

Challenging Oneself to Achieve Life Goals is Crucial to Youths' Life Satisfaction

5 Aug 2024 – The first national longitudinal study on youths - Youth Study on Transitions and Evolving Pathways in Singapore (Youth STEPS) - explored their life satisfaction, key aspirations and priorities as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. The longitudinal study followed more than 3,000 youths aged between 17 and 24, over a period of six years (2017 to 2022).

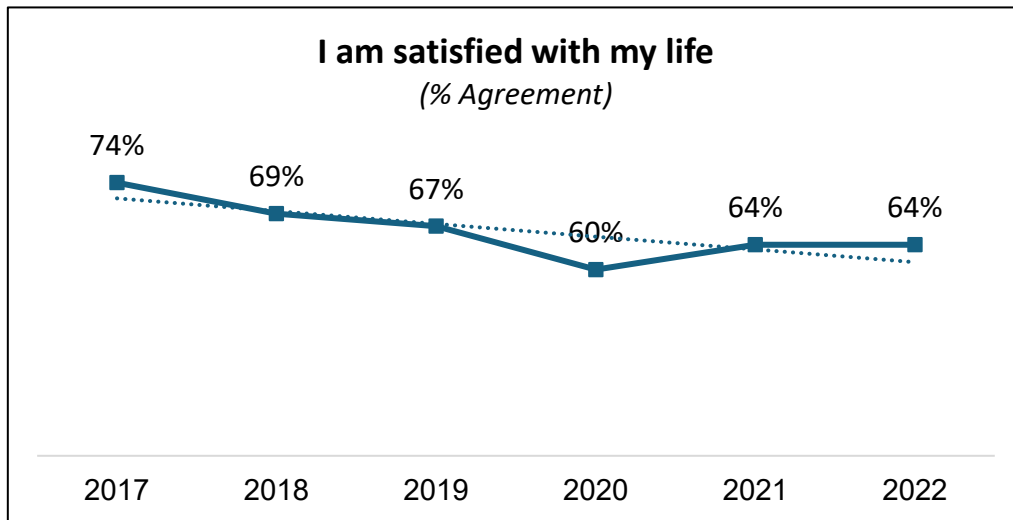
2. A collaboration between the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab at the National University of Singapore, the study provided the following key insights over the course of the period tracked:

- Majority of youths were satisfied with life, as showed from findings in 2021 and 2022.
- Factors such as having a good career, attaining higher education and forming meaningful relationships, are critical for ensuring life satisfaction.
- Detailed findings showed that youths:
 - prioritised their careers as one of the top life goals;
 - recognised the importance of continual skills upgrading; and
 - depended on important relationships for well-being.

Findings on Youth Well-Being

3. Youth's life satisfaction remained stable through 2021 and 2022, with 64% indicating that they were satisfied with their lives (Figure 1). Even though this is lower than when the study first began in 2017, the general downward trend is largely attributed to the impact of ageing. This is consistent with the happiness curve theory where happiness follows a "U"-shaped curve which starts off high in one's youth and begins to wane as individuals enter their 20s, reaching a nadir in their 40s, before picking up in their 50s and 60s.

