Reviewer's report

Title: Mental health impacts of racial discrimination in Australian racial and ethnic minority communities: A cross-sectional survey

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Reviewer: Elizabeth Brondolo

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The aim of the study reported in this paper was to test hypotheses about a) sociodemographic, cultural and phenotypic predictors of discrimination and b) the relationship of discrimination to psychological distress in a large and diverse sample of Australian individuals. The paper has a number of strengths, including the diverse sample. Some of the findings are new and interesting, although much of the data replicates existing and well studied issues. The theoretical rationale for the paper is under-developed. The analyses have substantial limitations. The data could make a valuable contribution if the authors considered the issues in a larger context and improved their analytic methodology.

Introduction:

1. The strength of the paper is the inclusion of so many different ethnic/racial/religious minority groups in one sample. This permits the authors to address issues of intersectionality, as they mention. But the authors offer only a very brief discussion of this issue.

2. It would have been useful to have some information on the nature of the different groups included in the study, including a description of their prevalence and a brief description of their relationship to the majority culture. Each of these groups has faced prejudice. Understanding the reasons driving the stereotypes about their group (i.e., their relative status or the degree to which they compete with more mainstream groups) would be helpful. For example, it might be interesting to frame the discussion of their relative status and the stereotypes they face within the context of Stereotype Content Model or another framework for considering the ways different groups are stigmatized.

3. In addition, some of the most interesting findings concern the degree to which individuals have visible or concealable characteristics that might make them targets for discrimination. The scientific literature on the visibility of stigmatizing conditions is not addressed adequately. The theoretical framing of these issues is needed to support the value of the data.

4. The prevalence rates of reports of discrimination vary substantially across studies depending on whether investigators are asking about relatively major incidents vs. more subtle episodes of race-based exclusion or rejection. Some discussion of the nature of the questions and the level of discrimination assessed would be useful.
Methods: The sample is large and very diverse. Participants belong to groups that vary in the nature of the characteristics which might cause them to be targeted for discrimination. As a result the data yield some very interesting, specific findings (e.g., gender differences in Sikhs and Muslims in the exposure to discrimination).

5. More detail on the ways in which the questions were framed for the participants would be helpful. This would help readers understand the degree to which the participants were considering issues related to subtle microaggressions versus episodes of more blatant discrimination.

Results: The authors provide detailed information on experiences of discrimination and on the relationship of discrimination to distress. Although it is interesting to read about the different types of discrimination assessed, the authors need a more systematic strategy for examining differences among the types of discrimination.

6. It is not clear that these different items (i.e., the different settings) are truly distinct. No information is provided on the degree to which these venues of exposures are intercorrelated. For example, there are several items assessing discrimination in places which could be considered public settings (i.e., stores, public places, transportation), other reflect discrimination in official settings (i.e., government, etc) in which equal treatment might be expected.

7. The authors perform many statistical tests which are uncorrected, and it is unclear if the outcomes would remain significant if they were corrected using Bonferroni adjustment or some other method. If items cohere into a one or more common factors, it would help in reducing the number of analyses performed.

8. To determine if there are unique effects associated with a particular venue in which discrimination occurred (e.g., in analyses in which they are examining the relationships of the different venues to distress), the authors compare the levels of significance of the OR associated with the different venues. (The same strategy is used to examine the effects of different coping strategies on distress). This is not the best approach. Regression analyses with multiple venues predicting the outcome would be a more appropriate strategy for determining if there are unique effects of any particular kind of discrimination in comparison to others. This would be difficult to do with so many different venues, so considering ways of combining items would be useful.

9. There were also some missed opportunities. For example, the authors report gender differences in overall exposure and in the intensity of exposure, but it also would have been useful to determine if there were gender differences in the types of settings in which discrimination was experienced. MANOVA analyses with the different settings would be one possible way of examining these issues.

10. It would have also been important to understand the exact nature of the intersectionality – very little information is presented about difference among groups in sociodemographic characteristics. (e.g., have some of the immigrant
groups been in Australia for longer than others? Does this affect their experiences of discrimination?)

11. Because it is not a true epidemiological or population based setting, it is difficult to evaluate how representative the reports of the frequency of exposure are. Therefore, analyses which examine the frequency with which different types of discrimination are reported are less valuable than analyses which examine predictors of these effects within the sample (i.e., degrees of visibility or location of effects, etc.).

Discussion: The authors raise many interesting issues and the paper is overall well written.

12. The conclusion that individuals can do little to offset the impact of discrimination is not reasonable given the data. It could also be the case that different groups can use different strategies successfully. No tests of moderation (e.g., by gender or religion or ethnic group or age) of the effects of coping on distress were performed. And not all possible coping strategies were assessed. It is clear that community/nationwide efforts to reduce discrimination are the primary and essential intervention, but that does not mean that people can do almost nothing to help themselves. Overall this paper has the potential to provide interesting data and add significantly to the field, but it will be important to pay more attention paid to the larger theoretical issues and address the many limitations to the analyses.

Note: The issues on addressing more of the theoretical background and addressing the limitations to the analyses would be necessary from my point of view to make the paper more effective and relevant to the field.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

No conflicts