

Mental Health and Wellbeing of Ethnic Minority Teachers

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“

**Equal rights, fair play,
justice, are all like the
air: we all have it, or
none of us has it.
That is the truth of it.**

”

— Maya Angelou

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Introduction

The Independent Review of the Mental Health Act (2018) clearly articulated the deep, longstanding inequalities that exist in the provision of mental health care in the UK. This is particularly the case for Global Majority¹ communities. As the mental health and wellbeing charity for the education sector, we are on a journey to improve how we reach, support and stay connected to educators from Global Majority backgrounds. This research forms part of our own inquiry and development. This is an under-researched area and we are publishing this work to document the current situation whilst we work with educators to develop responses to these findings.

In the wake of anti-racism protests following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, there has been greater attention given to equality, diversity and inclusion within organisational settings.²

Even when racial diversity is achieved however, there is still significant work to be done to attend to inclusion. And inclusion really matters. A sense of belonging is key to wellbeing, job satisfaction and in turn to performance. Inclusion is created through hundreds of interactions each day. If we truly want to create great educational institutions, we need all staff in the school or college to feel part of the “we” rather than made to feel ‘othered’.

1. The term Global Majority includes those people who identify as Black, African, Asian, Brown, Arab and mixed heritage, are indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately eighty-five percent of the world’s population, making them the Global Majority now (Campbell-Stephens, 2021)

2. Race Inclusion Reports: Talking about race at work, CIPD, March 2021.

“We are in no doubt that structural factors which engender racism, stigma and stereotyping increase the risk of differential experiences in ethnic minority communities.”¹

This project set out to understand how the wellbeing of ethnic minority educators compared with the wider population. The results show much in common with our national sample of British teachers. The results also clearly illustrate the “differential experiences” of Black and Brown and other ethnic minority teachers and leaders in schools across the country.

The body of this report is intentionally short. In section two, we have set out to amplify the voices of research participants and to allow them to tell their story with as little interpretation as possible.

For this report, we held focus groups with teachers who identified as having ethnic minority backgrounds. They included classroom teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders.

For more detail on the number, size and ethnic background of those in the groups, please refer to the methodology in Appendix A.

How we hope this report will be used:

We hope this report will be used as a way of hearing directly from ethnic minority teachers. Their contributions to our focus groups were illuminating and rich, and we’re incredibly grateful to participants for their time and insights.

1. Modernising the Mental Health Act, Final report of the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act 1983 (DHSC, 2018)

We recognise that many readers will be rightly impatient to see these findings turned into action.

If you are an ethnic minority teacher or educator in the UK, we hope this report goes some way toward helping you feel more seen and heard. Perhaps knowing that colleagues will be hearing experiences similar to your own may make you feel less alone.

For others working in education, who do not come from ethnic minority backgrounds, we hope this report improves your understanding of what your colleagues experience as part of their daily lives, and galvanises you to advocate for better practices in your school or college.

For school and college leaders, we understand that the responsibility for making positive changes in schools lies with you. We know that what you read in this report will help you to enact your duty to create cultures of inclusion for all staff in your schools and colleges.

School governors and academy trustees have an incredibly important role to play in working with your headteachers and CEOs to make real cultural change, and create truly inclusive school environments.

We acknowledge that this report is not unique, definitive or anywhere close to being enough to transform entrenched systemic factors that contribute to racism. It is, however, the beginning of a change in how Education Support thinks, acts, listens and advocates for better mental health for all teachers and education staff.

Section 1

What is common to all in the experience of teaching?

There is lots about the experience of working as a teacher that is shared, across all racial identities. Many of the themes highlighted in our focus groups with ethnic minority teachers were similar to those highlighted in our annual Teacher Wellbeing Index and our recent report into the experiences of Middle Leaders (Dorrell et al, 2022).

What follows is some of those themes, highlighted by comments from our focus group participants:

Teachers are motivated by a sense of purpose

We know from our Teacher Wellbeing Index (Scanlan and Savill-Smith, 2021) that **77%** of educators say they are motivated by a strong sense of purpose. Most often, that sense of purpose relates to being able to make a difference, working with young people, supporting learning or a love of a particular subject.

These findings were echoed by this group of teachers, and we also found that:

Most participants see teaching as rewarding

“It is a really rewarding, fun and varied career. I have lots of ex-pupils who have gone into teaching.”

Classroom teacher

“I love my job, despite all the challenges and I do find it so, so rewarding.”

Middle leader

However, the non-teaching demands of the role can make it difficult.

“[Teaching is] a rewarding career, and one that is so enjoyable when you are actually able to focus on the job you signed up to do... teach and help kids.”

Middle leader

“Teaching is meant to be exciting however the many hats and demands are making the job almost impossible to manage.”

Middle leader

“Teaching can be incredibly rewarding but the leadership of the school can easily make it an untenable job.”

Classroom teacher

Teaching is viewed as a vocation or calling, rather than a profession, but teachers feel undervalued.

“Teaching is undervalued and not respected in society and yet society is built on well educated people.”

Classroom teacher

“

**Society does not
appreciate teachers.
I have heard
‘just a teacher’ so
many times.**

”

Classroom teacher

“It’s a vocation and not for the faint hearted. Very rewarding in terms of variety and creativity.”

Classroom teacher

“A vocation, a rewarding career based on a love of helping people that is misunderstood by many.”

Middle leader

“Teaching is not a respected profession. My own relatives roll their eyes if something is mentioned about the education sector.”

Middle leader

“A career many people feel they could do, but one that is hard to do well.”

Middle leader

The ability to make a difference keeps teachers motivated but the job is becoming increasingly unmanageable

The best parts of teaching

- The direct and tangible impact that can be had through seeing students succeeding is a huge part of the appeal
- The job provides lots of variety, where no two days are the same – something that very few careers provide
- The opportunity to work in disadvantaged communities where you can support and guide students who may not get that support from other areas of their lives
- Making a positive contribution to society and future generations

“Love working with children and seeing how they progress both socially and academically but the workload seems to be increasing every term.”

