

# SUBMISSION TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ON SINGAPORE'S COMPLIANCE WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

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ANTI-RACISM COALITION  
(SINGAPORE)



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### **About the Anti-Racism Coalition (Singapore)**

The Anti-Racism Coalition (Singapore) (ARCS) is a coalition of individuals working towards racial justice and equality in Singapore. Through community-led research, documentation, advocacy, and capacity-building, ARCS takes an intersectional approach to centering and amplifying the lived experiences of marginalised persons in discussions of race and racism in Singapore. ARCS is led by individuals from ethnic minority groups and Chinese allies who envision a Singapore where substantive equality is a reality for all, regardless of race, language, religion, or other minority statuses.

## Executive Summary

In this report, the Anti-Racism Coalition (Singapore) (ARCS) highlights its concerns and recommendations in five thematic areas that have had the effect of perpetuating racial discrimination and racism in Singapore. These problems with Singapore's laws, policies, and practices undermine Singapore's compliance with its legal obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The findings and analysis in this report are supported by the results of a survey conducted by ARCS in September and October 2021, gleaned from the experiences of racial discrimination in Singapore.

Freedom of expression: Singapore's definition of racist hate speech and incitement to racial hatred do not align with article 4 of ICERD, which appears to have had the effect of suppressing legitimate discussions on racism and racial discrimination in Singapore. For instance, Sections 298 and 298A of the Penal Code are vague and overbroad, and criminalise a wider range of expression than those contemplated under article 4. The enforcement of these laws appear to have impacted individuals from ethnic minority groups who have voiced their concerns about race and racism in Singapore. The existence and enforcement of these laws may also cast a chilling effect on the free expression of concerns about race and racism.

Income inequality: Income inequality has continued to disproportionately affect individuals from ethnic minority groups, in particular the Malay community. Malays are overrepresented in the lower rungs of the occupational ladder and income distribution, and disproportionately represented in public rental flats. This income inequality has also manifested through food insecurity, which is likely to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Current financial assistance schemes do not go far enough in assisting lower-income ethnic minority persons, and there are also procedural hurdles in accessing these schemes.

Right to housing: Individuals from ethnic minority groups have faced barriers in accessing their right to housing in a non-discriminatory manner. The Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) has had the unintended consequence of creating direct and real financial burdens for minority-race homeowners, and efforts to ameliorate these negative impacts through allowing appeals for waivers of the EIP may not be sufficient. Rental discrimination based on race and ethnicity also continues to be a pervasive and widespread issue. Current measures taken by the government, through the Council of Estate Agencies, are insufficient to protect against rental discrimination as they are lacking in bite and ambit, and do not provide for an effective remedy for victims of rental discrimination.

Right to education: Educational attainment gaps have persisted between Chinese students and their ethnic minority counterparts, particularly Malay students. Existing special measures to close these gaps, such as through ethnic self-help groups, may be insufficient as evidenced from the persistence of this gap. This may also be perpetuated in part by the government's focus on equality of opportunities over equality of outcomes through their policy of meritocracy. This gap may also be further entrenched through the Special Assistance Plan, and the lack of adequate Muslim-friendly facilities in educational institutions, especially at the tertiary level.

Right to work: The government appears to have discriminated against Muslim workers, through its policy of banning religious headscarves for certain uniformed occupations. The ban on headscarves may be rooted in racist and Islamophobic prejudices, and there is a lack of publicly accessible and available information on the negative impact of this ban on Muslim women's access to employment. The government has also not taken adequate measures to protect workers of minority ethnicities from discrimination in the field of employment, which has manifested in hiring processes, workplace interactions, and opportunities for career progression, amongst others. While the government has recently announced its intention to enshrine workplace anti-discrimination guidelines from the Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) into law, this codification process will need to address the shortcomings of TAFEP, including its limited scope and reach, and lack of an effective remedy for victims of employment discrimination.

## Introduction

1. The Anti-Racism Coalition (Singapore) (ARCS) welcomes the opportunity to provide its input to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on Singapore's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).
2. This report focuses on five key themes: (i) freedom of expression; (ii) income inequality; (iii) the right to housing; (iv) the right to education; and (v) the right to work. Each section concludes with recommendations to ensure Singapore complies with its international obligations under the ICERD through its laws, policies and practices.
3. The findings and analysis in this report are supported by the results of a nation-wide survey conducted by ARCS in September and October 2021, gleaning the experiences of racial discrimination in Singapore. A total of 1,060 members of ethnic minority groups in Singapore participated in the survey. Key statistics from the survey have been included in the main report. The full results of the survey and a write-up of its key findings have been attached as Annex A.

## Background and Context

4. Being multiracial is one Singaporean trait its people and government have claimed to be proud of. According to the 2020 Population Census, the Chinese make up 74.3% of the resident population, the Malays 13.5%, the Indians 9%, and "Others" (e.g. Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Arab, Burmese, Filipino and Thai), 3.2%.<sup>1</sup>
5. As the majority race in Singapore, the Chinese enjoy certain privileges other ethnic minorities typically do not. Some of these privileges are enshrined in policy while others are sociological in nature. However, this notion of 'Chinese privilege' continues to be undermined and unaccepted by the government. For instance, in June 2021, Lawrence Wong, Minister for Finance, publicly challenged the concept of 'Chinese privilege'.<sup>2</sup> In August 2021, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reiterated the government's sentiments that it "is entirely baseless to claim that there is 'Chinese privilege' in Singapore", because the government "treat[s] all races equally, with no special privileges."<sup>3</sup>
6. As recommended by CERD, "no country can claim that racial discrimination is non-existent in its territory, and that an acknowledgment of the existence of the phenomenon is a necessary precondition for the fight against discrimination".<sup>4</sup> Further, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action makes clear that States must adopt and implement effective measures and policies to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance,<sup>5</sup> which should include measures to address the indirect discrimination and substantive inequality that 'Chinese privilege' perpetuates.
7. The State rhetoric that 'Chinese privilege' is non-existent harmfully invalidates and erases the experiences of ethnic minorities from the Singapore narrative. The State's denial of 'Chinese privilege' is motivated, in part, by the fact that acknowledging it would contradict the ideologies of meritocracy and multiracialism that the government has cultivated and championed in Singapore's nation-building.
8. According to experts, Singapore's meritocracy and multiracialism have evolved under the foundations of a Chinese ethno-nationalism, informed by the colonial constructions of race and its accompanying stereotypes, i.e. "Chinese are hardworking and materialistic",

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<sup>1</sup> Singapore Department of Statistics, "Census of Population 2020, Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion," (2021) Ministry of Trade & Industry, Singapore, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Policy Studies, "IPS - RSIS Forum on Race and Racism in Singapore: Opening Speech and Dialogue with Minister," YouTube video, 1:08:32, 28 Jul 2021, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agRngR5s7\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agRngR5s7_s).

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister's Office, "English Translation of Chinese National Day Rally Speech 2021," 29 Aug 2021, available at [https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/National-Day-Rally-2021-Chinese#\\_engtrans](https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/National-Day-Rally-2021-Chinese#_engtrans).

<sup>4</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Philippines*, UN Doc. CERD/C/PHL/CO/20, 28 August 2009, para. 13.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Declaration and Programme of Action*, 2002, available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Durban\\_text\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf).

"Malays are lazy and complacent", "Indians are dirty and greedy".<sup>6</sup> As a result, according to Barr and Skrbiš, "[since] the early 1980s the Singapore principle of multiracialism has not been applied as a tool to protect minority races [...] but as an instrument of ethnic assimilation into a peculiarly Singaporean Chinese-dominated society".<sup>7</sup>

9. In recent years, Singaporeans witnessed an increase in the reporting and documenting of racist incidents committed by the Chinese against ethnic minorities,<sup>8</sup> including incidents of rental and employment discrimination discussed later in this report. These have also included incidents of Black/brownface, which has roots in colonialism and anti-Blackness, with the Singaporean Chinese being its usual performers and suffering little consequence.<sup>9</sup> These occurrences, however, are neither new nor atypical for the Singaporean minority individual. For them, racism and racial discrimination in Singapore are normal.

### Freedom of Expression

10. Singapore's definitions of racist hate speech and incitement to racial hatred in the Penal Code and other legislation do not align with article 4 of ICERD,<sup>10</sup> and may have had the effect of perpetuating racism and racial discrimination by suppressing legitimate discussions on them.
11. In its State report, the Singapore government highlights the Sedition Act, which has since been repealed,<sup>11</sup> and Sections 298 and 298A of the Penal Code which "prohibit the incitement to racial hatred and discrimination in any form".<sup>12</sup> Section 298 criminalises the deliberate wounding of "the religious or racial feelings of any person",<sup>13</sup> and Section 298A criminalises "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion or race and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony".<sup>14</sup> In October 2021, Parliament passed amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code to make Sections 298 and 298A arrestable offences.<sup>15</sup>
12. However, Sections 298 and 298A are vague and overbroad, and are not formulated "with sufficient precision"<sup>16</sup> to allow individuals to regulate their conduct and to prevent conferring "unfettered discretion for the restriction of freedom of expression on those

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<sup>6</sup> Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project* (2008), p. 87-111. See also Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community* (1998); Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man* (2000); Terence Chong, *Asian Values and Confucian Ethics: Malay Singaporeans' Dilemma*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 32(3) (2002); Michael D. Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore: Networks of Power and Influence* (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project* (2008), 111.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance, Alex Stambaugh, "Singapore advertisement sparks 'brownface' controversy," *CNN*, 30 Jul 2019, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/30/asia/singapore-brownface-ad-sparks-controversy-intl-hnk-trnd/index.html>; David Sum, "Police investigating alleged racism and harassment in incidents in S'pore linked to YouTube channel," *The Straits Times*, 27 Apr 2021, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/police-investigating-alleged-racism-and-harassment-in-incidents-in-spore>; Malavika Menon, "Police investigating man accused of using racial slur and kicking 55-year-old woman," *The Straits Times*, 10 May 2021, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/police-investigating-man-accused-of-using-racial-slur-and-kicking-55-year-old-woman>; Akshita Jain, "'Find woman of your race': Mixed race couple abused in the street in viral Singapore video," *Independent*, 7 Jun 2021, available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/southeast-asia/racism-mixed-couple-face-abuse-singapore-b1860892.html>; Amierul Rashid, "Police investigating after woman filmed striking gong as neighbour carried out Hindu prayers at home," *Asia One*, 10 Jun 2021, available at <https://www.asiaone.com/singapore/police-investigating-after-woman-filmed-striking-gong-neighbour-carried-out-hindu-prayers>.

<sup>9</sup> Sharan Kaur, "Everything Old is New Again: Singapore's Long History with Blackface," *Coconuts Singapore*, 16 Aug 2019, available at <https://coconuts.co/singapore/features/everything-old-is-new-again-singapores-long-history-with-blackface/>.

<sup>10</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *List of themes in relation to the initial report of Singapore*, UN Doc. CERD/C/SGP/Q/1, 25 January 2020, para. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Today, "Parliament repeals 'extreme' Sedition Act' after 83 years", 5 October 2021, available at: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/parliament-repeals-extreme-sedition-act-after-83-years>.

<sup>12</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *Initial report submitted by Singapore under article 9 of the Convention, due in 2018*, UN Doc. CERD/C/SGP/1, 30 January 2019 ("Singapore ICERD State report"), para. 9.1.

<sup>13</sup> This is punishable with imprisonment of up to 3 years, a fine, or both. Section 298, *Penal Code (Chapter 224)*, available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PC1871?ProvIds=pr298->.

<sup>14</sup> This is punishable with imprisonment of up to 3 years, a fine, or both. Section 298A, *Penal Code (Chapter 224)*, available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PC1871?ProvIds=pr298A-#pr298A->.

<sup>15</sup> See, Section 3, *Sedition (Repeal) Bill*, available at: [https://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sedition-\(-repeal\)-bill-23-2021-\(p\).pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sedition-(-repeal)-bill-23-2021-(p).pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *General Recommendation No. 35: Combating racist hate speech*, UN Doc. CERD/C/GC/35, 26 September 2013 ("CERD General Recommendation No. 35"), para. 20.

charged with its execution".<sup>17</sup> For instance, Section 298A does not define the vague concepts of "disharmony", "public tranquility", or "maintenance of harmony".<sup>18</sup>

13. Further, Sections 298 and 298A criminalise a wider range of expression than those contemplated under article 4 of ICERD. While instances of racist hate speech and incitement to racial hatred may be covered by Sections 298 and 298A, other forms of legitimate speech, including discussions on race and racism, may also be unduly restricted.<sup>19</sup> This is inconsistent with the CERD's recommendation that the criminalisation of racist expression "should be reserved for serious cases, to be proven beyond reasonable doubt, while less serious cases should be addressed by means other than criminal law".<sup>20</sup>
14. The enforcement of these laws appears to have prevented individuals from ethnic minority groups from voicing their concerns about race and racism in Singapore. In January 2019, Sangeetha Thanapal, an Indian activist, was issued a stern warning under Section 298A over a Facebook post that called Singapore a "terribly racist country".<sup>21</sup> In August 2019, Preeti Nair and Subhas Nair were given conditional warnings under Section 298A for a rap video they had made responding to a "brownface" advertisement by Nets and Mediacorp.<sup>22</sup> In September 2020, Raeesah Khan, an opposition politician, was given a stern warning by the police under Section 298A for social media posts that suggested that there were racial, religious and class biases in law enforcement.<sup>23</sup>
15. The existence and enforcement of these laws, in addition to other laws ostensibly meant to preserve racial and religious harmony in Singapore, may cast a chilling effect on the free expression of concerns about race and racism. The survey done by ARCS found that 85% of 1,060 ethnic minority respondents felt the need to self-censor on social media when discussing race or racism sometimes, most times, or all the time. 39% felt either somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable posting about race or racism on social media. The reasons respondents provided for their discomfort include, among others: (a) being threatened with legal action or by the police (39%); and (b) the threat of losing their job or not being able to get a job in the future (41%). Experiencing negative consequences firsthand or witnessing other people face negative consequences impacted the majority of participants' (55%) decisions to post on social media about race or racism to a moderate or large extent.<sup>24</sup> These results largely corroborate the findings of a survey conducted by Channel News Asia and the Institute of Policy Studies, which found that two-thirds of respondents noted that "discussions of race were disconcerting in that they could be offensive and lead to tension".<sup>25</sup>
16. As suggested by the former UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance ("UN Special Rapporteur on racism"), "it is absolutely necessary in a free society that restrictions on public debate or discourse and the protection of racial harmony are not implemented at the detriment of human rights, such as freedom of expression."<sup>26</sup> The repressing of open discussions on race and

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Committee, *General comment No. 34, Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression*, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September 2011, para. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Singapore Legal Advice, "Racial Enmity: Sections 298 and 298A Penal Code Explained", 20 July 2020, available at: <https://singaporelegaladvice.com/law-articles/racial-enmity-sections-298-298a-penal-code/>.

<sup>19</sup> George Baylon Radics and Yee Suan Poon, *Amos Yee, Free Speech and Maintaining Religious Harmony in Singapore* (2016), University of Pennsylvania Asian Law Review, p. 234

<sup>20</sup> CERD General Recommendation No. 35, para 12.

<sup>21</sup> Straits Times, "Activist Sangeetha Thanapal issued stern warning for Facebook post that promotes ill will between races", 29 January 2019, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/activist-sangeetha-thanapal-issued-stern-warning-for-facebook-post-that>.

<sup>22</sup> Channel News Asia, "Preeti Nair and Subhas Nair given conditional warning for 'offensive' rap video: Police", 14 August 2019, available at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/preeti-nair-subhas-nair-conditional-warning-rap-video-police-865356>.

<sup>23</sup> Straits Times, "WP MP Raeesah Khan given stern police warning for social media posts that promoted enmity between different groups", 18 September 2020, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/wp-mp-raeesah-khan-given-stern-police-warning-for-social-media-posts-which-promoted-enmity>.

<sup>24</sup> Annex A.

<sup>25</sup> Institute of Policy Studies, *Key Findings from Channel News Asia – Institute of Policy Studies Survey on Race Relations*, p. 4, available at: [https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/cna-ips-survey-on-race-relations\\_summary\\_190816.pdf](https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/cna-ips-survey-on-race-relations_summary_190816.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Githu Muigai, Addendum: Mission to Singapore*, UN Doc. A/HRC/17/40/Add.2, 25 March 2011 ("UN Special Rapporteur on racism, Mission to Singapore, March 2011"), para. 28.

religion through such laws may “lead to suspicion, resentment and division”,<sup>27</sup> and can have the effect of “constraining freedom of expression and muffling dissent”.<sup>28</sup>

17. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:

- a. Repeal or substantially amend Sections 298 and 298A of the Penal Code in order to bring them in line with article 4 of ICERD;
- b. Review all other legislation that may be used to unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression with regards to expression about race and racism to ensure their compliance with Singapore’s human rights obligations; and
- c. Drop all charges, issue non-prosecution orders, and refrain from further charges against any individuals facing prosecution under Sections 298 and 298A and other non-human rights compliant laws, except in the most egregious cases of incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination.

### **Income Inequality**

18. Income inequality and food insecurity have continued to disproportionately affect individuals from ethnic minority groups, in particular the Malay community. To the extent that the principle of equality under ICERD is understood to include substantive or *de facto* equality,<sup>29</sup> this persistent inequality undermines the right to everyone to the non-discriminatory enjoyment of the full range of economic, social, and cultural rights under article 5 of ICERD. This is especially since income inequality results in “stark disparities in access to health, education, housing and other services essential to the enjoyment of economic and social rights.”<sup>30</sup>

19. Census data in 2020 has shown that Malays are overrepresented in the lower rungs of the occupational ladder and income distribution, with a monthly household median income of SG\$5,704, which falls below the national median of SG\$7,744.<sup>31</sup> Census of Singapore’s population in 1990,<sup>32</sup> 1995,<sup>33</sup> 2000,<sup>34</sup> 2005,<sup>35</sup> 2010,<sup>36</sup> and 2015<sup>37</sup> have detailed the continued persistence of Malays in lower occupational and economic strata. It has also been noted by Dr Mohamad Shamsuri, a researcher on Singapore’s Malay-Muslim community, how “the majority of Malay workers are concentrated in lower rung vocations which make them prone to the threat of unemployment”, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, Malays are disproportionately represented in public rental

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<sup>27</sup> Jaclyn Ling-Chien Neo, *Seditious in Singapore! Free Speech and the Offence of Promoting Ill-Will and Hostility Between Different Racial Groups* (2011) Singapore Journal of Legal Studies, p. 371.

<sup>28</sup> Netina Tan, *Multiracialism and Politics of Regulating Ethnic Relations in Singapore*, June 2013, p. 5, available at: <https://cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2013/Tan2.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *General Recommendation no. 32, The meaning and scope of special measures in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms [of] Racial Discrimination*, UN Doc. CERD/C/GC/32 24 September 2009, para. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Center for Economic and Social Rights, “Inequality: can human rights make a difference”, available at: <https://www.cesr.org/inequality-can-human-rights-make-difference-0>.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2020, Statistical Release 2: Households, Geographic Distribution, Transport and Difficulty in Basic Activities*, June 2021, p. 13 & 172, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr2/key-indicators2.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> William Keng Min Lee, *The economic marginality of ethnic minorities: an analysis of ethnic income inequality in Singapore* (2010) Asian Ethnicity, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2000, Statistical Release 5: Households and Housing*, 13 Apr 2018, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/cop2000/cop2000r5>.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *General Household Survey 2005, Statistical Release 2: Transport, Overseas Travel, Households and Housing Characteristics*, 27 Apr 2018, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/ghs/ghrs2>.

<sup>36</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2010, Statistical Release 2: Households and Housing*, Jan 2011, p. 10, available at: [https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2010/census\\_2010\\_release2/cop2010sr2.pdf](https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2010/census_2010_release2/cop2010sr2.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *General Household Survey 2015*, March 2016, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/ghs/ghs2015/ghs2015.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari, “Helping Singapore’s Malay-Muslim community beyond the pandemic”, *Today*, 6 May 2020 (“Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari, Today”), available at: <https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/helping-Singapore-malay-muslim-community-beyond-covid-19-pandemic>.

flats,<sup>39</sup> which have an income cap of SG\$1,500 and are meant for lower-income households in Singapore.<sup>40</sup>

20. This income inequality has also manifested through food insecurity. A nationally representative study by the Lien Centre in 2018 found that low income levels is the “single most recurrent theme about the potential reasons behind food insecurity”.<sup>41</sup> This finding is corroborated by a 2021 study conducted on 54 public rental flat residents by Beyond Social Services, a non-governmental organisation, which found that interviewees “demonstrated a trouble intimacy with food insecurity”,<sup>42</sup> with the COVID-19 pandemic having exacerbated this due to its “devastating financial impact.”<sup>43</sup> Notably, of the 54 public rental flat residents interviewed by Beyond Social Services, 44 belonged to ethnic minority groups (81.5%), with 31 interviews being Malay (57.4%).<sup>44</sup>
21. While Singapore has taken steps to improve the socioeconomic situation of vulnerable communities, including through providing financial assistance, academic support, and ethnic self-help groups as noted in its State report,<sup>45</sup> Singapore can and should take more “special and concrete measures to ensure the adequate development and protection” of lower-income ethnic minority persons, in line with its obligations under article 2(2) of ICERD. For instance, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri has noted how “targeted and accessible [public assistance] schemes” are necessary to improve the socioeconomic situation of the Malay-Muslim community in Singapore, to the extent that “the amount of public assistance schemes made available to the Malay community has yet to correspond with the level of success expected of its recipients”.<sup>46</sup>
22. Singapore can also take additional steps to remove the procedural hurdles impeding the meaningful access to financial and social assistance schemes.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri has noted how the Malay-Muslim community may face challenges accessing public assistance schemes because of a lack of adequate and accessible information on how to apply for assistance and the onerous paperwork demanding proof of their need.<sup>48</sup> More broadly, Beyond Social Services’ report noted that efforts to distribute food aid “appeared patchy and ad hoc”, with some interviewees being “left unclear about how to receive food assistance, despite clearly needing it”.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in March 2021, the Mind The Gap Collective noted in a commentary how low-income families have not been able to receive social assistance support because of the “stringency of [the] criteria and long waiting time”.<sup>50</sup>
23. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:
  - a. Take extraordinary measures to devote their maximum available resources to ensure that all persons, including members of ethnic minority groups, have non-discriminatory access to an adequate standard of living, including through, *inter alia*, access to nutritious food, sufficient water and sanitation, secure housing, electricity and services, social security and support schemes, and relief or support measures;

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<sup>39</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, “Key Indicators of Resident Households and Resident Population”, June 2021, p. 1, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr2/key-indicators2.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Housing and Development Board, *Residential Eligibility*, available at: <https://www.hdb.gov.sg/residential/renting-a-flat/renting-from-hdb/public-rental-scheme/eligibility>.

