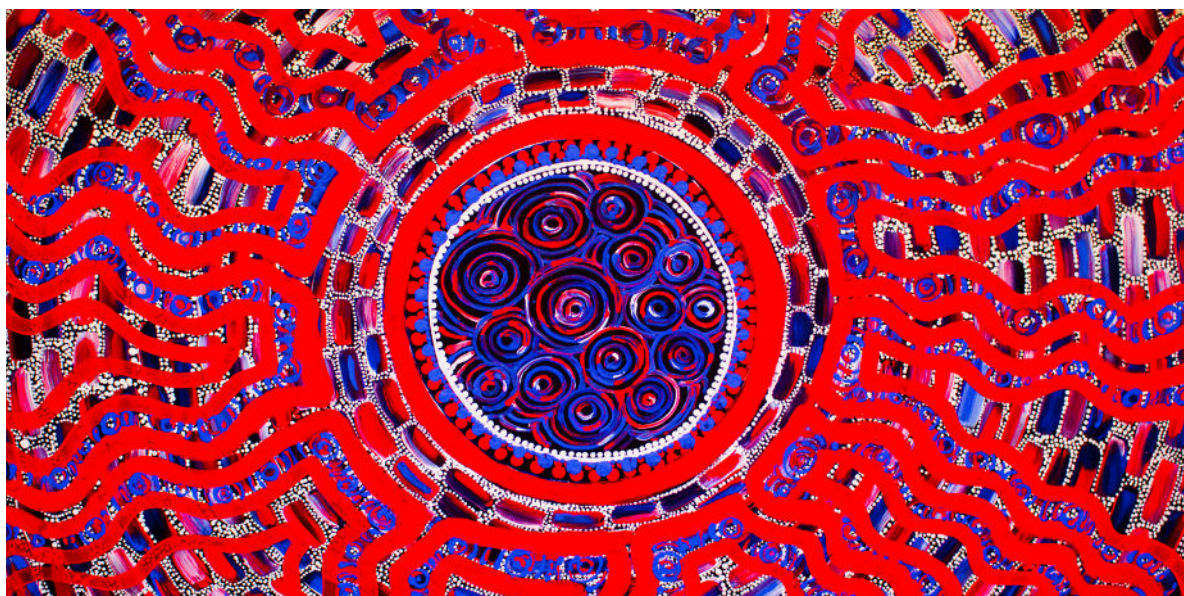


# Gari Yala (Speak the Truth)

## Gendered Insights







### About the artwork

Kirsten Gray is a Yuwalaraay/Muruwari woman living on Dharawal country and raising two small children. Her artworks are a contemporary and vibrant reflection of her passion for her Aboriginal culture.

‘Speaking truth’ explores the nature and extent of the contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this land for millennia.

Long before the birth of the Australian nation, our people were already making significant contributions to their families and communities.

It was the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people upon the arrival of the British, which helped transform our country into what it is today. Much of this labour was often unpaid, unrecognised and undertaken in discriminatory and harsh conditions.

Nonetheless, it is these ongoing contributions of our people which keeps each other, our communities and this country, strong.

### Acknowledgement of Country

The authors and partners of this report wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the nations across Australia and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

### Authorship

This report was written by Dr. Olivia Evans

Suggested citation: Evans, Olivia (2021). Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): gendered insights, WGEA Commissioned Research Report in partnership with the Jumbunna Institute of Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia, Sydney, Australia.

### Acknowledgement

Thank you to the Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia for use of survey data from the original Gari Yala (Speak the Truth) research project.

### Some words from Jumbunna

The Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research has a long history of conducting Indigenous-led research of Indigenous people. This report builds upon the work of our Indigenous People and Work Research and Practice Hub, particularly the development of the Gari Yala: Speak the Truth report in late 2020. We are proud to partner with Diversity Council Australia and Workplace Gender Equality Agency to provide this gendered insights report into Indigenous employee experiences.

Jumbunna, as a leading Indigenous research and thought-leadership entity, is proud to have worked with Gomeroi researcher Dr. Olivia Evans on this report. The collaboration within this report reinforces a view of Indigenous self-determination and ensures Indigenous standpoints are prioritised when researching Indigenous issues.

This report highlights that Indigenous women are underrepresented in the workplace and the inherent need to support Indigenous women in culturally unsafe workplaces. It also demonstrates the impact of workplace hierarchy and the impact of cultural load for Indigenous women. We are pleased to see how this work and report has ratified the ten truths established in Gari Yala and provides practical actions for employers to take within these truths.

Through understanding the insights provided in this report, employers can continue their Indigenous employment journey to address what is needed. I want to thank the Indigenous People and Work Research Hub for their vision regarding this project and Diversity Council Australia for lending their employment research skills.

### **Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt**

**Chair of Indigenous Research, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research**

### Some words from DCA

DCA is really proud to be part of this important collaboration between Jumbunna and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

DCA's research over many years has shown that diverse women can face multiple and intersecting forms of bias, discrimination and disadvantage at work, and we felt that examining how gender intersects with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity at work would be another important contribution to this evidence base.

Unsurprisingly, this report demonstrated, once again, that women with intersectional identities face particular barriers in the workforce, and how important it is that workplaces take the time to understand the diverse experiences of different women.

The power of the Gari Yala report was that it shared the truth about the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers. This second report shows that gender also makes a difference - that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women have particular workplace experiences that employers need to understand.

It's our hope that this report will help Australian workplaces build culturally safe and welcoming workplaces for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women.

**Lisa Annese**

**CEO, Diversity Council Australia**

### Some words from WGEA

Gari Yala is one of the first reports of its kind looking at the lived experiences of Indigenous workers inside Australian businesses.

Now, we are pleased to be part of another significant milestone – the extension of the Gari Yala research to understand how the intersection between gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait identity is experienced in the workplace.

This report will help businesses to understand the specific pressures that their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees face in the workplace. Importantly, it offers recommendations on where extra attention needs to be paid. In doing so, we hope this research can go some way towards understanding, and then closing, the gender gap in Indigenous employment in Australia.

What is striking in this report is the many similarities between the experiences of Indigenous women and men – clearly these issues of racism, discrimination and lack of support require attention across the board. However, a key area of difference that arises is the 'triple jeopardy' effects faced by Indigenous women carers. This needs to be a particular area of future focus for all employers and business leaders.

This research collaboration is a first for WGEA, examining where gender and diversity overlap to compound the effects of bias and discrimination at work. We are proud to have been a catalyst for this research, to partner with the Diversity Council of Australia and the Jumbunna Institute and to have provided the funding for this follow-up report by Gomeroi researcher Dr. Olivia Evans. We extend our thanks to each of them for their insights and expertise to make this research possible.

We hope this research creates new ways of thinking around diversity discussions in Australian workplaces, and brings us closer to our vision: for all women and men to be valued as equals at work.

**Mary Wooldridge**

**Director, Workplace Gender Equality Agency**

# Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are underrepresented in the Australian workforce. In contrast to the research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women leaving or entering the workforce, not much is known about the experiences these women have inside the workplace that may be driving gender differences in Indigenous employment. In 2020 the Gari Yala project documented the workplace experiences and recommendations of over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. This follow-up report describes the results from analyses reviewing this same data through a gendered lens.

The key themes explored in Gari Yala included:

**IDENTITY STRAIN:** refers to the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. The concept draws on literature, demonstrating members of minority groups expend effort and energy managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.

**CULTURAL LOAD:** is the (often invisible) load borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people. This creates an additional workload associated with, for instance, being consistently expected to respond to all things relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace and speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**CULTURAL SAFETY:** Cultural safety means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation. It occurs when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates difference. Unsafe cultural practice is any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and wellbeing of an individual

**ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY:** Organisational authenticity stems from a genuine support within the workplace to be inclusive and provide equitable treatment to Indigenous people and employees. This may be shown through leadership commitments, organisational policies or a focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments.

**ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITY:** the number of initiatives, programs and events organisations undertook relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and cultures

This report provides a deeper understanding of the intersection of gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in the Australian workplace. The results demonstrate the shared experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women in the workplace, but also highlight how these experiences diverge. In particular:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women had significantly less support in culturally unsafe situations and had the highest cultural load. These results suggest that trends of women’s disadvantage and marginalisation in the workplace are also present in the workplace experiences related to culture and identity.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with caring responsibilities are a particularly vulnerable group in the workplace, being more likely to be in culturally unsafe and unsupported employment and have higher cultural loads. Thus caring responsibilities are an important additional dimension to consider when addressing issues of gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in the workplace.
- Cultural safety is particularly protective for women and thus cultural safety efforts are likely to particularly benefit women and reduce some of the disparities highlighted in this report.
- Hierarchical position in the workplace also plays a role in experiences, with women in management having the highest cultural load, and women in lower levels having the lowest levels of support. In contrast, men in management positions are most likely to work in organisations with high levels of support, where they may be effective agents of change.

## Contents

Background .....	2
Demographics .....	4
Gendered Experiences in the Workplace .....	5
Gender and Caring Responsibilities .....	9
Gender and Position .....	12
Identity Strain, Cultural Load and Gendered Outcomes .....	14
Workplace Culture and Gender.....	17
Conclusions .....	23
Truths .....	24

# Background

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## Intersectionality and work

Every person has a complex set of identities that determine the way they live in and experience the world. Different dimensions of identity, including race, geography, class, sexuality and disability, combine with gender to influence individual experiences and outcomes at work. For this reason, gender inequality in the workplace is not experienced in the same way by all women.<sup>1</sup> Systemic discrimination and bias directed at these intersecting identities can create inequalities at every stage of the employment cycle, from recruitment and selection to training and promotion.<sup>2</sup> Failing to recognise and consider these intersections when addressing issues of inclusion and inequality can serve to perpetuate rather than improve these issues.<sup>3</sup>

Research on intersectionality in the workplace is growing, but fragmented. Australian research so far shows that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), from regional and remote locations, who are old or young, who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, who identify as LGBTQIA+, or who have disabilities can face multiple and compounding disadvantages when participating and progressing in the labour force.<sup>4</sup> Considering how employees experience multiple and intersecting forms of bias, discrimination and disadvantage at work, it is necessary to build a more detailed picture of Australian workplaces, develop tailored responses to gender equality issues, and ultimately achieve workplace gender equality goals for all. The present research explores the intersection between gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in experiences in the workforce.

## The present research

In 2020 the Jumbunna Institute and Diversity Council Australia recorded the experiences of over 1,000 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workforce. The resulting Gari Yala report, published in November 2020, detailed the experiences and recommendations of these workers and provided the first ever broad snapshot of Indigenous people's experiences of employment and the workplace in Australia. In the present report, this data was explored with a focus on gender. The analysis investigates the differing experiences of Indigenous women and men in the Australian workforce.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have substantially lower rates of workforce participation (51.5%) compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (65%) and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (59.2%).<sup>5</sup> Much of the work on exploring and reducing this gap to date has focussed on the external factors that could influence Indigenous women's participation in the workplace, such as caring responsibilities, schooling and experiences of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> However, little is known about the experiences inside the workplace that may be driving gender differences in Indigenous employment.

In the present report, these experiences were explored with a gendered lens, to determine whether there are systemic differences in the ways that Indigenous women and men experience employment and the workforce in Australia. Like the original report, the core concepts investigated were identity, cultural safety, racism, identity strain, cultural load and organisational authenticity, and the ways these concepts intersect to determine workplace experiences and outcomes.



## Methods

Data was collected by the Jumbunna Institute and Diversity Council Australia using an online survey (the Gari Yala Survey) containing items and scales measuring the key variables. Only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were currently employed or had been employed at some point in the last two years were able to participate. In total 1,033 people completed the survey - 623 (60.3%) participants identified as female, 383 (37.1%) identified as male, 11 (1.1%) identified as non-binary, gender fluid or another gender not specified and 16 (1.6%) preferred not to say.

Analyses were conducted by first comparing the responses of women and men across all relevant variables in the survey. Key analyses from the original Gari Yala report were then re-run splitting responses by gender. Finally, key demographic variables were selected based on established research on factors affecting women at work. Demographic variables with cell counts that were too low for reliable and meaningful analysis (i.e. < 50 participants per cell) were excluded. Analyses were then run comparing women and men on all variables across these selected demographics.

