



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

The Changing Nature of Asian Participation in Play, Active Recreation and Sport

Voices from the Community

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Executive Summary

The Changing Nature of Asian Participation in Play, Active Recreation and Sport: Voices from the Community

Introduction

This report draws upon focus groups with Asian New Zealanders living in Auckland to understand the perceptions, barriers and motivations relating to their own sport and physical activity participation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Key findings

- Asian New Zealand communities are highly diverse and their experiences of play, active recreation and sport vary significantly.
- Participants enjoyed a wide range of fitness and physical activities, and informal, recreational and competitive sports.
- Primary motives for participating include: 1) wellbeing, 2) physical health benefits, 3) social aspects, 4) being in nature, 5) family/community aspects.
- Key barriers to participation include: 1) cost, 2) transport (parking and traffic), 3) access and availability of facilities (particularly for recreational and informal sports), 4) competing priorities (family, work, community, school), 5) language, 6) accessible information about different sport and active recreation offerings in their communities, 7) social barriers (friends to participate with).
- The motivations, opportunities and barriers for Asian New Zealanders vary considerably based on age, gender, generation and language skills. Intersectionality is key for understanding such complexities.
- Family plays a key role in support or inhibiting participation.
- Unconscious bias, racist abuse and xenophobia impacts Asian communities' experiences of inclusion, belonging and wellbeing in sport and active recreation.
- Participants identified a number of actions that sports organisations and clubs could do to create more culturally inclusive and supportive environments: more Asian staff across all levels; listen and learn about cultural values and practices (i.e., food, language, events); address unconscious bias.

Background Context and Research Aims

In 2013, almost one in four individuals in Auckland were of Asian ethnicity.¹ Statistics New Zealand predicts that by 2043 the Asian population will make up 26 percent of the total New Zealand population, and 44 percent of the Auckland population.²

With this growing cultural diversity, sports organisations and fitness and active recreation providers have work to do to better understand and respond to the specific needs of this diverse and quickly changing community.

Previous research³⁻⁷ and conversations with various organisations (ActivAsian, Harbour Sport, Asia New Zealand Foundation) have identified the need for more research, investment and visibility of the needs, opportunities, barriers and experiences for the diverse Asian New Zealand community to participate in sport and active recreation in safe, supportive and inclusive environments⁸⁻¹².

In late 2022, Sport NZ commissioned Professor Thorpe, a sociologist of sport, gender and culture, from the University of Waikato, to lead a qualitative piece of work to complement their (ongoing) quantitative analysis. The objectives of this qualitative piece are understanding and answering the following questions:

- What are the experiences of Asian ethnic community groups when participating in physical activity in New Zealand?
- What are the perceptions, barriers and motivations relating to their own physical activity participation in New Zealand?

This report thus seeks to support Sport New Zealand's broader work for the wider sports sector by identifying the experiences of Asian ethnic community groups when participating in physical activity in New Zealand. In creating space for, listening to, and amplifying the voices of Asian New Zealanders, this report sheds new light on the perceptions, barriers and motivations relating to Asian New Zealanders physical activity participation.

Methods

In dialogue with Sport NZ, and with ethical approval from the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee, we adopted a strengths-based approach. Such an approach is important, given that much of the survey data and commentary across the sector highlight Asian New Zealanders' lower rates of participation in sport and active recreation.¹³⁻¹⁴ According to a Sport New Zealand report published in 2019 from survey data collected the previous year, "young and adult Asians have the lowest weekly participation and spend less time participating in fewer sports and activities".¹⁵

While surveys have consistently shown that Asian New Zealanders are among the least active groups in New Zealand society, the issue is complex, nuanced and multi-layered. Asian New Zealand communities are growing and evolving rapidly, and research and policy needs to be responsive to such changes.

Sampling approach

To gain insight into such complexities, we formed eight focus groups with already established (formal and informal) sport and/or fitness and community groups within the diverse Asian New Zealand community. Working within the timeframe, we focused specifically on Asian New Zealanders living in the super diverse city of Auckland, specifically targeting groups from North, South, East and West Auckland. This was a sampling strategy to capture some of the diversity of Asian communities across Auckland, but it was not the intention to present comparisons across these regions. Thus, locality does not feature in the analysis.

Our Advisory Group (consisting of key members of the Asian NZ community active in supporting and enabling sport, active recreation and play opportunities for the wider Asian community) was hugely helpful in identifying and inviting these groups to participate, and will hopefully be an asset for future work in this space. They championed the work among the community, and without this support we would not have been able to access such a diverse sample.

Focus groups

Sheryne Lok conducted all the focus group sessions and worked to create culturally respectful environments for participants to share their play, active recreation and sporting experiences. We worked to ensure diversity in sports, physical activities, gender, age and cultural/national backgrounds (see Figures 1 to 4).

The data gathering phase was due to take place in February 2023, but with the devastating floods in Auckland causing considerable social, emotional and financial stress among the community, it was important that we practiced utmost respect, patience, flexibility and care in organising the focus groups. Some delays were unavoidable, and some groups who had expressed an interest became unavailable after the floods. In such conditions, additional effort was made to host the focus groups in spaces that were comfortable, familiar and accessible to the group, and at times

that were suitable to participants. To create a supportive and safe environment for participants, focus groups were organised with participants of similar age (e.g., teen group; early 20s group), ethnicity (i.e., Japanese group), and/or sport/fitness programme.

Participants

Our final sample included 36 Asian New Zealanders currently living in Auckland, New Zealand; 67% female and 33% male (self-identified gender); between 16 and 73 years of age; from 12 different national and ethnic backgrounds: including Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, Fijian-Indian, Chinese Malaysian, Hong Kong Chinese, Chinese Indonesian, Taiwanese, Sri Lankan, and Indian. The Canadian and Fijian participants were both of Asian descent, but identified their original nationality in the demographic survey. Participants engaged in a wide array of sport, active recreation and physical play activities on a regular basis.

Figure 1. Ethnicity of Participants.

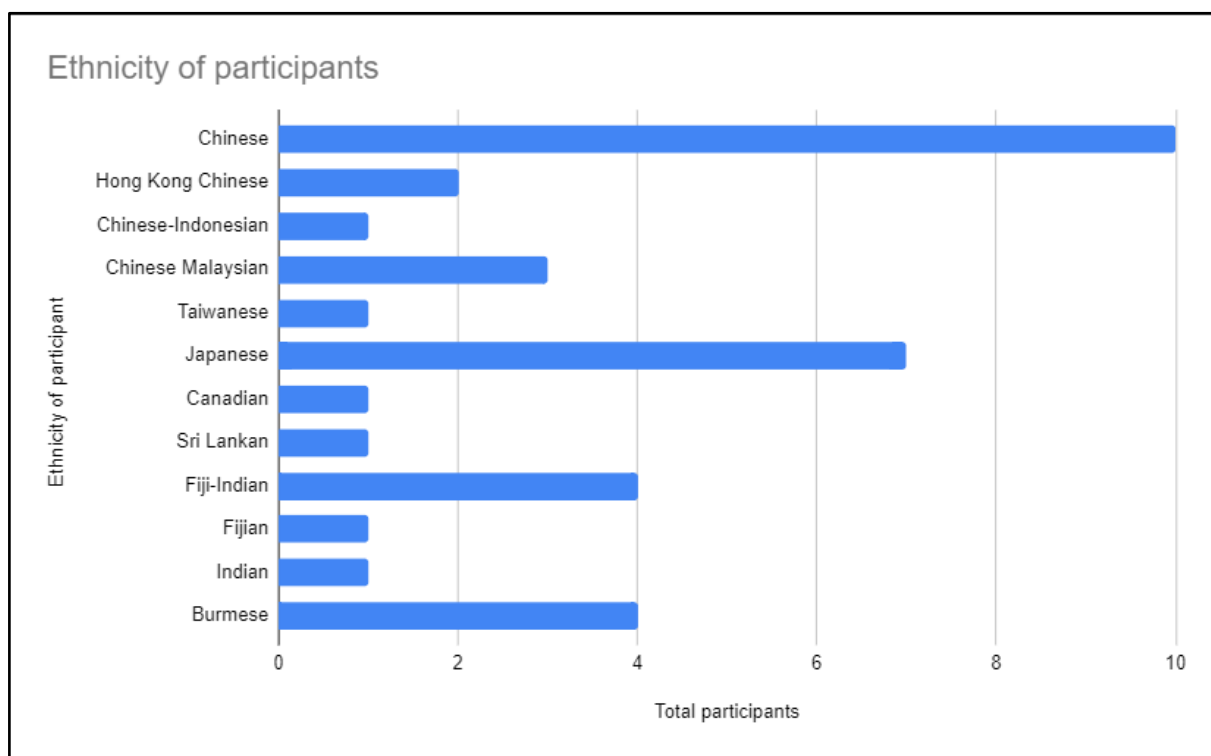


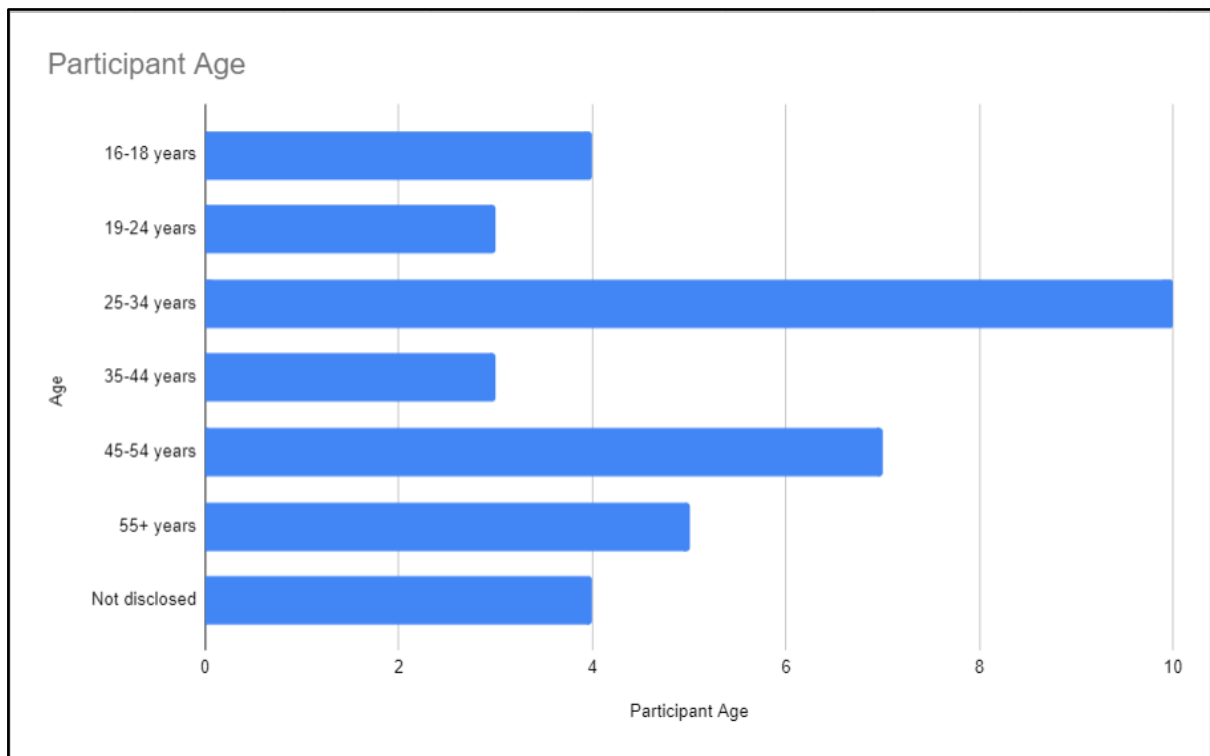
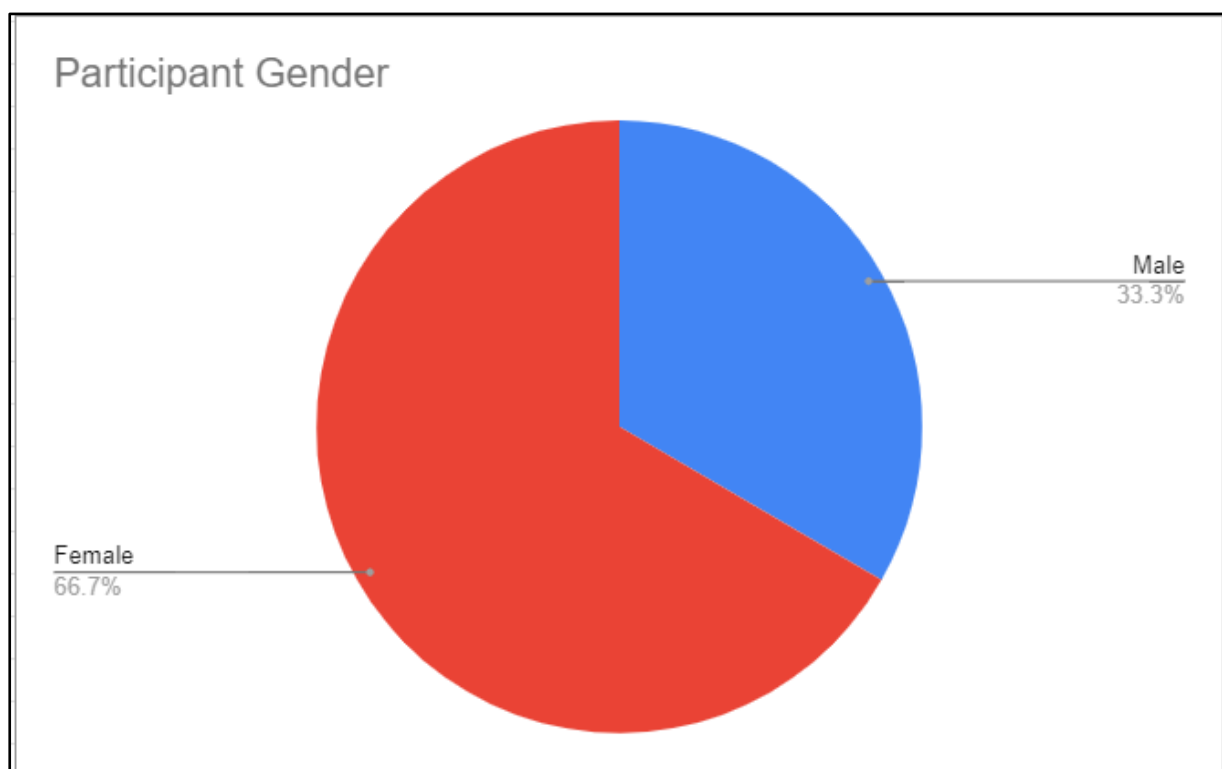
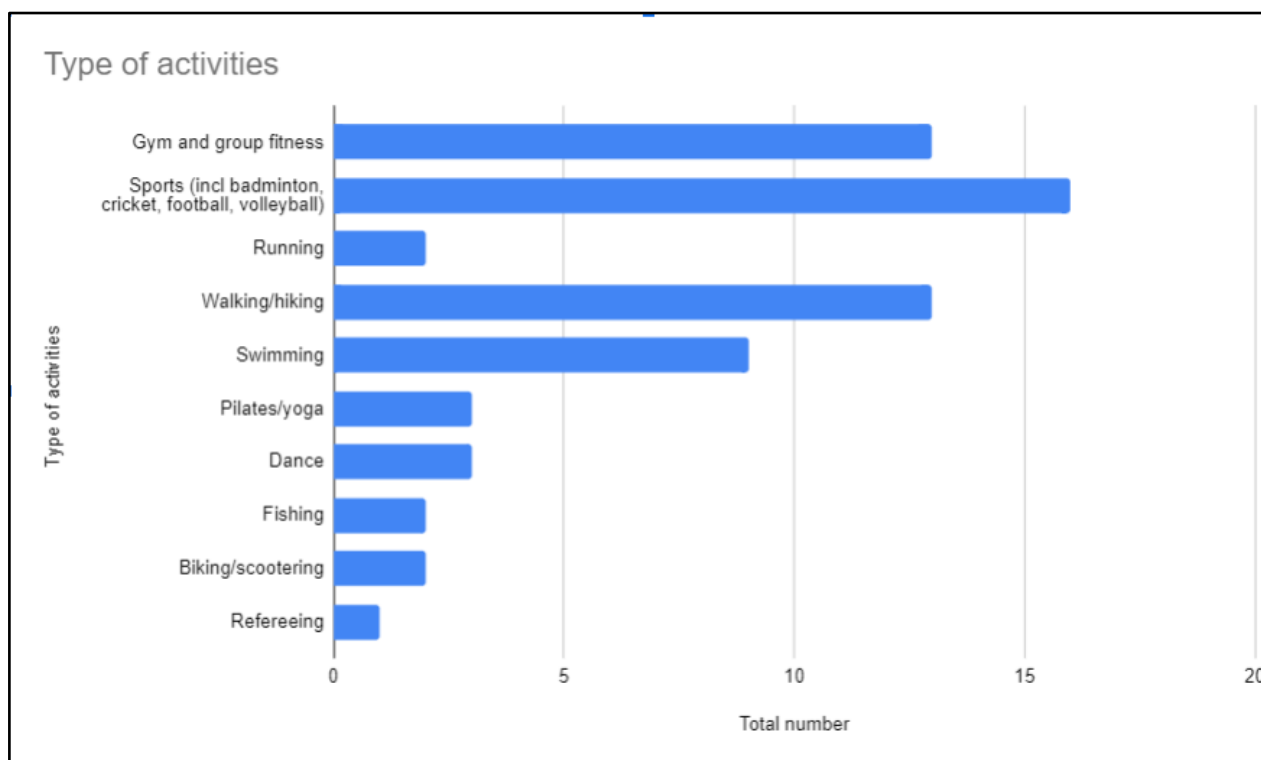
Figure 2. Age of Participants.**Figure 3. Gender of Participants.**

