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Why did Covid-19 not Further Harm the Mental Health of Poor Mothers in Singapore?

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Why did Covid-19 not Further Harm the Mental Health of Poor Mothers in Singapore?

(Waves 2 and 3 survey data + qualitative observational data)



- Unplanned opportunities brought about by onset of Covid-19 in between waves 2 and 3 survey.
- Economic impact of circuit breaker – GDP shrank by 2.2% in May 2020.
- Post-hoc analysis on impact of Covid on low-income mothers' jobs, incomes, parenting stress, financial and emotional stress as well as internal and external resilience factors.

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Mixed Methods

- Focused Group (n=39) qualitative observational data from survey interviewers comparing observations **across 3 waves** surveying the **same participating mother-child dyads**.
- Post-hoc statistical analysis and comparison of survey results between:
 - Wave 2 (pre-Covid-19 infection height)
 - Wave 3 (post circuit breaker)

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Financial Stress

Qualitative findings

Four-fifth of interviewers reported that mothers did not show extreme financial stress.

"The mothers had shared how Covid-19 hit their family finances but were not disproportionately distressed: "there is a trend that many found the stress is heavier. But I did not see any exhibiting great distress" (Interviewer-30).

Statistical results

IV: own job loss, loss of income earners, permanency of job, marital status; DV: Depression and anxiety of mothers (DASS)

No significant differences in wave 3 depression or anxiety of mothers who experienced loss of income or their own jobs between wave 2 and 3. However:

Permanency of jobs at wave 3 had a significant effect on mother's depression.

Unmarried mothers showed significant higher level of depression and anxiety when they loss income earners

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Emotional Stress

Qualitative results

- Only 2 interviewers observed intense emotional stress in mothers that stemmed from financial stress.
- A related emotional stress is having to manage HBL as they felt inadequate to be their children's tutors. And some only had one laptop to share among all the children.
- Emotionally isolated due to circuit breaker that is mothers could not tap on their usual social support network.

Statistical results

Paired sample t-test on 2 scales across wave 2 and 3 surveys no significant difference:

Parenting Sense of Competence (PSOC) ($t(461) = 1.956, p = .051$)

Child Total Behaviour Problems (CBCL) ($t(461) = -0.509, p = .611$)

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Qualitative findings

- 7 survey interviewers reported that they were surprised to see that the mothers maintained a cheerful and positive attitude:

“the facial expressions and the voice tone [not different from previous waves].” (I-26).

- Utilized government Covid Payouts
- Found another job
- Started homebased business

Statistical results

Paired sample t-tests revealed no significant differences in depression and anxiety in wave 2 and 3.

Further investigation on whether the effect of mother's own job loss or loss of income earner on depression and anxiety could be moderated by mothers' hope:

- When mother's hope was high there were no significant differences in depression scores.
- When mother's hope was low, loss of income earners was associated with a significant increase in anxiety.

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Resilience and Strategies in Coping with Stress

Note: hope is a sign of resilience and strength of these low-income mothers in not giving up, maintaining a positive attitude, it protected them from severe depression in the face of financial and emotional stress brought about by onset of Covid-19.

job loss on mothers' hope. st their job sion.

significant the effect of loss of income earners from wave 2 to wave 3 on mothers' anxiety scores at wave 3 was significantly moderated mother's hope at wave 3.

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Key Insights

- Government Covid-19 payout were cited by mothers as an important resource that prevented them from plunging into a state of crisis.
- Covid-19 payout could have reduced the sense of financial hardship experienced by low-income mothers
- The ease in accessing to the Covid-19 payouts added a layer of protection to the low-income mothers who are accustomed to coping with chronic financial stress.

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Key Policy Implications

- We posit that the external resilience of Singapore's strong fiscal capacity and national reserve that afforded the Covid-19 payouts policy which facilitated the internal resilience (hope) of low-income families.
- The administration of the schemes facilitated access by those from lower income groups. The poor mothers in this study did not have difficulty tapping into these funds. The potential physical barriers and stigma in applying for the payouts were minimized.