RAFFLES INSTITUTION
YEAR 5 GENERAL PAPER - STUDENTS' INFORMATION PACKAGE 2024
SOCIAL ISSUES

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 – 2023)

FAMILY & MARRIAGE

Cambridge 2019	Should both parents take equal responsibility for raising their children?
Cambridge 2015	'Parents have no right to impose their own values and beliefs on their children.' Discuss.
Cambridge 2014	'Traditional marriage is an outdated concept.' To what extent is this true of your society?
Y6 CT 2023	'It is harder than ever to keep children safe in today's world.' Comment.
Y5 CT 2023	'The family no longer plays an influential role in raising teenagers.' How true is this of your society?
Y6 Timed Practice 2023	'Young people today have little interest in traditional marriage.' How true is this of your society?
Y5 CT 2022	'The traditional family has lost its importance today.' Discuss.
Y6 Timed Practice 2021	Is the traditional family still relevant in your society today?
Y5 Promo 2021	'Modern parenting does not prepare children for the future.' How far is this true?
Y5 CT 2021	Is marriage still an attractive option in today's world?
Y5 Promo 2020	'Parents have too much control over their children's lives.' How far is this true of your society today?
Y5 CT 2018	'The idea of marriage is outdated in modern society.' Discuss.
Y5 Promo 2015	In the family, should the most important role of a man be that of a breadwinner?
Y6 CT2 2014	'Good parenting has little to do with how children turn out.' Comment with reference to your society.
Y6 CT2 2013	Is marriage still relevant in modern society?
Y6 CT1 2013	'Modern life is not conducive to the survival of the family.' Comment.
Y6 CT2 2012	"The traditional institution of marriage is in decline." Is this a cause for concern?
Y5 CT 2011	'The family has suffered at the expense of economic growth in Singapore.' How far do you agree?
Y6 Prelim 2011	'An unhappy marriage is best resolved with a divorce.' Comment.
Y5 CT 2010	Is monogamy unrealistic in modern society?

GENDER

Cambridge 2016	Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females is a desirable, but unrealistic, goal.
Cambridge 2014	Consider the view that some careers are more suited to one gender than the other.
Cambridge 2011	The world would be a better place if women had a greater say in politics. To what extent do you agree?
Y6 CT 2023	To what extent is gender inequality a significant issue in the world of science?
Y5 CT 2023	To what extent are different genders valued equally in today's society?
Y6 Timed Practice 2022	Consider the view that we are moving further away from, rather than moving closer to, achieving gender equality.
Y6 Timed Practice 2021	How far would you agree that technological progress has done more harm than good for gender equality?
Y5 CT 2021	'It is a woman's world today.' How far do you agree?
Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021	'We can never close the gender divide.' Do you agree?
Y5 Timed Practice 2020	Consider the view that gender equality is a desirable but unrealistic goal.
Y6 CT1 2019	'Success comes more easily to men than women.' To what extent is this true of your society?

Y5 Promo 2018	Can we ever achieve gender equality in sport?
Y6 CT 2018	Assess the view that women have been unfairly treated today.
Y6 Prelim 2018	"Women have never had it better." How true is this?
Y5 Promo 2017	"It is increasingly difficult to be a man today." Discuss.
Y6 CT1 2014	'No country can really develop unless its women are educated.' Do you agree?
Y5 Promo 2013	'Women are a decorative sex.' (Oscar Wilde) How far is this still an issue today?
Y6 CT2 2012	Does it matter that the leaders of most countries are men?
Y6 Prelims 2012	'Women are not suitable for politics.' To what extent is this true?
Y5 CT1 2012	'The pursuit of gender equality will do more harm than good.' Discuss.
Promo 2011	'It is increasingly challenging to be a man today.' Do you agree?
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 2023	How realistic is it for countries to implement a national minimum wage for all their workers?
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 2023	Winning at sport is due to wealth, rather than talent. Comment.
Y5 CT 2023	To what extent is meritocracy an effective way to enhance social mobility in your society?
Y6 Prelim 2022	'People with special needs are no longer invisible.' Is this true of the world today?
Y6 Prelim 2022	'Workers today have never had it better.' Is this an accurate view?
Y6 CT 2022	To what extent is meritocracy in your society still desirable?
Y5 CT 2022	'Equality for all is only an aspiration.' How far is this true of your society?
Y5 CT 2022	How far do you agree that celebrities have too much influence today?
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

Cambridge 2022	Assess the extent to which different age groups in your society are valued equally.
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 CT 2022	'The elderly are vital to society.' Examine this view in a world increasingly reliant on technology.
Y5 CT 2022	Assess the view that skills training for older workers is futile in your society.
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.
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?

YOUTH

Cambridge 2023	Evaluate the claim that sports personalities make good role models for young people.
Cambridge 2023	'Young people want to change the world because they do not know it is impossible.' How far do you agree?
Cambridge 2019	'Religion is an important part of the lives of young people today.' Consider whether this is true in your society.
Y6 Timed Practice 2023	'Young people today have little interest in traditional marriage.' How true is this of your society?
Y5 CT 2023	'Young people today are only interested in themselves.' Is this a fair comment?
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.

EDUCATION

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 Prelim 2023	'Formal education is less valuable today than it was in the past.' Is this true?
Y6 Timed Practice 2023	Is teaching to the test a relevant approach to education today?
Y5 CT 2023	Do you agree that the use of technology for education is not always beneficial?
Y6 CT 2022	'Online learning can never replace the physical classroom.' Discuss.
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.
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

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 2023	'People who undertake voluntary work do so more for their own benefit than for the benefit of others.' Discuss.

Cambridge 2023	Assess the extent to which all people in your society have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.
Cambridge 2023	To what extent are festivals and national holidays effective in promoting unity in your society?
Cambridge 2022	To what extent can individuals shape their own lives when the world is so unpredictable?
Cambridge 2022	'Consumerism is more of a curse than a blessing.' How true is this of your society?
Cambridge 2022	'It is not winning, but taking part, which matters.' How acceptable is this as an approach to life?
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 2023	How successfully has your society balanced the needs of the state against those of the individual?
Y6 CT 2023	How far do you agree that healthcare in your society leaves much to be desired?
Y6 CT 2023	Should there be limits to freedom of speech in your society?
Y6 Timed Practice 2023	Examine the view that competition is necessary in today's world.
Y6 Prelim 2022	'Obedience is a virtue.' Is this an accurate reflection of your society?
Y6 CT 2022	'Given the state of the world today, it is irresponsible to have children.' What is your view?
Y6 Timed Practice 2022	'The end justifies the means.' How far would you agree with this view?
Y5 CT 2022	Is following the rules always desirable?
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?
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,
5   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
10   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
15   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.

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

Global Outlook
Top 10 of the Global Gender Gap Index

rank	score
1. Iceland	0.858
2. Norway	0.835
3. Sweden	0.822
4. Finland	0.821
5. Nicaragua	0.809
6. Rwanda	0.804
7. New Zealand	0.801
8. Philippines	0.799
9. Ireland	0.796
10. Namibia	0.789

The #MeToo movement has galvanised people
40 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.

Women also introduce different legislation into parliaments and deliberating bodies than men do,
60 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
65 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

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
70　McKinsey & Co.

"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
75　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
80　countries where companies have three or more women on their boards, 43 have government-mandated quotas. Those without affirmative mechanisms are seeing
85　only incremental gains.

Leadership Gender Gap 2018

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

CLOSED GAPS　　REMAINING GAPS

Heads of State	81.1%
Ministers	79.2%
Managers, senior officials, legislators	67.6%
AI skills	71.8%

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

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
90　peers. They are often perceived as less legitimate. They continue to face unconscious bias, sexual harassment, discrimination, higher expectations and micro-aggressions
95　- 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
100　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
105　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,
110　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.
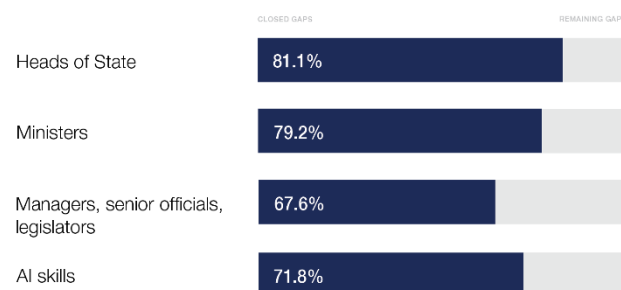
115 Optimists say that much has changed. Societies no longer consider domestic violence a taboo subject, for example, but an illegal act. Pessimists say that change is too slow. Men may now do more

120 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.
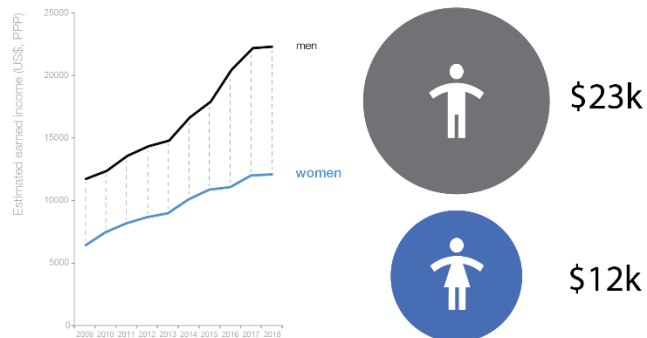
125 When asked about women's progress, I think of the glass that is either half full or half empty. But one thing is certain: women need to use their victories to galvanize

130 more victories. Failure must energize us to clamour more loudly for progress.

The Income Gender Gap 2018

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Source: Global Gender Gap Index 2018, World Economic Forum

For discussion/reflection:
• According to Liswood (lines 48-64), why does giving women a seat 'pay off'? List her justifications.
• Liswood states that "the arc of progress [in gender equality for women] is not straightforward" (line 65). What are some significant obstacles or roadblocks to gender equality that remain?
• Examine the impact of movements like #MeToo on workplace culture and gender equality. How have these movements changed the way society addresses sexual misconduct and harassment, and what are some unintended consequences of such movements?
• 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. To what extent is gender inequality a significant issue in the world of science? (Y6 CT 2023)
3. To what extent are different genders valued equally in today's society? (Y5 CT 2023)
4. 'It is a woman's world today.' How far do you agree? (Y5 CT 2021)
5. 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

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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
5   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
10   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
15   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
20   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
25   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
30   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.

35   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

45   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

50   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

55   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

60   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
5   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?

10   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
15   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
20   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
25   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
30   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.

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
45   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.

