

Religion 'Still Helps Shape Views On Morality'

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WHEN it comes to issues such as sex, marriage and gambling, religion still plays an important part in shaping what people perceive as acceptable behaviour, an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey on religion has found.

For example, about 57 per cent of respondents across all religious groups said it was wrong for those who are not married to have sex. Among those with no religion, a smaller number, about 37 per cent, felt the same way.

This indicates that people's perceptions about morality and their religious values are often intertwined, said IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews, who led the survey.

"With people who identify with particular religions... it is more likely you will feel a strong sense of importance of certain kinds of values, and you will police it and it will reinforce your ideas of (morality)," he said.

Between different religious groups, there can be different ideas of what is considered right and wrong.

On cohabitation before marriage, about 60 per cent of Protestant Christian and 75 per cent of Muslim respondents said it was wrong. Among Buddhist respondents, about 32 per cent felt the same way.

Dr Mathew said that on some issues, religious beliefs play out more as there are stronger restrictions, especially for monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam that believe in one all-powerful God.

Yet, the findings of the survey also revealed a sense of a "shared consensus" about morality here, he said.

This can be seen especially when respondents were asked about issues such as same-sex relations. On this count, those with no religion were almost as "conservative" as those with a religion.

For example, 65 per cent of them frowned upon homosexual sex, not far off from the 78 per cent of those with a religion who also did so. And 70 per cent felt it was wrong for married people to have sex with someone other than their spouse. Among those with a religion, about 80 per cent said it was wrong.

Dr Mathew put this down to culture, and what some have termed "Asian conservativeness".

Norms, he said, should be informed by such "universal principles" rather than by religious morality for a secular society to function well.

"It is important for those who feel strongly about their religious beliefs and values to try and put them within the broader framework of secular society," he said.