



# More than Tolerance: Embracing Diversity for Health

What do the findings mean for working  
with young people?

# About VicHealth

- \* Established in 1987
- \* Focus on behavioural and environmental contributors to health

# Current priorities

- \* Active communities and healthy eating
- \* Tobacco and alcohol
- \* Mental health and wellbeing

# Mental Health Promotion Action Areas

- \* Increasing social participation
- \* Increasing access to economic resources
- \* Reducing violence
- \* Reducing discrimination and promoting acceptance of diversity

# Priority populations

- \* Rural communities
- \* Indigenous communities
- \* Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- \* Young people

# About 'More than Tolerance'

Summarises a program of research comprising:

- \* Review of studies on the link between discrimination and health
- \* Community survey of attitudes and experiences (4000 people over 18 years)
- \* Review of strategies to address discrimination

Focus on people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

# Research Team

- \* Yin Paradies, University of Melbourne
- \* Kevin Dunn and Jim Forrest, university of New South Wales
- \* Rob Donovan and Rodney Vlasis, Curtin University
- \* Anne Pedersen and Colleagues, Murdoch University

# What do we mean by discrimination?

Discrimination is the process by which a member or members of a socially defined group is or are treated differently (especially unfairly) because of his/her/their membership of that group

# Levels & types of discrimination

## Levels

- \* Interpersonal (focus of 'More than Tolerance')
- \* Institutional
- \* Internalised

## Types

- \* Overt
- \* Covert

# Is discrimination bad for your health?

## Established link

- \* Depression
- \* Obsessive compulsive symptoms
- \* Cigarette smoking
- \* Substance misuse

# Is discrimination bad for health?

Probable link

Psychological and emotional distress

Somatization

Anxiety

Stress

Reduced quality/satisfaction with life

Low self esteem

Poor general mental health

Peer violence

Blood pressure

Infant low birth weight

Increased heart rate

Alcohol misuse

# Is discrimination bad for your health?

Possible link

Heart disease

Diabetes

Increased body mass

# Why is discrimination bad for your health?

- \* Constraints on access to resources required for health
- \* Negative evaluations resulting in poor psychological wellbeing
- \* Stress, fear and other negative emotions which in turn affect the body
- \* Engagement in health damaging behaviours

# Particular implications for young people

- \* Impact of early experiences on mental and physical health into adulthood
- \* Impact on identity formation
- \* Impact of discrimination on access to education & employment at a critical stage limiting opportunities and having impacts across the lifecycle

Experiences of discrimination  
in institutional settings  
Respondents born in a non-English speaking country

	Workplace	Education	Housing	Policing
Sometimes	31.5	24.3	15.0	15.8
Often	7.4	6.2	3.0	2.8
Total	38.9	30.5	18.0	18.6

## Experiences of discrimination in everyday contexts – respondents of non-English speaking background

	Shop/restaurant	Sport/public event
Sometimes	29.9	29.9
Often	3.9	14.9
Total	33.8	44.8

# Attitudes: positive indicators

- Low level of support for 'traditional racism' (less than 1:10), especially compared with other countries (3 in 10 in Europe)
- High level of support for diversity (90%)
- High level of security with people from different cultures (82%)
- High level recognition that discrimination occurs (84%)

# Attitudes – future challenges

37% believe that Australia is weakened by people 'sticking to their old ways'

Indicator of support for cultural retention

Ethnic identity good for health/protects against the impacts of discrimination

Capacity to retain one's culture of origin (while also operating in a new culture) important for health

Support of cultural communities important for newcomers (bonding capital)

# Attitudes – future challenges

## Social distance and out-groups

Concern about intermarriage to people from different cultural/religious backgrounds, compared to those from British/Christian backgrounds (8% and 11% respectively)

- \* Asian (20%)
- \* Muslim (43%)

36% identify groups they believe do not belong in Australian society

- \* 34% Muslim
- \* 21% Middle East
- \* 12% Asian

# Attitudes – future challenges

## Implications for health

- Undermines ethnic identity
- Affects access to resources
- Undermines social support from host communities
- Undermines social cohesion

# Attitudes –future challenges

## Recognition of the problem

- Only 12% identify as personally prejudiced
- 37% deny Anglo-Celtic privilege

# Attitudes – future challenges

## Implications for health

### Denial

- Compounding effects
- Contributes to stigmatizing

### Recognition

- Increases likelihood of action
- Reduces health impacts of covert forms of discrimination
- Increases resilience to impacts

# Geographic patterns

- \* Focus on outer-suburbs important (young age profiles)
- \* Continuing work in culturally diverse inner city and suburbs
- \* Supporting new settlement in rural areas

# What can we do about discrimination?

A spectrum of interventions

Primary – addressing the causes of discrimination before it occurs

Secondary – responding to early signs

Tertiary – prevent or minimise the impact of discrimination after it has occurred

# What can we do about discrimination?

Multi-level – individual, organisational, community, societal

Multi strategy – mutually reinforcing

Cross sector/cross discipline

Sensitivity to local context

Place and settings

Institutional and interpersonal

# Addressing discrimination

Strategy	Promising examples
Direct participation	Contact, deliberative polls, school based education
Communications/marketing	Media campaigns, protocols for responsible journalism
Community development	Ethnic community capacity building Responsible leadership
Workforce and organizational development	Diversity training 'Whole organization' approaches
Advocacy	Community campaigns to address racism/promote diversity
Policy and legislative reform	Anti discrimination legislation
Research and monitoring	Awareness raising through data collection

# Approaches to addressing interpersonal discrimination

- \* Building empathy
- \* Addressing false beliefs and stereotypes
- \* Building and invoking social norms
- \* Inducing dissonance
- \* Promoting dialogue
- \* Emphasising commonality and diversity

# More Information?

[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au)