Community Research Summary

Co-designing an anti-racism body for Scotland with adversely racialised communities

The views of adversely racialised communities

September 2023

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How to read this report

Important documents and information

To make it easy for readers to find certain important documents and information, we have put in electronic links to them where we first talk about them. These can be found in both the main body of the text and the footnotes.

The words we have used

We have tried to make our language clear and easy to understand. However, we may still have used some words or phrases that readers have not seen before or do not understand. Where we think we have done this we have explained them, either in the text where the words appear or in a footnote on the same page.

Introduction

In September 2022, the [Anti-Racism Interim Governance Group](#) (AIGG) hired two community researchers to carry out a study. The purpose of the study was to tell communities about our proposed Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland (AROS) and ask how it could best work for them. Our focus was not on personal racism but on structural racism[1]—in other words, the way public institutions[2] work and the racial inequity[3] or unfairness it leads to.

This summary sets out why and how we did this important research, and what we found.

Why we did this research

— Co-designing[4] ways to solve problems with the very communities they affect is a good way of getting institutions to change what they do[5].

— If the AROS is to bring about real and lasting change, it must be co-designed with adversely racialised communities in Scotland. It was therefore crucial that we talked to these communities and heard their views.

— By working with them, we could show that adversely racialised communities have both the goodwill and the expertise to help solve the problems they face.

— In this way, we could start to give communities the power to hold the AROS and Scotland's public institutions to account for ending structural racism.

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[1] When a society's laws, rules and policies result in and support the unfair treatment of others because of their "race" or ethnicity.

[2] Organisations run by the government and funded by our taxes, e.g. the NHS, the police, education.

[3] The absence of unfair, unjust, avoidable or remediable (i.e. can be removed) differences between people grouped by "race".

[4] People coming together as equal partners to create something.

[5] Norström, A.V., Cvitanovic, C., Löf, M.F. *et al.* 2020. Principles for knowledge co-production in sustainability research. *Nat Sustain* **3**, 182–190, [https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0448-2;](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0448-2) and Brandsen, T., Trui, S. Bram, V. (eds) (2018) *Co-production and Co-Creation Engaging Citizens* in Public Services Taylor & Francis, http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/25001.

How we did this work

We used what is called 'participatory action research' (PAR) because it is a powerful way of bringing together diverse voices. Under this method, researchers work with affected communities to understand social problems and bring about change.

We also designed our research around four principles: safety, trust, working together and equal power between communities and researchers. For example,

— We put a lot of effort and time into making sure communities could easily understand our survey and information materials.

— To build trust, we were clear about what the research would and would not cover and what we wanted it to achieve.

— Given the high risk that communities would feel they had less power than the researchers, we invited communities' feedback at each stage of the research. This allowed us to adjust what we did in order not to harm participants and to keep them fully involved.

The research had three phases. Below we describe these in more detail.

Phase 1: Co-designing the research with communities

The purpose of this phase was to co-design the study. Our aims in doing so were: to build trust with communities; make them feel that the research belonged to them; and, avoid re-traumatising them by not asking them to re-live any personal racism.

To find the best design for the study we did three things.

— Through online, unstructured interviews[6], we asked community leaders how we should talk to people in their communities.

— Through focus groups, we asked young people with experience of anti-racism practice how best to get other young people involved.

— Though regular meetings with a sub-group of the AIGG, we made sure everything we did was anti-racist.

With the help of these three groups, we co-designed a questionnaire. On their advice, we also created a video and flyer explaining why we were carrying out the research, how it was different from previous work and what difference it would make. It took us more than four months to make sure the wording was easy to understand. We then translated it into various community languages.

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[6] Unlike a questionnaire, unstructured interviews are more like a free-flowing conversation.

Phase 2: Gathering the data through our survey and listening tour

The purpose of this phase was to get as many people from Scotland's adversely racialised communities as possible to take part in our research.

