

# COVID-19 AND ANTI-CHINESE PREJUDICE: THE VIRUS OF PREJUDICE

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Binna Kandola, Elizabeth Pincher, and Larissa Dalgarno

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Registered office: Latimer House, Langford Business Park, Kidlington OX5 1GG

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## Executive Summary

The objective of the research was to identify increases in anti-Chinese prejudice since the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis.

There are two parts to the research. The first part was a survey, in which 412 people participated. The second part was a series of interviews conducted to provide more in-depth information. Interviews were carried out with 29 people.

208 out of 412 (50.49%) of those who answered the survey said they had experienced an increase in discrimination in at least one of the three questions asked.

The total amount of people who had directly experienced an increase in racial discrimination inside and outside the workplace: 176 (42.7%).

29.5% working people had witnessed and/or experienced discriminatory events at work since outbreak of COVID-19.

18.21% working people had experienced an increase in racial discrimination from their colleagues since the outbreak of COVID-19.

20% working people had witnessed an increase in racial discrimination between their colleagues since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Out of 412 people surveyed, 150 (36.5%) said they had experienced an increase in racial discrimination outside the workplace since the outbreak of Coronavirus.

When asked where these events had occurred, they happened most on the streets (38.82%), in shops (24.31%) and public transport (16.08%). However, they also occurred in schools, restaurants and sports and leisure facilities.

Incidents ranged from people shunning and avoiding people of Chinese heritage to verbal and physical abuse. Participants also reported being spat at and others coughing directly into their faces. Examples were also given of children being subjected to ridicule and exclusion by their peers - sometimes being encouraged to do so by their parents.

Many people were shocked at what was happening and it has made them feel more threatened and wary of going out. Chinese-owned businesses, in particular restaurants and take-aways, were financially impacted even before the lockdown. For some, it has made them question whether people of Chinese heritage will ever be accepted as British.

The interviewees were also disappointed that they received too little support from others who had witnessed the incidents that they had experienced. This led to increased feelings of isolation and that there is a lack of concern generally about anti-Chinese prejudice.

In this regard, there was criticism also of the mainstream media who it was felt play a part in fuelling the sense of grievance against Chinese people. Whilst there was surprise at the level of hatred on social media, it was, to some extent, to be expected.

The interviewees were well aware that the authorities have time and resources allocated to dealing with the current crisis. It was felt that political leaders would have an impact if they were to highlight this as an issue that needed to be addressed. The mainstream media, criticised for its lack of attention to the Chinese community generally, also have a role in publicising the treatment that people of Chinese heritage are being subjected to.

Support groups could also be established to support the victims of anti-Chinese racism.

Above all, though, there is ultimately a role for all of us. We all need to be vigilant to the treatment of people of Chinese heritage and, when we witness such behaviour, make clear our lack of tolerance and also to provide support to those on the receiving end.

# 1. Introduction

This research began with a message that was sent to one of the authors via LinkedIn. The message, from a client, asked what could be done about the anti-Chinese prejudice that she was facing both in the workplace and in public places. This led to a phone call, which in turn led to this research being carried out.

The objective of the research was a simple one: to identify increases in anti-Chinese prejudice since the outbreak of the coronavirus.

There are two parts to the research. The first was a survey, in which 412 people participated. The second part was a series of interviews conducted to provide more in-depth information. Interviews were carried out with 29 people.

We are indebted to everyone who took the time to share their experiences with us, some of which were extremely sensitive and powerful.

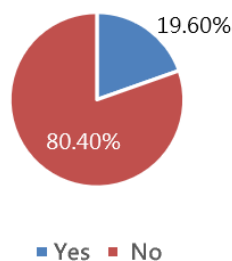
We sincerely hope that this report will make all of us look again at the way that people of Chinese heritage are being treated in the United Kingdom at this very moment.

## 2. Coronavirus and the Increase in Racial Discrimination: Survey Results

### 2.1 Workplace

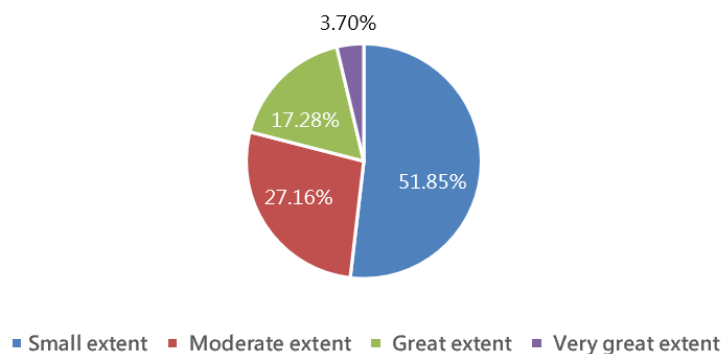
Out of 412 people who completed the survey, 81 people (19.6%) said that they had experienced an increase in racial discrimination from their colleagues since the outbreak of Coronavirus. 331 people (80.4%) said that they had not experienced this.

Have you experienced an increase in racial discrimination from your colleagues since the outbreak of COVID-19?



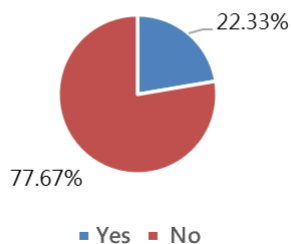
Of those who had experienced an increase in discrimination from their colleagues, 51.85% stated that it was to a 'small extent', 27.16% to a 'moderate extent', 17.28% to a 'great extent' and 3.7% to a 'very great extent'.

