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# Contributors of Singaporean Youths' Wellbeing:

Life Goals, Family-Community-Nation Capitals, Opportunity & Social Mobility

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## Abstract

Life goals induce one's current investment and set one's expectations of future outcomes, affecting one's current state of subjective wellbeing. Using National Youth Survey (NYS) 2016, which has a representative sample of Singaporean youths, we find that non-zero-sum life goals such as family-oriented life goals and altruism-oriented life goals enhance happiness and life satisfaction of Singaporean youths while career-oriented life goals, zero-sum in nature, reduce subjective wellbeing. Apart from personal motivations or life aspirations, perceived social mobility (in terms of career opportunity and meritocracy) matters positively in the subjective wellbeing of both youths in school and in the workforce. Family support and national capital (constructed using items on national pride, support for nation during crisis, sense of belonging, role in developing nation) are also important contributors to youths' subjective wellbeing. Given family support is an important contributor to wellbeing, shrinking family size and rising divorce rate pose challenges to the wellbeing of youths. Our exploratory empirics showed an improvement of intergenerational education mobility over the various waves of NYS, and that upward mobility is an important channel of up-lifting the subjective wellbeing of youths in Singapore. Maintaining mobility and meritocracy are critical to youths' wellbeing as the Singapore economy matures to a lower steady-state growth rate.



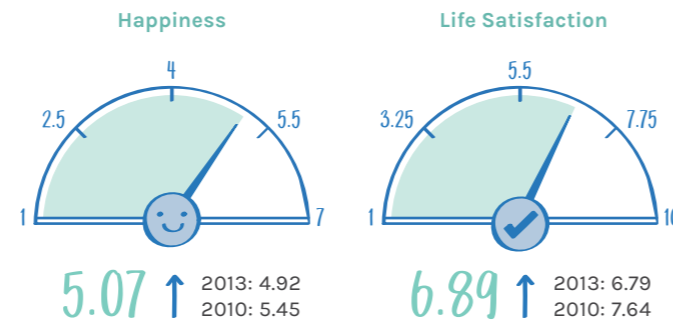
## Introduction

**Singapore's economy has been growing since her independence, with impressive economic output and low average unemployment rates, together with high educational attainment and life expectancy.**

Real per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has grown from S\$5,603 in 1961 to S\$73,957 in 2016<sup>1</sup> with average end-of-quarter seasonally adjusted total unemployment rate of 2.3<sup>2</sup> per cent, from 1992 first quarter to 2017 second quarter. The mean number of years of schooling for residents aged 25 and over has increased from 3.1<sup>3</sup> in 1960 to 10.7<sup>4</sup> in 2016 while the life expectancy at birth for residents has also increased from 62.9 years in 1960 to 82.9 years in 2016. Although these figures are not specific to the youths in Singapore, we can infer that both government and parental investment in human capital over the years have brought about higher educational attainment and better health of the youths in Singapore, preparing them for the economic and job opportunities available.

In the quest for economic wellbeing, are our youths pursuing and faring well too in terms of their subjective wellbeing? This chapter will provide an account, and examine the relationships of these and related measures of non-economic wellbeing with the various domains from the National Youth Survey (NYS) 2016. In particular, we are interested in how different subgroups perform in the various wellbeing indicators, and how perceived opportunities in Singapore, used as proxies for social mobility, might affect the subjective wellbeing of youths.

• **FIGURE 1: HAPPINESS & LIFE SATISFACTION**



In our study here, we focus on two indicators of youth's subjective wellbeing: happiness, and life satisfaction; the former is emotive in nature, a form of experienced wellbeing, while the latter is cognitive in nature, a form of evaluative wellbeing. Using data from the NYS 2010, 2013 and 2016, **Figure 1** shows that on a happiness scale from 1 to 7, taking all things together, youths' self-reported level of happiness has increased slightly from 4.92 in 2013 to 5.07 in 2016, and on a life satisfaction scale from 1 to 10, having considered all things in life, youths' self-reported level of life satisfaction, similar to that of happiness, has registered a slight increase from 6.79 in 2013 to 6.89 in 2016. However, these levels of subjective wellbeing are lower than those reported in 2010, which could be a year with an unusual spike, as reported in Ho (2015). Disregarding the spike in 2010, the levels of youth wellbeing are rather stable. Instead of trying to explain fluctuations of wellbeing over the years, we attempt to explain variations of wellbeing across characteristics of youth using NYS 2016.

