

# INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON WORKPLACE RACISM

## What is racism?

Racism happens in *many places*, including in workplaces.

Racism can be *intentional or unintentional* – sometimes well-intentioned people can do or say something racist even though they do not see themselves as racist.

Racism can be *conscious or unconscious* – sometimes people may not be aware that what they said or did is racist.

For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, racism manifests in 2 primary ways: *institutional* (or systemic) racism and *interpersonal* racism.

Whatever form racism takes, it has the *same effect* – racism excludes, marginalises, and/or disadvantages Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

### Institutional Racism

### Interpersonal Racism

#### Description

Happens when unfair organisational policies and practices, result in different access to opportunities based on someone's race/cultural background.<sup>1</sup>

Happens between individuals. It is the expression of stereotypes, dislike or disdain for a race of people other than a person's own, or the dominant or majority race.

#### Examples

An Indigenous person can't apply for a job because the *job requires an educational qualification*. Indigenous Australians are statistically less likely than non-Indigenous Australians to have educational qualifications due in part to their historical exclusion from the education system.

Workplace issues raised by Indigenous employees are treated less seriously and less likely to be investigated than workplace issues raised by non-Indigenous employees.

Examples of this include *social exclusion* (such as actively avoiding a person or ignoring requests to help or participate), racial *stereotypes* (such as those about competency or honesty, which block career opportunities), racist *harassment* (such as name-calling, jokes or comments) and racial *threats*.

#### Effect

Indigenous people being kept in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, despite them possibly having the skills to perform at the higher classification.

Indigenous people feeling unwelcome, undervalued, excluded, and humiliated, because of their cultural background.

#### Linked

Interpersonal and institutional forms of racism are linked. When organisations address cultural safety at an institutional (organisation-wide) level and deal with incidents of interpersonal racism through effective policies and practices, this creates a positive workplace culture in which interpersonal racism is less likely to occur.

## What Does Racism Look Like?

### APPEARANCE RACISM

*In previous workplaces due to having fairer skin I've been told I'm not a real Aborigine or that the real Aborigines live in the top end.*

59% of Indigenous workers received comments about the way they look or should look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, sometimes, often or always

### LOOKED DOWN ON

*If I share my heritage, then every error or mistake I make comes under scrutiny and...if I do well then I am an 'exceptional Aboriginal' who is out of the ordinary.*

Almost six in ten (58%) Indigenous workers reported feeling as though because they were Indigenous, people at work thought they were better than them, sometimes, often or always.

### ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

*It was my manager in my most recent job that said, "you people don't work do you?"*

56% of Indigenous workers reported hearing non-Indigenous employees make inappropriate comments or assumptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (e.g. about 'walkabout', education and career ambitions).

### RACIST SLURS AND JOKES

*In some work situations there had been blatant racism - being called a "mongrel breed" or "you abos get everything for free", "how did you get this job?" and more.*

44% of Indigenous workers reported hearing racial or ethnic slurs or jokes about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at work, sometimes, often or very often.

### SEEN AS A THREAT OR AS DISHONEST

Over a third reported people acting as if they were afraid of them because they are Indigenous (37%), or people thinking they were dishonest because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (36%).

### NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

*I have [been] treated as being less capable than other staff. I was actually told I speak really well - "Did you go to a Boarding School or a Private School because you speak and write really well".*

40% reported feeling that they were ignored or not taken seriously by their boss because they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander,

## What is the Impact of Racism?

### Drives Down Job Satisfaction

*I can get nervous and anxious about the point of my Aboriginality being brought up as the conversation can either go one of two ways - supported or casual racism leaks in.*

Indigenous workers experiencing unfair treatment at work because of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity were **two and a half times less likely to always be satisfied** with their job (13% always satisfied) compared to those who hardly ever or never experienced it (32% always satisfied).

### Reduces Recommendation of Workplace

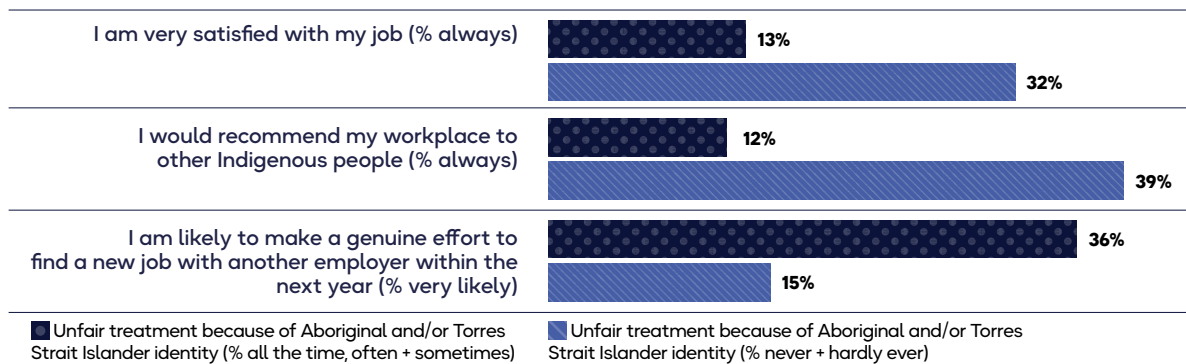
*I would certainly not recommend this workplace to any Aboriginal person without very thick skin.*

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents who experienced unfair treatment at work were also **three times less likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people** (12% always recommend versus 39%).