Has the increase in racial discrimination been to a:



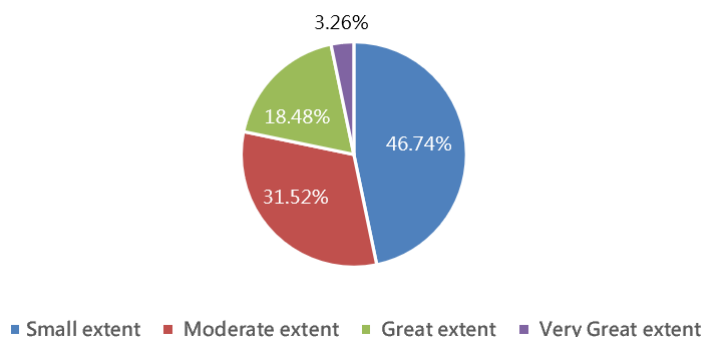
In addition to this, 92 people (22.33%) said they had witnessed an increase in racial discrimination between their colleagues since the outbreak of coronavirus.

Have you witnessed an increase in racial discrimination between your colleagues since the outbreak of COVID-19?



Of those who had witnessed an increase in racial discrimination, 46.74% of people witnessed an increase to a 'small extent', 31.52% to a 'moderate extent', 18.48% to a 'great extent' and 3.26% to a 'very great extent'.

Has the increase in racial discrimination been to a:



Below are some examples of what people have experienced in the workplace:

### *Avoiding interaction*

- Some people clearly try to maintain a safe distant from me.
- Others saying that you have coronavirus and avoid you.
- I was told to stay away from people

### *Coronavirus 'jokes'*

- Joking about the coronavirus that came from China, or that you have it or caused it.
- Get made fun of whenever I cough or sneeze.
- "Just casual level of racism."

### *Increase in discrimination*

- Chinese people are more likely to be discriminated - general feeling that they will spread the disease.
- Some people staring at me as if I was responsible for the virus, talking about Asians spreading the disease.

### *Racial slurs*

- Harassment during delivery work.

- Racist comments between colleagues that had then led to physical altercation.
- People being quite outspoken against me "Get away from me, you have got the coronavirus".

### *Staring*

- Wary looks or look at me funnily.
- Staring at me.
- Judging looks from colleagues whenever they talk about the outbreak, people staying away from me intentionally.

### *Masks*

- Most Chinese want to wear a facemask to protect themselves but non-Chinese colleagues feel they wear a mask because they are unwell. Tension got a little high in the last week when a few Chinese came into work with masks on.
- Talking about it in an insensitive way/stereotyping, e.g. linking the practice of wearing masks to people of a certain ethnicity.

### *Language*

- Conversations that would have not happened previously about singling out groups of Chinese people at tourist attractions and at airports.
- Colleagues treat me differently.
- I have seen multiple colleagues on multiple occasions make Sino phobic comments, with reference to culture and lifestyle choices.

### *Impact on Chinese business*

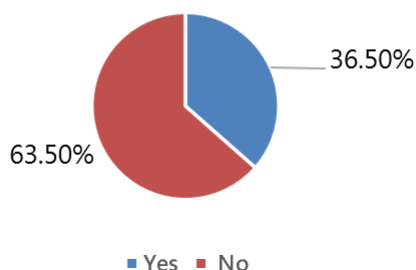
- Calling into my takeaway asking for coronavirus.
- Asking for a portion of coronavirus and hang up on phone.
- Colleague advised that due to the outbreak, she would not eat anything from a Chinese takeaway.



## 2.2 Public places

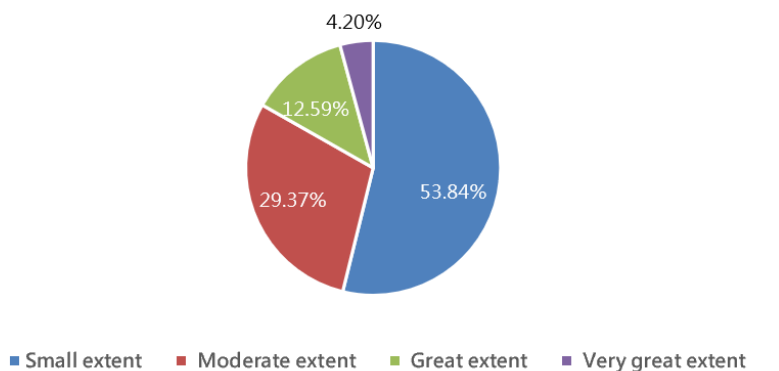
Out of 412 people surveyed, 150 (36.5%) said they had experienced an increase in racial discrimination outside the workplace since the outbreak of Coronavirus.

Have you experienced an increase in racial discrimination outside the workplace since the outbreak of COVID-19?

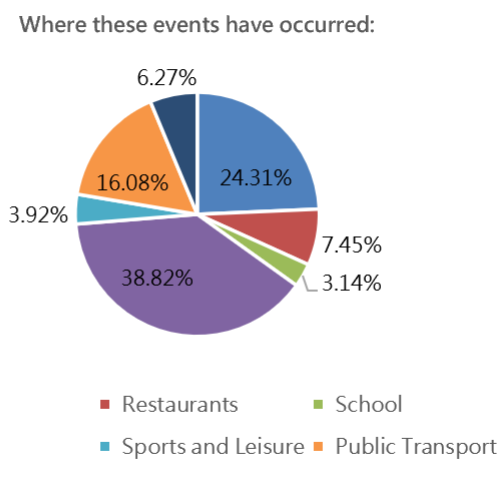


Those who had experienced an increase in discrimination reported the extent to which they had experienced it, 53.84% answered to a 'small extent', 29.87% of those experienced the increase to a 'moderate extent', 12.59% to a 'great extent' and 4.2% to a 'very great extent'.

Has the increase in racial discrimination been to a:



When asked where these events had occurred, they happened most on the streets (38.82%), in shops (24.31%) and public transport (16.08%). However, they also occurred in schools, restaurants and sports and leisure facilities.



When asked to describe these incidents, they ranged from more subtle behaviours (such as others being stared at or people avoiding them) to more overtly racist acts (such as being shouted at, or physical attacks).

