

Racism Ruins Lives

***An analysis of the 2016-2017 Trade Union Congress
Racism at Work Survey***

Executive Summary

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Commissioned by the Trade Union Congress

Submitted: 13 September 2018

Published: 15 April 2019



I've had three workplaces where I've had to bring grievances that were race related (racist in nature)...You can never absolutely prove it...It's insidious. The ignoring you is as bad as the shouting at you...I ended up on anti-depressants and suicidal. It makes you forget who you are, your strengths, your abilities. I'm a skilled intelligent woman who's worked for 35 years and I ended up barely able to send an email. It's like the perpetrators don't realise. Leaves you powerless. I'm having to leave my job and take a 10k wage reduction for a short-term post instead of my permanent one. It's either that or my life. My children/family have insisted. They want me alive (Black/ Black British Female, Advisor safeguarding and child protection)

Foreword

Frankly it's just too painful. It is ruining lives (Black/ Black British Female)

There is no doubt that racism and xenophobia remain widespread as the recent upsurge in reports of racist abuse and hate crime since the EU Referendum have demonstrated. Whilst there is considerable statistical data available about levels of unemployment, worklessness, lack of promotion and disproportionately low levels of access to training, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) believes that there is very little discussion about the day-to-day experiences of Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) workers in the workplace. The effects of racism at work has become the invisible issue that is not discussed when considering the position of BME employees at work.

To address the lack of presence of BME voices in the debates about racism in the workplace, the TUC carried out an online survey of union and non-union members to capture the experiences of discrimination in the workplace. The survey was completed by over 5000 respondents. The survey asked people to tell us about their experiences at work; if they had been racially harassed, attacked or bullied, if they had been treated differently by their employer because of their race (e.g. by being denied promotion, access to training or being unfairly disciplined). The survey also asked people to tell us about their experiences of raising issues of racism in the workplace; how their employers responded to their complaint, what support they were able to get and what impact the experience of workplace racism had on their lives.

This report shows that racism in the workplace still plays a major role in the life experience of BME workers. It places these experiences in a context that takes account of the historical roots of racism and the contemporary political events that influence people's attitudes and behaviours towards BME people. The report addresses specific BME workers experience of racism and xenophobia in the workplace. These include survey participants experiences of anti-Muslim racism, antisemitism, the experiences of discrimination experienced by the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities, Irish and Eastern European workers. This report also highlights the need to think intersectionally about the experiences racism in relation to gender and sexuality.

The experience of participants highlighted in this report challenge the assumption that racism is only a problem when specific incidents of racism take place,. It highlights the accumulative effect that institutional racism has on BME workers health, wellbeing and ability to function at work. The report shines a light on the personal and institutional nature of contemporary racism in the workplace and in doing so highlights the extent, scale and impact of the racism that BME workers experience and how it ruins their lives.

Over the years the TUC have consistently stressed the need for a separate, clear government race equality strategy and action plan. A strategy that is not based on the assumption that individual BME workers need to do more to jump over the

barriers of discrimination that are erected against them in the workplace – a strategy that results in real structural and cultural change.

Wilf Sullivan
(Trade Union Congress Race Equality Officer)

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Natasha Owusu and Wilf Sullivan at the Trade Union Congress for their help, support and patience in the planning, analysis and writing of this report. Most importantly, we would like to thank the thousands of people who have used this survey to share their experiences of workplace racism. Remembering and reliving experiences of racism can be extremely painful. Therefore, we have tried to treat your contributions to the discussion of racism at work with the utmost care and sensitivity. It is a simple fact that without you we would not have been able to draw further attention to the nature, scale, impact and persistence of racism in the workplace.

Executive Summary

Black History Month 2018 coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of Race Relations Amendment Act 1968 which outlawed, among other things, racial discrimination in employment. And yet racism remains a widespread and endemic feature of everyday working life in Britain. And while there is a vast body of evidence in relation to racial inequalities in employment, levels of income, promotion and access to training, discussion relating to the role played by workplace racism in producing these outcomes remains fairly muted. Further still, discussion of the various *and* cumulative impacts of workplace racism have been silenced all too often.

To address this, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) commissioned the *Racism at Work* survey. Between December 2016 and February 2017, some 5,191 people took part in the survey. As well as answering a whole series of closed questions relating to various aspects of their everyday working lives, no fewer than 4,833 responses were given to the following open-ended questions:

- (1) If you have experienced or witnessed any of the above [examples of racial harassment], please provide further information about the incident(s) (1,683 responses);
- (2) If you have been treated differently by your employer please provide an example (855 responses).
- (3) [Have you witnessed racial discrimination or harassment towards colleagues, clients or service users in the last 5 years?] Please describe your experience (1,261 responses);
- (4) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experiences in relation to racial harassment and discrimination? (1,034 responses).