### Reduces Retention

*I eventually left that organisation as I worked hard for two years without any success and it took its emotional toll on me.*

Indigenous workers who experienced unfair treatment at work were **twice as likely to be looking for a new employer** in the next 12 months (36% very likely) compared to those who hardly ever or never experienced it (15%).



## Do Indigenous Workers Have Effective Workplace Support for Racism?

*When I told the Manager what my co-worker had said they just turned their head and looked like they were laughing.*

*[They] would say that it was taken out of context, a misunderstanding, because of over sensitivity, I was playing the race-card etc...*

Indigenous workers in organisations with anti-discrimination compliance training that references Indigenous racism and a racism complaint procedure are almost half as likely to have experienced racist comments or jokes – but only 21% of Indigenous workers are in organisations that actually provide both.



# CALL TO ACTION

If you want to be part of the change in your workplace:

**1. Become an ally, rather than a bystander:**

- Be curious
- Be committed
- Show your support

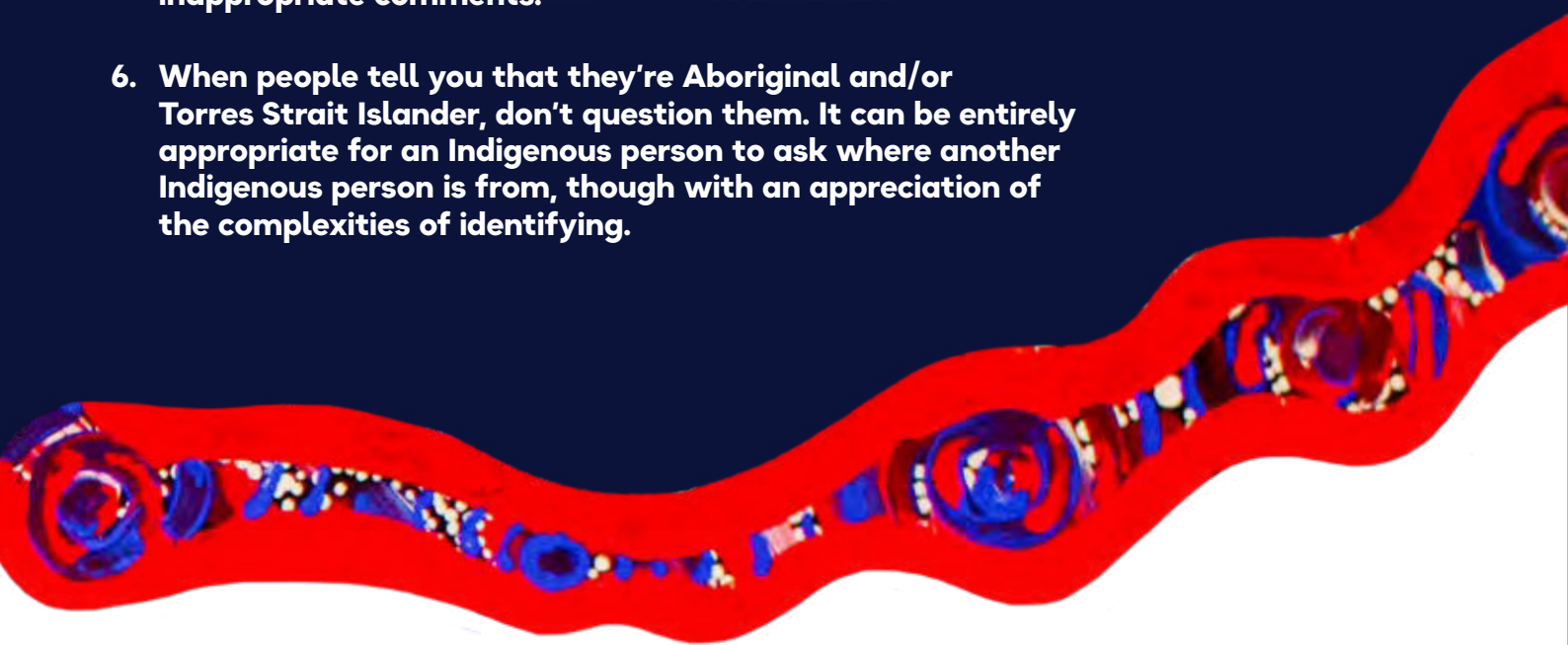
**2. Find out as much as you can about your local community and where you live – you live on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land – you don't need to go somewhere else to experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land, you live on it every day.**

**3. When you do have the training, participate with an open heart and genuine curiosity.**

**4. Get involved in events – go to the events, ask questions, support them with an open heart.**

**5. Have the courage to speak up at work when you hear inappropriate comments.**

**6. When people tell you that they're Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, don't question them. It can be entirely appropriate for an Indigenous person to ask where another Indigenous person is from, though with an appreciation of the complexities of identifying.**



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