The following are a few examples of incidents the sample had experienced:

### *Stares*

- I am aware that people stare at me and purposely avoid me (before social distancing was compulsory). Even had someone pull their child back away from me in a lift. Maybe I'm being more sensitive but I certainly do not feel comfortable going out anymore.
- People giving me glaring looks whilst out in public. I am Chinese and this began occurring before social distancing and self-isolation and staying at home was officially announced in the UK.
- It revolves around walking to and from work and being out and about in the supermarket, etc. It is quite subtle but I can feel it.

### *Avoidance*

- People have been avoiding me in particular.
- People walking further away from me and staring at me.
- People are pretty wary around me; I can feel that I am drawing more attention from people, particularly if I want to clear my throat or something like that.

### *Verbal abuse*

- I was called a 'fucking Chink' in an area I felt really safe in the past. People look at me funny and have covered their mouth/nose when I walk past.
- Stranger telling me to go home although I am British and lived here for over 40 years.
- As I am British-Chinese, I get treated with more suspicion. Racial slurs yelled (from a distance). People coughing at me. People who blame people like me for bringing coronavirus to the country.

### *Physical abuse*

- I have been harassed in public

- Youths deliberately coughed at me and laughed while running away.
- My friend was chased and had food thrown at them as racists yelled at them to go back to their country.

### *'Jokes' and comments*

- More jokes and awareness between everyone I know, keeping distance.
- Witnessed disgust expressed over Chinese food.
- People openly commenting to people they're out with they're fearful of passing me (assuming I don't understand English or they don't care if I do), people scowling/evil looks at me, covering their mouths upon seeing me to pass, turning on their heel and urgently walking away from me, seeing me and whispering and laughing and looking back at me, etc.

### *Wearing of masks*

- Western people discriminate against people who wear masks because they want to release their anger onto someone, somewhere. They don't understand that wearing masks is just a way to protect not a sign of being infected.
- Most Chinese want to wear a facemask to protect themselves but non-Chinese colleagues feel they wear a mask because they are unwell. Tension got a little high in the last week when a few Chinese came into work with masks on.
- Talking about it in an insensitive way/stereotyping, e.g. linking the practice of wearing masks to people of a certain ethnicity.

## 2.3 Media

The role of the media in the portrayal of people of Chinese heritage was commented upon as were posts on social media.

### *Media portrayal*

- Where it used to be quite subtle, it is now blatant because they think racist behaviour is acceptable. It doesn't help that the media is biased beyond reason and will do everything they can to blame others for the country's own predicament and lack of preparation.
- I think just people's perceptions have changed almost subconsciously due to media and news.
- Negative comments about Chinese people or Chinatown, etc, on the media

### *Online and social media*

- Mocking material referring to 'slant eyes' circulating on social media.
- On social media, racist/xenophobic comments are more common and less penalised.
- Then there's those online on social media in Facebook social groups/pages, using the origin of the outbreak to disguise/justify blatant racism.

## 2.4 Family, colleagues and friends

Incidents involving family, colleagues and friends were also referred to and examples are provided below.

### *Family*

- My son at school has been teased saying he's got c19.
- Death threats, foul remarks and physical assaults have been demonstrated in anger towards these victims. Me and my family are one of those victims.
- I've had members of my extended family (white British) circulating inappropriate material mocking people of Chinese heritage.

### *Colleagues*

- I had a colleague who came across a man who spat on her, saying she was a "virus spreader".
- Chinese colleagues are avoided.
- My colleague had a conflict with a customer who had a racial discrimination intention towards Chinese. My colleagues defended the Asian culture.

### *Friends*

- People laughing at my friend because she is Chinese.
- My friend has been discriminated because he is a Chinese person.
- I know someone who was sent a letter accusing them of spreading Covid-19 and was threatened with damage to their home if they didn't sell up to an English family.

## 3. The interviews

### 3.1 Background to the sample

Twenty-nine people were interviewed as part of the research. The majority (20) of our sample for the interviews was born and raised in the United Kingdom. Two were international students from China and seven were born outside the UK in Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, New Zealand, Malaysia, Canada and the USA.

Twenty-eight interviews were carried out by phone and there was one exchange conducted via email. The interviews took place between 21st March and 6th April 2020.

There were two students in the sample and the others were employed in a range of administrative, technical and professional roles. One interviewee is a chef but apart from that, no others were working in the restaurant and catering profession. This is quite a contrast with many of the BBC whose parents owned restaurants and takeaways.

The British Chinese community is very dispersed throughout the country. The parents for the majority of the British-Born Chinese (BBC) came to the United Kingdom in the 1960's and opened Chinese restaurants and takeaways. and at school the interviewees were the only Chinese student or one of a very small number. Many of the BBC had experienced bullying and intimidation whilst at school. This consisted of name-calling, taunting and physical intimidation. Appearance played a key factor in whether somebody was bullied or not. Some of the interviewees were of mixed heritage and commented that because they looked more like their Chinese parent, they were bullied more than their siblings who looked more like their white parent.

It would wind me up growing up but we would just get on with it. There weren't many mixed-race families around when I was growing up. My mum was so fair and so English that people thought I was adopted. My brother looks more like my mum so he didn't receive some of the treatment that I did

Chinese restaurants and takeaways were also a target for racism and so all of the BBC respondents had experienced this growing up. This consisted of verbal abuse but also physical attacks. Being widely dispersed meant that many families were the only Chinese people within the communities that they were living and working in. The racism included name-calling, physical attacks, having eggs thrown at the restaurant windows, faeces posted through the letterbox, fireworks being let off in their houses. Many families put up with the racism because not doing so would have impacted their livelihood. Quite a number of families moved to different towns because of the racism that they had experienced.

When reflecting on their experiences of their childhood and early adult hood, the interviewees said that these types of incidents had definitely become less frequent. Nevertheless, as one person said:

It sticks with you.

Because the BBC interviewees hadn't experienced overt hostility for many years, it made the more recent events even more shocking.

## 3.2 Workplace

There were mixed experiences about anti-Chinese prejudice in the workplace. For some of the workplace, this contrasted quite significantly with their experiences outside of work. For others, it was a continuation, albeit more subtle, often of what was occurring in society more generally. It was also clear, however, from the interviews that people had experienced racism in the workplace before the coronavirus outbreak. However, what our survey reveals is that the underlying level of prejudice had increased significantly at work.

