YOUTH

INTRODUCTION

The Youth Panel was convened and led by **Dr Humairah Zainal**, Exco Member of RIMA and Research Fellow at Singapore General Hospital. The rest of the panel members were:

- **Faris Ridzuan**, Master's Candidate in Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore
- **Farisha Ishak**, Singer and Youth Advocate
- **Kaven Siddique Lim**, Director of Converts Central
- **Khairul Rusydi**, Co-Founder and CEO of Reactor School

The panel members discussed key areas of concern amongst youths within our Malay/Muslim community.

After rigorous discussion and deliberation on areas of concern for further research on youths within our community, the Youth Panel had concurred on addressing two key challenges, namely:

1. Youth Leadership and Succession Planning
2. Structural Issues Affecting Youths' Mental Health

Youth leadership and succession planning are critical issues that impact the growth and sustainability of community-mediated organisations. In the context of Malay Muslim youths in Singapore, these issues take on added significance in an era where the community faces unique structural challenges that impact their mental health and well-being.

The aim of this paper is to consolidate findings from research conducted prior to and following the convention, as well as to provide policy recommendations.
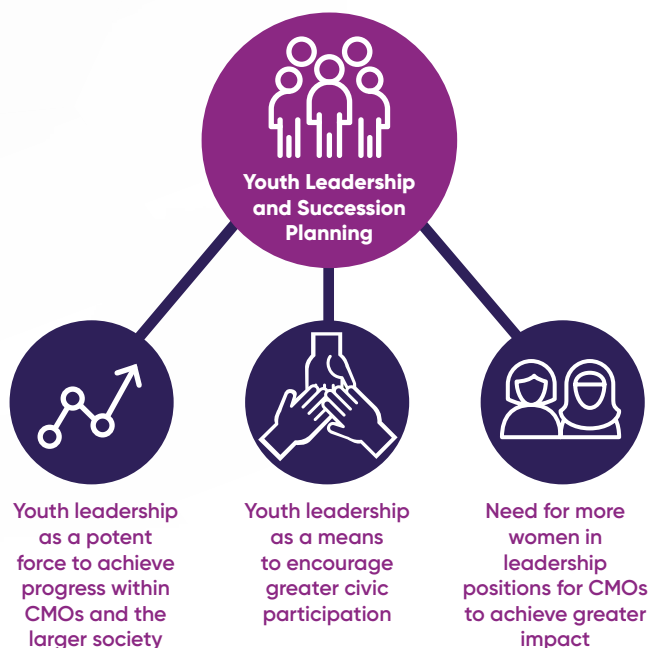
Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

Fig. 1: Issues related to youth leadership and succession planning

As stewards of tomorrow, youth leadership is pivotal for the progress of organisations and the larger society. In voluntary associations such as civic and political organisations[1], youth leadership paves the way for political socialisation, wherein the young can gain crucial skills that influence their potential to thrive in political participation as they reach adulthood. This is salient because taking up leadership roles in Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs) paves the way for youths to achieve greater impact within society, by being more civically involved.

---

[1] McFarland, Daniel A., and Reuben J. Thomas. "Bowling Young: How Youth Voluntary Associations Influence Adult Political Participation." *American Sociological Review,* vol. 71, no. 3, June 2006, pp. 401-425. doi:10.1177/000312240607100303.

Based on a study by McFarland and Thomas (2006), the Panel has found that youths' involvement in voluntary associations — through community service, representation, speaking in public forums and generating a communal identity — heavily influenced their future political participation. Additionally, providing opportunities for youths to hold leadership positions in CMOs creates avenues for leadership and can become a catalyst for youths to work on other goals to improve society. Framed as such, youth leadership becomes a call to action for more young people to come together to uphold and improve social justice.

Another challenge identified by the Panel is the lack of gender representation within the management boards of CMOs. As asserted by the Dalai Lama on women's leadership in *Battling Injustice: 16 Women Nobel Peace Laureates*, "The lives of the women Nobel Peace laureates [are] clear evidence of my belief that women are naturally more sensitive to others' needs and well-being. They have greater potential for expressing love and affection. Therefore, when, as now, compassionate leadership is required, women should take on a greater role in making this world a better place."

Women have a great potential that has not been tapped into, in the context of placing them in leadership positions within the boardrooms of CMOs. Such a trend is not only disconcerting, but it constitutes a great disservice to CMOs and the maximisation of their potential.

Finally, offering leadership positions within CMOs to youths from various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds is necessary to build organisations that are representative of Singapore's diverse social fabric. Ginwright (2007) elucidates the fact that when youths participate in organising and volunteering in civic affairs, they gain opportunities to develop critical civic praxis — through engagement with ideas, social networks and experiences that build individual and collective capacity for social justice.

The concept of critical civic praxis focuses on the collective dimensions of community change, and how political awareness serves as an important community resource for youths. Such an approach repositions youths from ethnic minority groups and underprivileged backgrounds as key civic partners in community change efforts.

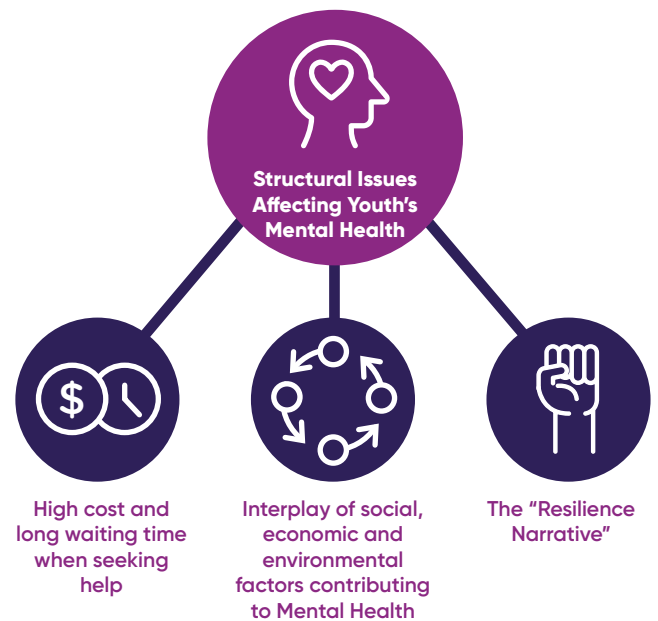## Structural Issues Affecting Youths' Mental Health

Fig. 2: Structural issues affecting youths' mental health

Despite youths' growing awareness of mental health and its importance, they continue to face challenges in obtaining such help despite the allocation of more resources to social institutions[2]. Individuals who take the initiative to seek professional help can incur high costs and long waiting times. It can take months to get an appointment with a public-sector psychiatrist or psychologist, while doctors in the private sector are not accessible to all youths. Moreover, current available measures focus on the "resilience

---

[2] Neo, Chai Chin, *et al.* "More Youths Seeking Help with Mental Health - but Finding It Isn't Always Easy." *TODAY*, 1 May 2022, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/youth-mental-health-illness-singapore-help-treatment-2649296.

narrative" – referring to the notion of having perseverance and self-confidence through one's battles with mental health. However, such a take on mental health, particularly for youths, is overly simplistic and does not provide the young with any concrete assistance. Existing gaps in the current provision of mental health services will need to be addressed by multiple stakeholders.

Additionally, risk factors for mental health challenges have been found by the World Health Organization to be caused by systemic factors such as institutional racism, sexism and socioeconomic injustices[3]. Mental health and common mental disorders are heavily shaped by the social, economic and physical environments in which people live. Moreover, individuals from a lower socioeconomic status are more susceptible to being diagnosed with a mental illness[4].

With the prevalence of mental disorders being well documented in Singapore, there is a considerable need to investigate further ways to provide better support for youths.