Classroom teacher

“The children and the fact no two days are the same keep me motivated.”

Middle leader

“

I like working in a disadvantaged community as I feel I can support pupils in a way that other aspects of society lets them down. I like advising and guiding pupils who perhaps lack that elsewhere...

”

Senior leader

“I enjoy the variation and interaction with the pupils and my subject, so overall I like the profession.”

Classroom teacher

“I love working with the kids - they are hilarious, kind, thought-provoking - and being able to help them achieve their goals, or get on the right path towards their goals.”

Middle leader

“I love the light bulb moments in the classroom. Those new experiences whether it's a school visit or a new dance routine, and the random daily facts they like to tell me every day.”

Middle leader

“I like defending decisions that I feel will help best our pupils to succeed academically and also socially.”

Senior leader

The worst parts of teaching

- The workload is extremely high, with lots of time needed to plan, mark and organise lessons. This is draining and stressful for many of the teachers we spoke to, that feel they are ‘never on top of our work’
- A big impact on teachers’ social lives outside of work
- A lack of emotional and mental health support for both staff and students due to an increasingly impersonal and officious school environment
- High levels of pressure and intrusiveness from senior leadership, with an emphasis on evidence and paper trails. This detracts from time with students and leaves staff feeling observed, but not supported
- Increasing presence of Ofsted, which continues to limit time spent with students, and increases stress, anxiety and time spent planning or organising lessons

“When I feel down about my job and the workload, I always relate back to when I was studying at university. Late nights, early lectures etc. The only thing that has changed with my lifestyle is the absence of a social life!”

Middle leader

“Between [student] behaviour, lack of support from parents, unrealistic expectations of the government and SLT, the joy is being sucked out of the job.”

Middle leader

“SLT seem to focus on paperwork and evidence trails. And that means less time spent on focusing on students and teaching.”

Middle leader

“We are constantly being expected to provide data, paperwork and evidence which we have very tight deadlines for. With no prior explanation or expectations provided.”

Middle leader

“There is too much micro-management as well. We feel like we are constantly being watched.”

Classroom teacher

“School leaders just expect that staff will be able to do anything they want them to do, rather than buckle under the strain, and often we do.”

Classroom teacher

Increased oversight from Ofsted causes challenges

Teachers at all levels, including senior leaders to classroom teachers, felt that the scrutiny of Ofsted had negative effects on their jobs and schools.

“There has been a lot of focus on Ofsted in the last academic year...leading to a lot of stupid choices in a lot of schools.”

Senior leader

“Schools are ruining their staff to please Ofsted.”

Senior leader

“The role is stressful enough without book scrutiny, Ofsted preparation, observations, walk-throughs etc...”

Classroom teacher

“Senior leaders also have a lot of pressure placed on them by governors and the concerns over being inspected and getting a black mark...so that is then transmitted on to their staff.”

Classroom teacher

“They [SLT] essentially have control of the working environment and it's their decisions, policies and processes that can determine the effective workload and wellbeing of the staff.”

Classroom teacher

[Pressures are] “High pressure, which comes from the top, to meet data targets...pressure on SLT which is then put on teachers.”

Middle leader

Most take immense pride in teaching, but they wouldn't recommend a teaching career to others

**Most teachers felt extremely proud of their jobs,
where they can:**

- Make a difference
- Be a part of students' achievements
- Deliver a job that is not financially motivated
- Be strong and resilient

**Most teachers would not recommend the role to family
or friends, due to:**

- The stress and demands of the role, which they could not recommend to loved ones in good faith
- The perceived low pay of the role
- The personal sacrifice in terms of time and energy required and a lack of work/life balance
- Their hard work being undervalued by friends, family, and parents, with a lack of respect for the profession

“I am proud because it takes a certain level of strength and resilience to do what we do.”

Middle leader

“The students make teaching worthwhile and I am proud to say I teach.”

Senior leader

“I’m proud of the fact that I know I do a good job and can see the kids in my class making progress, sometimes a huge amount of progress when I see where they came from.”

Classroom teacher

“I am proud to be a teacher; it’s a job we clearly are not in for the money. We are intrinsically motivated and I think that is crucial. We always want the best for our students.”

Middle leader

“I take pride in my work, kids’ performance, improvements. But know that I am low status in society relative to my peers from university.”

Classroom teacher

“I am proud to be a teacher - it is a noble cause that really makes a difference (even if only 25% of society realises this).”

Middle leader

“I’m proud to be a teacher - but wish it was more respected by society as a whole.”

Middle leader

“Yes, I’m proud - I make a difference and parents and my employer show their appreciation. Working in KS2 within a 3-18 school does help - all the advantages of facilities and expertise, plus we get to see the finished result at 18.”

Classroom teacher

“I would never recommend it these days, too much hard work and constant stress with too little recompense and respect.”

Classroom teacher

“I would not recommend it as a career path it’s a very stressful job.”

Senior leader

“Some days I just come home and go to bed because I am absolutely exhausted. Which has negative repercussions on my personal life/family.”

Classroom teacher

“I wouldn't recommend it and advised my children not to go into teaching.”

Middle leader

“Teachers are over-worked and undervalued. Poor [student] behaviour makes the profession very unattractive.”

Classroom teacher

“You have to really really want to dedicate your days, nights and weekends to it so unless it is something you are passionate about, don't go for it.”

Middle leader

“It's the best job in the world, but I'd worry if my children wanted to go into teaching.”

Middle leader

A minority of participants would recommend the career due to the fun and varied nature of the work, but would caution others about the downsides.

“I would recommend, but only if I thought they could handle it.”

Middle leader

“I would recommend it but wouldn't dress it up to be just getting in the classroom and teaching a subject you enjoy. There's so much more to it than that, particularly things that I don't feel teacher training prepared me for.”

Middle leader

“Only if they were truly aware of what would be expected from them - not going into it thinking it is a 9am - 3pm job.”

