

Help lower-income, less-educated non-Muslims improve understanding: Report

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Helping lower-income, less-educated non-Muslims get a better understanding of other races and religions would pay dividends for the whole of society, according to a new report.

It suggested that national education programmes or regular sports events in housing estates could be tailored for this group, which tends to have fewer interactions with people from other races and religions.

The Institute of Policy Studies made the recommendations in the report yesterday, after its research noted that Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if a terror attack here were to be carried out by foreign Muslims than if the foreign attackers were Buddhists, Christians or Hindus.

The report, which analysed a survey from last year of just over 2,000 respondents, looked at how Singaporeans would react following a terror attack perpetrated by groups that used religious labels.

It found that lower-income and less-educated non-Muslims were more likely to exhibit Islamophobia if overseas Muslim extremists carried out an attack here.

This group has more racially homogeneous social networks which, in turn, drastically reduce opportunities for interracial interactions.

"This also limits the potential for avenues to encourage a sense of empathy for people of other races and/or religions," the report added.

It suggested that aspects of school courses that teach multicultural values could be applied to programmes tailored for this group.

The findings suggested that even casual cross-racial ties, such as attending a wedding or celebration of someone of a different race, in the previous two years are enough to enhance trust among different groups.

Forum theatre, where members of the audience participate in the performance, could be introduced in primary and secondary schools to encourage open dialogue about the sensitive issues of race and ethnicity.

Mr Abbas Ali Mohamed Irshad, 29, founder of inter-religious non-profit group Roses of Peace, said that in his experience, people of the older generation are more concerned about bread-and-butter issues, compared with younger people, who are more likely to attend interfaith activities. "Such activities will need to engage more people in the heartland, and in their mother tongues, so that we can reach out to those with no access to such interfaith or interracial programmes."