

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1) What goes into a Pre-Sentence Report?

PCRS assists the Courts by preparing a Pre-Sentence Report, which assesses an offender's suitability to undergo and benefit from its probation regime. This process is a rigorous one that involves in-depth interviews with the offender, family and significant others, reports from professionals such as schools, National Service authorities and social service agencies. These reports offer insights into an offender's motivations, response to authority and ability to comply with rules, but these are not, by themselves, decisive factors on whether probation is suitable. Where relevant, psychological and psychiatric assessments are also obtained.

The overall assessment is guided by evidence-based tools and frameworks on offender management adopted across probation and correctional jurisdictions in countries such as US, UK, Canada, Australia and Japan. Intervention plans are formulated accordingly, with the intensity of intervention determined by the risks and needs of the individual.

2) What are some factors that determine suitability to be placed on probation?

Consistent with international literature, Probation Officers assess factors such as criminal attitudes, antisocial personality, peer association and leisure activities, engagement in work/school, substance abuse, family circumstances/supervision, other support systems in the community and if necessary, psychiatric/psychological assessments, in determining if an offender is suitable to undergo its probation regime.

3) What were the findings of the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) evaluation study mentioned in the Annual Report?

Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is a short-term, intensive, evidence-based family therapy that addresses high-risk delinquent behaviours in children and youth. The

study was conducted by MSF's Clinical and Forensic Psychology Service, in collaboration with PCRS, between 2014 to 2019.

The Randomised-Controlled Trial (RCT) found that youth probationers who underwent FFT generally exhibited better outcomes than those who did not undergo FFT. For example, youths and their families who received FFT demonstrated significant improvements in their mental well-being and were approximately four times more likely to complete probation.

4) What were some of the findings of the probation success study mentioned in the Annual Report?

A collaboration between the Translational Social Research Division (TSRD), National Council of Social Service (NCSS), and PCRS, the study was conducted to understand factors associated with the completion of probation orders for probationers below the age of 19, so that more targeted rehabilitation strategies can be developed.

Published in 2018, the study found that family supervision had the strongest direct effect on probation completion. Youths with high family supervision (i.e. caregivers who offer clear structure and supervision and show involvement in the youth's behaviour and experience) were 3.47 times more likely to complete probation, as compared to youths with low family supervision.

Among youths with low family supervision,

- Youths with high self-control were 3.60 times more likely to complete probation compared to those with low self-control.
- Youths with positive bonding to school or work were 3.09 times more likely to complete probation compared to those without positive bonding to school or work.

5) Why was there a decrease in the Probation Orders completion rate from 2018?

Despite a 4% drop from 2018, the completion rate for Probation Orders remains high at 80% in 2019. Changes to the completion rates could be influenced by fluctuations in cohort size, profiles such as age, risk levels, complexities of the cases and responsiveness to interventions. For instance, the proportion of those aged below 16 years old was higher in the closed cases for 2019 compared to 2018. As the completion rates for younger probationers tended to be lower, completion rates in 2019 also showed a slight decline.

6) Why has there been an increase in the number of Probation Orders?

In 2019, PCRS saw a 20% increase in referrals for Pre-Sentence Reports, compared to 2018. 2019 also saw an increase in the overall crime rates in Singapore. While there was a 1% decline in youths arrested in 2019 compared to 2018, there was an 8% increase in the number of youths aged 18 to 19 arrested in 2019. Arrest rates for those aged 20 to 21 remain largely unchanged.

The Courts can call for a pre-sentence report to assess the suitability of an offender to undergo the probation regime and consequently make a probation order if the court opines that it is expedient to do so. Almost half of the court referrals to MSF to assess suitability for probation were for those aged 18 and 19 years old.

Taken together, these factors could explain the overall 20% increase in court referrals. The increase in court referrals consequently leads to an increase in new probation cases.