Received: 9 September 2018 | Revised: 20 February 2019 | Accepted: 25 March 2019

DOI: 10.1111/ap.12402

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Australian Psychologist WILEY

# Gender norms in the Chinese community in Melbourne, Australia: Family and community roles

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**Funding information**
Carrington Health; Manningham Community Health Service

**Abstract**

**Objective:** The Chinese community in the Eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne forms one of the largest migrant communities in Victoria, yet the factors that influence their social, family, and work life are not clear. An understanding of the cultural underpinnings of the family and social dynamics will enable health service providers in the region to develop culturally appropriate strategies for promoting gender equity. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to explore the impact of gender norms on the family, employment, and social life of the Chinese community.

**Method:** Four focus groups with men and women (older and younger) of the community were conducted in Mandarin and/or Cantonese. The data was transcribed and thematic analysis of the data was undertaken.

**Results:** There are differences in the gender norms between the Chinese men and women with the men focusing on the family-oriented role of women and their own economic contribution to the family, and the women emphasising their homemaker-provider role within the family and the impact of family responsibilities on their career advancement. The influence of Australian laws on their marital relationships was also explored.

**Conclusions:** The findings suggest that health service providers could play an advanced role in improving the gender parity between members of the Chinese community by developing culturally relevant programs. Future research should explore the factors that influence the drivers of gender equity among culturally diverse communities.

**KEYWORDS**

Chinese community, family, family violence, gender norms, work

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In communities across the world, culture prescribes women's and men's behaviour in all aspects of life. Gender roles are pervasive and entrenched within societies and influence roles throughout the lifespan including reproduction, household duties, childcare, employment, participation in the community, and leadership. Women have traditionally been viewed as the inferior gender, and social, political, and economic inequalities have developed between women and men across most societies (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2017).

Gender inequality has implications for the causes, consequences, and management of disease and ill health (WHO, 2017). The VicHealth framework (VicHealth, 2004a) for preventing violence against women highlights that gender

  

roles and identities; distribution of power and relations; and social norms about violence against women have a strong association with the perpetration of violence against women. Indeed, gender inequality is the main underlying cause of violence against women and violence is the main contributor to ill health and premature death in Victorian women aged 15–44 years (VicHealth, 2004b).

These findings highlight the promotion of gender equality as a significant public health priority. The WHO (2017) describes gender equality as the provision of opportunities and allocation of resources and benefits or access to services without discriminating on the basis of a person's sex. Gender equity refers to the process by which gender equality can be achieved through a fair and just distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men; "the concept recognises that women and men have different needs and power, and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between the sexes" (WHO, 2017, para 4).

### WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC

1. Gender norms vary according to the culture and society in which women and men live
2. Attitudes to gender roles have become egalitarian in Western countries mainly as a result of legislative changes and opportunities for women to become educated and employed
3. Cultural norms influence women's and men's gender roles in the Chinese community

### WHAT THIS PAPER ADDS

1. Within the Chinese community, the gender roles of women and men in their family and community life are influenced by their cultural norms and values even after migration to Australia
2. Women from the Chinese community have limited community roles; dissemination of legal information is necessary to protect the women
3. Men from the Chinese community mainly believed in their role in financial contribution; rigid gender stereotypes and roles need to be addressed through health and community service programs

## 2 | GENDER NORMS

Gender norms are the standards and expectations of society to which women and men should conform (United Nations, 2016). They are defined by the culture of that society and adherence to them is achieved "through various mechanisms of social control, including social stigma and positive social sanctioning" (Kirch, 2008, p. 472). This is supported by Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) conceptualisation that gender does not only refer to the identity or a role within the family but an "institutionalised system of social practices" (p. 510) and that gender is associated with cultural beliefs, patterns of behaviour and organisational practices that operate at the individual and interactional levels. In conceptualising gender as a system, they emphasise that cultural beliefs and social relational contexts play a prime role in enacting gender differences and inequality in a society (see Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

In examining gender norms among men and women in 20 countries, the World Bank Report (Boudet, Petesch, Turk, & Thumala, 2013) revealed that traits associated with "good wives," "good husbands," "good girls," and "good boys" are strikingly similar across countries and have remained unchanged compared to previous generations. Boudet et al. (2013) also found that the traditional responsibilities had remained largely unchanged across the 20 countries with participants describing a good husband as one who held the highest household authority, made decisions and was a good provider. Similar to widely held notions, participants regarded a good wife as one who was obedient, caring, and respectful to the husband; and is responsible for the household work, and care of other family members (Boudet et al., 2013). The findings showed four main dimensions (presented from greatest to least importance) that determined a good wife or husband: domestic responsibilities; attitudes or behaviours; economic roles; and marital relations. These roles seem to be similar to the descriptions of gender roles based on "hegemonic beliefs" ascertained by Ridgeway and Correll (2004). According to these beliefs, men and women are characterised by a narrow set of abstract roles and the strength of the beliefs determines how they are enacted in a particular culture.

