

New survey aims to shed more light on millennials

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A new nationwide survey hopes to shed more light on millennials, and how they transit from adolescence to adulthood. The joint project by the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab will track 3,600 people between the ages of 17 and 24 for six years starting this year. The same group of youth - who belong to a nationally representative sample - will be surveyed yearly to capture their development across key life stages.

IPS Social Lab head Leong Chan-Hoong, who is leading a team of three researchers for the study, told The Straits Times it is the first longitudinal survey of youth here. It aims to understand their evolving aspirations, attitudes and experiences.

"Over time, their responses might change. For instance, whether they think they have achieved their aspirations, if they know what they want," he said.

The study funded by NYC is called Youth Steps, or the Youth Study on Transitions and Evolving Pathways in Singapore. Data collection will start this month. Participants will answer a broad range of questions ranging from social mobility and civic participation to their own and their parents' education profile. A survey segment will require respondents to rank how important certain matters are to them, such as achieving personal goals. More than 1,200 young people contributed questions for this section between May and July.

"At 17 to 24, young people are dealing with many disruptions... changes in school, workplace, relationships and family," said Dr Leong.

NYC chief executive David Chua said the study aims to understand the psyche of today's youth so that policymakers can better shape programmes to fit their needs in this transition phase, such as dealing with job uncertainties.

Dr Leong said studying their priorities, challenges and values is important, especially amid global uncertainty and complexity. "We spend a lot of time looking at the challenges of an ageing society. This is a group of people who will one day be paying for their retirement," he said.

The team will publish a yearly report of the results from the study, which will also gather feedback on national schemes targeted at youth. One of these is the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn scheme, designed to encourage polytechnic and Institute of Technical Education graduates to work and study at the same time.

"We want to know if improvements and changes in policy make a difference" to youth, said Mr Chua, adding the study could be extended if the data gathered is useful. In the later years of the study, researchers will add questions about family, marriage and parenthood. "We want to follow (them) through their critical life stages so we can see their development and how we can better equip them for an uncertain future."