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Experiences of Chinese, East and South-East Asian Communities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland

Research conducted by The Scottish Alliance of Regional Equality Councils (SAREC)
and its partner organisations:
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Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC).
Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC).
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**AWARDS
FOR ALL
SCOTLAND**



Contents

1- Executive summary	Page 4
2- Context	Page 5
3- Demographic characteristics of participants	Page 7
4- COVID-19 and lockdown	Page 10
5- Prejudice and hate crime	Page 15
6- Concerns moving forward	Page 22
7- Main findings	Page 25
8- Recommendations	Page 27
9- References	Page 28

1- Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a research project on the experiences of Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The project included the use of a survey and focus groups which explored individuals' experiences of prejudice or hate crime, awareness of the support available throughout the pandemic, and their hopes and concerns for the future.

Up to one third of the participants in the survey potentially experienced episodes of prejudice or hate crime during the pandemic, with several describing more than one incident. An even higher percentage of people (42%) reported to know of other members of their community experiencing prejudice or hate crime, while over two thirds (69%) heard or read racist remarks towards their community during the pandemic. Episodes of prejudice and hate crime affected people of all ages, but the number of reported incidents was very small, with only 6 episodes brought to the attention of organisations, such as Police Scotland or schools, out of 71 potential cases.

One sixth of participants (16%) stated the pandemic has been worse for Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities; many attributed this to more prejudice directed at them and being blamed for the outbreak. In line with this, almost half (46%) of survey respondents said they feel less safe since the pandemic started, percentages that were slightly higher both for younger and older age groups (16-29 years old and over 60s) compared to other age groups.

Most participants described the negative consequences of the pandemic on their lives touching on the harmful impact on their mental health and source of income. However, the majority of respondents were unaware or unsure of where to find support or advice to help cope with the pandemic and their concerns moving forward. Two thirds (67%) were either unaware or unsure about the support available from charities and councils and, similarly, most participants (55%) were either unaware or unsure of where to turn to for help regarding specific areas they are worried about when thinking of their future. Language was mentioned as a barrier relating to awareness of, and access to, support services, especially for the elderly population. Regarding areas of concern for the future, the topic that was most often mentioned was health, followed by employment, income & poverty, prejudice & hate crime, education, and housing.

Based on these findings, we have outlined a set of recommended actions for policy makers and organisations to address some of the main challenges for Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities, underlining the need to: 1) provide appropriate information to encourage reporting of hate crime or prejudice; 2) ensure key actors are prepared to receive and address reports of hate crime and prejudice; 3) set out initiatives or campaigns to proactively inform communities of the provision available to address the consequences of the pandemic and support capacity-building within communities; 4) ensure the participation of the community in the co-design of national and local initiatives and services addressing the consequences of the pandemic; and 5) increase public resources and funding available to support victims of prejudice and hate crime.

2- Context

The Scottish Alliance of Regional Equality Councils (SAREC) carried out this research project to better understand the experiences of Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The focus on this range of communities is due to the fact that reports of abuse affecting Chinese people being blamed for the pandemic also extend to others who are perceived as Chinese.¹

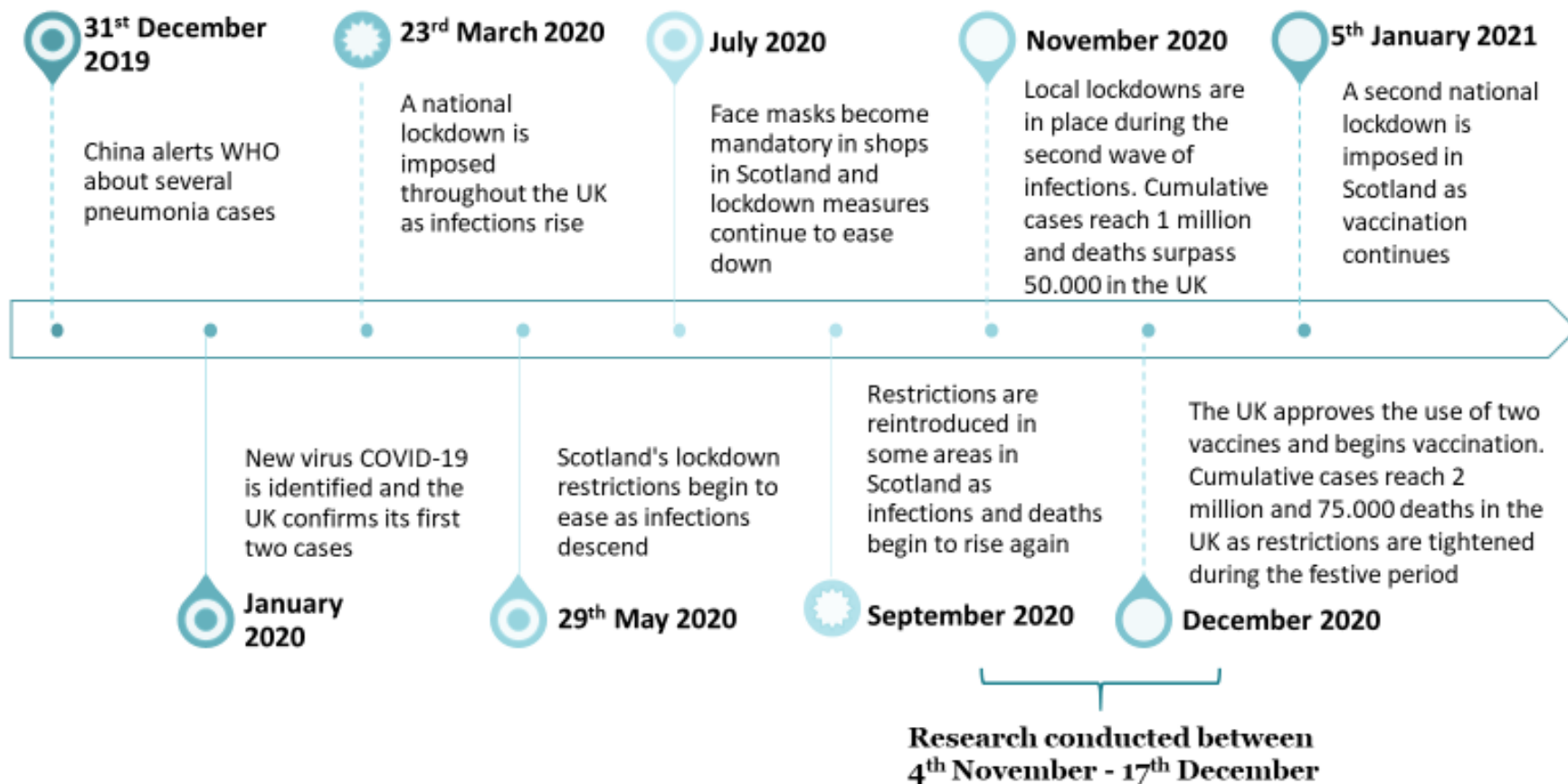
The project was funded by the National Lottery (Awards for All) and included the use of a survey and focus group with questions related to experiences of prejudice and hate crime, awareness of support services in the context of the pandemic and hopes and concerns for the future. The research was designed with the goal of informing policy makers and other organisations on actions required to better support Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities in Scotland.

