



# Introduction



My background - mental health & international student support



The Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice 2016



In 2017: 955 Chinese students; 3548 international students (27%)



Recent tragedies in Chinese student population at Victoria



East v West

# Background

- High levels of distress
- Under-utilisation & late engagement with mental health services
- Cultural influences impact help-seeking – stigma and saving face
- Preference towards using informal sources of help
- Value being able to rely on their own resources to manage stress
- Concerns over spoken English
- Lack of familiarity with counselling concepts and services
- Connecting with host nation students is challenging

# Study Aims



BASELINE LEVEL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
DISTRESS



WHO HELPS?



COUNSELLING BARRIERS

# Methodology



Parallel mixed methods design - quantitative and qualitative questions merged at interpretation



Cross-sectional web-based bilingual survey



Survey sent 31 July 2017, survey closed 31 August 2017



Kessler 10 measure of psychological distress

# Results

- Response rate of 25% (205/829)
- 61.2% female/37.9% male
- 75% were an only child
- 62% had lived in NZ for longer than one year
- Sample highly representative of population
- 16% responded in Mandarin

# Psychological distress

Psychological distress is defined as a state of poor mental health associated with symptoms from the anxiety-depressive spectrum

Psychological distress is linked with high-risk behaviours; poor academic performance, absenteeism, poor retention and social participation and is a risk factor for suicide.

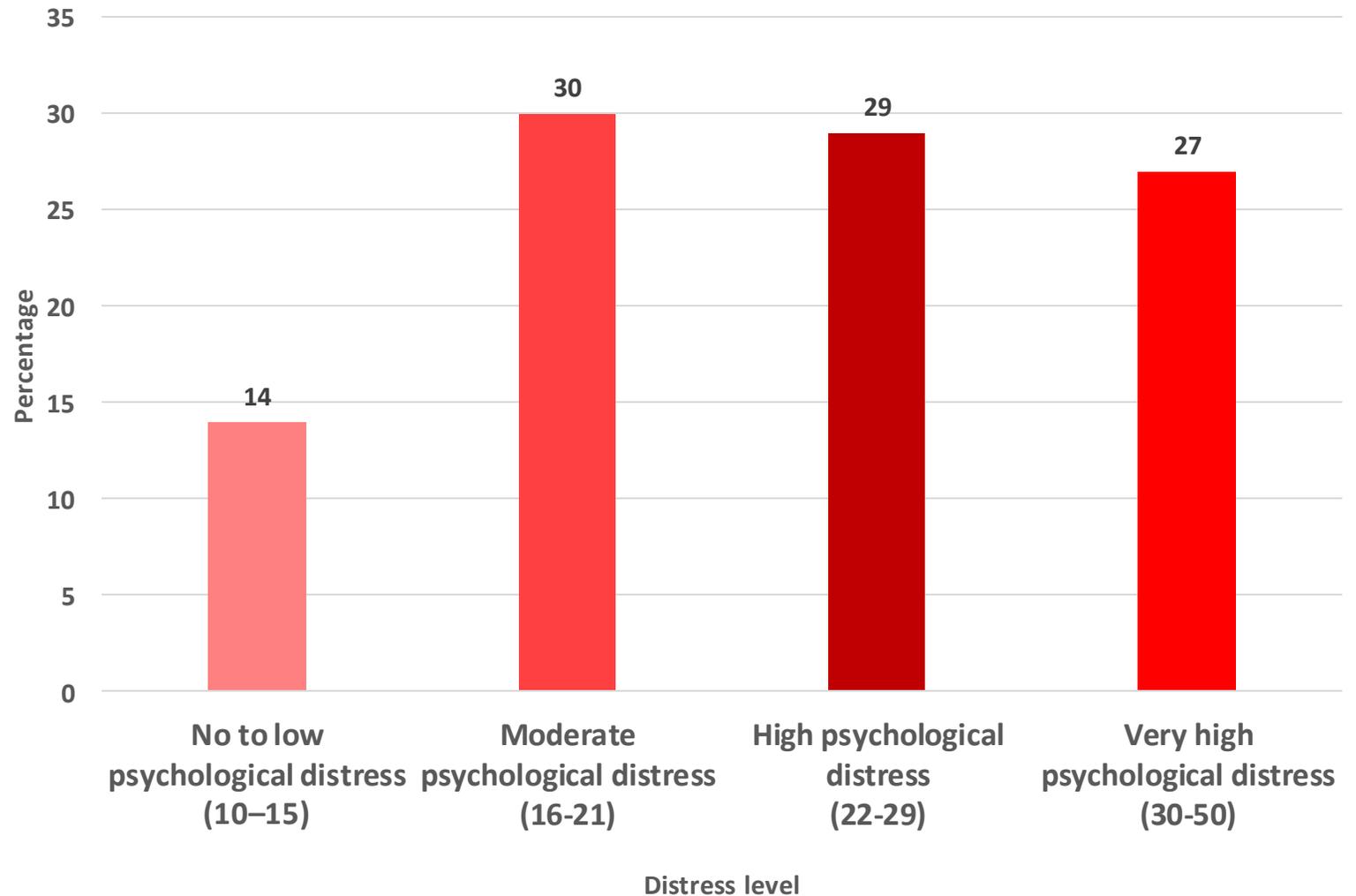
## Kessler 10 (K-10)

