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Headline: Most Singaporeans too reliant on cleaners, unwilling to pick up trash from the ground: Study

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Singapore residents are “substantially” reliant on cleaning services, with just under half saying in a survey that they are prepared to lift a finger and dispose of an empty plastic bottle on the floor.

The survey by the Singapore Management University (SMU), which examined public satisfaction with the country’s cleanliness, also found that more Singaporeans were satisfied with the level of public cleanliness in the latest survey than the year before.

The study, which was released on Friday (Sept 18), was led by sociology professor Paulin Tay Straughan from SMU and Dr Mathew Mathews, a senior research fellow from the Institute of Policy Studies at the National University of Singapore.

A total of 1,716 Singaporeans and permanent residents aged 21 and above were surveyed from December 2019 to April 2020.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

When asked what they would do if they encountered an overflowing bin:

- Over 90 per cent of respondents said residents should dispose of their litter elsewhere instead of adding to the full bin
- But 86 per cent also said they expected cleaners to clear the trash throughout the day to prevent the bins from overflowing

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- Over 90 per cent said that the authorities should demand higher standards of cleaning contractors to make sure the bins were cleared promptly

While almost all respondents believed that residents should be encouraged to keep their neighbourhood clean, fewer than half said they would volunteer with community clean-up groups.

Only 48 per cent said that they would dispose of an empty plastic bottle lying on the ground close to the bin. This figure dropped to 27 per cent if there was no bin nearby.

While over 90 per cent of respondents said they would confront a friend or family member who had littered, only 22 per cent said they would do so if it was a stranger.

When it came to returning their trays at food establishments:

- Close to 90 per cent of respondents said they did so after meals
- But 36 per cent felt that it was not clear if trays should be returned
- 37 per cent felt that it was the cleaners' responsibility to do so

The researchers suggested that cleaners limit their responsibilities to manning tray return stations and ensuring the overall cleanliness of the food outlet. This would remove the ambiguity over whether patrons should clear their own trays, they said.

CLEANLINESS OF PUBLIC SPACES

Residents had a high level of satisfaction — 93 per cent — with the cleanliness of public spaces in 2019, a 9-percentage-point increase from the year before.

There was also a substantial increase in satisfaction with the cleanliness at specific venues:

- 88.5 per cent were satisfied with the cleanliness at food and beverage outlets such as coffeeshops this year, up 17.1 percentage points from the year before
- 87.9 per cent were satisfied with the cleanliness of public spaces after events such as National Day Parade, up 13.6 percentage points
- 89.5 per cent were satisfied with the cleanliness of common neighbourhood areas such as void decks and corridors, up 10.2 percentage points

The researchers said that the satisfaction levels in this survey could be higher than in previous years due to the increased cleaning efforts to tackle Covid-19 in the early part of the year.

TODAY recently reported that cleaners in Housing and Development Board estates have been clocking longer hours, working up to 14 hours a day since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, but not all of them were getting overtime pay.

“We are hypothesising that the cleaning efforts stepped up as early as January when it was clear there was a global infection that was about to hit us,” said Professor Straughan during a media briefing on the survey results.

Respondents also felt that the thoroughness of cleaning was adequate for various public spaces, with the highest proportions for bus stops (93 per cent) and the lowest for coffee shops (76 per cent).

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The study also found that 12 per cent of respondents felt that the thoroughness of cleaning at MRTs and LRTs was excessive.

Meanwhile, fewer than 5 per cent said they found the thoroughness of cleaning at other public spaces, such as public pavements and wet markets, to be excessive.