

# SSR's 2024 Year in Review

KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND EVENTS OF THE YEAR



# FOREWORD BY SSR CO-DIRECTORS

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Another year has passed. SSR is approaching its 10th Year. As with previous years, SSR has embarked on numerous projects and made several contributions towards enhancing research on issues of significance in Singapore and uplifting the research skills of social work professionals.

Its annual conference focused on an issue that has attracted increasing attention not only in academia and also in society at large both in Singapore and around the world – youth mental health. Interest for this conference was exceptional, evidenced by the high number of sign-ups and a long waiting list for in-person attendance. The talks attracted spirited debates and high ratings.

Staff in SSR continue to pursue research of high translational and scientific import, over a range of issues such as struggles faced by young low-wage workers, developmental trajectories of youth offenders, digital peer support and mental health, caregiving challenges in low-income families, cyberbullying, protective factors for children against economic hardship, and the use of AI in social work. Several projects are collaborations with key agencies and partners in Singapore such as the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), National Council of Social Service (NCSS), and Health District @ Queenstown, reflecting the social significance of the projects. Many projects are published in high impact journals such as Journal of Family and Economic Issue, Developmental Psychology, Applied Developmental Science, and Nature Human Behaviour, attesting to the high level of scientific contributions contributed by the projects.

In addition to research, SSR's distinctive training workshops and research consultancy services continue to upskill the research capabilities of social work professionals in Singapore. Demand for the workshops and courses continue to be strong. Feedbacks are highly positive. Attendees express that the courses contribute to enhancing the policies and programmes in their workplace. In addition, SSR has been gradually transiting its regular seminars back to in-person mode. Despite the shift away the convenient remote format, interest in the seminars remain high, many of which attracted one of the highest attendance rates for seminars organized by research centres in NUS.

2025 marks SSR's 10th Year Anniversary. Plans are being made for a 2-day (instead of the usual 1-day) conference to mark this significant milestone. Two new Co-Directors, A/P Lee Jungup (Department of Social Work) and A/P Ong Ee Cheng (Department of Economics) will take over the reins to lead the centre. The centre will continue its trajectory of high-level research and enhancing research capabilities. More projects, courses, and seminar are being planned and developed at the moment. We look forward to a productive and meaningful year ahead.

**– Professor Eddie M. W. Tong and Associate Professor Irene Y.H. Ng**

# CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

This year, SSR continued to run the Capability Development Programme, supported by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and Tote Board under a S\$1.4 million fund since 2021. Here are some highlights from our activities this year.

## 01 SSR CONFERENCE 2024 YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH LANDSCAPE: UPSTREAM PREVENTION AND DOWNSTREAM INTERVENTION



With the ever-growing concern on youth mental wellbeing in mind, SSR organised a full-day hybrid conference with the theme “Youth Mental Health Landscape: Upstream Prevention and Downstream Intervention” at the NUS Shaw Foundation Alumni House Auditorium on 20th March. The day was packed with engaging sessions as 16 distinguished speakers addressed various topics related to mental health issues, ranging from the challenges faced by youths to the diverse upstream and downstream interventions that social service providers can offer to help them navigate life stressors and uplift their mental well-being.

The event was graced by Dr Janil Puthuchearu, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information and Ministry of Health and attracted an audience of over 800 social work practitioners, healthcare professionals, policymakers and researchers, who come from more than 100 organisations. The overall satisfaction score of 4.5 out of 5 underscores the high value that attendees placed on the insights gained from the conference.

For those who missed the excitement, the [conference proceedings](#) and press releases ([1](#), [2](#)) are available for download, offering a window into the rich insights shared by our presenters and moderators.

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## 02 RESEARCH TRAINING

2024 had been an eventful year. SSR completed a total of seven workshops and two runs of 13-week research mentoring programmes. We also introduced a new 1-day workshop on “An



Introduction to Diverse Methods for Collecting Data from Children and Adolescents”. In the research mentoring programmes, participants were mentored on various topics such as will-making, faith-based rehabilitation programme, children with adverse childhood experiences, homeless services, debtors’ emotion and caring for seniors.