All reported differences are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. In general, differences were interpreted to be meaningful when there was a difference of at least 10% between relevant groups. However, in some cases (e.g. when there were clear patterns in the data) smaller percentage differences between groups were treated as meaningful.

## A note on gender

Exploring gender differences in marginalised or minority populations can be viewed as problematic, largely because comparing women and men from these groups can be seen as interfering with culture, imposing western values or creating unnecessary divides in already marginalised groups.<sup>7</sup> However, from the perspective of reducing inequality and poverty, gendered analyses are an important means through which to identify, understand and address gender-differentiated needs.<sup>8</sup>

There is a large body of research detailing the differences in how women and men experience employment and the workplace. Much of this research details the ways that women face significant disadvantage and discrimination in the workplace compared to their male co-workers.<sup>9</sup> Intersectional research has found that women of colour experience even greater challenges in the workplace because they sit at the intersection of two marginalised identities.<sup>10</sup> Although all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face undue challenges in the Australian workforce due in large part to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession, it is likely that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience additional burdens because of their gender. Thus, the current report is not seeking to set Indigenous women and men in opposition, but rather highlight how gender identities intersect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities in the Australian workforce.

This report focuses on gender differences between women and men. For the purposes of this research, men were classified as any participant who identified as "male" and women were classified as any participant who identified as "female" in the survey, including both transgender and cisgender participants. This approach excludes non-binary, gender-fluid, intersex and people of genders other than male and female. This is because the 1.1% of participants who identified themselves as a gender other than male or female in the survey do not form a large enough portion of the sample to make reliable and valid statistical inferences. Thus, although gender is not a dichotomous construct, the limitations of quantitative analyses dictate that only differences between males and females are able to be reported on in this instance. We apologise if this approach makes any gender diverse individuals feel excluded from the narrative and we strongly advocate that future research should attempt to incorporate their experiences in a meaningful way.

# Demographics

The data collected represents a diverse range of employed Indigenous women and men with varying backgrounds and life experiences.

	Men		Women	
	Percent (%)	Number (n)	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Identified as having a disability	26.2%	96	19.3%	114
Had caring responsibilities	47.5%	182	53.3%	332
Identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer	21.3%	74	13.8%	76
Held a bachelor's degree or higher	51.6%	195	48.4%	300
18-35 years old	44.3%	170	40.9%	255
35-55 years old	43.6%	167	44.9%	280
55 and over years old	12.0%	46	14.1%	88

There was also a wide range of types of employment and workplaces represented. Women were less represented in executive and management positions and were less likely to hold full-time permanent positions. Both of these trends are well-documented gender differences in the wider Australian workforce.<sup>11</sup> Women were also more likely to hold an identified position.

	Men		Women	
	Percent (%)	Number (n)	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Worked in a mainstream organisation	73.1%	280	72.9%	454
Held an identified position	26.9%	103	37.9%	236
Worked in an Indigenous unit/team	13.3%	51	12.4%	77
Held an executive and/or managerial position	45.2%	173	25.9%	151
Full time permanent	72.8%	279	62.9%	392
Part-time permanent	12.0%	46	16.5%	103
Casual and/or contract	13.3%	51	18.0%	112
55 and over years old	12.0%	46	14.1%	88

# Gendered Experiences in the Workplace

This section explores differences in women and men's experiences of identity, cultural safety, racism, identity strain, cultural load and organisational authenticity in the workplace, as well as the outcomes of satisfaction and retention.

## Summary of findings

Overall there were very little differences in men's and women's experiences of identity, cultural safety, racism, unfair treatment, harassment, identity strain, and satisfaction with their jobs.

These results are somewhat surprising, particularly given that, more broadly, women tend to experience greater levels of discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment in the workplace.<sup>12</sup> However, the Gari Yala survey was one of the first of its kind to investigate these specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related issues in the workplace. Consequently, these similarities in the experiences of Indigenous women and men may point towards issues such as identity strain and cultural safety being issues equally relevant to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. Additionally, given that this research is the first of its kind, future research (including future iterations of the Gari Yala survey) could adopt more targeted and intentional questions to further explore gendered experiences of Indigenous employees in the workplace.

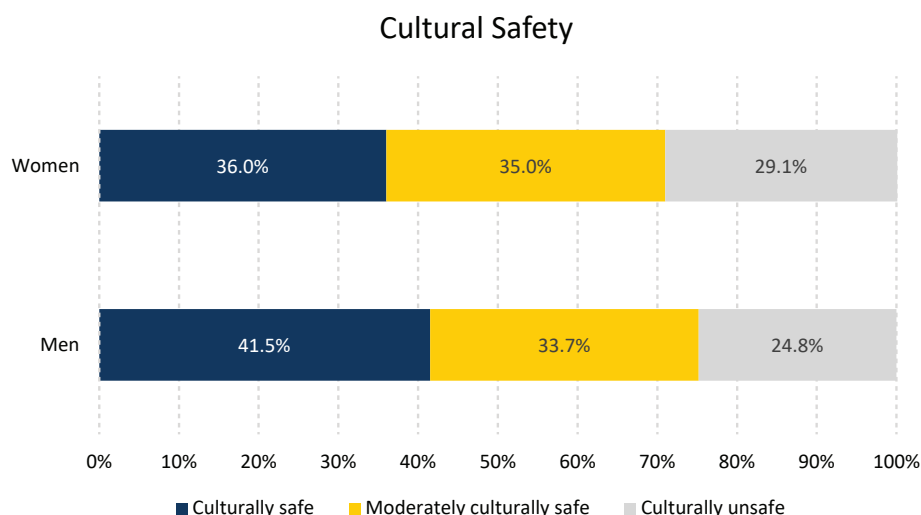
The main differences that did emerge were from women reporting significantly lower levels of support available to them compared to men and women having a higher cultural load. This lack of support fits with other research, which has shown that women are often not provided adequate support to address issues that arise in the workplace.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the higher cultural load fits with previous research which has demonstrated that women are often burdened with the "caretaking" roles and jobs that do not actively contribute to a company's bottom-line. Although this work can be worthwhile and personally fulfilling it is often over-looked by upper management.

## Identity

When it comes to identifying in the workplace, women and men were equally likely to find it important to identify as an Indigenous person in the workplace, share their identity at work (actively talk about their identity and not try to keep it private), and feel it is safe for them to do so.

## Cultural safety

Cultural safety refers to being able to practice your culture free from ridicule and condemnation, and is present when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates cultural differences. Women and men reported somewhat similar levels of cultural safety in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>



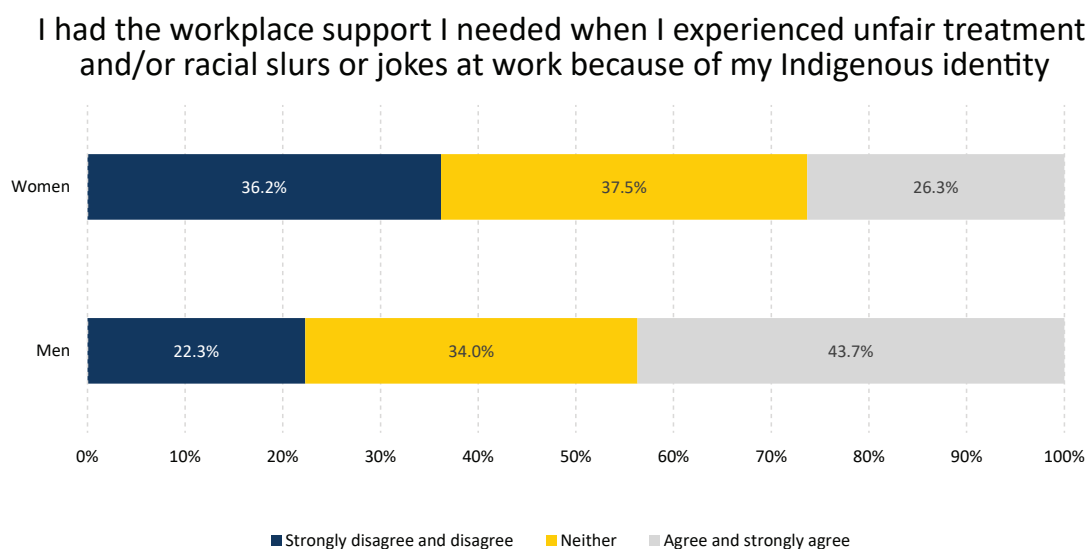
<sup>1</sup> CULTURALLY SAFE = respondents in culturally safe workplaces scored their workplace at least 4 or above out of 5 on survey questions asking how often their workplace was culturally safe (where 5 = culturally safe all of the time, and 1 = never culturally safe). MODERATELY CULTURALLY SAFE = respondents in somewhat culturally safe workplaces scored their workplace between 3 and 4 out of 5. CULTURALLY UNSAFE = respondents in culturally unsafe workplaces scored their workplace on average 3 or less out of 5.



In regards to particular experiences of cultural safety, women and men were equally likely to report being comfortable expressing their cultural and personal beliefs at work and feeling valued and supported as an Indigenous member of the workplace. Women and men also reported similar frequencies of Aboriginal people being appointed to internal roles with an Indigenous focus and the workplace valuing the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Experiencing or witnessing racism in the workplace, including unfair treatment and harassment based on race, were equally prevalent among women and men. In particular, women and men reported similar instances of being treated unfairly, hearing racial or ethnic slurs or jokes, receiving comments about the way they look, hearing inappropriate comments or assumptions, and feeling that they are being ignored or not taken seriously.

One notable exception in cultural safety was that women were significantly more likely to report not receiving the support they needed when they experienced unfair treatment and/or racial slurs at work because of their Indigenous identity. Together, these results suggest that although women and men experience comparable levels of cultural safety in the workplace and have similar experiences of racism, harassment and unfair treatment, when the workplace becomes culturally unsafe, women are more vulnerable as they are less likely to have access to adequate support.



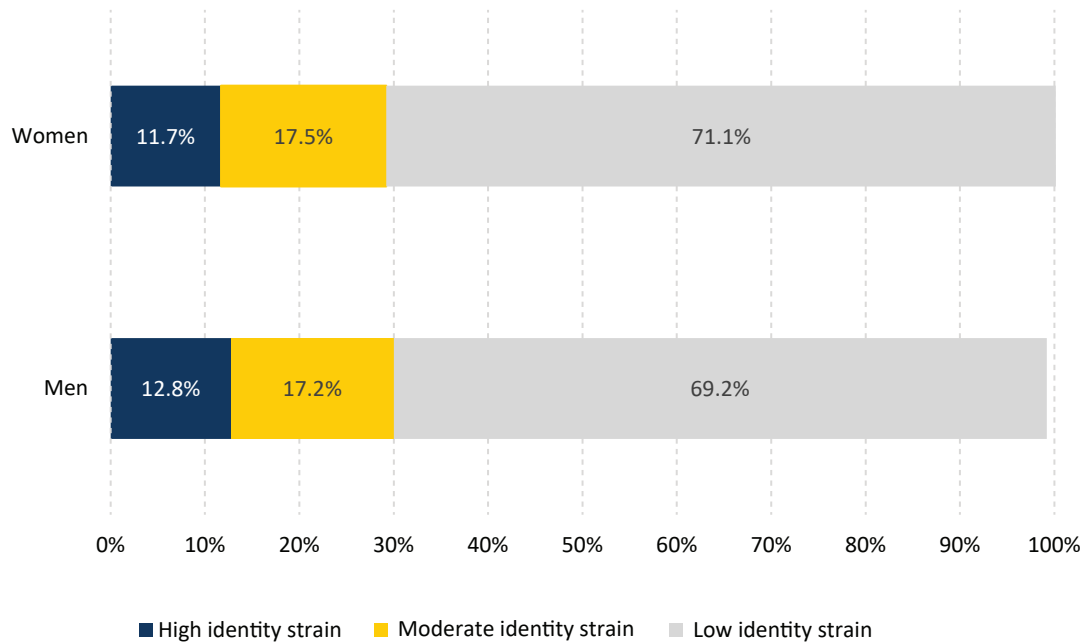
## Identity strain

In the 2020 Gari Yala report, the research team coined the term “Identity Strain” to refer to the strain Indigenous employees can feel when their identity, or the identity of others, does not match the norms and expectations of their broader organisation or workforce. Identity strain included participants feeling that they had to compromise their cultural integrity, being told to be less outspoken about Indigenous issues, having to work harder to prove an Indigenous person can do the job, and trying to avoid certain people, situations and places at work.