Figure 1: Youth remain generally satisfied with their lives in 2022

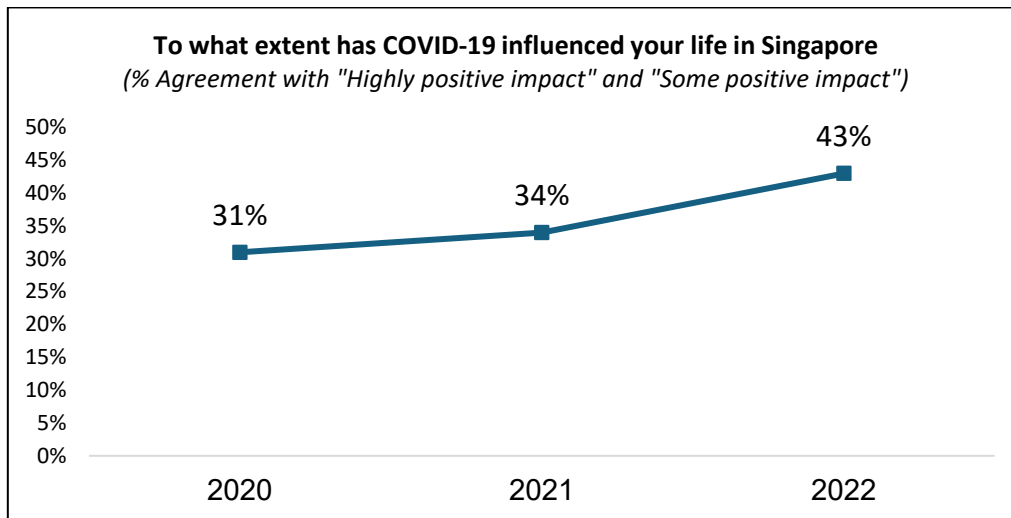


4. Majority of youths (78%) said that they have developed plans to help them work towards their aspirations in the coming years. They have also increasingly agreed there were enough opportunities in Singapore to achieve their personal aspirations (2020: 40%; 2022: 57%).

5. In addition, the study found that moving from school to full-time work, attainment of higher education and building meaningful relationships had significantly improved youths' life satisfaction.

6. While Covid-19 limited opportunities for youths and impacted their life satisfaction, youths also did not let the negative aspects of the pandemic colour their trajectories. Youths today have a renewed perspective of the pandemic and are more likely to view it as having a positive impact in their lives.

Figure 2: Extent of COVID-19 on life satisfaction



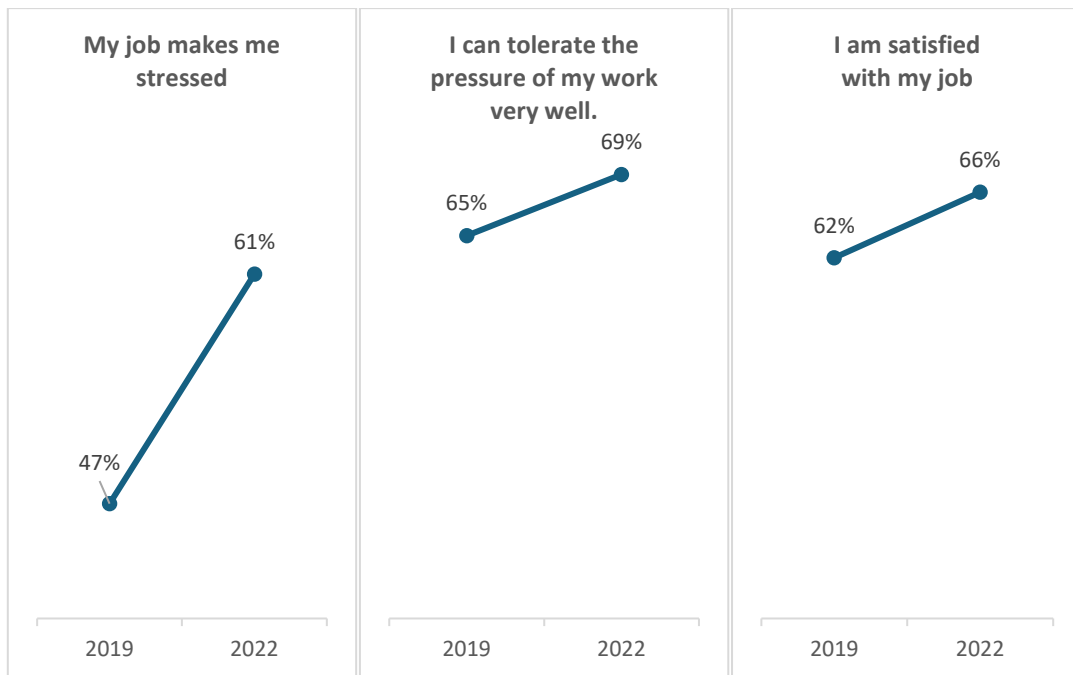
7. “We see resilience and adaptability in our Singaporean youths, despite the unexpected challenges and disruption. They described the pandemic as an opportunity to be clearer on their goals, especially in the areas of school, work, finances, and overall well-being, and to be more driven in achieving a comprehensive life.” said Associate Professor Vincent Chua, Principal Investigator for the first phase of the study.

