

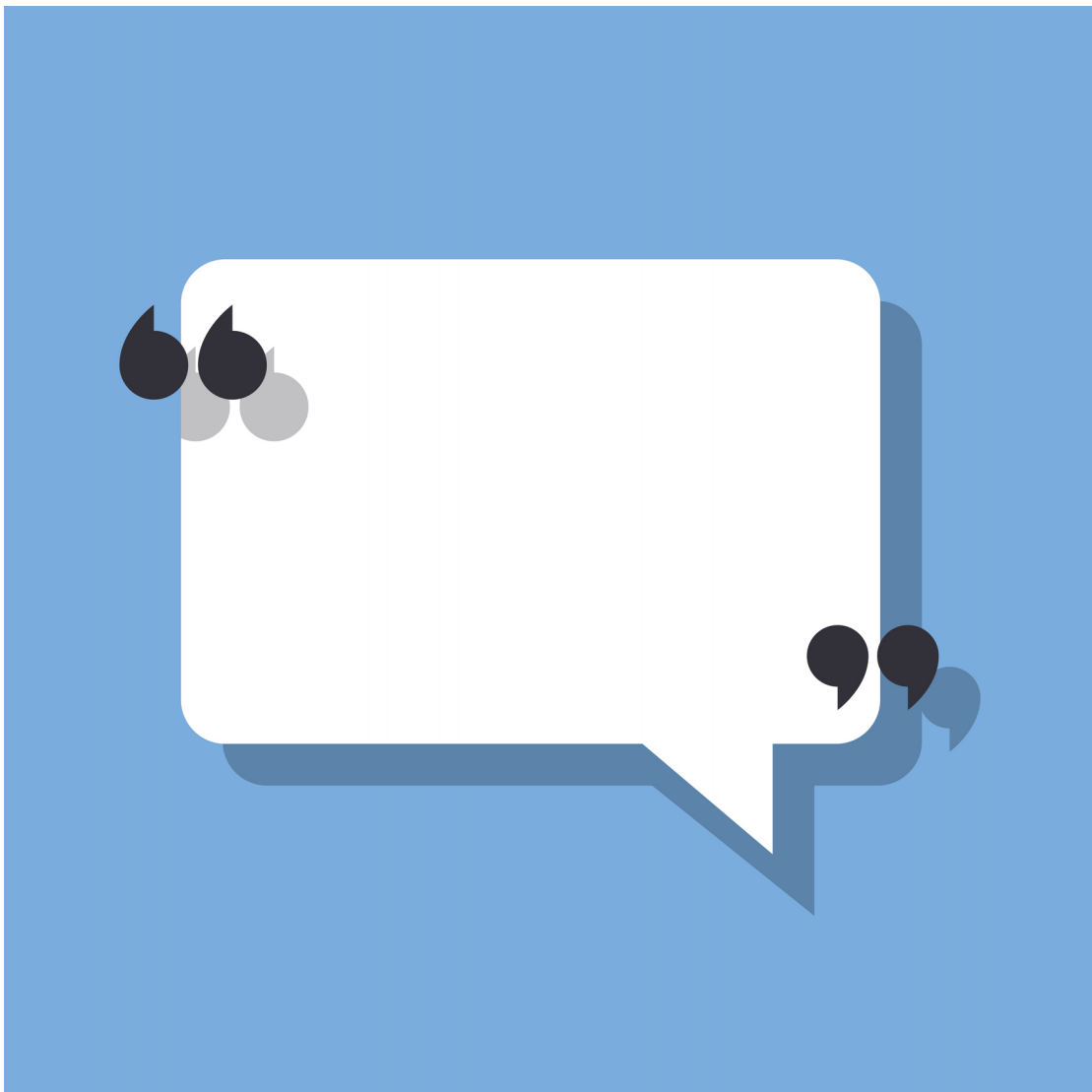


The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network



VOICES FROM THE RACE AT WORK SURVEYS

March 2024



REPORT

VOICES FROM THE RACE AT WORK SURVEYS

This report amplifies the voices of participants across Business in the Community's (BITC) commissioned Race at Work Surveys (2015, 2018 and 2021) with YouGov. The report summarises the thematic findings from each survey, highlights their implications for policy and showcases individual experiences through quotes.