Figure 4. Most Common Type of Sports and Active Recreation. 'Sports' were identified as: badminton, volleyball, pickleball, golf, climbing (bouldering), sepak takraw (kick volleyball), hockey, skiing, netball, boxing, table tennis, tennis, squash, pickleball, ultimate frisbee, and rugby.



Findings and Analysis

The diversity of voices and experiences of the Asian New Zealand communities are the focus of this research. In this report, we present the key findings under seven sections:

1. **Types of sport and active recreation:** Key motivations
2. **Barriers to participation:** Cost, transport, facilities, priorities, knowledge
3. **Gender and age:** Critical intersections
4. **The influence of family:** Support, fears and generational difference
5. **Negative experiences:** Cultural stereotypes and everyday racism
6. **Perceptions of sports organisations** efforts to build culturally inclusive environments and support participation
7. **Meeting the diverse needs of Asian NZ communities:** The hopes, frustration and calls to action from everyday change makers

In each section we begin by presenting key findings across the data set. We then present quotes from participants. We consider the voices from the Asian New Zealand communities, and the diversity of these perspectives, the greatest strength of this research. Thus, rather than including participant quotes in an Appendix at the end of the report, and risking participant voices as appearing secondary in importance, we bring the multiplicity of participants' lived experiences to the fore. We have tried to maintain the authenticity of participant voices, only editing for readability in a few

instances. In some sections, there may be signs of repetition, but we encourage the reader to pay attention to the nuances, particularly as to how different ethnic, cultural, gender and generational positionings are impacting Asian New Zealanders' experiences of sport, active recreation and play in a range of different ways. Recognising the diversity of Asian New Zealand communities, we are hesitant to draw conclusions that generalise across these communities. A broad brushstroke is not helpful here, and rather it is the nuances, details, differences and similarities that are important to consider with care.

While we set out with the aim for a range of sports and cultural groups to be represented in the eight different focus groups, we recognise that this project was not able to capture the full diversity of experiences within the rapidly growing New Zealand Asian population. Due to the timeframe of the project, we utilised our networks and connections, and focused on the Asian communities of Auckland. However, more research is needed to understand the sport, active recreation and play experiences of Asian New Zealanders across different regions, with more work focused on those from specific gendered, cultural and religious backgrounds, and those with different experiences in New Zealand (e.g., recent immigrants; 1st, 2nd, 3rd generation; language capabilities). All interviews were conducted primarily in English, and we acknowledge that more research is needed to ensure the voices of non-English speaking Asian New Zealanders are also captured.

The qualitative data collected in this research project (eight focus groups and three vignettes developed from the focus group data) seeks to complement the quantitative survey data being analysed by Sport NZ. We hope that bringing the qualitative and quantitative together (from this report and the Sport NZ data) will offer unique, original and timely insight into the perceptions, barriers, motivations and experiences of the Asian New Zealand communities in relation to their participation in sport, active recreation and play.

Summary of Findings & Participant Voices

1. Types of Sport & Active Recreation: Key Motivations

- Participants enjoyed a wide range of fitness and physical activities, including going to the gym ('gyming'), walking, swimming (pool), dancing (including Virtual Reality [VR] dancing, K-Pop), gardening, yoga, pilates, Zumba, running, scootering, stretching and online fitness classes. Outdoor activities including hiking and fishing were also popular recreational activities.
- Participants also engaged in a range of sports, including badminton (popular across the sample), volleyball, pickleball, golf, climbing (bouldering), sepak takraw (kick volleyball), skiing, netball, boxing, table tennis, tennis, squash, pickleball, ultimate frisbee, and rugby. While some participants engaged in competitive and elite level sport, social sports were more popular.
- Among younger Asian New Zealanders (16-24 years), 'gyming' was a particularly popular form of physical activity and fitness because of convenience around their busy working and social lives.
- Younger participants spoke of the importance of finding recreational sports facilities close by (to minimise transport time) with times/availability that suited their busy lifestyles.
- Older Asian New Zealanders (55+ years) described enjoying walking, dance and yoga classes, golf and going to the gym. Physical activity was considered an important means of healthy aging and maintaining mobility, as well as for social connection and relationships (with friends and community). Proximity of facilities to home was also a key consideration.
- Overall, participants noted six key themes when explaining what they enjoyed about their chosen sport and active recreation pursuits: 1) wellbeing, 2) physical health benefits, 3) social aspects, 4) being in nature, 5) family/community aspects, and 6) ease of use (i.e., facilities close to home, without having to drive too far and with reasonable fees).

Increases in cost of living have impacted when, where and how often people participate in sport and active recreation. Some commented that costs of fitness classes have increased considerably, and they are less willing to go to the gym or join busy workout/fitness spaces since COVID-19.¹²

- Overall, comparisons between New Zealand and Asia were positive in terms of safety and access to facilities. Some (particularly those from Japan and China) noted that recreational and social sports and physical activity programmes were more available in their 'home' countries, whereas New Zealand offerings tended to prioritise space, facilities and resources towards competitive sports.

- Participants showed an enthusiasm for trying new sports and physical activities. However, they argued that it is not easy to just try a new sport or activity, for a reasonable price, in New Zealand (see 'Barriers to participation').

Selection of participant quotes highlighting the range of sport, active recreation and play that is integral to the everyday lives of Asian NZ communities

"What I do is swimming, mostly swimming. But when I get busy, I can't go to the pool often, so at the most two or three times a week. But just right now, I haven't been able to go to the pool for probably two weeks-ish. Then I do walking with a group once a month, and just by myself when I can. Also, seasonal skiing, I love skiing! I also stretch every day at home while I'm watching the news." (Japanese woman, 60s).

"I go for walk with dog. Trying to go every day but no, I can't make it. Sometimes, I'm doing yoga and I used to do Zoom exercise with my friend, about 10 people in a group ... Sometimes I joined in Zoom exercise, and I also do hedge cutting, using big muscles." (Japanese women, 50s).

"I enjoy the outdoors such as hiking, swimming in the beach, going to the gym. I do summer football. Used to do winter football too, but now I just do social football and do classes at the gym or my own workout." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

"I'm into a sport called sepak takraw. And I like doing outdoor activities, like hiking and walking." (male from Myanmar, late 20s).

"I like to do badminton and I like to go on a (push) scooter ride from Missions to Saint Heliers and back." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, mid 20s).

"I only came to New Zealand when I was 15. When I was in school, I did touch rugby, football, social basketball, you name it ... I sort of switched to just going to the gym, quite religiously in the first couple of years of uni, and I found football again, which is my main sport ... I wasn't even playing then, had no intention of playing but then one thing led to another, started filling in for the team and then started making friends and really finding that camaraderie amongst the team and, alongside another coach at that time, we decided to make our own team. Since then, we've been playing and organising our own team for six years now." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"For me, there might be three stages. Before I came to New Zealand, I did quite a bit of cycling and played basketball with my mates. Then ever since I came to New Zealand, I did a little bit of social badminton and then started to play tennis and a little bit squash, but just socially. Then also started to learn to swim and joining the gym and doing some Zumba and Pilates. That's pre-Covid. Post-Covid, I seldom go to the gym and I only did a couple of sessions doing Pilates, but I quite enjoy doing some yoga and jogging in my spare time and also play badminton socially." (Chinese female, late 30s).

"I'm originally from Malaysia, in school I actually played netball, hockey, volleyball, and competitively badminton. I chose that as my main sport. Then after I've moved to New Zealand mainly just continued to play badminton, coaching in badminton as well, competing as well." (Chinese-Malaysian female, late 30s).

"The sport I play is football and I walk and run along the park. That's it. Oh, and I'm a vice president of the club and we provide the facilities for other kids to come and play." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 50s).

A selection of quotes that highlight different motivations for participation, as well as changing motivation through different life stages

"I like walking. I really enjoy walking. I do it for my health, basically. When I go to go walking, I usually go to Long Bay Beach and I can see the different seasons, and if I go the same time, I see the same dogs and people and Rangitoto and all the trees and flowers, I can see the change of seasons in the air, so mentally I think that helps me a lot." (Japanese women, 50+).

"Motivation is definitely the enjoyment, and the social side is really important now. When I had aspirations to play at a high level, the social side was still there, but it was sort of like a by-product. For me, it was about the performance aspirations and then when that sort of went, I grew an appreciation for the social side of the sport and giving back and just something to do over the winter." (Indian male, early 30s).

"I like staying healthy and fit. I think that's a really important part. For me, I can go to the gym and I can go for runs, but I find playing sport keeps me sort of healthy and fit rather than having to push myself to go to the gym or go for a run. I think that's a big part of what motivates me to play sport as well. It's a vehicle to keep me healthy; again, holistically, not just the physical side of things." (Indian male, early 30s).

"It's for my own wellbeing which will directly relate to my mental health. And I know that, that coming to the gym makes me feel good, not just physically but mentally because it's a relaxing time despite the fact that you're doing strenuous activity." (Indian male, early 30s).

"I think from primary up to high school, I was quite competitive with my sports. I played competitive football, rugby and volleyball. But then I think after high school I kind of just stopped all of that. I think it was just because I couldn't really find groups or sports team in uni, so I just kind of stopped because I think it's just a huge league difference from high school to uni as well, and for a while, I only played recreationally, basketball and volleyball. So for me, now I'm just mostly doing it for my mental health because yeah, it's good to get out there, surround myself with friends, just doing some activities. That's my motivation." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, late 20s).

A selection of sport / physical activity specific comments

Badminton

"I think when I first moved here, stranger in a strange land, you don't know anyone, what's the best way to make friends and have a social connection was through badminton. What do I know best? It was back in Christchurch, actually, when I first arrived. I went looking for a place to play badminton and I found a club. Not really a club, but there was some sort of a local competition and I entered and that's how I started meeting people, talking to people and growing some sort of a social life, and that just stuck. I found that getting involved in sports is actually one of the better ways for you to make friends and get to know people. That kind of continued. I think sport has brought me places, provided me with opportunities that I don't think I would have if not for sports." (Chinese-Malaysian female, late 30s).

"For me, throughout the years, I think I've tried different kind of sports or physical activities, but it looks like badminton and jogging around are the two sports or

activity that I've been engaging for a long time. With the badminton, I really enjoyed the social connection with my mates and it's not like other group sports that you need a team of 11 people or a number of people to do this sport. You only need two or four people that you can play socially for fun. I really enjoy playing badminton." (Chinese-Malaysian female, late 30s).

"I think definitely for me growing up, badminton was very much an Asian sport so I felt like that was my domain. I didn't have to feel threatened and I didn't have to feel like I had to work my way in. It was already my thing. Ultimate frisbee was new and so it was very accepting of everybody, so I was like, okay, yeah, I can join. On the flip side, if you had asked me about soccer or netball, I would have said, no, I don't think I'm going to have a good experience, and that might be because of the perception of the whole cultural differences thing." (Chinese female, early 30s).

"I grew up with my mum playing it. She would put me in the day care literally downstairs while she would play so I grew up watching it. It seems like there is a pipeline particularly for just people in sort of my generation where our parents would have their social clubs and would consistently play and then it led to us being thrown into the club as a child, didn't get a say in it but then end up enjoying it and continuing to pursue it. If I had the time, resources and the friends to do it now, I would definitely do it because I just love the way it feels. If we break it down clinically, badminton, table tennis, non-contact sports potentially is more appealing to Asian people." (Chinese female, early 30s).

"It just seems like different cultures lean towards other sports. Say for most Asians, it leans to more indoors like badminton, table tennis, I would say is probably the most common. Then other groups would just go for volleyball, basketball, football, hockey. Especially hockey, I think it's very – I can't think of the word ... European dominated. Yes, some Asians participate, but it's not that common. But I think that's more due to exposure, to be honest. It's what they [parents] feel comfortable ... say if I had a kid and I'm new to this country, I would obviously want to push him towards groups that I am personally comfortable with if I'm new to here ... and something they are very good at as well, because most of the Chinese community is very good at badminton." (Sri Lankan woman, aged 70+).

"I think in terms of sports badminton, they're quite Asian community dominated. It would just be more encouraging to play with people of your race. It's harder to get into a sport where the predominant group of people that play that sport aren't connected to you in terms of race." (Chinese female, teen).

Martial arts

"I think traditionally Asian sports, like taekwondo or those type of things are also quite popular with Asians. I think it's just to do with culturally what you're used to doing, and what you would traditionally be good at." (Chinese female, teen).

"Many New Zealand people are interested in Japanese culture. They have classes like aikido, judo, jujitsu and my husband and my son was doing. Anyway, my husband was still doing martial arts when I go there ... If somebody born in New Zealand and grown up here and do aikido, they have lots of training, so like for us, if we do some martial arts, that is an advantage." (Japanese woman, late 50s).

Tai Chi

"I want to try Tai chi. It's popular in Japan, but not as popular as New Zealand. I think, in New Zealand, so many Chinese people doing it in the park. I see a group of Chinese people doing it, so nice and I want to join." (Japanese women, late 50s).

