



HEALTHIER, LONGER,
BETTER LIVES

RETHINK
HEALTHY

Living Up to Expectations:

How Stereotypes Are Impacting Our Health

AIA Rethink Healthy Asia Report 2026



Changing the Way We See Health

At AIA, our Purpose is to help people live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives. Through Rethink Healthy, our brand campaign platform, we aim to challenge narrow perceptions of what it means to be healthy and, over time, broaden them to a more inclusive, attainable understanding of wellbeing.

As part of Rethink Healthy we commissioned this research to look beyond surface-level definitions, and question the social expectations and stereotypes that shape how health is understood, experienced, and lived every day.

Beyond nutrition and exercise, access or affordability, stereotypes play a powerful role in how health is defined, judged and experienced across the region. These societal expectations are a silent pressure in all of our lives that affect our short-term and long-term view of health and wellness — and whether we feel able to take steps toward living Healthier, Longer, Better Lives.

By surfacing how these beliefs are formed and internalised, this report aims to help people recognise what may be holding them back. In doing so, it encourages a shift towards more informed, inclusive choices that support wellbeing over the long term — not just for individuals, but for communities as a whole.

The Methodology

AIA commissioned Edelman Data & Intelligence (DXI) to understand how health and wellness stereotypes and social expectations shape people's experiences with health and wellness across five key markets in Asia: **Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.**

Combining desktop research, media analysis, and quantitative survey conducted in English and local languages, the study identifies the dominant stereotypes shaping health today — and how they influence emotions, behaviours, and the ability to live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives.

2,100

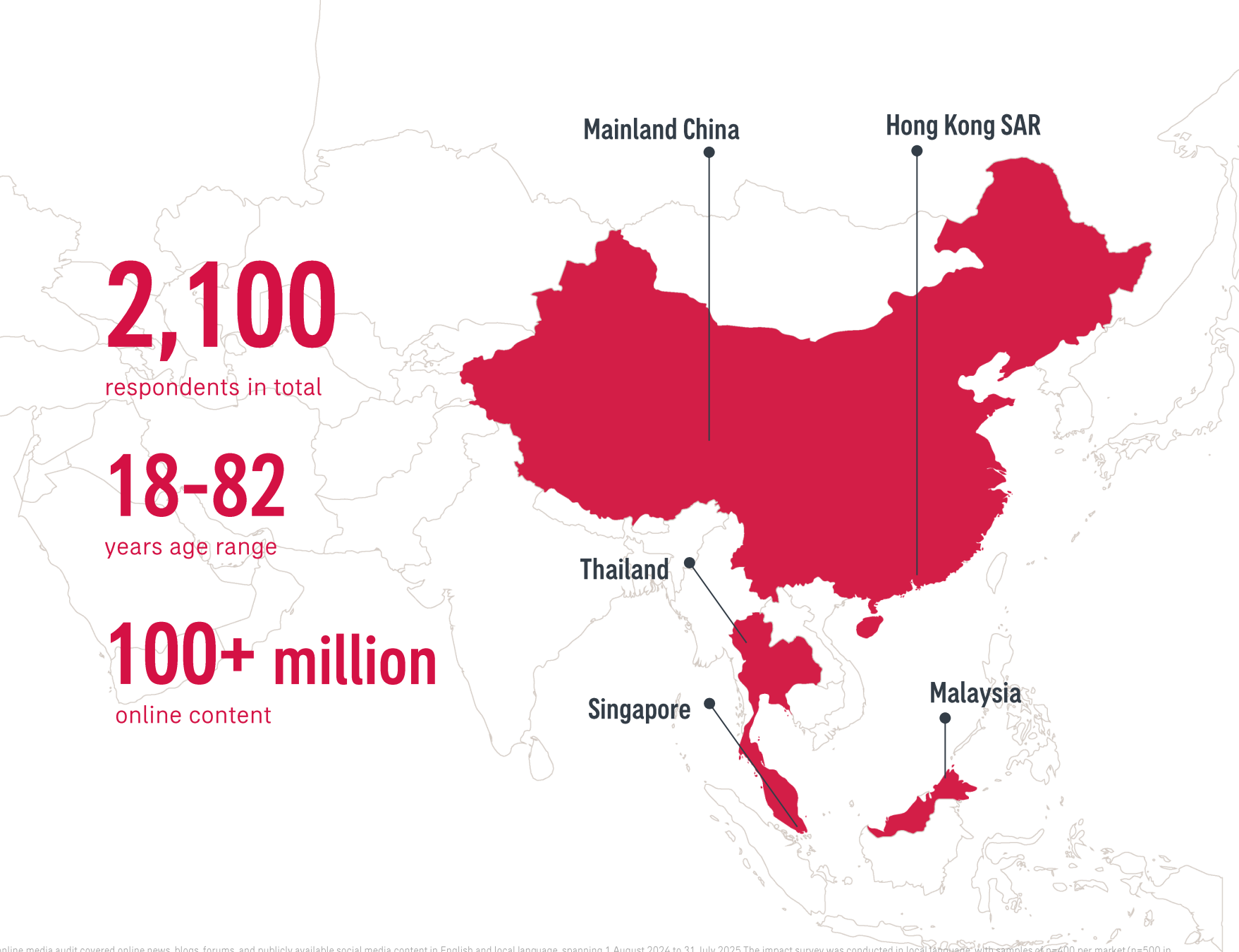
respondents in total

18-82

years age range

100+ million

online content



STEREOTYPES & IMPACT

Stereotypes are **powerful forces** in our understanding of health

In Asia, deeply rooted expectations and stereotypes continue to define what health, wellbeing, and success are supposed to look like.

