

## **Social support, engaging on national issues among young people's concerns: Survey**

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SINGAPORE - Robust engagement on national issues, overcoming challenges such as housing affordability and finding a network of people who they can trust are some of the concerns facing Singapore youth as they transition to adulthood, a new study has found.

The findings are based on an ongoing six-year survey called Youth STEPS conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab and the National Youth Council (NYC).

The preliminary findings of the study were shared on Saturday (July 23) at NYC's inaugural National Youth Dialogue.

Youth STEPS stands for Youth Study on Transitions and Evolving Pathways in Singapore.

The session was part of a series of dialogues discussing topics of interest to youth.

Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth Alvin Tan was guest of honour at the dialogue on Saturday, where participants discussed key findings of the study which surveyed 3,000 Singaporean youth born between 1993 and 2000.

The survey started in 2017 and participants were interviewed each year between 2017 and 2021.

He said: "Our youths have a stake in Singapore's future. We are partnering them to refresh our social compact, through active dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect for one another's views."

One of the participants of the dialogue, freelance business consultant Chris Selvakumar, 29, said he hoped to see Singapore become a more inclusive and empathetic society, with a greater sense of nationhood in the future.

He said: "National issues that I am more concerned about are the environment, mental health and evolution of social compact. These are pressing issues which need to be worked on as the world is in an uncertain and tumultuous period."

The study found that youth were able to increase their resilience to the stress of transitioning to adulthood by being part of a network of people who could advise them on important life decisions such as marriage, work and education.

While Covid-19 had halted the creation of broader social networks, it also strengthened youth's bonds with family and friends. More than 80 per cent of the respondents agreed that interacting with people also made them interested in things that happen outside of their community.

Dr Chew Han Ei, senior research fellow at IPS, said: "Youths in Singapore have been turning to the community even as they experience difficulties in their personal lives, and through these shared experiences, strengthened their sense of nationhood".

Among the challenges youth here grappled with was housing affordability. Dr Chew said youth's views on housing affordability being a challenge remain relatively unchanged over the course of the survey.

Since 2018, the study found housing affordability to be a key concern, which affected three in five young people who remained single from 2018 to 2021.

For those who were single in 2018 but married by 2021, the proportion facing challenges with housing affordability dropped as they gained awareness of the grants and support available to young families.

Rental prices for homes here continued to rise last month, with Housing Board rents climbing for the 24th straight month and private apartment rents increasing for the 18th straight month. Delay in Build-To-Order projects is another issue affecting young couples.

While a majority of youth trust the Government, relatively fewer feel that the trust is reciprocated. About 87 per cent of those who feel that the Government trusts them also trust the Government.

About 19 per cent feel the Government does not trust them at all or to a small extent.

The study recommended a boost in two-way communication between youth and the Government to address issues such as work-life balance, housing and support for young parents.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, NYC said that youth can tap funding, grants and mentorship through initiatives such as the Youth Action Challenge and the Young ChangeMakers grant to turn their ideas into action.

More findings from the Youth STEPS survey will be released later this year.