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A study by Singapore Management University senior lecturer of statistics Rosie Ching and her undergraduate class found that public toilet hygiene has fallen since 2016. (Photo: Kaustubh Krishna Kaslikar)

Public toilet hygiene standards have fallen at Singapore's hawker centres and coffee shops, according to a new study released by the Singapore Management University (SMU) on Tuesday (May 26).

Hawker centre toilets are "significantly dirtier" while coffee shop toilets have stayed "dirty and largely unchanged" compared to findings from a similar study conducted four years ago, SMU said in a press release.

The latest study, dubbed Project Waterloo, was conducted by SMU senior lecturer in statistics Rosie Ching and a class of 157 undergraduate students. Ms Ching also led the earlier study in 2016.

This year's study was based on fieldwork in 104 hawker centres and 1,181 coffee shops carried out by the students between January and February.

They scored the public toilets against a Toilet Cleanliness Index comprising more than 100 attributes – such as sinks, toilet paper and ventilation – that was first developed for the 2016 study.

On a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being the cleanest, coffee shop toilets scored 46.35, making them "significantly dirtier" than hawker centre toilets, which scored 58.23.

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Compared to the 2016 survey, the sharpest drop was in toilet bowl cleanliness. The study also noted a correlation with proximity to cooking facilities, as toilets located closer to such facilities tended to score lower on the cleanliness index.

"It was ... disheartening to see statistical analyses reveal a marked regression in toilet hygiene from 2016, and furthermore, in almost every single attribute of toilet cleanliness on average," Ms Ching said.

"We absolutely need to take greater care of the well-being of our toilet cleaners as well, given the daily conditions they face in tackling dirty toilets."

Member of Parliament and Mayor of North-West Community Development Council Teo Ho Pin, who was the patron for the study, said that poor hygiene in public toilets has "serious impact on the health and well-being of our people, especially seniors".

According to the latest survey, the dirtiest public toilets were located in Tuas, Telok Blangah and Bukit Batok coffee shops and hawker centres. The cleanest toilets were in Marina South, Tanglin and Changi.



A group of 157 Singapore Management University undergraduates conducted the nationwide study of public toilet hygiene standards in coffee shops and food centres. (Photo: Samuel Low)

## POOR PERCEPTIONS

This year's study also surveyed more than 8,000 food centre customers and workers about their perceptions of public toilet cleanliness.

Of nearly 6,000 customers interviewed at the food centres where they were eating, more than a quarter said they would not use public toilets in coffee shops and hawker centres.

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More than three in five customers felt a "moderate to a complete overhaul" of toilet cleanliness was necessary.

While almost all of the more than 2,000 coffee shop and hawker centre workers interviewed said that they used the toilets there, more than half said there was a need to improve the state of the toilets.

Public Hygiene Council chairman Edward De Silva, whose organisation supported the study, said the survey findings were "not surprising".

"They reflect the mentality of our citizens and our over-reliance on toilet cleaners. How to redress this mindset is the most challenging task," Mr De Silva said. "At the same time, the survey indicates the onus is on the owners of these premises to improve the toilet hygiene standards."

World Toilet Organization founder and CEO Jack Tan advised the public to "act by avoiding coffee shops with dirty toilets", as a way to "motivate" them to keep their toilets clean.

"I hope we will be able to spur a new wave in taking care of and having pride in our public toilets in our eating places. Only then will Singapore be truly a first-class country," said Project Waterloo participant Prabhudeva Krishnan, a first-year student at SMU School of Social Sciences.

Source: CNA/dv(cy)