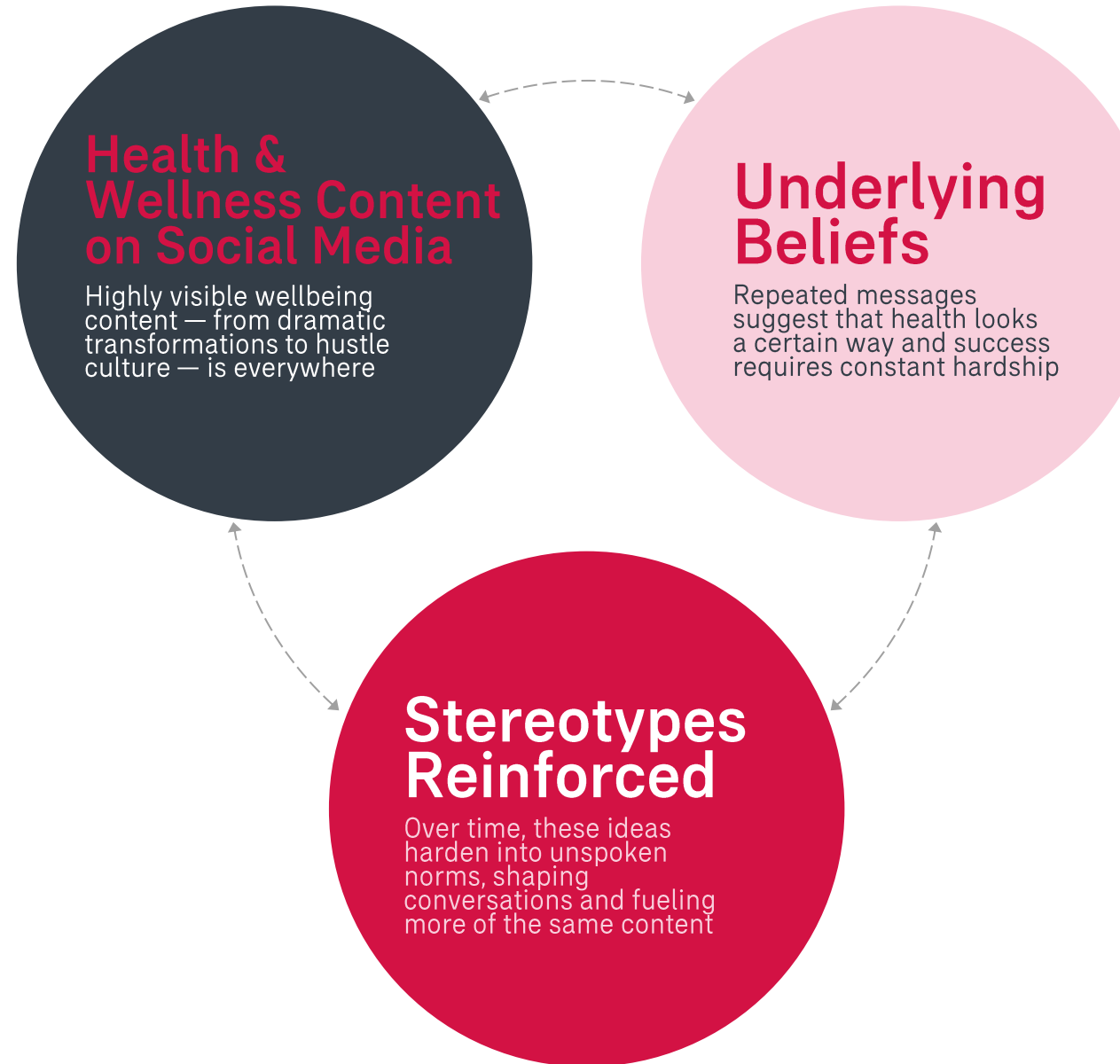
In a world where we're always scrolling, sharing, and comparing, ideas about health spread faster and reach further than ever.

Brands, influencers, and platforms now play a powerful role in shaping what health looks like — and the impression it leaves.

Social media is an **echo chamber** of pressure

While stereotypes often emerge from culture and lived experience, health and wellness content — particularly online — reflects, amplifies, and hardens them into rigid expectations.

Our audit of health and wellness content shows how frequently these ideas are repeated — and how easily they become the default definition of health.



The 20 Health and Wellness Stereotypes We Discovered

Our online media audit uncovered twenty common stereotypes across social media that shape what it means to be physically, mentally, financially, and environmentally healthy in Asia.



Mental Health



Physical Health



Financial Health



Environmental Health



Mental Health

is often portrayed as something to be **managed and contained** — turning mental health into a state defined by emotional restraint, self-discipline, and quiet endurance.

Suffering in silence is a sign of strength



Strict parenting is essential for a child's success



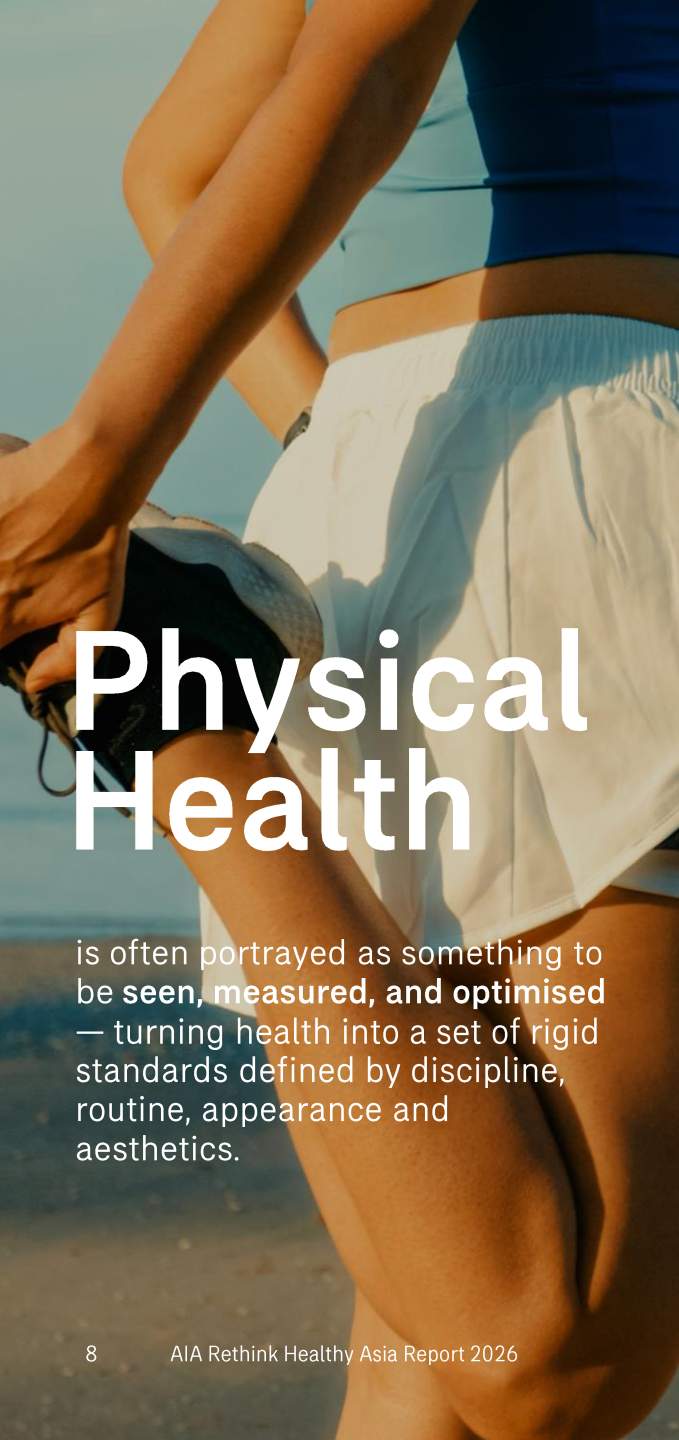
Family problems should be kept private

To be respected, a person must not show emotions



Real men never show vulnerability

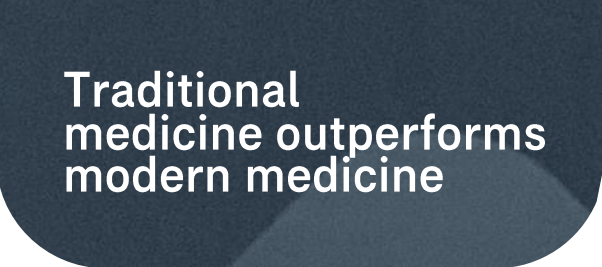




Healthy eating
equals clean eating



Only intense
workouts are
effective



Traditional
medicine outperforms
modern medicine



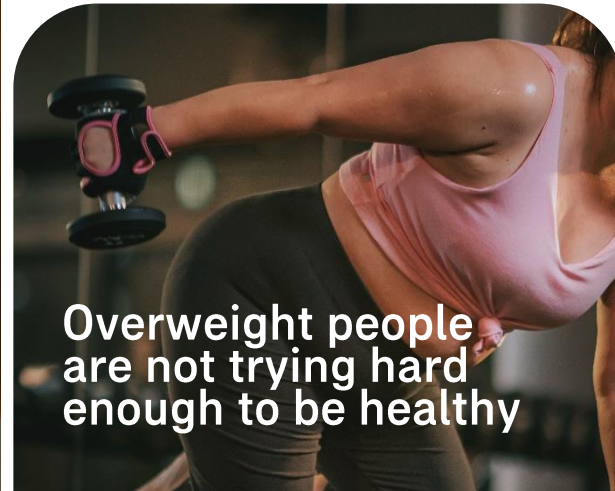
Being fit requires
a big financial
investment



