



Anti-Asian Racism in Canada: Lived Experiences, Impact on Mental Health, and Access to Services and Support

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Executive Summary

People of Asian descent have contributed to the development of Canada as a country since the 1700s. Yet, throughout Canada's history, they have been subjected to interpersonal and state-sanctioned racial discrimination, such as head taxes, exclusionary or restrictive immigration measures, denial of voting rights, denial of employment and internment (Government of Canada, 2023). In contemporary times, their experiences with violence and discrimination throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened public awareness of anti-Asian racism.

This study collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data from a pan-Canadian online survey and interviews, which focused on respondents' experiences with anti-Asian racism and its impact on their well-being, their patterns of accessing informal support and formal services following racist incidents and recommended strategies to prevent and address anti-Asian racism. A total of 513 respondents completed the online survey. The research team further interviewed 32 individuals individually or in small groups.

Key Findings

Asian Canadian Experience with Racism

Survey respondents experienced between one and five racist incidents, with an average of four incidents, in the last five years. They encountered a wide range of racist incidents, including being blamed for spreading COVID-19 (68.3%), denial of services (63.4%), unfair treatment at work or by people of authority (64.4%), verbal abuse (49.1%), being harassed or threatened by police or security guards (32.4%), and physical attack (32.8%). About seven out of 10 respondents (73.8%) witnessed people of the same race being subjected to racist behaviours. One in ten respondents experienced anti-Asian racism on a weekly or monthly basis.

Respondents were subjected to anti-Asian racism in various settings and living contexts. Out of 1458 reported racist incidents among 513 respondents, 15.2% took place in a store, bank or restaurant, 13.4% in public areas such as parks or sidewalks, 11.6% at work or when applying for jobs or promotions, 9.5% while using public transportation, 9.3% at social gatherings or when attending school or classes, 7.4% while accessing health care services or on the internet, and 5.1% when seeking or applying for housing as renters or buyers. Less frequently reported but noticeable percentages of incidents took place when participants interacted with the police, crossed the border into Canada, and interacted with the courts, ranging between 1.5% and 4.7%.

Furthermore, those respondents who identified themselves as females speaking a non-official language at home, seniors between the ages of 65 and 87, individuals with a trade certificate or diploma and people of certain religious minorities (i.e., Hindu, Muslim, Sikh) consistently had a high likelihood of experiencing various types of racist incidents. In addition to their racial identity, respondents asserted that perpetrators also responded negatively to their cultures (31.4%), languages (25.2%), gender identities or expressions (10.0%), social classes or income levels (9.8%), religions (6.2%), ages (4.8%), and physical or mental disabilities (4.0%).

Impact of Anti-Asian Racism

Survey respondents indicated that their experiences with anti-Asian racism have negatively impacted them in many ways. More than eight out of 10 respondents (84.7%) showed that they have re-experienced racist incidents: having nightmares, feeling and thinking as if a racist incident is about to happen again, or feeling upset when being reminded of their experiences with racism. About eight out of 10 respondents (78.3%) reported their tendencies to deny that they have experienced racism and to avoid activities, places, situations or certain types of people, such as White people or law enforcement officers, that remind them of their experience with racism. Seven out of 10 respondents (71.5%) recognized negative changes in their cognition and mood, including thinking about themselves or other people negatively, blaming themselves or other people who were not involved in the racist incidents, or having ongoing negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame. More than six out of 10 respondents (65.0%) indicated they had experienced physiological arousal and reactivity, such as tearfulness, restlessness, fidgety, anxiety, paranoia, worry or distractedness. About six out of 10 respondents (58.6%) reported dissociative symptoms, feeling numb or detached from their bodies, others, activities or surroundings, feeling everything unreal, dreamlike, distant or distorted, or feeling immune to pain. Seven out of 10 respondents (69.5%) stated that their experiences with anti-Asian racism have caused personal distress and negatively impacted their family life, work, school work, and interactions with other community members in general. On average, respondents had lived with the impact of racism for 28.5 months.

Furthermore, those respondents who were harassed by the police or security guards had the highest likelihood of experiencing the severe impact of racism, such as adverse changes in mood, physiological arousal, dissociative symptoms, and distress. On the other hand, those respondents who reported unfair treatment at work or by authority figures were more likely to experience a wide range of impacts of racism.

Accessing Help

A high percentage of respondents, 45.6%, indicated they accessed neither informal support nor formal services. Among those who sought help, 48.2% turned to their friends and family members for support and 21.4% accessed formal services offered by a program or an organization. A modest percentage of respondents, 16.2%, used both informal support and formal services. Seniors aged 67 to 87 and working-age adults aged 25 to 64 were 13 and three times more likely than young adults between 18 and 24 to access formal services. Those respondents who reported unfair treatment, verbal abuse and harassment by police or security guards were more likely to access formal services than those who did not experience these forms of racism.

Respondents who sought formal help to deal with the impact of racism accessed programs and services offered by ethnic community organizations the most (38.7%), followed by those provided by mainstream organizations (20.2%), immigrant serving agencies (17.8%) and university or college counselling services (14.7%). About 8.5% indicated using other services, such as private counselling.

Among those survey respondents who did not seek any informal support from family and friends, the most frequently cited reasons were “I feel nothing could be done” (35.1%), “I do not feel such support is helpful” (25.3%), and “I am afraid of the negative consequences” (10.7%). Respondents who did not access formal services offered by a program or an organization also cited “I feel nothing could be done” (29.2%) as a primary reason. Other attributing factors to their decisions not to access formal services included a lack of awareness about the existing anti-racism-focused services (20.3%), anticipated unhelpfulness (13.9%), limited English or French (10.5%) and fear of negative consequences (10.0%).

In terms of timing, more than half of those respondents who chose to access informal support to deal with the impact of racism reached out to their families and friends immediately, right after or within one week after a racist incident (55.7%). Another 29.4% sought informal support between one and four weeks later. About 14.5% approached their friends and families more than a month later. On the other hand, only about 25.6% of respondents who chose to access formal services contacted a program or an organization immediately, right after or within one week after a racist incident. Another 22.2% waited more than a month later. About 52.3% accessed formal services between one and four weeks later.

Survey respondents presented divergent assessments of informal support and formal services. A slight majority of respondents (58.4%) who relied on their friends and family members found their support very helpful or helpful. On the other hand, even though three-third of respondents (74.4%) who accessed formal programs thought those services designed specifically to help people impacted by racism, only 14.5% found them helpful or very helpful. Almost one-half (47.8%) thought such programs or services were not helpful to them.

