

Racism still an issue in Singapore today, say most polled

Laura Philomin

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SINGAPORE — Racism still persists in Singapore, going by a survey on race relations commissioned by Channel NewsAsia and the Institute of Policy Studies, where almost half of the 2,000 respondents felt it is still an important problem today.

Results from the survey showed that 46 per cent disagreed with the statement that racism was a problem of the past and not an important one in the present time.

More than half of the respondents also agreed that being part of the majority race is an advantage in Singapore, but 67 per cent disagreed that the needs of the majority race should be looked after first, before the needs of the minority races.

Almost three quarters (74 per cent) of respondents perceived themselves as hardly racist or not at all, but were more likely to notice racism in others.

Almost 40 per cent of respondents reported that their close friends were at least mildly racist. More Chinese respondents (42 per cent) reported feeling this way, compared to Malay (34 per cent) and Indian respondents (22 per cent).

They were also more likely to judge others as more racist than their close circle of family and friends. In general, 56 and 53 per cent of respondents perceived most Chinese and Malay Singaporeans to be at least mildly racist respectively. However, 49 per cent of respondents felt the same way about most Indian Singaporeans.

Six in 10 respondents said they had heard racist comments, mostly from workplace colleagues and friends. On how they responded to such comments, 63 per cent said they would ignore them while only 29 per cent indicating they argued with the person about the truth of the statement.

On what constitutes racism, about 65 per cent considered not sitting beside someone of a different race as racist. Outright discrimination — such as not hiring someone based on one's race or religion, or making generalisations about people of a particular race as being "dirty, lazy or too money-minded" — was considered racist and never acceptable by 70 per cent of respondents.

In comparison, less than half deemed it racist for a person to not have friends of a different race.

Racial minorities also reported to perceive more instances of differential treatment, with over half of them agreeing they had had people act as if they were better than them in the last two years. Two-thirds of Malay and Indian respondents also thought that they were treated differently because of their race.

Over 40 per cent of Malay respondents indicated they were also treated differently on the basis of religion and income or education. Six in 10 Indian respondents felt they were treated differently because of their skin colour.

When asked about how they responded to these experiences, more than half ignored the remarks, but 49 per cent of Malay and 37 per cent of Indian respondents said they worked harder to prove the detractors wrong.

Even though respondents from minority races attributed negative experiences they had encountered to race, comparatively fewer said they had been racially discriminated against.

Almost half of the Malay and Indian respondents said they had heard someone talk about racial discrimination or prejudice, but only a third of them had felt racially discriminated against.