Study on Social Norms in Neighbourhoods

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Supported by Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth

SG Cares

Objectives

Examine what are the key social norms in Singapore, and the implications to promoting socially responsible behaviours, especially in light of the dengue fever and Covid-19 pandemic
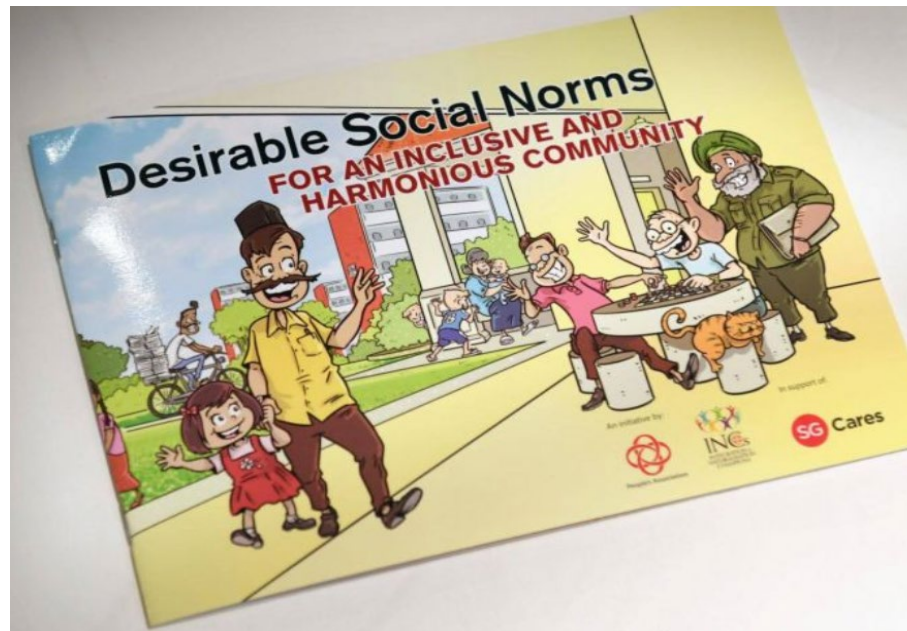
Inspired by People's Association handbook on "Desirable Social Norms for an Inclusive and Harmonious Community" Picture Source: The Straits Times, 21 Sept 2017
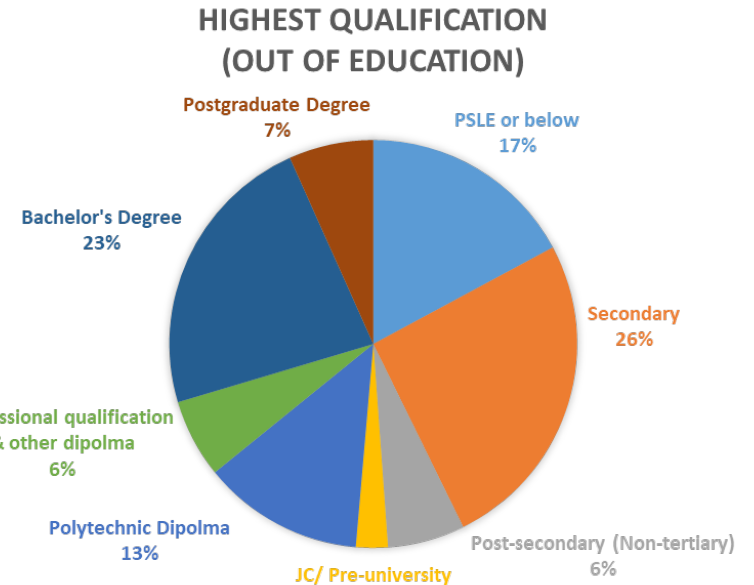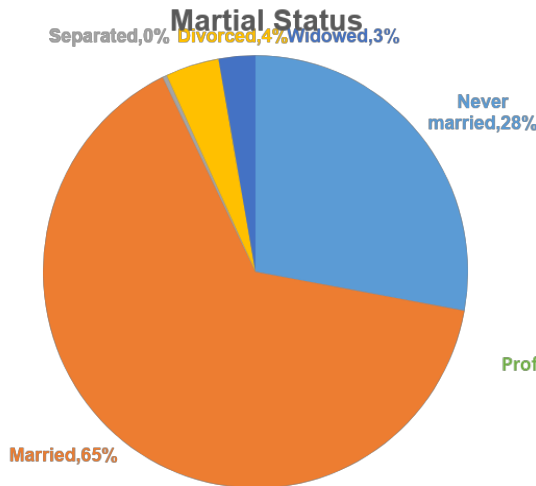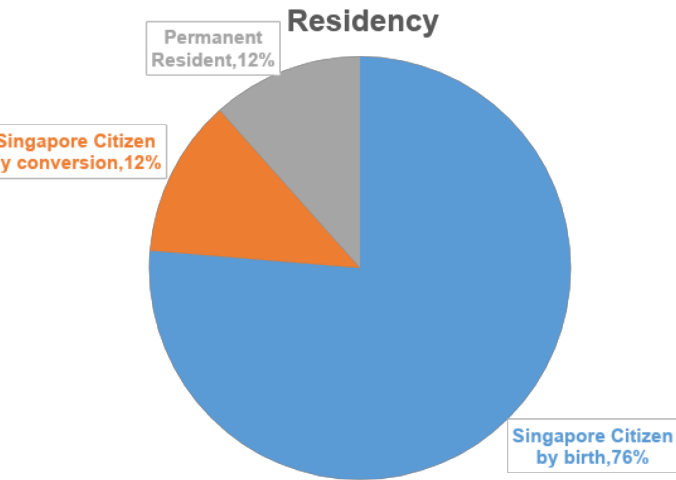
Methodology

Fieldwork: Door-to-door, Aug – Dec 2018

Sample: n = 3,015.

Method: Random sampling w replacement (DOS listing)

Response rate: 64.2%

Gender: female 52%, male 48%

SPOUSE'S RESIDENCY

- Non-resident, 3%
- Permanent Resident, 15%
- Singapore Citizen by conversion, 13%
- Singapore Citizen by birth, 69%

OCCUPATION

- Retired 14%
- Self-employed 7%
- Job seeker 4%
- Home maker 16%
- Student 8%
- Full-time National Service 1%
- Blue-collar positions 11%
- White-collar positions 39%

Residency

- Permanent Resident, 12%
- Singapore Citizen by conversion, 12%
- Singapore Citizen by birth, 76%

Martial Status

- Separated, 0%
- Divorced, 4%
- Widowed, 3%
- Never married, 28%
- Married, 65%

HIGHEST QUALIFICATION (OUT OF EDUCATION)

- Postgraduate Degree 7%
- PSLE or below 17%
- Bachelor's Degree 23%
- Secondary 26%
- Professional qualification & other diploma 6%
- Polytechnic Diploma 13%
- JC/ Pre-university
- Post-secondary (Non-tertiary) 6%

Why study social norms in neighbourhoods?
It is the foundation that nurtures social trust and bonding in the community, and the antecedent of responsible collective behaviours

*Social norms are collective representations of **acceptable group conduct**. They could be considered a unique cultural characteristic, like values, customs, and traditions, or as an informal **guideline that regulates behaviours** among members in the society. Social norms are antecedents of social capital – they create the foundation for a stable, orderly, and trusting environment.*

Key Findings

– Ranking of desirable social norms in the neighbourhood

– **Civic norms** that promote kindness in the neighbourhood, and **public transport norms** that show consideration to other users are valued highly, e.g., refrain from spitting/littering in public, gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling

– Younger adults rated **cultural norms** as more important. In contrast, middle-age and older adults rated **civic norms** as more important. Respondents between 45 to 64 years old seemingly most concerned about social norms generally

– Respondents living in smaller housing types rated both **cultural and civic norms** as more important

– Lack of awareness on some hygiene norms (e.g., clears own plates after eating in hawker centres/food courts, keep common areas clean and clear of obstacles) and civic norms that help others in need (e.g., volunteers to organise or help out at community events)

Social Norms

This is a list of social norms and behaviours that are considered acceptable or desired in a community. Neighbourhood is defined as a place that is within walking distance from your home. Please tell me how important it is to you that people behave in the following ways around your neighbourhood.