By offering a detailed quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the responses given by the people who took the survey, this report shines a light on both the personal, structural and institutional nature of contemporary workplace racism. In doing so, we draw attention to the various ways in which workplace racism has had a profound effect on people's lives, both inside and outside their place of work.

Key findings

Over 70% of Asian and Black workers who took the 2016-2017 Racism at Work survey reported that they had experienced racial harassment at work in the last five years.¹ What is more, around 60% of Asian and Black workers, and almost 40% of

¹ It is important to note that the analysis presented in this report is based on a non-representative survey sample. That is to say, the survey sample is not representative of the general population of Britain as a whole. Therefore, the analysis presented in this document cannot be generalised beyond that of the surveyed population itself. This is a consequence of the convenience rather than probability sampling, as well as the opt-in nature of the survey itself. This is reflected in the overall demographic profile of the survey participants. Nevertheless, the findings presented in this report

participants from a Mixed heritage background reported that they had been subjected to unfair treatment by their employer because of their race. The most prevalent form of racial harassment encountered at work was racist remarks. In fact, 46% of respondents from a Black, Asian and Mixed heritage background, and 32% of non- White Other participants reported that they had been subjected to 'verbal abuse and racist jokes'. In addition to this, one-third of employees from a Black, Asian and Mixed heritage background reported that they had been bullied and/or subjected to ignorant or insensitive questioning, while 11% of Black, Asian and Mixed heritage employees also stated that they had been experienced racist violence at work.

Ethnic minority employees also stated that they had been subjected to excessive surveillance and scrutiny by colleagues, supervisors and managers, as well as being denied promotion and development/'acting up' opportunities. What is more, ethnic minority employees reported being given unfair performance assessments, as well as being treated as being intellectually inferior to their White counterparts.

The *Racism at Work* survey also asked participants to share their experiences of raising issues of racism in the workplace and the different types of support they may, or may not have received. Indeed, the survey tells us that that far too many employers still fail to take this issue seriously. The personal statements provided by survey respondents also further attests that talking about and challenging workplace racism is extremely difficult, precisely because of a number of coercive and repressive practices which maintain and reproduce institutional and structural racism, and White hegemony. Over 40% of employees who reported a racist incident to their employer said that their complaint was either ignored or that they themselves had subsequently been identified as 'trouble makers'. At the same time, more than one-in-ten respondents raising a complaint said that they were subsequently disciplined and/or forced out of their job as a result of doing so. Moreover, survey participants also reported being subject to a counter-complaint, being subject to disciplinary action being transferred to another department/ worksite and/ or being forced out of their job, after raising a complaint/ grievance.

The TUC's *Racism at Work* survey also further evidences the profound impact that racism has on class experience, class position and the life chances of ethnic minority workers; the combined effect of which contributes to the reproduction of racial inequalities in labour market participation. For example, employees on non-permanent contracts were more likely to report racial harassment and discrimination by their employer than those with permanent contracts. This finding suggests that racism adds further precarity to people's everyday working lives. Similarly, ethnic minority staff working less than 16 hours a week were more likely to report that they had experienced racial harassment at work than those who worked full time. In comparison to participants working for large companies/ organisations (i.e. those employing more than 1,000 people), ethnic minority people working for small and medium-sized employers were also more likely to report that they had experienced workplace racism. While, 49% of participants reported that racism had negatively impacted on their ability to do their job, the *Racism at Work* survey also reveals the

provide a number of significant insights into the nature and scale of workplace racism today. For further discussion on the survey's methodology and the nature of the survey sample, see Appendix B.

extent to which workplace racism, alongside other forms of prejudice and discrimination, continues to determine who gets hired, trained, promoted, retained, demoted and dismissed.

The TUC's *Racism at Work* survey also stresses the need to think intersectionally about the experiences of ethnic minority people if we are to sufficiently grasp both their marginalisation in the workplace and the unequal position ethnic minority people occupy in the labour market more generally. For example, a considerable number of women identifying as Black reported that they had been pressurised, if not explicitly forced, to 'straighten' their hair, as well as being objectified in hypersexualised ways. What is more, almost 15% of ethnic minority women and 8% of ethnic minority men stated that racial discrimination had caused them to leave their job. In light of this, future discussions on how to address workplace racism must also recognise that racism occurs alongside sexism, homophobia, transphobia and disablism, thus making some people vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination and domination.