Paper Outline

Problem identification by panel members

Qualitative research interviews via focus group discussions and individual interviews prior to panel
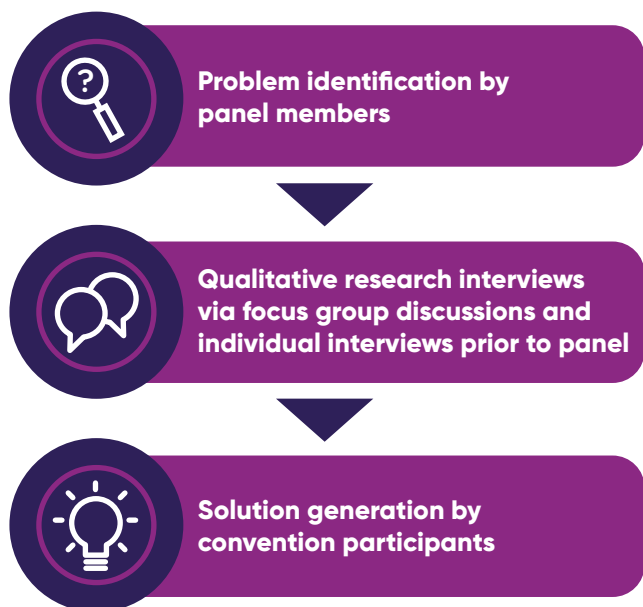
Solution generation by convention participants

Fig. 3: Brief outline of the Youth Panel paper

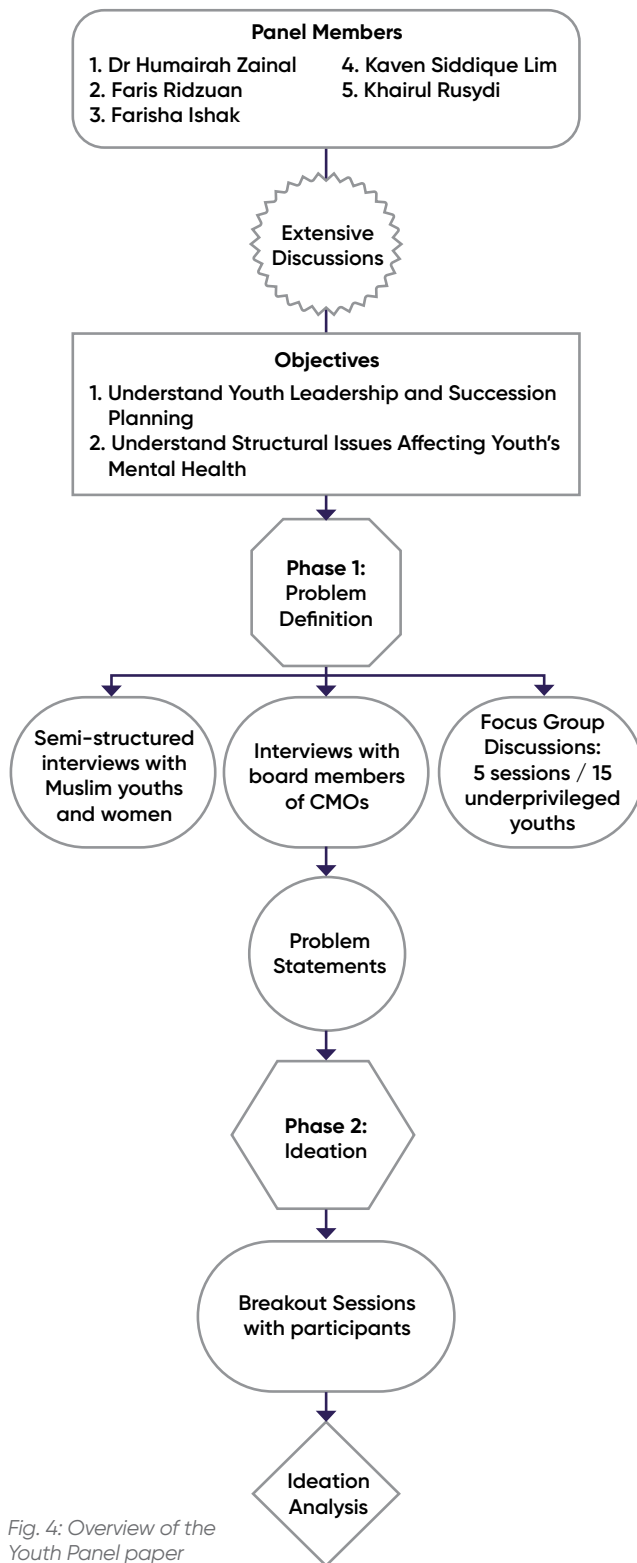The subsequent sections will outline the methodology, findings, and recommendations of each phase.

Panel Members
1. Dr Humairah Zainal
2. Faris Ridzuan
3. Farisha Ishak
4. Kaven Siddique Lim
5. Khairul Rusydi

Extensive Discussions

Objectives
1. Understand Youth Leadership and Succession Planning
2. Understand Structural Issues Affecting Youth's Mental Health

Phase 1: Problem Definition

Semi-structured interviews with Muslim youths and women

Interviews with board members of CMOs

Focus Group Discussions: 5 sessions / 15 underprivileged youths

Problem Statements

Phase 2: Ideation

Breakout Sessions with participants

Ideation Analysis

Fig. 4: Overview of the Youth Panel paper

---

[3] World Health Organization. "Social Determinants of Mental Health." https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809_eng.pdf.

[4] Ministry of Health, Institute of Mental Health. "COVID-19 Mental Wellness Taskforce Report." https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/covid-19-report/comwt-report.pdf.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Methodology

Semi-Structured Interviews with Muslim Youths and Women

Prior to the convention, qualitative interviews were conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews with Muslim youths and women in board-of-director (BOD) positions. Respondents for the FGDs were recruited through social media, and respondents for women in BOD positions in Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs) were recruited via email communications. For both FGDs and individual interviews, semi-structured interviews were adopted.

Additionally, respondents were guaranteed full anonymity in sharing their responses, which were codified and stripped of any identifying information. The interviews were conducted in English. Interview data was subjected to thematic analysis to identify salient themes and patterns.

Interviews with Board Members of CMOs

To obtain a fuller picture about accountability measures for youth leadership and succession planning present within CMOs, eight individual interviews were conducted with board members of CMOs. The respondents from these interviews hailed from a myriad of CMOs and consisted of both former and current members.

Focus Group Discussion with Youths

Five FGDs were conducted with 15 underprivileged youths from a myriad of ethnic, marital, employment and educational backgrounds. The breakdown of their demographics is as follows:
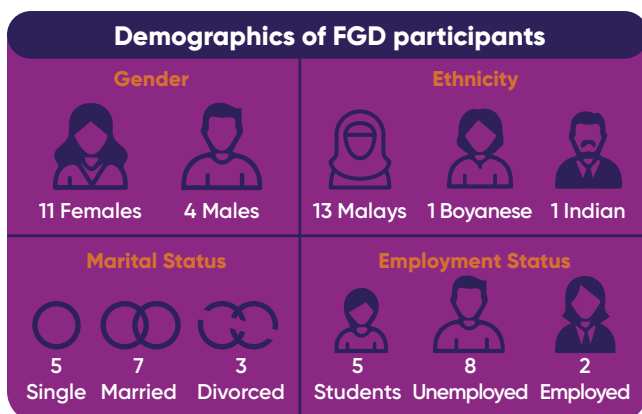
Fig. 5: Demographic information of focus group discussion participants