Career as a Key Priority for Life Goals

8. Youth ranked “Having a good career” among the top life goals that they are prioritising for the next five years. Others include being in good health and attaining financial security.

9. Although the youth panelists reported experiencing more job stress, more also indicated being able to tolerate work pressures and being satisfied with their jobs (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Youth Sentiment on Their Careers (% agreement)



**Note these questions were only asked to employed individuals.*

10. When asked to share what they believe is important in a job, most had indicated having good opportunities for advancement (2021: 95%; 2018: 95%) and job security (2021: 95%; 2018: 94%) and as key considerations. The study also showed that 60% of young job seekers in 2022 know what they need to do to get the job that they want.

11. “Together, these findings suggest that youth are steadily striving to achieve success in their professional lives - counter to claims that young workers today are “quiet quitting. They want to grow and learn in their professions but they also want to pursue their passions outside of work and that’s why work-life separation is important for them.” said Dr Chew Han Ei, Principal Investigator of Youth STEPS.

12. However, youths were concerned about the lack of connections to the right people that would help them secure their desired job. This was consistently cited as the top barrier to employment since 2019 (2022: 43%; 2019: 36%; see Figure 4).

| Figure 4: Top 3 Barriers to Employment Among Young Job Seekers | |
|---|---|
| 1 | I lack the connections necessary for employment in my chosen / future career |
| 2 | I am uncertain with regards as to how to find a job |
| 3 | I do not have enough opportunities to pursue the career I am passionate about |

13. More youths also desired flexible work arrangements with 76% in 2022, finding it important to have a job that would allow them flexibility, up from 60% in 2018. Taken together with another datapoint that one of the top goals that youth lacked confidence in achieving in

the next five years is ‘having time to do the things I want’, it means that youths are seeking flexibility in workplace arrangements to accommodate their many other areas of interests in life beyond work or even synergistic ways to combine their work and skills with these interests.

Growth Through Upskilling and Education Contribute to Life Satisfaction

14. Further regression analysis had shown that achieving higher education levels had a positive impact on life satisfaction. This is not unexpected as education is an important milestone along the youths’ journey thus far.

15. Even though they were undergoing or had undergone pre-employment training, they recognised the importance of updating their skillsets continually to enhance their employability and career progression opportunities. **Seven out of 10** (69%) had indicated plans to upskill or reskill within the next five years.

16. While youths are motivated to upskill for better career prospects and pursuit of their passion, we also understand from other NYC surveys that they expressed concerns that include time and financial constraints, and their ability to stay motivated to learn.

Relationships are Important to Youth Well-Being

17. Meaningful relationships in the past years, such as having close social networks and marriage, have offered crucial social support that benefits youth well-being.

18. Across the years, majority had indicated that they had people they could turn to for problem solving (85%) and advice on important decision making (88%). They also shared that their interactions with others drew them out of their comfort zones, such as to try new things (83%).

19. However, youths still faced barriers in dating and being in relationships. By 2022, two in five (39%) had never been in a relationship. Besides it being a lower priority, the top barriers to dating included ‘not having met the right person yet’, and ‘finding dating to be stressful in terms of expenses and expectations’ (See Figure 5).

| Figure 5: Top 3 Barriers to Dating among Single Youths | |
|---|--|
| 1 | I have not met the right person yet |
| 2 | I have more important priorities now (e.g., job, studies, self-discovery) compared to dating |
| 3 | Dating in Singapore is stressful (e.g., expensive, high expectations) |

Changing Needs of Youth Development

20. The findings underscore the importance of providing resources and support to help young Singaporeans attain key adulthood milestones to sustain or even improve their life satisfaction.