We will consider, in subsequent sections, the relationships of happiness and life satisfaction with life goals of youth, the various forms of capital (family, community, and national), with controls on demographic and socioeconomic background variables in a series of regression analyses. Finally, we will explore the relationships of wellbeing and opportunity, inequality, and social mobility.

## Demographic & Socioeconomic Background

Blanchflower (2009) surveyed international studies on subjective wellbeing and found that wellbeing was higher among married people, the highly educated, the healthy, and those with high income. In contrast, wellbeing was low among newly divorced and separated people, the unemployed, immigrants and minorities, those in poor health, the less educated, and the poor. However, these are covariates of wellbeing of the general population, and we want to ask if they are also relevant for youths. Suppose there is an intergenerational transmission of wellbeing and its determinants from adult parents to their youths<sup>5</sup>, then we could still find them as significant influencers of youth's subjective wellbeing. Are the determinants similar in Singapore?

Using data from NYS 2013, Ho (2015) documented that the wellbeing of Singapore's youths was related to demographic and socioeconomic background: non-Chinese registered slightly higher levels of wellbeing, better health was associated with higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, divorced or separated youths registered lowest scores, both educational attainment and educational aspiration were positively correlated with subjective wellbeing, and parental income or personal income had a positive influence on the wellbeing of youths. Are the results similar for NYS 2016?

## Life Goals

Forward-looking behaviours in economic models imply that life goals set by youths will induce investment in terms of time, effort, and resources to fulfil their dreams, and an expectation of the future outcomes will likely affect their current state of subjective wellbeing. We will use this conceptual framework to understand why life goals do or do not matter in the wellbeing of youth, either positively or negatively.

Based on comprehensive reviews, Casas et al. (2004) and Kasser (2004) documented positive correlations of intrinsic goals and personal wellbeing but negative relationships between extrinsic goals and subjective wellbeing. Using data obtained from Germany, Headey (2006) found that non-zero-sum goals (likened to intrinsic goals), which include commitment to family, friends and social, and political involvement, promote life satisfaction. Zero-sum goals (likened to extrinsic goals), on the other hand, including commitment to career success and material gains, appear detrimental to life satisfaction. Following the lead of Headey (2006), we will group the various items of life goals into zero-sum and non-zero-sum life goals, and examine their impact on wellbeing of the youth. Ho (2015) documented that family-oriented life goals, which are non-zero-sum in nature, were positively correlated with wellbeing while life goals such as "to earn lots of money", and "to migrate to another country" were negatively correlated with happiness and life satisfaction.

Using NYS 2016, we conduct factor analysis and construct life goal indices seen in **Table 1**. Family Life Goals and Altruism Life Goals are considered non-zero sum life goals while the third index constructed, Career Life Goals, is zero-sum.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Computed by the author based on online data from the Singapore Department of Statistics, [www.singstat.gov.sg](http://www.singstat.gov.sg). The deflator is Consumer Price Index (CPI), base year 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Computed by the author based on online data from the Singapore Department of Statistics, [www.singstat.gov.sg](http://www.singstat.gov.sg).

<sup>3</sup> Extracted from Barro and Lee (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from online data, Singapore Department of Statistics, [www.singstat.gov.sg](http://www.singstat.gov.sg).

### Note

<sup>5</sup> Family members and conditions have an influence on the wellbeing of the youth; for example, Schnettler et al. (2015) showed that family resources influenced the subjective wellbeing of university students in Southern Chile. With regard to intergenerational transmission of subjective wellbeing, Ong et al. (2013) found mutual altruism between mothers and their youths aged 15 to 19 years based on data from a social survey on Singaporeans.

