



City Mental Health  
Alliance UK

Research Report

# Mental Health And Race at Work

Insights and recommended  
actions for businesses

In partnership with



YouGov®

YouGov research, commissioned by the City Mental Health Alliance, in partnership with Lloyds Banking Group.



# Foreword



**Poppy Jaman OBE**  
CEO of City Mental Health Alliance

It is with concern, urgency and hope that the City Mental Health Alliance shares this Mental Health and Race at Work Research Report.

The CMHA's vision is that businesses protect, support and create positive mental health for all their employees. In working to achieve this vision, we must recognise that people who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background face particular

challenges, both inside and outside of work, which can contribute to poor mental health. This includes experiences of racism and exclusion, higher incidence of financial concern and cultural mental health stigma. And in the last year, they have faced difficult conversations about race following Black Lives Matter protests, as well as the disproportionate impact of COVID-19.

As businesses across the country work to build more diverse, inclusive and mentally healthy workplaces, they must be aware of these challenges and respond appropriately. The CMHA, in partnership with Lloyds Banking Group, is launching this research to help employers better understand two specific areas. Firstly, in these tumultuous times, what are the challenges and barriers that are specifically hurting people who are Black and from a Minority Ethnic background. And, secondly, what action do businesses need to take.

Some findings were not surprising, but still upsetting. 45% of Black, 26% East Asian, 23% south Asian and 24% Mixed Race employees said that they have experienced racism at work. Many respondents said that they feel like they can't be themselves at work, with one employee sharing, "It makes me feel like there is something wrong with

me; like I am not worthy unless I am how they want me to be.". This statement speaks to internalised discrimination perpetuated by systemic racism. Businesses must take action now to disrupt these experiences. The research also points to good practice in many businesses, with many respondents saying they are comfortable to talk about mental health, and access wellbeing support, at work. This points to an opportunity for businesses to actively support the mental health of their people.

To help guide businesses build mentally healthy and inclusive workplaces, this Report includes the CMHA's recommendations for five actions. These five actions have been informed by insights from this research, as well as CMHA member businesses and mental health and inclusion experts.

I am proud that the CMHA, an incredible community of businesses, has led with commitment and bravery on difficult agendas for nearly ten years, and this focus on mental health and race is no different. Thank you to Lloyds Banking Group for your truly collaborative partnership on this Research Report. Our hope is that it will inspire and inform how businesses dismantle the barriers that are stopping our colleagues and our organisations from flourishing, and build mentally healthy workplace cultures for all. Let's seize this opportunity to create change for good.

# Foreword



**Fiona Cannon OBE**  
Director Sustainable Business,  
Lloyds Banking Group

At Lloyds Banking Group the mental health and wellbeing of our people is a key priority. We're committed to increasing the understanding and reducing the stigma associated with mental health, so that our people feel comfortable discussing how they're feeling, and empowered to get the support they need. The last year has created a number of unique challenges that have impacted

us in different ways. Throughout the pandemic, we have provided additional health and wellbeing support to supplement the existing measures we have in place. These include creating a microsite of COVID-19 related support, providing free access to the leading mindfulness and meditation app, Headspace and making it easier for colleagues helping others to access support via our Employee Assistance Programme, Validium.

While we take an inclusive approach to mental health, we recognise that our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues face specific challenges that can impact their mental health and wellbeing. This is especially true for our Black colleagues and has been brought into sharp focus for the whole of society by the Black Lives Matter movement and against a backdrop of the pandemic.

We needed to start by listening. A series of honest sessions helped us understand the challenges and barriers we must tackle to support our Black colleagues, so in July 2020, we put this into action. Our Race Action Plan includes commitments around training, recruitment and progression, as well as pledging more support for Black communities across the UK.

We established a Race Advisory Panel, made up of 23 colleagues of Black and Asian and Minority Ethnic heritage from across the business to help influence and drive our diversity strategy.

We're continuing to learn and we're working in partnership with external experts to deliver a race education programme for all colleagues to help create allies for change across our organisation.

Working with Mental Health UK, we have also trained over 2,100 colleagues as Mental Health Advocates. These colleagues are helping us drive cultural change through raising awareness, increasing the understanding around mental health and signposting colleagues to support. We continue to deliver this training and will have trained 2,500 colleagues by the end of 2021.

We have made good progress but recognise there is still much more to do. As a result of the research findings, we are looking at a number of new initiatives and enhancements to existing channels that we need to put in place to provide more tailored support for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues. These include ensuring that we have more diverse representation in the promotion and delivery of our existing support channels, such as the Employee Assistance Programme and through our mental health advocate population, providing them with specialist learning resources. We are also piloting new ways to bring in more specialist support and expertise on race and mental health.

We're proud to be collaborating on this important piece of research with the City Mental Health Alliance as it helps support our commitment to build an inclusive organisation.

We hope this research, and the personal perspectives shared, help to inform businesses on this issue and inspire action to help create an anti-racist, inclusive working environment for everyone.

# Research methodology

- This report presents the findings from the 2021 survey commissioned by the City Mental Health Alliance, in partnership with Lloyds Banking Group
- An online survey was carried out with a YouGov panel of 1,076 employees in office-based industries who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background in the UK. Respondents held a range of jobs, including desk jobs, clerical, security and IT. We had a control group of 301 White British employees in similar job roles. Respondents were predominantly employed in the financial, legal, professional services and technology industries.
- 1,076 employees from 18 different Minority Ethnicities were surveyed. These included: Black (Caribbean, African or any other Black background); South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani); East Asian (including Chinese and other East Asian background); Mixed background (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, any other mixed/multiple ethnic background); and White non-British (including Irish, Gypsy and Eastern European).
- Fieldwork was conducted between 18th February 2021 and 10th March 2021.
- The data has been weighted to be representative of each ethnic group.
- Throughout the report, data is shown by ethnic group with comparisons made to the control group of White British office workers and any differences between sub-groups highlighted in the text of the report are statistically significant.
- Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

A wide range of ethnicities were surveyed because we recognise that people who come from different ethnic backgrounds have different experiences. We do recognise that not every ethnicity is represented here; this is due to limits of resource and availability of respondents. Our ambition is that future mental health and race research projects will go wider and deeper so that we can continue to add to this picture.

If you would like any further detail about the methodology or base sizes of respondents, please contact [cmha@citymha.org.uk](mailto:cmha@citymha.org.uk)

## A note on language

When talking about race, language is important. It carries weight in terms of emotion, respect and personal identity. It is understandable that people may feel uncertain or confused about what language to use when talking about race, and particularly so in a professional setting. It is important to ensure that uncertainty over language does not become a barrier to having important conversations or taking necessary action. We encourage people who feel uncertain to listen, do their own research, seek feedback and lead with courage not perfection. After consulting with people who are Black and from a Minority Ethnic background, inclusion experts and businesses, the CMHA uses the language “People who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background” to describe people from different ethnicities who are a minority in countries such as the UK. When we are talking about one specific ethnicity, we will use the appropriate language. We are also conscious that recommended language will evolve. We will continue to listen, learn and update our use of language as appropriate.



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# Executive Summary

The City Mental Health Alliance, in partnership with Lloyds Banking Group, is sharing this research to help improve the business community's understanding of factors that are negatively impacting on the mental health of employees who are Black or from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. We also talked and listened to the stories of people from these backgrounds, and some of their perspectives are included in this report. To our knowledge, there has not yet been research which looks closely at how mental health and race intersect in the context of work. This is a knowledge gap that we needed to fill. And, as many businesses prioritise building diverse, inclusive and mentally healthy work cultures, in the societal context of difficult conversations about race following the Black Lives Matter protests and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, there has never been a more important time to focus on this.

The research focuses on the impact that experiences at work and organisational culture can have on mental health, as well as external factors such as the global pandemic. We also considered what action businesses need to take to support the positive mental health of their people from these backgrounds so that they can thrive.

