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THE COLOUR OF FEAR

Racism and Safety Concerns for Women of Colour in the West Midlands

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Introduction

In the summer of 2024, racially motivated tensions escalated sharply across the UK following the tragic and horrific murders of three young girls - **Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice Dasilva Aguiar** in Southport - that was swiftly misused by extremist groups to incite racial hatred. In the days and weeks that followed, women of colour became some of the most visible and immediate targets of abuse. Across the West Midlands, women reported verbal harassment, physical intimidation, and threats while travelling, working, or simply walking in public spaces. Many restricted their movements, choosing to remain indoors, or avoiding public transport altogether. Community organisations were forced to implement emergency safety measures: public events were cancelled or postponed, staff risk assessments were implemented, paired travel was encouraged whilst lone working avoided, and a significant amount of frontline support shifted to phone-based work for several weeks.

During the riots, emergency meetings were called by political leaders and local authorities responded to rising tensions. However, most of these meetings were overwhelmingly held with religious institutions and male faith leaders. When images of these gatherings circulated on social media, it was clear to me, that **a majority of those consulted were men**. Issues affecting women, especially the fear, harassment, and violence they were experiencing, appeared less centred in these discussions. The only organisations intentionally engaging with women, listening to them, and offering platforms for their concerns were **women's rights and feminist organisations**, who stepped in where mainstream and political spaces had failed. Specialist meetings were held with black and minoritised women's groups and a handful of grant funders, provided small amounts of additional grant funding to pay for clinical supervision or therapy for staff. This support slowly disappeared over time, and the special meetings and specific grant funding, in most cases, no longer exist. It was a temporary fix to what was thought to be a temporary escalation of a problem.

Since the riots of summer 2024, the fear has not subsided. Instead, there was a disturbing shift. **Anti-migrant and anti-refugee protests began sweeping through towns and cities across the country**, creating an atmosphere where people of colour, regardless of citizenship, generation, or immigration status, felt increasingly targeted and unsafe. What began as online rhetoric quickly spilled onto the streets, leading to sustained intimidation, harassment, and racially motivated attacks. Women of colour, already disproportionately affected by racism, became specific victims, including in a number of **racially aggravated rapes and violent assaults** that deeply shook local communities. Media coverage of attacks on Sikh, Muslim, and Black women across the West Midlands throughout 2024 and 2025 amplified the fear and highlighted the gendered nature of this rise in hate.

Introduction to author

Sahdaish Pall BEM, Founder and Director of **Kaur Lab UK CIC**
Wolverhampton, January 2026

About me: I am the Founder and Director of **Kaur Lab UK CIC**, a community interest company committed to research, education, and advocacy on issues affecting women and girls, particularly those from Sikh and South Asian backgrounds. I have worked in the field of **violence against women and girls (VAWG)** for three decades, leading services, influencing policy, and supporting survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and harmful practices. As a local government **Councillor, women's rights advocate, and equality campaigner**, my work has always centred on amplifying the voices of women who are too often silenced or ignored.

Methodology and Survey Reach

The survey was conducted for a period of 3 months, from October 2025 – December 2025.

It is acknowledged that some may question whether the high proportion of respondents reporting experiences of racism reflects the focus of this survey on women of colour. However, it is important to clarify that the survey was open-access and widely circulated across multiple platforms. An online link to the survey was shared via WhatsApp groups, social media, and online platforms with requests for onward sharing, rather than being distributed through closed or invitation-only networks.

No screening question required respondents to have experienced racism in order to participate, and the survey included options to indicate no experience of racism or hate incidents. A proportion of respondents did select these options, demonstrating that participation was not limited to those with negative experiences.

The high reporting rates therefore reflect the self-reported lived experiences of women who chose to respond, rather than pre-selection or filtering by the researcher. Given the timing of the survey, following the summer 2024 riots, the findings point to a genuine and widespread pattern of harm, not an artefact of sampling bias.

As with all voluntary surveys, the data captures the voices of those motivated to respond. However, the scale, consistency, and depth of responses suggest that the prevalence of racism experienced by women of colour in the West Midlands is significant and under-recognised, particularly when considered alongside low reporting rates to the police and limited trust in statutory systems.

Disclaimer

This report is based on self-reported data collected through an anonymous survey and the option to include free text content so that respondents could share their stories or experiences. The views expressed reflect the lived experiences of respondents and do not necessarily represent the views of all women of colour in the West Midlands. All case studies are anonymised and identifying details have been altered to protect participants' identities.

Context and Rationale for the Survey

Racially Motivated Attacks on Women: Recent Public Cases in the West Midlands

In 2025, several high-profile cases in the West Midlands highlighted the increasing vulnerability of women of colour to racially motivated violence. These incidents, shared by West Midlands Police or the press, demonstrate a disturbing pattern of gendered and racialised targeting.

In **Oldbury**, in September 2025, West Midlands Police confirmed that a woman was raped after being approached by two men who made explicitly racist comments during the attack. Police publicly stated that the victim reported being told by the perpetrators that she 'should not be in this country' and should 'go back home,' establishing the attack as racially aggravated. At the time of writing this report in January 2026, 3 arrests had been made and bailed, but no perpetrators have been charged for this serious offence.

In the **Park Hall area of Walsall**, a woman was attacked in what police also reported as a racially motivated rape. The perpetrator was alleged to have made racially charged remarks to the victim during the assault, signalling that her race and/or ethnicity were factors in the attack. This case received widespread media attention due to the explicit racial motivation disclosed in public reporting. At the time of writing this report in January 2026, one perpetrator has been charged and is awaiting trial, for committing this offence.

In **Wolverhampton**, West Midlands Police reported that a Sikh woman was physically assaulted by a group of men. Reports of this attack were widely shared across social media platforms and generated significant community concern. Although the police have not publicly disclosed the specific comments made during this incident, the case was treated as a serious assault and was investigated amid wider concerns about rising hostility towards women from minority backgrounds. At the time of writing this report in January 2026, I am not aware of any arrests made in relation to this attack.

I have also seen evidence of several other 'racially motivated' attacks on women, which have been reported on social media, or discussed in online platforms, that I have not seen reported by local police forces. Often these racially motivated attacks are not reported to the police, due to women feeling they will not be believed, family honour, perceived lack of evidence, or because it happens so often it is normalised, so victims believe, 'what's the point.'

The incidents that are already in the public domain, form part of a wider pattern of racialised and gendered harm being documented across the region. They also reflect the concerns raised by women responding to the survey that this report is based on. Many described feeling increasingly unsafe in public spaces due to the rise in racially motivated violence.

This context forms the backdrop to this report. The rise in racism did not occur in isolation; it emerged from a climate of misinformation, political polarisation, unchecked online hate, and growing far-right mobilisation against small boats crossings and migrants. For many women of colour, these events did not simply create fear, **they re-opened old wounds, exposed longstanding inequalities, and revealed how fragile safety and belonging truly are**, even in the communities we have lived in for generations.

In conversations with women via my survey and face to face, a common theme has emerged: **many women of colour feel increasingly unsafe, unseen, and unsupported.** They described feeling anxious when walking alone, targeted for their skin colour or religious identity, and dismissed when seeking help. The cumulative emotional and psychological toll, stress, fear, anger, and trauma, cannot be overstated. Yet despite the growing number of

reports and personal testimonies, the issue has received limited political or institutional attention.

This was the catalyst for launching - **The Colour of Fear: Racism, Safety Concerns of Women of Colour in the West Midlands**, designed to gather anonymous data on women's lived experiences of racism, discrimination, and hate in the West Midlands since the summer of 2024. The survey aims to provide evidence that can inform **West Midlands Police, local Councils, the West Midlands Mayor's Office, and equality bodies**, ensuring that women of colour are not invisible in policy discussions about safety, justice, and social cohesion.

The process of launching this survey revealed another disturbing truth: **the resistance that emerges when women of colour dare to speak about racism.** After sharing the survey publicly, I faced online backlash and hostility. Some individuals accused me of being 'racist' for focusing only on women of colour; others questioned why the survey did not include white women. One person even sent me a message saying, *"Come and answer the questions,"* which to me sounded very much like a challenge or threat. Others claimed they would report me to the council, because of my political role locally, despite this work being conducted independently by **Kaur Lab UK CIC**.

A small number of women who are not from racially minoritised communities, also completed the survey and explicitly stated that they were white women. Several of these respondents challenged the survey's focus, claiming that it was 'in breach of the Equality Act' for not including them.

When the survey was shared online, in a few instances, the hostility in the comments became so extreme that the survey link had to be removed from certain social media pages for my own personal safety reasons. Some individuals disregarded the fact that the survey was specifically about racism experienced by women of colour and instead argued that issues such as grooming gangs constituted racism against white girls, using this to claim that white people should also be included. These reactions not only misinterpreted the purpose of the survey but also demonstrated the wider resistance and defensiveness that often arises when discussing racism in the UK.

Such reactions expose exactly why this, and further research is necessary. When women of colour speak about their experiences of racism, they are often met with denial, defensiveness, and attempts to silence them. This backlash is not new; it reflects a broader societal discomfort with confronting racism and privilege. Yet rather than deterring this work, these responses have strengthened my resolve to document, evidence, and advocate for change.

This report therefore serves several purposes. It records the **voices and experiences of women of colour** across the West Midlands at a point of time. It highlights the **emotional, physical, and psychological impact** of racism and hate and it offers **practical recommendations** for the police, government, education systems, and communities to ensure that no woman is left feeling unsafe or unheard because of the colour of her skin.

This is not a report about division - it is a report about truth, safety, and equality. The women who took the time to share their experiences have done so not to create separation, but to call for solidarity and action. Their courage in speaking out is an act of hope and it is now our collective responsibility to listen, learn, and act.

Executive Summary

This report, **The Colour of Fear: Racism and Safety Concerns for Women of Colour in the West Midlands,** presents the findings of an anonymous online survey conducted between October – December 2025 to capture the lived experiences of women of colour facing racism, hate, and insecurity across the West Midlands. Led by Kaur Lab UK CIC, the research responds to a sharp escalation in racially motivated hostility following the summer 2024 riots and the subsequent rise in anti-migrant and anti-refugee rhetoric and activity.

A total of 334 women participated in the survey. The findings reveal an alarming scale of harm: over three-quarters (76%) of respondents experienced racism or a hate incident since summer 2024, with many reporting repeated incidents rather than one-off experiences. Racism was overwhelmingly identified as the primary motivator (89.6%), often intersecting with gender, religion, and misogyny, particularly for Sikh, Muslim, Black, and South Asian women.

The impact of racism on these women's daily lives is profound. The majority reported heightened anxiety, fear, hypervigilance, and trauma, with many modifying their behaviour to stay safe. This included avoiding public transport, staying indoors after dark, avoiding certain areas, changing how they dress, and relying on others to accompany them outside. These findings point to racism functioning not only as a social injustice, but as a public safety and public health issue, eroding women's freedom, wellbeing, and sense of belonging.

Despite the scale and severity of these experiences, 82.9% of respondents did not report incidents to the police. The primary reasons included lack of trust, fear of not being believed, normalisation of racism, and uncertainty about reporting pathways. Awareness of Hate Crime Reporting Centres was extremely low, further contributing to under-reporting and isolation.

