

Young Chinese, Indians less likely to understand key Malay traits

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Eating halal food, wearing the tudung as well as avoiding alcohol and not touching dogs are perceived as important traits of being a Malay in Singapore.

But when it comes to understanding these key facets of the community, younger Chinese and Indian respondents of a recent study were found to be less likely to understand their importance.

For instance, on the point of not touching dogs, just 49 per cent of Chinese and 46 per cent of Indians aged 21 to 25 said it was important for the Malay community, compared with 74 per cent of Malays in the same age group. The new study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and Channel NewsAsia included 440 Malays out of 2,020 respondents.

Researchers said this lack of inter-cultural understanding among young Singaporeans may be a result of fewer interactions and friendships across racial lines, adding that it is a trend that "bears watching".

IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews said: "One takeaway is that while we care about our own ethnic identities, we need to learn how to respect and understand the important (ethnic) markers of other groups."

The study also showed that younger Malay respondents felt less strongly about some of these ethnic markers compared to their seniors.

For instance, 72 per cent of Malay respondents aged 21 to 25 indicated that wearing the tudung is "somewhat important" or "important", compared with 93 per cent of their counterparts aged 56 to 65.

In addition, and almost unanimously, 93 per cent of the Malays surveyed perceived being Muslim as at least somewhat important to their ethnic identity.

This sentiment towards religion was stronger among the Malays polled, compared with the 70.6 per cent of Indian respondents in the case of Hinduism, and the 37.4 per cent of Chinese respondents in the case of Buddhism or Taoism.

And when it came to inter-cultural romances and dating outside their ethnic groups, Malays indicated that they were comfortable with their offspring going out with Chinese and Caucasians. This opinion was mirrored by the Indian community. For instance, 91.2 per cent of Malays in the 26 to 35 age group were comfortable with their offspring dating Chinese, compared with 85.7 per cent for dating Caucasians and 81.3 per cent for dating Indians.

Among Indians in the same age category, 89.3 per cent were comfortable with their offspring dating Chinese, compared with 87.5 per cent for Caucasians and 75.4 per cent for Malays.

However, the converse was true for the Chinese, with 74 per cent saying they were more comfortable with their offspring dating Caucasians, compared with 59 per cent and 54 per cent for Malays and Indians, respectively.