## Key findings

- A significant number of respondents from all Minority Ethnic backgrounds have experienced racism at work - **45%** of Black, **26%** East Asian, **23%** South Asia, **24%** Mixed Race people.
- Of those that have experienced racism at work, **65%** Black, **59%** Asian and **48%** of Mixed Race people surveyed reported it negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing to a very large, large or moderate extent.
- People who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to say that they don't feel that the workplace is inclusive and that they feel pressure to change their behaviour to fit in. The research reveals a clear negative impact on some employees' mental health when they feel pressure to change their behaviour, including feeling isolated, excluded, anxious, uncomfortable and frustrated, with one respondent saying, "I feel sad, restricted, stressed and at a disadvantage".
- People who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to have had experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic that have contributed to poor mental health. South Asian and Black employees are more likely to have experienced a bereavement or traumatic personal experience (**14%**), while Black people are more likely to have had personal finance concerns (**41%**). This suggests that COVID-19 is compounding existing health and financial inequalities that may already exist for people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- While self-reported poor mental health appears to be relatively similar across all ethnicities, people who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to have experienced anxiety (**42%** of South Asian, **38%** of Mixed Race, **35%** of Black, **34%** of East Asian compared to **27%** of White British people).
- People who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to experience cultural and family stigma around talking about mental health than White people. The stigma is higher for people who are South Asian or East Asian.
- Encouragingly, respondents from across all ethnicities said they feel relatively comfortable talking about their mental health at work, including those ethnicities reporting higher levels of stigma. Many said they would be more comfortable accessing support at work if there was more diverse representation in the promotion and delivery of the support (**60%** of Black, **49%** of South Asian, **35%** East Asian, **30%** Mixed Race).
- Half of all respondents, across all ethnicities, said that their employer had supported their mental health through the COVID-19 pandemic, clearly highlighting the positive role that businesses can play. Employees who are East Asian and Mixed Race were most likely to agree that their employer had supported their wellbeing.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The research has led us to conclude that our colleagues who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background face a wider range of challenges, both inside and outside of work, that are negatively impacting on their mental health compared to White British colleagues. In the context of mental health and race at work, our research suggests that businesses can impact their people in one of two main ways. Businesses can support positive mental health, by building anti-racist, inclusive and psychologically safe cultures and by offering appropriate and representative mental health support. This will help all of their people to flourish. Or, alternatively, a business can have a negative impact on mental health if they do not challenge racist and non-inclusive systems and culture.

Achieving this vision will not just support people who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background. When a workplace culture causes hurt or does not foster feelings of belonging in some, there is less likely to be wider team cohesion and everyone is less likely to thrive. Lack of inclusion is also bad for business, with evidence from reports such as McKinsey & Company's [Diversity Wins](#) report showing that building an inclusive workplace helps businesses' resilience, productivity and reputation. The report says, "Hiring diverse talent isn't enough – it's the workplace experience that shapes whether people remain and thrive". Taking action is not only the right thing to do, it's the business-critical thing to do.

The City Mental Health Alliance recommends five strategic actions to guide businesses to build workplaces that are psychologically safe and which protect, support and create positive mental health for their people who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background. These recommendations are informed by this research, businesses, mental health and inclusion experts. They are designed to be high level so that they can be applied to most organisations. Section 6 of this Report also includes case study examples of how businesses are achieving these actions.

**For more practical guidance and case studies, please see the [CMHA's Mental Health and Race Toolkit](#)**

## Five Recommendations For Action

1

### **Recognise the specific challenges that employees from Black and Minority Ethnic groups face are facing**

We hope this report shines a light on the barriers and challenges which employees from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds face. Businesses should continue to learn and listen by creating a safe space to allow voices from within their own organisation to be heard.

2

### **Be actively anti-racist and prioritise inclusion**

It is not possible to build a psychologically safe environment for people if they experience or anticipate racism or exclusion. Racism and exclusion not only takes the form of offensive comments and bullying, but also includes not seeing "people like me" in senior roles, and not having access to the same opportunities, development and support, or feeling like you need to hide parts of yourself for fear of being judged. Existing structures that act as barriers to inclusion, and which cause people to feel a lack of belonging, must be addressed.

3

### **Promote and design inclusive workplace health and wellbeing systems**

Businesses need to ensure their mental health and wellbeing initiatives and systems are inclusive, representative and effective in reaching and supporting colleagues who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background. Involve appropriate colleagues in the design. This signals to colleagues that your business is aware of the additional and specific burdens they may face, and you are ready and able to provide appropriate support.

4

### **Allocate Board level responsibility**

Significant and sustained change in workplace culture will require senior leaders to drive the change forward and be accountable for progress.

5

### **Measure and be transparent about progress**

Measurement will be key for tracking what does and doesn't work, guide future thinking, increase accountability and sustain change.

# Detailed report findings



# 1 Impact of work culture and experiences on mental health

Our research suggests that employees who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to have experiences at work that negatively impact on their mental health compared to White British colleagues. This includes racism, feelings of not belonging and a pressure to adjust their behaviour to fit in. Many respondents say that these experiences are taking a toll on their mental health.

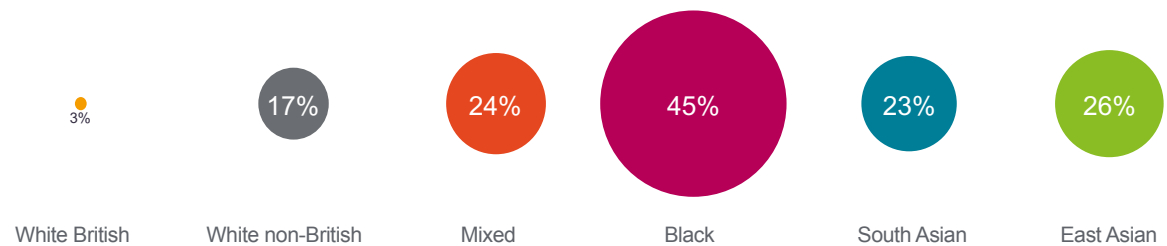
## Racism at work

Employees from all Minority Ethnic backgrounds have experienced racism at work, with **45%** Black, **26%** East Asian, **23%** South Asian, **24%** Mixed race and **17%** non-white British employees saying it has impacted them.

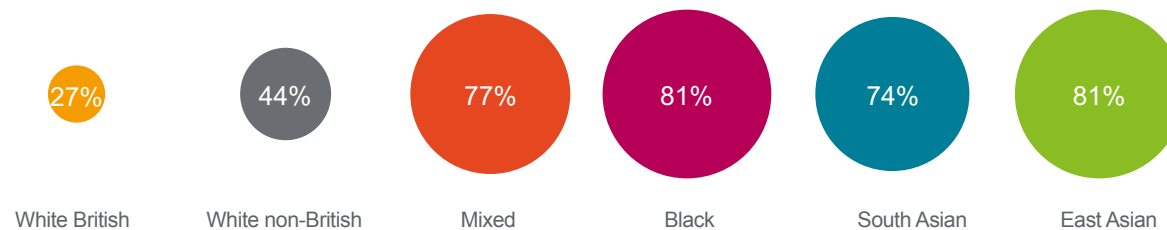
There is a clear perception that employers need to take action on racism. Less than one in five (**18%**) of respondents who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background, and just one in four (**24%**) of White British colleagues, thought that there is no need for their employer to actively challenge racism in their workplace.

This experience in the workplace is compounded by experiences of racism in other areas of daily life. The majority of people of colour who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background also experience racism outside of work, including on public transport and on the street. Two in four non-British White people said the same.