10-question rating scale to assess the frequency of psychological distress in the previous four weeks.

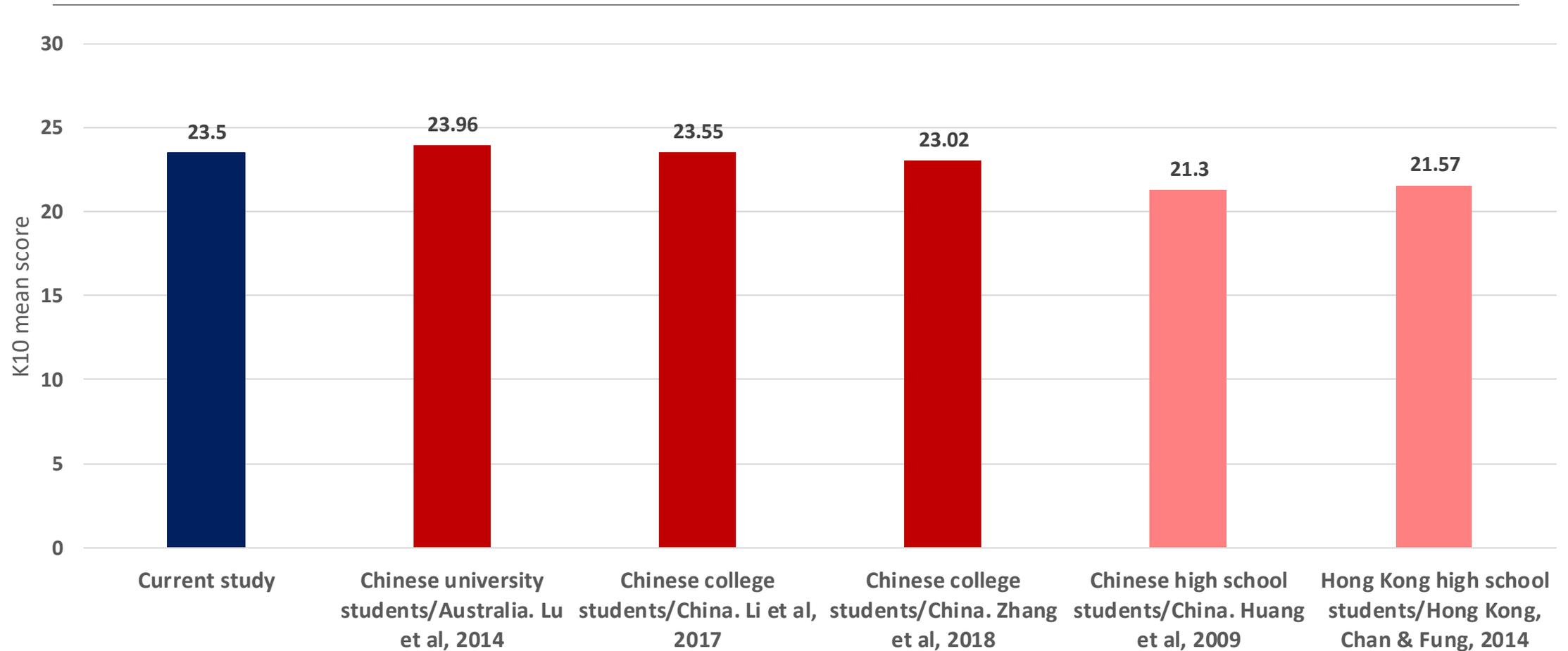
Scores range from 10-50

# Psychological distress

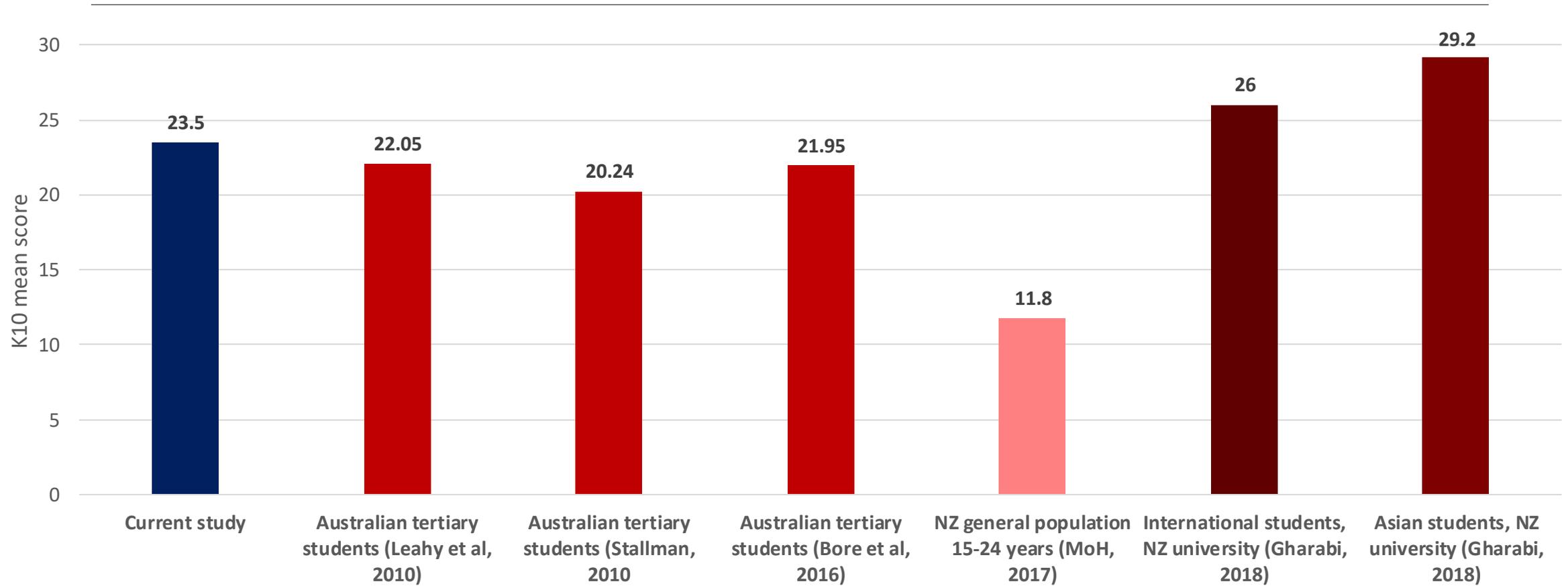
## K10 - Levels of distress in sample



# K10 mean