

Research Report

Exploring Intersectional Experiences of South Asian Ethnic Minority Students and Families in Special Educational Context in Hong Kong

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was extended to Hong Kong in 2008 and its vision is to embrace a disability-inclusive society (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2020). The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) has been enacted in Hong Kong to protect persons with disabilities against discrimination and harassment on the ground of disability. Culturally diverse populations with disabilities usually encounter more difficulties accessing appropriate education and healthcare services (Gillborn et al., 2016; Hussein et al., 2019). Today, the population of non-Chinese ethnic groups make up 8.4% of the 7.4 million total population in Hong Kong, amounting to 619,568 people (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). In the school year 2019/20, there were about 1,106 non-Chinese speaking students with special educational needs (hereafter SEN) studying in public sector ordinary schools and special schools in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2021).

This study is funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission. It is an exploratory study that aims to examine the experiences of barriers and support of South Asian (Pakistani, Nepali and Indian) students with special educational needs and their parents in navigating the special educational needs context in Hong Kong. This is the first of its kind in special educational studies in Hong Kong. The main target groups are South Asian families with at least one child diagnosed with SEN or waiting to be diagnosed. This study follows the definition of SEN of the Hong Kong Government, referring to children and students with learning difficulties that make them harder to learn than other children. It covers students with SEN in both the integrated education (IE) and special education (SE) systems.

2. Method

This study adopts qualitative method. Data collection took place in the period between February 2021 and January 2022 in the South Asian communities in Hong Kong. In total, the research team conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 South Asian ethnic minority families with children who were students with special educational needs. Among them, 6 families were of Pakistani origin, 5 Nepali and 4 Indian. Children from our informant families mostly had intellectual disability (ID) or/and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) among different types of special educational needs. This study also collected data from 7 professionals including teachers and social workers in the special education system through in-depth interviews.

3. Summary of Findings

3.1. Institutional Barriers

South Asian ethnic minority students and families seemed to experience more institutional barriers than their ethnic Chinese counterparts in terms of access to support in the special educational needs system in Hong Kong. These include:

- **The use of language in training** was a major obstacle. In Hong Kong, subsidized special educational training, including speech therapy and occupational therapy, are largely provided in hospitals, subsidized schools (governmental or aided) and NGOs. Most of

such training use Cantonese as the medium of instruction (CMI), with little resources provided for non-Chinese-speaking or English-speaking students. English medium of instruction (EMI) can merely be found in private special educational training centres that charge high training fee which is not considered to be affordable by many of our informants.

- **The use of language in assessment tools** represented another language barrier. Due to a lack of assessment tools in the appropriate language and expertise to make assessment for non-Chinese-speaking students, assessment would be delayed or not accurate.
- **Lack of subsidized English special schools** was another institutional obstacle that channeled most of the ethnic minority students with special educational needs to the Chinese-speaking ones. The only one non-subsidized English special school and some bilingual private training schools were expensive and not affordable for our informant families. This created a situation in which less well-off ethnic minority students with special educational needs could not enjoy the same education opportunities as other students, and that they became the “forgotten kids” in Hong Kong.
- **Lack of awareness education in the ethnic minority communities** might probably lead to an averagely poor understanding of special educational needs and insufficient information on relevant resources. This could cause confusion in the families and delayed assessment and intervention.
- **Social discrimination in the form of microaggression** against South Asian students with special educational needs was reported. Some professionals overlooked the fact that South Asian students with special educational needs are citizens in Hong Kong and have a right to receive education and medical care.

3.2 Institutional Support

- Some informants appreciated institutional support obtained from different professionals including teachers and social workers.
- **Parents Resource Centre (PRC) with Specialised Ethnic Minorities (EM) Unit**, a newly established service subsidized by the Social Welfare Department and operated by NGOs, has been very useful as a resource platform for South Asian parents and has potential to provide more supportive services.

3.3 Internal Resources

- **Family/ in-group support** was an important resource that helped parents get through barriers in accessing support services. For those with little family support, they found the help-seeking process particularly hard.
- **Religion** was another important resource. Muslim religion was explicitly mentioned as the spiritual guidance that supported many families in a spiritual way.

3.4 Other Factors

- **Different perceptions about** child development in the country of origin or in the South Asian migrant communities from the one of the mainstream Hong Kong society may sometimes attribute to missing timely assessment and intervention.
- **Co-ethnic belief regarding special educational needs.** There was a belief that speech delay could be outgrown in later years with a better monolingual environment. This belief could also lead to delay of assessment and intervention.

3.5 Intersectional Differences

- This study suggests that while “disability” itself may pose difficulties for students with special educational needs in our society, its interplay with country of origin, ethnicity and language further worsens the disadvantaged status of these students, leading to multiple deprivation of equal education opportunities.
- There were differences within the South Asian communities, which could be shaped by the intersection of factors such as socioeconomic status (SES) and cultural beliefs including religion and perceptions on children’s development.

4. Recommendations

The exercise of disability rights requires institutional support inside and outside the government. Therefore, this study makes the following recommendations that call for concerted efforts of relevant authorities and institutions including the Education Bureau, the Social Welfare Department, the Hospital Authority and various NGOs.

4.1 Language use and cultural sensitivity

- Use of English in subsidized special educational training including those in hospitals, in schools, in NGO services such as Special Child Care Centre should be introduced and enhanced for students with special educational needs and their parents.
- English assessment tools should be more broadly used for ethnic minority children with special educational needs undergoing assessment in subsidized services such as public hospitals, Child Assessment Centre, schools and NGOs. Simultaneous interpretation support should be offered if ethnic minority children or parents have difficulty in understanding the assessment process.
- Financial support should be offered for students with special educational needs and their families to acquire private special educational training in English if subsidized English training is insufficient or unavailable.
- There should be subsidized special schools using English as the medium of instruction (EMI).
- Cultural sensitivity of various professionals working in the special educational system should be enhanced. This includes understanding of South Asian students’ cultural backgrounds and some specific skills to communicate with them.

4.2 Community education and campaigns

- Community education on general understanding of special educational needs is necessary for South Asian ethnic minority communities. This should take place in the ethnic minority communities and in cooperation with ethnic minority associations or religious organizations such as mosques and temples. Educational sessions should be conducted with cultural sensitivity and the help of cultural facilitators. Public funding should be offered to encourage such educational activities.
- Community education should include support to connect South Asian parents with children with special needs to the parent mutual help groups in the wider society.

4.3 Awareness education

- Awareness education on the right to education of ethnic minorities targeted at the general public in Hong Kong is important. This will enhance the public awareness that ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are entitled to rights, including their rights to access to appropriate assessment, appropriate training and support services, to meet their special education needs like all other counterparts in Hong Kong.
- First, such awareness education can be incorporated in the multicultural education in schools for all children and youth living in Hong Kong.
- Second, awareness education should target at the various professionals working in the special education system.

