
“Young people today have never had it so good.” Is this true of youth in your country?

Introduction

“You (Singapore teenagers) are a generation that is especially blessed.” MM Lee Kuan Yew mentioned this in his speech in 2007. It seems to suggest that the youths today are blessed with a good life both materially and non-materially. While it is true that Singapore teenagers are living in an especially vibrant and prosperous time in our country, we may not be blessed with ‘a good life’ as our parents or grand-parents in the non-material sense with increased responsibilities and stress levels. In view of these polarizing opinions, it is not true that the life of youth in Singapore had never had it so good.

Main body

Opposing view – why young people today have never had it so good

The opportunities in improving our standards of living, education and job prospects are more abundant than ever before and the youths today are a blessed lot who continue to contribute and participate in this rapid growth and evolvement of our city state whilst reaping the ‘good fortune’ that it affords us. There is a great degree of social mobility for young people today to rise up the hierarchy ladder. The spirit of meritocracy is entrenched in our identity and more youth achieve higher standards of living. For example, bursaries and financial assistance schemes such as Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund are put into place for students who come from low-income families while academically inclined students are awarded Edusave scholarships. This allows the government to provide affirmative action by giving those in need with financial backing whilst rewarding those who did well. In terms of job prospects, according to the survey done in 2020 by polytechnics in Singapore, 90.7 per cent of the poly graduates who entered the workforce last year were employed within six months of graduation. This is up from 87.3 per cent in 2017. Therefore, the abundance of financial and employment opportunities meant that young people today had never had it so good.

Rebuttal – why the opposing view is wrong

While the essay so far has shown the material blessings and apparent ‘good fortune’ that the economy and opportunities have afforded us, this wealth does come with its price and opportunity costs. By providing equal opportunities and access to such benefits, meritocracy has promoted a competitive ethos in society. Students and their

parents continually strive to be better than their peers in hopes of getting the reward. It may sound good, but when done overboard it leads to disastrous outcomes such as increasing commitments and expectations on the individual. For example, such competitiveness or ‘kiasuness’ can be seen in the tuition industries. Many parents send their child to advanced tuition modules so as to prepare the child in advance. It is common to see Primary 1 students attending the Gifted Education Intensive Courses to prepare them for the entrance tests every student sits in Primary 3. Students would have to go through endless enrichment classes on top of school lessons with increased expectations of better grades. Therefore, when considering the ripple effects that such equal opportunity provides and how people in a better financial position might leverage on that to extend their advantage over others, young people today have struggles that those in the past may not have.

Supporting view 1

Moreover, it can be argued that young people today do not have it so good due to the increasingly unhealthy stress levels faced by our teenagers and working adults in this frenzied pace to keep up with change and evolution of our society. Our mental and physical health has to be monitored more closely with these increased stress levels. Young people today are assigned more responsibilities than those in the past coupled with a faster pace of life activities which distorts their mental and psychological health. For students, the peak of 27 youth suicides in 2015 raised much concern and alarm among educators, parents and healthcare providers. While for young adults, the survey "Working in Asia" found that not only do Singapore workers spend more hours at work relative to their Hong Kong and China peers, more than half (52 per cent of Singapore workers surveyed) say their stress level has gone up over the last six months. Therefore, it can be argued that young people today have not had it so good.

Supporting view 2

Furthermore, young people today have not had it so good as they have to face the burden of supporting elderly dependents and the aging population in the near future with increased expectations and economic responsibilities. In our society, there is a decreasing birth rate trend over the years. As we become older, our healthcare expenses are expected to increase.. Coupled with having fewer working adults in the family to support each older member, the cost burden on each adult becomes even higher. Not only does the family have to cope with higher healthcare expenses but there are fewer working adults to share the burden. According to Population.sg, Singapore

has about 4.7 citizens of working age in 2016 for every 1 older adult . By 2030, our country is expected to have only 2.3 citizens of working age per older adult which means greater tax contributions on young and able working adults. Therefore, young people today have never had it so good.

Supporting view 3

Lastly, it can be argued that young people have not had it so good as youths have to keep up with many changes today in terms of technological disruption. The ever evolving landscape of our times meant frequent technological disruptions that could displace certain jobs and industries. Consequently, young people have to constantly upgrade their skill sets towards higher order types that require less labour but more creativity. This results in greater commitments and they cannot rest on their laurels knowing that this situation today may change tomorrow. For example, the findings by the World Economic Forum on Asean showed that about one-fifth of Singapore's full-time equivalent workforce (20.6 per cent) will have their jobs displaced by 2028 due to the advancement in technology and automation in our daily lives. This is indeed a scary prospect and young people have to update their portfolios by attending courses such as Skills future to attain new skills and remain relevant in the new economy. Such added responsibilities and commitments were unimaginable in the stable era before where individuals work in traditional jobs. Therefore, young people today have not had it so good due to the constant disruptions in jobs brought about by technology.

Conclusion

Though youths may enjoy much material happiness and seem to enjoy a better life than their predecessors, they do face their unique sets of challenges and problems though these may be not as easily discernible and tangibly quantified. Hence, it is difficult to compare the lives of youths today and youths yesterday and fairly judge who has it better.