Examining Ethnic Discrimination in Schools:
Insights from a Comprehensive Survey

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Abstract

In today's society, issues of racial discrimination have remained commonplace, and when this issue permeated the field of education, it posed a significant challenge to creating inclusive educational environments. This study examined the prevalence, forms, and contributing factors of ethnic discrimination in schools, focusing on the perceptions of ethnic discrimination among students of different age groups and ethnicities. A survey of 133 randomly chosen participants was conducted, covering experiences of discrimination, school policy responses, and their impact on mental health and academic performance. Results revealed pervasive discrimination, with verbal harassment and stereotyping as the most common forms. Systemic issues such as stereotypes, cultural differences, and inadequate school policies were identified as major contributors. Recommendations included strong policy reforms, diversity education, improved support systems, and the need to raise awareness among students of all ages and educational institutions regarding the prevalence and dangers of ethnic discrimination.

Keywords: Ethnic discrimination, School policies, Diversity education, Mental health impact, Stereotypes and prejudice

1. Introduction

The study conducted by Edith Cowan University claimed that an educational environment maintaining the physical and mental health of students should include equity and inclusivity (Dhakal, 2024). However, various forms of ethnic discrimination in schools were responsible for undermining both of these, negatively affecting students' well-being and academic success. Educational institutions often reflect societal biases, perpetuating harmful behaviors and attitudes, particularly toward minority students (Glock, Kovacs, & Pit-ten Cate, 2019). Discrimination manifests in forms such as verbal harassment, stereotyping, and unequal treatment by staff, with long-term consequences for mental health and academic performance (Peguero & Williams, 2013).

Previous research has highlighted these challenges but has often fallen short of addressing the systemic factors that sustain such discrimination. Asian students who face unique challenges are often targeted by microaggressions or overt discrimination tied to racialized stereotypes (Juang & Alvarez, 2011). Despite existing school policies designed to address such behaviors, enforcement often lacked consistency, leaving minority students vulnerable.

This study sought to examine the experiences of ethnic discrimination among students, focusing on its prevalence, contributing factors, and impact. Specifically, it aimed to identify the gaps in current anti-discrimination policies and propose more effective interventions. By analyzing comprehensive survey data, the research provided actionable recommendations for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. This paper discussed the problem statement: How does ethnic discrimination affect the educational setting, and what measures can be implemented to mitigate its impact on student life?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The study employed a random sampling technique to ensure a diverse and representative participant pool. The survey included 133 respondents, primarily high school and college students, from diverse age groups and ethnic backgrounds. Asian students comprised 52.63% of the sample, followed by White/Caucasian (29.32%) and Black/African American (9.77%) students.

2.2 Survey Design

The 17-question survey covered the following areas:
- Demographics: Age, gender, ethnicity, and grade level.
- Discrimination Experiences: Incidents, forms, and targeted groups.
- Contributing Factors: Perceived causes of discrimination.
- School Responses and Impacts: Policy effectiveness, mental health effects, and academic consequences.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and all results were presented in raw data tables. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to provide context for the quantitative findings. Random sampling was used to minimize selection bias and to increase the generalizability of the findings. By including participants from multiple ethnic backgrounds and education stages

### 2.4 Potential Biases in Participant Selection

Although it used the random sample to ensure diversity, the study acknowledges potential biases in participant selection. The overrepresentation of Asian students may make the results toward experiences specific to this group, potentially underrepresenting the challenges faced by other ethnic minorities. Additionally, since participation was voluntary, students who have strong opinions or personal experiences with discrimination might have been more likely to join this survey.

