



SSR RESEARCH MENTORING PROGRAM GRADUATION

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"I got to see so many different perspectives and hear many exciting stories. This is also a good place to meet like-minded people and together, try to make the world a better place."

Dr Neo Yu Wei

Research Fellow,
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"I learnt a lot more about the different practice wisdoms from my mentees."

Dr Ng Guat Tin

Research Associate,
Social Service Research
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"This programme is a good start in kicking off more practice research by practitioners themselves."

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WORK CLIENTS**Picky, entitled, unmotivated?****A study on barriers to employment**

Chia Siew Geok, Annie | Huang Xiang Lin, Jessica

The neoliberal discourse surrounding welfare-to-work initiatives in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries has been driven by policies that support the economically inactive in their attempts to return to the labour market. Consequently, these policies are also meant to discourage an entitlement mentality and to prevent an erosion of work ethic. Singapore is no exception to framing its policies under a neoliberal discourse. However, local literature on the barriers to employment, faced by the unemployed, is sparse. It is unclear if unemployed individuals can be assumed to be (i) willing and able to work or (ii) at risk of developing an entitlement mentality. Hence, this exploratory study aims to examine the key reasons for unemployment among clients served by the Kreta Ayer Family Services and @27 Family Service Centre's (FSC) service boundaries. The study shows insight into the meanings that unemployed clients have constructed around their employment status, job-seeking processes, and receipt of social assistance. While only 17% of the clients were actively searching for work, most were unemployed due to physical or mental health issues. They have been engaged in various types of informal or domestic work and few conformed to the typical archetypes of "picky", "entitled" and "unmotivated" clients who wilfully remained unemployed without good reasons. Instead, this study found that unemployed clients often faced multiple, long-term barriers to employment such as low educational qualifications, mental health issues or heavy caregiving duties that prevented them from being employed in the formal sectors. Thus, this study recommends an examination of practitioners' assumptions about the value of formal work and a review of the ComCare Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance (SMTA) scheme to address the complex challenges faced by the unemployed, low-income clients.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WORK CLIENTS**A small-scale study on the information needs of middle-aged and older adults**

Joyce Ang | Tristan Gwee | Crystal Tang

Amidst the many challenges of the older population, difficulties or limitations in accessing information is one challenge that directly or indirectly contributes to poor choices, lesser utilization of services, lower self-efficacy and social isolation. As the senior population rapidly increases and people are living much longer, the need for information to enable a senior to have better quality of life and to support them to live well and independently in their community increases. This study seeks to examine the information needs of middle-aged and older adults, identifying (i) information sources, (ii) types of aging-related information they are interested in receiving, (iii) current gaps or barriers that they experience in obtaining information, (iv) preferred ways of getting information (for example, aging topics and living concerns), and (v) effective ways of information dissemination to them. The research is conducted by convenient sampling of seniors that attend the Senior Wellness Centre at Lakeside Family Services and the Senior Activity Centres of Presbyterian Community Services using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study found that the top three most accessed information sources are from the TV, newspapers and at senior activity centres. Health is the most important information need. The seniors also generally preferred human intermediaries. Language is a significant barrier that prevents seniors from obtaining information independently due to lack of translation, excessive jargon and complicated instruction. The use of information-communication technology shows great potential in meeting the information needs of the future elderly and may be further explored among the middle-aged and the young-old group.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WORK CLIENTS**Against all odds: A qualitative exploratory study of lived experiences of academically performing children from lower-income families**

Siti Adriana Bte Muhamad Rasip

Working towards the vision of poverty transformation within empowered communities, South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCC) focuses on education as one of determining factors in facilitating transformational change among low-income families. Our quantitative study of the results collected among our beneficiaries' children revealed a 50-50 pass-fail rate, even though 92% of the children attend school 70% of the time. Nevertheless, ten children managed to rise against the odds and emerged as top scorers or the most improved in their respective cohorts. This exploratory study interviewed these children and their parents to understand how they have performed well despite the challenges they faced. The qualitative analyses show that the children are self-motivated; have a structured, yet balanced study-leisure routine; their parents supervise them in their homework albeit to different extents and there is open communication between parent and child. In addition, their parents keep their children away from negative influences in the neighbourhood. In school, the children have competent and supportive teachers, healthy competition and support among their peers in class. Other than strong teacher-child relationships, regular and open teacher-parent communication is critical to supporting the children in their studies. Conversely, the responses towards tuition are mixed among the children - some children felt that they benefited from it while others did not. This study recommends the reduction of systemic barriers facing lower-income families to enable the children to continue doing well in school. In particular, measures to help children from lower-income families must consider reducing time-poverty for parents struggling to balance between long, unstable hours in their employment and time spent with their children.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Establishing relationships with youths: A youth worker's perspective

Teo Siu Fong, Juliana Jenette

CARE Singapore runs a regular youth program for students in Normal Academic (NA) and Normal Technical (NT) course in several schools. Studies have found that the relationships that youth workers form with the young people they were supporting were critical in the success of these youth programs. However, it is unclear what components of the worker-youth relationship contribute to the strength of the bonding between them. Hence, this study sets out to find out what are the important components within the worker-youth relationship that are beneficial to the youths for their development. In doing so, CARE Singapore can improve on building and focusing on these specific components in its delivery of its youth programs. This study will also contribute to the training of the youth workers by highlighting how they can build a stronger relationship with the students in the NA and NT classes.

