

Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland: 2006

Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

Catherine Bromley, John Curtice and Lisa Given
Scottish Centre for Social Research

This paper summarises the key findings from research on discriminatory attitudes in Scotland in 2006. This research addressed two main questions - what is the extent and character of discriminatory attitudes, and why do people hold such attitudes? It measured attitudes towards discrimination on all six of the grounds for which anti-discrimination legislation exists in Great Britain: age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

Main Findings

- Just 29% of people in Scotland say that sometimes there is good reason to be prejudiced. The majority (65%) say that Scotland should do everything it can to get rid of all kinds of prejudice.
- The incidence of discriminatory attitudes varies considerably from one group to another. Discriminatory attitudes towards Gypsies/Travellers and transsexual people are quite widespread. They are only rarely expressed about women and people with disabilities.
- Discriminatory attitudes are quite frequently expressed towards both gay men and lesbians, and Muslims. But while such attitudes appear to have declined in recent years so far as gay men and lesbians are concerned, the opposite has happened in the case of Muslims.
- In general discriminatory attitudes are most likely to be expressed by those with few educational qualifications and by older people.
- Those who know someone who belongs to a particular group are less likely to express discriminatory attitudes. But living in an area where relatively large numbers of a group reside does not appear to make much difference.
- Fears about the extent to which people feel that different groups threaten their culture appear to be a key reason why people hold discriminatory attitudes.

Introduction

This paper summarises the key findings from a research project on the incidence of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland. It covers discriminatory attitudes on all six of the grounds for which anti-discrimination legislation exists in Great Britain: age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion/belief and sexual orientation. The project was funded by the Scottish Government and the former UK Department for Trade and Industry. It was designed to help inform the work of both the new Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Government.

The research was conducted by including a module of questions in the 2006 *Scottish Social Attitudes* (SSA) survey. SSA is a high quality annual survey conducted by the *Scottish Centre for Social Research*. It is designed to inform public policy and facilitate the study of public opinion in Scotland. The 2006 survey interviewed a representative sample of 1,594 adults across Scotland between August 2006 and January 2007.

Research Questions

The research was designed to address two main questions:

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

For the purposes of the research, 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.’ The project only looked at the incidence and character of attitudes defined in this way. It did not examine the incidence of discriminatory behaviour.

The project focused on three topics: relationships, employment, and the provision of goods and services. Because some of the survey questions had been asked on previous SSA surveys in 2002 or 2003, it is also possible to assess whether the incidence of discriminatory attitudes has changed in recent years.

Discriminatory attitudes in three contexts

Asked about their attitudes towards prejudice in general, just 29% agree that ‘sometimes there is good reason to be prejudiced’. In contrast, 65% agree that ‘Scotland should do everything to get rid of all kinds of prejudice’. So only a minority uphold what might be considered an avowedly discriminatory outlook, though such an outlook is more common amongst those with fewer educational qualifications. The incidence of discriminatory attitudes varies, however, depending on the circumstances, and indeed the group, in question.

1) Marriage and Relationships

Exactly half would be unhappy if a relative married a transsexual person (described in the survey as ‘someone who has had a sex change operation’). Meanwhile, around a third said the same in respect of an asylum seeker (37%), a Gypsy/Traveller (37%), and someone of the same sex (33%). In contrast only around 10% expressed unhappiness at the possibility that a relative might form a relationship with someone who was black or Asian, Jewish or from a Chinese background.

In general, those with more educational qualifications are less likely to express unhappiness. So also are younger people and those who say they know someone who belongs to a particular group.

Although a sizeable minority of around 30% feel that same-sex sexual relationships are “always” or “mostly” wrong, over half think they are “rarely wrong” or “not wrong at all”. Just over half (54%) agree that same-sex couples should have the “right to marry”¹, while just a fifth (21%) disagree. However, a majority (57%) of those aged 65 and over, together with a majority of those who attend a religious service regularly, believe that sexual relations between two people of the same sex are always or mostly wrong.

