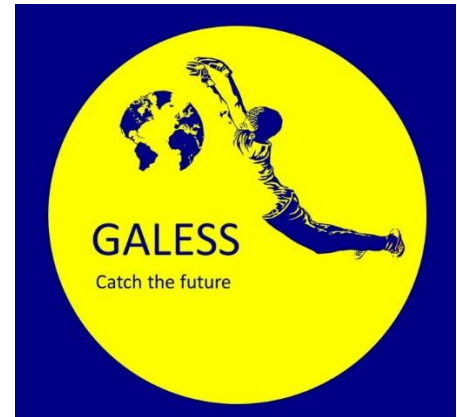


GALESS Yearbook 2026

Research Reports Conferences
Poland and Melbourne 2026

Research Domain :

Colors Included - Minorities



November 2026.



GALESS Certificate presentations Poland 2026

Research Domain: Colors included.

This year has been marked by inspiring international collaboration and meaningful dialogue. Through two remarkable conferences, one in Rybnik (Poland) and one in Melbourne (Australia), students aged 16 to 18 from countries all around the world (Japan, China, Italy, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia, Poland) came together to explore a shared theme: “Minorities” in the research domain “Colors Included” .

For me, it was especially meaningful to welcome participants to my hometown of Rybnik. It was wonderful to share the place I call home, and to see it through the eyes of new friends.

It was a time for engaging presentations and meaningful dialogue, where participants shared experiences, perspectives, and ideas. It was also a time to seek solutions, inspire one another, and learn how young people can contribute to creating more inclusive communities.

Beyond the conference sessions, it was a time to explore the beauty and culture of Poland and Australia, enjoy delicious local food, share fun together and build friendships that crossed borders and continents.

Together, we discovered that while our backgrounds may be different, our hopes for understanding, respect, and inclusion are shared. This yearbook celebrates young people’s journey, their achievements, and the connections that will continue long after the conferences have ended.

We, as a GALESS community, feel proud and grateful to be part of this incredible experience and would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the students, guiding teachers, organizers, jury members, key note speakers and everyone else who contributed to making it such a memorable journey.

Thank you all,

Ania Schilling

GALESS team- Front Desk

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**CAMBERWELL
GIRLS
GRAMMAR
SCHOOL**

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD): A hidden condition

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Summary

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a common yet hidden condition. Approximately 1 in 14 people have DLD, this translates to two students in every classroom. DLD is the term used when a person has difficulties with talking and/or understanding language and there is no known reason for these difficulties. Language underpins everything - thinking, social interactions, reading, writing and engagement in the academic world.

This project explores Developmental Language Disorder, with a focus on its impact and ways to build awareness and support people with for DLD.

Key words

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)
Language Disorder

1 Introduction

The design thinking process was used to direct the research process. This process has five stages: empathise, define, ideate, prototype and test.

A Miro board was used to initially support the decision making around choosing the research focus. Different types of minority groups were highlighted, then the focus shifted to neurodivergence. Different types of neurodivergence were explored and discussed before Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) was chosen as the focus.

In the empathise stage, general questions about DLD were initially generated, then refined. Developmental Language Disorder was then researched and information collated in a table for future reference. Additional questions were then generated to direct further research. Insights from the initial research helped identify the key focus of the research - awareness building for young people.

Ideas for raising awareness were generated on a collaborative Miro board. These ideas were then analysed using an Impact Matrix to consider which ideas were low or high impact, and the level of resourcing required for each idea. Relatively high impact ideas with relatively low levels of resourcing were developed with arguments for each analysed using the Three Pillars of Sustainability Framework. [1]

During the Prototyping and Testing stages, the team engaged with DLD experts including Dr Shaun Ziegenfusz, an Australian DLD specialist speech language pathologist, academic and co-founder of The DLD Project.

2 Background information

2.1 What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?

Developmental Language Disorder, or DLD, as it is commonly referred to, is a communication disorder that impacts everyday life. People with DLD have difficulties

with understanding and/or using language. Language disorder is the overarching term for difficulties with language. Developmental Language Disorder is the term used when there is no known cause for the person's language difficulties.

2.1.1 What DLD isn't

DLD is not caused by poor parenting, low intelligence, or a simple speech sound error. Children and adults with DLD have normal non-verbal intelligence, despite struggling with spoken and/or written language. Speaking more than one language at home does not cause or result in DLD. If a child speaks more than one language, then DLD will be present in every language they speak.

DLD is not to be confused with autism. Whilst a language disorder can co-occur with autism, DLD is diagnosed specifically when there is no known cause. If a child meets the criteria for autism and has language difficulties, then they would be diagnosed with having a Language Disorder associated with Autism, rather than DLD.

Some people with dyslexia (Specific Learning Disorder - Reading) have DLD. Not all people with dyslexia have DLD and not all people with DLD have dyslexia. DLD affects oral language broadly, although it looks differently for different people. Dyslexia strictly involves word-level reading and comprehension challenges.

DLD is a language comprehension and/or expression problem, and not a physical difficulty in making speech sounds, such as a lisp, although some people with DLD may also have a speech disorder.

2.2 Prevalence of DLD

DLD affects approximately 1 in 14 people globally. There are around 400,000 children with DLD in Australia, and around 2 million people Australians in total. In fact, Developmental Learning Disorder is five times more prevalent than autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with ASD occurring in approximately 1.1% of Australians. Although not as commonly known, a sample conducted by the US National Library of Medicine showed that the prevalence of DLD was 6.4% at 10 years. There is no significant gender distribution for DLD. [2]

2.2.1 Reasons for low awareness

Despite affecting roughly 1 in 14 people, DLD is largely a 'hidden' condition. Due to DLD predominantly affecting comprehension and expression, many people diagnosed with DLD mask their difficulties by indicating they understand, when they don't, relying on peers to explain instructions or saying 'I don't know' in social contexts, all of which can be misinterpreted. In addition to this, there are no physical or outward markers of DLD, meaning that it is quite difficult to recognise in people especially children. Some children with DLD are incorrectly labelled as being naughty, inattentive or defiant due to their language difficulties.

DLD frequently overlaps with more known conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia or autism, leading to these conditions being prioritised and leaving the underlying language difficulties not addressed. As children with DLD grow older, with support, grammatical errors may disappear, and on the surface, language difficulties may not be so apparent. This may make the adult presentation of DLD appear as general awkwardness or anxiety. Despite being more prevalent, DLD also receives significantly less funding and research attention in comparison to dyslexia or autism. In addition to this, there is less high-profile public representation to drive awareness when compared with the many media campaigns that heavily advocate for ADHD or autism. [3]

2.3 Features of DLD

Overall, the most noticeable sign of Developmental Learning Disorder is difficulties with language which affect day-to-day life, including accessing the school curriculum and social interactions. For some students this might mean difficulties following instructions or word finding difficulties. For others it might be muddling the words in sentences or having difficulties remembering information.

2.3.1 Language features

Each person with DLD has a different profile but there are some key language features of Developmental Learning Disorder which include:

- Consistent difficulties using language to express thoughts through spoken language.
- Limited ability to use different sentence structures and connect words to form basic and grammatically correct sentences.
- Reduced vocabulary and difficulties using vocabulary to maintain conversations
- Difficulties communicating in different situations and reading social cues, especially if language is complex.
- Difficulties remembering sounds, words, direction or patterns. [4]

2.3.2 Co-occurring conditions

DLD frequently co-occurs with other neurodevelopmental learning and mental health conditions including ADHD, Specific Learning Disorders, Speech Sound Disorders, Literacy and Numeracy Difficulties, Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), and Mental Health Conditions.

2.3.2.1 Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity that interfere with daily function. ADHD occurs in roughly 40% to 50% of individuals with DLD and can often pose as an additional barrier in various fields. [5]

2.3.2.2 Specific Learning Disorders

Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) is a category of neurodevelopmental conditions that affect the brain's

ability to acquire, process, or use specific academic skills. Dyslexia (reading), dysgraphia (writing), and dyscalculia (maths), are common examples that fall under the general umbrella of SLD.

2.3.2.3 Speech Sound Disorders

Speech Sound Disorders involve difficulty with producing speech sounds correctly or clearly, affecting an individual's ability to be understood by others. These can involve articulation, or phonological processes (using sound patterns correctly), and they are usually diagnosed and treated in childhood. [6]

2.3.2.4 Literacy and Numeracy Difficulties

Literacy and numeracy difficulties are different to Specific Learning Disorders. They can arise from various factors, including inconsistent instruction or other underlying conditions. Most students with literacy or numeracy difficulties can achieve age-appropriate levels of mastery with quality instruction and targeted intervention. [7]

2.3.2.5 Developmental Coordination Disorder

Also known as dyspraxia, this condition involves impaired coordination of physical movements that affect daily activities like handwriting, dressing, or sports, even with the absence of underlying neurological or muscular disease. [8]

2.3.2.6 Mental Health Conditions

Mental health is a broad category that encompasses disorders that affect emotional regulation, mood, thinking, and behaviour. Challenges include anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric conditions. Due to ongoing communication and social interaction stress, as well as potential isolation, individuals with DLD may be of higher risk of Mental Health Conditions. [9]

2.4. Impact of DLD

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) can have a significant impact on both students and their families. Students with DLD often experience difficulties with learning, communication, and social interactions, which can affect academic achievement, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing. They may struggle to follow classroom instructions, maintain friendships, and participate confidently in school activities, increasing the risk of anxiety and social isolation. For teenagers, they report that it is challenging when their intelligence is questioned and when others treat their difficulties as a behaviour problem. [10]

For families, DLD can create emotional, financial, and caregiving challenges. Parents often need to provide additional support, advocate for educational accommodations, and organise speech therapy and other interventions. As DLD frequently persists into adulthood, many families continue to play an important role in supporting their child's educational, social, and employment transitions. [11] [12]

2.4.1 Learning

Students with DLD often experience academic difficulties across all curriculum areas including literacy and numeracy in comparison to neurotypical peers. By the time they reach adulthood, they are six times more likely to be diagnosed with reading and spelling disabilities, and four times more likely to be diagnosed with mathematics disabilities than those without DLD.

Language underpins reading, writing, and numeracy so if a student has difficulties with language, this is likely to impact their academic achievement. Moreover, in the Australian curriculum and many international education curriculums, the main format for assignments and exams is written. As students with DLD have difficulties with oral language, they often have difficulties with literacy, with 17-50% of all students with DLD presenting with a reading and/or writing disability as well. These academic struggles are increased by the fact that DLD has little support and research, and that individuals with DLD often go undiagnosed. [3] [4] [13]

2.4.2 Socialising

Social functioning refers to an individual's ability to develop friendships, participate in social activities, and interact effectively with others. Because language is essential for communication, students with DLD often experience significant social challenges. Difficulties with vocabulary, sentence structure, and language comprehension can make it difficult to follow conversations, especially in fast-paced group discussions whether online or in person. As a result, students with DLD may struggle to respond appropriately, initiate conversations, or interpret social cues such as humour and sarcasm. These communication barriers can negatively affect peer relationships and social competence. Students with DLD are sometimes perceived as withdrawn and may participate less frequently in social interactions, reducing opportunities to develop social skills. This does not mean that students with DLD are not prosocial – interested in socialising with others.

Students with DLD may also experience difficulties with conflict resolution and understanding others' perspectives. As a result, students with DLD face a higher risk of social isolation, bullying, and exclusion. These experiences can contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and lower self-confidence, highlighting the importance of providing social and communication support within school environments. [11] [14]

2.4.3 Social/emotional wellbeing

DLD can heavily impact social and emotional wellbeing of individuals, from challenges with everyday communication, to contributing to higher rates of loneliness, clinical anxiety, and/or depression. Individuals with DLD sometimes have difficulties starting or joining conversations or keeping pace with fast-moving interactions. This leaves them more likely to be isolated by peers. Furthermore, difficulty grasping jokes, complex questions, or constantly shifting topics can cause

individuals to appear awkward, thus increasing the risk of social rejection. [15]

Because DLD is an invisible condition, unaware peers may misread communication struggles as odd or antisocial behaviour, making students vulnerable to bullying. In addition, conversational hurdles impact their ability to join groups, resolve conflicts, or process changing social dynamics. [16]

2.5 Awareness of DLD

DLD is a hidden, common condition. Despite global awareness raising efforts, especially through the Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder (RADLD), awareness of DLD is still low, especially compared with other conditions such as autism.

2.5.1 Student awareness

A key aim of the project was to find out about the level of student awareness of DLD and what young people would like to know about DLD. This information was used to inform the two proposals.

2.5.1.1 Student survey results

A student survey was created to find out how aware students in Years 7 – 12 were of Developmental Language Disorder as well as what they wanted to know about DLD (See Appendix A for survey questions.)

A total of 139 students responded to the survey. The number of students who responded in each year level can be seen in Figure 1.

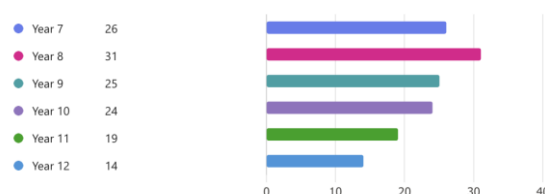


Figure 1. Student survey participation by year level.

Only 14% of students had heard of DLD (Figure 2) and only 5% knew someone with DLD (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Student awareness of DLD.



Figure 3. Percentage of students who know someone with DLD.

More than 40% of students correctly identified the prevalence of DLD as 1 in 14 (Figure 4), however there was a wide range of responses to this question, which supports the need for an awareness campaign.

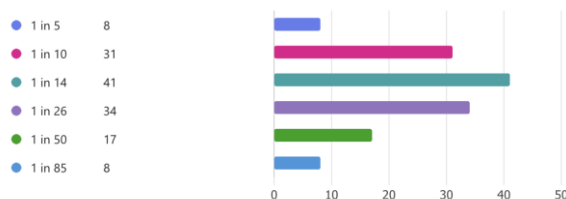


Figure 4. Student identification of the prevalence of DLD.

2.5.1.2 Key themes

The following key themes and questions about emerged from the student survey.

Definition: What is DLD?

Prevalence: How common is DLD?

Identification: How is DLD identified? What are some of the features?

Causes: What causes DLD?

Impact: How does DLD impact school and daily life?

Duration: How long does DLD last?

Support: How are people with DLD supported? What is helpful?

Community: How can we learn more about DLD? How can we educate others to know more about DLD?

The information in the survey shows that students have low awareness of DLD, but they also have many questions, suggesting a level of curiosity. The student-generated questions can be used to inform the design of awareness materials for young people as this ensures they are relevant.

2.5.2 Teacher awareness

Another aim of the project was to find out about the level of teacher awareness of DLD and what they would like to

know about DLD. This information was used to inform the two proposals.

2.5.2.1 Teacher survey

A teacher survey was created to gain some insights into teacher awareness of DLD. (See Appendix B for survey questions.)

9 teachers responded to the survey, so it is important to be mindful of this small sample size when analysing the survey results.



Figure 5. Teacher awareness of DLD

78% of teachers who completed the survey were aware of DLD (Figure 5). This is higher the average rate of awareness.

Interestingly, none of the teachers knew anyone with DLD (Figure 6), so perhaps this group of teachers don't currently have a student identified with DLD in their class.



Figure 6. Percentage of teachers who know someone with DLD.

Teachers had a high level of awareness of the prevalence of DLD (Figure 7). This is possibly due to a Global Ambassador for RADLD being on staff.

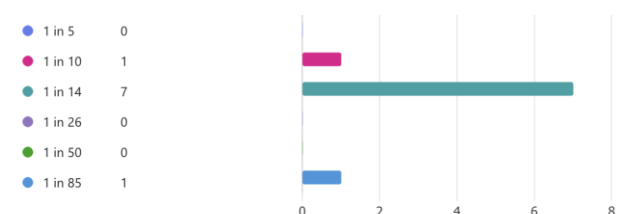


Figure 7. Teacher awareness of DLD prevalence

There was a technical issue with the question about features of DLD. Teachers were only able to indicate one feature instead of multiple features (Figure 8). The main features identified related to students' ability to use language and

included word finding difficulties, engaging in conversations and using correct sentences.

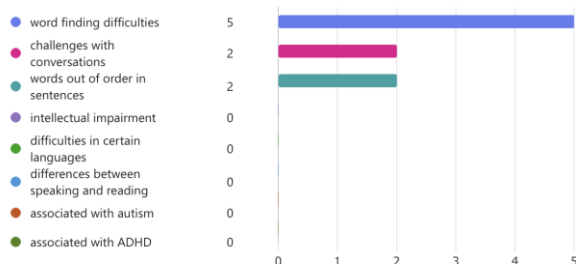


Figure 8. Teacher identification of the main features of DLD.

None of the teachers who completed the survey had been provided with information about DLD in their Initial Teacher Training (ITE) (Figure 9). All teachers who completed the survey had been teaching for more than 16 years. There have been changes to ITE courses in universities, however recent research shows that only 32.5% of pre-service teachers are learning about DLD in their ITE courses. [17]



Figure 9. Percentage of teachers provided with DLD information during their Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

3 Proposal

Our aim is to increase awareness in young people and there are two ways we initially propose to do this.

- Raise young people's awareness of DLD via digital posters.
- Run a Developmental Language Disorder Celebration Day in our school.

4 Arguments to or for the proposal

4.1 Three Pillars of Sustainability Framework

The Three Pillars of Sustainability Framework was used to analyse each proposal and determine their suitability. The three pillars (environment, society and economy) are used to understand the sustainability of an idea. While each pillar has a specific focus, the three pillars are interrelated. The environment pillar has a focus on protecting the environment. The social pillar highlights social equity in particular. The economic pillar considers the viability of an idea.

4.2 Key proposal 1: Raising young people's awareness and understanding of DLD via digital posters

The aim of Proposal 1 is to create a series of digital posters to provide information and raise collective awareness of DLD in the community. The process is outlined below.

- Gain permission from leadership (e.g. School Principal).
- Identify and organise information to be used.
- Contact Head of Media Technologies at school for guidance and necessary background information.
- Design a series of digital posters.
- Determine the location of posters and the frequency of display.
- Publish the posters at the desired frequency and location.
- Align and associate different posters with special dates (e.g. Neurodiversity Celebration Week).
- Seek feedback from students.

4.2.1 Selection of information to share

Results from both teacher and student surveys show that the school community has limited knowledge of DLD. The most frequently asked questions: "What is DLD?", "How does it affect people's lives?" and "How can one support people with DLD?" provide a basis for the content of the proposed posters. By displaying this information in simple language, students and teachers could gain valuable knowledge about the fundamentals of DLD.

4.2.2 Potential outcome

The proposal should result in a new awareness in people without harming identity confidentially. Simple wordings and key pointers paired alongside visuals should increase the memory recollection of viewers. This can also influence how people act around others.

4.3 Proposal 2

The aim of Proposal 2 is to hold a Developmental Language Disorder Celebration Day at school to celebrate neurodiversity and educate teachers and students about providing support for people with DLD. The process is outlined below.

- Form a planning team including teachers and students.
- Propose the idea to leadership groups (e.g. School Principal, School Captains and Student Council).
- Liaise with the Head of Service Learning.
- Find a suitable day in the School Calendar.
- Network with DLD specialists.
- Create informative banners.
- Organise networking activities to allow students to connect (e.g. bracelet making).
- Seek feedback from students.

4.3.1 Selection of information to share

The focus for the DLD Day would be to provide information about ways to support individuals with DLD. This can be done through panels, community activities, and quizzes. The survey results show that out of 139 students who responded, only 14% have heard of DLD, and 5% of

students know someone with DLD. The most frequently asked questions were “What is DLD?”, “How can we support someone with DLD?” and “What are the features of DLD?”.

According to the teacher survey (9 respondents), the most common question was “How can I support a student with DLD?”. The results from both surveys suggest that the school community lacks sufficient knowledge about Developmental Language Disorder to currently provide students with DLD with the best support.

4.3.2 Considerations

Careful consideration would need to be given to the types of activities undertaken to manage resource use. Our school is a busy place, so we would need to find a time in the school calendar. Most of all, we need to ensure that students don't feel they have a spotlight on them or feel embarrassed, especially if they have DLD but haven't shared their diagnosis.

4.3.3 Potential outcomes

The potential outcomes of this proposal include a collective awareness of DLD, a collective increase in knowledge of DLD and how to support individuals with DLD, and new connections between students. It should also reduce misconceptions of DLD and influence how we perceive those with DLD.

5 Summary of arguments

A systematic analysis of Proposal 1 indicated that creating digital posters to raise awareness about DLD should provide easily digestible general knowledge of DLD, and influence how people act around one another. The impact matrix indicated that this proposal should be relatively high impact with low resourcing required.

The positive aspects of this proposal include the fact that visuals and short messages are easily retained, resulting in a stronger collective awareness. One potential issue is that having posters displayed on small screens may impact their effectiveness; however, this can be easily solved by posters being displayed on bigger screens and increasing the frequency of displays. Over time, social advantages include reducing small misconceptions and increasing general support for students. An economic advantage is that it is relatively cheap to produce digital posters and spread them around the community. Environmental advantages include the availability of solar power to project the posters.

A systematic analysis of Proposal 2 indicated that holding a Developmental Learning Disorder Celebration Day could build collectively deeper understanding of DLD and equip both teachers and students with the knowledge to support those with DLD. This should also reduce major misconceptions associated with it and influence how we act around others. The possible issues that may arise include students feeling targeted and causing feelings of embarrassment. However, as the aim of the day is to provide information to support individuals with DLD, the outcome is more likely to benefit the students and further

help them develop. Social advantages of this single event include strengthening community and fostering a widespread sense of belonging.

6 How can some of these challenges be overcome?

Implementation of these two proposals requires a strong culture of community, and awareness of the time and resources required. Clear guidelines need to be provided, information needs to be checked for accuracy, and careful consideration of the impact on students with DLD is essential.

These challenges can be overcome by working in a multidisciplinary team with leaders, teachers and students to plan and implement each of the proposals. A clear timeframe should help with organising resources and ensuring that the proposals happen in a timely manner. There may be the opportunity to harness champions – teachers and students with particular knowledge or experience. This happens in our school with other conditions such as ADHD and dyslexia.

7 Global perspectives

DLD affects people of all cultures and languages. It is not restricted to a particular group of people. People with DLD who speak more than one language will have difficulties in each language. This highlights how DLD is a borderless global condition. In this next section, we compare DLD support and resources in the UK with Australia. [6]

7.1 DLD in the UK

As DLD affects 2 children in every average classroom, around 1.3 million children across UK are impacted. There are different ways that DLD awareness and support is being addressed. [18]

7.1.1 RADLD

RADLD (Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder) is an organisation created to raise awareness about DLD. Its aim is to create a world where people with DLD are supported to pursue their aspirations by providing internationally relevant information, disseminating evidence-based information, and developing a global network for advocacy. [19]

RADLD originated as the RALLI campaign (Rallying Awareness of Language Learning Impairments) in UK in 2012. This was a group consisting of four academics, two of whom trained as speech and language therapists, and two as clinical psychologists, together with a practicing speech and language therapist. Together, they decided that a campaign with accessible internet materials was needed to attract public attention to DLD. This was necessary for the recognition of children's language difficulties, which were previously under-recognised. (It is important to note that prior to 2016, DLD was sometimes referred to as a Specific Language Impairment. The change in terminology led to a change from RALLI to RADLD.) [20]

Since its beginnings in 2012, RADLD has expanded into a large organisation with volunteer ambassadors in over 40 countries, and resources translated into over 20 languages. It continues to increase DLD awareness across the globe. A key date in the year is the International Developmental Language Disorder Awareness Day which usually runs on the third Friday in October. [21]

7.1.2 Schooling

The UK is not only active in the spread of knowledge of DLD, but they have also well-developed and resourced specialist schools supporting students with DLD to develop and thrive. These schools include:

- **Moor House School and College:** Located in Oxted, for students aged 7–19
- **Meath School:** Located in Ottershaw, for primary-aged children with speech and language disorders
- **Dawn House School:** Located in Rainworth, for students aged 5 – 19
- **St Catherine's School:** Located in Ventnor, for students aged 7–19
- **Blossom House School:** Located in New Malden, for students aged 3 - 19

7.1.3 Resources/Organisations

In addition to RADLD, there are many DLD focused organisations including:

- The **Adult DLD Assessment Service (ADAS)** is a free clinic run by speech and language therapists, which provides assessment and diagnosis for adults who have suspected DLD.
- **The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)**
- **Engage with Developmental Language Disorder (E-DLD)** connects individuals with DLD and their families to academic research with the aim of having DLD become fully understood by families and professionals.
- **Speech and Language UK** - an organisation providing services and free resources relating to understanding DLD.
- **Afasic** - a parent led membership organisation and registered charity that provides information and support for families with children and adolescents with DLD.
- **The International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD)** - a research collaboration.

7.1.4 Legal support

People with DLD in the UK are legally supported by the following:

- Equality Act 2010
- Special Education Needs and Disability Act (SEND) 2001
- Children and Families Act 2014

7.2 Issues

Some of the key issues in the UK include the need to raise awareness of DLD in the Youth Justice system, legal protections, mental health and accessible assessments.

7.2.1 Youth Justice

Young people convicted of a criminal offence are significantly more likely to face another conviction within 12 months if they have undiagnosed language difficulties. In a study of 145 young offenders recruited through the youth justice system, three in five were found to have DLD, none of which were diagnosed before the study. Young people with DLD were found to be 2.6 times more likely to reoffend in the year after their assessment with 62% of people with DLD reoffending compared with 25% of people without DLD reoffending. DLD has emerged as a much stronger predictor of reoffending than other factors thought likely to affect their chances, such as non-verbal IQ levels, age and previous offences. One explanation for this finding is that poor language skills make it hard for young offenders to engage with services which help avoid reoffending, as these services often involve talking through what happened, listening to victims and expressing regret, which involve language. [22] [23]

7.2.2 Legal protections

The UK currently has Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) in place which provide important legal protection for children with disorders. This protection is currently being challenged through the Policy Exchange's *Out Of Control* report - a blueprint by the UK think tank Policy Exchange. The report recommends stripping EHCPs due to an 'over-diagnosis' of children, however this report ignores DLD, which affects around two children in every classroom and is underdiagnosed. [24]

7.2.3 Mental health

Research in the UK has found that many young people with DLD experience anxiety, especially as they approach adolescence, due to the increasing language demands and complexity of peer relationships. These struggles are compounded by the fact that many individuals with DLD are undiagnosed. Many individuals with DLD struggle keeping up with lessons and conversations. They try to mask their difficulties by indicating understanding, even when they don't understand, or withdrawing from social situations in which they may be exposed, such as school. [25]

7.2.4 Examinations

A new UK-wide report has called for urgent reform into the accessibility of exams for students with DLD. It has highlighted how current exam arrangements fail to recognise the full impact of language difficulties. Despite the high prevalence of DLD, many students are excluded from vital support as eligibility criteria narrowly relies on reading and vocabulary scores rather than comprehensive language assessments, and functional ability.

Recommendations include modifying exam language, recognising DLD as a distinct category for access arrangements, and involving speech and language therapists in access arrangement decisions. The report warns that without reform, thousands of capable students will be judged unfairly, limited by their language processing difficulties rather than their cognitive abilities. [26]

7.3 Comparison

Table 1. Comparison of Australia and UK DLD Awareness and Supports

Public and Professional Awareness	
Australia	UK
Surveys reveal under 20% of the general public are aware of DLD; and teachers often misidentify crucial signs in the classroom [27].	Overall low to moderate; growing traction via dedicated charity campaigns, though public awareness remains low.
Legal support	
Australia	UK
Disability Discrimination Act 1992 - general legal requirement but no mention of DLD Disability Standards for Education Act 2005 - outlines what schools and teachers should do - no specific mention of DLD.	Equality Act 2010 - protects people from discrimination - DLD not specifically mentioned Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 – strengthens the rights of children with disabilities in education. Schools and local education authorities in England are legally obliged to identify and provide tailored support to ensure children with DLD face no barriers to learning. Children and Families Act 2014 - covers Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans for people up to the age of 25.
Key Peak Bodies and Advocacy Networks	
Australia	UK
Speech Pathology Australia (a professional peak body) and grassroot groups such as The DLD Project	CATALISE (Criteria and Terminology Applied to Language Impairments) Consortium developed an international consensus on terminology and diagnostic criteria. The official term Developmental Language Disorder was adopted. [28] Both Australia and the UK were members of the panel, but led by UK-based researchers at the University of Oxford and focused predominantly on the UK context [29]. ICAN Charity, NAPLIC, and RADLD

Research groups	
Australia	UK
Language and Literacy for Young People (LaLYP) run through Curtin University, Perth	Moor House Research Institute [30] University College London - Language and Cognition Lab: SCALES Project (Longitudinal study of children's language) University of Oxford - TICLD (The Intervention Consensus for Language Disorders Group) project The University of Bath and City University, London – SoUNDS (Screening of Undiagnosed DLD in Students) Project [31].
Educational Support	
Australia	UK
Varies by state/territory e.g. specialised Language Development Centres in WA No consistency of Individual Education Plans	Support coordinated via Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) frameworks
Funding and Healthcare Access	
Australia	UK
No unified funding scheme Medicare Chronic Disease Management plans cover up to 5 subsidised speech sessions (often clinically insufficient) [32] with NDIS access restricted only to individuals with severe functional impairment [33].	National Health Service (NHS) provides speech and language therapy pathways, though waiting lists can be long, and vary by region

7.4 Insights

The United Kingdom's approach to supporting Developmental Learning Disorder is more developed than the support given in Australia. Neither country's core disability or education legislation names DLD specifically, but the UK framework is more targeted - the Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Act 2001 create legal obligations for schools, whereas Australia's Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Standards for Education remain more general.

In Australia, DLD is not formally included in the National Disorder Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for funding. Only approximately 350 of 400 000 of individuals with DLD have accessed some sort of funding via the NDIS. In contrast, the United Kingdom is more advanced in terms of recognising and providing support for individuals with DLD. Students with DLD have a statement of needs that must be met in any situation and location and are legally supported by SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) legislation.

In both the UK and Australia, Initial Teacher Education explicit training on Developmental Language Disorder is not mandated as part of the core curriculum content, resulting in teachers being unprepared to identify and support individuals with DLD. Most teacher knowledge and skills building still comes via DLD-focused organisations such as National Association of Professionals concerned with Language Impairment in Children (NAPLIC) in the UK and The DLD Project in Australia.

Both Australia and the UK show low public awareness of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), although the UK has gained more ground through dedicated charity campaigns such as RADLD and NAPLIC. Both have a strong presence on social media including Facebook and Twitter, where they discuss and promote DLD. This has resulted in children, adults and families feeling more confident to share their experiences of DLD. In Australia there is a slow growing awareness of this disorder. For example, The DLD Project has successfully advanced community awareness, supported research and brought in broader education of DLD for parents and teachers since 2020. The UK also has a denser research and advocacy infrastructure, reflecting the field's strong UK origins. Australia's efforts are comparatively smaller scale.

Educational support in Australia varies significantly by state, while the UK's SEND Act provides more structured (if regionally inconsistent) pathways. Funding is a weak point in both systems: Australia's Medicare and NDIS coverage is limited and often insufficient, whilst the UK's National Health System (NHS) speech therapy service is hampered by consistently long waiting lists.

In summary, there are similarities and differences in how people with DLD are supported in Australia and the UK.

8 Global learnings

Much can be learnt from the United Kingdom's more developed approach to DLD. Their provision of EHCPs, legally binding support guarantees for individuals with DLD, helps reduce many negative secondary impacts of the disorder, such as social isolation, academic underachievement and mental health struggles. The lack of equivalent support services in Australia, which does not include DLD in its NDIS funding, impacts the level of support individuals with DLD can access and may exacerbate the negative secondary impacts of their disorder.

In terms of research, much can be learned from British research as well. The UK is one of the leading nations in DLD research. Moreover, the support groups in the United Kingdom are good points of reference for new support groups in Australia. The United Kingdom has many groups, such as RADLD and NAPLIC, and others that are government or university backed, driving awareness among parents, doctors and more, allowing DLD to be recognised early and providing confidence for individuals with the disorder.

9 Global contributions

Our proposal has focused on raising awareness for young people. As we have researched Developmental Language

Disorder, we have gained a greater understanding of this common, hidden condition, but also gained insights into awareness and understanding of DLD for secondary school students.

Our proposal to focus on raising awareness of DLD with secondary school students, may provide some useful insights into supporting adolescents with DLD, and building greater understanding with their peers. It is suggested that these proposals could be applied to different contexts and countries, as DLD is a global condition, affecting people across cultures, countries and languages.

10 Conclusion

There is a need to build awareness and support for people with DLD, as shown in the surveys conducted as part of this research project. Different approaches can be taken to raising awareness and providing support for people with DLD. Using insights from adolescents can support the design of materials that are relevant for this group.

Using tools such as an impact matrix and the Three Pillars of Sustainability Framework helped highlight low resource, and relatively high positive impact actions. The overall conclusion is that awareness raising is a low resourcing solution which should have a positive, student-focused and practical outcome.

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Appendix A Student Survey Questions

- What year level are you in?
- Have you heard of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?
- If yes, what do you know about DLD?
- Do you know anyone with DLD?
- How common do you think DLD is?
 - Options: 1 in 5; 1 in 50; 1 in 10; 1 in 14; 1 in 26; 1 in 85
- What would you like to know about DLD?

Appendix B Teacher Survey Questions

- Have you heard of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?
- If yes, what do you know about DLD?
- Do you know anyone with DLD? Yes/no
- How common do you think DLD is?
 - Options: 1 in 26; 1 in 50; 1 in 10; 1 in 14; 1 in 23; 1 in 85
- How can you support a student with DLD?
- Which of these are features of DLD?
 - Word finding
 - Having conversations
 - Putting words in the correct order
 - Intellectual impairment
 - Difficulties in certain languages
 - Differences with reading and speaking
 - Associated with ADHD
 - Associated with autism
- Did you learn about DLD when you were training to be a teacher?
- How many years have you been teaching?
 - 1 – 5 years
 - 6 – 10 years
 - 11 – 15 years
 - 16 + years
- How much professional learning have you received about DLD after you became a teacher?
- What would you like to know about DLD?

Contributions of the Melbourne Greek Community

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Abstract

The Greek community in Melbourne is one of the largest and most influential groups within the city. With the largest population of Greek people outside of Greece, it is crucial that such a significant community is explored. We aim to research the origins of the Greek population in Melbourne, their advancements in maintaining their heritage country's culture, and the current state of this community in the present societal and economic landscape. This project aims to investigate this community's historical context and to uncover some of their personal experiences, by conducting personal interviews. Our findings are important as they help us gain valuable insight into the hardships and victories of the Melbournian Greek people. These findings are important as they outline perspectives for understanding contemporary multicultural integration and preserving the unique struggles and triumphs of the Melbournian Greek community.

1. Introduction

Our thesis aims to understand the Greek community in Melbourne. We will explore their journey from Greece, contributions to Australian Society, their challenges and responses to hardships and victories.

We strive to observe the Greeks' contributions to their community and also that of the greater Melbournian community. To observe these hardships, we are using three pillars of sustainability: the Environmental pillar, the Social pillar, and the Economic pillar

Our primary method for finding this information and collecting data was through the use of interviews. We planned to interview a member of the Greek minority in order to gain an understanding of how modern Greek Melbournians view their culture, current hardships and their contribution to the three sustainability pillars. Our questions revolve around these sustainability pillars, asking about how Greeks have supported themselves both economically and socially, how they have endured times of hardship and how they have contributed to the betterment of the environment through their healthy lifestyles and sustainability practices. Interview questions were selected to allow us to answer our research question concerning their contribution to the greater community through a lens that is inaccessible from internet sources alone.

Melbourne is well-known for having the largest Greek population outside of Greece, providing a deeply rooted culture. The main spark behind the growth of this

community was the massive post World War II migration boom, driven by the Australian government's "Populate or Perish" policy, in which the government heavily supported immigration from foreign countries. The large population surge was also due to the Greek Civil War during 1944 to 1949, as tens of thousands of Greek migrants arrived searching for peace and stability. Today, the impact of these migration waves provide a rich environment for investigating diaspora sustainability across generations.

Through evaluating the trajectory of Greek Melbournians through the Three Pillars of Sustainability, it becomes evident that this ethnic minority group has been able to both retain their unique identity and contribute to Australian society, in Melbourne specifically. The social pillar is represented by the Greeks' maintenance of their culture and language, as well as their dedication to the Greek Orthodox Church despite the assimilation and xenophobic tendencies towards Greeks from some sectors of the community within Melbourne during the 1960s and 1970s. Financially, the Greek Melbournians have experienced a rise in social mobility within the nation. The first generations of Greeks to Victoria were manual laborers with limited English skills, but they began to educate themselves and establish businesses, allowing for the following generations to rise as business owners, legal professionals, and politicians with extensive influence within the state. Additionally, the environmental pillar represents the positive changes that the Greek community has made to Melbourne, from the old Greek Precinct of Lonsdale Street to areas like Brunswick and Oakleigh that are home to numerous Greek citizens and their communities. Finally, the difficulties that the Greek community has experienced, both in the past and in the present day, contrast with their celebrated status as Australian citizens today, which allows for an investigation into the methods through which such a statistical minority has overcome numerous obstacles to define the identity of one of the world's most prominent cities.

