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Report

A pilot study on East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) people's experience of racism and hate crime in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic

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1. Introduction

Since the start of the COVID-10 pandemic, racism and hate crimes against East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) people have surged sharply in the UK and worldwide. There have recently been reported incidences in towns and cities including [Southampton](#), [Sheffield](#) and [Edinburgh](#). Such reports have also hit the headlines [regionally](#) and [nationally](#). Anti-Asian hate crime cases have tripled in London alone since the start of the pandemic. In Nottinghamshire, from the beginning of the pandemic to August 2020, there were 56 reported coronavirus-related hate crimes and half of them were specifically against the Chinese community, which was four times the amount of the similar period in 2019, according to the Nottinghamshire Police.

These are official data and visible news reports. But it is well known that a large percentage of hate incidents are not reported to the police for different reasons and therefore go unnoticed. A bottom-up, community-based approach is therefore needed to better understand how people in the ESEA community have experienced and coped with racism and hate crimes, why they have chosen to, or not to, report these incidents to the police, and what they hope that the government will do to tackle the problem. This survey was designed to address this need, and as a pilot study to gain a better understanding of the topic in preparation for a bigger research project.

This [survey](#) was conducted online and through social media in the period of a week from 25 May to 1 June 2021. It is the preliminary stage of a larger project to understand East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) people's experience of racism and hate crime in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of making evidence-based recommendations to tackle racism and hate crime. The survey consists of 10 multiple choice questions and roughly takes 2 minutes to complete. The participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Although based on a small sample (N=71), the results largely correspond with the findings from [previous studies](#) and can therefore still help us better understand the ESEA community's experience of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

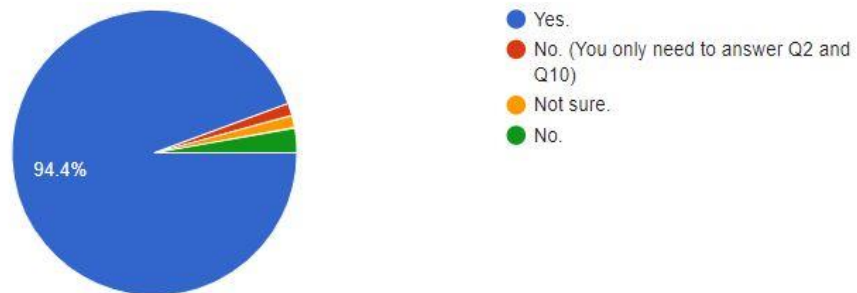
2. Key findings

The key findings of this pilot study are:

1. Most participants (94.4%) identify with, or feel comfortable with, BESEA (British East and Southeast Asian) or ESEA (East and Southeast Asian) identity. Despite the different attitudes towards the use of identity categories such as Chinese, British Chinese, Oriental etc., BESEA or ESEA has increasingly become a more inclusive and less controversial term for personal identification and political mobilisation in the community since the start of the pandemic.

1. Do you identify yourself as British East and Southeast Asian (BESEA), or East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) currently living in the UK? (This includes but not limited to British Chinese and Chinese.) (If your answer is no, you only need to answer Q2 and Q10.)

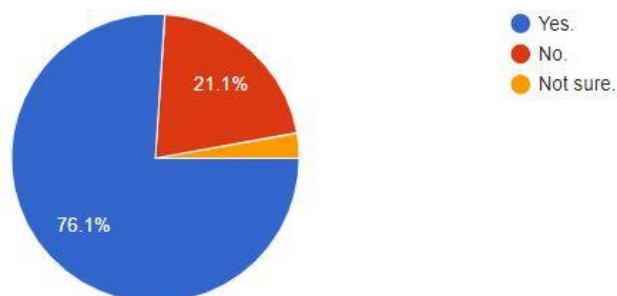
71 responses



2. Most participants (76%) know of someone who has experienced a racist hate incident because of their ESEA identity. Racism is therefore a widely acknowledged fact or experience within the ESEA community in the UK.

2. Do you know of anyone who has experienced a racist hate incident because of their East and Southeast Asian identity? (Something is a racist hate incident if the victim or anyone else thinks it was carried out because of hostility or prejudice based on race.)

