

TAKING ACTION TO COMBAT RACISM

Research Report





Acknowledgement of Country

Women’s Health East acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We affirm that sovereignty was never ceded, and that colonialism and racism continue to impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and contribute to the high rates of violence they experience. We recognise the strength, resilience and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and express our hope for, and commitment to, reconciliation.

Acknowledgement

We would like to sincerely thank Manningham Council for funding this project, and the community members who generously supported this project and shared their experiences with us.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE TAKING ACTION TO COMBAT RACISM PROJECT IS A TWO-YEAR INITIATIVE RUNNING FROM AUGUST 2022 TO JUNE 2024.



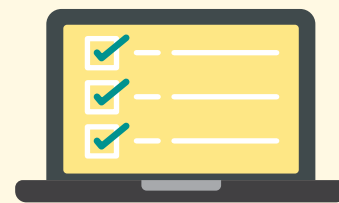
The project is led by Women's Health East and funded by Manningham Council, under the Manningham Community Grant Program. It was developed in response to increased reports of racism targeting the Chinese community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project engaged with Chinese women residing in Manningham during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explored their experiences of racism and gathered insights into potential strategies to combat this racism.

Research findings were obtained through a survey shared on WeChat, a widely used communication app in the Chinese community. 42 responses were collected from this survey. Additionally, five 90-minute focus group discussions were conducted separately with 15 Chinese women and 4 Chinese men who have lived experiences of racism. While the project primarily focuses on women's experiences, the decision was made to include men who had a strong interest in the topic and who were referred by women participants. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perceptions of racism within the Chinese community while maintaining a primary focus on women's experiences. The research was conducted in Mandarin, which was the participants' preferred language. Great importance was placed on establishing trust, as well as respecting accessibility and cultural sensitivity, when engaging directly with Chinese women. A Mandarin-speaking Bicultural Worker facilitated the sharing of participants' personal experiences and perceptions of racism in a culturally safe manner.

The research explored the following:

- Chinese women's understanding and perception of racism
- Chinese women's experiences of racism and help-seeking behaviours
- drivers of racism experienced by the Chinese women
- Chinese women's ideas of potential strategies to combat racism.

A finding emerging from the research is the changing nature of racism. Over the past few decades, racism has come to manifest in arguably more subtle and discreet ways, making it more challenging to identify incidents of racism. The participants expressed uncertainty about the definition of racism, questioning whether their perceived attacks were racially motivated or were instead directed at them as individuals and unrelated to their racial background. The hidden and subtle forms of racism also make it difficult to collect evidence or explicitly identify people's experiences of racism, as participants wonder if they are being overly sensitive.



42
SURVEY
RESPONSES
COLLECTED

X5

90 MINUTE
FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSIONS

WITH
15 CHINESE WOMEN
4 CHINESE MEN
WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED RACISM



Nevertheless, overt and direct forms of racism do persist, with increased racist attacks experienced by Chinese women at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to participants, racism takes place in a wide range of settings, including the workplace, public transport, shopping centres, and when accessing public services. In addition, the research shed light on the intersection of racism and sexism, as well as assumptions held about disadvantaged groups such as survivors of family violence.

Participants provided valuable insights into the drivers of racism as experienced by Chinese women in the community. These insights offer an understanding of its origins, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to participants, these drivers include:

- stereotyping and prejudice
- cultural narratives and media representation
- cultural differences and language barriers
- cultural values to preserve harmony and prioritise self-improvement
- internalised racism
- service gaps.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

After experiencing direct racism, most participants opted to remain silent or sought support from family or friends as a coping strategy instead of reporting the incident or seeking out available support services. The majority of survey respondents and focus group participants were not aware of the services available to help them manage and overcome racist attacks.

The reluctance to report incidents can be attributed to various factors, including concerns about confidentiality, efficacy and transparency of reporting procedures; cultural values to preserve harmony; challenges to identify subtle racism with definite evidence; and the perception that reporting will not solve the issue. The participants who knew about and used available services expressed frustration about experiencing long waiting periods and a lack of effective reporting pathways. The participants also expressed concerns about anonymity and lamented the hierarchical process of lodging complaints when seeking support in the workplace.

The research revealed the detrimental impact that racism had on the participants' wellbeing, especially on their mental health. Numerous participants shared that after experiencing racism, they had developed a sense of helplessness; some even suffering from extreme emotional distress for years after the incident.

Participants appreciated this rare opportunity to be heard and expressed a strong willingness to be involved in further discussions. They identified potential strategies to support the community in responding to racism, including information sessions about how to recognise racism and where to seek emotional support, with the hope of creating a united voice within the Chinese community. The report highlights the need to improve mutual understanding, conduct more culturally specific research, and involve the Chinese community in the planning and implementation of policies, programs and services in Melbourne's eastern region and beyond.

The research has limitations, including the under-representation of younger members of the community, as well as international students. It was noted that the elderly participants may be less likely to experience racism due to their limited interactions with other ethnic groups, as they tend to stay within the Chinese community for social and cultural reasons. The research also included a small sample size, which cannot and should not be used to represent all members of the diverse Chinese community in Melbourne's east. This report concludes with a set of recommendations to address these identified gaps and help inform future directions.



THE RESEARCH REVEALED THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACT THAT RACISM HAD ON THE PARTICIPANTS' WELLBEING, ESPECIALLY ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.

OVERVIEW



In 2022, Women's Health East received funding from Manningham Council to deliver an anti-racism project.

The Taking Action to Combat Racism project was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to increased reports of racism targeting the Chinese community. The two-year project was carried out from August 2022 to June 2024. This project applies a gender lens in recognition of the unique forms of racism faced by Chinese women. The project has three components: information sessions, research, and a co-design campaign.

