

| RAFFLES INSTITUTION YEAR 5 GENERAL PAPER - STUDENTS' INFORMATION PACKAGE 2022 SOCIAL ISSUES | | |
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SOCIAL ISSUES

Enduring Understanding(s):

What will students understand as a result of this unit?

1. What is defined as a social problem differs by context (e.g. time, place, political and legal systems).
2. Social problems are sociocultural, political and economic phenomena that prevent a significant number of societal participants from developing and using their full potential.
3. Social and political structures and arrangements determine the underlying features of the social world and play a role in perpetuating or mitigating social problems.
4. The politico-economic system of a society, from which social problems emanate, is a result of historical events and conscious choices by those with power and influence.
5. There may be a discrepancy between what a country is supposed to stand for and the actual conditions in which many of its people live.
6. Individuals are products of their social and political environment. Who they are, what they believe, what they strive for, and how they feel about themselves are all dependent on other people, the society in which they live, and the politics that govern their lives.

Essential Questions:

What are the essential questions of this unit?

1. What are the causes and consequences of social problems?
2. How significant is human agency in shaping, resisting, challenging and sometimes completely changing the social structures and institutions that affect their lives?
3. Why do governments prioritise some social problems to address over others?
4. Can social problems be effectively mitigated or eliminated?

Essay Questions on Social Issues (2010 – 2021)

FAMILY & MARRIAGE

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|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Cambridge 2019</i> | Should both parents take equal responsibility for raising their children? |
| <i>Cambridge 2015</i> | 'Parents have no right to impose their own values and beliefs on their children.' Discuss. |
| <i>Cambridge 2014</i> | 'Traditional marriage is an outdated concept.' To what extent is this true of your society? |
| <i>Y6 Timed Practice 2021</i> | Is the traditional family still relevant in your society today? |
| <i>Y5 Promo 2021</i> | 'Modern parenting does not prepare children for the future.' How far is this true? |
| <i>Y5 CT 2021</i> | Is marriage still an attractive option in today's world? |
| <i>Y5 Promo 2020</i> | 'Parents have too much control over their children's lives.' How far is this true of your society today? |
| <i>Y5 CT 2018</i> | 'The idea of marriage is outdated in modern society.' Discuss. |
| <i>Y5 Promo 2015</i> | In the family, should the most important role of a man be that of a breadwinner? |
| <i>Y6 CT2 2014</i> | 'Good parenting has little to do with how children turn out.' Comment with reference to your society. |
| <i>Y6 CT2 2013</i> | Is marriage still relevant in modern society? |
| <i>Y6 CT1 2013</i> | 'Modern life is not conducive to the survival of the family.' Comment. |
| <i>Y6 CT2 2012</i> | "The traditional institution of marriage is in decline." Is this a cause for concern? |
| <i>Y5 CT 2011</i> | 'The family has suffered at the expense of economic growth in Singapore.' How far do you agree? |
| <i>Y6 Prelim 2011</i> | 'An unhappy marriage is best resolved with a divorce.' Comment. |
| <i>Y5 CT 2010</i> | Is monogamy unrealistic in modern society? |

GENDER

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Cambridge 2016</i> | Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females is a desirable, but unrealistic, goal. |
| <i>Cambridge 2014</i> | Consider the view that some careers are more suited to one gender than the other. |
| <i>Cambridge 2011</i> | The world would be a better place if women had a greater say in politics. To what extent do you agree? |
| <i>Y6 Timed Practice 2021</i> | How far would you agree that technological progress has done more harm than good for gender equality? |
| <i>Y5 CT 2021</i> | 'It is a woman's world today.' How far do you agree? |
| <i>Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021</i> | 'We can never close the gender divide.' Do you agree? |
| <i>Y5 Timed Practice 2020</i> | Consider the view that gender equality is a desirable but unrealistic goal. |
| <i>Y6 CT1 2019</i> | 'Success comes more easily to men than women.' To what extent is this true of your society? |
| <i>Y5 Promo 2018</i> | Can we ever achieve gender equality in sport? |
| <i>Y6 CT 2018</i> | Assess the view that women have been unfairly treated today. |
| <i>Y6 Prelim 2018</i> | "Women have never had it better." How true is this? |
| <i>Y5 Promo 2017</i> | "It is increasingly difficult to be a man today." Discuss. |
| <i>Y6 CT1 2014</i> | 'No country can really develop unless its women are educated.' Do you agree? |
| <i>Y5 Promo 2013</i> | 'Women are a decorative sex.' (Oscar Wilde) How far is this still an issue today? |
| <i>Y6 CT2 2012</i> | Does it matter that the leaders of most countries are men? |
| <i>Y6 Prelims 2012</i> | 'Women are not suitable for politics.' To what extent is this true? |
| <i>Y5 CT1 2012</i> | 'The pursuit of gender equality will do more harm than good.' Discuss. |
| <i>Promo 2011</i> | 'It is increasingly challenging to be a man today.' Do you agree? |

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| Y6 CT1 2011 | 'A nation cannot really progress until it empowers its women.' Do you agree? |
| Y6 CT2 2011 | 'Women in the developed world have never had it so good.' Do you agree? |
| Y6 CT2 2010 | 'Infidelity is a biological imperative.' Discuss. |
| Y6 CT2 2010 | Do you think there is much ambiguity and confusion about what it means to be a man in today's world? |

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION + DISCRIMINATION

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Cambridge 2019 | To what extent should income equality be a goal in your society? |
| Cambridge 2016 | 'People who do the most worthwhile jobs rarely receive the best financial rewards.' To what extent is this true of your society? |
| Cambridge 2013 | How far is increased prosperity for all a realistic goal in your society? |
| Cambridge 2012 | In your society, how far is equality for all a reality? |
| Cambridge 2011 | It is inevitable for technology to be more responsive to the problems of the rich than the poor. Discuss. |
| Y6 Prelim 2021 | Have our efforts to address discrimination made us overly sensitive? Discuss this in relation to your society. |
| Y6 CT 2021 | 'Criminals are victims too.' To what extent do you agree with this view? |
| Y6 CT 2021 | Discuss the view that ending poverty is desirable but unachievable. |
| Y6 CT 2021 | Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? |
| Y5 Promo 2021 | To what extent does your society truly care for its underprivileged people? |
| Y5 CT 2021 | 'The key to good health is wealth.' Comment. |
| Y5 Timed Practice 2020 | To what extent should the rich be expected to help the poor? |
| Y5 Timed Practice 2020 | 'It is surprising that discrimination still exists in the world today.' How far do you agree? |
| Y6 Prelim 2019 | Assess the view that your society is not doing enough to eradicate prejudice. |
| Y6 Prelim 2019 | To what extent is poverty the fault of the individual? |
| Y6 CT2 2018 | 'Poverty is a result of personal failure.' To what extent is this true of your society? |
| Y6 CT1 2013 | Is equality for all within your country a realistic and desirable aim? |
| Y6 CT 1 2012 | Do you agree that we can now do little to help the poor in our world? |
| Y6 CT2 2012 | Is it ever possible to eliminate stereotypes in society? |
| Y6 Prelim 2012 | 'Success is determined by one's intelligence.' Discuss. |
| Y5 CT1 2012 | 'People who are in poverty have only themselves to blame.' Comment. |
| Y5 Promo 2011 | Is it always the responsibility of the state to help the poor? |
| Y6 CT2 2011 | What can people in your society learn from its youth? |
| Y5 Promo 2010 | Have we paid too high a price in our pursuit of economic growth in Singapore? |
| Y6 Prelim 2010 | 'Inequality is a fact of life.' To what extent should we accept this? |

(Age) SOCIAL STRATIFICATION + DISCRIMINATION

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|---------------------------------|--|
| Cambridge 2017 | To what extent are people judged more by their physical appearance than by their abilities? |
| Cambridge 2016 | Longer life expectancy creates more problems than benefits. Discuss. |
| Cambridge 2015 | When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or the old? |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2021 | 'There is little to look forward to in one's old age.' To what extent is this true of your society? |
| Y5 Promo 2021 | 'Technology is key to reducing inequality.' How far do you agree? |
| Y5 CT 2021 | To what extent is ageism a problem in your society? |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021 | Evaluate the claim that too much has been done for the elderly in your society. |

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| Y5 Promo 2020 | 'When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, the poor should be given the highest priority.' What is your view? |
| Y6 CT1 2019 | Should the responsibility of taking care of the elderly fall solely on the government? |
| Y5 CT1 2013 | Is old age approached with horror in your society? |
| Y5 CT1 2012 | How far do you agree that it is the responsibility of the young to take care of the elderly in your society? |
| Y5 CT1 2011 | Is longer life expectancy a blessing or a curse? |
| Y6 CT2 2011 | 'Retirement is a redundant word today.' To what extent is this true? |
| Y5 Promo 2010 | To what extent is raising the retirement age a necessary evil in today's society? |
| Y6 CT1 2010 | 'Growing old can be an empowering process.' Do you agree? |
| <u>YOUTH</u> | |
| Cambridge 2019 | 'Religion is an important part of the lives of young people today.' Consider whether this is true in your society. |
| Y6 Prelim 2021 | How far is an overseas education a necessity for young people in your society? |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2020 | To what extent do young people have a significant voice in political affairs? |
| Y5 Timed Practice 2020 | To what extent are young people in your country prepared for the future? |
| Y6 Prelim 2019 | To what extent are young people in your society prepared for a world that is constantly changing? |
| Y6 Prelim 2018 | 'Young people celebrate the wrong heroes.' How far is this true in your society today? |
| Y6 Prelim 2016 | In your society, how far are young people prepared for the challenges of tomorrow? |
| Y6 Prelim 2014 | 'Young people today think of nothing but themselves.' Is this a fair description? |
| Y5 CT1 2014 | Do you agree that teenagers in your society have a bright future ahead of them? |
| Y6 CT1 2013 | With reference to the developments in the world today, to what extent would you agree that the future holds much promise for young people? |
| Y5 Promo 2013 | 'Always follow your dreams.' Is this good advice for young people today? |
| Y6 Prelim 2012 | Are the youth in Singapore prepared for future challenges? |
| Y5 Promo 2011 | Is too much being expected of today's youth? |
| Y5 Promo 2010 | 'Today's youth have no regard for authority.' Discuss this with reference to the youth in your society. |
| <u>EDUCATION</u> | |
| Cambridge 2020 | 'An appreciation of music is vital for a fully rounded education.' How true is this of your society? |
| Cambridge 2013 | 'Education should only be concerned with what is useful in life.' Discuss. |
| Cambridge 2011 | Does better education necessarily lead to a better standard of living? |
| Y6 CT 2021 | 'To be effective, schools must turn to technology.' How true is this of education today? |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021 | To what extent is education an effective way to combat poverty? |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2020 | Do you agree that a university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary today? |
| Y5 Timed Practice 2020 | Do schools in your society still teach what is relevant? |
| Y6 CT1 2019 | To what extent is education still the key to a nation's success? |
| Y6 CT1 2014 | Consider the view that the study of history is essential for mankind. |
| Y5 Promo 2014 | To what extent do you think that creativity can be cultivated? |
| Y5 Promo 2014 | How relevant is the study of History in our world today? |
| Y5 CT1 2014 | 'Only grades matter in education.' Discuss. |
| Y6 Prelim 2013 | 'Qualified but not enlightened.' Is this a fair description of educated people today? |
| Y6 CT1 2013 | 'The teaching of literary classics should be made compulsory in schools.' Discuss. |

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| Y5 CT1 2013 | 'Singapore can do without the study of the humanities.' Discuss. |
| Y6 CT2 2012 | To what extent should schools use examinations to evaluate students? |
| Y6 Prelim 2012 | 'An educated people can be easily governed.' Is this a valid statement? |
| Y5 CT1 2011 | 'Education has resulted in only more inequality.' Do you agree? |
| Y5 CT1 2010 | 'Education is the great leveller.' How far is this true? |
| Y6 Prelim 2010 | To what extent should government influence education? Discuss with reference to your country. |

SOCIAL ISOLATION

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| Cambridge 2011 | Examine the view that loneliness has become the new curse of modern society. |
| Y6 CT2 2012 | "Not in my backyard." To what extent is this a growing problem in your society? |

OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Cambridge 2021 | How far is the pursuit of happiness the most important human goal? |
| Cambridge 2021 | To what extent is charitable giving desirable? |
| Cambridge 2020 | To what extent is human life in general about the survival of the fittest? |
| Cambridge 2020 | 'We shape our buildings, but then our buildings shape us.' To what extent is this true of your society? |
| Cambridge 2020 | To what extent can any society claim to be great? |
| Cambridge 2020 | How far can prosperity and uncontrolled population growth go hand in hand? |
| Cambridge 2018 | 'People today do not work as hard as they did in the past.' How true is this of your society? |
| Cambridge 2018 | Is pressure a motivating force or a cause for unhappiness? |
| Cambridge 2018 | Consider the view that we do not take enough responsibility for our own well-being. |
| Y6 Prelim 2021 | 'Social activism today has done more harm than good.' How fair is this assessment? |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2021 | 'All talk, no action.' How far does this describe activism today? |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2021 | 'Handicrafts no longer have any practical benefits in modern society.' Comment. |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2021 | Is patriotism always desirable? |
| Y5 Promo 2021 | 'The purpose of the justice system should be rehabilitation, not punishment.' Discuss. |
| Y5 Promo 2021 | 'In the age of modern celebrity, there are no real heroes.' Do you agree? |
| Y5 Promo 2021 | 'City living is no longer attractive.' How true is this? |
| Y5 CT 2021 | Does a crisis always unite a nation? |
| Y5 CT 2021 | Should working from home become the norm in your society? |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021 | How important is discipline in your society? |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021 | Do you agree that public libraries serve little purpose today? |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021 | 'Co-operation, not competition, is the key to success today.' Comment. |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021 | 'If you have not left your borders, you have not learnt much.' How true is this? |
| Y5 Common Essay Assignment | 'A nation that simply complains.' Is this a fair comment about your society? |

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| Y6 Timed Practice 2020 | To what extent should sport in your society focus on local rather than foreign talent? |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2020 | Consider the value of having routines in today's world. |
| Y6 Timed Practice 2020 | Should capital punishment still have a place in your society today? |
| Y5 Promo 2020 | Is cooperation always desirable? |
| Y5 Promo 2020 | 'Work-life harmony is a myth.' How far is this true of your society today? |
| Y5 Promo 2020 | Discuss the value of humility in today's world. |
| Y5 Timed Practice 2020 | Consider the value of creativity in society. |
| Y5 Timed Practice 2020 | Should tradition be regarded with greater importance in the world today? |
| Y5 Promo 2019 | Consider the value of empathy in our world today. |
| Y6 CT2 2019 | Is it fair to expect businesses to give back to society? |
| Y6 CT1 2019 | 'Talent matters most.' How far is this true of your society? |
| Y6 CT2 2018 | Is it ever justifiable for people in society to make decisions for those who are unable to do so? |
| Y6 CT2 2014 | Do you agree with the view that consumerism is harmful to society? |
| Y5 Promo 2014 | In modern life, are we trying to do too much? |
| Y5 CT1 2014 | 'Change should always be embraced.' Comment. |
| Y5 CT1 2014 | 'Stress is healthy.' Discuss. |
| Y6 CT2 2013 | 'People today lack the capacity to imagine and feel.' Is this a fair characterisation of individuals in your society? |
| Y6 Prelim 2013 | Is work-life balance ever achievable in your society? |
| Y6 Prelim 2013 | How important are memories? |
| Y6 CT1 2013 | Do we expect too much from public figures? |
| Y5 Promo 2013 | How important is it for us to recognise and celebrate our heroes? |
| Y5 Promo 2013 | To what extent is Singapore a liveable city? |
| Y5 CT1 2013 | Consider the importance of conversation. |

SECTION A: GENDER ISSUES

Reading 1: To hope or doubt – The state of women’s progress in the world

EU 2-6

Laura Liswood | World Economic Forum | 20 December 2018

This reading will help you understand:

- The progress that has been made in gender equality for women
- The benefits of promoting greater inclusion of women
- Causes for concern that remain with respect to gender equality for women

I often invoke the words of United States abolitionist Frederick Douglass when asked about the state of women’s progress globally: “there is no progress without struggle”.

More than 110 diverse women, including the first Muslim women and the first Native American, were elected to Congress in the 2018 US midterm elections. Several factors appeared to shape the results, including an increase in the number of women willing to run; women of colour moving forward; and President Donald Trump himself - his comments, policies and the allegations surrounding his treatment of women.

A record proportion of women - 20% - were elected on the national level that night. This election certainly represented progress, though not without struggle. And the US still lags behind other countries, many of which have elected bodies composed of 40% or more women.

The gender gap around the world

There are signs of hope. More and more countries have gender-balanced national cabinets. Rwanda’s parliament is 60% female. Iceland continues its path toward complete gender parity, according to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report. Saudi women are at last able to drive legally and allowed into sports stadiums, though the Crown Prince has also jailed activists fighting for women’s rights.

In Germany, it appears likely that Chancellor Angela Merkel will be succeeded by the new Christian Democratic Union party leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. Two female heads of state in a row? That has only happened three times before: in Ireland, New Zealand and Bangladesh.

On the business side, countries are continuing to use affirmative mechanisms to ensure that women have seats on company boards. Even in the US, where quotas cause heated debate, California has mandated that publicly traded companies headquartered in the state must have at least one woman on their board. Many corporations now have boards of more than 50% women.



40 The #MeToo movement has galvanised people across the world to think about harassment in the workplace. It has given women permission to share their most difficult experiences, and it has highlighted how disastrous, both personally and professionally, such experiences can be. It has shown us what happens when women have to rely on men who abuse their power.

45 Corporations now understand that allegations and proof of sexual misconduct can harm them and pose ethical, reputational and financial risks which affect their bottom line, stock price and hiring ability. Larry Fink, CEO of global investment firm BlackRock, sent a letter to clients worldwide which highlighted the need to look beyond financial results. Every company must demonstrate how it “makes a positive contribution to society”, he wrote, including in diversity and talent management.

Why giving women a seat at the table pays off

50 Women are good for business. Research conducted over three decades shows a correlation between women’s representation in leadership roles and positive outcomes in organizations. Catalyst, Credit Suisse and McKinsey & Co. have all reported that companies with more women in leadership and on boards have a higher correlation of profitability and financial performance. They also have fewer instances of fraud, corruption and financial reporting mistakes.

55 Experience in Norway, which requires companies to reserve at least 40% of board seats for women, has shown that women are more likely to consider the long term, and include constituents other than shareholders in their board deliberations. Women encourage boards to focus more on communities, the environment and employees.

60 Women also introduce different legislation into parliaments and deliberating bodies than men do, often related to family, education and healthcare. With a critical mass in parliament, women can change its hours of operation to reflect the needs of legislators with children. In Sweden, proceedings now end at 6pm instead of 10pm. And in a virtuous circle, more women in public office inspire younger women to follow in their footsteps.

When women are involved in post-conflict negotiations, peace is more likely to prevail. A peace agreement is 35% more likely to last for at least 15 years when women are involved in the process, according to statistical analysis.

The 'glass cliff' phenomenon

65 But the arc of progress is not straightforward. The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 says it will take more than 200 years for the gender pay gap to disappear, at the current backsliding rate of progress. The world is leaving around \$12 trillion in GDP on the table because of this gender gap, according to McKinsey & Co.

70 “Industries must proactively hardwire gender parity in the future of work through effective training, reskilling and upskilling interventions, and tangible job transition pathways, which will be key to narrowing these emerging gender gaps and reversing the trends we are seeing today”, says Saadia Zahidi, Head of the Centre for the New Economy and Society and Member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum.

While the number of women on boards is increasing, it's happening slowly, and often because of government action. In the 44 countries where companies have three or more women on their boards, 43 have government-mandated quotas. Those without affirmative mechanisms are seeing only incremental gains.

Then there is the scrutiny that comes from holding power. Women who make it to the top face a set of challenges unknown to their male peers. They are often perceived as less legitimate. They continue to face unconscious bias, sexual harassment, discrimination, higher expectations and micro-aggressions - small but steady erosions of their authority.

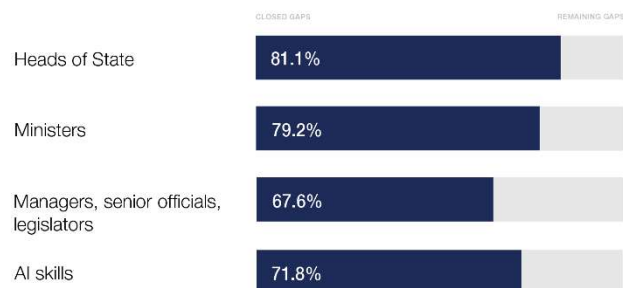
When women achieve high-level positions, they often face a precipice known as the "glass cliff" phenomenon. They have broken the glass ceiling by rising to leadership roles in dire times, such as financial crisis, controversy or conflict. Then they are pushed off the cliff if they can't find or create solutions - consider Theresa May and Brexit. As a result, women are often forced out sooner than their male counterparts because of the high-risk nature of their assignments, and the lack of support or authority to accomplish their difficult goals, according to Price Waterhouse Coopers.

Action, reaction

The #MeToo movement, despite empowering women, has led to unintended consequences. US Vice President Mike Pence has a rule not to dine alone with a woman who is not his wife. The #MeToo movement has made this line of thinking more common, perpetuating the unequal treatment of women in the office.

Bloomberg recently published an article titled "Wall Street Rule for the #MeToo Era: Avoid Women at All Costs". Fearing they could be entangled in accusations of sexual misconduct, some men have simply avoided associating with women at all. They may stop hiring, coaching or mentoring women, ironically ensuring a continuation of inequality and the gender pay gap. With that attitude, a woman's career prospects suffer, just in an entirely different way. I am reminded of Newton's third law of physics: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Leadership Gender Gap 2018



Source: LinkedIn data featured in the Global Gender Gap Report 2018, World Economic Forum

Optimists say that much has changed. Societies no longer consider domestic violence a taboo subject, for example, but an illegal act. Pessimists say that change is too slow. Men may now do more household work than in previous generations, for instance, but women still continue to do far more care in the home than men, freeing up men's time to achieve.

