

Equality and Human Rights Commission
Research report 101

Prejudice and unlawful behaviour:

Exploring levers for

change

Executive summary

Dominic Abrams, Hannah J. Swift and Lynsey Mahmood
Centre for the Study of Group Process, University of Kent

© 2016 Equality and Human Rights Commission

First published: July 2016

Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series publishes research carried out for the Commission by commissioned researchers.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Commission. The Commission is publishing the report as a contribution to discussion and debate.

Please contact the Research Team for further information about other Commission research reports, or visit our website.

Post: Research Team
 Equality and Human Rights Commission
 Arndale House
 The Arndale Centre
 Manchester M4 3AQ

Email: research@equalityhumanrights.com

Telephone: 0161 829 8500

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

You can download a copy of this report as a PDF from our website:

www.equalityhumanrights.com

If you require this publication in an alternative format, please contact the Communications Team to discuss your needs at:

correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Executive summary

The Equality and Human Rights Commission ('the Commission') is interested in exploring the relationship between prejudiced attitudes and behaviours in order to identify what can be done to prevent and respond effectively to unlawful behaviour in England, Scotland and Wales (GB). To inform this work this report was commissioned to summarise and integrate evidence from research in GB between 2005 and 2015. The aim was to address three fundamental questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between prejudiced attitudes and unlawful discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence?
2. What is the extent and prevalence of unlawful behaviour based on prejudiced attitudes in GB?
3. What is known about how to prevent or respond to unlawful behaviour related to prejudiced attitudes?

These questions are explored in relation to all of the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 (age, race, sex, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity). We refer to these as 'protected characteristics'.¹ This approach allows us to look at differences as well as commonalities between the protected characteristics, giving the Commission insight into where levers for change may be generally effective or specific to the experiences of discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence of those people with and who share particular protected characteristics.

¹ Specialist terms used in this report are defined in the Glossary.

The nature of prejudiced attitudes and unlawful behaviour

We use the following definition of prejudice:

'bias that devalues people because of their perceived membership of a social group' (Abrams, 2010, p. 8).

Prejudice involves a number of different elements. These include: the way that people categorise one another; the stereotypes and expectations they link with these categories; the extent to which they perceive groups as having conflicting and interdependent values and goals; their willingness to engage in social contact and make relationships with one another; the emotions they feel about their own and other groups; and the norms and social pressures that bear on their behaviour. All of these are embedded in a wider social context, in which the groups may or may not be in conflict and in which social relations within communities are more or less cohesive and harmonious.

The report focuses on behaviours that discriminate against others and/or are unlawful and directed at someone because they have or share a protected characteristic; in this case, discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence.

There is little evidence from GB that directly links individuals' values² and prejudiced attitudes on the one hand with particular acts of unlawful behaviour on the other. However, there is substantial theory and international evidence that these elements are connected (Abrams, 2010). Therefore, considering the evidence that is available on each of these elements and how they are connected helps to provide a fuller picture of the situation faced by people who share each protected characteristic, as well as what can be done to respond to and reduce unlawful behaviour.

Evidence from GB shows that there are different forms of prejudiced attitudes directed towards people who share different protected characteristics and that experiences of discriminatory behaviour also depend on which protected characteristic is involved and the context in which the discrimination occurs.

Experiences of identity-based harassment and violence were found for most of the protected characteristics. For some protected characteristics this is recognised as hate crime, however not all protected characteristics are recognised under current hate crime legislation. For a more detailed review of hate crime causes, and motivations see Walters, Brown and Wiedlitzka (in press).

² See the Glossary at the end of the report for definitions of some of the terms used throughout.

The following sections summarise the evidence for each protected characteristic in turn. There are important differences in the nature of prejudiced attitudes towards different groups, and the manner and settings in which these unlawful behaviours towards those groups manifest. However, across protected characteristics there are also common aspects to experiences of discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence. Some of these overarching aspects are considered in the sections on the prevalence of unlawful behaviours and those on interventions. There is emerging evidence that approaches that work to foster positive attitudes and associated behaviours more generally could have a broader impact across protected characteristics and the complex intersectionalities that exist between them.

