



Press Release

'Doing Equality Consciously: Understanding Unconscious Bias and its Role and Implications in the Achievement of Equality in Hong Kong and Asia'

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'Doing Equality Consciously: Understanding Unconscious Bias and its Role and Implications in the Achievement of Equality in Hong Kong and Asia' is a project funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and housed at the University of Hong Kong's Women's Studies Research Centre (WSRC) and the Faculty of Law's Centre for Comparative and Public Law (CCPL). The prevalence and impact of unconscious bias has been widely documented in studies across different disciplines and fields, including in educational, corporate, healthcare, and legal sectors. Drawing together literature on unconscious bias, social identity theory, and intersectionality and using results from primary quantitative research, this study is the first of its kind in Asia to provide insights into the nature of unconscious bias in this context and the potential for interventions in different settings to help address such biases. The study recruited a total of 112 participants from secondary schools, universities, and the corporate sector and used the implicit association test (IAT) to assess participants' unconscious biases. An intervention was designed and implemented to test the effects of such measures on respondents' bias levels.

The study presented clear evidence of the widespread prevalence of unconscious bias in relation to racial and gender stereotypes across different groups of participants, with racial biases being stronger than gender-based biases. It was found that the intervention was effective in reducing bias levels significantly in relation to gender-based biases but not racial biases, reflecting that the latter is more entrenched and requires more complex approaches to address it. Significantly, the study also found that social group networks and their exposure could impact the effectiveness of intervention. Therefore, while intervention tools have the potential to reduce and potentially eliminate unconscious bias, they must be well-tailored to different groups and contexts and carefully fine-tuned for different types and manifestations of biases. The findings further showed that a failure run effective post-IAT interventions may have negative effects on bias levels.

The research report makes a number of KEY recommendations to address unconscious bias and its detrimental impact in relation to race and gender in Hong Kong. The recommendations include: (1) institutionalising training in governmental, educational, corporate, health, civil society, legal, and social welfare organisations; (2) incorporating implicit bias awareness in early childhood education; (3) integrating unconscious bias research in law and policy; (4) calling on the Equal Opportunities Commission to issue guidelines and codes of practice in relation to addressing unconscious bias in various domains; and (5) mandating data collection and disaggregation across different sectors. The study will hopefully be the first phase of a long-term endeavour to develop a better understanding of unconscious bias in Hong Kong and in Asia more broadly.

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