

Fourth Family Research Network (FRN) Forum: *“Effective Social Programme Evaluation”*

Friday, 26 March 2010
Auditorium, Level 1, Civil Service College



Evaluation of Work Support: Lessons from Phase I

Family Research Network Forum
26 March 2010

Irene Y.H. Ng, Alexander Lee, Ngiam Tee Liang,
Ho Kong Weng, Nesam Tharmalingan



Presentation Outline

1. Work Support Programme
2. The longitudinal programme evaluation
 - Data and instruments
 - Research design
3. Pilot study
 - Findings
 - Implications for longitudinal study
4. Looking ahead



Work Support

Started in 2006 to help recipients find employment and achieve financial independence through interim financial support and other assistance

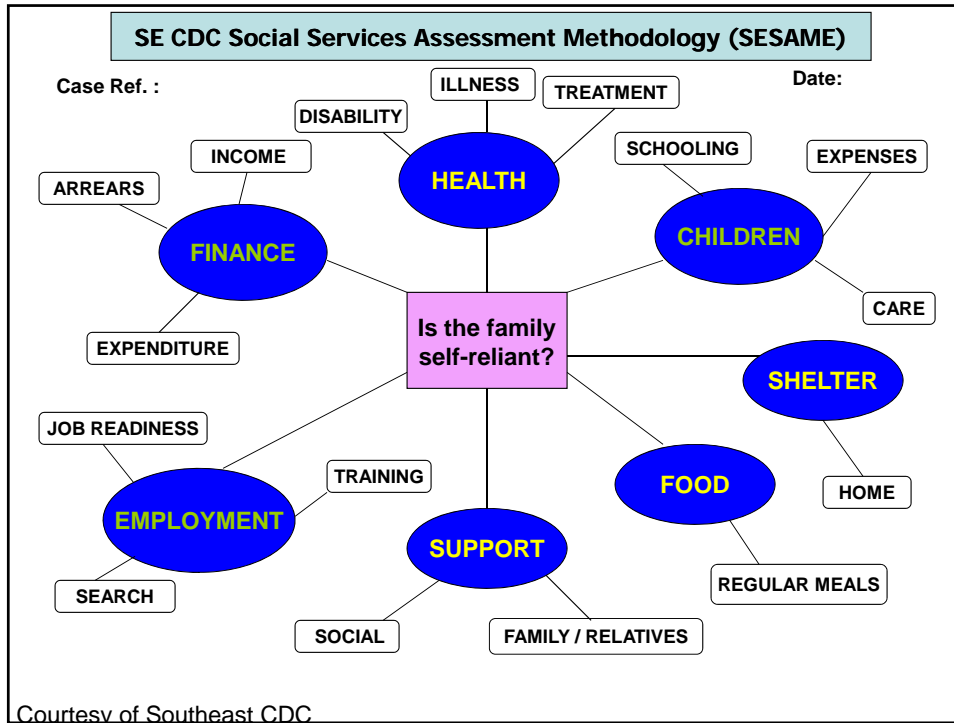
Work Support Self-Reliance

For households with at least one working member

Case Management

For households with children





WS Evaluation - Aims

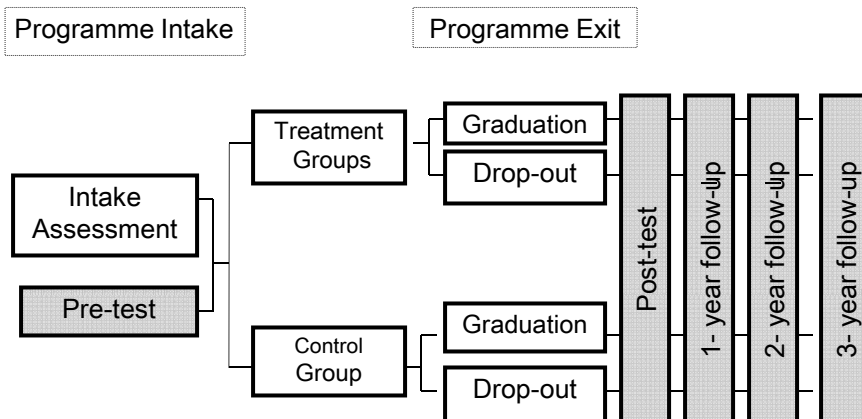
Target: WSSR families with children

1. Assess the socioeconomic status of WSSR families
2. Analyze factors influencing outcomes
3. Analyze incentives/motivations towards self-reliance
4. Understand challenges faced by different types of WSSR families

WS Evaluation - Phases

- Phase 1: July 2009-Jan 2010
 - Process evaluation
 - Pilot study
- Phase 2: 2010-2016
 - Longitudinal study of 800 respondents