In general, the spread of instances of identity strain at the individual and aggregate levels were similar across both genders.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LOW IDENTITY STRAIN = respondents with low identity strain scored at least 4 or above out of 5 on reverse coded questions asking about the prevalence of identity strain experienced at work (where 5 = low identity strain, and 1 = high identity strain). MODERATE IDENTITY STRAIN = respondents with moderate identity strain scored between 3 and 4 out of 5. HIGH IDENTITY STRAIN = respondents with high identity strain scored on average 3 or less out of 5.

## Identity Strain

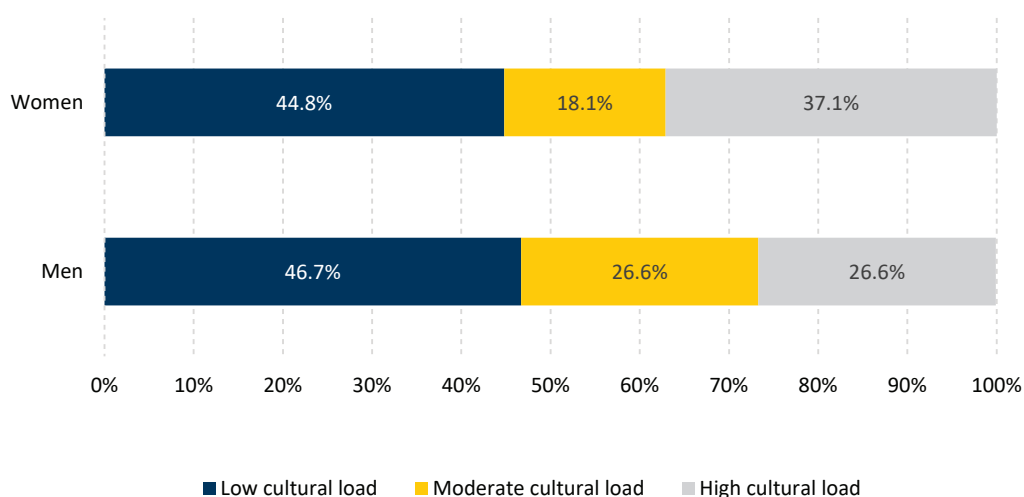


## Cultural load

Cultural load refers to the additional load that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people take on at work (e.g. organising NAIDOC week activities, advising on Indigenous issues, initiatives or content), particularly when they are the only Indigenous employee or one of a small number of Indigenous people in the workplace.

In terms of the particular experiences and expectations related to cultural load, women and men reported similar rates of cultural load on certain metrics, such as having extra Indigenous-related work demands and educating non-Indigenous colleagues about culture and racism. However, when aggregated, women were more likely to have a high cultural load, and men were more likely to have a moderate cultural load.

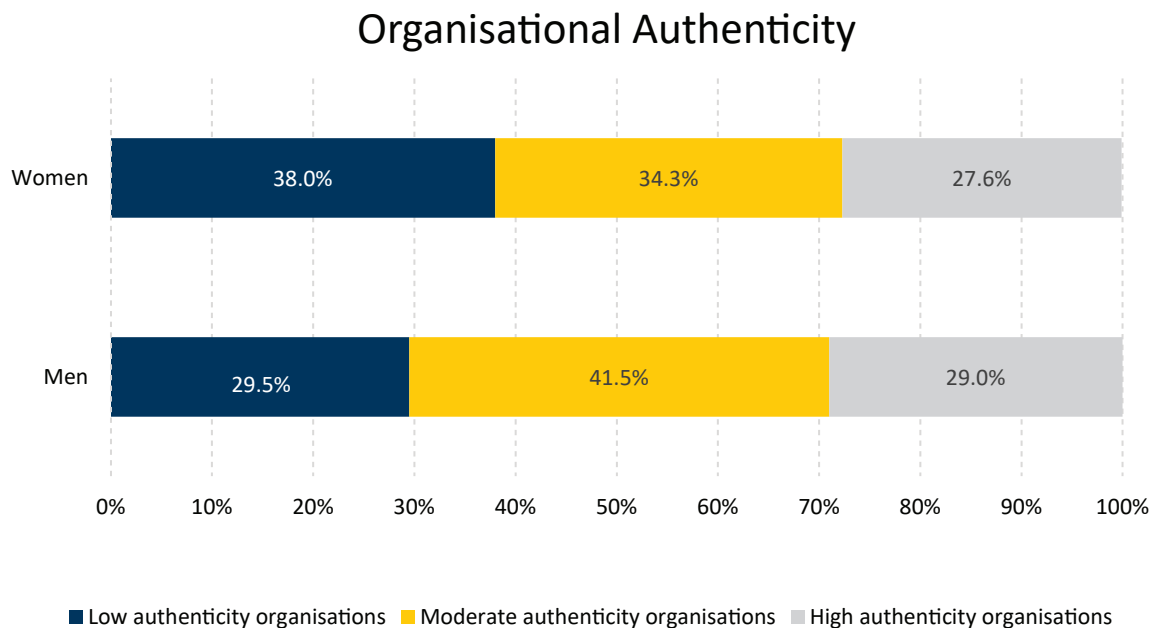
## Cultural Load



This finding fits with mainstream research on gender in the workplace, which finds that women are the most likely to be assigned or accept unpaid or unrecognised additional work assignments.<sup>14</sup> These extra work demands, which are often not valued to the same degree as regular workloads, are cited as one of the reasons women are slower to get promoted than men.<sup>15</sup>

Organisational authenticity

Organisational authenticity refers to the degree to which organisations are genuinely committed to creating a workplace that is inclusive and treats Indigenous people and employees equitably. Overall, women were more likely to be working in organisations with low authenticity, although men were more likely to be in moderately authentic organisations. Women and men were roughly equally represented in highly authentic organisations.<sup>1</sup>



In terms of specific authentic attributes of organisations, men were slightly more likely to report that their organisations demonstrated some aspects of authenticity, including either agreeing or strongly agreeing that:

- their organisation genuinely supports the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (agree and strongly agree: men 68.4%, women 57.6%)
- the policies of their organisation are inclusive and equitable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (agree and strongly agree: men 61.9%, women 53.8%)
- their organisation focusses on quality careers for Indigenous staff (agree and strongly agree: men 50.4%, women 42.7%)

However, there was little difference in the number of women and men either agreeing or strongly agreeing that:

- the leaders of their organisation are committed to the inclusive and equitable treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (agree and strongly agree: men 64.2%, women 58.1%)
- their organisation over-promises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the benefits of working there (agree and strongly agree: men 40.2%, women 34.8%)

<sup>1</sup> HIGH ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY = respondents in organisations high in authenticity scored on average 4 or above out of 5, where 5 = highly authentic and 1 = very unauthentic MODERATE ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY = workers in organisations moderately authentic scored their organisation between 3 and 4 out of 5. LOW ORGANISATIONAL AUTHENTICITY = workers with low organisational authenticity scored their organisation on average less than 3 out of 5.



## Outcomes

In terms of workplace outcomes, women and men reported similar experiences and feelings. Notably, women and men were equally satisfied with their job, likely to recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people, and willing to work extra hard to help their team succeed. However, men were slightly more likely to consider making a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (very likely, likely, or somewhat likely: men 63.9%, women 56.6%).

# Gender and Caring Responsibilities

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It is well-established that women spend substantially more time than men in unpaid care. Research has demonstrated that caring responsibilities can have an adverse impact on women's careers and workforce participation.<sup>16</sup> These disadvantages stem from the uneven distribution of unpaid caring responsibilities between women and men, the undervaluing of the social and economic contribution of unpaid care, the gendered stereotypes associated with caring responsibilities and the systemic lack of suitable working conditions that support carers.<sup>17</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to provide care to children, family and members of their community. Moreover, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women take on significantly more of these responsibilities than men.<sup>18</sup> There is some research to demonstrate the impact that these caring responsibilities have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's entry and participation in the workforce.<sup>19</sup> However, there is a dearth of research investigating the experiences of Indigenous women with caring responsibilities in the workplace.

In general, women with caring responsibilities are often at a greater disadvantage than men in terms of career progression, work performance and inclusion in the workplace. For example, research has found that while women who have caring responsibilities are passed over for promotion and seen as a liability, caring for children often enhances a man's employment opportunities.<sup>20</sup> It is likely that there are similar gendered disadvantages present in the experiences of Indigenous women carers in the workforce.

To explore these dynamics in an Indigenous employment context, the intersection between gender and caring responsibilities in an employee's experiences in the workplace was investigated. Caring responsibilities were defined as any individual who identified as having to care for children or adults with or without disabilities.

## Summary of findings

When considering the intersection between gender and caring responsibilities in Indigenous employment experiences, some distinct trends emerged.

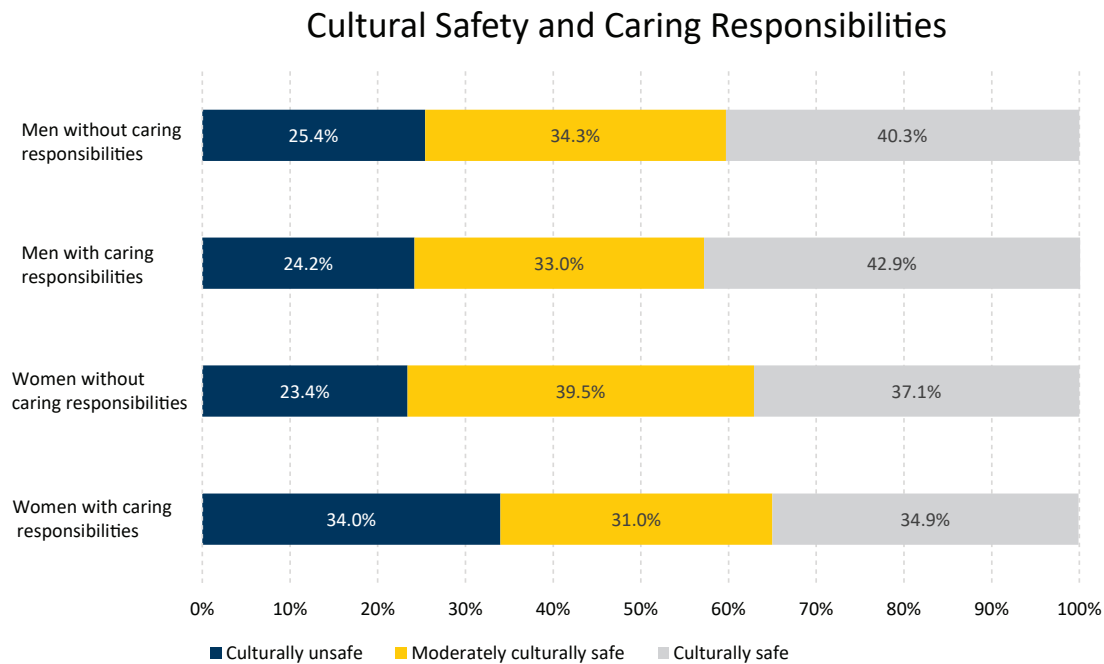
In terms of cultural safety, women with caring responsibilities were at a heightened risk of working in culturally unsafe environments and lacking the support needed when they experienced racially unfair treatment or harassment.

Women with caring responsibilities were also more likely to work in low authenticity organisations. Given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have some of the highest rates of caring responsibilities in Australia, it is possible that these women remain in culturally unsafe and inauthentic work environments because they are concerned that leaving will put themselves and those they care for in a vulnerable position.

Women with caring responsibilities also had the highest cultural load of any of these groups, which may also reflect their feeling of unable to turn down this extra workload out of concern for the stability of their position. Overall, these results suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with caring responsibilities being a particularly vulnerable group in the workplace. However, it should be noted that the classification of caring in the present research was fairly broad and did not take into account the amount of different caring responsibilities or time spent caring. It is likely that a more nuanced measure of caring responsibilities would uncover even greater gender differences in workplace experiences.

