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SSR RESEARCH MENTORING PROGRAMME

ABSTRACTS

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

MENTORS' MESSAGES

Neo Yu Wei

The word "research" comprises two parts - "re" and "search" or "re-search". This means that research is not only about new discoveries, but also about questioning and re-testing previous findings. I hope research mentoring participants will look back on their 13-week journey and reflect, rethink and rediscover new ways of understanding old problems.

Ng Guat-Tin

As the second run of SSR's Research Mentoring Programme is close to the "finishing line" there is a surge of energy as mentoring participants strive to prepare their presentations. I hope that participants will sustain their endeavours in practice research when the programme ends and other work competes for their time and attention. Practice research is an important part of our professional responsibility to service users and should be given work priority.

MENTORS' MESSAGES

Ong Qiyan

For social service practitioners in particular, research is a painful yet delightful process that helps you to cast doubts on your own beliefs and assumptions about clients and others, your work and the work of your colleagues. Be brave and always remember why you started on this journey even if you end up losing some friends who are unable to face the truth that you have found.

Sim Keng Ling Helen

Congratulations! You have completed the research mentoring course! Hope you enjoyed the process, and made some new research buddies. Looking forward to reading your future research pieces, and all the best for your research journey ahead.

PANEL 1: FAMILY AND ELDERLY

Life still goes on: Bereaved experiences of Life Point's seniors

Liau Yi Fang

Death is a taboo subject especially among the older generation. Death of a family member is believed to be a family affair, hence, sharing with others may not seem appropriate. Little is known about the bereaved experiences of seniors in Singapore. This study aims to find out the bereavement experiences of senior members of Life Point, who have lost their spouses. Life Point helps seniors prepare for End-of-Life matter and support seniors during their grief journey. The study will enable Life Point to find out the services needed by the bereaved seniors.

From the research findings, it is shown that different seniors have different ways of coping with grief and loss of their spouses. Some cope by manifestation of grief e.g. crying out loud, while others cope by adjusting to the new life without the deceased e.g. doing grocery shopping. A qualitative study using in-depth interview with three widows and three widowers was conducted and a model was constructed with the information gathered.

The different experiences of spousal bereavement tell us that grief is multi-dimensional. It is not just an affective experience, but also changes the lifestyles and increases the awareness of end-of-life preparations. This study enables Life Point to consider specific areas of programmes and services to focus on. For example, conduct educational talk on coping with grief and loss to allow them to cope with the grief better.

PANEL 1: FAMILY AND ELDERLY

Understanding and enhancing financial literacy of low income households

Koo Ngar Shan Alice | Quek Yanjun Jocelyn

One common way of supporting low income families to achieve financial stability is through financial literacy programmes, which usually include educating participants on basic financial concepts and knowledge. The assumption behind this approach is that low income families do not have adequate financial knowledge. As few local studies were published on the topic, we decided to conduct an exploratory study of financial knowledge, attitude and practice of our clients.

We adopted a mixed method design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data on knowledge of financial concepts and local resources, basic skills in maths, recent practice and future plan. Our respondents were all existing clients of family service centres (FSC) whose household was eligible for financial assistance, and who had school-going children. Interviews were conducted in the first three weeks of October 2017 in both FSCs where the authors work in.

Findings from the exploratory study will go towards the design of a financial literacy programme for the local poor. In particular, the team is designing a board game which requires participants to make use of their knowledge in local financial resources and budgeting concepts to win the game. Through the game, we hope to address participants' misconceptions, provide locally relevant financial information and to allow participants to practise their skills in a fun and rewarding way.

PANEL 1: FAMILY AND ELDERLY

Study on management of Protection Order Breaches

Chan Sze Ki Odelia | Choo Beng Chong

Under the Women's Charter in Singapore, the PPO allows the police to arrest the perpetrator if there is a recurrence of family violence, thus protecting victims from further abuse. However, some social workers have raised concern about the ineffectiveness of police response to PPO breaches. The study aims to examine this issue; identify the factors that contribute to police decision to arrest perpetrators or to investigate PPO breaches; and find ways to improve the management of PPO breaches.

A survey was sent to 200 social workers who conduct the family violence mandatory counselling programme. Through this, we collated data for 46 cases of PPO breaches and compared the cases that led to police arrest or investigation and those that did not, in order to identify underlying patterns. Subsequently, we intend to match these cases to police records and conduct focus group discussions to gain deeper insights into the challenges faced by frontline police when responding to PPO breach reports.