Longitudinal Survey - Research design



Longitudinal Study – Main Data

1. Questionnaire survey (N=800)
 - Aim: N=300 by last survey
2. In-depth interviews (N=50)

Issues

- Non-response and attrition
- Identification of key factors to be included in study



Survey Topics

1. Employment & earnings
2. Household income & expenditure
3. Barriers to employment
 - Health & mental health
 - Criminal history
 - Children's health, education, and care giving
 - Support & network
4. Life events and outlook
5. Pre-test: History of coping/poverty
6. Post-test: WS experience



In-depth Interview Themes

1. Details of financial coping in the past
2. In-depth description of the impact of WS on the subjects' economic and social systems
3. Specific examples of how the quality of life has changed with WS
4. Stories of resilience in the face of financial hardships



Longitudinal Study –Other Data

1. Administrative records – baseline information
2. Basic tracking
 - By survey company
 - 3, 5 & 8 months after completion
 - Variables: employment, earnings, expenditure, savings, arrears
3. Staff, practitioner interviews



Longitudinal Study –Other Data

Issues

- Extracting Administrative data
- High attrition in tracking
- Policy and implementation variations through time and by CDC
- Socio-economic trends



Research Design

- Gold standard for impact evaluation: experimental design
i.e. randomly assign to treatment or control group
- What is randomization?
 - Simply a random draw, so that each applicant gets an equal chance of being selected
 - No criteria at all about who is selected
- Why randomize?
To truly separate out the programme effects from other factors.



Research Design

Example

1. More resourceful individuals are selected for the programme
=> more likely succeed
=> programme effects more than actual
2. More problematic individuals are selected for the programme
=> less likely succeed
=> programme effects less than actual



Randomisation in Work Support

- We are unable to randomly accept or reject applicants, but, we can randomly assign people to variations of the programme
- 3 groups were identified at a meeting with CDC managers on 12 June 2009 and subsequent visits to individual CDCs.



Sample Groups

- **Group 1**
Name: Base/Control Group
– No modification in assistance
- **Group 2**
Name: WS Trial Amount
– "Additional" financial assistance
- **Group 3**
Name: WS Trial Duration
– Extension of duration of assistance



Group 2

Research question:

Will larger financial aid amounts improve needy families' ability to achieve self-reliance?

Additional \$50 per dependent

- Estimated at providing two hours of tuition per month or two slices of fruit a day.



Group 3

Research question:

Will supporting needy families for a longer duration improve their ability to achieve self-reliance?

Extension of duration for 6 months for cases which have:

- graduated (completion of KPIs); and
- reached maximum assistance of two years.

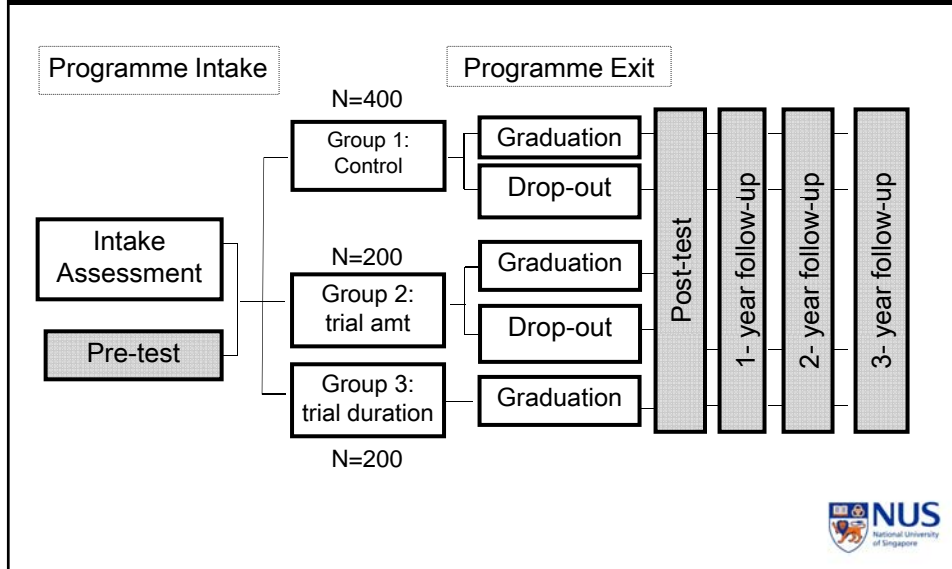


Randomization - Issues

- Sampling procedure
- Informing and following respondents
- Variation through time and by CDC