In Australia, attitudes towards gender roles appear to have changed in some respects and not in others. For example, Evans and Kelley (2002) in their comparison of Australians' attitudes between 1984 and 2001, found that while a greater proportion (82%) of Australians agreed with women's engagement with employment in 2001 compared to 1984 (62%), there was not much difference in their attitudes towards women devoting most of their time to family roles (49% in 2001 compared to 48% in 1984). Across the Western world, people seem to have developed more

egalitarian attitudes over time (e.g., Brewster & Padavic, 2000). The credit for attitudinal shifts lies with legislative changes and an increasing opportunity for women to become educated and participate in paid employment (van Egmond, Baxter, Buchler, & Western, 2010). However, there is limited research on the shift in attitude towards gender roles in the non-Western world although women in such countries have also had an increasing opportunity to take part in education.

## 3 | GENDER NORMS IN THE CHINESE SOCIETY

While an examination of gender roles in range of cultures is necessary, this study focuses on the Chinese community. Historically, Confucianism shaped Chinese values and behaviours (Hinsbergh, 2015). The core of Confucianism is humanistic with a particular emphasis on the importance of the family and social harmony (Juergensmeyer, 2005). According to Chuang and Su (2009), social harmony, differences in authority between men and women, and sacrificing individual needs along with family are historically central to the Asian culture. The four virtues for Chinese women are: to be aware of her social status; behave according to the appropriate social norms; speak softly and politely; and have a humble manner (Lee, 2000). Furthermore, the traditional model for a Chinese woman is a virtuous wife, a good mother, and a good daughter-in-law, who shows respect to her husband's parents (Leung, 2003).

Gender relations and family structures have undergone major change in China throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, with women's socio-economic status improving and reaching parity on some levels. In the 1960s, Chinese leader Mao Zedong propositioned that "women can hold up half the sky," inspiring women to work alongside men and increased the number of women working in many professional fields. However, he also believed that population growth empowered the country, and families were encouraged to have as many children as possible. As a result, life expectancy and population dramatically increased, which became a setback for the whole country (Mann, 1992). To counter this, the one-child policy was introduced in 1978 (Zhu, Lu, & Hesketh, 2009) and later abolished in 2015. This policy which restricted most families from having more than one child created a gender imbalance where families favoured boys over girls. It led to disproportionate abortion of female foetuses, resulting in more boys being born (Lofstedt, Shusheng, & Johansson, 2004) and reinforcing the value of male children in the Chinese culture.

Doucet (2006) outlines that structural inequality in the labour market and gender ideology guarantees that Chinese women are still responsible for the majority of work in the home, particularly caring for children. Similarly, Choi and Chen (2006) reiterate that housework is not part of Chinese men's traditional role and that Chinese women perceive higher family demands. However, work demands for women are not any lower and due to the past one-child per family policy, women do not have siblings to help them. Therefore, women find it difficult to satisfy the traditional expectations to spend more time at home than at work. In addition, women continue to bear the responsibility of taking care of their elderly relatives. According to Yi and Chien (2002), Chinese women are willing to sacrifice their professional career for the sake of their families.

Traditional Chinese family values have gradually been replaced by Western family values and more egalitarian gender roles have replaced the traditional gender roles in Chinese marriage. Kulik (2002) points out that individuals whose parents are well educated and have a high socio-economic status tend to express more egalitarian gender role views and pass them onto their children. However, according to Zhou (2006), men feel less comfortable when the stereotypical husband–wife roles and status quo is reversed, especially in relation to income.