One of the challenges of the questionnaire is that discrimination is inherently subjective, as the level of discomfort can vary greatly depending on personal experiences. In fact, the definition of racial discrimination should c8. The authors primarily utilize descriptive statistics to explain the results, resulting in challenges in validating discoveries or revealing correlations. Incorporating advanced statistics would enhance the exploration of relationships and improve the robustness and validity of the results. 9. Consider incorporating graphical representations, such as bar charts, pie charts, or line graphs, to present key data findings visually. Graphs are often more effective than tables in illustrating trends, relationships, and distributions, allowing readers to grasp the significance of the results quickly. ome from the victims themselves, since what may seem like harmless words to some can be deeply hurtful to others. Therefore, when addressing the issue of objectivity, the Institute should aim to include even the smallest acts of discrimination, even if they aren't recognized by everyone, to ensure a more comprehensive representation of racial discrimination on campus

3. Results

3.1 Question 1: Age

The survey captured a diverse age range, with most respondents falling in the 21 and above category (48.87%) and the 15-17 age group (31.58%). Younger respondents under 12 years old (2.26%) and those aged 12-14 (6.77%) were less represented.
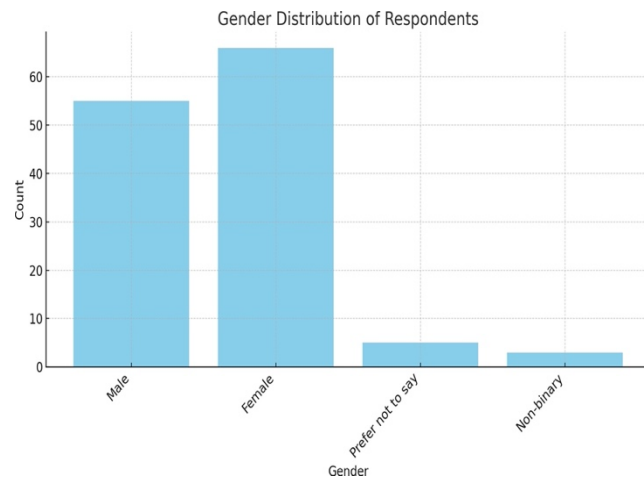
Age Distribution of Respondents
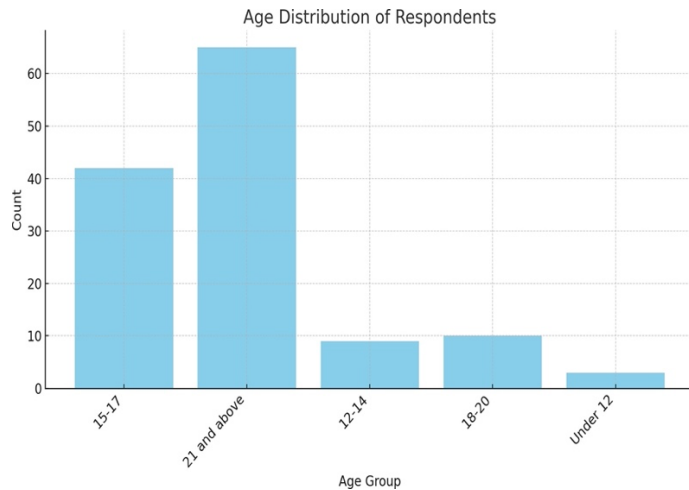
The large proportion of older participants, particularly those aged 21 and above, suggests that the findings may reflect a blend of high school and college-level experiences with ethnic discrimination. The relatively smaller proportion of younger respondents indicates a potential gap in perspectives from middle and elementary school students. This highlights the need for further exploration of how discrimination affects younger age groups.

3.2 Question 2: Gender

The survey revealed that most respondents identified as female (49.62%) or male (41.35%). Smaller groups identified as non-binary (2.26%) or preferred not to disclose their gender (3.76%).