1.1 Scope of Investigation

We aim to observe and identify some of their contributions to the betterment of their communities and also that of the greater Melbourne community. To observe these hardships, we used the three pillars of sustainability: the Environmental pillar, focusing on things such as their use of regenerative backyard farming and how they have managed to turn places like Lonsdale into efficient and safe locations; the Social pillar, seeing how their community has both endured hardships and prospered through their 80 year history, for instance, shown through the rise of the Greek Orthodox churches and the preservation of culture, and finally the Economic pillar, observing their effect on Melbourne's businesses and also the hardships such as a lack of initial jobs and periods of

economic recession such as in 2008.

2. Literature review

2.1 Context of Greek Immigration

The first Greeks to arrive in Australia were seven sailors, who were convicted of piracy and were transported to New South Wales in 1829. Of these sailors, two, Ghikas Burglaidis, also known as Jigger Bulgaru and Andonis Manolis stayed in the country. Jigger went on to marry an Irish woman and start a family, resting in Nimmitabel Pioneer cemetery currently. The first free Greek migrant was Katerina Georgia Plessos who was escaping the Greek independence wars with her husband. The start of the mass migration began in approximately the 1850s during the height of the gold rush, in which many Greeks came to make a fortune. By 1871, there were still only 19 Greece-born women in Victoria, and 127 men according to the Origins Museum of Victoria. This imbalance was due to many men coming for riches and gold and not intending to permanently settle, leaving their family back in the Mediterranean. Over time, Greek immigration slowly increased with even more arriving once World War I started in 1914. They were treated with disdain though due to their country's neutrality at the beginning of the war with a secret census being carried out to monitor the Greek community also according to Wikipedia contributors. (2026, July 6). They also managed to establish their own Greek newspaper called Australis in 1913.

This new influx led the Australian government to put a quota on the amount of Greek people allowed to immigrate with only 100 allowed to enter the country a month coming into effect in 1920.

After World War 2, Greece was devastated by conflict and devastation caused by the untold weapons of war that were used. Due to this, many immigrated to other countries, many of whom Australia welcomed readily thanks to the "Populate or perish" policy. Most of the Greek people found work in factories or farms due to discrimination and the language barrier with the majority coming to Victoria during 1961 - 1970 (24, 461), according to the Victorian Government Greek Community Profile. After the first few thousand had settled in, many more came, emboldened by families helping less fortunate relatives escape, friends following friends and the establishment of suburbs such as Oakleigh, Brunswick, Preston and South Melbourne which became the epitome of Greek culture and safe places to settle down.

Due to this new influx, many new businesses and communities were set up along with schools, eventually leading Melbourne to have the highest Greek population outside of the Hellenic Republic.

After the 1970s, the Greek population further declined but saw a sudden increase due to the Grecian economical crisis in 2010 in which many people fled to more economically stable countries.

Today over 44000 people who were born in Greece live in Melbourne with an additional 170 000 claiming Greek Ancestry.

2.2 Historical Context of the Social Pillar of Sustainability

The Greek population is a very tightly knit group due mainly to the Greek Orthodox Church. This church is the main reason that the Greek community of Melbourne has formed, with members first discussing the matter of bringing a Patriarch of Jerusalem over to Australia in 1895. These members demonstrated their commitment to their community, promising large and various amounts to convince the Patriarch to send a priest to Australia. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful in 1895 and somewhat successful in 1897 with Dorotheos Bakaliaros visiting temporarily according to an article by Dr. Christos N. Fifis. However in 1898, they were finally triumphant with the Patriarchate finally sending over Athanasios Kantopoulos. While they did have a priest, the next challenge was the establishment of a physical church. In 1898, the Greek community of Melbourne decided to collect money for the establishment of the church in Melbourne further according to Dr Christos's article. They managed to procure 125 Pounds and a loan from the three executive members: Grigorios Matorikos, Alexandros Maniakakis and Antonios J. J. Lekatsas to purchase a 600 Pound property. Today, the Holy Church of the Annunciation of Our Lady (Evangelismos) stands today in the exact same location of 186 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne 124 years later, a testament to how far this community was willing to go, forfeiting material possessions in exchange for the betterment of this social community.

While the Greeks have been physically distant from their homeland brethren, they have not been ignorant to their pleas: in 1906 the community collected 187 pounds and sent it to the Greek Minister of Finance in response to Bulgarian attacks along with a letter saying "for reorganization and building a well trained army and navy (...) to enable us in the near future to be able to fight effectively against our multiple enemies". This small act was one of many to support the Hellenic Republic with much bigger donations coming in other times of strife. These donations demonstrated that the Greek community still valued their roots even with their geographical and sometimes generational differences showing unity and an appreciation for Greece.

Today the hardships that the Greek Orthodox community has overcome, such as securing land and a priest, have shaped their church into one with over 170 000 members still following and attending the same church and religion that has allowed their community to stay together and maintain their connection to their heritage.

However recent hardships have caused declines in members due to the disconnection from religion that all Christian faiths are facing. Additionally, younger people are becoming less interested and disinterested in their heritage with the founder of the Greek Circle, Marianna Moriadis saying “Greek culture is embedded in who they are, but for those of us born in Australia, the connection can feel more symbolic than lived”. For this reason, she has led the establishment of Melbourne social groups such as the Greek Circle according to Mossonidis, M. (2025, July 25).

The Greek Circle is a Greek social group aimed towards the younger generation, specifically those aged 18 - 30. Their aim is to bridge the gap between the generations, offering a complement to other University clubs by offering smaller, more intimate events that do not judge people's varying connection to heritage while still educating them. Some of their events include pottery classes, Greek dancing, picnics, and drinks nights paired with lectures about Greek history, tradition, and mythology. The group's long term goal is to collaborate with local Greek Australian businesses, artists, creators, and cultural leaders in order to further support the Greek community.

Marianna is not the only one to set up these clubs with other groups such as the Pallaconian Youth Club thriving and keeping the community together. So, as we can see the Greeks have experienced many hardships in their traditional social gatherings but have risen to the challenge of embracing the newer generation through groups like the Greek Circle and others. They have contributed to help maintain their identity and pass it on to new generations.

2.3 Historical Context of the Economic Pillar of Sustainability

The Greek community is perhaps most well known for their economic contributions to Melbourne. After WW2, many new clubs, restaurants and shops opened in the Greek Precinct, with the intention to support Greek blue collar workers, taxi drivers and cleaners. These restaurants intended to provide a taste of home that was desperately needed for the homesick immigrants, often serving traditional Greek food such as moussaka and baked zucchini, two very traditional Greek dishes. While these

restaurants were new they still valued Greek tradition with many restaurants closing late with people such as Nicole Papsavas (current co-owner of Stalactites) citing “The idea of it staying open until late came from the Greek way of staying up and having fun. It’s the kind of food you’d have at home in Greece”. Some restaurants such as Stalactites did not want to just replicate the food but to replicate the atmosphere with Stalactites replicating the ceiling of the Cave of Diros, one of Greece’s most impressive natural beauties in an attempt to remind people of the wonders of their country. Over time the number of these businesses increased thanks to many Greek immigrants supporting these businesses through actions as small as ordering a coffee every day, which allowed many of them to thrive thanks to the community's help according to Epa, R. (2023, January 30).

The peak of this expansion was in the 1980s although with smaller increases in the 1990s partly due to Greece winning the Euro cup in 1990. For over 100 years, these businesses have been at the heart of the Greek community and that of Melbourne making up a significant portion of our restaurants and shops, to the point that it is uncommon not to see a Greek-owned business. Despite the changing conditions, these businesses still offer a place for Greeks to indulge in their country’s food and bond with their fellow Melbournians, along with having the effect of supporting these beloved local businesses, to the point that an entire Precinct is filled to the brim with Greek owned businesses. Therefore, the constant support from the Greek community has allowed their businesses to thrive and become an essential part of the Melbourne economy.

2.4 Historical Context of the Environmental Pillar of Sustainability

The Greek community is historically known for their sustainable, environmentally efficient Mediterranean diets and use of garden space to grow food. Partly the reason for this is due to them using their gardens as a way to reconnect with their homeland. Early on, Greek immigrants had trouble finding their traditional foods in local shops with some examples such as Amaranth. To combat this, many Greek people started to grow Amaranths of their own because the lack of supply caused them to grow Amaranth” (Theodosiou, 2022). Their willingness to tend to and grow their own food, because of a short supply shows their willingness to continue to stay connected to their culture and birthplace by following the same lifestyle and diet with many Greek people also only preparing seasonal dishes in that specific season instead of generalising it for all seasons. This healthy lifestyle has led to an increase in plants that can absorb CO2 emissions and also allows members of the Greek community, while a small community, to live on a

sustainable diet which almost certainly impacts the environment positively.

Greek Melburnians are also known for their ability to successfully build vast, energy efficient areas such as the Melbourne Greek precinct, located between Swanston and Russell streets in the **CBD News**. (2021, April 21).. Soon after WW2, a large number of Greek migrants came looking for safe places where they could speak their language, share their music and feel accepted in a community according to **CBD**. (2021, April 21). Soon clubs, restaurants and shops opened, driven by an urge to help establish a sprawling urban area that would eventually become the Melbourne Greek Precinct. Due to the precinct's position as an urban centre. It is more environmentally efficient thanks to the reduced usage of vehicles due to traffic and also the fact that electrical and other key infrastructures do not need to be dispersed as much and resources can be saved in expanding the power grid.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method of Investigation

Our method for finding and eliciting this information was through the use of interviews. We planned to interview a member of the Greek minority in order to gain an understanding of how modern Greek Melbournians view their culture, their current hardships and their contributions to the three sustainability pillars, along with using our own research from sources such as Wikipedia and the Greek Herald to view more historical examples of hardships and contributions and how these examples have shaped Greek society.

3.2 Reasons for Using Interview as Method

We chose to conduct an interview as we already had someone who was willing to be interviewed and it was also easier to provide results through the use of a transcript of the interview we could analyse later.

The benefits of an Interview were also that we were able to access rich and unique qualitative data that is hard to find on the internet. People's experiences in a community are rarely documented unless they are an important individual and this interview gives us a rare glimpse of what a member of the community thinks of it.

Additionally, we planned to interview multiple respondents but were unable to due to logistical constraints. This however did allow us to spend more time and effort in interviewing one person and thereby gain a richer description of their experiences which we may not have accessed if we split our time and resources into two or more interviews.

3.3 Data Collection

We collected our data through an audio recording of our interview, which was then transcribed through the direct feature in the iphone Voice memos app. We then checked the transcript and edited the mistakes while also formatting it in a Q and A style format. This transcript was separated into three tables, symbolising the three themes that underpinned our research question. These themes are the contributions to Melbournian and Greek society through three pillars of sustainability (Social, Economic and Environmental)

3.3 Data Analysis

In this thesis, a thematic analysis was preferred as it was seen as a way to be able to observe and categorise information in an effective and meaningful way. By first splitting the information that was thematically analysed into the three pillars of sustainability, the important sections of the article are isolated and shown in a comprehensible way, where readers can read specific primary evidence regarding Greek Australians (aim for concision). In the table provided for thematic analysis, the three columns help readers to understand this information, with reference to the specific interview questions and the quotations of the interview that contains information regarding the sustainability pillars.

4. Results

4.1 Thematic table on the Social Pillar of Sustainability

Quotations from the Interview	Question	Contribution to society through Social Pillar of Sustainability
1st quote	As someone of Greek heritage teaching in Melbourne, how do you personally define your identity? Do you define yourself as Greek, Australian or a blend of Melbourne, such as Australian Greek?	I live in the inner north, so uh, in Fairfield and you know the shop on Station Street, the Greek cake shop, the one on Station Street? No, the one on station street, the little great Greek cafino in there, and it is always out the front. You walk past and there is always a whole bunch of Greek men mostly, smoking and swearing. However, that's not the point. The point being that Greek businesses support and Greek support Greek businesses and so they stay connected. I think, um, And we probably speak about this later in the questions, but I think because they came and were able to economically boom through entrepreneurship, it means that they can remain connected to their Greek heritage, so they can still travel home to Greece. They can bring their family out. They can support Greek churches or the Greek Orthodox Church. They can support Greek business. And so culturally they've been able to stay connected. I think the other interesting thing, less around the economic side, but more around the cultural side, is um, do you know Nick Gianopolis? You're probably too young. So he, uh, is a Greek man who really came about in the 80s and 90s and his whole shtick, his comedy act. So he wrote Acropolis now, and then the Wog Boy, I don't know if you know that movie. And so his whole thing is around celebrating, poking fun at and of, the Greek ethnic group, but also what he actually did was he made it relatable to people who weren't Greek. And so he put it into the forefront. So people who were not Greek understood what it meant to be Greek and understood why they act the way they do and they start, they are able to connect. So therefore people who didn't necessarily have Greek heritage, were able to connect in and with the culture, and then in turn support it. So by going to Greek shops, by going to restaurants, by going to the milk bar, whatever it might have been. So it's not him alone, but I think culturally, because there were such high numbers, it meant that it was more relatable for people who weren't within that community. So that makes sense? Yeah. Look him up. He has a very interesting story. He's from Richmond.
2nd quote	Um, so Melbourne's Greek community has kind of shifted its, like, geographic heart from the inner city Lonsdale Street, um, to more going further out to suburbs like Oakleigh, Brunswick, compressed. So how do you see these physical spaces functioning today as hubs of cultural preservation?	Yeah, and I guess it's to my point before, isn't it, that Greeks support Greeks? And so again, because my area is Greek, particularly the Northcote Preston place. If you drive around the streets, you will see Greek clubs everywhere. And so you might not notice what it is until you actually pay attention, but it's filled with, mostly again, Greek men. And sometimes their wives, but they make, have cultural connection points, whether it's the church or whether it's clubs or whether it's their, um, their local restaurant, they maintain cultural connection points. And so they can continue to have that woven community. But the other thing is, again, I think what the Greeks were able to do by being, well, by becoming relatable because of comedians, actors, whatever, and there were so many, they have been able to weave their culture into Melbourne's culture. And so, therefore, those hubs... become places that are really well supported generally.
3rd quote	So how do the physical community spaces like the cafes and cultural centres alter the actual landscape of Melbourne to kind of make it feel like the biggest Greek city outside of Greece?	Have you been to Oakleigh? Perry: Um, a little bit. I used to play soccer down there. Did you? And did you go to the main street where it is not to the main street, but to Eat Street, where all the food is? Perry: Yeah, I can't. I've driven past it. So, if you were to get out of your car and you were to walk through, it... is an incredibly Greek feeling space, right? Like everyone sits outside, there's a lot more smoking there than anywhere else in Melbourne, I think. But they all sit outside, they sit in the middle, this pathway, there's no cars. There's a lot of Greek speaking, but there's also people who aren't Greek, obviously enjoying the food and the culture. And so I think, you know, something that we've not spoken around about is pride, so I think what it does is it fosters pride in second, third, fourth gen Greeks that say, actually, this is being celebrated and we can go to this area and we can sit as a multicultural group and celebrate where my family comes from. And so, I don't I think that necessarily answers it.

4th quote	Um, we've got one more question: What has the Greek community done in times of hardship? How have they supported each other, both economically and socially?	I grew up in a small country town. And both of my, both of my grandparents owned fish and chip shops in the Greeks, in the small country town. And I was so embarrassed to be a Greek person. It's because there wasn't so much, like it was a very white Australian area. And I think, by not having a community around you, it is really hard to remain connected to that. So as a consequence of that, my language is quite poor, so it's now better, and I understand quite a lot, but I don't speak as much as I should, and I certainly don't write, because there was no Greek school there. Whereas when you come to Melbourne and you are surrounded by a community, who are supportive and who normalise it, it is far easier to feel proud of where you come from, because you see other people like you. And so for my dad who went to school in a small country town, and experienced awful racism. Because, of course, in the '70s, you can imagine what it might have been like in a small country town. The names he might have been called. And so for my grandparents as well, who also obviously face a lot of racism. I think the way that they understood was you work through it. So you continue working. And whilst you assimilate, When you're surrounded by people who are like you, you're able to still remain culturally connected to who you are and where you've come from. But, It's kind of interesting because I've spoken to them about it a lot, and if you speak to them about how they were treated, It's really quite appalling. So the fact that they came through the other side is a testament to, I guess, culturally the strength of that community. And not just the Greeks, many communities at that time. And people obviously still face racism today. It's pretty awful. Does that answer that question?
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4.2 Thematic table on the Economic Pillar of Sustainability

Quotes from the Interview	Question	Contribution to society through Economic Pillar of Sustainability
1st quote	As someone of Greek heritage teaching in Melbourne, how do you personally define your identity? Do you define yourself as Greek, Australian, or blend such as Australian Greek?	No, the one on station street, the little great Greek cafe in there, and it is always out the front. You walk past and there is always a whole bunch of Greek men mostly, smoking and swearing. However, that's not the point. The point being that Greek businesses support and Greek support Greek businesses and so they stay connected. I think, um, And we probably speak about this later in the questions, but I think because they came and were able to economically boom through entrepreneurship, it is meant that they can remain connected to their Greek heritage, so they can still travel home to Greece. They can bring their family out.
2nd quote	So how do the physical community spaces like the cafes and cultural centres alter the actual landscape of Melbourne to kind of make it feel like the biggest Greek city outside of Greece?	Have you been to Oakleigh? Perry: Um, a little bit. I used to play soccer down there. Did you? And did you go to the main street where it is not the main street, but to Eat Street, where all the food is? Perry: Yeah, I can't. I've driven past it. So, if you were to get out of your car and you were to walk through, it... is an incredibly Greek feeling space, right? Like everyone sits outside, there's a lot more smoking there than anywhere else in Melbourne, I think. But they all sit outside, they sit in the middle, this pathway, there's no cars. There's a lot of Greek speaking, but there's also people who aren't Greek, obviously enjoying the food and the culture. And so I think, You know, something that we've not spoken around about is pride, so I think what it does is it fosters pride in second, third, fourth gen Greeks that say, actually, this is being celebrated and we can

		go to this area and we can sit as a multicultural group and celebrate where my family comes from. And so, I don't think that necessarily answers it.
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4.3 Thematic table on the Environmental Pillar of Sustainability

Quotes from the Interview	Question	Contribution to society through Environmental Pillar of Sustainability
1st quote	So a kind of unique aspect of Greek culture is self-sufficiency and gardening. So how big is growing your own food to your family and how much organic and natural food affects your daily lives and traditions?	I try to almost, oh, not exclusively, because that's really quite hard, but I try to primarily eat only organic and natural food. I think the other thing that has been very big in my life is cooking. So, as a Greek family, cooking is very important to us and using produce that you have. So my yaya, my grandmother, still has an enormous garden that she, um, tends to and provides for the entire family, so that's important to her. My dad has chickens and eggs and has a small farm, so we get some meat from him. And then it's always like, um, if I go to my ER's house, someone's brothers, friends, cousins, I don't know what, has found some fish somewhere, and then that's what she's, you know, so like it's really important in terms of trade of food, but also making sure that we eat sustainably and organically and as well as possible. Um, going out to restaurants wasn't necessarily a thing unless you were going to other Greek restaurants because they believe in the way, um, in eating certain types of food and eating really well. And again, I think because of that, it has helped them be a relatively prosperous culture in terms of, I think the food piece is quite relatable. Because, you know... Hmm.

4.4 Analysis of Interview

After examining our interview, we were able to further strengthen our previous discoveries whilst also discovering new components of Greek culture within Melbourne and Victoria. We saw our findings on Greek migration backed up by answers to our questions concerning the respondent's family's arrival to Melbourne, as on her Father's side her family had arrived due to the aftermath of the Greek Civil War and the 'populate or perish' policy, as we had previously found. There was a difference on her Mother's side, however, as her Mother's side had arrived later, telling us that Greek migration had not come to a standstill after the 'populate or perish' period, and has instead persisted into later years. We were also introduced to reception areas, which were similar to current day detention centres, receiving asylum seekers and providing a place for them to stay whilst they looked for work, a place where the respondent's grandparents had been placed when they first arrived in Australia. These reception centres had been in Melbourne since after the Second World War, so it is likely that the respondent's grandparents on her father's side had been placed into these reception centres as well.

A key theme throughout the whole interview was that Greeks support Greeks, something we had come across throughout our research and through our own lives too. This idea was supported heavily by the respondent's answers, as she spoke on the heavy support that Greeks give to other Greeks, whether it be culturally, through pride in their nationality, or financially, through supporting Greek businesses. The respondent was able to provide examples from her personal experiences of Greek pride, as her area of living (Inner North Melbourne) is a very key space in the Greek community. She spoke on how there is a Greek cake shop which is regularly supported by Greeks from the community, working as a hub of sorts for Greek culture. In addition, the Greek Orthodox church is a very key part of the Greek community, as church services allow for people of the Greek community to connect with one another.

All in all, our interview was incredibly insightful to our existing findings and introduced us to new insights about Greek culture and national pride. The respondent's firsthand knowledge provided a deeper context regarding how national pride is preserved, expressed, and transformed across generations today.

4.1 Strengths and limitations of interview

This investigation uses a combination of primary and secondary sources to examine the historical development and contemporary significance of Melbourne's Greek community. Qualitative research was conducted through an active stimulus recall interview with a member of the Greek community, while secondary research draws upon government publications, historical records, census data, articles from Greek youth groups.. The use of both qualitative and quantitative evidence allows historical events to be compared with modern experiences, providing a broader understanding of the community's development across the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainability.

A key strength of this investigation is the diversity of its sources. Government publications and census data such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics & State Government of Victoria. (2024, March 27) has provided reliable demographic and statistical information regarding migration patterns, ancestry, and religious affiliation, while historical records such as **Fifis, C. N.** (2026). establish the context surrounding Greek migration to Australia. Community origins and cultural institutions provide valuable insight into the preservation of Greek identity, traditions and institutions within Melbourne. The interview further strengthens the investigation by offering contemporary firsthand perspectives that cannot be obtained through historical records alone, allowing these experiences to be linked with the historical development that has shaped the community.

Despite these strengths, the investigation has several limitations. The interview represents the experiences of a single individual (and their parents from their perspective) and therefore cannot fully reflect the perspectives of Melbourne's diverse Greek population. The Greek community encompasses multiple generations, including post-war migrants, more recent migrants following the 2010 Greek financial crisis, and Australian-born descendants, each of whom may have different experiences and perspectives regarding cultural identity and community involvement.

Additionally, some secondary sources such as **Fifis, C. N.** (2026). originate from Greek community organisations whose purpose is to celebrate and preserve Greek heritage. While these sources provide valuable historical information, they may emphasise achievements and cultural successes such as Theodosiou, P. (2022, October 21) while giving less attention to internal challenges or differing viewpoints. Similarly, historical records from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often incomplete, limiting the availability of evidence relating to

the experiences of ordinary migrants, particularly women and lower-income families.

Although these limitations should be acknowledged, the use of multiple source types enables evidence to be cross-referenced, improving the overall reliability of the investigation. By combining historical documentation with contemporary perspectives, this research provides a unique examination of how Melbourne's Greek community has evolved over time and continues to contribute to the city's multicultural identity. Consequently, the investigation establishes a well-supported foundation for analysing the community's historical challenges, achievements and ongoing contribution to Melbourne's society.

4.2 Significance and implications of the Interview

From the findings obtained over the course of this project, we can understand the Australian Greek population better. This can help Australians in turn act in a way which helps support Greek people better, treating members of this community respectfully and with dignity, , sourced from our interviewee. The three sustainability pillars also contributed to the significance of this report. The environmental pillar showed how Greek people were and continue to be sustainable with their actions, emphasising their environmentally efficient diets, which is important for showing us the possibilities of how we can eat in a more sustainable way. Through looking at the economic pillar, we can observe the Greek community's perseverance in opening up economic growth in Australia after WW2, showing us how a strong community can really make a big difference in Australian society. Looking at the social pillar also shows us how Greek groups continue to socialise with each other, particularly with the Greek orthodox church, whilst also showing commitment to the community, which people can look up to.

Evaluating the findings of this investigation yields critical implications for multicultural policy, modern urban planning, and historical research methodology. Socially and economically, the community's post-war evolution demonstrates that successful migrant integration depends on targeted structural support, paired with strong internal networks, proving that accessible settlement infrastructure and micro-enterprise investment build long-term socio-economic resilience for Melbourne and Australia. Furthermore, the modern shift toward youth-led platforms like the Greek Circle highlights that cultural preservation is dynamic, implying that government multicultural funding must evolve beyond traditional heritage clubs to support modern initiatives that engage younger generations. Environmentally, the retention of traditional Mediterranean practices, such as seasonal diets and

suburban backyard food production, provides practical models for localised sustainability, while the clustering of businesses in the Greek Precinct offers a historical template for walkable, energy-efficient urban commercial zones. Methodologically, integrating primary interview insights alongside secondary census data from **Australian Bureau of Statistics & State Government of Victoria**. (2024, March 27) underscores both the value and limitations of oral history, implying that personal qualitative accounts must systematically be cross-referenced with quantitative evidence to ensure analytical accuracy and historical reliability.

5. Conclusion

Over nearly two centuries, Melbourne's Greek community has transformed from early nineteenth-century arrivals into one of the most vibrant diaspora populations in the world. As this investigation demonstrates, Greek Melburnians successfully navigated systemic discrimination, language barriers, and initial economic hardships, building a resilient identity that fundamentally shaped Victoria's multicultural landscape. Synthesizing primary interview accounts with historical data, across the three pillars of sustainability, highlights this profound impact. Environmentally, traditional seasonal diets, backyard farming, and compact cultural hubs like Lonsdale Street promoted sustainable, localised living. Economically, driven by post-World War II migration and the "Populate or Perish" policy, migrants progressed from manual labour to establishing thriving businesses that continue to stimulate the local economy. Socially, guided by the ethos that "Greeks support Greeks," key institutions like the Greek Orthodox Church alongside modern initiatives like the Greek Circle have preserved heritage, fostered intergenerational connections, and supported both local and homeland communities. Ultimately, despite limitations such as single-interview perspectives and historical source gaps, cross-referencing diverse qualitative and quantitative evidence confirms the community's lasting legacy, proving that maintaining cultural heritage and contributing to a host nation are mutually reinforcing endeavours.

6. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Ms Bellchambers and Mr Victor for supporting us and giving feedback on our thesis as we went through the process of researching and writing. We would also like to thank our respondent, who was so co-operative and open to being interviewed about her Greek culture. We thank all for their time and support.

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Appendix: Full transcript of results

Marcus: So thank you for coming with us.

Allan: Yeah. Okay.

So can you share a bit about your family's migration story?

So like when did your family arrive in Melbourne? And like, what were the primary push and pull factors of migrating to Australia?

Member of the community: Um, well, my 2 sides of family are a little different because they're actually generationally a little different. So I'll speak to my dad's side 1st. Um, so they came out, most of his siblings were born in Greece. Dad was actually born in Australia because he was the youngest of all of the siblings. But they came out in, they left Greece in 54 and came to, they were in Melbourne by 55, I think. Um, early 55. And obviously they came post-war. So Greece went into Civil War after World War II. And so there was still a lot of unrest. And then Australia obviously had the policy, which not the official name, but

Marcus and Member of the community: populate or perish

Member of the community: yep. So they came out as part of that policy. They then got put into reception centres. So do you know about the reception centres? Um, not really. Not really. Essentially, I think it's like the old version of a detention camp, essentially. Not the same, but essentially they're putting dorks, right? So all the Greeks ended up in dorks, wives and children in one place, men in another, and often the men were then sent to go and find work and homes and then could send for their family and wife. So, uh, they were put into the reception centre, um, until they found work. Whereas my mum's side was later. So, um, Her family also came out on ship, but my grandparents weren't married. They actually met in Australia, weirdly enough. And so my grandfather, he was, I wrote it down actually, so I didn't forget, he was 62. And she was a few, my grandmother was a

couple years later, so they came and landed in Melbourne. And by then, reception centres were, well, they ended up just working, they knew a friend, and he came, and he worked at a mechanics, and he did a lot of sugarcane farming, so they'd go up north for sugarcane time, and then they'd come back, and essentially, we just travel finding work. So both of my parents were actually born in Melbourne, which is probably relatively rare for someone of their age, generally they would have been born overseas. So that actually makes me 3rd gen. And then both sides moved to country Victoria.

Um, does that answer that question? Or have you got any questions?

Perry: I think that's pretty good. OK.

Marcus: All right, um, uh, someone of Greek heritage teaching in Melbourne, how do you personally, like, define your identity? Like, is it, do you define yourself as Greek, Australian, or just, or blend of Melbourne, such as Australian Greek?

Member of the community: Like, I think part of being in Melbourne is that most of us are multicultural in some way or another, and I think it's really special to be able to say that my family, I come from Greek heritage, and I have children now, so it's become even more important to me around that identity because I want them to understand. Their dad or my husband doesn't have any Greek heritage. He is Dutch English. And so I think it's a really important deal, a big deal, and important that they understand what my identity is, and in turn, what that makes them. as multicultural Melbournians, who are connected to their Greek heritage because they have great grandparents who speak Greek to them still. Mm hmm. Cool, thank you.

Perry: Um, so Greeks and Melbourne are often described as a dominant minority, which is a group that has maintained distinct routes while holding a significant influence. So why do you think the Greek community succeeded in gaining a big level of influence compared to some other migrant groups?

Member of the community: I've thought about this a lot, actually, and your questions are really interesting. Because I think that And I think about this with my grandparents a lot who are very connected to their Greek community. Greeks support Greeks. So, um, I live in the inner north, so uh, in Fairfield and you know the shop on Station Street, the Greek cake shop, the one on Station Street? No, the one on station street, the little great Greek cafino in there, and it is always out the front. You walk past and there is always a whole bunch of Greek men mostly, smoking and swearing. However, that's not the point. The point being that Greek businesses support and Greek support Greek businesses and so they stay connected. I think, um, And we probably speak about this later in the questions, but I think because they came and were able to economically boom through entrepreneurship, it means that they can remain connected to their Greek heritage, so they can still travel home to Greece. They can bring their family out. They can support Greek churches or the Greek Orthodox Church. They can support Greek business. And so culturally they've been able to stay connected. I think the other interesting thing, less around the economic side, but more around the cultural side, is um, do you know Nick Gianopolis? You're probably too young. So he, uh, is a Greek man who really came about in the 80s and 90s and his whole shtick, his comedy act. So he wrote Acropolis now, and then the Wog Boy, I don't know if you know that movie. And so his whole thing is around celebrating, picking fun at and of, the Greek ethnic group, but also what he actually did was he made it relatable to people who weren't Greek. And so he put it into the forefront. So people who were not Greek understood what it meant to be Greek and understood why they act the way they do and they start, they are able to connect. So therefore people who didn't necessarily have Greek heritage, were able to connect in and with the culture, and then in turn support it. So by going to Greek shops, by going to restaurants, by going to the milk bar, whatever it might have been. So it's not him alone, but I think culturally, because there were such high numbers, it meant that it was more relatable for people who weren't within that community. So that makes sense? Yeah. Look

him up. He has a very interesting story. He's from Richmond.

Perry: Um, so Melbourne's Greek community has kind of shifted its, like, geographic heart from the inner city Lonsdale Street, um, to more going further out to suburbs like Oakleigh, Brunswick, compressed. So how do you see these physical spaces functioning today as hubs of cultural preservation?

Member of the community: Yeah, and I guess it's to my point before, isn't it, that Greeks support Greeks? And so again, because my area is Greek, particularly the Northcote Preston Peace. If you drive around the streets, you will see Greek clubs everywhere. And so you might not notice what it is until you actually pay attention, but it's filled with, mostly again, Greek men. And sometimes their wives, but they make, have cultural connection points, whether it's the church or whether it's clubs or whether it's their, um, their local restaurant, they maintain cultural connection points. And so they can continue to have that woven community. But the other thing is, again, I think what the Greeks were able to do by being, well, by becoming relatable because of comedians, actors, whatever, and there were so many, they have been able to weave their culture into Melbourne's culture. And so, therefore, those hubs... become places that are really well supported generally.

Perry: Yeah, that's good. Um, so a kind of unique aspect of Greek culture is self-sufficiency and gardening. So how big is growing your own food to your family and how much organic and natural food affects your daily lives and traditions?

Member of the community: Um, I try to almost, oh, not exclusively, because that's really quite hard, but I try to primarily eat only organic and natural food. I think the other thing that has been very big in my life is cooking. So, as a Greek family, cooking is very important to us and using the produce that you have. So my yaya, my grandmother, still has an enormous garden that she, um, tends to and provides for the entire family, so that's important to her. My dad has chickens and eggs and has a small farm, so we get some meat from him. And then it's always

like, um, if I go to my ER's house, someone's brothers, friends, cousins, I don't know what, has found some fish somewhere, and then that's what she's, you know, so like it's really important in terms of trade of food, but also making sure that we eat sustainably and organically and as well as possible. Um, going out to restaurants wasn't necessarily a thing unless you were going to other Greek restaurants because they believe in the way, um, in eating certain types of food and eating really well. And again, I think because of that, it has helped them be a relatively prosperous culture in terms of, I think the food piece is quite relatable. Because, you know... Hmm.

Perry: Um, so our last question has kind of already been answered because it was talking about kind of the, um, like, strong businesses and how to support Greeks. So we might put you on the spot with another question. So how do the physical community spaces like the cafes and cultural centres alter the actual landscape of Melbourne to kind of make it feel like the biggest Greek city outside of Greece?

Member of the community: Have you been to Oakleigh?

Perry: Um, a little bit. I used to play soccer down there.

Member of the community: Did you? And did you go to the main street where it is not the main street, but to Eat Street, where all the food is?

Perry: Yeah. I've driven past it.

Member of the community: So, if you were to get out of your car and you were to walk through, it... is an incredibly Greek feeling space, right? Like everyone sits outside, there's a lot more smoking there than anywhere else in Melbourne, I think. But they all sit outside, they sit in the middle, this pathway, there's no cars. There's a lot of Greek speaking, but there's also people who aren't Greek, obviously enjoying the food and the culture. And so I think, You know, something that we've not spoken around about is pride, so I think what it does is it fosters pride in Second, third, 4th gen Greeks that say,

actually, this is being celebrated and we can go to this area and we can sit as a multicultural group and celebrate where my family comes from. And so, I don't think that necessarily answers it. But in terms of the look, the aesthetic, is that what you mean?

Perry: Yeah.

T: I think you can feel like you are in Athens or in a, you know, a place where, but we're sitting in the middle of Melbourne because everyone looks, sounds and is enjoying Greek culture. And so clearly for Greek people to remain connected to that, that's a really big deal for them and a point of pride.

Marcus: Yeah, OK. Um, we've got one uh, one more question. So, um, what has the Greek community done in times of hardship? How have they supported each other, both economically and socially?

Member of the community: I grew up in a small country town. And both of my, both of my grandparents owned fish and chip shops in the Greeks, in the small country town. And I was so embarrassed to be a Greek person. It's because there wasn't so much, like it was a very white Australian area. And I think, by not having a community around you, it is really hard to remain connected to that. So as a consequence of that, my language is quite poor, so it's now better, and I understand quite a lot, but I don't speak as much as I should, and I certainly don't write, because there was no Greek school there. Whereas when you come to Melbourne and you are surrounded by a community, who are supportive and who normalise it, it is far easier to feel proud of where you come from, because you see other people like you. And so for my dad who went to school in a small country town, and experienced awful racism. Because, of course, in the '70s, you can imagine what it might have been like in a small country town. The names he might have been called. And so for my grandparents as well, who also obviously face a lot of racism. I think the way that they understood was you work through it. So you continue working. And whilst you assimilate, When you're surrounded by people who are like you, you're able to still remain culturally

connected to who you are and where you've come from. But, It's kind of interesting because I've spoken to them about it a lot, and if you speak to them about how they were treated, It's really quite appalling. So the fact that they came through the other side is a testament to, I guess, culturally the strength of that community. And not just the Greeks, many communities at that time. And people obviously still face racism today. It's pretty awful. Does that answer that question?

Perry: Yeah. Um, I think that's what we prepared.
All of our questions.

Member of the community: Did you get what you need?

Marcus: Yeah, definitely.

Perry: So, yeah, thank you.

T: That was some very, very good responses. That, yeah, that's definitely gonna help out our report a lot. I hope so.

T: Yeah. Okay, um, I think... Good stuff, boys. I can't wait to read it. you. Well done.

Culture and language for Indigenous Australians in the Legal System

Ashton Bedoya, Jian Yao Choong, Sanat Salem, Sean Tseng

Camberwell Grammar School, Australia

2026

Teacher Mentors: Ms Georgia Bellchambers (*Head of Gifted and Talented Programs*) & Mr James Victor (*Gifted & Talented Coordinator*)

Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the original custodians of the land on which we learn, work and cherish - the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, which are the native inhabitants on which our school and research are based. We would also like to acknowledge that the land on which we stand today was never ceded, and that for many centuries, it was cared for, loved and protected. We wish to extend our respects to the elders of this land who carry the stories, wisdom and culture of this land. As we are continuously grateful for the opportunity to live and learn in this country today, it is with this gratitude that we commit to roaming respectfully throughout their lands.

