“Where do I belong, where is home?”:

Experiences of racism and homelessness

Report by Michael Allard, Sophie D'Souza and Georgia Leith

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Contents

Foreword

"In 2022 Crisis approached me to be a community researcher for their Racism and Homelessness research project, as I work within the Homeless community. It was important for me, that the methodologies used in the project would be as participatory and democratic as possible.

Working on a research project where community researchers are valued meant I felt assured that we would be working together towards social change; centering the knowledge offered by the community's lived experience ensures that the narratives and research are authentic and relevant.

Many of the experiences of the interviewees you will hear are traumatic, discriminatory, and awful. As awful and as violent as they are, as a peer researcher who is part of the global majority, I live my life knowing that racism can rear its ugly head at any, and the most unexpected of times.

These experiences of discrimination and racism – whether direct, indirect, or structural – affect people's relationships with organisations, society, and individuals. They frame our world. This is shown by the participants' reports of discriminatory incidents when accessing homeless services. This discrimination can also intensify the reasons people from global majority communities become homeless in the UK.

This report is important as there have been few research studies, highlighting the links between race, ethnicity, and housing inequality. By shining a light on the challenges faced by these communities, we can make systems and organisations fairer through better practices. If bad practice is allowed to flourish, it can affect everyone, and maintain systems of oppression. Best practice means making systems better for all."

Dani

"I am a lived experience researcher and passionate about ending homelessness in the UK.

The research was needed to show how Black people in the UK are treated and the lack of support given to them depending on where they live.

I was motivated to get involved as it's time these issues are exposed and action is taken to ensure Black people have the same opportunities to get housed."

Andrea

"There is a real gap in existing research and understandings of homelessness and racism.

Many of the decision-makers, and leading researchers in the "field" who get to shape understandings of racism and homelessness don't necessarily have lived experiences, and this impacts on the way that they create policies, research, and representations that affect our lives. However, the lived experiences of racism and homelessness across communities of colour and global majority folk can be vastly different and it takes all of us to do this work; anti-racism is a lifelong commitment.

Racism creates many of the conditions for housing precarity and homelessness, which disproportionately affects Black, people of colour, and global majority folk. When Pratichi from Crisis approached me about doing this research back in 2021, it spoke to the heaviness that my heart had been holding for a long time due to my lived experiences of racism and homelessness.

I took part in this work at a time when racist Covid-19 discourse from media and politicians led to increased violences towards East and Southeast Asians globally. As a trans, nonbinary, intersex, and disabled person of East Asian heritage taking part in this research, I wanted to make sure that intersections of identity including race, gender, sex, class, and disability were spoken about in this research.

This research is a much-needed project where people with lived experiences of racism and homelessness have some power to shape understandings and research about racism and homelessness. Listen to the participants. Listen to people with lived experience of racism and homelessness. There should be more work like this that is both participatory and moves us all towards action."

Si Long Chan

"As a long-standing campaigner, lived experience researcher, public speaker and media spokesperson on mental health, racism, discrimination, and homelessness. I possess a deep understanding of homelessness having done extensive outreach, interviews and fundraising in London, Kent and abroad.

I wanted to take a stand against homelessness and raise awareness of those regularly ignored and forgotten, including the Asian and disabled community. Before, during and after Covid I had horrific experiences trying to get housing support, and this motivated me to take action against stigma and discrimination, so that others wouldn't have similar experiences. At that time, there was no research available on homelessness, mental health and racism amongst ethnic minorities.

The rewarding part of this project is the journey of transformation of my negative experiences into something positive and valuable.

The public and others have preconceived ideas of homelessness, that it's a typical white, British, middle-aged man sleeping rough, misusing substances and that they are primarily to blame. Homelessness is a last resort and is usually never their fault.

There's a constant fear of the unknown when you're homeless. You're disorientated with no permanent residence. There's no structure, security and stability in your life and no sense of normality or humanity. This causes prolonged, irreversible damage to your physical and mental health, including severe PTSD. It is a vicious never-ending cycle difficult to escape.

Navigating homelessness services is more difficult and stressful when you're an ethnic minority, you are disabled, or you cannot communicate in English. Services do not make reasonable adjustments for religious and cultural barriers, disabilities and mental health issues. There's direct, indirect, and structural racism in the system itself. Many poor decisions and assumptions are made by those in power who do not possess the lived experience, so lack the basic understanding and empathy. The result of this discrimination and poor decisions can negatively impact people to the extent that they lose their lives.

Decision-makers must actively engage and be aware of these issues, and work together cross-sector alongside lived experience researchers to take immediate action to address this never-ending issue - because homeless people are humans too."

Tamanna Miah

About the authors

The lead authors of this report were Michael Allard, the former Research Manager of Crisis, Sophie D'Souza, a former Crisis employee and now a PhD student at Stanford University, and Georgia Leith, Senior Research & Evaluation Officer at Crisis. In addition, Pratichi Chatterjee, who now works for Huddersfield University, led the scoping of the research project whilst working at Crisis, and made invaluable contributions at this stage and when offering advice towards the end of the project. The lead authors have reflected on their own positionality around race and homelessness in relation to this project – please find their statements in the Appendix 4.

The other key contributors to the research were a group of community researchers from the project's Experts by Experience panel: Tamanna Miah, Manoel Filho, Kemi Olowo, Leonie McKenzie, Blessing Francis, V L, Dani, Si Long Chan, Rodrigo de Oliviera, Andrea Gilbert, and staff from Maroon Solis CIC. Other contributors from the Experts by Experience panel included Ruth Hayles, Maria N'Doye, Pardip Gill, and Arif Shah Obayedul Hoque.

In addition, there were other contributions from panellists who are not named, either by request, or for other reasons, and we'd like to acknowledge their input into the report.

About the research's Experts by Experience panel and Power With

The lead authors would like to acknowledge the huge debt of gratitude to the project's Experts by Experience Panel and Power With. This report would not have been possible without the hard work, energy and generosity of the panel – 17 people from minoritised ethnic groups, most of whom had experience of either homelessness or precarious housing, and some of whom had experience of supporting people of colour with housing or homelessness. Between August 2022 and August 2023, this group helped to shape the research in terms of design and narrative of the core research findings. In addition, 13 of the group acted as community researchers, helping to deliver the research by supporting the design of the research materials, identifying research participants, doing research interviews, and carrying out some analysis activities.

Many of the activities of this group were facilitated by Miranda Keast and Delia Águila of Power With, who also provided group members with interpersonal support – this research would not have been possible without their hard work, as well as the skill and sensitivity they used when working on the project.

About the project advisory group

We would like to thank the advisory group who have provided input at different points during this project. It was made up of the following members: Anna Yassin, Glassdoor; Tracey Bignall, Race Equality Foundation; Maxwell Williams, the Runnymede Trust; Positive Action in Housing; Dominic McGovern and Jotepreet Bhandal, AKT; Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Heriot-Watt University; Anya Ahmed, Manchester Metropolitan University; Mushtaq Khan, BME National; Nick Beales, Ramfel; Tracey Gore, Steve Biko Housing Association; Sophie Boobis, Homeless Link.

In addition, we received input from the following people, who we also thank for their support: Henri Baptiste, Nicholas Clare, Jill McIntyre, Shabna Begum, and James Gleeson. During the research we also benefited from conversations with the following organisations at different points in the project: Shelter (in England, Wales and Scotland), Groundswell, Foleshill Women's Training, Toynbee Hall, the McPin Foundation, Friends, Families and Travellers, Sistah Space, Southall Black Sisters, the Shared Health Foundation, MEAM the Greater London Authority, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester Combined Authorities, Tai Pawb, and other staff from Heriot-Watt University.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have happened without the generosity of 58 research participants and the Experts by Experience Panel, who shared with us often painful experiences of racism and homelessness and other challenges they had experienced. Our hope is that this report will in some way advance the causes of ending racism and ending homelessness, so that other people do not suffer the kinds of harms they faced.

Staff from Crisis were key in helping to ensure that the organisation devoted resources to working on racism and homelessness, and it is not possible to name everyone involved in bringing this about. In addition, other colleagues provided advice, support with delivering the research, and in identifying next steps for this area of work. Thank you to the following current and former staff members at Crisis, as well as others who helped us in different ways:

Louise Harris, Alice Dore, Francesca Albanese, Ben Sanders, Erika Moisl, Christina Briggs, Sonia Bernard, Dulal Ahmed, Carey Hill, Juline Sinclair, Vanessa Brown, Rhiannon Sims, Jasmine Basran, Pilar Lara Cruz, Jean Man, Jagtar Behal, Sarah Walters, Cherelle Laryea, Maeve McGoldrick, Jasmine Harris, Ruth Jacob, Chris Hicks, Ailidh Durie, Marcia Williams, Peter Harrison, Jasper Harvey, Rhuaraidh Fleming, Damian Ashe, Shakeela Mandil and Sophie Reardon. Lastly, we had support from many people, some already named above, with identifying research participants to take part in interviews with us. We are very grateful to Revolving Doors, the Magpie Project, the Wallich, Inverness Food Stuff, Home4U, Glasgow City Council, as well as to staff at all of the Crisis Skylights, including former staff from the South Yorkshire and Coventry Skylights.

Content warning

We warn readers that this report contains quotes and experiences from participants that may be upsetting or triggering for the reader. The content talks about overt and implicit racism, including physical and verbal attacks and racial slurs, experienced by people who we spoke to throughout the course of the research; it also mentions sexual assault and drug/alcohol abuse. If you feel unsafe, vulnerable or unwell whilst reading the report we urge you to stop reading and take steps to support your health, wellbeing and psychological safety.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and context

There has for some time been an evidence gap around the experiences of homelessness faced by people of colour. This research sought to address this evidence gap, amplify the voices of those who have experienced racism and homelessness, and draw attention to these issues.

While a lack of affordable housing is a key factor in why many people face homelessness, you are more likely to experience homelessness if you are from a minoritised ethnic group; as with poverty, people of colour are overrepresented in homelessness statistics and services. Less clear are the reasons why this is, and what roles direct, indirect, and institutional racism and discrimination play in this over-representation of people of colour in homelessness statistics.

The resurgence of activist movements like Black Lives Matter following the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent attention on racism ingrained in institutions, organisations and systems prompted Crisis to shine a light on the impact of racism on our 'members' – people who use Crisis' services because they are experiencing homelessness – within the housing and homelessness systems.

Crisis set out to contribute rich and experience-centred insights to the evidence base around how people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds experience homelessness.

As a homelessness charity we have a strong understanding of the causes of homelessness. Pressures of broken housing markets, cost of living crises and stretched public services, on top of individual pressures around employment, finances or relationships work together to push people into homelessness. We understand the impact homelessness has on the people who experience it, the effects of long-term housing precarity on an individual and on society, and the solutions that will end homelessness for good.

The aim of this research is to add more intersectionality to our understanding, highlighting some of the reasons why people of colour are overrepresented, and giving readers better understanding of the additional pressure of racial inequality.

1.2 Existing evidence

'Race' and ethnicity, housing and homelessness

Multiple sources of official homelessness data build up a picture of noticeably worse experiences and housing outcomes for particular ethnic groups.

Similar patterns of disproportionality are reflected across the three nations of Great Britain. For each quarter between June 2018 and December 2023, 10-11% of statutory homelessness applicants in England identified as being from a Black ethnic background[1], despite only making up 4% of the English population at the time[2]. The disparity has been comparable in Wales over recent years[3] [4]; meanwhile the gap has been widening in Scotland[5], where in 2022-23, white people represented 95% of the Scottish population, but 84% of homeless households[6].

Other governmental sources demonstrate this further. The proportion of people sleeping rough in London who identified as being from a Black background has been increasing steadily over the last few years. As of March 2024, 24% of all people seen rough sleeping identified as Black, and the majority (55%) of those sleeping rough were non-UK nationals[7]. Black households are also over-represented in temporary accommodation, with 20% of households in temporary accommodation in England listing a lead applicant who identified as Black[8], and are disproportionately more likely

[1] Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2024). Tables on homelessness. Online

[2] Office for National Statistics (2021), Ethnic group: England and Wales: Census 2021.

[3] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[4] Wales Centre for Public Policy (2021), Improving Race Equality in Housing and Accommodation.

[5] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[6] Scottish Government (2023), Homelessness in Scotland: 2022-23. Online

[7] CHAIN (2024), CHAIN Annual Report April 2023 – March 2024. Online

[8] Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023), Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2022-23.

to be placed in temporary accommodation away from their local area compared to white households[9]. Furthermore, in England and Wales, households where all members identified as Black had the highest levels of living in overcrowded housing overall. However, in several regions the level of overcrowding was highest in households that identified as Asian or Asian British/Welsh. Pakistani and Bangladeshi households face greater risk of homelessness than Indian and other groups[10].

In addition to the trends that we see in these statutory data sources, there is valuable evidence generated by the research community that focuses on experiences of housing in Britain among minoritised ethnic groups, with some attention in this research given to homelessness specifically[11], which further confirms these trends. One such research piece shows that Black people are over three times more likely to face homelessness than white British people[12]. A recent State of the Nation report on homelessness and ethnicity which pulled together a wide range of governmental and other datasets, provided 'overwhelming statistical evidence that Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities, taken as a whole, experience disproportionate levels of homelessness in the UK[13].'

This inequality resulting in homelessness can be identified 'upstream', with existing evidence that consistently points to housing systems across Great Britain that disadvantage people of colour.

Households from minoritised ethnic groups are twice as likely as white households to live in unaffordable housing[14]; additionally the quality of housing conditions has been improving more slowly for minoritised ethnic groups compared to white households[15]. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups in particular, often live in poor housing conditions, which it has been argued is driven by 'the most flagrant denial of the right to adequate housing' by government policy in England[16]. Most minoritised ethnic groups in London continue to experience 'worse housing conditions, less tenure security, higher rates of housing need, worse affordability, and lower wealth than white Londoners.[17]'

Despite this, government inquiries into racism have generally neglected the topics of housing and homelessness[18], though there is increased attention from governments in Scotland and Wales, if not in England, in the role of 'race' equality in housing[19 20].

There is a growing interest from homelessness organisations and academics in this area to explain the association between homelessness risk and ethnicity. The detailed statistical analysis from the State of the Nation report mentioned above concluded that the heightened risks of homelessness faced by minoritised ethnic communities exist even when holding other contributory factors to homelessness risk constant, such as demographics, poverty and local housing market conditions. This suggests that there are additional factors at play that make it more difficult for people of colour to avoid or escape homelessness.

[9] Iafrati, S., Claire, N. and Lawrence, H. (2023), Out of Area Housing Policy Brief. University of Nottingham.

[10] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[10] For a useful summary of relevant evidence about issues of race, ethnicity, housing and homelessness, please see pages 8-10 of Homelessness Amongst Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities: A Statistical Report on the State of the Nation, from Heriot Watt University, and Ethnic Inequalities and Homelessness, from the Centre for Homelessness Impact for a focus on homelessness and ethnicity specifically.

[11] Finney, N. (2022), Ethnic inequalities and homelessness in the UK. Centre for Homelessness Impact.

[12] Herriot Watt University (2022), Black people are over three times more likely to experience homelessness.

[13] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[14] Elliott, J. and Baxter, D. (2021), What's causing structural racism in housing? Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[15] Dillon, M (2023), How does the housing crisis affect different ethnic groups in London? Positive Money.

[16] de Noronha, N. (2021), Another tale of structural inequality?, IPPR Progressive Review, 28(1).

[17] Gleeson (2022), Housing and race equality in London: An analysis of secondary data. GLA Housing and Land.

[18] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[19] Robinson, D., Preece J. and Robbins, G. (2022), Race Equality in Housing, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence.

[20] In Wales, the Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action plan published in July 2022 acknowledges the increased risk of homelessness among ethnic groups and contains commitments in this regard. There is ongoing work around these commitments and the areas of focus required, including calls for improved data on 'race', ethnicity and homeless in Wales. Welsh Government (2022), Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.

Racism, housing and homelessness

There is a growing evidence base around the role racism plays in this heightened risk of homelessness for minoritised ethnic groups.

Existing research points to discrimination within the housing sector more widely. People identifying as from Black, Asian and Mixed ethnic groups were more likely than people identifying as white to experience discrimination when trying to access a home in the private rented sector[21]. Furthermore, social housing practices have been identified as discriminatory towards minoritised ethnic groups – for example, due to their prioritisation of people with a longer history of living in the local area – and it has been noted that the fragmented and deregulated housing market, alongside immigration policy more broadly, makes it more difficult to 'tackl[e] housing disadvantage and discrimination[22].' It has been argued that dominant social housing allocations practices in England also put minoritised ethnic groups at higher risk of living in segregated and economically disadvantaged areas[23], and that the digitalisation of social housing application processes also puts people from minoritised ethnic groups at heightened risk of exclusion from accessing a home[24].

There are also other factors that compound the impacts of an unequal housing system, such as the labour market and welfare system[25], as well as the role played by social housing landlords in fostering or undermining 'integration' in a community[26] and in the 'policing' culture[27]. Taken together, these point to structural racism throughout the housing system[28].

These disparities have many historical roots, with people who migrated to the UK from countries that were once part of the British Empire settling in more economically disadvantaged areas, with poorer access to housing options. Issues like discrimination by private and social landlords, and the adverse impacts of Right to Buy on people of colour, led to different policy responses seeking to reduce discrimination and improve housing access for minoritised ethnic groups in the latter half of the twentieth century[29].

These patterns of inequality in the housing sector underpin the likelihood of becoming homeless. While it has been noted that there is 'limited evidence on how experiences of racism in the UK affect risks of homelessness, experiences of homelessness or interventions to reduce homelessness[30]', some notable recent publications[31] point to cases of direct and overt forms of racism making a person homeless, experiences of discrimination that are associated with greater exposure to homelessness, and a more structural form of racism that creates barriers for people of colour who are homeless or insecurely housed to access a settled home[32 33].

Furthermore, a recent report (based on focus groups with homelessness sector staff that took place at a similar time to our own fieldwork) points to a number of other factors around why people of colour might be excluded from access to housing and homelessness support, and experience higher levels of homelessness, including: mixed levels of awareness around statutory homelessness and housing rights; a reluctance to access housing and homelessness entitlements due to fear of negative repercussions and 'rocking the boat'; and decreased access to suitable housing compared to other ethnic groups, over concerns around being in a 'safe' area[34]. Taken all together, these findings paint a powerful picture of the role racism plays in homelessness.

These valuable pieces of work demonstrate the systemic racism and discrimination across the housing and homelessness sector. In this research, we sought to explore, through real experiences, the varied contexts in which this could happen, and how it might affect both British citizens and non-UK nationals.

Homelessness, and its disproportionate impact on people from Black and minoritised ethnic communities, is devastating but solvable[35]. Through this research, we hope to highlight some of the ways that racism – including racism that is ingrained in how systems operate – can contribute towards homelessness, and make recommendations for how policymakers and services can address this.

[21] Shelter (2021), Denied the Right to a Safe Home.

[22] Lukes, S., de Noronha, N. and Finney, N. (2018). Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(17), 3188-3206.

[23] Manley, D. and van Haam, M. (2011), Choice-based letting, ethnicity and segregation in England, Urban Studies, 48(14), 3125-3143.

[24] This has been discussed at a series of workshops held by the PRIME initiative during 2023 – see

[25] Elliott, J. and Baxter, D. (2021), What's causing structural racism in housing? Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[26] Finney, N., Harries, B., Rhodes, J. and Lymperopoulou (2019), The role of social housing providers in creating 'integrated' communities, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(17), 3207-3224.

[27] Perera, J. (2019), The London Clearances: Race, Housing and Policing, Institue of Race Relations.

[28] For a concise overview of how structural racism manifests in the housing system, see: Elliott, J. and Baxter, D. (2021), What's causing structural racism in housing? Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[29] Shankley, W. and Finney, N. (2020), Ethnic minorities and housing in Britain. In Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK, Bristol, Policy Press.
Lukes, S., de Noronha, N. and Finney, N. (2018). Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(17), 3188-3206.

[30] Finney, N. (2022), Ethnic inequalities and homelessness in the UK. Centre for Homelessness Impact.

[31] We were in contact with the organisations responsible for these, hoping to complement this activity and avoid duplication. In addition to these it is worth noting that at the time of writing, Pathway Housing Solutions, Heriot-Watt University and Shelter England, among others, are also in the process of doing further research about homelessness amongst minoritised ethnic groups, on topics including experiences of housing/homelessness services, access to social housing, and place-based experiences of housing disadvantage.

[32] Menezes, D., Netto, G., Hasan, S., Herriot Watt University (2023), Minoritised ethnic access to social housing in Scotland at key transition points, Shelter.

[33] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[34] Fitzpatrick, S., Watts, B. and McIntyre, J. (2024), Taking a race and ethnicity lens to conceptualisations of homelessness in England, Heriot-Watt University.

[35] See: Crisis (2018), The plan to end homelessness.

1.3 Our research

Research objectives and questions

We focused our research on an overarching objective: to gain a stronger understanding of why and how people from Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic backgrounds are more likely than others to experience homelessness or insecure housing.

Within this, we wanted to explore the following:

- **what experiences of homelessness and housing have been like for people of colour**
- **how people feel they have experienced racism, and whether there are any connections between this and their experiences of housing and homelessness**
- **how these experiences interact with other parts of life where there are similar patterns of racial inequity as those seen in housing and homelessness – such as in health, education, the justice system, and for current and former non-UK nationals, the immigration system.**

We worked with an Experts by Experience panel to co-develop specific research questions that would sit under these objectives:

1. **What are the pathways into and out of homelessness for people of colour experiencing homelessness?**
2. **How do systemic racism and discrimination shape or worsen experiences of homelessness?**
3. **What experiences do people of colour with experience of homelessness have of accessing support with housing?**
4. **What strategies of resistance and survival do people of colour experiencing homelessness use to navigate conditions of homelessness?**

The first 3 questions aimed to frame our inquiry around:

- **personal experiences leading up to homelessness, any key triggers, and the presence of any contextual factors, as well as what happened afterwards which helped alleviate their homelessness (in cases where this had ended)**
- **trying to understand systemic racism and its operations within, and across, institutions and systems that people encounter**
- **participants' experience of accessing support and housing, and what constituted 'better' service experiences, to try to identify practical ideas that statutory and non-statutory homelessness support services could follow up with.**

To ensure the research was not excessively 'damage-centred' and limited to the deficit-focussed factors that contribute to homelessness, the fourth research question was designed to learn more about how people navigate and survived these conditions, about individual and community strengths, and the additional resources outside of more formal services that people drew on. This could both illustrate the strengths of people of colour who have experienced homelessness and help policymakers and practitioners to think more creatively and openly about ways of ending and helping people to cope with homelessness.

By using a primarily qualitative approach, we aimed to spotlight valuable, in-depth insights from the experiences of the participants - people of colour who had experienced homelessness - including how they felt racism had shaped their interactions with services and their broader life experiences. These experiences were shaped by a variety of factors specific to the individual, including gender, parenthood, immigration status, etc.

Therefore, the participants of this study do not speak for all people of colour, or all people of their ethnicity. Nonetheless, with this research we hope to highlight themes that speak to the broader impact of racism; and provide some deeper context for the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic communities in homelessness statistics.

To learn more about the journey Crisis took to develop these research objectives and questions, please see Appendix 1.

Definitions

In this research, what constitutes 'homelessness' is in line with Crisis' definition of 'core homelessness': rough sleeping, statutory homelessness, temporary accommodation or other forms of 'hidden' homelessness.[36] For more details about this definition of homelessness and why this definition is particularly pertinent to research into homelessness of minoritised ethnic groups, see Appendix 2.

The experts by experience panel and community researchers

We recruited seventeen people to be part of an Experts by Experience panel, all of whom identify as people of colour or being from a Black, Asian or minoritised ethnic group and who have either lived experience of homelessness (including forms of precarious housing that might be considered homelessness), or experience of supporting people of colour through homelessness.

The panel met at different stages of the project to guide its development and delivery. Everyone was invited to provide input on: developing research questions, choosing research methods, the design of research materials, and the interpretation of the research findings.

Thirteen community researchers contributed to the research design (e.g. consent forms, participant information sheets, and the interview topic guide), recruitment of research participants, and analysis. Nine of them conducted research interviews on the project as well.

For more information about this panel, please see Appendix 3

Intersectionality and positionality

For discussion of the way racism intersects with other systems of oppression and discrimination, and positionality statements by the researchers, please see Appendix 4.

Research methods

The research objective and questions focused on understanding individual experiences; therefore, our core research method was semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with people from minoritised ethnic groups with experience of homelessness from across all three nations in Great Britain.

[36] see page 72, Watts, B., Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McMordie, L., Pawson, H. and Young, G. (2022), The homelessness monitor: Great Britain 2022, Crisis, Heriot Watt University and UNSW Australia.

[37] Yang, C. and Dibb, Z. (2020), Peer Research in the UK, Institute for Community Studies.

While the interviews followed a fairly 'traditional' format in terms of the relationship between interviewer/interviewee, the discussion guide was designed to be flexible, allowing for the interviewee to talk about – or not talk about – 'topics they felt were more or less relevant to the topic of racism and homelessness. Most interviews lasted around an hour, though interview lengths varied from 30 minutes to 3 hours, and some involved multiple members of the same household, an interpreter,[38] or a support worker.

A sample frame was devised with target quotas to reach the diversity of ethnic background, geography, and experiences of different kinds of discrimination that Crisis and the Experts by Experience panel agreed should be represented. Research participants were then recruited through multiple routes: Crisis' public communication channels; contacts of the Experts by Experience; our own Skylight homelessness services; other partners in the homelessness sector; and outreach to other organisations working with people facing challenges such as homelessness, destitution and immigration issues.

Our final research sample included 58 individuals, as follows:

- **homelessness experience: 40 people who were currently homeless or in precarious housing, and 18 who had experienced this in the past. Many had experience of a range of types of homelessness or precarious housing. At least 17 of those currently experiencing housing difficulties were in living conditions that would qualify as core homeless (e.g. rough sleeping, sofa surfing, unsuitable temporary accommodation).**
- **ethnicity: 20 people identifying their ethnicity as Black African, eight identifying as Black Caribbean, and 30 people from other minoritised ethnic groups.**
- **citizenship status: 28 UK citizens, nine seeking asylum, four with refugee status, six with other permanent residency status, and 10 with other kinds of immigration status (all non-UK nationals)**
- **geography: 24 participants living in London, 10 in the Midlands, 11 in Scotland, seven in Wales, and the remainder from other areas in Northern and Southern England.**

As a result of this sample frame, the findings from this research are oriented towards England and London in particular, as well as towards people identifying with Black ethnicities. A more detailed breakdown of the sample can be found in Appendix 5.

[38]One limitation of this research is that most interviews were conducted in English, despite there being many participants who were not native English speakers. Even among participants in this cohort where no interpreter was required, it is plausible the interviews would have been different had they taken place in the person's native language.

2. **"Messing with your mind":** experiences of racism and discrimination among people of colour who have been homeless.

In this chapter, we talk about how systemic racism and discrimination shaped the lives of research participants. The findings from this chapter are important context for the remainder of the report.

2.1 How racism affected people of colour who have experienced homelessness

At the time of the interviews, most research participants were experiencing homelessness. This led to a range of challenges with health, difficulties with accessing work, and not being able to maintain relationships with friends or family. The majority of the participants who were parents experiencing homelessness with their children were in temporary accommodation, although some had briefly been in harsher conditions prior to this. All the people we interviewed described how not having a secure and stable place to call home impacted them on a daily basis.

The impacts of homelessness will be familiar to those who have heard or read about other people's experiences of homelessness, and particularly to those who have experienced homelessness themselves. In this research, however, the harms of homelessness were often compounded by the harm caused by systemic racism.

Those interviewed for this research reported experiencing racism not just in direct relation to their housing situation but permeating through many areas of life. With the aim of supporting an intersectional approach to the research questions, and more fully reflecting the stories of the interviewees, these experiences are discussed in the following chapter.