The respondents were also evenly categorised by their highest educational qualifications and monthly household incomes:
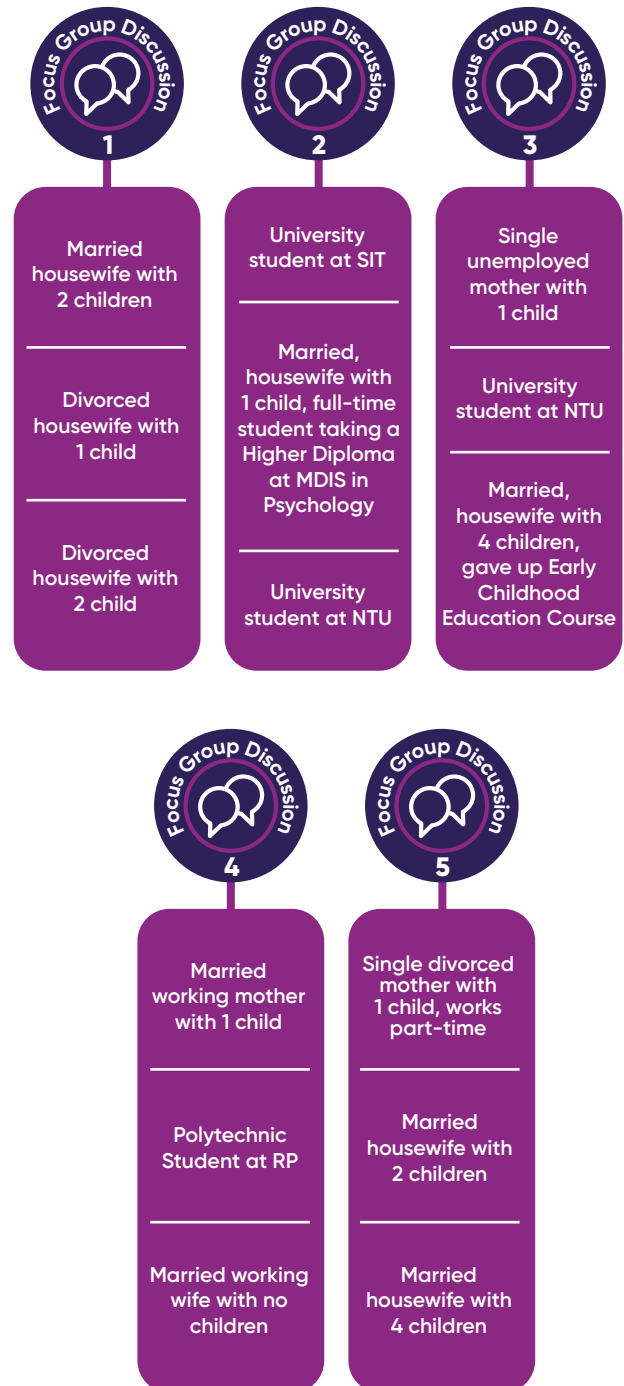
Focus Group Discussion 1
- Married housewife with 2 children
- Divorced housewife with 1 child
- Divorced housewife with 2 child

Focus Group Discussion 2
- University student at SIT
- Married, housewife with 1 child, full-time student taking a Higher Diploma at MDIS in Psychology
- University student at NTU

Focus Group Discussion 3
- Single unemployed mother with 1 child
- University student at NTU
- Married, housewife with 4 children, gave up Early Childhood Education Course

Focus Group Discussion 4
- Married working mother with 1 child
- Polytechnic Student at RP
- Married working wife with no children

Focus Group Discussion 5
- Single divorced mother with 1 child, works part-time
- Married housewife with 2 children
- Married housewife with 4 children

Fig. 6: Demographic information of individual focus groups

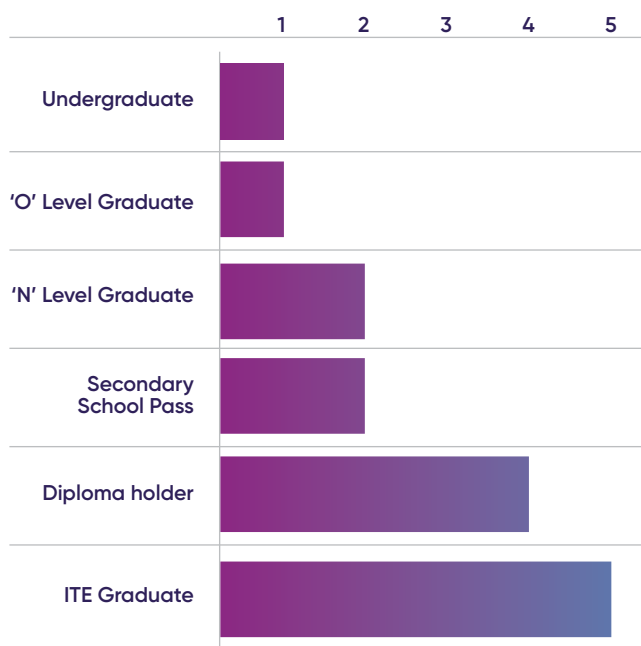## Educational Level of Respondents

Fig. 7: Educational levels of focus group discussion participants

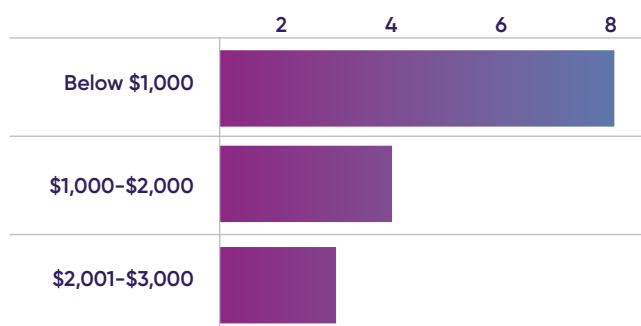## Monthly Household Income of Respondents

Fig. 8: Income brackets of focus group discussion participants

Key Findings

Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

This concern was investigated to shed greater light on the accountability measures on youth leadership and succession planning in Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs). Primary data for the project was collected through individual semi-structured interviews with board members of CMOs. Conversations were also conducted with the heads of youth organisations in Singapore. Secondary data was collated from scholarly publications and published reports from the relevant ministries and social service agencies. Key findings of the primary research are as follows:

Perceived Irrelevance of Malay/Muslim Organisations (MMOs) to Muslim Youths

- Some respondents had shared that MMOs perceive themselves to be playing a role in advocacy through various programmes and initiatives.
- Many respondents, however, had shared that there is more room for MMOs to play a larger role in advocacy, as presently there is a degree of disjuncture between board-of-directors (BOD) and youths on the ground who are in touch with the real issues.
- Respondents had shared that MMOs are unable to capture the interests of the youths and are unrelatable.
- Respondents had highlighted a palpable barrier existing between BODs and youths due to BODs' reluctance to connect with youths on issues they find compelling.
- Some respondents highlighted the need to balance advocacy for causes with ensuring alignment with the State for practical considerations such as funding. However, this delicate tightrope must be treaded, as respondents had also mentioned that MMOs need to veer away from being too focused on numbers and prioritise impact instead. BOD members had also shared a necessity to cover new and emerging issues that concern the community.

Perceived Reluctance of Older Generation to Provide Opportunities to Young Leaders

- A majority of respondents had shared that they sense a great reluctance from the older generation to step aside for younger leaders.
- The lack of opportunities to reach BOD positions for younger leaders poses an uphill battle for Muslim women to secure BOD positions.
- Respondents had cited a trend in current succession planning such that senior BODs are usually replaced by older members. As a result, many young members are unable to be groomed to become BODs.

- Respondents had also shared that they did not receive adequate guidance or recognition from senior BOD members.
- Additionally, there is reluctance of senior BOD members to engage with new and alternative ideas.
- Many respondents cited organisational tendencies to align with the State due to fear of censorship or funding being cut off. However, one respondent shared she was very appreciative of the President in her organisation who was highly receptive to streamlining processes and ideas that the respondent had suggested.

