

S'pore is kiasu and elitist, survey finds

Respondents want a society that has affordable housing and cares for elderly

By **ROBIN CHAN**

SINGAPORE citizens and permanent residents perceive their society as kiasu, competitive, self-centred and elitist, a survey has found.

They want to see a society that has affordable housing and effective health care, and that cares for the elderly and disadvantaged.

These were among the top 10 values and behaviours chosen by some 2,000 Singapore residents, which the people behind the survey said could affect the country's development.

The chief executive of the Barrett Values Centre, one of the firms behind the survey, said that eight of the top 10 values chosen were considered "potentially limiting" to society's well-being.

"We're not saying they are bad or wrong," said Mr Phil Clothier. "But if lived to excess, it has the

ability to become limiting on our happiness, fulfilment or effectiveness."

But he added that it was good that people were being honest, as it served as a starting point from which to "create the change".

Others say the findings could help shape a "national conversation" that the Government is starting to find out what kind of nation Singaporeans want in the future.

"It is one way of getting a sense of what in our lives and attitudes are changing," said Dr Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, who chaired a panel discussion on the survey yesterday.

MP Baey Yam Keng (Tampines GRC), who was at the discussion, said that in identifying kiasu-ism and self-centredness as top values, Singaporeans were showing that they were "open to criticising ourselves".

"It is the kind of attitude we need when we go into the national conversation," he said.

The survey, which covered residents across gender, housing types and age groups, was done in June and July by local organisational development firm aAdvantage Consulting, and the Britain-based Barrett Values Centre. It will be done every year from now.

Respondents were asked to pick the top 10 values and behavioural traits from about 90 that best described themselves, Singapore society today, and the kind of society they desired.

The Barrett Values Centre has also conducted this survey in 17 other countries, including the United States, Sweden and Bhutan.

It found that 41 per cent of the values selected by Singapore residents were in the "potentially limiting" category.

This is compared to 72 per cent in Venezuela, 56 per cent in US, 42 per cent in Sweden and just 4 per cent in Bhutan, long seen as the happiest nation in the world.

Some participants at the discussions, however, raised questions about the survey methodology and results.

Professor David Chan, director of the Behavioural Sciences Institute and professor of psychology at the Singapore Management University, said the list of choices left out values that other surveys have shown Singaporeans identify with. These include multi-culturalism, multi-religionism, meritocracy, pragmatism and rule of law.

The list also included a mixture of behaviours and public services, which Prof Chan said might have produced misleading results. He said: "We can compare people's importance ratings between freedom of speech and the rule of law, but it is not very meaningful to ask people, 'Is freedom of speech or housing more important?'"

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Top 10 types of values and behaviours...

...as chosen by 2,000 Singapore citizens and PRs aged 15 years and above.

What Singapore society is today

- Kiasu
- Competitive
- Self-centred
- Material needs
- Kiasi
- Deteriorating values
- Elitism
- Blame
- Uncertainty about the future
- Security

What they would like to see in society

- Affordable housing
- Caring for the elderly
- Effective health care
- Caring for the disadvantaged
- Compassion
- Concern for future generations
- Quality of life
- Equal opportunities
- Social responsibility
- Employment opportunities

SOURCE: BARRETT VALUES CENTRE AND AADVANTAGE CONSULTING GROUP