4.4 Information flow

- Information flow of existing services should be improved. Efforts should be made by the authorities to proactively channel relevant service information (e.g, Parents Resource Centre (PRC) with Specialised Ethnic Minority (EM) Unit and the Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in Kindergartens / Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres) to the ethnic minority communities and other relevant service units.

報告摘要

1. 前言

《聯合國殘疾人權利公約》(UNCRPD)於2008年擴展至香港，願景是建立一個包容殘疾人的社會(Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2020)。香港亦制訂了《殘疾歧視條例》(DDO)，以保護殘疾人免受基於殘疾的歧視和騷擾。不同文化背景的殘疾人通常在獲得適當的教育和醫療服務方面遇到更多困難(Gillborn et al., 2016; Hussein et al., 2019)。目前，非華裔人口佔香港740萬總人口的8.4%，達到619,568人(政府統計處 Department, 2022)。在2019/20學年，大約有1,106名有特殊教育需要的非華語學生(下稱 SEN)在香港公營普通學校和特殊學校就讀(教育局, 2021)。

是項研究由平等機會委員會資助。這是一項探索性研究，旨在了解南亞族裔(巴基斯坦、尼泊爾和印度)有特殊教育需要的學生及其家庭在香港特殊教育制度中的經歷，包括遇到的挑戰和所獲的支援。本研究在香港的特殊教育研究中尚屬首次。主要目標群體是至少有一個孩子被診斷為有特殊教育需要或等待診斷的南亞家庭。本研究跟從香港政府對特殊教育需求的定義，意指有學習困難的兒童和學生；並包括在融合教育(Integrated Education)中和特殊教育(Special Education)中接受教育的學生。

2. 方法

本研究採用定性方法。研究團隊於2021年2月至2022年1月期間在香港的南亞社群中收集數據。研究團隊在15個有特殊教育需要學生的南亞家庭中進行了半結構化深度訪談。當中，6個家庭來自巴基斯坦，5個來自尼泊爾，4個來自印度。在不同類型的特殊教育需要中，受訪家庭的孩子大多患有智力障礙(ID)或/和自閉症譜系障礙(ASD)。本研究還通過深度訪談收集了特殊教育系統中教師、社工等7名專業人士的數據。

3. 調查結果摘要

3.1 制度上的障礙

南亞族裔學生及其家庭似乎比華裔學生和家庭在特殊教育系統中尋求支援時經歷更多制度性的障礙。這些障礙包括：

- 培訓時使用的語言是一個主要障礙。在香港，獲資助的特殊教育培訓，包括由醫院、資助學校(官立或資助學校)和非政府機構提供的言語治療和職業治療，大部分以粵語為教學語言，很少有為非華語或英語學生提供培訓服務。英語教學只能在收費高昂的私立特殊教育培訓中心找到，大部分受訪家庭均未能負擔費用。
- 評估工具所使用的語言是另一個障礙。由於評估工具缺乏適當的語言支援和專業知識為非華語兒童和學生進行評估，評估會被延誤或不準確。
- 目前香港欠缺資助英語特殊學校，這是另一個制度障礙，故此大多數有特殊教育需要的南亞少數族裔學生要在以中文為教學語言的特殊學校接受教育。況且，唯一一所沒有津貼的英語特殊學校以及雙語私人訓練中心費用昂貴，受訪家庭未能負擔。這造成了有特殊教育

需要的貧困少數族裔學生無法接受與其他孩子一樣的教育機會，成為香港「被遺忘的孩子」。

- 少數族裔社群缺乏公眾教育以提升意識，這可能會導致他們對特殊教育的理解不足以及未能得到足夠資訊以獲取相關資源。這容易使相關少數族裔家庭感到混亂，延遲評估以及介入。
- 社會歧視依然存在。受訪者提及日常生活中遭遇到細微的語言攻擊的例子。一些專業人士忽略了一個事實，即使有特殊教育需要，南亞學生也是香港公民，有權接受教育和醫療服務。

3.2 制度上的支援

- 一些受訪者讚賞不同的專業人士（包括教師和社會工作者），為他/她們提供支援。
- 由社會福利署資助、非政府機構營運的新成立的服務——家長資源中心（PRC）的少數族裔（EM）部門能夠有效地作為南亞家長的資源平台，並有潛力提供更多支援性服務。

3.3 內部資源

- 家庭/團體的支持是非常重要的資源，可以幫助父母相對順利地渡過照顧過程中的不同階段。對於那些沒有家庭支援的人來說，他們感到尋求協助的過程特別辛苦。
- 宗教是另一種資源。不少受訪家庭明確地指出穆斯林宗教是他們的精神支柱。

3.4 其他因素

- 受訪家庭對兒童發展的理解往往源自原籍國或是其他南亞族裔在港生活的經歷，與香港的主流觀念有所不同，這有可能阻礙了及時的評估和介入。
- 家長混淆了特殊教育的需要和作為移民的適應需要。他們相信，隨著更好的單語環境，遲緩的語言能力應該在孩子大幾歲以後會自動改善。這種觀念也可能導致未能及時進行評估和介入。

3.5 交織性的差異

- 這項研究表明，「殘疾」對有特殊教育需要的學生帶來不利，而它與原籍國、族裔和語言的相互交織會令受影響群體的社會地位進一步惡化，導致此群體被剝奪了平等的教育機會。
- 南亞社群內部存在差異，這可能與社會經濟地位 (SES)和文化因素（包括宗教信仰和對教育的理解）等多種原因的交叉影響所致。

4. 建議

殘疾人權利的行使需要政府體制內外的配合。本研究提出以下建議，要求有關當局和機構，包括教育局、社會福利署、醫院管理局，以及各非政府機構共同作出努力。

4.1 語言使用和文化敏感度

- 加強英語在資助的特殊教育培訓中的使用，包括在醫院、學校、非政府組織中（例如特殊幼兒中心）的培訓，這可惠及有特殊教育需要的學生及其家庭。
- 在公立醫院、兒童評估中心、學校、非政府機構等資助服務機構中，應更廣泛地使用英語評估工具進行特殊教育需求評估。如果少數族裔兒童或父母在評估過程中有語言困難，可以考慮提供即時傳譯。

- 如果資助的英語特殊教育培訓不足，應為學生及其家庭提供財政支援以便他/她們可以獲得非資助的英語特殊教育培訓。
- 設立以英語為教學語言的資助特殊學校。
- 增強在特殊教育系統中各專業人員的文化敏感度，當中包括了解南亞學生的文化背景以及與他/她們溝通的一些特別技巧。

4.2 社區教育和宣傳運動

- 有關特殊教育需求的社區教育應在南亞少數族裔社區中進行，並與少數族裔協會、清真寺或寺廟等宗教組織合作。社區教育課程必須顧及文化敏感度以及應該在有文化工作協調員的幫助下進行，也應該提供公共資助以鼓勵舉辦此類教育活動。
- 社區教育包括幫助這些南亞父母與華人社區中有特殊需要兒童家長的互助團體聯繫起來。

