

Equalities

Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2010: Attitudes to discrimination and positive action

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This paper summarises key findings from a module of questions on attitudes to discrimination and positive action included in the *Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA)* survey 2010. The survey explores attitudes to discrimination in relation to gender, age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and transgender. This is the third time a module of questions on attitudes to discrimination has been included in SSA, enabling analysis of changes in attitudes over time. The SSA survey involves around 1,500 interviews annually, with respondents selected using random probability sampling to ensure that the results are robust and representative of the Scottish population.

Main Findings

In 2010, only a minority of people in Scotland (28%) felt there was sometimes good reason to be prejudiced, while two-thirds felt Scotland should do everything it can to get rid of all kinds of prejudice.

Some sections of society – particularly those with lower levels of educational attainment and older people – were more likely than others to feel prejudice was sometimes acceptable, and to express discriminatory views about particular groups.

In contrast, people who knew someone from a particular group were less likely to express discriminatory views about someone from that group.

Discriminatory attitudes were particularly common in relation to Gypsy/Travellers and transgender people. For example, 55% of people said they would be unhappy with someone who cross-dresses in public forming a relationship with a close family member, while 37% said the same of a Gypsy/Traveller.

Although 75% of people felt that it is wrong to make someone retire because they have reached a certain age, 39% felt that someone aged 70 was unsuitable to be a primary school teacher.

41% of people felt someone who experiences depression from time-to-time was unsuitable to be a primary teacher.

While 82% of people felt mothers should be entitled to 6 months paid leave after they have a child, only 46% said the same for fathers.

Less than a quarter of people felt that a bank should be allowed to ask employees to remove crucifixes (15%), headscarves (23%) or turbans (24%). However, 69% thought they should be allowed to ask a Muslim employee to remove a veil that covered their face.

For the most part, the extent to which people express discriminatory attitudes has changed little since 2006. However, there has been a further significant decline in expression of discriminatory attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. Moreover, support for same sex marriage has increased – by 2010, 61% agreed that gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to marry.

There has been a small increase in the proportion who felt that people from ethnic minority groups and people from Eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland.

Public views of positive actions to promote equality varied widely depending on both the action and the group in question.

People were more likely to feel that only interviewing women for a job would be unfair (79%) than to say the same about increasing training opportunities for female staff (37%).

More people (48%) felt that providing more training to black or Asian staff would be unfair than said the same in relation to female staff.

Opposition to positive action in job recruitment and training was strong among young people and graduates – two groups who on other measures were generally *least* likely to express discriminatory attitudes.

Introduction

This report presents key findings from a study of public attitudes towards discrimination and positive action. Based on data from the *Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA)* survey, the study aimed to:

- Measure the extent and character of discriminatory attitudes in Scotland in 2010
- Assess the extent of support for positive action to try and achieve equality for different groups, and
- Examine how attitudes have changed over time.

It focused on discriminatory *attitudes*, rather than *behaviours*, and examined attitudes towards different groups of people currently protected by equalities legislation in the UK, including: men and women; older people; people of different religions; gay men and lesbians; disabled people; ethnic minority groups; and transgender people.

The survey included two sets of detailed questions – one about personal relationships and one about employment – in the expectation that attitudes towards a particular group are likely to vary depending on the context.

General attitudes to prejudice

In 2010, only a minority (28%) of people in Scotland felt that there was sometimes good reason to be prejudiced against certain groups, while two-thirds (66%) believed Scotland should do everything it can to get rid of all kinds of prejudice.

However, at almost 3 in 10 the minority that felt prejudice can sometimes be justifiable was a substantial one. Moreover, some sections of society were more likely to hold this view than others.

In particular, those with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to think this, as were older people. Conversely, people with a preference for living in a more diverse area, as well as those who felt that immigration had a positive impact on Scotland, were less likely to feel there was ever a good reason for prejudice. Similarly, those who knew personally someone from a different racial or ethnic background, a Muslim, or someone with a learning disability were all less likely than those who did not know anyone from these groups to feel that prejudice is ever justifiable.

Relationships

Respondents were asked if they would be happy or unhappy if a close relative married or formed a long-term relationship with someone from each of ten different groups. Responses varied widely depending on the group in question:

Over half (55%) said they would be unhappy about a family member forming a relationship with someone who cross-dresses in public.