Middle leader

Despite the challenges, most are likely to stay in the career, due to:

- Finding the job enjoyable and challenging, and getting to teach a subject that they care about
- The significant pay drop they fear they may face by changing careers into a different sector

However, some plan to cut down their hours or leave in 5-10+ years' time, a decision that is particularly influenced by plans to start families, something that is viewed as incompatible with the demands of teaching. Others are looking forward to retirement, some earlier than planned.

“I plan to start a family late next year or early 2024 and I plan to work as a TA afterwards rather than staying on as a teacher.”

Middle leader

“I am currently pregnant. After my maternity leave I will actively look to leave - even though I love this job! Lack of flexibility is a huge factor.”

Middle leader

“I’m currently at M6 [teachers' main scale pay point] where it becomes more difficult to move to higher pay and the work–life balance is no longer really worth teaching. If I can find a job with better work–life balance and same pay then I will leave.”

Classroom teacher

“I worry that when I decide to start a family, I will be too tired/overworked to give my future children the time and attention they will need.”

Middle leader

“I’m hoping to go as soon as I can access my pension, really. Though can see myself giving up the ghost and taking time out before that due to stress and the pressure.”

Classroom teacher

The main drivers of stress

The most recent Teacher Wellbeing Index (Savill-Smith and Scanlan, 2022) reported that **72%** of school teachers and **84%** of school leaders described themselves as stressed.

“It’s impossible not to feel stressed, because of the sheer amount of work that needs to be got through.”

Classroom teacher

The ethnic minority teachers who took part in our focus groups were no exception, and feeling overwhelmed by high workload was found to be the main driver of stress among them.

Other causes of stress were:

- Feeling unable to “switch off” at the end of the day and/or having difficulty sleeping
- Facing unrealistic deadlines
- Experiencing unexpected ‘drop-in’ lesson observations from senior leaders, alongside routine observations
- Managing challenging student behaviour
- Ofsted inspections
- Data analysis and reporting
- Feeling unsupported
- Issues connected with the Covid-19 pandemic (see more in the next section)

“I am stressed nearly all of the time, the Head does ‘drop-ins’ at random times and can pull you up on anything.”

Middle Leader

“I seem to be constantly working when I’m at home; if I miss an evening, I’m totally behind with the workload.”

Classroom teacher

“Unrealistic deadlines with low levels of support bring a great deal of stress.”

Senior Leader

“If I say I am stressed, I get told to leave school at 4pm - but still produce all the data analysis by 9am the next morning.”

Middle Leader

“I think there is a general level of background stress ... main reasons are: schools expected to do more and more, yet recruitment not reflecting that. Therefore, more workload has to be picked up, when you already feel stretched.”

Senior Leader

“My main challenges are to do with physical and mental stamina - just sheer workload and ever moving goalposts.”

Classroom teacher

“Senior leaders also have a lot of pressure placed on them by governors and the concerns over being inspected and getting a black mark for whatever happens to the “in thing”, so that is then transmitted on to their staff.”

Classroom teacher

“SLT drop ins, delivering lessons, behaviour management - having to be on top form every lesson so that students do not take control.”

Middle leader

“I have not had support as a new person in leadership and this is a contributor to stress and late nights, which affect your personal life.”

Senior leader

These findings are consistent with other research we have conducted into the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff. For example, our report “Pressures on Middle Leaders in Schools” (Dorrell et al, 2022) and our Teacher Wellbeing Index (Savill-Smith and Scanlan, 2022). This demonstrates that ethnic minority teachers are subject to the same unsustainable pressures as the white teaching population, but are also subject to additional sources of stress due to their race or ethnic heritage.

The impact of Covid-19 on teachers' stress levels

A major consequence of the Covid-19 virus in schools was the need for working staff to cover for their colleagues who were ill. This was all while managing day-to-day running of schools and ensuring the continuity of teaching and learning.

“Everyone (including SMT) knows what Covid-19 has done to education and still they come ask why learners are NOT making progress.”

Classroom teacher

“I am a sixth form tutor so people [pupils] are doing public exams for the very first time and with almost perfect predictions getting rejected from multiple universities and it filters back to us.”

Classroom teacher

“Their attitudes to learning have regressed too.”

Classroom teacher

“Regardless of what children have missed, staff shortages, interventions not taking place etc. children are still expected to make the same progress regardless of how much time they’ve missed.”

Classroom teacher

“At the moment I think all staff are struggling. For my children it’s their first proper year of schooling so many are quite behind”

Classroom teacher

“The pandemic worsened the strain as a lot of children regressed and it’s been an uphill struggle”

Classroom teacher

Section 2

What else do ethnic minority teachers' experience in the workplace compared with their white counterparts?

In addition to all the well-established stressors that come from a career in teaching, ethnic minority teachers have an additional layer of stress that comes from navigating experiences of racism or being racialised in the workplace.

What follows are the experiences that our participants described...

Tokenism

“

I've purposely been singled out as the token Black teacher when visitors have been in school.

”

Middle leader

The term **tokenism** is attributed to Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her study of the workplace experiences of women working in a large industrial supply corporation (Kanter, 1977). She concluded that members of a 'token group' (tokens being minority members) are likely to have negative experiences at work as a result of their token position (or low numerical representation).

“I think I was employed by my school to tick a box.”

– Middle leader

Microaggressions

There were many examples of microaggressions shared by the teachers:

“What do you eat to get that physique? Is it too cold for you? Where are you from then? Is the food spicy enough for you?”

Senior leader

“I work in a department of 20, five of whom are Asian. Would never say I’ve experienced racism, but the last entrance exam featured the names of 15 members of the dept. in the questions - all five Asian teachers names were omitted.”

Classroom teacher

“I do my own hair, so I can decide that in one week I have two hairstyles, but the looks and comments that you get as if you are the centre of attraction is weird.”

Senior leader

“Why do you walk that around the place with that swagger?”

Senior leader

“

I am always confused for any other Asian teacher with dark hair - one teacher laughed it off and said 'same thing' when I pointed out she said my name wrong.

”

Middle leader

“Can you bring in some of your food from home? I used to use it to my advantage. On one occasion I made it too hot as [a] microaggression back.”

