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PANEL STUDY ON SOCIAL DYNAMICS SINGAPORE

Study on Family Relationships

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THE FUTURISTS

Weathering social storms in Singapore

By M NIRMALA
SENIOR WRITER

SOCIOLOGIST Tan Ern Ser has been studying Singaporeans all his life and now wants to know even more about what they think, feel and worry about of night.

He wants to understand how families in Singapore are coping with life and its stresses and how family members are communicating with one another.

He also wants to know whether Singaporeans are more optimistic about life compared to 50 years ago.

And even more than that, he is keen to know what can be done to reshape policies that can help Singaporeans meet their aspirations of wanting a bigger house, a better car or a higher degree but are finding it tough to achieve.

So he will be sending interviewers across Singapore later this year to get the answers from 5,000 families.

And then, every year, interviewers will drop in on the same families to find out how their lives have changed. They will seek updates on how families feel about their housing dreams, educational aspirations and movement up the job ladder.

"Rather than study evidence on a personal basis, we are, metaphorically speaking, hoping to build a house brick by brick. We don't want to have bricks thrown all over, so we would not be able to construct the big picture," says Associate Professor Tan.

Such a wide-ranging longitudinal study has not been done here before, and it will be valuable in tracking how resilient Singapore families are.

Resilient families have the ability to bounce back when faced with turbulent social changes and future shocks – such as a natural disaster, a medical crisis like Sars in 2003, or a terrorist attack.

Surviving these social blitzes helps families, communities and countries grow stronger. The findings of the study will provide critical insights for policymakers to assess the effectiveness of current policies and develop new ones to address long-standing problems.

Knowing what is actually happening in Singapore society will help ordinary Singaporeans too, says Prof Tan. "We will be able to help, say an anxious 50-year-old grandmother, understand why her career-driven children and school-going grandchildren don't see her as often as they used to. Or how the neighbourhood is culturally more diverse than before.

"Some of the things that are changing in long-term studies and follows in the footsteps of the United States, Britain and Taiwan.

The findings of the overseas studies have provided insights into the way families have evolved over time.

They have also enabled researchers to link long-term outcomes to past events, and infer future possibilities based on the observations of current trends.

Pioneering work on families was done by the University of Michigan in the United States. Started in 1968, the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) began with 5,000 households and now surveys more than 7,000 households. The studies have found how families have aged and changed over the years.

The findings shed light on the changing jobs Americans have held, fluctuations in income levels, the status of married couples, childbearing patterns and the educational demands of Americans.

The Social Lab invited Dr Frank Stafford, a chief researcher in the US study, to discuss with Singapore academics and civil servants the challenges faced in carrying out such long-term research.

"Singapore as a country has become more complex and has made the job of leaders tougher," says Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser (left), seen here with Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, his deputy at the Social Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies. Prof Tan will be sending interviewers across the island later this year to learn more about what Singaporeans think, feel and worry about. ST PHOTO: GEORGE DIAS

(The findings of the study) will be valuable in tracking how resilient Singapore families are. Resilient families have the ability to bounce back when faced with turbulent social changes and future shocks – such as a natural disaster, a medical crisis like Sars in 2003, or a terrorist attack.

How families cope

THE 5Mandelde study, called the Panel Study on Social Dynamics, will be a key project of the Social Lab, formed last year at the Institute of Policy Studies.

Prof Tan, 50, a well-regarded sociology lecturer and researcher at the National University of Singapore (NUS), has done comprehensive research on several social issues linked to ethnic relations and ageing, among others.

His deputy at the Social Lab is Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, 42, a statistician and a psychologist by training. He has done extensive research on migration and intercultural relations in Singapore.

They will have a team of seven researchers and administrative staff, including sociologists, psychologists and statisticians.

Dr Leong says: "To assess the risks a society is facing, we need to constantly keep tabs on the tempo and experiences of people as they go through changes."

Singapore is a new course to such long-term studies and follows in the footsteps of the United States, Britain and Taiwan.

The findings of the overseas studies have provided insights into the way families have evolved over time.

They have also enabled researchers to link long-term outcomes to past events, and infer future possibilities based on the observations of current trends.

Complex society

IN THE Singapore survey of 5,000 households, Social Lab researchers will be asking families several questions.