Percentage of people who have experienced racism at work



Percentage of people who have experienced racism in any setting, outside of work



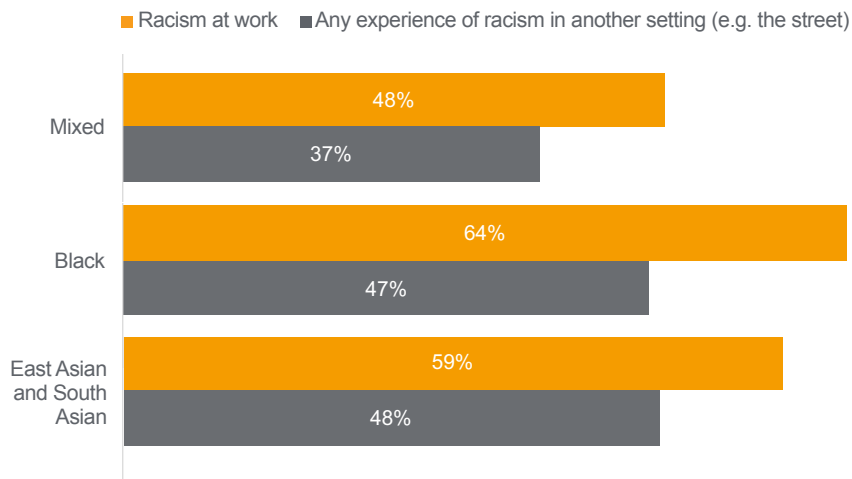
# 1 Impact of work culture and experiences on mental health

## Impact of racism at work on mental health

Of those who say they have experienced racism at work, **64% Black, 59% Asian** and **48%** of Mixed Race people surveyed reported it negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing to a very large, large or moderate extent.

When we asked respondents to think specifically about their experiences of racism at work compared with experiences of racism in another setting, victims are more likely to say that racism at work has a negative impact on their mental health.

**Extent experience of racism negatively impacted mental health and wellbeing**  
(%very large/large/moderate extent)



### Personal perspective

“It has become increasingly important to me that my employer shows that it is actively challenging racism and that it is working to be inclusive. When I see my organisation do this, it makes me feel supported, included and I feel a sense of belonging.” **Shalah Akhtar, PwC**

### Expert view

“Work can take on a significant and important place in a person’s life because many of us devote a significant amount of our time and purpose to work, while building a network, and trust, with the people around us. People go to work, not just to make money, but also for the experience of the job, the place and the community around them. If there is discrimination, we may feel rejection, and the value of work diminishes, and it takes away from our ability to lead a fulfilling life, as well as impairing our capability to perform at maximum potential.” **Professor Gathoni Hamilton-Foster, BAME Therapy**

# 1 Impact of work culture and experiences on mental health

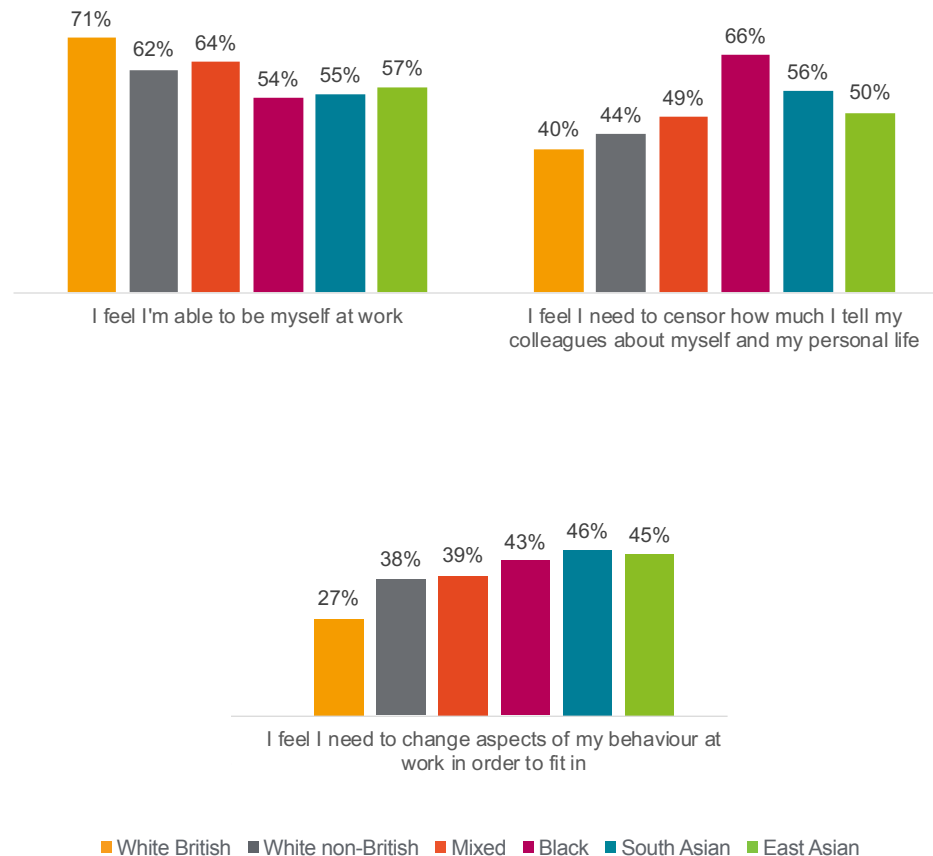
## Negative impact of non-inclusive work culture on mental health

Negative experiences relating to race aren't just about explicit racist incidents. Employees who are Black or from Minority Ethnic backgrounds are less likely than White British colleagues to say that their workplace is inclusive. Many report feeling like they don't fit in or feel pressure to adjust their behaviour to be more accepted by colleagues. The research shows:

- **65%** of White British employees agree that their employer has an inclusive culture, compared to just **55%** of Black, **55%** of East Asian and **56%** of South Asian employees.
- **46%** of South Asian, **45%** of East Asian and **43%** of Black employees say they feel they need to change aspects of their behaviour at work to fit in, compared to just **27%** White British people.
- **71%** of White British respondents said they feel able to be themselves at work; but only **54%** of Black people, **55%** of South Asian and **57%** of East Asian respondents felt the same.

**52%** of Black people, **49%** of East Asian, **49%** of South Asian and **45%** of Mixed Race said that feelings of not fitting in at work was a contributing factor to their poor mental health in the last 12 months. **34%** of White British people said the same.

Agreement with statements about inclusion (% strongly agree/agree)



# 1 Impact of work culture and experiences on mental health

Qualitative responses also reveal the impact on mental health when a person feels like they can't be themselves or has to change aspects of their behaviour to fit in at work. Whilst some respondents say that having a professional version of themselves is just a case of separating work from personal life, many say that having to change themselves at work leads to discomfort, a lack of confidence and a feeling of being held back from reaching their potential.

### Personal perspective

"I first experienced racism when I was just seven years old and that changed my perspective of how others may perceive me simply because of the colour of my skin, as well as my feeling of belonging. Every single racial event that a Black or Minority Ethnic individual experiences is a negative message. It is someone telling you that you are less worthy or that you don't belong. This can be painful and is never forgotten. From my perspective, it's no surprise that these experiences can impact on mental health and wellbeing." **Leroy Knowles, Banking**

### How does it feel to not be yourself at work or to have to change aspects of what you say or do at work?

*No feelings really. I think we all present differently at work to some extent than we would outside of work*

*Fine. I feel work is a separate space from the rest of my life, so it's fine for me to only express a portion of my personality there.*

*Used to it - been keeping my personal and working life relatively separate my entire career*

*My organisation has majority white male in managerial and senior positions. A view/behaviour that is different to that is frowned upon. This means that as a woman of colour I have to act in a certain way to be accepted*

*Feeds into imposter syndrome - that the only reason I have achieved any success is because people see me as a different person than who I really am*

*It sometimes makes me nervous and uncomfortable, but generally I don't expect to be able to always behave the way I want at work*

*I feel like this holds me back; energy that I could be putting into developing myself and excelling at what I do is being diverted into trying to fit the image/idea of what I \*should\* look like.*

*This makes me feel like I am not included and like I cannot get ahead at work*

*It makes me feel like there is something wrong with me; like I am not worthy unless I am how they want me to be.*

*Like I don't belong there*

*Sad, restricted, stressed and at a disadvantage.*

*It makes me feel isolated and alone at such times as certain topics arise A bit frustrated and embarrassed. A bit like I wish I could be somewhere I felt more free.*

