

## Study shows most seniors view continued employment positively

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Nine in 10 seniors view continued employment and lifelong learning positively, but only half felt there are sufficient and suitable job options, a study conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has found.

And only 37 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that “in general, most elderly Singaporeans have little to worry about”, while 46 per cent rated their financial adequacy as average or poor.

Commissioned by the Council for Third Age, a group supported by the Ministry of Health to promote active ageing in Singapore, the study found that 90 per cent of respondents believe working after retirement will give them financial independence, social connection and a sense of self-worth.

However, only 52 per cent felt there were suitable jobs that could match their qualifications and experience. Forty-four per cent said there is a lack of opportunities for seniors in the job market and over 60 per cent felt potential employers prefer to hire younger workers.

The study on seniors’ perceptions and attitudes towards ageing was conducted between October 2013 and January this year. Responses were received from 2,006 Singaporeans aged 50 to 74 who live in three-room Housing and Development Board flats or larger housing units here.

A working paper based on the findings by IPS senior research fellow Dr Mathew Mathews and National University of Singapore sociology professor Paulin Tay Straughan was also published.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Mathew said the respondents’ perceptions on employment prospects may stem from “a mismatch of skill sets (rather than) any overt attempts to discriminate”. He suggested redesigning jobs to make them more manageable for seniors.

“Sometimes assigning more than one senior to a job might be helpful — they can arrange to work on their task for shorter lengths and have some flexibility working around other important things they want to accomplish in their senior years,” he said.

While seniors viewed continued employment positively, fewer — three in four — indicated that their children were supportive. Dr Mathew said some may be less supportive of their elderly

parents working if they are tasked with “menial” work. Others may feel their parents should enjoy retirement.

“I think children should respect their parents’ wishes — a task might be menial but enjoyable for an older person, especially if they see it as a way to connect with their surroundings and people,” he said.

While 89 per cent of respondents agreed lifelong learning would help them keep up with changes in everyday life, only 44 per cent intend to learn a new skill and less than a third said they had learnt something over the past year. They cited barriers such as time commitment needed for household chores and the lack of relevant courses.

Less-educated seniors were also significantly less interested in continued learning — around 27 per cent who hold primary qualification said they were likely to learn a new skill in the next few years, compared with 64 per cent of those who hold post-secondary or diploma qualification.

Said Dr Mathew: “We must remember that, for those who had very little schooling in the past, there are more hurdles when they think about learning. In general, they associate learning with rather stressful conditions.

“This is where more needs to be done to showcase new ways of learning that simulate less of classroom styled learning but perhaps more experiential type learning.”