

Low interaction among citizens and foreigners

Ng Jing Yng

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SINGAPORE - They may live next door to each other but a local study has found that nearly half the local-born citizens it surveyed do not interact with their immigrant neighbours.

This finding was shared at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) conference on integration yesterday by IPS research fellow Mathew Mathews, who surveyed 888 local-born Singaporeans and 937 foreign-born Singaporeans in 2010.

Among the local-born citizens, 48 per cent said that they have had no contact with an immigrant. The two groups of participants also differed on who should take charge in initiating interaction: 78.6 per cent of local-born Singaporeans felt immigrants should take the lead but only 37 per cent of immigrants felt likewise.

The study, which also included 47 in-depth interviews, found that some local-born citizens felt there is a lack of neighbourliness among Singaporeans and that they did not view the neighbourhood as a place for integration compared with places like churches and schools.

The immigrants, meanwhile, said there are existing stereotypes that discourage interaction between local-born and foreign-born citizens.

Based on his findings, Dr Mathews recommended "broad-based programmes to address neighbourliness despite of immigrant status".

At schools, however, a separate 2010 study by independent researcher Joy Chew found that over 80 per cent of students surveyed had positive sentiment towards their international peers.

Most of the 139 students from secondary and primary schools made friends with their foreign counterparts in less than a month and found it beneficial to have international classmates as they added diversity and provided motivation to work harder.

Dr Chew, who was formerly the head of policy and leadership studies at the National Institute of Education, said that "strong peer cultures (in schools) feed on students' desire for friendship, academic cooperation and competition".