

The Deaf of Singapore

The Singapore Sign Language Community

The Deaf in Singapore are found in every language group. Since Singapore is a first world country the percentage of deaf is probably comparable to the percentage in Western countries, i.e. 1 to 2 in every 1000 births. There are three major races found in Singapore: the Chinese are often Buddhist, some are Christian, Indian are Hindu with some Christian, and Malay are mostly Muslim. There are four official languages, Mandarin (Chinese), Tamil (Indian), Malay and English. While a hearing person in Singapore is likely to know several languages, the deaf are at a severe disadvantage to learn to lip-read and speak because of all these languages.

The standard of living is higher than that of any of the nearby nations. Singapore is a fairly flat, small island with a few hills in the centre. It is a crowded city with many well built roads and high rise apartments, located just across a causeway from the southern tip of Malaysia.

In Singapore, the children are taught Signed Singaporean English which is not the way they sign when among themselves. Research is needed to see if the community would want and would use Holy Scripture if it were translated into their vernacular Singapore Sign Language.

Primary Religion:

Mixed—see description

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

Unknown

Churches:

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Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

None

Population (date):

Potentially 5-10,000 (2011)



Heard the Gospel?

Hindrances to Use of Scripture

A translation of Scripture in the Singapore Sign Language is not yet available

Response to the Gospel

Some have responded well. The number is unknown.

Bilingualism

Cross-cultural missionaries needed

Cross-cultural missionaries could be helpful in training the local community how to do translation in their own sign language.

Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group

Several, but exact number unknown

Number of Congregations Using Primarily the Local Language

There are several churches with a Deaf ministry, but only one with a Deaf pastor. This church, however, uses Signing Exact English (SEE), not Singapore Sign Language which is their heart language.

Language of Outside Communication or Trade

Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English depending on the need. All four are official languages of the nation. English is the language of government, education and business though about 1 of every 5 are not able to read English.

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Group Description

Literacy

Adult Literacy

Possibly 80-90% in English or Chinese

Community Development

Clothing

Western

Transportation

Buses, underground trains, private cars (for the rich)

Water

Pumped in from Malaysia

Shelter

modern high rise apartments – usual housing in Singapore

Health Care

Very good, easily available

Infant Mortality Rate

1 per 1,000 births

Life Expectancy

Male 80; Female 85

Leading Cause of Death:

Heart disease

Society

Family Structures

Most Singaporeans are Chinese, so the family structure depends on which Chinese language group the Deaf person belongs to as to which family structure he/she comes from, e.g some Chinese language groups are matriarchal while others patriarchal
Deaf Singaporeans tend to associate mostly with other deaf Singaporeans, at a deeper level than they do even with their hearing families.

Social Habits/Groupings

Self Image

Secretive – maybe ashamed of it. When I first visited Singapore I was told the “old” language did not exist any more. My contact said that Signing Exact English was the standard sign language. I only discovered that Singapore Sign Language is alive and well when I was invited to attend a Bible study which was conducted in SEE, but was interpreted by a Deaf signer into Singapore Sign Language.

Judicial/Punishment:

Mainly British system

Celebrations

Chinese, Indian and Malay holidays

Cultural Change Pace

Rapid

Local Language Broadcasting

None in Singapore Sign Language

Education/Youth

Primary Schools

At least one school for the Deaf – using SEE only

Language of Textbooks

English or Chinese

Religion

Religions

Depends on the family tradition, which according to *Operation World* (2010) is Buddhist 40%; Non-religious 18%; Christian 16%; Muslim 14%; and Hindu 4%.

Status of Christianity

Scripture

Translation Status	None
Other Forms Of Gospel Available	Literature: n/a
Other Forms Of Gospel Available	Recordings: n/a
Other Forms Of Gospel Available	Film/Videos: Yes. Have access to American Sign Language (ASL) videos
Other Forms Of Gospel Available	Radio: n/a