• TABLE 1: LIFE GOAL INDICES

Index	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Family Life Goals</b>	
To maintain strong family relationships	0.726
To get married	
To have children	
<b>Altruism Life Goals</b>	
To be actively involved in local volunteer work	0.829
To be actively involved in overseas volunteer work	
To help the less fortunate	
To contribute to society	
<b>Career Life Goals</b>	
To acquire new skills and knowledge	0.72
To start my own business	
To earn lots of money	
To be famous	
To discover, design or invent something new	
To have a successful career	

• TABLE 2: SIMPLE WELLBEING REGRESSION ON LIFE GOALS

	Happiness	Satisfaction
Family Life Goals	.2460143***	.2113418***
Career Life Goals	-.0599607***	-.0722501***
Altruism Life Goals	.1154323***	.1237207***
Sample Size	3,531	3,531
Adj. R-squared	0.0787	0.0636
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000

Note  
\*\*\*p<0,01

**Table 2** shows the simple wellbeing regressions on life goals. The results clearly document the positive correlations between non-zero-sum life goals (Family Life Goals and Altruism Life Goals) and subjective wellbeing, be it happiness or life satisfaction; in contrast, zero-sum life goals (Career Life Goals) are negatively correlated with the wellbeing of youths, consistent with the results of Headey (2006). As the constructed indices are normalised, the magnitudes of the coefficients suggest that family-oriented life goals are relatively more important than the other life goals in the wellbeing of youths.

## Family Capital & Community Capital

Family members and conditions have an influence on the wellbeing of the youths. For example, using the first four waves of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey, Ulker (2008) found that parental divorce significantly and negatively affected the wellbeing of female youths; current living arrangements were important determinants of the mental health and life satisfaction of the males. Offer (2013) showed that adolescents' emotional wellbeing was enhanced by eating meals together with family members, especially with the presence of the fathers, and that leisure activities with family members were beneficial to teens' wellbeing. A review by Proctor et al. (2009) showed that parental marital status, and social support from family and friends were important determinants of the wellbeing of youths. These findings suggest family as a capital stock benefiting the wellbeing of the children and youths. Waithaka (2014) introduced a conceptual model of family capital to explain an intergenerational transfer of statuses, where family stock is a stock of resources of multiple dimensions: economic wealth of the family, social networks and support of the family, and cultural knowledge, habits, beliefs, and values of the family. Distinguishing tangible resources, in the form of economic support, from intangible resources, in the form of social support, Schnettler et al. (2015) found that the former correlated positively with the life satisfaction of university students in Southern Chile while the latter was related to happiness.

In NYS 2016, respondents were asked to indicate the position of their household in a 10-point income scale, and we call this variable Household Income Step, which represents a type of family tangible resources.

Available in NYS 2016 are 6 items on family support with regard to one's family upbringing, developed by Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000), and we will use them to construct a Family Support Index to represent the family stock (**Table 3**).

• TABLE 3: FAMILY SUPPORT INDEX

Index	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Family Support</b>	
I feel appreciated for who I am	0.767
If I have a problem, I get special attention and help from family	
No matter what happens, I know I'll be loved and accepted	
We enjoy having dinner together and talking	
We compromise when our schedules conflict	
We are willing to help each other out when something needs to be done	

Next, we will represent community capital by participation in social groups and assumption of leadership positions in these groups. Social participation has been found to be positively correlated with wellbeing of students. For example, Gilman (2001) reported positive and significant correlations of students' global life satisfaction and their social interests and participation in structured extracurricular activities. Also, in Gilman et al. (2004), students who reported low social interests and low participation in structured extracurricular activities scored low in all satisfaction domains.

We construct the Leader-Social Participation variable by estimating and normalising the times per year the youth participated and held a leadership position, measured as holding an official title, in at least one social group.

## National Capital

Ho (2015) reported a positive correlation of national pride with wellbeing of youths in Singapore, consistent with the findings of Tambyah et al. (2009) and Ha and Jang (2015). As NYS 2016 has three more items related to national pride, and are closer to the notion of contributing or investing in the national capital, we will use them to construct a National Capital Index (**Table 4**).

