

17 NOV 2020

9.30 AM


NUS

**SSR RESEARCH SKILLS FOR SOCIAL
SERVICES MENTORING
PROGRAMME**



ABSTRACTS

CONTENTS

- “HELLO HELLO, CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?": A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CLIENTS' EXPERIENCE RECEIVING CASEWORK AND COUNSELLING (C&C) WITH PHONE AND/OR VIDEO CALLS DURING A PANDEMIC pg 4
Charmaine Pang, Jessica Ho Shi Hui, Khong Zhi Yin
- A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF CASE MANAGERS' PRACTICES IN TACKLING HOMELESSNESS CHALLENGES POSED BY COVID-19 AT NEW HOPE COMMUNITY SERVICES pg 5
Anand s/o Vijakumar, Lilian Ong, Joella Elsie Panthradil
- CCF EMPLOYEE SURVEY: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF NEW WORK ARRANGEMENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC pg 6
Lim Kai Yun
- PRACTICES TO SUPPORT SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS' COPING WITH JOB STRESS AND JOB ADAPTATION AMIDST COVID-19 MEASURES IN THE FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE SETTING pg 7
Fionn Lui Hui Min, Danielle Tan Hwee Ling
- EXAMINING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF EMPLOYMENT MATCHING PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH-AT-RISK FROM EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE pg 8
Wong Wan Wen
- EFFECTIVENESS OF TRANSITION PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS IN CHILD PROTECTION SETTING pg 9
Lin Siping, Nurmy binte Ibrahim
- 

CONTENTS

- PROCESS EVALUATION OF PROGRAMME SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH EX-DRUG OFFENDERS
Edwin Tan Lye Soon pg 10
- EXAMINING THE SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS OF LOW-INCOME FOREIGN INDIAN WIVES
Lavania Maria Rajasuria pg 11
- UNDERSTANDING THE VIEWS AND PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS WHOSE ADOLESCENTS HAVE BEEN ENGAGING IN SELF-HARM
Valerie Quan Yen-Li, G Thanya, Pushpalatha Sheena Jebal pg 12
- NEEDS ASSESSMENT REVIEW ON ADOLESCENTS OF DIVORCED MUSLIM PARENTS
Sarinah binte Mohamed pg 13
- HOW SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN SINGAPORE USE FACEBOOK TO ENGAGE CLIENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
Shawn Lim Zeyuan pg 14
- REDEFINING THE SOCIAL SERVICES SPACE: CASE STUDY ON A GROUND-UP COLLECTIVE, MIND THE GAP, IN THEIR COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSE TO COVID-19
Sharifah Khadijah Binte Syed Alwi Madihi pg 15
- 

“Hello Hello, Can You Hear Me Now?”: A Qualitative Study on Clients’ Experience Receiving Casework & Counselling (C&C) With Phone and/or Video Calls During a Pandemic

Charmaine Pang, Jessica Ho Shi Hui, Khong Zhi Yin

To curb the community spread of COVID-19, Singapore enforced a circuit breaker (CB) period between 7 April – 1 June 2020, where strict safe-distancing regulations were implemented. During this period, social service agencies (SSAs) were highly encouraged to provide services remotely, with in-person engagements allowed only for high-risk cases. This qualitative study seeks to understand the experiences of low-income families who received C&C services via phone or/and video calls during the CB. Specifically, it aims to explore: (i) the factors that influence the experiences of clients who received C&C services via phone or/and video calls and (ii) to understand clients’ perceived benefits and challenges when utilising these remote services. The data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 8 low-income clients from two SSAs. While it appears that most clients prefer using remote services to conduct C&C services, mainly due to convenience, the findings suggest that remote services alone should not be the only mode of service provision during this pandemic. Clients’ accessibility to technology, as well as the variation of their needs, need to be considered when deciding on the suitability of remote C&C. This study also exemplifies the critical role that technology plays in delivering essential social services during a pandemic, and urges all to recognise digital access as a need instead of a want.

