

Distortionary Effects of Housing Discrimination in Singapore

Atiksh Sinha

Singapore American School, Singapore

Abstract

Housing discrimination is a relatively covert but important phenomenon that affects the experiences of the Chinese, Malay, and Indian people residing in Singapore differently. This study investigated whether property rental agents discriminate against prospective renters based on ethnic origin, while considering broader trends in dwelling types and household living arrangements in Singapore. Primary data collection involved an experiment where 300 standard rental inquiry messages were sent, with 100 from each fictitious profile indicating Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnicity, and callback rates and time to response were measured. Secondary data on living arrangements and dwelling type from 2002 to 2025 were sourced from the Singapore Department of Statistics and analyzed using trend analysis, cross-correlation analysis, descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and logistic regression. Chinese profiles had the highest callback rate (72%), followed by Malay (61%) and Indian (41%). The chi-square test showed a significant association between ethnicity and callback rates ($p < .001$). Logistic regression indicated that Indian profiles had significantly lower chances of receiving callbacks than Chinese profiles ($p < .001$). According to secondary sources, married-with-children families have declined considerably, and one-person families have increased, alongside a trend of moving away from large HDB flats to smaller flats and apartments, as supported by the cross-correlation analysis between the two trends. These results indicate that racial discrimination in the rental sector in Singapore is not uniform among all minorities and is influenced by changes in housing demand.

Keywords: Chinese; Discrimination; HDB; Housing; Housing Mobility; Housing Policy; Indian; Malay; Singapore