## 4 | GENDER ROLES AND IMMIGRATION

With immigration, there are changes to "traditional Chinese values." The research suggests that changes in the family structure, gender roles and gender relations as a result of immigration can lead to conflicts in marital relationships. Chan and Ng (2013) emphasise the lack of social support and that "cross-pressures of ethnic and mainstream cultures make learning gender roles and identity a complex process" (p. 35). Zhou (2006) found that immigrants needed to redefine their cultural values, social norms, and behaviours. Indeed, the majority of Chinese immigrant parents in a study by Qin (2009) expressed challenges adapting to their new life after migration in terms of economic stress, particularly among fathers, and this led to a decreasing physical and psychological presence of parents in their children's lives. The shift in the control of resources following migration was related to increased conflict among couples according to Zhang, Smith, Swisher, Fu, and Fogarty (2011). Yu (2006) also found that many women have altered their notions of gender egalitarianism and developed varied gender ideologies after immigration.

## 5 | THE PRESENT STUDY

Previous studies were conducted mainly in Canada and the United States; the extant literature did not reveal any peer-

reviewed studies about gender norms of Chinese immigrants in Australia. This limitation suggests that further research regarding gender norms and their effect on gender equality in the large Chinese migrant community in Australia is required. Of the 526,000 China-born people in Australia, 160,652 of them live in Victoria (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) and form the largest overseas-born community in the eastern municipalities of Whitehorse (29.9%), Monash (25.5%), and Manningham (23.4%) in Melbourne (State of Victoria, 2016). To gain a comprehensive understanding of gender norms and how these are implicated in gender equality, research needs to include a full representation of Chinese immigrants, male and female, of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. It is necessary to gain insight into the impact of employment and educational qualifications on migrants' attitudes to gender roles. While previous Australian research (Evans & Kelley, 2002) has examined the attitudinal shifts over time as a result of women's increased participation in employment and education, little is known about attitudes to gender roles in migrant communities. Therefore, the objectives of the present study were to examine: (a) gender norms within the Chinese community in Melbourne, (b) the role of immigration, employment, and educational qualifications on gender norms, and, (c) the implications of gender norms on gender equality.

# 6 | METHOD

## 6.1 | Design

A qualitative methodology was used to examine the notions of gender norms among men and women in the Chinese community within Manningham and Whitehorse municipalities of Melbourne, Australia. An interview protocol was developed to explore attitudes to the workplace, family, community, and leadership roles. Focus group discussions were conducted in groups divided by age and gender. Thus in all, there were four group discussions held: (2×Gender; 2×Younger/Older age groups).

## 6.2 | Participants

Men and women from the Chinese community in the Eastern Metropolitan region of Melbourne, Australia were recruited to participate in the study. They were recruited from a range of organisations including community groups, health service providers, senior citizens groups, play groups, libraries, and community events using promotional flyers displayed in Chinese and English. They were also recruited electronically via social media sites such as FaceBook, Twitter and a Chinese social media site, WeChat, as well as local council and health service websites. Thirty-seven participants who spoke Cantonese, Mandarin, or English voluntarily took part in the study. Of the 37 participants, there were 20 males and 17 females. Those in the "Younger Age" focus groups (male = 10; female = 10) were in the age range of 18–40 years and those in the "Older Age" focus groups (male = 10; female = 7) were between 41–80 years. Participants needed to be first or second-generation migrants in that they were born overseas in China or another country which has a large population of Chinese people or were born to parents of Chinese origin. Most participants (89%) in both the age groups were born in China and had moved to Australia; a small proportion of them (11%) had been born in Malaysia and had then migrated to Australia. Only adults aged 18 years and over were included as the notions of gender norms and gender equity would be better developed and advanced among adults compared to children and adolescents.

Participants were reimbursed with a $25 gift voucher for the time and travel costs associated with their participation. Childcare options were also made available for some of the focus groups to enable families with children to participate in the study.

## 6.3 | Materials

A focus group interview protocol was used to examine participants' views on the role of men and women in their families, workplaces, and communities. The protocol was developed based on issues that influence people's gender norms as identified in the literature. The questions appraised culturally relevant gender norms and were translated into Chinese.

## 6.4 | Procedure

Ethics approval to conduct the project was obtained from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants attended an age (18–40 years or 41+ years) and gender-appropriate focus group session. They were informed about the aims of the study and provided with the opportunity to clarify any aspect of the study; they were then asked to sign a consent form available in Chinese and English to indicate their willingness to partake in the study. They were also provided with a Withdrawal of Consent form if they wished to discontinue their participation from the study. A range of measures were adopted to ensure full confidentiality and so that local health service providers would not have access to the names of participants.

The focus group sessions were conducted by a researcher who spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin; there was also a note-taker well-versed in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English who took notes in Chinese. No audio or video recording of the discussions were made to protect the identity and

anonymity of participants. A registered psychologist was present to oversee all the sessions.