The near-equal representation of male and female respondents provides a balanced view of gendered experiences with ethnic discrimination. However, the smaller representation of non-binary individuals and those who chose not to disclose their gender may limit the understanding of how discrimination uniquely impacts these groups. This calls for the intentional inclusion of underrepresented genders in future surveys.
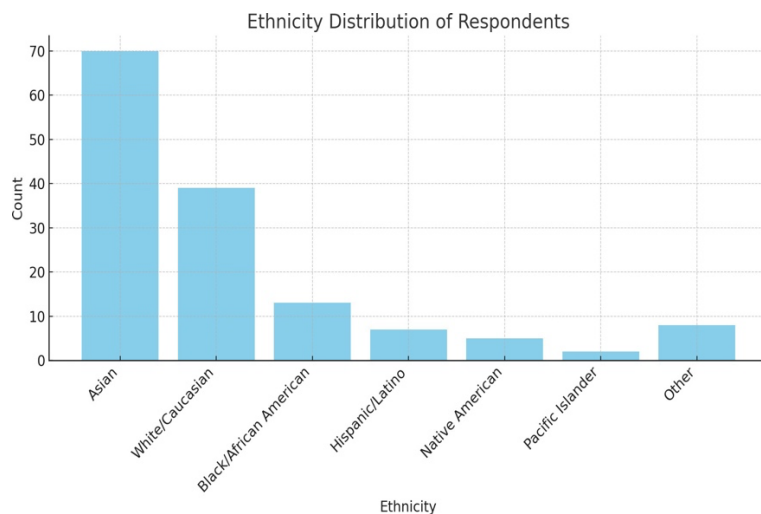
Gender Distribution of Respondents

3.3 Question 3: ethnicity

Ethnic diversity among respondents was notable, with Asian individuals (52.63%) forming the majority, followed by White/Caucasian (29.32%) and Black/African American (9.77%) participants. Hispanic/Latino (5.26%), Native American (3.76%), and Pacific Islander (1.50%) respondents were less represented.

The significant representation of Asian respondents may indicate that discrimination against this group is particularly pressing. Additionally, the lower representation of other ethnicities suggests that while the survey captured a diverse range of experiences, some minority groups may still face barriers to participation in studies like this one. This underscores the importance of inclusive outreach in future research.

Ethnicity Distribution of Respondents

3.4 Question 4: Grade Level

Participants were primarily from college/university (48.12%) and high school (43.61%). Middle school

students accounted for a smaller proportion (5.26%).

The dominance of older respondents aligns with the age distribution observed in Question 1, indicating that ethnic discrimination may become more visible and impactful during later stages of schooling. Middle school students, while a smaller portion of the sample, may provide insights into the early onset of discriminatory behavior.