[1 – Not important at all, 6 – Very important]

Ranking of Desired Social Norms in Neighbourhoods

	Norms	Percent rating 'very important'
1	Remove stagnant water to prevent mosquitoes breeding	73.0
2	Refrain from spitting or littering in public	72.6
3	Only smokes in designated areas	68.7
4	Leashes pets and clears their droppings	62.4
5	Gives up seats on public transport	62.1
6	Burns incense only at designated bins	61.7
7	Ensures garbage is properly bagged before disposal	61.7
8	Gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling or riding a personal mobility device	60.6
9	Queues up properly	58.0
10	Allow others to alight before boarding train	57.6
11	Ensures excess water is drained before hanging wet laundry outside	57.5
12	Moves to the back/centre of the bus/train for others to board	55.2
13	Keep common areas clean	53.3
14	Takes care not to mix halal and non-halal utensils	53.1
15	Reduces noise levels in the evening	52.3
16	Refrains from using the horn or high beam indiscriminately	49.8
17	Shows understanding to funerals at void decks	49.0
18	Gets along well with neighbours	48.7
19	Keeps to the left of escalators and walkways	48.3
20	Shows understanding to weddings at void decks	43.1

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Norms		Percent rating 'very important'
21	Being conscious of noise levels in public places	43.1
22	Willing to share their table at hawker centres	41.8
23	Holds the lift when someone is approaching	41.6
24	Shows understanding to incense burning	41.2
25	Respects personal space by keeping a comfortable distance from others	38.9
26	Would do favours for neighbours	38.2
27	Proactively offers help to others in need	36.6
28	Practices environmentally friendly habits	35.4
29	Interacts with people of different backgrounds	34.5
30	Would ask neighbours to keep eye on their home when no one is around	31.8
31	Smiles and greets others	29.7
32	Refrains from public displays of affection	29.2
33	Clears own plates in hawker centres	28.2
34	Would eat at hawker centres	27.0
35	Dress appropriately	24.8
36	Speak in English when interacting with people of different cultures	18.4
37	Volunteers to organise or help out at community events	16.8
38	Borrows/lends household items	15.9
39	Able to speak local languages/dialects when interacting with others	15.7
40	Participates in grassroots and community events	10.3

Top 20 – Classification By Types of Social Norms

	Norms	Percent rating 'very important'
1	Remove stagnant water to prevent mosquitoes breeding	73.0
2	Refrain from spitting or littering in public	72.6
3	Only smokes in designated areas	68.7
4	Leashes pets and clears their droppings	62.4
5	Gives up seats on public transport	62.1
6	Burns incense only at designated bins	61.7
7	Ensures garbage is properly bagged before disposal	61.7
8	Gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling or riding a personal mobility device	60.6
9	Queues up properly	58.0
10	Allow others to alight before boarding train	57.6
11	Ensures excess water is drained before hanging wet laundry outside	57.5
12	Moves to the back/centre of the bus/train for others to board	55.2
13	Keep common areas clean	53.3
14	Takes care not to mix halal and non-halal utensils	53.1
15	Reduces noise levels in the evening	52.3
16	Refrains from using the horn or high beam indiscriminately	49.8
17	Shows understanding to funerals at void decks	49.0
18	Gets along well with neighbours	48.7
19	Keeps to the left of escalators and walkways	48.3
20	Shows understanding to weddings at void decks	43.1

Cultural norms	Civic norms	Public transport norms
Unique to Singapore's multicultural environment	Behaviours that show kindness and consideration	Desirable behaviours when using the public transport system

	Norms	Percent rating 'very important'
21	Being conscious of noise levels in public places	43.1
22	Willing to share their table at hawker centres	41.8
23	Holds the lift when someone is approaching	41.6
24	Shows understanding to incense burning	41.2
25	Respects personal space by keeping a comfortable distance from others	38.9
26	Would do favours for neighbours	38.2
27	Proactively offers help to others in need	36.6
28	Practices environmentally friendly habits	35.4
29	Interacts with people of different backgrounds	34.5
30	Would ask neighbours to keep eye on their home when no one is around	31.8
31	Smiles and greets others	29.7
32	Refrains from public displays of affection	29.2
33	Clears own plates in hawker centres	28.2
34	Would eat at hawker centres	27.0
35	Dress appropriately	24.8
36	Speak in English when interacting with people of different cultures	18.4
37	Volunteers to organise or help out at community events	16.8
38	Borrows/lends household items	15.9
39	Able to speak local languages/dialects when interacting with others	15.7
40	Participates in grassroots and community events	10.3

Segmentation by age and housing types on 20 selected norms

Cultural norms	Civic norms	Public Transport norms
Burns incense only at designated bins	Removes stagnant water around their homes to prevent mosquito-breeding	Gives up seats on public transport
Takes care not to mix halal and non-halal utensils	Refrains from spitting or littering in public	Gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling/riding
Shows understanding to funerals held at void decks	Only smokes in designated areas	Allow others to alight before boarding train
Shows understanding to weddings at void decks	Leashes pets and clears their droppings	Moves to the back/centre of train/bus for others to board
Shows understanding to incense burning	Ensures excess water is drained from laundry before hanging them	
Respects personal space by keeping a comfortable distance from others	Keeps common areas (e.g., corridors and walkways) clean and clear	
Interacts with people of different backgrounds	Interacts with people of different backgrounds	
Speaks in English when interacting with people of different cultures	Clears own plates after meals in hawker centres etc	

Selected Cultural norms
- Segment by age and dwelling types

"Burns incense only at designated bins" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Burns incense only at designated bins (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	65.5
25 TO 34	61.8
35 TO 44	59
45 TO 54	66.9
55 TO 64	59.5
65 AND ABOVE	57.8
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	66.7
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	63.9
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	59.5
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	61.3
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	62.4
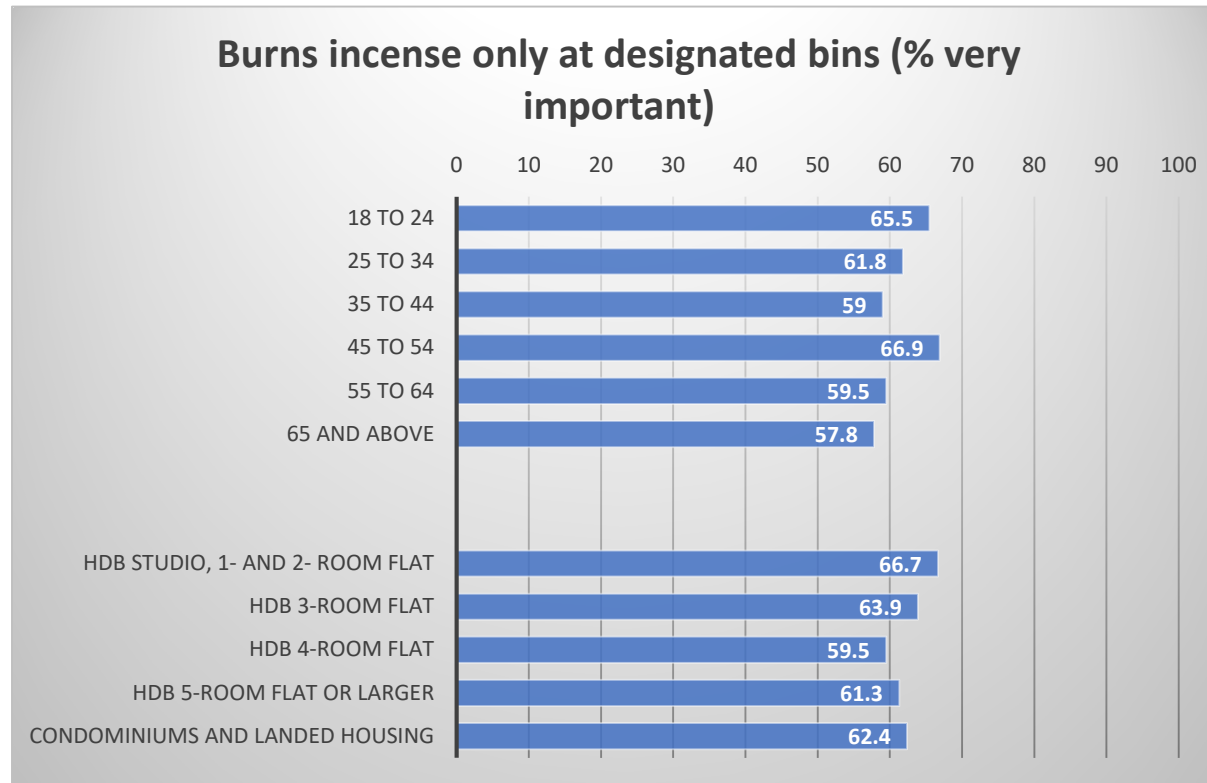
"Takes care not to mix halal and non-halal utensils" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Takes care not to mix hala & non-hala utensils (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	61.2
25 TO 34	53.5
35 TO 44	53.1
45 TO 54	53.7
55 TO 64	51.1
65 AND ABOVE	48
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	67.7
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	55
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	51.3
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	52.7
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	47.9

"Shows understanding to funerals held at void decks" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Shows understanding to funerals at void decks (% very important)

Category	%
18 TO 24	59.8
25 TO 34	50.6
35 TO 44	50.9
45 TO 54	50.3
55 TO 64	44.1
65 AND ABOVE	41.2
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	61
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	49.3
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	47.3
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	50
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	45.2

"Shows understanding to weddings at void decks" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Shows understanding to weddings at void decks (% very important)

	%
18 TO 24	51.7
25 TO 34	43.1
35 TO 44	44.5
45 TO 54	46.4
55 TO 64	36.7
65 AND ABOVE	38.1
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	54.6
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	42.2
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	41.8
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	44.3
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	39.7