YOUTH PROGRAMS**Project Y.O.U.! (Your Own Uniqueness):
A needs assessment to study the current trends and
engagement of youths at-risks in Singapore**

Muhammed Naguib Bin Amid Selamat

For the past ten years, youths-at-risk have been a concern among social welfare groups, grassroots organizations and government-related agencies in Singapore. In response to the ill effects of juvenile delinquency and youth arrests, youth agencies and organizations in Singapore provide youth services to reduce youth arrests and youth delinquent behaviour. This study aims to assess the needs of youths-at-risk, through the facilitation of focus group discussions with schools and partner agencies, as well as through the coordination of a youth camp. This study collected primary data from a questionnaire administered to the youths attending a youth camp. In total, 23 youths from the five Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centres (THK FSC) responded to the survey. The results show a preference for outdoor activities such as overnight camping, as well as fitness activities such as soccer, swimming and gym. While the respondents indicate that co-gender activities are preferred, majority of the respondents do not have any preferred location for the venues of the planned activities. Respondents also prefer activities to be carried out in the evenings. There are some differences in the preferences of youth activities among different age groups and between the two genders. One of the limitations of this study is the use of quantitative data. Future studies may look into including qualitative methods and getting direct feedback from youths-at-risk and their families.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Evaluation: Evaluating the evaluated

Chan, Nicholas | Song Fu En, Daniel

The Youth Corps Leaders Program (YCLP) is a specialised training program for youths to develop into volunteer leaders in the community service sector. As the Leaders program starts to stabilize and continues to be implemented on a regular basis, it is important to revise the evaluation framework to ensure that the program achieves its intended outcomes. An accurate and sensitive evaluation framework would allow for program owners to reallocate resources more appropriately and review relevant program components or processes, if necessary. This study aims to revise the evaluation framework of the YCLP as the program starts to stabilize after undergoing several changes since its inception. Literature reviews on various evaluation frameworks for similar youth-led service-learning programs and interviews with Youth Corps community partners were conducted. We propose a refinement to the logic model of the program and an enhancement to the current research design based on four variables – the type of research design, assessment mode, reflection type and ability of self-selection – to strengthen and make the evaluation framework more robust. This study also discusses the limitations of this evaluation framework and how it can be applied to evaluate other service learning programs.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES & PROCESSES**Crouching assistance, hidden bias –
Understanding financial assistance practices from
practitioners' lens**

Bavani Pillai | Chew Jia Hui | Tan Jia Wei

Social work practitioners (SWPs) in the Family Service Centres (FSC) often conduct financial assessments in their work. Despite standardised assessment tools and eligibility criteria, there are variations in the decision-making process. This study aims to understand the underlying decision-making process in SWPs' assessment for financial assistance (FA) and to test for implicit biases. A mixed methodology was used – FSC ComCare Fund data was analysed to identify variables for testing. Using vignettes, the study tested whether the quantum of FA, as assessed by SWPs, was impacted by gender, marital status, number of employed household members, type of dependents and whether the clients had received FA previously. 25 SWPs from Kampong Kapor and Whampoa FSC participated in the vignette study. 12 SWPs were then randomly identified, through groupings based on years of work experience, to participate in qualitative interviews. The vignette study found that on average, SWPs assessed (i) male clients to receive more FA than female clients, (ii) single-income households to receive less FA than dual-income and unemployed households and (iii) more senior SWPs were more generous in quantum of FA recommended. Similarly, the interviews concurred with the vignette study that assessments differ based on SWP's seniority. It is also evident that SWPs strongly believe that FA is used to meet needs and as a tool to engage clients.

**Training needs assessment of a local FSC:
Microskills in counselling and psychotherapeutic
interventions**

Tham Chee Kin, Steven

A self-reporting questionnaire comprising of 30 items with Likert scale and two open-ended questions was administered at a local Family Service Centre. The aim of the study is to determine the training needs of the social workers in the area of psychotherapeutic strategies that are helpful when working with their cases. The research involved 12 participants with at least three years of working experience in the family service sector. The outcome of the research indicated there were several training needs that the centre could address, including micro-skills in counselling and psychotherapeutic techniques. The research also highlighted the need for supervision when managing the case.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES & PROCESSES**Exploring cross-agency organizational strategies to help social work practitioners adapt to the Social Service Network (SSNet)**

Eswari Annavee | Gerad Matthews Sekar | Tan Li-Shan, Sophie |
Vidyakeeshan Vijayadas Menon

