

Exploring the Health, Wellbeing, Social, Cultural, Community and Human Rights Experiences of the Ānuanua Community in the Cook Islands

The Manarangi Community Survey Report

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Table of Contents



Executive Summary
Introduction
Existing Research
Research Design, Methodology and Procedure
Findings
Demographics
Physical Health
Mental Health
Religion and Spirituality
Community
School Life
Work Life
Human Rights
Recommendations
References
Acknowledgements and Thanks





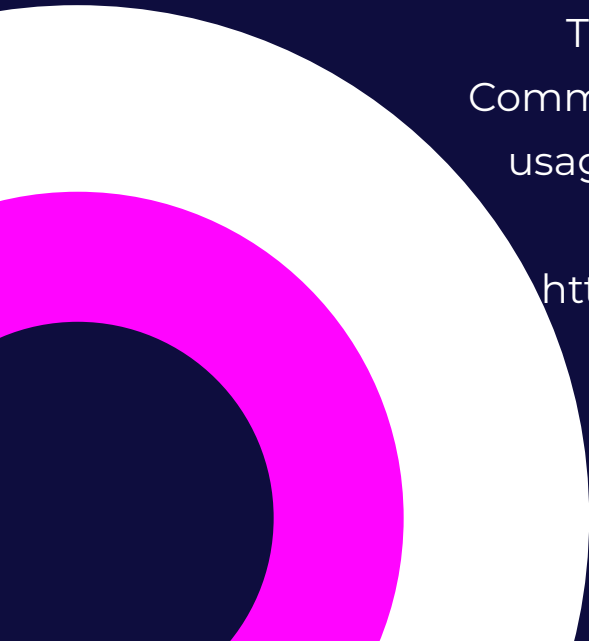
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Executive Summary

The Manarangi Survey was run in Rarotonga and Aitutaki at the end of 2024. 55 respondents completed the survey.

Age & mobility: Most respondents were mid-life (**36.4%** aged 30–39; **20.0%** 40–49), with about **one in six** over 50. A mobile cohort, **61.8%** had lived 6+ months outside the Cook Islands.

Akapapa'anga: Genealogies spanned many islands (multi-select): **Rarotonga 80.0%, Aitutaki 65.5%, Atiu 38.2%, Tongareva 34.5%**, and others—signalling wide kin ties across all of the Cook Islands.

Education: Attainment was high for a small population setting (**38.3%** highest at NCEA Level 3; **36.2%** Bachelor's).

Identity & sexuality (self-described): People used **Cook Islands terms first—akava'ine/laelae 33.0%, akatāne 11.0%**—alongside “man” (**31.0%**) and “woman” (**25.0%**). When offered Western modifiers, cis- transgender and non-binary **20.4%** chose “none of these apply.” Sexuality was diverse (**gay 32.7%, straight attracted 23.6%, lesbian 18.2%, bisexual 12.8%, pansexual 9.1%**).

Demographic data shows that: this is a **community-connected, mid-life, highly educated sample**. Results illuminate patterns among respondents but should not be over-generalised. Several questions were **multi-select** (totals can exceed 100%).

Manarangi was funded by the German Embassy to Aotearoa-New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

Health & healthcare

- **Self-rated health** was steady to positive (**45.4%** very good/excellent; **41.8%** average; **12.7%** poor). Most had **light-moderate** contact with health services in the past year (**25.4%** none; **41.8%** 0–2 visits; **23.6%** 3–4).
- **Satisfaction** with healthcare providers leaned neutral-to-positive (**47.3%** satisfied/very satisfied; **43.6%** neutral).
- **Barriers to care** centred on **relational comfort** (multi-select): **“didn’t want to make a fuss” 56.9%**, **embarrassment 37.2%**, **not comfortable with provider 31.4%**, **hoped the problem would go away 31.4%**; **cost 3.9%**.
- **Discrimination in care** was not universal but present for some: **homophobic comments 41.5%**, **misgendering 28.3%**, **transphobic comments 24.5%**; **43.4%** reported **none** of these.
- **NCDs: 40.0%** reported an NCD diagnosis (most often hypertension and diabetes).
- **Gender-affirming care (GAC): 29.1%** were aware of local options; **9.1%** had accessed GAC in the Cook Islands.

Mental health & support

- **First lines of support** were **friends (83.6%)** and **trusted family (65.5%)**; **10.9%** would go to a **doctor/health professional**; **10.9%** said **no one**.
- **Service use: 27.3%** had used a mental health support service; among those users, **73.3%** were **satisfied/very satisfied**, **6.7%** dissatisfied.

Family, faith & culture

- **Family support: 54.6%** described families as **supportive/very supportive**; **36.4%** **neutral**; **5.4%** **unsupportive/very unsupportive**; **3.6%** not out/questioning.
- **Care balance:** Families were **more dependent on respondents (53.7%)** than respondents were on family (**27.8%**).
- **Faith: 76.4%** rated religion/spirituality **very or extremely important**. Impact on life as an Ānuanua individual was most often **“neither easy nor difficult” (64.8%)**, with **27.7%** saying **difficult/very difficult** and **7.4%** **easier/very easy**

- **Culture:** All rated culture at least somewhat important; **58.2%** said it was **extremely important**, **34.5%** **very important**. **Confidence (87.3%)**, **pride (90.9%)** and **self-acceptance (50.9%)** were commonly linked to culture (multi-select).

Community participation

- **Belonging:** Many had or belonged to **Te Tiare Association (56.4%), PRIDE Cook Islands (29.1%), TAOA (18.2%),** and **sports teams (18.2%); 23.6%** had **never** joined an Ānuanua-specific community group (multi-select).
- **Exclusion: 83.3%** reported **no** exclusion from groups/teams because they are Ānuanua individuals; **16.7%** had experienced exclusion.
- **Contribution: 30.9% always** and **21.8% usually** attended cultural events; **54.5%** had **organised** an event/served as **ta'unga; 81.8% volunteered regularly; 92.5%** of that work was **unpaid.**

School experiences (retrospective)

- **Overall: 16.7%** positive/very positive; **44.4% neutral; 25.9% negative/very negative; 13.0%** did not attend school in the Cook Islands.
- **Bullying/harassment: Never 27.7%, rarely 23.4%, sometimes 25.5%, usually 17.0%, always 6.4%.**

- **Curriculum & teacher understanding: 95.8%** reported **no Ānuanua content** in the curriculum; teachers' understanding of Ānuanua issues was **a little (45.8%)** or **none at all (29.2%)** for most (only **2.1%** "a great deal").

Rights & everyday safety

- **Legal protection (post-2023 decriminalisation): 40.0%** said legislation **adequately protects** Ānuanua, **21.8% no, 38.2% unsure.**
- What would help **"to a great extent": Anti-discrimination policies 76.0%, school measures 78.4%, training for public servants 74.5%, census inclusion 74.0%, public figures speaking in support 66.7%, recognition of partnerships/adoption 69.2%/68.0%, easier gender recognition 68.6%.**
- **Public harassment/violence: Never 29.1%, rarely 49.1%, sometimes 20.0%, always 1.8%.** Of those harmed, **14.5%** reported to authorities/support; **58.2%** did not.

How to hold these findings

It is important to note that these results are illuminative, not exhaustive: the sample is comprised mostly of middle-aged, highly educated and community-connected individuals. Where the data are strongest, they identify specific levers and the kinds of changes that would make everyday life easier to navigate for Ānuanua individuals in the Cook Islands. Overall, the data show the Ānuanua community contributing: organising events, volunteering, caring, praying, studying, and working, integrated into family and work life, while navigating various challenges in Cook Islands society.

"MANARANGI"

Mana: power, **Rangi:** sky or heavens. **Manarangi:** power, authority from the heavens, inherent to all, including Ānuanua individuals who are integral parts of Cook Islands life and culture.





Introduction


The Manarangi Survey and this associated community report is a collaborative project funded by the German Embassy to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. As a survey, it represents a significant milestone in research in the Cook Islands.

Manarangi involved many hands, eyes, ears and kai vananga generously given to the research team by Rainbow+ individuals in the Cook Islands. As a project, it has been developed intentionally to support local movements seeking to advance the holistic wellbeing of the Cook Islands' Rainbow+ community. For the first time, a systematic and community-led research initiative has deliberately set out to document the lives, aspirations, challenges, and strengths of the Ānuanua community – a local, indigenous term of belonging that refers to queer, Rainbow+, and gender-diverse people. In short, this initiative is the first comprehensive community research survey of the Cook Islands Ānuanua community; one that we hope will support the recognition and affirmation of the way Ānuanua people have always been part of Cook Islands culture, society and kin structures.

Undoubtedly, the timing of this survey is significant. In 2023, the Cook Islands Parliament repealed provisions of the *Crimes Act 1969* that criminalised same-sex sexual activity between men (Cook Islands Government, 2023). This historic law reform came after decades of advocacy by community organisations such as the **Te Tiare Association (TTA)**, **PRIDE Cook Islands**, and **Te 'Anuanua o Aitutaki (TAOA)** who worked tirelessly to challenge legal and social discrimination. As Valery Wichman (2024) has noted, this reform was about more than removing an archaic law – it represented a symbolic recognition of dignity and humanity for Ānuanua Cook Islanders. Yet, as many local advocates have also pointed out, decriminalisation is only one step on a longer journey toward equity and holistic wellbeing.

For generations, the lives of Ānuanua Cook Islanders – especially those who identify as akava'ine (an indigenous Cook Islands term of cultural belonging for transfeminine people) and akatāne (transmasculine) – have been marked by a complex interplay of acceptance and exclusion. On the one hand, akava'ine have long been visible within families, villages, and cultural events, with many individuals taking up roles in caregiving, performance, and creative life (Anderst et al., 2021). On the other hand, colonial legacies, the imposition of conservative Christian norms, and imported Western models of sexuality have layered stigma and shame onto these identities (Alexeyeff, 2009). The result has been an enduring tension where ānuanua are often embraced in certain cultural contexts, yet marginalised in others, particularly within churches and formal institutions.

The Manarangi Survey builds on a foundation of regional-wide research embedded within local partnerships (Ravulo et al., 2024), most notably the Manalagi Project in Aotearoa New Zealand. Launched in 2020, Manalagi was the first national study dedicated to the wellbeing of Pacific Rainbow+ communities (Thomsen et al., 2023). Using culturally grounded approaches, including the newly-coined, Manalagi HCLC model (Honour, Connect, Listen, Collaborate) (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2026),



Manalagi gathered data from over 750 participants (Rainbow+ and allies) helping to demonstrate both the vulnerabilities and the resilience of Pacific Rainbow+ people (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021). The Manarangi Survey extends this legacy into the Cook Islands, showing the genealogical relationship between Aotearoa-based Pacific research and locally grounded inquiry in our Pacific homelands.

Why this Survey Matters

The importance of this survey cannot be overstated. Until now, most available data on Ānuanua Cook Islanders came from public health research, especially HIV and STI surveillance. For example, the 2009 Second Generation Surveillance (SGS) survey identified low levels of HIV testing and condom use among akava'ine and men who have sex with men (MSM), highlighting both behavioural risk factors and systemic stigma (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009).

Similarly, the 2016 UNDP Pacific Multi-country Mapping and Behavioural Study found that Ānuanua Cook Islanders faced high rates of verbal and physical abuse, with many reporting reluctance to seek healthcare due to fear of discrimination (UNDP, 2016). While these studies were vital, as is common in the public health space, they tended to position Ānuanua Cook Islanders primarily in terms of “risk populations,” focusing on vulnerability rather than the fullness of their identities, cultures, and aspirations.

The Manarangi Survey takes a different approach. While it still documents challenges such as stigma in schools, workplaces, and healthcare settings, it also centres resilience, leadership, and cultural pride. It asks questions about holistic wellbeing, family acceptance, and the contributions of role models. It frames Ānuanua people not only as subjects of study but as knowledge holders and leaders in their own right. In this sense, the survey, as much as a survey instrument is able to, moves beyond a deficit model toward what Valery Wichman (2024) describes as “tūranga memeitaki” – a Cook Islands Māori philosophy of wellbeing that emphasises wholebeing, connection, and dignity.



34%

of Manarangi
Respondents
aged 30-39

33%

Identified as
akava'ine or
laelae

36%

Had a bachelors
degree

80%

'Akapapa to
Rarotonga



Regional and Global Connections

The Manarangi Survey also attempts to place the Cook Islands within a wider global and regional narrative regarding the lives of queer/LGBTQIA+, Rainbow+ individuals and communities. Across the Pacific, Indigenous gender-diverse identities have long existed, for example fa’afafine in Samoa, fakaleitī/leitī in Tonga, fakafifine in Niue, māhū in Hawai’i, and palopa in Papua New Guinea. These identities are not Western imports; they are deeply rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and social structures (Besnier & Alexeyeff, 2016). Yet, colonialism imposed new legal, religious, and cultural frameworks that sought to erase or stigmatise them. Today, Rainbow+ people in the Pacific continue to negotiate these contradictions, asserting their place in both cultural and modern national contexts.

For Cook Islanders, these negotiations are further shaped by patterns of migration and diaspora. Tens of thousands Cook Islanders live in Aotearoa-New Zealand and Australia, where they encounter different legal regimes, healthcare systems, and social attitudes. The Manalagi Project has shown that Pacific Rainbow+ people in Aotearoa-New Zealand face high levels of discrimination, particularly when navigating healthcare systems that are often culturally unsafe (Thomsen et al., 2023). At the same time, diaspora spaces can provide opportunities for activism, visibility, and solidarity that can support movements that are located in our homelands.

By conducting the first dedicated survey of Ānuanua Cook Islanders in the Cook Islands, the Manarangi Survey not only generates local data but also strengthens these transnational connections. It contributes to regional solidarity, providing evidence that can be used in both domestic advocacy and international human rights forums.

Ānuanua

Ānuanua means rainbow and has increasingly been used as a collective term for the LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and others) community in the Cook Islands since the emergence of the advocacy and campaign around equality and the Cook Islands Crimes Bill. Michael Tavioni explains that Ānuanua is an ‘Akairo derived from Te Rangi and cosmology and that it is a physical representation of the ‘the belt of Tangaroa’– a sign of success (p. 11). In many Pacific contexts, the rainbow is a symbol of beauty, transformation, and covenant, making it a fitting metaphor for communities that embody fluidity and colour. Using Ānuanua in this report is a deliberate act of localisation: it places queer Cook Islanders within their own cultural language, rather than relying on imported terms like “LGBTQI+.”

Akava'ine

Akava'ine is a culturally specific identity in the Cook Islands that refers to transfeminine people – those assigned male at birth who live as women, or whose gender expression is feminine (Anderst et al., 2021). The term is sometimes translated as “in the manner of a woman,” aligning it with cognate terms such as fa’afafine in Samoa and fakaleiti in Tonga. While akava'ine have long been recognised in Cook Islands society, their position has often been precarious. Families may accept them in domestic or performance roles, yet churches and public institutions may marginalise them.

Historical accounts suggest that akava'ine were visible in pre-colonial Cook Islands society, though their status shifted dramatically under missionary influence in the 19th century (Besnier & Alexeyeff, 2016). Today, akava'ine navigate a complex landscape of acceptance, resilience, and resistance.



Phylesha Brown-Acton
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MVPFAFF+

The acronym MVPFAFF+ was coined by Phylesha Brown-Acton on behalf of 50 Pacific Rainbow+ activists to capture the diversity of Indigenous Pacific gender and sexual identities: Māhū (Hawai'i and Tahiti), Vakasalewalewa (Fiji), Palopa (Papua New Guinea), Fa'afafine/Fa'atama (Samoa), Akava'ine (Cook Islands), Fakafifine (Niue), and Fakaleiti/Leiti (Tonga). The “+” acknowledges further identities that may not be fully captured by the acronym (Brown-Acton, 2020).

The significance of MVPFAFF+ lies in its refusal to collapse Pacific identities into Western categories like “gay,” “transgender,” or “non-binary.” Instead, it affirms that Pacific peoples have their own epistemologies and vocabularies for understanding gender and sexuality. Using MVPFAFF+ alongside terms like Ānuanua positions Cook Islands research within a regional genealogy of Indigenous knowledge.

Brown-Acton has often reminded us that MVPFAFF+ is not the Pacific equivalent to LGBTQIA+ and other such terms that emanate from Euro-American contexts. Rather, MVPFAFF+ is a reminder that gender-liminal individuals in the Pacific also have an indigenous reference point that places them within their cultural, social and familial contexts.



Tūranga Memeitaki

Tūranga Memeitaki can be translated as “good standing” or “wellbeing” in Cook Islands Māori. As theorised by Wichman (2024), it refers to a holistic sense of health that encompasses physical, psychological, spiritual, and relational dimensions. It moves beyond Western biomedical notions of health to embrace what Wichman calls “wholebeing.” In the context of the Ānuanua community, tūranga memeitaki is both an aspiration and a framework. It highlights the need to move beyond deficit models that focus only on risk or vulnerability, and instead to emphasise the resilience, leadership, and joy that exist within the community.

Akapapa’anga

Akapapa’anga refers to genealogy or whakapapa – the tracing of relational connections across generations and families. In Cook Islands research, akapapa’anga is both a method and a worldview (Wichman, 2024). It acknowledges that individuals are never isolated but are always situated within networks of kinship, community, and land. For Ānuanua people, akapapa’anga affirms that their identities are part of these genealogies, not an aberration or a break.

Kai Vānanga Vataavata

Kai Vānanga Vataavata is a Cook Islands methodological innovation described by Valery Wichman (2024). It refers to elevated conversations that are respectful, dialogical, and culturally appropriate. Similar to talanoa, it emphasises openness and relationality, but it is tailored to the specific needs of marginalised communities. In practice, kai vānanga vataavata provides a safe space for Ānuanua people to share their stories, knowing that they will be received with dignity.

For the Manarangi Survey, kai vānanga vataavata inspired the way community consultations were conducted. Rather than imposing a rigid survey structure from outside, the project engaged participants through dialogue, listening, and shared reflection.



Existing Research

As alluded to earlier, research on Ānuanua or queer and gender-diverse Cook Islanders, although relatively scant, has tended to emerge from public health and surveillance framings that focused on HIV/STI risk. Two cornerstone studies are routinely cited. First, the Second Generation Surveillance (SGS) Survey of akava'ine and men who have sex with men (MSM) (Cook Islands, 2009) documented sexual behaviour patterns, condom access and use, HIV knowledge, and contact with services (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009). While these data were crucial for programming, their risk lens often foregrounded vulnerabilities over lived experience and culture.

Second, the Pacific Multi-Country Mapping and Behavioural Study (2016) included a Cook Islands arm and extended the analysis beyond behaviours to structural determinants of risk (e.g., discrimination, institutional capacity, service environments) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016). Findings recorded barriers to testing, persistent stigma, and uneven organisational readiness to deliver inclusive services.

Crucially, these reports shaped the early evidence base for Ānuanua Cook Islanders and were a result of public health approaches to preventing sexually transmitted infections, however, this approach offered limited space for cultural, relational, and identity-affirming accounts of Ānuanua life beyond health risk (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009; UNDP, 2016).

Recently, two surveys led by Jjoji Ravulo et al., (2024a; 2024b) in partnership with the Pacific Gender and Sexuality Diversity Network, has identified the need for greater legislative protection for Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientations Gender Identities and Sex Characteristics (PIDSOGIESC+) across the region, better access to healthcare and greater competency in the public service regarding supporting PIDSOGIESC+; among a raft of recommendations. While enormously useful data, only 5 respondents in the sample from across the region were from the Cook Islands.

Over the past decade, research in the Cook Islands and in Pacific Indigenous research spaces have also pivoted toward wellbeing and cultural frameworks. A major inflection point is Valery Wichman's (2024) thesis, which theorises Tūranga Memeitaki (good standing/holistic wellbeing) as "wholebeing" grounded in akapapa'anga (genealogy) and kai vānanga vataavata (elevated, culturally safe conversations). Rather than define Ānuanua primarily through vulnerability, Wichman centres relational belonging, dignity, and cultural continuities, arguing that meaningful policy must be led by Ānuanua knowledge holders themselves.

This echoes wider Pacific scholarship that resists extracting "LGBT" categories from local epistemologies (Besnier & Alexeyeff, 2016) and aligns with the Manalagi HCLC model (Honour, Connect, Listen, Collaborate) developed in Aotearoa-New Zealand to operationalise Pacific relational ethics in Rainbow+ research (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2026).



Cook Islands literature: Akava'ine, acceptance, and the long shadow of coloniality

Qualitative analyses now document akava'ine experience within family, church, and community, showing a dual reality of care and constraint. Anderst et al. (2021), drawing on interviews from a regional dataset (Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands), report high levels of verbal, physical and sexual abuse in tandem with narratives of resilience, humour, and pride. Participants locate themselves in a shifting place between tradition and Christianity, negotiating acceptance in some family and church sites and discrimination in others. Rather than interpreting this as contradiction, the authors argue it evidences active place-making, where akava'ine reconcile modern and Indigenous values in everyday life (Anderst et al., 2021).

Law, policy, and symbolic change

The 2023 decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations in the Cook Islands, reversing colonial-era provisions first embedded in the Crimes Act 1969, is widely seen as symbolically transformative, even as social stigma persists (Cook Islands Government, 2023). Regionally, ILGA World's legal mapping underscores uneven progress across the Pacific, where statutory reform and social conservatism frequently travel together (ILGA World, 2024). Community organisations (e.g., Te Tiare Association, PRIDE Cook Islands and TAOA) have long advocated for change, linking legal dignity to service access and safety in schools, workplaces, and health facilities (UNDP, 2016).

Culture, performance, and belonging

Cook Islands dance, performance, as well as arts and crafts remain important cultural sites where akava'ine visibility is celebrated and contested. Ethnographic work (e.g., Alexeyeff, 2009) traces how gendered performance travels across tourism, diaspora festivals, and church stages, showing that visibility may coexist with constrained respectability, which is valued in public culture yet policed through religious and heteronormative ideals. This lens helps explain why some akava'ine report recognition without rights, or care without equality—accepted when entertaining or serving, yet marginalised in institutional decision-making (Alexeyeff, 2009).



Regional Pacific research: Samoa, Tonga and Fiji

Samoa and American Samoa (fa'afafine/fa'atama)

Samoa's fa'afafine have long been studied, but much work historically centred anthropological typologies or etiology rather than health systems and rights (Carney, 2015). Current peer-led and NGO reports (e.g., Samoa Fa'afafine Association, Asia Pacific Transgender Network [APTN]) emphasise complex gender taxonomies (fa'afafine, fa'atama) and call for legal protections, healthcare competence, and anti-violence measures tailored to community realities (APTN, 2022). Recent needs assessments document service avoidance due to stigma, low provider knowledge, and conditional acceptance—family support that is contingent on performance or service roles rather than unconditional dignity (Winter et al., as cited in UNDP/UNFPA briefs; APTN, 2017, 2022).