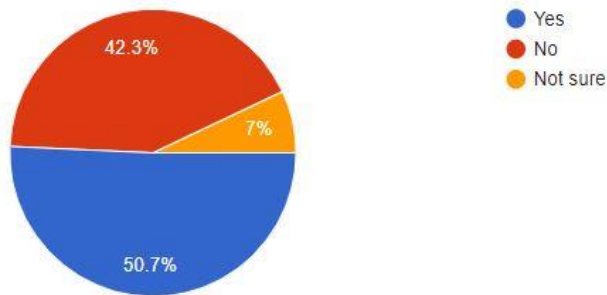
71 responses



3. Half of the participants of the survey have experienced a racist hate incident themselves since the start of the pandemic, demonstrating the prevalence and urgency of the issue.

3. Have you experienced any racist hate incident yourself since the start of the pandemic? (If your answer is no, go to Q. 10)

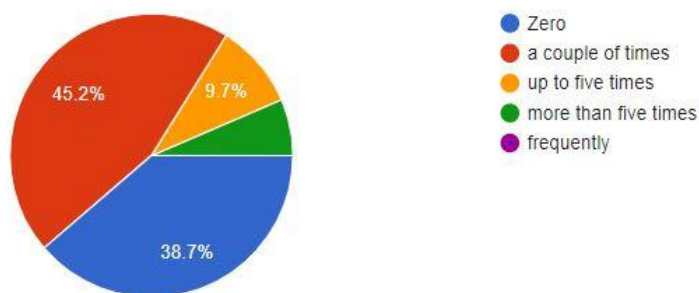
71 responses



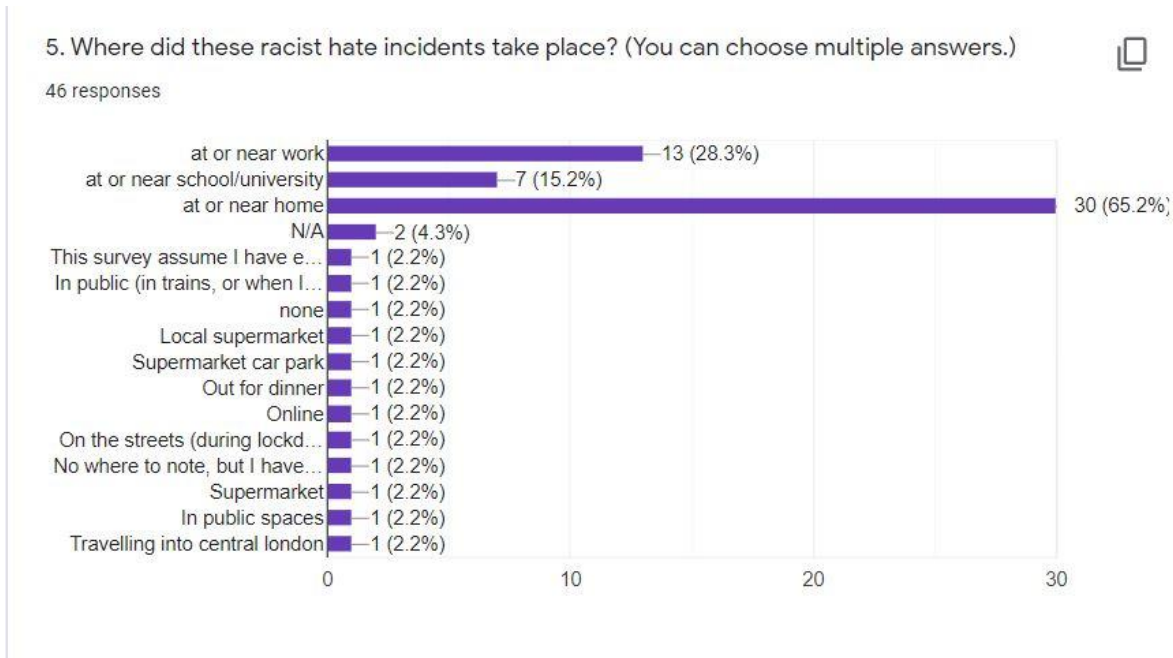
4. Among those who have experienced racism and hate crime, 45% of the people have experienced a couple of racist hate incidents. A small percentage (9.7%) of them have experienced it for up to five times, and 6.4% have experienced it for more than five times.