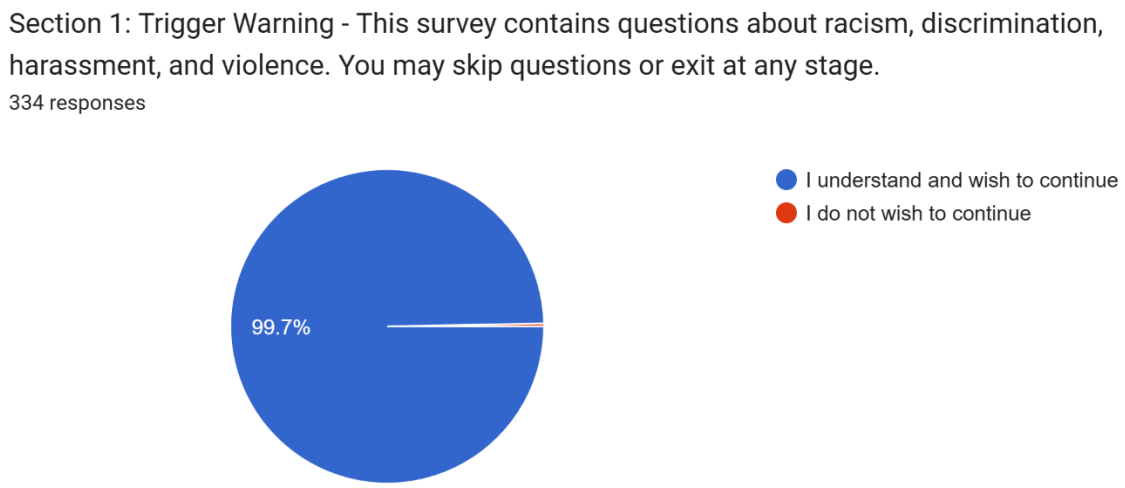
The survey also highlights widespread concern for the next generation. 93% of respondents expressed fear that younger women, children, or siblings will face racism, reflecting a deep loss of confidence in institutions to protect minority communities.

Alongside quantitative data, open-ended responses revealed consistent themes: frustration at institutional inaction, anger at political and media narratives that fuel division, and strong calls for visible leadership, accountability, education, and community-based safety measures. The survey itself attracted backlash, including accusations of racism and attempts to silence the research, underscoring the resistance that often emerges when women of colour speak openly about racism.

This report situates the survey findings within the wider regional context, including publicly reported cases of racially motivated rapes in Oldbury and Walsall, and a physical assault on a Sikh woman in Wolverhampton. All reinforce the gendered and racialised nature of current threats facing women of colour.

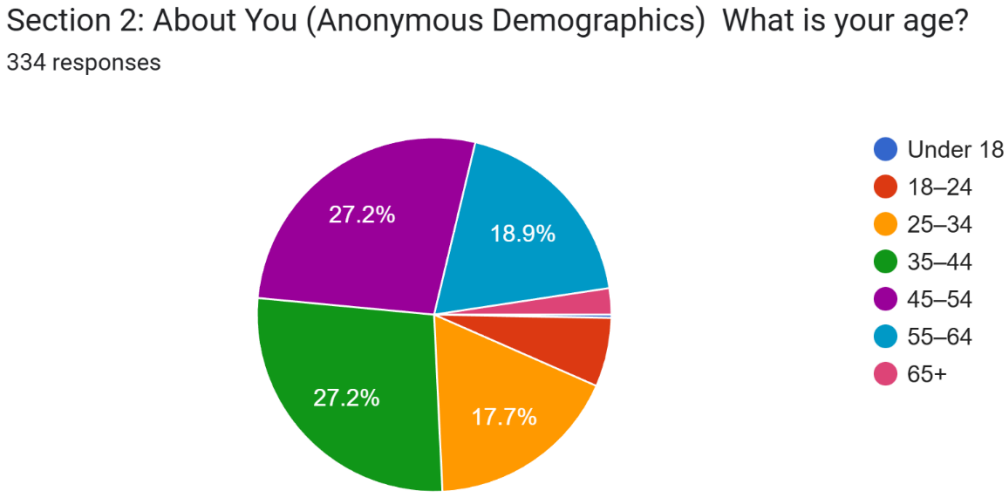
The report concludes with clear, evidence-led recommendations for West Midlands Police, local authorities, the West Midlands Mayor's Office, national government, education settings, and community organisations. Central to all recommendations is the principle that women of colour must be heard, believed, and involved in shaping the solutions that will affect them.

Survey outcomes:



Trigger Warning & Participation

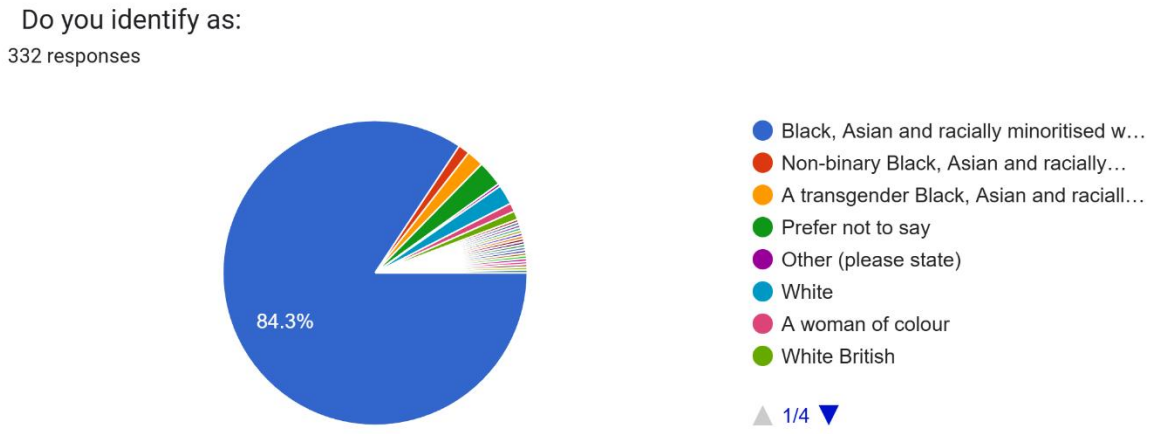
Despite the survey beginning with a clear trigger warning, advising respondents that the questions would cover racism, discrimination, harassment and violence, **99.7% of participants chose to proceed**. This exceptionally high level of engagement demonstrates both the **urgency of the issue** and the willingness of women of colour to share their experiences, even when the subject matter may be distressing or retraumatising. The strength of this response indicates that women feel a **pressing need for their voices to be heard**, and that they have lacked safe platforms to express these concerns. It also reflects a level of **trust in the survey process** and underscores the importance and relevance of this research. Only a very small proportion (0.3%) opted out, further highlighting that the overwhelming majority felt compelled to contribute to this conversation.



Age of Respondents

A total of **334 women** participated in the survey, representing a broad age range. The largest proportion of respondents were aged **35–44 (27.2%)** and **45–54 (27.2%)**, indicating strong engagement from women in mid-adulthood who are often balancing professional responsibilities, and caregiving roles,. A further **18.9%** were aged **55–64**, showing that older women, who may have experienced racism across multiple decades, also felt compelled to contribute. Younger women were represented too, with **17.7% aged 25–34** and small but significant participation from those **18–24** and **65+**.

This age spread demonstrates that experiences of racism are not limited to a single generation: **women across all life stages are reporting harm, hostility, and fear in the current climate**. It also highlights how deeply rooted and widespread these issues are, affecting women who are early in adulthood through to those who have lived in the UK for several decades.



Racial and Identity Demographics

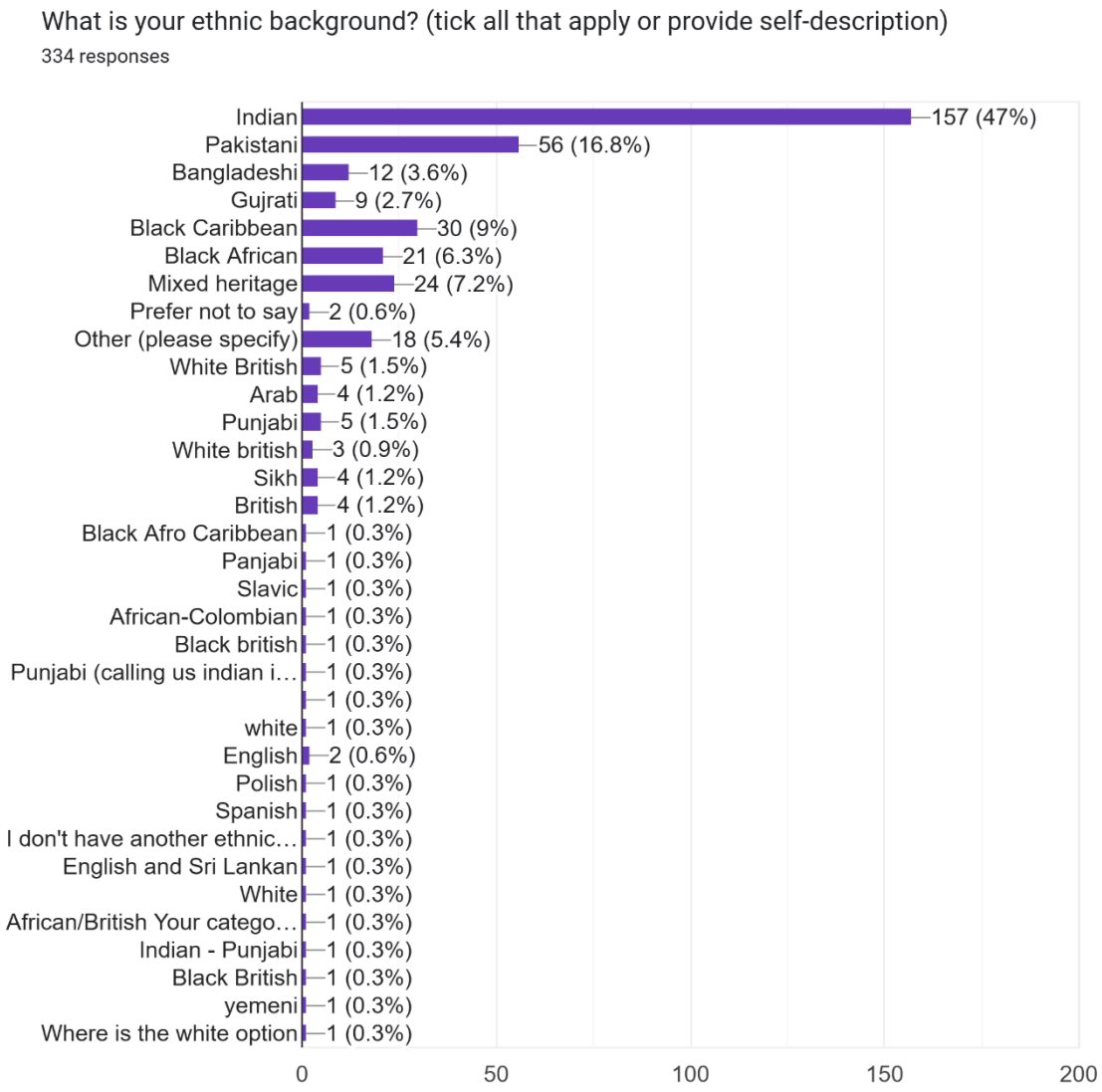
A total of **332 respondents** answered this question, with the vast majority (**84.3%)** identifying as **Black, Asian, or racially minoritised women**. This confirms that the survey successfully reached the intended population and reflects a strong willingness among racially minoritised women to document their experiences of racism and hate.

