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MEDIA RELEASE

RIMA Study on Normal (Technical) Stream Students Debunks Race-Based Hypotheses and Explores Interventions for their Success

1. As Singapore aspires to be a meritocratic society where education represents a primary conduit for social mobility, education remains an area in which the gap between different ethnic groups is most pronounced. While the Malays have achieved better educational qualifications over the years, the educational attainment gap with other races continue to persist. One area of concern is that Malays are overrepresented in the Normal (Technical) (NT) stream. To better understand this issue, the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA) has collaborated with Associate Professor John Donaldson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the School of Social Sciences at the Singapore Management University (SMU) to conduct in-depth interviews with more than 100 low-income adults representing the main races who had spent time in the NT stream to get a sense of their life experiences and trajectories.

Webinar to Discuss Findings of Study

2. A discussion on the findings of this study will be held on **Wednesday, 1 September 2021** at **8.00pm** via Facebook live at <https://www.facebook.com/singaporeRIMA>. The study, which has been published in a report titled *Dreams Realised, Dreams Deferred: Understanding and Addressing the Racial Gap in Educational Achievement in Singapore*, will also be launched at the event.
3. The webinar will feature the primary researcher and author of the publication, Assoc Prof Donaldson, as well as two other panellists: Dr Mardiana Abu Bakar, Lecturer with the Policy, Curriculum and Leadership Academic Group at the National Institute of Education (NIE), and Dr Teng Siao See, Research Scientist at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the NIE. They will be discussing some of the key findings of the research and explore possible interventions to support NT students from diverse backgrounds and abilities to achieve their aspirations. The session will be moderated by Dr Johannis Auri Abdul Aziz, member of the Executive Committee of RIMA.

Findings of Study

4. The research explored factors that could explain the education gap among the ethnic groups, as well as the interventions and pathways that have allowed some NT stream students to succeed in achieving their dreams. Consequently, the research findings rejected most of the race-based hypotheses such as the 'Malay stereotype' and uncovered other aspects of motivation, and personal or contextual factors such as trauma or family dysfunction that affect the student education outcomes significantly.

5. The study showed that the Malay interviewees were generally neither more nor less motivated compared to their counterparts. Both Malays (24 out of 33, or 72.6%) and non-Malays (21 out of 37, or 56.7%) who were unmotivated before entering the NT stream found motivation at some subsequent point. The study also found that nearly 70% of those interviewed held a specific, identifiable aspiration or dream, and a further 16% held a non-specific or non-material dream at some point in their lives.
6. However, the study is inconclusive on the factors and key differences that separate those from NT stream who succeeded and those who did not. Among the success factors identified included discovering a passion, having someone who unconditionally believed in them, wake-up calls, institutional support and flexibility that provided second, third, or even fourth chances, and financial aid which proved vital in some cases. The study also affirms the important role teachers play in helping the students to overcome their challenges and encouraging them to succeed, and having a conducive and flexible learning environment.
7. **We invite members of the media and the public to join us at the live webinar on www.facebook.com/singaporeRIMA.**

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About the Centre of Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA)

The Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA) is the research arm of AMP Singapore. RIMA's transformation from a research division of AMP to a full-fledged research centre in February 1998 underscored the growing emphasis on research to support the provision of services, as well as to promote intellectual discourse and discussion on issues and developments affecting the Malay and Muslim communities.

Today, RIMA's mission is to undertake strategic research aimed at providing thought leadership in contemporary Malay and Muslim affairs. Our vision is to be a centre for research excellence for the advancement of the Malay and Muslim communities. To this end, RIMA conducts research programmes in a number of key areas, which include economics, education, religion, social, leadership and civil society.