4.3 意識提升教育

- 以香港公眾為對象的意識提升教育尤為重要。其目的在於提高大眾對香港少數族裔權利的認識，包括他們有權獲得適當的評估、適當的培訓和支援服務，以明白他/她們與一般香港公民一樣，享有接受特殊教育的權利。
- 首先，這種意識提升教育可以納入學校的多元文化教育中，加強所有居住在香港的兒童和青少年的意識。
- 其次，意識提升教育應針對特殊教育系統中的各類專業人員。

4.4 信息傳遞

- 有關當局應主動傳遞相關服務信息（例如，家長資源中心設有少數族裔部門及幼稚園/幼稚園暨幼兒中心第一層支援服務試驗計劃）予少數族裔社區以及其他相關服務單位。

1. Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was extended to Hong Kong in 2008 and its vision is to embrace a disability-inclusive society (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2020). The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) has been enacted in Hong Kong to protect persons with disabilities against discrimination and harassment on the ground of disability. The exercise of disability rights requires institutional support inside and outside the government (Grech, 2009; Katsui et al, 2016; Shang et al., 2011). Comparing to the mainstream populations, culturally diverse populations with disabilities usually encounter more difficulties accessing appropriate education and healthcare services due to complex barriers such as language use and lack of culturally sensitive information (Gillborn et al., 2016; Hussein et al., 2019). A multicultural society with ethnic minorities with disabilities but insufficient institutional support to accommodate their specific needs may challenge the authorities' stated goal of disability inclusion.

Today, the population of non-Chinese ethnic groups make up 8.4% of the 7.4 million total population in Hong Kong, amounting to 619,568 people (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). The Hong Kong special education system includes special schools (SE) targeted at students with more severe or multiple disabilities of the nine categories as well as integrated education (IE) carried out in ordinary schools to support students with mild or marginal disabilities in an inclusive culture (Education Bureau, n.d.). In the school year 2019/20, there were about 1,106 non-Chinese speaking students with special educational needs (hereafter SEN) studying in public sector ordinary schools and special schools in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2021). This study is funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission. It is an exploratory study that aims to examine the experiences of barriers and support of South Asian (Pakistani, Nepali and Indian) students with special educational needs and their parents in navigating the special educational needs context in Hong Kong. This is the first of its kind in special educational studies in Hong Kong.

The main target groups are South Asian families with at least one child diagnosed with special educational needs or waiting to be diagnosed. This study follows the definition of special educational needs of the Hong Kong Government, referring to children and students with learning difficulties that make them harder to learn than other children (Education Bureau, 2014, n.d.). The term special educational needs cover nine categories of students including those with specific learning difficulties (SpLD), intellectual disability (ID), autism spectrum disorders (ASD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), physical disability, visual impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI), speech and language impairments (SLI) and mental illness. This study covers students with special educational needs in both special education and integrated education systems.

2. Background

2.1 Special Education and Ethnic Minority Students

In the literature of special education, representation of minority students has been an issue of concern and controversy. For a long time, scholars (Dunn, 1968; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Mason et al., 2014) have discussed about the disproportionately overrepresentation of minority students in special education. These studies tend to explain the

overrepresentation phenomenon as a result of cultural insensitivity and teachers' misidentification of disability based on race or ethnicity, a process of systemic bias and institutionalized racism in the education system. However, this argument has been criticized for being built on investigations that have methodological pitfalls (e.g. Morgen et al., 2017) and for neglecting other risk factors such as poverty and housing segregation (e.g. Shakey, 2013). Studies with contrasting findings (Morgen et al., 2017; Morgen et al., 2018) have posited that minority students are less likely to be identified to receive special education based on their race, ethnicity and language use. In other words, minority students are underrepresented rather than overrepresented. Suggested reasons for the underrepresentation include social stigma experienced by parents, the difficulty in accessing care and services, and the subsequent tendency of parents to deny atypical functioning of their children. (Zuckerman et al., 2014; Gillborn et al., 2016).

Despite the controversial findings, most scholars advocate the enhancement of the use of culturally sensitive screening procedures (e.g. Artiles & Trent, 1994; Guerrero, Rodriguez, & Flores, 2011; Morgen et al., 2018) and to improve the cultural competence of special education professionals including school teachers in providing culturally responsive teaching and instructions (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Apart from that, the need for home-school-community collaboration (Artiles & Trent, 1994) has been emphasized. Within the large body of literature on home-school collaboration for minority students with special educational needs, scholars have stated that "disability" is closely related to cultural beliefs of the culturally diverse communities, and that every culture has different parameters for typical and atypical development. These could result in significant differences among culturally diverse groups in the use of related services (Sontag & Schacht, 1994; Shu-Minutoli, 1995; Harry, 2008). For example, Islamic precepts have strongly shaped the ways of raising a child with autism in some South Asian immigrant families (Jegatheesan, Miller, & Fowler, 2010). Moreover, it is revealed that different endowment and use of social and cultural capital among various culturally diverse parents can have implications for home-school interactions (Trainor, 2010). These observations on different understandings of "disability" and the use of cultural and social resources have offered insights for the scholarship. First, they reaffirm the significance of cultural sensitivity in achieving equal education opportunity because there are different culturally shaped understandings of "disability" and "special education". Second, they have shifted the perception that minority students with special educational needs and their families are passive recipients of help to one that see them also as active agents in coping with challenges.

2.2 South Asian Ethnic Minorities and Equal Education Opportunity

It is stated in the Race Discrimination Ordinance enacted in 2009 that irrespective of individual race, disabilities and gender, all students are entitled the rights to equal education opportunity. How about the situation in Hong Kong? Are ethnic minority students overrepresented or underrepresented in special education in Hong Kong that undermine their equal access to learning? Are they confronted with misidentification because of the culturally insensitive screening procedures? Do they encounter school professionals and community service workers who are culturally insensitive and resistant to their concerns? How do ethnic minority families cope with their children with special educational needs? Although there has been considerable public and scholarly attention on ethnic minorities and education in Hong Kong, most of them leave the above questions unexplored.