• TABLE 4: NATIONAL CAPITAL INDEX

Index	Cronbach's alpha
<b>National Capital</b>	
How proud are you to be a Singaporean	0.88
I will do whatever I can to support Singapore in times of national crisis	
I feel a sense of belonging to Singapore	
I have a part to play in developing Singapore for the benefit of current and future generations	
We compromise when our schedules conflict	
We are willing to help each other out when something needs to be done	

## All Together!

Now, we are ready to consider together all the contributions of family capital (Family Support Index), community capital (Leader-Social Participation) and national capital (National Capital Index) with control on individual demographic and socioeconomic background, to the subjective wellbeing of youths in Singapore. We will examine also the impact of the three types of life goals in the regressions: Family Life Goals, Career Life Goals, and Altruism Life Goals. **Table 5** shows the happiness regressions while **Table 6** shows the life satisfaction regressions. We report the findings for the entire sample of NYS 2016 in column (1), full-time students in column (2), and full-time working youths in column (3). The sub-samples allow us to examine if the covariates of subjective wellbeing vary over the life stages of youths or in the transition from school to work.

Based on **Table 5**, Family Support Index has a positive and significant influence on happiness for both full-time students and youths working full-time. Leader-Social Participation has a positive impact on happiness of the working youth. National Capital Index contributes positively to happiness for both sub-samples. These relational stocks are important determinants of the happiness of the youths.

Family Life Goals and Altruism Life Goals, both being non-zero-sum, contribute positively to happiness while Career Life Goals, which is zero-sum, has a negative impact on happiness of full-time working youths and the entire sample, based on columns (1) and (3). Note that, in particular, the absolute value of the Career Life Goals is comparable or even larger than that of the Family Life Goals for

working youths; there is a tension between family life and work life, and the negative influence of the zero-sum career-oriented life goals overwhelms the positive influence of the non-zero-sum family-oriented life goals.

Household Income Step, an item representing a form of tangible family resources, is positively correlated with happiness. Personal Income has a positive and significant ( $p < .10$ ) coefficient for youths working full-time. Parents' income does not matter in the happiness of full-time students as its influence may be captured in Household Income Step. Economic variables such as income would translate to higher purchasing power for goods and services required in the production of happiness.

• **TABLE 5: HAPPINESS REGRESSIONS**

	Entire Sample	Student (Full-time)	Working (Full-time)
Age	0.0065190	0.0089422	-0.0008524
Male	-0.0099065	0.0268949	0.0114422
Non-Chinese	0.1010657***	-0.0269390	0.2049529***
Has Religion	-0.0247969	-0.0530791	-0.0136559
Lives in HDB	-0.0054636	-0.1201255*	0.0415363
Married	0.0654093	0.4992298	0.0405680
Working (Full-time)	0.0575684	-	-
Student (Full-time)	0.0233104	-	-
Family Support Index	0.2895059***	0.3545105***	0.2121161***
Leader-Social Participation	0.0612090***	0.0287608	0.0559987**
Family Life Goals	0.0858998***	0.0880409***	0.0722240***
Career Life Goals	-0.0459849***	-0.0028605	-0.0802326***
Altruism Life Goals	0.0409162**	0.0520638*	0.0561828**
National Capital Index	0.1963654***	0.1322280***	0.2212535***
Household Income Step	0.0991781***	0.0827601**	0.1122121***
Parents' Income	-	-0.0397135	-
Personal Income	-	-	0.0494864*
Sample Size	3,445	1,205	1,660
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Adj R-squared	0.2385	0.2237	0.2313

Note \* $p < 0.1$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 6** reports the findings on life satisfaction regressions. The results and interpretations for life satisfaction in **Table 6** are similar to those for happiness in **Table 5**. For full-time students, only Altruism Life Goals matters in their life satisfaction while all three life aspiration indices matter in the life satisfaction of working youths.

As the three life goal indices are statistically significant covariates in the regression results reported in **Tables 5 and 6**, we are interested to investigate if our youths exhibit patterns of life aspirations in clusters, and if affirmative, whether further analyses would suggest what matters more in the wellbeing of the respective clusters separately and what is common across the clusters.

