

# Racism at Work Survey Results

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Objectives &amp; Methods</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Results</b>	<b>7</b>
Who is experiencing it?	7
Subtle Racism	8
Is that racist?	10
Silent Witness	14
Why so quiet?	16
Fight or Flight?	18
Let's Talk	20
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
1. Participation	25
2. The survey	27

# Executive Summary

In the modern workplace, racism is widespread, subtle and often ignored.

This is a statement that many people may question, however this report provides a solid basis of evidence for these claims. Our survey gained insight into 1,500 people's experiences of racism in the modern UK workplace. The motivation for this research arose from a workplace climate in which racism still exists, but isn't recognised. It is a common misconception that racism is limited to acts of verbal and physical abuse, meaning that when these explicit behaviours aren't present, the majority group may assume that all races are treated equally at work. We wanted to find out if people were still experiencing racism at work, and if they were, what exactly were they experiencing and what was being done about it?

All data was gathered through a survey which was distributed to people using a variety of online platforms. More information on the method and analysis can be found in the appendix section of the report.

The present research revealed that 60% of Black people, 42% Asian people and 14% white people have experienced racism in the workplace. Of the people who had experienced racism, 20% had experienced verbal or physical racial abuse. We also explored how people define racism; when selecting from a range of scenarios, less than half of people could detect subtle racism. There were no racial differences in how well people were able to detect racism. A key issue was how people responded when they witnessed racism. When people confronted the perpetrator they were most likely to feel they'd resolved the situation. However, the most common response was to take no action. Furthermore, the most common reason for not taking action was fear of the consequences, something that minorities were most concerned about.

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations to organisations.

1. *Creating a safe climate* – Overall, our findings show that people are fairly comfortable talking about racism. This suggests that the previous belief that we are all too afraid to discuss racism is not necessarily the case. However it is important to note that those who have experienced racism are the least comfortable discussing it. We therefore need to promote discussion of racism with individuals who have experienced it first-hand, these are the people who have the richest insight into how an organisation's culture may be fostering a racist environment. Organisations can make open discussion a habit through setting up regular minority discussion groups.
2. *Developing our understanding of what we mean by racism in organisations* – One third of those who didn't report racism said it was because they were unsure of whether it was serious enough. Organisations should mention both subtle and explicit forms of racism in their employee code of conduct. There is an educational role that needs to be undertaken, particularly with leaders and HR. Reporting incidents to a line manager and to HR were amongst the least effective actions to resolve problems. Additionally, unconscious bias training can be utilised to raise awareness of subtle racism.
3. *Everyone has a role to play, including bystanders* - Organisations must work towards building a culture of inclusion, in which people can challenge one another on racism without fear. Education can be highly effective to help everyone become better at constructive challenge.

# Objectives & Methods

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent of racism in the workplace today.  
What is perceived as racist behaviour?

The actions people take when they are victims of racism or when they witness it  
The reasons why people do not take action when they experience or witness racist behaviour

## Participants

In total, the online survey had 1501 respondents. In order for a respondent to be included in the analysis, they had to meet certain inclusion criteria. These being, that they must be currently employed, live in the UK, and identify as either White, Black, or Asian. 88 respondents failed to meet these criteria, meaning that our final sample consisted of 1422 respondents. (Further details can be found in Appendix 1).

## The Survey

The survey was in three sections:

Section one asked for demographic questions about respondents e.g. age, race, gender.

Section two asked questions relating to what people considered to be a racist act.

Respondents were given brief descriptions of a range of scenarios, ranging from overt acts to subtle acts of racism.

Section three explored real experiences of racism, either directly as victims or as witnesses.

(Further details can be found in Appendix 2).

# Results

## Who is experiencing it?

We asked participants "Have you experienced racism in the workplace? This is the proportion of each racial group that responded "Yes" .



A chi square statistical test showed a highly significant difference between the amount that each racial group had experienced racism ( $\chi^2, (1347) = 242, p < .0001$ ). These findings show that racial minority groups experience racism significantly more than racial majority groups.

Overall, 31% of all people across all racial groups reported experiencing racism at work.



## Subtle racism

In order to further explore the nature of workplace racism, we presented participants with a list of different experiences which involve varying forms of racial or ethnic discrimination. Participants were asked to select, from the list below, the situations they had encountered:



- (A) I have been intentionally excluded from work or social events because of my race. 10%
- (B) I have been verbally or physically abused because of my race by other colleagues. 7%
- (C) I have been falsely accused or criticized by colleagues because of my race. 7%
- (D) Colleagues have made assumptions about my ability, character or behaviour based on stereotypes of my race. 25%
- (E) I have sometimes felt that because of my race, I am not always actively included by my colleagues. 14%
- (F) I sometimes feel that because of my race, colleagues treat me differently. 20%
- (G) None of the above. 61%