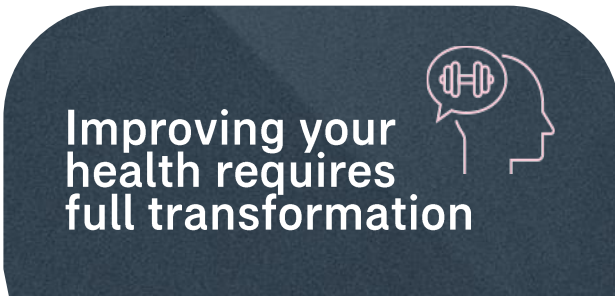
Fitness requires
discipline with
no compromise



Viral diets are
better than
regular diets



Overweight people
are not trying hard
enough to be healthy



Improving your
health requires
full transformation



True wellbeing
requires daily
rituals


Physical Health

is often portrayed as something to be **seen, measured, and optimised** — turning health into a set of rigid standards defined by discipline, routine, appearance and aesthetics.



Financial Health

is frequently framed around **duty and success** — defining financial wellbeing solely through financial provision, responsibility, and role fulfilment.



A man's worth depends on his financial success



Not supporting parents financially is ungrateful



Sons are responsible for family success



Wealth determines a person's worth

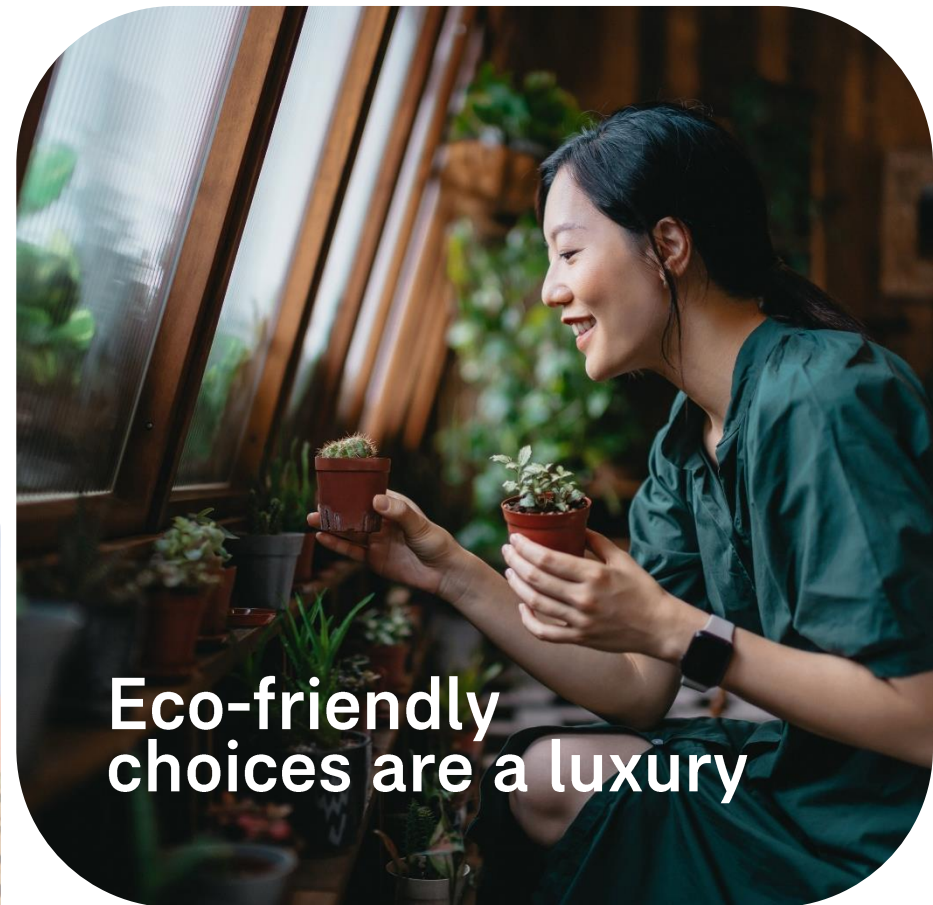
Environmental Health

is often associated with **being performative** — shaping perceptions that sustainability is driven by trends and social signalling.

Sustainable living
is just a trend



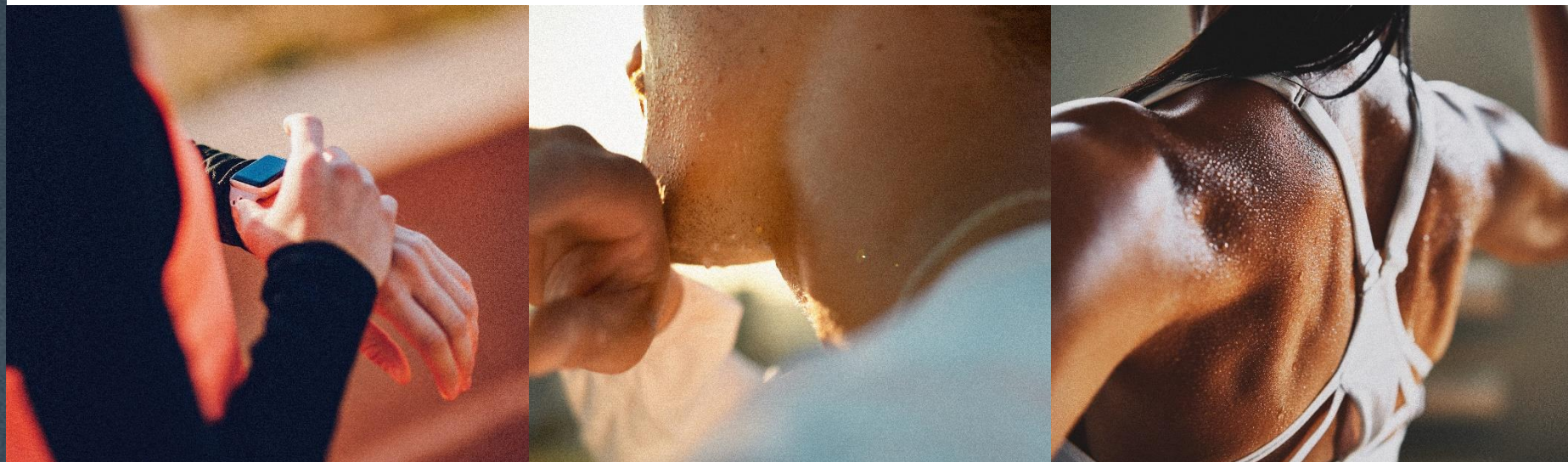
Eco-friendly
choices are a luxury



The most widely accepted stereotypes in Asia

Our survey indicates that many people believe being healthy requires strict discipline, daily routines, and visible physical change. These beliefs are widely accepted, reinforcing narrow expectations around what health should look like and how it should be achieved.

Physical Health = Rigid Fitness Standards



69%

agree that fitness
requires discipline
with no compromise

65%

agree that true
wellbeing requires
daily rituals

59%

agree that improving
your health requires
full transformation

The most widely accepted stereotypes in Asia

Our research shows that mental health stereotypes around emotional control are deeply rooted across the region. Many people still equate holding in emotions with respect, strength, and keeping the peace — reinforcing expectations that make it harder to express vulnerability or seek support.