"Shows understanding to incense burning" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Shows understanding to incense burning (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	46.3
25 TO 34	40.7
35 TO 44	39.6
45 TO 54	45.2
55 TO 64	38.9
65 AND ABOVE	37.3
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	53.3
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	42
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	40.4
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	41.4
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	35.4
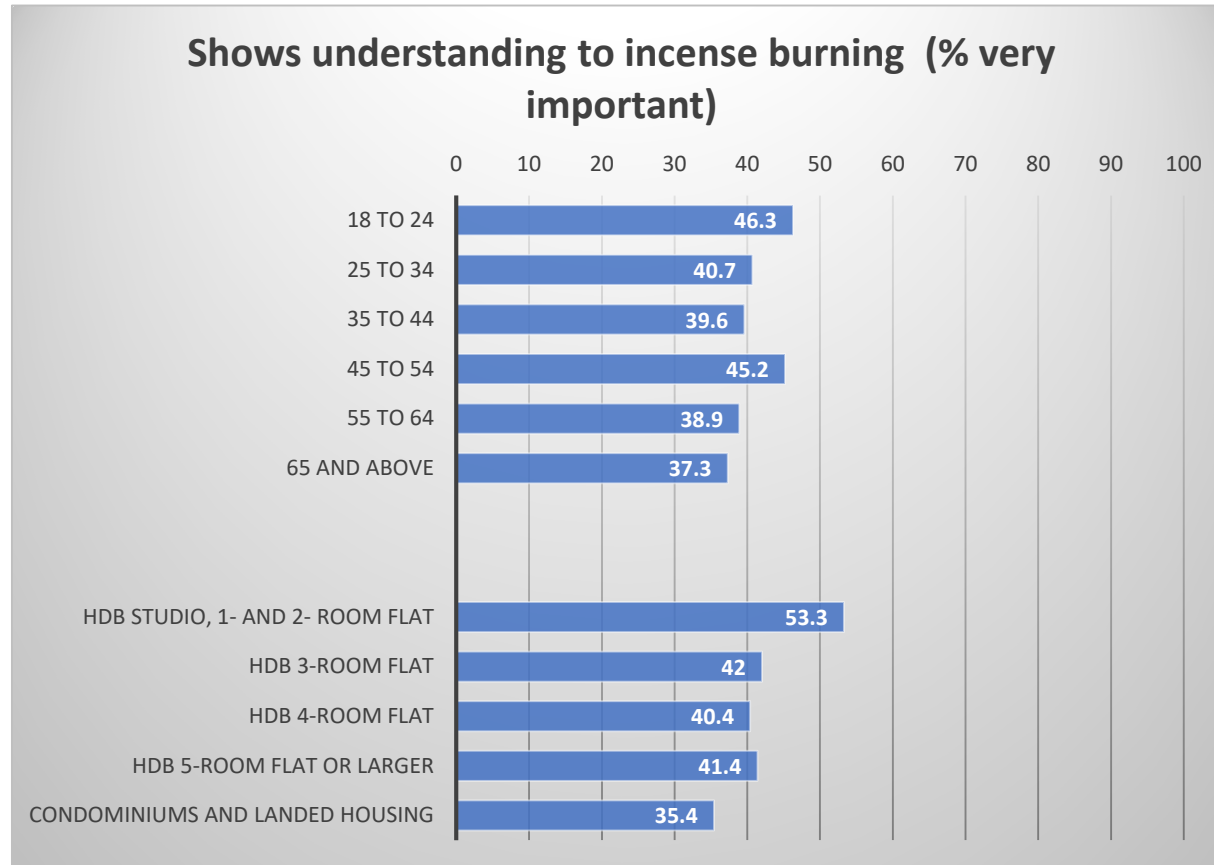
"Respects personal space by keeping a comfortable distance from others" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Respects personal space (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	42.4
25 TO 34	42.9
35 TO 44	40.9
45 TO 54	42.2
55 TO 64	34.6
65 AND ABOVE	30.3
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	45.1
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	42.2
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	36.5
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	39.3
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	36
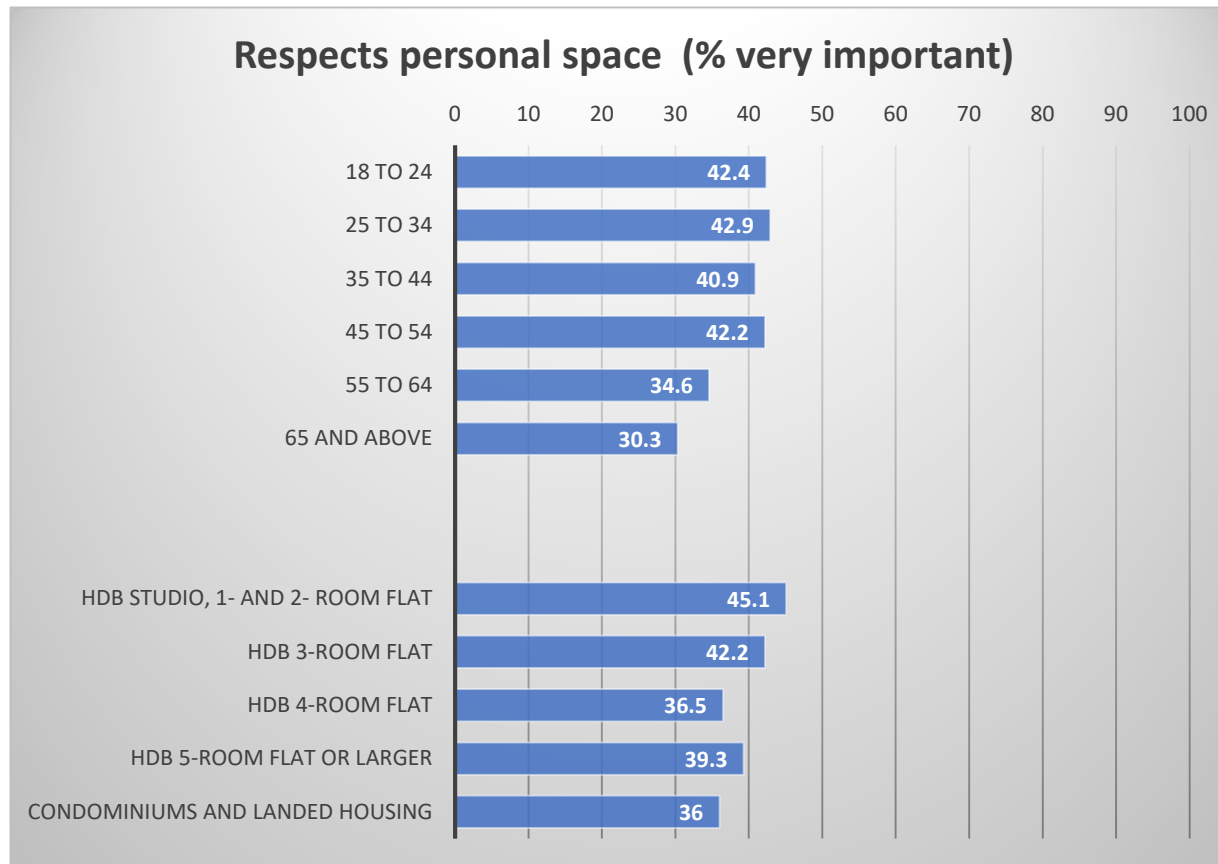
"Interacts with people of different backgrounds" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Interact with people of different background (% very important)