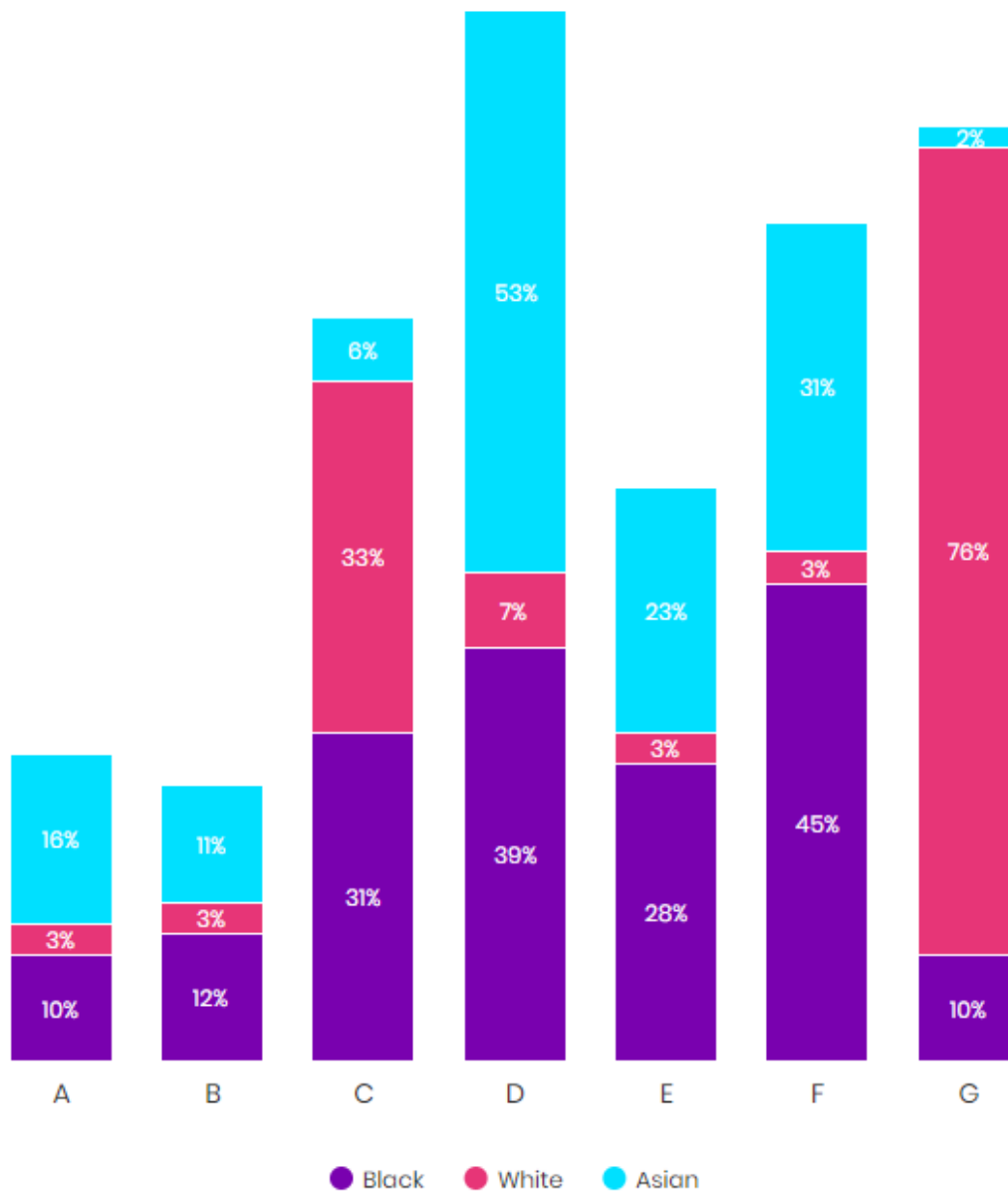
The above percentages show the proportion of all participants that selected each response option. The following percentages represent the responses of those who reported experiencing racism: 59% selected (D), 46% selected (F), 37% selected (E), 29% selected (A), 20% selected (B), 19% of participants selected (C), and 10% selected (G). The percentage of racial minorities experiencing explicit forms of racism was consistently higher. For instance, 13% of Black participants and 12% of Asian participants reported having experienced verbal or physical racial abuse in the workplace; this compares to 4% of white participants.



13% of minority participants have experienced verbal or physical racial abuse at work.



The racial split of the responses is shown below.



## Is that racist?

10% of those who had experienced racism, also selected "None of the above". This highlights just how broad the definition of racism is - that for 41 people, their experience didn't fit our criteria. This finding led us to investigate the responses of participants who had not reported experiencing racism.



These respondents indicated that, because of their race, colleagues had: made assumptions about their ability, character, or behaviour (10%); treated them differently (8%); and had failed to actively include them (3%).

In order to find out how people view racism, respondents were presented with a range of scenarios, and participants had to indicate if the behaviour was racist or not. Some scenarios were easier to classify than others, because they had varying degrees of ambiguity and also depicted benevolent and malevolent forms of discrimination. The scenarios were as follows:

- (A) A UK based business consultancy firm is made up of 100 employees. 73 are white, 14 are black and 13 are Asian. (15% thought this racist)
- (B) The consultancy firm is an international company, a fortnightly senior leaders meeting is held. This meeting was held in English language, however once the meeting was finished in English, some individuals continued the meeting in another language. (21% thought this racist)
- (C) A team leader, Sandra, persistently gets the name of a member of her team, Kashif, wrong. (34% thought this racist)
- (D) Sandra is hiring for a new project manager. She is deciding who to invite for an interview between two equally qualified and experienced candidates, Mark and Mohammed, she chooses Mark as there are no other Asians on the team and she thinks Mohammed will feel left out. (81% thought this racist)

