

Racial discrimination seen in Townsville

By JACK WATERFORD

An attempt to scientifically measure discrimination in the Queensland city of Townsville has produced hard evidence that Aborigines are being actively and subtly discriminated against in housing, employment and services in hotels there.

A research team led by Professor Knud Larsen, an American now at the University of

Queensland, used blacks and whites in similar situations to measure different responses.

Their research, published by the Office of Community Relations, showed job discrimination to be widespread, some discrimination in all housing cases, and markedly different treatment in hotel service.

With the job survey, the researchers proceeded on the basis that discrimination would not be openly shown. The telephone was used for seeking interviews for jobs which had been advertised in the Townsville newspaper.

'Differences in response'

A man would call, introducing himself by name, and adding "I am an Aboriginal from Yarrabah. I read your ad in the paper and would like to make an appointment with you, please".

About 20 minutes later, a white would ring, using an Anglo-Saxon name and exactly the same form of words but omitting the reference to being an Aboriginal.

"Any difference in response must therefore be attributed to discrimination based upon that single qualifier", the report said.

The applications embraced jobs

single qualifier", the report said.

The applications embraced jobs ranging from unskilled to professional. Attempts were made to get past secretaries to actual decision-makers.

Refused

In half the cases where the white was offered an interview, the black was refused one, being told the position was filled.

"When we add the probable large numbers who are rejected spuriously after some assessment, we can begin to grasp the magnitude of employment discrimination", the report said.

magnitude of employment discrimination", the report said.

With the housing survey, two women, one black and one white, sought housing either from advertisements in the newspaper or rental agencies.

Each woman was the same age, dressed similarly, gave the same account of her marital status and

number of children, both said their husbands were railway gangers and were looking for the same type of accommodation.

Each woman made 18 applications, in seven of which it appeared from identical responses that the house in question was not available because it had already been let.

Commitment

In seven of the remaining 11, the black woman was told the house had already been let, while the white woman, coming afterward, was told that it was available. In one case, the house was available, but with a higher bond for the black woman. In another case, a real-estate agent told the black woman that the only house available was one for \$80 a week, but informed the white woman that he had one at \$35 and another at \$45.

In two other cases, agencies invited whites to come again to check if anything had come in, but did not do this for the black woman.

"We are reporting 100 per cent discrimination, that is, every single case which could not be explained by prior commitment [and identical response] indicated discrimination against the Aboriginal applicant", the report said.

"Here we can see clearly why Aboriginal people are out of the housing market. Discrimination in housing prevents Aboriginal

people from obtaining decent housing for their families.

"A year after the Anti-Discrimination Act, housing discrimination is blatant in Townsville. The facts speak for themselves".

With the hotel experiment, three women went into each of

town the hotel experiment, three women went into each of Townsville's 13 hotels. One was a well-dressed Aboriginal woman, the other two, one white and one black, were dressed identically in thongs, tee-shirts and jeans.

Experiments

Each asked for a drink and, 30 seconds later, for ice in it. The experiments were carried out with at least 30 minutes between the arrival of one and the departure of another.

In all cases, the white woman received service without any discrimination. In four cases, the well-dressed woman was given service but with some measure of discrimination, the sloppily dressed black woman was refused service in three hotels and given service with discrimination in another. In nine hotels, both black women were served without discrimination.

The researchers concluded that dress codes used to exclude Aborigines did not apply to whites and could be considered racist.

They also pointed out that hotel policy on serving Aborigines appeared to change from day to day, so that an Aboriginal could never be certain of receiving service.