They will want to know the number of times family members eat together, whether they talk to each other in person or use Skype and who takes care of financial problems when they suffer a setback.

They will also ask how many hours they spend on leisure activities with the family, and for significant changes faced in the previous 12 months – who got married, divorced or died, who retired and which shift at the PILE or O levels.

"Singapore as a country has become more complex and has made the job of leaders tougher. People nowadays are less confident," says Prof Tan.

His deputy, Dr Leong, points to the angst middle-class Singaporeans feel about finding and keeping jobs. Many worry about being replaced by foreigners. Parents also worry that their children might not make it to the middle class and may slide down the social ladder.

The survey will also look at the whole spectrum of families. This includes the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues and how these affect the institution of the family.

Today's society is more diverse and pluralistic and the state has a more challenging task in balancing between competing demands and interests, says Dr Leong.

While gay groups say they lack basic equality and are being criminalised for their sexual orientation, many Singaporeans hold conservative views on homosexuality.

Politicians stepped in last month and called for tolerance of different views when some Christians joined Muslims in urging followers to wear white in protest against a gay rights rally.

The findings from the Singapore study will provide signals and leads on how some families weather social and economic storms better. These leads will help Singaporeans persist and even thrive in the midst of unforeseen problems and social disruptions.

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Since the first period a few part-time experts in Singapore involved in the study.

Tomorrow: Embrace, not fear, the high-tech future

ST OPINION ONLINE

ASSOCIATE Professor Tan Ern Ser and Dr Leong Chan-Hoong talk to Senior Writer M Nirmala about the new study on families. Watch the exclusive video interview at stinytimes.com/news/opinion

MEDIA REPORTS:

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2 November

தமிழ் முரசு
TAMIL MURASU
VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

சமூகப் போக்கைக் கண்டறிய 5,000 குடும்பங்கள் நீண்ட கால ஆய்வு

குடும்ப, சமூக குணாதிசயங்களையும் போக்கையும் கண்டறிய கிட்டத்தட்ட 5,000 குடும்பங்கள் தொடர்ந்து பல ஆண்டுகளுக்கு ஆய்வு செய்யப் படவுள்ளன.

முதல் முதலாக சிங்கப்பூரில் நடைபெறும் இத்தகைய நீண்ட கால ஆய்வு நேற்று தொடங்கியது. சிங்கப்பூர் கொள்கை ஆய்வுக் கழகம் நடத்தும் இந்த ஆய்வு குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்களின் வாழ்க்கை, அவர்களது இலக்குகள் போன்றவற்றை ஒவ்வொரு ஆண்டும் ஆய்வு செய்யும். சமூக நடத்தை குறித்த சிங்கப்பூர் குழு ஆய்வின் மூலம் சிங்கப்பூர் குடும்பங்கள் எவ்வாறு செயல் படுகின்றன? சிரமமான காலங்களைக் கடந்து செல்ல எவை உதவி புரிகின்றன? சமூக மாற்றங்களை உருவாக்கும் காரணங்கள் என்ன? போன்ற கேள்விகளுக்கு விடை காண விழைகிறது. இலக்குகள், விழுமியங்கள் குறித்த அம்சங்களிலும் ஆய்வு கவனம் செலுத்தும்.

குடும்பங்கள் ஆண்டுக்கு ஒரு முறை ஆய்வில் கலந்துகொள்ள இணக்கம் தெரிவிப்பார்கள் என நம்புவதாக ஆய்வுக் குழு தலைவரும் தேசிய பல்கலைக் கழகத்தின் இணைப் பேராசிரியருமான டான் அர்ன் செர் கூறினார்.

"பெரும்பாலான ஆய்வுகள் ஒரு முறைதான் நடத்தப்படும். ஆனால் அது ஆய்வில் கலந்துகொள்பவரின் சூழ்நிலை மற்றும் ஒரு சிறு பகுதியைத் தான் வழங்குகிறது. ஆனால் ஒரே குடும்பத்தைப் பல ஆண்டுகள் தொடர்ந்து ஆய்வு செய்வதன் மூலம் தகவல் கூடும் இன்னும் பெரிதாக வரக்கிறது," என்றார் திரு டான்.

