



Workforce

Racism guide

Introduction

This guide was developed to support employees who are currently experiencing or have experienced racism linked to the workplace. It will also help managers who may be supporting an employee or individuals and teams improve their understanding of racism. It is for all employees regardless of job role, grade, or experience.

NHS Scotland acknowledges that racism exists in wider society and is, therefore, reflected within the workplace. We recognise that racism is destructive, not only to people who experience it but also to their families, their colleagues, and the health service as a whole. To perform at their best, employees should feel safe, respected, and valued at work.

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Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Educate all employees on racism in the workplace.
- Provide advice and support for managers and employees subjected to racism.
- Signpost employees to sources of support, including relevant workforce policies.

Who does this guide apply to?

This guide applies to all employees. It also applies to bank, agency, sessional workers, volunteers, contractors, and those on placement, such as trainees, students, or individuals undertaking work experience

What is racism?

This section includes a list of definitions relating to racism and examples of racial harassment.

Definitions

Racism is the belief that people of some racial groups are inferior to others and the behaviour which is the result of this belief. Racism also refers to the aspects of a society which prevent people of some racial groups from having the same privileges and opportunities as people from other races.

The Equality Act 2010 describes **race** as meaning colour, nationality including citizenship, and ethnic or national origins. It also covers ethnic and racial groups.

Under the Equality Act 2010, there are 2 types of **discrimination**:

- **Direct discrimination** is when an employee is treated worse than another employee in a similar situation because of their race.
- **Indirect discrimination** is when a practice, policy, or rule applies to everyone but has a worse effect on a particular racial group.

Harassment occurs when someone's unwanted conduct violates an individual's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading,

humiliating, or offensive environment for that individual due to their race. This is considered prohibited conduct under the Equality Act 2010.

Victimisation is when an employee is treated badly because they have made a complaint of racial discrimination or are supporting someone who has made such a complaint. This is considered prohibited conduct under the Equality Act 2010.

Microaggressions are small acts or remarks that make an employee feel insulted or treated badly because of their race, even though the insult may not have been intended. Such acts can combine with other similar acts or remarks over time to cause emotional harm.

Examples of racial harassment

Examples of racial harassment include:

- racial comments or noises, mimicking
- racial gestures
- commenting on someone's body, appearance, or what they're wearing or eating
- threats or intimidation
- unwanted physical contact, for example, touching someone's hair
- offensive jokes, banter, and comments
- ostracising or 'freezing out', excluding from social events, ignoring, and staring
- belittling or patronising comments and remarks
- the use of derogatory terms or nicknames
- the display, sending, or sharing of offensive material of any sort
- graffiti
- stereotyping

It is also important to recognise not all racial harassment happens within the workplace. It can occur outside of working hours, at work social events, in a car park, or via digital messaging and social media. Third-party harassment can also occur, for example, a patient making racial comments to employees.

Examples of less favourable treatment

Examples of less favourable treatment include:

- Repeatedly unsuccessful in applying for promotion when the successful candidates have the same qualifications or experience but are not from a BME background.
- Lack of feedback when unsuccessful when others who are not from a BME background do receive feedback.
- Lack of support for training or CPD applications compared with others who are not from a BME background.
- When annual leave and special leave requests are not considered equally with colleagues who are not from a BME background.

Intersectionality of racial harassment

There is clear evidence that women, disabled people, and those from the LGBTQ+ community are at increased risk of racial harassment. Discrimination can also be by perception, which, in the case of race discrimination, could be by individuals making assumptions about the employee's ethnicity, religion, or beliefs.

Recognising racism

Disclosing racism can be traumatic. Employees often won't report it because they fear the repercussions, for example, being labelled as a 'troublemaker' or being ostracised at work. Such responses in themselves can be considered to be victimisation. Other people do not report what is happening to them as they do not want to re-live their experience or don't believe reporting will lead to action. To help identify racism, managers should remain vigilant.

The following list, although not exhaustive, can give some indicators that an employee might be struggling. Everyone's experience of racism is deeply personal, and signs of it can vary significantly.

