

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Caught in the Middle: The Hidden Mental Health Pressures Facing Singapore's Sandwich Generation Women

First-of-its-kind SCWO–JCU study finds that workplace stress, caregiving responsibilities and family pressures place a significant mental health burden on women in Singapore.

Singapore, 6 October 2026 – As Singapore's national coordinating body of women's organisations, the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) partnered with James Cook University (Singapore Campus) (JCU) on a first-of-its-kind study to better understand the mental wellbeing of women in midlife—an often-overlooked group balancing work, caregiving responsibilities and family commitments. The study forms part of SCWO's ongoing commitment to evidence-based advocacy and the development of programmes, partnerships and policy conversations that better support women across different stages of life. At a time when Singapore is encouraging greater workforce participation, supporting caregivers and preparing for an ageing population, the findings highlight the importance of investing in women's mental wellbeing as a national issue—not simply an individual one.

Among its key findings, workplace stress, family problems, relationship challenges and caregiving responsibilities emerged as the leading contributors to mental health concerns faced by women in Singapore. Participants in the study also showed a higher prevalence of symptoms consistent with anxiety and depression than that reported in a broader Singapore population study, pointing to the possibility that middle-aged women face distinct and cumulative pressures that deserve greater attention.

Often described as the "sandwich generation", women in midlife frequently balance work, caregiving for children and ageing parents, household responsibilities and major life transitions. Despite their important roles in families, workplaces and communities, their mental health has received comparatively little attention in local research.

Surveying nearly 500 women aged 40 to 59, the study provides new evidence to inform future conversations, policies and support initiatives.

Key Findings from the Study

The study highlights several important trends:

1. **Mental Health History & Compounding Pressures:** Half of respondents (50%) reported having experienced a mental health concern at some point in their lives. Rather than a single cause, many identified multiple sources of moderate-to-extreme stress contributing to their distress. Workplace stress (54.3%) and family problems (51.3%) emerged as the most common pressures, underscoring how overlapping demands across work and home can compound mental health challenges.
2. **Higher Incidence of Anxiety and Depression Symptoms:** Participants in the study showed a higher prevalence of symptoms consistent with anxiety (33.5%) and depression (21.8%) than reported in a broader Singapore population study, which found prevalence rates of 15.2% and 14.1% respectively. While the findings are not directly comparable, they suggest that middle-aged women may face unique and cumulative stressors that warrant further attention.
3. **Awareness & Service Use:** A majority of participants (58.4%) were completely unaware of female-specific mental health services in Singapore, such as the programs at KK Women's and Children's Hospital or the National University Hospital, and 92.4% had never used them.
4. **Perceived Affordability vs. Accessibility:** 53% of participants perceived mental health services in Singapore as unaffordable or highly unaffordable. Conversely, 54% believed that services are accessible or highly accessible.
5. **Help-Seeking Stigma:** Stigma towards seeking professional help was relatively low; respondents felt that seeing a therapist would not impair their self-confidence (60.7%), satisfaction with themselves (69.3%), or make them feel inferior (66%); though a sizeable proportion continue to perceive stigma.
6. **Help-Seeking Intentions:** If faced with a mental health concern, participants were most likely to seek help from a mental health professional (75.9%), an intimate partner (63.2%), or a friend (56.9%). They were less likely to seek help from phone helplines (39.4%) or religious leaders (37%).

The findings suggest that many middle-aged women are not struggling with a single source of stress, but with the cumulative weight of pressures across work, caregiving and family life, even as barriers to seeking support persist.

Why This Matters Now

Singapore's rapidly ageing population, low fertility rates and changing workforce dynamics are placing increasing demands on women across different life stages. As primary caregivers for children, ageing parents and family members, many women experience overlapping pressures that accumulate over time. The findings suggest that poor mental health among middle-aged women is rarely driven by a single factor, but by the cumulative effects of work, caregiving, relationships and family responsibilities.

Women aged 40 to 59 represent one of Singapore's largest demographic groups and form a substantial proportion of the workforce. Midlife is also a period marked by significant hormonal and physiological changes, including menopause, which may intersect with workplace, caregiving and family demands to influence women's mental wellbeing. Supporting their wellbeing is therefore not only a matter of individual health, but also one of family resilience, caregiving capacity, workforce participation and healthy ageing. As Singapore seeks to support women through different life stages, the findings underscore the importance of adopting a life-course approach to women's mental health and ensuring that caregiving and career transitions do not come at the expense of long-term wellbeing.

The study also found that women who reported having supportive male colleagues were more likely to experience higher life satisfaction, lower levels of mental health stigma and greater willingness to seek support. This reinforces the important role workplaces and colleagues can play in creating environments where seeking help is normalised and encouraged.

