

4 in 10 Singaporeans prejudge others based on race: study

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At least four out of every 10 Singaporeans have the tendency to decide what a person's behaviour and views will be like based on their race, before they even interact with them.

This was one of a host of findings revealed at an Institute of Policy Studies and OnePeople.sg forum on indicators of racial and religious harmony on Wednesday morning. The results were gleaned from Singapore's very first study on the state of racial and religious relations among its people.

Beyond the 46 per cent of some 4,109 respondent Singaporeans who said they "agree" or "strongly agree" to the statement "When I know what a person's race is, I have a good idea of what some of their behaviour and views are like", a further 35.6 per cent of respondents said they "somewhat agreed" with the line.

Nanyang Technological University associate sociology professor Kwok Kian Woon, one of four panellists invited to speak on the findings, had harsh words in response to this.

"Learning takes effort. Stereotyping is the laziest thing to do," he said, explaining that the learning of inter-cultural skills is an integral part of everyday life in Singapore. "And focusing on colour and thinking that once you look at a colour you know everything about that human being across you, that is really, for me, something that is against everything we know about what is good in Singapore."

This, taken in conjunction with a first round of findings released in the same study in mid-July, seems to serve as sobering reminder that Singapore has not yet arrived at a place where its society has become "colour-blind" — the idea that race or religious identity does not affect how people interact with one another, or have any bearing on how others presuppose a person's behaviour or suitability for a job.

Issues at the workplace

The study's findings on perceived discrimination at the workplace are also telling: 35 per cent of the survey's Malay respondents said they sometimes felt like they were discriminated against at work. About 29 per cent of the Indian respondents echoed their sentiment, as did 28 per cent of Eurasians and "Others", as compared to 16 per cent of Chinese respondents.

Figures increase more dramatically when it comes to applying for a job or being considered for promotion — nearly half (48 per cent) of Malay, and 41 per cent of Indian and Other-race respondents said they occasionally felt discrimination when it comes to applying for jobs, as compared to 16 per cent of Chinese participants.

For job promotions, while 17 per cent of Chinese sometimes felt discriminated against, 44 per cent of Malays, 40 per cent of Indians and 38 per cent of Eurasians and Others felt they sometimes were judged by race.

IPS research fellow Mathew Mathews, who led and presented the findings of the study, did qualify, however, that a substantial amount of survey participants who chose "sometimes" mapped to another part of the study where they said they could "possibly" have been or were "not sure" if they had been discriminated against by race.

Under another indicator titled "Perception of Social Exclusion", it was found that where 10.6 per cent of respondents felt Chinese people have to work harder or much harder than other races to have a decent life here, 17.6 per cent of Indian and 19.6 per cent of Malays faced the same difficulties as compared to Singaporeans of other races.

In order to reach top positions in companies and organisations, the perceived difficulty increased — 16.5 per cent felt the Chinese have to work harder or much harder, while the figures for Indians and Malays stood at 30.8 per cent and 36 per cent respectively.

The study, conducted over five months from late last year to the middle of this year, was jointly conducted between OnePeople.sg and IPS. Read more about the earlier part of its results released in July [here](#).