Participants could choose their level of response to any question. No identifying information was recorded in the notes; rather, people's responses were recorded anonymously. Their views were recorded verbatim and each session lasted an average of 2 hr. At the conclusion of the session, participants were provided with information about local health services along with the contact details of organisations that provide relationship support. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss any individual matters for which they required clarification with the psychologist.

Upon completion of the focus group discussions, the data was translated to English. It was then transcribed and thematic analyses conducted separately for the Chinese men and women. The data from the two age groups were combined for each gender.

## 7 | RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the data was conducted for all focus groups. Thematic analysis is a method of qualitative data analysis that is independent of theory and epistemology and the findings can be applied across a range of relevant theories; therefore, because of the theoretical freedom it provides, this method of analysis can be used to provide a rich, detailed, and complex explanation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Thus, the analysis included identifying, analysing, and reporting themes from the data. The findings are explained in the context of the relevant literature in the Section 8.

The data is presented independently for Chinese women and men. The stages of thematic analysis included: (a) an identification of broad themes across the entire dataset, and (b) a further refinement within each cultural group and gender. The themes have been derived using an inductive approach wherein the themes identified are strongly linked to the data (Patton 1990); this approach of thematic analysis is thus data-driven. Further, a recursive process of analysis is used where the data was read and re-read throughout the stages to familiarise ourselves with the data and then to generate codes and arrive at themes.

The findings from the analysis of themes indicate that common gender norms exist within the groups regardless of gender or age. The female groups produced one overarching theme pertaining to the *homemaker-provider role of women*, while the male groups produced two overarching themes: *family-orientated role of women* and the *economic role of men.* The theme of *new legal paradigms* was also identified among older Chinese men. Sub-themes were further derived within each gender group.

The findings in the following sections are presented in themes according to gender in the following order: (a) Chinese women, (b) Chinese men. The age of the participants is highlighted within the theme's accompanying narrative when a difference in age group was distinct. Young males (YM) and young females (YF) denote 18–40 years, while older males (OM) and older females (OF) denote 41 years and above. Quotes are italicised; these serve to illustrate examples of the themes.

### 7.1 | Chinese women

**Theme 1** Homemaker-provider Role of Women: most women described multiple professional and domestic roles they were expected to undertake. They explained how they concurrently managed household and outside duties while also caring for their children, with little help from their husband. Although they preferred such responsibilities to be shared by both partners, they indicated that women did most of the work and hence experienced greater stress.

> *I still had to go to work – lecture and mark assignments. … Carrying a big belly, give birth and breast feed and all the duties waiting at home.* (OF)

> *It is tough to be a Chinese woman. I brought my breastfeeding child with me to work. I put [him/her] in childcare room. … Our working hours were very long. …We had to work on Sundays. …That's why it is very tough to be a Chinese woman: minding the household duties, the children. My husband focuses on his job more….* (OF)

> *I think it is best that all responsibilities are shared. But in actual fact, women do most of the housework. That's why women endure more stress.* (YF)

> *Before we were married, he cooks most of the time and I washed the clothes. After we got married, I do all the housework….* (YF)

**Theme 1a** Factors affecting Career Advancement. A few women lamented that reproduction affects women's ability to advance in their professional career. They reiterated that having children disadvantaged them in maintaining and progressing in their careers mainly because of the lack of support from their husband.

*Having kids is a disadvantage.* (YF)

*Equality amongst men and women has not yet been achieved. If I want to have kids, I probably won't get a promotion from my company.* (YF)

*Under this circumstance, it was very hard to go to work. Children in primary school also need their parents at home. I needed to communicate with my husband, for the education of our children at home and for responsibility of housework. If I have the chance, I would still work.* (OF)

**Theme 1b** Caregiving Responsibilities. Although the women needed to abandon their careers, they believed it was necessary to care for their young children and therefore prioritised children over their career and re-established their career when their children were older.

*Kids need their mothers to be with them. The child's development is an important factor to consider.* (YF)

*Kids would need someone to be with them in their first two years. When they grow older, you may go out and work.* (YF)

*I have no other option than to take care of my children at home. But I'm still very willing and devoted to the family. Especially when the children are young and need a lot of care and mentoring.* (OF)

*There should be different focuses for men and women, especially at certain times. When a family has a child, when the child is still a toddler, the female looks after the child and it is her job. After that period she may have her own career.* (OF)

**Theme 2** Social Status and Integration: Overwhelmingly, women placed significant importance on professional work outside the home. Employment represented independence and social integration, which collectively gave women social dignity. They reiterated the importance of maintaining their capacity to earn and make a financial contribution to the household. This also led to them gaining respect from society and being a valuable member of it.

