

Media Release

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Schools the major site for youth racism, new report finds

A major report released today by The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) reveals that schools are the primary setting for the experience of racism among young people. The national study, titled *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians*, also finds that 70% of secondary school students experienced at least one form of racism, with those from migrant backgrounds experiencing the highest levels.

“With the Federal Government launching Social Inclusion Week next week, this study is a stark and timely reminder that Australia has a long way to go in addressing the challenge of racism in schools, especially for students from migrant backgrounds,” says Dr Lucas Walsh, Director of Research at FYA. “This report confirms that schools are uniquely placed to engage the challenges and benefits of diversity and that a whole-community approach should support them to do this.”

The research involved 823 students from 18 secondary schools across Australia and examined; their experiences of racism; the effects of that racist behaviour on health and wellbeing; where that racist behaviour most often occurs; how they respond to racism, and their attitudes towards race relations generally. Prepared by Deakin University’s Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, some of the report’s key findings include:

- the group most at risk of racism is female first-generation migrants in Years 11 and 12;
- an underlying racism permeates schools across Australia with 80% of participants from non-Anglo backgrounds and 55% from Anglo backgrounds reporting experiences of racism;
- school education programs around racism are proven to reduce racist behaviour;
- the experience of racism has serious impacts on health and wellbeing.

Professor Fethi Mansouri, Director of the Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation says, “This report, and other research in the field, tells us that there is an urgent need for well-targeted professional development on intercultural understanding and racism for teachers and school leaders. Schools and students would also benefit greatly from curriculum materials that facilitate constructive and meaningful engagement with the sensitive issues of culture, race and inclusive practice.”

Dr Helen Szoke, Commissioner of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission says “The connection between experiences of discrimination and young people’s well-being are well documented. For this reason school-based programs which promote diversity and educate young people about discrimination are important prevention strategies.”

This report coincides with the release today of a report by VicHealth, *Building on our strengths*, which also shows that there is a clear link between racism and a range of health problems.

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Dr Lucas Walsh and Professor Fethi Mansouri are available for interview

A copy of the report will be available for download from Thu 19 November at www.fya.org.au

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