Tonga (leiti/fakaleiti)

Tonga's literature highlights strong cultural visibility of leiti/fakaleiti and rising religious conservatism that has intensified stigma (Transrespect/TVT, 2015; Parliamentary Briefing, UK, 2022). Qualitative and policy reviews document criminalisation legacies, misgendering in services, and reliance on Tonga Leitis' Association (TLA) for outreach, legal aid and training (UNFPA, 2022; UNAIDS, 2017). While Tonga's Leiti are well-known for their cultural visibility through pageantry and social labour, this does not automatically translate into institutional inclusion (e.g., law, health, education), where violence against Leiti is still reported.

Fiji and the region

Fiji's trans communities have been central to regional peer-led research on legal rights and health access (APTN, 2022). Regional networks such as the Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network (PSGDN) coordinate advocacy, capacity building, and evidence generation across Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Fiji, PNG, and others (PSGDN, n.d.; Pacific Sexual Health & Well-being Shared Agenda, 2015–2019). This landscape underscores that Cook Islands findings should be read alongside regional patterns of service avoidance, violence exposure, and policy gaps (PSGDN, n.d.; UNAIDS, 2017).



Diaspora research (Aotearoa New Zealand): Youth, trans health, intersectionality

Diaspora is a key context for the Cook Islands Ānuanua community. In Aotearoa New Zealand, national and school-based surveys supply robust, population-level evidence on Rainbow and trans health inequities.

- Counting Ourselves (national survey of trans and non-binary people) evidences stark disparities in psychological distress, discrimination in healthcare, and service avoidance; it underlines the need for gender-affirming care, competent providers, and anti-discrimination protections (Veale et al., 2019).

- Youth19 (and the Youth2000 series) provide detailed profiles of Rainbow rangatahi, including Pacific Rainbow youth. Analyses consistently show higher rates of depression, suicidality, safety concerns, and healthcare barriers among sexuality- and gender-minority students; intersectional briefs focusing on Māori, Pacific, Rainbow, and disabled youth reveal compounded inequities (Clark et al., Youth19; Ministry of Youth Development, 2020). Recent work stresses service competence gaps and mixed experiences of seeking help in mental health settings (Fraser et al., 2022).

- Peer-reviewed syntheses (Fenaughty et al., 2023) link mental health disparities among trans and sexuality-diverse youth to cisheterosexist stigma, reinforcing the need for affirming environments across schools, health, and community (Fenaughty et al., 2023).

In the Pacific diaspora, Pacific Rainbow+ scholarship (e.g., Manalagi) argues that “double discrimination” (racism plus homo/transphobia) produces a contradictory condition of hypervisibility (subject to trauma voyeurism) and structural invisibility (marginal in mainstream Rainbow and heteronormative Pacific spaces) (Thomsen & Brown-Acton., 2021). This framing resonates with Wichman’s Cook Islands analysis of belonging and dignity and suggests that diaspora evidence is likely to have direct relevance to Ānuanua policy design at home (Wichman, 2024).



Education, religion, and violence

Across Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Aotearoa-New Zealand evidence bases, three **cross-sector themes** recur:

1. **Schooling and youth safety.** Youth19 and diaspora studies show bullying, exclusion, and identity hiding to avoid harm. These are patterns echoed in Cook Islands qualitative accounts of school-based stigma and in Tonga/Samoa peer reports of harassment (Clark et al., Youth19; Anderst et al., 2021).
2. **Religious spaces.** Churches remain ambivalent sites—sources of sociality and care but also policed gender/sexual norms that can produce conditional acceptance and internalised stigma (Anderst et al., 2021; TVT, 2015; PSGDN issue briefs).
3. **Violence and service access.** Reports note verbal/physical/sexual violence, fear of disclosure, and avoidance of mental-health services because of anticipated discrimination (UNDP, 2016; UNAIDS Tonga Report, 2017; Veale et al., 2019; Youth19 Health Services).

These patterns, we believe, validate the Manarangi Survey's decision to measure schooling, health, religion, family, work, and resilience together, and to interpret findings via Pacific wellbeing rather than risk-only frames.

Human rights and legal change: necessary but not sufficient

The legal environment matters for safety and service design. Decriminalisation in the Cook Islands (2023) and law-reform debates across the Pacific are tracked by ILGA World and regional policy briefs (ILGA World, 2024; UK Parliament, 2022). However, multiple sources caution that law reform alone does not erase social stigma. Without health-worker training, school inclusion policies, church dialogue, and resourced community organisations, reform can remain symbolic rather than lived (UNFPA Tonga policy review, 2022; Ravulo et al., 2024a; 2024b). This insight supports Manarangi's emphasis on recommendations that translate legal dignity into everyday inclusion.



Research Design, Procedure and Methodology

The Manarangi Survey was designed as a relational, community-led inquiry into the lives and wellbeing of Ānuanua (Rainbow+/Queer) people in the Cook Islands. The research team working toward a tight timeline, began the process of research through the use of the Manalagi HCLC Model (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2026), which stands for Honour, Connect, Listen, Collaborate.

Beginning well: Honour

We began with Honour. For Manarangi, honour meant recognising a specific historical moment and its genealogies. In 2023, the Cook Islands repealed colonial-era provisions that criminalised consensual sex between men—legislation that had long overlaid stigma upon Indigenous realities of gender and sexuality (Cook Islands Government, 2023). While decriminalisation did not dissolve shame or discrimination overnight, it changed the symbolic landscape in which research would land. Entering that landscape required us to acknowledge the decades of community advocacy by Te Tiare Association (TTA), PRIDE Cook Islands, TAOA and many Ānuanua leaders; advocacy conducted in churches, homes, workplaces and public life, often at personal cost (UNDP, 2016; Wichman, 2024).

Honour also meant declaring our Akapapa'anga: our relational positions rather than presenting the project as a detached technical exercise. Following Wichman's (2024) framing, the research team held kai vananga in Rarotonga with community members from the Ānuanua community. Further, Dr Thomsen and Phylesha Brown-Acton had connected with the Cook Islands Ānuanua community in various capacities before. Working together was an expression of our akapapa'anga connections with the local community, whilst Valery Wichman being a key advocate and leader around decriminalisation was an important aspect of this research team's desire to honour the work that began before our arrival.

Building trust: Connect

Honour naturally led into Connect. Before a single survey item was drafted, we mapped relationships with TTA and PRIDE Cook Islands, which included health and education stakeholders, church allies, youth advocates, and outer-island contacts. The purpose was simple: ensure that the instrument, the recruitment plan, and the way results would be shared were tied to people most affected. While the timeline for the project was compressed due to funding constraints, we scheduled meetings with community and used small kai vananga meetings to learn which topics mattered most and how they should be approached (Wichman, 2024). Connectivity also had a material dimension. Following the relational ethics described in Manalagi's HCLC model (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2026), the project budget covered venue hire, kai, transport, and an atinga (token) of NZD \$50 for survey participants. These were not "incentives" in the narrow sense; they were forms of reciprocity, recognising time, expertise, and the emotional labour of sharing.



Safety first: Listen

With relationships in place, we moved to Listen. Listening was not just something we did in interviews; it shaped the instrument. Guided by the existing Manalagi Survey instrument, we asked: how do we design a survey that ensures dignity, choice, and emotional safety? The survey would invite accounts of school bullying, family tensions, discrimination in health services, and experiences within churches. These are topics that can be re-traumatising if mishandled (Anderst et al., 2021; UNDP, 2016). We therefore adopted a trauma-informed sequence: beginning with identity and strengths, then moving carefully into more sensitive domains, with opt-outs available at every step.

Listening also shaped language. Just as we did with the Manalagi Survey in Aotearoa-New Zealand, we had open text boxes when it came to questions regarding gender and sexuality so that people could write themselves into the survey using Cook Islands Māori terms that were most appropriate to them, as well as in English. The tone was deliberately affirming: rather than providing categories for respondents to choose from, the survey asked respondents to describe their gender and sexuality in their own terms. This gave agency back to respondents to ensure that they could frame who they were in the way that made the most sense to them.

Sharing power: Collaborate

The final HCLC principle, Collaborate, concerned governance and co-ownership. Rather than treat community partners as “recruitment channels,” we established a research team that included community leaders as named investigators, partnering with community organisations in Rarotonga and Aitutaki as co-owners of the project. Ultimately, the Ānuanua community members will own this data on behalf of their communities. The research team reviewed the draft instrument, approved the final version after sense-checking with community.

Collaboration shaped where the survey happened. While an online link was available, we prioritised neutral, private venues for in-person completion: community rooms if requested and travelled to respondents with tablets that we had pre-loaded the survey instrument onto, to ensure that respondents would be able to complete the survey without the barrier of WiFi and internet access.




The Survey Instrument: What we asked and why

The Manarangi Survey instrument was initially based broadly off the design of the Manalagi Survey that was administered in Aotearoa-New Zealand by the Manalagi Project team. This approach was deemed more suitable than attempting to import a survey instrument from Europe or North America, as the surveys run by PSGDN in 2023-2024 had already taken this approach (Ravulo et al., 2024a; 2024b) to produce important data. The Manalagi Survey instrument was co-designed by Pacific Rainbow+ community members across Aotearoa-New Zealand, and had a clear focus on culture, community-building, spirituality and other aspects of positive wellbeing. Further, many of the issues expressed and covered in the Manalagi survey were deemed likely to have congruence with the Cook Islands context by local Cook Islands Ānuanua leaders through dialogue with the research team. This is partly because of the shared 'akapapa or genealogy between Pacific Rainbow+ individuals in Aotearoa-New Zealand and the wider Pacific region.

The Manalagi Survey instrument was shared with local leaders in the Cook Islands who analysed the instrument and provided additional advice around how the instrument would need to be adapted to the Cook Islands context. Through pre-consultation dialogue with Ānuanua leaders, additional sections were added to the survey instrument, including education, work, and human rights – domains that were not in the original Manalagi survey instrument.

Following this, two community meetings were called in Rarotonga in November 2024, where the research team shared the draft instrument with attendees – all of whom were Ānuanua community members. Attendees at the meeting provided further feedback on the final instrument and wording of the survey. Their advice and approval of the final questions created the final research instrument which was renamed to Manarangi in order to be localised into the Cook Islands language, whilst preserving the shared context and meaning of the Manalagi ethos and framing. A position that advances the notion that Ānuanua individuals, like all Cook Islanders are gifted an inherent mana, which is relationally derived from the heavens or rangi, and connected to 'akapapa – providing place and space for them unquestionably within their families, culture, history, spiritual framework and wider-society.

Furthermore, while earlier research (SGS 2009; UNDP 2016) has offered valuable insight into sexual health, service access, and structural stigma, this evidence base remained thin on education, work, family and household, religion and spirituality, disability, and role-model/resilience pathways (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009; UNDP, 2016).



Manarangi, as affirmed by community voices, would therefore include the following domains:

- 1. Demographics and identity language** (including akava'ine/akatāne and other Indigenous terms);
- 2. Schooling** (safety, bullying, hiding identity, supportive adults);
- 3. Physical and mental health** (self-rated health; experiences of dismissal or disrespect in care; avoidance of services and why);
- 4. Family/household** (support, conflict, housing stability);
- 5. Religion and spirituality** (participation, belonging, harm, or affirmation);
- 6. Work and income** (inclusion, harassment, career progression);
- 7. Community connection and role models;**
- 8. Discrimination and violence** (verbal/physical/sexual, reporting, redress);
- 9. Aspirations and recommendations** (what change looks like from participants' perspectives).

Much like the Manalagi Survey, the Manarangi survey questions were designed to be short, asked in plain-language, and sequenced to maximise efficiency. A key item of feedback from community members was to ensure that the survey was not overly-extensive, thus reducing the likelihood of community members completing the survey in its entirety. Sensitive items were accompanied by “skip” options and on-page reassurance that people could decline to answer without explanation. We also included open-text prompts to invite narrative, recognising that numbers alone cannot capture context, nuance, or humour, key qualities that Anderst et al. (2021) identified as central to akava'ine place-making and resilience.



Who Participated: Eligibility and Sampling

Eligibility was intentionally inclusive: Ānuanua Cook Islanders aged 15+, living in Rarotonga, Aitutaki, or other islands, and those questioning or exploring identity. Sampling followed community-centred purposive and network approaches through TTA/Pride Cook Islands, TAOA and private social groups, aiming for diversity in age, gender modality (including akava'ine), island, and ability status. The target was 40-50 respondents, grounded in feasibility and consistent with prior small-population studies; the achieved n=55 mirrors the scale of Cook Islands evidence from past surveillance while broadening scope beyond sexual health (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009; UNDP, 2016). It also provides a solid base for future research survey promotion as more data is needed to better support the efforts of providing safe and meaningful progress on the wellbeing of Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.

To make the survey accessible to as many Ānuanua community members as possible, we held two community data collection meeting sessions in Rarotonga in December 2024. And further data gathering happened in Aitutaki, where our local investigator travelled to Aitutaki with tablets to enable those resident there an opportunity to also participate. In these sessions Ānuanua community members were able to complete the survey on tablets in Rarotonga as well. These were tablets provided by the research team. These tablets allowed for offline data collection that did not rely on paper modes, which are always susceptible to damage and loss during movements, as well as differing data security requirements. This mode of digital offline data collection was favoured as the research team also travelled around Rarotonga and Aitutaki, presenting tablets to respondents in order for them to complete data collection. All respondents who completed the survey were offered a small atinga of \$50NZD or gift of reciprocity in recognition of their contribution and time, in-line with local Cook Islands custom. Community members that attended the planning meetings were also offered an atinga of the same amount for their contribution to the design of the research instrument.



Consent and Ethics

The Manarangi project received Cook Islands Research Ethics Committee approval in October 2024. Information sheets and consent were offered in plain English and Cook Islands Māori although the survey was administered in English only. For 15–17 year-olds, consent procedures balanced youth safety with confidentiality, mindful of the risks associated with forced disclosure in families or schools. In line with regional best practice, we developed distress and disclosure protocols: if someone indicated current harm or asked for help, while support on-island in Rarotonga and Aitutaki is limited, the research team were able to provide warm referrals to health, counselling, legal, or protection services, if respondents required them. No respondents indicated they needed these referrals after completing the survey.

The survey was completed anonymously, although research team members were often present in the same room when respondents completed the survey to answer any questions or troubleshoot any issues respondents had with the survey. Respondents were given the option of being left alone by the research team, or could request that the research team remained present based on their own degree of comfortability. As the survey was administered digitally and offline, there was no risk of respondents being able to be identified by IP addresses, as a result, the research team are not able to attribute responses to any specific individuals via this means. As the sample that Manarangi is focused upon is a specific community group, there is still a small risk that some may be identifiable based on how much respondents shared in qualitative responses. As such, qualitative responses are reported as de-identified to ensure the risk of accidental disclosure of participation is minimised as much as possible.

Data Stewardship

Data were stored in an encrypted environment with role-based access. Quantitative analysis focused on descriptive profiles across domains, with cross-tabulations where numbers allowed (e.g., by age band; by gender modality including akava'ine; by island). Qualitative data (free-text fields) were analysed using rapid, rigorous thematic coding, guided by Tūranga Memeitaki (as an interpretive anchor) and HCLC principles (as relational checks on tone and inference). Patterns (e.g., “church belonging and concealment” occurring together) were cross-checked against earlier Cook Islands and regional findings to situate local narratives within wider Pacific experience (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009; UNDP, 2016; Anderst et al., 2021; Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2023; Wichman, 2024).

Crucially, interpretation did not happen alone. Emerging findings were sense-checked with the Ānuanua Community at the Cook Islands 2nd Annual Ānuanua Week, where a community workshop was run by the research team. At this event, the research team presented preliminary findings to the community, who then held a kai vananga to discuss the findings. Those discussions are also folded into this report.

Limitations



Survey responses:

55 participants



Completion rate:

98 percent

While insights in this report are rich and illustrative, it is important to remember that although the sample is one of the largest of Cook Islands Ānuanua experiences in recent times, the relatively small nominal number (n=55) restricts statistical inference and may under-represent outer islands beyond Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

Self-selection is likely, as people connected to community networks are more visible to recruitment. A cross-sectional design such as the Manarangi Survey is not about determining causality, rather, it is meant to help us draw a more detailed picture of the experiences of Ānuanua in the Cook Islands - although it will not be a complete picture. This, however, we believe is a strong foundation for better supporting Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.

By naming these limitations we hope it helps readers interpret patterns cautiously and point to areas where future research that targets outer-islands and other under-sampled part of the Ānuanua community, can be carried out to enhance our understanding.

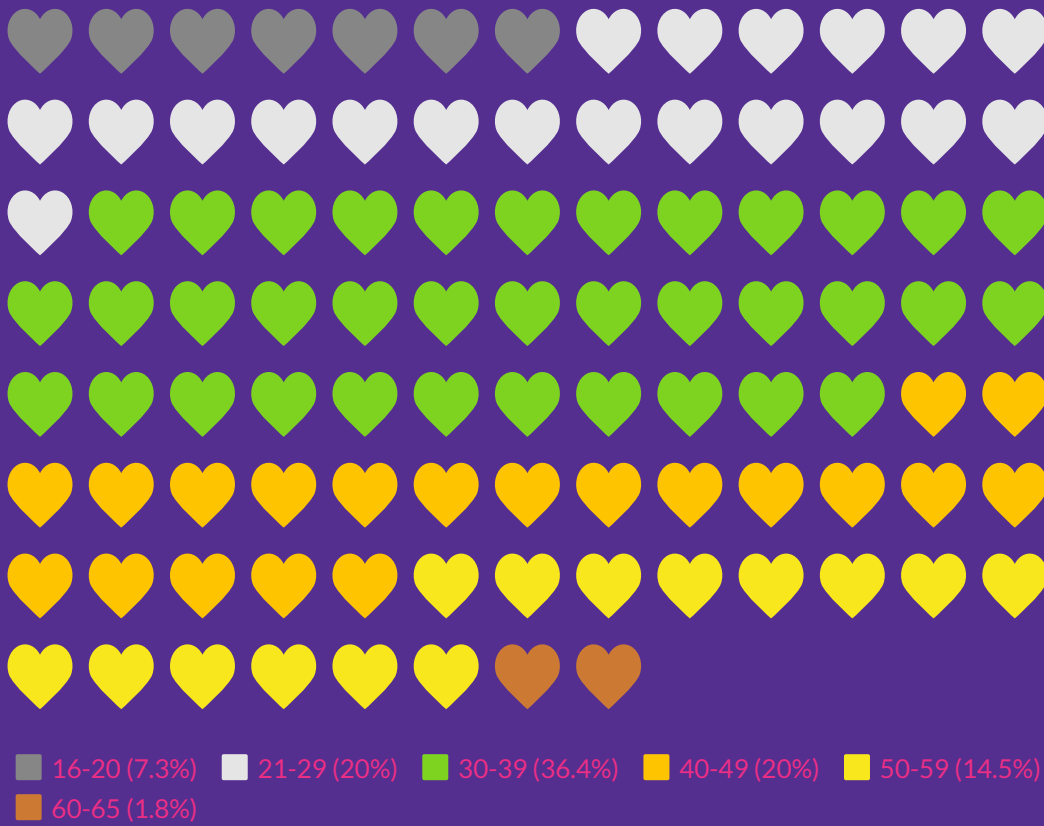
Note also that none of the questions were compulsory, so respondents could skip past questions that did not apply to them. Furthermore, many questions were multi-select, so some percentages on specific questions will total higher than 100%.

Following the Manalagi HCLC spirit, the Manarangi dataset is co-owned by Cook Islands Ānuanua Organisations: Te Tiare, PRIDE Cook Islands and TAOA.



Part 1: Demographics

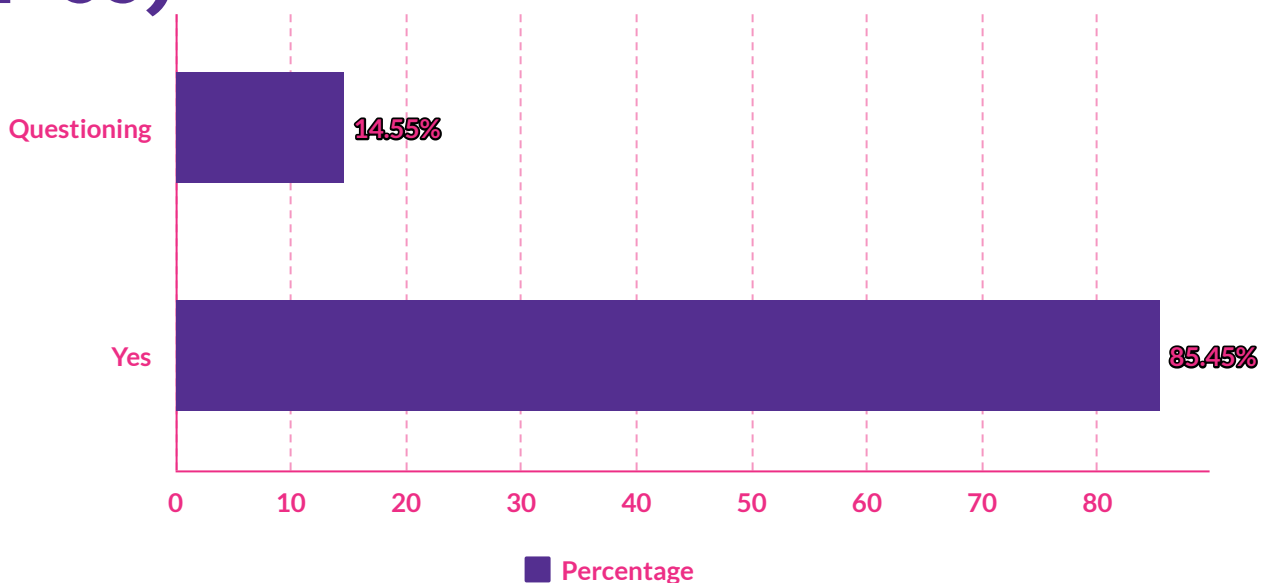
1A. How old are you? (n=55)



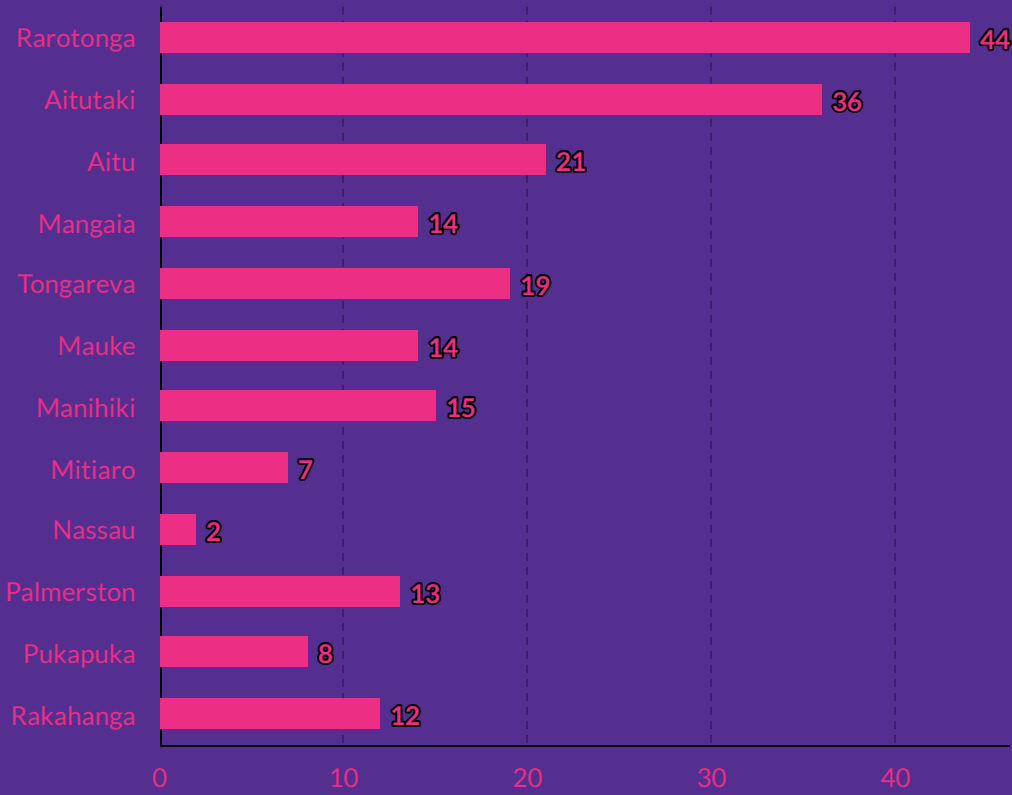
Respondents to the Manarangi Survey were likely to be in their 30s or 40s, with a smaller number (roughly 15%) over 50.