3.5 Question 5: Have you ever felt discriminated against at school based on your ethnicity?

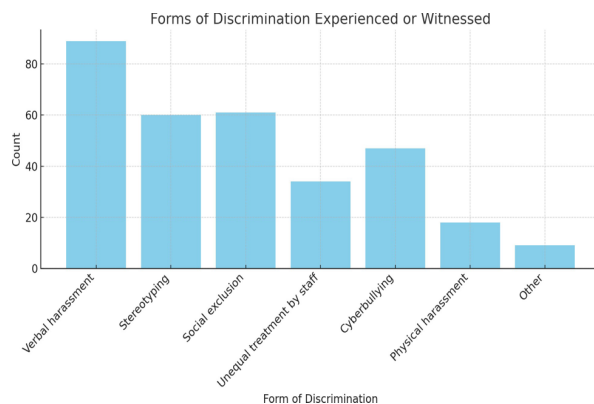Experience of Discrimination

Grade Level of Respondents
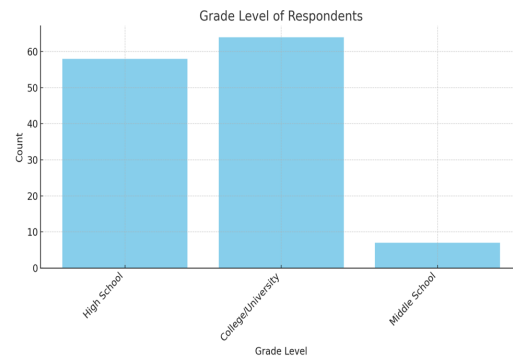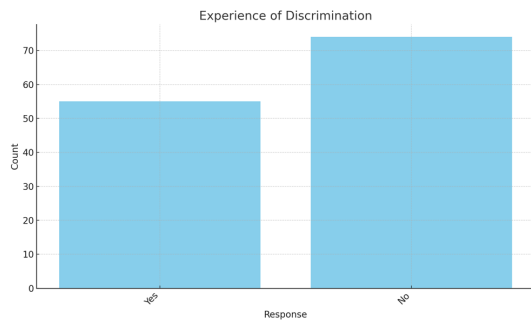
A significant portion of respondents (41.35%) reported experiencing ethnic discrimination, highlighting that nearly half of the participants have been affected. The majority (55.64%) who did not feel discriminated against suggests that while discrimination is prevalent, its reach may not encompass the majority experience—or individuals may perceive or define discrimination differently.

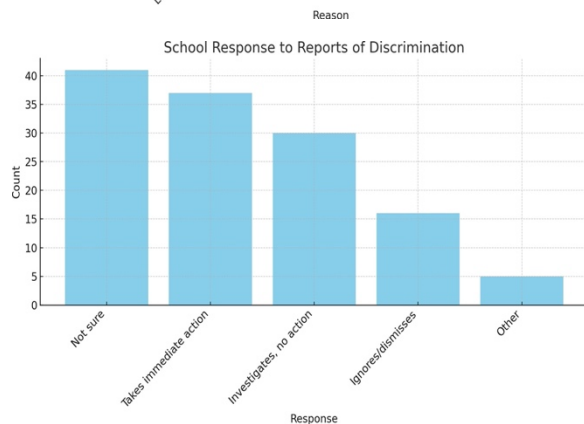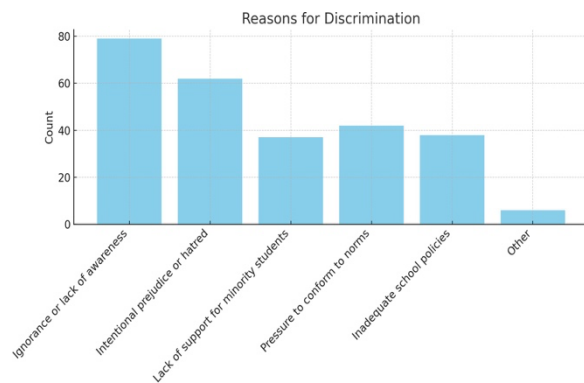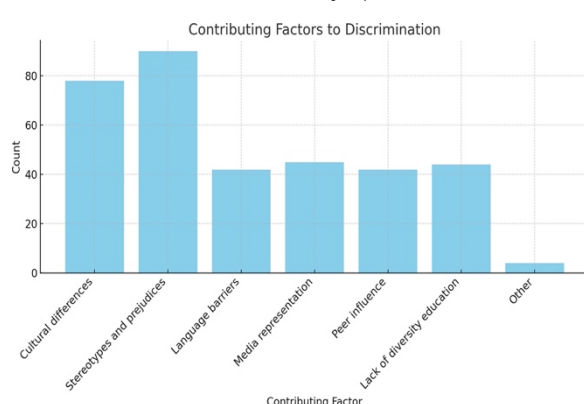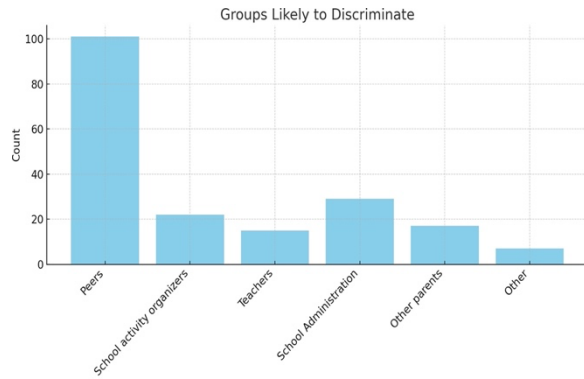### 3.6 Question 6: Who do you think is most targeted by ethnic discrimination at your school?