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
55   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.
In contrast, having kids does not affect men's salaries, a recent study of careers of men and women in
60   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.

Is this because women are seen as being of lesser worth? If so, the embedded misogyny needs to be
70   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.

75

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.

80

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.

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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.

90

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.

95

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

←————————————————————————→

Least optimistic   Most optimistic
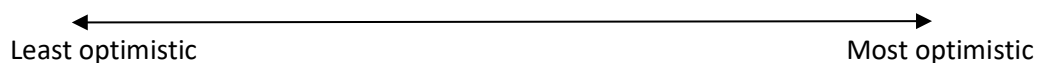
2. Reading 2 highlights some ways in which women are working to advance the cause of gender equality. To what extent do you think this phenomenon is observable in Singapore society? Research and build your case with supporting reasoning and examples, including those that relate to the gender wage gap 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?

5. In what fundamental ways has the evolution of digital platforms since 2006 empowered women to spearhead social change?

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. To what extent is gender inequality a significant issue in the world of science? (Y6 CT 2023)
5. 'We can never close the gender divide.' Do you agree? (Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021)
6. Consider the view that gender equality is a desirable but unrealistic goal. (RI Y5 Timed Practice 2020)
7. '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: Do transgender athletes have an unfair advantage?   EU 1- 4
Tiffany Abreu | DW News | 24 July 2021

> **This reading helps you understand:**
> * The different measures implemented by various parties to make competitive sports more inclusive
> * Why in areas like sporting ability, gender and equality, much remains to be done to put transgender athletes on a more equal footing

Several trans women competed in the Tokyo Games, marking the first time openly trans athletes participated in the Olympics. New Zealand's Laurel Hubbard first attempt in the weightlifting competition marked her Olympic debut. Hubbard's participation as a trans woman in the Summer Olympics has prompted controversy — and uproar — with critics saying her eligibility is a threat to
5   fairness in sport. Others say the inclusion of trans athletes cannot be overlooked if there are no meaningful advantages.

What does the science tell us about trans athletes in elite sport?

Few studies have been done on trans people's athletic performance — and, to date, there are no published studies on trans athletes participating at the elite level, say experts. But some papers have
10   been published in the lead-up to the Olympic Games. One study, published in 2020, looked at US military personnel who transitioned while in service and found that trans women maintain an edge after one year of feminizing hormone therapy, which usually includes suppressing testosterone levels and boosting estrogen. The research was carried out by Dr. Timothy Roberts, a pediatrician and associate professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and his colleagues. They found that trans
15   women who underwent hormone therapy for one year continued to outperform non-transgender women, also known as cisgender women, though the gap largely closed after two years. But even then, trans women still ran 12% faster.

Roberts, however, suggested the difference in running times needs additional perspective. "It was a 12% advantage after two years in run times. But to be in the top 10% of female runners, you have to
20   be 29% faster than the average woman. And to be an elite runner, you've got to be 59% faster than the average cis woman," he told DW. Another study, carried out by sports scientist Tommy Lundberg, found that trans women who underwent feminizing hormone therapy generally maintained their strength levels after one year.

Do trans women have an advantage when competing in elite sports?

25   Without hormone therapy — yes. But even with hormone therapy, current research suggests trans women still maintain an edge in strength. "Pretty much any way you slice it, trans women are going to have strength advantages even after hormone therapy. I just don't see that as anything else but factual," said Joanna Harper, a medical physicist at Britain's Loughborough University.

Strength is one of several key factors — including explosiveness, endurance and lean body mass —
30   that determine whether an athlete has an edge. But Harper, whose research focused on trans runners like herself, rejects the idea that trans women competing in sport would have an "unfair" advantage, noting that there are many other factors that go into shaping how an athlete performs — including hand-eye coordination and technique, which are necessary for excelling in sports like golf.

35   One major factor is hemoglobin levels — which is the most important physiological factor when it comes to endurance sport. Hemoglobin in the blood transports oxygen throughout the body, including to the muscles. Since hemoglobin levels follow testosterone levels, non-transgender men tend to have higher hemoglobin levels than cisgender women. But Harper's study found that testosterone suppressants reduced hemoglobin levels in trans women to that of cisgender women, thus eliminating the advantage.

40   For Tommy Lundberg, whose research at Sweden's Karolinska Institute focuses on skeletal muscle strength of trans people receiving hormone therapy, the advantages for trans women in strength are to the point where fairness cannot be ensured in most sports. "The big problem right now is that the [hormone] therapy itself doesn't really remove the advantage to an extent that you can claim that fairness has been achieved," Lundberg told DW. "And actually, the IOC (International Olympic

45   Committee) states that the overriding objective is, and remains, the guarantee of fair competition. That's what they say in their guidelines. So that's the problem right now: They don't go hand-in-hand."

In another paper Lundberg co-authored that looked at untrained trans women, Lundberg and his colleague found that "muscular advantage enjoyed by transgender women is only minimally reduced when testosterone is suppressed." The study, like any other — including Roberts and Harper's — has

50   its limitations. Harper, who had also done a review of a similar set of studies to Lundberg's, said both of their studies found a "fairly modest change" in strength in non-athletic trans people. "But their review made it seem more definitive than our review did," she said.

"If you are looking for information on cisgender athletes, you'd never use studies on non-athletic trans people. You just wouldn't do that. It's just that we don't have any data on trans athletes. So I think you

55   have to take the results with a certain grain of salt."

When do differences between sexes in athletic performance emerge?

Young boys and girls, regardless of the gender assigned at birth, have similar muscle mass. It's only once a child experiences puberty that the differences begin to emerge — and they become pronounced once boys experience a surge in testosterone. "Typically, if you're 8 or 9 years old, there

60   is no biological performance difference between boys and girls. So it starts at around age 11 where you start to see this disparity — and then it really kicks in during puberty. And then you have, basically, this big difference in muscle mass," said Lundberg.

Roberts, who is a pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine, said: "Younger children before puberty — there is no reason to have divisions of sex between boys and girls. They're physiologically

65   fairly equivalent. It's after puberty that you really see this divergence in athletic performance."

There have been no studies carried out on adolescent trans athletes. So there is no data on trans athletes who took puberty blockers or gender-affirming hormone therapy during puberty — and certainly none before puberty. Part of this comes down to following guidelines. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health requires trans adolescents to have begun puberty

70   before undergoing puberty suppressants, the first stage before undergoing hormone therapy.

Trans adolescents in sport have made headlines in recent years, as more than a dozen US states have a policy that allows trans girls to compete competitively at the high school level as long as they self-identify as female. For Blair Hamilton, a Brighton University researcher on trans athletes, this doesn't go far enough to achieve an equal playing field.

75   "For example, Connecticut was allowing [trans female runners] to race unmedicated," said Hamilton, who is also a transgender footballer. "We don't agree with that." Hamilton said athletes seeking

eligibility to run in competitive races in the female category should first undergo hormone therapy to reduce the advantages. To do otherwise, said Roberts, would give them an edge. "To compete against the females as soon as you socially transition — before you get any hormone blockers or hormone

80   therapy — it's unfair." "Tomorrow, if I said: 'I'm a woman and I'm going to go compete in the women's class.' It's unfair. I still have testosterone, I have all the advantages I started with," said Roberts.

What is the recommended testosterone for trans women to compete?

This is a thorny issue that sports scientists disagree on. The "normal" healthy range for cis women is between 0.3 and 2 nmol/L, according to Mayo Clinic estimates — though they vary among labs.

85   Women with polycystic ovarian syndrome tend to have higher testosterone levels, which can reach 5.2 nmol/L. "Healthy" male testosterone ranges from 8.3 mnol/L to 32.9 nmol/L.

The IOC's regulations say trans women can compete if their testosterone levels in serum are at 10 nanomoles per liter for a year for at least 12 months prior to their first competition. With Roberts and Lundberg's recent papers, however, the IOC has faced renewed criticism following Hubbard's inclusion

90   due to its eligibility criteria. But the IOC said it would not review its guidelines — set in place in 2015 — until after the Tokyo Games.

World Athletics (IAAF) in 2019 changed its rules, requiring testosterone levels to be below 5 nmol/L continuously for at least 12 months. This criterion for trans women is backed by Hamilton as well as Harper, who noted the IOC's current guidelines are based on outdated techniques measuring

95   testosterone levels. But the IAAF's criteria runs contrary to Roberts' study on trans military personnel, which suggests two years of hormone therapy is needed before competing.

Lundberg, however, said there is no sufficient evidence that two years would be enough to ensure fairness in the female category in most sports. "It would be an easy fix if you could just change regulation to two years, instead of one. But I don't think that's a feasible solution either. Actually, right

100   now, there is nothing to indicate that."

Do trans men have an advantage when competing in elite sport?

"What we've got in our study is, actually, the trans men dominated," said Roberts, referring to his study on trans US military personnel. After one year of masculinizing hormones, there was no difference in pushup or run times — however, the number of situps performed in one minute by trans

105   men exceeded cisgender men, or non-transgender men. "But nobody's up in arms saying that trans men are going to dominate men's sports," said Roberts, adding that much of the advantage gained for a cisgender man occurs during puberty. "Having gone through female puberty does not provide you with a baseline skeletal advantage over your average cis man. You're getting testosterone, which levels the playing field in large part because testosterone really produces a lot of differences, but

110   there's not that extra anatomical advantage that a trans woman has over cis women — a trans man isn't going to have that over a cis man," he said.

Sports scientist Lundberg notes that trans men competing is "not as sensitive in sports." "Even if they get testosterone, it's not a threat to fairness if they switch to the male category," he said. "The problem then is, of course, if they would want to stay in the women's category even when they get

115   testosterone — because then it would become doping."

Is there a way to achieve both fairness and inclusion in sport?

None of the experts interviewed support a blanket ban on trans athletes, which is in line with a recent study. But experts, like Lundberg, say the regulations should be determined on a sport-by-sport basis,

especially when safety is a factor, like in rugby. "We don't have this easy fix or easy regulation that can
120   be applied," said Lundberg. "You basically have to choose or prioritize either inclusion or fairness. They
don't go hand-in-hand right now."

"And in most sports, it's going to be problematic to include transgender women and achieve fairness.
That's what the current research suggests," he said. Lundberg's research has seen him come under
fire on social media, with many accusing him of being transphobic. But he tells DW that is not the case.

125   "I think the transgender issue is very important. But protecting the women's category in sport is also
very important. They have fought long enough to have fair competition in sport," he said.