### 3.2.1 Positive experiences in the workplace

In the corporate world you can feel protected from this. Where I work, it is a very professional place, where people have been trained in diversity and inclusion. It's also a multinational organisation and so is more familiar with dealing with a whole range and diversity of people

The quote above is representative of how several interviewees felt. One person said that in their organisation, everyone had been trained in how to work with a diverse range of colleagues. This was felt to have had a beneficial effect on the working environment and climate. One person, whose job is in a building society, said "I am really lucky to be working with people like this."

For these individuals, the workplace was in contrast to the social environment. The workplace felt safer than the environment outside of work. One interviewee referred to the response of a boss when she told him about an incident that had occurred in a supermarket. He enquired further to understand the situation better and then told her that if anything like this ever happened again, she should tell him immediately.

### 3.2.2 Negative experiences in the workplace

Others had experienced anti-Chinese discrimination in the workplace since the outbreak of coronavirus.

The incidents ranged from deliberate and overt avoidance, to indirect comments indicating anti-Chinese sentiment. Some referred to the lack of support from their colleagues when discussing their experiences with them.

### *Avoidance and shunning*

A common experience in the workplace is that of avoiding colleagues of Chinese heritage. This included taking a wide berth around their colleagues of Chinese heritage, avoiding shaking their hands, and staring.

I was walking down the corridor and a colleague of mine was coming in the opposite direction. When he saw me, he almost swerved to get around me. And this was before all of the social distancing rules came in. I said to him "Did you just give me a wide berth?" I did it in a joking sort of way and he said, "I was just doing that to keep you safe."

Some are concerned not just about the situation now at work but what it will be like once the present crisis is over. One person, who travels a lot in his work, is hearing about the experiences of people of Chinese heritage in several different countries and he is becoming increasingly concerned about travelling to these locations in the future.

### *Expressing racist comments and views indirectly*

It's all very subtle.

The incidents at work are characterised mainly by the quotation above. But there are other instances which are more blatant and direct. The following quotes are examples of how racist views will be expressed openly but not directly to the person of Chinese heritage.

My manager said that the takeaway near where she lives had their takings down and she said that was probably no bad thing.

My boss said she avoids all Asians on the bus and all Chinese on the bus. So, there's not many people she can sit next to now. People don't think it's racist; they say they don't mean anything by it

It is to be expected that people will talk about the coronavirus outbreak in the workplace. However, some interviewees found that their colleagues were taking the opportunity to express very negative and stereotyped views about China and people of Chinese heritage.

I have noticed that there are a lot of individuals with opinions about race. They are blaming a certain group. And some very strong individuals in the groups are saying that people of Chinese heritage are responsible for the outbreak.

### *Lack of support*

There was a general feeling that racial prejudice against the Chinese and people of Chinese heritage is generally ignored in the workplace. This sense that prejudice against Chinese people is not taken seriously has been felt more acutely since the coronavirus outbreak. One of the interviewees told her boss of what she had recently experienced. His response was to tell her that couldn't possibly be true. On one occasion where an individual had been spat at on her way to work, she chose not to talk about this with her colleagues saying:

I couldn't talk to my colleagues about my incident about being spat at as they wouldn't have taken it seriously. They would never have understood it. They are white and don't understand what it is like to be Asian and in a minority.

## 3.3 Public places

Many of the incidents that people of Chinese heritage have faced have occurred in public spaces – in the streets, in shops, on public transport, in bars and restaurants. They are also aware of incidents that have occurred within their local community, which have all added to an environment of greater threat and lack of security.

As in the workplace, the incidents range from shunning and avoidance, verbal abuse, coughing and spitting and confrontations.

### 3.3.1 In the streets

A very common reaction that many people experienced is that of being avoided in public and treated with suspicion. This could be avoiding walking past a person of Chinese heritage or very obviously pulling up a scarf or jumper around the mouth. For some, there was initially a sense of disbelief that this could be happening. For example, one woman seeing how a man had pulled up his jumper around his mouth as he approached her, wanted to make sure that he had done it because of her. She said "You have this self-doubt; I don't want to think people are racist and that they only do it when they pass me. But this guy after he had passed me uncovered his mouth."

As one person, who had experienced something similar, said:

It just makes me feel like some sort of outcast.

Our interviewees reported being verbally abused on the streets, as well as outside their houses. One interviewee, a BBC, has a security camera outside his house. A woman passing by, seeing him coming out of his front door, pointed to the camera and said "You should know your place. You can't do that in this country." As the interviewee said, "that was the worst type of racism I have heard in a long time."



This feeling of surprise at the depth of feeling of the racism they are experiencing was something that was recounted by many of the interviewees. One mentioned an incident in Manchester when he was walking along the pavement and someone shouted at him: "Fuck off back to China." The interviewee reflected that: "I've lived in Manchester for 17 years and this is the first time this has ever happened to me."

For others, this type of abuse has become so frequent that, as one person said:

"Fuck off back to China" is a common one. I kind of expect it.

There are variations on this theme that others have been subjected to. Another person reported, when walking back home from work, that someone shouted at her "Fuck off back to China and keep your money." The interviewee went on to say that there has always been a lot of ignorance shown about Chinese people "but now you can feel the hostility."

One man was doing nothing more than waiting for a bus at the bus stop. The elderly woman in front of him turned around to him and "told me to go home." In this particular instance, so stunned was he by her comment, he didn't quite know how to respond.

There were two instances of people being spat at in public places. One incident occurred at Waterloo station as the interviewee was on her way to work. She felt something hit the back of her head and touching it she felt it wet. Looking up she saw two men standing above her at the top of the steps. "You just spat at me, didn't you?" she shouted at them. They didn't respond and instead turned and walked away. She walked after them, caught them up and one of them turned and said to her "No we didn't. It must've been rain." To which she responded, "If you hadn't done it, you would've said "What are you talking about"" Having trained and worked as a barrister for many years, she could tell when people were not telling the truth. Continuing to work after this very upsetting incident, she felt that she couldn't tell any of her colleagues because they would not have understood what she had experienced.

