

Australian African Network (AAN) Survey 2007 – 2008

Summary Report

7 November 2008

The survey was an initiative of AAN and is the first that we know of in Australia. AAN was seeking more information about the challenges and needs of who had been or were currently in mixed relationships where one partner was of African heritage.

The survey was put online 14th October 2007. This report summarises all data from that date until 14th October 2008. The survey was promoted via the AAN website, the African OZ website and emailed to AAN supporters. It was put online at the same time as AAN was seeking signatories for a petition protesting then Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' statements about Sudanese migrants, which may have slightly affected the data.

Who filled in the survey?

A total of 75 respondents started the survey, of whom 59 (78%) completed it

Of the 75 there were:

- 48 non African women
- 8 African women
- 5 non-African men
- 13 African men
- 1 did not specify gender and was not African
- 1 woman did not specify ethnicity

This strong imbalance in gender and non African background has affected the results of the survey. We have a good picture of the issues for non African women, but not enough data for any of the other groups – African and non-African men, and African women. This does not detract from the importance of the data but does indicate a strong need to get a more representative range of respondents.

At this stage it's unclear why the response has been so skewed – reasons may include that it could be because it was chiefly online, not adequately promoted to African communities, there was a problem with the survey design, or for cultural reasons relating to disclosure of personal information.

Relationships

Of the 21 African respondents 11 were currently in a mixed relationship, 2 used to be 1 was 'just friends' and 7 did not answer. However 4 of these 7 indicated that their partner was of the same ethnicity as them.

Of the 53 non-African respondents, 28 were currently in a mixed relationship, 18 used to be, 4 were just friends and 3 did not answer.

Location

43 were from NSW, 31 were from other Australian states and 1 was from the USA. Of those in NSW, 31 were from Sydney (mostly inner west and western suburbs), 7 were from rural NSW (mostly Central Coast) and 4 only stated "NSW".

Countries and ethnicities

21 African respondents named 12 different African countries of origin and spoke 10 African languages plus English and Arabic. The countries were: Egypt-Zimbabwe (mixed), Ghana, (3) Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, (3) Zambia, mixed Zambian-German (mixed) and Tanzania. There was also one Afro-American and two just "African".

38 out of 54 Non African respondents named 18 different countries or regions of origin for their partner. (This question was not on the survey for a couple of weeks when it was first launched so we missed out on some valuable data). The countries were Botswana, Central Africa, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana (7), Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria (7), Senegal, Sudan, Guinea Conakry, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, West Africa, and Zimbabwe. 2 respondents just said "African, 1 said "African American" and one said they had Kenyan and Rwandan friends.

In all, this represents 18 countries and all regions of Africa, although West Africa is most strongly represented.

The majority of non-African respondents identified as "Anglo Australian" (56.6% of non-African respondents) or "Australian" (22.6%) . 22% identified as being from other backgrounds – European, Pacific Islands, Malay Chinese, Aboriginal, and New Zealand. Two people identified only as "white".

Languages

African respondents reported speaking 10 African languages plus English and Arabic. Non African respondents reported 16 African languages being spoken in their homes, plus English, French, Arabic, Portuguese, Croatian and Polish.

A total of 24 African languages and dialects were reported. They were Akan (Twi, Ashanti), Kiswahili, Pidgin or Creole, Igbo, Sotho, Zulu, Bari, Bemba, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Shona, Mende, Yoruba, Wolof, Ewe, Susu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, Shangaan, Tchopi, Ndebele, Djola, Nuer.

Seven non African and three African respondents reported 3 or 4 languages spoken in their household. 27 out of 51 non African respondents (52.9%) and 3 out of 21 African respondents (14%) spoke only English in their homes.

Respondents currently in a mixed relationship reported 18 African languages being spoken in their homes (47.36%) plus English, French and Portuguese. Only 11 out of 38 respondents currently in mixed relationships (10.3%) spoke only English.

Only 6 (8.24%) respondents who used to be in mixed relationships reported African languages being spoken in their homes and our question didn't clarify if this was current or when they had been in a mixed relationship. 12 out of 21 respondents who used to be in mixed relationships (57.1%) reported that only English was spoken in their homes.

Refugees

4 African heritage respondents said they were refugees but none were in mixed relationships. 8 non-African respondents said their partner was a refugee. 5 of these respondents were married, 2 separated or divorced and 1 gave no answer.

Religion

64 people answered this question. 38 were Christian, 17 said no religion, agnostic or atheist, 4 were Moslem, 4 were new age/ spiritual. We asked if people's

partner /ex partner shared their religious beliefs. Of the 41 people who said yes, 32 (78%) were married or in de facto relationships. Of the 23 respondents who said no, only 9 (39%) were married or de facto. These findings indicate that shared religious beliefs may be a factor in holding mixed relationships together.

Children

36 people were parents of mixed children. 32 were women, 3 were men and 1 did not answer. 16 of the women were currently in mixed relationships, 15 used to be and 1 did not answer. 4 respondents were of African heritage, of whom 3 were men. 3 families had non-African heritage children as well, 1 also had African heritage children and 2 had step children.

The 18 people currently in mixed relationships had a total of 36 children; the 15 who used to be in mixed relationships had 25 children. All but one correspondent had their children living with them all the time. The children living in families where partners were together were slightly more likely to be aged between 0 and 5, whereas children of separated respondents were in a wider range of age groups but more likely to be older than 2. Families of respondents currently in mixed relationships tended to be slightly larger, more separated respondents had only one child, although a small number of respondents had 3.