In the meantime, sports scientists and researchers will continue to debate and advise on what the
best steps forward will be. "There's not very much information out there and even less that's really
specific to trans athletes. But the Olympics are here, international sports are here, and trans people
130   are around. So decisions have to be made," medical physicist Harper said. "So people have to make
the best decisions they can with the data that are available now."

"And hopefully, as we get more — and better — data, it will lead to improved policies."

For reflection/discussion:
- How have scientific studies been used to shape public perception towards trans-athletes' participation in sports? Can science have a significant impact on social norms?
- Who are the other stakeholders involved in this issue? What do their concerns say about social norms and sports in general?
- The debate about transgender athletes is one specific issue within a broader discussion concerning transgender rights. What is another issue you can think of, where a similar tension between inclusivity and fairness can be observed? Explain your answer.
- How do current regulations on trans athletes' participation align with the ideals of inclusivity and fairness in sports?
- While the broader debate concerns trans athletes, the discussion has been centred on trans women's participation in competitions. Why do you think this is the case? Concurrently, there is also a greater focus on trans women in the larger trans debate. What do you think this illustrates about the larger trans movement? Do you think it is cause for celebration or pessimism? Why?
- In Y5 Term 1, we learnt that being 'constructions of reality', the media can significantly shape 'perceptions of the world' (see Media Issues, EUs 3 and 4). How do you think the media has shaped and continues to shape the way people understand the debate on trans athletes and trans people?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:
1. Do you think there is much ambiguity and confusion about what it means to be a man in today's world? (Y6 CT2 2020)
2. Consider the view that we are moving further away from, rather than moving closer to, achieving gender equality. (RI Y6 Timed Practice 2022)
3. 'We can never close the gender divide.' Do you agree?
4. 'Change should always be embraced.' Comment. (RI Y5 CT1 2014)
5. Consider the view that gender equality is a desirable but unrealistic goal. (Y5 Timed Practice 2020)
6. 'It is surprising that discrimination still exists in the world today.' How far do you agree? (Y5 Timed Practice 2020)

SECTION A: GENDER ISSUES

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.

5   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,
10   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
15   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."

20   Kanem added that the coronovirus 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
25   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
30   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

What could be the potential long-term effects on a society that denies women the ability to make decisions regarding their reproductive health?

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.

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).

5 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
10 years before 1950, and it isn't the way most humans have lived during the 55 years since 1965.

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
15 essential fragility of the nuclear family.

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
20 of their husband, raising children.

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.

25 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
30 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.

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
35   primarily about childbearing and childrearing. Now marriage is primarily about adult fulfilment."

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.

40   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.

And while more than four-fifths of American adults in a 2019 Pew Research Center survey said that
45   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.

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
50   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,
55   with a barrier around their island home.

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
60   themselves up. Think of all the child-rearing labour affluent parents now buy that used to be done by 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.)

These expensive tools and services not only support children's development and help prepare them
65   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.

70   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

75   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
80   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
85   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
90   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
95   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
100 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
105 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-
110 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
115 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?
- How has the shift from extended families to smaller ones affected the support that family members used to provide each other?
- How have changes in societal and/or cultural norms influenced perceptions of marriage and parenting?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. 'Young people today have little interest in traditional marriage.' How true is this of your society? (Y6 Timed Practice 2023)
2. Is the traditional family still relevant in your society today? (RI Y6 Timed Practice 2021)
3. 'The idea of marriage is outdated in modern society.' Discuss. (RI Y5 CT 2018)
4. 'Modern life is not conducive to the survival of the family.' Comment. (RI Y6 CT1 2013)

Supplementary reading:
1. "Singapore's total fertility rate hits record low in 2023,falls below 1 for first time" – Theresa Tan, The Straits Times, 29 Feb 2024 (https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/singapore-s-total-fertility-rate-hits-record-low-in-2023-falls-below-1-for-first-time)

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

5   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*

10   *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

15   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

20   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

25   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

30   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

35   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
50 successfully in circumstances where the family once anchored by marriage has broken down in their midst.

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
55 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
60 households.

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
65 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.

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,
70 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
75 of arms raising them include – first and foremost – those of their own parents.

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.

80 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."

85 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

90 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.

95 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.

100

> **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? Why?
> - How might the upbringing of children in multigenerational households differ from those in two-parent households? What advantages and disadvantages are there to multigenerational households in terms of raising children?
>
> **Related RI essay questions**:
> 1. 'The traditional family has lost its importance today.' Discuss. (RI Y5 CT 2022)
> 2. 'Modern life is not conducive to the family.' Do you agree? (RI Y6 CT1 2013)
> 3. 'The family has suffered at the expense of economic growth in Singapore.' How far do you agree? (RI Y5 CT 2011)

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.

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 decision[1] to grant a gay man's appeal to adopt his biological son in the interest of the child's welfare. The boy was conceived
10   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.

Currently, surrogacy is barred in Singapore. Those who have gone abroad for it and returned home to
15   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.

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
20   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.

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[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".

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
40　to be amended so that an appropriate balance can be struck when important public policy considerations are involved."
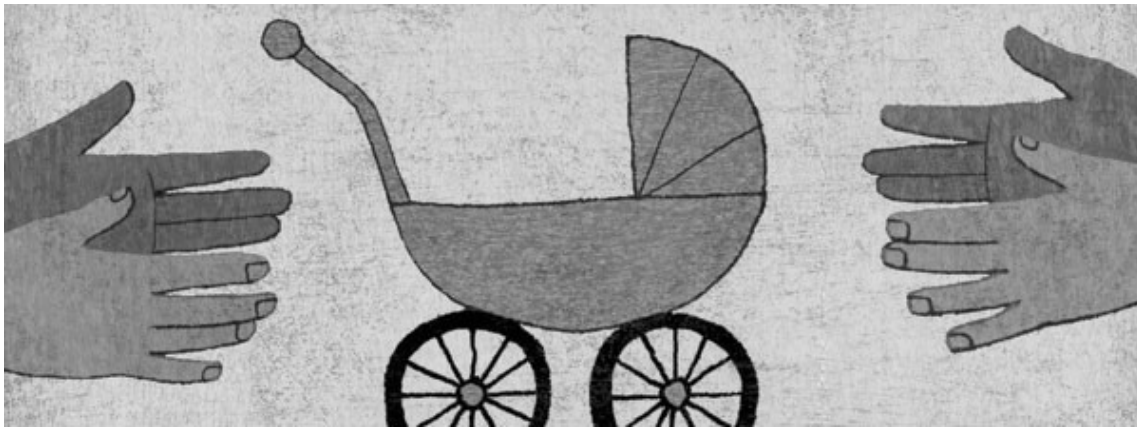
Dr Fatimah later asked if Mr Lee's ministry would be involved in monitoring the gay couple's child and to keep an eye on his psychological and mental well-being.

Mr Lee replied: "We are concerned about the formation and mainstreaming of same-sex parent family
45　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.

"Just like other Singaporeans, they have access to opportunities and social support such as education,
50　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' (lines 18-19). 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' (lines 44-45)? Do you agree with this view? Provide a further point of support as well as opposition of your own.
4. Singapore's laws do not recognise same-sex marriage and the formation of same-sex parent family units, and children are only considered legitimate if they are born in a traditional family unit. Is it justified for the government to write laws that invalidate same-sex parent family units, and promote heterosexual parent family units?
5. What tradeoffs are there for the government and Singapore society, if laws were rewritten to be more inclusive towards same-sex marriage and same-sex parent family units?

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. 'Young people today have little interest in traditional marriage.' How true is this of your society? (Y6 Timed Practice 2023)
4. Is marriage still an attractive option in today's world? (RI Y5 CT 2021)
5. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI Y6 CT 2021)
6. 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.

Long after I returned to the office, I noticed little differences in the way I related to my second son
10   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
Over the last two years, Richard Petts, a sociology professor at Ball State University, and Chris Knoester,
20   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.

In their most recent paper, published in May 2019, Petts and Knoester found that, even nine years
25   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 off after their children arrive. A recent study from Sweden found
35   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
      wins such as the settlement in which JPMorgan Chase agreed to provide equal benefits to fathers and
40   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
      widespread criticism for taking three days off for the birth of his son, just four years later, basketball
45   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?
      There are several reasons new fathers in the United States return to work so quickly, the most obvious
50   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
      workers do not meet them.

55   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
      to some paid family leave through private-sector employers.

60   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
      parental leave taken increased by nearly five weeks for mothers, but only two to three days for fathers.

65   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," said Rebecca Glauber, a professor of sociology at the University of New
      Hampshire.

      How to make paternity leave an American norm
70   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 —

75 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,
80 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,
85 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
90 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
95 through it together.

For discussion/reflection:
- 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" (line 73)? Justify your opinions, with additional reading and research of your own.
- According to the research cited in the article, what are some of the long-term effects on children whose fathers took paternity leave?
- What potential impact does the stigma associated with men taking paternity leave have on their professional lives?
- These are details of Singapore's 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 B: ISSUES TO DO WITH FAMILY, MARRIAGE & PARENTI

Reading 10: Family members should not have to bear burden of looking after dementia patients alone EU 1-4 & 6
CNA |1 February 2023

> **This reading will help you understand:**
> • The evolving social measures with regard to the care for the elderly in Singapore
> • The pressures faced by families and government as demographics and needs change over time

Initiatives to make Singapore more dementia-friendly have been announced in recent weeks. Under the 2023 Action Plan for Successful Ageing unveiled on Monday (Jan 30), the Ministry of Health (MOH) is increasing the number of community outreach teams that can identify seniors at risk of dementia and link caregivers with resources.

5 Yio Chu Kang is poised to be the first dementia-friendly constituency, incorporating features such as colourful murals to serve as location markers for seniors with the condition, and personal alert buttons that allow residents to get assistance in an emergency.

These are important developments for Singapore's rapidly ageing population - around one in 10 people aged 60 and above suffers from dementia. The provision of infrastructure and services for 10 dementia patients is welcome relief for their families.

But unlike infrastructural adequacy that can be achieved through centrally planned resource management, meeting the caregiving needs of dementia patients is not as straightforward. It requires us to involve not just individual families, but all of society in deliberating on the best care for an expected rise in the number of people with dementia here.

15 In researching policies that can support ageing in Singapore, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy conducted discussions with 72 people of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds. This issue of caregiving especially in relation to seniors with dementia emerged as a critical concern.

The participants' views can be summarised in three points but all allude to one answer - if we do it together, we can be stronger emotionally, physically and fiscally.