The survey was conducted between the beginning of November and mid-December 2020 through an online form, telephonically and distributed as a printed version in relevant workplaces with the support of SAREC's four constituent Regional Equality Councils across Scotland. The survey was translated into both traditional and simplified Chinese characters. The information available from this survey was complemented by feedback from three focus groups organised with community members in Glasgow during November.¹

¹ All focus groups complied with the government's COVID-19 guidelines.

Due to the fast expansion of the pandemic during 2020 and 2021 and the changes to the measures implemented to control it, we present a timeline with the main milestones² to comprehend the context in which this research was conducted.

COVID-19 timeline in Scotland

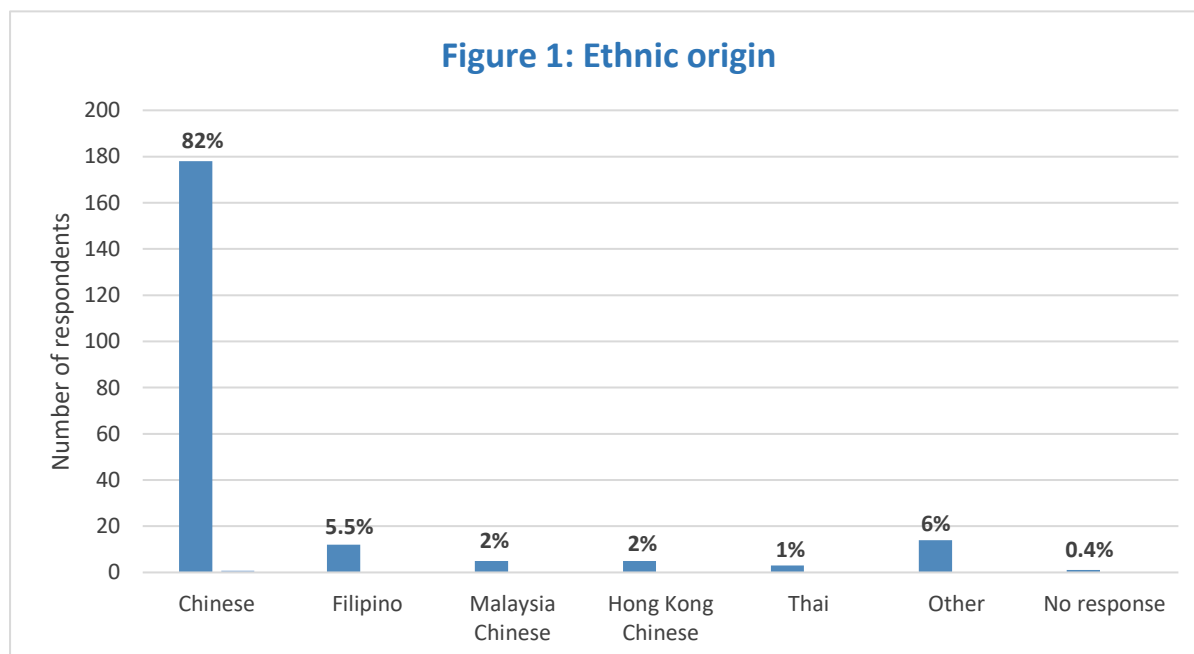


3- Demographic characteristics of participants

Survey participants' demographics

218 people took part in the survey. Most of the participants responded to the form online, 35 answered the questions telephonically and some also completed a printed form distributed in different workplaces. 65% of the participants were women, 34% men and only one participant stated they were non-binary. Respondents included people from all ages with 4% aged between 16-19 years old, 17% between 20-29, 16.5% between 30-39, 24% between 40-49 years old, 16% between 50-59, 9% between 60-69, and 13% aged over 70 years old.ⁱⁱ

Most of the participants stated a Chinese ethnic background (82%), while 5.5% declared a Filipino ethnicity, 2% a Hong Kong-Chinese ethnicity, 2% a Malaysian-Chinese ethnicity, 1% a Thai origin, and 6% other Asian or mixed originⁱⁱⁱ.



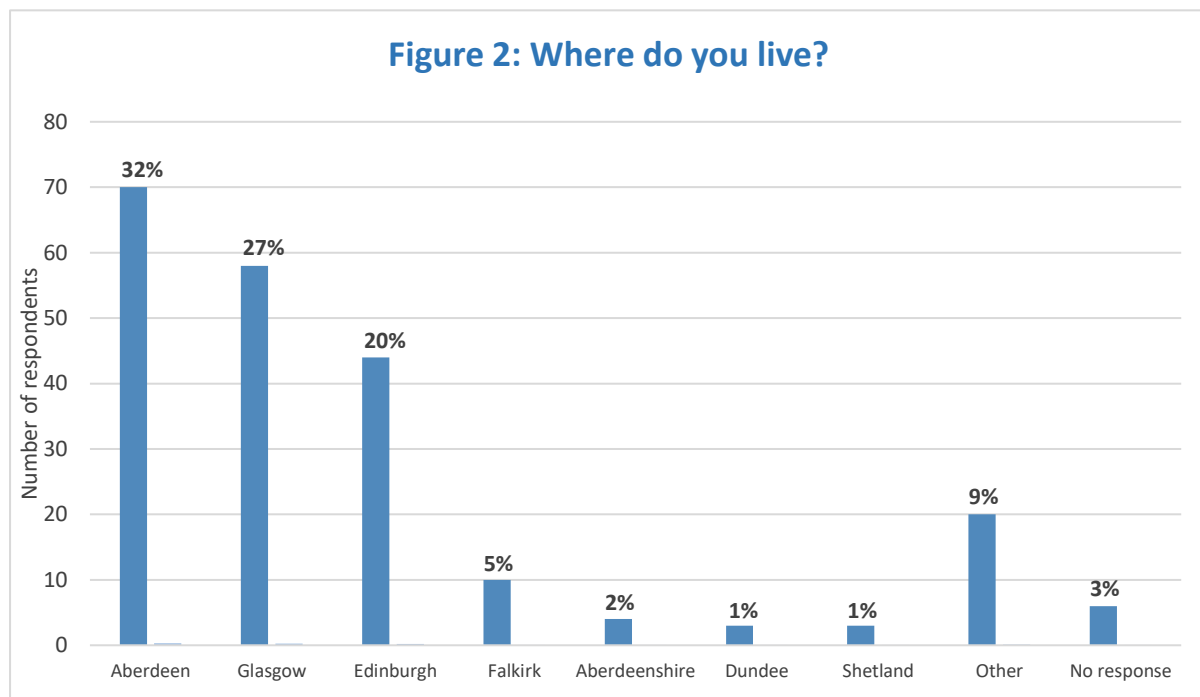
Though not the most recent source of data, the 2011 Scotland's Census provides the most comprehensive information about ethnic minorities in Scotland, of which 2.7% of the population stated an Asian or Asian Scottish/British ethnicity (including Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani). Within this broader ethnic minority 33,706 people (0.6%) specified a Chinese or Chinese Scottish/British ethnicity and 21,097 people (0.39%) identified as Asian, Asian Scottish/British or Other Asian (excluding Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani).³

ⁱⁱ Please note that most percentages presented in the report are based on rounded data and only some percentages are unrounded to avoid confusion when rounded data coincides and the number of responses does not. Appendices contain unrounded data.

