

Nearly half a million have benefited from Covid-19 financial support schemes

Three financial support schemes to assist those who lost their jobs or had their incomes cut because of the Covid-19 pandemic have helped close to half a million people in Singapore.

Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Social and Family Development, said that the Temporary Relief Fund, Covid-19 Support Grant and the Covid-19 Recovery Grant have benefited about 480,000 individuals as at the end of last year.

She was speaking yesterday – which was World Social Work Day – at the Post-Pandemic Challenges And Planning for Social Services online conference organised by the National University of Singapore’s Social Service Research Centre.

Noting that the pandemic affected vulnerable groups more, Ms Sun said the Covid-19 financial support measures complemented pre-pandemic assistance schemes, such as ComCare financial assistance, to these

groups.

The community has also stepped up, she said, citing how the SG Cares Community Networks – comprising various public, corporate and community agencies – have checked in on 50,000 families living in public rental flats since the pandemic started in 2020, to check on their well-being.

The networks have connected about 5,000 families to agencies for different kinds of aid, Ms Sun said.

“The pandemic has thrown up new gaps and exacerbated existing needs in our communities. Yet, it has prompted new solutions towards these challenges and brought the sector and the community closer together,” she said. This heightens the need for sound research and evaluation of programmes to better understand post-pandemic challenges and how to tackle them, she added.

Theresa Tan

Seniors mentally better off than younger ones during circuit breaker

They faced significantly lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress, study finds

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Older adults had better mental health than younger people during the circuit breaker in 2020, when all non-essential activities came to a halt in a move to stem the spread of Covid-19.

A study by the Geriatric Education and Research Institute (Geri) found that older adults in Singapore had faced significantly lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress.

This is similar to the findings of

overseas research – that younger adults were more affected mentally by lockdowns, said Dr Yu Chou Chuen, the study's principal investigator and a research fellow at Geri.

He presented the study at the Post-Pandemic Challenges And Planning For Social Services online conference organised by the National University of Singapore's Social Service Research Centre yesterday.

The study interviewed 602 Singaporeans in 2020, with the average age of the group of younger adults being 40, while the older group's was 67.

The study found that regardless of age, respondents who were

more adaptable in adjusting their life and lifestyle to the Covid-19 pandemic had lower levels of stress and depression.

While the study did not examine the reasons why older adults had better mental health, Dr Yu offered a few possible reasons.

Older adults had fewer financial and caregiving responsibilities as they may have retired and their children were grown up, compared with the younger group, who worried about their jobs and finances and had to care for both their young children and elderly parents.

Dr Yu added: "As people age, they would have gone through more crises and more ups and downs in life and are better able to manage their stresses."

He also noted that the seniors in his study were all healthy.

Previous news reports have said seniors are not as digitally savvy as the younger crowd and that they feel more isolated and vulnerable during the circuit breaker, but Dr Yu noted that seniors are not a homogeneous group.

In another presentation at the conference, Dr Ad Maulod said the same situation can be experienced very differently by people even if they are in the same age and income group.

The senior research fellow at the Centre for Ageing Research and

Education (Care) at the Duke-NUS Medical School noted that those with mobility problems said life was no different as they were already housebound before the pandemic started.

This was unlike what some of their neighbours living in heavily subsidised Housing Board flats said.

Some of the socially active seniors said they felt they would go mad cooped up in their tiny rental flats during the circuit breaker.

Those who had bad relationships with the person they lived with also voiced the same sentiment.

Dr Maulod said Care did five qualitative studies that examined issues such as loneliness and caregiving, and the pandemic's impact in these areas.

About 200 seniors and their caregivers participated in these studies.

About three-quarters of these seniors live in HDB rental flats and most live alone.

One finding was that caregivers faced more stress and isolation during the pandemic. This is due to various reasons such as the lack of caregiving support and cutting back on social interactions with friends for fear of infecting the person they are caring for.

Dr Maulod noted that with families having fewer children and seniors living longer, the Government's policy of depending on one's family as the first line of support is an uphill struggle for some families whose seniors need a lot of help with daily life.

Besides the prolonged toll on caregivers, some seniors have strained relationships with their children, or their offspring are struggling to even support themselves.

"Some caregivers are also afraid to seek help for their caregiving stress, as they fear others may think they are not a good son or daughter if they complain about the stresses they face," said Dr Maulod.

There is an urgent need to ramp up the provision of caregiving services in the community to support the family in caring for the senior, he added.

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Number of Singaporeans interviewed in the survey by the Geriatric Education and Research Institute.