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 Protester holding an anti-hate sign at a rally

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News_

COVID-19 and hate crime in Australia

7 May 2020

Countering prejudice-motivated abuse related to COVID-19

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An organisation co-run by Professor Gail Mason from the University of Sydney Law School, the Australian Hate Crime Network (AHCN), has called for greater vigilance in countering racism and other forms of bigotry that is erupting amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic.

“There are signs of a recent surge in racist incidents against Asian Australians and international students.

“These incidents appear to be triggered by racist assumptions that people from China or those who look ‘Asian’ are to blame for the COVID-19 pandemic,” Professor Mason said.

Both the Australian Asian Alliance and the Australian Human Rights Commission have received reports of physical and verbal abuse of this nature – in the streets, shops, public transport and elsewhere. In addition, there

are incidents of racist graffiti and vandalism of the homes of Asian-Australians.

Government leadership to address incidents

The AHCN commends Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese and the Queensland Police for condemning and identifying racist incidents against Asian Australians that are related to the virus.

“We need more of these public statements from police leaders, condemning the abhorrent nature of these racist attacks,” Professor Mason said.

Widespread prejudice abuse

The AHCN has found that the problem of prejudice-motivated abuse related to COVID-19 extends beyond the Asian community to other targets of prejudice and bigotry, such as Jewish, Muslim, disabled and LGBTI communities.

Members of the AHCN have been documenting the many other forms of online virus-related abuse, including antisemitism. Australian racists online have been sharing various images of Jews as the coronavirus, as well as accusing ‘the Jews’ of creating and spreading COVID-19, and of wishing that all Jews die from the virus.

The AHCN’s Muslim members have noted reports that since March 28, tweets with the hashtag #CoronaJihad have appeared nearly 300,000 times, and have potentially been seen by 165 million people on Twitter, according to data shared with TIME by Equality Labs, a digital human rights group.

“It is concerning that some conservative religious leaders in the US and elsewhere are linking the virus to LGBTIQ people and attributing the virus to God’s wrath for the concessions meted out by way of same-sex marriage,” Associate Professor Nicole Asquith, AHCN Secretary said.

Comprehensive data collection required on a national level

While reports demonstrate horrendous incidents of anti-Asian racism in Australia since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AHCN notes that it is not possible to state with certainty whether there has been an increase in incidents due to the lack of comprehensive or consistent data collection systems in Australia; while some state police forces do collect data on hate crime, most do not.

“This lack of consistent, official and centralised data on hate crime was identified more than a year ago after the Christchurch massacre,” Professor Mason said.

“We would like to hear from law enforcement agencies around the country about what progress has been made to monitor and track hate crime since then. We need a national data base for hate-motivated crime.”

About the Australian Hate Crime Network (AHCN)

Co-Convened by [Professor Gail Mason](#) of Sydney Law School, the AHCN is a partnership comprised of academics, community representatives and government organisations. It is dedicated to developing priorities and outcomes that address and prevent hate crime and hate incidents in Australia. The AHCN advocates for improvement in data collection, law enforcement and criminal justice responses to hate crime.

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