18 TO 24	38.2
25 TO 34	33
35 TO 44	36.4
45 TO 54	37.1
55 TO 64	30.7
65 AND ABOVE	32.2
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	44.6
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	36.3
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	31.8
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	34.2
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	34.4
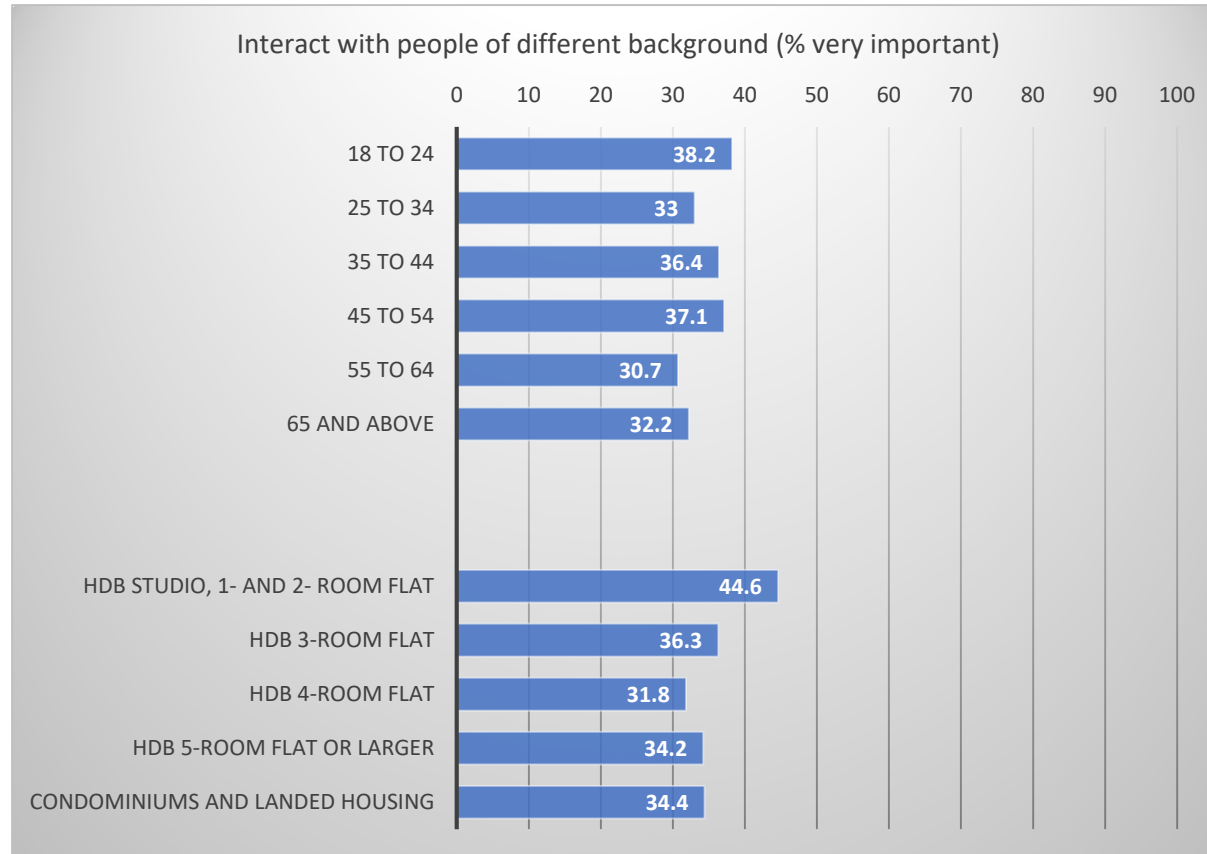
"Speaks in English when interacting with people of different cultures" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Speaks in English when interacting with people of different cultures (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	20.1
25 TO 34	22.4
35 TO 44	16.2
45 TO 54	19.5
55 TO 64	18.2
65 AND ABOVE	13.9
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	32.3
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	19.7
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	17.5
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	16.9
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	14.3
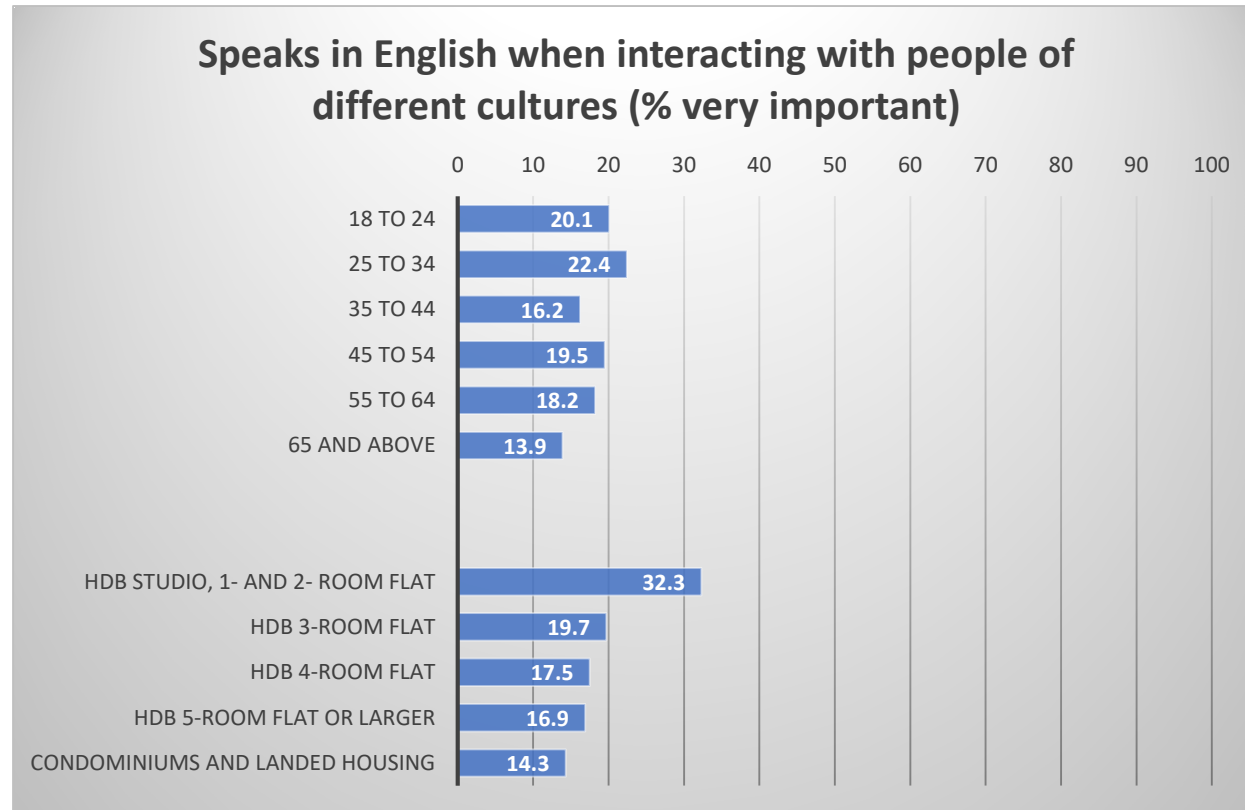
Selected Civic norms
- Segment by age and dwelling types

