

# Scheme to curb family violence helps over 80 men

It supports those who have caused harm to be part of the solution in ending the violence

**Esther Loi**

The sight of his wife collapsing to the ground from his punches was a wake-up call for Mr Muhammad Firdaus Zhairudin.

The 35-year-old, who used to hit his wife when he could not control his anger, panicked and immediately called the police. He was let off with a stern warning.

He vowed to stop inflicting violence on his family. That same year, in September 2019, he joined Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities' (THKMC) Brotherhood programme, an initiative to support men who have committed family violence in their healing process.

Mr Firdaus' journey to recovery has not been easy, as it took around two years before he could regulate

his emotions and learn to think before responding.

Today, as he approaches his fifth year in the programme, Mr Firdaus is much closer to his six children and wife.

He has been working as a hotel front desk executive for around four years – the first long-term job he has held. He stayed for up to only four months in each of his previous jobs.

Mr Firdaus said that handling unreasonable customers is a good "challenge" for him, as he is able to put what he learnt from the programme into practice.

When he starts feeling angry, he uses a breathing technique before taking time to cool down, sit down, or drink a beverage.

"The first few seconds will change everything... You must do

something else, if not, something bad will happen," he said.

Set up in September 2019, the Brotherhood programme aims to break the intergenerational cycle of violence by supporting men who have caused harm to others to be a part of the solution in ending family violence, said THKMC.

Each run of the programme comprises eight to 10 sessions, conducted every three weeks. Each session covers topics such as personal values and healing, as well as group sharing segments that allow participants to talk about their problems and discuss coping strategies.

More than 80 men have benefited from the programme, with 55 currently enrolled in the group.

Participants will also be given opportunities to be trained as group facilitators and mentors, said Mr Ben Ang, principal social worker at THKMC.

Together with the National University of Singapore's Social Ser-



Mr Muhammad Firdaus Zhairudin, 35, is among those who have benefited from Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities' Brotherhood programme. He says his goal for this year is "just to love my family more... I know I've been hurting them too much".

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vice Research Centre, THKMC conducted a qualitative study on 11 participants in November and December to find out how to attract and sustain engagement levels in the programme.

Preliminary findings, which were released at a symposium on Jan 20, showed that most participants suffered from adverse childhood experiences, which may have shaped their beliefs in toxic masculinity.

Ms Fionn Lui, a social worker at

THKMC who heads programme research, said the study showed that men who committed family violence are interested in showing emotional vulnerability, but only in a safe environment where they are not judged but treated sincerely.

Mr Firdaus looks forward to the sharing segments, as he can listen to other participants' problems, provide support or advice, and talk about his own troubles.

Similarly, he is now willing to share his feelings with his family

members and listen to their opinions.

Recalling that his children used to avoid eye contact with him out of fear, Mr Firdaus said: "Now we watch movies and go food-hunting, and we can even joke around together."

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THKMC said in 2023 that it started to involve spouses and family members in the programme. This was well received by the participants.

Mr Ang noted that his team also organises informal social events – group hikes and sports activities – and invites the men's families, because familial support encourages the men to keep showing up for the sessions.

Participants have also been giving back to the community, by reaching out to inmates upon release.

In July 2023, laws to better protect victims of family violence and enhance the rehabilitation of abusers were passed, including an update to the definition of family violence to cover physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse.

Speaking at the symposium on Jan 20, Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling said that perpetrators of family violence are often overlooked.

She urged the public to show them empathy as some may have faced abuse in their own lives or have mental wellness issues.

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