*I don't feel empowered and it makes me feel less of myself.*

*Really frustrated and sad.*

*Very uncomfortable, angry and frustrated.*

*Not free to be who I am makes me feel unhappy about myself. Having to feel uncomfortable in what I say and how I say it has a huge impact on how I feel around my team. I don't feel confident and feel that I don't have a say*

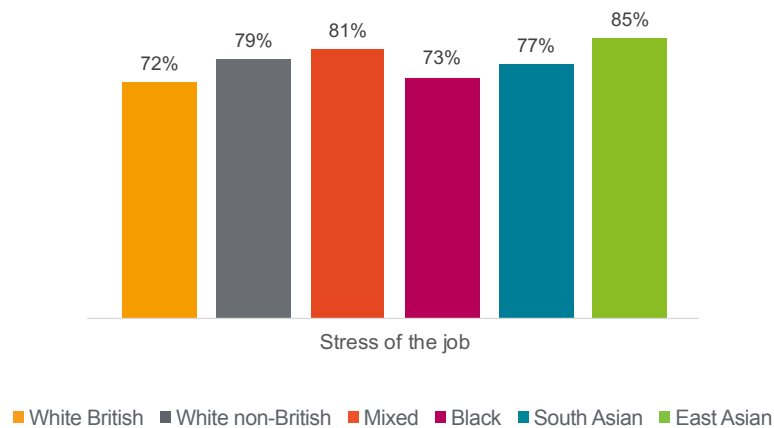
*It makes me feel a bit restricted and anxious sometimes*

# 1 Impact of work culture and experiences on mental health

## The impact of work stress

The research showed that stress is a key contributor to symptoms of poor mental health at work for all ethnicities. However, people who are Black, East Asian or White non-British are more likely to report being negatively impacted by the stress of their jobs.

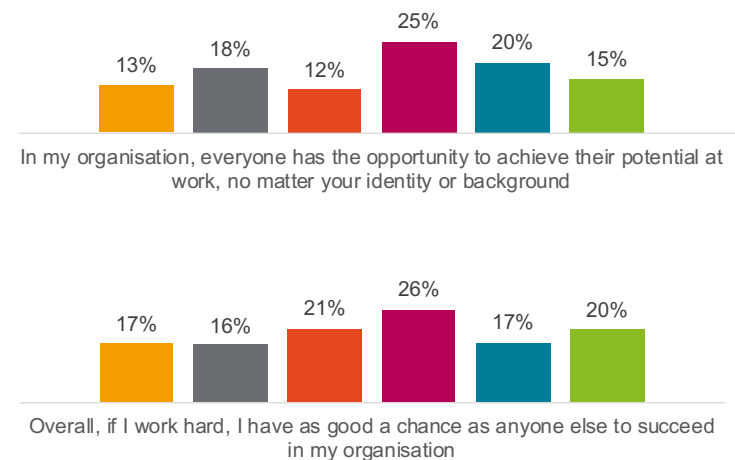
**Contributors to symptoms of poor mental health at work**  
(% great/small extent)



## There is perceived inequality of opportunity

Black, South Asian and East Asian employees are less likely to agree that there is equal opportunity at work. **25%** of Black people, **21%** of Mixed Race, **20%** of South Asian and **18%** of Non-white British disagreed that everyone in their organisation has the opportunity to achieve their potential no matter their identity or background. **13%** White British and **12%** Mixed Race people disagreeing with the same statement.

**Equality of opportunity in the workplace**  
(% disagree/strongly disagree)



## 2 The Impact of the global pandemic

Nearly two thirds of all employees (**60%**), across all ethnicities, say that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The research shows that people who are Black or from Minority Ethnic backgrounds are more likely to point to a wider range of factors that have negatively impacted on their mental health during the pandemic compared to White British colleagues. Factors include personal finances, trying to find a work/life balance and bereavement. **14%** of Black and **14%** of South Asian respondents said that they had a traumatic personal or family experience because of COVID-19, compared to **6%** of White British. **18%** of South Asian and **14%** of Black people said that they have experienced a bereavement since the start of the pandemic, compared to **9%** White British. Furthermore, Black employees are the most likely to report concerns around personal finances, with **41%** saying that this has been a worry.



**Finding a worklife balance**  
*Higher for:*  
**East Asian employees (59%)**  
**South Asian employees (53%)**

**Traumatic personal or family experience of Coronavirus**  
*Higher for:*  
**Black employees (14%)**  
**South Asian employees (14%)**

**Personal finances**  
*Higher for:*  
**Black employees (41%)**  
*And more likely for:*  
**Black women (47%)**  
**than Black men (34%)**

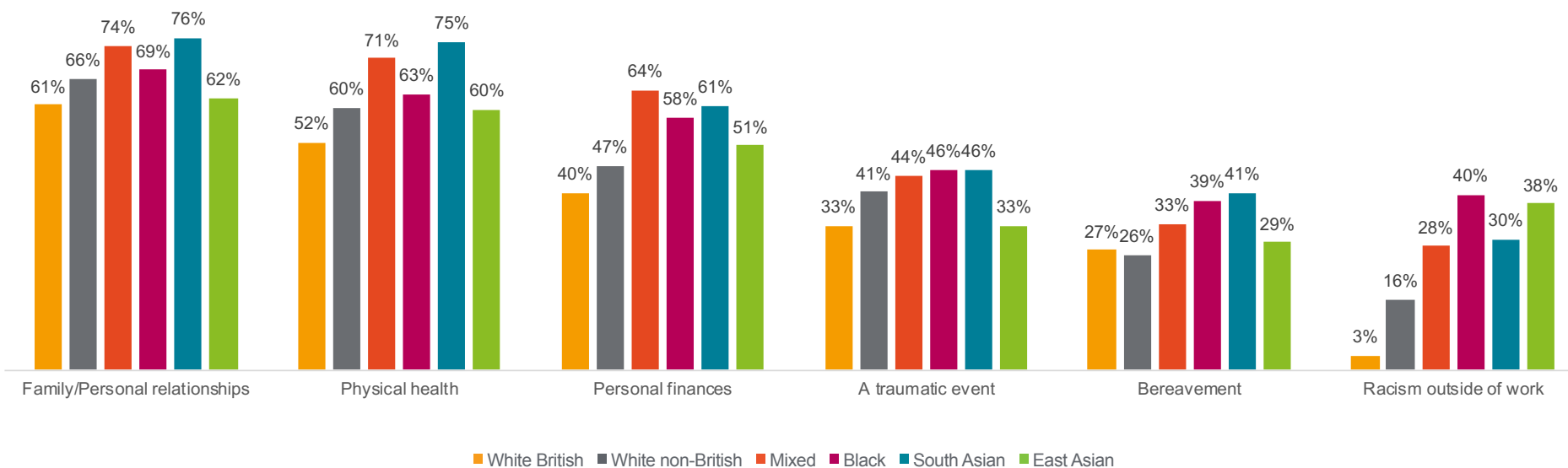
**Bereavement**  
*Higher for:*  
**South Asian employees (18%)**

**Loneliness**  
*Higher for:*  
**White non-British employees (46%)**  
**Mixed Race employees (47%)**  
*And more likely for:*  
**Mixed Race women (55%)**  
**than mixed Race men (38%)**

# 3 Impact of experiences outside of work

The research shows that people who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to point to more pressures outside of work that contribute to symptoms of their poor mental health. This includes racism in public settings, worry about personal finances and concerns over physical health. In order to provide the appropriate wellbeing support, employers should be aware of the different stressors that impact different demographics.

**Contributors to symptoms of poor mental health outside of work - (% great/small extent)**



# 4 Mental health and stigma

We asked the respondents about their mental health and whether they felt any stigma in talking about it.