ⁱⁱⁱ Other ethnic minorities stated included Asian (1), Bruneian Malaysian (1), Cantonese (1), Chinese Singaporean (1), Chinese Jamaican (1), Indian (1), Indian Chinese (1), Mixed race half Chinese (1), Pakistani (1), Portugal Chinese (1), South Korean (1), Taiwan Chinese (1), and Indonesian (2).

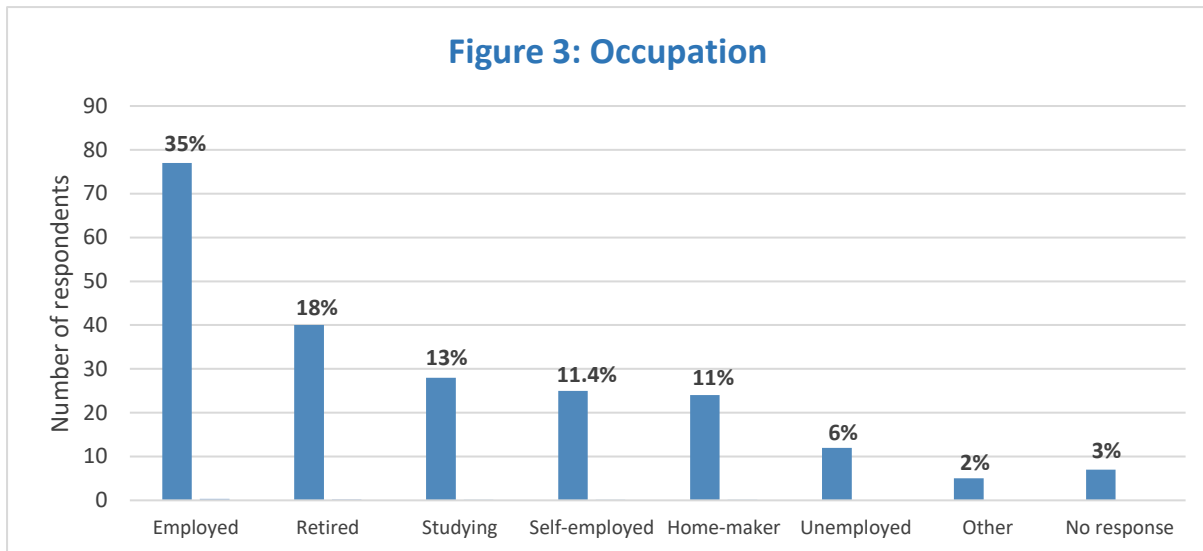
A majority of 64% of the participants left the religion question blank, or answered atheist, agnostic, none, or N/A. 16% of participants stated to be Buddhist, 12% Christian, 5% Catholic, 1% Muslim, and 2% mentioned another religion^{IV}.

82% stated to live in a major city and 13% mentioned a town or a more rural setting. 32% of participants declared to live in Aberdeen City, 27% in Glasgow, 20% in Edinburgh and 5% in Falkirk. Other locations less often mentioned were Aberdeenshire (4), Dundee (3) and Shetland (3). A small number of participants mentioned they live in locations in England (3), or between locations in England and Scotland (2), with 1 stating to live abroad. However, we included their feedback considering the travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic and the complex living arrangements that people might have turned to during this period.



Regarding the occupation of the participants, 35% stated they were employed (including part-time employment), while 18% declared themselves as retired, 13% studying, 11.4% self-employed, 11% a home-maker and 6% unemployed. Only 5 participants selected “other” activity.

^{IV} Other religions stated included Jewish (1), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (1); Spiritual (1) and Hindu (1).



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the labour market in Scotland and the UK during 2020. The Scotland's Labour Market Trends published in December 2020 showed an unemployment rate of 4.2% which represents an annual increase of 0.6% compared to 2019, a statistic that considers only those that are economically active and therefore do not include people that are not seeking work or those that are retired, for example.⁴ Though by no means directly comparable to the data of our research due to its small sample size, this suggests that the unemployment rate in these communities in Scotland might be slightly higher than the national average. Further research would be necessary to substantiate this. Those who stated they were unemployed were also from diverse age groups, 7 of them were aged between 40-59, 3 between 20-39, and 2 participants were 60-69 years old.

Section 1 of the appendices contains a full breakdown of the survey participants' demographic information.

Focus group participants' demographics

18 members of the Chinese community living in Glasgow and its surrounding areas attended three focus groups in November, two of them were in-person and the third one was held through an online platform. The focus groups included elderly members of a community centre, a group of volunteer teachers and a group of mothers. Of the 18 participants, 13 of them were women and 5 men. The age composition of the groups ranged from 20-29 to over 70 years old: 8 participants were aged between 20-29 years old, 4 members aged 30-39, 4 participants over 70 and 2 were aged between 60-69 years old.

10 of the focus group attendees stated no religion, 5 were Buddhist and 3 Christian. 4 participants declared they were in employment, 1 self-employed, 6 retired, 5 students and 2 home-makers.

4- COVID-19 and lockdown

This section explores how the COVID-19 lockdown has impacted the Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities and awareness of where to find support in this context. This segment also examines the perception of the impact of the pandemic on these communities compared to others, and whether they feel they have been more or less affected.

Experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown

89% (194) of the participants left comments about their experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown. Two thirds of these remarks were negative (66%), with participants focused on the difficulties during this period. In general, these negative comments can be classed in three main thematic groups that were closely intertwined. The first thematic group mentioned the daily activities they were unable to do in a context of lockdown, such as socialising with family and friends, attending school and universities or travelling. A second group underlined their feelings during lockdown, with a relevant number of participants mentioning the impact on their mental health and stating they felt “depressed”, “lonely”, “exhausted”, “unhappy” or “scared”. The third group focused on the economic impact of the lockdown on their businesses or work, stating they lost their jobs, their monthly income dropped or that there were fewer opportunities for employment.

Examples of negative comments:

“It has been hard. Not being able to go out and meet friends and family has definitely been difficult. My mental health has suffered from lockdown. I spend more time on social media which has also affected my self-esteem as I compare myself to other people/their lives/their bodies”.

“I am feeling lonely, depressed and scared without any reason. I am restless and mentally fatigued”.

“All the lectures are moved online through Zoom, I feel they are less productive. Lack of face to face interactions with the others means I can't practice my English. I feel very lonely and unhappy but I can't tell my parents in China as I don't want them to be worried”.

“I'm working from home before the COVID-19 anyway. The home schooling and extra housework drive me crazy. I was stressed out. I felt much better when kids were back to school”.

“This is affecting my business and my income has dropped 15-20%”.

“As my income drops it affects the quality of life for the whole family. Currently I worry about losing my job and the pressure is higher than ever”.

30% (58) of the participants made neutral or balanced comments on their experiences during lockdown. One group of participants within this cluster of responses highlighted some of the negative and positive consequences of the pandemic in their daily lives, while another group of respondents mentioned they did not experience a significant change in their lives since the pandemic started.

Examples of balanced or neutral comments:

"I'm fortunate to have been furloughed and to live with parents so money has not been as much an issue for me personally. Mental health wise I have had ups and downs but overall, I am grateful to have had time to be in solitude more and to have time to focus on what's good for me".

