

EVERYDAY RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE HOW DOES IT FEEL?

Leonardo Da Vinci partnership project

ERAW

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Everyday Racism in the Workplace

Background

The study was carried out in partnership between InterCultural Iceland (Reykjavik, Iceland), Angus College (Arbroath, Scotland), Centro d'Iniziativa per L'Europa del Piemonte (Turin, Italy) and Chancengleich in Europa (Dortmund, Germany).

Funding was provided via Leonardo Da Vinci as part of the cross Europe Education and Culture Lifelong Learning Programme with InterCultural Iceland (ICI) as lead partners. The context and background to the study was given through visits to each partners organisation with meetings and activities with key players such as Migrant Worker Organisations and Advocacy groups. All partners undertook survey work with relevant samples within their area creating data sets which can be examined either by location or as a whole.

In order to ensure sample inclusion of a wide range of migrant groups, survey materials were translated into a range of languages including: Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian, Latvian, Polish, Czech, Arabic and Turkish. In turn, responses given in languages other than English were translated into English.

Definitions

The key term 'Everyday Racism' used in this work is drawn from the work of Philomena Essed: Understanding Everyday Racism – an Interdisciplinary Theory: Sage Publications 1991: "As a concept everyday racism has been useful in showing that systemic racism is reproduced largely through routine and taken-for-granted practices and procedures in everyday life.... Although everyday racism has such an informal ring that it may sound as if it concerns relatively harmless and unproblematic events, the psychological distress due to racism on a day-to-day basis can have chronic adverse effects on mental and physical health"

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/essed45.htm>) Essed also uses the terms everyday prejudice and everyday discrimination (Essed 1984,1991,2002). Clearly the concepts of racism, prejudice and discrimination are linked and have been the subject of much research; however, whilst many workplaces and organisations are vigilant to observe legislation and may offer training and provide policies designed to deal with more obvious and clear racism, discrimination and prejudice; the more subtle forms (which we hypothesise are daily events) are likely to remain unobserved and unchallenged. Despite their everyday and less obvious manifestations, nonetheless, this form of racism is insidious and may be relentless leaving the recipient unhappy, confused and unclear about possible action or complaint. Additionally, neglect in addressing such matters within workplace policies, training or discussion further renders it out of sight.

A second key text also informs the study: Race Critical Theories. Essed and Goldberg. Blackwell Publishers 2002. This text charts and provides theoretical discourses on the context of race and racism and the numerous manifestations of the concepts.

Professor Alvin Alvarez cites everyday racism as "subtle, commonplace forms of discrimination, such as being ignored" and goes on to state "these incidents may seem innocent and small but cumulatively they can have a powerful impact on individual mental health". (In Essed and Goldberg 2002)

Annie Barnes in her book 'Everyday Racism' argues that such racism is a virus of sorts shown in body language, speech and isolating attitudes. Further, she points out that the covert nature of these behaviours means that victims may struggle to ascertain if bigotry is at play. As Alvarez says "Trying to ignore these insidious incidents could become taxing and debilitating over time, chipping away at a person's spirit." (Alvarez 2010)

The following examples are given by Barnes and resonate with the experiences detailed by the respondents of our survey:

"Ignoring people of certain races is another example of subtle racism. Say a Mexican-American woman enters a store waiting to be served but the employees behave as if she's not there, continuing to rifle through store shelves or sort through papers. Soon afterward, a white woman enters the store, and the employees immediately wait on her. They help the Mexican-American woman only after they wait on her white counterpart. The covert message sent to the Mexican-American customer? You're not as worthy of attention and customer service as a white person is".

Positive social interactions can be seen as the oil for societies gears and negative interactions as the grit that prevents smooth running. Hence, it is in the interests of all members of society to attempt to at the very least be aware of their contributions to both positive and negative. As social diversity increases it could be said that there is a learning curve where social actors learn to live and work together so their diversity as an asset rather than a problem. To this end we can see that the overt racism which was common and unlegislated pre 1970s has to a large extent been counteracted through legislation and education. Institutional racism has also been the subject of action and education. Both issues remain challenging: on the one hand the trivialization of racist and xenophobic¹ discourse has heavily affected the political debate as well as media narratives; on the other hand Governments across the EU have adopted scapegoat strategies in relation to the economic and social crisis, openly blaming migrants and ethnic minorities for labour market and welfare systems shortages. Nevertheless, redress instruments are available, though not always really accessible, for victims, and work place policies have reduced incidents. Less visible forms of racism and racial discrimination, it is clear to see from the data above, remain, on the contrary, largely unmonitored and unchallenged.

