



MEDIA RELEASE

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CULTURALLY DIVERSE VICTORIANS FREQUENT TARGETS OF RACISM

A large survey of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people living in Victoria reveals almost two-thirds have been targets of racism in the past year, with nearly half reporting they had experienced six or more incidents a year.

The VicHealth, *beyondblue*, University of Melbourne and Department of Immigration and Citizenship survey of 1139 residents, released today, also shows 40 per cent of people who had been victims of at least 9 incidents of racist behaviour over the previous 12 months suffered high or very high mental distress.

Survey participants experienced racism in public spaces (35%), in the workplace (32%), at the shops (30%) and on public transport (29%). It was also common in education (22%), sports (20%) and housing (18%).

Lead researcher of the *Mental health impacts of racial discrimination in Victorian culturally and linguistically diverse communities* report, Associate Professor Margaret Kelaheer, of The University of Melbourne, explained the findings were unsettling and represent a deeply entrenched and complicated health issue in Victoria.

“A major finding of this study is that racism at any level is associated with worse mental health. People who experienced racism on a monthly or more frequent basis were more likely to be above the threshold for high psychological distress than people who had no experience of racism,” she said.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter, said: “It is appalling that half the people we surveyed were called racist names, teased or heard racist jokes or were verbally abused, and 44 per cent were ignored, told they were less intelligent or that they did not belong because of their cultural background. It’s clear that racism hurts more than your feelings – it’s a very serious, but preventable, health issue.”

The release of this data follows the publication of similar research last week which found a massive amount of racism directed at the 755 Aboriginal Victorians surveyed, with 97 per cent saying they had been targeted in the past year.

Ms Rechter added that it is not clear whether Aboriginal people were actually targeted more or whether they were more aware of subtle racist behaviour.

“In any case, there is never an excuse to be racist to anyone, at any time,” Ms Rechter said.

“This research shows that incidents that might seem harmless can accumulate and have a powerful impact. Every racist incident that we can prevent can make a difference.”

beyondblue CEO Kate Carnell AO said the survey’s results were upsetting, but provided added incentive to stamp out racism.

“Prejudice is a terrible force and unfortunately it still exists in our community,” she said. “The experiences of racism as reported in the survey cause enormous distress, which can put people at greater risk of depression and anxiety.”

“Clearly we must work together to ensure all Australians have the best possible chance of maintaining good mental health.”

The report will be officially launched today at the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) state conference in Melbourne by ECCV Chairperson Joe Caputo and the research partners.

Download the survey at: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/lead-cald

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Notes about the survey

The survey was undertaken with culturally diverse people living in two metropolitan and two rural local government areas in Victoria in 2011. It is not possible to determine whether the results of this research are any higher or lower than any other area of Victoria or Australia. These comparisons were not made in this study and the context and definitions of racism vary across other studies.

VicHealth has funded two Victorian councils to undertake the Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Project. This survey was conducted at the start of a four year pilot to promote positive attitudes and behaviour towards cultural diversity in order to reduce race-based discrimination.

Key findings:

- Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed experienced racism in the previous 12 months.
- Most had experienced racism multiple times, with 40% experiencing six or more incidents a year.
- Men were significantly more likely than women to experience racism.
- Sikhs and Muslims were significantly more likely to record racist experiences than Christians and Hindus.
- The proportion of people who experienced high volumes of racism decreased with age.
- People living in metropolitan areas were significantly more likely to report experiencing racism than people in rural areas.
- People educated at higher levels reported significantly more experiences of racism than people with lower levels of education.
- Over 40% of those who experienced nine or more incidents of racism recorded high or very high psychological distress scores.
- As people experienced more incidents of racism, their level of psychological distress became more severe. This suggests that every incident of racism that is prevented can help reduce the risk of a person developing mental health problems such as anxiety or depression.
- Almost 40% worried at least a few times a month that their family and friends would be victims of racism. This demonstrates that the impact of racism spreads beyond the person directly targeted.
- People who experienced racism in shops, in government and on public transport were significantly more likely than others to experience high or very high psychological distress.
- 64% of the sample avoided situations where they predicted that racism would take place. This suggests that experiences of racist incidents may have been even higher than reported if people did not avoid these situations.
- It also indicates that many did not feel safe to participate in activities that many other Australians might take for granted, with 23% avoiding these situations often or very often

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