The 2016-2017 *Racism at Work* survey also documents the fact that workplace racism can have a significant impact on people's physical and emotional well-being. Worryingly, of the Asian, Black and Mixed heritage participants who reported experiencing racism at work, 55.6% reported that this had impacted on their mental health, while 28% declared that workplace racism had an impact on their physical health. Not only this, 28% Asian, Black and Mixed heritage participants who had experienced racism at work said that this had resulted in them taking a period of sick leave.

The personal statements provided by survey participants also draw attention to the ways in which contemporary workplace racism is rooted in forms of racial thinking that once underpinned imperialism, colonialism, slavery and scientific racism. For example, people racialised as non-White continue to be thought of as 'intellectually inferior' to White people, 'child-like', 'degenerate' and 'subhuman'. What is more people racialised as non-White were also framed as belonging to places characterised as 'dirty', 'wild', 'uncivilised' and 'backwards'. Indeed, this was also evident in terms of the gendered ways in which many survey participants experienced racism at work.

The personal statements provided by survey participants also provide insights into the workplace experiences of racism both build-up and aftermath of the 2016 European Union (EU) Referendum and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US). This was arguably most prevalent in terms of Islamophobic narratives which associate Islam and Muslim people with terrorism. Relatedly, the *Racism at Work* survey further highlights that xenophobia remains a significant problem. Indeed, the survey demonstrates that the prevalence and deepening of anti-immigrant sentiment before, during and after the EU Referendum has had a profound impact on the working lives of participants who self-identified as White European. In doing so, the survey sheds further light on the exclusionary, if not probationary, nature of Whiteness.

Echoing wider academic, political and media narratives, survey participants describing themselves as White British used the *Racism at Work* survey to suggest

that globalisation, deindustrialisation, neoliberalism and austerity have had a disproportionate, detrimental impact on the 'White working class'. In fact, a worrying number of White British participants used the survey to downplay the nature and extent of workplace racism, express various forms of White resentment and/ or allege the pervasiveness of 'reverse racism'. This included expressing opposition to attempts to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, while also opposing 'positive discrimination' and 'political correctness'. The personal statements provided by many White British respondents also highlight the way in which White resentment can in classed and gendered ways. This was commonly expressed as a belief that contemporary society is organised in such a way that it disadvantages White, working class, straight men.

Overall, the evidence captured by the 2016 *Racism at Work* draws further attention to the role played by historically coded forms of racial thinking, as well as the structural and institutional dimensions of racism in the workplace. Not only does the survey demonstrate the systemic nature of racism, it also sheds further light on the hegemonic nature of Whiteness. The analyse presented in this report also suggests that the entrenched nature of workplace racism and racial inequality must be addressed through substantive structural, institutional and legislative reform. The *Racism at Work* survey also provides a number of critical insights in terms of the anti-racist educational work that must now be carried out. It is our view that the key findings presented here should be used to achieve a better collective understanding of how the past, and the broader politics of the present, shapes people's everyday experiences of racism at work, especially the continuities between the types of racism encountered in the workplace and the forms of racism articulated and practiced by the economic and political elite in this country. To this end, we must also challenge the idea that we live in a post-racial society. In doing so, we must counter the way in which workplace racism is routinely reduced to either a series of random one-off events and/ or the implicit attitudes and unconscious biases of the individual.

In short, the *Racism at Work* survey reminds us that racism remains an integral feature of workplace culture and everyday working life for a substantial number of people in this country. We must recognise this and attend to the fact that racist ideas and racial inequality in the labour market rely on a series of everyday workplace practices for their reproduction.

Recommendations

Having reviewed both the quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered by the 2016-2017 TUC *Racism at Work* survey, we put forward a number of recommendations for government, employers, the TUC and individual trade unions.

For Government, this includes:

- setting-up an annual review which measures whether progress is being made in terms of addressing racial inequality in the labour market;
- Investigate the role played by racism and other forms of discrimination and harassment in sustaining racial inequality and precarious forms of work;

- Ensure that anonymised application forms are used across all sectors of the labour market;
- Introduce new legislation ensuring that the procurement of government and public sector contracts are subject to Equality Impact Assessments;
- Commission a wide-ranging review into whether employers are fulfilling their equality duties and how employers respond to instances of racism in the workplace.
- Take positive action measures to tackle structural racism by properly resourcing the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to conduct sector-based annual reviews, while also giving the EHRC the authority impose action plans aimed at improving employer performance in relation to the recruitment, retention and promotion of ethnic minority workers;
- Ensure that employment tribunal committees are diverse, while also reinstating the authority of employment tribunals to make wider recommendations;
- Immediately review the implementation of the [‘Code of practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers’](#) and introduce new legislation guaranteeing employees the legal right to have their ‘language proficiency’ assessed free of charge by an independent expert, while also ensuring that employees are given the opportunity to receive additional learning support if necessary;
- Change the Protection from Harassment Act to ensure that employers are responsible for protecting their workers against racism by third parties, such as clients, contractors and customers.
- Audit small companies to ensure that complaints of discrimination and inequality are dealt with in a sensitive and timely manner, while also supporting small companies and businesses employing more than fifty people to carryout and publish a pay audit in relation to ethnicity.