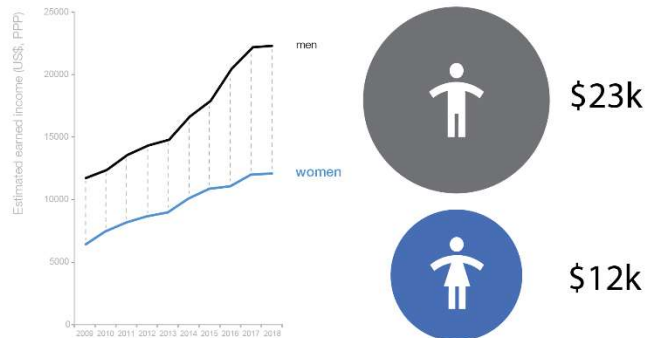
When asked about women's progress, I think of the glass that is either half full or half empty. But one thing is certain: women need to use their victories to galvanize more victories. Failure must energize us to clamour more loudly for progress.

The Income Gender Gap 2018



Over 10 years

Global Average, Annual Earnings



Source: Global Gender Gap Index 2018, World Economic Forum

For discussion/reflection:

- Liswood suggests that there are “signs of hope” for greater gender equality for women (line 12): (a) List these signs of “hope”; (b) Conduct further research on the events and statistics referred to in the article.
- According to Liswood, why does giving women a seat “pay off” (ln 36)? List her justifications.
- Liswood states that “the arc of progress [in gender equality for women] is not straightforward” (line 51). To what extent has the progress in closing the gender wage gap and dismantling gender discriminatory policies been effective?
- Based on the reading and your responses to the above questions, do you think there is more room to “hope” or for “doubt” with respect to the progress of gender equality for women today?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females is a desirable, but unrealistic, goal. (Cambridge 2016)
2. ‘It is a woman’s world today.’ How far do you agree? (Y5 CT 2021)
3. Have efforts to promote equality of the sexes done more harm than good? (RI Y5 Promo 2019)

Supplementary readings:

1. “How big is the global gender gap? Depends on which number you look at – by Andre Tartar and Cedric Sam, 27 March 2019” (<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-bloomberg-new-economy/progress-women-made-worldwide-gender-gap/>)
2. “Summary of progress of the world’s women, 2019-2020; Families in a changing world” – by UN Women (https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/publication/UNWOMEN_Progress-of-the-worlds-women-2019-20-Executive-summary-2019.pdf)

SECTION A: GENDER ISSUES

Reading 2: How the fight for gender equality is changing

EU 1-4 & 6

Ai-jen Poo | TIME | 8 March 2018

In this article you will learn about:

- How women across the societal spectrum are actively advocating for gender equality
- The power of alliances to shift the struggle of marginalised groups into the public eye

In 2006, TIME magazine named “You” as the Person of the Year, recognizing the shift that had taken place on the internet. Users had become the drivers of the World Wide Web. YouTube made users producers, Wikipedia made users experts and MySpace made people stars. Users were tired of being passive so they stopped being the audience, and TIME’s cover headline read, “You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world.” Nothing has been more true.

The same shift is happening now in the women’s movement.

Women have been fighting for equal rights for generations, for the right to vote, the right to control our bodies and the right to equality in the workplace. And these battles have been hard fought, but we still have a long way to go, and our victories are under threat. Equality in the workplace — women in a range of fields from domestic work to the entertainment industry can tell you — it’s still just a dream.

January 2017 marked a new moment for women as millions gathered around the country and the world, and launched our Web 2.0 of the women’s movement. We knew President Trump’s administration wasn’t going to listen to us. But we marched to be heard not by the president or a political party, but by one another.

While previous marches focused on specific issues, this time we wanted to raise them all. Years of activism by women organizers leading the Black Lives Matter movement, the Dreamer immigrant youth movement and leaders like Tarana Burke, founder of “Me Too,” created a new foundation for how we understood and made connections between our different experiences with violence and inequality.

And we began to listen to our own stories, and respond, at scale. We heard women with disabilities share their health care stories at Town Hall meetings and we called Congress in unprecedented numbers to protect our care. We heard Susan Fowler’s year at Uber, and we called for accountability in Silicon Valley. We heard our sisters speak about harassment in the workplace and we named names and even got some out. We heard actresses tell of their casting couch experiences and we made The Weinstein Company toxic. Farmworker women listened to women in Hollywood, and recognized their own stories in the courageous truth-telling they heard. Our capacity to listen exploded with the number of voices speaking until the cultural momentum of #MeToo became unstoppable.

And that’s when it happened. We stopped looking up, to those in power, and started looking around at the women standing beside us — from different backgrounds, working in different sectors, of different ethnicities, with different stories — and realized our strength is in our diversity not our singularity, and the power that we need to claim is our own.

We shifted from focusing on protesting laws to lifting each other up to become the lawmakers. Danica Roem is now the first transgender person to serve as a state legislator in the country. In fact, more

women than ever have decided to throw their hats in the ring and run for public office. We grew tired of reporting sexual predators, so we, following the leadership of black women, went to the polls and voted for Roy Moore's opponent.

- 40 We're writing a new playbook for power. We are growing our organizations, taking over others and forming new ones. We're working together, refusing to be isolated and doing what it takes to get the job done. Because that's what women have always done.

- We have seen the effects of this shift already in 2018. When yet another mass school shooting took place in Parkland, Florida we saw the rise of Emma Gonzalez, an 18 year-old student tired of the lack of action on gun control by the powers that be. At the Oscars last weekend, Frances McDormand invited producers to meet with all of the other female nominees because "we all have stories to tell and projects we need to be financed," and called for "inclusion riders" to make sure storytelling is inclusive both in front of and behind the camera. Farmworkers and domestic workers, the two groups of women workers who have been the most systematically excluded from protections at work, are mobilizing to Washington, D.C. to demand new protections from sexual harassment for all women.

- The message is loud and clear: We'll take over from here, thanks. The rate things have been going, we're certain we'll do a better job. When Lev Grossman wrote the feature for TIME's Person of the Year in 2006, he said, "It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes." The same is true of the power shift we are witnessing with women.

- We are watching women create the world we want to live in — not only changing the world, but also changing the way the world works. This year Golden Globe attendees who are part of #TIMESUP invited activists, myself included, as their "plus ones" because they know this movement will only be successful when all women are successful.

- This International Women's Day is about every single woman. It's about every LGBTQ woman and every woman of colour, every Hollywood actress and every domestic worker, every woman who loses a job to an under-qualified man, every woman who has been assaulted because of her gender whether she works in the spotlight or in the shadows. Every last one of us.

- 65 We're done with asking for things to change; we're making change ourselves. And so far it looks pretty good. It's only March, but every single woman is the Person of the Year. Welcome to our world.

[See end of Reading 3 for discussion/reflection questions.]

Reading 3: The unequal, unnoticed life of a female worker

EU 1- 4 & 6

Shailey Hingorani | Channel News Asia | 5 November 2018

This article will help you consider:

- Social norms and structural barriers that women in Singapore face contributing to inequality
- Possible ways to close the gender wage gap

In Singapore, women earn a staggering S\$640,000 less than their male counterparts over a 40-year career.

The differential, which includes CPF contributions, was calculated as part of AWARE's ongoing research on how the labour market treats women unfairly and what the government, employers, and trade unions can do to address gender inequality at the workplace.

The recent spate of conversations on Oxfam's Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index omitted one of its most significant findings - how gender inequality contributes to economic inequality.

How does gender inequality manifest itself in a country where men and women have equal opportunities to education and jobs?

It takes three insidious forms: Unequal pay for equal work, unpaid care work, and the fact that the labour market sorts men into higher-paying jobs and women into low-wage work.

Unequal pay for equal work

Using the Manpower Ministry's Labour Force Survey data on median monthly incomes of male and female employees who worked full-time to calculate the gender wage gap over a 40-year period to cover an individual's most productive work years, we found the gender wage gap has narrowed over the past decade but remains persistent across age groups, occupational categories, and hierarchical positions.

In 2016, women earned less than men in all occupational categories except clerical support. The gap at the top of the career ladder, where women are underrepresented, is even worse. A measly 10 per cent of all corporate directors of SGX-listed firms are women, and they are paid a whopping 43 per cent less than their male counterparts.

What makes the wage gap possible?

Gendered social norms that inherently devalue women's labour, and lack of policies that require employers to offer equal pay for equal work. In the workplace, women continue to face additional barriers - including gender bias, both conscious and unconscious, which result in unequal opportunities, choices and outcomes.

We regularly meet women who are discriminated against because of their motherhood or pregnancy status, women who are harassed at work, and women who are passed over for a promotion because of stereotypes that dictate what women "can" achieve.

It is easy to dismiss some of these claims as uncommon, after all Manpower Ministry statistics show only 57 pregnancy-related unfair dismissals in 2016.

However, these numbers would be much higher if the data took into account the full range of motherhood related workplace cases of well-performing pregnant employees whose contracts are

changed from full-time to part-time, salaries reduced, positions demoted, and those who are forced to resign, shortly after their employers find out about their pregnancy.

- 35 Make no mistake, the gender wage gap not only affects women's ability to make an income in their productive years, it also undermines their ability to save for their retirement needs.

Singapore has definitely made some progress in narrowing the gender gap in CPF savings, but there is still a gap of around 11 per cent between the average CPF balances of women and men. With women living longer than men they need more, not less, retirement savings.

Unpaid care work is still women's work

- 40 Despite moves to encourage shared responsibility within households and between households, and the public provision of certain care facilities, domestic work, including providing care to children and elderly, and household chores, is still considered a female responsibility.

- 45 This work, which remains largely invisible and unpaid, has a direct effect on labour market outcomes, particularly with respect to female labour force participation, the gender wage gap, and even the duration, quality and type of paid work that women can undertake.

In 2016, 78 per cent of prime working-age women outside the labour force were not working because of family responsibilities, including caregiving. The comparable percentage of men outside the labour force was a puny 9.6 per cent. This gap in labour force participation between men and women further widens their earnings' gap and therefore their retirement savings.

- 50 "Why can't women just try harder?" is a question we are often asked at talks and events on gender inequality, suggesting hard work and the right attitude as an easy remedy to women's workplace woes.

- 55 When women try to stay in jobs that do not provide paid childcare leave by taking unpaid leave to care for their sick child, they are dismissed for being "unreliable". When they try to find new work, employers do not hire them because they do not want workers whose attention is divided between caregiving responsibilities and work.

These are some examples of the types of disadvantages mothers face at work, sociologists refer to it as the "motherhood penalty", which numerous studies have quantified to be a wage gap of thousands of dollars between working mothers and childfree women over a lifetime.

- 60 In contrast, having kids does not affect men's salaries, a recent study of careers of men and women in Denmark shows, and hardly affects their careers in terms of the type of jobs they gravitate towards.

A typical refrain of sceptics of the gender wage gap is that women just "choose" lower paying jobs, which conveniently ignores the structural conditions that lead to gender inequality in the first place. Yes, it is true that women are over-represented in low-paying jobs in the social care industry and in cleaning, jobs considered to be natural extensions of their domestic roles in the private sphere.

- 65 It is not that women are deliberately choosing low-paying jobs but that the jobs they do are valued less than the jobs that men do. Empirical evidence shows that when a large number of women became designers in the US, wages occupation-wide fell by 34 per cent. When they became biologists, wages fell by 18 per cent.

- 70 Is this because women are seen as being of lesser worth? If so, the embedded misogyny needs to be tackled by not condoning any expression of it.

Another explanation for women's over-representation in low-paying jobs has indeed to do with choice, but more importantly the social context in which they make the choice.

Women are not simply choosing low-paying jobs, they are choosing the types of jobs that provide temporal flexibility required to attend to their caregiving responsibilities. These jobs tend to be shift-based, part-time, low-paying, and precarious.

A possible alternative could be to create more flexible jobs to allow employees of all sexes to balance their career and caring responsibilities so that those looking for flexibility are not automatically pushed into the low-paying informal sector.

So what can we do?

Fortunately, we can still take concrete steps to address the gender wage gap. First, public policy can encourage private sector companies with more than 250 employees to publish their median male and female wages.

In Britain, employees have used published wage data to talk to their managers about the concrete steps - such as training on unconscious bias for all their employees, evaluation of hiring and retention policies - that they plan to take to make workplaces more inclusive.

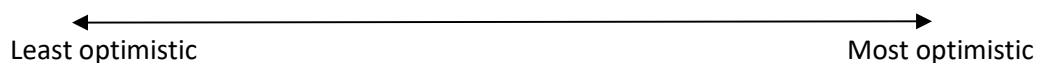
Second, the Singapore Government should disallow unequal remuneration for equal work in all sectors of the economy. It should go beyond promoting Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices to providing employers with incentives to organise regular unconscious gender-bias training for managers and HR professionals, and to clearly communicate their grievance handling procedures to their employees.

Finally, we must recognise, reduce and redistribute caregiving responsibilities so that they become a shared social responsibility. The provision of free childcare, increased investments in eldercare infrastructure, more flexible working arrangements, and paid family care leave are some measures known to reduce adverse labour outcomes for women.

As we continue our fight against economic inequality, let's bear in mind that addressing gender inequality is of critical importance for realising a Singapore that cares for all.

For discussion/reflection:

1. On the scale below, where would you place readings 1, 2 and 3 in terms of their optimism about the progress of gender equality for women? Explain, drawing from the ideas in each text, the basis for your choice. You can consider



2. Reading 2 highlights some ways in which women are working to advancing the cause of gender equality. To what extent do you think this phenomenon is observable in Singapore society? Research and build your case with supporting reasoning and examples, including those that relate to the gender wage gap and discriminatory policies.
3. Based on Reading 3, what are some causes of the gender wage gap in Singapore? Why is this gap problematic?
4. In Reading 3, what are some measures the author suggests for addressing gender inequality? Do you consider these measures realistically implementable in the context of Singapore? Why or why not?

Related essay questions:

1. Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females is a desirable, but unrealistic, goal. (Cambridge 2016)
2. Consider the view that some careers are more suited to one gender than the other. (Cambridge 2014)
3. The world would be a better place if women had a greater say in politics. To what extent do you agree? (Cambridge 2011)
4. 'We can never close the gender divide.' Do you agree? (Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021)
5. Consider the view that gender equality is a desirable but unrealistic goal. (RI Y5 Timed Practice 2020)
6. 'Success comes more easily to men than women.' To what extent is this true of your society?(RI Y6 CT1 2019)

Supplementary readings:

1. "Why 2018 will be the Tipping Point for Gender Equality in the Workplace" - Jeremy Goldman, Forbes, 2 January 2018 (<https://www.inc.com/jeremy-goldman/will-2018-be-tipping-point-for-gender-equality-in-workplace.html>)
2. "Gender Inequality remains a problem in Singapore: Here's Why" – Noah Tan, The Pride, 4 April 2018 (<https://pride.kindness.sg/gender-inequality-in-singapore-remains-a-problem-heres-why/>)

SECTION A: GENDER ISSUES

Reading 4: Nearly 2.4 billion women globally don't have same economic rights as men EU 1- 4

Press Release | The World Bank | 1 March 2022

This reading helps you understand:

- That despite the pandemic, 23 countries have improved laws to advance women's economic inclusion
- The different measures implemented across different regions to address a range of areas where women have been disadvantaged
- Why in areas like equality in the workplace and childcare services, much remains to be done to put women on a more equal footing

Around 2.4 billion women of working age are not afforded equal economic opportunity and 178 countries maintain legal barriers that prevent their full economic participation, according to the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2022 report. In 86 countries, women face some form of job restriction and 95 countries do not guarantee equal pay for equal work.

- 5 Globally, women still have only three quarters of the legal rights afforded to men -- an aggregate score of 76.5 out of a possible 100, which denotes complete legal parity. However, despite the disproportionate effect on women's lives and livelihood from the global pandemic, 23 countries reformed their laws in 2021 to take much-needed steps towards advancing women's economic inclusion, according to the report.
- 10 *"While progress has been made, the gap between men's and women's expected lifetime earnings globally is US\$172 trillion - nearly two times the world's annual GDP," said Mari Pangestu, World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships. "As we move forward to achieve green, resilient and inclusive development, governments need to accelerate the pace of legal reforms so that women can realize their full potential and benefit fully and equally."*
- 15 *Women, Business and the Law 2022* measures laws and regulations across 190 countries in eight areas impacting women's economic participation – mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions. The data offer objective and measurable benchmarks for global progress toward gender equality. Just 12 countries, all part of the OECD, have legal gender parity. New this year is a 95-country pilot survey of laws governing childcare -- a critical area where
- 20 support is needed for women to succeed in paid employment. A pilot analysis of how laws affecting women's economic empowerment are actually implemented is also included, highlighting the difference between laws on the books and the reality experienced by women.

- 25 The Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa regions showed the largest improvements in the WBL Index in 2021, though they continue to lag behind other parts of the world overall. Gabon stands out with comprehensive reforms to its civil code and the enactment of a law on the elimination of violence against women. Gabon's score rose from 57.5 in 2020 to 82.5 in 2021.

- 30 Globally, the highest number of reforms were made in the Parenthood, Pay, and Workplace indicators. Many reforms focused on protecting against sexual harassment in employment, prohibiting gender discrimination, increasing paid leave for new parents, and removing job restrictions for women. The Pay and Parenthood indicators have the lowest average scores in the index, but they have increased in the last year, rising 0.9 and 0.7 points, respectively, with average scores of 68.7 and 55.6. The gains in the Parenthood indicator have largely been around paternity leave and shared parental leave, but the low score highlights the need to accelerate reforms in this area.

35 *“Women cannot achieve equality in the workplace if they are on an unequal footing at home,” said Carmen Reinhart, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank Group. “That means leveling the playing field and ensuring that having children doesn’t mean women are excluded from full participation in the economy and realizing their hopes and ambitions.”*

Across the world, 118 economies guarantee 14 weeks of paid leave for mothers. More than half (114) of the economies measured mandate paid leave for fathers, but the median duration is just one week.

40 In the past year, Hong Kong SAR, China—which previously provided 10 weeks of paid maternity leave—introduced the recommended 14-week minimum duration. Armenia, Switzerland, and Ukraine introduced paid paternity leave. Colombia, Georgia, Greece, and Spain introduced paid parental leave, which offer both parents some form of paid leave to care for a child following birth. Laws promoting paid leave for fathers can reduce discrimination in the workplace and improve work-life balance.

45 *Women, Business and the Law 2022* introduces pilot research behind two new areas: legal environment for childcare services and implementation of laws. A growing number of economies are investing in childcare to enhance children’s skills and recognize unpaid care work by women, who often take on more caregiving duties. The pilot research analyzed laws in 95 economies and finds that most OECD high-income and Europe and Central Asia economies regulate public childcare services while in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia regulations mandate the private sector or employers to provide care services for children of working parents.

50 To make childcare more affordable and widely used, some countries offer financial support to parents or childcare providers. The research also looked at quality aspects regulated such as teacher-to-child ratio, maximum group sizes, training requirements for teachers, as well as licensing, inspections and reporting requirements for service providers. More evidence is needed on what constitutes good quality and what aspects of quality might determine parental uptake of services.

55 This edition also explores the operation of Women, Business and the Law indicators in practice in 25 economies. An analysis of the laws’ implementation schemes reveals a substantial gap between legislation on the books and legal operation. Laws alone are not enough to improve gender equality; factors at play include not only their implementation and enforcement, but also social, cultural, and religious norms. These gaps will be further explored in future cycles of Women, Business and the Law reports.

Advanced Economies

Advanced economies continue to make progress on the indicators. Greece, Spain and Switzerland reformed laws in 2021, all focusing on improving paid leave for new parents. Twelve advanced economies are the world’s only economies that score 100 – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

East Asia and the Pacific

The East Asia and the Pacific region continue to reform its legislation towards gender equality, but at a slow pace. Two economies from East Asia reformed last year. Cambodia introduced an old-age pension system that sets equal ages at which women and men can retire with full pension benefits. Vietnam eliminated all restrictions on women’s employment.

Europe and Central Asia

The Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region is the second highest scoring region, with an average score of 84.1. Four economies reformed last year. Armenia and Ukraine introduced paid paternity leave, and Georgia introduced paid parental leave. Ukraine also equalized the ages at which women and men

75 can retire with full pension benefits. Cyprus allowed women to apply for a passport in the same way as men. Important challenges remain in the areas of Pay and Pension which have the lowest average scores in this region. For example, almost half of the economies in ECA do not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, and the ages for full pension benefits are still unequal in 17 economies.

Latin America and the Caribbean

80 Women in Latin America and the Caribbean have less than three-quarters of the legal rights of men. Two of the region's 32 economies enacted reforms in the past year. Argentina explicitly accounted for periods of absence due to childcare in pension benefits. Colombia became the first country in Latin America to introduce paid parental leave, aiming to reduce discrimination against women in the workplace. Only half of the economies in the region guarantee any paid leave for fathers.

Middle East and North Africa

85 Women in the Middle East and North Africa have, on average, only half of the legal rights that men do. However, the region improved its laws the most due to reforms in five economies. Bahrain mandated equal pay for work of equal value and lifted restrictions on women's ability to work at night. It also repealed provisions giving the relevant authority the power to prohibit or restrict women from working in certain jobs or industries. Egypt enacted legislation protecting women from domestic violence and made access to credit easier for women by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in financial services. Kuwait prohibited gender discrimination in employment and adopted legislation on sexual harassment in employment. Lebanon enacted legislation criminalizing sexual harassment in employment. Oman allowed women to apply for a passport in the same way as men.

South Asia

95 Women in South Asia have only two-thirds of the legal rights of men in the region. Only one economy in the region reformed. Pakistan lifted restrictions on women's ability to work at night.

Sub-Saharan Africa

100 Sub-Saharan Africa has a wide range of performance on the Women, Business and the Law index, ranging from 89.4 in Mauritius to 29.4 in Sudan. The region implemented comprehensive reforms, achieving the second highest improvement in the index last year. Gabon stands out, with comprehensive reforms to its civil code and the enactment of a law on the elimination of violence against women. These reforms gave women the same rights to choose where to live as men, get jobs without permission from their husbands, removed the requirement for married women to obey their husbands and allows women to be head of household in the same way as men. Gabon granted spouses equal rights to immovable property and equal administrative authority over assets during marriage. Gabon also enacted legislation protecting women from domestic violence. Gabon's reforms gave women the same rights to open a bank account as men and prohibited gender-based discrimination in financial services.