comparisons – Chinese students



# K10 mean comparisons – other groups



# Help-seeking

*“No matter how big, one beam cannot support a house”*

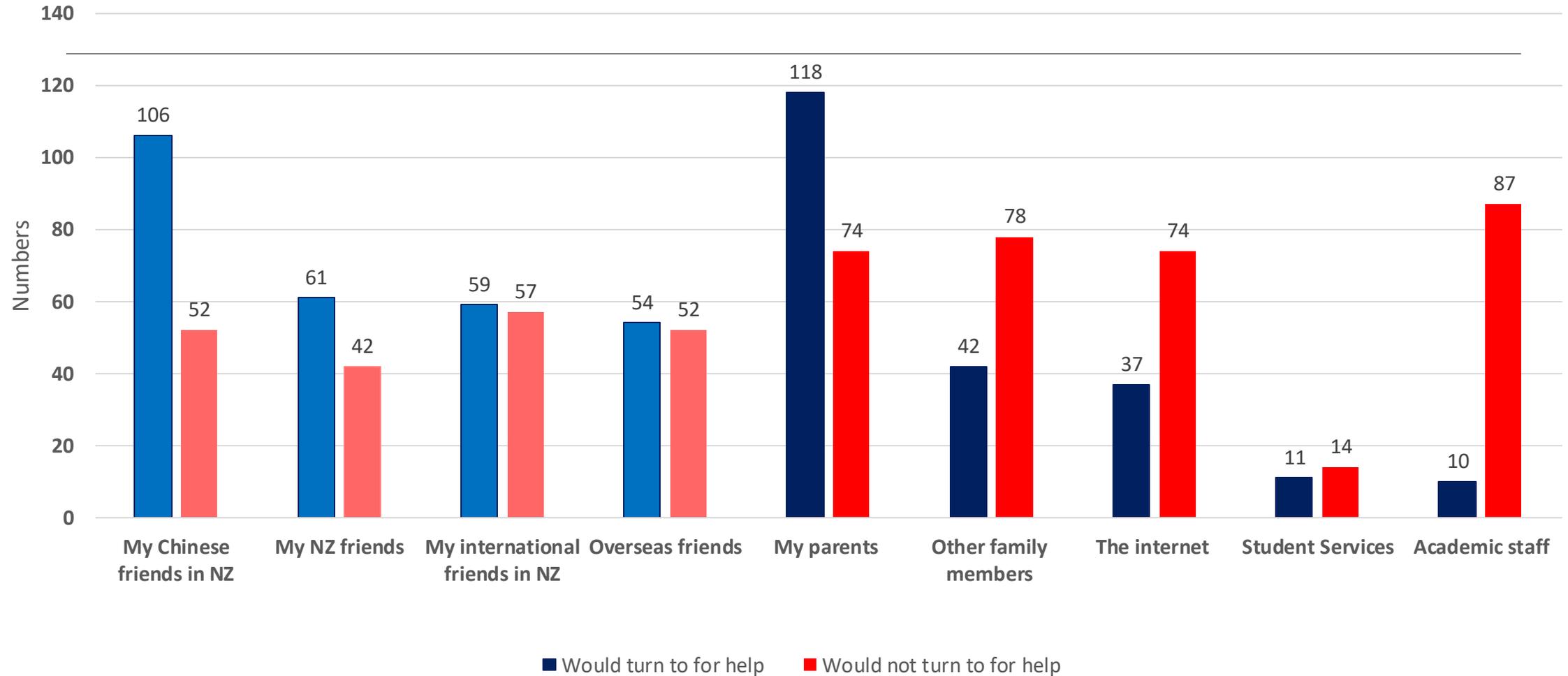
*Chinese proverb*

Help-seeking can be formal through counselling, medical services or informal through family, friends, religion, self-help technology etc.

Participants were asked to rank their top three sources they would turn to for help when stressed and the three sources they were least likely to turn to when stressed.

This study was not explicit about the type of stress experienced.