"Calm and relaxing but schoolwork has been harder to understand without the help of directly speaking to teachers".

"It's been challenging but I am one of the lucky ones that are not badly affected by it. My whole family is healthy, I remained employed, so it's not been too bad for me. Staying at home can be difficult but I use the time to explore nearby areas to walk and explore my kitchen with new and interesting cuisine".

"Does not affect me that much, as I am at home all the time to look after my family".

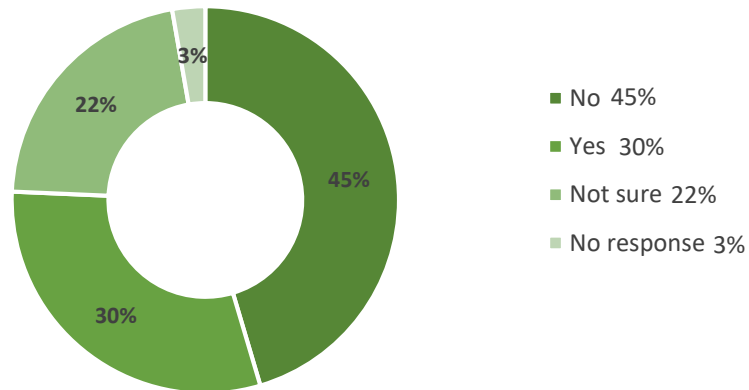
Only 4% (7) of the participants made entirely positive remarks about their experiences during lockdown, most of them saying it has been "OK" and referring to the extra available time to spend at home and slow down.

The feedback provided in the focus groups touched on similar themes as the survey's participants. Respondents mentioned how their daily routines were disrupted as they were unable to socialise or travel, as well as the negative impact on their mental health. Elderly attendees added that they were also physically deteriorating because of the lack of mobility during lockdown, while younger people mentioned they felt depressed when reading negative comments on social media and mentally exhausted during home-schooling. Some positive aspects of lockdown were also stated by participants, who highlighted that it enabled them to learn new skills, spend more time with their families and brought communities together.

Awareness of support available

Though most of the comments about the experiences during lockdown stressed its negative impacts, 45% of the survey's participants were not aware of the support available from organisations to help cope with the consequences of the pandemic. A further 22% were not sure of the support available and only 30% of respondents mentioned they know of the support available from organisations like charities and councils. Therefore, less than a third of respondents had clarity about where to find help in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 4: Have you been aware of support available from organisations like charities and councils?



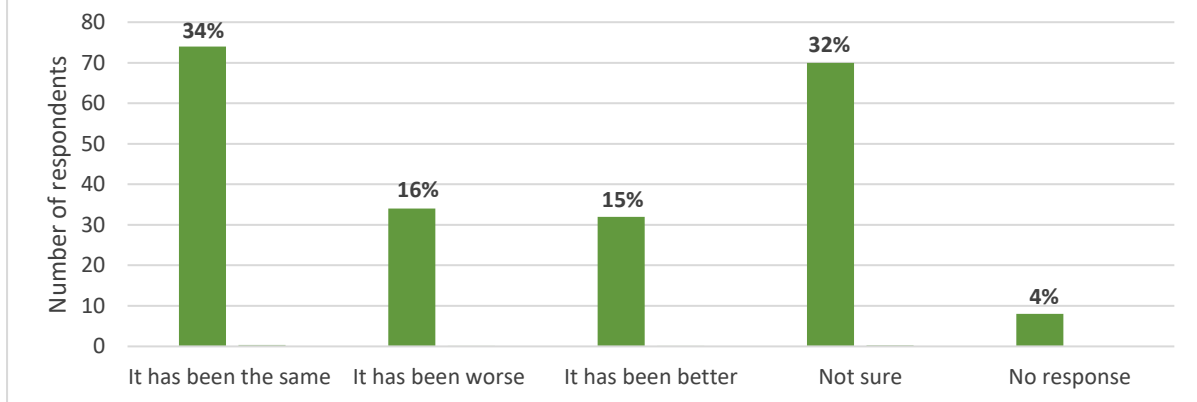
The age group with higher levels of awareness of the support available for the pandemic was aged over 70 years old (39%) and the group with less awareness was aged between 50-59 years old (17%).

Most of the participants in the focus groups (14 out of 18) stated they know where to find support, with only 4 of them unsure of it. However, it is useful to note that these participants were either active members of a Chinese community centre and/or organised community groups in Glasgow, so they did have in place a support network or a focal point to seek help within their own community. Other participants in the survey also mentioned they have relied on support from family and friends for shopping, booking GP appointments and also to keep businesses afloat.

Perception of the impact of the pandemic in Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities

Participants' perception of the impact of the pandemic in their community when compared to other communities showed that 34% of participants stated the impact has been the same for their community, while 15% of respondents stated it has been better for their community and a similar 16% declared it has been worse for them. However, almost a third of the participants (32%) were unsure about their response to this question.

Figure 5: Do you feel your community has experienced COVID-19 and lockdown differently compared to other communities?



19% (41) of the participants left comments when prompted to expand on their response to the questions in this section, many of them provided reasons as to why they considered the pandemic has been better, worse or the same for their community compared to others. Participants who considered that the pandemic has been worse for their community stressed that since the virus originated in China, the community has faced a negative backlash as they are blamed for the pandemic. Several participants mentioned that because of this they feel more exposed to prejudice or racism, a theme that will be analysed in detail in the next section. Another relevant set of participants mentioned elderly people in the community has been especially affected because they are not accustomed to communicating or socialising online and their level of English is a barrier to accessing mainstream support services, leaving them with fewer options than others to seek help, an argument that was also brought forward by participants in the focus groups. In this context, elderly participants mentioned that they have turned to Chinese community-based organisations.

Examples of comments:

“Thankfully I have not experienced much myself due to having a supportive network, but family and friends with the same background have experienced racial slurs and segregation since the pandemic and are seen as ‘filthy’ and to blame for the entire virus, when it doesn’t come from us as a race”.

“Many people who hated the lockdown blamed China for 'spreading' it. So, I believe people especially online were not happy about the fact that they are in lockdown, and actively point to Asians about it”.

“People direct their frustration on our community, blaming the pandemic on us”.

“Covid has given many the greenlight to act on xenophobic prejudices which has not been fun”.

“Many elderly Chinese can't speak English. In order to receive help and support from the city council, you need to phone or register online. I know how to use a smartphone and internet however, all the websites are in English. I'm disappointed that the Glasgow city council didn't take the considerations of the needs of the BME elderly when designing their service. Fortunately, we have Wing Hong in Glasgow, the help is just a phone call away”.

“Most of the Chinese elderly in my age group can't speak English at all, there are less options for us to choose when we need help and support. Fortunately, there is a Chinese day centre in Glasgow to support the elderly. I don't know how the other Chinese elderly coping in other cities”.

Participants in the survey and focus groups who stated the pandemic has been better for their community connected this mainly to their preparedness to comply with the measures and take it seriously from the start. Those who thought the impact of the pandemic has been the same for their community did not expand on the reasons for it in the survey, but younger focus group participants argued that COVID-19 is a global crisis that affects everyone in different ways and therefore no one is better off.