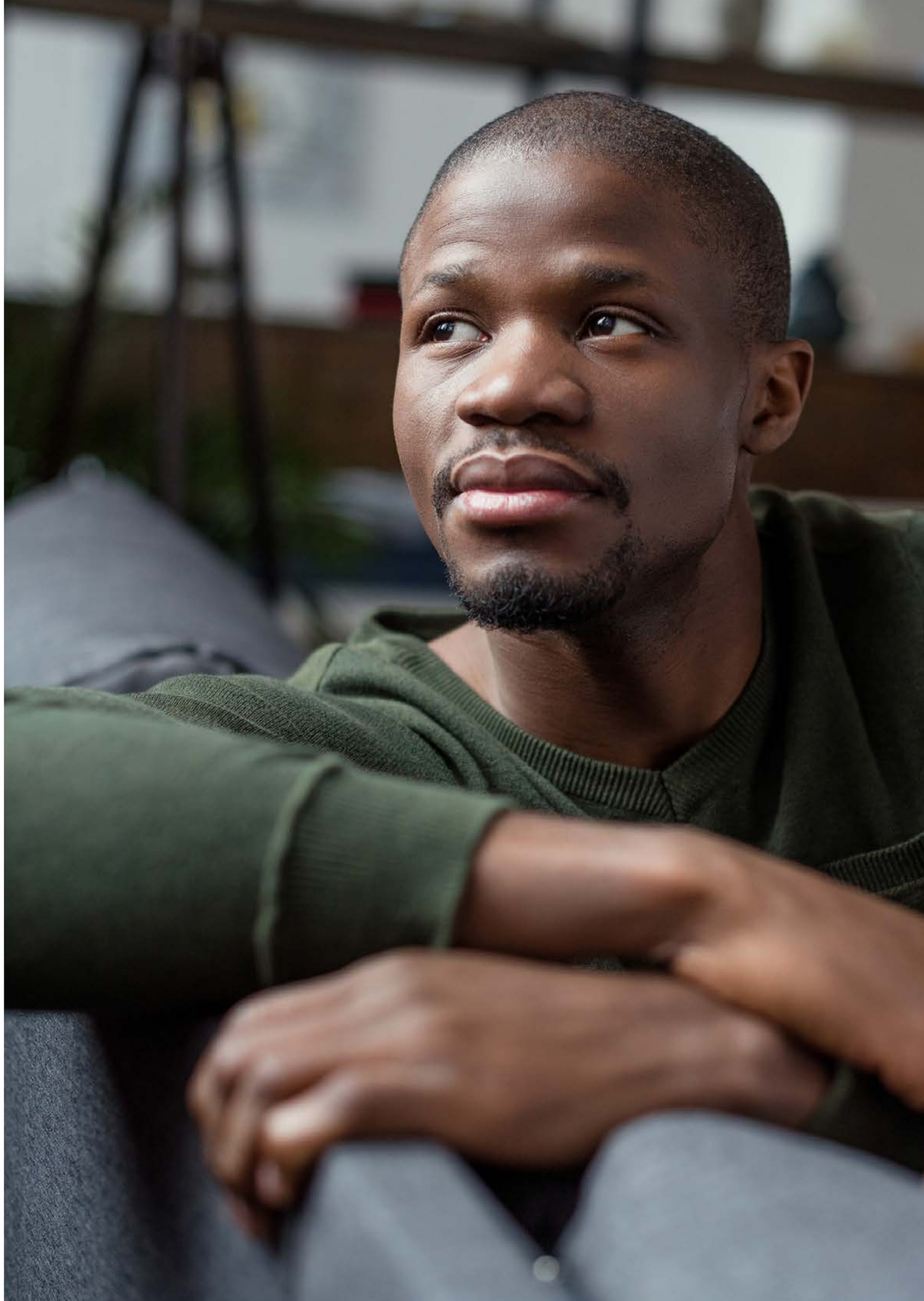
Interviewees had varying attitudes about what role racism played in their lives – from those who felt it had a noticeable impact on their wellbeing and social status, to those who felt that whilst racism was present in society, it had a greater impact on other people of colour who they knew. It was striking, however, that when asked if they could share examples of how racism had affected their lives, participants could usually both identify examples of direct forms of racism that they had experienced, and discuss other ways in which less tangible forms of racism had affected them. In many cases, systemic racism had shaped people's lives, and caused them harm through trauma, fear or even violence.

Experiences with openly racist behaviour

The more direct and overt examples of racism were physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and bullying. These included experiences in public and private spaces, from members of the public and professionals; some were recent at the time of interview. One participant described being recently told he and his friends were not welcome in a pub because they weren't white.

"...The guys said to us, these just ordinary guys drinking in the pub, they said, 'You lot are not welcome next week when we have our big St George's day party' and I'm thinking flipping heck, and they say this out in the open in the pub." [Interview 1]

Other incidents that had happened earlier in life had such a significant impact on people's lives that they continued to have an impact now. One woman had been a victim of a racist attack 20 years earlier, whilst she was pregnant, that had a traumatic impact on her. A man described being born into a predominantly white family and community and being socially ostracised from birth (see case study 1).



Case study 1: Brian's* experience of finding his identity and facing racism and discrimination [Interview 2]

Brian was born in the 1970's, and as a child with mixed heritage he experienced racism, discrimination and associated traumas. These experiences had a major impact on Brian's childhood, life and identity.

"being mixed race, of Caribbean and Mancunian background, kind of thing, I got stick from both sides"

"I had quite a rocky beginning. I was born in a block of flats with no gas, no electricity, my mum gave birth at the age of 21."

The stigma directed towards his mother for being white and having a child with a Black man led to incidents of racial abuse from both the Black and white communities where he grew up. This stigma almost cost Brian his life just after birth.

"When my mum gave birth she was that ashamed of me she locked me in a bedroom and hid me in that bedroom from birth and the neighbours in the block of flats found out that she had a kid in there and they got me ... I would have died if they had not have done that, and that was because of who I was. She was ashamed of what I was."

There were many instances of direct racism and discrimination that Brian faced in the local community, which affected him and his family. He remembers that when he would join his mum while she did cleaning work, some of her clients were racist towards him and said they didn't want him in their homes.

"I was the first mixed race [in the area]... I can remember my mum used to get paid to clean this house on a Saturday... he would be like 'Get that Black b*d out of my house'... I had to sit on the door step ... I was shunned."**

Brian was also the victim of racist bullying at school, which sometimes resulted in extreme and nearly lethal violence. While this was particularly common and severe at his secondary school, racism was a part of all aspects of his life.

"School was hard, school was hard ... I was fighting for my life ... We had a London open top bus and I was getting kicked off the bus holding on to bars ... people stamping on my hands trying to kill me because I was a Black b*d. That is the kind of schooling that I went through there."**

The process of trying to find his identity, and a community that may be more accepting of him, created friction between Brian and his foster carers. A conflict about Brian growing out his hair into dreadlocks led him to leave home and school, becoming homeless for the first time. He then made the decision to move to West Africa, to further explore his identity.

"I had various trauma going on through my childhood and I was homeless at the age of 15 ... The people who were looking after me didn't want me to grow dreadlocks but I was fighting for my identity at that stage, so I left and it was 3 weeks before my GCSEs of which I did none"

"Me and my friend we moved into the biggest ghetto [in West Africa] which ... opened my eyes ... I thought we would all be on a beach smoking weed and listening to Bob Marley. No. What my idiot self had done was moved myself [into] the middle of a civil war!"

Whilst living in West Africa, Brian experienced both acceptance and rejection based on his racial background. His experiences culminated in very difficult interactions with the paramilitary police, leaving a friend dead and Brian with PTSD. He returned to England after a year, traumatised, rejected, and homeless.

Brian had been drinking from a young age and his use of substances to self-medicate escalated during multiple periods of homelessness. He also had numerous negative interactions with police, which would trigger his trauma responses and lead to conflicts that would often get out of hand, resulting in multiple prison sentences.

"They would be snotty, racist, and aggressive towards me and that was just like – it was like light to a moth."

Carrying these experiences of extreme trauma and facing complex mental health needs, drug addiction and homelessness, Brian did not receive the holistic support from services that was needed to end his homelessness. This led to Brian taking extreme action to get the help he needed to get himself off drugs.

"[Local services] expected me to be dead by now really and I must be a pain in the arse for them when my paperwork comes back on one of their piles."

"I jumped in front of a car to get clean."

Brain has since been accommodated through Housing First, an approach which aims to provide personalised support alongside housing for people with multiple and complex needs. Having accommodation and support has allowed him the space to find out what his mental health needs are, get the correct diagnosis, and access support for his PTSD and trauma. This has also impacted the way that Brian thinks about his sense of self and his identity.

"My identity now, I have had to create it myself. And the way that I've learnt in the last few years is to create the identity that I'm happy with rather than being a people pleaser and that is what I've done, because doing that to please societal levels, to tick certain boxes so that I get that help that I might be entitled to – you know, all of these kinds of things, it's like all that has done is pull my psyche and who I am apart. It's pulled me apart. Because they've all needed that part of what I'm made up of for them to work with what they need to do. And that is forgetting about me as a whole holistic approach to who I am. And that's [Brian]."

*Names have been changed to protect people's identities

Some of the more overt experiences of racism happened to people in and around their home, or at their place of work or school, meaning their sense of safety in everyday life had at one time or another been particularly under threat. A participant talked about being bullied and attacked in a predominantly white area.

"I mean racism has existed from when I was born.... [I'm from] a very rich and privileged area in [the Home Counties] people would follow me home from school, they would throw bricks at us, at our windows... They would throw [food associated with participant's community] at our windows; it would stain our windows. They would try and go into your gardens and mess up your gardens or steal things. They would do all sorts of thing. They would try and beat you up after school, lunchtime, breaktime. You would go and report it, the teachers wouldn't believe you." [Interview 3]

People tended to associate experiences of racism in Britain (in both interpersonal and more structural forms) as coming from white British society and culture. However, it is important to note that a small number of participants also described experiencing discrimination from people who themselves might have experienced racism, including people who participants identified as not being white and/or not being British. This also included examples of discrimination from people from the same country of birth as they were, but from a different ethnic background, as described by a woman identifying as Kurdish.

People we interviewed who described the impact of racism on them as being more minor could nevertheless recall direct incidents of racism from earlier in their lives or report other ways in which racism affected them. In some cases, people had normalised such encounters with racism.

"People walk in the street sometimes, 'Oh you Black n**r, you monkey' and people in the street say that. They say it and they go, but that's normal. I don't give them any reaction or something... [It makes me feel] unwelcome, yeah. But it's alright. It is what it is at the end of the day."** [Interview 5]

"[Racism] did affect me in the beginning, but then you have just got to get on with it, haven't you. Because otherwise you're just going to be picked on and picked out all the time, so you have got to try and make the best situation out of it all, haven't you." [Interview 6]

The impact of geographical location

Though many interviewees who gave examples of racism had only ever lived in ethnically diverse areas like London or Birmingham, some research participants who had lived in multiple areas in the UK said they felt racism was worse outside of major urban areas, or that not having people of colour from their own or other communities in the area had been an isolating experience. Whilst racism manifests itself in different ways in different areas, these views show how people of colour can feel sometimes feel there are limited areas where they are safer from racism.

"I was looking for who to connect to in this city but I could not find anyone. I could not find anyone, so that scared me a lot. It scared me when I was in Stoke-on-Trent. I could not see any Black I can talk to or anybody that is from Nigeria as well. So I only do this alone. So I don't even bother to go out again – I stay inside and the more I stay inside the more I'm worried... I have more connection in Birmingham. Because it is a big city, you know you can see a lot of different faces with different backgrounds. So it made me happy." [Interview 7]

One person said that when she lived in a more affluent and whiter area her daughter had been subject to harassment from the police because of her skin colour.

"It was a predominantly white area, I lived where- if you walked five minutes, they've got gated communities, like millionaire houses and stuff. So the police are always driving down there. My daughter was going to the shop because the electric had cut out, and she had her hood up and they stopped her because they thought she was a boy, she was a Black boy. But then when they realised, oh it's a girl, they tried to use the excuse, what's she doing out late at night. She was just about to turn 11 years old. You know in the winter it gets dark. They tried to use that and referred it to social services and the social services did nothing because she's allowed to go out. It wasn't even two minutes away from the house. It was just down the road. On her scooter it was probably two minutes. They realised that they had made a mistake and plus because she had PTSD she was all panicky. Then when we moved to another area which is more multicultural, no-one asked her 'where's your mum." [Interview 8]

One person, who had lived in Scotland and England, felt that whilst anti-immigration policies in England 'enabled' racist attitudes, these attitudes still existed in Scotland.

"I think the Scottish government says the right things about refugees and racism and all of that... that is the difference between England and Scotland. Scotland, it is still very much underneath. You are still rumbling there, you still get obviously the 'Go back to your country' and all that on a Saturday night, but you don't get it as much from the press and things like that because the Scottish government says different things about people in my position." [Interview 1]

More 'hidden' forms of racism

Alongside many examples of overt racist behaviour, participants often felt racism manifested in covert ways, at a time in history when racism was on the surface seen as less socially acceptable. People talked about how racism was often disguised, hidden, or secretive.

"You're Black, you're going to get racism regardless. This day and age it's very subtle, it's very insidious. It's not as blatant as it used to be in the 70s or 80s. now it's a little bit more insidious and you can't really call it out because no one calls you a n*r or a n****g or whatever anymore, but it's just people's attitudes. You can tell when people see and treat you differently, have a point of view, think of you a certain way. You can just see it but because they don't actually say anything you can't really call it out, or you can but then you just reinforce the stereotype that they've got of you because then you're the angry Black man or angry Black woman."** [Interview 9]

There were examples of when racism seemed to be the explanation behind someone else's behaviour, for example when a man said people in a local church were avoiding being near them, or when another interviewee was accused of faking anaphylactic shock relating to a peanut allergy, whilst out shopping.

"When I go to church... I see some racism there, people that, you want to sit with them, they will get off and go to another seat and sit down. You will be wondering what is going on with you because the further I experienced that, I was saying this seat is okay for two of us to sit, and he left. He went to the other side and sat down. When I got to him I have to ask somebody and somebody told me that they don't want to sit with me. I was so scared; I say what is wrong with me? [Interview 7]

"[The shopkeeper] was calling me all kinds of names. Because I'm Black. They automatically didn't think that I had a nut allergy, they just thought I was on crack... the paramedics were good, I thought 'Yeah, you tell them!'. It was really nice just to have people in my corner that day, you know. The director of the firm contact me and I got a goodwill gesture." [Interview 10]

Some people described being followed in shops under the assumption that they were stealing, with the accuser sometimes claiming they were not racist to justify their behaviour.

"In the sense of racism, I will just tell you an experience that happened. It's not like overly major, it was something little. But like I was shopping with my friend and we... noticed there was someone following me... she looked at me and she was like 'I caught you, you're stealing...' then we got to the till and we were in like the queue for the till and then this woman is still stood near the tills but like blatantly watching us now seeing if we were going to pay for it... she said to the till person 'have they paid for everything...? Are you sure? Are you sure you haven't stolen them...?' If it makes you feel better anyone could search my pockets right now, but I'm not giving no one the consent to do that because I haven't done anything wrong anyway.
And then I was like it's clearly because I am Black why you're following me around. Any other girl in here – why don't you just follow us somewhere else. That is just weird to me. I didn't speak to you so you're just going off of looks... I've just never been in that shop since."
[Interview 11]

There were also examples of people who felt associated with stereotypes relating to their racialised identity. One person identifying as Chinese described experiencing a racialised, 'positive' stereotype ascribing intelligence to them.

[People were] just assuming that I'm really clever and stuff, or that I have all these attributes because of like my identity... I do think that does happen a lot. Like you have those stereotypes where it's like 'Oh, you're good at maths because you're this and that', or this person is really gifted and talented kind of thing because of their race." [Interview 12]

Another person identifying as Black African said that in school she felt teachers communicated with her less often and less kindly than white pupils, and that this was based on being racially associated with stupidity and strength.

"I feel like sometimes there is this weird, unspoken elephant in the room of white people sometimes, where they feel they can't relate to us purely just because of the fact that we have different coloured skin. Whilst yes you might not be able to relate to a lot of the experiences, we're still human beings, we still go through things... You can be white, black, blue, purple, green, orange, yellow. It's still the same feelings... We don't have an additional layer of feelings because we're Black. An additional layer of feelings that don't exist because we're Black. Because I feel like in my case it was almost like either you're too dumb to understand what's going on, so this doesn't affect you, or this affects you, but you're just made of steel so don't worry. I don't know, there's just this overarching, Black people are just so strong and can push through everything." [Interview 13]

It was also noted how some ways in which society had arguably improved for people of colour – for example, through increased social mobility – concealed the ways in which racism persisted, and in some participants' views, was getting worse. It was argued that there were ways in which some forms of racism were socially acceptable or normalised. People talked about feeling that racism towards UK citizens was linked to language about migrants in newspapers in politics.

"If we look at people like Rishi Sunak for example, we can see why just putting people of colour in positions of power doesn't mean that we're going to have freedom from racism... this person has no idea what that's like." [Interview 12]

"When you listen to the TV there is always 'stop the boats,' and there is all this sort of negativity that is coming in all of the time and that wears you down... The 'go back to your country kind of thing,' that has increased... I think it's gotten worse... I like going out on a Saturday night but it's safer to stay in because when people are a bit tanked up, when they've had a few drinks out comes all this rubbish and it's not easy to take. I think that people have had more of a licence [because of 'stop the boats' language]." [Interview 1]

There were also conversations about personal history, and how the experiences of racism of participants' family members had shaped their own lives, and their outlook as well.

"It [racism] has affected my life from the very start with my dad... I've been shown discrimination, racism from childhood, growing up in the situation. My brother, I've experienced a lot of racism issues with him. Being with him and other races, basically attacking him while I'm with him and us having to flee that situation. Him being discriminated against with stop and search." [Interview 14]

People also talked about the ways in which experiences of racism manifested themselves in encounters with specific institutions or systems. For example, people talked about receiving differential treatment from health services, employers, and the police. The example of police stands out in particular – some interviewees lacked trust in the police because of personal experiences and the experiences of acquaintances.

"I know the majority of the Black people from [borough], where I'm from, would rather not speak to the police because they might end up being incriminated instead of being the victim in this situation. And the questions being asked, like it's too much. So if I was to get like punched or something and a white person may be punched, I know that it's less likely that the Black person would go to the police." [Interview 15]

More encounters with racism in systems and institutions are discussed in chapter 3.

2.2 Links between racism and other kinds of discrimination

Some participants existed at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. For them, experiences of racism were often compounded or complicated by other experiences of discrimination, based on gender, sexuality, and other aspects of their identity.

There was a significant pattern of Black people of all genders being associated with racist tropes around aggressive behaviour, and this had particular manifestations when intersecting with gender-based discrimination. One interviewee felt this was directly linked to perceptions about power and attempts to control minoritised ethnic groups.

"Black women are not the only ones that get angry. Especially the young ones. They say because we're young we're unruly and we're- what's the word, it's unruly and- oh what's the other one they used to us? Uncontrollable, that was it. Unruly and uncontrollable." [Interview 16]

There were many examples of Black women who felt dehumanised and that they were receiving low levels of support because of this. Staying in a B&B hotel for four months with young children, a woman reflected on how a degrading 'angry Black woman' racist stereotype was ascribed to her, and that any anger that she felt was interpreted as irrational. This shows how the stereotyping could have the impact of silencing and shaming someone from speaking out against inequitable treatment.

"When you lose your temper, at that point you have lost every chance of getting anyone to listen to you... They will classify you as verbally aggressive even when you have rights to be angry" [Interview 17]

This emotional suppression seemed to be directly connected to an awareness of the racial stereotypes that exist for Black women, with extremely detrimental consequences. A woman with multiple health conditions said this reduced the access to care and support which was already sorely missing from her life.

"As a Black woman it's harder to get everything, full stop. It's harder to get support, it's harder to get help, it's harder to get advice. It's literally ten times harder to do anything. Because the minute you try to speak up for yourself and defend yourself, you are quickly labelled as aggressive, violent, scary, you name it. I am none of those things. Only when provoked." [Interview 16]

There were also comments about there being stereotypical conceptions around motherhood that led to some lone mothers feeling stigmatised and unsupported when they felt under threat of being seen as unfit for parenthood. One interviewee, whose family had experienced domestic violence during her childhood, said that when she was at school, she experienced a scrutiny towards her and her mother by professionals, which made her feel threatened with the prospect that she may be taken into care instead of provided with support.

"There was a few teachers that used to do this, it was almost like they'd invite me into their office to trip me up. They would ask leading questions that if I don't respond in a certain way it triggers some sort of Social Services involvement... You weren't checking in to see if we were okay, you were checking in to see if you could get my mum into trouble... Every single thing she could pick on it was almost like, oh is that because your mum's not feeding you. Oh is that because of this and is that because of that. Like I said, it was weird because my mum paid for everything that she could... we were never on free school meals. We weren't even entitled to it... They would never ever speak to my mum. That's when I knew there was an ulterior motive... If you genuinely cared you'd see how my mum could get extra support, even counselling. It was never, ever offered or even suggested to my mum or us. That just made me realise there's something different here, this isn't one of those experiences that everybody has. The difference is that we're Black and you feel as though my mum's not doing her job correctly, even though you don't know what's happening." [Interview 13]

For Black men, intersecting racial and gender-based discrimination also existed, and was most commonly articulated in stories connected with mental health and contact with police. It was clear that deeply damaging stereotypes seek to vilify rather than care for Black men. There was a feeling of disposability, and a need to suffer in silence.

"If you have mental problems as a Black person you cannot say it, you have to keep it to yourself. That is my opinion... It's stigmatised like 10,000 times more, you're dangerous, you're violent... I am demonised even more." [Interview 18]

"Well because if you look at the setting of this country, and indeed the West as well, men are seen as a disposable thing or object. We are not prioritised, our mental wellbeing is not prioritised" [Interview 19]

Some participants talked about experiencing kinds of discrimination that blended prejudiced assumptions about their religious or cultural background with racism. This was reported particularly in relation to Islamophobia, though also talked about in terms of judgements and norms relating to food and diet.

"Obviously as time has gone on, after 9/11, it was more religious discrimination. It's so familiar. I have had people accusing me of having a bomb in my bag. I'm like why would I have a bomb in my bag." [Interview 3]

"We do eat what they call intestine. Intestine meat, liver, kidney, and all those stuffs. We do eat them, but they don't believe of eating those things, because these are Muslim and this thing is so difficult for me to explain. From there they separated me [in community centre] and they didn't allow me to belong again." [Interview 7]

One participant described an experience of racism as intersecting with discrimination relating to her disability – in which she was judged based on prejudices around physical appearance, and perceived intelligence.

"I experienced a lot of racism with one teacher even referring to me looking like a monkey because she just did not want me on her course, because it was kind of a prestigious beauty school and I had managed to wangle my way on to a course that they were trying to block me from going on but when I saw that there was an empty space they had no leg to stand on to deny me being on that course so I got on it, the teacher really made it difficult for me, they didn't want to support my disabilities, which is like dyslexia. They kept making me appear like I am super dumb and taking me out of the class all the time to have words with me and just distracting my education. And in the end I did not pass the course. It ended not in a very nice way because I lost so much weight. I was stressed out with my housing, coming to a course I am getting racially bullied as well and it was just like there was no rest for me. I'm not a wicked person, so they were the wicked ones." [Interview 20]

There were also examples of discrimination on the basis of sexuality and minoritised gender identities, which sometimes intersected with racism. One participant felt their identities meant multiple forms of discrimination had a compounding impact on one other. This included being at increased risk of violence whilst living on the streets as a queer trans person of colour born outside of the UK.

"For myself, I am Black, queer, and on the streets. ... it is 'beep, beep, beep, beep...' If you are a girl and with a different sexuality, different orientation, then the target is amplified more. But then it is awful. You are getting everything, like sexually assaulted, beaten up, bullied. All of the abuse." [Interview 21]

However, it is also worth noting that some people described experiencing discrimination on the basis of sexuality from their own community, that could be distinct from the experiences of racism.

"My sexuality, that has been - it's a war. Like now I am so afraid to go back home because I can't face what I faced earlier, yeah. Some people base[d] on what they believe, their belief system and their background or the system that is around where they live. The[y] term you as one bad sinner or one bad person." [Interview 22]

Most common of all in our sample was the intersection between discrimination based on ethnicity and on nationality. Previous research has talked about how there is 'overlap' between the discrimination faced by non-UK nationals and minoritised ethnic groups, and that the two forms of discrimination 'cannot be easily disentangled'.[39] In our research, we heard examples of non-UK nationals of colour experiencing discrimination that seemed to combine xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment with racism.

"One time when I was with my friend on the bus when my child was very young, there was a big old man, he was a white man, so he was screaming and shouting at us, he was next to us standing, he was saying 'Go back to your country', and so that really scared the hell out of me. Yeah, so my friend was saying 'He's crazy, he is crazy' and I kept quiet and people were just looking at him and then they started talking to him to stop, you know, being offensive to us. So that really impacted me." [Interview 23].

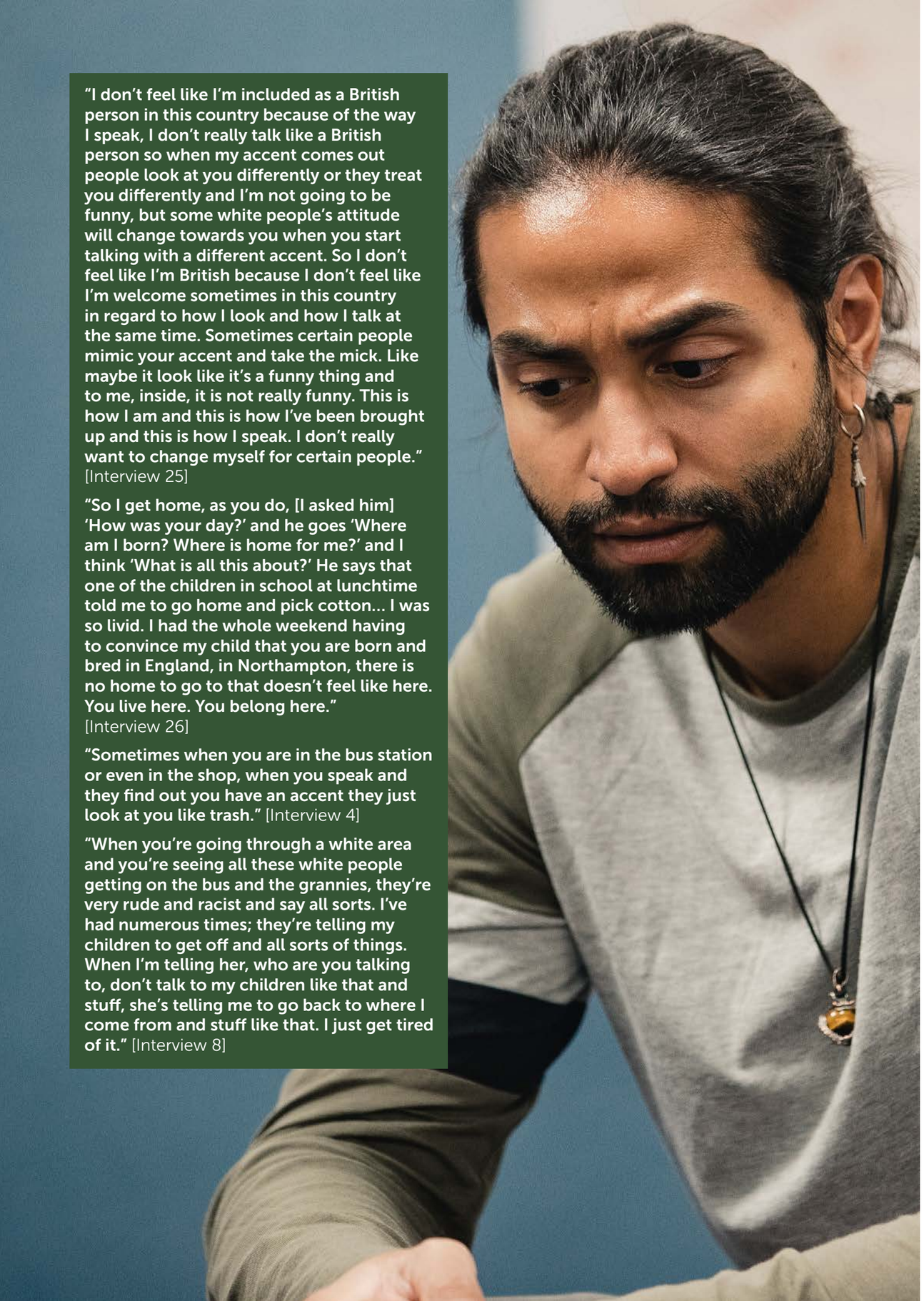
"There is a lot of direct things. Lots of 'go back to where you come from', I get that. I call it one of my five a day and yeah, I have to get one every time I go out there will be someone that will sort of like give me some sort of hate or abuse because of the colour of my skin." [Interview 1]

Someone born in Iraq described experiences of microaggressions based on her background that seemed related to both her ethnicity and nationality. Being perceived as 'other' and 'outsiders' manifested as hostility towards people who migrated to the UK.