1B. Do you identify as part of the Ānuanua (queer, Rainbow+ LGBTQIA+ Community)? (n=55)

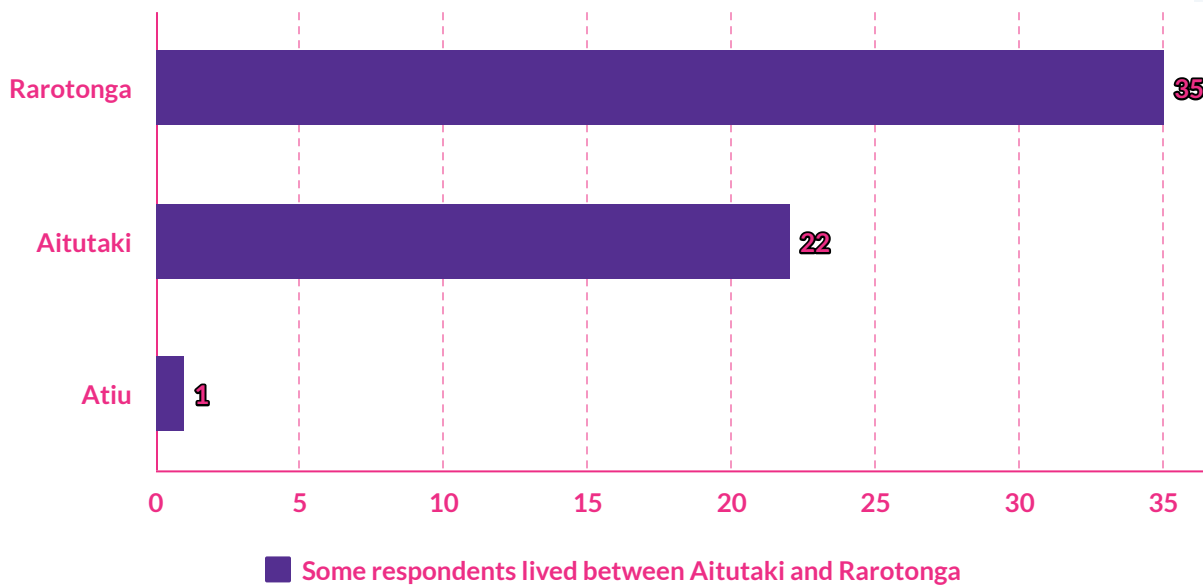


1C. Which Islands of the Cook Islands do you 'Akapapa to? (n=55)

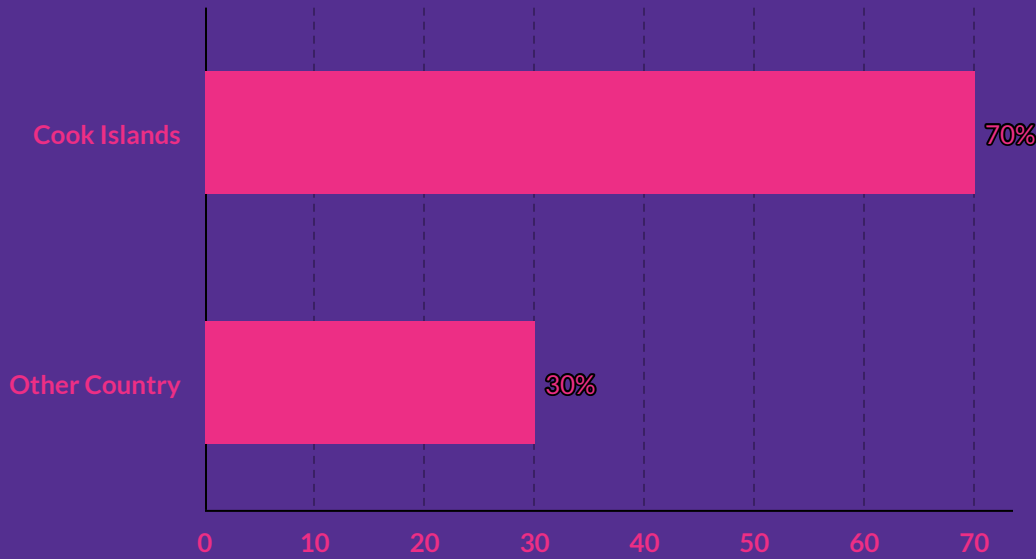


* Respondents were able to choose as many options that applied to them.

1D. Where in the Cook Islands do you currently live? (n=55)



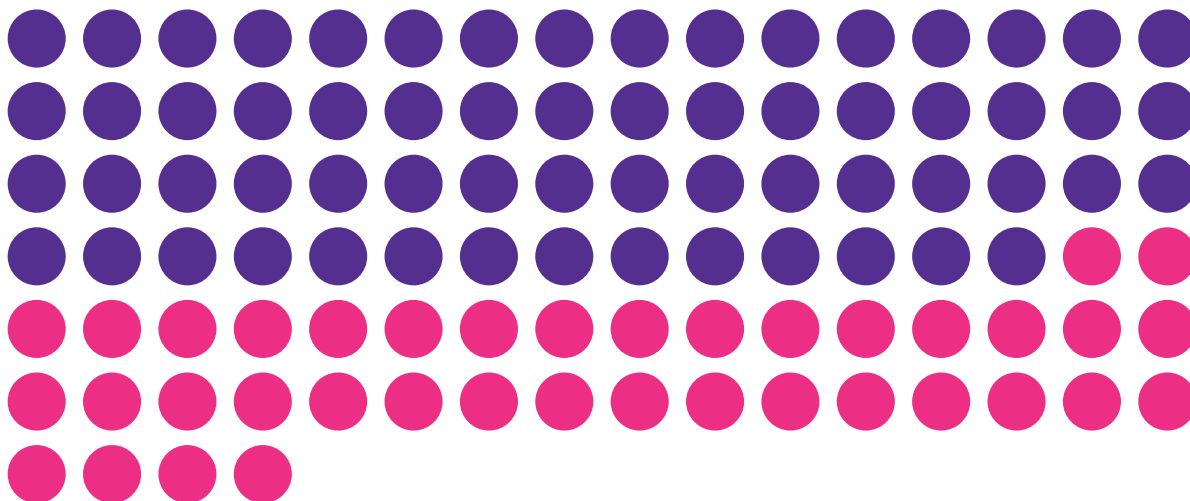
1E. Where were you born? (n=55)



Majority of respondents that selected 'other country' were born in New Zealand, followed by Australia. There were a few respondents who indicated they were born in other Pacific Islands as well.

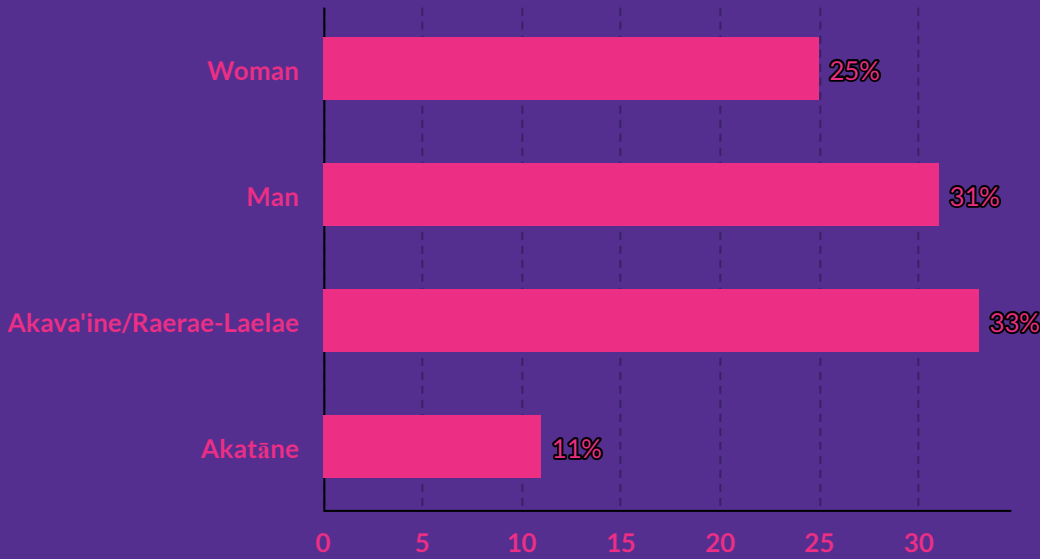


1F. Have you lived outside the Cook Islands for more than 6 months before? (n=55)



■ Yes (61.8%) ■ No (38.2%)

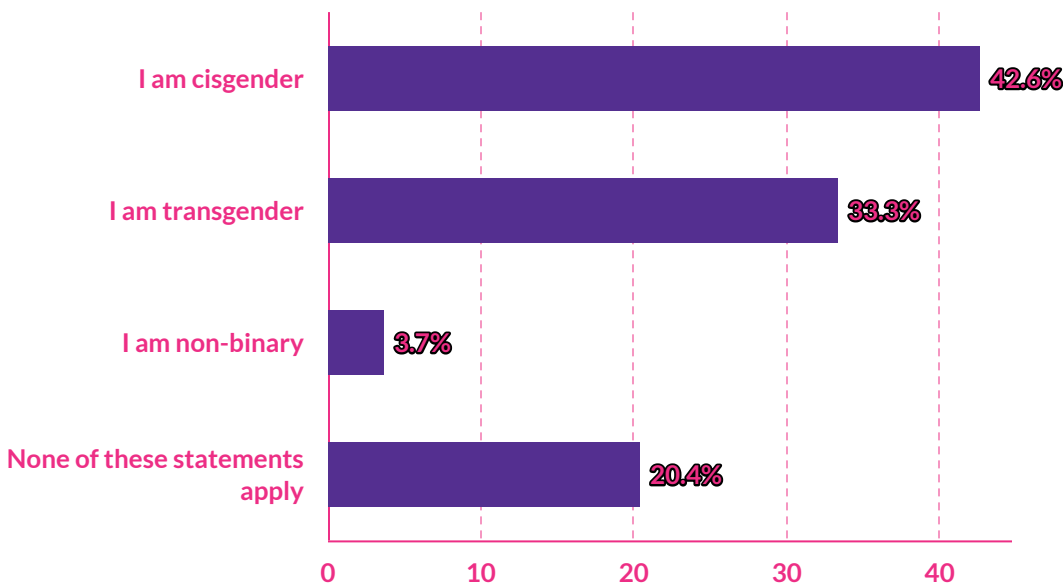
1H. How do you describe your gender?(n=55)



This was an open text box where respondents could write in their gender identity. Of the 55 respondents, the most commonly written in response was a Cook Islands indigenous identity: Akava'ine or Raerae/Laelae - suggesting in the Cook Islands, Indigenous terms and identities for gender are also significant, and are used alongside Western terminologies.

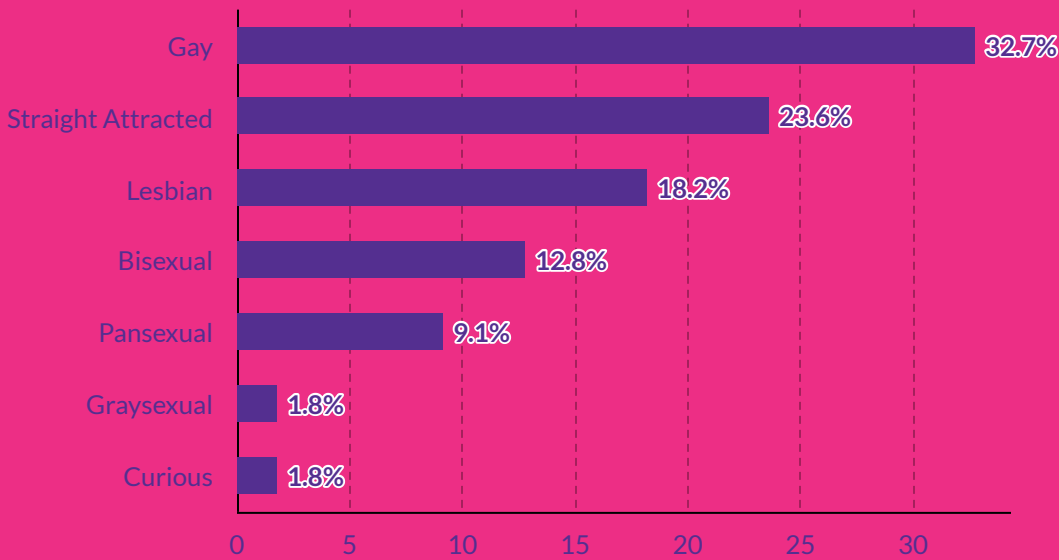


1I. Which of these statements apply to your gender? (n=55)



When asked whether respondents were either cisgender, transgender or non-binary, category modifiers of gender identities in Western contexts, a large number of respondents (20.4%) indicated that they did not resonate with any of these descriptors.

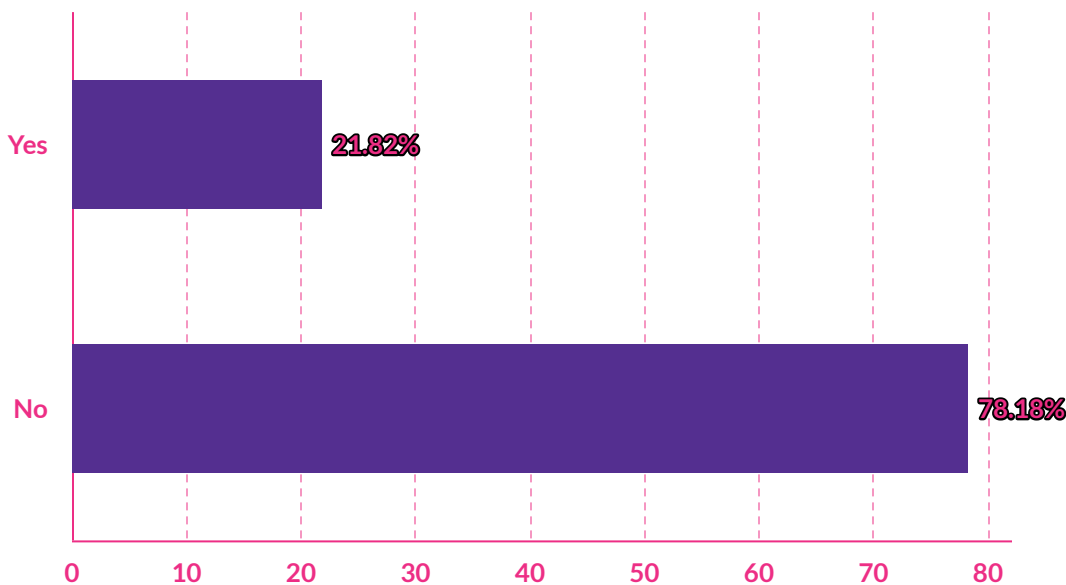
1J. How do you describe your sexuality?(n=55)



The largest number of respondents identified as gay, with the second highest category being straight attracted. This is likely to be a consequence of transgender individuals whose gender identity is non-normative, but whose sexual orientation is heterosexual. In other words, transgender women are women as a social construct, thus, their attraction to men, is expressed as heterosexual desire. For transgender men, the same is true in that their gender identity is not aligned with what they were assigned at birth, but within their gender identity as a man, their attraction to women is also an expression of heterosexual desire.

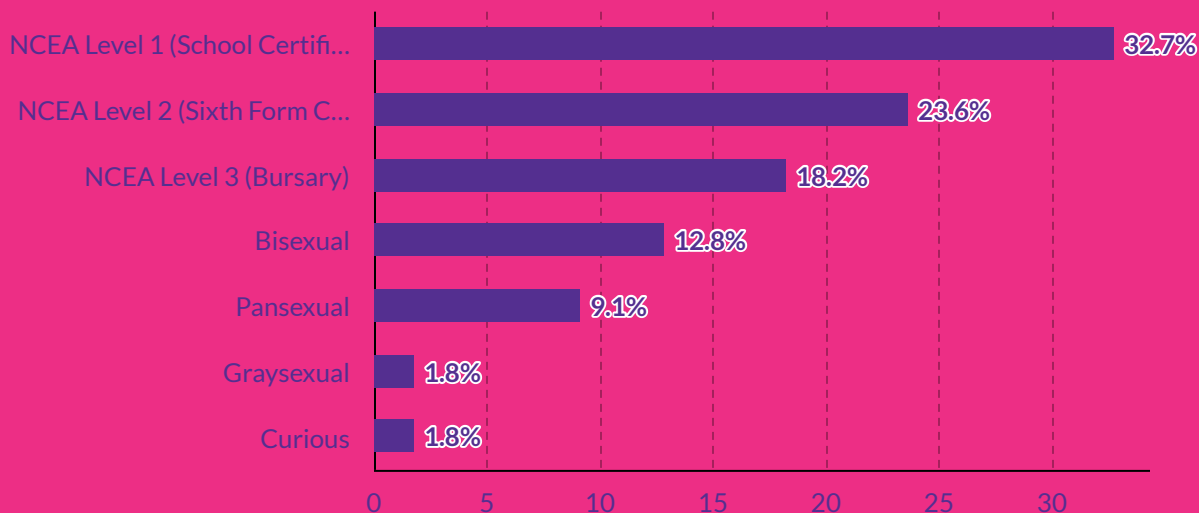


1K. Do you live with any kind of physical disability? (n=55)



7.27% of respondents also identified as neurodivergent. Of those living with a physical disability, 4 indicated hearing difficulties, another 4 indicating eyesight difficulties, and 1 indicated they were living with chronic gout.

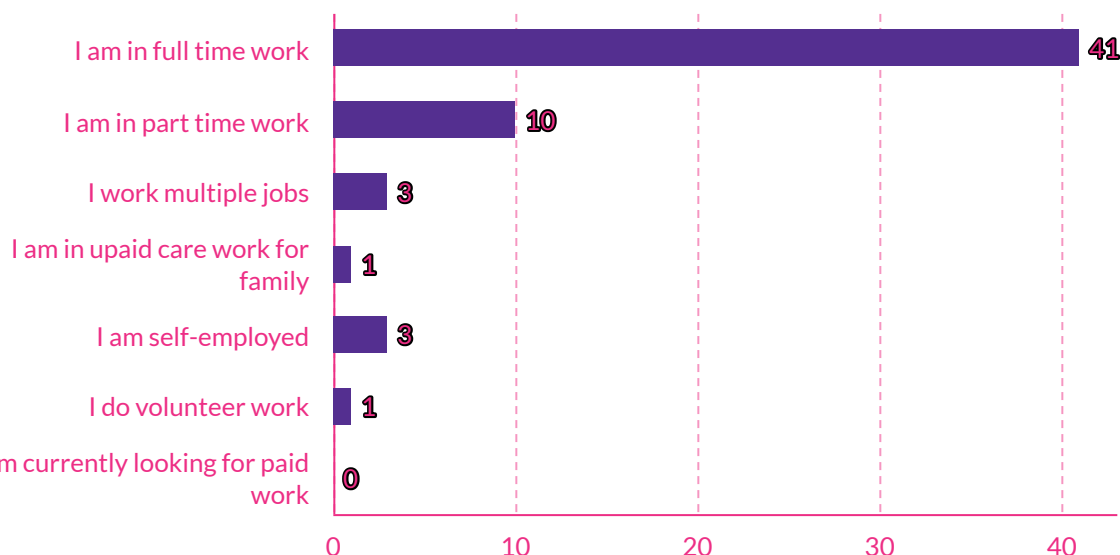
1L. What is your highest level of formal education/qualification received? (n=55)



Census indicators suggest about 71.5% of residents aged 15+ report a secondary qualification (Cook Islands Statistics Office, 2023). Respondents to the Manarangi Survey then, demonstrate high levels of qualification attainment. Over a third of respondents held a bachelors degree, and only 2.1% of the sample had Level 1 or School Certificate as their highest qualification. This suggests that the sample was highly-educated, especially when held in comparison to the wider Cook Islands population. This should be interpreted cautiously, as some of this is likely to be attributed to the sampling bias that was explained in the report's limitations section.