• **TABLE 6: SATISFACTION WITH LIFE REGRESSIONS**

	Entire Sample	Student (Full-time)	Working (Full-time)
Age	0.0021977	0.0053167	-0.0014623
Male	0.0017623	0.0192602	0.0109851
Non-Chinese	0.0215741	-0.0204149	0.1236675**
Has Religion	-0.0052569	0.0032368	-0.0198897
Lives in HDB	-0.0020362	-0.0618129	0.1033282*
Married	0.1187022**	0.3665415	0.0694459
Working (Full-time)	0.1311448***	-	-
Student (Full-time)	0.1140127**	-	-
Family Support Index	0.2775646***	0.3386545***	0.2042832***
Leader-Social Participation	0.0512828***	0.0340937	0.0437098*
Family Life Goals	0.0581675***	0.0432124	0.0459163**
Career Life Goals	-0.0558288***	-0.0137793	-0.1031126***
Altruism Life Goals	0.0540861***	0.0675242**	0.0581421**
National Capital Index	0.1828467***	0.1468292***	0.2201106***
Household Income Step	0.1222272***	0.0881217**	0.1234022***
Parents' Income	-	0.0012976	-
Personal Income	-	-	0.0921596***
Sample Size	3,445	1,205	1,660
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Adj R-squared	0.2171	0.2083	0.2212

Note

\* $p < 0.1$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

## Perceived Mobility & Inequality

Life aspirations form the current stock of goals our youths have for the future, spurring them toward the future and at the same time influencing their subjective wellbeing. Apart from the motivations they have now, how the future might turn out to be, especially in terms of the expected realisation of personal aspirations and career opportunities, would have an impact on their subjective wellbeing as well. Therefore, we will next use items on perceived opportunity in achieving personal aspirations and having a good career to examine their influence on the subjective wellbeing of youths in Singapore.

Furthermore, perceived opportunity in realising one's personal aspirations and career may be viewed as perceived social or intergenerational mobility, which has an influence on one's subjective wellbeing. For example, using data from the General Social Survey in the U.S., Nikolaev and Burns (2014) showed that downward intergenerational mobility had a negative impact on self-reported level of happiness while upward intergenerational mobility had a positive effect, with the downward mobility negative effect stronger than the upward mobility positive effect. Zhao et al. (2017) used data from mainland China and found that both inter- and intra-generational social mobility had a positive effect on subjective wellbeing; downward intra-generational social mobility had a negative effect but it was not the case for downward inter-generational social mobility as family advantages might help maintain the levels of wellbeing previously enjoyed.

Social mobility and inequality are related concepts, and can be jointly determined in the conceptual model of Ho (2010). Does inequality increase or decrease happiness? Katic and Ingram (2017) hypothesised that the relationship between income inequality and subjective wellbeing was influenced by mechanisms such as egalitarian preferences, perceived fairness, social comparison concerns, as well as perceived social mobility. Alesina et al. (2004) showed that inequality could have different effects on happiness, depending on the perception of social mobility and the economic status of the respondents; Americans perceived high social mobility and those who were rich perceived a high chance of their offspring moving down the social ladder,

and therefore a higher income inequality was associated with a much lower expected economic status for their children, implying lower level of happiness; on the other hand, Europeans who were poor were adversely affected by income inequality because Europeans perceived low social mobility. Those who were poor perceived a low chance of their offspring moving up the social ladder, and therefore a high income inequality meant their children being trapped with much lower expected economic status, resulting in lower level of happiness. In other words, wellbeing, inequality, and perceived social mobility are inter-related.

How about the case of Singapore? Using the World Values Survey Singapore 2012, Ho (2016) provided evidence that the middle income class was squeezed in terms of national pride because of income inequality, and suggested the perception of low social mobility being a possible reason. Extending Ho's (2016) study on the general population, we are interested to find out the relationship between subjective wellbeing and perceived social mobility as proxied by perceived opportunity in career and personal aspiration, attitudes related to inequality, as well as the interaction between perceived opportunity and attitudes related to inequality among youths in Singapore.

