

Most feel level of prejudice in Singapore largely unchanged or eased: IPS

Olivia Siong

Channel News Asia, 28 January 2014

SINGAPORE: Most in Singapore feel the level of prejudice in the country has largely remained the same or eased over the last five years, according to the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey on race, language and religion.

The findings were presented at the Institute's annual Singapore Perspectives conference on Tuesday.

Across all categories, such as race, religion, language and gender, a large majority of respondents said they felt the same, or a lower level of prejudice in Singapore compared with five years ago.

In terms of racial prejudice, 46.8 per cent of respondents said prejudice levels were the same, while 37.2 per cent said racial prejudice was less apparent now compared to five years ago.

As for religious prejudice, 50.7 per cent said things have not changed, and 39.2 per cent said prejudice levels have gone down.

Gender-related prejudice saw the largest improvement across the categories, according to respondents.

42.9 per cent said the prejudice is less common today, compared to five years ago, while 50 per cent said things are unchanged.

A smaller group, however, felt that way about nationality-based prejudice.

40.5 per cent said nationality-based prejudice has not changed, while 27.4 per cent said it has gone down.

32.1 per cent felt that prejudice based on nationality has gone up.

Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow at Institute of Policy Studies, said: "People have accepted the fact that for many areas, when it comes to race, language, religion, we don't have a lot of prejudice in the sense that we don't over-generalise people based on that particular race, (and) we don't have very strong feelings of animosity or hatred towards them.

"More people feel that depending on what nationality you are, there's some kind of prejudice. I think that's something that people have experienced and there's been a lot of discussion of that sort.... So people are a little bit more in tune with that and clearly as the years go by, there's more and more of those feelings (so) people feel this is something to be concerned about."

As a whole, a large majority agreed that Singapore is free from racial tension, with about 86 per cent choosing strongly agree, agree or somewhat agree.

About 70 per cent also said the government is responsible for racial and religious harmony in Singapore, while about 46 per cent felt the government has done well in improving the integration of new immigrants.

However, some said the community and the individual also have a part to play in upholding racial and religious harmony. After all, the day-to-day interactions are where racial and religious harmony is lived out.

Zainudin Nordin, chairman of OnePeople.sg and MP for Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC, said: "There will always be the sense that the authority, the government could do more, or make things happen more. But I'm of the belief that the community or society who are living the daily interactions and relationship building are also a key pillar in the whole thing.

"We can set rules and regulations, we can have enforcement, but nevertheless the daily interaction can't be driven by rules and regulations alone. It is about us understanding what the common destiny that we want is, and what is the direction we want our society to be shaped upon."

4,131 Singapore residents were polled in the survey.