Small numbers of respondents identified as:

- **Non-binary Black, Asian or racially minoritised individuals (1.2%)**
- **Transgender Black, Asian or racially minoritised individuals (1.8)**
- **Women of colour using their own terminology** ("Other" or self-described categories)
- **White or White British respondents**, many of whom stated in open comments that they responded because they felt the issues also affected them or because they objected to the survey's focus on women of colour.

A small proportion selected **"Prefer not to say"**, (2.7%) indicating that issues of identity disclosure remain sensitive and sometimes carry perceived personal risk.

Overall, the data demonstrates that the survey overwhelmingly reflects the voices of **racially minoritised women**, while also capturing the social tensions surrounding conversations about race, identity, and targeted support.

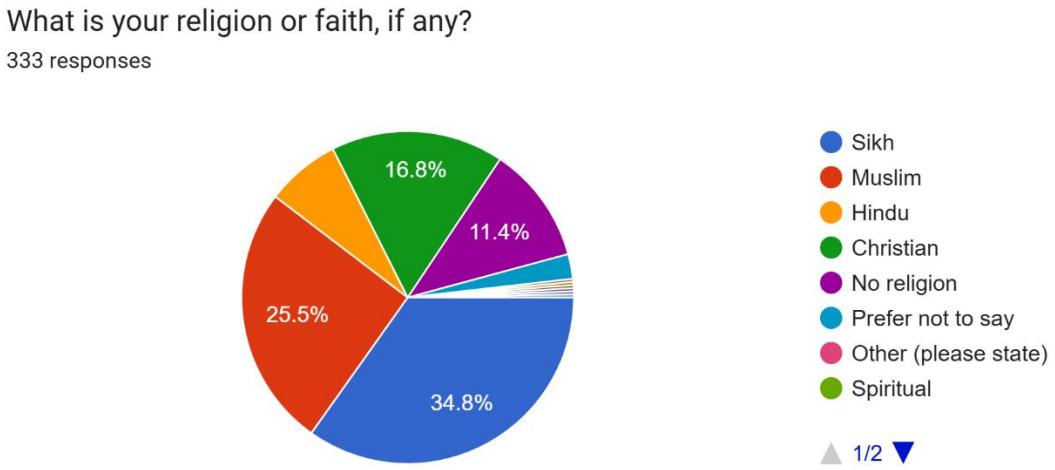


Commentary on Ethnic Background of Respondents

The survey attracted a broad range of ethnic backgrounds, demonstrating strong engagement from communities most affected by the recent rise in racist incidents and hate crime. Almost **half of all respondents (47%) identified as Indian**, with significant representation also from **Pakistani (16.8%)**, **Black Caribbean (9%)**, **Black African (6.3%)**, **Bangladeshi (3.6%)**, **Gujrati (2.7%)**, and **Mixed heritage (7.2%)** women. Smaller numbers identified as **Sikh (1.2%)**, **Punjabi (1.5%)**, **Arab (1.2%)**, **African-Colombian (0.3%)**, and various dual-heritage identities.

A small number of respondents (2.1%) identified as **White or White British**, and some used the free-text option to raise concerns about the lack of a dedicated “White” category. One response used dismissive or sarcastic comment such as “Where is the white option?”, indicating that a minority may have attempted to challenge the survey’s focus on women of colour.

Overall, the data confirms that the survey successfully reached its intended demographic: women of colour across the West Midlands, with especially high response rates from South Asian and Black communities. The wide range of ethnic identifiers also highlights the diversity within the umbrella term *women of colour*, reinforcing the need for culturally nuanced analysis and community-specific responses.

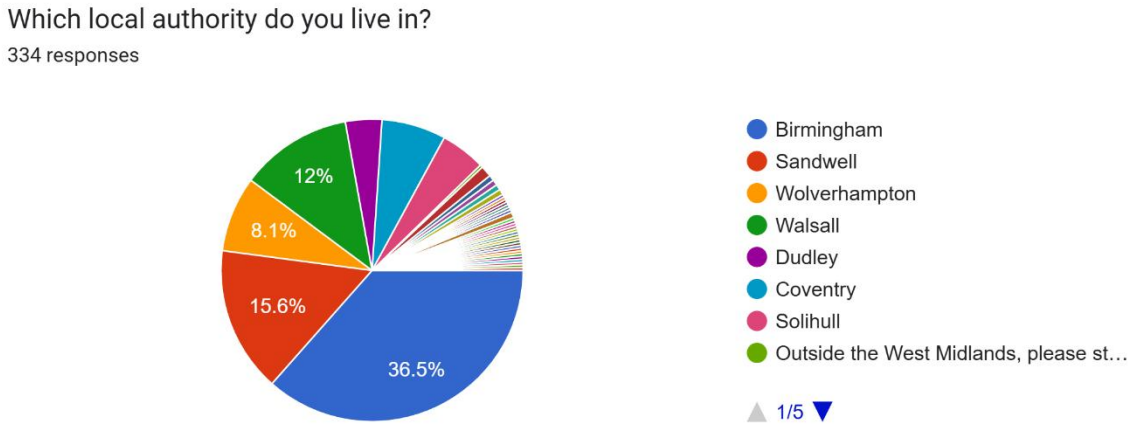


Religious and Faith Identity of Respondents

The survey captured a broad range of faith identities, reflecting the diversity within racially minoritised women across the West Midlands. **Sikh women** represented the largest proportion of respondents **(34.8%),** followed by **Muslim women (25.5%)** and **Hindu women (7.2%). Christian women** accounted for a further **16.8%,** while **11.4%** identified as having no religion. A small number selected "Other," **"Spiritual,"** or chose not to disclose their faith.

This distribution is significant in understanding the context of racism experienced by women of colour. Many of the incidents reported in later sections are linked not only to ethnicity but also to visible religious identity, for example, Sikh and Muslim women being targeted because of their clothing, symbols, or perceived affiliation with a particular religion. The strong representation from Sikh and Muslim women aligns with the increase in racially motivated attacks affecting these communities since summer 2024.

The diversity of faith backgrounds highlights that racism is cutting across religious lines, impacting women from multiple belief systems who collectively reported feeling unsafe, targeted, or overlooked by institutions.



Local Authority of Residence

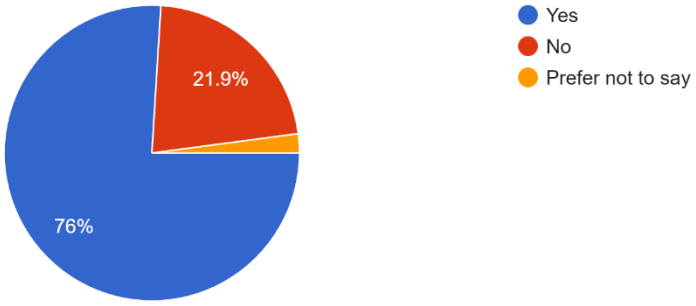
The data shows that experiences of racism reported in this survey span **every major local authority in the West Midlands**, with the highest proportion of respondents living in **Birmingham (36.5%)**, followed by **Sandwell (15.6%)**, **Wolverhampton (8.1%)**, and **Walsall (12%)**. Smaller but meaningful numbers also came from **Dudley (3.9%), Coventry (6.9%), Solihull (4.8%),** and surrounding areas.

This geographical spread demonstrates that **racially motivated harassment, discrimination, and fear are not isolated to one borough**, they are being felt across the region. The concentration of responses from Birmingham and Sandwell is consistent with the demographics of these areas, where large Black, Asian, and racially minoritised communities live and work. However, the presence of respondents from all local authorities indicates that **racial tension and targeted hostility towards women of colour is a West Midlands-wide issue**.

The range of local authorities represented also highlights the need for **coordinated regional action**, rather than fragmented borough-by-borough responses. Women of colour are experiencing similar fears, threats, and acts of racism regardless of their specific postcode, and they require **co-ordinated and consistent protection, communication, and leadership** from all statutory agencies and combined authority structures.

Section 3: Experiences of Racism & Hate (Since Summer 2024) Since Summer 2024 (post-riots), have you experienced any form of racism or hate incident?

333 responses

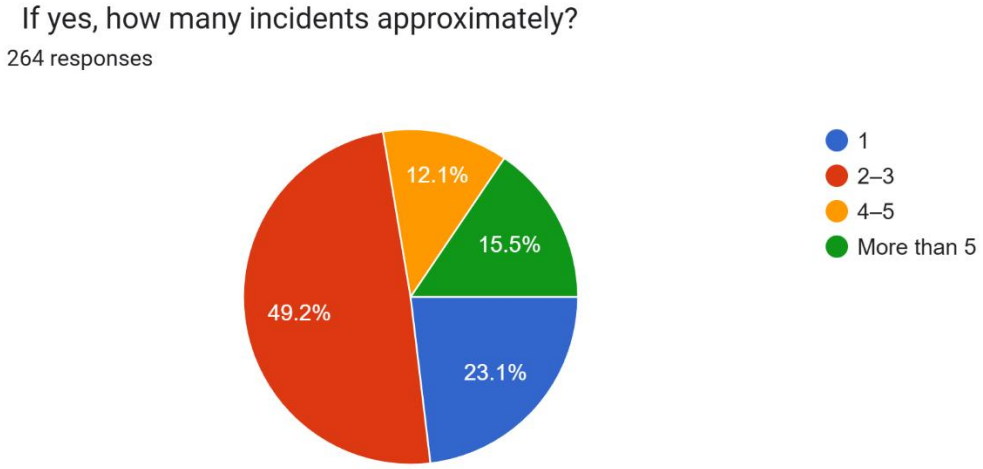


Experiences of Racism & Hate Since Summer 2024

The findings reveal an alarming and urgent picture: **76% of respondents reported experiencing racism or a hate incident since the summer 2024 riots**. Only one in five women (**21.9%)** reported no such experiences, and a small minority (2.1%) preferred not to disclose.