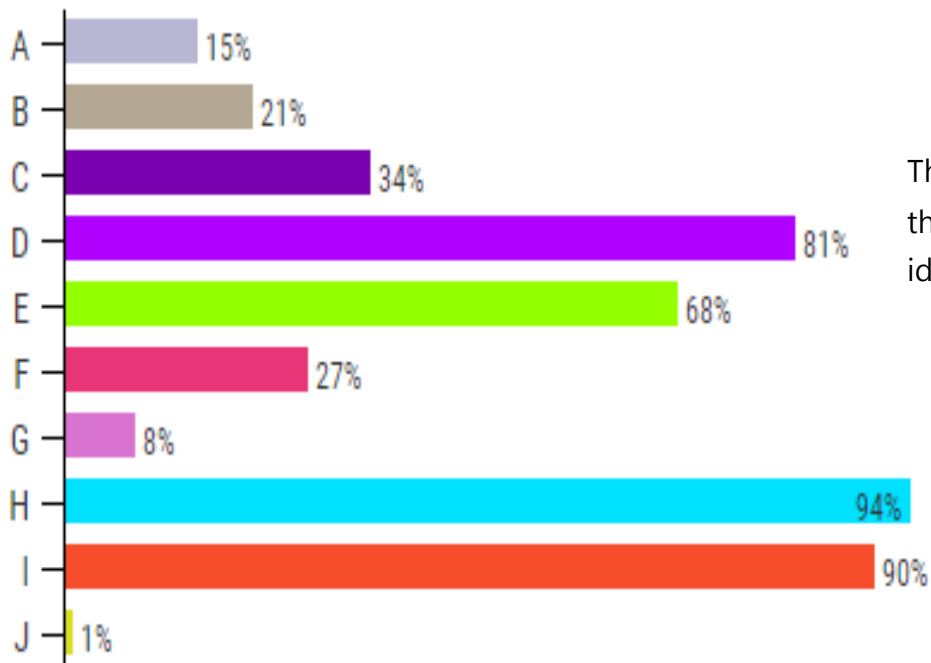
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*"I felt it was racism, but I wasn't sure if anyone else did."*

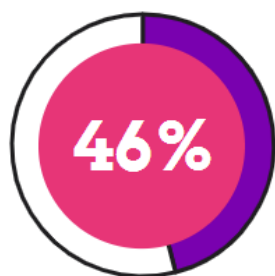
*Quote from a participant*

- (E) Sandra is holding a work get-together at her house, and has arranged a hog roast for the event. Sandra decides not to invite the new team member Raj, as she thinks he will be offended by the hog roast. (68% thought this racist)
- (F) The head of marketing is launching a new campaign and needs advice on which accountant to work with on the project, either Michelle or Yin, the manager hasn't spoken to either but recommends Yin because, although she's new, she seems more mathematically competent. (27% thought this racist)
- (G) Sandra is pitching to a client and the colleague helping her has dropped out in the last minute. Both Rob and Abdul have offered to help. She chooses Rob as she has more experience of working with him in the past and hasn't worked with Abdul on pitching before. (8% thought this racist)
- (H) A significant amount of office petty cash has gone missing. Sandra tells her colleagues that she thinks it is Omar, "I'm not a racist, but he is black". (94% thought this racist)
- (I) Jenny and Sandra are overheard talking in mocking Chinese accents when Yin leaves the office. (90% thought this racist)
- (J) None of the scenarios are, in my opinion, racist. (1% agreed with this statement)

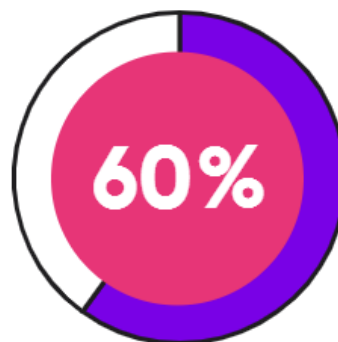
*(A & G = no discrimination; B, C, D, E & F = subtle; H & I = explicit; D, E, F = benevolent; B, C, H & I = malevolent)*



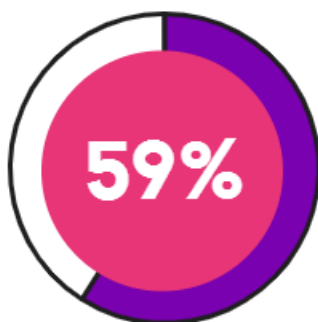
The following lists the situations by the frequency which they were identified as racist



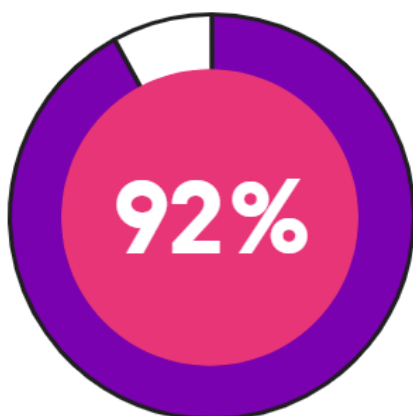
46% identified subtle discrimination



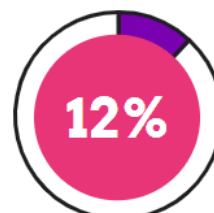
60% detected malevolent discrimination



59% were able to detect benevolent discrimination



92% identified explicit discrimination



12% incorrectly identified a scenario as racist

When we compared the different racial groups' ability to identify explicit, subtle, benevolent, and malevolent forms of discrimination, no significant differences were found ( $\chi^2, (1422) = .051, p > .05$ ;  $\chi^2, (1422) = .368, p > .05$ ;  $\chi^2, (1422) = .182, p > .05$ ,  $\chi^2, (1422) = .045, p > .05$ , respectively). When discussing racism and racist acts there is greatest recognition for the more explicit forms. There is less agreement on the more subtle forms of behaviour and so there will be more conflict potentially on whether some forms of behaviour are racist or not. Therefore just because one person does not view an action or decision as racist does not mean that another person will take the same position. The white sample were just as likely to identify subtle forms of racism as the minority samples.