*In the past my mother-in-law looked after my child and I go to work. Otherwise, I feel that I don't have face.* (OF)

*When you don't have a job, people would think you are not independent.* (YF)

*If you don't work, you don't have a source of income. You are not independent and you have no dignity.* (YF)

*Having job means independence. Very reassuring and delightful. It is a symbol of independence. … As a woman with a career, you have more social status.* (OF)

*I really respect Chinese women. They do the same things a man can. … They sacrifice a lot for the sake of their family. … If there is a chance, I will go back to work… [so that I] won't become detached from the society.* (OF)

**Theme 3** Collective Gender Roles: This theme was elicited by older and younger women who believed that both men and women needed to make a financial contribution for the family's wellbeing. There were some differences in such views between older and younger women as outlined below.

The older women predominantly maintained that financial responsibilities should be shared and not segregated by gender (Shared Financial Responsibilities). They indicated that it was necessary for both partners to contribute financially to support the family and especially in times of hardship.

*If both [husband and wife] are working, they strive together for their finances in the family.*

*Both have the responsibility to provide financial input to the family.*

*In the past, both my husband and I didn't earn a lot as University teachers. We could only raise our only daughter. …it was very tough.*

*If there's ever a problem [financially], we both need to support the family.*

The younger Chinese women attributed shared financial responsibility to modern financial pressures (Modern Financial Pressures). They explained the expectations from

everyone including the parents of both partners for women to also be financial contributors. Because they needed to also support their older parents, they needed to ensure they worked and earned enough and thought that it was a "luxury" to be a full-time housewife in the modern-day world.

> *Women are expected to do a lot more nowadays. It's not just the man who needs to earn money, even the men's parents would expect the women to have some financial and domestic abilities.*

> *It is a luxury to be a full-time housewife. The education for men and women is the same. Therefore, there's equality amongst men and women.*

> *I think men should feed the family… the stress levels are higher nowadays… therefore, the woman has to share his responsibilities.*

**Theme 4** Migration and Gendered Protection: A few women described the Australian law as providing greater protection for women than their country of origin. They expressed the freedom women had with regard to marriage and the consequences for being forced into marriage, an issue that was common in China. They also indicated how the Australian legal system protects women against family violence and the public awareness regarding the issue.

> *I heard forced marriage is illegal here [in Australia]. You will have to pay a fine for that. But in China, it is so common.* (YF)

> *There is no stress of being forced to marry here.* (YF)

> *I heard about a woman who was experiencing domestic violence and ran away from home. The government would provide her with shelter and look after her living.* (OF)

> *Women are much more protected in terms of domestic violence. Lots of media made an appeal to protect women.* (OF)

**Theme 4a** Accessibility. In spite of being aware of a better legal system in Australia compared to China, many younger women expressed concerns about the accessibility of such laws and protective services. They lamented about the lack of knowledge among women regarding laws and services to protect and assist them in times of family violence.

> *I have a friend, her English is not good. Her husband locks her up at home. … The knowledge of the law hasn't been popularised.*

> *I don't know the details of the laws.*

> *Most who are mistreated are the ones who don't know how to use the Internet and are not good in English. They don't even know there's a community organisation out there.*

## 7.2 | Chinese men

**Theme 1** Family orientated role of women: Men differentiated skills and abilities according to sex. Women's aptitudes were described as interpersonally facilitative and nurturing; thus attributing the responsibility of childcare and domestic work to them. Men believed that women are more efficient in caring for children and that therefore there was no need for a discussion about gender equality in this aspect. Men also indicated that they should bear the economic responsibility of the household because of the greater burden on women in caring for the children.

> *Women have better social skills, communication skills, and are more patient. Their techniques are better than men.* (OM)

> *Women are born to be meticulous. They are more suited for taking care of children.* (OM)

> *Women may be better at this [taking care of children]. It is about efficiency. Whoever does it better should do it. … It's not because they want to be unequal; it is the reality that creates the inequality.* (YM)

> *Who contributes more to the kids in the family? Of course, the mother … men should contribute more [in terms of money].* (YM)

**Theme 2** Economic role of men: the majority of men were employed or had a history of professional employment prior to retirement.