Football

“Football has always been the one that I play the most growing up in school. All of the ones that are listed there were like school teams. Did not even consider joining a club before, just purely because I didn't know much about it. I've always thought clubs were like the professional clubs. You know, social player like myself probably is not the way to go, and it wasn't until I started getting involved in the football teams at [tertiary institution] and that's when I realised, oh cool, you can be affiliated to a club or you can play socially at a club, and that's when the idea stemmed from where we would just create our own team and sort of affiliate ourselves with a club nearby. We ended up picking [local football club] and that's really it. The reason why I continue on doing it is because of the friendships. I love the fact that we can hang out after training and after games and have a cup of tea and whatnot. That's always been a great motivator for me.” (Hong Kong-Chinese male, late 20s).

Dancing

“I enjoy the dancing class because it's very close to where I live, it's central so it takes me only 10 minutes. I've been posting my dancing video and then more of my friends joined me. I'm really glad to see them again, I didn't meet them for a while because we didn't have any ideas of what to do. My mother in law also enjoy her dancing group as well. So does my aunt, she enjoys tai chi so I'm really grateful that this organisation exists and people can socialise again and reconnect with people.” (Chinese woman, early 40s).

“I think my motivation of doing exercise changed over the past few years. At the beginning, I tried to lose weight because I didn't feel confident about my appearance and I joined gym and then I work out a lot back then. Then I have some health issues so I couldn't be that active as before. Now the dancing is something I really enjoy and tried to pick up myself. Try to destress and not to think about the real life struggles. Just to destress. Because I also try a lot of dancing classes. In the Newmarket one, and one on North Shore as well, but most of the people there are so young. I'm in my 30s, and they move so fast I can't catch up. I just can't catch up. I'm really glad they have this dancing class, the level for beginners. It's easier for me to pick up so I really enjoy.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“Gyming”

“I go to the gym because I like the classes. It's good; you can bounce off people's energy. It's fun. The provider is good. And I also go to the gym because it's mentally good for me and physically feel good afterwards. I like also playing football because you get to socialise with friends, but also just focus on yourself.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, mid 20s).

“I used to play badminton but I just run out of time. With the gym, you can just come and go anytime you want by yourself. You don't need to adjust to other people. I just come to the gym. And I like this gym too, I like the people here.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“Gym is just more convenient, you can just go at your own pace. For example, my cousin used to drag me on runs but then he's so much faster than I am so it's awkward, he has to go at my pace. But the gym, you just come whenever you want, when you have time and just do it. Can be alone or with a buddy, it doesn't really matter.” (Taiwanese woman, mid 20s).

Outdoor physical activity and recreation

“Like when I was younger, I used to be very athletic. I used to play all sorts of sports. I used to play netball, soccer, cricket, softball, badminton, running, soccer,

all sorts during primary, intermediate and high school. I continued to do that in university as well when I was studying. But I think for me, I have stopped soccer – all the sports that I used to play in the team, like for teams and stuff like that, and then I discovered outdoor nature, Mother nature that sort of thing. I think this links back to my work, how I feel a little bit stressed at work and then to de-stress is not to really be around too many people. So for me, the change would be like just doing something simple, that doesn't require too much effort for me to get out and be active, and then enjoy being healthy.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

“Swimming at the beach also is therapeutic. It's like you get a natural endorphin hit.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Comparisons between sport and physical activity provisions in New Zealand and Asian countries

“But I think the other reason is in New Zealand, sport is very popular so it seems everybody do something compared to my home town. In Shanghai, people don't have so much time to do activities outside so maybe they just join a club and do one or two times a week. Normally, they just go to the gym because in the gym, they have everything – dancing, yoga, facility things and the pools so they just go to there. But here you have more choice, you have more time, not that busy.” (Chinese woman, late 40s).

“There's more time and opportunity, better facilities here. I feel safer on the street to do, to be walking and running, and I've gone on hikes alone quite a few times. My friends and I have gone on hikes on our own and the whole hike, no one is there, and we still feel safe.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

“It's more accessible to nature. Where I lived before was city in Bangkok. But here, just around the corner, we have parks and bays or beach access that we can walk to. Our local park is our local playground.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

“Definitely more opportunity, better opportunity to access and afford the facilities here.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

“Better here than from where we come from. It's like an upgrade. We don't have gym facilities, we don't have lights. Grounds, we just use the village grounds, we just mow down whatever ... After the rice has been harvested, just play on that.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

2. Barriers to Participation: Cost, Transport, Facilities, Priorities, and Local Knowledge

- Cost was a major barrier to participation. In particular, individuals did not like having to pay fees/subscriptions and then having extra affiliated costs accumulating as well. For people from lower socio-economic groups this is a considerable obstacle in the way of the social and health benefits identified elsewhere.
- Participants also identified the competitive nature of most New Zealand sports as a barrier. Many wanted to engage in more social sports and group fitness, but described facilities and resources being prioritised to organised sport rather than social, recreational sport and informal activities.
- Some noted that club and team selection policies (that prioritise elite and competitive sport) were limiting participation among those who were keen social, recreational and/or informal participants.
- They felt that there were limited avenues to try new sports, particularly for sports for which they did not already have knowledge and skills. If they were not able to play at a competitive level, participants felt unwanted at clubs and programmes.
- For young Asian athletes who were excelling in their sports, they found a lack of people from similar backgrounds detracted from their enjoyment.
- Participants noted that social clubs were not easy to access, and often hard to find out about what was available (where, who, when, etc.). Some participants suggested better collation and sharing of information as to what is available for Asian communities within different regions. Such information should be available in a range of languages, and shared with new migrants who may otherwise struggle to access this information.
- Social barriers presented an issue. Participants expressed a reluctance to join new clubs/gyms, etc., if they did not have friends accompanying them. In some cases, they stated that if they did attend alone, they often needed other people to play with, and there was not an easy way to join established groupings. Suggestions were made for public bulletin boards for those with similar backgrounds (i.e., age, nationality, gender) interested in doing social, recreational and/or informal sports together.
- Parking, traffic, public transport and maintenance of public spaces were identified as barriers, particularly in Auckland.
- Language posed an issue at times, particularly for older participants and recent arrivals. Notably, participants mentioned being confused by signage in public facilities, with a lack of assistance in this area.

- Time was a major barrier, with family, work, transport, school and church commitments all inhibiting people's ability to participate in sport, active recreation and physical play.
- For some, particularly new immigrants, sport and physical activity may not be among their highest priorities, with education and work needing to take precedence during times of resettlement.
- Participants sometimes felt excluded from sports with a long tradition and high popularity in New Zealand (i.e., rugby, netball) because of a lack of cultural knowledge. Participants often felt that they lacked the required knowledge around the rules to be able to 'fit in'. Some noted that such knowledge seemed to be intergenerational in New Zealand, which made it harder for non-New Zealand born residents and/or newcomers to access and feel confident in such sporting environments.
- Barriers (felt particularly strongly by recent immigrants) to trying a new sport or physical activity, included: 1) 'knowledge' (i.e., what is available, when, where, for how much and for whom); 2) 'social connections' (i.e., fear of not wanting to go alone, particularly if there are few other Asian participants); and 3) anxiety/fear/embarrassment of not knowing about sports or activities popular in New Zealand but not in their home countries (i.e., not knowing the formal and informal rules and etiquette of sports such as rugby and netball). Subsequently, participants suggested clubs/organisations should offer more free trials ('Give it a Go' sessions) or open days to welcome new participants, with efforts made to ensure such information is widely available (using appropriate networks and in a range of languages) to reach the Asian communities.

Example quotes highlighting the range of barriers to participation: Cost, transport, facilities, selection policies, focus on competition

Cost

"I stopped soccer because I hated having to pay for everything. Because we pay \$350, and then every single week, we had to bring in \$10 or \$5 for the home game. Then again, the t-shirt, \$25, \$30. And I'm like, what is this? So I was like, no, I'm not going to join anymore. Working as hard already and then ... but yeah, that was one of the reasons that I quit." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

"I like to go line dancing or some other activities as well but it's not close by, one thing, and then very high cost. Even yoga is high cost now ... Every year, when the cost goes higher and higher, they have to increase their fees as well ... I did yoga one day a week. We started with 10 classes with \$60, it was very cheap. Then it went up, when I stopped during Covid, it was \$85, maybe nowadays \$100 or so for 10 classes. Everything's going up." (Sri Lankan woman, mid 70s).

Facilities: Access and maintenance

"Badminton right now, there's only one place you can actually play badminton in the Shore right now because the flood flooded one or the other courts on the Shore. So, there's only one court now and it's always so full, if you want to play in the club and not everyone can just join." (Chinese male, teen).

“I think support for club is a real big problem – you know how many clubs around South Auckland, they’re just learning around about now that there’s \$900 million taken out of the South Auckland activity and community budget so that’s going to have a huge impact. I think the infrastructure of the club is a key problem. One of the things you want to do when you get people is keep them but we’re starting to see some parts of the club suffer. You can have some great talent and great people come down but they don’t stay because they see it’s run down.” (Fijian-Indian male, late 40s).

“I think in terms of volleyball, definitely accessibility can be improved because you have the school league, but the school league, it’s very much just if your school isn’t one of those schools that play well in the school league, you have no opportunities whatsoever to break into the volleyball circle ... And if you want to play for clubs, it’s all very network based and if you just never break into that circle and never get to know those people, you will pretty much never get selected into the teams and never actually have the opportunities to play for the clubs around here. That’s what I think, in terms of accessibility.” (Chinese female, teen).

“Actually, to be honest, lately I’ve noticed that a lot of the sort of paths in and around suburbs are not very well maintained. The grass is overgrown and so it makes walking really hard and makes sharing paths quite hard. I think I would definitely do more if the grass wasn’t overgrown. The paths are small and I want to enjoy a walk in a weird loop on the grass, I would appreciate that. Lately, that has been an obstacle to enjoying the outdoors.” (Chinese woman, 30s).

“For me and my friends, it would be just the time because we can only book it around like night time, because during the day it’s mostly just clubs and school students for the clubs. So it’s mostly only free at night time, which is kind of not as good because I work early mornings, so I get home around 12 and then wake up early, so that’s the only issue.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Transport

“I don’t have transport that’s why I’m doing that yoga at home. That’s why I walk close to our area. If I want to go to gym, I need close to and easily.” (Chinese woman, late 40s).

“I do not want to drive an hour out west just to go bouldering. That’s a barrier. It’s so far away. There’s no other facility – well, okay, there’s two but I don’t like the one in North Shore, that’s still really far away. The West Auckland one is great, it’s got a great culture, it’s hugely popular for people from all walks of life. It’s the only one. We need one out east. I would buy a yearly pass right off the bat.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“Just getting to the gym is very difficult because I live in Devonport and the gym is in Takapuna. I have to choose the time to travel, and sometimes I’m sitting in a car for about an hour just to get to the gym. That puts me off.” (Japanese woman, early 60s).

“Five minutes’ walk is close. I can accept 10 minutes driving, otherwise I would think that’s too far away.” (Sri Lankan woman, mid 70s).

Focus on, and priorities given to, competitive sport

“I would say even league [formal competition] is a bit too competitive for me. I just want to come in, play a game and have no expectations that I have to show up next week because maybe I have some event to go to. But we’re just here to have a good hour and a half, two hours together in the sport. I don’t need that league aspect, even if it’s a friendly thing. I’m just here for the game.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“School sports, the nature of it is to compete. At least definitely when I was at school and I can’t imagine there is now, there’s no sports you can just do all the sake of sports which, actually, if you think about it, is something that is quite lacking in our society. There are social clubs everywhere but you have to really, really look for them, I feel.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“In New Zealand sports, even in school sports, there’s trials. Whereas in Japan, in club sports there’s still trials but you still get in anyway. It’s just whether you’re in a different grade. Everybody can have a chance and try and learn a sport but I feel like that doesn’t really happen over here. You get turned away. You’re in or you’re out. That deterred me a lot from doing sports.” (Japanese woman, late 40s).

Difficulties accessing social, recreational and informal sport

“I wanted to pick up pickleball recently and then my friend was going to invite me to a club that ran pickleball but apparently everyone there were expert and they didn’t want newcomers, so that was unfortunate and I have not yet found a place where they would welcome newcomers and lend you the rackets to play. It sounds really enjoyable, it’s like badminton but also kind of like tennis and kind of like squash, so it sounds like right up my alley. But I haven’t had the time to seek out a beginner friendly club that will run at a time that I can make.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“One time I went to Pakuranga Plaza. There’s a table tennis court there but I can’t find anybody around that place and I also can’t find how to join that game. It’s very confusing. I was there running around but there was nobody to tell me how to join.” (Chinese-Malaysian woman, mid 50s).

“The issue is because of the language barrier and being the migrant community, sometimes we don’t really know how to access the facility for a not so popular sport to support. So, sports that are not as popular or not as well-known can be quite challenging to find a place to practice, that’s been quite a challenge.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Social barriers: Friends and networks

“I would like to have something like a basketball game just on the court. But I think it’s just having nobody to play with. Usually you see the basketball courts full of people and their friends, their classmates playing with each other but my friends aren’t interested in any of that stuff. I don’t have anyone to play with. It would be nice if I had someone, like a small group, we can casually just go out play a small game of anything.” (Taiwanese woman, mid 20s).

“I have the time but I feel a bit shy going to a new class. I just need a big push to push myself to start it. I think once I start and then if I start talking to the people in the class, I might be okay. But to go in the class, everybody knows each other and they say, hi, hi, hi. So awkward. That’s always my fear ... Even if it is somewhere accessible and in my time range, the idea of going there by myself and around all these people I don’t know ...” (Japanese woman, late 40s).

“[It would be helpful to have] some kind of public bulletin board where you can have an idea of who’s coming. Me and my friend, we’re both 20-year-old women, we would like to come and that would be helpful for us. I think the problem remains that you don’t want to go by yourself, you want to go with a friend. So if you know maybe someone in the community whose name you recognise and say, we’re going to come, then it’s nice to know that you have a friendly face there. Just like going to a party and you don’t have a friend to go with you kind of thing.” (Chinese woman, 20s).

Competing priorities

“For particularly the new immigrants, academic performance or looking for a job might be on the top list rather than getting active or doing particular sports. So even though those people are aware that getting active or doing exercise is good for them mentally and physically, they still continue to put lots of time and effort in to study or their job hunting or career.” (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

“For me, I work during the day, and in night time I usually have church commitments, so it's six days of my week and I've got church stuff going on so I don't really have time so I only use that one day free to play badminton.” (Burmese woman, late 20s).

“I think for me definitely just the time eaten up by different commitments, like school, going to and from school, transport that way. Clubs as well, if I join them I'm devoting my time to those sorts of activities.” (Japanese-Canadian woman, early 20s).

“Time, family commitments, work commitments, balance of life. Because we don't have lighting facility, people don't want to show up at night, playing football.” (Fijian-Indian male, late 40s).

Language

“I think language is a major barrier, especially if they've just moved to New Zealand and they're not fluent in English. I think language is always a huge problem if they want to try. Also, the lack of confidence because they can't speak English fluently, or people are struggling or people from the clubs or running the clubs are struggling to understand them. I think that's one of the things that prevents ... or the kind of experiences that make them maybe pull back a bit.” (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

“I actually prefer the Asian group instructor ... If I found a Chinese instructor, I understand the terms, the language easier. Like the yoga instructor, there is some terms that I just have no clue what they're talking about. When you say in Chinese, I can understand a little bit more, not fully understand, just a little bit more. But for my mother-in-law, they just don't understand English at all. They can generally like hi, hello, how are you, how much? That's all. I don't think they would go to the gym because they don't understand the English language, they would just find this other kind of organisation.” (Chinese woman, early 40s).

