

Women could do their part to defend S'pore: Poll

Eight in 10 would like to give them the chance to contribute to country

Jermyn Chow

The Straits Times, 9 October 2013

WOMEN should be given the option to volunteer for the defence of the country, said the majority of people in a poll.

Eight out of 10 people would like to give women the opportunity to do their part for Singapore's defence, even though they are not currently required to do so.

Seven out of 10 thought women could serve the armed forces in professional roles such as doctors or accountants, or by helping out in national service-related events like National Day parades and the military's open houses.

Only two out of 10 felt that women should be given the option to serve a two-year NS stint. But only one woman in 10 said they would choose to do this.

The findings were part of the first independent survey on public perceptions about NS, carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and commissioned by the Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS).

Dr Leong Chan Hoong, who led the study, said the findings show that NS is a "collective journey".

"It is not just for half the population aged between 20 and 35," he said. "People realise and want it to be about the whole nation."

Even simple gestures from the female population, such as organising lunch for men training in the field, would make a "significant psychological impact", said Dr Leong, an IPS senior research fellow.

The study also found that women had more favourable perceptions of NS than men.

It comes amid ongoing discussions spearheaded by the CSNS on how to beef up support and commitment for NS.

In August, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen indicated that the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) may expand its volunteer programme to allow Singaporeans who are not currently eligible for NS to get involved.

Said accounts and administrative executive Cecilia Ho, 56, a mother of two: "There may not be many women who will join initially but as time passes, more women will be more encouraged and brave enough to take part."

jermync@sph.com.sg