"During the Christmas time, I worked for sorting the mail, hourly paid, I remember there was a... woman, she told me 'Where are you from?' I told her 'I am from Iraq'... She gave me a different look, she said 'how did you come here?' I told her by airplane, I got a visa. I experienced lots of small things [like this]." [Interview 24]

But we also heard from UK citizens of colour that they felt discrimination directed towards them was centred on judgements about whether or not they 'belong' in the UK, which could be reached based on names, skin colour, or accent. These examples show how migrants are racialised and how racist attitudes can be intertwined with xenophobia.

[39] Lukes, S., de Noronha, N. and Finney, N. (2018). Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(17), 3188-3206.



"I don't feel like I'm included as a British person in this country because of the way I speak, I don't really talk like a British person so when my accent comes out people look at you differently or they treat you differently and I'm not going to be funny, but some white people's attitude will change towards you when you start talking with a different accent. So I don't feel like I'm British because I don't feel like I'm welcome sometimes in this country in regard to how I look and how I talk at the same time. Sometimes certain people mimic your accent and take the mick. Like maybe it look like it's a funny thing and to me, inside, it is not really funny. This is how I am and this is how I've been brought up and this is how I speak. I don't really want to change myself for certain people." [Interview 25]

"So I get home, as you do, [I asked him] 'How was your day?' and he goes 'Where am I born? Where is home for me?' and I think 'What is all this about?' He says that one of the children in school at lunchtime told me to go home and pick cotton… I was so livid. I had the whole weekend having to convince my child that you are born and bred in England, in Northampton, there is no home to go to that doesn't feel like here. You live here. You belong here." [Interview 26]

"Sometimes when you are in the bus station or even in the shop, when you speak and they find out you have an accent they just look at you like trash." [Interview 4]

"When you're going through a white area and you're seeing all these white people getting on the bus and the grannies, they're very rude and racist and say all sorts. I've had numerous times; they're telling my children to get off and all sorts of things. When I'm telling her, who are you talking to, don't talk to my children like that and stuff, she's telling me to go back to where I come from and stuff like that. I just get tired of it." [Interview 8]

Finally, there were also ways in which people's socio-economic status could be built into racist discrimination, fitting with a broader pattern by which economic inequality can often be 'the driving force behind wider inequalities and unequal outcomes' experienced by minoritised ethnic groups.[40] Participants didn't necessarily identify themselves as 'working-class', which, as other research has shown, may have been driven by ways in which the term is associated with both the stigma of 'lower' socio-economic status, as well as associations with whiteness.[41] It was nevertheless common for participants to have current or past experience of poverty, and notable that the research participants who were least likely to report experiences of racism were also people who had greater financial stability, and whose experiences of homelessness had been briefer.

In addition, some described being stigmatised for their socio-economic status, in ways that chimes with former Prime Minister Theresa May's comment that some in government had looked at social housing tenants in the Grenfell Tower as 'second-class citizens.'[42] Thinking about interpersonal forms of discrimination, people described feeling pigeon-holed by those in positions of authority, based on how their racial identity was viewed within socio-economic boundaries. When an interviewee was asked whether she thought her ethnic identity was connected to a poor experience she had with the police, she talked about being judged based on her appearance in racial and economic terms:

"I've just been made to feel small and silly about what I'm saying. I could be nothing to them. I don't want to say [it happened] because I'm Black, but because of the kind of person I am. Like a young Black girl, from South London, from Croydon, the slang I would use. I feel like [some people] just put me in a box. That is just how we spoke in our school, that is just how we dress, like wearing tracksuits… just because I like to wear tracksuits or I use slang, it doesn't mean that I'm just a terror or something… It doesn't mean that you have to judge me like that." [Interview 15]

A woman who was appealing against a decision about her immigration status talked about how, whilst she had purposefully dressed well for the appeal in court, this was used against her as evidence of having a good income, despite the fact she was in poverty at the time.

"I have had this one linen white shirt, you know, linen, white, doesn't go out of fashion, it doesn't go out of fashion. I wore that shirt, and I had a wig I've had for so many months a friend made for me. I went to court, and before, I did not know this when they were checking me out, the lady from the Home Office, she was taking notes… when they turned me down again and the letter she wrote… [said] 'Miss XXX looked fashionable, she had fashionable hair, had nice fashionable clothes… [If I was] looking all rough and scruffy, then they would get social services to say 'Oh, they don't think that you're mentally stable enough to look after a child' …because this is how they pass judgement and make up their minds about people." [Interview 17]

[40] R Runnymede Trust (2020), Evidence Submission to the CRED.

[41] Snoussi, D. and Mompelat, L. (2019), We Are Ghosts: Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice, Runnymede Trust.

[42] Adu, A. (2023), Theresa May: social housing tenants viewed by some Tories as 'second-class citizens', The Guardian, 13 Sep 2023.

There were other examples in addition to class stereotypes where people felt their identity or experiences were associated with stigma and shame. Some felt they had experienced stigma because of being homeless or because of drug dependency – it was common to feel 'judged', particularly among people who had slept rough.

It was particularly striking that two women of colour we interviewed described experiencing racism that was combined with stigma relating to what behaviours were considered acceptable for a parent. This made it feel harder to access support for alcohol and drug dependency.

"It's like there is a stigma for single mothers – we are not allowed to drink, we are not allowed to have a drug because you're a parent. And it happens. And then when it becomes a thing where they are addicted there is a stigma and no one wants to help you, there is no services for like detoxing with your child and there is a risk of social services stepping in and taking your child away, which makes a lot of parents and mums not want to reach out for help as well, because they are scared that their children will be taken off of them." [Interview 20]

One participant felt that despite being discriminated against on the basis of socioeconomic status, people of colour were often excluded from conversations about class.

"Back during the pandemic, and I think it was like MPs had been saying the phrase like 'white privilege' of being a phrase that like neglects, that has led to the neglect of white working class kids, and I think that there is the sort of almost erasure of people who are working class, but who aren't white, who are going through these different experiences too, as though they just don't exist." [Interview 12]

2.3 How people of colour responded to racism

People talked about many impacts of racism on their lives. These included issues with physical safety, barriers to accessing services, being unable to achieve or progress with goals, health problems, and financial insecurity. An interviewee described how she faced exclusion from school and was overlooked for promotions at work, and that in both cases her racial identity played a part. (Again, these impacts are discussed more in chapter 3).

"Obviously education: we all know that we're more likely to be excluded, which was the case with me. Although I was always excluded with my white friend, I was excluded way more than her... They never, ever tried. It was 'just get out'... With jobs... [employers say] 'Oh you're brilliant at what you do', yeah, but not brilliant enough to be promoted. Even though all of the parents want me to keywork their child but I can't move up to the next level. But then there are people that have literally just qualified on to level 3 now running the room because you're friends with them and go out with them for a drink. Really?" [Interview 27]

As is evident from some of the quotes above – for example, where people talk about being worn down and afraid because of racist incidents – the impact of racism on people's mental health and wellbeing, and their sense of safety, was noticeable. This fits in well with a much larger evidence base about the impact of racism on health, some of which is discussed in the introduction. The psychological impact of racism was likened to a "dark cloud" that "messes with your mind", indicating the pervasiveness of the psychological harm caused by racism amongst our interview sample.

"I mean I've had experiences of racism direct and ones that are indirect but I guess the indirect one is where I say it's a bit more sophisticated because it's hard to tell and it almost messes with your mind... I think that it can have that effect on people, where they are walking around with this kind of dark cloud." [Interview 28]

"I think that there is this mental impact of knowing that for example you are a part of the lowest socioeconomic demographic on earth, essentially, and when you put everybody together and you start doing like this whole comparison thing, it can be quite disheartening almost, whereas like okay, so does that mean we're lost to everything?" [Interview 28]

Related to this, racism was described as damaging people's self-esteem and leading to an internalised sense of inferiority. A few described how as a result of this, they had at points in their life wished they belonged to another ethnic group. They talked about wanting or trying to 'pass', by changing their name or wearing different clothes or make-up.

"Like if they are experiencing disrespect about their race or about their culture or something [...] it's just cutting their confidence really." [Interview 11]

"Growing up I have experienced racism being a Moroccan man. Being different. Name-calling. Growing up wishing I was white-coloured skin instead of tan colour, so that can affect your self-esteem... I changed my name at age 18 from an Arabic name to a British name... Now I am actually quite proud of where I come from. I'm glad. And I'm quite open that I'm from Morocco." [Interview 29]

Racism was spoken about as bringing about feelings of pressure and stress. It was clearly articulated that experiencing racism was traumatic and had enduring psychological effects. A few described how these psychological impacts were directly linked to people's sense of agency. Their comments are very suggestive of the ways in which the harms caused by systemic racism lead to powerlessness at a personal level, with consequences at the wider societal level, even if the racism in question is more 'hidden'.

"When you think about it [racism], it stresses you. You have no power." [Interview 30]

"I know people that are scarred from racism to the point that they walk around just ready to defend at all points in time. I don't know, you could call it maybe a trauma." [Interview 28]

There were also comments that the practical and psychological impacts of racism could damage one's sense of belonging. When asked to describe what a world without racism would look like, one person said that it would feel like 'home'.

"Society would feel great because you feel welcome, you feel this joy of – you feel at home. There is that joy of feel at home. Wherever you walk in to, everyone accepts you, you are so happy. Society will be a better place for everyone actually." [Interview 22]

Amidst this there was a tension described between wanting to 'shrug it off' without dwelling too much on racism, and others who wanted to call out and name the harm it caused. One person described being pulled in both directions. Her comments suggest feeling exhausted by a kind of gaslighting created when people question whether or not the more subtle forms of racism she experiences are 'real'.

"I think for a lot of people who have experienced racism, there's also that internal battle with even trying to confront the racism and understand it and understand how it's then impacted you and your decisions moving forward. Because a lot of the time people experience micro aggression and they don't realise how impactful [it is]... It's just like this idea of always having to justify one's self. Always having to justify one's experience of racism. Also pandering around to not offend anyone but also try and be as truthful about your experience as possible. But that's so hard to do. There's so much that goes on and that is involved in that processing. But it's almost like, yeah what's the point. I don't even want to discuss this because it's just too draining." [Interview 13]

Likewise, another participant talked about how in a world without racism she wouldn't have to feel as on guard against potential harm, or as self-conscious.

"I would be a lot more confident in myself and I wouldn't have to worry about certain things that I feel maybe white people don't even think about when they leave their house, like when I want to stick up for myself I have to think how it's going to be perceived by everybody else around me, especially if I'm in a place where I am the only person- So I feel like yeah, I will be able to be free, really, I will be able to be who I want to be and not be the protective version of myself. I can just be soft." [Interview 15]

As a result of this tension, people responded in a range of ways to experiences of racial harassment. While some people tried to hold the perpetrator accountable, others did not, either due to concerns about potential harm to themselves, or a lack of trust that doing so would be useful.

"Some people, like a friend I have, someone, an employee, drew the head of a monkey and left it and that thing morally destabilised her... I would go straight to the police or something because I'm different... if someone is going to blatantly target me that way I am not going to tolerate it, do you understand?" [Interview 31]

These tensions come to life in one example of racism in the workplace. Verbal, racial abuse was initially ignored by the victim due to concerns about the impact on his employment. But the racism was then observed by other colleagues and led to limited accountability for the perpetrator's behaviour.

"He was another housekeeping [colleague] and he kept calling me Black Monkey, and for me at the beginning I didn't give my attention... [later] they went to the general manager and they reported it... [they said] that was inappropriate and 'we don't want to listen to this kind of racism stuff in this hotel, we work here,' and they supported my situation to be honest. The general manger, he came to me and he said 'Did he say that?' and I said yes, he did. 'And what is your reaction?'. I am just here to work, I don't want a fight, it's not such a big deal sometimes because yeah, he said I am Black, he didn't say anything wrong, but I know he is cheeky, and he said it to just tease me or get attention or just try and make me angry and after he makes me angry he will be like 'Oh you see him, he is aggressive' and I said it's not worth it, I don't want to lose my job because of him. So they said 'no, that thing is inappropriate and we don't want to see it here. We have a policy and we keep the employee rights in this hotel,' and stuff. So they talked to him, they gave him a warning." [Interview 5]

People of colour described having to go about their day to day lives knowing that racism was a possibility. In a few cases, however, participants said they had avoided contacting certain services – such as the police and the courts – due to concerns that engaging with these services may expose them to racism and put them at risk of other harms. This meant they were arguably losing access to legal entitlements that they should have been able to access.

"I was at a cashpoint and it was something like 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. I was opposite my friend's house and the police officers stopped me, and I was like 'What do you want? I'm literally just at a cashpoint, I'm not doing anything' and they were basically saying to me – well basically one of them turned it around to say to me 'We're just checking up on you' and I said, 'I don't need you to check up on me' and he was like 'Well if you're going to be like that, if you ever get raped don't call us…' I wasn't intimidated, and I showed that I wasn't intimidated, so that is why the police come out with 'Well if you get raped then don't bother calling us'. Mate, I wouldn't call you if I was flipping robbed, let alone raped." [Interview 27]

"I am so stress[ed] and I wish to take my case to the court but I'm staying traumatised because the experience that I had [with the Home Office]. Sometimes when you are a coloured person, I cannot say all of them, but some people are like seeing or serving you differently. Not treating you equally. I see that. So just I can't do nothing now… I can understand that I have the right to appeal or to take these things to court. But honestly, I was looking for coloured people working in a legal firm or something like that, if that helped. But again I can say that something came up in my mind, that micro-aggression, that is not good. I don't want to reflect these things on others, but just staying calm and maybe seeing what's going to happen." [Interview 32]

One interviewee reflected on how, when accessing public and essential services – for example, relating to housing, or health – she felt ambivalent about whether or not she would experience racism, both at an interpersonal or institutional level. In spite of her best intentions to avoid assuming the worst of institutions, she did not feel that the energy this took was worthwhile.

Interviewer: **"Do you feel that individual experiences with one person who is racist or one person in the system… does that impact on your feelings and ability to then go and ask for help from others?"**

Participant: **"I'm going to be very honest and I'm going to say no it doesn't, but I regret it every single time… I've never grown-up thinking, 'oh yeah, this is a white person, I shouldn't speak to them, oh this is a Black person, I should speak to them.' I'm like, 'yeah you're just human beings. If I like you, I like you. If I don't like you, I don't like you. But I think one issue that is hard is that I look at everyone like that, but people don't look at me like that. So then I go into a circumstances with an open and fresh mind, every single time, and that subconscious thought of them being white, might be there but it doesn't stop me from having that interaction and it doesn't stop me from having that conversation. Then I get to a point and there's some sort of micro aggression that I pick up on and it's almost like, yeah I can't even be surprised, I expected this."** [Interview 5]

Added to this was a difficult decision about whether or not to address the racism she encountered.

"I was getting into the flow of this conversation thinking oh yeah, you might be a cool person and then I just realised actually you're racist. Or you have an unconscious bias that you really have not unpicked at all and you're just saying all sorts of offensive stuff that you probably don't even realise you're offending me at this point in time. Now I have to make a decision as to whether to tell you or not and then that becomes awkward because I don't know if I tell you, if you will then start to overcompensate. Or if you'll actually just be really passive and not really understand where I'm coming from. So in answer to your question, no. But like I said, I regret it every time because I feel like because I am so open and so like, oh yeah, 'you're just a human.' It's almost like I treat others how they'd like to be treated, but I don't necessarily get treated how I would like to be treated. So then it's almost like I'm putting myself in the same position again. But I don't want to give up." [Interview 5]

Another person said that seeking support from white-centric institutions was a gamble or risk given that many people working in these institutions perpetuated racism towards people seeking their help which created a feeling of fear and mistrust. There was a sense of worry and apprehension about seeking support given the direct and indirect ways in which services can operate with racist attitudes and assumptions.

"It's a risk, it's a gamble. It's like I'm playing some sort of roulette each time and just seeing, oh am I going to get my feelings hurt today by a white person. Or are they going to help me?" [Interview 13]

Conclusions

This chapter has shown the many ways in which people we interviewed have encountered, or continue to encounter, contemptible forms of racist abuse. Instances of racism were at times overt and explicit, and at others underhand. Stories included racist instances that happened recently and others that had happened in formative childhood years. For some of our interviewees, racism had made a significant mark on their lives, and left psychological impacts that affect their sense of safety and belonging.

This was compounded by experiences of other kinds of discrimination at the same time, based on gender expression, sexuality, disability, and class. There was often a blurred line between racism and prejudice towards immigrants, that meant both UK and non-UK nationals were affected by discrimination about whether they 'belonged' in the UK – such as being told to 'go back home'.

Experiencing racism or discrimination from a service or institution can elicit a belief of future risk of harm in those settings, and result in avoidance of the services set up to help people. The deeply concerning implication of this is that major public services are not serving all members of the public. The shift towards providing psychologically and trauma informed practice in services may go some way to alleviating the cumulative harm of homelessness, racial discrimination and other disadvantages.

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The psychological impacts of racism have many important implications when considering experiences of homelessness among people of colour. There is a clear potential for the traumas of homelessness and racism to have a compounding impact: in a context of multiple pressures around financial instability, a broken housing market and dwindling services, it's clear to see how the overt and veiled racism could make it harder for people into prevent or end their homelessness.

3.“The colour of my skin is everything”: how racism causes homelessness

There is already strong evidence about the dominant causes of homelessness in Britain, which shows that while experiences of poverty, as well as the housing market and policy, are particularly important, other factors such as the welfare system and employment are also key drivers.[43] In addition, recent statistical analysis into homelessness among minoritised ethnic groups shows firstly that experiences of discrimination can be associated with experiences of homelessness, and secondly that the heightened risks of homelessness faced by some ethnic groups cannot be fully explained by socio-economic, demographic and other factors rather than ‘race’ or ethnicity itself.[44]

In this chapter, we share findings about the ways in which various forms of racism were involved in people of colour becoming or remaining homeless. We have also referred to a range of other evidence sources when considering the role that participants and researchers felt was played by systemic racism in individual people’s lives and their housing situations. Taken together, the findings explore the role racism can play in the ‘other’ factors driving homelessness among people from minoritised ethnic groups.

[43]Bramley, B. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) , Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?, Housing Studies, 33(1), 96-116.

[44]Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

3.1 How overt racism can cause homelessness

When describing how they became homeless, interviewees talked about factors that are familiar from other homelessness evidence, including issues with the cost and security of privately rented housing, living arrangements with family or friends breaking down, domestic abuse, having No Recourse to Public Funds, health issues, and challenges relating to income from social security and/or employment. On discussing these in more detail, it was clear that multiple issues contributed to someone being homeless in the first place, as well as to them remaining homeless. These were sometimes likened to multiple sources of stress or pressure, with mental health being put under strain a common theme.

"Just like a plastic bag. If you put [in] too much water or a balloon, with [too much] air, it's going to burst. The same with a human being." [Interview 33]

The research also revealed multiple examples of how racist incidents could be key drivers of people becoming homeless. Whilst this in isolation was not necessarily enough to make them homeless (with, for example, financial circumstances also being a key factor), the wider discriminatory context and the racist incident led directly to their homelessness. It is plausible in these cases that these people may not have become homeless had it not been for the presence of racism.

People described being subject to racist intimidation and bullying in their local area, or online, leading to their displacement and uprooting.

"Me and my family ... were renting social housing but people in the local area would basically terrorise us for being Chinese racially, so we would have like a lot of harassment at the flat we were living in so we were kind of forced to move to a new area and like relocate, basically." [Interview 12]

"... I had actually been like doxed online, so that was to do with far-right fascist people and so I couldn't go home for a little while and I was just like trying to stay safe by sofa surfing at other people's houses... it was actually through doing protests around Black Lives Matter that they identified me and put my details online, so they put my address online." [Interview 12]

There were also examples of people whose experiences of racist bullying in childhood affected their success in school and their ability to access income, which in turn affected their housing circumstances.

"It could be a whole range of reasons why [I became homeless]. I know I was heavily bullied at school, like really racist [language] like 'donkey' and 'Chinese,' and just violent... friends who I thought were friends would just like trip me up and try to make me mad... I hardly was at school because I could not cope with it, I just could not physically cope with it and I didn't want to tell my parents because at the time I was really scared about what would happen... it led to a decline in how I felt about people." [Interview 34]

Another participant said that his experiences of bullying in school continued when he was in the army, and suggested this contributed to him going to prison, and rough sleeping.

"Growing up, I think I was the only half-caste family to grow up in [area]. There wasn't many Black [families]... [In school] I felt out of place. I felt as if I wasn't wanted, like... they pick on you, you'd be bullied all the time. I'm only 5ft 3... I'm only small. I found it intimidating... When I was in the forces I used to get a lot of racism and bullying. Because in 1976 when I joined there was a lot of it going on then... I was the only Black one in the squad, and I was Welsh, so that didn't help... I used to think why couldn't I have been born white, or why couldn't I have been born somewhere else... [Later] I was getting in to trouble all the time and doing drugs, and not bothering, just living on the streets." [Interview 6]

One person in foster care described the final trigger for him running away from home was an argument about him having dreadlocks (detailed in case study 1), showing how racist expectations around assimilation and conformity had a harmful and counterproductive effect.

Among participants who had experience of employment in the UK, there were stories of racist bullying and harassment in the workplace that made it impossible to sustain a job, and therefore maintain a stable income, leaving them more vulnerable to poverty and homelessness (see case study 2).

Case study 2: Roberta* experiencing racist violence in the workplace [Interview 25]

Roberta used to work in healthcare. She experienced racism from patients, and one day was physically assaulted for following protocol around not administering medication to a patient, due to not being trained and certified to do this.

"He [patient] said 'F* you, you b****. You Black b****'. He grabbed the chair, I was sitting on the chair, he grabbed the chair and tried to pull the chair from underneath me and tried to hit me with the chair."**

The impact of this trauma and the lack of support provided to her by her employer resulted in the participant leaving not only the job role, but the sector completely, despite her extensive training and commitment to helping other people:

"So after this, I'm not going back in to healthcare, I'm not working in healthcare, I am going to see if I can get a job working from home because I can't do with being around people. So that is how I developed my social anxiety around being around people, being with people [...] So it really developed my PTSD and then it brings up all sorts of personal issues after that."

There were serious consequences for Roberta's mental health, which she cited as a key driver of her homelessness. She needed to take time off work for mental health and for recovery from a physical injury, while only receiving statutory sick pay, which was not enough to cover rent.

*Names have been changed to protect people's identities

Across all of these racist incidents, the traumatic impacts of racism often contributed to mental health challenges that were either a 'trigger' for someone becoming homeless or made it harder for them to leave homelessness behind.

Suppression of childhood trauma in particular seemed to be connected to later mental health difficulties in the narratives of some participants. A participant who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and psychosis and who experienced a six-month stay at an inpatient mental health facility shared:

"I mean it's not the first time I've had a mental breakdown, but something has to happen before I have a mental breakdown. Like I go through stress maybe a bit of stress in my childhood. Stress I've not admitted to. That is how it later affects me in life, when I've had another mental breakdown, and that is how things start going wrong for me." [Interview 35]

One research participant spoke of how it was plausible that he might not have been homeless had it not been for the impact of racism on his and his family's life.

"Well it [racism] has affected my life because it's mainly with the mental health issues and thinking back to the past of how things were previously – and the bullying at school... it was effectively because I've always been thinking like if people like the medical services had not been racist to my mum would I have been in a better place? Would my mum be around? Same with me, would my health have been better? Would I flourish more? Yeah, so it's a lot of unanswered questions. [Interview 34]

3.2 How overt and implicit racism in societal systems can cause homelessness

The racism people experienced when interacting with the different systems and institutions that all of us rely on to live our lives, such as health, education, employment and housing could also contribute to their homelessness. In this section, we explore interviewees' stories of racism from and within these systems. They take the form of instances of racist or discriminatory behaviour from people operating from within them, and of treatment while navigating these systems that highlight embedded systemic racism.

The systems and institutions described below have known links to homelessness. Homelessness risk is increased for people experiencing poverty and economic disadvantage,[45] whom systems such as these have failed to support.

[45]Bramley, B. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) , Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?, Housing Studies, 33(1), 96-116.

Education

Systemic racism in schools makes it harder for people of colour to succeed academically.[46] In our research, participants talked about how at school they could be perceived as dangerous, resulting in it being harder to succeed at school, later impacting their financial and housing situations. These stereotypes were described as intersecting with perceptions of lower socioeconomic status.

"I feel like certain [secondary school] teachers had a shorter fuse for certain people that were coming from [my primary school]... almost like because we were coming from lesser schools maybe where we were undisciplined by nature... Most people I came over with from my school were indeed Black... we had to maybe jump through more hoops and stuff and maybe try a bit harder to go unnoticed." [Interview 28]

People also described feeling as though their behaviour was 'policed' at school, which often resulted in forms of school exclusion that led people of colour to become homeless. This fits with wider evidence around teachers' vigilance and punitive responses to Black boys being driven by stereotypes and assumptions,[47] and evidence that youth of colour are disproportionately excluded from schools.[48] One interviewee described how experiences of racism in school led to him being excluded, which was one of the reasons why he ran away from home as a teenager, without a home of his own to go to.

"I take shit for weeks, and the whole school and playground and everybody would know, even other members of the school would get in on the joke about hassling the Black lad, and then I would explode, but I would explode in such a sense that it was like 'woah, that's a police matter that,' and the school would be trying to hide the fact that they had a racial issue going on within that... school, so therefore they didn't really want the police coming in and getting a statement from me about the abuse that I had received and not been dealt with." [Interview 2]

Another participant talked about how the visibility of the arrest in front of other schoolchildren meant he was branded as a criminal and led him on a path that included prison and homelessness.

"The first time I got arrested I was arrested in secondary school. In the school, literally. And that was when I was in Y9 or Y10 or something. So from then when I was arrested, and I am in school and everybody can see me walking in handcuffs, boom... from that day I was known as a criminal. So I just picked up that thing. I just picked it up and owned it... I feel like I was set up from school anyway because... my tutor, he was the police officer. The only reason why he knew how to find me was because I confided in him when I was in school. So that was a set-up." [Interview 36]

Participants shared experiences of discrimination from their teachers reinforcing an idea of children of colour being 'lazy' or 'naughty'. These labels, based on racist stereotypes, led to neglect and unmet educational needs. This was coupled with reports of late diagnoses of mental health challenges and learning difficulties that went undetected during school years.

"I've been neglected for the majority of my life. Especially during education in terms of primary school and secondary school. I was neglected quite a lot. Because they didn't understand the things that I was going through. I used to get put in isolation a lot and I used to get given a lot of detentions. I used to get called stupid and say I'm never going to make nothing of my life, I'm never going to amount to anything... I'm never going to achieve anything. I'm going to be a statistic." [Interview 16]

Undiagnosed learning difficulties combined with racial stereotyping led to stigmatising labels assigned to Black participants when they were school-aged children. Not addressing these learning difficulties made it harder for one participant to find their own home when they were forced to leave their parents' house.

[46] See, for example Graham, M. and Robinson, G. (2004). "The silent catastrophe" institutional racism in the British educational system and the underachievement of Black boys, Journal of Black Studies, 34(5), 653-671.

[47] Gilliam, W.S., Maupin, A.N, Reyes, C.R., Accavitti, M. and Shic, F. (2016), Do Early Educators' Implicit Biases regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behavior Expectations and Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions? Yale Childhood Study Center.

[48] Demie, F. (2019), The experience of Black Caribbean pupils in school exclusion in England, Educational Review, 73(1), 55-70.