110 Also in the Africa region, Angola enacted legislation criminalizing sexual harassment in employment. Benin removed restrictions on women's employment in construction, so that women can now work in all the same jobs in the same way as men. Burundi mandated equal remuneration for work of equal value. Sierra Leone made access to credit easier for women by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in financial services. Togo introduced new legislation which no longer prohibits the dismissal of pregnant workers, reducing women's economic opportunities.

[See end of Reading 5 for discussion/reflection questions.]

Reading 5: Only half of women in developing world in charge of their own bodies

EU 1- 4

Lin Taylor | Thomson Reuters Foundation | 14 April 2021

This reading helps you understand:

- The different ways in which the lack of body autonomy has affected women in developing societies
- The sociocultural origins of such practices, which worsen gender inequality
- How the pandemic has magnified such inequalities

Only about half of women and girls in developing countries are able to make decisions over their own bodies such as whether they want to have sex, seek healthcare and use contraception, a United Nations report said on Wednesday.

From being denied access to contraception or abortion services, made to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) and virginity tests, or married as children, women and girls are often forced to give up control over their bodies, it said. “The right to autonomy over our bodies means we must have the power and agency to make choices without fear of violence or having someone else decide for us,” said Natalia Kanem, head of the U.N.’s sexual and reproductive health agency, UNFPA.

Women in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Central Asia are least likely to have control over their bodies, such as being able to refuse sex with a partner or accessing sexual healthcare without needing permission from a male relative, UNFPA said. In places including Mali, Niger and Senegal, only 10% of women had “bodily autonomy”, said the report, which analysed multiple datasets on gender equality, sexual health and access to contraception in 57 countries.

Kanem said social taboos around sex and entrenched patriarchy prevented women and girls from having any say, since male relatives tended to have power over women’s choices. “Gender inequality is the most insidious and pervasive impediment to bodily autonomy. It starts from the cradle,” Kanem, a paediatrician and epidemiologist, told reporters in an online media briefing. “Gender unequal norms and attitudes lead to power imbalances that restrict women’s decision-making ... (driving) the expectation that women and girls will yield to others in all aspects of their lives.”

Kanem added that the coronavirus pandemic had worsened existing inequalities for women and girls. “What was previously bad is now worse with the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in increasing sexual violence, more unintended pregnancies, and new barriers to health access along with job and education losses.”

UNFPA said last April that global lockdowns could lead to a 20% surge in domestic violence as victims remained trapped at home with their abusers. Researchers also predicted there could be an extra 13 million child marriages and another 2 million cases of FGM in the next decade as the pandemic stymies global efforts to end both practices.

Deepening poverty caused by a global recession could also drive more families to marry off their daughters early, UNFPA said. Despite such setbacks, a World Bank report in February said 27 countries reformed laws or regulations to give women more economic equality with men in 2019-20.

For reflection/discussion:

Reading 4:

- In the overview provided in reading 4 of policies that different regions have adopted to improve the lot of women, assess and classify the priorities in which each region has focused their efforts on in the following areas:
 - a. Work-Life balance
 - b. Equal Pay
 - c. Harassment
 - d. Career Opportunities
 - e. Children & Career
- Which areas in the above classifications have seen the most improvements? How will these positive changes impact women in these regions?
- What areas have seen the least improvements? How will these gaps further impact the plight of women?

Reading 5:

- In groups, analyse the strength of the following factors that contribute towards the problems resulting from the lack of body autonomy mentioned in this article:
 - a. Traditional views and practices
 - b. Lack of governance in enshrining and enforcing the rule of law to protect the rights of women
 - c. Lack of awareness due to limited education and/or media exposure

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females in a desirable, but unrealistic, goal. (Cambridge 2016)
2. How far would you agree that technological progress has done more harm than good for gender equality? (RI Y6 Timed Practice 2021)
3. 'It is a woman's world today.' How far do you agree? (RI Y5 CT 2021)
4. 'A nation cannot really progress until it empowers its women.' Do you agree? (RI Y6 CT1 2011)

SECTION B: ISSUES TO DO WITH FAMILY, MARRIAGE & PARENTING

Reading 6: The nuclear family was a mistake

EU 3 & 6

Adapted from *The nuclear family was a mistake* | David Brooks | *The Atlantic* | February 2020

This reading will help you understand that:

- The family structure is determined by the prevailing socio-economic and cultural forces and how these shifts will lead to a change in people's attitudes towards the family.
- The "nuclear family" structure may not be as ideal as some may have considered it to be.
- With the fall of the nuclear family, extended families might be able to fill the gap and maintain social stability, particularly for the marginalised.

35 The story of our times is that of the family, once a dense cluster of many siblings and extended kin, fragmenting into ever smaller and more fragile forms. We've moved from big, interconnected, and extended families, which helped protect the most vulnerable people in society from the shocks of life, to smaller, detached nuclear families (a married couple and their children).

40 For a time, it all seemed to work. From 1950 to 1965, divorce rates dropped, fertility rates rose, and the American nuclear family seemed to be in wonderful shape. Most people seemed prosperous and happy. In these years, a certain family ideal became engraved in our minds: the two-parent nuclear family, with one or two kids, living in some detached family home on some suburban street. We take it as the norm, even though this wasn't the way most humans lived during the tens of thousands of years before 1950, and it isn't the way most humans have lived during the 55 years since 1965.

45 **The fall of the "nuclear family"**

Today, only a minority of American households are traditional two parent nuclear families and only one-third of American individuals live in this kind of family. That 1950–65 window was not normal. It was a freakish historical moment when all of society conspired, wittingly and not, to obscure the essential fragility of the nuclear family.

50 For one thing, most women were relegated to the home. Many corporations, well into the mid-20th century, barred married women from employment: Companies would hire single women, but if those women got married, they would have to quit. Demeaning and disempowering treatment of women was rampant. Women spent enormous numbers of hours trapped inside the home under the headship of their husband, raising children.

55 The period from 1950 to 1965 demonstrated that a stable society can be built around nuclear families – so long as women are relegated to the household, nuclear families are so intertwined that they are basically extended families by another name, and every economic and sociological condition in society is working together to support the institution.

60 But these conditions did not last. The constellation of forces that had briefly shored up the nuclear family began to fall away, and the sheltered family of the 1950s was supplanted by the stressed family of every decade since.

Some of the strains were economic. Starting in the mid-'70s, young men's wages declined, putting pressure on working class families in particular. The major strains were cultural. Society became more individualistic and more self-oriented. People put greater value on privacy and autonomy. A rising feminist movement helped endow women with greater freedom to live and work as they chose.

65

Also, since the 1960s, the dominant family culture has been the “self-expressive marriage.” “Americans,” he has written, “now look to marriage increasingly for self-discovery, self-esteem and personal growth.” Marriage, according to the sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, “is no longer primarily about childbearing and childrearing. Now marriage is primarily about adult fulfilment.”

70 Fallout from the fall

This cultural shift was very good for some adults, but it was not so good for families generally. Fewer relatives are around in times of stress to help a couple work through them. If you married for love, staying together made less sense when the love died.

75 Over the past two generations, people have spent less and less time in marriage – they are marrying later, if at all, and divorcing more. In 1950, 27 percent of marriages ended in divorce; today, about 45 percent do. In 1960, 72 percent of American adults were married. In 2017, nearly half of American adults were single.

80 And while more than four-fifths of American adults in a 2019 Pew Research Center survey said that getting married is not essential to living a fulfilling life, it’s not just the institution of marriage they’re eschewing: In 2004, 33 percent of Americans ages 18 to 34 were living without a romantic partner, according to the General Social Survey; by 2018, that number was up to 51 percent.

85 Over the past two generations, families have also gotten a lot smaller. The general American birth rate is half of what it was in 1960. In 2012, most American family households had no children. There are more American homes with pets than with kids. In 1970, about 20 percent of households had five or more people. As of 2012, only 9.6 percent did.

Over the past two generations, the physical space separating nuclear families has widened. Married people are less likely to visit parents and siblings, and less inclined to help them do chores or offer emotional support. A code of family self-sufficiency prevails: Mom, Dad, and the kids are on their own, with a barrier around their island home.

90 Finally, over the past two generations, families have grown more unequal. America now has two entirely different family regimes. Among the highly educated, family patterns are almost as stable as they were in the 1950s; among the less fortunate, family life is often utter chaos. There’s a reason for that divide: Affluent people have the resources to effectively buy extended family, in order to shore themselves up. Think of all the child-rearing labour affluent parents now buy that used to be done by
95 extended kin: babysitting, professional child care, tutoring, coaching, therapy, expensive after-school programs. (For that matter, think of how the affluent can hire therapists and life coaches for themselves, as replacement for kin or close friends.)

100 These expensive tools and services not only support children’s development and help prepare them to compete in the meritocracy; by reducing stress and time commitments for parents, they preserve the amity of marriage. Affluent conservatives often preach that everybody else should build stable families too. But then they ignore one of the main reasons their own families are stable: They can afford to purchase the support that extended family used to provide – and that the people they preach at, further down the income scale, cannot.

105 When you put everything together, we’re likely living through the most rapid change in family structure in human history. People who grow up in a nuclear family tend to have a more individualistic mind-set than people who grow up in a multigenerational extended clan. People with an individualistic mind-set tend to be less willing to sacrifice self for the sake of the family, and the result is more family disruption. People who grow up in disrupted families have more trouble getting the education they

need to have prosperous careers. People who don't have prosperous careers have trouble building stable families, because of financial challenges and other stressors. The children in those families become more isolated and more traumatized.

Who's paying the price?

The people who suffer the most are the vulnerable – especially children. In 1960, roughly 5 percent of children were born to unmarried women. Now about 40 percent are. The Pew Research Center reported that 11 percent of children lived apart from their father in 1960. In 2010, 27 percent did. Now about half of American children will spend their childhood with both biological parents.

About twenty percent of young adults have no contact at all with their father. American children are more likely to live in a single-parent household than children from any other country. Children of single parents or unmarried cohabiting parents tend to have worse health outcomes, worse mental-health outcomes, less academic success, more behavioural problems, and higher truancy rates than do children living with their two married biological parents.

Single men are affected too. Today many American males spend the first 20 years of their life without a father and the next 15 without a spouse. In the absence of the connection and meaning that family provides, unmarried men are less healthy – alcohol and drug abuse are common – earn less, and die sooner than married men.

For women, the nuclear-family structure imposes different pressures. Though women have benefited greatly from the loosening of traditional family structures – they have more freedom to choose the lives they want – many mothers who decide to raise their young children without extended family nearby find that they have chosen a lifestyle that is brutally hard and isolating. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that women still spend significantly more time on housework and child care than men do, according to recent data. Thus, the reality we see around us: stressed, tired mothers trying to balance work and parenting, and having to reschedule work when family life gets messy.

Without extended families, older Americans have also suffered. According to the AARP, 35 percent of Americans over 45 say they are chronically lonely. Many older people are now “elder orphans,” with no close relatives or friends to take care of them. In 2015, The New York Times ran an article called “The Lonely Death of George Bell,” about a family-less 72-year-old man who died alone and rotted in his Queens apartment for so long that by the time police found him, his body was unrecognizable.

Finally, because groups that have endured greater levels of discrimination tend to have more fragile families, African Americans have suffered disproportionately. Nearly half of black families are led by an unmarried single woman, compared with less than one-sixth of white families. (The high rate of black incarceration guarantees a shortage of available men to be husbands or caretakers of children.) According to census data from 2010, 25 percent of black women over 35 have never been married, compared with 8 percent of white women. Two-thirds of African American children lived in single-parent families in 2018, compared with a quarter of white children. Black single-parent families are most concentrated in precisely those parts of the country in which slavery was most prevalent. Research by John Iceland, a Penn state professor of sociology, suggests that the differences between white and black family structure explain 30 percent of the affluence gap between the two groups.

Americans are now hungering to live in extended and forged families, in ways that are new and ancient at the same time. This is a significant opportunity, a chance to thicken and broaden family relationships, a chance to allow more adults and children to live and grow under the loving gaze of a dozen pairs of eyes, and be caught, when they fall, by a dozen pairs of arms.

For decades we have been eating at smaller and smaller tables, with fewer and fewer kin. It's time to find ways to bring back the big tables.

For discussion/reflection:

- According to Brooks, what were the preconditions existing in America from 1950 to 1965 that allowed the nuclear family to be temporarily successful?
- What are some factors contributing to the weakening of the nuclear family structure over the last 50 years?
- How applicable are these factors to your society? Do you observe a similar shift/weakening in nuclear family structure in your society? Which factors were particularly significant and why? Conversely, were/are there factors associated with your society that insulated nuclear families from adverse effects?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Is the traditional family still relevant in your society today? (RI Y6 Timed Practice 2021)
2. 'The idea of marriage is outdated in modern society.' Discuss. (RI Y5 CT 2018)
3. 'Modern life is not conducive to the survival of the family.' Comment. (RI Y6 CT1 2013)

SECTION B: ISSUES TO DO WITH FAMILY, MARRIAGE & PARENTING

Reading 7: The nuclear family is no mistake

EU 3 & 6

Adapted from The Nuclear Family Is Still Indispensable | Hal Boyd & W. Bradford Wilcox | The Atlantic | 21 February 2020

This reading will help you understand that:

- Multigenerational families and other family structures cannot replace the nuclear family.
- The nuclear family will have spillover effects on the safety of the larger community and neighbourhood.

The nuclear family is disintegrating – or so Americans might conclude from what they watch and read. The quintessential nuclear family consists of a married couple raising their children. But from Oscar-winning *Marriage Story*'s gut-wrenching portrayal of divorce or the Harvard sociologist Christina Cross's *New York Times* op-ed in December, "The Myth of the Two-Parent Home," discounting the importance of marriage for kids, one might draw the conclusion that marriage is more endangered than ever – and that this might not be such a bad thing.

Meanwhile, the writer David Brooks recently described the post–World War II American concept of family as a historical aberration – a departure from a much older tradition in which parents, grandparents, siblings, and cousins all look out for the well-being of children. In an article in *The Atlantic* bearing the headline "The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake", Brooks argued that the "nuclear family has been crumbling in slow motion for decades." He sees extended families and what he calls "forged families" – single parents, single adults, and others coming together to support one another and children – as filling the vacuum created by the breakdown of the nuclear family.

Yet the search for alternate forms of family has two major flaws. First, there's evidence indicating that the nuclear family is, in fact, recovering. Second, a nuclear family headed by two loving married parents remains the most stable and safest environment for raising children.

There are, of course, still reasons for legitimate concern about the state of the American family. Marriage today is less likely to anchor family life in many poor and working-class communities. While a majority of college-educated men and women between 18 and 55 are married, that's no longer true for the poor (only 26 percent are married) and the working class (39 percent). What's more, children from these families are markedly less likely to live under the same roof as their biological parents than their peers from better-off backgrounds are.

But there is also ample good news – especially for kids. Today, the divorce rate is down, having fallen by more than 30 percent since peaking around 1980, in the wake of the divorce revolution. And, since the Great Recession, out-of-wedlock births are now dipping as well. Less divorce and less non-marital childbearing means that more children are being raised in stable, married families. Since 2014, the share of kids in intact families has begun to climb, reversing a decades-long trend in the opposite direction. And as Brooks noted – citing research that one of us conducted at the University of Virginia – the nuclear family headed by married parents remains a personal ideal even among men and women who harbour no moral objections to alternative family structures.

None of this suggests that scholars and social commentators are wrong to extol the role extended families can play in improving children's lives. In her *New York Times* article raising questions about the importance of the two-parent home, Cross hypothesised that living closer to extended family may actually be helping protect black children "against some of the negative effects associated with parental absence from the home". And, in Brooks' evocative telling, the alternatives to the nuclear

family hold enormous promise: “Americans are hungering to live in extended and forged families”, arrangements that “allow more adults and children to live and grow under the loving gaze of a dozen pairs of eyes, and be caught, when they fall, by a dozen pairs of arms”.

40 Grandparents, for example, are sharing homes with children and grandchildren; single adults and single parents are forging novel alliances on websites like CoAbode, where, according to Brooks, “single mothers can find other single mothers interested in sharing a home.” These emerging arrangements not only afford people more freedom to choose their own ties that bind, but they also promise to fill the void left in the absence of a strong nuclear family.

45 There’s no question that “a dozen pairs of arms” can make lighter work of family life. Society should applaud those who step up to try to rescue adults and children left adrift in a nation where, despite promising trends, many children still grow up outside an intact two-parent family.

Why the “nuclear family” still matters

But Americans should not presume that society can successfully replace families headed by married parents with models oriented more around kith and kin. Caution is especially warranted as extended families and communities struggle to foster upward mobility or to raise the next generation successfully in circumstances where the family once anchored by marriage has broken down in their midst.

55 It turns out that the relationship between nuclear families and larger communities is more symbiotic than substitutionary, more interdependent than interchangeable. Whatever the merits of extended or other non-nuclear forms of family life, research has yet to show that they are entirely equipped to shoulder the unique role of a child’s two parents.

Today, most multigenerational households – which include grandparents, parents, and children – contain only one parent. This often occurs because a mother has moved in with her own parent (or the reverse) following a divorce or breakup. According to the sociologist Wendy Wang, 65 percent of multigenerational families include a single parent. But research reveals mixed outcomes for such households.

65 Sara McLanahan of Princeton University and Gary Sandefur of the University of Wisconsin have found that the average child raised by a “mother and grandmother is doing about the same as the average child raised by a single mother” on outcomes such as dropping out of high school or having a teen birth. And in the absence of both parents, children raised by their extended kin, such as an aunt or uncle, are significantly more likely to have, in the words of one study, “higher levels of internalising problems” – including loneliness and sadness – compared to their peers raised by married parents.

70 As for other emerging forms of family, such as forged families, there are well-founded reasons for scepticism about the role unrelated adults might play in raising a child. Over the years, study after study has detailed the many possible downsides to introducing unrelated adults, especially men, into children’s lives without the presence of those children’s married parents.

This is because, sadly, adults who are unrelated to children are much more likely to abuse or neglect them than their own parents are. One federal report found that children living in a household with an unrelated adult were about nine times more likely to be physically, sexually, or emotionally abused than children raised in an intact nuclear family. All this is to say that, for kids, it matters if all the pairs of arms raising them include – first and foremost – those of their own parents.

75 The positive effects of stable marriage and stable nuclear families also spill over. Neighbourhoods, towns, and cities are more likely to flourish when they are sustained by lots of married households.

The work of the Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson tells us that neighbourhoods with many two-parent families are much safer. In his own words: “Family structure is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictor[s] of variations in urban violence across cities in the United States.”

His Harvard colleagues, the economists Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren, have drawn similar conclusions about the relationship between the health of the American dream and the presence of two-parent families in a community. Working with a team of scholars, they found that black boys are more likely to achieve upward economic mobility if there are more black fathers in a neighbourhood – and more married couples, as well. And for poor children of all races, Chetty and his team have found that the fraction of children with single parents in a given community is the strongest and most robust predictor of economic mobility – or its absence. Children raised in communities with high percentages of single mothers are less likely to move up. In other words, it takes a village – but of *married* people – to raise the odds that a poor child will have a shot at the American dream.

To be sure, the isolated nuclear family detached from all social support is simply not workable for most people. Married couples raising children – as well as other family forms – are more likely to thrive when they are embedded in strong networks of friends, family, community, and religious congregations.

Likewise, communities are stronger and safer when they include lots of committed married couples. It’s good news, then, that the share of children being raised by their own married parents is on the rise. Extended kin can (and sometimes must) play a greater role in meeting children’s needs. But as any parent knows, when it comes to an inconsolable child, even a “dozen pairs of arms” from the village don’t quite compare to the warm and safe embrace of Mom or Dad.

For discussion/reflection:

- What are some reasons provided by the authors to support their view that the nuclear family is still indispensable?
- Why do the authors assert that “the relationship between nuclear families and larger communities is more symbiotic than substitutionary, more interdependent than interchangeable” (lines 52-53)? How far do you agree with their arguments?
- While Brooks in the previous reading talks about the fall of the nuclear family and the need for extended families to fill the gap, Boyd and Wilcox believe that the nuclear family is still an important unit that cannot be replaced by extended families. Whose view do you think is more applicable to your society?

Related RI essay questions:

1. ‘Modern life is not conducive to the family.’ Do you agree? (RI Y6 CT1 2013)

SECTION B: ISSUES TO DO WITH FAMILY, MARRIAGE & PARENTING

Reading 8: Government does not encourage single parenthood as a lifestyle choice EU 1-3, 5 & 6

Adapted from Authorities looking at adoption laws and surrogacy, do not support gay families | Rachel Au-Yong | The Straits Times | 14 January 2019

This reading will help you understand:

- The ethical, social, health and legal implications of adoption and surrogacy as a form of forming families
- That legislation and policy-making regarding adoption and surrogacy must take into account values of broader society

The authorities are reviewing adoption laws, as well as looking into the issue of surrogacy, following a recent landmark case involving a gay father adopting his biological child who was conceived through a surrogate in the United States.

5 Even so, Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee stressed the Government's position on same-sex parenthood, saying it does not support the formation of families by gay parents.

10 Mr Lee was responding to three MPs in Parliament on Monday (Jan 14). The trio – Mr Christopher de Souza (Holland-Bukit Timah GRC), Dr Fatimah Lateef (Marine Parade GRC) and Mr Seah Kian Peng (Marine Parade GRC) – had raised questions about last month's High Court decision¹ to grant a gay man's appeal to adopt his biological son in the interest of the child's welfare. The boy was conceived through commercial surrogacy.

Some celebrated the ruling as a mark of progress for the gay community, while others pointed out that it goes against what constitutes a family in Singapore. Yet others felt the laws surrounding surrogacy were unclear, and wondered if the man had exploited a loophole to become a father.

15 Currently, surrogacy is barred in Singapore. Those who have gone abroad for it and returned home to apply for adoption of their surrogate children will have their applications assessed on a case-by-case basis. To date, the courts have granted the adoption of 10 surrogate children to married couples who had turned to surrogacy because of infertility issues.

20 But the surrogacy issue, Mr Lee said, "is a complex issue with ethical, social, health and legal implications for all parties involved". He added "For commercial surrogacy in particular, concerns have been raised about the exploitation of women and commodification of children. These issues are not trivial, and warrant careful study and discussion."

Meanwhile, he issued this note of caution: "Persons who are considering surrogacy should take this into account from the outset while making their decision, as such factors could have a significant impact on the child."