Mental Health = Emotional Suppression & Control



57%

agree that to be respected, a person must not show emotions

60%

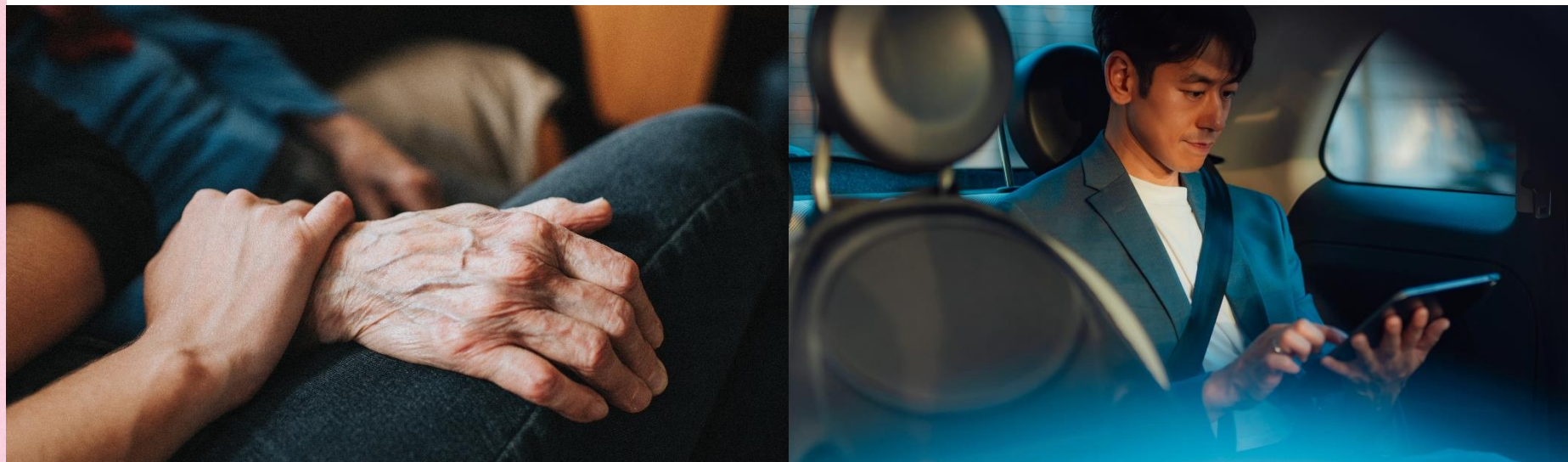
agree that family problems should be kept private

B1. In many cultures, people grow up hearing certain sayings or beliefs about health, family, and life. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Showing agree) / Base: All respondents (n=2,100).

The most widely accepted stereotypes in Asia

We found that many people continue to believe that being healthy means providing financially for family — and that personal worth is tied to this responsibility. These expectations run deep, creating real pressure when life circumstances make them difficult to meet.

Financial Health = Obligations to Provide



52%

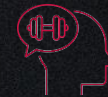
agree that not
supporting parents
financially is ungrateful

41%

agree that a man's
worth depends on his
financial success

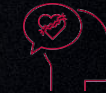
Stereotypes We Reject — But Still See Everywhere

We found stereotypes that people disagreed with, but still found highly relevant to their lives and the world around them. That means that even when people don't personally believe in health stereotypes, they still see them show up everywhere — in content, conversations, and culture. Their persistence reflects how deeply rooted they are, continuing to influence and cause harm. Reducing their impact starts with greater care in how they are repeated — and in how brands and society support people in challenging them.



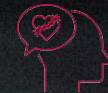
Only intense workouts are effective

62% Disagree
45% Find relevant



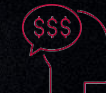
Real men never show vulnerability

43% Disagree
53% Find relevant



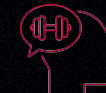
Suffering in silence is a sign of strength

51% Disagree
56% Find relevant



Sons are responsible for family success

47% Disagree
47% Find relevant



Being fit requires a big financial investment

52% Disagree
44% Find relevant

B1. In many cultures, people grow up hearing certain sayings or beliefs about health, family, and life. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Showing disagree) / Base: All respondents (n=2,100).
B2. You will now see several beliefs from the previous list. For each one, please indicate how relevant it is in your life and experiences. Which best describes your relationship with this belief? (5-point scale, showing top-3-box relevance) /
Base: Respondents who evaluated the respective stereotype (Only intense workouts are effective n=517; Real men never show vulnerability n=526; Suffering in silence is a sign of strength n=527; Sons are responsible for family success n=516; Being fit requires a big financial investment n=514). Note: To manage questionnaire length, each respondent evaluated a subset of five stereotypes from the full list of twenty.

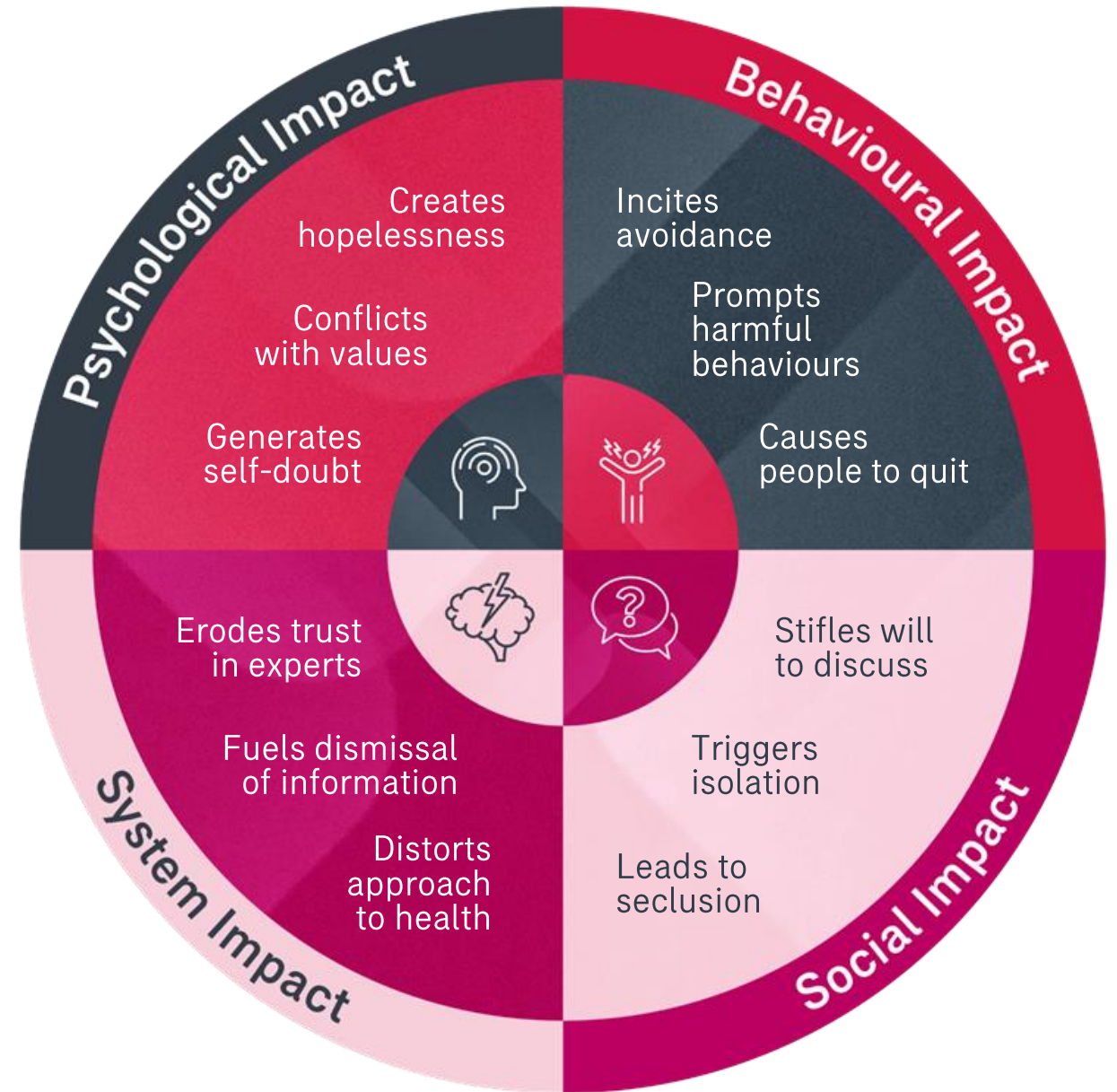
Stereotypes don't just shape beliefs — they **shape behaviour**