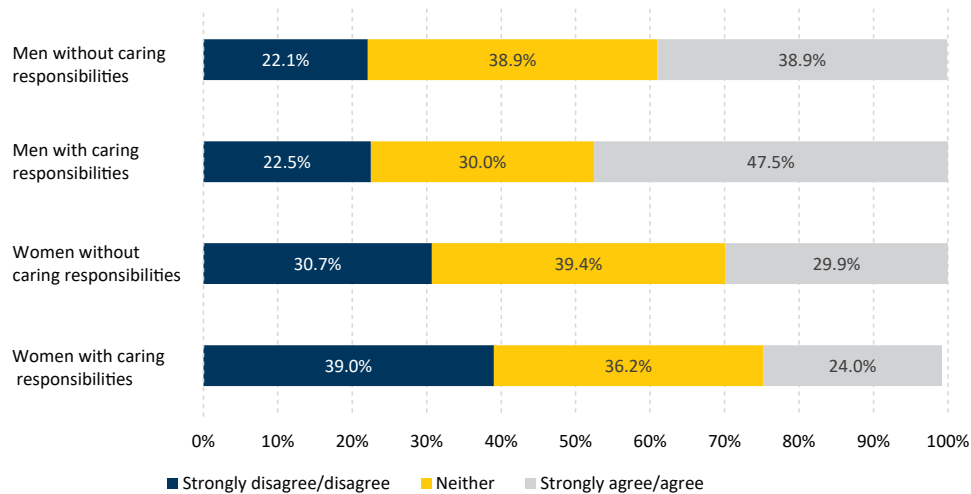
Cultural safety and caring responsibilities

Women with caring responsibilities were more likely than any other group to report working in culturally unsafe organisations.



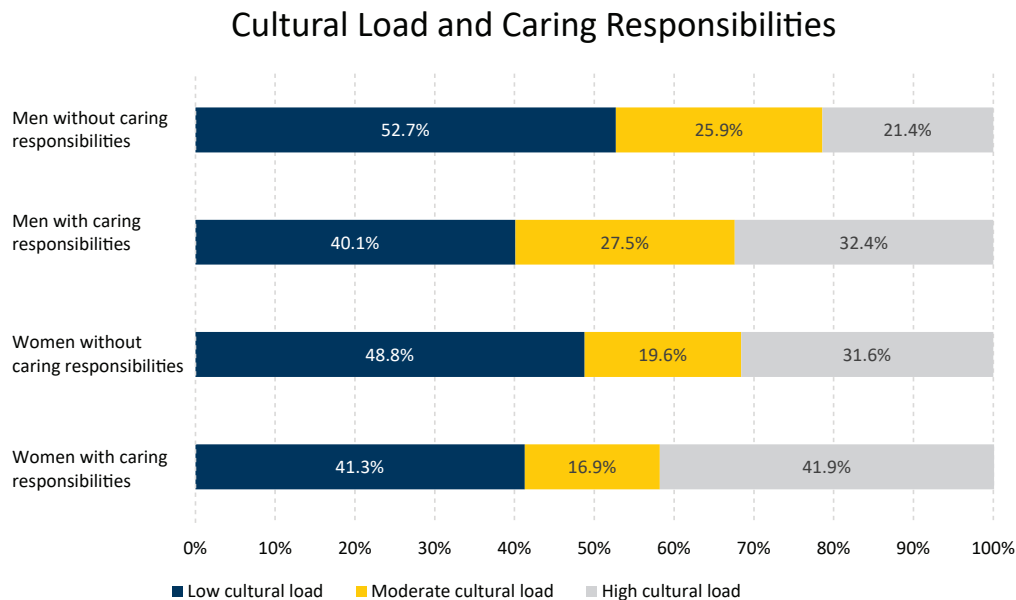
Similarly, women with caring responsibilities were the most likely group to disagree or strongly disagree that they had support when they needed it.

I had the workplace support I needed when I experienced unfair treatment, and/or racial slurs or jokes at work because of my Indigenous identity



Cultural load and caring responsibilities

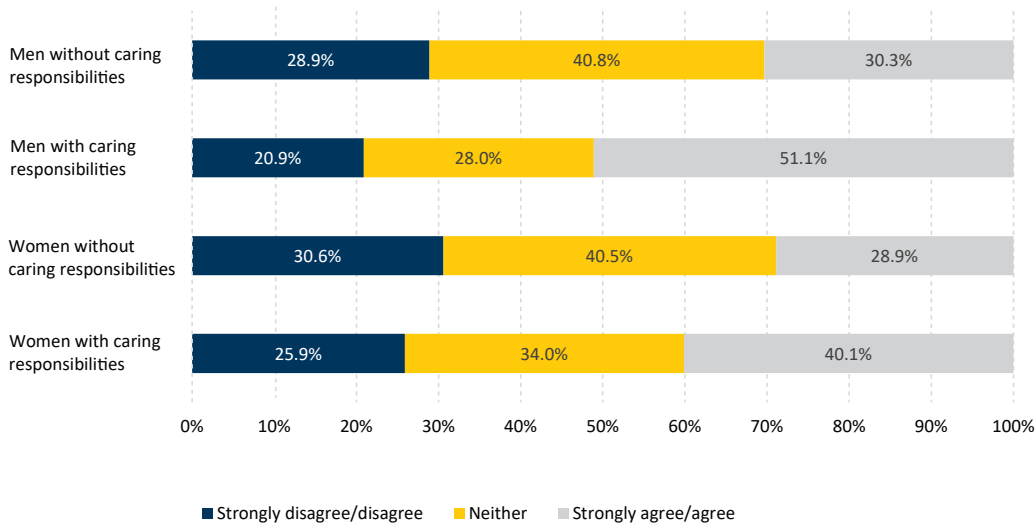
Women with caring responsibilities also had the highest rates of cultural load and men without caring responsibilities had the lowest.



Organisational authenticity and caring responsibilities

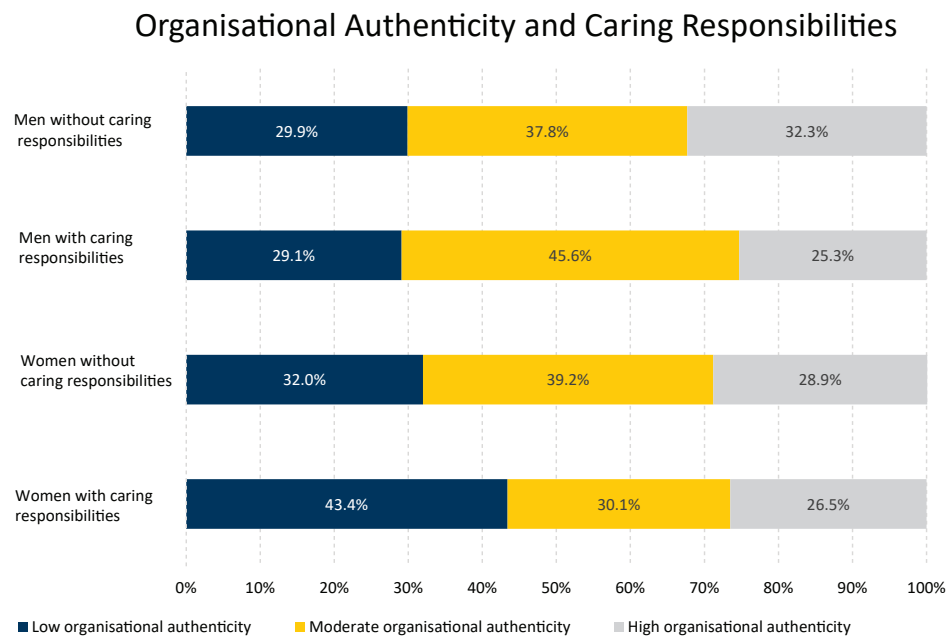
Men with caring responsibilities were the most likely to say their organisation over-promises the benefits of working there, followed by women with caring responsibilities.

My organisation over-promises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People on the benefits of working here





Women with caring responsibilities stood out as the most likely to work at organisations with low authenticity.



# Gender and Position

In this sample, men were more represented in higher-level management and leadership roles than women, which is a trend found in the general population more broadly.<sup>21</sup> To explore whether there are gender differences in the experience of leadership and management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers the relationship between type of role and gender was investigated.

## Summary of findings

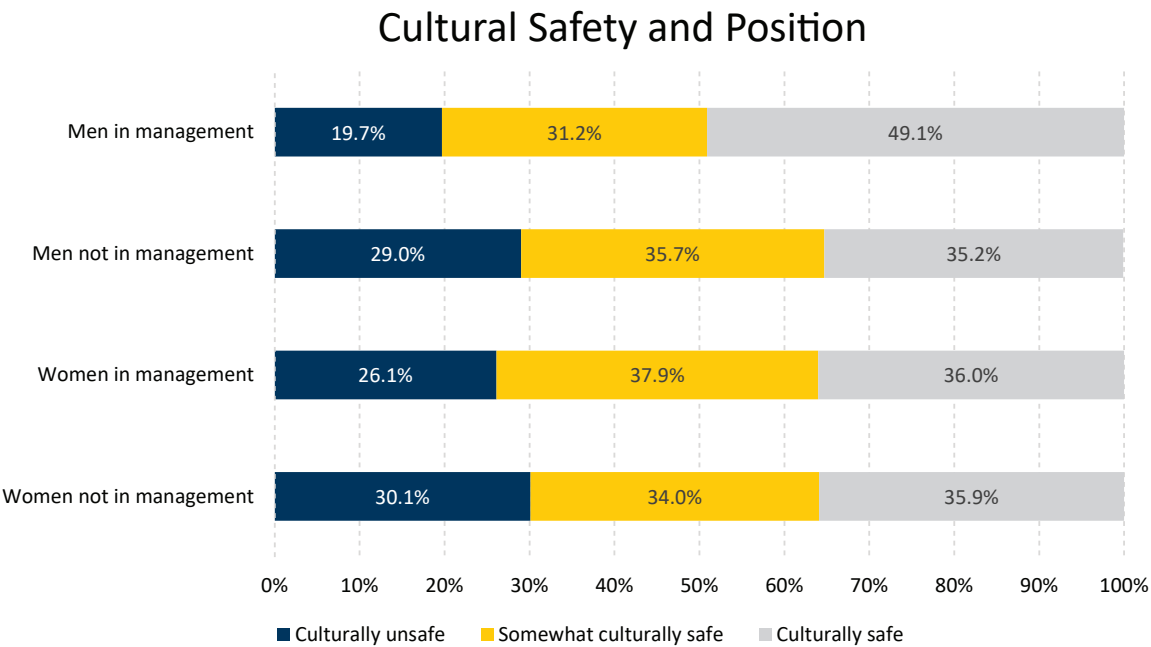
As previous research would suggest, there are some differences in the way women and men experience different roles in the workplace. Notably, women who were in management and executive positions had the highest cultural load. On the other hand, women who were in lower level positions were less supported when experiencing unfair treatment, racism and harassment.

Interestingly, men in management and executive positions were the most likely to work in culturally safe workplaces. This could be a reflection of those kinds of workplaces being likely to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, or even men in those roles being especially effective at actioning or maintaining certain levels of cultural safety. Research on gender and leadership has demonstrated that men in leadership positions are more influential than women in leadership at mobilising people towards workplace equality, because they are viewed as being more authentic and influential.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, our results reflect the wider trend that women are underrepresented in managerial and executive positions in the workforce. In these positions, women tend to be burdened with, or take on, a high level of cultural load. On the other end of the spectrum, women in low level positions are some of the most vulnerable as they are less likely to have support available to them.

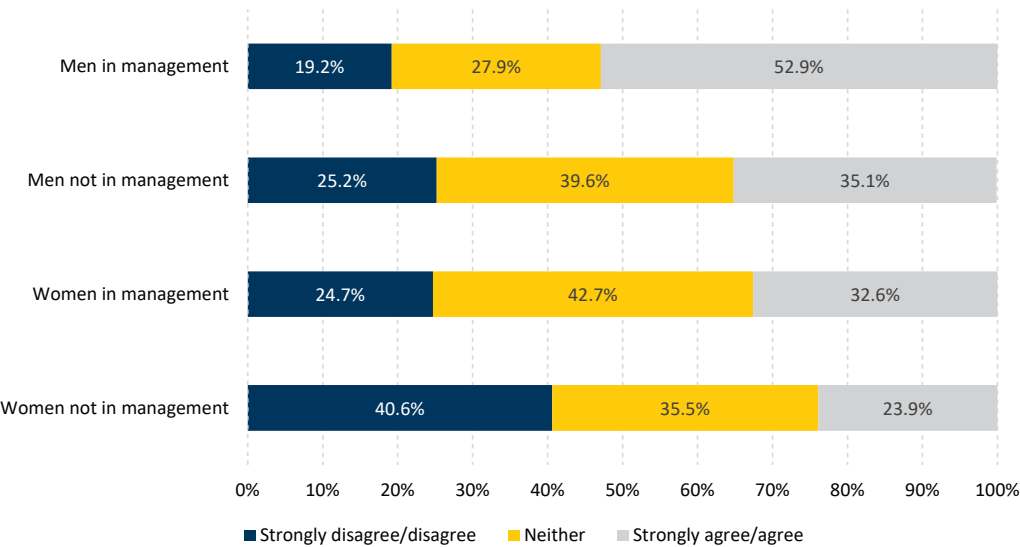
Cultural safety and position

Men in management positions were the most likely of any group to work in a culturally safe workplace.

