

Half of all Malays, Indians in Singapore feel discriminated against when applying for jobs: IPS survey

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A survey paper by researchers from Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has found that in 2018, about half of all Indians and Malays in Singapore felt racially discriminated against when applying for a job.

The report, which was published in July, examined the results of two surveys polling a total of 4,015 Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents on their attitudes towards issues around race and religion, such as trust, acceptance, and discrimination.

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.

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

It found that in the five years between 2013 and 2018, more Singaporeans had close friends of other races, and millennials in particular were the most open to knowing people from a different race.

Racial minorities more likely to perceive workplace discrimination

While 90 per cent of the survey respondents reported no discrimination at public institutions like hospitals, schools, social service agencies or the police, the survey did record a slight increase in perceived discrimination during job applications and promotions for racial minorities in 2018 compared to 2013.

About 52 per cent of Malay respondents said they faced racial discrimination "sometimes", "often", "very often" and "always" when applying for a job in 2018, while this figure was 47 per cent for Indian respondents.

For Chinese respondents, the figure was just 12 per cent.

Similarly, Malay and Indian survey respondents reported higher perceived levels of discrimination come promotion time.

Fifty-one per cent of Malay respondents and 45 per cent of Indian respondents said they felt racially discriminated "sometimes", "often", "very often" and "always" when it came to job promotions, compared to 14 per cent of Chinese respondents.

In general, over half the respondents still considered race as an important factor “always”, “sometimes” or “most of the time” when making hiring decisions.

Overall, the number of Malay and Indian respondents who felt discriminated against “sometimes”, “often”, “very often” or “always” rose between 2013 and 2018 by about 5.5 per cent on average.

Meanwhile, the number of Chinese respondents who felt the same fell by an average of 4 per cent.

Nevertheless, the report concluded that perceived workplace discrimination in Singapore was considered “relatively low”.

It added that the increase in perceived discrimination among minority races could be due to “greater awareness of the presence of discriminatory behaviour in the workplace”.

Respondents: Malays, Indians have to work harder to have “a decent life”

Apart from job applications and promotions, the IPS report found that respondents generally felt that Malays and Indians had to work harder than Chinese to have a “basic, decent life in Singapore”.

It did not define exactly what these terms meant.

In general, more respondents felt that all racial groups had to work harder in 2018 compared to in 2013.

But in particular, Malay and Indian respondents were more likely than Chinese respondents to feel that someone from a minority background had to work harder to achieve a decent life.

For example, about 19 per cent of Chinese respondents felt Malays had to work hard for a decent life in Singapore, while this figure was 40 per cent among Malay respondents.

But when it came to climbing the corporate ladder, about two-thirds of respondents felt that regardless of race, the same amount of work was needed for someone to reach top positions in a company.

However, among the remaining one-third of responses, Malay and Indian respondents felt it was harder for them to climb to top positions compared to someone from another race.