"Removes stagnant water around their homes to prevent mosquito-breeding" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Removes stagnant water around their homes to prevent mosquitoes breeding (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	60.6
25 TO 34	69.1
35 TO 44	75
45 TO 54	79.4
55 TO 64	74.5
65 AND ABOVE	74.6
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	81.5
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	74.3
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	71.8
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	72.6
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	70.8
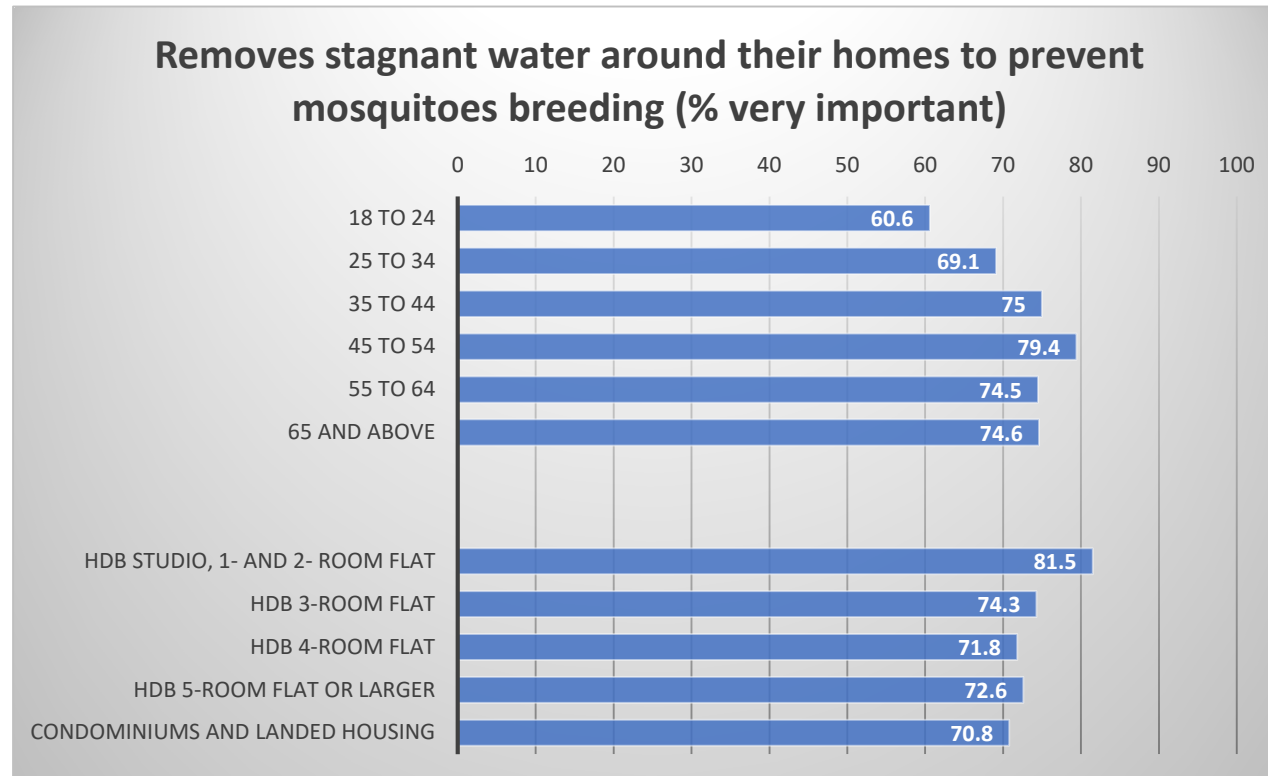
"Refrains from spitting or littering in public" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Refrains from spitting or littering in public (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	71
25 TO 34	71.2
35 TO 44	75.2
45 TO 54	77.6
55 TO 64	72.3
65 AND ABOVE	66.7
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	74.9
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	75
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	70.9
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	72.4
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	72.9
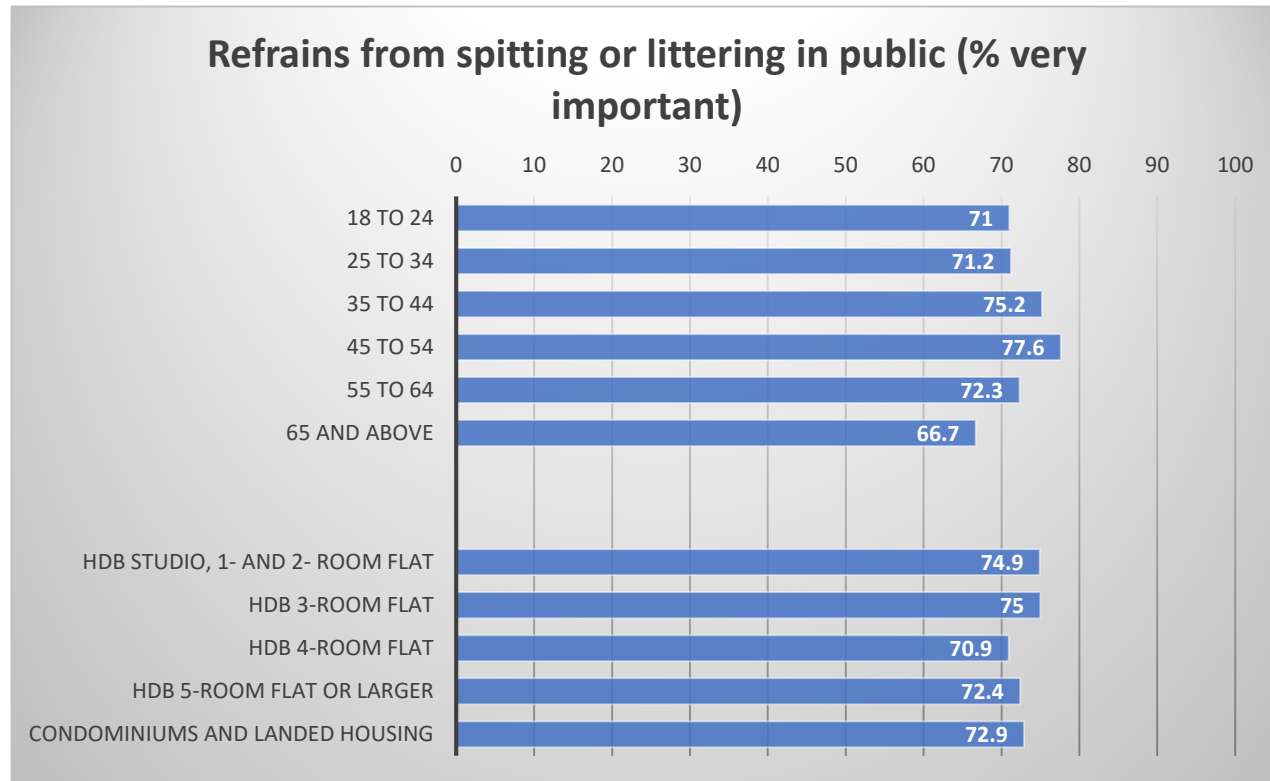
"Only smokes in designated areas" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Only smokes in designated areas (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	65.8
25 TO 34	63.4
35 TO 44	71.1
45 TO 54	74
55 TO 64	70.5
65 AND ABOVE	65.5
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	72.3
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	70.8
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	66.3
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	68.1
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	71.5
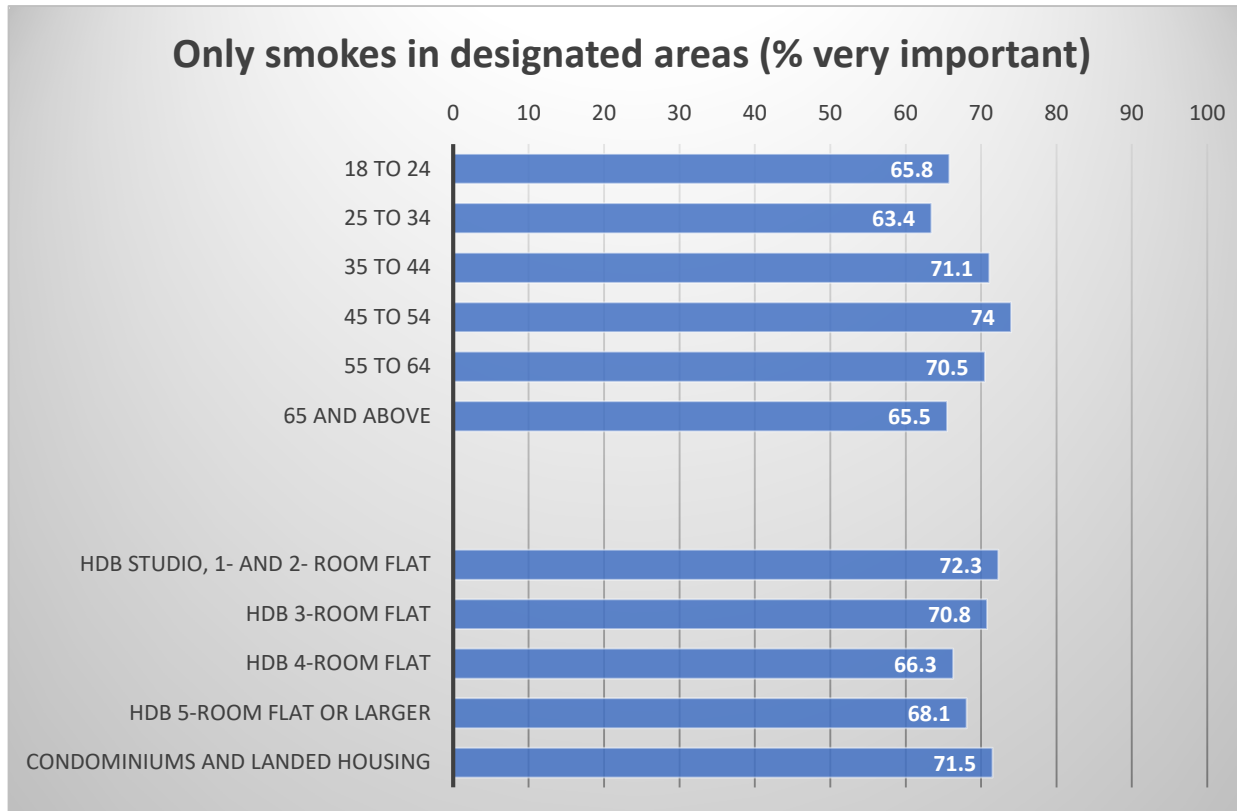
"Leashes pets and clears their droppings" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Leashes pets and clears their droppings (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	56.9
25 TO 34	57.7
35 TO 44	61
45 TO 54	69
55 TO 64	65.5
65 AND ABOVE	61.1
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	67.7
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	63.4
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	59.9