4. How many times have you experienced racist hate incidents since the start of the pandemic?

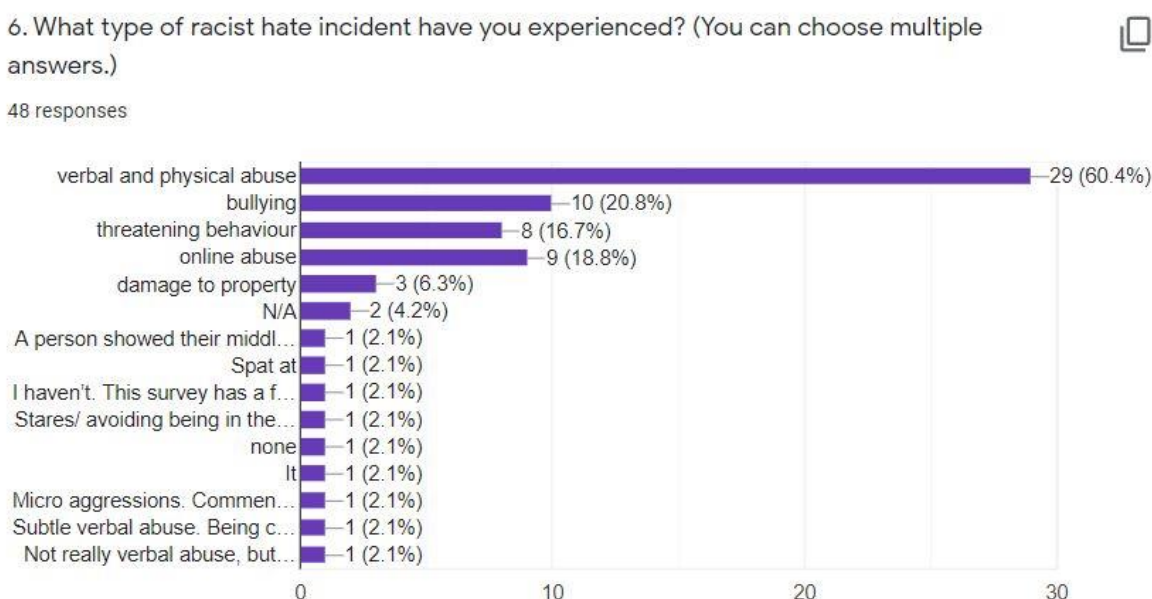
62 responses



5. Most (62.5%) of these racist hate incidents took place at or near home, i.e. in the neighbourhoods where people live in. The locations participants identified include streets, local supermarkets, public transport and restaurants/takeaways.



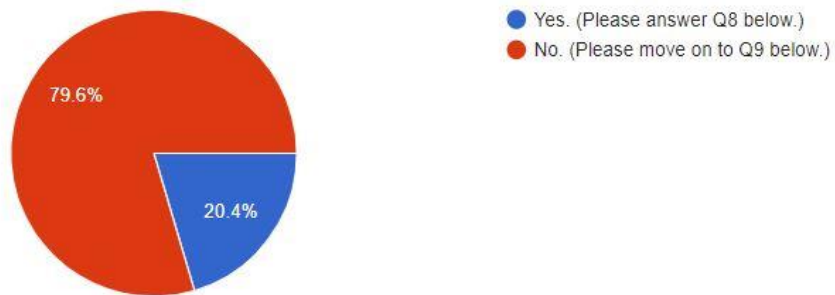
6. Among those racist hate incidents, the majority (60%) took the form of verbal or physical abuse; 20.8% bullying; 18.8% online abuse; 16.7% threatening behaviour; 6.3% damage to property; and 2.1% spitting. Participants have also reported microaggressions such as stares, showing middle fingers and deliberate avoidance in public spaces.



7 Among those who have experienced racist hate incidents, the majority (79.6%) have **not** reported these racist hate incidents to the police. Only around 20% people have done so.

7. Have you reported the racist hate incident to the police?

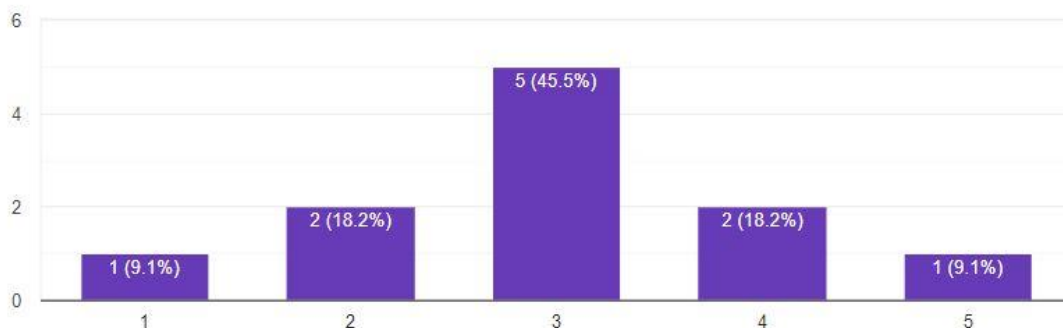
49 responses



8. Among those who have reported racist hate incidents to the police, Around half (45.5%) feel neutral (i.e. neither satisfied nor unsatisfied) about the response from the police. There is a mixture of good and bad experiences.

