



Cause Kit

Waiting Room by Nicole Midori Woodford

What do you need to know?

The number of single-person households made up of seniors, that is those over 65, in Singapore is set to increase from 35,000 in 2012 to 83,000 in 2030.¹ This is due to an ageing population and declining birth rates. This leads to the potential of social isolation amongst the seniors, that is the state of being cut off from normal social networks.

Those at the highest risk of social isolation when living alone are low-income seniors who suffer from poor health² meaning to say, they find it difficult to carry out daily activities such as eating and showering.³ Low-income seniors also tend to have poor social support.⁴

Even if they wish to participate in social activities, their lack of mobility and physical ailments makes it harder for them to do so.

Why should you care?

In 2014, at least 1 in 2 Singaporeans over the age of 65 reported feeling lonely.⁵ These feelings of depression and loneliness are perpetuated by staying alone. Seniors living alone are twice as likely as their peers to develop depressive symptoms.⁶ In 2017, the number of seniors who took their own lives reached 129, the highest since elderly suicide tracking started in 1991.⁷

For more reclusive seniors with no close friends and family, loneliness is not just in life, but also in death. To pass on unnoticed is a terrifying concept for many seniors, as it makes them feel as if their deaths do not matter.⁸ For individuals who are superstitious, it is believed that without having final rites, they may become 'wandering souls' – a worrying prospect.⁹ However, with no one to watch out for them and foot the cost of their funerals, seniors with no kith or kin may not get the proper and dignified funeral send-off they desire.

¹ Toh, Yong Chuan (2018, Mar 20) [Parliament: Seniors and people with disabilities to get more protection under proposed law](#)

² Ng, Jing Yng (2014, Apr 1) [Stronger social support 'needed to boost health of lower-income elderly'](#)

³ Choo, Felicia. (2019, May 7) [Over-60s suffering more with chronic diseases than a decade ago: Study](#)

⁴ Ng, Jing Yng. Ibid.

⁵ Tai, Janice. (2015, Dec 17) [More seniors in Singapore taking own lives](#)

⁶ Paulo, Derrick. (2018, Apr 22) [Like a knife poking my heart](#)

⁷ Aqil, Haziq Mahmud. (2018, Jul 30) [Number of elderly suicides at all-time high: SOS](#)

⁸ Tai, Janice. (2017, Dec 10) [Volunteers who ensure no one dies alone.](#)

⁹ Siau, Ming En. (2016, Dec 18) [More needy seniors signing up for free funeral services.](#)

Where is help available?

There are several organisations which help to arrange free funeral services for the poor and destitute seniors. This includes Nam Hong Welfare Service Society, as well as the Love and Unity Volunteer Establishment. These organisations take charge of collecting the body, cremation, scattering ashes as well as appropriate religious prayers and rituals.

To meet the psychological needs of the elderly, Tsao Foundation's Hua Mei Mobile Clinic provides psycho-emotional therapy and counselling for seniors at end-of-life. The Life Book series aims to encourage more conversation about end-of-life matters by providing adequate and easily accessible information for public reference, so that caregivers and elderly alike are able to discuss the topic of death more openly.

How can you help?

As a donor

Donate to hospices such as Assisi Hospice, Dover Park Hospice or HCA Hospice Care. They provide end-of-life care that preserves the individual's dignity and quality-of-life.

Find them on giving.sg

As a volunteer

Love and Unity Volunteers Establishment (LUVe), run by Tommy Yu, conducts about 20 pro bono funerals for the destitute elderly annually. He also visits the elderly several times each week, and has done so for over 30 years.

Contact LUVe on giving.sg.

As an advocate

Raise awareness about social isolation in relation to the elderly. Host a screening of Waiting Room with your friends, colleagues or families.

Use our screening kit www.15shorts.com/learn.