The research component of the project provided an opportunity to engage Chinese women residing in Manningham and give a voice to their lived experiences of racism and thoughts on potential strategies to combat racism. Through community engagement and word of mouth, Women's Health East reached women living, working, or playing in surrounding suburbs in Melbourne's east. The research component consisted of focus group discussions and a survey, which yielded important findings and offered a rare insight into Chinese women's experiences of, and perspectives on, racism, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when racially-motivated attacks against Asian people were reportedly more frequent.

The project received strong support from the local Chinese community who wanted their voices heard. Many participants expressed that it was the first time a project listened to their experiences and ideas. Participants also took this opportunity to seek emotional and community support, wanting to understand if others had had similar experiences of racism and how they had managed and overcome them.

This was aligned with one of the project objectives, which was to improve the mental health of Chinese women in the community by providing opportunities for them to meet others in the same community, thereby fostering social interaction and developing a sense of belonging.

This report presents the key findings derived from in-depth focus group discussions with 15 Chinese women and four Chinese men who have experienced racism, along with survey responses from 42 Chinese community members residing in Melbourne's east. This report commences with an overview of the methodology used for data collection, followed by findings derived from thematic analysis, including direct quotes from the focus group discussions. The report concludes with recommendations for future consideration.



THIS REPORT PRESENTS THE KEY FINDINGS DERIVED FROM IN-DEPTH FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND SURVEY RESPONSES.

METHODOLOGY

A Chinese Mandarin-speaking Bicultural Worker from Women's Health East engaged a designer from an Asian background to develop a flyer to promote the project among Chinese women living, working, and playing in Manningham. A registration form was created for women in the community to express their interest in participating in the focus group discussions. To encourage registrations for the focus groups and collect additional data, the Bicultural Worker also developed a community survey, which was distributed through WeChat, a widely used communication app in the Chinese community. The Bicultural Worker then called each registered participant to check their eligibility and explain the project. In addition to four focus group discussions with 15 Chinese women, another focus group discussion with four Chinese men was also organised, consisting of individuals who either expressed strong interest in participating or who were referred by women participants. They were asked to share their perceptions and observations of Chinese women's experiences of racism.

Focus group participants were selected based on a set of criteria. Each participant was required to:

- be over 18 years of age
- speak Mandarin as their first language
- have experienced racism or witnessed racism towards Mandarin-speaking women, their friends, and family, and/or would like to share ideas for potential solutions to address racism
- live, work or play in the Manningham Council area.

All focus group discussions were recorded with the participants' consent. The Bicultural Worker contacted each participant to explain the research, including its purpose, process and how the data would be used. A focus group interview guide was prepared by the Bicultural Worker, who also facilitated the focus group discussions in Mandarin. The recordings were transcribed into scripts in Mandarin before being translated into English for data analysis. The focus group sessions included a total of 19 Mandarin-speaking community members (15 women and four men), and 42 responses were collected from the survey on WeChat.

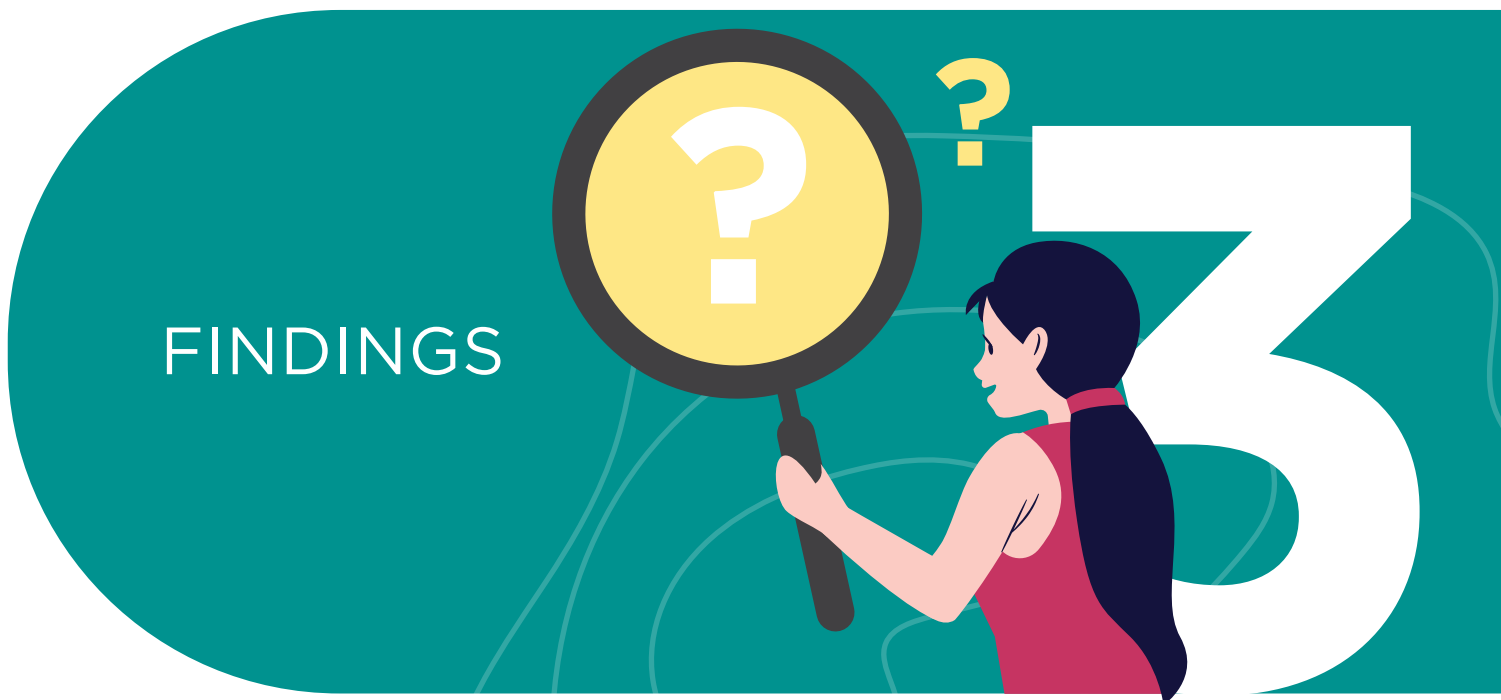
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Demographic data was collected at the beginning of the survey and focus group discussions. The number of years that participants had spent living in Australia ranged from four years to 35 years. Survey respondents were asked to self-rate their English proficiency. Out of the 42 survey respondents, 70 per cent (n=35) said they either could speak English "Not well" or "Cannot speak English at all". Among the 19 focus group participants, 68 per cent (n=13) said that they spoke English "Well".

