

Study shows racial stereotyping toward young children

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Credit: US Department of Education, Flickr

New research from The Australian National University (ANU), Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and the University of Michigan have documented young children and youth of colour in the US face significant racial stereotyping from adults who work with them.

For the first time this national study has analysed stereotypes held by

White adults who work or volunteer with [children](#) across the US, examining their reported attitudes towards adults, teenagers and children from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. This includes attitudes towards Black and Hispanic/Latinx groups, but also towards those from Native American, Asian and Arab backgrounds.

Lead author Associate Professor Naomi Priest of the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods said the study found high levels of negative racial stereotyping towards non-Whites of all ages among adults working or volunteering with children.

Highest levels of [negative attitudes](#) were found towards Blacks across all stereotypes measured. These attitudes were: being lazy, unintelligent, violent and having unhealthy habits.

Native American, and Hispanic/Latinx people were seen as similarly negative on several stereotypes. These were most pronounced towards adults, but seen even towards [young children](#) aged 0-8 years.

Black children were seen less negatively than Black adults, but were seen more negatively than children from other racial groups except for Native American and Hispanic/Latinx.

Young Black children aged 0-8 years were almost three times more likely to be rated as being lazy than White adults, with Native American and Hispanic/Latinx young children also more likely to be considered lazy than White adults.

Young Black children were more than twice as likely to be rated as unintelligent or violence-prone compared to White children of the same age, with young Hispanic/Latinx children also seen as more unintelligent or violence prone than White children.

Some of the strongest levels of negative stereotyping reported by White adults working with children were reported towards teenagers, with teen Black and Native Americans close to 10 times more likely to be considered lazy than White adults.

Black and Hispanic/Latinx teens were between one and a half to two times more likely to be considered violent prone and unintelligent than White adults and White teens.

Associate Professor Priest said "these findings are highly concerning given the strong scientific evidence that negative racial attitudes are associated with poorer quality care and services and with disparities in health, education and social outcomes.

"That these negative attitudes have been found towards even young children aged 0-8 among adults who work or volunteer with them has serious potential consequences for these children's outcomes throughout life," she said.

"Countering these negative stereotypes among adults who work with children, and protecting children from minority backgrounds from the potential impact of these attitudes, is an important strategy to address racial disparities."

This analysis was conducted by Dr. Naomi Priest during her time as a Visiting Scientist with co-author Professor David Williams, Florence Sprague Norman and Laura Smart Norman Professor of Public Health at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and uses national data collected by the University of Michigan's National Voices project.

"This study is a wake-up call for every professional group who works with children in the U.S.-doctors, teachers, police, child care workers, and others," said Professor Williams.

"It suggests that many professionals, with good intentions, may be treating America's most valuable possession, our little children, badly without even being aware of it."

The research will be published in a paper titled "Stereotyping across intersections of race and age: Racial stereotyping among White [adults](#) working with children" in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

More information: Naomi Priest et al. Stereotyping across intersections of race and age: Racial stereotyping among White adults working with children, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0201696](#)

Provided by Australian National University

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