They can impact motivation and limit people's ability to take action for their health. That's why everyone — from society to brands to individuals — has a role to play in challenging them.

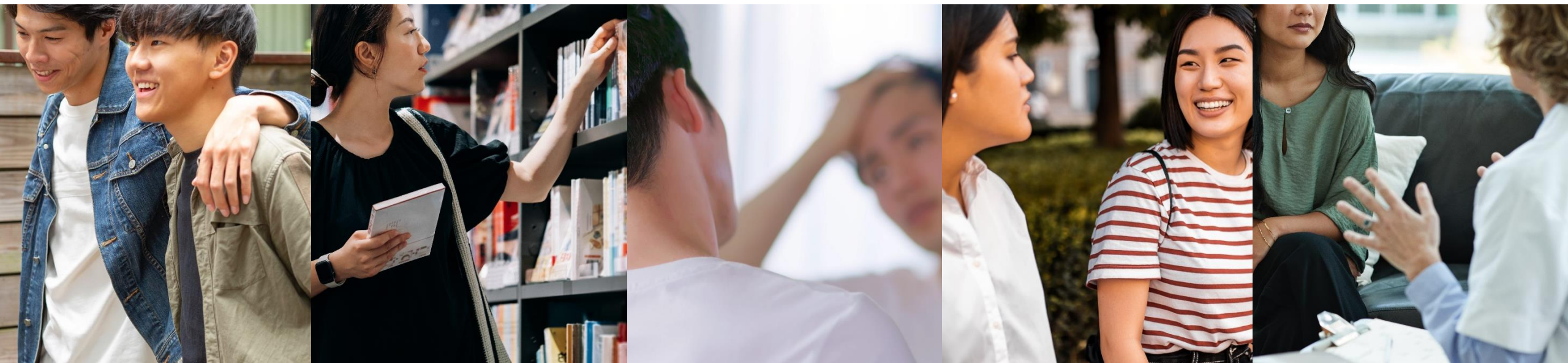
Stereotypes affect people in **multiple, meaningful ways**

To understand how these stereotypes affect people, we tested their impact across **12 different dimensions**. This revealed not only how different stereotypes make people feel, but how these beliefs shape thinking, behaviour, relationships, and engagement with health and wellness.

Across these dimensions, clear and consistent patterns emerged in how people respond to each stereotype.



More than 90% of people say stereotypes negatively affect their wellbeing



IN SINGAPORE...

98%
stated stereotypes
impacted them socially

SOCIAL IMPACT

IN MAINLAND CHINA...

90%
said stereotypes impacted
how they engage with the
system and health initiatives

SYSTEM IMPACT

IN HONG KONG SAR...

93%
said stereotypes
impacted their health
and wellness behaviour

BEHAVIOURAL IMPACT

IN MALAYSIA...

96%
stated stereotypes
impacted them socially

SOCIAL IMPACT

IN THAILAND...

93%
said stereotypes impacted
how they engage with the
system and health initiatives

SYSTEM IMPACT

B4. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree that this belief leads to the below types of consequences. Please rate from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree". (5-point agreement scale, headline showing the percentage of respondents agreed with any impact from any stereotypes, content showing the percentage of respondents agreed with any impact for respective dimension from any stereotypes) / Base: All respondents n=2,100.

Avoidance, self-doubt,
and making misguided
choices are the most
common negative
responses to health
and wellness stereotypes

85%

Decided to hide
their struggles

84%

Focused on
the wrong priorities

85%

Felt unable to discuss
the matter with others

84%

Began doubting their
ability to manage the issue

THE BIGGEST IMPACT

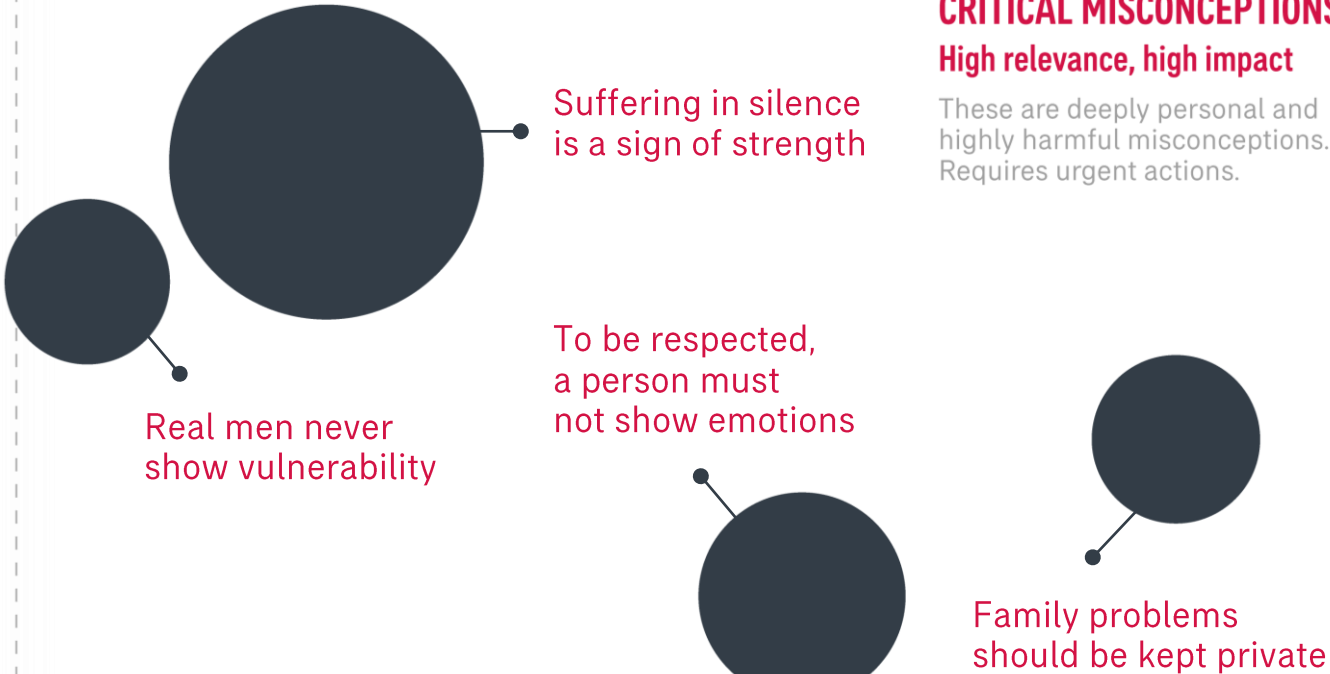
The Most Impactful Stereotypes are those Related to **Mental Health**

Across all 12 dimensions of impact, mental health stereotypes stand out as the most damaging.