49% said the same of someone who has had a sex change operation.

37% would be unhappy about a Gypsy/Traveller joining their family circle.

30% would be unhappy if a family member formed a relationship with someone of the same sex.

23% would be unhappy about a family member forming a relationship with a Muslim, compared with 18% for a Hindu, 9% for a Jewish person and just 2% (of non-Christian respondents) for a Christian.

1 in 5 (21%) would be unhappy about a family member marrying someone who experiences depression from time to time.

1 in 10 (9%) would be unhappy about a black or Asian person joining their family circle.

Differences in responses by age and education were striking. Those aged 65 and older and, to a lesser extent, those aged 55-64, were more likely than younger generations to say they would be unhappy at the prospect of someone from any of these groups (except Christians) joining their family circle.

Those with lower levels of educational attainment were also significantly more likely to say they would be unhappy if a close relative formed a relationship with someone from most of these groups. In contrast, knowing someone from a particular group was associated with being less likely to feel unhappy with someone from this group joining your family circle.

In 2010, 50% said that sexual relationships between two adults of the same sex are either rarely wrong or not wrong at all, compared with 27% who thought they were always or mostly wrong. A majority (61%) agreed that gay or lesbian couples should have the right to marry one another if they want to.

Employment

Respondents were asked how suitable or unsuitable different kinds of people would be for the job of primary school teacher. Again, there were wide variations in attitudes towards people from different groups taking on this role:

Gypsy/Travellers were most likely to be considered unsuitable – 46% said this.

Similar proportions felt that someone who experiences depression from time to time (41%) and someone aged 70 (39%) would be unsuitable for such a position.

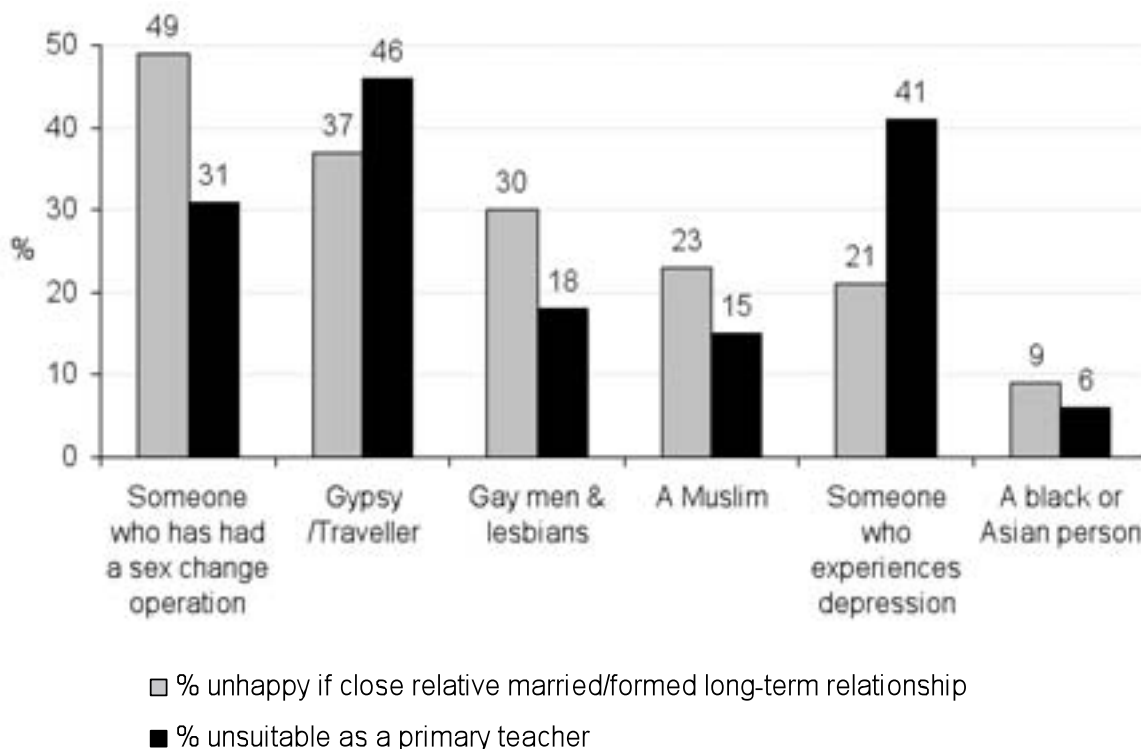
3 in 10 (31%) felt someone who has had a sex change operation would be an unsuitable primary teacher.

