

All races treated fairly when using public services: study

Tan Qiuyi

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SINGAPORE: Singapore's multi-racial policies have been successful so far, according to a first-of-its-kind study on the state of racial and religious relations in the country.

The findings show that public services like schools and hospitals treat everyone fairly, and that most Singaporeans appreciate cultural diversity.

However, Singaporeans do not seem to be making enough close friends of other races, and there is a perception that minorities have to work harder to get to the top.

The survey was conducted by national racial harmony agency OnePeople.sg and the Institute of Policy Studies and it involved more than 4,000 Singaporeans of all races. Out of the 4,131 respondents, 1,736 were Indians and Malays.

The survey covers a set of 10 indicators looking at different facets of racial and religious relations in Singapore, ranging from the public service experience to the individual's colour-blindness. Each indicator has its own score.

Singapore scored 9.75 out of 10, in terms of how fairly public services like schools and hospitals treat people of different races.

Only one in 10 of minority respondents felt they were treated worse than those from other races.

Dr Mathew Mathews, research fellow at Institute of Policy Studies, said: "Policies in Singapore over the last near 50 years have pretty much safeguarded minority interests have been taken care of. They don't feel that public services are biased against them."

Singapore also did well in terms of embracing diversity, scoring 7.6 out of 10.

More than half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they could learn a lot from other racial groups.

However, the lowest score was for close inter-racial friendships, at 4.5 out of 10. Less than half of those surveyed said they have one close friend of another race.

Zainudin Nordin, chairman of OnePeople.sg, said: "We're not just talking about superficial (relationships). We're talking about having real binds, moving from tolerance towards trust. Telling us you need to have close friends is very important, because in daily life if you are not even having a close friend of a different race, how can you start to have trust, and belief, and even ensure you are able to work together in a crisis?"

Another less glowing score is how minorities feel about social exclusion - at 6.2.

About four in 10 said Malays and Indians in their organisations have to work harder to get top positions at work.

Overall, the researchers said the work for multi-racialism in Singapore is far from over.

What is missing in this survey is immigration and how it is changing racial and religious relations in Singapore. Researchers said this is something to be looked into, especially for the next round of the survey in about four or five years' time.

Apart from tracking progress, Mr Zainudin said the results will inform understanding and future discussion of racial harmony in Singapore.

The findings will be shared with policymakers, community and religious leaders, as well as employers over the next few months.