

Singaporeans have become less happy over past decade, survey finds

Those with balanced approach to life were the most satisfied among the respondents

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Singaporeans have become less happy over the past decade, but those who embrace family and traditions, care about society and the environment, and have some money and social status – without over-emphasising any one area – were generally more satisfied with life, a survey found.

The 2022 Quality of Life Survey also found that people who prioritise material possessions and the finer things in life were the most unhappy, despite being better off financially.

The latest edition of the survey, which has been conducted roughly every five years since 1996, polled 1,905 Singaporeans aged 21 and older from June to July 2022. Respondents were asked to evaluate their quality of life in areas such as relationships and health, and how often they felt they were enjoying life, among other things.

The survey's findings were presented on Jan 11 by academics from the National University of Singapore Business School – Associate Professor Tambyah Siok Kuan, honorary fellow Tan Soo Jituan and PhD candidate Yuen Wei Lun – in a book.

The researchers found that those who took a balanced approach to life – perceiving family values, sustainability, traditionalism and materialism as equally important – were the most satisfied. This group made up 30 per cent of respondents.

Next were those with a pro-social orientation, who focus on family, others and the environment, and eschew materialism. They made up nearly one-fifth of respondents.

They were followed by people who prioritised family values and traditions – such as religion and conservative values – but placed less emphasis on sustainability. They comprised about a third of those surveyed.

The group that was least satisfied with life comprised those whose values emphasised materialism and placed the lowest importance on sustainability and traditionalism. They made up 17 per cent of respondents.

The survey also found a decline in self-reported well-being among Singaporeans overall and across all 15 life domains measured, which include relationships, health, standard of living and household income. Scores had also fallen between 2011 and 2016.

The domains people were most satisfied with were their relationships with their children, parents and siblings, while they were least satisfied with their household income. This was consistent across the past three surveys.

As with earlier surveys, men, those who are married, and those with higher education and income tended to have greater levels of happiness.

There was also a dip in people's satisfaction with their democratic rights from 2011 to 2022, which had a negative impact on their well-being.

Among the six rights measured, people were most satisfied with the right to vote and least satisfied with the right to criticise the Government. The other four rights measured were the right to participate in any kind of organisation, gather and demonstrate, be informed about the work and functions of government, and freedom of speech.

At a media briefing on the findings, the researchers said there was a silver lining despite the gloomy picture: Singaporeans were generally satisfied with their lives, and felt they had the important things in life.

Singapore also continues to rank fairly well in the annual World Happiness Report, and was the 25th happiest country in 2023.

The findings also showed that those who help and empathise with

strong family relationships.

While the results were discouraging, she noted that the 2022 survey had been done during the Covid-19 pandemic, and also amid geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainties.

Bright spots, such as people's satisfaction with their familial relationships and happiness derived from pro-social behaviours, underscore the importance of a strong social and family fabric in building a cohesive, caring and inclusive country, she said.

"Singaporeans can also nurture and integrate the right mix of val-



The 2022 Quality of Life Survey also found that people who prioritise material possessions and the finer things in life were the most unhappy, despite being better off financially.
ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

ues, trust, openness and democratic processes that will provide a common ground for making Singapore a happy and fulfilled society."

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NURTURING A HAPPY SOCIETY

Singaporeans can also nurture and integrate the right mix of values, trust, openness and democratic processes that will provide a common ground for making Singapore a happy and fulfilled society.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR TAMBYAH SIOK KUAN, an academic from the National University of Singapore Business School.