

Asian Sexual Violence Survivors' Experiences and Expectations of Support Within Schools in New Zealand

Executive Summary

This research was funded by the Lottery Grant Board with a Health Research post-doctoral fellowship. This report is based on findings from a two-year project that employed an innovative, culturally responsive and age-appropriate approach to understanding young Asian sexual violence survivors' lived experiences and expectations of support within schools in New Zealand.

According to the 2023 Census, Asians comprise 17.3% of New Zealand's total population, and Asian communities are one of the fastest-growing populations in New Zealand. Despite the growing demographic significance of the Asian communities in New Zealand, the experiences and needs of young Asian sexual violence survivors remain largely unexplored. This study addresses a significant research gap that exists in providing culturally responsive and age-appropriate support for young people within the Asian communities, which comprise diverse ethnic subsets. Addressing this gap is crucial for fostering inclusivity and equity within New Zealand society.

The use of the term "Asian" is undetermined because the Asian community has many subcultures. Due to the small sample size of this qualitative study, this research does not provide data covering all Asian ethnicities in New Zealand. The participants in this study were self-identified with some of the largest Asian ethnic groups in New Zealand, such as Indian, Chinese, Korean, Filipino and Pakistani.

Leveraging the power of arts in health research, the study aimed to investigate Asian sexual violence survivors' experiences and expectations of support from schools, to identify social, cultural, and systemic barriers preventing these survivors from accessing support and to explore new insights gained through arts-based research methods regarding the support of these young survivors.

The study used a qualitative thematic research design. A total of 14 semi-structured arts-based interviews were completed between June 2023 and December 2023. They included seven young Asian people affected by sexual violence, six educators/school counsellors with experience of supporting young Asian survivors in educational settings, and one caregiver of a young Asian survivor. Bringing forth different perspectives from the participants promotes a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under the study. Data from the interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and arts-based analysis.

The project report focuses on the main themes around young Asian survivors' help-seeking experiences and their expectations of support. The creative component of the study is addressed in separate publications focusing on new insights gained through arts-based research methods.

Key Findings

Six broad themes emerged from the data analysis:

- Experiences with support services
- Impact from peers
- Impact from caregivers
- Cultural norms and beliefs
- Experiences with the education system
- Expectations of the support system

Lack of Timely Support: Young Asian survivors often lacked timely support due to accessibility issues, infrequent interventions, and long waiting times, which negatively impacted their mental health, relationships, and academic performance.

Negative Experiences With Support Services: Survivors who received support sometimes faced negative experiences with providers, which discouraged them from remaining within the support system and seeking further help.

Caregiver Challenges: Many caregivers lacked support and understanding from support systems, limiting their ability to assist survivors effectively. Some caregivers discouraged survivors from seeking support due to mistrust in the system, concerns about family reputation or shame regarding sexual violence within the family.

Cultural Barriers: Cultural norms around gender roles, family reputation, coping mechanisms and the model minority stereotype fostered silence and created pressures that further influenced survivors' reluctance to seek help.

Peer Impact: While peer support is critical for the wellbeing of young survivors, ineffective or unhealthy peer influence often led to negative experiences. Dating or peer relationships sometimes involved sexual violence, making disclosure difficult due to peer pressure and misconceptions about sexual violence.

Culturally Insensitive Support: Many support providers, including educators and school staff, lacked the cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence needed to offer effective support. Limited time, resources, and training further hindered their ability to assist. Referring young Asian people to external services was also challenging due to parental permission issues, a shortage of suitable agencies, and disconnection between support service providers.

Empowerment-Focused Support Preferences: Young Asian people affected by sexual violence preferred empowerment-based approaches that offered decision-making autonomy and sought greater caregiver involvement through holistic, wrap-around support.

Creative and Arts-Based Approaches: Participants found creative and arts-based methods valuable for establishing safe spaces where sensitive topics like sexual violence could be explored and discussed. Participants gained new perspectives about their experiences through arts-based methods.

Key Recommendations

Informed by the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to equip young Asian people affected by sexual violence and their caregivers with the necessary skills and knowledge for help-seeking, and to enhance the cultural competence and sensitivity of support service providers within New Zealand education system:

Cultural Competence Training: Implement comprehensive and consistent training for support service providers focusing on cultural competence and sensitivity when assisting young Asian individuals and their families.

Culturally Sensitive Support Services: Develop school-based support services tailored to the specific needs of young Asian people and their caregivers. These should build trust, improve parent-child communication, and enhance awareness of available support systems.

Caregiver Education: Provide culturally relevant education programmes to enable caregivers to challenge cultural norms around sexual violence and help-seeking behaviours, improving their understanding of available support options.

Community Collaboration: Engage with community leaders and organisations to address cultural barriers, build trust in support systems, and improve access to resources for young Asian people and their families.

Empowerment-Focused Approaches: Ensure support services prioritise survivor agency by adopting strength-based, person-centred, empowerment-focused approaches that encourage young people's participation in care decisions.

Strengthen Peer Support: Improve peer assistance programmes in schools by training peers in cultural sensitivity and empathetic support, creating a positive and supportive peer environment. Enhance knowledge and skills and foster healthy conversations about the topic of sexual violence prevention.

Improve Access and Consistency: Remove barriers and streamline referral processes to ensure timely, continuous, and reliable support for young people affected by sexual violence.

Collaborative Support Models: Develop an integrative support services model by fostering collaboration between legal, health, and education systems for more effective support.

Policy Advocacy: Advocate for educational policies that prioritise inclusivity, culturally responsive, and equitable access to sexuality education and support services in schools for young Asian people and their families.

Arts-Based Methods: Incorporate arts-based approaches into support systems to offer safe spaces for creative expression, fostering healing and amplifying marginalised voices.

Further Research: Support ongoing research that explores equity, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity in supporting young Asian people, ensuring that findings inform practices, policies, and future interventions. Prioritise cultural competency in research design and implementation.

These recommendations aim to create a holistic, wrap-around, supportive and culturally responsive environment within New Zealand educational institutions for young Asian people and their families.

To be referenced as:

Wang, Y., & O'Connor, P. (2024). *Asian sexual violence survivors' experiences and expectations of support within schools in New Zealand: Project report*. Centre for Arts and Social Transformation, University of Auckland.

Research website: <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/education/research/research-centres-and-units/centre-for-arts-and-social-transformation/research-projects-/asvs.html>