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Background

This thematic review was commissioned by the BITC Race Leadership Team to draw out the themes from the open text responses to the Race at Work Surveys of 2015, 2018 and 2021. Thank you to the corporate sponsors BT, Co-op, Enterprise-Rent-A-Car, KPMG, Nationwide, Sainsbury's and Shell, whose generous sponsorship of these studies enabled us to gather the insights in collaboration with YouGov. Thank you to Professor Nelarine Cornelius and the excellent team for the analysis of 42,346 open coded boxes of comments and stories across the three studies. And a special thank you to all the survey respondents who took the time to share their stories with us.

I urge the growing number of employers, currently more than 1000, who have signed the Race at Work Charter to lead the way and implement all the calls to action to make organisations in the UK, workplaces where policy, process and decision making is transparent, access to opportunity is available for everyone, and leaders, managers and HR professionals are inclusive and accountable.

**Sandra Kerr CBE, Race Equality Director,
Business in the Community.**

Introduction

This research was conducted by Professor Nelarine Cornelius and colleagues Dr. Sarah Marks, Dr. Rym Mouelhi, Luyao Bao and Benish Khan from Queen Mary University of London, and Dr Chidozie Umeh, University of York, due to the identified need to examine ethnic minority employees' experiences of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), career barriers, racial harassment and organisational responses to racism, with the aim to identify successful outcomes and promote racial equality.

Research Questions

- What do ethnic minority employees consider successful equality, diversity, and fairness outcomes?

- How do employees perceive organisational response to reported racism?
- What is the role of leadership and specific departments like HR in promoting equality, diversity, and fairness policies?

Summarised Findings

2015

Unfair recruitment, limited promotion information and workplace politics impact ethnic minority employees as they face discrimination and hindered career growth. Racial harassment, including verbal abuse and marginalisation, persists. HR and unions address the issue, but reporting and trust in HR are limited. Training practices vary, and diversity representation in senior management remains insufficient.

2018

Challenges for ethnic minorities include inclusion policies in marginalised workspaces, negative perceptions of high performance and stagnation of overqualified individuals. Harassment themes involve verbal abuse, unfair work allocation, biased assessments and tokenism. Senior leaders fuel racial harassment by directly or indirectly enabling it. Brexit, lack of organisational support and work-life balance also impact outcomes.

2021

COVID-19, Brexit and the Black Lives Matter movement were excuses for racial abuse, especially in senior positions and HR departments. The importance of allyship in diversity policies grew but unrecognised allyship hampered supportive workplaces. Survey respondents emphasised accountability, transparency and clear guidelines, while proactive measures were needed to address gender, hierarchy, and class intersections.

Trends across surveys

The analysis exposed recruitment bias, limited promotion data and disparities faced by ethnic minorities. Location bias (discrimination in career opportunities based on location) hindered career advancement. Racial abuse and marginalisation

were prevalent. Trust and reporting were constrained, despite allyship. HR responses were viewed more positively than employee perception, necessitating accountability, transparency and clear guidelines. Proactive actions were crucial amid racial abuse, influenced by COVID-19, Brexit, Black Lives Matter and intersections with gender, hierarchy, and class dynamics, requiring greater scrutiny and consideration.

Implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) and EDI Policy and Practice

1. Fair hiring and advancement practices: Review recruitment for fairness and equal opportunities regardless of ethnicity and improve communication about promotion opportunities. A better understanding of 'informal' practices is crucial.

2. Systemic EDI implementation and accountability: Unfairness and favouritism can only be tackled by embedding EDI principles into organisational systems, holding all levels accountable.

3. Addressing career biases based on location: Address preference based on geographical location, rather than qualifications or abilities, as this hampers career advancement and limits opportunities.

4. Reporting and trust-building: Combat racial harassment by improving reporting mechanisms and foster trust to create a safe and supportive environment.