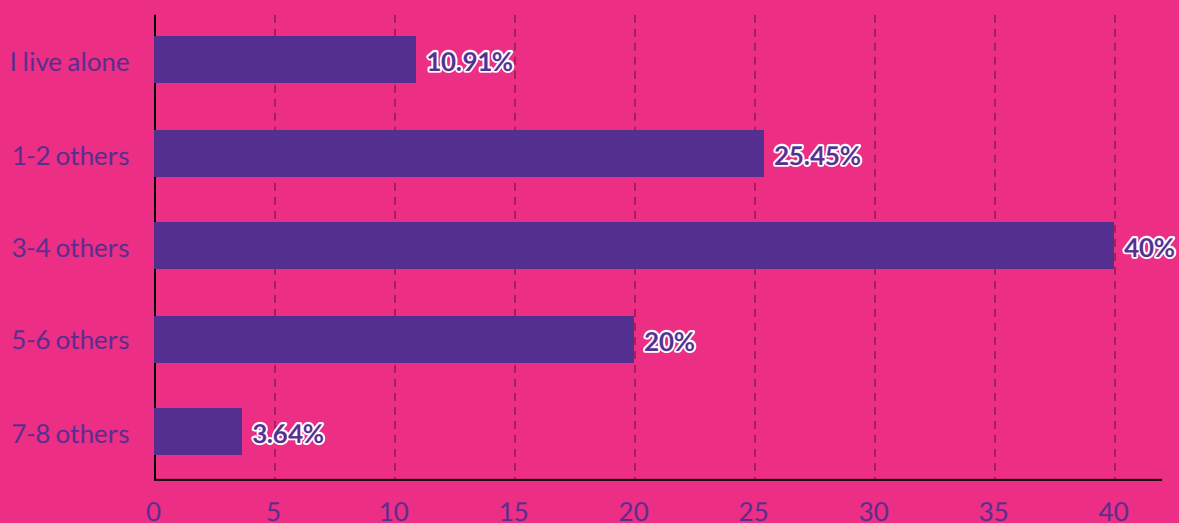


1M. Which of these describe your current employment situation (n=55)



All respondents described themselves as employed in some capacity, with the vast majority in full time employment. A small number of respondents are working multiple jobs and some respondents ran their own businesses. Overall the Manarangi sample were active in the Cook Islands workforce.

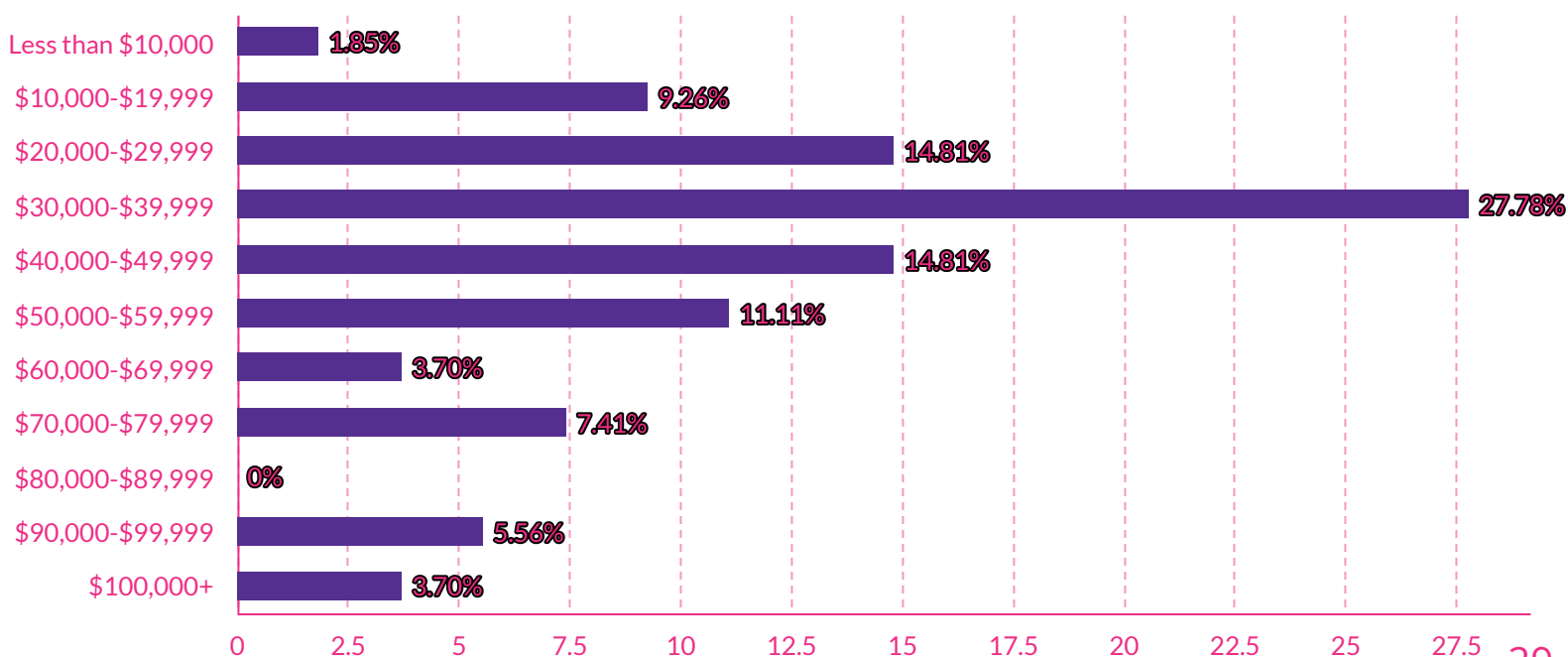
1N. How many people do you live with in your household? (n=55)



Respondents to the Manarangi Survey were likely to be living in a household with multiple individuals. These homes are co-inhabited with one or two individuals (25.45%) to between three and four others (40%), with a significant number living with five to six others in their households. Living with others can have a positive impact on socialisation, maintaining familial ties and wellbeing, provided the environment is safe and inclusive, whilst overcrowding can sometimes be seen as a challenge to optimal wellbeing outcomes.



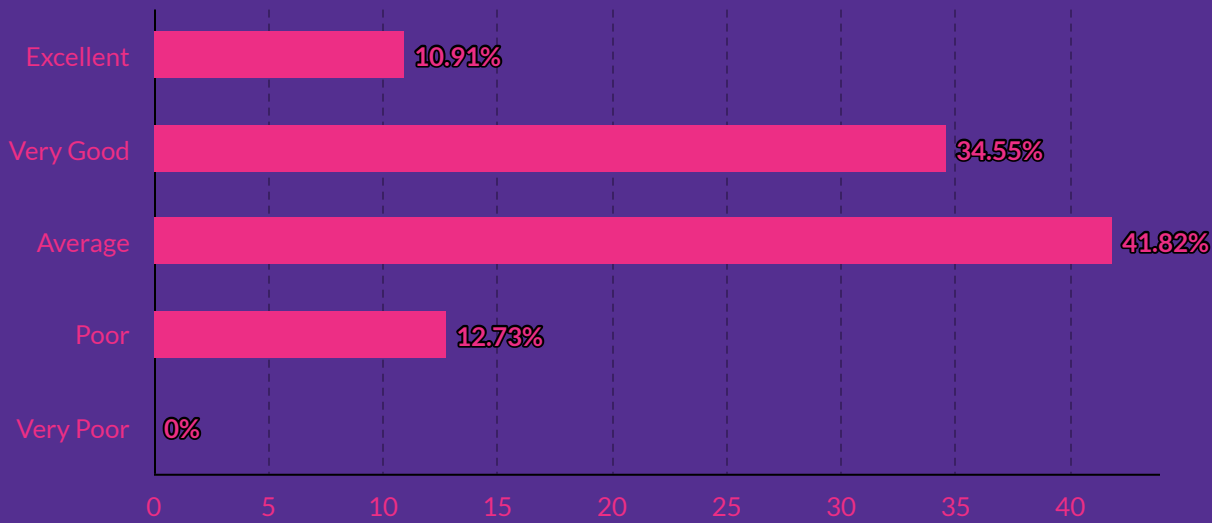
10. What is your approximate personal income from all sources (n=55)





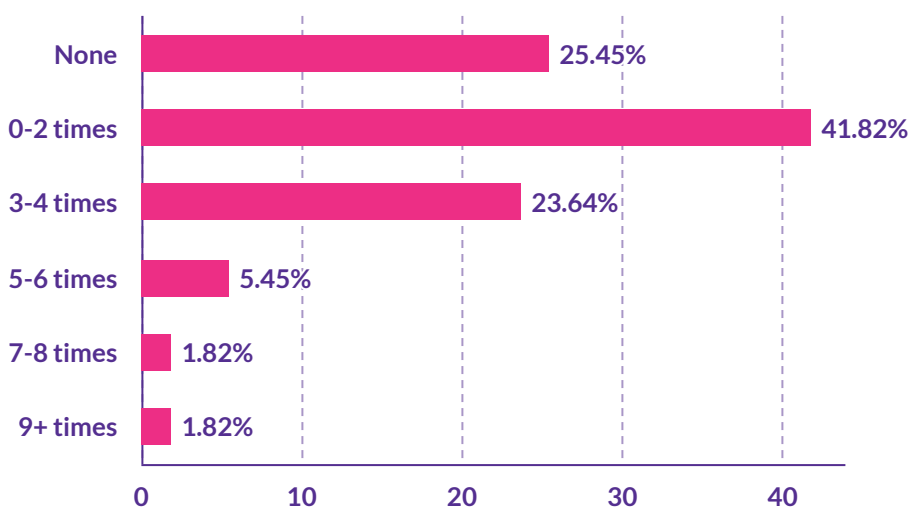
Part 2: Physical Health

2A. In general, how would you rate your current physical health? (n=55)



In general, self-rated status of health as reported by Manarangi respondents was strong. While most responses clustered around the middle, as to be expected in a survey of this kind (nearly 42% choosing average), quite a high number of respondents indicated that they believed they were in very good (34.5%) or excellent (10.9%) physical health – a collated number that is slightly higher than the number of respondents who selected average.

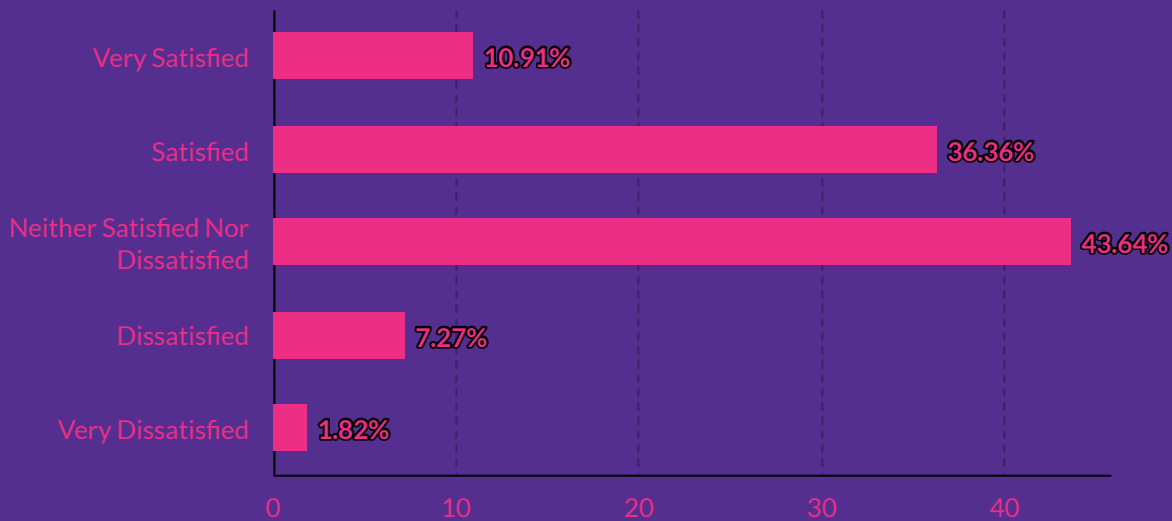
2B. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you visited your doctor, a medical clinic or hospital for your physical health? (n=55)



Respondents to the Manarangi Survey were likely to have light to moderate contact with the Cook Islands healthcare system. While nearly a quarter of respondents had indicated that they had not seen a medical professional for their healthcare in the past 12 months, many more had visited a doctor at least once or twice (41.8%), nearly a quarter between three and four times, with just over 9% visiting a doctor or medical clinic/hospital at least 5 times in the past year. Those respondents who did often were monitoring a chronic condition



2C. How satisfied are you with the level of care you receive from your doctor/health professional, medical clinic or hospital? (n=55)



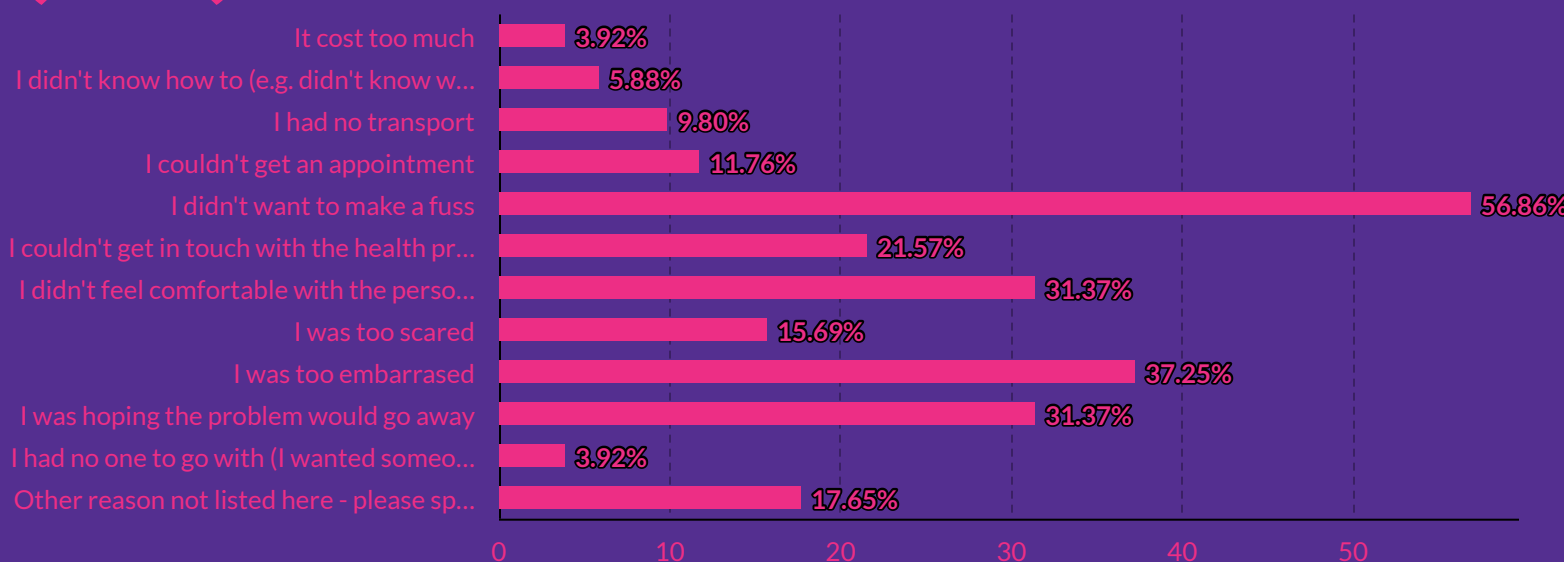
A significant number (43.6%) of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the services they receive, with (47.3%) reporting feeling satisfied (36.4%) or very satisfied (10.9%). Just over 9% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The high ambivalence that was reported, in tandem with the percentage of respondents who had reported dissatisfaction, suggests that more could be done to enhance the experience with Cook Islands healthcare settings for Ānuanua respondents to the Manarangi Survey.

When given the opportunity to add detail to question 2C, respondents said:

- “Waiting times and diagnostics need to be better.”
- “They are alright but long waiting times.”
- “We don’t have all diagnostic tools like NZ but we make do with what we have.”
- “Don’t like going doctors, feel uncomfortable.”
- “They are good with what we have. Rarotonga has access to tertiary care.”
- “Just tells us the same thing and give us the same medicines or advice.”
- “Not catering to my needs as a trans woman, no idea of hormone info.”
- “Feel discriminated against.”



2C. Reasons respondents did not get healthcare despite needing it (n=55)



International literature often points to Rainbow+ individuals using healthcare services at a lower rate than non-Rainbow+ populations (Thomsen et al., 2023). For respondents to the Manarangi Survey, the most significant reason they chose not to seek out healthcare when they had needed to was: "I didn't want to make a fuss (56.86%)," "I was too embarrassed (37.25%)" and "I was hoping the problem would go away (31.37%)." These responses seem to cluster around self-minimisation where respondents framed their response to health need as minimising creating a burden for others. In addition, the high number who responded that they hoped the problem would go away could also relate to a self-reported form of resilience. These findings suggest also the significance of attitudes and beliefs around healthcare among the Cook Islands Ānuanua community, and it requiring further research and investigation.

Respondents who checked 'other reason' to 2C were asked to provide details. Here's what some (not everyone added a comment) said:

"I've always had trouble going to the taote (doctor)... I know many akava'ine who have died because they akama (shy or ashamed) to go taote."

"Just feel uncomfortable when people stare at me and the nurses look at me like I'm an alien."

"I'm akama (shy or ashamed) sometimes because they think I'm a man."

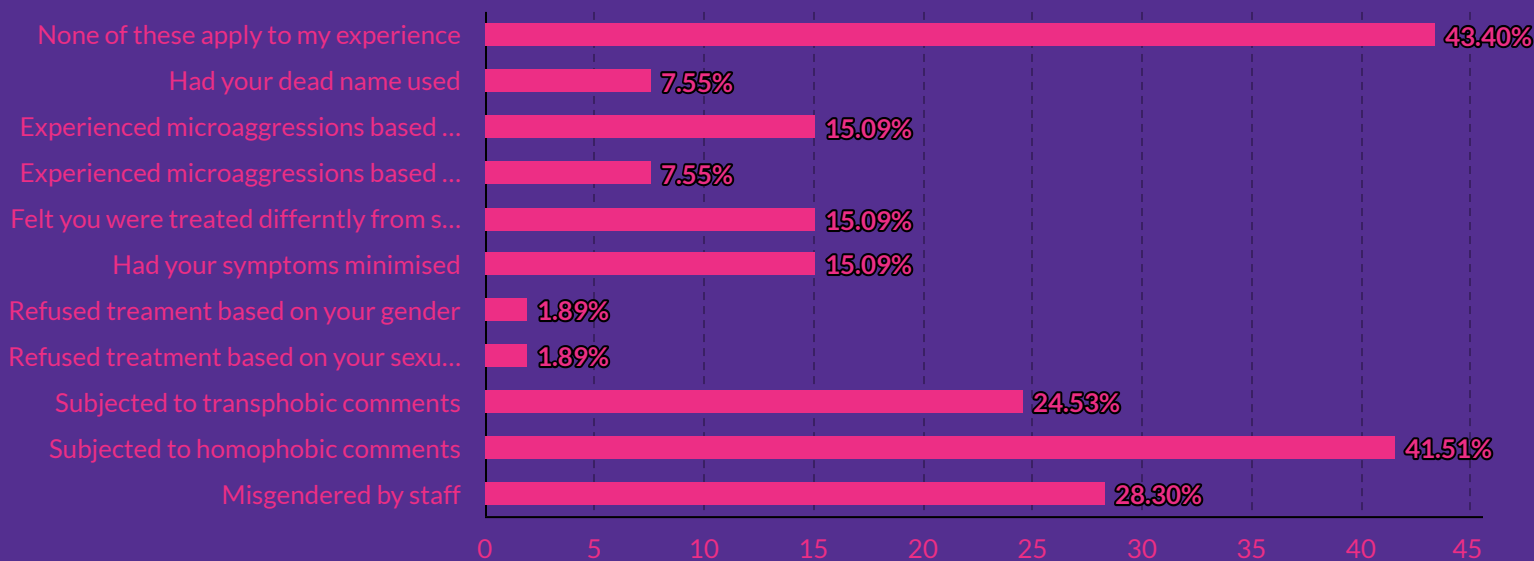
"Doctors have been fine, but I see that staff judge akava'ine and akatāne at times."

Some also wanted to express support and appreciation:

"I have no problems with our healthcare and the service provided to me."

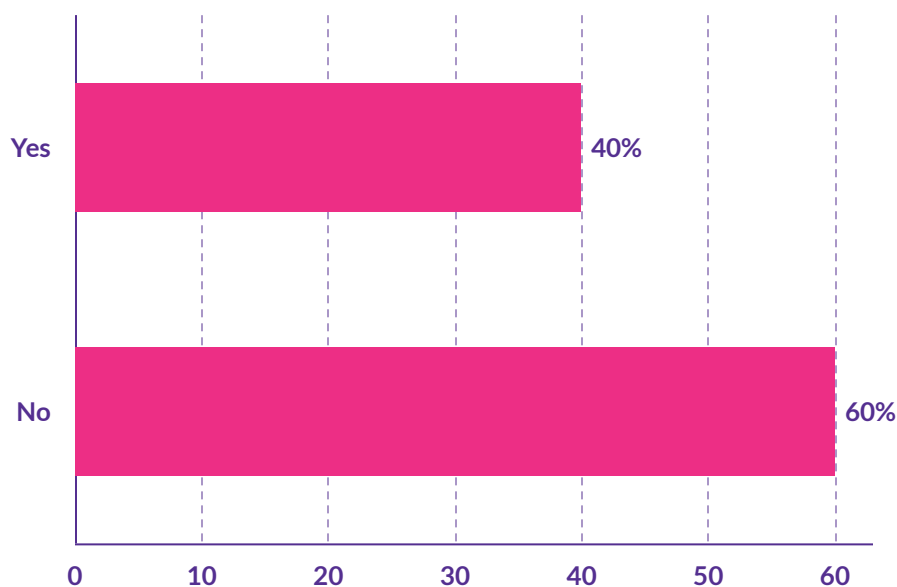
"I've been cared for and supported in healthcare."

2D. Have you ever experienced any of these discriminatory behaviours at your doctor's office, a medical clinic or hospital in the Cook Islands? (check all that apply) (n=55)



Whilst over 43% of respondents reported not experiencing these discriminatory behaviours in a healthcare setting in the Cook Islands, those who did, were predominantly impacted by homophobia and misgendering, suggesting that discrimination is part of the experience for Ānuanua in the Cook Islands. There were very few reported incidences of refusal of care, which is a positive result, although one reported incident is one too many. This data does point to the importance of addressing discrimination in healthcare for Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.

