Racism - Universities Institutional Racism

"Racism in universities: There's a sense you don't fit in"

"Covert racism and discrimination persist in the UK's colleges and universities, according to new film, Witness, commissioned by the University and College Union (UCU). The project, initiated by the UCU Black Members' Standing Committee, chronicles the experiences of the union's black members.

Gurnham Singh, a lecturer in social work, explains: "There is a massive abundance of what are called micro-aggressions … it's like death by a thousand cuts. When you experience them all the time, those micro-agressions have a cumulative effect."

Kirsten Forkert, a lecturer in media theory, says: "There is an assumption in higher education that it is already a progressive workplace and problems like racism don't exist. So when you try to raise this issue the response is: 'We don't have to deal with issues like that.'"

She adds that that job insecurity and casualisation present more of a worry for ethnic minority staff. "There is a sense that your face doesn't fit," she says.

Gargi Bhattacharyya, professor of sociology, says it is "very difficult for staff in further and higher education to explicitly talk about racism at work".

"People use codes, or only talk about it in a small group, but in the wider workplace people find it difficult to use the 'R' word," she explains.

Josephine Kwhali raises the issue of supposedly unconscious bias. "I don't think some of it is unconscious, I think that's a get out clause," she says. "After years of anti-racist debates, policies, strategies, universities banging on about increasing diversity ... if it still is unconscious, there really is something worrying about what it will take for the unconscious to become conscious."

The UCU, which is holding a day of action against workplace racism on 10 February, has also released the results of a survey of more than 600 black members, which found that although direct discrimination on the basis of colour is rare, more insidious forms of racism are commonplace. The results show that black staff are less likely to take up high-grade posts than white colleagues, and are more vulnerable to the stresses caused by bullying at work.

The latest figures from the Runnymede Trust show that the overwhelming majority of professors – 92% – are white, with just 15 black academics in senior management roles across the entire British university system.

One respondent to the UCU survey wrote: "Black and minority ethnic staff, who are often more qualified than their counterparts, are often bypassed through indirect action or behaviours."

Meanwhile, seven out of ten respondents reported that they were sometimes or often subject to bullying and harassment from managers.

One said: "In the past 15 months my line manager has threatened me with disciplinary action on four occasions and started a grievance against me once. None of his threats have been taken up by the institution, which also refused the grievance. At our last staff meeting he referred to me as 'unprofessional'".

When asked to rank the best measures to challenge racism, "effective sanctions against perpetrators" was the preferred option, followed by "improved support for black staff", and "better training for senior staff"."

Source: The Guardian

Link: https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/feb/04/racism-in-universities-there-is-a-sense-your-face-doesnt-fit