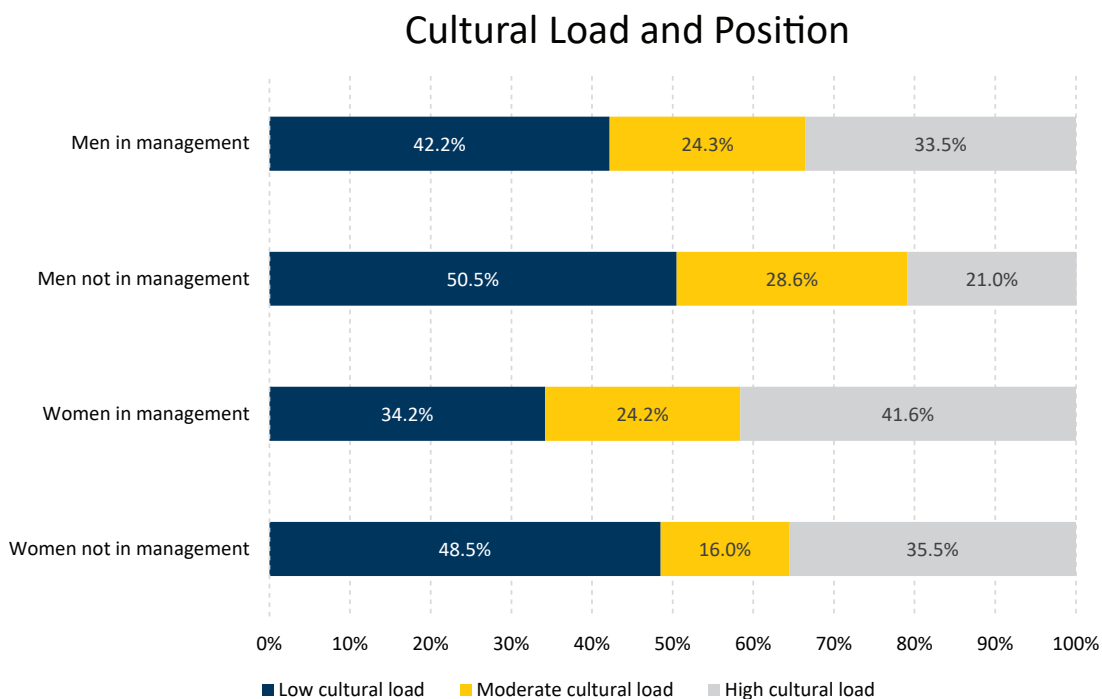


In contrast, women in non-management positions were most likely to feel they did not have the support they needed.

I had the workplace support I needed when I experienced unfair treatment and/or racial slurs or jokes at work because of my Indigenous identity



In terms of cultural load, women in management positions had the highest rates of high cultural load and men not in management had the lowest.



# Identity Strain, Cultural Load and Gendered Outcomes

The Gari Yala report outlined how the heavy burdens of identity strain and cultural load impact on Indigenous employees, particularly with their job satisfaction, intentions to leave and likelihood to recommend the workplace to others. These are relatively new concepts and thus there is not a lot of research on their differentiated impacts on women and men in the workplace.

## Summary of findings

When examining the gender differences in these burdens, there were some marked differences in the experiences of women and men. Although identity strain was equally prevalent across both genders, it appeared to have a stronger association with women’s satisfaction in the workplace, including whether they would recommend the workplace to others. Similar results were found for cultural load. In contrast, high levels of identity strain were associated with intentions to leave for both genders, but seemed much stronger for men. Overall, these results suggest that while cultural load and identity strain appear to affect both women and men, there are differences in these impacts with women being less satisfied and men being more likely to leave.

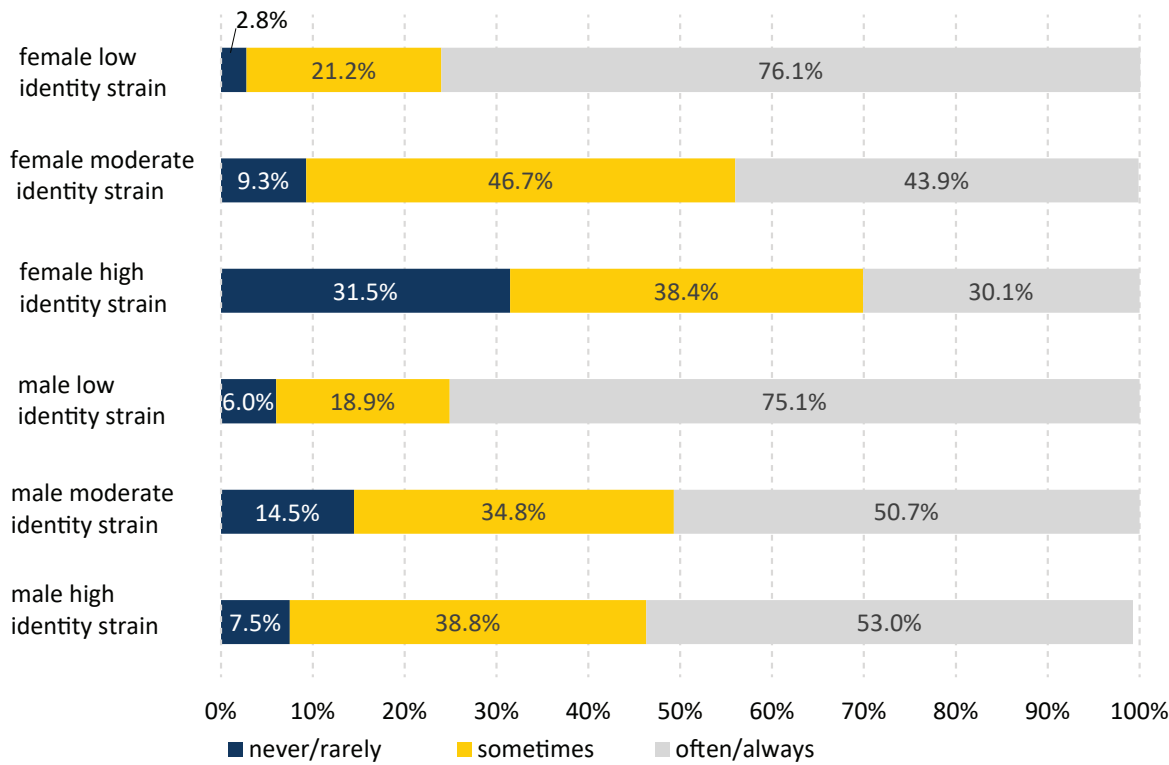
The intentions to leave results are particularly interesting, given that research generally finds that women have the highest exit rates from employment.<sup>23</sup> These results suggest that identity strain tips these scales, with men who experience high strain being the most likely to consider leaving. However, the results could also be due to the specific wording of the question, which asks whether they will consider looking for a new job with another employer. Research suggests that women tend to exit jobs into unemployment or leave the workforce altogether.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is possible that future research with more specific retention questions would yield different results.



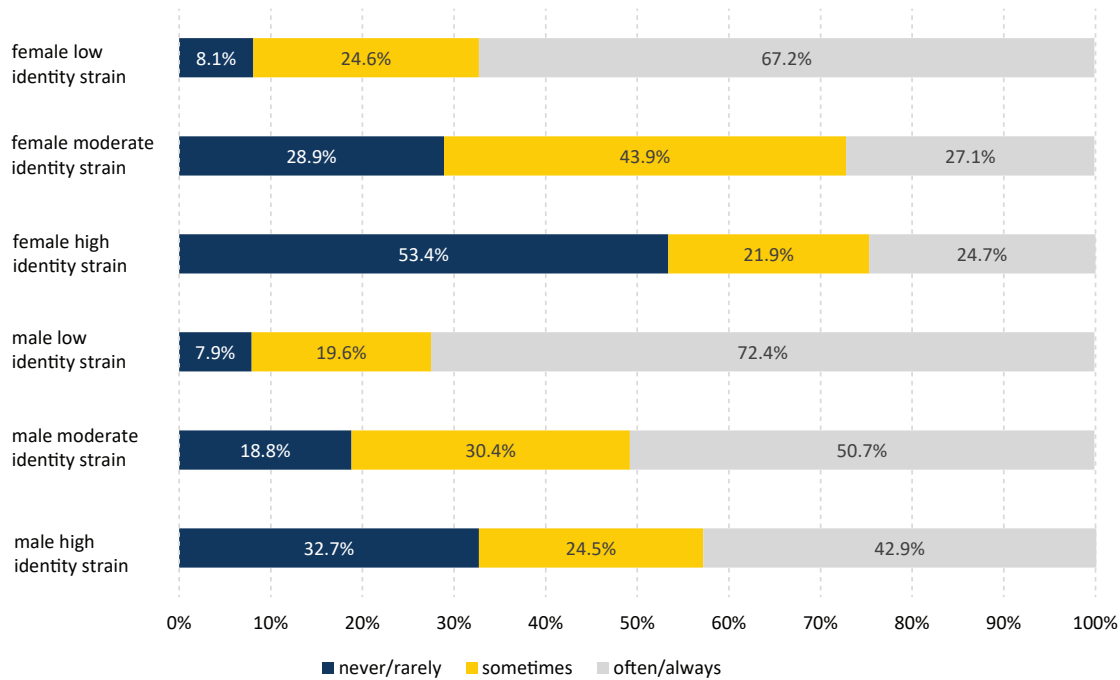
Identity strain, cultural load and gender

Women with high identity strain were the least likely to report being satisfied with their job. Men with low identity strain were the most likely to report high job satisfaction.