Most survey respondents were over 50 years old. Out of the 42 respondents, 74 per cent (n=31) were over 55 years old. Similarly, 53 per cent (n=10) of focus group participants were aged 50 years and older. During the focus group discussions, some participants suggested that older members of the Chinese community may be less likely to experience racism due to their limited social interactions with other ethnic groups.

The majority of participants had completed higher education. Among the survey respondents, 62 per cent (n=26) had completed either a bachelor or master degree. Similarly, 84 per cent (n=16) of the focus group participants had completed either a bachelor or master degree. This may be attributed to the Chinese community's inclination towards pursuing higher education, influenced by cultural factors. There was, however, a knowledge gap among participants when it came to Australian society and its systems. This may have contributed to differing expectations regarding strategies to address racism.





THEME 1

CHINESE WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

1.1. Sub-theme: The changing nature of racism and confusion around the definition of racism

Chinese women who participated in the focus group discussions described a perceived change in how racism manifests, shifting from overt and direct forms to more indirect and subtle forms over the past two to three decades. This shift has made it more challenging to identify instances of racism or the intentions behind certain behaviours. This theme emerged from all five focus group discussions.

As the nature of racism has shifted to be more indirect and subtle, the participants felt that they lacked concrete 'evidence' or 'proof' to identify a racist attack or microaggression. Participants expressed uncertainty about the motives behind these incidents. Specifically, they were unsure whether the attack was targeted at them individually or aimed more broadly at the Chinese community. This ambiguity made it challenging to determine whether the incidents were racially motivated. Nevertheless, overt and direct forms of racism, such as the use of racist language toward the Chinese community, still persist, and this was especially evident at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants also reported confusion around the definition of racism. While many participants explicitly defined racism as 'when people divide others into different categories, believing that some races are superior' and 'treating people using different standards and judgements based on race', others admitted to feeling uncertain or needing to search online for clarification. This suggests a lack of consensus around the concept of racism, highlighting the importance of education and raising awareness to promote a common understanding throughout the community.

“

I HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED DIRECT INSULTS IN RECENT YEARS. IT HAS BECOME MORE SUBTLE... HE [THE PERPETRATOR] KNEW THAT I WAS UNCOMFORTABLE. I KNEW HE WAS TARGETING ME, BUT I COULDN'T DIRECTLY CONFRONT HIM BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE PROOF.”

FINDINGS (CONTINUED)



ANOTHER INCIDENT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS TAKING A BUS. AT THAT TIME, I WAS LEARNING ENGLISH AND WOULD TAKE THE 903 BUS EVERY DAY. ON ONE OCCASION AT BOX HILL CENTRAL, I NOTICED THAT THE DESTINATION SIGN ON THE FRONT OF THE BUS HAD CHANGED. I ASKED THE DRIVER IF IT WAS GOING IN MY DIRECTION, AND HE LOOKED AT ME STRANGELY AND SAID, 'YES.' SO, I BOARDED THE BUS, AND THERE WERE PEOPLE AROUND ME LAUGHING. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WERE LAUGHING. THE DRIVER SAID 'YES', SO I GOT ON. BUT THEN I REALISED IT WAS GOING THE WRONG DIRECTION. THERE WAS A DELIBERATE INTENTION BEHIND IT BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE AROUND WERE LAUGHING, BUT NO ONE TOLD ME THAT WHAT HE SAID WAS INCORRECT. THERE WERE ALSO SOME CHINESE PEOPLE ON THE BUS WHOSE ENGLISH WASN'T GOOD, INCLUDING A YOUNG CHINESE GUY. HE WAS IN THE SAME SITUATION AS ME AND ENDED UP TAKING THE WRONG BUS AS WELL. SO, BOTH OF US WERE ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED THAT DAY. IT WAS ALREADY DARK, AND AFTER TWO STOPS WE GOT OFF THE BUS. WE WERE WONDERING WHAT WAS GOING ON AND BOTH FELT THAT THE DRIVER DID IT ON PURPOSE. ”

This woman's quote illustrates how subtle forms of racism can impact one's daily life and interactions with others. It exemplifies how racism can create feelings of exclusion and frustration among Chinese women, and how a person's language proficiency can be used to discriminate against them. In this instance, hearing the other passengers laugh only exacerbated her sense of isolation and humiliation further, highlighting the importance of bystander intervention. Ultimately, there is a need to address not only overt forms of racism but also subtle forms that may go unnoticed or unaddressed.



