted that anonymity of the Internet allowed individuals to behave more unkindly online. She said she observed that social comparison tended to peak at the end of the year when social media users who were more privileged posted about their overseas trips and purchases. She also said that youths were more savvy and thus less susceptible to scams.
- Ms Ng said that as a content creator, she learned to cope with negative online comments over time. She said that social media users should be mindful of the comments they posted, as these could negatively impact others. She said that individuals should focus more on themselves and their journeys, as social media posts often highlighted the more glamorous aspects of people's lives.

Participants asked (via pre-webinar questionnaire) about the specific groups likely to be more affected by online harms, and how they should address them.

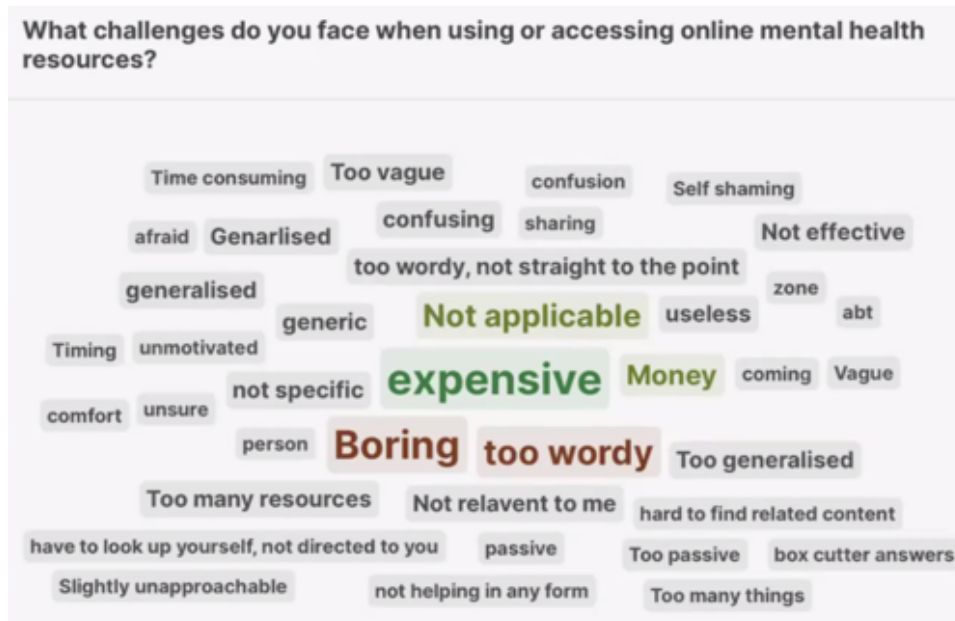
- Ms Chan said that people with lower self-esteem and limited social support were more vulnerable to online harms. She said that it was important for youths to set personal boundaries for the content they consumed, and to develop coping mechanisms to address distressing feelings. She said that these coping mechanisms included talking to friends and family or having hobbies that could help youths maintain their balance between the online and offline worlds, thereby reducing vulnerability to online harms.
- Ms Ng said that individuals could use negative comments as motivation for continuous self-improvement and added that having a strong sense of self was crucial.

Participants asked (via pre-webinar questionnaire) what were some signs that an individual was facing online harms and the long-term psychological impacts of experiencing online harms.

- Ms Chan shared that online harms, such as cyberbullying or social comparison, could negatively impact an individual's sense of identity. She said that warning signs included being unhappy when not able to spend enough time online, isolating oneself from others, and missing school or social gatherings in favour of spending time online. She said that these individuals should seek help as soon as possible.

(ii) Resources and Support Systems

Participants were asked (via Slido) about the challenges faced when using or accessing online mental health resources.