8. (Please answer this question if your answer to Q7 is Yes.) If you have reported a racist hate incident to the police, on a scale from one to five, how satisfied are you with the way how the case was dealt with?

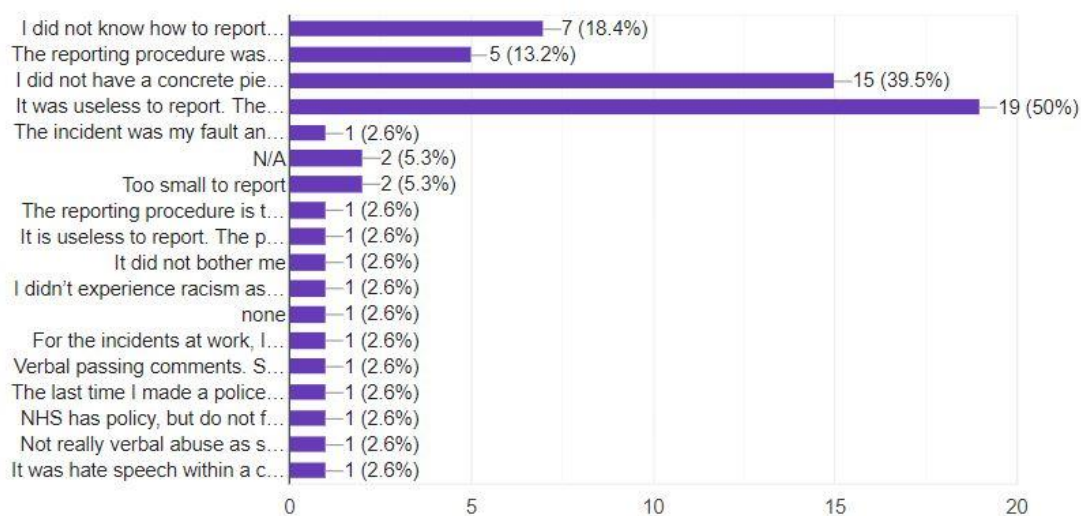
11 responses



9. Among those who have not reported racist hate incidents to the police, half of them think it was useless to report these incidents as the police could not do anything. The understanding that one has to present concrete evidence (e.g. photos, videos, or eyewitness accounts) during the reporting process is seen as a major obstacle and deters victims from reporting hate incidents. 18.4% of the respondents do not know how to report a hate incident and 13.2% feel the reporting procedure was too complicated to navigate.

9. (Please answer this question if your answer to Q7 is No.) If you have NOT reported the racist hate incident to the police, why not? (You can choose multiple answers.)

38 responses

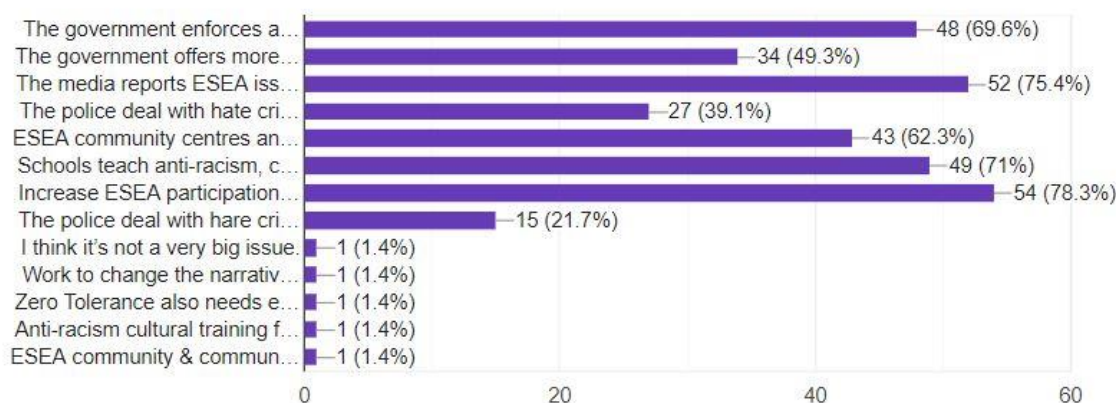


10. Key areas of work that the participants have identified to tackle racist hate crimes include: ESEA participation in public life, media representation, school education, government policy and practice, community work, community centres and organisations, and police work.