THE INDETERMINATE BURDEN OF CAREGIVING

20 First, caregiving is not just physical work, but also emotional work. There are no clear-cut solutions to manage the intangible well-being of individual caregivers even as they think foremost about the welfare

Participants recounted episodes of frustration and stress due to the seemingly endless tasks they had to complete on behalf of their relative - the number of trips to healthcare facilities, therapy and so on.
25 They shared the torturous dilemma of choosing between the sense of love and responsibility for their seniors, and their anxiety about securing their future retirement if they were to drop out of full-time employment to give that care.

The Home Caregiving Grant from the Government of S$200 per month, while welcome, does not make weighty decisions easier.

30 Though passing off the caregiving burden to hired help may seem like a simple and fuss-free option, participants said that the low standard of care and professionalism available currently means that family members must be on hand to provide supervision.

Second, a good way forward is to re-imagine the responsibility of caregiving as a shared one across the community, tapping on not more dollars and cents but social capital.

35   If family members are not so consumed with thinking that caregiving responsibilities fall solely on them and embrace the role that the community and professionals can play, the task of managing seniors with dementia might feel less daunting.

Our cultural challenges are two-fold: While care facilities are available even if still under-supplied, families grapple with the notion that it is where seniors are "dumped". And as Asians, we tend to think
40   it is an imposition to have "outsiders" help us with issues that are related to our family.

How can we shift this narrative so that tapping social resources is not seen as a bad thing?

Professional care in such facilities is available but not much is spoken of these centres' tangible benefits. They serve as places where the elderly can engage one another and share stories of their past, and they pool a community's resources in caring for people with dementia.

45   To improve the overall quality of care in Singapore, one participant suggested including a basic module on gerontology in all social studies or tertiary institutions' general curriculum. The course can equip individuals with basic caregiving skills and raise awareness of policy issues on ageing.

Inter-generational interaction, especially in the early stages of cognitive decline, can turn things around for dementia patients too. For instance, there are volunteering programmes where pre-school
50   and primary school students engage seniors in reading and gardening at dementia daycare centres.

Greater public engagement in eldercare centres not only divides the caregiving burden more effectively, but diversifies the support available to seniors beyond the professional care of institutionalised facilities.

MANAGING THE FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Third, participants recognised that we all need to prepare ourselves for the fiscal implications of being
55   an ageing society. Again, the load is lighter if we can share it.

From the perspective of public finances, managing the challenge of ageing is part of the Government's rationale for a 2 per cent increase in the Goods and Service Tax (GST) introduced between 2023 and 2024. This has been portrayed as a highly unpopular move.

However, when the participants of our study were taken through all the public policy and real-life
60   considerations about being an ageing society, it was a surprise to find that more were willing to contemplate saving and contributing more to take on this burden.

Our post-discussion survey indicated that 13 more of our participants were prepared to draw more resources from savings and their family to age well compared to before our discussions began. Also, 11 more of them indicated they were prepared to have the Government generate needed resources
65   through the GST.

Six more participants indicated that those resources should be drawn from the national reserves. We expected this to be higher as it would seem to be the quick-fix to public finances.

We learnt that the younger participants want to know that their support today means that they too will be supported tomorrow as their future seemed more uncertain. Reciprocity is a fundamental
70   tenet of any social compact.

Anticipating the challenges arising from an ageing population and shouldering the costs are critical questions we must address. There will be far more comfort, from households to country, if we know that we can manage them because we can pool our resources to do it together. Significantly, 26 more participants indicated confidence in ageing well in Singapore at the end of our discussions. The government's refreshed Action Plan provides us with the structure by which to make this a good place to grow old in.

75

For discussion/reflection:
- What does this article say about key challenges facing an aging society today?
- The article lists several key parties in caring for the weak and vulnerable in society. Is it possible for all to shoulder responsibility equally? Why or why not?
- Whose ultimate responsibility is it to provide for dementia members at home? Is this a realistic expectation? Why or why not?
- How do Singapore's policies to help those suffering from dementia and their families compare to more progressive ones, such as those found in European countries? Can Singapore learn from any countries?
- Singapore has relied on twin principles when it comes to social support – firstly, to position the family as the first line of care and support, and secondly, to supplement this with the Many Helping Hands framework, where the public sector, VWOs, charities, and other community groups work together to deliver social services and assistance programmes. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach in supporting dementia caregivers, as well as other vulnerable groups, such as the 'sandwiched' class?
- What role do you think local communities should play in assisting seniors with dementia?
- What are your views on using tax increases to fund services for the elderly in Singapore? What concerns could arise?

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)

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 11: Rethink governance and institutions to tackle poverty and inequality   **EU 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

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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.

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
10   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

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.

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?

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.

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.

KH: Undergirding the MIS research is an understanding of deprivation and well-being as specific to a
60   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.

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
65   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.

KH: We will not get rid of poverty and inequality by telling people who are anxious about falling behind,
95   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.

KH: The major barriers to tackling poverty and inequality, and the major levers which control them,
100   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

120   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.

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 12: Inequality and social good: A new culture of shared wellbeing requires reforming a system that promotes individualism EU 3-6

Teo You Yenn | Academic.SG | 22 Oct 2022

This reading will help you understand:

- What people need to lead meaningful and flourishing lives
- What social conditions enable people to pursue the lives they would like to lead
- How the aforementioned social conditions vary along class and gender lines

First, what do people need to lead meaningful and flourishing lives? This question can seem subjective. Is it possible to answer it in a general or universal way? Philosophers, political theorists, economists, sociologists have tried.

5   When a team of collaborators and I conducted research on a Minimum Income Standard, we did not start with the language of "a meaningful and flourishing life." Instead, we used the language of basic needs and basic standards of living. But, in our multiple focus group discussions with ordinary Singaporeans, people emphasised that life should not just be about staying alive, about survival. A "basic standard of living" needs to entail living a meaningful, good life. Thus, our understanding of meaningful and flourishing lives is not plucked from moral philosophy. It emerges from ground
10 realities as expressed by the many ordinary Singaporeans who participated in our project. From these conversations, we crafted this definition:

A basic standard of living in Singapore is about, but more than just housing, food, and clothing. It is about having opportunities to education, employment and work-life balance, as well as access to healthcare. It enables a sense of belonging, respect, security, and independence. It also includes
15 choices to participate in social activities, and the freedom to engage in one's cultural and religious practices. People value both autonomy and interdependence — having individual choices and preferences, but also social respect and belonging. Moreover, as we learnt when we talked to people of different ages, different parts of this definition take on varying levels of importance at different points in the life course. A child of 5 years old; a student finishing up their 'O' levels; a single parent of
20 a teenager; a married father with two young children; a retiree at age 70 — they have different priorities and different sources of income for meeting needs. In order for everyone to be able to meet needs and live meaningful, flourishing lives at all points in the life course, a great deal of attention must be given to social conditions that enable this possibility.

Social conditions
This brings me to my second question: what social conditions enable or disable people in pursuing the
25 lives they would like to lead? There are many: food systems and their integrity, environmental protections and justice, laws or regulations safeguarding religious participation, political and civil liberties, and so on. Although we often think of the fulfillment of needs as individual quests, it is impossible to fulfill these needs without various kinds of enabling social infrastructure. Since this is where most of my research has focused, I will focus on just these conditions: wage work and care
30 infrastructure. Incomes can come from many sources, and where they come from varies for different types of households and at different stages of our life course. But wage work is crucial, both as a means to an end, and as an end in itself. In a capitalist economy, it is the primary means for most people to

generate income to meet their needs. It is also, on its own terms, something that confers meaning and respect.

35

When scholars talk about wage work, we refer to the availability of jobs, the level of wages, and work conditions — schedules, flexibility, security, leave provisions, bargaining power. When people are at the part of the life course when they participate in wage work, they are also responsible for a range of care needs — for children, older persons, or disabled family members. Therefore, the discussion of

40   wage work can never be separated from that of care and care infrastructure. Care infrastructure refers to the constellation of things that allow for care and wage work to be pursued simultaneously: paid caregivers, institutions of care such as childcare centers, caregiver leave and the various laws, subsidies, or regulations that affect the prices of care services or the opportunity costs of leaving wage work to care. That I talk about wage work and care infrastructure does not mean I am primarily

45   interested in the needs of people in the middle part of the life course, or only on dual-wage worker households. This is not just a "work-life balance" problem for working adults. The lives of everyone — the daily rhythms and schedules they live by, the possibilities for their present and future — are tangled up at this intersection of wage work and care.

50   Even children are affected. What time they have for homework, tuition and enrichment activities, what kind of leisure they do or do not have, and how and with whom they spend their days — these are all dependent on the constellation created by their parents' work conditions, the caregivers their parents rely on, and the time and money their parents have or do not have for paid activities. Thus, most people, regardless of age and role in a household, are entangled in the tensions between wage

55   work and the responsibilities of care.

Social conditions and inequality
The third question is how social conditions vary along class and gender lines. In recent decades, there has emerged globally an increasingly polarised job market, in which the quality of jobs has bifurcated. There is divergence of wages and benefits, schedules (and control over them), stability and

60   predictability, bargaining power, provisions for time off, autonomy, respect afforded to workers. Job quality and employment relations are poor for those with lower levels of educational attainment. Work is precarious and uncertain for people with fewer credentials. Care gaps are also more pronounced for workers with less leverage in the labor market and fewer resources to outsource care labor. On the other hand, those with certain credentials, skills, and cultural and social capital have

65   benefited greatly since compensation for some types of jobs have grown significantly. Additionally, the market for providing care services has expanded for those with the ability to pay.

Gender also matters: women play larger roles as caregivers and face greater challenges to reconcile wage work and care responsibilities; men play smaller roles in housework and giving care and continue

70   to have larger roles as breadwinners. Women are far more likely than men to adjust their relationships to wage work to carry out care responsibilities, resulting in wage differentials as well as different labor force participation patterns. These are not merely outcomes of some static "traditional culture," but instead result from the ways in which public policy, by enabling or incentivizing certain gendered parental roles and practices and not others, contributes to the thickening and persistence of

75   inequalities.

"Money isn't everything. Money can't buy happiness. Money cannot buy respect. Dignity is more important than money." These are tropes often repeated. And they are wrong. It may be true that money cannot directly buy any of those things, but money is a precondition for them. Money can buy

80 a HDB flat so a person can live as a typical Singaporean does, where their children have their own bedrooms as they grow up. Money can buy the clothes that one needs to show up appropriately dressed at a wedding and then others that help one fit in at the office. Money can buy a birthday present so that a child can go to their friend's party and feel happy rather than embarrassed. Money can allow a retiree to donate money to their religious group, helping them feel they still contribute to society.