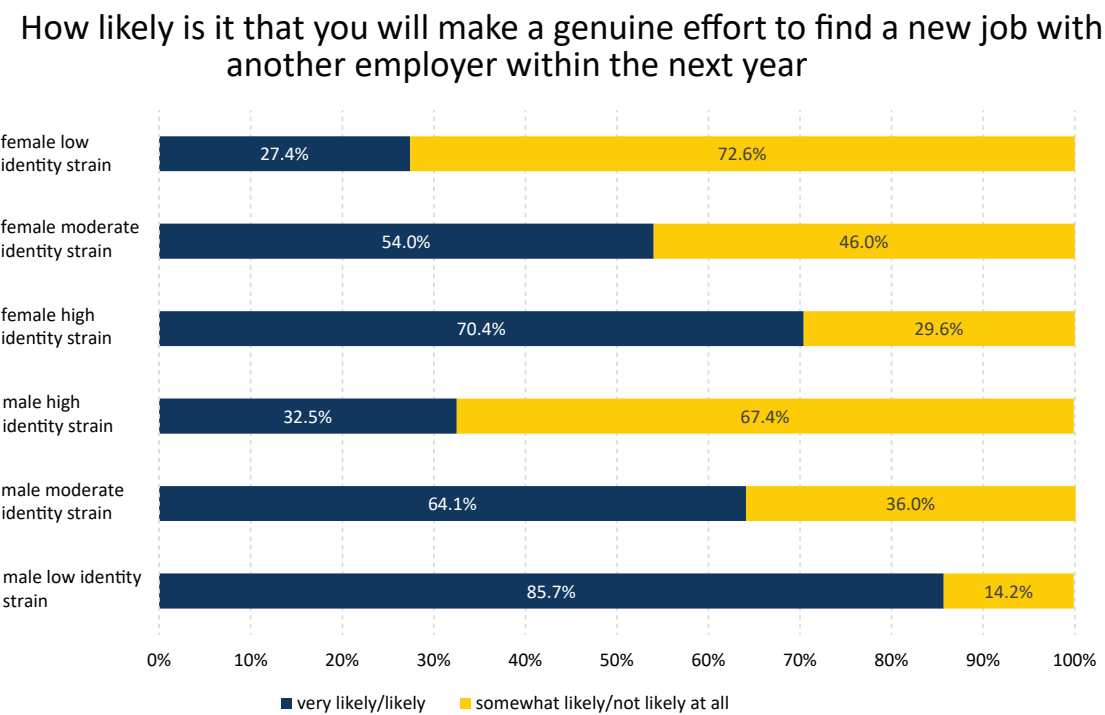
I am very satisfied with my job



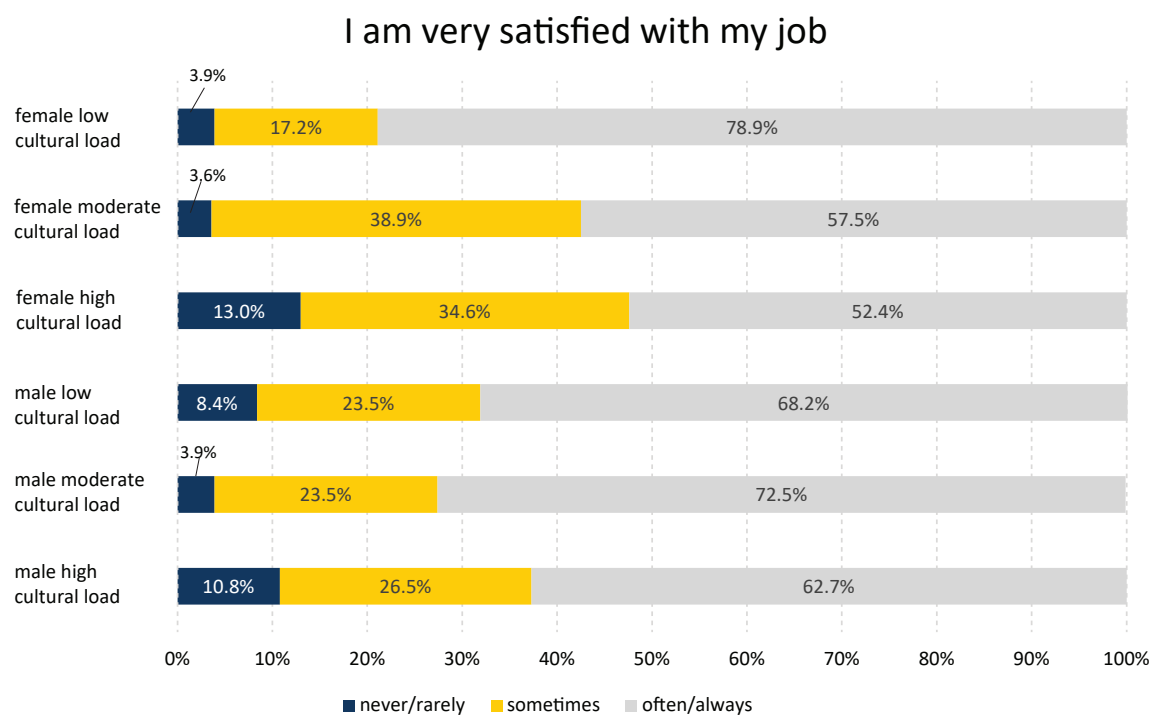
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people



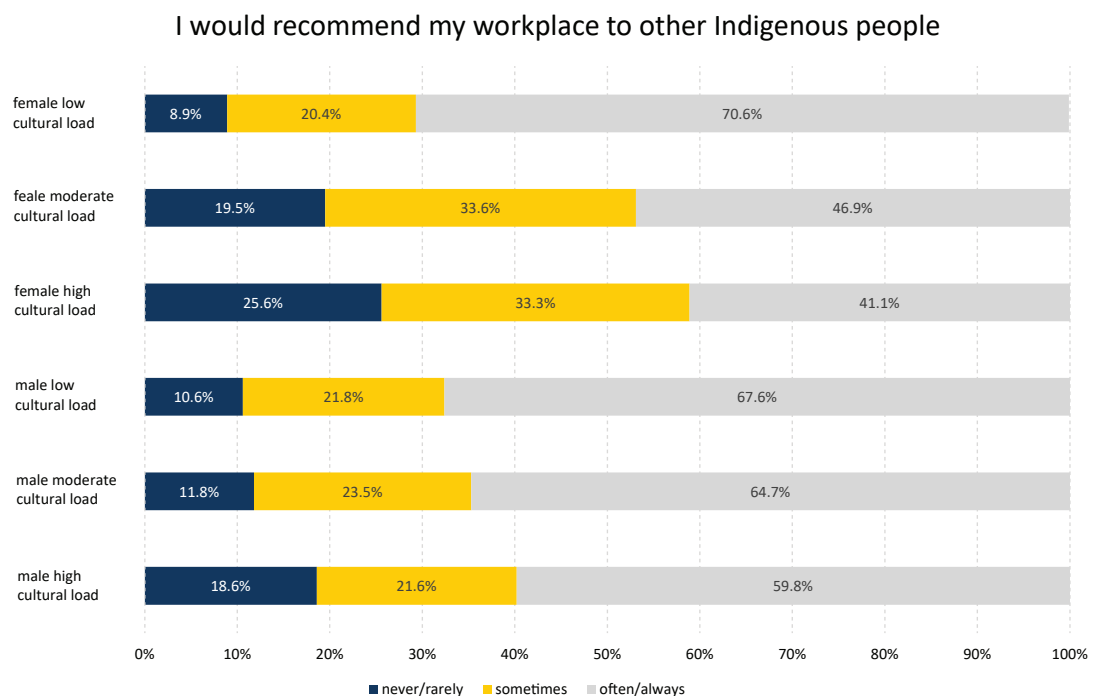
However, high identity strain seems to have a stronger effect on male intentions to leave compared to women.



Women with low cultural load were more satisfied with their job than women with high or moderate cultural load, whereas men were relatively the same.



Similarly, cultural load appeared to have little impact on men's intentions to recommend the workplace to others but women with low cultural load were much more likely to recommend their workplace compared with women with a high cultural load.



## Workplace Culture and Gender

Prior research on gender and the workplace has found that women and men experience the culture of workplaces differently. For example, research has revealed a prevalent gender bias against women in the workplace, with women less likely to be listened to, talked over and left out of informal networks.<sup>25</sup>

As well as the previously discussed organisational authenticity and cultural safety, the Gari Yala project also measured the relative activity of an organisation, based on the number of initiatives, programs and events organisations undertook relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and cultures. Examples of these kinds of activities included having a Reconciliation Action Plan, organising network groups and mentorships and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days/weeks of significance.

In terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, not much is known about the impact of organisational characteristics and culture on women's and men's experiences. Thus, the relationships between gender, and cultural safety, organisational authenticity, and organisational activity on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees were explored.

## Summary of findings

Overall the results suggest that positive workplace cultures, that is organisations that are culturally safe, authentic and active, have a strong impact on both women's and men's experience and employment outcomes. However, women appear to reap benefits over and above those of men on some of these axes, in particular seeming to benefit from the protective aspects of cultural safety and increased awareness that comes from authenticity and organisational activity.

Women in moderately active organisations had the highest cultural load. This finding suggests that organisations that are more highly active in supporting Indigenous employees and addressing Indigenous issues may be more cognizant of the burdens of cultural load compared to moderately active organisations. Moreover, the gender differences indicate that women in these moderately active organisations are more likely to bear the burden of this increased load. Promisingly, women in highly active organisations had similar rates of cultural load to men in moderate and highly active organisations, suggesting organisations that are more active in these spaces may also be more active in addressing gender inequalities.

## Cultural safety and gender in the workplace

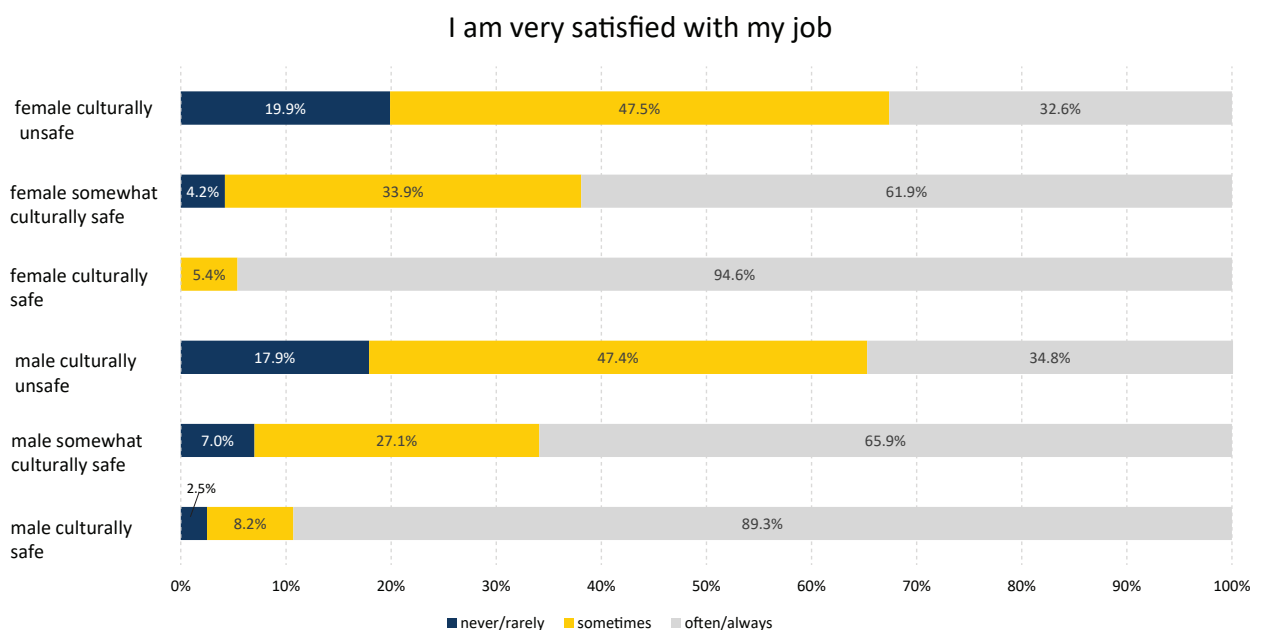
Being in culturally safe organisations seems to have more benefits for women compared to men in terms of their experiences of inclusion and their employment outcomes.

In particular, compared to women in culturally safe working environments, women in culturally unsafe working environments were:

- over 10 times more likely to often or very often be treated unfairly at work
- 20 times more likely to often or very often hear racial or ethnic slurs at work

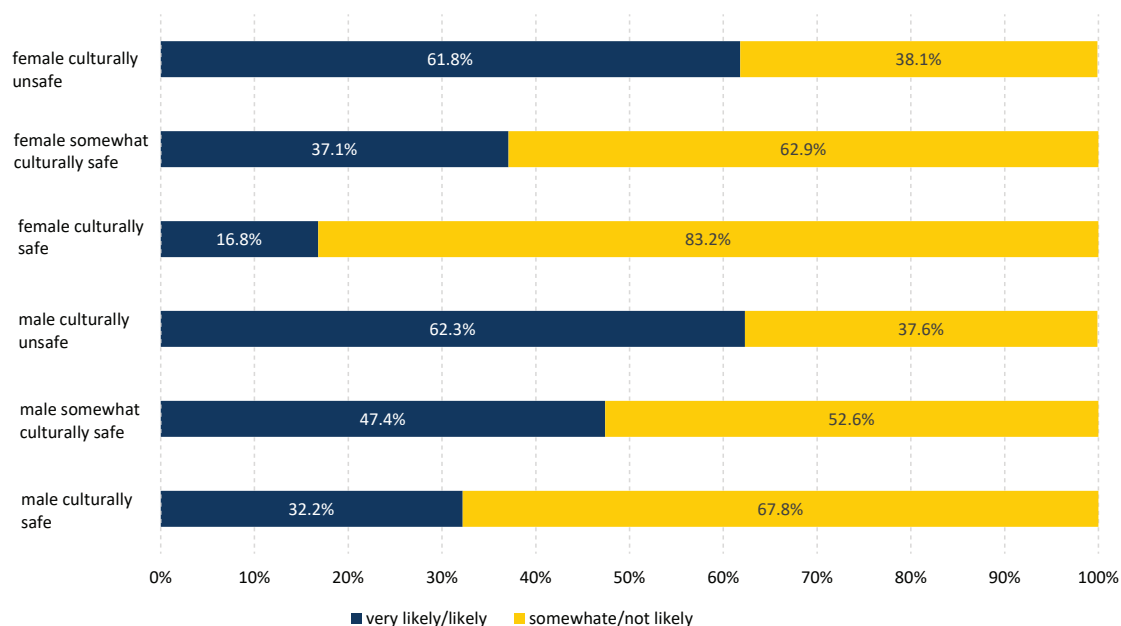
However, this same pattern was not as strong among men.

