

**IPS Working Papers No. 22:  
Results from the Perception and Attitudes towards  
Ageing Seniors Survey**

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With increased longevity and better health, the third age provides great opportunities and challenges for both individuals and society. This working paper, which I co-authored with Associate Professor Paulin Straughan from the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, was based on a survey commissioned by the Council for Third Age. Over 2,000 Singapore residents between 50 to 74 years were surveyed. The households chosen to be part of this study were randomly selected from the full database of Singapore households although the survey did not include those who lived in one- or two-room HDB rental flats.

The results of the survey indicate that on the whole the senior population is positive about the prospect of ageing. About 80% of the respondents were confident that their needs would be met as they aged. Based on comparisons with a well-established indicator for quality of life among older persons, our Singapore respondents had similar scores as their Western European counterparts. Age discrimination was also relatively low with only a small proportion reporting that they had been subjected to age discrimination or prejudice, although about 20% of the respondents had heard about someone else who had encountered such negative experiences.

Many of those surveyed embraced the benefits of lifelong learning and believed that senior employability was a good way to stay financially independent, socially connected and have a sense of self-worth. They also had ample people in their social networks to support them. Few reported feeling socially isolated.

While positive attitudes are often an important predictor of behaviour, their correlation is still small. For instance, although many seniors in our study indicated that there were many benefits to lifelong learning, participation rates in lifelong learning platforms were low. Perhaps motivation to engage in such positively regarded engagements was not strong enough to foster behaviour. There could also be barriers to seniors accomplishing what they believe as beneficial. For instance, many older persons cited the lack of time or household responsibilities as impediments to being able to pursue lifelong learning. There was also a portion that did not think that opportunities were as accessible as they wanted them to be.

The study did not focus on those who lived in one- or two-room HDB rental apartments. As a proportion of the overall population of seniors, less than 10% of seniors live in such housing

with even fewer expected to do so in the future as Singapore's relatively more self-sufficient baby-boomers hit the third age. One can expect that fewer among this group would enjoy such quality of life or optimism. In fact the current survey showed a positive relationship between those who have less health, mobility and finances and lower levels of quality of life. Those with less education and income tended to also be less positive about many aspects commonly associated with successful ageing. One clear challenge in the years to come is to see how quality of life and enablers of successful ageing can be realised even for those who are from the bottom 10% of the population.

The study does reveal that various national programmes to foster successful ageing among Singaporeans resonate with the population. However, there are significant barriers to ensuring that most seniors come on board to participate in these possibilities. Many enablers of successful ageing involve habits that start early — interest in lifelong learning, cultivating good social relationships and participation in the community and groups beyond one's family or relatives. This requires more among the population to make investment choices earlier, to realise the full benefits of these during their third age.

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