## Witnesses

When asked, 52% of our participants reported having witnessed racism. The group proportionally most likely to have witnessed racism were Black participants; 69% of this group had witnessed racism compared to 53% Asian and 45% White. A chi-square statistical test of significance was carried out, and a highly significant difference between the different racial groups' reported rates of witnessed racism ( $X^2(2, N=1365) = 43.23, p < .01$ ) was found.



## Silent Witness



- (A) A took no action. 32%
- (B) I reported the incident to a manager or the HR department. 16.5%
- (C) I confronted perpetrator. 31%
- (D) I spoke to the victim of the event. 18%
- (E) I filed a complaint with an authority. 3%

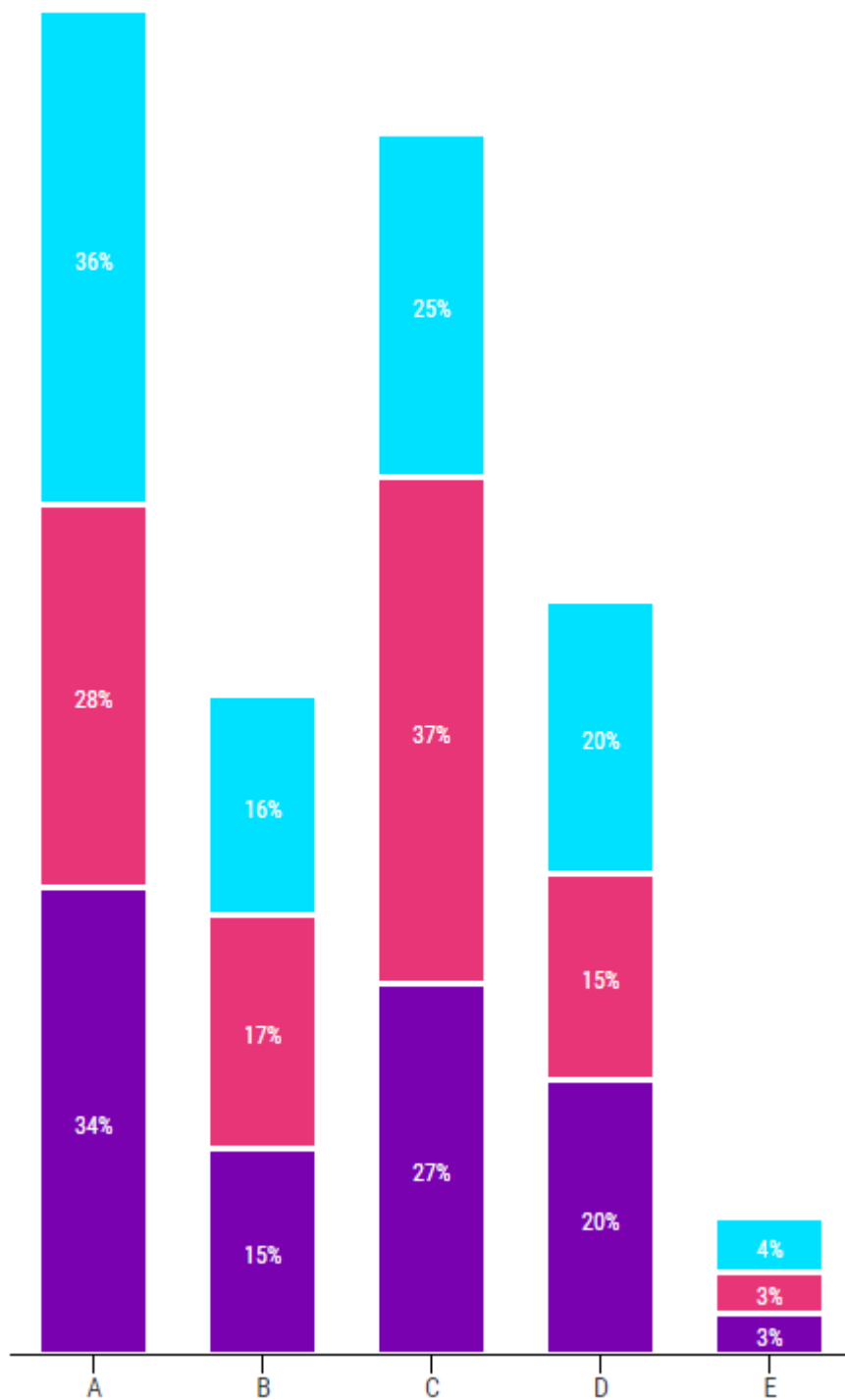
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*"I was falsely put under investigation for raising concerns about a Director being racist. I was later made redundant"*

*Quote from a participant*

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The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each response option. The most commonly reported option was to ignore the incident.