Preliminary findings from the study indicated that social workers believe pro-arrest policies, proactive police involvement as well as close collaboration and info-sharing between police and social services will improve victim safety.

PANEL 2: YOUTH

School absenteeism through the eyes of YGOS caseworkers: Contributors and intervention effectiveness

Chai Binhua

Singapore enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in the world, with a world-class education system which is studied by and is a role model for many countries. Even so, few schools are spared from having students who exhibit high absenteeism. Given that high quality labour force is one of our most important edges on the global arena, school absenteeism has to be addressed. In this study, we aim to understand the contributors to absenteeism and associated contextual factors surrounding cases of high absenteeism. Data was obtained from Youth Guidance Outreach Services, a social service agency working with youth-at-risk. Selection was based on absenteeism rate provided as part of the referral process from schools to the Enhanced Step-Up (ESU) programme, a programme designed to provide support to youths with high absenteeism. The criterion of 20% or more absenteeism from school was applied, as per guideline set by Ministry of Social and Family Development. 11 male and 4 female cases were chosen. Among them, 5 were in Secondary Four and 10 in Secondary Three at the time of intake. Thematic analysis was adopted to identify themes which contribute to school absenteeism, as recorded by respective caseworkers. Contextual factors of the student were also taken into account. Previous work by Kearney (2008) was used as reference to guide the coding of themes. Results show that Kearney's four categories of absenteeism (avoidant of school-related stimuli, escape from aversive and/or evaluative situations at school, pursuit of attention from significant others, and pursuit of tangible reinforcers outside of school) found support. Likewise, contextual risk factors (which include poverty, school violence and victimisation, school climate and connectedness, parental involvement and family variables)were discerned. Some contextual factors such as homelessness and teenage pregnancy were not found, due to culture and criteria of ESU, where pregnant youth will be referred for other intervention. Implications of this study were discussed.

PANEL 2: YOUTH

Developing the Youth-Serve Programme

Kuan Sook Yeen Janell

The Youth-Serve programme, designed by Lakeside Family Services, aims to equip and empower Normal Academic/Technical stream students with the knowledge, heart and skills to be community change makers. It is conducted as part of the Ministry of Education's Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum in secondary schools. Although Youth-Serve will be conducted for the third time in 2018, the relationships between programme components and outcomes have been implicit, and the programme has not been evaluated thus far. This study articulates the programme model by clarifying (i) the relationships between programme component and outcomes, and (ii) underlying assumptions and theories. This is done by interviewing programme developers, teachers and students and by going through past programme notes. Findings from the study contributed to the development of a third iteration of Youth-Serve and the development of an evaluation framework.

The study found that Youth-Serve was developed largely based on experiential and service-learning theories. A few programme components were found to have no logical linkages to the desired outcomes. These components were removed. Through the study, a programme logic model was drawn and a framework for programme evaluation was proposed.

PANEL 2: YOUTH

Understanding relationships between youths and their workers: Is it a meaningful relationship?

Goh Ting Yeow Joel

This research sets out to inquire how youths and their workers described their relationship with each other and whether they found their relationships or interactions to be meaningful. To better understand the relationships, youth and worker pairs were interviewed separately, focusing on the interactions of the dyads. Aspects of the conversations and activities between the dyads were explored as well. The study also explored if workers shared the same insights about meaningful interactions and relationship with the youths. The sample for this study is made up of 6 pairs of youths and their worker from one agency.

Collaborating for Success: A study of school attendance issues among Malay pupils in two primary schools

Siti Khadijah Bte Setyo R S

Regular attendance in school is important for the academic and social development of students. Poor attendance, especially amongst younger students, hinders the acquisitions of literacy and numeracy skills, and it also creates a negative cycle that potentially leads to other social and emotional problems in the future.

This study looks into the cases of Malay students with attendance issues in two primary schools in Singapore and aims to provide recommendations on potential collaboration between Mendaki and the schools in rendering support to address the problem. For the purpose of this study, a student is deemed to be having attendance issues and is at-risk of dropping out if he is absent for 20% or more of the school term without valid reasons. The impetus behind the study is to ensure that the proposed intervention does not duplicate existing efforts and that it involves collaboration between school and/or Mendaki and parents.

