

Roundtable discussion: Research Priorities on Social Development

22 November 2013

CENTER FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (ASIA)

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At the visioning retreat held on 9 September 2013 organized by NUS' Centre for Social Development Asia (CSDA), two substantive themes were identified as priority and for further discussion, which are vulnerable families and Children and issues related to care of the elderly. On 22 November 2013, professionals and practitioners from social

work agencies, government, community agencies and academics participated in a roundtable discussion on these two topics. Experts from the field were invited to share their perspectives. The two panels were chaired by Professor in Social Policy and Analytics, Paul Cheung (Dept. of Social Work).

Agenda

- Welcome remarks
- Roundtable discussion on research priorities in vulnerable families and children
- Roundtable discussion on research priorities in elderly issues
- Way ahead and conclusion





“Who are vulnerable families and children?” Mohd Ali Bin Mahmood, Senior Director of the Training & Consultancy (Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura – PPIS)



Panel 1: Research priorities concerning vulnerable families and children

The first speaker, Mohd Ali Bin Mahmood, Senior Director of the Training & Consultancy (Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura – PPIS) discussed the diverse profile of vulnerable families and children. In practice, the category of vulnerable families covers those with low income, debts, parents who are incarcerated, family violence, child abuse, and so on so forth. He commented that research and current programs have considered these families as subjects of vulnerabilities but yet to assess their strengths and potentials to overcome their situation.

According to Mr Mohd Ali, current programs tend to focus on displaced families who become homeless or in transitional homes for various reasons depending on their living environment. In view of the diverse profile of vulnerable families, he was concerned about the effectiveness of available programs and interventions. An important goal of helping programs is to empower its clients to overcome their vulnerabilities rather than just enable them to fulfil the program activities. However, whether this goal has been achieved or whether vulnerable families are strengthened through the provided programs and services are left unknown.

He expressed his concern about the parents-centric approach of available programs that help homeless parents settle housing matters. Children in these displaced families are also considered



vulnerable subjects. Programs have not taken into account their impacts on children, for example, how they would cope with the homeless situation and make adjustment in foster homes where they live with relatives and change daily routines. Meeting parents’ needs is not the same as meeting children’s needs. The speaker suggested incorporating a child-centric approach and outcomes of research on resilience into programs and services.

As vulnerable families face multiple complex issues at the same time, social workers struggle with the fact that a common program or intervention would not be able to meet the needs. Based on his experience, Mr Mohd Ali commented that individualization would be necessary in providing better services when one-size programs or interventions no longer fit in the situations. However, he was also concerned with the degree of individualization that a junior social worker could put in given his/her limited expertise and experience.

Panel 1: Research priorities concerning vulnerable families and children

Next up was Ms Chan Lay Lin, Deputy Head of the Medical Social Work Department, Institute of Mental Health. She shared her experience in working with vulnerable children and adults in a psychiatric setting and focused on three groups of people who have yet received due attention.

The first group are persons with intellectual disability and mental illness who social workers have difficulties in rehabilitating them. The second group are children of people in the first group. A recent local study revealed that 10.95 percent of outpatients with mental illness have young children who are at high risk of developing psychological and emotional problems, and mental illness. The presence of parental mental illness does not guarantee poor outcomes but the interaction of parental mental illness and other variables affects resilience and risk level. It was also observed that no proper explana-

tion on the parents' treatment or absence is discussed with children; the lack of communication regarding mental illness between parents and children is another emerging issue.

The second category of her clients comprised adults diagnosed with intellectual disability and mental disorders at the same time, who statistically account for 1-5 percent of the population. When going through traumatizing life events, they are likely to develop depression, maladaptive behaviors or worsening of self-care. The Institute of Mental Health has started the Adult Neuro-Developmental Service (ANDS) program to provide consultancy to families who take care of adults with intellectual disability and mental disorders. Other issues in this group include difficulties in providing day care, services in nursing homes, limitations in terms of expertise and experience of professionals who work with patients in this category.

"A focus on vulnerable families and children in psychiatric setting"

*Ms Chan Lay Lin,
Deputy Head of
the Medical
Social Work
Department,
Institute of
Mental Health*



Panel 1: Research priorities concerning vulnerable families and children

“Young teenager parents and their first born child” - Dr Rosaleen Ow, Head of the Department of Social Work, NUS

The final speaker in this panel was Dr Rosaleen Ow, Head of the Department of Social Work, NUS. Based on her professional experience and research work, she presented an emerging issue concerning young teenage parents with their first born child. Though this category of vulnerable children accounts for a small fraction in the population, intergenerational impacts are significant. Dr Ow emphasized that more upstream preventative and developmental works would be needed to break the cycle. For instance, other than general supports for the first three

years to the child, professionals also need to look into health issues and psychological and social needs of the young parents as well as other support for their development at the same time. She also commented that long term support is essential in terms of physical and mental health of both parents and child.