25 Mr de Souza, in response to the speech, pointed out that commercial surrogacy "commodifies the life of a baby" and was "exploitative to women", and urged the authorities to bar the practice explicitly, including in adoption laws.

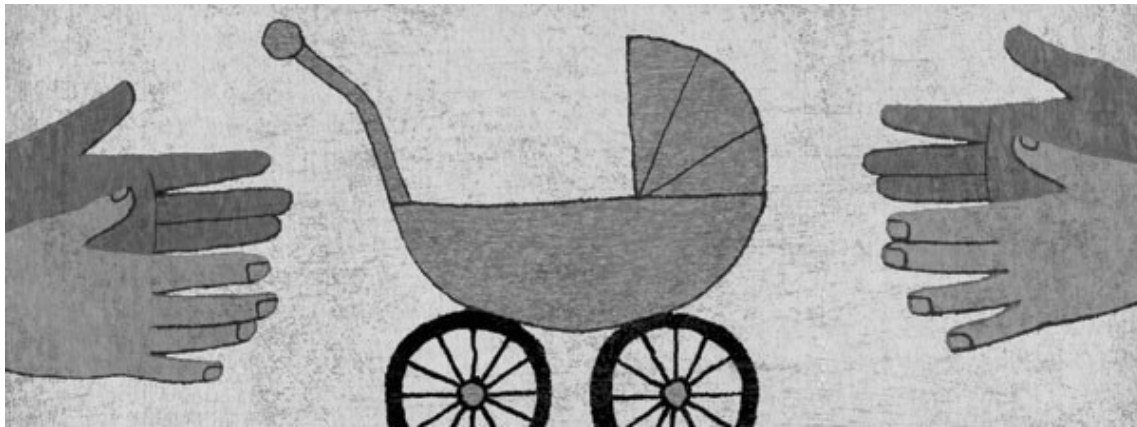
¹ "Landmark High Court case allows Singaporean gay dad to adopt surrogate son" (K.C. Vijayan, The Straits Times, 17 Dec 2018) - <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/landmark-high-court-case-allows-gay-dad-to-adopt-surrogate-son>

30 While acknowledging the concerns, Mr Lee said: “Whether we should completely prohibit surrogacy by Singaporeans within Singapore or all over the world... it's something that we must consider holistically and carefully, keeping in mind the wishes, aspirations and concerns of mothers who would otherwise not be able to conceive their own flesh and blood.”

In the review of the Adoption of Children Act, the focus is to see how it can be “strengthened to better reflect public policy, which is, in turn, a reflection of the values of our broad society today,” Mr Lee said.

35 Noting that the “prevailing social norm” is still that of a man and woman marrying, and having and bringing up children in a stable family unit, he said his ministry did not support the gay couple's appeal to adopt the child, as “this would have been contrary to public policy”.

40 He added: “For instance, while the welfare of the child should always be a very important consideration in adoption proceedings, we are looking at whether the Adoption of Children Act needs to be amended so that an appropriate balance can be struck when important public policy considerations are involved.”



Dr Fatimah later asked if Mr Lee's ministry would be involved in monitoring the gay couple's child and to keep an eye on his psychological and mental well-being.

45 Mr Lee replied: “We are concerned about the formation and mainstreaming of same-sex parent family units in Singapore, but when it comes to the welfare of the child, we have to act on the basis of whether there are concerns.”

In spelling out the official position, Mr Lee reiterated that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have a place in Singapore society and are entitled to their own private lives.

50 “Just like other Singaporeans, they have access to opportunities and social support such as education, employment, and healthcare, and should, like all Singaporeans, not be subject to prejudice and discrimination,” he said. “However, we must be mindful that a push for rights and entitlements which broader society is not ready for, or able to accept, will provoke a pushback, and can be very socially divisive. A push to use legislation or the courts to precipitate social change involving issues as deeply held and personal as this polarises society.”

55 He added: “The Government's policy is not to intrude or interfere with the private lives of Singaporeans, including homosexuals, and their relationships or partnerships. However, we do not support the formation of family units with children and homosexual parents through institutions and processes such as adoption.”

60 Mr Lee also said that while there are “increasingly diverse forms of families” here, the family structure the Government encourages is that of the married man and woman bringing up children in a stable family unit.

“Most of us would agree that it is ideal for children to grow up in families anchored by strong and stable marriages... It follows from this that the Government does not encourage planned and deliberate single parenthood as a lifestyle choice,” he said.

65 Referring to the recent case, Mr Lee said: “While an adoption order serves to make a child legitimate under the law, it does not on its own guarantee benefits and privileges such as citizenship, education or housing.”

Access to housing, for example, will continue to be determined by prevailing criteria, in line with public policy supporting parenthood within marriage.

70 But, he added: “All Singaporean children, regardless of their legitimacy status, will receive government benefits that support their growth and development, including healthcare and education benefits.”

For discussion/reflection:

1. According to Desmond Lee, “surrogacy is a complex issue with ethical, social, health and legal implications for all parties involved”. What are these implications and who are the parties involved?
2. In your opinion, should surrogacy be accepted as a way of forming families in your society? Consider this from multiple vantage points, such as from a social or ethical perspective.
3. Why do you think the government is “concerned about the formation and mainstreaming of same-sex parent family units in Singapore”? Do you agree with this view? Provide a further point of support as well as opposition of your own.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. ‘Traditional marriage is an outdated concept.’ To what extent is this true of our society? (Cambridge 2014)
2. In your society, how far is equality for all a reality? (Cambridge 2012)
3. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RII Y6 CT 2021)
4. Assess the view that your society is not doing enough to eradicate prejudice. (RI Y6 Prelim 2019)

SECTION B: ISSUES TO DO WITH FAMILY, MARRIAGE & PARENTING

Reading 9: Paternity leave has long-lasting benefits. So why don't more American men take it? EU

3 & 6

Nathaniel Popper | *The New York Times* | 11 June 2019

This reading will help you understand that:

- Parental leave for men is a growing trend in many societies, though it may take different forms.
- Parental leave is significantly changing parenting patterns, while resulting in a range of positive outcomes for families in particular.
- The expansion of paternity leave programmes in some industrialised countries may overcome sociocultural barriers traditionally preventing fathers from taking paternity leave.

In 2017, my family and I began an unintended experiment, testing the effects of paternity leave.

When my first son was born in 2012, I had only recently joined *The New York Times* and all I got off was the week of vacation I had stored up at the time.

5 By the time my wife and I had our second son in 2017, the newspaper had significantly ramped up its support for new fathers, and I got 10 fully-paid weeks to spend with our growing family. For my wife and me, those first two months of life with a newborn were just as sleepless as they'd been the first time around. But there were fewer fights and less resentment, and my wife got back to her own work more quickly.

10 Long after I returned to the office, I noticed little differences in the way I related to my second son that seemed most easily explained by the extra time I'd spent with him. To this day he regularly calls out for me in the night in a way that my first son rarely did. And when I am with him, I feel a certain intangible sense of ease that has only come more recently with my older son. This feeling of ease, along with my growing comfort with wrangling both kids at once, have had predictably positive effects on my wife, reducing her stress levels, and making us both happier.

15 While I've always been hesitant to attribute too many of the subsequent improvements in our family life to the parental leave I took in 2017, a growing body of research suggests that paternity leave does, in fact, have far broader effects than we might have anticipated, including some which endure years after the leave period itself.

Men who take paternity leave are less likely to get divorced

20 Over the last two years, Richard Petts, a sociology professor at Ball State University, and Chris Knoester, a sociology professor at Ohio State University, have co-authored a series of papers, analysing data from long-term surveys of thousands of American families. Their research demonstrates that paternity leave provides lasting benefits, not only to relationships between fathers and their children, but also to mothers and to relationships between the parents.

25 In their most recent paper, published in May 2019, Petts and Knoester found that, even nine years later, children whose fathers took at least two weeks of paternity leave after they were born reported feeling closer to their fathers than children with fathers who did not take leave. In research on married parents for a forthcoming paper, the sociologists found that even relatively short periods of paternity leave caused couples' divorce risk to drop and to remain significantly lower for as many as six years to come, even as their children reached school age.

30 “The big news in the US is that the boost is not just in the year or two after a child’s birth,” Petts told me. “It seems to be more sustained.”

This new work on American families builds on several earlier papers, mostly from Europe, where paternity leave is more common, which found that fathers are, in the long term, more likely to remain involved in parenting and to equitably divide household chores with their partners if they take time
35 off after their children arrive. A recent study from Sweden found that mothers whose partners were offered flexible paid leave in the year after a child’s birth were less likely to need antibiotics and anti-anxiety medication.

Despite mounting evidence of the benefits of paid parental leave for fathers as well as mothers, occasional high-profile news about a major international company offering paternity leave, and legal
40 wins such as the settlement in which JPMorgan Chase agreed to provide equal benefits to fathers and mothers, the expansion of paternity leave programs in the United States remains slow.

Public enthusiasm for paternity leave has been growing: A 2016 Pew Research Center study found that nearly 70 percent of Americans support some form of paid leave for new fathers. There are signs of a rapid cultural shift as well. Though, in 2014, New York Mets second baseman Daniel Murphy faced
45 widespread criticism for taking three days off for the birth of his son, just four years later, basketball player Dwayne Wade was showered with support when he missed six games following his daughter’s birth in 2018.

Nevertheless, recent surveys suggest that, while most American men take some time off work after the birth or adoption of a child, most take no more than a few days’ leave.

Why aren’t American men taking leave?

50 There are several reasons new fathers in the United States return to work so quickly, the most obvious being the lack of a national policy mandating paid leave for all workers. The Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave, but its eligibility requirements are strict (to qualify, an employee must have worked at least 1250 hours during the 12 months before the start of the leave period, for an organization employing at least 50 people within a 75-mile radius), and many American
55 workers do not meet them.

Even fewer American parents have access to paid family leave. Though six states — California, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Washington and Massachusetts — as well as the District of Columbia have passed paid family leave laws, their provisions vary. A March 2018 national survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that only 16 percent of workers in the United States have access
60 to some paid family leave through private-sector employers.

And research suggests that, even when fathers do gain access to paid parental leave, they may be reluctant to take it. After California’s paid family leave law, the first such law enacted in the United States, took effect in 2004, economists Charles L. Baum and Christopher Ruhm found that the percentage of men taking time off after a child’s birth rose only modestly; the average period of
65 parental leave taken increased by nearly five weeks for mothers, but only two to three days for fathers.

California fathers’ caution about embracing paid paternity leave wasn’t entirely irrational. Some studies do show that taking paternity leave can damage a man’s professional reputation and affect his future earning potential.

“Men who take paternity leave do tend to be stigmatized and viewed as less committed employees,”
70 said Rebecca Glauber, a professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire.

How to make paternity leave an American norm

The successful expansion of paternity leave programs in other industrialized nations suggests that these cultural barriers can be overcome. Certain policies have been shown to be especially effective in encouraging men to take full advantage of paternity leave benefits. The adoption of a so-called “daddy quota,” for example — a use-it-or-lose-it period of paid leave earmarked for new fathers — has successfully boosted paternity leave participation rates in several Scandinavian countries. In 2006, in a departure from the rest of Canada, Quebec adopted a “daddy quota” similar to the Scandinavian model, offering five weeks of dedicated, non-transferable, government-paid leave to new fathers in the province.

Within two years, 75 percent of new fathers in Quebec were taking paternity leave, up from 22 percent before the use-it-or-lose-it “daddy quota” was implemented, according to research by Ankita Patnaik, an economist at Mathematica Policy Research in Washington, D.C.

Patnaik found that men in Quebec who’d taken the “daddy quota” continued to spend more time on household work, even one to three years after completing their paternity leave. Further, Patnaik’s research found, these fathers’ increased participation in household tasks appeared to free up their children’s mothers to pursue their own professional ambitions. One to three years after childbirth, mothers in Quebec whose partners had taken the “daddy quota” were working an hour longer per day, on average, and were 7 percent more likely to be employed full-time, Patnaik found.

Richard Petts, the Ball State University sociologist who researches the impact of paternity leave on American families, said that he did not find solid evidence that paternity leave boosts mothers’ careers, but that may simply be because American fathers take much shorter paternity leaves than their Canadian counterparts.

For my part, I came out of my own paternity leave with an easy ability to take both of the kids as soon as I was done at work, or to handle sick days when they came up. That allowed my wife to transition back to her own job more quickly, and to commit with more confidence to new projects. We are both still as overwhelmed as most other parents of little kids, but at least we feel like we’re muddling through it together.

For discussion/reflection:

1. Popper raises the issue of legislative constraints and sociocultural norms hindering fathers in America from taking paternal leave. In your opinion, how could these existing challenges be effectively mitigated, apart from a proposed adaptation of a “daddy quota” (lines 74-78)? Justify your opinions, with additional reading and research of your own.
2. Singapore has recently extended its paternity leave scheme for fathers:
<https://www.profamilyleave.gov.sg/Pages/GPPL.aspx>
<https://www.heybaby.sg/supporting-work-life-harmony/leave-schemes-and-related-benefits/paternity-leave>
In your view, will these measures be effective in mitigating the challenges faced by families/supporting families with working parents?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Should both parents take equal responsibility for raising their children? (Cambridge 2019)
2. In the family, should the most important role of a man be that of a breadwinner? (Y5 Promo 2015)

Supplementary reading:

1. For a Singapore perspective: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/parliament-6-in-10-dads-did-not-take-paternity-leave-last-year>

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 10: Rethink governance and institutions to tackle poverty and inequality

EUs 2, 5 & 6

*Adapted from To tackle inequality, stop expecting the same rules to make a difference | Sophie Chew
| Rice Media | 17 October 2020*

This reading will help you to understand:

- The moral and political imperative society has in addressing poverty and reducing it to very low levels
- The growing awareness concerning the link between poverty and inequality, as well as the situation of poverty across different domains like education, healthcare, the justice system, and the climate crisis
- The harmfulness of state-sanctioned discourse as well as people's underlying perceptions that deny the hardships associated with being impoverished
- That for there to be real change, the principles by which decisions are made and policies formed concerning poverty need to fundamentally transform
- The justifications for why we should redefine need in the context of poverty to something more expansive
- How the average individual can help tackle poverty by exercising their civic and social responsibilities, by communicating their concerns about poverty to political leaders

We sat down for an interview with Assoc Prof Teo You Yenn, author of This Is What Inequality Looks Like, and Dr. Ng Kok Hoe, who led Singapore's first homelessness survey last year, about poverty and inequality in Singapore today.

This interview is being held to mark the IDEP, or International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. How achievable is this? Is poverty inevitable in Singapore, or is it a failure of imagination to think so?

5 Kok Hoe: We only have to look to the evidence, which is that there is significant variance in levels of poverty and inequality across countries. It's clear that you can do something about it. You can push it to very low levels—or, if you don't do the right things, let it get out of hand.

10 You Yenn: I think if poverty was not seen as inevitable in 1960s Singapore, with all our plans and dreams of development, certainly we should not see it as inevitable today. And if we think of IDEP as an international goal, shared by humanity in all its different contexts, we are in a very good position to make more headway on this as a small and wealthy country. Neither extreme wealth nor extreme poverty are natural phenomena. We know from looking at trends around the world that much of it has to do with laws and policies. Poverty and inequality come about through specific decisions about our societies: what we reward and what we punish, who gets to make decisions on behalf of the collective, and so on.

Traditionally, poverty and inequality have been seen as 'unspeakable', 'invisible' topics, but I do think there's been a shift. These issues have stayed in the spotlight for the last few years. What changes have you observed in public discourse since This Is What Inequality Looks Like was published, or the homelessness survey findings were released?

15 YY: I'm not sure I'm the most objective person to comment on this, because I've been immersed in this for the last few years! But I think there have been two interesting and promising shifts. The first is that when poverty is invoked, so is inequality; they are mentioned in the same breath. I think this

20 signals a growing consciousness that there is something relational about poverty and wealth, that poverty is not ghettoised as ‘poor people problems’, and it has something to do with the way wealth is distributed across our society. I also see shifts—particularly this year, with Covid and the GE—that poverty and inequality are being invoked in different domains. In education and healthcare, certainly, but also in discussions of migrant workers, the justice system, and the climate crisis. There is a growing recognition that you have to see these seemingly different domains as interconnected.

25 KH: Feedback comes to us in very interesting ways, sometimes from people whom you wouldn’t consider traditional consumers of academic research. Our research has come up in conversations with neighbours in the lift, with taxi drivers, students, even banks have written to us because they see applications for our research in their actuarial services. I do think there is a growing community of people who are concerned about poverty and inequality, and this is precious progress. But there’s still a long way to go.

So what has not changed? Which sacred cows have you found most resistant to being slayed, and why are these so troubling?

30 KH: Public discourse and narratives exist at different levels. State-sanctioned discourse, in particular, is often the last to shift decisively. But what’s also hard to shift is people’s underlying explanations for why the problem exists. I also learnt how damaging the denial of people’s hardships can be, particularly when those people begin to internalise narratives about themselves. Then, there’s a different kind of danger when policymakers begin to believe their own narratives. In my research, one of the beliefs which has been most resistant to change is this: that you deserve the housing you can afford. It feels so natural that you don’t even question it, let alone consider the possibility of an alternative. Dominant narratives are complete packages. They don’t just contain a problem statement, but a proposed solution. If people do not own flats, the explanation is probably that you haven’t been wise with money or worked as hard as you should have, so the solution is therefore to be better with money and work harder. These narratives are damaging and divisive. They tear at the fabric of society by rejecting collective responsibility in favour of individual rehabilitation.

Back in March, you jointly wrote a piece for AcademiaSG saying that now is the time to go big with structural changes to tackle poverty and inequality. I wanted to ask how you think things have played out since—say, in the Covid budgets, or in some of the proposals and speeches from the GE and the new Parliament.

KH: I think we need to observe some more, I would say there are few signs that we are drawing the right lessons from this crisis. So far, most of the significant schemes have been time-limited. We’ve seen a huge emphasis on skills and training, and a strong reluctance to move on wages. And in terms of financial assistance, conditionality has made a swift return even though the economy is still completely out of shape. All these signal reliance on familiar strategies, business as usual.

45 YY: I would agree. There are no real signs that the fundamental principles are being rethought. I think the general approach to try to protect jobs is sensible, but broader social protections have to be on the table. And the outright dismissal of minimum wage as a possibility, when eight years after its introduction, the Progressive Wage Model still only covers three sectors making up only about 15% of low wage workers, that’s something I don’t understand. This crisis has prompted us—not just in Singapore, but globally—to think about what it means to have flourishing lives. Reconsidering this cannot be the job of a small group of elites.

It’s ironic that Covid has caused us to rethink so many things we’ve taken for granted—physical contact, offices, essential work— but not others. This is supposed to be a once-in-a-lifetime

pandemic, and yet we only seem content to make tweaks within the margins of what we already know. What would it take to move the needle on poverty and inequality?

50 KH: We have to look at whether the rules for making rules are changing. If the same type of people are making decisions, according to the same metrics of what is desirable, using the same priorities, with the same ideology and entrenched mindsets, how can we expect the outcome to be different?

YY: The rules by which we make the rules—that gets to the heart of it. Evaluating policy cannot be restricted to a narrow ideological or technocratic approach, nor to a narrow elite.

So there are changes to processes, and you’ve also given practical suggestions in terms of policies which should be considered, like better wage protections and delivery of public goods like care services. What needs to change in terms of principles?

KH: At a fundamental level, I would say two things. The first is a greater focus on primary policy goals rather than secondary criteria. Social assistance, like Comcare, is a good example of this. Its primary goal is to help people meet basic needs and achieve a certain standard of living. Then there are the secondary criteria, like fiscal prudence and efficiency. Both these things are important, but the system has become extremely skewed towards secondary criteria, sometimes even at the expense of the primary goal. There is so much talk about gatekeeping that one could be forgiven for thinking that the goal of Comcare is to gatekeep itself. You often hear about the possibility of benefit fraud and so on—without evidence, I should point out—but I have never heard any clear discussion of what changes we would like to see in people’s lives, or what standard of living it’s meant to lift people up to. We hear almost nothing about this, but a lot about costs. This is the other thing: we should be more transparent about social costs. We tend to be very mindful of fiscal costs, but if the system doesn’t work as it should, people end up sacrificing basic needs like food and shelter. We’ve heard so many accounts of people experiencing food insecurity recently. In Singapore! In 2020! The social sustainability of welfare systems—cohesion, mobility, equality—is as important as fiscal sustainability.

YY: We also ought to have some clearer benchmarks as to what the targeted outcomes are. Having standards is critical to evaluating whether something is working or not.

This brings me to your Minimum Income Standards research, which adopts an expansive definition of ‘minimum’: not just getting by at a subsistence level, but including access to opportunities and options, and the security, dignity, and independence these bring. The latter might be thought of as what we need to thrive, not merely survive. Why is it important to reframe ‘need’ in this way?

55 YY: Our focus group participants consisted of people across socioeconomic lines. The definition is reflective of a broad consensus across members of society. It’s not low-income people’s wish lists or high-income people’s sense of entitlement. It is what ordinary people believe is reasonable for everyone in Singapore today: just being alive is not a life.

60 KH: Undergirding the MIS research is an understanding of deprivation and well-being as specific to a time and place, as well as relative to what others in that context have. Participants kept saying: this is Singapore in 2018, not the 1960s or 1980s. To expect us to live without X is not acceptable. That is how everyone in Singapore lives today.

65 YY: It’s true that you see some diversity in people’s preferences. What might matter to someone might not matter to me and vice versa. I don’t think we have much of a book budget, for example. And if I didn’t have books, I don’t think I could live. But the underlying needs, which made the definition, are so profoundly universal. You might not be able to reduce the need for respect to a number, but what

we are trying to show is that there are certain monetary preconditions which allow for participation and belonging and respect. Money cannot directly buy these things, but money is absolutely a precondition to achieving those needs.

- 70 KH: This is why standards are important, because until you accept that there are basic levels below which people's lives will be affected, how can we begin to think about the generosity of social welfare schemes? How can we say that we are interested in helping people meet their needs if we are reluctant to define those needs?

