

Racial, religious harmony in Singapore improving: Survey

More S'poreans have close friends of other races

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More Singaporeans now have close friends of another race compared with five years ago, and are more trusting of those of different races or religion.

Inter-racial and inter-religious harmony in Singapore is improving, based on a survey of citizens and permanent residents last year.

But the survey also revealed an uptick in minority groups perceiving workplace discrimination, for instance when applying for jobs. Researchers say this may be due to greater awareness of the presence of discriminatory behaviour in the workplace and how this might have affected some minorities.

The survey findings from a study of race, religion and language by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) were released yesterday. It received support from racial harmony advocacy group OnePeople.sg.

In addition, most, including minorities, perceive little to no discrimination and social exclusion in public spaces here – an important sign of racial and religious harmony, they said.



Pupils of Westwood Primary School celebrating Racial Harmony Day at school on July 22. TNP FILE PHOTO

Researchers had polled 4,015 people between August last year and January, asking for their views about race and religion in 10 areas. A similar study was done in 2013.

In last year's study, researchers found that a higher proportion of Singaporeans have close friends of another race than in 2013.

Thirty per cent of Chinese respondents had a close Malay friend last year, up from 23 per cent in 2013 – an indication of higher levels of racial harmony and inter-racial interaction, the researchers noted.

Likewise, 77.2 per cent of Indian respondents said they

had a close Chinese friend last year, up from 63 per cent in 2013.

Fewer people also stereotyped a person based on race, the study found. In 2013, 46.8 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that race is indicative of another person's views or behaviour. This has dropped to 35.2 per cent.

When asked whether people from a different race or religion could be trusted to help in a national crisis such as a Severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) outbreak, more said yes.

The study found that between the 2013 and 2018 surveys, trust in all races increased. For

instance, 61.3 per cent of respondents trust "all or mostly all", or "more than half", of Singapore Malays to help in a crisis, up from 52.7 per cent previously.

In a similar vein, 63.1 per cent of respondents said they could trust Singapore Indians to help in a crisis, up from 54.1 per cent.

On the whole, Singaporeans were positive about the level of racial and religious harmony here, with more than nine in 10 saying it was either moderate, high or very high.

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