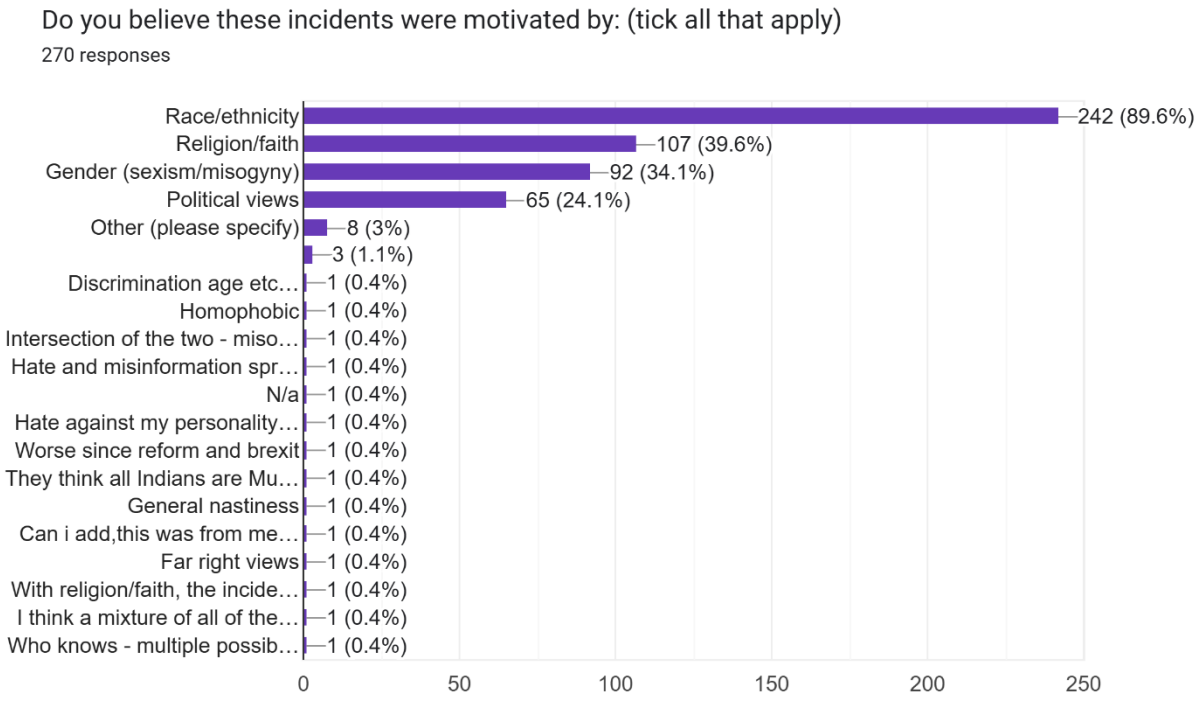
This exceptionally high prevalence underscores the scale and severity of the current climate for Black, Asian and racially minoritised women in the West Midlands. The data reflects not isolated or occasional incidents, but a widespread pattern of hostility, targeting and fear that is shaping women's daily lives. The aftermath of the riots has clearly intensified racial tensions, leaving women feeling increasingly unsafe in public, targeted for their identity, and unsupported by systems intended to protect them.

These findings demonstrate an urgent need for stronger public messaging, improved reporting pathways, visible safety measures, and coordinated action and support from local authorities, the police, and regional leadership. The scale of harm reflected in the research findings cannot be dismissed as anecdotal. It is a widespread, lived reality for the overwhelming majority of women who responded.



Number of Racism or Hate Incidents Experienced

This chart shows the scale of repeat victimisation among women of colour who reported experiencing racism or hate since Summer 2024. Of the 264 respondents who confirmed experiencing at least one incident, almost half (**49.2%)** reported **2–3 separate incidents**, indicating that racism is not a one-off event for these women, but a repeated and ongoing harm. A further **15.5% experienced more than five incidents**, highlighting a small but deeply affected group facing chronic and persistent targeting. Only **23.1% experienced a single incident**, and **12.1% reported 4–5 incidents**, suggesting that high-frequency exposure to racism is notably common. These findings demonstrate that women of colour across the West Midlands are routinely exposed to sustained hostility, which compounds fear, stress, and trauma over time and demands a coordinated, long-term response from statutory agencies.



Motivation Behind Incidents

The data shows overwhelmingly that racism is the primary driver behind the incidents reported by women of colour. **89.6%** of respondents identified *race or ethnicity* as a motivating factor, making it by far the most commonly cited cause. This confirms that women of colour are not facing isolated or random hostility but targeted and identity-based abuse.

Alongside race, **39.6%** of women believed their experiences were linked to their *religion or faith*, highlighting that racism and religious discrimination are often intertwined, especially for visibly identifiable groups such as Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu women. A further **34.1%** linked their experiences to *gender, sexism, or misogyny*, demonstrating the intersecting nature of racism and misogyny in the lives of women of colour.

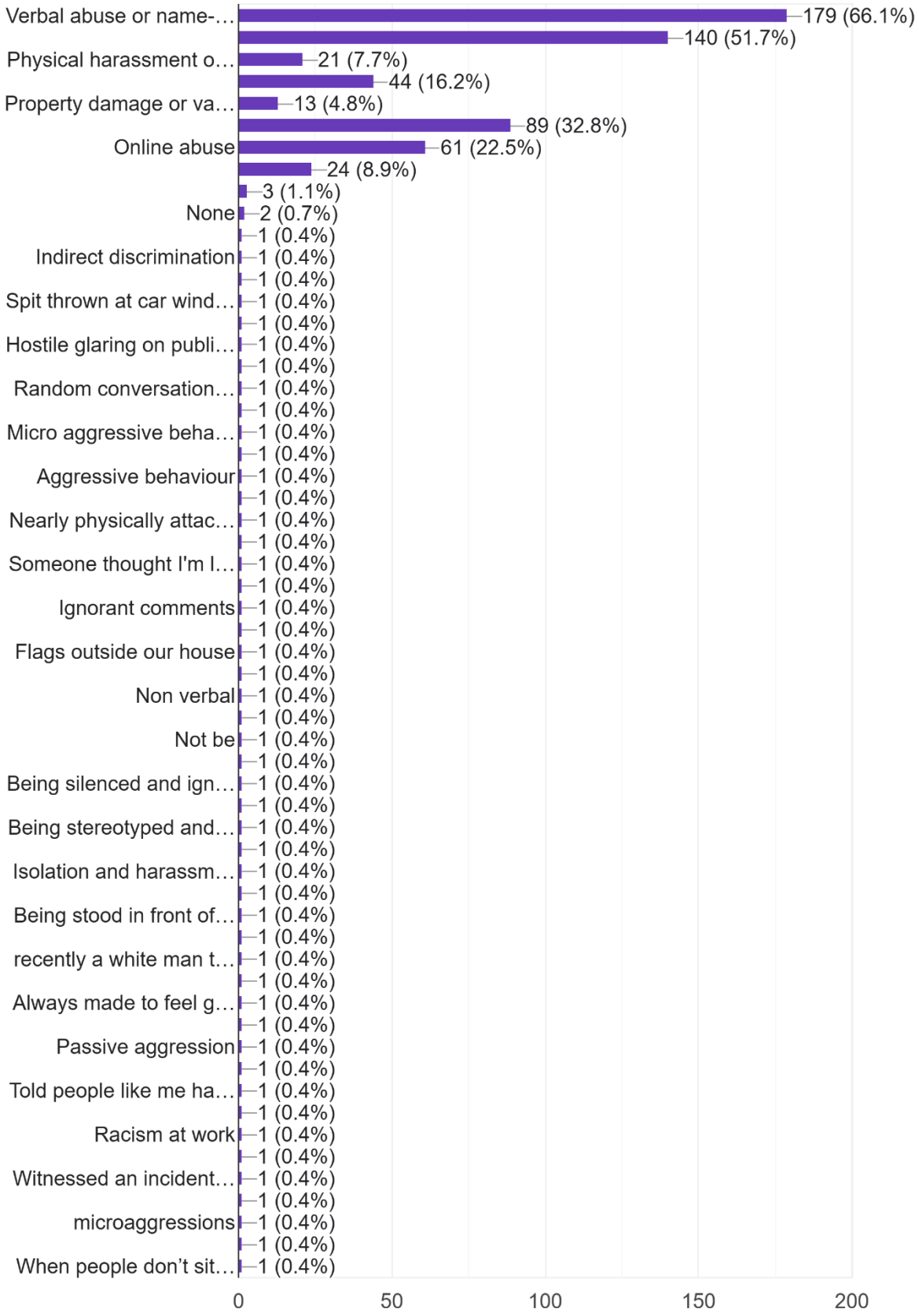
Additionally, **24.1%** felt that *political views* or the current political climate contributed to the hostility they experienced. This aligns with national concerns that inflammatory rhetoric, far-right mobilisation, and divisive public discourse have emboldened perpetrators and created a more hostile environment for minority communities.

Smaller but notable mentions under “Other” reflect experiences of homophobia, age discrimination, misinformation, far-right activity, and generalised hatred, indicating a broad and complex landscape of prejudice.

Overall, the responses paint a clear picture: **women of colour are being targeted because of who they are**, at the intersection of race, gender, faith, and current political tensions. This reinforces the need for urgent, coordinated responses from police, councils, and government to address rising racialised and gendered hate.

What type of incident did you experience? (tick all that apply)

271 responses



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Type of Incidents Experienced

The data shows that women of colour are facing a wide spectrum of racist and hate-motivated incidents, many of which are overt, hostile, and occurring in everyday public and professional environments. The most commonly reported incidents were **verbal abuse or name-calling (66.1%)**, followed closely by **racial slurs (51.7%)**, demonstrating that direct, explicit racism remains a dominant experience for women in this region. These forms of abuse are often minimised by society, yet they carry significant psychological harm and reinforce an environment where women of colour feel unsafe, dehumanised, and targeted.

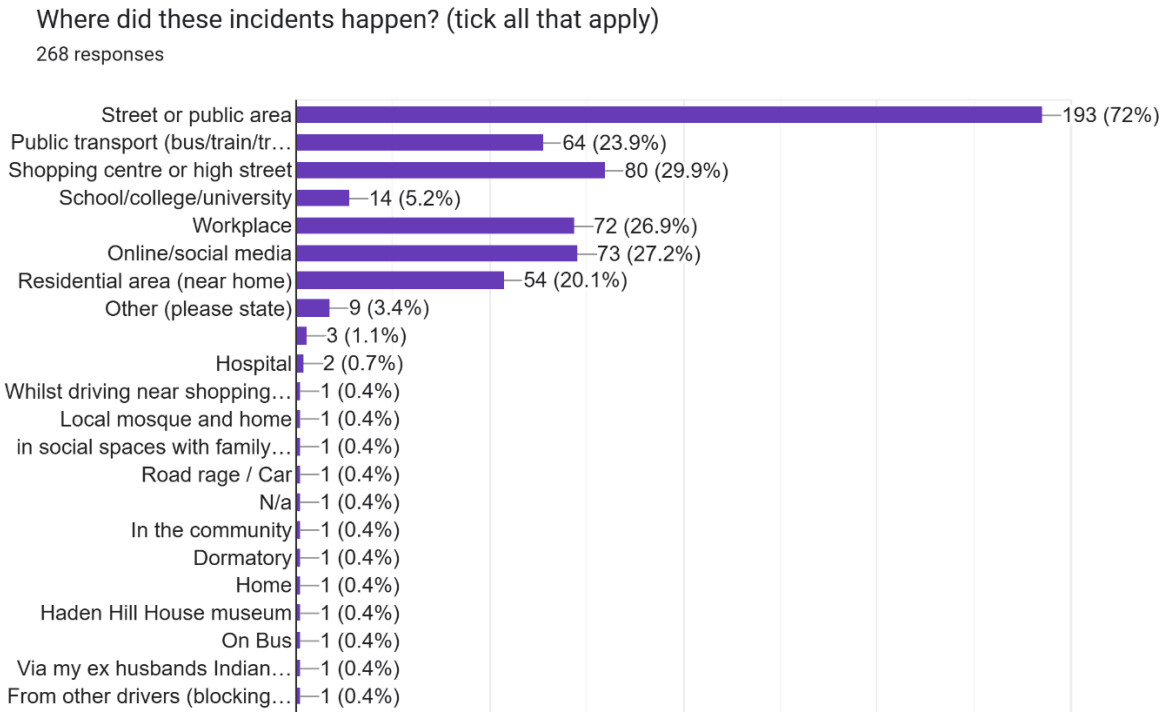
A worrying **32.8% experienced threats or intimidation**, indicating an escalation from verbal hostility to behaviours that create fear and coercion. Alarmingly, **22.5% experienced online abuse**, reflecting how racism has expanded beyond physical spaces into digital platforms, often without consequence for perpetrators.