Recommendations

Recommended Strategies for Preventing Anti-Asian Racism

- Deliver anti-racist education that supports community members to examine their beliefs and implicit and explicit biases
- Organize public and social media campaigns to raise awareness about anti-Asian racism
- Support Asian Canadians to speak up about their experiences
- Ask community leaders to champion and promote diversity and racial equity
- Advocate for fair representation of Asian Canadians and reporting on their experiences in the media
- Allocate and advocate for equitable funding for anti-Asian racism work
- Collect and use data to inform anti-racism policies and actions
- Examine and address systemic anti-Asian racism in Canadian institutions

Recommended Services and Support for Asian Canadians to Deal with the Impact of Anti-Asian Racism

- Organize mutual support groups
- Offer free trauma-informed counselling or coaching
- Facilitate access to advocates, ombudspersons and resources
- Offer support for reporting racist incidents and accessing legal assistance
- Offer support in natural settings, such as at community centres and religious gathering places
- Develop restorative justice programs
- Have in place crisis lines and clinics dedicated to people who have experienced anti-Asian racism

1. Introduction

People of Asian descent have contributed to the development of Canada as a country since the 1700s. Yet, throughout Canada's history, they have been subjected to interpersonal and state-sanctioned racial discrimination, such as head taxes, exclusionary or restrictive immigration measures, denial of voting rights, denial of employment and internment (Government of Canada, 2023). In contemporary times, their experiences with violence and discrimination throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened public awareness of anti-Asian racism. Social media posts, grassroots reporting lines, survey results and interviews have documented a wide range of racist incidents facing Asian Canadians, such as racial slurs, disrespectful treatment, social exclusion, threats of harassment and physical assaults (the ACCT Foundation, 2022; Newbold et al. 2022).

To support Asian Canadians who have experienced racial discrimination, the ACCT (Act! Chinese Canadians Act Together) Foundation has established a reporting line to gather stories of racism across Canada and connect impacted community members with relevant resources. Its records indicate that approximately 25% of Asian Canadians who accessed the reporting line requested referrals to mental health services and support (the ACCT Foundation, 2022). However, many service providers, including settlement agencies and community organizations, could not take referrals due to their limited capacities to provide culturally responsive, trauma-informed services.

In response to the emerging needs, community and service partners across the country have spearheaded an action research initiative to understand and respond to the impact of racism on Asian Canadians' well-being. This research report documents the collaborative inquiry process, key learnings about Asian Canadian experience with racism, and suggested strategies to prevent anti-Asian racism and address racism-related mental health challenges.

2. Background

According to the 2021 census data, about 19.3% of Canada's population, or 7,013,835 people, have identified themselves as Asians (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Asian Canadian residents have ancestral roots from East Asia (e.g., China, Korea and Japan), South Asia (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), Southeast Asia (e.g., Cambodia, Laos, Philippines and Vietnam), West Asia (e.g., Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey), and Central Asia (e.g., Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) (Statistics Canada, 2022a). The majority are first generation (69.5%), followed by second generation (25.9%) and third generation (4.6%) (Statistics Canada, 2023b). Of Canada's foreign-born population, 51.5% were born in Asia. With respect to recent newcomers to Canada arriving in Canada between 2016 and 2021, 62.0% were born in Asia (Statistics Canada, 2023c). Among racialized Canadians, at 26.5% of the total Canadian population, the South Asian group represents 26.8%, followed by Chinese (17.7%), Filipino (9.8%), Southeast Asian (4.2%), Korean (2.3%), and Japanese (1.1%) (Statistics Canada, 2023c).

Since the late 1700s, people of Asian heritage have contributed to the development of Canada as a country (Government of Canada, 2023). Historically, Chinese, Japanese and South Asian settlers helped develop several national infrastructures and industries, including the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), lumber and mining (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2022). However, state-sanctioned colonial and racist policies and practices reinforced the view of Asian Canadians as exploitable labourers and perpetual foreigners. Successive governments introduced exclusionary or restrictive measures against Asian Canadians in immigration (e.g., the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, also known as the Chinese Head Tax, and the Continuous Journey Regulation of 1908), voting (e.g., the Qualification and Registration of Voters Act of 1872 in provincial elections in British Columbia and the Dominion Election Act of 1920 in federal elections), employment (the Inspection of Metalliferous Mines Act of 1897) and civil rights (e.g., Japanese internment under the War Measures Act) (Government of Canada, 2023).

In the contemporary context, the "model minority" myth, which was introduced to undercut the civil rights movements and reinforce the stereotypes of polite, law-abiding and high-achieving Asians, has undermined racial inequities experienced by people of Asian descent (Nguyen, 2020; Wu, 2013). Socioeconomic inequities facing Asian Canadians, including high poverty rates among Korean, Arab, and West Asian Canadians ranging from 27% to 32%, are overlooked (Hou & Frank, 2020; Lee-An & Chen, 2021). Asian Canadians have reported significantly high rates of racial discrimination and racially based violence (Godley, 2018; Hall & Hwang, 2001). Intersectional analyses confirm that women of Asian descent have faced racism and sexism professionally and personally (Mukkamal & Suyemoto, 2018). The shooting rampage in Atlanta that killed six Asian women in 2021 exposed Asian hate and gender-based violence in North America (Chen, 2022).

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the relative risk of ethnic and racial discrimination has increased among Asian groups. For instance, Chinese Canadians were 10 times more likely than non-racialized residents to report being victims of ethnic or racial discrimination during the first year of the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Between 2019 and 2020, police-reported crimes motivated by hatred of a race or ethnicity increased (from 884 to 1594 incidents), with East or Southeast Asians (from 67 to 269, or +301%) and South Asians (81 to 119, or +47%) among the most impacted (Wang & Moreau, 2022). These findings are consistent with those documented in several research studies, which indicated high percentages of Asian Canadians feeling concerned about personal safety or an increase in the frequency of harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity or skin colour in their communities (Angus Reid Institute, 2022, Heidinger & Cotter, 2020). Well-circulated video footage in social media have elucidated the traumatic experiences of many Asian Canadians with physical and verbal assaults (Jang et al., 2021; Jiwani, 2020; Xu, 2020).

In the wake of increased racial discrimination and violence against Asians throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, community leaders, policymakers, and academic researchers have undertaken efforts to inquire into and respond to anti-Asian racism. Yet, the extent to which Asian Canadians have experienced racism and been impacted by racism-related stress has remained understudied (Louie-Poon et al., 2021). The need to generate practical strategies to prevent and address anti-Asian racism in Canada has further created an impetus for this community-based action research.

3. Methods

This community-based study adopted an action research approach, which involves the interplay of critical reflection on the issue of concern and individual and group actions to improve social conditions in the community (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The study aimed to strengthen our collective understanding of and responses to anti-Asian racism and its impact on Asian Canadians. An advisory committee comprised of 18 community leaders and settlement organization representatives from across Canada helped guide the development and implementation of the research plan. The research team members collected and analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data from a pan-Canadian online survey and interviews, which focused on respondents' experiences with anti-Asian racism and its impact on their well-being, their patterns of accessing informal support and formal services following racist incidents and recommended strategies to prevent and address anti-Asian racism. Survey respondents and interviewees met these inclusion criteria: (1) self-identified Asian Canadians, (2) 18 years of age or older, and (3) experienced racism in Canada in the last five years. The online survey was available in English, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Cantonese, Korean, Japanese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