Lack of cultural knowledge and confidence in particular sporting contexts

“When I came to New Zealand, clubs and joining a club was seen as like, “Oh my God, these are like where the very good players would go”, whereas me, just wanting to kick a ball for fun, would just have to find a pitch somewhere and do it myself. So, I think with that is the understanding and the awareness and not being bred in an environment where you already know how to go for information, where to go for information. I think it definitely created a barrier for a lot of the newcomers' community.” (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

“You kind of lose the confidence if you see other people your age who've been doing it since they were younger and then you're like, “Oh, I can't start now because that'll just be embarrassing”” (Chinese female, teen).

3. Age and Gender: Critical Intersections

The motivations, opportunities and barriers for Asian New Zealanders are complex, varying considerably based on age, gender, generation and language skills. For some, religion, ethnicity, and gender intersected to impact family support of their sporting and fitness involvement, as well as their experiences when participating.

In this section we focus particularly on young Asian New Zealanders and Asian women's experiences, with some insight also into older Asian New Zealanders. While there is some repetition with previous themes (i.e., barriers), the *intersections* of gender, ethnicity, generation and age all offer insights into the subtle differences within and across the increasingly diverse Asian New Zealand communities.

This section thus highlights the importance of multi-layered and intersectional approaches to understanding the sport, active recreation and play experiences of Asian New Zealand communities.

Age

- Young people (16-24 years) described strong family expectations to prioritise their education (and music) over sport, and thus experienced some conflicted messaging (between families, school and wider NZ society) about the importance of sporting participation and achievements, which they navigate in a range of ways.
- Some commented on competing demands for young people's recreational time, with many youths opting for (passive) digital leisure (i.e., social media) and play (i.e., gaming) over physical activity.
- Some commented on the popularity of K-Pop, with digital and social media inspiring music and dance cultures among Asian New Zealand youth in schools, at home and in outdoor public spaces (see a recent documentary [here](#) about Auckland-based K-Pop Dance group, KDA, and its popularity among Asian youth)¹⁶.
- Some youths commented that their participation in particular sports was strongly shaped by their parents' support for some (i.e., badminton, tennis, swimming) and aversion to other sports (particularly the avoidance of contact sports), and the cultural beliefs of what they are (not) good at.
- Youth offered nuanced discussion about the intersection of culture, ethnicity, biology and gender in shaping family, school and wider social assumptions and stereotypes of what sports and physical activities they should (or not) participate in. Their discussions reveal highly considered and critical thinking about the conflicting messages they receive, and how these shape their decisions and practices in relation to sport and active recreation.

- The absence of other Asian youth participants: Some noted that they had, or were in the process of, dropping out of particular sports (i.e., netball, volleyball) because of the lack of other Asian youth participants. This impacted their feelings of belonging, connection and enjoyment.
- Some youths noted that being second generation New Zealanders meant that their understandings and experiences of sport and physical activity were different from their parents (who migrated from Asian countries), which at times caused some conflicted messaging from schools, NZ society and parents about the role of sport and physical activity in their lives.
- Many youths commented on cultural stereotypes experienced during their schooling years, from PE teachers, coaches, fellow students and athletes, that they weren't interested or 'good' at sports, which many found very discouraging. Some accepted and internalised these stereotypes ("I'm no good at sport"), whereas others actively resisted them.
- Some Asian youths noted that, because New Zealand children are strongly encouraged to invest a lot of time learning and developing skills in sports from a young age, joining/learning new sports later in life can be intimidating and embarrassing, which can put them off trying new sports and joining clubs and teams (even when interested in doing so).
- Active recreation needs change across the lifespan, with older Asian New Zealanders highly motivated for social and health reasons. Walking and dancing were highly popular activities among older Asian women.
- Many older Asian New Zealanders see high value in physical activity for supporting healthy aging and maintaining mobility. A strong motivator, particularly for older women, is to be active and helpful grandparents and community members.

Gender

- Traditional gender roles still inhibit some Asian women's participation in sport but, as highlighted in New Zealand and international research, this varies considerably across different ages, cultures, ethnicities and religious backgrounds.
- Some young Asian women commented on family expectations not to participate in contact sports and to prioritise fitness and physical activities that help to maintain a slim physique, and to avoid building too much muscle or strength. Young women noted that their reasons for participating (i.e., health, fun) were sometimes in contrast to expectations from their families (i.e., weight management, appearance).
- Some young Asian women reflected on how cultural stereotypes shaped their experiences of playing sport in school (i.e., PE teachers and coaches making judgements that did not accurately reflect their interests or abilities).

- Observations were made of generational changes in family support of girls and women's participation in sport and physical activity.
- Some noted exciting opportunities coming up with FIFA Women's world cup to connect with Asian communities, and inspire Asian girls and women's participation.
- Reflecting findings from recent research focused on women's experiences of sport and active recreation during the pandemic (by Thorpe and colleagues), some Asian women described experiencing unwanted physical and verbal attacks while participating in sport and active recreation. One of the women in this study recalled a traumatic encounter in the sauna after swimming, and some Asian women in our previous research described experiencing racialised verbal attacks when walking. They described such encounters being exacerbated during the pandemic, creating new and triggering old fears of exercising in outdoor, public spaces.

Quotes illustrative of the range of sports and physical activities that Asian youth currently (and/or previously) participate in across the week

"I play badminton and volleyball on the weekends, and I train at the gym Monday to Friday." (Chinese male, teen).

"I play badminton, volleyball, and golf sometimes in the weekends and I go to the gym as well from Tuesday to Friday." (Chinese male, teen).

"I mainly just play volleyball. Right now, it's school season, so there's a lot of volleyball happening. And I used to play tennis, but then I quit." (Chinese female, teen).

"I'm a competitive swimmer. And I play netball, but I'm planning to stop this year." (Chinese female, teen).

Some young adults described experiencing more autonomy (from parents) to choose sports and physical activities after high school

"I think it makes it more enjoyable when you make the decision as a young adult to start doing something that is your choice. Because the gym is a hobby that I decided to do as an adult that I thought I don't know if I'll enjoy it, but I tried it out and I enjoyed it so it became a passion. Whereas it would be very different if I had been told as a child, you have to go to the gym. I wouldn't have fostered those good habits and that good mindset towards it. That may be cultural but I don't know." (Chinese woman, early 30s).

"We try random as sports with my mates now. I guess the constraint back then is as a kid you don't get that much say. Of course, you can express your interest, but it's usually your primary experience is what your parents did. But as I have more freedom now, me and my mates we can just go, are you guys keen for golf or something, or want to play volleyball at the beach? It's more a freedom aspect and I have a bit of time now with my mates so we can try out these things." (Chinese male, early 20s).

“Oh, I’m just not a sports person”: Confidence, identity and the limitations of cultural stereotypes during childhood and youth

“Back at [local high school in Auckland’s North Shore], people didn’t do sports because they didn’t see the point in it. They thought that time would be better spent on their academics and really becoming the smartest person ever. I think it’s very different in terms of why people don’t do it. I think it depends on the culture. It depends on the scenario; every single person has their different reasons. But here, at [another local high school on the North Shore] Long Bay – again, I don’t want to push it onto race, but all my friends at [local high school in North Harbour] were Asian and specifically most of them were Chinese, and now most of my friends are white so I guess there is a cultural difference, but it’s also like a socioeconomic difference as well. And all my friends now, most of them don’t play a sport probably because they’re just not bothered. They live life, I guess they go through life quite chilled, like they would rather spend time either working, making money or hanging out with friends.” (Chinese female, teen).

“I go to [local high school on the North Shore], right, and that’s a boys’ school and most of my friends there that I do know are from intermediate, and they’re really academic focused, but I’m kind of in the middle here. I don’t really mind, but as long as I’m doing well in school, I should be fine. Then all my other friends go to [local high school on the North Shore] and some of them, I try to encourage them to come to the gym with me. There’s this person that used to go with me, but then as he went, he got more and more discouraged. I asked him recently why he stopped going and he told me that it’s not worth the effort, it’s too much effort to go, and things like that.” (Chinese male, teen).

“Yeah, pretty much all of my friends at school are Asian. Most of them didn’t grow up playing sports, so they just never played. And the other side to it is that they wanted to focus on their academics, so then they quit. They prioritise their academics or sport, they saw that they weren’t particularly good at it so they kind of were like, there’s no point of me continuing, and then they just stopped and they’re like, we can study now.” (Chinese female, teen).

“If people don’t grow up playing, it is more unlikely for them to chime in when they’re older because you kind of have that self-expectation or imposter syndrome of, “Oh, I’m just not a sports person”; I’m just not sporty compared to all these other people that were really good when they were in primary school. Me and my mum had a literal conversation about this because my brother is six. He’s Year 2 and he’s starting to join some sports activities at his school and then my mum was talking about how that’s just the local culture of studying the sports where you’re young and kind of just having fun, and then that just leads to when you’re older. Whereas me, because I didn’t come to New Zealand until I was eight and then when I first came here, it was more about learning the language and just studying and all that, and I just wasn’t in that cultural circle of just blending it in when I was really young so it was very hard for me to pretty much be seen as a person that does sports.” (Chinese female, teen).

“I think that has something to do with Asian families as well, because I think a lot of Asian parents when their kids are young, they’re trying to build them up to become either like a music prodigy or a maths and science prodigy as opposed to a really good sports player.” (Chinese female, teen).

Some sports are seen as more culturally appropriate for Asian children / youth, with some traditional 'Kiwi' sports (i.e., rugby, netball) harder to access based on cultural stereotypes (in the home and schools)

"I find especially in New Zealand there's a big culture in sports, the mainstream sports rugby, soccer, where you basically have this almost family generations being really, really into it. I feel like it makes it harder for new generations to break into the sport or people who are new to it, or possibly Asian when we were kids and find ourselves surrounded by a very different environment." (Chinese woman, early 30s).

"I think almost when you're younger, rugby, netball, soccer, there's always an assumption that as a kid you should know the rules. I felt that and I was like, oh, I don't actually know the rules, like the finer things, and somehow, some unspoken Kiwi culture, they all have that same rule book and I feel like I missed out and I'm not sure how. It just so happens that I missed out, but I know all the badminton [rules] so the barrier to continue in that is obviously much lower than other sports." (Chinese woman, early 30s).

"For me, [my entry into] cricket was from a group of friends at primary school, so essentially in primary school, whilst my school was quite diverse, all us Indian boys or all the South Asian boys gravitated together and what was our common sport? Our common sport was cricket. Interestingly enough, me being Fijian-Indian, no one from my country really knows cricket or plays cricket but that's how I was exposed to it, probably from like year three or year four and then we just continued playing, and to this day at 33, I'm still playing and still involved. Thanks to those friends I got involved and it was something that piqued my interest and I continued watching and growing and developing." (Fijian-Indian male, early 30s).

"I guess the rugby part, that is because of my culture, my Fijian-Indian culture where rugby is a big thing. Growing up, my dad used to support the Fijian team, especially during the sevens. We'd watch sevens on TV and stuff like that and that was a big push in terms of it, but we were never encouraged to play because we would get smashed by the big Polynesian boys and Māori and Island kids. I even remember when I first started and I first signed up and my grandma said to me, "You're going to get stuck at the bottom of a tackle under some big, big Island boy". And I was just like, "That's the sport, and it's who I am". The funny thing was at that age, I wasn't small either. Physically, I'm not a small person so it was interesting that they held such perceptions around it." (Fijian-Indian male, early 30s).

Importance of early access and support for building confidence

"I think promoting more Asians as soon as they enter primary school just to get into sports and fitness. Because, at that point, when you're five years old, you don't really think about, "oh, no, I might be bad at this, I might embarrass myself". You're not really thinking that. You're kind of just like, "okay, I might as well do this because I don't really know what I'm doing, but I might as well try it, right?" So, getting into it early I think is so, so important for just supporting to get more Asians into sport." (Chinese female, teen).

"I think when I compare it from Japan, for the school, especially the primary school, in Japan every school has baseball club, soccer club. Every school has so many sports. All the teachers organise it and it's all free so all the kids can join after school. But here, when my kids were little, they had almost nothing. You only get touch rugby. If they had more opportunity to try the sports, that would have opened up the door for them to play the sports later on. And it was all free. And all the teachers volunteered. Here, teachers go home, boom. I wish there was something kids could try and then they can decide what they want to play

even later on. If they could try when they were little, I think they could decide what they want to play later on when they're older." (Japanese woman, late 40s).

Digital trends impacting youth participation

"Even though people have time that they can look after or control themselves, there are different types of recreation opportunity available and competing with each other, like young people are particularly into digital games and movies and videos like Tik Tok, etc. So even though they are not busy with their study or during holiday, they find themselves spending lots of time googling their eyes on the screen, which is also something that's competing against this time spent on sport and active recreation." (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

"Among the younger generation, they are very into their digital stuff, so that is one of the challenges as well, for sure." (Chinese-Malaysian woman, late 30s).

"I think most popular activity is K-pop one because in my college have the K-pop club and so many young people like and do this one." (Chinese woman, early 30s).

"I think [the most popular sports] are badminton and tennis. I played badminton last month and I know a lot of people play badminton, especially Asians I think. It's a big group. But for the K-pop, they [youth] don't have to prepare the equipment. Because for badminton and tennis, they spend a lot of money on the equipment." (Chinese woman, late 30s).

Reasons for dropping out of sport: Focus on academic study, lack of other Asian participants and pressure to perform

"Right now, it's time to think about what you want to do for university, think about what you want to do for your career, and if it's not going professional in sports, just don't do that much sports. That kind of vibe. But also, the other extracurriculars, like music, like instruments and arts and school leadership and all of that jazz, that pile on top of each other. But it's very simple. I just end up not getting enough sleep and that's just a bad cycle, I think." (Chinese female, teen).

"I wouldn't say now but back when I was still in primary school and intermediate, I think one of the barriers is that it just wasn't a priority for us in our culture. My parents didn't force me to go do a sport. I think it's a bit different from when you look at here, the Kiwis here, a lot of them they put that as a priority ... We are sort of like, study and get good grades. I sort of regret not doing more back then." (Chinese female, teen).

"I think I'll continue with this school season, but I just don't know if I'll play for clubs, this year at least. Yeah, I definitely think – this might just apply to me, but it might apply to a lot of Asian people in general, it's just the academic things that also pile up on top of sports. So a lot of people play sports for fun, but I think not a lot of people ... Yeah, I don't know what the point is. It's just academics." (Chinese female, teen).

"I stopped swimming for about eight months-ish because I was having anxiety from the competitive side of swimming, the need to perform. That was also a big barrier, I was about to quit permanently at that stage." (Chinese female, teen).

"I started competitively swimming when I was really young, I was seven, and I was always top performing, top in New Zealand, top three placings, those things. Then after Covid, right, because 2020 was Covid, I had a serious drop in my results and suddenly, I realised that I didn't really train because I liked it but it was more because I liked winning. I like going to competitions and getting awards and

things. And the other thing was I didn't really have friends. I don't know, because there aren't a lot of Asians in competitive sports. There's really not that many and I don't know if it's because of a cultural difference, but I was just never able to fit in with sports people. No matter what sport I did, it was always the same, and so, from that I realised, "Oh, I don't actually enjoy this." (Chinese female, teen).

