

<b>Headline</b>	What makes Singaporeans happy		
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# What makes Singaporeans happy

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FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

**T**HE media gives some insight into what makes Singaporeans happy or upset.

Singaporeans are happy when the Government rolls out a family-friendly Budget. Singaporeans are annoyed by service staff who are not passionate about their work or cannot speak English well. Depending on the performance of their investments, Singaporeans may love or loathe the coffee shop talk about the stock and property markets.

These snapshots motivated us to study three things Singaporeans consider when they evaluate their quality of life: happiness, enjoyment and achievement. In a recently published book that we wrote, *The Wellbeing of Singaporeans*, we reported that more than one in four Singaporeans (27.5 per cent) are very happy with their life and about half (51.1 per cent) are quite happy while less than 1 in 100 (0.9 per cent) are very unhappy. Singles are the

happiest lot while the middle-income group is the least happy.

But what makes Singaporeans happy? We found five contributing factors: fluency in English, satisfaction with personal life (for example, standard of living and health), satisfaction with interpersonal life (for example, friendships and family life), pride in being a Singaporean, and the perception of how the Government deals with ethnic diversity.

Singaporeans who are more fluent in English reported more happiness. In Singapore, those who speak English better tend to be more educated and hold higher-paying jobs. This is consistent with other analyses in our book showing that Singaporeans who are highly educated with medium to high levels of incomes are the happiest.

While financial resources are important, Singaporeans also found happiness in relationships with those close to them. Satisfaction with personal and interpersonal lives is associated with more happiness.

In addition, Singaporeans' happiness

has a broader social dimension: national pride and the performance of the Government. The prouder Singaporeans are of their nation, the happier they are.

The Government's role in ensuring that the different ethnic groups co-exist harmoniously also affects happiness. The more Singaporeans perceive the Government to have been effective in dealing with ethnic diversity, the happier they are.

Apart from happiness, enjoyment of life also contributes to quality of life. More than one in 10 Singaporeans (11.5 per cent) never or rarely enjoy life. We observed that low-income Singaporeans enjoy life the most while the highly educated

enjoy life the least. Satisfaction with personal life, satisfaction with interpersonal life, and national pride also affected Singaporeans' enjoyment of life.

Finally, do Singaporeans think that they have achieved the most out of life? Almost one in four Singaporeans (23.9 per cent) feels that he or she has accomplished nothing or very little in life.

Ironically, it is the low-income earners who feel they have accomplished much while the high-income group feels exactly the opposite. We found that the higher the household income, the more a Singaporean feels that he or she has not achieved much in life. Perhaps such families have expectations that are so high

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that their members feel that they have not accomplished much. Alternatively, they may feel that they have not pushed themselves to their limits because their lives have been comfortable thus far.

As with happiness and enjoyment, personal life satisfaction and national pride affect one's sense of achievement. But what's interesting is that the perception of the quality of public services also matters. Singaporeans who believe that the Government is doing a good job in providing public services also tend to feel that they have accomplished much in life.

What do these findings tell us about Singaporeans? While they are generally a happy lot, more can be done to help them appreciate their own achievements and to find more enjoyment in life. Perhaps they have forgotten how to savour simple pleasures.

They may also be setting themselves up for disappointment by imposing unrealistically high expectations on themselves. A balance must be struck between setting and striving towards standards of achievement and ensuring personal well-being in other areas of one's life.

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