

Prejudice is being privatised by equality legislation

November 17 2014, by Clare Parkin



Prejudiced attitudes towards minorities have not gone away as a result of equality legislation they have just been privatised, new research by the University of Sheffield has revealed.

The study, which looked at attitudes towards [minority groups](#) and legislation in the UK, identified widespread hostility towards laws and regulations which were viewed as unfairly privileging minority groups.

It found that people alter how they relate to others in public, out of an obligation to comply with the law rather than because they believe in or accept the values enshrined in it.

Many of the respondents claimed their 'true' opinions about minority groups could only be freely voiced in the private setting of their home amongst people they trust where they are immune from legal constraints and the expectations of society.

The research also offers a new angle to understand the rise of populist parties like UKIP.

The majority of those asked in the study acknowledged they know little about the specifics of The Equality Act 2010 but expressed hostility to the form and content of the equality law which they dubbed 'political correctness.'

The research revealed a perception that behaviour in public is regulated and controlled by equality legislation. This was seen as restricting natural or normal ways of behaving in public space.

The workplace was named as an area where people viewed these forms of regulation as being particularly prevalent and feared expressing prejudice there because of the risk of legal sanction or disciplinary action. It was also felt these forms of legislation unduly privileged minority groups.

Author of the report, Professor Gill Valentine, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of Social Sciences said: "Equality legislation produces an expectation that the UK has a progressive and cosmopolitan public culture yet rather than prejudiced views disappearing, as a consequence of the obligation to comply, it is just changing its form. Blatant public expressions of intolerance are becoming less commonplace but privatised and discrete forms of prejudice persist. A privatisation of prejudice is taking place."

The research says this causes problems for both those who the legislation

seeks to protect - because it makes it more difficult to expose and challenge prejudice views - and for those critical of the social expectations equality legislation creates, because it breeds a sense of anger and frustration that their views are being silenced in public by the law.

The study claims the privatisation of prejudice provides fertile ground for anti-immigration parties such as UKIP with disaffected members of society, unable to express their anxieties about minority groups in [public](#) because of what they perceive as 'political correctness,' doing so through the ballot box instead.

The research is based on in-depth multi-stage qualitative research involving 30 individual case studies from a range of social backgrounds.

More information: The full brief relating to this research is available at livedifference.group.shef.ac.uk/

Provided by University of Sheffield

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