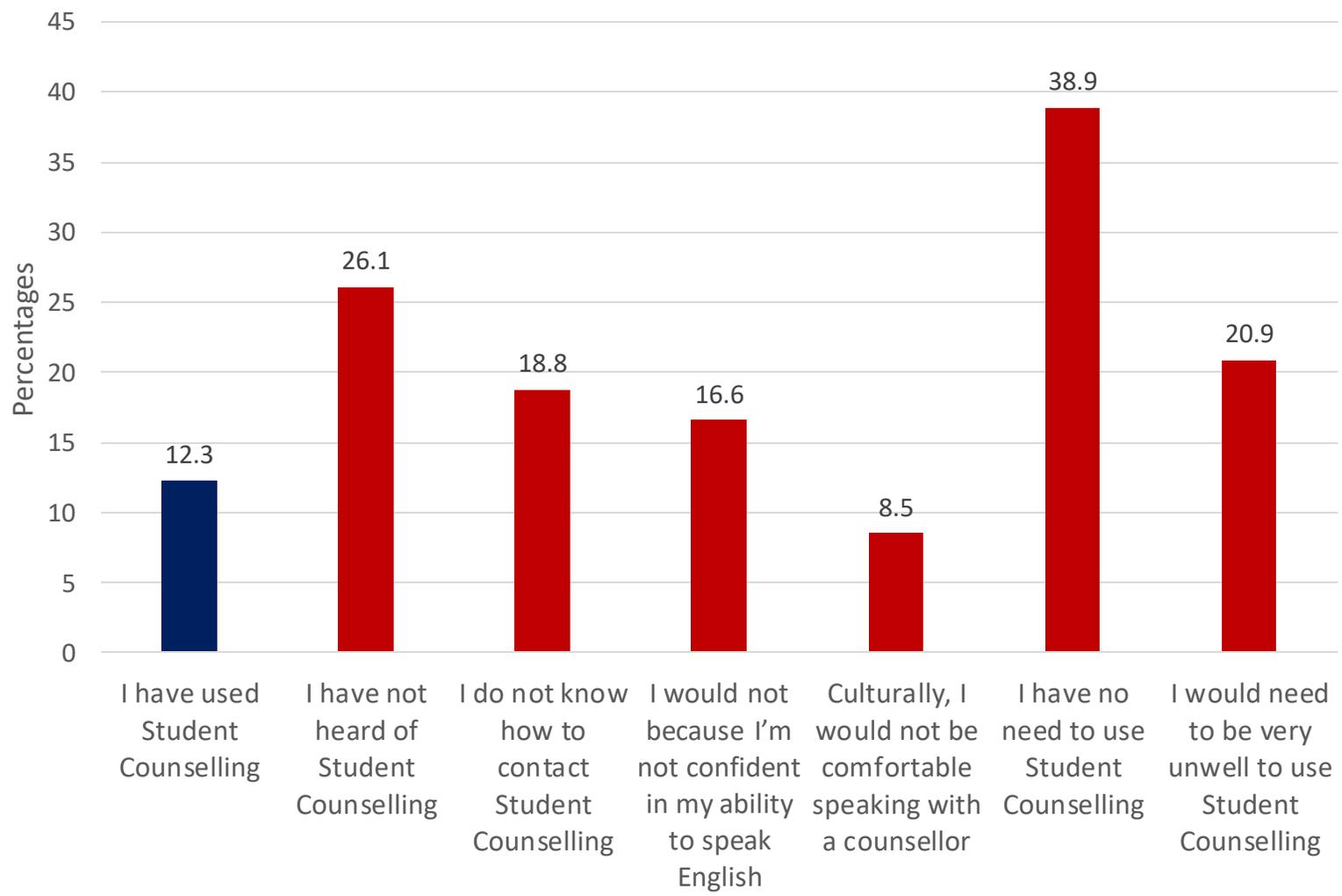
# Help-seeking - who Chinese students would or would not turn to for help when stressed