1.2 Sub-theme: Chinese women experience a unique form of racism and sexism

The participants shared that Chinese women's experiences are shaped by the intersection of racism and sexism, highlighting the unique challenges they face in society. Participants observed that gender norms may encourage Chinese women to prioritise harmony and modesty, leading to a tendency to be more accommodating and less assertive in certain social situations. Due to social pressure to prioritise family and make certain sacrifices for others, Chinese women may be less likely to speak up or seek help when they are subjected to discrimination. Participants highlighted that physical vulnerabilities can also make Chinese women a target for racist attacks.

Within the workplace, Chinese women may be subject to pay gaps and other subtle forms of discrimination. For example, one participant knew of a Chinese woman whose annual salary was \$20,000 lower than that of a male colleague, despite having the same title and workload. This unfair treatment was attributed to both race and gender, as another woman in the group explained: "one factor is being a woman, and another is being Chinese."

Some Chinese women also experienced unfair treatment when accessing social or health services, being subjected to assumptions and judgements from practitioners who were unwilling to understand their situation. For instance, one woman participating in a focus group experienced both racial discrimination as a Chinese woman and discrimination as a survivor of family violence. When applying for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), she encountered subjective judgements based on her status as a single mother, family violence survivor and migrant who speaks English as a second language. During her consultation, the practitioner saw a Mongolian Blue Spot on her child, which is a type of birthmark commonly seen on Asian babies that resembles a bruise. The practitioner quickly formed assumptions without an in-depth understanding of the participant's situation, and promptly reported it to the Child Protection Centre. As a result, the participant's child was taken away from her and placed with a foster family for 45 days. It was an utterly traumatic experience for both the participant and her young child.

This experience exemplifies the dire consequences of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination within institutional settings, where cultural ignorance can have devastating impacts on individuals and families. It also illustrates the multifaceted nature of discrimination faced by Chinese women, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to address inequalities and discrimination at a systemic or institutional level.

1.3 Sub-theme: The importance of family education and bystander intervention

Focus group participants shared unsettling encounters of verbal abuse and mockery inflicted by school-aged teenagers, who had used derogatory terms and adopted inappropriate behaviours towards them. They expressed their concerns about the potential correlation between this issue and family attitudes, as well as dynamics within the school environment.

This experience emphasises the critical role of family attitudes in shaping young people's behaviours and attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups. Racist or xenophobic attitudes can be passed down through generations, with younger generations being influenced by parental or family attitudes. The experiences shared by the participants reinforced the importance of encouraging bystander intervention when observing discrimination.

Moreover, one female participant recounted a distressing incident at Flinders Street Station where she was verbally harassed and had her phone forcefully taken from her by a member of the public. There was a bystander who chose not to intervene and instead "pretended to be asleep". With no bystanders intervening, the participant

was "shocked" that "in public like this, it shows that she [the perpetrator] was very confident about her behaviour." The participant's experience illustrates a concerning lack of intervention by bystanders, amplifying her feelings of isolation and helplessness in a public space. It reveals the importance of encouraging better behaviour by raising awareness and fostering a culture of care and respect.



A DOZEN OR SO YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND 8-10 YEARS OLD SHOUTED, 'ASIANS SHOULD NOT BE HERE.' ONE BOY SAID, 'YOU ASIAN,' WHILE POINTING WITH HIS FINGER. I SIMPLY COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. THERE WAS A WOMAN IN HER THIRTIES, WHO WAS PROBABLY SUPERVISING THESE KIDS, AND SHE CAME OVER TO THEM AND SAID, 'LET'S GO.' I WANTED TO FOLLOW THEM OUTSIDE TO TALK TO THAT WOMAN. HOWEVER, SHE SAID, 'SORRY, WE HAVE TO GO.' SHE WASN'T SAYING SORRY BECAUSE THEY WERE SAYING SOMETHING WRONG... SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO THE CHILDREN LIKE 'YOU ARE WRONG, YOU SHOULD APOLOGISE.' NOT AT ALL... I JUST FELT SO DISAPPOINTED. ”

THEME 2

DRIVERS OF RACISM EXPERIENCED BY CHINESE WOMEN

2.1 Sub-theme: Stereotypes and prejudices

According to participants, certain racist stereotypes and prejudices include assumptions that the Chinese community is “not capable, reliable, or trustworthy”. One participant shared her experiences of running a shop and employing a local staff member who said, “I don’t trust any Chinese [people] except for you and your partner.” She also shared that a customer once entered the shop and requested “specifically not to be served by Chinese [people]” because “Chinese people have poor vision and will definitely get things wrong.” Another woman who works as a mentor for jobseekers shared that some employers prefer not to employ people of Asian heritage. On one occasion, she referred a non-Asian jobseeker to a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) for a course. Most of the employees at the RTO were of Asian heritage. The jobseeker then asked her if the RTO was a trustworthy organisation, since “the employees are mostly Asian and don’t speak native English”.

Based on the participants’ anecdotes, it is evident that racist stereotypes and prejudices against the Chinese community are deeply ingrained and have tangible effects on members of the Chinese community. The general mistrust towards Chinese people highlights the pervasive nature of discrimination and biases faced by the Chinese community. It illustrates how, even in interpersonal relationships, individuals may face unwarranted suspicion and scepticism solely based on their race. The customer’s request not to be served by a Chinese person due to perceived inadequacies reflects how these stereotypes can manifest in everyday interactions.

The job mentor’s observations revealed systemic biases in employment practices; how race-based discrimination can influence hiring decisions, perpetuate inequalities in the workforce and limit opportunities for individuals from the Chinese community. These quotes highlight the need for concerted efforts to challenge race-based stereotypes, address systemic inequalities, and promote inclusivity and respect for diversity in all aspects of society.