"My mum had to kick us out because Social Services threatened to take my younger siblings off her if we didn't leave, because the house was overcrowded. Despite me having learning difficulties and whatnot. But back then I wasn't on the list of- I wasn't even flagged as being put for assessment or anything. They just put it down to me being lazy or whatever excuse they came up with... But it's just back in the day nobody really knew about learning difficulties, so I was just put down to being a naughty child or a lazy child. I was just like, I'm not lazy, I'm actually very active. But what do I know." [Interview 16]

Related to this, some interviewees felt they more generally received weaker pastoral support because of their ethnic background. When a participant's mother had been a victim of domestic abuse, this was communicated by the police to the school, and the school responded to this with extra policing instead of extra support. The interviewee feels this was a different response to that given to a white pupil in similar circumstances.

"With obviously the police, things go on the report, that report then trickles down to your school and then your teachers start treating you in a different way... there was people in my classroom going through the same things and I remember the teachers almost looked like they were friends of the parents, would tell them to do this and tell them to do that. Oh yeah there's this support service, and there's that support service. But with my mum, it was just like nothing... here was a few teachers that used to do this, it was almost like they'd invite me into their office to trip me up. They would ask leading questions that if I don't respond in a certain way it triggers some sort of Social Services involvement." [Interview 13]

Some also described feelings of loneliness and lack of safety in school, with one participant talking about 'an overarching sense of not feeling at home'. Participants talked about the impact of bullying, which was often racist in nature, having a traumatic impact.

"[Pupils were] calling me like n**r and stuff. Things like that... I left school really early. I was heavily bullied. I really couldn't cope... how I had been treated by teachers not stopping the bullying, so it led to a decline in how I felt about people and even though I was a really nice person I would turn inwards and I couldn't express how I felt emotionally."** [Interview 34]

Housing

Unaffordable, insecure or unsuitable housing can contribute to greater risk of homelessness, and there is a range of evidence to show that people of colour are often at higher risk of housing disadvantage (see chapter 1.2).

Many of the wider trends in poor housing conditions faced by people of colour came to life in the experiences of participants. One person talked about moving a lot during childhood due to issues with housing affordability and security, as well as housing redevelopment that failed to improve her own housing situation – this echoes research that shows how gentrification in the UK often leads to negative outcomes for minoritised ethnic groups.[49] She had since experienced homelessness with her children and felt that history was repeating itself in her life today.

"We bounced around a lot during childhood... Our house that we originally grew up in, the Government wanted to knock it down. So they moved us out, knocked down all of our houses, rebuilt new ones and moved us all back... It's made it very, very much more upsetting because the same things that I went through, that I had no control over, my kids have had to go through. But I'm hoping that, that will never have to happen for my grandchildren. I'm hoping I can break the cycle from now." [Interview 16]

[49] Shankley, W. and Finney, N. (2020), Ethnic minorities and housing in Britain. In Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK, Bristol, Policy Press.

Similarly, there were participants who had lived in overcrowded conditions, which had a negative impact on power dynamics within the household and their personal ability to have privacy. This included both large families with inadequate living space, and multiple households living in the same home. For some, overcrowded conditions existed from a young age and continued into adulthood. These examples reflect the wider evidence that people identifying as Black African[50], Bangladeshi and Pakistani[51] all experience high rates of overcrowding.

"When you move to someone's house they are already living in that property and they consider themselves to be the owner of the house, even if they are sharing the rent half-half but they consider themselves the owner of the house. For example, the first house I moved they were a family of five people, five family members. [Our family] were just living in one room, so they said we are sharing the greater part of the rent and you are paying the lesser part of the rent, so they kind of acted as landlords, so like I felt being dominated." [Interview 37]

"Coming up to ten years ago was a real struggle and we were very squashed for space in my parents' house, living at home with my parents, because at the time only my eldest brother moved out, so there were another six of us amongst four bedrooms, which wasn't really ideal... My mum... [was] sleeping in the living room on the floor rather than on a bed, she said it is more comfortable for her... it just created some [in]tensity amongst siblings with regards to privacy and just like everyone having their own space, if that makes sense."
[Interview 37]

The interviewee above said the driving factor for overcrowding was financial; he lived in a London borough with a lack of affordable alternative housing options, showing how people of colour often have poorer access to a suitable home.

"If I'm honest, nothing negative or tragic happened that led to the overcrowding. It was just that... at the time anyway, due to the ages of siblings in my household, some of them weren't at the time in fulltime employment or work because they were still studying... I think what led to it was the fact that we weren't all financially secure or able to have better residency available, if that makes sense."
[Interview 37]

People also described experiences of living in housing in areas where they experienced higher levels of racism than in other parts of the country. This created a difficult trade-off where they had moved to an area with more affordable housing, but felt less safe there. (Similar examples relating to homeless accommodation are discussed in the next chapter).

"When I first moved to Sheffield, my local [supermarket] had a security guard following me around everywhere. I couldn't believe it. It was like something out of the seventies." [Interview 10]

While many people preferred to live in an area in which they felt safer, there was not always a choice about this. Indeed, the most severe impacts of racism in local neighbourhood included people made homeless from social housing due to racist harassment from people in their neighbourhood, as described already in this report, and noted in other work.[52] [53]

Another example of this was very recent at the time of the participant's interview. She had to leave her home because of bullying, violent threats and intimidation from neighbours, which she felt were driven by racism and xenophobia; she was moved into temporary accommodation for homeless households due to the lack of safety in her own home.

"It's happened a lot of times. Not once... last time what happened for us, a guy came in to our garden and he punched the doors, he tried to open the door. The man, he was in his 50s and he banged the windows... he says 'I am going to kill you' and I don't know why that all happened... and before we have also some young boys and they broke our big window in the living room. And like every month or two or three weeks we have also young boys and they punch eggs on the windows, and also it is hard, when I clean it it's really hard and also it's so sad because why they do that? Also [my] children, they are born here, they always say 'We are Scottish', they feel that. We are from here, not different... I show a lot of times my housing officer and we have pictures and photos. They attack us and that is why we want to move." [Interview 38]

[50] Office for National Statistics (2023), Overcrowding and under-occupancy by household characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021.

[51] Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: A statistical report on the state of the nation. Herriot Watt University and I-SPHERE.

[52] Menezes, D., Netto, G., Hasan, S., Herriot Watt University (2023), Minoritised ethnic access to social housing in Scotland at key transition points. Shelter.

[53] Fitzpatrick, S., Watts, B. and McIntyre, J. (2024), Taking a race and ethnicity lens to conceptualisations of homelessness in England, Heriot-Watt University.

The lack of support and regulation that could arguably prevent such experiences was even stronger in the private rented sector, with evidence of people experiencing discrimination from landlords based on ethnicity, nationality, or both. People talked about seeing adverts for private rented properties online that were discriminatory – with some using racist language about who couldn't live in their property, and others saying their homes were exclusively for certain ethnic groups. This prevented people of colour from accessing a home.

"At one point I was looking at some flats and they were saying that people with a certain background... they were looking for people with Asian backgrounds to rent flats and stuff like that and I was like 'wow.' It really opened my eyes on the rental market, for this time period. I was like wow, that's horrible... then at one point I saw the landlord wrote on his description on Facebook Market saying they don't want people with Asian backgrounds because they don't want the house smelling like curry." [Interview 25]

People felt that landlords were making discriminatory housing decisions after judging the name on an application form or looking at a person's skin colour, even if they couldn't express this explicitly.

"It's really hard to tell if you're going for housing whether it is your identity or not that is the reason why you don't end up accessing the housing, especially if you might sit somewhere ambiguously in people's perceptions. Because I don't think that people are so obvious, especially because there are rules about housing discrimination, and so I think that people are a lot more subtle at times in how they might say 'no' to you... like when you've been for flat viewings and maybe people had asked you questions about your identity and where you felt a little bit 'Hmm, this is a bit of a strange question' but then you didn't know if they were just genuinely coming from a place of curiosity, or maybe they asked you that question and it had an impact on your access to that housing in the future." [Interview 12]

In a more overt case of discrimination, one person became homeless following an eviction from a landlady who had shown racist attitudes towards her. The landlady regularly let herself in to the home without providing notice, and blamed the tenant for issues in the property. The interviewee said her landlady manipulated other residents in the street to think she was a 'difficult' tenant.

"Even if I was telling the truth there would be no point .... Because she [landlord] is white and a homeowner and therefore she is right... She made me sound like an aggressive Black person who was going to beat her up. She tried to paint a particular picture of me to everyone on the road. She has the authority and power to do that ....towards the end of the harassment, she would come by and she would knock on the door and say things to me, like stereotype me ... I started to feel really weak and very, very tired all the time, but to stand on my doorstep and to say very loudly because she wanted all the other neighbours to hear what she was saying, 'You're the only Black person on this road." [Interview 10]

Many people renting a home described living in poor housing conditions, including issues with mould, damp, and kitchens or bathrooms in disrepair. Echoing the comments of Awaab Ishak's family, who felt that racism contributed to the death of the two-year-old boy from exposure to black mould,[54] some felt that poor responses from their landlords to issues with living conditions may have been connected to their own ethnic or racial identity. One participant struggling with the cost of living also talked about having to pay to fix issues in the home herself due to the lack of response from her social landlord; she believed this could be linked to discrimination. Another felt her private landlord's lack of response to mould in her flat was linked to her landlord being racist.

"I had to call someone to come and fix it myself, because what the agents say to you is it's not an emergency... I had to email them really bad, 'Okay, if you guys tell me what exactly is an emergency. My boiler stopped working and you say it's not an emergency. The sink got blocked, everywhere was flooded, I got a video, you said it's not an emergency, the toilet got blocked and I couldn't go to the toilet. It wouldn't flush for days. It's not an emergency, so what is an emergency, can you tell me?'. All those things I've had to pay myself to have them fixed because I couldn't wait for them... I don't know if there is kind of discrimination going on there. I kind of have a feeling that there might be, but I don't want to just, you know. I don't want to just conclude on a false thinking." [Interview 39]

[54] Baker, F. (2022), The question a little boy's death raises about racism and the housing sector, Inside Housing, 20 Dec 2022.

"My housing situation now is an issue. I don't see it as my experience of my landlord so much as tied down to experiences of race in terms of how he treats me. I think that like the issue I'm having is to do with mould and basically disrepair. I can't even cook in my kitchen because it's been that mouldy and the other day I ate mould. So that has been like a real health issue like both mentally and physically because I can't eat properly and it's cost a lot because I've had to throw out food, clothes, stuff like that... they've been pretty inactive up until this point where I said actually I need to leave if this is going to be the case, because it's not really fit for me to live here." [Interview 12]

A lack of attention to these issues led some people to become homeless, where some felt discrimination continued as they pursued support from homelessness services – this is discussed further in the next chapter.

Finally, it is worth sharing the reflections of a social housing tenant who felt his landlord's accusations of anti-social behaviour against him, which were led partly by a neighbour in the estate, reflected a form of institutionalised discrimination that wasn't necessarily helped by the fact that housing staff were also people of colour.

"The person that dealt with me at the antisocial behaviour team I am assuming was Black. He has a Black sounding name, an African sounding name, so his attitude towards me has coloured the way that the council have dealt with me... so Black on Black racism, I don't know how that works, but it's just like – yeah, so there is something institutionalised about how they deal with social housing tenants as opposed to leasehold tenants and like I say, the tenant upstairs had the ear of the council to the point where she can call them up morning, noon, and night, and they would be sending their teamw over to monitor the situation, and like I say, I'm not totally innocent but the way that they've got me down is that I'm a thug, a threat, a gangster, and I'm far from all those things." [Interview 9]

Policing and the justice system

Many participants had had negative experiences and associations with the police, some of which are already described in chapter 2. In addition, as covered elsewhere in this chapter, people described ways in which they felt racism in the police and justice system was also present in experiences at school and with immigration services.

People reported situations in which they felt the police failed to support them adequately. An interviewee talked about the police and other services missing opportunities to support them with alcohol dependency.

"No one ever said, 'Oh there's a programme that's free called AA', not once. Not one GP. And it is clearly on my medical records, 'issues with drink' and not one of them suggested it. Not one police officer suggested it even though I was constantly in custody and sometimes rocked up in custody drunk off my nut." [Interview 20]

Another person described a scenario in which the police made no effort to help prevent her from becoming homeless.

"I was living with my mum and my mum had a mental breakdown, trigger warning – she tried to kill me, sort of thing. I didn't leave. I don't know why. And then she got the police to remove me. I became homeless but the police did not find anywhere for me to go... or even give me any advice of someone who could help me... now, like coming out of it, a lot of people said 'So the police just left you outside?'" [Interview 15]

There were cases of people being accused of criminal behaviour. A social housing tenant wrongfully accused of murder indicated that this was driven by racist stereotyping and by a powerful relationship between the police force and social landlord.

"Apparently the neighbour recorded me saying 'I'm going to kill you; I'm going to kill you' and I wasn't in the house when that happened. So yeah, probably all Black gay men sounds the same, I don't know. But yeah, the police, they can pre-judge you... recently I've had police knock on my door. Two weekends in a row I've had police come to my property... I know that if they listen to organisations like [the] Council, for example... they probably will tend to believe what they have to say rather than what I have to say." [Interview 9]

People of colour also described experiences of receiving harsher treatment from the police than a white person, including longer prison sentences, consistent with patterns of overrepresentation of people of colour in prison settings, and discrimination involved in sentencing.[55]

"Has it [racism] affected me? I don't know .... I will tell you one thing though, there was a time when I was in... a hostel, yeah, I think that I was about 17, 18... we went to town, me and one of my bredrin... He got caught with a knife, I got caught with a knife, you know what he got? Bail. You know what I got? 3 months in jail. So what else do you want me to say? And that's facts." [Interview 36]

Other evidence shows that many people facing homelessness have experiences with being criminalised, and that without adequate support there can be a 'revolving door' between prison and homelessness due to reoffending.[56] Interviewees' experiences show how this can be amplified by racism from the police.

"From the minute I got arrested in school ...I had that bad boy role... when I get arrested for dumb stuff obviously it mashes up my home, doesn't it. I have to go to another place. Like is said, once you go to jail, you come back out and you're in a new place. They give you a new place. You lose all your things and you have to start again... if I don't live there then they send me back to jail. So it is just a violent vicious circle." [Interview 36]

One interviewee spoke of initially going to prison for an offence committed by a white friend.

"... They pulled up next to his window and he obviously drove off and they saw his face and they saw my face and everything and they still came to my house saying I was driving the car. And then I ended up getting 10 months of that and a 4 year ban as well... He looks nothing like me. He is old, he is white and everything, and they've seen his face, but they only singled me out... I went for 10 months and that was my first ever sentence and ever since then I've just been in and out of prison. Once I went in prison I ended up with a drug habit while I was locked up, so once I got released my drug habit continued on the outside and then I got done for worser offences, ...all kinds of things. Then it just kind of spiralled out of control." [Interview 40]

Another participant described someone she had lived on the streets with also going back and forth between prison and rough sleeping, in part due to being given an anti-social behaviour order.

"This is the only place that [my friend] knows, so all the time she came out of jail she comes back to the same spot and what happened? ...one or two months... police, send her back in jail, spend like three months, two or three months or whatever in jail, come back, the same thing happened. This has been her life for 20 years. ..... gone. Completely gone. The only thing that she knows is street, jail, street, jail, street, jail." [Interview 21]

[55] Yasin, B. and Sturge, G. (2020), Ethnicity and the criminal justice system: What does recent data say on over-representation?, House of Commons Library.

[56] Wilson, W. and Bellis, A. (2017), Housing support for ex-offenders (England and Wales), House of Commons Library.

Employment

There is widespread evidence that people of colour are disadvantaged in the labour market and are more likely to be in insecure forms of work or have multiple jobs in order to manage financially.[57] Whilst being employed is not a guarantee of being able to avoid homelessness,[58] it can be an important means of ensuring you have the financial security to cover housing costs. But people of colour in our sample described experiencing discrimination in the employment system that made it harder to access or maintain work.

As described in case study 2, this included examples of racism from members of the public in the workplace. This extended to direct and indirect forms of racism from colleagues and employers, fitting with wider evidence about the scale of racism in the workplace – with a recent study showing that 2 in 5 workers from a minoritised ethnic group saying they've experienced racism in the workplace in the last 5 years.[59]

One person talked about how when working as a cleaner, she believed office staff's attitudes towards her were racist in nature, which led her to change jobs.

"I did office cleaning and I worked in offices where people have been mean and unkind and I know it's because of racism, you understand. So what I've done, in all of the offices that I've worked, I have had to leave them all." [Interview 31]

People also felt that racism may have contributed to them struggling to access work. A suspicion that racism played a part in the difficulty finding work led one interviewee to pursue self-employment.

"I was really discouraged by the amount of interviews I got and no follow ups... I think that kind of shaped how I looked at employment/business maybe. In terms of race, or my experience of race in employment, I think that it's played a part... I have a really – what seems like a European name at least ... people have looked at that and maybe expected somebody different... I feel like I've seen the surprise on people's faces when they call my name and I stand up... You start to think all sorts of things, so for the most part I tended to avoid what felt uncomfortable for me." [Interview 28]

Another person said that racism in the workplace made them reluctant to share details about their ethnicity when applying for and starting new jobs.

"I have experienced discrimination in a workplace indirectly due to my colour and I've worked for major commercial companies. So going forward in life, if I apply for jobs I wouldn't be comfortable disclosing that, because I think that it's based on the colour of your skin. Before they select you." [Interview 41]

One participant had a direct experience of racism in a job interview. This left them with a difficult decision of whether to take a job that would help her be in a more stable housing situation but would put her at risk of experiencing racism, or to turn down the job and put herself at risk of an insecure housing situation.

"I've had people do like eyes at me before and stuff in interviews and just been like – it's how can you think this is okay like now, like when we do have better education on it... Like when people pull back their eyes to make it look like Chinese or Japanese eyes... It's kind of like at that point you're sat there thinking how much do I need this job? like do I have the right situation behind me to be able to turn this job down? Or do I need to take this on and just put up with that sort of behaviour. And I think that is something that you can be faced with when you're making these decisions. Yes, so that is one thing to do with work, and then the knock on effect with housing." [Interview 41]

[57] Trade Union Conference (2022), Still rigged: racism in the UK labour market. RacismintheUKlabourmarket.pdf (tuc.org.uk)
[58] Sanders, B. and Allard, M. (2021), 'Barely breaking even': the experiences and impact of in-work homelessness across Britain, Crisis.
[59] Trade Union Conference (2022), Still rigged: racism in the UK labour market.

Healthcare

As previously noted, racism is recognised as a social determinant of poor health, with experiences of racism causing a range of mental health impacts. It should also be noted that poor housing and homelessness can lead to poor health too. It is therefore particularly striking that the healthcare system itself was often a space in which racism played out in the lives of people of colour. This is also notable given the stigma and barriers to accessing healthcare that are also faced by people experiencing homelessness.[60]

One participant felt that a dismissive attitude toward people of colour could lead to negligence by healthcare professionals.

"I got looked at and all that and the doctor was like 'Oh it's a fistula, just put cream on it and she'll be fine' and my mum said no, this is serious, like I need a second opinion. So she ended up getting a second opinion from the doctor and the second opinion doctor came and examined me more in detail and she was like no, this is an abscess, you need surgery... stuff like that, it was ridiculous. Basically they just want you out. If you're a certain colour they diagnose you and kick you out. They will misdiagnose and kick you out." [Interview 25]

People reported feeling ignored by healthcare professionals when they were told that their health issues were related to their ethnic background. A 25-year-old felt that a GP wasn't helping address the underlying causes behind her high blood pressure, which may have been linked to the pressures of experiencing homelessness and a difficult work environment.

"The GPs dismissed a lot of problems because of certain things that are common in Black people... They just say it's common for people that are Black to experience that, so they just dismiss everything.... if I have high blood pressure, I'm told that's because you're Black, basically. But yeah, it might be, but I feel like it should still be investigated... I'm 25." [Interview 15]

We spoke to Black women experiencing homelessness who described having had discriminatory experiences from healthcare professionals during childbirth based on racist and dehumanising stereotypes of Black women being strong. This corresponds to wider patterns of inequality in the experiences of women during childbirth in the UK, with Black women four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth.[61]

"I feel like with Black women in particular they believe that we have this supernatural strength that other women don't have... they would say to me, oh you don't need medication. You're strong enough to manage this. But you would give, say for instance the Caucasian woman next door to me, the medication... it was very much I was disregarded when I got to the hospital. I wasn't listened to. Like I said, they've got this thing that Black women have this unfounded strength and they told me to go bed and sleep. I said to them, 'oh I'm in labour.' But because I was so early in my pregnancy they didn't believe me." [Interview 14]

The same interviewee said that these stereotypes were then applied to her premature baby.

"They would say to me when she was born as well- because she was a 25 week-er, they would say to me, ah don't worry, the Black babies survive. They're just so strong. So there's already this expectation of, oh you don't need to worry about this one, she'll be fine, do you know what I mean. I'm just like, well no I still want the same attention and care that you're giving the other children, if that makes sense. Just because she is a brown or Black baby, doesn't mean that she's got the strength that they expected from me as well, to have. So I find that very disturbing, that that is the notion that they have." [Interview 14]

There were also comments that healthcare access was better in less ethnically diverse areas, and that people of colour were bearing the brunt of cuts to public services.

"In the white areas, yeah the healthcare is better. You get the same doctor and stuff like that. Even when you're Black, even if they don't like you and stuff, they will make sure that they will try and give you the best care because they don't want a bad rating or whatever. But then when you go to an urban area like [Outer London borough] or something, you get rubbish care." [Interview 15]

One person said that her experiences of local health services, which she felt were influenced by discrimination towards her family, had put her off from accessing support for her own health conditions.

"I just sort of gave up with all of it and I've really neglected my health, if I'm honest, because I don't trust any of them... And that is the thing, I literally suffer with PTSD because of the NHS... they tried to force us to sign DNR and blackmail us and emotionally manipulate us and they seemed to get away with it... They treated us like double standards, you know? And if it was another British family I don't think it would have been the same." [Interview 3]

It was particularly shocking to hear about participants who had negative experiences of healthcare professionals, and who felt their homelessness could have been prevented with better medical support. In these cases, participants said they felt racism could have played a part based on wider experiences of the local area. Some interviewees felt that medical professionals had suggested that they deserved to be suffering from severe medical conditions, and one even described clinicians wishing harm on them.

"One of the reasons that me and my mum fell into homelessness was my health... ... People who I turned to for support like a psychologist, he told me to go hang myself, a nurse who also told me to go hang myself on a separate occasion... if the health people had been like really supportive then I wouldn't have ended up being on the streets and in hostels several times over with my mum and I would say the teachers but it was mainly medical services that let us down in a great way." [Interview 34]

[60] See Groundswell (2023), #HealthNow peer research report 'Knowing where to turn': access to mental health support whilst experiencing homelessness and Hertzberg, D. and Boobis, S. (2022), The Unhealthy State of Homelessness 2022. Homeless Link and Homeless Health Needs Audit

[61] MBRRACE-UK (2020), Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care 2020: Lay Summary.

Similarly, there were non-UK nationals who felt that the healthcare system was complicit in keeping them homeless (discussed further later in this chapter, under 'The immigration system').

Some people reported facing barriers to accessing support that could help with their homelessness. For example, there were difficulties accessing medical paperwork due to the high cost associated with GPs providing these, or even doctors being unwilling to detail in official documentation why someone's diagnosis means their living conditions are not appropriate. Some people were very clear that it is because of systemic racism that health services treat them differently and create obstacles to them having the necessary paperwork to build a case for more appropriate housing. Health services, and specifically GP surgeries, were described as having "no empathy" for the struggle of being both homeless and facing mental health difficulties. Contact with a GP exacerbated one of our participant's mental health difficulties, which they described as a "breakdown".

"I remember calling my doctor up to speak to the receptionist and I needed a supporting letter because this is what any borough or any council requests supporting letters from applicants and they were like 'Oh, there is a £50 charge for a supporting letter' and I'm like oh my god, I'm homeless, I don't have a job, I have facing mental health problems and on top of that you are asking for £50 for a letter ... supporting letter." [Interview 41]

There were also people who described issues accessing healthcare that related to wider, structural discrimination. Participants who experienced undiagnosed health difficulties spoke about the negligence of school and healthcare systems who failed to identify their unmet needs. In one participant's story, there were three generations who had late diagnoses of neurodevelopmental and learning difficulties. The impact of this included falling behind in school, and interacting with systems that are not set up to be accessible for the participant. Further to this, a lack of proper assessments and tailored, responsive support led to prolonged homelessness.

"It's my mental health and my learning difficulties. Because it makes it very difficult for me to fill out forms, to remember to do things. It also makes it really difficult for me to focus long enough to fill out a form without getting frustrated and angry. So it gets very, very hard. Because a lot of the support that I get now I never had back in the day, so I got evicted from quite a few places, despite the fact that I didn't have the support that I needed at the time, because I didn't know that I needed it." [Interview 16]

The immigration system

Poor treatment of non-UK nationals is a core part and legacy of structural racism in Britain, built on colonialism and manifested in the slave trade and events like the Windrush scandal, showing how discrimination against people categorised as migrants is intertwined with racism. More widely, there is a well-documented account of how people of colour from commonwealth nations were subject to discrimination upon emigrating to the UK, as well as being subject to racism from members of the public in the latter half of the 20th century.[62] Research participants who had emigrated many years ago, or whose parents had emigrated to the UK, talked about memories of seeing anti-immigrant sentiment play out in racist language towards them and their families.

"I can remember coming through Gatwick airport and I remember how Gatwick airport was laid out, I can't explain it but there is like people – the public would get access in to the airport, and so when they walk out of customs and walk in to – like my uncle picked me up from the airport, my sister and my stepdad, so when I got there they had people outside with the [banners] saying 'Go back to your country, get out of here' and I feel like an immigrant, even though I was legally allowed to come in to the country, I feel like I was an immigrant coming off of a boat. That is how bad it was." [Interview 25]

[62] Lukes, S., de Noronha, N. and Finney, N. (2018). Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(17), 3188-3206.

Most of the non-UK nationals in our research had come to the UK during the era following the introduction of the 'hostile environment' policies in the 2010s, which both led to the Windrush scandal and coincided with examples of racist rhetoric appearing in communications from the government, with 'go home' vans echoing the language of the far-right National Front.[63] More generally there were views that racism formed part of the xenophobic language that opposed migration to the UK.

"Since [leaving home] it's opened up a whole new can of worms of how racist sometimes this country can be. It's really opened up a can of worms. I feel like my mum was sheltering me a little bit too much... I worked with old people and obviously they always tell you 'Go back where you came from' every time you look after [them]... I didn't know it was that extreme." [Interview 25]

Some people felt racism played a part in how they were treated by the immigration system, based on their encounters with relevant staff.

"I feel irritated, angry, upset, and also violated. Because all my dignity as a human being has been stripped off of me and now I am more like a naked beggar. That is what it is, a naked beggar out on the street begging... So for people to say, 'Oh this is not racism', if it is not racism at its highest order then I don't know what else it is." [Interview 19]

There were people of colour in our research who were not UK citizens who felt they received differential treatment based on their ethnicity, giving the example of Ukrainians fleeing war being treated as more 'deserving' than people who have fled war and violence in other countries. [Interview 42]

"I mean they're biased, they're racist. I mean we have seen they are institutionally racist because if you're white, if you're Ukrainian... They are given three years, allowed to work. So why not a brown person from Africa, Asia, South America. Why are they treated like terrorists and detained, or from Syria, the Middle East. As long as you're not white, blonde, blue eyes, why aren't you treated the same? If they can do it for one race, or one country then why can't they do it for others?" [Interview 33]

"I notice some kind of preferential treatment between the Black and the Ukrainian people. People are saying that the Ukrainians are more like international refugees and we were not refugees, so maybe that is the reason... because the way that we are being treated, a lot of us believe it is because we are Black ...the treatment might not be the same because at the end of the day they just threw us out on the streets with our children. They don't even mind where we go from there."