Senior leader

“A member of staff asked me if all of my hair on my head belonged to me on Monday”

Middle leader

“It’s more the ‘wow’ kind of expression that I get. I understand years ago when it may not have been common for people to see ‘Black hair styles’ but with social media, TV etc. it’s openly out there.”

Senior leader

“A member of staff once asked me if I was a blood or crip (gangs from LA) as a ‘joke’ in the staff room.”

Senior leader

“Obvious ones being, school events/ fundraising/website you will find loads of representations of people who have the ‘right face’ at the forefront, even though all the work, success has been possible by the staff who don’t have the ‘right look.’”

Classroom teacher

“At my previous school, there was a lot of micro-racism. Being asked to speak to an African parent to ‘speak the lingo’ when my heritage is Jamaican.”

Middle leader

“I see micro-racism far more with my colleague who has a thick Ghanaian accent - ironically he gets more comments from the African boys. Comments like ‘Fresh’ etc. when he struggles with certain words.”

Middle leader

The term **microaggressions** was first used by Chester M Pierce in 1969. Although the meaning of this term has evolved over time, microaggressions can be defined as a term used to describe a subtle but offensive comment or action directed at a minority group. The commonplace, subtle nature of microaggressions can have a significant negative impact on the health of people of colour who experience them (Mind, 2022).

Conformity, cultural assimilation and code-switching

“My school is largely made up of ethnic minorities so I feel I fit in well.”

Classroom teacher

“You are constantly thinking about how you’ll be perceived. It’s exhausting.”

Senior leader

“We are even encouraged as Black people to dress less flamboyant in a formal setting.”

Senior leader

“[day-to-day challenges are] being too “trendy,” [wondering] are your clothes white enough, if you are shapely, making sure you wear baggier clothes, so as not to be sexualised etc. Culturally our food smells delicious...some people complain about the smell.”

Senior leader

“

I have never asked if I can pray during lesson times...due to break and lunchtime duty as well as meetings – I always miss my prayers... but have never mentioned it at work... I feel it will impact negatively on my career.

”

Middle leader

“One of my AHT [Assistant Headteacher] colleagues often tells me I need to think more carefully how I portray myself... as a Brown man. Sometimes I feel I have to work harder than colleagues to prove myself... and actually similarly other ethnic minorities.”

Senior leader

“Yes very reserved and ultimately submissive to microaggressive staff members ... code-switch to families and staff.”

Senior leader

“Code-switching, it’s how we navigate the world.”

Senior leader

“We all have to code-switch. We don’t speak with each other the same way in the staff room as an SLT.”

Senior leader

“

It's like having to be a chameleon.

”

Senior leader

Conformity involves a change in belief or a behaviour in order to fit in with a particular group. Cultural assimilation is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a society's majority group or assume the behaviours, and beliefs of another group.

The term **code-switching** refers to any member of a marginalised or underrepresented identity adapting to the dominant environment around them in any context, including but not limited to the language they use (Washington-Harmon, 2022).

Puwar (2004) describes “Black bodies in predominantly white spaces are incredibly visible as different, they are also under **assimilative** pressure to conform to the behavioural norm. They are expected to take on the ways and means (social codes) of whiteness”.

Stereotyping

“People assume I get good results because most of the pupils at my school are the same ethnicity as me...so not much to do with my hard work but rather my ethnicity.”

Senior leader

“As a Black male you are stereotyped as laid-back ... good for behaviour but not for teaching and learning.”

Senior leader

“I’ve had staff literally jump out of their seat when I arrived as I have a European name, so they aren’t expecting to see me.”

Senior leader

“I think that people think because I am the same colour as most pupils I must clearly have better relationships and some sort of natural affinity... but the funny thing is a lot of the pupils think I don’t have a degree cause most Brown people they know don’t have a degree so why would I?”

Senior leader

“

On my first day as an NQT I arrived at school in a suit and tie only to be directed to the kitchen by a member of staff rather than the main hall.

”

Senior leader

A stereotype is a widely-held, simplified belief about a specific group which is embedded in social institutions and the wider culture. Groups can be stereotyped on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, language, etc.

**Belonging to more than
one minority group**

“

I experienced racism at another school and homophobia the year I did my civil partnership — I was SLT and the Head would not allow me to change my name without legal proof I was allowed.

”

Senior leader

"I believe it would be tricky to be openly gay and proud in my current school."

Classroom teacher

"I worked at a Catholic boarding school and couldn't sell my house so had a 40 mile commute so I asked to live on site temporarily in staff accommodation. I was told that my wife and children [could live] there [but] I could not do so because it did not fit with the Catholic ethos. I told them I was lesbian and not Catholic at interview but they needed a HoD and expected me to be fine with things like that."

Classroom teacher

"I have not got jobs or been told not to apply for headships because of my religious background. Independent schools often are attached to churches and therefore unless you can convey a sympathy with Christian faith you are not in the running."

Classroom teacher

“

I was told that I was supporting extremism – when simply we were visiting a Mosque to learn more about the religion for RE.

”

Middle leader

Racial identities do not exist in isolation, and each person's experience is different. By looking at how a person can belong to multiple groups or have multiple identities, it can highlight how the range of experiences within a group can vary.

Categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability are interconnected and operate simultaneously to produce experiences of both systemic advantage and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). This is referred to as **intersectionality**, and is important to consider when recognising the differences that exist within groups, and our focus group attendees were no different (Smooth, 2013).

**Social cultures can affect
people's sense of belonging**

“

At my old school, the Head insisted we ‘team build’ once a month through getting drunk on a staff night out. I went once and had to carry the Deputy [Head] home.

”

Middle leader

“In my school there are members of staff that have progressed because they have the right ‘look’...young, white, stylish...no responsibilities/ties outside work so that they are able to socialise with senior members and work all hours when needed.”

Classroom teacher

“If you are not in the Friday pub crowd, you are not in with the right people...if there wasn't some connection, there would be more SLT from these backgrounds.”

