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Institute of Policy Studies launches long-term study on family relationships

*The Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics by the **Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)** is the first long-term survey on family structures and social values in Singapore. The study, which targets 5,000 households island-wide, will allow researchers at the National University of Singapore (NUS) to track and evaluate changing social behaviours, cultural norms and aspirations of Singaporeans.*

Background on Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics

1. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has launched a nationwide research study on family relationships and social attitudes, reaching out to 5,000 Singaporean households.¹ The study will be conducted through IPS Social Lab, the Institute's survey research unit.
2. Since 1 November 2014, interviewers have begun fanning out across the island to collect data on how families have evolved with the changing times. The same families will be interviewed every year, allowing researchers to assess how Singaporeans deal with, among other issues, fluctuating incomes, domestic changes (marriage, divorce, birth of children, retirement) and potential external shocks (environmental threats to health, medical epidemics, security threats).
3. The focus of the study is on family resilience and social mobility. Survey respondents will be asked how they cope with life and its daily demands, including childcare arrangements and eldercare responsibilities. They will also be asked about their education and housing aspirations, and their quality of engagement with family members and neighbours.
4. The first phase of data collection (Wave 1) will be conducted from November 2014 over a period of six to nine months. In the initial contact, the heads of households will be surveyed on a range of topics, including family relationships and how members interact with each other (e.g., how often do they have meals together, how they communicate with each other, who makes major household decisions).
5. In subsequent years, other members of the household may be asked to take part in the survey. Households were selected based on a random sample

¹ The study will include both Singapore citizens and Singapore permanent residents

generated by the Department of Statistics Singapore. The study covers the whole spectrum of families in society, including non-traditional structures, such as blended families (families with step-children), single-parent and even absent-parent families, as well as childless marriages.

6. Selected participants will receive a letter of invitation to take part in the survey, and interviewers will conduct the survey through face-to-face interviews. Each interview will take up to an hour, on average, to complete.

7. The Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics will be spearheaded by the IPS Social Lab. Established in November 2013, the eight-person research team is helmed by NUS Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser and IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Leong Chan-Hoong. It is supported by consultants in the field of sociology, psychology, statistics and research methodology. The research effort is the flagship project of the one-year-old IPS Social Lab, which has commissioned Ascentiq Pte Ltd, an independent market research company, to collect the data.

8. Dr Tan, head of IPS Social Lab, said that the research results will give important feedback on the challenges related to family cohesion and functioning, and provide insight into the well-being of families in the context of today's society. "With the family as the focal point, the study can help identify families at risk, vulnerable groups and possible points of intervention. Policy makers will be able to assess the needs of families and the effectiveness of social policies over time," said Dr Tan.

9. There will be a concerted effort to retain members of the panel from year to year, through regular contact, events and the release of relevant findings. "The survey respondents in our study are part of a community, an eco-system, which will reveal important insights into the Singaporean family," said Dr Leong, who is Principal Investigator of the study. "It's not just a census of the family, but a research study dedicated to tracking the forces of change that affect the resilience of the family."

Operational considerations

Interviewers

10. Up to 50 field interviewers will be deployed to conduct the interviews. Given the longitudinal nature of the Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics, which will be conducted annually, the emphasis on building rapport between interviewer and survey respondent is critical to the long-term success of the project.

11. There was a conscious effort to recruit interviewers for the longer term. IPS Social Lab and Ascentiq paid special attention to selecting interviewers through a screening process. Interviewers were hand-picked for their interest in the themes of family well-being and social bonding that are central to the project. Interviewers' experience in conducting prior surveys in the community and the ability to connect with their subjects were important considerations, as they would need to knock on doors and persuade heads of households to commit their time and effort to the long-term survey project. The interviewers come from varied backgrounds, and have experience in teaching and voluntary welfare organisation work, among others.

12. In the run-up to the project launch, the mainly bilingual team of interviewers had to undergo intensive training to hone their interview skills and also to bone up on their knowledge of data collection, so as to explain the value and integrity of the data collection process to potential survey respondents.

Ethics

13. Survey participants should rest assured that the Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics has been developed according to stringent guidelines set by the NUS Institutional Review Board. Also known as the Ethics Review Committee in some countries, the Board reviews, approves and monitors the ethical aspects of all NUS research projects that involve human subjects.

14. This is all the more important, as the recently-introduced Personal Data Protection Act in Singapore has enhanced consumer awareness of data privacy issues and heightened cognizance of the individual's right to protect their personal data. Being an academic project, the Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics does not fall under the Do Not Call registry guidelines, which applies only to marketing campaigns.