This reflects the wider evidence around who is most affected by policies that restrict access to statutory funds and support – often talked about with the phrase No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). These policies mean that non-UK nationals without leave to remain or a visa (or those who do have leave to remain but have NRPF conditions imposed on them as a condition of their leave to remain) are unable to access social security, statutory homelessness support and a range of other publicly funded services. It is estimated that at least three-quarters of people with NRPF are from a minoritised ethnic group.[64]

Interviewees felt that NRPF conditions had prevented them from accessing support with financial difficulties, housing, health and a range of other issues, and how this led them into situations like homelessness and destitution. This echoes wider evidence about the links between NRPF policies and homelessness.[65]

"Not having access to public funds – I never knew the implications until then because many people that originally would have assisted us, this was kind of the barrier that they couldn't do it. There is a limit to how they can access those. Even the council, we don't have access to council housing because of that clause" [Interview 42]

"It's like I [was] just put to one side, you get me? Though I was still working. Working and paying my tax. Yeah, I couldn't get accommodation, I couldn't get any support. I have to wait until like the night shelter comes, like call the night shelter to get accommodation... I feel like they handcuffed me when I couldn't work. You get me? ...Mentally. So what are you going to do now? You're not getting any benefits, you're not entitled to no public fund, you cannot work, so what are you going to do now?" [Interview 18]

People also talked about being fearful of the risk of deportation or other potential consequences of asking for state support. They talked about not seeking healthcare and avoiding reporting racist abuse to the police.

"I never was happy to go to the hospitals because somehow I was believing that if I was going to the hospital maybe if something more serious happened they would check my immigration and they can send me back. I was afraid somehow." [Interview 45]

"I've had friends, asylum seekers that have come from Sudan and they've been in the UK for a few weeks... they tell you that they've just been racially abused outside of Tesco and you say, 'why didn't you report it?' 'No, no, no, let's have our case looked at first and then we can do that.' ...a lot of asylum seekers do not want any involvement with the police or anything to do with the criminal justice system because they think it will affect their cases." [Interview 1]

[63] Travis, A. (2013), Tory immigration language 'like National Front of 1970s', The Guardian, 25 Sep 2013.

[64] Smith, C., O'Reilly, Rumpel, R. and White, R. (2021), How do I survive now? The impact of living with No Recourse to Public Funds, Citizens Advice.

[65] Boobis, S., Jacob, R. and Sanders, B. (2019), A Home For All: Understanding Migrant Homelessness in Great Britain. Crisis.

Some who had lived in the UK for a long time without settled status felt government policies were purposefully making their lives difficult, as reflected in the term 'hostile environment.'

"... They still go ahead and pass those bills, and then they sit back and then pretend to say 'Oh, we didn't know it was going to be that bad'. Of course you did... I think it's called a hostile environment and it was done intentionally. I keep saying to my friends, the system is broken by design, and it's turned in to a particular demographic." [Interview 19]

There were specific issues with accessing suitable housing for non-UK nationals, reflecting wider evidence about barriers migrants have faced accessing a home over the past century.[66] Some people talked about being moved to parts of the country that were unsafe, sometimes with very little notice;[67] some were living in Home Office accommodation in conditions that were unsafe or bad for their health.

"We have three children, especially one who is autistic and needs his own bedroom according to the law, at that point I just feel a bit of discrimination because they are growing up, they need more space... my daughters, they sleep on a double bed... my husband, he puts the mattress against the wall, just like me, and at night time he puts it down on the floor and he sleeps on the floor... there was seepage through the bathroom and that seepage came all the way to the floor and some parts of the wooden planks, they are swelling up because of the water underneath and no one took care of that." [Interview 44]

"It is shared just for five people and there are another five people living in the same space ... when I arrived here it was very challenging... the room didn't have a lock for the door - it was broken, because someone else was living in this room." [Interview 45]

Those with NRPF but not seeking asylum had other issues accessing housing. One person talked about how, after moving to the UK on a student visa, she felt guarantor requirements from private landlords discriminated against her because of her lack of contacts in the UK and this contributed to her being homeless.

"I was thinking [because I] had more money it would be easy for you to get an apartment, ...you go to view it and then the next thing they tell us 'Oh, I'm sorry, we have given the house to someone else' and at some point it was beginning to look like 'Oh is it because we are Black?' Because I see no reason why – I told you that I am ready to make payments, even if you wanted to select three months advance and you still won't give the house to me. It has happened not once, not twice, but so many viewings. I got tired at some point of going to view the houses... It's like the moment that they see you they just realise that 'Oh...'. I don't know. That is how we were feeling at that point. And then they tell you that okay, you need to get a guarantor. Someone that has been living in the UK for years and probably has a house in the UK. I mean I'm here as an international student and I feel [I] can afford your rent." [Interview 46]

There were other issues with accessing a private rented home for non-UK nationals. The Right to Rent scheme means that only a select cohort of non-UK nationals are legally allowed to rent privately, and it has been argued that this 'turn[s] the private rental market into a border-check.'[68] This meant that for some people it was often necessary to sofa surf, or to rent from landlords who took advantage of their immigration status by charging more rent, avoiding following required renting practices, or housing them in poor conditions.

[66] See for example de Noronha, N. (2021), Another tale of structural inequality?, IPPR Progressive Review, 28(1).

[67] A detailed account of issues in housing and social support for families seeking asylum in the UK has recently been published, see Human Rights Watch and justfair (2023), "I Felt So Stuck": Inadequate Housing and Social Support for Families Seeking Asylum in the United Kingdom.

"When I was very new to the city and to the country, I was trying to find a place to live and I ended up renting an accommodation in central London, that was very, very, very precarious and the person who managed the place used to charge a lot of money and it was not a very safe place because it was very exposed... I felt very unsafe. And that is a kind of common situation around some gangs even ...the situation with housing and taking advantage of people who are vulnerable and who are in a vulnerable situation and don't have documents or don't have real information. They charge like three or four times more than the [normal] price. It was a very, very bad time. I tried to [leave] as soon as I could and then get away from that." [Interview 47]

In one instance a woman discovered she wasn't renting privately, but that from a social housing tenant who was subletting to her. When he got into debt, she became homeless.

"I started opening the letters to find out the place was being sublet. I could see it as a housing association property and the landlord was subletting. We were paying him. His rent was £500 but we were paying over £1000 for one bed." [Interview 17].

Similarly, without a legal right to work in the UK, some asylum seekers had to turn to illegal or informal forms of work. Given the low amount of financial support on offer from the state for non-UK nationals, and the inability to access the support at all when awaiting the outcome of an appeal, illegal and informal forms of work were the only way some people could access income. In some cases, this led to people being exploited by criminals. One person who had fled abuse in her country of birth said she worked illegally whilst being unsure of how else to survive in the UK, and had to share some of the income with the person who gave her forged identity documents, on top of the tax payments taken from her salary. She was imprisoned for three months before being granted access to the asylum system.

'I was really scared. I was just 17... there was a friend I met who said he wanted to help me get in to a job, and that he is going to help me arrange all these documents and everything, and then I paid him, I think I paid him £600, he gave me a document and introduced me to the person who is going to employ me as well, and that is when I started [working], I was earning money, at the same time I was paying this guy monthly as well... the immigration officer just turned up... I told them my name... they couldn't find me in the system, and they said for this reason I'm afraid we're going to have to arrest you." [Interview 39]

Another participant talked about being exploited by her ex-partner, from whom she had to flee due to domestic abuse, because of her asylum application.

"My ex, because he knew about the system and he tried to abuse me and said if you want everything easier you should stay with me and you should accept everything... the immigration system, I think that it is has increased the violence because the people know the weakness and try to use it and some people do have those kind of personalities to control others... some of the men, they think that they can do anything to you or when you don't have a refugee status, because you are an asylum seeker." [Interview 4]

[68] Mckee, K., Leahy, S., Tokarcyk, T. and Crawford, J. (2020), Redrawing the border through the 'Right to Rent': Exclusion, discrimination and hostility in the English housing market, Critical Social Policy, 41(1), 91-110.

People also described being subject to unfair treatment in the immigration system, in particular unexplained delays in decision-making processes at the Home Office and contradictory statements about their claim.

"They [the Home Office] told me they were waiting because I was faced with domestic violence, that they were waiting for the police report but finally after one year when I went to the police station they just told me 'sorry, because there wasn't any evidence like a third person there, actually we just closed the case one year ago, and there is nothing else.' And nobody informed me. Not the police, not the Home Office. They just wasted one year of my time." [Interview 4]

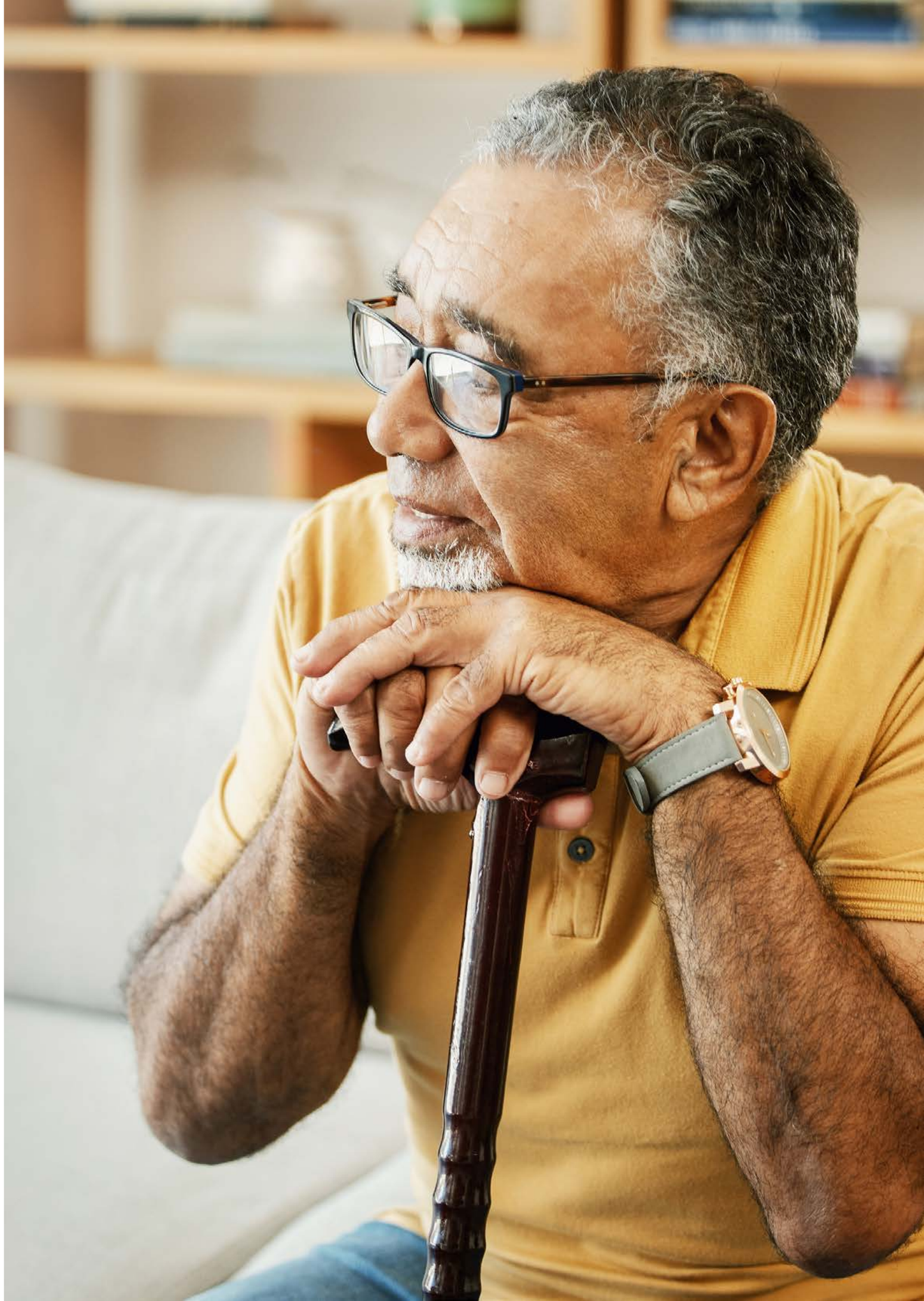
There were also bad experiences in immigration detention centres – echoing evidence of violent and racist behaviour in some centres.[69]

"It is totally different from Her Majesty's Prison. In prison you go in, you are out on a certain day… you put your head down and you get on with it. Immigration detention is uncertain… Whether you are going to be put back in to a society in Britain or whether you are going to be deported back to your own country and so there is this uncertainly that makes [immigration centres] a really, really bad place. I saw no suicide attempts when I was in HMP, but I saw three suicide attempts in three months when I was in immigration detention and these are desperate, just desperate, desperate people at the end of their tether. Their dreams shattered, everything. It is just not a good place to be." [Interview 1]

Some felt the sheer length of time they had been in the country with uncertain citizenship status had taken a huge toll on their mental wellbeing and felt the system they were working in was impersonal, working with a 'cut and paste' or 'copy and paste' mentality.

"They [the Home Office] will take your case, they will leave your case for five years, you won't hear anything from them, and they won't write to you…. You cannot eat properly. You cannot buy clothes. You cannot buy anything… It is so difficult for you to live a proper life… this thing is affecting your health, physically and emotionally… No information. Nothing. Every day the same. For the whole five years. Every day is the same. So this is the kind of thing that The Home Office do to destabilise life and by the time they will give you that paper… by the time you are 40, when you get your paper you are 50." [Interview 7]

"It's the same sort of people that caused the Windrush scandal, the same people that are still looking at our cases that have this thing that we are lying to them, so cut and paste every refusal. They cut and paste and find a way of refusing your case… I'm saying to them we have spent 20 years trying to get some sort of resolution on my case. Look at it. My fear of returning to my own country is genuine, it's there, I've given you all the reasons. Why are we still dithering. Why don't you – or at least allow me to work. Allow me to become somebody and to continue to use my skills, so live a normal life rather than just this rotting away and sitting and mental degradation and everything that comes with being in the position I am." [Interview 1]



[69] Chowdhury, S. (2023), Brook House: 'Unnecessary, inappropriate and excessive' force used at migrant removal centre, inquiry finds, Sky News, 19 Sep 2023.

For one person, being unable to contribute to the family costs put pressure on his relationships, especially with his ex-partner and child. This led to a relationship breakdown and homelessness.

"I've been in this country now for 20 years... I'm not allowed to work and I don't have access to public resource... our relationship broke down and she asked me to leave the house, just like that, and so I had nowhere to go... I became homeless and so I was sleeping rough. It took me a while to figure out where to go because at that point I was really distraught because I didn't see it coming because we had been together a long time and had a child together and then the next thing I found myself out on the street, out in the cold." [Interview 19]

Not being able to work and waiting for long periods of time because of bureaucracy, he said he was struggling with the impact of sofa surfing and sleeping rough whilst being unable to access income, and was experiencing severe mental health issues now.

"In my case now they've got me on the ground with their feet on my neck and then they are tightening and pressing hard... you couldn't say you don't know how it's affecting me, because I'm here crying out 'I can't breathe, I can't breathe' and the more I cry out the more you keep tightening the noose', so to speak, so it is very, very horrible... we are fighting a battle and the battle that we're fighting is not a physical battle, it's a psychological battle with these horrid people." [Interview 19]

These discriminatory practices towards non-UK nationals had wide and lasting impacts. People who now had leave to remain or had become UK citizens talked about ways in which racism based on being born abroad continued, as well as how the immigration system continued to have an impact on their life and ability to have a settled home. One interviewee described how, despite having a legal right to be in the UK, she had seen first-hand how her father was detained upon travelling back into the country.

"Even with immigration, he's been detained several times with me. Letting me wet myself. The Border Force- because seeing him as a threat, despite having toilets and facilities for me to use, they preferred that I wet myself so that they could detain my father. Despite him being a legal immigrant here." [Interview 14]

People born in the UK described how norms relating to identification meant they could be placed under suspicion for not having documents like a birth certificate, as described by one person being asked to provide cash payments to have issues fixed in her flat, and the potential impact on receiving welfare payments.

"He has asked me to try and pay my rent in cash to a repairs person, who came out because the radiator in the house, like the water burst... it looks really dodgy if I have these large sums of money coming out of my bank account where there is no attribution to them. But I have to use the bank statement... my birth certificate isn't a UK one, so it doesn't class as being a valid form of identity here." [Interview 12]

There were examples of people being subject to discrimination on the assumption that they were non-UK nationals when trying to rent a home – regardless of whether or not they had been born in the UK. The experience of one person waiting for the return of her identity documents illustrated other evidence that Right to Rent more broadly causes racial discrimination.[70]

"I feel it is discrimination because you contact a letting agent or something and they will ask you – I don't have an English accent so that is one thing that stands out on its own... You have to present your documents – I don't have a British passport to give. Even as British, our ethnicity does stand against us in most cases." [Interview 17]

People who were formerly excluded from accessing social housing due to their legal status sometimes felt that discrimination was continuing even after they were given access to relevant waiting lists.

"When I was applying for housing and placing the bid I had access before but now they removed my email and I am unable to receive any[thing]... most of them are saying that, 'Oh sorry, we don't have such a flat that you are asking for...' They have on their website, if you go, 'We have this, this and this in this place' and when you see that, after I see that I went there and applied for that, but the answer was 'We don't have, we don't have, we don't have'. So honestly, that is because I am from a minority or from the BME community." [Interview 32]

Some people described facing a cliff-edge when they were granted 'leave to remain' or refugee status and were then evicted from Home Office accommodation as a result of their new status. They described there being no link between the Home Office accommodation system and other state housing and homelessness services.

"They gave us 28 days to evacuate the building after I got my papers. So we were given 28 days and I had two kids, so I was going to the council, I called them, then I had a caseworker and I was calling them to let them... the council was not doing anything. They kept saying I need to call them. She said I need to give them a call and I would give them a call but they... didn't respond to my call. And I called, until the last day of the evacuation that they told us to move out of the house because other people were coming in to the house, to the flat. So we moved out of the room." [Interview 48]

Similarly, two participants talked about losing access to state income upon being granted refugee status, but then not being able to access relevant benefits that would enable them to start living their lives in the UK. In both cases this led the participants into new forms of homelessness. A third participant said she was given access to Universal Credit more quickly, but had to take out an advance that would take her time to pay back.

"After six months or something like that someone was informing me that I am entitled to apply for working tax credit or something like that but I only can apply from the first six months since I started the job but I wasn't aware of that, I didn't know that I was not entitled to that. So it had been refused my application a couple of times. And after I get in to debt in housing. It is not easy, working just under 20 hours a week and covering everything. That is not easy. In a couple of years' time I ended with debt and suddenly I received a court letter from the housing and I was trying to contact lawyers and see how I can be supported or what I'm going to do but finally if you don't know, if you have nothing and you don't have to do anything with that, so I can't deal with these things." [Interview 32]

Two interviewees commented on how the treatment of immigrants prescribed by hostile policies could be costing the public more money than it would cost to support people effectively.

"Effectively all these people are going to be on the streets and if the Home Office is throwing them out on to the streets then why is it not taking steps to actively deport them if they are saying that they have run out of appeals or whatever, so why is it that you are just leaving people to be on the streets. Again, that is part of the narrative. When they have got people on the streets committing petty crime that is going to alienate people from British society, so I think that all these things are deliberate." [Interview 1]

"They prefer to waste their time and money... they want to show that yes, we abide by human rights factors and those kinds of stuff, but [not] in practice... They try to make things very hard for you." [Interview 4]

The sheer length of time navigating the immigration system and a difficult life in the UK without recourse to public funds meant that one person, still awaiting the outcome of an asylum claim, felt he could see neither his previous nor current country as home.

[70] A recent evaluation of Right to Rent said that unlawful race discrimination was not happening at a systematic, significant level, but that it does nevertheless take place: Banerjee, J., Green, M. and Scanlon, K. (2023), Right to Rent scheme: Phase two evaluation, Home Office.

"I spent half of my life now in Zimbabwe and more than half of my life now in this country, so for myself now I think that I've got an identity crisis. I don't know where do I belong, where is home? I keep asking myself this question and I don't have an answer because yeah, I feel like I live here, but I still don't feel like I belong here, if that makes any sense, because if I do belong here then I shouldn't have to be dealing with immigration matters and I shouldn't have to deal with racism matters, I shouldn't have to challenge services to provide me things that sort of a British person is entitled to. I am equally entitled to whatever I'm entitled to, but I still have to tick this box that 'Oh, do you have this, can you provide this evidence?' so yeah. It is not a good place to find yourself in."
[Interview 26]

How different forms of racism can sustain homelessness

Not all participants described experiences of racism within each of the above systems and institutions. Particularly in the case of education and healthcare, there were some more positive experiences – for example, the transformative impact of someone who dedicated time and energy to providing support. A few people talked about how finding someone to listen to them could make an enormous difference.

"Having that one hour chat to the doctor really made me feel much better and that then led to me having the guts and the courage to go and get some counselling. But then there has also been many obstacles my life where I have felt really low and I have felt let down by the doctors."
[Interview 29]

However, it was common for people to have poor experiences in more than one of the above areas, and for these experiences to interact with overt or more structural forms of racism. In this way, racism did not work in isolation. People often felt they encountered racism on multiple fronts. In a few cases, people described racism as being all-encompassing and feeling trapped – this is reflective of how experiences of structural racism can result in people feeling like they are an overloaded vehicle, or that the system is like a birdcage.[71] A powerful example of this is described in case study 3.

[71] See Lingayah, S. and Kelly, N. (2023), Contains Strong Language: A Guide to Talking About Racism. Reframing Race. containsstronglanguagerrjuly23.pdf (reframingrace.org) and Sweetland, J. (2023), Talking About Racism in Child and Family Advocacy: Framing Strategies, FrameWorks. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/talking_about_racism_in_child_and_family_advocacy_Jan2023.pdf

Case study 3: How Martin* felt racism caused him to become homeless, and remain homeless [Interview 1]

Martin came to the UK in the 1990s on student and working visas and later claimed asylum, as changes in political leadership made it unsafe for him to return to his home country in Africa. His application was refused, and he was evicted from social housing. He then described going through a series of forms of homelessness and state provided accommodation as he appealed the decision and applied for asylum again.

"So you get turfed out and then you sofa surf and then in my case sort of like people get tired of it. People get tired of putting you up and then you are on the streets proper and that was, yeah, sleeping in doorways, sleeping on the London buses, going from one end to the other."

While rough sleeping, Martin found himself targeted by drug dealers and developing a crack dependency.

"The worst situation is being forced, when you're in that vulnerable position, being forced by drug dealers to carry drugs, to ferry drugs, to sell drugs."

Without any income, Martin shoplifted in order to survive. As a result of this he went to prison

"I found myself on the streets... and it's a painful, it's a lonely, lonely place. And I was a drinker, sort of like just like everyone else after work, go and have a pint and things like that. But I found myself having to drink to escape the long day. The 24 hours that are in the day. And drink again leads to harder substances and then to support this, what I call a drug habit that I developed...I shoplifted to eat. I shoplifted to feed my habit. It was just the way of survival and obviously I got caught."

Martin says the main cause of his homelessness wasn't his personal behaviour, but a system that allowed him to be evicted from Home Office accommodation without any other housing to go to.

"They gave me 21 days to leave the property and yeah, so that is me with all my belongings and suddenly I am out on the streets with nothing, so eventually those belongings become extra baggage and you leave a bit here, a bit there, and eventually you lose it all."

Martin believes his treatment in court, in prison and by the police has been harsher because of his background.

"The habitual burglar, my cellmate, someone that has been a criminal since he was a young man and does a burglary and gets 13 months for it and yet you're sitting there with 6 months for a shoplifting of two lumps of meat. Things like that. So you look at it and you think how is that? So yeah, the courts service I think is harsher on people like myself and of course the police. I mean it's no secret that a person that looks like me is seven times more likely to be stopped and searched in London."

When out of prison, Martin was homeless again and sofa surfed with a friend. Eventually he accessed Home Office accommodation again, but did not feel his accommodation was safe.

"I've got a roof over my head and that is an absolute positive. A negative is that honestly I have no say in who it is that I live with. And also we are not allowed to lock our doors, so I have lived with someone from – he was a child soldier... he was just not really ready for society, so he slept with a knife under his pillow because that is what he was used to, but because we are not allowed to have locks on our doors because the immigration must be able to come in and inspect and arrest you for deportation or whatever, so yeah. It is a very dangerous situation and when you communicate that to The Home Office or the people that are in charge of The Home Office accommodation arrangements no action is taken... the Home Office contractor, they have absolutely no interest... It is almost as if we are a bother, we are really a bother... It is institutional, it is deliberate, and I think it's quite blatant."

Martin felt that local health services were complicit in this racism, by refusing to provide him with a letter that confirms his living circumstances are bad for his health.

"I have breathing problems, a lot of breathing problems. So I've gone to the doctor and I've said this is the case, I think that the mould in there is affecting me badly. I took photographs and took them to the doctors and the doctor said ' I'm not going to write any letters that are going to get someone else evicted', and I'm thinking can you not write and say mould and [my] condition do not go together. Again, they refused."

Martin felt that living with NRPF meant he was in limbo, and unable to make progress with achieving any of his life goals. He has been on medication for depression at some points.

"They have made no attempt to deport me but at the same time they've not given me the right to flourish and live my life."

Though Martin didn't discuss encountering overtly racist abuse from people working for the state, he thinks there is 'no doubt' that racism is underneath the wider system.

"I think the system sets you up to fail, when you're a Black person I think that it's a lot harder because they know that you've got no one that you know in the country and they know that you are going to be – you have no other help, but they actually allow it to happen. So when you declare to them 'Listen, I have got nobody', I have nobody else in this country, I am on my own. But they still throw me out. So I think that is a deliberate act... think that my incarceration, I think the length of time as well that it's taken to resolve my immigration matters. That is all linked to racism really. And that is a Home Office which we all known from Windrush, it's the very same people that are looking at our cases, those very same people that there has been no change and that continues, the racism continues."

When asked what were the main barriers he faced to improving his situation, Martin said:

"The colour of my skin is everything... being Black is almost a crime, I'm sorry to say."

*Names have been changed to protect people's identities

Conclusions

The stories in this chapter illustrate the varied ways in which societal, structural, and direct racism and discrimination intersect with the causes of homelessness.

The stories from interviewees demonstrate instances of racism as a cause of homelessness, shedding light on the role that racism plays as an immediate 'trigger' for homelessness (for example, having to leave a home where they were subjected to racist abuse issues in their current housing or experiences of violence) or having a knock-on effect on housing precarity (for example, avoiding work as a result of racist incidents in the workplace leading to loss of income). The stories also help us understand 'upstream' causes of homelessness based on structural and systemic discrimination, where racism indirectly contributed to their becoming homeless. The shocking experiences described above show how people continue to feel dehumanised by institutions that play a crucial role in their lives.

4.“They see me as a threat”: experiences of accessing homelessness support

This chapter explores the experiences of people of colour when accessing support to address their homelessness; and how their experiences shaped their outcomes. Both statutory services and third sector services are referred to.

4.1 Interviewees' experiences with statutory homelessness support

Experiences in England

Some interviewees in this research were not eligible for homelessness support from the state, as they did not have recourse to public funds. This meant that they were not able to access temporary accommodation or social housing via their local council and relied on Home Office accommodation or on non-statutory sources of help.

Many of the experiences shared by interviewees in England who had access to public funds were like those encountered by the wider population and outlined in other research.[72] A key theme was that processes for accessing support were slow and required an intense amount of labour from the person experiencing homelessness, at a time when they were often going through other additional challenges. Some people felt that council staff were purposefully avoiding them, whether due to resourcing issues, 'gatekeeping' behaviour, or a lack of adequate housing or accommodation in the area. This was sometimes seen as deliberately harmful and led to stress and poor mental health, often compounding the impact of experiences of racism and homelessness.

"I still don't know who my housing officer is... I was emailing them back to back and no one got back to me from the council even until now, not even a message from them... No one has got back to me, even though they said 'Oh we will come back to you in five working days', but still nothing. It has been almost two months now, three months. Still nothing." [Interview 39]

In this context, some people said they were unable to make progress with resolving their homelessness unless they could effectively advocate for themselves or find someone – whether at the council or at another service – to advocate for them. Those without this ability to advocate reflected later that they felt they had been let down.

"I needed people that knew more than me to advise me, so I believe that seeking support or having organisations that supported me made a massive difference to how people perceive your case, because sending an email to a housing officer without copying other people, she could decide to say that she never received that. But if you send an email to a housing officer and you copy the solicitor, the CEO, the charity, or somebody else, an MP or something, even if the housing officer denies now receiving, all the others received it. So you see, having organisations really does help." [Interview 17]

"I tried [the] council for months and weeks and I just couldn't get anywhere... It just confused me. A single woman on the street, why do you leave ... why am I exposed this way? So it has challenged me, it has challenged me trying to access help... I just couldn't understand the reason, and that is what bothers me. Because if I can understand a reason behind something then I'm better able to cope with it. But when I am just left to try and figure it out, I guess it's not right, but it's more difficult for me to cope with." [Interview 31]

A related issue was the perception of a lack of joined-up processes and relationships between council homelessness support and other services that were the first point of contact in someone's homelessness journey – such as healthcare and prison services – and that it felt like different services were passing responsibility back and forth between one another. This was manifested in negative experiences like the one quoted in section 3.2 (Interview 41), where the GP practice was charging a person experiencing homelessness to produce a letter for the council.