With the recent introduction of the Code of Social Work Practices (CSWP) and implementation of Social Service Net (SSNet), practitioners have to adapt to the various changes in work structure and protocols. Specifically, with the adoption of SSNet, there seems to be a general perception among practitioners that social work practices have become more complex and practitioners face challenges in adapting to new work-flows. In addition, they have to manage a fine balance between the time spent on casework and case conversion in SSNet. Hence, this study seeks to explore the strategies of change management across four social service agencies in Singapore that are aimed at enabling practitioners to cope with the implementation of SSNet. A total of 24 participants, with different levels of seniority within each agency, were purposefully sampled and interviewed. This study showed that effective communication is a key factor underlying the success of the change management strategies adopted by the different agencies. In particular, employee involvement in communication and decision-making are essential for effective change management. The results not only serve to inform the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) that oversees the administration of the SSNet, but also social service agencies involved in subsequent phases of the SSNet.

PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS & OUTCOMES**Evaluation of the structured meaningful activity program for person with dementia (PWD) in Ren Ci Nursing Home**

Angelia Lestari | Nalina Kumari Resmi | Nang Soe Mon Ooe

Management of behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) is one of the major challenges for health care workers. The use of anti-psychotic medication for these symptoms is controversial because of its harmful side effects for persons with dementia (PWD). Current clinical guidelines recommend that management of BPSD should pursue non-pharmacological interventions as first choice and pharmacological interventions as a second line alternative. Ren Ci wanted to explore the effectiveness of using non-pharmacological interventions (structured meaningful activity) in the reduction of incidences of expressive behavior in PWD. A three member research team conducted a quantitative research study in 40 PWD residents in Ren Ci nursing home dementia unit. The researchers collected data on participation rate of PWD in structured activities, comparison review of antipsychotic drugs usage, and nurse's satisfaction survey in the dementia unit to evaluate the program for PWD. The research team collected data on the activities and the medication usage. For activities, the team collected data on the timing and frequency of the activities, the popularity of each activity and the output of activities by evaluating the participation rate and engagement time of each activity. The CBS (Challenging Behavior scale) was used to as an outcome measure for the residents' behavior. T-Test and Chi-Square Test were performed to analyze the data. Short-term evaluation after a year of activity showed that behavior deteriorated and did not improve. Intermediate evaluation showed that medication usage has decreased or stayed the same even though CBS score regressed. The result may be due to natural progression of the disease and the aging process. The program might be effective, but only in reducing the symptoms, during the progression of the disease .

PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS & OUTCOMES**Go – Stop – Go: Evaluation of marital enrichment programs**

Lim Syl-vyn | Pong Pao Ling, Theresa

Research reveal that children brought up by both parents are more intelligent and less likely to suffer from emotional distress in later years, than those raised by just one parent. In Singapore, it was found that the median length of a marriage for divorced couples is ten years and the median age of mothers at first birth was 30.3 years old (The Straits Times, 2015). Based on the data, it is reasonable to assume that many divorced couples are likely to have primary-school aged children at the time of separation. Research indicates that marital satisfaction, instead of factors like positive parenting practices, is directly correlated to children's behaviour. In view of this, Lakeside Family Services (LFS) has introduced two marital enrichment programs as part of its preventive work with vulnerable families. The first program, "Couples' Sessions", which focuses on marital relationship, is designed for clients staying at LFS-run shelter for the homeless. The second, "Family First! Program", focuses on married couples with school-going children and is designed for clients receiving casework management support from the family service centres. The purpose of this study is to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of these two programs in improving marital satisfaction. Through this evaluation, it is found that husbands and wives view marital satisfaction differently. To run programs for couples, timing of the activities and availability of child-minding resources are important considerations to improve participation rates. In addition, participate rates can be boosted by explaining how the programs can benefit the children.

Perceptions of Legacy

Koh Mui Ching, Sandy

Engaging palliative care patients in legacy-related activity is commonly practiced by medical social workers (MSW) and occupational therapists (OT) in the palliative team. Research has shown that legacy-related activities, such as recording patients' life-stories or creating keepsakes for loved ones, were found to assist patients in improving their sense of dignity and ego integrity. Legacy-related intervention, such as life reviews, were found to improve communications between patients and family members, as well as a perceived improvement in physical symptoms. At Bright Vision Hospital, about one out of five palliative care patients engages in legacy activities. This exploratory study aims to understand the palliative patients' perception of legacy and their participation in legacy related activities. It also aims to explore underlying social, economic and cultural factors that influence perception and participation in legacy activities for patients in the Singapore context. This study concurs with other studies that participants who engage in legacy activities report a sense of pride over life's achievements and have a sense of relief and closure. Patients who decline participation perceive the process of reflecting about their past as too painful, while some express that they have "no personal significance" to bequeath a legacy.



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ABOUT US: Social Service Research Centre (SSR) is a research centre within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. It was set up with the aim of bringing together resources and ideas to promote and test social innovations and help evolve a new social science infrastructure for Singapore's next phase of social development.