Tokenistic Role of Women

- A concern voiced by many respondents was that women did not have to be elected to BOD positions, which had small quotas, but could be co-opted. As a result, many of these women occupied BOD positions merely due to technicalities in organisational constitutions.
- Respondents had also shared a desire for a shift — from organisations appearing progressive by having women in BODs for the sake of optics — to becoming progressive where women no longer occupy token designated roles. Several respondents shared potential benefits for organisations, such as preventing the organisation from being susceptible to groupthink and, most importantly, how young women could bridge communication between younger members and more senior members.
- As a result of being in largely male-dominated organisations, where women are relegated to being token members, respondents felt intensely aware of their gender with a pressure to represent the entire gender at times.
- Respondents also shared that they felt unseen in the organisation, where, due to entrenched patriarchal practices, women have not felt welcomed in joining BOD positions.
- Additionally, female respondents cited facing misogyny from members within the organisation. Many respondents noted a lack of diversity and inclusivity in views shared within the organisation, and also cited feeling left out of decision-making due to their opinions not being taken seriously. This has led to a reluctance in speaking up.
- On the topic of inclusion, respondents cited a desire for greater diversity within BODs in terms of age, gender, and educational background, and also within the entire organisation itself where diversity is welcomed and ability is seen as important. Muslim women also spoke of the "second shift" — a concept coined by Arlie Hochschild, where Muslim women who are also board members struggle to juggle their household and childcare duties alongside their career and BOD commitments[5].

Structural Issues Affecting Youths' Mental Health

Community effort is critical, and the research intends to examine the impacts of the Singaporean education system and other factors on youths' mental health. Primary data for the project was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with underprivileged youths. Additional online surveys were conducted with youths from Institutes of Higher Learning. Secondary data was collated from scholarly publications and published reports from the relevant ministries and social service agencies. The key findings are as follows:

Absence of Economic Capital

- For respondents, the absence of economic capital stemmed from an awareness of financial literacy but thwarted by difficulties in financial management due to circumstances. Many respondents were reliant on financial assistance, mainly through ComCare, Family Service Centres (FSCs) for families, as well as the Ministry of Education (MOE) bursary, MENDAKI, Tertiary Tuition Fee Subsidy (TTFS) and the Muslimin Trust Fund Association (MTFA) for education.
- Respondents in FGDs generally understood the importance of financial literacy. However, unforeseen circumstances may still have an adverse impact on their acquisition of economic capital.

---

[5] Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Second Shift*. Penguin, 1989.

- Most respondents generally had sufficient finances for their daily expenses. Some difficulties faced by respondents in maintaining their finances were due to a myriad of challenges faced in their childhood. This included parental divorce, financial difficulties, and female respondents having to leave school to care for their siblings.

- Another impediment respondents faced was acknowledging the value of part-time work but being unable to commit to anything beyond that due to their family predicaments. This was especially so for female respondents who were mothers and who had to juggle part-time employment with childcare duties. However, these women faced great difficulty in securing social assistance due to institutions asking for them to place their children in childcare and finding full-time employment instead.

- Lack of understanding from social assistance providers was gleaned from the interviews. Women may desire to be good mothers by focusing on childcare – and this may necessitate not working or choosing to work part-time instead of full-time. Social assistance providers are perceived to not understand or appreciate this.

- Notably, there were female respondents who took charge of managing expenses for the household, a task previously associated with men. While there is an awareness of the importance of financial literacy among respondents, having to constantly deal with personal difficulty and uncertainty makes it an uphill task to accumulate adequate savings to achieve upward social mobility.

Lack of Psychological Capital

Many of the respondents' parents themselves have had or are having challenges with their mental health issues. Many respondents have experienced traumatic events in their own lives growing up, and they continue to struggle with financial difficulties. Notably for female respondents, they cited the pressure to be considered a good mother to their children as a source of stress. An additional impediment for respondents to seek help was posed by the stigma surrounding mental health:

- As a result of the haunting brand that is associated with poor mental health, the stigma still exists within the community. This results in a lack of social support for respondents' mental health challenges, leading to a hesitance to seek for help.

- Many respondents who were battling with mental health issues, and were aware that they should seek help from professionals, were hesitant to do so. As a result, some respondents employed coping mechanisms by seeking social support from family and loved ones, as well as seeking religious guidance.

- For most respondents, Islam was crucial as a source of psychological capital for them, with many seeking Islamic knowledge online.

The study also found that there was a correlation between educational level and psychological capital. Respondents who had attended polytechnic or university were more likely to have a more racially and economically diverse group of friends and to rely on their social networks such as friends for emotional support. As a result of their various difficulties and challenges in securing social assistance, respondents mostly felt that their perspectives had a limited impact on policymakers. Additionally, many felt that political leaders did not understand the concerns of the people on the ground such as themselves. Only one respondent shared an interest to be involved in policy planning. Respondents had a desire for there to be more support in terms of financial assistance, for single mothers, and for there to be structural changes in how the social assistance system works.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

Based on our findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews, we consolidated key findings to develop problem statements to be discussed further using the Design Thinking process with participants during the convention, where participants also reflected on personas that were not discussed. The problem statements are as follows, with participants using the guiding questions as a tool to brainstorm during the ideation exercise of the convention:

Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

1

Resistance from older board members to provide learning opportunities to younger members, especially women. This stems from structural barriers such as patriarchal beliefs and androcentrism that exist within CMOs. Traditional perceptions remain on the role of women in BOD positions, causing it to remain a challenge for women to assume these positions.

2

The lack of diversity in terms of recruiting youths from different educational backgrounds is a perceived barrier for women to take up BOD positions in CMOs. Additionally, the inability for CMOs to capture the interests of youths has led to a disjuncture between BODs and youths.

Guiding Questions During Ideation

How can we ensure greater diversity and inclusion in the leadership structures of Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs) for maximum impact on society?

How can CMOs encourage youths of diverse backgrounds to aspire towards contributing more actively through leadership positions in the future?

How can we minimise the barriers to Board appointments for youths? For young Muslim women?

Structural Issues Affecting Youths' Mental Health

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

1

Structural issues such as intergenerational poverty, housing, family issues, as well as lack of support from stakeholders such as CMOs and schools in which youths seek financial assistance while making the best of their circumstances, impede youths from achieving social mobility.

2

Generational mental health issues, turbulence within personal lives and constant financial stress experienced by youths contribute to their difficulties with mental health. While aware of the importance of good mental health and of the avenues to seek help, youths remain reluctant to seek help from professionals for their struggles due to the stigma attached to mental health issues.

Guiding Questions During Ideation

What can different stakeholders do to provide better support for youths who are facing mental health challenges?

a. Government
b. Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs)
c. Schools