Many participants – women in particular – were housed in temporary accommodation after accessing support, but often found the accommodation was either unsuitable or not temporary at all (as discussed more later in the chapter).

Some of the men interviewed talked about only being given limited access to more emergency forms of accommodation, some of which felt unsuitable. There were others who reported being 'bottom of the list' for support because they did not have any children or disabilities.

"I cannot share in a shelter. The shelter, there is more drugs, your stuff gets stolen and I cannot leave at 7 o'clock and come back at 9 o'clock, I can't do that. My mental health. And that is very bad for your mental health. Each day you're moving to a different shelter." [Interview 33]

"The one issue I was having with the housing list is that I was hardly ever seeing any one-beds and all the one-beds would be for like priority mothers and stuff like that, and you know – what is it called? The priority code. A lot of times it didn't fit to my priority number." [Interview 28]

Often a lack of affordable housing meant that people had to consider or move into housing that didn't meet their needs, including homes in poor condition and in areas far from their local area. People spoke of being put under pressure to choose an unsuitable form of housing from the council, and in some cases were told they would be seen as refusing to co-operate or making themselves 'intentionally' homeless if they didn't accept this home. In London these issues were particularly acute and meant some people stayed in temporary accommodation for a long time without a clear longer-term solution.

"You don't know how long you're going to be homeless for... when I was evicted I had to go to one hostel and they still refused to help me anyway after I was put in this hostel... my daughter had to take two buses to school. So it was like they're putting you in places where you've got no community connection, so you've got no networks, and you don't know how long you're going to be there, so you don't know whether to even bother making these connections or whether to keep by yourself and isolate yourself because you don't know what the hell is going on." [Interview 27]

Some people were given access to supported accommodation – a term describing temporary accommodation in which residents are also meant to receive additional support for their needs or background. In some cases, this helped people to overcome challenges with their mental health or adjusting to a new life following an experience of domestic abuse. However, there were participants who said the 'support' component of their accommodation was non-existent. This meant they were unclear on whether the council was still providing them with any homelessness support, and when they would move into a settled home. An example of this is described in case study 4.

[72] A useful point of comparison is Crisis' research into the Homelessness Reduction Act, Sutton-Hamilton, C., Allard, M., Stroud, R. and Albanese, F. (2022), 'I hoped there'd be more options': Experiences of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018-2021, Crisis.

Case study 4: How services responded to Joy* becoming homeless [Interview 15]

Joy is an interview participant in her early twenties who identifies as a Black woman. She became homeless during the pandemic after an experience of violence from an abusive parent, who asked her to leave.

"I was financially abused as well, so I had to give most of my money. I never had an opportunity to save anything and so I couldn't go into private rent, especially not in London. I had no option."

Joy contacted the council's homelessness support team, but she was accused of fraud because her sister had previously contacted them and they looked alike. Joy asked her sister for help. With little space in her home, Joy ended up staying in her sister's car, outside her flat.

"I felt sorry that my sister had to be burdened with me, so I couldn't really stay there, so I just stayed in her car really... It was scary. It was really scary. Every noise I was scared. I was scared of like insects and then that was like the least of my worries when I was in there. It was cold."

Joy asked a youth homelessness charity for support and they were able to obtain access to emergency accommodation. From this she moved into supported accommodation, where she has now been for 2 years.

Joy's experiences in this accommodation have been poor. Her shower doesn't work and she uses a bucket from her tap. She has no contact with staff who are meant to be supporting her, or with the council who are meant to be helping her to find a longer-term solution. Residents are not allowed to use the facilities such as the lounge area, and so everyone stays in their rooms, leading to increased isolation. Inappropriate relationships between staff and residents were also reported.

"I feel like the staff have the attitude as well. The 'You should just be grateful' sort of attitude when I want to complain about something... We have support workers but they have got too many people per support worker. And one of them keeps quitting so we have to go through everything again, but currently my support worker – I don't actually know her name, like they don't really make an effort to make an appointment or anything, so I can't be bothered any more."

Joy was unsure what would happen next and felt trapped due to the way in which work would lead to higher housing costs, because of unique problems with how the social security system is set up for people in supported accommodation.

"We don't get equipped with any skills... I have no clue what could happen next. I don't know if I might be homeless again, I don't know. There is no move-on plan and I can't see, because of the way that the benefits is set up, it's really difficult to save money with housing benefits and the rent here is very high if I was to pay it from my own wages, but I have no other option but to live here... It makes me feel really sad really, because I feel like I'm just being scammed and I'm not getting out of here... I'm trapped."

Joy has set up her own business whilst in the accommodation, and still hopes one day to have a home of her own.

*Names have been changed to protect people's identities

In contrast, when people received access to a settled home, the difference was often transformational. One person talked about noticing her young child becoming healthier once they had left a B&B and had a home of their own.

"It was like a ton of weight was off my shoulders. I felt happy. I felt okay. And now my child, my second child, she loves food... You give her breakfast and then she is asking you about lunch. So being in the hotel was just annoying. Not being able to eat and visiting friends and family – she felt that she had to take food home to the hotel. Wherever she saw food she needed to take some, because we all did that at the hotel. Everyone did it to survive. Unconsciously, being a five year old she picked up the habit that she had to take some for later, she would say 'Mum, can we take some for later' or I would ask her why did you do that and she would say 'Mum, I'm taking it for later'. Unconsciously she knows she has to take some and keep some for later." [Interview 17]

In addition, people described support as being particularly helpful to them when the multiple services needed to end their homelessness felt joined-up – for example, when they received effective mental health support to help them remain in housing. There were also examples of people who said they felt the 'emergency' nature of their living situation was well understood, for example because of a severe health issue they were going through, and that the council responded promptly to this.

"This guy [support worker] has done so much for me actually, he has done so fucking much. He went to pick me up on the streets, yeah, ...for me to make money, bring me to a doctor for me to be on methadone you know [...] basically that guy saved my life." [Interview 21]

Receiving psychological support in the form of access to mental health care was generally spoken about as being helpful for people being supported out of homelessness. This is especially important given the overrepresentation of mental health challenges among people facing homelessness and people of colour, with a significant number of research participants having formal diagnoses of anxiety, depression and PTSD amongst the cohort. When asked about their mental health, one participant spoke about the supportive role of therapy in breaking the stigma around mental health difficulties in their cultural context.

"Mentally, in the past I would have said no, because in Africa it is almost like a taboo. But with all the things that I've been going through, and I am still going through, so I might say I have some little wellbeing that I need to check. But thankfully I'm in therapy." [Interview 19]

However, some people felt that they were not given enough help to live sustainably in their home due to poor conditions in their new home and the lack of financial resources to improve this, or because they didn't have ongoing help with other aspects of their lives. There were also examples of people who returned to homelessness because their initial housing solution wasn't sustainable. Some felt they were in limbo after issues with social housing conditions meant they were then in temporary accommodation, but it was unclear when they would be able to return to a settled home (as discussed further later in this chapter).

In one case, an interviewee said he had been "in and out of social housing and hostels since" 1989. He described having become homeless from social housing on multiple occasions, due to: being housed in a flat that was unaffordable on his income; being incorrectly evicted for anti-social behaviour; and, on this occasion, because of his heating being broken for two months, and extensive damp.

"I was evicted and the judge even said she hoped that [the] council would pick me up again because it's obviously something that I wasn't aware of and they should have pointed out to me at the time of signing up for the property... What I found out is that [the council] will blatantly lie to your face and to say anything that they want to say because you've really got no come back or no proof of what they've said or what they've advised you... I have always thought of organisations, especially the ones like [them] to be fair, trustworthy, and honest, but I've been on the receiving end of them blatantly lying to me about certain situations and circumstances. Or when they've explained my situation to other bodies they've just spun it in such a way that I'm the devil incarnate. I haven't got a leg to stand on."

Across all of these experiences were feelings of powerlessness. He felt that over time staff in the council had built up a racist attitude towards him, and he was worried about whether he would be able to return to his home.

"I've seen discrimination and people looking at me and having the stereotypical view of what a Black guy is supposed to be ... since I've been in this property here, they have kind of like pre-judged me and I've not had fair and proper treatment from them... I have a funny feeling that they are not going to move me back. I don't know." [Interview 9]

Experiences in Scotland and Wales

The rights of citizens facing homelessness vary significantly between England, Scotland and Wales. In our research, there were limited differences in experiences of statutory homelessness support depending on which country an interviewee was from. This is partly due to the different citizenship statuses of research participants. Six out of seven interviewees in Wales had No Recourse to Public Funds, meaning they could not access homelessness support from their local council,[73] whereas in England and Scotland there were a mix of people with and without access to public funds. But when comparing the experiences of those with access to public funds between Scotland and England, the positive and negative experiences they highlighted were fairly similar.

The key differences were that interviewees in Scotland generally described staying in temporary accommodation for shorter periods of time compared to interviewees in England, and that waiting for social housing did not take as long in Scotland. However, interviewees described similar issues across both nations with finding council staff to be impersonal and slow, as well as placing pressure on them to say yes to a potentially unsuitable home (as with the experiences of many people applying to their local authority in this way).

"I was told a time limit I should roughly expect to get a place and it was – they were right, it took three months... I was lucky to receive a place. They explained it fairly well... They always pressure you to bid for houses that might not be suitable for you in areas that you might not want, so they put a bit of pressure. That was a negative... They could have maybe updated me more rather than me chasing them. They could maybe have kept me in the loop as opposed to me constantly chasing them. [Interview 29]

"My son, he is disabled, and I thought that he would improve but he is still non-verbal and there are a lot of things... I remember once we were offered a house... that was on the first floor, it was a flat, third floor, so we said that he is not aware of the dangers so he doesn't know he can fall from a balcony but they just called us and said pack your stuff and you're moving in tomorrow... first let us see the apartment, show us the flat, then take our ...wish in to consideration, what we want to do, and then move us." [Interview 44]

A family in Home Office accommodation who had recently been granted leave to remain in the UK talked about how they had been assessed as homeless by their local council in Scotland, but received letters threatening them with eviction, which they felt was linked to discrimination towards them as non-UK nationals. Their solicitor suggested the council might not be following their legal obligations to provide the family with temporary accommodation.

"I think that we were not treated the way that we should be... it was clearly written in the notice that despite our calling you so many times and asking you to reply you didn't do so. So this is our last notice that we are giving you and this time you have to move otherwise we will put your stuff outside and we will just remove you from the house. That is discriminatory in the kind of words they have used for us. It is very discriminatory. I wonder if they would do the same with a British national... I mean if you read the words they are threatening... the solicitor contacted my husband and he explained that you don't have to move until the council provides you temporary accommodation, so ignore that letter." [Interview 44]

[73]The one research participant with recourse to public funds in Wales was considered high priority for support due to being older and having multiple health issues. He was positive about his current support though more critical of not being given help with sleeping rough when he was much younger. [Interview 6]

How people felt racism affected their experiences of accessing statutory support

Interviewees did not generally talk about overt experiences of racism when dealing with staff in the statutory homelessness system. However, there were ways in which they felt racism prevented them from accessing effective support or suitable housing from these services.

A few people described encountering explicitly racist harassment or abuse whilst in social housing or temporary forms of accommodation, and felt the responses to this were either inadequate, or that they shouldn't have happened in the first place. A resident in 'exempt' accommodation[74] in England described how another tenant was racist and violent towards her and that she felt the police did not hold him accountable for this. The accommodation provider seemed to do little as part of this process.

"[Another tenant] and her partner would be fighting and everything. So at one point, it would come to a point that the behaviour was so bad that I ended up intervening, because like she was screaming 'Get off me, get off me' and I was like 'is everything okay?' and then her partner was telling me to fuck off and all of that and then we ended up arguing. So he wanted to fight me, and then he started saying racial slurs... I ended up getting the police involved twice because it was just getting ridiculous and I'm pissed because the police didn't do fuck all... their words were 'There is not enough evidence to fully arrest him. All we have to do is charge him with racial aggravation' and that was it, and I'm like 'Are you kidding me?' so it was ridiculous." [Interview 25]

A woman in Scotland who had fled her social rented housing due to racist harassment from neighbours, as described in section 3.2, said the response from the council and police was poor. She was offered accommodation in a location where she felt her family would also be unsafe, and therefore had no choice but to return to the housing where she was experiencing the harassment.

"My housing officer or the police they advise me to call them... and they said to me that we're going to help you, but the way that they treat me with no respect, it was not good things. It is not good that they are making me return to where I am... after I come back to my home, they call me and offer me a place that is really, really worse. Worse. I am scared to go there to live." [Interview 38]

Another interviewee in England was eventually able to leave temporary accommodation where she had experienced racist abuse, but whilst advocating for this, was threatened with being discharged from the council's duty towards her.

"I had to get a solicitor because they had shipped us out to [borough] in a racist area... it took six months because they didn't want me to come back into the borough... At one point they said they discharged duty and I made myself intentionally homeless. But they couldn't do it because I had a solicitor... [he] knew everything." [Interview 8]

As noted earlier in this chapter and in other research, it is common for people facing homelessness to be told by local authorities that the only housing they can be helped to access is a distance away from their local area and support networks. Building on this, there was in some cases a latent fear for people of colour that moving to a new area could mean they were at greater risk of racism. This was sometimes articulated as wanting to feel 'safe' or stay close to support networks, where, as discussed in chapter 3, there were people who described feeling safer from racism in some areas compared to others.

[74] Exempt accommodation is shared housing for people with support needs, and there have been many issues with 'rogue' landlords exploiting and not giving appropriate support to tenants. See: Crisis (2023), Bill to tackle rogue landlords passes key test in Parliament.

"All of a sudden I'm being asked to move all the way to Nottingham, which I told them I'm not going to. I said you would rather kill me than send me there because if you send me there, I'm not going to lie to you, you just want to kill me, because I'm going to die. And the guy goes 'Oh that is the only thing that we have right now at the moment, if you're not taking it, you're rendering yourself homeless' making yourself homeless, intentionally homeless, kind of. I was being threatened to be honest, but then I said to him I'm not taking it, not going to Nottingham, because I've got all my support system here in London." [Interview 39]

"I know some people as well that are still stuck in the countryside, and it affects their children because they don't get to play outside because the whites don't want to play with them. They're in their own bubble." [Interview 8]

There were then examples of people who suspected that discrimination may be taking place 'behind the scenes' when they were attempting to access homelessness support. One person felt that the poor support from the homelessness service was linked to a perception that she was threatening, and that this was linked to her racialised identity.

"I don't know if there is kind of discrimination going on there. I kind of have a feeling that there might be, but I don't want to just, you know. I don't want to just conclude on a false thinking... they see me as a threat, I have to be honest, each time I call them. They don't want to stay on the phone with me." [Interview 39]

The belief that racism was underlying the treatment received from homelessness staff sometimes seemed informed by wider experiences with public services in Britain, and was spoken about as part of a wider anxiety about whether providing information about ethnicity to a public service was necessary, or potentially harmful, as discussed in chapter 2. One person seeking homelessness support was asked if she had family to stay with and felt this was based on assumptions about people of colour being from larger families.

It's arguable that this question would be posed by most statutory homelessness services, regardless of someone's ethnic background, to try and find a solution to someone's living situation.

However, as the interviewee was also asked to provide extensive evidence to prove her citizenship, despite having lived in the country for around 20 years, it seems understandable for her to view this question through the lens of racism. Whilst some circumstances require people to prove their citizenship status to access homelessness support, the fact they need to do so is linked to a wider system of discriminating against non-UK nationals, and in particular migrants of colour, as discussed in chapter 3. In addition, the amount of documentation required of her could be evidence of a gatekeeping practice. If not asked of all service users, this would point to direct discrimination against people of colour.

"I keep saying to them I don't have anybody that will help me, I don't have friends, I don't have family, there is just me by myself... they want extra documentation, they wanted my passport, they're asking me what is my status, and I keep telling them I'm British and they are like 'Oh we need proof of that' and I'm like you can easily go on the database and get that. Why do I need to bring in my passport and my certificates of nationality? I don't understand... I put down place of birth, which is Trinidad, so straight away automatically they are wanting to know my immigration status, which I have to tell them, I've been living here like 20 odd years and I don't need to show you that. I said you should find that out, like straight way. As long as I've got a national insurance number, you know my status, and I keep saying to them, and then they're like 'No, we need more documents, we need more of this, need more of that, we need to know how long you've been here.'" [interview 25]

Related to this, people talked about how being given support by another person of colour working for the local authority did not necessarily lead to an improvement in the quality of support given. This could make it challenging to identify racism if staff they were in contact with were also people of colour.

"I just feel like it's hard to even pinpoint a lot of things because like I said, there's a lot of people that look like us [at the council]." [Interview 8]

Though some services seemed to be racially 'diverse' in terms of their staffing, this did not improve the experience of people of colour approaching them for support. Sometimes people felt they were paired up with a member of staff with a similar ethnic identity as a deliberate strategy, and there were also comments about how it might be a way to be more dismissive towards someone.

"I thought that because I was Black and she [housing officer] was Black she wasn't taking it as seriously as she was meant to be taking it, that I was really homeless, actually homeless, outside. And she just wasn't taking me seriously. Like I was her niece or something. And that is the same like when I first had a support worker here [in supported accommodation.] She was a nice woman but she was acting as if I was her daughter and she just left her professionalism out, which meant that she didn't do her job as to what she was meant to be doing." [Interview 15]

"It's like if there is a complaint or any sort of expression or emotional expression or an expression that might contradict what they're offering or suggesting, it's like they bring another Black person in to basically beg on their behalf. It's almost like, oh yeah we'll just bring another Black person to you because you probably have kinetic powers, and you can align with each other and understand what we're trying to say. It's like, bringing another black person does not change the fact that you're telling another Black person to still come and tell me that I need to basically move out of my house because my husband is abusing me. It doesn't lessen the blow... In my experience I've always felt like there's just a Black face that's used to pass on crap news." [Interview 13]

How families felt trapped in the homelessness system

Finally, there were ways in which the themes described in this report came to a head in particular for parents of colour. These interviewees were often lone mothers of school-age children, often identified as Black, and tended to live in London or other major urban areas in England. According to the quantitative findings outlined in the introduction, these interviewees represent the circumstances of people receiving some of the worst treatment in the homelessness system.

Many parents talked about being stuck in a cycle of moving between different forms of unsuitable homes, particularly in high-pressure housing market areas like London, and repeatedly experiencing homelessness as a result. As well as being evicted due to property redevelopment and having to move out due to poor living conditions, interviewees spoke of being given poor support from homelessness services (such as being directed to an unaffordable property).

Some felt that their situation would have been resolved more easily had they not been from a minoritised ethnic group. One interviewee was still in temporary accommodation over two years after having been moved out of social housing because the severe mould was affecting her daughter's lung health. She felt that there were many tenants in her estate who had been affected by similar issues, and that people of colour were disproportionately affected by the social landlord's mismanagement. She commented on how this was damaging the lives of many children of colour living without suitable homes.

"A lot of the people that I've met are people of colour who have been put in this temporary situation, which is sad because if the council know that they have to rehouse you, rather than keep you in limbo and cause all this stress and trauma and instability, especially for the children. The adults okay, it's bad, but for the children that are our future, that is a sad part for me. I just think that is totally unfair on them. Nine times out of ten, it's children of colour or parents of colour. So that's what really sits with me, and it just makes me think and feel that something needs to be done. Because this is not right." [Interview 14]

Another participant felt Black women were being treated particularly badly in the homelessness system in her area.

"[Racism] blocks us from getting the homes that we deserve, I think. I feel like we get the worst of the worst, to be honest. Even with temporary accommodation, do you know what I mean? Here in [London borough] the only people that have been getting evicted are Black women... Also just the checks that we have to go through. Like we have to have a guarantor and stuff like that. I know white people that are moving from home to home and going nowhere near the checks that we're having to do. Or getting the references and stuff like that, so they seem to be more trusting off the bat. Do you know what I'm saying?"
[Interview 27]

This case illustrates how the need for statutory services to lean on the private rented sector to end people's homelessness, due to a lack of supply of social homes, results in people from Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic groups approaching their local authorities for help, then experiencing the discrimination throughout the private rented sector as described in chapter 3.

In addition, mothers often described how these issues were exacerbated by gender-based discrimination when using homelessness services. Women described feeling both invisible and hyper-visible – as being both ignored, but then treated as overly aggressive if they decided to speak up.

"With the council it's more just trying to advocate for myself and stand my ground and be heard. It's just fighting to be heard... You are treated as if you don't matter... more from the housing [compared to other services]. But it is a thing where you are disregarded a lot and you're seen as a situation that you'd want to ignore or eliminate, that's how I feel." [Interview 14]

"'Oh we've been told you've refused two properties. If you refuse this one you're making yourself homeless', like should you even be saying that, who told you that, how did you know that? I really didn't want to take my anger out on him because I know once you start doing that you're being labelled an angry Black woman."
[Interview 39]

These themes come together in case study 5 below, where an interviewee experienced a range of these issues, and felt that the housing and homelessness system as it currently operates means that people of colour are being trapped in homelessness.

Case study 5: The homelessness experiences of Elaine* and her children [Interview 8]

Elaine is living in temporary accommodation with her children but has been experiencing homelessness and insecure housing on and off for more than a decade. She talked about how homelessness services have failed her, by pushing her to rent unaffordable housing in the private rented sector, moving her into unsuitable temporary accommodation, and reducing her opportunities to access more affordable social housing. She feels her situation is less common for white families.

"I've been bouncing around, you can say homeless for probably 14 years now... they put you on the housing list and then they take you off the housing list and they put you back on. It's like when you get homeless again they'll find you a property, they'll try and find you something that is private so then they have an excuse to take you off. Then you're homeless again, they put you back on it. I feel like I'm bouncing around which is just not nice... there's people that I've known of have just been housed. Like when it's a certain situation they've been housed. In particular white women."

Experiences of domestic violence have left Elaine with complex PTSD, anxiety and depression, and her daughter also has mental health challenges. Elaine feels that support with staying safe from her ex has been poor.

The emergency accommodation house she was staying in was accessible to strangers, and trying to keep her family safe contributed to her being threatened with a social services investigation.

"I saw big footsteps. Like they came in and the footprints was on. So I just changed the locks, and they got upset about that. They was desperately trying to do what they wanted to do and harass me. They even had Social Services on me and stuff like that and made up some stuff with Social Services. Then when I complained about, where did this referral come from, it's like no-one knew."

Elaine also talked about having to move between different forms of temporary accommodation, and services trying to pass on responsibility for her housing situation to one another.

"They have certain contracts where they're sending people in accommodation and then after a year they're being kicked out. I was in my last one, it was only for a year. So I'm like, why did you just put me in that one for a year and then kick me out... I've tried to stick to my guns to try and stay in [home borough]. But they moved us out to Dartford and then they moved us back in, then they tried to move us to here, now it's Merton. But then it's like they tried to sneak- slyly discharge and say, well we're Merton's responsibility."

My caseworker's saying no, but she's under temporary accommodation which is your responsibility... I just feel sometimes with our demographic, I feel like in particular services are not for us. They wasn't for us in the beginning. So when we come up against situations their excuse is they'll kick us out of the borough and let another borough deal with us, it's too much money."

Elaine describes the poor condition of temporary accommodation she has been placed in: she has stayed in a property filled with black mould, and currently has to travel for nearly two hours to drop off her children at their school.

"I still take them to school, it's nearly two hours, about an hour and 45 minutes. Yeah it could take as long as that. I still take them to school there because I want them to have still the stability. Even though I don't like that school, it's racist, but they have some friends there that they like."

Elaine says she has been threatened with being classed as 'intentionally' homeless when she has refused to move into unsuitable temporary accommodation.

"They're sending you into properties they know is not suitable and then they probably know some people's breaking point and a lot of people will say I'm not moving in there, I'm not going in there. They say to them, oh you're intentionally homeless."

Elaine feels that she would have been treated differently if she were white, and that services are not built around the needs of people of colour. She also talked about being stereotyped as aggressive and treated impersonally by homelessness services. She feels experiences with domestic violence were used against her in keeping her away from her local area.

"With white women I've noticed they get the treatment of housing, they get social services, the education, all of this. I'm being seen like as a monster. Even with housing, I thought because of my situation I'd be able to get housed properly and stuff, they just use the excuse and their little clauses they always try and use, is she's fleeing so we've put her somewhere else so she can flee over there.

'She's not safe', that's what they're using, so that they'll get rid of you... It's so awkward because even when you're trying to advocate for your child or something, they're flinching. It's the first thing, they don't see you as a person."

Elaine thinks that underneath her experiences there are wider issues with housing preventing herself and other people from minoritised ethnic groups from having a settled home. She says that as accessing social housing has got harder over time, younger generations are more likely to become homeless. She feels that as more social housing is lost, people of colour in particular are becoming homeless as a result.

"Why is it that we're not getting houses and we're housed in horrible places and in temporary accommodation and then again that they have no intention of moving us out and they're selling all the social housing and they're doing all of this? I'm just wondering, in ten years' time where are we going? Where are we going to go if there's no more houses? They're selling off social housing, so there's people ending up that are in social housing being evicted too because they're selling the blocks off."

*Names have been changed to protect people's identities

4.2 Interviewees' experiences with non-statutory homelessness support

Beyond local councils, people often turned to other sources of help when they were facing homelessness. This was particularly important for people with No Recourse to Public Funds who were unable to access Home Office accommodation, who worked with groups that organised hosting schemes where they could stay with other households. Advice from charities, friends and community groups about how to navigate homelessness and other services in the UK was also welcomed by non-UK nationals who were newer to the country.

Across the interviews, people also sought or received help from a range of homelessness charities and reported a mix of positive and negative experiences. People talked in particular about the benefits of having contact with a support worker who dedicated time to listening to someone's problems; receiving more tailored support with health and wellbeing to help resolve their housing issues; and having someone who could act as an advocate for them with a statutory homelessness service.

"[They] helped me to get access for counselling and then I also now know that I have some mental illnesses and one of them is PTSD… Being able to talk about it. Yes… I am happy to be able to share as well, and this is as a result of the work of the charities… that have been putting a lot of the support for me, yes." [Interview 45]

Again, in some cases, individual friends or acquaintances could also play these roles, with examples of people who acted as advocates including doctors, local religious leaders, and solicitors. Some people also gained access to more bespoke accommodation where they received wraparound support to help resolve other issues connected to their homelessness.

"It's like Housing First… [but] they look after basically single women with like alcohol background, like domestic violence. People who have been having violence, abuse, and this kind of thing basically, and they took me in to care… I have got that keyworker…

who looks after me weekly, and basically she is [happy to come to an] appointment if I need to go… I am someone sometimes that's 'Oh, I don't want to go to the doctor' when actually it is [important to go]." [Interview 21]

When support from non-statutory services was less helpful, this was often because of organisations being too limited in their expertise to address the range of problems the person was experiencing, having limited resources to offer, or providing support for a short period of time. One person described how she felt the charities she had turned to did not work together well enough to help address the complex problems she had experienced.

"I just think that there is too many services available not doing enough… It's like really weak, weak services available and they don't realise that people's lives are in the balance, their mental health is in the balance." [Interview 20]

It is worth noting that the interviews brought up similar issues with discrimination from non-statutory homelessness services as had been experienced with local authorities. People spoke of feeling judged based on ethnic identity, and of stereotypes about being 'difficult' to work with. People also picked up on culturally insensitive and prejudiced comments.

"I feel that the way that society is – and the way that people's attitudes from my experience and what I see, each one of those – the categories that you're ticking, the services look at it and go like 'Oh, that's a negative, that's a negative, I'm going to have to work with there, that is something I'm going to have to work around there with this client." [Interview 2]

"'Wow, your English is so good', because I'm an asylum seeker. Migrant. What, you think I'm uneducated just because I come from a banana republic?" [Interview 33]

By contrast, there were some comments about the benefits of receiving support from people who they had shared experiences with, and who understood the importance of being able to tailor services towards someone's cultural or national background, for example, by offering translation.