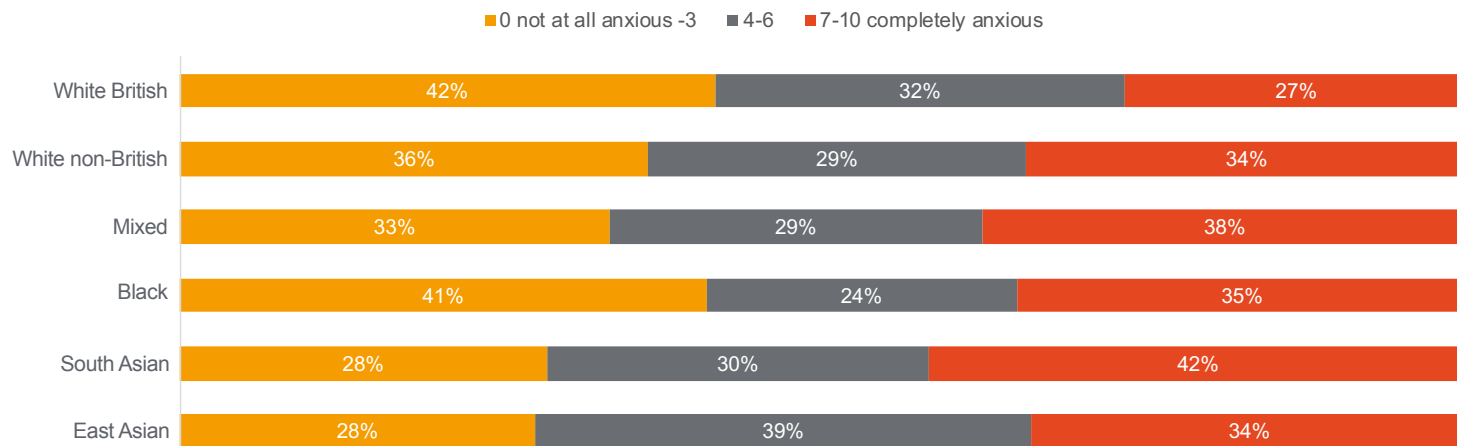
### State of employees' mental health

Self-reported levels of mental health and wellbeing are similar across all ethnicities, with **72%** of people self-reporting poor mental health over the last 12 months, including anxiety, depression, addiction and stress. The research does show that employees who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to report experiencing anxiety. **42%** of South Asian, **38%** of Mixed Race, **35%** of Black and **34%** of East Asian employees report experiencing anxiety, compared to **27%** of White British people.

The research also revealed significant differences between gender for people from certain Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Women who are Mixed Race, Black and South Asian women are more likely to self-report experiencing symptoms of poor mental health over the last 12 months than men of the same ethnicity, or women who are White British. **81%** of Black women, **80%** of South Asian women and **71%** if East Asian women report experiencing poor mental health symptoms compared to **56%** of Black men, **40%** of South Asian men and **37%** of East Asian men.



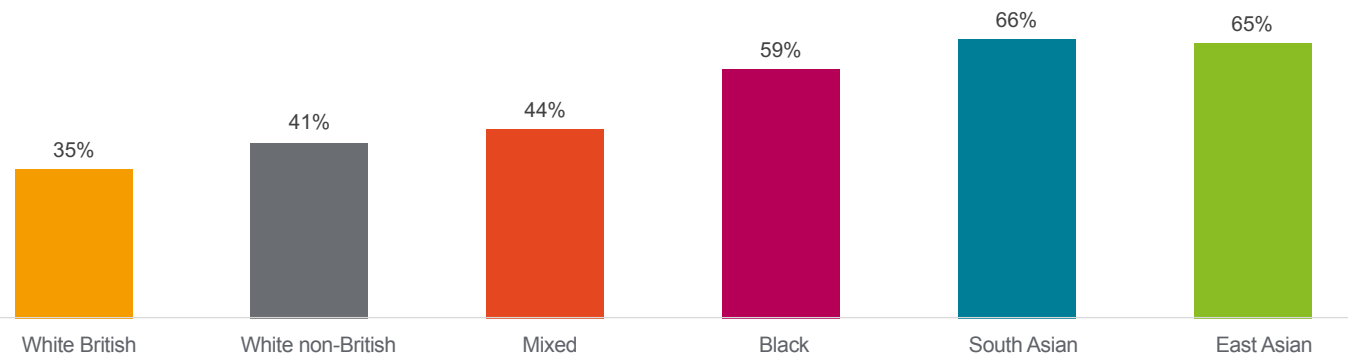
### Experience of anxiety





## 4 Mental health and stigma

In my culture there is stigma around talking about poor mental health or mental illness (% tend to agree/strongly agree)



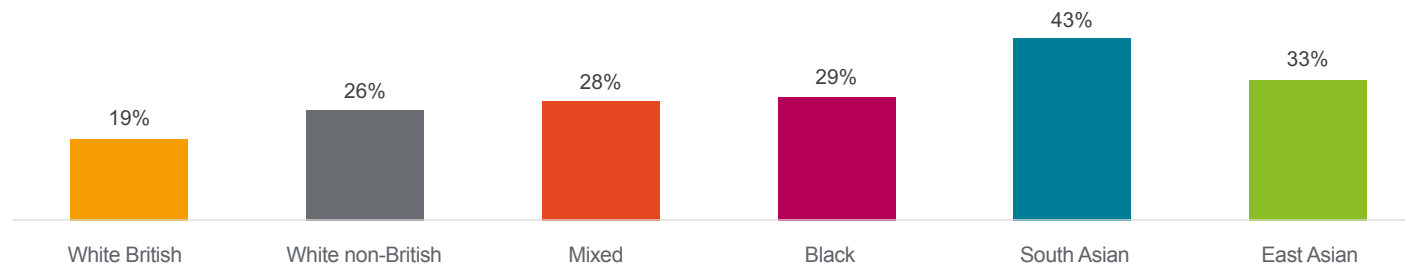
### Cultural and family mental health stigma

Employees who are Black and from Minority Ethnic backgrounds are more likely to experience cultural stigma around mental health, with this being particularly pronounced for those from South Asian and East Asian backgrounds. People who are South Asian (**66%**), East Asian (**65%**) and Black (**59%**) say that in their culture there is stigma in talking about mental health. This compares to **35%** of White British people. They also report a stigma in talking about mental health within their family.



## 4 Mental health and stigma

In my family there is stigma around talking about poor mental health or mental illness (% tend to agree/strongly agree)



### Relationship between stigma and poor mental health

Our research suggests a direct correlation between cultural stigma and symptoms of poor mental health – in particular low mood, anxiety and depression. Of those respondents who said they faced cultural stigma, **77%** said they had symptoms of poor mental health in the last year. Whereas, of those people who do not face cultural stigma, fewer people reported symptoms (**69%**). This points to an opportunity that businesses have to support the mental health of their people, through playing a role in actively challenging stigma and normalising conversations about mental health.

### Personal perspective

“Over the last year, I have experienced poor mental health as a result of numerous challenges and pressures at home and at work, on top of the physical and psychological impact of COVID-19, and the isolation, resulting in stress and anxiety. “I am British Asian and sometimes, because of my cultural background and the stigma in acknowledging and talking about mental health, I felt the pressure to carry on as if everything was fine. I worried that talking about my mental health with my loved ones could affect the dynamic of our relationships, which therefore limited how much I disclosed. But I recognised that I needed support. Work was really supportive, and

gave me to have much needed time out, to rest, seek therapy and focus on getting myself back to who I am. And my colleagues were a fantastic support network during this time. As far as I’m concerned, your work can be a place of support. It’s an environment where you build strong, trusting relationships with your colleagues. As your colleagues come from different backgrounds with different perspectives, they can challenge your way of thinking and the diversity allows for more open dialogue. For me, I found so much value in these relationships to talk about my mental health.”