A Qualitative Exploration of Case Managers' Practices in Tackling Homelessness Challenges Posed by COVID-19 at New Hope Community Services (NHCS)

Anand s/o Vijakumar, Lilian Ong, Joella Elsie Panthradil

Singapore implemented a "Circuit Breaker" (CB) period, effective from 7 April to 1 June 2020 to curb and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This period saw an increase in the number of referrals to the shelters run by NHCS, which typically provide accommodation for the homeless. Clients attended to by our case managers during this period experienced several challenges and accelerated the need for well-planned crisis management practices. The objective of this research is to recommend to NHCS' management a set of new crisis management practices to improve and facilitate case management beyond the current COVID-19 crisis. Semi-structured interviews were first conducted with our case managers to understand challenges faced by clients during this period and how they addressed these issues given the CB constraints. Four main themes emerged from the interview data - 1) challenges faced while working with external agencies; 2) clients' delayed access to long-term stable housing; 3) new clients facing problems living in the shelters; and 4) shelter operation and case management challenges. Using these themes, we conducted a consensual focus-group discussion with the case managers to review the themes and formulate solutions. The findings and recommendations would guide NHCS management to review workplace policies and practices to adapt to the evolving phases of the pandemic.

CCF Employee Survey: Investigating the Impact of New Work Arrangements During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Lim Kai Yun

To ensure continuity of services and the safety of staff, new work arrangements were implemented in the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF), to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace ever since DORSCON Orange was announced. This study sought to investigate the impact of changes in work arrangements on the staff in CCF, their coping, and support required. This study also served as an internal evaluation of the organisation's response to the outbreak of COVID-19 from the staff's perspective. Results from this study could help CCF in better supporting their staff throughout this COVID-19 pandemic, and ultimately in ensuring or improving work productivity.

The CEO of CCF was interviewed to understand the directives and decision-making process of the new work arrangements. An online survey was then conducted among all staff members, with a response rate of 64%.

Less than half of the participants indicated that their stress level increased after new work arrangements were implemented (48%). Results showed that staff were adapting well to the current work arrangement and agreed that CCF took appropriate measures to ensure their health and well-being. However, the split team arrangement hindered the communication between colleagues from different teams. Providing services through virtual platforms was also challenging for social workers and specialists. Other issues such as longer working hours, the lack of physical space, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life were also highlighted by participants. Notably, all participants indicated that they knew who to look for if they faced struggles at work. A majority indicated that they were well-supported by superiors and team mates; only 29% faced difficulties working with their team.

Practices to Support Social Service Professionals' Coping With Job Stress and Job Adaptation Amidst COVID-19 Measures in the Family Service Centre Setting

Fionn Lui Hui Min, Danielle Tan Hwee Ling

Amidst rapid changes in response to COVID-19 implemented across Singapore and in our workplaces, social service agencies have had to rapidly adapt their work processes and incorporate safe management protocols whilst supporting people adversely affected by the situation. Social service professionals (SSPs) have thus had to simultaneously manage their personal coping and support the coping of the low-income and vulnerable clients in the community. This study therefore sought to explore SSPs' coping with job stress and job adaptation in the Family Service Centre (FSC) setting, so as to uncover areas of stressors for SSPs. This would allow agencies to strengthen support for SSPs in the relevant areas of stressors, enhancing SSPs' wellbeing such that the needs of clients can be adequately met even in times of COVID-19.

The two research questions are: a) How have SSPs in an FSC setting in Singapore been coping with the stressors resulting from COVID-19 measures? b) How have adaptations to COVID-19 measures impacted SSPs in an FSC setting in Singapore? Using a mixed-methods study, 43 respondents across 2 FSCs were surveyed, and a follow-up focus group discussion was conducted with 6 randomly selected social workers/social work associates.

The findings showed that most SSPs expressed an ability to cope with changes brought about by COVID-19 in relation to their direct work with clients, and maintained an overall positive outlook on the changes brought about by COVID-19. However, administrative changes due to the implementation of safety protocols, barriers in accessing adequate supervision, and reduced connectedness with colleagues have resulted in increased levels of job stress. As safe distancing measures are likely to carry on in the foreseeable future, agencies can strengthen their support to SSPs by enhancing communication channels to convey consistent messaging in terms of expectations towards adherence to measures, increasing the frequency of remote clinical support, and creating more avenues to foster connectedness amongst SSPs.

Examining the Sustainability of Employment Matching Programme for Youth-at-Risk From Employers'

Perspective

Wong Wan Wen

Empirical studies show that soft skills, as well as numeracy and literacy skills, are valued by employers. Studies also show that greater support from employers plays a part in helping youth-at-risk sustain employment. Employment training, with an emphasis on psychological well-being, predicts better psychological outcomes in youths, which in turn may help them stay in employment.

To encourage youth-at-risk to find jobs and stay in employment, the Operations and Service Capability Office (OSCa) of the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) has been conducting the Employment Matching Programme since 2017.