The panel engaged participants in lively discussion on addressing factors or causes of dysfunctionality or difficulties in families for the purpose of conducting upstream prevention.

Participants also raised the need of developing programs or framework based on good local practice apart from adopting evidence-based overseas programs or models. Organizational issues to optimize resources in providing services to vulnerable families were also discussed. Participants also expressed their concerns about the impacts of funding sources on programs or services other than program progress alone.

Discussing the development of social policies and welfare programs, participants suggested that family service centres seek opportunities for coordination in research and development in view of manpower constraint of a single FSC that is unable to address the accumulated impacts of multiple issues. Besides,

further collaboration with ministerial agencies and the academia should be put forward to evaluate the discrete and summative impacts effects of social policies at a macro-level.

There were a few comments on organizational problems in detecting social issues and handling cases. For instance, social issues may be first detected at hospitals, in schools or child care centres before the cases are referred to FSCs. Participants raised the need for assistance in places where frontline workers may have to handle social issues in the role of a social worker. It was suggested that helping agencies develop partnership with communities in providing services as well as build up knowledge and helping capacity for the grassroots.



Panel 2: Research priorities concerning elderly issues

The first lead discussant in this panel was Ms Lee Lay Beng from the Agency for Integrated Care who shared her experience in providing health care for the elderly. She first presented various perception of ageing from the perspective of a healthcare professional. Stereotypes of elderly patients include those who experience falls, aches and pain, incontinence or suffer from frail, chronic diseases, and so on so forth.

She emphasized the importance of supports provided in the community to the elderly as these activities should be recognized as preventative care. Giving examples in other countries such as the United States, Australia, Hong Kong where a more comprehensive system and

partnership models with communities have been set up, Ms Lee raised the need of developing a local model for Singapore, conducting pilot projects and furthering research into long term care for the elderly.

She commented that there is a great deal of uncovered possibilities in the local communities to provide better services for the elderly. She advocated the strengthening of relationship between the academia and practitioners, showcasing successful models, conducting proper documentation to capture data for research and translating research outcomes into practice.

**“Ground
experience on
eldercare” -**

***Ms Lee Lay Beng
from the Agency
for Integrated Care***



Panel 2: Research priorities concerning elderly issues

**“Current
landscape of
ageing
demographics”
- Ms Peh Kim
Choo, Director
of Hua Mei
Centre for
Successful
Ageing**

The next speaker is Ms Peh Kim Choo, Director of Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing who presented her research on the current landscape of the ageing population in Singapore and prospective in the field. Singapore is one of the fastest ageing countries in the world where the number of elderly aged 80 years and above accounts for the biggest proportion. The number of the elderly living on their own has increased over the years. These facts indicate an increased demand for healthcare services and community and home-based caregiving supports. Foreign domestic workers would play a complementary role in providing caregiving services in the familiar environment of the elderly' own home with families and friends.

According to Ms Choo, one of the key policy challenges is how to more effectively bring together the differ-

ent services that the elderly would require. It is not limited to coordinating various long-term care services, but also how long-term care can be better integrated with other care needs of the elderly including medical care and social care. Integrating care does not mean having all services rolled into a single programme. The needs of the elderly are diverse, and therefore need to be met by a diversity of services.

In her attempt to address conceptual issues of ageing, Ms Choo shared her concern about how to identify the next generation of the elderly in our dynamic population and how to understand them better. Other matters concerning long term care for the elderly include income security, role of family as first line of caregivers, role of institutions, role of volunteers, foreign domestic workers and their competencies.



Panel 2: Research priorities concerning elderly issues

Rounding out the panel, Dr Lee Geok Ling in the Department of Social Work shared the pressing issues in the local landscape of the aged population, including affordable healthcare, urgency of eldercare, elder abuse, and hospice care, and so on so forth. She also introduced a summative framework of issues related to care of the elderly. Dr Lee also pointed out several research priorities in

the field. Firstly professionals and researchers should build up a profile of the elderly and caregivers and identify prevalent issues concerning these subjects in elderly care. Secondly, program evaluation is essential to addressing needs and configuring problems in the field. Finally, more research work is needed to examine the service gaps at different levels.