இதன் மூலம் சமூக மாற்றம், அரசு கொள்கைகளின் செயல்திறன் போன்றவற்றை மேலும் தெளிவாக அறிய முடியும் என்றும் அவர் குறிப்பிட்டார்.

முதற்கட்ட ஆய்வு கிட்டத்தட்ட ஆறு முதல் ஒன்பது மாதங்கள் வரை நீடிக்கும் என எதிர்பார்க்கப்படுகிறது.

கிட்டத்தட்ட 50 தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட ஆய்வாளர்கள் அனைத்துத் தரப்பினரையும் பிரதிநிதிக்கும் சிங்கப்பூர், நிரந்தரவாசி குடும்பங்களை ஆய்வு செய்வார்கள். ஒற்றைப் பெற்றோர், குழந்தைகள் இல்லா தம்பதியர், தனியாக வசிப்பவர்கள் போன்ற குடும்பங்களும் இவற்றில் அடங்கும்.

இந்த ஆய்வு கிட்டத்தட்ட ஒரு மணி நேரம் பிடிக்கும் என்றும் ஆய்வில் கலந்துகொள்வோர் கூறும் தகவல்கள் ரகசியமாக வைத்துக்கொள்ளப்படும் என்றும் ஆய்வுக் குழு வலியுறுத்தியது.

முதற்கட்ட ஆய்வின் முடிவுகள் 2015,ஆம் ஆண்டு இறுதியில் தயாராகிவிடும் என எதிர்பார்க்கப்படுகிறது.

TODAY

Long-term study to track 5,000 households in 'census of the family'

By JANICE HENG

RESEARCHERS will follow 5,000 families from year to year, tracking their lives and aspirations, in the first academic survey of its kind in Singapore.

The long-term study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) began on Saturday. "You can look at it as a census of the family," said IPS senior research fellow Leong Chan-Hoong.

The Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics aims to find out how families behave, what helps them weather tough times, and what factors drive social change.

It will also cover subjective aspects such as values and aspirations – "things you don't have in administrative data", he added.

Dr Leong helms the eight-person research team together with National University of Singapore associate professor Tan Ern Ser.

The survey is the flagship project of the IPS Social Lab, the institute's survey research unit. Prof Tan hopes that families will be open to being surveyed once every year, as is the plan. "You can't force anyone to respond, but you can persuade them on the importance of the survey."

Most studies are one-off, providing only snapshots of their respondents' circumstances.

But following the same families over time allows for much richer data, said Prof Tan. "If you track over five years, 10 years, you can join the dots and get a better sense of the processes."

This will help in studying issues such as social mobility and the effectiveness of government policies, for instance.

Some 5,000 families will be surveyed from year to year in the first such academic study. The interviews will include questions on family interaction. ST FILE PHOTO

The first wave of data collection is expected to last for six to nine months. About 40 to 50 handpicked interviewers are surveying a random, representative sample of Singaporean and permanent resident households.

Heads of households will be interviewed in this phase, but other household members could also be asked to respond in future years.

The hour-long interviews include questions on family interaction, such as whether the family has meals together and who makes household decisions.

Survey participants should rest assured that the study will uphold rigorous ethical standards and their confidentiality will be preserved, said the researchers.

Data from the first wave is expected to be ready by end-2015.

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联合早报

Study into how families change over time launched

SINGAPORE – To gather data that could help policymakers tackle challenges faced by families, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has launched a long-term study into how families change over time and how family environments influence one's success in life.

The study will track about 5,000 households possibly over decades on various fronts, such as how they cope with issues like fluctuating income, marriage, divorce, birth and "external shocks", such as epidemics and security threats.

Called the Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics, the study will cover Singaporean citizens and permanent residents, and include non-traditional families such as those with stepchildren, single parents, no parents or no children.

Sociologist Tan Ern Ser, who is leading the project with IPS senior research fellow Leong Chan-Hoong, said the data collected will paint a more accurate picture of Singapore's social landscape for policymakers. Additionally, the study seeks to capture the values and aspirations of households and track whether they practise what they believe in, he added.

Singapore's families are doing reasonably well, but there are challenges relating to raising children, childcare, eldercare, work-life balance and social and financial health, said the National University of Singapore don.

The Government is also concerned over any entrenchment of poverty — whether low-income families succeed in rising up the social ladder or stay poor, he added.