- 75 **Many people are deeply concerned about poverty and inequality, but don't see what they as individuals can do to change things. What can the average RICE reader—as an ordinary member of society who is not an activist, social worker, or policymaker—do in their own sphere?**

- YY: We've been asked some version of this question many times, and I think there's a way to read that pessimistically and optimistically. The pessimistic version is that it makes me wonder what it says about us: about our fear of collective action; of action that could be seen as political; and perhaps
80 about our sense of disempowerment and alienation from civic engagement, such that there is a presumption built into the question that people cannot act collectively, and all we can do is to make choices as individuals. I think this is a mistake. It is REALLY important that we don't have illusions about what our individual choices, particularly consumer choices, can do to change inequality. Individual choices, made in isolation, cannot change rules and systems.

- 85 **I think we tend to look to individual choices, because—ironically—having identified the issues as structural tends to make people feel powerless. To that end, isn't there something to be said about how our own choices might perpetuate inequality? For example, the eternal question of whether to send your kids for tuition?**

- 90 YY: Maybe it's not helpful to think about it as exercising power, and better to think about it as exercising our civic rights and obligations. At the individual level, if we need to feel powerful to act, no one will. A lot of times, we do feel powerless! But if you feel it is your right and your obligation, perhaps that's a lower bar for motivating action.

- 95 KH: We will not get rid of poverty and inequality by telling people who are anxious about falling behind, or have a mind to get ahead through personal advantage, not to do so. Tackling inequality must involve closing loopholes and taking away incentives for people to act a certain way. So for example, instead of fixating on tuition, why not look at the school admissions system, and see if it gives certain sections of society unfair advantages?

So we should direct our attention at the correct places, at the correct levers of power.

- 100 KH: The major barriers to tackling poverty and inequality, and the major levers which control them, have to do with governance and institutions. We must block unfair advantage and make sure we don't suppress people who are already disadvantaged while trying to help them. So in terms of what the individual can do, it's to tell policymakers to do these things. Sometimes people say Singaporeans complain a lot. Well, I think Singaporeans don't complain enough! Exercise your right as a citizen. Go see your MP. You're their constituent, they're supposed to represent you in Parliament. So if you're
105 concerned about inequality, go tell your MP and ask them to do something about it.

YY: "Complain more" is great shorthand, but I would like to reframe it a bit. There is a serious message here, which is: citizenship is a duty and a right. So, complain more, yes, but don't let your complaints

be limited to those things that are in your narrow self-interests. Direct complaints to the right people. And partake in community—from time to time, complain collectively!

This feels challenging, given that a lot of what we might think of as collective action—unions, mass demonstrations—are not avenues we have access to.

- 110 That's certainly true, but demonstrations are only the tip of the iceberg even in the places where they exist. I think when the average person hears 'social movements' we think of demonstrations because that's what we see in the news, but it's only a part of collective action. Attending one talk is not going to change anyone's life, and you might not see a line from showing up at a meeting to getting a politician to act on something. But many small encounters, building trust, can build up to more
- 115 significant collective action. Speaking up and working on an issue together can, in turn, put pressure on people who can make decisions and set the agenda. Showing up is important. Engaging is important. Building community is important.

In the afterword to the 2nd edition of *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*, You Yenn suggested that we are experiencing a moment, not yet a movement, where poverty and inequality are concerned. This was in 2019. First, could you elaborate on the difference between the two? Second, where do you think we are now? And third, where do we go from here?

- YY: I think it's far too soon to say where we're at, but also, the journey of how we arrive at the goal of greater equality is supremely important. No single individual or group should have a monopoly on deciding what an ideal society should look like. I don't really know how to answer 'where do we go from here', because I don't look at it in terms of a next target. I don't think of democracy and justice as just end goals, but processes. You have to keep building, and contribute to this thing that is larger than the individual. In that process, you build human connections and ideas and ethics that are the basis of solidarity. That's what I mean by a movement.
- 120
- 125 KH: It does feel like there is a lot to do. Just gathering evidence and making sense of the world is hard. Then there is evaluating, critiquing, and finally, articulating an alternative. This last part—articulating an alternative—is something that I hope, in the coming years, we can do together.

For discussion/reflection:

- Teo Yu Yenn spoke about a key shift in terms of how people understand poverty being the recognition that 'seemingly different domains' are in fact 'interconnected' (line 49) when it comes to perpetuating poverty. Identify any two or more domains (such as education and healthcare), and offer some explanation of how these might reinforce each other to worsen poverty.
- According to both speakers, what are the official narratives often used by the government to define how inequality/poverty can be defined and resolved?
- What are their criticisms of these official narratives?
- Summarise the key changes that the speakers pinpointed as being necessary before poverty can be properly tackled as a problem.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent should income equality be a goal in your society? (Cambridge 2019)
2. How far is increased prosperity for all a realistic goal in your society? (Cambridge 2013)
3. Discuss the view that ending poverty is desirable but unachievable. (RI Y6 CT 2021)
4. To what extent is poverty the fault of the individual? (RI Y6 Prelim 2019)
5. Is it always the responsibility of the state to help the poor? (RI Y5 Promo 2011)

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 11: Soul searching required to solve Singapore's foreign workers problem **EUs 2, 3, 5 & 6**

Adapted from Solving Singapore's foreign workers problem requires serious soul searching, from top to bottom | Ng Jun Sen & Justin Ong | Today Online | 11 May 2020

This reading will help you understand:

- The economic and ethical tensions inherent in the reliance of migrant workers to fill low-wage jobs
- The moral justifications for committing to an overhaul of the status quo with regard to Singapore's foreign workers situation
- The different roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, including the government
- The multitude of challenges and obstacles to be overcome before there can be positive change
- The discriminatory attitudes the majority of Singaporeans hold towards migrant/foreign workers

Mr Syedur Rahman Liton, 34, pines for his wife back home in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as he tries to put on a brave front about possibly contracting COVID-19. For the past month or so, the lifting supervisor has been isolating himself along with 100 other company workers at a factory-converted dormitory in Senoko Loop, part of a precautionary move to socially distance migrant workers living in similar accommodation from the community at large to prevent the further spread of the novel coronavirus.

It is a sacrifice that these foreign workers are making for the rest of Singapore society, experts say. As a result, the country owes migrant workers a debt of gratitude, and possibly, a concrete commitment to change when the pandemic is over. For the 400,000 migrant workers living in Singapore, their future could remain shrouded in uncertainty for some time. Their livelihoods here will hang in the balance even after COVID-19 has been eradicated in the Republic, experts said.

Amid the crushing impact of the circuit breaker measures and the drastic blow to the construction industry, will Mr Liton's employer survive the economic drought that has already started? While Mr Liton ponders over the future, his host country - Singapore - will also have to reassess its whole relationship with migrant workers like him, especially its "addiction" to cheap migrant labour, and examine whether the lessons learnt from the explosion of COVID-19 cases in the workers' dormitories could be used to implement meaningful changes.

THE STATUS QUO

There are about 200,000 migrant workers housed in 43 purpose-built dormitories around Singapore. These are licensed dormitories housing more than 1,000 workers each and are required to comply with the requirements under the Foreign Employee Dormitory Act (FEDA), such as providing facilities that include sick bays and isolation rooms.

Despite this, around 20 of the purpose-built dormitories - nearly half - flout the FEDA licensing requirement on average each year, Manpower Minister Josephine Teo revealed in Parliament on Monday (May 4). Operators face fines of up to S\$50,000 and up to a year in jail for Feda offences.

Another 95,000 workers are housed in the 1,200 factory-converted dormitories; 20,000 in construction temporary quarters; and 85,000 work permit and S Pass holders in the construction sector housed in Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats, private residential premises and others. These are not covered under the FEDA due to their smaller size, though they have to comply with other regulations such as the building and fire safety codes. By law, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) prescribes a minimum of 4.5 sq m per dorm resident for living space, which includes the sleeping quarters, kitchen, dining and toilet areas.

While the purpose-built dormitories have met the needs of the workers during “normal times”, dorm operators said these large facilities were not built nor regulated to cater for a pandemic of such a scale. A spokesperson from Mini Environment Service (MES), which oversees operations at Jurong Penjuru Dorm 1, Jurong Penjuru Dorm 2, Blue Stars Dorm and The Leo, added that a dormitory “by nature is dense”. “The older specifications and designs of a dormitory were based on a functional approach and pandemic management was not a consideration in the design and use,” the spokesperson added.

FUTURE HOPES FOR DORMS

The operators hope that the next couple of years will bring improvements to the conditions and living standards within the dormitories. “A review of standards for dormitory operations can only be good for the foreign worker community as it will help to raise quality levels across the industry,” said Mr Kong.

Agreeing, the MES spokesperson said that the ability to “tear down” the dormitories with older specifications and update them will “benefit all stakeholders”. The issues which the operators would like to address include the long-standing conundrum of safe distancing. “If we are to prepare for future pandemic situations, the density of the dorm population needs to be addressed and employers need to set aside higher budgets for rentals, for instance,” said Mr Cheah of S11 Dormitories.

MORE SPACE WILL COME AT A COST

While migrant workers are covered by Singapore’s main labour law, the Employment Act, employers of migrant workers also generally assume a greater responsibility for their welfare, including food accommodation and healthcare, than if they had hired a local resident to do the same job.

But while employers in the construction sector agree that changes to how migrant workers are housed are needed, several said the influence they have on their workers’ living conditions is limited. It is largely not up to the employers to dictate the density or the living conditions within the dormitories, but for the operators to decide and the authorities to regulate, they claimed.

Should new guidelines cause housing to be more costly, not all contractors may be able to stomach this, the employers said. “When the new guidelines come in... it will affect (employers’) cashflow.” At the end of the day, some employers think it boils down to who would be willing to shoulder and split the extra costs.

GOVERNMENT: ROLE AS REGULATOR

As the authorities hunker down to mitigate the viral spread, the Government is also looking into new housing arrangements for migrant workers who have recovered from COVID-19 through a pipeline of short, medium and long-term plans, said National Development Minister Lawrence Wong. While details of these plans are not yet known, several suggestions have been raised, most notably, to increase the minimum standard for living space specified in FEHA.

After all, it is too much to expect private operators and employers to do so on their own, said Mr Alex Au, vice-president of migrant worker rights group Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2). “Employers and dorm operators have to watch their bottom lines. They are not welfare services. If the legal standards are low - which we feel they are currently - they would be foolish as profit-making enterprises to over-provide and drive up their own costs.

“That’s what the Government is for - to ensure socially-conscious minimum standards, but to do so in an across-the-board way so that a level-playing field for all businesses is maintained,” he said. Mr Au called for a doubling of the living space per occupant to 9 square metres - equivalent to 10 workers living in a four-room HDB flat. Assoc Prof Theseira, a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP), said a proper study is needed to determine what construes a reasonable standard for living space. “If we come up with one set of standards for living for Singaporeans in a similar situation, for example, a long-term hostel, dormitory, or

army camp residents, it would be quite unjust to apply a lower standard to migrant workers just because they are migrant workers,” he said.

TWEAKING SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC MODEL

75 A more fundamental question would be whether Singapore should continue to rely heavily on low-cost migrant workers, said experts. In Singapore, past crises have historically led to a rethinking of the Republic's social compact - the combined series of unprecedented crises such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the global financial crisis of 2008 required national responses that “threw our planning out of gear” and necessitated the 2013 Population White Paper, said then Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

80 With Singapore now facing what has been touted as “a crisis of a generation”, some, like Assoc Prof Theseira and fellow NMP Anthea Ong, have called for a committee of inquiry into the foreign worker dormitory outbreak to work out the structural changes that Singapore sorely needs. One silver lining, from a policymaking perspective, is that the current worries about Singapore's overreliance on migrant workers are aligned with the Government's goal of raising the productivity of the resident workforce.

85 This dates back to 2012, when then Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said the easy availability of foreign labour will reduce the incentives for companies to raise productivity. Since then, Singapore has taken steps to progressively reduce this reliance, such as tightening the foreign worker dependency ratio ceilings, said Dr Seah. “There is scope to reduce this reliance even further. By encouraging companies to rely less on foreign labour in their production processes, we can in fact nudge them to adopt smarter and less costly methods of production,” he added.

95 Associate Professor Kenneth Paul Tan, from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said he hopes the review on dormitories, when it comes, will take in diverse voices from civil society in policy discussions. “And I hope, most of all, that we have deeper discussions with a view to minimising our dependency on low-waged migrant workers, investing in productivity-enhancing technology, redesigning essential jobs to overcome unnecessary stigma, and designing more generous social safety nets for the many who will have difficulty integrating into a new and more resilient economic society.”

PEOPLE: SOCIETY'S APPETITE FOR CHANGE

100 IPS' Mr Gee said that this traditional mindset of relying on lower-skilled and low-wage labour has created a “category of residents who have limited rights as a non-permanent resident foreigner and are treated differently”. If Singapore decides that in a post-pandemic world, it needs to elevate their living standards to a decent level that Singaporeans can accept for themselves, then another question will be what level would Singaporeans be comfortable with, said Mr Gee. “The same level as the lowest-paid Singaporean household? Or lesser? We have to negotiate and discuss this,” he said.

105 In this fundamental re-think of the role migrant workers play in Singapore's prosperity, TWC2's Mr Au urged the authorities to also look beyond living standards in dormitories, such as long-standing issues on the recruitment fees that migrant workers bear and the non-payment of salaries.

110 Assoc Prof Theseira said: “Fundamentally, the current structure is low-cost, and as a result, generally Singaporeans benefit in the narrow sense that we pay lower prices for anything produced by foreign workers. Either our costs would go up, meaning more taxation, or standards would fall, meaning more potholes, uncleared fallen trees, et cetera, without so many low-cost workers. That means that we have collectively contributed to current conditions for foreign workers, because we have found these low costs and high standards of service too compelling to raise too many questions about their treatment and the market structure,” he added.

SINGAPORE ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRANT WORKERS

So, are Singaporeans willing to pay for the higher costs that will inevitably arise from offering migrant workers a better deal? The jury is still out, based on past experience, according to the experts interviewed.
115 The empirical evidence suggests that the mindset of Singaporeans towards migrant workers has not changed, despite an outpouring of sympathy whenever a major incident occurred.

At the IPS webinar, MWC executive director Bernard Menon lamented that despite past events such as the SMRT bus driver strike in 2012 and the Little India riot the following year, the momentum arising from the online discourses on worker welfare would eventually peter out. “We have a lot of people coming up and
120 saying ‘you should improve this, you should improve that’,” said Mr Menon. But unfortunately, though you can obviously tell that there’s been a gradual increase over time of interest and concern ... this has lagged behind the expectations I’ve had during these crises.”

Most recently, in December last year, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women jointly published a detailed study into society
125 attitudes towards migrant labour in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The study included both work permit holders working in the construction industry and foreign domestic workers as part of their report.

It found that overall support for migrant workers had decreased in the past nine years, when a similar study was conducted in 2010. “Knowledge regarding migrant workers across the four countries remains low, and discriminatory attitudes prevail with significant numbers of members of the public in migrant destination
130 countries stating that migrant workers should not enjoy equal working conditions with nationals,” the report stated.

The study found that 36 per cent of the 1,005 Singapore respondents believed migrant workers should not receive the same work conditions as local workers, or be entitled to join a union. Around 40 per cent said migrant workers who end up exploited only have themselves to blame, a majority - 60 per cent - disagree
135 that migrant workers should receive the same pay and benefits as nationals, and 53 per cent said migrant workers threaten the country’s culture and heritage. Nevertheless, a majority of the Singaporean respondents (58 per cent) recognised that migrant workers had a net positive effect on Singapore’s national economy.

A ROUND OF SOUL-SEARCHING

With the pandemic forcing Singapore - as a collective - to pay the price for years of apparent neglect, commentators said that after COVID-19 is eliminated, Singapore needs to openly embark on some serious
140 soul-searching. For a start, the society’s mindset and attitude towards migrant workers need to “undergo a sea change”, said Associate Professor Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University.

“SG United must include migrant workers from the get-go ... We cannot, as a society, seek to harness the benefits of their being here and yet not prepare to bear the costs of their being in our midst. We cannot
145 continue to have the gains privatised but the costs socialised in our migrant worker policy,” the law don said.

Having spent more than a decade working in Singapore, Mr Liton is keenly aware of the value of social inclusion. Like his friends Asit and Zakir, Mr Liton is a poet, who often pens his thoughts about crises and conflicts around the world, and attends poetry events with Singaporeans such as those organised by Sing Lit
150 Station and local Bengali publication Bangla Kanthar. On Apr 17, he wrote in Bengali: “The whole world drowned in darkness today / Every person surrounded by death, disorder and the virus / Humanity is counting down the hours of waiting / For when the end comes - A new dawn.”

For discussion/reflection:

- The authors describe Singapore's reliance on foreign labour as an 'addiction' (line 14). What are they implying about the nature of our dependence on foreign workers? Based on appropriate reading and research, explain why our dependence on foreign workers can be seen as an 'addiction'.
- The MES spokesperson suggests that 'tear[ing] down' (line 40) older dormitories and building new ones would 'benefit all stakeholders' (line 41). Identify all the different stakeholders, and explain how each would benefit from new dormitories (with updated specifications).
- From lines 60 – 66, what are the key justifications Alex Au provides for why the government should play a regulatory role? How convincing do you find his reasoning?
- What is the authors' purpose in including past crises like the 9/11 terrorist attacks, SARS outbreak, and the global financial crisis (lines 75-76)?
- Explain, in your own words, how a new 'category of residents who have limited rights as a non-permanent resident foreigner' (line 98) has been created in Singaporeans' minds. Why is such thinking concerning?
- Eugene Tan argues that Singapore 'cannot continue to have the gain privatised but the costs socialised in our migrant worker policy' (lines 144-145). Explain what he means in your own words.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. 'People who do the most worthwhile jobs rarely receive the best financial rewards.' To what extent is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2016)
2. In your society, how far is equality for all a reality? (Cambridge 2012)
3. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI Y6 CT 2021)
4. To what extent does your society truly care for its underprivileged people? (RI Y5 Promo 2021)
5. Have we paid too high a price in our pursuit of economic growth in Singapore? (Y5 Promo 2010)

Supplementary resources:

1. ST CCloseUp video. Migrant Burden: How foreign workers are illegally recruited in Singapore

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 12: COVID-19 has revealed a new disadvantaged group among us – digital outcasts EU 2 &

3

Anthea Ong | Channel News Asia | 31 May 2020 Updated 2 Feb 2021

This reading will help you understand:

- How and why low-income households, the differently-abled, and seniors struggle to keep up with the rest of society in terms of digital literacy and skills
- Why the pandemic has deepened the digital divide in Singapore society
- The challenges Singapore needs to overcome to close the digital divide

We are now forced online to learn, work, live and stay connected. Yet due to the lack of internet connectivity, requisite devices or digital literacy, there are many who are cut off from such access. They are not digital natives nor immigrants, they are digital outcasts.

- 5 COVID-19 has exposed and deepened the digital divide in our society. Given the speed at which most of society is moving ahead, closing this gnawing digital divide must be an urgent priority if we are to have a Smart Nation that is also united.

HOW DEEP IS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN SINGAPORE?

The latest Household Expenditure Survey 2017/2018 tells us that only 81 per cent of resident households have a personal computer, and only 87 per cent have internet access. This suggests that at least one in 10 households in Singapore are not plugged into our digital world.

- 10 Only 45 per cent of households residing in 1- and 2-room HDB flats have internet access, compared to 96 per cent of households living in private condominiums and other apartments. Only 31 per cent of the 1-2 room HDB households have a personal computer, in contrast with 95 per cent of households in private condominiums and other apartments.

- 15 These numbers mean that some of us are almost guaranteed to have internet connectivity and a personal computer, while more than 5 in 10 households living in 1-and 2-room HDB flats have no internet access or personal computer. This is also reflected in the ground realities exposed by home-based learning (HBL).

- 20 The Ministry of Education (MOE) has loaned out an estimated 20,000 devices, including laptops and tablets. A few community groups I personally know and supported, including Engineering Good, have given out more than 2,600 laptops in total. They have also provided Wi-Fi dongles or SIM cards to several families.

- 25 The bleak picture does not end at infrastructure. Stories from the ground reveal significant struggle in terms of digital literacy and skills, particularly among low-income households, the differently-abled, and seniors. ReadAble, a community organisation supporting families in rental flat communities, shared the many struggles of parents using laptops donated - whether with Zoom or even in-app functions, resulting in their children's education being compromised.

- 30 According to Society Staples, a social enterprise working with the persons with disabilities (PWD) and the Disabled Persons Association, many PWDs have difficulty working from home due to a lack of equipment and Internet access. Some do not have the skills-set to take their work online especially when their previous work was done face-to-face. This can mean loss of income and opportunities to retrain or learn new skills. They also miss out on maintaining or even expanding connections with

family and friends, which increases mental stress and strains existing coping mechanisms, especially for those with psycho-social disabilities.

35 Cassia Resettlement Team, a community organisation, has had to support many low-income individuals, particularly seniors, who struggle with the digitisation of government services. For example, SingPass is required to access many such services including checking Central Provident Fund (CPF) accounts, which are regularly required to apply for welfare schemes, checking medical appointments or medical tests results and prescriptions.

40 In 2006, the Government's iN2015 Masterplan pledged that every household with a school-going child would own a personal computer by 2015. I remember this clearly as I was running my own education technology company then and was very energised by this vision of a digital future which my company also participated in. Sadly, despite this iN2015 ambition, our efforts to become a Smart Nation since 2014 and the Digital Readiness Blueprint released in 2018, we continue to struggle with a deep digital divide in Singapore.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES PERPETUATING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

45 One of the structural issues that stand out as perpetuating the digital divide is the gaps in government intervention. Market forces are the key driver of this divide. Although internet connectivity and personal computers are necessities in today's world, they are still priced beyond the reach of the low-income in our society. This disparity in turn perpetuates further inequality.

50 The Government intervened by introducing the NEU-PC Plus Scheme in 2006, offering students and PWDs from low-income households a new personal computer bundled with three years of free internet connectivity. While it has benefitted more than 40,000 households, the scheme falls short in several ways.

55 First, it only permitted one laptop per eligible household regardless of household size, increasing to two only last month due to HBL. Second, the application process is complex and bureaucratic. Third, it is limited in scope, excluding pre-school, home-schooled and university students. Fourth, it disadvantages against PWDs, who only receive a 50 per cent subsidy as compared to 75 per cent for students. Fifth, under the Home Access scheme, adults have no option to apply for a personal computer, only a tablet or smartphone.the

60 I commend MOE and the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) for working hard to resolve digital access issues during this circuit breaker period. IMDA enhanced the NEU-PC scheme. MOE worked with schools to loan out personal learning devices and kept schools open for those who struggled with digital access.