Career Opportunity is a standardised variable based on the 5-point Likert scale item "There are enough opportunities in Singapore for me to have a good career" while Aspiration Opportunity is derived from "There are enough opportunities in Singapore for me to achieve my personal aspirations in life". These variables are used as proxies for expected or perceived upward mobility, especially for the case of Career Opportunity.

NYS 2016 has two items on attitudes related to inequality (and social mobility): Inequality-Incentive and Work-Connection. Inequality-Incentive is based on a 10-point scale where 1 represents "income should be made more equal" at one end, and 10 represents "we need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort" at the other end. This item suggests a certain perceived optimal level of inequality; a higher score suggests a preference for higher inequality while a lower score the opposite.

Work-Connection, also a 10-point scale, has 1 representing "in the long-run, hard work usually brings a better life" at one end, and 10 representing "hard work doesn't generally bring success—it's more a matter of luck and connections" at the other end. Katic and Ingram (2017) used a reverse-coded version of this question to represent perceived social mobility. Here we interpret the reverse-coded version as an indicator for perceived meritocracy.

**Table 7** shows the happiness regressions for the entire sample, full-time students and youths working full-time, with Career Opportunity, Aspiration Opportunity, Inequality-Incentive, and Work-Connection added as covariates. **Table 8** shows the life satisfaction regressions.

Career Opportunity is significant for all the three samples, especially the sample for full-time working youths, based on both **Tables 7 and 8**. Aspiration Opportunity is only significant for the entire sample, for both happiness and life satisfaction regressions.

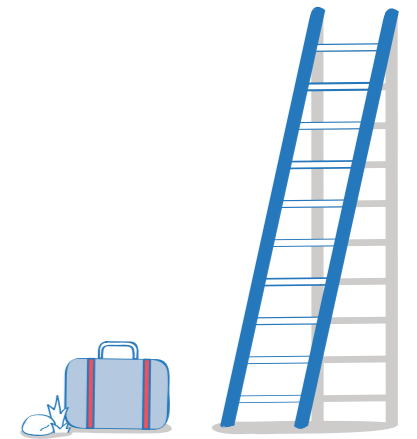
A higher Inequality-Incentive brings about a lower level of happiness in the entire sample in **Table 7**, though not in the separate samples, would be consistent with the zero-sum life goals bringing lower wellbeing<sup>6</sup>. As for the life satisfaction regressions

reported in **Table 8**, a higher Inequality-Incentive brings a lower level of life satisfaction in the combined sample as well as the sample of youths working full-time.

A higher Work-Connection lowers happiness as a perception of a lack of meritocracy brings about a lower level of emotive and experiential wellbeing as well as a lower level of cognitive and evaluative wellbeing, with significant coefficients for all six happiness and life satisfaction regressions in **Tables 7 and 8**.

Family Support Index, National Capital Index, and Household Income Step continue to be statistically significant throughout all happiness and life satisfaction regressions.

Family Life Goals remain significant in all happiness regressions in **Table 7** but not in the separate samples in life satisfaction regressions in **Table 8**.



### Note

<sup>6</sup> Schneider (2012) showed that when the gap between perceived inequality and preferred inequality increased, wellbeing would decrease. A higher Inequality-Incentive might represent a higher preferred inequality, narrowing the gap, and hence might enhance wellbeing. This mechanism seemed absent in our sample. Hence, we offer an alternative reason via the life goals mechanism.

