

# Fewer seniors satisfied with life during pandemic: SMU survey

Malavika Menon

The number of elderly residents who reported being satisfied with life dropped as the Covid-19 situation became worse in Singapore early last year, a survey found.

The findings by Singapore Management University's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (Rosa) were released yesterday.

Rosa's Singapore Life Panel, a monthly survey of Singaporeans aged 55 to 74, as well as their spouses, covered a host of areas including the impact of the pandemic on economic outcomes, the health effect of Covid-19 and the social well-being of older adults amid a changed environment.

Among the roughly 7,500 respondents, 53 per cent reported in January last year that they were satisfied with life but this figure dipped to 46 per cent in April. The share of respondents satisfied with their economic situation dropped from 41 per cent to 36 per cent in the same period.

With the end of the circuit breaker and gradual re-opening, more seniors reported being satisfied with their economic situation though the figure did not hit the pre-Covid-19 level in January last year.

On the health impact of the pandemic on seniors, the survey found a 31 per cent reduction in doctor visits from January to April last year.

The lower probability of diagnosing chronic conditions and reduced inpatient and outpatient care led to a 23 per cent fall in out-of-pocket medical spending for seniors in the same period.

Those who lived alone felt more social isolation or loneliness and hence lower levels of well-being.

Conversely, those who lived alone but engaged in more social activities or communicated more frequently with friends and loved ones digitally felt less alone and enjoyed improved well-being.

Reflecting on the findings, director of Rosa, Professor Paulin Straughan, spoke of the need for sustained efforts to help vulnerable seniors.

"In the last year, we saw a lot of outreach happening, a lot of it from volunteers who saw the gaps and stepped up to look after whoever they had sight of. We hope to see more ground-up initiatives going forward. We need to tap resources we have as residents in the community," she said.

Rosa has recommended monitoring the pandemic's long-term health effects among non-Covid-19 patients due to delayed healthcare and worsening mental health as a result of the crisis.

Another suggestion was for the medical community to prepare and promote telehealth practices on a large scale. Targeted policy interventions were also recommended to ensure the well-being of certain groups of seniors, like those living alone, due to their specific needs.

mmala@sph.com.sg

## 46%

Of seniors surveyed who were satisfied with life last April, down from 53 per cent reported in January last year.

## 36%

Of respondents who were satisfied with their economic situation last April, down from 41 per cent in January.