2.2 Sub-theme: The impact of cultural narratives and media representation

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants in the focus groups recounted personal experiences of racist attacks targeting the Chinese community in various forms, primarily manifesting as verbal abuse due to their use of protective masks. These encounters illustrate the pervasive nature of racism faced by the Chinese community. One participant had

faced accusations from customers who blamed them for bringing COVID-19 to Australia. Participants noted a gradual decrease in these incidents over time. When asked about the possible reasons behind this decline, participants said that the racist sentiments and attacks targeting the Chinese community were fueled by negative cultural narratives and media representation during the pandemic’s early stages. One participant commented that “people’s perceptions of Chinese individuals, not just related to COVID, are generally not positive.” Some participants suggested that this was due to ongoing political tensions between Australia and China. Instances of racism notably increased at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, coinciding with heightened political tensions in the bilateral relationship between Australia and China. Indeed, the increase in racist sentiments and perceptions of Chinese people was likely driven by the collective anxiety and uncertainty felt during the pandemic. Participants attributed the subsequent decline in racist attacks to increased public knowledge about COVID-19 and noted changes in public discourse.

The focus group participants highlighted the role of cultural narratives and media representation in shaping societal attitudes towards the Chinese community, citing the historical context of the White Australia Policy and its abolishment as a benchmark for progress in combating institutional racism. While acknowledging advancements in anti-racism legislation and societal norms, participants also expressed concern, recognising the potential for subtle forms of discrimination to persist despite legal protections. This suggests the ongoing need for proactive measures to address racism and foster a more inclusive society.

2.3 Sub-theme: Navigating cultural differences and language barriers

Cultural differences contribute to diverse behaviours and interpretations of social norms and regulations. The discussions showed that certain behaviours among community members may be perceived differently in Australia due to people’s varying cultural backgrounds. These differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and reinforce stereotypes and prejudices. It is important to recognise that it is these stereotypes and prejudices, rather than the cultural differences themselves, that perpetuate racism. Many participants stressed the urgent need to promote cultural awareness in order to dismantle stereotypes and foster mutual understanding and respect. This is especially beneficial for the elderly population, who grew up in a very different cultural context. Therefore, the participants requested that information sessions be organised to equip Chinese women with better knowledge of local Australian culture, societal norms and systems.



I'VE NOTICED IN VARIOUS SERVICE INDUSTRIES INCLUDING RETAIL, WE OFTEN ENCOUNTER SITUATIONS WHERE A SALESPERSON WILL HAPPILY ASSIST AND CHAT WITH WHITE CUSTOMERS BUT WILL PRETEND NOT TO NOTICE OR WILL AVOID SERVING YOU IF THEY SEE THAT YOU HAVE AN ASIAN FACE OR PERCEIVE THAT YOUR ENGLISH IS NOT GOOD. ”



Meanwhile, organising events to celebrate cultural diversity and increase awareness of different cultures values and traditions can help bridge cultural divides and work towards preventing race-based discrimination.

In addition, the participants shared that language barriers played an important role in driving incidents of racism, as it can hinder effective communication between individuals who speak different languages. This can lead to misunderstandings, misconceptions, and misinterpretations of intentions, which may exacerbate tensions and perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices. While some Chinese-speaking individuals may not speak English as fluently as native English speakers, this perception can lead to the belief that Chinese individuals are not as capable as native English speakers, reinforcing negative stereotypes and contributing to discriminatory attitudes. In addition, individuals who are not fluent in English may experience exclusion and marginalisation, which create disparities in access to resources and opportunities for education, employment, and healthcare. For example, one participant shared that during work meetings, her manager would skip her turn to speak, saying, “You are speaking too slowly. We will move on to the next person,” dismissing her and depriving her of the opportunity to share her ideas.

Chinese women who are not proficient in English may not report incidents due to their inability to confront the perpetrators or fully understand the situation. While the victims may perceive that the perpetrators are using inappropriate language or behaviours towards them, they may not fully understand what is being said. Lack of language proficiency can be a barrier to participating in community life, which leads to the feeling of isolation and alienation. As observed by the focus group participants, some women in the community, especially those who are elderly or new to Australia, tend to “distance themselves from society because they experience unfair treatment.

They prefer working in the Chinese community or shopping at Chinese stores to avoid such unfair treatment”.

2.4 Sub-theme: Cultural values of social harmony and self-improvement

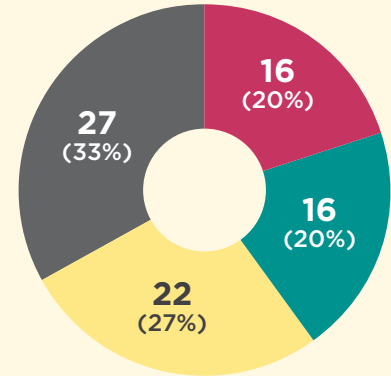
The survey results showed that 27 survey respondents (33 per cent) selected ‘cultural values’ in response to the question “What do you think are the reasons that hinder the Chinese community from speaking out or seeking help to challenge racism?”. This theme also emerged from the focus group discussions, with women pointing out Chinese women’s tendency to stay silent and avoid conflict when facing racist sentiments or behaviours. It’s important to recognise that this likely stems from cultural values such as preserving social harmony and avoiding conflict rather than a lack of willingness to address issues of racism. The key here is to encourage open dialogue and empower individuals to speak out against racism targeted at their community .

