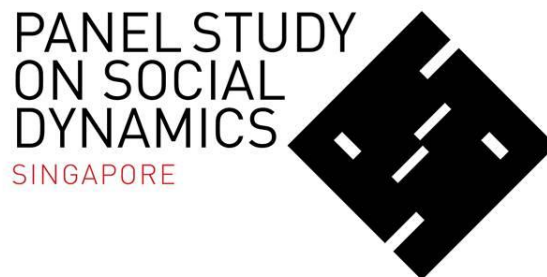


## The Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics – Wave 1

By Eugene Teng  
*IPS Research Analyst*

SINCE 2015, the IPS Social Lab has been conducting the [Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics](#), a longitudinal study on family resilience, and social values and attitudes in the country. It tracks a panel of 5,000 households, representative of Singapore’s population, over multiple years. We have collected three waves of data so far, and will soon embark on the fourth wave of the study.



### Challenges Faced

A study of this scale is not without its challenges. An initial hurdle was achieving a sizeable response rate in the first wave. Door-to-door interviewers are often hard-pressed to convince residents to answer a one-off, 15-minute survey, what more a survey that can take over an hour and requires a long-term annual commitment. Nevertheless, the doggedness of our interviewers yielded us a healthy 72 per cent response rate for the first wave.

The next difficulty is in retaining as much of the panel as possible year-on-year, as every drop-out affects the integrity of the sample. In light of this, Social Lab makes panel engagement a priority. For example, in Wave 1 we invited panel members to submit photographs of their idea of “home”. The best 12 were then collated into a calendar, which was sent to each participating household. We also made significant efforts towards interviewer recruitment and training, knowing that rapport between interviewer and

respondent is very important. Fortunately, our efforts bore fruit — we achieved a retention rate of over 90 per cent in Waves 2 and 3.

### **Wave 1 Findings**

Our Wave 1 data reveal that most Singaporean families were financially stable, with three-quarters reporting enough or more than enough income for monthly expenses. In case of an emergency, 70 per cent had enough funds to last three months. As reported by the heads of households, families here were generally satisfied with their family life in the household (86 per cent), their household's overall quality of life (83 per cent), and their household's current achievements (79 per cent).

However, a sizeable minority faced financial difficulties, and more attention needs to be paid to them to see how they can be supported. While the majority of households had income adequacy, 30 per cent did not have enough funds to last three months in case of an emergency. About a quarter of our panel said that their household income was insufficient for monthly expenses, or that it varied from month to month.

Interestingly, of the roughly one-fifth of respondents who received financial support, most got it from family members and relatives — only 30 per cent took financial aid from the government; even fewer received funds from charitable organisations. This finding alludes to the strength and primacy of familial bonds in weathering financial difficulties. The role of the government and other organisations thus appears to be relatively small. Whether this is due to needy families having their requests rejected or simply not reaching out for help is a question for further research.

### **Looking Ahead**

The data collected in the first wave of the study serve as a baseline indication of the state of Singapore families. As we survey these same households in the following waves, we will be able to see how their household satisfaction, financial situation, and societal values and attitudes change over time, and determine the factors behind these changes.

The Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics is timely as the country sails into uncharted waters. In the event of an economic downturn, how would families' financial resilience be affected, especially among those who are already struggling? How will they cope with economic disruption? Furthermore, 60 per cent of our sample live in couple-based homes with children, but this is likely to decline as the number of couple-based families with no children, families led by single parents, and those living alone increase. The effects of this demographic shift remain to be seen.

The longitudinal nature of the study is thus of unique value to policymakers. Nation-wide panel studies in other developed countries, from which this study takes inspiration, have helped to inform policies on various issues — social mobility, income and employment dynamics, and voting behaviour, to name a few. Findings from such studies have allowed policymakers to trace long-term outcomes to past events, and project future possibilities by observing current trends. It is our aim for the Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics to serve a similar function in Singapore.

*Eugene Teng is a Research Analyst at IPS Social Lab. The findings from the Wave 1 of the Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics are available [here](#) in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. More information about the study is available [here](#).*

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*If you have comments or feedback, please email [ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg](mailto:ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg)*



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