According to the 2021 Population Census, South Asian people constitute the third largest group of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong with a total number of 101,969 (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). While some South Asians are well-off with higher social status, the majority belongs to the disadvantaged minority groups who are subject to economic deprivation, racial discrimination and social exclusion (e.g. Law & Lee, 2012; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2016; Census and Statistics Department, 2018). Existing literature on ethnic minorities and education in Hong Kong has been largely confined to investigating the barriers in language acquisition, particularly the Chinese language (e.g. Shum, 2011; Fang, 2011; Lai et al., 2014), assuming Chinese language competence as the major factor in affecting the education achievement as well as social integration of ethnic minority young people. Other studies point to the right to education and responsive multicultural learning environment (e.g. Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2012; Hue & Kennedy, 2013; Hue, 2018). Most of these studies tend to focus on ethnic minority students' disadvantages without calling attention to their potential strengths and resources in tackling education difficulties. Despite policy lobby (Growing Together, 2008; Hong Kong Government Press Release, 2015), no specific measures have been implemented to accommodate the needs of ethnic minority students with special educational needs until recently. While the Landscape Study on Non-Chinese-Speaking Children (Zubin Foundation, 2017) has been the only report that explicitly addresses the issue, it has not teased out the specific conditions and barriers faced by South Asian students with special educational needs that may be conditioned by their ethnicities and socioeconomic positions. In short, ethnic minority students with special educational needs have so far remained "invisible" in Hong Kong, and this topic has been overlooked as a significant aspect of equal education opportunity and social integration of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

2.3 Multicultural Education and Intersectionality

This study adopts the conceptual frameworks of multicultural education as well as intersectionality. Multicultural or diversity education can be seen as a strive for equal education, with the major goal to "change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school." (Banks & Banks, 2007, p.1).

Intersectionality is a concept that draws a critical lens to explicate the complexities of belonging and subordination: how, when and why various social constructs such as gender, race, ethnicity and class intersect to form multiple levels of identities (Crenshaw, 1991). In this study of disability and special education, intersectionality is used to examine the differences (advantages or disadvantages) caused by the interactions between individual identities (e.g. race and language) and institutional practices (e.g. special education assessment) (e.g. Grant & Zwier, 201; Garcia & Ortiz, 2013). This could help to move the focus away from individual differences and to understand how South Asian students and families are embedded in conditions, where multiple factors intersect to facilitate or constrain their access to equal education opportunity.

3. Research Questions

In view of the above literature review, the present study aims to examine the experiences of barriers and support of South Asian ethnic minority students with special educational needs and their parents in navigating in the special educational needs context in Hong Kong. The research questions are:

- a. How do South Asian students with special educational needs and families experience institutional support and barriers in the special educational context in Hong Kong?
- b. How do South Asian students with special educational needs and families make use of their resources and are constrained by factors deriving from co-ethnic communities?
- c. How have these experiences been shaped by intersectional factors?
- d. How to improve strategies in policy, education sector and community projects?

4. Method

This study adopts qualitative method (Creswell, 2013) to make sense of the rich and multiple realities understood and reflected by South Asian students and families regarding their experiences in the special educational needs context.

4.1 Target group

South Asian ethnic minority (Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese) families with children with special educational needs were the main target group of this project. They were chosen because they may encounter more difficulties probably due to 1) documented racial discrimination and social exclusion, and 2) their culture of origin and languages used are far from similar to those of the majority Chinese population.

4.2 Data collection

Data collection was conducted between February 2021 and January 2022. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Caritas Institute of Higher Education before commencement. The research team included a research assistant of Pakistani origin. We established contacts with NGOs and schools, through which informants were referred. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit families from all three communities: Pakistani, Nepali and Indian. Semi-structured interview guideline (Appendix II) was prepared to include questions about their experiences, including realization of the atypical developments of the child, decision to go for diagnosis, daily education and caring practice, support networks, interactions with relevant professionals and friends in the co-ethnic social circles. All interviewed families were offered an incentive in the form of a small amount of cash. Community interpreters for Urdu – English and Nepali – English interpretation were engaged in some interviews in order to facilitate better communication and rapport. All interviews took place either in the informants' home or in the NGO that made the referral. Most of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed whereas observations were documented in the form of field notes. Informed consent was obtained from all informants.

Informants included 15 families with children who were mostly students with special educational needs, from which 6 were of Pakistani origin, 5 Nepali and 4 Indian (see Appendix I). In most of the interviews, we were able to interview at least one parent and talk to the child with special educational needs. Sometimes, a sibling or a relative joined in. Although we invited both parents to our interview, mothers were the main interview partners in most of the families while fathers joined merely in 5 of the families. Originally, we planned to have more than 1 interview in each family if parents would not like to have joint interview or if the child would like to talk to us separately. However, parents preferred to be co-interviewed and the child was not capable to talk to us separately. Children with special educational needs in these families

were all born in Hong Kong; their age ranged from 5 to 21. Except one child, all other children underwent diagnosis; among them 8 were diagnosed with intellectual disability, 5 with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), 4 with speech delay, 2 with attention deficit and 1 with hearing impairment. Except for 1 adult child who had finished special school for intellectual disability, all other 14 children were either attending kindergarten, special school or ordinary primary school. All informant names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Apart from the 15 South Asian families, we also interviewed 7 professionals including 2 teachers, 4 social workers and 1 ethnic minority ambassador.¹ The 2 teachers worked in schools with a majority of ethnic minority students, one of them was responsible for coordinating training and activities for students with special educational needs. The 4 social workers were either working in Parent Resource Centre with service for ethnic minority parents or in family service with experiences working with ethnic minority families.

4.3 Data organization and analyses

The process of data organization and analyses was ongoing and open-ended. All data collected including interview transcripts and interview notes were analyzed based on the qualitative content analysis methods and procedures (Creswell, 2013). Software package NVivo was applied to assist in the analysis of data. Materials were organized, read, summarized and coded with recurrently emerged themes such as language in training, language in assessment, religion and family support. These themes were compared and combined with the themes derived from the NVivo analyses. They were also compared to our research questions. To ensure trustworthiness, initial findings and analyses were shared with some interviewed families, community workers and interpreters through telephone or face-to-face contacts.

4.4 Limitations

There are a few limitations in this study. First, this research is qualitative and exploratory in nature, with the objective to have more understanding of the experiences of South Asian students with special educational needs and their parents. Generalizations concerning other ethnic minority populations and transferability of the findings are limited.

Second, due to the difficulty to locate families willing to be interviewed, variability (Patton, 1990) regarding types of special educational needs, age of student, family socioeconomic background and religion is limited. For example, our sample has been largely concentrated on students and families from a rather lower-income background. This has, to some extent, constrained the intersectional analyses.

5. Findings

The findings of this study will be presented in this section based on our research questions.

5.1 Institutional Barriers and Support

¹ Ethnic minority ambassadors are young people of ethnic minority backgrounds trained to reach out to offer useful information and support services for disadvantaged ethnic minority individuals and families. Their training and employment are supported by the Home Affairs Department in cooperation with some local NGOs. Details see http://www.isshk.org/en/our_services/detail/35

Existing studies report that students with special educational needs in Hong Kong are confronted with various difficulties including social stigmatization, deprivation of opportunity, and pressure to keep academic performance (Mak & Kwok, 2010; Chan et al., 2017; Kwok & Kwok, 2020). This study reveals that while some of these difficulties are common, South Asian ethnic minority students and families have experienced more institutional barriers that make their access to suitable education and support services even harder.

