

END EVERYDAY RACISM

Your story matters. Record racism for a better Cambridge.

OCTOBER 2023 REPORT



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE
Department of Sociology

THIS REPORT

This report, written by Dr Hande Güzel with the support of Dr Ella McPherson and Professor Mónica Moreno Figueroa, provides an overview of the End Everyday Racism (EER) research project and shares the findings from August 2021 to February 2023. It is based on 40 submitted testimonies and is the second report of the End Everyday Racism project.

For more, including our 2021 report, visit our website at www.racismatcambridge.org

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Glossary of terms

Racism is a series of “acts, mechanisms, and processes that operate to distribute power, resources, and privilege unequally among the social groups originally defined in the history of European colonialism, using ideas that link bodies, behavior and biocultural heredity.” (Moreno Figueroa & Wade 2022: 10).* It is a form of social organisation that is based on inequality and oppression.

Everyday racism: One of the ways in which racism is perpetuated as a system of oppression is through everyday manifestations and micro aggressions. Since racism is a complex term, we want to explain our understanding of the operation of racism distinguishing direct and structural racism:

“**Direct racism** refers to acts of stigmatization, in which people demean and violate the worth of others (with insults, jokes, threats, negative stereotyping, negligence, etc.) and acts of discrimination in which people deny others access to valued resources (employment, land, services, housing, etc.) This may require a certain level of conscious intention, but it may not.” (Moreno Figueroa & Wade 2022: 10-11)

Forms of racism can also refer to structural processes, environments, or atmospheres and less discrete or more diffuse experiences. “**Structural racism** refers to a diverse set of processes and forces that work to disadvantage a racialized category, processes that work through concrete organizations but also through social structures that extend beyond the bounds of particular institutions, understood as concrete organizations. A historical perspective is vital here in order to grasp processes that were in the past overtly racialized (e.g., enslavement, colonial practices of violent dispossessions, land expropriation, labor exploitation, policies and practices of racial segregation) and that established deeply rooted material-semiotic patterns of inequality. These patterns may persist because of the operation of policies and practices that no longer appear overtly racialized but that still work to maintain racial inequality” (Moreno Figueroa & Wade 2022: 11).

Sometimes racism can even appear through apparently ‘**well-meaning**’ comments or actions, where the person acting or commenting may not be aware of being racist and intends ‘well’, yet this does not negate the existence of racism. Everyday racism thus encompasses both direct racist attacks and daily, seemingly small and subtle ways or patterns (derived from structural processes) through which racism is experienced and perpetuated.

Racist Incident: We will talk in this report of racist incidents, events or experiences interchangeably. We will encompass a variety of cases as described by the witnesses that include, as described above, both direct and structural forms of racism. We are aware that some forms of racism might be easier to capture in this format than others and that the term ‘racist incident’ might fall short for what people can experience and witness.

Witnessing: Despite its colloquial conceptualisation as an act of observers or bystanders, we understand witnessing as an act by anyone reacting to injustices – in this case, everyday forms of racism either experienced or observed. Submitting a testimony to the EER platform is an example of acting on everyday racism, and hence is an act of witnessing. Witnessing is both a means and an end; it is a means to remedying injustices, but speaking and hearing testimony also has value in and of itself as an act of solidarity (McPherson 2022).

A person targeted by racism, a **target witness**, can also bear witness to racism. In addition to a target witness, a **bystander witness** is someone who was present during an event of everyday racism but not directly targeted, whereas a **mediated witness** is someone who heard about everyday racism across time and/or space. A **bystander witness** and a **mediated witness** are still affected by racism even if not directly targeted, as racism is a dehumanizing process that affects all members of society, be it by negatively racializing or disadvantaging them, positively racializing or privileging them, or hurting the community.

Testimony: The information and narrative provided by witnesses through the EER platform is called a testimony.

Report refers to both the official report one can file through the University’s institutional channels, and the document that compiles the findings from testimonies, such as this one.

References

McPherson, Ella. 2022. ‘Witnessing: Iteration and Social Change.’ *AI + Society*, 38, 1987-95.

Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G, and Peter Wade, eds. 2022. *Against Racism: Organizing for Social Change in Latin America*, Pitt Latin American Series. Pittsburgh P.A.: University of Pittsburgh Press.

The EER Project's Goals

In 2018, we launched the End Everyday Racism project at the University of Cambridge. Reflecting the origins and the evolution of the project, EER has both academic and activist goals, as well as a strong commitment to recognising and validating those who have experienced racial abuse.

Unpacking the dynamics of a complex everyday phenomenon

- Through testimonies and analysis, this activist research project aims to generate knowledge about how everyday racism works in a higher education institution such as the University of Cambridge.
- The testimonies gathered through our EER witnessing platform help us understand how racism is experienced at Cambridge with numeric and descriptive evidence.

Supporting and informing antiracism activism

- This project is also about informing the work of student and staff antiracism activism and pushing the agenda for institutional change at the University and beyond.
- The project aims to raise a collective case against racism, illustrating in clear and quantifiable ways the lived impacts of racism on students and staff. Through a focus on the emotional and embodied effects of everyday racism, we describe how racism limits and challenges the lives of those affected at the University.

Creating solidarity through recognising and validating those who have experienced racial abuse

- The collective process of documenting everyday racism validates the experience for many and encourages them to acknowledge such experiences for what they are: unacceptable.
- Compiling a collective narrative provides a sense of solidarity amongst people who can often feel isolated and alienated at the University of Cambridge.
- Participating in the project builds our community of antiracism solidarity.

The EER Project in Practice

The End Everyday Racism activist research project uses a digital witnessing platform to collect anonymous testimonies of everyday racism in and around the University.