<sup>41</sup> Emma Glendinning, Siew Ying Shee, Tania Nagpaul, and Jinwen Chen, *Hunger in a food lover's paradise: Understanding food insecurity in Singapore* (2018) Lien Centre for Social Innovation: Research, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Beyond Social Services, *People Give, Just Take and Eat”: Food Insecurity and Food Aid in a Public Rental Neighbourhood in Singapore*, September 2021 (“Beyond Social Services, September 2021”), p. 15, available at: <https://beyondresearch.sg/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/BSS-Food-Insecurity-Report-2021.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 7.42 – 7.46.

<sup>46</sup> Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari, 6 May 2020.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, The Straits Times, “Forum: Simplify application process for financial aid”, 12 August 2020, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/forum-simplify-application-process-for-financial-aid>.

<sup>48</sup> Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari, 6 May 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Beyond Social Services, September 2021, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Mothership, “Why do some S’pore families choose to ‘struggle’ rather than get help from social services?”, 23 March 2021, available at: <https://mothership.sg/2021/03/mind-the-gap-commentary-anthea-ong/>.

- b. Mobilise the necessary resources to combat the devastating financial impact of COVID-19 in the most equitable manner, by allocating resources prioritising the special needs of persons from marginalised groups, such as lower-income households from ethnic minority groups;
- c. Remove all barriers, including procedural hurdles, to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by all persons, including members of ethnic minority groups;
- d. Take additional steps to break the link between poverty and racism by expanding special measures or affirmative actions, such as outreach or support programmes, in line with CERD's General Recommendation No. 32; and
- e. Take additional steps to reduce the systemic income inequality on the basis of ethnicity, such as through implementing a minimum wage policy, more progressive taxation schemes or expanding existing wage supplementation schemes for lower-income households.

### **Right to Housing**

24. Individuals from ethnic minority groups in Singapore continue to face barriers in accessing their right to housing in a non-discriminatory manner. This has manifested both as a: (i) direct result of State policy, through the Ethnic Integration Policy; and (ii) lack of adequate and effective State policy to combat rental discrimination based on one's ethnicity.

#### Ethnic Integration Policy

25. The Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) has the unintended consequence of "creating or perpetuating racial discrimination" in Singapore's public housing system, in violation of articles 2(1)(c) and art. 5(e)(iii) of ICERD. This is in spite of the fact that it was introduced ostensibly to encourage "social mixing among different racial groups in Singapore" and prevent racial segregation (article 3, ICERD), as highlighted in Singapore's State report.<sup>51</sup>

26. Under the EIP, minority-race homeowners are indirectly discriminated against and often bear a direct and real financial burden when selling their home. The EIP states that an ethnic minority homeowner cannot sell their flat to Chinese buyers once the Chinese quota has been reached, which reduces the pool of eligible buyers, resulting in poorer financial outcomes. Pritam Singh, Leader of the Opposition, has noted that "the inequity the EIP engenders for some minority Singaporeans is real, distorts the market and has serious economic consequences".<sup>52</sup>

27. For example, an ethnic minority seller in a Chinese-constrained block can only sell to non-Chinese buyers, which means they "would either need a longer time to find a fellow ethnic minority buyer or accept a selling price that is below market value".<sup>53</sup> A study conducted in 2013 found evidence of this price dispersion, as Chinese-constrained neighbourhoods with more Malay residents had lower selling prices than those with fewer Malay residents.<sup>54</sup> Another recent study found that the proportion of HDB blocks that have met the Chinese quota has remained at around 17% since 2016, implying that minority homeowners in 17% of HDB blocks may suffer poorer outcomes when selling their homes.<sup>55</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on racism also noted how the EIP may, in addition to the above problems,

<sup>51</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, paras. 8.1 – 8.6.

<sup>52</sup> Channel News Asia, "Minorities bear 'direct and real' financial burden from Ethnic Integration Policy for public housing: Pritam Singh", 26 Jun 2021, available at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/pritam-singh-ethnic-integration-policy-grc-minorities-race-1939536>.

<sup>53</sup> Leong Chan-Hoong and Yvonne Yap, *Geographic-Ethnic Segregation in Singapore: Emerging Schisms in Society*, in Terence Chong (ed), *Navigating Differences* (2020), 235. This has also been noted by Desmond Lee, Minister for National Development, who noted: "With a smaller pool of eligible buyers, sellers may have to lower their asking price or they may take longer to market and sell their flat": see, Singapore Parliament, "Review of Ethnic Integration Policy for HDB Blocks and Neighbourhoods", 5 July 2021, available at: <https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/sprs3topic?reportid=oral-answer-2476>.

<sup>54</sup> Maisy Wong, *Estimating Ethnic Preferences Using Ethnic Housing Quotas in Singapore* (2013) *The Review of Economic Studies*, pp. 1178 – 1214.

<sup>55</sup> Today Online, "Study finds 'clustering' of races in some neighbourhoods largely due to purchasing power disparity", 25 Jul 2021, available at: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/study-finds-clustering-races-some-neighbourhoods-largely-due-purchasing-power-disparity>.

“prevent members of ethnic minorities from finding accommodation close to their families”.<sup>56</sup>

28. Efforts by the government to ameliorate these negative impacts may not be sufficient to safeguard against the indirect discrimination of the EIP. In 2020, only 21% of home-sellers were successful in their appeal for a waiver of the EIP on their flats.<sup>57</sup> This is likely to disproportionately impact ethnic minority home-sellers, as the government receives “more appeals from sellers from minority races”.<sup>58</sup>
29. Further, it is worth re-examining whether the EIP has been effective in preventing racial segregation and encouraging social mixing (article 3, ICERD), especially in light of the above-mentioned collateral negative impacts on homeowners from ethnic minority groups. A study conducted in 2020 found that there may be a “hidden form of ethnic segregation” even with the EIP, where residential areas with a higher Chinese concentration have higher socio-economic status.<sup>59</sup> Scholars have also questioned the government’s premise that the forming of ethnic enclaves would lead to racial riots:<sup>60</sup> for instance, Low argued that the 1964 racial riots are “decontextualized and over-simplified”, as the “existence of ethnic enclaves need not lead automatically to antagonism and riots”.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Kathiravelu noted that the threat of racial riots “is largely constructed, with little contemporary basis and relevance”.<sup>62</sup>
30. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:
- a. Continue reviewing the rationale and relevance of the EIP, in light of its indirect discrimination against ethnic minority individuals, with a view to eventual abolishment;
  - b. Make available and accessible more information on the negative impacts of the EIP on members of ethnic minority groups, including information on selling prices and the reduced options of housing for ethnic minority homebuyers and sellers; and
  - c. Exercise greater flexibility in the implementation of the EIP in order to ensure that ethnic minority home-sellers are not disadvantaged when selling and seeking public housing, including through: (i) reviewing the appeal process and criteria to seek waivers; (ii) considering having the Housing and Development Board commit to buying back affected flats at the evaluation price; and/or (iii) having a larger geographical area be used for representing the anchor for the EIP, rather than the precinct and block quotas.

### Rental discrimination

31. The Singaporean government has failed to take adequate measures to protect individuals from minority ethnicities from rental discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, in contravention of its obligations under article 5(e)(iii) of ICERD to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to housing.

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<sup>56</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on racism, Mission to Singapore, March 2011, para. 37 – 38.

<sup>57</sup> The Straits Times, “Successful ethnic quota appeals for HDB flats up to 21% last year from 14% in 2018”, 5 July 2021, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/successful-ethnic-quota-appeals-for-hdb-flats-up-to-21-last-year-from-14-in-2018>.

<sup>58</sup> Singapore Parliament, “Review of Ethnic Integration Policy for HDB Blocks and Neighbourhoods”, 5 July 2021, available at: <https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/sprs3topic?reportid=oral-answer-2476>.

<sup>59</sup> Leong Chan-Hoong, Eugene Teng and William Weiliang Ko, *Thirty Years of Ethnic Management in Neighbourhoods: Evaluating the Success of the Ethnic Integration Policy*, in Leong Chan-Hoong and Lai-Choo Malone-Lee (eds), *Building Resilient Neighbourhoods: The Convergence of Policies, Research, and Practice* (2020), pp. 29 – 49.

<sup>60</sup> See for instance, Public Service Division, “Cultivating a Harmonious Society, Becoming One People”, available at: <https://www.psd.gov.sg/heartofpublicservice/our-institutions/cultivating-a-harmonious-society-becoming-one-people/>; Si Yun, “Controlling ‘Memories’, Controlling Society?: The HDB Ethnic Quota”, *echo-system*, 11 January 2020, available at: <https://tsiyun.wordpress.com/2020/01/11/controlling-memories-controlling-society-the-hdb-ethnic-quota/>.

<sup>61</sup> Adeline Low Hwee Cheng, *The Past in the Present: Memories of the 1964 ‘Racial Riots’ in Singapore* (2001) Asian Journal of Social Science, p. 448.

<sup>62</sup> Laavanya Kathiravelu, “Rethinking Race: Beyond the CMIO Categorisations”, *New Naratif*, 9 September 2017, available at: <https://newnaratif.com/rethinking-race-beyond-the-cmio-categorisations/>.

32. Rental discrimination on the basis of one's ethnicity is a pervasive and widespread problem in Singapore and has been reported in various media outlets.<sup>63</sup> In the survey conducted by ARCS, of the 350 respondents who had experiences seeking out housing, 63% had experienced rental discrimination. Of those who had experienced rental discrimination, 94% believed that they were discriminated against on the basis of their race.<sup>64</sup> These findings echo the results of a YouGov survey conducted in 2019, which found that 49% of Singaporean Indians and 34% of ethnic Malays had faced discrimination based on their ethnicity when renting properties.<sup>65</sup>
33. ARCS acknowledges that the government has taken steps to address potential racial discrimination in the residential property rental market. For instance, Singapore's State report highlights how the Council of Estate Agencies (CEA), a governmental agency, has published practice guidelines on property advertising and investigated racially discriminatory advertising complaints.<sup>66</sup> This has, however, fallen short of Singapore enacting a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, in line with article 1 of ICERD, that can be applied in instances of racial discrimination in the housing sector.
34. The CEA, as a response to rental discrimination, is limited in both ambit and bite, and is not sufficiently effective to "prohibit and bring to an end [...] racial discrimination by any persons" (article 2(1)(d), ICERD) for two reasons. First, the CEA's guidelines do not apply to disputes between landlords and renters.<sup>67</sup> Second, although the failure to comply with the CEA's guidelines may result in written warnings or disciplinary action for property agencies and agents,<sup>68</sup> individuals who have been racially discriminated against do not have access to an effective remedy, including "just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered as a result of such discrimination" (article 6, ICERD).
35. The inadequacy of the CEA in protecting ethnic minority individuals against rental discrimination is further evinced by how racial discrimination in accessing housing have largely gone unreported. The survey conducted by ARCS found that 84% of those who had faced discrimination in accessing housing did not report it. Commonly stated reasons included not knowing where to report the incident, believing that nothing would happen even if the incident was reported, and fear of the repercussions of reporting as a non-citizen.<sup>69</sup>
36. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:
- a. Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation covering all the rights and freedoms protected under the ICERD, including protecting against discrimination in the housing sector on the basis of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, in line with article 1 of ICERD;
  - b. Set up an independent and impartial body to undertake prompt, independent and thorough investigation into all cases of discriminatory practices in the housing sector by private actors, including landlords and property agencies and agents; holding those responsible to account; and providing effective remedies, including appropriate

<sup>63</sup> See for instance, Asia One, "Not all races welcome: Woman highlights discrimination in Carousell room rental listings", 24 May 2021, available at: <https://www.asiaone.com/singapore/not-all-races-welcome-woman-highlights-discrimination-carousell-room-rental-listings>; CNBC, "Even in weak market, racial bias trumps profit for many Singapore landlords", 3 Mar 2017, available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/02/singapore-rental-racism-prc-and-indian-tenants-often-deemed-undesirable.html>; BBC, "No Indians No PRCs: Singapore's rental discrimination problem", 1 May 2014, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26832115>; Vice, "Forget Income. To Some Landlords, Your Race is More Important.", 23 May 2021, available at: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/z3x4b4/rental-racism-malaysia-singapore>.

<sup>64</sup> Annex A.

<sup>65</sup> YouGov, "One in four Singaporeans have faced racial discrimination when renting property", 11 January 2019, available at: <https://sg.yougov.com/en-sg/news/2019/01/11/one-four-singaporeans-have-faced-racial-discrimination/>.

<sup>66</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 10.49.

<sup>67</sup> This has been acknowledged by the CEA, who noted that they are aware that real estate agents "may be required to act under the instruction of your landlord-clients, who may have their own preferences for tenants"; see, CEA, "Be professional and sensitive when conveying your landlord-client's preferences for tenant profiles" Jan 2019, available at: <https://www.cea.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ccpo/educational-materials/Tips-of-the-month/be-professional-and-sensitive-when-conveying-your-landlord-client-s-preferences-for-tenant-profiles.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 10.49.

<sup>69</sup> Annex A.

compensation, guarantees of non-repetition and reviews and changes in relevant laws and practices; and

- c. Undertake activities to raise public awareness of existing and new mechanisms for individuals who have experienced racial discrimination in the housing sector to lodge complaints.

### **Right to Education**

37. Students from ethnic minority groups, especially Malay students, have faced obstacles in realising the right to substantive equality in the enjoyment of their right to education. This has been evidenced by the educational attainment gap, which has, in part, been exacerbated by Special Assistance Plan schools (SAP schools).
38. Furthermore, Muslim students are also affected by the lack of adequate Muslim-friendly facilities in educational institutions, especially at the tertiary level, which may inadvertently impede their participation and performance in school.

#### Educational attainment gap

39. Educational attainment gaps have persisted between ethnic minority students and their Chinese counterparts,<sup>70</sup> which has also been highlighted in Singapore's State report.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that the State can do more in order to ensure equality of outcomes in the enjoyment of the right to education under article 5(e)(v) of ICERD.
40. Educational statistics have highlighted the attainment gap between ethnic minority groups, specifically the Malays, and those of the majority race. According to the Education Statistics Digest 2020 published by the Ministry of Education Singapore, in 2019, 98.0% of Chinese children in Primary 1 progressed to post-secondary education, while only 93.5% of Malay children, 94.1% of Indian children, and 92.6% of children categorised as "Others" did so.<sup>72</sup> According to the Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion, 47.5% of Malay residents aged 25 years and above had post-secondary or higher qualifications in 2020, which was significantly lower than 58.3% of Chinese residents and 67.3% of Indian residents who had the same. A higher proportion of Malay residents (28.9%) had below secondary as their highest qualification attained, compared to the proportion of Chinese residents (26.2%) and Indian residents (18.3%) who had the same. The proportion of Malay residents who had below-secondary as their highest qualification attained was higher than the national average (25.5%). On the flip side, while 34.7% of Chinese residents and 41.3% of Indian residents had graduated from university, the proportion of Malay residents who had graduated from university remained significantly lower at 10.8%.<sup>73</sup>
41. This attainment gap has persisted in spite of some of the special measures that the government has taken to close it, suggesting that these measures may be inadequate. Examples of such measures highlighted in Singapore's State report include supporting Malay tertiary students through the Tertiary Tuition Fee Subsidy scheme and annual grants to Yayasan MENDAKI (Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community), a self-help group established by the government.<sup>74</sup> However, as Lee and Gopinathan have pointed out, despite the government setting up the MENDAKI to provide

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<sup>70</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *List of themes in relation to the initial report of Singapore*, UN Doc. CERD/C/SGP/Q/1, 25 January 2020, para. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 10.32.

<sup>72</sup> Ministry of Education Singapore, *Education Statistics Digest 2020*, October 2020, p. 53, available at: <https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/about-us/education-statistics-digest-2020.pdf?la=en&hash=C5E45EEA6E424D9749F617A4D88A171F6E20AB9A>

<sup>73</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, June 2021, pp. 18 - 19, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 7.44.

financial and educational assistance to Malay students, a gap between Malay and Chinese students persists.<sup>75</sup>

42. ARCS notes that the majority of Singapore's educational assistance schemes highlighted in the State report are disbursed to all regardless of race or ethnicity.<sup>76</sup> This is ostensibly due to Singapore's longstanding policy of meritocracy,<sup>77</sup> which prioritises equality of opportunities (formal equality) over equality of outcomes (substantive equality).<sup>78</sup> This appears to be inconsistent with Singapore's obligation to adopt special measures to secure "adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals requiring such protection as may be necessary in order to ensure such groups of individuals equal enjoyment" of the right to education (article 1(4), ICERD). ARCS notes that expanding existing and developing new special measures, in line with General Recommendation No. 32,<sup>79</sup> are compatible with the principle of meritocracy in order to achieve substantive equality between students from different ethnic groups.<sup>80</sup>
43. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:
- a. Continue collecting and publishing disaggregated information on the educational attainment gap between students from different ethnic groups;
  - b. Strengthen its efforts to provide equal opportunities for children of ethnic minority groups, in particular Malay students, and that it remove all policies that disadvantage or discriminate against ethnic minority students;
  - c. Support programmes subsidising tuition fees for Malay students at the national level, rather than through the Yayasan MENDAKI self-help group; and
  - d. Expand existing and develop new special measures, in line with General Recommendation No. 32, aimed at closing the educational attainment gap between ethnic minority students and their Chinese counterparts.

#### Special Assistance Plan schools

44. Another contributor to the educational gap between students belonging to ethnic minority groups and their Chinese counterparts is the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools, as it results in unequal access to opportunities and resources. As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on racism, SAP schools "are a visible symbol of the marginalization of ethnic minorities" and "create the impression that there is a hierarchy of cultures in Singapore".<sup>81</sup>
45. While the SAP was introduced to "preserve the traditions and ethos of the Chinese medium schools",<sup>82</sup> it has inadvertently resulted in the "maintenance of separate rights for different racial groups" (article 1(4), ICERD) by promoting Chinese elitism, and thereby disadvantaging ethnic minorities in their educational opportunities and resources. Although SAP schools are "open to students of all races who are proficient in the Chinese language",<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Michael H. Lee and S. Gopinathan, *Fostering Economic Competitiveness, National Identity and Social Equity Through Education Reforms: The Cases of Singapore and Hong Kong*, in J Zajda (ed.), *Globalisation and Education Reforms* (2018), pp. 190 - 191.

<sup>76</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 7.42 - 7.43.

<sup>77</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 10.32.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, MCCY, "Forging the Singapore brand of meritocracy and building an exceptional Malay/Muslim community", 14 May 2018, available at: <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources/speeches/2018/may/forging-the-singapore-brand-of-meritocracy-and-building-an-exceptional-malaymuslim-community>.

<sup>79</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *General Recommendation no. 32, The meaning and scope of special measures in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms [of] Racial Discrimination*, UN Doc. CERD/C/GC/32 24 September 2009, para. 6.

<sup>80</sup> This has similarly been noted by CEDAW in the context of gender balance in Singapore's 2017 review; CEDAW, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Singapore*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/5, 21 November 2017, para. 16. See also, UN Special Rapporteur on racism, Mission to Singapore, March 2011, para. 41 - 42.

<sup>81</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on racism, Mission to Singapore, March 2011, para. 43.

<sup>82</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 10.37 - 10.38, 11.9; Singapore Infopedia, "Special Assistance Plan Schools", 21 Jul 2016, available at: [https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_2016-07-21\\_154021.html](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-07-21_154021.html)

<sup>83</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 10.37.

students from ethnic minority groups are systematically disenfranchised from the scheme as the majority of students proficient in the Chinese language are of Chinese descent.

46. This is significant to the extent that students in SAP schools have access to greater resources and opportunities. For instance, SAP students in secondary school receive \$300 more a year.<sup>84</sup> Out of 17 Integrated Programme (IP) schools in Singapore,<sup>85</sup> 6 of them are SAP schools, which substantially makes for more than a third of IP schools.<sup>86</sup> The resources and programmes in SAP schools boost their students' chances of obtaining government scholarships, as can be seen with how more than 90% of the Public Service Commission (PSC) and uniformed scholars have been Chinese, and a significant 6 of the 16 fourth-generation leaders who are political office-holders were educated at SAP schools.<sup>87</sup>
47. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:
- a. Continue reviewing the rationale and relevance of the SAP school scheme, in light of its indirect discrimination against ethnic minority students; and
  - b. Open SAP schools to all students, including non-Chinese speaking students, so that academically gifted students from all communities can have access to the resources and opportunities in SAP schools.

#### Muslim-friendly facilities in educational institutions

48. The Singaporean government has failed to provide Muslim students with the necessary provisions for their active participation in educational institutions, which may infringe on the right of Muslim students to the enjoyment of the right to education under article 5(e)(v) of ICERD. This disproportionately impacts Malay students, with 98.8% of the Malay community being Muslim as of the 2020 census.<sup>88</sup>
49. Reports of the lack of Halal food options in tertiary educational institutions<sup>89</sup> are supported by the survey conducted by ARCS. Out of 419 Muslim or Muslim-raised respondents, 54% stated that they had difficulty finding Halal food in their schools. Of the 309 Muslim or Muslim-raised respondents residing on school premises, 44% were somewhat unsatisfied and very unsatisfied with the provision of Halal food in their schools. Of 439 Muslim or Muslim-raised respondents, majority stated the lack of options available (82%) and lack of access to healthy food (51%) as the primary issues relating to Halal food in school, with most respondents facing such difficulties in government schools across primary, secondary, tertiary, and university levels.<sup>90</sup>
50. Furthermore, the survey results also showed that more than half (58%) of 396 Muslim or Muslim-raised respondents had difficulty finding designated prayer spaces in their schools, with most respondents facing such difficulties in government schools across primary, secondary, tertiary and university levels.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Straits Times, "Parliament: SAP students get \$300 more a year; those taking language electives get more, says Ong Ye Kung", 1 Mar 2019, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/parliament-sap-students-get-300-more-a-year-those-taking-language-electives-get>

<sup>85</sup> IP schools are schools targeted at the top 10% of performers in the Primary School Leaving Examination, and is a 6-year course leading to the GCE A-Level examination.

<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Education, "WHERE DO I WANT TO GO?", (n.d.), available at: <https://www.moe.gov.sg/microsites/whats-next-for-psle-students/where-do-i-want-to-go/integrated-programme-ip/index.html>; The Learning Lab, "Everything You Need To Know About Integrated Programme (IP) Vs 'O' Level", 31 Oct 2019, available at: <https://www.thelearninglab.com.sg/blog/2016/11/integrated-programme-vs-o-level/>.