5- Prejudice and hate crime

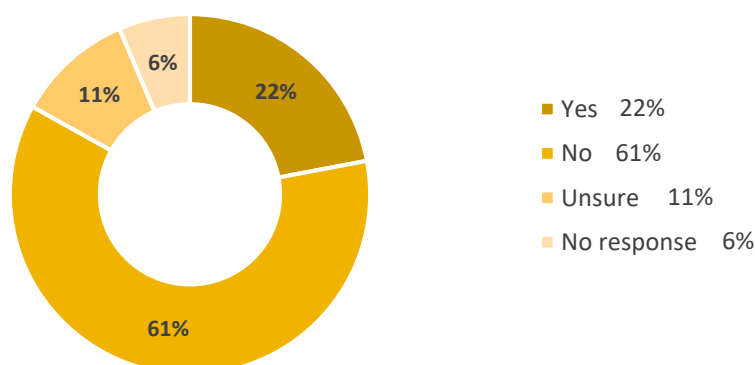
This section concentrates on analysing experiences of prejudice or hate crime affecting Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and whether or not those impacted by it reported the episode(s) to relevant organisations such as Police Scotland, school or charities, among others. Another set of queries in this section looks at participants' knowledge of other members of their community experiencing prejudice or hate crime, how often they hear or read racist remarks towards the East Asian community and how they feel about their safety since the beginning of the pandemic.

For context, racist crime remains the most commonly reported hate crime according to the Report on Hate Crime in Scotland 2019-2020. In this period, a total of 3,028 charges related to race crime were reported, a 4% increase compared to the year prior. This was still the second lowest annual figure since 2003-2004.⁵ However, these figures only include reports to the Police that concluded in charges being presented, therefore many incidents affecting ethnic minorities in Scotland are not accounted for.

Experiences of hate crime and prejudice during the pandemic

Though 61% of the participants stated they have not experienced prejudice or hate crime during the pandemic, 22% did report facing episodes of it and a further 11% were unsure about this. Some of the participants that stated to be unsure did expand on situations such as objects being thrown at them, being stared at when wearing a mask on the street or shops (mandatory use of face coverings in shops in Scotland was introduced only in July 2020⁶) and being uncertain about comments made towards them because they do not speak English fluently. Taking this into consideration up to one third (33%) of the participants potentially experienced episodes of prejudice or hate crime during the pandemic.

Figure 6: Have you experienced prejudice or hate crime since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic? This may have been something that happened to you in your local area or something that was said to you online.



Incidents

Prejudice or hate crime affected people of all ages. Over 1 in 4 participants (27%) that stated they experienced prejudice or hate crime or were unsure of it were aged between 16 and 29 years old, 13% were aged between 30-39, 27% between 40-49, 13% between 50-59 and 21% over 60 years old.

Of those who stated experiencing incidents of prejudice or hate crime (48), 13 of them declared to live in Glasgow, 12 in Aberdeen, 7 in Edinburgh, 7 in Falkirk and the remaining in different smaller towns. Considering the participants that live in each one of these areas, 22% of those living in Glasgow stated they experienced prejudice or hate crime during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as 17% of those in Aberdeen and 16% in Edinburgh. The data on the 7 participants affected in Falkirk indicates a high prevalence of episodes in the area since only 10 participants declared to live there.

22% (47) of the participants left comments when prompted to give more details on their experiences of prejudice and hate crime during the pandemic, including 8 remarks from people who were unsure about the episodes they experienced. Some of these participants also described facing two or more incidents throughout the pandemic and touched on episodes experienced by themselves and by others. From the information available in these statements a majority of 22 episodes of prejudice and hate crime took place on the street, 12 were in shops (supermarkets/takeaways), 4 on public transport (bus/train), 4 in schools or universities, 3 online, 2 in workplaces and 1 in the post office.

26 of the incidents described consisted of verbal abuse, including being called “China virus”, blamed for the pandemic and other derogatory terms. 18 of the participants touched on more subtle or nuanced acts of prejudice that were sometimes non-verbal. These can be grouped as microaggressions^v, such as hostile looks or avoidant behaviour.⁷ 7 experiences also detailed physical abuse, including being spat at, coughed at and objects being thrown at individuals. Participants in the focus groups that experienced prejudice agreed that the most frequent experience they faced were hostile looks that made them feel uncomfortable, which occurred in a variety of public spaces, with avoidant behaviour mentioned by one of them.

Examples of comments:

“I was out with my friends in town (me being the only Chinese) and a guy around my age called me ‘corona’ as we passed him and his friends on the street. A guy in my class has openly said ‘I don’t want to sit next to her, I will get corona’ to another Chinese in my class and called her ‘ching chang chong’”.

“2 teenagers walked past me and my kids coughing and saying ‘Chinese Coronavirus’”.

^v Definition of microaggressions: “brief, everyday interactions that send denigrating messages to [people of colour] because they belong to a racially minoritised group. Compared to more overt forms of racism, racial microaggressions are subtle and insidious, often leaving the victim confused, distressed and frustrated and the perpetrator oblivious of the offense they have caused (Rollock, 2012)”.

“The phrase ‘China virus’ is being used on social media”.

“I experienced prejudiced time after time on the street and eventually ended up in a fight”.

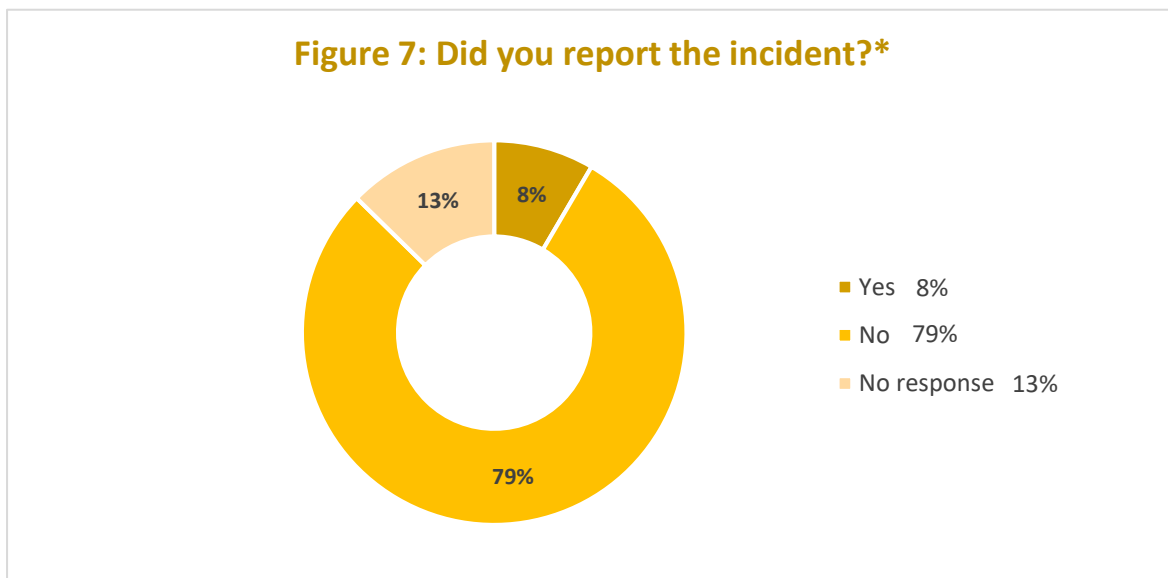
“While at a post office I was followed and shouted at by an elderly person, ‘you Chinese brought the COVID-19 virus”.