- EER emerges from the antiracism research and work developed by Professor Mónica Moreno Figueroa at the University of Cambridge, and beyond – including her observations as University of Cambridge Race Equality Champion (2017-2021) and the work of her organisation, the Collective for the Elimination of Racism (COPERA). In conversations with Dr Ella McPherson, the two decided to join their expertise and concern for social justice and transformation to develop this project.
- EER is based on a witnessing platform designed to support advocacy and solidarity-building and developed by *The Whistle*, an academic start-up led by Dr McPherson. *The Whistle* and the EER project take a decentring approach to technology that follows a methodology of solidarity and makes space for the pluralism of voice and for care.
- Witnesses are prompted to provide information on where everyday racism occurred, how it developed, and its emotional and physically-embodied consequences – a distinctive element of this project and an innovation stemming from Professor Moreno Figueroa's research.
- All members of the University can submit anonymous testimonies, including students, academic staff, assistant staff, and alumni. Witnesses verify their University membership using an @cam or @cantab email address – data that is checked but not stored.
- As a research project, we adhere to the British Sociological Association's code of ethics, and we request witnesses' consent before they submit any personal data. The EER platform does not collect the identities of witnesses nor of those involved in racist incidents. The data shared remains anonymous and can only be seen by the EER team and stakeholder partners.
- At the end of writing their testimony, a witness can download it as a PDF, for their record and to assist with making an official report, should they choose to do so. As an activist research project, EER is not aimed at resolving individual cases, nor is it an official reporting procedure for the University.

Activities and Selected Events to Date

- End Everyday Racism published its first findings report in October 2020. The report has garnered interest from a wide variety of groups, including students and staff members at the University of Cambridge, researchers of 'race' and racism, policymakers, University leadership, the media, and colleagues at other institutions. Please visit our website to read this report: www.racismatcambridge.org.
- Following the first report launch, the EER team met with various groups at the University to disseminate the findings and discuss ways of moving forward. These include meetings with the Vice-Chancellor's office, various Colleges and their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion teams, Cambridge Students' Union, and various Departments at the University. Lead researchers on the team also shared the results at the British Sociological Association Annual Meeting.
- EER has also partnered with various institutions to support them with starting their own End Everyday Racism projects. These include the University of Oxford and the University of Essex, as well as a human rights NGO. Requests for collaboration illustrate how helpful the spaces that EER creates can be across academic and non-academic institutions in the UK, and how much of a gap exists in institutions meeting the needs of those who have been racialised. We are now considering how to share the project widely in the most accessible ways possible.

THE TEAM

The End Everyday Racism Project is an independent research project made possible by a group of researchers and experts.



Dr Ella McPherson and Professor Mónica Moreno Figueroa, of Cambridge's Department of Sociology, are co-founders and co-leads of the End Everyday Racism project.



Dr Hande Güzel is responsible for data analysis, writing reports, and dissemination of findings from the data.



Louis Slater designed *The Whistle* platform used by EER and provides technical support to the project.



Zeta Graham is the outreach coordinator for EER, organises public events, and manages the project's social media accounts. Joe Cotton is EER's communications advisor.



Saide Mobayed tracks the impact of the project.



Anusha Arumugam manages EER's partnerships with other institutions.



Dr Kerry McInerney develops EER's networks.

EER has gone through a wide consultation process with various organisations and individuals within and outside the University of Cambridge. EER supporters include UCU Cambridge Branch, Cambridge University Student Union and Graduate Union, FLY, The Black Cantabs Research Society, The 1752 Group and the Decolonising Sociology Committee.

The project and underlying research have been supported by Cambridge's Department of Sociology and generously funded by Horizon 2020: EU Programme for Research and Innovation, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account, and Cambridge's University Diversity Fund.

Going forward, EER will be housed at the new Institute of Research on Race, Anti-Racism, Inequality and Social Exclusion (RAISE), located in Cambridge's Department of Sociology and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

FINDINGS SUMMARY (1 of 2)

Staff and student witnesses submitted 40 testimonies between August 2021 and February 2023, providing the following findings:*

- More than two-thirds of target witnesses felt that their **job or study or could be at risk** as a result of the racist incident witnessed. More than three-quarters of target witnesses stated that the incident made or might have made it **difficult for them to perform well in their work or studies**.
- In terms of location, testimonies point at the prevalence of racism in the **workplace**; 39% of witnesses located their experience of everyday racism in their place of work. This is followed by racism experienced in **colleges**, in **transit**, or in **accommodation**, each at 18%.
- **Racism against Asian people** continues to be one of the highest reported categories, alongside that against mixed race people. We expect this in part is because the impact of the pandemic on the negative racialisation of East Asian people continues.
- Many witnesses stated that their **gender identity** shaped their experience of negative racialisation, as well as **nationality and/or ethnicity** and other intersecting characteristics.

Racist incidents continue to have significant emotional and physical impacts on witnesses

- More than one-third of respondents experienced feelings directed towards them of hostility, rejection, indifference, and well-meaningness.
- More than half of the witnesses felt **anger, embarrassment, and incredulity**.
- In terms of physical consequences, more than half experienced **bodily tension and nervousness**.
- Almost three in four respondents **feared that the racist incident will happen again**.
- Two-thirds of witnesses felt like they **do not belong at the University of Cambridge**, and more than half felt detachment.

**As not all witnesses responded to all questions, some of the data has an N (total number of observations) smaller than 40. Witnesses were divided equally between staff and students.*

FINDINGS SUMMARY (2 of 2)

Key findings include that respondents experience **institutional loneliness, feel guilty** for not filing an official report, experience **racism that is masked as well-meaningness, feel excluded from places**, sense their **time being constrained and monopolised** by the experience, and feel **worthless and insignificant** because of the racist incidents.

Based on the findings, EER recommends the following actions:

- More people of colour with antiracism training should be part of the teams developing and handling official reporting mechanisms and in counsellor positions, and this contribution should be recognised in their workloads.
- Members of the University not usually targeted by racism, whether white or belonging to other privileged racialised groups, should build their antiracism skills through training, as well as find opportunities to demonstrate their awareness of racism and their support to people targeted by racism.
- Porters should receive further training in non-discriminatory practices.
- Policymaking should better link up efforts to end everyday racism with efforts to widen inclusivity and participation.
- Racism's intersection with gender, sexuality, and age – among other characteristics such as class, religion and disability – should be taken into account in policymaking.