Another cultural value behind the Chinese community’s aversion to respond to racism is the emphasis on individual responsibility and self-improvement within Chinese culture. There is a saying in Mandarin: ‘Sweeping the snow in front of one’s own door’. Elaborating on this expression, two women explained that historically, Chinese people have tended to focus on their own issues before interfering with or engaging in the affairs of others. This focus on self-improvement is intended to promote personal accountability, but it can also lead to a lack of collective action when it comes to combating racism. Encouraging discussions and initiatives that foster solidarity and mutual support within the community can help overcome this barrier.

FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

What do you think are the reasons that hinder the Chinese community from speaking out or seeking help to challenge racism? (You can choose more than one option.)

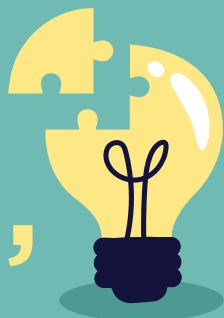
- THE CHINESE COMMUNITY MAY BE BUSY THINKING ABOUT SETTLING IN AUSTRALIA. (16)
- THE CHINESE COMMUNITY MAY THINK THAT REPORTING IT WON'T ACHIEVE ANYTHING. (16)
- THE CHINESE COMMUNITY MAY NOT KNOW THAT THERE ARE SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR THEM TO GET HELP. (22)
- THE CHINESE COMMUNITY MAY ADOPT DIFFERENT CULTURAL VALUES. (27)
- OTHER. (0)



In two focus group discussions, participants expressed that the Chinese community lacks a united voice and representation. While there are Chinese organisations serving the community, much more could be done to support community members. One factor contributing to the lack of a sense of unity is the community's diversity. Unlike some close-knit communities where individuals are often interconnected and united by a shared faith, the Chinese community is very diverse, with individuals coming from various regions, backgrounds, and cultural traditions. This diversity can result in a lack of familiarity among community members and a fragmented sense of identity, making it challenging to mobilise collective action against racism. Efforts to bridge existing divides and cultivate stronger connections among people from diverse backgrounds are essential for fostering solidarity and empowering the community to collectively address racism.



WE DON'T LACK COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS, BUT WHAT'S LACKING IS A CONNECTING THREAD; A WAY TO UNIFY THEM.



2.5 Sub-theme: Overcoming internalised racism

In the discussions, several participants expressed concerns about individuals within the Chinese community not fully integrating into their local communities. For example, one participant commented, "If your actions don't align with the local customs, there might be issues". The belief that alignment with local customs is necessary to avoid issues suggests a degree of internalised pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms, reflecting a nuanced interplay between cultural differences and internalised racism.

A significant proportion of participants suggested that negative perceptions of Chinese individuals can arise from the behaviour of a few, leading to broader negative associations with the entire community. One participant shared that "sometimes our behaviours as Chinese individuals cause local residents to be resentful of us," using the analogy of "one bad rat contaminating the entire pot of porridge". This belief suggests an acceptance of negative stereotypes and a sense of responsibility or pressure among Chinese individuals to disprove these stereotypes through their behaviour. The internalisation of negative societal perceptions can contribute to feelings of self-blame and collective guilt within the community. This can then inadvertently reinforce discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within the community. Additionally, internalised racism can result in a lack of collective effort to challenge racism. Feelings of shame and guilt can deter individuals from speaking out against racism or advocating for social change, creating divisions within communities and weakening collective action and advocacy against racism. Such observations highlight the importance of recognising and challenging internalised racism in order to promote cultural inclusivity.

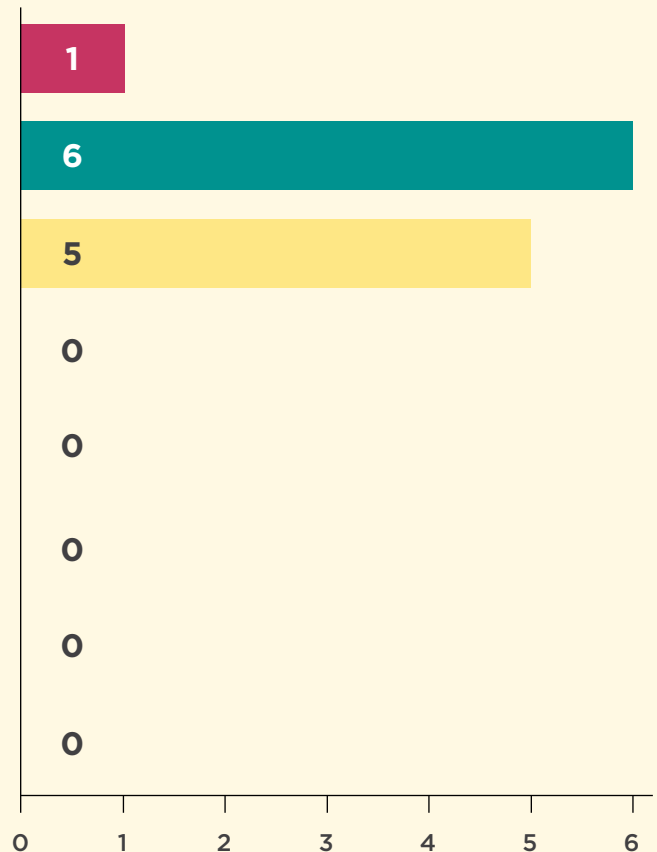
THEME 3 CHINESE WOMEN'S HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

Among the 12 survey respondents who reported experiences of racism, 92 per cent (n=11) chose to keep it to themselves or talked to family and friends. It is concerning to note that most members of the Chinese community are unaware of where to seek support. The survey included a question asking participants if they were aware of any support and services that are available to them to help manage experiences of racism. One of these is the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), a service that aims to prevent discrimination and promote human rights in Victoria through investigations, independent reviews and advocacy activities. Out of the 42 responses received, only one person indicated that they were aware of this service. Among the 19 focus group participants, two of them were aware of these support services, revealing a significant gap in community knowledge around available resources. This also suggests that incidents of racism faced by Chinese women are significantly under-reported.