The responses show a clear pattern: these beliefs create pressure that discourages people from speaking openly about their struggles. Instead, many retreat, hide what they are going through, and pull back from others — cutting themselves off from support when they need it most.

These stereotypes have **high impact** and **high relevance** across Asia

The pressures shaping our mental health are hard to escape. Our data shows that these mental health stereotypes are not only widespread — they also have the greatest impact. Nearly half of respondents (49%) report that these stereotypes negatively affect how they feel, think, or behave.



These stereotypes don't just make people feel bad — they **push people into isolation**

B4. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree that this belief leads to the below types of consequences. Please rate from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree".
(5-point scale, 5-point scale, showing the percentage of respondents agreed with the impact from any of the four mental health stereotypes) / Base: Respondents who evaluated any of the four mental health stereotype n=1,502

The Behavioural Impact...

56%

agree that these stereotypes lead to **dismissal of information**

56%

agree that these stereotypes lead them to **avoid particular health-related actions or behaviours**

55%

agree that these stereotypes lead them to **engage in wellbeing-damaging behaviours**

The Social Impact...

64%

agree that these stereotypes **stifle their will to discuss**

63%

agree that these stereotypes **lead to seclusion**

58%

agree these stereotypes **trigger isolation**

IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL MARKETS

Every market experiences the impact of common stereotypes differently

Across the region, mental health stereotypes are consistently harmful. At the same time, each market has its own set of particularly influential stereotypes. Where community and family expectations play a strong role, the impact of these beliefs varies meaningfully from one market to the next.

IN SINGAPORE...

People are more impacted by stereotypes about **financial success** and how it affects identity and masculinity

The Stereotypes

- Wealth determines a person's worth
- A man's worth depends on his financial success

The Action

We need to redefine wellness as more than wealth and status, and normalise conversations around emotional and family wellness beyond financial planning.

IN MAINLAND CHINA...

People are more impacted by stereotypes about family duty and achievement

The Stereotypes

- Not supporting parents financially is ungrateful
- Strict parenting is essential for a child's success

The Action

We need to promote dialogue about multi-generation financial planning that eases pressure, not causes pressure, and promote tools and language for more balanced parenting.

IN HONG KONG SAR...

People are more impacted by stereotypes about the rigidity of **physical health** and **sustainability** as social signalling

The Stereotypes

- Fitness requires discipline with no compromise
- Sustainable living is just a trend

The Action

We need to show that wellness and sustainability can be about authentic, achievable choices

IN MALAYSIA...

People are more impacted by stereotypes about the cost of pursuing health and the huge change required to be more healthy

The Stereotypes

- Being fit requires a big financial investment
- Improving your health requires full transformation

The Action

We need to debunk these perceptions by raising awareness of accessible and affordable health solutions and encouraging people to build on and reward everyday habits, celebrating progress not perfection.

IN THAILAND...

People are more impacted by stereotypes about the intensity required for **physical health** and the **demands of family life**

The Stereotypes

- Only intense workouts are effective
- Not supporting parents financially is ungrateful

The Action

We can support people by celebrating moderate movement and proof that small sessions can deliver, as well as advocating that good financial planning can mean supporting your parents without sacrificing your own wellbeing.

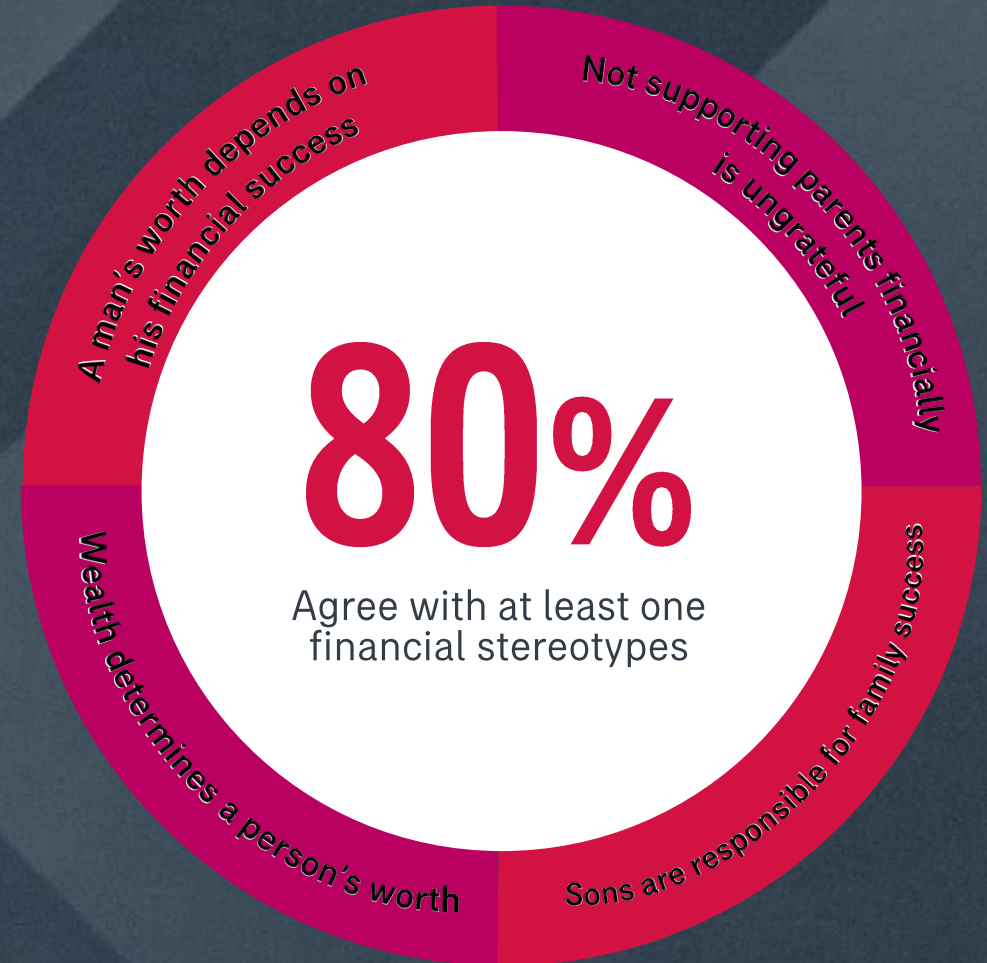
IMPACT OF FINANCIAL EXPECTATIONS

Financial Stereotypes **Persist,** **Despite Pressure** They Cause

In Asia, financial stereotypes are firmly entrenched. Beliefs that tie wealth to status, responsibility, and gender roles continue to shape how people understand financial health. Many people accept these expectations — even as they create pressure and strain.

There is **Deep Agreement** on Financial Stereotypes

Our survey reveals that **four in five** believe in at least one of these financial health stereotypes, showing how strongly cultural expectations persist.



B1. In many cultures, people grow up hearing certain sayings or beliefs about health, family, and life. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Showing percentage of respondent agreed with any financial stereotypes) / Base: All respondents (n=2,100)



But These Beliefs Often Leave People Feeling Worse

When we treat financial success as a measure of worth, economic pressure becomes emotional pressure too — affecting confidence, relationships, and wellbeing.