The importance of young Asian role models

"He represented New Zealand three times in the New Zealand team that go over to Asia in Thailand to compete with the rest of the world in sepak takraw. He's very passionate, very into his sport. And he actually also encouraged other ethnic young males from all over New Zealand, like they had a group of four different ethnic background, like the Philippines, Karen ... and so formed a team to go to Thailand." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

"The reason why I'm stopping netball competitively and in general is because, again, there's no Asian people there and ... I don't know, it's just the type of thing where you just feel more comfortable with people of your own ethnicity. I don't know, it's probably a culture thing, but you just fit in better. But yeah, I think it definitely makes a big difference." (Chinese female, teen).

A selection of participant quotes relevant to older Asian participation: The importance of physical activity for social connection and healthy ageing

"Talking more in the elderly space now, is more of a social reason behind why they want to engage, and I think a lot of the supporting structures here in New Zealand can be somewhat competitive, so I feel like that can be a bit of a barrier." (Indian male, early 30s).

"The other thing is when people grow older, say when they can't do badminton or cycling or anything, the only thing left for the older people is walking. They could have outdoor bowling facilities somewhere, that's something that older people could do. I don't think that there's any rather than walking, so if they could improve for the elderly group sports activities, they will be more healthier as well, socially and then interaction and everything." (Sri Lankan woman, mid 70s).

"I think I've changed a little bit. When I started coming here when I was a little bit younger, I was thinking of just losing weight. But now, I'm trying to build my muscles and I've started changing the exercise as well. My goal has been changed. Social media, like on internet. I've read that when you're older you need to build the muscles in your body to keep you strong, your body and your bone as well. Oh, so I need more muscles, yeah, making more muscle than just trying to lose weight." (Japanese woman, early 60s).

"Nobody is pushing me, but I'm working at home. I love my work, but mentally I'm going to be tired if I continuously working. After the exercising, I do more great feeling, so motivated. I want to do more good quality of my work. For that, I have to do exercise. Mentally it is good for me. And also, getting old – I mean, ageing. Ageing is very beautiful, but shape is getting changed. When I see the mirror or I see some young people, Oh, I'm not same as them. I understand, but of course, I want to work, I want to keep good shape and until end of my life, I want to do my things by myself. I know exercising, it helps muscle, and also memory, everything, so that is big motivation." (Japanese woman, early 60s).

"In Japan, we started to talk about healthy age quite a while ago. Not just age, longevity – if you can live long with tubes coming into your body, there's no point for living longer. We have to be healthy enough to enjoy the life, and if we are enjoying the life, we can do things for others as well. We are all involved with the community works and we want to achieve that. I have only one daughter and she

is getting married later on this year. I want to be healthy. If they're going to have a child or children, I still want to be healthy enough to look after their child, children. I've always had quite big confidence for my health. I still don't catch a cold and I don't think I have caught Covid either, yet. But, without me realising, my health was going to be declining, I think, so that's the time I started to do more actively, and that's the time I started dancing in here.” (Japanese woman, early 60s).

“My biggest motivation is my family. I have two daughters, one in Japan, one in New Zealand. They are old enough. I don't have to look after them, but I'm a mum, so I want to be healthy. I don't have to live longer, but I always want to be healthy so I can help them. I shouldn't say that but if they have children, they don't have yet – I want to be a grandma one day so I want to be a healthy grandma to look after the children. And also, I have family members in Japan and I want to visit Japan more often so I have to be strong and healthy. At the moment I'm not very good, very bad shoulder, and I don't think I can handle the long, long flight at the moment. So I want to improve my health, to visit my friends and family in Japan. That's my motivation. Also, I'm a part of community work and I want to help people like senior people and Japanese community and stuff. So I have to be mentally and physically healthy. That's my motivation.” (Japanese woman, early 60s).

A selection of participant quotes relevant to gender: Changing attitudes and ongoing challenges

Limitations of social stereotypes on Asian girls and young women's opportunities to participate

“High school PE class back when they were mandatory. For some reason, our PE classes were split between boys classes and girls classes, so I was in the girls class and my PE teacher was a white woman and she just operated under the assumption that all of the Asian girls in the class didn't want to do sport and didn't want to get hit by the ball, so I never got to participate to the full intensity that I would have wished. The few times I did get to do that, one time I did get hurt but it was fun. I wanted to be just like everyone else. I didn't enjoy that segregation she had maybe consciously or unconsciously performed because I felt like I wasn't being valued as a team player to the same degree as everyone else when I could perform the same as everyone else. That was hard.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“It was sort of an assumption that none of us would participate and I was definitely grouped with the rest of the Asian girls, despite not standing with them, or showing interest in whatever sport we were playing. Then it took me a while to realise she was grouping me in with the others, because I'm clearly different from the girls that she is picking for the good position, good games and stuff. I thought, “oh, what am I doing wrong?” and then it took me a while to realise it wasn't what I was doing, it was her perception of me/the group.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

Gender and cultural norms: Emphasis on non-contact and women-only spaces

“And the other thing is cultural things, mostly for women. With the cooking and all housework, they hardly get time to do recreation activities.” (Fijian-Indian male, early 40s).

“That's what they expect from women, so mostly they don't have any sport. If you like, for young people more but when you get older, so if I am in Sri Lanka I won't be doing any exercise when I get older, only cooking, tired, and all this ...” (Sri Lankan woman, mid 70s).

“Mainly non-contact and something only women are involved in. Not a mixed

sport. Like netball, only females play netball. If they want to go have a game of touch or rugby, it has to be only women. Only if they want to do it. If men are involved, no, I'm not going there, I'll stay home, do some cooking.” (Fijian-Indian male, early 40s).

Sport, fitness and body image: Cultural and parental expectations

“My mum and dad think I shouldn't do weight training because it will make me look bulky. I think it's the same thing as you said, lack of understanding. I think especially in Asian culture where they expect women to look slim, and only do yoga. No weights. But we're not doing it for looks, we're doing it for health.” (Taiwanese woman, mid 20s).

“For my mum, she doesn't want me to get bulky or make you manly but she does support me going to the gym and staying healthy and losing weight. But, I don't think she understands the extent of the training I do. She says my arms are getting too big, whereas I look at myself and go, yay, my arms are getting big. I think it's a lack of education in that older generation for my mum, she's getting old, and outdated perspective on fitness and health. Just like how social media used to be about toning and getting skinny, and now it's actually realising that there is scientific basis behind doing resistance training because it helps with your bone density and health, and the bonus is it makes you feel good.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

Signs of change

“We get some Asian girls, a few women, at the cluster. I think it's changing now, slowly. The chance is coming. But I think with the women's world cup this year in New Zealand, I think that will be a big boost for women.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

“All those large teams, famous teams like USA, they're coming here and kids are going to get a chance to go and see them play. I think that's going to really help inspire our girls.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

4. The Influence of Family: Support, Fears and Generational Differences

- Some families are highly supportive of sport and active recreation participation.
- Some youths and women described having to challenge dominant cultural ideas about sporting participation, having conversations with their parents and families to help them understand why their participation is important.
- As previously noted, Asian families place higher priorities on other activities (particularly academic success), which means time and resources for sport may not be actively supported.
- Some families deepen their support as they see, hear and learn about the social and physical health and wellbeing benefits of their children, youths, and partner's (i.e., wives) participation.
- In some cases, family members are not supportive because they have particular ideas about physical activities and body image. Female participants mentioned that parents would discourage them from going to the gym because they assumed it would lead to masculine traits (i.e., building muscle mass) (see 'Gender' above).
- Parents were often not supportive of contact sports such as rugby or mixed martial arts. The same cultural value is often not placed on these sports in Asia as it is in New Zealand, and parents were subsequently more worried about the risk of injury.
- Husbands offered varying perspectives on their attitude towards, and support of, their wives' participation in sport and physical activity.
- Evidence of strong family support for older members' participation (i.e., younger female family members encouraging older women [mothers and grandmothers])

Example quotes highlighting the strong influence of parents on Asian youth participation in sport and active recreation

“Culture has a great influence in Asian communities’ participation, especially the parents influence, like the parents have a big say in whether the kids can spend time on sports or recreation and how much time they spend on it and what particular sport or active recreation they spend time on. For example, some parents urge their kids to spend more time in tutoring class to study more on science and math, etc., but not necessarily on sports and active recreation. And even though some Asian parents are particularly keen on their kids getting active, they focus on particular sports like badminton, hoping their kids could gain valuable skills and can compete at high level competitively.” (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

Parental support

“Yeah, my parents have supported me because they know physical activity is good for you and stuff, and they know I enjoy it. And then my dad actually got me into playing golf because he was very good and he was able to coach me and stuff and teach me like all the techniques and stuff to help me get better. They're pretty supportive.” (Chinese male, teen).

“For me, my family, I think most of us we really enjoy football. That's one of the things our family love. I've been playing social and winter sports, so they'll come watch me at the par, or sometimes I put together a summer football team at Waiheke. There's also one where we get together as friends and family and everybody goes out there and enjoy the day.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, late 20s).

“I think the pattern, the willingness, has definitely changed over time. Before it was more like – because it's also about our families coming into this new country, not being assimilated. But now, over time, kids growing up here and parents as well being more familiar with the New Zealand culture, they're more open to us, to children, being recreational, taking on sports. They encourage that.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

“Hockey is the most important sport I've played; it's shaped me and a big part of making me who I am today. I've always enjoyed sport. I think personally I was quite good at it when I was younger and I think that was a big reason why I continued with a variety of sports. Tennis, golf, swimming, athletics day, gymnastics. Mum and Dad would take me to everything, so they were definitely a big influence on me when I was younger.” (Indian male, early 30s).

“For us, parents, we watch football at home. The kids watch anything else but they are glued to TV with us watching football. It's where their interest goes.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

“My mum really supported it. I think it did change recently. At the start, she really supported me because she did play the sport herself. And growing up, I'd never been a competitive sportsperson. I've always been more academic/arts driven so she was just happy that I was getting more active. But then recently, because Year 12 as well, a lot of other opportunities in terms of academic and arts start to pile up on top of just volleyball season, and actually just two days ago, she was like, maybe you should consider not playing next year because you're going to be so overwhelmed. I guess her attitude did change a little bit. So, from completely supportive to a little bit reluctant because of just everything piling up.” (Chinese female, teen).

Parental uncertainty: Cultural and generational differences

“With the recreation value, for Kiwi families, rugby is passed down from one generation to the next, and it's like seen on TV everywhere. Whereas with this one, the youth kind of lead themselves. It's kind of like they discover their own passion or their own sort of sport passion and then they go with it and then the parents will just either allow them – it's not like ... Young families here would probably go and support their children, their young children to go watch them play on the weekend. But if you're older, parents just let you do that. It's not like a family tradition. For example, my dad and my uncle, they didn't play sport or they didn't play soccer so they wouldn't ... but they would enjoy watching FIFA and stuff like that.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, late 20s).

“I think both because I myself grew up here and so it was never a one size fits all for physical activity. As I grew older, it became – we always knew that doing sports is good for you, being active is good for you and then it gradually was

defined and there was granularity of building muscle, doing resistance training offers these benefits, cardiovascular exercise offers these benefits and then as you grow older you start to see more on social media when it shifted. Then it's like, okay, everyone's doing it and it makes sense because there's no negatives to doing it. I had that, whereas my parents didn't see that shift. Social media, that's not what they're interested in. Growing up in a culture where there's all kinds of physical activity, it's hard to just put yourself in a box and say everything else is bad.” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“My parents, they weren't supportive, but they weren't unsupportive. They just were indifferent. I was like, “oh, I want to play this sport”, and they'd go, “okay”, and they just pay for my sports. Even now, they're indifferent. I'll say that I'm going to badminton and they go, “okay”. Just indifferent, just Asian parent things.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, late 20s).

Parental concerns: Contact sports and injury

“I think it's been a lot easier for us to go out and do what we love, like recreational stuff, when our parents are assimilated into the New Zealand culture. It's been a lot easier because they know, they feel more comfortable in the society. I think that's quite key ... and I think we would get a slightly different reaction. Parents do tend to get worried more if they have daughters and obviously, you know, just going out and then coming home late and stuff like that. So, if you're exercising or not, they still get worried because a lot of the children still stay at home kind of thing.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

“A lot of parents are just scared for their children to go into more dangerous sports, I think, because of injuries. I think Asian parents are a lot more cautious in terms of their parenting styles.” (Chinese female, teen).

“When I was a child, I used to play rugby. I first played rippa rugby, then touch rugby and then I was literally waiting to play tackle rugby. I really wanted to play because all my friends were playing, and I got into one of the best teams for my school, but then my mum stopped me from playing. Because there was this one time that I was playing and one of my team mates had a concussion and that wasn't very good, because my mum was really scared for my mental health, I guess.” (Chinese male, teen).

“If I'm at home, I tell my dad or mum that I want to go play rugby. You will get injured, no one is supposed to be going there. You're an Indian, you aren't supposed to be playing rugby. I don't know where that background is from. But it's just the same turn off – I want to play rugby; no, you're not playing rugby. You want soccer, that's fine ... I think it's the physicality of the sport. And on the other side, if I say I want to go for a run for 5 km, it's oh yeah, go for it, because there's not going to be contact. I always wanted to try some physical, like some really physical contact but then the comment comes from friends, okay, if you get injured you can't go to work, you can't earn money, all this sort of stuff. Cultural background stuff comes in, so I'm like, okay, I might as well just stay out of it.” (Fijian-Indian male, late 40s).

“For me, if my daughter wants to try rugby, I might not quite encourage her because I'm not familiar with it. This is first reason. The second reason I think is it maybe belongs to other ethnic groups. The main people who play rugby belongs to another group, for example maybe mainly they are Māori or Pacific people like to play that so I might not encourage my daughter to do that. Swimming, tennis, that's more international. From my point of view, these are more international than rugby because in China, it's not popular, rugby. From my point of view, focus on the tennis, lots of Chinese people play tennis as well. Swimming is a very familiar sport and I might want her to try. [in response to question about her

daughter playing rugby] We have a different health perspective. We eat different stuff and I feel like I might try to avoid that contact, the body contact as well. You know what I mean? I worry about my daughter if she go with the people together and she might easily catch cold. I might prefer it so you can play with the people who have similar hygiene. Like the habit is similar so if you catch cold you prefer wear masks, more responsible.” (Chinese woman, early 40s).

“I like lifting belts that help support your lower back so you don't ... but my dad told me, well, he took my belt away and he told me that it's going to make me internally bleed and break my back and things like that, that I know it's not going to happen. My dad said if you use the belt again, I'm going to cancel your membership.” (Chinese male, teen).

Different parental expectations of coaches

“I maybe thought they have a Chinese staff there, or they make me feel more welcome. I haven't pre-judged, so if this organisation is an Asian one, I might have a priority of good thinking of that. For example, my daughter go to swimming class, it's run by Korean people. I also went to the local – they run the swimming class so maybe there the priority is children have fun. But for the Asian coach run the class, they focus on the skills so they can learn very fast. They skill up very quickly. They combine. They still combine the local culture, very supportive, very encourage and making very friend but they also focus on the skills. It's different. I find the local like maybe we say Western culture teachers who, especially for the young kids, they are more focused to encourage you, give really, really less pressure on the study. This, for Chinese parents, I feel disappointed. I know if I don't have any expectation, okay, that's fine, we just come to play and maybe some sports, you just play. But if I've got some expectation then this is another story, I might change.” (Chinese woman, early 40s).