Classroom teacher

Many teachers felt that a drinking culture was widespread, with their status and position within the school being dependent on participating in activities like trips to the pub. Many were frustrated as this excluded them because their personal choices, culture or faith meant they did not drink alcohol.

Whilst some said that social activities were organised in more inclusive settings, others said that the topic of alcohol versus alcohol-free venues caused tension. Some felt that this has affected their employment prospects, as they're 'not in the right crowd', and have missed valuable opportunities to gain favour amongst senior leaders in their schools.

Overt racism

“

We've recently had an incident of racism among a group of students, and I am finding it hard to sit back and watch as nothing is done.

”

Middle leader

“Students will call out names about me in the corridor... my school is in a small rural(ish) town with most students being white British.”

Middle leader

“I had a student (with SEN needs) verbally abuse me - with racial slurs as well as profanities.”

Middle leader

Overt racism is the intentional harmful attitudes or behaviours, towards another individual or group because of their skin colour, ethnicity or race.

Some teachers had experienced overt racism from their students, such as name-calling and swearing.

Others experienced overt racism from the decisions made by the senior leadership teams, or their inaction in response to racist incidents at schools.

“I have been at a school many years ago where I saw a colleague with a strong Indian accent get given all the difficult classes so she was set up to fail.”

Classroom teacher

“Racist graffiti in the toilets with no attempt to identify the culprits. The Assistant Headteacher who was dealing with it felt like I was making a big issue of nothing. So I felt compelled to vote with my feet.”

Senior leader

Overt racism was also experienced when staff were passed up for promotions or progression to other roles, where other staff with similar experiences and skill sets succeeded (see also Section 4, barriers to progression).

And others were forced to accept that they would not be a good fit for the school's vision and would change schools to one where they felt they would be regarded as better matched.

“But the reality is that there are some schools that I will not [get] a job at, but there are others where I will be part of the vision. So I can either get stressed about the rejections or look at the type of schools that are more open minded and forward-thinking.”

Classroom teacher

**Feeling reluctant to
challenge others**

“I don’t want to be treated like that ‘hysteric minority’ who sees race in everything.”

Senior leader

“After my maternity leave it was assumed I didn’t want the [middle leader] role. I did but wanted to work 4 days and so had to step down. I think it was more that I am a mum now...”

Middle leader

“I’m very reserved and ultimately submissive to microaggressive staff members.”

Senior leader

Those teachers who experienced a form of discrimination, often did not want to highlight the issues in case it bolstered people’s perceptions of damaging stereotypes. These included being accused of ‘playing the race card’ (i.e. the discriminatory notion that someone is trying to get preferential treatment because of their race), or appearing to act differently from the expected norm.

Some handled this by dismissing or tolerating microaggressions, taking a submissive stance, or not feeling able to challenge the underlying assumptions of others.

Barriers to progression

Recent progression analysis indicates that teachers from most ethnic minority groups and at most stages of their career are less likely to progress to the next stage compared to their white counterparts (Worth et al, 2022).

Some teachers in this study agreed that the racist attitudes of the majority white workforce (i.e. white middle or senior leaders) deemed them unsuitable for promotion. This was particularly relevant for the more senior roles, where there were preconceived and stereotypical notions of what a leader looks like. There were instances where less-experienced colleagues progressed, but more-experienced ethnic minority teachers did not. This institutional racism sometimes led to the feeling that they always needed to keep their work 'up to scratch' in order to ensure they were seen as competent.

“It’s harder to progress as a teacher from an ethnic minority background, you are overlooked for promotions.”

Classroom teacher

“There have been instances where I have felt I wasn’t offered progression routes given to others with similar experiences.”

Classroom teacher

“

In my school there are members of staff who have simply progressed because they have the right 'look', and socialise with the right people.

”

Classroom teacher

“I have applied for jobs, and colleagues of mine with similar background who are qualified for the role, and have not been given an interview, when someone less capable or experience is chosen for the job.”

Classroom teacher

“I once applied for role and was told I was that I was the only candidate. As a result, the interview date was cancelled and I never heard from them again.”

Classroom teacher

“Before I got my current post, the SLT did not believe I was ready despite having the experience and qualifications, they advertised and hired but were let down and they then approached me. 5 years on I am still there.”

Middle leader

“I observe people are not being promoted on merits but there is a lot of nepotism¹ and cronyism.²”

Classroom teacher

“London is very diverse, yet most senior positions in schools are held by white men.”

Classroom teacher

“Higher SLT and Management, being all middle class white men, so progression as a black female is difficult. Always wanting to make sure your work in up to scratch.”

Senior leader

“Lack of job progression is key one I believe but I’m not [sure] it has much to do with race especially at entry to middle management level. This might be a different case for senior management level or headship however.”

Classroom teacher

“But that does not mean people should be appointed just because they make up a quota.”

Classroom teacher

1. Nepotism refers to the practice among those with power or influence of favouring relatives or friends, especially by giving them jobs.
2. Cronyism refers to the appointment of friends and associates to positions of authority, without proper regard to their qualifications.

“I just want total and transparent equality of opportunity, and to be judged on my contribution and potential.”

Classroom teacher

“It’s dead man’s shoes in my school³, but my head got creative and found a way for me to have progression – so I know my skin colour is irrelevant.”

Classroom teacher

3. Dead man’s shoes – this is an idiom suggesting that the only way to make progress, to get promotion, is when someone dies or moves on.

Section 3

Teachers are living with symptoms of stress and poor mental health

The stress involved in teaching resulted in a variety of symptoms which are indicative of poor mental health.

Examples included teachers suffering from anxiety, an inability to 'switch-off', loss of sleep, tiredness, tearfulness and medicating (or needing to) to help them cope with the situations faced in schools.

“The last 3 to 4 years I have been struggling with falling asleep as I just can’t switch off. My mind keeps going over everything that I need to complete that week my mind is overloaded and this is why I can’t seem to switch off when I get home. I am trying to stay off sleeping pills but honestly, I don’t know how long I can keep it up.”

Classroom teacher

“There are days when I have burst into tears because I was just so overwhelmed.”

