

Coronavirus has fuelled racism against Asian-Australians, but why isn't official data showing it?

By Jason Fang, Samuel Yang and Christina Zhou

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PHOTO: UNESCO has urged people to denounce xenophobia around COVID-19 by using the hashtag #IAmNotAVirus. (ABC News via Pexels/Cotton Bro)

阅读中文版本 | Baca dalam Bahasa Indonesia

The Federal Government has urged Australians to report and call out racist attacks when they see them and to not retaliate against Chinese Australians for any feelings they may have towards Beijing.

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Asian-Australians have been verbally and physically assaulted, refused service, received death threats and had their properties damaged.

Acting Minister for Immigration Alan Tudge condemned the recent vandalism of a Chinese-Australian family home in his Melbourne electorate as "disgraceful" and "cowardly" but reassured the Asian community "99.9 per cent of Australians" were on their side.

"I also ask and advise individuals to report those cases to the police if it's a serious threat of violence or property damage, or to the Human Rights Commission for any other racist attack," he told the ABC.

"I say to the broader Australian public, call out the racist attacks when you see it.

RELATED STORY: 'I need time to heal': Chinese-Australians speak out after racist vandal attack

RELATED STORY: 'It's just evil': Racist vandals target Chinese-Australian family's home, rock thrown through window

RELATED STORY: 'The virus is not racist. Neither are we': Doctor calls for unity after racist attack

MAP: Australia

Key points:

- Experts say racist incidents are under-reported by the Asian community
- There are concerns the diplomatic dispute between Australia and China could fuel racism
- The Federal Opposition is calling for the Government to reinstate a national anti-racism campaign

"Ask them not to do it. Don't stand by and let it happen because we all have a responsibility to call it out."

Several politicians have echoed Mr Tudge's advice, including the ACT's Minister for Justice and Mental Health, Shane Rattenbury, who recently encouraged Canberrans to "speak up if it's safe".

Last month, ACT Discrimination Commissioner Karen Toohey noted reports to the ACT Human Rights Commission of racist incidents had increased in March, including against health workers and retail staff.

Victorian Multicultural Commission chair Vivienne Nguyen told the ABC there was "no doubt that there is a significant increase in incidents of racism against the Asian community".

"What you see is not something that sometimes is spoken, but the glance, the rolling of eyes, and the whispers here or there," she said.

"That certainly is noticeable, there is no doubt about that."

Ms Nguyen said it was widely known racist incidents were well under-reported, either because people didn't know about legal avenues, or the "onus of proof is way too high above for anyone to be charged".

In Victoria, victims can either lodge a complaint under the state's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, or with the Human Rights Commission under Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

"The lack of understanding and lack of awareness of the legislation means that we find ourselves in a situation ... now with under-reporting," she said.

"Members of the Asian communities feel that there's really not a lot that can be done and therefore they don't do anything about that, other than perhaps sharing it with their friends and networks, and using social media as a way to convey their feelings and experience."

Have you have been the subject of a racist incident, or seen it take place? Tell us your story.

'Chinese people need to be clean'

Tell us your story

Racism and the pandemic

We want your help to get a better picture of what's happening from across Australia; to hear from people who have been subjected to racism or seen it take place.



PHOTO: Chinese migrants have been a part of Australia since the 19th-century. (AAP: Lukas Coch)

Since the first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus was recorded in Australia on January 25, many people from Asian backgrounds in Australia say they have experienced both subtle and not-so-subtle racism.

The Australian Human Rights Commission recently revealed to the ABC that about one in four people who lodged racial discrimination complaints in February and March said they were targeted due to coronavirus.

Sydneysider Katie, an Australian permanent resident, said she ended a relationship with a man she had been dating since last October due to his prejudices about her Chinese ethnicity.

The 27-year-old, who doesn't want to disclose her last name, told the ABC that after visiting her family in Shanghai in January, the man suggested they should stop seeing each other.

"He said to me: 'I don't want to catch coronavirus, I don't want to die'," she said.

"I was in complete shock."

The conversation quickly got heated after she called him out as being "racist", according to Katie.

"Then he said: 'Chinese people need to be clean'. That was absolutely disrespectful and disheartening," she said.

"Even though Shanghai had a relatively low infection rate at the time, I was in quarantine at home with my family for most of the time.

"It's ridiculous, what he said. It took me a long time to come to terms with it myself.

"It kind of changed how I view my future partners."

