

# An analysis of “*This Is What Inequality Looks Like*”: Issues on Social Inequality

## Written Report

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Chapter 1.1: Background**

Inequality has always been an issue in every society. “*This Is What Inequality Looks Like*” is a book by Singaporean author and professor at National Technological University, Teo You Yenn. It offers an insight into the invisible world of poverty and unfairness in contemporary Singapore.

The book is a compilation of essays regarding several topics touching on the lives of the less affluent in Singapore. It is backed by years of field work on the lives of those who are less fortunate, and highlights a few pressing issues the country has to address, with regards to inequality. The first chapter explains and provides a foundation for the rest of the book. It explores the many meanings of the keyword “Inequality”. It examines the true definition of the word, and highlights common assumptions and misconceptions people would tend to have about it. The second chapter dives into the lives of the less fortunate. There are strong signs of negativity and insecurity around areas where the less fortunate lives, as well as less ambient and cramped environments. The third chapter is centered around the topic of work-life balance, of which the less fortunate have little access to. It illustrates the busy daily routine and troubles faced by the less fortunate, and how it impacts their work life balance.

The fourth chapter revolves around the future of children. Every parent would want the best for their children. This chapter explores the hopes and dreams of less fortunate families for their children, as well as the challenges faced by their children. The fifth chapter gives insight to daily lives of the less fortunate and shows how they are treated differently because of their social

class. The sixth chapter discusses the differentiated deservedness of the less fortunate and what they deserve to have; people have different types of access and degree of public support depending on who they are and how they live.

The seventh and eighth chapter brings up a very important topic, dignity. Being of lower socio-economic class, being unable to spend time with their children, being unable to afford this or that. Such helplessness leads to great hurt to one's dignity, self-respect and ego. The needs and wants of the less fortunate, are more or less the same as those of the higher classes. The ninth chapter illustrates the reaction and thoughts people have regarding the essays and the issues it brought up. Some may frown upon it, while others find it to be something to ponder over.

Hence, this book revolves around the theme of society issues such as Social Stigmatization, Deservedness, Work Life Balance and ultimately Inequality.

## **Chapter 1.2: Rationale**

Inequality is a social issue that many societies face, regardless of their development. However, more developed and affluent societies tend to have a lesser problem of inequality (trend observed from gini coefficient ranking). Singapore, a little nation in South-East Asia that has become increasingly developed and rich in the past 5 decades has a Gini Coefficient of 0.459. Singapore ranks 119th among 151 countries involved in the ranking world population review 2020). So, why is it that Singapore ranks so far down on the Gini Coefficient?

The book explores the social issues that exist, and the implications it brings. The book highlights many “invisible” problems that we do not notice, or rather, the ones we tend to ignore. Humanities are academic disciplines that study aspects of human society and cultures. Therefore, it is important to study the problems that remain so well hidden to many. Thus, this research

aims to explore the link between the SES of people and their motivational drive to do better, as well as how the writer uses critical theory to connect with the readers.

### **Chapter 1.3: Research Questions**

1. How extensive or pervasive is social inequality in Singapore?
2. How effective are our current measures in helping those of low socioeconomic status?
3. How does the Conflict Theory account for the competition of resources among different social classes leading to the broadening of the social gap?
4. How does the Functionalist Theory account for the existence of unequal distributions of resources and treatment across different social classes leading to the increase of social stratification?

### **Chapter 1.4 : Thesis Statement**

The conflict theory by Karl Marx accounts for the power structure hierarchy in the current society, resulting in large inequalities.

### **Chapter 1.5 : Scope**

The analysis will mainly focus on the compilation of essays “This is what inequality looks like”. The content will be on the 1st chapter through 10th chapter.

Another analysis medium will be the book “50 years of social issues in Singapore”. The book was published during the golden jubilee of Singapore’s independence, and points out the

rapidly changing social context in Singapore, as well as the way people feel and respond in accordance to the changing landscape.