Abstract

Aboriginal Australians represent the world's oldest continuous living culture. Despite their connection to the land long before European imperialism, Aboriginal populations continue to experience systemic inequalities arising from decades of oppression and a lack of political representation.

This paper aims to examine the marginalisation of First Nations peoples, analysing how language barriers have continued to severely restrict access to the justice system. Ultimately, this paper considers the consequences of a lack of linguistic accommodation and cultural knowledge in the court system.

Keywords: Aboriginal Australians, Torres Strait Islanders, Indigenous Australians, First Nations people, justice system, language, culture

1. Introduction

Sustainability is often associated with the preservation of natural resources, and ensuring the longevity of our environment. Yet true sustainability also encompasses preserving cultures and supporting communities that may lack the access to the opportunities others may disregard or overlook. In this paper, we'll examine the sustainability of Aboriginal people's equality in the courts of justice by looking through three key lenses. These are language, justice and future opportunities. By ensuring the stability of these aspects, we can ensure Indigenous people have the opportunity to thrive for many generations.

The separation of families and ostracising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from society, colonisation disrupted these foundations of sustainability in the first place - originating from colonialism. Government policies

including the introduction of unfamiliar non-traditional legal systems, intentionally ignored traditional customs and introduced segregation in the form of the 'White Australia Policy'. This forced cultural assimilation and complete lack of representation in the legal system is what further contributed to the disconnecting communities from country, weakened their traditional languages and established ongoing disparities in Australian society^[1].

2. Research Aims and Objectives

Despite significant progress with regards to Indigenous rights in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples still continue to experience systematic disadvantages within our legal system.^[2] The historic exclusion and persecution of these people is what contributes to the current viewpoint of Aboriginal people, and continues to affect their interactions within the legal system. However, simply addressing these issues from a legal standpoint, cannot truly remedy these issues alone. Instead, it requires an understanding of the foundations that influence and drive the long term sustainability of Indigenous peoples.

2.1 Method and Research Questions

This paper adopted a qualitative research methodology, as the objective of the report was to understand lived experiences, analyse professional opinions and expert observations surrounding language and justice barriers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australians justice system. It was further designed to explore the future opportunities of these peoples within Australian society. Therefore, a qualitative approach was deemed as most suitable for a report that focuses on complex social and cultural issues that require a personal nuance that numerical data alone cannot adequately represent.

The aim was to collect primary data through semi structured interviews with researchers, professionals and others with extensive expertise in the field of Indigenous law, language and justice. Semi structured interviews were conducted as they allowed for a consistent set of questions to be asked, while encouraging respondents to elaborate on points they felt were necessary. This produced deeper, more rich responses that formal, closed survey questions could not achieve.

Unfortunately, due to the time constraints and location of respondents around the country, interviews were primarily conducted through email. Although this did eliminate the opportunity for observing non verbal communication of respondents and limiting opportunities for follow up discussions, it enabled the possibility of participation of

experts across the whole of Australia, that otherwise would not have been logistically possible. This diversity of responses proved to be highly useful for the complexity of this report.

Hence, the interview questions focused on seven key themes:

1. Language barriers within the justice system
2. Interpreter accessibility
3. Community trust
4. Traditional dispute resolution
5. Access to Legal Aid
6. Recommendations for reform
7. Future outlook

The responses to the interview questions were placed into a comparative spreadsheet before undergoing thematic analysis. This involved identifying recurring concepts, ideas and viewpoints and grouping them into larger themes. The said themes then served as the basis of the analysis presented in this report.

Several limitations of this structure of interview were prevalent, and only a small number of recipients responded to the questions. However, each respondent possessed considerable expertise in Indigenous linguistics, justice or legal access. Allowing for a diverse cross section of responses through different perspectives and areas of expertise. Therefore the quality and relevance of the responses greatly outweighed the somewhat small sample size. The collected findings were then compiled and used to complement, rather than replacing academic literature and government reports.

This thesis investigates Aboriginal Australians specifically in the legal system, and how the three pillars (language, justice and future opportunities) will influence Indigenous Australians over the long term. Language represents the preservation of Indigenous cultural identity and effective communication through legal systems. Justice considers accountability, fairness and integrity before taking the law into account. Future opportunities aim to explore potential pathways to augment Aboriginal representation and image within Australian society.

As such, the objective of this project is to answer the following research question:

How do language, justice and future opportunities contribute to the long-term sustainability of Indigenous Australians in the justice system?

2.2 Stakeholders

When addressing key stakeholders in relation to this issue, it is important to note that it does not only affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but also governments along with explicit stakeholders of the justice system. Incarceration should be a consideration for all people, regardless of their involvement - as taxpayer money is often used to fund the imprisonment of people, rather than redirection towards early intervention programs to directly assist Aboriginals^[3]. High imprisonment of Indigenous people in relation to non-violent crime also places a high level of strain on the entire corrections (Amnesty International. (2022)).

These facilities and resources could be invested or used to house more violent prisoners who commit more serious crimes, hence governments and policy-makers must balance public safety with the restriction of budget and the expectations of people^[4].

Law enforcement also plays an important role in considering the safety and wellbeing of the public - which includes Aboriginal Australians. These services manage crime prevention, community engagement and overall trust in the state. They must build this responsibility and delegated belief that affects how law enforcement is trusted and relied on for the welfare of all peoples. In particular, mental health services and management is important in the context of violent or moderate crime, especially as studies relate intervention to an improved way of management - rather than punishment and deterrence.

3. Linguistic Concerns

One might assume that there are actually very few stakeholders or people affected by the difficulties experienced in the judicial system by Aboriginal people, but if these concerns are to be addressed properly, then multiple major and minor parties and groups will need to be involved. Lasting reform cannot be achieved by governments alone. It requires ongoing consultation with Indigenous communities, continued investment in culturally appropriate services, and a commitment from society to recognise the importance of equal access to justice. Only through collaboration, education, and meaningful representation, Australia can continue moving towards a judiciary system that is fairer, more inclusive, and better equipped to meet the needs of all Australians, but especially our Aboriginal Peoples.

Estimates by the National Museum of Australia show that Aboriginal people have existed in Australia for over 65,000 years.^[5] During those 65,000 years did they

develop a diversity of cultures, traditions and connections like no where else in the world. However, most importantly to us, they created their own languages. Today, according to the AIATSIS there are more than 250 indigenous languages with over 800 dialects. These languages form an integral part of aboriginal identity and culture with approximately 77,000 people speaking an indigenous language at home.^[6] And, despite the strong support now for reviving and prolonging the strength and longevity of indigenous languages, it was not always this way.¹

3.1 History and Linguistics

On January 26th 1788, what is now known as the First Fleet landed in Port Jackson on the lands of the Gadigal people and the wider Eora Nation (National Museum of Australia)^[1]. What followed was more than two centuries of law enforced and ‘cultural’ discrimination against the aboriginal people. Of these, the arguably most horrific of these actions was the Stolen Generation. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported around 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were taken from their families under government assimilation policies and forced into institutions, missionaries and foster care (AIATSIS). Stripping them of their names, culture and language. This forcefully decimated entire generations of Indigenous language speakers. At the same time, aboriginal peoples across the country were gradually forced to learn more and more English to adapt to their changing environment, with many moving to ‘work’ on cattle stations. This eventually led to the creation of ‘Aboriginal English’. Originating in the Port Jackson region, Aboriginal English is a mix of indigenous language and English which can have unique vocabulary, grammatical structure and meanings. It is important to note that aboriginal english is not centralised and similar or the same words can have very different meanings. In addition, different speakers of Aboriginal English may have very different ways to say the same things. For example, in Australian English and most other forms of western English, a pause in speech is generally taken to mean one is finished talking or is unsure of their answer, however to many speakers of Aboriginal English, silence is a productive and positive part of their communication ([The] Australian National University).

3.2 Law and Linguistics

In the 2021 court case ‘Murray v Feast’ (Ricciardo, A. A. (2023)), the appellant, Mr Murray, gave evidence that he was a Walmajarri man who mainly speaks Walmajarri in addition to other indigenous languages and dialects. Murray gave evidence through an interpreter, however during Murray’s evidence, the Magistrate instructed the interpreter to not interpret portions of Murray’s evidence

as he was presumed to be speaking English. Despite both Murray and the interpreter’s attempts to inform the magistrate that rather than Australian English as he presumed, Murray was speaking Aboriginal English and Kriol, the magistrate proceeded without interpretation.

This scenario clearly emphasises the lack of knowledge in the justice system of the subtle differences between different forms of english. Despite these differences seeming small, to an Indigenous person who has been placed in the cold foreign environment of the judiciary system while under accusations of crime, the ability for them to effectively understand their position and communicate their perspective is crucial. During his appeal in 2023, Murray attempted to demonstrate that the results of the trial were unfair and biased due to this. Unfortunately, the judge deemed that while the Magistrate had erred in his assumption of Murray speaking Australian English, he was not found to have directed himself in a way which failed to acknowledge the socio-linguistic gap or that the Magistrate’s direction led to an unfair trial.⁴

This language barrier can also affect mental awareness and accountability in indirect ways.

For example, in the case known as ‘R v Condren’, a Townsville man Kevin Condren was accused of brutally murdering a woman on Mount Isa in 1983 on the basis of a signed confession given based on questioning in a police interview. This is a likely case of ‘gratuitous concurrence’, or the act of saying ‘yes’ to a question regardless of its meaning or accusation. The strong tendency of aboriginal people to do this has been well known since the mid 1800s, making many Aboriginal people more susceptible to police interviews and unclear courtroom questioning.³

In 1987, Condren appealed on the grounds that the police transcript of their interview did not convey their original meaning due to differences in aboriginal and Australian English. This clearly highlights discrepancies between Australian English, Aboriginal English and orthography and a lack of acknowledgment of it at the time.

Unfortunately, linguistic evidence which was heard in full during the appeal hearing was deemed ‘legally admissible’ due to reasons including judges not recognising the gap between Aboriginal and Australian English and others.

3.3 Language Results

Language with regard to the legal system in Victoria was a central theme that we considered throughout our research. This included two aspects; unfair treatment based on bias and general equity in the system.

We found in regard (*Respondent 2*) to the first aspect that language continues to prove a large linguistic and cultural barrier to representation in the legal system. This includes full participation and a lack of general understanding towards the culture and language for cases not explicitly handled in the Koori Court. Also in this regard, Australia's historical handling of language in regards to systematic erosion of this culture is likewise concerning to audiences. These attempts have appeared to scar Aboriginal Australians, and fuel distrust and a feeling of incompetence over their abilities to cater for all people; including themselves.

The issues mentioned above have the effect of compounding issues pertaining to access and justice problems. It is especially prevalent when many elders and Indigenous people have English as their second, or even third language when dealing with other people who do not speak their language. Regardless of these large issues, this paper also notes from research that there have been some attempts to better integrate and understand these groups, including the establishment of some services in the Northern Territory (NT), designed to specifically support these groups of people. These notable organisations include [The] North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) for criminal and civil cases, and [The] North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (NAAFLS) for family and domestic violence dealings. When incorporating these organisations with both informal dealings and the Koori Court, they are very substantive in that territory for assisting Aboriginals in equal representation.^[7]

Respondent 2 commented on the lack of competence in the space of language interpretation and translation. This included judges having a deep distrust of interpreters, where they also may not trust the fact of translators being objective to the scenario of the court. Of course, translation will always cause some errors persistent in cultural differences and human error; but that proves the same over other languages - not just Aboriginal languages across Australia. Many interpreters used for these languages are not explicitly skilled and trained in the language of the accused or representative, so translations may take on a different interpretation depending on cultures and backgrounds. These errors in slightly different dialects and languages can prove detrimental to adequate equity in the legal system. *Respondent 1* often notes a lack of availability of full translators for the language given, often attributed to low numbers of speakers in that native language or exact matches in regions nearby.

These dealings mentioned above also cause issues in regard to trust and competence of the legal system, excluding the Koori Court, which again requires a guilty plea to be entered for those accused for overall eligibility.

The relationship established and destroyed over several crises from historical events further affects opinions of Aboriginals in this regard. Language barriers aforementioned and systemic bias and racism compound distrust overall as per *Respondent 2*.

While these findings are overall lower than the ones found through the legal system, they produce an interesting insight into how language plays such an important role when dealing with cases involving Aboriginal people, especially those who do not speak the lingua franca of English. Further comments on the system such as the Koori Court can be found in the next portion below (Justice).

4. Justice and Aboriginal Australians

Aboriginal peoples in the Australian judicial system have historically been marginalised and discriminated against. Studies show that First Nations people; both as adolescents and adults, frequently have interactions with the justice system that is of a more concerning regard in comparison to other ethnic groups. This is primarily linked to the treatment and challenges that they have faced in the past, including colonisation and systemic racism. This portion of the paper will go into detail regarding the current issues, stakeholders of the issues (not just Aboriginals), and solutions going forward into the future.^[8]

First Nations people make up just 3% of the general Australian population, yet represent nearly a third of incarcerated people in the justice system.^[3] They are more likely to be arrested, imprisoned, held without bail, or even die in custody in comparison to other ethnicities.^[9] This brings important questions regarding overrepresentations of Aboriginal people by nearly tenfold when comparing the figures, but it is important to note that this only includes adults.^[7]

As with many native populations across the world, an example being the United States - deaths of Aboriginals in police and imprisonment remain of significant concern. Although the overall rates of death in custody may not be higher than those not part of the ethnic minorities, Indigenous people are still more likely to be imprisoned or arrested in the first place^[1]. This produces more overrepresentation and issues that stem from this purpose as well.^[9]

4.1 Justice Results

Findings and recommendations on ways to improve the overall efficacy of the criminal justice system come in multifaceted ways. Advocacy and human rights groups call for redirected investment, expansion of justice

programs, bail laws and criminal responsibility. This section goes over the findings and recommendations for Justice alone.

In Victoria, where this paper has been produced - the age of criminal responsibility has recently been raised to the age of twelve under the previous Andrews Labor government. This factual idea aligns closely with research conducted, where one interviewee commented on the status of all youth, including Aboriginal and those of other descent. This is related to how children's brains are constantly developing and evolving during adolescence and the pubertal years. This is connected to the development of the brain during puberty, where decision making along with the pre-frontal cortex is not fully developed at age ten or twelve - but is often debated for more serious crimes. Regardless, it is also raised that mental health and discussion programs often have more efficacy than punishment alone. Continuing to keep all youth out of the justice system proves beneficial to all, as summarised by the current issues and statuses above.

Another concern area for the justice system closely included availability of Victorian Legal Aid for those of indigenous origin. This paper also notes that the Koori Court is accessible to those accepted by Aboriginal tribes; serving as a mediation point between the justice system, traditional cultures and esteemed elders. Nevertheless, disputes stemming from inside Aboriginal communities are often resolved internally and informally, with no recourse to the western legal system as noted by *Respondent 1*. This is an interesting feature, as the previous introductions described a large number of Indigenous people incarcerated in gaols and detention facilities. The question must be asked whether the informal system has enough onus to keep people out of the legal system; which is in no shape or form a criticism of the current methods of resolving disputes. A possible solution could be to integrate this way of informal negotiation prior to the use of the Koori Court, which is also interesting in its own regard that it requires those accused to plead a guilty charge, and also the magistrate or judge plays the final say - with Elders only as 'advisors'. It also utilises a non-traditional method of practice, using an oval table^[11] in discussion with Elders and decision makers to conform a different sense of combined agreements to crime and justice.

Informal negotiation with the justice system, combined with a lack of Victorian Legal Aid (VLA) is an outstanding issue in the justice system. Further research conducted with stakeholders and language advisors demonstrate the lack of interpretation and understanding regarding VLA, which is already underfunded and underresourced to date. This is related also to individuals providing their own counsel to the court, with the use and

advent of generative artificial intelligence models (e.g. ChatGPT with OpenAI) that has a lack of knowledge in the field - this practice causes unfair trials and misguidance with regard to decisions. Funding should be increased in the region of VLT, notes in domestic areas such as family law; advancing justice due to the tolls emotionally, financially and socially to those utilising different methods of representation that do not suit the accused. This paper also notes that changes in the near future are slowing, but with significant steps forward such as introduction of the National Court Interpretation Guidelines (2022), with reforms across the board; and increased efforts in reconciliation and the importance of language when it comes to Aboriginal Australians. Integration of cultural society and language is also important for greater understanding in the broader Australian context.^[12]

Only through reforms of the system as aforementioned can we strive for a greater understanding and integration of Aboriginal Australians in the justice system, achieving equity and eliminating bias in the western system that has unfairly treated Indigenous Australians. This portion only comments on some findings that were found in regard to justice, language and its regard to this section has already been commented on with analysis.

5. Implications and Recommendations

When considering the points of Language and Justice for Aboriginal Peoples in the Australian Judiciary System, we are brought to one final question. What can we do to improve the situation moving into the future? To improve our stance toward managing Aboriginal Peoples' needs in the Judiciary system, reflecting upon the 2023 Constitutional Referendum for the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, which aimed to create an Indigenous People's voice in handling matters pertaining to their societies and culture (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), there is a visible opportunity to introduce something similar into the Judiciary System. While they are distinctly separate fields, the principle of meaningful representation can still be applied to the Australian justice system^[7] (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020).

One practical reform would be the introduction of dedicated Indigenous Cultural and Language Support Officials who are available during any and all relevant cases, hearings and trials. Rather than acting solely as interpreters, these officers could translate and communicate legal terminology in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate, verify that all parties understand the legal process, and ensure that important information is communicated precisely (Judicial Council on Cultural Diversity, 2016). This would help curb

misunderstandings that may arise from language barriers or cultural differences, and remedy the misunderstandings that do arise (Cooke, 2002). It would also allow judges and legal professionals to make decisions based on a clearer understanding of the facts (Law Council of Australia, 2018).

Such a role would also create meaningful employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the justice sector. Expanding access to education and training in legal interpretation, and judicial support would encourage greater Indigenous participation in the legal profession while building stronger relationships between Indigenous communities and Australia's legal institutions (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2018). Greater Indigenous representation within the judiciary would also help foster trust and confidence in a system that has historically disadvantaged many Aboriginal Australians (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991).

One might assume that there are actually very few stakeholders or people affected by the difficulties experienced in the judicial system by Aboriginal people, but if these concerns are to be addressed properly, then multiple major and minor parties and groups will need to be involved. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Australian Federal and State governments, courts, legal professionals, educational institutions, and, most importantly, everyday Australians. Lasting reform cannot be achieved by governments alone. It requires ongoing consultation with Indigenous communities, continued investment in culturally appropriate services, and a commitment from society to recognise the importance of equal access to justice (Productivity Commission. 2020). Through collaboration, education, and meaningful representation, Australia can continue moving towards a judiciary system that is fairer, more inclusive, and better equipped to meet the needs of all Australians, but especially our Aboriginal Peoples.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this project ultimately was to explore the question listed in the introduction and methodology - how do language, justice and future opportunities contribute to the long-term sustainability of Indigenous Australians within Australia's justice system?

The findings illustrate that language still remains one of the most impactful and prevalent barriers precluding Indigenous participation in the Australian legal system. While progress has been made, with arrangements such as interpreter systems and specialised courts, research and interview responses have proven that a divide still remains.

This can potentially be attributed to interpreter availability, cultural understanding and recognition of Australian Aboriginal Englishes.

This research further establishes that justice cannot simply be measured by exact equality in the legal system, and is much more complex. True justice involves participation without agendas, equal understanding and culturally respectful communication throughout legislation and proceedings. In the absence of these foundations, the divide between Aboriginal communities and Australian justice systems will broaden, and existing trust will be weakened. With low overall confidence in the Australian justice system, long term social sustainability will struggle to emerge.^[4]

However, the research does feature reasons to remain optimistic, but ultimately - protecting indigenous languages, increasing cultural competency in Australia's legal system and allowing for equal access to justice, is what will truly contribute to an upward trajectory for the long term sustainability of Indigenous Australians. To ensure this is feasible, collaboration is crucial. Collaboration between Governments, legal professionals, indigenous communities and the broader Australian society. And whilst as a nation, we have indeed come far, Aboriginal Australians still continue to experience significant sociological disadvantages in our legal system. This disparity will not accompany a simple solution, nor one true answer. However by understanding and acknowledging the pillars of sustainability that this report has explored, it will certainly facilitate a greater understanding of Aboriginal peoples in that fashion.^[13]

7. Acknowledgements

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8.1 Table of Results

R E S P O N D E N T	A Respondent's Experience	B Unfair treatment of Aboriginal Australians in justice system due to language barriers	C Justice deficits due to lack of interpreter access	D Community trust impacts due to language barriers in court system
1	Chief investigator in an ARC research grant focusing on the experience of Indigenous people in criminal court when an interpreter is involved. Also 20 years of research in access to justice issues for Indigenous people more generally	Yes, I think that barriers to access to justice and full participation in the legal system are poorly understood and poorly catered to in the legal system.	Yes, especially if there is a lack of trained interpreters in a particular language or the judge doesn't give enough respect to the need of interpreters	The relationship between indigenous communities and the justice system is already frayed and this confirms that distrust
2	I have been researching access to justice in Australia's courts, particularly in the civil (as opposed to criminal) system for many years including restrictions to access for Indigenous Australians. However, I am not indigenous	Absolutely. The attempts to systematically eradicate Indigenous languages have deeply scarred Indigenous Australians which compounds the obvious access to justice issues for those Indigenous Australians who speak English as a 2nd or 3rd language.	Yes. Interpreting always adds complexity and an additional point for errors to creep in. Judges do not always trust the objectivity or expertise of interpreters and litigants may also distrust interpreters. Language is complex and dialects can change meanings dramatically so an interpreter may easily misconstrue questions or answers where their expertise is in a slightly different language. It is often difficult to find qualified interpreters with an exact language match particularly for many Indigenous languages.	Significantly. Indigenous people are often already rightfully sceptical about the justice system due to its inherent and historical biases against them. Language barriers compound this scepticism.

3	<i>No response</i>	Yes - Indigenous legal and interpreting services in the Northern Territory (NT) are specifically designed to provide culturally sensitive support and language access. Key organizations include North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) for criminal and civil cases, and NAAFLS for family and domestic violence matters. These services routinely coordinate with the government's Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) to ensure clients can communicate in their preferred Indigenous language.	Yes – unfortunately, it happens a lot – see this article and this article	It does and there is plenty of academic evidence to ‘confirm’ how it does.
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8.2 Table of Results

RE SP O N DE NT	E Role of traditional language in resolving disputes pre-court	F Accessibility of Legal Aid in VIC for Aboriginal Australians	G Recommendations for positive changes?	H Outlook for positive changes?
1	Not best placed to answer.	Not sure but efforts to employ community outreach officers in recent years especially in non-criminal law will assist!	<i>No response</i>	<i>No response</i>
2	As a non-Indigenous person, this is difficult to answer but I suspect many disputes (especially civil disputes) are resolved without any recourse to the Western justice system and this is true of disputes in all cultures.	I am from NSW but, based on my knowledge of Legal Aid, I would be confident in saying absolutely not. Legal Aid is woefully inadequate for meeting the justice needs of all Australians particularly Indigenous Australians.	I am not Indigenous. However, I believe additional funding for Legal Aid, particularly in domestic areas such as Family Law would advance the aims of justice, civil society and the economy because the massive financial, emotional, psychological and social cost of inadequate legal representation is easily underestimated. Generative AI is, unfortunately, exacerbating this problem with the courts now becoming clogged with self-represented litigants misguided by GenAI.	Unfortunately, not. However, there have been significant steps forward in the past decade with the introduction of the National Court Interpretation Guidelines and an increased recognition of the importance of Indigenous Language and Culture in broader Australian society. We are slowly improving and the research that students like you are doing is part of that, so well done.
3	Yes, it can and it does – suggest they review Victoria’s Koori Court .	I say yes, but others would not agree.	We need to divert youth away from the court system.	<i>Initially, this question was not asked, as it was conducted as an email.</i>

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Correlations of Loneliness Among Elderly Individuals Living Alone in Urban Communities in China

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Abstract: With the swift progression of population aging and urbanization in China, the aging demographic situation is growing increasingly severe, propelling the nation towards a moderately aged society. The proportion of elderly individuals living alone in urban areas has surged, drawing widespread attention to their loneliness issues. To elucidate the current state of loneliness and its influencing factors among individuals aged 70 and above living alone in Gusu District, Suzhou, this study focused on 211 elderly residents living alone. Loneliness was assessed using a single-item measure, complemented by questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, and on-site observations. Empirical analysis was conducted through χ^2 tests and binary logistic regression. The findings revealed that the incidence of loneliness among elderly individuals living alone in Gusu District stood at 24.68%, significantly lower than the national average. Female gender, no spouse and financial hardship emerged as notable risk factors for loneliness. The core mechanisms contributing to lower levels of loneliness encompassed individual proactive adjustment, government support, and intensive community companionship. Nevertheless, some elderly individuals still experienced loneliness due to spatial constraints in historical urban areas, inadequate aging-friendly renovations, mismatches in the supply and demand of elderly care services, and diminished family support. The study recommends optimizing aging-friendly renovation policies for historical districts, enhancing tiered and categorized elderly care services, bolstering spiritual comfort and psychological support, and establishing a collaborative care system involving families, communities, and the government to effectively alleviate loneliness among elderly individuals living alone and enhance their quality of life and well-being.

Keywords: Loneliness; Elderly living alone; Social support; Aging-friendly

community; Gusu District

1. Introduction

Regarding the loneliness experienced by the elderly, several large-scale studies in recent years have yielded consistent data. A comprehensive analysis spanning six continents and involving approximately 460,000 elderly individuals revealed that the overall proportion of elderly people worldwide experiencing a sense of alienation is 26% [1]. Another study encompassing over 1.25 million elderly individuals arrived at a similar conclusion, indicating that 27.6% of the elderly feel lonely [2]. There are also variations in the prevalence of loneliness across different countries and regions. Generally, the proportion is relatively low in Northern European countries, while it is comparatively higher in Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and some high-income countries [3].

The "Healthy China 2030" Plan Outline states that "advancing the construction of a healthy China is a crucial foundation for achieving a moderately prosperous society in all respects and essentially realizing socialist modernization." As the population ages, mental health issues among the elderly are garnering increasing attention. Compared to other age groups, the elderly face multiple challenges, including physiological decline, children moving away, retirement, and widowhood. Their social support networks continue to shrink, and their social roles gradually diminish, making them highly susceptible to loneliness [4]. Research has found that over 28% of individuals aged 65 and above in China feel lonely [5]. Loneliness not only impairs the quality of life of the elderly but also increases the social pension burden and medical expenses [6].

Suzhou stands as the prefecture-level city with the most robust economic prowess in China and serves as a pivotal central city within the Yangtze River Delta. Its total industrial output value has consistently ranked first among all prefecture-level cities nationwide for numerous years. Historically, Suzhou served as the capital of the Wu State during the Spring and Autumn Period, boasting a history of over 2,500 years without relocation of its city site. It is recognized as one of the first batch of National Historical and Cultural Cities and the cradle of Wu Culture. Culturally, Suzhou is

home to eight classical gardens and the Grand Canal, both inscribed as World Cultural Heritage sites. Intangible cultural treasures such as Kunqu Opera and Suzhou embroidery enjoy global acclaim. Suzhou has also been designated as the "Capital of Handicraft and Folk Arts" by the United Nations, embodying the core essence and serving as a global exemplar of Jiangnan Culture. Gusu District, uniquely in China, is designated as a National Historical and Cultural City Reserve, representing the historical roots, cultural heart, and urban center of Suzhou.

Rooted in the unique community ecology of the historic urban area in Suzhou's Gusu District, this study seeks to address the academic gap left by insufficient attention to elderly individuals living alone in specific regions within existing aging research. Its core objectives encompass three key aspects: (1) it aims to systematically portray the authentic living conditions of elderly residents living alone in Gusu District across five critical dimensions—daily care, health management, self-care capabilities, social interaction, and mental well-being—while precisely identifying their diverse needs and core challenges. (2) employing a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative surveys, qualitative in-depth interviews, and field observations, the study identifies key risk and protective factors influencing the quality of life for these elderly individuals. It analyzes how urban development and the renewal of historic districts facilitate or hinder their living conditions, and clarifies the roles and effectiveness of multi-level support systems involving families, communities, and policies. (3) the research provides a solid empirical foundation for developing a more targeted and humane community-based elderly care service system in Gusu District, as well as for optimizing local policies aimed at supporting elderly individuals living alone. While existing research predominantly focuses on macro-level aging issues or the general characteristics of the elderly population, this study zeroes in on the specific living condition of "living alone" within the unique spatial context of historic urban areas. By combining statistical data analysis with qualitative insights, it aspires to offer scientific guidance for enhancing the "Suzhou-style elderly care" service model in Gusu District and refining policies for elderly individuals living alone, ultimately elevating their well-being, dignity, and sense of security, and

aligning with the core objectives of the national strategy to proactively address population aging.

2. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1 Definition of elderly people living alone and loneliness

The criteria for defining the elderly vary across different countries and regions due to their distinct demographic situations. In China, the elderly population is clearly categorized: those aged 60-69 are classified as younger elderly; those aged 70-79 as middle-aged elderly; and those aged 80 and above as the oldest-old. In this study, elderly people living alone are defined as individuals aged 70 or above who live independently for an extended period (typically more than six months) and lack daily companionship and care from family members due to widowhood, divorce, remaining unmarried, or their children being away ^[7]. Loneliness is a subjective experience, and thus, people's understanding of it varies, leading to a lack of consensus on its definition. Consequently, the measurement of loneliness also differs based on these varying definitions. Some studies employ a single question, such as "Do you often feel lonely?" to gauge respondents' loneliness, relying solely on their self-assessment. Other studies utilize scales, such as the UCLA Loneliness Scale ^[8]. The UCLA Scale encompasses a wide range of content and is relatively complex, targeting young people and younger elderly individuals. In contrast, the single-question measurement method is straightforward and more suitable for the oldest-old. This paper adopts the latter approach ^[9].

2.2 Definition of demographic data

(1) Measurement of Loneliness: This paper measures loneliness using the question, "Do you often feel lonely?" with initial response options of: 1 "never," 2 "occasionally," and 3 "often."

(2) Measurement of Demographic Characteristics: This primarily encompasses age, gender, marital status, and socioeconomic status.

(3) Measurement of Social Relations: Based on the social relations of the elderly respondents, variables are used to assess the quantity and quality of social support for elderly individuals living alone. I. The contact and intimacy level between elderly

individuals living alone and their children and relatives, including the living distance between the elderly and their children (with data collected from the child living closest), and self-assessed relationship status with family members, categorized as good, average, or poor. The former variable reflects the quantity of relationships between elderly individuals living alone and their children and family members, while the latter reflects the quality of these relationships. II. The intimacy level (quality) of relationships between elderly individuals living alone and their neighbors, including self-assessed relationships with neighbors. III. Participation in various social activities within the community, including community or resident activities, elderly activity rooms or centers, community cultural centers, elderly schools, and outdoor or indoor fitness facilities.

(4) Measurement of Health Status: This includes three variables: self-rated health, categorized as good, average, or poor; and self-care ability, divided into fully self-sufficient and not fully self-sufficient.

Statistical analysis was conducted using *SPSS 26.0* software. Measurement data conforming to a normal distribution were expressed as mean $\pm$ standard deviation ($\bar{x} \pm s$), with independent sample t-tests used for intergroup mean comparisons. Skewed distribution measurement data were expressed as median and interquartile range (IQR), with independent sample Mann-Whitney U tests used for intergroup comparisons. Count data were expressed as percentages, with χ^2 tests or Fisher's exact probability tests used for intergroup comparisons. A statistically significant difference was defined as $P < 0.05$.

3. Research Methods

This study was conducted in Gusu District, the historical urban area of Suzhou, China. This study adopts a mixed methodology to comprehensively capture the breadth and depth of the living experiences of elderly individuals living alone. Quantitative data were collected using online questionnaires (in order to get adequate data) while qualitative ones were collected through field observations (in order to get well-rounded data). Participants were recruited from five representative communities within Gusu District using convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were as

follows: (1) aged 70 years or older; (2) living alone in a private household; (3) having resided in Gusu District for at least one year; (4) being capable of signing the informed consent form.

The survey targets elderly individuals living alone who have been 70 years or older by November 1, 2025, and who have been permanent residents of the area for over six months (defined as having only one elderly person living in the household for more than 8 hours a day). The survey will take place in November 2025 and April 2026.

The structured questionnaire comprises three sections: (1) demographic and background information (e.g., age, gender, education level, marital status, duration of residence, and family situation); (2) self-care ability and health status (e.g., activities of daily living, chronic conditions, and access to medical resources); (3) economic, social, and environmental factors (e.g., income level, entertainment expenses, frequency of community service utilization, social interaction frequency, and living conditions). Most survey items utilized a five-point Likert scale or categorical response options. The survey was administered online. For elderly individuals unable to use digital devices, their family members were permitted to complete the survey on their behalf, provided that only the relevant information of the elderly individual was provided. Concurrently, we conducted semi-structured interviews and on-site observations with 15 respondents. These respondents were purposefully selected to encompass diverse dimensions such as age, gender, duration of residence, and self-reported well-being. The interview topics covered daily routines, social interactions, digital technology usage, experiences of loneliness, concerns about the future, and perceptions of community services. Each interview lasted between 10 and 40 minutes and was audio-recorded with the respondents' informed consent.

Field observations were conducted in the respondents' homes and surrounding communities to document housing conditions, accessibility features, and the availability of community service resources. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in Chinese. This qualitative research component aims to uncover subjective meanings and contextual nuances that survey data alone cannot reveal—particularly how elderly

individuals perceive loneliness, seek assistance, and envision their future lives.

4. Research Results

4.1 General characteristics of the sample

Among the 211 respondents, women (n=129, 61.1%) outnumbered men (n=82, 38.9%). Specifically, 68 respondents (32.22%) were aged between 70 and 74, 77 (36.49%) between 75 and 79, and 66 (31.28%) were aged 80 or above.

4.2 Characteristics of living ability

The respondents generally exhibited high self-care abilities. Regarding "independent dressing," 139 respondents (65.9%) reported being fully capable, while only 40 (19.0%) indicated they were completely unable to manage on their own. Similarly, 139 respondents (65.9%) were fully capable of "independent eating," and the same proportion (65.9%) reported being able to complete "independent toileting." Notably, "independent getting in and out of bed" (n=145, 68.7%) and "indoor autonomous activities" (n=145, 68.7%) had the highest rates of complete mastery. These findings suggest that the majority of elderly individuals living alone in the Gusu district can still maintain sufficient physical function to meet their basic daily living needs.

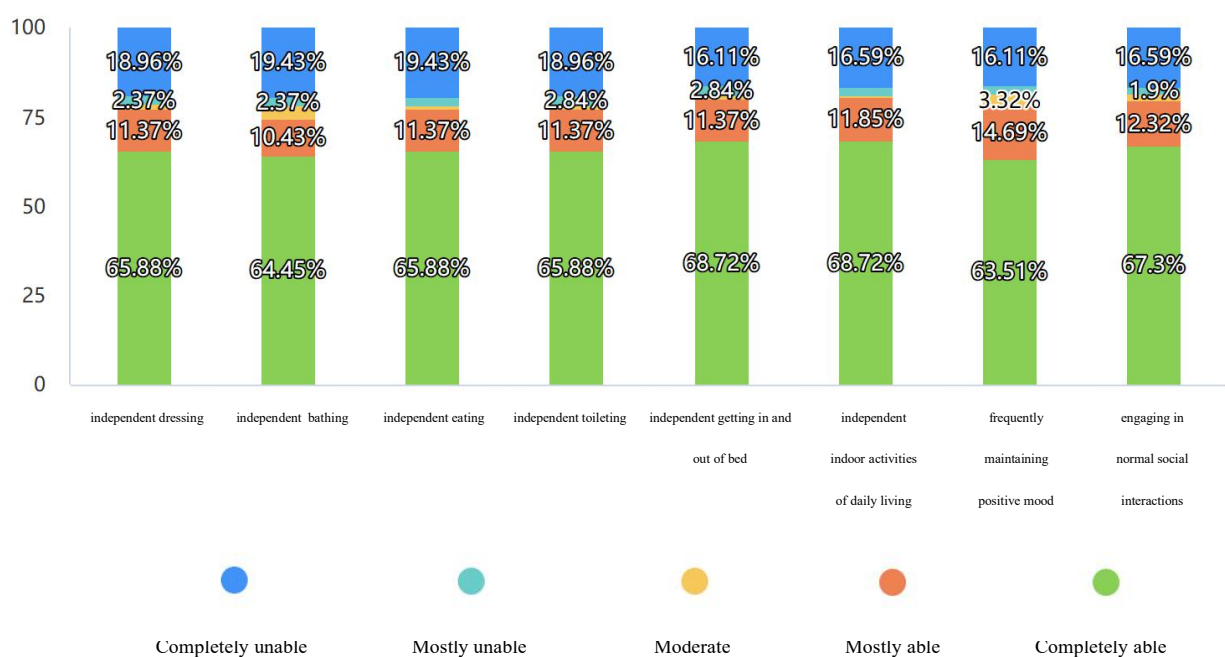


Figure 1 Daily living capacity of elderly people living alone

4.3 Loneliness status and sample distribution characteristics of elderly individuals aged 70 and above living alone

Among the surveyed elderly individuals aged 70 and above living alone, 75.32% reported not feeling lonely, while 24.68% indicated they did feel lonely. Table 1 presents the sample distribution characteristics of these elderly individuals living alone, along with the chi-square test results examining the correlation between independent variables and loneliness. Elderly women, those without spouses, those with low socioeconomic status, and those with low educational attainment living alone are more prone to experiencing loneliness.