Another woman also reported being spat at. She was walking along the street having done her shopping. A man passed her and as he did so, leaned towards her and spat at her. She was so shocked that she dropped her shopping. Composing herself, she saw a police officer nearby. She told him what had happened and he was very concerned. He asked her if she was alright and if she was okay continuing her journey home alone or whether she wanted to be accompanied. She was disappointed, however, that the police officer did not choose to go after the person who had spat at her.

### 3.3.2 Public transport

Similar experiences occurred on public transport including avoiding those of Chinese heritage, taking extra precautions when being close to them (for example, covering their mouths.), staring more at people on public transport, particularly on the London underground

It was around the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of March I began to feel real discomfort that I've never felt before. I was sitting on the tube and I realised I was the only one sitting in my half of the carriage. The other half was sixty per cent full. I didn't want to think the worst and I thought maybe it's just a coincidence – maybe people using those doors to get on and off. The longer the journey went on, I realised that it couldn't be a coincidence. I was pleased to get off."

Similar occurrences have happened on buses. "On a crowded bus, my sister and I were the last people that people sat next to."

Because of these experiences, one person had said that even before the lockdown, he had stopped travelling on public transport "because I was feeling so uncomfortable."

One person received so much racist abuse on her train to work that she quit her job just two weeks after she started it.

Nor is it to be assumed that it is only white people who are perpetrators. One woman, who was born in South Korea and considers Britain to be home, was on the underground in London and was mocked and jeered at by a group of Asian teenagers. She chose to ignore them and only reflected on how bad their behaviour was when she saw the response of friends when she recounted the incident to them.

### 3.3.3 Shops

Going to the shops was another area where people of Chinese heritage found that they are likely to receive abuse. One woman said, "I was standing in a queue and somebody pushed me and I said, "Excuse me". And the woman who pushed me said, "Why don't you go back to your own country." She was white but she had a foreign accent. She felt she had more right to be here than me."

Another person had a very similar example. Once again this involved somebody pushing into a queue as she was waiting to pay for her lunch. When she objected to him trying to get in front, he turned around and pulled his jumper over his face and started swearing about coronavirus. She went on, "At first, I thought I'll leave it – I'll be the bigger person. Then I thought people wouldn't think twice about using the word "Chink." So, I decided to say something. I said, "That's very ignorant of you. Chinese people are not a virus. I'm not Chinese. I'm not even Italian." He was shocked and only said repeatedly "I don't fucking care. I don't fucking care.""

The level of hostility is so great that one woman has decided that she will no longer go to the supermarket as she feels increasingly threatened by the atmosphere that she detects there.

An international student on a visit to his local Tesco supermarket with some fellow students caught the attention of a group of young men. They started shouting "Coronavirus" at them and then proceeded to confront them and cough in their faces. The students didn't feel sufficiently confident in their English to respond and so left the supermarket as quickly as they could.

### 3.3.4 Social gatherings

Pubs, bars and hotels have the added dimension that people are typically having a drink. A fashion designer, who works and lives on the south coast of England, was in a pub and on a table nearby was a group of health workers. "They were saying things like "I blame the Chinese. Such unhygienic people." I was sat on my table; my partner had just gone out and I rang a friend and said loud enough for them to hear "These people are saying things about Chinese people. They are saying Chinese people eat wild animals – well, what is venison?""

One person had gone to Dublin with friends for a short break. They were sitting in a bar in the evening and a group of young men arrived. First of all, they started directing comments towards the group about coronavirus and the Chinese. As they drank more, they became increasingly aggressive and they eventually chased this person and the group out of the bar.

One person was in a hotel and waiting for the lift. One lift had broken down and so the one that was in operation was quite full. "As the lift started to move, one man looked straight at me and said, "I hope no one's got the virus." I said, "No, I have not got the virus but my name is Corona." And then he replied, "I didn't mean anything by it." This is just such a typical attitude. People think they can get away with anything."

## 3.4 Family and friends

Numerous examples were provided of what the impact of the increase in prejudice against people of Chinese heritage had had on their family and friends.

The impact on family appeared to be particularly concerning. Parents were hearing of their children being bullied at school. "My six-year-old daughter was crying the other day when her school was closed. She was told that this was happening because Chinese people are to blame. I felt very angry about that."

Another parent reported that her child came home from school and said that there were notices saying, "No Chinese people to be allowed into the school." She said, "I thought this was absolutely appalling and at the same time thought this couldn't possibly be true. So, I told my daughter to go back to school the next day and check this. She said that her friends had said that no Chinese people were to be allowed into your homes either. This wasn't anything done by the school, it was just rumours flying around and a lot of people take this in."

Whilst these are examples of children's behaviour towards one another, there were also examples of parents encouraging the children to avoid contact with children of Chinese heritage. One mother recounted an incident when she was dropping her child off for a play date. Another parent had arrived with her daughter at the same time and she was talking to a third parent who was on the other side of the interviewee. This woman shouted across to her friend "I don't think I've got the courage to pass by." She had to pass by me to get to the house and I was thinking "Did she mean me?" Either she thought I couldn't speak English or she couldn't be bothered to hide her racism. I don't like confrontation and so didn't say anything but I thought she must've been talking about me."

The consequences of the actions of other parents are having a dramatic effect on some families of Chinese heritage. One family had taken their children out of school before the lockdown because other parents had told their children not to play with the schoolmates of Chinese heritage.

And one father recounted to me that the parents at his four-year-old son's football club had told the children "not to stand so close to Kevin". The parents decided that they had no choice but to take their son out of the football club.

The parents of the interviewees have also been on the receiving end of abuse.

My dad is nearly 70 years of age and he was out for a walk where he lives in a residential area of Manchester. Some youths went up to him, shouted at him and coughed in his face.

