

Study identifies factors affecting active and productive aging among older Singaporeans

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Researchers at Duke-NUS Medical School's Centre for Aging Research and Education (CARE) conducted a longitudinal study between 2016-2017 looking at factors influencing health, well-being, activity and productivity levels in older Singaporeans. The Transitions in Health, Employment, Social Engagement, and Intergenerational Transfers in Singapore Study (THE SIGNS) was conducted in partnership with the

Ministry of Health (MOH).

"THE SIGNS study focuses on [physical health](#) and healthcare utilisation, psychological wellbeing, social networks, social participation, intergenerational transfers within the family, volunteerism, life-long learning, work and retirement. All these factors affect older Singaporeans' wellbeing, which in turn affects their ability to participate and contribute within their families, communities and the larger Singapore society as a whole," said Dr. Rahul Malhotra, Assistant Professor of Health Services and Systems Research and Head of Research at the Centre for Aging Research and Education, Duke-NUS Medical School.

The team surveyed a cohort of 4,549 community-dwelling Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 60 years and above. Key findings of the study include:

Health

- While about 62 percent of older Singaporeans rated their own health as good, very good or excellent, with a similar proportion across males and females and ethnic groups, about 38 percent rated their health as fair or poor. These individuals reported having been diagnosed with three or more chronic diseases. The most common were [high blood pressure](#), high blood cholesterol, joint pain/arthritis/rheumatism or nerve pain and diabetes. About 42 percent were pre-obese, indicating that lifestyle influences on well-being need to be examined more closely. In terms of psychological health, about 12 percent of older Singaporeans had clinically depressive symptoms, with the proportion increasing with age.
- There was significant influence of psychological health on healthcare utilisation, where lower levels of personal well-being

were associated with higher healthcare utilisation. Being lonely, on the other hand, was associated with lower levels of healthcare use.

Social

- The study found that stronger social networks were associated with a lower likelihood of depression and loneliness.
- Social engagement and participation were found to correlate with the access to services such as financial management and environmental access e.g. grocery shopping or using public transport.

Lifelong learning

- Only 13 percent of older Singaporeans took a course in the last 12 months of the survey, with major barriers cited as age, lower socioeconomic status and poor health. Women compared to men were more likely to engage in lifelong learning.

Singapore's population is aging rapidly. Recent estimates suggest that by 2030, approximately one-quarter of the population will be above the age of 65. Longevity has been increasing steadily in Singapore and with longevity it is important to understand the social, psychological and physical health aspects of older Singaporeans, in order to assess their causes and estimate how their well-being in these domains changes over time.

"This study enables us to provide [policy makers](#) with evidence on how older Singaporeans are doing on various dimensions of their lives, which impact on their active and productive engagement in the wider community and society. This baseline understanding can guide the

development of targeted policies and programmes, which seek to provide them with more opportunities to actively and productively participate and contribute to Singapore society," said Dr. Chan Wei-Ming Angelique, Associate Professor of Health Services and Systems Research and Executive Director at the Centre for aging Research and Education, Duke-NUS Medical School.

Professor Patrick Casey, Senior Vice Dean for Research at Duke-NUS Medical School, commented, "This large nationally representative study by Duke-NUS researchers provides detailed and valuable insights in areas that need to be addressed so that older Singaporeans can lead productive and active lives."

CARE is currently conducting the second wave of the study, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2019.

Provided by Duke-NUS Medical School

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