

Study Shows One in 10 S'porean Women Willing to do Full-time NS

One in 10 Singaporean women are willing to volunteer for a two-year stint in full-time National Service (NS), according to a recent survey by the Institute of Policy Studies to gauge public attitudes toward NS.

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SINGAPORE: One in 10 Singaporean women are willing to volunteer for a two-year stint in full-time National Service (NS), according to a recent survey by the Institute of Policy Studies to gauge public attitudes toward NS.

The study, which covered 1,251 Singaporeans, also showed that Singaporeans see NS as fulfilling a social mission beyond its defence mandate.

About 80 per cent of respondents said women should be allowed to contribute to national defence as a volunteer.

Over 70 per cent of respondents said this should be in the form of service in the defence force, as a professional or helping out in NS-related events, such as the Army Open House or National Day Parade.

Less than a quarter of respondents recommended a two-year full-time NS option for women.

Among the women who said yes to that, 9.3 per cent of them said they will take up full-time NS.

Some respondents said this could be because most women have not had any real experience of military service.

The study's principle investigator said the figure is relatively sizeable.

Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: "Based on the 9.3 per cent figure, I won't expect all of them to eventually sign up. I personally think that it would be a good chance where we have 500 to 800 women who sign up for National Service on a voluntary basis. This is about two battalion size of infantry soldiers."

On the flip side, Dr Leong said Singaporeans will need to think about the psychological impact of having women serving in the military in the event of a war and the risks that come with it.

The study also showed that there was strong support for National Service.

Singaporeans surveyed believed NS serves different aims such as to instil discipline and value among the young; for national defence; and to transform boys into men.

All male Singaporeans have to be conscripted after the age of 18.

Some Singaporeans have also raised concerns over the two-year duration of NS.

Eighty-four per cent of the respondents said the duration is "just right". This sentiment cuts across socio-economic class. Fifteen per cent of the respondents think that NS is too long.

Younger Singaporeans tend to have a different perception of NS compared to their older counterparts.

While both groups share similar attitudes over issues like NS being a rite of passage for a Singaporean man and NS being important to nation building, older NSmen are more likely to think that NS is necessary for the defence and survival of Singapore, and believe that their contributions are valued.

The study pointed to several factors that may be helpful in motivating servicemen.

The top three are: Matching of servicemen's personal skills and abilities to NS vocations, public recognition for servicemen's contributions, and more recognition for servicemen at certain stages of their lives, such as when they're married, or when they have a child.

Dr Leong said: "I think the results of the findings are very heartening to see that there's strong public support for National Service as an institution.

"I suppose what the policy makers can consider is how to harness the interest of Singaporeans -- women (and) the first generation PRs (Permanent Residents) -- to contribute to defence so that from the NSmen's point of view, they are not going through this journey alone and that the whole Singapore is behind them."

About two-thirds of respondents also said that first-generation PRs, who are administratively exempted from NS, should contribute to defence as volunteers.