Respondents identified Black/African American (59.40%) and Asian (57.89%) students as the most targeted groups, underscoring the impact of racism on traditionally marginalized communities. The relatively lower figures for other groups may reflect either fewer instances of discrimination or underreporting of these experiences.

Most Targeted Groups by Ethnic Discrimination
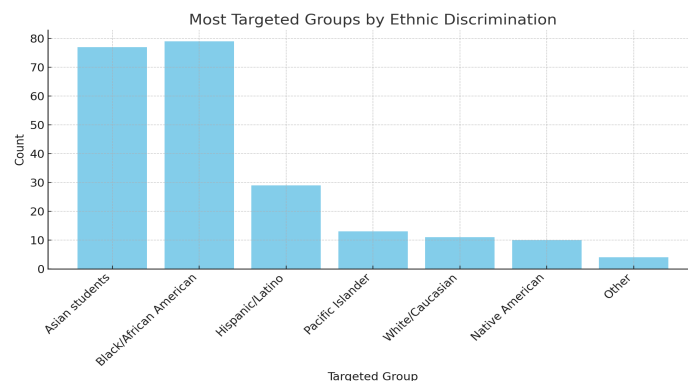
3.7 Question 7: What forms of discrimination have you experienced or witnessed?

Forms of Discrimination Experienced or Witnessed

The high prevalence of verbal harassment (66.92%) indicates that overt forms of discrimination are a common issue. Social exclusion (45.86%) and stereotyping (45.11%) point to subtler, systemic forms of bias. Unequal treatment by staff (25.56%) and cyberbullying (35.34%) highlight the multifaceted nature of discrimination.

Groups Likely to Discriminate

Contributing Factors to Discrimination

Reasons for Discrimination

School Response to Reports of Discrimination

3.8 Question 8: Who are the groups most likely to racially discriminate against others in your school?

Peers were overwhelmingly identified as the most likely to engage in discrimination (75.94%), suggesting that student-to-student dynamics are the primary source of ethnic bias. The roles of school staff and parents, while less frequently cited, remain concerning and indicate the need for broader community involvement to mitigate discrimination.

3.9 Question 9: What factors do you believe contribute to ethnic discrimination at your school?

Stereotypes and prejudices (67.67%) emerged as the leading contributors to ethnic discrimination, highlighting deep-seated biases in school environments. Cultural differences (58.65%) were another prominent factor, suggesting that a lack of cultural integration or understanding fosters division. Interestingly, language barriers and peer influence (both 31.58%) indicate structural and social pressures that exacerbate discriminatory behaviors. Efforts to address stereotypes, media influence, and lack of diversity education could mitigate these issues.

3.10 Question 10: Why do you think ethnic discrimination occurs at your school?

Ignorance or lack of awareness (59.40%) was identified as the top reason for ethnic discrimination, reflecting an urgent need for comprehensive education and awareness programs. Intentional prejudice or hatred (46.62%) reveals that conscious bias still plays a significant role. Issues such as inadequate policies (28.57%) and lack of support for minority students (27.82%) suggest systemic gaps in school environments that require administrative intervention.

### 3.11 Question 11: How does your school typically handle reports of ethnic discrimination?

The most common response was uncertainty (30.83%), suggesting a lack of transparency in how schools handle discrimination reports. While 27.82% indicated that schools take immediate action, the remaining responses—such as ignoring reports (12.03%) or conducting investigations

without action (22.56%)—point to inadequacies in response protocols. Strengthening reporting mechanisms and increasing accountability could address these concerns.

3.12   Question 12: How effective do you think your school's policies are in preventing and addressing ethnic discrimination?

