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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Release

### **Increase in Number of Calls Involving Loan Sharks and Gambling Issues**

The suicide rate in Singapore decreased from 9.35 to 7.85 per 100,000 residents, bringing a total number of confirmed suicides to 353 in 2010. There were a total of 401 suicides in 2009. In 2010, 227 males and 126 females died by suicide. Some possible causes of the decrease could be that there is a greater awareness of this taboo subject in the community and more are willing to come forward to talk about their distress and to seek help. In recent years, more community resources are also being pumped in to help those who are struggling with various needs and crisis.

For the last 41 years, the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) has been providing confidential 24-hour emotional support by trained volunteers to people in crisis, thinking of suicide or affected by suicide. In the recent review period from April 2010 to March 2011, SOS handled a total of 41,079 calls, of which 27,596 (67.2%) were crisis calls. On the average, SOS handled 3,423 calls per month, or about 113 calls per day. This is an increase of 2.8% in the total number of calls from 39,956 as reported in last year's annual report.

Of the 27,596 crisis calls, 2,370 or 8.6% were related to difficulties in paying off debts. This is of concern as there is a sharp increase in the number of calls specially featuring loan sharks issues and gambling problems. 352 calls were regarding difficulties involving loan sharks (up by 61.5% from 2009) and 196 calls were about gambling problems (up by 48.5% from 2009). What is worrying is that the trend has been inching upwards in recent years. These are also usually callers with medium to high suicide risk, and they are particularly difficult to engage because their urgent need is for fresh funds to service their loans. Where appropriate, these clients are also referred to other community resources for additional help and support.

SOS has been increasingly extending counselling support to clients who are experiencing difficulties and who are feeling suicidal. Counselling support is provided by professional staff members who are trained counsellors and social workers. In the recent review period, a total of 147 counselling cases (up by 48.5%) and 343 counselling sessions (up by 51.8%) were handled by SOS. The presenting problems of those who sought counselling vary, with



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the most commonly presented problems being relationship issues (boy-girl relationship or relationship with parents/children/spouses) and psychological issues (crisis-related, suicide grief or mental illness). Relationship issues made up 37.1% of all problems presented during counselling sessions while psychological issues formed about 34.7%. Material issues involving unemployment, financial difficulties and loan shark debts were about 17.3% of all problems presented during counselling sessions.

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Issued by Corporate Communications, Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)

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### **About SOS**

**Vision:** To be an available lifeline to anyone in crisis.

**Mission:** SOS provides confidential 24-hour emotional support by trained volunteers to people in crisis, thinking of suicide or affected by suicide.

For more information, please visit [www.sos.org.sg](http://www.sos.org.sg).