Classroom teacher

“I often wake up in the middle of the night worrying about all the things I have to do at work and feeling guilty that I’m not up doing them - this is about 3am!”

Middle leader

“I have periods of time when everything becomes overwhelming and I start to feel anxious.”

Classroom teacher

“It’s sad to admit but sometimes I am so stressed that I even dream about work, it affects my sleep, my relationship, but I just really struggle to switch off.”

Middle leader

“I am constantly tired, sleep for 5 hours a night and constantly marking, but I have grown to accept that is part of the job.”

Classroom teacher

“I struggle to sleep worrying about a list that never seems to be ticked off!”

Classroom teacher

“A few years back, I was told I had mild depression. I told the headteacher at the time and he didn’t really seem to care. Saw me getting there at 7 am and leaving at 6.30pm most days and didn’t think that was a cause for concern.”

Middle leader

“Not in terms of diagnosable mental health but certainly when I have taught difficult students, I have carried the worry and anxiety with me through the school day, the evening at home with my loved ones and weekends.”

Middle leader

“I agree with [name deleted], I know colleagues depending on anti-depressants because of the pressure they are under.”

Classroom teacher

“I have mild anxiety that I am able to manage; not on medication yet.”

Middle leader

How do ethnic minority teachers cope with their stress

“My department are always venting at each other.”

Middle leader

“I talk to colleagues informally as friends. My HoD was SLT and had mental health issues and he is very open about it and that helps.”

Classroom teacher

“I have just gained the subject leader role so I now have regular scheduled line management meetings with an AH which I feel will help me to vent to her with the necessary issues rather than other colleagues.”

Middle leader

“It’s difficult as an Assistant Head ... often being the bearer of bad news and also the support network for colleagues. You have no friends at work.”

Middle leader

“I think I have a very supportive family network, but they all work standard 9-5 jobs so are free for me to rant to when I eventually get home from work.”

Middle leader

“I think within a school, there are little cliques and within those cliques you are able to vent, dictated by seniority, departments, ethnicity, religion ... the culture breeds cliques, each to their own.”

Senior leader

“We vent often, though some things I vent about with my Headteacher rather than the whole staff.”

Middle leader

“I will never talk to my line manager. I do not trust him at all.”

Classroom teacher

“I’d only really vent to those I can trust and they are usually the black staff.”

Senior leader

“I don’t tend to vent anymore as in my deputy role, I need to be the sounding board for others and the time I would have spent venting, I can clear something off my to-do list!”

Middle leader

“It’s difficult as an AH [Assistant Headteacher] ...often being the bearer of bad news and also the support network for colleagues. You have no friends at work.”

Middle leader

“I speak with my partner or no-one. Most of what I deal with is confidential and I have no peer group.”

Senior leader

The main way teachers described handling the stress involved in their job was by venting to their colleagues. Venting has been described by Rosen et al (2021) as “a common form of communication between individuals both inside and outside the work environment. By definition, venting refers to an emotion-focused coping strategy where individuals discharge their negative feelings by expressing them to others”.

The venting described, could take place collegially within a department, individually to a line manager, or within a particular safe group which could be formed around shared religion or ethnicity. Venting was seen as a useful way of coping with negative feelings by expressing them to others with the same frame of reference or experiences.

Teachers also discussed how opportunities to vent can be affected by factors including trust e.g. whether junior staff feel able to approach their line managers.

As teachers take on more senior roles, their own opportunities for venting with others become fewer as they are required to support less-experienced staff, and are often constrained by time. The need for confidentiality can also be an issue. Those in senior positions often turn to their friends and families outside of work for support.

Examples of the positive ways in which teachers took action themselves to reduce stress, rather than via a response from their schools, included:

- Reducing the number of days worked
- Taking up different forms of exercise
- Taking the opportunity to refresh by going outside school for a walk

“... at times I just have to take a walk off site to clear my head.”

Middle leader

“The last few years have been really tough and I reduced my working day to get a better balance of work and school.”

Classroom teacher

“

**I can't speak for others
but I think outside of
school I have a strong
network of friends and
family around me.**

”

Middle leader

“I took up Tai Chi many years ago, and try to do it every week, no matter how pushed for time I am. It’s guaranteed to make you focus on something that’s got no connection with work.”

Classroom teacher

“I’m lucky enough to be in charge of squash so play before school. Staff have clubs - I make the effort to do the crossword and creative writing club.”

Classroom teacher

When asked about the stress of the job, participants also talked about their strong family networks, and cultural attitudes towards mental health.

“I have family who help with childcare two days a week, so reduces the financial burden. I get cooked meals at least once a week, which helps and gives me a break from cooking. It reduces the ‘mental load’ at home.”

Middle leader

“We have support at home ... my mum is amazing. Cooks, cleans, feeds, launders and irons. Free labour.”

Middle leader

“We may have stronger family units or community.”

Senior leader

“In some cultures I think ‘you just get on with it’ and don’t stop to think what it is you are actually experiencing.”

Middle leader

“I can’t speak for all cultures, but I feel like some areas of African culture has not quite caught up with mental health - particularly the idea that it is weak to admit it.”

Middle leader

“

I think some of the older generation of ethnic minorities at my school certainly ... feel they should be grateful for even having a job!”

”

Senior leader

Section 4

Summary of our findings

Stress is a normalised part of being a teacher, regardless of ethnicity.

Teachers feel overworked, undervalued, and stretched thin by the need to manage expectations, including those of parents. There is also a sense of being supervised by SLT, and Ofsted which adds to the pressure.

Teachers from an ethnic minority background have to deal with the stress of teaching, plus the additional impact of racist and racialised experiences.

Alongside occasions when there is overt racism and discrimination there are often microaggressions and 'othering' from staff – and there are reports of cliques and a lack of social inclusivity, leaving many feeling isolated.

Ethnic minority teachers call for much wider equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training to create more inclusive cultures.

Colleagues need to be aware of the effects of their words, comments and behaviour, even when they believe no malice is intended.