The online survey was administered nationwide between October and December 2022. It adopted several established instruments, including those measuring racial differences in physical and mental health due to discrimination (Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003) and the impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2020), and racial and ethnic stress and trauma (Williams, Metzger, Leins, & DeLapp, 2018). A total of 513 respondents completed the questionnaires. At the time of the survey, their reported provinces of residence were Ontario (28.7%), British Columbia (24.2%), Alberta (16.2%), Quebec (6.5%), Nova Scotia (4.8%), New Brunswick (4.7%), Saskatchewan (4.5%), Manitoba (3.0%), Prince Edward Island (3.0%), Newfoundland and Labrador (2.6%), Yukon (0.9%), Northwest Territories (0.57%) and Nunavut (0.2%). Sociodemographic data indicated that respondents ranged between 18 and 87 years of age, with an average of 38 (see Table 1). With respect to gender, 59.5% identified themselves as female, 38.8% as male and 1.8% as non-binary. About 3.1% identified themselves as LGBTQ+ community members. More than two-thirds of respondents (71.7%) were born outside of Canada, with China, Philippines, Korea, India, Taiwan, United States, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam among the top countries of birth. They came to Canada as economic immigrants (30.3%), family-sponsored immigrants (27.3%), international students (25.6%), temporary workers (6.3%), refugees (3.0%), or under other circumstances such as being dependents of international students or economic immigrants (7.6%). About six out of ten respondents (58.3%) indicated they speak a home language other than English or French. A significant percentage of respondents had no religious affiliation (43.9%), followed by those who identified themselves as Christian (36.8%), Buddhist (11.7%), Hindu (2.9%), Muslim (2.7%), Sikh (0.6%) and Jewish (0.2%). Other reported religions (1.0%) included Taoism and Baha'i. Survey respondents represented all levels of education and income. Even though 85.6% of all respondents reported a post-high school education and 57.7% completed a bachelor's or graduate degree, 42.0% reported a personal income of less than \$30,000. Another 32.2% had a personal income from \$30,000 to less than \$60,000. About 8.2% of respondents disclosed having a mental or physical disability.

The research team interviewed 32 individuals in small groups between two and four persons (22 interviewees) or individually (10 interviewees). Interviewees reported their residence in Alberta (40.6%), Ontario (34.4%), British Columbia (21.9%) and New Brunswick (3.1%). Their ages ranged between 19 and 79, with an average of 36 (see Table 2). Gender representation included females (71.9%), males (25%), and non-binary (3.1%). About 9.4% identified themselves as LGBTQ+ community members. Two-thirds of interviewees (78.1%) were born outside of Canada, citing China, Japan, Madagascar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and the United States as their countries of birth. They came to Canada as family-sponsored immigrants (52.0%), international students (24.0%), economic immigrants (16.0%) and refugees (8.0%). About six out of ten interviewees (62.5%) indicated they speak a home language other than English or French. More than half of the interviewees had no religious affiliation (53.1%), followed by those who identified themselves as Christian (34.4%), Buddhist (9.4%) and Muslim (3.1%). Survey respondents represented all levels of education and income. Interviewees were diverse in their levels of education, with 37.5% with a bachelor's degree, 28.1% with a graduate degree, 25.0% with a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate, 3.1% with a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma, and 3.1% with a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level. More than half of the interviewees (56.3%) reported a personal income of less than \$30,000.

Table 1: Sociodemographic overview of survey respondents

	N	%
Total	513	100
Gender		
Female	305	59.5
Male	199	38.8
Non-binary	9	1.8
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	497	96.9
LGBTQ+	16	3.1
Place of birth		
Canada	147	28.3
Outside of Canada	367	71.7
Immigration categories		
Economic immigrant	111	30.3
Family-sponsored immigrant	100	27.3
Refugee	11	3.0
International student	94	25.6
Temporary worker	23	6.3
Other	28	7.6
Home Language		
English	207	40.4
French	7	1.4
Other	299	58.3
Religion		
No religious affiliation	225	43.9
Christian	189	36.8
Buddhist	60	11.7
Hindu	15	2.9
Muslim	14	2.7
Sikh	3	0.6
Jewish	2	0.4
Other religion	5	1.0

	N	%
Education		
Less than a high school diploma or its equivalent	8	1.6
High school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate	65	12.7
Trade certificate or diploma	22	4.3
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	60	11.7
University certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level	61	11.9
Bachelor's degree (e.g., B.A., B.Sc., LL.B.)	185	36.2
University certificate, diploma, or degree above the bachelor's level	110	21.5
Income Level		
Less than \$10,000	92	18.0
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	58	11.3
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	65	12.7
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	64	12.5
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	60	11.7
\$50,000 to less than \$60,000	41	8.0
\$60,000 to less than \$70,000	45	8.8
\$70,000 to less than \$80,000	25	4.9
\$80,000 to less than \$90,000	22	4.3
\$90,000 to less than \$100,000	14	2.7
\$100,000 and over	26	5.1

Table 2: Sociodemographic overview of interviewees

	N	%
Total	32	100
Gender		
Female	23	71.9
Male	8	25.0
Non-binary	1	3.1
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	29	90.6
LGBTQ+	3	9.4
Place of birth		
Canada	7	21.9
Outside of Canada	25	78.1

	N	%
Immigration categories		
Economic immigrant	4	16.0
Family-sponsored immigrant	13	52.0
Refugee	2	8.0
International student	6	24.0
Temporary worker	-	-
Other	-	-
Home Language		
English	12	37.5
French	-	-
Other	20	62.5
Religion		
No religious affiliation	17	53.1
Christian	11	34.4
Buddhist	3	9.3
Hindu	-	-
Muslim	1	3.1
Sikh	-	-
Jewish	-	-
Other religion	-	-
Education		
Less than a high school diploma or its equivalent	-	-
High school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate	8	25.0
Trade certificate or diploma	-	-
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	1	3.1
University certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level	1	3.1
Bachelor's degree (e.g., B.A., B.Sc., LL.B.)	12	37.5
University certificate, diploma, or degree above the bachelor's level	9	28.1
Income Level		
Less than \$10,000	10	31.3
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	4	12.5
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	4	12.5
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	2	6.3
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	-	-
\$50,000 to less than \$60,000	-	-
\$60,000 to less than \$70,000	1	3.1
\$70,000 to less than \$80,000	2	6.3
\$80,000 to less than \$90,000	1	3.1
\$90,000 to less than \$100,000	1	3.1
\$100,000 and over	4	12.5