Josh Robertson  
@jrojourno

Japanese consulate in Brisbane warns expats of anti-Asian [#racism](#) because of [#coronavirus](#).

"Although it is a small number, there are reports from Japanese residents in the embassy and consulate that they have suffered discrimination and harassment."

Subject: 【新型コロナウイルス】差別行為や嫌がらせの発生

Reply-To: 在ブリスベン日本国総領事館
<consular@bb.mofa.go.jp>

●新型コロナウイルスを原因とする差別行為や嫌がらせが発生していますので、ご注意ください。

1 新型コロナウイルスを原因として、アジア系市民に対する差別行為や嫌がらせが発生しています。4月15日には2人の女性アジア系留学生が、メルボルン市内において、白人女性に人種差別的な言葉を浴びせられた上で髪を引っばられる事件も報道されています。


また、クイーンズランド州においても差別被害が発生していることから、州警察大臣、多文化大臣及び警察長官は、差別行為を直ちにやめるよう

♡ 13 6:33 AM - Apr 23, 2020

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She said she had never confronted racism at such a personal level having lived in Australia for almost 10 years.

How fast is coronavirus growing around the world?

 Charted growth in key countries, on a logarithmic scale.

INFOGRAPHIC: Growth in known cases in key countries, on a logarithmic scale

This chart uses a logarithmic scale to highlight coronavirus growth rates. Read our explainer to understand what that means — and what we can learn from countries that have slowed the spread.

Stay up-to-date on the coronavirus outbreak

- Download the ABC News app and subscribe to our range of news alerts for the latest on how the pandemic is impacting the world
 - You can also get up-to-date information on the Federal Government's Coronavirus Australia app, available on the App Store, Google Play and the Government's WhatsApp channel.
-

Separating Chinese-Australians from Beijing

There are also concerns the Chinese community in Australia — whether they're citizens, permanent residents or international students — could become collateral damage in the extraordinary diplomatic dispute between Australia and China over the COVID-19 pandemic.


Mr Tudge told the ABC he hoped the tensions between the two countries would not further escalate racism in the country.

"We've also got to be very clear in separating people's views about the Chinese Government, the Communist Party of China, and Australians or permanent residents here who may be ethnically Chinese," he said.

"They're two completely different things.

"People can rightly have a view about the Chinese Government or the British Government or the American Government or the Australian Government, but that's very different to how you treat fellow Australians."

Coronavirus questions answered

 Coronavirus questions answered

Breaking down the latest news and research to understand how the world is living through an epidemic, this is the ABC's Coronacast podcast.

Chinese-Australian Liberal MP Gladys Liu said there was bipartisan support from Parliament to tackle racism and urged people against misdirecting their anger towards the Chinese-Australian community.



PHOTO: Gladys Liu is the first Chinese-Australian woman to be elected to the Lower House. (ABC News: Adam Kennedy)

"I want these people to know: do not confuse what has happened in the world with Australian Chinese," she said.

"Australian-Chinese did not cause COVID-19, did not have anything to do with it. In fact, Australian-Chinese are just like all Australians, we are in it together.

"What we need is to encourage more recognition and appreciation of [what] different people bring to this country ... and I really encourage better understanding between the multicultural communities and the rest of our country."

What the experts are saying about coronavirus:

- Lessons Australia can learn from other 'first mover' countries
- How isolation affects your brain, and what you can do about it

Calls to reinstate a national anti-racism campaign



PHOTO: The Human Rights Commission had a national campaign targeting racism in the community. (Supplied: Human Rights Commission)

Last week, Mr Tudge said during a press conference the Government would be placing advertisements in multicultural media in the weeks ahead to denounce racism and to provide some guidance on how to report it.

But Mary Patetsos, chairperson of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), said the Council was calling for an anti-racism campaign targeted at the entire country.

"I think these are very difficult times," she told the ABC.

"I think it will need to be a call of unity, a call of respect, and a call to the entire Australian community to refrain from poor behaviour and to exhibit leadership and quality we are known for, which is to care for each other."

The Federal Opposition is calling for the Morrison Government to reinstate a national campaign which could be modelled on the campaign, "Racism. It stops with me", launched by the Gillard government in 2012, as well as establish a national strategy that confronts systemic racism.

According to the website of the previous campaign — which ended in 2018 — it encourages and coordinates efforts by those who are already working to reduce and prevent racism.



