

MOE to raise spending to \$457m over next five years to boost social science and humanities research



Education Minister Chan Chun Sing announced the increase in spending at the Singaporean Researchers Global Summit on Sept 21, 2021. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR



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SINGAPORE - A total of \$457 million has been set aside to strengthen social science and humanities research in Singapore over the next five years.

This is around a 30 per cent increase from the \$350 million that was previously set aside from FY2015 to FY2020 to support key initiatives launched by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).

Education Minister Chan Chun Sing, in announcing the increase in spending on Tuesday (Sept 21), said it will help to boost support for young Singaporean researchers with promising careers and efforts to build a vibrant social science and humanities research ecosystem in Singapore.

He was speaking on the second day of the Singaporean Researchers Global Summit held at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

From 2016 to 2020, the SSRC awarded funding to a total of 37 projects under the Social Science Research Thematic Grant, spanning a variety of topics that are salient to Singapore's socioeconomic challenges.

These include projects which studied raising productivity levels in the service sector, understanding how low-income families adapt to their environments and fostering harmonious inter-group relations in early childhood.

Mr Chan said: "The objective is to cultivate interdisciplinary research... The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the importance (of this). While a biomedical scientist can sequence the virus and develop vaccines, we need the behavioural scientists to help us better understand the science behind the impact of Covid-19 on our well-being."

He cited how Dr Anne Rifkin-Graboi, senior lecturer (research scientist) at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in NTU, used her training in behavioural neuroscience to draw on existing data to examine the impact of Covid-19-related stress on early childhood development and family functioning in a project that she led.

Her project was awarded the Social Science Research Thematic Grant in 2020. It began on Aug 31 and will span three years.

Dr Rifkin-Graboi, who is also head of infancy and early childhood research at the Office of Education Research in NIE, told The Straits Times that previous research had shown that stress during the mother's antenatal or early postnatal period could possibly impact the child's behaviour, such as in forming friendships and in aspects of cognitive development. This includes the ability to plan, organise and inhibit information.

She said: "However, we really don't know what the specific outcomes will be in Singapore, though we are hypothesising that the impact may be different depending on the degree of additional stress families have experienced in relation to the pandemic.

"(Other factors include) pre-existing risks and resilience factors, and the ages of the children during... the peak periods of restriction on activities and social gatherings."

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Mr Chan also announced a new SSRC graduate research fellowship targeted at Singaporeans pursuing their PhDs or post-doctorate stints overseas.

"This initiative offers a boost to those Singaporeans who have made the move to embark on a research career on their own, and are interested in working with established researchers in Singapore," he said.

The fellowship will provide a grant of up to \$10,000 for PhD students, and \$20,000 for post-doctorate fellows.

Applications for the scheme will open next year.

Prospective applicants may refer to the NTU, National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Technology and Design webpages for more information.

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