5. Promoting senior management diversity: Make diverse representation in senior management a priority to promote inclusive decision-making, encourage allyship and cultivate an inclusive organisational culture.

2015, Theme: Employment opportunity disparity

Recruitment and selection processes are often unfair, and there is a lack of promotion opportunities or information about promotion opportunities. These challenges affect employees of all ethnic backgrounds, with a higher prevalence

in the public sector. Ethnic minority employees face unfairness and favouritism in interpersonal relationships, due to workplace politics. Career progression is hindered by location, bias, and discrimination. Racial harassment involves verbal abuse, marginalisation and redundancy. While HR and unions play a role in addressing racial harassment, reporting and trust are limited. Diverse representation in senior management is crucial yet missing.

2015 voices

“In the face of an exemplary work record, I was told that I did not fit in, denied work assignments, training, networking and other advancement opportunities provided to co-workers, paid less than co-workers, and denied promotion opportunities and generally ignored by management. HR are there to protect the management. The worst thing that one can do when racially harassed/bullied is to expect HR to intervene. Furthermore, as a minority, complaining about such harassment will have the complainant labelled as a troublemaker or someone who ‘plays the race card’ or someone who has a ‘chip on their shoulder’. This makes others wary and limits work, networking and promotion possibilities. In reality, if racial harassment/bullying occurs there are two options (1) leave (2) grin and bear it.”

[Black Caribbean, Male]

“My view is that the process of effective succession planning is undermined at appraisal rounds. Unconscious bias will allow for shortcomings in unconsciously preferred staff to be excused altogether or seen as 'within tolerance' (since no one is perfect), whilst the same shortcomings are seen as underperformance or lack of potential in others. This means that staff like me who are not 'preferred' consistently remain under the radar of systems designed to pick up talent, fast-stream said talent or provide 'timely' development opportunities.”

[Black Caribbean, Female]

“It happened because there is bias in favour of certain groups when it comes to promotion and opportunities for advancement. The result is that certain ethnic groups are liked, favoured and promoted, while others like mine, (Black Africans), are over-looked and bypassed and are hardly/rarely considered for promotion.”

[Black African, Female]

“Every day racism and harassment happen to me and my colleagues because we are black background, and zero or flexible workers. I have applied [for a] part-time permanent job in my company last June and they gave all colleagues the opportunity, but me and my colleagues didn't, and these all problems came from Eastern European background managers in the company and agency as well.”

[Black African, Male]

“Most vacancies are always pre-organised for someone [in] particular, and the whole recruitment exercise is just a tick box exercise, to stay with [in] legal, equal opportunities parameters, going through the motions, and stating that the company has followed the process. Most jobs are geared, manufactured, to suit certain individuals, with the right managers, friends. Knowing who is who, and making the face fit the system, and discounting the qualifications, experiences.”

[Indian, Male]

“The government agency that I work for does not value people with skills they do not recognise. I have project management skills which are a must due to the huge Blueprint changes that are programmed but very few have these skills yet those with professional surveying skills are promoted into management roles when they cannot manage.”

[Indian, Female]

“I don't have confidence in [the] internal recruitment process, managers get away by interviewing personal friends and offering [them] positions, when the most suitable candidate is overlooked.”

[Pakistani, Male]

“Because my face did not fit and I was not in the right location.”

[Non-British Asian, Female]

“There was a large internal recruitment drive at my last job which a lot of my colleagues applied for. A Muslim colleague was advised at interview that her ID was unsuitable but was not advised why this was the case. However, she had provided the same ID as everyone else due to interview that day who had experienced no issues at all.”

[White British, Female]

“Nepotism in recruitment. Managers giving staff who are bad at their jobs easier jobs which equip them with better skills.”

[White British, Male]

“There are some organisations set up by Board Directors but they are a little 'forced' so [for example] the gay people I know well don't feel that it's for them and they are not radical enough to be a part of it. The business is very male, white and middle class. The Board Directors talk [about] equality but the statistics would demonstrate that they are not willing to push it down the ranks - the talk, to me, appears to be ineffective when it comes to recruitment or to career progression and, for example, the senior operators are extremely male, white, straight and middle class. This is then off-putting to female, ethnic, working class people as it appears non-inclusive.”