“The Chinese staff I feel are more welcoming. My daughter go to the gym, there's a Chinese instructor and also staff, so they can explain much more better and fit my value so meet my expectation of the topic. I understand the local because I want to know which parts she need to improve and the local teacher will say, oh, she's very good, very nice, and say all the good word but not what I want. I want like homework, which part I can do better. Something like this because I want to improve but they won't say that. They just say it very gently. Maybe if this organisation have a Chinese staff, I think they can attract a lot of Asian groups to come.” (Chinese woman, early 40s).

Example quotes highlighting differing attitudes among Asian husbands towards their wives' participation in sport and active recreation

“If my wife says, “I want to play netball”, I say, “okay fine. Find a club, you go and play”. She's one lazy lady. She will not drive all the way from here to Manurewa which is the next netball courts. If something was close by, she'd go and join it. She said, “I don't care, I will not go, I'd rather stay home and do some cooking and enjoy my other hobbies apart from sports”.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

“It comes down to us as well, how much we are willing to help and support. If I say, don't worry, you go for a walk, I'll do the dishes. It's been said from ancestors [that women should be at home] but it's changing now. My kids will be different to what I was.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

“My husband thinks if I do some activity make me feel full of energy and keep fit. Otherwise, he think I do nothing, just lie down.” (Chinese woman, late 40s).

Example quotes of intergenerational families supporting/inspiring/motivating each other to be more active

“My family is also very supportive. Because they can see I've changed – because I felt tired all of the time after activity and I feel exhausted after two dance, so once a week for me at the moment is really good. I also invite my mum to join the same class. She also like it very much.” (Chinese woman, early 40s).

“For me, because in past few months I didn't do any sports. Because my mum cooks very well, I eat a lot and she sometimes complains if I didn't do any sports. But after I joined gym and the free hip hop activities, she's very happy about this. Sometimes I also invite my friends to join the free activities. They are very happy.” (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

“Because I live alone in New Zealand, a long time ago I lived with my mum and she always push me to do some sports because I'm lazy. Because I living here, it just something I needed to keep healthy or needed to do more so I just joined some group, like the dance class so happy.” (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

“My family has always been pretty supportive of me doing sport. Because my mum once said to me she wanted me to grow up in sports so that I liked being active, unlike her, who sat around and didn't do any sports. They like me staying active.” (Chinese female, teen).

“My husband has been really supportive. He really look at the video and say – he did comment on my move because I used to go to gym and he say, “you dance like a cardio dance and now you are better”. I do appreciate his compliment. Other thing I want to add is I really see the changes in my mother-in-law, because for the past few years I really tried to offer some dance group that fit her but now you can see she's glowing, she's happy. She keeps saying, “remember to enrol me for the next semester”. Okay, okay. I can see her changes she is much more happier.” (Japanese woman, mid 50s).

“The biggest motivation for me doing sport is my husband. He's an exercise freak ... I used to just wait for him to finish his exercises and then go out. But one day I thought, oh, why not me doing things and I started going to the gym. Also my mother, her health is not very good, her back is so bent, she's very old, and knees very sore and bent, so I thought I didn't want to end up like my mother. I want to be more active when I get old. That's why I've been training myself.” (Japanese woman, mid 50s).

“When I was younger, I kind of was like, oh, I want to play volleyball because my mum played it when she was in high school and when she was in uni. But I think its technical nature makes it hard to start when you are like five, six years old as opposed to other sports, like, I don't know, touch or basketball. So, it just never really happened until last year actually, Year 11 when I got selected to play for Long Bay, which is one of those North Shore schools that has an okay volleyball reputation. So, then it kind of brought me half into the volleyball circle here and more opportunities started coming in because I stepped into that network and then one thing related to the other and just started playing more. But before that, mainly just because my mum played and I was like, I just want to try it out.” (Chinese female, teen).

5. Negative Experiences: Cultural Stereotypes, Unconscious Bias and Everyday Racism

While participants spoke with passion about the positive aspects of their sporting and physical activity experiences, they also highlighted several areas where they encountered negative aspects:

- At times, despite having names that were easy to pronounce, some facilitators made no effort to learn names of Asian origin, sometimes calling them an Anglo name that was similar. Participants found this disrespectful and negatively impacted their feelings of inclusion and belonging at such clubs/organisations.
- Frequently, participants encountered unconscious bias surrounding Asian women and sport. They felt that there were assumptions made that Asian women would not want to participate in sport, and if they did, they would not be very good. Several comments highlighted that this made individuals feel 'othered' and not valued within this environment (see also 'Gender and Age').
- 'Stacking' is an issue in competitive sport. Asian athletes feel they are often overlooked for team selection based on stereotypes that Asians aren't 'good at' or serious about sport. Some described being pigeon-holed into playing only certain positions because of their ethnicity.
- Some members highlighted that racist abuse was an ongoing issue in their sport. This included on-field targeting of players based on ethnicity, and off-field side-line abuse. Not only were they called racist names, but they felt like they were blamed for the issue if they reported it. According to participants, this is occurring at a very high frequency, but more so in adult sport than youth sport.
- Other participants (particularly older individuals) highlighted that they struggled with adapting to new cultural norms in Aotearoa. While they accepted that this was a challenge they would have to rise to, they were sometimes confronted by people who aggressively drew attention to this difference.
- A few commented on the rise of xenophobia¹⁷ and racialised attacks during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Some Asian women experienced heightened fear when exercising in public spaces. (This is further evidenced in recent research by Thorpe and colleagues, including Dr Nida Ahmad and Dr Anoosh Soltani, based on interviews with over 100 New Zealand women [including >10 of Asian heritage] focused on the role of sport and physical activity in their experiences of wellbeing during the pandemic¹⁸).

Example quotes from participants that highlight how cultural stereotypes, misunderstanding and unconscious bias shape their participation in sport and active recreation

"Even if it's just like unconscious bias, there is [a stereotype] that Asians are just bad at sport." (Chinese female, teen).

“During high school, but also in primary, the people, the PE teachers could never remember my name or get my name right because it’s very Japanese. I did touch rugby back in primary school for three years. Same coach every year, but he could never remember my name. For me, it wasn’t necessarily that I couldn’t participate, but more I didn’t really feel like a part of the team.” (Japanese-Canadian woman, early 20s).

“High school, uni, always has favouritism, it’s called unconscious bias. That’s obviously present when getting selected for teams and all that, there’s always favouritism. That’s something you have to deal with. I think race had to do with only one aspect of it. They preferred, selected over other ethnic groups, so that was the first time that I really realised there was that unconscious bias towards that. Sometimes there’s just that group of people that just prefer not to have other people.” (Chinese male, early 20s).

“Definitely in high school, there’s definitely some stereotypes and favouritism. I think just in general, especially if you’re an international student and not Kiwi/Asian, they’re going to think you don’t want to participate. Even the kids themselves do it. When they pick team mates, they don’t pick [the Asian kids].” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“I felt like there was no recognition when I did something well or the same things that the teacher would praise a non-Asian girl for doing, I would do the same and I wouldn’t get the same praise. That immediately became, what’s the difference? Why is this always happening?” (Chinese woman, early 30s).

“I remember in our start of Year 11, because the year before I’d been in junior prems for netball. During that year, because I was also the only Asian there. I don’t want to push this into racism or anything, but I was barely allowed on court and it was bad enough to the point where other parents were coming up to me and saying, “Oh, you should have gone on; you’re literally as good as them”. And later on in Year 11, when we had netball trials, everyone else – because for our school’s prem trials, you have to be invited and so everyone in my team was invited because it was junior prems and you’re going into senior, except for me. I was the only one who wasn’t invited to even trial for prems. I wasn’t even given the chance. Maybe I’m not as good as them, but, I think ... yeah.” (Chinese female, teen).

“Small balls with a net in the middle, like tennis, badminton, table tennis, that minimises physical contact with another person, and also maybe swimming and ice skating and those kinds of stuff that you kind of see Asian people do, like individual performing sports that just doesn’t have other people on court with you. I think that comes from like the concept that Asian people, they have less power but more agility, I guess, so less people will go into rugby and football and that kind of stuff. But then, I don’t think that idea is completely true because my mum literally used that idea against me once. Because I always get mad at myself when I’m not playing at my best and she pretty much told me to stop expecting so much from myself. She’s like, “Oh, you’re shorter compared to the other girls”. You have less power, you’ve got to work a lot harder to be at the brown or white people level. But I don’t think that’s even true. I think people just think that, and then with that mindset, they limit themselves from other sports. Like the international stage. If you look at Japan, they’re thriving and everything and they aren’t the tallest people, so I think it’s the conception and the idea that Asian people are lighter and shorter and then I guess more humbled, so then they’re less likely to actually be able to take that first step to go into those more powerful and physical contact-y sports.” (Chinese female, teen).

“I think it's hard to tell. Because most times if I don't get an opportunity, the first thing in my head wouldn't be, oh, that's because I'm Asian. It would probably be, oh, I'm probably not good enough for this team. I think it's all very nuanced, but I think there probably is, because there was once I went to trial for this club and then pretty much everybody that didn't make it into the team were Asians and only one Asian person made it into that team. This was at an adult level, but the people justified that as saying, well, maybe because you were just short and then we want taller players, which is fair enough. I don't know, I think it's very nuanced. It's probably not just you're not making it in because you're Asian ...” (Chinese female, teen).

“When I was a child, when basketball was called mini ball, I used to be the top shooter, I guess you could say. I used to be really competitive in basketball but then as I grew older, more and more – I remember the first year I played, all my friends were Asians, a few white boys, a few Polynesians, and then as I grew older, it'd be more white people joining on the team and then it'd be like I don't even get to touch the ball pretty much. I'm just walking around. I'd even be calling when I'm fully open for the ball and they almost ignore me pretty much and I was pretty much a benchwarmer as well.” (Chinese male, teen).

“I don't really want to lure everything into the box of racism, but there is some pattern that I can examine even with just volleyball right now, is that I think Auckland, it's not that Asian people don't play volleyball, it's just that Asian people never break into the top circle of volleyball. There's the Asian volleyball circle, and they're like the brown, I guess Māori Polynesian people circle of volleyball, but those circles, you never see them at New Zealand representatives or that kind of thing. They're in their own little groups, say in the South Auckland or like around other areas. But at North Shore, it's predominantly non-Asian, I think, and it's like a stereotypical thing that Asians can only play libero and centre instead of ... those two positions, what you would see Asians play if they do make it into a top team. But, I don't know, it's probably maybe the biological aspects or, I don't know, cultural aspects of just how people are brought up play into it as opposed to just pure discrimination. But there is a pattern that I can kind of see.” (Chinese female, teen).

Example quotes from participants regarding their experiences of racism in sport and active recreation

“While not a victim myself, but my team as a whole, there's been a lot that have been racially abused.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

“A lot of instances where just clashes between the Asian players and players from other ethnicities who do speak English as their first language. Straight away, they're being side-lined. Straight away, they're being looked down on because they speak another language. As far as I'm concerned, it created a lot of instances on the pitch where the player, the Chinese player or any Asian player could be speaking to the opponents and then because of misunderstanding and language barrier, that's when a lot of the fights or brawls happen and it all just came down to not understanding each other. If you look at the match reports at the end submitted by both teams, they're saying complete different story. One saw it this way, the other team saw it this way. But just on the sport, there was no way of actually clarifying it because the referee obviously didn't know any better either.” (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

“If you write an incident report, which I've done regularly, against one of the big clubs, somehow we are the liars. Their incident report, it's just like that's the truth, everything is fact, whatever they tell is the fact; whatever we are saying is lies. That's the other thing I have noticed.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

"I had one very bad experience in the changing room at the (council) pool. I was washing my jandals in the hand basin and this lady, a Kiwi lady, just looked at me, she came over to me and said, "Oh, we don't do it in New Zealand". She was very angry, and she was pointing at me, my face, and said, "no, you go back home". I cried." (Japanese woman, mid 50s).

"Our hair is black, right, so it's quite visible, and a Kiwi lady, probably in her late 50s, when I was brushing the hair (in the changing room after swimming) and then taking the hair from the brush and trying to put my hair into the bin, she was really staring at me. I didn't understand why, she said something like, "You guys are always dropping your hair and the pool becomes very dirty" or something like that. But I'm pretty sure everyone, human beings, hairy animals, cats, dogs, they, we, lose our hair so they are also losing their hair but it's not so visible. That's one experience." (Japanese woman, mid 50s).

Racialised and sexualised attacks

Some of the Asian New Zealand women in a recent study (led by Thorpe) described experiencing racialised attacks when leaving the home and exercising outside, with the frequency of such attacks heightened through the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁸:

"I go outside for a walk, someone shouts at me, screams at me, I get terrified for my life. How do you expect me to have wellbeing when no one in the society accepts you?" (Muslim woman of Asian heritage, mid 30s).

For some Asian women, walking outside and being in nature may be a highly positive affective experience that improves their subjective wellbeing. Yet for others (particularly those distinguished through particular clothing and/or head coverings), public outdoor spaces carried a new set of risks during the pandemic when fears of the 'Other' and implicit and explicit forms of racism were on the rise.

The following quote is from a middle-aged Asian woman who experienced an unwanted sexual advance in the sauna after swimming at a community pool. In her own explanation, we hear how the intersection of gender and ethnicity shapes others interactions with and (mis)treatment of Asian women in public spaces of physical activity:

"When I was in sauna (after swimming) and I think only me was there, and one big guy came and say hi, just briefly talking, and he started to touch my shoulder. I said, what are you doing? It's getting scary and I get out from the sauna. And my blood pressure was ... I almost fainting. It was a scary experience. I, of course, told to the person ... and I was so shocked. Maybe you feel us, small frame and also face is quite friendly so many people easily talk to us? And sometime in Japan, I don't have that kind of experience. The people don't talk a lot in the sauna. I do enjoy talking to people in spa pool, so I think it's a good thing. But when a guy touches my body, different story, totally different story. Again, person to person comfortable distance, that's different depending on the culture, and touching as well, probably." (Japanese woman, early 60s).

6. Perceptions of Sport and Active Recreation Organisations Efforts to Build Culturally Inclusive Environments and Support Asian Participation

- Many participants felt that their sport and physical activity organisations respected their cultures.
- Some noted that efforts by sports organisations and clubs to be more inclusive of language (particularly with signage in different Asian languages) were much appreciated and considered more welcoming and inclusive than organisations and programmes that didn't go to such efforts.
- Clubs and gyms with Asian staff were also preferred by many.
- Food is particularly significant for certain ethnicities, and it was noted that it is important for clubs to make efforts to provide more than Western options if your club represents multiple cultures (and/or wants to be more inclusive and supportive of different cultures and ethnicities).
- Funding was a major issue – both in terms of providing subsidised participation where possible and investing in facilities.
- Overwhelmingly, participants felt that more could be done to create sports opportunities for Asian communities, particularly where they made up a high proportion of the population. It is important that this happens early too, so that young people engage in sport and recreation, build confidence, and develop positive lifelong habits. Having access to and support for activities that are culturally relevant to these communities is important.
- In summation, there were a number of actions that participants believe sports organisations and clubs could do better to create more culturally inclusive and supportive environments:
 - i) More effort towards greater cultural representation (i.e., food options, spelling words/names correctly).
 - ii) Having alternative options to what is viewed as a competition-focused New Zealand culture around sport, and a call for clubs and organisations to reconsider priorities of space and resourcing that tends to go to the elite teams/players first. Can social, recreational, informal needs be equally prioritised?
 - iii) Accessibility to information about sport and recreation could be improved. Participants noted that there are events and sports competitions taking place, but it can take a lot of effort to find out about them. Such information should be available in a range of languages. Having a central information point would also help with social aspects as many individuals felt excluded

- from some activities because they didn't have an established group.
- iv) Participants asked that information about grants is made more accessible, so that providers of sport and activities popular among Asian communities can apply for grants and additional funding to further support their programmes.
 - v) Participants would also like to see more Asian staff in their sport and active recreation providers.
 - vi) 'Have a Go' sessions are a good start, but more sustained efforts are needed to welcome and keep participants.
 - vii) More festivals events that celebrate intersections of sport, physical activity and Asian cultures
 - viii) Some identified concerns in the lack of representation of Asian leaders in sport and members on governance boards (which they felt were very insular connection driven groups).⁸
 - ix) Calls for more representation of Asian people in sport and active recreational organisations promotional material.

