

Social satisfaction levels fell for seniors during circuit breaker: Survey

Goh Yan Han

Social isolation during the circuit breaker period resulted in lower social satisfaction levels for senior citizens, according to results of a monthly survey of about 7,500 people aged between 55 and 75 here.

Social satisfaction levels dipped by about 4 per cent in May when compared with January.

In particular, for senior citizens living with others, satisfaction levels fell to the pre-circuit-breaker levels of peers living alone, while

those living alone saw even lower satisfaction levels, as safe distancing measures made it more difficult to find support from friends and the community.

As of last month, while satisfaction levels have rebounded after the circuit breaker period, which was from April 7 to June 1, they are not back to the levels they were at before.

The Covid-19-related findings from the May to July iterations of the longitudinal Singapore Life Panel survey, done by Singapore Management University's (SMU)

Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (Rosa), were revealed at a media briefing yesterday by centre director Paulin Straughan.

As Singapore's population ages, the proportion of those who remain single and live alone will increase, said Professor Straughan, a sociologist and former Nominated MP.

She added that society will have to be redesigned such that every Singaporean, regardless of circumstances, can look forward to growing old gracefully.

She suggested that living arrangements include an enclave of social support for senior citizens even while they live in the privacy of their own homes.

The findings also suggested that a digital divide affected the well-being of senior citizens. Those who used communication technology – such as phone calls and text and smartphone apps to message and video-call others, as well as social media – reported higher levels of

satisfaction and well-being and a lower sense of social isolation.

The survey also showed that older Singaporeans who experienced unforeseen income loss during the pandemic reported lower life satisfaction levels. Many in their late 60s and 70s continue to be concerned about employment and employability, said Prof Straughan.

It was also announced yesterday that non-profit foundation Ngee Ann Kongsi would contribute \$15 million over seven years to SMU to support research on the well-being of the elderly and successful ageing in Singapore.

The amount is the largest research funding that the university has received from a non-governmental organisation and is also Ngee Ann Kongsi's largest donation for research to date.

About \$1.5 million of the funding will go towards helping Rosa to translate research into policy insights this year.

In view of the survey findings, the research team will meet representatives from the Government and social service agencies to assess the Covid-19 policies implemented, and look into strengthening current initiatives and the development of new approaches to tackling issues experienced by the elderly.

Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin, who was guest of honour at the media briefing, said that research in this area is very important, given that by 2030, one in four Singaporeans will be 65 or older.

"We need to ensure that the quality of life for those who are ageing is looked after... It's not just about the healthcare system.

"It's also about living life healthily, physically and, from a mental health perspective, being engaged," said Mr Tan, who is also chairman of the People's Action Party Seniors Group.

gyanhan@sph.com.sg