The final piece of material is the current affairs and news. Our research aims to analyse government schemes and packages, and their effectiveness in helping the less fortunate. The COVID-19 crisis has also had a notably great impact on the vulnerable, further showing the social economic gap between Singaporeans. During the 2020 GE in Singapore, the opposition parties have brought up issues with the current government legislation, problems that are worth taking a closer look at.

## **Chapter 1.6 :Significance of research**

This research is significant because Singapore is one of the most affluent countries in the world, yet it has a relatively high gini coefficient. Out of 136 countries considered, Singapore currently ranks the 26th most income disparate. This makes them the second most income unequal country in Asia. According to the Singapore government, over 105,000 families live in poverty. This translates to about one in 10 family homes, or 378,000 people. When people think of Singapore, poverty tends to slip their mind. Thus, people do not commonly think of social issues and poverty when they think of Singapore. When they do, there are often preconceptions that those people did not work hard, or they did not put in enough effort. This research sets out to prove that despite being a considerably developed country, poverty is still fairly common in Singapore.

Additionally, this paper seeks to make a study of the various literary theories of describing social inequality. By analyzing the self motivation forces utilized in the less fortunate's struggle against society, this paper attempts to take inspiration from their superb perseverance that is a valuable trait often overlooked. This paper also serves to analyze the role of the conflict theory in the society structure that us of the present.

## **Chapter 1.7 : Limitations**

This paper covers the literary aspects of the book. The language use of the writer does not document the full extent of societal problems, only the way the writer is describing and convincing readers regarding these issues. Thus, this paper does not cover other possibly significant aspects of Social Inequality.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Chapter 2.1 :Introduction**

The following literature review introduces social theories which are in relation to the situation of poverty and inequality in Singapore's society. The conflict theory and functionalist theory will lay the foreground for the analysis and discussion of "*This is what inequality looks like*".

### **Chapter 2.2 : Conflict Theory**

Conflict Theory (Marx, 1847) is a social and political philosophy associated with the Frankfurt School. It was first brought up by German philosopher and sociologist Karl Marx in the 19th century. In this theory, Marx focused on the causes and effects of class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The "bourgeoisie" refers to the owners of the means of production, which is the material needed for labour and goods production, and the capitalists, while the "proletariat" refers to the working class and the poor. Marx believed that "individuals and groups within society interact based on conflict rather than consensus"(Marx, 1847).

In the theory, Marx believed that humans must go through labor in order to survive in nature. Since humans are so poorly adapted to the world of nature, we have to change nature in order to survive. Hence, Marx proposed that labour is the way to transform society to fit our needs. When we do labor, we are able to free ourselves from natural constraints. However, once we freed ourselves from our natural constraints, we have created a new system, or a thesis. When there is a thesis, there will always be an antithesis, which is the reaction of people who are not benefited by the current system or state of society that opposes the current state of the society. Hence, after we have freed ourselves from the natural constraints, we created social constraints.

The way humans work together to overcome their natural constraint, but the way labour is organised has led to social constraints, where the bourgeoisie simply did not need to labor at all but they are still able to receive what they want.

As the proletariat did not have access to the means of production, they could only sell their labour in order to bring in income for their survival. Although the proletariat are indeed being paid for selling their labour, Marx argues that the proletariat are being paid an amount that barely allows them to survive. Marx also argues that the bourgeoisie are paying the proletariat much less than the worth of what they produce. It is the deficit between what the proletariat produce and what they receive that causes the inequality within society to become larger. This in turn creates a surplus, or profit. The bourgeoisie have complete control over the profits. Hence they are constantly trying to get more profits by increasing productivity of the workers but at the same time, cutting the cost of labour from the proletariat. The powerful bourgeoisie is constantly oppressing the proletariat, which results in a class conflict and resources being unequally and unjustly spread out within the people to the advantage of the bourgeoisie.