Table 1 Test on the relationship between sample distribution characteristics and loneliness among elderly individuals aged 70 and above living alone (N=211)

Variable	Proportion (%)	Never feel lonely (%)	Have a sense of loneliness (%)	<i>P</i>
Demographic characteristics				
Age				0.34
70-74	32.22	61.07	38.93	
75-79	36.49	51.85	48.15	
≥80	31.28	34.82	65.18	
Gender				0.006
Male	38.9	45.39	55.61	
Female	61.1	36.76	63.24	
Marital status				0.54
With spouse	16.55	43.67	56.33	
No spouse	83.45	38.89	61.11	
Educational background				0.004
Illiteracy	21.56	44.63	55.37	
Primary school	33.04	56.88	43.12	
Junior high school	22.87	60.23	39.77	
Senior middle school and above	22.53	66.93	30.07	
Financial situation				0.001
Wealthy	32.32	52.88	47.12	
General	53.87	37.56	62.44	
Living in difficulty	13.81	27.09	72.91	
Social relationships				

Variable	Proportion (%)	Never feel lonely (%)	Have a sense of loneliness (%)	<i>P</i>
Living distance from children				0.003
The same residential area	20.02	53.98	46.02	
The same street or community	19.66	52.89	47.11	
Different streets in the same city	52.35	63.27	36.73	
Different cities	7.97	36.87	63.13	
Relationship with family				0.004
Good	55.76	53.88	46.12	
General	42.11	67.89	32.11	
Poor	2.13	72.66	27.34	
Relationship with neighbors				0.005
Good	78.32	55.43	44.57	
General	18.77	49.73	50.27	
Poor	2.91	75.21	24.79	
Participate in community activities				0.54
Participating	58.92	60.25	39.75	
Not participating	41.08	41.32	58.68	
Health status				0.001
Good	35.12	55.82	45.18	
General	37.66	35.09	64.91	
Poor	27.22	28.15	71.85	
Self-care ability				0.001
Fully self-reliant	83.02	44.76	55.24	
Not fully self-sufficient	16.98	20.87	79.13	

The living environment and social relationships of elderly individuals living alone are closely linked to their sense of loneliness. Approximately 39.68% of the children of these elderly individuals reside in the same neighborhood or street, while more than half live in the same city but in different streets or communities. Around 7.8% of the children live in different cities. Although this proportion is relatively small, when these elderly individuals require assistance, their children are unable to provide it due to the distance. The elderly individuals living alone generally have a

positive evaluation of their family relationships, with about 97.87% rating them as "good" or "average," and only 2.13% rating them as "poor." These elderly individuals also tend to maintain good relationships with their neighbors, with only about 2.91% reporting poor neighborly relations.

4.4 Factors influencing the loneliness of elderly people living alone in cities

The analysis results of the influencing factors of loneliness among elderly people living alone in cities are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Influencing factors of loneliness among elderly people aged 70 and above living alone in cities (N =211)

Variable	Occurrence ratio	<i>P</i>	Variable	Occurrence ratio	<i>P</i>
Demographic and social characteristics			Social support		
Age, 70-74 years old			The nearest distance to the children's residence	1.162	0.008
75-79	0.952	0.211	Relationship with family	1.252	0.006
>80	1.583	0.004	Frequency of family contact	1.167	0.007
Gender (Male)	1.432	0.007	Relationship with neighbors	1.087	0.37
Marital status (with a spouse)	1.573	0.005	Neighbor contact frequency	1.062	0.34
Educational attainment (illiteracy)			Whether to participate in community activities (yes)	1.148	0.76
Primary school	1.116	0.3	Health condition (good)		
Junior high school	1.329	0.08	General	1.955	0.003
Senior middle school and above	1.903	0.002	Poor	2.256	0.001
Economic status			Self-care ability	1.895	0.002

	(affluent)	(able to take care of oneself)
General	1.406	0.006
Living in difficulty	1.873	0.003

(1) The influence of demographic characteristics and socioeconomic status on loneliness. Age, gender, marital status, education level, and economic status all significantly impact the loneliness experienced by elderly individuals living alone. Women living alone are more prone to loneliness than men, with a risk approximately 43% higher. The risk of loneliness among elderly individuals living alone without a spouse is about 57% higher than that of those with a spouse. A higher education level correlates with an increased risk of loneliness among the elderly living alone. There is no significant difference in loneliness between elderly individuals with only a primary school education and those who are illiterate or have minimal literacy. However, the risk of loneliness for those with a junior high school education is about 1.32 times higher than for the illiterate or minimally literate group, and for those with a high school education or above, it is approximately 1.9 times higher.

The poorer the economic condition of the elderly, the higher their risk of loneliness. This aligns with our understanding that elderly individuals living alone with limited financial resources tend to worry more about their livelihood and old-age care. Additionally, compared to their wealthier counterparts, they may experience a psychological gap, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness.

(2) The impact of social relationships on the loneliness of elderly individuals living alone. Our research reveals that most elderly individuals living alone in Chinese cities maintain good relationships with their neighbors; however, support from neighbors does not significantly affect their loneliness. This underscores the crucial role of family, primarily children, in the emotional well-being of elderly individuals living alone. The geographical distance between children and their elderly parents often determines the frequency of their interactions and communication. Consequently, the farther away children live, the greater the loneliness experienced by their elderly parents living alone. It is evident that maintaining close ties and good

relationships with family members can help alleviate the loneliness of elderly individuals living alone in urban areas.

(3) Health status as a significant factor affecting the loneliness of urban elderly individuals living alone. The risk of loneliness among elderly individuals living alone with fair or poor self-rated health is approximately 1.96 times and 2.256 times higher, respectively, than that of those with good health. The risk of loneliness for elderly individuals who are completely unable to care for themselves is about 1.9 times higher than that of those who are self-sufficient.

5. Research Conclusions and Discussion

The study findings reveal that the prevalence of loneliness among elderly individuals living alone in Gusu District stands at 24.68%, lower than that in other regions. This low rate primarily stems from the combined effects of strong personal adaptability, a well-established government support system, and intensive community companionship services, which together form a stable mechanism for maintaining "low loneliness" [1,2]. On the flip side, over 20% of respondents still reported experiencing loneliness, with a greater number indicating unmet needs in social interaction and meaningful social engagement.

Research indicates that the incidence of loneliness among elderly individuals living alone in Gusu District is lower than that in other regions, for the following reasons:

I. Government Level: Comprehensive Policies and a Robust Service System

High level of old-age security ensures economic peace of mind. Suzhou boasts strong financial resources overall, with comprehensive coverage of pensions, senior citizen allowances, and meal subsidies in Gusu District. Special assistance is available for elderly individuals in need, directly reducing the risk of loneliness through enhanced economic security.

Mature integration of medical and elderly care alleviates health anxiety. A 15-minute healthcare circle for the elderly has been established, featuring improved door-to-door services by family doctors, family beds, and accompanying services. This facilitates easy access to medical care and promotes health, thereby reducing

loneliness and depression stemming from health concerns.

Full coverage of smart elderly care provides safety and companionship. Elderly individuals living alone are equipped with free one-button call systems, smart water meters, smoke detectors, and smart bracelets. With 24-hour backstage monitoring, a combination of technical and human defenses ensures that the elderly are not alone and receive assistance in emergencies.

Precision policies focus on spiritual comfort. Psychological care, visiting services, and spiritual comfort are included in the list of basic elderly care services. The government regularly purchases these services to prevent loneliness at an institutional level ^[9].

II. Community Level: High Density of Companionship and a Strong "Acquaintance-Based Elderly Care" Atmosphere

Regular door-to-door visits provide high-frequency emotional support. Community grid members, volunteers, and "senior partners" form pairs to regularly visit, chat, accompany, and provide agency services to elderly individuals living alone, filling their daily emotional void and continuously intervening in loneliness ^[8].

Comprehensive elderly service facilities offer ample social opportunities. Day care centers, meal assistance points, and cultural activity rooms are within walking distance, enabling the elderly to dine, engage in activities, and socialize nearby, forming stable social circles and effectively reducing loneliness ^[9].

Mature neighborhood mutual aid mechanism fosters a warm ancient city atmosphere. Initiatives such as young people helping the elderly, neighborhood watch programs, and caring merchant alliances provide strong social support from acquaintances. The elderly receive assistance when needed and have daily conversations, significantly decreasing the incidence of loneliness ^[1].

Rich cultural activities enrich spiritual lives. Leveraging the resources of the ancient city, intangible cultural heritage experiences, festival activities, and popular science lectures are organized to meet the spiritual needs of the elderly, providing them with sustenance and anticipation in life and making loneliness difficult to take hold ^[4,10].

III. Individual Level: Active Adaptation to Living Alone and Exceptional Self-Regulation Abilities

Solid economic and health foundations reduce anxiety. Elderly individuals in Gusu District generally enjoy economic prosperity, comprehensive medical insurance, and high self-assessed health levels. Most can take care of themselves, have stable control over chronic diseases, and possess unlimited social and activity capabilities.

Sufficient intergenerational support ensures stable emotional connections. Suzhou's high degree of urbanization means that most children live in the city, maintaining high-frequency contact, regular visits, and harmonious relationships with their elderly parents. This effectively offsets the emotional void caused by living alone, with the elderly expressing high satisfaction with family support and a strong sense of psychological security.

Active Lifestyle and High Social Participation. The elderly have diverse interests, are accustomed to going out, and participate in community activities. They maintain social connections through square dancing, calligraphy, painting, chess, cards, and voluntary mutual assistance, fostering a strong sense of self-worth and continuously diluting feelings of loneliness ^[4].

Rational concept of living alone and mature psychological adjustment. Influenced by Jiangnan culture, the elderly accept living alone, value independence and dignity, and do not equate it with loneliness. They proactively establish daily routines and demonstrate strong abilities to live alone and regulate their emotions ^[11].

Over one-fifth of elderly individuals living alone still experience feelings of loneliness. Possible reasons are as follows:

Some elderly people are reluctant to live with or in close proximity to their children, leading to a sense of failure or abandonment among those living alone, irrespective of their material circumstances ^[11]. This phenomenon aligns with survey findings: 89.6% of respondents expressed a desire not to live with their children, yet an equal percentage reported that their children had already moved away. The yearning for independent living coexists with the experience of bereavement, and the psychological conflicts arising from this cannot be resolved solely through material

means^[7].

Furthermore, the historical urban areas themselves may contribute to this contradiction. Although the quadrangle courtyards, alleys, and narrow streets in Gusu District possess cultural and aesthetic significance, they pose numerous practical challenges for elderly residents living alone. The absence of elevators, narrow staircases, and the lack of age-friendly modifications (all constrained by cultural heritage protection regulations) limit their mobility and social engagement^[12,13]. Even if physically capable of walking, if elderly individuals are unable to climb four flights of stairs to leave their homes, they are effectively confined indoors. Consequently, despite possessing adequate self-care abilities, they may still find themselves socially isolated^[1,2].

Considering that most respondents reported having sufficient self-care ability and income level, the actual impact is more significant than expected. This phenomenon can be explained by the following factors.

Firstly, the one-child policy and the rural population migration to urban areas change the family structure fundamentally. Many adult children work and live in other cities; although they talk on the phone regularly, they are unable to provide everyday companionship or care. Although the concept of “empty-nest elderly” can reflect the reality, it fails to fully demonstrate the emotional stress of being the last member of the family.

Secondly, the traditional communities that connect closely in Gusu district can actually intensify the feeling of loneliness. The elderly who have lived for several decades in the same alley watch neighbors and friends move away gradually or even pass away one after another. The community which once offered mutual support only remains the blank of memory. Our data also illustrates that those who feel satisfied with their living conditions often have better mental health. This illustrates that the elderly people’s feeling toward their living environment is equally important as the actual condition of the environment itself. Some studies indicate that helping the elderly externalize the negative self-awareness and rebuild the partner relationship can significantly ease their sense of loneliness.

Thirdly, the data demonstrates that 16.6% of the respondents are completely unable to engage in normal social interactions. To some of them, this results from the limitations of their body; to the rest of them, it reflects the social withdrawal phenomenon after losing the spouse or having their children move away. If the community can offer convenient, affordable and attractive activity space, it may be helpful for them to get rid of the isolated state. Some studies indicate that designing improper housing can not only increase the physical risk but also intensify the mental stress, making daily activities overwhelming, and further intensifying the sense of loneliness.

Although Suzhou's current pension policies are relatively comprehensive in certain respects, they still exhibit notable limitations when addressing the specific needs of elderly individuals living alone in historical districts. Firstly, while the income verification mechanism for subsidy services effectively covers the poorest groups, it inadvertently creates a coverage gap for low- and middle-income elderly populations. The income threshold for subsidy eligibility is set too high for these groups, leaving them unable to afford private pension services despite not qualifying as impoverished ^[9,11]. In our sample, 64.9% of respondents reported monthly incomes exceeding 2,500 yuan, placing a significant portion in this intermediate zone. Consequently, those requiring support but not classified as destitute may be overlooked.

Secondly, while heritage conservation regulations are vital for preserving Suzhou's cultural identity, they have yet to be fully harmonized with principles of age-friendly design. Current guidelines lack explicit provisions for enhancing safety and accessibility through permissible modifications that preserve architectural aesthetics ^[12,13]. This regulatory ambiguity discourages both homeowners and service providers from undertaking necessary renovations, resulting in a gradual decline in the habitability of homes for elderly residents as their physical capabilities diminish.

Thirdly, despite high awareness of community services among the elderly, their utilization rates remain low among those living alone. For instance, only 46.4% of respondents reported using community canteens or similar facilities. This indicates a

significant disconnect between service provision and actual needs—either the services offered do not align with elderly individuals' requirements, or barriers to access (such as cost, distance, scheduling conflicts, and digital literacy) persist^[2,7,9]. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 16.1% of respondents were unable to maintain a positive emotional state even when utilizing community services, highlighting a particular lag in the development of psychological support services.

6. Implications from the research

Based on the aforementioned research findings, we propose the following recommendations.

(1) It is essential to redefine the concept of "successful aging" to diminish reliance on the family as the sole support system. Public education campaigns should underscore that community care does not signify a failure of filial piety but rather represents a legitimate and valuable form of support. Schools, workplaces, and community organizations should all contribute to the normalization of elderly care services.

(2) A balanced regulatory framework should be established for housing renovations within heritage conservation areas. Additionally, the scope of subsidies for age-friendly renovations should be broadened to encompass all elderly individuals living alone with low incomes, not just those in extreme poverty.

(3) Given the prevalent emotional distress observed in this study, psychological support services, including regular follow-ups, counseling, and peer support groups, should be prioritized for development.

(4) Artificial intelligence-driven technologies should be leveraged to enable round-the-clock monitoring, fall detection, medication reminders, and social interaction features. AI-based platforms can offer personalized and scalable support services, complementing manual care efforts and alleviating the burden on family members and community service providers.

7. Research Limitations and Future Directions

This study acknowledges several limitations. (1) The sample was recruited using convenience sampling, and the interviewees generally exhibited higher levels of

social engagement compared to the overall survey sample. This discrepancy may introduce selection bias and limit the generalizability of the research findings to elderly individuals living alone in other historical districts or non-heritage areas. Despite the government's efforts in communication and coordination, some respondents remained hesitant to voice their dissatisfaction with public services. Such social desirability bias may result in an underestimation of the challenges faced. (2) The online nature of the survey may exclude elderly individuals lacking digital devices or with low digital literacy; although family members were permitted to assist, this could still introduce reporting bias.

To address these limitations, future research should employ probability sampling methods, develop concise and psychometrically robust assessment tools, and collect longitudinal data to monitor changes in living conditions and well-being over time. Comparative studies across multiple historical districts in China and internationally would aid in distinguishing between context-specific and universal influencing factors. Finally, there is an urgent need for experimental or quasi-experimental research to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as housing renovation subsidies, AI monitoring systems, and peer support programs, thereby providing a solid foundation for evidence-based policy formulation.

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Assimilation or Erasure: Language Shift and Identity Among *Cina Benteng*

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Summary

Cultural erasure refers to the gradual disappearance of cultural elements, including language, within a community over time. This study examines language shift among *Cina Benteng*, an ethnic group of Chinese descent primarily residing in Tangerang, Indonesia, where usage of Bahasa Indonesia has become more dominant than traditional Chinese languages. This makes the group a relevant case for examining processes of cultural erasure and language shift. This phenomenon is influenced by many changes throughout Indonesian history, including the Indonesian government's enforced policies, as well as continued interaction with broader local communities. *Cina Benteng* is selected as the focus of this study due to its long history of assimilation and the significant decline in the use of heritage Chinese languages compared to other Chinese-Indonesian communities. The study also seeks to examine how language shift corresponds with changes in cultural expression and identity within the context of assimilation. By integrating historical context and present-day social interactions, this research aims to provide a clearer understanding of how minority communities adapt linguistically and culturally over time, analyze the factors influencing language use, its correlation with the expression of cultural identity, and the influence of the social environment on communication practices within *Cina Benteng*.

Keywords

Cultural erasure, *Cina Benteng*, language shift, assimilation, cultural identity

1. Introduction

The Chinese-Indonesian community is one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Indonesia, making up approximately 4% of the total population (GoodStats, 2024). This minority group consists of many subgroups that have developed distinct cultural identities shaped by historical experiences and local environments. One prominent subgroup, a double minority, is the *Cina Benteng* community, primarily located in Tangerang, Banten. Unlike most Chinese-Indonesian groups, the *Cina Benteng* community has relatively low economic status and lives in

underprivileged conditions. They have undergone several centuries of extensive cultural assimilation with local Betawi and Sundanese populations, dating back to 1407. These conditions caused the formation of unique traditions, languages, and identities that distinguish them from other Chinese-Indonesian groups (Sulaiman, 2015).

The experiences of the *Cina Benteng* community raise important questions regarding cultural change, identity, and preservation. The shift away from traditional Chinese languages and customs, particularly during the New Order period with the implementation of discriminatory rules under President Soeharto before the violent 1998 riots against ethnic Chinese, shares characteristics commonly associated with cultural erasure. These rules included the censorship of Chinese beliefs and traditions, literature and press, even forcing citizens to change Chinese names on legal documents (Setijadi, 2015). Simultaneously, the community's long history of interaction with local cultures suggests that some changes may be better understood as cultural assimilation or acculturation rather than complete cultural loss.

This study aims to examine how *Cina Benteng* people perceive and express their cultural identity in society, as well as the extent to which language shift has affected the *Cina Benteng* community. Through this paper, two questions are to be answered: "How do *Cina Benteng* people see and express their cultural identity in their family, community, and society?" and "To what extent is language shift experienced in the *Cina Benteng* community?"

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *Cina Benteng*

Indonesia is home to many different communities, one of which is the Chinese ethnic group, who account for approximately 4% of the country's total population (GoodStats, 2024). Among the various Chinese-Indonesian communities is the *Cina Benteng* community, a Chinese-Indonesian sub-ethnic group that has historically resided in Tangerang, Banten, and possesses a distinct cultural identity shaped by long-term interaction with the indigenous population.

The origins of the *Cina Benteng* community can be traced back to migrants from mainland China,

particularly from the Fujian province, who arrived in Tangerang in 1407 as part of a fleet led by General Zheng He in his Ming Dynasty expedition (Kumala, 2022). Many of the traders temporarily resided along riverbanks and coastal areas near ports while waiting for favorable winds to return to China or continue their journeys. During this period, they frequently interacted with the local population through trading and other forms of social exchange. Over time, these interactions led to intermarriage between the Chinese migrants and the local communities. As a result, a distinct community gradually emerged. Following the establishment of permanent settlements and the growth of intermarriage, many members of the community gradually shifted their occupations from trade to agriculture, construction, and other forms of manual labor.

As a result, a distinct community gradually emerged, combining elements of Chinese and local cultures, which later became known as the *Cina Benteng* community. It is also important to highlight that the *Cina Benteng* name itself came late in the 17th century, because this distinct community mainly resided in Tangerang, around a fortress built by the Dutch colonizers (Izzah, 2024).

Cina Benteng has become a community with many qualities that differentiate them from other Chinese ethnic groups around Indonesia. Many of their cultures, traditions, and dialects are a result of centuries of acculturation with the indigenous people, mainly with the Sundanese-Betawi ethnic. The *Cina Benteng* dialect is a result of centuries of interaction with the locals; they have grown to adapt, resulting in a dialect/language that also includes both the essence of Betawi and Chinese dialect, mainly their ancestral language, Hokkien. Cultural ceremonies such as Cio Tao, a traditional wedding ceremony of the *Cina Benteng* community, are also the result of acculturation with local communities. For example, the ceremonial attire worn during Cio Tao reflects a blend of Chinese and Betawi culture. This is just one of the many unique characteristics of the *Cina Benteng* community that have emerged through a long history of interaction with local societies (Pardede et al., 2023).

2.2 Language Shift

Language shift refers to the process where a community gradually replaces one language with another across multiple generations (Iqbal et al., 2025, 4394–4402). This usually occurs because the community must survive in the face of social, economic, or political pressures.

The language shift in *Cina Benteng* revolves around the mixture of Hokkien and local Indonesian languages such as Betawi or Sundanese. After centuries of intermarriage between the Chinese and local people of Indonesia, the use of Hokkien and Chinese gradually

merged with local languages, giving rise to *Bahasa Benteng* as used by the community today. Although most *Cina Benteng* people no longer inherit Hokkien or other Chinese languages as their mother tongue, several cultural and linguistic markers remain, such as a distinctive Benteng accent, unique terms, and Chinese vocabulary that continue to be used in daily interaction.

Joshua Fishman's GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) measures the endangerment and development of a language. Furthermore, Fishman's GIDS aligns with UNESCO's Language Endangerment Framework and *Ethnologue's* Language Vitality Categories to create EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale). EGIDS quantifies language status across 13 levels and allows researchers to measure language shift in a particular language (Lewis & Simons, 2009).

The following are the levels of the EGIDS scale numerically in order. The first level is *Level 0 (International)*; the language is internationally used. The next level is *Level 1 (National)*, where languages serve as a national language. *Level 2 (Regional)* languages function as the primary language of many institutions within a specific region rather than the country as a whole. *Level 3 (Trade)* languages are used as a means of communication among speakers of different languages, despite lacking official status. *Level 4 (Educational)* languages have a standardized writing system, and are actively used in literature and formal education. *Level 5 (Written)* languages have a written form and are used in literature and religious texts, however, are not a primary language of education and remain underdeveloped. The next levels, particularly Levels 6 and 8, have subdivisions to mark the critical point in the change of language shift. The first subdivision is *Level 6A (Vigorous)* where the language is actively used in oral communication and continues to be transmitted across generations. The next subdivision, *Level 6B (Threatened)*, is the point where the language is spoken regularly; however, a substantial proportion of parents no longer transmit it to their children. *Level 7 (Shifting)* languages are infrequently used with evident language shifts, as well as the lack of transmission from one generation to another. *Level 8A (Moribund)* is the level in which the language is spoken primarily by the grandparent generation, although some members of the parent generation retain the ability to speak it. *Level 8B (Nearly Extinct)* languages are spoken only by members of the grandparent or great-grandparent generations. *Level 9 (Dormant)* languages remain recognized by the community; however, their use in everyday communication is minimal. Lastly, *Level 10 (Extinct)* languages have no remaining speakers, and the community makes no immediate effort to maintain its association with the language. (Lewis & Simons, 2009)

2.3 Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging to a cultural group, shaped by many factors such as: religion, ethnicity, ancestry, and more. It involves the beliefs, norms, and any ties between a person and their culture, acting as a moral and behavioural guide for individuals (Baskin, 2020). However, cultural identity is not static throughout a person's life. For marginalized groups and immigrants, it is often influenced by pressure from dominant cultures and challenges of adapting to a new environment, leading to assimilation or other outcomes. These experiences create a dilemma between preserving one's original cultural heritage or conforming to the dominant culture for a sense of collective belonging.

Jane Collier and Milt Thomas's theory of cultural identity suggests that there are seven properties or seven manners in which a group communicates their identity with one another. The first one, 'Avowal and Ascription', is a concept that suggests an individual's identity is constructed by how they view themselves and how others perceive them. Avowal refers to how an individual presents or expresses themselves within a group identity. Ascription refers to how others perceive a singular person. 'Modes of Expression' discusses a group's core symbols (interpreted cultural beliefs about the world around them), names, and norms that a community follows to express their shared identity and place in a group.

'Individual, Relational, and Communal Identity' are the three components that build a cultural identity. Individual refers to how an individual interprets their identity according to their experiences. Relational refers to the interaction between one individual and another according to the "appropriate" behavior. Communal identity refers to the communication regarding the affirmation, negotiation, or creation of a shared identity.

'Enduring and Changing Aspects of Identity' discusses how a cultural identity can change as a result of external factors, namely: social, political, and economic.

'Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioural Aspects of Identity' are aspects that refer to how an individual's emotions connect with their cultural identity in particular situations. Affective is how an individual "feels" about their identity. Cognitive refers to how an individual "thinks" about their identity. Behavioural refers to how an individual "acts" regarding their identity.

The next property is 'Content and Relationship Levels', which refers to an interaction between two or more individuals to deliver a message/content. Content refers to the true fact of the message that is being conveyed, while relationship refers to the interpretation of said message by the individuals influenced by their experiences.

The last property, 'Salience or Prominence', refers to how noticeable an individual's identity is in a particular situation. An individual has many identities that conform in different contexts, such as religion, culture, academics, gender, and more. Prominence leans more towards the identity's personal importance to the individual. (Collier & Thomas, 1988, 99–120)

2.4 Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of cultural identity and language shift within the *Cina Benteng* community. Three data collection methods were used: qualitative interviews, literature review, and an online questionnaire. The overall research procedure is illustrated below (Figure 1)

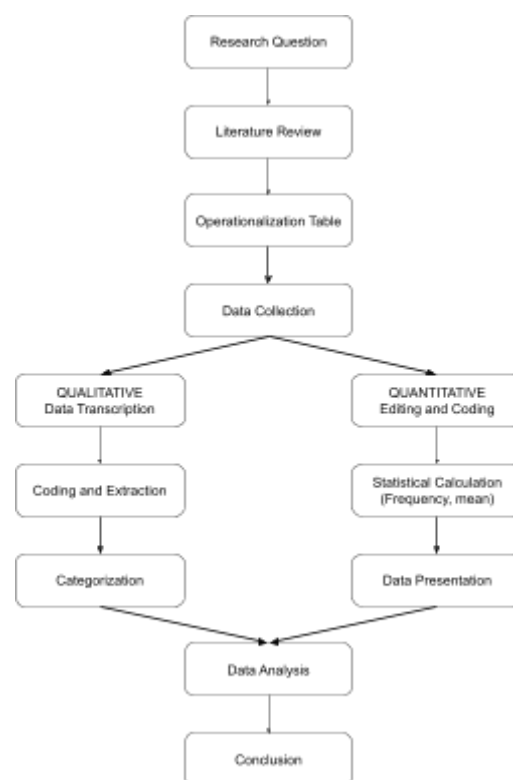


Figure 1. Flowchart of research procedure

The primary method consists of qualitative interviews, where several structured questions are asked to four representatives of the *Cina Benteng* community, who were chosen through snowball sampling. This method was chosen to obtain in-depth insights into participants' experiences regarding cultural identity and language shift.

The second method is a literature review. Books, articles, and other relevant sources were collected and analysed related to language shift and cultural identity to establish a theoretical framework for interpreting findings and results.

The third method is an online questionnaire, distributed to members of the *Cina Benteng* community. The questionnaire employed a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) to measure respondents' perceptions of cultural identity, language use, and other related topics. The quantitative data complemented the qualitative findings by highlighting and quantifying response patterns.

3. Analysis

3.1 Validity and Reliability of Questionnaire

The questionnaire used to obtain data has passed the 'Pearson Product-Moment Correlation' test, measuring validity by correlating each item's value with the total value of all items resulting in the standard number of 0.444, meaning any number higher is valid. Similarly, it has also passed the 'Cronbach's Alpha' test, measuring reliability based on internal consistency with the standard number being 0.7 resulting in 'reliable' for *Cultural Identity* and Language Shift being 0.8835239471 and 0.7295075979 respectively.

3.2 Extent of Language Shift in *Cina Benteng*

The *Benteng* language is a combination of Hokkien, Sundanese, and Betawi dialects alongside the national language Bahasa Indonesia, a result of long-term interaction between Hokkien-speaking Chinese settlers and local communities. The combination of languages is also known as cultural blending. The best-known example is their usage of '*Cide Kode*'. This term was made by combining the words 'Cici', meaning sister, and 'Koko', meaning brother, with 'Gede', meaning older.

Among 20 people, 90% of them can understand or speak *Bahasa Benteng* (Figure 2), and 18 speak the language with their parents or guardians, suggesting that *Bahasa Benteng* is still used in day-to-day conversations across and between generations, such as from parent to child.

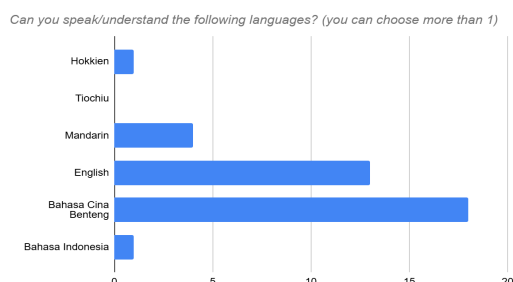


Figure 2. Proficiency of different languages among *Cina Benteng*

Despite this, *Bahasa Benteng* is not as prevalent as it seems in daily life. "It's already considered rare for natives to truly speak *Benteng* fluently. They exist, but maybe only the elderly can speak fluent *Benteng*," participant 4 said. 14 of 20 people representative of *Cina Benteng* speak *Bahasa Indonesia* more frequently than *Bahasa Benteng* (Figure 3) because the usage of the former is more dominant in their community than the latter. "The language, well.. We use *Bahasa Indonesia* with occasional *Benteng* words," stated participant 3.

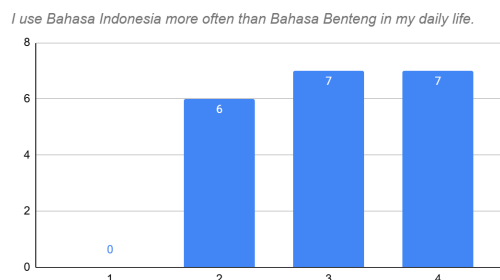


Figure 3. Use of *Bahasa Indonesia* compared to *Bahasa Benteng* (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: agree, 4: strongly agree)

In addition, the usage of Hokkien or Chinese in the *Cina Benteng* community is extremely scarce. "The majority of mixed races can't speak Chinese anymore," participant 2 remarked. "If it's Mandarin or Hokkien, it's rare. Especially Mandarin. Very rare, *truly* rare," participant 4 said. This inability to speak Hokkien or Chinese applies to people from both the older and younger generation. This is supported by participant 1's statement, "Of course they (parents) speak Indonesian. My kids? No... they all (can't) use mixed language, mixed Hokkien," which is further supported by questionnaire responses, suggesting limited transmission of traditional Chinese languages across generations (Figure 4).

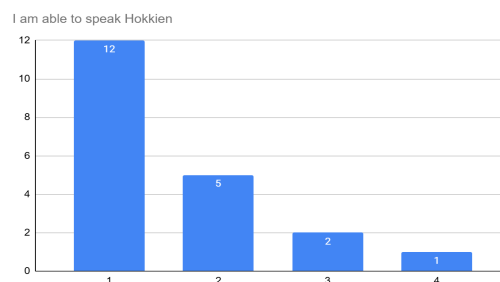


Figure 4. Ability to speak Hokkien among *Cina Benteng* (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: agree, 4: strongly agree)

In line with the analysis of language shift in the *Benteng* community, *Cina Benteng* can be categorized as EGIDS Level 6B (Threatened). Qualitative interviews and questionnaires show that while traditional Chinese languages are no longer transmitted consistently, the

community still maintains important cultural and linguistic markers, including a characteristic *Benteng* accent, Chinese-derived terms, and specific vocabulary that continues to shape local speech patterns. These surviving features demonstrate that language shift in Cina Benteng involves both language loss and the persistence and integration of ancestral linguistic elements into the surrounding local language.

3.3 Cultural Identity of the *Cina Benteng* Community

The cultural identity of the *Cina Benteng* community has been shaped by centuries of interaction between Chinese immigrants and the indigenous population of Tangerang, resulting in a unique blend of Chinese, Betawi, and Sundanese influences. This unique identity is reflected in certain aspects of their daily lives, including language, traditional ceremonies, and clothing, serving as a clear characteristic for cultural identification.

Through the examination of avowal and ascription, it can be determined that cultural identity is highly valued within the *Cina Benteng* community. During interviews, members of the community mentioned that they were “proud” to identify themselves as *Cina Benteng*. Furthermore, in the *Jabodetabek* area, recognition of their culture tends to come naturally, as *Benteng* people are “usually recognized by outsiders by their accent.” In contrast, further areas were less consistent in cultural recognition. Participant 4 shared an experience where their appearance led others to question their Chinese identity altogether: “People might think, ‘You’re Chinese? From where? Why don’t you look Chinese?’ That’s my reason for having to introduce myself as *Cina Benteng*.” This indicates that the label ‘*Cina Benteng*’ functions more as an identity participants must actively explain. Comparing responses and theories proves that Avowal and Ascription is moderate within the ethnic community.

It is also evident that ritual practices persist despite declining understanding of cultural meaning, such as the traditions of Sincia, Peh Cun, and Cio Ko. Participant 2 admitted, “Yes, it’s carried out, but its meaning was never taught.” This emphasizes the continuance of performing cultural rituals as a form of obligation, however the underlying meaning has been lost to a gradual decline of cultural literacy. In contrast, the results of the questionnaire indicate that 90% of participants still follow the Peh Cun tradition (Figure 5) and 80% still understand the meaning behind it (Figure 6). Although the quantitative and qualitative data do not align, the theory and interview results support each other, suggesting that the underlying meaning behind traditions has faded. This reflects the

aspect of Modes of Expression, particularly the indicator of participation in cultural tradition.

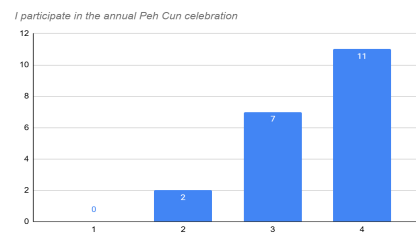


Figure 5. Participation in annual Peh Cun celebrations
(1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: agree, 4: strongly agree)

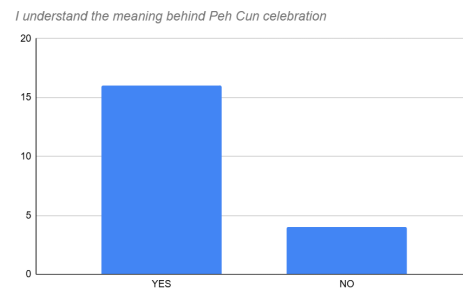


Figure 6. Understanding of Peh Cun celebration
(YES: 16, NO: 4)

This is further supported by the intergenerational transmission which happens through inherited obligation rather than explicit teaching. As participant 4 said, “Actually we don’t know anything. We just follow it. The point is to know, understand, and remember the devotion of our ancestors,” which shows the continued perseverance, lacking historical understanding. Digital spaces have become a medium for cultural exchange, as *Cina Benteng* people have “started sharing on social media what’s happening with *Cina Benteng*,” and “a lot of people are joining in,” which reiterates the strengthened community gathering that is not limited by physical meetings. Both cultural transmissions reflect the ‘Individual, Relational and Communal Identity’ aspect for both ‘Identity through Family Relationships’ and ‘Identity in Community’.

The influence of social media and modern technology is also evident in how ancestry and respect are maintained as core values by the younger generation. Participant 4 noted, “even sweet seventeen birthdays are now held at wedding venues” with “large scale” invitations alongside “*gambang* and *keromong* music”, showing that honoring ancestors can take many forms through “prayer, worship, and offerings,” prioritizing respect over rigid procedure. Technology emerges as a bridge between generations which help develop and preserve tradition, reflecting the indicator for ‘Stable Cultural Values’ with the aspect ‘Enduring and Altering Identity’.