105

Participants were provided with guiding questions to facilitate the Design Thinking process to brainstorm about profiles that had not been discussed during the convention. These were the guiding questions:
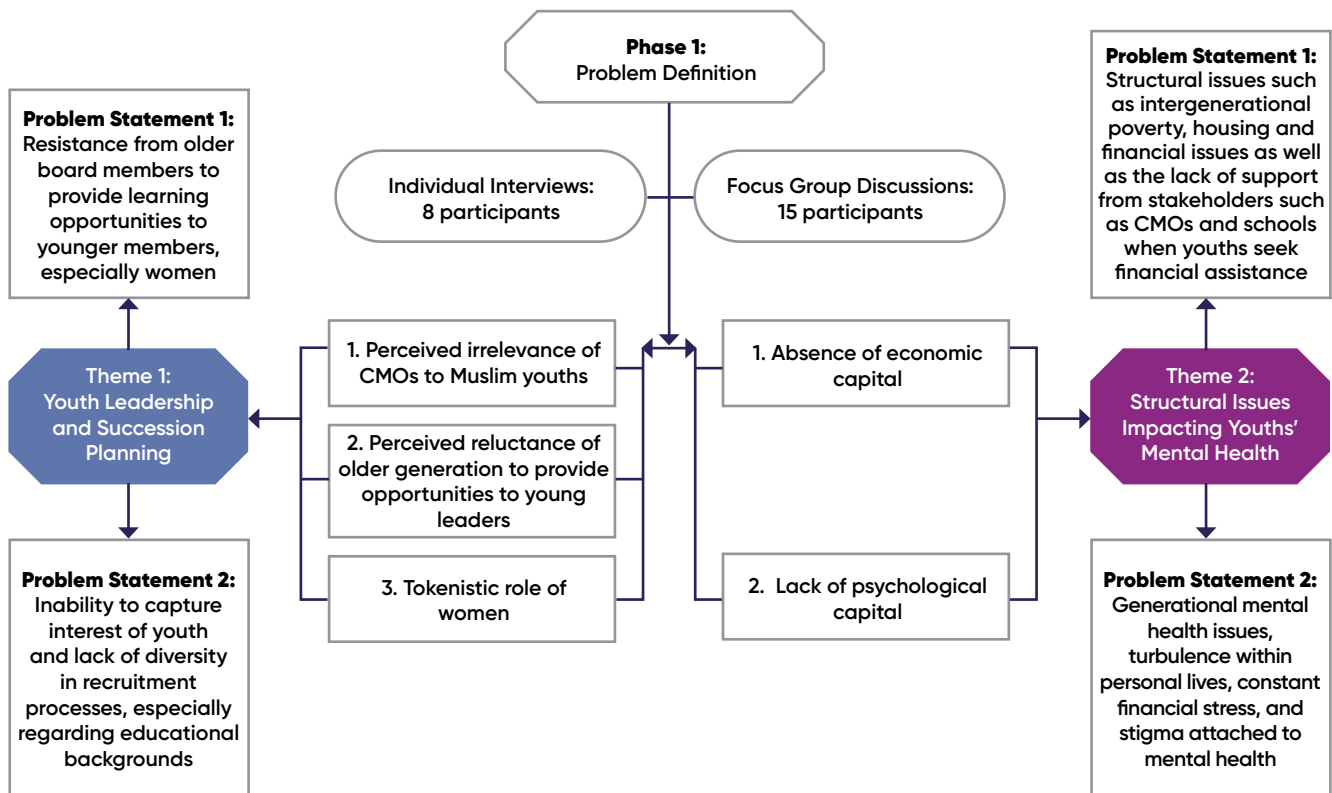
What are some of the other groups of youths which you have come across?

What are the challenges faced by these youths?

What are some solutions that we should consider in resolving the existing challenges these youths face?

Phase 1:
Problem Definition

Individual Interviews:
8 participants

Focus Group Discussions:
15 participants

Problem Statement 1:
Resistance from older board members to provide learning opportunities to younger members, especially women

Theme 1:
Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

Problem Statement 2:
Inability to capture interest of youth and lack of diversity in recruitment processes, especially regarding educational backgrounds

1. Perceived irrelevance of CMOs to Muslim youths

2. Perceived reluctance of older generation to provide opportunities to young leaders

3. Tokenistic role of women

1. Absence of economic capital

2. Lack of psychological capital

Problem Statement 1:
Structural issues such as intergenerational poverty, housing and financial issues as well as the lack of support from stakeholders such as CMOs and schools when youths seek financial assistance

Theme 2:
Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health

Problem Statement 2:
Generational mental health issues, turbulence within personal lives, constant financial stress, and stigma attached to mental health

Fig. 9: Overview of ideation phase for the Youth Panel Paper

IDEATION

In order to improve service to youths within the Malay/Muslim community, ideation breakout sessions were convened on the day of the convention. These ideation breakout sessions were intended to encourage participants to share their perspectives and to ensure engagement from participants. There were a total of 78 participants and 15 breakout groups, with seven groups for Youth Leadership and Succession Planning as well as eight groups for Structural Issues Affecting Youth Mental Health.

During the group breakout sessions, participants discussed the problem statements with the guiding questions to assist them and brainstormed further using the Design Thinking Process:
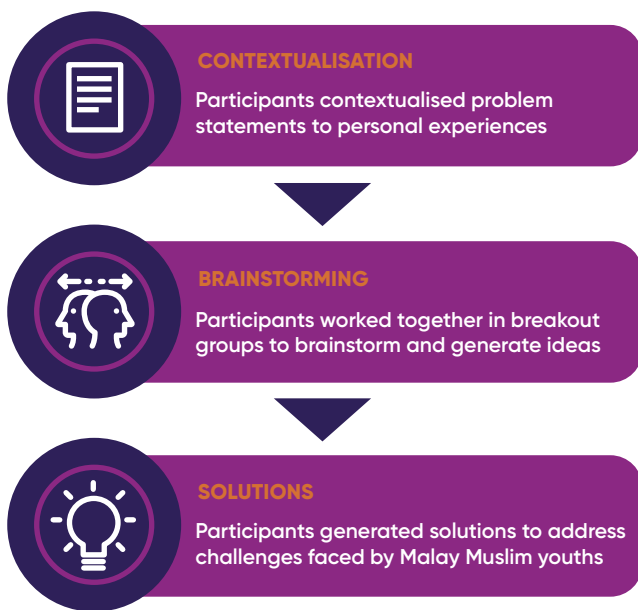
CONTEXTUALISATION
Participants contextualised problem statements to personal experiences

BRAINSTORMING
Participants worked together in breakout groups to brainstorm and generate ideas

SOLUTIONS
Participants generated solutions to address challenges faced by Malay Muslim youths

Fig. 10: Ideation process for the Youth Panel Paper

Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

1. How can we ensure greater diversity and inclusion in the leadership structures of Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs) for maximum impact on society?

Participants felt that more could be done to increase transparency pertaining to entering the leadership structures. Many participants had shared that there were not many resources available for prospective

volunteers to understand the leadership structures within CMOs, which led to a lack of clarity and understanding. Participants also shared anecdotes leading to a common belief that it was an uphill task for youths to participate in leadership positions within CMOs due to resistance from older members. Overall, participants believed that it was salient for youths to have access to resources and avenues where they are able to volunteer and take on leadership roles. Participants shared that the lack of awareness and information for youths to do so can limit the potential of CMOs to be dynamic, vibrant and representative of today's Malay/Muslim community.

IDEATION ANALYSIS

It is recommended that CMOs enhance transparency and clarity by learning from corporate world practices. This will enable them to establish clear leadership structures and succession planning programmes.

CMOs should institutionalise their leadership structures and adopt corporate ladder methods. By doing so, individuals can work their way up to leadership positions and contribute to the organisation's success.

To implement this approach, it is recommended to create a professional career path that allows volunteers to ascend from volunteer roles to leadership positions within the organisation. This will incentivise volunteers to work towards becoming leaders and contribute to the organisation's growth.

The creation of a clear succession planning programme is crucial for CMOs. Older members with leadership positions should guide and train younger and capable youths who show potential, making it mandatory to ensure maximum impact on society.

Volunteers should be given opportunities to shadow executive committee members from youth organisations. This will provide valuable learning experiences for the volunteers and enable them to learn from experienced leaders.

By implementing the above recommendations, CMOs can create a strong leadership structure, ensure a smooth transition of leadership for the future, and ultimately achieve their goals.

2. How can we minimise the barriers to Board appointment for youths, especially for young Muslim women?

Redefining criteria for Board appointment to be beyond academic achievements is key in minimising the barriers to Board appointments for youths, especially young Muslim women. The mentoring of junior board members by older board members would provide a platform for youths to gain hands-on experience prior to taking up leadership positions. Putting into the constitution for there to be women on the Board is a concerted effort to recognise the role of Muslim women in the community. Additionally, more effective outreach efforts through social media, networking events; and encouraging youths and women to be more vocal in order to nurture a culture of speaking up and openly sharing ideas; are essential to making Board appointment more accessible to young Muslim women.