**Arbi Rai, Lloyds Banking Group**

# 5 Workplace support

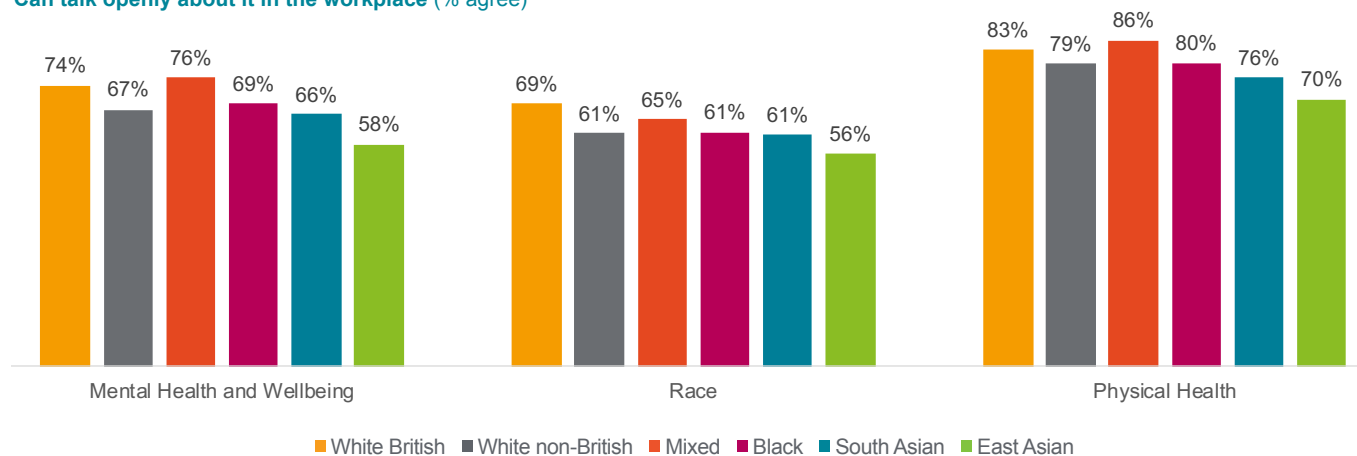
We asked people what they think of mental health support in the workplace – including awareness of and comfort in accessing it. The research reveals that the majority of respondents, from across all ethnic backgrounds, view work as being a safe environment to talk about their mental health and access wellbeing support. And many said that their employer has supported their mental health and wellbeing during the global pandemic. So it is clear that businesses have an opportunity to play a key role in helping to support the positive mental health of all employees. The research also points to what would make employees more comfortable to use the services. The research suggests that if employers did more to challenge

mental health stigma in the workplace and offered mental health and wellbeing support that was more understanding of people who come from different Minority Ethnic backgrounds, people would be more likely to use it

### Comfort in talking about mental health

The majority of respondents agree that the subject of mental health can be talked about openly in the workplace. However, there is still some stigma; people are still less comfortable talking about mental health than physical health, and even less comfortable talking about race.

Can talk openly about it in the workplace (% agree)



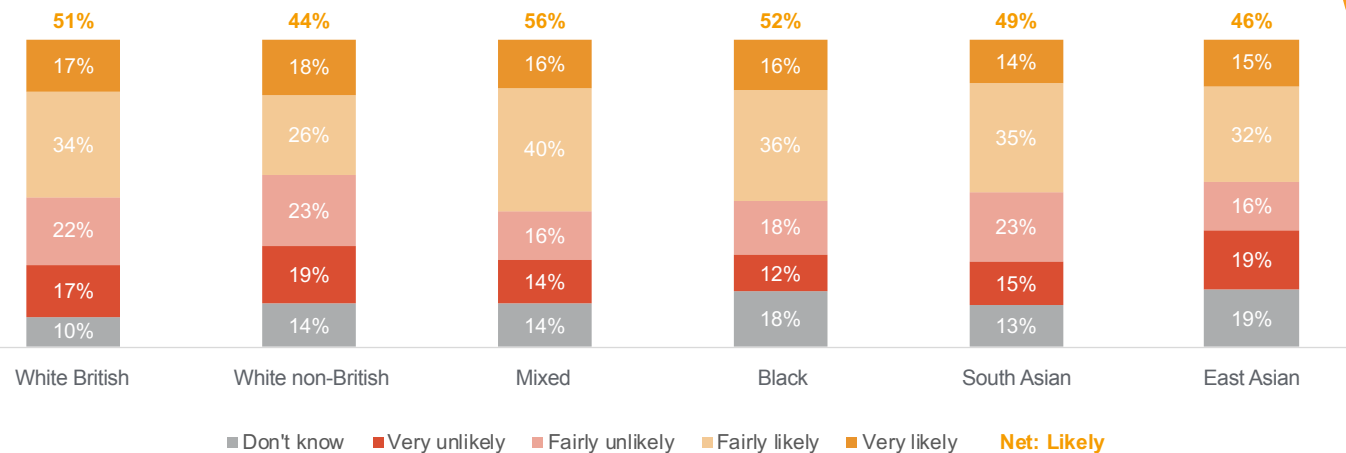
## 5 Workplace support

### Comfort accessing, and awareness of, mental health support

Around half of all different ethnicities said they would be likely to use the support offered by their organisation. Encouragingly, this includes South Asian and East Asian employees who report a higher level of mental health stigma due to cultural and family reasons. This suggests that the workplace can play a key role in supporting those people who may be less likely to ask for mental health support from their community. However, employees who

are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are less aware of the mental health support available. **68%** of White British people say that they are aware of the mental health support available in their workplace, compared to **63%** of Black employees, **54%** of East Asian and **52%** of South Asian employees saying the same. This suggests that businesses can do more to promote mental health and wellbeing support so that employees are aware of what is available.

Likelihood to use support offered by organisation if need mental health and wellbeing advice or support



### Personal perspective

From experiences as a South Asian person and having led the Muslim Network at my organisation, my colleagues have told me they feel more comfortable to talk about their mental health at work than with their communities, because of stigma in their culture or family. I think that workplaces can create a safer place for talking about mental health by having more diverse representation when promoting access to support and having someone from a similar cultural background that colleagues can talk to."

**Shalah Akhtar, PwC**

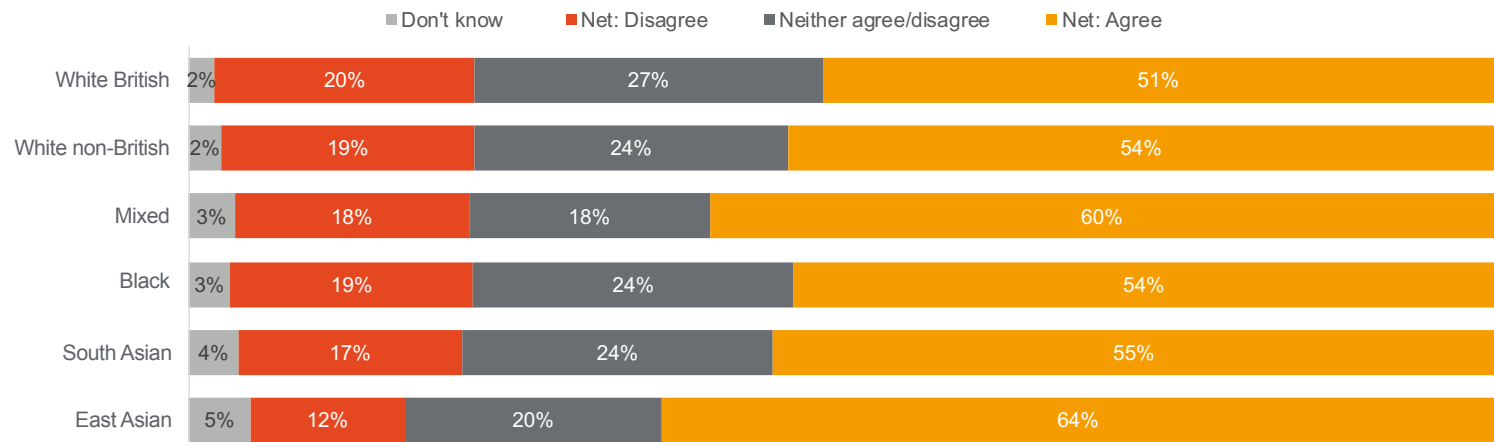
## 5 Workplace support

### Support during the pandemic

Over half of all respondents felt that their employer had supported mental health and wellbeing through the Coronavirus pandemic, which clearly shows that many businesses have prioritised the wellbeing of their people over the last year.

Employees who are East Asian (**64%**) and Mixed Race (**60%**) are the most likely to say that agree their employer had supported them, with White British (**54%**) being the least likely.

