

BRIEFING

RACE AT WORK CHARTER COMMITMENT THREE – TACKLING BULLYING AND HARASSMENT FROM CUSTOMERS, CLIENTS AND SERVICE USERS

Employer policies on bullying and harassment must be extended to include tackling bullying and harassment from customers, clients, service users and contractors.

Background

In 2021, 29% of Black and 27% of Asian employees say that they have witnessed or experienced bullying and harassment from their managers and 38% of Black, 29% of Asian and 27% of Mixed Race employees say that they have witnessed or experienced bullying and harassment from customers, clients and service users. Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse employees are twice as likely than White employees to have experienced or witnessed racist harassment from managers, customers/clients and colleagues.

A rapid review by Bain and Company of the comments from employees in the Race at Work 2021 survey found some interesting insights.

Intersectionality of race with other characteristics can increase the likelihood of experiencing racist harassment

Black and Arab employees reported the highest odds of experiencing racism at work (28.9% vs 8.5% of White employees). 22.2% of Asian employees (incl. Pakistani, Bangladeshi,

Indian, Chinese and any other Asian background said this). 14.4% of Gypsy, Irish Travelling, Mixed and Other employees reported experiencing racism in the workplace.

“A CUSTOMER RACIALLY ABUSED ME AS I WAS NOT ABLE TO ASSIST THEM IN THE WAY THEY WANTED. I REPORTED THIS INCIDENT AND THEY WERE BANNED PERMANENTLY FROM ENTERING OUR PREMISES.”

ARAB, FEMALE, 42

“ON 2 OCCASIONS CUSTOMERS HAVE USED RACIST SLURS TOWARDS ME. I HAD REPORTED IT TWICE AND WAS ASKED WHAT I WANTED TO DO ABOUT IT?”

MIXED WHITE AND ASIAN, FEMALE, 35

Disability is the second indicative factor in predicting whether one will experience harassment. Those who indicate having a disability are 1.5-2.3 times more likely to experience racism than their counterparts who did not indicate facing a disability.



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For White employees, the next most indicative factor is age, with older respondents reporting higher incidences of racial harassment. Older ethnic minority people are more likely to experience racism by bullying. Younger workers are more likely to report inappropriate comments.

Otherwise, public sector workers experience higher incidences of racism than private sector workers (1.5 – 2 times).

Most instances of racial harassment are in the form of inappropriate comments/ jokes or bullying

30% of racial harassment occurs in the form of inappropriate comments, 20% in the form of bullying and 7% report being singled out.

“A COLLEAGUE MIMICKED A STEREOTYPICAL INDIAN ACCENT, AND ALSO USED THE TERM ‘RAG HEAD’. WHEN I QUESTIONED IT, IT WAS LAUGHED OFF AS BANTS.”

PAKISTANI, MALE, 40

22% of all respondents and 30% of Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse respondents have experienced/witnessed harassment by a client/customer.

In these incidences, there is a significantly higher proportion of harassment in the form of racist/inappropriate comments.

Additionally, 8% of respondents report clients/customers refusing to interact with a Black, Asian, Mixed Race or ethnically diverse person.

“CUSTOMER TOLD ME SHE DIDN'T WANT TO BE SERVED BY ME AND I SHOULD GO BACK TO MY COUNTRY.”

PAKISTANI, FEMALE, 52

“I HAVE WITNESSED MULTIPLE INCIDENTS WHERE CUSTOMERS HAVE SWORN AT OR VERBALLY ABUSED STAFF MEMBERS, AND ON SOME OCCASIONS, SPAT AT THEM.”

WHITE, MALE, 32

“I DID NOT DO ANYTHING AND NO ONE DID EITHER. IT SEEMS ACCEPTED FOR FRONT-OF-HOUSE COLLEAGUES TO BE ABUSED AND RACIAL SLURS USED BY CUSTOMERS. THEN WE WELCOME THOSE CUSTOMERS BACK. IN SOME CASES, WE ARE EVEN FORCED TO APOLOGISE IF WE SPEAK UP [AGAINST A CUSTOMER].”

BLACK, FEMALE, 46

When complaints are made or incidents of harassment or bullying from customers and clients is witnessed, it is important that the organisation has transparent processes that clearly set out the steps that must be taken in response to defuse, investigate and/or resolve the incident.

These insights highlight that employer policy on bullying and harassment from customers and clients needs to be:

1. **Clear and transparent** – have a process of steps to take if an incident occurs.
2. **Clearly communicated** to employees, customers and clients.
3. **Properly actioned and investigated.** If an investigation is required, it should be conducted, wherever possible, by those from the relevant protected characteristics. This will ensure that there is an understanding of the issues discussed and their impact on individuals.

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Resources

- Toolkit on [Tackling racial harassment and bullying](#)
- Employer policy action on bullying and harassment in the workplace tracked with [Race at Work Charter 2019](#)ⁱ and [Race at Work Charter 2020](#)ⁱⁱ reports.
- We have called on the Government to strengthen protection for employees through the promised Employment Bill.

BITC's expert Inclusion Advisers are on hand to provide advice and training to our members to support them to tackle bullying and harassment, and to review policies and approaches in this area. In addition to helping our members progress against individual charter commitments, our Inclusion Advisory team can also work with you to embed the commitments as part of a review of your wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy. For more information, contact advisory@bitc.org.uk.

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REFERENCES

ⁱ BITC Race at Work Charter 2019
ⁱⁱ BITC Race at Work Charter 2020