Performance:

- unexplained deterioration in quality of work
- turning down professional development or training opportunities
- reduced participation or contribution in team meetings

- lack of engagement in online chats, or constantly offline
- visibly uneasy or tense during meetings

Attendance:

- being persistently late or leaving early
- coming in early or staying late for no obvious reason
- having more frequent absences

Behaviour:

- avoiding social spaces or events, appearing isolated
- withdrawing from previous sources of support, including team chats or catch-ups
- a loss of confidence
- avoiding or being visibly uncomfortable around certain colleagues
- increased anxiety, distraction, or having problems with concentration
- increased signs of stress or being easily overwhelmed
- being easily startled

Physical:

- a change in appearance
- fatigue or exhaustion
- increased physical tension
- panic attacks
- sleeping or eating disorders
- substance misuse or dependence
- self-harm, including suicide attempts

Having a conversation with an employee subject to racism

Employees affected by racism may not be willing or able to discuss what is or has happened to them. It may be because they don't know how to report it or are not aware that support is available. If you suspect one of your colleagues is being racially harassed, you can start a conversation.

There may be cases where you try to do this, and the colleague chooses not to disclose or report. If this happens, it's important to respect their decision. Ask them what they would like to happen next and how they would like to be supported, as this will be different for everyone.

Questions to help start a conversation:

- Is everything alright at work?
- Is there anything happening at work that's concerning you?
- I've noticed that you're not yourself lately, is everything okay?

You should listen to them and believe them when they share their story.

Do not interrupt, downplay it or say it could have been worse.

Demonstrate empathy. Not everyone wants, or is ready for, anything more than simply being heard.

When someone chooses to talk about racial harassment, they may approach their manager, a friend, or a colleague. Alternatively, they may share with a trade union representative, HR, or the occupational health service.

It is important to keep the information confidential. However, there may be situations where it should be reported, for example, when someone is at significant risk.

If you are a manager, and the employee discloses this to you directly, you should adopt the principles outlined above. However, you also have an obligation to respond to the disclosure positively and take appropriate action under the NHS Scotland Workforce policies. In addition, to reassure employees that such disclosures are welcomed, you can incorporate the following into your management practice:

- Lead by example and make people in your team feel safe to speak-up about racism, share their perspectives and points of view, and remind colleagues of our shared values.
- Review information in your area related to complaints of racism, racial harassment, and race discrimination. Make sure action is taken to prevent further incidents and that staff who experience racism are supported appropriately.
- Promote and encourage staff to participate in equality, diversity, and inclusion education, linking this to appraisals and PDPs.
- Encourage staff to complete their equality monitoring information and explain why this is important. Review information about

workforce equality data and, if necessary, take action to improve diversity in your team.

Advice and support for employees subject to racism

If you have been the victim of racism, you may be going through a lot of distress. This is a normal reaction to have. You must remind yourself that you are not to blame and that support is available. The following section is a list of actions you may take to help you manage your experience of race discrimination.

Talk about it

Talking can empower you and your fellow colleagues to take steps to address race discrimination in the workplace. It can help open up wider conversations about racial inequalities in the workplace. Even if you don't want to make a formal report about the behaviour you have experienced, discussing it in a safe, non-judgmental environment with a trusted friend, colleague, trade union representative, or mentor may help you access the support you need when you need it.

Collect evidence

It is good practice to retain any evidence of race discrimination you have experienced. This could include notes you have made or any physical evidence such as texts or emails. The more detail you have the better, especially if you decide to make a formal complaint. You should make note of anyone who witnessed the harassment you experienced or anyone you have consulted for advice or support.

Report it

If you feel comfortable doing so, we strongly recommend you report any racial harassment as soon as possible in line with the [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#). You may also consider [reporting it as a crime to Police Scotland](#). If your experience relates more to issues such as being denied access to opportunities or promotion, this type of discrimination should be reported in line with the [Grievance Policy](#).

External support and advice

If you need immediate support, you should contact:

- [National Wellbeing Hub](#) – Call 0800 111 4191
- [NHS 24](#) – Call 111
- [Police Scotland](#) – Call 101, or in an emergency 999
- [CrimeStoppers UK](#) – Call 0800 555 111
- [The Samaritans](#) – Call 116 123

For immediate workplace support you may also contact your trade union or professional organisation.

Further information is also available from your organisation's BME network, where they exist, or on the Scottish Government website.

Relevant NHS Scotland workforce policies

NHS Scotland has national workforce policies that apply to all staff. These policies should be used to address instances of racism and racial discrimination:

- [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Grievance Policy](#)
- [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)