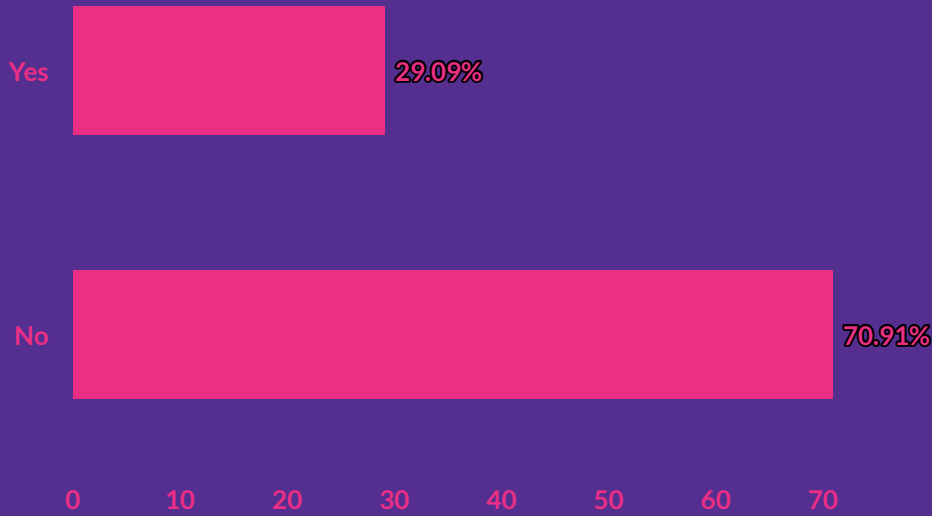
2E. Have you ever been diagnosed with a Non-Communicable Disease (NCD)? (n=55)



Those who answered yes were asked to provide details of the NCD they had been diagnosed with.

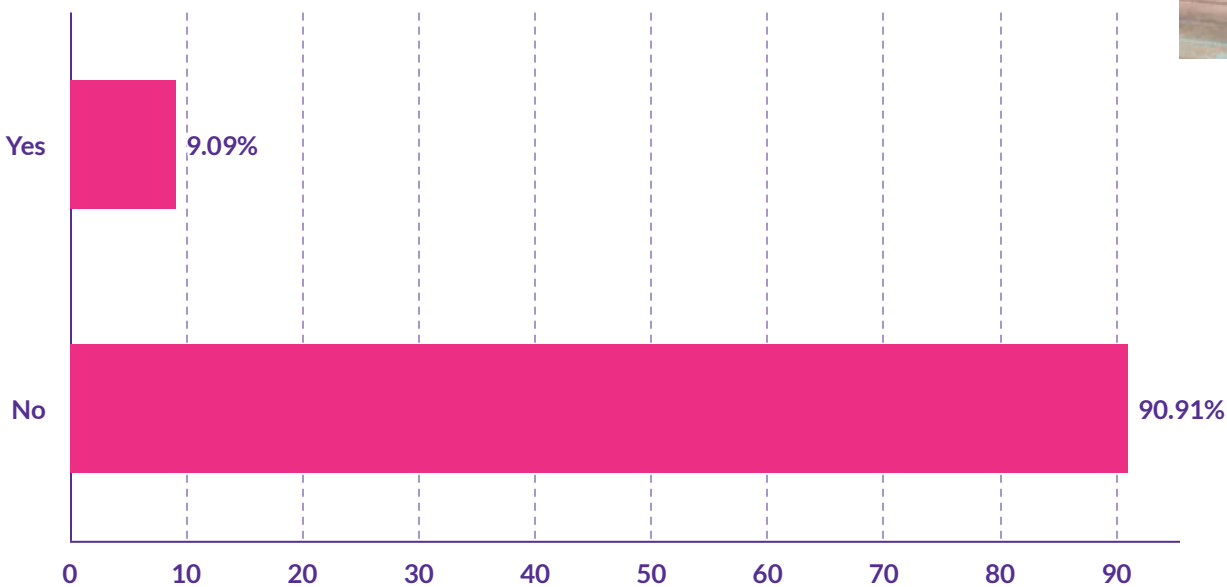
- Diabetes appeared 6 times.
- Gout appeared 3 times.
- Toto kake or high blood pressure appeared 5 times
- cancer and lung disease appeared twice
- Fatty liver disease appeared once.

2F. Are you aware of any gender affirming care in the Cook Islands? (n=55)



Gender affirming care in this case was also specified to include hormone replacement therapy or HRT. HRT is not illegal in the Cook Islands, and according to respondents and in discussions at the Kai Vananga, HRT is meant to be available locally. This question did not ask what type of gender affirming care respondents were aware of. Considering the low number of positive responses, making gender affirming care widely understood in terms of access would make a difference to Ānuānua lives; especially those who identify as Akava'ine and transgender.

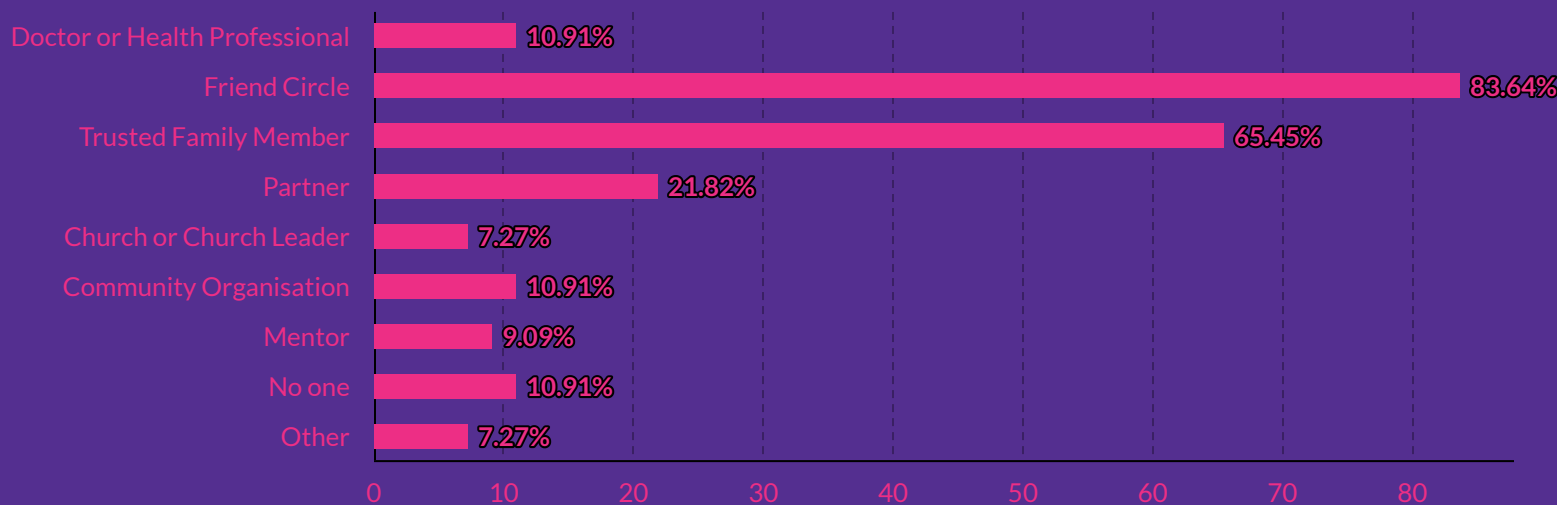
2G. Have you ever accessed gender affirming care in the Cook Islands? (n=55)





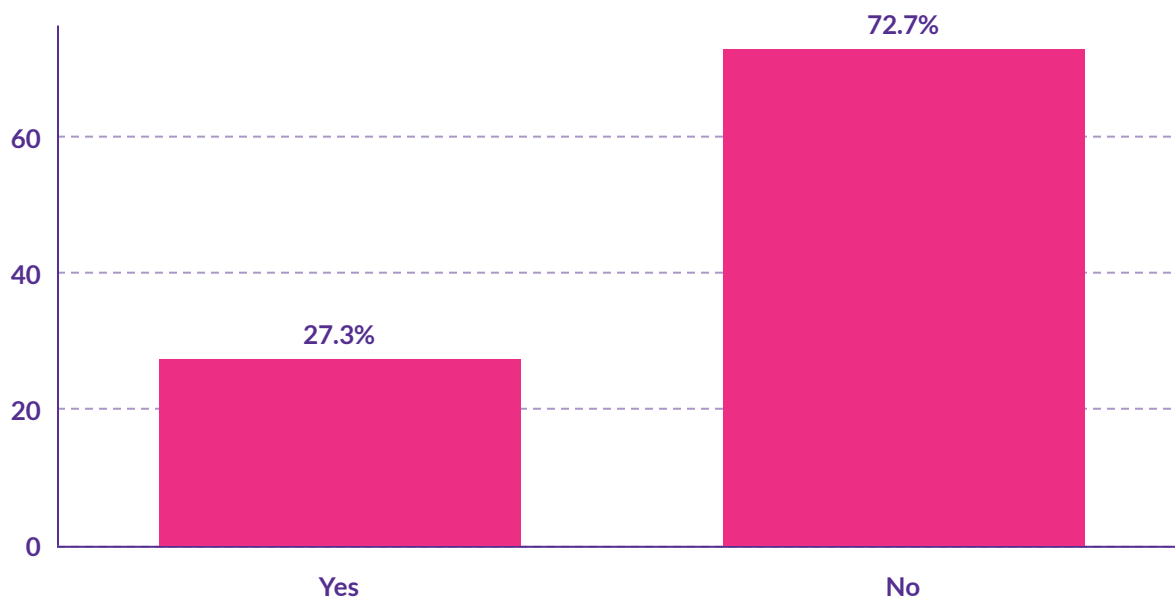
Part 3: Mental Health, Service Use and Experiences

3A. When you are experiencing mental distress, (mental health, symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, thoughts of self-harm etc.) who are you most likely to seek support from if at all? (n=55)

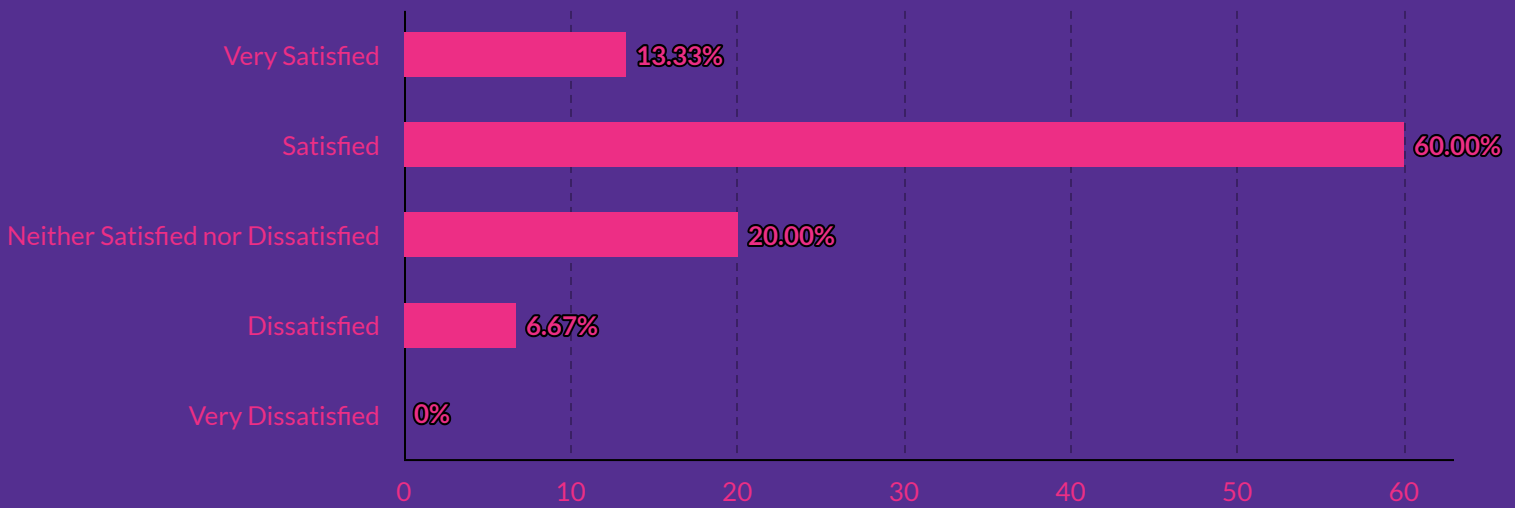


When asked about who respondents were most likely to seek support from when experiencing mental health distress, Manarangi respondents indicated that they were overwhelmingly likely to reach out to their friend circle (83.6%) followed by a trusted family member (65.5%). This was then followed by partner, and interestingly, a high number of respondents (10.9%) indicated they would reach out to no one. This number was the same number reported as those who would reach out to a doctor or health professional. During the 2025 Kai Vananga held by the research team and Ānuanua community members, there was a feeling expressed by some attendees that it is difficult to access any mental health services in the Cook Islands, and it was natural for many to seek support from within their own circles, if at all.

3B. Have you ever used a mental health service in the Cook Islands? (n=55)



3C. Overall, how satisfied were you with the healthcare you received from the mental health support service and/or professional (n=15)



Those who indicated that they had used a mental health service were then asked to provide additional details. While only one respondent indicated they were dissatisfied, with nearly three quarters satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received, respondents were very aware of the resourcing constraints in the Cook Islands. Additional comments:

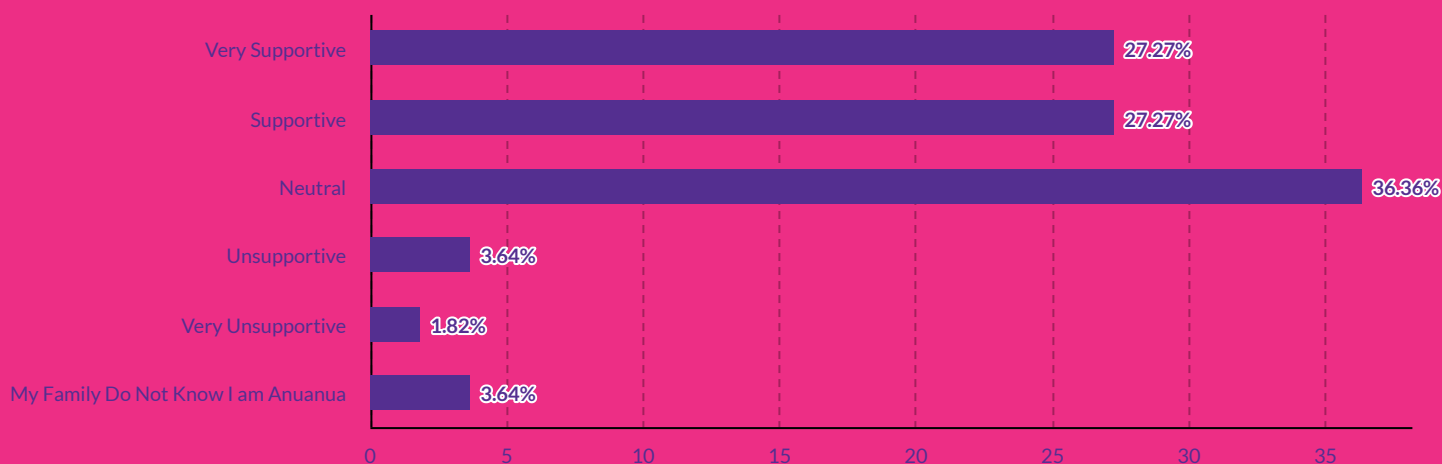
- Very good, but under resourced.
- Very good service but stretched out.
- Need more resourcing, especially for gender and sexuality issues.
- Very good in Rarotonga, but need more in Aitutaki.
- I wish Aitutaki had a psychologist, staff here need more training on mental health issues.
- Couldn't get an appointment, only available time 3 weeks away, my appointment was rescheduled so I never tried again after.





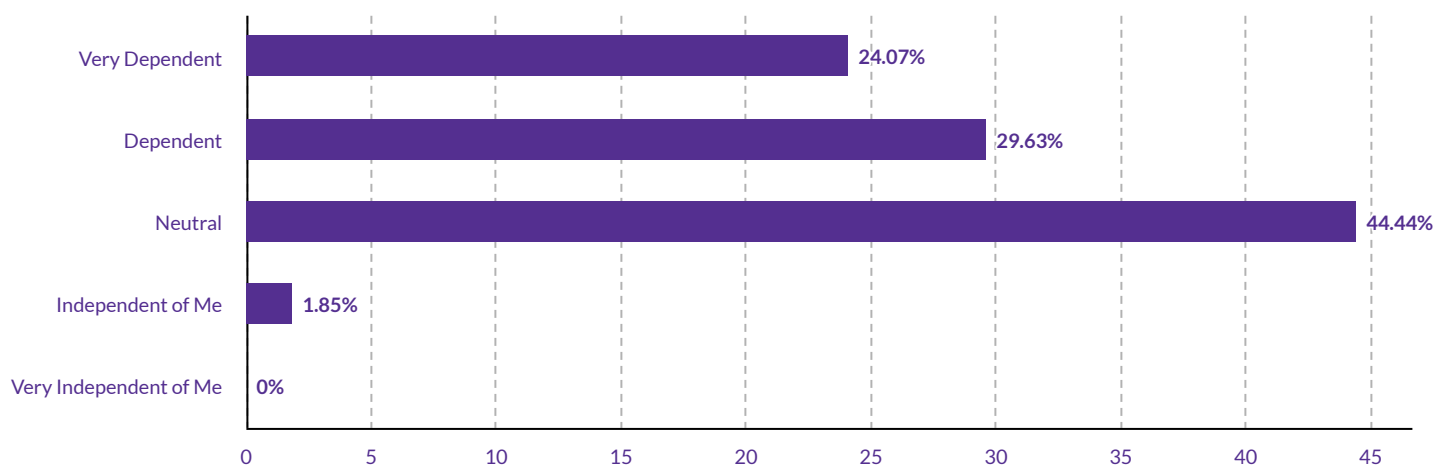
Part 4: Family Life and Connections

4A. In your opinion, how supportive are your family of you being part of the Ānuanua community? (Supportive can mean your Ānuanua identity is a non-issue, or your family supports Ānuanua events and activities)



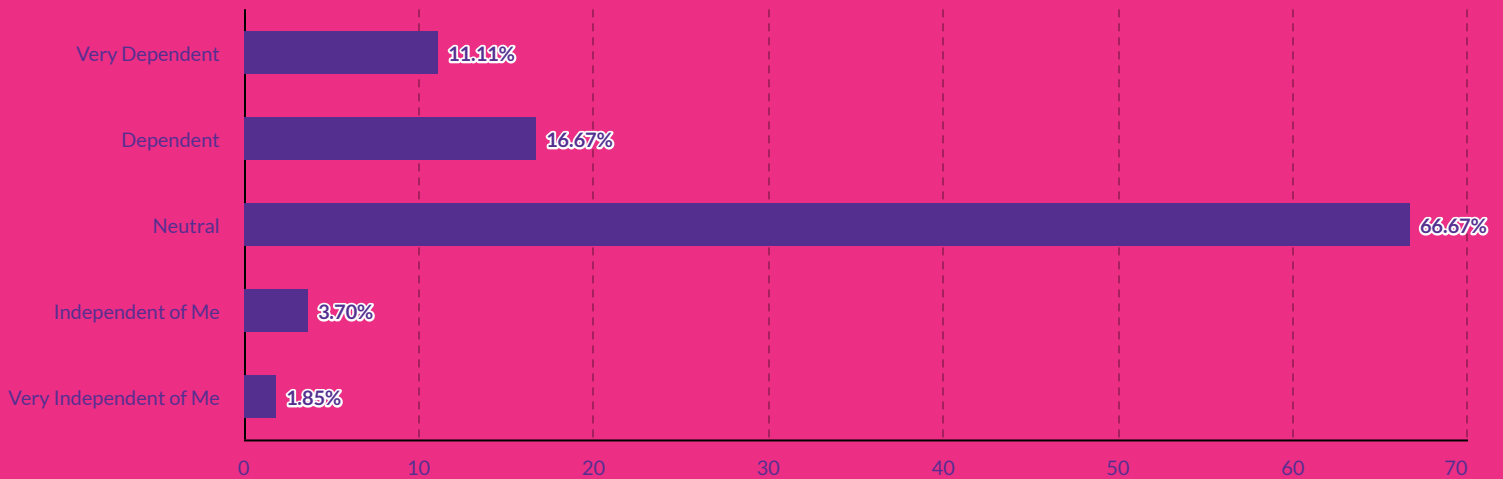
Just over half of the respondents indicated that their family was either supportive or very supportive of them being Ānuanua. Over a third of respondents felt their family was neutral, while 5.4% indicated that their family was supportive or very unsupportive of their Ānuanua identity. A further 3.6% indicated that their family was not aware they were part of the Ānuanua community. This intimates a complex situation of affirmation, ambivalence and some pockets of outright exclusion within various familial contexts in the Cook Islands. It should be noted, however, that the Manarangi Survey oversampled networks connected to community organisations where respondents were likely to be 'out.' This suggests that there could be more complexity that this sample may have not accounted for.

4B. On average, how dependent is your family on you for support? (ie financially, help with chores, babysitting, emotional support/care, career planning, advice, etc.)



Responses to this question indicate for over half of Ānuanua respondents felt they were an important part of their familial structure, as they indicated that their family were either dependent or very dependent on them for support.

4C. On average, how dependent are you on your family for support? (ie financially, help with chores, babysitting, emotional support/care, career planning, advice, etc.)



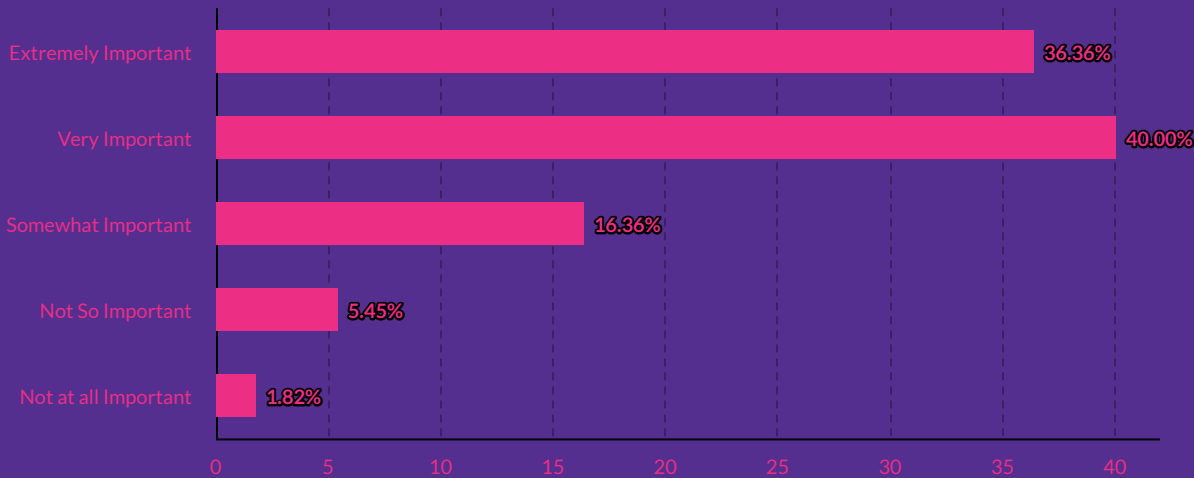
Majority of respondents to this question indicated that when it came to their dependence on family support, they were neutral. Roughly a quarter indicated that they were dependent on their family for various forms of support. The responses to this question as well as responses to question 4B show that Anuanua individuals who took the Manarangi survey felt they were relied upon by their families in various settings, whilst not feeling as if they relied on their families to the same degree.