65 But gaps persist. The device loan programme came with conditions and liability provisions. Community organisation 6th Sense shared that there were families who were too scared to bring those devices home as they would not be able to afford to pay the schools if the devices got lost or broken.

Further, the families were rightly worried about going to school and risking COVID-19 infection. One teenage student I know developed severe anxiety when she had to go to school every day before HBL began. Why should any child be required to go to school to use IT facilities at the height of a pandemic?

70 Given these gaps, community organisations found that it made more sense to give every family good internet connection and every child a personal computer. The Minister for Education has said that, by 2024, every Secondary 1 student will have a tablet, a laptop, or a chromebook. I propose a broader Digital Adequacy Framework, which I will elaborate later.

MOVING TOWARDS DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR SGUNITED

75 The Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) has boldly committed in its Digital Readiness Blueprint that all Singaporeans will be digitally ready, no matter their income or current IT abilities. I would like to offer some suggestions from the ground regarding enhancements to existing schemes and structural changes.

80 The NEU-PC Plus Scheme's application process could be further streamlined, for instance, by allowing beneficiaries of the various financial assistance schemes to automatically qualify. Can the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and MOE work together to ensure that every family with a child on MOE's Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS), or every family supported by ComCare who has a child in school, automatically gains adequate access to a fully subsidised personal computer?

85 IT subsidy schemes should include device replacement and customer care. Adults supported under ComCare or residing in HDB rental flats should also have the option of receiving a partially or fully subsidised digital device, depending on their income. The scheme should also be broadened immediately to permit applications to benefit all children whether preschool, home-schooled or university students, and adults from low-income families.

90 PWDs must be better supported given the changing nature of work post COVID-19. To reduce the time and resources required to deliver digital devices to families, we may need a Digital Empowerment Voucher (DEV) scheme that combines aspects of the existing Public Transport Voucher and Innovation & Capability Voucher schemes. The vouchers could be stipulated for use only with local SMEs which would directly assist our local enterprises in these trying times.

95 To realise the Digital Readiness commitment to provide digital connectivity and devices for those with limited resources adequately, a Digital Adequacy Framework should be considered. Because it's not enough to just be digitally ready or included, this digital participation must adequately support their learning, work and social connections meaningfully.

100 Under this Framework, tablets must be decoupled from the definition of "personal computer" across the board for learning and work purposes. We should also view the amount of hardware deemed adequate for each household to be based on the needs of each member in it. For instance, should every student in Primary 5 and above not have their own laptop, considering the MOE's digital literacy plans for upper primary students?

The Framework should also fold internet speed, hardware functionality and digital literacy into its analysis to enable meaningful digital participation. Within this Framework, universal internet access should be provided as a public utility especially for low income households.

105 Can IMDA and HDB work with commercial providers and town councils to ensure that all low-income households have adequate internet connection? For instance, can Wireless@SG be expanded to cover all rental flats in Singapore, and enhanced for sufficient speed much like the ubiquitous Wi-Fi access available in shopping malls?

110 Finally, the Digital Adequacy Framework should underpin the Digital Readiness Blueprint. Much public policy has been characterised by efficiency, effectiveness and economy, with emphasis on outcome measures that can be determined more by what can be easily measured than by what might be most helpful to measure.

Meaningful statistics and metrics across all vulnerable groups should be gathered regularly to inform policy design and updates. In the UK, for example, the Office for National Statistics studies the digital

- 115 divide across locations, gender, age, income, disability, ethnic groups/language, education and other social and economic determinants of digital inequality.

COVID-19 has spotlighted our deep digital divide and the digital outcasts in our midst. Our clarion call for SGUnited must surely be a Singapore that is digitally resilient and united.

For discussion/reflection:

- In line 24, the author identified the lack of digital literacy and skills amongst the 'digital outcasts' as another challenge, on top of infrastructure. In what ways is this an even greater challenge, compared to lack of access to IT equipment?
- How is uneven access to digital infrastructure and poor digital literacy amongst vulnerable groups related, or even mutually reinforcing?
- The author suggests that the pandemic has worsened the implication of the digital divide, given the 'changing nature of work post COVID-19'. Explain why this is the case for low-income workers and those with disabilities, as well as in terms of education, for children from low-income families.
- The author's suggestions are mainly focused on improving infrastructure and help schemes. Can you propose other measures that may be of help? For instance, what can we, as members of society, do to help ameliorate the digital divide?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent is human life in general about the survival of the fittest? (Cambridge 2020)
2. 'There is little to look forward to in one's old age.' To what extent is this true of your society? (RI Y6 Timed Practice 2021)
3. 'Technology is key to reducing inequality.' How far do you agree? (RI Y5 Promo 2021)

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 13: Education reforms, and more, needed to fix inequality

EU 2-4

Adapted from Education reforms, and more, needed to fix inequality | Linda Lim & Pang Eng Fong | Channel News Asia | 2 June 2018

This reading will help you understand:

- Why education, instead of being a social leveller, is contributing to worsening inequality in today's world
- How the Singaporean ideology of "meritocracy" potentially compounds the problem of inequality
- Suggested approaches to mitigating inequality

Combating inequality has been declared a "national priority" in Singapore. This makes sense, given the pernicious effects that persistently high inequality can have on economic growth, political stability, social cohesion, quality of life, and even national security.

5 The 2016 Brexit and Trump votes occurred in the two major developed countries with the greatest income inequality — the UK and US respectively. Studies suggest that socio-cultural as well as economic divides resulting from inequality contributed to these electoral results, which have since led to populist and protectionist policy proposals that will slow growth in the long run.

10 Inequality itself also directly lowers economic growth through under-realisation of scarce talent, and weaker consumption demand — both are of particular concern to Singapore given our small labour force and market size.

15 As an already mature, high-income and thus slow-growing economy, we can also no longer expect rapid growth to mask the economic effects and social challenges of rising inequality, as it did in previous decades. Instead we need to boldly confront the root causes of inequality, which lie in how our economic and social institutions actually work. Focusing on education policy as the main solution can actually worsen inequality.

How does education contribute to inequality?

In developed economies like the UK, US and Singapore, education, especially university education, contributes to the widening skills premium (excess of skilled over unskilled labour income), and parents and students naturally clamour for more of it.

20 This is where education and inequality are mutually reinforcing. Higher-income families invest more in private tuition for academic subjects, extracurricular enrichment activities, and parental attention. This enhances their children's school performance and chances of getting into "good" (elite, brand-name) schools and universities, thus achieving credentials that employers value and reward with "good jobs" and high salaries.

25 Employers are known to use educational certification and school reputation as "screening devices" that differentiate between job candidates, and as proxies for behavioural characteristics and social networks they believe enhance employees' contribution to the enterprise.

Expansion of higher education has been accompanied by a widening "college premium" — or gap between graduate and non-graduate incomes — even as the supply of graduates increases.

30 Recent studies in the US and UK suggest that this is due to losses to non-graduates, as well as gains to graduates, as employers start requiring degrees for work that did not need it 30 years ago.

And as university degrees become more common, institutional reputation becomes more important, intensifying competition for places at the most selective institutions, and widening their graduates' salary premium over graduates of less selective institutions.

Can education reforms reduce inequality?

35 Policy-makers in developed countries have focused on reforms in education to reduce inequality. In some countries, particularly the US, unequal resource allocation between "rich" and "poor" school districts is a major factor contributing to unequal educational, employment and income outcomes.

This is less of a problem in Singapore, given the Ministry of Education's worthy efforts to equalise the allocation of resources — including the "best" teachers and administrators — between "neighbourhood" and "elite" schools. But it is hard to improve already high-performing, well-
40 resourced schools.

More importantly, as we noted in the *New Nation* in 1976: "The effect of any school variable which can be manipulated by decision-makers is small relative to other determinants of student performance... Family background is a very important variable affecting educational performance and earnings of individuals... changes within the school system itself will not necessarily bring about more
45 equal performance of students in school or greater income equality among them when they are employed."

Recent, separate research by NTU associate professor of sociology Teo You Yenn, and NUS associate professor of social work Irene Ng, confirms the dominant impact of family circumstances on student performance in Singapore today.

50 The PISA test which we regularly top shows that 15-year-old students in Singapore on average perform better than those in OECD countries, but here the gap between the top and bottom scorers is wider and the dependence on parents' socio-economic status higher.

Another popular policy is to increase lower-income students' access to more selective schools, including through priority admissions, as Singapore plans to do in Primary One and post-PSLE student
55 assignments to elite schools. But at best this can cater to only a small subset of low-income students, probably those already best qualified. This could widen the student performance gap between elite and neighbourhood schools, and subject more families to "exam stress".

Since school performance is heavily dependent on family resources, lower-income children could underperform relative to higher-income classmates in elite schools, reinforcing stigmatisation from
60 priority admission, and lowering self-esteem which research shows is a major determinant of individual performance.

Priority admission for lower-income children would also intensify competition among higher-income students for "fewer" elite school places, thus worsening the "education arms race".

65 In the US, such competition has worsened inequality and increased social stratification by increasing home values (hence family wealth) in residential neighbourhoods in the top public school districts. Tweaking Singapore's education system will not reduce inequality because it does not change the underlying unequal socio-economic structure to whose incentives families of all income levels rationally respond.

70 Parents naturally seek for their children entry into secure, well-paid employment in large corporate and government bureaucracies, and cartelised high-earning professions, which still use traditional academic credentials to screen candidates and remunerate employees.

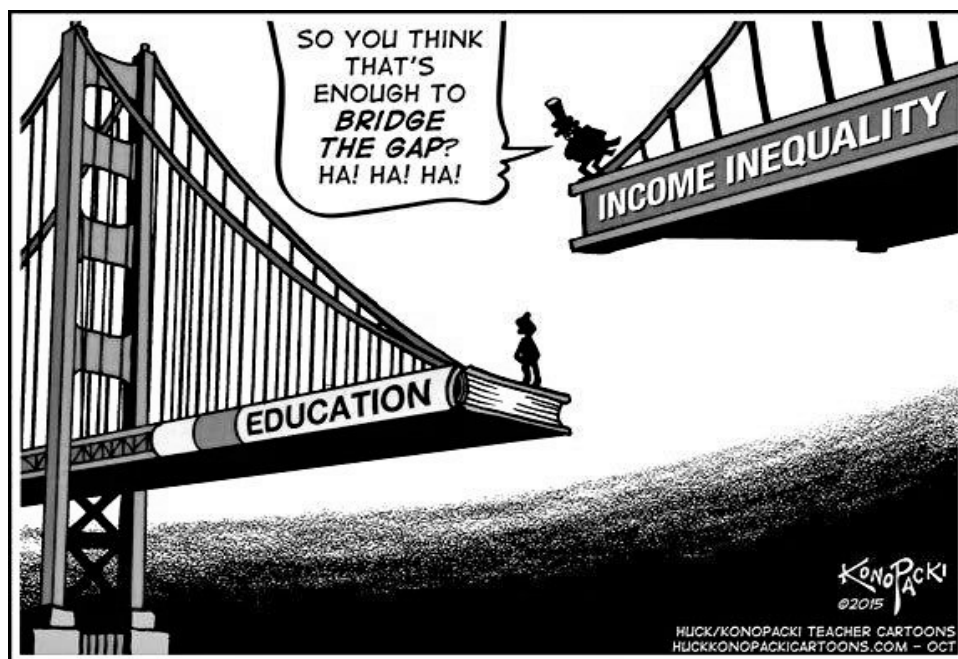
The impact of meritocracy

The Singaporean ideology that we are a “meritocracy” where economic success based on hard work and the right academic credentials justifies unequal returns, poses some problems.

75 It entrenches hierarchy, and hence a systemic inequality to which social mobility can at best contribute slightly more diverse members at each level of the pyramid. Overall inequality does not decline, and at worst, those who fail to “make it” up the ladder are considered to “deserve” their inferior position on the social as well as income scale.

80 Beginning with the competitive “streaming” of students by exam results at an early age, such stratification has stigmatising and demotivating effects which limit educational attainment and reduce intergenerational mobility.

85 Meritocracy as currently construed in Singapore, and served by the educational system, is arguably the problem, not the solution, for both economic development and inequality, as it is in other highly unequal rich societies. A UK study shows that students from higher-income families are more likely to go to university, and to more selective universities. They also earn more than students from lower-income families who graduate from the same institutions in the same subjects, and with similar other characteristics.



Reducing inequality through redistribution need not harm growth

90 We need to look outside the education system for policies that do work to reduce income and wealth disparities. They include higher tax rates on high income earners, levies on capital gains, estates and inheritance, and a stronger social safety net — all of which Singapore has eschewed, believing these would reduce the incentive to work hard, save and invest, and thus harm economic growth.

But high-income Scandinavian countries, Switzerland and Germany, have reduced inequality over decades through progressive universal tax-and-transfer systems that included labour market policies, spending on healthcare and social protection while growing at respectable rates and ranking high on

95 productivity and innovation indices — some even while maintaining budget surpluses and strong currencies.

Some high earners may resent high tax rates, but all citizens benefit from subsidised public services, including health and education, and receive unemployment insurance and retirement pensions. Besides reducing economic and social divides, these policies may also encourage savings for growth-enhancing investments in business enterprises (rather than housing consumption, as in Singapore). Recent improvement in Singapore's still-high Gini coefficient also results not from educational policy, but from increased social transfers to vulnerable groups — subsidies for low-wage workers, the elderly and elderly poor.

105 But these have been insufficient to narrow the cumulative wide income and wealth gaps created by past policies and market forces. Our post-tax-and-transfers Gini still ranks with the highest among developed countries (lower than the US but similar to the UK), is much higher than those of other small high-income economies (in Scandinavia), and is unlikely to be fiscally sustainable.

110 However, we have run large budget and current account surpluses for decades, piling up huge foreign exchange reserves that have been well-invested by our sovereign wealth funds. More of these could be converted into social spending that could both increase productivity and reduce inequality.

Reforming the education system — by equalising resources, eliminating streaming, increasing curricular flexibility and minimising social segregation — can reduce inequality and social stratification, and foster the innovation and entrepreneurship required for post-industrial economic growth, only if the deep-seated institutional roots of inequality are addressed.

115 The political will to do this is what matters in the struggle for a more just and equal society that will benefit all of us.

For discussion/reflection:

- Read paragraphs 2-3 of this article. According to the author, why is it an imperative for societies to address inequality?
- In your own words as far as possible, explain how education and inequality can be “mutually reinforcing” (line 19). To what extent have you observed this in the context of Singapore?
- In what ways might meritocracy in Singapore further exacerbate inequality?
- Why is social redistribution, explained in lines 88 – 96, un-meritocratic, but perhaps more just?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent should income equality be a goal in your society? (Cambridge 2019)
2. To what extent should the rich be expected to help the poor? (RI Y5 Timed Practice 2020)
3. To what extent is education still the key to a nation's success? (RI Y6 CT1 2019)
4. ‘Success is determined by one's intelligence.’ Discuss. (RI Y6 Prelim 2012)
5. ‘Inequality is a fact of life.’ To what extent should we accept this? (RI Y6 Prelim 2010)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 14: Many millennials are worse off than their parents – a first in American history EU 2, 4-

6

Tami Luhby | CNN | 11 January 2020

This reading will help you understand:

- Understand the challenges the millennial generation faces with regard to job security and wealth generation
- The underlying reasons why these issues are not talked about more

On paper, it looks like Scott Larsen is doing better than his father was at the same age.

At 29, Larsen has a college degree and earns more money, but he doesn't feel he's moving up in the world.

5 When his father, Craig, was 29, he was already married, owned a home in Payson, Utah, and had two of his five children. Now 64, Craig Larsen worked as a mechanical engineer, earning about \$20,000 a year at the time, or about \$50,500 in today's dollars, even though he hadn't finished college. His wife, Kathy, was a stay-at-home mom.

10 Scott, the youngest of the kids, is a marketing manager for a health and beauty company based in nearby Provo, Utah. Though he earns around \$60,000 annually – about 20% more than his dad did at his age – he is living with his parents, because he doesn't feel he can afford to buy a place of his own thanks to soaring housing prices. While his dad was able to purchase a house for a little over twice his annual salary, Scott Larsen says he'd have to spend more than five times his yearly paycheck.

15 “The prospect of taking care of a family or buying a normal, decent home seem like far-off dreams that I'll have to reconsider in another five years,” said Scott Larsen, noting that living at home is “horrible” for his social life but is a “financially sound idea”.

Even though the US economy is growing – according to a recent CNN poll, 76% of Americans think it's doing better than it has in decades – not everyone is prospering. Millennials are on track to be the first generation not to exceed their parents in terms of job status or income, studies show.

20 Democratic presidential candidates have seized on that reality, rolling out plans for erasing crippling student loan debt and guaranteeing health care, designed in large part to appeal to a generation that feels it can't get ahead. “

Coming of age in a financial crisis

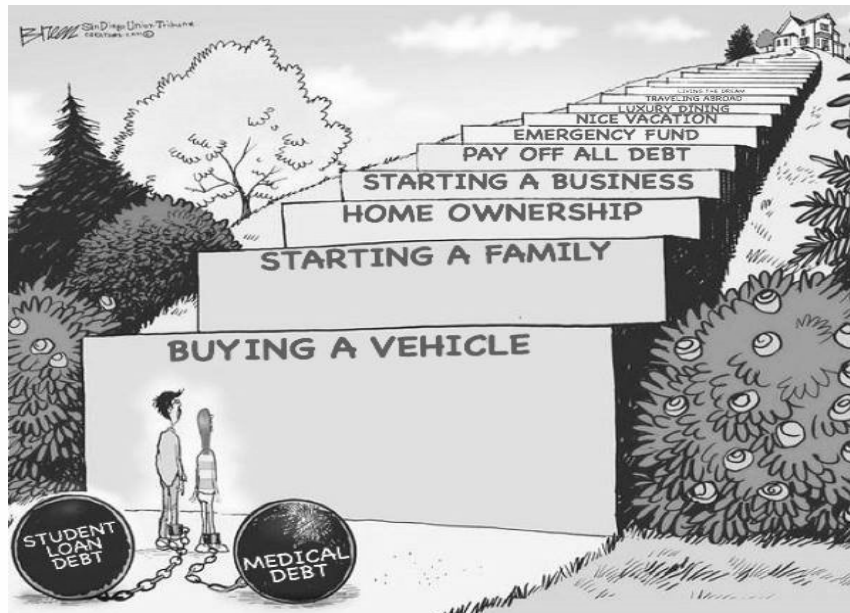
25 Millennials – which the Pew Research Center classifies as the generation born between 1981 and 1996 – have faced challenges. They came of age at the worst possible moment – when the economy collapsed in the Great Recession, said Michael Hout, a sociology professor at New York University. The US economy is not supporting a continuing increase in occupational status to the extent it once did. Compounding the problem is that millennials' parents did benefit from an upward shift in job status, making it even harder to surpass their accomplishments.

30 Among Americans born in the late 1980s, only 44% were in jobs with higher socioeconomic status than their parents when both were age 30, while 49% had positions of lower status, according to Hout, who published a study on millennials in the 2019 Stanford Center on Poverty & Inequality Pathways Magazine.

That's a far cry from those born in the late 1930s, some 70% of whom did better than their parents. The rate has drifted downward since, but millennials are the first to fall below 50%.

Another study found that only half of those born in 1984 earned more than their parents at about age 30, compared to 92% of those born in 1940.

“A big part of the American dream is that each generation will do better than the one that preceded it,” said David Grusky, a sociology professor at Stanford and one of the authors of the second study, which was published in the journal *Science* in 2017. “That has been part of what’s supposed to make this country special and distinctive. When it’s just a coin flip, we’re not living up to that commitment. It’s a pretty fundamental part of what we say this country can deliver and we’re not.”



Rising house prices and college costs

More than a dozen millennials told CNN of their struggles to meet or exceed their parents’ job status or lifestyle. Some had trouble landing good-paying jobs, while others found that housing prices, student loans and other expenses were dragging them down.

Take Brianna Garcia, 26, of San Antonio, Texas. The first in her family to graduate college, she earned a bachelor’s degree in education two years ago from Our Lady of the Lake University in her hometown. She had hoped to become an elementary school teacher, but districts were downsizing at the time she was applying.

She broadened her search, looking for “something a little higher paying to help me work my way up”. But she was repeatedly thwarted by a lack of experience. Finally, with the help of her mom, she landed a job in March at a medical clinic, doing filing for \$11 an hour.

While her parents had their struggles and relied on government assistance for a time, they were able to buy a house by the time her dad was 30 and raise two children. Her father, 51, was an accountant at a bakery and is now a payroll supervisor at a shoe company. Her mother, 49, worked in medical records.

“My parents made it for the most part, but they’ve always wanted better for me,” said Garcia, who lives at home and hasn’t started paying off her \$27,000 in student loans because her income is too low. “I’m trying to do so and work hard but with this job market that doesn’t feel very open and the housing costs that are unrealistically high, it feels impossible sometimes to do better than my parents.”

“All I want to do is have a stable job so that when my parents need my help, I can do it,” she said.

For Sarah Clinton, 34, the problem isn’t with her career. She feels that she and her husband both have good, stable jobs with decent salaries and the ability to advance – she works with the homeless after

earning a master's in social work and he sells long-term care insurance while pursuing his MBA. But the Waltham, Massachusetts, couple barely make enough to afford their \$2,300 monthly rent and other life expenses.

- 65 Home prices have risen faster than inflation. In 1980, the typical home sold for about \$197,500, adjusted for inflation, according to US Census Bureau data. Now, it's more than \$325,000.

- 70 Saving to buy a house or start a family doesn't seem feasible at the moment, Clinton said. Her parents, meanwhile, served in the military and received housing allowances. Eventually, they bought a home off the base in New Hampshire. After they left the service, her dad took another government job and her mother became a nurse.

"They want me to have a child, purchase a home, but I can't do that now," Clinton said. "It's a goal that we feel that much further away from reaching."

Wealth creation is lagging, too

- 75 When it comes to wealth, millennials are falling behind, as well. They typically have much less net worth than Generation X households did when each generation was between 25 to 34 years old, according to a recent Government Accountability Office study of Federal Reserve Bank data. The median wealth of millennial households was just over \$20,000, while Gen X had about \$31,250 according to the GAO.

Part of the reason is that millennials are less likely to be homeowners at that age. Some 43% of millennial households owned homes, compared to 51% of Gen X, according to the GAO.

