

People sleeping rough on Singapore streets down 40% from 2019

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The number of people spending the night in public spaces here fell by more than 40 per cent to 530 in 2022, from 921 in 2019, according to a Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) report released on Monday.

The most common reasons cited for sleeping rough were disagreements with family or co-habitants, issues securing or maintaining housing, and financial problems, MSF found in a single-night street count and survey it conducted in November 2022.

While efforts have been stepped up to offer such rough sleepers help, about half of those surveyed said they had not sought community or government assistance.

Most of the rough sleepers were middle-aged and older Chinese men, a profile generally similar to that recorded in previous local street counts.

The nationwide street count builds on earlier counts carried out by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) in 2019 and 2021.

The 2019 count had found 921 people sleeping rough across the island. The 2021 count found 616 rough sleepers, but is not directly comparable as it was conducted over several nights.

In the latest count, almost half of the rough sleepers were sighted near or at Housing Board blocks, which included void decks, stairwells, pavilions, playgrounds and exercise stations.

One quarter were sighted at parks and benches, 12 per cent around commercial areas such as malls, and 11 per cent in food centres and markets.

The majority of sighting locations were sheltered and well lit. Rough sleepers said they intentionally chose such locations, with shelter and availability of facilities surfacing as top considerations for the choice of sleeping location.

While previous local street counts suggested that rough sleepers were more likely to be found in larger and older neighbourhoods, the 2022 street count did not find a similar trend.

Kallang, Geylang, Bukit Merah, the Southern Islands and Tampines saw the highest number of rough sleepers.

The Nov 11, 2022, count covered 400 areas in Singapore from 11pm to 3am.

Of the 530 rough sleepers sighted, 57 were awake and willing to take part in MSF's survey.

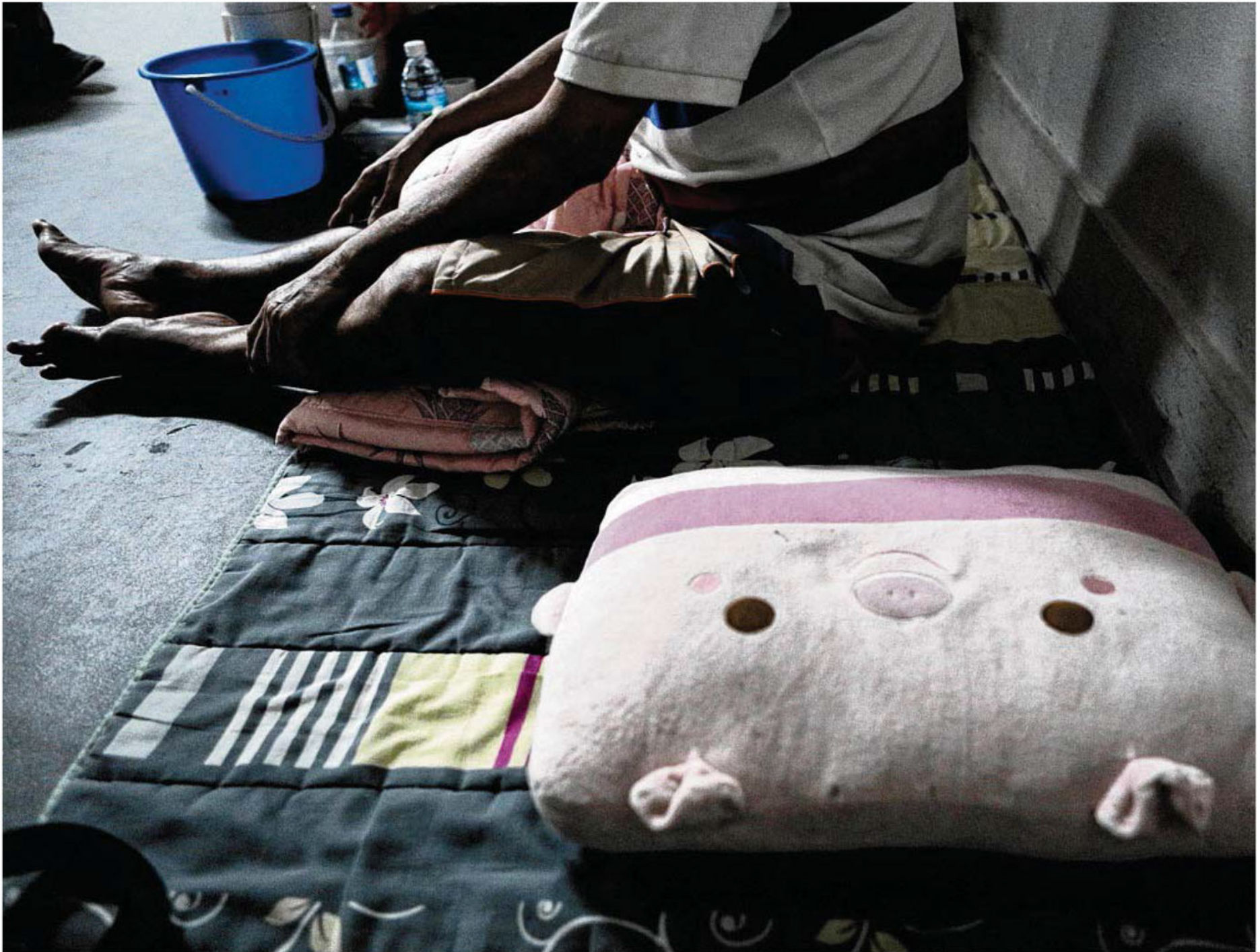
The majority of this group said they were not first-time rough sleepers, although about half started sleeping in the open less than a year ago.

Almost half of the respondents were in some form of employment, including holding full-time jobs, with 43 per cent earning more than \$300 per week, MSF said in the 40-page report.

Among those who were unemployed, around half said they were actively looking for work.

Rough sleepers in Singapore often grapple with multiple issues

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Some people sleep in public spaces due to estranged relations with co-tenants, or even just to be closer to their workplaces. ST FILE PHOTO

Multiple issues in the way of stable housing

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that hinder them from securing stable housing arrangements, said the report.

These could include difficult family relationships or difficulties holding down a job due to poor health, for instance.

Others sleep in public spaces due to estranged relations with co-tenants, or even just to be closer to their workplaces. A small proportion may be unable to care for themselves and have no family support, the report added.

Poor physical and mental health may also have caused homeless people to be unable to maintain their jobs, particularly in physically demanding occupations, according to the report on a 2021

count. Almost half of 88 rough sleepers surveyed in the 2019 count reported health issues.

MSF said its research team adopted a single-night count method in order to include in the count rough sleepers who are unwilling to engage with services, and therefore unlikely to be reflected in existing shelter and outreach data.

Such a point-in-time count would also minimise duplicate counting from cumulative street counts conducted over several weeks, as rough sleepers may move to different locations and be counted more than once.

Thus, the one-night count would provide a more accurate picture of the number and geographical spread of rough sleep-

ers, and the resources required to support them, said MSF.

The November 2022 street count was a more intensive exercise than previous counts, as it involved 860 trained volunteers: from the Partners Engaging and Empowering Rough Sleepers (Peers) Network, community partners, academics and members of the public.

The Peers Network comprises community groups, social service agencies, and government organisations working together to support rough sleepers.

The 2019 and 2021 street counts by LKYSPP involved 480 volunteers and more than 200 volunteers, respectively.

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