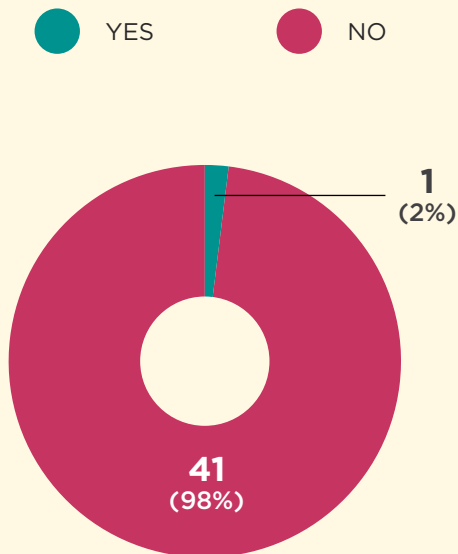
What did you or the victim(s) do to respond to the incident? (You can choose more than one option.)

- FOUGHT BACK AND CONFRONTED THE PERPETRATOR(S).
- DID NOT DO ANYTHING, JUST KEPT SILENT AND KEPT IT TO MYSELF.
- TALKED TO MY FAMILY AND/OR FRIENDS ABOUT THE INCIDENT.
- REPORTED THE INCIDENT TO SUPERVISOR/MANAGER.
- REPORTED THE INCIDENT TO VEOHRC.
- CALLED THE POLICE.
- TALKED TO THE VICTIM AND OFFERED HELP THROUGH WORD OF COMFORT.
- OTHER.



FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

Did you know that there are services available to support people who experience racism? (e.g. VEOHRC)?

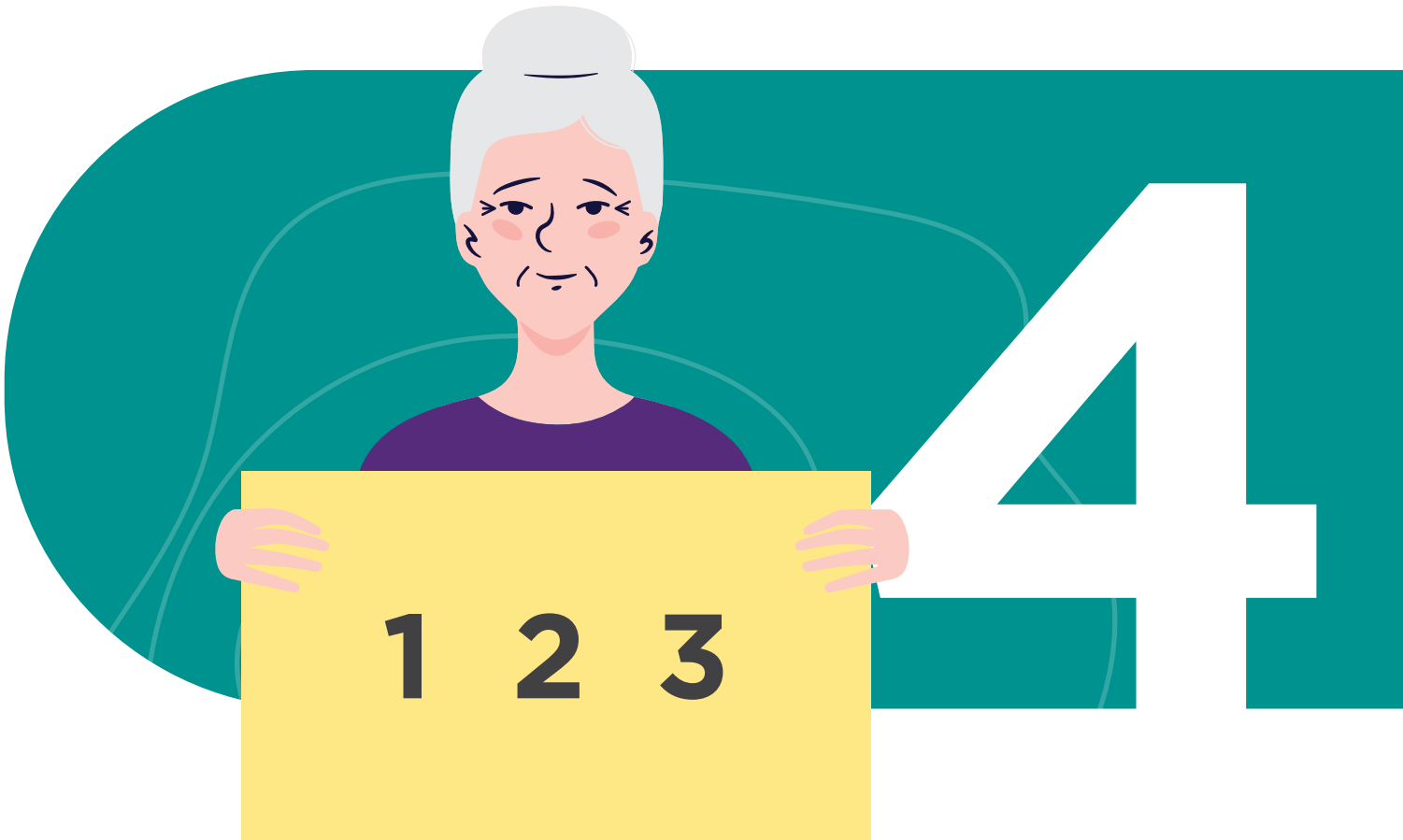


The two participants who knew about the service expressed scepticism about the efficacy of reporting incidents, complaining of long processes and a lack of transparency in the reporting procedure. Other participants shed light on several key aspects contributing to the reluctance of Chinese women to report incidents of racism. It is difficult to identify whether an incident is racially motivated, especially with a lack of definitive evidence. Cultural values to preserve harmony and avoid confrontation also contribute to this overall reluctance, as individuals may fear repercussions or further discrimination if they speak out.