“When I went out, I noticed that people deliberately coughed when they saw a Chinese passing by. My child was called ‘Chinese virus’ by school mates”.

“I always wear a mask when I go out. I am quite often stared at and at times people said something to me, but as I do not speak English, I did not know what they said”.

Reporting

Considering only those participants who stated experiencing prejudice or hate crime or were unsure of it (71), only 6 incidents were reported (8%) and 56 were not (79%), which represents a low incidence of reporting. The 6 incidents were all reported by women, 3 of them to the Police, 2 to schools and 1 to the manager of a shop.

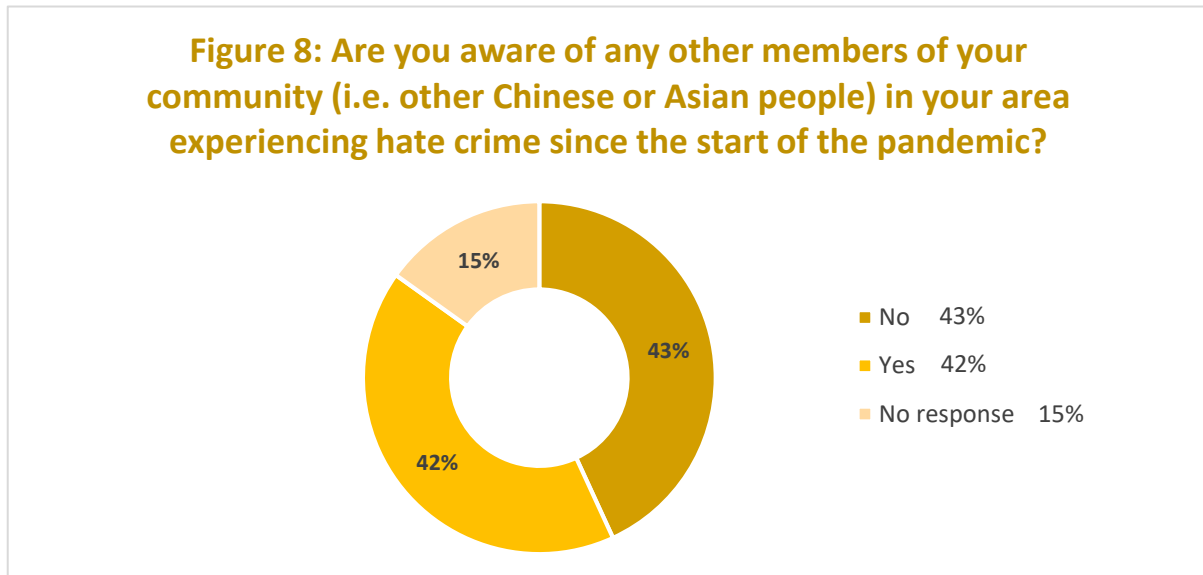


*NB: the information contained in this graphic only considers those participants that stated experiencing prejudice or hate crime or were unsure if they did.

Participants in the focus groups mentioned experiencing uncomfortable episodes of hostile looks or avoidant behaviour. None of these were reported. Research in this specific topic has shown that one of the reasons for low levels of reporting of hate crime and prejudice among Asian people is the model minority stereotype, used to describe the educational and career success of minority ethnic groups while at the same time hiding broader inequalities experienced by these communities.⁸

Awareness of others experiencing prejudice or hate crime

In comparison with the self-reported experiences (22%), a higher percentage of participants stated to be aware of other members of their community experiencing prejudice or hate crime since the start of the pandemic, indicating a higher likelihood of people reporting others' experiences over their own. 42% of the participants stated to know someone in their area that had experienced it, while a similar 43% said they did not.

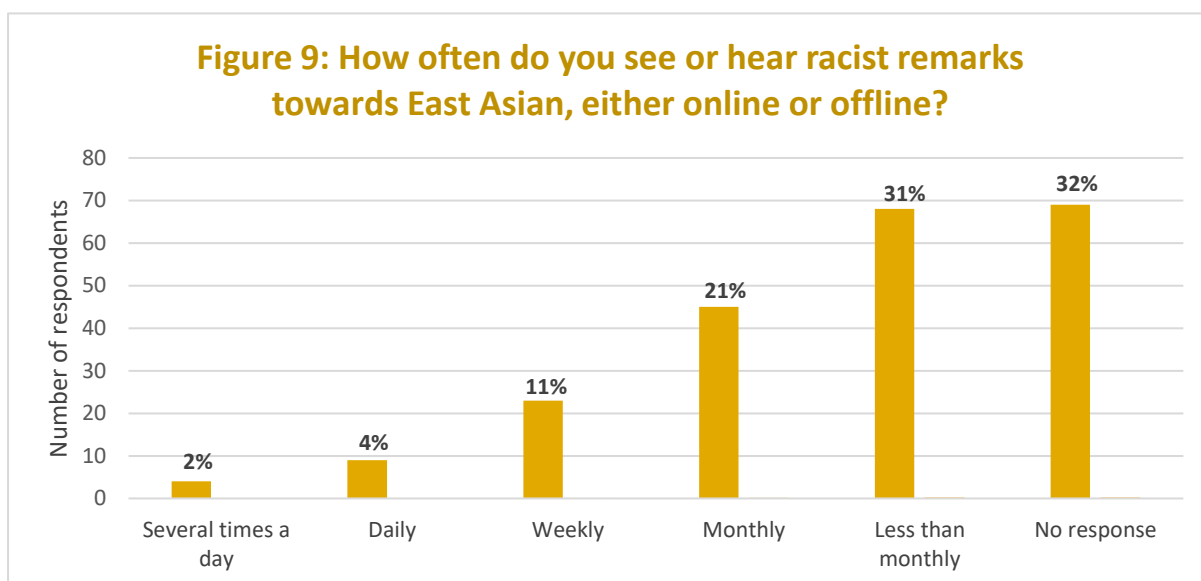


Participants in the focus groups mentioned keeping informed of other people's experiences of prejudice or hate crime through family and friends, news and online sources. Those that accessed online information stated to be worried about the increased number of posts and comments inciting hatred towards the Chinese community.

Frequency of racist remarks

Regarding the frequency in which participants have read or heard racist remarks towards Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities during the pandemic, 69% or over two thirds of respondents stated to do so at some point; while close to 38% or over one third read or heard this type of remarks monthly or more often. 6% of participants declared they have read or heard them on a daily basis or several times a day, 11% weekly, 21% monthly and 31% less often than monthly.

Figure 9: How often do you see or hear racist remarks towards East Asian, either online or offline?