“Issues related to eldercare”

Dr Lee Geok

Ling in the

Department of

Social Work

ISSUES RELATED TO CARE OF THE ELDERLY

WHO	Elderly		Careviers		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Healthy and sick -Rich and poor -With and without family support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Informal (spouse, children, domestic helpers) -Formal/Professional 		
WHAT Needs	Biological	Psychological	Social	Spiritual	Financial
	Medical compliance	Mental health	Social connectedness	Meaning of life	Affordable health care
Continuum of care	Preventive → Remedial				
	-Preparation for death		-Elder abuse		
HOW	Micro: Working with individuals and families		Mezzo: Working with groups	Macro: Working with organisations and communities	
Mode of service delivery	-Casework	-Group work		-Public education	-Elder care leave
	Befriending	-Outreach programme			



SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHY

Session 1: Vulnerable Families and Children

Mr Mohd Ali Bin Mahmood

Senior Director
Social Services, Training & Consultancy
PPIS

Mohd Ali Mahmood has more than 20 years of Social Work experience. He is currently the Senior Director overseeing Social Services, Training and Consultancy for PPIS (Singapore Muslim Women Association). He is also a trainer for the Social Service Institute and a lecturer for the institute's Higher Diploma in Social Services. He is a member of the Ministry of Social and Family Development Fostering Committee and the National Council of Social Service Committee for Professional Practice Standards. Mohd Ali graduated from The National University of Singapore majoring in Social Work and was a recipient of the prestigious Outstanding Social Worker Award in 2009.

Ms Chan Lay Lin

Senior Principal Social Worker/ Deputy Head
Medical Social Work Department
Institute of Mental Health

Chan Lay Lin is the Senior Principal Medical Social Worker with the Medical Social Work Department at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). At IMH, Lay Lin oversees training and supervision matters in the social work department and leads a team of medical social workers in systemic psychotherapy. Lay Lin has done clinical and management level work at the family service centres, and at National University Hospital, and National Cancer Centre specializing in psychosocial oncology and in palliative care. Her current interest is in grief work, family caregiving and psychotherapy with families with mental health problems.

Dr Rosaleen Ow

Head
Department of Social Work

Dr Rosaleen Ow is currently Head of the Department of Social Work at the National University of Singapore. Her teaching and research interests are in social work practice with low-income families, single-parent families and children of divorce, and social work in health care, especially in end-of-life issues from a multicultural perspective. Her current projects include a book on child welfare services in Singapore, advance care planning, intergenerational issues related to dysfunction and families of divorce. She sits on a number of advisory boards in local non-government organizations and government committees on research and service delivery. She is engaged with the regional Consortium of Institutes on Family in the Asian Region (CIFA) as a council member and is the current chair of the Scientific Committee for the 2016 International Conference on Social Work in Health and Mental Health.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHY

Session 2: Elderly Issues

Ms Lee Lay Beng

Senior Manager (Organisation & Manpower Development)
Community Care Development Division
Agency for Integrated Care

Lee Lay Beng graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree (Social Work/Sociology) at the National University of Singapore and obtained the Master of Social Science (Gerontology) at the University of Sydney. Since graduation, she has been practicing as a social work practitioner in the healthcare setting. Recently she has been seconded to the Agency for Integrated Care to oversee the capacity and capability building of medical social workers in the intermediate and long term care sector and the development of community care services.

Ms Peh Kim Choo

Director
Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing
Tsao Foundation

Peh Kim Choo is currently the director of Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing of the Tsao Foundation, a not-for-profit operational family foundation focusing on aged care. Kim Choo comes from a background in social work and counselling but over the years, has worked in a wide range of capacities from direct service to capacity building and programme development.

Dr Lee Geok Ling

Assistant Professor
Department of Social Work, NUS

Lee Geok Ling is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore. She is also a Registered Social Worker with the Singapore Association of Social Workers, and a certified member in thanatology with the Association of Death Education and Counseling. She completed her M.Soc.Sci. in Social Work from National University of Singapore, Singapore and Ph.D from The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. Her areas of research interest are in palliative care, infertility, loss and grief. She is currently involved in multi-disciplinary research projects on quality of life and needs assessment of patients in palliative care and their families, and an intervention study with advanced cancer patients using integrative body-mind-spirit approach.

In her short academic career, Geok Ling has published nine peer-reviewed journal articles and one book chapter. She has received best oral presentation award and best poster presentation (2nd prize) at the Singapore Palliative Care Conference 2011, and The University of Hong Kong Student Award for Outstanding Abstract at 2010 Joint World Conference on Social work and Social Development.



Conclusion

Chairman of the Advisory Council of the CSDA and Associate Professorial Fellow at the NUS Department of Social Work, Dr S Vasoo expressed his thanks to speakers and participants for their sharing of professional experience in the two panels. Wrapping up the roundtable discussion, he challenged researchers and practitioners in the field to think further about the social issues, build up partnership in conducting applied research, and put forward ideas and actions to tackle the problems. He suggested CSDA take up a consultative role and provide technical support and partner with agencies in conducting research to understand the service gaps, construct profiles of clients, advance models/ programs, and so on so forth. Further dialogues on various aspects of vulnerable families, children and elderly would be carried out to surface emerging issues in the field, showcase successful programs/ models, and promote research networking and collaboration.

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