From our observation, the *Cina Benteng* community also have a shared trait, which is their pride in their culture. Participant 3 stated that, “with pride, I introduce myself as *Cina Benteng*,” with other respondents

sharing the same sentiment (Figure 7). This pride correlates to participant perception of traditional values as educational for the academic interest of its “successful acculturation”, and personal as if “*Cina Benteng* were to disappear.. It would feel really sad”. Lastly, *Cina Benteng* expresses their identity through digital storytelling by creating *Cina Benteng* cultural content on TikTok, overall making their cultural identity into a firm, preserving, accessible practice. This reflects the *Affective, Cognitive and Behavioral Aspects of Identity* and proves that they are present within the *Cina Benteng* community.

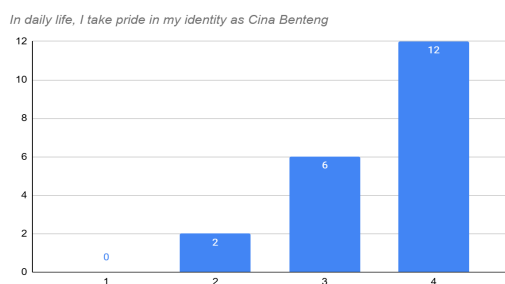


Figure 7. Pride in identity among *Cina Benteng*

Another important factor in identity is cultural transmission, which operates through practice. Participant 4 clarifies that “it’s not an obligation. The family teaches through practice. Ancestral worship is a form of devotion”. Despite this, there exists gaps in cultural understanding, which is solved with communal engagement. One participant admitted, “I’m still *Cina Benteng*, but only on a shallow level. I don’t really understand it,” prompting the decision to join the *Benteng* community so they are able to “learn more”. This was also reinforced by another participant crediting an elder directly, “I learned a lot from him; he is my teacher,” showing that community ties actively deepen cultural literacy and shape identity through practice and habits.

Overall, the findings indicate that *Cina Benteng* identity is sustained through cultural practices, family values, community involvement, and a strong sense of pride. However, the gradual loss of cultural knowledge and understanding shows that preservation is not always accompanied by a full understanding of its origins and meanings. Nevertheless, the community continues to adapt its traditions to social changes, allowing its cultural identity to remain relevant and be passed on to future generations.

3.4 Relationship between Language Shift and Cultural Identity

The *Benteng* language’s categorization as EGIDS Level 6B (Threatened) suggests that, despite its continued use in certain regions, intergenerational transmission of the language is very weak. Though this may be evident in the

Benteng language, the community’s perception of their cultural identity is relatively healthy. Results from the interviews and questionnaire suggest that the *Benteng* people are proud of their identity and culture. An example of a response mirroring this idea is participant 4’s response when asked about their *Cina Benteng* identity: “*Cina Benteng* is my own identity, and there’s a lot of stigma surrounding *Cina Benteng*, which pushed me to take further action.” This dichotomy suggests that, despite the hardships and limitations experienced by the older generations, the younger generation is aware of the dangers ahead for the *Cina Benteng* culture and is actively making efforts to preserve it.

The main factor shaping *Cina Benteng*’s unique yet conflicted identity is the centuries of acculturation its people have experienced. This acculturation has created many new traditions and cultural practices; however, it has also led to an unclear sense of identity. In the structured interview, participant 4 mentioned that their appearance and others’ unfamiliarity with the *Cina Benteng* ethnicity had caused their Chinese heritage to be questioned by society, extended to the point that questions such as “Why don’t you look Chinese?” emerged in daily conversations. *Cina Benteng*’s unique identity, caused by centuries of successful acculturation, had brought both positive and negative perceptions of their culture. Apart from physical appearance, the *Benteng* language has also led to some misperceptions about the community. Despite their Chinese heritage, a common characteristic among *Benteng* people is the inability to speak Chinese heritage languages such as Hokkien and Mandarin. This is caused by a multitude of factors, including government censorship of Chinese culture, assimilation between the original Chinese voyagers and locals, and the growth of *Bahasa Indonesia*, rendering it the dominant language even in Chinese ethnic regions. Over time, losing the ability to speak their ancestors’ languages has led to conflicting perceptions of the *Cina Benteng* community’s cultural identity.

The last factor that contributes to the complicated identity of *Cina Benteng* is erasure. From a historical perspective, the erasure of *Cina Benteng*, or Chinese culture in general, can be described as the biggest struggle faced by Chinese-Indonesians as a minority group. The enforcement of laws prohibiting them from expressing their Chinese identity resulted in the gradual loss of their original identity, whether it’s the traditional language disappearing from native tongues or Chinese names being removed from official documents. The enforcement accelerated the shifting of language and discrimination towards Chinese minorities. Despite this, the erasure experienced by *Cina Benteng* helped shape their identity and their journey towards cultural preservation. The uncertainty around their identity has encouraged them to reconnect with their heritage, as Participant 4 had stated before: “I’m still *Cina Benteng*, but only on a superficial level; I don’t understand.

That's why I decided to join *Cide Kode Benteng*, to learn more." This reflects how erasure has not only influenced the community's present identity but has also inspired them to learn more and pass on their cultural heritage.

3.5 Comparison between *Cina Benteng* and *Cina Lasem*

One minority with similar historical experiences yet a contrasting outcome from *Cina Benteng* is *Cina Lasem*. They have resided in Lasem, Central Java for generations, and fall under the *peranakan* category, meaning their ancestors have blended closely with the local Javanese population through language, culture, and everyday life (Mahmudi, 2020, 894–902).

The Chinese ethnic community that settled in Lasem resided near the Babangan River. They arrived as part of Cheng Ho's fleet, which reached mainland Java in the 14th century. Residing near a river is very often known as a society center as it helps with transport and easy access to the sea (Suliyati, 2009: 11). The prolonged stay of Chinese ethnic in Java, especially in the regency of Lasem, are indicated by the existence of three aged *Kelenteng*, those are; *Cu An Kong*, *Gie Yong Bio*, *Po An Bio*. All date back to the first known Chinese ethnic landing in Lasem. The long stay of Chinese ethnic in Lasem area, starts an acculturation process, producing unique Chinese-Javanese architecture batik a mixed theme batik

A similarity that is highlighted between the two sub-groups is the acculturation process.

This highlights a similarity between two of the Chinese-Indonesia subgroups, in a way, they both have a very similar way of acculturation process, as they both arrive in the same timeframe and the same fleet, they reside for a long time resulting in cross-marriage with the local ethnic, this results in a mix of both ethnicities, for an example, *Cina Benteng*, in which acculturated with the *Betawi* ethnic group, creates a unique language, musical instrument. On the other hand, *Cina Lasem* created a unique architecture and clothing. They both have identical ways to acculturate with the civilization, their existence in the civilization around them is indicated by establishment of a place of worship, in which are *Kelenteng* which could be found in the environment both of the sub ethnic group resides.

In the same way as *Cina Benteng*, both minorities have experienced a shift away from traditional Chinese languages; however, the outcome of this shift is different. In *Cina Benteng*, the language has experienced significant acculturation, resulting in the creation of *Bahasa Benteng*. On the other hand, the *Cina Lasem* community has experienced assimilation, causing the original Chinese language to be replaced and dominated by Javanese and

Indonesian. Overall, this comparison demonstrates that although both communities experienced language shift, the underlying processes of acculturation and assimilation have shaped their linguistic identities in fundamentally different ways.

This comparison highlights that language shift among Chinese-Indonesian communities, despite similar experiences and limitations, produces distinct linguistic and cultural outcomes. Therefore, the comparison supports this study, showing that language shift is closely related to the preservation, adaptation, and expression of cultural identity.

4. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations

4.1 Conclusions

This study shows that the shift in the *Cina Benteng* community's cultural identity cannot be classified as a single type of cultural amalgamation. Instead, it has been shaped by centuries of acculturation, assimilation, and erasure, producing a unique and rich culture.

This study determined that *Cina Benteng* people maintain a strong cultural identity despite centuries of pressure and prejudice. Representatives' responses to indicators based on Collier and Thomas' '*Cultural Identity Theory*' suggest that members of the ethnic community proudly identify themselves as *Cina Benteng*, while still experiencing many misperceptions from outsiders due to their appearance and inability to speak Chinese heritage languages. Even so, they continue to preserve their identity through traditions, values, and community participation.

Furthermore, the investigation found that the *Cina Benteng* community has undergone a significant shift from traditional Chinese languages to their unique dialect called *Bahasa Benteng*. Based on certain indicators and Fishman's EGIDS framework, *Bahasa Benteng* can be classified as *Level 6B (Threatened)*, still regularly spoken but not consistently transmitted across generations.

Overall, the findings show that language shift does not necessarily result in the loss of cultural identity. Instead, the *Cina Benteng* community continues to preserve its identity through cultural practices and shared values despite changes in language use. The comparison with the *Cina Lasem* community further demonstrates that different processes of acculturation and assimilation can produce distinct linguistic and cultural outcomes, highlighting the relationship between language and cultural identity.

4.2 Recommendations

Comparative studies with other Chinese-Indonesian communities may also provide deeper insight into how assimilation and acculturation influence language preservation.

The results of this research can be used to support cultural preservation efforts. Community organizations, schools, and local cultural institutions may develop activities that introduce *Bahasa Benteng*, traditional ceremonies, and local history to younger generations. Digital media and social media platforms can also be utilized to document and promote *Cina Benteng* culture so that it remains recognized and appreciated by both the community and the wider public.

4.3 Limitations

There are some limitations present in this paper that hinder the development of the research. Firstly, the sample size of the questionnaire as well as the variety of respondents are limited, as most consist of young adults, thus lacking diversity in age groups. Similarly, the interviews lacked sample size, involving only 4 participants. Secondly, communication with cultural and religious figures was difficult to obtain, preventing access to the perception of someone actively making efforts to preserve the culture. Lastly, several cultural spaces in *Cina Benteng* are not readily accessible, which decreases the amount of potential sources for this research. It is hopeful that for future research, these limitations can be overcome.

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How Military Perceptions Are Influenced by the Presence of a Military Family Member in the Ivanhoe Grammar School Plenty Campus Community

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Summary:

War and conflict have a significant presence within modern Australian history and are deeply embedded within Australian culture. In particular, the first World War marked the first major global conflict that Australia participated in, giving rise to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC). Our research is specifically targeting the perceptions of the military influenced by the presence of living military personnel or war veteran family members connected to our school community within the Plenty Region of Melbourne, Australia, where our school campus is located. Individuals with military family members are a minority group within the Plenty Campus community population, and our research focuses on comparing this group against those without military family members.

Our work will investigate different aspects of one's perception towards the military, which will include focusing on perceived benefits and detriments, as well as opinions on the amount of funding the military should receive. Additionally, we will explore if having any living military personnel or war veteran family members has any influence on willingness to enlist into the military as well as any attitudes towards conscription or any form of mandatory military service. This will be compared against Singapore, whose military mandates at least two full years of service.

The overall aim of our research is to gauge the impact that the presence of living military personnel or war veteran family members has on one's perception on the military, so that the conclusions made could possibly be applied and generalised to other fields, deepening our understanding of society's perceptions.

Keywords:

perception, military, family, school

1. Introduction:

The military plays an important role in protecting a country, responding to emergencies, and helping communities during times of crisis. However, people's opinions about the military can vary depending on a range of factors. These include personal experiences, family background, culture, education, and the policies of the country they live in. The aim of this experiment was to determine whether having family members who have served in the military influences

an individual's perception of military service. The investigation also compared the views of Australian students and teachers with participants from Singapore to investigate how family experience and cultural background affect opinions on military service, defence spending, enlistment, and compulsory in Singapore but voluntary in Australia, comparing the two groups provides a better understanding of how different national systems can influence public perceptions.

Before conducting the research, it was predicted that the participants with family members who had served in the military would have an increased positive perception of military service compared to those who do not have military connections. Additionally, it was expected that the Singaporean participants would exhibit more positive views towards military service than Australians, due to the compulsory two year enlistment programme in Singapore. Accordingly, the research questions were developed based on the outlined hypotheses, with the primary objective of identifying whether and how experiences of family members affect an individual's perception of military service.

Previous research suggests that family can have a significant influence on people's attitudes towards the military. Individuals with relatives who have served often have a better understanding of military life and the responsibilities involved. However, research from the Australian Word Bank on military, education, and health expenditure (referenced in APA 7) shows that family experience is not the only factor that shapes opinions. The media, education, cultural values, and personal beliefs also play important roles. Studies have found that countries with compulsory military service tend to have more positive public attitudes towards it, while countries with voluntary service are generally more supportive of allowing people to choose whether they join the military.

Australia has a long and significant military history that continues to influence and shape its national identity and values. The service and sacrifice of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) during the First and Second World War helped establish values of courage, mateship, resilience and sacrifice that remain deeply embedded within Australian society today. These values are commemorated annually through ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day services, reflecting the military's enduring influence on Australian culture. Military involvement is also reflected in local communities, including Ivanhoe Grammar School Plenty Campus, where students in Years 9–12 can participate in the Australian Army Cadets program. The program encourages leadership, teamwork, discipline and an appreciation/understanding of military service, making the school community an appropriate setting to

investigate whether family military connections influence perceptions of the military.

Overall, this investigation examined whether having family members with military experience influences public perceptions of military service. By comparing the views of Australian students, teachers, and participants from Singapore, the study aimed to identify both similarities and differences in attitudes towards military service, compulsory enlistment, and defence spending.

2. Justification:

This study is important because it helps us look at the chances and challenges that minority groups in Australia encounter. We will also compare our results with those from another country. Our findings can educate people about minority rights, representation, and social inclusion in Australia. They also support community and educational efforts that promote justice and fairness. This is achieved by identifying whether and how family connection to the military shapes attitudes towards funding, enlistment and conscription, highlighting where assumptions about a minority group's views may not hold and where representation or consultation could be improved.

3. Method:

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data, to investigate perceptions of the military across different demographic groups within the Ivanhoe Grammar School Plenty Campus community, alongside a smaller Singaporean sample for cross-cultural comparison.

The first stage involved distributing a survey to the broader secondary school community, including staff, students, and some alumni. This survey collected quantitative demographic information to assist with sampling, asking participants their age range, whether they had any living relatives (including immediate family) who were active military personnel or war veterans, how many such relatives they had, the nature of their relationship to these relatives, and the relatives' gender. This data served two purposes: providing baseline quantitative context and enabling participants to be grouped according to whether they had a living family member with military experience (referred to as the "Yes Group" and "No Group" respectively).

Using this survey data, a quota sampling approach was applied to select participants for follow-up interviews, ensuring representation across the Yes and No Groups as well as across students and teachers. Participants who had agreed to be interviewed were then contacted, and Calendly was used to schedule interview times, both for members of the Ivanhoe community and for the two Singaporean participants who took part in the cross-cultural comparison.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted. For Ivanhoe participants, the interview began with a context question that differed depending on group membership, where Yes Group participants were asked about their

relationship to their military family member and whether that family member had seen active combat, while No Group participants were asked where they primarily sourced their information or opinions about the military. All participants were then asked a common set of questions addressing their perceptions of the benefits and detriments a military brings to a country, their views on military funding relative to other sectors (using 2024 Australian GDP expenditure figures on defence, education, and healthcare as a reference point), their willingness to consider enlisting, their attitudes towards the introduction of conscription in Australia, and a reflective question asking whether their responses would have differed had their family military status been the opposite of what it was.

The interview schedule for the two Singaporean participants was modified to reflect Singapore's existing system of mandatory National Service. These participants were asked about the perceived benefits and detriments of having a military, their attitudes (positive, neutral, negative, or mixed) towards mandatory military service, whether they would choose to remove or retain National Service if given the choice, and what single modification they would make to the system if able.

All interview responses from both the Ivanhoe and Singaporean participants were subsequently analysed thematically to identify patterns and divergences in perception across groups, including comparisons between the Yes and No Groups, between students and teachers, and between the Australian and Singaporean participants. This analysis formed the basis of the qualitative findings reported in the Results and Discussion section.

4. Discussion of Results:

This section of the report presents the findings from participant interviews, organised by question and theme. The discussion first covers responses from all participants before examining the Singapore-specific questions and evaluating the study's methodology.

4.1 Questions asked to all participants:

4.1.1 'What benefits do you believe there is to having a military?':

The results relating to the 'benefits' question indicated that participants often considered their own protection and the defence of their nation over endangering people of other nations. Throughout all age groups of the Plenty Campus demographic, almost all participants cited that the main benefit they associated with a defence force is its ability to provide protection. One participant with a family member of military background expressed that the presence of a military assisted in evoking a sense of safety and security. Participants without a family member of military background also reported similar beliefs in that the primary benefit of a nation's military is to guard and defend civilians. This pattern of protection as the driving benefit behind a military permeated both the Plenty Campus demographic and Singaporean inputs. One

participant reported that the presence of a military should be redundant, that in a “perfect” world a military must not be necessary in order to guarantee the safety of the people. It was also said that the presence of militaries in our world is necessary for a nation to survive in the current “hostile” world. The results display that the military is not perceived to be a show of force, but rather a mandatory defence mechanism designed to shield a nation’s people. There was an almost unanimous perception recorded of the military despite the varying family history, ages and backgrounds. This pattern suggests that the presence of a military family member has a minimal effect on an individual’s perception of military benefits.

4.1.2 ‘What detriments do you think having a military brings?’:

Participants were asked what detriments they perceived having a military brought to a nation. The responses varied in focus, with some respondents emphasising a perceived image of abuse of power while others concentrated on the financial difficulties that a nation may face in funding a military. One participant reported that funding a military may detract from adequate financial support for other government sectors such as healthcare and education, reporting that the benefits of the military are not as “tangible” as other sectors may provide. This detriment was the most commonly identified one by participants. However, it was only expressed by those without living military family members. Participants with living family members often emphasised more political disadvantages of the presence of a military. This includes restricted travel and access, unfavourable public image for military organisations due to perceived abuse of power and a potential to increase political tensions between nations. The difference in these trends may indicate that the presence of a family member in the military may influence how an individual perceives the detriments of a military and how it affects a nation’s people and government, not just one or the other exclusively. It is difficult to say which perceived detriment required ‘deeper’ critical thinking and consideration, however the results display that those without military family members tend to be more focussed on the people’s lives while those with military family members are more likely to consider the nation’s government and the nation as a whole.

4.1.3 ‘Do you think that the military deserves to receive more, less, or the same amount of funding it does now?’:

Participants of the study were asked for their opinion about the amount of funding the Australian Defence Force (ADF) should receive, more specifically, whether it should decrease or increase, after being provided with the context of the Australian government’s allocation of funds towards other government sectors such as healthcare and education. Only one participant cited that they believed that the military should receive less funding than it currently does, and that instead, funding should be diverted more towards healthcare and education. Moreover, all participants with military family members reported that they believed that the military should receive

more funding, with two emphasising rising political tensions and international relations. Those without military family members were more likely to believe that the funding that the ADF currently receives is adequate, expressing the need for other government sectors to also be allocated a balanced amount of funding. The contrast in the results may suggest that individuals with family members in the military may be more inclined to support it and thus respond with a desire that more funding should be directed towards the ADF. The implications of this may be that having this presence of a military family member could enact a bias that may make the military appear to be a more favourable government sector to have funds diverted to.

4.1.4 ‘Would you ever consider enlisting or joining any military organisations?’:

Respondents were asked if they would consider joining the military and were encouraged to elaborate on their reasoning when answering the question. The goal was to discover if the participants’ attitudes towards the military affected their desire to join, but also if there any differences between students, teachers, and participants from Singapore. The responses indicated that generally, while the attitude towards the military as an institution was generally respectful, the overwhelming majority of participants were not willing to join the military themselves. In general, the findings revealed the reluctance of most participants to join the military. Out of the total of 18 participants, 3 participants (17%) would consider the possibility of joining the military, while 15 of them (83%) stated they would not (Figure 1). The main reasons for discouragement from joining the military included personal career goals, family duties and obligations, concerns for safety, and preference for different types of jobs.

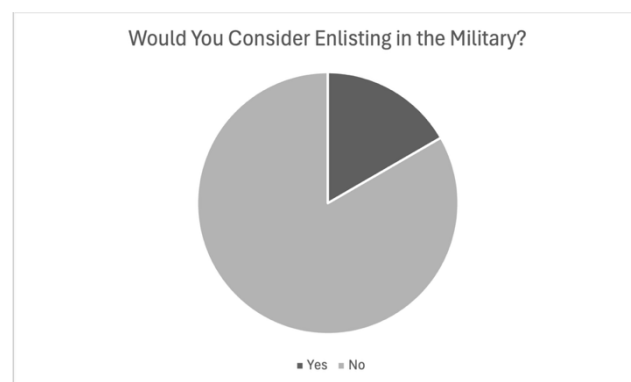


Figure 1: Would You Consider Enlisting in the Military?

Out of all the students involved in the survey, 4 out of 10 (40%) demonstrated interest in joining the army either permanently or on Army Reserve basis, while 6 students (60%) expressed their refusal towards this opportunity. Those students who found military service attractive mentioned serving their country, gaining management skills and new experience as their motives for signing up. On the contrary, those students who chose not to join the military had different career plans, and they were worried about the risks of military service or did not find the military lifestyle appealing according to their personality. Teachers’ interest in joining the military is much lower. There were only 1 out of 6 teachers (17%) who expressed

the desire to serve in the army or army reserve, while 5 teachers (83%) did not have the desire to join (Figure 2). However, the justifications provided by teachers significantly differed from those of students. Many teachers indicated that their age, family situation and job position wouldn't allow them to serve. Nevertheless, teachers illustrate their respect towards the Australian Defence Force demonstrating that refusal to serve doesn't equal negative attitude towards the military.

The responses by Singaporean participants contrasted sharply because military service was not a matter of personal choice, but a necessity connected with national obligations. Cultural factors influence how service is perceived in Singapore; this is particularly evident when enlisting is seen as an inescapable part of growing up and reaching adulthood by every citizen. In conclusion, the Singaporean participants have a positive perception of the military, but they do not want to volunteer for military service. While Australian respondents see recruitment as a unique decision, influenced by personal motives, the Singaporean participants showed a clearer understanding that this phenomenon is a common responsibility. Ultimately, the data collected illustrates a clear majority of participants who would not consider voluntary enlistment regardless of the three-year cadet program and the compulsory Singaporean military involvement.

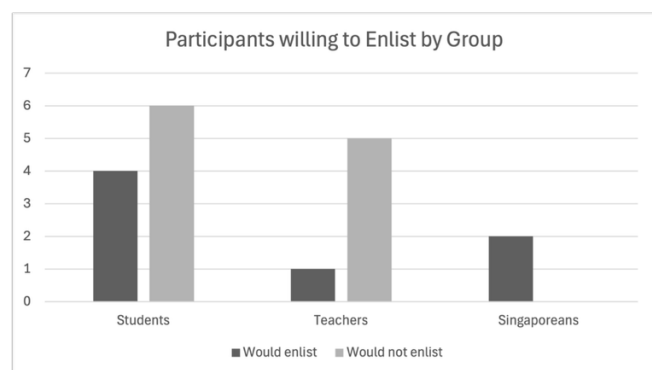


Figure 2: Participants Willing to Enlist by Group

4.1.5 'Do you believe that Australia should contemplate introducing conscription or any form of mandatory military service?':

The participants were questioned if compulsory military service should be implemented in Australia and were asked to justify their positions. Conscription was undoubtedly one of the most prominent topics that showed a great difference between the Australian and Singaporean participants. Out of the 16 Australian participants (10 students and 6 teachers), 15 (94%) were against conscription and only one (6%) student supported a limited time of military training, but not full service. Contrary to the Australians, all Singaporean participants (100%) agreed that National Service was necessary and did not consider it a violation of their personal freedom. Among student participants, 9 out of 10 (90%) were against conscription. The most widespread justifications included the importance of individual freedom, personal choice and the fact that people function better if they choose to serve. The only participant who showed a favourable attitude towards conscription suggested short-

term military training enhance discipline and readiness, but not a full-time military service. The participants in this group showed unanimous opposition to compulsory military service, as all 6 teachers (100%) were against mandatory enlistment. It seems that all of the 6-teacher participants think that the voluntary army is more effective in Australia since soldiers want to fight. Many of them mention democratic values of Australia and say that compulsory military service would be contrary to people's rights and freedom and thus would not receive public approval.

The participants from Singapore had quite a different opinion. They both accepted compulsory National Service and thought it was beneficial for national security, discipline, and social awareness. In contrast to the participants from Australia, they saw military service as civic duty that is essential to crafting national identity. Overall, attitudes on conscription are dependent on cultural background. 15 out of 18 participants (83%) opposed the idea of implementing compulsory military service in Australia, and three participants (17%) were in favor of conscription (Figure 3). The participants from Australia preferred voluntary defence force, while the Singaporean participants saw conscription as a necessary service to their country. These statistics suggest that it is not favourable to enforce conscription within countries with voluntary enlistment, whereas nations such as Singapore who currently have conscription see no reason to stop the program.

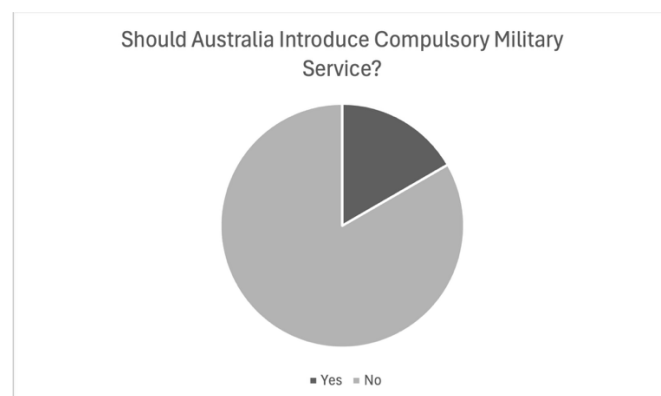


Figure 3: Should Australia Introduce Compulsory Military Service?

4.1.6 'Do you think your responses would be different if you didn't have any live military personnel in your family/had any live military personnel in your family?':

Participants were asked "Do you think your responses would be different if you didn't have any live military personnel in your family? Please explain." In general, from the reflection questions, the results revealed that the participants did not believe that their opinion would alter even if they had or did not have a military family member. Out of 18 participants, 14 participants or 78 percent stated that their opinions would not change, while four or 22 percent participants indicated that they would only make slight changes to their opinions if they had a military family member (provided that they previously did not have

one) or lacked the presence of one (provided that they previously did have one) (Figure 4). 70 percent of students still held the same opinion (Figure 5). Teachers were the most consistent group; 83 percent of them indicated that their responses would not change (Figure 5). This is likely due to their established knowledge and experience, which may cause them to be more confident in their opinion. All Singaporean participants (100 percent) stated that their opinions would not change (Figure 5). This suggests that participants believed that the presence of military family members had little effect on their responses.

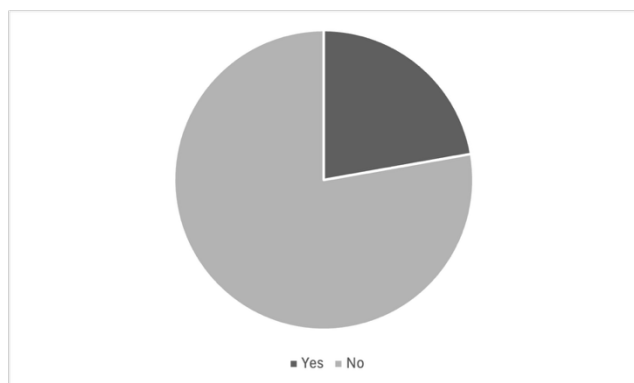


Figure 4: Whether Participants Thought Their Responses Would be Different if They Didn't Have Any Live Military Personnel in Their Family/Had Any Live Military Personnel in Their Family

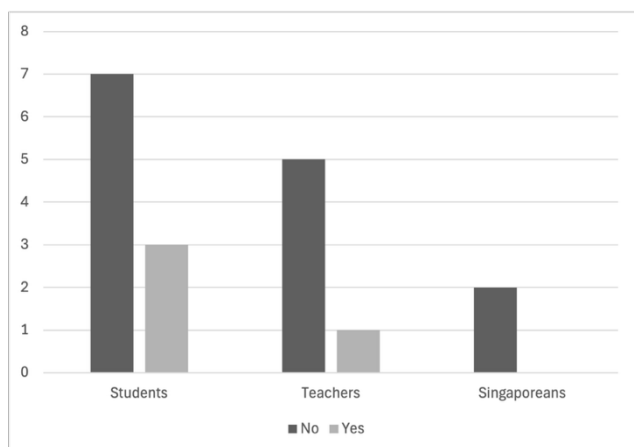


Figure 5: Whether Participants Groups Thought Their Responses Would be Different if They Didn't Have Any Live Military Personnel in Their Family/Had Any Live Military Personnel in Their Family

4. 2 Questions asked only to Singaporean Participants:

4.2.1 'Do you have positive, neutral, negative or a mix of attitudes towards mandatory military service?':

The results relating to attitudes towards mandatory military service revealed a mixed pattern between the two Singaporean participants, largely shaped by their proximity to the service itself. Participant 1, a senior commander currently serving as a reservist, reported that his attitude had shifted substantially over time. He explained that at 18 he considered the military "really necessary" due to the government narrative he had been raised on, but that with age and what he described as

"more critical thinking skills," his position moved toward the negative. He attributed this shift to a growing awareness of the financial cost of maintaining the military relative to its tangible benefit to the population. In contrast, Participant 2, who has not undergone national service herself, described a consistently positive outlook. She associated the two years of service with discipline, lifelong friendships, and a shared collective experience that she felt contributed to national identity and community cohesion. This divergence suggests that direct participation in mandatory service may correlate with a more critical or negative attitude, while those who benefit from the outcomes of the system without bearing its personal cost tend to view it more favourably. Both participants, however, acknowledged that national security and a sense of safety were central to the perceived value of the military, even as they diverged sharply on whether that value justified the personal and financial cost of maintaining it.

4.2.2 'If you had a choice, would you remove Singaporean mandatory military service or would you keep it?':

When asked whether they would remove or retain mandatory military service, the two participants again returned notably different responses despite both invoking practical, rather than purely ideological, reasoning. Participant 1 stated unequivocally that he would remove it entirely, arguing that the service functions less to protect the population and more to project an image of stability for foreign investors. He suggested that the perception of safety created by Singapore's military is "mostly for investors" rather than for civilians, and characterised the continued spending on defence as a poor use of resources compared to alternatives such as healthcare or education. One participant reached the opposite conclusion, but through a similarly pragmatic lens. She indicated that although she would ideally prefer a voluntary system, she recognised that Singapore's small population and limited natural resources meant that a voluntary model would likely fail to attract sufficient recruits, leaving the country under-prepared in an emergency. This suggests that even participants who arrive at opposing conclusions may be reasoning from a shared recognition of Singapore's structural vulnerabilities, differing chiefly in how much weight they place on individual cost versus collective preparedness.

4.2.3 'If you could make one modification to the mandatory military service in Singapore, what would it be and why?':

Regarding proposed modifications to the system, both participants favoured reform over abolition when asked to isolate a single change, though the nature of their proposed changes differed considerably. Participant 1 proposed shortening the length of service from two years to approximately six months, drawing a comparison with Taiwan, which he noted maintains a shorter service period despite facing what he considers a more immediate geopolitical threat than Singapore. He reasoned that if a

country in a more precarious security position could sustain a shorter training period, Singapore's two-year requirement was difficult to justify. Participant 2 instead proposed a change focused on welfare rather than duration, calling for stronger regulation and oversight of the physical and mental health support provided to servicemen. She referenced hearing of cases involving inadequate mental health safeguarding during training, and suggested that if mandatory service is to continue, greater institutional accountability should accompany it. This distinction indicates that while male participants with direct experience of service may prioritise structural changes to the system's scope or duration, participants without that lived experience may instead focus on the wellbeing of those undergoing it.

4.2.4 Overview of Singapore Specific Questions:

Taken together, these findings indicate that attitudes towards Singapore's mandatory military service are shaped less by abstract political values and more by direct personal exposure to its costs. The participant who had completed service and continued to serve as a reservist displayed a more critical, resource-focused perspective, whereas the participant without that experience displayed a more favourable, identity and community-focused perspective. Despite this divergence, both participants converged on the view that some form of reform, whether to duration or to institutional safeguarding, would improve the system, suggesting that even supportive attitudes towards national service in Singapore are not entirely uncritical.

4.3 Evaluation of Method:

The method that was used in this study primarily consisted of collecting qualitative data from interviews conducted on a wide range of age groups within the Ivanhoe Grammar School Plenty Campus community, as well as a select few Singaporean adults. As with any study, this study could benefit through repetition to reinforce its internal validity, ensuring that the relationship between how having a military family member influences an individual's perceptions of the military is thoroughly explored. Furthermore, the sample size for the study was quite limited, meaning that the data collected may not be reflective of the general Ivanhoe Grammar School Plenty Campus community. In future iterations or reproductions, this study would benefit from increasing its sample size. Another aspect that could be improved would be the number of questions asked to each individual. Because each individual was asked a relatively low number of questions, this meant that there was only a limited amount of qualitative data that could be collected for each individual. If there were more questions, more information could be interpreted and therefore would provide a more comprehensive overview of an individual's perceptions of the military. Finally, due to the nature of the method itself, responses from participants were often inconsistent in length and detail. This occasionally made interpreting results difficult as baselines for a standard response often

varied between questions and there were frequently huge variances in the depth of participant responses.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study investigated how the presence of a military family member influences an individual's perceptions of the military. Because the study was concentrated on a minority group within the Plenty Campus community, it may be possible for conclusions to be generalised to other minority groups, such as those who belong to a specific occupation. The study has found that although some beliefs remained the same regardless of the presence of a military family member, many responses and perceptions did ultimately differ. These results display that even without direct involvement with an organisation, an individual's perceptions of the organisation may be influenced and altered based on a relationship with a person that is directly involved. These findings suggest that relations between organisations and the public could be developed and improved through the endorsement of key individuals, such as ambassadors. This study primarily focussed on deepening the understanding of how military perceptions are influenced and changed by examining the role that a family member who has served in a military plays. Future studies are encouraged to repeat this study with altered questions. For example, a question could be about what improvements a participant believes could be made to an organisation. Furthermore, questions could be tailored to other government sectors such as the healthcare or education sector, to broaden the scope beyond just military perceptions. This could assist in contributing to a more ubiquitous understanding in how an individual's relationships affect their perceptions.

6. Acknowledgments:

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Japan's Unspoken Need: Creating a Low-Barrier and Gender-Inclusive Guideline for Menstrual Product Distribution in Japan's Evacuation Shelters

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Abstract

Japan, a country prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons, sees thousands of people evacuated every year. While such people face genuine hardship during these times, women in particular face added hardships in evacuation shelters during menstruation due to a lack of available sanitary products, unhygienic environments, and privacy issues. Female evacuees have reported using unsafe alternatives during menstruation, such as toilet paper or plastic bags, increasing the risk of infections like UTIs and creating long-term fertility issues. The problem is further exacerbated by the societal stigma around menstruation, which discourages aid requests and delays proper stockpiling.

The aim is to develop a national guideline for distributing menstrual products in Japan's evacuation shelters. There is a goal of also addressing gaps in implementation caused by limited public awareness of menstrual needs and insufficient prioritisation by policymakers. Through analyzing past government data and conducting interviews with survivors, companies, NGOs, and local governments, the plan is to create an effective and reliable framework that ensures safe menstrual health management during emergencies. The hope is for this framework to be applied globally in other areas facing the same problems.

Keywords

Menstrual care, evacuation shelter, gender-inclusive guidelines, societal stigma, national guideline

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Global Context

During humanitarian crises around the globe, adequate menstrual management within evacuation shelters continues to be extremely difficult. Problems such as resource scarcity, lack of infrastructure (e.g., clean and safe washrooms), and inadequate privacy have resulted in severe hygiene risks and psychological distress for female evacuees. For this paper, adequate menstrual care is defined not only as a hygienic condition, but also as a state of social and mental well-being that protects dignity, safety, and privacy. This includes regular access to menstrual products, appropriate washing facilities, safe disposal systems for used products, and accurate education on menstrual self-care.

Being unable to maintain menstrual hygiene often results in bloodstained clothing or prolonged use of menstrual products,

which increases the risk of rashes, toxic shock syndrome, urinary tract infections, and other diseases.[1] [2]Dignity, an inherent human right as defined by the United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is undermined as women must turn to unhygienic alternatives, such as reusing damp cloth and plastic bags, without being able to reach out for help due to shame and cultural taboos.[3]

Following heightened advocacy for fighting period poverty in the late 2010s, global awareness of menstrual health as a priority has seemingly increased. In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) formally recognized menstrual health as a global health and human rights priority, urging governments to take stronger cross-sector action, especially in humanitarian and disaster settings. [4] However, this has not yet been achieved in practice in Japan, where policy gaps and a lack of societal awareness make adequate menstrual care a necessary demand at evacuation shelters.

1.2 Japan

Japan is located at the boundaries of several tectonic plates within the Pacific orogenic belt, making it highly prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. As a result, national systems for stockpiling and distributing essential goods, particularly food and daily necessities, have been formally established and are generally operational, with additional backup systems in place for any shortcomings in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Despite this relatively stable stockpiling system for emergency goods compared to other nations, the provision of menstrual supplies is often deprioritized, and current methods of distribution are inadequate in supporting female survivors.

