Racism is forcing ethnic minority doctors to leave jobs, warns BMA report

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Widespread racism in the medical workforce is "wrecking the lives of many doctors" and forcing some to quit the profession, a hard hitting report from the BMA has warned.

The report, *Racism In Medicine*,[1] surveyed 2030 UK doctors and medical students on their experience of racism in the medical profession and the workplace. The survey results and testimonies (box 1) led the BMA to conclude that widespread racism exists on a personal and institutional level, stemming from doctors, other NHS staff, and patients.

> **Box 1: Examples of comments reported by survey respondents**
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> - A junior doctor of mixed-other ethnic background said, "I was called 'headscarf b**ch' by a patient. A patient refused to be seen by me as my name did not sound British. A supervisor did not wish to discuss the experience of the patient not wishing to be seen by me and I was met with mostly silence."
> - A consultant of black, African background said, "Less confident to report such incidents again because no action was taken against the perpetrator. I feel uncomfortable and anxious of reprisals."
> - A junior doctor of Asian background said, "Working in A&E was a nightmare. Continued racist behaviour from patients and their relatives. Due to this, I have decided not to pursue a career in emergency medicine."

Three quarters (76%) of 1464 respondents who answered a question about how often they experienced racism in their workplace said they had at least once in the past two years, and (17%) reported regularly experiencing racist incidents.

Almost a quarter (23% of 1239 who answered the question) said they had considered leaving their job in the NHS because of racial discrimination, and 9% said they had already left in the past two years. Staff from black, Asian and other backgrounds were most likely to have considered leaving or left.

Chaand Nagpaul, BMA chair of council, said, "The NHS was built on the principle of equality of care for patients whoever they are, but this report shows that the NHS is shamefully failing in this principle for its own doctors, with those from ethnic minorities reporting alarming levels of unfair treatment and racial inequality at work.

"Racism is wrecking the lives of many doctors, affecting patient care and threatening services. The time for talk on this is over. Our report makes a range of clear recommendation for change which demand action across the health system, from government to NHS organisations, leaders, and other institutions."

In other findings, 1047 doctors (52%) reported bullying in their workplace related to their ethnicity, and this was most often (68% of cases) perpetrated by senior doctors.

The report found very low levels of reporting of incidents, with 71% of respondents who personally experienced racism choosing not to report it to anyone.

It also noted institutional barriers to career progression. Of 1246 doctors to respond to this question, 60% of those from Asian backgrounds, 57% from black backgrounds, 45% from mixed backgrounds, 36% from white non-British backgrounds, and 58% from all other backgrounds, but only 4% of white British respondents, said they thought that racism had been a barrier to their career progression.

Sixty per cent of 896 respondents who answered this specific question said that racism they experienced had negatively affected their wellbeing

The report identified a "systemic failure" and said that all health organisations must work together to end structural racism and rectify the unequal outcomes in career progression and in job satisfaction faced by different ethnic groups.

Among its key recommendations are:

- Making centralised guidance on HR processes available across all organisations in the medical profession
- Making training in equality, diversity, and inclusion mandatory in medical school curriculums
- Introducing mandatory reporting on the ethnic pay gap, to go with gender pay gap reporting
- Ensuring that medical students and doctors have access to independent routes to raise concerns, such as "freedom to speak up" guardians, and
- Requiring all organisations responsible for progression of doctors to publish their outcomes by ethnicity.

1 BMA. Racism in medicine. https://www.bma.org.uk/media/5746/bma-racism-in-medicine-survey-report-15-june-2022.pdf.