We invited community and third-sector[7] organisations, including national and local "race" equality organisations, to take part. We asked them to invite others in their networks, too. To reach yet more people, we shared a link to the survey online. We also hired other community researchers to take the survey out to places across Scotland where community members gather.

Community organisations also hosted in-person listening sessions for us in five cities (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness). These sessions allowed community members to come together and discuss our questions with each other. We made it as easy as we could for them to come, e.g. by picking suitable meeting places, putting on food and drinks and providing childcare. We were also open about paying community organisations for their time and expertise.

Phase 3: Co-analysing the data

The purpose of this phase was to analyse the results of our survey; and finally, to write up our findings in a report we would share with communities, policy-makers and the wider public.

Members of the AIGG with lived expertise in racism[8] co-analysed the data with us. Where we could, we used the exact words our participants had used. That meant we could be sure we were reflecting their true emotions and meaning. (These can often be lost when we put other people's words into our own.)

The recommendations in our report are based directly on what community members told us they wanted. In this way, we have made it clear that we see adversely racialised communities as experts in tackling racism.

Challenges

We faced a number of challenges doing this research:

— We would have liked to have involved more communities and their members. However, we did not have enough people or resources to do this.

— Some of the language and terms we used were not clear.

— We did not have enough time to bring community members into our co-analysis team.

— Consultation fatigue meant that some community members did not take part.

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[7] Charities, social enterprises, community groups and voluntary organisations.
[8] Before doing so, we encouraged them to reflect on how their experiences might shape how they interpreted the data.

Findings

A total of 531 people from across Scotland took part in the research. Most responded as individuals, although some participants said they were answering on behalf of organisations. Below is a summary of what they told us.

1. Standardised data collection

Communities feel that recording "race" and ethnicity data in Scotland should not be left to one central body. Rather, it is something all Scotland's public institutions should do. However, they would like the AROS's help to make sure this data is then shared with communities.

2. An integrated approach

When asked in what areas the AROS should map work on racism and anti-racism, a number of participants said it should include all 22 options[9] listed under this question. The most popular options included employment, school and higher education, housing, immigration and health.

Areas put forward by the participants themselves included COVID-19 and its impact, the cost-of-living crisis and its impact, poverty, the justice system, popular culture, language, media stories, sport, the environment, public places and legal representation. The impact of structural racism should also be built into impact assessments[10] and emergency preparedness[11] throughout the public sector.

The above suggests that communities would like to see work on racism and anti-racism mapped across all these sectors. And here too, they would like the AROS to act as the central body for sharing this information (see also, 7 below).

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[9] Physical health, mental health, life expectancy, employment, school education, higher education, housing, income, strengths of communities, funding for anti-racism work, representation of racially minoritised in leadership positions, community safety, children's wellbeing, older people's wellbeing, immigration, gender equality, inequities faced by sexual minorities, religion, disability, caring responsibilities, arts and others.

[10] A planning exercise that is used to identify the pluses and minuses of a project or policy.

[11] The steps organisations should take to make sure people are safe before, during and after an emergency.

3. Valuing lived experience

Communities want the AROS to value and record their research, lived experiences and anti-racism efforts. They would also like it to set up safe spaces for them to talk to researchers and other institutions about this.

4. Acknowledging and valuing community expertise

Communities want their skills and expertise to be valued, too. They suggest that the AROS set up a live database (i.e. one that can be updated instantly) of community groups working on anti-racism. This would hel p funding bodies find groups with the expertise they need. They would also like the AROS to monitor who and what community organisations the public sector and charities fund. This would help to ensure that the process is open and fair.

Reflecting on this research, the researchers themselves felt it is important to recognise that participants may also have particular skills (e.g. academics of colour) to bring to anti-racism work.

5. Focusing on accountability[12]

Another theme coming out of the research was public institutions not being made to answer for failing to tackle racism. Participants feel this is mainly down to two things: 1) little or no information on what is or is not being done; and, 2) institutions having little or no capacity to deal with racism.

