

Most don't expect abuse against a community after attack

Picture the scenario: A foreign extremist organisation, made up of members of one religious group, has launched a terror attack in Singapore. Chaos ensues, and there is a heightened level of suspicion.

Would Singaporeans whose religion is implicated in the attack worry about a backlash against them by people of other religions?

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) report showed that four in five Muslims and non-Muslims feel

there would be either no abuse, or very few and isolated incidents of verbal abuse.

One-third of Singaporeans would even be proactive in expressing solidarity with those whose religion was implicated.

Released yesterday, the study also found that after an attack, younger respondents were less likely to be suspicious of strangers of the same religion as the overseas extremist organisation that

carried out the terror attack.

The IPS report follows a survey of just over 2,000 Singaporean respondents conducted last year.

The study aims to understand how Singaporeans would react following a terror attack in the country perpetrated by organisations that use religious labels, namely Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu groups.

Respondents were told to imagine that news reports had emerged

of a bomb explosion at an MRT station platform, with four hypothetical scenarios – that it was carried out by either an extremist Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim overseas organisation.

The study found that Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if it had been carried out by a foreign Muslim group than if a Buddhist, Christian or Hindu group had been behind it.

The study found that most Singa-

poreans feel it would take two to three years for the country to recover from an attack.

Asked how long it would take for most Singaporeans to feel united as one people, Muslim respondents indicated 3.62 years on average, the longest among the four religions.

"The findings suggest that Muslims may be more conscious of the potential backlash and suspicions that would inevitably arise within Singapore as a result of a terror attack," the researchers said.

However, they added it was noteworthy that a third of non-Muslims would be proactive in expressing solidarity in such circumstances,

and they would even let others know they do not associate Muslims with such terror attacks.

But few would join a campaign or event that recognises that people of a particular religion are not the cause of the terror attack.

About a quarter of non-Muslims surveyed would do so, in the case of an attack by foreign Muslim groups.

"Still, it is encouraging that a quarter of non-Muslims would go out of their way to join such activities to show their support for Muslim Singaporeans," the researchers said.

Lim Min Zhang



Police ushering library users to safety during anti-terror drill Exercise Heartbeat at the National Library Building yesterday. In analysing a survey from last year of just over 2,000 Singaporeans, researchers also found that older and less well-off people were less likely to retain trust in and openness to Muslims in the event of an attack by a foreign extremist Muslim group. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

SEE HOME B6

Interracial mingling vital in weathering terror strike: Study

S'poreans would display stronger negative reactions if attack had been by Muslims

Lim Min Zhang

In the event of a terror attack here, Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if it had been carried out by a foreign extremist Muslim organisation than if Buddhists, Christians or Hindus had been behind it, a survey has found.

In analysing a survey from last year of just over 2,000 Singaporeans, researchers from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) also found that older and less well-off people were less likely to retain trust in and openness to Muslims in such circumstances.

However, non-Muslims who had more interracial interaction were more likely to express solidarity with Muslims after an attack, which highlights the "importance of providing ample avenues for interracial mingling", the researchers said.

The report, released by IPS yesterday, is believed to be the first public

study of its kind to examine perceptions of different religious groups after a hypothetical terror attack.

The report – titled *Community Relations Amidst The Threat Of Terror* – is authored by IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews and co-authored by IPS research associate Leonard Lim and IPS research assistant Shanthini Selvarajan.

The Singaporeans were asked to respond to news of a bomb exploding on an MRT station platform which killed 15 people and wounded 40.

They were further told that the authorities had confirmed the identity of those behind the terror attack, and given four scenarios of the foreign extremist organisation involved – that it was Buddhist, Muslim, Christian or Hindu.

If the attack was by a Muslim group, 48 per cent of respondents were quite or very likely to be suspicious of a Muslim stranger walking around in their neighbour-

hood, compared with 40 per cent for a Buddhist or Hindu stranger and 35 per cent for a Christian stranger if the attack was by the corresponding group.

Less-educated respondents, as well as those less well off as measured by housing type, were also more likely to show less trust and openness after an attack.

Across most of the survey findings, those residing in one- and two-room Housing Board flats fared differently from the rest.

"This is indicative of the exclusion those at the extreme end of the socio-economic status may be experiencing, which fuels their prejudices and biases," said the authors, adding that this minority group may not be receiving full access to programmes that promote multiculturalism and interracial interaction.

The study also found "substantial levels of mistrust" between races in Singapore, especially by the majority Chinese community in relation to the minority Malays and Indians.