In this case, the father recognised the school uniform the teenagers were wearing - they were from the same school that the interviewee had attended. He was so appalled at the behaviour shown towards his father, he contacted the headteacher of the school, told him what had happened and recommended that an assembly be held to let all everyone know that this sort of behaviour was not acceptable.

Another person told of an incident when her mother was on a plane. She was walking to the toilet and someone said to her "Get away from me you dirty woman."

One interviewee said that her cousin, since the coronavirus outbreak, regularly receives abuse when she is out on her regular run. "And the thing is she's a doctor working in the respiratory unit of the hospital."

Friends and partners have also been affected. Several interviewees pointed out that it wasn't just them who had noticed the increase in verbal abuse towards people of Chinese heritage – their friends had noticed it and been subject to it too. The boyfriend of one interviewee and his friends had been chased by a group in a town centre when they have gone for an evening drink. They had food thrown at them and were told to "Go home - go back to your own country."

This behaviour can occur in any environment at any time. The friend of one interviewee had been getting a beauty treatment. When a customer of Chinese heritage left the salon, having said her goodbyes to everybody, another customer said out loud "I hope you don't come back." The interviewee said "My friend was shocked and didn't know what to say. But nobody else said anything either."

Behaviour and attitudes like these have impacted friendships. The partner of one interviewee is Scottish and not of Chinese heritage and has heard things said by some acquaintances about people of Chinese heritage: "There are people that he's known for several years and he's had to unfriend them because they are saying things like "We should send the Chinese home." And these are people who have met me. He's had to tell them "You are racist.""

## 3.5 Community impact

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that it is not just individuals who have been affected but businesses as well. For example, several instances were given of Chinese restaurants and takeaways having abusive notices placed on their doors and windows. From the interviews, it was apparent that this had happened in quite a few locations including London, the South Coast, South Wales and the North East. These are not isolated incidents and are likely to be part of a pattern occurring nationwide.

Previously very popular and successful Chinese restaurants witnessed a severe loss of trade well before the lockdown occurred. Another interviewee mentioned a Chinese street food van, which had been very popular especially with students, had closed weeks before the lockdown so sudden had their drop in trade been.

One interviewee who works close to a University mentioned the change that she had seen, "the streets around here used to be full of Chinese students and now they are completely gone. I don't know where they've gone." A University lecturer gave a reason for the lack of visibility of Chinese students, "they are now scared to go out - it's as simple as that."

## 3.6 Media

It is interesting to note that the mainstream media - TV stations, radio, newspapers - received more critical comments than social media.

### 3.6.1 Lack of interest in anti-Chinese racism

There was a widespread perception that discrimination and racism against Chinese people and people of Chinese heritage is not something that is of interest to the mainstream media.

We, as a community, feel it's gone up a lot. Chinese businesses have been affected more because it started earlier. Everyone knows racism has shot up. But unless it's actual violence, it's ignored by the media.

The interviewees felt that the Chinese community is taken for granted and not listened to. "No-one cares what we think as long as we pay our taxes and we are not seen as a burden. But we can be mocked."

Contrasts were drawn with how the media deals with stories of racism against other minority groups where more attention is given to those issues. "I am not shocked about the incidents. I am shocked these haven't been reported in the news more. The UK is meant to be liberal but it isn't. Racism still exists and the media aren't interested what happens to us."

By way of example, a few people commented on Piers Morgan mocking the Chinese accent on his morning television programme. Whilst Morgan himself was the focus of much of the media attention, others also referred to the fact that his co-host, Susanna Reid, whilst seemingly objecting to his statements nevertheless seem to enjoy them. "In January Piers Morgan mocked the Chinese language on TV. Even though his co-

host said this was like 70s television, she was also laughing along with him. It's actually seen as acceptable to make fun of people of Chinese people in this way."

### 3.6.2 Media portrayal of people of Chinese heritage

Another consistent theme that emerged from the interviews with regard to the media, was how few people of Chinese heritage there are on mainstream TV.

You just don't see Chinese people portrayed in the mass media. If we are invisible, we don't exist.

"In the UK media, Chinese people are very rare – I think there is one actor on Casualty but apart from that, I can't think of another example."

It was felt that there was a thoughtless portrayal of people of Chinese heritage. A couple of interviewees mentioned disappointment in the Guardian who they suggested tended to show Asian people in masks even though the stories were not to do about China. "This creates an association that is the face of the pandemic. This is the imagery of the pandemic. I'm very conscious of these associations."

Another said "We have no voice in the media – about what people like us are having to go through. Even the Guardian and the BBC will be homing on an East Asian person with a mask on. The media are fuelling it."

Some people also felt part of the way that the media fuels the racism is by its portrayal of China; that the Chinese government and the Chinese people did not know what they were doing." The attitude is that China didn't handle it well – not like us. Some of this is true – they did bungle it. But it's become a 'them' and 'us' thing. China is now providing ventilators to Italy but nobody says anything about that."

### 3.6.3 Online and social media

Racism and abuse on social media was seemingly almost to be expected. The hatred that people saw made them concerned, threatened and angry. Some individuals had decided to challenge those posting hateful comments and, in some instances, they were successful in changing attitudes. "I tried to explain to people that it's a virus but others have said that it's from China so it is a Chinese virus so why don't you take it back with you. Some people I've challenged have said sorry."

More comments were made, though, about the support they get via social media from other people of Chinese heritage. The British-born Chinese Facebook group has 15,000 members and there is discussion about the racism that people of Chinese heritage have faced. Some felt it was almost inevitable that there would be "Chinese bashing". As one person explained "With Brexit it was the Muslims who were the target but now it's the Chinese."

One interviewee saw a message on a WhatsApp group which her husband, who is white and English, is a member of. "It was a song about Coronavirus and it made various insulting references to Chinese people. It was sent to my husband by his brother, my brother in law. I asked why he sent it and what he thought he was doing. He apologised but said that he had not seen anything anti-Chinese in the song. I couldn't see a source for it, which showed me that it was in general circulation. It's probably still going around now."

