

## Racism still a problem for some Singaporeans, CNA-IPS survey finds

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SINGAPORE: Racism remains a problem for some Singaporeans, with one in three among minority races having felt racially discriminated against, according to a nationwide survey specially commissioned by Channel NewsAsia in partnership with the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The survey, which polled 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 21 and above, is among the few large-scale surveys on race relations in Singapore.

Conducted between June and July this year, the survey was done through a random sampling of dwelling types. Malay and Indian respondents were oversampled to ensure sufficient minority representation. Selected households completed a survey questionnaire then returned it to a surveyor at a stipulated time, to reduce the possibility of interviewer bias.

The results were then statistically weighted to ensure that the final sample resembled the national population in terms of racial composition, dwelling type and gender.

Instances where respondents felt they were treated differently than other people were more commonly felt among racial minorities, the survey found. More than half of minority respondents agreed with statements such as “people have acted as if they are better than you”.

Two-thirds of Malay and Indian respondents who had experienced such differential treatment claimed that race was the basis of such treatment. Among Malays who had perceived such differential treatment, nearly half said they were treated differently because of their religion, or because of their income or education. Among Indians, 62 per cent said they were treated differently because of their skin colour.

While many minority respondents attributed these negative experiences to race, comparatively few – about 30 per cent – felt that they had been racially discriminated against.

“This could be because the notion of ‘racial discrimination’ connotes a much more negative experience which surpasses the types of differential treatment they perceived,” said IPS senior research fellow Dr Mathew Mathews, who headed the survey.

More respondents had heard of someone else being discriminated against, with nearly half of minority respondents saying someone had shared their experiences of racial discrimination or prejudice with them.

About 60 per cent of all respondents had heard racist comments, with under half of the respondents noting that such comments were made by workplace colleagues and friends, the survey found.

Faced with such comments, the majority preferred to avoid confrontation, with 65 per cent of respondents saying that they ignored the person’s comments. About 17 per cent said they

agreed with the person making the racist comments, while 29 per cent said they argued with the person about the truth of their statement.

### **Most prefer own race for many roles**

The survey results also showed a high level of in-group preference – the majority of respondents preferred those of the same race as spouses, to help them run their business or to share personal problems with.

More Singaporeans were amenable to social interaction across racial boundaries, the survey found. For example, close to 70 per cent of Chinese respondents were open to inviting Indians and Malays to their house for a meal. Most were also amenable to Indians and Malays playing with their children or grandchildren.

More minority respondents were accepting of the Chinese compared to the Chinese accepting minority respondents for various roles and relationships. The least preference among many respondents was for new citizens, according to the poll.

“Overall, the survey findings highlight that Singaporeans espouse the values of multiracialism and try to live out these multiracial ideals,” said Dr Mathews, adding that most Singaporeans are “self-aware and acknowledge that there is some racism in the community”.

He added: “The survey findings however remind us that we need to continue to nurture positive race relations.”