18% said the same of gay men and lesbians, 15% of a Muslim, and just 6% of a black or Asian person.

Again, older people, those with lower levels of educational attainment and those who did not know anyone from the group in question were more likely to feel that members of these groups were unsuitable primary teachers.

Although very few people (just 2%) felt men would be unsuitable primary teachers, 17% gave responses that suggested they considered women to be more suited to this role than men. People also held different views about paid maternity and paternity leave. While 82% agreed that mothers should be entitled to six months paid leave after having a child, just 46% felt that fathers should have an equivalent right.

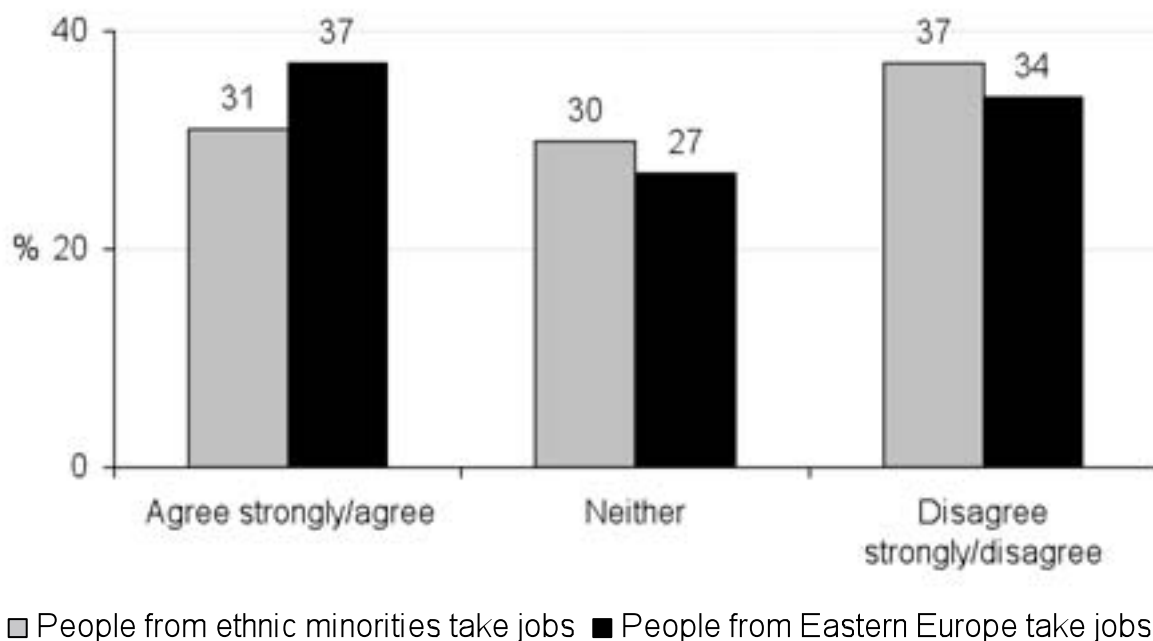
Figure 1 - Discriminatory attitudes in different contexts



In relation to older people working, three-quarters (75%) felt that it is wrong to make people retire just because they have reached a certain age, compared with 22% who thought older people ought to be made to retire to make way for younger age groups. However, even among those who said it is wrong to make people retire when they reach a certain age, 35% felt that someone aged 70 would be unsuitable for primary teaching.

Although relatively few people felt that a black or Asian person would be unsuitable as a primary teacher, or said they would be unhappy if someone who was black or Asian married a close family member, a higher proportion believed that ‘People from ethnic minorities take jobs away from other people in Scotland’ (31%). Even more (37%) believed that ‘People who come here from Eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland’.

