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Analysing race inequality in employment

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Employment analysis: Elisabeth Griffiths, principal lecturer at Northumbria Law School at Northumbria University, explores employment issues in the recent review by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) of prejudice and unlawful behaviour because of race.

Original news

Long-term government strategy needed to achieve race equality, LNB News 18/08/2016 158

While for some people life has become fairer over the past five years, for others progress has either stalled or gotten worse, particularly for young Black people, a report by the EHRC has revealed. In light of this, the ECHR has called for a comprehensive, coordinated and long-term government strategy with clear and measurable outcomes to achieve race equality.

What are the primary problems identified in the report regarding employment opportunities for Black and Ethnic Minority people in the UK?

This report explores the relationship between prejudiced attitudes and behaviours in an attempt to consider and evaluate possible methods of responding to and preventing unlawful discriminatory behaviour in England, Wales and Scotland. The report focuses on behaviours that discriminate against others and are unlawful on the basis of protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. It is clear from the report that experience of discrimination varies depending on which protected characteristic is involved and the context in which discrimination occurs. This summary explores issues of race inequality in the employment context.

A large portion of the research on expression of prejudice against Black and Ethnic Minority centres on immigration, or perceptions of racial prejudice and immigration in relation to other Ethnic Minorities. The report suggests that the evidence shows that perceived prejudice towards Black and Asian people is less prevalent than perceived prejudice towards Eastern Europeans. Evidence of *experiences* of racial prejudice however, has primarily focussed on Black and Asian Ethnic Minorities.

The recent statistics published by the EHRC as part of the race report—'Healing a divided Britain: the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy' published in August 2016—show a worrying picture of race inequality in employment:

- unemployment rates are significantly higher for Ethnic Minorities—12.9% compared with 6.3% for White people in 2013
- Black workers with degrees earn 23.1% less than White workers
- Black people who leave school with A-levels typically get paid 14.3% less than their White peers, and
- significantly lower percentages of Ethnic Minorities work as managers, directors and senior officials compared to White people

The July 2016 report suggests that in the employment context there is a feeling among Ethnic Minorities that White people dominate. In 2008–09, an objective experiment tested attitudes towards race in recruitment practices across England and Scotland—2,961 applications were sent to 987 advertised posts. The applications were equivalent except the names of the applicants were substituted to represent stereotypically Ethnic Minority and White British male and female applicants. 68% of White candidates received a positive response, compared to 39% of Ethnic Minority, meaning that for 29% of the time White sounding names were preferred by recruiters. However, there were no significant differences between different Ethnic Minority groups.

The report also looked at evidence of stereotypes of Ethnic Minority groups that led to Ethnic Minority employees feeling that their Ethnic Minority led to a lack of status and authority in their jobs, which they felt often compounded institutional

racism that in turn prevented them from progressing in their careers. Some Black employees felt they had to work harder than others to take advantage of the same opportunities.

Visible difference was also reported as making it difficult for employees to highlight similarities with their colleagues and many felt this visible difference was used as a means of scrutinising their work without employers appearing to discriminate. This ambiguity led many in this situation to question whether or not the attitude of the employer was actually attributable to their race.

Second generation Ethnic Minority employees expressed difficulty in managing their different identities, Ethnic Minority women in particular felt they faced discrimination based on their gender combined with their race.

What are some of the proposals offered to tackle these problems? Are these solutions likely to be successful?

Some of the interventions reported focus on using educational tools as a means of reducing prejudiced attitudes in the context of employment. Three interventions were considered in the report:

- use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to discuss cross-cultural race-related issues. Group discussion was encouraged to increase knowledge of racism and cross-cultural issues
- heritage resources from the 'Changing Nation' exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland were used to explore national identity, cultural diversity and how young people adopt and accommodate new information— however, these groups didn't necessarily change their concept of identity and belonging or their attitude towards minority groups as a result of the intervention
- evaluation of various interventions used by different police forces to reduce racial bias in police 'stop and search'

All of the interventions were based on education. The idea being, that if people can learn about diversity and value it then they tend to feel less prejudice towards other groups. Educational programmes which increase awareness of valuing cultural diversity may be beneficial and can foster positive attitudes, but there is a lack of strong evidence on this in the report and none of the interventions were evaluated robustly. Campaigns such as 'Show Racism the Red Card' report positive feedback from participants but there is no direct evaluation of the campaign and its impact on race discrimination.

How do the conclusions vary between England and Wales and Scotland? For example, how do public sector equality duties differ in each country?

The report aims to inform the EHRC strategy going forward in terms of interventions that could influence discriminatory behaviour. The report looks at evidence across Great Britain from 2005–15 and in turn is attempting to provide a comprehensive overview of unlawful discrimination and possible interventions in England, Scotland and Wales. There is therefore no variation in the report's conclusions across Great Britain.

Is there anything else of particular importance regarding employment for Black and Ethnic Minority people in the report?

The report describes incidents of discriminatory behaviour by older people in nursing homes and their families towards Black and Ethnic Minority staff, highlighting problems for some workplaces when race intersects with age. Although the managers interviewed do state that those attitudes towards Black and Ethnic Minority care workers tended to change once the older people got to know the staff better. Similar incidents were reported in hospital settings when Ethnic Minority medical students reported being stigmatised by older patients particularly where the university and teaching hospitals were in locations where the population is less diverse. Intergroup contact is seen as a successful intervention in terms of changing older people's attitudes in this context.

Interviewed by Evelyn Reid.

The views expressed by our Legal Analysis interviewees are not necessarily those of the proprietor



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