President Trump's remarks about Coronavirus being a "Chinese disease" were commented on by many people. As well as being seen as "ludicrous and ridiculous", the bigger concern was that he was "inviting and condoning racism". For many interviewees, the impact of President Trump's comments were most noticeable on social media, where it was felt that there were many people prepared to support his views.

## 3.7 Reactions of others

Interviewees also discussed the reactions of others who had either witnessed the incidents or those that they subsequently talked to about their experiences.

### 3.7.1 Not being believed or listened to

The biggest disappointment was expressed by those whose partners are not of Chinese heritage. "My in-laws are white and English and I expected better of them to be honest. They didn't seem to understand the impact of what is being said on me."

Another person described her husband's response, who is white, when she described how she had been shunned by his friend's mother. "He didn't believe that this has happened and thinks it's just the way I've interpreted the situation. He said, "You're paranoid." When white people see situations like this, they tend to focus on me and not on the situation."

This was echoed by another interviewee. "My husband is from a very fortunate background. He has lived a privileged and sheltered life. I think he doesn't fully appreciate the situation. He understands how I feel and he is respectful of that. But he has trouble understanding how racist people can be. His family isn't racist and so he's never been exposed to racism. I had to sit down and tell him "this is happening.""

Trump's comments about coronavirus being the Chinese disease was challenged by some. One reported that she ended up having a debate with her boss about it and another said that his friend commented "Well, it is just the same as calling it the Spanish flu." Totally ignores the fact that it's very easy to pick up Chinese people in public as the physical features are so different and distinctive."

Another had found that people he had spoken to were dismissing the violence and attacks on Chinese people, seeing it as "Nothing more than a one-off incident. They just dismiss it."

### 3.7.2 Lack of response

People were most concerned about the lack of response of other people who had witnessed the incidents that they experienced. This reinforced the feeling that anti-Chinese racism is ignored and even tolerated by people. It made them feel that when they challenged the perpetrators, they did not have the support of other people around them.

A group of Chinese students who were confronted by teenagers who were jeering at them and coughing in their faces found that others witnessing the event were, in fact, laughing at what was happening - in effect supporting the perpetrators.

The feeling of isolation was summed up by one person who said:

No-one stands up for you, no-one sticks up for you. I feel very hurt about that."

The interpretation one person put on the lack of support was that others felt that people with Chinese heritage deserved it. "People are not concerned about Chinese people getting beaten up – the feeling I get is that "They deserve it". Chinese people are the scapegoats."

## 3.8 Impact on individuals

This section looks at the impact the incidents had on the individuals.

### 3.8.1 Threat

The biggest impact the racism has had on individuals is a highly increased sense of risk and feelings of insecurity. People referred to feeling "threatened", "concerned", "scared", "in danger", "stressful", "anxious".

As a result of these emotions, people also said they were "more aware of people around me", "vigilant", "hesitant about going out", "feeling targeted", "can't go out".

One consequence of the feeling of threat was that people felt they were unable to respond to the criticisms that were being made of China (e.g. defending the wet markets) and on occasion to tackle the anti-Chinese prejudice that was being displayed. Where people did challenge, the response of the perpetrators ranged from being slightly apologetic to open hostility. As one person said: "I don't necessarily get an apology but they just try to get me to understand that they didn't mean anything by their comments."

As well as feeling threatened and intimidated, several people mentioned their sense of disappointment. "It's disappointing. I was born in Wales and I've lived here all my life. I've experienced racism unfortunately and I've had to put up with it. I've never felt in danger though but now it's different." The sense of shock is summed up by one interviewee:

I just think "Wow-this is really happening."

There is a real concern about the possibility that somebody will become more violent. "I'm not afraid of it but I wonder if they start saying things where it might end up. I'm concerned if it escalates."

### 3.8.2 Racism revealed

The majority of people spoken to said that they had just become much more aware of anti-Chinese racism. "This is nothing to do with the virus - it's to do with racism" said one person Another said, "These attacks are born out of racism not fear."

One interviewee who lives in the United Kingdom but was born in Singapore said, "I come from a country where I'm in the majority and I don't think about it [racism] - in the way white people don't think about it here. I've had people shouting at me but I've never thought of it as something systemic. But this feels sudden



and systemic. It's not just about Coronavirus. I believe it's always there and this has given the opportunity for some people to express it."

Another said, "All of this stems from inherent racism towards Asians. When this first happened, people were making fun of Chinese people panic buying. They just weren't taking it seriously because it was about Chinese people."

Some argued that people wanted to find a scapegoat. "It's evoking a feeling of wanting someone to blame. It's originated from China and the Chinese are seen as the problem." This feeling was reflected in comments by another interviewee, "I've always had the feeling the individuals are capable of this viewpoint. The outbreak has given certain individuals an opportunity to express their views."

A distinction was all also made by some between the overt racism and its more subtle forms. Several people also made the distinction between ignorance and malice and that the response would be different depending on their evaluation, "with a lot of people it's just ignorance. The educated racists scare me because it's intentional. They could understand both points of view and they've chosen to believe one side only. Educated people are smart enough to hide their racism. They give hints of prejudice and it makes me wonder "Did they really mean that?""

### 3.8.3 Questioning identity

For a significant number of the British-born Chinese, the incidents that they had experienced were making them question their identity.

We see ourselves as being part of Britain. We dress the same as everyone else, we speak the same language and we are very integrated into society. But this is making me question that.

This theme was something that appeared in responses from other interviewees. "Nearly every British-born Chinese person I've spoken to is genuinely very shocked about what has happened. They are British, have lived all their lives in Britain and yet they feel like outsiders now."

Another said: "I was brought up quite 'westernly'. This is the first time that I've ever felt like a foreign alien. When I walk down my street, I think people think I'm another dog-eating foreigner."

