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Headline: SMU Examines the Importance of Social Integration on the Well-being of Older Adults in Singapore during a Pandemic

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The Singapore Management University (SMU)'s Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA) published a series of research briefs that examine the importance of social integration for well-being among older adults across several contexts, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of their political participation, and finally in terms of their social networks. Older adults refer to those aged 55 to 75, a demographic in Singapore that is expanding exponentially.

The research series leverage data collected from the Singapore Life Panel (SLP), a population-representative monthly survey with a monthly response rate of about 7,500 respondents, tracking the lives of Singaporeans aged 55 to 75. The SLP is ongoing and has been running since July 2015. Several modules specifically examining the perceptions and attitudes held towards COVID-19 were fielded from April 2020 to better understand how older Singaporeans were responding to the pandemic.

In addition, a module specifically examining respondents' views on GE2020 was fielded in August 2020. Questions on social networks were fielded in August 2020 to better understand the social networks of panel respondents and its relation to their well-being.

Singaporeans have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic for close to a year. As the nation prepares to ease into the third phase of COVID-19 restrictions, it is vital to examine how older Singaporeans have responded to changes in their daily activities since the onset of COVID-19 and its accompanying restrictions and to identify vulnerable groups that have been slower to recover.

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As per the research titled "Coping in the time of COVID-19: Transitioning from the onset of COVID-19, the 'Circuit Breaker', Phase 1, and Phase 2", a third of respondents experienced financial difficulties arising from the pandemic, with the most common feedback being a need to lower one's standard of living.

For older Singaporeans who were not as digitally literate, their reliance on traditional forms of communication led them to perceive the risks associated with COVID-19 to be higher.

According to Professor Paulin Straughan, Director, ROSA, "The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the fear and anxiety of individuals towards health, livelihoods and how we go about our daily activities. As we move forward into phase 3 of Singapore's recovery, we must do all that we can to reassure older adults and not leave them behind in our transition to a new normal. This can be achieved by promoting the well-being of our seniors and sustaining their meaningful engagement in the community."

Survey findings suggest that older Singaporeans have been adjusting to living life amidst a pandemic and their well-being has been improving since the end of the circuit breaker.

However, the older groups, the less educated, those who rely on traditional forms of communication and those who do not keep informed on COVID-19 through various sources of information have been slower to adapt. Thus, to safeguard the well-being of older Singaporeans, specifically that of the former groups, the report has recommended a few measures.

Setting up a grassroots initiative to keep older Singaporeans invested and informed on the latest COVID-19 developments can help in targetting less technologically savvy older adults in community spaces to keep them updated on information on COVID-19

Creating new channels to disseminate up-to-date information on COVID-19 which would be accessible to all Singaporeans regardless of digital literacy (e.g. Via SMS and digital display panels at HDB estates) will also be helpful.

Finally, empowering seniors with digital skills will help the population in the older groups to keep themselves informed.