"In terms of language I get asked do you want us to have this conversation in English or do you need a translator… In terms of understanding, I have come to realise that they also have a mixture of people from other ethnic groups as well working for them so I think that has also …these people have the experience [of immigration] as well." [Interview 46]

Conclusions

Existing evidence (described in the introduction) points to a higher risk of homelessness for people from Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic groups than for white people, and this chapter shines a spotlight on the role both statutory and non-statutory homelessness services play in perpetuating this inequality.

The stories shared by our participants came from a context of challenges that exist throughout this sector, i.e. under-resourcing, low housing stock, bad quality housing, slow progress, and missed opportunities for joined-up working. Within this context, the stories built a picture of staff in the very services set up to help prevent and end their homelessness not advocating for them, avoiding them or not prioritising them based on racial bias. There were instances of indifference from staff in response to racist incidents. Women and parents faced additional challenges, contending with both gender- and 'race'-based discrimination. All of this leads to people staying longer in unsuitable or unsafe accommodation. In addition, the homelessness system is inextricably linked to structural racism in the wider housing system.

Interviewees' experiences of non-statutory homelessness services shared some of the same themes around limited resource and limited time, which will affect a person facing multiple disadvantages and a build-up of pressure far more negatively.

However, there were examples of positive experiences from statutory and non-statutory services, borne out of successful partnership working across services, support tailored to meet needs more closely, and compassionate staff who recognised the additional challenges people from Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic groups were facing around their housing.

5.“[We are] all one family’: what helped people to navigate racism and homelessness

This final chapter focuses on the protective factors and sources of strength that participants drew on to navigate the challenges in their lives, and how these varied across the interviews.

5.1 Sources of strength and support

As noted in the previous chapter, non-statutory and informal forms of support were, in some cases, particularly important in helping people to navigate or leave behind homelessness. Some interviewees had also gone on to volunteer or work with organisations supporting people with homelessness, immigration issues and other challenges, even if they themselves were still going through such issues. They found supporting other people to be a source of comfort in processing their own experiences, and in developing a renewed sense of purpose.

"I like to try and help other [similar] people and in general I feel I like to help anyone that is suffering from mental health, so helping others helps me." [Interview 29]

Some people found that becoming politically active around causes that were important to them helped to keep them motivated. There were comments about how working on anti-racist activism also fostered a sense of connection with other people, as well as a sense of solidarity with other marginalised groups of people.

"Getting involved with different sorts of activisms online has been really helpful, especially during COVID, like I was living along every day seeing Asian people being attacked every day on social media, or being blamed by the news and stuff for COVID and seeing the way that they were using Asian faces for all of the media around COVID. And that was really isolating... I don't think I had a lot of friends around me who were [Asian] as well.... Connecting with people who were going through these experiences was really important... we did things like we organised protests." [Interview 12]

"We had some protest in London and some people came out and they just insult us, you know. 'Just go back to your country, why are you on the street, what are you fighting for?'...if there is a hard life it is hard for everyone and you should join us because now there is many groups that are originally from this country and they stand with us. And we are standing for those that are vulnerable in the society." [Interview 4]

For participants with NRPF and seeking asylum in the UK, the role of self-education was described as empowering. Becoming familiar with their rights through independent research, though not without challenges to navigate to legitimate sources, built a sense of agency and control in an otherwise opaque and unknown situation. The led many participants on to engage in advocacy work, supporting other migrants and asylum seekers with their applications, and passing on knowledge. This type of community resource sharing created power and comradery which seemed to contribute to a sense of purpose.

"I always have to manage everything in my life and that is a good way, and I learn to try to maximise my chances to get everything in one ... So I went to one site, the UK.gov website, and researched about it and went to the Citizen's Advice website as well and got as much information as I could and if my situation compared with the claiming requirement." [Interview 47]

"Nothing is so beautiful like knowing your rights. If you know your rights then people will not cheat you. They will not treat you bad because if you know your rights and you are somewhere and experiencing racism or unfair treatment, you know what to do about that, you know here to report it, and if you tell the person look, is it because this is this, why are you doing this? Is this the way that you guys treat everybody or are you just singling me out and doing the wrong thing, because I know that this is not allowed under so and so and so and so." [Interview 17]

In some cases, knowledge was shared through communities of people facing homelessness, members of which could be a source of solidarity for one another. This included those in Home Office accommodation waiting for a decision on their legal status, groups of people who slept rough in a given area, and people giving each other practical support with food and laundry during prolonged stays in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

"We eat different kinds of food as well with other asylum seekers. They cook Eritrean food and sometimes it's Algerian food, sometimes it's Yemeni food, so different kinds of cultures. At first they were all one family, so I was one of the parts of the family because we are all in the same situation and waiting for a decision to be made, so we used to gather together and have some food and have something going on, sometimes go for a walk. We go to play football in the park." [Interview 5]

More generally, family and friends were sometimes important sources of financial, practical and emotional help; and relieving day-to-day pressures.

"When I was living in the hotel I had friends cooking and bringing food for me weekly. They would cook and bring food to me. I had two friends that were cooking every week to bring in home cooked meals for me and my kids and I had a friend that was taking off my laundry to wash in her house. Another friend cut a key to her flat for me to go there over the weekend, cook, whatever, whatever time I wanted to go and wash my clothes and cook some meal there. For me that was quite helpful because I didn't realise the laundrette had become so expensive." [Interview 17]

'Chosen' family was an important source of support for people experiencing multiple intersecting marginalised identities, especially for queer people of colour who reported experiencing disconnection from their family of origin. Chosen family helped to combat the loneliness which was described at both the physical level, as well as at a psychological and ideological level.

"So the first group I ever joined, it was very nice and they built me up because there were a lot of people who were born here and they were dealing with the same thing, and I was like 'Oh, it's not just me'... it's like actually the Welsh ballroom community, if you have heard about it... It was kind of supportive, because they knew my situation and everyone's situation there so we were trying to support each other. We would meet like three times a week and see, laugh, dancing. We can just have a fire down the river and just sing. It was just free. It was so free. I loved that. We were so much free and you feel like at least it's some people you are related with and in some situations and you're still there and happy.' [Interview 49]

Other people talked about inner strength and their individual efforts as being important when facing the pressures of homelessness. In one example given, an interviewee drew on the wisdom of a culture different to his own.

"I mean a few coping mechanisms. One is to never give up hope. Because just like it rains, the sun will always come out, you know, you have to weather the storm basically... I think never give up. Because there is a native tribe in my country and a friend of mine translated this to me... even the British couldn't dare to colonise them because they had skulls hanging on the windows and their motto is... my friend said to me it's like 'the longer I live the more daring I become.'" [Interview 33]

Parents talked about how their children were a motivation to keep going while in difficult living situations.

"Just get my kids settled and let them know that no matter what this is where you're supposed to be... My kids are the main thing that keep me going, making sure that they don't go through what I had to go through." [Interview 16]

"I am stronger than I know. That's not through a stereotypical branding, that's a strength that I've pulled upon within me. I have this determination in me to get the job done when it needs to be. Not only for me, but for my children as well." [Interview 14]

There were also people who talked about the inspiration and drive they had been given by their parents or other relatives – in some cases from people who were in another country or who had passed away.

"The memory of my mum, because remember when I told you that inner voice tells me to wake up, I think that is kind of like my mum's spiritual because she kind of still lives with me and she's like there. 'I didn't get you there to just sleep. Do something.'" [Interview 49]

Related to this, having a strong connection to cultural heritage was a key protective factor for people to protect against the detrimental impacts of racial trauma. In addition, in some cases, feeling connected to cultural origins contributed to an empowered self-identity that combatted the harmful narratives perpetuated by a society where systemic racism exists.

"I will give you a very good example, like if you meet a typical Igbo man from Nigeria, anywhere in the world, even if you meet them in India, in the Antarctic, the arctic, Greenland or whatever, and you ask them their name – they will give you their first name, middle name, family name, their father's names, his grandparent's name, his house, whatever the house is, his village, house – he gives you everything all the way down to his roots and it is a very, very proud thing to do."[Interview 19]

For one interviewee who had been without leave to remain for twelve years, feeling connected to, and proud of, her heritage and family's history in their home country seemed to provide a sense of confidence and perseverance:

"My mum is like a princess... Exactly, yes, and in our place, in my mum's place, a woman – whoever she gives birth to, that child naturally belongs to the royal family. So it is always connected. So for me, I see myself as an Esan from the Benin kingdom." [Interview 19]

Some participants spoke about the role of spirituality in enabling them to persevere through the painful and exhausting experience of homelessness. Whilst not all participants shared a spiritual or religious perspective, some viewed the world and their experiences through a religious framework, and their faith created room for a sense of perspective, which framed their homelessness as a 'journey' and not a coincidence. Participants with faith spoke about miraculous experiences of healing, and in one case they ascribed their housing breakthroughs to supernatural intervention.

"For me, my spirituality, even attending church is always very important to me because I would say that that was the main thing that kept me together. That was the main thing that gave me the strength and the positivity through the process. I felt I was on a journey and nothing happens coincidentally and you cannot face the situation that you have no way out of. Whatever situation comes to me, or to anybody, it will never be too much for them. You never get more than you can bear. So for me I believed in that and attending the retreat kind of made me to feel that presence. Being in the place of worship, you know there is this peace that you experience when you are in a temple, a place of worship" [Interview 17]

"Because at that point actually there was this particular prayer I had made. I said I wanted God to give me a miracle that was beyond my understanding, that was beyond my comprehension. Because yes, looking at how I got the accommodation, I remember my housing officer saying it will take 8-13 years of being on the waiting list to get a place and now I got my bidding number in April, I was evicted in July, and by September I got a call to say I ranked first in a property I bid for." [Interview 17]

There were many interviewees who did not have a religious background or faith, or did not talk about these resources as being relevant to their lives and as a source of strength.

5.2 Barriers to internal and external sources of strength

The nature of homelessness and racism could mean that the resources described above were out of reach. People talked about struggling with their mental health and how this made it challenging to find ways to cope.

"There was a time that I had to medicate for depression and I am a bubbly, outward looking, really forward-thinking guy but I was really in the depths of despair then and the best coping mechanism is I have just tried to say that I won't let it beat me, but that is a very difficult situation that I have to work on every day, and sometimes speaking to people like yourselves, again – I've had an outlet here and it will probably keep me going for another few days and then I find something else, so it's about constantly addressing the situation and saying I will not let it beat me because otherwise it can." [Interview 1]

For many, informal support and community networks were missing from their lives. These participants described issues with isolation because of their location, health, or responsibilities at work or when caring for family. They also commented on how being marginalised based on their identity meant that they had less developed support networks or did not have a clear sense of community.

"The one thing as well that affects me and my children like racially, is that there's no community anymore... When I was about nine years old and stuff I used to go to school on my own. It was fine... They'd say hi to your mum and stuff like that. They'd be watching me, and I don't know they're watching me. They would tell my mum, oh she didn't go home, she's running up and down. I didn't know they were watching. They wouldn't do it in a way to make my mum feel like she's a bad mum or whatever, everyone had that community spirit where you knock on the friend's house and stuff. I feel it's all gone. [Interview 8]

Indeed, it was notable that factors which could act as sources of strength for some people could have been sources of harm for others. Some people described how their family or partners had contributed to their becoming homeless. This reflects evidence on homelessness more widely, including white people – in the 2022-23 financial year, households in England who had been assessed as facing homelessness by their local authority reported the most common reason for their homelessness was family or friends no longer accommodating them.[75]

"Every man for himself, you understand. If you don't have a very close, tight-knit friend, like a very close friend you can easily run to in times of need, you are more or less on your own if anything happens to you, so that was exactly what happened to me when my ex came to an end and she asked me to leave the house. So I became homeless and so I was sleeping rough." [Interview 19]

Similarly, people talked about how they were sometimes ostracised or stigmatised because of their actual or perceived behaviours from a family or community, that contributed to their becoming homelessness or meant they couldn't access informal help. This meant that some saw family or community as a source of danger.

"I used to rent from someone I know, so a faith-based relationship. The relationship broke down because of accusations that she made against me, so I was just asked to leave without giving me the opportunity to find somewhere to live, or an alternative... I was being accused of taking information outside." [Interview 31]

"There is a quote in the bible of Love Thy Neighbour and it's a sin to covet your neighbour and stuff like that and I was literally put in a situation where there was nothing but hate coming from my neighbours and myself and I was in that perpetually day in and day out and I was wondering why I wasn't getting any blessings and it was just bad luck, upon bad luck, upon back luck and I could not escape that situation. I was in this hamster wheel." [Interview 20]

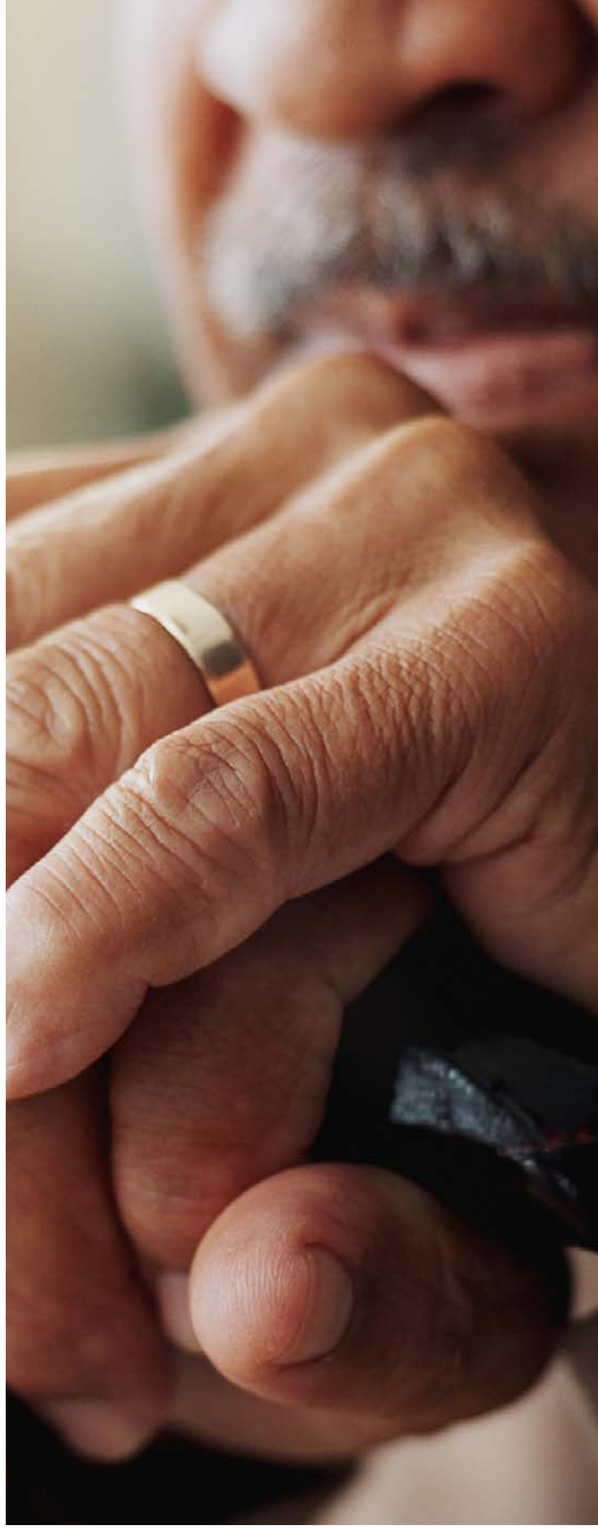
Examples of other ways in which people had been ostracised from communities and families included stigma around drug use and prejudice towards sexuality.

"If something [bad] happened to you, who is going to look after, who is going to fucking care? Nobody. Nobody. You know, you are not even going to be in the news. You're going to say 'fucking junkie, homeless' that is all you're going to say. That's it... You get rejected actually by family, even by the community... there is such a taboo, you know. Such a shame. You bring shame to the community ...you know, you are just being fucking bullied." [Interview 21]

Interviewees also described how people who they were close to during their homelessness were potential sources of harm to them once they had left homelessness behind.

"Some people try to harm me ...you know you need to cut certain relationships you have with people because people become bitter and stupid and try to harm you, so the life from the past ....it can be very trying, very, very ugly." [Interview 21]

The final case study in this report illustrates some of these tensions, as one man's experiences of racism and homelessness left him fairly isolated to deal with the psychological harm caused to him, though he had found some resources and strengths to draw on in daily life.



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Case study 6: How Andy* tried to cope with racism and homelessness [Interview 29]

Andy identifies as Black but grew up in a city where other people were predominantly white. He described experiencing verbal racist abuse as a child and feeling threatened.

"People were intimidating. One time I jumped on the bus and someone was sitting next to me looking at me, there was a few of them and it made me very uncomfortable and I had to leave that situation because I was very uncomfortable in case I got attacked."

Racism affected Andy's confidence and self-esteem, as well as his sense of belonging.

"I used to like hide my middle name because I was ashamed of it. I used to always point out that my mother was white and I just so wanted to be white like everyone else and now I am actually proud of my dark skin."

Andy went through a difficult time towards the end of his childhood. In the space of a year, his parents split up and one of them moved far away to a different area. He also found out that he had been adopted as a baby. At this time he didn't want to live with his parents anymore. Without much money of his own, he had to sofa surf with friends.

"Finding out I was adopted at age 18, it really upset me and made me feel lost in the world. If I was told at a younger age I wouldn't have run away and maybe the relationship would have been better... unfortunately that done quite a lot of damage to my mental health which I'm recovering from."

Eventually as Andy began working, he was able to rent a flat of his own, but his mental health was still poor, and he kept his adoption a secret from his friends. He decided to work abroad but struggled to balance work and health issues, and at one stage became homeless again.

"I struggled to find some accommodation and yeah, I was jumping from hotel to hotel until I secured an apartment and I wasn't homeless anymore. It can be quite stressful when you're in these situations. It can have quite an impact on your mental health."

After issues with substance dependency, Andy developed an auto-immune disease that left him unable to work full time. Through this, he began to receive better medical care for his trauma, which made day-to-day life easier. He also became eligible for social housing in Scotland. He then found that opening up to people about his own experiences, and supporting others experiencing similar challenges, was a source of strength for him.

"I talk a lot about mental health and on my road to recovery. So I am trying to be an inspiration for people... now I am willing to share my secret to anyone and everyone as well as listen... attending support groups, speaking about my story to anyone that is willing to listen... I like to try and help other adopted people."

Andy also said there are times when he still feels quite alone, and that he is struggling to truly feel 'at home' at this stage of his life.

If you don't have a family your mental health can take a dip, family meaning partner, children, life can feel like it's getting away from you in your 30s and 40s but I'm learning to cope with that... It's different points in my life, different stages, I have had the support and other stages I've felt like I'm completely alone... I love Scotland. I also love Morocco. There is a bit of an identity crisis where I don't feel at home in Scotland and I also don't feel at home in Morocco. That is the risks and that's the challenges that people of colour face, these identity crises."

*Names have been changed to protect people's identities

Conclusions

Despite the manifold pressures created by homelessness and housing precarity, which are compounded by overt and subtle forms of racial discrimination, drawing on external sources (religious communities, 'chosen' families, children), as well as internal ones (like connection to one's heritage or faith) can act as a buffer against the challenges people face.

These are important coping mechanisms, but they alone cannot prevent or end someone's homelessness, and cannot be a substitute for effective services needed to end homelessness and racism. They are also in no way a given. The disadvantages associated with housing instability (such as mental ill health, isolation, and stigma) can become barriers to the meaningful sources of strength that could be empowering and stabilising.

This chapter shows how important practical and psychological support can be to maintain dignity and motivation under such dehumanising circumstances; and yet how even this can be out of reach in a context of multiple disadvantages.

6.Conclusions and recommendations

Racism and discrimination have no place in our society, yet its pervasiveness and the impact it has on people of colour across Great Britain remains.

The experiences of the participants in this research show that in the UK, themes of racist practices, hostile immigration policy and racial discrimination continue to be highly relevant today. Systemic racism and xenophobia, along with broader prejudices, impact people of colour profoundly. This research aimed to connect these issues to personal human experiences, especially regarding interviewees' housing and homelessness journeys.

The interviews provided accounts of people's experience of homelessness and racism and how these dual experiences affect each other. Racial discrimination in our interviewees' stories manifests as overt and implicit, at an individual level and also into the very systems that people interact with every day, causing homelessness and making homelessness harder to avoid or escape from.

Our research found that:

- **Experiences of racism and discrimination, whether direct or structural, have an impact on people's relationships with society, institutions, and services. This creates distance at best and at worst greatly damages someone's identity. These equate to a 'pressure' that can either directly lead to homelessness or contribute to existing housing pressures.**
- **Racism and discrimination aggravate some of the main causes of homelessness. This manifests in increased contact with the police and criminal justice system based on racist assumptions; discrimination by landlords and employers due to racist belief or actions; ingrained economic discrimination that causes people of colour to be over represented in poverty; physical health issues that are not treated appropriately due to racist assumptions. In addition, services do not take account of the impact of these and other generational traumas on people of colour's mental health. These all contribute to the structural, interpersonal and personal risk factors of homelessness being more acute for people of colour and therefore more likely to lead to homelessness.**
- **People of colour who participated in this research had negative encounters with homelessness services. This included not being able to access the support as well as being treated differently by those offering support. Despite the over-representation of people of colour in homelessness services, few services have offers that take this into consideration when providing support.**
- **People of colour who participated in this research drew on community, activism, family, faith, and education to help them navigate the challenges of racism and homelessness. But the isolating effects of racism and homelessness mean that for some people, these resources are out of reach.**

Pressures that put housing at risk can be structural, personal, or interpersonal. These pressures are often multifaceted, layered and closely linked with poverty, trauma and other vulnerabilities. Not only do these pressures lead to homelessness but they are aggravated by homelessness, making it harder to navigate services and systems to find accommodation that can become a home.

This research showed how racism and discrimination are not only a pressure in and of itself, but also intersect with other pressures cumulatively impacting on someone's housing. This is how deep-seated inequality, including direct and more subtle forms of racism, contribute to people of colour being overrepresented in homelessness statistics in England, Scotland and Wales.

Recommendations

The Experts by Experience group developed a set of actions for Crisis in response to the findings of this report. These can be found in Appendix 6.

These actions informed the following recommendations to accompany this report.

1. Our culture at Crisis

The research is an important evidence base, which we must build on by continuing to listen, learn and reflect on the experiences of people from minoritised ethic communities. Racism and discrimination have no place in our society and Crisis is committed to working against this. Everyone should have a safe place to call home, and we are determined to be there for everyone who needs our support.

Alongside this research, Crisis is working to meaningfully embed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in our work and our organisational culture and practices. Our 10 year strategy sets out a bold vision for the beginning of the end of homelessness which is about thinking bigger and developing solutions to overcome the barriers to progress. Our work must be grounded in fairness and equity. We're on a journey to meet this vision and after a full external review of our policies, workplace culture and ways of working we have committed to:

- **A learning and development programme so that all managers at Crisis have the knowledge and understanding to equitably and consistently apply our policies and practices and address equality, diversity and inclusion issues in the workplace including bullying, harassment and micro-aggressions**
- **Be more transparent with decision-making, understanding and application of Crisis' policies such as our pay and renumeration policy**
- **Develop targeted programmes to support under-represented groups to succeed in the workplace and grow the potential of our existing colleagues, including development programmes to support staff with lived experience of homelessness and colleagues who are from minoritised ethic communities to ensure they can learn, grow and ultimately succeed at Crisis.**

2. Our services at Crisis

Our network of Skylights provide support up and down the country – from finding a home, to applying for jobs, learning vital skills, and accessing healthcare and support. We want to provide people the best services possible. The research has identified a lack of suitable and inclusive services for people from minoritised ethnic communities and highlighted experiences of discrimination when seeking help. In the next 12 months we will:

- **Improve data collection on protected characteristics - including ethnicity - to better understand who is using our services and groups who are under-represented in the areas we work in**
- **Explore how to reach those under-represented groups who may benefit the most from our service offer**
- **Commit to reviewing our whole service offer to particular marginalised groups, using insight and external resources to improve access and outcomes.**

3. Policy solutions

With the right polices in place we can end homelessness. But these must work for everyone and there are historical and structural barriers stopping people getting equal access to housing and support. The research has evidenced experiences of overt and implicit racism and discrimination, which continues because of institutional racism and racially focused policies.

To address the disproportionate impact of homelessness on people of colour in England, the UK Government:

- **Should use the forthcoming cross-departmental homelessness strategy to look at the disproportionate impact of homelessness on people of colour and the intersectionality with other forms of discrimination. The cross- government strategy and inter-ministerial group on addressing all forms of homelessness should look at ways to mitigate this impact, including through improving the experience of housing options and access to and experience of social housing. The strategy should ensure that all public services people are likely to interact with when facing homelessness are involved in homelessness prevention activity as effectively as possible, including better integration between mental health and housing, which was identified as a particular issue for people of colour in this research.**
- **Should tackle discrimination in the private rental sector in England through the Renters' Rights Bill by ending Right to Rent, a policy which the High Court ruled in 2019 was causing racial discrimination.**

To address the disproportionate impact of homelessness on people migrating to the UK, the UK Government must make sure that everyone can access help and support to prevent or resolve their homelessness, regardless of where they are from.

As a minimum the UK government:

- **Must ensure that Home Office policies, including No Recourse to Public Funds, do not contribute to homelessness across the UK nations. Policies relating to newly recognised refugees must be improved to reduce the risk of people becoming homeless when leaving asylum accommodation. This includes:**
  - Extending the eviction notice for asylum accommodation to at least 56 days give people more time to find an alternative place to stay and services more time to help prevent homelessness.
  - Requiring Home Office accommodation providers to make referrals to local authority housing services when someone is given notice to leave their asylum accommodation.
  - Granting people in the asylum process the right to work after six months.
- **Should ensure that wider immigration policy does not push people into homelessness, including allowing those who have arrived since the introduction of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 to enter the asylum system and have their claims processed accordingly, and repealing the Illegal Migration Act 2023.**

While the majority of this research was conducted in England, we hope that the broad themes and learnings within this report may also provide helpful insights as other parts of the UK develop policies to address the disproportionate impact of homelessness on people of colour. For example, the actions relating to homelessness within the Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: How this research began

During the past few years, homelessness and housing organisations, as well as independent/academic researchers into homelessness among Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic groups in Great Britain, have taken a strong interest in the role that racism plays in the causes, experiences and impacts of homelessness. There was a widely recognised evidence gap around people of colour's experiences of homelessness, but a key trigger for this growing interest was the anti-racism protests that took place in Spring 2020, in the USA and other countries, following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer. This led many institutions in the Great Britain to, at least on the surface, talk more about 'race' equality or racism than they ever had before.

Crisis' commitment to focusing on racism and homelessness rose up the agenda thanks to ongoing efforts from staff of colour in 2020 advocating for the organisation to shine a light on the impact of racism on members (people who use Crisis' services because they are homeless). This also highlighted how racism can be ingrained in the organisational culture of institutions, including our own, even when there are well-intentioned efforts to change this. Staff from Crisis' research team therefore carried out some scoping work to identify different opportunities for further research. Research proposals were developed after reviewing existing evidence and consulting with a range of people about what they felt would be useful for the research to focus on, and how best to go about it. These consultations, which took the form of formal and informal meetings, interviews and an online survey, took place with Crisis staff, academics, national and local charities working on issues around 'race' equality, racism, housing and homelessness, as well as individuals with lived experience of racism and homelessness.

Even after this phase of work was completed, its spirit continued long afterwards in debates around how to design research materials and understand research findings.