The purpose of this study is to examine the sustainability of the youth-at-risk Employment Matching Programme from the employers' perspective. The study aims to a) Identify the expectations that employers have of youth-at-risk during the interview process and on the job; b) Understand employers' experiences in retaining youth-at-risk, the difficulties faced when working with them, and management strategies; and c) Assess employers' willingness to continue hiring youth-at-risk and determine how MSF can provide better support to the employers. The study examines the perspectives of employers because it is important in two ways. Firstly, employers have first-hand working experience with these youths, and their insights would be relevant and applicable to our programme. Secondly, employers have the power and influence over these youths and hence also the sustainability of their employment. A sample of 8 employers from different industries, who have engaged MSF's youth-at-risk, will be engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews will be transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

Effectiveness of Transition Practice Framework for Children and Young Persons in Child Protection Setting

Lin Siping, Nurmy binte Ibrahim

The three-stage Transition Practice Framework was developed by Child Protective Service's Practice Enhancement Team (CPS PET) to ensure that children and young persons (CYPs) have a smooth transition during placement change, to minimise the trauma impact, and to prevent any unnecessary placement breakdowns. In each stage, the framework outlines specific practice intervention areas and tools used by the practitioners for CYPs, new carers, previous carers and other network people involved. The purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of the practice framework in (a) reducing the number of placement changes; (b) sustaining placements for 12 months or more; (c) decreasing behavioural and emotional dysregulation; (d) ensuring that children's care needs are mapped out in case plans; and (e) supporting caseworkers in case planning.

We intend to survey caseworkers and review casefiles of 50 CYPs who were referred to CPS PET for transition work between 2017 and 2020. We hypothesise that CYPs placed under this programme will have fewer placement changes, a higher likelihood of sustaining their placements, and a decrease in frequency and intensity of behavioural and emotional dysregulations, as measured by the Structured Decision Making Tools (SDM) and Child and Adolescents Needs Assessment (CANS) tool. Additionally, we hypothesise that CYPs who are placed in this programme have their care needs all met and mapped out clearly in the case plans such that their Child Protection Officers are able to follow up closely, and that caseworkers feel supported in their case planning.

Process Evaluation of Programme Supporting Families With Ex-Drug Offenders

Edwin Tan Lye Soon

Our Keluarga (OK) is a programme that has been running at Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre @ Bedok North for the last five years. It is designed to bring support to families with incarcerated parents with drug issues when they return to their families. The attendance and participation rates of this programme have been consistently high. The number of families who had participated in OK increased from the initial 10, to the current 24 families. In this study, I will explore the factors that contribute to the high attendance and participation rates of families in the programme. Through conducting semi-structured interviews with participants who had completed one round of the programme and had been participating in the programme for five years, I discovered that the key factors that could explain the participation rates are: 1) the development of trust among the groups; 2) participants felt that the people in programme were “like family”; and 3) acknowledgement of the problems they faced. The findings will inform both the directions for evaluative research and programme review in the future.

Examining the Social Connectedness of Low-Income Foreign Indian Wives

Lavana Maria Rajasuria

The number of binational marriages in Singapore has been steadily increasing, with a majority being between Singaporean men and foreign women. With their financial stability being dependent on their immigration status, low-income binational families face higher financial and social strain than Singaporean families. In addition to financial stress, low-income foreign wives also commonly experience family violence and challenges with integration. Social connectedness is a basic need, and the ability to maintain positive social relationships with others increases emotional security and support during adversity. Although Singaporean policies are influenced by “unity in diversity”, it has been found that low-income foreign wives commonly experience social exclusion.

This exploratory study looks into the social connectedness of low-income foreign Indian wives by understanding how they receive support and their experiences in interacting with others in the community. Data from four qualitative interviews showed that these women tend to start off in similar situations when they first arrive in Singapore. However, significant life events take them down various paths that shape their social networks. Marital status and gender roles, especially, can influence how they perceive and experience social connectedness. The findings have implications on future community work initiatives by ROOTS (Retaining Our Origins; Transitioning to Singapore), a programme serving low-income binational families in Ang Mo Kio. This study will also be expanded to include participants of other nationalities.