💡 IDEATION ANALYSIS

To ensure that young Muslim women have access to Board appointments, it is recommended to take several important steps to promote diversity and inclusivity in the selection process.

Expanding the criteria for Board appointments beyond academic achievements is crucial to ensure that a diverse range of candidates is considered. This will increase the chances of young Muslim women being appointed to the Board, and create a more inclusive environment.

Providing mentorship opportunities for junior board members is also essential to support their development and enable them to navigate their roles successfully. Pairing junior board members with more experienced mentors can offer guidance and support, and help youths develop their leadership skills.

To ensure that women are included on the Board, it is crucial to have a clear commitment to gender diversity written into the organisation's constitution. This will send a clear message that the organisation values diversity and it is committed to creating a more inclusive environment.

Increasing outreach efforts to encourage open sharing of ideas and diverse perspectives is another important step. Using social media, networking events, and other avenues to reach a wider audience can promote the importance of having a diverse range of perspectives on the Board, thereby attracting a more diverse range of candidates.

By following these recommendations, CMOs can create a more inclusive and equitable management board that provides opportunities for young Muslim women to take on leadership roles and contribute to the organisation's success. This will not only benefit the organisation but also help promote diversity and inclusivity in the wider Muslim community.

3. How can we encourage youths of diverse backgrounds to aspire towards contributing more actively through leadership positions in CMOs?

Participants had shared that they understood the crucial role CMOs play to foster a conducive environment for youth leadership roles and for youths to thrive, regardless of socioeconomic status or academic background. As a result, participants had shared that there needs to be a reconceptualisation of criterion for youth leaders so that it focuses on the individual's contribution to the community. Additionally, participants had suggested that outreach efforts be widened to identify prospective youth leaders. Many participants had also shared concerns about the lack of clarity pertaining to the leadership track for youths.

IDEATION ANALYSIS

To create a more inclusive and diverse environment for young people to take on leadership roles, it is recommended to implement the following measures:

Redefine success to focus on how individuals can contribute to the community rather than centring solely on academic or wealth status. This shift in perspective can encourage young people from diverse backgrounds to aspire towards leadership roles and feel valued within the community.

Utilise marketing efforts such as youth camps and social activism dialogues to identify potential youth leaders. These initiatives can provide a platform for young people to engage with their community, demonstrate their leadership potential, and create opportunities for them to take on leadership roles.

Establish a clear leadership track for youths to develop themselves within the organisations they are working with. This will make the process more transparent and provide young people with a clear understanding of what they need to do to progress into leadership roles.

By implementing these measures, CMOs can create a more inclusive and diverse environment for young people to take on leadership positions. This will ensure that the organisation is representative of the community it serves, where young people from all backgrounds have an opportunity to contribute to its success.

Structural Factors Impacting Youths' Mental Health

What can different stakeholders do to provide better support for youths who are facing mental health challenges?

A. GOVERNMENT

Participants felt that with high costs incurred from seeking help for mental health, more could be done in terms of resources for the public to receive grants to offset financial barriers. There was great emphasis from all participants that there needs to be a transformation in the narrative pertaining to seeking help for mental health, particularly the "resilience narrative" where individuals are told they should just strengthen their "determination" to overcome mental health challenges. To achieve this, participants had suggested that the Government play a more active role by having a coherent voice that reinforces measures to combat mental health challenges.

To increase awareness and education around mental health issues in the workplace, it is recommended to:

Develop a workplace mental health policy that outlines the organisation's commitment to supporting employee mental health and well-being. This policy should include provisions for mental health accommodations, resources for employees to access mental health services, and guidelines for addressing mental health issues in the workplace.

Provide mental health training to all employees, including managers and supervisors, to increase awareness and understanding of mental health issues, reduce stigma, and provide strategies to support colleagues with mental health challenges.

Establish an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to provide confidential counselling and support services to employees who may be experiencing mental health issues. This programme should be widely promoted and easily accessible to all employees.

Implement regular mental health check-ins and surveys to assess employee mental health and well-being, identify potential areas for improvement, and evaluate the effectiveness of mental health programmes and initiatives.

Foster a culture of open communication and support around mental health issues, including providing opportunities for employees to share their experiences and ideas for improving mental health support in the workplace.

By implementing these measures, organisations can create a supportive and inclusive workplace culture that prioritises employee mental health and well-being. This can lead to improved employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, and ultimately benefit the overall success of the organisation.

B. COMMUNITY AND MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

Participants noted that Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs) play an integral role in the structural challenges faced by Malay Muslim youths pertaining to their mental health. They had raised concerns about the use of resilience and religion as sole remedies to mental health challenges without adequate touchpoints for youths to confide about their difficulties.

Participants had suggested the role AMP can play to facilitate this and bridge the gap between Malay Muslim youths and their mental health difficulties. There needs to be better understanding of the intersectionality of identities for Malay Muslim youths. Being both Muslim and Singaporean, there is a strong stigma pertaining to mental health and seeking help. Additionally, participants noted that a key challenge likely to be faced by Malay Muslim youths today is career choices and how to go about applying for their careers.

To improve and expand support for the mental health of our Malay Muslim youths, it is recommended to:

Develop a more holistic approach to address mental health challenges in the Muslim community by integrating resilience and religion.

Utilise touchpoints within the community — such as mosques — to foster better understanding and acceptance of mental health issues.

Launch an "I'm Okay Not to Be Okay" campaign to facilitate a safe platform for youths to discuss their problems with other like-minded young people.

Provide career advisers to guide youths of working age in applying for jobs.

Create more inclusive support systems that reconcile Islam and mental health, recognising the intersectionality of identities and addressing the stigma that exists within the Muslim community in seeking counselling.

IDEATION ANALYSIS

Participants had suggested the following to address how schools can step up to aid students in their mental health:

One of the key points was the importance of ensuring that all schools provide identical resources for mental health support to their students. The participants agreed that this is essential for creating an equitable learning environment where every student has access to the same level of care and support.

Another topic that was brought up was the need for financial literacy education to be included in school programmes. The participants discussed the importance of teaching students basic financial skills to help them better manage their money as they grow older. They emphasised that this would be a valuable life skill that could help students make informed decisions and manage financial difficulties in the future.

C. SCHOOLS

Participants had discussed several important topics related to student well-being. One of the key points was the importance of ensuring that all schools provide identical resources for mental health support to their students. The group agreed that this is essential for creating an equitable learning environment where every student has access to the same level of care and support.

Participants also discussed the need for financial literacy to be included in school programmes as a valuable life skill that could help students make informed decisions and avoid financial difficulties in the future. Participants recognised that strong family relationships are crucial for a child's mental health and well-being, and suggested that greater collaboration between schools and family service centres could help facilitate this.

Finally, participants brought up the importance of creating greater awareness of mental health issues and normalising conversations about seeking help.

The participants also discussed the role of family service centres and teaching staff in mediating parent-child relationships. They recognised that strong family relationships are crucial for a child's mental health and well-being, and suggested that greater collaboration between schools and family service centres can help facilitate this. They emphasised the importance of working together to support families in a respectful and collaborative way.

Finally, the participants talked about the importance of building greater awareness of mental health issues and normalising conversations about seeking help. They acknowledged that there is still a stigma attached to mental health issues, and that many students may be hesitant to seek help. The participants discussed ways to encourage students to open up and seek support when needed, such as by creating a safe and welcoming environment as well as providing resources and support for those who need it.

CONCLUSION

As part of the AMP 4th National Convention, the Youth Panel was convened to further investigate Youth Leadership and Succession Planning within Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs) and Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health. To prioritise the voices and experiences of youths interviewed, data collection and analysis were qualitative in nature. Following the analysis of interview findings, four problem statements were generated for the Youth Panel. These problem statements were then used for ideation as part of the Design Thinking process by 78 participants at the convention.