Those who report experiencing the most racism - minority black people and Asians – were also most likely to take no action. White people were most likely to take action.

## Why so quiet?

We examined respondents' reasons for their lack of action.

We asked 'was there a particular reason as to why you did not take action?' Participants' responses are below:

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*"I was very junior at the time and felt unable to challenge the manager on this point"*

*Quote from a participant*

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● A ● B ● C ● D ● E

- (A) 'I didn't have time'. (3%)
- (B) 'I was unsure of who would be appropriate to talk to'. (23%)
- (C) 'I didn't consider it serious enough to report'. (25%)
- (D) 'I feared the consequences'. (39%)
- (E) 'It wasn't my business'. (11%)

When analysed by racial group, we found that white and black people gave similar responses in line with the overall pattern. Asian people were more likely to select option B over option C.

However, on this question we did find significant gender differences: women were significantly more likely than men to not report racism due to fear of consequences,  $X^2(2, N=212) = 10.41, p = 0.01$ .

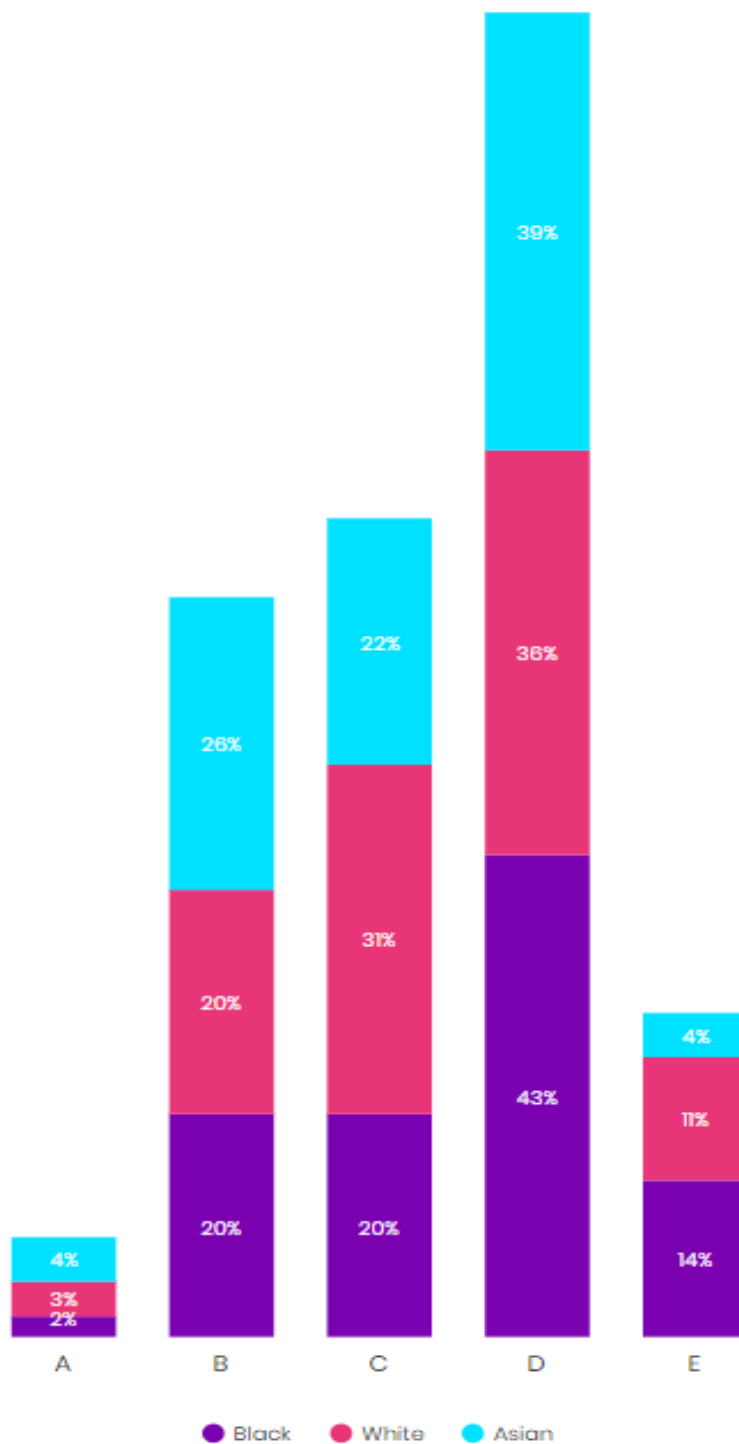
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*"The perpetrator was a volunteer, not an employee"* .

*Quote from a participant*

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The most common reason amongst all groups for not taking action was fear of the repercussions. However, this result was more pronounced in Asians, and to a greater degree amongst black people.

## Fight or Flight?

As the above section revealed, those in the majority groups preferred to confront the perpetrator, whilst those in the minority group preferred not to act. Minorities fear the response they will receive if they take action. Therefore, creating safe work environments where minorities feel comfortable challenging racist behaviour is an important step in tackling the problem. Beyond this, though, it seems reasonable to ask: what is the best way to challenge racism?