EVERYDAY RACISM IN NUMBERS



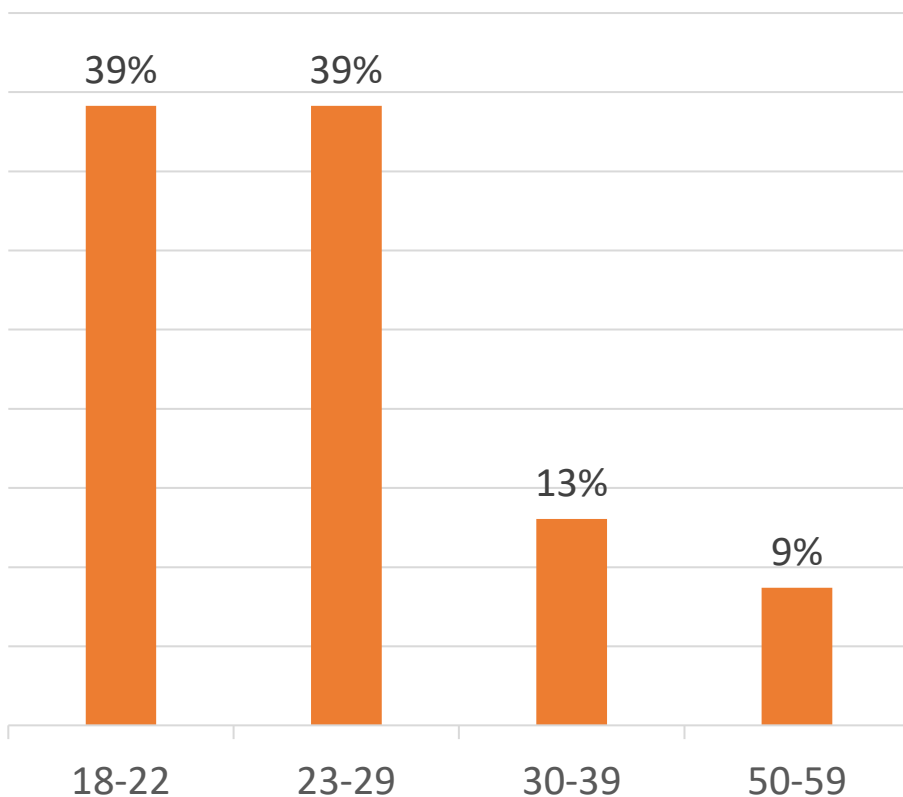
Witness characteristics

Most were target witnesses

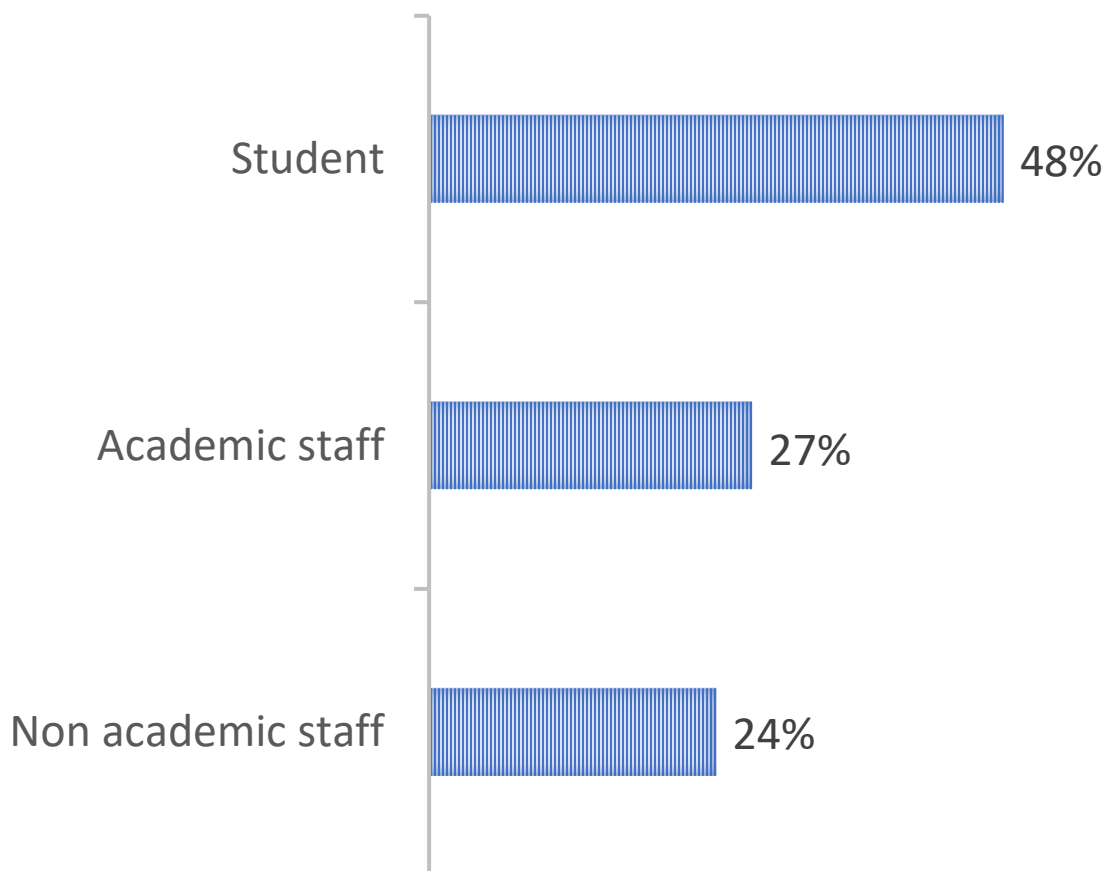
Target witness	29
Mediated witness	6
Bystander witness	5
Total	40

This indicates a need for more participation from mediated and bystander witnesses.