In the context of workplace discrimination, concerns about confidentiality also exacerbated participants' reluctance to report incidents. This is because, as one female participant shared, "it might be difficult to remain anonymous, especially if there are only one or two Chinese people in the company". The hierarchical process of lodging complaints poses challenges for effective resolution. Concerns about biases held by those in positions of authority added to participants' scepticism surrounding the efficacy of seeking help. Doubts regarding the effectiveness of reporting inevitably deterred Chinese women from seeking assistance. One woman commented, "Even if I report it to them, nothing much will happen". The reluctance to report incidents of racism among Chinese women is influenced by various factors, including systemic barriers, cultural norms, and doubts about the responsiveness of support services.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) DEVELOPING AND FUNDING ANTI-RACISM PREVENTION AND PROGRAMS TO RAISE AWARENESS

4.1.1 Challenge Internalised Racism and Celebrate Cultural Identity

To combat racism effectively, it is crucial to address internalised racism within Chinese communities while simultaneously celebrating cultural identity. Efforts should focus on challenging internalised racism by fostering self-affirmation and empowerment within affected communities. This can be achieved through education and awareness programs that highlight the harmful effects of internalised stereotypes and encourage individuals to reject negative societal narratives about their cultural group.

Providing platforms for open dialogue and reflection can help individuals recognise and challenge internalised biases, promoting a more positive self-concept and collective identity. Celebrating cultural identity plays a vital role in combating racism by promoting pride, understanding and appreciation for diverse cultural backgrounds. Embracing and showcasing cultural heritage through festivals, art, literature, and community events not only fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity within cultural groups but also promotes intercultural understanding and respect throughout broader Australian society. In this way, we can work towards building a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals are valued and respected regardless of their cultural background.

RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

4.1.2 Challenge Stereotypes and Encourage Bystander Interventions

Cultural misunderstandings and misconceptions can contribute to social divisions and prejudice. This recommendation aims to bridge cultural divides and foster mutual understanding between the Chinese community and broader Australian society. Additionally, research showed that people experienced racism in a wide range of settings, like at work, on public transport, during consultations with healthcare and social services workers, and in shopping centres. Our research findings confirm the importance of bystander interventions, empathy, and cross-cultural training. Specifically, we recommend fostering empathy through advocacy and educational initiatives that encourage bystanders to intervene in instances of racism and offer emotional support to victims of racism.

4.1.3 Empower Chinese Women and Address Knowledge Gaps

The research findings showed a lack of awareness around the definition of racism and, as a result, how to identify incidents of racism. It is fair to suggest that the Chinese community would benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of how to recognise and address racist behaviours. During the focus group discussion, some participants would ask others whether or not their lived experience could be classified as incidents of racism. Given the inherent complexity of racism, its identification can sometimes pose a challenge. A well-informed community is better equipped to combat racism. To foster such awareness, we recommend developing information sessions and peer support groups to increase community members' understanding of racism and facilitate interactions with the community. By providing information and resources that highlight the intersection of sexism and racism and its impact on their lives, we can empower Chinese women to recognise and articulate their experiences more effectively. This could involve hosting workshops, seminars, or community discussions focused on intersectionality and its relevance to their lived experiences.

(2) FURTHER RESEARCH TO REACH OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Despite multiple attempts at promoting the project to other disadvantaged Chinese community groups, such as international students, these groups were underrepresented in both the focus group discussions and survey responses. This underrepresentation highlights the need to adopt culturally sensitive strategies to engage marginalised community groups, raise awareness of primary prevention initiatives, address barriers to participation and ensure that the voices of all relevant community groups are heard and accounted for in research efforts. It is imperative to conduct further research specifically tailored to understanding their experiences of racism and the unique challenges they face, which can provide valuable insights into the intersecting dynamics of racism and other forms of oppression experienced by people within the Chinese community.

(3) IMPROVE REPORTING TRANSPARENCY AND PATHWAYS

Many Chinese women are unaware of where to seek support or how to report incidents of racism, highlighting the importance of increasing outreach and accessibility of support services. This is critical to ensure that those affected by racism know where to turn for assistance. Even among those who are aware of reporting services, there is a prevailing perception that reporting is unlikely to lead to meaningful action. By improving transparency, we aim to overcome this scepticism. Transparency in reporting and clear pathways for addressing incidents of racism are essential for building trust among Chinese women and ensuring that reported incidents are taken seriously. This trust is a fundamental component of effective anti-racism efforts.

5

The Taking Action to Combat Racism project offered a valuable opportunity to engage directly with the Chinese community living and working in Manningham. The research carefully explored both women's experiences of racism and their ideas for potential strategies to combat racism, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research uncovered important findings about the Chinese community's experiences of racism in Melbourne's east, through a thorough analysis of qualitative data from focus groups and quantitative survey data. While the data gathered proved highly valuable and insightful, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, including the under-representation of younger generations and other groups in the community, such as international students.

The research findings showed the need for greater action to work towards a future in which all members of Australian society may enjoy a sense of safety, belonging and mutual respect in their everyday lives, regardless of their cultural or racial background.

CONCLUSION





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