

Are Singaporeans really pessimistic?

YAHOO! NEWS By Nicholas Teo | Yahoo! Newsroom – 16 hours ago



Yahoo! Newsroom - Experts say that Singaporeans are not as pessimistic as the recent Gallup survey suggests. Two experts Yahoo! Singapore spoke to said that while pessimism is typically understood to be a state of mind in which one anticipates undesirable outcomes, one should also not forget that the western idea of “pessimism” does not necessarily fit into our cultural definition of “happiness”. (Yahoo! Singapore file photo)

Experts say that Singaporeans are not as pessimistic as the recent Gallup survey suggests.

Two experts *Yahoo! Singapore* spoke to said that while pessimism is typically understood to be a state of mind in which one anticipates undesirable outcomes, one should also not forget that the western idea of “pessimism” does not necessarily fit into our cultural definition of “happiness”.

“Pessimism is not necessarily a bad thing, as stereotyped in the Gallup study,” said Joel Yang, head of the Master of Counselling Programme in SIM University. “Culturally, it can be said that in Singapore, we are taught from birth to be more cautious, be humble and to fear losing out.”

By using a strategy called “defensive pessimism”, we may sometimes set low expectations in order for us to manage our anxiety and eventually achieve success.

In addition, we may even focus on areas of potential pitfalls and not reveal our strengths in order to allow us to feel more “in control” of the situation, and even prepare in advance to try to prevent failure from occurring, he explained.

William Tov, assistant professor of psychology at Singapore Management University and co-author of a research on well-being in Singapore, agreed, adding that it is important not

to generalise Singaporeans across the board from one survey alone. Tov said, "To label Singaporeans as pessimistic about the future is untrue.

"While 24 per cent of Singaporeans say their lives in the future will be worse than their current ones, it can also be said that 76 per cent of Singaporeans think that their future will be as good, if not better, than the present."

Divided views

Singaporeans *Yahoo! Singapore* spoke to were divided on their views of the survey.

The results of the survey were not surprising, said Darren Ng, a 20-year-old full-time national serviceman. "Most Singaporeans were brought up to have high aspirations," he said. "When they realise their goals and dreams are hard to attain, their enthusiasm for life fades and some of them give up."

In addition, Singaporeans could be feeling overwhelmed by an unending list of bad news, said 23-year-old Linette Lai, a university graduate. "I guess one of the reasons for the pessimism could be that we think this is as good as it is going to get, and there is not much that many people can look forward to," she said. "In Singapore, we have been fairly insulated from major economic shocks, even in the global crisis. But at the same time, there is a sense that the outside world is in turmoil and this could potentially affect Singapore badly."

However, 53-year-old S K Yap, who works in the financial industry, was adamant that the survey had neither depth nor base, and hence should be taken with a pinch of salt. She has this to say to Singaporeans who said that their future would be worse off five years down the road: "Step out of your comfort zone in Singapore. Do a comparison that would be fair. You never know what is good, until you know what is bad."