# Student Counselling

36 Chinese international students accessed the service in 2017 (4% of Victoria's Chinese population)

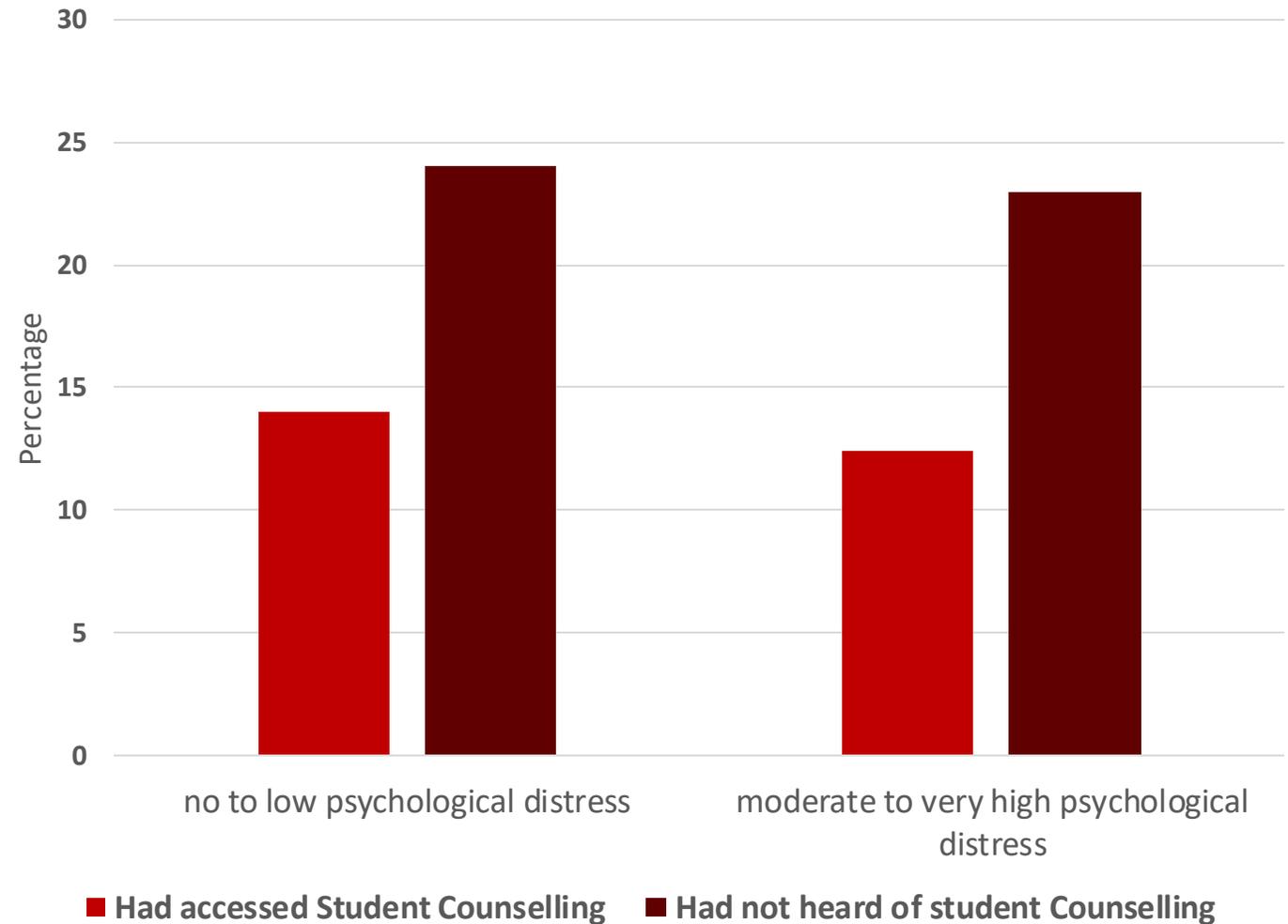
## Use of, and barriers to Student Counselling use



# Student Counselling

Participants K10 scores were compared with their awareness and use of Student Counselling

## Student Counselling use and awareness



# Student Counselling

Participants were asked what would make Student Counselling more accessible?

## Awareness

*“It will be good if there is an introduction section of the student counselling on the day of orientation”*

*“I have been here for 5-6 years, I don't know there is a student counselling”*

## Language

*“Sometimes if we say something using our own language, we could feel better.”*

*“If English communication is not ideal, shall provide students opportunities to communicate using mother tongues.”*

# Cultural concerns with counselling

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*“...we do not have this kind of student service back in China and we don't know how it works”*

*“China doesn't really pay attention to psychological health, Chinese tend to express to family members or close friends, might not be able to really express own real thinking to the professional yet strangely felt counsellor”*