The teachers who participated in our focus groups were in favour of EDI training. It was stressed that reactive training (that responds to racist occurrences) is less effective than proactive training that takes place before any racist events occur, and attempts to improve culture and awareness at school.

Line management experiences are variable but getting it right can help with stress management .

Where participants have effective line management relationships they can be useful for sharing information, discussing sensitive topics and managing stress.

Trust is an essential component of these relationships. A lack of trust can be a significant barrier to using the relationship to help manage stress.

**What can be
done differently?**

The teachers we spoke to had clear views on what they'd like to see schools do differently.

There was agreement across groups that proactive training was needed in schools to ensure that their colleagues, and, in particular senior leaders, understood the effects of inappropriate comments, microaggressions and 'othering' behaviour. This was viewed as distinct from reactive training that takes place after discriminatory events take place.

“The resources should be about changing attitudes and negative school cultures around race. It's racist staff that need to be educated rather than us have strategies to cope with racism.”

Senior Leader

There was a clear desire to connect with others from similar backgrounds too. While many reported feeling well connected to the wider teaching community, they expressed a desire for specific networks for teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

“Your network is very small if you are from ethnic minority.”

Senior leader

“For sure, it's a very lonely job.”

Senior leader

What Now?

Let's work together. We'd love to hear from educators, school leaders and policymakers on what else we can do to support minoritised teachers and leaders.

Throughout 2023/24 we will carry out a programme of audience and partner engagement to gain further insights and develop tailored resources and information for:

- Individuals who want to care for themselves and their colleagues due to experiences of racism
- School leaders who want to improve their school cultures to make them meaningfully inclusive
- Policymakers who want to create policy that supports the education system to develop inclusive cultures and support individual mental health and wellbeing.

If you would like to participate, please drop us a line at **enquiries@edsupport.org.uk**.

We are actively seeking funding to invest in the development of services for ethnic minority teachers and educators. If you are interested in funding this work, please get in touch via:

enquiries@edsupport.org.uk

**What support is
available?**

Organisations/support services that support ethnic minority teachers

Unions

ASCL Ethnic Diversity Network

<https://www.ascl.org.uk/Our-view/Campaigns/Equality,-diversity-and-inclusion/Ethnic-Diversity-Network>

NASUWT

<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/equalities/under-represented-groups/black-teachers.html>

National Education Union

<https://neu.org.uk/black-educators>

NAHT

<https://www.naht.org.uk/leadersforraceequality>

Prospect BAME Network

<https://prospect.org.uk/get-involved-in-the-union/prospect-bame-network/>

TUC Guide to Race in the Workplace

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-guidance/equality-and-discrimination/race>

Teacher networks

ABBLed Network (Association of BAME Business Leaders in Education)

<https://abbled.org/>

All in One Education

<https://allinoneeducation.co.uk/>

Asian College Network

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/asiancollegenetwork/>

Aspiring Heads

<https://aspiringheads.com/>

BAMEed Network

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/>

BAME Ed Bristol

<https://www.bameedbristolsw.co.uk/home>

BAMEed East Midlands

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-east-midlands/>

BAMEed East of England

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-east-of-england/>

BAMEed Further Education

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-further-education-fe/>

BAMEed North West

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-north-west/>

BAMEed SEND

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-send/>

BAMEed SE (Beds, Bucks & Herts)

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-southeast-beds-bucks-herts/>

BAMEed South London

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-south-london/>

BAMEed Wales

<https://www.bameedwales.org/>

BAMEed West Midlands

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-west-midlands/>

BAMEed Yorks & the Humber

<https://www.bameednetwork.com/regional-network/bameed-yorkshire-and-the-humber/>

BAME Education

<https://www.bameeducation.com/>

Black Men Teach

<https://blackmenteachtc.org/>

The Black Nursery Manager

<https://www.theblacknurserymanager.com/>

Black Teachers Connect

<https://blackteachersconnect.co.uk/>

British Chinese Language Teaching Society (BCLTS)

<http://bacsuk.org.uk/british-chinese-language-teaching-society-bclts>

Diverse Educators

<https://www.diverseeducators.co.uk/>

Early Years Black List

<https://www.theearlyyearsblacklist.com/>

Educating for Equality

<https://www.educatingforequality.co.uk/>

Educate and Celebrate

<https://www.educateandcelebrate.org/>

Euro-Asia Teachers' Network

<https://rcecrete-euroasianet.eu/>

Jewish Teachers' Association

<https://www.jvn.org.uk/jewish-teachers-association-223.php>

Muslim Teachers' Association

<https://mta-uk.org/>

National EIS BAME Network

https://equality.eis.org.uk/anti-racism/bame_network

PhysEquity (PE professionals)

<https://physequity.wordpress.com/>

Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators (SAMEE)

<https://www.samee.org.uk/>

Young Black Teachers Network

<https://www.ybtn.co.uk/>

Ethnic minority organisations

BAME hub

<https://www.bamehubuk.org/what-we-do/>

The Early Years Black List

<https://www.theearlyyearsblacklist.com/>

Mindful Equity UK

<https://mindfulequityuk.co.uk/>

National Roma network

<https://nationalromanetwork.wordpress.com/nrn-resources/roma-and-education/>

The Prosperity Project

<https://www.tprosperityproject.com/>

Race Matters

<https://www.racematters.education/>

Race Reflections

<https://racereflections.co.uk/>

The Traveller Movement

<https://www.travellermovement.org.uk/>

Equalities organisations

Edapt

https://www.edapt.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI2YrwmbDJ-wIVB7btCh1y_wxKEAAYASAAEgL_7PD_BwE

Equality and Advisory Support Service

<https://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>

Equality and Diversity UK

<https://equalityanddiversity.co.uk/>

A reflective exercise

Here are some questions you can use to reflect on your own attitudes towards the issues raised in this report.

Ethnic minority educators

How can I build a reflective practice to allow me to identify and process difficulties or hurt?

What networks can I join to experience a sense of community and reduce any isolation I'm feeling at work?

How can I look after myself so that I stay well and remember why I fell in love with this job?

