



Response to Question Taken on Notice in the Public Hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion's Inquiry into Racial Vilification on 9 May 2022

Question

Member	Extract	Page reference
Lawder	<p>MS LAWDER: In your submission you refer to the fact that in preparation for this consultation, your office undertook a literature review and there was limited, you know, documentation about racism in Australia, let alone in the ACT, maybe even less in the ACT itself. Do you know, at all, is that common internationally, is it reflective of the same level internationally or are we even worse off in terms of supporting literature?</p> <p>Ms Griffiths-Cook: That is actually a very good question, I am happy to take that one on notice in terms of whether the levels, I guess, that have been demonstrated through the research here are equivalent or otherwise to research in international jurisdictions.</p>	p. 6

Response

The literature review undertaken by my team was limited to exploring the knowledge base that is available regarding racism and children in Australia. While considerable effort was made to include as many papers as possible, our review was not exhaustive albeit that it provided an indication of the knowledge base available.

However, international research was not included in our investigations, and I am therefore unable to provide an accurate comparison to the level of knowledge in other countries. Having said that, many of the papers that were reviewed cited the research gap in respect of Australian children's and young people's experiences as an issue, which might suggest that there is a greater level of research in international jurisdictions. In particular, Shepherd et al (2017) noted that most studies on racism in childhood are based on children in the United States of America.

Included in our review were papers published since 2000 that explored forms of racism as they impact children, or in respect of children navigating the meaning of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in Australian society. The review was integral to shaping our consultation, (for example, our research questions and methodology) but was not intended to be an academic piece or a complete review of available research.

However, the review did indicate that there are significant gaps in our understanding of the role racism plays in Australian society. There are also specific gaps in understanding the experiences and attitudes of children and adolescents (Priest et al, 2020; Runions et al, 2011; Shepherd et al, 2017).

The gaps in our knowledge of racism in Australia are also reflected in what we know in respect of gaps in the ACT knowledge base. These are outlined below.

There appears to be an overemphasis on direct interpersonal forms of racism.

According to Bodkin-Andrews et al (2017), much of the research and literature about racism in Australia ignores “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on the complex nature and impact of racism” (pg 180) and, in doing so, prioritises Western perspectives and contributes to the silencing of those experiencing racism in their everyday lives.

One of the ways this is happening is by overemphasising individualistic perceptions of racism and direct interpersonal forms. Researchers argue that historical, cultural, and systemic contexts must also be considered if we are to truly understand the impact and prevalence of racism. Without doing so, views of racism are limited to “an individual’s negative attitude and ignores not only the systemic nature of racism...but also more subtle or everyday expressions of it...” (pg 182).

Furthermore, interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people found that racism cannot be reduced to a subtle or blatant dichotomy and that their experiences were a:

“...multi-dimensional, overt, and everyday occurrence. Perceptions of racism were reported at the interpersonal level, with verbal racism (e.g. Name calling, jokes, threats) and behavioural racism (e.g. Avoidance, assault), as well as at the institutional (e.g. Denial of services, over-application of punishment) and macro-levels (e.g. Media misinformation, selective views on history, lack of concern).” (pg 185)

Australia’s knowledge base in respect of the forms and impact of racism is still developing.

Paradies et al (2008), Shepherd et al (2017), Runions et al (2011) and Ben et al (2021) all indicate this in papers that were included in our review. For example, Shepherd et al (2017) refers to studies that indicate racism can influence development at very early ages but notes that there are fewer studies looking at the ongoing consequences. Much more is needed to understand the full impact of racism on the health of children in Australia.

Paradies et al (2008) note that the particular impact of racism on health is well known internationally but has not been well researched in Australia. The paper also acknowledges that it has been recognised as a public health threat that has a negative impact on the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Ben et al (2021) outline a growing knowledge base about racism in Australia, which has been considerably enhanced over the past two decades, but note some key gaps, including knowledge about racism and children.

Vicarious racism and racism within homes, neighbourhoods and within intimate friendship groups are among the least studied aspects of racism. Other spaces in which racism is known to occur, but on which more information is required are the dynamics of racism online and in the media, as well as instances in sport.

Runions et al (2011) also note that racism is under-researched in Australia when it comes to a focus on children, stating that:

“Very little Australian research has examined the link between racism and child wellbeing and health outcomes.”

This study does state, however, that discrimination is increasingly recognised as a key factor in wellbeing and health for people from ethnic and cultural minorities.

The growing evidence base shows that psychological distress, depression, and anxiety are identified as the most common of the poor mental health outcomes associated with racism. In particular, there is a need for further research on younger children from a range of minority groups.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, I am unable to provide a categoric assertion about the comparison between research in Australia versus other countries, as it was outside the scope of our review.

Further, despite a growing body of knowledge in Australia, the papers we reviewed indicated that there are still gaps in our understanding about the complex and multidimensional forms of racism and the impact it has on different population groups, particularly children and young people.

To this end, our consultation seeks to contribute to research in this area while also, and perhaps more importantly, obtaining children's and young people's views about what we can practically be doing here in the ACT to address and respond to racism more effectively.

Reference list

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