Cultural safety also appears to have a gendered impact on job outcomes. With women in culturally safe working environments being the most satisfied with their job and the least likely to be considering leaving their employer in the future.



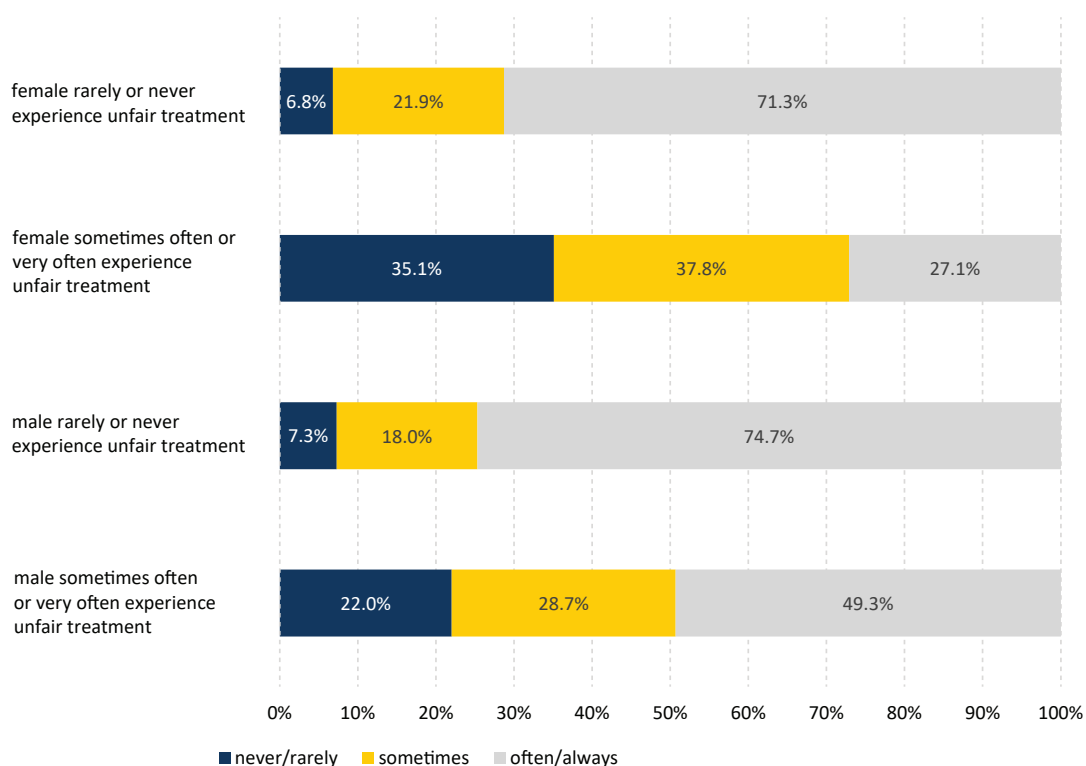


## How likely is it that you will make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year?

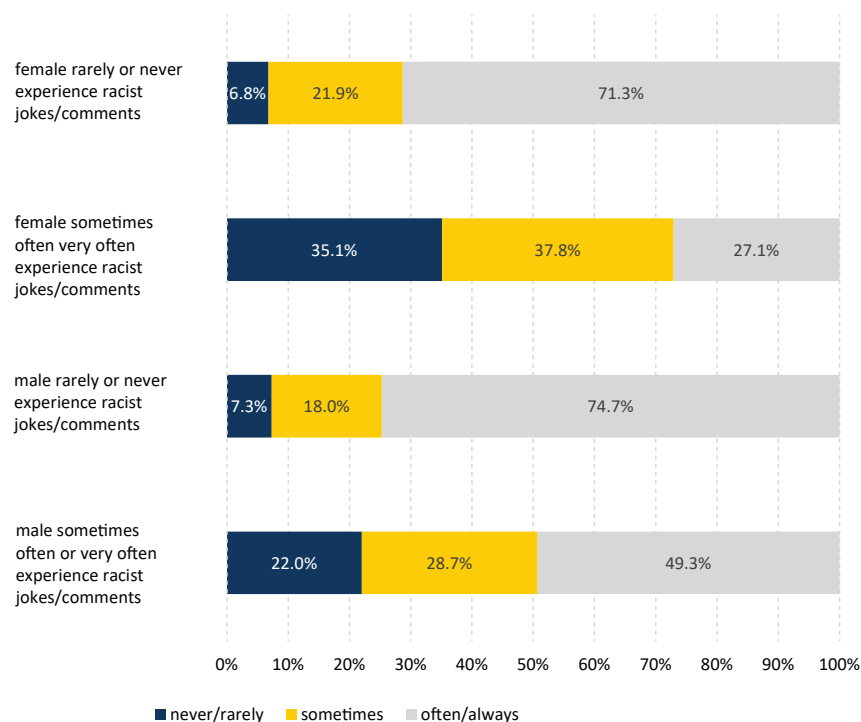


Women who experienced unfair treatment and heard jokes/slurs with some frequency were also the least likely to recommend the workplace to others.

## Would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people



## Would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people

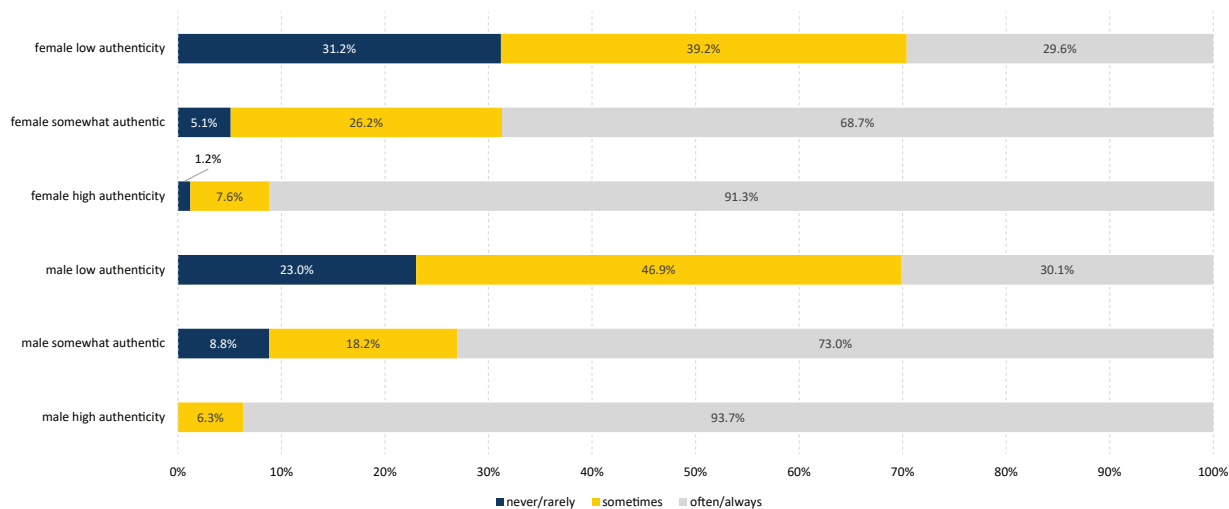


Women in culturally unsafe organisations appear to be most at risk of being treated unfairly suggesting that cultural safety is particularly protective for women.

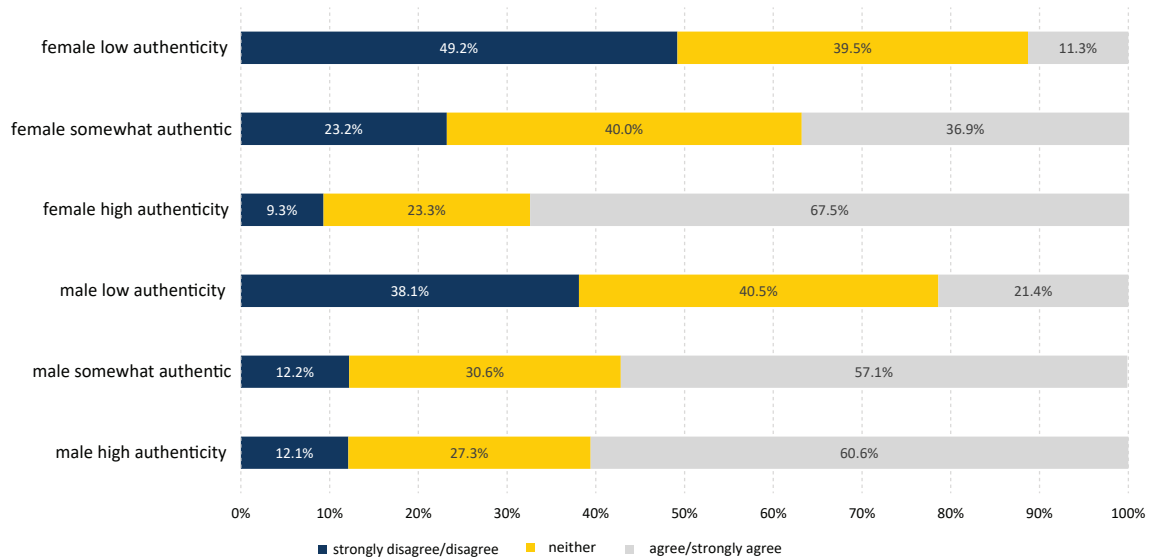
## Organisational authenticity and gender in the workplace

In terms of organisational authenticity, women in low authenticity organisations were more likely than any other group to never, or rarely, feel culturally safe and to disagree or strongly disagree they had the support they needed.

### My workplace provides a culturally safe place of work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

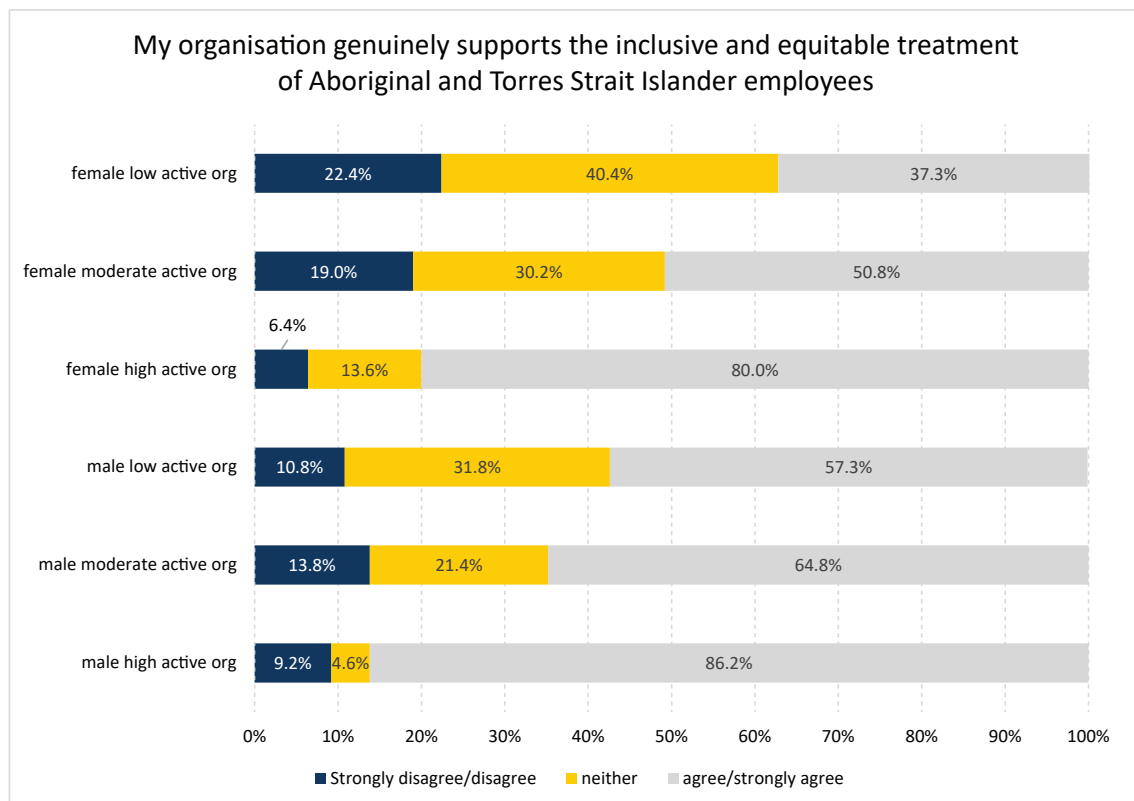


## I had the workplace support I needed when I experienced unfair treatment and/or racial slurs or jokes at work because of my Indigenous identity