5.1.1 Medium of instruction in training

The medium of instruction was found to be the major obstacle. The eight-year-old Jivan (M, Indian) was diagnosed with ASD and borderline intelligence at the age of three. His parents reacted quickly by looking for different resources to help him. However, they were confronted with the difficult question where to find affordable English special educational training for their son:

You know we speak English, it is our mother tongue, right? So if we apply for the local schools ... All the schools, special schools, are mainly run in Chinese ... we have no option. I know there are good facilitators sent by the Government to the schools, special schools ... unfortunately we have to go to the expensive school! ... If your pocket does not allow, you can only do a few things, not too much. For those who have some money, you can use [better trainings in private schools]. But ... from where to bring the money? We cannot bring the money... Special education is expensive in Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong, subsidized special educational training, including speech therapy and occupational therapy, are largely provided in hospitals, schools and NGOs. Most of these training use Cantonese as the medium of instruction (CMI), with little resources provided for non-Chinese speaking students. Training that uses English as a medium of instruction (EMI) can be found in private training centres too. What Jivan's parents meant by "go to the expensive school" was to go for English private speech therapy and special educational training classes during his son's kindergarten years. These classes supplemented the English training provided by a subsidized NGO that took place only once a week and was for a short period of time as they did not belong to regular support service. Jivan's parents had to work harder in order to pay for his private classes with the purpose to speed up the improvement before entering the primary school.

The importance of using an appropriate language or English in special educational training for non-Chinese speaking students was revealed by Ms Ko, the special educational needs coordinating teacher of a subsidized secondary school with a majority of students with South Asian backgrounds:

We use English ... we employ a speech therapist who uses English in training ... Use Cantonese? I think this is not reasonable. These children do not speak proper Cantonese, how can they understand? If we really do it in this way, the whole world will be diagnosed with speech delay. For those new immigrant students from South Asia, for some of them, English may be their second language ... despite this, it is still better, they can catch up with English better.

However, most subsidized schools in Hong Kong do not pay extra care to address this language issue when some non-Cantonese speaking students need special educational training. Most of our informants were non-Cantonese speaking parents who had financial difficulties to pay for

private English special educational training for their children. Their only option was to accept special educational training in Cantonese for their children.

5.1.2 Language used in assessment

Apart from the medium of instruction used in training, the language (Chinese) used in assessment tool represents another language barrier. Ms Ko continued to explain:

Based on what we learned from our study, there should be around 5% ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder] students, but we have very few. Or you may say that dyslexia is a very common problem in Hong Kong, maybe up to over 10%, but again, in our list, very few. ... our number of cases is small, not much in quantity to report to EDB [Education Bureau], this is because we could not conduct the diagnosis, there is no appropriate assessment instrument ... I have two non-Chinese speaking students, they did the assessment in Chinese before coming to our school and were diagnosed as having dyslexia. They must be afraid of Chinese at that time. One of them is now in Secondary 3 and did the assessment again. Our educational psychologist reassessed him in English, and found that the result was different, much better.

Due to a lack of assessment tool in the appropriate language and expertise to make assessment for non-Chinese-speaking students, assessment would be delayed or not sufficiently accurate. The case of the Secondary 3 student from Ms Ko's school demonstrates an example of inaccurate assessment due to unfit language.

5.1.3 Lack of subsidized English special schools

Besides the medium of instruction in special educational training in ordinary schools, hospitals and NGOs, a lack of subsidized English special schools represents another institutional barrier. Special schools in Hong Kong accommodate students with severe or multiple disabilities. However, all of them provide education in Chinese.

Ahaan (M, 13), born in another Indian family, was attending a Chinese special school. His father complained about the absence of English-speaking subsidized special schools:

And then at this time we had difficulty to find schools because we don't know Chinese. The problem is we couldn't find any English school. English school is a big problem here in Hong Kong ... English schools are only available to the wealthy people who have a car or maybe ... We even tried to go through the EDB, we tried to apply through the EDB, even the private school we went and visited, they expected too much, like every year, they asked for around HK\$12,000 per year. And then they wanted us to pay that [extra] money. But they also expected that we should come from somewhere with a car and from the high-class residence ... So we are forced to put our kid in a Chinese-speaking school now.

Hong Kong education system has so far neglected the need and right of non-Chinese speaking students who are in need of special school accommodation. For students from better-off families, they may still have the chance to obtain education in non-subsidized English special schools. But for those coming from less well-off or poor families, they were forced to go to Chinese-speaking special schools, in which training would be less effective for them. As described by Ahaan's father, children like his son are "forgotten kids" in Hong Kong.

5.1.4 Lack of awareness education in ethnic minority communities

Except for two families, all others received no helpful information or resources from friends or relatives in the co-ethnic community in regard to how to tackle suspected developmental issues of their child at the beginning. Better-educated parents were able to look for more relevant information on the Internet on their own once they were alert of the atypical development or possible delay of development of their child. For instance, Jivan's mother told us how they informed themselves about autism: "Before, we were completely blank. So, we didn't know what this [autism] was, then we read everything over the Internet".

Other parents waited to see if the condition of their child would be improved at a later age. Some of them tried some other ways, including sending the child to their country of origin to live there, hoping that the monolingual environment would be helpful for their child's development, or to see a doctor in the hometown. Nevertheless, these parents finally brought their child back to Hong Kong because they wanted their child to receive education in Hong Kong. For example, Faneel's (M, 15, Nepalese) mother sent him back to Nepal when he was 3. The boy was found having difficulty to speak. Mother thought he might improve in his later years. After 3 years the boy's condition did not improve, and he was brought back to Hong Kong. With the help of a friend and a social worker, the boy went through diagnosis and was admitted to a special school for students with mild intellectual disability at the age of 7. Faneel's mother remembered the time when she was confused, without much understanding of the situation: "I didn't know what was happening to Faneel. There was no language [she did not speak Cantonese nor know sufficient English], no interpretation".

This state of confusion is probably related to the poor general knowledge on how to tackle atypical developmental issues and where to seek support. Due to a lack of public education, information about children's special educational needs in various ethnic minority communities has been insufficient. One social worker from a Parent Resource Centre revealed:

For ethnic Chinese parents in Hong Kong, I feel that there are more awareness campaigns in the past 5-10 years, more information on how to train children like those with autism, how to detect autistic behaviors, skills to employ at home.... In comparison with Chinese parents, we do not have similar campaigns for ethnic minorities.

Like in the case of Faneel, many children suspected to have developmental issues missed the assessment and training in pre-school years due to a lack of information and understanding in the ethnic minority communities. Existing literature informs us that early intervention and early support for parents have positive effects on children's school performance and social skills and it is more likely to keep children stay out of special education (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Slavin, 1996; Green, 2005). Delayed placement in special education creates more risks and difficulties in learning (Hibel & Jasper, 2012).