- 80 Student loans are also an issue. Several millennials told CNN that their college debts are crushing their ability to advance – an issue their parents largely didn't have to contend with. Young families had \$1,415 in education debt, on average, in 1989, according to an Urban Institute calculation of Federal Reserve Bank data, which looked at those aged 18 to 29. That burden soared to \$13,039 by 2016.

- 85 If it weren't for her student loans, Kathy Israel would be able to live on her own. Though she purposely attended a state law school to keep costs in check, she has still accumulated \$120,000 in student debt.

The 30-year-old works in compliance for a Big Four auditing firm, but she had to move back with her parents because of her \$1,200 monthly student loan payment.

- 90 Her parents didn't initially finish college, but grew her mother's family costume jewellery business into a successful company while raising four children. Her dad later earned his bachelor's degree at a state college – incurring no debt – and got a job as a statistician. His master's degree was paid for by his employer.

"They were building a life," said Israel, who lives in St Petersburg, Florida. "I am stagnant. You can't get ahead. You can only get behind if you aren't conscious."

For discussion/reflection:

- According to the reading, what factors are contributing to the struggles of millennials in the US?
- To what extent are these factors applicable to your society?
- What do you think "building a life" entails in your society? Are a house and family considered important in your society today?

Related RI essay questions:

- To what extent are young people in your society prepared for a world that is constantly changing? (RI Y6 Prelim 2019)
- 'Young people today think of nothing but themselves.' Is this a fair description? (RI Y6 Prelim 2014)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 15: Pandemics: Youth in an Age of Lost Opportunity

EU 2-4 & 6

Adapted from Chapter 3 of The Global Risks Report 2021 | World Economic Forum | 16 January 2021

This reading will help you understand:

- The challenges today's youth around the world were already exposed to before the Covid-19 pandemic
- The new or elevated risks the youth would have to overcome, ranging from unstable educational environments and dwindling pathways in the employment landscape, to increased risks of disenfranchisement
- The improvements and investments that are necessary to ensure the flourishing of the generation of youth currently experiencing the pandemic

Young adults (ages 15–24) around the world are experiencing their second major global crisis within a decade: they entered youth in the throes of the financial crisis, and are now exiting at the outset of a pandemic not seen in generations. They will face serious challenges to their education, economic prospects and mental health.

- 5 The outlook for this generation had already been diminished by environmental degradation, rising inequality (of many types – gender, intergenerational, economic and ethnic), varying degrees of violence, and social disruption from the tech-enabled industrial transformation. While the digital leap forward unlocked opportunities for some youth, many are now entering the workforce in an employment 'ice age'.
- 10 In May 2020, the World Economic Forum's *COVID-19 Risks Outlook* warned of a "next lost generation". According to the Global Risks Perception Survey (GRPS), "youth disillusionment" is a top neglected risk that will become a critical threat to the world over the next two years. Hard-fought societal wins could be obliterated if the current generation lacks adequate pathways to educational and job opportunities.

Fragile education systems

- 15 The year 2020 saw unprecedented challenges to the global education system. During the first wave of pandemic lockdowns, 80% of students globally were out of school, as traditional classroom teaching was rendered mute. Despite worldwide adaptation for remote teaching via television, radio and internet, there were stark regional differences in capacity; at least 30% of the global student population lacked the technology to participate in digital and broadcast learning. While adaptive measures allowed schools to re-open eventually, many challenges remained throughout subsequent
- 20 waves of COVID-19 because of ineffective or slow government responses.

- 25 School closures aggravated youth inequalities between and within societies because young women and those of disadvantaged socio-economic statuses were hit hardest. Students in high-income households potentially benefited from more targeted and individualized learning arrangements, but resource-strapped youth struggled to participate in educational opportunities in the absence of digital connectivity, adult support or adequate space to study at home. For others, border closings complicated educational mobility.

- 30 Home schooling and home working increased household stress and the incidence of violence against young adults. In areas where school provides access to food and a safe space, school closures put students at higher risk of child labour, recruitment by organised crime, human trafficking, and gun violence.

School closings have had devastating consequences on young women. Gender-based violence has increased globally during the pandemic, and rapes rose in advanced and developing countries alike. Teenage pregnancies are expected to increase, from Latin America to East Asia and Africa—previous health crises suggest that some of these girls might be prevented from returning to school. Globally, COVID-19 and its “shadow pandemic” on girls and young women risk reversing 25 years’ worth of global gains in girls’ education, exposing girls to a higher chance of underage marriage.

Employment turmoil

Although many economies recovered from the 2008–2009 Financial Crisis, those hit hardest by the Great Recession never did fully. As a result, youth unemployment has risen globally since 2008. National policies still fail to lift up youth in many cases. Weak structural transformations have largely failed to reduce stubbornly high, systemic youth unemployment, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.

The increase of unbound job schemes originating from the ‘gig’ economy, unpaid or low-paid internships and continued high numbers of youth in the informal market have spurred young workers to jump between low-paid short-term jobs. At the same time, labour market distortions narrowed employment opportunities for young adults: a deficit of employment opportunities for highly educated youth in some sectors, and a “skills crisis” in others.

Policy responses to COVID-19 further exacerbated the marginalization of young workers. The global economy plummeted in the second quarter of 2020, disproportionately affecting the incomes of young adults. In many economies, they were the first to lose their jobs to lockdowns. Many young adults work in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic—such as the service industry and manufacturing—often on part-time or temporary contracts with limited job protection. The informal sector, where almost 80% of the world’s young workers are employed, was particularly impacted. Altogether, the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), already at 21% in early 2020, is likely to rise in the coming year.

Young adults’ employment prospects were being challenged by automation, as well as by disruption from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, before interrupted education opportunities and job losses set them further behind. Youth unemployment may increase across regions, given that more sectoral restructuring and shifting consumer habits are expected to trigger mass layoffs.

“Pandemics” are at risk of becoming the double lost generation of the 21st century. Lack of opportunities for future economic, societal and political participation could have long-lasting global consequences.

A narrowing pathway for youth

Lockdowns may cause an education loss of at least one semester, which, like absenteeism, could affect future academic performance, increase dropout rates and induce riskier health behaviours. This could make it harder for students at the secondary and tertiary levels to acquire the necessary skills to pursue further education or vocational training, or even to secure entry-level jobs. And such further education or training is even more important for “jobs of the future”.

Young women face the risk of being kept out of school for household or agricultural work, not being able to finish their secondary education, or not being able to return to work after leaving during the pandemic for caregiving responsibilities; young men could face increased financial pressure in societies where they are the sole financial contributor of the household. A widening of educational, socio-economic and gender inequalities can be expected.

The 2008–2009 Financial Crisis has shown the persistence of youth unemployment—young adults have continuously struggled to integrate into and align their skills with a grim job market. This struggle can leave long-lasting marks on their livelihoods. As the world starts to recover from COVID-19, young adults are likely to face such challenges again, this time amplified by the world’s digital leap forward. Entry-level jobs today require more skills than they did a decade ago, and, at the same time, there are fewer available because of automation.

The consequences of rapidly changing markets make youth more vulnerable to unstable contracts, career instability and limited promotion prospects. This can lead to a higher risk that they will miss out on social safety benefits, job protection and re-skilling opportunities. More importantly, a stunted employment outlook complicates young people’s ability to consolidate economic capital and social mobility. Young students are expected to face increased debt burdens as student loans continue to reach record levels, and graduates entering the workforce in an economic crisis are more likely to earn less than their peers. In economies where informal work is predominant—mostly because of high shares of agricultural and services industry professions—lack of social protection increases youth’s risk of sliding into poverty quickly.

Fear, anger and backlash

Young people have become more and more vocal in the past decade, in the streets and in cyberspace. Their concern and proactivity with key issues such as economic hardship, persisting intergenerational inequality, failure in governance and rampant corruption is inspiring; but they have also expressed anger, disappointment and pessimism. The multitude of youth protests embody an increased sentiment of betrayal by the generation in power over insufficient action on social and climate justice, political change and corruption. COVID-19 has added a new criticality to youth disillusionment with their dire economic outlook, missed educational opportunities and disapproval of government emergency response. These confrontations and the associated potential disruptions could become constant if the underlying causes are left unaddressed.

Limited economic and educational prospects are likely to exacerbate youth frustrations. The compounding trends of lower intergenerational mobility and widening socio-economic inequalities, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, have markedly deteriorated youth’s mental health. Loneliness and anxiety among youth in developed economies had already been described as an “epidemic”, but since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, mental health has deteriorated for 80% of children and young people across the globe.

Such discontent risks exploitation by reactionary actors. Prolonged lockdown loneliness and job loss stresses—resulting in higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—could make youths more susceptible to alluring but divisive ideas in developed economies. More radical youth movements could lead to heightened inter-generational tensions and deepen societal fragmentation along new fault lines. “Social cohesion erosion” compounded by “youth disillusionment”—critical short-term threats to the world in the GRPS—would challenge fragile national institutions or even destabilize political and economic systems altogether.

At the same time, dire prospects for economic and social mobility will likely force more young workers to migrate abroad in search of better opportunities—adding to the current 31 million youth migrants across the world. This would induce the real brain drain of the 21st century. However, young migrant workers could see such opportunities diminished if stricter migration policies implemented during the pandemic are slow to relax or become permanent in receiving countries.

Passing the baton

115 The pandemic has exposed youth's vulnerability to widespread economic and societal shocks. Political and economic systems will need to adapt globally to directly address youth's needs and minimize the risk of a lost generation. Investment in improving education sectors and in upskilling and reskilling, ensuring adequate social protection schemes, closing the gender gap and addressing mental health scars should be at the centre of the recovery process.

120 New ways of learning have the potential to be more inclusive, adaptive and comprehensive, enabling students to develop 21st century skills such as creativity, innovation and advanced inter-personal skills. However, it is more critical than ever for the public and the private sector to invest jointly in ensuring connectivity for all youth. Given the fast-changing nature of the job market, more investment is also needed in vocational and on-the-job training. Investment in educational technology must be accompanied by adaptations of the physical educational infrastructure so schools can continue to offer in-person services while harnessing the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

125 The current crisis has also revealed and exacerbated gender inequalities in education and work. Recognizing this gap is the first step in closing it. Schools and employers need to adopt measures to close the gender gap, such as adopting flexible and remote work, ensuring that young women can return to school or the workplace after lengthy absences for caregiving, and implementing support programmes for victims of gender-based violence.

130 The mental and physical health situations of youths need to be addressed from the outset of economic and societal recovery to minimize the yet-unknown long-term effects of the pandemic and its consequences. The digital leap forward and emerging digital tools can increase youth accessibility to support measures and reduce the stigmatization of mental health issues originating from these chaotic and uncertain times.

135 Beyond these short-term investments, more needs to be done in the long run. Young people are demanding more egalitarian, equitable and sustainable societies, yet they continue to face unnecessary barriers and blocked pathways. Channels must be strengthened to enable youth to make their voices heard in all levels of government, on company boards and in multilateral organizations— which will in turn foster an intergenerational transfer of experience, knowledge and skills; serve as a bridge builder against societal frictions; and decrease youth frustrations. Youth must be guaranteed a say in the global recovery. Failure to ensure youth a seat at the table risks entire societal and economic systems being rejected by this generation.

For discussion/reflection:

- What are the authors implying by the use of the phrase “employment ‘ice age’ ” (line 9)?
- Explain why the authors warn that ‘hard-fought societal wins could be obliterated’ (lines 12-13) in the context of the Global Risks Perception Survey findings that ‘youth disillusionment’ would become a serious threat (line 11).
- Critique whether the government response here in Singapore in terms of re-opening schools after the outbreak of Covid-19 was similarly ‘ineffective’ or ‘slow’ (line 20). What are some possible explanations for a sluggish government response?
- The authors suggest that ‘the absence of digital connectivity, adult support or adequate space’ (lines 24-25) affected the ability of some youth to cope with school closures due to the pandemic. In the context of a similar group of youth in Singapore, what other factors can you think of that reduce students’ ability to learn without physically going to school?
- According to the authors, youth tend to fill jobs in the ‘gig’ economy, or the ‘informal [job] market’ (line 42 & 43). Why is this phenomenon undesirable?

- Who are the 'pandemics', and what do the authors mean by describing them as the 'double lost generation of the 21st century' (line 59)?
- The authors believe that there is an 'increased sentiment of betrayal by the generation in power' (lines 90-91) amongst the youth. Identify as many real-world examples as you can, of such a sentiment being expressed.
- In the last section (lines 114-141), a number of solutions to mitigate the risks faced by the 'pandemics' are offered. Identify the solution that is likely to have the greatest impact, and explain why this is the case.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent do young people have a significant voice in political affairs? (RI Y6 Timed Practice 2020)
2. To what extent are young people in your country prepared for the future? (RI Y5 Timed Practice)
3. 'Young people today think of nothing but themselves.' Is this a fair description? (RI Y6 Prelim 2014)
4. With reference to the developments in the world today, to what extent would you agree that the future holds much promise for young people? (RI Y6 CT1 2013)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 16: What is 'lying flat', and why are Chinese officials standing up to it?

EU 2, 5 & 6

Ji Siqi, He Huifeng, and Brian Peach | SCMP | 24 October 2021

This reading helps you understand:

- How/why the 'lying flat' phenomenon is an attempt, chiefly amongst younger Chinese, to provide a counter-narrative to the 'Chinese dream' ideology championed by the government
- Why this mindset of striving for no more than what is utterly necessary to secure one's survival has resonated amongst ordinary Chinese youth, mainly as a form of resistance against the perceived false promise of attaining success through hard work
- Why the movement is seen by the government as a huge threat not just in terms of a stagnating economy, but also overall demographic and mental well-being of Chinese society, as well as sociopolitical stability
- Specific vulnerabilities that the Chinese society has that makes the 'lying flat' movement more worrying compared to similar trends seen in other advanced economies like the US and Japan

"Lying flat" is a movement about doing nothing. And that makes it about everything. For months, the chatter surrounding lying flat, or tang ping, has permeated Chinese society, sowed discourse and become ubiquitous enough to finally warrant a public condemnation by President Xi Jinping. "It is necessary to prevent the stagnation of the social class, unblock the channels for upward social mobility, create opportunities for more people to become rich, and form an environment for improvement in which everyone participates, avoiding involution and lying flat," Xi said in comments published on October 15 by the Communist Party's flagship journal on political theory, Qiushi. His words address a trend that strikes at the very heart of his "Chinese dream" ideology, which he has described as the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".

So what does 'lying flat' mean?

"Lying flat" essentially means doing the bare minimum to get by, and striving for nothing more than what is absolutely essential for one's survival. It represents the mindset of lying down instead of being a productive member of society. Rather than striving to study hard, buy a home, or even start a family, a subsection of society is rejecting it all to lie flat. Some have dubbed it a manifesto against materialism, some suspect it is simply being lazy, and others say this type of defeatist attitude is an inevitable result when people become so overwhelmed and dismayed by the notion of working themselves to the bone that they feel there is no other option but to give up.

Where did 'lying flat' come from?

Unlike many buzzwords that have come before it, "lying flat" does not represent a new fad. But a viral online post in April 2021 brought it to the forefront of many minds, especially the younger generation, and it has since gained immense traction in China. On the Baidu Tieba social media platform, a man named Luo Huazhong, in his mid-twenties, wrote about how he had embraced this lifestyle of minimalism for two years. "Life is just lying down, lying down and lying down," he said in the post, titled "Lying flat is justice". Luo explained how he was living a low-desire, zero-pressure lifestyle without stable employment, while staying with his parents in Zhejiang province. When he was feeling up for it, he would travel three hours to Dongyang, Zhejiang, where the world's largest film studio is located. He found work there that he considered perfect – acting as a dead body in movies. His post included a picture of himself lying down, dressed in an ancient Chinese assassin costume for one of his roles. The photo and post spread like wildfire online. "When I say lying flat, I don't mean that I just lie down every day and don't do anything," Luo later said in media interviews. "Lying flat is a state of mind – that is, I feel that many things are not worthy of my attention and energy."

Why has lying flat resonated with ordinary Chinese?

30 Similar stories about unmotivated Chinese youth have also circulated in the past. One involved a group of young migrant workers who self-mockingly called themselves the “Sanhe gods” and would roam around the Sanhe area of Shenzhen’s Longhua district. Having grown tired of working long hours in factories for little pay, they instead took occasional one-off jobs as labourers and received cash for a day’s work.

35 Their motto was, “With one day’s pay, you can have fun for three days.” They slept in public parks, ate instant noodles and spent time in internet bars until they ran out of money. But local authorities eventually cracked down on the “Sanhe gods”, and their story never gained the type of notoriety nor longevity that “lying flat” has.

40 In the internet era when countless posts feature complaints and gripes about personal struggles and the hardships of life, the concept of lying flat stands out because of its philosophical undertones that serve not as a call to action, but to inaction.

45 “Since there has never really been an ideological trend exalting human subjectivity in this land, I shall create it for myself,” Luo said. “Lying down is my wise-man movement.” The ethos struck a chord with much of China’s young and disenchanted workforce that has been hit particularly hard by the nation’s economic slowdown, trade tensions with the West and the coronavirus pandemic.

50 This followed years of being spoon-fed the rose-tinted propaganda of Xi’s “Chinese dream” with the promise of a bright future for the nation and a “better life” for themselves. It became especially hard to swallow for the millions who have slaved away in China “996” culture of overwork – meaning shifts from 9am to 9pm, six days a week – and still cannot afford a home, much less achieve a happy work-life balance. And an increasing number have lost the motivation to even try.

What risks does lying flat pose to China?

From white-collar workers in China’s bustling cities to university students, an army of frustrated young people took to social media and internet message boards in recent months to declare themselves “lying flat youth”.

55 And across the country, T-shirts printed with “Do nothing lie flat youth” have become hot selling items. Authorities have been scrambling to suppress the phenomenon, fearing that it could challenge the established social and economic order.

In the long run, lying flat could not only affect Chinese consumption and growth, but also lower the birth rate that is already eating up the country’s demographic dividend and threatening its social welfare system, according to economists and social commentators.

60 Psychologists and doctors also warn that prolonged inactivity raises the risk of life-threatening physical and mental disorders, including heart disease and depression.

65 It is easy to understand the anxiety of Chinese authorities over the lying-flat attitude, said Dr Gavin Sin Hin Chiu, an independent commentator and former associate professor at Shenzhen University. “If it becomes widespread, it will affect young people’s expectations of income growth, consumption, marriage and childbirth, which will be detrimental to China’s ability to avoid the middle-income trap, where growth stagnates and incomes stall,” he said.

President Xi's call for a society "in which everyone participates", and his insistence that people not lie flat, was publicised just three days before authorities announced that China's gross domestic product growth during the third quarter of this year slowed to just 4.9 per cent, compared with a year earlier. China's economy had staged an impressive recovery from the impact of the coronavirus, but is now faced with numerous headwinds, including a property slump, energy crisis, weak consumer sentiment and soaring raw material costs.

The lying-flat trend also appeared to reach its zenith in the third quarter.

Additionally, Xi's latest comments fleshed out his concept of "common prosperity", saying it was time for China to advance its goal of all citizens sharing in the opportunity to be wealthy.

But he also said government officials at all levels should not make promises they cannot keep, and must avoid the "trap of welfarism" to support the lazy.

"Only by promoting common prosperity, increasing the income of urban and rural residents, and improving human capital can we increase overall productivity and consolidate the foundations for high-quality development," the Qiushi article quoted him as saying. "China must prevent polarisation, promote common prosperity and achieve social harmony and stability."

Is China censoring the lying-flat movement?

The "Great Firewall" is doing its best to keep people from talking about lying flat.

When censors realised how popular Luo's original post was becoming, it was scrubbed from the internet. However, copies quickly spread online, sparking lively discussions and videos – many of which garnered millions of views each. But they, too, have since been deleted.

Authorities have used all of the tools at their disposal to steer the social narrative back toward the official line. State-backed media outlets helped lead the charge. Nanfang Daily called the trend "shameful". Hu Xijin, editor-in-chief of the nationalistic Global Times tabloid, said: "Young people are the hope of this country. Neither they themselves, nor the country, will allow them to collectively lie flat."

Analysts say that the idea of people doing nothing is particularly jarring for Chinese authorities, as it reflects a sort of silent rebellion that cannot easily be quashed. Quelling protests in the streets is one thing, but getting millions of individuals out of their beds and forcing them to engage in society is entirely different.

The censorship and preaching have, in some cases, sparked heated backlash and lent credence to the movement, particularly in the eyes of people who struggle to simply earn a living. Analysts at Nomura, in the financial services group's special report on Asia in August, said they believe that the wealth-inequality issue will continue to be a growing concern among China's leaders for years to come.

"Falling social mobility, as a result of widening wealth inequality, is sowing the seeds of discontent, especially among younger people, who have higher expectations after observing the vast amounts of wealth accumulated in cities," the report said. "This kind of disenchantment and dissatisfaction is only likely to worsen with the expected slowdown in economic growth. The lying-flat movement, which calls on young people to opt out of the struggle for workplace success and to resist the attractions of consumer fulfilment, is a direct extension of this discontent."

Do people lie flat in the United States and elsewhere?

105 At John F. Kennedy’s presidential inauguration in 1961, he inspired Americans to see the importance
of civic action and public service. The JFK Library says his historic words, “Ask not what your country
can do for you – ask what you can do for your country”, challenged everyone to contribute in some
way to the public good. This call came after the so-called Beat Generation movement prompted
110 people – dubbed beatniks – to rebel against conformity and traditional lifestyles in the 1950s. “Beat”
was initially slang for “beaten down”.

In the 1990s, the United Kingdom classified a growing group of people as NEET – an acronym for “Not
in Education, Employment or Training”, and it included those who were unemployed and not looking
for work. Around 2010, the “Satori generation” was coined in Japan to describe young people who
were seemingly free from material desires and no longer wanted to work.

115 And a few years ago, South Korea had its “Sampo generation”, referring to those who had given up on
romantic relationships, marriage and having children. Eventually, the generation’s name evolved to
include a disinterest in employment, home ownership, interpersonal relationships and even hope.
“It’s not new across the world to see youth of different generations and different nations losing their
motivation to strive for a better life, while turning against materialism and forgoing regular jobs and
120 careers,” Dr Chiu said.

