

# Seniors displayed resilience during pandemic: Study

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Older adults were hit emotionally when the fear of Covid-19 forced them to retreat into their homes, but they subsequently showed a strong sense of independence, awareness and initiative in managing their physical and mental well-being, a new study has found.

This resilience was largely thanks to support from the family, particularly adult children, and community service providers, the study by the National University Health System (NUHS) found.

Associate Professor Tan Ker Kan, head and senior consultant at the division of colorectal surgery at the National University Hospital (NUH) and its medical board vice-chairman of research, led the study.

He said the findings reaffirm the value of the work of community service providers, who reached out to seniors via phone calls and digital tools when face-to-face visits were not possible.

Prof Tan and his team wanted to find out how the pandemic im-

pacted seniors, who were more vulnerable. Moreover, overseas studies have shown that the elderly were at higher risk of developing anxiety and depression during the pandemic.

But most of the seniors interviewed by the NUHS team put any negative assumptions to rest. The team spoke to 62 able-bodied seniors aged 65 to 84, living in Housing Board flats in Pioneer, Buona Vista, Bukit Batok and Sengkang, from January to June this year.

Explaining the seemingly small sample size, Prof Tan said at a media briefing on Friday that this was a qualitative study, where respondents were not restricted by closed-ended questions. It meant that they had to be willing to commit 30 to 40 minutes to doing the survey questionnaire.

Prof Tan, who is also assistant dean of research at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said the questions included how Covid-19 measures had affected respondents' routine, health and relationships; what their key difficulties of living with Covid-19 had been; and what the silver lining of living with the pandemic had been.

The team also interviewed 14 staff of community service providers such as the Silver Generation Office – the outreach arm of the Agency for Integrated Care.

Madam Lam Chwee Gek, 65, a volunteer turned full-time digital ambassador with the SG Digital Office, told *The Straits Times* that she spent many months convincing her husband Ng Say Seong, 66, to learn to use digital tools.

Mr Ng said he has friends who refused to pick up digital skills, but that such skills have proved to be very important and helpful. He also said he and his wife could spend more time and have dinner with their adult children who worked from home during the pandemic.

Dr Kwek Liling, a senior resident physician at NUH's surgery department, who was part of the research team and is a grassroots leader and community volunteer, said the study reassures volunteers that their time spent delivering food and asking seniors if they were okay was well spent.

Said Prof Tan: "I think we undervalue the contributions from the Government and the community providers. We need to be ready for the next pandemic and not take this strong social fabric for granted."

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