Of the respondents who reported taking action, we asked 'what was the outcome of this action?' Response options with the percentages of people responding to each are below:

- (A) 'The action led to appropriate outcomes and the situation was dealt with'. (50%)
- (B) 'The issue was not resolved'. (27%)
- (C) 'The complaint was ignored or no action was taken'. (20%)
- (D) 'The action worsened the situation'. (3%)



In only half of the situations where action was taken was the issue resolved.

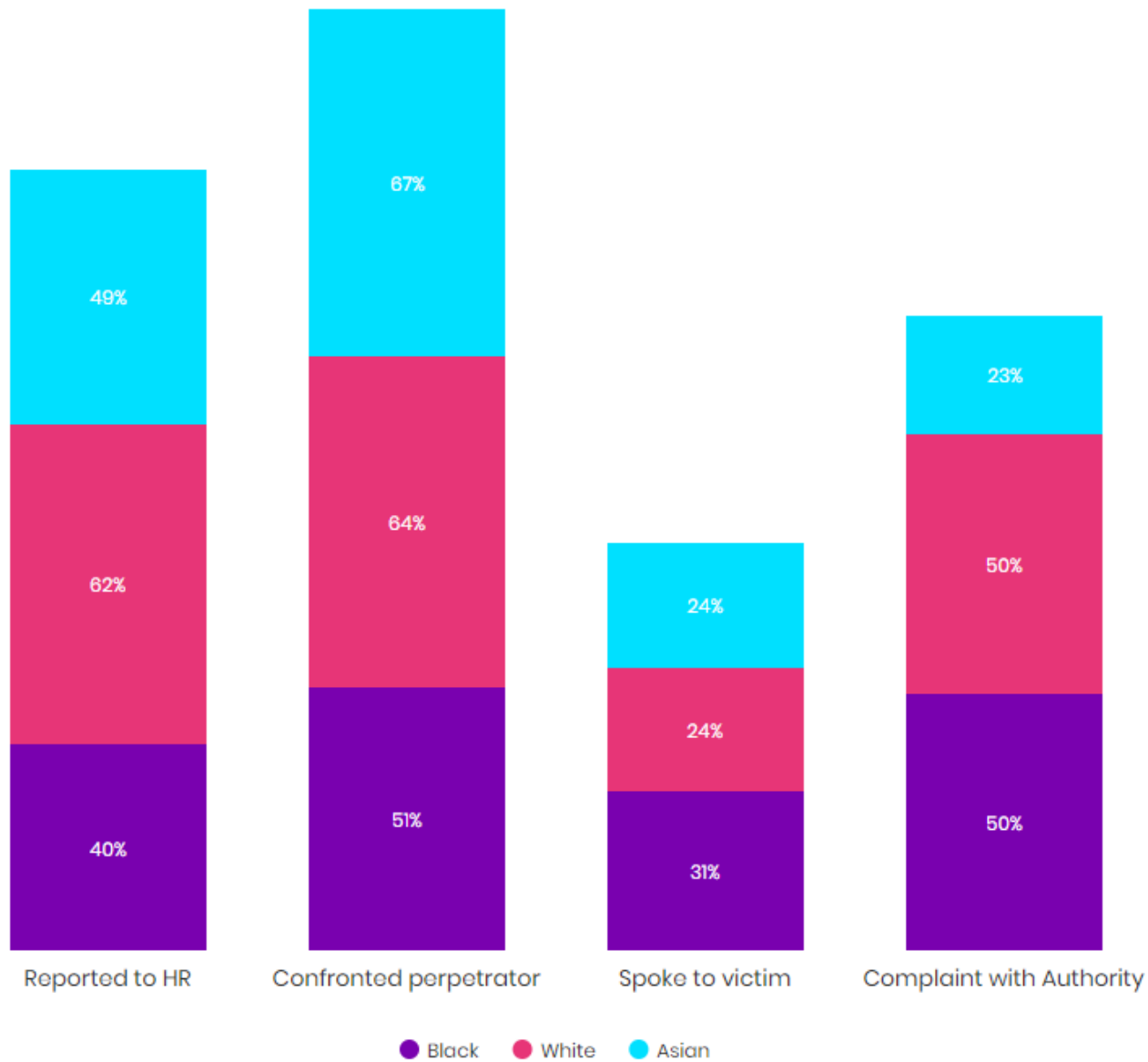
Confronting the perpetrator was the action most likely to lead to a feeling of resolution. 62% of participants taking this action reported that it resolved the situation. Only just over half of respondents who reported it to HR (52%) felt that it had resolved the situation. The figures for reporting it to an authority e.g. the line manager, were even worse with just over 40% (42%) feeling that the issue had been resolved. The least effective action was to talk only to the victim (26%). These results suggest that challenging the perpetrator is the most effective way to challenge racism. It is also the most direct which means that people may be unwilling to take the risk of doing it.

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*"I helped the victim to report the matter to the Union rep who took action. The matter was resolved."*  
*Quote from a participant*

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Percentage of participants who felt their action resolved the situation, grouped according to action taken and race

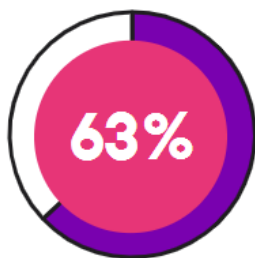


## Let's Talk

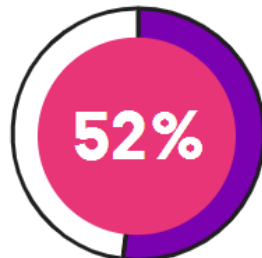
We've discussed what people have seen, what they have experienced, and what they believe.