The findings also show that **16.2% of women were subjected to sexualised comments or harassment**, underscoring the intersection of racism and misogyny. For women of colour, gendered racism is not an abstract concept, it manifests in sexualisation and demeaning behaviour that targets both their race and their womanhood.

Physical harassment or assault was reported by **7.7%**, and **4.8% experienced property damage or vandalism**, demonstrating that for some, the abuse escalates into material or physical harm.

The “Other” category provides qualitative insight into the subtler yet equally damaging forms of racism: microaggressions, workplace discrimination, job applicant bias, being ignored or treated differently, passive aggression, and institutional racism. These experiences highlight that racism is not only overt and violent but also embedded in systems, interactions, and everyday environments.

Together, these findings reflect a layered landscape of racial hostility, from microaggressions to direct violence, which women of colour are navigating daily. The breadth and nature of these incidents show that racism in the West Midlands is not isolated or exceptional; it is persistent, normalised, and deeply harmful.



Where Did These Incidents Happen?

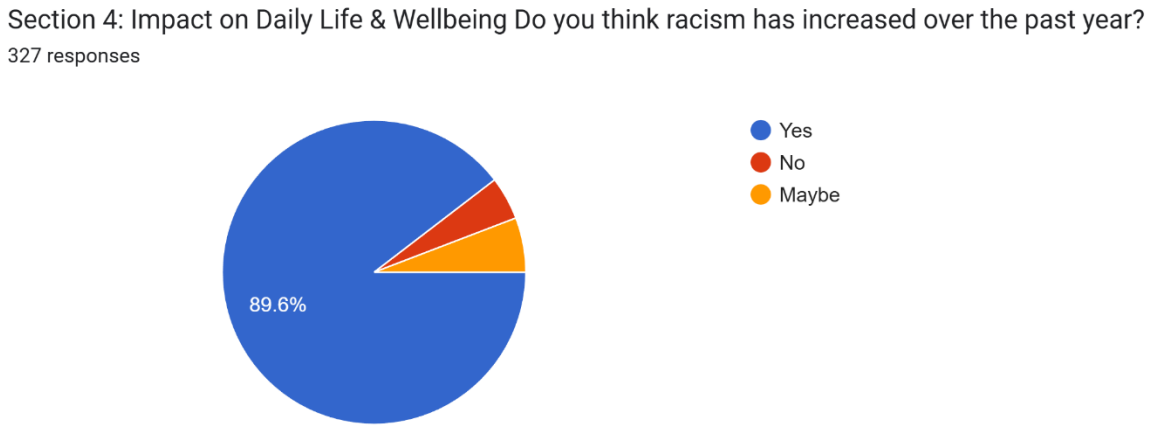
The survey results show that racism and hate incidents against women of colour are occurring in a wide range of everyday public and private settings, demonstrating that the problem is neither isolated nor confined to specific environments. The overwhelming majority of respondents (72%) reported experiencing incidents in **streets or public spaces**, indicating that simply moving through their communities has become a point of vulnerability and fear. A further **29.9%** experienced incidents in **shopping centres or high streets**, locations that should feel neutral and safe but have become sites of harassment, intimidation, and racialised abuse.

Public transport was another major area of concern, with **23.9%** of respondents encountering racism on **buses, trains, or trams**. This reflects a pattern echoed nationally, where enclosed, high-pressure environments create opportunities for racialised targeting. Incidents occurring **online or via social media (27.2%)** highlight how abuse is not confined to physical spaces but follows women into digital environments, making the hostility inescapable.

Worryingly, more than a quarter (**26.9%**) reported incidents occurring in the **workplace**, revealing that racism permeates formal and supposedly regulated spaces. Educational settings such as **schools, colleges, and universities** were also cited **(5.2%),** indicating that younger women and students are not shielded from this climate.

Finally, **20.1%** of respondents reported incidents happening **near their homes**, in residential areas where people should feel most secure. This suggests that racism is infiltrating the intimate geography of daily life, eroding women's sense of safety even within their immediate neighbourhoods.

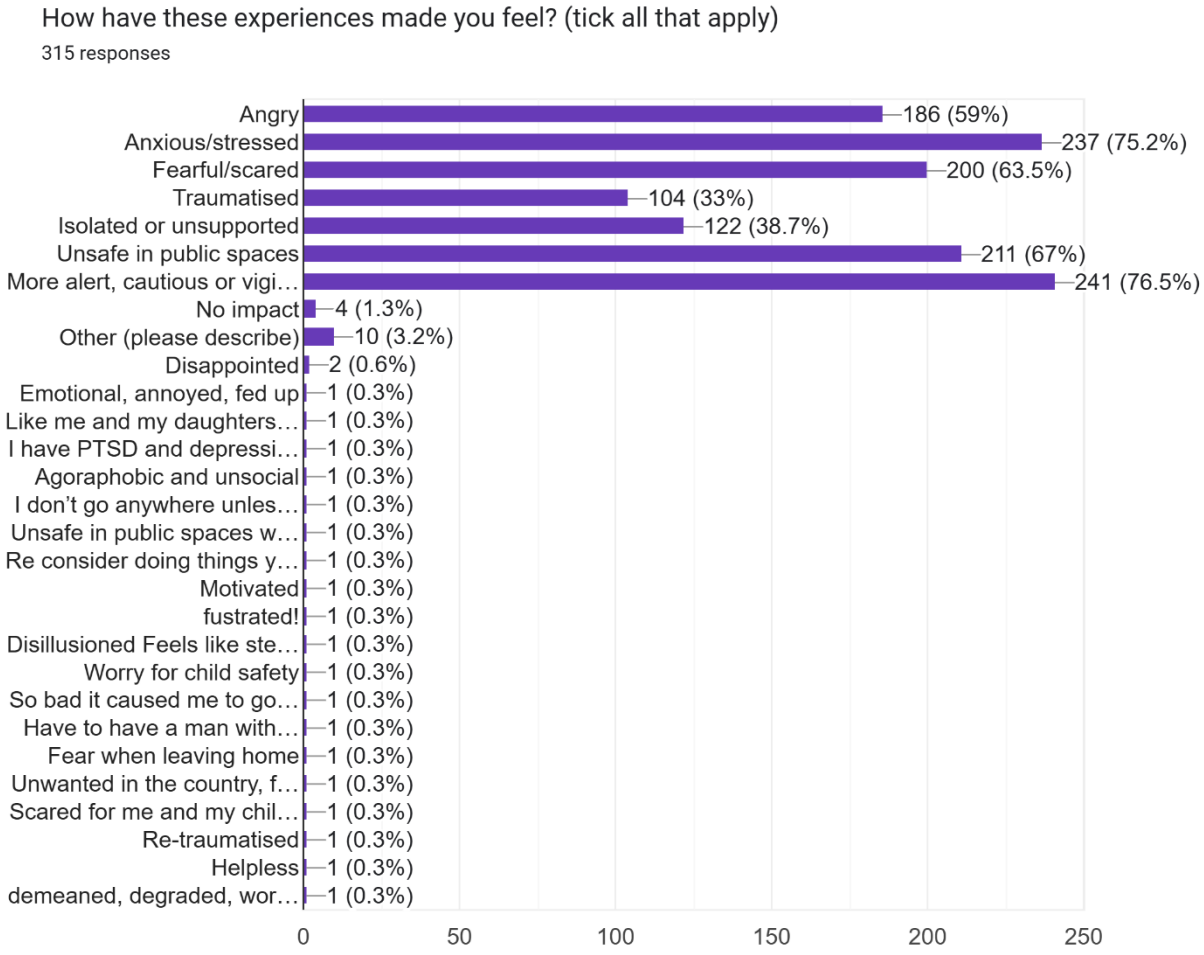
Overall, the data paints a concerning picture: racism is not bound to a particular context, it is pervasive, showing up in public, private, professional, digital, and community spaces. For women of colour, this means the risk of racialised harm is continuous and unpredictable, impacting mobility, wellbeing, and participation in everyday life.



Do you think racism has increased over the past year?

The data shows an overwhelming consensus among respondents that racism has intensified over the past year. **89.6% of women of colour reported a clear increase in racism**, while only a very small minority felt unsure or disagreed. This near-unanimous response reflects a shared and urgent reality: women of colour across the West Midlands and beyond are experiencing a noticeable escalation in hostility, discrimination, and unsafe public environments.

The strength of this finding provides compelling evidence that the rise in racialised and misogynistic abuse is not anecdotal or isolated. It is being widely and consistently felt across communities, cutting across age, ethnicity, and religion. For many respondents, the past year, particularly post-riots, has brought heightened fear, hyper-vigilance, and a decline in their sense of belonging and safety. This makes the case for immediate, coordinated action across policing, local councils, and national government both undeniable and urgent.