10. What do you think are the best ways to tackle racism and hate crimes against East and Southeast Asian people? (You can choose multiple answers.)



69 responses



3. Recommendations

According to the survey participants, some of the best ways to tackle racism and hate crimes include:

- Increase ESEA participation in politics, media and all aspects of public life. (78.3%)
- The media reports ESEA issues in a non-biased way. (75.4%)
- Schools teach anti-racism, colonial history, and ESEA history. (71%)
- The government enforces a Zero Tolerance for Racism policy. (69.6%)
- ESEA community centres and organisations work with the government and the police to tackle hate crimes. (62.3%)
- The government offers more financial and policy support to ESEA community centres and organisations. (49.3%)
- The police deal with hate crimes more efficiently and effectively. (39.1%)

These are also our recommendations to tackle racist hate crimes. This corresponds with the results of [a previous pilot survey](#) on ESEA community needs and demands that the researcher conducted in April 2021.

Specific to the issue of hate crime reporting, it is recommended that

- the police and community centres and organisations work together to communicate the reporting process more effectively to the ESEA people.
- the police simplify the reporting procedure, specifically stating that the presentation of concrete evidence (e.g. photos, videos and witnesses) is not compulsory during the reporting process.
- the police establish a track record and an efficient communication process in dealing with hate crimes, making the investigating process and outcome transparent to the community and the victims.

4. Conclusion

This pilot study shines crucial light on how people in the ESEA community in the UK have experienced and coped with racism and hate crimes, why they have chosen to, or not to, report these incidents to the police, and what they hope the government will do to tackle the problem. The researcher was struck by how many people (50.7% of all participants) have experienced racist and hate crimes, as well as the frequency and extent of the racist hate incidents they have experienced. This corresponds with media reports and police data about rising hate crimes against ESEA people. Racism and hate crime are therefore real problems for ESEA people living in the UK, and this needs to be addressed at different levels.

The researcher was also struck by how few people (only 20.4%) among those who have experienced racist hate incidents, have reported these incidents to the police. Among those who has not reported hate crimes, 50% of the participants think it was useless to report these incidents as the police could not do anything; 18.4% of the respondents do not know how to report a hate incident; 13.2% feel the reporting procedure was too complicated to navigate. This showcases the necessity for better communication between the police and the community, and the need to simplify the reporting process. This also demonstrates the insufficiency of [existing police data and official statistics](#) in understanding the extent of racist hate crimes against the ESEA community.

Having said the above, reporting hate crimes is not the only way to tackle the problem of racism and hate crimes. Key areas of work that the participants have identified to tackle racist crimes include: ESEA participation in public life, media representation, school education, government policy and practice, community work, community centres and organisations, and police work.

This pilot study has the following weaknesses:

1. This study is based on a small sample (N=71) through a snowball sampling technique.
2. This survey was conducted in English and can potentially exclude ESEA people, especially those from the older generation, whose English proficiency may not be sufficient to participate in the survey.
3. This survey was conducted online and through social media. This means that participants are likely to be media-savvy young people.
4. The results of the survey are therefore more likely to represent young people's experiences living in the cities in the UK.

5. The researcher did not ask questions about participants' personal information due to GDPR considerations. Information regarding participants' age, generation, period of residence in the country, class, gender, sexuality, geographical location, education etc. may prove key to discern patterns of racist hate crimes.
6. The researcher did not ask follow-up questions such as participants' experience in reporting (or not reporting) hate crimes to the police. These experiences may be key to understanding the motives and psychological processes of hate crime reporting, based on which more targeted recommendations can be made. There is a gap between knowing how to report hate crimes and the act of reporting, this process needs to be understood as one that is both social and psychological, both collective and individual.
7. In the original survey design, there was an implicit assumption that everyone has experienced a racist crime incident since the start of the pandemic. This assumption needs to be challenged. Among others, the following factors need to be taken into consideration in improving the survey design: participants' pre-pandemic experience, the intersectionality of identity, the distinctions between unconscious bias, institutional racism, microaggression, racist hate incident, and racist hate crime.

These weaknesses should be taken into consideration in the further development of the project.

You can find the original survey form [here](#). You can also read the survey results on this [padlet](#).

Contact:

If you have any questions and suggestions about this study, please contact Dr Hongwei Bao from the University of Nottingham: hongwei.bao@nottingham.ac.uk.