Conflict theory takes into account the wide income disparity in an affluent and modern society like Singapore, and serves to potentially give us a broad viewed analysis. Its focus on oppression and income is especially fitting for analysis of inequality in Singapore.

### **Chapter 2.3 : Functionalist Theory**

Functionalist theory (Durkheim,1893) is a social theory that originated from the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim. The theory believes that “Inequality is inevitable and plays an important role in our society. Any conflict is seen as temporary and society becomes better when these problems are counteracted.”

Durkheim believed that "The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. It can be termed the collective or creative consciousness." (Durkheim, 1893). In Durkheim’s perspective, society is like our human body. It is made up of many different parts to keep it in good condition. The

different parts of society are basically the social structures, and each social structure has its own role, or social function to fulfil. Social functions are further divided into two types: Manifest and Latent functions. Manifest functions are basically functions that are intended outcomes that a structure is supposed to fulfil, while latent functions are consequences that are unintended or unrecognized. There is also social dysfunction, which is defined as any social pattern that impedes the normal functioning of society. Society will not be able to function if one of the social structures is missing. Durkheim also firmly believes in societal equilibrium. Hence, if a part of society is disrupted or unable to continue functioning, measures must be taken in order to keep society going. When one part of society experiences a crisis, another part must adapt to fill the void in some way.

In functionalist theory, Durkheim believed that every part of society is indispensable. Hence, some of the downfalls that each system brings is not only inevitable, but it is actually necessary in order for society to function properly. These dysfunctions of society actually require people to take action against them. It is these reactions from society that helps to achieve rules and laws that are set in many of our modern society. These rules eventually lead to better social stability, allowing society to become a better place.

The functionalist theories account for the different functions everyone plays in a society for the society to function normally. Its focus on the inevitability of social functions enables it to be applicable to *This is What Inequality Looks Like* where poverty might actually be instrumental in preventing social dysfunction.

## **Chapter 2.4 : Conclusions**

To summarise, conflict theory states that there is and will always be a perpetual class conflict in society due to the unequal distribution of resources, to the advantage of those of higher power and of greater social status. It focuses on the concept of social inequality deriving from the conflicts that exist between social classes which will eventually trigger social change. The Functionalist theory states that all aspects of society serve a function and are necessary for the survival of that society. It explains that all elements of society are interdependent and that

downfalls of the system (such as societal inequality) are necessary for society to become stronger and more successful.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Chapter 3.1 :Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory will be used as a lens to examine the role of unequal distributions of resources in a society in shaping the circumstances of the poor. By analysing the extent of the unequal distributions, this allows us to clearly identify the correlation between social conflict and income, of which plays an instrumental part in determining one's social class.

Specifically, this allows us to zoom in on the different resources distributed unequally and the effect of each on class conflicts. These unequal distributions are mainly attributed to the reduced social mobility of a typical capitalist society like Singapore. The exclusive challenges faced by lower classes are very closely related to their income, of which is one of the main resources that are unequally distributed.

Additionally, conflict theory also reinforces the importance of money in today's world. This is especially applicable to Singapore, which is voted as one of the most expensive cities to live in the world (Business Insider 2020). The need for money for survival is especially strong in Singapore, which further escalated the issue of being low income. Thus, the conflict theory is able and is suitable to be used in analysing the social construct of Singapore's social inequality.

### **Chapter 3.2 :Functionalist Theory**

Functionalist Theory is used to analyse the importance of a social function, which in this context is social inequality in order for society to function properly. The theory would thus state the importance of the existence of social inequality for society to improve. The lack of this function has to be filled up by another. In order for the society to be balanced, there has to be

inequality. The somewhat paradoxical analogy of social inequality in this case can be examined in the social context of Singapore.

Functionalist Theory can be used in the same manner to investigate the need of the social function “class placement” in a society. Differing class placements would have different privileges or disadvantages over the other. The lack of class placements might have adverse effects on other social functions, as stated in the theory that all social functions are interdependent. Therefore, the functionalist theory can be used as an effective analysis medium of the function known as “class placement” in Singapore’s society in *This is What Inequality Looks Like*.

## Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

### Chapter 4.1 : Definition of Social Inequality

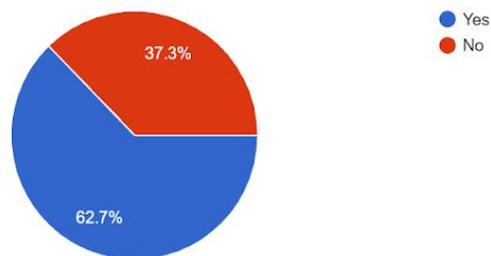
#### Chapter 4.1.1 : Pre/misconceptions

Social Inequality. What do these 2 words actually mean? There are many definitions of the term, and most are correct, but there are however, hidden meanings to this word. Some common misconceptions would merely suggest that it is simply the unequal distribution of wealth in a society. Others may picture it as the very existence of poverty. Solving inequality is not simply adapting communism.

On the other hand, there is a small percentage of populations in Singapore who are ignorant of the existence of poverty. This is supported by our survey conducted independently.

Do you think that inequality is a very serious matter in Singapore's society?

51 responses



“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

*-Independent survey, July-August, 2020*

37% of respondents overlook the seriousness of inequality. However, it did not come as a surprise as Singapore is among the wealthiest countries in the world, yet among that list we rank

second only to Hong Kong (*Central Intelligence Agency 2017, as stated in the book*) . It is of no wonder that some respondents would think that the inequality in Singapore is not very serious.

### **Chapter 4.1.2 : Social Inequality**

The question now is “what is the true definition of social inequality”. Arguably, there is not one true definition of the term.

*“Social inequality is the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or society.”*

- *What Is Social Inequality in Sociology? - Definition, Effects & Causes ;Study.com*

The sentence above is the widely adapted definition of the term. However, it should be kept in mind that opportunities and rewards often have a big effect on a person’s social status, and that an equal society does not mean communism. Ironically, the social status of one is directly related to the rewards and opportunities. Therefore, the focus should be shifted from the difference in social status to the unequal treatment that is given. Redefined, it can be framed as “Unequal treatment of different social positions”. As similar as it is to the original definition quoted from Study.com , the key difference is the absence of the terms “opportunities and rewards”, which is replaced by “treatment”. We live in a pragmatic world ;opportunities and rewards are words way too shallow to document the full extent of the unfairness faced. There are unmaterialistic aspects such as confidence and stress that the simple terms like “opportunities and rewards” barely cover. Thus, we have to keep in mind that social inequality is about the unequal treatment received.

The conflict theory can be used in analysing this issue. For example, the poor generally have low and unstable income and less education. The rich however have stable and high incomes, and are able to afford elaborate schooling. There is the competition for scarce resources, of which in the case of social inequality, is money, which is not really that scarce at all,

but nevertheless as essential. This results in the control that the elite exerts over the poor. The higher class are able to monopolise markets, control jobs, create demand. Blatantly speaking, social inequality is resulted from higher classes dominating lower classes. Such domination of power would prevent and hinder societal progress as a whole as those in power repress those without in a bid to maintain their status quo. This is rather evident in Singapore. As one of the most expensive countries to live in in the world, the importance of money increases. Additionally, the income disparity is rife in this advanced and modern society.

*“In 2016, income inequality as measured by the Gini Coefficient stood at 0.458 before transfers and 0.402 after transfers”*

*“Per capita household income (paid work) for the top 10% of households was \$12,773, 2.1 times that of the 81st-90th decile households (\$5958); 5.4 times that of the 41st-50th decile households (\$2339); and 23 times that of the lowest 10% households (\$543)”*

*-This Is What Inequality Looks Like ; Step 1 :Disrupt the Narrative ; Inequality and Poverty<sup>5</sup>  
5:Singapore Department of Statistics (2016)*

As observed in the above quoted statistics, the steep decrease in income from the top 10% down to the next 10% percentile (\$12 273 to \$5958) is proof of the income disparity in Singapore.