Unlike the past practice of studying different families in different samples, the new study is longitudinal and will track the same family constantly over several years. This is necessary as family conditions change, such as when individuals leave or enter households through marriage or divorce, or when there are births and deaths.

"Being able to capture this complexity, all these processes going on, enables us to have richer data," said Associate Professor Tan. Similar surveys have been conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom, leading to policy changes.

Data collected from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, conducted by the University of Michigan since 1968, covers more than 70,000 individuals and have been used to determine welfare reform and healthcare expenditure. In the UK, the British Household Survey has informed policy debates on income, poverty and healthcare.

The IPS study will involve 50 field interviewers holding hour-long surveys annually with a random sample of about 5,000 households generated by the Department of Statistics. Surveys started last Saturday.

There will be a concerted effort to retain the same survey participants over the years by encouraging interviewers to stay in touch with survey participants, said the IPS. Should households drop out of the sample, new households will be added in a manner that matches Singapore's demographic profile as closely as possible. XUE JIANYUE

> There is no perfect family, no perfect household. Every family or household has its own challenges. Sometimes they do pretty well, sometimes they don't.
>
> **Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser**
> SOCIOLOGIST AND NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE DON

家庭与社会变化追踪调查 本地展开首个

何惜薇 报道
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新加坡政策研究所展开本地首个长期追踪家庭变化的学术调查，希望从5000个住户的生活经历了解新加坡的家庭关系与结构、社会价值与社会流动情况，从而协助政策的制定。

这项名为"新加坡社会动态追踪调查"（Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics）的研究，对象是一家之主为新加坡公民或永久居民的家庭，并对这组家庭做长期追踪。这些家庭的住址由统计局随机抽取，涵盖面广，包括传统家庭、单亲家庭、由不同国籍成员组成的家庭，以及没有孩子或家长的家庭。

三阶段研究 首轮已展开

研究由政策研究所社会研究室执行，分三个阶段，每个阶段相隔约一年。

社会研究室组长、新加坡国立大学社会学副教授陈恩赐说："多数家庭都不处于完美的状态，关键是他们是否具韧性，能不能应付种种挑战。我们要了解家庭的健康情况，包括经济状况，成员是否相互扶持及他们对未来的憧憬。"

陈恩赐说，研究员希望长期访问相同的家庭，以跟进他们如何面对变化。他举例说，有些家庭的成员可能丢了饭碗、退休或离婚，另一些则出现孩子结婚搬离原来住所或迎来新生命等转变，而外部环境也可能对家庭成员的健康和安全等构成威胁。

陈恩赐说："我们要了解人们如何生活，他们具体怎么做，而不是他们的想法。每个人都说他们相信看护的重要，但是具体有几个人花时间照顾家人呢？"

他指出，从主要看护者是孩子、朋友还是社会这方面，就可看出社会价值观的改变。

首轮调查前天已展开，约40名受过训练的调查人员登门进行约一小时的访问，以初步了解家庭的现状和结构，如成员的就业情况、教育程度、收入、是否需要特别帮助，以及家庭成员之间的关系和互动。这个阶段的调查将历时六至九个月，社会研究室希望最迟在明年底就能公布调查结果。

第二和第三阶段的调查则在明年到后年之间，以及后年至2017年间展开。

将成制定政策风向标

这类长期追踪的调查在国外相当普遍，美国、英国和台湾等地的研究员都通过类似调查了解社会动态。美国密歇根大学的"收入动态追踪调查"是当中的标杆，是许多进行类似调查机构借鉴的对象。有关调查始于1968年，调查对象是5000个家庭和1万8000个人，现在数据库中已有超过七万人的资料，成为检讨扶贫措施、福利援助改革和医疗保健花费等社会政策的重要依据。

"新加坡社会动态追踪调查"首席研究员、社会研究室副组长梁振雄博士说："在本地，与家庭有关的调查很多，但是没有一个长时间追踪家庭的变化。家庭健康可影响社会流动和贫富差距等，新加坡人如何面对挑战和威胁，将是制定有效政策的风向标。"

他说，有关调查的设计符合国大道德检讨委员会的要求，务必做到不侵犯受访者的隐私。

ASCENTIO