

Singaporeans see virtues like compassion in themselves but view society as materialistic

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Singaporeans see themselves as being more gracious and less self-centred now than they were three years ago, according to a new survey.

This finding is based on an attribute that many say they have - compassion. But in the first National Values Assessment survey, done in 2012, it did not rank among the Top 10 personal attributes.

Another newcomer on the list is positive attitude.

The findings, unveiled at an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) seminar yesterday, bode well for the country if Singaporeans act on their values, said former civil service head Lim Siong Guan at the event.

But when placed against how the respondents view their fellow residents here, the results indicate a major disconnect between what Singaporeans see as their own personal values and those of society.

How S'poreans see themselves

Here are the top 10 values and behaviours in the eyes of Singapore citizens and permanent residents, according to a survey of 2,000 people this year.

The list, from a survey done between March and June, is based on the number of responses each item received. Their old position, from the 2012 survey, is in brackets.

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PERSONAL VALUES OF SINGAPOREANS

- 1 (1) Family
- 2 (7) Responsibility
- 3 (2) Friendship
- 4 (4) Happiness
- 5 (3) Health
- 6 (5) Caring
- 7 (6) Honesty
- 8 (*) Compassion
- 9 (*) Positive attitude
- 10 (9) Respect

•The new items replace "well-being" (8) and "work-life balance" (10) from the 2012 list.

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WHAT SINGAPORE SOCIETY IS TODAY

1 (1) Kiasu (afraid to lose)

2 (2) Competitive

3 (4) Materialistic

4 (3) Self-centred

5 (5) Kiasi (afraid to die)

6 (8) Blame

7 (10) Security

8 (*) Education opportunities

9 (*) Effective healthcare

10 (*) Peace

•The new items replace "deteriorating values" (6), "elitism" (7) and "uncertainty about the future" (9) from the 2012 list.

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WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN SINGAPORE SOCIETY

1 (1) Affordable housing

2 (2) Caring for the elderly

3 (3) Effective healthcare

4 (5) Compassion

5 (7) Quality of life

6 (4) Caring for disadvantaged

7 (*) Peace

8 (10) Employment chances

9 (*) Caring for environment

10 (6) Concern for future generations

•The new items replace "equal opportunities" (8) and "social responsibility" (9) from the 2012 list.

The new Top 10 personal values are all virtues, including compassion and respect.

Alas, society is largely seen as being competitive, materialistic and kiasu (Hokkien for afraid to lose) by the 2,000 residents surveyed here between March and June this year. The poll was done by local business consultancy aAdvantage and Britain-based Barrett Values Centre.

The disconnect puzzles Mr Lim, who heads Honour (Singapore), an organisation that promotes the value of honouring one's word and one another.

He said: "Practically everything seems to be the fault of others." One is left wondering "how the two reckonings - the individual describing himself and the individual describing others - can be so different".

However, the Singapore Kindness Movement's general secretary, Dr William Wan, who was also at the seminar, told The Straits Times: "The results show people believe they are kind, but they don't see society as kind. But we can see that Singaporeans are becoming more compassionate. Perhaps people are not sensitive enough, or too busy, to see it."

He cited some recent spontaneous acts of kindness- for instance, after an accident in Boon Keng Road on Wednesday, passers-by rushed over to free a man who had been pinned under a cargo truck.

IPS senior research fellow **Gillian Koh** said that the overall results show a shift towards a more positive society.

On the 2012 list of how Singaporeans saw society were items such as "deteriorating values", "elitism" and "uncertainty about the future". They are not on the latest list.

Newcomers taking their place include "education opportunities", "effective healthcare" and "peace" - these could "indicate people are acknowledging improvement in such areas", said Barrett Values Centre chief Phil Clothier.

Dr Koh said they suggest that government policies for healthcare and education since 2012 have resonated with the people.

She cited the Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas), which gives less-well-off Singaporeans subsidised care at participating GPs and dental clinics, as well as the SkillsFuture scheme, which encourages people to acquire relevant skills throughout their working lives.

Effective healthcare remains a priority for Singaporeans in society today, alongside affordable housing as well as care for the elderly and disadvantaged.

Said Mr Clothier, who has done similar assessments in about 20 countries: "Perhaps it would be instructive to find out how recent changes in policies and implementation surrounding these areas have resulted in positive outcomes and what remains challenging."