## Chapter 4.2 : Challenges faced by the Poor

### Chapter 4.2.1 : Everyday Lives

In the first essay of the book, the writer Teo You Yenn mentioned about the appalling living conditions of the rental flats the lower income households live in. The building is run down and dirty. The flats attract many bed bugs, bringing discomfort even into their sleep. Units are packed so densely it sparks tensions among residents. Distinct smells permeate through every corner. Families living in rental flats also tend to avoid interacting with each other. They fear gossip, and do not want any unwanted attention. Conclusively, the living conditions in the estate that lower-income families live in is not only hostile, but also atrociously uncomfortable.

*“In a city with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, there are people living in the conditions I (author) have described. Their flats are too small for separate bedrooms for parents and kids; they worry about becoming homeless; they run out of cash at some point every month; they live in spaces so dense that trash and bed bugs are perennial problems; their main mode of entertainment is the TV; they are reminded daily that their neighbourhoods are dangerous; they don't turn the lights on because they want to save money; they boil water their kids need for warm showers; their flats are filled with the castaways of the wealthy”*

*-This Is What Inequality Looks Like; Everyday Lives; In context: what are needs and how are they social?*

Another feature that writer Teo You Yenn has spotted in the low-income neighbourhood is the excessive presence of law enforcement. Police cars and policemen are frequently seen patrolling around the neighbourhood. Many crime related posters are put up by the police force, alerting the residents of recent crimes that have taken place in the neighbourhood.

*“Rental neighbourhoods that perpetuated a sense of insecurity and danger, distrust and surveillance.”-This Is What Inequality Looks Like; Everyday Lives; Rental Flats:the neighbourhood*

The posters actually add stress to the people living in that area, as people are constantly reminded of the dangers that are lurking in their neighbourhood. They end up living not only uncomfortably, but also constantly in fear. Additionally, exposing children to the high crime rates in the area have adverse effects on their growth and development. A study was conducted by the United States Department of Justice in the District of Columbia (DC), a city in America which has one of the highest crime rates at 60 per 1000 residents. The study was conducted with 213 boys aged 13-17, where 98% of them identified themselves as black or African-American. The high crime rate affected the children significantly, where only 21.6% of the boys did not engage in criminal activities. The others were all involved in many different crimes, where 19.2% of the participants had been caught for assault, and 31.9% of the boys being reported for property offences such as burglary or theft. Hence, exposing children to such violent and hostile environments is definitely not the best for them, as shown in the study above.

The writer also mentioned how most of the dreams of these lower income families were just to own a house of their own. In their perspective, owning a property would give them a sense of security. To quote,

*“if they die prematurely, their families will not be homeless”*

In Singapore, the government has actually been helping Singaporeans by giving them a home to stay in. The Housing Development Board (HDB), founded in 1969, aimed to provide all Singaporeans with better quality housing at affordable prices. HDB is now home to more than 80% of Singapore’s population, across 23 towns and 3 estates. ([hdb.gov.sg](http://hdb.gov.sg)) .Singapore has ascended from facing a serious housing crisis in the 1960s to becoming the city with one of the highest home ownership rates in the world. (Propertyrescue.co.uk) However, the lower income families are still struggling, and they are unable to afford buying a HDB flat on their own. The

government's Central Provident Fund (CPF) scheme has an "ordinary account" which can go to paying for HDBs. The CPF scheme was founded in 1955 is a compulsory savings and pension plan for working Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. Unfortunately, it is not effective in helping lower income families as their income is already low in the first place. As CPF savings are calculated with percentages, their CPF contributions would be very little. With housing becoming really affordable in Singapore and house ownership become a ubiquitous phenomenon, most Singaporeans, not just the lower income families, believe that real security can only come about through house ownership.