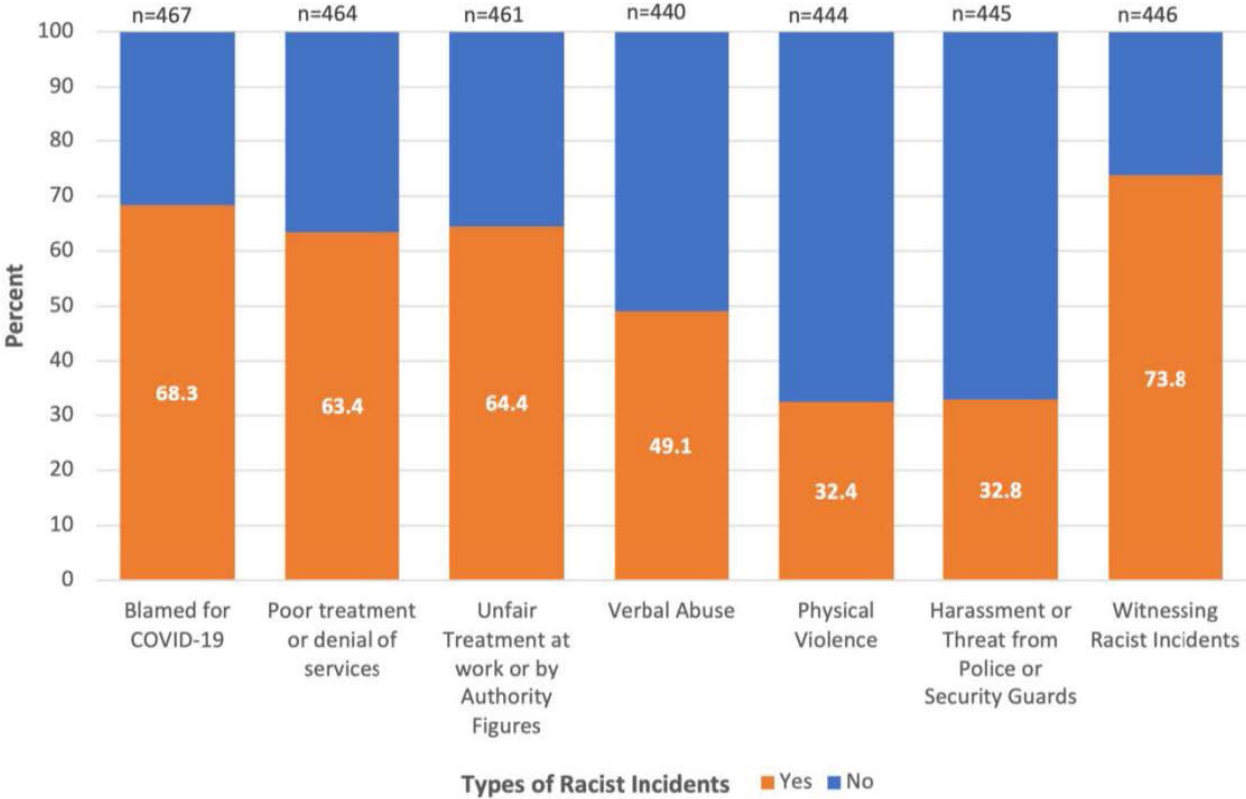
The research team members used quantitative tools, Qualtrics and SPSS, to analyze survey data. They performed both descriptive and referential analyses to establish the prevalence of anti-Asian racism and its impact and examine the associations among the key sociodemographic variables and Asian Canadians' experience with racism, its impact and support-seeking behaviours. They further used the qualitative software NVivo to analyze the transcribed interviews.

4. Findings

Asian Canadian Experience with Racism

Survey results showed that respondents have experienced between one and five racist incidents, with an average of four incidents, in the last five years. An equal percentage of respondents (10.5%) indicated that they had experienced anti-Asian racism on a weekly or monthly basis. Another 35.1% of respondents reported that they had experienced racism a few times a year. About 43.7% assessed that they had experienced less than one racist incident a year. Survey respondents indicated that they had experienced a wide range of racist incidents in the last five years, including being blamed for spreading COVID-19 (68.3%), denial of services (63.4%), unfair treatment at work or by people of authority (64.4%), verbal abuse (49.1%), being harassed or threatened by police or security guards (32.4%), and physical attack (32.8%). About seven out of 10 respondents (73.8%) have witnessed people of the same race being subjected to racist behaviours.

Table 3: Experience of anti-Asian racism



Qualitative accounts further illustrated how Asian Canadians have experienced a wide range of racism in their communities. A community member shared her experience during the Covid-19 pandemic:

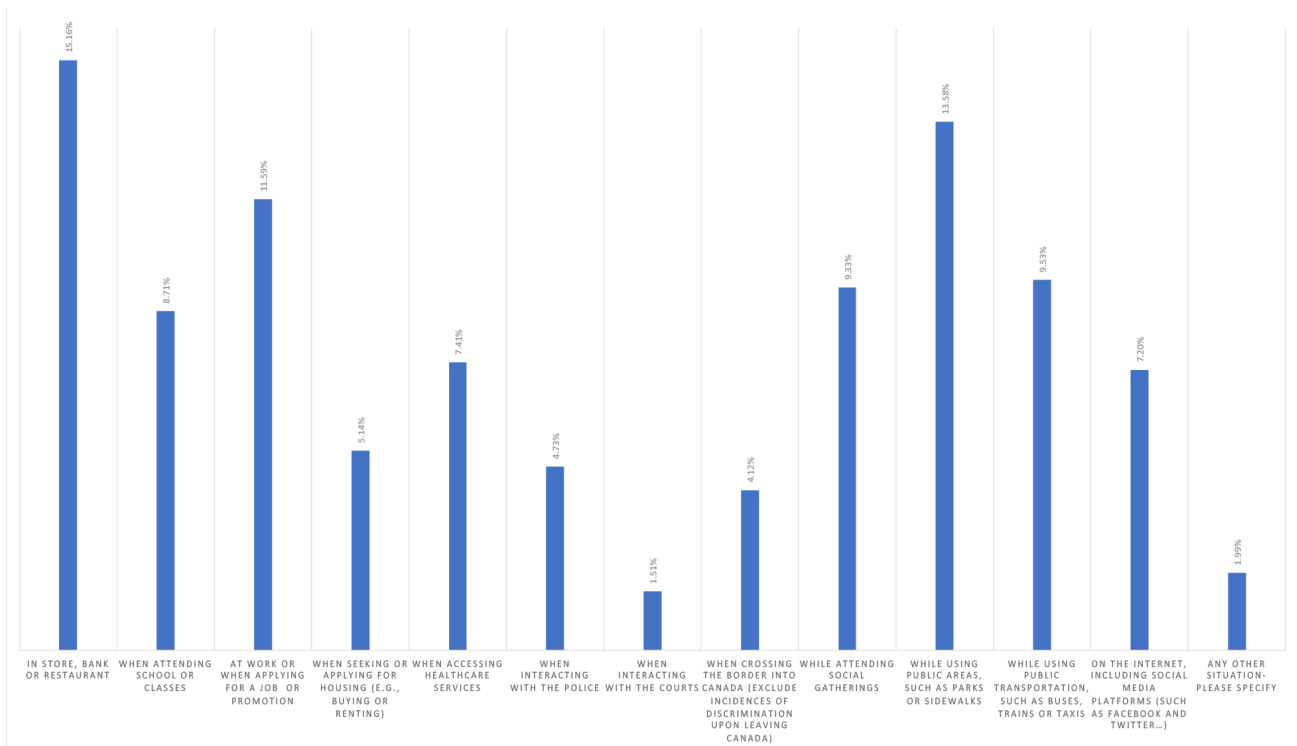
I was called Asian trash when I said, “Excuse me,” because I needed to walk by someone. I was asked if the kitchen has dogs and was told with “Ching Chong gong Ning Gua” by several customers while volunteering at a culture festival. People avoided me at the beginning of COVID. They coughed intentionally behind me and followed me around while laughing when I was in the supermarket.

In another situation, Asian hate was manifested in physical violence.

I was attacked by a stranger when I walked on the street; while he ran towards me directly and smacked my head, I was in shock and only bent over a bit to avoid more harm. No one came to help me or stopped the guy, so I only yelled at him, “What are you doing?!” and let him run away. I tried to call a non-emergency call afterward. However, I found it too vague of its definition that I even didn’t know if I had met the category to call.

