

## Majority of elderly Singaporeans hope to continue working after retirement: IPS report

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Most elderly people in Singapore are keen to continue working after retirement, according to an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) report on a survey commissioned by the Council for Third Age. It covered more than 2,000 people between the ages of 50 and 74.

The survey, released on Wednesday (Oct 15), found that 90 per cent of respondents felt that working after retirement is a good way to stay financially independent, stay connected with society and offers the elderly a sense of self-worth.

But while the outlook on working after retirement was positive, it was a different story when it came to actually being in a job.

Only 53 per cent of respondents said there were sufficient job opportunities for seniors in the current job market. Nearly half (48 per cent) said there were no suitable jobs that could match their qualifications and experience.

The survey noted an overwhelming perception - more than 60 per cent of respondents - that potential employers prefer to hire younger workers. About a third also said they felt their lack of job hunting skills was a barrier to continued employment.

### **'COMPLEX' ISSUE OF EMPLOYABILITY**

The issue of employability is a complex one for seniors, the report's researchers said. "Increasing optimism for employability has to involve both greater buy-in from employers and also more realistic expectations by seniors about work and the need for retraining," the report said. "Redesigning work to make it more manageable and flexible is a step in the right direction since it allows seniors to participate in the workforce, though hopefully at a pace they are comfortable with."

IPS' senior research fellow, Dr Mathew Mathews, elaborated: "It is kind of complicated. On the one hand, it is about new ways of doing work, redesigning work, such that you are able to not demand the same kind of hours and allow a certain amount of flexibility. Because we do recognise that people at the older stage may not want to work the same kind of level, they want to pursue other activities as well. So some redesign of work would be very crucial."

Employers must also be able to see that older workers can make valuable contributions, noted Dr Mathews. "There is always that perception that jobs which are meant for seniors are fairly menial - these are not the kind of jobs which can tap on to the pre-existing skills that seniors have. Seniors have a lot of experience and jobs need to take that into consideration."

Deputy CEO of the Employment & Employability Institute (e2i) Ms Ang Li May said that when the institute works with employers, it tells them to look at mature workers as people with years of experience who can contribute to the organisation.

She added: "Internally, we also work with training providers to design programmes to guide HR and line managers on how to recruit based on competencies. So from that aspect, when employers are aware of how they can recruit based on competencies and when we refer people who are competent to the employers, hopefully there will be a job match."

### ***LIFELONG LEARNING***

The study found that most of the seniors in Singapore have a positive attitude towards lifelong learning. Nearly 90 per cent said it helps them to stay relevant, while more than 60 per cent said it can help them improve their skills to get ahead in their careers.

However, only 58 per cent of respondents had knowledge of Continuing Education and Training courses offered in places accessible to them, and just 17 per cent had enquired about a course that could help them stay employed.

Respondents also said they preferred a less formal classroom setting for learning. With the seniors' different learning needs and varied preferences for learning, the report's researchers recommended options such as informal classrooms and courses guided by seniors.

Dr Mathews said: "The issue is if I go for lifelong learning and it does not translate to a job, then what is the point? But if people can begin to see that lifelong learning is valuable in itself, you grow as a person, there is information and skills you develop.

"That itself is very meaningful, the social connections you can make in that process. If more are able to see that, then the interest in being part of lifelong learning will increase."

### ***TEACHING SENIORS***

Training providers said teaching seniors is a totally different ball game. Their needs are different from younger learners. Some require basic coaching in the area of resume writing and interviewing skills. Courses also need to be re-designed to include less formal classroom settings, and more hands-on learning, or even seniors teaching other seniors.

"Mature workers with deep passion and convictions gravitate to what they feel deeply about, associate with peers they can identify with and feel validated and affirmed when they are part of the teaching as much as being a learner themselves," said Mr David Kwee, CEO of Training Vision Institute, which conducts courses for adult learners.

He added: "Setting up a structure, a process, a set of activities to enable them to learn, to share and to co-create value through learning for living - this makes them and the world they live in a richer, better and more meaningful place."