

Portrait of a Middle-Class Man

Charissa Yong

The Straits Times, 21 February 2015

IT Consultant Luke Yip, 39, believes that anyone who is hardworking, and who has some education and aptitude for their job, can achieve success.

However, the diploma-holder adds that "it is easier for some people who are privileged, and a longer and tougher road for others".

His opinion mirrors that of the average middle-class Singaporean - who strongly believes in meritocracy here, but also that having connections and a rich-family background make it easier to do well in life.

The typical middle-class household here earns between \$4,000 and \$9,999 a month, according to sociologist Tan Ern Ser's new report titled "Class and Social Orientations". More than a third of Singaporeans fall into this category, his survey showed.

Nearly all of them think they are doing as well as or better than the average Singaporean.

Mr Yip, who together with his wife - a tuition centre manager - makes about \$6,000 a month, describes his household as "an average family with enough for sustenance, with a little bit to spare for those little luxuries in life".

But like most other middle-class Singaporeans, Mr Yip and his wife - who have to support their four-month-old son and their elderly parents - worry about the rising cost of living. "Even with the (recent) increase in childcare subsidies, the cost of childcare and other necessities is still going up. Moreover, our income is not increasing enough to catch up with the inflation," he says.

He believes the Government should offer more subsidies to households like his. This would help them cope with financial pressures, which are the reason he can afford to give only a few hundred dollars a year to his 68-year-old father.

"Love and gratitude" are why he wishes he could give his father more support, says Mr Yip, whose mother died when he was young.

It is the same reason why almost two-thirds of middle-class Singaporeans support their aged parents financially, according to Prof Tan's findings on class and social attitudes.

His survey polled 2,700 Singapore citizens aged 15 to 74. The face-to-face interviews were conducted from November 2010 to July 2011, with a brief pause in May 2011 during the General Election season.