### My employer has supported my health and wellbeing through the Coronavirus pandemic



## 5 Workplace support

### What works well?

Respondents who appreciated workplace wellbeing support shared what they think works well. Many like having an open culture and support from those who have received mental health training. Clear communication of what is available is also important. For many, having external support (such as an Employee Assistance Programme) reassures them that it will be confidential and there will not be negative repercussions.

### What support is preferred?

Across all ethnicities, employees said they would be comfortable accessing support from line manager (50%), other colleagues (45%), Mental Health First Aiders (42%), EAPs (42%), employee support groups/networks (35%) and HR departments (33%).



### What respondents said when we asked “What do you think works well in terms of the mental health and wellbeing support offered by your employer?”

*Being open and honest as well as being approachable is key. Ensuring these topics are constantly on the agenda helps remind everyone how important it is to seek out help and where to find the help.*

*Although no one is a professional counsellor or trained in mental health support, the environment is casual enough that when we discuss personal problems, my co-workers are sympathetic and sometimes offer good advice. When it comes to stress from workload, we are always welcome to ask the partner responsible for HR if some responsibilities can be passed onto or shared with someone else.*

*One to one support and senior leaders leading by example that it is okay to not feel okay.*

*Open discussions and making sure people are aware there are resources there.*

*I think we have a lot of programmes in place, and different flavours that appeal to different people. We're good at acute support and low level preventative stuff (wellbeing). We're very good at making it clear that the business cares about these issues.*

*Communication. Employees know that support is available and it is regularly communicated how to access it.*

*Employee Assistance Programme is confidential and accessible outside of work times. Also internally there is open communication so I can always talk to my line manager about it.*

*EAP program where there is some distance between you and the person you are talking to.*

*I think its better to have external, experienced professional not colleagues or immediate supervisors or line managers. They mostly lack confidentiality and professionalism.*

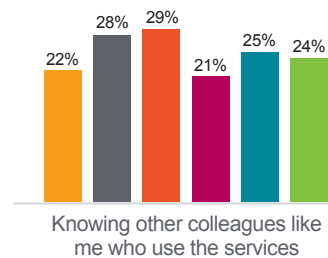
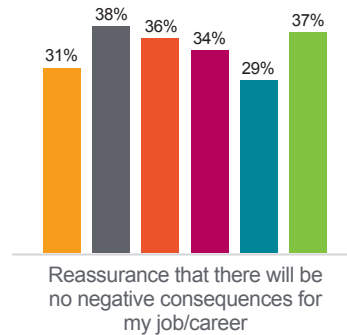
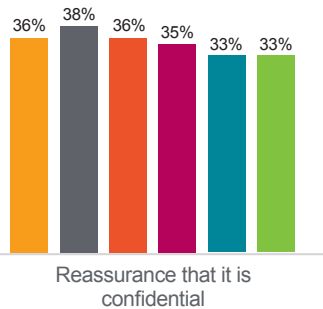
*External companies provide the majority of support and my manager is proactive in checking our wellbeing.*

## 5 Workplace support

### How to improve support

When considering what would help to increase the comfort of employees in accessing support through work, over a third of employees, from across all ethnicities, said that they would be more comfortable accessing support at work if there was reassurance that it would be confidential and that there will be no negative consequences for their career. Black people and people from White non-British backgrounds are more likely to say that they would be more comfortable if they knew that “colleagues like me” use the support services.

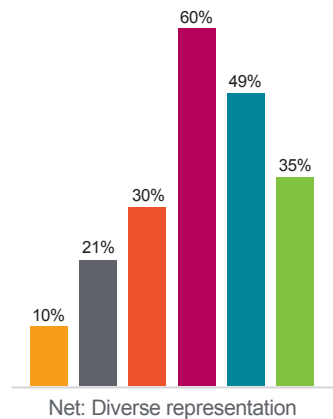
### What would make you more comfortable to access mental health and wellbeing support at work?



## 5 Workplace support

People who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background are more likely to say that diverse representation in the promotion and delivery of mental health and wellbeing support would make them more likely to use it, with this being particularly high among Black people. Respondents pointed to a number of ways in which more diverse representation could be achieved, including by having someone from a similar cultural background to talk to; if the mental health and wellbeing support were more appropriate for and understanding of people who come from different Minority Ethnic backgrounds and cultures; and if the promotion of the support was more ethnically diverse.

**Would more diverse representation make you feel more comfortable to access mental health and wellbeing support at work?**



White British White non-British Mixed Black South Asian East Asian

### Personal perspective

“My first experience of counselling involved a counsellor who was far removed from the inner turmoil I was battling with, and this distance seemed ideal. However, I soon realised that they were too far removed: when it came to discussing issues about my mental health that related to my Blackness, they didn’t quite seem to comprehend and, thus, know how to respond. In the end, I didn’t completely get the help that I needed; there were race-related issues concerning my mental health that were left unresolved. Diverse representation in mental health support services isn’t just important, it’s vital for full healing and recovery for those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. It’s one of the reasons why I became a Workplace Wellbeing Champion at my company - a small step in making work a place of support for all.”

**Ashley Fontaine, EM360**

### Expert view

“If an employee from a Minority Ethnic background has to specifically request mental health support or a therapist who understands challenges related to their race, this will lead to barriers for accessing that support. Organisations should provide a supportive and exclusive space for staff from Black and Minority Ethnic background to allow them to be their authentic true self, and have the freedom to explore any pressures that are affecting their mental well-being, without fear of judgement.” **Professor Gathoni Hamilton-Foster, BAME Therapy**



## 5 Workplace support

What respondents said when we asked “What could be improved in workplace mental health and wellbeing support?”

*Make it feel more honest. It seems to be more virtue signalling than anything else.*

*Need to be led by senior people in the company who are unbiased and supportive.*

*We need to have less judgement and people need to know that it will not affect their job or their reputation if they admit to struggling.*

*A more open discussion particularly from the management.*

*Peer support is very effective and should be embedded into the culture. No use leaving anything to managers, or (worse still) to HR.*

*Making it clear what possible support could be provided regarding your job and that there would not be negative consequences to your career.*

*Raise awareness of mental health issues and how it impacts our daily life.*

*Think they should encourage conversation on the impact of stress on your mental health.*

*More communication that it is available and should be used in time of need.*

*Reducing the stigma around mental health.*

*If the mental first aiders were not someone you had to work with on a day to day basis.*

*There is still a stigma for some people to not speak about mental health and that hasn't been broken down yet.*

*A 'one-size fits all' approach - everyone's challenges will be highly individual, so the solutions should be individualised too.*

*More access and diversity. You can help but minorities are overlooked. And in most of the cases there is no understanding of our problems. They are very dismissive when discrimination or bullying is mentioned.*

*A more diverse workforce so issues surrounding racism at work could be spoken about without fear of consequences. In fact if they had a completely non white workforce, there would be no issues of racism and therefore no mental health issues regarding this topic.*

*In my organisation more could be done to recognise how ethnic minorities might feel marginalised. Things as simple as brochures having more inclusive team photos. Not everyone identifies with programmes adorned by images that they don't identify with.*



## 6 What action can businesses take?

The CMHA is calling on businesses to take five strategic actions that will help them to build workplaces that are psychologically safe and which protect, support and create positive mental health for their people who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background. These five actions have draw on the experience of businesses, as well as mental health and inclusion experts.

They are designed to be high level so they can be applied to most organisations and workplace cultures. For ideas on how your business can achieve these actions, we have included some examples of good practice in the following pages. For further case study examples and practical guidance, please see the [CMHA's Mental Health and Race Toolkit](#).

