

Prevalence and Mental Health Consequences of Ethnic and Racial Harassment: A Briefing for the IOPC

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Our research

Recently-conducted research, using nationally representative data on ethnic minorities in the UK, has demonstrated a high prevalence of ethnic and racial harassment and a strong association between experiencing ethnic and racial harassment and mental health.

The research found that ethnic and racial harassment is severely underreported in police statistics: around 10 per cent of ethnic minority people reported experiencing ethnic and racial harassment in the past year. Further, almost twice as many ethnic minority people felt unsafe or avoided public places due to their religion, ethnicity, race or nationality. Experiencing ethnic and racial harassment, or fearing it, was associated with poorer mental health, an association larger than the difference in mental health between the employed and unemployed.

Relevance to the work of IOPC

Widespread experiences of ethnic and racial harassment are likely to complicate interactions between ethnic minority clients and authorities, including police.

Firstly, because ethnic minorities are likely to be mistrustful of authorities in the face of widespread personal experience of harassment, and second because of the fact that experiences of ethnic and racial harassment will result in ethnic minority clients who are more anxious and depressed. Awareness of this general context is necessary when handling cases involving ethnic minorities, regardless of the specific grounds for the complaint.

Specific findings

- Individuals reporting ethnic and racial harassment are not necessarily the most disadvantaged. This risk is higher for ethnic minorities who are younger, more highly educated and male. The reported harassment is predicated on being in public places and possibly having the confidence to identify and report it.
- Risk of harassment is positively associated with certain types of places: areas of high white concentration, areas with higher

proportion of UKIP or BNP voters, more deprived areas (net of ethnic composition). But, surprisingly, this risk is not related to other crime.

- There is a substantial association of ethnic and racial harassment with worse mental health. Those experiencing ERH are more stressed and anxious. There is some evidence that ethnic ties are a resilience factor. Some factors are more effective for UK-born ethnic minorities while others more for the foreign-born.
- There is a widespread ripple effect of ethnic and racial harassment as reflected through its persistence over time and spillover effects, especially for UK-born ethnic minorities.

Suggestions for interviews

- Harassment due to race, ethnicity, religion or nationality is common and reports of racially motivated mistreatment should be taken seriously.
- Investigators should be mindful of the ethnic concentration and political climate of the area of residence of the client, as poor treatment is more likely in areas of low ethnic minority concentration.
- Characteristics of the client may also be important, as those who are born in the UK, and or more highly educated, are more likely to report harassment. Less educated or foreign born respondents may need more probing to uncover racialised mistreatment.
- Higher levels of ethnic and racial harassment in the community may increase fear, which results in worse mental health even among those minorities who do not directly experience harassment. This may impact the demeanour, quality and clarity of evidence taken from ethnic minority members in more deprived or hostile local environments.

Please see the attached briefing note for further details, or feel free to get in touch with the research team directly with your questions.

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