

## Singaporeans list family, friendship as top values in society: Survey

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Family, friendship and compassion are among the top values that Singaporeans feel best describe themselves.

However, many described their society as materialistic, self-centered, "kiasi" and "kiasu" - colloquial phrases referring to timidity and the fear of losing out.

This emerged on Thursday (Jul 23) from a survey of 2,000 Singapore residents, including citizens and permanent residents.

The National Values Assessment, conducted between March and June, looked at values and behaviour that respondents feel best describe themselves. They were also asked their perception of Singapore society and their workplaces, and what they desire them to be.

Respondents said their desired Singapore society would be defined by values like affordable housing, effective healthcare, caring for the disadvantaged and the environment.

The survey aims to get preliminary insights into what matters to Singapore residents, and to generate a meaningful discussion about the society and workplace environment they desire.

The survey was conducted by aAdvantage Consulting Group and Barrett Values Centre. Its results were announced during a discussion on Thursday, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies. It involved academics, professionals from the public and private sectors, as well as non-Government organisations.

### **NEED TO REIGNITE SENSE OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY: RESEARCHER**

"We have left the idea of community and family so far behind, and focused much more on what policy can do, laws can do, and what we have to earn in order to survive. So you have to re-ignite that sense of family and community, which people want to express more of," said Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

"The second point is to create contexts, environments where employers live by those values, actually allow for more platforms, whether it is the way they structure their canteen, whether they structure their rest places, structure their working hours, to express more of that concern in a family, community way, than just this is the workplace and here are the laws," she added.

One of the session participants was Mr Lim Siong Guan, chairman of Honour (Singapore), a charity that seeks to promote the culture of honour and honouring in Singapore. He felt that some of the ills listed in current culture, particularly "kiasu", competitive and self-centred, are a case of "meritocracy gone wrong". He said that if individuals just look after their own interests, it will result in people having a disdain for others and a sense of entitlement.

This is the second time the survey is being done. In the first survey, done in 2012, elitism and deteriorating values were listed as common traits in society. But this time, these traits were not among the top 10 - an indication of positive change.

For the 2015 survey, respondents also highlighted education opportunities and effective healthcare as among the things that they value in Singapore. These were not among the top 10 in the 2012 survey.

Said Dr Koh: "I think it is clear that there have been many policy shifts and many new policy initiatives to deal with some of the concerns of Singaporeans over the past few years. So when you look at the changes, I think some of the highlights are about educational opportunities, about affordable healthcare, and you will recognise that there are policies that have been implemented to address these.

"For education, you see that the Government has actually created more sports in tertiary institutions for Singaporeans. You see that there's the announcement of SkillsFuture, there is an improvement of vocational training and education, so that Singaporeans feel that vocational (training) is a track to advance their own life goals."

### **RESPECT, RECOGNITION DESIRED IN THE WORKPLACE**

The survey also sought people's views of their workplaces. The respondents believe their employers are focused on building high performance systems and processes. On the other hand, they also used terms like "cost reduction" and "long hours" to describe their workplaces.

As for what workers hope to see, they listed values like "respect" and "employee recognition". Mr Vincent Ho, director of Advantage Consulting Group, said: "From there you have gaps identified, because you have (what is) desired and (what is) current. If that area becomes an area ... of priority, then perhaps the organisation can spend time in terms of how they can engage their employees, different pockets of the employees to look at these areas."

It is hoped this will help people take the first step towards change, to start conversations - whether it is in the Government, among bosses or friends - on how to create a better society and a more productive workplace.