We finished our survey by asking participants "When you're at work, on a scale of 1-100 (1 meaning very uncomfortable, 100 being very comfortable) how comfortable are you talking about racism?"

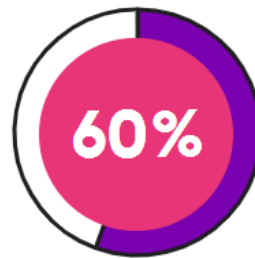
The bubble charts display how comfortable different groups of participants were talking about racism.



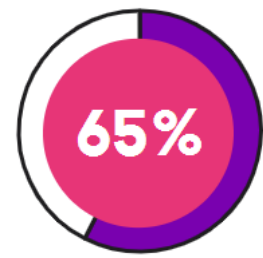
How comfortable participants, who hadn't experienced racism, were talking about racism on average



How comfortable participants, who had experienced racism were talking about racism on average



How comfortable participants were talking about racism on average



How comfortable participants who didn't think racism is a problem, were talking about racism on average.

60%, suggesting that overall people are moderately comfortable talking about racism at work. An average rating of 60 would show that most people are moderately comfortable discussing it. The average rating for Black participants was 52 and 57 for Asian participants. These averages show that racial minorities are less comfortable talking about racism than the majority.

The average rating of all participants who had experienced racism was 52%; this highlights the issue that those who are experiencing the problem of racism are the ones who feel the least comfortable talking about.

It could be argued that, if all the discussions about workplace racism are led by people who aren't experiencing it, then the outcomes of these discussions will never be truly reflective of the issue. Providing further support for this argument, the average rating for those who haven't experienced racism was higher than average at 63. The average rating is *even higher* at 65 for the group of participants who stated they don't believe that racism is a problem in the workplace.

# Recommendations

Despite differences in how we think about racism at work, the statistic remains that 10% of racial minorities have been verbally or physically abused at work because of their race. This simply isn't something that can go unchallenged.

Racism is a problem in the workplace, we shouldn't be questioning whether it is or not; we should be questioning what we can do to stop it.

Our findings provide the groundwork for future strategies to fight workplace racism. Our recommendations are as follows;

## 1. Creating a safe climate

Encourage discussion with those at the core of the issue; our findings show that people are, on average, 60% comfortable talking about racism. This suggests that the previous belief that we are all too afraid to discuss racism is just not accurate.

The truth is that the people who are most comfortable discussing racism are those who don't view it as a problem in the workplace; those who have experienced racism are the least comfortable discussing it. Furthermore minorities are least likely to directly challenge racist behaviour that they witness because they fear the consequences.

The issue is not just one of talking about race but creating a safe enough climates where those who have been discriminated against feel that they can speak up without fear of retribution and that they will be listened to. We therefore need to promote discussion of racism with individuals who have experienced it first-hand, these are the people with the richest insight into how an organisation's culture may be fostering a racist environment. Organisations can make open discussion a habit through setting up regular minority discussion groups.

The first step in preventing this is making sure that all complaints are taken seriously. All it takes is for one report of racism to be ignored, to foster fear of reporting in others. Line managers and business leaders should make sure that all employees feel equally valued, this can be ensured by helping employees understand how they fit into the long term strategic goals of the business. A culture can be built where managing directors and business partners use their power to stand up for victims of racism, rather than protecting the perpetrators.

Creating safe climates is something that needs to be initiated, led and role modelled by leaders in organisations. Adopting the view, as some leaders do, that racism is a thing of the past and does not exist in their organisation, means that when people do have genuine grievances they are more likely to be seen as whingers and complainers. In other words not only are the grievances not addressed but ironically the people bringing the complaints are seen as the problem.

## 2. Developing our understanding of what we mean by racism in organisations

Racism has evolved. Whilst this report makes clear that overt and blatant discrimination on the basis of race still occurs, there are also far more subtle ways in which it manifests itself today. Because the modern forms of racism are more indirect and subtle they are also open to interpretation. However there is a need for organisations to understand that, whilst there may be some ambiguity in inferring the intentions of an action, they should not rule out that race played a part. There is educational role that needs to be undertaken, particularly with leaders and HR. Reporting incidents to a line manager and to HR were amongst the least effective actions to resolve problems.

One third of those who didn't report racism said it was because they were unsure of whether it was serious enough. Organisations can do this by describing subtle, as well as explicit, forms of racist behaviour in their employee code of conduct. Additionally, unconscious bias training could be utilised to raise awareness of subtle forms of racism, such as making assumptions about a colleague based on racial stereotypes.

### 3. Everyone has a role to play-including bystanders

Finally, the most effective way to resolve an issue was to challenge the perpetrator directly. However, the most common reason for bystanders' failure to report racism was the fear of consequences.

Organisations must work towards building a culture of inclusion, in which people can challenge one another on racism without fear. Education can be highly effective to help everyone become more effective at constructive challenge. This will bring benefits not just in creating greater inclusion but it will also lead to greater creativity, reduced likelihood of groupthink and better decision-making.

The white majority group, even though they are least likely to experience racism, is most likely to challenge racist behaviour when they witness it. However, they are also less likely to recognise the more subtle behaviours as racist. Education will play a part here, to help understand not only how racism has changed but the impact that these more indirect actions can have on their minority colleagues. The majority group has an important part to play here in continuing to challenge the negative behaviours they see in the workplace.