Survey respondents indicated that racist incidents occurred in various settings and living contexts (Table 4). Out of 1458 reported racist incidents among 513 respondents, 15.2% took place in a store, bank or restaurant, 13.4% in public areas such as parks or sidewalks, 11.6% at work or when applying for jobs or promotions, 9.5% while using public transportation, 9.3% at social gatherings or when attending school or classes, 7.4% while accessing health care services or on the internet, and 5.1% when seeking or applying for housing as renters or buyers. Less frequently reported but noticeable percentages of incidents took place when participants interacted with the police, crossed the border into Canada, and interacted with the courts, ranging between 1.5% and 4.7%. Respondents also elaborated in their qualitative accounts that other racist incidents occurred while playing sports, driving, going on a date, at the airport, and interacting with people in their neighbourhood or at a playground in front of their children.

Table 4: Anti-Asian racism in diverse settings and living contexts



Interviewees' accounts elaborated on Asian Canadians' experiences with racism in various settings and living contexts. As community members increasingly interact with others on social media, anti-Asian racism has been widely expressed online. A young Asian recalled her experience with racially motivated bullying.

A man on Facebook with a profile picture of Bruce Lee also named himself Bruce Lee. I assumed he was another peer who really liked Bruce Lee. He added a bunch of Asians from my school but, after that, proceeded to threaten to kill our parents. He messaged names intending to be offensive "Tofu" and told us to "leave this country" At first, I blocked him. Later, a group of friends I decided to add him to the group chat and questioned why he didn't like Asians. He continued to spew hate for all Asians, how we were stealing jobs and raising housing prices.

Another respondent encountered anti-Asian racism regularly while using public transportation:

A bus driver repeatedly shut the door in my face on my regular route. I finally confronted him and wanted to know if it was about race. He said I "shouldn't play that card" but that Chinese people "are also responsible" - presumably, for COVID. I no longer take public transit if at all possible.

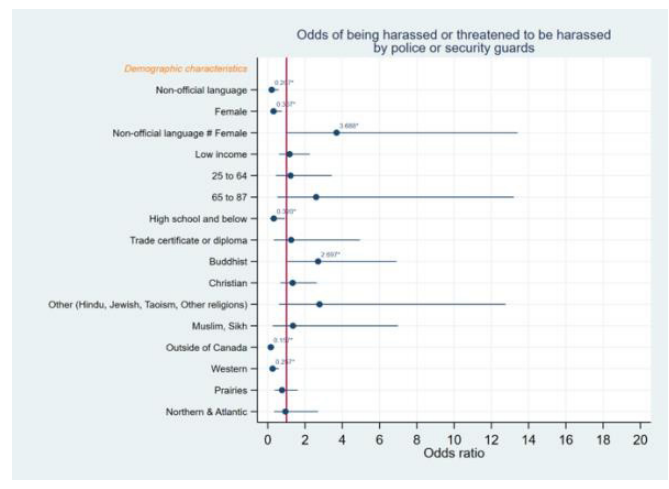
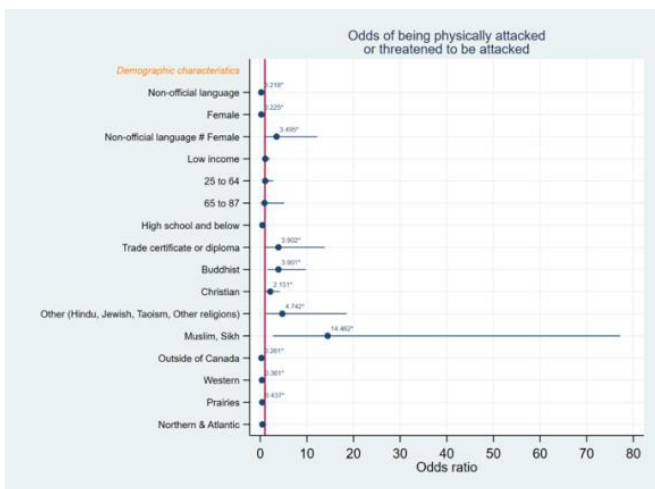
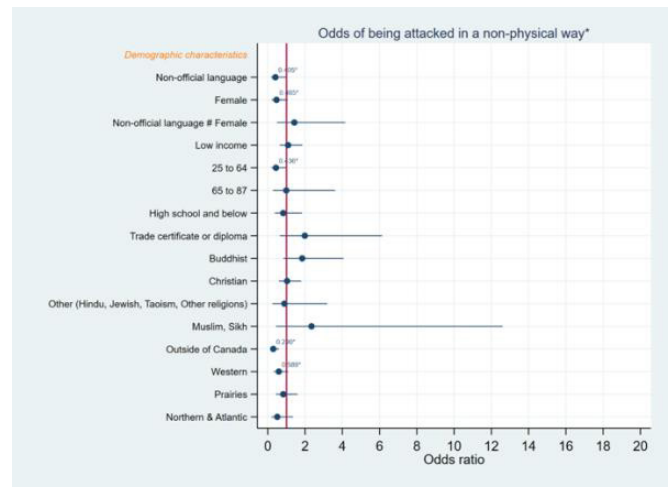
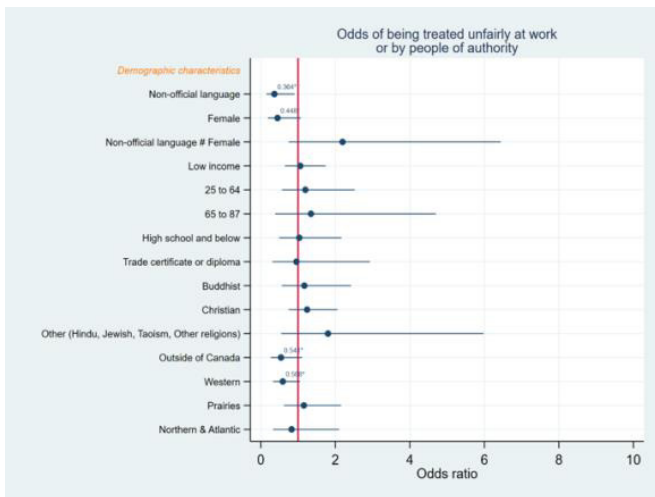
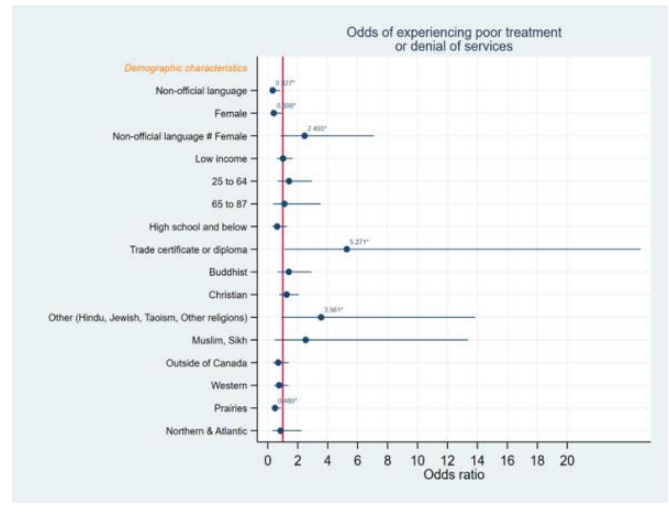
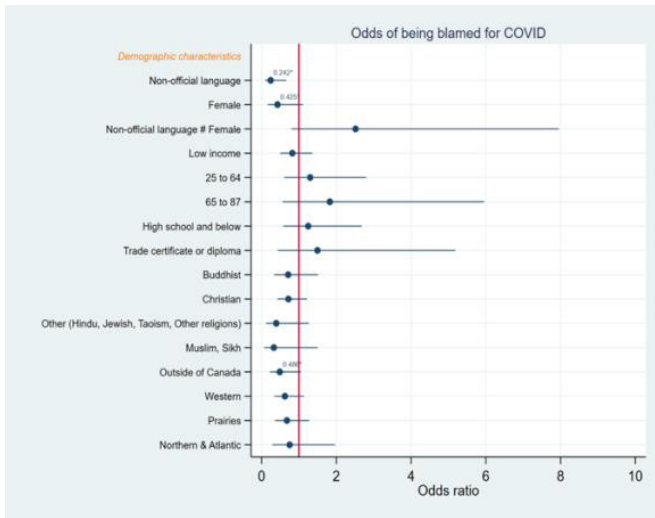
Anti-Asian racism permeates the workplace. These two personal experiences were situated in the context of systemic racism.