Longitudinal Survey - Research Redesign



Pilot Study

Survey: N=50

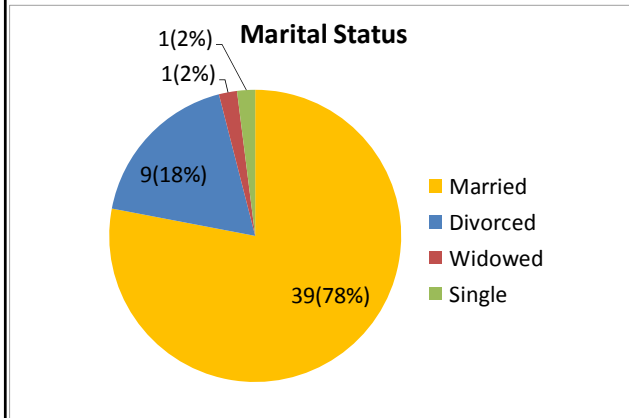
In-depth interview: N=5

Purpose:

- Test instruments/questionnaire/interview guide
- Identify issues:
Sampling->contact->interview->recording->data entry/capture->coding->analysis
- Practice

Pilot Study: Demographics

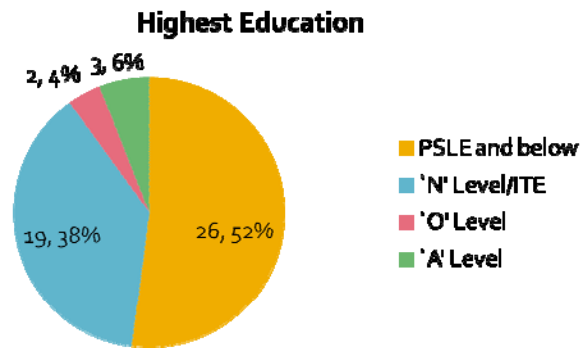
Mean household size = 4 (1-10)
 Mean number of children = 3 (0-8)



Pilot Study: Financial coping

Reasons for approaching CDC	No.	%
Owed too much utilities	27	54
Owed too much mortgage/rent arrears	22	44
Owed too much other bills	22	44
Lost job	13	26
Ways of coping in past year	No.	%
Cut down on expenses	29	58
Received/borrowed from friends and family	20	40
Managed on remaining salary	19	38
Received agency help	13	29

Pilot Study: SES



Very low education

Pilot Study: SES

	Amt	N
Salary in past month	\$815 (\$50-\$1,450)	15
Household income in past month	\$1,061 (\$20-\$2,300)	44
Per capita household income	\$304 (\$7-\$2,300)	44

- **Low response rates for employment and earnings questions**
- **Income levels below bottom 10%**
(Dept of Stats Income Trends Report 2008)

Pilot Study: Personal Barriers to Employment

	No. (%)	N
Has chronic health condition that limits work	21 (44%)	48
Generally depressed (K-6) ($\alpha=0.89$)	18 (37%)	49
Generalized anxiety disorder ($\alpha=0.72$)	23 (47%)	49
Criminal record	11 (22%)	50
Spouse with criminal record or in prison	6 (12%)	50

Pilot Study: Children-related Barriers to Employment

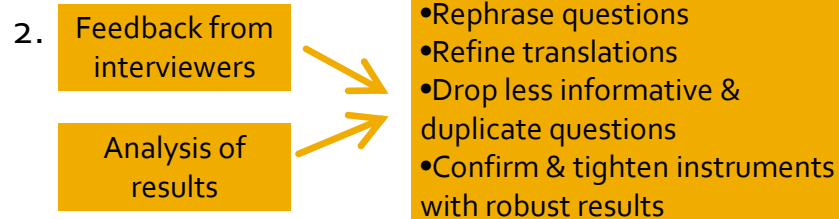
	No. (%)	N
Has a child with a physical, learning or mental health condition that limits regular activities	16 (33%)	48

Top conditions:

Asthma (8), learning/behavioural problem (4), mental retardation (3), mental/emotional illness (3)

Pilot Study: KEY INSIGHTS

1. Understand Work Support families better
 - Very disadvantaged: bottom earners, and high prevalence of barriers to employment



Looking Ahead

- Long phase of planning and process evaluation was important
 - Confidence in survey & interview guide
 - Common understanding of the research design
 - Good working relationship with MCYS & CDCs
 - Balance between research rigour and minimal implementation disruption

Looking ahead



- Nurturing a baby into a kind and helpful monster
 - Research perspective: focus on final welfare outcomes
 - Policy perspective: inform
 - Implementation perspective: facilitate

Summary

1. Prepare administrative data
2. Consider randomization
3. Collaborate
4. Focus on the essentials