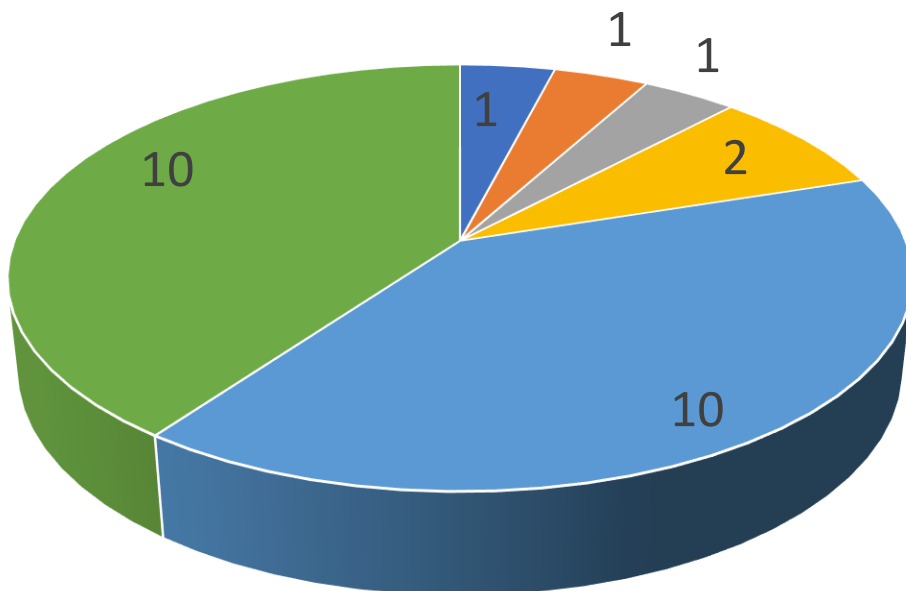
Of those who reported their age (N=23), most were between the ages 18 and 29



Witnesses were divided equally between students and staff (N=40)



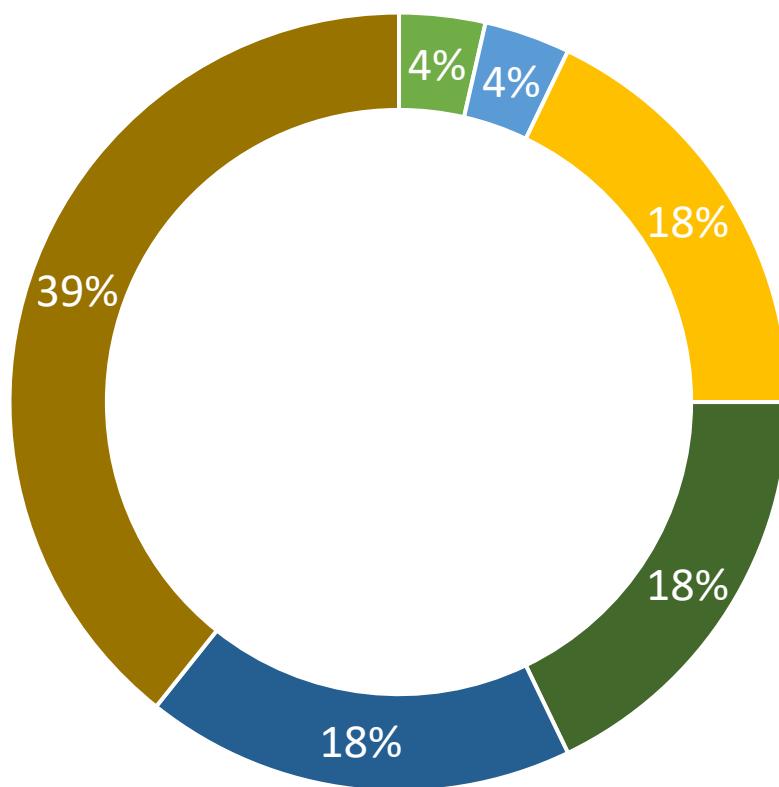
Forty percent of target witnesses identify as Asian, and another 40% as mixed race (N=25)



- Arab/Middle Eastern
- Indigenous, Native or Aboriginal background
- White
- Black
- Mixed race/mixed or multiple ethnic origin
- Asian

Racism against Asian people continues to be one of the highest reported categories. We suspect that the impact of the pandemic on the negative racialisation of East Asian people continues.

Witnesses experienced racialisation in a variety of Cambridge locations (N=28)



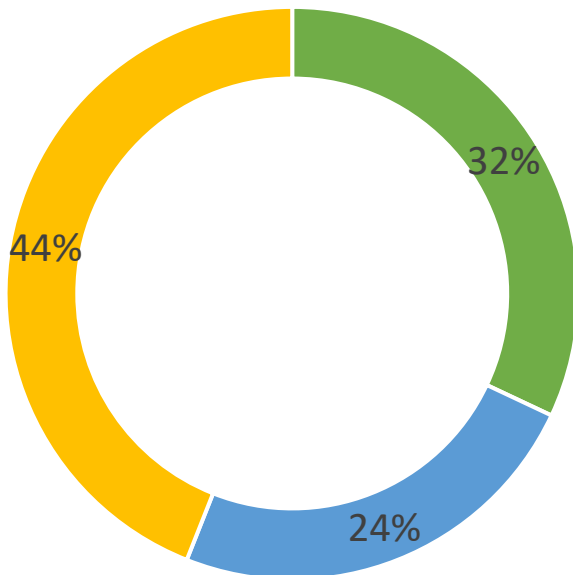
- In a supervision
- In Cambridge city
- In a college hall or bar
- In my accommodation
- In transit (walking, cycling, etc)
- In my place of work

Given that remote work and teaching remain prevalent, we asked about in person versus online incidents:

In person	35
Online	5
Total	40

Everyday racism significantly impacts witnesses' work and studies

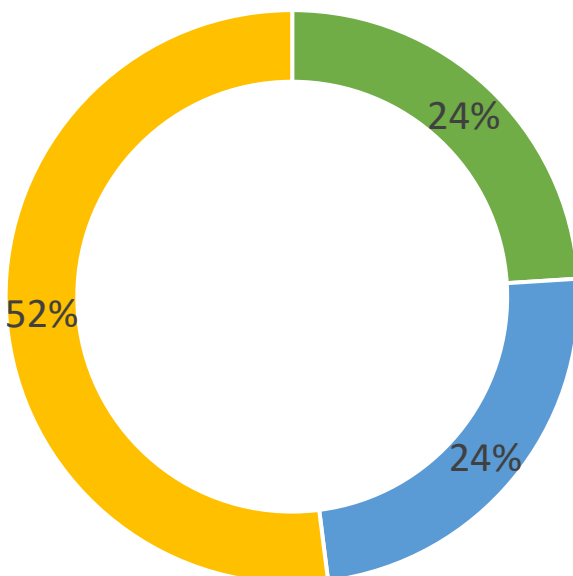
Job/study at risk (N=25)



■ No ■ Not sure ■ Yes

More than two-thirds of target witnesses feel that their job or study is or might be at risk as a result of the incident.