Being raised in Australia and Papua New Guinea, I am very fluent in English (and three other languages, for that matter). When I applied to be an IELTS Examiner in 2015, I was asked to take the Speaking and Writing test and score perfect 9.0s for both skills as one of the requirements before I could be interviewed and trained as an examiner. This was not required for my Canadian counterparts, who, in my opinion, would not be able to achieve such a score on the first try. I withdrew my application. Two years later, I was informed that the process was changed, wherein an interview was conducted first before it was decided whether the candidate should take the test or not. I was asked to reapply by my colleagues, but by then, I had lost faith in the recruitment/employment system as my wife had also experienced systemic discrimination in applying for work, salary grade and promotion.

I experienced delayed promotion at work despite having more qualifications and achievements in the work than a white colleague who was promoted over me. My appeal was rejected, and I had to apply again in 2 years with a loss of potential salary increase. I was never promoted to head of the department, even though I had great achievements and reviews. The department never had a Chinese/visible minority department head ever in its history. I was the only Asian on staff for over 40 years.

Furthermore, those respondents who identified themselves as females speaking a non-official language at home, seniors between the ages of 65 and 87, individuals with a trade certificate or diploma and people of certain religious minorities (i.e., Hindu, Muslim, Sikh) consistently had a high likelihood of experiencing various types of racist incidents (Figure 1). In addition to their racial identity, respondents asserted that perpetrators also responded negatively to their cultures (31.4%), languages (25.2%), gender identities or expressions (10.0%), social classes or income levels (9.8%), religions (6.2%), ages (4.8%), and physical or mental disabilities (4.0%).

Figure 1: Odds of experiencing various forms of racism among sociodemographic groups



Notes:

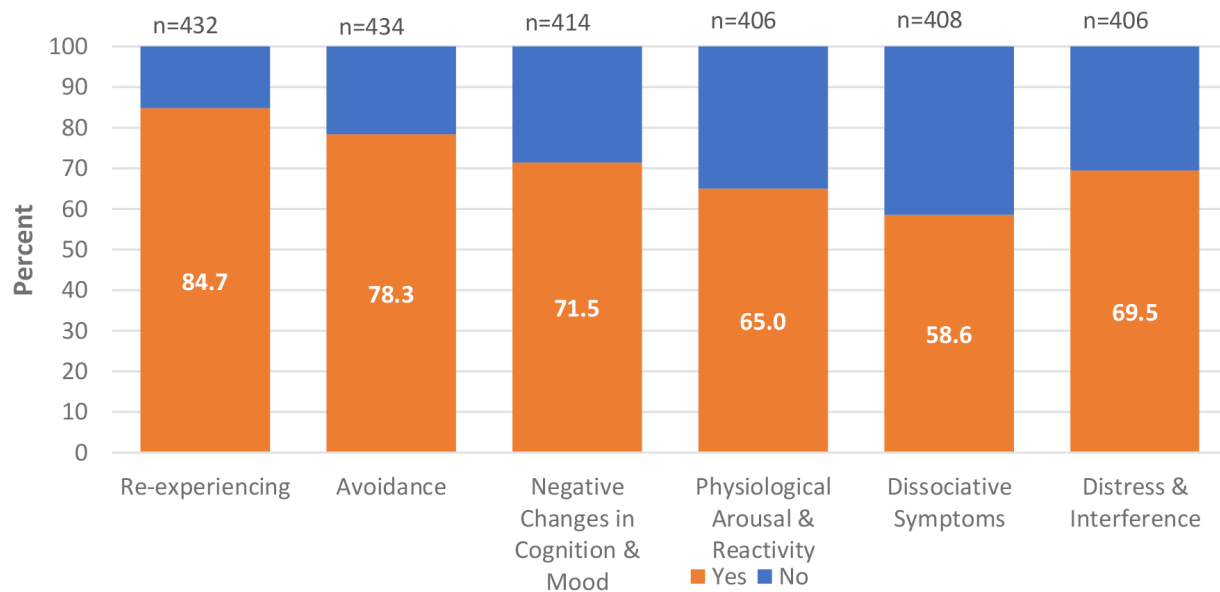
*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Reference groups - Language spoken: English or French; Gender: Men; Income level: non-low income; Age group: 18 to 24; Educational attainment: College CEGEP, bachelor's & higher; Religion: No religious affiliation; Country of birth: Canada; Region: Central; Each experience of racism: Never experienced; Each impact of racism: Never experienced

Impact of Anti-Asian Racism

The survey measured the impact of racism, asking questions that determined whether respondents have re-experienced racism, such as having nightmares about their racist encounters; avoided activities, places, situations or people that remind them of their experience with racism; experienced negative changes in cognition and mood, including self-blaming; experienced physiological arousal and reactivity, such as not being able to calm down after something upsetting; had dissociative symptoms, including feeling numb or detached from the body, peoples, activities or surroundings; and experienced distress and interference that impact their family life or work. Survey respondents indicated that their experiences with anti-Asian racism have negatively impacted them in many ways. More than eight out of 10 respondents (84.7%) showed that they have re-experienced racist incidents: having nightmares, feeling and thinking as if a racist incident is about to happen again, or feeling upset when reminded of their experiences with racism. About eight out of 10 respondents (78.3%) reported their tendencies to deny that they have experienced racism and to avoid activities, places, situations or certain types of people, such as White people or law enforcement officers, that remind them of their experience with racism. Seven out of 10 respondents (71.5%) recognized negative changes in their cognition and mood, including thinking about themselves or other people negatively, blaming themselves or other people who were not involved in the racist incidents, or having ongoing negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame. More than six out of 10 respondents (65.0%) indicated they had experienced physiological arousal and reactivity, such as tearfulness, restlessness, fidgety, anxiety, paranoia, worry or distractedness. About six out of 10 respondents (58.6%) reported dissociative symptoms, feeling numb or detached from their bodies, others, activities or surroundings, feeling everything unreal, dreamlike, distant or distorted, or feeling immune to pain. Overall, seven out of 10 respondents (69.5%) stated that their experiences with anti-Asian racism have caused personal distress and negatively impacted their family life, work, school work, and interactions with other community members in general. The data showed that, on average, respondents have lived with the impact of racism for 28.5 months.

