

Perception gap in views on elderly

Survey finds seniors don't see themselves the way others do

BY MELISSA SIM

A GAP between the way Singaporeans view the elderly and the way senior citizens see themselves has shown up in a new survey.

It shows that while nearly 90 per cent of the general population feel seniors are well-integrated and can contribute to society, less than 70 per cent of those aged 65 and above actually feel this way.

Another key finding: While 93 per cent of Singaporeans feel intergenerational relationships are important, less than 30 per cent actually spend time with extended members of their families.

The survey of 2,000 people by the Council for Third Age (C3A) was aimed at examining attitudes towards ageing. It provided insights into how a senior's relationship with his friends and family contributes to his overall well-being.

C3A is a group which promotes active ageing in Singapore.

Explaining the difference between what Singaporeans say and what they do, C3A chairman Gerard Ee said one reason younger people spend less time with older family members is that they are "too busy".

Other seniors may not have good relationships with their families, and this accounts for their lack of self-esteem, he added.

In some instances, he said, seniors did not prepare enough for their golden years and now find that they either lack money or have few friends to interact with on a daily basis, and this could lead to feelings of loneliness and a lack of self-worth.

Mr Ee said that because families are smaller these days, it is more important than ever for older

Healthy signs

ALTHOUGH some findings in the Council for Third Age (C3A) survey raised concern, it also showed encouraging trends.

For instance, about half of those aged 50 and below have started planning financially for their later years. And half of those aged 50 and above regularly participate in physical activity with a group of friends at least three times a week.

Sixty per cent also said they exercised regularly, and 73 per cent said they had a balanced diet.

In terms of staying engaged, more than half the respondents said they would work past the retirement age of 62.

Reacting to the findings, C3A chairman Gerard Ee said he was pleasantly surprised that many in their 50s and below had started planning for their later years. But he said more could be done to increase the percentage.

As for those planning to work past the retirement age, he acknowledged that "some have to do it for economic reasons".

But he added: "Some also realise that the key aspect to healthy ageing is to be engaged in something meaningful."

er folk to have "networks of people to grow old with".

The disconnect has to be addressed, he said, because another survey finding showed the bene-

fits of making sure seniors are well-integrated: Respondents with supportive families and friends around them were more likely to be satisfied with life.

Take housewife Peggy Cheng, 60, for instance. The mother of three, one of the respondents in the survey, said she was healthy and life was very enjoyable.

She goes to the movies with her grown children, and sometimes even goes to a pub or club with her daughter. "She can dance, I can have a drink," she said.

"There are always ways to meet them halfway."

To encourage more such intergenerational bonding, C3A has lined up several initiatives.

Among them is a conference co-organised with the National University of Singapore.

To be held in April next year, the 4th International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes will bring together 300 international and local experts and delegates to discuss such issues and how to better integrate seniors into society.

The council will also launch an Intergenerational Bonding Award this month to encourage people to develop programmes which promote such activities.

C3A will also set up the Knowledge Networking on Ageing Programme (Knap), a platform for organisations and individuals to share experiences and information on ageing issues.

The council's chief executive, Mr Henry Quake, said Knap will allow research data to be translated into meaningful programmes.

Another programme on the cards is the annual Active Ageing Festival, which encourages seniors to try new things in a safe and fun environment.

The council will also continue to support the development of interest groups, and promote understanding of seniors and ageing issues among youth.

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Attitudes towards the elderly

2008 study on public perception of ageing and senior citizens

Seniors valued but have lower self-esteem

	All respondents	Respondents aged 65 and above
Can play an active role in society	87%	68%
Well-integrated with the rest of society	69%	58%
Not weak and ill	63%	56%

Seniors not positive about relying on family

	All respondents	Respondents aged 65 and above
Can rely on family to take care when ill	71%	63%
Can count on siblings and/or nieces and nephews if in need	52%	48%

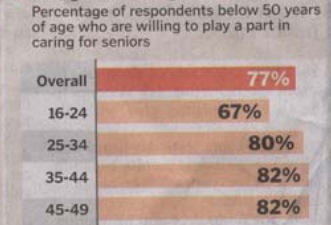
Social networks increase sense of well-being

	Respondents who were generally more satisfied with life	Respondents who were generally less satisfied with life
Talk to family members when making important decisions	88%	79%
Turn to family members for assistance if faced with difficulties in doing things	81%	59%
Can rely on family members to take care when ill	79%	59%
Have friends to count on for support when in need	72%	56%

Preparing for old age (for those below 50)



Young least willing to care for seniors



Retirement in Singapore



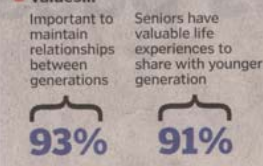
Active ageing (Percentage of respondents who answered "Yes")



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Values...



...and actions



Source: COUNCIL FOR THIRD AGE