Two interviews were conducted with key personnel from the two primary schools to understand the current situation, interventions available and challenges faced in addressing attendance issues amongst Malay students in respective schools. It was found that despite having three levels of intervention to address problem of attendance, schools faced difficulties in engaging parents and the problem is compounded, as school personnel in one school articulated that they "lacked cultural awareness" in engaging Malay families.

As both schools articulated that their challenge revolves around engaging Malay families, this study recommends a partnership between schools and Mendaki in which existing expertise in Mendaki will be tapped on to support schools' efforts in engaging Malay families. This allows for effective resource allocation and opportunities for capacity building for both Mendaki and schools' personnel, especially in engaging Malay families and supporting Malay primary school students to attend school regularly.

PANEL 3: CHILDREN

Eyes glued to screen: Caregivers' management of pre-school children's screen time

Teo Meiyi Stella | Toh Xiaoping Naomi

In Singapore, children have access to a wide variety of screen devices (e.g. smart phones, tablets, televisions) at an early age. Screen devices are used as education and entertainment tools, but scholars agree that excessive screen time affects young children developmentally, and it is important to manage it. Existing research has focused on how parents manage children's screen time, as they are the traditional gatekeepers.

With an increasing number of dual-income families in Singapore, the gatekeeping role could be extended beyond parents. More parents are engaging associate caregivers (e.g. grandparents, helpers and childcare centres) to support caregiving for young children. In some situations, associate caregivers could be spending more time with the children than their parents. The role of associate caregivers as gatekeepers of children's screen time however remains relatively unexamined in the literature.

This study looks at how parents and associate caregivers manage pre-schoolers' screen time, and how they navigate the differences that arise. A total of 11 caregivers from four families with preschool children were interviewed.

The study found that access points for screen time indeed extends beyond parents to associate caregivers. Reasons caregivers articulated for giving screen time to children include its convenience as babysitting tool and educational purposes. Grandparents also tend to accede to grandchildren's requests for screen time.

Parents and associate caregivers have strategies in place for managing children's screen time. These strategies are affected by their perceptions of games, education level, and the power dynamics between the parents and associate caregivers. The way parents engaged the associate caregivers over children's access to screen devices is also affected by the power interplay.

Ultimately, the families interviewed valued preserving relationship over resolving differences in screen time management practices.

PANEL 3: CHILDREN

Mentoring in Singapore preschools: A snapshot of current practices

Geow Li Er Adel | Hong Shi En | Khoo Siew Ling Geraldine

The study aims to map and understand the current mentoring landscape of preschools in Singapore with the following research questions: What are the current mentoring practices of local preschool for beginning teachers; the benefits and challenges/barriers experienced in a mentoring relationship; and the forms of support required by mentors and mentees. In this study, mentoring comprises of a series of purposeful social interaction that extend professional learning and improve reflective practices of both the mentor and mentee.

A sample of 205 responses were collected via a self-reported online questionnaire. Respondents were educators attending the Early Childhood Conference 2017 organised by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA). Data revealed that the top three forms of mentoring practices educators are currently engaged in are lesson observations (61%), peer coaching (55%) and 'buddy system' (36%). On a scale of 1-4 with 1 being least and 4 being most important, mentor training (3.23) is the most important challenge faced, followed by compatibility of the mentor-mentee pair (3.17), amount of time set aside for mentoring (3.17) and financial reimbursement (2.38). Lastly, mentors stated that training (85%) and resources (80%) are the kind of support required as a mentor, whereas mentees stated training (84%) and resources (81%) are supports required from mentors.

For benefits of a mentoring relationship, the most recurrent themes for mentors were "better working relationship", followed by "learning and sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience" and lastly "mentor's growth and self-understanding". Based on respondents who have experienced both mentor and mentee role, the last two themes were reiterated and reinforced. The theme that recurred most for mentees were "learning new knowledge and skills", followed by "teaching practices and strategies" and "guidance and support from mentors". Responses from those who experienced both role also highlighted and reinforced the first and third theme.