Despite menstruation being a natural biological process experienced by most women, it continues to be treated as taboo in Japanese society. This stigma has caused menstrual needs to be overlooked in daily life, where a lack of open discussion and understanding has led to inadequate support for women during their periods. This issue is particularly evident in Japan's evacuation shelters, where female evacuees have consistently reported high levels of physical and psychological distress. Menstruation-related hardships are often cited as a major source of distress during their time at evacuation shelters.

A study conducted by Oikawa and Tokiwa in 2022 on women who experienced shelter life during the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake found that 37% of all hardships they reported were related to menstruation, making it the most frequently cited category of distress. [5] Participants also reported difficulty obtaining sanitary pads because the shelter's management

leaders were exclusively men who lacked understanding of how menstrual products are used. The study suggests that ensuring an environment that preserves women's dignity during menstruation is a critical component of addressing women's health needs in evacuation shelters.

Therefore, this paper focuses on creating more gender-inclusive guidelines to improve women's menstruation experiences at evacuation shelters. Current research and guidelines rarely compare or analyze specific methods of distributing menstrual products directly to women, and there is a notable lack of comparative analysis that incorporates the gender differences in understanding these needs. By comparing evaluation data on four main methods of direct distribution, as well as taking gender differences and female dignity into consideration, this paper offers grounded improvements that existing guidelines must incorporate in order to achieve comfortable menstrual product distribution. The creation of guidelines that adequately encompass menstrual care will increase comfort and accessibility for women within shelters, to ensure dignity and hygiene for future disasters that will occur within Japan.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Identifying Possible Causes of Inadequate Care

Focus was placed on identifying possible causes of the discomfort women experience with menstruation in evacuation shelters. It was hypothesized that insufficient stockpiling and distribution of menstrual products caused the discomfort experienced. Additionally, it became apparent that the Japanese government has not clearly defined how many menstrual products should be stockpiled or distributed, or in what way.

Mr. Sakano, an employee of the Shibuya City Office for Disaster Prevention, and Mr. and Ms. Komachi, a couple living in Ishikawa Prefecture who managed an evacuation shelter after the Noto Peninsula Earthquake in 2024, assisted in the investigation of this hypothesis.

According to Mr. Sakano, the government shows a formula that local governments use when deciding how many sanitary pads to stockpile. Most local governments follow the disaster prevention manual issued by the government. Moreover, according to Mr. and Ms. Komachi, sanitary pads are included among relief supplies delivered to affected areas; menstrual products reach the evacuation shelters immediately.

Therefore, unlike many nations that face similar issues regarding inadequate and unhygienic menstrual care during emergencies, negative menstrual experiences in Japanese evacuation shelters are not primarily caused by a shortage of supplies. Japan has established stable supply lines for necessities due to its long history of natural disasters and recent domestic movements advocating for menstrual products as a necessity. Many local shelters across the nation currently cooperate with NGOs and menstrual product companies to stockpile products prior to disasters and have backup supplies prepared as well. Rather, the issue lay elsewhere.

While looking into other possible causes, the method of menstrual product distribution in evacuation shelters itself emerged as a potential problem. The psychological strain associated with requesting these can greatly intensify the discomfort experienced during menstruation.

Previous studies, including research by Oikawa and Tokiwa, recorded many cases where people struggled to receive the amount of pads they needed before proper supply systems were established.[5] The Japanese government has also recognized this issue.

Guidelines for Disaster Prevention and Reconstruction from a Gender-Equal Perspective (2013) states that when distributing daily necessities in evacuation shelters, menstrual products and underwear should be handed out by female staff or placed in women-only spaces or women's restrooms to make them easier to access.[6]

Similarly, *Guidelines for Disaster Prevention and Reconstruction from the Perspective of Gender Equality* (2020) notes that during the Great East Japan Earthquake, most shelter leaders were men, making it difficult for women to express their needs.[7] Even when menstrual products or underwear arrived, women often felt uncomfortable receiving them from male staff. The report again emphasizes the need to improve distribution methods, such as having female staff handle these items or placing them in women-only areas.

These findings show that the way menstrual products are distributed in Japanese evacuation shelters can significantly affect people's menstrual experiences. Being unable to ask for help or access proper menstrual products can undermine dignity and lead to the use of unhygienic alternatives.

Underreporting also prevents developments for a gender-inclusive disaster management system. Even if menstrual products are being sufficiently stockpiled in shelters, current guidelines are meaningless if they do not reach the hands of those who need them. Therefore, determining what distribution method would be most

accessible and outlining how such methods should be incorporated into future disaster guidelines is of utmost priority in bridging the gap between providing and receiving.

3.0 Problem Statement

3.1 Structural Problems

3.11 Deprioritisation of Menstrual Needs

One potential key cause for the deprioritization of female sanitary needs is the lack of women being involved in disaster-management planning, both on a governmental and local scale. A 2023 study by Japan's Cabinet Office revealed that over 60% of local government departments of emergency management have no women in them. In 2023, only 10.8% of national disaster reduction committee members were female. [8] This lack of representation in everyday policymaking has led to the avoidance and overlooking of female-specific needs due to many male policymakers being unaware of female needs and underestimating the disproportionate harm women face during times of disaster. This is exacerbated by the tendency to avoid menstrual discussions due to societal taboos. Guidelines should heavily encourage evacuation shelters to incorporate women into their staff, particularly in matters regarding menstrual care, so that improvements can be implemented. For instance, female waste disposal bins are often cleaned less because male staff are unaware of how quickly sanitary waste can pile up or feel reluctant to deal with "women's hygiene issues". Since female staff are not always available, there must be an emphasis on educating male staff as well. A comfortable, gender-inclusive environment can only be achieved through all people changing their thoughts and actions.

It is imperative to note that these structural issues, such as a lack of representation within decision-making roles, cannot be fixed merely via guidelines and considerations during disasters. A gender-inclusive approach in everyday life is incredibly crucial for long-term improvements to female safety, hygiene, and comfort. Understanding that women are affected differently by disasters compared to men is essential. Incorporating this knowledge into regular training, improving decision-making methods, and increasing the proportion of females in decision-making roles serve as crucial foundations for any smooth implementation of gender-inclusive responses during disasters.

3.12 Lack of Standardized Distribution Methods

A standardized distribution method has yet to be established in Japan, leading to significant variation in how menstrual products are provided across shelters. Distribution practices often depend on the personal decisions of staff members, resulting in inconsistent levels of privacy and comfort. While certain shelters have made efforts to incorporate women's needs into their management practices, many continue to distribute products in ways that may cause embarrassment. Consequently, the accessibility of comfortable distribution methods remains uneven and region-dependent. In areas where feminist or gender-inclusive activism is low, like Akita and Tottori Prefectures, menstrual needs and implications remain disregarded, making the human right of adequate menstrual care a matter of luck rather than stable reform. Rather than leaving it up to personal discretion, national guidelines must establish adequate guidelines to ensure hygiene and comfort for female evacuees.

3.13 Overreliance on Individual Preparedness

Additionally, many public guidelines encourage women to prepare menstrual products in emergency kits or carry them around on a daily basis. However, sole reliance on individual equipment is dangerous; the unpredictable nature of natural disasters means that many women do not have it on hand during evacuation. Although individual preparation is important, during a disaster, there will be an inevitable demand for menstrual products. Therefore, there is a need for a top-down approach that ensures accessible, safe, and dignity-preserving distribution.

3.2 Social and Cultural Barriers

In Japan, there has historically been a stigma around menstruation. Periods were historically viewed as impure, leading to restrictions such as prohibiting women from entering sacred areas or kitchens during their period. Although these practices are no longer enforced under the law, the perception of menstruation as "dirty" continues to influence social attitudes and hinders the development of menstrual care.

3.21 Modern Day Silence

A silent stigma persists around menstruation as it continues to be treated as an uncomfortable topic or just a 'woman's issue'. Despite the universality of menstruation, the fear of judgment and stigmatization makes many women feel embarrassed or

ashamed to talk about their menstrual needs. There is widespread female internalization of the idea that menstrual pain and discomfort are something to silently endure rather than address, and it is ingrained in them from a young age. From elementary school sex education, girls and boys are segregated so that girls can be discreetly taught about their periods. Even if boys are taught about menstruation, only biological facts are addressed, and realistic struggles such as cramps, headaches, mood swings, varying amounts of flow, and product differences are not portrayed. The lack of education regarding menstruation persists into adulthood, manifesting as inadequate policies and little open support for women during menstruation.

This silence becomes even more harmful in crisis settings such as evacuation shelters. Women frequently hesitate to request menstrual products or support, while male staff struggle to understand what appropriate care looks like. Workers have recalled not differentiating between types of pads when preparing supplies for distribution, although pads vary significantly depending on day, flow, and comfort needs. As a result, women may be forced to use products that do not match their situation - for example, heavy-flow pads on light days- leading to discomfort, fear of leakage, and unnecessary waste of limited supplies.

These social factors, deeply ingrained in societal stigma, contribute to a negative cycle of women not reporting their true needs, staff and policymakers not recognizing them, and the failure of the system to capture and provide meaningful support for menstrual challenges in shelters. Adequate menstrual care does not just mean hygiene; dignity and safety must also be ensured through guidelines that consider the societal barriers to receiving period products.

Another factor that at first glance seems unrelated to women's menstrual health is the lack of safety that makes women more prone to sexual violence during disasters. Many report that they refrain from going to the bathroom at night due to the fear of being assaulted. Lack of lighting around bathrooms and surrounding areas, overcrowded facilities, insufficient monitoring, and a lack of secure women's areas are all factors that contribute to danger and inadequate privacy. Being unable to access bathrooms at night can force women to resort to unhygienic alternatives, such as tissues and clothing, or the prolonged usage of used sanitary pads. Such conditions limit the ability to manage menstruation with dignity and are dangerous for health, highlighting the urgent need for disaster guidelines that explicitly address gender-sensitive facility design and privacy.

3.3 Policy Gaps

3.3.1 Current Guidelines

Multiple policy gaps are evident in current guidelines. The guidelines for analysis were narrowed to 4 prominent existing guidelines on evacuation shelter management, created and published by the Japanese cabinet and widely referenced across Japan.

①Guidelines for Ensuring Satisfactory Living Conditions at Shelters [9]

②Guidelines for Securing and Managing Toilets in Evacuation Shelters [10]

③Guidelines for evacuation shelter management and support for evacuees: Checklist [11]

④Women's perspectives for strengthening disaster response capabilities: Guidelines for disaster prevention and reconstruction from a gender equality perspective [7]

Upon analysing what these guidelines had in common regarding catering to women's needs, 7 elements were found to be shared by multiple guidelines regarding catering to women's hygiene.

Table 1: Presence or absence of elements in each guideline

	①	②	③	④
Stipulate distributing place and hand by women	○			○
Establish women-only space	○		○	
Install women's toilets more than men toilets	○		○	
Install toilets in a location that is easily accessible	○	○		
Install sanitary bins		○		
Improvements such as constant stockpiling of menstrual products in women's toilets or women-only spaces				○
Prepare a variety of menstrual products				○

Only Guideline ④, the gender-equality–focused guideline, addressed the disposal of menstrual products or the direct distribution of menstrual products to evacuees. Even then, the recommendations remained vague, stating that “consideration is required” without specifying procedures, responsible personnel, or minimum standards.

3.3.2 Lack of Instruction on Distribution

Although national guidelines mandate the provision of menstrual products, they do not specify how they should be distributed. As a result, many shelters place boxes of pads in high-visibility locations such as hallways, stages, or near reception desks. Although these methods can make menstrual products visible, accessibility is not achieved. The prospect of walking up to a public box of pads under the eyes of strangers creates enough embarrassment and anxiety to deter many women from taking them when necessary. Under current guidelines, women must choose between their needs and the fear of being seen taking pads.

3.3.3 Preparing Various Sanitary Pad Types

Additionally, guidelines do not address the need for multiple product types to be available. Most shelters stockpile multiple types of sanitary pads, but the staff in charge of placing them or delivering them to other shelters do not differentiate between the product types. Despite sanitary pad types varying significantly depending on day, flow, and comfort needs, guidelines only collectively refer to them as “sanitary pads” and do not stress the importance of properly arranging a variety. Many staff view sanitary pads as homogeneous and offer only one type on display at a time, despite having multiple in stock. As a result, women may be forced to use products that do not match their situation, such as heavy-flow pads on light days or light-flow pads on heavy days. These not only cause discomfort and fear of leakage but also constitute an unnecessary waste of limited supplies. Guidelines must differentiate between different types of sanitary pads to prevent this.

3.4 Disposal

Lastly, in most guidelines, no disposal guidance was observed. There was no guidance on how often bins should be emptied, where sanitary waste should be disposed of, or how to prevent odors or leaks. A stable sanitary waste disposal system must be integrated into the current waste disposal system to prevent the buildup of used products, discomfort, and unhygienic conditions.

The absence of clear guidelines regarding direct distribution to evacuees, privacy, and disposal has direct implications for

women’s health and safety during disasters. Policy gaps in the current national guideline make menstrual care practically inaccessible, despite seeming technically provided. These flaws must be urgently addressed in improved guidelines, as female dignity and hygiene continue to be undermined in every ongoing disaster.

4.0 Survey Methodology

4.1 Participants and Procedure

Data were collected using an anonymous online survey (Google Form) to evaluate the perception of menstrual care necessity and determine optimal menstrual product distribution methods using a grounded approach. Responses were gathered from 641 people living in Japan who are associated with our school, such as teachers, students, and their parents. Out of the participants, 484 (75.5%) were female, and 156 (23.5%) were male. The participants' ages ranged from their 10s to 60s. Questions were asked in Japanese and translated into English for this report.

4.2 Measures and Research Design

The survey utilized a mixed-method design divided into three key sections.

1. General Assessment:

All participants were given a list of potential necessities, including period products, and were asked to select items they considered were a “basic necessity” during disasters.

2. Female Cohort:

Female participants were asked to rate both their comfort level and their willingness to use different menstrual-product distribution methods in evacuation shelters, organized into three dimensions: method, amount, and place. The survey investigated 4 main methods:

Method ①: Being handed products directly by female staff.

Method ②: Being handed products by staff regardless of gender (male staff included).

Method ③: Self-pickup from a public supply (location of supply investigated separately).

Method ④: Receiving as part of a sanitary kit, which also contains wet tissues and other amenities

3. Male Cohort:

Male participants were evaluated on their operational awareness of menstrual health and disaster logistics using five factual statements. Each statement utilized a uniform 4-point descriptive measurement scale to capture their level of knowledge:

- Fully Aware
- Somewhat Aware
- Largely Unaware
- Completely Unaware

Additionally, the male cohort was polled on their estimation of daily female product usage, their support for free resource distribution, and their perceptions of what distribution framework would be most approachable for female evacuees.

5.0 Survey Results

5.1 General Assessment: Perception of Menstrual Products as an Emergency Necessity

Based on the data, men's awareness of menstrual products as a need is lower than that of women. A chi-squared test was conducted to examine whether gender was associated with the answers provided. The results showed that menstrual products had the largest gap (+29.4) in need perception, with 97.3% of women perceiving them as a basic necessity as opposed to 67.9% of men.

Table 2: Gender differences in disaster necessities

Item	Female Need Perception (%)	Male Need Perception (%)	Gap (%)
Menstrual products	97.3	67.9	+29.4
Water	100	100	±0
Disinfectants	82.4	78.2	+4.2
Blankets	94.6	91.7	+2.9
Underwear	86.4	66.7	+19.7
Tissues	90.3	77.6	+12.7
Food	99.4	100	-0.6

5.2 Female Cohort Results

5.2.1 Female Preferences for Distribution Methods:

Female participants were asked to evaluate the four potential distribution methods on a 5-point Likert scale, with one equaling "Would not want to use," and five equaling "Would want to use". The data revealed a strong preference for decentralized, low-interaction methods over direct handouts. M refers to the average preference score on the Likert scale. Methods are ordered from most preferred to least preferred.

Method ③: Self-pickup from a public supply; Evacuees independently retrieve products from a designated site. (M=4.55, most preferred method of distribution alongside Method ④)

Self-pickup from a public supply

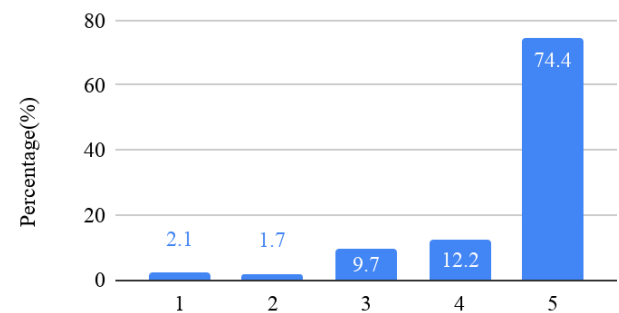


Figure 1: Percentage of Female Preference Level for Self-Pickup

Method ④: Receiving as part of a sanitary kit; Kits are distributed upon arrival and contain other basic amenities such as a toothbrush or wet tissues. (M=4.55, most preferred method of distribution alongside Method ③)

Receiving as part of a sanitary kit

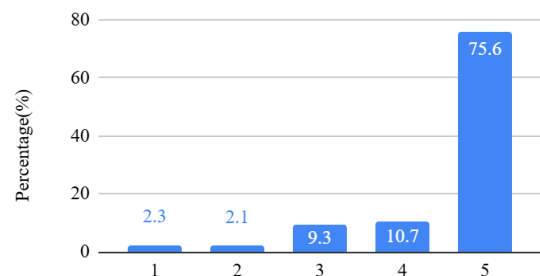


Figure 2: Percentage of Female Preference Level for "Receiving as Part of A Sanitary Kit"

Method ①: Being handed products directly by female staff. (M=4.41, Third most preferred method of distribution)

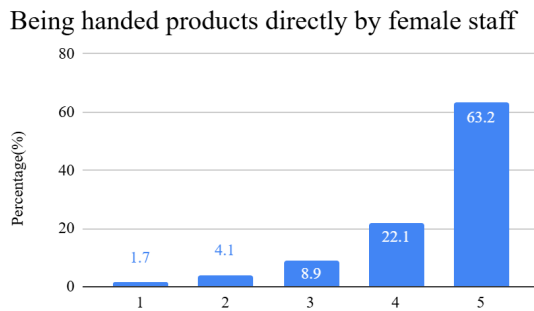


Figure 3: Percentage of Female Preference Level for “Being Handed Products Directly by Female Staff”

Method ②: Being handed products directly by staff, regardless of gender. This was placed as a separate option to Method ① to determine whether staff gender made a difference. (M=3.20, least preferred method of distribution)

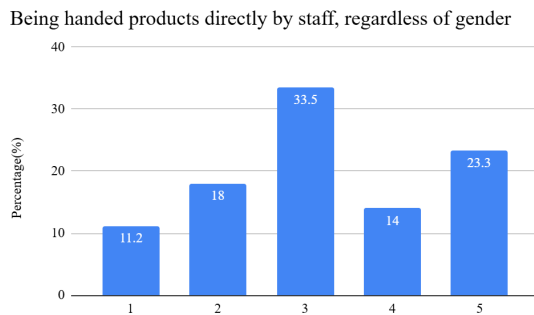


Figure 4: Percentage of Female Preference Level for “Being Handed Products Directly by Staff, Regardless of Gender”

Regarding volume, an overwhelming 99.4% of participants preferred receiving several sanitary pads at a time rather than a single item.

5.2.3 Spatial and Situational Barriers

Female participants were asked what hindered their ability to acquire menstrual items. When accessing menstrual care, the primary barrier cited was the physical presence of men around distribution points. Secondary barriers included confusion about where supplies were stored, fear of menstrual products running out, and general hygiene concerns regarding disposal. These concerns were also reflected in the open-ended responses. One participant wrote:

“I feel unsafe and uncomfortable in case there are men around who mistakenly perceive menstruation as something sexual.”

5.2.4 Preferred Distribution Locations

To mitigate the barriers identified in 5.2.3 and find the optimal location free from stigma, participants identified where they

would feel comfortable picking up menstrual products. Locations identified here are also the prioritized places for Method ③ (self-pickup). Participants were given multiple physical locations and could select multiple options.

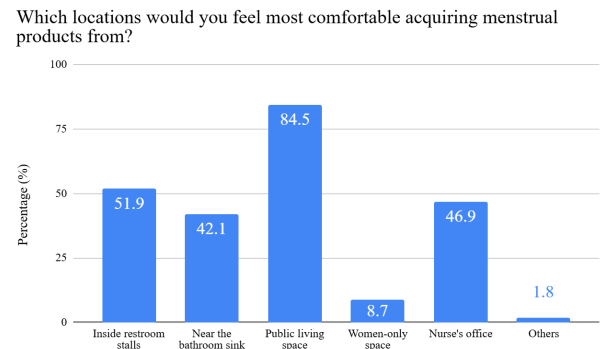


Figure 5: Percentage of Female Preferences for Various Locations Within A Shelter

Locations identified here are also the prioritized places for Method ③ (self-pickup). Participants were given multiple physical locations and could select multiple options.

- 84.5% of participants selected “women-only spaces”, such as bathrooms or changing stations
- 51.9% of participants selected the “inside the restroom stall.”
- 46.9% of participants selected the medical room/nurse’s office

5.2.5 Requirements for Comfort

Open-ended responses were gathered regarding what female participants thought was important regarding shelter comfort. Four critical requirements were revealed:

1. Proper Disposal Infrastructure

With 65 responses mentioning the need for proper disposal, a system for menstrual product disposal was one of the highest cited requirements. For example, one participant wrote, “It is important to maintain a hygienic environment. I imagine garbage collection will stop during a disaster. I think the place where used sanitary pads can be disposed of moderately is necessary because sanitary products can be smelly.”

2. Supply abundance and variety

51 participants expressed the need for a diverse inventory of menstrual products, including various types (daytime and nighttime) and items (disposable sanitary underwear, tampons)

3. Laundry and Clothing Contingencies

18 participants expressed anxiety regarding stained clothing, with requests for spare changes of clothes and functional washing facilities and washrooms.

4. Medical and Rest Spaces

15 participants proposed ideas similar to a permanent women-only space within the shelter, voicing the desire for a dedicated resting area for those experiencing menstruation-related illnesses. Some added that the creation of such an area would make them feel safer and ensure privacy.

5.3 Male Cohort Results

5.3.1 Baseline Knowledge and Awareness Gaps

The survey evaluated male participants' awareness of menstruation biology and the specific practical realities faced by women in crisis.

Statement ①:

Participants were tested on their awareness of the issue of inadequate menstrual care. The responses revealed a profound awareness gap; over half of the male participants (51.9%) reported a lack of awareness.

In evacuation shelters, there are women who face unhygienic conditions or experience discomfort because it is difficult to receive menstrual products (blood-absorbing items).

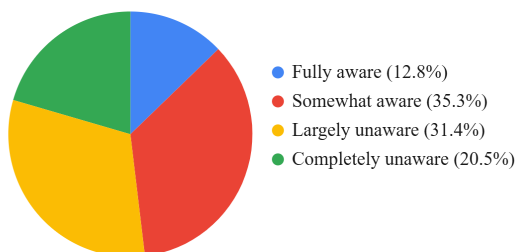


Figure 6: Percentage Pie Chart for Male Awareness of Inadequate Menstrual Care Within Shelters

Statement ② and ③:

When presented with basic biological facts, around 66.6% of participants reported awareness (combining “Fully Aware” and “Somewhat Aware”).

Menstruation is a natural bodily function that cannot be controlled (unless medication is used).

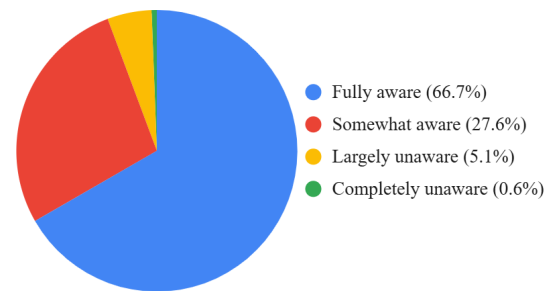


Figure 7: Percentage Pie Chart for Male Awareness of Menstruation as A Natural Bodily Function

The amount of menstrual flow and timing of menstruation vary from person to person.

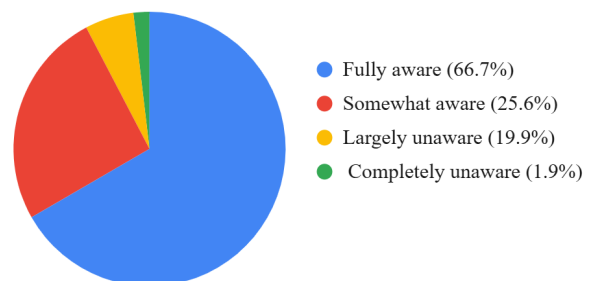


Figure 8: Percentage Pie Chart of Male Awareness on Menstruation Flow and Timing Varying from Person to Person

Statement ④:

When evaluated on their awareness of hygiene risks and the need for frequent maintenance, the proportion of men who reported awareness decreased to 55.1%.

Physiological and hygienic issues can arise if menstrual products are not changed frequently.

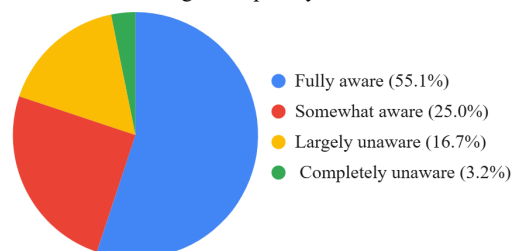


Figure 9: Percentage Pie Chart for Male Awareness on Hygiene Risks and Need for Maintenance

Statement ⑤:

Regarding knowledge of the fact that there are various types of menstrual products for varying uses, a total of 42.3% of participants reported lacking awareness, the highest proportion of unawareness discovered through all 5 statements.

There are several types of menstrual products, such as those designed specifically for daytime and nighttime use

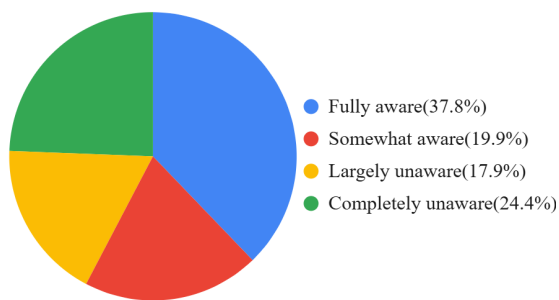


Figure 10: Percentage Pie Chart for Male Awareness of Varying Types of Menstrual Products

5.3.2 Daily Consumption Rate Estimates

When asked to estimate daily product consumption, 35.3% admitted they did not know, and 5.8% underestimated the total at “1 or 2 pads.” In total, 41.1% of male participants demonstrated insufficient operational knowledge regarding daily usage rates.

How many sanitary pads do women use per day during their period?

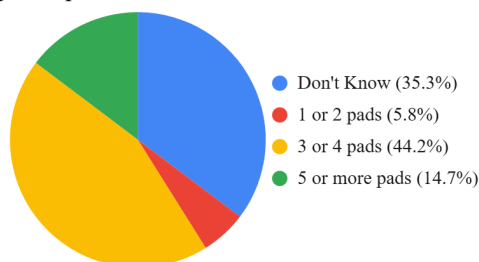


Figure 11: Percentage Pie Chart for Male Awareness on The Number of Sanitary Pads Used Per Day During Menstruation

5.3.3 Male Perception on Necessity and Distribution

When asked if menstrual products should be provided for free as basic life necessities, 79.5% of participants chose “Agree”, and 14.1% chose “Slightly agree”. The main reasons for opposition were the cost of buying and supplying products and the perception that menstrual products were of lower priority compared to food, water, and blankets. Moreover, when asked to rate their resistance toward public-space distribution of menstrual products on a 5-point Likert scale (one equalling “No resistance” and five equalling “Feel great resistance”), the average resistance rating was 1.61. It is important to note that these results are self-reported and may not be fully accurate due to bias.

On the other hand, when asked if they felt the need for improvements in menstrual care, 87.1% expressed agreement, and many cited that menstrual products are physiologically necessary for women, especially in shelters during times of crisis and stress.

Menstrual products should be provided for free within evacuation shelters.

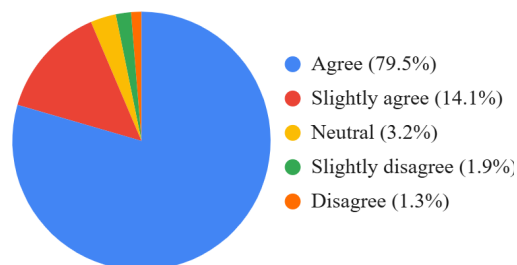


Figure 12: Percentage Pie Chart for Male Agreement on Menstrual Products Being Provided for Free Within Evacuation Shelters

Finally, regarding optimal logistics, 72.4% of male participants estimated that women would consider distribution within women-only spaces to be the most accessible method.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Preferred Method of Distribution

The tie between Method ③ (Self-pickup) and Method ④ (Kits) as the top preferences implies that the ideal distribution system requires zero verbal interaction. Handing out products directly in a way that requires human interaction, even when staffed by females (Method ①), introduces a social cost that evacuees prefer to avoid. Therefore, shelters must prioritise passive distribution, such as pre-stocking restroom stalls or embedding items directly into standard entry kits.

However, despite being ranked third, Method ① (directly receiving from female staff) still has high preference rates. Japanese women do not feel strong resistance when asking staff of the same gender, so shelters concerned about unnecessary hoarding or misuse of products may still opt for female-staff-based distribution. Guidelines must prioritize these methods and avoid those containing the identified social barriers of male presence or hygiene concerns, such as hand-to-hand distribution from male staff or placing products in open public areas.

Self-pickup from a public supply is suitable when menstrual products can be distributed enough because it makes the management burden light and gives women a sense of security that they can pick up day or night. Distribution through kits reduces embarrassment because it is distributed to everyone

and requires less management. However, if kept in storage for too long, the products within the kits may expire, so shelters should keep track of shelf life. Providing multiple pads at once is preferable. However, some men lack practical knowledge of the amount of menstrual products, so information should be provided.

6.2 Feedback

Upon evaluating the four methods through the survey results and further analysis, the results were incorporated into a draft guideline that was sent to several organizations that offered feedback and improvements.

- Kawasaki City Office for Disaster Prevention [12]
- Shibuya City Office for Disaster Prevention [13]
- Training Center for Gender & Disaster Risk Reduction [14]
- Mrs. Fujiko Komachi, a survivor of the Noto Peninsula Earthquake

According to the Shibuya City Office, being handed products directly by staff could be difficult due to staff shortages. Moreover, when it comes to kits, there may be a problem of postmenopausal women unnecessarily receiving menstrual products when resources are limited. However, women affected by the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake who received kits in the shelter voiced that kits can be beneficial to all ages and genders, as menstrual products can be used as a substitute for absorbent pads for urinary leakage.

In the survey, there was a high preference for Menstrual products to be distributed in women-only spaces or restroom stalls. However, the Shibuya city office stated that it is difficult to secure women-only space while efforts are being made to provide additional space for evacuees, especially in areas with large numbers of evacuees, such as Tokyo. On the other hand, many existing guidelines mention setting up changing rooms separated by gender, so they should be used as women-only spaces. Moreover, because many men also supported distributing in women-only spaces, societal barriers for implementation are low.

6.3 Consciousness Related to Distribution

Since many women feel uncomfortable receiving menstrual products in front of men, it is desirable to distribute them in women-only spaces or restroom stalls. Confusion over where the menstrual products were available and being distributed was also a primary concern found from the survey, and shelters must clearly mark distribution points. Many women were also concerned about the supply of menstrual products running out. Therefore, it is important to make people aware

that an adequate supply is available. These measures can help reduce anxiety about potential shortages and prevent people from taking more products than they actually need.

Few men were found to have practical knowledge of menstruation, particularly regarding the use and management of menstrual products. There is also a substantial gender gap in how men and women perceive menstrual products as essential items (Section 5.1). To address this, the guideline should include basic, practical information on menstruation and menstrual products. This content will be especially important for male staff responsible for operating the shelters, ensuring they can provide appropriate support and maintain a dignified environment for all residents.

6.4 Other Menstrual Supplies

In the survey, many survey participants felt uncomfortable with the men handling sanitary bin disposal; the guideline should recommend that female staff manage disposal whenever possible to ensure hygienic and reassuring handling.

Organizations working on disaster risk reduction and gender equality noted the need to support people who face additional challenges beyond menstruation. For example, systems should allow evacuees sheltering at home to receive menstrual products when they collect food.

It is recommended to set up gender-neutral restrooms and put menstrual products there too, so that LGBTQ+ evacuees can access them without discomfort. Portable toilets within shelters can be repurposed as gender-neutral ones. Moreover, extra considerations must be made for those with physical disabilities or language barriers.

1. Basic Knowledge Shelter Staff Should Have

(1) Menstruation

- Menstruation is a natural, cyclical shedding of the uterine lining that typically occurs approximately once a month and cannot be controlled.*
- The heaviness of menstrual flow and the timing of periods for every cycle vary from person to person.
- Women attach sanitary napkins, a type of menstrual product, to the inside of their underwear to deal with their flow every month. Menstrual products are essential items used to absorb or catch menstrual blood to prevent staining clothing or furniture during a period.

(2) Menstrual products

- Menstrual products must be changed regularly. Failure to do so can lead to severe infections from bacterial growth or rashes.
 - There are various types of menstrual products. For example, daytime pads are relatively thin and designed for easy replacement, and nighttime pads are thicker and designed for longer use.
 - The amount of sanitary products used during a period varies from person to person, but on heavy flow days, one or two pads are usually not enough. A minimum of 3 to 5 pads per day is recommended. The usage time of a product is specified on the package.
- *Circumstances like stress, hormonal imbalances, or medical intervention can delay or pause menstruation

2. Recommended Actions for Shelter Management

(1) Stockpiling of Menstrual Products

- Stockpile a wide variety of menstrual products, such as daytime and overnight napkins, disposable period underwear, and tampons. Napkin types are not interchangeable.

(2) Facilities

Restrooms

- Install more women's restrooms than men's restrooms
- Install them in places that are easy to go to even at night
- Install sanitary bins to dispose used sanitary products (disposal bins are placed in restroom stalls. it is recommended that the bins have lids.)
- Install gender-neutral restrooms and place menstrual products.

Space Separated by Gender

- Changing rooms
- Restrooms
- ✕ Also, it is advisable to divide laundry rooms

(3) Operating Structure

- Women should be included in the management of evacuation shelters.

(4)Way to Distribute in Evacuation Centers

〈Menstrual products〉

A Self-pickup from a women-only area

B Being handed products directly by women staff

C Receiving as part of a sanitary kit, which also contains wet tissues and other amenities

※Guarantee the constant availability of diverse menstrual products, regardless of methods A and B.

〈Women's underwears〉

Female staff distribute underwear to evacuees who request them

Make it possible for home evacuees* to receive them as well

*People who remain in their homes during evacuation because their homes are safe

(5)Disposal Methods for Used Sanitary Products

- Disposal of used sanitary products which were thrown away in sanitary bins should be done by women. Shelter staff should determine manager and frequency considering the scale of shelter.
- Also, announce to shelter residents that used menstrual products in sanitary bins should be done by women.

(6) Things to Communicate in Evacuate Shelters

- Place and way to get menstrual products
- Having enough menstrual products
- Signs which indicate taking only what you need

※Also, please keep an eye on people who have intersectionality

8.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, disaster guidelines must incorporate a low-barrier and stigma-free approach to menstrual product distribution. Menstrual products should primarily be placed in easily accessible locations away from the public eye to minimize feelings of shame and embarrassment. In Japan, these feelings, combined with inadequate management and consideration, create barriers that prevent women from accessing menstrual products.

The proposed guidelines provide more concrete measures than previous disaster guidelines, such as placing menstrual products in women-only spaces, distributing them through female staff or volunteers, and including them in sanitary kits. Furthermore, they address women's potential needs that have often been overlooked in existing guidelines, including proper menstrual waste disposal and ensuring that evacuees are informed about the availability of an adequate supply of menstrual products.

The long-term goal is for the grounded, societal-focused guideline developed in this study to be incorporated into broader national disaster-management frameworks. However, no matter how good the guidelines, many key challenges like stigma can only be addressed through sustained education and long-term public engagement. Moreover, this guideline has the potential to be adapted for use in other contexts with similar needs. A gender-inclusive guideline that confronts stigma and fills current policy gaps is essential for creating safe and dignified evacuation shelters.

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Between acceptance and exclusion-principles of functioning and challenges in the contemporary adult community related to the Ukrainian minority in Poland.

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Keywords : minority, immigrants,, asylum, UKR status, Assistance Act

ABSTRACT

From the very beginning the arrival of Ukrainian refugees to Poland was connected with many controversies. The Ukrainian minority belongs to one of the most significant and dynamically developing minorities in Poland. People of Ukrainian nationality have inhabited our country for centuries. Their presence on Polish soil has a long and complicated history - dating back to the common heritage of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's dramatic events of the first half of the 20th century, and the resettlements and assimilation policies after World War II. The shared past, although marked by painful moments, is the foundation on which the contemporary relationship between Poles and Ukrainians is built. There are over 1.5 million Ukrainians in Poland. However, since 2022, the influx of war refugees from Ukraine has caused significant legal, social, and demographic changes. Difficulties have arisen in many areas, such as the economy, healthcare, housing, and the labor market.