**Theme 2a** Sex-differentiated traits and social behaviour: Most Chinese men perceived male-dominated occupations to be reflective of their abilities and roles in society. They indicated that they should play a greater role in employment because of their greater physical capabilities and that certain jobs (such as finance and accounting) are more suitable as a woman's profession while others such as leading the society are best suited to men.

> *Men are physically stronger. Men should work more. They are more capable of taking up responsibilities than women.* (OM)

> *Men can look at the bigger picture, while women are more likely to be in charge of specific aspects, such as finance or accounting. Most presidents in service are men.* (OM)

> *There are still more men who work in politics than women. In terms of what they want, women want stability; men want change. Men will come out and strive for benefits.* (YM)

> *In the Chinese community, men are the leaders; they are more likely to lead and explore outwards.* (YM)

Greater financial contribution. The younger men emphasised that they earned more than their female partner. They explained their employment trajectory after obtaining postgraduate qualifications.

> *I started working here in 2009, before that I worked as a professional manager in a large-scale company. I now conduct my own business…* (YM)

> *I've been working in a property management company for two years… before that, I went to high school and university….* (YM)

The political revolution and historical hardship. The older Chinese men described the influence of the political revolution (i.e., the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966 under the leadership of Mao Zedong) in China and the personal hardships they experienced prior to migration. They indicated that both husband and wife were required to support their family by gaining employment as they could not have subsisted on a single person's income. They explained that after the country's change in political and cultural ideologies, women felt more economically liberated and therefore believed it was their right to work; this changed women's professional and economic role in society. They also reflected on the hardships of finding employment, especially that equivalent to their skills and qualifications upon migration to Australia and how they overcame the challenges by undertaking any position they were able to gain.

> *After 1949, a single income family could not have survived. …Therefore, both [husband and wife] must go to work.* (OM)

> *The man may feel that he has no status in the family [if he does not work]. After liberation… there was a change in ideologies…in a good way. Women won't be stood against [for her career pursuits].* (OM)

> *After you came to Australia, you have to rely on yourself. …I was a University teacher. After I came here, I worked in labour for a computer company and factory. It was very hard to find a job 20 years ago.* (OM)

**Theme 3** Collective Gender Roles. This theme was elicited by the younger men who felt that domestic chores and parenting duties should be shared and not segregated by gender. They believed in the similar capability of both men and women to undertake different tasks.

> *Raising children is not just the responsibility of the mother. The man should support the wife too.*

> *…Besides the power to give birth to a child, there's no specific difference in what a man or a woman can do.*

> *I think both should work hard, and not rely solely on one person.*

> *I have kids already. My wife has always been working. In our everyday life, I take care of the kids. I am a freelancer worker…It depends on the realistic situation of the family.*

> *At my home, I cook and wash the dishes. My wife takes care of the cleaning and washes the clothes.*

**Theme 3a** Financial Control by Women. The majority of younger men indicated that the family's finances were controlled by their female partners, regardless of who earned the money. They believed it was necessary for the woman to maintain control over the finances and that they had limited knowledge of the financial situation in the household. They also expressed some dissatisfaction over the "unequal" command over the finances.

> *I have money to eat and refill the fuel. My salary must go to her.*

> *I have a card, but my salary goes into our joint account. …The longer I stay in Australia, the more I feel it is unequal.*

> *I have a card, but I don't know the situation about my money.*

> *No matter how much money you earn, she won't think it's enough.*

**Theme 4** New Legal Paradigms: The older male participants found that the Australian legal system was different to what they had been accustomed to prior to migration.

**Theme 4a** Female-friendly legal system. They indicated that the Australian law favours women over men, particularly within family law and that because of the ease of applying for a divorce, women could effortlessly obtain a divorce. Further, they maintained that the laws were unfair towards men and that women would be supported by the law or the community irrespective of who was at fault within the relationship.

> *There is a lot of freedom nowadays. You can get a divorce if you want, you can even get divorced multiple times.*

> *It is inclined towards the women. Not so good to men. For example – divorce – it is inclined towards women. 99% is helping the women, despite whether it is the women's wrong doing or not.*

> *It is unfair, because it is too inclined towards the benefits of the women.*

> *In Australia, women's rights are better than men's. For instance, if a woman gets divorce, the community looks after the woman.*

**Theme 4b** Familial dispute resolution. Most of the older Chinese men believed Australian laws allowed women to have a significant amount of freedom and protection and often interfered with family affairs, which should ideally be managed within families rather than the legal system. They reiterated that disputes within the family should not be reported to the police unless they are "major" issues. They indicated that intimate partner violence was not fairly assessed and that the relevant laws jeopardised family harmony.