85 Wage conditions and care infrastructure shape people's access to money. Since social conditions of wages and care vary along class and gender lines, the capacity to earn and accumulate money to meet short and long-term needs, is also variant. This variation is something we should care about because it indicates that the right to live meaningful and flourishing lives — not a controversial right to get behind — is not equally accessible.

90 What do people need to lead meaningful and flourishing lives? The question of social good needs to be posed in this way, placing ordinary people — not experts, or politicians, or ideologues and pundits — in the middle, as protagonists. Certain needs can meaningfully be considered universal in a given society and moment. It is useful, in broad terms that allow for variations, to conceptualise needs this way. It provides a starting point for deliberating how to ensure that everyone can lead meaningful and
95 flourishing lives. To aspire to better, we have to look closely at the present. Whose needs are well beyond met, whose needs are just met, and whose needs are not met at all? Why do these variations exist?

Through various research projects over the years, I have found that people of different class backgrounds have to devise different strategies matching the different conditions they face in the
100 nitty-gritty of everyday life—working, housework, caring for kids, helping them with homework, supporting ageing parents, upskilling and retraining, leisure.

A university-educated professional man has decent odds of navigating life's needs step by step: from courtship to marriage and housing; to career progression and salary increments that go into meeting children's growing needs and demands, while saving, investing, and insuring for old age or poor health.
105 Access to money and time — providing some amount of slack and some degree of flexibility — allows for the pursuit of leisure and family life, and some freedom to pursue individual interests. His counterpart with fewer educational credentials and in low-wage work is less likely to encounter life as a progressive path, and less likely to be able to meet the ideals required and rewarded by employers or public policy — credentials, employment patterns, or particular modes of 'doing family.'[1] With
110 each set of needs, whether housing or children's education or leisure, there is less to spend. Needs are met to a poorer degree (in both quantity and quality).

When we compared household budgets required to meet basic standards of living to actual incomes from work, we found that people's capacity for meeting basic standards of living were highly variant depending on occupation, education level, and type of work. Women and men are faced with different
115 options as they try to pursue meaningful lives. In a context where education has intensified as parental responsibility and become a key component of care labor, mothers and fathers feel compelled to take on different roles. Women, far more than men, reconfigure their own needs, fold down ambitions, step back from wage work and thereby reduce their lifetime earnings and future security, in service of children's educational needs.

120   Variations per se are not a problem and indeed are to be embraced in a diverse society, but we are not talking merely about difference in a horizontal way, but about hierarchy, about inequality in outcomes, the uneven meeting of what people need to lead meaningful and flourishing lives.

At stake

As we go about pursuing needs, we encounter many agents and institutions: markets, schools, employers, hospitals, banks, and various state agencies, including their regulations or human
125   representatives. Through these encounters, we learn about how our society defines who belongs and who does not, who deserves and who does not, what one should do to try to deserve, and what one cannot possibly change if one is not deserving. We learn about individual responsibility, about how no one owes us a living, about the massive spoils that go to winners as well as the cracks losers may fall through. We learn, in other words, how the game is played. We get a strong sense that the game is
130   primarily an individual hustle. Actions have to be oriented toward one's own family and one's own children. There is very little space in this daily hustle for doings, beings that are oriented toward shared wellbeing and long-term societal good.

There is thus a key tension I've noticed while interviewing people across the years: they have a strong sense of society yet also retreat into the individual cocoon of the family. They are conscious of what's
135   needed for social wellbeing, but feel they must maximise their own familial interests. The tension exists, I think, because the turn toward greater neoliberal, market fundamentalist orientations in recent decades has not totally extinguished an older, nation-building and developmentalist orientation. This tension between the social and the individual, between the greater good and self-interest, between social wellbeing and individual gains, exists in every society. Given political
140   polarization and the large-scale, collective action challenges posed by problems such as the climate crisis, a key challenge all societies face is how to develop a political culture that gives the social due salience.

How people meet their needs has an impact on that political culture. The economic, social, political, legal, regulatory and bureaucratic conditions that people encounter shape their perceptions of the
145   game they and their fellow citizens have to play. As people negotiate these conditions, certain commonsense beliefs and practices form. That is the material that makes up our social and political culture.

At present, that material builds individualistic rather than solidaristic orientations. As Singaporeans navigate the system to try to meet their needs, they focus on questions like how to plan my life so
150   that I can secure housing; how to help my child so they can keep up in school; how to upgrade my skills so I can stay relevant; what insurance I need to buy in case I fall ill and cannot work; how to save enough money for my own retirement.

There are macro political economic ways to think about this private/societal tension. The problems to be addressed in the world today include: extreme income and wealth inequality; the resulting
155   disproportionate power of the wealthy and unelected to influence political decisions and the intensification of political marginalization and precarious lives of the middle class and poor; environmental devastation, including again inequality shaping both its causes and impacts.

After decades of neoliberalist reform and market fundamentalism, the institutions that currently exist to solve these problems — states, global governance institutions, banks, corporations, universities and
160   think tanks, civil society — are organised in ways that make it hard to resolve the problems. Powerful and narrow interests prevent a shift of orientation toward ordinary people's interests and broad social

good. Tackling these problems requires radical changes to existing institutional arrangements. We can think of what's needed in terms of stasis versus dynamism: a system that does not reconsider and revamp its fundamental assumptions and principles in light of changing material realities, versus a
165   system that can.

An analogue exists when we refocus on the case of Singapore and on ordinary people trying to meet needs. People have universal needs but face uneven conditions when they try to meet them. These inequalities are not problems of marginal outliers, nor problems we can ghettoise as problems of a small minority. They cannot be fixed by plugging gaps. Certain things have changed in recent decades
170   that affect the distribution of things and the meeting of needs: the constitution of households and family; the educational level of workers and the constitution of firms; the ethno-national make-up of the country; the sheer scale of movement of wealth, and not just capital, into the city.

To wonder about the risk of stasis versus the possibilities for dynamism is to ask about the institutional arrangements that exist to tackle the challenges that arise with these changes. Several other questions
175   logically follow. What is the economy for and whose interests should it serve? What are the presumptions about the causes of inequality that undergird current policies and institutional practices? Whose perspectives are represented and whose are left out in decision-making processes? What types of solutions have become entrenched and continue to be pursued even as they no longer serve? What barriers exist that suppress the expression of ideas and positions that depart from orthodoxy? What
180   avenues exist for bringing about institutional reform and leadership renewal?

Since this forum is in support of 'Forward SG,' and given what the 4th generation PAP leadership has said about the need to forge a new social compact for a challenging new world, I hope they are willing to place these questions on the agenda. In varying forms, these are the questions Singaporeans are already asking and worrying about. As we confront that tension between individual and social, between self-interest and solidarity, I think it is possible to temper the former and strengthen the
185   latter, but not without departing from business as usual. A strong state with capacity and moral vision, in tandem with a robust society built on solidarity, are crucial for the wellbeing of a country and the people living in it. For such a polity to exist, considerations of institutional underpinnings, including considerations of power and representation, are critical.

For discussion/reflection:

- Teo argues that we need to go beyond 'the language of basic needs and basic standards of living' (lines 5-6) in understanding how people may live 'meaningful and flourishing lives' (line 9). What is the contrast between helping meet people's basic needs and helping them live flourishing lives? What other areas of need or fulfilment did she use to develop her point further? Do you consider these other areas to be entitlements that all Singaporeans should possess, or are they more like privileges, which are good to have, but not essential? Why?
- Teo focuses on 'wage work' (line 29) and 'care infrastructure' (lines 29-30) as two key 'social conditions [that] enable or disable people in pursuing the lives they would like to lead' (lines 24-25). What are some obstacles that might prevent us from improving these conditions? To what extent is the overcoming of such obstacles a matter of individual responsibility rather than society's collective responsibility, or vice versa?
- With reference to lines 56 to 72, summarise the ways in which 'social conditions vary along class and gender lines' (line 56). In your opinion, how fair is it that some social groups must contend with far more challenging social conditions compared to others? Should it be left to such social groups to catch up to the rest of society as much as they can, or should we attempt to 'level up

the playing field'? List justifications for each and weigh them against each other. Which position is more justified or fairer to you?

- Why does Teo argue that 'the right to live meaningful and flourishing lives' (line 88) is 'not equally accessible' (line 89)? What justifications can you think of for why Singapore should endeavour to make this right as equally accessible as possible? Consider both moral and practical reasons in your answer.

- Teo asserts that there are two kinds of 'variations' (line 96) in terms of different social groups 'devis[ing] different strategies' to cope with the 'different conditions they face' (line 99) – those that are 'horizontal' and those that are 'about hierarchy' (line 121). What is the distinction between them, and why does Teo suggest that variations due to hierarchy are unacceptable?

- What compromises or drawbacks may 'agents and institutions' (lines 123) have to face if they wanted to move away from individualism and focus on more collective good?

- Teo argues that the 'economic, social, political, legal, regulatory and bureaucratic conditions that people encounter shape their perceptions' (lines 143-144) such that there is a personal stance that is 'individualistic' rather than 'solidaristic' (line 148). Provide examples of how prevailing conditions may have emphasised the individual over the collective based on any three out of the five areas listed by Teo.

- Teo uses the term 'stasis versus dynamism' (line 163) in her analysis. Consider the characteristics and conditions that make Singapore what it is today. Which is more preferable, and why?

- In your opinion, how can Singapore prompt a shift from viewing the attainment of a flourishing life as a personal responsibility, to one of collective responsibility?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. In your society, how far is equality for all a reality? (Cambridge 2012)
2. 'The family no longer plays an influential role in raising teenagers.' How true is this of your society? (RI Y6 CT 2023)
3. To what extent are different genders valued equally in today's society? (RI Y5 CT 2023)
4. 'When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, the poor should be given the highest priority.' What is your view? (RI Y5 Promo 2020)
5. 'Women have never had it better.' How true is this? (RI Y6 Prelim 2018)

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 13: Soul searching required to solve Singapore's foreign workers problem   EU 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

45   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
50   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

55   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 FEDA.

60   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.

65   "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
70   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

      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
75   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.

      With Singapore now facing what has been touted as "a crisis of a generation", some, like Assoc Prof Theseira
80   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
90   costly methods of production," he added.

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
95   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
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
100   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.

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
105   recruitment fees that migrant workers bear and the non-payment of salaries.