• TABLE 7: HAPPINESS, OPPORTUNITY &amp; INEQUALITY REGRESSIONS

	Entire Sample	Student (Full-time)	Working (Full-time)
Career Opportunity	0.1086995***	0.0813802*	0.1796543***
Aspiration Opportunity	0.0752141***	0.0465906	0.0208951
Inequality-Incentive	-0.0364552**	-0.0359554	-0.0176422
Work-Connection	-0.1251633***	-0.1319381***	-0.1194846***
Age	0.0121575***	0.0180427*	0.0040088
Male	-0.0362013	0.0094620	-0.0198164
Non-Chinese	0.0566399	-0.0684964	0.1677022***
Has Religion	-0.0290790	-0.0630933	-0.0173293
Lives in HDB	-0.0208971	-0.1413905**	0.0251838
Married	0.0367718	0.3658876	0.0235688
Working (Full-time)	0.0316601	-	-
Student (Full-time)	-0.0019386	-	-
Family Support Index	0.2602965***	0.3302827***	0.1823950***
Leader-Social Participation	0.0534254***	0.0272963	0.0459201*
Family Life Goals	0.0718292***	0.079071***	0.0598319***
Career Life Goals	-0.0239124	0.0129532	-0.0527357**
Altruism Life Goals	0.0197281	0.0274996	0.0347596
National Capital Index	0.1215907***	0.0846934***	0.1389403***
Household Income Step	0.081779***	0.0599492*	0.0906036***
Parents' Income	-	-0.031248	-
Personal Income	-	-	0.0308244
Sample Size	3,445	1,205	1,660
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Adj R-squared	0.2866	0.2517	0.2921

**Note**

\*p&lt;0.1, \*\*p&lt;0.05, \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

• TABLE 8: SATISFACTION, OPPORTUNITY &amp; INEQUALITY REGRESSIONS

	Entire Sample	Student (Full-time)	Working (Full-time)
Career Opportunity	0.1331545***	0.1032782**	0.1697227***
Aspiration Opportunity	0.0525458**	0.0460683	-0.0014933
Inequality-Incentive	-0.0531012***	-0.0289509	-0.0600300***
Work-Connection	-0.1052884***	-0.1269128***	-0.1123591***
Age	0.0074580	0.0144396	0.0031038
Male	-0.0229944	-0.0015916	-0.0145883
Non-Chinese	-0.0178650	-0.0616943	0.0852980*
Has Religion	-0.0101385	-0.0062200	-0.0262044
Lives in HDB	-0.0172076	-0.0841501	0.0910207*
Married	0.0945596**	0.2274385	0.0574243
Working (Full-time)	0.1053982**	-	-
Student (Full-time)	0.0895325*	-	-
Family Support Index	0.2497471***	0.3122919***	0.1778354***
Leader-Social Participation	0.0437582***	0.0321701	0.0364586
Family Life Goals	0.0449268***	0.0329121	0.0344128
Career Life Goals	-0.0336885**	0.0023837	-0.0739909***
Altruism Life Goals	0.0332294*	0.0441410	0.0340840
National Capital Index	0.1099569***	0.0949258***	0.1506407***
Household Income Step	0.1072564***	0.0618606*	0.1144526***
Parents' Income	-	0.0099560	-
Personal Income	-	-	0.0772392***
Sample Size	3,445	1,205	1,660
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Adj R-squared	0.2616	0.2389	0.2726

**Note**

\*p&lt;0.1, \*\*p&lt;0.05, \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

In summary, based on **Tables 7 and 8**, Career Opportunity and Work-Connection are important covariates of the youths' wellbeing in Singapore, based on NYS 2016. It is then natural to ask if actual

social mobility has increased over the various waves of NYS. We attempt to explore further in the next section.

# Actual Social Mobility

While the earlier section provides evidence that perceived mobility has an important influence on subjective wellbeing of youths based on NYS 2016, we want to ask whether actual social mobility has increased or decreased over the various waves of NYS and the implications for subjective wellbeing. We now make use of an available variable on educational attainment and educational aspirations for all past waves of the NYS to derive a coefficient of intergenerational mobility in education. Education Step is a 5-point item, representing educational attainment at different levels: Below Secondary, Secondary, Post-Secondary (Non-Tertiary), Diploma and Professional, and University. Education Step is available for fathers, mothers, and non-student youths. Similarly, we construct the corresponding Education Aspiration Step for youths who are students.

Among the three possible variables for measuring intergenerational mobility, namely education, income, and occupation, educational attainment is more reliable as it is less subject to yearly variations and variations in career stages or ages of parents and children, which affects both income and occupation class.