<sup>87</sup> Zainal H. & Abdullah W., *Chinese privilege in politics: a case study of Singapore's ruling elites* (2019) Asian Ethnicity, pp. 491 – 492.

<sup>88</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2020, Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion* June 2021, p. x, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.pdf>.

<sup>89</sup> See for instance, Aditi Bharade, "Muslim Hall residents still strained by limited halal food options in NTU", *soapbox.sg*, 20 September 2021, available at: <https://soapbox.sg/2021/09/20/muslim-hall-residents-strained-limited-halal-food-options-ntu/>.

<sup>90</sup> Annex A.

<sup>91</sup> Annex A.

51. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:

- a. Review the current provision of Muslim-friendly facilities in educational institutions at all levels; and
- b. Ensure the availability and accessibility of Muslim-friendly facilities in educational institutions at all levels.

### **Right to Work**

52. Racial discrimination and racism in the field of employment have manifested both as a direct result of discriminatory State policies, as well as a failure of the State to adequately safeguard against racial discrimination in the workplace.

#### Banning of religious headscarves for Muslim uniformed workers

53. ARCS welcomes the government's recent announcement that Muslim uniformed workers across the public healthcare sector will finally be allowed to wear their tudung, or hijab, at work from November 2021.<sup>92</sup>

54. However, ARCS notes with regret that other Muslim uniformed workers, such as those in the Singapore Armed Forces and Singapore Police Force, are still not allowed to wear the tudung at work.<sup>93</sup> This may have the "effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination wherever it exists" against Muslim women (article 2(1)(c), ICERD), disproportionately impacting Malay women.<sup>94</sup>

55. The government has justified this ban on the basis that uniformed services are "impartial and secular arms of the State", and should be seen to wield armed force and enforce the laws of Singapore "without fear or favour".<sup>95</sup> Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also noted how the government has been "'cautious about how non-Muslims will react' to seeing more Muslim women wearing the headscarf".<sup>96</sup>

56. Unfortunately, justifying a ban on religious headscarves in the uniformed service based on the potential reaction of non-Muslim individuals means that the government may be complicit in perpetuating prejudices rooted in racism and Islamophobia.<sup>97</sup> This contravenes Singapore's obligation to take immediate and effective measures to combat prejudices (article 7, ICERD) and "to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms" (article 5, ICERD).

57. Additionally, there is also a lack of publicly accessible and available information on the extent to which this ban has impacted Muslim women in their access to employment.<sup>98</sup> There also appears to be some inconsistency in the government's stance against religious headscarves, suggesting that Muslim women are being singled out unfairly: notably, Sikh

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<sup>92</sup> Today, "NDR 2021: Muslim staff in public healthcare sector, including nurses, can wear tudung at work from Nov 1", 29 August 2021, available at: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/ndr-2021-muslim-staff-public-healthcare-sector-including-nurses-can-wear-tudung-work-nov-1>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, *Census of Population 2020, Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion* June 2021, p. x, available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> Today, "NDR 2021: Muslim staff in public healthcare sector, including nurses, can wear tudung at work from Nov 1", 29 August 2021, available at: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/ndr-2021-muslim-staff-public-healthcare-sector-including-nurses-can-wear-tudung-work-nov-1>; see also, Singapore ICERD State report, paras. 10.47.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, OHCHR, "The Netherlands: UN expert calls for greater equality and tolerance", 7 October 2019, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/FR/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25101>.

<sup>98</sup> This was similarly noted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in their concluding observations for Belgium and Turkey; see, CEDAW, *Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Belgium*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/BEL/CO/7, 14 November 2014, paras. 18 – 19; and CEDAW, *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Turkey*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/6, 16 August 2010, paras. 16 – 17.

men in Singapore are allowed to wear turbans at work,<sup>99</sup> including in the Singapore Armed Forces.<sup>100</sup>

58. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:

- a. Monitor and assess the impact of the ban on Muslim uniformed workers outside of the public healthcare sector wearing the tudung at work on Muslim women's access to employment, and make publicly available and accessible such information;
- b. Review its existing policies on banning Muslim uniformed workers outside of the public healthcare sector from wearing the tudung at work, with a view to abolishing this ban eventually; and
- c. Continue taking immediate and effective positive measures, including training and education, to combat prejudices which lead to racial and religious discrimination, such as those relating to the wearing of religious headscarves.

#### Workplace anti-discrimination legislation and policies

59. The Singaporean government has failed to take adequate measures to protect ethnic minority individuals from employment discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity, in contravention of its obligations under article 5(e)(i) of ICERD to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to work.<sup>101</sup>

60. Recent research has shed light on the existence and pervasiveness of racism and racial discrimination in, *inter alia*, hiring processes, workplace interactions, and opportunities for career progression. A review of the Instagram page Minority Voices, which collects stories from ethnic minority individuals, reveals the nuanced and multifaceted ways in which ethnic minorities experience discrimination and racism, including through job advertisements looking for "Chinese-speaking individuals", being rejected from jobs because of one's race, microaggressions, and verbal harassment and insults.<sup>102</sup> The survey by ARCS found that 28% (52 out of 183) of Malay women respondents were told that they would not be allowed to wear religious articles of clothing (e.g. hijab) at work,<sup>103</sup> consistent with the numerous reports of Malay-Muslim women who have been told to remove their hijab by their employers.<sup>104</sup>

61. The issue of workplace discrimination has also been well-documented in several academic and policy studies. A simulated study conducted by Chew, Young and Tan to examine the effect of race on hiring decisions found that "Chinese participants rated Malay applicants as less competent, less suitable for the job, and recommended a lower salary than equally qualified Chinese applicants".<sup>105</sup> A survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies and OnePeople.sg found that 73.2% of Malays and 68.2% of Indians perceived discriminatory treatment when applying for a job; 59.6% of Malays and 56.3% of Indians perceived

<sup>99</sup> Reuters, "Job or hijab? Singapore debates ban on Islamic veil at work", 21 Sep 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-singapore-women-rights-idUSKCN26C030>.

<sup>100</sup> NS.sg, "SAF No. 5 Dress", available at: <https://www.ns.sg/nsp/portal/site/saf-dress-code/details/safno5-dress>.

<sup>101</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *List of themes in relation to the initial report of Singapore*, UN Doc. CERD/C/SGP/Q/1, 25 January 2020, para. 11.

<sup>102</sup> Instagram, "minority voices", available at: <https://www.instagram.com/minorityvoices/?hl=en>.

<sup>103</sup> Annex A.

<sup>104</sup> Humairah Zainal and George Wong, *Voices behind the veil: Unravelling the hijab debate in Singapore through the lived experiences of hijab-wearing Malay-Muslim women* (2017) South East Asia Research, pp. 107 – 121; Anisah Kader, "The Time I Fought for Justice and The Hijab", *Beyond The Hijab*, 29 July 2021, available at: <https://beyondhijab.sg/2021/07/29/the-time-i-fought-for-justice-and-the-hijab/>; Today, "Tafep investigating incident at Tangs dept store where promoter at pop-up booth was told to remove hijab", 19 August 2020, available at <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/tafep-investigating-incident-tangs-dept-store-where-promoter-pop-booth-was-told-remove>; Mothership, "S'pore woman allegedly asked about removing hijab when applying for preschool teacher job", 14 June 2021, available at <https://mothership.sg/2021/06/maple-bear-preschool-hijab-teacher/>; Coconuts Singapore, "Remove your hijab if you want the job, Chinese restaurant tells Muslim woman", 7 August 2021, available at <https://coconuts.co/hongkong/news/remove-your-hijab-if-you-want-the-job-chinese-restaurant-tells-muslim-woman/>; Reuters, "Job or hijab? Singapore debates ban on Islamic veil at work", 21 Sep 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-singapore-women-rights-idUSKCN26C030>.

<sup>105</sup> Peter K.H. Chew, Jessica L. Young, Gerald P.K. Tan, *Racism and the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore: effects of race on hiring decisions* (2019) *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, p. 5.

discriminatory treatment when at work; and 70.4% of Malays and 65.7% of Indians perceived discriminatory treatment when seeking a job promotion.<sup>106</sup>

62. These figures are consistent with the survey conducted by ARCS. With regards to hiring, out of 866 respondents who were currently or previously employed, 63% indicated that they experienced workplaces looking exclusively for Chinese-speakers. In the workplace, 29% of respondents experienced racist slurs or insults at the workplace; 27% experienced negative comments about their skin colour; and 27% experienced comments that attributed their work ethic to stereotypes about their race. Out of 783 respondents, 17% indicated that they had left a job previously due to racism.<sup>107</sup>
63. ARCS welcomes the recent announcement of the government's intention to enshrine workplace anti-discrimination guidelines from the Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) into law, and to set up a tribunal to deal with workplace discrimination.<sup>108</sup> This is in spite of Singapore having asserted in its State report that "non-legislative measures are preferable and have a greater ability to influence and change mind-sets than legislative measures".<sup>109</sup>
64. While specifics of the anti-discrimination legislation are still unknown, ARCS hopes that this legislation remedies the shortcomings of TAFEP and the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) to ensure that they are effective in prohibiting and bringing to an end racial discrimination by any persons in the field of employment (article 2(1)(d), ICERD). For instance, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) has highlighted how "efforts should extend to cases beyond the hiring stage", and noted how the "current penalties (curtailment of work-pass privileges for employers) do not provide a direct or legal remedy for victims of discrimination" (article 6, ICERD).<sup>110</sup> AWARE has also documented how discrimination claims, even if genuine, may be difficult to substantiate if they are "subtle and difficult to document", which may, in instances of wrongful dismissal, subsequently "discourage many employees from approaching TADM".<sup>111</sup>
65. Additionally, ARCS hopes that the new anti-discrimination legislation and workplace tribunal have a wider reach than the current TAFEP and TADM. AWARE has noted how "many workers are simply unaware of TADM's existence as a recourse option for wrongful dismissal",<sup>112</sup> and stated that they "believe discrimination [in the workplace] remains under-reported in Singapore".<sup>113</sup> The survey done by ARCS confirms this phenomenon: only 0.6% of respondents reported incidents of racially discriminatory practices to TAFEP.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, while 545 out of 866 respondents indicated experiencing workplaces looking exclusively for Chinese-speakers,<sup>115</sup> the Ministry of Manpower only received an average of 39 workplace discrimination complaints based on race and language, out of an average of 379 workplace discrimination complaints per year.<sup>116</sup>
66. In light of the aforementioned concerns, ARCS recommends the relevant Singapore authorities to:

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<sup>106</sup> Mathew Mathews, Leonard Lim and Shanthini Selvarajan, *IPS-OnePeople.SG Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony: Comparing Results from 2018 and 2013*, July 2019, pp. 35 – 36, available at: [https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/ips-working-paper-no-35\\_ips-onepeoplesg-indicators-of-racial-and-religious-harmony\\_comparing-results-from-2018-and-2013.pdf](https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/ips-working-paper-no-35_ips-onepeoplesg-indicators-of-racial-and-religious-harmony_comparing-results-from-2018-and-2013.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> Annex A.

<sup>108</sup> The Straits Times, "NDR 2021: Fair employment guidelines to become law, new tribunal to deal with workplace discrimination", 29 August 2021, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/ndr-2021-fair-employment-guidelines-to-become-law-new-tribunal-to-deal-with>.

<sup>109</sup> Singapore ICERD State report, para. 11.9.

<sup>110</sup> AWARE, "Workplace discrimination: Laws needed to hold errant employers to account", 7 December 2020, available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2020/12/workplace-discrimination-laws-needed-to-hold-errant-employers-to-account/>.

<sup>111</sup> AWARE, "Difficult for workers to substantiate wrongful dismissal claims", 15 July 2021, available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2021/07/47135/>.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> AWARE, "Workplace discrimination: Laws needed to hold errant employers to account", 7 December 2020, available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2020/12/workplace-discrimination-laws-needed-to-hold-errant-employers-to-account/>.

<sup>114</sup> Annex A.

<sup>115</sup> Annex A.

<sup>116</sup> The Straits Times, "60% of job discrimination complaints in S'pore each year are nationality-based", 15 September 2021, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/60-of-job-discrimination-complaints-in-spore-each-year-are-nationality-based>.

- a. Ensure that the newly announced workplace anti-discrimination legislation protects against the full range of racism and racial discrimination detailed above, in line with article 1 of ICERD;
- b. Ensure that victims of racial discrimination in the field of employment can file complaints under existing and new protective mechanisms without fear of reprisal or intimidation;
- c. Ensure that the newly announced tribunal undertakes prompt, independent and thorough investigation into all cases of discriminatory practices in the field of employment; holding those responsible to account; and providing effective remedies, including appropriate compensation, guarantees of non-repetition and reviews and changes in relevant laws and practices;
- d. Publish detailed statistics and evidence on the nature and extent of current complaints of employment discrimination, with data segregated based on race and ethnicity; and
- e. Undertake activities to raise public awareness of existing and new mechanisms for individuals who have experienced workplace discrimination in the to lodge complaints.

### **Conclusion**

67. Singapore has come a long way in the steps it has taken to protect and strengthen multiracial and multicultural cohesion. ARCS is also heartened by the Singaporean government's assurance of its "unwavering commitment" to "work towards a society free from racial discrimination".<sup>117</sup> In that sense, ARCS and the Singaporean government are ultimately working towards the same goal of ensuring that substantive equality can be a reality for all in Singapore, regardless of race, language, religion or other minority statuses.

68. However, no society is perfect, and laws, policies, and practices need to be reviewed, fine-tuned, and improved upon in order to ensure their continued relevance in today's society. This is especially if existing laws, policies, and practices have had the consequence of perpetuating racism and racial discrimination, such as those that ARCS has identified above. Further steps also need to be taken to ensure that individuals from ethnic minorities are adequately protected against racism and racial discrimination.

69. ARCS also notes that the rights protected by the ICERD do not exist in silos, and regrets Singapore's rejection of recommendations received in its most recent Universal Periodic Review to ratify further human rights treaties.<sup>118</sup> To this end, ARCS echoes the CEDAW's recommendation to Singapore in 2017 and Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendation to Singapore in 2019 to ratify the other major international human rights instruments in order to ensure the enjoyment of all of their human rights and fundamental freedoms,<sup>119</sup> including the:

- a. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- b. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- c. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- d. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families; and

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<sup>117</sup> ICERD Singapore State report, para. 1.2.

<sup>118</sup> Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Singapore, Addendum, Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review*, UN Doc. A/HRC/48/16/Add.1, 10 September 2021, para. 56.

<sup>119</sup> CEDAW, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Singapore*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/5, 21 November 2017, para. 50; Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore*, UN Doc. CRC/C/SGP/CO/4-5, 28 June 2019, para. 50.

e. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

## Annex A: Full Results of Survey Done by ARCS

A survey was conducted by ARCS in September and October 2021, gleaning the experiences of racial discrimination in Singapore. A total of 1,060 members of ethnic minority groups in Singapore participated in the survey.

### Notes:

- The denominator for some questions changes because of missing responses as participants may choose not to answer a specific question.
- If the denominator cannot be determined (e.g. for questions that allow for selection of multiple responses), the assumed denominator would be the total number of individuals who would have been eligible to answer that question.

### Demographic Information

Out of the 1,060 members of ethnic minority groups who participated in the survey, 32% (n=339) were Malay, 46% (n=488) were Indian, and 22% (n=233) were "Others" (e.g. Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Arab, Burmese, Filipino, Thai, etc) (Figure 1).

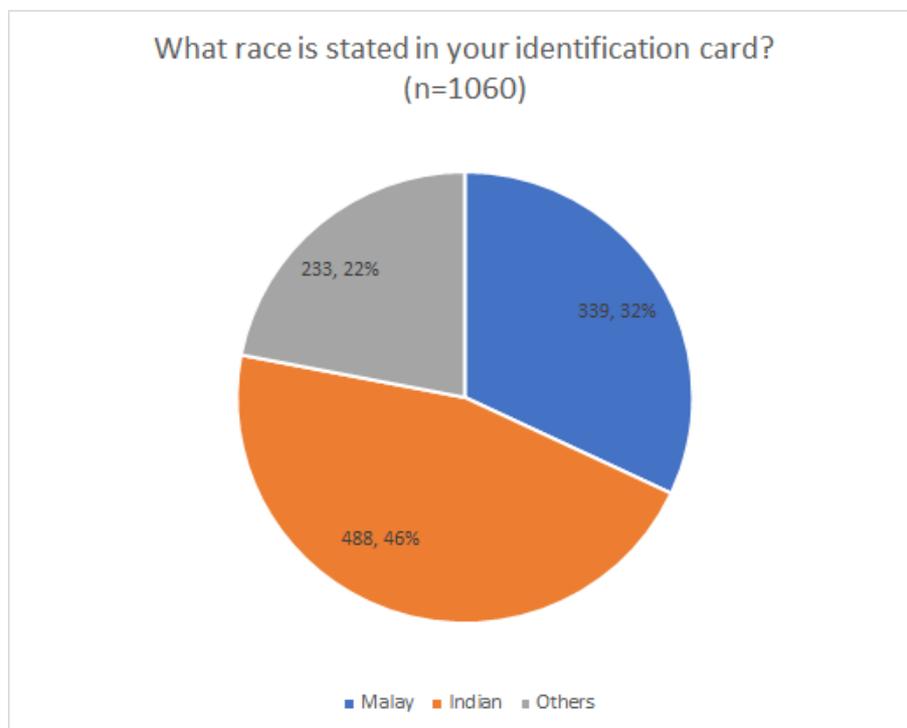


Figure 1. What race is stated in your Identification Card? (n=1140)

One major limitation in the data preparation and analysis relates to coding participants' demographic information according to the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model, the dominant organising framework of race in Singapore used by the State. Participants were prompted to enter the race they identify as via a fill-in-the-blank question to allow the most autonomy to self-describe. However, to quantify this information as needed for the report's analyses, participants' responses had to be aggregated according to the CMIO model (i.e. the race stated in their Identification Card), which certainly led to people being categorised in ways they may not have chosen for themselves.

### Freedom of Expression

When asked about being comfortable when posting on social media about race/racism (Figure 2), about 43% (n=454) of participants felt somewhat comfortable or very comfortable, compared to about 16% (n=175) who were neutral. In contrast, 39% (n=415) reported being somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with doing so, while 2% (n=16) of respondents reported not using social media.

How comfortable do you feel posting on social media about race/racism? (n=1060)

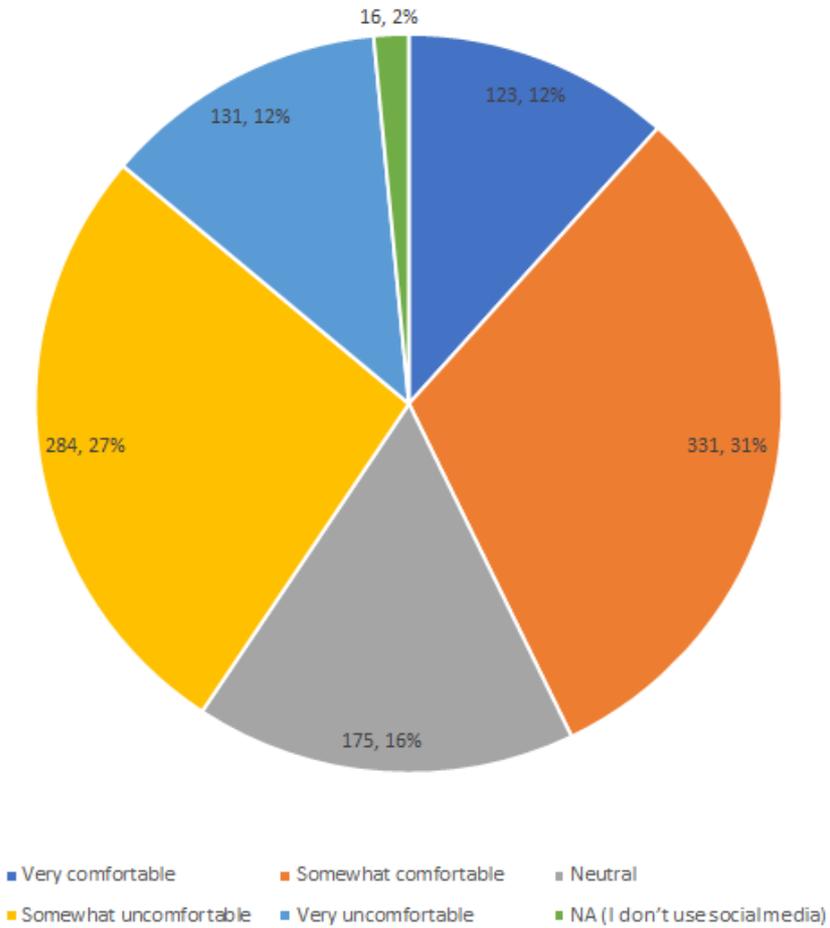
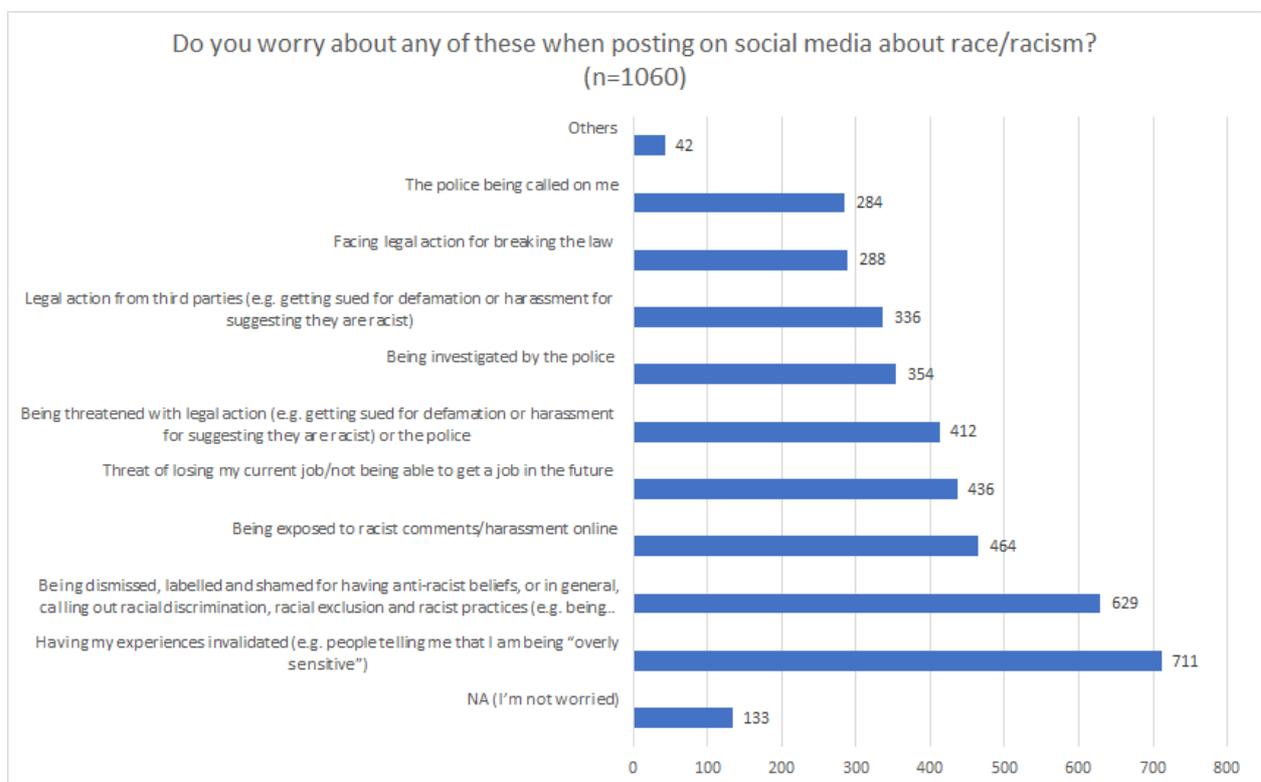


