

Racism in the Workplace: Hearing and addressing lived experiences of racism at work



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Policy & Practice Briefing

People's Voice Media

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Executive Summary

This policy brief presents insights from the often-unheard experiences of people from Global Majority communities in the workplace. Based on the 37 stories gathered from people from Global Majority communities in 2024, we found that systemic racism is prevalent in many workplaces. Global Majority voices are routinely not listened to or heard by white peers, with racism in the form of microaggressions and tokenism creating a culture of power imbalance. This must be addressed.

Based on these insights, the briefing presents practical recommendations for employers – specifically those working in leadership or HR roles, as to how they can ensure Global Majority voices are heard and the manifestations of systemic racism are addressed in their organisation.

Introduction

Systemic racism continues to underpin the experiences of people from Global Majority communities in the UK, yet they are not listened to. This is highlighted by contradictions between the lived experience of racialised people, and the claims of the previous government that systemic racism does not exist in this country (BBC News, 2021).

This briefing focuses on experiences of racism in professional settings, and the way in which they are not being listened to or truly heard. This is symptomatic of predominantly white organisations, operating in predominantly white spaces, continuing to uphold the status quo by believing that simply being ‘not racist’ is enough, **when they need to be actively anti-racist.**

Key Insights

People assume that unless a certain word has been used or, uh, something obviously discriminatory has happened, that racism doesn't exist.

The key insights to come out of the stories reveal that racism does not always show itself in overt ways, which leads to racialised people not being listened to or believed when they report acts of racism. Racism in the workplace can show itself in a variety of ways.

Microaggressions

They were very abrupt and blunt with me for some strange reason. ... But they were allowing other people to have their say and talking, as if to say what I had to say wasn't important.

Microaggressions can include a range of actions, stemming from internalised racism. Microaggressions experienced by those sharing their experience include their contributions not being valued, being interrupted, or witnessing eye-rolling when racism is discussed.

Tokenism

Someone has said to me once, 'I'm glad you're here.' And I said, 'Oh yeah, why's that?' 'You tick a box,' was the answer.

Tokenistic practices exist in all corners of society. It's performative inclusion and a symptom of systemic racism. It also has the opposite effect to what is intended, as outlined by one storyteller: *"When [inclusion] is tokenistic, my voice doesn't seem to carry as much weight. ... I'm just there to be a visual representation."*

Power imbalances

You might share an idea, and it's not heard, but then [a] white person says the same thing and it's heard.

Systemic racism creates the power imbalances that perpetuate it. If covert racism goes unchallenged, a culture of racism is created that makes it almost impossible for Global Majority voices to be heard. Actively anti-racist workplace policies and practices are needed to change this.

Recommendations

To begin to address racism within the workplace, it is important that the voices of people from Global Majority communities are heard, their experiences understood, and action taken. To do this, we recommend that employers:

- **Organise** racial affinity spaces where Global Majority colleagues can share experiences without fear of reprisals, and provide peer support.
- **Establish** mechanisms through which direct and witnessed incidents of racism can be reported and addressed.
- **Set-up** an anti-racism and allyship learning programme where employees have dedicated learning on how to be anti-racist and how to be an ally to their Global Majority colleagues.

Method

Originating in 2007, Community Reporting has been developed across Europe as a mixed methodological approach for enhancing citizen participation in research, policymaking, service development, and decision-making processes. In-line with work such as Glasby (2011) Community Reporting purports the validity of lived experience and knowledge-based practice in these fields. It uses digital, portable technologies to support people to tell their own stories in their own ways and then connects these stories with change-makers in different settings and sectors.

The evidence that has informed this briefing has come from Community Reporter stories from racialised people who have worked in co-production, discussing their experiences of racism in this professional setting. This work has been **in partnership with the Co-Production Collective**, looking at 37 stories from around the UK in 2024.

About People's Voice Media

People's Voice Media is a civil society organisation established in 1995, that uses storytelling as a tool for social change in the UK and across Europe. In 2007 we launched the Community Reporting methodology and began to build the **Community Reporter Network**. The Community Reporter Network now spans the UK and Europe, with 50+ active partner organisations from different sectors in the arenas of policy, research and services. This work is supported by **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**.

References

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Glasby, J., 2011. *Evidence, policy and practice: Critical perspectives in health and social care*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Contact

Visit: <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

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