

More can be done to facilitate mixing among people of different social classes, IPS survey finds

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More effort could be made to encourage Singaporeans from different school backgrounds and housing types to mix together, according to researchers behind a Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) survey which was released on Thursday (Dec 28).

The nationwide survey, which was done in partnership with the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), asked 3,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents about the nature of their social ties.

The face-to-face survey was conducted between January 2016 and October 2017, and selected respondents through a random sampling of dwelling types.

In terms of socio-economic diversity, the survey found that respondents can easily name people they know from different gender and age groups. They are also fairly able to list people from different racial, religious and nationality groups within their network.

But those surveyed were less likely to have named people from different backgrounds across two categories - the type of school attended, that is, what the respondents believe to be "elite" and "non-elite" schools, and whether they lived in public or private housing.

"CLASS BOUNDARIES MORE SALIENT"

"The findings do show and suggest that class boundaries tend to be more salient than gender boundaries, than racial boundaries, religious boundaries. So this is one area that we could certainly devote more resources and attention to," said National University of Singapore's Associate Professor Vincent Chua, who is part of the research team.

Researchers said cultural factors could explain why there is low diversity in relation to status groups.

For example, members of one status group could also struggle to communicate with those from another status group because of differences in the way they speak English.

Types of social norms as well as areas of interests and hobbies imply that groups have less interaction with one another as they may be unsure if the members are interested in socialising across groups.

Researchers added that this is a self-reinforcing loop that requires active social programmes and social development policies to break.

"What the survey is telling us is that in terms of how people are interacting with each other, we have to take comfort that there is strength in the relationships across race, across religion, but we need re-double our efforts to encourage one another to make friends across different social backgrounds, different housing types," said IPS' Deputy Director for Research Dr Gillian Koh.

One example of a programme that encourages mixing with those outside of their usual social circle is the Outward Bound Singapore camp for students, Dr Koh said.

The new five-day adventure-based, multi-school camp for all Secondary 3 students is slated to kick off in 2020, and it aims to bring teenagers of different institutions together.

Survey respondents were also asked a list of questions about the nature of their social support networks, such as the people they spoke to regarding important matters, who they confided in when they felt down and to whom will they turn to for job information and assistance.

Respondents were then asked to provide detailed profiles for each of the persons they named.

More than 17,000 names were generated through the study. According to the results, nearly all respondents - 99 per cent - said they have someone to discuss important matters with.

The vast majority - 87 per cent - also named someone they confided in when they are feeling down. Meanwhile only 14 per cent said that they found a job with the help of someone they know.

Overall, the study found that people generally seek close kin for advice on important matters, for financial support, or as confidants, while workplace ties are important sources of social companionship as well as inter-ethnic and inter-nationality relations.

FORGING TIES HELP BUILD NATIONAL IDENTITY, PRIDE

The study also found that social domains such as education, work, voluntary association, sports and cultural participation are platforms of opportunities for people to have a more diverse network.

Analysis of the findings also showed that people who forged ties with a variety of social groups tend to have stronger sentiments of national pride, identity and social trust.

In response to the survey findings, MCCY told Channel NewsAsia that it already has several initiatives to promote social mixing.

These include arts and heritage activities in the community like PAssionArts and Arts in Your Neighbourhood.

The ministry said it will also continue to bring people with different backgrounds and abilities together through sports initiatives.