But the trend is more worrying in China than in other countries, he explained, because China’s
economic development is not as advanced. “The significant difference is that [similar] movements
occurred when the United States and Japan had already entered the stage of advanced economies,
with per capita disposable income much higher than the current level in China,” he said. “China is now
125 at a crossroads of becoming a high-income economy or finding itself stuck in the middle-income trap.
The lying-flat movement would negatively affect China’s efforts to escape the middle-income trap.”
So it’s little wonder that Xi and the rest of China’s leadership are so intent on stamping out this lying-
flat ethos that has become such an outsized threat.

For discussion/reflection:

- Is there any good that might come out of “lying flat”?
- What might be the long-term impact of “lying flat”?
- Do you think this movement will resonate with Singaporeans, particularly among the younger generation? Why or why not?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. ‘People today do not work as hard as they did in the past.’ How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2018)
2. ‘Work-life harmony is a myth.’ How far is this true of your society today? (RI Y5 Promo 2020)
3. ‘Young people today think of nothing but themselves.’ Is this a fair description? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim 2014)
4. ‘Always follow your dreams.’ Is this good advice for young people today? (RI Y5 Promo 2013)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 17: South Korea is No Country for Young People

EU 1-4 & 6

Katrin Park | Foreign Policy | 5 November 2021

This reading will help you understand:

- How serious a problem depression and suicide is amongst young people in South Korea, a problem that has only been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic
- The economic policies and disparities, as well as cultural undercurrents that are contributing to rapidly escalating rates of depression in this group
- That widespread unhappiness amongst young voters have precipitated large swings of political support between the political incumbent and main opposition party
- Possible ways forward to cope with the mental epidemic
- The simmering tensions that exists between the older and younger Koreans, particularly in regard to the former's perception of the latter's lack of resilience

The ultra-violent Netflix survival drama *Squid Game* is a sensational dramatisation of despair in South Korea, a country that's obsessed with youth and where K-pop and K-beauty stars shine from TVs and billboards—two industries fueled by the glamour of the young. In *Squid Game*, debt-ridden individuals sign up to participate in children's games that could cost them their lives for a chance to win more than \$38 million. It's an utterly dystopian and factionalised take on South Korean society. But its mixture of youth and despair resonated in the country, where suicide has been the number one cause of death for young people since 2007.

For the past two decades, it has had the highest suicide rate among developed nations: 24.6 suicides for every 100,000 people in South Korea in 2019, compared to 14.5 suicides in the United States in 2017. Although South Korea's older adults are still the most likely to die by suicide due to poverty and isolation, young people are rapidly dying by suicide. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of South Koreans under age 40 who took their own lives rose by 10 percent, according to the Korea National Statistics Office.

At the core of this despair are economic woes, worsened by the pandemic. South Koreans in their 20s and 30s have long felt limited by the gap between the haves and the have-nots. They call the country "Hell Joseon," likening it to an infernal kingdom one can only escape through death or emigration. A college degree used to guarantee a job—perhaps not the most well-paying or fancy job but a job, nonetheless. This is no longer the case.

Even before COVID-19, the unemployment rate for young people was nearly three times the national average. In the midst of the pandemic in November 2020, almost 40 percent of new college graduates gave up their searches for new jobs. An epic housing crisis in the capital area, where nearly half the South Korean population lives, has made matters worse. The average price of an apartment in Seoul has doubled in the past five years under the current government's misguided policies on mortgage rules and tax penalties. Four years ago, it would have taken 11 years' worth of South Korea's median annual household income to buy an apartment in Seoul. Now, it costs more than 18 years' worth of income. Rents have shot up, leaving young people with limited savings and without a shelter.

The number of people in their 20s experiencing depression has nearly doubled over the past five years. Yet seeking therapy is difficult in a culture that sees it as a sign of weakness. In fact, even though almost 30 percent of South Koreans suffer from mental illnesses like depression and alcohol abuse at some point in their lives, only 15.3 percent seek treatment.

35 Then there's the constant pressure and endless competition like the brutal educational race that begins in kindergarten. One in three middle and high school students in Seoul have thought of suicide because of academic burdens and worries over their futures and careers, according to the National Youth Policy Institute. It's no wonder South Korea nearly tops the ranks in raising the world's unhappiest children.

40 When the Korean War ended in 1953, poverty was widespread. But because everyone was poor, there was less inequality. Most important, there was hope for the future—for example, the miners and nurses who went to West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s to toil in coal mines and hospitals knew their children back home would have a better life. Rapid economic growth, unfortunately, hasn't translated into shared prosperity. The housing crisis hasn't affected young people born into wealth as they pay for houses in cash or let apartments sit empty rather than rent them out at a low price.

45 In 2017, a record number of young voters elected Moon Jae-in for president when he promised to create a fair and just society where anyone willing to work hard could own a home and raise a family. This has not happened. Corruption among the elite has continued. Government officials benefited from the housing crisis through rent hikes and land speculation. The justice minister was indicted for bribery and fraud. One of the charges included illegally getting his daughter admitted to a university—a sore point since a university admission scandal was at the start of the corruption scandal that toppled Moon's predecessor.

50 Bleak prospects and social immobility have driven young people to the main opposition conservative party, delivering them landslide victories in April's mayoral elections. Sensing a youth revolt against Moon, the opposition party quickly chose a 36-year-old former entrepreneur as its leader, which would have been unthinkable a few years ago given his youth and inexperience.

55 "Suicide has become a global crisis. And financial distress, like debt, unemployment, and lower income, can significantly raise suicide risk," said Eric Elbogen, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University, whose research found a significant association between cumulative financial strain and increased suicide risk in American adults. "Financial strain triggered by the pandemic is critical to consider and poses a risk to elevate rates of suicide, adding to the enormous health consequences of the pandemic. Understanding this link can help bolster suicide prevention efforts."

60 A more meaningful nod to young people would help them counter the feeling of hopelessness that has engulfed them. Right now, this means boosting social safety nets and hiring not just part-time gigs but full-time jobs with a living wage to give young people a chance. This would give them the confidence to make future plans.

65 South Korea should also invest in improving young people's mental health. The stigma surrounding mental illness should be removed. South Korea's pop culture dynamo of movies and music can be retooled to raise awareness and encourage treatment—for once, the country would be using its cultural assets to empower its young people rather than exploiting their youthfulness. It can learn from Finland. The Nordic country reduced the number of suicides by half since 1990 using the world's first national suicide prevention campaign. It involved all government agencies to improve treatment and support; it also made the media responsible when reporting on the subject.

70 Establishing a national mental health system and community-level services as well as training more mental health professionals would be an obvious step forward. At present, mental health makes up around 3 percent of the country's total health budget. For the older generation, an effort to understand how the young feel would go a long way. When a new law reduced the maximum number

75 of weekly working hours from 68 to 52 in 2018 to improve work-life balance, older people lamented it. It was their sweat and tears that raised the country from the ashes of the Korean War. Now, young people who have never known hunger, goes their thinking, are ruining the economy amid mounting debt and global competition. Rather than keeping their head down and working hard, they complain of depression.

80 Perhaps this is not a sign of young people's lack of willpower or strength. Rather, times have changed—and people have changed with it. South Koreans aren't the only ones suffering—but the discrepancy between a rich and culturally successful society and the despair of so many people is particularly painful.

85 In South Korea, support for youth should also extend to celebrities, whom many young people adore and look up to. Just to name a few, in late 2019, young K-pop idol Sulli killed herself, as did singer Goo Hara and actor Cha In-ha. In 2020, actress and model Oh In-hye killed herself. Earlier this year, actress Song Yoo-jung took her own life. A spate of suicides among U.S. cultural icons might have triggered a round of soul-searching. Not in South Korea.

For reflection/discussion:

- Park describes how it now 'costs more than 18 years' worth of [South Korea's median annual household] income' (lines 25-26) for one to purchase an apartment in Korea. For comparison, how much income does one need to purchase an apartment in Singapore? Carry out appropriate research of your own.
- Park also reveals how many young Koreans do not seek therapy because it is often seen 'as a sign of weakness' (line 28). Do you think there is a similar perception here? What other local factors do you think there are that might discourage sufferers of mental illnesses here from seeking help?
- Reflect on Singapore's education system, and identify specific **aspects/elements** that could lead to 'constant pressure and endless competition' (line 31).
- According to Park, why were people in Korea less unhappy in the past, even though 'poverty was widespread' (line 36)?
- List and explain another example from other societies whereby 'bleak prospects and social immobility' (line 49) appear to have led to the sudden popularity of political opposition or outsiders. Carry out appropriate research of your own.
- Park suggests that a lack of understanding is the reason why older Koreans hold the negative sentiment that young people 'are ruining the economy' (line 76) by 'complain[ing] of depression' (lines 77-78). In Singapore, what might be some obstacles that might prevent a better understanding amongst older Singaporeans regarding the challenges young people here face?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or the old? (Cambridge 2015)
2. 'Poverty is a result of personal failure.' To what extent is this true of your society? (Y6 CT2 2018)
3. How can people in your society learn from its youth? (Y6 CT2 2011)
4. Is too much being expected of today's youth? (Y5 Promo 2011)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 18: The faces and insecurities of Singapore's elderly working poor

EU 1, 3, 5 & 6

Kane Cunico, Yvonne Lim & Jade Han | Channel News Asia | 15 May 2017

This reading will help you understand that:

- An ageing population has traditionally been viewed as a problem because fewer people are working and paying taxes.
- Despite this view, there are companies that are benefiting from an ageing population.

As Singapore ages, the number of seniors who work into their silver years is growing too – especially among the lower-income group, for whom retirement is an alien concept. In recent years they have become more visible as food court cleaners, servers, security guards, tissue-sellers and scrap collectors.

- 5 Given Singapore's plethora of help schemes for the needy – such as the Pioneer Generation Package (PGP) and Silver Support Scheme for the old – why do the elderly poor feel the need to work for long hours and often low pay? Do the jobs that the elderly poor do, as well as society's safety nets, offer them adequate sense of security and quality of life in their old age?

Relative poverty rising among the working elderly

- 10 In a 2015 paper on elderly poverty in Singapore written for the Tsao Foundation, Assistant Professor Ng Kok Hoe of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy made one surprising observation – while the poverty rate among elderly persons not working had fallen over the years, that for elderly persons in the workforce appeared to have actually increased dramatically.

The poverty rate among the working elderly jumped from 13 per cent in 1995, to 28 per cent in 2005, to 41 per cent in 2011.

- 15 “This should be a strong reminder that work cannot be relied upon as the only, or even the primary, response to income insecurity in old age,” Dr Ng wrote. “In labour markets where older workers are likely to end up in low-paying and undesirable jobs, work may decrease their quality of life without raising their standard of living.”

- 20 According to Manpower Ministry figures, in 2016 about 23 per cent of persons over 65 in the formal workforce were earning less than S\$1,000 a month. That's less than the 36 per cent in 2013, and 57 per cent in 2003, indicating that earnings for elderly workers have been rising.

But inflation and wages in the rest of society have also risen. And Dr Ng's calculation draws the comparison between the elderly and the general population. It uses 40 per cent of the median population work income as a “convenient poverty line”, and compares that to elderly individuals' incomes (which, besides work, could include sources such as children and state assistance).

- 25 Overall, Dr Ng has estimated that 6 in 10 elderly people in Singapore in 2011 were poor by that measurement. He acknowledges that what is considered poor “is debatable”, and notes that a project commissioned by the Tsao Foundation is looking into how much elderly households actually need for a decent standard of living in Singapore. (Singapore has no official statistics when it comes to elderly poverty, or poverty for that matter.)

Why work?

- 30 “In Singapore, no money how to live?” is what Mr Ong Hock Soon says if asked why he is working long hours as a hawker's assistant at the age of 69. But in the same breath, he'll tell you that he has turned

down offers of social assistance, and would rather be self-reliant and “work until cannot move”. That mentality of independence is something that crops up repeatedly among the working elderly.

35 Ms Nurasyikin Amir once thought like most people – that seniors should stop going around collecting heavy loads of cardboard. “Like, rest at home, you’re old, retired already,” said the volunteer with the Happy People Helping People Foundation, which assists cardboard collectors.

“But what we came to realise is that when they collect boxes, they feel more empowered; they are earning their own money, even though it’s not much, maybe S\$2, up to S\$10 a day. Who are we to stop them, right?” she said.

40 Some don’t want to be a burden on their children. Like food-court cleaner Wong Yeow Kee, 85, who works a 3pm to 11pm shift. “I have children, but I like to smoke and drink, so I work to support my habit and enjoy life. I don’t want to ask for their money.”

45 Indeed, there are those receiving financial assistance who still do the occasional odd job to “find meaning in life”, said Mr Ng Koon Sing, head of COMNET Senior Services under AMKFSC Community Services.

But yet others do it out of “insecurity” and fear that “the money will run out”, he also noted. Many would have worked at low-paying jobs most of their lives, with modest or hardly any savings which illness and vices like gambling can quickly wipe out.

The catch-22² of low-wage work

The limited job opportunities for an elderly person with little education is what concerns observers.

50 The older they get, those who previously held blue-collar jobs would find themselves even lower down the workforce rung, noted Dr John Donaldson, who has written on poverty in Singapore. “One could have been a welder in their younger years, but today, they have to downgrade and become a cleaner,” said the Associate Professor of Political Science at the Singapore Management University.

55 But wheels have been in motion to bolster the earnings of older workers. The Government’s roll-out of the Progressive Wage Model has scaled up incomes in the cleaning, landscape and security sectors –where low-wage older folks tend to gravitate. Then there is the Workfare supplement, paid by the State to top up the wages of eligible low-income older workers.

The hitch? Those doing informal work don’t benefit. And manual jobs carry the element of uncertainty, often depending on health.

60 Take Madam Lee Yuit Mei, 67, who has osteoporosis. She used to earn S\$800-S\$1,000 as a full-time cleaner, but after breaking her wrist in a fall in 2010, she switched to working part-time. She now makes just S\$350 a month working three-hour days, four times a week. But with savings squirreled away over the years, she can meet her living expenses, she says.

Too many sets of hoops?

65 For those less lucky and in need of temporary financial aid, there is the ComCare Short to Medium Term Assistance scheme. Those aged 55 and over made up about 35 per cent of applicants in 2015 – up from 29 per cent in 2012. Indeed, the problem in Singapore is not the lack of schemes to help the elderly poor – as, say, compared to other countries in the region featured earlier in this series*.

² This is defined as a situation in which the solution to a problem is impossible because it is also the cause of the problem (Cambridge Dictionary)

Said Mr Simon-Peter Lum, assistant manager of COMNET Senior Services under AMKFSC Community Services: “We’d be hard-pressed to find seniors who are the abject poor, compared to other countries.”
70 For instance, those on Public Assistance may not get a lot of cash upfront, which has often been noted by critics – but, Mr Lum pointed out, they get many other subsidies (such as for medical treatment) and fee waivers (such as rental).

The problem, rather, is that there are too many targeted help schemes – with varying criteria and limiting conditions attached, observers say. This creates two types of problems. One: Confusion and
75 lack of understanding, which might explain why some elderly poor would rather just carry on working than attempt to seek support. Said Dr Ng: “Researchers don’t understand the schemes fully, civil servants don’t often understand all the schemes available, so how would those people know where to get the help?”

Two: Having to jump through hoops to meet criteria, means that some will fall through the cracks.
80 Take the requirement that applicants don’t have children who can support them. Said Ms Nurasyikin: “Just because they have kids, it doesn’t mean that they are taken care of... But (applicants) don’t get the assistance just because the database shows that they have kids.”

The further danger, said Dr Ng, is that such rigorous means-testing would “discourage others who might actually qualify if they tried”. Ms Wong Yock Leng, a senior social worker with Tsao Foundation,
85 said: “When you ask for ComCare assistance, they will check for everything... That’s why a lot of people don’t apply anymore after that. It’s so daunting, the whole process.”

To read, watch and learn more on the elderly poor in other societies, go to:
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/elderly-poverty-series>

For discussion/reflection:

- Explain what Dr Ng means when he says ‘work cannot be relied upon as the only, or even the primary, response to income insecurity in old age’ (lines 14-15).
- Why do you think there are no official statistics for poverty in Singapore (see lines 28-29)?
- What are the reasons raised in the article for why the elderly carry on working? Can you offer possible explanations for the apparent contradictions?
- Why is low-wage work a ‘Catch-22’, particularly for the elderly in Singapore?
- Summarise the authors’ main criticisms of the nature of assistance schemes in Singapore, which might make them less effective. Reflect on the possible rationales for designing the assistance schemes this way.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Longer life expectancy creates more problems than benefits. Discuss. (Cambridge 2016)
2. Consider the view that longer life expectancy is always desirable. (RI Y6 Prelim 2019)
3. To what extent is ageism a problem in your society? (RI Y5 CT 2021)
4. Evaluate the claim that too much has been done for the elderly in your society. (RI Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021)
5. Should the responsibility of taking care of the elderly fall solely on the government? (RI Y6 CT1 2019)
6. ‘Retirement is a redundant word today.’ To what extent is this true? (RI Y6 CT2 2011)
7. To what extent is raising the retirement age a necessary evil in today’s society? (RI Y5 Promo 2010)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 19: Families under pressure in an ageing society

EU 1-4 & 6

Kalyani K Mehta | The Straits Times | 9 December 2017

This reading will help you understand:

- The evolving social compact with regard to the care for the elderly in Singapore
- The pressures faced by families and government as demographics change and society matures

Singapore society is undergoing rapid change. Several social trends in particular - such as the rising number of unmarried adults, increase in percentage of the elderly living alone or as couples, the rise in divorce rates and the unmet needs of family caregivers – come together in a way that should make us question if the existing social compact needs revisiting, especially the presumption that the family is the first recourse to caregiving for the elderly.

The idea of a social compact between government and people was articulated eloquently in 2001, by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. He emphasised that this "enduring social compact" ensures each and every person would be given equal and maximum opportunity to progress and there would be a social safety net for the minority who could not cope. The notion of every individual maximising his or her potential, with a minimal safety net for the hapless minority, has remained the mainstay in Singapore.

But evolving family structures, work demands and prevalence rates of diseases such as dementia have added to changing dynamics and family pressures. External factors such as rising inflation, increasing global economic competition and labour migration have also played a part, increasing insecurities faced by Singapore residents. In the face of all these demographic, economic, social and global shifts, existing policies have to be revisited for their relevance to contemporary challenges.

The repercussions of an ageing society are felt in every sector. Within the family, having an ageing elderly member means conversations relating to healthcare and caregiving. Also, end-of-life, legal and financial issues, become urgent and important, and potentially areas of stress and conflict. This is true even if the elderly family member does not reside in the same household. In fact, the caregiving issue may then become even more important.

In the past, having an elderly person in the family was considered comparable to having a "treasure". But today, with rising medical costs and longer life expectancy, people's perceptions have changed. Filial values may still be in existence but other challenges that the family faces, such as making ends meet and paying for children's education, may cause apprehension and anxiety to set in.

Outside the family, the effects of an ageing population on the workplace are clearly visible. The younger workforce is shrinking. Meanwhile, we are likely to observe a larger proportion of people aged above 62 remaining at the workplace, due to the re-employment and retirement age policies as well as the financial needs of seniors. Age management policies - policies to integrate mature employees in a multi-generational workforce - will have to be embraced by human resource professionals. In the community, silver-haired volunteers are noticeable. They may be grassroots leaders, "health ambassadors", befrienders, elder-sitters or leaders of ethnic/religious organisations. Seniors prefer to "age-in-place" so when they are retired, or semi-retired, this is a fulfilling way to spend their time in meaningful activities. Active elderly grandparents are often child-minding their grandchildren or chauffeuring them from one extra-curricular activity to the next, while their adult children are busy working.

There are many examples of public servants who still contribute after they are well into their 60s and beyond; and many writers, artists and social workers have won national recognition after they entered their retirement years. In 2015, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Tharman Shanmugaratnam stated in his

40 opening speech at the International Consortium of Social Development held at SIM University: "Our whole approach must be to empower people and empower aspirations. Never leaving people to fend for themselves, but keeping that compact of personal and collective responsibility alive." DPM's reference to "collective responsibility" is evidence of a more inclusive approach that the Government is adopting.

45 When it comes to care of the vulnerable elderly, families need more support than what they are getting now. If their needs are not met, those who are better off may hire foreign domestic helpers; however, the lower-middle-class and lower-income families face a myriad of insurmountable financial and psychological stresses.

50 It is thus urgent for the Government to revisit some policies relating to caregiving and family. For example, it should consider a caregiver's allowance to alleviate the financial hardship of families where one member has to quit his or her job to care for a frail loved one. Parental care leave should also be mandated for all sectors of the workforce to let adult children care better for their parents. And more resources need to be pumped into building up our community health and social services and programmes. Gerontological training should be a requirement for centre managers and professionals who are assigned to look after the elderly in senior daycare centres, integrated multi-service centres and senior activity centres. If they are not aware of the psycho-social and health aspects of the ageing process, would they be able to carry out their tasks competently?

55 As strains on the family increase, policymakers may need to look beyond the family, and to the community as the main line of defence for the future. Involving the community goes beyond co-locating services and programmes in a geographical vicinity. Involving the community will mean tapping resources around an area or around networks that grow organically, and harnessing them to improve the lives of seniors. One good example is social enterprise The Social Iron that matches seniors, with time on their hands, with professionals who need ironing services. Other examples include harnessing elderly volunteers to befriend the vulnerable aged sick.

65 A sense of community grows from policies that recognise the efforts of community members in a reciprocal exchange of services, mutual help between people of different ethnic groups, gestures of kindness towards adults with disability, as well as daily routines of caregivers that may affect their work patterns. The community includes the workplace, the grassroots and recreational spaces.

The family is important but in the context of Singapore's ageing society, we need a multi-pillared approach to supporting our ageing population. The state, community, family and individual should form a new social compact where all pillars are equally important and irreplaceable.

For discussion/reflection:

- According to the article, what are the terms of the original social compact outlined by former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong? What are the social costs of an ageing society?
- In your opinion, what are the three most important factors necessitating a change in the social compact? Why?
- Based on your own understanding as well as what you've learnt, are the government and community doing enough for the elderly?

Related RI essay questions:

1. When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or old? (Cambridge 2015)
2. Should the responsibility of taking care of the elderly fall solely on the government? (RI Y6 CT1 2019)
3. 'Growing old can be an empowering process.' Do you agree? (Y5 CT1 2010)