Theme 1: Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

1. Due to structural barriers such as patriarchal beliefs and androcentrism within CMOs, there is resistance from older board members to provide younger generation members, especially women, with opportunities to learn. There remains a traditional perception of the role of women in board-of-director (BOD) positions within CMOs, causing for it to be an uphill task for women to take up these positions.

- Participants' recommendations for CMOs to adopt leadership ascension protocols similar to those of the corporate world and for there to be shadowing between older and younger board members were the two main ideations that targeted these issues. See Appendix B for further details.

2. Lack of diversity in terms of recruiting youths from different educational backgrounds is a perceived barrier for women to sit in BOD positions in CMOs. Additionally, the inability of CMOs to capture the interests of youths has led to a disjuncture between BODs and youths.

- Participants' recommendations for CMOs to expand their definitions of success to qualify for board membership and having a clearer commitment to gender diversity within the constitution were the two main ideations that targeted these issues. See Appendix C for further details.

Theme 2: Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health

3. Structural issues such as intergenerational poverty, housing and family issues, as well as the lack of support from stakeholders such as CMOs and schools when youths seek financial assistance (while making the best of their circumstances) remain as impediments for youths to achieve social mobility.

- Participants' recommendations for the fostering of a culture of open communication and support around mental health issues given the stigma and development of a workplace mental health policy outlining organisations' commitment to supporting employee mental health and well-being were two main ideations that addressed these issues. See Appendix D for further details.

4. Generational mental health issues, turbulence within personal lives, and constant financial stress experienced by youths contribute to their difficulties with mental health. While aware of mental health and avenues to seek help, youths remain reluctant to seek help from professionals for their struggles due to the stigma attached to mental health issues.

- Participants' recommendations for there to be a more holistic approach to address mental health challenges within the Muslim community by integrating resilience and religion as well as launching an "I'm Okay Not to Be Okay" campaign to break down the stigma were two main ideations that addressed these issues. See Appendix E for further details.

The various solutions generated serve as great starting points for how the Government, CMOs, policymakers and fellow Malay/Muslims can work together to improve the lives of our youths in Singapore.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literature Review

Muslim Leadership in Singapore

When the pandemic momentarily brought the entire world to a standstill, it has also catalysed a greater awareness of existing fissures within our community, namely the leadership within our community. In the context of Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious fabric, a core aspect of the 'Malay plight' has been argued to be the legitimacy of Malay political leadership in Singapore, with both the ruling-party-affiliated Malay politicians and their Malay opposition counterparts being diametrically opposing in terms of their perceptions and predispositions towards this particular issue[6]. Notably, the latter views much of the source of the Malay grievance to be inadequate success of the Government and Malay MPs in fulfilling Malay aspirations as an ethnic minority in Singapore, further arguing that PAP Malay MPs, chosen and co-opted by the state to represent Malays, have not delivered what they had promised to.

In light of this, a bold, albeit controversial, alternative model of leadership known as 'collective leadership', was publicly put forth by AMP in both their 1990 and 2000 National Conventions. Under this form of leadership, for their credibility, Malay/Muslim Organisations (MMOs) must not be led by politicians. Instead, MMOs must be 'non-partisan' and 'independent,' and a collaborative and consultative Council comprising politicians (from both sides) and non-political leaders should be established to deliberate on major issues affecting the community and find common ground. In his article, Mutalib argues for this model, believing that this alternative or its variant could mitigate, if not resolve, the long-standing Malay plight, thus benefiting the community and Singapore as a whole. Though this concept of 'collective leadership' has since been dismissed, the principles of this alternative leadership are arguably still relevant today[7].

Building on this, in Mutalib's *Being Ethnic Minority and Muslim in a Global City-State*, he analyses the predicaments faced by Muslims in Singapore in the realms of politics, education, social mobility, economy and freedom of religious expression[8]. On the issue of Muslim leadership in Singapore, he highlights the problem of Malay leadership legitimacy, namely in terms of inadequate educational and religious credentials, and ineffective leadership. He also writes about the impediments to effective Malay leadership, namely the GRC electoral system and orientation of Muslim organisations and institutions. The latter, in particular, are often headed by people closely allied to the Government, some of whom are PAP party cadres. Like many pro-establishment agencies elsewhere, leaders of MMOs are often seen as not being bold enough to relay accurate feedback to the Government. As a result, Malay leadership has long been regarded by Malays to be ineffective in safeguarding their interests and aspirations. Taking all this into consideration, evidently more needs to be done to develop Muslim leadership talent so as to improve its leadership legitimacy (Hussin Mutalib, 2014). Notably, Mutalib raised two pivotal areas that have received little attention in discussions about Singapore's Malay dilemma — namely, countless Malay public seminars and conventions calling for attention to their plight, and the Government's similarly persistent resistance to such calls, seen as inimical to national interest.

Majulah!: 50 years of Malay/Muslim Community in Singapore highlights three broad principles that have guided Muslim community leaders in ensuring that the interests of religion, race and our country are in harmony[9]. They are, namely, practising Islam in a way that preaches moderation and respects culture,

---

[6] Mutalib, Hussin. "The Quest for Leadership Legitimacy among Singapore Malays." *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 20, no. 1, 30 May 2012, pp. 70–85.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Mutalib, Hussin. *Singapore Malays: Being Ethnic Minority and Muslim in a Global City-State*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2014.

[9] Rasheed, Zainul Abidin, and Norshahril Saat. *Majulah!: 50 Years of Malay/Muslim Community in Singapore*. World Scientific Books, 2016.

heritage and context; preserving a Malay culture that exemplifies Islamic values and joining fellow citizens to build a society that values meritocracy, self-reliance and integrity; and living respectfully with others in a multi-religious, multi-racial society.

Walid Jumblatt Abdullah has investigated the nature of secularism as practised by the Singapore state: focusing on the two main Islamic organisations, MUIS and Pergas, he argues the state uses 'muscular' and 'calibrated' secularism to manage them[10]. While 'muscular secularism' refers to a direct, interventionist approach characterised by draconian measures, harsh laws, and formal co-optation, 'calibrated secularism' is a more indirect form of intervention consisting of symbiotic relationships between religious organisations and the state, known as informal co-optation. Though *asatizah* (religious teachers and/or scholars) have been referred to as being apolitical; not visibly active in politics; portrayed as being controlled by the Government; and their actions merely an extension of Government policies concerning the local Muslim community — Mostarom argues that this leadership community employs carefully considered pragmatism in its dealings with state authorities, with the broader objective of preserving the interests of the local Muslim community[11]. This includes *asatizah*-led initiatives to facilitate harmonious coexistence with the vibrant cultural and religious diversity present in Singapore, which is often viewed as merely an extension of state interest.

While there is extensive literature on Muslim leadership in Singapore, it is overwhelmingly male-dominated, wherein it does not showcase the diversity and inclusion structures within Community and Muslim Organisations (CMOs), and how this may have an impact on youths, especially women who now hold board-of-director (BOD) positions within these organisations.

Health Challenges in Singapore

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting stressors have also taken a serious toll on the mental health of Muslim youths in Singapore, but also youths at large[12]. In a series of polls conducted by the National Youth Council between April and December 2020 on Singaporean youths' challenges and sentiments on COVID-19, mental well-being remained a challenge for 52% of respondents[13]. The top stressors cited by youths were anxiety over the future, stress over finances, and worries about academic or work performance. With the pandemic, schools and Institutes of Higher Learning invested efforts to train staff to identify signs of distress in students and to refer students to professionally trained counsellors. With a rapidly increasing trend of youths being diagnosed with depression, however, schools have yet to adequately aid the improvement of students' mental health[14]. While mental health features prominently in MOE's revised Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum, the emphasis disconcertingly remains on building mental resilience rather than acknowledging that struggling with mental health is something all individuals are susceptible to. This is a great cause for concern, what with the highly competitive Singaporean education system.