- 1 Recognise the challenges that employees from Black and Minority Ethnic groups are facing**
- 2 Be actively anti-racist and prioritise inclusion**
- 3 Promote and design inclusive workplace health and wellbeing systems**
- 4 Allocate Board level responsibility**
- 5 Measure and be transparent about progress**

## 6 What action can businesses take?

### London Stock Exchange Group is leading from the top

“At London Stock Exchange Group, we are committed to fostering an environment where our people can thrive and fulfil their potential. As the Executive Committee sponsor for Wellbeing, I am working to ensure we continue to strive for positive mental health for all. As part of that ambition, we need to ensure we support the positive mental health of our colleagues who are Black or from a Minority Ethnic background. We recognise that these colleagues face particular pressures and stresses arising from race-related issues that can impact on their mental health, both within and outside of the workplace. We need to identify and address those pressures where we can and ensure that we are offering our colleagues the specific support, tools and services to continue to support their mental health and wellbeing.” David Shalders, Chief Operating Officer, London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG)

### Hogan Lovells puts diversity at heart of its wellbeing offering

Hogan Lovells recognised the pandemic has had varying impacts on individuals and different groups, so the international law firm reviewed its wellbeing offering through various diversity lenses, including ethnicity. Its REAHL (Race and Ethnicity at Hogan Lovells) Network nominated one of their Steerco members to sit on the firm’s working group that was set up to deal with working from home/return to the office during the COVID-19 period, to bring any concerns specific to ethnic minorities collected by the wider network. Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) include ethnically diverse representation and regular MHFA catch ups include sharing resources and discussions on race and wellbeing, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain ethnic groups and how we can best support those coming from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. The imminent appointment of a ‘REAHL MHFA’ will ensure the two groups are linked with each other.

#### Personal perspective

“Racism is deeply rooted in our systems and in every part of society. This may be uncomfortable to accept but it is a reality that I, as a black woman, have to deal with on a daily basis, and in raising my daughter. Just last year, I was racially abused and threatened on my way to work for parking my car in a free, public parking space. The trauma and shock of that experience followed me into the office and I couldn’t just ‘leave it at the door’. I am fortunate to have an amazing team who allowed me the space to talk and didn’t try to explain or dismiss my lived experience. Their support, understanding and being given a safe space to talk about it enabled me to process the situation. However, I recognise many of my friends and colleagues are in spaces where they feel uncomfortable to vocalise how they feel. For me, the events of the last year has reinforced that silence is not what is needed right now. To be silent is to be complicit; to bear witness to an injustice in the workplace or in our communities and not call it out, is to be complicit. Societies and cultures, including workplace culture, will only change when there is collective, systematic action.” **Employee at Linklaters**

## 6 What action can businesses take?

### Lloyds Banking Group Race Action Plan

Lloyds Banking Group has had a comprehensive ethnicity strategy in place for some time but recognised there was more to do, particularly for its Black colleagues who were facing difficult and sometimes nuanced challenges, and were underrepresented within the Group. Following in-depth listening sessions with colleagues, in July 2020, the Group committed to address this with its Race Action Plan which aims to drive cultural change, recruitment and progression across the Group, and looking beyond the Group, to also support Black communities. These are the commitments that make up the plan:

1. Setting a new public goal, complementing the broader 2018 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic target, to specifically increase Black representation in senior roles from 0.6% at senior grades to at least 3% by 2025, to align with the overall UK labour market.
2. Setting up a new Advisory Board made up of 23 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues to influence and inform the organisation's ongoing diversity strategy and ensure it is making the right progress.
3. Working in partnership with external experts to deliver a race education programme, which has rolled out to 7,000 colleagues so far, and removing issues of bias within the organisation and setting clear expectations on inappropriate behaviour.
4. Continuing regular listening sessions to gauge and understand colleague experiences and progress against the Plan.
5. Publication of the Group's first Ethnicity Pay Gap report in 2020.
6. Ensuring diversity on all senior executive recruitment shortlists with a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic candidate and training recruiters, hiring managers and third-party suppliers to ensure they understand these expectations and have the tools to hire inclusively.
7. Nurturing talented Black colleagues through specific development and sponsorship programmes for both middle management and senior grades, so that Lloyds can help break the ceiling for senior role models.
8. Help address the challenges faced by Black communities, beginning with a partnership with Foundervine and Black Business Network specifically to help Black entrepreneurs.

**“ Our race advisory panel plays an essential role as we work to embed inclusivity within Lloyds Banking Group and supports our purpose to help Britain recover by helping create an organisation that better reflects the society we serve. Panel members come from a wide range of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds from all areas of our business and bring valuable perspectives, experiences, and nuance to each conversation. We know that different groups face different challenges in the workplace - the panel provides a space to share views and perspectives on our approach, informs key decision making, and challenges the way we do things. Having such a rich mix of backgrounds at the table leads to more balanced and much better informed decision-making across the Group. ”**

Sam Owo, Race Action lead,  
Lloyds Banking Group

## 6 What action can businesses take?

### Oliver Wyman focuses on allyship

Oliver Wyman is committed to ensuring the wellbeing of all their people. As part of this, the consultancy focuses on allyship to support Black colleagues. It has worked to encourage everyone to take actions, such as:

**Listening** to Black colleagues and friends, and when they share their experiences not jumping to try to share a similar story, as sometimes people just need a friendly ear

**Checking in** on Black colleagues and friends proactively, to show them concern for their wellbeing.

**Joining events** hosted by Black colleagues and taking the time to really learn from them.

**Signalling allyship** in meaningful, not performative ways, such as by volunteering time and speaking up to call out racism.

Oliver Wyman has also brought in external speakers to discuss race and mental health, and has led facilitated discussions to give all colleagues the opportunity to better understand the challenges and journeys of people different to them, particularly around race and culture.

### PwC runs inclusive Mental Health Awareness campaigns

As part of PwC's ongoing effort to normalise conversations about mental health, it has used storytelling extensively. Having people across the organisation share their lived experiences of mental wellbeing challenges has proved to be an effective way of engaging staff in the conversation, helping to break the stigma often still associated with mental health. This has included creating a film, with people from diverse backgrounds, exploring how the experience of mental ill-health plays out in different cultures and communities, where this can still be a taboo subject.

#### Personal perspective

“After experiencing a traumatic event in my personal life, I was struggling with my mental health and was at breaking point. I wanted to be open and honest with my line managers, and because I trusted them both this made it a little easier. They were supportive and gave me time, understanding and support. Together with the support of them, team members, my family and friends, I was able to get better. And during the later stages of my recovery, being at work and having a sense of purpose, in an inclusive environment, helped me to start to go back to my old self. The conversations I have had in the workplace have provided me with confidence to talk about mental health more openly to loved ones including family, friends and my community. There is still some stigma around seeking support in the Black Caribbean community, with the added pressure to be a strong Black woman. Personally, I love a good spa day - the full works of treatments! I describe counselling, which was the main form of treatment I received through work during my recovery, as a ‘spa day for your mind’. This sounds less scary when describing the mental health recovery process to someone who has never experienced it.”

**Shanice-Kay Bolding, Lloyds Banking Group**

# Resources

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESOURCES

- [“Mental Health And Race Toolkit”](#) for businesses from the CMHA
- [Panel discussion](#), hosted by the CMHA, about how race can impact on mental health
- How racism makes us sick: Professor David R. Williams looks at how racism makes us sick in his [TED Talk](#), [The Impact of Racism on Mental Health Briefing Paper](#) from Synergi Collaborative Centre
- [“Racism and Inappropriate Behaviour: Five Actions For Allies”](#) from BITC
- A manager guide to [Supporting the wellbeing of People of Colour and Black colleagues](#) from Mental Health First Aid England
- [Change The Race Ratio](#) – a campaign to accelerate racial diversity
- [The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network](#)
- [BAME Therapy](#)
- [Chinese Mental Health Association](#)
- [Mind’s Peer Support Directory](#)
- [Black Thrive](#)

### CMHA Mental Health and Race in the workplace

This new course builds awareness and understanding of the disparities experienced by people of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and the intersectionality of race, racism and mental health, in the context of the workplace. Participants will learn about racism and systemic racism, micro-aggression and allyship. The course will also cover the key stages for having compassionate conversations that will promote engagement, coalition building and the necessary actions to create psychologically safe environments for ethnically diverse people in the workplace. For all CMHA training, [go here](#).



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