

Many social workers unclear about social spending, poll finds

Jose Hong

In a survey by volunteer group SW101, a third of 242 social workers polled said they have no idea how much the Government spends tackling poverty but half believed government programmes are helping poor people.

Those polled included social workers, researchers and academics on the front line of issues facing low-income individuals.

The survey aimed to study how social workers viewed poverty; the level of poverty in Singapore; what causes it; and what they thought about government policies to tackle the issue.

SW101, which focuses on issues facing low-income individuals, had conducted a separate point-in-time survey on the issue of homelessness with volunteer welfare organisation Montfort Care.

The Straits Times reported those results yesterday.

Assistant Professor Ng Kok Hoe from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, who was part of both research efforts, said the results released yesterday provided a starting point for educating social workers.

Other results show that 57 per cent are willing to pay more in taxes to fund more government spending to help the poor.

A similar figure also thought that government programmes to improve the conditions of poor people are “generally making things better”.

Social workers tell *The Sunday Times* they are as much to blame for the lack of awareness of government spending on poverty-related issues.

But Mr Tan Kwan Boon, 25, said that the authorities do not publish enough figures on social spending.

Ms Bavani Pillai, 31, thought enough was going to social spending but she wished it could be tweaked to be less focused on means-testing.

“I was quite surprised that one-third don’t know, because we are part of the system,” she said. However, she added that there are also challenges when trying to get a clear response from the authorities.

Prof Ng said the data is out there.

But he added: “I’m a researcher so I can really dig for information. Still, it could help to make that information more easily accessible.”

He said issues such as poverty and social policy should be given greater emphasis in education.

“There must also be platforms beyond organisations where social workers can speak with other social workers about these issues,” he said.

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