Table 5: Impact of Anti-Asian Racism



Furthermore, those respondents who were harassed by the police or security guards had the highest likelihood of experiencing the severe impact of racism, such as adverse changes in mood, physiological arousal, dissociative symptoms, and distress. On the other hand, those respondents who reported unfair treatment at work or by authority figures were more likely to experience a wide range of impacts of racism (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Impact of racism on various sociodemographic groups



Notes:

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1

Reference groups - Language spoken: English or French; Gender: Men; Income level: non-low income; Age group: 18 to 24; Educational attainment: College CEGEP, bachelor's & higher; Religion: No religious affiliation; Country of birth: Canada; Region: Central; Each experience of racism: Never experienced; Each impact of racism: Never experienced

Qualitative accounts shed light on the racial trauma experienced by Asian Canadians. Interviewees talked at length about losing trust in other people, increased vulnerability, and compromised mental health. A respondent stated: “I can’t trust people. I put my guard up and worry about my kid’s future. I feel vulnerable.” Another respondent redirected his anger toward his family: “I used to lash out at my family members because of what I had to go through at work, especially from my boss.” Among the recurring dynamics was the cumulative, long-term impact of anti-Asian racism on respondents’ well-being. A young adult assessed the impact of her ongoing experience with racism during childhood: “In my youth, I was frequently taunted by other children and had multiple adult people say racist things to me. Those have caused more damage to my mental health.” An elderly community member elaborated on how she has constantly lived with anti-Asian racism all her life:

I’ve felt anger for being treated with no respect and no acknowledgment of my humanity, even in my senior years. Even though Covid has been a factor in today’s anti-Asian racist behaviour, being Asian Canadian has meant always being aware of negative views in some people’s eyes. Although my family has lived in Canada through five generations for over 100 years, I have always been a foreigner and will never belong.

The devastating impact of racism has also been manifested in diminished self-worth and internalized racism. A respondent offered their account:

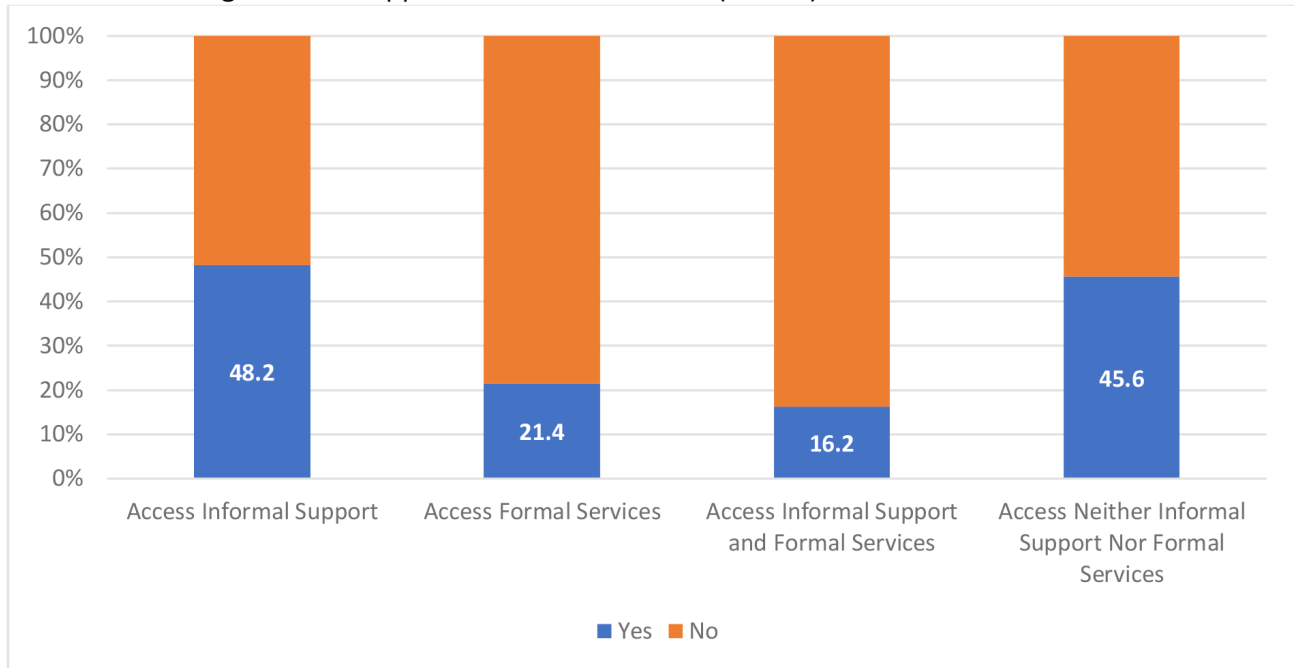
Sometimes I find I’m ashamed of myself because of my ethnicity or having an accent while speaking English. I became more self-conscious and worried that some attack will happen again. It made me want to reject my Asian identity and try to appear Westernized to avoid being made fun of. When others made nasty remarks about my intellect, it made me feel worthless because I couldn’t live up to the stereotype of Asians being smart. It also negatively impacted my view of white people because those who made racist jokes or remarks to me were white people.

Accessing Help

Survey data established the patterns of accessing informal support and formal services among Asian Canadians following their encounters with racism. A high percentage of respondents, 45.6%, indicated that they accessed neither informal support nor formal services (Table 6). Among those who sought help, 48.2% turned to their friends and family members for support and 21.4% accessed formal services offered by a program or an organization. A modest percentage of respondents, 16.2%, used both informal support and formal services.

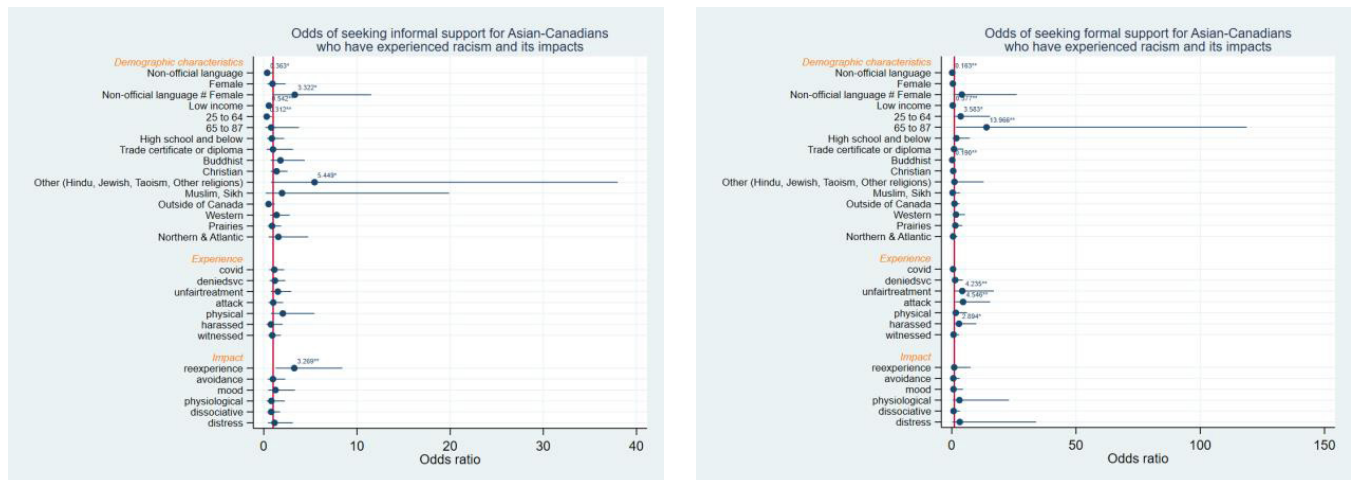
Table 6: Accessing informal support and formal services (N=425)

Table 6: Accessing informal support and formal services (N=425)



Our analysis further showed that seniors aged 67 to 87 and working-age adults aged 25 to 64 were 13 and three times more likely than young adults between 18 and 24 to access formal services (Figure 3). Those respondents who reported unfair treatment, verbal abuse and harassment by police or security guards were more likely to access formal services than those who did not experience these forms of racism.