Figure 2 - Beliefs about whether people from ethnic minorities and people from Eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland



Sample size: 1366 (all respondents who completed a self-completion questionnaire)

Religious dress and symbols

Religious dress and symbols have been a particular focus of debate about religious and cultural diversity in the UK in recent years. Respondents were asked whether they thought a bank interviewing people for a job serving customers ought to be able to ask prospective employees to remove particular religious symbols or items of dress while at work.

People were least likely to accept that a bank should be able to insist a Christian woman remove a crucifix while at work – 15% thought this. Slightly more (24% and 23% respectively) thought the bank should be able to insist a Sikh man remove a turban and that a Muslim woman remove a headscarf that did not cover her face. In contrast, a far higher proportion – 69% – said the bank should be able to insist a female Muslim employee remove a veil that did cover her face.

Table 1 - Should a bank be able to insist employees remove religious dress or symbols? (column %)

	Sikh man with turban	Christian woman with crucifix	Muslim woman with headscarf	Muslim woman with veil
	%	%	%	%
Yes, definitely should	12	6	10	41
Yes, probably should	12	9	13	28
No, probably should not	35	34	44	14
No, definitely should not	34	46	28	11
Can't choose	6	5	4	4
(Not answered)	1	1	1	1
Sample size	1366	1366	1366	1366

Attitudes towards a bank's rights *vis-à-vis* their employees with respect to a Sikh man wearing a turban and a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf varied in much the same way as did most other attitudes covered by the survey – older people and those with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to say the bank ought to be able to insist that an employee remove these items.

However, there were fewer differences in attitudes towards the veil, with a majority of both graduates and those with no qualifications supporting the bank's right to ask that this be removed. Support for the bank's right to ask a Christian woman to remove a crucifix was highest among those aged *under 35*.

Promoting equality and positive action

As well as asking questions aimed at tapping the extent to which people hold discriminatory views, SSA 2010 also asked about attitudes towards promoting equality and different kinds of positive action.

Relatively few people (6% in 2010) felt that attempts to promote equal opportunities for women had gone too far. In contrast, 23% felt attempts to promote equality for black and Asian people had gone too far, while 20% said the same with respect to gay men and lesbians. However, similar proportions (26% and 22% respectively) felt that attempts to promote equal opportunities for these two groups had not gone far enough.

Most (76%) agreed that shops and banks should take action to reduce barriers to disabled people using their services, even if this leads to higher prices. An even higher proportion (93%) believed that providing information about public services in 'easy read' formats for people with learning disabilities is a good use of government money.

However, attitudes to providing information about public services in translation for people who do not speak English well were more divided – 47% felt this was a good use of government money, but 34% thought it was a bad use.

Respondents were also asked whether they felt providing funding for organisations that focus on helping particular groups of people find work was a good or a bad use of government money. Support for this kind of targeted action varied depending on the group in question – three-quarters felt that funding this kind of support for people over 50 or for people who experience depression from time to time was a good use of money, compared with between 31% and 43% who said the same with respect to funding support for Gypsy/Travellers, gay men and lesbians, Muslims and black and Asian people to find work.

Attitudes to different kinds of positive action that employers could take to try and increase the representativeness of their workforce varied depending on both the group in question and the nature of the action. While only 37% felt that increasing training opportunities for women would be unfair, almost half (48%) felt that providing more training to black or Asian staff would be.

A majority felt that giving a suitably qualified disabled candidate an automatic interview for a job or only interviewing women for a post would be unfair (63% and 79% respectively). In contrast with findings on discriminatory attitudes, it was the more highly educated and those in managerial or professional professions who were most likely to view these kinds of positive action as unfair.

Table 2 - Views on giving money to organisations that help particular groups find work (row %)

		Very good/ good use of govt money	Neither good nor bad use	Bad/very bad use of govt money
Gypsy/Travellers	%	31	25	42
Gay men and lesbians	%	38	30	30
Muslims	%	39	28	32
Black and Asian people	%	43	28	28
People who experience depression from time to time	%	74	18	7
People over 50	%	75	16	9

Are attitudes changing?

For the most part, the survey found relatively little change since 2006 in the extent to which people express discriminatory attitudes. There were, however, two main exceptions to this: a further decline in discriminatory attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, and a small increase in the proportion who felt that people from ethnic minority groups and people from Eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland.