### **Chapter 4.2.2 : Children and Expectations**

In the third essay of the book *This is What Inequality Looks Like*, "Work-Life Balance Should Not Be Class Privilege" writer Teo You Yenn explores how lower-income families raise their children, and also their expectations on how they want their children to be like in the future.

Most parents have high expectations of their children, not just parents from lower-income families. Naturally, we would want our children to strive for the best, and become successful in life. However, for most low income families, the bar is set a little lower. It is not about aiming for the top of the world, but to actually live a comfortable life in a healthy environment, where they do not have to constantly worry about their rent being due or how much money is left this week. Many of the expectations of their children are developed as a result of what their parents have lacked in their childhood. They hope their children can achieve what they had failed to do. To become better than them.

*"The circumstances and experiences of low income families reveal the deep inequalities embedded in our education system --the focus on narrow definitions of abilities, the demand for precocity, the reliance on parental involvement and commercial services, together undermine the democratic promise and potential of mass education"*

*-This Is What Inequality Looks Like; I Want My Children Better Than Me*

Low income parents feel inclined to help their children in schoolwork, but lack the expertise and skills to do so. All parents want the best for their children, but low income children face more and greater challenges in their journey through education.

In the book, Mdm M, a mother of 3, struggled during her childhood. She had to beg on the street with her mother, and she was eventually put into a Girls' home. She was married by the age of 21 to an unfaithful husband, who ran away when she had her first child. It is actually these experiences that made parents want better for their children, hoping that their children would not go through the same kind of pain as them.

The Functionalist Theory (Durkheim, 1893) is utilised to analyse the experiences and expectations of the parents of lower income families. In the theory, Durkheim deems everything that happens as necessary so as to sustain order in society. Durkheim actually does not view crime and delinquency as a dysfunction, but a necessary part of society. In this case, Mdm M's childhood might be a necessary part of society too. Although experiencing such a traumatising early life is definitely not a positive thing, she is able to learn lessons from the harsh society, and educate her children to survive in a cruel environment. Hence, she is able to be clear headed and be better at parenting, which allows her children to not go through the same childhood as her. By overcoming, or in any sense improving the situation of poverty, it contributes towards societal progress in the form of better educated and successful children. Similarly, the theory also states the improvement of a function would ultimately affect the society as a whole, as all functions are interdependent. This prevents not just a vicious cycle, but it is actually able to improve social mobility in the society. By passing on her knowledge to her children and giving her children what she needed when she was young, Mdm M can help her children to be better educated, and get a stable job in the future, moving up the social ladder and at the same time decreasing the stratification between the higher and lower classes of society.

### **Chapter 4.2.3 : Differentiated Class Protections**

In the fourth essay, the writer discusses the topic of class protection and the differing treatment and privileges people of varying Socio-Economic Statuses (SES) receive from the

society. She gives examples such as the Central Provident Fund (CPF) which is not enough for people of low socio-economic status who are unable to acquire jobs. Those who do not engage in a marriage are also unable to receive tax reductions or public housing. Elderlies only receive healthcare subsidies when they prove they do not have adult children to support them. The eligibility for support and subsidies depend on employment income, a specific marital form as criteria. The withdrawal of CPF when one is old, their ability to pay for housing, healthcare, retirement is also dependent on how long they are able to sustain continuous employment. The policies of applying for help are designed to ensure that one only gets what the state has designated as their “need” through qualification for the most “needy” but it often does not apply to people’s actual needs. The support is strictly for the “most needy” instead of social security for all citizens. The absence of a clear poverty line makes it more difficult for low income families to apply for assistance. People are taking healthcare, housing, education for granted such that it is rarely asked why and how public support needs to be organised and divided to people. Such policies that are only applicable when one meets a criteria discriminates against those who do not. Unmarried people also hold a disadvantage in housing policies. Differentiating generates practices and meanings to the categories as people form their own social categories.