PANEL 4: HEALTHCARE

Balik Kampung: Community reintegration and what it means to older adults after an illness or injury

Ho Cher Ern Dorita

This study describes the experiences of community re-integration of elderly in Singapore after hospitalization due to illness or injury as often they experience a change in functional ability that limits their ability to return to daily living as before. It is a descriptive study using semi-structured interviews with five elderly clients from a day rehabilitation centre and who are currently undergoing rehabilitation due to difficulties in their ability to return to their previous lifestyles. The study showed that all clients experienced a change in lifestyle; having a more sedentary routine after their illness or injury. These changes were mostly due to factors unrelated to their actual physiological deficits. The majority desired an active routine, such as engaging in voluntary work, but felt that this was unachievable. They received varying degrees of informal social support, but had differing experiences with these sources of help. Factors influencing clients' perception of their ability to reintegrate into the community included: i) personal and cultural values of aging and recovery, ii) level of understanding of persons offering support and iii) quality of support rendered. The findings suggest that community re-integration is influenced by a complex matrix of factors and barriers that span across personal, social and environmental domains. Changes in lifestyle are pertinent to clients and could be used as outcomes when discussing goals and therapy plans with them. Community-based health and social services should emphasize not only on empowering clients and their families, but should explore the timeliness and provision of professional help and services as families may not be the most appropriate nor adequate support due to relationship dynamics and expertise.

PANEL 4: HEALTHCARE

Health-related quality of life of patients living with advanced heart failure: A systematic review of the literature

Ku Si Mun Jasmine

Heart failure (HF) is a major health problem. Especially with an ageing population and increased life expectancy, patients are more likely to develop advanced heart failure that is incurable, at later stages of their lives. Given the gloomy prognosis, the quality of life of patients with advanced heart failure is significantly compromised. Hence, there is an increased interest in utilising health-related quality of life instruments (HrQoL) as outcome measures to evaluate heart failure. However, most of these widely used measures are not patient-centered, and may not capture aspects of HrQoL that are important to individual patients. To improve measurement and clinical care of patients living with advanced heart failure, it is important to understand the breadth of issues and domains of HrQoL that are meaningful to them. The aim of this systematic literature review is to examine the commonalities and differences found in four existing studies, regarding the experiences of patient's living with advanced heart failure, and how these experiences impact on their HrQoL. Findings from the literature review showed that the patient's perceptions towards their HrQoL to be subjective and multidimensional. Although physical symptoms experienced from the condition has impinged on patients' ability to participate in physical and social activities, they also positively appraised other aspects of their HrQoL. This includes psychosocial and emotional factors such as good social support, spirituality, and self-care behaviors that may enhance the patient's experience of HrQoL. Hence, this suggests that researchers and clinicians should exercise caution when using existing HrQoL instruments with a narrow range of outcome domains to understand changes in patients' lives. This systematic review concludes that future research studies should seek to deepen understanding of HrQoL domains that are meaningful to patients.

PANEL 4: HEALTHCARE

Speaking through cards: The experiences of patients with congenital heart disease transiting from a paediatric to adult healthcare facility

Gan Jin Ai Clarissa

Congenital heart diseases (CHD) are the most common birth defects among children. Given that 90% of children born with CHD reach adulthood, the majority of them would transit from a paediatric to an adult cardiology facility. This study is interested in understanding the experience of CHD patients transiting from a paediatric to adult cardiac healthcare facility. In addition, this study aims to find out how the developmental life stages of patients are impacted. Two young adults aged 21 and 25 years old with moderate to complex CHD were recruited during their clinic visit at National Heart Centre Singapore in October 2017. Using a qualitative methodology, one to two hour semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted using emotion cards. The responses from the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis. The preliminary findings indicate that the physical transition from one healthcare facility to the other was mostly uneventful. Instead, the findings were predominantly about the psychosocial coping of the young adults as they journeyed through their developmental life stages. Preliminary findings also suggest that young adults with CHD exhibited an indomitable spirit, mental fortitude and strength. Grappling with a chronic illness from a young age along with life's challenges and hardships, have led to resilience in their coping. Additionally, family support, in the areas of managing the medical expenses and providing a conducive home environment, plays a major role in the young adults' ability to achieve their developmental life goals. However, strong family support may not necessarily equate to young adults sharing their worries with their families because they do not want to place additional burdens on their loved ones. The preliminary findings from these two interviews will help to fine tune the interview questions and process for the subsequent interviews in the research.

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