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	61.9
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	65.6
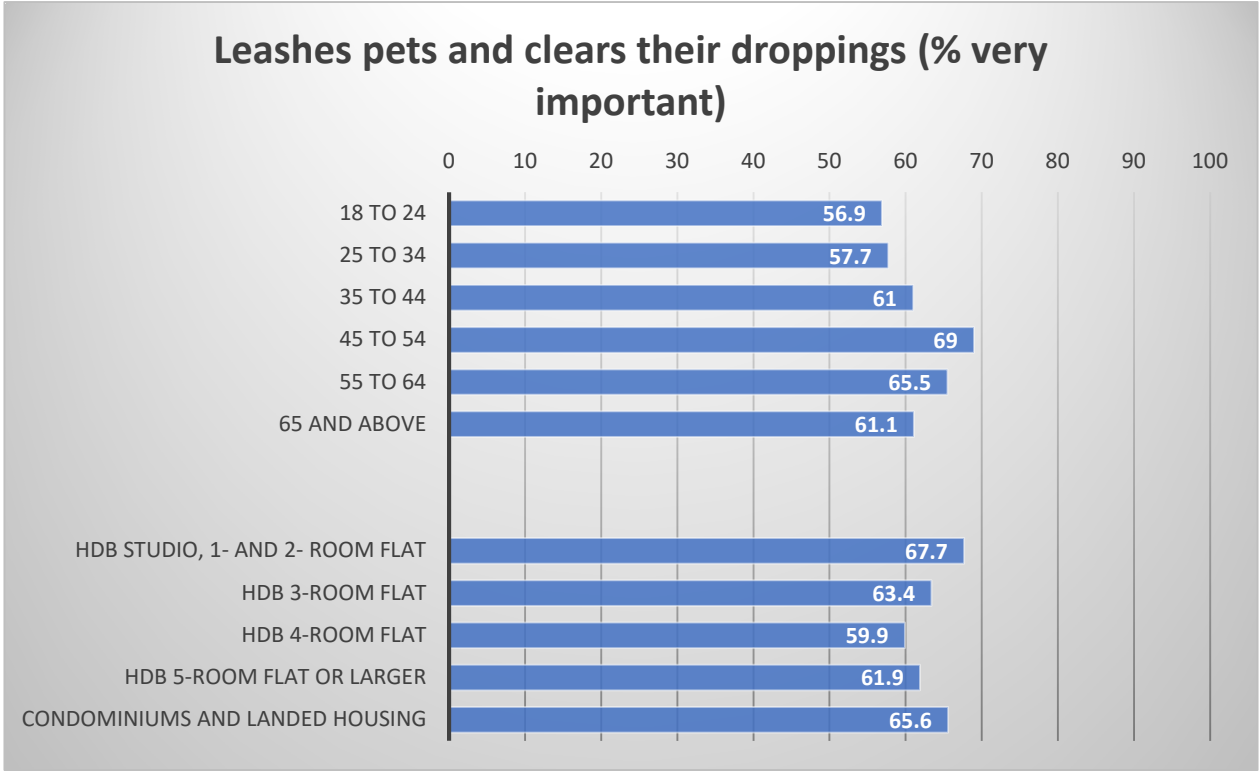
"Ensures excess water is drained from laundry before hanging them" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Ensures excess water drained before hanging wet laundry outside (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	46
25 TO 34	53.2
35 TO 44	56.3
45 TO 54	64.8
55 TO 64	64.2
65 AND ABOVE	55.2
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	70.6
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	60.8
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	57.5
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	56.3
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	47.2
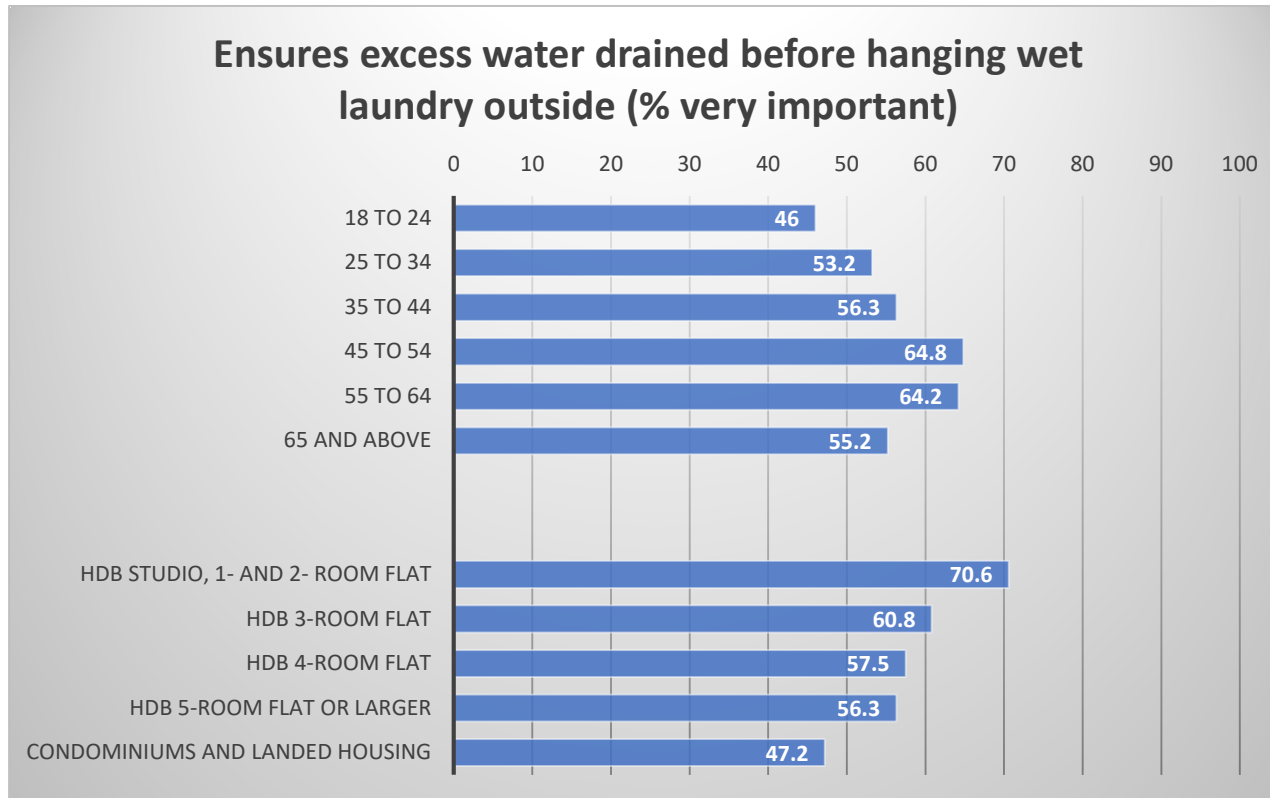
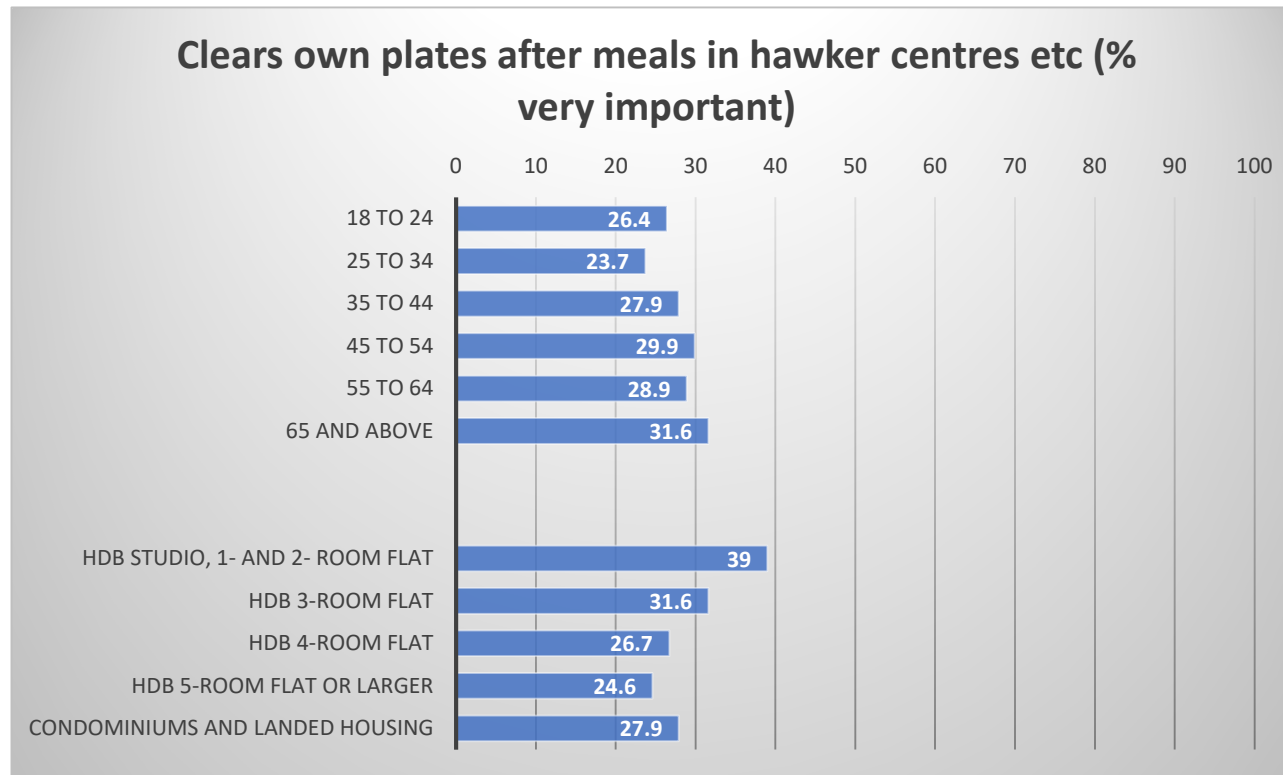# "Keeps common areas (e.g., corridors and walkways) clean and clear" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Keep common areas clean and clear (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	42
25 TO 34	45.6
35 TO 44	51.3
45 TO 54	60.2
55 TO 64	60.3
65 AND ABOVE	56.1
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	68.2
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	56.4
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	49.6
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	51.7
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	54.2
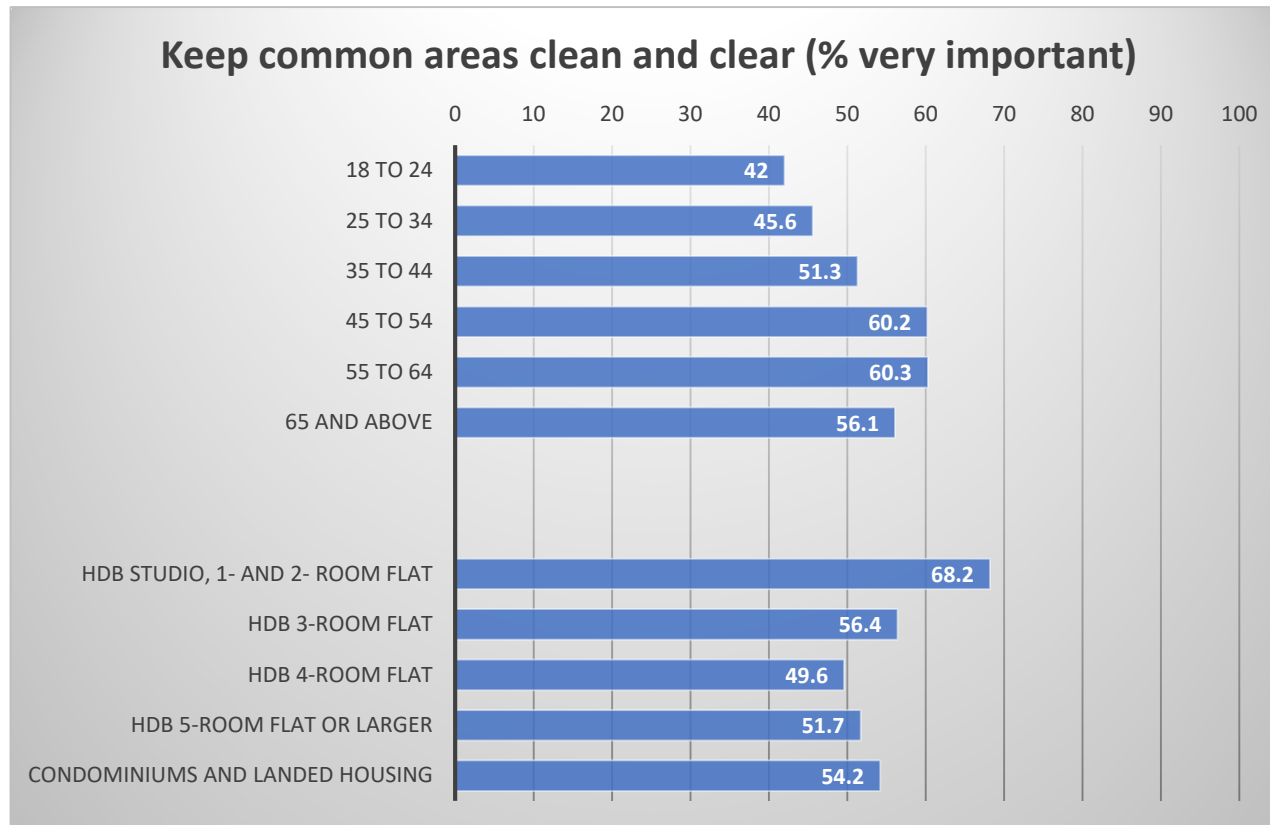
"Being conscious of noise levels in public spaces" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Conscious of noise levels in public places (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	43.7
25 TO 34	41.1
35 TO 44	42.5
45 TO 54	48.1
55 TO 64	45.1
65 AND ABOVE	36.7
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	48.2
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	46.6
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	43
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	42
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	36.7
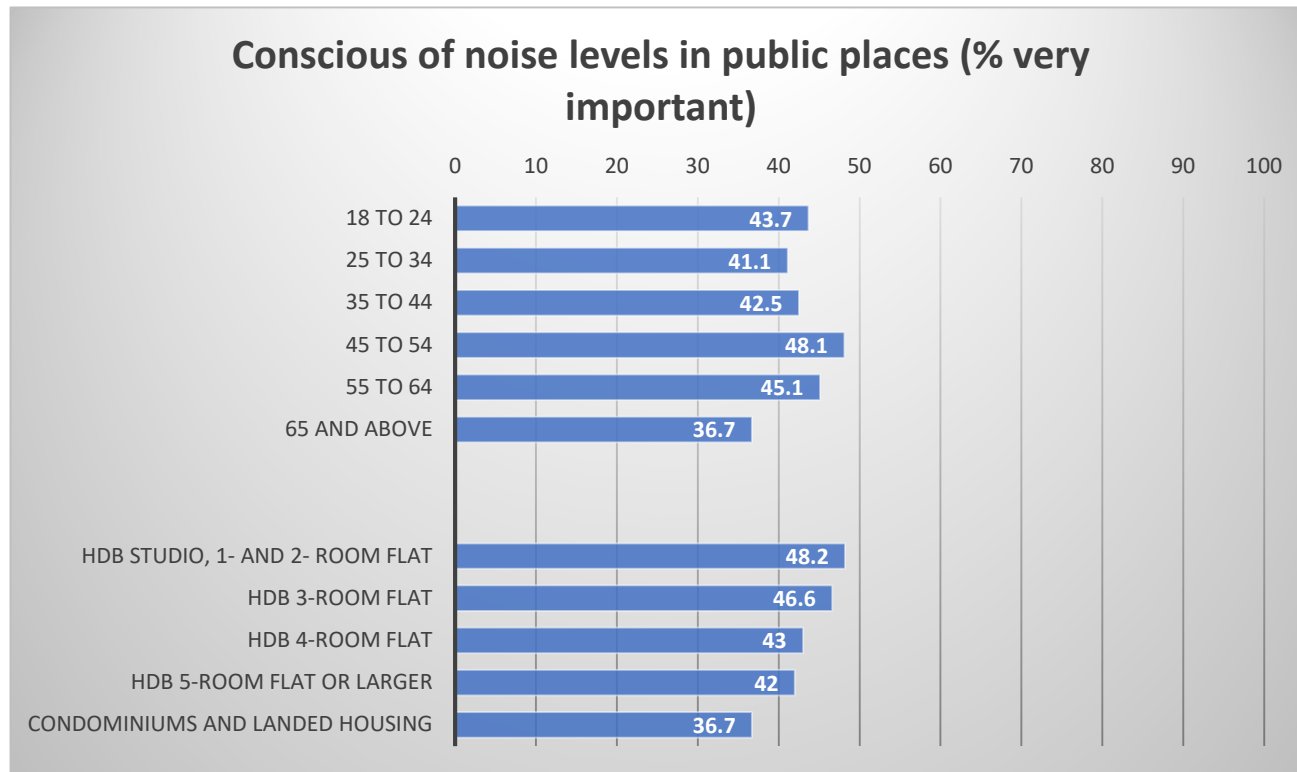
"Clears own plates after meals in hawker centres etc" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Clears own plates after meals in hawker centres etc (% very important)

