

RACISM AS A DETERMINANT OF SEXUAL HEALTH

Authors:

REBECCA M. REEVES¹, ALISON COELHO¹

¹*Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health*

Background/Purpose:

Racism is a social determinant of health, affecting the health and wellbeing of many members of our society. Racism can increase an individual's risk of getting HIV as well as their future management of HIV if they do get it. Normalised racist behaviours in the Australian community, systemic racism in public services, such as healthcare and unconscious bias all contribute to negative health outcomes.

Approach:

Acknowledging how our behaviours may be racist or contribute to racist systems is a first step towards eliminating racism in our society. The Multicultural Sexual Health Network hosted a forum on Racism and Health in April 2018. Framed with the voices of our communities, health and community workers heard from academic and community experts about the impacts of racism at both the population and individual level.

Outcomes/Impact:

Fifty people attended the forum and reported learning new information (detailed below) that was relevant to their work. Participants engaged with speakers and discussed ways they can address racism within their services. There is a growing body of evidence about the impacts of racism on health, such as psychological distress and cardiovascular ill-health. Further evidence shows that racism is a direct barrier to seeking healthcare. Research on the impact of racism on sexual health is limited, but evidence from the U.S. shows a clear relationship between racism and increased likelihood of unprotected anal intercourse within the gay community and unprotected vaginal intercourse in women of colour. Locally, the targeting of migrants for HIV testing was perceived as racism and a barrier to future help-seeking.

Innovation and Significance:

Racism can increase the risk of HIV. This forum started the discussion about racism and sexual health, including HIV. Participants were encouraged to acknowledge and address racism in their services, as a step towards elimination.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.