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
110   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,
140 commentators said that after COVID-19 is eliminated, Singapore needs to openly embark on some serious 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 Station and local Bengali publication Bangla Kanthar. On Apr 17, he wrote in Bengali: "The whole world
150 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 of 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 CloseUp video. Migrant Burden: How foreign workers are illegally recruited in Singapore

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 14: America's Cities Are Staggeringly Unequal   EU 2 & 3
Ronald Brownstein | The Atlantic |23 July 2020

This reading will help you understand:
- Even if countries like America have experienced high levels of economic growth, inequality caused by racial divides and educational shortcomings are exacerbating the divide.
- Policies aimed at tackling poverty and boosting economic growth are not uniformly distributed and do not necessarily benefit everyone within a nation.

The rising tide of economic revival in many of the nation's largest urban centers has definitively not lifted all boats. And that may help explain why so many cities have faced waves of protest this year. In every major American metropolitan area, including many of those that have prospered most since the 2008 financial crash, huge gaps still separate white people and people of color—not only in terms of

5   average hourly wages, but in terms of educational attainment too.

"No place is actually doing well. Even the best performers … have racial inequities that are unconscionable," says Sarah Treuhaft, the vice president of research at PolicyLink, an Oakland-based research-and-advocacy group. "Economic growth is not enough. Many prosperous places are not doing well on sharing that prosperity."

10   These sobering findings are contained in today's new release of the National Equity Atlas, a massive online compendium of census and other federal data about cities and metropolitan areas. The Atlas, based mostly on data through 2017, is produced by PolicyLink and the Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California. It allows users to assess different areas' performance along dozens of indicators, including wages, education, and housing costs, and then compare the standing of

15   different racial groups.

Taken together, the new findings highlight the underlying inequities, beyond the immediate questions of police reform, that brought thousands of Americans to the streets after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. They map the central internal fissure—racial inequality—that's dividing the nation's largest metropolitan areas, even as those areas come under intensifying external pressure from President Donald Trump and other Republicans.

The Atlas's architects say the data all point to the same conclusion: Growth alone won't eliminate racial disparities. No city anywhere in the country, no matter how prosperous, stands out for achieving both rapid growth and effective racial inclusion, Treuhaft told me. That underscores the need for education, housing, and wage policies—among others—specifically targeted at closing these gaps, the authors argue. "What that means for me is the need to even more consciously center racial equity in our economic policies," says Manuel Pastor, a USC sociology professor and the director of the Equity Research Institute.

Among the key disparities:

In all of the 150 largest metropolitan areas, white workers earn higher median wages than workers of color. The widest gap exists outside New York City in the affluent Connecticut suburbs of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk, where white people earn almost $16 an hour more than people of color. The gap exceeds $10 an hour in 12 more metropolitan areas (including Los Angeles and Houston) and stands at $5 an hour or more in over 100 metros.

In all but one of the 150 largest metros, the share of white adults holding at least a four-year college degree exceeds the share among people of color. (The sole exception is in the Manchester and Nashua area in southern New Hampshire, which has a small minority population.) In many places, these gaps are enormous: The share of college-educated white people is at least 25 percentage points higher than the share of college-educated minorities in Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; Denver; and Durham, North Carolina, among other places. Even that comparison can understate the divergence, because Asian Americans achieve advanced education at high rates. Looking directly at the gap between white people and Black people or white people and Latinos produces even starker contrasts. In San Francisco, the share of white adults with a bachelor's degree is more than double the share of Black adults, and more than triple the share of Latino adults.

In each of the nearly 140 metropolitan areas for which data are available, students of color are more likely than white students to attend K–12 schools where at least three-fourths of the kids are poor or low-income. Again, these differences can be enormous: In more than 50 metropolitan areas, the share of minority kids who attend high-poverty schools is at least 30 percentage points higher than the share of white kids who do. Studies have consistently found that students in high-poverty schools are less likely to succeed academically.

Two crosscutting trends in the results underscore the magnitude and durability of these racial disparities. One is that they persist in cities from the most to the least affluent. Neither weathered urban centers in the Rust Belt trying to emerge from post-industrial decline nor the high-flying "superstar cities" along the coasts and through the Sun Belt are exempt from these inequities. In fact, because Sun Belt cities have created so many high-paying information-age jobs, which are filled mostly by white people, the gaps tend to be wider in those places. In Cleveland, Detroit, and St. Louis, for instance, the median wage for white residents is about $6 an hour greater than that for people of

color. That white advantage is more than $8 an hour in Denver and Dallas, nearly $10 an hour in San Francisco, and more than $14 an hour in San Jose. Additionally, the education gap between white and nonwhite adults tends to be wider in the cities that are thriving than in those that are struggling, largely because many more white people in prosperous cities hold degrees.

Pastor says the performance of the leading information-economy cities (which include traditional powerhouses such as Boston and New York) signals a departure from the urban experience of the previous few decades. Through the late 20th century and into the early 21st, overall economic growth was greatest in the metro areas that did best on measures of racial inclusion. Not now. "The new economy, [which] emerged out of the Great Recession being so information-driven and oriented to higher-educated individuals, may be changing our metropolitan areas" in a way that produces greater inequality, Pastor told me. "In the past, we could say that as a region was more equitable, it might grow more sustainably over time … But what we can see here with this data is that you can have robust economic growth and still be falling pretty short on racial equity and inclusion."

The second ominous trend in the new results is that even with steady growth from 2009 until the onset of the coronavirus pandemic this spring, many of these disparities are wider than they were 10, 20, or even 30 years ago. In 65 of the 150 metropolitan areas, the gap in the median hourly wage between white workers and workers of color has widened since 2000 by at least $1 an hour; the gap has narrowed by at least $1 an hour in only six of the metros. (The rest saw small changes in either direction.) The trend in adults' educational attainment is only slightly more optimistic: Since 2000, the college-degree gap between white people and people of color has widened substantially in 50 of the metros, narrowed appreciably in just 15 of them, and changed little in the other 85.

The persistence of these disparities underscores how local trends reflect changes in the larger economy, particularly the increase in inequality that's tilted gains toward the wealthy, and the low wages that still define the service sector, "where people of color are concentrated," Treuhaft said.

Perhaps even more daunting is the endurance—and, in many instances, the exacerbation—of racial and economic segregation in schools. In several metro areas—including Boston, Charlotte, Houston, and Los Angeles—the gap between the share of white children and and the share of children of color attending high-poverty schools is wider than it was in 2010. Even in the few big metros that have narrowed this gap since 2010, a huge racial chasm still remains. In Chicago, about half of kids of color attend high-poverty schools. Just one in 20 white kids attends such schools.

Justin Scoggins, the data manager for the Equity Research Institute, says the durability of school segregation is one of the most formidable barriers to creating more equitable cities. "It is really disheartening to see that is where we have some of the largest racial gaps," he told me. "In terms of actual economic outcomes, it's very important."

As daunting as they are, these results may not even capture the full dimensions of the challenge today. Most of the data in the Equity Atlas, as I noted, run through 2017, when the economy was still growing steadily. But now, as the coronavirus burns through the country, the economy faces a potentially prolonged recession. And historically, low-income, Black, and Latino workers have suffered the most during extended downturns. Which means that absent a specific policy focus on closing these gaps, the disparities that helped fuel this year's protests may widen, not narrow, in the months ahead.

"Through the recovery period, we did see that people were doing better in terms of employment and wages, but it was taking way too long for Black and Latinx workers to catch up," Treuhaft said. "And now we are in a new recession and we face the same challenge of inclusive recovery."

For discussion/reflection:
- What are some key disparities highlighted in the article, and how do they affect people of colour in Metropolitan areas?
- According to the text, why is economic growth alone insufficient in eliminating racial disparities in metropolitan areas, and what specific policies are needed to address these gaps?
- Based on your observations, how do you think the pandemic affected the level of inequality in the cities highlighted in the article?
- How does the type of inequality raised by the writer compare to what has been observed in Singapore? Assess some of the policies that the government in Singapore has put in place to try to address inequality.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:
1. To what extent is human life in general about the survival of the fittest? (Cambridge 2020)
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. 'Technology is key to reducing inequality.' How far do you agree? (RI Y5 Promo 2021)
5. 'Inequality is a fact of life.' To what extent should we accept this? (RI Y6 Prelim 2010)

SECTION C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY

Reading 15: 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.

The 2016 Brexit and Trump votes occurred in the two major developed countries with the greatest
5   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.

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
10   force and market size.

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.

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.

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.
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?

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-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 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".

In the US, such competition has worsened inequality and increased social stratification by increasing
65   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.

Parents naturally seek for their children entry into secure, well-paid employment in large corporate
70   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.

It entrenches hierarchy, and hence a systemic inequality to which social mobility can at best contribute
75   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.

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
80   intergenerational mobility.

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-
85   income families who graduate from the same institutions in the same subjects, and with similar other characteristics.
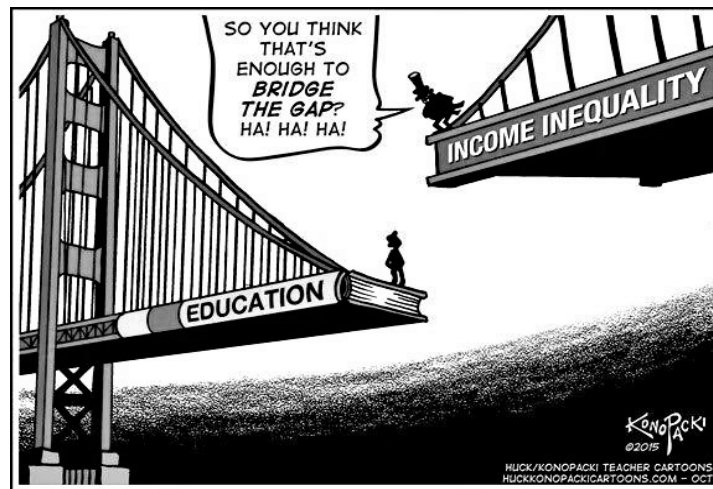
Reducing inequality through redistribution need not harm growth

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
90 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
100 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.

But these have been insufficient to narrow the cumulative wide income and wealth gaps created by
105 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.

