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MEDIA RELEASE



Older people need \$1,379 a month for basic needs, according to study

22 May 2019 – How much money does an older person need to meet their basic needs? According to a team of researchers in Singapore, in 2018, the figure for a single person aged 65 or above, living alone, was \$1,379 a month.

The team of researchers, led by Assistant Professor Ng Kok Hoe from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (LKYSPP), conducted focus group discussions involving over 100 participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. Using a consensus-based methodology known as Minimum Income Standards (MIS), the groups came to agreement on how ordinary Singaporeans think about basic needs, and determined the household budgets necessary for older people to meet those needs.

Participants generated lists of items and services related to housing and utilities; things needed in a two-room HDB flat; personal care items and clothing; food; transport; leisure and cultural activities; and healthcare. Each item or service was only included if participants came to a consensus that it was a basic need, and could explain their reasons for its inclusion.

"This study reveals that ordinary members of society can come to a consensus about a basic standard of living in light of norms and experiences in contemporary Singapore," said Dr Ng. "Such income standards can help by translating societal values and real experiences into unambiguous and substantive benchmarks that policy can aim for."

Key findings in the report include:

1. **Participants agreed that basic needs go beyond subsistence.** They emphasised values such as quality of life, independence, autonomy and social connections
2. Based on the lists of items and services, the household budgets necessary to meet basic needs were:
 - a. **\$1,379 per month for single elderly households**
 - b. **\$2,351 per month for coupled elderly households**
 - c. **\$1,721 per month for single persons aged 55-64**

Said Associate Professor Teo You Yenn from the School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), another member of the research team and author of the best-selling "This Is What Inequality Looks Like": "To tackle inequality, it is critical to establish an agreed floor below which no one should fall. The MIS method can be usefully applied to generate societal consensus across a range of household types."

MIS research was first developed by researchers at Loughborough University's Centre for Research in Social Policy in the UK. It has since been used in the UK, Japan, South Africa, Mexico, France and Ireland.

The research team will hold a public lecture on 22 May (Friday) for the public release of the research findings. The event will include a screening of an animated video about the research, a presentation by Dr Ng, and a question and answer session with the research team, moderated by Associate Professor Kenneth Paul Tan (LKYSPP).

More details of the study can be found in the full text of our [report](#) and the accompanying [website](#) (both of which are embargoed until the public lecture).

About the research team

The team comprises:

- Assistant Professor Ng Kok Hoe, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore
- Associate Professor Teo You Yenn, Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University
- Dr Neo Yu Wei, Social Service Research Centre, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore
- Dr Ad Maulod, Center for Ageing Research and Education, Duke-NUS Medical School
- Ting Yi Ting, Social Service Research Centre, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

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