

## 3 in 10 young Singaporeans worry about ‘losing purpose for living’ due to Covid-19 impact: IPS study

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SINGAPORE — As normalcy gradually returns, the Covid-19 pandemic has left at least three in 10 Singaporeans in their 20s worried about losing their purpose for living, triple the proportion of those aged above 60 who feel this way, a study has found.

This is given the disruptions caused by the pandemic to much of what these young people consider important and gives them purpose, said lead Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) researcher, Dr Mathew Mathews.

“This includes travelling both for leisure and job opportunities or training and socialising,” he added.

“While some have suggested that the young do better during the pandemic because they are digital natives and have no problems with adapting to new work routines which leverage on information technology, we may forget that they might be affected in other (aspects) of life.”

The study, released on Monday (April 26) and conducted by IPS researchers, surveyed more than 500 Singaporeans aged 21 years and above from April 2020 to March this year. The polls were done in 22 waves — that is, the 500 respondents were questioned periodically 22 times.

Around 31 per cent of respondents aged 21 to 29 were “rather” or “very worried” about losing their purpose for living as compared with only 11 per cent of those aged 60 and above.

And 27 per cent of those in their 20s had trouble falling or staying asleep to some extent in recent months, compared with only 9 per cent of those aged 60 and above.

This is despite the fall in stress levels caused by the pandemic, from 50 per cent in an early phase of the study last April to 33 per cent in March this year.

The researchers noted that other psychological wellbeing indicators were generally positive.

For example, a majority — or more than 60 per cent — of all respondents indicated that they had not experienced much difficulty sleeping, or outbursts of irritability and anger.

A fairly similar proportion of respondents who reported family problems in March this year had done so a year earlier.

### **Attitudes to vaccination**

In recent months, researchers found an improved attitude towards vaccination, following reduced concerns about the vaccine’s safety and potential side effects.

Support for vaccination rose from 60 per cent in early February to about 67 per cent in March this year.

This improved attitude towards vaccination during this period was accompanied by a fall in:

- Concerns about the vaccine's safety and side effects, from 63 per cent to 53 per cent
- The proportion of people who did not believe the vaccine would prevent them from getting infected, from 57 per cent to 50 per cent
- The proportion of people who were unwilling to take the vaccine if offered, from 20 per cent to 13 per cent

While at least half of the population still hold doubts about the vaccine, the study found that youths were more likely to be concerned about vaccine safety as compared to those aged 60 and above.

At least 60 per cent of those in their 20s and 30s were concerned about the safety and potential side effects of the vaccine, compared with 48 per cent of those above the age of 60.

The researchers said this could be attributed to the younger demographic having more exposure to information and a plethora of views expressed on social media about the safety of vaccinations.

"This coupled with the consideration that they have many more years of healthy living ahead of them, they are probably more concerned that any potential side effects that vaccinations may pose can result in them living with these effects for a much longer period," said Dr Mathews.

"For the older demographic, who is faced with greater risk if they are infected, the protection that vaccination provides probably weighs more importantly than any potential long term side effect."

### **More optimistic about the job market**

Perceptions about the job market in the latest phase of the survey have improved markedly from a year ago, the researchers said.

Around 80 per cent of respondents polled last May believed that the job market would be bad for the next six months, as compared to the 42 per cent polled in March this year who believed so.

Furthermore, the proportion of those who believed that the job market would improve more than doubled from 13 per cent last May to 32 per cent in March this year.

However, employment confidence levels differed according to age, education and income levels, the study found.

Respondents who are confident of having a job in the next six months are:

- Aged 39 years and below (60 per cent), compared with those aged 50 and above (50 per cent)
- Hold a degree (64 per cent), compared with those with a secondary-level education or below (48 per cent)
- Earn a monthly salary of more than S\$5,999 (71 per cent), compared with those earning under S\$3,000 (48 per cent)
- Working in the professional services sector (62 per cent), compared with those in the labour, transportation and retail sectors (54 per cent)

About six in 10 Singaporeans also trusted that the Government would be able to create new jobs and training opportunities during this period of economic downturn, up from 56 per cent in May last year.

The proportion of respondents who trusted that the Government is serious about developing a strong Singaporean core of highly skilled talents also grew from 62 per cent in September last year to 72 per cent in March.

Dr Mathews said various measures rolled out by the Government such as the Jobs Support Scheme, which provides wage subsidies to help companies retain and pay their local workers as businesses take a hit from the Covid-19 pandemic, contributed to this optimism.

“That being said, the challenge is how to continue to keep job confidence given that the economic disruption from Covid will last for a while,” he added.

“More will need to be done to give the Singaporean worker a cutting edge based on his or her ongoing skills upgrading and training to be able to meet the needs of the changing economy.”