

Is racism systemic in the UK?

Racial inequality permeates all aspects of life in the UK. In the past black and ethnic minority people have not been comfortable talking about racism. But following the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 and the many protests that ensued all over the world, BAME people from all spheres of life have come out to voice their concern about the prevalence of systemic racism with many sharing their experiences cutting across all facets of life. From footballers, actors and singers to professionals and students, many have come out to share stories of how they have suffered racism at different times in their career.

There have been many incidents whereby footballers suffered persistent racism on the pitch, from monkey gestures to banana peels being thrown on the pitch. Now black footballers and their white counterparts have sent a massive message across the world that racism will no longer be tolerated in football.

Black workers are often afraid of reporting racism at work for fear of losing their jobs. During the COVID-19 pandemic we heard cases of medical professionals working on COVID-19 wards in hospitals despite being in the high-risk category without proper risk assessments even after it became apparent that BAME staff were disproportionately affected by the virus. Some even had to work without adequate PPE. Many contracted the coronavirus in line of duty and lost their lives to the deadly virus.

In schools, black pupils continue to have the highest temporary exclusion rates. School policies are tougher on young black boys. What their white counterparts will do and get a slap on the wrist could get them sanctioned or asked to attend schemes for behaviour issues. Being taken out of the classroom while other children are having lessons to attend such schemes could have detrimental effect on a child's mental well-being. Being put through such schemes result in unnecessary labelling children and a stain on their records. Parents are often too afraid to speak out when they think their children are being treated unfairly as they fear this could have an adverse effect on them at school.

Directly or indirectly school exclusion contributes to the increase in knife crime which has become endemic in the UK. Since the 'stay at home' came into effect due to COVID-19 there has been very few reported cases of stabbing in the capital. As the lock-down is eased and life goes back to normal we hope Local Authorities, the MET police and the Mayor of London will press the reset button and ensure all children are safe and no child is left behind regardless of the colour of their skin, background or the community where they live.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the setup of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities to examine all aspects of racial inequality in the UK. But the sincerity of the government will be assessed in how representative of the BAME community appointments to the board are and the commitment of the government to fundamental change.

Now is the time to stand up to racism, inequality and injustice.

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