Examples of quotes from participants that highlight their observations and appreciation of clubs and organisations working to better understand and respect their cultures

"I didn't feel abnormal. In our club, we celebrate different cultural activities as well. We get together and go to yum cha or we sometimes celebrate Chinese New Year. It used to be a dominantly European ladies club but more Chinese and they respect." (Chinese-Malaysian woman, late 40s).

"I always go to gym because they hire a lot of the Chinese instructors and they celebrate Chinese New Year. I remember during the Chinese New Year, they put a cute rabbit at the reception because the year of the rabbit. They put the four (Chinese New Year) words at the front of the classroom so a lot of people joined that class and they hand out a lot of vouchers for Chinese. So, I think they encourage a lot of Asians to come there." (Chinese woman, mid 40s).

"What they [sports club] started to do was provide more non-alcoholic options over the bar, and all of a sudden had more water freely available and all of a sudden added a prayer room in their space and so all of a sudden, now that these people felt a little bit more welcomed, a little bit more included ... and living in New Zealand, we know food brings people together and doing things, small things like that, or giving small compromises, could make a huge difference for our communities." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

Some participants expressed disappointment when organisations/leaders/staff refuse to listen to their concerns and suggestions

"This sports club, 60% of their junior club was South Asian, and probably a good percentage of that were either Hindu or Muslim, yet the canteen and the food offerings that they provided for all the members either had beef or pork or weren't halal. It was through conversations and about, hey, how can we do this, how do we make you more responsive and inclusive to your organisations? "No, it's too hard". "Our caterers can't do that". It's like, no, you just have to change your meat supplier here or there and all of a sudden, you've created a more inclusive environment. They didn't do that. Through all the conversations, they even hired a new caterer and they didn't explicitly ask for that, which I found really disappointing." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

"I remember talking to a chairperson, and saying, "hey, what are you doing around food?" And he told me a story about how his club members asked him, "next time instead of buying \$5 pizzas from Pizza Hut, can you bring halal pizzas?" He told me that he wasn't going to because it's too hard. Considering he was quite a big leader across the space, it was quite disappointing to hear that it was just too hard rather than being inclusive or asking how they could do it." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

The importance of Asian staff: Language and belonging

"At the swimming pool, there is Korean speaker working there. I love that. Most facility worker can, of course, be a native English speaker but some people can speak Chinese and Korean if they are working. It's a big help for users." (Japanese woman, late 50s).

"The dancing instructor is from China and I really like her class. She's energetic and it's a very different [style] from the people here." (Chinese woman, mid 40s).

"You feel that they've thought about you. I think it's as much as when you walk in the door and someone says hello or speaks in your language, it's very comforting. I think it's huge, it's just a very welcome feeling that you get if you've got that luxury." (Fijian-Indian male, late 40s).

Beyond lip service: Participant suggestions on how to build a more culturally inclusive sport system in Aotearoa

"I think for me, on the walls [of the sport and rec centre] when they have all the food and stuff, I think once there was a Japanese food displayed and I didn't realise until then how much it had just been other food that we don't really eat at home, that we're really unfamiliar with. Seeing that was really cool. More of that can make that idea of living healthy, eating healthy, a lot more accessible with a different culture." (Chinese woman, early 30s).

"I think also there's a bit of the club doesn't know necessarily what to do to engage with the right audience. I just mentioned a few things to get started about what the club does, it has a Chinese flag on – if we talk about Asia specifically here, we have a Chinese flag on the website but we have nothing else. We don't celebrate the culture, we don't know about the culture. You hear Chinese New Year, that's it. I'm sure there's a lot of things that they do, and you can extend that further than the Chinese culture. Other cultures are impacted on that as well." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 40s).

"Just poor cultural understanding across the board. So "the door's always open", administrators use that type of language, which really beg to differ is whether you're actually doing anything to engage with these pockets of the diverse communities, not just limited to the Asian ethnicity. I found that to be the most common problem where clubs aren't actually doing anything to engage and to attract these people from coming through the door. And then afterwards, it's who is actually the go to person? [It would be great to have a] welcoming officer, someone who can actually handle the communication and the relationship building side of things. Most of these people are coming in with very limited knowledge of the clubland. Very limited knowledge of the sport and rec system here in Auckland/or in New Zealand." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"I feel there's a lot of clubs – maybe not a lot but there's clubs that are aware of those cultural barriers and then their attempts to remove those can sort of be half attempted. Sometimes it's just, we'll put a bit of communication in a different language and hopefully that's enough. But it's not understanding how you can build that relationship, and the too hard basket excuse is one that is put out there a lot. This is my personal experience as well from when I was younger to now, it's less explicit racism or discrimination. It's a little bit more subtle now but it still

has that impact. And there's an awareness to try and reduce some of those barriers ... but just because your "doors are open" doesn't actually mean you're being inclusive." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

'Have a Go' sessions a great start, but more sustainable efforts needed

"I noticed some clubs already have the awareness to engage the Asian community because there's changes in the demographics. As a lot of people know, there's a lot more Asians emigrated to New Zealand and the Asian population in a couple of local boards, especially Howick local board, are particularly high. So the clubs would like to do something, but it looks like they also have lots of barriers and don't know where to start. Some of them have organised a couple of 'have a go' sessions for the community to try and to get a taste of some of their sports, but it looks like the have a go sessions are really great. They engage the community really well, they create a wonderful atmosphere and the community really enjoy it. However, after those a have a go sessions, everything goes back to normal. There's no more food or music or there isn't a welcoming atmosphere, the bilingual volunteers or the facilitators are gone and everything goes back to normal. When you think about situations like this, it's not hard to think that the Asian communities might feel it's quite daunting to go into a club that is full of Pākehā." (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

"For lots of outsiders, like the new immigrants, they hardly know the existence of the club before and after the try to have a go sessions, they start to know about the club, but not too much and they just tentatively try to do a little bit of this and a little bit of that but still have no idea about what exactly going on like a normal day. So I think for the clubs, it would be great to really think in the shoes of the new immigrants and embed those little norms or those cultural things into the club rather than just a organise something like a have a go. Think about the long term, think about a more sustainable way that can help the new immigrants feel more welcoming and gradually introduce them into a more comfortable atmosphere." (Chinese woman, mid 30s).

"I think maybe hold more Asian festivity where we celebrate physical wellbeing or activities. That would be great to see in the community, then all the Asian community can come and participate or represent their own country within the activities. Like exhibition, Asian sport exhibition. That would be awesome. Like tai chi, badminton, sepak takraw and everything, all in one. Having more festivals would help with engagement." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Culturally-appropriate means of knowledge sharing and networks

"Yeah, sometimes the new immigration people don't know how to find a place to do activities. When I came here several years ago, I feel very hard to find a club to play badminton. I Googled, found Lloyd Elsmore so I went there. After chatting, they told me maybe you can go to the ladies club, there is also a place in East Tamaki. It's very hard at the beginning to let them know where to find the group and what kind of activities you like." (Sri Lankan woman, mid 70s).

"I think important is the information sharing so that people know what they can do and which kind of cost and where to go. Such as the swimming pool. A lot of people don't know the child don't need to pay the cost [free U16]." (Chinese-Malaysian woman, late 40s).

"I think with social gathering, like for me, I love to go hiking – on the weekend, we enjoy walking, doing the tracks and stuff like that so I think if there is a social group, a hiking social group, more of that in Auckland that we sign up to, that would be quite cool. That would actually get more people to sign up and join and be more active." (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Funding support

“It would be good, government subsidy, support for less popular sport as well. And I think, you know how in migrant communities we have our popular sport back in our country, but it’s not very discoverable – well, it hasn’t been exposed a lot in New Zealand but it is out there, and so, if that can be encouraged ... Yeah, it would be great to receive some support when we run a competition, sport tournament.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, late 20s).

“I think that when they do the grants round, it needs to be more accessible to ethnic groups. And more people need to be aware that those grants are available and when the rounds are so that they can also apply on time. Because sometimes the bigger sports, like soccer, that are operated and managed by the soccer club will probably go for the funding round. That’s general, that’s diverse. But if there is a smaller grant opportunity for, say, sepak takraw, there’s sports that are not as popular or like social groups that you want to form, like social sport or something like that where people will be encouraged to be creative around what kind of activities there are for their ethnic people or even people that they know, like their group of circles, of friends, stuff like that.” (Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Awareness of cultural biases

“Everything is so much if you know the coach, you have so much advantage over other people. And the people that know the coach are usually white people. I don’t really know what specifically they can do because the people that do end up getting into the teams, they are good, but they are also good because they were in that circle from quite a long time ago, and from their standpoint, they don’t actually need that many extra people to go into their circle because their circle is already pretty good and they don’t need 30 people for a 10 people team. So I don’t really know what specifically they can do. I guess definitely just it’s more arbitrary in terms of just the mindset needs to be more open, I think. I don’t think having a specific Asian volleyball program would help because that would just feed into the segregation even more, as opposed to actually adding them into the existing circle. But I think that mindset could just be better.” (Chinese female, teen).

More Asian representation in sports and club organisations and leadership positions

“Representation, I can speak for the sport of badminton, where you see easily 80, 90% of Asian participants but, when you look at people running the sport administration level, RSO, NSO, they are still non-Asians, so how are the Asian voices wants and needs being heard and being addressed or being taken into account? I guess that’s also one of the reasons that would prevent people – I mean, I’ve seen it with my own eyes where players are just not coming back because they don’t see the point of doing it because we continue to get side-lined with what we want and what our needs are.” (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

“We’ve got some great representation on the Sport NZ board, but why can’t we see that in terms of our operational workforce so that they can start to create change and start to push up? And when we’re pushing up, no one’s actually hearing and changing anything. How do we start to influence from the top down? And that’s through having people in key influential roles to be able to support and influence the right people at the right levels so that we’re signing cheques to be able to do the right pieces of work.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

Greater visibility

“I think that they need to make the advertisements not just maybe you see people playing football and the advertisement, when they make it, usually you'd see a white person kicking a football or something like that. You don't really see Asians almost at the front picture of the sport. It's hard to picture it.” (Chinese male, teen).

“It's also not what is televised. We see a lot of rugby, we see a lot of netball. [But these sports aren't represented as] being an approachable sport for certain types of people and not Asians.” (Chinese women, early 30s).

7. Meeting the Diverse Needs of the Asian NZ Communities: The Hopes, Frustrations and Calls to Action from Everyday Change Makers

We conducted a focus group with five sport facilitators, all of whom are of Asian heritage (Indian, Fijian-Indian, Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, Malaysian) and work in various sport and active recreation organisations, programmes and clubs with the aim of enhancing opportunities and experiences for the Asian communities. This group brings many decades of experience as athletes, active participants, coaches, administrators, managers and sports leaders. The following are some of the key insights they shared as to what New Zealand can do to better support Asian participation in sport, active recreation and play:

- While it is easy to pay lip service to helping Asian New Zealand communities, it is more difficult to actually create systemic change through strategic planning and funding to identify and support the needs of the diverse Asian New Zealand communities.
- “Asian” is an umbrella term that encapsulates so many diverse groups. Therefore, approaches need to be targeted towards the various sections of this intersectionality (i.e., regions of the country; gender; age; different Asian cultures, heritage, nationality, and generation). It is important that the umbrella term ‘Asian’ is used critically and contextually, recognising the significant diversity among rapidly growing communities.
- While the rapidly growing Asian New Zealand population in Auckland often gets the most attention, the sport and active recreation experiences of Asian communities in other parts of New Zealand also deserve specific attention and focus.
- Recognising this diversity among the Asian New Zealand communities, different groups each need a leader/s to speak for them, but identifying people who are willing to take on these roles can be difficult (as such roles and career-paths have not been well documented or made highly visible among the Asian communities to date). More support for current and the next generation of Asian sport leaders is needed.
- Despite large and rapidly growing populations, this sector is under-resourced and funding poses an ongoing issue. The Asian community typically do not participate in the same structured way as Western participants, and thus they often miss out on funding, resources and facilities, with critical decisions continuing to be made by organisations with little Asian voice, representation or leadership.
- Additionally, people in governance positions typically don’t value putting resources into targeting participation from the Asian communities. Some noted

that there are opportunities to engage with wealthy Asian business people in this space too.

- Despite challenges and frustrations, it is a rewarding space to work. Creating change for the next generation, making a difference in communities and building the capabilities of individuals within communities were identified as key factors.
- There is significant passion and skills among the Asian sport facilitators. They are working tirelessly to improve the conditions for their communities to participate in sport, active recreation and play, but often feel that their work isn't being seen and valued by those in leadership positions. They are also being stretched to work across rapidly growing and diverse Asian communities, without adequate funding, support and staffing.

New and ongoing challenges in meeting the sporting and active recreation needs of growing and diverse Asian New Zealand communities

“When I started working in this space, it was very tick boxy, very much “we want to drive numbers”. I don't think it was genuinely done in that space and it was just, oh, hey, we've got some money to drive participation so this is what we're going to do. And as we saw as time went on, the money disappeared and so did the focus on these communities.” (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

“The term ‘Asian’ as well is a very umbrella term that describes many cultures and many ethnicities, so some of the pathways might work for certain parts of the Asian communities, but not for other parts of the Asian communities.” (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

“To give an example of the intersectionality needed here, the first-generation Asians, 1.5 generation Asian, second, third, fourth generation of Asian, they all experience different things and you can't lump them all together and expect the same way would work for every one of them.” (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

Role models and leadership opportunities

“Last year I went to a national level sport conference, and I'm the only Asian there. Countless times when I was in a leadership position with an RSO where I go to leadership breakfast, leadership event, workshop or whatever, and 100% of the time I'm the only Asian female; 99% of the time I may be one of two to three Asians in the room. So that tells you the problem; half the problem, if not all the problem.” (Chinese-Malaysian female, late 30s).

“I really like the word role model and being able to walk the talk. I think that's something that's not just above but throughout the community as it's really easy to do that simple thing. But how can you actually make sustainable change and be part of the bigger long term impacts? And I guess acknowledging the situation. I think there has been some acknowledgement but really backing that acknowledgement. And, if that means giving us resources or funding or connections or support, that would go a long way.” (Indian male, early 30s).

