

Study Confirms Discomfort Between S'poreans And New Immigrants **A Recent Study Has Confirmed Discomfort Arising From The Growing Pool Of** **New Immigrants In Singapore.**

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SINGAPORE: A recent study has confirmed discomfort arising from the growing pool of new immigrants in Singapore.

The Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony -- put together by the Institute of Policy Studies and OnePeople.sg, the national body for racial harmony -- showed that Singaporeans were less comfortable with new Singaporeans as their boss, employee, or neighbour.

The study covered some 5,000 local households.

It showed that 93.8 per cent of non-Chinese respondents are comfortable with having a Singaporean Chinese as their boss. The figure drops by nearly 20 percentage points when it comes to having a new immigrant from China as a boss.

Similarly, 84 per cent of Chinese, Malay and Eurasian Singaporeans said they are comfortable with an Indian Singaporean as their boss, but only about 74 per cent feel the same when it comes to reporting to a new immigrant from India.

Fewer Singaporeans also feel comfortable with having new immigrants as their employees or next-door neighbour.

For example, 92.7 per cent of non-Malay Singaporeans said they are comfortable with having a locally-born Malay neighbour. However, this figure drops by 5.9 percentage points when it comes to having a new Singaporean Malay, as a neighbour.

Similarly, 95.4 per cent of non-Chinese respondents said they are comfortable with having a locally-born Chinese as a neighbour. The figure drops by 14.2 percentage points when it comes to having a new immigrant from China as a neighbour.

The biggest gap came from Singaporeans' comfort level with having new immigrants making up the majority of people in the country -- only about 50 per cent of respondents are comfortable with that idea, with most preferring the status-quo when it comes to Singapore's current racial mix.

Zainudin Nordin, chairman of OnePeople.sg, said: "The reality is we are going through a major change in socio-economic situation in Singapore... There are people who are concerned about the differences that are happening because of these new arrivals. "How then do we minimise those concerns -- so rather than allowing people to do nasty things, allowing for people to take negative actions, allowing discrimination and even insults from

happening in public places -- how then do we now make the effort to ensure people come close together.

"The new arrivals and Singaporeans need to realise that we have a common destiny. That common destiny must be the reason why we need to work together and slowly we believe and build the trust. All of us must realise that this tension does exist and all of us must understand that we should not allow this to become a problem for us in the future, for the country to move to a better Singapore."

Participants at a forum on race and religious relations warn of social enclaves based on nationalities, forming in Singapore. They said new immigrants need to get out of their comfort zone, the same way Singaporeans too need to work on inter-racial ties.

Kwok Kian Woon, a forum participant and Associate Professor of Sociology at the Nanyang Technological University, said: "In the course of living together, how we can go beyond our comfort zones and participate in and take an interest in, as well as learn from each other.

"On the one hand, there are times when one feels that one needs to retreat in one's comfort zone and not deal with the messiness of the chaos of living in such a culturally diverse world.

"On the other hand, there are many possibilities in discovering even more about ourselves by looking through the lens of others."

That goes beyond just racial and religious tolerance, which experts said scores well in Singapore. It was the relations, they said, that matters.

Only 45 per cent of respondents said they have at least one close friend of another race. A "close friend" was defined as a friend they can call upon in times of need.

Trust in minority races also seems to be an issue -- about 63 per cent of non-Chinese think that more than half of Singaporean Chinese can be trusted to help when faced with a national crisis like SARS.

The figure dips to about 50 per cent when it comes to a Chinese trusting a Malay, Indian or Eurasian.

Mr Zainudin said: "We know that for us to be able to move forward, there needs to be some form of real action from individual, from society, from community.

"We believe that from the data that we have acquired, we would like to share with all stakeholders and our partners, that this effort needs to be done together -- be it, in providing more platforms for interaction, more platforms for people to converse and discuss about real issues.

Mr Zainudin added that organisations need "to be able to identify key actions that can be done - - be it allowing people to knock at their neighbours' door, saying hello to people, making friends at the workplace. Being good friends in schools so they can build that relationship all the way to NS.

"So building relationships and having close friends is about us building that trust and over time, we need to work together in that direction."

The study is the first in Singapore to study issues of race and religion. It is meant to serve as a benchmark to measure the state of race and religious relations here today and in future, as a scorecard to measure how far attitudes have changed.