Never before have we accepted such a large group of immigrants in such a short period of time. This required urgent legal regulations and openness on the side of Polish citizens. Although their situation is very dynamic, we will discuss the events of recent years, the perspectives of both sides, and the regulations and laws concerning refugees and national minorities in our country.

The paper will discuss the legal basis for the functioning of the adult part of the Ukrainian minority, both in the context of international law and national regulations as well as local politics in shaping social attitudes.

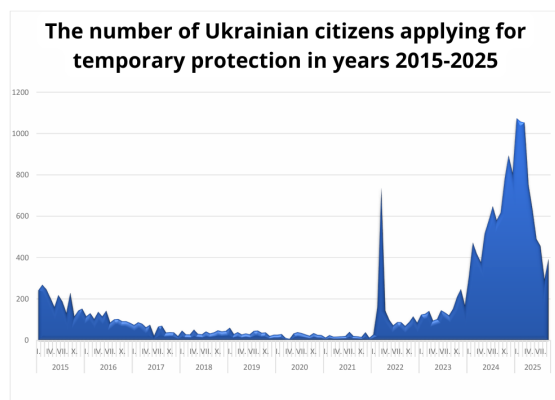
We will pay particular attention to differences in the perception of this minority in the context of the adult part of the society and the process of gradual transition from hospitality to community building. We will include examples of good practices – integration activities, joint projects, and intercultural cooperation (with particular emphasis on Rybnik and the Silesian Voivodeship) through the lens of organisations located mainly in our city.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary societies are characterized by increasing cultural and ethnic diversity, resulting from migration processes as well as political and economic changes. One of the most significant national minorities in Poland are Ukrainians, they play an important role in our country's social and demographic structure. In Poland, their presence has both historical and contemporary foundations, primarily connected with labor and educational migration.

Compared to other national and ethnic minorities in Poland, Ukrainians stand out mainly because of their large population and the dynamic changes in their demographic structure, being the largest group of immigrants in the country. In 2025 they made up

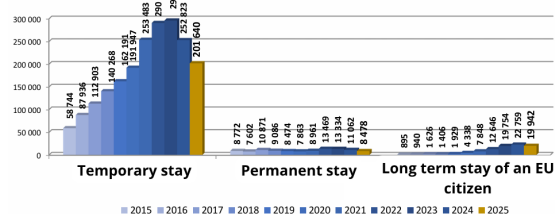
78% of all foreigners in Poland¹. Before 2022, the number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland was already high and steadily increasing; however, after the outbreak of the war, migration intensified dramatically. In 2025 there were 1,55 mln Ukrainians benefiting from a residence permit².



*UKRAINA_01102025.pdf

Nonetheless, the Ukrainian community in Poland is highly diverse, consisting of long-term migrants, temporary migrants, and war refugees.

Legitized stay of Ukrainian citizens - applications from years 2015 - 2025



*UKRAINA_01102025.pdf

An important aspect of their functioning in Poland involves various legal residence statuses, such as visas, work permits, residence permits, refugee status, and temporary protection, all of which determine their legal and social situation.

The analysis of the Ukrainian minority allows for a better understanding of the challenges related to integration, migration policy, and intercultural

relations. The case of Ukrainians demonstrates how geopolitical changes can influence the social structure of a state and the significance of national minorities.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Poland and Ukraine have shared a long and complex history marked by both conflict and cooperation. The history of relations between our nations reaches back to the 10th and 11th centuries. One of the first significant dates in our shared history is 1569, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was established under the Union of Lublin, uniting the territories of present-day Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia, and a substantial part of Ukraine. Its existence for more than 200 years played an important role in shaping the culture and religion of many Indo-European people.³ In 1772, the partitions of the Commonwealth took place, resulting in the disappearance of the Polish state, while its territories including Ukrainian lands were divided among the Russian Empire, Prussia, and the Habsburg Monarchy.

After a long struggle for independence, Poland reappeared on world maps only in 1918. However, the ongoing relationship between Poles and Ukrainians posed a significant challenge for the resurgent country⁴. Ukrainians wanted to regain the territories of then-Poland that had once belonged to them. In November 1918, an armed conflict over Eastern Galicia, an area located in present-day Ukraine, broke out and was ultimately won by Poland.

¹ <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/obywatele-ukrainy-w-polsc-e--raport-statystyczny> [last accessed: 31/05/2026 GOV]

² <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/obywatele-ukrainy-w-polsc-e--raport-statystyczny> [last accessed: 31/05/2026 GOV]

³ <https://zpe.gov.pl/a/rzeczpospolita-obojga-narodow/DYdm5PNSD> [last accessed: 31/05/2026 ZPE]

⁴ <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/teksty/69906.Polacy-w-walce-o-niepodleglosc-1914-1918.html> [last accessed: 31/05/2026 Mirosław Szumiło for Przystanek Historia]

In 1919, the Polish-Soviet War broke out. Soviet Russia sought to seize Polish territory, and some of these territories were taken over by Poles in an armed conflict with Ukraine. In 1921, the Treaty of Riga was signed, ending the Polish-Soviet War, establishing the border and incorporating territories inhabited by Ukrainians, such as Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (which included Lviv), into Poland. During the territorial changes, many people settled in areas incorporated into Poland, thereby becoming part of the Ukrainian minority.

The period of World War II was particularly significant in Polish-Ukrainian history. The bloody and brutal conflicts that took place in Eastern Europe at that time were deeply etched in the collective memory of both nations. After the war, the communist authorities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics commonly known as USSR took over influence in Eastern Europe. The border dispute continued, with Poles striving to rebuild their country, and Ukrainians seeking to establish their own independent state in territories that both nations considered their own. Ukrainians formed the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army. This was an anti-democratic and anti-communist organization that engaged in armed activity in the name of Ukrainian independence. One of its major operations involved opposing the forced displacement of Ukrainians from Polish territories initiated by the communist authorities. Their activities included blowing up railway stations and freeing detainees from repatriation centers. As a result of the "Vistula" operation carried out in 1947 by the then communist authorities, almost the entire Ukrainian minority living in south-eastern Poland was resettled to the territories of northern and western Poland, where its largest concentration is currently located⁵. After the war, communist parties alongside the USSR took over power in Eastern Europe.

⁵

<https://www.gov.pl/web/mniejszosci-narodowe-i-etniczne/ukraincy>
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Service of the Republic of Poland]

The fall of the "Iron Curtain" marked the end of the division of post-war Europe into the Eastern Bloc (all satellite states of the Soviet Union) and the Western Bloc, and the end of communist rule. The key moments of its collapse were the Autumn of Nations in 1989, the process of systemic transition. Ukraine declared independence in 1991. The post-independence period was characterized by the development of EU asylum and immigration policy, and for Poland it meant a time of new opportunities due to its accession to the European Union in 2004. In light of these changes, we became part of the EU migration control system, and the attitudes of Poles began to change to be more open towards foreigners⁶.

Initially, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine began as a hybrid war in 2014, the main objective of which was Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. The most important event that led to such a large influx of migrants from Ukraine to our country was the outbreak of the actual Ukrainian-Russian war and the beginning of the war in Donbas. It was not until 2021 that the conflict began to escalate, and in early 2022, it escalated into armed aggression by Russia in the form of an invasion. Shortly afterward, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared martial law in Ukraine. From that moment, many countries imposed sanctions on Russia and provided military support to Ukraine. However, these actions proved insufficient to stop the aggression. Since the first day of the full-scale invasion, millions of people have crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border seeking refuge. Some continued further west into Europe, some returned

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*file:///C:/Users/micha/Downloads/Ukrain%CC%81cy_na_polskim_rynku_pracy_PL.pdf
*<https://repozytorium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/37435/PDF/012.pdf>

[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Michał Kilijański for NKE]

*https://notatkizlekcji.pl/historia/za-zelazna-kurtyna.html#Historia_zelaznej_kurtyny

[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Notatkizlekcji.pl]

to Ukraine, but a considerable proportion remained in Poland.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF IMMIGRANTS IN POLAND

The Ukrainian-Russian war brought many negative consequences, both internally and internationally, including the situation in Poland. Ukraine suffered the most – cities, hundreds of thousands of residential buildings, educational institutions, monuments and hospitals were destroyed. Thousands of people lost their lives and the rest of them were forced to resettle to other countries, particularly women, children and elderly people, as men were conscripted into military service.

The demographic and social consequences were also very serious. Families broke up, some regions became depopulated, and the birth rate fell. The war reduced incomes and slowed down economic growth, limiting the share of domestic and foreign trade.

After the outbreak of the war, various organizations attempting to intervene lacked sufficient resources, partly because Ukraine is not a member state of certain international institutions. This occurred within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), whose purpose is to defend member states in the event of an attack on one of them and to take measures to prevent the spread of conflict. Member states that broadly engage in assistance are not obligated under the treaty, but rather through bilateral agreements with Ukraine. NATO does not possess the authority to establish refugee law concerning Ukrainians and instead focuses mainly on voluntary military support for the country.

Rights under the Temporary Protection Directive include the right to residence, access to the labor market and housing, medical assistance, and children's access to education. Anyone legally residing in the European Union also has the right to Legal regulations concerning Ukrainians are largely established by the European Union. Under European Union law, Ukrainian citizens are entitled

to temporary protection in any EU member state, which may be extended depending on the situation in Ukraine. The right to temporary protection is granted automatically upon a migrant's arrival in Poland or another European Union country. In order to benefit from this status, individuals must comply with the instructions of national authorities⁷ and demonstrate their eligibility for temporary protection on the basis of citizenship, international protection status or an equivalent form of protection, place of residence in Ukraine, or, where applicable, family ties or a basic bank account.⁸ Those enjoying temporary protection have the right to apply for international protection—asylum.⁹

As a result of the war, the rules of residence and employment of Ukrainian citizens in Poland were separated from other minorities. The citizens of Ukraine who came to Poland without Polish citizenship in the period from February 24, 2022, benefit from the specified legal acts. Immigrants must also have an active UKR status (legal residence status for Ukrainians) in the PESEL register, which is a valid identification number for individuals in Poland. Thanks to this agreement, each immigrant can work, run a business, receive social and family benefits, medical care, and education in schools.¹⁰

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https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-assistance-ukraine/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-your-rights-eu_pl
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, European Commission]

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https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-assistance-ukraine/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-your-rights-eu_pl
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, European Commission]

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https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-assistance-ukraine/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-your-rights-eu_pl
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, European Commission]

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<https://halasiwspolnicy.pl/praca-pobyt-ukraincow-w-polsce/>
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Tomasz Zaremba]

However, the departure of a Ukrainian citizen from the territory of the Republic of Poland for a period exceeding 30 days deprives him of the right to legal residence, the right to medical care, benefits and social assistance¹¹.

Like any insured citizens in Poland, Ukrainians are entitled to free healthcare under the National Health Fund, including primary healthcare and reimbursed medications (certain medications partially or fully financed by the National Health Fund). However, it should be noted that access to some healthcare services is subject to certain restrictions. Currently, the right to free healthcare is granted to beneficiaries of temporary protection who use a PESEL number with UKR status and meet specific criteria. Access to full healthcare services is also available to Ukrainian citizens in Poland who hold the aforementioned PESEL number with UKR status and hold a specific title, such as an employment contract or a contract of mandate. This can also be obtained through voluntary health insurance, provided, among other things, that they reside in Poland.

When the war in 2022 resulted in a mass inflow of refugees, Poland quickly took steps and began to help. The most important thing was state and legal support. The government introduced special regulations, the so-called "Assistance Act", which allowed Ukrainians legal stay after February 24, 2022, due to the war. As a result, their stay in Poland was considered legal until at least September 30, 2025 (and is still being extended), which enables them, among other things, to work and access public services¹².

Under the newly adopted law, Ukrainian citizens' stay in Poland should be considered legal if they entered Poland on or after February 24, 2022, and

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<https://halasiwspolnicy.pl/praca-pobyt-ukraincow-w-polsce/>

[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Tomasz Zaremba]

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<https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/od-1-lipca-br-zmiany-w-zasadach-pomocy-uchodzcom-wojennym-z-ukrainy>

[last accessed: 31/05/2026 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration]

declared their intention to stay in Poland. Under this law, any Ukrainian citizen who came to Poland from Ukraine due to military operations in that country could legally stay in Poland for 18 months, with the possibility of extending their stay to three years.¹³.

Thanks to the concluded laws, e.g. Article 22, paragraph 1. - [Registration of Ukrainian citizens as unemployed or seeking employment] Ukrainians could easily obtain employment under the same conditions as Poles, provided they had a PESEL number. Under this law, local government authorities were obligated to provide Ukrainian citizens with a wide range of assistance, including accommodation, full meals, free transportation between accommodations and medical facilities, personal hygiene products, and other supplies. Polish law created a special protection and integration system for Ukrainians, which is relatively broad and flexible in response to the exceptional circumstances of war.

UKRAINIAN MIGRATION TO POLAND AFTER 2022

The war continues to have a profound impact on the labor market, demographics, and social situation to this day. Poland accepted millions of refugees, which was the largest wave of migration since time immemorial. This posed a challenge to the education, healthcare, housing, labor, and social welfare systems. Initially, Poles had to support Ukrainians who refused to work. Over time, however, a significant portion of immigrants in Poland found employment, filling the gaps. One of the most important problems facing our country is the economy. Another key concern is our country's security. Poland increased its defense spending and strengthened its international position, including in NATO and the EU. Polish border protection and military presence also increased.

¹³

<https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-04-27/poland-parliament-adopts-new-law-to-regulate-influx-of-ukrainian-refugees-and-provide-them-with-protection-and-assistance/>

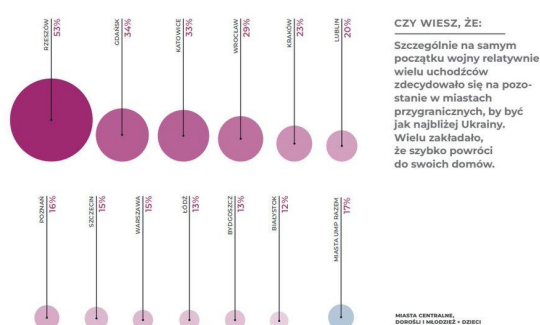
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Library of congress]

Ukrainians in Poland significantly support the economy, generating as much as 2.7% in 2024 GDP. Refugees quickly entered the job market, mainly occupying industry, logistics and services sectors. The number of people employed has increased, In 2024, 714,000 Ukrainian citizens were recorded as working in Poland. Thanks to improved specialization, the productivity of Polish companies and employees has also increased, which benefits public finances. Furthermore, refugees from Ukraine have a positive impact on consumption and generate additional demand.¹⁴

Ukrainian citizens constitute 3.8% of Poland's population. In 2024, Ukrainians formalised 3.9% of marriages concluded in Poland were 4.6% of students of Polish schools in the 2024/2025 school year and 3.7% of university students. In addition 4.7% of working people in 2024 are Ukrainian citizens¹⁵. Ukrainians are distributed very unevenly across Poland.

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O JAKI PROCENT WZROSŁA LICZBA MIESZKAŃCÓW MIASTA?



DIFFICULTIES AND STRUGGLES

Since 2022, the Ukrainian community has been forced to leave their country and seek help in other countries. Poland and other European countries

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<https://postpravda.info/pravda/raporty/ukraincy-w-polsce-pkb/>

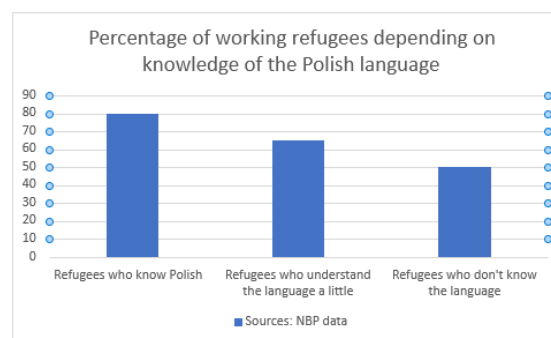
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Piotr Kaszuwara for Postpravda.info]

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<https://ukrainskidom.pl/gus-dashboard-o-obywatela-ch-ukrainy-w-polsce/?hl=pl-PL>

[last accessed: 31/05/2026,GUS]

have become the main destinations for Ukrainians, who have since struggled with difficulties related to finding jobs, housing, raising children, and medical issues. Refugees also share emotional difficulties, present in the daily adaptation challenges of both women and men. Ukrainians face numerous challenges on a daily basis, including feelings of loneliness, loss, uncertainty, lack of loved ones, concerns about providing them with decent living conditions in a new place, and the language barrier, which is a major obstacle in navigating the new reality¹⁶. In Poland, not knowing your native language limits your ability to communicate with employers and makes it difficult to perform many jobs, especially those requiring customer contact.



Finding a job often requires a career change, including work below one's qualifications, which may be less rewarding and less well-paid. This situation is particularly acute for those with advanced education and professional experience in Ukraine. Such individuals may encounter difficulties finding suitable employment that will allow for a continued professional career. Such groups of workers include accountants, doctors, and lawyers. Differences in legal systems, the need for diploma recognition, and the need to pass additional exams constitute barriers that limit professional integration.¹⁷

¹⁶ ki-florczak-from-the-university-of-wroclaw/

[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Ksenia Pletnova for IPM]

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<https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Uchodzczy-z-Ukrainy-.pdf>

[last accessed: 31/05/2026 Radosław Zyzik, Łukasz Baszczak, Iga Rozbicka, Michał Wielechowski for PIE]

Another common problem for Ukrainians is finding a place to live. A significant influx of Ukrainians at the same time resulted in rising rent prices and a housing shortage, especially in larger cities and regions with a developed labor market. In Poland, many people relied on private organizations or centers that provided assistance to those in need, but over time, the need arose to find a place of their own. The lack of a steady income, long-term employment, or an employment contract, combined with prejudice against the Ukrainian community, made Poles reluctant to rent their apartments to guests. In most cases, the problem stemmed from the landlords' requirements. These primarily involved demands for high security deposits, the aforementioned long-term contracts, or proof of income, which migrants are unable to provide. This means that even economically active individuals have had, and continue to have, difficulty finding any type of accommodation.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Already in previous years, a large number of Ukrainians came to Poland primarily for work purposes, because the Polish labor market had a high demand for workers, which favored migration of Ukrainians and their everyday contacts with Poles¹⁸.

In 2019, almost a million Ukrainians used temporary work permits in Poland, while before the war, over 1.3 million Ukrainian citizens lived here, mostly as workers, students or economic migrants.¹⁹

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<https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/regionalprofile/english-version-country-profiles/545413/ukrainian-migrants-in-poland/> [last accessed: 31/05/2026, Marta Jaroszewicz and Mateusz Krepa for BPB]

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<https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/regionalprofile/english-version-country-profiles/545413/ukrainian-migrants-in-poland/>

[last accessed: 31/05/2026, Marta Jaroszewicz and Mateusz Krepa for BPB]

This meant that many Polish families, entrepreneurs, and local communities knew Ukrainians even before 2022 and often helped them integrate into the labor market, into everyday life, and in learning the Polish language and culture. Poles often employed Ukrainians in companies, supported them with formalities, and facilitated neighborly contacts. Furthermore, organizations and initiatives supporting Ukrainian integration were established in many larger cities organizing cultural events, language courses, and job-finding assistance. Such activities were not centrally organized by the state, but stemmed from a grassroots need for cooperation and mutual assistance.

Poles also helped Ukrainians because many of them had personal migration experiences or were familiar with opinions from earlier conflicts, which built empathy and social solidarity with their eastern neighbors. Thanks to this, real contacts existed before the war, which later facilitated enormous social engagement and humanitarian aid.

After the outbreak of the war, Poland ranked first (relative to GDP) among all countries that provided aid to Ukraine. We donated the largest amount of heavy weaponry. Poland is also among the countries that—in absolute numbers—accepted the largest number of refugees.²⁰

In addition, Poles have provided individual assistance to Ukrainians. Research has shown that as many as 70–77% of Polish households have participated in helping Ukrainians (financially, materially, by providing housing, or by volunteering)²¹. Many Poles opened their homes

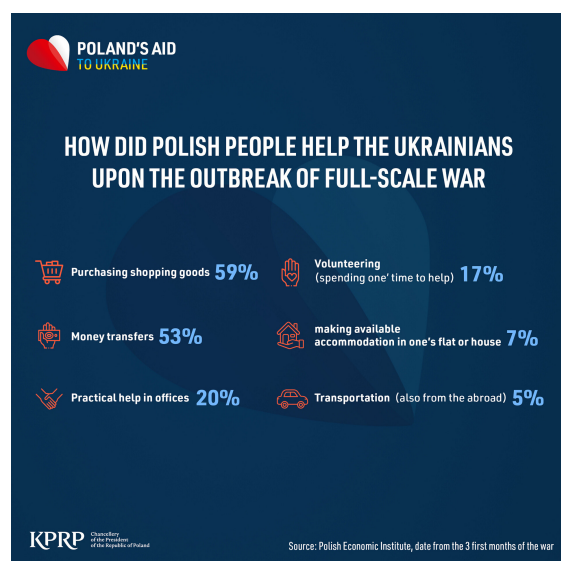
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<https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/andrzej-duda/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/polska-pomoc-dla-ukrainy-plen.93620> [last accessed: 31/05/2026, BIP Editorial Office]

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<https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/andrzej-duda/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/polska-pomoc-dla-ukrainy-plen.93620>

and apartments to arriving refugees, offering temporary shelter. Poles themselves donated billions of zlotys to help Ukrainians in the first months of the war through donations and purchases of essential products. Parcels with the most essential items were and continue to be sent to those suffering. Collections are being organized for example, the “Warmth from Poland for Kyiv” campaign, a fundraising campaign that collected PLN 7.6 million for 230 power generators for the bombed capital of Ukraine. Reception points were established in all voivodeships, offering assistance to those crossing the border. The points provided meals, rest areas, basic medical care, and information on the rules of residence in Poland, available forms of assistance, and the rules for legalizing stay in Poland. Twelve such points are still operational.²² Collections for those in need were also organized in our Silesian region, including by the Silesian Museum and the Museum in Bytom.



Support for accepting Ukrainian refugees into our country is unfortunately declining significantly. In

[ej-duda/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/polska-pomoc-dla-ukrainy-plen.93620](https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/polska-pomoc-dla-ukrainy-plen.93620)
[last accessed: 31/05/2026, BIP Editorial Office]

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<https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/andrzej-duda/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/polska-pomoc-dla-ukrainy-plen.93620>[last accessed: 31/05/2026, BIP Editorial Office]

March 2022, it reached 94% and remained around 80% for the following year, but in the spring of 2023 – amid reports of the so-called grain crisis – it began to decline. In October 2024, only 53% of Poles supported accepting Ukrainians into the country.²³ Polls published on January 7, 2026, by the CBOS polling center indicate that 8% of respondents supported accepting Ukrainian refugees, while 46% opposed. These are the worst results in the history of the survey, which began shortly after the annexation of Crimea, more than a decade ago.²⁴

CONCLUSION

The Ukrainian minority has been present on Polish soil since the dawn of time, but its significant inflow occurred after the escalation of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in 2022. These events led to numerous legal regulations, both from international organizations and Poland. Ukrainians faced numerous difficulties in finding jobs, housing, and accepting the events unfolding in their homeland.

No one can answer with certainty today when the conflict between Ukraine and Russia will end, or how long it will continue to impact the fate of its people and nation. The only thing that seems certain at this point is the belief that as long as the conflict persists, Poland will continue to provide aid to Ukraine, despite the fact that relations and perspectives differ.

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https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2024/K_099_24.PDF
[last accessed: 31/05/ 2026, CBOS]

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<https://notesfrompoland.com/2026/01/07/opposition-to-accepting-ukrainian-refugees-rises-to-highest-ever-level-in-poland/>
[last accessed: 31/05/ 2026, Daniel Tilles for NFP]

Between Shelter and a New Reality: Difficulties Faced by Ukrainian Children and Youth in Poland.

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Abstract

In 2022 the armed attack on Ukraine has forced thousands of children to leave their home country and begin life in a completely new reality. Poland has become a place of shelter for them, but also a space full of educational and social challenges. The sudden change of environment, language, and everyday living conditions has required children to adapt quickly to a situation they were not prepared for. In our work, we will show what changes and difficulties Ukrainian children have faced after arriving in Poland, how those experiences have influenced their everyday functioning and adaptation to a new environment. We will present the differences between the Polish and Ukrainian educational systems and healthcare, focusing on different rules of learning, communication, and the organization of public services. We will emphasize the challenges Ukrainian children are facing at schools, such as language barriers, different teaching methods, grading systems, and peer relationships. Special attention will be given to the process of learning the Polish language and to how language skills influence children's independence, sense of safety, and active participation in school life. We will discuss difficulties outside school, related to adapting to new social, cultural, and everyday norms. Our work will also focus on showing how the experience of war and forced migration may affect children's mental well-being, pointing out possible effects such as stress, adaptation difficulties, symptoms of trauma, and feelings of isolation, emphasizing that children can react to these experiences in different ways. We want to highlight the importance of stability, daily routines, and supportive relationships with the social environment in building children's resilience and supporting their adjustment to the new reality. Particular attention will be given to actions taken in the Silesian region, especially in the city of Rybnik. We will show how schools, specialists, and the local community can support Ukrainian children in the adaptation process to their new living conditions.

Introduction

On the 24th of February in 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, our neighbouring country, began. Poland offered

its help immediately, both humanitarian and intangible. In this paper we will focus on Ukrainian immigrants, especially children, who were often orphaned and traumatized, who came to Poland. We will contemplate statistics, challenges and obstacles in the form of system differences, psychological health problems and local means of support. We will mainly focus on the years from 2022 to 2024 and data collected in primary and secondary schools. In addition to the perspective of Ukrainian refugees included in the research, we will also present the perspective of Polish citizens, especially those living in our city, Rybnik.

1. Demographic and conceptual context

1.1 Conceptual categories and research definitions

The situation of Ukrainian children in Poland should be analyzed through the prism of their legal status. The first group are migrants from Ukraine - people who left the country voluntarily, often staying in Poland before the outbreak of the war. The second group are refugees, people who were forced to flee due to the threat to their lives, who arrived after February 24, 2022 and who benefit from temporary protection of foreigners [1] (Fig. 1). The basic indication of eligibility is the PESEL UKR number, which guarantees children access to educational and medical care on similar rules to those of Polish citizens [2]. Since the beginning of a full-scale war in 2022, over 28 million crossings of the Polish-Ukrainian border have been recorded. Approximately 43-90% of refugees were mothers and children in each wave of migration.

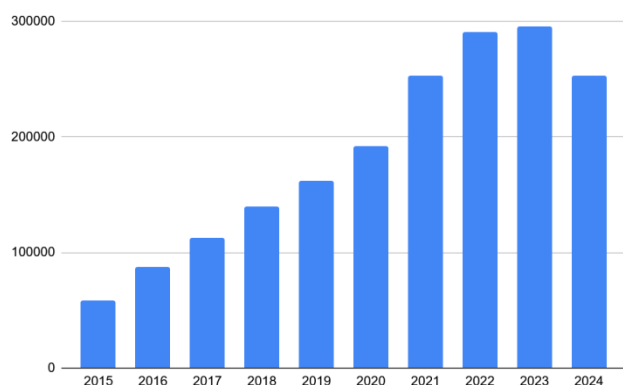


Fig. 1 Ukrainian citizens applying for temporary protection in Poland throughout the years

1.2 Scale of the occurrence - statistical data after the year 2022

After 2022, many Ukrainians were included in the Polish educational system. The scale of changes in the system is unprecedented. Ukrainian citizens constitute approximately 78% of all foreigners in the country, almost half of whom are children [3]. The largest number of Ukrainian children and youth who came to Poland after February 24. study in the: Masovian Voivodeship - 33.6 thousand, Silesian Voivodeship - 21 thousand and in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship - nearly 21 thousand. Among cities in which the most Ukrainian students study are: Warsaw - approx. 17.2 thousand, Wrocław - 8.5 thousand and in Kraków - 7.4 thousand [4].

Before the outbreak of the war, 4 million students studied in Polish schools [5]. It is estimated that after the outbreak the number of Ukrainian students in educational institutions in Poland increased by over 360% compared to children from Ukraine studying in Poland before February 2022. There are approximately 342,000 Ukrainian school-age children in Poland (including 292,000 with PESEL UKR), however, 156,000 remain outside the Polish system [6]. In 2023, more than half of Ukrainian refugee children were not enrolled in Polish schools [7]. About 173 thousand children attended primary and secondary schools, which constituted approximately 4% of all students in Poland [8]. It is worth adding that 83% of Ukrainian teenagers use online schools in parallel, and 30% of stationary students in Poland combine both systems [9]. According to data from the Educational Information System, in February 2023 it was as many as 187.9 thousand. children from Ukraine [10]. The introduction of compulsory schooling in September 2024 resulted in an increase in the number of students in the Polish educational system by 18,000 [11] (Fig. 2).

Currently over 85 thousand Polish classes have at least one student from Ukraine. Those numbers are constantly controlled and analyzed in the reports of MEN - the Ministry of National Education [12].

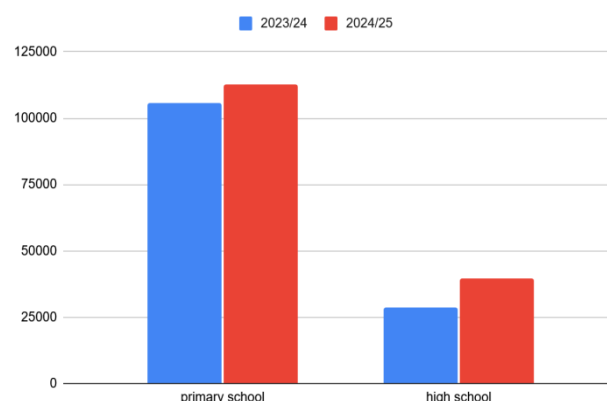


Fig. 2 Number of Ukrainian students in Polish schools

1.3 Specification of the situation of Ukrainian children in Poland

Ukrainian children are a group at increased risk of mental problems (post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, trauma), which is confirmed by data from the UNICEF article on the mental health crisis among the youngest [12]. As many as 73% of Ukrainian children feel anxiety, 53% feel sadness, and 43% struggle with mental disorders resulting from the war [13]. School plays a stabilizing and supportive role for them. Due to language and social barriers, the state allocated over PLN 7.8 billion for educational support, introducing, among others, intercultural assistants and opening new special classes for Ukrainians [14]. Many children grow up in single-parent families, some of their relatives stayed in their home country, some went to fight in the war, which makes it even more difficult to adapt and come to terms with the new reality [15].

2. Educational systems: Polish and Ukrainian - in a comparative perspective

2.1 Structure and functioning of the educational system in Ukraine

The educational obligation in Ukraine starts at the age of 6. Currently schooling there lasts 11 years and is carried out in three levels:

Primary education lasts 4 years from the age of 6 to 10 (class 1-4). All lessons are carried out by one teacher,

besides subjects like: physical education, foreign languages, the basics of information technology, art, music.

Lower secondary school (basic secondary education diploma), lasts 5 years (classes from 5 to 9), when Ukrainian students learn basic subjects such as foreign languages, mathematics, history, biology, geography, chemistry and physics, physical education, information technology and world literature, art, and the basics of health. In class 8 and 9 the students can begin learning subjects such as: biology, geography, I.T, mathematics, world literature, physics or chemistry on an extended level.

Higher secondary school (full secondary education diploma), lasts 2 years, in classes from 10 to 11, the students have a choice to continue learning subjects from previous classes on a basic level or an extended one.

Ukrainian students are assessed using the nationally applicable 12-grade grading system; grades from 1 to 3 mean a failing grade, and grade 12 is the highest, excellent grade. The school year starts at the beginning of September, usually on its first day, and ends at the end of May or the beginning of June. It is divided into two semesters - the end of the first semester and start of the second one is signaled by a winter and Christmas break lasting about 3 weeks throughout the country. In order for Ukrainian students to apply for higher education (University or College) in their country, they must possess a certificate of complete secondary education which they receive after graduating from higher secondary school. The recruitment process is based on the results of the Independent External Assessment - ZNO. It is a standardized test, required for all high school graduates wishing to apply to universities in Ukraine. The assessment is mandatory from two subjects: Ukrainian language and literature. Taking tests from other subjects depends on the field of study the student wishes to pursue. The examinee may choose no more than four additional subjects. [16]

2.2 Polish educational system

In the Polish educational system, education is compulsory from the age of 7. It lasts from 11 to 13 years depending on the selected secondary education mode:

Primary school, which lasts 8 years. During primary education students gain general knowledge from subjects such as languages, mathematics, geography, chemistry, physics, I.T, art, technology or physical education. At various stages of education, certain subjects are dropped and students start learning new ones, e.g. social studies or health education.

Before starting high school, students take an eight-grade exam from three basic subjects: Polish, mathematics and a modern language, which in most cases is English. Results

from the exam have an impact on which secondary school the student gets into.

Secondary school - depending on the chosen school and field of study, the students are mainly educated in its field;

- **general secondary school, 4 years;**

In the general secondary school the student obtains general knowledge along with extended knowledge of subjects they major in. It prepares the student for the Matura exam (although passing it is not mandatory) and provides for further education at higher institutions such as Universities.

- **technical school, 5 years;**

The student gains secondary and vocational education depending on the field of study they chose. It ends with a vocational exam, which is mandatory, and the Matura which is not obligatory.

- **vocational school, 1st degree, 3 years;**

It prepares the student to perform a specific profession and enables further education at a 2nd degree vocational school.

- **vocational school, 2nd degree, 2 years;**

It is for graduates from the 1st degree vocational school. It allows the student to receive a vocational diploma and take the Matura exam (Fig. 3).

Students in Poland are assessed in a 6-grade grading system, where grade 1 is a failing grade and grade 6 is excellent. Many schools also use a percentage system ranging from 1-100%.

The school year in Poland starts on the 1st of September or with the beginning of this month, and lasts until the first Friday after the 20th of June. It is divided into two semesters, which change is signaled by the winter break. Its start depends on the voivodeship and it lasts 2 weeks.

The document that allows students to apply for University in Poland is the Matura exam - it is a state, voluntary examination for secondary school graduates in Poland, summarizing their gained general knowledge. It allows the graduates to obtain a secondary school leaving certificate, necessary to undertake higher education. The test is obligatory from three main subjects: Polish, mathematics and modern foreign language, as well as from additional subjects selected by the student, most often the ones they majored in before. [17]

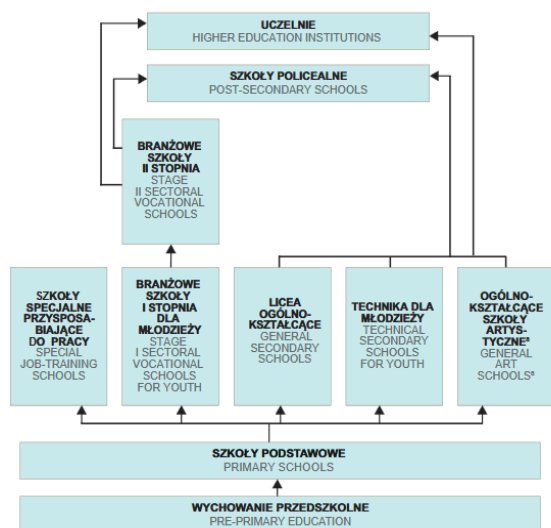


Fig. 3 Polish educational system

2.3 System differences as a source of adaptation difficulties

Teaching styles in Poland and Ukraine are similar to a significant degree, which results from their common educational heritage. However not in every aspect. Regardless of all the similarities, both systems are still different from each other, which may cause many challenges and problems for Ukrainian students in adapting to the new environment. The differences are noticeable in the approach of teachers, their relationships with the students, the grading system and the differentiation in working methods. The first remarkable difference is the stages of teaching, in Ukraine there are three types of schools - primary, lower secondary and higher secondary, and in Poland only two - primary and secondary. It is worth mentioning that Ukrainian children start their education at the age of 6 for usually 11 years, so until they are 17, in Poland there is a year difference: students start at the age of 7 and finish around 18 years old, depending on which type of secondary school they choose. This can be confusing for many Ukrainian students, because after arriving in Poland and starting their education again, they are usually assigned to younger classes which makes it difficult to also establish contact with their new classmates. The material covered and the pace of work in a given class in Poland and Ukraine are also different. Another obstacle might be the grading system: in Ukraine they have a scale from 1 to 12, and in Poland from 1 to 6.