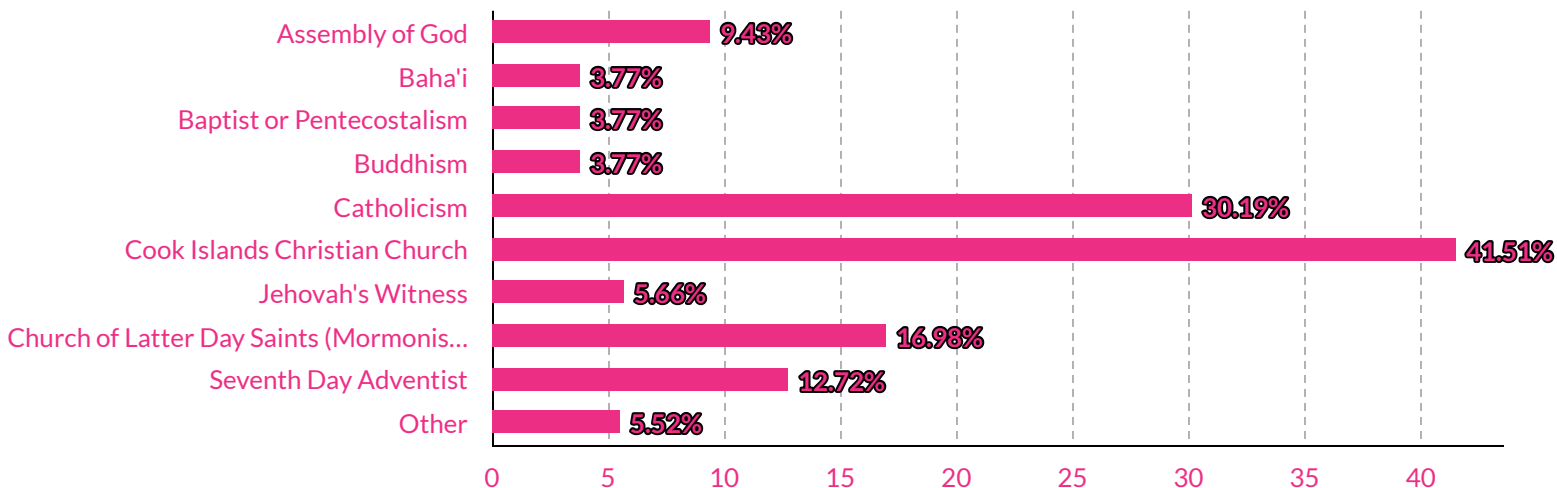
Part 5: Religion and Spirituality

5A. How important is religion or spirituality to you?

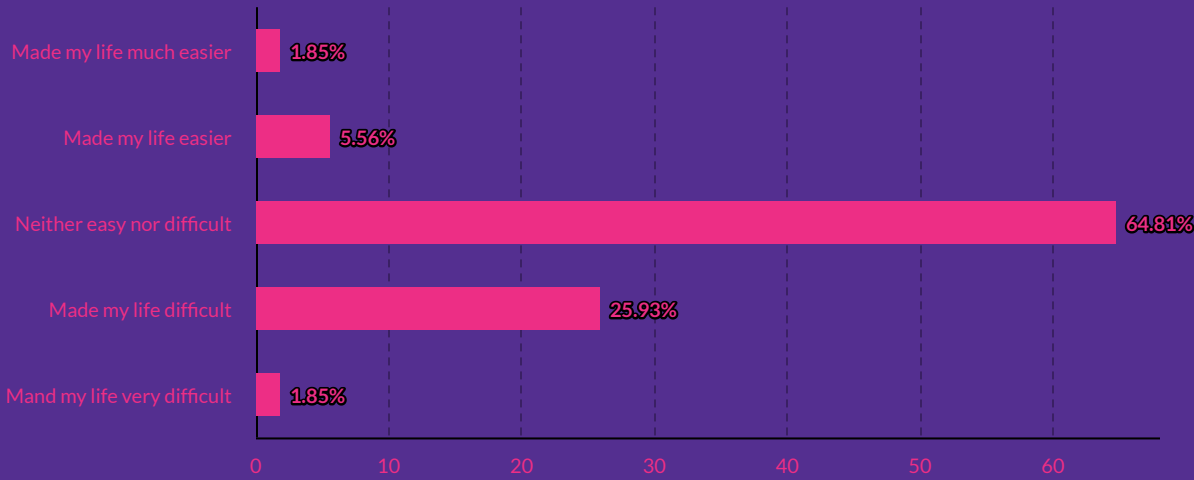


Nearly 93% of respondents to the Manarangi Survey intimated that religion or spirituality was at least somewhat important to them as individuals. Furthermore, over three quarters indicated that it was very important or extremely important – highlighting the significance of religion and spirituality to the lives of Anuanua in the Cook Islands.

5B. Have you ever belonged to or are actively practising any of the listed organised religions/denominations/churches? (Please tick all that apply).

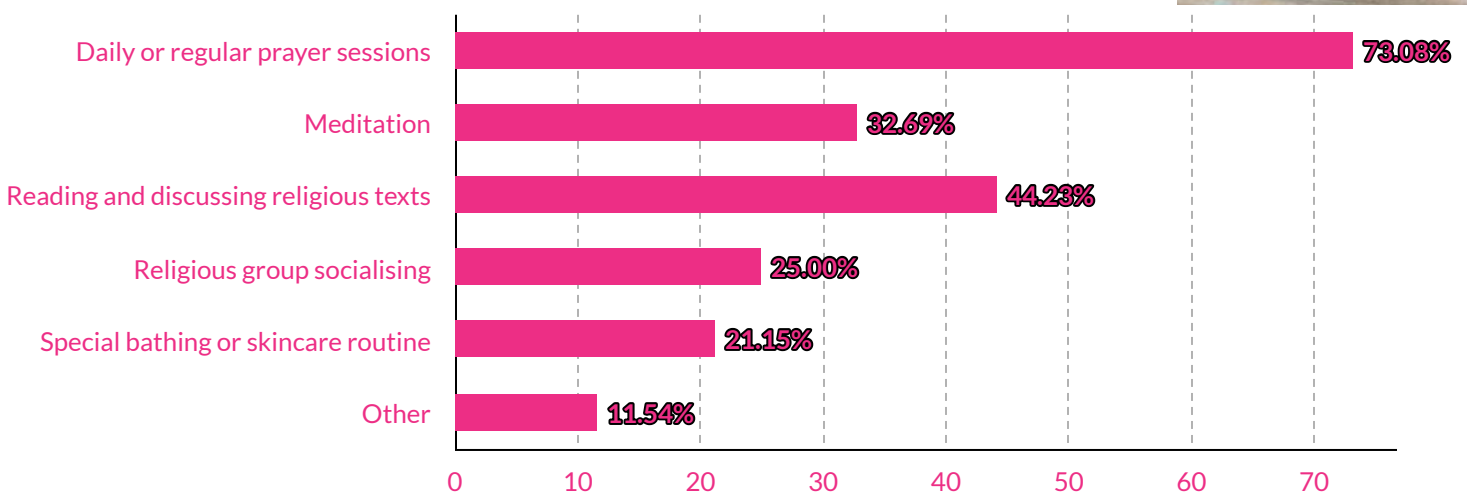


5C. How has religion impacted your ability to live your life as a member of the Ānuanua community? (n=54)



When asked to indicate what impact religion had had on the lives of respondents as Ānuanua, respondents overwhelmingly sat somewhere in the middle. Roughly 65% of respondents indicated that religion made their lives neither easy nor difficult. Although over a quarter indicated that religion did make their life difficult or very difficult. Qualitative responses tended to orbit around a complex relationship, where some churches, respondents believed, were more accepting than others. Further, respondents who added detail mentioned that the Church was full of different opinions, where some were anti-Ānuanua, where others were embracing of Ānuanua.

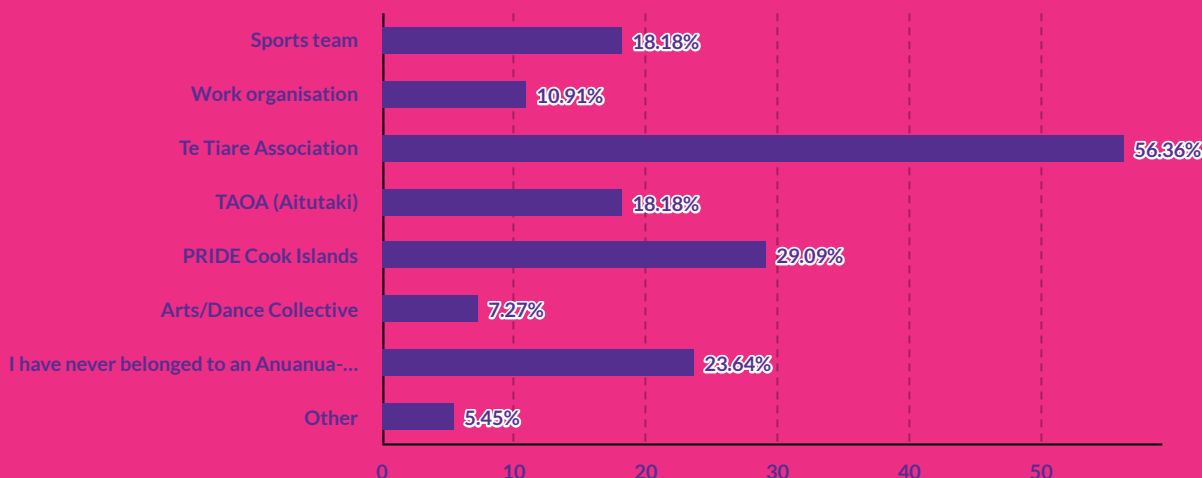
5D. Do you engage in any of these self-care practices that are related to spiritual nourishment and fulfillment? (check all that apply)





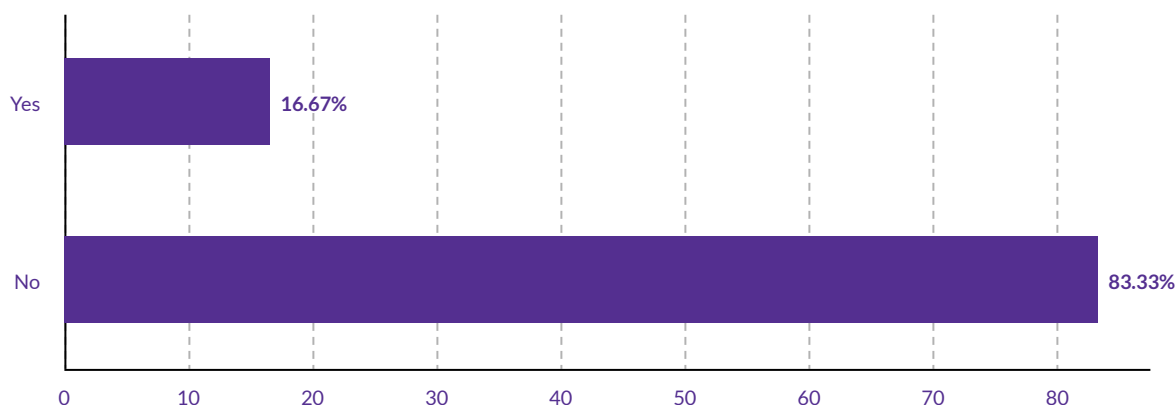
Part 6: Community Organisations and the Role of Cook Islands Culture

6A. Have you ever belonged to any Ānuanua-specific community groups/organisations or sports teams? Check all that apply.



Unsurprisingly a large number of respondents indicated that they had been a member of Te Tiare Association in the past or present, with PRIDE Cook Islands and TAOA also indicated as organisations a significant number of respondents had engaged with. Sports teams were also highlighted multiple times by respondents, with nearly a quarter indicating they had not belonged to any Ānuanua-specific community groups or organisations in the Cook Islands before.

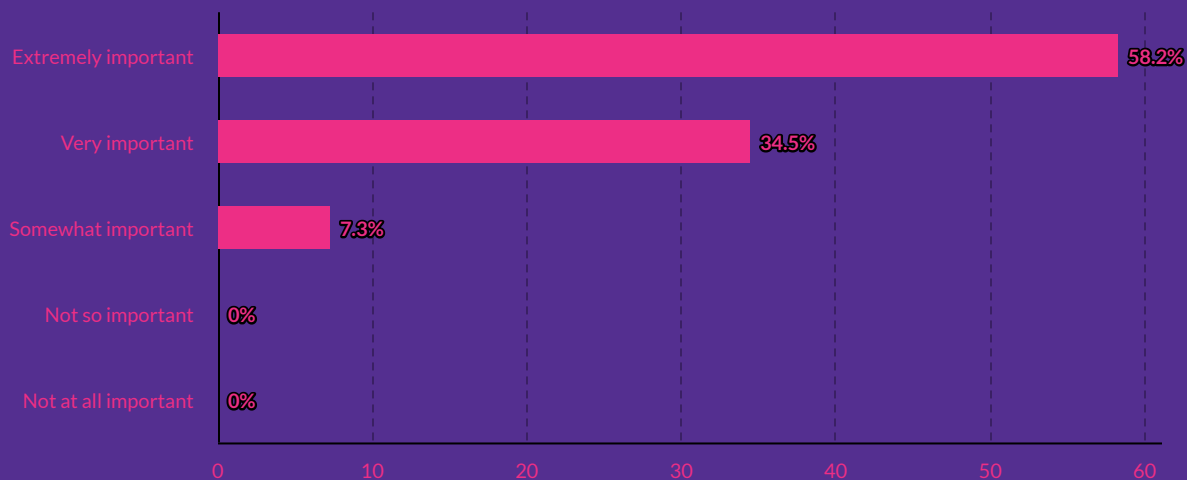
6B. Have you ever experienced exclusion from a community group/organisation/sports team in the Cook Islands because of being Ānuanua?



In general, a large portion of respondents had indicated that they had not experienced exclusion from community groups in the Cook Islands before due to being Ānuanua. This perception suggests that for the majority of Ānuanua in the Cook Islands, being Ānuanua should not be a barrier to participation. However, as 16.7% of respondents indicated that they had experienced exclusion from a community group because of being Ānuanua, it suggests that discrimination can and still does occur for Ānuanua seeking to participate in community groups in the Cook Islands.



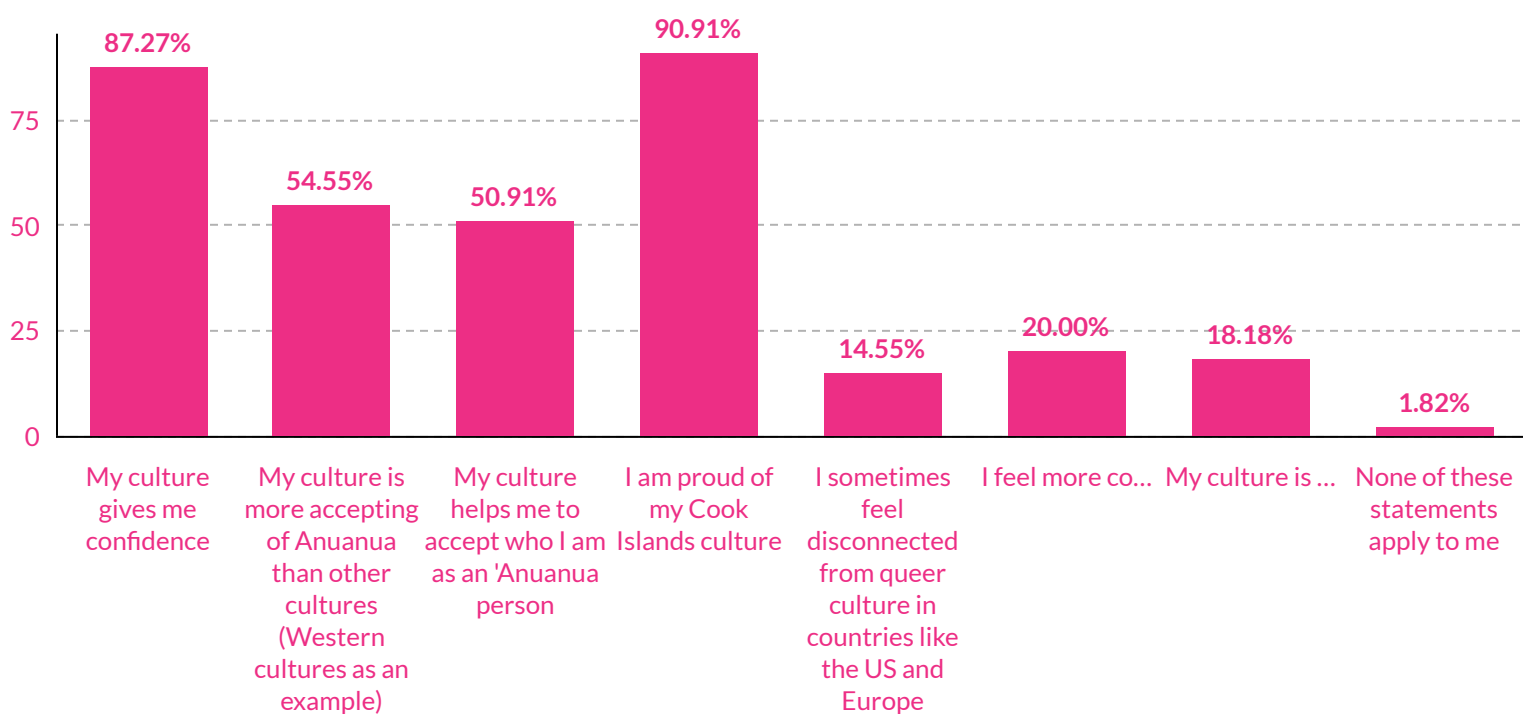
6C. As an Ānuanua person, how important is your culture to you?



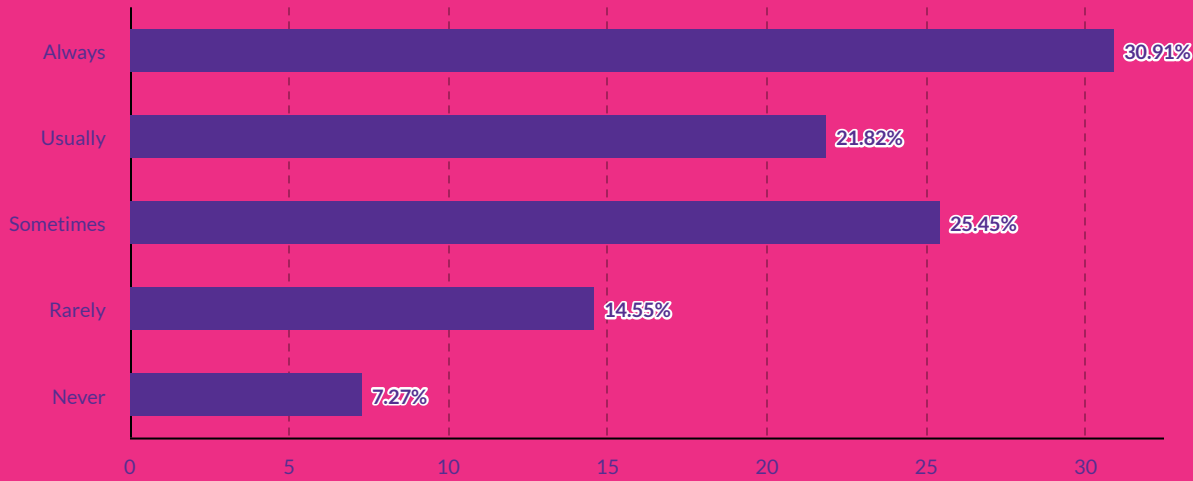
Responses to the question regarding the role of culture and its significance for respondents were emphatic. All respondents to the Manarangi Survey indicated that their culture was at least somewhat important to them. Over 92% of respondents indicated that their culture was very important or extremely important to who they are as Ānuanua people.