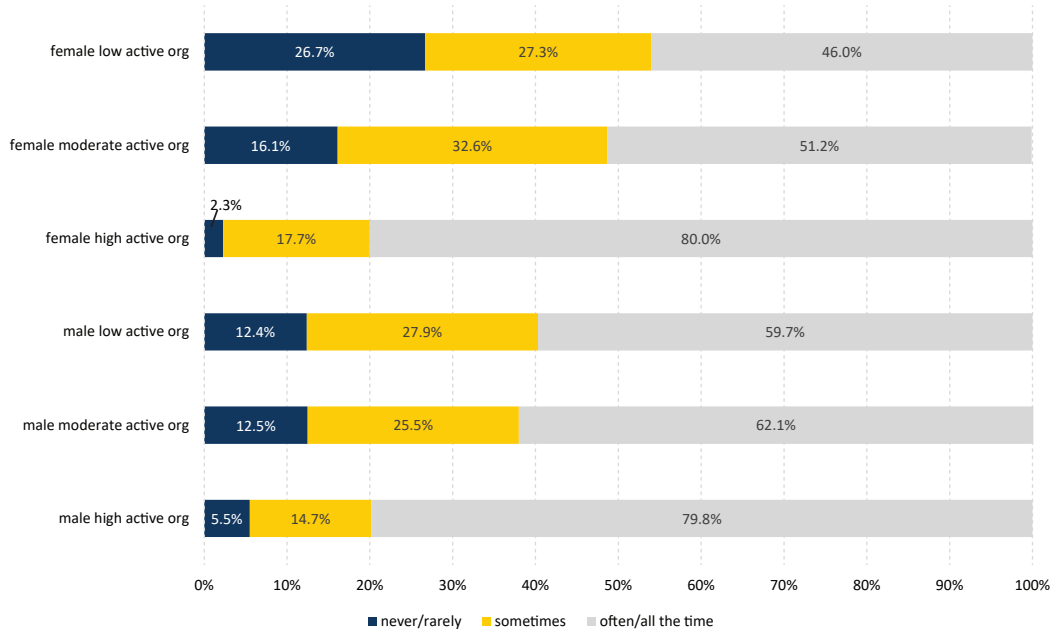
This suggests that a lack of authenticity impacts women harder than men, and puts women in these organisations at a heightened risk for not getting support.

For organisational activity, women in low and moderately active organisations<sup>1</sup> felt very strongly that their organisation was not genuine, were the most likely to indicate their organisation was culturally unsafe and were the most likely to disagree or strongly disagree that they had support when they needed it.

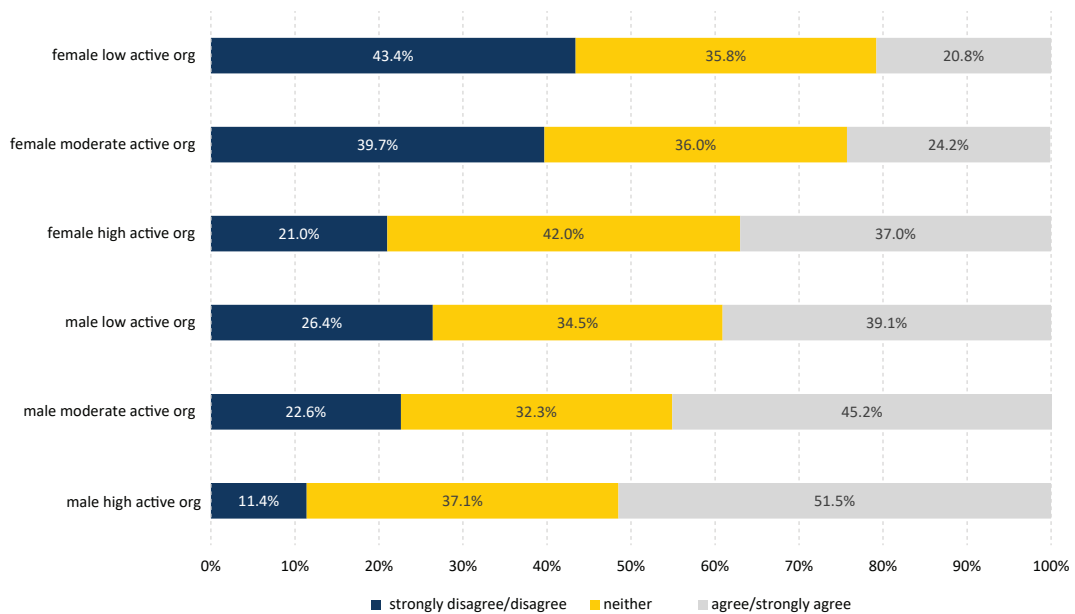


<sup>1</sup> HIGH ACTIVE = organisations high in activity had 9+ out of 16 possible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused initiatives implemented. MODERATE ACTIVE = organisations moderate in activity had 4-8 out of 16 possible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused initiatives implemented. LOW ACTIVE = organisations low in activity were those who had under 3 of the possible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused initiatives implemented.

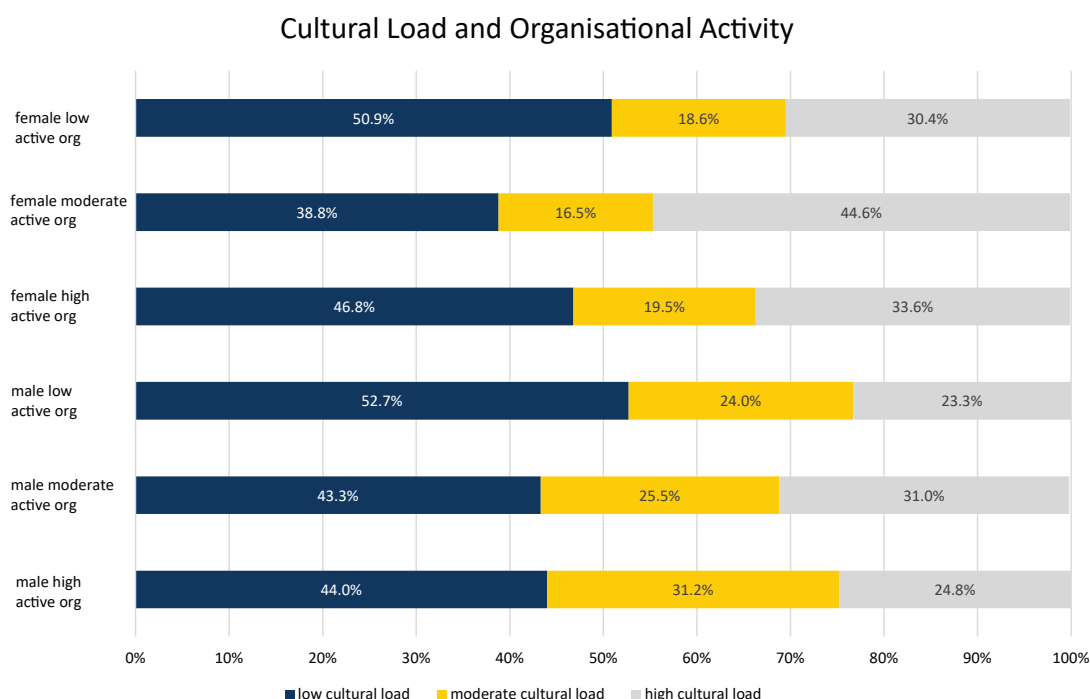
## My workplace provides a culturally safe place of work fo Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



## I had the workplace support I needed



Interestingly, women in moderately active organisations had the highest cultural load, and reported a high burden of cultural load in the form of being asked to organise events/activities, educate others, and know everything about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.



## Conclusions

Overall, the present report has provided insight into the intersections between gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities in the Australian workforce. Although the general analyses demonstrated a shared experience of identity, cultural safety, identity strain, organisational authenticity and outcomes, there were nonetheless notable differences in women's and men's experiences of access to support and cultural load.

Moreover, further intersectional analyses revealed that Indigenous women with caring responsibilities are at particular risk in the workplace as they tend to be working in more culturally unsafe and inauthentic organisations and have the highest cultural load. Position level also appears to play a role in experiences in the workplace, as women in management positions had the highest cultural load and women in lower positions were the most lacking in support. Promisingly, results demonstrated that women benefit significantly from the protective aspects of workplaces that are culturally safe, authentic and highly active.

Although this research has brought to light some of the ways that gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity intersect, further targeted research is needed to explore these intersections in more depth. In particular, future research should endeavour to explore particular areas where gender inequalities are most likely to exist. For example, research has found that men wield additional influence and perceptions of authenticity when calling for gender diversity initiatives in the workplace.<sup>26</sup> The results in this report indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men may also have this leverage in their workplaces, however a more specific investigation is needed. Future research would also benefit from more nuanced measures of background and demographic information, particularly with regards to caring responsibilities. This report should therefore serve as a first step in the process of investigating these intersections.

The 2020 Gari Yala report concluded with 10 Truths to centre Indigenous Australians' voices to create workplace inclusion. The current report demonstrates how these truths can and should include a gendered approach. In particular, Truths 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 directly address issues highlighted in the current report.



# Speak the truth: What Employers Can Do

## **Truth: Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this may be.**

Organisations must be prepared and willing to interrogate and understand the truth about their employees' experiences at work, and in particular how gender and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity intersect to determine these experiences. Organisations must also acknowledge and seek to address how their policies and workplace culture around caring responsibilities may be particularly harmful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in their workforce.

## **Truth: Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness.**

One particularly consistent finding throughout this report was that women lack the support needed to deal with culturally unsafe situations when they arise. This lack of support was particularly prevalent for women with caring responsibilities and in lower level positions. Workplaces should ensure that the systems they put in place to support and maintain cultural safety are available and accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

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

The current report suggests that identity strain and cultural load may have different impacts on the workplace outcomes of men and women. Addressing identity strain and cultural load could be a key for increasing women's satisfaction and improving the retention of men in the workforce.

## **Truth: Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload**

The current report revealed how women bear the largest burden of cultural load, which is often invisible work that is in addition to their regular workload. Workplaces need to recognise cultural load and understand how and why this kind of work falls more often on women. Cultural load also needs to be valued for the important work it is and fairly compensated.

## **Truth: Consult with Indigenous staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity**

One promising finding of the present report is that gender differences in cultural load seem to go down as organisational activity goes up. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused activities are important for improving cultural safety and provide invaluable opportunities for Indigenous-employees to connect with their co-workers, participate in cultural events and share their culture. As organisations seek to increase their activity in this space, they should be aware of cultural load and how and to whom it is distributed.

## **Truth: Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments**

In the present sample, women were underrepresented in management and executive level positions and over-represented in precarious employment. Efforts to improve Indigenous employee retention and career development should focus on how the careers of women, and in particular women with caring responsibilities, can be supported and furthered. Additionally, this report demonstrated how career progression often comes with additional burdens of cultural load for women. Organisations should be aware of this trend and seek to ensure that career development does not come at the cost of additional uncredited workloads for their female Indigenous employees.

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

The current report demonstrates the ways in which the experiences of Indigenous women in the workplace differ from Indigenous men. As well as looking to high-impact initiatives more broadly, organisations should seek out initiatives that will address issues of gender equality in the workplace, and particularly those that work through the intersection of gender and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Moreover, workplaces should take into account the additional dimension of caring responsibilities when seeking to address these issues.



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