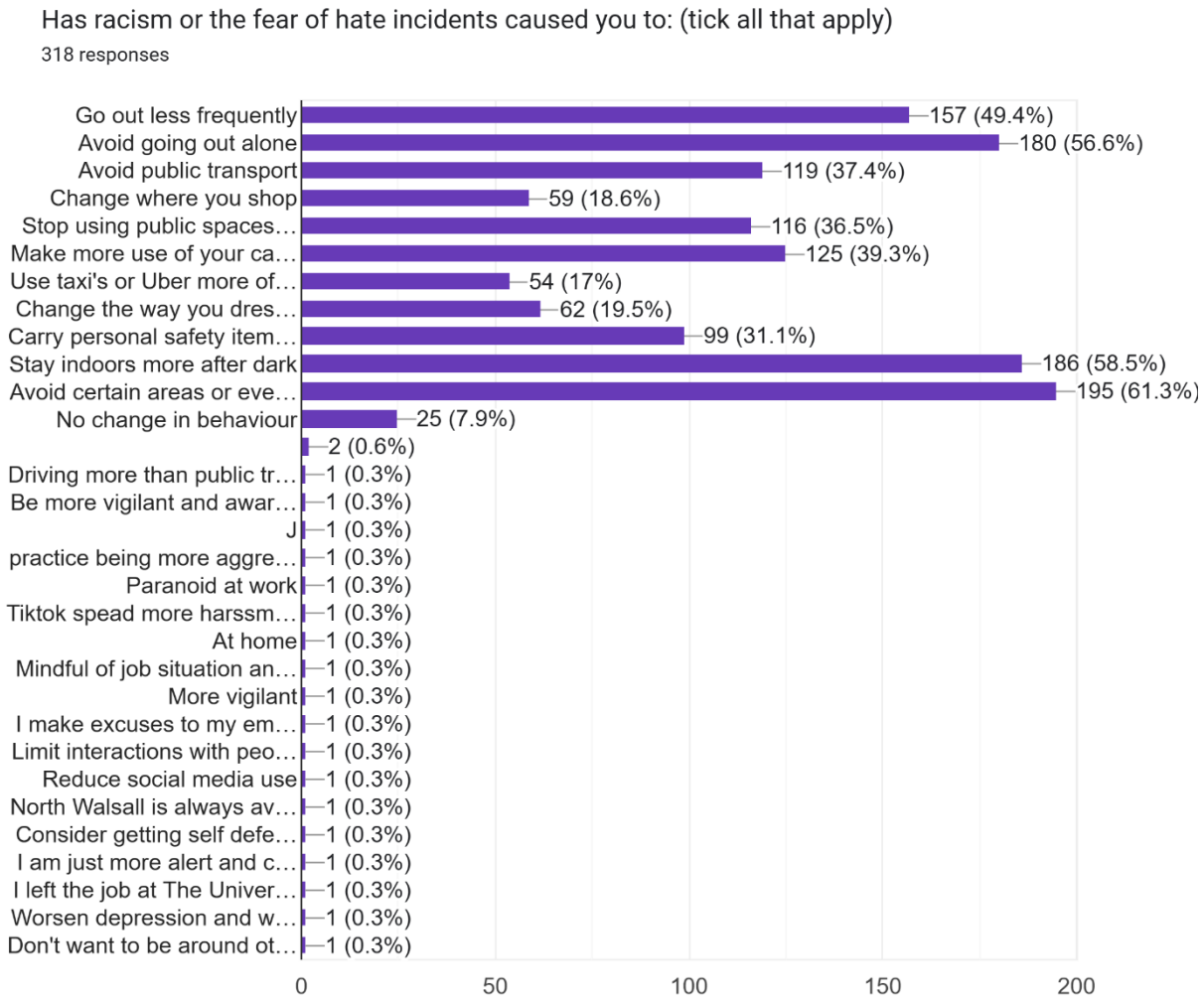


Impact of Racism on Emotional & Psychological Wellbeing

The data shows a profound emotional and psychological toll on women of colour experiencing racism across the West Midlands. The majority of respondents reported **heightened vigilance (76.5%)**, **feeling unsafe in public spaces (67%)**, and significant levels of **anxiety/stress (75.2%)** and **fear (63.5%)**. **One-third (33%)** described feeling **traumatised**, while **38.7% felt isolated or unsupported**.

These responses highlight not just momentary distress, but the long-term physiological and psychological effects of living in a persistent state of racialised threat. Research shows that chronic anxiety and hypervigilance activate the body's **fight-or-flight system**, increasing cortisol and stress hormones. Over time, this can impact **sleep, concentration, cardiovascular health, decision-making**, and overall wellbeing. For many women, these experiences have altered their daily routines, reduced their freedom of movement, and shifted how safe they feel in their own communities.

This pattern aligns with established research on racial trauma, demonstrating that repeated exposure to racism can produce symptoms similar to PTSD, including intrusive thoughts, avoidance behaviours, and long-term emotional exhaustion. The scale and consistency of these findings clearly indicate that racism is not only a social issue, but a **public health issue** affecting the mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of women of colour across the region.



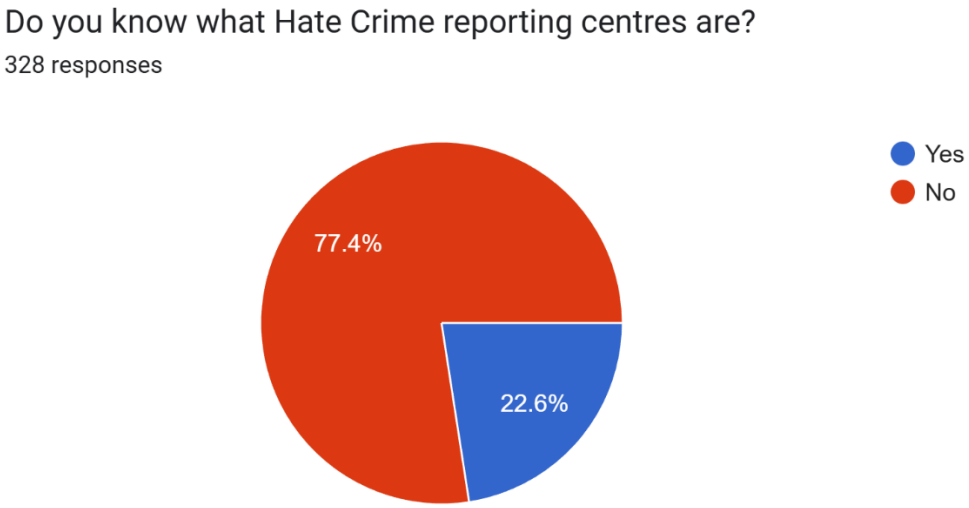
Has racism or the fear of hate incidents caused you to…?

The data shows a profound shift in how women of colour are navigating daily life as a result of racism and rising hate incidents. A majority of respondents reported modifying their behaviour in ways that significantly reduce their freedom, independence, and wellbeing.

More than half **(56.6%)** now avoid going out alone, and **61.3%** avoid certain areas or events entirely. Almost half (**49.4%**) go out less frequently, highlighting a widespread withdrawal from public spaces. Fear has also influenced practical decisions, with **39.3%** relying more on their cars and **37.4%** avoiding public transport - changes that have financial, social, and psychological consequences including environmental.

Nearly one-third **(31.1%)** now carry personal safety items, and **19.5%** have changed the way they dress in an attempt to minimise targeted hostility. These adaptations demonstrate the extent to which racism is shaping women's everyday choices, eroding their sense of safety, and forcing them into 'survival mode.'

Taken together, these findings illustrate a pattern of restriction and hyper-vigilance that is both pervasive and gendered. Women of colour are not simply experiencing racist incidents; they are restructuring their lives to anticipate and avoid further harm. This level of behavioural change reflects chronic fear, diminished trust in public safety systems, and the cumulative impact of racialised and gendered hostility.

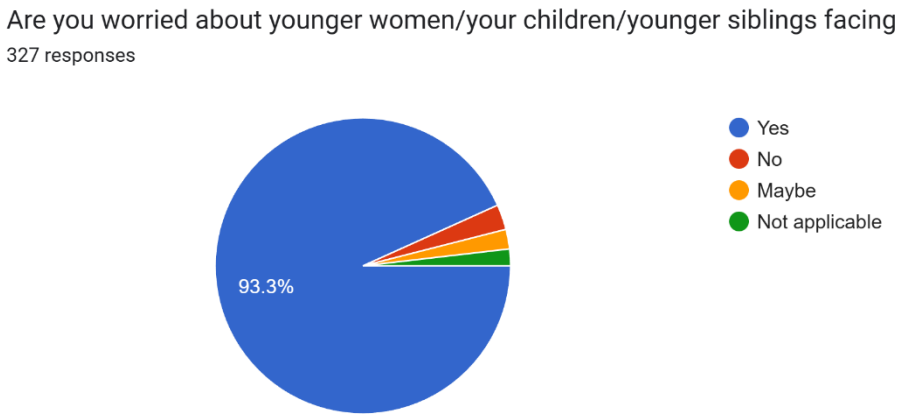


Awareness of Hate Crime Reporting Centres

The findings show a significant gap in awareness of formal reporting pathways. **More than three-quarters of respondents (77.4%) stated that they do not know what Hate Crime Reporting Centres are**, suggesting that many women of colour are experiencing rising levels of racism without knowing where or how to safely report incidents. This lack of awareness directly contributes to chronic under-reporting, feelings of isolation, and diminished trust in statutory agencies.

It's important to see this outcome, alongside the data gathered (page 27), highlighting that high levels of racism, harassment, and violence **(82.9%)** are not being reported to the police either.

For women who are already navigating fear, vigilance, and behaviour changes linked to racism, the absence of clear, accessible information about reporting options further compounds their vulnerability. The data highlights an urgent need for **local authorities, the police, and partner agencies to improve public communication, deliver targeted outreach, and ensure reporting mechanisms are visible, culturally competent, and trusted within racially minoritised communities**.

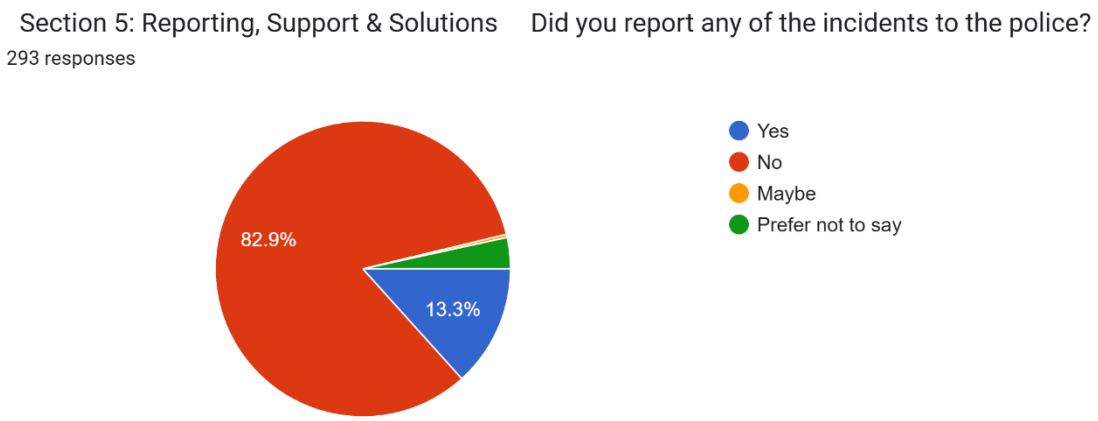


Are you worried about younger women/your children/younger siblings facing racism?"

The responses show an overwhelming and urgent concern about the future safety of younger generations. An extraordinary **93.3% of respondents** reported that they are worried about younger women, girls, or younger siblings experiencing racism. This finding highlights a deep, generational fear that racism is not only worsening in the present but there is concern that it will directly harm future generations.

This level of concern reflects a **collective loss of trust in public safety**, social cohesion, and institutional protection. Women are not only managing their own fear, vigilance, and behavioural changes, but they are also carrying the additional emotional burden of trying to protect children and younger family members.