- **To ensure that Crisis' work was filling an evidence gap, adding value to debates around racism and homelessness, avoiding duplication of the work of other organisations also doing research in this space, and taking an ethical approach to its work, the following key themes emerged from both the initial scoping phase and subsequent follow-up conversations:**
- **That the research should involve people with lived experience of the issues being explored. This was based on Crisis' lack of previous work on issues around 'race' and ethnicity in particular; and was seen as a way to create greater accountability towards the research audience, as well as being a way of improving research design and delivery.**
- **That the research should take as its starting point the position that racism in Great Britain is systemic, rather than approaching the topic from a more politically 'neutral' perspective.**
- **This research was seen as an important and valuable opportunity to raise awareness around experiences of homelessness among people of colour, and to identify or act on opportunities for change. However, a complex theme emerged around concerns around the risk of the research being extractive or potentially even harmful to people of colour who have experienced homelessness. This would depend on whether relevant opportunities for change were identified, as well as how the research was presented upon publication.**
- **Indeed, it is essential to recognise that millions of people of colour in Britain already have an intimate understanding of racism and that thousands have expertise about homelessness by virtue of their own experiences. The injustice of racism and homelessness already has an enduring legacy; even if it has not been adequately represented in more formal 'evidence', this does not negate the reality of its existence across centuries, most powerfully replicated through the British colonial project that instilled and solidified racial hierarchies.**

Therefore, many of the findings within the report itself will not be new or surprising to many readers who identify as people of colour and/or have worked in Britain's homelessness sector. This does not undermine the necessity of dedicating time, attention and resources towards gathering these experiences in a research format, in order to provide a basis upon which to equip ourselves and others to act. Given that people affected by racism and homelessness have a range of views about the nature and impact of their experiences, research like this provides the opportunity to bring together these different perspectives and try to identify key themes and points of difference.

The research team tried to remain cognisant of the risk of perpetuating 'negative' narratives about marginalised communities throughout the project. Despite benevolent intentions to bring about change by exposing the impact of the oppressive conditions in which people live, there remained a danger of perpetuating ideas of specific marginalised groups as being somehow inherently broken or pathological, making positive change seem impossible. See Crisis (2020), Talking about homelessness: Introduction to framing.[76]

To mitigate these risks, we followed advice from Eve Tuck's commentary on 'damage-centred' research. This includes presenting the significance of the social and historical context in which the damage is taking place, as well as committing to an epistemological shift that is able to hold and show complexity and multiplicity.[77]

Tuck reminds us of the importance of constructing a fuller representation of communities most intimately affected by oppressive conditions, including in this case, homelessness and systemic racism, in order to resist tendencies within research to oversimplify social issues.

There are many tensions and ethical dilemmas that we were required to navigate from the project inception; however, we sought to remain open and curious about how to make our efforts to report systemic harm in a way that does not undermine the humanity of those victimised by oppressive social conditions. We are committed to sharing the stories and experiences of our participants as honestly as possible in this research and embracing the calls to action of so many people affected by racism and homelessness that must stem from this inquiry. As expressed by one of our research participants, we feel a responsibility to

"transmit this message to the government on our behalf, maybe you are our voice today, as we can't get close to them to hear our voice. They don't know how people are living."

[76] See Crisis (2020), Talking about homelessness: Introduction to framing.

[77] Tuck, E. (2009), Suspending damage: A letter to communities, Harvard Educational Review, 79(3), 409-428.

Appendix 2: Definitions and language

1. Defining racism

The UK Government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities claimed in their 2021 report that racism in Britain was restricted to interpersonal experiences, rather than more institutional or structural forms. Leading anti-racism and 'race' equality organisations in the UK condemned this report[78]; and further reports have laid bare institutional racism in the organisations that govern British society[79], including the Home Office[80] and the Metropolitan Police[81]. Furthermore, the recent Chief Constable of Police Scotland publicly described the service as 'institutionally racist' around the time that we were gathering stories for the research.[82]

A challenge is sometimes made about how to 'prove' certain forms of racism exist, whether because experiences reported by individuals are too subjective, or because depending on how racism is defined, it may be 'hidden'. We take the presence of less 'tangible' forms of racism as a given.[83]

A crucial starting point for this report is that racism in Britain exists in a variety of forms and is systemic in nature. There is a wealth of evidence pointing to how people's experiences in areas such as health, the justice system and housing are often worse if they are from a minoritised ethnic group. The Evidence for Equality National Survey provides some up to date and large-scale evidence of how people experience racist discrimination; it revealed that nearly a third have experienced racial discrimination in the institutional settings of employment and education.[84]

We share the view expressed by many others that underlying these patterns are not only conscious beliefs about the inferiority of certain groups based on the artificial construct of 'race', but also 'structural' racism – a wider range of ideas and practices that cause harms to minoritised ethnic groups, in ways that sometimes are and sometimes are not linked to conscious beliefs in inferiority.

We agree with the position of the Reframing Race initiative that taken together, structural, interpersonal and institutional racism, jointly produce systemic racism, which causes harm to minoritised ethnic groups, and requires transformational change in order to be reset.[85]

Systemic racism

It is also important to be clear about the seriousness of the harms caused by systemic racism today. The Windrush scandal led to the uprooting of thousands of people's lives by threatening them with deportation, and deporting them, decades after they were granted the right to live in in the UK, resulting in the poor treatment and deaths of people of colour because of institutional racism in policing. Structural discrimination enables unequal outcomes for some ethnic groups in many ways; in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic this meant that healthcare professionals and patients of colour were more likely to die from the disease than those identifying as white. The cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately affecting people of colour, which is particularly notable given the strong relationship between poverty – and experiences of childhood poverty in particular – in driving homelessness.

Racism and these impacts all affect the health and wellbeing of people of colour, with racism now seen as one of the key social determinants of health, and minoritised ethnic groups being at higher risk of developing a mental health problem, but less likely to receive support for it. In addition, awareness of how racism affects you as a person of colour can in and of itself lead to worse mental health. A study using data from four waves of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) found that cumulative exposure to racial discrimination has incremental negative long-term effects on the mental health of people from minoritised ethnic groups in the United Kingdom. The enduring and negative psychological impact of racism is traumatic, and the findings from the present research illuminate this.

[78] Runnymede Trust (2021), Statement regarding the report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.

[79] Forrest, A. and White, N. (2023), No 10 crackdown on racism as minister warns officials n-word slurs won't be tolerated, The Independent 27 Aug 2023.

[80] Gentleman, A. (2022), Windrush scandal caused by '30 years of racism immigration laws' - report, The Guardian, 29 May 2022.

[81] Hamilton, F. (2023), Baroness Casey review: Met Police has lost public faith, says report, The Times, 21 Mar 2022.

[82] Police Scotland (2023), Chief Constable statement on institutional discrimination.

[83] An important influence on our thinking here have been other arguments that have been made about the role of racism in housing and policing, that argue for a need to go beyond both interpersonal and institutional understandings of racism. See: Elliott-Cooper, A. (2023), Abolishing institutional racism, Race & Class, 65(1), 100-118.
Lukes, S., de Noronha, N. and Finney, N. (2018). Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(17), 3188-3206. and Netto, G. and Abazie, H. (2012), Racial harassment in social housing in a multi-ethnic city: the case for moving beyond acting against individual perpetrators of racial harassment, Urban Studies, 50(4), 674-690.

[84] Ellingworth, D., Bécares, L., Šťastná, M. and Nazroo, J. (2023), '4. Racism and racial discrimination', in Finney, N., Nazroo, J., Bécares, L., Kapadia, D. and Shlomo, N. (ed), Racism and Ethnic Inequality in a Time of Crisis: Findings from the Evidence for Equality National Survey, Policy Press, Bristol, pp 54-77.

[85] Lingayah, S. and Kelly, N. (2023), Contains Strong Language: A Guide to Talking About Racism. Reframing Race. containsstronglanguagerrjuly23.pdf (reframingrace.org)

[86] Platt, L. (2021), Why ethnic minorities are bearing the brunt of COVID-19, London School of Economics and Political Science.

2. Language and terminology around 'race'

There are many debates around what language to use when describing who among us are subject to systemic racism, which were reflected in both our scoping phase and when working with the Experts by Experience panel. A few key themes of these discussions were as follows:

- **It is problematic to group together people from a range of backgrounds under an umbrella term, as it diminishes the variety of experiences people have. However, an overarching term is useful in order to describe the workings of racism and who experiences it, and to communicate this clearly.**
- **Whilst racial identity was seen as important to many and for some was seen as a helpful way for communities affected by racism to name their oppression, the concept of 'race' was seen as a social construct borne out of white supremacy culture, and so was disliked.**
- **Ethnicity was also viewed as a construct but tended to be seen as a more neutral way of talking about different identities, given the range of shared cultural experiences it can refer to beyond physical attributes or traits. There are also some standardised ways of talking about different minoritised ethnic groups in the UK that are helpful for comparing the findings of this research with other work, even if there were concerns about some of these standardised terms.**
- **As is now standard practice for the UK government, there was a strong dislike of the term BAME and also some dislike of BME, for the suggestion that people identifying as white do not also have an ethnicity.**

Based on these discussions, and with approval of the Experts by Experience panel, we used the following terms in our report:

- **Minoritised ethnic groups – as this term talks about the process of marginalisation people experience in a white-dominant society like Great Britain. At points in our report we have also used the term 'Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic groups' to give clear examples of who is subjected to racism.**
- **People of colour – as this has positive associations relating to empowerment for some of us who are victims of racism, and makes it clear that systemic racism often targets people based on physical attributes, though some have concerns about the notion that only victims of racism have a skin 'colour'.**
- **As it was seen as important for people to self-identify their 'race' or ethnicity, whenever we talk about a particular ethnic group or another term that describes multiple ethnic groups, we make it clear that this is based on how people identify themselves – e.g. 'people identifying as Black'.**

The research team acknowledge that the terminology used in the report itself may not land comfortably with all readers. We try to be specific where we can about ethnicities and ethnic groups, to avoid homogenising the experiences people describe as relevant to all ethnic groups. However, with a report so full of quotations, it is not always feasible to specify ethnicity. The research team decided against specifying the interviewee's ethnicity with each quotation for both practical and ethical reasons.

3. Defining homelessness

There are many types of homelessness, including the following:

- **Rough sleeping – i.e. living on the streets or in the open.**
- **Statutory homelessness – that is, people who are legally recognised as homeless by their local council, whether because they are currently homeless, or are at immediate risk of experiencing homelessness.**
- **Temporary accommodation. This includes temporary housing provided by a council, hostels, refuges, shelters, and bed and breakfast accommodation.**
- **Other forms of 'core' and 'hidden' homelessness. These include sofa surfing, overcrowding, living in non-residential buildings or vehicles, and people experiencing homelessness, but not legally recognised as such because of not meeting other eligibility criteria for statutory support.**

However you define it, at the time of writing, homelessness in Britain is rising, with over record statutory homelessness levels in England and Scotland, , and staggering increases in temporary accommodation use in Wales over the last few years . This number is expected to rise in the short and long term without significant changes in government policy, and thousands of others experience wider forms of homelessness, including being evicted by a landlord or being asked to leave your home by a friend or family member.

When thinking about homelessness among minoritised ethnic groups, it is important to consider what types of homelessness they are particularly likely to face. Heriot-Watt's research shows, for example, that the disproportionate risks of homelessness faced by households from Asian backgrounds are only revealed if you look at types of 'hidden' homelessness such as overcrowding.

These types of homelessness are not always captured in frameworks like 'core' homelessness, and it has also been argued that thinking about homelessness through other established policy frameworks, like severe and multiple disadvantage, risks excluding minoritised ethnic groups who do not fit a particular profile – for example, of a single, white male – from the creation and funding of associated programmes supporting people with homelessness, and associated data collection. There is therefore a risk that having too restricted a definition around homelessness may exclude people of colour who experience less typically explored forms of homelessness.

To try to obtain a broad understanding of the ways in which racism and homelessness can be connected, in the report we have defined homelessness in fairly inclusive terms, encompassing both 'core' and 'wider' types of homelessness, and all of the types in the list above.

4. How research participants understood 'race' and ethnicity

When asked how people usually identify themselves in terms of racialised or ethnic identity, some people were indifferent about this; they usually had a shorthand term for describing themselves and sometimes treated the concepts of ethnicity and 'race' fairly interchangeably. Often, however, even if people identified as being from a minoritised ethnic group or 'race', participants felt that identifying themselves in terms of a specific 'race' or ethnicity was difficult (a view also shared by some of those who were more indifferent to this, upon further discussion).

There were a range of reasons for this. Some people felt that another identity was more important to them, or easier to identify, and superseded 'race' or ethnicity. For example, regional or national identity or identities, and/or those of their parents or grandparents, were often more salient ways of identifying oneself. But people did not always consider this to be an ethnic identity.

"[I am] Asian and then Bangladeshi... it's where my parents were born and the people that raised me or brought me to the world, so to speak, and it's where they originated or resided before, yeah. In their original country of origin."

"I am from a Caribbean background. So I spent some of my childhood growing up in the Caribbean and then the rest of it here... I would say maybe because I spent most of my time growing up in the Caribbean in young childhood, I'd say that that [I am Black Caribbean]. But I guess others categorise me sometimes as Black British because obviously I was born here. I don't know, sometimes I get corrected when I'm answering a question and they're like, 'yeah you're black British' and I'm like, okay."

"[My ethnicity] would be white, Black Caribbean mix I suppose. I do get cocky at the job centre and just put 'Manc! [i.e. Mancunian]'"

A common theme was the view that 'race' and ethnicity were social constructs and that using these perpetuated untrue, unscientific and/or potentially harmful ways of talking about human beings.

"I have now come to realise that race is not an ethnicity. And I do not identify with it. So it's an institution. That is what race is, an institution. Created in the 18th century and backdated, you know, it's a social construct... I don't class it as 'Black.' I try to avoid that word because it's a colour in a box, it's like a crayon, you can't identify it to a culture, it doesn't lead you anywhere."

"In terms of ethnicity I would identify on an equality form as Black African British. My parents were both born in West Africa, Sierra Leone... I'm very aware that [Black African British] in itself is a social construct... It's not wholly true to my identity. Like it's not specific enough to who I am."

However, it was also the case that some participants felt a specific racialised identity was important to them. It either provided a sense of empowerment or was an important way to acknowledge how they are seen by others in the UK.

"I am Black and I am proud of it."

"My racial identity for me I think it is something that I can't do anything about. I am Black African. I know I'm different... I'm proud of wherever I come from."

"I'm a Black Caribbean person and that is how people born here would view me, as a Black Caribbean person. Not just British."

Within this it could be implicit that the concepts were necessary not just to reflect one's own identity, but to name the privilege of the 'white' majority. Some participants said that 'whiteness' was part of their identity, but did not associate themselves with a white ethnic majority – for example because they had a mixed ethnic background.

"This is always tricky because I am mixed race. So – but I am from South America. Always I don't know what to say, because in the first place I want to say I am mixed Black, white, but I mean I am also from South America and I don't know what to say, so I always go for mixed others... I come from a Black mixed family, bu[t] my skin is very white... I feel myself much more connected with the Black culture in Rio than anything else."

Across these perspectives it was common for people to say they disliked being pigeon-holed. There were various ways in which people were critical of standardised categories and terms that were available to them, for example, the standard ONS language used around ethnicity when applying for statutory homelessness support or in other public services. A common theme was that the terms available were overly simplistic:

"They are labels that were created to make things sound and look easier but it's not necessarily that simple."

"I don't like the term 'mixed race', I feel that is a very white and western centric view of it. I prefer to look at my ethnicity and just say – because I feel like with mixedness, especially with terms like biracial like half-and-half, it's like putting your identity in to percentages. So I don't really like to say that I'm half of anything, because I don't think that that fully represents someone's experiences. I think that is just a way for people to understand you so I just say when people ask me what I am I will just be like 'I'm Scottish and Chinese' instead of saying that I'm half-and-half something."

It was also seen as odd that some ONS categories involved a nation or a whole continent, but others did not. Within this, one participant had mixed feelings about how to identify themselves, due to different forms that racism could take relating to both the idea of being 'African' or being from a specific country within Africa.

"[The ethnicity category'] 'African' is big. We have different parts of Africa so if you're narrowing it does it does help. We have East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, and within those African continents we still have the countries, so narrowing it down kind of helps for me to say okay, this is where I am particularly from... when it becomes Nigerian or something, not everyone will appreciate that. Some will feel maybe they may fall victim due to where they come from or they may get stereotyped."

Underlying many of these concerns was a questioning of whether identifying oneself in terms of ethnicity was truly beneficial or not – for example, whether it could be linked to discrimination in employment. There was fear about being subject to harmful stereotypes which could prevent them from receiving formal support from services. There was a sense that disclosing this information works against them given the perception that services will discriminate on the basis of that information.

"Sometimes when I fill out the form like the part that says what your background is like or are you Black Caribbean and stuff like that – I tend not to fill it out because I feel fearful filling that out because I know what's going to come. And like 'Oh, we can't help you' or sometimes they will say 'Have you not got any family members that could help you in this situation' and what are you trying to say, like all Black people have got family."

"I don't normally have a problem ticking those boxes, but I know it depends, like it just depends; if it's a doctor's surgery then I would be more comfortable ticking that but say if I was applying for a job then I wouldn't disclose that information."

Related to this, some participants expressed a desire to go beyond narrow ways of talking about their ethnic or racialised identity – for example, by thinking about their common humanity with people from all ethnic backgrounds, or by finding more empowering terms such as the 'global majority'.

"Everyone is a person of colour, you're a colour, Chinese people are a colour. Germans are a colour. Everybody is a person of colour and so that is quite a broad blanket. It goes across the board so it's not identifying any particular people, or culture."

"I mean who is brown, who is coming with all these different colours. I don't get it. There is no really Black person and there is no really white person, and no really brown person. It's just boxing people into a colour with colours and, you know. I have never met a white person before in my life... and I have never met a Black person before."

"I remember I attended a conference, a lady said that we are not a minoritized ethnic group, that we are a global majority. That is how she summed it up. She doesn't believe in ethnic minorities. That we are a global majority, because every part of the world, we are there, we are represented."

There is a risk that lived experience expertise can be integrated into research in a tokenistic way with little power actually being redistributed. We have tried to remain sensitive and reflective of power dynamics at each stage of the process. For example, whilst the project has also had an Advisory Group made up of people with 'professional' but not 'lived' expertise, we have always prioritised working with the Experts by Experience Panel in this project. Nevertheless, there remains a power imbalance between people who have been involved in a less secure and more temporary way in this research and more permanent members of staff employed by Crisis to work on or inform the project.

It is difficult to measure the success of this aspect of the project until after the research has been published and disseminated.

Appendix 3: The experts by experience panel and community researchers

There are many recognised benefits from engaging people with lived experience of the issues being explored in research, and enabling them to be involved in ways other than simply taking part in researchers' activities (e.g. as survey or interview participants) – particularly when researching marginalised individuals or communities. Research with a 'participatory' approach improves the rigour and real-word relevance of research, but also creates opportunities for communities in building experiences of agency and power in knowledge production about issues that affect them.[99] Based on this knowledge and conversations with stakeholders in the scoping phase of the research, we wanted to ensure that lived experience was centred in the scoping and development of the research, as well as throughout as many stages of the research process as was realistic.

For this reason, we adopted a community research approach: a method that provides opportunities for people with relevant lived experience to help shape and deliver the research.

We recruited 17 people to be part of an Experts by Experience panel, all of whom identify as people of colour or from a Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnic group and who have either lived experience of homelessness (including forms of precarious housing that can be considered homelessness), or experience of supporting people of colour through homelessness. Panellists were recruited by online and in-person communications, via Crisis' and other homelessness services, and by word of mouth. Support in facilitating activities and research training for the panel was provided by Power With and Expert Citizens.

In addition, thirteen of the panel members were also community researchers, contributing to the research design (e.g. consent forms, participation information sheets, and interview topic guide), recruitment of research participants, and analysis. Nine of them conducted research interviews on the project as well.

There are different models for doing community research: community researchers can take part as research advisors, employees, or in rarer cases become 'partners or leaders in all aspects of research'.[100] Our model was not a full 'partnership' approach, due to the pre-agreed nature of the research objectives, limits on project resourcing, as well as the need for flexibility in different aspects of delivering the research. We did, however, try to maximise opportunities for people with lived experience to meaningfully shape and deliver the research, as described above. Panellists and community researchers were given remuneration for their time and labour.

[99] Yang, C. and Dibb, Z. (2020), Peer Research in the UK, Institute for Community Studies.

[100] Roche, B., Guta, A. and Flicker, S. (2010), Peer Research in Action I: Models of Practice, Wellesley Institute, York University and University of Toronto.

Appendix 4: Intersectionality and positionality

Though the report focuses on systemic racism and the way it manifests and impacts upon the lives of people of colour experiencing homelessness, it is important for us to address the way racism interacts with other systems of oppression and discrimination – such as those based along other identity lines including gender, sexuality, dis/ability, nationality, socio-economic status and others. 'Single-axis' approaches towards the inequalities of gender or 'race' fail to recognise the 'complexity of social structures and subjective experiences'.[103]

Whilst we chose to focus the project inquiry on experiences of systemic racism, we must keep the role of other aspects of identity in view – specifically uplifting the experiences of those positioned at the intersection of multiple minoritised identities ('race' being one) who may be experiencing various forms of discrimination and disadvantage. This has therefore been addressed in how we have designed and analysed the research.

Each of us is differently situated in what Patricia Hill Collins terms 'the matrix of domination'.[104] Stemming from Black feminist thought, this matrix helps us to understand our identities as complex and intersecting, keeping in focus that though constructs such as 'race' have no biological basis, they are influential in shaping social reality.

As researchers, our own identities and experiences will have undoubtedly shaped our view of the world which will therefore affect how we each approach this work and the key topics explored in this report – namely, racism and homelessness. The lead authors of this report are keen to model a level of self-awareness and reflection that is needed to dismantle systems of oppression at both the individual internalised level, as well as at the institutional and systemic level, and we are therefore sharing more details about our own positionality in relation to the project.

Sophie D'Souza: **At the time of writing, I am a Senior Research Officer employed by Crisis who identifies as a person of colour, and whilst this provided a basis for a depth of experience and understanding of racism and its impacts, I do not have direct lived experience of homelessness. Given this, I am not able to draw on personal experiences of homelessness. This meant that I had simultaneous insider-outsider status when interacting with research participants, potentially impacting upon all stages of the research process from conceptualising the project, through to materials design, data collection and analysis. To mitigate against the risk of leading where I should be lead, I felt it was essential to co-develop and share leadership between different members of the Crisis research team and expert panel.**

Michael Allard: **At the time of writing, I am a Research Manager employed by Crisis. When asked about my ethnicity I usually select an option like 'White Other' because of my skin colour, and identifying my ethnicity as Jewish. Whilst I have had some experience of racism, I can generally avoid racism by being seen as 'white' and not being seen as Jewish because I dress in a 'secular' way. This and the fact I have always lived in settled and secure housing conditions mean that I have limited lived expertise that I can bring to bear when doing research on racism and homelessness. As I'm in the privileged position of overseeing this research, I've seen it as my responsibility to try and channel the perspectives of others with more relevant lived experience in my work, though it is impossible for me to entirely avoid bringing my own subjective experiences to this work.**

Georgia Leith: **My role was to oversee the research project from the first draft of the full report that Michael handed to me to the finished article. I joined the project after the data had been collected and analysed, and findings written up, because of key staff leaving the organisation, and my main task was to edit down the draft. I have not been part of the early and continual conversations with the Experts by Experience throughout the project. I do not have lived experience of homelessness and, as a white person, I have no lived experience of racism. Through my work on this report I have been acutely aware that the responsibility of the project falling to me to finalise does little to address power imbalances. It has been uncomfortable to edit the draft passed to me, and delete quotations, knowing that I, from my privileged position, was erasing interviewees' stories of lived experience. I have kept in the forefront of my mind that I have been entrusted to see this project reaches the objectives it set out to achieve, and that the voices of the interviewees remain central and unfiltered.**

Further to an interrogation of our individual social locations as researchers working on the project, it is also important to consider the organisational positioning of Crisis. Historically our mission has been about ending homelessness; however, an engagement with systemic oppression and discrimination, such as in the form of racism, has not explicitly been a part of how we have conceptualised ending homelessness. Our 2018 manifesto Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain names many strategies for ending homelessness, but does not name anti-racism as a solution.[105]

This research is therefore taking place against an organisational backdrop that is new to building the systemic capacity to reflect and take action against the current white-dominant culture of our own organisation.

We acknowledge that this inhibits the institutional credibility and authority we have to address the topic of racism. That being said, we do not underestimate the lived and learnt expertise brought forward by our Experts by Experience panel, and staff with lived experience of racism and/or homelessness who have been involved in bringing about this research. This research forms the first and most substantive contribution to a broader commitment we have made to dedicating time and resources to addressing the upstream and systemic causes of homelessness situated in a wider agenda on social change – including discrimination and multiple forms of systemic oppression.

[103] Carastathis, A. (2014), The concept of intersectionality in feminist theory, Philosophy Compass, 9(5), 304-314.

[104] Collins, P.H. (2009), Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Routledge, New York.

[105] Crisis (2018), The plan to end homelessness.

Appendix 5: Interview sample

Ethnicity category based on standard ONS classification	No. of participants
Arab	2
Asian Bangladeshi	2
Asian Pakistani	2
Asian Indian	1
Asian Other	1
Black African	20
Black Caribbean	8
White & Asian	1
White & Black Caribbean	3
Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean Background	4
Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	5
Any other ethnic group	6
Prefer not to say	1
Unknown / refused	2
TOTAL	58

Current Accommodation of participants when interviewed	No. of participants
Temporary Accommodation	13
Private Rented Accommodation	13
Sofa Surfing	3
Living with Family / Friends long term	1
Council or Housing Association	8
NASS or Home Office Accommodation	6
Hostel or Other Nightly Paid Accommodation	3
Sleeping Rough	3
Supported Accommodation	1
Emergency Accommodation	3
Hosting Scheme	2
Unknown	2

Immigration status	No. of participants
Asylum seeker	9
British citizen	28
Indefinite or exceptional leave to remain	5
Limited leave to remain	7
Refugee status	4
Other settled status	1
Other immigration status	3
Unknown	1

Region	No. of participants
England	40
London	24
Midlands	10
North	4
South	2
Wales	7
Scotland	11
TOTAL	58

Gender identity	No. of participants
Female	30
Male	27
Non-binary	1

Appendix 6: Areas of action for Crisis

The following recommendations were developed jointly by the Experts by Experience panel and some Crisis staff as a response to the main findings from the report.

1. Develop a stronger anti-racist culture at Crisis

This may involve:

- Integrating anti-racism more clearly into different areas of work (e.g. recruitment practices, policy and influencing)
- Rolling out stronger training about anti-racism for staff (potentially by panel members)
- Providing greater support for staff of colour experiencing racism
- Considering anti-racism through lenses of intersectionality and power dynamics
- Recruit more staff and volunteers of colour; being transparent about the diversity staff.

2. Support anti-racist work of other charities (e.g. health, police/justice, employment, education)

- Develop stronger relationships and partnership opportunities around anti-racism where we know there are links between different systems, racism and homelessness (e.g. Health Foundation, Runnymede)
- Work with organisations with an existing track record of addressing racism.

3. Improve our own support services for people of colour

- Assess experiences and outcomes of members according to ethnicity to identify any unequal treatment
- Focus specifically on supporting people of colour to complete a homeless application
- Develop service's PIE model further around links between racism, homelessness and the varied traumas stemming from these
- Roll out training on cultural competency
- Expand support offer for people with poorer English.

4. Provide direct support to groups supporting people of colour facing homelessness

- Offer learning opportunities and training for grassroots/ community housing providers who are focused on supporting people of colour (e.g. information about the homelessness system, Crisis' service model)
- Consider opportunities for a grants programme including proactive outreach and accessible application processes
- Consider internship schemes; shadowing; work experience; mentorship which do not have a particular educational background or age requirement.

5. Work with council homelessness services to improve their work with people of colour

- Present and workshop research findings
- Bring together knowledge from Crisis and more specialised homelessness services to identify areas for improvement.

6. Communicate with the public and policymakers about racism and homelessness

- Use Crisis' public communications channels (e.g. podcasts) to raise awareness about racism and homelessness
- Work with politicians and policy makers to raise the profile of links between racism and homelessness.

7. Advocate for removal of 'hostile environment' policies that cause homelessness

- Advocating for improved access to welfare and homelessness support
- Advocating for removal of Right to Rent policies
- Advocating for improvements to asylum accommodation including whether people are housed near community.

8. Advocate for better support and access to housing for people of colour facing homelessness

- Advocating for better enforcement against racist discrimination from housing providers and for repairing harm
- Advocating for more social housing supply, targeted according to needs of minoritised ethnic groups
- Advocating for improved practice in social housing allocations and council homelessness support
- Call for bespoke funding for homelessness support for people of colour facing repeat homelessness.

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