

## #trending: Singapore netizens say cost of eating out has risen, disagree with findings of food prices survey

**Lee WenXin**

**Today Online**, 14 March 2023

- An Institute of Policy Studies' survey found that prices of food outlets such as hawker centres and food courts have remained mostly the same between late 2022 and early 2023, after the GST increase
- Online users disputed the results of the survey and questioned its accuracy, with many claiming that food prices have risen
- Stall owners surveyed by IPS indicated that they may raise prices in the future
- IPS clarified that the survey only looked at food price increases following the GST hike, between September to November 2022 and January to February this year

SINGAPORE — A survey that found that many food stalls did not raise prices after the recent Goods and Services Tax (GST) increase has been disputed by some online users, who claimed that food prices were firmly on the rise.

The study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) found that many hawker centre, food court and kopitiam stall owners did not raise prices between late last year and early this year despite rising operational costs.

Even among those who did raise prices, the increase was a small margin of not more than 30 cents for each food item, the IPS survey showed. The findings were released on Monday (March 13).

The online community, however, disagreed with the research conclusions, with some calling into question the accuracy of the study.

An Instagram user on TODAY's post of the IPS study wrote: "Last time a kopitiam bento set could go for \$5.50, now \$7; coffee or Milo around \$1.80, now \$2 plus; is this research legit?"

Another wrote: "It's no way close to reality. Go to all the schools and ask the children to write the prices of all their daily meals including drinks they had for a month outside of schools, then come back with the data."

Social media users also noted instances of so-called "shrinkflation" — when prices of goods remain the same but the quantity decreases — which may have resulted in the survey results being inaccurate.

One Instagram user said: "The portion sizes are now so small that you can probably take these 'findings' with a pinch of salt."

A Facebook user agreed: "Cost is one thing but size or volume can be another. Many could have reduced (amount) to keep price low but consumers may need to eat double to fill up."

Online users also lamented that wage increases cannot match the rising cost of living, especially with another impending GST hike at the start of 2024.

"I can imagine prices will increase another 10 per cent when GST increases again at the end of the year. The thing is, my salary only increased 3.6 per

Some people shared their cost-saving tips with fellow Singaporeans.

"Personally, if you hunt around, you can do lower than \$15 a day," one wrote.

The commenter said that three curry puffs costing \$1 each would do for breakfast.

"A can of luncheon meat and baked beans cost \$2.50 and 92 cents respectively. Will do for lunch. Dinner of two vegetables and one meat will be under \$4."

### **IPS CLARIFIES DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY THAT WAS USED**

IPS conducted the survey by collecting the first round of data from September to November 2022, before the GST rose from 7 to 8 per cent in January this year.

They then collated prices from January to February after the GST increase and compared them with the prices before the tax increase.

Some stall owners have indicated that they have not raised prices for the time being, but might consider price increases in the future, IPS said, adding that the prices studied were taken off menus, which may or may not be updated to reflect real-time prices.

The prices were also taken from food establishments that were seen as more affordable such as food courts, hawker centres and kopitiam. Prices of restaurants or food delivery services are likely to increase exponentially, IPS added.

In response to queries from TODAY, researchers clarified that their study only looked at increases following the GST hike and not increases owing to other factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic or the Russia-Ukraine war.

They also noted that their study had specified that the quality and quantity of food were not accounted for, and that the difference in prices could have reflected variations in these aspects.

As to whether the study had accounted for price differences due to the type of food establishment, they said that they had used a standardised criteria to classify establishment types to reflect difference in food prices.

For example, hawker centres were defined in the study as "open-air, standalone complexes with many food and drink stalls" while food courts were defined as air-conditioned food establishments.

The researchers reiterated that the focus of the study was to provide an "in-depth regional analysis of food prices" at the time of data collection, which was between September to November last year, and not on price differences between 2022 and 2023.

The cost of eating out here is likely to continue to go up relative to individual and household incomes, IPS warned.

Hawker food may no longer remain as cheap compared to other meal options in the current economic climate.