

**No One Can See Me Cry: Understanding Mental
Health Issues for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority
Academics, Professional Staff and Students in
Higher Education**

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Thursday 2nd July 2020

A Thought...

- 'Jason... I know you like music... you know that *Kasabian* song **Underdog**...
- There is a lyric in that song that **perfectly encapsulates racism**...
- Your always going to have to **lose to ultimately win** in attempting to try and overcome this horrible thing... **the end result is inevitable altered mental state and trauma**...'

(Male, Mixed-Heritage, Academic, 15).

A Thought...

- ‘It is exhausting being a **Black person in higher education**, the racism and discrimination you continually experience from mainly **White people in the end pushes you to the precipice of madness...**
- ... all your thinking to yourself is come on... **No can see me cry... pull yourself together and just try and get through it. It’s wrong, its just so wrong...**’

(Female, Black, Professional Staff, 11).

The BAME Mental Health Experience...

- According to mental health charity **MIND (2013)** Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities continue to experience **differential outcomes** within the United Kingdom (UK) **mental health system despite increased attention on the area...**
- The trauma of racism for BAME academics, students and professional staff within higher education remains problematic against a backdrop of **cultural and organisational institutional racism (Arday, 2020).**
- Within higher education (HE), BAME staff and students consistently face barriers in terms of accessing contextually appropriate mental health intervention that **recognises sophisticated nature of insidious racism in all its overt and covert manifestations (Arday, 2020; Arday, 2018)**

Framing the Context...

- This discussion forms part of a qualitative mental health study which attempts to **illuminate experiences of racial discrimination regarding BAME individuals within the Academy** and impact upon mental health...
- The continual and residual trauma faced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals encountering **racial discrimination requires a particular set of psychological interventions** that help to unpack the violence of those racialized experiences... **(Grey et al., 2013)**.

Experiencing Racism in the Academy...

- The correlation between **continuous encounters of racism within the workplace and the effect on physical and mental well-being** for BAME individuals within the higher education sector is hardly surprising particularly given the paucity of psychological interventions in dealing with this trauma (**Memon et al., 2016; Myrie and Gannon, 2013**).
- The physical and mental well-being of BAME individuals within the sector remains an after-thought, which sadly becomes **intensified at the height of crisis, often exacerbating feelings of anxiousness, isolation and marginalisation** (**Palmer and Ward, 2007**).
- The cumulative effect of facing racialized episodes requires further examination as we begin to illuminate **discriminatory patterns regarding mental healthcare experiences for ethnic minorities** (**Arday, 2020**).

The casual instrument of discrimination...

- For many BAME individuals within higher education, they will often have to navigate the **institutionally racist and inequitable terrain of academia...**
- **This habitually coincides with a normative and causal integration of insidious and subtle racism, in the form of racial micro-aggression** (a cumulative and covert form of racism involving conscious and intentional actions or slurs) and hyper-surveillance which among many other discriminatory tropes renders **ethnic minority individuals as less capable (Rollock, 2011).**
- This context becomes further exacerbated particularly when considering **the lofty, egalitarian ideals often espoused by universities (Arday, 2019; Shilliam, 2015).**
- These ideals often become contradicted, **as universities continue to be complicit perhaps more than other institutions** within British society in maintaining and sustaining racial inequality **(Alexander and Arday, 2015).**

The lived experience...

- ‘I have found myself ignoring these symptoms and letting this build and build. The isolation... **I experience as a Black person in the Academy is debilitating**, you end up residing in this prism which becomes a downward spiral...
- ... Consequently, the violence of these racialized cultures affects your mental wellbeing... **In my own person case it resulted in a nervous breakdown and me self-harming to gain some semblance of control back** that had been taken away from me...’

(Female, Mixed-Heritage, Academic, 21).

Marginalisation...

- ‘I have worked in my department for 3 years and there has always been a conscious effort by my **White colleagues to ostracise me and keep me on the margins of everything...**
- **... You end up suffering a kind of double violence** when you then go and speak to a healthcare professional at university that thinks you are being hypersensitive or paranoid, **it is really disconcerting and makes you feel even further isolated when you cannot rely on mental health professionals to assist you in your time of need.** You say something... and it’s like here we go again... Black person talking about race...’

(Male, Black, Academic, 27).

Isolation... Victimization...

- ‘I am the only **student of colour on my degree programme...** and to be honest my White counterparts make **me aware of this and so do my lecturers...**
- **... I am made to feel inferior** and this results in a horrible anxiousness that I experience everyday resulting in panic attacks and ultimately just not attending, **for fear of encountering this everyday, all day in lecturers and seminars...**’

(Female, Asian, Student, 2).

Considerations and Recommendations...

- The need for targeted **psychological interventions to better support ethnic minorities** in conceptualising and dealing with their racialized experiences is pivotal, in an attempt to stay ahead of **more sophisticated and pernicious forms of racism** (Arday, 2020; Suresh and Bhui, 2006).
- The relentless, daily encounter with racial discrimination is a **nuanced and complex experience** that requires contextual psychological interventions such as **cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing** (Lamb et al., 2012; Sewell, 2012).
- Such interventions must coincide with a **more diverse pool of healthcare professionals aware of the impact of racism** and attempts must be made where prevalent to not decentre racism as the problem (Arday, 2020).

Forthcoming Paper...

- **Arday, J.** *No One Can See Me Cry: Understanding Mental Health Issues for Black and Ethnic Minority Staff in Higher Education* (Higher Education: Under Review).