2) Employment

Around half say that a person with

depression (51%), a Gypsy/Traveller (48%) or a person aged 70 (49%) would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher. Such views were expressed about someone aged 70 even though three quarters of people oppose a compulsory retirement age. This may suggest that people feel that someone aged 70 might not be able to cope effectively with the particular demands of primary school teaching, rather than opposition to the principle of older people working.

In contrast, hardly anyone at all (4%) said that a black or Asian person would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher, while around 15-20% said the same about a gay man or lesbian or a Muslim person. In general older people, those with few, if any, educational qualifications and those who say they do not know someone from a particular group are all more likely to say that someone would be unsuitable.

Around one in five (22%) feel that women are more suitable than men are to be a primary teacher. A small minority (14%) say that a woman’s role is to stay at home while a man should earn money. Both these views are more common among older people and those with few or no qualifications.

A considerable minority, around 30%, say that ethnic minorities and people from Eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland. Strikingly, this view is particularly common amongst those aged 18-24, perhaps because they are less likely to be in secure employment themselves.

¹ The question wording referred to marriage rather than a civil partnership.

3) Goods and services: The provision of bed and breakfast

The survey asked whether a person running a bed and breakfast business in their own home should be allowed to refuse a booking from certain groups. In all but one case less than 30% feel that a bed and breakfast owner should be able to refuse a booking, ranging from 29% in the case of someone aged 21 to 15% in respect of someone with a learning disability. However, just over half (51%) say it should be permissible for a bed and breakfast owner to refuse a booking to a same-sex couple (this became unlawful in April 2007, after this survey was conducted).

In general, attitudes towards the right to refuse a booking are not sharply divided by age, education or whether someone knows someone from a particular group.

4) The three contexts compared²

In the majority of cases people are more likely to express unhappiness about a possible long-term relationship than they are to say that someone is unsuitable to be a primary school teacher or that a B&B owner should be allowed to refuse a booking. For example, while 34% say they would be unhappy about a relative forming a same sex relationship, just 21% feel that a gay man or lesbian would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher. Similarly, the equivalent figures for a Muslim person are

² It was not possible to ask about exactly the same set of groups across all three sets of circumstances.

24% and 15% respectively. It appears that discriminatory attitudes are more likely to occur in the private realm of relationships than they are in the public realm of employment.

However, there are some notable exceptions. Far more people (51%) say that it should be possible to refuse a bed and breakfast booking than express unhappiness about a close relative forming a same sex relationship (34%) or feel that a gay man or lesbian would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher (21%). Equally, nearly half (48%) think that a Gypsy/Traveller would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher, whereas just over a third (37%) say they would be unhappy about a close relative marrying a Gypsy/Traveller.

Are attitudes changing?

Discriminatory attitudes towards Muslims seem to have become more common in recent years. The same may also be true about ethnic minorities. In contrast, the incidence of discriminatory attitudes towards gay men and lesbians appears to have declined.

In 2003 38% said that Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live here; by 2006 this had increased to 50%. Over the same period there was a four point increase in the proportion who say they would be unhappy about a relative forming a relationship with a Muslim person. Meanwhile, there also appears to be increased concern about the

impact of ethnic minorities on jobs; in the 2006 survey 27% agreed that ethnic minorities take jobs away from others in Scotland compared with 20% in 2002.

There has been an eleven point drop since 2003 in the proportion who say that sexual relations between two men, or between two women, are always or mostly wrong. Similarly, the proportion who disagree that same sex couples should have the right to marry has dropped by eight points over the same period. There has also been a seven point fall in the proportion who feel that a gay man or lesbian would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher. These changes are in line with long-term trends in attitudes to same sex relations.

In other respects there seems to have been little or no change in attitudes. In 2002 28% said that women are more suitable than men as primary school teachers, a figure that has now fallen to 22%. On the other hand, there has been a small increase (from 11% to 14%) in the proportion supporting the view that a woman's place is in the home. Equally, whereas in 2002 26% said that sometimes there is good reason to be prejudiced, 29% did so in 2006.

