

# RACISM

## What is it?

*The Human Rights Commission use a definition of racism as using biological differences, whether imagined or real, to assert superiority of one group over another - devaluing the 'other' - to justify aggression or privilege.<sup>1</sup>*

## Why is it important?

Racism was identified in the Christchurch city profile consultation as an area of concern. It was also identified as part of the consultation to develop the Human Rights Commission Action Plan.<sup>2</sup> Experience of racism can adversely affect a person's health.<sup>3</sup>



## Data

The City Health and Well-being consultation in 2010 received some anecdotal evidence of racist incidents or fear of racist harassment in Christchurch.

## Impact on inequalities

The Ministry of Health identifies that racism affects health partly because indigenous and minority populations tend to experience less favourable social and economic circumstances and access to health care and partly because of the more direct psychosocial stress that racism engenders.<sup>4</sup>

Racism is increasingly recognised as a determinant of health and driver of inequalities. It can create tensions and divisions in communities and affect the quality of care offered to different groups. Actual violence or fear of violence stemming from racism can cause social isolation and misery for individuals and communities. Experience of, or fear of discrimination may lead individuals and families to avoid mainstream cultural institutions, including health care systems, in which discrimination may occur.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence that exposure to racism is significantly associated with poor mental health and lower physical functioning, smoking and cardiovascular disease.<sup>6</sup>

## Solutions

The Human Rights Act of 1993, Section 61, prohibits language that is threatening, abusive or insulting and considered likely to excite hostility against a person or group on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins. The Human Right Commission has a South Island Office based in Christchurch, which undertakes education and advocacy work around all aspects of human rights, including racism. It has mechanisms for people to make complaints about ongoing racial harassment.

A webpage to encourage the reporting of incidents of bullying or harassment, primarily against overseas students studying in the Christchurch area has been developed.<sup>7</sup> The website is supported

<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Commission. 2004. Human Rights in New Zealand Today: An Action Plan For Human Rights. <http://www.hrc.co.nz/report/chapters/chapter18/race01.html> Accessed 18.11.12.

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> Rapadies Y. 2006. A systematic review of empirical research on self-reported racism and health. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35 (4): 888-901. Available from <http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/35/4/888.short> Accessed 18.11.12.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Health. 2002. Reducing Inequalities in Health. <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/4127> Accessed 18.11.12.

<sup>5</sup> Burgess DJ, Ding Y, Hargreaves M, van Ryn M, Phelan S. 2008. The association between perceived discrimination and underutilization of needed medical and mental health care in a multi-ethnic community sample. *Journal of Healthcare for the Poor and Underserved* 19, 814-911.

<sup>6</sup> Harris R, Tobias M, Jeffreys M, Waldegrave K, Karlsen S, Nazroo J. 2006. Racism and health: the Relationship between experience of racial discrimination and health in New Zealand. *Social Science o and Medicine* 63 (6): 1428-41.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.report-it.org.nz/>

by Christchurch City Council, the Human Rights Commission, the NZ Police Force, Te Runanga O Ngai Tahu, Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology and the Universities of Canterbury and Lincoln.

### ***Data limitations***

The New Zealand Police do not have a routine system for recording 'hate crimes' or crimes which may be racially motivated. There is no local data recording complaints of racism.

### ***Connections with other issues***

Antisocial Behaviour, Social Connectedness, Migrant and Refugee Support

### ***Impact of the earthquakes***

*As time passes and these papers are updated the initial sections on the impact of the earthquake are going to be kept as an archive of what we thought the situation was at the time. Updates are provided where possible.*

#### **As at November 2011**

The full impact is unknown at this stage but there were some very positive stories in the media of various different ethnic groups assisting across Christchurch in the clean-up and feeding of volunteers. Such positive reporting can help to breaking down barriers.

Prepared by Community and Public Health.