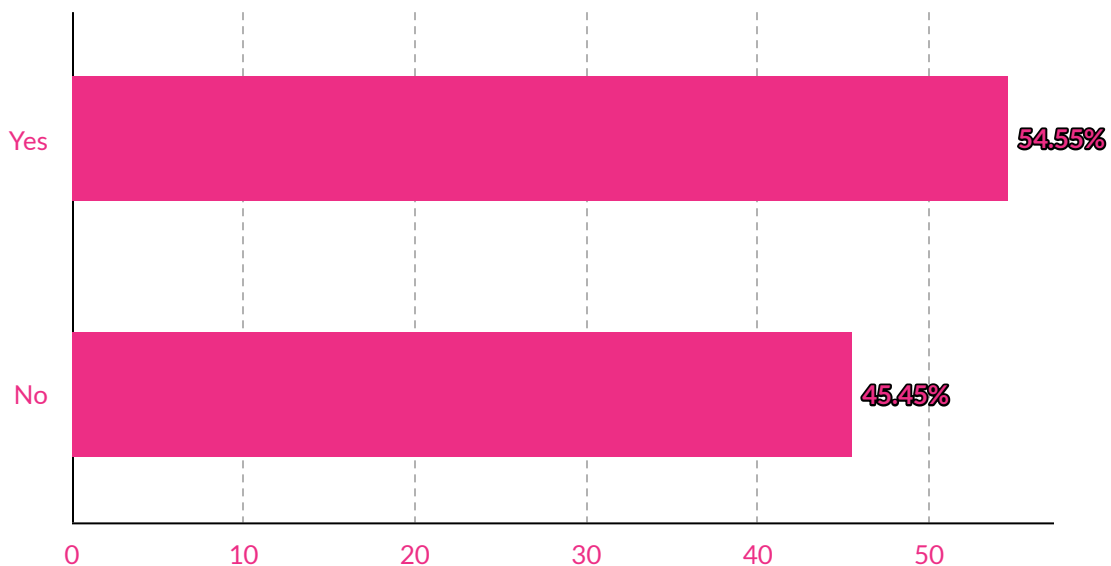
6D. Check all the statements that apply to you



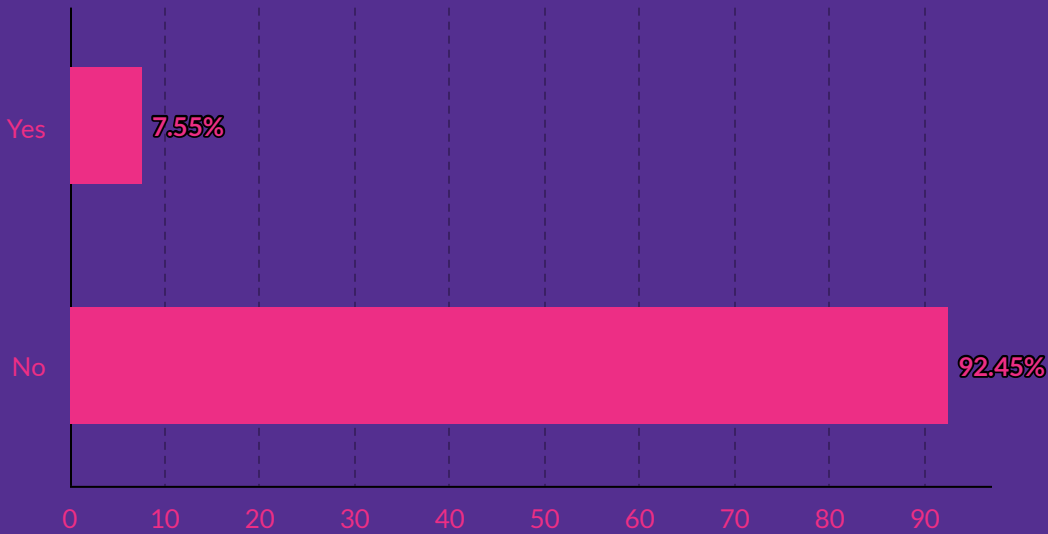
6E. How often do you participate in, or attend cultural events such as celebrations, independence days, fundraisers etc.?



6F. Have you ever organised a cultural event or ta'unga for your community or your workplace/family/organisation you're affiliated to?



6G. Were you compensated for this work?



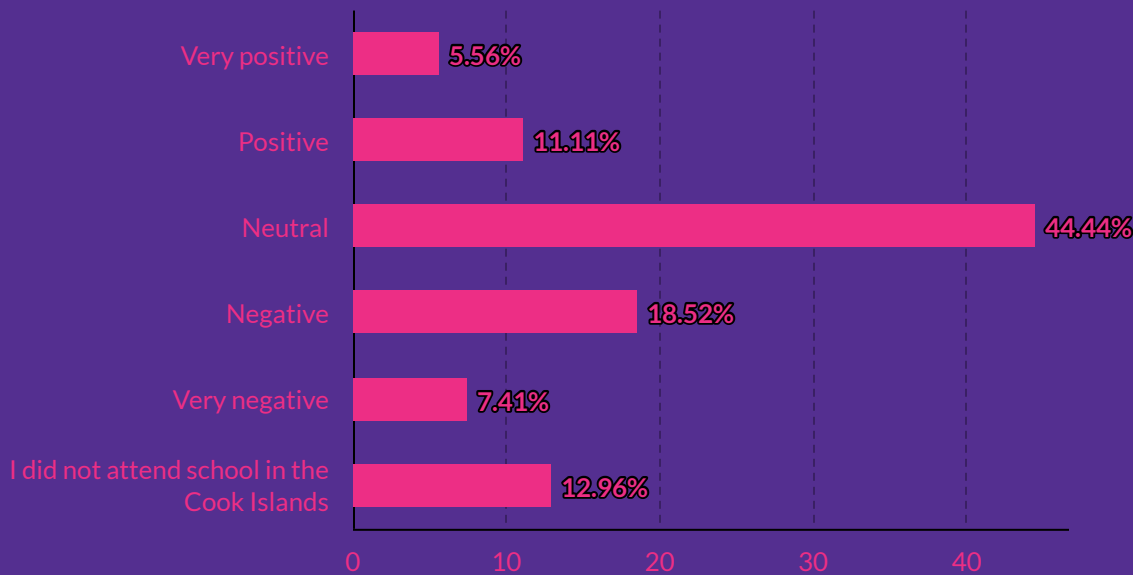
In providing more details regarding 6G respondents wanted to express the following:

- Aro'a atu e aro'a mai i to'ou tangata tupu.
- As Ta'unga you don't expect anything in return but the aro'a from others.
- It's our 'akono'anga.
- It's our culture to contribute.
- It's part of our cultural obligations Ara Tiroa and Are Vananga.
- I'm happy to help.
- No, never, but it's a part of our culture to help out.
- We give a lot of our time freely to help our community.
- As ānuanua we [are] expected to look after and also hold knowledge because everyone goes overseas and we take care of everything at home and obligation to church and tao'anga.
- We as ānuanua have always contributed to our community and culture is an area that we are respected as ta'unga in different areas as we hold the kite maarama.
- Love for the culture.
- No need to compensate.
- We do this all for love of our culture, family and the community.



Part 7: School Life

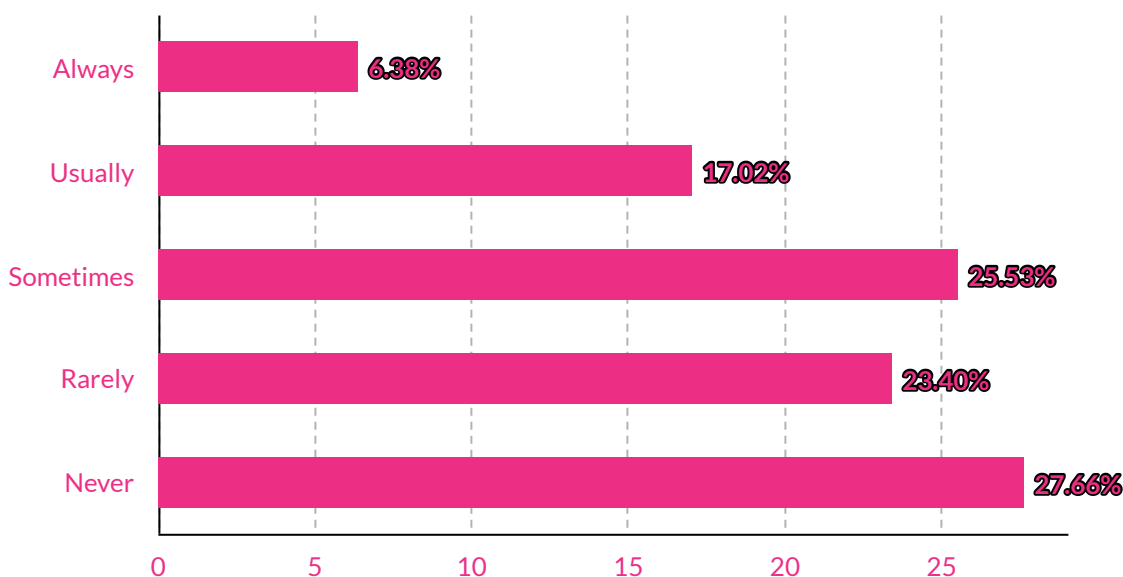
7A. On average, how would you rate your overall experience as an Ānuanua student in school?



While schooling can be a testing time for all young people, it is clear that for Ānuanua respondents to the Manarangi survey, they were more likely to have reported a negative or very negative (25.93%) experience of schooling as opposed to a positive or very positive one (16.66%). The vast majority by far, however, reported a neutral experience (44.44%). Respondents who did not attend school in the Cook Islands were branched to the next part of the survey and did not answer the remaining questions in this section.

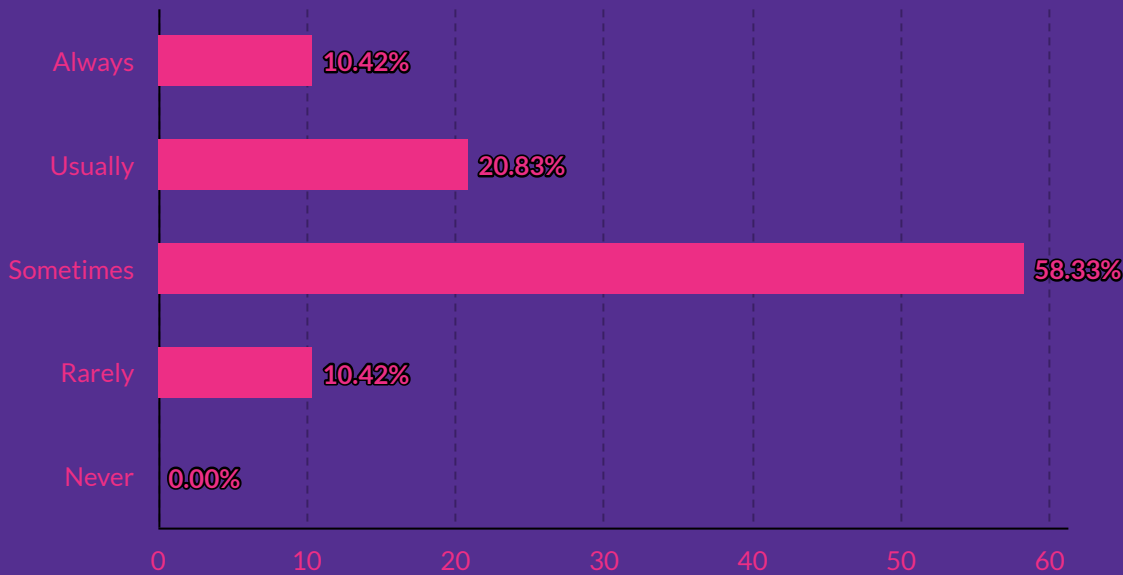


7B. Have you ever been bullied or harassed at school for being Ānuanua?



International literature points to Rainbow+ young people being placed at risk of being bullied in school environments that are often anti-Rainbow+ and homophobic as well as transphobic. Nearly 30% of respondents to Manarangi indicated that they did not experience bullying at school, which means 70% of respondents had experienced bullying at some point, even if it was rare for about 23%. Alarming, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they experienced bullying or harassment either regularly (usually) or nearly always in their school environment.

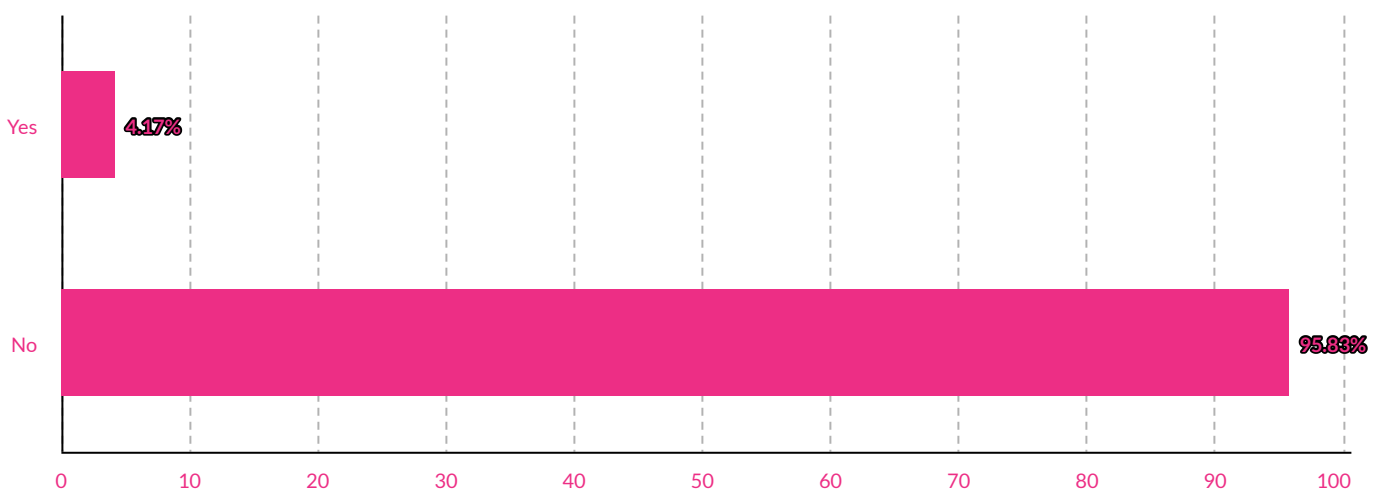
7C. How often did you hear homophobic or transphobic comments at school?



Hearing homophobic or transphobic comments at school was a common experience for respondents to the Manarangi survey. In fact, not a single respondent indicated that they had not heard such comments coming through school. This is of course supported by international literature on the experiences of young Rainbow+ people in schools. Alarming, again, over 30% of respondents indicated that hearing homophobic and transphobic comments at school was a usual or 'always' occurrence.

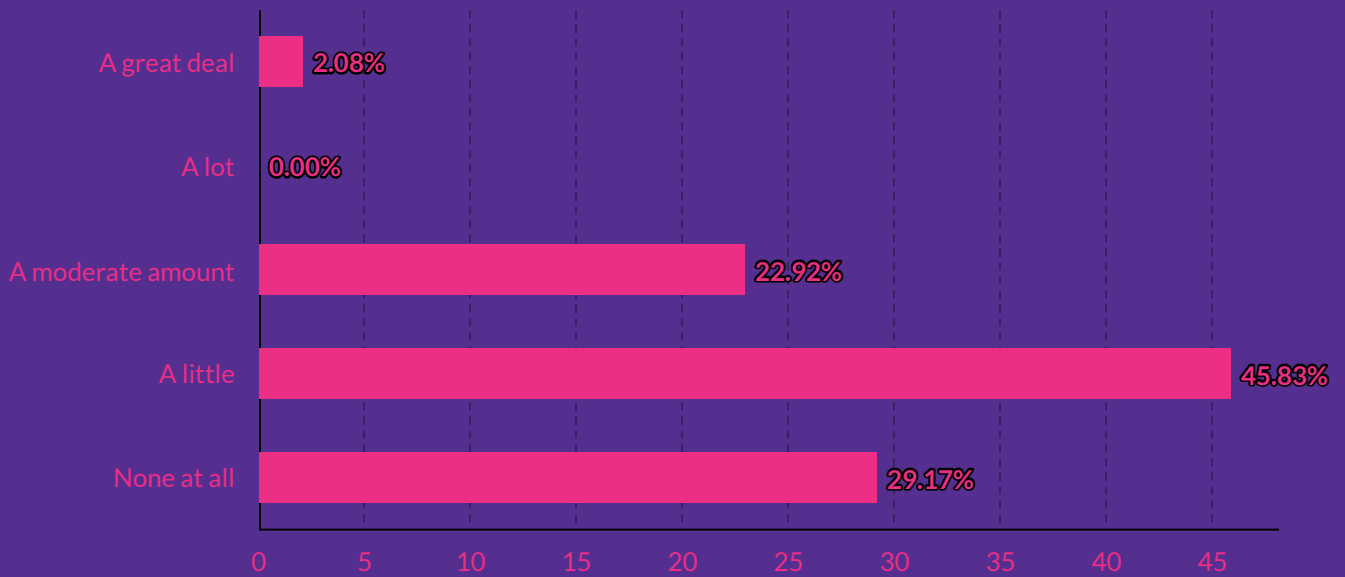


7D. Were Ānuanua topics or the Cook Islands Ānuanua community covered in your school curriculum?



Unsurprisingly, respondents to the Manarangi survey indicated overwhelmingly that their school curriculum did not include any instructional material related to the Cook Islands Ānuanua community. Whilst it can be difficult to deconstruct homophobic and transphobic social attitudes, which means educating on Ānuanua or Rainbow+ may be a two-edged sword (where focus can lead to exposure to other violences), the invisibility of the Ānuanua community in curriculum does align with wider experiences of bullying, trans and homophobic experiences reported in the survey.

7E. To what extent do you feel teachers at your school understood the challenges faced by Ānuanua students?



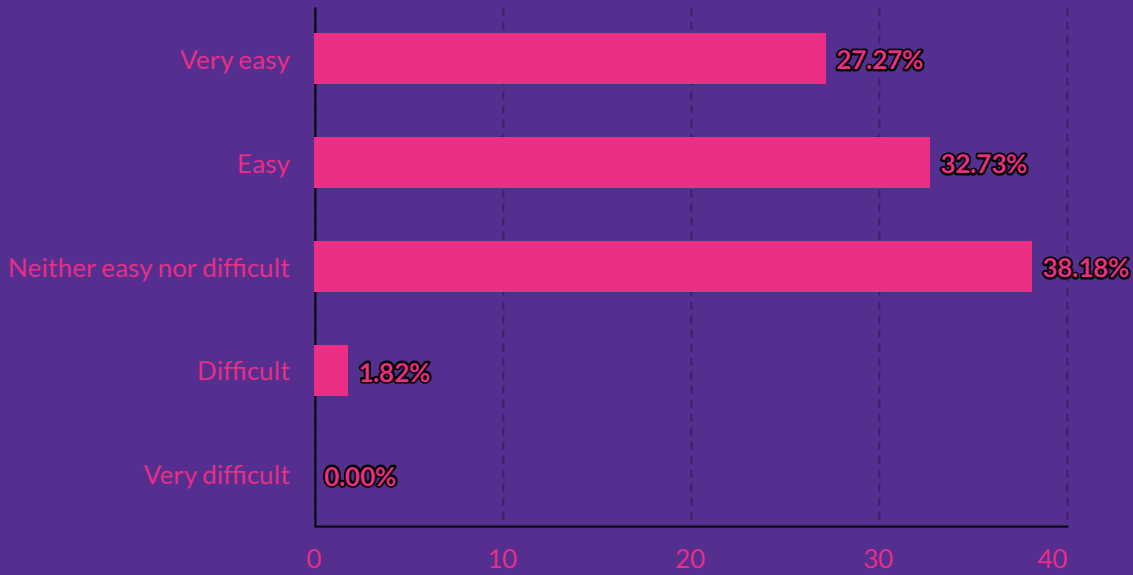
Considering respondents indicated that they were most likely to not have been exposed to Ānuanua topics or material in their school curriculum, it is unsurprising then that respondents also indicated that they did not feel their teachers understood the challenges faced by Ānuanua individuals to a significant extent. Respondents did predominantly suggest they felt their teachers understood their challenges a little (45.83%) with the next most common option selected being none at all (29.17%). Tellingly only 2.08% of respondents felt that their teachers understood a great deal, the challenges experienced by Ānuanua students.





Part 8: Work Experiences

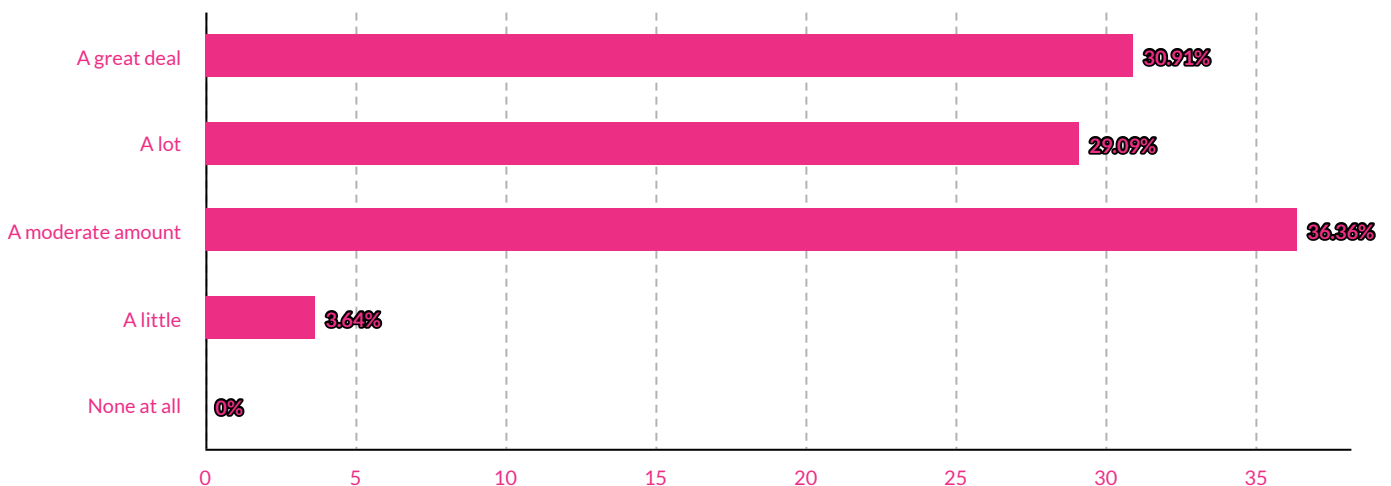
8A. How easy is it for you to share your Ānuanua identity at work?



Respondents to the Manarangi survey indicated that disclosure of their Ānuanua identity was relatively easy in the workplace. Contrasting from experiences of school, over half felt it was easy to disclose their identity at work, with a further 38.18% suggesting it was neither easy nor difficult. Encouragingly, only 1.82% suggested that it would be difficult to disclose their identity at work.

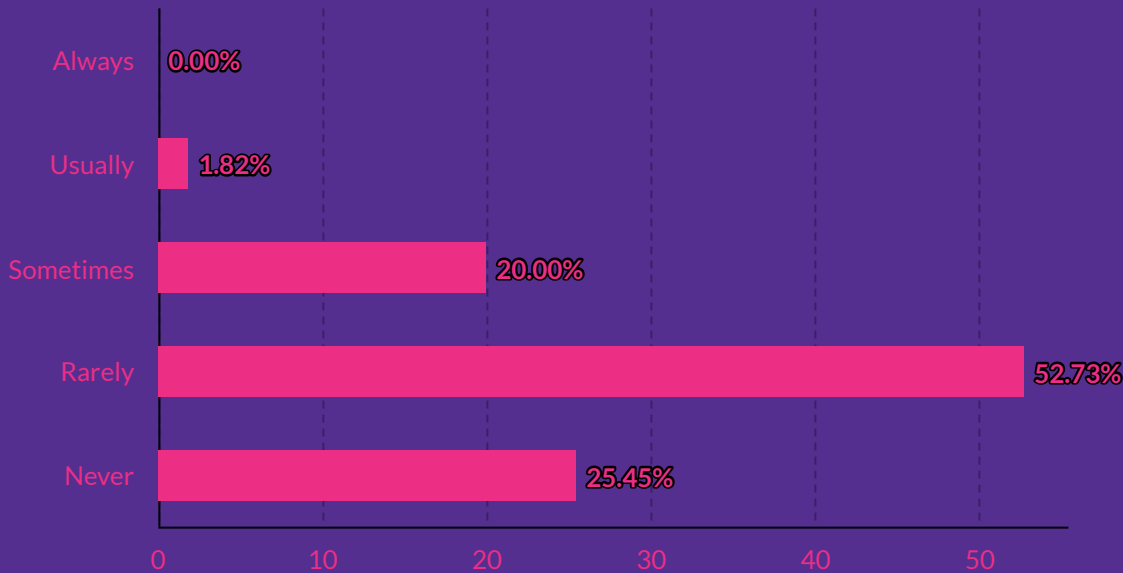


8B. To what extent do you feel supported by your employer in relation to being Ānuanua?