5.1.5 Social discrimination in the form of microaggression

Negative experiences due to social stigma and discrimination were reported. For example, Sunny's (M, 21, Pakistani) mother recalled an incident happened in his son's final year in a special school, a school for students with intellectual disability. Sunny banged heavily on the window of the school bus and was sent directly to a public hospital. Before his discharge, the

hospital doctor, with the help of an interpreter, told Sunny's mother that she should go "home": "you better go back to Pakistan, go back to your hometown, take him away."

Besides, Sunny had some negative experiences in the mosque. Since he had difficulty in reading and some "strange" behaviours, the teacher was reluctant to teach him reading the Holy Book. Other children also bullied Sunny by making fun of his pronunciation. They therefore stopped going to the mosque after one year.

These two incidents indicated that stigma and discrimination still exist against children with special educational needs in our society. It could be discrimination coming from inside the co-ethnic community, most probably due to a lack of understanding and acceptance. It could also be discrimination coming from professionals in the mainstream community. In this case, the blunt comment made by the hospital doctor suggests that discrimination against children with special educational needs can be understood as microaggression based on ethnicity or country of origin. Asking them to "go back" to Pakistan reveals that the hospital professional overlooked the fact that Sunny and his family were Hong Kong citizens and that Sunny had a right to receive education and medical care in Hong Kong.

5.1.6 Support from various institutions

Despite the institutional barriers identified above, our informants appreciated support they obtained from different professionals including teachers and social workers. For example, Rayan's (M, 5, Pakistani) family told us how helpful the social workers were:

I was afraid that I missed something important. So I seek help from social workers ... There are 3 social workers who helped us go through the whole process: one from SWD [Social Welfare Department], one from [the name of the Child Assessment Centre] and one from the kindergarten. The worker from SWD guided me step by step carefully and explained everything in detail ...they kept telling me when I came to the SWD,... when I didn't understand I called him, he told me all the procedures...and then after finding out he checked everything for me, he checked the whole folder, whole document, and then he arranged ...

Elaf (M, 11, Pakistani), now attending Primary 5 in a Chinese ordinary school, was diagnosed as having mild intellectual disability and inattention half a year ago. Before the diagnosis, the boy had not received any special educational support. The family felt very helpless all the way. The research team referred the family to a nearby Parent Resource Centre after our interview. Talking to a trained ethnic minority ambassador in the centre, Elaf's mother could, for the first time, release her negative emotions accumulated so far in her native language. She obtained information about her son's situation in a comfortable way in which she did not have to ask for help from interpreters or feel ashamed as if she had done something wrong. This was what she told us later: "She [the ambassador] told me ...I asked again because I did not understand. She explained ...It is comfortable".

These are positive experiences reported by our informants, in which they obtained support from the social workers and staff from the existing social welfare and educational institutions. A newly established service - Parents Resource Centre (PRC) with Specialised Ethnic Minority (EM) Unit – has been reported useful as a resource platform for South Asian parents. This service is subsidized by the Social Welfare Department and operated by various NGOs

(Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2020). Nevertheless, only very few of our parent and professional informants were informed of this service.

Besides, it is observed that related experiences vary among kindergartens and schools. It appears that teachers in schools and kindergartens with a larger proportion of non-Chinese-speaking students had more understanding on the needs of ethnic minorities and were more helpful. For example, although once feeling being forced to attend a Chinese-speaking special school, Ahaan's parents expressed their thankfulness for the present special school teachers who made good efforts to accommodate parents who did not speak and read Chinese. They were able to obtain school announcements in English and an extra WhatsApp group for English-speaking parents was set up for them to communicate with the school.

5.2 Co-ethnic Resources and Other Factors

Section 5.2 presents resources and other factors deriving from the co-ethnic communities. Family support and religion appear to be the obvious co-ethnic resources while different understanding about child development and special educational needs issues seem to limit their timely access to diagnosis and support services.

5.2.1 Family/ in-group support

Support from the family is an important resource. While some of our informants did not obtain much support, there were some parents who went through different stages of searching for appropriate education and support services relatively smoothly as they received abundant support from their family networks.

For example, Rayan's mother received a lot of support including advice and being accompanied by her sister-in-law to professional visits when she and her husband realized that their son had atypical development. Within 4 months, they obtained the full assessment for their son in a Child Assessment Centre. Rayan's mother revealed that this would be impossible "without the assistance of her sister-in-law" and other members of her extended family. Despite some negative experiences such as bullying in the kindergarten, in our visit to their home, Rayan appeared to be a happy child as he was much loved and accompanied by other children in the extended family.

For those with little family support, they found the caring work and help-seeking particularly hard. For example, Faneel's mother felt very stressful in taking care of his son from the very beginning because she was poorly informed about the relevant services and had no other person in her surroundings to give a helping hand. Even her husband was always absent from home. Even though she was referred by the social worker in his son's school to one of the Parent Resource Centres half a year ago, she could not join the parents' activities in the centre because she could not find someone to help take care of her son to free herself for attending these activities.

5.2.2 Religion

Religious belief is another important resource that supports the families in a spiritual way. Rayan comes from a Pakistani Muslim family. This was how his aunt explained how God guided them to support Rayan and his parents:

We as her [Rayan's mother] family, we never blame her ... we say why would this happen? It is God who decides all these, so we never complain and blame ... blame it's mommy or daddy's fault ... but we need to work hard, it's part of our job ... [God says] the right thing is we need to support him, to support our sister, we do not say something bad which would hurt her and her son, so we need to support her, where we could get support we would recommend her to get.

Ahaan belongs to the Indian Muslim community in Hong Kong. His father also talked about the power of religion: "my brothers and other family members accept him [son] as a special gift ... all good or bad come from God, all will be good at the end... because of this, we should give him even more love".

5.2.3 Different perception about children's education and development

As pointed out above in 5.1.4, insufficient community education on children's atypical developments plays a role in attributing to a lack of awareness and delay of assessment and intervention for ethnic minority families. At the same time, it is revealed that different cultural perceptions about children's development and education can be another factor in play. The social worker in one Parent Resource Centre revealed her experiences with some Nepalese families:

I think it is because, in Nepal ... we discuss about this with our Nepalese parents, here in Hong Kong, children usually start receiving education at the age of 2 or 3, attending school [kindergarten or nursery] ... but in Nepal, many of their children do not even speak properly at the age of 6 or 7...so this is about the country, about the education, all these frame the parents, how they perceive if their children are alright or not ... [it]is different from ours.