Figure 3: Likelihood of accessing informal support and formal services



Notes:

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1

Reference groups - Language spoken: English or French; Gender: Men; Income level: non-low income; Age group: 18 to 24; Educational attainment: College CEGEP, bachelor's & higher; Religion: No religious affiliation; Country of birth: Canada; Region: Central; Each experience of racism: Never experienced; Each impact of racism: Never experienced

Respondents who sought formal help to deal with the impact of racism accessed programs and services offered by ethnic community organizations the most (38.7%), followed by those provided by mainstream organizations (20.2%), immigrant serving agencies (17.8%) and university or college counselling services (14.7%) (Table 7). About 8.5% indicated using other services, such as private counselling.

Table 7: Types of formal services (N=129)

	%
Immigrant serving agencies (e.g., Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association)	25.6
Ethnic community organizations (e.g., Chinese Canadian Community Organization)	16.7
Mainstream organizations (e.g., Toronto Counseling Centre)	16.7
University or college counselling services	7.8
Other	11.1

Among those survey respondents who did not seek any informal support from family and friends, the most frequently cited reasons were “I feel nothing could be done” (35.1%), “I do not feel such support is helpful” (25.3%), and “I am afraid of the negative consequences” (10.7%) (Table 8). Respondents who did not access formal services offered by a program or an organization also cited “I feel nothing could be done” (29.2%) as a primary reason. Other attributing factors to their decisions not to access formal services included a lack of awareness about the existing antiracism-focused services (20.3%), anticipated unhelpfulness (13.9%), limited English or French (10.5%) and fear of negative consequences (10.0%).

Table 8: Reasons for not accessing informal support (N=328) or formal services (N=620)

	Informal Support (%)	Formal Services (%)
I feel too ashamed.	8.5	6.9
I feel nothing could be done.	35.1	29.2
I am afraid of the negative consequences.	10.7	10.0
I do not feel such support is helpful.	25.3	13.9
I do not have people in my life that I can talk to.	8.5	-
My English or French is not good	-	10.5
I do not know if such a service exists or how to find it.	-	20.3
My family or friends discourage me from accessing services.	-	2.1

In terms of timing, more than half of those respondents who chose to access informal support to deal with the impact of racism reached out to their families and friends immediately, right after or within one week after a racist incident (55.7%) (Table 9). Another 29.4 sought informal support between one and four weeks later. About 14.5% approached their friends and families more than a month later. On the other hand, only about 25.6% of respondents who chose to access formal services contacted a program or an organization immediately, right after or within one week after a racist incident. Another 22.2% waited more than a month later. About 52.3% accessed formal services between one and four weeks later.

Table 9: When accessing informal support (N=201) or formal services (N=20)

	Informal Support (%)	Formal Services (%)
Immediately, right after or less than one week after the incident	55.7	25.6
One week later	12.9	16.7
Two weeks later	8.5	16.7
Three weeks later	5.0	7.8
Four weeks later	3.0	11.1
More than a month later	14.9	22.2

Survey respondents presented divergent assessments of informal support and formal services. A slight majority of respondents (58.4%) who relied on their friends and family members found their support very helpful or helpful (Table 10). Closer to one-third (28.7%) held a neutral view about their informal support, and another 12.9% thought their friends' and families' support was not helpful. On the other hand, even though three-third of respondents (74.4%) who accessed formal programs thought those services to be designed specifically to help people impacted by racism, only 14.5% found them helpful or very helpful. Almost one-half (47.6%) thought such programs or services were not helpful to them.

Table 10: Helpfulness in informal support (N=202) and formal services (N=90)

	Informal Support (%)	Formal Services (%)
Very helpful/ helpful	58.4	14.5
Neutral	28.7	37.8
Very unhelpful/ unhelpful	12.9	47.8

5. Recommendations

Drawing upon the input from research participants and the critical insights emerging from the collaborative inquiry, several recommendations are put forward to prevent anti-Asian racism and support Asian Canadians in dealing with the impact of anti-Asian racism. Professionals and community leaders are also invited to attend to the necessary knowledge and skills to help community members following their encounters with anti-Asian racism effectively.

Recommended Strategies for Preventing Anti-Asian Racism

- Deliver anti-racist education that supports community members to examine their beliefs and implicit and explicit biases
- Organize public and social media campaigns to raise awareness about anti-Asian racism
- Support Asian Canadians to speak up about their experiences
- Ask community leaders to champion and promote diversity and racial equity
- Advocate for fair representation of Asian Canadians and reporting on their experiences in the media
- Allocate and advocate for equitable funding for anti-Asian racism work
- Collect and use data to inform antiracism policies and actions
- Examine and address systemic anti-Asian racism in Canadian institutions

Recommended Services and Support for Asian Canadians to Deal with the Impact of Anti-Asian Racism

- Organize mutual support groups
- Offer free trauma-informed counselling or coaching
- Facilitate access to advocates, ombudspersons and resources
- Offer support for reporting racist incidents and accessing legal assistance
- Offer support in natural settings, such as at community centres and religious gathering places
- Develop restorative justice programs
- Have in place crisis lines and clinics dedicated to people who have experienced anti-Asian racism

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Developing Competency to Address Anti-Asian Racism and Its Impact on Wellbeing

A Training Program for Settlement and Community Workers

This research report was made possible by funding from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada as phase one of a three-year project to increase the capacity of settlement and community organizations to deliver coordinated, anti-racism services to meet the needs of immigrants who experience racial trauma.

The research was then used to guide the development of a 15-hour training program that has been receiving tremendous feedback. The program was designed with the outcome that participants will gain in-depth knowledge about anti-Asian racism and its impact on Asian Canadians' wellbeing. They will also develop practical skills to support victims of racism.

The 15-hour training program will be delivered in a hybrid online format, with 11 hours of self-paced learning and 4 hours of facilitated discussion and reflection and across four modules:

- Module 1: Anti-Asian Racism in Canada
- Module 2: Theoretical Grounding: Deconstructing Anti-Asian Racism
- Module 3: Research on Anti-Asian Racism: Experience, Impact and Patterns of Reporting and Accessing Services
- Module 4: Preventing and Responding to Anti-Asian Racism

“Thank you so much [training facilitator] for sharing your wisdom and making me aware of the importance of addressing anti-Asian racism in our daily life. As a victim of anti-Asian racism, I was not confident in reporting or talking about my experience. Now, I am confident to speak up, well-equipped with knowledge and resources. Thank you for empowering me.”

Please get in touch with us to learn more.

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