> *Westerners would tell others "my husband hits me." Chinese would endure it for a year and not say a word. Australians have too much freedom; they call the police for small issues.*

> *[Proverb] "You do not share the family's ugly side to outside." Therefore, as Chinese, things are solved at home; you don't report it to the police. Unless the problem is real big and the family cannot get back together. …According to the traditional way, one should try to solve things at home first.*

## 8 | DISCUSSION

Gender equality is not just a process, it is a practice; it is understanding that by integrating gender sensitivity into every aspect of development makes tangible impacts on the lives of both women and men—United Nations Development Program (2010, p. 5).

The objective of the present study was to examine gender norms in the Chinese community in Melbourne, Australia. The findings indicate that men and women of this community perceive their own and their counterpart's roles differently. Men emphasised the family-oriented role of women; the significance of their financial responsibility; the collective responsibility of both men and women in performing household chores and financial control; and the impact of the Australian legal system on family dispute resolution. On the other hand, women focused on their own multiple household responsibilities; the importance of their status and dignity in society; their collective responsibility with men in relation to financial contributions; and the protection they received from the Australian legal system through migration. Each finding will be elaborated in detail in the ensuing sections.

## 8.1 | Gender norms of Chinese women

Among the women in the Chinese community, the overwhelming finding was in relation to their homemaker-provider role. Similar to the men's attribution of roles related to domestic chores to women, the women expressed the multiple household responsibilities they were required to undertake. They usually performed most of the domestic chores and child care duties along with trying to maintain suitable employment. This finding is similar to the revelations in the multi-country study by Boudet et al. (2013) that the description of a good wife across several countries is one who performs the household chores and takes care of other family members. Choi and Chen (2006) and Doucet (2006) have also explained the gender ideology in the Chinese community that assures Chinese women perform the majority of the household work and that this work is outside of the realm of Chinese men's traditional role.

Because of the lack of support from their partners and the expectation to raise their children, the women believed they had limited opportunities for career advancement. They were not fully aware of the support offered by social services such as child care services. Promoting the existence of such services may offer them a choice to advance their careers and gain financial independence. Corresponding to the present finding, Yi and Chien (2002) also explain the sacrifices Chinese women make in relation to their professional careers for the wellbeing of their families. These findings suggest that although women migrate and live in a more egalitarian society such as Australia, they still uphold traditional Chinese values and gender norm expectations. The findings are similar to an earlier review of Australians' attitudes towards women's family roles wherein a substantial proportion (48%) of them over two time periods (1984 and 2001) believed that women should be mostly devoted to family responsibilities (Evans & Kelley, 2002).

Despite restricting the majority of their duties to household work, especially after giving birth, the Chinese women also highlighted the significance of social status and integration in their lives. Specifically, they professed their intention to maintain employment as a way of gaining social dignity and integrating with the rest of the society. This finding explains the importance of work outside the home to main the social status of Chinese women. They could thus be encouraged to continue with professional work if they choose to do so even after giving birth to enable their integration with the mainstream society.

Both older and younger women reiterated the importance of collective gender roles in relation to shared financial responsibilities of the household. This finding resonates with previous findings that illustrate the importance Chinese men and women place on the shared contribution of all family members towards the family's financial wellbeing (Qin, 2009). Similar to the Chinese men's (especially the older men) reiteration that both partners needed to work to support the family, the women also believed that they had an obligation to participate in the family's financial responsibility, especially in times of hardship. The younger women explained that it was indeed a "luxury" to be a fulltime housewife in the present-day due to other obligations such as supporting older parents. These findings elucidate the shared understanding of Chinese men and women of the importance of maintaining employment and contributing financially; it also illustrates the need to support women in their endeavour to fulfil this obligation.

Finally, the Chinese women expressed satisfaction with the protection they received from the Australian legal system. They indicated that this system offered them a greater sense of safety compared to the Chinese legal system. The importance of legislative protection to promote women's participation in society has also been previously highlighted (van Egmond et al., 2010). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that women are protected in several ways through the legal system. However, the younger women maintained their concerns about their accessibility to the protective laws because of a lack of knowledge of the laws and services that could assist them. This finding highlights the importance of conveying information about relevant services to the community so that they can access them. The information should be conveyed in a language and format that would be readily comprehensible by the layperson and made available through avenues that would reach the community at large.