For employers, we put forward the following recommendations focusing on employer leadership, responsibility and accountability:

- Ensure that a senior figure within the organisation, who is either trained or demonstrates a requisite level of experience or understanding, is made responsible for ensuring that the company has an equality and diversity policy in place and that this policy is shared with all staff, external stakeholders, contractors, clients and customers;
- Ensure that senior leadership figures sign a policy agreement that guarantees equality and diversity practitioners have the time, space and resources required to fulfil their role, particularly in terms of having time to investigate and respond to reports of racism;
- Ensure that equality and diversity training is made mandatory for all managerial staff;
- Ensure that senior management figures and all employees in leadership positions are clear about their organisation’s policies on racism, equality and diversity, and acknowledge their responsibility to ensure that these policies are put into practice at all times;
- Consider appointing a senior ethnic minority figure in the organisation to represent more junior employees that experience/witness harassment and

bullying in order to prevent 'speaking out' against racism having a career limiting impact;

- Ensure that senior organisational leaders and Human Resources staff work in a constructive, collaborative and transparent manner with trade unions, employee network groups and diversity and inclusion specialists;
- Work with trade unions to establish targets and develop positive action measures to address racism and racial inequalities within the workforce;
- Ensure that equality and diversity audits/ assessments do not simply focus on measuring the demographic composition of the workforce, but also examine whether there is structural inequality in terms of pay, bonuses and levels and rates of recruitment and promotion;
- Make sure that there is a simple method for ethnic minority workers to report racism at work, and make sure that ethnic minority workers feel confident that complaints will be taken seriously, acted on and dealt with satisfactorily;
- Establish structures, roles and processes that unequivocally communicate that all reports of racism will be taken seriously and will be handled in a sensitive and timely manner, acting in ways which protect staff who are subject to racism;
- Establish and sponsor ethnic minority employee networks which create 'safe spaces' and offer support to people who have experienced racism;
- Ensure that training and the promotion of equality and diversity includes a discussion of the continued persistence of racism and racial inequality in the labour market, why the Race Relations Act was amended in 1968 to outlaw discrimination in employment, and why such legislation and equality duties are required today. This should take place within a broader discussion of Britain's colonial and multiracial history, with emphasis placed on how this informs the expression and experience of racism today;
- Employee training should also make a clear distinction between racism and prejudice, rather than succumbing to the challenge presented by White resentment and claims of 'reverse racism';
- Ensure that procurement agreements with clients and external contractors should also include a commitment to opposing racism and treating staff with dignity and respect.

Finally, we propose that the Trade Union Congress and individual trade unions:

- Undertake an unflinching inventory of what individual trade unions and trade union branches are, or are not doing, to challenge workplace racism;
- Ensure that all trade union members are made aware of relevant points of contact, including Black and Minority Ethnic and broader equality and diversity points of contact above branch level;
- Ensure that all complaints of racial discrimination are taken seriously and are acted on and dealt with satisfactorily, including reports against management and/or union officials;
- Ensure that all trade union equality and diversity officers have a satisfactory understanding of racism, as well as being suitably experienced, trained and/or qualified;

- Ensure that any help and support extended to a person(s) experiencing workplace racism enables said person(s) to respond in a manner that feels appropriate to them;
- Undertake renewed effort to educate trade union members on how to record evidence of workplace racism;
- Advise trade union members on the risks associated with trying to report and challenge racism as an individual worker, outlining how trade union members can guard against those risks either by being a trade union member and/or part of Black and Minority Ethnic employee networks;
- Develop a protocol for dealing with instances and cases where both the victim and the perpetrator of racism are members of the same union;
- Recognise the impact that racism and xenophobia outside the workplace can have, especially on people's ability to do their job;
- Ensure that trade unionists and workers more generally either develop or are made aware of the types of support available to them from trade unions and the TUC more broadly;
- Carefully examine decision-making processes to ensure that there are no attitudinal, political or bureaucratic barriers in place preventing the full participation of ethnic minority members in the unions as either activists and/or elected/appointed representatives;
- Consult ethnic minority workers in relation to bargaining issues that are relevant to their workplace experience, as well as how the union's mainstream negotiating agenda impacts on their working lives;
- Negotiate with employers to develop a clear-cut equal opportunity policy which must include a zero-tolerance approach to racism.