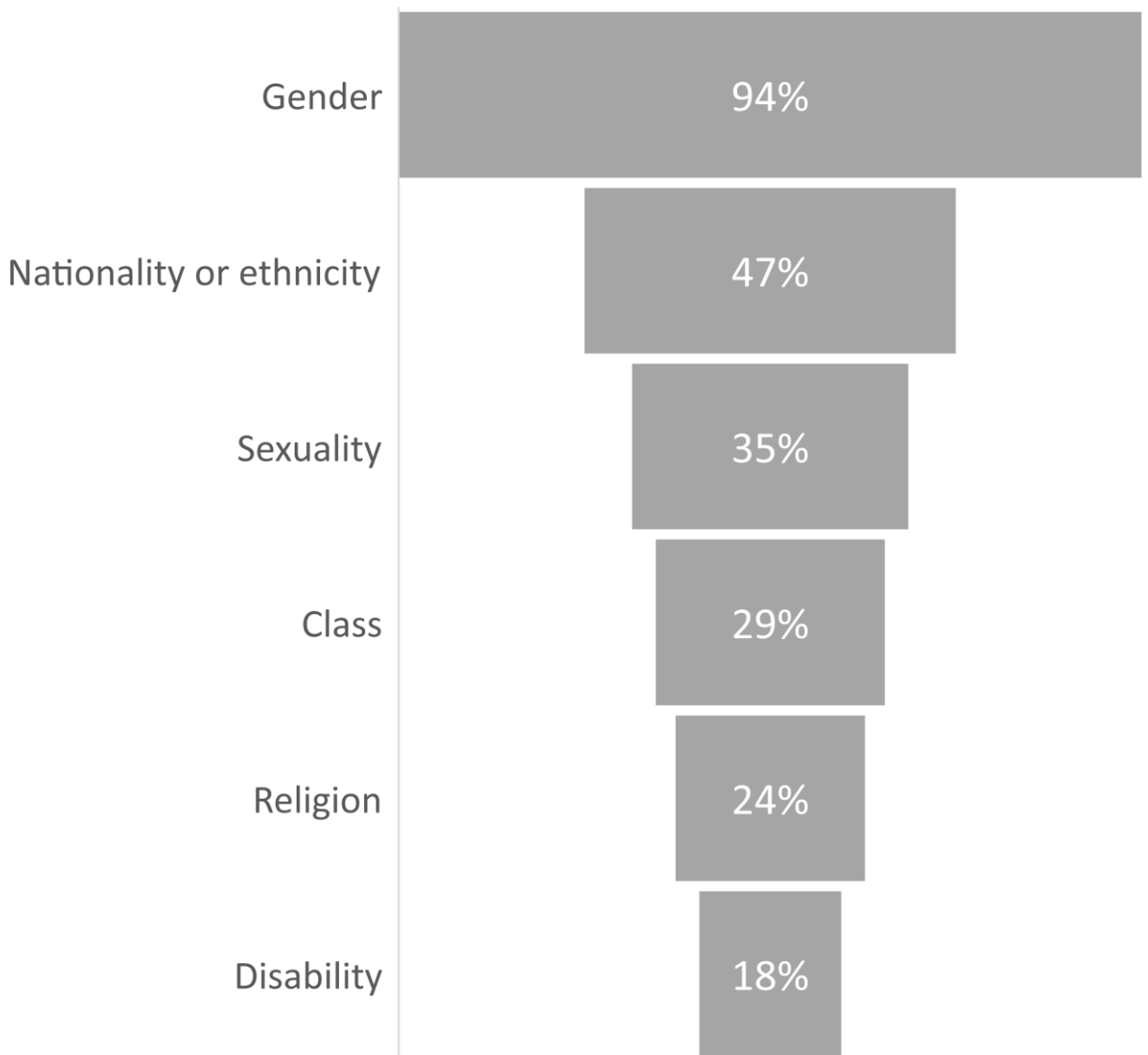
Job/study made difficult (N=25)



■ Not sure ■ No ■ Yes

More than three-quarters of target witnesses stated that the incident made or might have made it difficult for them to perform well in their work or studies.

Target witnesses reported that their intersecting identities were of relevant importance to their experiences of racism (N=20)