Disability

No evidence was identified that directly assessed the relationship between prejudiced attitudes towards disabled people and disabled people's experiences of discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence. However, the evidence that is available revealed that disability discrimination, although associated with beliefs that the rights of disabled people are important, is driven by structural barriers, over-simplistic categorisation, and patronising stereotypes.

Expressions of prejudiced attitudes towards people with mental health conditions are more negative than those directed at people with physical disabilities. However, this research found evidence on experiences of discrimination and unlawful behaviours to only be available for physical disability or disability as general category. There are important intersectional aspects of disability with particular groups such as ethnic minorities or older people.

The most interventions reviewed were designed to reduce prejudiced attitudes towards disabled people (6). Overall, contact between disabled and non-disabled people produces the most effective results, especially when other factors in the situation are optimal (for example, there is equal status and cooperation). The Time to Change campaign was the biggest and most well-evidenced intervention, and focuses on reducing mental health stigma.

Race

There is some evidence to suggest that people who more strongly value diversity show less discriminatory behaviours based on race, but other evidence suggests that even when people do not acknowledge or express their prejudices they may still make discriminatory choices.

Surveys that assess expressions of prejudice have largely focused on attitudes towards different ethnic groups and immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Attitudes towards Black and Asian people are perceived to be quite stable, and prejudice is perceived as being lower than that towards Eastern European people.

Experiences of racial discrimination are reflected in hate crime statistics. Race remains the highest reported motivation for hate crime recorded by the police in England/Wales and Scotland. Most evidence of discrimination was found in employment and education settings.

Race is a complex category as research sometimes, but not always, includes groups such as Gypsies and Travellers and asylum seekers or immigrants (which involve nationality, ethnicity, skin colour and other factors) within it.³ There is some psychological basis for this (for example, common prejudices involve viewing the group as posing a threat). Across this category, there is some evidence that effective approaches have involved promoting positive contact between groups using education methods.

Religion or belief

There is evidence of a link between prejudiced attitudes and intended behaviours which shows that dehumanisation, feelings of tension between national and religious identity, and experiences or perceptions of discrimination lead to increased hostility and support of extremist views.

Expressions of religious prejudice often focus on visible differences (for example, religious dress or symbols). Evidence assessing attitudes towards different religious groups shows that Muslims are perceived to be the most targeted group for prejudiced attitudes, and that this is linked to perceived cultural threat.

Intersectionalities were identified between religion and belief and race, as well as sexual orientation, where individuals report conflicting identities that compound concerns about discrimination.

³ Nationality and citizenship are included under the Commission's definition of the protected characteristic of race, along with colour and ethnic or national origins.

Experiences of discrimination are mostly evidenced through hate crime reports, for example anti-Muslim hate incidents recorded by Tell MAMA, or anti-Semitic incidents recorded by the Community Security Trust (CST). Evidence suggests that experiences of online hate are common for people from both religions and could be an area for potential intervention.

Effective intervention approaches have included increased indirect contact between people of different religions (for example, using social media) and education that encourages discussion of intergroup norms (what behaviour is considered acceptable or is expected by members of different social groups) to challenge prejudice.

Age

There is evidence of a link between prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviours for age which shows that stereotypes, albeit benevolent, can directly affect older people's self-concept and capabilities.

Expressions of prejudiced attitudes are generally positive towards all ages, but age discrimination affects all age groups. Evidence suggests that attitudes towards older people are more benevolent and patronising, whereas younger people are met with more hostile stereotypes. More research is needed to understand the impact of such stereotypes on younger people.

Prejudiced attitudes based on age are detrimental when they manifest as discrimination in employment and health and social care settings, where older people may be denied opportunities given to younger people. In employment settings this is particularly problematic for women, who report facing double discrimination (age and sex).

Evidence suggests that awareness of age stereotypes can be particularly damaging for older people and can be heightened through the language used to refer to older age. Experiences of discrimination based on age are present in health and social care settings, where older patients are often treated differently from younger patients in primary care, mental health service provision, and healthcare in prison.