63%

Feel negatively about
financial health stereotypes

B3. When you encounter this type of saying or belief, what feelings or thoughts typically come up for you? (Top showing the percentage of respondents feeling any negative emotions about any financial stereotypes, bottom showing the percentage of people feeling the respective emotions about any financial stereotypes) / Base: Respondents who evaluated any financial stereotype n=1,504.

Most Common Negative Emotions...

35% feeling **pressured**

27% feeling **judged**

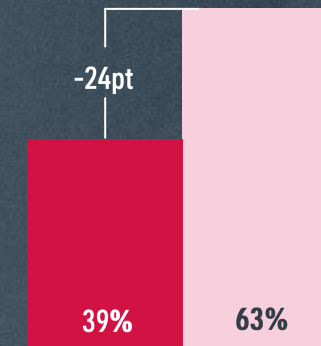
20% feeling **sad**

Financial Stereotypes

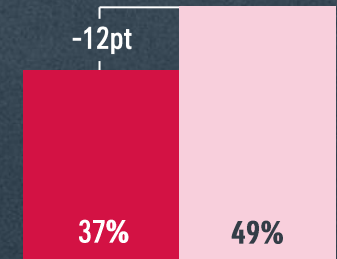
Split Generations

The difference in agreement between generations points to changing attitudes around financial stereotypes. Compared with older generations, younger people are less aligned with beliefs that link financial provision and personal worth — highlighting a potential shift in how these expectations are viewed over time.

Generational Divide in Agreement **Gen Z** vs **Boomers**



Not supporting parents
is financially ungrateful



Wealth determines
a person's worth

B1. In many cultures, people grow up hearing certain sayings or beliefs about health, family, and life. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Showing agree / disagree) / Base: All respondents (Gen Z n=406; Boomers =300). Note: Gen Z refers to respondents born in or after 1997 (aged 28 or younger in 2025), while Boomers refer to those born in or before 1964 (aged 61 or older in 2025).

IMPACT ON GENERATION

Young people are the **most affected** by stereotypes

No generation in APAC feels the weight of wellbeing stereotypes more than Gen Z. For them, these beliefs resonate deeply and influence multiple aspects of their wellbeing.

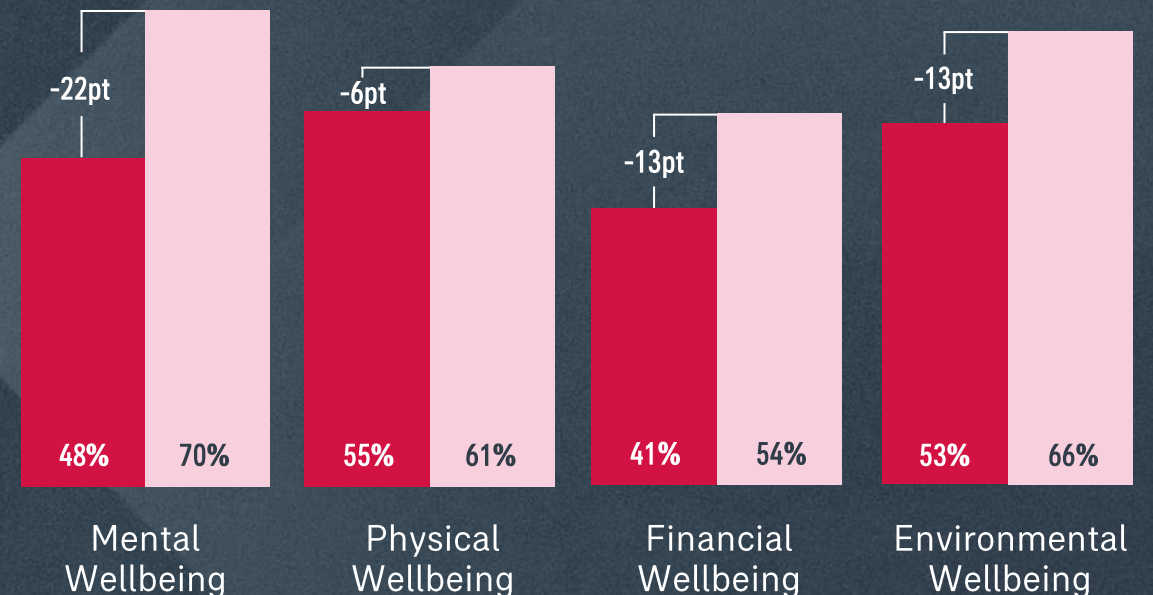
Gen Z reports **Lower Wellbeing** across the board

In every dimension of wellbeing, Gen Z trails older generations. Lower reported wellbeing across physical, mental, financial, and environmental areas coincides with stronger impacts of stereotypes for younger people.

A1. How would you rate your overall wellbeing across the following areas? Please rate from 1 to 9, where 1 represents "poor" and 9 represents "excellent". (9-point scale, showing top 3 boxes for each wellbeing dimension) / Base: All respondents (Gen Z n=406; Boomers n=300).

Note: Gen Z refers to respondents born in or after 1997 (aged 28 or younger in 2025), while Boomers refer to those born in or before 1964 (aged 61 or older in 2025).

% report good wellbeing
Gen Z vs **Boomers**

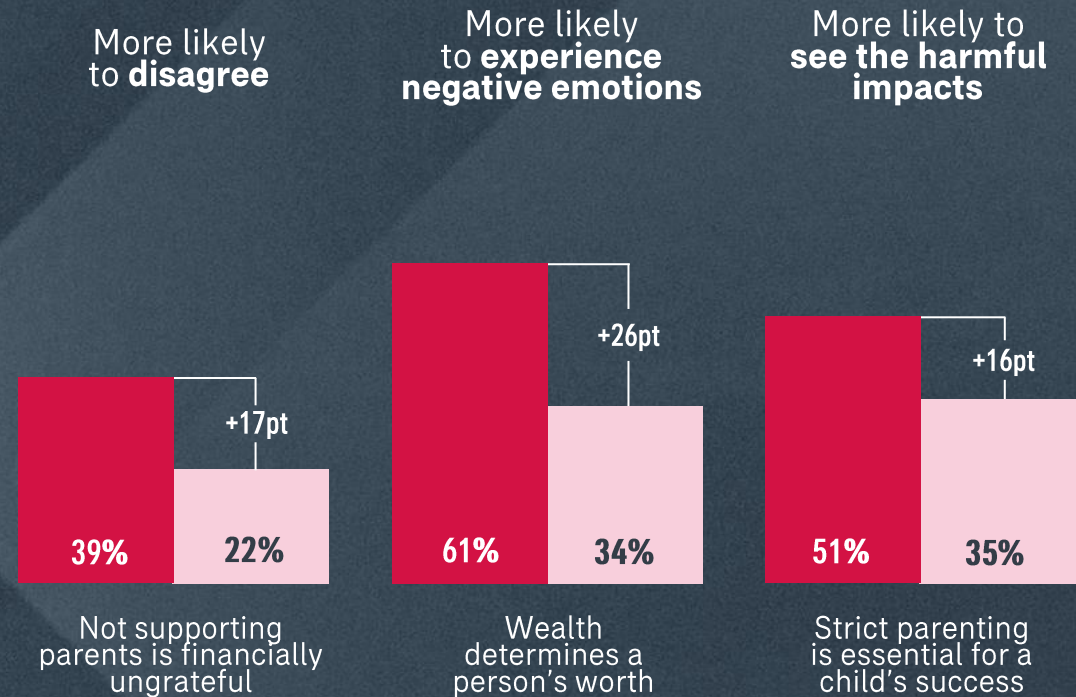


Rejecting a Stereotype Doesn't Remove Its Impact

When financial success becomes a measure of worth or responsibility, economic pressure quickly turns into emotional and social strain, affecting confidence, relationships, and overall wellbeing.