It could be claimed that 'hurt feelings' are just an issue for the protagonist and of no consequence to employers or wider society. This claim ignores the fact that the result of such 'hurt feelings' can mean days lost at work, reduced productivity, increased social tension, the provocation of violence and conflict and consequences for both mental and physical health. Thus, society suffers and for those who may care little about social harmony may perhaps note the financial cost is considerable. Larson et al 2007 in their research with Aboriginal Australians established a clear link between emotional responses to interpersonal racism and reduced health indicators.

¹ "Attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity" (European Migration Network Glossary)

Nazroo et al (2002) showed that it was the experience of racism rather than ethnicity per se that was a determining factor in the relationship between social experience and health. A clear point is made by Nazroo that the “lumping together” of all ethnic groups is problematic – of course the relationship of trope and stereotype to racism and discrimination is clearly made as is the link to wider social processes such as the media and political system which can be seen as drivers of both.

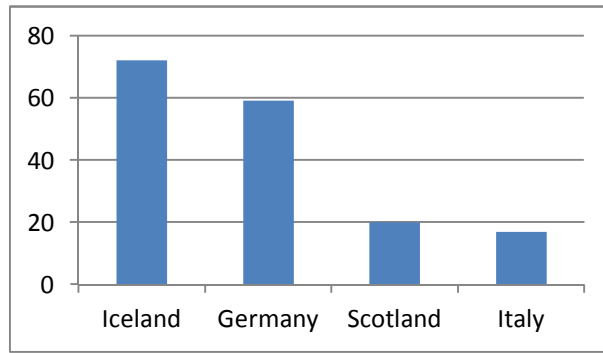
Littlewood and Lipsedge (2006) examine the links between racism, psychology, psychiatry and treatment of ethnic minorities. They clearly show how subtle aspects of everyday racism (although they do not refer to it as such) impact negatively on minorities. This is especially pertinent in terms of issues of cultural frames of reference and linguistic matters – they document a patient who was denied release from a psychiatric establishment because he stated that he had ‘been chasing wild swans all day’. As Littlewood and Lipsedge note this was a misquote of the colloquial “wild goose chase” and would have been obvious with a little time and thought on the part of the establishment. Not overt racism – but something that resulted in prolonged detention in a psychiatric establishment for the individual concerned.

Methodology of the survey

The aim was to establish from the “biographies” of those involved, the frequency, location and impact of everyday racism. Thus a report grid (See Appx 1) was drawn up based on an Icelandic research that InterCultural Iceland had already conducted (see report: www.ici.is) This enabled respondents to compile a record of incidents over a specific two week period. A covering letter was drawn up and all materials were translated into a range of languages as discussed previously. Each partner undertook to identify a sample group of appropriate respondents and attempted to ensure that respondents in each country received instructions in similar ways in order to ensure the study was replicated between geographical locations. Respondents were not asked about racism in any form but about communication and how different forms of communication resulted in a range of feelings and the locations of this communication.

Once all partners had submitted their completed responses all data was entered onto excel spreadsheet and comments were translated into English.

The total number of responses was 168 people with migrant background. In many cases it was difficult to reach participants and many of them would hand in an unfinished paper. In some cases migrants did not want to fill out the paper because they said it was all about negative things and in still other cases they stated that they didn’t trust that the information wouldn’t reach their employers.



Number of participants

From the outset the intention was to undertake a simple survey with a focus on the communication situations and the feelings generated rather than any adherence to scientific method. There were, however, clear intentions to draw on established methods and to observe ethical considerations and utilise methodological praxis. For example, the same two week period was observed for respondents to complete the grid and all respondents were issued with identical cover letter and report grid. All data was submitted centrally and analysed concurrently.

Results

The key findings were:

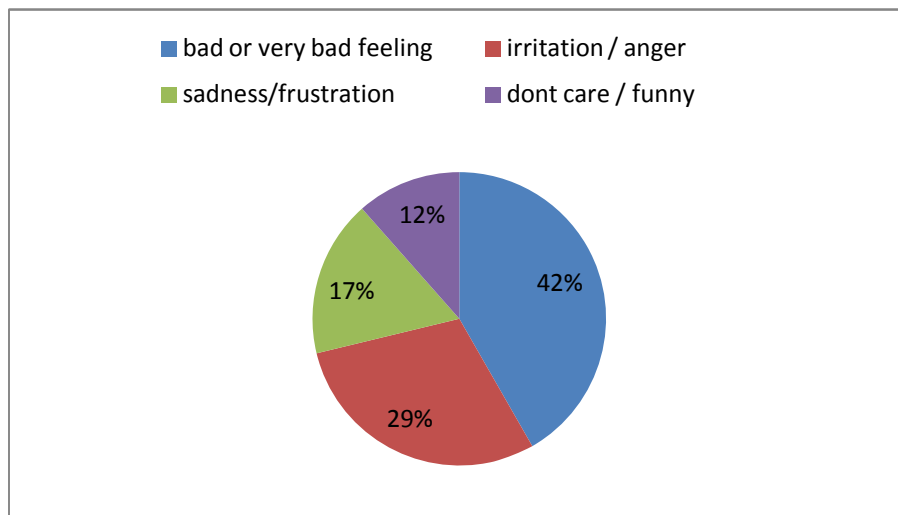
- Avoiding communication or contact, pretending not to understand, ignoring, staring, speaking loudly or patronisingly and showing distrust or suspicion were experienced by the majority of respondents
- In all countries the main location of events was the workplace except Germany where a large number of incidents also took place while shopping.
- For some respondents the frequency of the events was high – more than 20 times in the two week period