This was measured by asking the respondents what proportion of people of each race they thought

would return their wallet if they had dropped it in a shopping mall.

A majority of Chinese respondents said they could not trust Indian and Malay people to hand it back; they were more likely to trust a fellow Chinese person to return it.

But non-Muslims who had more interracial interaction in the previous two years – such as friendships or shared cultural experiences with Malays – were less likely to display Islamophobic tendencies after an attack by a foreign Muslim group.

They were also more likely to express solidarity with Muslims after an attack.

The researchers added: "This suggests that efforts to deepen understanding and integration among different communities in Singapore, through events in the grassroots, schools and other such organisations, should continue as the country seeks to build up social ballast before any terror attack."

Mr Murali Pillai, deputy chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Home Affairs and Law, said: "The study, at face value, provides further evidence of what we all fear – that terrorism has the potential to tear apart our society and unwind all the progress we have made to strengthen multi-racial and religious harmony over the past decades.

"This was a point observed in Parliament last year when MPs unanimously passed a motion to affirm our longstanding principle of multiculturalism as a bulwark against the challenge posed by terrorism."

The survey of Singapore citizens, conducted by consumer research firm Media Research Consultants and funded by MediaCorp, questioned 1,016 Chinese people, 504 Malays and 511 whose ethnicity was classified as Indian or others.

mzlim@sph.com.sg

In the event of a terror attack...

Respondents who are likely to be suspicious towards those of a particular religion, after an attack by terrorists claiming to be of that religion

Muslims	48%
Buddhists	40%
Christians	35%
Hindus	40%

Respondents who would let others know that they do not associate people of that particular religion with terror attacks

Non-Muslims, when the attack was by a foreign Muslim group	34%
Non-Buddhists, when the attack was by a foreign Buddhist group	34%
Non-Christians, when the attack was by a foreign Christian group	32%
Non-Hindus, when the attack was by a foreign Hindu group	30%

Respondents who would join a campaign or event that recognises that people of that particular religion are not the cause of the attack

Non-Muslims, when the attack was by a foreign Muslim group	25%
Non-Buddhists, when the attack was by a foreign Buddhist group	33%
Non-Christians, when the attack was by a foreign Christian group	30%
Non-Hindus, when the attack was by a foreign Hindu group	26%

Respondents from various religions who are quite or very likely to speak to people of other religions to clarify that the terrorist does not represent their own community

Buddhists	34%
Christians	43%
Muslims	50%
Hindus	42%
No religion	40%

Respondents from various religions who are quite or very likely to help people of other religions who have been affected by the terror attack carried out by a terrorist from the same religion as theirs

Buddhists	59%
Christians	77%
Muslims	75%
Hindus	76%
No religion	64%

Source: INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES REPORT STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Help lower-income, less-educated non-Muslims improve understanding: Report

Helping lower-income, less-educated non-Muslims get a better understanding of other races and religions would pay dividends for the whole of society, according to a new report.

It suggested that national education programmes or regular sports events in housing estates could be tailored for this group, which tends to have fewer interactions with people from other races and religions.

The Institute of Policy Studies made the recommendations in the report yesterday, after its research noted that Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if a terror attack here were to be carried out by foreign Muslims than if the foreign attackers were Buddhists, Christians or Hindus.

The report, which analysed a survey from last year of just over 2,000 respondents, looked at how Singa-

poreans would react following a terror attack perpetrated by groups that used religious labels.

It found that lower-income and less-educated non-Muslims were more likely to exhibit Islamophobia if overseas Muslim extremists carried out an attack here.

This group has more racially homogeneous social networks which, in turn, drastically reduce opportunities for interracial interactions.

"This also limits the potential for avenues to encourage a sense of empathy for people of other races and/or religions," the report added.

It suggested that aspects of school courses that teach multicultural values could be applied to programmes tailored for this group.

The findings suggested that even casual cross-racial ties, such as attending a wedding or celebration of someone of a different race, in the

previous two years are enough to enhance trust among different groups.

Forum theatre, where members of the audience participate in the performance, could be introduced in primary and secondary schools to encourage open dialogue about the sensitive issues of race and ethnicity.

Mr Abbas Ali Mohamed Irshad, 29, founder of inter-religious non-profit group Roses of Peace, said that in his experience, people of the

older generation are more concerned about bread-and-butter issues, compared with younger people, who are more likely to attend interfaith activities. "Such activities will need to engage more people in the heartland, and in their mother tongues, so that we can reach out to those with no access to such interfaith or interracial programmes."

Lim Min Zhang