Covert discrimination and positive action

It is often argued that surveys underestimate the incidence of discriminatory attitudes because people are reluctant to express such views in the presence of an interviewer. However, they

may not be so reticent to criticise the anti-discrimination policies being pursued by government.

However, only 6% say that attempts to secure equal opportunities for women had gone too far. While rather more (21%), say the same about attempts to give equal opportunities to gay men and lesbians, neither figure is very different from the pattern of answers to other questions on the survey about women and gay men and lesbians.

Around one in five (23%) say that attempts to give equal opportunities to black and Asian people have gone too far. This figure is higher than the incidence of discriminatory attitudes towards black and Asian people uncovered by some of the other questions in the survey, but not of others. While only around one in ten (11%) say they would be unhappy about a close relative forming a relationship with a black or Asian person, over a quarter (27%) say that ethnic minorities take jobs away from other people. The contrast suggests that discriminatory attitudes are more likely to be expressed towards black and Asian people as a group than they are towards them as individuals.

Just over a third (35%) think it unfair for a company to provide its female employees with extra training to help secure promotion. Two in five (41%) say the same about black and Asian people. Meanwhile a majority (57%) feel it would be unfair if a person with a disability were automatically

to be interviewed for a job, even if other candidates appear to be better qualified. It appears that such measures are regarded as procedurally 'unfair'.

These forms of positive action are most likely to be opposed by those with more educational qualifications and those in middle class jobs. It seems that those who already have qualifications or a secure senior post are more reluctant to see others helped to obtain the advantages they already have.

Why do people hold discriminatory attitudes?

For the most part, where people live appears to make little difference to the likelihood that they will express a discriminatory attitude. In particular, there is no evidence that those who live in an area where there is a relatively large proportion of Muslims, or a relatively large proportion of black and Asian people, are significantly less likely to express discriminatory attitudes towards those two groups.

Previous research³ found that people are less likely to express discriminatory attitudes if they say they prefer to live in an area that contains lots of different kinds of people. But at the same time it also found that people are less likely to hold discriminatory views about a group if they

feel that members of that group have a lot in common with the rest of society, or if they know someone who belongs to that group.

These results raised a conundrum. Is it the case that people will only stop upholding discriminatory views if they are persuaded that people who belong to other groups are much like themselves? Or might people be less inclined to uphold such views so long as they feel comfortable living in a society that contains lots of people who are acknowledged to be different from each other?

To address these questions two scales were developed from questions included in the survey. One measures perceptions of the degree to which 'other' groups pose a 'cultural threat'; the other attempts to tap the degree to which people are comfortable with overt expressions of cultural difference.

In general, concerns about 'cultural threat' appear to be more strongly linked to the expression of discriminatory attitudes than are attitudes towards 'cultural diversity'. This, however, is more clearly the case in respect of people's attitudes towards relationships than it is attitudes towards the suitability of someone as a primary school teacher. Meanwhile, neither scale is particularly effective at identifying who does and does not support the right of a bed and breakfast owner to refuse someone a booking. Equally, neither scale appears to be strongly linked to people's attitudes towards positive action.

³ Bromley, C. and Curtice, J. (2003), *Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research.

Concerns about 'cultural threat' also appear to be more important for some groups than others. They seem to be particularly important in shaping attitudes towards Muslims, and probably also asylum seekers. Meanwhile cultural threat seems to influence attitudes towards black and Asian people as a group, but less so when

they are referred to as individuals. In contrast cultural threat seems relatively unimportant in influencing attitudes towards someone with a learning disability. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests that different groups may be subject to different kinds of prejudice⁴.

⁴ Abrams, D. and Houston, D. (2006), *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice in Britain*, London: Cabinet Office

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Scottish Government Social Research
1-F (Dockside)
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ
Tel: 0131 244-0874
Fax: 0131 244-7573
Email: socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

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