Encouragingly again, respondents to Manarangi indicated that they all felt at least a little support from their employer for being Ānuanua, more impressively, none indicated that they didn't feel any support from their employer at all. Nearly 60% indicated that they felt a lot or a great deal of support by their employer in relation to being Ānuanua.

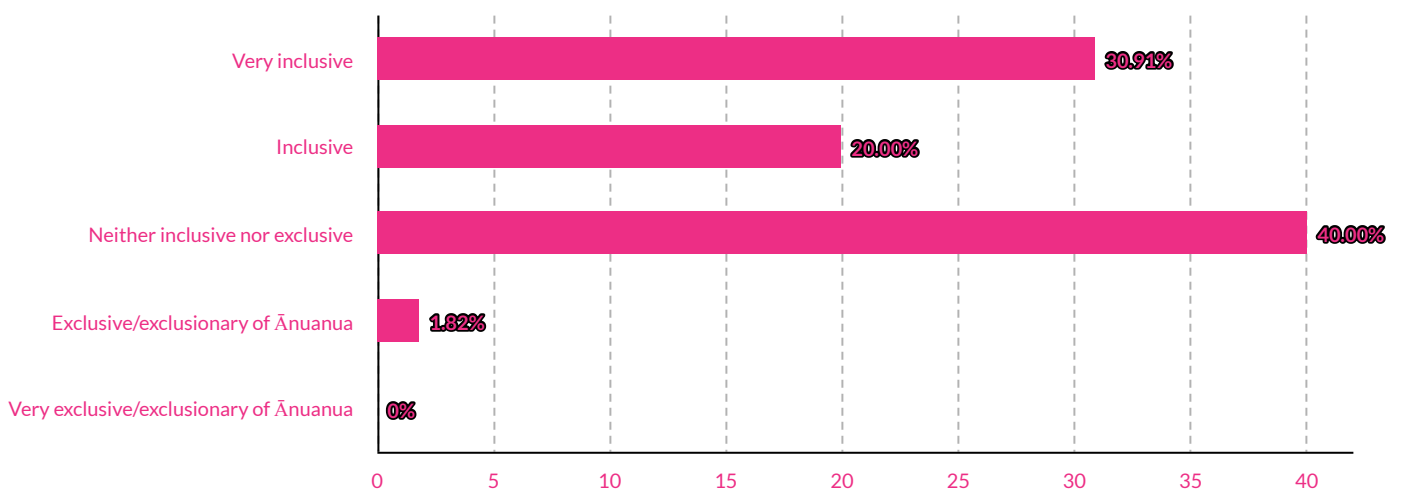
8C. Have you ever experienced discrimination from colleagues/clients/customers before because of being Ānuanua?



Respondents to the Manarangi survey indicated that experiencing discrimination at the work place from either colleagues or customers was actually a rare occurrence. While it is hoped that no one would experience discrimination at the work place at all, it is encouraging to note that over three quarters of respondents said it was rare (52.73%) or never happens (25.45%) at the work place.



8D. How would you describe the overall climate at your workplace for Ānuanua employees?

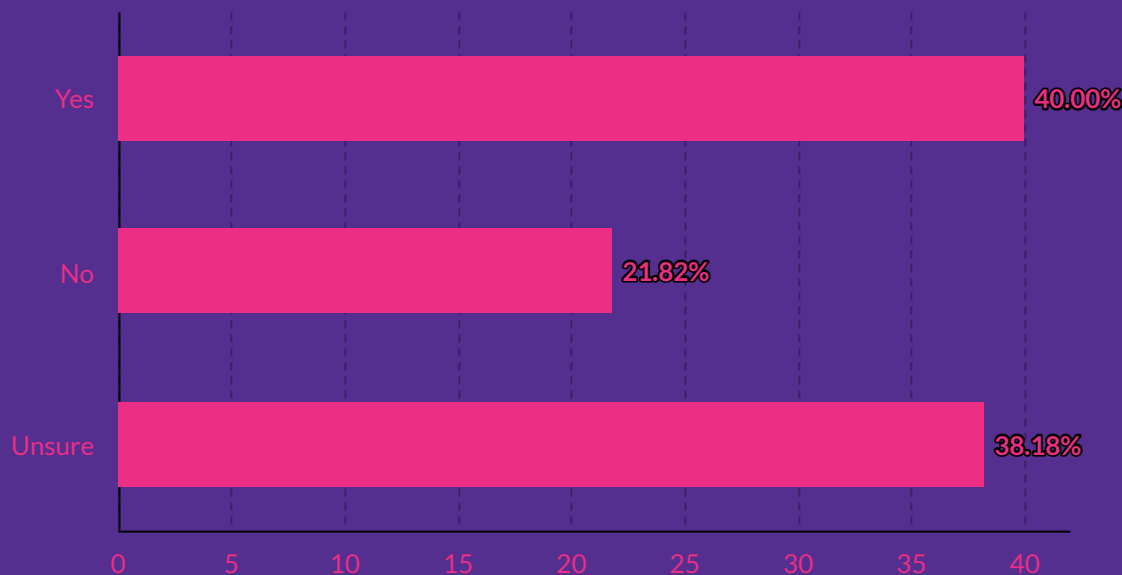


Respondents were likely to describe their workplace as inclusive or very inclusive of their Ānuanua employees (50.91%), with a further 40% indicating that their workplace was neither inclusive nor exclusive of Anuanua employees. Only 1.82% of respondents indicated that their workplace was exclusive or exclusionary of Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.



Part 9: Human Rights

9A. In your opinion, does Cook Islands legislation adequately protect the human rights of Ānuanua people?



40% of respondents to the Manarangi survey indicated that they felt Cook Islands legislation did adequately protect the rights of Ānuanua, with 38.18% unsure, and 21.82% suggesting that they were not adequate.

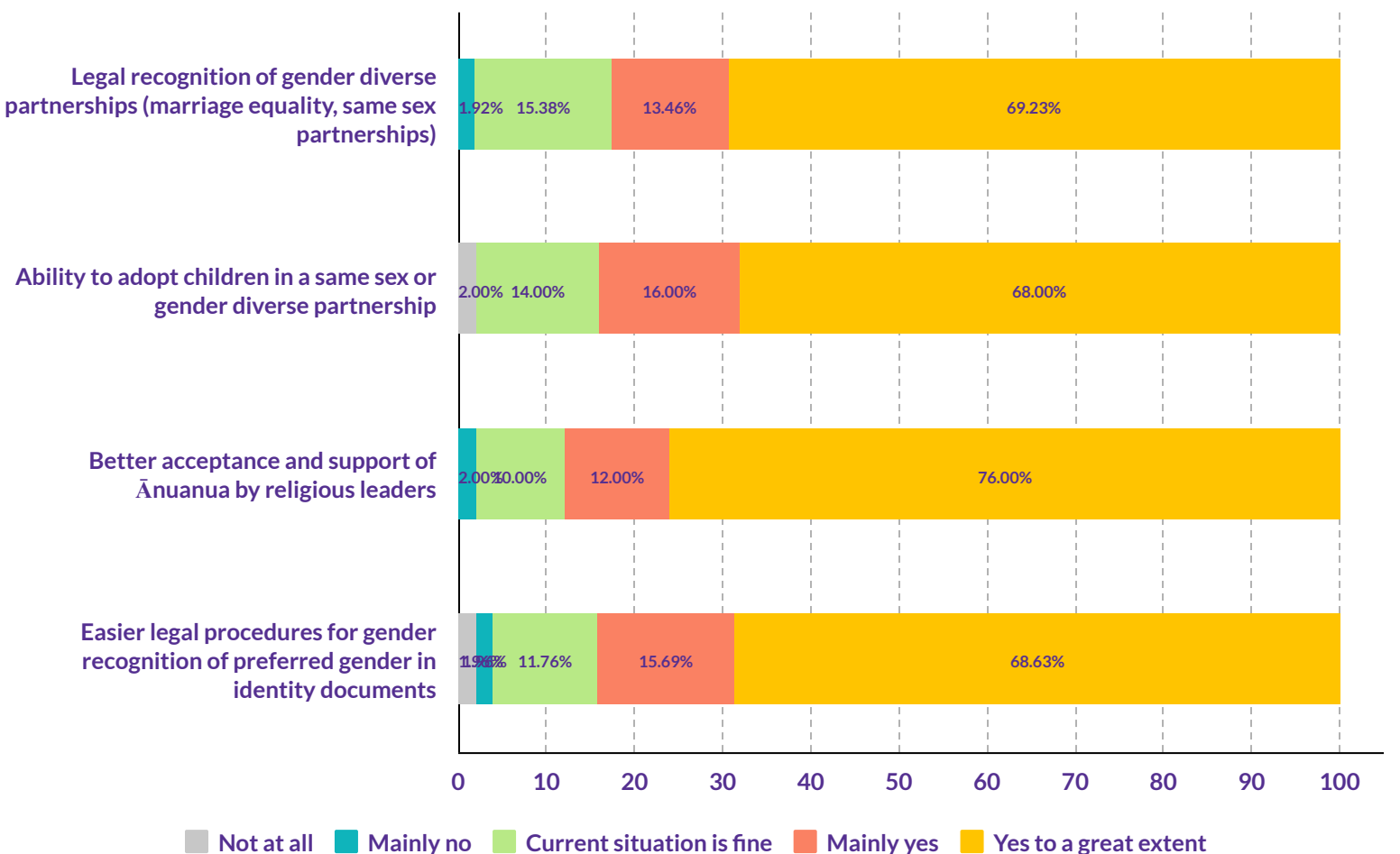


Qualitative responses added more depth to responses provided to question 9A.

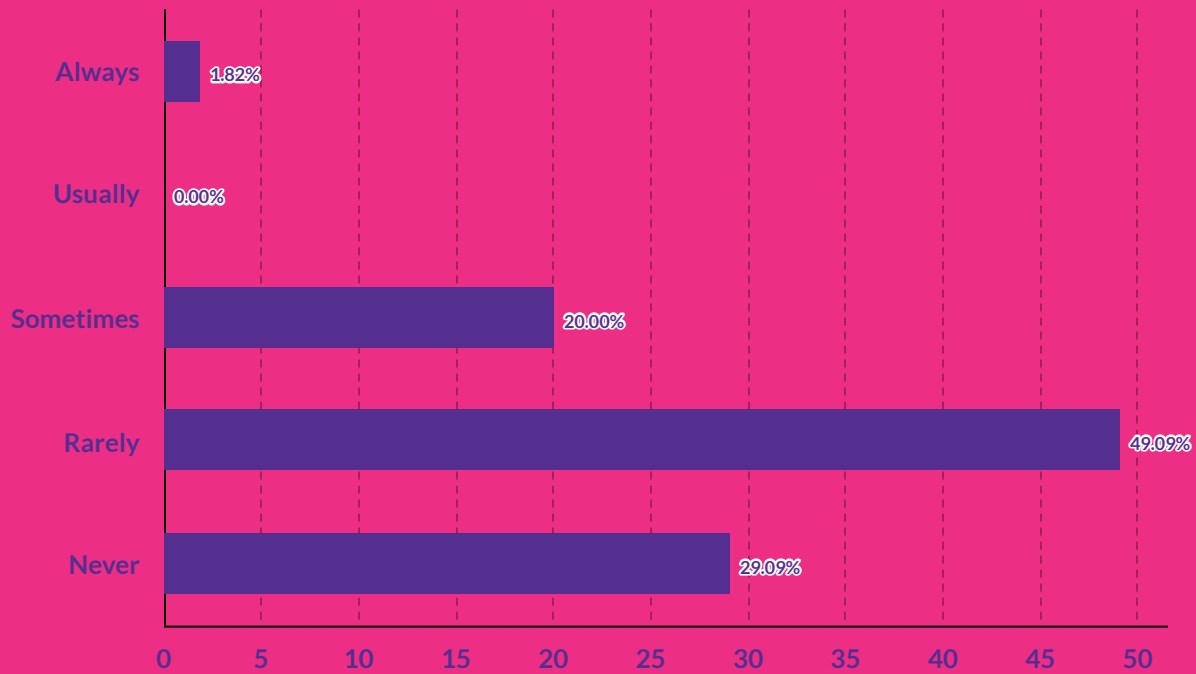
While it appears that many respondents 'felt' that legislation was adequate in the Cook Islands in protecting Ānuanua human rights, there were strong opinions expressed by respondents that added depth to their responses. Here is a summary of some of the key points advanced.

- In support of Cook Islands legislation, a large number of responses pointed to decriminalisation being adequate enough in their opinion.
- Others expressed that as long as there is mutual respect between all in society, there is no need for Ānuanua to be re-emphasising the uniqueness of Ānuanua in Cook Islands society where there is a cultural place for Ānuanua.
- Some expressed that protection under the Cook Islands Employment Act was enough protection for them.
- Many also expressed that decriminalisation is not enough, and should be seen as just the first step. Some named the fact that there is still no hate crimes provision, poor reporting mechanisms of violence experienced by Ānuanua when it does take place, also that there needs to be a focus on advancing Ānuanua health, wellbeing, education and employment opportunities.

9B. What would allow you to be more comfortable living as Ānuanua in the Cook Islands? Please indicate to what extent the following measures would improve life for Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.

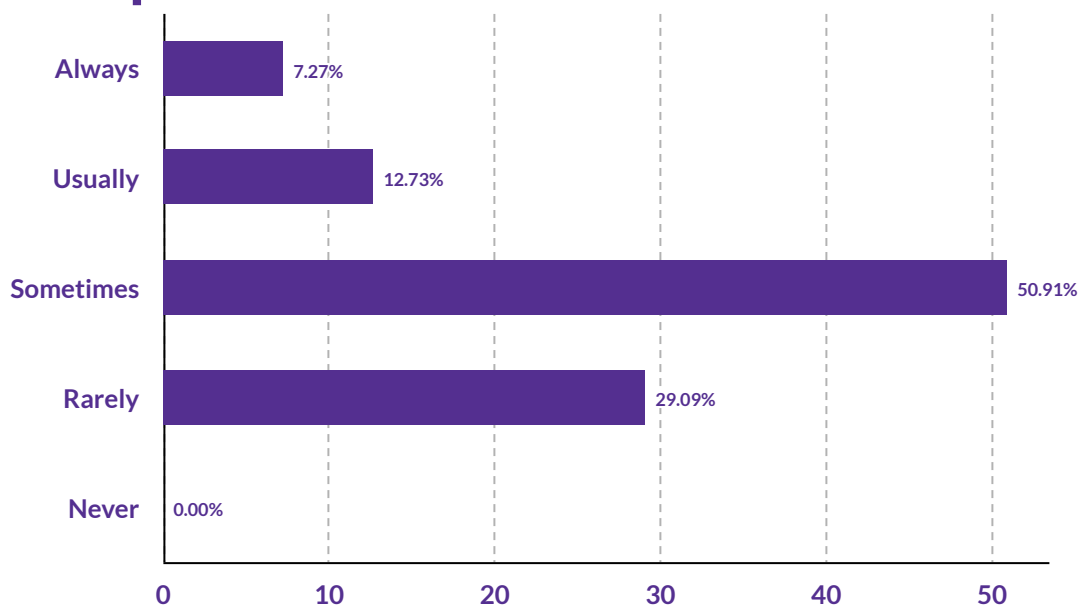


9C. Have you experienced violence or harrassment in public due to you being Ānuanua in the Cook Islands?



Respondents to the Manarangi survey indicated in general that violence due to being Ānuanua was not a regular collective experience, with nearly thirty percent of respondents indicating that they had never experienced violence in public due to being Ānuanua. This is not to say that it does not occur, while rare (49.09%), twenty percent of respondents indicated that they experienced it sometimes; with 1.82% indicating that it was a regular experience for them.

9D. How often do you think Ānuanua people in the Cook Islands experience violence?



Interestingly, despite respondents reporting personal experiences of violence as Ānuanua in the Cook Islands as being rare or never occurring to them, their perception very much slanted toward it being a common experience. Or anticipated experiences of discrimination being reported highly in this question.

Recommendations

The cross-cutting recommendations in the Manarangi Report take into account feedback and sense making activities that were held with the wider Cook Islands Ānuanua community. These recommendations are meant to be supportive, relational in their approach and grounded in the Cook Islands context. These recommendations were also developed following a kai vananga held in Ānuanua Week 2025 that discussed the findings of the Manarangi Survey.

Health and Wellbeing

1. Develop, advocate for and deliver Ānuanua competency trainings for the Cook Islands' Healthcare workforce to address discrimination.

Respondents believed that discrimination occurred from a lack of understanding. One approach to help solve this issue and address discrimination is through building relational learning opportunities for those within the healthcare system.

2. Find ways to empower Ānuanua representation in the healthcare workforce.

While building stronger understanding among the current healthcare system and workers is crucial in terms of addressing discrimination, so, too, is the need for more Ānuanua professionals working in the healthcare system. This will require concerted and targeted efforts toward recruiting more Ānuanua into safe training environments in taking up healthcare professions.

3. Advocate for the revision of administrative systems to be more inclusive of Ānuanua. Respondents to the survey and through the kai vananga expressed the desire for administrative forms, such as those used for enrolment into healthcare services be updated to allow for Ānuanua gender identities to be selected and affirmed within administrative systems.

4. Develop outreach programmes to increase familial and social acceptance of Ānuanua young people.

Wellbeing is tied inextricably to family acceptance. Campaigns and initiatives to involve families is crucial to addressing this area of wellbeing. Resourcing and encouraging efforts to formulate Parent-led networks and support groups like PFLAG to help provide networked support for families of Ānuanua individuals in the Cook Islands.

5. Develop and promote culturally appropriate mental health awareness and literacy programmes among Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.

While improving mental health service access should be a wider systematic priority for the Cook Islands healthcare system, resourcing is a real constraint. Furthermore, survey results show that first lines of support for Ānuanua are friends circles. Thus, mental health wellness is most likely to be better supported when societal-wide mental health literacy is increased. Especially among Ānuanua who are likely to be their friends' first line of support under mental health distress.

6. Increase awareness of gender affirming care options in the Cook Islands.

During Kai Vananga, community members suggested that HRT in particular is meant to be available in the Cook Islands, but very few know how to access it. This is reflected in survey results. For Ānuanua who need HRT as a life-saving and affirming treatment, the Cook Islands health system must seek to connect these services more intentionally with those who are in need.

Social, Cultural, Community and Religious Spaces

7. Ānuanua groups and advocates must continue to work with sympathetic religious institutions to build connections, understanding and coalition.

Survey results overwhelmingly affirmed the significance of the role of religion in the lives of Ānuanua in the Cook Islands. This was also underscored in the Kai Vananga. It is recommended that Ānuanua groups continue to work with Churches in the Cook Islands to continue to affirm the positive and valuable contributions Ānuanua provide and to work in coalition towards promoting greater Ānuanua inclusion in religious spaces.

8. Ānuanua organisations need to be funded and supported as vital spaces of advocacy and community building. They should also seek to build community engagement and partnerships to develop Ānuanua work and educational opportunities.

Ānuanua spaces and organisations have been underscored as vital spaces and places for Ānuanua. These must be continued to be funded to support their service delivery and advocacy work for Ānuanua in the Cook Islands. Moreover, these organisations must also work toward fostering partnerships across community groups in the Cook Islands, and seek funding for Ānuanua-led programmes in health, education and employment.

9. Invest in opportunities to showcase Ānuanua contributions to Cook Islands culture, events and festivals.

Respondents to Manarangi overwhelmingly underscored the significance of their culture to who they were, highlighting also their willingness to contribute to its preservation and propagation through high levels of volunteerism and service. Ānuanua often excel in creative expressions and opportunities to highlight their contribution to Cook Islands cultural festivities as well as the promotion of Cook Islands language and knowledge can help to increase belonging and inclusion across Cook Islands society.

Education, Workplaces and Human Rights

10. Develop, advocate for and deliver Ānuanua competency training for educators in the Cook Islands.

Survey results demonstrated how school experiences for Ānuanua were suboptimal, evidenced by high levels of violence, harassment and bullying reported retrospectively by respondents. Furthermore, respondents overwhelmingly reported that their teachers and school staff had very little knowledge of the challenges Ānuanua students face in the Cook Islands.

11. Include Ānuanua topics and themes in the Cook Islands education curriculum as part of a comprehensive sexuality education programme, train educators to deliver Ānuanua material in a nuanced and safe way.

Ānuanua are an integral part of Cook Islands society and culture, yet they are invisible in the Cook Islands education system. Advocacy for the safe delivery and teaching of Ānuanua affirming content as part of comprehensive sexuality education should be part of an overall strategy that seeks to address Ānuanua inclusion in school systems in the Cook Islands. This must also be integrated into efforts to implement recommendation 10.

12. Continue to organise and promote Ānuanua-specific events in workplaces and industry to continually affirm the contributions Ānuanua make to work places across the Cook Islands.

Workplace experiences for Ānuanua in the Cook Islands in general have been described as affirming for most respondents. Emphasising these positive experiences and underlining them can contribute positively to wider societal attitudes toward Ānuanua in the Cook Islands.



13. Advocate for the enactment and strengthening of anti-discrimination legislation in the Cook Islands.

Respondents to the Manarangi survey rated this one of the most significant human rights interventions that could make life more comfortable for Ānuanua in the Cook Islands. While decriminalisation was a massive victory for the Ānuanua community in the Cook Islands, there are still not many legislative protections that explicitly protect Ānuanua from discrimination in the Cook Islands.

14. Advocate for the establishment of a specialised police unit or personnel trained in supporting Ānuanua victims of violence, and safeguard reporting processes.

Anticipation of violence in public settings was pertinent among Ānuanua respondents to the Manarangi survey. In kai vananga discussions, participants were clear on the need for better informed and safer police processes for Ānuanua to be able to report incidences of violence. This will need to include training for police personnel in how to work with Ānuanua in a safe way, as well as establish clear reporting processes that are safe, confidential and responsive.

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