# Appendices 1: Participants

The paper is designed to be accessible to all audiences. As such, statistical reporting is only employed where necessary, and, for the most part, descriptive percentages are reported. Quite often, we will compare the responses of different racial groups using percentages. Unless it is explicitly stated otherwise, race comparisons using percentages are weighted against the representation of that race within the respondent population. Or in other words, because we had a greater number of white respondents than minority respondents, we have accounted for the racial imbalance by using percentages as opposed to individual counts.

Please note, we also investigated gender and sector effects but found very few real differences.

Therefore, we have chosen to report gender and sector findings only where they are statistically significant.

## Participants

Participants were paid or unpaid depending on the recruitment method. Paid participants were recruited through Mechanical Turk (0.2%), and Prolific (85%). Mechanical Turk is a crowdsourcing internet marketplace where workers are paid to complete human intelligence tasks, whilst Prolific provides demographically-screened participant panels for the purpose of academic research. The remaining respondents were unpaid and recruited through Pearn Kandola LLP's social media platforms (4.8%), email circulation to Pearn Kandola LLP's clients and ChangeBoard (10%). All participants completed the survey through the same open link, between November 20<sup>th</sup> 2017 and January 19<sup>th</sup> 2018.

UK DEMOGRAPHICS									
Race	Gender	Age	Professional Services (574, 40.37%)	Manufacturing (70, 4.92%)	Retail (274, 19.27%)	Oil & Gas (12, 0.84%)	Public Sector (459, 32.28%)	Other (33, 2.32%)	Total
White (731, 51.41%)	Male (233, 16.39%)	Below 18	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
		18-20	1	1	7	0	3	0	12
		21-29	20	4	9	0	5	0	38
		30-39	29	2	12	1	16	1	61
		40-49	34	2	3	1	18	1	59
		50-59	17	1	3	0	27	1	49
		60+	3	4	1	1	4	0	13
	Female (493, 34.67%)	Below 18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		18-20	4	1	12	0	5	1	23
		21-29	46	9	28	2	38	1	124
		30-39	65	8	30	1	54	0	158
		40-49	29	4	18	2	36	1	90
		50-59	30	5	10	0	34	0	79
		60+	8	1	1	0	9	0	19
Black (252, 17.72%)	Male (62, 4.36%)	Below 18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		18-20	2	0	2	0	0	0	4
		21-29	13	2	5	0	4	1	25
		30-39	12	1	1	0	7	2	23
		40-49	1	0	2	0	3	0	6
		50-59	2	0	0	0	2	0	4
		60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Female (187, 13.15%)	Below 18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		18-20	2	1	6	0	2	1	12
		21-29	23	1	18	0	17	3	62
		30-39	29	0	7	0	21	0	57
		40-49	13	1	2	0	18	3	37
		50-59	3	0	1	0	8	1	13
		60+	2	0	0	0	4	0	6
Asian (432, 30.38%)	Male (166, 11.67%)	Below 18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		18-20	3	0	10	0	3	2	18
		21-29	37	3	19	0	17	2	78
		30-39	24	7	4	2	8	1	46
		40-49	9	2	1	0	4	0	16
		50-59	2	0	0	0	3	0	5
		60+	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
	Female (261, 18.35%)	Below 18	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
		18-20	9	0	4	0	9	1	23
		21-29	37	1	20	0	23	4	85
		30-39	43	4	22	2	31	3	105
		40-49	10	1	7	0	15	1	34
		50-59	4	1	1	0	4	0	10
		60+	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total (1422, 94.73%)	Total Male (462, 32.56%)	Below 18	3	0.21%					
		18-20	93	6.55%					
		21-29	419	29.51%					
		30-39	453	31.90%					
	Total Female (948, 66.81%)	40-49	249	17.54%					
		50-59	160	11.27%					
		60+	43	3.03%					

# Appendices 2: The Survey

The survey can be accessed via this open link (<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LFNB597>). Its questions were designed for three purposes, and depending on the purpose, elicited forced-choice explicit or implicit, quantitative responses. The following, lists and categorises the content of the survey:

Section 1) Demographic questions: age, race, gender, employment status and location.

Section 2) Definitions and attitudes towards racism.

- a) Definitions: Situational judgement tests where participants distinguished between racist and non-racist acts.
- b) Attitudes: 'Do you think racism exists?' , 'Do you think racism is a problem?'

Section 3) Personal & observer experiences.



- a) Observer: 'Have you ever witnessed racism in the workplace?' , 'How did you respond after witnessing the event?' , '(If you took action) what was the outcome of this action?' , '(If you did not take action) was there a particular reason as to why you didn't take action?'
- b) Personal: 'Have you, in your own opinion, ever experienced racism in the workplace?' , 'Have you experienced any of the following situations?'

As mentioned above, the race response was a forced choice between 3 options (Asian, White and Black). Obviously, racial identity is far more complex than this choice allows for, and for some individuals this will have been a difficult or even perhaps alienating exercise - for this we apologise. This was a deliberate design choice; allowing us to see how the outside world stereotyped our respondents. This is important for the interpretation of our findings, because when it comes to racial discrimination, a person's experiences are more influenced by how others see us, than by what we know ourselves to be.





Difference inspires business

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