“I think for me it's the whole role modelling, you can't be it if you can't see it, right?! They did a piece of research maybe two years ago around their workforce and the huge gap in the Asian community in terms of how many people are working in the workforce. Sport was not generally a career path for a lot of us. Or, when

we spoke to our parents about it, they kind of laughed at us and they were like, "Huh, are you actually sure that you want to do this?" So, it's having people and role models up in front and championing them and putting them at the forefront and saying, hey, these people are leading change." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

"You've got your different ethnicities and this is just a generalisation that may not apply in all instances, but trying to find a champion or a leader to bring forth sport as an experience for their community or for their group or for their people can be quite tricky." (Indian male, early 30s).

"No one expects Sport New Zealand to solve the world's problem in one day. But what I would love to see is for them to trust the people on the ground like us to deliver what they set up to do so. They need policy makers on their senior management team. They will need definitely representation people that actually live and breathe the demands and the needs of these people, that will soon become a quarter of the nation's population. Then from there, it's actually setting the direction and having the oversight and visibility of them actively and interested in engaging with the Asian population and allowing us by giving us the resources to continue on our work and keep building on the initiative that we're doing." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"One of the big frustrations or challenges are being the token Asian. It's the lack of resources actually addressing it. Where is the Asian representation from Active as the regional ... the biggest powers that be for Auckland? They don't even have an Asian person leading in that space." (Chinese-Malaysian female, late 30s).

The need for targeted strategy (revisiting structures of support), investment and systemic change

"To be honest, I think a lot of sports organisations are still not open minded to change, to adapt and to accept – yes, accept on a superficial level, but genuine acceptance, it's a different ball game." (Chinese-Malaysian female, mid 30s).

"How many years have we read the report that Asians are one of the least active? Instead of putting such a negative spin on it, what are the action plans? What are the strategies to tackle it? Do we get why are they less active or why just throw out that statement? It's a very negative connotation to me because you're not providing anything else to support that statement, why is that the case." (Chinese-Malaysian female, mid 30s).

"When we look at our structure, the sector support, their healthy active learning, women and girls, all sort of things that are placed way higher above on the list. Even though we are included in the diversity and inclusion kind of work, understanding and responding to the needs of the Asian NZ community is only a tiny part of this diversity and inclusion team. There's a lot of strategy work needs to be done to really drive this work and to place it in a more important place. So when people talk about other piece of work in the sport sector, there should be a great place for us to share our achievement and to share our work as well." (Chinese female, mid 30s).

"A lot of money and structure was put towards clubs and the way that structured support was delivered, yet we know that our communities, especially our Asian communities, don't necessarily always participate in these structured systems. So how do we make sure that we also give them the fair opportunities that all these other communities don't? And I think it could come down to funding but for me, it's about those people who are generally, and it's this is a generalisation, but they are generally middle aged white men who haven't experienced these barriers before in their life and expect people just to pick it up and just run with it. So as a result, they don't put value on it and they see this piece of work diminish

and go away and they're like, "Oh, why is it not happening anymore?" or "you're not valuing it." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

"Funding is definitely a big issue. We are relying on one major regional funding stream ... We are already heavily, heavily overloaded with the fact that there's only seven of us and there are 442,000 Asian people in Auckland alone. So how are we meant to change the entire sport and rec sector, let that be our goal, if we only get so limited resources? That is the frustration and challenge that we unfortunately have to work with on a daily basis. A lot of people appreciate what we do, but they're not putting money where their mouth is. Because we do need more people. We do need dedicated funding into the community so that they can benefit from it." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"In the last five years that I've been working in this space, I think most of the times when you're trying to advocate to the higher power, it does feel like you're talking to a brick wall. Everyone knows about the inactiveness of the Asian ethnicity group. Everyone knows about the significant growth of the Asian population. And yet no one is doing anything about it." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"Trying to showcase the need for this change is always a challenge. There'll be token efforts to try to make a little bit of change. But the long term sustainability of these things doesn't seem to sort of push through. So I feel like it's very, very difficult to just go to a club and be like, "Hey, look, this is why we have this approach, this is what we stand for". That is always a struggle. So then you end up trying to create financial incentives or other incentives to show that this could bring in – or to justify why we would do this or make this change." (Indian male, early 30s).

"If the Asian population means that much to [national and regional sports organisations] or to anyone involved, that requires commitment and investment, and how are you putting your skin on the game by actually contributing to this initiative?" (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"Systems change do take time. I'm not talking about a one-off payment, using some of the words that have been used before, probably half arsed attempts. But are we actually committing to engaging the Asian community through play, active recreation and sport and what would that pose? What are the impacts of the xenophobia that Asian people have to deal with as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic? All these factors add up." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"I think a lot of the changes that we're seeing in New Zealand society mimic what our Asian communities have already started to do or have always done. There's a real move to active recreation and play, but yet these are key fundamental parts of who we are as people. It's about understanding what the barriers are and what the differences are to be able to enable it. So being able to understand that, that yes, our communities are different, but they're also very similar but what are the things what are the levers that you need to pull, they need to pull to be able to do it, and it's just about valuing what our communities are going to bring to sport and active recreation that we don't already have." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

"A big part of our system is a lack of money to be able to do anything. We could be engaging our Asian communities who are entrepreneurs, who are business owners, who are in high paying jobs. They are more likely to spend more money and bring more money into sport and physical activity than if we don't engage them. That's a big missed opportunity because we're not thinking about it." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

"After countless years of reporting that the Asian ethnicity group has the lowest participation rate compared to other ethnicity groups, the censuses reporting that

Asians are experiencing the highest growth in both Auckland and New Zealand population, I think it is time for our [national and regional sports organisations] to actually look at these issues seriously and really take on the feedback that they're hearing. What are the action plans that follow through?" (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"No one expects them to know everything but talk to us, have that direct dialogue with us, people on the ground so that we can voice these feedback and needs and sometimes even frustrations ... Sometimes it just feels like they're (sports leaders) sitting on their high chair and not reacting and responding to what the people are saying. And I sincerely hope that [national and regional sports organisations] use this research as the starting point and really reprioritise their investment areas and really emphasise on the needs to support the Asian community in sport and rec." (Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s).

"We have this data saying that the population is growing and growing and in 2040 it's going to be massive and the current situation points to the Asia population being less active ... we can do these little things here and there, but it needs to be a really substantial piece of work to investigate the issues, the solutions and I feel the community needs to be involved in that or the people need to be involved in that. I think taking it seriously is probably the main message, is going, hey, this is the situation, what are we going to do about it, and how can each stakeholder bring their value to be part of the solution." (Indian male, early 30s).

"I really hope that [national and regional sports organisations] formulate a strategy to increase opportunity for Asian community, and really addressing equity and inactivity in the Asian community. The second thing is to put into resources, invest in us and support us (Asian sports facilitators). For example, provide training, opportunity to really upskill our people and also provide funding resources so we can support more people." (Chinese female, mid 30s).

Asian sport leaders: Driven by a passion to improve opportunities for their communities

"For me, it's about creating a bit of space for our communities so that our next generation don't have to again deal with all that stuff. Giving them the opportunity to walk in and feel welcome rather than having to fight to build their space are the key things that keep me going and keep me fighting for this kind of work." (Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s).

"It's really rewarding seeing the impact and change that you can have and seeing people feel more comfortable or themselves in any environment that they've been foreign to. That's definitely a big driver. I've been inspired by a lot of the work that's happened before or in other spaces ... I just want to be a part of that positive change and seeing what's come so far and there's still space and improvement yet to happen. But for me, that's what drives me, is wanting to be a part of the change." (Indian male, early 30s).

"I really like the idea of system building and using the locally led approach and insights approach to engage the community. So rather than just we deliver something for the community, we actually build the capability of the community leaders and helping them and supporting them, offering the guidance they need to help them so they can deliver and they can take more actions for their own people. That's something I really enjoy. For the second part, what drives me in my day to day work, I noticed in a couple of Aktive survey results, the Asian community continues being the least the least active community in physical activity and sports. That means we still have a lot of work to do to turn things around, and I hope, years later, when we look at the new round of Aktive survey, Asian community is not at the bottom. Then I'll be feeling super happy." (Chinese female, mid 30s).

Vignettes

South Auckland Rangers: Asian communities, Connection and Countering Everyday Racism

The South Auckland Rangers Football Club (South Auckland FC) is a popular club in south-east Auckland. Located in the growing suburbs of Flat Bush and Ormiston, the local population is expected to be over 55,000 people by 2046.

The club has approximately 500 members, and has a unique membership base, whereby 80–90% of their members are of Indian descent. As the club is located within a mixed socio-economic area, the club notes that one of their challenges is to maintain and increase their membership base. With the increasing costs of living, as well as family and work commitments, the club has noticed affordability to playing sports as an emerging challenge among their mostly Asian membership. The club works hard to decrease the barriers to participation among their communities, including efforts to maintain affordable seasonal fees, and occasionally offers free practices to the local communities.

As a committee member of Asian descent stated, “we’ll do something about it [affordability] to help, because we want the kids here”. This was also supported by other committee members who emphasised their own “love of sports, and love of football”, which continued to drive their “passion to give back” to local kids and the wider community.

As one club administrator noted, there is also a high demand among older Asian players: “we’ve noticed the older people they want to play more football to keep active but we can’t offer them the facilities because we’ve got that much space only for training and we have to cater for the whole club of 500 members.” The interest and enthusiasm to play is there, but the club is hamstrung by limitations in facilities and funding.

Despite various efforts by the club to create a supportive and culturally-responsive environment for their diverse Asian communities, committee members expressed concern that many of their players regularly face racial abuse when playing teams from other clubs. One member recalled a recent experience, “my team as whole, has experienced a lot of racial abuse, side-line abuse and some bullying”. The club states that while racial abuse occurs in all ages, the seniors and masters age groups experience racial abuse on close to a weekly basis, “When it comes to an older age group, it’s almost every week or once every two weeks.” This was supported by

another member who explained, “our boys have been called dark chocolate and all those names”.

Although the frequent racial abuse has not deterred these coaches and committee members from playing football, they acknowledge that the impact of racial abuse can vary between age groups. As one of the coaches stated “For my group, the younger group, they’ll get motivation out of it and try play better”. However, one member noted “it’s demotivating, and we don’t want to play those kinds of teams anymore”. While members of the South Auckland Rangers bring a passion for football and are working to build a strong community that celebrates diversity and inclusion, and values participants' cultural identities and ethnic heritage, they continue to experience frustration when interacting with some other clubs whose players and officials continue to demonstrate racism on the pitch.

ActivAsian: Grassroots Leadership with, from and for Asian Communities in Auckland and Beyond

In 2009, the ActivAsian initiative was developed through the regional sports trust, Harbour Sport. The initiative was expanded to the regional sport trusts, Sport Waitākere and Sport Auckland in 2018 and subsequently to CLM communities Sport in 2021. The aim of ActivAsian is to inspire, empower, and collaborate with the Asian communities through play, active recreation, and sport. The initiative has four key objectives: building capability; increasing participation; increasing awareness; and inclusion in sport.

One of the successes of the ActivAsian initiative is the locally led approach to community programmes. Programmes are developed and tailored based on the demand of local community members, to reflect the different ethnic and cultural participation preferences across the city. As explained by one Asian sport and recreation facilitator, this work requires some rethinking and unpacking of some of the deeply entrenched ways of organising, offering and doing sport and active recreation in New Zealand: “I just think the way you participate in sport and recreation in New Zealand is very prescriptive, meaning there's only one way to do it and if you don't obey the way that they want you to do, it's almost like, well then you got to only play socially by yourself, or with your mates.” This was supported by another facilitator who states the challenges of a one-size fits all approach to participation that has long been dominant in New Zealand: “we're [currently] not doing it in a meaningful way, (that is) able to create real systemic change [and] to get our communities' physically active in ways that we would love them to be and become lifelong participants”.

As the ActivAsian initiative continues to grow across the region, the sport and recreation facilitators note that a common theme they have identified through their engagement with other sport administrators and clubs, is the lack of cultural competency and/or cultural intelligence within the sector. Even though many clubs and organisations are observing the quickly changing demographics of their society, some don't know how to work towards more culturally inclusive organisations and offerings. As explained by one facilitator, “I found that a lot of administrators think that as long as they're not being exclusive then they're being inclusive”. A similar view was discussed by another facilitator who stated, “there's an awareness to try and reduce some of those barriers but I feel like they (clubs) fall short on creating a truly welcoming environment”.

Although the sport and recreation facilitators collectively note that there is no quick fix to improving cultural competency, they suggest that to begin with, it's important to be open minded on cultural differences, be curious, and reflect on how to create a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Despite ongoing challenges, the facilitators have also seen considerable progress among some of the clubs and organisations they have been working with. They gave the example of a golf club they had been supporting: “Through the recommendations that we've made, they've now got a Korean member, a non-voting board member sitting at the meetings. They are also in the process of translating all of their correspondence into Korean and Chinese as well. And just for a bit of context, but 60% of their members are of Asian descent, with the majority of them being Korean. That's why we came in in the first place. It was just rewarding and exciting to see that, through what we have done and recommended, they have lost their fear.”

The staff of ActivAsian are passionate and highly skilled in their work to create meaningful change in the sport, play and active recreation sector, and supporting their communities to ensure they have access to culturally safe, inclusive and supportive environments. In the words of one staff member: “One of the most rewarding parts of my job is seeing the faces of our community members coming to our program and just the realisation that they know this is *for them*. You know that from the moment we talk to them about what they want, to actually working with the relevant sports codes or service providers to put this program on and for them to bring their kids and/or the kids themselves, it is very rewarding seeing the smiles on their faces”.

Driven by a deep belief in the power of sport, active recreation and play to improve the lives of the diverse and rapidly growing Asian New Zealand communities, ActivAsian staff bring important cultural knowledge and leadership to the New Zealand sporting sector, and are eager to share their expertise so that others can be part of the change.

Burmese Refugees and the Karen Community: Fishing, Family, Culture and Family Recreation

Beginning in the early 2000's, Burmese refugees are one of the largest ethnic groups to arrive in New Zealand. For many Burmese refugees, sport, physical activity and recreation is seen as a way to spend time together, help assimilate into the New Zealand culture, and enjoy being active.

One common activity that was discussed by participants is the importance of recreation finishing within the Burmese community. This is because it's a recreational activity that can involve all members of the family and the wider community. Additionally, fishing is seen as an activity that can bring everyone together, regardless of their age and gender. As stated by one participant "I would say every single household has a fishing rod, in our community. The only time we do a family outing, is when we organise family camping around a fishing plan". This was further supported by another participant who explained that fishing is an opportunity for everyone to be involved in harvesting food and being able to spend time together. As the participant emphasised "Fishing is probably the most important activity for the family, and I think a lot of the families for our ethnic people, it's quite a significant family activity, because it's like everybody is able to go together and they all enjoy it". Both participants further explained that fishing has improved the well-being of many people in their community.

However, both participants note that given the importance of fishing to their community, they would love to see water safety educational opportunities promoted to the wider Asian community. As explained by one participant, "It would be great to have tailored water safety around fishing and being near the water being included that is then shared with our ethnic people". This is because people often forget how dangerous being in and around the water can be.

The participants also mentioned how assimilation into the New Zealand culture has opened their eyes to the wide range of different sport and recreational activities in New Zealand, with such activities offering valuable opportunities to build meaningful social connections, supporting mental and physical health and wellbeing. For older generation adults, in particular, such activities can also offer important opportunities where people can participate in activities that remind them of their home country and culture.

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