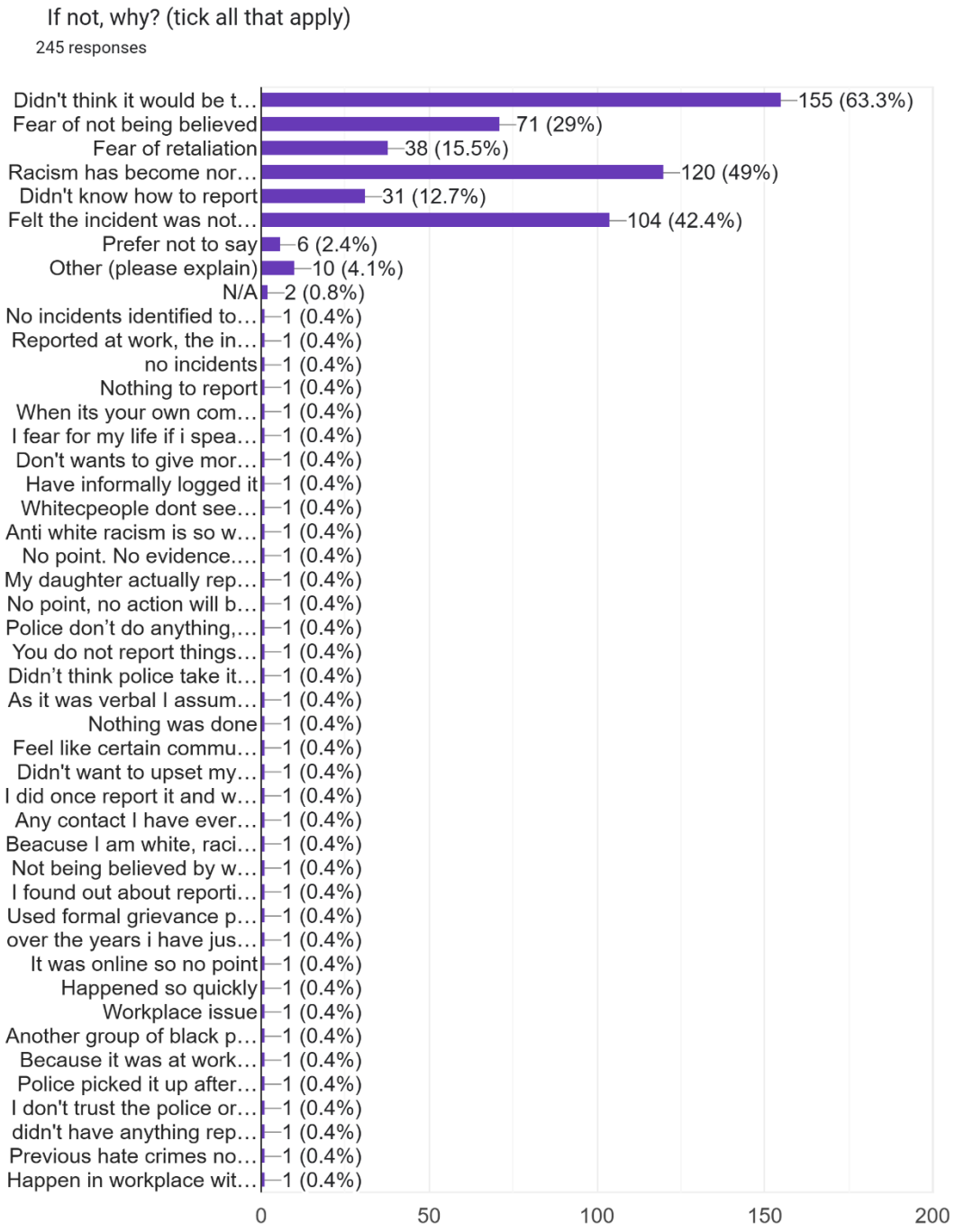
This result strongly indicates that racism in the West Midlands is perceived not as isolated incidents but as a **widening threat** that is shaping how families think, plan, move, and navigate public life. It underlines the urgent need for **preventative interventions**, community reassurance, and visible commitments from local and national leaders to safeguard the next generation.



Reporting to the Police

The data shows an overwhelming lack of trust in policing among women of colour. Despite the high levels of racism, harassment, and violence reported elsewhere in the survey, **82.9% of respondents did not report any of the incidents to the police**. Only **13.3%** felt able to report, with a small minority unsure or preferring not to say. This indicates a profound disconnect between police services and the women they are meant to protect.

The extremely low reporting rate highlights barriers such as fear of not being believed, past negative interactions, expectations of inaction, and concerns about being minimised or blamed. These figures demonstrate the urgent need for improved trust-building, culturally competent policing, and mechanisms that ensure women of colour feel safe, supported, and taken seriously when they come forward.



Reasons for non-reporting

The data shows that **the vast majority of women who experienced racism did not report it**, with significant barriers shaping this silence. The most common reason, cited by **63.3%**, was the belief that the incident would **not be taken seriously**, reflecting a profound lack of confidence in statutory services. Almost **half (49%)** felt that racism has become so normalised that reporting seems futile, while **42.4%** believed the incident was "not serious enough," highlighting how women of colour frequently minimise harm due to repeated exposure or societal dismissal of their experiences. Further barriers included a **fear of not being believed (29%)**, **fear of retaliation (15.5%)**, and **not knowing how to report (12.7%)**. Collectively, these findings illustrate a deep and systemic trust deficit, leaving many women to endure racism unsupported and unprotected.

Understanding Lived Experiences

Beyond the quantitative data, the survey included several open-ended questions to capture the depth and nuances of women's lived experiences, insight that statistics alone cannot convey. These narrative responses provide crucial context, illustrating how racism is felt, interpreted, and internalised in everyday life. Women used this section to describe the emotional impact of incidents, barriers to reporting, and their views on what needs to change at the level of policing, councils, and national government. The comments reveal patterns of fear, frustration, exclusion, and mistrust that numbers cannot fully express, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change. These testimonies form the emotional and experiential core of the report, grounding the findings in the real voices of women of colour across the West Midlands.

Respondent no 7
"Racism is not taken as seriously as antisemitism, and it should. We need a better education system, and the media and government need to highlight more incidents and hold racists accountable by fining or incarcerated them. They (police) need to inform the victims of any updates. I reported 5 months ago and have not had any updates. They also need to weed out their own racist officers and fire them instead of putting them on desk duty."

Respondent no 19
"Awareness of how to report, particular in areas like places of worship and community centres. But also, awareness of what counts as a race hate crime, I think too many women (particularly migrants) don't think a lot of things that happen to them count and don't report. I also think there needs to be more onus on men. We keep being told what we should do, what we should carry, how we should walk, run, take transport, but never do we talk about what men can do as allies and also to not be pricks (sorry for the language)."

Respondent 32
"More education and publicity around the positives of immigration and the history of immigration. More scrutiny of the media who seem to deliberately highlight bad news stories relating to ethnic minorities. More ownership at political level and recognition of the benefits of immigration and reality of small percentage that are actually here. Ownership that the issues most people are facing are not caused by migrants."

Respondent 34
"Stop encouraging racist behaviour and not allow things like flags to be displayed everywhere, stop publicising hatred against immigrants."

Respondent 55
"So much! It's become acceptable to racially abuse people of colour, and I see more people encourage those doing it rather than stepping in to help so I didn't feel reporting it would achieve anything, but it has certainly made me more fearful, and I am a professional myself. More needs to be done to show support for ethnic communities and make it clear that we are supported and respected."

Respondent 65
"(Councils) Meet more with communities, provide safe spaces and ways to report racist incidents, make a clear stance on not allowing racism in the community, rather than just letting things be (eg the raise the colours and flags situation and associated racist and violent behaviour and vandalism where councils have not really taken a strong position of condemning racism associated with it)."

Respondent no 90
“I think racism needs to be taken more seriously, especially casual racism and micro aggressions, including between communities e.g. racism between Indian people. People need to also be more educated on the contribution of PoC to this country and ALL policies which parties such as Reform promote. Racism should also be taught in schools from young. I’ve always grown up knowing I can change my name, gender, appearance, anything apart from my skin colour.”

Respondent no 131
“More education for younger people around misogyny and sexual harassment and racism. it is almost too late for the older generation, but we can educate the next generation to be more accepting.”

Respondent no 149
“Invest more into safety. More community and youth spaces. Mental health support. Fund charities and organisations who can help. Stricter laws.”

Respondent no 165
“The media and politicians’ narratives need challenging, severely and robustly. They have fed into the far right demonisation of diversity and asylum seekers and refugees. Vulnerable people have been targeted relentlessly by the biased media depictions click baiting and race baiting headlines they need to stop platforming reform (politician name) and allowing this hateful rhetoric to become normalised. The problems, the country Is facing, it’s not because of immigration or diversity and certainly not because of Muslims and Islam it is years of corruption at the heart of Government. The tax evading billionaires have rinsed the nation and it is the billionaire political lobbyists donors pulling the strings at the heart of our parliament.”

Respondent 176
“The government needs to put a stop to this racist and violent rhetoric. Education for the masses. Police need to be trained and retrained. The media needs to be held accountable and made to pay for misinformation. More support for minority communities is needed. Tougher measures to be put in place to deter crime against women and racially aggravated crime.”

Respondent 293
“Show the public the importance of reporting and how effective it can be in terms of leading to interventions, not just through PR or words at a conference, but with tangible action. Hate crimes are often not reported because it takes so much time and mental/physical effort to go through the reporting process and to re-live the traumatising events throughout, all for the case to end up going nowhere with no further action taken most of the time. By reporting, there are also potential consequences for the victim in terms of further attacks if the perpetrators find out about the reporting.

The police force as a system need to hold themselves accountable to individual and collective racist/Islamophobic/discriminatory attitudes within the force and rid themselves of this accordingly. No member of the public, especially women of colour, are going to feel safe in reporting a crime to the police when it’s evident that the people who are responsible for calling out injustices within the community align themselves with the very injustice that is unfolding.

The police also need to do better as a whole in terms of upholding the law against actual perpetrators of racist hate crimes compared to other populations that are considered to be "criminal" and yet are not harming others. Arresting protestors who are peacefully speaking out against genocide without causing disturbance or harm to anyone, while simultaneously allowing people who are overtly racist to riot across the country and start racist hate marches without any consequence whatsoever only perpetuates the feeling of unsafety and lack of

reliance that people of colour have towards the police. I understand that this survey is specifically for the west midlands police however such obvious discrepancies in law enforcement needs to be addressed across the nation as a whole."

Respondent 302
"Educational systems to teach children about different religions and cultures so they don't stick every colour person into one category and stereotypes that have become social to their own convenience and when we are acknowledged it's either usually for hate racial slurs or as a fake front to show they are including diversity in workplace when they try and meet their inclusion policies. So more seen as a tick box approach when really behind the surface there is no recognition for the person being a human being just like anyone else but experiencing a different reality and hardships just because of their colour of their skin, gender (women) and religion.

I tend to feel as a woman I can't stop others from staring in public but have always experienced from young, being sexualised and preyed on just from other people's stares, especially from another man on public transport.

I do fear interacting socially especially when alcohol involved in even when it's a work party as there's been numerous of times that colleague or stranger from a white background would make a joke or lean towards asking 'where you from' and implying I'm not from UK and you know they trying to get to what my background and religion is when I don't feel comfortable to say as I don't know why the question matters and feel judged by the tone of voice and approach they use.

Also in particular the rise in lots of people putting up the England flag and I feel has been used as a threat symbol to intimate those of colours as it feels like history repeating itself in Britain. So racism doesn't just happen today, there's always been a pattern in history of this where we carry the trauma from our parents and theirs from the times they had to make sacrifices and as we were made to feel excluded in systems like schools, community etc.

There's also so much evidence on how those of coloured background (minority) have had a deep struggle in hardships of poverty and mental health. Not only have our own cultures and religions tried to tell us our mental health needs to be put aside and to toughen up, it makes younger generations like myself who now grow up online feel we can't escape the targeting. One towards women and always been judged and another for being a women of colour trying to live a life in this world. If we are too outspoken it's seen as rude and feels only acceptable to suffer in silence.

And that we have to carry ourselves in public and having to fit an ideal image just to become less targetable of hate crime, sexualised and harassment."