PHOTO: The Coalition government discontinued the Gillard government's national anti-racism campaign in 2018. (AAP: Ellen Smith)

Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs Andrew Giles said the Prime Minister's remarks to condemn racism needed to be "backed by action".

"We need something more than just words, we need a campaign that makes it clear that Australia has a zero-tolerance approach to racism," he said.

"By looking at the adequacy of the laws, starting off a campaign to send clear signals to the entire Australian community, particularly those who are bearing the brunt of racism right now that we stand together, and looking at a broader strategy to see the consequences of racism on individuals and communities."

Ms Patetsos added Government action was "critical" and that they must own the national anti-racism strategy.

"If COVID-19 teaches us nothing, it teaches us that governments can take the lead and can actually role model what we need to do," she said.

"And also the importance of bipartisan support at a time of crisis. It is not about dividing us.

"It is about uniting us. It is not about who came up with the idea first. It is really about activating what works."

Your questions on coronavirus answered:

- Why do so few drugs kill viruses?
- What happens when the next outbreak hits?
- What can I read in isolation?

Freedom of speech is important but 'words can kill'



PHOTO: Racist graffiti was scrawled at a construction site in Hawthorn, Melbourne, in March. (WeChat)

Ms Nguyen said ongoing awareness and education — whether that was in schools or in the community — about the ramifications racist behaviour had on people was also important.

"[As] someone who came from a war-torn country [Vietnam] and a single-regime government, I absolutely believe the basic human rights of individuals are absolutely crucial," she said.


"But that freedom of speech needs to be balanced with responsibility ... every one of us, not just ... constrained to our leaders, because words can kill, words can affect people in ... much deeper and more profound [ways] than we think.

"And those are the aspects, I believe, need to form part of the solution."


Australian police have also reiterated that racism will not be tolerated, after a string of racially motivated incidents reported since the pandemic began.

In Queensland, police say there have been at least 22 reported cases of racially motivated incidents since March, including physical assaults and racist slurs.

Police charged a 15-year-old girl with two counts of assault occasioning bodily harm after she allegedly accused a woman, 26, of having coronavirus before punching her in the face several times at Brisbane's Queen Street Mall on March 8.

**Multiculture Vic**
@multiculturevic

Racism is simply unacceptable & we cannot tolerate it here in Victoria. If you or someone you know has experience [#discrimination](#) or [#vilification](#) on the basis of [#race](#) or [#religion](#) head to our website to find out how to report it: [multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au/experienced-ra...](https://multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au/experienced-racism) [#StopRacism](#) [#EndRacism](#)



11 8:37 PM - Apr 19, 2020

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PHOTO: A rock was thrown through the window of this Chinese-Australian family's home in addition to this graffiti. (Supplied)

A spokeswoman for the Tasmanian Police said there were three racism-related incidents in March, including two assaults.

This includes an incident where a Hong Kong student studying in Hobart was allegedly taunted and punched in the face for wearing a medical face mask at a local supermarket.

"We encourage members of the community to be mindful and considerate of others, particularly during this current time of emergency," the spokeswoman said.

In NSW, police charged a 55-year-old man last month after he allegedly harassed and threatened people with a whip outside the Chinese consulate in Sydney.

And in Victoria, two female international students were assaulted on Elizabeth Street in Melbourne's CBD last month in an alleged racist attack, while a Chinese-Australian family's home in Knoxfield was graffitied with the words "COVID-19 China die".

A Victoria Police spokesperson told the ABC it took all incidents of racism, discrimination or vilification based on religion, culture or ethnicity seriously.

"Victoria Police understands the impact that these incidents can have on individuals. They can leave our communities feeling vulnerable, threatened and isolated," they said.

"Anyone who experiences or witnesses these crimes is encouraged to report them to your local police station."

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Share your racism story with us

We know that incidents of racism have elevated anxiety in Asian communities across Australia and an increasing number of people are now looking for solutions.



So, we want your help to get a better picture of what's happening across Australia; to hear from people who have been subjected to racism or seen it take place.

Your identity will be treated as strictly confidential by the ABC, unless otherwise agreed with you, and any sensitive information you provide to us will not be published without your express permission.

For details about how the information we collect during crowdsourced investigations is handled, see the ABC Crowdsourcing Collection Statement.

*

Name *

Email *

What is your gender? *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other/gender diverse
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your ethnicity? *

What is your age?