The institutionalisation of public assistance has also deeply hindered the efforts of low income families to apply for the help they deserve. Just for the purpose of public assistance, the government has come up with various institutions, aimed at specific aspects of the help required.

*“The ‘Many Helping Hands’ of ‘community’ is effectively made up of a number of state-initiated if not state-run organizations: the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF); the National Council of Social Service (NCSS); the People's Association (PA) etc etc”*

*This Is What Inequality Looks Like; Dignity Is Like Clean Air ;Poverty As An Exception*

There is a creation of criterias and means test in order for families to receive said help. These institutions scrutinize one’s profile, including income, employability, and familial

conditions among many others. In this way, the state only marks a small and exceptional minority as poor and needy.

In Chapter 3, it was previously discussed that the Functionalist Theory can be used in the investigation of the social function “class placement”. In the context of the book as aforementioned, being of the lower class would mean low income, resulting in the inability to afford a house of their own. Therefore, having to live in rental flats which have unfavourable living conditions that are potentially detrimental to one’s health and development. The higher class have the privilege of owning better housing and living conditions. The discriminations and differentiation in the policies allows those who have a certain amount of wealth to benefit, but those who do not meet these requirements are inevitably left out to survive on their own.

#### **Chapter 4.2.4 : Dignity and Pride**

In one of the last essays, the writer brings up the topic of dignity. According to the writer, dignity is defined as a “sense of being valued, a feeling of being respected, a sensation of esteem, of self worth”. (Teo, 2018) Dignity is also obtained from our daily lives, where simple little actions of others towards us can easily shape our ego.

She mentions a series of her interactions with the people of lower income families. A widow stays home, because she is afraid of gossip if she talks to male neighbours. A father is angry because his son’s teacher accused his son of doing something but she had no evidence. A mother of 2 children will not go to social service agencies to ask for help again because the last time she did, the staff asked her to get a job. From these, the writer realises that the interactions were very brief and not longer than a few minutes. She began to realise “what appears to be minutiae because the incidences --- though brief, though a long time ago - had hurt their feelings” (Teo, 2018). These encounters all hurt the ego of the people, and it was etched in their

hearts for so long, that they can clearly recall every word they said during the seemingly short and insignificant conversation.

Due to how much we value our dignity, many people will refuse and avoid receiving help from others, which could be damaging efforts to reduce inequality. Being low income also adversely affects one's dignity, as it is associated with being incapable, among other negative values.

## **Chapter 4.3 : Government policies/measures**

### **Chapter 4.3.1 : Meritocracy**

According to Functionalist Theory, every conflict is temporary and society will become better when these problems are counteracted. (Durkheim, 1893) Social Inequality is one of the problems in society that the Functionalist Theory sees as necessary. Hence, actions must be taken by society in order to solve the problem of Social Inequality and make society a better place. One of the many actions taken to solve the problem of inequality in Singapore is meritocracy.

As defined by the Civil Service College of Singapore, meritocracy refers to the notion that individuals are appointed to positions on the basis of their ability to do the job, and not because of their family background, ethnicity, age, gender, or national origin. With meritocracy, students are being rewarded based on their merit, and they are given more opportunities to climb up the social ladder. This encourages the children of lower-income families to work harder, so that social mobility can be improved and the people of lower income families are able to live a better life in the future. Singapore has relied on meritocracy for a long time now. Not just to find more local talent, but also to improve the social stratification in our society. The reliance on meritocracy goes way back in Singapore's history, when Singapore first gained self governance in 1959. The ruling party, the People's Action Party has been using meritocracy as a guideline since gaining self governance from the British in 1959. This has definitely worked out well, as Singapore has climbed from third world to a first world country in a short span of 30 years.