Knowing Where to Turn

Despite growing national attention on mental health, more than half of respondents were unaware of mental health resources tailored specifically to women. While services were generally perceived to be accessible, affordability remained a concern. The findings suggest that improving access is not only about increasing the availability of services, but also ensuring women know where and how to seek help, understand the support options available, and feel confident accessing them. Strengthening mental health literacy and clearer pathways to care can encourage earlier help-seeking and better navigation of available support.

Dr Seow Yian San, President of SCWO:

"This study is about far more than mental health. It is about how we value and support the women who hold together our families, workplaces and communities. Too often, women in midlife are expected to seamlessly balance careers, caregiving and countless invisible responsibilities, yet the cumulative impact on their own wellbeing remains under-recognised. As Singapore prepares for the future, investing in women's mental wellbeing is not simply a health imperative; it is fundamental to workforce resilience, healthy ageing, stronger families and a more inclusive society. We hope this research serves as a catalyst for deeper conversations, evidence-informed policies and collective action that enable women not merely to cope, but to thrive."

Dr Sherry Aw, Senior Lecturer, James Cook University in Singapore:

"What was particularly striking during the research was that many women were most concerned about how their mental health challenges might affect or burden their families. This highlights that midlife women may prioritise the people who depend on them over themselves. Our findings show that mental health concerns rarely stem from a single source. Workplace demands, caregiving responsibilities and family pressures can accumulate over time. This highlights the importance of understanding how work and familial pressures intersect in women's lives, and the need for workplaces, communities, and policymakers to play a role in supporting mental wellbeing."

Life-Course Approach to Women's Mental Health

While public conversations around mental health have grown significantly in recent years, much of the focus has centred on youth and young adults. This study contributes important local evidence on the mental health experiences of middle-aged women, highlighting the need for a life-course approach to women's wellbeing. SCWO will use the findings to inform future advocacy, partnerships and public education efforts aimed at strengthening support for women across different life stages, and hopes the research will encourage broader conversations among employers, healthcare providers, community organisations and policymakers. Together, the findings provide an evidence base to support more coordinated efforts to improve the mental wellbeing of women throughout their lives.

About the Study

Understanding Attitudes and Perceptions of Mental Health amongst Middle-Aged Women in Singapore was conducted jointly by SCWO and James Cook University (Singapore Campus) (JCU).

Data was collected between August and November 2025 through a survey of women aged 40 to 59 in Singapore. The research examined perceptions of mental health services, mental wellbeing, help-seeking attitudes, mental health stigma and the role of male allyship in supporting women's wellbeing.

Download the full report here:

<https://www.scwo.org.sg/images-uploads/scwo-jcus-mental-health-study-report.pdf>

See the infographics here:

<https://www.scwo.org.sg/images-uploads/scwo-jcu-infographic.pdf>

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About SCWO

The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) is the national coordinating body of women's organisations in Singapore. As a unifying force for women's voices, SCWO works to advance gender equality through advocacy, education, collaboration, research and direct support services that empower women and strengthen families and communities.

About James Cook University (Singapore Campus)

The Singapore campus of James Cook University is fully owned by James Cook University Australia, which is ranked in the top 2%¹ of universities in the world. Established in 2003, the Singapore campus delivers high-quality teaching and research across disciplines including business, psychology, information technology and science.

With a diverse student body, the university is committed to producing graduates who are ready for the global workforce, with a strong emphasis on real-world relevance, innovation, and sustainability. James Cook University (Singapore Campus) is a three-time recipient of the EduTrust Star Award for excellence in academic and operational standards.

For more information: <https://www.jcu.edu.sg/>

¹ 2026 Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings and 2024 ShanghaiRanking Academic Ranking of World Universities as a percentage of higher education providers in the International Association of Universities (IAU) database.

APPENDIX: WHERE WOMEN CAN SEEK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Women experiencing mental health concerns can access support through a range of services in Singapore:

Women's Mental Wellness Service

KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH)

Provides specialist mental health services for women, including support for issues related to life transitions, pregnancy, postpartum mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Women's Emotional Health Service

National University Hospital (NUH)

Provides multidisciplinary care and specialist support for women's mental health concerns.

James Cook University (Singapore Campus)

The JCU Psychology Clinic offers confidential clinical psychology services to the public. The clinic provides services face-to-face, as well as through telepsychology (online therapy).

Community-Based Counselling and Support

Family Service Centres and community organisations offer counselling and emotional support services, including subsidised options for those requiring financial assistance.

Primary Care and Polyclinics

General practitioners and polyclinics can provide an initial assessment and referrals to appropriate mental health services.

For Immediate Help (24-hours)

- National Mindline: 1771 or <https://mindline.sg/>
- Samaritans of Singapore (SOS): 1767
- Institute of Mental Health Mental Health Helpline: 6389 2222

Other Helplines

- SAGE Counselling Centre – The Seniors Helpline: 1800 555 5555
- Singapore Association for Mental Health Helpline: 1800 283 7019
- Silver Ribbon Singapore: 6386 1928