WHY THE DANES ARE SO HAPPY...
A history of defeat resulting in the birth of a small nation-state was ironically what helped the people of Denmark become such happy people, said Mr. Joergen Oerstrom Moeller.

Describing the Danes as a "tribe", Mr. Moeller – formerly the Danish ambassador to Singapore and now a visiting research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies – said that being a small, uni-culture society pushed together by defeat created a strong sense of trust between people.

And it is this trust that fosters the sense of security which encourages risk-taking and innovation in the Danes.

"It encourages people to be creative and to dare to try something bold," he said, adding that this has helped the country stay competitive.

The sense of trust is reinforced by a government rated top in the world for being corruption-free, as well as a strong social welfare system that the Danes "are very happy to pay high taxes for," said Mr. Moeller.

Political parties have tried and failed to campaign on platforms of reducing taxes and raising income.

"They try to say, you can have strong social welfare with lower taxes, but the Danes are too smart for that."

"They know that if you want something, you have to pay for it."

The downside is that such a society means immigrants have to adapt or be excluded.

"This will have some impact on the inflow of talent," said Mr. Moeller.

"But I think there is a gradual opening up, even if it's going to be acrimonious at times."

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SURVEY OF UNDERGRADS

As families shrink, will happiness too?

Mum's love more important than dad's: Respondents

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WHETHER it is raising "wonderful" children or the impact of relationships with one's parents, family featured the strongest in what made undergraduates in Singapore happy, a study has found.

And this has significance for Singapore where divorce is on the increase and birth on the decline, said Nanyang Technological University (NTU) economist Ho Kong Weng, who conducted the study with 62 undergraduates, 71 percent of whom are Singaporeans.

"It's important to think about who will provide family support when families are getting smaller," said Assistant Professor Ho, who presented the findings at a two-day symposium on happiness organised by NTU and Thailand's Chulalongkorn University.

For example, in single-parent families, the child would spend less time with his parent, and that would have an impact on his happiness, he said.

This could also explain why respondents said that a mother's love was more important than a father's, as it was shown that mothers spent more time with them.

"But of course you have to bear in mind the argument that it's quality not the quantity of time spent that matters," he added. "We're not talking about spending a lot of time together watching TV."

Speaking on the results during the symposium, National University of Singapore social work professor Irene Ng said the time and effort parents spent imparting values and attitudes to their children played a key role in the children's ability to deal with adversity.

"When a student goes through break-ups or exam stress, what makes one student rise to the challenge and another crumble is related to their attitude," she said.

"I think many parents spend a lot on their children's education and buying them material things, but the study shows that these have less impact on happiness."

Indeed, respondents indicated that pursuing academic success reduced their happiness, said Asst Prof Ho, and money was the least important determinant of happiness.

"I don't think the results are very surprising," he said. "But I think we can draw important lessons from them."

For instance, while a mother's emotional support had a positive influence on the respondents, the opposite was the case for fathers.

Indeed, respondents indicated that pursuing academic success reduced their happiness and money was the least important determinant of happiness.

"But a father's transmission of morals and permission in freedom mattered to the respondents, so maybe there is a case for gender specialisation (in parenting)."

Overall, the respondents rated themselves an average of 4.887 on a happiness scale of one to seven (seven being the highest), and they also tended to rate their best friends, boyfriends or girlfriends as being happier.

The study also showed that a boyfriend or girlfriend's happiness was a more important determinant of the respondents' happiness than their parents' and best friends' happiness.

"However, they also confide more in their parents when they are in a relationship," said Asst Prof Ho. "They told us it's because they prefer their parents' advice in such situations. So it still underscores the family's importance."

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