When it came to analyzing the feelings that participants related to their experience, the feelings expressed were categorized into four groups according to what kind of feelings were expressed:

1. Bad or very bad feeling
2. Irritation and/or anger
3. Sadness and/or frustration
4. Don't care/funny

These groupings representing the main responses in terms of respondents processing of emotional reactions to the 14 situations.

In the following graph it is clear that 88% of the participants experienced some kind of negative or very bad feeling when faced with manifestations of everyday discrimination. Only 12% stated that they found their experience funny or they didn't care which can also be interpreted as a form of self protection in an uncomfortable situation.



The words that participants used to describe their feelings were for example: „after so many years in this country, still a stranger“, „like I’m a worse person“, „ I just want to cry every day“, „ I wish I had another job“, „I’m like an object“, „frustrated“, „angry“, „sad“, „lonely“, „nervous“.....

This part of the survey is very important for our project as the aim is to develop ideas for awareness training and awareness raising about how certain behaviours make people feel. It is clear how damaging it is for both those who experience it and society that immigrants or people with migrant background feel like this as part of their every- day life.

Another important result for the project is concerning the question on where the incidents took place. When broken down between countries, Germany is the only place where more people experienced the discriminative behaviour towards them while shopping than on the workplace. Within this sample were a number of people who did not work full time and thus their interactions daily within the workplace were limited – the fact that this subgroup experienced incidents outside of the workplace, the incidents were located in shops – the workplace of others. The experience of customers and service users is always a concern for providers and as such we show that it is not limited to between worker interactions but additionally between worker and customer/service user.

In the following word cloud you can clearly see which words were mostly used by the participants in all countries.

assertions that the law is being enforced and nothing else is required. Hence it is important to emphasise the loss to productivity and the increase in conflict that will arise from the presence of un- recognised everyday racism. The first step is information and education. To this end we propose:

- The simple step of awareness raising through the placement of postcards in workplaces and other organisations suggesting reactions to scenarios. See in Anex I the postcards that will be disseminated in printed version as well as on our websites.
- Information and education via a dissemination conference where the findings and their implications will be shared. See the conference program in Anex II
- The hosting of this paper on partner organisation websites and distribution to trade unions representatives and managers.
- Below you will also see the suggestion of the content of awareness courses for managers and staff on workplaces.

Outwith the scope of this project but considered vital is the provision of workplace training, both for managers and staff.

With any organisational or social change there is likely to be a degree of resistance. However, it is also likely that there will be a substantial proportion of individuals who are inclined *not* to hurt the feelings of others and who may be doing so unconsciously. Thus there is likely to be a small wave of change with minimal effort or input. Key also is empowerment of people who experience everyday discrimination and those who wish to support actual and potential recipients. Raised awareness should provide the tools for challenge.

Proposal for action

It has been shown through researches (Essed, 1991) how important the attitudes of the managers on a workplace are and how much influence their behaviour and attitude can have on other staff members. Managers, line managers or other people in some kind of power positions within a company are in the position to create, maintain or reject racist or prejudice atmosphere at the workplace. Managers are in power positions at the workplace and therefore it is much more difficult to deal with their prejudice or discriminative behaviour. Importantly their attitudes can directly stimulate racist or prejudice attitudes of other staff members. Similarly, prejudice and racism tend to reduce when managers or supervisors show initiative to fight racism and discrimination in their department or workplace. Thus, an open-minded and conscious manager or head of department can have a tremendous impact in such a way that other staff members treat each other with respect and inclusion and open-mindedness.

But how can their awareness about the problem be raised? What training or education should take place? After looking through the findings of the survey in those four countries and looking into the outcomes of a significant research in Iceland about the theme, the

partnership has come to the conclusion that the following components would be important in workplace training.