How can I support colleagues who are also experiencing racism in the workplace? How can developing meaningful connections help us to stay well?

All educators

What can I do to deepen my relationships with colleagues at work?

What behaviours or actions of mine might inadvertently leave a colleague feeling excluded?

What do I really believe about race and inclusion? Who and how do I want to be in the workplace?

Everyone is guilty of stereotyping sometimes. Where do I do it?

School and college leaders

How important is inclusion to me as a leader? How much time am I willing to give to it?

What can I do to make my school or college more inclusive?

How do we currently react to "banter" that may make someone uncomfortable or hurt? How do I want to deal with that going forward?

What do staff think about these issues? What support or development do we need in our school or college?

If you're experiencing difficult feelings, please call our emotional support helpline.

It's free, open 24/7 and completely confidential.

You'll speak to a qualified counsellor.

08000 562 561

Section 5

Lessons learned for Education Support

Teacher Wellbeing Index

We know that our findings in the Teacher Wellbeing Index 2022 are insufficient. When we shared the findings that ethnic minority staff reported less stress than white colleagues, they were met with scepticism from our focus group participants. Most found it unlikely that they would experience lower levels of stress and poor mental health than their white British colleagues, particularly as they viewed stress as being a key characteristic of their teaching careers.

Although participants shared some explanations as to why the experiences of stress might be different, it is clear that our sample size of ethnic minority educators is not adequate, and we need to ask more nuanced questions going forward. We will address these issues in our next version of the Index.

Appendices

METHODOLOGY

This research study had three main aims:

1. Provide insight into the issues and challenges experienced by ethnic minority teachers at work and how these may impact on their mental health and wellbeing
2. Explore how stress impacts the mental health and wellbeing of ethnic minority teachers
3. Recommend the resources most needed by education organisations which would benefit the mental health and wellbeing of ethnic minority teachers at work

The research comprised three online focus groups, which were conducted by YouGov using its panel of education professionals. Three focus groups explored:

- Perceptions of their teaching career
- Current challenges to the profession
- Specific challenges for teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds
- How this impacts on their mental health and wellbeing
- How best they could be supported

The specific topic of stress experienced at work was also investigated, with reference to the overall findings in the Teacher Wellbeing Index (2022).

Each focus group comprised teachers working at different levels in schools. The first group involved classroom teachers, the second group was middle leaders and the final group was senior leaders. All participants worked in primary or secondary schools (with learners aged 4-18) in different parts of England, and the majority worked in the state-funded education sector (a detailed breakdown is shown below).

The focus groups were held online using YouGov's text-based platform where the participants typed in their responses to the questions asked and discussed their experiences with each via text messages. Many of these messages have been included in this report, so that the reader can see the teachers' views. The focus groups were conducted by two moderators from YouGov, one of whom was from a mixed-race background and one who was white. All focus groups were held in March 2022, lasted approximately 1.5 hours, and were observed by Education Support.

The teachers

Sample

Total: 26

- 6 senior leaders
- 11 middle leaders
- 9 classroom teachers

School sector

- 12 Primary (one from the independent sector)
- 14 Secondary (two from the independent sector)

Gender

- 17 women
- 9 men

Age range

27-54 years

Average age

41 years

Length of time teaching

- 7 teaching 5 years +
- 19 teaching 10 years +

Self-reported ethnicity

(NB some categories are also recognised as being a nationality)

- 5 Pakistani
- 4 white and Asian
- 4 any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
- 3 Indian
- 2 Black Caribbean
- 2 African
- 1 Mixed Black
- 1 Black African
- 1 Caribbean
- 1 Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
- 1 White and Black Caribbean
- 1 Arab

GLOSSARY

We recognise that there are different definitions of the terms connected with race, and that the use of language is dynamic. It is complex and exists in a context which can render its use inadequate. With this in mind, the following are definitions of terms we have used throughout this report.

Ethnic minorities

Our use of the term ‘ethnic minorities’ is the same as that of the UK Government. It refers to all ethnic groups except the white British group. Ethnic minorities include white minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups. We have not used the terms BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) or BME (Black and Minority Ethnic), because these terms emphasise certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and Black) and exclude others (‘mixed’, ‘other’ and ‘white ethnic minority’ groups). Where teachers in this study referred to terms such as BAME or ‘non-white’, these have been reproduced exactly as noted by them. This also applies to any research studies which have been included.

We appreciate that this term will not resonate with everyone. We also acknowledge that while these individual experiences are personal to the participants, there is enough research evidence available to support these views as resonating across many experiences of ethnic minority groups.

We concur with The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development which advises employers to be sensitive in the language and terminology used when talking about race and ethnicity. We agree that it is important to engage and invite input from both staff bodies and external experts (CIPD, 2021). As such, we have shared the self-reported ethnicity of the participants in our research.

Global Majority

The term Global Majority includes those people who identify as Black, African, Asian, Brown, Arab and mixed heritage, are indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately eighty-five percent of the world’s population, making them the Global Majority now (Campbell-Stephens, 2021).

Minoritised

The term minoritised, coined by Yasmin Gunaratnum in 2003, provides a social constructionist approach to understanding that people are actively minoritised by others rather than naturally existing as a minority, as the terms racial minorities or ethnic minorities imply (Milner and Jumbe, 2020).

Race

Under the Equality Act 2010¹, race is a protected characteristic. Race can refer to a person's skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin.

Racism

Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.

Institutional racism can be defined as “The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (Macpherson, 1999).

Racialised

Racialised communities acknowledge that Black and Asian people, and people from other minority ethnic communities, are categorised by race because of the white-led systems they exist within. “Racialised” doesn't define people's community or identity, but the phenomenon that is happening to them (Esmée Fairburn Foundation, 2022).

We have also capitalised every instance of the word 'Black' in this report. We concur with the view of Laws (2020) that, for many people, Black reflects a shared sense of identity and community. White carries a different set of meanings; capitalising the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists².

1. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/9>

2. White supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of colour by white peoples and nations of the European continent; for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege (Lawrence and Keleher, 2004)

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