[White British, Female]

2018, Theme: Systemic Exclusion

There is marginalisation within inclusive policy spaces, negative perceptions of overperformance, and employees are 'held back' for business reasons, leading to career progression constraints. Challenges such as being over-qualified but career stagnated, the need for self-promotion, location and age-influenced career advancement and work-life balance was deemed important. Harassment themes encompassed verbal abuse, marginalisation, unfair work allocation, biased assessments and tokenism. Senior leadership often perpetuated racial harassment, and reporting resulted in redundancy or support for leaders. Brexit-related issues emerged and positive discrimination and support from organisations and management became crucial, as did work-life balance.

2018 voices

“A senior manager insulted me and was very patronising, I was too scared to do anything for fear of job loss.”

[Pakistani, Male]

“A senior manager making jokes about "w****" in front of his whole team which includes BAME* people.”

[Indian, Male]

“A white colleague said she should have been sat next to someone she gets on with. I was sitting there, a headscarf wearer. I never said anything. She then became a senior and would abort my payments without good reason so I would always email her stating she was incorrect. For my review

she said I was defensive. I had to take this critique but always thought she was treating me like I was inferior.”

[Bangladeshi, Female]

“Favouritism. Someone less qualified and skilled but a close personal friend of the senior manager was given the role.”

[Black Caribbean, Male]

“I was a temp at the time. Senior Manager walked past me and murmured, “You're looking very tanned” in a very unpleasant way. I was shocked as racism is not really present in that office. He definitely wasn't giving me a compliment, or what some people regard as a compliment. He has since been promoted several times but not in the place I currently work.”

[White Asian, Female]

“Line managers picked on everything I did; used threatening words all the time; overlooked me for promotional opportunities and the list is endless. Reported it to senior managers but was ignored and they all ganged up on me.”

[Black African, Female]

“Victimising someone from ethnic minority. I complained to a senior manager – not the line manager as they were responsible for the bullying. The line manager went unpunished, and the colleague lost his job.”

[White British, Female]

“They don't value the type of job I do enough to become a senior manager, women don't become senior managers here, I'm foreign.”

[Non-British White Background, Female]

2021, Theme: The HR-Employee Perception gap

COVID-19, Brexit, and the Black Lives Matter movement were used as justifications for verbal abuse or discussions about race. Mistreatment of minorities was consistently observed in senior-level positions and HR departments. Allyship, gained prominence, particularly regarding race and diversity policies. However, individuals rarely recognised their own actions as allyship or connected them to a supportive organisational culture. The importance of accountability, transparency, and clear guidelines was emphasised. HR responses tended to be more positive about equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives compared to employees. Overall, a proactive approach and improvements were

needed to address these issues effectively. The intersections of gender, organisational hierarchy, and class were identified as influential factors.

2021 voices

“I reported more than once [an issue] with a colleague due to her race and beliefs. The person involved in the negative behaviour got promoted. The lady in question left after being signed off with depression. I had to sit through colleagues talking about black people having it better than [in] the US so shouldn't complain and was told I can stay post-Brexit but new people shouldn't be allowed. I'm British, mixed raced and born in England.”

[White and Black Caribbean, Male]

“Related to Brexit, when we got the referendum results, my supervisor made the comment ‘we got England back, let's take away all the f***ing immigrants’ this was said in front of foreign colleagues and my reaction was to give her a bad look which she understood and then she realised of her comment. But it was too late.”

[Non-British White Background, Female]

“By nature of the profession most of my colleagues are from the BAME* community, however the senior managers and executives are White British and this is reflected in the non-existence of any initiative to promote race equality. For example, there was minimal acknowledgement of Black Lives Matter.”

[African, Female]

“A colleague who is white responding to a conversation I was having about Black Lives Matter and said all lives matter. This same colleague responding to a conversation said all Polish people are horrible.”