15. As the number of market surveys and commercial campaigns has increased over the years, interviewers also have to deal with what the industry has termed as "survey fatigue" among the public. Competing with the slew of other survey interviewers in the field is just one of the many challenges.

International comparisons

16. Singapore may be a newcomer to such long-term studies, but panel studies of a longitudinal nature are rich sources of data for countries like the United States, Britain and Taiwan. Their findings have allowed researchers to trace long-term outcomes to past events, and infer future possibilities based on observing current trends.

17. One of the world's longest-running panel studies, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), is conducted by the University of Michigan. In 1968, the survey began with 5,000 households and 18,000 individuals, and now has a database of over 70,000 individuals. Data from the PSID is used by US law makers to analyse the official poverty measure, welfare reforms and health care expenditure. The PSID also provides long-term histories of marriage, childbirth and living arrangement data that contribute to the understanding of demographic trends and their effects on the socioeconomic well-being of families and individuals.

18. In January, IPS Social Lab invited Dr Frank Stafford, a chief researcher in the US study, to discuss with Singapore researchers and civil servants the challenges faced in carrying out such a long-term study. One of the major challenges is panel retention, or the re-engagement of survey respondents from one year to the next. Failure to retain respondents in a panel study leads to smaller sample sizes, resulting in loss of statistical power and precision. This also leads to sample bias, which may weaken the predictive capacity. A key to the PSID's success is its focus on tracking survey respondents across states and over time, even if they part from their family, or leave the household.

19. "Our approach to the study is that it should be based on an unbiased sample, constituting a good representation of Singapore residents," said Dr Tan. "Our task is to uncover what is really 'out there', and ensure that our interpretations are always objective, value-free, and evidence-based."

20. In Britain, the Economic and Social Research Council follows 100,000 individuals in 40,000 households, through its panel survey Understanding Society. Together with the British Household Panel Survey, the massive undertaking has informed policy debates on income and poverty, health care, young people at risk, births outside marriage, ethnic mobility and fluctuations in the labour market, among others.

21. Taiwan's Panel Study of Family Dynamics conducted by researchers at Academia Sinica has enabled researchers to elicit trends from the panel survey data regarding demographic trends, including fertility patterns and education attainment levels of second-generation immigrants, persistence and change of family structures across generations, residential arrangements for the aged, allocation of educational resources among siblings of different gender, relationship between income stratification and reproduction, and intergenerational transmission of family values and resources.

About IPS Social Lab

IPS Social Lab is an independent centre for social indicators research. It seeks to understand Singapore society through survey-based research on social perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in Singapore, using the most robust standards in survey methodology and statistical analyses. IPS Social Lab is committed to serve the public interest as a national resource centre for longitudinal data. Policymakers can also tap Social Lab to broaden their research capability.

About the Institute of Policy Studies

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) was established in 1988 as an independent think-tank to study and generate public policy ideas in Singapore. IPS became an autonomous research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore in 2008. Today, IPS continues to analyse public policy, build bridges between thought leaders, and communicate its findings to a wide audience. The Institute examines issues of critical national interest across a variety of fields, and studies the attitudes and aspirations of Singaporeans through surveys of public perception. It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in its analysis and takes the long-term view in its strategic deliberation and research. For more information about IPS, visit www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/

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Annex A

Glossary

	English	Chinese	Malay	Tamil
1	National University of Singapore	新加坡国立大学	Universiti Kebangsaan Singapura	சிங்கப்பூர் தேசிய பல்கலைக்கழகம்
2	Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy	李光耀公共政策学院	Sekolah Dasar Awam Lee Kuan Yew	லீ குவான் யூ பொது கொள்கை பள்ளி
3	Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)	新加坡政策研究所	Institut Pengajian Dasar	கொள்கை ஆய்வுக்கழகம்
4	IPS Social Lab	社会研究室	Makmal Sosial Institut Pengajian Dasar	கொள்கை ஆய்வுக் கழக சமூக ஆய்வகம்
5	Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics	新加坡社会动态追踪调查	Tajuk Kajian: Kajian Panel Singapura mengenai Dinamik Sosial	ஆய்வுத் தலைப்பு: சிங்கப்பூர் ஆய்வுக் குழு மேற்கொள்ளும் சமூக இயக்கவியல்பற்றிய ஆய்வு
6	Dr Tan Ern Ser	陈恩赐博士	-	-
7	Dr Leong Chan-Hoong	梁振雄博士	-	-