For the British-born Chinese in particular, these recent incidents have brought back memories of racism experienced earlier in their lives. "A part of me always feels not accepted. I wonder about my future and where I would want to be. I could go to Singapore. Justin Trudeau has just stood up and said some good stuff." Another person who has lived most of her life in Britain has been so shocked by her reaction but she too is considering whether her future lies in this country or elsewhere.

One person who was so alarmed at how she believed she was being viewed began wearing a sticky label which said, "Please don't fear me - I don't have the virus."

### 3.8.4 Wearing masks

The wearing of masks when one has an illness is a common practice in East Asian societies. It's also a practice that has been adopted by the British-born Chinese community. However, many of the people interviewed said that they have now become very wary about wearing masks in public. It makes the level of fear and threat deeper and more complex for people of Chinese heritage.

For everyone in the country, the principal fear is that of catching the virus. For people of Chinese heritage, not being able to wear a mask increases their sense of vulnerability to the virus. In addition to that, they have the ongoing threat of verbal and potentially physical abuse towards them.

Those who have parents and relatives who live abroad have been advised by them not to go outside without wearing a mask. But in Britain, many people of Chinese heritage have decided that it's too unsafe to go out with a mask on.

It has been shown the mask is a preventative measure and can help prevent catching the virus. But I have a fear of wearing it now. If I don't wear it, I can avoid a racist attack. I don't feel secure if I'm wearing it."

Another indicated "If you are racist you will find any excuse. And the virus and the masks give people an excuse for their behaviour."

### 3.8.5 Self-doubt

An interesting impact of the behaviour and attitudes they are being subjected to is that several people indicated it made them question their own perception of events. It made them wonder whether they weren't being too sensitive to what was going on and that their interpretations were overly negative. "You can easily write it off as me projecting. You can find excuses. When it's not obvious, you can't process it and it just sits."

There was also a lot of relief and gratitude expressed that this research was being conducted. For one person at least it gave some validation to the questions that were going round his head.

It's good to know it's not just me.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

The data in this research indicates that there has been a significant increase in anti-Chinese racism since the outbreak of coronavirus. In the survey that was carried out, nearly 20% of people of Chinese heritage had experienced increased racism in the workplace and over a third has experienced it in public places.

The types of incidents that were recorded included being shunned and avoided; verbal abuse; physical abuse. What was perhaps most disappointing for the people in the survey and of those interviewed was the response of other people who had witnessed the incidents. Too often nobody did anything at all and on occasions seem to be supporting the perpetrators.

The impact of these incidents on the victims was multi-fold. The most common and predictable impact is that people feel shocked, surprised and threatened by what is occurring. This has led to people of Chinese heritage being very careful about how often, when and where they go out.

Furthermore, there is an increased reluctance, when people of Chinese heritage do venture out, to be seen to be wearing masks. Masks are worn to protect individuals from contracting illness. As a consequence, there are multiple layers of threat that the people of Chinese heritage are experiencing. Like everyone else, they're concerned about contracting the virus and not wearing masks increases the level of vulnerability. In addition to that, they feel increased insecurity and threat from the people around them.

There is also a sense that what they're experiencing has exposed underlying anti-Chinese prejudice that exists within society. Coronavirus has given people an opportunity to express their prejudices.

People were also disappointed that they receive too little support from others who had witnessed the incident that had occurred to them. This led to increased feelings of isolation and that there is a lack of concern generally about anti-Chinese prejudice.

In this regard, there was criticism also of the mainstream media who it was felt play a part in fuelling the sense of grievance against Chinese people. Whilst there was surprise at the level of hatred on social media, it was, to some extent, to be expected.

For some of the British-born Chinese, it has led them to start questioning their identity. In particular, whether they would ever be accepted truly within British society.

## 4.2 Recommendations

Interviewees were asked what actions they would like to see happen. It should be noted that some felt that there was so little interest in anti-Chinese prejudice that they could not see anybody willing to take any action.

### 4.2.1 Leadership

It was felt that political leaders have a critical role to play here. They can make reference to anti-Chinese prejudice and say that it is unacceptable and something that they and the authorities will not tolerate. The people who participated in interviews recognised that the attention and priorities of the government and leading politicians will clearly be on responding to the current crisis. However, it was felt that they can make statements regarding the way in which some people are treating people of Chinese heritage and making their life so uncomfortable.

### 4.2.2 The role of the media

Having stories which on the one hand show the prejudice that is being shown against people of Chinese heritage should at least start making people more aware of the problems that this particular community is facing at this present time. Some also felt that they could cover stories which demonstrate some of the ways in which China has been dealing with the crisis as opposed to only referring to it as the source of the virus. For many people who responded to the survey and who were interviewed, this would represent a major shift in the way that the media cover issues to do with the Chinese community.

### 4.2.3 Publicising the research

Another way of raising people's awareness of the issues that the Chinese community faces is by publicising this research. It was hoped by some that this would change some people's perspective at least on their views and attitudes towards people of Chinese heritage.

### 4.2.4 Setting up support groups


It was felt that support groups and helplines could be set up to help victims of anti-Chinese prejudice. This could be done by local authorities or by individual institutions such as universities. By doing this, it will send a signal that these organisations and communities recognise the level of pain that is being experienced by people from the Chinese Community.

### 4.2.5 A role for all of us

Ultimately, all of us can play a part in ensuring the safety of people of Chinese heritage in our communities. We are in a very special situation and there may well have been a reduction in the levels of anti-Chinese prejudice due to the lockdown. There is an opportunity for all of us, however, to play a part in helping our fellow citizens of Chinese heritage to feel safer once these restrictions are over. We can all remain vigilant and when we witness some of the ugly behaviours that have been described to us during the course of this research, we should all be prepared to take action to support which, in turn, will lead to a suppression of the attitude on display.



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	Latimer House Langford Business Park Kidlington OX5 1GG
	<a href="mailto:info@pearnkandola.com">info@pearnkandola.com</a>
	<a href="http://Pearnkandola.com">Pearnkandola.com</a>
	+44 (0) 1865 399060