Figure 2. How comfortable do you feel posting on social media about race/racism? (n=1060)

When asked about what they worried about when posting about race/racism on social media (Figure 3), out of 1060 participants who responded, the top reasons cited were that they were worried about having their experiences invalidated (n=711, 67%), about being dismissed, labelled and shamed for having anti-racist beliefs, or in general, calling out racial discrimination (n=629, 59%), and being exposed to racist comments/harassment online (n=464, 44%). A sizable number of respondents also indicated that they worried about the threat of losing their job or not being able to get a job in the future (n=436, 41%), and being threatened with legal action or the police (n=412, 39%). As for Other worries, respondents indicated the following in open-ended responses:

- Being singled out as “anti-establishment”/getting “blacklisted”
- Losing their Employment Pass
- Their Permanent Resident (PR) status not being renewed
- Hurting chances of Permanent Residents who are applying for Singaporean citizenship
- Being charged under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA)
- Having personal information leaked by government agencies in order to discredit their accounts of racism experienced, which has happened previously<sup>120</sup>

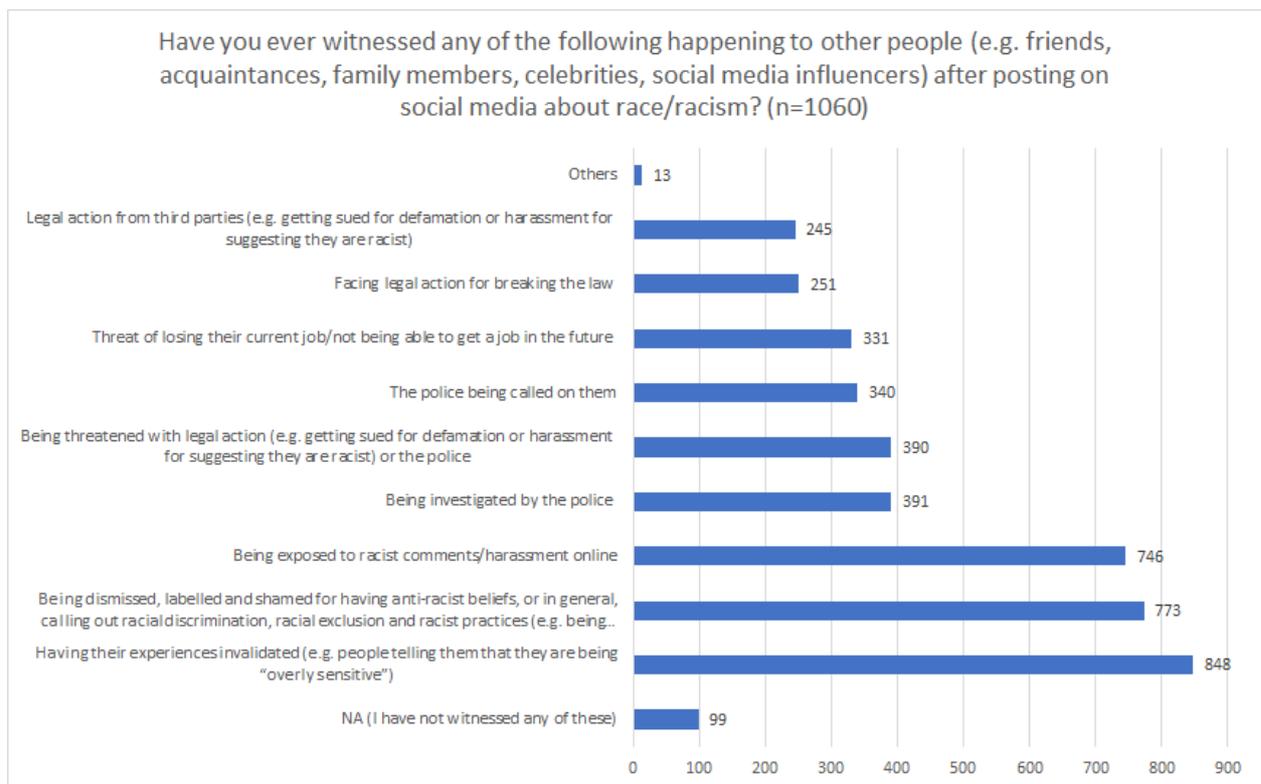


**Figure 3. Do you worry about any of these when posting on social media about race/racism? (n=1060)**

<sup>120</sup> Today Online, “MSF corrects errors in viral posts about elderly cleaner, urges public to use less ‘distressing’ means to help the needy”, 30 July 2020, available at: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/msf-corrects-errors-viral-posts-about-elderly-cleaner-urges-public-use-less-distressing-means-help>

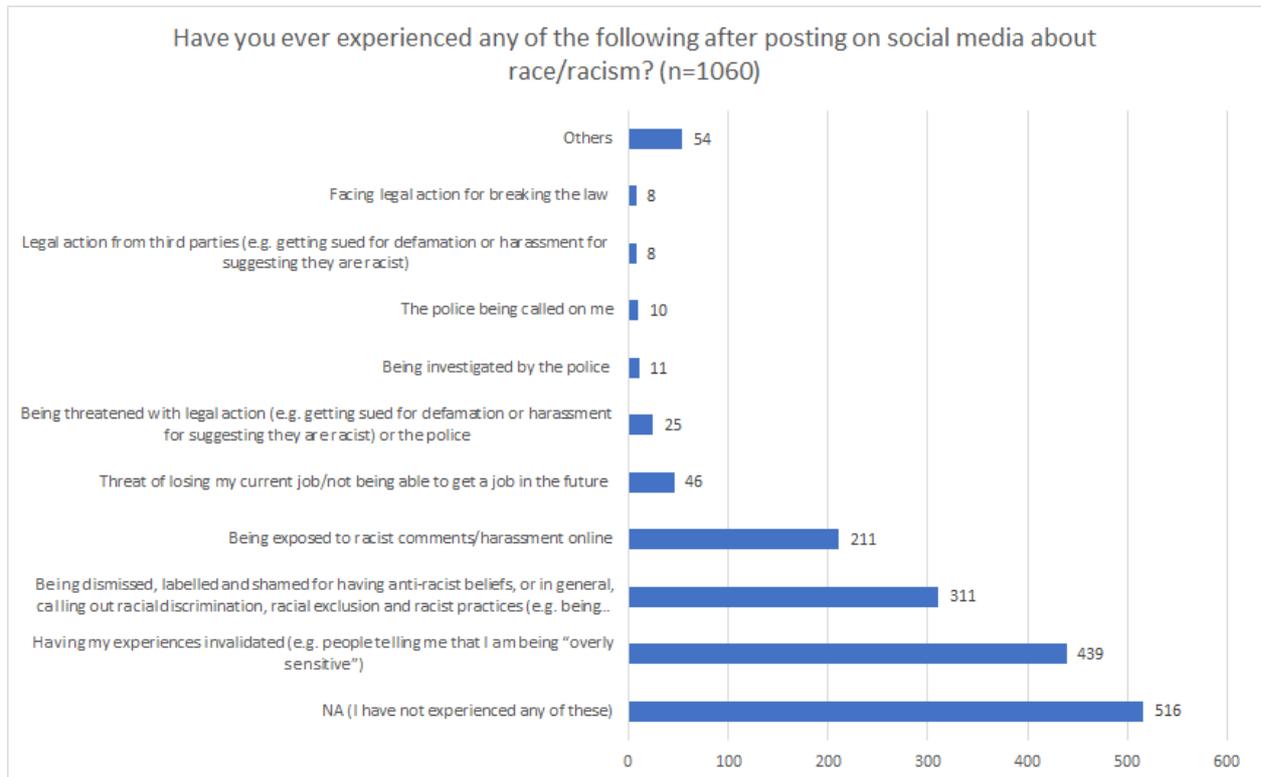
When asked about whether they had witnessed any events happening to others after posting about race/racism on social media (Figure 4), out of 1060 participants who responded, the top events cited were seeing others have their experiences invalidated (n=848, 80%), seeing others be dismissed, labelled and shamed for having anti-racist beliefs, or in general, calling out racial discrimination (n=773, 73%), and being exposed to racist comments/harassment online (n=746, 70%). These findings align with the worries articulated by participants in the previous question. A sizable number of respondents also indicated witnessing others being investigated by the police (n=391, 37%), and being threatened with legal action or the police (n=390, 37%). As for Other, respondents indicated that they witnessed the following happening to other people in open-ended responses:

- Being banned on Facebook as posts calling out racism went against Facebook’s community guidelines
- Loss of Employment Pass
- Being unable to renew their PR status
- Being investigated and arrested by the Internal Security Department



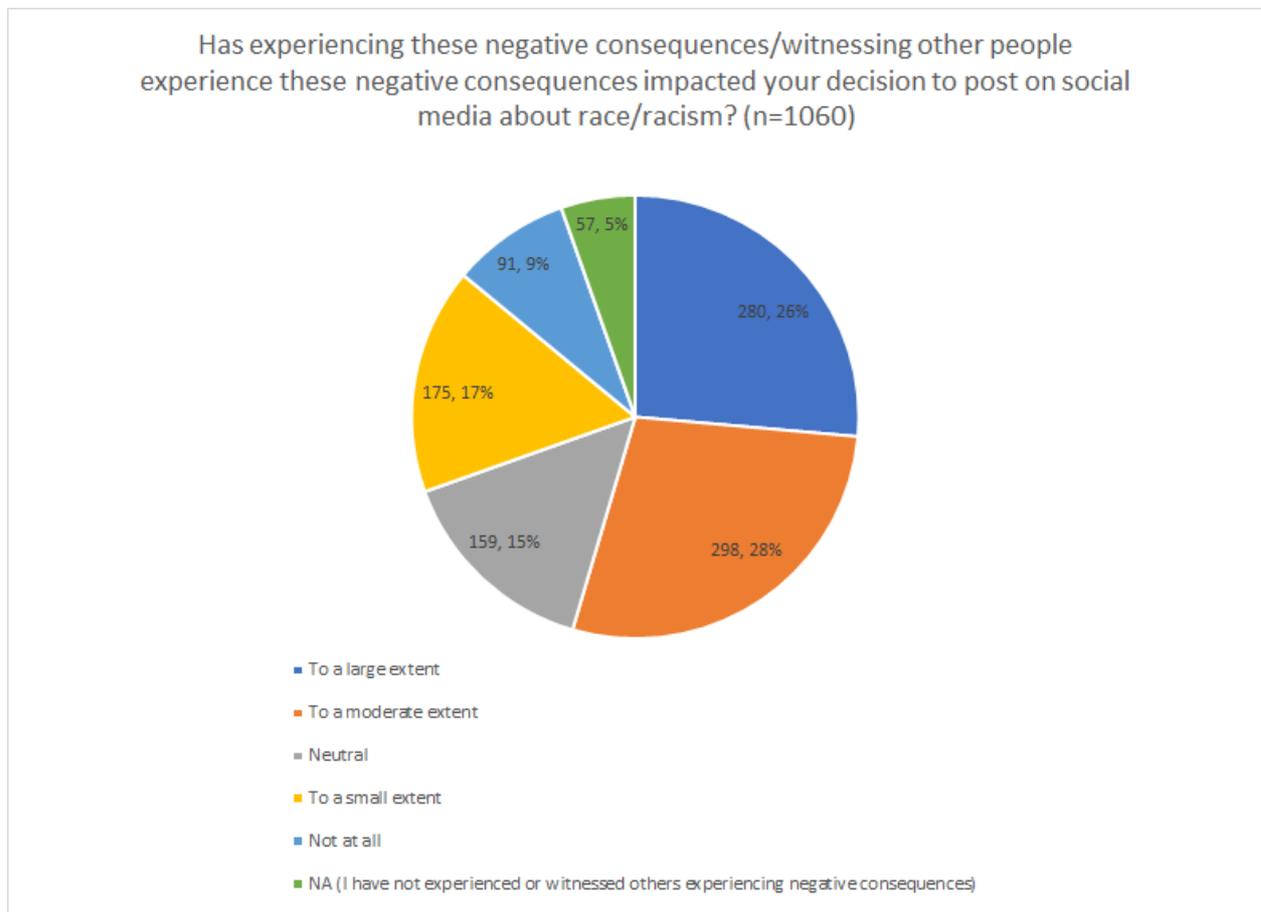
**Figure 4. Have you ever witnessed any of the following happening to other people (e.g. friends, acquaintances, family members, celebrities, social media influencers) after posting on social media about race/racism? (n=1060)**

When asked about whether they had experienced any events themselves after posting about race/racism on social media (Figure 5), out of 1060 participants who responded, most participants reported not experiencing any (n=516, 49%). Nevertheless, participants also reported that they had mostly experiences having their experiences invalidated (n=439, 41%), had been dismissed, labelled and shamed for having anti-racist beliefs, or in general, calling out racial discrimination (n=311, 29%), or been exposed to racist comments/harassment online (n=211, 20%). These findings align with the worries, as well as what they have witnessed happen to others, as articulated by participants in the previous two questions. It cannot be ignored that a significant number had experienced the threat of losing their job or not being able to get a job in the future (n=46), were threatened with legal action or the police (n=25), and were investigated by the police (n=11).



**Figure 5. Have you ever experienced any of the following after posting on social media about race/racism? (n=1060)**

Participants were asked if experiencing these negative consequences/witnessing other people experience these negative consequences impacted their decision to post on social media about race/racism (Figure 6). Out of 1060 participants, 26% (n=280), 28% (n=298), 15% (n=159), 17% (n=175) and 9% (n=91) responded *to a large extent*, *to a moderate extent*, *neutral*, *to a small extent*, or *not at all*, respectively, indicating that what participants had witness impacted a majority of their decisions to post on about race/racism on social media to a moderate/large extent. About 5% (n=57) of participants reported that they had not experienced or witnessed others experiencing negative consequences.



**Figure 6. Has experiencing these negative consequences/witnessing other people experience these negative consequences impacted your decision to post on social media about race/racism? (n=1060)**

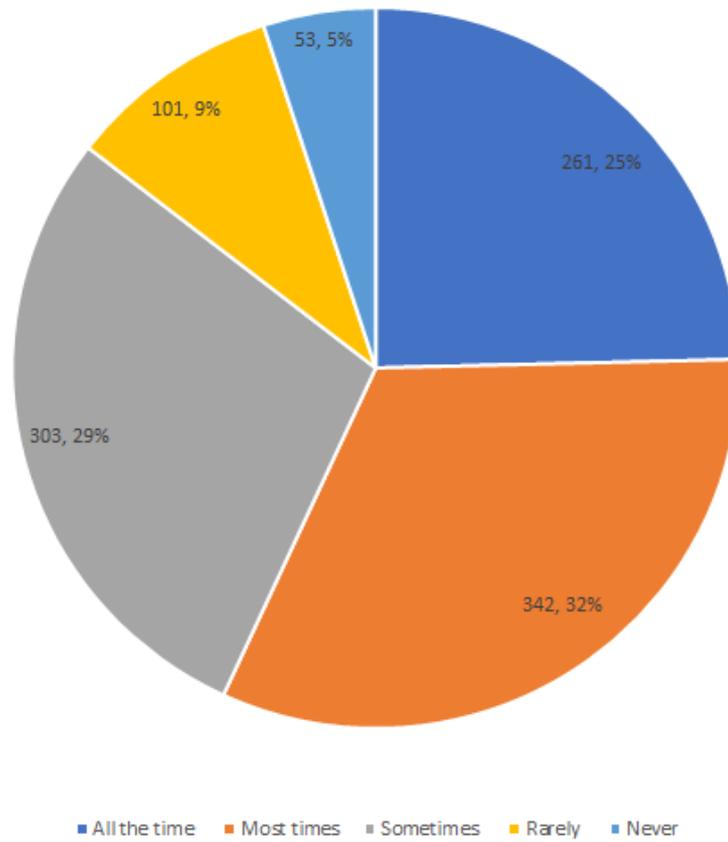
For participants who responded *to a large extent* and *to a moderate extent*, they further elaborated on the impact this had on them posting on social media:

- Stopped posting completely about race/racism on social media
- Made their social media accounts private
- Shared posts about race/racism only with close friends and family

Quite a few respondents indicated that they had witnessed Preeti Nair and Subhas Nair Preeti Nair being given conditional warnings under Section 298A for a rap video that they had made,<sup>121</sup> and how that made them more “anxious” when posting about race/racism on social media thereafter. Participants were asked about how often they felt the need to self-censor on social media when discussing race/racism (Figure 7). Out of 1060 participants, 25% (n=260), 32% (n=342), 29% (n=303), 9% (n=101) and 5% (n=53) responded *all the time*, *most times*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never*, respectively, indicating that a majority of participants did engage in self-censorship for a majority of occurrences.

<sup>121</sup> Channel News Asia, “Preeti Nair and Subhas Nair given conditional warning for ‘offensive’ rap video: Police”, 14 August 2019, available at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/preeti-nair-subhas-nair-conditional-warning-rap-video-police-865356>.

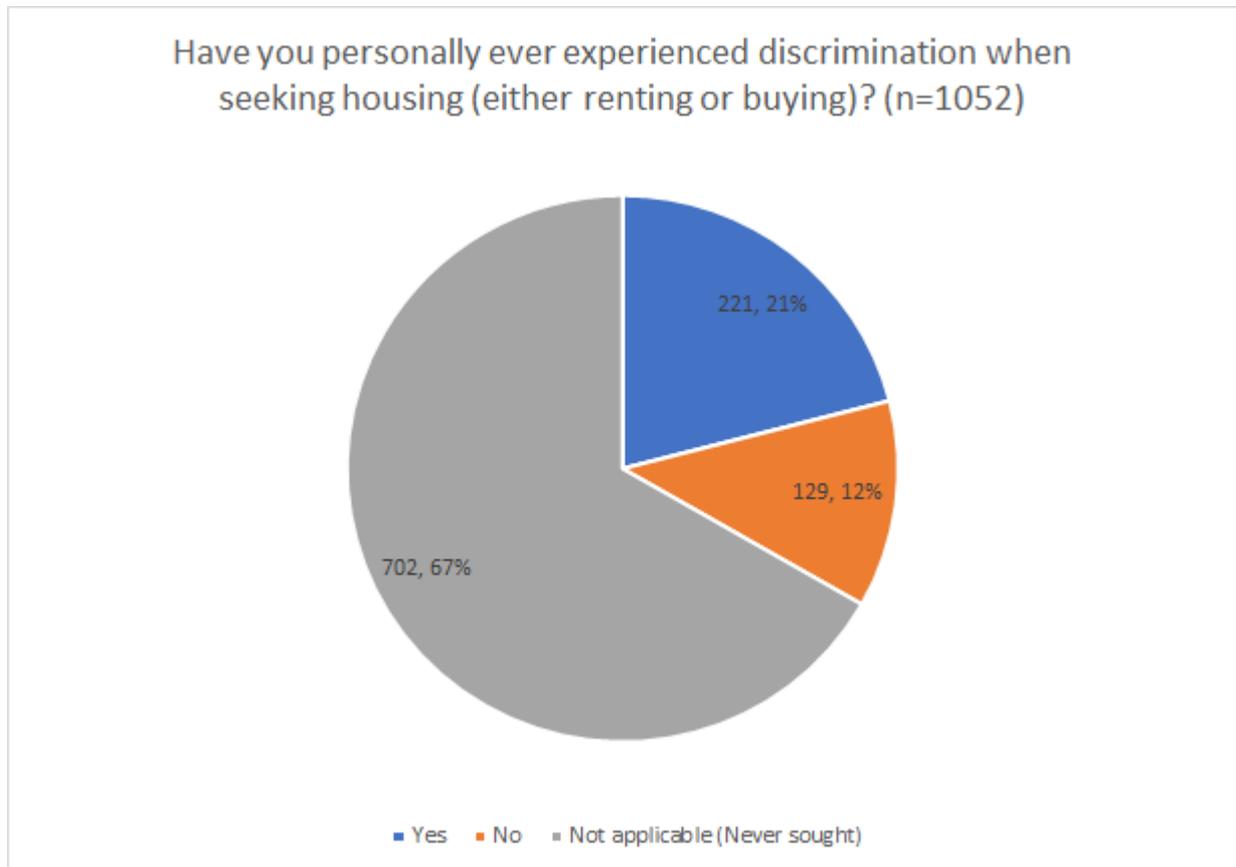
How often have you felt the need to self-censor on social media when discussing race/racism? (n=1060)



**Figure 7. How often have you felt the need to self-censor on social media when discussing race/racism? (n=1060)**

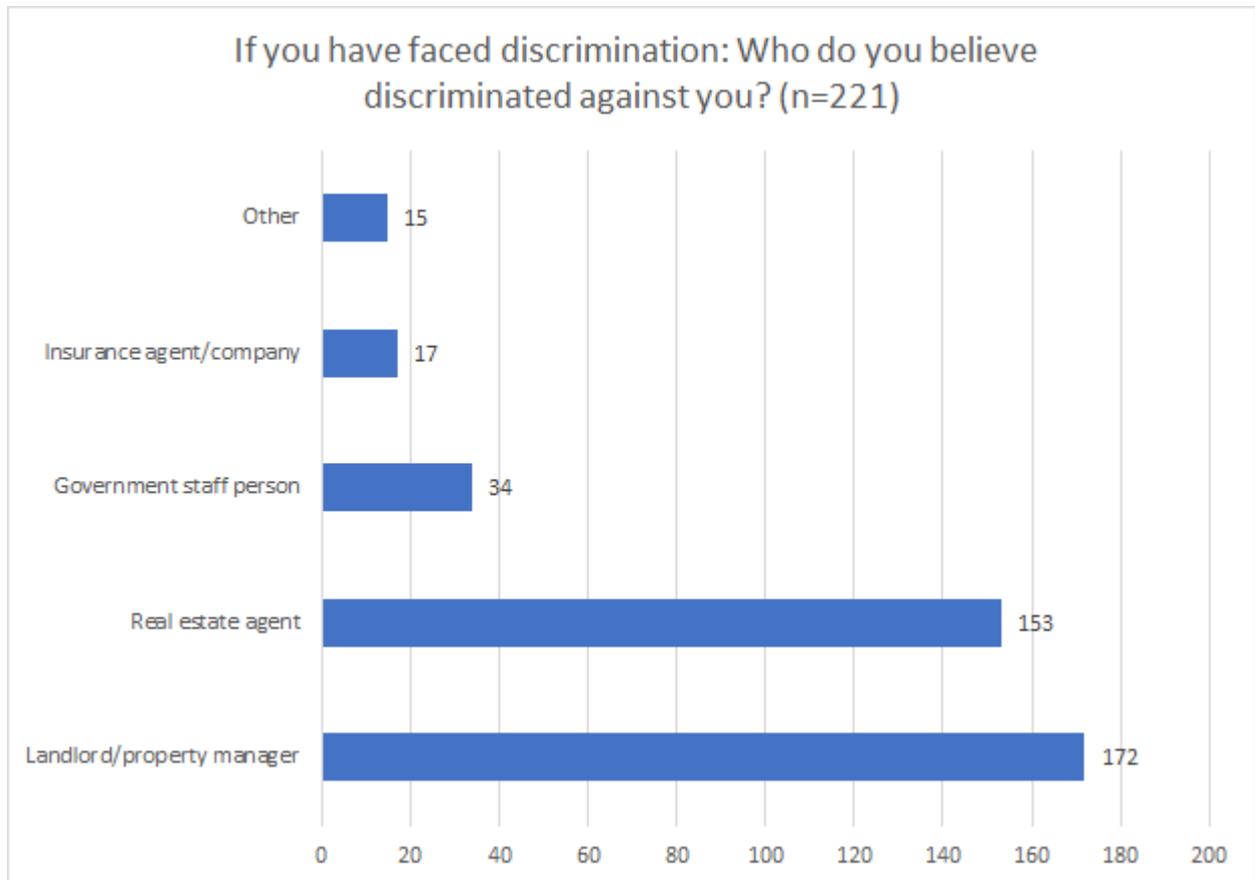
## Right to Housing

Participants were asked about whether they had personally ever experienced discrimination when seeking housing (Figure 8). Out of 1052 participants, 350 (33%) had experiences with seeking out housing. Of these participants, a majority of 63% (n=221) indicated ever facing discrimination. These 221 participants were eligible to participate in the following questions for this section.