At the same time, the proportion of people who viewed positive action to help increase the labour market prospects of black and Asian people and disabled people as unfair also increased.

The biggest and most rapid change in discriminatory attitudes in the last decade has been in views of gay men and lesbians. In 2000, 48% felt sexual relationships between two adults of the same sex were always or mostly wrong. By 2010 this figure had fallen to just over a quarter (27%). At the same time, support for same sex marriage has increased from 41% in 2002 to 61% in 2010, while more people said a gay man or lesbian would be a suitable primary school teacher in 2010 compared with 2006 (56% compared with 48%).

These changes in attitudes have occurred across most groups in Scottish society, including people brought up in an era when male same sex relationships were illegal (although it remains the case that older are more likely than younger people to hold discriminatory views towards gay men and lesbians).

The only questions on which the incidence of discriminatory views increased between 2006 and 2010, albeit only very slightly, related to the perception that people from ethnic minority groups and people from Eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland. The proportion of people who agreed with these propositions increased from 27% to 31% for people from ethnic minority groups, and from 32% to 37% for people from Eastern Europe.

Table 3 - Trends in attitudes towards same sex relationships, 2000-2010

	2000	2004	2005	2010
	%	%	%	%
Always/mostly wrong	48	41	40	27
Sometimes wrong	8	8	10	9
Rarely wrong	8	7	9	8
Not wrong at all	29	37	35	50
<i>Sample size</i>	1663	1637	1549	1495

At the same time, the proportion of people who regarded positive action to increase the labour market prospects of black and Asian people and disabled people as unfair increased slightly (from 41% to 48% and from 57% to 63% respectively). These changes suggest that the advent of the recession may have had some impact on attitudes towards the position of certain groups within the labour market in particular.

Other changes since 2006 included:

A fall in the proportions of people who felt someone aged 70 and someone who experiences depression from time to time would be unsuitable primary teachers, and

A fall in the proportion of people who regarded women as more suitable for primary teaching than men.

Conclusion

For the most part, only a minority of people in Scotland hold views that could be described as discriminatory. However, some groups – particularly Gypsy/Travellers and transgender people – appear to be the subjects of fairly widespread discriminatory attitudes.

The findings also suggest that discriminatory attitudes towards a group of people with particular characteristics may often be more common than discriminatory attitudes towards individual members of that group, possibly reflecting concerns about cultural diversity and labour market competition.

The incidence of discriminatory views is not evenly spread across Scottish society, with certain sections (e.g. older people and those with lower levels of educational attainment) still relatively more likely to express such views.

All other things being equal, we might expect the incidence of discrimination to decline over time as a result of generational change, increasing educational attainment and increasing contact between people with different characteristics. However, this process is not necessarily inevitable.

The small increase in discriminatory views with respect to the perceived labour market position of ethnic minority groups and people from Eastern Europe since 2006 highlights the possible impact of the recession on attitudes – and provides a reminder for policy makers that external events may impact on public attitudes that otherwise appear to be shifting in a more liberal direction.

Policy makers concerned with reducing discriminatory views cannot afford to be complacent, and need to be willing and able to address the specific circumstances that give rise to discriminatory attitudes towards particular groups.

Support for positive action varied widely depending on both the action and the group in question, but there appeared to be particularly strong resistance to actions that may violate people's notions of equality of process. Moreover, opposition to positive action involving

preferential treatment in recruitment or training was strong among those generally *least* likely to express discriminatory attitudes.

If policy makers do wish to pursue positive action in particular areas, substantial effort may be required to convince the public – including those generally opposed to discrimination – of the merits of such action in achieving equality of outcome.

Finally, the increase in support for same sex marriage since 2006 suggests that a majority of people in Scotland would support same sex relationships being treated in law in the same manner as heterosexual relationships.

Methodology

The *Scottish Social Attitudes* (SSA) survey involves around 1,500 interviews annually, with respondents selected using random probability sampling to ensure that the results are robust and representative of the Scottish population. The 2010 survey, which was conducted between June and October 2010, involved face-to-face interviews and a self-completion questionnaire. This research findings also draws on findings from several previous years of SSA when respondents were asked the same questions, in order to assess how public attitudes have changed over time.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, or would like further copies of this research findings summary document please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131-244 0874.



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