Suburb/Town/City *

State/Territory *

- ☐ New South Wales
- ☐ Victoria
- ☐ Queensland
- ☐ South Australia
- ☐ Western Australia
- ☐ Tasmania
- ☐ Australian Capital Territory
- ☐ Northern Territory

What is your contact number?

Have you seen or heard any evidence of an increase in racism in Australia since the coronavirus pandemic began? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Have you been the subject of a racist incident or seen one take place? *

- ☐ Yes, I have been the subject of a racist incident.
- ☐ Yes, I have seen a racist incident take place.
- ☐ No, I haven't.

What do you think governments and other authorities should be doing to address racism in Australia?

Is there any other information you would like to add?

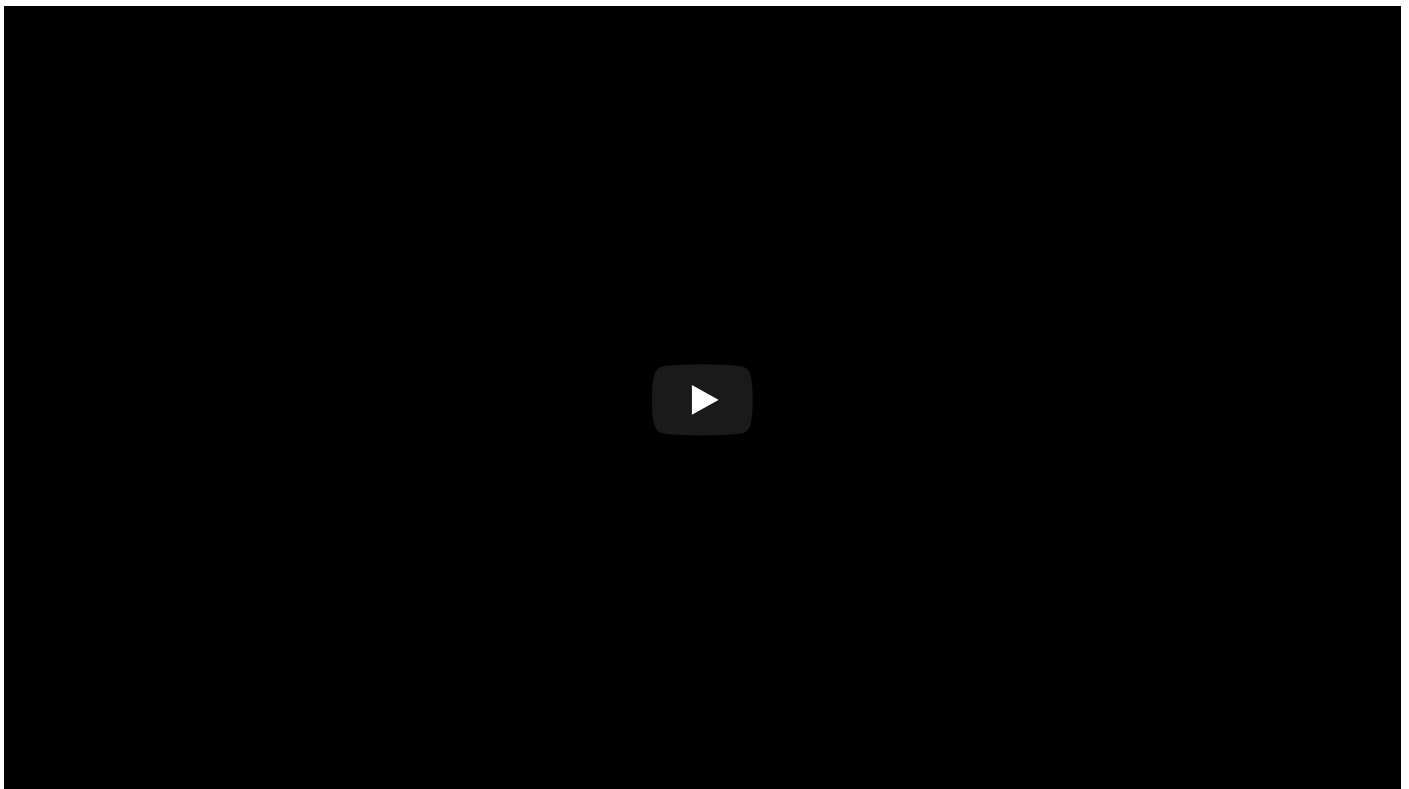
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- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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