This argument about a different understanding may be supported by literature informing us about early childhood education in Nepal and Pakistan, which is not fully developed and not widely accepted as necessary (Bhandari, 2017; Rasheed et al., 2020). This may shed light on why some Pakistani and Nepalese parents in Hong Kong were not well aware of the provision of free kindergarten education in Hong Kong, preferred to send their children (such as Faneel) back to their country of origin before they reached the school age of 6. Or even when children were sent to kindergarten in Hong Kong, communication with the kindergarten teachers was poor or not followed up even when parents were made alert to possible developmental delay of their child. For example, Elaf, now 11 years old attending Primary 5 in an ordinary school, was diagnosed as having mild intellectual disability and inattention half a year ago. His mother was already informed by the teacher of Elaf's possible delay in the kindergarten, yet she and her husband were not able to take responsive action. Elaf's sister said:

my mom remembered the teacher had mentioned that, but she ... maybe she could not pick up ... because of language barrier ...there was even a psychologist telling us something ... Mom has this concept, she feels that with time he can improve and catch up ... He is the fourth son, all other three of us were a bit late at the beginning, many of us too [in the community], but were later OK, we could catch up.

In this case, while communication (including the language used and the way the message was delivered by the educational professionals) was certainly a factor, the different understanding of child development and education, as based on either the experiences in the country of origin

or those in the co-ethnic communities in Hong Kong – indicates another factor limiting their timely assessment and intervention.

5.2.4 Co-ethnic belief regarding special educational needs

It appears that there is a popular belief in the South Asian ethnic minority communities: While many of our informants experienced a time confused with the question whether their child's atypical development was caused by their conditions as ethnic minorities living in a multilingual environment (Cantonese, English and their native language) or something else, they then quickly adopted the thought that with time and with a better linguistic environment their child might outgrow these atypical or slower developments, particularly speech delay. They reported that they always heard stories about a child who had "speech delay" at an early age but became normal later on. They believed the seeming "delay" at the beginning was caused by the multilingual environment in Hong Kong. Therefore, many of them, as in the case of Faneel illustrated above, was sent by their parents to their country of origin with the hope that a monolingual environment could improve their ability. Such belief was particularly strong among some elderly people who had influence on their younger generation. This belief had almost become a myth. For example, Sunny was sent by his parents to their village in Pakistan because his grandmother insisted that the village could provide an environment to "focus on one language" that was believed to be beneficial for his development.

Besides, while some of the children were diagnosed with ASD or intellectual disability, parents in the interviews tended to tell only about the speech delay. This could be due to their lack of comprehensive understanding of ASD and intellectual disability. Or it is because of the prevalent belief that speech delay could be outgrown in later years. By saying this, it seems that level of "disability" could be minimized as autism and intellectual disability are still terms with very limited general understanding in the South Asian communities and casted with strong social stigma and shame (Bhardwaj, Forrester-Jones & Murphy, 2017).

As such, it seems that many of our informants tended to mistake atypical developmental issues for adaptation difficulties encountered by a migrant/ethnic minority child in Hong Kong. For instance, when a 3-year-old boy has very limited interaction with other children, speaks little and plays on his own, are these autistic features or protective behaviors invoked by the unfriendly environment the child experienced in kindergarten and playground as someone with a different outlook and speaks just little Cantonese? In fact, the differences are not at all easy to identify. But the sensitivity to detect possible developmental delay and the ability to seek information and assistance should be established as part of the general knowledge and capability in our society, for both Chinese and non-Chinese populations.

5.3 Intersectional Differences

Existing studies report about challenges faced by students with special educational needs and their families in Hong Kong that include social stigmatization, deprivation of opportunity, and pressure to keep academic performance (Mak & Kwok, 2010; Chan et al., 2017; Kwok & Kwok, 2020). Our findings reveal that while South Asian students and their families shared some of these common challenges, they were confronted by more institutional barriers including lack of sufficient support in the special educational system and race-based social discrimination. This suggests that while disability may have disadvantages in our society, its interplay with country of origin, ethnicity and language may further worsen the disadvantaged status of these students, leading to multiple deprivation of equal education opportunities.

From the perspective of equal education opportunities, while South Asian students with special educational needs are generally more deprived than the local Chinese students with special educational needs, there are differences within the South Asian communities as well.

Socioeconomic status (SES) of the parents, which can be reflected from household income, parents' education and occupation, plays a role in shaping the access to learning opportunities and support services. Parents with higher SES did not only have relatively more financial resources to pay for some private training (such as most of the Indian families in our sample), but also mastered the methods and have confidence to seek help from NGOs and relevant information from internet. Even with insufficient financial resources, better educated parents/relatives seemed to be more alert and ready to take responsive action at an earlier stage. Examples are the informant families who made efforts to seek early intervention from various channels (such as Milan's and Rayan's families in our sample).

Cultural beliefs or perceptions represent another factor shaping the coping methods adopted by the South Asian families. First, it is the religious belief. Our findings revealed that Muslim informants with strong extended family support highlighted the positive role of religion that helped them to accept their child as he/she was because he/she was a gift from God (such as the families of Rayan, Raim and Ahaan). Scholars (Jegatheesan et al., 2010) suggest that this connection may be explained by the power of Islamic belief that strongly connects family members and the child and helps reducing initial superstitious beliefs and questioning why they had a child with a disability. This strong belief allowed them to offer continuous love and care to their child, and also to obtain understanding and support from the extended family. Comparing to families that did not specifically articulate the positive role of religion, these families appeared to have built up better familial strength to assist them overcome difficult times.

Another co-ethnic factor is the different perceptions about child development, education and special educational needs. As revealed above, some informants took reference from their country of origin or that from their co-ethnic communities to understand what typical and atypical child developments are. They believed that atypical developments were caused by multilingual environment in Hong Kong. Such perception was strongly related to their migration context (understanding of child development in the country of origin and experiences in the co-ethnic community in Hong Kong) and could become a factor attributing to delayed assessment and intervention.

As such, these multiple factors intersected to condition how South Asian students and families could have better or less access to special educational opportunities and relevant support services.

6 Recommendations

The exercise of disability rights requires the Hong Kong government to uphold the principles of equality, prevent discrimination of rights based on disability, and provide institutional support inside and outside the government, including law reforms and policy changes in industry, education and empowerment of individuals and communities to advocate for disability rights (Shang et al., 2011; Harpur, 2012; Katsui et al., 2016). Based on the above findings, this study recommends the following to eliminate institutional and cultural barriers for achieving equal opportunity in the special educational needs context and a more disability-inclusive

society in the long run. These recommendations require the concerted efforts of relevant authorities and institutions including the Education Bureau, the Social Welfare Department as well as the Hospital Authority.