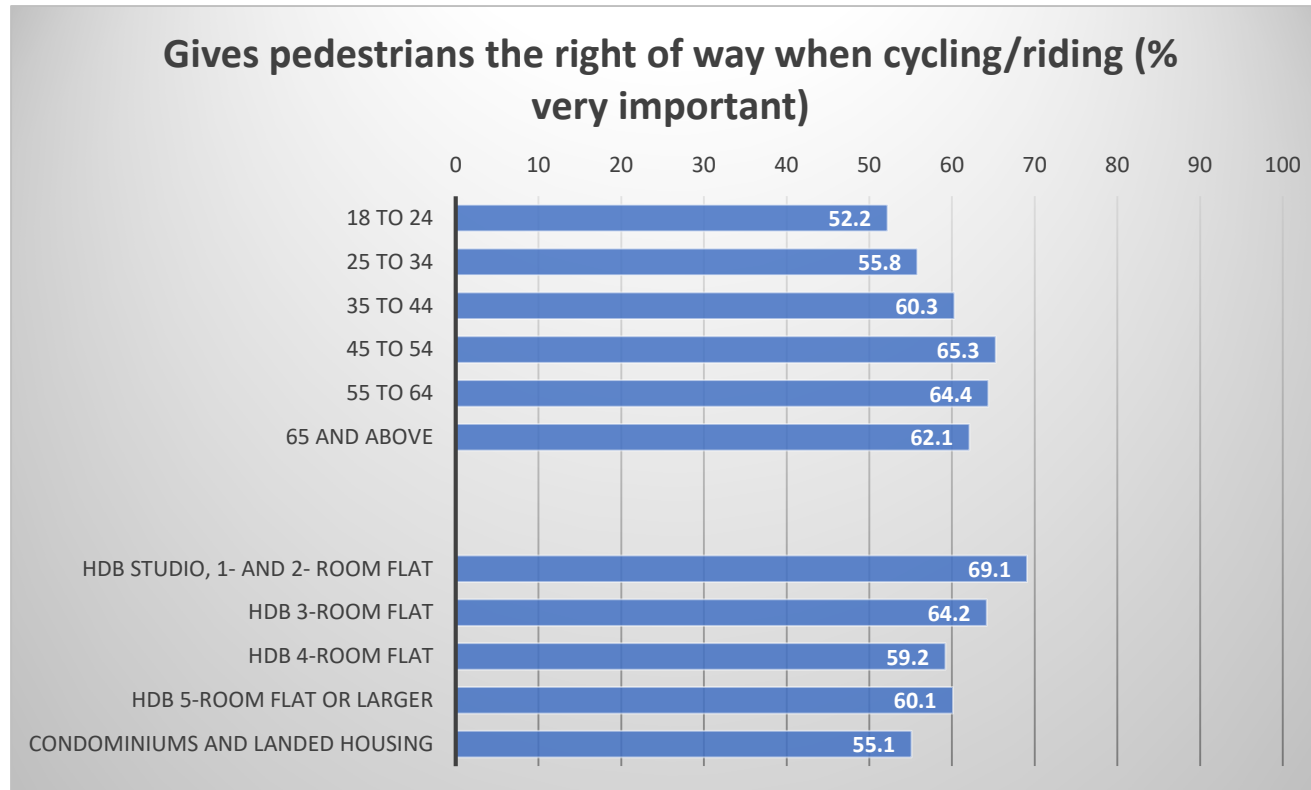|	
18 TO 24	26.4
25 TO 34	23.7
35 TO 44	27.9
45 TO 54	29.9
55 TO 64	28.9
65 AND ABOVE	31.6
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	39
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	31.6
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	26.7
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	24.6
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	27.9