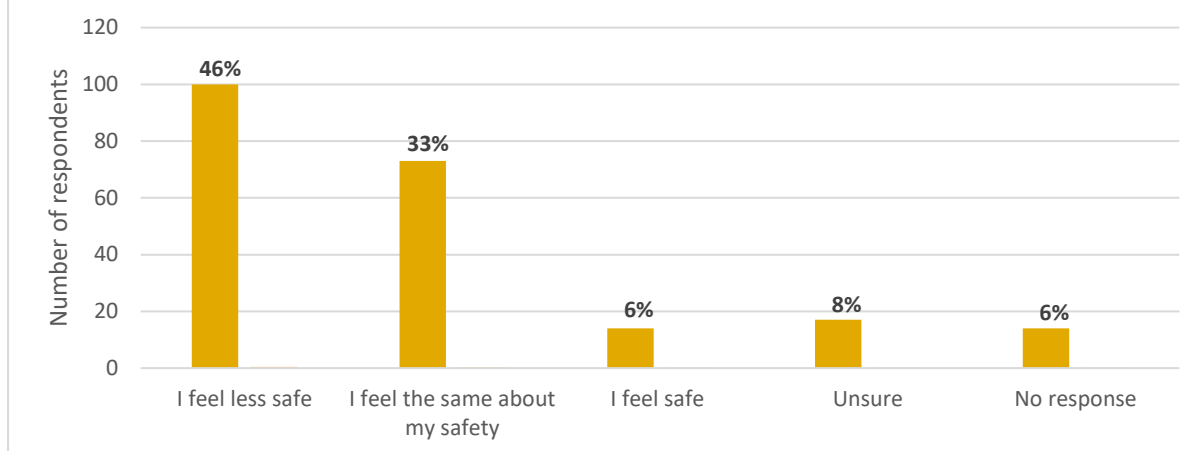


When compared by age, the younger set of participants showed a higher rate of frequency for this question. 42% of those aged between 16 and 29 years old mentioned they heard or read racist remarks on a weekly basis or more often, while only 10% of those aged over 30 years old reported this frequency, and the average for all age groups reached 17%. Participants of the focus groups that were younger and stated to use social media regularly also reported hearing or reading racist remarks more often when compared to other respondents, stating to do so on a weekly basis. This higher frequency might be partly explained by the time younger people spend online and on social media, which currently decreases with age.⁹

Feeling safe

Intertwined with the experiences of prejudice and hate crime and to the racist remarks heard or read during 2020, 46% of the participants stated to feel less safe since the pandemic started, 33% said they feel as safe as before the pandemic, 6% declared to feel safe, and 8% were unsure about it.

Figure 10: Since the start of the epidemic/pandemic, do you feel any different about your personal or family safety?



A higher percentage of younger people said they feel less safe when compared to other age groups. 58% of those aged between 16 and 29 years old stated to feel less safe compared to 27% of those between 30-39, 46% of those aged 40-49, 43% of those between 50-59 and 50% of those aged over 60. It is worth noting that the percentage of those that stated to feel safe was very low for all age groups.

All 18 participants that provided feedback in the focus groups agreed they feel less safe since the pandemic started. Some of them associated this opinion to the likelihood of becoming the target of prejudice, but also to the economic uncertainty and the international tensions between China and other countries.

When prompted to leave more details on their experiences, survey participants mentioned feeling less safe because of incidents related to prejudice or racism online and offline. A smaller number of participants also related feeling less safe due to the economic uncertainties and the possibility of falling ill with COVID-19, concerns that will be further analysed in the following section.

Examples of comments:

“It is not uncommon for racist things to be said about the Asian community. I feel that it has become normalised to say these things and we are meant to just ‘let it go’ because it’s ‘just a joke’ when if we are hurt, our feelings are valid and we are allowed to tell people it’s not okay. But unfortunately, if we do that it means we are ‘too serious’ and ‘can’t take a joke’ when it’s actually offensive”.

“I believe a lot of people are frustrated with the government regulations of the lockdown. Through frustration they get angry. My husband faced this retribution from a stranger and was physically assaulted”.

“Living in Scotland for more than 10 years, I am used to receiving comments in public transport either trains or buses, especially during times when I am out with friends who are

ethnically similar, and we prefer to be silent and ignore those who make them. However, from recent targeting of Asians because of COVID, I fear more for my relatives i.e. my mother who is at times vulnerable in public areas”.

“The most racist people are online. They hide behind the screen and use keyboards as their weapons of assault. There should be more law/regulation for the social media”.

“(I feel) Less safe in terms of the effect of the virus on our health. Not less safe due to racism”.

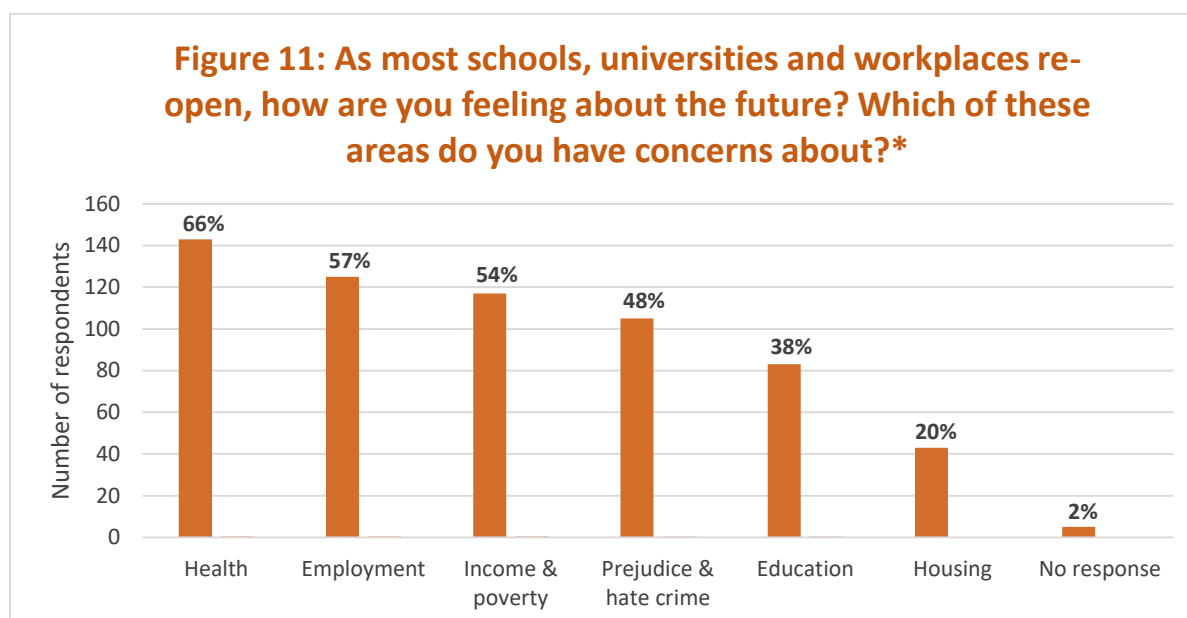
“Many people have lost their jobs and are having financial hardship. People will break the law if they are desperate”.

6- Concerns moving forward

The last section touches on the areas that concern people in a context of gradual re-opening of schools, universities and workplaces; as well as their awareness on where they can look for support for the issues they are worried about.

Areas of concern

When asked about areas of concern thinking of the future, a majority of 71% declared two or more areas of concern and 27% stated only one. The topic that concerned most people was health with 66% of participants mentioning it, which was followed by 57% citing employment, 54% income and poverty and 48% prejudice and hate crime. Education and housing were two areas of concern less often mentioned, with education declared by 38% of the participants and housing by 20% of them. Only 2% of participants did not mention to be worried by a specific issue.