EMOTIONAL and PHYSICAL IMPACTS of EVERYDAY RACISM

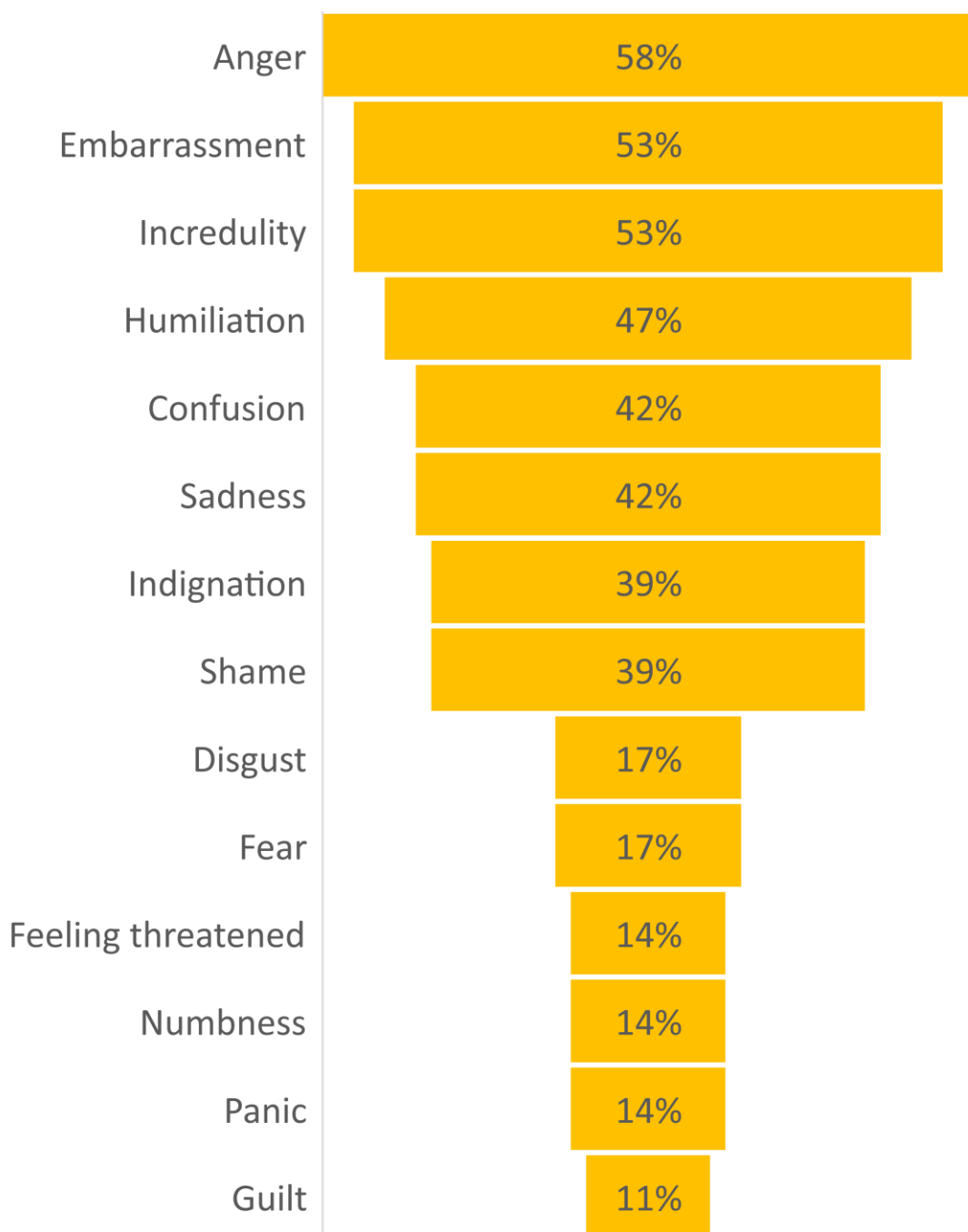


**Witnesses experienced negative emotions directed at them during the racist incidents, including hostility and rejection
(N=37)***



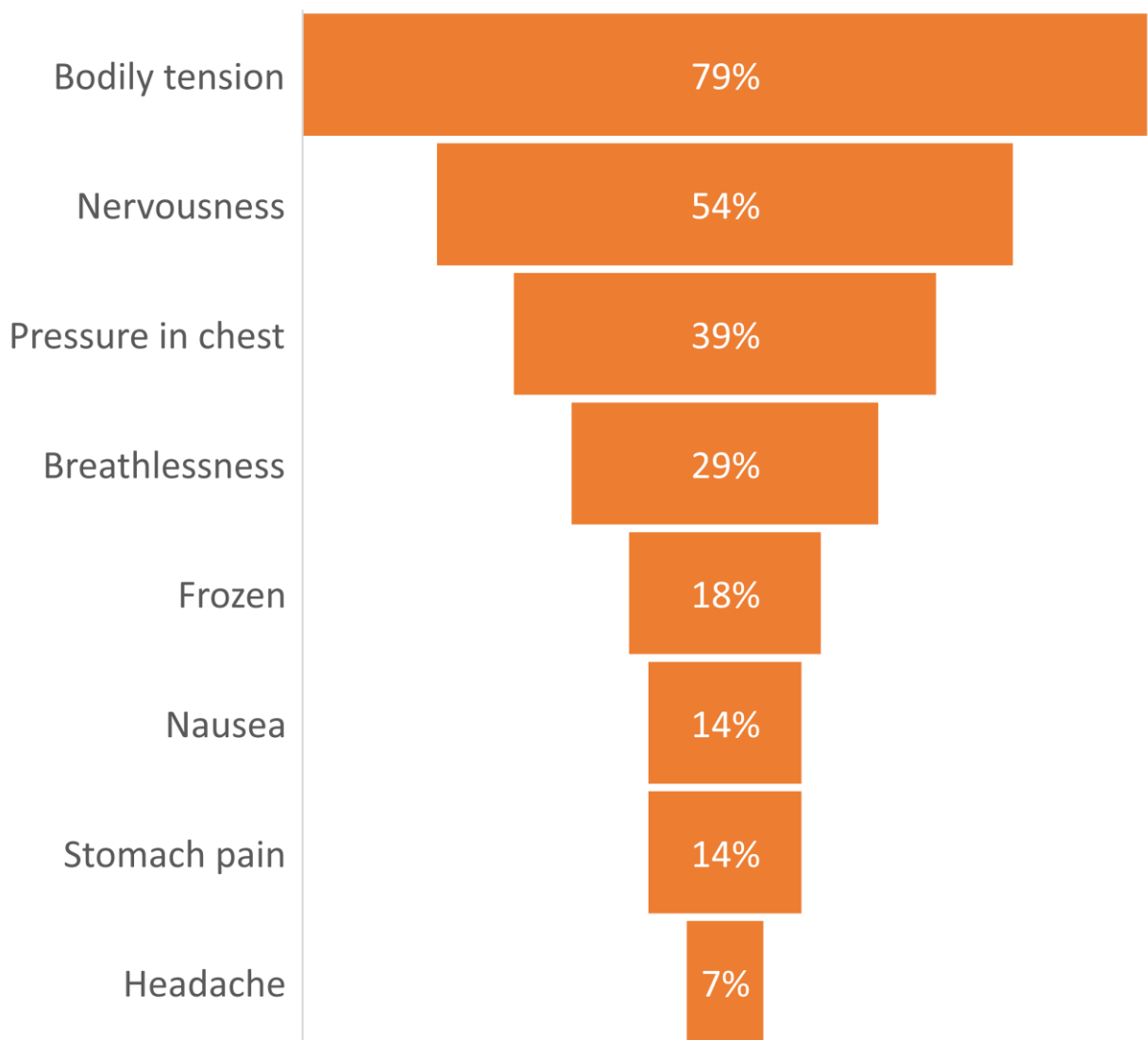
**In answering the question, witnesses could choose as many emotions as they experienced.*

