

LIVE FAST

DIE YOUNG

By: Gina Lim

A visualisation showing the state of drug abuse among youths in Singapore.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE HAVE STARTED OUR DESCENT INTO SINGAPORE CHANGI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT TRAFFICKING DRUGS IN SINGAPORE CARRIES THE **MANDATORY DEATH PENALTY**...

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01 | TOTAL NUMBER OF DRUG ABUSERS

Singapore is well-known for their strict punishment against drug users. When you first land here, they even advise you against selling them. A study in 2015 found that the total cost of drug crimes to Singapore stands at **1.23 billion** dollars, not including the emotional costs to families (Auto, 2020). Over the years, the number of drug abusers have been increasing from **1,809 in 2006 to 2,729 in 2021**.

However, there has been a noticeable decrease in the past two years which could be attributed to the temporal effects of the **pandemic** and lower number of social interactions among the community.

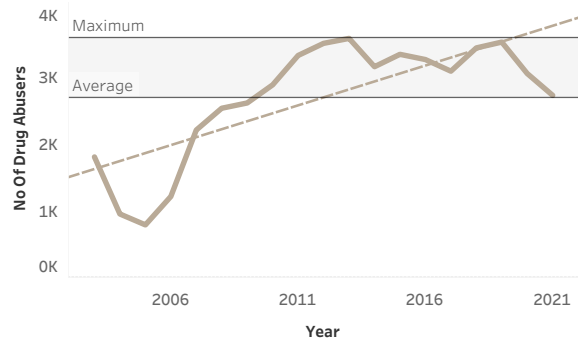


FIGURE 1 | Number of Drug Abusers From 2003 to 2021

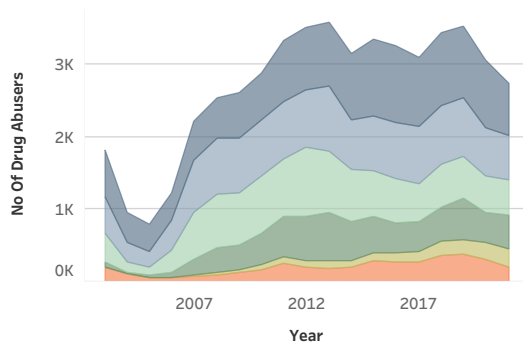


FIGURE 2 | Number of Drug Abusers by Age from 2003 to 2021

02 | AGE COMPOSITION OF DRUG ABUSERS

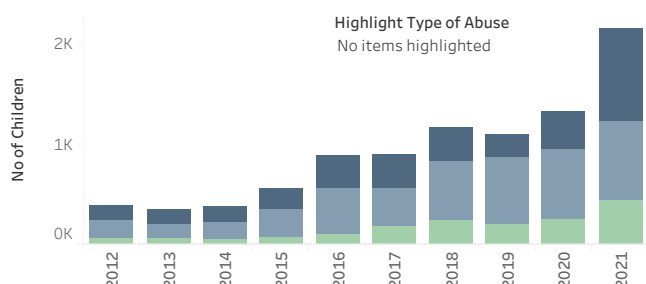
Y.O.L.O—A phrase that’s come to be associated with the reckless behaviour of youths whose brains aren’t fully developed, resulting in impulse decisions that may even cost them their lives. Those aged **20 to 29** have made up the **bulk** of drug abusers since 2013, peaking in 2016 at **1,064**, followed by those aged **30 to 39**.

However, a more worrying trend is the steady increase in drug abusers for those aged **below 20**, mere juveniles. According to MSF, **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** from familial mental disorders, substance abuse, incarceration, or violence are principal determinants of youth drug abuse.

03 | TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILD ABUSE CASES

Child abuse cases continue to climb, reaching staggering heights of **2,141 in 2021**. This follows the rise in **2020**, which saw the highest number of cases in a decade. Meanwhile, child sexual abuse cases jumped **70%** from **2020**.

With the pandemic, parents may suffer from stressors like job and relationship issues which leads to them inflicting their pressures on their children. Children with experiences of childhood adversity should be identified early to provide **preventive interventions** upstream.





YOUTH OFFENDERS WITH A HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD MALTREATMENT ARE 1.28 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO REOFFEND WITHIN 7.4 YEARS.

-- Ministry of Social Development, 2021

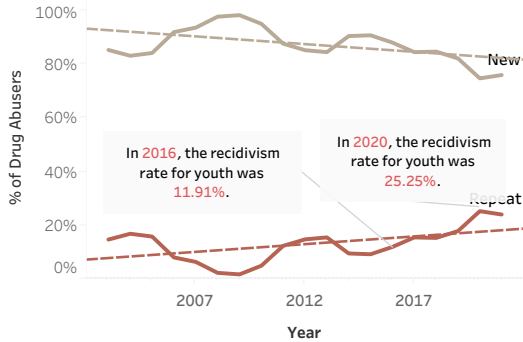


FIGURE 4 | Recidivism Rate of Youth Drug Abusers from 2003 to 2021

04 | RECIDIVISM RATE OF YOUTH DRUG ABUSERS

Normally, youths who run afoul of the law are sent to rehabilitation centres or youth homes in Singapore whose aim is to help them go through holistic development programmes.

The **recidivism rate** for youth drug abusers has shown a slight upwards trend overall with it more than doubling between 2016 and 2020. This is most likely due to the addictive nature of drugs which makes it hard to quit, and ACEs. Interestingly, recidivism rates vary among drugs of choice with it typically being higher for **amphetamines** and **heroin** users (Taxman & Mun, 2018).



WHAT CAN WE DO?

The link between child maltreatment and future substance abuse is well-documented, and should be discussed and mitigated so that children with ACEs are less likely to indulge in drugs in the future. Here is what, we, as parents can do:



Talk about the risks of drug abuse early



Provide a safe space for children at home and beyond



If you're also suffering from drug abuse, get help

Resources:

- Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) – Website: www.chat.mentalhealth.sg
- Institute of Mental Health (IMH) 24-hour Helpline – Tel: 6389 2222
- National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) – Tel: 6732 6837
- National Care Hotline – Tel: 1800-202-6868
- Narcotics Anonymous Singapore – Tel: 8405 8432
- mindline.sg (chatbot and compendium of customised local mental health resources) – Website: www.mindline.sg