

GARI YALA

(SPEAK THE TRUTH)



Jumbunna
Institute for Indigenous
Education and Research

We drew on the insights and experiences of 1,033 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait workers, who told us...

Sharing your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background at work is vitally important

78% said it was important for them to identify as Indigenous within their workplace



BUT IT CAN BE COMPLICATED

63% experience high identity strain¹ – the strain Indigenous employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace

39% carry the burden of high cultural load, which comes in the form of extra work demands and the expectation to educate others

28% work in culturally unsafe workplaces

Indigenous employees face significant workplace racism and exclusion

38% reported being treated unfairly because of their Indigenous background sometimes, often or all the time

44% reported hearing racial slurs sometimes, often or all the time

59% reported experiencing appearance racism – receiving comments about the way they look or 'should' look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person

Racism impacts wellbeing and job satisfaction – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers who experienced unfair racist treatment were:

- 2.5 times less likely** to always be satisfied with their job, compared to those who rarely or never experienced unfair racist treatment
- 3 times less likely** to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people
- 2 times as likely** to be looking for a new employer in the next year

Workplace supports are ineffective



Only **1 in 3** had the workplace support required when they experienced racism



Only **1 in 5** worked in organisations with both a racism complaint procedure and anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to Indigenous discrimination and harassment

WHO ARE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples constitute 3.3% of Australia's total population.² Over 65% of Indigenous people in Australia have secured employment,³ with a growing Indigenous middle class who are 'largely overlooked'.⁴ With growth in the number of Indigenous professionals, it is even more critical that Indigenous perspectives are heard and respected within the context of work.

1 Identity strain is a term coined by the Gari Yala research team, which refers to the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the expectations of the dominant workplace culture. The concept draws on literature demonstrating members of minority groups expend effort managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>.

3 S. Hudson, *Mapping the Indigenous Program and Funding Maze*, accessed at: <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2017/09/rri18-snapshot.pdf>

4 J. Lahn, 'Aboriginal Professionals: Work, Class and Culture', *CAEPR Working Paper No. 89/2013*, 2013.

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1.

Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this may be.

2.

Ensure any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related work is Indigenous led and informed.

3.

Develop organisational principles to make it clear how Indigenous community engagement and employment should work in practice.

10.

Look to high-impact initiatives – those that research shows are linked to better wellbeing and retention for Indigenous staff.

10 TRUTHS

to centre Indigenous Australians' voices to create workplace inclusion

9.

Take action to address workplace racism.

4.

Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness.

5.

Recognise identity strain and educate non-Indigenous staff about how to interact with their Indigenous colleagues in ways that reduce this.

8.

Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments.

7.

Consult with Indigenous staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity.

6.

Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload.

The authors and partners of this report wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the nations across Australia and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that all Elders and mobs in locations across Australia have their own experiences with 'work'. We hope this report enables our mob to tell our own stories. *Gari Yala, speak the truth.*