A training session for managers and other staff members in leading positions:

Aims:

- That the participants become aware of the existing diversity in their company/organization
- That the participants understand the difference between stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination and that they become familiar with the hidden everyday forms of discrimination
- That the awareness of different manifestations and consequences of prejudices and discrimination in general are understood and put in context with their workplace.
- That the participants have thought about and discussed ways to react when they encounter or hear of discriminative or racist attitudes or behavior at their workplace
- Creating a positive attitude towards diversity by helping the participants to see diversity as a resource / benefit / advantage for the company and therefore increase effectiveness
- That the participants understand the benefits of a socially responsible organisation
- That the participants have thought through a reaction plan when such incidents occur in their workplace and developed guidelines for intervention when discrimination takes place

In this training for managers the main focus would be to make them aware of their responsibility in the organisation and after becoming familiar with the different manifestations and consequences of every day discrimination and to develop meaningful guidelines for intervention when it takes place. The methods used would be diverse including lectures, group work tasks and presentations.

A training session for all staff (including managers)

Aims:

- That the participants become aware of the existing diversity in their company/organization
- That the participants understand the advantages of diversity in general and at an individual level
- That the participants understand the difference between stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination and that they become familiar with the hidden everyday forms of discrimination
- That the awareness of different manifestations and consequences of prejudices and discrimination in general are understood and put in context within their workplace.

- That the participants know and empathize with the bad feelings that every day discrimination causes to those who experience it on a regular basis.
- That the participants have thought about and discussed ways to react when they encounter or hear of discriminative or racist attitudes or behavior at their workplace

In this training the main focus will be on raising awareness on what kind of behaviour causes what kind of feelings by those who experience discrimination on a daily basis. Methods used during the training will be very active and participants will be working in small heterogeneous groups where organisational leaders and other staff will work together on certain tasks. This way the staff members have better access to the managers in a safe environment and the managers have better way of making their companies policy clear to all staff members. Preferably the managers have had a session with the trainers before so that they have already developed guidelines for their company in this context.

Anex I

Country of origin..... Resident in Iceland for: less than 1 year..... 2-5 year..... more than 5 years..... Gender..... Age.....

Today I experienced that I felt that someone:

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Where did this happen? (at work, in the shop, etc)	Which words describe best the situation?
Pretended not to understand me																
Avoided communication or contact with me																
Called me names																
Laughed at me																
Ignored me, pretending they didn't see me																
Talked down to me – was patronising																
Showed dislike with facial expression																
Talked to me like I was a child																
Stared at me, looked me up and down																
Spoke to me loudly and drew attention to me																
Showed me distrust or suspicion																
Showed impatience toward me																
Called abusive words after me																
Talked ABOUT me, not WITH me																

How did you feel filling out this survey?.....

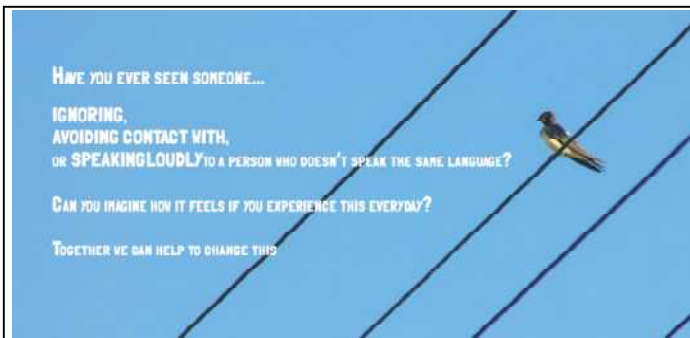
If you made several crosses, why do you think people behave like this?.....

What would you mostly want to change in people's attitude and behaviour towards you in Iceland?



Anex II

The postcards that will be printed and distributed are in three versions and printed on both sides. The postcards will be printed in English, German, Italian and Icelandic.



Anex III - The Draft program of the dissemination conference:

Dissemination conference in Arbroath, Scotland on May 13th 2014

- 08.30 – 09.00 Registration and coffee.
- 09.00 – 09.20 Everyday racism / everyday discrimination – Theoretical input about the concepts (Cherry Hopton)
- 09.20 – 09.30 Discussion and questions.
- 09.30 – 09.50 Presentation on discussion about everyday racism in Germany (Ingibjörg Pétursdóttir).
- 09.50 – 10.00 Discussion and questions.
- 10.00 – 10.20 Coffee break
- 10.20 – 12.30 Stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, hidden discrimination – what do these concepts mean, how does it feel to experience it? (Guðrún Pétursdóttir)
- 12.30 – 13.30 Lunch
- 13.30 – 14.30 What can be done on workplaces to detect and respond to hidden discrimination? (Guðrún Pétursdóttir)
- 14.30 – 14.50 Coffee break
- 14.50 – 15.15 Presentation of the postcards and the Report (Rona/Cherry/Mina)
- 15.15 – 15.40 Short presentation of ENAR (Luciano Scagliotti)
- 15.40 – 16.00 Panel discussion. Moderators: Marco Alfieri and Antonella Montanari. Participants in panel: Anna Maria Milosz, Angelica Cantú Dávila, Györgyi Turoczy and some others with migrant background from Italy and Scotland.
- 17.00 - Informal discussion with partners and participants interested in a discussion