The majority of respondents rated school policies as either somewhat effective (32.33%) or not very effective (27.07%). Only a small proportion (11.28%) considered the policies very effective. These results emphasize the need for more robust and clearly communicated policies that effectively address ethnic discrimination.
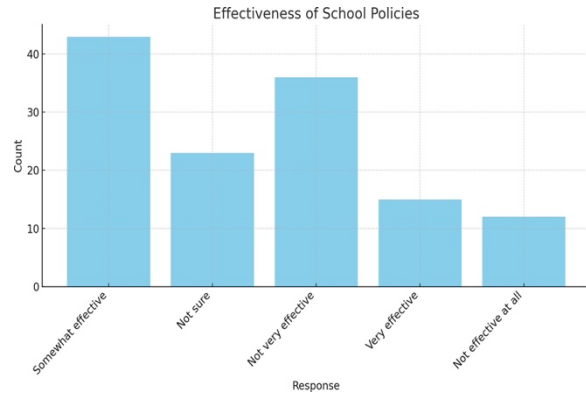
3.13   Question 13: How has experiencing or witnessing ethnic discrimination affected your mental health?

Mental health impacts were notable, with feelings of isolation (28.57%) and lower self-esteem (28.57%) being frequently reported. Increased stress and anxiety (27.82%) and depression (22.56%) further illustrate the emotional toll of ethnic discrimination. Addressing these impacts requires better mental health resources and support systems for affected students.
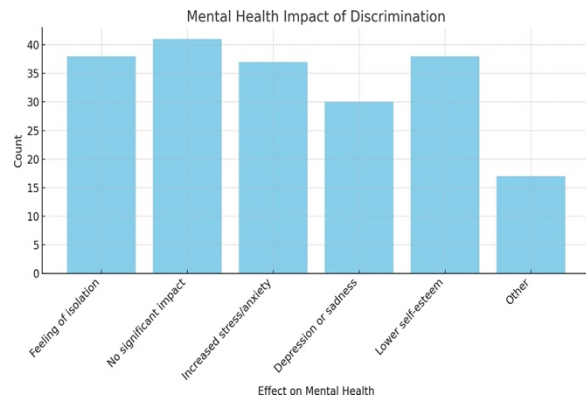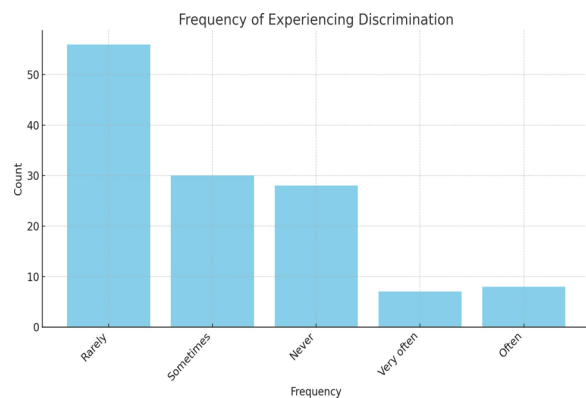
3.14   Question 14: How has ethnic discrimination affected your academic performance?

While 47.37% of respondents reported no significant impact on their academic performance, others experienced negative outcomes, such as decreased motivation (23.31%) and avoidance of certain classes (21.80%). A small proportion (9.02%) indicated they worked harder to counter stereotypes, suggesting resilience among some students but underscoring the need for systemic solutions.
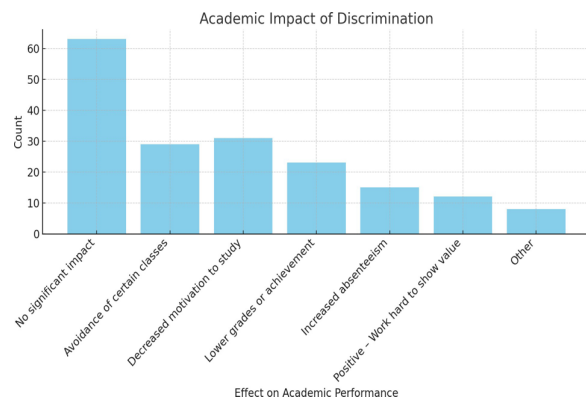
3.15   Question 15: How often do you feel you are discriminated against at school?