However, although meritocracy has worked in the past, the effectiveness of meritocracy is becoming less and less evident. The Straits Times published a joint-study conducted by the Singapore Children's Society and the National University of Singapore. The results of the study was shocking, as it shows that 48% of students in Type 1 Primary Schools and 40.7% of students in Type 1 Secondary Schools have a monthly household income of at least \$10,000. Type 1 schools refer to Integrated Programme (IP) schools, their affiliated primary schools, and primary schools which offer the Gifted Education Programme. From the results, we can infer that most children of higher socioeconomic status are going to better schools. So, why has meritocracy stopped being effective, despite being successful in the building years of the nations?

The main reason for the ineffectiveness of meritocracy in modern Singaporeans society is due to the families of higher socioeconomic status. Meritocracy is the concept where people are awarded based on their merit, and many people get rewarded very well due to their merits. Above we have earlier mentioned that all children want the best for their children, not just lower income families. Hence, in order to allow their children to strive for the best and be rewarded for their academic achievements, the parents are willing to fork out money on tuition and enrichment lessons that will help their children gain more merits to be rewarded even better. Since the parents already have better access to resources, they are able to pay more in order to give their children the best education, allowing their children to have a starting block that is placed further in front of the kids of lower income families. Hence, they are able to receive the merits that were meant to help some of the talented children from lower income families. As the children now gets the merits and the rewards, the children will have better access to resources, which helps them perform better than the lower income families who not only do not have their own resources, but they are also unable to receive help from the government because most of the rewards and help are given to the children of higher income families. This allows the children of higher income families to be more successful in their education, and most of the time when they are in the workforce. The children of higher SES get better jobs that pay more, which widens the social stratification between the higher class and the lower class. This causes meritocracy to not

only lose its effectiveness, but it also worsens the inequality in Singapore by widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

### **Chapter 4.3.1 : SkillsFuture**

In order to decrease the widening gap between the higher class and the lower class, the government has to come up with new measures in order to reduce the severity of inequality in the Singaporean society. Government policies such as meritocracy seem to be losing its effectiveness, and even widening the gap of social inequality in the VUCA (Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world.

In 2015, the Singaporean government launched the SkillsFuture programme, a programme aimed to help individuals adapt to the modern competitive environment by teaching them new skills that are able to help them in their jobs. It is a national movement that aims to provide Singaporeans with the opportunity to fulfil their fullest potential throughout life. The government provides the people with at least \$500 of subsidies to let Singaporeans take up courses and training to learn new skills that are required in modern society. This not only improves the skillset of the workers, but it also helps them to take on better jobs that have better pay to improve their circumstances and allow social mobility to take place. In a survey conducted by The New Paper, almost 80% of the respondents found the workshops and training useful at work. Ms Aryani Suhardi, 38, became a chatbot trainer at insurer Prudential Singapore in 2017 after more than a decade in customer service thanks to the SkillsFuture Programme. She felt that “the workshops introduced her to a variety of resources that she could use for self development”. Hence, we can conclude that SkillsFuture proved to be one of the more effective measures that can reduce the social stratification within modern Singapore.

## **Chapter 5 : Creative Product**

Our creative product is a 5 min video which serves as a crash course for Singaporean's to understand the inequality issue within Singapore. It has all the key points from our report and research, even showing examples of how it is prevalent without Singapore. It serves to be a quick, informative, educational and entertaining video for people of all ages to understand and raise awareness without having to watch a long documentary.

This is the link to our video:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yBoO6cqN8hHS-vSYfNGC60tX-Dc4IPTb/view?usp=sharing>

## **Chapter 6 : Conclusion**

Social inequality is very prevalent in Singapore and there are individuals and groups who can barely afford a living. It is possible that inequality will never be solved as long as society

exists. The government has put in effort to attempt to lower the socio-economic ladder and allow those that come from lower-income backgrounds to get a chance to move up. However, according to our research, the government's doing is not enough to balance out the social inequality in Singapore. Although there is no way to really make the society equal, there is a need to bring to the attention of people that there are still ones out there who suffer from poverty. There is a need for the system to start changing to better cater to those who are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder so that the disparity can truly be bridged.

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