

# Teen boys feel more supported by parents, compared with girls: Study

**Elisha Tushara**  
Correspondent

When Ms Tunitha Reku, 44, talks to her 15-year-old son, he is happy to give his mother just the gist of what happened in his school. However, it is different with her daughters, who are 13 and 14.

“Whatever Leshawn discusses with me is usually on the surface; he doesn’t go into details. But my daughters like to have detailed discussions. So there’s definitely more in-depth discussions with them,” said Ms Tunitha.

The full-time tutor told The Straits Times that because of these differences, the type of attention she gives her daughters is different from what she gives her two sons, the younger of whom is six.

This differentiated support is what researchers would recommend after a National Institute of Education (NIE) study found that Secondary 1 boys feel more supported by their parents as compared with girls of the same age.

This is because girls may have different perceptions of the quality of support they get from their parents, said Dr Melvin Chan, who led the study. He noted that past research has found that girls tend to report less positive perceptions of parental support, compared with boys.

“Even if parents feel that they

offer adequate support to their children, it is important to consider their child’s perception and experience of the support received,” he said, adding that these findings could inform parents and educators on appropriate and differentiated support practices between boys and girls.

The study of 5,441 Secondary 1 students from 28 schools, conducted in 2023, aimed to understand which aspects of parental support impacted students.

It also found that support at home and at school matters during adolescence, and that students who receive more parental support exhibit more positive psychosocial traits and fewer problematic behaviours such as defiance.

Dr Chan said that while these results are supported by past research, very few local studies have examined adolescent development comprehensively, with an adequately large sample that allows robust inferences of the data.

The study was done in 2023, as part of a larger study project by NIE called Dreams: Drivers, Enablers And Pathways Of Adolescent Development In Singapore.

Dreams was commissioned by the Ministry of Education, and follows 7,000 adolescents throughout their four- or five-year journey in secondary school.

It consists of seven sub-studies, with each investigating a key area of adolescent development, in-



Ms Tunitha Reku with her children: (from left) Lashell Nishan Pillai, 14, Dashnelle Nishan Pillai, 13, and Leshawn Nishan Pillai, 15. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TUNITHA REKU

cluding special education needs and the impact of financial disadvantage. Dr Chan, who is assistant dean of knowledge management at NIE’s Office of Education Research, is a co-lead principal investigator for Dreams.

He presented part of his findings at an NIE conference in May, titled “Profiles of parent support and its association with students’ psychosocial outcomes”, which sought to understand how students perceived the support they received from their parents.

His study examined four types of parental support – socio-emotional, autonomy, academic ex-

pectations and school support.

Sixty-two per cent of students said they experienced high levels of support from their parents, while 33 per cent indicated low support, and 5 per cent felt they have very low support.

The study found that for every two boys in the high parental support group, there was only one girl.

While the effects of socio-economic status were present, they were not as pronounced as gender differences.

Dr Chan said the study also seeks to answer the question of whether parental support for

school-related issues matters as much as parental support at home.

He said that in a globalised society like Singapore where dual-income families are common, parents often face time constraints due to work commitments.

“Hence, there could be a division of roles in a home-school partnership, whereby parents assume responsibility for caregiving and support within the family domain but leave school-related matters for schools to manage,” said Dr Chan.

He noted that the study indicates that parental support matters both at home and when children face challenges in schools. Thus, parents may need information on providing quality school-related support.

While 38 per cent of students reported low parental support, Dr Chan said this may suggest that parents could be taking a more relaxed stance towards home-school support and involvement after the Primary School Leaving Examination.

“More often, adults may say that they offer sufficient resources and support for their children, but it is also important to consider the quality of support from the children’s perspective. It is therefore meaningful to track this trend over time.”

[elisha@sph.com.sg](mailto:elisha@sph.com.sg)

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