Two examples of interventions to reduce age discrimination were identified, both of which aimed to challenge stereotypes and norms surrounding older age, and to increase positive relations between old and young people.

Sex

There is evidence of a link between prejudiced attitudes towards women (and attitudes towards masculinity) and unlawful behaviours. Research linked attitudes about masculinity and the values that people hold about gender to treatment of female sex workers in Scotland.

Expressions of prejudiced attitudes focus mainly on interpretations of values and women's roles in society, as well as gender stereotypes. As is the case for disability and age, attitudes towards women appear to be positive but may mask more 'benevolent' or patronising forms of prejudice. High levels of violence against women and girls suggest a discrepancy between apparently benevolent attitudes and experiences. Despite evidence that most people want equal opportunities for men and women, among those who hold power over equal opportunity in employment the picture is very different.

Experiences of sex discrimination are examined across a number of settings including employment, education, and health and social care. Evidence on experiences where protected characteristics overlap was found between sex and sexual orientation.

Interventions have focused on violence towards women as well as partner violence perpetrated by women. A well-evidenced approach that focused on educating about domestic violence was effective in reducing the perceived acceptability of domestic violence among children.

Sexual orientation

Despite there being the most evidence on this protected characteristic, there was very little that explored the direct link between prejudiced attitudes and unlawful behaviours. Only one piece of evidence did so, showing that helping behaviour (in this case, lending money for a parking fee) was lower for a person perceived to be homosexual, compared to a heterosexual person. However, the attitude of the 'helper' was inferred rather than measured directly.

Research on expressions of prejudiced attitudes suggests an improving trend over time, especially on measures of social distance. However, certain values (such as religion) and settings (for example sport) are perceived to create barriers to equality.

Experiences of discrimination primarily focus on hate crime statistics. These suggest that crimes are motivated by antipathy towards a particular sexual orientation, especially gay men. Education, employment and health and social care are the main settings in which homophobic discrimination has been researched.

There is evidence that women's and men's experiences require more differentiated investigation. There is less evidence on the situation for women compared with gay men, particularly for those with disabilities.

A whole school intervention approach was found likely to be effective to address homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying among school aged children and young people, but there were no other examples of interventions against which to compare its impact.

Gender reassignment

The evidence for a link between attitudes and behaviours for this protected characteristic is very limited and only suggests an association between values, such as the belief that gender is biologically based, and reduced support for trans rights. No research looked at behaviours being directly affected by attitudes or values.

There was very little research identified in the systematic review that directly looked at attitudes towards transgender people. Much of the research on this group was subsumed within research on sexual orientation.

An important difference compared to sexual orientation is that the main perpetrators of transphobic discrimination, harassment or violence are more likely to be identified as strangers (rather than peers). Fear of discrimination was more common than actual experiences, especially for incidents that were not commonly experienced but had a greater perceived severity and longer recovery time (for example, physical or sexual attack). However, it is likely that, as with many types of hate crime, a far greater prevalence of transgender hate crime exists than is reported in crime surveys or police statistics.

The literature search did not identify any interventions.

Marriage and civil partnership

There was no evidence about links between attitudes and behaviours relating to marriage and civil partnership.

A small volume of evidence on prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviours in relation to marriage status was identified through the systematic review, as well as on intersectionality with other protected characteristics (for example, race, sex and sexual orientation). This is probably because there are unique features relating to these other protected characteristics (for example, cultural values) that influence attitudes and expectations surrounding marriage and relationships.

Attitudes towards same-sex relationships and marriage have become more positive over time, although support tends to be greater among younger age groups.

The area in which intervention seems most urgent is forced marriage, for which women and children, particularly from ethnic minority groups, are the most at risk. Various organisations and charities are actively working to deal with the consequences of forced marriage for individuals. Forced marriage raises three different policy challenges: it is a focal issue that some people use to justify their prejudices against some ethnic minorities; it is sometimes depicted by politicians as a race and immigration issue; fundamentally it is a question of human rights and gender equality. All three aspects need to be recognised when formulating policy.

The literature search did not identify any interventions.

