

Zero tolerance is failing to stop racism among young

Teachers and youth workers urged to confront discrimination

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Racist attitudes and a "climate of intolerance" still exist among many young people in Britain today, a report by two leading charities has revealed.

It highlights the "I'm not racist but..." trend, in which teenagers explicitly deny holding discriminatory views, despite expressing them casually in conversation.

The study claims that a "zero tolerance" approach to racism, in which children are excluded from school or kicked out of youth clubs for offensive comments, has failed. Instead it has driven the problem underground.

Teachers and youth workers are urged to confront and challenge such attitudes, particularly where myths are being propagated.

The research, by the Runnymede Trust and Trust for London, also suggests that higher-level, racist violence remains a "serious problem" in the country. Police officers, speaking anonymously, confessed they believed that the problem was being under-reported.

Studying the prevalence of racism is considered to be extremely difficult because people will rarely admit their attitudes to researchers. As a result, this piece of work analysed in depth a number of projects working closely with schools and youth clubs.

In one case, 82 per cent of teachers at a school in Bexley, southeast London, said they saw at least one "act of bias" in the classrooms or corridors each day. Among comments recorded were: "All Muslims are terrorists"; "Dirty Gypo" and "Don't be such a Jew".

Bharat Mehta, chief executive of the Trust for London, which funded the study, said: "The work has shown that

many people hold racist views but the issue of racism has become such a difficult one in our society that individuals will go to great lengths to avoid having their views or what they say labelled as racist." He added that zero tolerance "does not work and only serves to push the problem underground".

Sarah Isal, deputy director of the Runnymede Trust, a think-tank that specialises in research about race, added: "What the projects did find is that racist views are still very much prevalent among young people and there is a climate of intolerance with

good coz there's no blacks"; "Some of them are all right. Not the pure black ones. Half Castes are OK"; "I'm not being racist but I'm more scared of black people than white people"; and "Blacks... run around with tazer guns killing white people for no reason. The Muslims came and bombed London".

Tom Currie, from Leap Confronting Conflict, which works on tackling young people's discriminatory attitudes, said that the area had once been a BNP stronghold. It had a large white working-class population adapting to a dramatic increase in the number of



Racist views are still prevalent among young people, the researchers found

ethnic minorities. He said that the project had discovered a widespread "fear" of being perceived as a racist. "There is a widely held knowledge that being racist is wrong," he said.

However, in the Bexley school, for example, where his organisation worked, it found "cliques being formed, insensitive language, preference for some groups and scapegoating of others based on ethnicity".

Mr Currie argued that austerity had heightened tensions. He and his colleagues work with groups of children to help to break down racist attitudes.

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of teachers at a school in Bexley, South London, said that they saw at least one "act of bias" every day

Source: The Runnymede Trust and Trust for London

negative stereotyping relating to specific groups." She argued that it was a complex picture, with divisions even between immigrants who had arrived recently or who were more settled, whatever their colour. However, black people were still much more likely to be the victims of racism than their white counterparts, she said.

Ms Isal argued that the research also revealed that "the label of being a racist is so stigmatising that there is a will not to be associated with it on the one hand, but that does not mean people do not hold those views. It is the 'I'm not racist but...' argument."

In Bexley, academics also spoke to white children, aged 11 to 16, in a youth club to ask about their local fears. Among the quotes were: "The area's



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