

## **Race not an issue in Singapore, study finds** **But most Singaporeans do not have close friends of another race**

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MOST Singaporeans say that race is not a factor in determining who gets promoted at work or served at public facilities here, according to a new study.

But while the survey found that many believe all races are generally treated fairly by society, it also notes that more than one in two Singaporeans do not have a close friend of another race.

Just 45 per cent of the 4,131 Singaporeans interviewed have such friends, an attribute that is essential for racial harmony, said the study released yesterday.

It is the first such study carried out to gauge the state of racial and religious harmony in Singapore by asking people for their views on 10 areas.

Overall, the results are positive, indicating that people of different races and religions get along.

The study's authors attributed it to government policies that foster social harmony. For instance, eight out of 10 Malays and Indians do not feel they are treated worse than other races in the workplace. And nine out of 10 feel there is no discrimination when they use government services, like hospitals.

Also, the vast majority of Singaporeans take online racist or offensive postings in their stride, such as when former NTUC staffer Amy Cheong ranted on Facebook about Malay void deck weddings.

Fewer than 10 per cent say they are often upset by incidents that insult their religious beliefs or racial customs.

These are among the key findings of the study carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and racial harmony advocacy group OnePeople.sg.

The study ranked the 10 indicators with scores, from one (worst) to 10 (perfect). The score was above five for all except for interracial friendships, at 4.51.

Despite the positive picture, IPS and OnePeople.sg said racial harmony remains a work in progress.

OnePeople.sg chairman Zainudin Nordin cited especially inter-racial friendships.

Such close-knit relationships form the backbone of racial harmony, the Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC MP said at a press conference.

"It could be as simple as going into a lift and not looking down, but making an effort to chat with the neighbour of another race and deepening that relationship," he added.

The study found that two in 10 Chinese have a Malay or Indian friend, while nearly two-thirds of Malays and Indians have at least one Chinese friend.

Dr Mathew Mathews, the study's principal investigator and an IPS research fellow, attributed the poor score in inter-racial friendships to the population demographics.

The Chinese form almost 75 per cent, a vast majority compared to Malays (13 per cent) and Indians (9 per cent).

As a result, the Chinese can go about their daily routine without needing to meet someone from a minority race, Dr Mathews said.

Sociologist Tan Ern Ser, who was not involved in the study, agreed but said economic status could also be a factor.

"We need to promote inter-racial collaborations on projects of common interest and under conditions of equality," he added.

But Dr Norman Vasu of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies noted that the other findings show the poor friendship score has not hindered inter-racial relations.