Witnesses felt a range of negative emotions as a result of the racists incidents, including anger and embarrassment (N=36)*



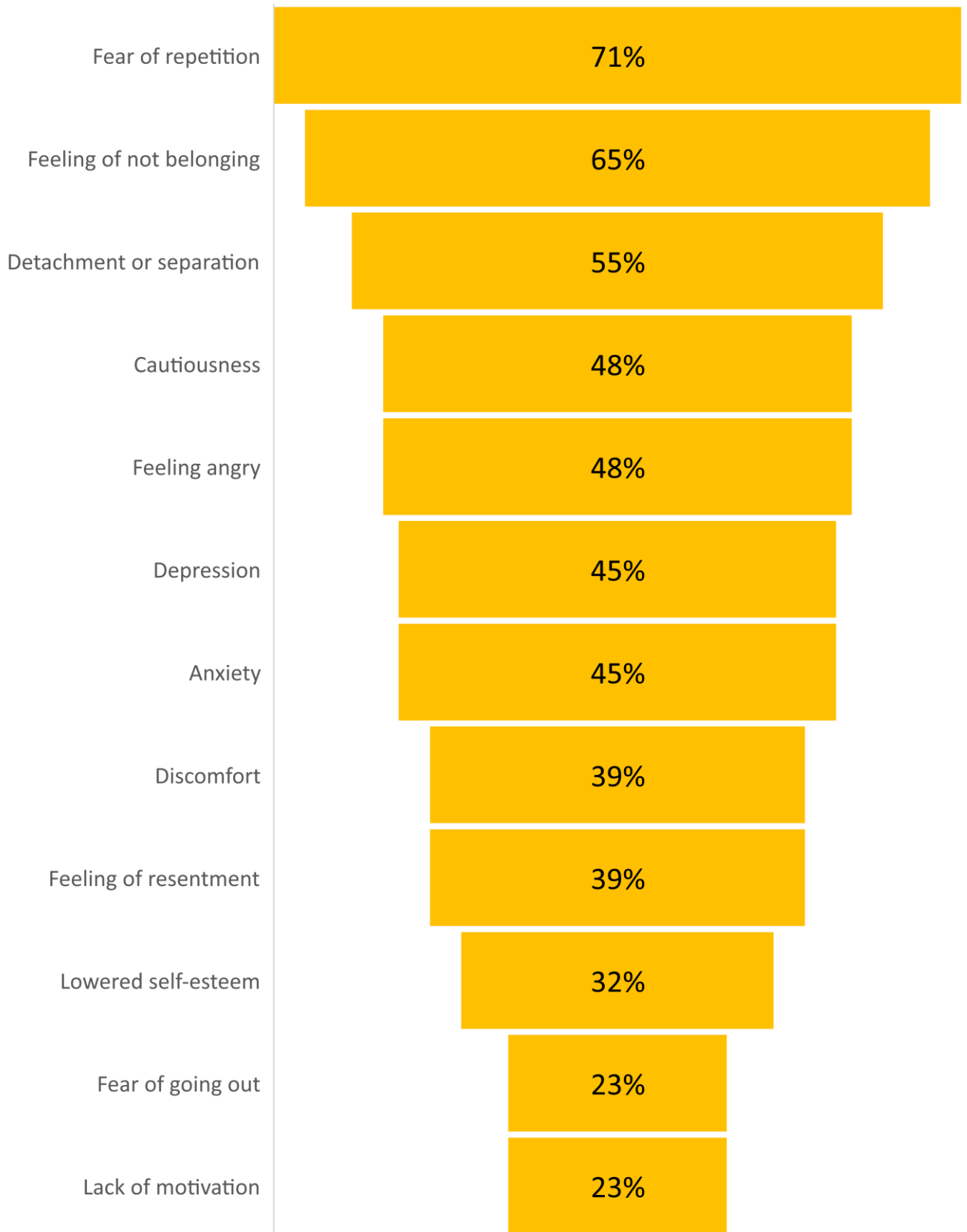
**In answering the question, witnesses could choose as many emotions as they felt.*

Many witnesses physically felt bodily tension, nervousness, chest pressure and breathlessness (N=28)*



**In answering the question, witnesses could choose as many physical consequences as they experienced.*

Among other consequences, many witnesses felt a fear of recurrence, a sense of not belonging at Cambridge, and detachment (N=31)*



**In answering the question, witnesses could choose as many consequences as they experienced.*

KEY CONCLUSIONS from QUANTITATIVE and QUALITATIVE DATA*



**Quantitative data includes the aforementioned, and qualitative data was collected through free text boxes and analysed thematically*

One of the most recurrent emotions witnesses expressed in their free-text testimonies was **institutional loneliness** due to the lack of an official reporting mechanism that they trust.

One witness remarked that, following a racist incident, *'My college was extremely unhelpful and took no action'*. Another wrote, *'I tried to figure out what I can do about the issue. There seems to be no standard procedure for reporting incidents related to racism, and there doesn't seem to be mechanisms within the University that hold these people accountable..'*

Witnesses wrote about pressure from peers and friends to **forgive perpetrators**. In the absence of trusted official reporting mechanisms, this pressure is perhaps seen as more justifiable, as the incident and the emotions that it causes can be downplayed more easily.

