

Singapore has adapted well to life amid Covid-19: Study

Linette Lai

The New Paper, 27 April 2021

SINGAPORE: Over the past year, Singapore residents have better learnt to cope with the pandemic on various fronts even as many remain cautious over their livelihoods, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) found in a new paper.

And societal trust - the "social glue" that builds strong communal bonds and improves psychological well-being - has played a key role in helping the country adapt to the new normal, researchers said.

Broadly, people's attitudes on issues such as job prospects and overall well-being took a hit last year when the pandemic began, but had recovered by the time the study ended in March.

"What we see, one year into the crisis, is that our society is clearly vulnerable to crisis but Singaporeans are clearly adaptable," said IPS principal research fellow Mathew Mathews, who also heads the institute's Social Lab for social indicator research.

One reason society has been able to adapt has been the raft of government policies, he added.

The study carried out online polls with groups of 500 Singapore residents at regular intervals between April last year and March this year.

It asked for their thoughts on topics such as stress levels and finances.

Those who had less trust in Singapore and Singaporeans - measured by their responses to questions such as whether the country would remain united - tended to feel more threatened by the pandemic, and therefore had worse overall well-being.

In contrast, the well-being of people with high levels of trust was less affected by perceived threats posed by Covid-19.

These results show that trust can serve as a form of social capital in the crisis, "protecting people against the harmful and threatening effects of the pandemic", researchers said.

"Enablers of societal trust - such as effective information management, enforcement of desirable social norms, and fair and equitable treatment for all - must therefore continue to be a priority for governments."

One significant improvement over the course of the year was Singaporeans' sentiments on the job market.

In late May, eight in 10 respondents said they felt the job market in the next six months would be bad. This number had gone down to four in 10 by March.

Sentiments about working from home also improved.

In September last year, around 60 per cent of respondents who mostly worked from home said they enjoyed doing so and were productive. By the time the study ended, 80 per cent said they enjoyed working from home, with 73 per cent believing they were productive.

Younger people were found to be more likely to be worried about vaccine safety, as well as psychologically impacted by the pandemic. For instance, three in 10 Singaporeans aged between 21 and 29 - the youngest age group surveyed - were at least somewhat worried about losing their purpose for living, compared with only a tenth of those aged 60 and above.