A small number of white women also responded, appearing to challenge the focus of the survey. Some of their comments included:

Respondent 109
"Deport asylum seekers, stop releasing those that have committed terrible crimes from prison early and more policing in parks, towns and streets. Better street lighting, longer sentences. Education in schools and community centres in how to protect yourself if someone gives you abuse, follows you home, approaches you with a weapon etc. there is lots of education surrounding not to do this mad that but no education on what to do if you get approached.

Deport all asylum seekers - they have different ideologies to us. It's the norm in their culture to rape women and walk around with weapons - how are women and men supposed to protect ourselves."

What Women Say Needs to Change

The open comment section of the report generated hundreds of comments, however there were key themes that came out of the suggestions and experiences posted by respondents.

What Can the Police Do Better? - Key Themes

- **Take reports seriously**: act, investigate, follow up.
- **Be visible**: more patrols on streets, public spaces, transport hubs.
- **Build trust**: engage with local communities and women of colour.
- **Tackle internal racism**: remove racist officers, improve vetting & accountability.
- **Improve diversity**: workforce that reflects communities.
- **Better training**: anti-racism, cultural awareness, misogyny, intersectionality.
- **Listen & believe victims**: compassionate, trauma-informed responses.
- **Clear reporting routes**: make hate crime reporting easier & well publicised.
- **Act on early warning signs**: tackle microaggressions, flags, harassment.
- **Work with councils & community groups**: joint safety plans.

What Should Local Councils / West Midlands Mayor's Office Do Better? - Key Themes

- **Publicly condemn racism and hate**: show visible leadership.
- **Improve safety:** lighting, CCTV, remove intimidating flags.
- **Increase community outreach**: create safe reporting hubs.
- **Promote anti-racism education:** schools, workplaces, communities.
- **Address institutional racism**: hold councillors accountable.
- **Provide support and protection:** for victims of racism.
- **Increase diversity in leadership**: leaders to reflect communities and impact decision-making.
- **Work jointly:** police, faith groups and community partners.

What Should the Government Do Better? - Key Themes

- **Publicly condemn racism and hate speech**: stop inflammatory rhetoric.
- **Strengthen laws and penalties:** punishment for racist abuse, hate crime, violence against women.
- **End divisive narratives around immigration**: promote unity and accurate information.
- **Address institutional racism:** in government, policing, and public services.
- **Increase funding:** grants for community safety, youth services, and anti-racism initiatives.
- **Promote diversity in leadership**: reflect the communities they serve, in public institutions, impact decision-making.
- **Improve education**: true history, racism awareness, equality, emotional intelligence.
- **Ensure fair media regulation:** stop sensationalism and harmful narratives.
- **Show leadership on women's safety**: VAWG agenda must include protection for racially minoritised women specifically.
- **Invest in public services:** (NHS, schools, policing) reduce social tensions driving hate.

Additional Themes from Respondents

- **Stop normalising racism through silence**: be visibly anti-racist at national level.

- **Challenge far-right extremism**: stronger action on hate groups, marches, and online radicalisation.
- **Regulate social media** to prevent the spread of racist misinformation and incitement.
- **Hold politicians accountable** for racist rhetoric, discriminatory behaviour, and harmful messaging.
- **Tackle underlying causes of division**: poverty, austerity, lack of opportunity, housing insecurity.
- **Use accurate crime statistics** to counter harmful myths about minorities.
- **Acknowledge racism against all groups** while recognising the *heightened vulnerability* of women of colour.
- **Improve the asylum and immigration system** with fairness, clarity and compassion.
- **Reform the justice system** for faster prosecutions and stronger consequences for race-based harm.
- **Provide national anti-racism campaigns** similar to the public health campaigns.
- **Support community cohesion initiatives** and fund local partnership work.
- **Ensure visible representation** of Black, Asian and other minority women at senior levels.
- **Act decisively on hate symbols** (e.g., misuse of flags) used to intimidate communities.
- **Prioritise safety in public spaces** through lighting, CCTV, patrols, and safer infrastructure.
- **Address Islamophobia, anti-Blackness, anti-Sikh hate, and intra-community racism** explicitly.
- **Strengthen the CPS and police capacity** to bring hate crime cases to court promptly.
- **Increase consequences for media outlets** that fuel division through biased reporting.

Racism Against Women of Colour and the VAWG Policy Gap

While the UK's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy recognises the gendered nature of abuse, it does not explicitly address racism as a driver of violence, harm or vulnerability for women of colour. The findings of this report demonstrate that racialised harassment, threats and sexual violence are shaping women's safety, freedom of movement and wellbeing in ways that sit at the intersection of race and gender. Without an explicit focus on racism within VAWG policy, the experiences of women of colour risk being overlooked, fragmented across systems, or treated solely as hate crime rather than as part of a wider pattern of gendered violence. Addressing racism must therefore be recognised as a core component of any effective VAWG strategy, not an optional or parallel issue.

The following recommendations set out what statutory agencies must do to address this gap and respond meaningfully to the realities women of colour are facing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of - **The Colour of Fear: Racism, Safety Concerns of Women of Colour in the West Midlands** and the experiences shared by 334 respondents across the West Midlands, it's clear that urgent, multi-level and multi-organisational action is required. The recommendations below are grouped by key institutions: **Policing**, **Local Authorities & the West Midlands Mayor's Office**, **National Government**, and **Community & Education Sectors**. They reflect what women of colour are asking for directly, as well as wider structural reforms indicated by the data.

1. Recommendations for West Midlands Police

1.1 Improve Trust, Accountability & Response

- Treat all reports of racism and hate crime seriously, with clear investigation processes and transparent follow-up.
- Introduce mandatory anti-racism, cultural competency, and misogyny training for all officers, with yearly refreshers.
- Increase visible policing in high-risk areas identified by respondents (streets, high streets, public transport).
- Create dedicated Hate Crime Liaison Officers trained in trauma-informed practice, intersectionality, and community engagement.

1.2 Strengthen Community Relationships

- Establish regular engagement forums with women of colour, community groups, non-government organisations, and faith organisations.
- Co-produce safety plans with Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Black and Mixed-heritage community leaders.
- Increase recruitment of Black, Asian, and racially minoritised women into policing roles at all levels.

1.3 Improve Reporting Pathways

- Promote Hate Crime Reporting Centres widely through community organisations, social media, places of worship, GP surgeries, libraries and schools.
- Simplify reporting pathways, including anonymous reporting tools and translation support.
- Ensure frontline officers understand the difference between racism, hate crime, hate incidents and the cumulative harm caused by repeat harassment.

2. Recommendations for Local Authorities & the West Midlands Mayor's Office

2.1 Public Safety & Visible Leadership

- Publicly condemn racism, misogyny and hate incidents, particularly following riots, attacks, or periods of heightened tension.
- Take strong, rapid action against intimidation tactics such as the misuse of flags, threatening symbols, or territorial markings.
- Improve streetlighting, CCTV coverage, and police presence in high-risk areas identified through this survey.

2.2 Support Services & Community Protection

- Create safe, accessible reporting hubs located in community centres, gurdwaras, mosques, churches, and libraries.
- Fund specialist women's organisations, especially those led by racially minoritised women, to provide culturally competent support.
- Provide emotional and practical support for women experiencing racial trauma, including counselling and advocacy.

2.3 Anti-Racism & Equity in Governance

- Introduce mandatory anti-racism training for councillors, senior leaders, and staff.

- Hold councillors accountable for racist behaviour, social media activity, or failure to uphold equality duties.
- Increase diversity within local authority leadership, ensuring representation reflects the population served.
- Embed anti-racism in local policy, community safety strategies, and safeguarding frameworks.

3. Recommendations for National Government

3.1 Legislative & Policy Reform

- Strengthen laws and penalties related to hate crime, racist abuse, sexualised racism, and threats against women.
- Update hate crime legislation to recognise intersectional harm (e.g. race + gender + religion).
- Improve CPS timeliness and outcomes for race-based offences.

3.2 Public Messaging & Media Responsibility

- Publicly condemn racist rhetoric, inflammatory political messaging, and far-right narratives.
- Hold MPs and public figures accountable for spreading racially charged misinformation.
- Introduce stronger media regulation to curb sensationalist coverage that fuels division and hostility.

3.3 National Investment in Safety & Inclusion

- Fund nationwide anti-racism campaigns comparable to public health campaigns.
- Increase resources to police forces, NHS mental health services, schools, and youth provision in racially diverse areas.
- Improve the asylum and immigration system to reduce confusion, inflammatory discourse, and community tensions.

4. Recommendations for Education, Schools & Youth Settings

4.1 Curriculum Reform

- Integrate accurate teaching on colonial history, migration, anti-racism, and race equality from primary school onwards.
- Introduce emotional intelligence, healthy relationships, and anti-bullying content that addresses racism explicitly.

4.2 School & College Safety

- Improve staff training on racism, microaggressions, religious discrimination, and intersectional harm.
- Create safer reporting pathways for young women experiencing racism in school or on public transport.
- Partner with local councils and policing teams to protect high-risk routes for pupils.

5. Recommendations for Community & Faith Organisations

- Create community-led safety networks offering escorts, safe spaces, and reporting support.
- Deliver workshops for men and boys addressing misogyny, racism, and harmful narratives about women of colour.
- Ensure faith institutions actively challenge racism within their own congregations and offer support to affected women.
- Encourage partnership working between Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Black, Caribbean and mixed-heritage communities to promote unity during times of tension
- Encourage membership of women in key positions within the community and faith organisations leadership.

6. Recommendations for Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Develop a **West Midlands Regional Anti-Racism & Women's Safety Taskforce** involving councils, police, NHS, schools, universities, community groups, and academics.
- Share data across agencies to detect rising patterns of racialised hostility early.
- Co-produce solutions with women of colour, following the principle of 'nothing about us without us.'

Conclusion

The findings from this survey present a clear and urgent message: **women of colour across the West Midlands are experiencing a significant, sustained rise in racism, fear, and unsafe environments**. The emotional and behavioural impact is profound, and trust in institutions, especially policing, remains critically low.

Implementing the recommendations in this report requires visible leadership, sustained investment, and a multi-agency commitment to equity, safety, and justice. The voices of women of colour must remain central to decision-making, ensuring that their lived experiences drive meaningful and lasting change.

Hate Crime reporting centres

True Vision provide advice on hate crime, how to report it, and where to get support.

Stop Hate record hate incidents and provide third party support for all victims of hate crime.

Citizens Advice provides further information and guidance on reporting a hate crime or hate incident to the police.

Racially motivated hate crime reporting centres

On Your Side record and report hate incidents directed against East or Southeast Asian individuals and provide support for anybody in the UK who identifies as part of an East or Southeast Asian community.

Rakkha record and report hate incidents directed against Sikh and South Asian individuals and provide support for Sikh and South Asian victims of hate.

Religiously motivated hate crime reporting centres

https://www.muslimsafetynet.org.uk/ Muslim Safety Net was established in response to a report published by Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) following the racially and religiously aggravated riots in the summer of 2024.

Community Security Trust (CST) record and report antisemitic hate incidents and provide support for victims of antisemitism.

Tell MAMA record and report anti-Muslim (Islamophobic) hate incidents and provide support for victims of anti-Muslim hate.

https://sikhguard.org/ Sikh Guard is an initiative that aims to encourage the reporting of hate crime by members of the Sikh community throughout the United Kingdom.