One witness stated, *'Everyone around me told me to forgive him and that he was just joking and that it was not a racist comment, all of these people were white.'*

Institutional loneliness goes hand-in-hand with feelings of not belonging in Cambridge.

One witness commented: *'I just know this is what Cambridge will always be like for me. I know I can't make a home here for that reason.'*

Respondents experience institutional loneliness

Witnesses feel guilty for not officially reporting the incident

In many cases, a hierarchical relationship exists between the perpetrator and the witness. Due to the fear that their job or study might become more difficult or even at risk, respondents may not officially report the incident.

Examples include needing a reference letter from the perpetrator or the fact that the perpetrator has access to their records or accommodation.

One witness stated, *'I didn't know what to do as he has a master key to my building, and thus access to my personal space.'*

Not speaking up leads to a feeling of guilt for witnesses. The emotional labour of the racist incident, thus, is left entirely with witnesses.

One witness commented, *'I felt guilty for not challenging it directly [...] because I might need a [...] reference from him.'*

Well-meaning-ness is under-recognised as racism

More than one in three target witnesses have experienced racism in the form of well-meaningness.

As this is not as overt as other forms of racism, it is often unnoticed or ignored by others, and it can be difficult to challenge.

An example given by witnesses is how friends or colleagues sometimes speak with pity about the witness' country of origin, in the guise or manner of being sympathetic.

Racist incidents, especially if they are unresolved, have a long-term impact on how target witnesses experience time and place, creating a domination over their everyday life.

Witnesses feel anxious about entering places where the incident occurred or where they might run into the people who targeted them. Some have stated that they are permanently avoiding these places, even if these are their workplaces. One witness stated, *'I now permanently work from home and avoid going into the office as much as possible'*.

Testimonies illustrate that 'portering', which is used by witnesses to refer to being negatively racialised by porters as one enters a college, continues.

One witness shared the following incident, *'A black colleague was visiting me at work. The porters made him wait outside the college. This has never happened to me with a visitor before or since'*.

Witnesses also testify to how incidents of racism monopolise their time, such as through needing to take time off work or studies to process incidents and their consequences.

Witnesses' access to places and time is limited by racism

Witnesses testify about feelings of frustration, overwhelm, and helplessness with respect to the racist incident's diminishment of their value as people and of the value of the knowledge and work they produce.

This diminishment includes ridicule about target witnesses' names or countries of origin, the regurgitation of stereotypes, and discomfort with their presence.

Ongoing rejection at academic and/or informal events, being consistently neglected by peers, and assumptions of professional incompetence are some examples of the diminishment of knowledge and work.

Witnesses feel worthless and insignificant as a result of racist incidents

ACTION POINTS



Based on these findings, the End Everyday Racism project recommends the following actions:

More people of colour with antiracism training should be involved with the development and deployment of reporting mechanisms and in counsellor positions

- Witnesses continue to voice their feelings of powerlessness and mistrust in the official reporting system, in part because of the absence of people of colour with antiracism skills involved in the development and deployment of reporting mechanisms. In witnesses' experience, this absence is reflected in a dearth of counsellors with antiracism training at the University and colleges. All-white panels investigating discrimination deter people from reporting the incident, and the lack of antiracist counsellors of colour make the respondents feel like they do not have access to any emotional support in the institution.
- The University and colleges should appoint more people of colour with antiracism training, including to positions related to official reporting mechanisms and as counsellors. The University and colleges should also recognise this labour can disproportionately fall on staff of colour and should adjust workloads accordingly.
- Members of the University not usually targeted by racism, whether white or belonging to other privileged racialised groups, should build their antiracism skills through training as well as find opportunities to demonstrate their awareness of racism and their support to people targeted by racism.

Porters should receive further training on non-discriminatory practices

- The urgent need in collegiate Cambridge for porters to receive extensive training on non-discriminatory practices, identified in EER's last report in 2020, persists. Both students and University staff members continue to experience 'portering', namely being denied access to or exit from college grounds. Several witnesses have also noted that their complaints are either dismissed or not taken seriously.
- Porters' lodges are entry and exit points to college grounds, and interaction with them shapes and determines one's overall experience in a college.
- Employing more porters of colour with antiracism training can also make students and staff of colour feel safer and more welcome on entering college grounds.

Policymaking should better link up efforts to end everyday racism with efforts to widen inclusivity and participation.

- The University prioritises its outreach events, including widening participation. Failure to take steps to end everyday racism would mean that students from underprivileged backgrounds may feel like they cannot belong to the University of Cambridge.

Racism's intersection with gender, sexuality, and age – among other characteristics – should be taken into account in policymaking.

- Racism impacts certain groups of people more than others. Amongst witnesses, this was the case for women, LGBTQ+ communities, and the younger population. Anti-racism policies developed by the University should take these intersections into account.

Witness
feedback
supports the
EER project
and our
witnessing
platform

Feedback shows that providing testimony has a cathartic impact on witnesses, highlights significant limitations in institutional reporting mechanisms, and raises new ideas for the use of findings.

'Thank you so much for doing this project! It matters so much and it would be really helpful to know more about the kinds of things that people experience, especially in a department like mine where there aren't many staff of colour and so it's very hard to share experiences.'

'This has been very cathartic, thank you.'

'I think it's an amazing idea that our testimonies can be collected to demonstrate the extent of racism permeating in our society, and the negative impact it creates on us personally.'

'I chose to submit it because someone told me [that] the [U]niversity had 5 official complaints of racism in 2020... I could probably name 5 instances of racism I'd gone through in that year... So clearly something's wrong with reporting.'

'I think they [the testimonies] should be used in diversity training events.'

Racist incidents create an overwhelming range of emotional and physical reactions for those who experience them, as well as negatively impact their sense of space, time, self, and belonging, making it difficult to process and move past them. This should be considered in all actions taken.



To find out more, and to provide witness testimony, visit our website:

www.racismatcambridge.org