*“I have only met with two psychologists, one is a westerner who doesn't understand my thoughts and feelings and that increased my illness, I don't blame her because we have different life experiences and backgrounds, but at the same time it's not my fault to be ill.”*

# Student Counselling wait time

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*“the wait time is ridiculously long, and ain't [sic] nobody has time for that to be honest.’*

*“I've only used Student Counselling once. Although I was under a lot of stress and mental distress, I needed to wait for about two weeks for my appointment. When the day finally came, I felt I didn't need it that much anymore. I understand Student Counselling is a very busy service at Vic, [sic] however, I'm just wondering if there's any way to improve this?”*

Of additional concern is the finding from Blau et al., (2015), where students who had longer wait times to receive psychological support showed a lower willingness to recommend the university, lower institutional commitment, and higher perceived stigma for receiving psychological help.

## Decreasing stress on transition

Participants were asked what they would do differently to reduce stress on transition to Victoria if they had their time again.

### Get involved

*“go out and social have more friends, meet new people. Friends can make you feel less lonely.”*

*“I will try to get involved from the beginning. Go to student learning to participate workshops. Attend Vic Plus programme. So many of these I did not really know when I came here”*

### Study harder

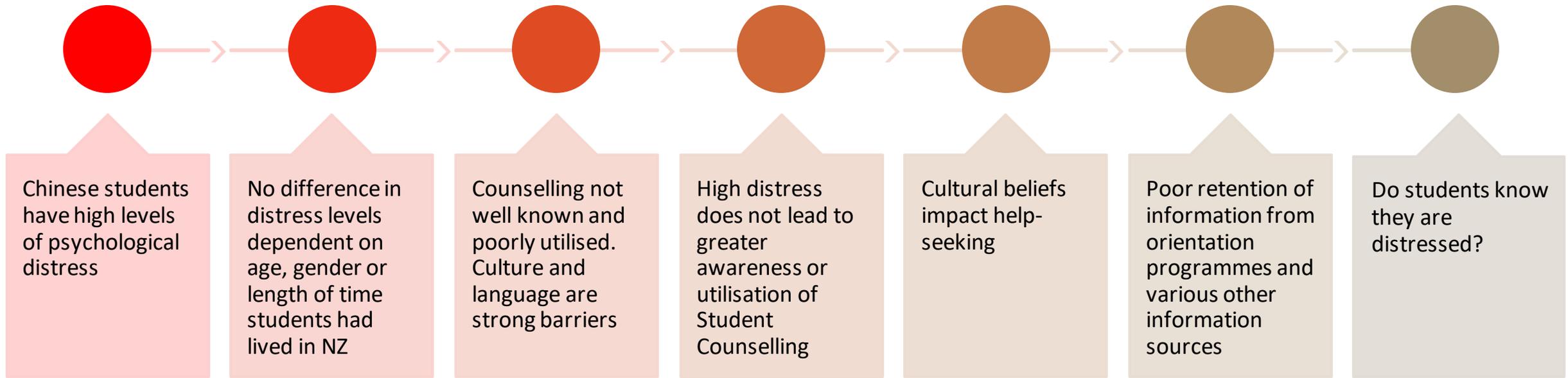
*“Studying harder and harder”*

*“Doing some preparation for every classes.”*

### English language concerns

*“I would not take a class that requires the attendance of discussion group every week. That made me really nervous and uncomfortable. I wasn't good at English, I hope the coordinator or someone else have warned me about that.”*

*“I guess as for not a native speaker, English speaking is always the first challenge.”*



## Summary



Pre departure - students & parents sessions - life in NZ, what to expect at university; services at university



Orientation - slow down; extend orientations; provide information in native languages, assign peer groups



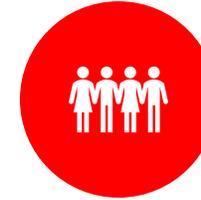
Counselling - cultural and language options; promotion; staff training; resourcing v need



Language - support to improve English confidence; all staff aware of challenges faced by non-native English speakers



Friends - better information about health, supports etc to allow them to support peers with correct information



Ongoing peer support groups; utilise current peer groups and include service/support information



Mental health literacy – mental health education opportunities and supports

In an ideal world...