Pregnancy and maternity

There was no evidence about links between attitudes and behaviours relating to pregnancy and maternity. Most of the evidence that was captured in this area focused on employment settings.

Expressions of prejudice have been researched among both employers and employees, focusing largely on views about parental leave and gender roles. Evidence suggests that employer prejudices may reflect structural and economic factors that they perceive to involve conflict between equality and the economic needs of business.

Women in employment settings who have returned to work after a period of parental leave report being discriminated against, and there is an apparent disparity in employee experiences and employer views of whether their policies are helpful and implemented to the benefit of mothers. The evidence suggests that a lack of knowledge and understanding underpins discriminatory behaviours rather than prejudiced attitudes necessarily.

Outside of the workplace, teenage mothers report feeling excluded, stigmatised and stereotyped, suggesting that they may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination.

Some of the challenges in this area are amplified by intersections with disability, race and sexual orientation, which can create additional barriers, different expectations and stereotypes that may feed into disparities in healthcare.

The literature search did not identify any interventions.

The extent and prevalence of unlawful behaviour

The quantity and quality of evidence of recorded discrimination is very uneven and varied. There is more evidence for some protected characteristics (such as discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation) than others (such as discrimination on the basis of pregnancy). However, there is clear evidence that people are exposed to discrimination because of all protected characteristics and that some people's protected characteristics, including disability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment, make them vulnerable to identity-based violence (for some protected characteristics this is recognised as hate crime).⁴

Drawing general conclusions about the prevalence and extent of unlawful behaviour based on prejudiced attitudes is difficult because of the limited nature of the evidence. Both within and across protected characteristics we found that there was no consistent approach to measuring expressions of prejudiced attitudes or instances of discrimination. For instance, most surveys exploring the extent of prejudice and discrimination have focused on only one protected characteristic and no single survey or piece of research covers experiences of discrimination against all nine protected characteristics.

Different methods and measures for asking about experiences of discrimination also paint different pictures about its prevalence. One survey showed that 15 per cent of respondents reported having experienced disability discrimination or prejudice. However, another survey recorded that 0.6 per cent of those surveyed reported having experienced disability discrimination.

Given this, and the poor quality of evidence that is available, it is not possible to provide exact estimates of the prevalence of discrimination or prejudice that are comparable across protected characteristics.

Preventing and responding to unlawful behaviour

Our systematic review identified 42 different sources of interventions that had been used to change values, reduce prejudiced attitudes or prevent discrimination or problematic behaviours, such as bullying. After sorting these for relevance (see search criteria in the Methodology section in the Appendix), 24 evaluations of

⁴ Protected characteristics recognised as hate crime strands in GB are race, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, and gender reassignment.

interventions were examined. Most of these (14) were carried out in educational settings or used educational methods, and the interventions tended to focus on one point of influence, for example: changing children's attitudes towards women and the acceptability of domestic violence; challenging extremist norms; or using social contact (interactions between people from different groups) to change people's attitudes about a particular group.

The most frequently evaluated intervention was the Time to Change campaign, which focuses on mental health discrimination. This campaign employs a mixture of approaches to influence several different elements of prejudice, including improving knowledge and understanding of disability and mental health stigma, changing attitudes towards disabled people or those with a mental health condition, and affecting people's motivation to avoid being prejudiced about mental health.

The systematic review did not reveal any interventions that could be assessed for gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, or pregnancy and maternity. This does not mean that no interventions have been implemented in these areas. However, none of these interventions have been evaluated or documented in the academic or non-academic literature.

Because we are looking for the most effective interventions, we examined the strength of any assessment used to capture an intervention's impact. We evaluated the quality and comprehensiveness of the assessment of each intervention as a way of judging confidence in that intervention's effectiveness. On a scale from 0 to 100, the quality levels ranged from 15 to 73, highlighting the marked variability we found. We recognise the resourcing and time restrictions often experienced by organisations that carry out these intervention projects, as well as the challenge of accessing some difficult-to-reach groups. Because of these issues, it may not be possible for those organisations to assess the impact of their work to an optimal level. Further work is needed to establish the investment/benefit ratio of achieving different levels of confidence. A level of 75 per cent is good but potentially an expensive aspiration. More work is needed to provide guidance on the elements that are necessary for a minimally acceptable and useful evaluation. Accepting that the feasibility of optimal evaluation (100 per cent) will vary from setting to setting, we believe that any evaluation should be required to justify the level of confidence expressed in reaching conclusions about the impact of their work, with the strengths and limitations of evaluations clearly communicated.