## 8.2 | Gender norms of Chinese men

The present findings demonstrate that Chinese men largely believe in the responsibility of women for the caretaking of the household relevant to domestic chores as well as childcare responsibilities. Men attributed their diffusion of such a responsibility to the superior skills of women to perform such tasks. Specifically, they indicated that women were more nurturing and efficient and that this was a reason for them to be allocated family care responsibilities. Indeed, Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) assertions about the influence of cultural beliefs on gender roles seem to hold true for members of the Chinese community. The findings are also similar to those of Doucet (2006) who explained that Chinese women are still responsible for the majority of work in the home, in particular childcare activities as a result of the gender ideology in the Chinese society. Further, Choi and Chen (2006) also emphasise that housework is not part of Chinese men's traditional role and that therefore Chinese women perceive higher family demands. Taken together, the findings suggest that family care responsibilities mainly lie in the hands of Chinese women

and that men may not participate in such activities either because of their ideology or the women's notions that it is their role to perform such tasks.

To compensate for the increased burden on women to perform household tasks, the men reiterated their increased responsibility in maintaining the financial wellbeing of the household. They also attributed sex-differentiated traits to gender-biased roles in employment and economic roles. These findings are similar to that of the general Australian population as indicated in their comparison of attitudes in 1984 and 2001 which showed that while. The younger men presented their greater financial contribution to the family because of their higher educational qualifications. These roles are perhaps borne out through the collective cultural beliefs of the differences in gender roles (after Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

The older men on the other hand discussed the influence of The Political Revolution in China on their family's decision to work. Both the husband and wife needed to financially support their family and hence gained employment. Although this demonstrates that older men had more liberal views in relation to women undertaking employment, it also coincides with the influence of such decisions on future generations. This led to a reduced physical and psychological presence of parents in their children's lives (Zhang et al., 2011) resulting in conflict for the following generation in the adoption of gender roles.

Another theme elucidated from the younger men in the present study was in relation to collective gender roles. These men believed in the sharing of equal responsibility that men and women should bear for domestic chores and parenting duties, similar to that of the Chinese women. They further indicated that women usually controlled the finances within the household because of their better knowledge about the financial situation within the household. This view is similar to previous findings that suggest the changing gender norms and behaviours after immigration (Zhou, 2006); it is also reflective of the changing attitudes of the younger generation in relation to gender equity within the Chinese community.

Finally, the men expressed some conflict with the new legal paradigms in Australia. They indicated that the laws in Australia were more women-friendly than in China. They also expressed concern that family matters were managed by the legal system rather than being settled within the family. Consequently, they reiterated that the Australian family laws jeopardised family harmony. Although previous research has not specifically examined this concept, researchers suggest the challenges that immigration brings to the redefining of cultural values, social norms, and behaviours (Chan & Ng, 2013; Zhou, 2006). Taken together, the findings suggest the importance of educating migrant men in the Chinese community of the rationale behind the Australian legal system, the importance of gender equity and of demonstrating egalitarian attitudes in all aspects of life.

## 9 | CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the findings from the women and men in the Chinese community in Melbourne demonstrate several differences and few similarities in gender norms and roles between Chinese men and women. They further delineate the varied gender role expectations and norms that men and women adhere to. Gender equity could be achieved within the Chinese community through primary prevention programs to change the attitudes of men and women to encourage male participation to a greater extent in family, employment, and community life. Health and community services would be well suited to develop culturally intrinsic programs to close the gap in the role imbalance between women and men in the Chinese community and challenge rigid gender stereotypes and roles, while upholding the importance of cultural beliefs in family wellbeing. Long-term solutions include the participation of community groups in the development of culturally appropriate services. Such services could be developed and implemented based on the cultural underpinnings of the Chinese community as compared to solely a Western model of health promotion. Further research should be conducted into the elements that constitute a culturally intrinsic program. Such efforts will collectively assist in reaching the United Nations and VicHealth objectives of promoting gender equality in all communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first author received funding from Carrington Health and Manningham Community Health Service in Melbourne, Australia to conduct this project.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. At the time of conducting this project, the second author worked with the Manningham Community Health Service and the third author, at Carrington Health. However, both of them are no longer employed by the two organisations

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**How to cite this article:** Satyen L, van Dort J, Yin S. Gender norms in the Chinese community in Melbourne, Australia: Family and community roles. *Aust Psychol*. 2020;55:50–61. https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12402