*NB: Percentages add up over a 100% because participants could select several areas of concern.

As would be expected, the areas of concern more often mentioned varied depending on the age group. For example, the top 3 issues of most concern to those aged between 16 and 29 years old were employment (73%), education (62%), health (60%) and prejudice and hate crime (60%). For those aged 30-39 it was health (69%), employment (58%) and education (56%). For the age group between 40-49 years old it was employment (62%), income and poverty (58%) and health (51%). For those between 50-59 it was employment (68%), health (68%) and income and poverty (63%). The age group over 60 years old mentioned health (77%), prejudice and hate crime (46%) and income and poverty (44%). In line with these trends, the elderly participants in the focus groups highlighted worries related to health and prejudice as they noted they are retired and have stable incomes, while younger participants -who are still attending university or raising a family- acknowledged a wider selection of concerns.

When asked about other areas of concern 25% (54) of the participants left a comment which either expanded on their stated concerns or added a new one. Participants aged over 60 stated to be worried about the prospects for younger generations, an argument that was also cited by older participants in the focus group. Though related to the main areas of concern, other specific issues stated by participants included: the effectiveness and safety of vaccines, delays in the treatment of health conditions not related to COVID-19, an economic recession bolstered by the combination of the pandemic and Brexit, having to spend life-time savings, the adequacy of government policies, international tensions with China and climate change, among others.

Examples of comments:

"I'm worried about the future of my children and grandchildren more than myself. I've been through so much when I was younger, nothing can be worse than back then (the 70s, 80s). I have no mortgages to pay and receive a regular income from my pensions. Situations are not looking so good for the younger generations".

"I'm concerned about job prospects for the young people. They spend all their life trying to get a degree but there are no jobs for them. There should be more initiatives to help them get employed".

"I'm a cancer survivor, my routine check has been cancelled, I'm worried about it".

"Post COVID-19 recession and Brexit recession, the price of the household bill may increase and we're earning less".

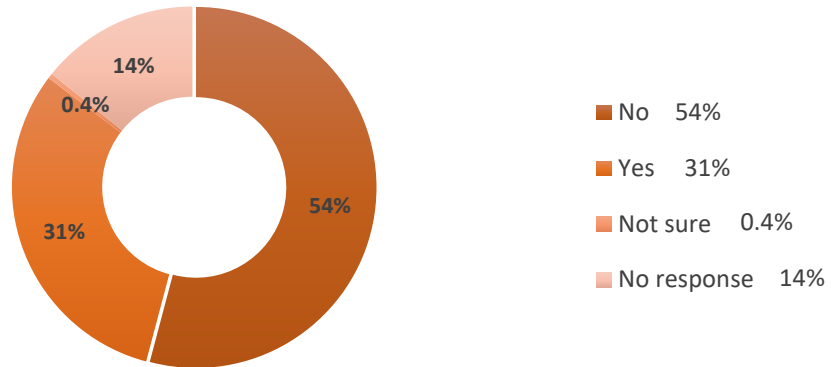
"We were saving up to buy a house in a better schooling area, however, I don't know if we can get our job back after the Covid, we may have to spend all our saving to survive".

"The UK government's policies are not strict enough and people do not adhere to the guidelines/policies. This is why the country cannot control the COVID situation".

Awareness of support related to the areas of concern

Following a similar trend as when asked about awareness of the support available from charities and councils to help cope with the pandemic, most participants were not aware of where they can receive advice and support on the specific areas they are worried about. 54% of the participants did not know where to find this help and less than a third (31%) said they were aware of where they can turn to for guidance and help.

Figure 12: For the areas you have concerns, are you aware of where you can receive advice and support?



Levels of awareness of where to receive advice and support were slightly higher for the younger and older age groups compared to others. Awareness among those aged 16-29 years old was 38% and for those aged over 70 it was 39%, while the knowledge in all the other age groups was less than 29%.

7- Main findings

The analysis of the survey and focus groups data identified 10 main findings on the experiences of Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Most participants described a negative experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The main themes expressed were related to the daily activities that people were unable to do and the harmful impact on their mental health and on their jobs or source of income.
2. The majority of participants were unaware or unsure of where to find support or advice to help cope with the pandemic and their concerns moving forward. Two thirds (67%) were either unaware or unsure about the support available from charities and councils and similarly, most participants (55%) were either unaware or unsure of where to turn to for help regarding specific areas of concern thinking of the future. Language was mentioned as a barrier related to awareness of, and access to, support services, especially for the elderly population.
3. One sixth of participants (16%) stated they feel the pandemic has been worse for Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities, many of them attributing this to more prejudice directed at them and being blamed after the initial outbreak of the virus in China.
4. Up to one third (33%) of the participants potentially experienced episodes of prejudice or hate crime during the pandemic and several mentioned more than one incident. An even higher percentage of people (42%) reported to know of other members of their community experiencing prejudice or hate crime, while over two thirds (69%) heard or read racist remarks towards their community during the pandemic.
5. The type of prejudice and hate crime incidents described by those affected consisted mainly of verbal abuse, followed by microaggressions such as hostile looks or avoidant behaviour and physical abuse declared by a smaller number of participants. Incidents affected members of all age groups.
6. The incidence of episodes of prejudice and discrimination that was reported to authorities or organisations was very low. Only 6 incidents were reported out of 71 potential cases.
7. Younger age groups heard or read racist remarks towards Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities much more often than those over 30 years old. 42% of those aged between 16 and 29 years old mentioned they heard or read racist remarks on a weekly basis or more often, while only 10% aged over 30 years old reported this frequency, which can be partly explained by the time younger people tend to spend online.

8. Almost half of participants (46%) stated to feel less safe since the pandemic started, with a higher percentage of younger (58%) and elderly (50%) people feeling slightly more unsafe compared to other age groups.
9. Reasons for feeling less safe than before the pandemic touched on incidents related to prejudice or racism online and offline, economic uncertainties, the possibility of falling ill with COVID-19 and international tensions with China.
10. The topic that concerned most people thinking of the future was primarily health, followed by employment, income and poverty, prejudice and hate crime, education and housing.

8- Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research we are presenting a set of recommended actions for policy makers and organisations to take into consideration to better address the challenges that Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities are facing in Scotland:

1. Key actors, such as Police Scotland, educational organisations, councils, and charities must provide clearly communicated and accessible information to encourage members of Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities to come forward and report episodes of hate crime or prejudice affecting them.
2. Ensure that key actors, such as Police Scotland, educational organisations, councils, and charities are prepared to receive reports of hate crime and prejudice incidents, addressing them appropriately.
3. Set out initiatives or campaigns to proactively inform Chinese, East and South-East Asian communities of the provision available to address the consequences of the pandemic, with a special focus on the support concerning hate crime and prejudice, ensuring the collaboration of all key actors. Consideration should also be given to projects that assess community capacity (e.g. existing groups, networks etc.) and where appropriate, how the building of capacity could be supported.
4. Chinese, East and South-East Asian community members and representatives must be actively involved in the co-design of national and local initiatives and services addressing the consequences of the pandemic on their community, including hate crime and prejudice. This will ensure they are suitable and able to tackle current obstacles (such as language barrier or the model minority stereotype) to access support.
5. Increase public resources and funding available to support victims of prejudice and hate crime throughout Scotland.

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