B1. In many cultures, people grow up hearing certain sayings or beliefs about health, family, and life. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Showing the difference between Gen Z and Boomers for disagree) / Base: All respondents (Gen Z aged 18-28 n=406; Boomers aged above 60 n=300). B3. When you encounter this type of saying or belief, what feelings or thoughts typically come up for you? (Showing the difference between Gen Z and Boomers in the proportion reported any negative emotional impact) / Base: Respondents who evaluated the respective stereotype (Wealth determines a person's worth Gen Z n=94; Boomers n=73). B4. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree that this belief leads to the below types of consequences. Please rate from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree". (5-point scale, showing average of top-2-box agreement across impact statements) / Base: Respondents who evaluated the respective stereotype (Strict parenting is essential for a child's success Gen Z n=99; Boomers n=75).
Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers. Gap values are calculated using unrounded figures and may not sum exactly to the displayed percentages.

Gen Z vs Boomers



IMPACT IS PERSONAL

Health and Wellness Stereotypes **Don't Affect** Everyone the Same Way

The risk isn't just the message — it's assuming it works the same way for everyone. When people's context and lived experience are overlooked, even well-meant health messages can add pressure and make those with lower wellbeing feel left behind.

Wellbeing shapes our confidence and how we cope

Wellbeing affects how people handle challenges and relate to others. Higher wellbeing builds confidence; lower wellbeing brings uncertainty — shaping how health messages are received.

X3. How true are these statements about your general wellbeing and outlook? I feel confident in my ability to handle life's challenges, I feel like a different person when I'm alone vs. when I'm with others, I often compare myself to others and wonder if I measure up. (Showing the gap of very and extremely true between those with good and poor wellbeing) / Base: All respondents (Good Wellbeing n=583, Poor Wellbeing n=597). Wellbeing is calculated by summing self-rated scores across four dimensions (physical, mental, financial, and environmental wellbeing; each rated on a 1–9 scale). Those having good wellbeing are classified as respondents in the top quartile (75th percentile and above), while those with poor wellbeing are classified as respondents in the bottom quartile (25th percentile and below).

FOR THOSE WITH **GOOD WELLBEING**

+57_{pt} **more likely** to feel confident in their ability to handle life's challenge

FOR THOSE WITH **POOR WELLBEING**

+40_{pt} **less likely** of feeling able to be themselves with others

+9_{pt} **more likely** to compare themselves with others and wonder if they measure up

Our own wellbeing defines our experience with health and wellness stereotypes

Stereotypes don't land the same way for everyone. People with stronger wellbeing often experience them as motivating cues that validate their choices. Those with lower wellbeing, however, are more likely to experience them as added pressure — deepening insecurity and self-doubt.

B3. When you encounter this type of saying or belief, what feelings or thoughts typically come up for you? (Showing those selected any positive / negative feelings) / Base: Respondents who evaluated the respective stereotype (Wealth determines a person's worth – Good Wellbeing n=226, Poor Wellbeing n=80; True wellbeing requires daily rituals – Good Wellbeing n=320, Poor Wellbeing n=45; Fitness requires discipline with no compromise – Good Wellbeing n=311, Poor Wellbeing n=55; To be respected, a person must not show emotions – Good Wellbeing n=310, Poor Wellbeing n=44; Being fit requires a big financial investment – Good Wellbeing n=291, Poor Wellbeing n=50). Wellbeing is based on self-rated scores across four dimensions (physical, mental, financial, and environmental wellbeing; each rated on a 1–9 scale). Those having good wellbeing refers to respondents who selected the top three boxes in respective dimension, poor wellbeing refers to those who selected the bottom four boxes in respective dimension.



Health should **empower** — not alienate

Many health and wellness stereotypes end up alienating and discouraging large parts of the population. When these stereotypes are used in media, marketing and as wider depictions in culture, it's important to recognise not just who they empower, but who they exclude — and the real harm that exclusion can cause.

Motivation only motivates those who can relate. For everyone else, it risks doing the opposite. And if the goal is to help people live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives, that difference matters.

IMPACT & RESPONSIBILITY

Our aim is to
empower everyone —
not just those
already thriving

We launched the Rethink Healthy campaign to encourage people across Asia to live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives. This means moving beyond traditional ideas of what “healthy” should look like, and promoting a more inclusive and accessible vision of health — one in which everyone can take part.

Our work on stereotypes helps drive this shift. Through this regional research, we explored the health and wellbeing stereotypes people face, and the real effects these beliefs have on everyday life.

We hope this sparks greater awareness — encouraging brands and individuals to consider whether familiar expectations are empowering or limiting.

When these assumptions are challenged, more people can define health on their own terms.

Actions for...

Society

Brands

People

Actions for Society

Normalise the many versions of healthy

Instead of portraying one "right" lifestyle, we can normalise different bodies, budgets, abilities, ages and starting points.

Make the healthier choice easier to access

Many of the stereotypes were tied to status, cost and time. Society can reduce this by supporting low-cost, local enablers of health like public recreation spaces and accessible community programmes.

Promote "talking it out" versus "toughing-it-out"

Create environments where discussing stress, money worries or family pressure is safe and normal, like workplace peer programs and community-led support circles.

Actions for Brands

Stop using stereotypes as shorthand for motivation

Because the data shows the same stereotype can feel validating to people with higher wellbeing but pressure people with lower wellbeing, brands should avoid creative that implies:

- “Real health requires a big transformation”
- “Discipline = worth”
- “Struggle = weakness”
(linked to “silent” stress” norms)

Replace with: *“Start where you are,” “small steps count,” “health isn’t a look,” “support is strength.”*

Make inclusion tangible – show the accessible path

When stereotypes imply expense or status, we can reduce alienation by offering budget-tier routines, free starter plans and community partnerships period.

Design accessible messaging with two entry points

Building communications that work for the thrivers (who find norms motivating) and strivers (who experience them as pressure). Pair aspirational messages with low-friction versions like, *“If you’re not ready, here’s a first step.”*

Bring in trusted voices and be transparent about limits

Partnering with credible practitioners and institutions for guidance and signposting, avoiding overconfident “one-size-fits-all” claims and include “this may not be right for everyone” guardrails (especially for mental and physical wellbeing content).

Actions for People

Practice “message filtering”: Is this helping me—or pressuring me?

Because stereotypes can feel motivating for some and harmful for others, consumers can actively choose content that supports their current wellbeing state.
A quick self-check:

- *“Do I feel energized after seeing this, or judged/deflated?”*
- *“Does this assume money/time/body type I don’t have?”*
- *“Does it encourage progress — or perfection?”*

Curate your feeds to reduce comparison spirals

Consumers can:

- Unfollow “perfection” accounts
- Follow creators who show messy, realistic progress
- Set time boundaries if social media increases comparison pressure

Rethink Healthy to live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives

Our *Healthier Together* report highlights eight simple behaviours that support living Healthier, Longer, Better Lives. Choose one small habit from each and start weaving them into your routine. Begin with just one today and build your way to a healthier future.

By challenging stereotypes and broadening how health and wellbeing is represented, we can create more inclusive messages that inspire more people to live **Healthier, Longer, Better Lives.**

RETHINK HEALTHY



HEALTHIER, LONGER,
BETTER LIVES