21. The study also highlighted youths' desire for continuous learning and upgrading of skills to enhance their employability. The Government is committed to providing financial support to support youths who pursue upskilling, through initiatives such as the ITE Progression Award, and course fee subsidies offered by SkillsFuture Singapore. The Government will also continue to expand alternative upskilling pathways, such as SkillsFuture Work-Study Programmes where employers deliver part of the training on-the-job and individuals can work and upgrade to a higher qualification, as well as bite-sized and flexible upskilling via micro-credentials that can stack to a full qualification.

22. In addition, employers can consider redesigning human resource policies and workplace structures, guided by the study's insights on youths' career aspirations and needs, to better attract, hire and retain young talent.

23. Besides the demand for varied opportunities on learning and upskilling, youths can benefit from support, such as mentoring and networking opportunities, to help them expand access to the jobs they desire.

24. Youths can also tap on opportunities, such as joining interest or hobby groups and volunteering, which would allow them to further widen their social circles and build meaningful relationships with like-minded peers.

25. "These findings affirm the positive impact on youths' life satisfaction, when they set life goals for themselves, and embrace the challenges towards achieving them. We should avoid being over-protective of our youths, but instead encourage them to go beyond their comfort zones as we journey alongside them to support their aspirations while keeping them grounded," said Mr David Chua, NYC's Chief Executive Officer.

Taking the Next STEPS

26. IPS Social Lab and NYC will continue its research collaboration and extend Youth STEPS for another five years from 2024 to 2028. Led by IPS Social Lab Research Fellow, Dr Teo Kay Key, Youth STEPS 2.0 will build on existing insights by surveying approximately 3,200 young people aged 24 to 31. The panel will include returning participants from the first phase of the study, as well as newly recruited members.

27. This extension will provide further clarity on young people's evolving aspirations, experiences, priorities and barriers they face throughout their late youthhood. The results of this research extension will be released after the study concludes in 2028.

-End-

Media Contacts

Liang Kaixin
Associate Director
Communications & Public Affairs
Institute of Policy Studies

kaixin@nus.edu.sg
+65 9452 4479

Vanessa Ho
Manager
Strategic Communications
National Youth Council Singapore

vanessa_ho@nyc.gov.sg
+65 9146 9260

About Youth STEPS

The Youth Study on Transitions and Evolving Pathways in Singapore (or Youth STEPS) is the first national long-term study to follow the same, nationally representative group of youth at different points of their journey into adulthood. It is a collaboration between the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab at the National University of Singapore.

Launched in 2017, Youth STEPS seeks to build a holistic understanding of youth in Singapore, covering topics such as life aspirations, quality of relationships, personal values and attitudes, as well as achievements and well-being. It involves a nationally representative panel of young people, who are recruited and tracked at different points of their journey into adulthood. The first phase of the study began in 2017 with 4,041 young people aged 17 to 24 and ended in 2022.

The findings from this study aim to help policymakers and sector partners formulate more relevant policies and programmes for youth in Singapore.

NYC also provides other flagship studies and works with youth sector partners to develop understanding on the youth landscape in Singapore. More information about our research and engagement can be found here: www.nyc.gov.sg/research-engagement/youth-steps.

About the Institute of Policy Studies

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) was established in 1988 as an independent think-tank to study and generate public policy ideas in Singapore. IPS became an autonomous research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore in 2008. Today, IPS continues to analyse public policy, build bridges between thought leaders, and communicate its findings to a wide audience. The Institute examines issues of critical national interest across a variety of fields and studies the attitudes and aspirations of Singaporeans through surveys of public perception. It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in its analyses and takes the long-term view in its strategic deliberation and research.

For more information about IPS, visit <https://www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips>.

About IPS Social Lab

IPS Social Lab is an independent centre for social indicators research. It seeks to understand Singapore society through survey-based research on social perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in Singapore, using the most robust standards in survey methodology and statistical analyses. IPS Social Lab is committed to serving the public interest as a national resource centre for longitudinal data. Policymakers can also tap IPS Social Lab to broaden their research capability.

About the National Youth Council

At NYC, we believe in a world where young people are respected and heard and have the ability to influence and make a difference in the world. Together with our partners, we develop future-ready youth who are committed to Singapore by instilling in them a heart for service, resilience and an enterprising spirit.