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## 03 PUBLICATIONS

SSR published 3 issues of SSR Snippet and 2 research guides in 2024. The range of themes in the Snippet is extensive, spanning from the concerns of the working poor in Singapore, to supporting people who lost their loved ones to suicide, the need for cultural competence among social service professionals and understanding the experiences of palliative care professionals. These publications resonate with SSR’s tradition of engaging with diverse concerns pertaining to marginalised populations, the social service sector and the engagement between academia and social work practice. The research guides, on the other hand, offer useful tools for social service research, such as qualitative research methods and programme evaluation. These critical perspectives provide food for thought while also shedding necessary insights into further directions that need to be adopted by the sector.

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## 04 RESEARCH CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT (RCD) SERVICE



Consultancy advice is provided as part of this service on research, evaluation and training projects that SSAs are keen to embark. The goal of this service is to contribute to the development of practice research in the social service sector by developing and enhancing the research capabilities of practitioners in the field. In 2024, we continue our cherished partnerships with Fei Yue Community Services and Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities Limited. We also welcomed South Central Community Family Service Centre as a new partner in our RCD service. We look forward to forging more partnerships to further enrich the research landscape in the sector.

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*“Our collaboration with the NUS SSR team over the past year has been a truly valuable and insightful experience. Every session with them was productive, reflecting their strong commitment to improving our evaluation processes and raising the overall quality of our programme. Lay Hoon and Zhi Han were particularly outstanding, always demonstrating patience and professionalism. They listened closely to our facilitators’ insights and provided thoughtful guidance as we worked together to develop a detailed Theory of Change (TOC). This guidance was key in helping shape the program’s direction, ensuring that our facilitators felt supported and that we had a clear structure for measuring our impact. Their expertise also helped us understand the deeper factors behind the program’s long-term success, bridging the gap between implementation and research.*

*The NUS SSR team’s role went beyond just the TOC. They were instrumental in helping us summarize and consolidate the best practices observed during the program. Their analysis allowed us to integrate these practices into our observational rubrics, which has made a significant improvement in how we evaluate the program. This integration has ensured our assessments are more comprehensive and aligned with our key goals, enabling us to refine the program continuously with a solid foundation of evidence-based practices.*

*They also helped us sharpen our focus on pre- and post-survey evaluations. Their refinements allowed us to better target specific areas of impact, resulting in clearer and more meaningful data. This, in turn, gave us a deeper understanding of the program’s outcomes and overall effectiveness. Their contributions have undoubtedly enhanced how we approach program evaluation, making our framework more rigorous and impactful.*

*Overall, we are deeply appreciative of the NUS SSR team’s ongoing support and expertise. Their collaborative approach, attention to detail, and dedication to improving our program have made a real difference. We’re excited to continue this partnership and further build on the progress we’ve made together.”*

**OK Programme Team – Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre (THK FSC)**

*"Our first engagement with SSR's RCD service has been highly beneficial, even in the early stages. The consultant, Lay Hoon, has helped us reflect on our Clinical Transformation Project, especially in aligning the existing assessments in place, providing not just ideas but also concrete examples. These examples have allowed us to view changes from different perspectives. When challenges arise, she offers constructive feedback, guiding us toward effective solutions. We greatly appreciate the practical support and insights she has provided."*

**Kwan Mei Leng – Lead Early Intervention Teacher/Project Lead for Clinical Transformation Project, Fei Yue EIPIC centre**

## 05 SEMINARS

SSR's seminar series in 2024 featured a wide variety of topics, including broader structural issues such as welfare systems in East Asia; issues close to the heart of practitioners such as bereavement coping, cultural competence in social work and youths in public spaces; and interventions such as cash transfer randomised controlled trials (RCTs) for the low-income and a national suicide strategy. The seminars continued to be well-received by attendees, attracting more than 100 attendees for online seminars and hybrid events, and majority of them rating the seminars as useful or very useful. SSR will continue to curate seminars with a range of exciting topics that are relevance to social service professionals, academics and policymakers.