Main issues

Forty three people answered an open-ended question about what were the main issues affecting them and their families. A thematic analysis of responses indicated that the main issues were lack of connection to African community and culture (30% of respondents); cultural issues (20%); and racism, prejudice and media representation (18%). 13% identified belonging / connection to Australian community and lack of extended family support as important issues and 11% named sexism and absentee parenting /lack of responsibility by African father.

Less than 10% mentioned employment and accreditation, financial concerns, or said there were no issues of concern. Issues raised by only 1 person are not mentioned here.

The issue named by the most people, lack of connection to African community and culture, included concerns about lack of support from the African community or only having a small African community to turn to. People mentioning this concern were all non African but included both single non-African parents who wanting their children to be more connected to the African community, and also partnered non-Africans with the same concern, or who were concerned about their African partner's loss of country and culture.

Few people spelled out what they meant by 'cultural issues', another high rating concern, although a small number mentioned differences over parenting, partner's level of education, and religion.

Racism was most often mentioned by non Africans, and as an external factor impacting on the relationship or on their children.

These concerns are predominantly those of non-African women. The main difference in response between women who were currently partnered compared to those who were separated was that more partnered women mentioned racism or prejudice as an issue, and more separated women mentioning absentee fathers and lack of connection to African community. A question on languages spoken in the home also indicated that far fewer languages were spoken in single, non-African parent households.

The few Africans who responded had different concerns. African women were

most concerned about social connection and a sense of belonging for their children, and African men were most concerned about employment and connection to the Australian community. However the number of respondents to this question was too small to be statistically significant. Only 2 of potentially 8 African women answered, and only 4 of potentially 13 African men.

The main trend emerging from non-African men's answers to this question was the need for social connection, but only 4 men answered this question.

Another question asked respondents to rate activities AAN might do. This had a slightly better return rate from African respondents: 5 African women responded and 9 African men. Overall, 58 people responded (77% of all respondents).

Overall, respondents were very positive about most of the activities suggested on the survey. They were most interested in picnics (77.5%) and seminars on political and cultural issues (75.86%), support groups (67.24%) and seminars on mixed relationships (65.51%). There was also a strong level of interest in parties, conferences, and political lobbying and advocacy (Between 62% and 58%). There was least interest in activities for teens (31%), probably because few respondents were parents of teens.

These results complement the identified issues of lack of connection to community and the concern about racism mentioned above.

Although again the number of African respondents and non-African men was too low to be significant, some trends emerged in answer to this question. Most African respondents were primarily interested in seminars on political and cultural issues, with African women slightly more interested in social activities and African men slightly more interested in more structured activities such as seminars on mixed relationships and support groups.

Non African men in mixed relationships were enthusiastic about all proposed activities except for activities for teens and advocacy and lobbying.

There was little difference between the interests of non-African women who were partnered or separated, except that partnered women were slightly more interested in social activities.

A space was provided for people to make additional comments and the most noticeable trend was a desire for groups / social activities in the respondent's local area or state if they were not from NSW. Further comments requested at the end of the survey tended to echo earlier responses about lack of connection and isolation from African communities and culture.

Some quotes from the survey:

Living on the Central Coast I feel like an outcast and my son may start to feel the same as he becomes older and realises he lacks all knowledge of his African heritage and has no African male or female friendships ... I feel lost, unable to know how to establish a circle of African friends for both my four year old and myself

Employment is an issue at the moment . I am qualified as Accountant in Nigeria and have extensive experience in that area but having trouble in being accepted here even though I am willing to upgrade these qualifications. I am proud man and want to support my Australian wife.

Political attitudes to race and media portrayal of Africans I believe affect the way people see my partner and I, and therefore our child.

Ensuring my child grows up proud of her heritage and understanding of both her African and Australian families.

Lack of Financial and emotional support from African parent. Absentee parenting from African parent. Lack of support from African family overseas. Children having little knowledge of African heritage. Bridging the gap of cultural indifference.

We would like some African people on TV and mixed ethnicity portrayed on TV! Not unspoken of. Not everyone has one ethnicity

I would like to let other Australians know what it is like to meet and fall in love with some one from different culture with VERY different values.

I am in Vic and I think you are in Sydney, but would come if I could, with or without my husband. There is no counselling or support for us as newly arrived couple for relationship stresses.

Summary

59 people completed this online survey of people who were or had been in mixed relationships. The majority of respondents were non-African women, and this has skewed results to their concerns. However the survey remains an important source of data on the issue of cross cultural relationships.

Respondents represented more than 18 African countries and cultures, (with a majority of West African connections) and around 24 named language groups.

While most respondents were currently in mixed relationships, a high percentage of respondents were separated mothers of mixed race children. A total of 66 children were living in mixed families, either single parent or partnered.

The main issues identified by the survey were lack of connection to African culture and community, cultural differences and racism/prejudice. For separated women, absentee fathering was also an important issue.

Survey data also indicated, although no-one named it as an issue, that children in single parent families also lost access to African language. For African respondents the main issues seemed to relate more to general well-being – social connection to community and employment. It would be interesting to know if this trend holds good with a larger groups of African heritage respondents.

Religion appeared to be a factor in holding relationships together but there was not enough data about refugees to be clear if refugee status was a stressor or in fact denoted a stronger commitment to the relationship.

The survey will remain online until the end of 2009 and efforts will be made to gain more responses from African heritage people via end of year African community and AAN social events, and through encouraging non-Africans on our mailing list to ask their partners to fill it out.