**Table 9** shows intergenerational education mobility based on samples of working youths for the various waves. Father's Education matters more than Mother's Education, and the latter is not significant statistically; hence we remove the latter. The coefficient of Father's Education is a simple measure of the intergenerational persistence, or the inverse, of mobility. The coefficient is seen to decrease across the various waves, suggesting improvements in social mobility between the working youths and their fathers.

• **TABLE 9: INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION STEP MOBILITY FOR WORKING YOUTHS**

	2002	2005	2010	2013	2016
Male	-0.0633217	-0.2572667**	-0.0791893	-0.0405874	-0.2037000***
Non-Chinese	-0.4347621***	-0.6453446***	-0.4039193***	-0.7551898***	-1.0257020***
Parents Unmarried	-0.3233825**	-0.0086164	-0.1590174	-0.3578772***	-0.1465406**
Father's Education	0.3122229***	0.3267048***	0.2757750***	0.1769100***	0.1571114***
Sample Size	767	404	688	1,234	1,675
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Adj R-squared	0.1363	0.1501	0.0996	0.1812	0.2684

**Note**  
\*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 10** shows the intergenerational education aspiration mobility based on samples of students from the various waves. The dependent variable is educational aspiration of the youths in school while the independent variable Father's Education is

based on the education attainment of the father. The coefficient of Father's Education in the fifth wave is much lower than that of the first wave.

• **TABLE 10: INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION ASPIRATION STEP MOBILITY FOR STUDENTS**

	2002	2005	2010	2013	2016
Male	-0.0886964	-0.0958674	-0.2146076**	-0.0203610	-0.0201473
Non-Chinese	-0.3435199***	-0.3642993***	-0.2544201**	0.0625645	-0.0552246
Parents Unmarried	-0.5009355**	-0.0852227	-0.2256310	-0.0336963	-0.0959776*
Father's Education	0.2010856***	0.1248982***	0.1343752***	0.1209678***	0.0653562***
Sample Size	406	577	426	1,123	1,250
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Adj R-squared	0.0901	0.0612	0.0488	0.0481	0.0319

**Note**  
\*p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

Note that the coefficients of Father's Education in **Table 10** are lower than those in **Table 9**, as students' educational aspirations might be influenced to a larger extent by educational policies and the generally homogenous school environment in Singapore, rather than by parental background in terms of Father's Education. In the last two waves, Non-Chinese did not have lower educational aspirations in **Table 10**, but educational attainment did have a negative correlation with Non-Chinese for the last two waves in **Table 9**.

Based on the findings from **Tables 8 and 9**, we may say that intergenerational education mobility could have increased between 2002 and 2016, contributing positively to the subjective wellbeing of youths in Singapore, for both working youths and youths in school. Further investigations are needed as the regressions done here are preliminary and serve as exploratory studies.





## Conclusion

Using NYS 2016, we showed that proxies for family capital, community capital, and national capital are important determinants of subjective wellbeing of our youths in Singapore. In particular, non-zero-sum life goals such as family-oriented life goals and altruism-oriented life goals contributed positively to wellbeing, while zero-sum life goals such as career-oriented life goals have a negative impact.

While community engagement and social participation are important youth development strategies, the role of the family seems to be critical in the subjective wellbeing of the youth and its relationship with other variables may be researched further, as well as the changing nature of families in Singapore which may have an impact on family support and life goals related to the family. Further investigations on the different types of resources in family support, as in Waitthaka (2014) and Schnettler et al. (2015), would help us understand better on the transmission of both economic and non-economic wellbeing from parents to their youths.

Apart from life goals, expectations about the future, proxied by perceived opportunities in career and perceived meritocracy are also key contributors to wellbeing. Mechanisms of upward mobility, differences in upward mobility, and differential returns in human capital investment, if any, across sub-groups of youths in Singapore should be investigated further, as they matter in the subjective wellbeing of our youths significantly.

Our exploratory empirics showed an improvement of intergenerational education mobility over the various waves of NYS, and hence a channel of lifting up the subjective wellbeing of youths in Singapore. Our future research will examine the interaction of inequality, mobility and subjective wellbeing of youths in Singapore, and an intergenerational transmission of both economic and non-economic wellbeing in Singapore.

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