

Social Justice Research Programme

Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland

Catherine Bromley and John Curtice
NatCen Scotland

In 2002 a module of questions was included in the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey in order to tap the extent and character of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland on disability, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity. The research was undertaken by NatCen Scotland with the support and collaboration of the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission, Stonewall Scotland and the Scottish Executive. This report summarises the main results from the survey.

Main Findings

- The majority of people (68%) say that the country should do all that it can to get rid of all kinds of prejudice, while 26% say that there is sometimes good reason to be prejudiced.
- Some groups are thought to experience more prejudice than others, with 56% saying that there is a great deal of prejudice in Scotland against people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds while 49% say the same about gay men and lesbians. In contrast, 31% say there is a great deal of prejudice against disabled people and 20% against women.
- Discriminatory attitudes are more likely to be expressed in respect of gay men and lesbians and minority ethnic groups than in respect of disabled people or women. For example, 18% say they would prefer an MSP who is not gay or lesbian and 11% say they would prefer a white MSP, while 4% express a preference for a male MSP or one who is not disabled.
- People who say they prefer to live in an area with different kinds of people are less likely to express discriminatory attitudes than are those who say they prefer to live in an area with similar kinds of people. For example, 27% of people who prefer to live in an area with different kinds of people express the view that gay male couples are not as capable of being good parents as a mixed sex couple. This compares with 52% of people who say that they prefer to live in an area with similar kinds of people.
- Discriminatory attitudes are least likely to be expressed by those who are educationally well qualified and most likely to be expressed by those aged 65 and over. For example, 11% of people with a degree said they would mind if a relative married someone from a different racial or ethnic background, compared with 21% of those with no qualifications. Similarly, 29% of those aged 65 and over take that view compared with 6% of those aged 18-24 years.

Introduction

There are two competing visions of Scotland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The first suggests that Scotland is a socially conservative society, while the second argues that Scotland is an outward looking, tolerant society.

To find out which of these descriptions is more representative of the views of people in Scotland, the 2002 Scottish Social Attitudes survey, undertaken by NatCen Scotland, carried a module of 40 questions on people's attitudes to discrimination in Scotland. Interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 1665 people across Scotland in the summer of 2002.

The survey focused on discrimination in relation to gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. This is the first time that a public attitudes survey on discrimination has been undertaken on this scale. This report therefore offers a unique insight into whether those who express discriminatory attitudes in Scotland do so in respect of a wide range of groups, suggesting those views are a reflection of a generalised sense of prejudice, or whether instead the prevalence and perhaps even the character of discriminatory attitudes varies according to the group in question.

Research Aims

A discriminatory attitude is defined as one that directly or indirectly suggests that some social groups may not be entitled to engage in the full panoply of social, economic and political activities that are thought to be the norm for most citizens.

Using this definition, the research set out to answer three questions:

- What do Scots themselves believe is the extent of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland?

- What is the extent and character of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland?
- Why do people hold discriminatory attitudes?

As the research was designed to focus on attitudes to discrimination, it does not explore the degree to which discrimination actually occurs in Scotland, or whether respondents themselves had experience of discrimination or prejudice.

What do Scots themselves believe is the extent of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland?

Prejudice is thought to be more common for some groups than others. For example, respondents perceive minority ethnic groups and gay men and lesbians to experience a greater degree of prejudice than disabled people and women. While 5% state that none of these groups experience prejudice, 52% state that all four groups do so.

What is the extent and character of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland?

Only a minority of people express discriminatory attitudes or appear to approve of prejudice. Just over one in four (26%) say that 'sometimes there is good reason to be prejudiced against certain groups'.

Discriminatory attitudes are however more likely to be expressed in respect of gay men and lesbians and minority ethnic groups than women or disabled people. Nearly one in five say they would prefer not to have a gay or lesbian MSP while one in ten would prefer a white MSP. Less than one in twenty express a preference for a male

MSP or one who is not disabled. Even so, all of these are distinctly minority views.

Discriminatory attitudes towards gay men and lesbians feature most prominently in the area of families and relationships. Nearly two in five disagree that a gay male couple are as capable of being good parents as a mixed sex couple, while one in three say the same about a lesbian couple. In both cases there is a similar proportion who do agree with these statements.

Economic concerns feature more prominently in attitudes towards minority ethnic groups. For example, one in five agree that people from minority ethnic communities take jobs away from other people in Scotland. Meanwhile, there are gender stereotypes applied to women seen through more than one in four saying that women are more suitable primary school teachers than men.

There is considerable support for measures to reduce the impact of discrimination. Less than one in ten say that equal opportunities for disabled people or for women have gone too far, while around one in five say this in relation to gay men and lesbians and minority ethnic groups. In contrast, almost six in ten say that equal opportunities for disabled people have not gone far enough. More than four in ten express this view in relation to minority ethnic groups and women, while one in four say that equal opportunities for gay men and lesbians have not gone far enough.

Overall, the proportion of people in Scotland who have negative attitudes to the promotion of equality for all four groups is very small. One percent say that attempts to give equal opportunities have gone too far in respect of all four groups. In contrast, 13% say that attempts to give equal opportunities have not gone far enough for all four groups. It seems then that the balance of opinion is in

favour of further action, at least for some of the groups in question.

Why do people hold discriminatory attitudes?

Three possible explanations are offered for why people express discriminatory attitudes. These relate to: sociological attributes; economic position; and psychological disposition. All three make some difference to the likelihood that someone expresses a discriminatory attitude. For example, those with a university degree are usually less likely to express a discriminatory attitude than those with no qualifications. Similarly, those who find it difficult to live on their current income are also more likely to express a discriminatory attitude than those who say they are living comfortably on their income.

The degree to which there are differences of view does however vary from group to group. Such differences tend to be sharpest in respect of those groups where discriminatory attitudes are more common in the first place, such as towards minority ethnic groups and gay men and lesbians, and less sharp in respect of women and disabled people, where prejudice is less evident.

While all three explanations provide some understanding of the reasons why people express discriminatory attitudes, it appears that psychological differences appear to matter the most. People are less likely to express prejudicial attitudes if they are happy living in a community of different kinds of people. Equally they are also less likely to express a discriminatory attitude if they believe that they have a lot in common with members of a different group in the first place.

If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any enquiries about social research, please contact us at:

Scottish Executive Social Research
1F (Dockside)
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ
Tel: 0131 244-7565
Fax: 0131 244-7573
Email: socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

If you wish a copy of "Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland", the report which is summarised in this Research Findings, please send a cheque for £5.00 made payable to The Stationery Office to:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
EDINBURGH
EH3 9AZ
Tel: 0870 606 5566
Fax: 0870 606 5588
<http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop>

This document (and other Research Findings and Reports) and information about social research in the Scottish Executive may be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>

The site carries up-to-date information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Executive. Subjects covered include transport, housing, social inclusion, rural affairs, children and young people, education, social work, community care, local government, civil justice, crime and criminal justice, regeneration, planning and womens issues. The site also allows access to information about the Scottish Household Survey.

