

# Elderly more generous with strangers: NUS study

**Lim Min Zhang**

The elderly donate more to strangers than younger adults do, even when such generosity is unlikely to be reciprocated, a recent study has found.

But such easy trust could also work against them, warn welfare organisations.

The study, conducted by a team from the psychology department at the National University of Singapore (NUS), showed that both younger and older adults are equally generous to people who are close to them, such as family members and close friends. However, senior citizens are more generous to those who are more socially distant, such as complete strangers.

Assistant Professor Yu Rongjun, who led the study, said that greater generosity was possibly observed among senior citizens because as people age, “their values shift away from purely personal interests to more enduring sources of meaning found in their communities”.

The study, conducted from March last year to January, involved

78 adults. The average age of half the group was 70, while the other half’s was 23. To measure generosity, participants were asked to complete 72 scenarios in which they were given a hypothetical sum of money and had to decide how much they would be willing to share.

On average, the older group gave about two times as much to strangers as the younger group.

The seniors’ level of generosity did not decrease with social distance as quickly as that of the younger adults. The elderly were also more likely to share resources with strangers even when the act

## OUTLOOK ON LIFE

**I think my generation is more caring because our needs are simple; we have seen the world and do not crave for much.**



**RETIRED MANAGER MICHAEL WONG, 78**

was unlikely to be reciprocated.

Retiree Michael Wong, 78, a former human resource manager at a sports club, said: “I think my generation is more caring because our needs are simple; we have seen the world and do not crave for much.”

Mr Wong estimates that he donates between \$100 and \$120 a month to charity, including \$30 to the National Kidney Foundation.

Since older people trust strangers more easily, they might be more susceptible to scams.

Ms Lim Sia Hoe, 58, executive director of Centre For Seniors, said: “This highlights the risks of the elderly unwittingly trusting someone who appeals to their emotional needs, especially if the person happens to be in desperate personal circumstances, such as social isolation and cognitive impairment, or is undergoing bereavement.”

However, Prof Yu added: “Providing older adults with more opportunities to help others is not only beneficial to our society, but it might also be a boon to the well-being of older adults themselves.”

mzlim@sph.com.sg