

4 in 10 Singaporeans get upset by neighbours burning incense and joss sticks: IPS survey

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What do you dislike about the things people do in your neighbourhood?

For many, the burning of incense and joss sticks is a pet peeve, according to a July report on racial and religious issues by researchers from Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The report examined the results of two surveys polling a total of 4,015 Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs) on their attitudes towards issues like intercultural understanding.

One survey was administered between 2012 and 2013, and the other between 2018 and 2019, to record changes in public sentiment over a five-year period.

Minority races were over-sampled so their responses could be better analysed, but the final results were weighted to be nationally representative, the report said.

It added that the survey had a "good representation" of common religions in Singapore, (including respondents with no religion) and roughly equal numbers of respondents with degrees, diplomas and secondary school qualifications.

Singaporeans upset by incense burning in housing estates

IPS' survey found that in general, Singaporeans displayed high levels of inter-racial and religious trust, and were comfortable having neighbours of other races.

However, it added that neighbourhoods were "a potential setting for some types of tensions to arise".

The survey polled respondents on seven types of behaviour they encountered in their neighbourhood that made them feel upset.

These included the burning of incense or joss sticks, religious chanting, cooking of ethnic food, noisy events in the void deck, and having religious items blocking access to the common corridor.

Among the behaviours, the burning of incense or joss sticks faced the most opposition, with four in 10 respondents indicating it made them upset "sometimes", "often", "very often" or "always".

The behaviour with the second highest opposition levels was loud events at the void deck, while the one that upset Singaporeans least was "neighbours telling their children to avoid your children at common areas".

More Malay and Indian respondents were upset by the burning of incense, joss sticks and religious items than Chinese respondents, the survey found.

Almost 70 per cent of Malay respondents and almost 60 per cent of Indian respondents said this behaviour upset them “sometimes”, “often”, “very often” or “always”, compared to 35 per cent of Chinese respondents.

IPS' report said that in general, respondents were not likely to get upset at any of the behaviours with high frequency, but cautioned that the unhappiness caused by some behaviours could lead to tense communal relations if not managed well.

The researchers also found that close to half of all respondents were “slightly”, “moderately” or “very” uncomfortable with having their homes located near a place of worship for another religion.

It did not ask respondents to elaborate why they felt uncomfortable, but the report suggested that religious music, chanting, or incense could be potential factors.

Over 70 per cent of Singaporeans stereotype others based on race

In terms of racial stereotypes, the report found that the vast majority of respondents still admitted to engaging in some degree of racial stereotyping.

In 2018, 76 per cent of Malay respondents and 70 per cent of Chinese and Indian respondents said they somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they “had a good idea of someone’s behaviour or views based on their race”.

However, the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to engaging in racial stereotyping dropped by nearly half between 2013 and 2018, the report said.

In addition, older respondents were more likely to engage in racial stereotyping than younger respondents.

Those from the 46 to 55 age bracket admitted the most to engaging in racial stereotyping, with almost 75 per cent of respondents somewhat agreeing, agreeing, or strongly agreeing to the statement.

The report added that this could be because younger Singaporeans were more likely to have close friends of other races, while older Singaporeans had less racially diverse networks.

Singaporeans most comfortable with Chinese and Eurasian spouses, in-laws

Apart from racial stereotyping, the survey also found that there were “distinct differences in preferences” when it came to interracial marriages.

It asked respondents to rate how comfortable they were with having someone of a different religion be their spouse or family member by marriage.

When calculating a racial group’s acceptance rate, respondents from the group in question were excluded from the data, the report said.

In general, it found that in 2018, respondents were most comfortable with Chinese spouses, in-laws, and siblings-in-law, followed by local-born Eurasians.

When it came to religion, respondents were most comfortable with those of Buddhist, Catholic, Christian or Taoist denominations, compared to those with Muslim or Hindu beliefs.