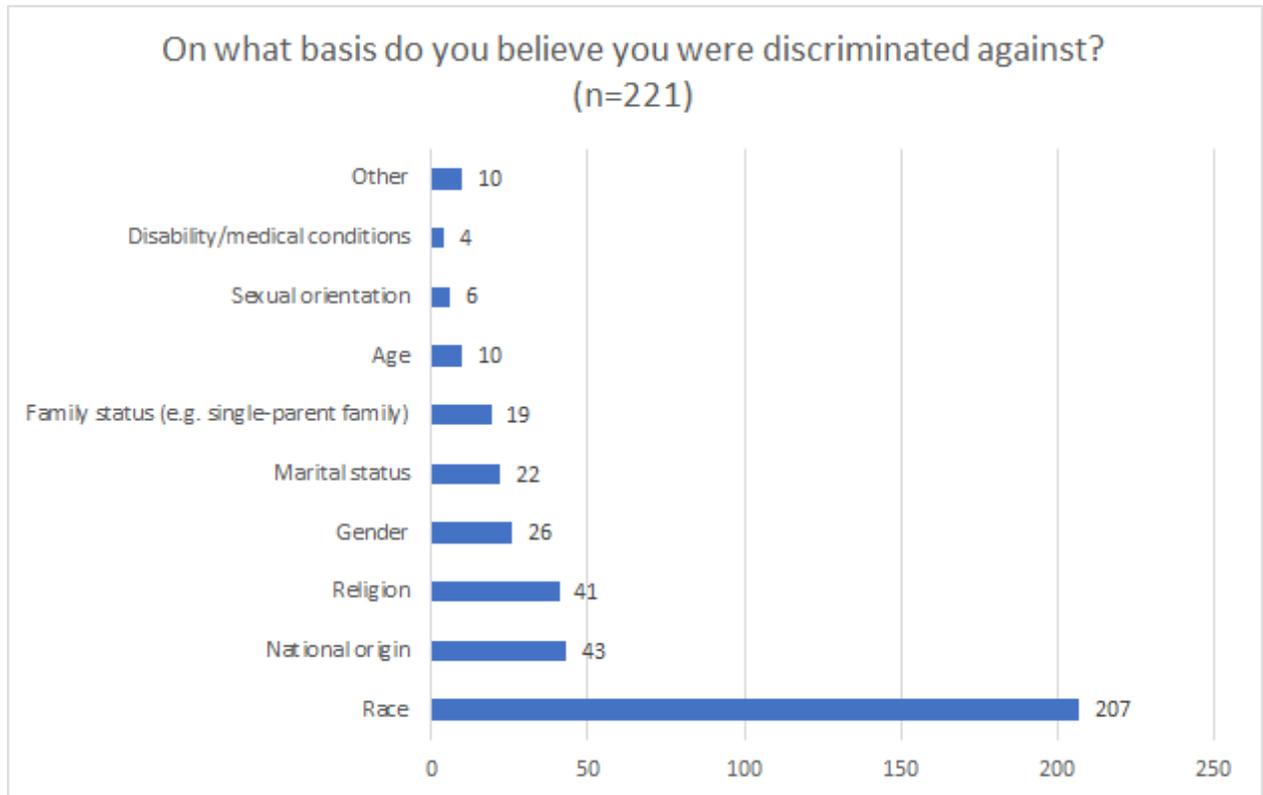
**Figure 8. Have you personally ever experienced discrimination when seeking housing (either renting or buying)? (n=1052)**

Of these 221 participants who had ever faced discrimination when seeking out housing, they were then asked who they believed had discriminated against them (Figure 9). Most participants (n=172, 78%) reported facing discrimination from the landlord or property manager, as well as from real estate agents (n=153, 69%). For the Other option, a significant number of respondents stated the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) as a basis of discrimination in open-ended responses.



**Figure 9. If you have faced discrimination: Who do you believe discriminated against you? (n=221)**

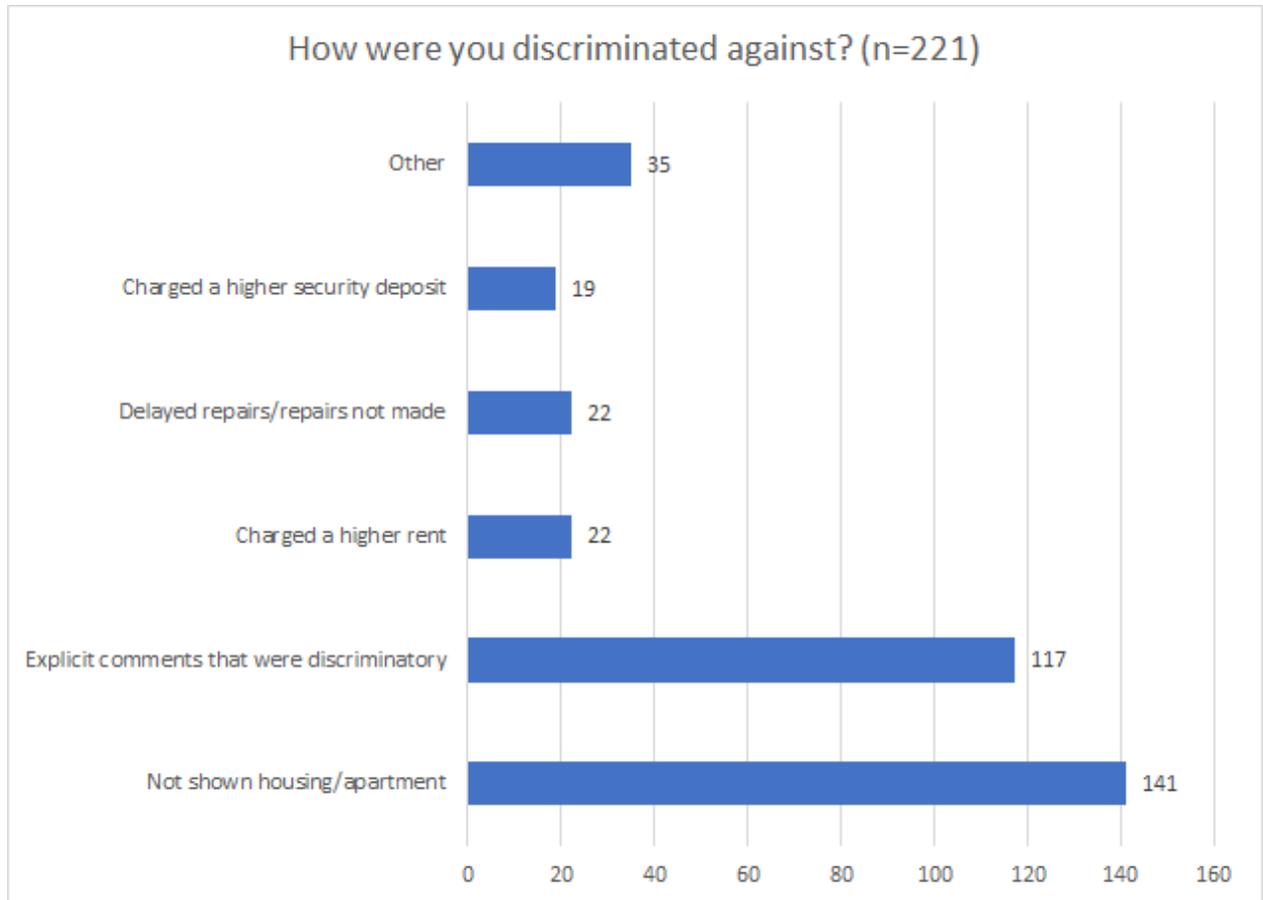
These 221 participants were then asked about the basis upon which they believed they were discriminated against (Figure 10). Most participants cited race (n=207, 94%), national origin (n=43, 19%), and religion (n=41, 19%) as bases for discrimination.



**Figure 10. On what basis do you believe you were discriminated against? (n=221)**

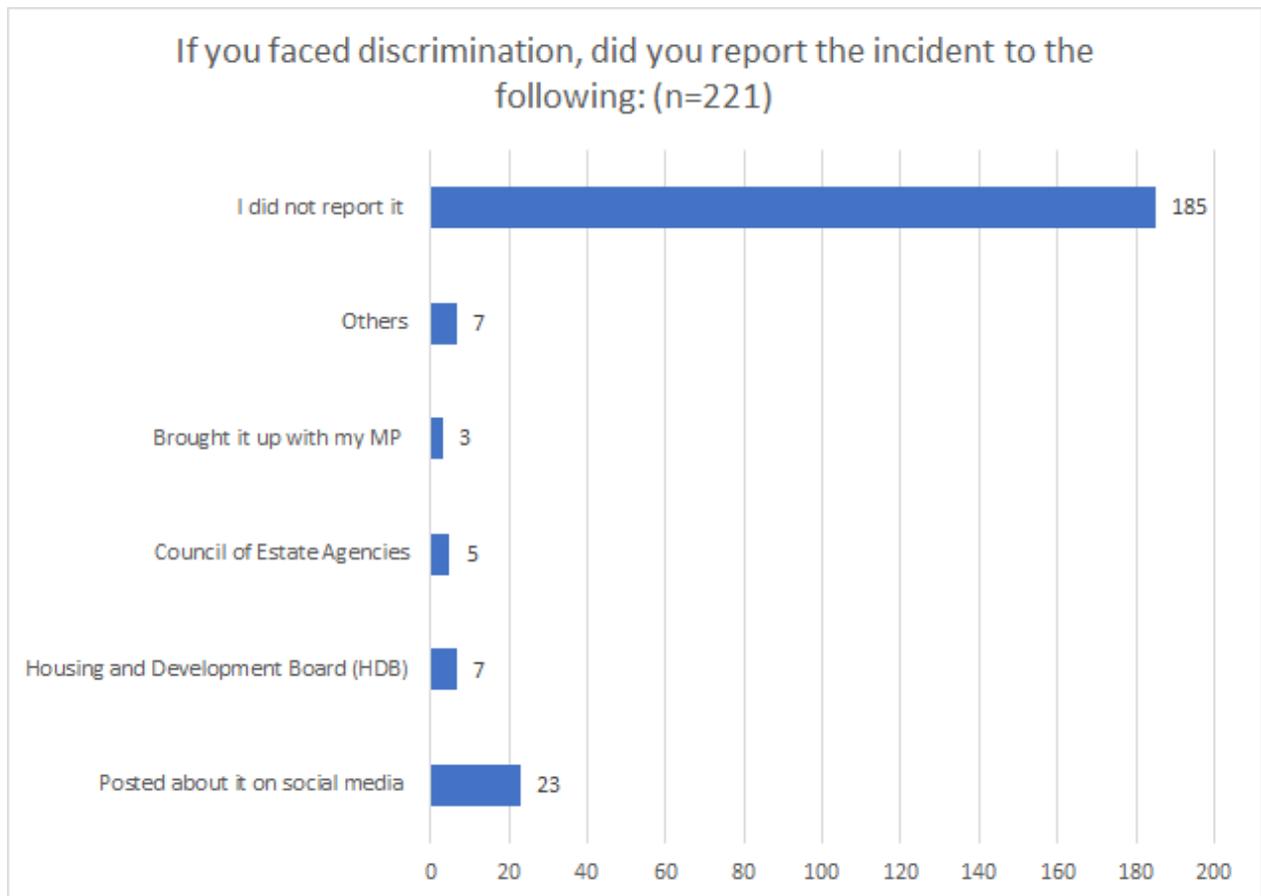
These 221 participants were then asked about how they were discriminated against (Figure 11). Most participants reported that they were not shown the house/apartment (n=141, 64%), or had encountered explicit comments that were discriminatory (n=118, 53%). For the Other option, several participants stated the following in open-ended responses:

- Rental listings explicitly stating their preference for Chinese tenants
- Being denied viewing of property or being ignored once they told the landlord/property manager/real estate agent their race or nationality



**Figure 11. How were you discriminated against? (n=221)**

The 221 participants who had experienced discrimination when searching for housing were then asked if they had reported such discriminatory experiences (Figure 12). Most participants reported that they had not reported it (n=185, 84%), or had posted about it on social media (n=23, 10%).



**Figure 12. If you faced discrimination, did you report the incident to the following: (n=221)**

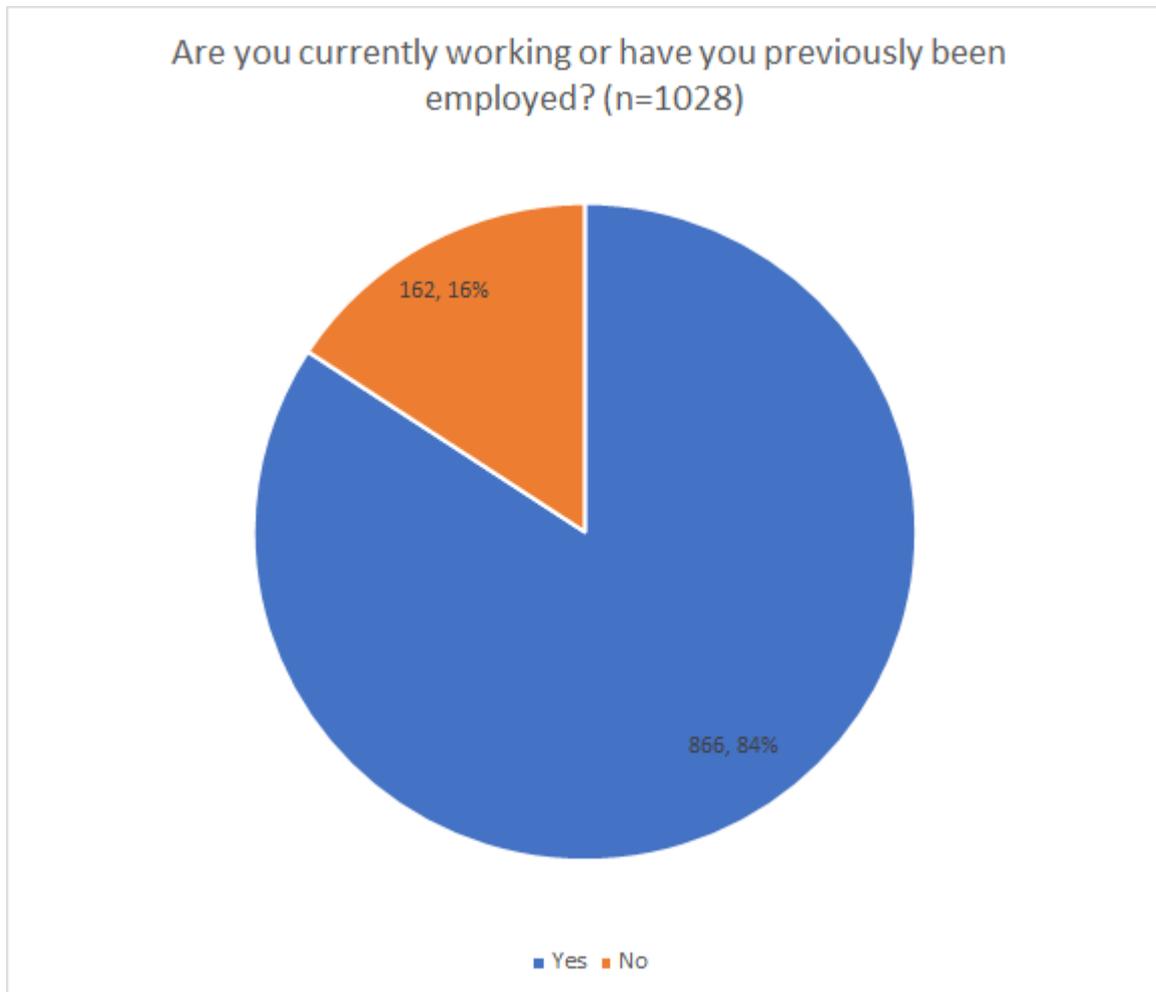
When asked in an open-ended question as to why they did not report such an incident, common responses were:

- No one would believe them or care about what they had gone through
- No one would take their reporting of the incident seriously as such incidents were so commonplace and normalised
- Not seeing the point of reporting such incidents as they would be explained away as “personal preference of the landlords” instead of racism
- Being afraid of being labelled as racist for reporting such incidents of racism
- Not seeing the point of reporting such incidents because of the belief that there would be no action taken
- The high mental toll and exhaustion of reporting such incidents, without the guarantee that it would yield any outcome or that they would be heard
- Not knowing the right platform to report such incidents
- Non-Singaporeans indicated fear of losing their PR status or their Employment Pass if they reported such incidents

For those who had reported such incidents to the Housing and Development Board (HDB) and the Council for Estate Agencies (CEA), all stated that there was either no follow-up action taken or that they were sent generic replies that did not address the issue.

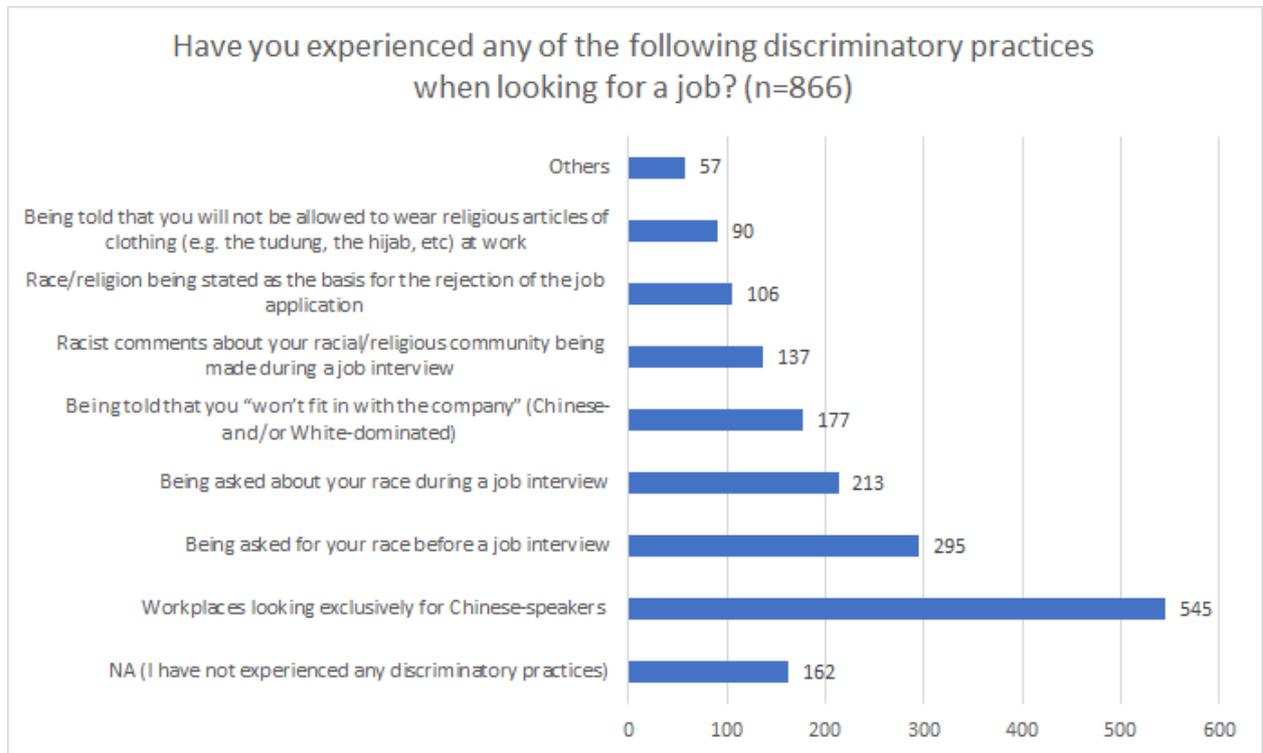
### Right to Work

A total of 1028 participants responded to the question on whether they were currently working or had previously been employed (Figure 13). A majority of respondents responded yes to this question (n=866, 84%). The remainder of this section reflects the responses for these 866 participants.