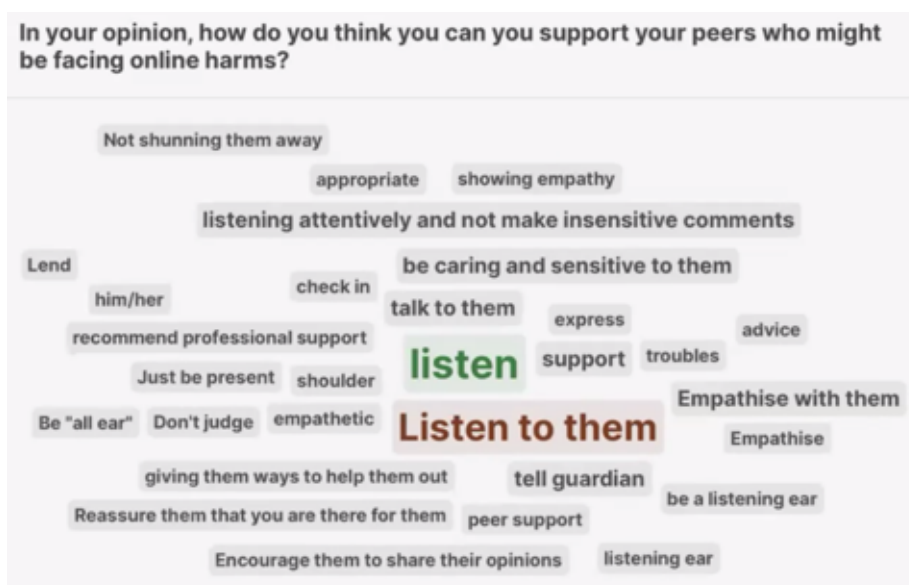


- The most common responses included expensive, boring or too wordy.

Ms Kumar asked panellists about the types of available mental health resources youths could access.

- Ms Chan said that fully funded services, such as [SHINE Children and Youth Services](#) and the TOUCHline contact at 1800 377 2252, were available for youths to connect with a counsellor. She said that other services, such as expressive forms of therapy and targeted interventions for different age groups were also available.
- Ms Ng said that in addition to Government services available, there were also online communities offering support.

Participants were asked (via Slido) about how they could support their peers who might be facing with online harms.



- Ms Dy Juanco acknowledged the sensitivity of topics in local-foreigner discussions, e.g. foreigners taking the jobs of Singaporeans. She shared that she received hurtful comments from local friends who could not relate when she shared the challenges she experienced as a foreigner working in Singapore. She encouraged participants to provide a listening ear to their peers and approach these conversations with sensitivity.

A participant asked (via Zoom Webinar Q&A) about how they could support their peers who were apprehensive about receiving help.

- Ms Ng noted that sometimes, being a listening ear was enough, as youths might be feeling overwhelmed. She said that rather than seeking solutions, youths could simply need someone to hear their challenges. She also added that journalling could help youths process their thoughts.
- Ms Chan said youths could help by being present for their peers. She added that providing emotional and physical support involved understanding why their peers might feel apprehensive about seeking help and offering solutions and suggested that youths could offer to attend counselling sessions together with their peers.

A participant asked (via Zoom Webinar Q&A) how youths could build resilience to cope with negative comments/criticisms online.

- Ms Chan shared healthy coping strategies such as building up positive internal self-talk, inculcating a sense of realistic optimism, and discovering methods that promoted positive feelings within themselves.

(iii) Ways Youth can partner Stakeholders to ensure a Safer and More Supportive Digital World

Participants were asked (via Slido) about the strategies they could take to better protect themselves and others in the digital environment.



- The most common responses from the youth were to be mindful and be mentally resilient among other responses.

Participants asked (via pre-webinar questionnaire) about ways they could promote or create a more positive online community.

- Ms Ng said that individuals should be mindful when commenting online, do their part by being kind and calling out harmful behaviours.
- Ms Chan agreed, emphasising that the silent majority needed to be brave and call out perpetrators when they witnessed harmful behaviours online. She added that by being silent, social media users inadvertently endorsed the harmful action.

Participants asked (via pre-webinar questionnaire) how social media companies could help creators cope with or be protected from online harms.

- Ms Ng shared that most online platforms currently had features designed to report and reduce harmful comments. She shared that this could involve restricting certain keywords or preventing specific comments from being displayed.

Participants asked (via pre-webinar questionnaire) how organisations could collaborate with other stakeholders to create a safer and more secure online space for youths.

- Ms Chan shared that TOUCH Community Services had a team that visited schools to educate, advocate and provide interventions when needed. She shared that counsellors were updated about the latest trends within the online space to ensure that the counselling sessions were more relatable and relevant. She added that digital wellness ambassadors were trained to spot and call out harmful behaviour online as part of their advocacy in the digital world.
- Ms Kumar said that the #TechHacks Youth Panel had been engaging with youths, the Government, and other stakeholders to understand the issues youths faced online and propose policy recommendations to encourage a safer and more secure online space for youths.