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
110 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 Lim and Pang, 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 C: ISSUES TO DO WITH SOCIAL MOBILITY AND INEQUALITY

Reading 16: "Good enough": The risks and responsibilities of choosing a primary school   EU 3-6
Jacqueline Ho | Academic.SG | 16 June 2022

This reading will help you understand:

- The intentions behind the evolution of the focus of Singapore's education system from 'brand-name' schools to the vision of 'Every School a Good School'
- Factors influencing parental decision-making concerning primary school selection, including security and assurance
- How parents interpret the risks associated with school choice and construct narratives of responsible parenting
- That notions of risk and responsibility are shaped by parents' social positions and experiences, leading to diverse perspectives on what constitutes good parenting in school selection
- Parental risk management strategies contribute to educational inequality

Registration for Primary One is about to begin, and with it, another round of hand-wringing about whether parents should try to send their children to "brand-name" schools. The now-familiar phrase "Every School a Good School," introduced a decade ago by then-Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, insists that this is unnecessary. Part marketing slogan and part policy direction, it represented a vision
5   that every school would have its unique strengths and that parents and students should recognise these. "Every School a Good School" is in line with the Ministry of Education's efforts to build "multiple peaks of excellence" — to develop pathways and evaluation metrics that reward not only academic achievement, but also talent in non-academic domains, character development, and more. The vision is of an education system where there is no single definition of "goodness." Rather, each student finds
10   a pathway and school that is best for them. Parents should therefore feel no need to compete for "elite" schools.

There have been real changes in the information available to parents about schools. PSLE results are not easily available, school websites offer rich information about extracurricular and distinctive programmes, and mainstream media describe schools as "popular" rather than "good," recasting
15   "goodness" as subjective rather than absolute. Yet the competition for primary schools continues and

has perhaps even increased, as MOE recently noted when announcing changes to the P1 registration framework. During last year's registration exercise (July-October 2021), I interviewed 50 parents to understand how they went about choosing a primary school. The vast majority were middle-class but they varied in terms of their educational backgrounds. Given that the intent of "Every School a Good
20   School" is to eliminate the perception that there is a hierarchy of schools — a single dimension along which all schools can be compared — I especially wanted to understand whether, and why, parents drew on hierarchical criteria to evaluate schools.

Searching for schools, searching for security
I remember telling a friend, a week before I conducted my first interview, that I was nervous about alienating the "kiasu parents" I was sure I would encounter. I was concerned that interviewees might
25   feel I was judging them.

Thinking back, I realise my concern was likely a product of how we as a society imagine this "type" of parent. To explain why the competition for coveted schools continues year after year — and more generally, why MOE's attempts to deemphasise exams and grades have met with resistance — we commonly call to mind pathologising images of parents who "jostle for" and "hanker after" top schools
30   by volunteering or moving, who define success as "being in the top fifth percentile," or who are simply "kiasu-as-heck." The stereotypical "kiasu parent" is overbearing, incomprehensibly competitive, and will not settle for anything but the "best school."

Yet in analysing the words parents use to describe their feelings throughout the P1 registration process, I find that they are more often looking for schools that are "good enough" or "not too shabby," and
35   that make them feel "safe" or "reassured." They worry about their children "losing out," and want to prepare them to "enter society with maximum armour." Parents also use the language of "enough" to describe their own actions during the registration process: some fret about whether they are "doing enough;" others feel assured that they have done "a reasonable amount."

These words suggest that for many parents, choosing a primary school may be more about seeking a
40   basic sense of security than about moulding their children into doctors and lawyers (though one parent did explicitly say that this was her wish). Kiasuism, then, is not so much a psychological malaise, but rather one of several ways that parents establish a feeling of security — about their children's futures, and about the things they are doing as parents to guide these futures. But why must parents do this work?

45   At the broadest level, this need to construct a sense of security is simply an attribute of modern societies: when one's future is no longer guaranteed by one's position at birth, this heightens the perception of risk. Systems like mass education, infused with the meritocratic ethos that "one must do something to make one's fortune" (Beck-Gernsheim 1998), insist that these risks can be controlled through careful planning. Thus individuals begin to develop their identities around the things they are
50   doing to build a secure future amidst uncertainty (Silva & Corse 2018).

Systems within society, such as the P1 registration process, also govern how these risks are managed. That parents must choose a school means they are designated to manage the risks associated with school (Ball 2003). Given the complexity of Singapore's P1 registration system, the sheer number of things parents can do to exercise this choice (Debs & Cheung 2021) reinforces the notion that parents
55   are agents with the ability to minimise uncertainties regarding their children's futures. How parents experience these risks and interpret their responsibility for managing them depends on their social position, including their social networks and past experiences of the education system.

How parents interpret risk and responsibility

Eva and her husband both attended an "elite," "super hot" primary school. When friends questioned why they were not using their alumni advantage to register at their alma mater, Eva "struggled" for
60   some time about the choice: "It makes me anxious, oh, so my kid is just going to a neighbourhood school, does that affect him negatively […] Will he be missing out on better teachers, better materials, better exams? And ultimately, tsk, am I being a good parent if I don't maximise his potential?" After reflecting extensively on her "values" and "definitions of success," she eventually opted for a new school near her home. During the interview, she was able to share a coherent list of what she
65   prioritised in her children's education. These included developing character traits like "resilience" and "kindness," and nurturing a love of learning that would help her children find their passions and skills, rather than "how much money [they're] going to earn next time." Siew Ling also chose a neighbourhood school near her home, but the decision process caused her less angst. Once she registered her son at the school's affiliated MOE Kindergarten, she saw no need to look into other
70   schools ("case closed"). She does not believe that primary school matters to a child's outcomes, because "even if you have the best teacher in the world, [if] the kid really doesn't want to study, you can't force a horse to drink." Guided by her belief that "ultimately it's still depending on the kid," she says that she will "of course […] try to encourage and help the kids to learn and to complete their homework," but also says she will "just kind of leave it to fate lah." Describing her approach to
75   parenting, she said she believed in "放羊吃草[2]." [4] By allowing her children to explore and mix with different people, she believed they would learn the "EQ" that would serve them well in the workplace, as she had experienced herself.

Some parents interviewed believe that that a school should help their child grow in qualities like kindness and resilience, and not just gain good grades. This comparison offers a couple of takeaways.
80   First, parents experience the choice of a primary school as either risky or not. This depends on how they interpret the school hierarchy. That is, when they look at indicators of hierarchy — say, a school's balloting history, or its reputation in the neighbourhood WhatsApp group — do they see these as indicators of risk? Whereas Eva worries her child might miss out on better opportunities if she sends him to a neighbourhood school, Siew Ling does not believe that differences between schools will
85   matter to her child's educational outcomes. Digging deeper, we see that for parents like Eva, their interpretations are built from everyday encounters with social difference. As they narrate these experiences, they come to believe that the inequalities between schools are consequential. Molly, for instance, avoided choosing a less popular school despite being impressed by its website, CCAs, and niche programmes, because her "anxiety as a parent kicked in." Having previously taught at a school
90   that was the "lowest ranked" in its neighbourhood, she said she used to feel "very shy" when asked where she taught. Her teaching history at this school also lost her prospective clients when she worked as a private tutor. She worries that her "shy and awkward," "not very confident" son might feel even less confident if he receives similar reactions when introducing his school.

Depending on parents' experiences, however, less popular schools can also signal security, while elite
95   schools can signal risk. Justine has heard about a parent being told by a teacher at a well-known school that if their child could not cope, they could transfer her to another school. She avoids choosing popular schools, for fear that she as a parent "can't keep up" with the homework load and that her child will be "left behind." Lisa also avoids "top brand schools." She does not want her children to become "arrogant" or "yaya papaya," like the students at such schools whom she encountered during
100   her schooling years. Whether they target schools that are higher or lower on the hierarchy, it is narratives of how school inequalities matter that lead some parents to derive their sense of security from a school's hierarchical position. By contrast, Siew Ling draws on a meritocratic narrative that

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[2] A Chinese idiom that has the literal meaning of letting the sheep out to graze in the pasture. It means to allow children to go unchecked.

outcomes depend on the individual child. Since the differences between schools do not matter to her, she pays no attention to the school hierarchy when making her choice.

105 Second, as parents make sense of the risks facing them, they develop varied understandings of what it means to be a responsible parent. Among parents who interpret the school hierarchy as a measure of risk, being responsible means judiciously choosing the schools that will minimise these risks. They are "proud" of the "homework" they have done, "scold" their friends for not acting sooner, or comfort themselves that even if they do not succeed in getting into a certain school, "at least [they] did

110 something." Given how dominant this definition of responsible parenting is, parents who do not do this "something," like Eva and Siew Ling, must develop alternative narratives of security to affirm that their children's futures will be secure regardless of their choice of school. These narratives contain different notions of parental responsibility, and which ones parents draw on is partially shaped by their class-differentiated experiences of the education system. Siew Ling believes her choice of school

115 does not matter because "it depends on the kid." This was a common refrain that I heard. For some parents, this notion is appealing because it reflects their own experience of social mobility. Charmaine, who attended neighbourhood schools and was raised by a single mother, qualified for the Express stream despite not receiving homework help and being "very very much on [her] own." This leads her to believe that "it's very much based on character or your interest in studies." Her sister also embraces

120 this notion and incorporates it into her parenting approach. As she tells Charmaine, "Why worry? Just let them be what they want to be, they will do well if they can do well." In this, she echoes Siew Ling's emphasis on allowing her children to explore on their own.

In contrast, the narrative that Eva draws on involves her playing a more active role as a parent. While Eva believes primary school does make a difference for certain outcomes, she anchors her sense of

125 security in alternative "values" like character development and joy in the learning process. She comes to understand her "job" as "[helping] them see what are their options" given what they enjoy doing, in order that they may have a "fulfilling career." Stella is another parent who believes that "it's ok if a child is mediocre in results," as long as they "find something that they will enjoy and be passionate about." As students, both Eva and Stella felt they were pushed to do well academically but did not

130 enjoy their studies, explaining their current emphasis on finding joy and passion in the learning process.[5]

Some parents who do not compete for good schools believe children should be allowed to explore at their own pace.

Inequalities, old and new
This competition for primary schools persists not simply because of the "mindsets" or "parenting

135 styles" of grade-obsessed kiasu parents, but because P1 registration is a social process through which parents learn to be responsible for managing risk. By comparing parents who choose schools in different ways, we see how it is narratives of how schools matter, built on lived experiences of inequality, that lead many to interpret a school's hierarchical position as an indicator of risk. As these parents tap into their own memories of school and canvass their friends for "live reviews" or informal

140 rankings, they hear about their friends' children "turning 360" because of "bad company," remember how "very proud" they were when their "normal" secondary school was granted autonomous status, and regret not receiving better language training when they struggle to write grammatically correct work emails. Having grown up in a hierarchical school system, parents have learned the meanings of fundamental social differences — "neighbourhood" and "elite," "disciplined" and "paikia,"

145 "autonomous" and "government," "EM3" and "EM1," "EQ" and "IQ" — through experiences that have made them feel anxious, proud, or ashamed. These emotions remind them that certain schools carry risks while others afford security, driving them to sort into different schools, and fueling the unequal competition that continues to stratify schools.