When it comes to reporting racism, respondents said they face various barriers. These include nobody following up on the incident, it being too much work to prove that it happened and not having the personal capacity (e.g. time, resources or funding) to deal with it.

6. Building better understanding

Communities want the AROS to improve people's racial literacy[13]. They listed a number of topics this could cover, ranging from bystander training[14] and colourism[15] to the perceptions people have of adversely racialised communities.

They would also like existing evidence on racism and anti-racism to be reviewed. This would help people understand not just what we already know but also where further research is needed—for example, lived experiences of racism and information on different ethnicities.

Other ways the AROS could build understanding include pointing people to what anti-racism work is going on and setting (and enforcing) anti-racism standards.

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[12] Holding an organisation to account for what it says it will do, by monitoring what it does and imposing some kind of penalty if it fails to act.

[13] The knowledge, skills and awareness to talk thoughtfully about race and racism.

[14] Learning how to successfully intervene in or challenge discriminatory behaviour.

[15] Discriminating against people with darker skin tones.

7. An interactive digital library

Communities told us they would like information on racism and anti-racism (research, policy, lived experience, anti-racism work, etc) to be stored in one place; and for that place to be open to everyone. They are tired of being researched and would like to see all the research that has already been done lead to action.

On the subject of action, participants also felt that better recording of people's experiences of structural racism could create a live body of anti-racism casework.

8. Anti-racism standards

Communities want the AROS to set anti-racism standards for how public institutions should work. They suggested a number of things they could include: calling out racist behaviour, sharing best practice, setting targets and monitoring whether they are met, and helping institutions to embed anti-racist ways of working.

They also want the AROS to make sure public institutions apply these standards.

9. Direct and equal involvement

Communities want to be directly involved in the AROS's work. This could be as educators, researchers, recruiters for research or community liaisons[16].

They also want to be paid for their involvement, stressing that the AROS must be clear about what jobs and pay would be open to them.

10. Clear and continuing communication

Finally, communities said that the AROS should have a plan for keeping them up to date with its work. They feel this is particularly important for those "at risk of racial discrimination".

Although we used a range of ways to tell communities about our survey, most people who took part only heard about it when talking to the community researchers. For that reason, the AROS should consider various ways of keeping communities informed. This should include using community liaisons, who can speak to communities in the places where they gather.

To find out more about what we did and what we learnt, please see our full research report.

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[16] People whose role it is to keep organisations and communities in touch with each other.

A final note on our wording

There are several words that we use a lot and which we would like to explain here:

— "Race": It is widely understood that "race" is not a biological fact but a political idea that we, as a society, have invented[17]. When differences between groups are understood in terms of differences in appearance (e.g. skin colour) or other biological features, they are said to be racialised[18]. All groups in society can be said to be racialised in some way. But certain groups, such as communities of colour, are racialised with the aim of making them out to be somehow less worthy or important. For this reason, we refer to these groups or communities in this report as being adversely racialised or racially minoritised.

— Community: We recognise that this word is too broad to do justice to the diversity of Scotland's people. We use it here as a shorthand way of talking about communities of colour, as well as those who face racism generally, living in Scotland.

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[17] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023) Using population descriptors in genetics and genomics research: A new framework for an evolving field. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/26902

[18] 1. Miles, R. & Brown, M., 2003. Racism. Second ed. London: Routledge; 2. St Louis, Brett. 2005. Racialization in the "zone of ambiguity". In: Karim and S. John, eds. *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice.* Oxford University Press, pp. 29–50; 3. Banton, M. (2005) Historical and contemporary modes of racialization. In K. Murji, & J. Solomos (Eds.), Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice (pp. 51–68). Oxford University Press; 4. Erel, U., Murji, K. & Nahaboo, Z. (2016) Understanding the contemporary race-migration nexus. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39(8), pp. 1339–1360.