**Figure 13. Are you currently working or have you previously been employed? (n=1028)**

The 866 participants who are currently working or had ever been employed were asked if they had ever experienced any discriminatory practices from employers when looking for a job (Figure 14). The top cited experiences included workplaces looking exclusively for Chinese-speakers (n=545, 63%), being asked for one's race before a job interview (n=295, 34%), and being asked about one's race during a job interview (n=213, 25%).

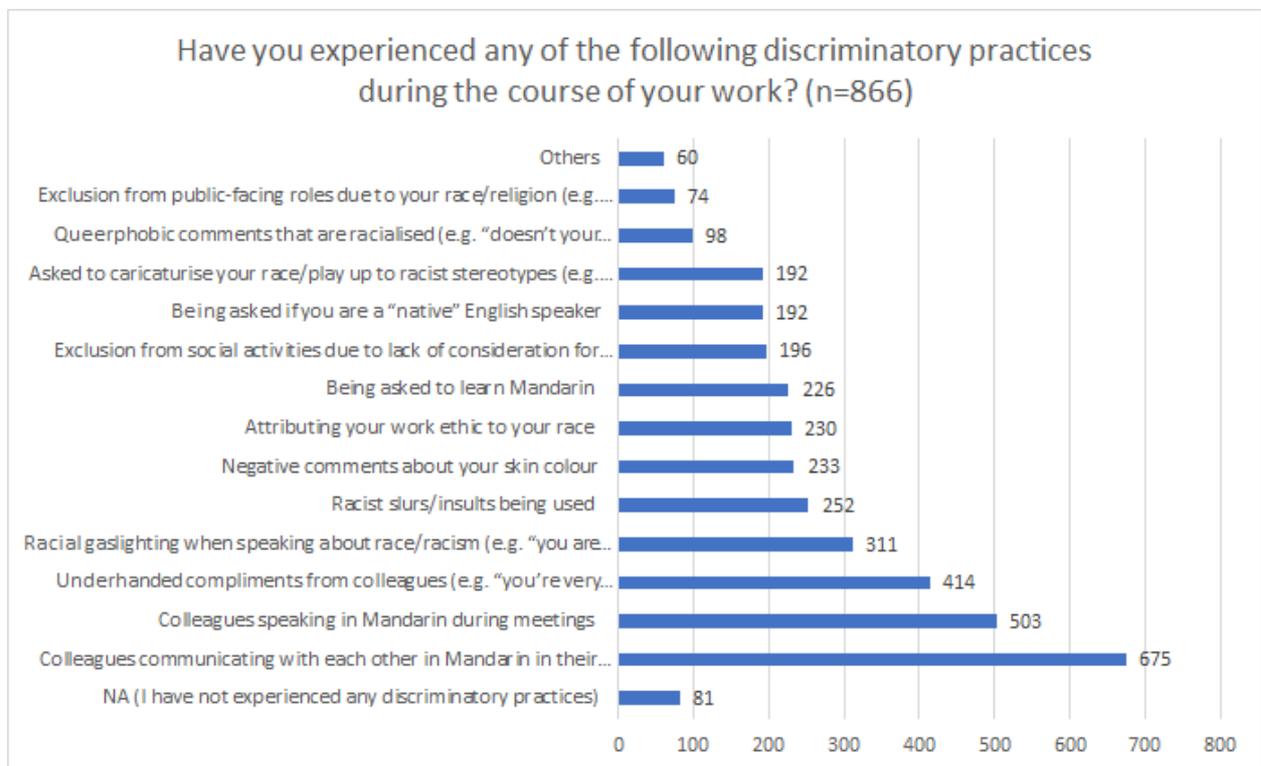


**Figure 14. Have you experienced any of the following discriminatory practices when looking for a job? (n=866)**

The 866 participants who are currently working or had ever been employed were also asked if they had ever experienced any discriminatory practices from employers during the course of their work (Figure 15). The top cited experiences included colleagues communicating with each other in Mandarin in their personal capacities with participants in earshot (n=675, 78%), colleagues speaking in Mandarin during meetings (n=503, 58%), and receiving underhanded compliments from colleagues on the basis of participant’s perceived race (n=414, 48%). In the Others option, open-ended responses included:

- Being pigeonholed to do specific tasks due to one’s race, gender or religion
- Being threatened with firing should they not partake in activities that go against one’s religious beliefs (e.g. asking Muslim colleagues to partake in work events with alcohol)
- Racist and xenophobic microaggressions (e.g. being made to explain one’s religious choices, being mistaken for other individuals of the same ethnic group, mispronunciation of names, vocalising or acting based on racist stereotypes, being questioned about one’s citizenship, not being given days off during one’s religious festivals, xenophobic comments about participants’ home countries)

It should be noted that a significant number of participants who were queer faced queerphobic comments that were racialised (n=98).

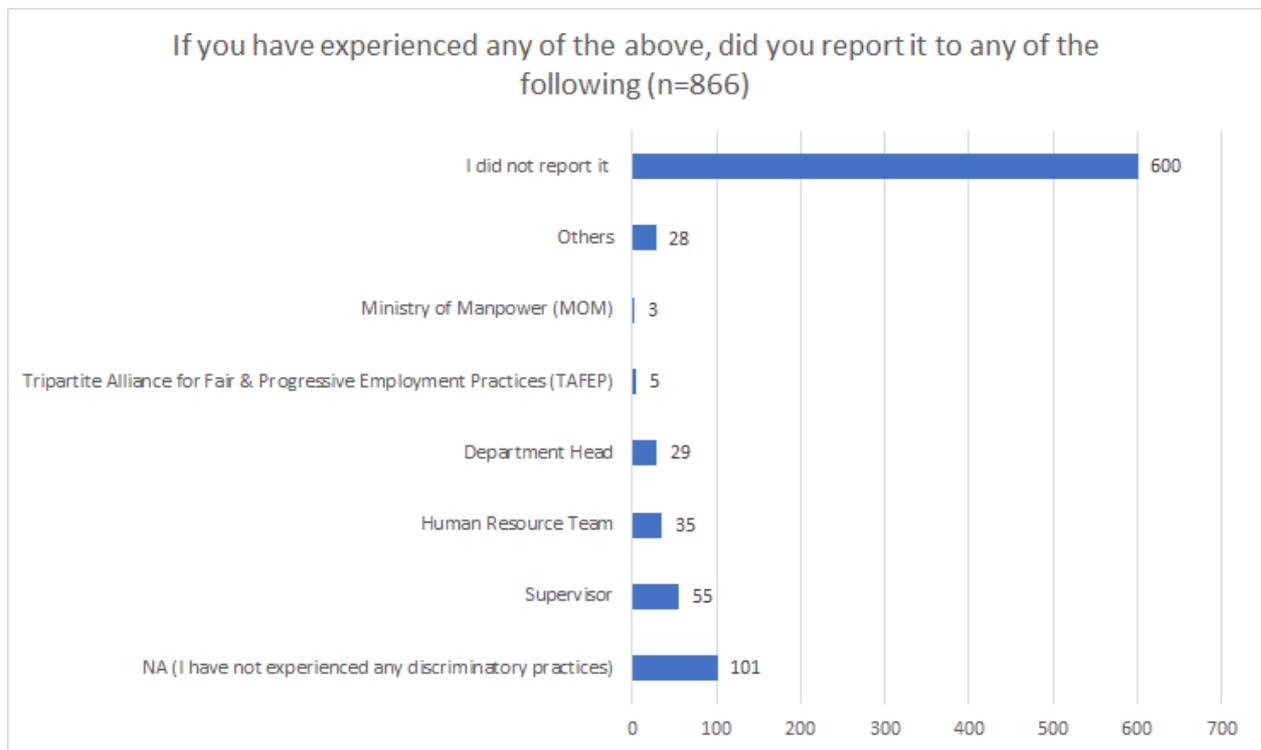


**Figure 15. Have you experienced any of the following discriminatory practices during the course of your work? (n=866)**

The 866 participants who are currently working or had ever been employed were also asked about whether they had reported any of these discriminatory practices from employers (Figure 16). Most participants cited that they had not reported it (n=600, 69%). When asked to elaborate on why these participants did not report it, reasons stated in open-ended responses include:

- They could not report it to their supervisor or other higher ups as their supervisor and higher ups were the ones engaging in racist behaviour
- They could not report it to Human Resources (HR) as HR personnel were the ones engaging in racist behaviour
- They did not think they would be taken seriously
- They did not think they would be believed
- They believed that nothing would come of reporting and that it would be “pointless”
- They feared facing further negative repercussions if they reported it (e.g. being “blacklisted”, being labelled as “sensitive”, friction between colleagues)
- There was a lack of reporting channels
- They chose to leave the company instead

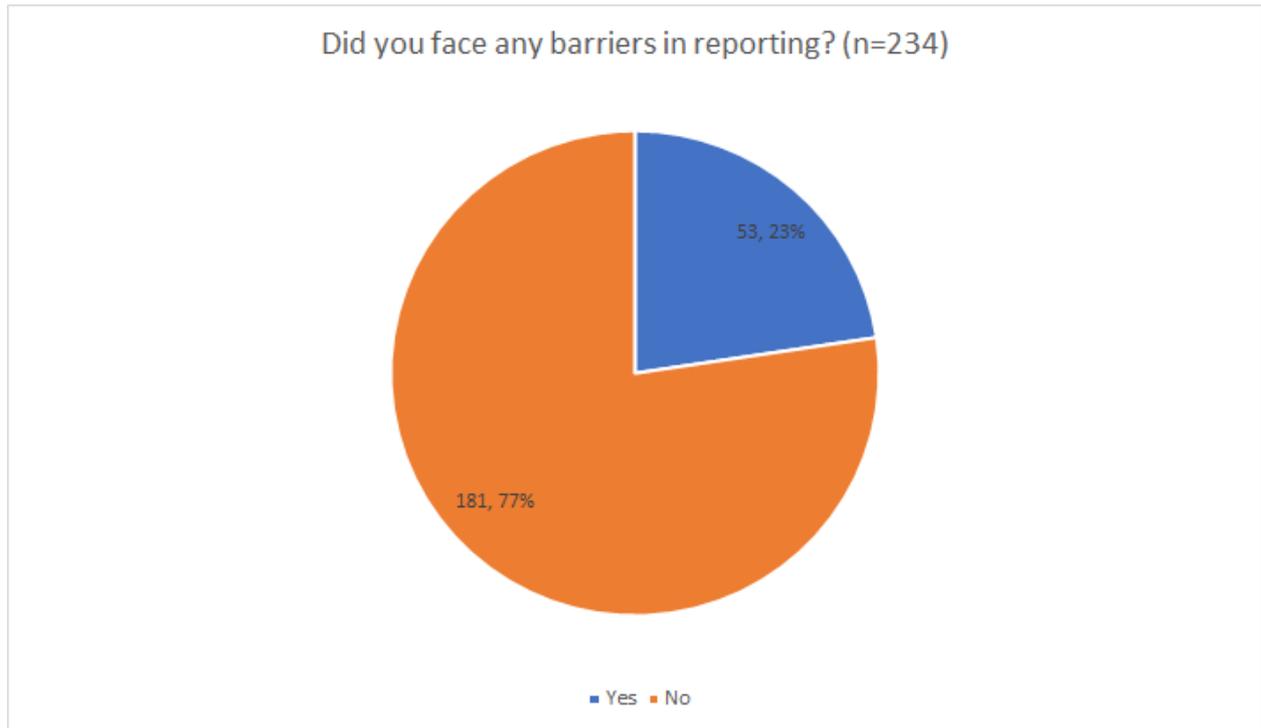
For those who did report such incidents, most approached their supervisors, HR team, or their department heads.



**Figure 16. If you have experienced any of the above, did you report it to any of the following (n=866)**

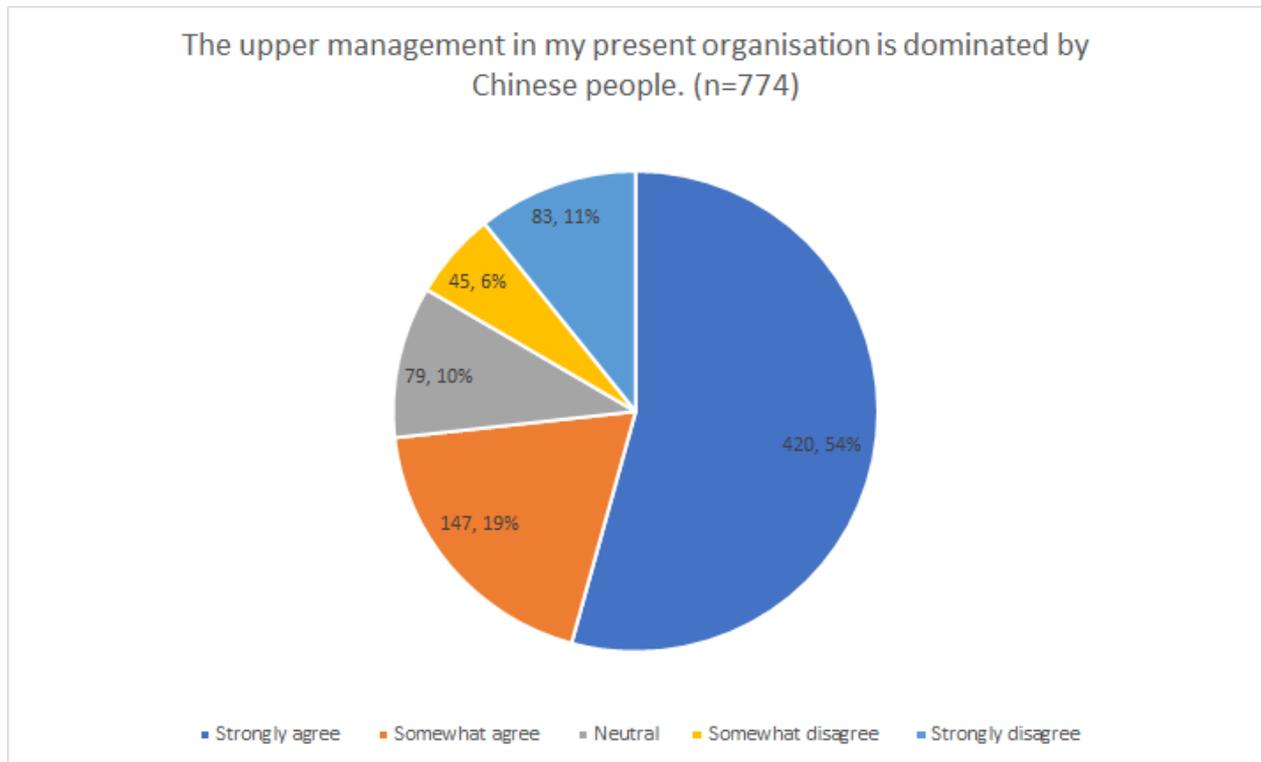
For those who cited that they had reported such occurrences (n=234), about a quarter of them reported facing barriers to reporting (n=53, 23%) (Figure 17). When asked to elaborate on the barriers to reporting faced, open-ended responses stated:

- Being dismissed and gaslit by supervisor, higher ups and HR personnel, who were Chinese
- Being told by supervisor to “let it slide”, downplaying of incident being reported
- Long and taxing complaints process
- Poor complaint management (e.g. refusal to lodge formal complaint by HR personnel, breach of confidentiality regarding complaint by HR personnel which led to complainant’s reputation in the company being tarnished, retaliation from perpetrator who was in a more senior position, threats of being fired because of reporting)
- No action taken



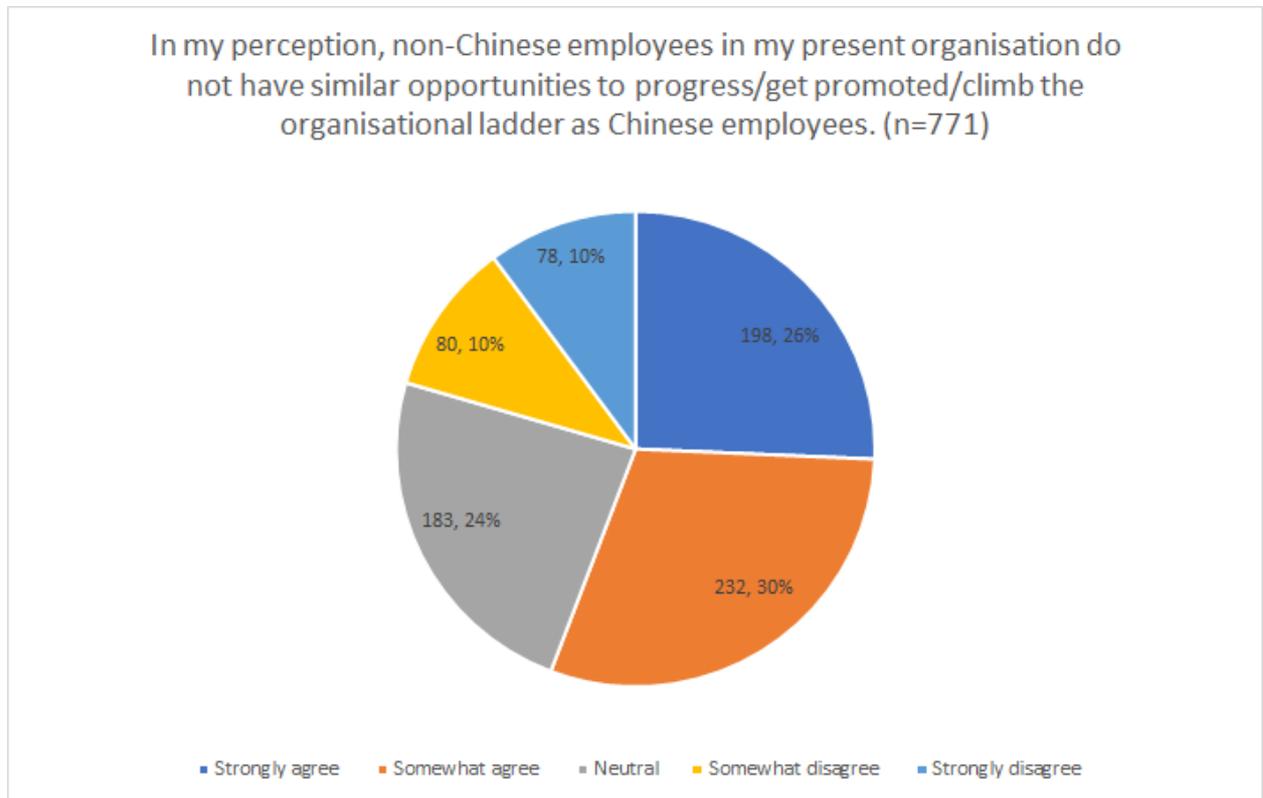
**Figure 17. Did you face any barriers in reporting? (n=234)**

A total of 774 participants were then asked about their perceptions about whether the upper management in their present organisation was dominated by Chinese people (Figure 18), to which a majority of participants strongly agreed (n=420, 54%) or somewhat agreed (n=147, 19%) with the statement. Only about 17% (n=128) somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.



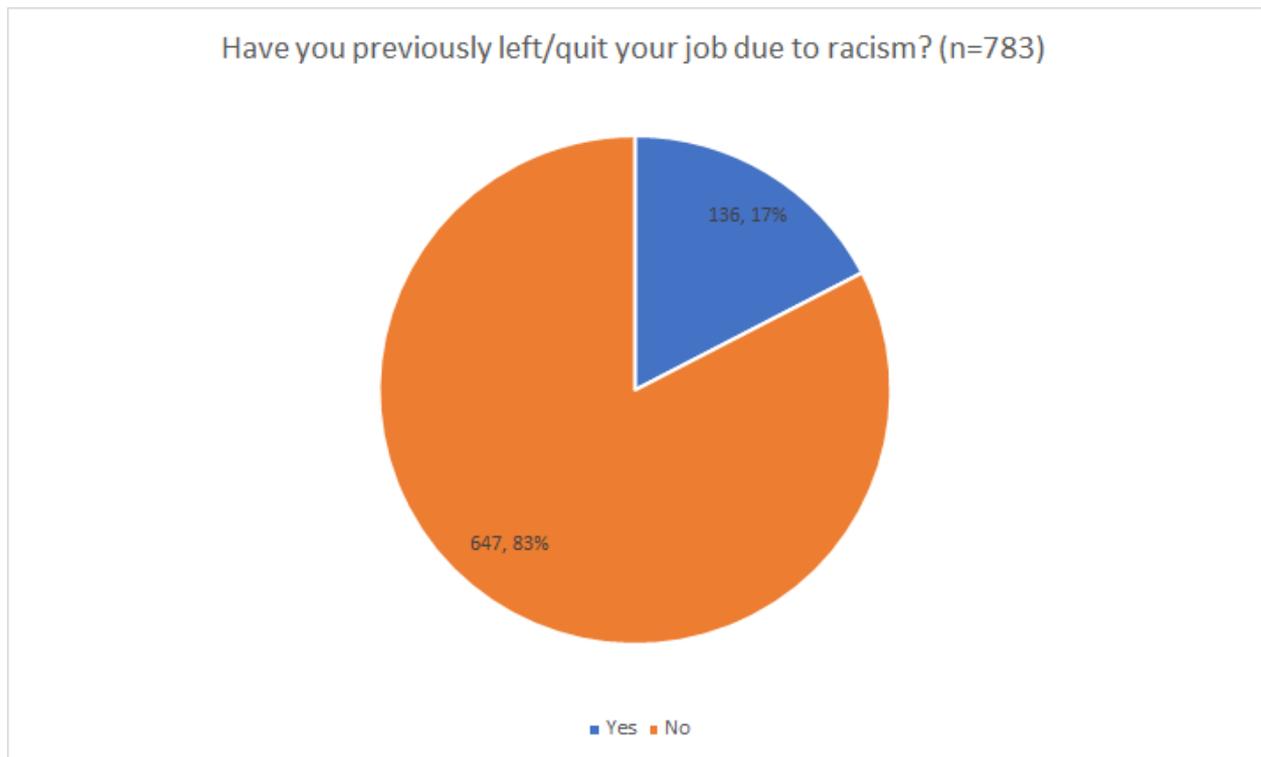
**Figure 18. The upper management in my present organisation is dominated by Chinese people. (n=774)**

A total of 771 participants were then asked about their perceptions about whether the non-Chinese employees in their present organisation did not have similar opportunities for career progression as Chinese employees (Figure 19), to which a majority of participants strongly agreed (n=198, 26%) or somewhat agreed (n=232, 30%) with the statement. A quarter of participants (n=183, 24%) somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.