For younger students attending primary school in Poland, the eighth grade exam might be a surprise. In Ukraine there are only final exams needed to receive a secondary education certificate - in Poland, the equivalent will be the Matura exam. However, students from both countries take these tests from different subjects. In Poland, the tests from

the Polish language, mathematics and a modern foreign language are all mandatory on the basic level. Students may also take tests from extended subjects they picked previously. In Ukraine, students are obliged to write and pass the tests from the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian literature; depending on the student's preferences, they may choose up to four additional subjects. In theory, the systems may differ slightly, but the approach of each student is individual and subjective. [18]

3. Adaptation barriers in the school environment

3.1 Language barrier as a key factor of exclusion

Language barriers are one of the main reasons why refugees feel uncomfortable and uncertain after arriving in a new country [19]. Ukrainian students who were forced to suddenly leave their country and change schools, universities due to the outbreak of the conflict, have a significant problem with communication. Because of this barrier they feel excluded in a new, school and peer environment.

Problems with communication with peers and teachers negatively affect not only their well-being, but also their approach to life and functioning in a completely new system. There is also a risk of communication problems between students and teachers and inaccurate understanding of the instructions, which makes it difficult for students to learn. Interpersonal relationships with peers also have a huge impact on their sense of exclusion from society [20].

However it should be mentioned that younger children learn languages or the system faster than teenagers and adults. Younger children in preschool and early primary school age have fewer problems with adapting to a new environment, while older children and teenagers have a bigger problem with it [21].

3.2 Educational difficulties and system differences

The education of Ukrainian youth after the outbreak of the conflict is not limited to attending Polish schools. About 83% of Ukrainian teenagers attend Ukrainian online school, and 31% study at home [22]. Some use both methods. It is worth mentioning that not all registered students actually study and attend classes. It largely depends on their parents and their approach to education. 20% of Ukrainian students have problems with listening carefully [23]. The limited availability of intercultural teaching assistants in schools to

support them is another factor related to concerns about enrolling or staying in school.

Ukrainian students have many difficulties related to education. A very sudden and unexpected change in the teaching system, differences in the curriculum and the pressure to catch up quickly have a negative impact on young people and their attitude towards continuing education. It should be mentioned that the educational systems of Poland and Ukraine, despite many overlapping elements, are still different. In Polish schools, the pace of work is different than in Ukraine, the core curriculum is slightly different from what Ukrainians learned in their previous schools. Both countries use different teaching methods, teachers also have different approaches. Difficulties in communication between teachers and Ukrainians students cause many struggles during learning. All those obstacles make Ukrainian youth discouraged from continuing their education in Polish schools.

3.3 Peer relationships and functioning in the school community

Establishing new peer relationships in the school environment is a particularly important element for Ukrainian students to feel comfortable. Unfortunately, not everything allows young people to establish such relationships: the language barrier, other interests that are often unknown to the other person, do not help in establishing new relationships.

According to the “Out of School” research carried out by the International Rescue Committee, approximately 20 to 25% of students are not satisfied with going to Polish schools and believe that they cannot rely on their peers [24]. What is interesting, older students more often believe that they can rely and seek help from their peers [25]. That means that they are more aware of the situation that occurred and more willing to ask for help despite, for example, the language barrier.

Students from younger grades spend more time with their peers - this proves that younger children and youth can adapt more quickly and easily to the new environment [26]. It is worth noting that Ukrainian teenagers who do not attend Polish schools struggle with an increased level of cultural and social isolation, which affects their psychosocial well-being [27]. This shows how important interpersonal contacts are in adolescence and when going through such a difficult time.

Polish schools and kindergartens tried to adapt to the situation as best as possible. When a student was admitted to school, it was first necessary to identify their school-related needs: learning the Polish language, motivation to learn, the need to compensate for program

differences, recognizing the differences in the functioning of the educational system in Poland [28]. Many preparatory units have been opened for this purpose. Ukrainian students were provided with additional classes to learn a new language. In some schools, intercultural assistants have been employed to help children and teenagers communicate and adapt faster, and to support teachers [29]. As a member of the EU, Poland, following the example of other countries, has adopted an integration model in the field of emigration policy, i.e. foreign children go to school together with children from the host country, and they are admitted to classes according to their age or attend lower classes [30]. Teachers try to make acclimatization as easy as possible and help students adapt to new responsibilities. In theory, the system differs slightly, but the approach of each child involved is individual and subjective. Psychological and pedagogical assistance was also available to all students and their parents. The outbreak of the war is a traumatic event that affects everyone differently, so such assistance was crucial to provide refugees from Ukraine with a sense of security and comfort in our country.

4. The experience of war as a factor that deepens difficulties

4.1 Subjective perception of war by children

How children understand war: differently than adults, more emotionally, often fragmentarily. For children war is a complete breakdown of the previously known, safe world. Children were brutally separated from their everyday activities - attending school, doing homework, playing, contact with peers. They have been separated from their routines, which are an essential part of development and maintaining balance in children's lives. They were forced to watch the fear and helplessness of adults in the face of the new reality. Adults whose strength was the foundation of their sense of security. Confronting the war, children witnessed noise, explosions and panic, but did not understand why those things became part of their everyday life [31]. At least one third of all Ukrainian children ended up in Russian-occupied territory, many of them came to Poland and it is here that they experience separation from their parents and other family members. The lack of sense of security, seeing the helplessness of authority figures, which for children are usually their parents, the unhealthy, new and chronic amount of stress in children, seeing people injured and panicking had a lasting impact on their psyche. Unfortunately, often also on their health and life. Among children, a fear of air raid alarms is observed, which causes fright and emotional fluctuations. 40% of the surveyed

children declare feeling a permanent state of fear. Another almost 40% of respondents, according to UNICEF research, study remotely or combine on-site and remote learning. This confirms the thesis about the negative impact of the war on the development, education and interpersonal contacts of Ukrainian students [32].

4.2 Psychological consequences of armed conflict in children

Forced migration is the movement of people who are forced to flee or leave their place of residence. Ukrainian children are the ones struggling with this situation. They experience unimaginable stress, separation from their families and the trauma associated with this occurrence [33]. Due to the constantly developing nervous system of children, the effects of war trauma are often more serious than in adults, often staying with them for the rest of their lives. The first years of a child's life actively influence its future, so caring for the peaceful and proper development of the youngest is extremely important. The war has robbed young Ukrainian citizens of their childhood, an environment that would support their growth, friends, families and places of residence. The war leaves unimaginable damage to the psyche of the children. People who were exposed to armed conflict in their childhood are at risk of mental disorders caused by traumatic experiences. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the most common mental disorders among war victims [34]. It is characterised by flashbacks, panic, fear of noise, nightmares and avoidance of conversations about the past. Children affected by PTSD urgently require mental health care. Other disorders that affect children include childhood depression, which often manifests itself as a lack of appetite, sleep problems and chronic sadness. War victims may also experience regression, as a result of which the children lose previously acquired skills, start sucking their thumbs again, wet the beds or, for example, have a lisp. Psychosomatic symptoms are also typical. Affected children suffer from chronic pain without a medical cause, e.g. severe headaches or abdominal pain. Aggression for trivial reasons is also typical for young trauma victims. A source of help for those children is to restore a sense of security and balance. Some children have also fallen victim to anxiety disorders, characterized by chronic crying, anxiety and panic attacks. The disorders listed above are not the only ones the victims suffer from. They are only some of the examples.

4.3 Factors affecting students mental well-being

Research carried out by Market Research World shows that every tenth student who started studying at a Polish school after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine felt so bad that they did not want to do anything. What is interesting, the mental well-being of children surveyed in this study improved based on where they lived. Children in cities declared a better mental health condition than children living in villages and small towns. The size of the place of residence also increases the social support index, which is an important element in improving the children's mental well-being. It is also worth noting that the average mental well-being index is the highest among students who declare willingness to stay in Poland. The positive financial situation of the family also has an impact on the welfare of children. UNICEF research shows the importance of children's closest environment [35]. Relationships with family and friends are extremely important to them. Language support programs also prove to be an important element of assistance. Thanks to them, children develop their language fluency, which facilitates their interpersonal contacts and education in Poland. It is worth promoting a positive attitude towards mental health services. This will provide mental help to many children who do not always understand the essence of this phenomenon. However some teenagers' negative opinions about services supporting mental health have a negative impact. Such opinions discourage other young people from seeking psychological help, which contributes to an increased sense of isolation.

5. Local conditions of integration: the example of Rybnik

5.1 The extent of the Ukrainian student population in Rybnik

In this section, we will focus on the city of Rybnik, located in the Silesian Voivodeship in southern Poland. This is the city where we come from and where we study. Currently, approximately 15,000 Ukrainians live in Rybnik [36]. As of September 30, 2022, there were 660 Ukrainian students enrolled in Rybnik's schools [37]. By the end of 2023, that number had risen to approximately 800 [38]. In addition to admitting children into existing classes, so-called preparatory classes were created (classes focused on preparing and integrating children into the new educational system) as well as separate Ukrainian classes in elementary schools, high schools, and technical schools. Teachers from Ukraine were also hired to assist the new students. In total,

approximately 6.5 million PLN was spent on this segment of assistance in 2022 [39].

5.2 Organization of education and support in schools

The arrival of the students was sudden and unexpected. The institutions were unprepared, especially given the challenges posed by language barriers, trauma, and family issues. In addition to helping them acclimate and adjust to a completely unfamiliar educational system, the children needed to be provided with additional remedial classes and Polish language lessons totaling 6 hours per week. Furthermore, at each school, students can access educational and psychological support provided by the school staff.

5.3 Integration programs and institutional support

Various programs supporting Ukrainian students were implemented in Rybnik, such as an EU-funded project aimed at reducing early school leaving and expanding access to education for Ukrainian students. This project ran from July 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023. In addition to ensuring students' access to education, additional support teachers were funded in three schools.

Currently, the "Friendly School" program is underway, running from 2025 to 2027 [40]. "The main goal of the Program is to support schools attended by students from Ukraine by creating conditions in which entire school communities feel safe, and children and youth can build friendly peer relationships and develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies." The activities aim to level the playing field for the education of children and youth, including by creating a safe atmosphere in schools.

5.4. Psychological and social support

Given the trauma and painful experiences refugees have endured, it is essential for the city to provide them with adequate support and assistance. There are many institutions and centers in Rybnik that assist and support children and their families. These include, among others: the Crisis Intervention and Psychotherapy Center in Rybnik [41], and the Archdiocesan Psychological Counseling Center "Przystan", Rybnik branch [42]. Additionally, meetings are organized periodically for volunteers and those providing shelter to refugees—that is, "free sessions led by specialists aimed at restoring emotional well-being and developing self-protection skills in the role of a helper." Psychological and educational support is also available in many public schools.

5.5 Challenges and best local practices

We continue to face a variety of challenges, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and helping children adjust to their new environment. However, we are trying to organise events and initiatives that uphold Ukrainian traditions, such as the play "Before and After," which took place on April 27, 2023. It describes the situation of Ukrainian society before and after the events of February 2022. The play features students and graduates of Kyiv universities. Ukrainian Culture Days are also organized annually, where residents can learn more about their eastern neighbors, participate in workshops or visit the food zone, and view local art. The Rybnik community remains engaged and open to projects and events.

One of the most interesting projects is the "28th District," established in 2018, which supports Ukrainians in Rybnik in every way possible. Initially, it was aimed at adults coming to Poland for work, but it quickly evolved into a place of ongoing assistance. From the outbreak of the war until the end of March 2022, as many as 6,500 people sought help. Staff worked 24-hour shifts to accommodate the massive waves of refugees, particularly by finding them places to sleep. Initially, it was the only such facility, and over time it became the most important one providing support for refugees in Rybnik. Once people were provided with basic living conditions, the association began offering language courses—for example, for doctors—and legal counseling, particularly regarding employment issues. The 28th District also assisted those who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Childcare on a larger scale began in 2021, initially in the form of fundraising, such as collecting pajamas, through programs like "Child-Friendly Space." Currently, it operates on a volunteer basis, with volunteers supporting this initiative pro bono. The Rybnik Women's Council and the Rybnik Youth City Council are also actively involved.

Summary

The war has directly affected Ukrainians and indirectly affected Poles. Many refugees have come to Poland, including Rybnik, where residents have supported Ukrainian children in many ways. At the same time, we are still seeking solutions to important challenges, especially the language barrier, adaptation to the Polish education system, and the need to preserve Ukrainian culture and traditions.

It is also important to consider parents' perspectives, which can sometimes be very different or extreme. As a country, we try to provide strong psychological support, remembering the scale of trauma and post-traumatic stress

many refugees may carry. It is hard to fully understand the tragedy they have experienced.

Alongside practical help, we remain open to local initiatives and events that promote Ukrainian culture and offer at least a small sense of safety and belonging. Although the situation still affects everyone, attitudes have gradually improved on both the Ukrainian and Polish sides. Peer relationships can bring many emotions, both positive and negative.

Despite difficulties and limited experience, we continue to help and adapt. Ukrainians have become an important part of today's Polish reality, and we value what they have brought to our lives.

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Investigation on the effectiveness of the systems Singapore has in place to prepare individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder for adulthood

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Summary

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition of varying severity with lifelong effects, characterised by challenges with social interaction and communication, as well as limited or repetitive patterns of thinking and behaviour. This report is mainly focused on how the different systems that the Singapore government has in place to accommodate individuals with ASD as they transition from childhood to adulthood. ASD support systems in Singapore help both children and adults. For example, the focus for children is on early intervention to provide additional accommodations as soon as possible, specialised education to accommodate the learning needs of those with ASD, and the promotion of inclusive school environments to make learning more accessible. As these children grow into adults, employment training and job placement are provided to help individuals become gainfully employed, and action is taken to create socially connected workplaces. This report will examine how these governmental systems personally impact individuals with ASD. Using both primary and secondary research methods, we hope to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current systems and how to mitigate the weaknesses.

Keywords

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Singapore, early intervention, transition planning, employment support

1. Introduction

In today's world, adults need to constantly communicate as they make decisions that affect how they live and what they do. They experience constant change in their environment, such as meeting new people or adapting to new habits. They also have to adhere to a social standard that expects them to be functional and to respect one another when expressing their opinions or managing challenges at work. However, people diagnosed with ASD might not be able to bear these social and mental challenges without much difficulty. According to Hodis et al. (2025), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition of varying severity with lifelong effects, characterised by challenges with social interaction and

communication, as well as limited or repetitive patterns of thinking and behaviour.

Though it varies with the individual, people with ASD often experience executive function difficulties. This includes issues with organising, attention, working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibition (Bennie, 2026). Since executive function is needed in many areas of everyday life for both children and adults, people diagnosed with ASD may find it difficult to complete tasks independently throughout childhood and into adulthood.

Therefore, we decided to research the effectiveness of the current support systems Singapore has in place for children while they are still in school, and how these systems help them adapt to adult responsibilities.

For the purpose of this research paper, we will be focusing on people with ASD with low to moderate support needs. Individuals with low support needs (Level 1) require support, while those with moderate support needs (Level 2) require substantial support (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). We will also focus on the workforce as the central aspect of adulthood.

To further research this specific sub-topic, we conducted an interview with an educator experienced in working with students diagnosed with ASD, who has been actively involved in supporting them and finding ways to optimize their learning. Additionally, we interviewed someone who was a registered psychologist, an approved Clinical Supervisor with the Singapore Register of Psychologists, and a member of the Singapore Psychological Society. Since beginning her career in 2011, she has gained extensive experience working with children and adolescents with developmental disorders and psychiatric conditions in both hospital and community settings. An important point highlighted by both interviewees was that each individual would require a different combination of support systems to meet their needs, which may be difficult to accommodate currently. This shows that there is a need for targeted support systems that help individuals with ASD develop the skills required to gain independence.

1.1 Challenges Individuals with Autism Face in The Workforce

The challenges that individuals with ASD face, such as difficulties in self-expression and self-regulation, continue to affect them even as they venture into adulthood and the workforce.

According to our educator interviewee, individuals with moderate support needs would require more support to express themselves adequately, often leading them to rely more on others to communicate or complete everyday tasks. When it comes to future employment, they may require additional guidance with workplace communication, interpreting social situations, and collaborating with colleagues.

Participants in a 2023 survey by Davies et al. reported repeated frustration with the focus on solely social skills during job interviews, even when the job objectively does not require them. Therefore, there will often be people who do not accept people with ASD in their work environment, disregarding the fact that they have different needs and have greater difficulty socialising compared to someone without ASD. Due to this, many individuals with ASD find themselves in social isolation, being ostracised from or rejected from many social circles and communities within their workplace, as soft skills are usually not honed well enough to aid them in adulthood.

Additionally, the majority of work environments often cause sensory overloads for individuals with ASD. Individuals with ASD are hypersensitive to excessive stimuli, such as light, noise, or movement (Escribá, 2022). This may affect their focus and well-being, and their work efficiency and output may decrease due to the non-accommodating environment.

2. Importance of Early Diagnosis and Intervention

Early diagnosis and intervention play a crucial role in improving the developmental outcomes of children as they grow older, because they help children with ASD develop essential soft and hard skills early. These skills form the foundation needed to succeed in Singapore's education system and to transition into adulthood, whether for further education or employment. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, "Research shows that early diagnosis of and interventions for autism are more likely to have major long-term positive effects on symptoms and later skills." (NICHD, n.d.) This is because a child's brain is still rapidly developing during the early years, making it much more responsive to therapies and support. Early intervention programs often include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavioural therapy, and family support, all of which help children develop communication, social, and daily living skills. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention also stated in 2024 that "Early intervention services can greatly improve the development of a child with ASD". These services enable children to build essential skills at a young age, increasing their independence while giving them more time to improve their readiness for school, adulthood and employment.

A similar point was raised by both of our interviewees, that early interventions play a very crucial role in helping children with ASD get the support they need early. Identifying ASD at a young age allows parents and educators to introduce appropriate support measures into their lives. At the same time, a child's brain is still highly adaptable to changes in their environment and lives. This enables them to become more independent in adulthood and better adapt to handling social situations, reducing their reliance on support services in the future.

The interviewees also pointed out that individuals with ASD often experience difficulties expressing their emotions verbally, and at times are unable to express themselves in ways that are not conventional and quickly understandable. Hence, they emphasised that early interventions and appropriate support are critical, otherwise it could lead to cases where children with ASD often express their frustration inappropriately. For example, meltdowns might be misinterpreted as intentional defiance and violence. This further leads to the mistreatment of those with ASD, from school to the workforce (Pinard, 2023).

They believe that early intervention and support systems will enable them to regulate their emotions more effectively and communicate more effectively before those emotional expression behaviours become deeply ingrained.

Despite the well-established benefits of early diagnosis and intervention, their effectiveness ultimately depends on whether children can access these services in a timely manner, and they can only be realised if individuals receive support in time. This raises questions about the accessibility and capacity of Singapore's current support systems.

3. Current Systems in Place in Singapore

3.1 Disability grants and financial support in Singapore

Singapore has introduced various schemes and subsidies to reduce the financial barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. For example, the Goh Chok Tong Enable Fund (GCTEF), administered by SG Enable, provides financial aid to support the education, aspirations, and disability-related needs of persons with disabilities. The fund works with schools, hospitals, and social service agencies to assist eligible individuals, helping to offset the costs of specialised education, assistive technology, and other essential support services.

3.2 Enabling Masterplan 2030

Singapore has also strengthened support for persons with disabilities through the Enabling Masterplan 2030, a roadmap aimed at building a more inclusive society. The plan strengthens school-to-work transition support by

improving vocational training, employment opportunities and lifelong learning programmes, enabling individuals with ASD to develop skills needed for greater independence. It also promotes collaboration between schools, employers and community organisations to ensure that individuals continue to receive support as they transition into adulthood. (Ministry of Social and Family Development [MSF], 2023)

3.3 Early Childhood Support in Singapore

Singapore has implemented numerous initiatives to support individuals with ASD from childhood through the workforce.

Children diagnosed with ASD have access to a range of early intervention services aimed at supporting their developmental needs. These include therapies such as occupational therapy and speech and language therapy, which help improve communication, social interaction, sensory regulation, motor skills, and activities of daily living.

For instance, parents can also apply their child with ASD to a programme known as the Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) ran by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) and SG Enable. This programme delivers educational intervention and therapies through a team of early intervention educators and health professionals, including speech and occupational therapists. Each child receives an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) that is specific to their developmental needs, while caregivers are also guided on strategies to reinforce learning and development at home. This programme is mainly for infants and toddlers aged 1 to 6 years, providing early intervention to better support them when they are still highly responsive to therapies.

3.4 Educational Journey Support in Singapore

In schools, systems such as the Structured Sensory Programme are also offered, as implemented by specialised schools dedicated to educating individuals with special educational needs, including ASD, such as APSN Katong School. It comprises sensory regulation sessions, sensory play lessons, and sensory breaks. These activities help students with autism manage sensory processing difficulties, improve self-regulation, and access the curriculum more effectively.

For example, according to St. Andrew's Autism Centre (n.d.), it has tailored curricula and smaller class sizes to further optimize learning and growth for individual students, with 2 teaching staff for about 6 students per class. They also provide vocational training in areas like food preparation, urban farming (Yeo, 2024), and office skills to hone work behaviours. These experiences are

meant to prepare students for future work and aid them in their adult lives. Another example is Pathlight School, which offers a programme known as the Vocational Track. This programme provides experiences and an environment in which they can utilise autism strategies and experiential learning to prepare and support the transition of existing Pathlight students. This curriculum focuses on areas such as IT skills, Daily Living Skills, General Vocational & Office Skills, and Vocational worksites. These all focus on equipping students with a skill set that will help them prepare for adulthood and its many aspects, such as the workplace, living, and communicating with others.

Our psychologist interviewee explained that in particular, she identified transition planning in SPED (Special Education) schools as playing an instrumental role in equipping students with ASD with the knowledge and skills needed to live, work and continue learning throughout their lives. This programme offers two pathways to cater to the differing needs, abilities and aspirations of students with ASD.

The first route involves SPED schools working with families to facilitate after-school transition planning for SPED students. By focusing on their strengths and talents, they will be able to thrive in any environment post-SPED.

Whereas for the second route (Vocational Certification), students are given a much longer runway, starting at age 21, to attain the proper certifications for their desired jobs. In this route, MOE works with the Ministry of Social and Family Development and SG Enable to provide adequate support and job opportunities for SPED graduates.

3.5 Transition to Workforce and Workforce Support in Singapore

Much like the Employment and Employability Centre, the Vocational Certification trains SPED students in areas where they show interest or particular talent. However, the Vocational Certification route allows students to learn the skills through different services and other forms of support. For example, students interested in pursuing a career in community services may take this route, which provides opportunities to participate in activities such as Day activity centres and Sheltered Workshops, equipping them with the experience to tackle similar challenges and activities in the future.

The Singapore government also supports individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through the Open Door Programme (ODP), administered by SG Enable and supported by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). The ODP encourages employers to hire and retain persons with disabilities by providing grants for job redesign, workplace modifications, training, and job support services. It also funds job coaches who help employees adapt to their roles and supports employers in creating more inclusive workplaces. By reducing barriers to

employment and providing both employees and employers with the necessary support, the ODP helps individuals with ASD gain meaningful employment, develop independence, and achieve long-term success in the workforce. (SG Enable, n.d.)

4. Analysis of The Effectiveness of Current Systems in Place

These systems most certainly help Special Education students gain life skills essential for living, working, and learning, preparing them for post-school life. Singapore has provided support to students with ASD, enabling them to progress to post-secondary education and gainful employment and making it easier for them with these systems to progress through life. They also assist them so they don't have to struggle as much to find employment, move on with their lives, and receive extra support.

Overall, these programmes have been effective in preparing individuals with ASD for life after school by equipping them with essential life and vocational skills. The high employment and job retention rates suggest that Singapore's transition support systems have successfully helped many individuals with ASD achieve greater independence and meaningful employment.

As a result of these programmes, 80% of participating SPED students secured employment after graduation, and 83% of those employed remained in their jobs for at least six months (Channel News Asia, 2016). This displays the effectiveness of the current systems in place, showing that in some areas, adequate support is being provided to individuals with ASD.

5. Limitations of The Systems Put in Place

However, there are still some obstacles that stand in the way of these programmes being able to adequately support individuals with ASD. Firstly, there is limited reach, where existing programmes are hard to access. Then, financial barriers naturally further make support inaccessible to less well-off families. And the last one we will address is limited adult support, which is why we have to improve systems to prepare individuals for adulthood in the first place.

5.1 Limited Reach

5.1.1 Limited Capacity

A major issue arises with individual systems, such as the Employment and Employability Centre. Since they are separated from main government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education, and considered their own sector

focused on industry training rather than formal education, their resources and reach are severely limited. While the Employability and Employment Centre (E2C) is highly effective in helping individuals with ASD find and retain employment, its capacity is limited. In 2022, E2C accepted 140 new beneficiaries, whereas autism affects around 1% of Singapore's population. This means that although E2C provides valuable support, it is only able to assist a small proportion of individuals with ASD who may require employment support.

Our interviewees also agreed that the existing support systems are insufficient to meet the growing demand. As one interviewee explained, there are "long waiting times for intervention programmes and therapy services." This makes it difficult for individuals with ASD, especially children, to receive the timely support they need, especially when early intervention is shown to be highly beneficial and important for individuals with ASD.

In addition, our interviewees highlighted that specialised schools have limited enrolment capacity due to low teacher-to-student ratios, which restricts access for many families. These findings are consistent with the government's recognition in the Enabling Masterplan 2030 that "demand for services continues to grow" (SG Enable). This suggests that current systems in place do not meet the needs of individuals with ASD.

5.1.2 Long Wait Times

Long wait times also prevent children with ASD from getting the support they need. Applying for support programmes in Singapore, such as EIPIC, involves wait times of up to 28 months (Thian & Ang, 2024). Though we average 7.5 months of waiting nationally, compared to other regions like Europe, this is not as efficient as we could be. In Europe, according to Ikhsan et al. (2025), most ASD support services could be accessed within about 6 months.

5.2 Financial Accessibility

The treatments and support systems required by individuals with ASD can create a significant financial burden for families, especially when there is limited capacity and when parents are being pushed to the private sector for support. According to our interviewees, therapy and consultation sessions for individuals with ASD can typically range from SGD\$140 to SGD\$250 per session. In addition to therapy costs, families may also need to pay for specialised education and school-related expenses as well travel fares. For example, although Pathlight School reduced its monthly school fees to SGD\$150 in 2023 to improve affordability, specialised education and other support services can still contribute to long-term financial costs (Autism Resource Centre (Singapore), 2023). As many individuals with ASD require continuous support, including

but not limited to occupational therapy, speech therapy, and behavioural interventions, these costs can accumulate significantly over time. This places considerable financial pressure on families, especially those from lower socio-economic statuses and those who require frequent sessions to support their child's development.

The financial burden is especially concerning because early intervention and continuous support are important in helping individuals with ASD develop essential communication, emotional regulation and independence skills. However, when families are unable to afford regular support programmes, they may have to reduce the frequency of sessions or even forgo certain forms of support entirely. This may limit the individual's ability to fully benefit from available support systems and affect their preparation for adulthood.

Although schools such as Pathlight have increased financial support for students, financial assistance was provided to only 36% of the student population in 2023 (Autism Resource Centre (Singapore), 2023). This indicates that a substantial proportion of families continue to bear the costs of specialised education alongside therapy and intervention services.

Unfortunately, existing financial assistance schemes may not fully eliminate the cost burden on families. Since ASD support often requires long-term intervention across different life stages, families may still need to bear significant out-of-pocket expenses even after subsidies are provided. Many financial assistance schemes in Singapore are means-tested, meaning the amount of support a family receives depends on factors such as household income and per capita household income (PCHI). As a result, families whose income slightly exceeds the eligibility threshold may receive reduced financial assistance or may not qualify for certain schemes, despite still facing substantial costs for therapy and intervention services. Furthermore, different schemes cover different types of support, meaning that not all therapies, specialised educational programmes, or intervention services are fully subsidised. Families may therefore need to pay for services that fall outside the scope of available funding. In addition, applying for financial assistance often requires families to submit supporting documents and undergo an assessment process, which may delay access to support. Consequently, some families may struggle to maintain consistent access to the interventions their child requires, potentially affecting the child's long-term development and progress.

This issue is important because many support systems in Singapore focus heavily on childhood and schooling, leaving some adults with ASD more reliant on their families after graduation. Without sufficient lifelong financial support, families may continue to shoulder the responsibility of arranging and funding support services even after individuals transition into adulthood.

5.3 Limited Adult Support in Singapore

Although Singapore has invested heavily in childhood support, comparatively less structured support is available for adults with ASD, creating a gap in long-term independence. This limitation is acknowledged in the Enabling Masterplan 2030, which emphasises the need to "strengthen support across different life stages" and "enhance support for caregivers."

Even though more has been invested in support systems during childhood, the effectiveness and reach of such programmes across individuals with moderate support needs is not high enough to sufficiently prepare individuals with ASD for adulthood and developing functional independence. According to the Autism Enabling Masterplan SG in 2023, the majority of individuals with ASD past the age of 21 still live in family homes and do not live independently, where they still require substantial support. However, in Sweden, there are national support programmes for independent living, such as the LSS housing legislation (Service and Support for Certain Functionally Impaired Persons), which enables individuals with ASD to live more independently through supported housing, personal assistance and community-based support services.

5.4 Dependence on Early Intervention

Ultimately, the effectiveness of Singapore's support programmes depends not only on their design but also on whether children can receive early intervention soon after developmental concerns are identified. This makes early diagnosis and intervention key to determining the long-term outcomes of support systems. Although Singapore has strengthened developmental screening through initiatives such as developmental surveillance in primary care and preschool settings, delays often occur after children are identified because of limited diagnostic and intervention capacity (Wong et al., 2025).

Mandating full psychological evaluations for preschool children with suspected ASD has increased demand for diagnostic services, resulting in long waiting times at public centres such as KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and National University Hospital (NUH) (Wong et al., 2025). Screening fails to translate into timely treatment (Wong et al., 2025). Consequently, early identification does not always translate into timely intervention, reducing long-term effectiveness of Singapore's current support systems.

In comparison, Sweden has strengthened both early identification and follow-up support. According to the University of Gothenburg (2025), paediatric nurses have received additional training to identify early signs of ASD, while children suspected of having ASD are referred promptly for specialist assessment and support. This highlights that improving early identification alone is

insufficient. Singapore must also expand intervention capacity to ensure children receive timely support after being identified.

6. Future Developments

To further strengthen its support systems and address the limitations of existing support systems for individuals with ASD and improve their quality of life, Singapore has announced upcoming initiatives. Under the Autism Enabling Masterplan and Enabling Masterplan 2030, there are plans to improve lifelong learning, employment readiness, and independent living through structured skills development and community-based support systems. These include structured education support in schools, vocational training and job coaching to prepare individuals for employment, as well as transition planning programmes that help individuals move from school-based learning into work and adult services. In addition, several other initiatives, such as inclusive environments, specialised training for professionals, and accessible public spaces, further enhance participation in society (SG Enable, 2022) and are planned for introduction.

Next, Singapore plans to include virtual reality training to simulate real-life situations and better prepare individuals with ASD for adulthood by enhancing their independence and social functioning in areas such as conversational skills, emotional recognition, and daily living tasks. These skills are essential for adulthood, particularly in workplaces and social settings where individuals are expected to communicate effectively and make decisions with less guidance than in childhood.

Moreover, according to the Ministry of Social and Family Development (2024), there are plans to add wearable technologies that provide individuals with ASD and caregivers with powerful real-time insights into emotional and physiological states. By using AI-driven facial recognition to detect others' emotions, the system provides on-screen cues that help individuals interpret social situations more independently, gradually reducing reliance on constant caregiver support. The AI-driven device enables social understanding and interactive games to practice facial expression recognition. This strengthens their ability to read and understand social cues, which is crucial when navigating and maintaining adult relationships in workplace or community settings. Some newer wearable systems go further by predicting meltdowns and emotional overloads through monitoring of heart rate, stress indicators, and movement patterns (MSF Development 2024).

Additionally, there are plans to add technologies such as AI-powered diagnostics that can track eye movements and gaze patterns, as well as speech, vocal tone, facial expressions, emotional responses, and repetitive and typical behaviours. These systems can be used in homes,

preschools and clinics, to enable earlier and more efficient identification of ASD. Earlier diagnosis may allow children to be referred for intervention services sooner, improving their chances of receiving the support during their primary years of development.

While these technologies may reduce diagnostic delays, improvements in the capacity and accessibility of intervention programmes and specialised services are still needed to ensure that children receive timely support after diagnosis. Early detection allows individuals to develop self-regulating skills, which are essential for managing stress and navigating adulthood, especially when help is less accessible. All in all, the upcoming systems can help individuals bridge the gap between childhood dependency and independence by providing a strong foundation for building essential life skills.

7. Recommendations

Based on the limitations identified in the current support systems, recommendations should focus on improving accessibility, expanding support capacity, and ensuring that individuals with ASD receive continuous support throughout their transition into adulthood. The following recommendations aim to address key challenges such as limited reach, gaps in early intervention access, and financial barriers faced by individuals with ASD and their families.

7.1 Further Reach

If programmes like those of the Employment and Employability Centre can be expanded and integrated with key government bodies such as the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and SG Enable their reach to individuals with ASD will significantly increase, enabling these individuals to receive more structured support and guidance in navigating adulthood. By making successful transition programmes more widely available across relevant organisations, more individuals with ASD can receive assistance in developing workplace skills, understanding employment expectations and adapting to adulthood responsibilities.

Moreover, in line with the Enabling Masterplan 2030's recommendation to strengthen support across different life stages, the government should invest more resources into support systems for adults with ASD, ensuring support is distributed more evenly across an individual's entire life rather than placing excessive pressure on childhood systems to fully prepare individuals for adulthood. Government agencies, together with employers, can support this by expanding community-based services and implementing workplace accommodations such as workplace mentors, job coaches, flexible communication methods, sensory-friendly workspaces and staff training on autism awareness. These

measures would allow individuals with ASD to participate more independently in society while reducing their reliance on family members for continuous support.

7.2 Improve Early Intervention

Singapore should strengthen early intervention systems by expanding the capacity and accessibility of intervention programmes to ensure individuals diagnosed with ASD can receive timely support. While early diagnosis allows individuals to be identified earlier, its effectiveness depends on the availability of appropriate intervention services soon after diagnosis.

To achieve this, more resources should be invested into expanding early intervention programmes, increasing the availability of trained professionals and reducing waiting times for access to support services. This would allow more children with ASD to receive support during critical years, when intervention has the greatest potential to improve developmental outcomes.

Furthermore, awareness of available intervention programmes should be improved among families to ensure individuals with ASD can be connected to suitable services as early as possible. By strengthening the accessibility and capacity of early intervention systems, Singapore can ensure that more meaningful and successful support is provided to prepare for adulthood.

7.3 Improve Financial Accessibility

Singapore should strengthen financial support systems for individuals with ASD and their families to ensure that access to necessary support services is not limited by financial ability. Therefore, the government should consider expanding subsidy coverage for long-term therapies, increasing financial assistance for specialised schools, and simplifying eligibility requirements so that more families can access support to ensure families can obtain support more consistently.

Additionally, simplifying application processes and increasing awareness of available financial support would allow more families to access assistance without facing unnecessary barriers. Greater financial assistance should also extend beyond childhood, as individuals with ASD may continue to require assistance in adulthood.

By improving financial accessibility, Singapore can ensure that individuals with ASD receive continuous support based on their developmental needs rather than their family's financial capacity. This would strengthen the effectiveness of existing ASD support systems and improve long-term outcomes as individuals transition into adulthood.

8. Conclusion

Overall, Singapore has established a wide range of comprehensive systems to support individuals with ASD as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Through early intervention programmes, specialised education, transition planning and much more, many individuals with ASD are equipped with skills to help them navigate the path to independence when transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Both our secondary and primary research indicate that these systems have been effective in improving educational and employment outcomes, as well as overall readiness for adulthood, for individuals with ASD.

However, findings also show that these systems are not without their fair share of flaws. Long waiting for intervention programmes, high therapy costs, and insufficient support beyond school years continue to prevent some individuals with ASD from accessing the support they require. Because many government programmes depend on early intervention, children who experience delays in diagnosis or access to services may begin their transition journey at a disadvantage. As demand for these services continues to increase, these challenges reduce the overall effectiveness and accessibility of the support systems in place. These findings suggest that while the systems themselves are effective, their overall impact is limited because demand for support exceeds the resources currently available. As a result, accessibility, rather than programme quality, becomes the main barrier to successful transition into adulthood.

Emerging technologies and initiatives have high potential to address these existing gaps in the support systems. AI technologies, such as virtual reality scenarios, can simulate much more realistic situations with lower manpower requirements, thereby greatly reducing support pricing and making support more accessible. However, technology alone cannot fully resolve the underlying challenges of limited capacity, financial barriers and unequal access to support services. Based on the evidence gathered, Singapore's current ASD support framework is effective in preparing many individuals with ASD for adulthood, but its overall impact remains limited when individuals who require support are unable to access these programmes consistently.

Therefore, Singapore's challenge is no longer simply developing effective support programmes but ensuring these programmes are accessible, sustainable and available throughout an individual's entire life. The effectiveness of support systems should be measured not only by the quality of the programmes they provide but also by whether every individual who requires assistance has an equal opportunity to benefit from them. Moving forward, continued investment in accessibility, lifelong support and inclusive environments will be invaluable efforts for ensuring that

individuals with ASD are able to achieve greater independence and fully enjoy adulthood.

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