Suggestions for policy and research

Having reviewed 197 sources of evidence (24 of which were evaluations of interventions) and 85 independent sources of measures to capture experiences of discrimination, it is clear that the volume, breadth and depth of research evidence is not the same across different protected characteristics. For example, the largest volume of evidence and measurement was on sexual orientation. Yet there were only two evaluations of interventions that aimed to change prejudice towards people on the basis of sexual orientation. It was also notable that although there is clear evidence about the existence of sexist attitudes, relatively few sources of evidence document the prevalence of people's experiences of sex discrimination.

The evidence and gaps in the evidence that have come from this systematic review have important implications for policy makers and researchers. These are listed below.

Data and measurement

- **Develop better quality and standard of measurement in surveys**
The data available through current surveys do not allow us to draw nuanced estimates of experiences of discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence. They also do not allow comparison between the experiences of people with different protected characteristics, of the experiences of people from different countries in GB.
- **Sustain sources of evidence that allow comparison over time**
The lack or loss of evidence that allows comparison over time is a problem and makes it difficult to assess confidently whether experiences of prejudice and discrimination are improving, getting worse, or changing form for particular groups.
- **Improve evidence on the perspectives of perpetrators as well as victims of particular acts of discrimination, identity-based harassment and violence within particular contexts and time periods**
This will provide greater insight into which interventions might work best in particular contexts, and to what extent the focus of intervention should be on perpetrators, victims, or both.
- **Develop a comprehensive framework on tackling prejudice and discrimination**

This would enable assessment of the evidence systematically across different approaches and interventions to substantially improve its relevance for policymaking. The framework would need to take account of the social context, the particular settings, the time frame and duration of change, and the particular protected characteristics that are implicated when planning interventions.

- **Improve the robustness and quality of evaluations**

Development of a quality threshold approach to guide future interventions will enable more confident and systematic assessment of what is effective, why it is effective, and substantially improve relevance for policymaking.

Developing interventions and assessing what works

- **Develop greater insight into which interventions might work best**

The current evidence base does not allow for any robustly evidence-led policy choices. More research is required to capture the connections between perspectives of both perpetrators and victims of particular acts of discrimination and unlawful behavior within particular contexts and time periods. If future interventions are designed and assessed to meet rigorous standards it will provide greater confidence in interpreting their outcomes and better understanding of what works. This would enable the knowledge gained to inform the introduction of intervention approaches across different protected characteristics and different contexts.

- **Explore emerging evidence that general intervention approaches could be effective across protected characteristics**

Intervention approaches that have taken a more general approach to addressing prejudice, discrimination and identity-based violence and harassment use educational work to challenge prejudice in general. They also use methods such as encouraging perspective taking or reinforcing values of equality and the valuing of human life, and highlighting prosocial norms. There is evidence that these are effective approaches and should be tested further.

Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from the Commission's website: www.equalityhumanrights.com.

For advice, information or guidance on equality, discrimination or human rights issues, please contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service, a free and independent service.

Website www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Telephone 0808 800 0082

Textphone 0808 800 0084

Hours 09:00 to 20:00 (Monday to Friday)
10:00 to 14:00 (Saturday)

Post FREEPOST Equality Advisory Support Service FPN4431

Questions and comments regarding this publication may be addressed to: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com. The Commission welcomes your feedback.

Alternative formats

This publication is also available as a Microsoft Word file from www.equalityhumanrights.com. For information on accessing a Commission publication in an alternative format, please contact: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com.

© 2016 Equality and Human Rights Commission

Published July 2016

You can download this publication from

www.equalityhumanrights.com

© 2016 Equality and Human Rights Commission
Published: July 2016