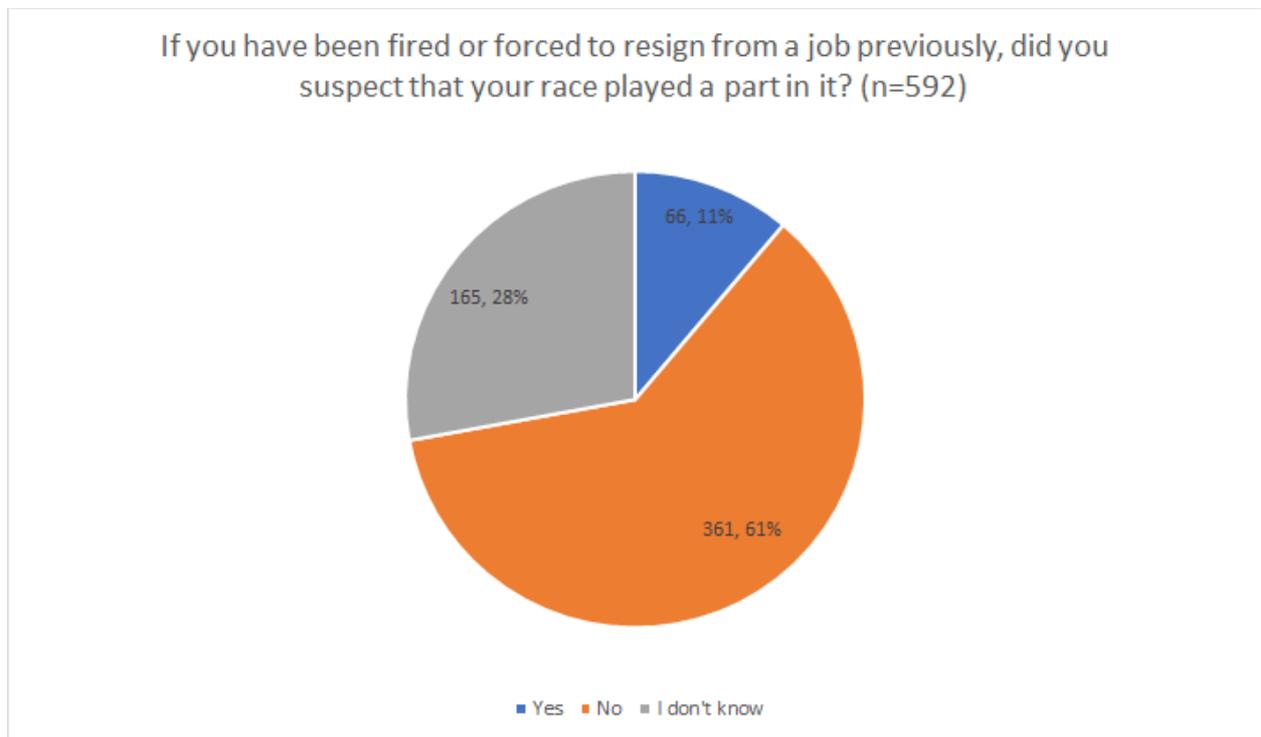
**Figure 19. In my perception, non-Chinese employees in my present organisation do not have similar opportunities to progress/get promoted/climb the organisational ladder as Chinese employees. (n=771)**

A total of 783 participants were then asked whether they had ever left/quit their job due to racism (Figure 20). About 17% (n=136) of participants responded yes to this question.



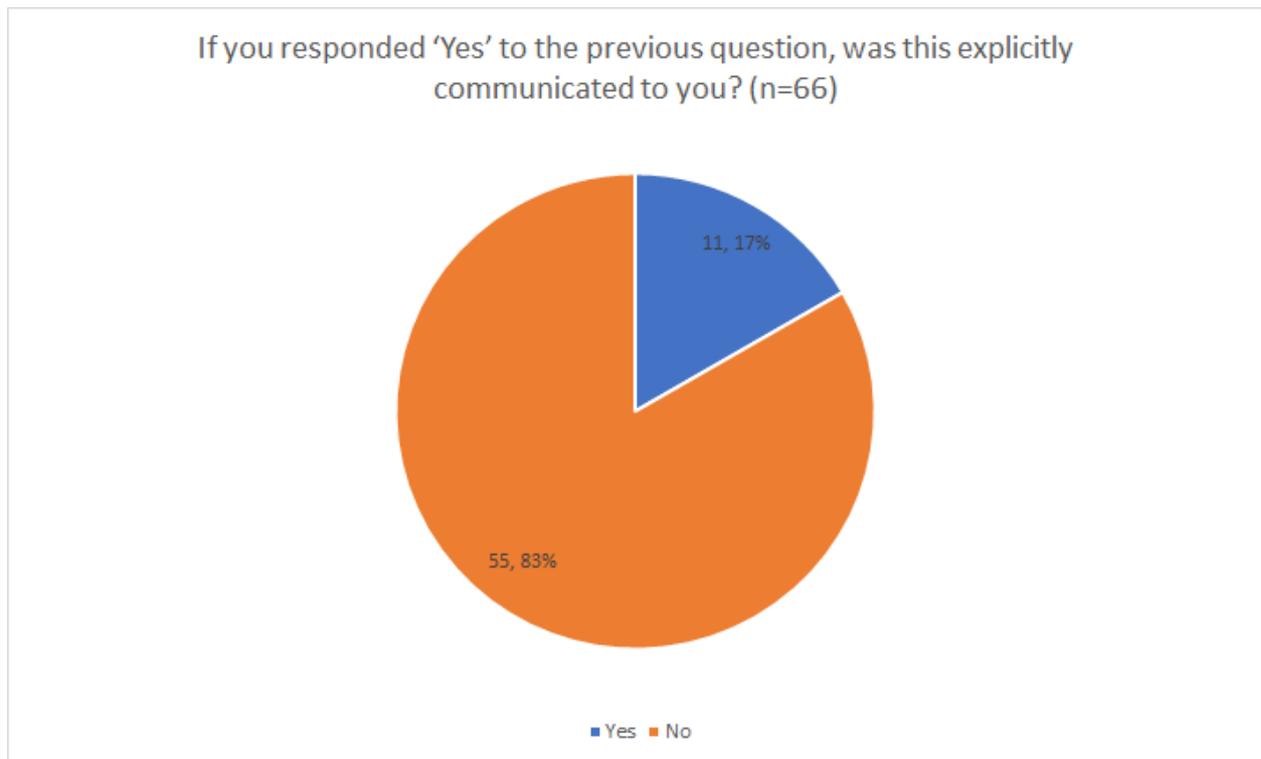
**Figure 20. Have you previously left/quit your job due to racism? (n=783)**

A total of 592 participants were then asked if they had suspected that their race had played a part in previous experiences of being fired or forced to resign from a previous job (Figure 21). About 11% (n=66) reported that they had suspected so, while 62% (n=361) responded no, and 28% (n=165) did not know.



**Figure 21. If you have been fired or forced to resign from a job previously, did you suspect that your race played a part in it? (n=592)**

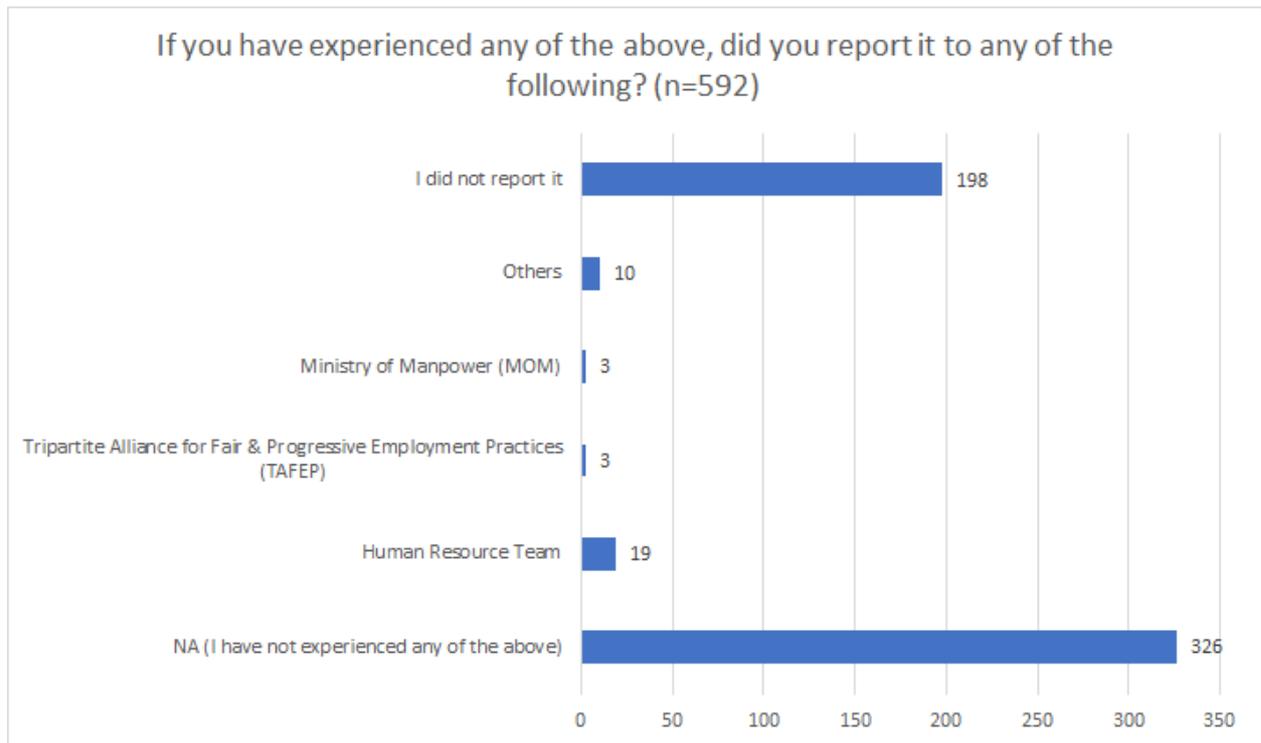
Among the participants who responded 'yes' to the previous question in Figure 21 (n=66), they were then asked if this was explicitly communicated to them (Figure 22). About 17% (n=11) mentioned that this was the case.



**Figure 22. If you responded 'Yes' to the previous question, was this explicitly communicated to you? (n=66)**

A total of 592 participants were then asked if they had reported any of the experiences above to anyone (Figure 23). Most participants had never experienced any of the situations asked in Figures 20-21 (n=326, 55%) or did not report it (n=198, 33%). Of those who did (n=35), the most common avenue was through the human resource team (n=19, 54%). When asked to elaborate on why respondents did not report the incident, open-ended responses stated:

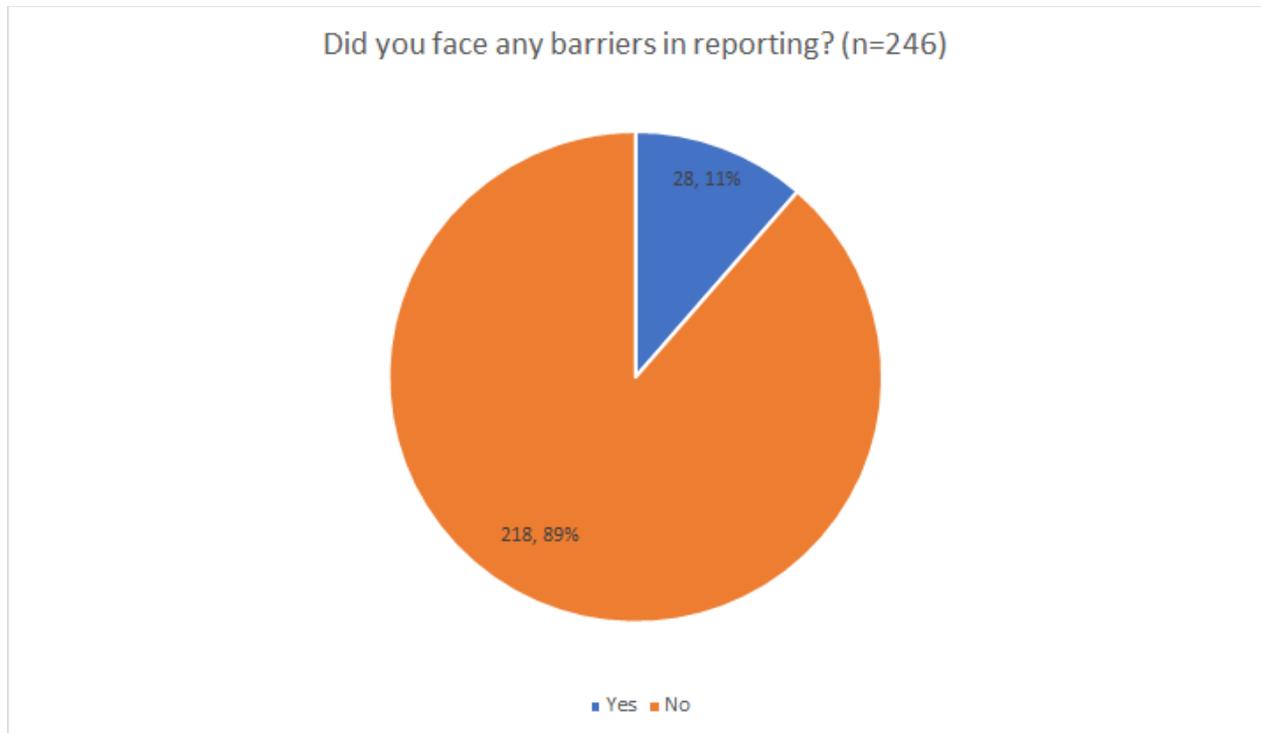
- Lack of trust in the complaints procedure
- Lack of trust in management to treat the complaint seriously
- Did not know who to report such an incident to
- Mentally and emotionally taxing to provide evidence of daily microaggressions
- No human resource team/clear authority in the company to report the incident to
- Fear of difficulty in finding other work, especially for freelancers



**Figure 23. If you have experienced any of the above, did you report it to any of the following? (n=592)**

For those who cited that they had reported such occurrences (n=246; Figure 24), about 11% (n=28) of them faced barriers to reporting. When asked to elaborate on the barriers to reporting faced, open-ended responses stated:

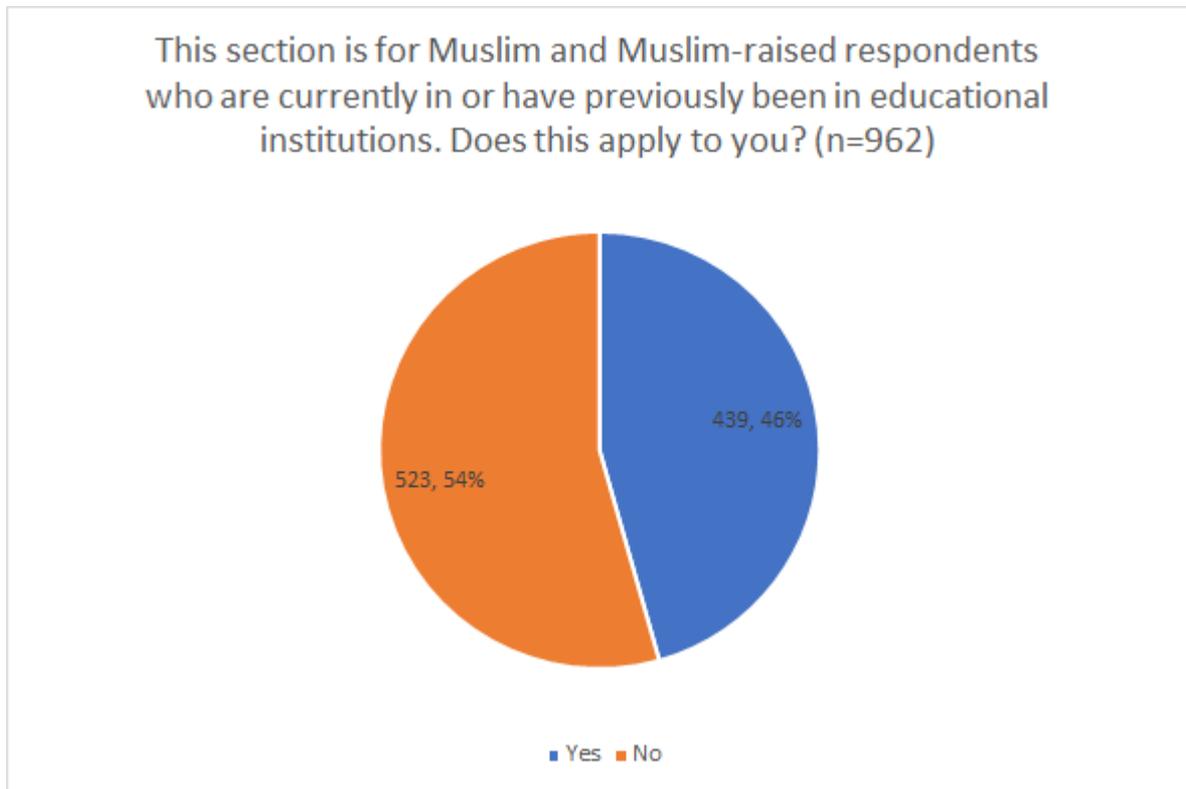
- Not being believed
- Difficulty in gathering and presenting evidence of everyday microaggressions



**Figure 24. Did you face any barriers in reporting? (n=246)**

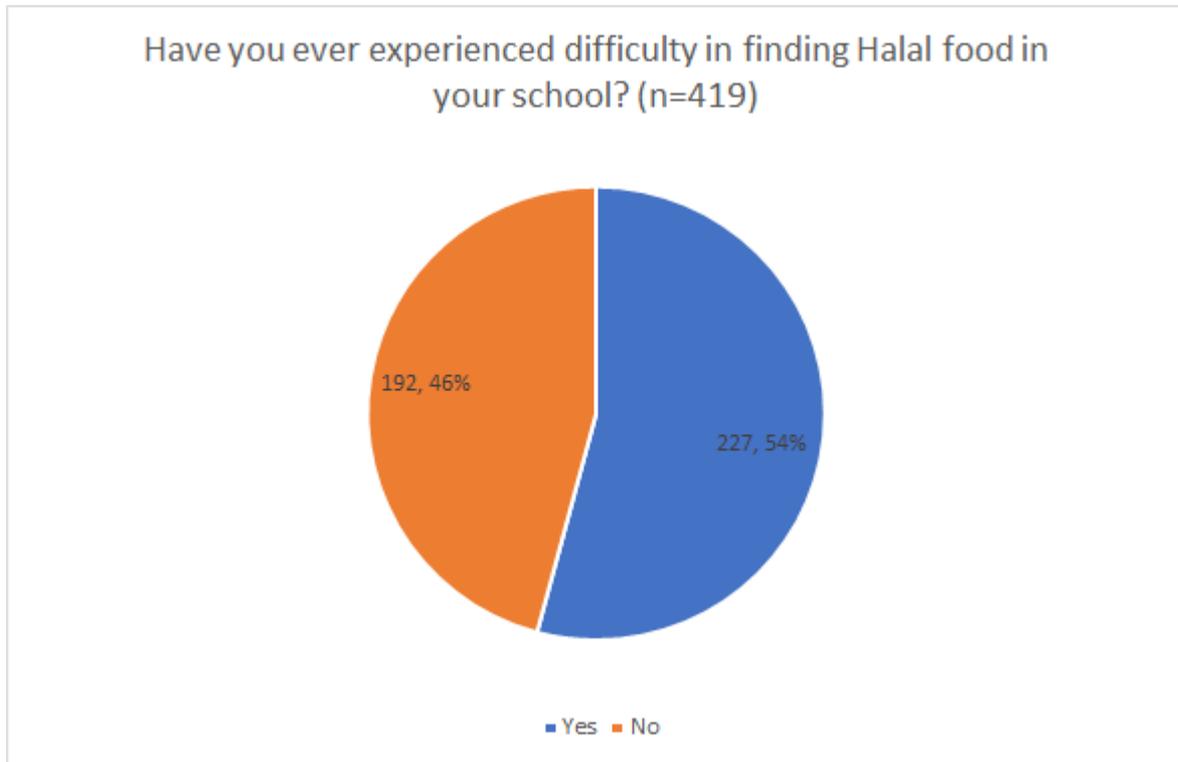
### Muslim-Friendly Facilities in Educational Institutions

A total of 962 participants were asked if they identified as Muslim or Muslim-raised individuals who are currently or have previously been in educational institutions (Figure 25), of whom about 46% (n=439) responded yes, and were eligible to participate in the following questions.



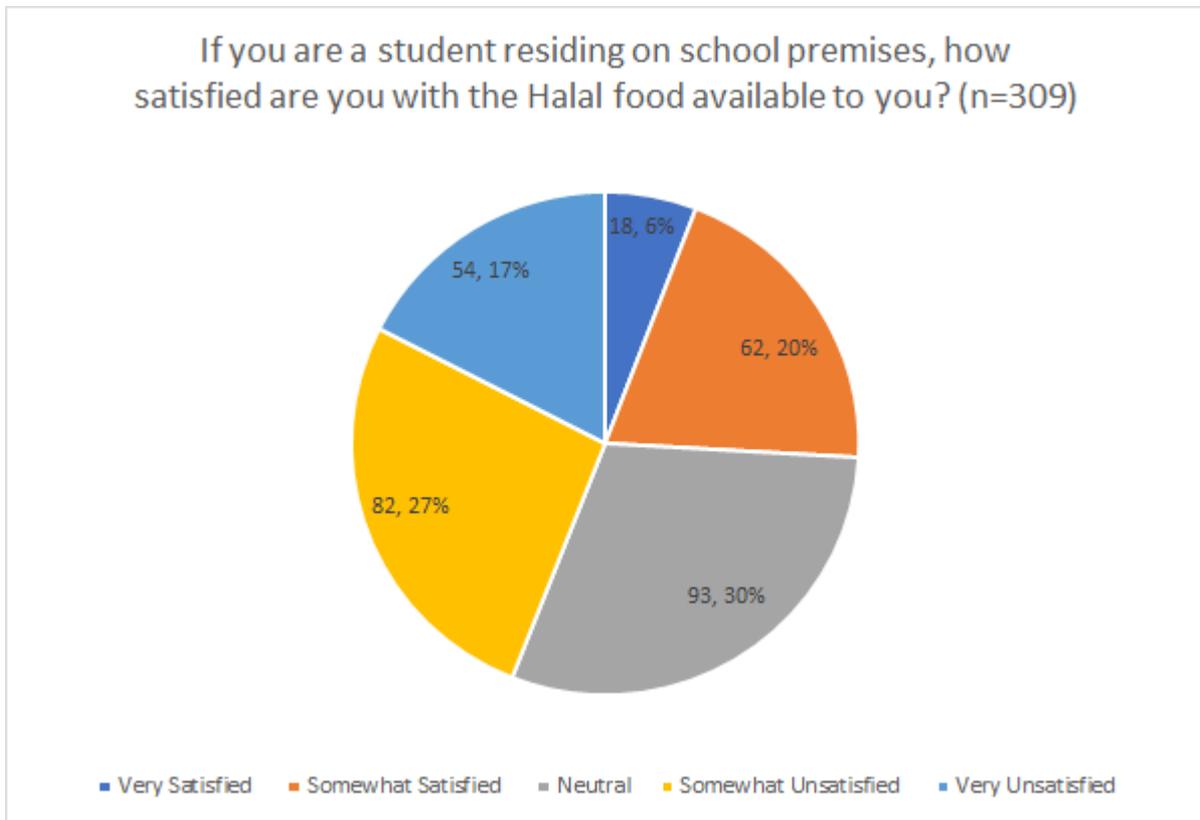
**Figure 25. This section is for Muslim and Muslim-raised respondents who are currently in or have previously been in educational institutions. Does this apply to you? (n=962)**

A total of 419 participants responded to the question on whether they had ever faced any difficulty in finding Halal food in school (Figure 26). Of these participants, slightly over half (n=227, 54%) responded yes.