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# RESEARCH PROJECTS

## In-Work Poverty and the Challenges of Getting By Among the Young [Phase 2] (IWP2)

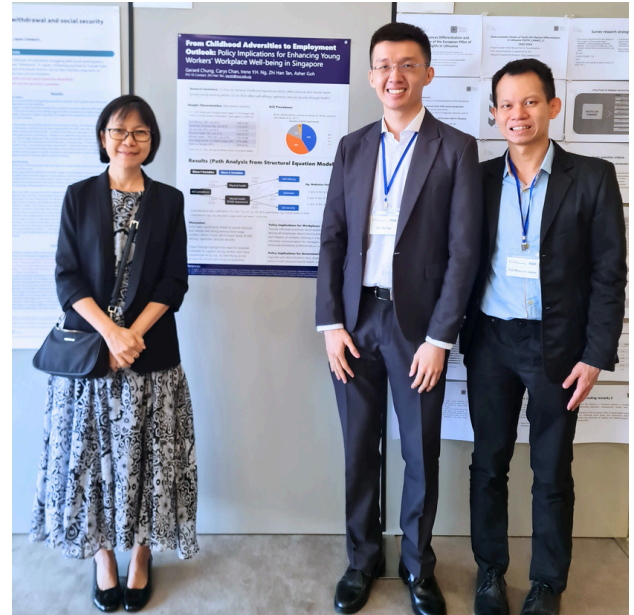
Funded by the Social Science Research Thematic Grant amounting to about S\$1 million, IWP2 continues from Phase 1 in studying the challenges faced by low-income young workers aged 21-40 and their efforts at advancement.

In the past year, the team administered its third wave of survey (about 1,500 respondents) to track the experiences and challenges faced by young individuals in employment, meeting financial needs, managing family responsibilities and achieving personal and family aspirations. It also conducted the third wave of in-depth interviews with 40 selected young workers, and interviewed 15 pairs of young parents to explore the gendered dimensions of balancing caregiving and work.

The tripartite partners' perspectives, challenges and efforts at tackling the issue of low wage work were explored in interviews with senior staff from the Ministry of Manpower, Singapore National Employers' Federation and National Trades Union Congress.

While fieldwork for Phase 2 is ongoing, the team continued to share findings from Phase 1. For instance, we presented at the EASP-FISS Conference 2024 in Kyoto in June this year (see photo), and published on [time poverty](#) in the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*.

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Journal of Family and Economic Issues  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-024-09951-1>

ORIGINAL PAPER



### Time Poverty among the Young Working Poor: A Pathway from Low Wage to Psychological Well-being through Work-to-Family-Conflict

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#### Abstract

Research on time poverty is nascent, and has focused more on unpaid household production and gender differences. Using survey data of 1,620 workers aged 21 to 38 in Singapore, we found that work-based time poverty affects the psychological well-being of young workers. First, factor analysis of time-related work quality indices led to a work-based time poverty measure along two dimensions: (i) long and late working hours, and (ii) nonstandard and uncontrollable working hours. Then, through a structural equation model, we found that individuals in low-wage work are more time poor in terms of nonstandard and uncontrollable hours. These hours worsen work-to-family conflict and together, they mediate the relationship between low wage and two psychological well-being outcomes: generalised anxiety disorder and self-efficacy. Our findings have implications on low-wage young workers' ability to invest time in their families and on training. They suggest the need to work with policymakers and employers to address workplace time poverty challenges that are beyond what young workers themselves can control.