6.1 Language use and cultural sensitivity

- Language seems to be one of the crucial issues. In the existing special educational system, Cantonese is the language used on most occasions including information sessions, assessment and training (including various therapies). However, Cantonese is not the first language or the language spoken at home for all South Asian students with special educational needs. Using a “foreign” language in assessment and then in training could lead to inaccuracy in assessment, ineffective training or simply denial of these children and their parents to go for assessment and the subsequent support services. While Indian students and parents prefer English as it is their daily language, neither Cantonese nor English can serve the same function for most students and parents with Pakistani or Nepali origins. Nevertheless, it is revealed in this study that it is easier for most South Asian students and parents to master English than Cantonese.
- Therefore, this study suggests that the use of English should be enhanced in subsidized special educational training including those working in hospitals, schools, and subsidized NGO services such as Special Child Care Centre. The training includes special educational training, speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.
- Although English assessment tools have been introduced for special educational needs assessment, they should be more broadly used in subsidized services such as public hospitals and Child Assessment Centre. Simultaneous interpretation support should be offered if ethnic minority children or parents have difficulty in understanding the assessment process.
- Financial support should be offered for ethnic minority students and families to acquire private special educational training in English if subsidized English training is insufficient or unavailable.
- There should be subsidized special schools using English as the medium of instruction. At present, there is only one private English special school and there are some private bilingual training centers, yet all request tuition fee which is unaffordable for the average ethnic minority families in Hong Kong.
- Enhancement of cultural sensitivity of various professionals working in the special educational needs system is important on top of more use of English. This includes understanding of South Asian students’ cultural backgrounds and some specific skills to communicate with them. This is, for example, particularly critical when using English to communicate with students whose daily or native language is neither English nor Cantonese. For instance, the commonly used language in Pakistan, Urdu, is written from right to left, the opposite direction to English and Chinese. Many new immigrant children from Pakistan are confused at the beginning of the school education in Hong Kong. Professionals in special education services should have an understanding of this when conducting assessment and training.

6.2 Community education and campaigns

- Education on general understanding of special educational needs is necessary for South Asian ethnic minority communities. Content can include general information about different types of special educational needs, educational pathways of students with special educational needs in Hong Kong, relevant resources in healthcare, education as well as social services, parenting skills regarding how to identify atypical development at an early age and raising a child with special educational needs.
- Community education should also be conducted on ethnic minorities' rights to special education and the related healthcare and support services. Ethnic minority parents should be encouraged to understand that having a child with special educational needs is not their faults and they should not bear the burden of shame. They have the right to talk about it and the right to ask for equal education opportunities.
- Community education should be conducted in individual ethnic minority communities and in cooperation with ethnic minority associations, religious organizations such as mosques and temples. Besides, educational sessions should be conducted with cultural sensitivity and the help of cultural facilitators who not merely translate the language, but also work as a bridge between different cultural understandings. Public funding should be offered to encourage such educational activities.
- Community education should include support to connect South Asian parents with children with special needs to the parent mutual help groups in the wider society.

6.3 Awareness education

- Awareness education on the right to education of ethnic minorities' targeted at the general public in Hong Kong is significant. This is to enhance the awareness that ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are entitled to their rights to special education like all other Hong Kong citizens, including their rights to access to appropriate assessment, appropriate training and support services. Equal opportunity to education and social integration of ethnic minorities should be perceived as essential cornerstones of an inclusive multicultural society. With awareness education, social stigma and discrimination may be eliminated.
- First, such awareness education can be incorporated in the multicultural education in schools for all children and youth living in Hong Kong.
- Second, awareness education should target at the various professionals in the special educational needs system. As shown in our findings, some medical professionals do not acknowledge the rights of ethnic minority children. They overlook the fact that ethnic minority children with special educational needs and their families are entitled to obtain medical care and special education in Hong Kong, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, educational level and family income.

6.4 Information flow

- Information flow of existing services should be improved. Efforts should be made by the authorities to proactively channel relevant information to the ethnic minority communities.
- For example, the Social Welfare Department should proactively spread the information about Parents Resource Centre (PRC) with Specialised Ethnic Minority (EM) Unit and the Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in Kindergartens / Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres both in the ethnic minority communities as well as in the relevant service units.

Appendix I Informant Profile

Informant child's name	Ethnic Origin	Parents' education	Monthly household income in HKD/ number of person in household	Gender of child	Age of child	Diagnosis	Education and training
Rayan	Pakistani	M Primary F Secondary	30-40 K/4	M	5	Borderline cognitive ability, weak motor skills	Kindergarten; waiting for referral for special educational training
Sunny	Pakistani	M Primary F Secondary	20-30 K/5	M	21	Intellectual disability, speech delay	Just finished special school; no more training
Raim	Pakistani	M Secondary F Secondary	20-30 K/4	F	10	Borderline intellectual disability	Primary 4; special training at school
Gulsan	Pakistani	M --- F Primary	20-30 K/5	F	14	Intellectual disability, speech delay	Primary 6 (Islamic school); special arrangement at school
Elaf	Pakistani	M Primary F Primary	20 K/6	M	11	Borderline intelligence, inattention	Primary 5; waiting for the school for referral of special educational training
Tarfaan	Pakistani	M Primary F Primary	30-40 K/6	M	7	Intellectual disability	Special school
Faneel	Nepalese	M Secondary F Secondary	30 K/4	M	15	Intellectual disability	Special school
Chantin	Nepalese	M Bachelor F Secondary	20-30 K/4	F	5	Not yet (suspected ASD; waiting for assessment)	Kindergarten
Milan	Nepalese	M Bachelor F Primary	20-30 K/3	M	5	Attention deficit	Kindergarten; speech and occupational therapies from NGOs
Yadav	Nepalese	M Bachelor F Secondary	20-30 K/4	M	10	Hearing impairment, speech delay	Primary 4; speech therapy
Binsa	Nepalese	M Secondary F Secondary	20 K/4	F	11	ASD	Special school
Jivan	Indian	M Bachelor F Postgraduate	50 K/4	M	8	ASD, borderline intelligence	Primary 2; earlier intensive training including speech therapy
Hamsika	Indian	M Bachelor F Postgraduate	50 K/5	F	6	ASD	Special child care centre
Arnav	Indian	M Diploma F Bachelor	70 K/6	M	7	ASD, speech delay	Special school
Ahaan	Indian	M Bachelor F Bachelor	30 K/4	M	13	Intellectual disability	Special school

Appendix II

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Diagnosis

1. Please share when and how did you realize that your child has atypical development or learning difficulties?
2. Why did you decide to go for diagnosis? Was it a difficult decision?
3. How was the diagnosis process?
4. Are language and finance critical issues during the diagnosis?

Caring and education practice

5. Please describe your daily caring and education practice. What do you do to take care of your child's learning difficulties?
6. How is the division of labor at home?
7. How did you learn to do or request the above-described trainings/services?
8. What is the most difficult part for you in taking care of your child?
9. What do you wish for your child or want him/her to be?
10. Has the outbreak of COVID-19 made the situation more difficult?

Support systems

11. Do other members of the family understand the learning difficulties? Are other members of the family supportive?
12. How do people usually perceive children with xxx (the name of the specific learning difficulty) in your community?
13. Does/did your child encounter discrimination or bullying in school because of her/his learning difficulty?
14. Is the school supportive? Is it difficult to ask for special accommodation for your child?
15. Is language an issue for you to obtain external support?
16. Do you share your experiences with other parents in similar situation? How?

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