

## **Survey on Family and Social Attitudes to Track 5,000 Households over the Years**

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Researchers will follow 5,000 families from year to year, tracking their lives and aspirations, in the first academic survey of its kind in Singapore. The long-term study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) began on Saturday.

The Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics aims to find out how families behave, what helps them weather tough times, and what factors drive social change. It will also cover subjective aspects such as values and aspirations.

Helming the eight-person research team are IPS senior research fellow Leong Chan-Hoong and National University of Singapore associate professor Tan Ern Ser. The survey is the flagship project of the IPS Social Lab, the Institute's survey research unit which Professor Tan heads.

Prof Tan hopes that families will be open to being surveyed once every year. Most studies are once-off, providing only snapshots of their respondents' circumstances. But following the same families over time allows for much richer data, said Prof Tan: "If you track over five years, 10 years, you can join the dots and get a better sense of the processes."

This will help in studying issues such as social mobility and the effectiveness of government policies, for instance, he added.

The first wave of data collection is expected to last for six to nine months. About 40 to 50 handpicked interviewers are surveying a random, representative sample of Singaporean and permanent resident households.

This covers all sorts of families, including single-parent families, couples without children, and individuals living alone.

Heads of households will be interviewed in this phase, but other household members could also be asked to respond in future years.

The hour-long interviews include questions on family interaction, such as whether the family has meals together and who makes household decisions. Other topics include childcare and eldercare arrangements, work-related stress, and respondents' aspirations for themselves and their children.

Survey participants should rest assured that the study will uphold rigorous ethical standards and their confidentiality will be preserved, said the researchers.

Data from the first wave is expected to be ready by end-2015.

Panel studies which track the same group over time are well-established in other countries. The University of Michigan's Panel Study of Income Dynamics, for instance, has been

running since 1968 and now covers over 70,000 individuals. In Britain, such studies have informed policy debates on issues such as poverty and healthcare.