

Are the disadvantaged given adequate support in your society?

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In Singapore, capitalism has allowed most families to gain financial wealth and prosper economically. While Singapore is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, one cannot ignore the fact that a fraction of our population remains at a disadvantage. This group refers to individuals in our society who find themselves in unfavourable circumstances and hence have a lower chance of attaining success in education and in the workplace. This is due to several impediments which prevent them from achieving success, namely physical and mental disabilities, as well as a poor financial background. By adopting the ideology of a “compassionate meritocracy” where no one gets left behind, it is of utmost importance for our society to provide help and ensure that the disadvantaged are able to live decent lives and have ample opportunities for success. I postulate that the state needs to do more to assist the disadvantaged. While society has provided financial support, improved infrastructural design and provided more working opportunities to better their lives, it is important to note that there have been insufficient efforts in eradicating stereotypes towards the disadvantaged and ensuring an equal playing field in education.

Firstly, the physically disabled are given sufficient help from the government to live a comfortable life due to resources being employed to improve our infrastructure. Those who are physically handicapped, especially those who are wheelchair bound, may face problems with mobility. This is because it is an uphill task for them to use stairs or even board the bus. These mobility problems have led to much inconvenience and lowered the standard of living for the physically handicapped. To ensure that they are able to commute more comfortably, the Singaporean government has improved our infrastructure to accommodate their needs. An example that epitomises this is the addition of wheelchair ramps onto SBS buses to allow wheelchair users to board the bus with ease. SBS transit is also currently working on a project to create automated wheelchair ramps in the future. This will further ease the inconvenience that the physically disabled face when taking public transport. Furthermore, the government has increased the number of railings along HDB corridors to ease the movement of the handicapped, as they are able to hold on to these railings for support. These examples show that the physically handicapped are given sufficient help to improve their wellbeing as such infrastructural improvements allow them to live life more comfortably.

Furthermore, to a large extent, the state has provided enough assistance to the mentally disabled to ensure that they are given ample opportunities in the workforce. Those who are mentally disabled may face problems in employability due to insufficient educational opportunities and employers not giving them a chance. Hence, the Singapore government has tried to ameliorate this problem by providing adequate educational opportunities and encouraging firms to employ them. This is evident as Singapore has set up several educational institutions for the mentally handicapped. This includes schools such as Eden School, Northlight and Pathlight, and M.I.N.D.S, which stand for the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore. These schools aim to provide the disadvantaged with a chance at education, inculcating in them skills and expertise which are required in the workforce. This ensures that they are equipped with the necessary skills to be employed. Furthermore, the government has reduced corporate taxes for firms who employ the mentally handicapped. This policy has incentivised firms to employ the

mentally disabled. Companies such as MOS Burger have started to employ those with mental disabilities. Hence, it is evident that by providing the disadvantaged with sufficient educational and work opportunities, the Singaporean government has provided enough assistance to the disadvantaged. With their help, the disabled now have a higher chance of attaining success in the workplace and gaining employability. Hence, enough has been done to ensure that the disadvantaged are not left behind but have ample opportunities in the workplace.

Lastly, our society has provided enough financial support to the poor in our society. The financially poor are at a disadvantage in Singapore as they do not have the means to provide for themselves. This could lead to a lower standard of living as they are unable to procure certain goods. Furthermore, it could result in a disadvantage in education as they cannot afford educational resources such as textbooks. Hence our society has provided financial assistance to the poor. The government has implemented the Public Rental Scheme which aims to provide highly subsidised one-room flats for those who are unable to afford housing. The OOD Financial Assistance Scheme and ST School Pocket Money Fund were also introduced to ensure that poorer students can afford resources in school and that their education is not compromised. Furthermore, the government has implemented MediFund which is an endowment fund to subsidise health care bills for the poor. The myriad of examples highlight the fact that Singapore has provided sufficient financial aid to the poor. This aid ensures that the poor are able to enjoy a higher standard of living by having access to necessities such as housing and healthcare, and education. Hence, much has been done for the poor in Singapore.

However, despite all the help given, the poor are still at a disadvantage when compared to the rich, especially in education. This has made meritocracy into merely an ideal as the poor and the rich are not on equal ground. It is clear that success is not purely determined by hard work and skill but also based on financial background. This is because the wealthy have the financial means to afford enrichment classes such as Adam Khoo Learning Centre and Kidstart which give their children a head start. At the other end of the spectrum, the poor are at a disadvantage as they are unable to afford such classes. Hence, they have a lower chance of excelling academically due to the limited amount of assistance they receive outside of the classroom. While the government has tried to pilot the scheme KidStart and provide highly subsidised tuition through CDAC, these measures are insufficient. The tutors are not comparable to the tutors in private tuition centres in terms of teaching qualifications and knowledge. Hence, the poor are still put at a disadvantage in education as they have a lower chance of success due to their financial background. More can be done to level the playing field in education for the disadvantaged.

Lastly, I disagree to a certain extent that the disadvantaged in Singapore have been provided with enough help to gain employment opportunities. This is because despite the reduction in corporate tax, many firms are still not hiring disadvantaged workers for various reasons. Hence, it is evident that not enough has been done to ensure employment opportunities for the disadvantaged, as discrimination still prevents them from landing a job. To ensure that they are given ample opportunities in the workplace and are not discriminated against, more needs to be done to change the mindset of the employers in Singapore, to convince them to give everyone equal opportunities in hiring for a job. However, in the present day, not enough has been done for the disadvantaged to ensure ample opportunities for them in the workplace, as discrimination still diminishes their chances of success.

In summation, the government is still not doing enough for the disadvantaged in Singapore. Despite allowing them to live more comfortably through improving infrastructure, providing opportunities for them in the workforce and ensuring that they have ample educational opportunities and a higher standard of living through providing financial support, there are certain aspects which the Singaporean government help is inadequate. These aspects include providing an equal playing field for the poor in education and providing sufficient workplace opportunities for the disadvantaged. Moving forward, it is important for Singapore to provide sufficient assistance to the disadvantaged to ensure that no one gets left behind. This is a progressive process and requires the active participation of the populace through changing mindsets in society, and more assistance from the wealthy to the poor. Only then, can the society be able to sufficiently help the disadvantaged.

Comments:

Question requirements are addressed as different variations of 'disadvantaged' are provided. You can afford to elaborate less and provide more examples instead e.g. why do employers still discriminate. Assess the effectiveness of government policies. While policies may have been introduced they may not always be effective so you need to evaluate whether these measures are sufficient. Organisation is also rather confusing at times. Though there is a slight degree of repetition, the essay is very engaging in general, due in part to the insightful beginning and ending.