

Most Baby Boomers Want Independence in Golden Years

A possible reason: They wish to avoid tensions with families of children

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Three-quarters of some 3,000 baby boomers surveyed want to live on their own in their golden years, going by the results of the first study on those now aged between 44 and 61.

Only 37 per cent expect to live with their children. About the same proportion hope to live near at least one of them.

The numbers do not add up to 100 per cent because respondents could pick more than one option.

The study did not find out the reasons for their preferred housing arrangement, but the study's authors put it down to baby boomers being more wary of the likely tensions of living with their children's families; they also value their own independence and privacy.

The study, commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, was released yesterday.

Associate Professor Angelique Chan and Dr Yap Mui Teng, the study's authors, said little is known about Singapore's one million baby boomers' expectations and views on ageing and retirement.

As this group joins the growing ranks of Singapore's senior citizens, it is crucial to get an insight into their hearts and minds so their needs and concerns can be addressed, they added.

The 88-page report on the study covers areas from this group's retirement plans to the kind of support they expect in their old age. Gender, age and educational level shape their preferred living arrangements and what they expect of their children. For example, more women than men expect their children to support them financially when they are old.

And more early baby boomers (those born between 1947 and 1954) than late baby boomers (those born between 1955 and 1964) expect to live with their children.

Said Prof Chan: 'Older Singaporeans may have been brought up to feel that their children will take care of them in their old age.'

Another notable observation: The better-educated baby boomers are more receptive to living in a nursing home. Of those who say they do not mind living in such a facility, 40 per cent have tertiary education.

A third of those surveyed said they have plans to move out of their current homes. Of

this group, almost one in three want smaller homes.

Most baby boomers The Straits Times interviewed said they prefer to live on their own in their golden years.

Take Madam Ong Mei Eng, a 58-year-old mother of two, who said: 'I'm a very straight-talking person. I say what I think. My children understand me, but their spouses may not, so I would rather avoid clashes.'

The study said these baby boomers' housing preferences have important implications for the future demand and supply of public housing. For instance, it is important to assess whether there are enough facilities and help schemes for senior citizens who want to live on their own, Prof Chan said.

One in two willing to work as long as they can

NEARLY half the 3,000 baby boomers surveyed either want to work or have to work as long as they are able to, going by results of the first-ever study on these 44- to 61-year-olds.

Thirty-four per cent say they want to continue working, and 11 per cent say they have to.

Sociologists say it is a positive sign that this many are willing to continue being economically active.

Associate Professor Angelique Chan from the National University of Singapore's Department of Sociology, one of the two researchers who did the survey, noted that baby boomers are more educated than their parents.

This lot understands that their Central Provident Fund savings may not see them through their retirement years, given that people now live longer, she said.

However, those surveyed named various reasons for wanting to keep working and money was not always among them.

'When the population is more educated, they get more intrinsic satisfaction from working. They want to continue working for the sense of self-worth,' she said.

Society gains from their staying financially independent and mentally stimulated, which makes for better mental health, she added.

Although nearly half of baby boomers want to continue working as long as possible, two in five - especially the better educated - want to retire before they hit 65.

More males than females are likely to choose not to work at all after retiring.

Prof Chan explained that the sense of self worth is what keeps women working.

Many of them have taken time off in their younger years to rear children, 'so when

they can work again, they want to do so, to feel like they are contributing to the community', she said.

Leisure Activities Popular, High Tech Goods are Less so

High-Tech devices to help with the housework are not terribly exciting to baby boomers - they just want to relax and travel.

The most popular products and services that people in the 44- to 61-year-old age group are ready to pay for are leisure activities targeted at seniors (41 per cent). Seniors-only travel activities come next (34 per cent), followed by educational activities (23 per cent).

Though only 5 per cent are willing to pay for service robots, this group is not totally tech-shy: 10 per cent are willing to pay for health and medical information transferred to them via telephone, and 12 per cent will spend on smart homes and high-tech assistive devices.

Men and women show no differences in their demand for these products and services.

The question though, is whether baby boomers will be able to afford these gadgets and services, since half of those surveyed (52 per cent) expect monthly budgets of less than \$1,000 in retirement.

But the study uncovered that half the baby boomers surveyed expect no change to their standards of living; another four in 10 even expect it to improve.

Sociologists are concerned about this.

Associate Professor Angelique Chan from the National University of Singapore's Department of Sociology said these people may be 'overly optimistic'.

'We need to let people know how much health care will cost and educate them more. Few people have actually done the maths on how much they would need after retirement,' said Prof Chan, one of the two researchers who did the survey.

It's emotional support they want

IT IS not financial support baby boomers want from their families but emotional support.

Help with money comes a distant third, after having strong family ties and physical care.

Of the respondents, 34 per cent said they expected emotional support from their families; 31 per cent said they wanted physical care and 26 per cent cited monetary support.

Baby boomer Oon Ing Seong, 55, who was a car salesman until his retirement, is

among those who values emotional support over financial support.

'Having emotional support makes life easier. Life is short, so happiness is more important, not money,' said the father of a 21-year-old now in university.

The survey results did not surprise sociologists.

Dr Yap Mui Teng, a senior research fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy's Institute of Policy Studies, one of the two researchers who carried out the survey, said most of the baby boomers surveyed believed they had adequate savings for their old age.

'Perhaps more than money, they want good relationships with their family and children,' she said.

She noted, however, that the 2007 study was done before the current financial crisis.

The study threw up gender differences on the kind of support expected. Men expected their families to give them physical care, with 37 per cent choosing that. Only 26 per cent of women expected it.

Nearly a third of the women - 31 per cent - said they were counting on monetary support, compared to 21 per cent of men.

Dr Yap Mui Teng is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies who leads the institute's work in demography and family. Her research interests include policies on the aged.