150 Yet this sorting, while the focus of much public discourse, may not be the only way that parents' risk management strategies contribute to educational inequality. Choice processes like the P1 registration system hold parents responsible for managing educational risks. Parents therefore learn to account for their choices to their friends, themselves, and sometimes even their children. In the process, they develop varied understandings of responsible parenting, which could shape their involvement in their children's education outside of choosing a school.

155 For some parents, being a "good parent" means doing the necessary "homework" to secure a "good school." Others who do not participate in this competition develop alternative narratives of security: that it "depends on the child," that it is more important for children to find their "passion," or that they will be able to "make do" with any school because they can seek out enrichment courses elsewhere. This narrative work is particularly necessary for parents like Eva, who do believe that school
160 inequalities are consequential and who face pressure from friends to choose a "good school." As discourses like "Every School a Good School" and "Life Beyond Grades" draw some parents away from conventional definitions of responsible parenting, like gunning for good schools and grades, this raises new questions about how such parents are channeling old anxieties into alternative enactments of good parenting, and how this might contribute to new types of inequality in parental involvement and
165 educational outcomes.

For discussion/reflection:
- Ho began by referencing the well-known MOE vision of 'Every School a Good School' (line 3). In what ways might this be a deliberate attempt by MOE to redefine enduring beliefs about schooling success in Singapore?
- Based on lines 12-17, how do we know that this move has not been entirely successful?
- What makes it apparent that 'parents [often] drew on hierarchical criteria to evaluate schools (line 22)? Should this trend be of concern to other stakeholders involved in Singapore's educational system? Why or why not?
- Ho asserts that school selection has become a primary means for parents to 'establish a feeling of security' (line 42). What does this reveal about parental beliefs concerning the wider environment beyond the school system?
- Consider the rationalisations employed by Eva and Siew Ling respectively in working through the choice of school for their children (lines 58-77). Explain how their choice of school was ultimately based on contrasting appraisals of the downsides and upsides of selecting 'elite' (line 58) versus 'neighbourhood' (line 60) schools.
- Compare the upsides and downsides of opting for 'a less popular school' as defined by Molly (line 88) against that as perceived by Justine (line 92) and 'Lisa' (line 98).
- What are the two contrasting perceptions of parental responsibility as explained by Ho between line 105 and line 131? Explain how the contrasting perceptions might be strongly linked to the parents' own unique and often disparate experiences.
- Explain what 'indicators of risk' (line 83) mean in the context of school selection. How do these terms challenge state narratives about Singapore schools?
- What does Ho mean by the label 'narrative work' (line 159)? Why is it essential 'for parents like Eva' (line 159), who have decided to attach greater worth to helping their 'children to find their "passion" ' (line 157)?
- Identify and explain possible factors that contribute to parents assigning high stakes to the choosing of a primary school. How do you think this issue might develop, in light of Singapore's evolving demographics as well as social and political landscape?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Assess the extent to which all people in your society have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. (Cambridge 2023)
2. 'Parents have no right to impose their own values and beliefs on their children.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2015)
3. 'Parents have too much control over their children's lives.' How far is this true of your society today? (RI Y5 Promo 2020)
4. 'Education has resulted in only more inequality.' Do you agree? (RI Y5 CT1 2011)
5. 'Education is the great leveller.' How far is this true? (RI Y5 CT1 2010)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 17: 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.

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

5   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.

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

10   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.

"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".

15   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.

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

20   feels it can't get ahead. "

Coming of age in a financial crisis
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.

25 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.

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 30 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."
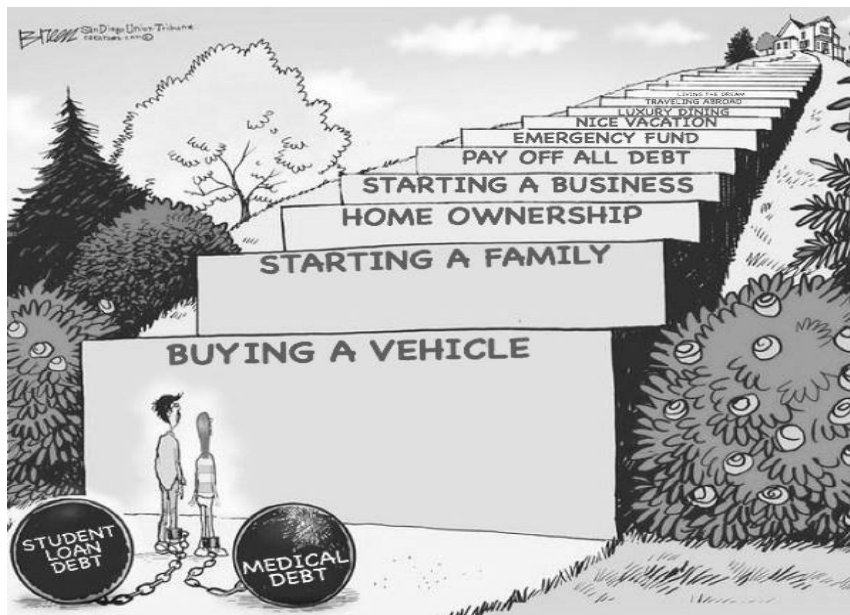
Rising house prices and college costs
35 More than a dozen millennials told CNN of their struggles to meet or exceed their parents' job status or lifestyle. Some had trouble landing good-paying jobs, while others found that housing prices, student loans and other expenses were dragging them down.

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. 40 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.

45 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.

50 "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.

55 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.

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.

60 "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
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
65 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.

Student loans are also an issue. Several millennials told CNN that their college debts are crushing their
70 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.

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.

75 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.

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
80 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?
- Consider millennials in Singapore. What similarities and differences do you see in term such struggles? Can you explain why there are differences?
- What do you think 'building a life' entails in your society? Are a house and family considered important in your society today?
- How have normative notions of what is considered a 'good life' evolve across different generations here in Singapore? Can you provide possible explanations for key shifts in such notions?

Related RI essay questions:
- To what extent can individuals shape their own lives when the world is so unpredictable? (Cambridge 2022)
- How far is the pursuit of happiness the most important human goal? (Cambridge 2021)
- 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 18: Pandemials: 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
The year 2020 saw unprecedented challenges to the global education system. During the first wave of
15 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.

School closures aggravated youth inequalities between and within societies because young women
and those of disadvantaged socio-economic statues 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
25 connectivity, adult support or adequate space to study at home. For others, border closings
complicated educational mobility.

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
30 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
35 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
40 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
45 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
50 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.

55   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.

60   "Pandemials" 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
65   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
70   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
75   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
80   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
85   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
90   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
95   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
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.

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.

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.

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.

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—
140 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 disllusionment' 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 'pandemials', 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 'pandemials' 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 19: 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,
5 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?
10 "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
15 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
20 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
25 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.

In the internet era when countless posts feature complaints and gripes about personal struggles and
40 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.

"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
45 economic slowdown, trade tensions with the West and the coronavirus pandemic.

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-
50 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".

And across the country, T-shirts printed with "Do nothing lie flat youth" have become hot selling items.
55 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.

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,
65 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.

70 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

75 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

80 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

85 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

90 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.

95 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,

100 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 people – dubbed beatniks – to rebel against conformity and traditional lifestyles in the 1950s. "Beat"
110 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:
- In what ways might the 'rose-tinted propaganda of Xi's "Chinese dream" ' (line 46) have contributed to the lying flat movement?
- What positive outcomes might come out of the 'lying flat' movement? Consider this from the perspective of different groups/stakeholders, such as young Chinese, the older generations of Chinese, and the Chinese government.
- Based on lines 54-66, what might be the adverse impacts of 'lying flat'?
- The author suggests that the Chinese authorities are doing what they can to 'keep people from talking about lying flat' (line 82). How might this do more harm than good in terms of shaping young Chinese's beliefs and values and their understanding of the government's duty of care?
- Do you think this movement will resonate with Singaporeans, particularly among the younger generation? Why or why not?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:
1. Assess the extent to which different age groups in your society are valued equally. (Cambridge 2022)
2. 'People today do not work as hard as they did in the past.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2018)
3. 'Work-life harmony is a myth.' How far is this true of your society today? (RI Y5 Promo 2020)
4. 'Young people today think of nothing but themselves.' Is this a fair description? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim 2014)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 20: 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.

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
35   world's unhappiest children.

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
40   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.

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
45   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.

Bleak prospects and social immobility have driven young people to the main opposition conservative
50   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.

"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
55   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."

A more meaningful nod to young people would help them counter the feeling of hopelessness that
60   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.

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
65   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 – including the older generation's core beliefs and values – that might prevent a better understanding amongst older Singaporeans regarding the challenges young people here face?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Assess the extent to which different age groups in your society are valued equally. (Cambridge 2022)
2. When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or the old? (Cambridge 2015)
3. 'Poverty is a result of personal failure.' To what extent is this true of your society? (Y6 CT2 2018)
4. How can people in your society learn from its youth? (Y6 CT2 2011)
5. Is too much being expected of today's youth? (Y5 Promo 2011)

SECTION D: INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES & AGEING

Reading 21: 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
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
10   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.

"This should be a strong reminder that work cannot be relied upon as the only, or even the primary,
15   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."

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
20   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."

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 45 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-22[3] 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.

But wheels have been in motion to bolster the earnings of older workers. The Government's roll-out 55 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?
For those less lucky and in need of temporary financial aid, there is the ComCare Short to Medium 65 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*.

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[3] 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

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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. Assess the extent to which different age groups in your society are valued equally. (Cambridge 2022)
2. Longer life expectancy creates more problems than benefits. Discuss. (Cambridge 2016)
3. Consider the view that longer life expectancy is always desirable. (RI Y6 Prelim 2019)
4. To what extent is ageism a problem in your society? (RI Y5 CT 2021)
5. Evaluate the claim that too much has been done for the elderly in your society. (RI Y5 Common Essay Assignment 2021)
6. Should the responsibility of taking care of the elderly fall solely on the government? (RI Y6 CT1 2019)
7. 'Retirement is a redundant word today.' To what extent is this true? (RI Y6 CT2 2011)
8. To what extent is raising the retirement age a necessary evil in today's society? (RI Y5 Promo 2010)