Selected Transport norms
- Segment by age and dwelling types

"Gives up seats on public transport" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Gives up seats on public transport (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	53.7
25 TO 34	55.8
35 TO 44	65.3
45 TO 54	69.2
55 TO 64	64.4
65 AND ABOVE	60.1
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	68.2
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	67
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	60.4
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	62.6
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	54.7
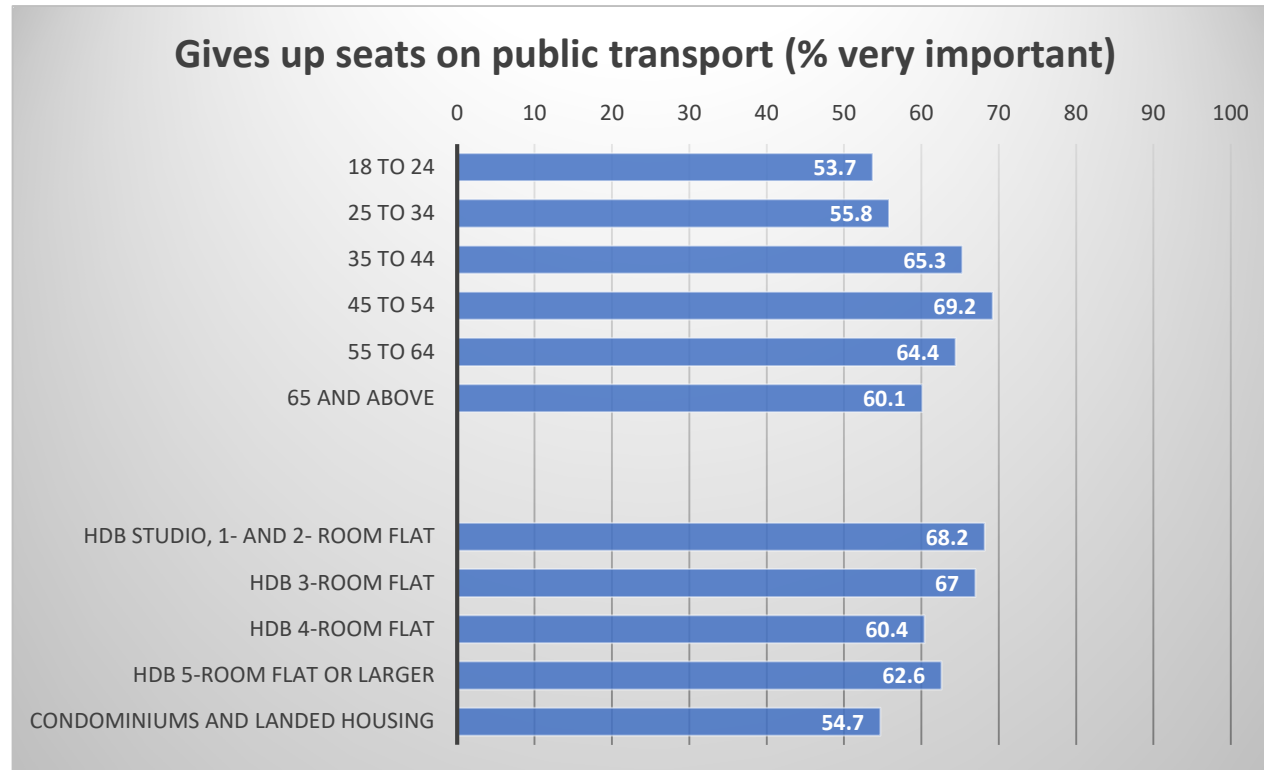
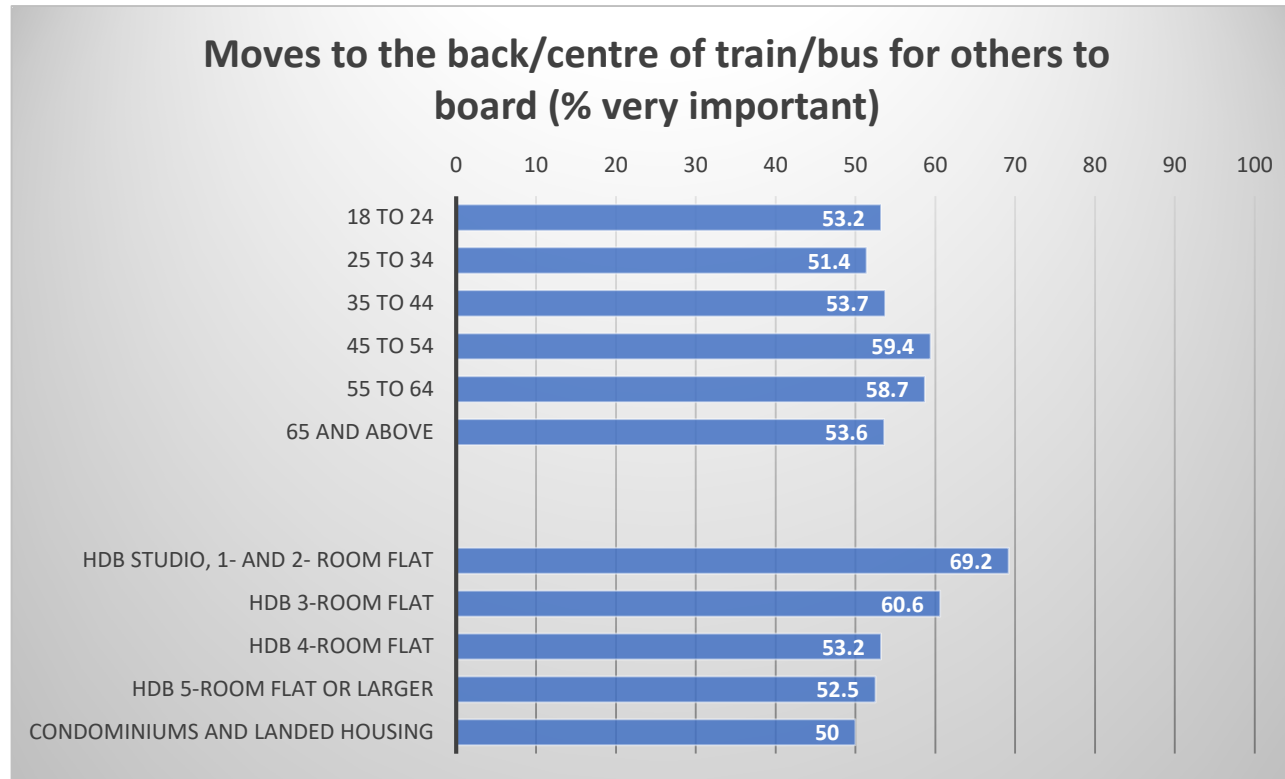# "Gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling/riding" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling/riding (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	52.2
25 TO 34	55.8
35 TO 44	60.3
45 TO 54	65.3
55 TO 64	64.4
65 AND ABOVE	62.1
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	69.1
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	64.2
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	59.2
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	60.1
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	55.1

"Allow others to alight before boarding train" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type
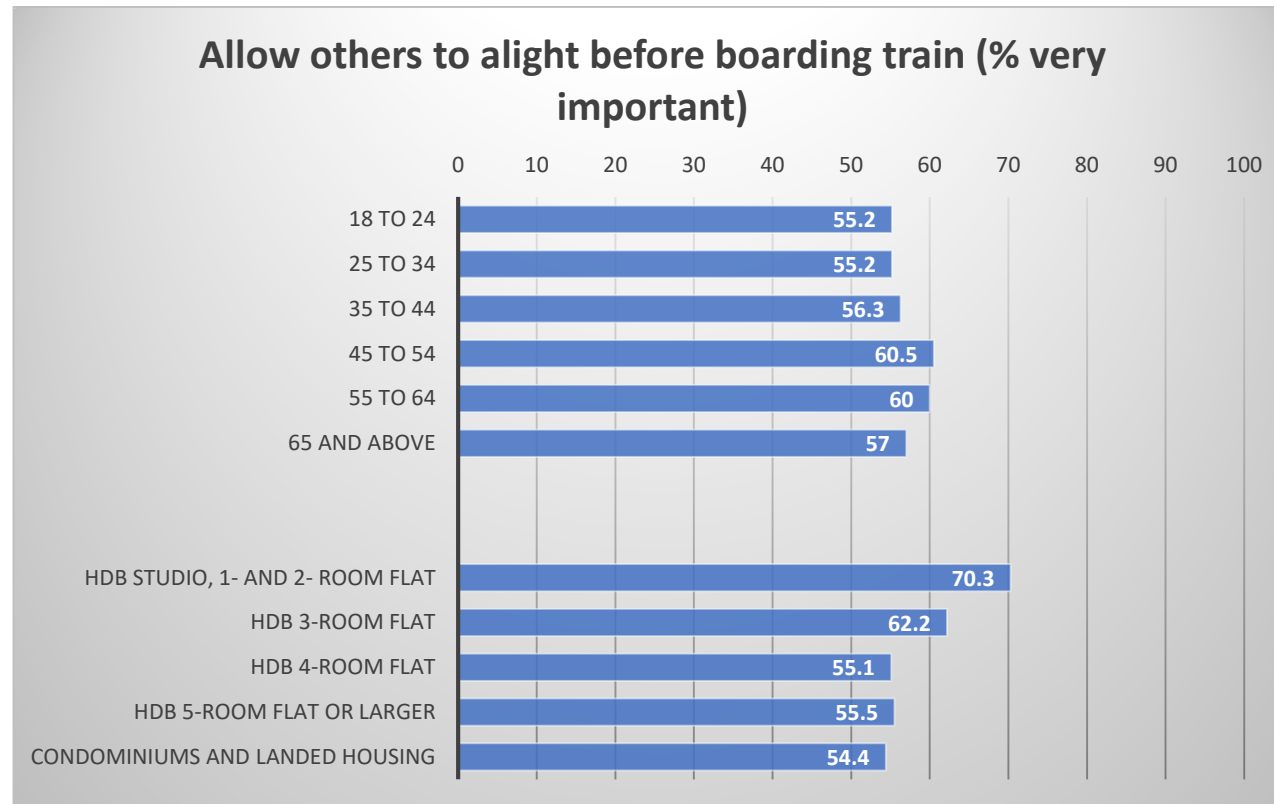
"Moves to the back/centre of train/bus for others to board" – Percent rating "very important" by age and dwelling type

Moves to the back/centre of train/bus for others to board (% very important)

Category	Value
18 TO 24	53.2
25 TO 34	51.4
35 TO 44	53.7
45 TO 54	59.4
55 TO 64	58.7
65 AND ABOVE	53.6
HDB STUDIO, 1- AND 2- ROOM FLAT	69.2
HDB 3-ROOM FLAT	60.6
HDB 4-ROOM FLAT	53.2
HDB 5-ROOM FLAT OR LARGER	52.5
CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED HOUSING	50

Re-cap - Key Findings

– Ranking of desirable social norms in the neighbourhood

– **Civic norms** that promote kindness in the neighbourhood, and **public transport norms** that show consideration to other users are valued highly, e.g., refrain from spitting/littering in public, gives pedestrians the right of way when cycling

– Younger adults rated **cultural norms** as more important. In contrast, middle-age and older adults rated **civic norms** as more important. Respondents between 45 to 64 years old seemingly most concerned about social norms generally

– Respondents living in smaller housing types rated both **cultural and civic norms** as more important

– Lack of awareness on some hygiene norms (e.g., clears own plates after eating in hawker centres/food courts, keep common areas clean and clear of obstacles) and civic norms that help others in need (e.g., volunteers to organise or help out at community events)

Implications

– Targeted audience and localised messages to promote greater awareness on the desired social behaviours, e.g. reduce noise levels in estates with older residents; promote the understanding of Singapore's multiracial environment such as having weddings/funerals in void decks and incense burning

– In light of the dengue fever and Covid-19 pandemic, we can make a habit to clear our plates and trays after consuming food at hawker centres and food courts

– Promote **civic norms** that help forge a strong society, e.g., volunteers to organise or help out at community events

– Promote **public transport norms** that show respect to other commuters, e.g., let others alight before boarding buses

Limitations

‒ Cross sectional study, limited in causality inference

‒ The underlying drivers of social norms need further verification

Future Studies

‒ What are the built environmental features (e.g., amenities, proximity to shared spaces) that can help foster mutual support, sense of ownership, and collective responsibilities?

‒ Where are the places that people feel most at ease or frustrated with each other? What can urban planners or Singaporeans do to support or mitigate this feeling?

The End

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