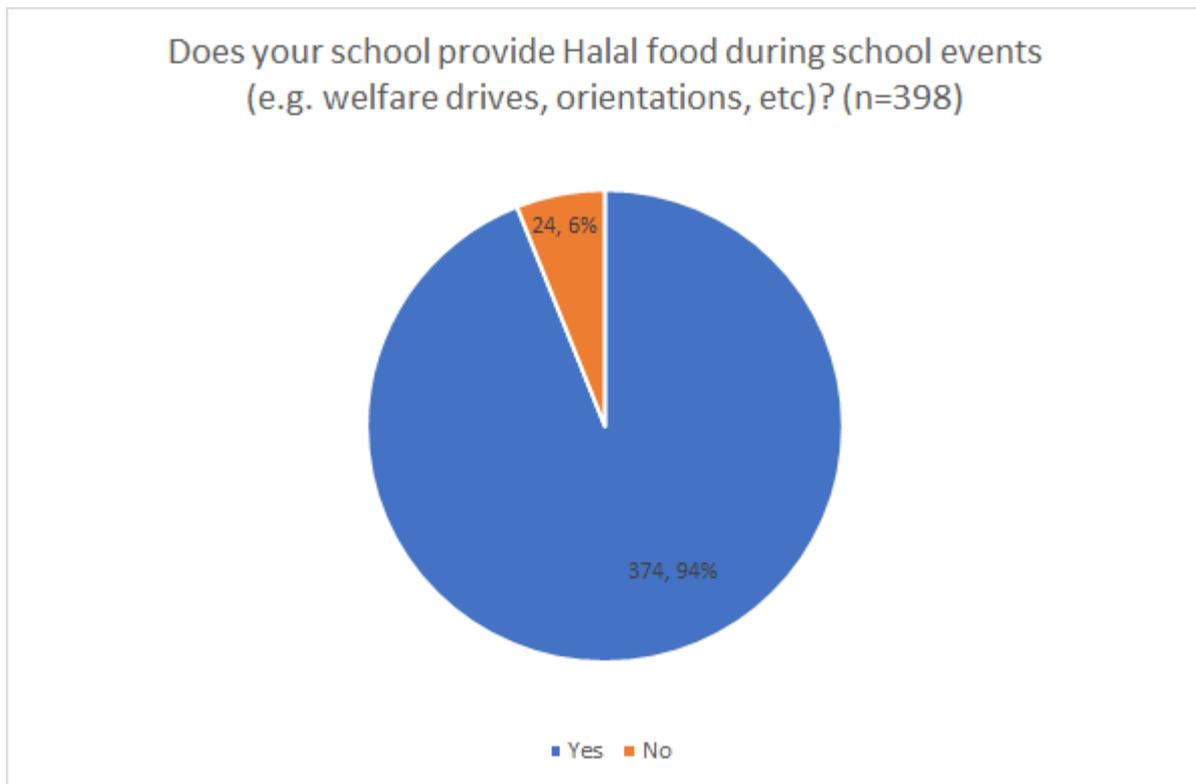
**Figure 26. Have you ever experienced difficulty in finding Halal food in your school? (n=419)**

A total of 309 participants then responded to the question: "If you are a student residing on school premises, how satisfied are you with the Halal food available to you?" (Figure 27). To which most participants responded that they were largely very unsatisfied (n=54, 17%), somewhat unsatisfied (n=82, 27%), or neutral (n=93, 30%). About a quarter of participants responded that they were somewhat satisfied (n=62, 20%) or very satisfied (n=18, 6%).



**Figure 27. If you are a student residing on school premises, how satisfied are you with the Halal food available to you? (n=309)**

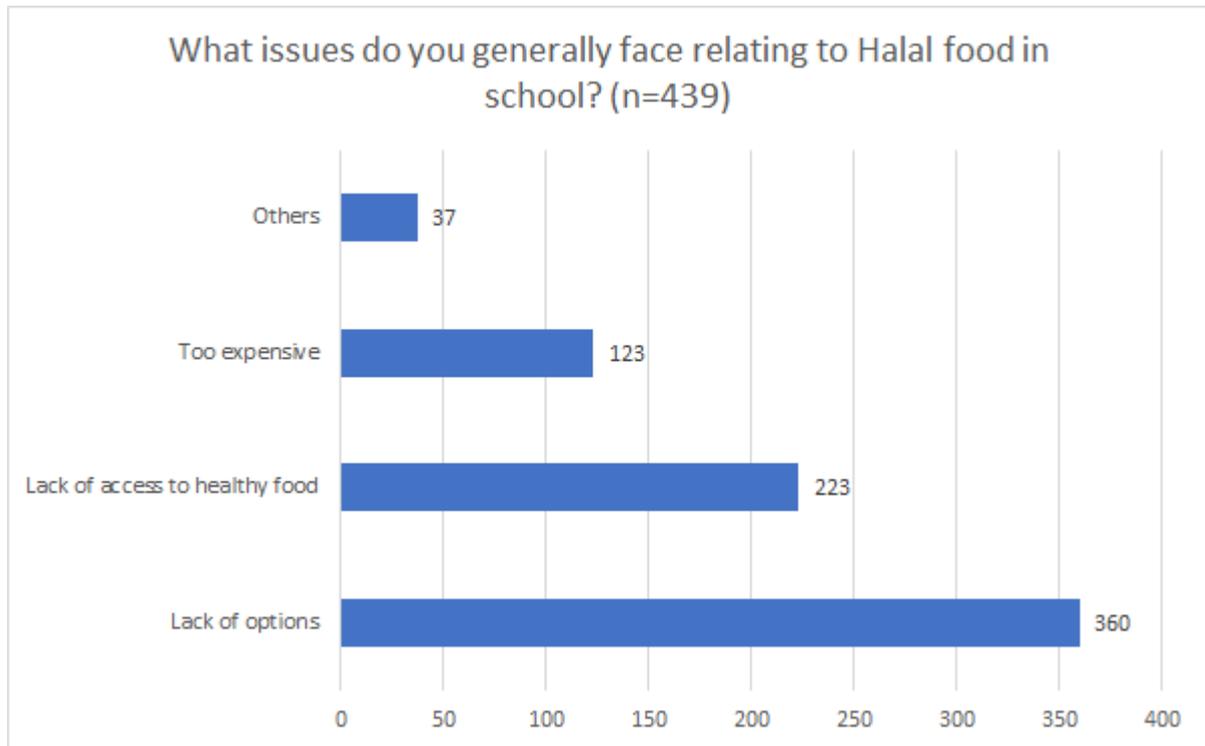
A total of 398 participants responded to the question on whether their school provided Halal food during school events (Figure 28) to which most participants responded yes (n=374, 94%).



**Figure 28. Does your school provide Halal food during school events (e.g. welfare drives, orientations, etc)? (n=398)**

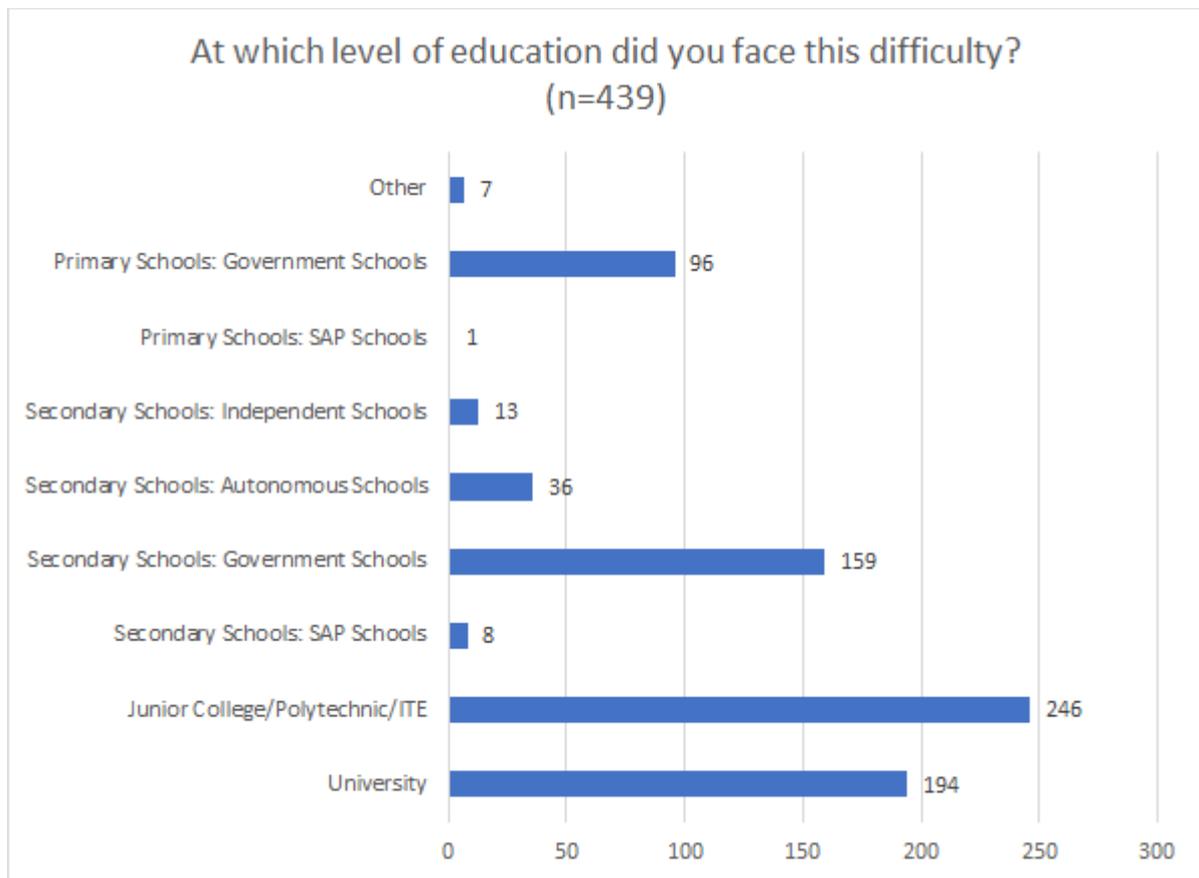
For the 439 participants eligible to answer this question, they were asked about the issues that they generally faced relating to Halal food in school (Figure 29). Most participants cited a lack of options (n=360, 82%), lack of access to healthy food (n=223, 51%), or that food was too expensive (n=123, 28%). For the Other option, open-ended responses stated:

- Few Halal food stalls and hence, long queues at these stalls during peak periods or food running out quickly
- Halal food stalls not opening at times, leaving people with even fewer options or no options at all



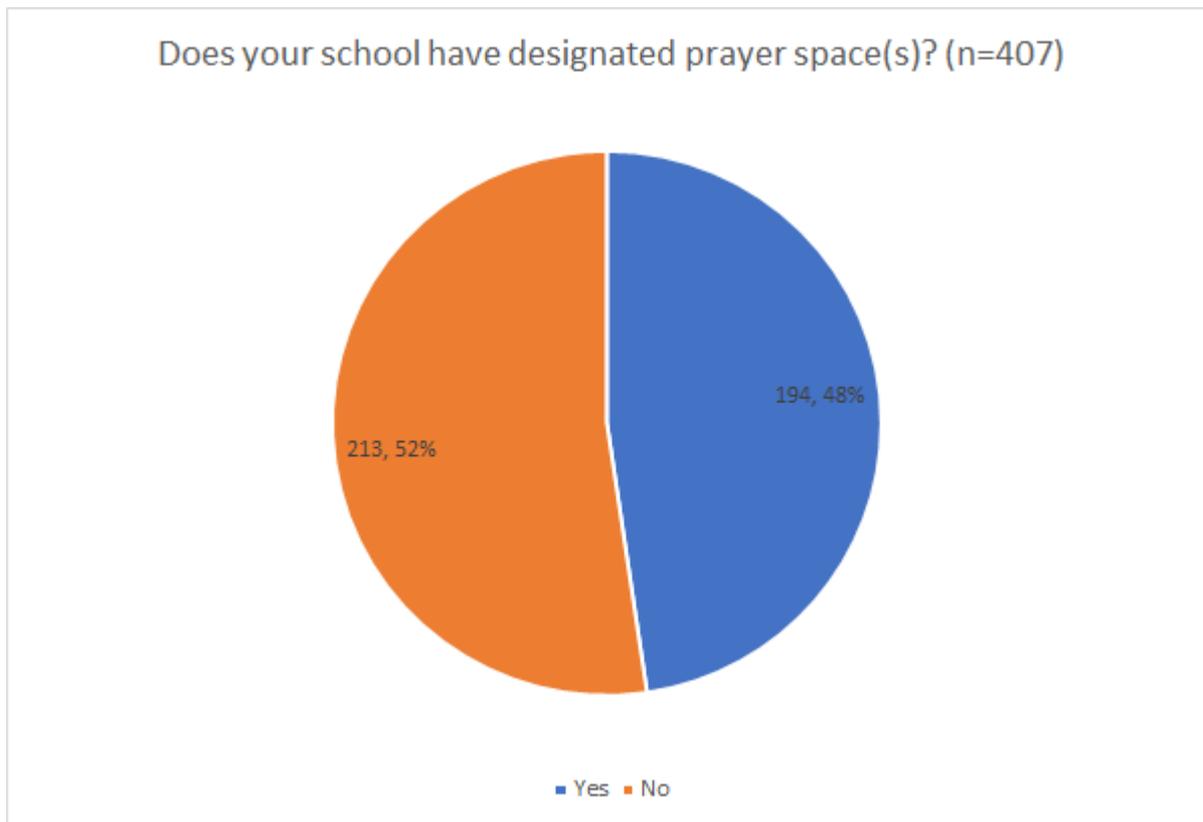
**Figure 29. What issues do you generally face relating to Halal food in school? (n=439)**

For the 439 participants eligible to answer this question, they were asked about the level of education at which they faced such difficulties (Figure 30). Most participants cited facing such difficulties in Government Schools - both primary (n=96, 22%) and secondary (n=159, 36%), as well as tertiary (n=246, 56%) and university-level (n=194, 44%) institutions.



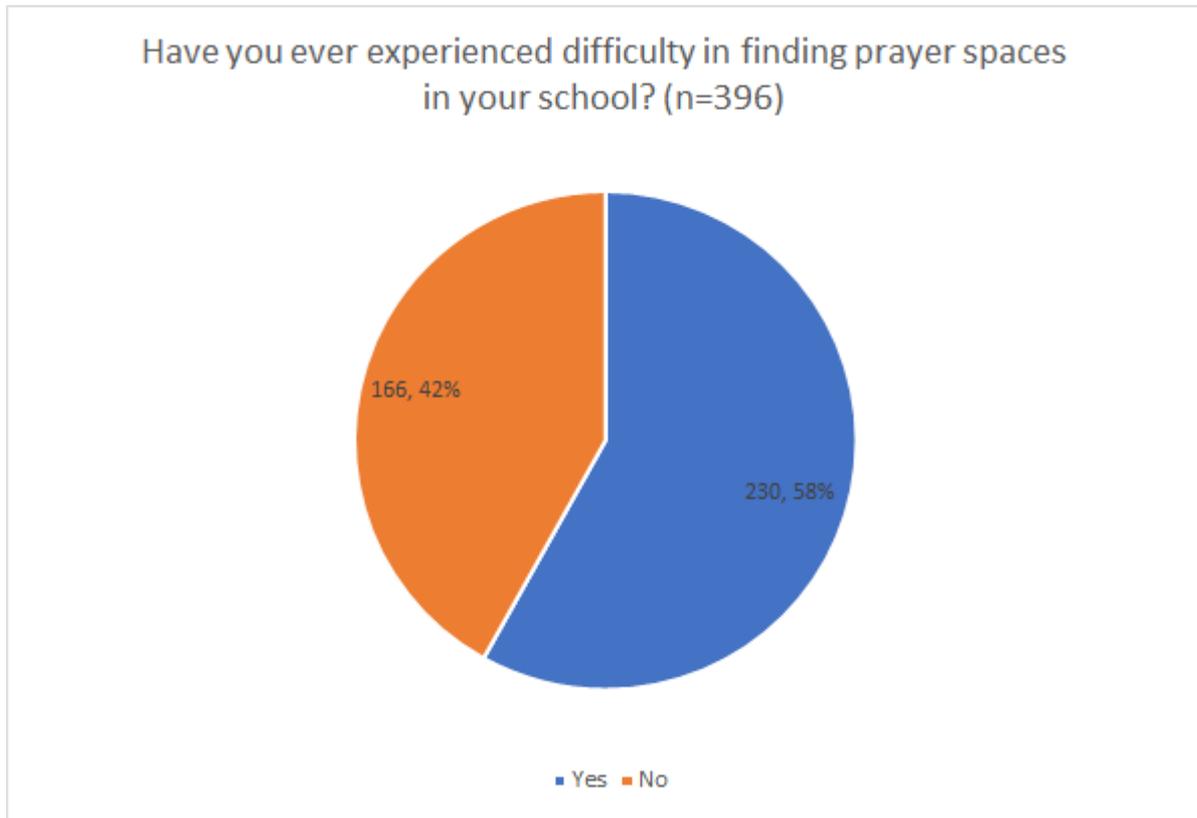
**Figure 30. At which level of education did you face this difficulty? (n=439)**

A total of 407 participants responded to the question on whether their school had designated prayer space(s) (Figure 31) to which slightly less than half of participants responded yes (n=194, 48%).



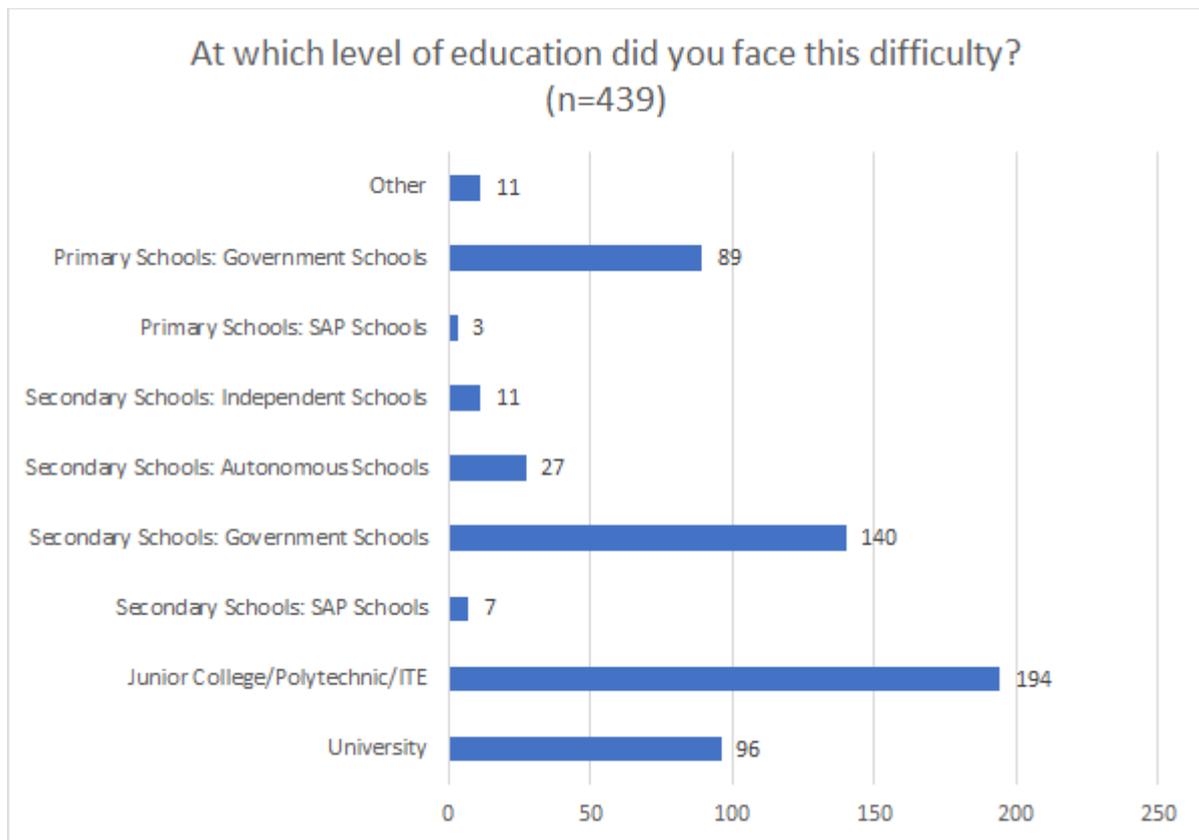
**Figure 31. Does your school have designated prayer space(s)? (n=407)**

A total of 396 participants responded to the question on whether they had ever experienced difficulty in finding prayer spaces in their school (Figure 32) to which slightly more than half of participants responded yes (n=230, 58%).



**Figure 32. Have you ever experienced difficulty in finding prayer spaces in your school? (n=396)**

For the 439 participants eligible to answer this question, they were asked about the level of education at which they faced such difficulties (Figure 33). Most participants cited facing such difficulties in Government Schools - both primary (n=89, 20%) and secondary (n=140, 32%), as well as tertiary (n=194, 44%) and university-level (n=96, 22%) institutions.



**Figure 33. At which level of education did you face this difficulty? (n=439)**