The solutions to promote mental well-being, as proposed by the *asatizah*, would often involve increasing one's spirituality through acts of piety that bring one closer to God, such as performing one's prayers and reading the Quran. However, often neglected are the oppressive forces in society, such as institutional racism, sexism and class injustices that may also contribute to the individual's mental health condition.

---

[10] Abdullah, Walid Jumblatt. "Religious Representation in Secular Singapore: A Case Study of MUIS and Pergas." Asian Survey, vol. 53, no. 6, December 2013, pp. 1182-1204. University of California Press.

[11] Mostarom, Tuty Raihanah. "Muslim Religious Leaders and the Promotion of Harmonious Coexistence in Singapore: Government Project or Community Initiative?" In *Islam and Peacebuilding in the Asia-Pacific*, edited by Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, World Scientific Books, 2017, pp. 213-241.

[12] Ministry of Health, Institute of Mental Health. "COVID-19 Mental Wellness Taskforce Report." https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/covid-19-report/comwt-report.pdf.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Neo, Chai Chin, *et al*. "More Youths Seeking Help with Mental Health - but Finding It Isn't Always Easy." TODAY, 1 May 2022, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/youth-mental-health-illness-singapore-help-treatment-2649296.

The online talks and podcasts organised by young local *asatizah* on social media illustrate this point. Most of these talks are largely focused on the rhetoric of self-help as necessary solutions to societal problems. In a keynote address at the MENDAKI Symposium on 30 June 2022, Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies Tharman Shanmugaratnam underscored how education has been and is one of Singapore's most fundamental social and economic strategy — especially now as we look to the future. Education is how we develop the social attributes we need to be a vibrant and cohesive society. It is how we develop the skills that we need to be a competitive economy. But more than just specific social or economic skills and capabilities, education is how we shape the character of our nation. It has been so, and remains fundamental to the character of the future Singapore[15].

Acknowledging gaps in the Malay community in education, Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam noted the great leaps by Malay students, citing how 15-year-old Malay students in the 2018 PISA tests outperformed the average

of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries[16]. Improvements within the Malay community in attaining post-secondary qualifications and beyond have also been the largest in the last decade compared to that of other ethnic groups, with very significant progress. However, gaps remain. The gaps are evident in every educational level. The gaps faced by the Malay community exist not only because Malays have been overrepresented in lower socioeconomic groups but also because there is a greater proportion of Malays who start off weak in school, and remain weak[17]. However, no studies have been conducted on challenges that youths from various socioeconomic groups face with mental health, despite research showing that individuals from lower socioeconomic levels are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental illness[18].

Given the gaps identified in the literature, these are salient areas of concern that need to be delved deeper into, to understand emerging trends within our community and how to provide better support for youths.

---

[15] "Keynote Address by SM Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the Mendaki Symposium 2022." *Prime Minister's Office Singapore*, Newsroom, 30 June 2022, https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/Keynote-Address-by-SM-Tharman-Shanmugaratnam-at-the-Mendaki-Symposium-2022.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Vaingankar, Janhavi Ajit, *et al.* "Understanding the Relationships between Mental Disorders, Self-Reported Health Outcomes and Positive Mental Health: Findings from a National Survey." *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, vol. 18, no. 1, 4 March 2020, p. 55. doi:10.1186/s12955-020-01308-0.

Appendix B:

Theme 1: Youth Leadership and Succession Planning: Guiding Question 1

Due to structural barriers such as patriarchal beliefs and androcentrism within CMOs, there is resistance from older board members to provide younger generation members, especially women, with opportunities to learn. As such, how can we ensure greater diversity and inclusion in the leadership structures of CMOs for maximum impact on society?

	Lack of transparency pertaining to entering the leadership structures	Resistance from older members	Lack of awareness and information of youths
Enhance transparency and clarity by learning from corporate world practice	✓		
Institutionalise their leadership structures and adopt corporate ladder methods	✓	✓	
Create a professional career path	✓		
Clear succession planning programme	✓		✓
Shadow executive committee members		✓	✓

Fig. 11: Solutions addressing Guiding Question 1 of Theme 1: Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

Appendix C:

Theme 1: Youth Leadership and Succession Planning: Guiding Questions 2 and 3

Lack of diversity in terms of recruiting youths from different educational backgrounds is a perceived barrier for women to sit in BOD positions in CMOs. Additionally, the inability for CMOs to capture the interests of youths has led to a disjuncture between BODs and youths. As such, how can we minimise the barriers to Board appointments for youths, and especially for young Muslim women?

	Lack of mentoring	Lack of concerted effort to recognise role of Muslim women in the community	Lack of effective outreach methods
Expanding the criteria for Board appointments beyond academic achievements		✓	
Mentorship opportunities	✓		
Clear commitment to gender diversity written into the organisation's constitution		✓	
Social media outreach efforts and networking events			✓

Fig. 12: Solutions addressing Guiding Question 2 of Theme 1: Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

Similarly, how can CMOs encourage youths of diverse backgrounds to aspire towards contributing more actively through leadership positions in the future?

	Lack of diversity (with regard to socio-economic status or academic background)	Strict criterion evaluating an individual's contribution to the community	Lack of outreach methods to identify perspective youth leaders	Lack of clarity pertaining to leadership tracks
Redefinition of success for youths	✓	✓	✓	
Marketing efforts such as youth camps and social activism dialogues			✓	✓
Clear leadership track for youths				✓

Fig. 13: Solutions addressing Guiding Question 3 of Theme 1: Youth Leadership and Succession Planning

Appendix D:

Theme 2: Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health

Structural issues such as intergenerational poverty, housing and family issues, as well as the lack of support from stakeholders such as CMOs and schools when youths seek financial assistance (while making the best of their circumstances) remain as impediments for youths to achieve social mobility. What can the Government do to provide better support for youths who are facing mental health challenges?

	Lack of resources to defray high costs of seeking mental health services	Problematic narrative pertaining to seeking help for mental health	Focus on "resilience"
Develop a workplace mental health policy that outlines the organisation's commitment to supporting employee mental health and wellbeing		✓	✓
Provide mental health training to all employees		✓	✓
Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to provide confidential counseling and support services	✓		
Implement regular mental health check-ins and surveys		✓	✓
Foster a culture of open communication and support around mental health issues		✓	✓

Fig. 14: Proposed solutions related to Theme 2: Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health for the Government

Appendix E:

Theme 2: Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health

Generational mental health issues, turbulence within personal lives and constant financial stress experienced by youths contribute to their difficulties with mental health. While aware of mental health and avenues to seek help, youths remain reluctant to seek help from professionals for their struggles due to the stigma attached to mental health. What can CMOs do to provide better support for youths who are facing mental health challenges?

	Use resilience and religion as sole reminders to mental health	Lack of understanding of the intersectionality of identities for Malay Muslim youths	Stigma pertaining to mental health and seeking help	Career choices and applying for their careers
Develop a more holistic approach to address mental health challenges in the Muslim community by integrating resilience and religion	✓	✓	✓	
Utilise touchpoints within the community, such as mosques			✓	
Launch an 'I'm Okay Not To Be Okay' campaign	✓	✓	✓	
Provide career adviser				✓
Create more inclusive support systems that reconcile Islam and mental health	✓	✓	✓	

Fig. 15: Proposed solutions related to Theme 2: Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health for Community and Muslim Organisations

Similarly, what steps can schools take to address such issues?

	Unequal resources	Lack of financial literacy classes	Lack of strong family relationships	Lack of awareness of mental health issues and stigma on seeking help
Provide identical resources for mental health support to their students	✓			
Financial literacy to be included in school programmes		✓		
Greater collaboration between schools and family services centres			✓	
Building greater awareness of mental health issues and normalising conversations about seeking help				✓

Fig. 16: Proposed solutions related to Theme 2: Structural Issues Impacting Youths' Mental Health for Schools