**Keywords** Time poverty · Low-wage workers · Generalised anxiety · Self-efficacy · Work-to-family conflict

#### Introduction

Are the wage poor also more time-poor? While much research has documented the poor hours and conditions of low-wage jobs (LaBriola & Schneider, 2020), it is not a given that low-wage jobs equate with time poverty (Orkoh et al., 2020). In fact, some research has documented that higher income and more educated persons in executive or managerial positions are more time starved (Hämmig et al., 2009; Ruckl, 2019). It might also be the case that lowest earning individuals are most time rich due to the lack of jobs and opportunities leading to un- or under-employment. Whether low-income earners are also more time-poor therefore remains as a theoretical and empirical question to be answered. This is what this article seeks to do, and we do

so for young people in work. That is, we look at work-based time poverty, and we analyse this among only young workers aged 21 to 38. The limited research on time poverty has so far either referred to time poverty in terms of people's general lack of time (e.g., Zuzanek, 2004) or focused on time poverty resulting from the need to spend more time on unpaid household production, as is the case for women or lower income households that cannot afford time-saving technology (e.g., Whillans & West, 2022). We have found no research focused on the nature of paid work that affects one's time scarcity, and the effects of such work-based time poverty. Our analysis will therefore focus on the work domain, specifically the characteristics of jobs that make one time poor.

Similarly, one's life stage leads to different time constraints and significance assigned to those constraints. For young workers who are at the initial phase of their work lives, time poverty might be expected as a sacrifice for advancing their careers. However, in the case of low-wage young people, if they work in jobs with limited prospects for advancement and are too time poor to invest in the accumulation of human capital to access higher paying jobs, then time poverty becomes a double whammy to financial poverty. Time poverty can also have adverse effects on

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## Enhancing Positive Outcomes in Youth and the Community (EPYC)

EPYC (Enhancing Positive Outcome in Youth and the Community) is a long-term initiative headed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). The project focuses on crime prevention and the reintegration of youths in Singapore. The project is currently on the 6th wave for the last cohort. A total of 574 interviews were completed in the year 2023.

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## Sandwich Generation of Malay Women Caregivers in Low Income Families in Queenstown Health District: Needs and Access to Services

This qualitative study seeks to understand the caregiving needs and challenges facing the sandwich generation, specifically Malay women from low-income families in the Health District @ Queenstown. As sandwich caregivers, these women perform multiple generational caregiving responsibilities. We aim to understand the barriers they face in navigating health and social services, as well as their health literacy to comprehend, access and evaluate health information and services to make informed choices for their own health and that of their care recipients. This study is currently in its fieldwork and data analysis stage. We have had very insightful interviews with the Queenstown district respondents, as well as focus group discussions with professionals who are working with families and supporting caregivers. These initial insights are promising in helping us further our study and develop our work with various sectors to better support the needs of caregivers.



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## Integrating Technology and AI in Social Work

This exploratory study aims to understand how social work students and social service practitioners perceive and use technology and AI professionally and how they learn about new technological developments relevant to their profession. A short survey targeting 1,000 participants will cover areas such as attitudes towards human-AI collaboration, AI's impact on their professional identity and purpose, and values of responsible AI. The survey also hopes to understand how individual or organizational characteristics affect participants' attitudes toward technology and AI use, access to training and support opportunities. The study's findings hopes to harness the potential benefits of AI while mitigating risks and challenges, ultimately enhancing the quality of services provided to clients and communities in Singapore.

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## Testing a Generative AI Role-playing Tool

Role-playing in social work education is an active learning method crucial for developing students' communication and engagement skills. "SWAT:Role-Play" is an AI role-playing tool developed by the research team to facilitate role-playing in social work education. This study aims to evaluate the usefulness, usability, and feasibility of the tool for social work education. There are three parts to the study. An ongoing online survey of 300 NUS Social Work students who have or are taking the SW2105 Values & Skills for Helping Relationships course aims to gather their perceptions of the role and value of role-play in social work education. 30 students will then be invited for a trial of the role-playing tool, followed by an interview to provide their feedback. Finally, Masters' student research assistants with social work experience will evaluate the AI's responses using metrics which will be developed by the team. The findings could inform curriculum development and suggest new ways to incorporate AI tools for experiential learning in social work educational.

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