The majority of respondents reported experiencing discrimination rarely (42.11%) or never (21.05%). However, a combined 11.28% (often and very often) highlights that a subset of students consistently faces discrimination, requiring targeted interventions for these vulnerable individuals.

Effectiveness of School Policies

Mental Health Impact of Discrimination

Academic Impact of Discrimination

Frequency of Experiencing Discrimination

Specific Impacts of Ethnic Discrimination

Personal Responses to Ethnic Discrimination
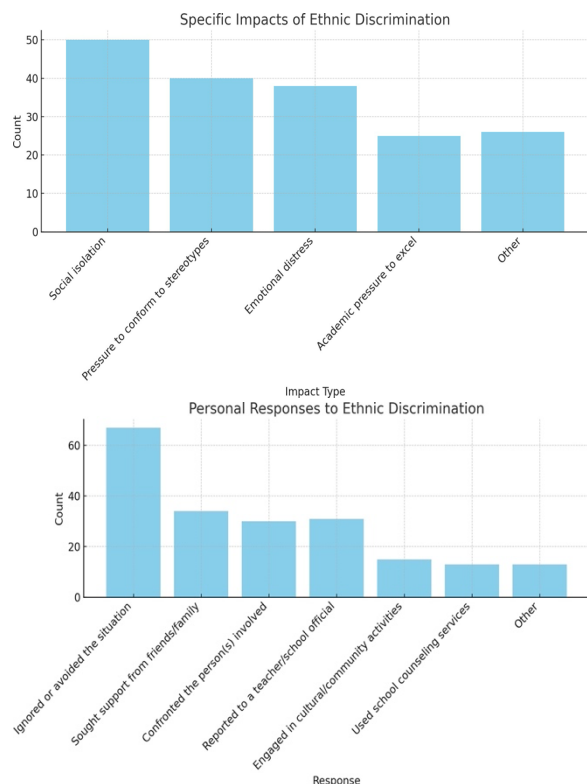
3.16 Question 16: In what ways do you feel ethnic discrimination has specifically impacted you?

Social isolation (37.59%) and pressure to conform to stereotypes (30.08%) were the most reported impacts, underscoring the social challenges faced by minority students. Emotional distress (28.57%) and academic pressure to excel (18.80%) reflect how discrimination extends into both personal and academic realms.

3.17 Question 17: How have you personally handled or responded to ethnic discrimination?

Most respondents (50.38%) reported ignoring or avoiding discrimination, indicating a lack of confidence in existing systems or uncertainty about how to respond. Seeking support (25.56%) and reporting incidents (23.31%) were less common, reflecting a need for better resources and encouragement for proactive responses.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Analysis of Discrimination Trends

The findings of this study illustrate that ethnic discrimination is pervasive and deeply entrenched in educationalenvironments. The data reveal that Black/African American (59.40%) and Asian (57.89%) students are perceived as the most targeted groups. This aligns with previous research, which identifies these groups as disproportionately affected by microaggressions and systemic biases in schools (Huynh, 2020). Verbal harassment (66.92%) and stereotyping (45.11%) emerged as the most common forms of discrimination. The prevalence of verbal harassment underscores how overt discriminatory behaviors persist despite anti-bullying initiatives in many schools.

Social exclusion (45.86%) was also a prominent issue, often overlooked because of its subtle nature. These exclusionary practices may lead to feelings of isolation, affecting students' mental health and social development. This aligns with Modood's (1988) work, which highlights how these less visible forms of discrimination can be as damaging as overt actions.

4.2 The Role of Systemic Factors

Systemic factors such as cultural differences, stereotypes, and a lack of diversity education were highlighted as major contributors to ethnic discrimination. Stereotypes and prejudices, identified by 67.67% of respondents, reinforce harmful narratives that position minority students within narrow societal roles, leading to exclusion and unrealistic academic expectations. For instance, the "model minority" myth associated with Asian students can impose undue academic pressure while simultaneously invalidating their experiences with discrimination (Glock, Kovacs, & Pit- ten Cate, 2019).

