

# COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## Research Highlights 'Interview'



### Self-Introduction

- Briefly introduce yourself, the department and school that you are in.

I am **Associate Professor Teo You Yenn**, Provost's Chair in Sociology at the **School of Social Sciences (SSS)**, and author of *This is What Inequality Looks Like*.

### Elaboration

- Share with us what is your research project.

For "What older people need in Singapore: A households budgets study", I worked with collaborators from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (NUS), the Social Service Research Centre (NUS), and Duke-NUS Medical School. Together we conducted focus group discussions to ascertain how ordinary Singaporeans think about what constitutes basic needs in Singapore today, and to determine the household budgets necessary to meet those needs. Using a methodology known as Minimum Income Standard (MIS), we answered the question, "How much money do older people need to achieve a basic standard of living in Singapore today?"

- What inspired you to embark on this research project?

The experience of Minimum Income Standard researchers in other societies has shown that it is possible to achieve consensus on a concrete definition of a basic standard of living, as well as a benchmark figure for determining whether households have the resources to achieve it. At a time when there is considerable discussion in Singapore surrounding needs, inequality and poverty, researchers have a valuable role to play in helping to set clear standards and benchmarks to guide and assess social support systems and policies.

- What is/are the most interesting finding(s) of this project?

We found that in 2018, a household of a single elderly person living alone required a monthly income of \$1,379 to meet a basic standard of living. The research demonstrates that ordinary members of society are able to come to consensus about what a basic standard of living in contemporary Singapore means, and that crucially, it is one that reflects values of dignity, respect, social belonging and choice.

- **How do you think your research can impact society?**

Findings about the income needed for a basic standard of living have significant implications for policies regarding wages and government transfers. Detailed breakdowns of existing sources of household income should be examined to understand how best to support households to obtain the resources needed to meet their needs. For instance, can we continue to rely on family transfers in a time of demographic change? Should the Progressive Wage Model or other policies be adjusted in light of these findings? In some places, such findings have formed the basis for campaigns for employers to commit to voluntarily pay living wages.

Research on matters that concern ordinary members of society should be made accessible to the public so that people have information with which to discuss problems and potential solutions. To this end, we have made efforts to share our findings with the general public through public talks, media engagements, and at our website: <https://whatsenoughsg.wordpress.com>

### Future Plans

- **Tell us about your future research plans and if you are looking for any research collaborators!**

We are in 2019-20 carrying out further Minimum Income Standard research to determine the levels of household income required to meet basic needs for other household types, specifically households with children of different age groups. In the following years, we hope to continue to update this research. In other societies, such research is updated on an ongoing basis to ensure that the figures found through the study are current and reflect changes in modes and costs of living.

### What counts as needs?

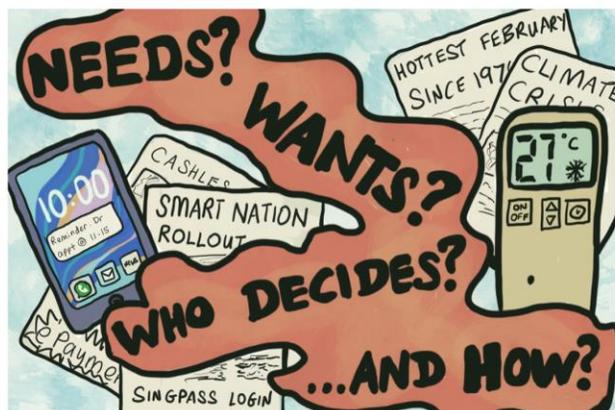


Illustration by [Jolene Tan](#)

What older people need in Singapore: A households budgets study (May 2019)



Link to video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olz2BVSUFDo>