Understanding the Views and Perspectives of Parents Whose Adolescents Have Been Engaging in Self-Harm

Valerie Quan Yen-Li, G Thanya, Pushpalatha Sheena Jebal

Self-harm has been empirically shown to materialise and culminate during the adolescent years. The lifetime prevalence of self-harm among adolescents has increased exponentially across the globe and is projected to be a rising social issue of concern. Self-harm literature and research findings are mostly based on Western community samples, predominantly from the United States, United Kingdom and Europe, with limited research conducted in Asian countries. Whilst studies have been conducted in Singapore to investigate the prevalence and contributing factors leading to self-harm, this qualitative study seeks to further expand our understanding of the role of parental factors, which have been found to significantly influence adolescent self-harm practices, and understand the support that can be given to parents to manage self-harm behaviour in their adolescent children. Three parents, whose children self-harmed while they were adolescents, were selected through convenience sampling. They were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. We hope the insights gained from this pilot study will provide us with the impetus, as a Social Service Agency (SSA), to identify specific interventions through which we can render assistance and support to parents and self-harming adolescents.

Needs Assessment Review on Adolescents of Divorced Muslim Parents

Sarinah binte Mohamed

The aim of this study is to find out the needs of adolescents, aged 13-17 years old, who participated in the SALAAM Support Programme for Children and Adolescents in Grief. Specifically, the study explored adolescents' needs when adjusting to parental divorce. This will inform the SALAAM programme in order to address these needs more adequately.

Data will be gathered in two stages. This study will focus on findings from the first stage, from data collected through semi-structured interviews with the facilitators of SALAAM. The second data-collection stage is being planned to include interviews with the adolescents and their custodial parents.

Findings from the facilitators showed that adolescents' needs can be categorised into psycho-social needs, physical needs, educational needs and social-interpersonal needs. These needs are also inter-related. Adolescents who experience their parents' divorce often do not have some of these needs met adequately. While SALAAM has helped adolescents in the programme to address their psycho-social needs, some of the other educational, physical, social and interpersonal needs were discussed in the groups, but not in-depth. This suggests that SALAAM will need to consider whether these areas of needs are best addressed through its programme or through working with other agencies.

How Social Service Agencies in Singapore Use Facebook to Engage Clients During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Shawn Lim Zeyuan

COVID-19 has compelled Singapore to employ adaptive policy strategies to mitigate its impacts on the public health, economic, and social landscapes (Abdullah & Kim, 2020). In the milieu of safe distancing measures which curtails the physical provisions of key social services (such as physical outreach and face-to-face counselling), the social service sector has had to adapt its modus operandi to ensure continual client support and service delivery. Given the more acute impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable population segments (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2020), the need for alternative solutions becomes even more urgent.

This research aims to describe how Social Service Agencies (SSAs) employed the use of social media, specifically Facebook, to support operations and service delivery prior to and during Singapore's Circuit Breaker measures (7 April to 1 June 2020). Facebook posts of four SSAs on their Facebook pages were analysed using content analysis. Findings indicated that there were differences in how SSAs employed their Facebook pages to engage their audience, as well as in the messages that were being communicated. Implications, future research directions, and areas of consideration for conceptualising the social service sector within the online space will also be discussed.

Redefining the Social Services Space: Case Study on a Ground-Up Collective, Mind the Gap, in Their Community-Led Response to COVID-19

Sharifah Khadijah Binte Syed Alwi Madihi

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” - Helen Keller

Without a doubt, COVID-19 is much more than a health crisis. It also set about an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. Low-income families were badly affected, especially those whose income relied on daily wages, lost employment from the impacted industries, had minimal savings / non-emergency funds, or relied on daily support (i.e. food distribution, school meals etc). It was further exacerbated when social services operations came to a temporary halt and families-in-need were unable to seek any help.

Responding to emerging needs of vulnerable households as well as the widening of service gaps to support families in coping with the precarious times, eight varied entities came together to form the Mind the Gap (MTG) initiative. The collective comprises a mix of registered non-profit organisations, community/neighbourhood groups, and informal social movements. The purpose of the collective was to support families who have fallen through the gaps in our social welfare system compounded by the impact of COVID-19, and to distribute equitably a common fund of \$1.2 million raised. The collective also presents an alternative model of citizen-led community partnership, tapping on existing social capital and community assets so that no one is left behind.

Six of the eight MTG partners and two beneficiaries were interviewed. Each interview averaged 1.5 hours. Stories of four beneficiaries were also considered in the findings. The case study offers rich data for rethinking and developing the relationship of ground-up initiatives and the state social welfare system in light of COVID-19, providing opportunities for future collaboration and co-existence.



Social Service Research Centre
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

Social Service Research Centre

Email: ssr@nus.edu.sg

Tel: 6601 5019

Join our mailing list by filling in your details at <https://bit.ly/2xcfDOs>. Be the first to know about SSR's upcoming events, including information about the next round of SSR Research Mentoring.