Language barriers (31.58%) and media representation (33.83%) were also notable contributors. These findings suggest that beyond individual prejudice, broader societal influences shape perceptions and interactions within schools. Inadequate diversity education (33.08%) further exacerbates these challenges, as schools fail to equip students and staff with the skills to navigate cultural differences.

4.3 School Policies: Gaps and Opportunities

The study reveals significant dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of school policies addressing discrimination. While 27.82% of respondents indicated that schools took immediate action, nearly an equal proportion felt reports were ignored or dismissed (12.03%) or investigated without resolution (22.56%). This reflects a lack of consistent enforcement and transparency in handling discrimination complaints.

Notably, only 11.28% of respondents found their school's policies to be very effective, with 27.07% describing them as not very effective. This disconnect between the presence of policies and their perceived impact highlights the need for schools to move beyond performative measures. Policies must be accompanied by accountability mechanisms, training programs, and communication channels that inspire trust in students and their families.

4.4 Implications for Mental Health and Academics

The effects of ethnic discrimination extend into both mental health and academic performance. Among respondents, 28.57% reported feelings of isolation, while others experienced increased anxiety (27.82%), depression (22.56%), and lowered self-esteem (28.57%). These findings align with Smith et al. (2021), who identified a direct correlation between discrimination and mental health challenges in students.

Academically, the survey revealed that 23.31% of students experienced decreased motivation to study, and 21.80% avoided certain classes or activities due to discrimination. While nearly half of the respondents (47.37%) reported no significant impact on their academic performance, the subset experiencing these challenges is significant enough to warrant attention. This suggests that discrimination not only affects individual students but also undermines the broader educational goals of inclusion and equity.

4.5 Recommendations

Based on these findings, several actionable recommendations emerge:

Policy Strengthening and Enforcement
Schools must establish and enforce clear, transparent policies that address ethnic discrimination. Reporting mechanisms should be accessible and anonymous to encourage students to come forward without fear of retaliation.

Diversity Education
Comprehensive training programs should be implemented for both students and staff to promote cultural competency and dismantle stereotypes. Incorporating lessons on diversity into curricula can foster empathy and mutual respect.

Support Networks
Peer support groups, counseling services, and safe spaces can help students cope with the psychological impacts of discrimination. Expanding mental health resources within schools is critical.

Community Engagement
Schools should involve families and local leaders in initiatives that promote inclusivity. Hosting cultural awareness events and establishing advisory councils with diverse representation can help create a more welcoming environment.

Practical Recommendation
Introducing mandatory diversity education programs, such as "Teaching Tolerance" or "Facing History and

Ourselves," can help students and staff learn about cultural awareness and empathy. Additionally, integrating multicultural education into the school system will help highlight the contributions of various ethnic groups, promoting inclusivity. Schools should also create peer mentoring programs and safe spaces where minority students can share their experiences and receive support. To further strengthen inclusivity, schools can form diversity advisory councils with parents, teachers, and community leaders, and host cultural exchange events to build understanding and collaboration within the school community. These actionable steps will ensure that recommendations go beyond theory and result in meaningful change.

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the pervasive nature of ethnic discrimination in educational settings and its profound impact on students' mental health, social well-being, and academic performance. The data reveal that systemic issues—such as stereotypes, lack of diversity education, and inadequate policy enforcement—fuel discriminatory behaviors, while gaps in school responses exacerbate these challenges.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that combines policy reform, community involvement, and proactive support systems. Schools must prioritize fostering an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and respected, regardless of their ethnicity. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this study, educational institutions can take meaningful steps toward mitigating discrimination and promoting equity.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the effectiveness of interventions and examine the intersectionality of ethnicity with other identity factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and disability. This study serves as a foundation for further exploration and action, emphasizing the urgency of addressing ethnic discrimination in schools.

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