[Non-British White Background, Female]

“Nursing and auxiliary staff from racialised minorities looking after Covid patients were being reprimanded for requesting PPE by white managers. I made several appeals on their behalf.”

[Non-British Asian Background, Male]

“They didn't want to speak to me because I'm Asian and [they think] I caused the Covid virus.”

[Indian, Female]

“[A] staff member was bullying others. [I] Challenged her and she took the issue to HR, who investigated and found it was my fault. Despite there being witnesses to her behaviour and what she did, she went and cried on the nice white HR

lead, who believed her over me, her manager and the rest of the team. I left in the end because I then began to be bullied by management as a result, because it is always the black person who does the bullying, just in case you didn't know it! White privilege at its finest."

[Caribbean, Female]

"I raised my concerns with HR-they did nothing so I had to leave the company and sue them through ACAS."

[Pakistani, Male]

"I raised it with HR, but they dismissed it."

[White Asian, Male]

"Some colleagues regularly bully me about my nationality and accent. I reported it to HR, but I was told to address the issue myself with the colleagues in question."

[Mixed multiple ethnic background, Male]

"Nowhere to report to. HR don't do anything because they believe that a manager is not racist otherwise they would not be a manager."

[Chinese, Male]

"My bosses and colleagues harassed me. They gossiped about me saying I smell badly and they always wanted to touch my hair. I complained about it through my line manager and threatened to take the issue elsewhere. HR got involved but did not help much. The issue never really got solved properly."

[African, Female]

"Every time something goes wrong they used to blame me and say this is not your country we do better in the UK. I haven't done anything to report [it] because my HR managers [are] all friends with them and confidential information leaks out, so to keep my job I just go quiet every time."

[Mixed multiple ethnic background, Female]

"A colleague was being treated unfairly by a client over commitments that couldn't be completed and was personally attributed to race - but when raising this with HR it was not taken up."

[Non-British Asian Background, Male]

"Senior leaders within an organisation must not shy away from challenges around race in the workplace when things go wrong. It is important that leaders see the challenges, analyse them, and identify and act to address them in an even-handed way. This means ensuring that protecting

an organisation's reputation does not diminish recognising an issue and supporting the individual that has highlighted a problem. The aim must be to deliver outcomes that are transparent, just, and fair."

Professor Nelarine Cornelius, Queen Mary University of London

HR professionals are the gatekeepers of procedure and practice within organisations and CEOs and leaders expect them to do what's right. They have a key role to play in dismantling policies and practices that enable systemic racism in the workplace and replace them with policies and procedures free from bias.

What's next

There are three calls to action for employers: increasing **transparency**, increasing **access** to information and opportunity, and increasing **accountability** and embedding equality into policies and practices. There is one additional call to action specifically for HR professionals in the workplace.

Increase transparency in hiring and advancement

Practices: Monitor each stage of the recruitment and selection process. Challenge any disproportionate disparities in candidate performance from stage to stage and review processes for bias, including comparison by location if relevant. Review recruitment agency performance if you use them.

Systemic EDI implementation and accountability:

Senior leaders, executive sponsors, HR, EDI, employee networks and resource groups should work together to embed EDI principles into organisational systems. Combat racial harassment by improving reporting mechanisms and fostering trust to create a safe and supportive environment. Review employee survey data to monitor the impact of changes introduced, holding all levels accountable.

Promote diverse representation in senior management: Make diverse representation in senior management a priority to promote inclusive decision-making. Improve access to information on progression criteria, expertise and skills required for senior roles and clarity on how these can be demonstrated. Give constructive feedback, encourage allyship, and cultivate an inclusive organisational culture.

Call to action for HR professionals in the workplace.

HR professionals should take an approach that safeguards the organisation *and* supports the individual who makes a complaint or reports inappropriate behaviour. They should explore options for resolution and restorative action that provide outcomes that are just and fair. This action is necessary to ensure safeguarding, as well as the reputation of the employer and the individual. Taking the right action not only protects the organisation and its brand but also safeguards the individual's mental health and wellbeing.

**The acronym BAME is no longer used and has been replaced with 'Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse' However, for authenticity on the quotes we have left unchanged*

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