



The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network



Toolkit

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR ETHNICALLY DIVERSE WOMEN

A practical guide
for managers



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BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION & WIDER CONTEXT

There is growing awareness around the disparities in mental health outcomes across ethnicities in the UK. The Cabinet Office Race Disparity Unit¹ first reported in 2017 and highlighted that, in 2014, 29% of Black/Black British women experienced a Common Mental Health Disorder in the past week, 28.7% of women from a Mixed Other background and 23.6% of Asian women reported the same. That is a higher rate than for White British women or Other White women – 21% and 16% respectively. These findings are limited to England due to a lack of readily available data investigating race, gender and mental health in Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

The National Study of Health and Wellbeing, also known as the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS), runs every 7 years. Since 1993, it has uncovered how everyday stresses, strains and joys affect the health of people living in England.

The 2021 survey, the fifth in the series, has an objective of interviewing circa 8,000 adults aged 16 and over from across England. The survey findings will inform and improve local and national planning for health and support services.

More than 1 in 3 (38%) of ethnically diverse women have experienced or witnessed racial harassment and bullying from customers and clients. The rate is highest for Bangladeshi women at 65%³

It is important that managers are aware of differences in challenges linked to their employees' mental health and wellbeing as a result of cultural background and lived experience. For example, women from ethnically diverse backgrounds are more likely to face discrimination and racist abuse. This has been linked to increased stress, hyper-awareness of difference, increased levels of psychosis and depression, decreased self-esteem, emotional distress, trauma and post-traumatic stress.²

Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people have disproportionately lost their jobs, are more likely to be unemployed or in precarious work and are likely to have lower earnings than their White counterparts.⁴

Financial insecurity has been linked to higher rates of mental ill health.⁵ A lack of access to either employment or good quality employment can decrease quality of life, social status, self-esteem and achievement of life goals.⁶ Black, Asian and ethnic minority people have lower access to care and interventions that support mental health. For example, they are more likely to be discriminated against under NHS health care⁷ and have less access to green space. The lack of access has been linked to a reduction in wellbeing.⁸

Research by Simetrica Jacobs found that, among East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) communities in the UK, experiencing racism leads to a 15.2% increase in the likelihood of being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. They estimate that the cost of racism experienced by ESEA communities for employers amounts to £2.24 billion.⁹

This guide, like the self-care toolkit we commissioned to support ethnically diverse women, does not have all the answers. Despite growing interest in how race, mental health and gender interact, we are limited by a lack of data. This guide aims to contribute towards the growing effort to educate and support managers with practical techniques to build authentic relationships and foster a deeper appreciation of the unique mental health challenges that may be faced by the Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees in their teams.

THE OPPORTUNITY

While the pandemic has exacerbated existing disparities, it has also acted as an unprecedented catalyst for change. It has challenged the way we think about mental health and race at work, and it has helped employers reimagine new ways of working. Previously, practices that are beneficial to mental health, such as flexible working, were difficult to implement. These interventions are now commonplace, and many employers have elevated mental health on parity with physical health for the first time.

On May 25th 2020, this increased commitment to mental health converged with the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent anti-racism protests. Overnight, there was renewed urgency in tackling racial disparities in the workplace. Employers held listening circles, drafted and executed race action plans, and signed the Race at Work Charter. We saw cultural employee networks step up and influence their organisations in ways that had previously been considered impossible. Those at the top table created advisory boards, supported their employee networks, acted as role models, and gave their managers the space to look after their mental health and that of their teams. This enthusiasm has persisted as, more than one year later, organisations from all sectors continue to develop practices that better support their ethnically diverse talent.

However, the challenge remains. Business in the Community's Mental Health at Work survey found that in 2020, 41% of employees experienced symptoms of poor mental health, directly related to work.¹⁰ More than half (51%) of these symptoms were due to increased work pressure.

Similarly, those from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to have faced financial insecurity, bereavement, job losses and lower access to care. These are all risk factors for serious mental health conditions. The impact of the pandemic will be long-lasting and new insights into the scale of the challenge will continue to emerge.

Although this guide focuses on the role of managers in supporting the wellbeing of Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees in their teams, it is important to have the support of the wider organisation and C-suite executives. Employers can demonstrate their commitment by signing and implementing the Race at Work Charter and the Mental Health at Work Commitment. Both of these initiatives act as roadmaps to greater equality and positive mental health outcomes for organisations and their employees.

Businesses can also create environments where individuals are supported to perform at their best by implementing BITC's Wellbeing Workwell Model. This model encourages employers to take a preventative, whole-person, whole-organisation approach to health and wellbeing.

Encouraging connection and immersion in nature is also a cost-effective and evidence-based way to foster improved wellbeing.¹¹ Employers can support this by sharing information on greening workspaces and encouraging lunchtime walks in nature.¹² It is important to recognise that green spaces are not universally accessible. Black people in England are nearly four times more likely than White people to not have outdoor space at home.¹³ This lack of access to green space is compounded by the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities, cited in the BITC publications, Ethnicity and the Economic Impact of COVID-19 factsheet and the Black, Asian and minority ethnic women, mental health and COVID-19 factsheet.

There is no one-size fits all approach to wellbeing, but one thing is clear: it is crucial for employers and managers to take a compassionate, authentic and personalised approach by taking the time to understand and respond to the individual needs of their employees. Without buy-in from the top table, managers are limited in their power to truly transform the mental health of their ethnically diverse teams for the better.

METHODOLOGY

This guide has been funded by the Prince of Wales Charitable Foundation. It has been developed in partnership with race and mental health experts Tamikah Andrew-Thomas (Integrative Counsellor and Psychotherapist, Head of Programme for Psychology and Counselling, City Lit) and Delrose Bowes (Humanistic Integrative Counsellor and Co-ordinator of Psychology and Counselling, City Lit). The guide draws on their 28-years of combined experience in supporting organisations and individuals with identifying and responding to the unique mental health challenges faced by Black, Asian and ethnic minority women.

In April 2021 25 ethnically diverse women attended a virtual event focused on the wellbeing of ethnic minority women. The content in this guide represents their answers to the question “What support have you seen/ would you like to see from your manager(s) to aid your wellbeing?”

In addition, the guide also features statistical analysis from the Race at Work 2015 and 2018 surveys and the Mental Health at Work 2020 survey, as well as insights from BITC Equality, Diversity and Racism in the Workplace, a thematic review conducted by The University of Manchester’s Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE).

This guide supplements BITC’s Self-Care Wellbeing for Ethnically Diverse Women toolkit, which has been piloted with over 300 individuals.



“This guide... draws from their 28-years of combined experience in supporting organisations and individuals with identifying and responding to the unique mental health challenges faced by Black, Asian and ethnic minority women.”



KEY GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

1

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
CONNECTION**

2

**RELATIONAL
CONNECTION**

3

**VISIBLE
CONNECTION**

The practices cited within this guide have been effectively implemented and taught by practitioners for over two decades. The insights are based on recurring themes witnessed and experienced by counsellors during years of practice.

Cultural awareness is the understanding that we all have different values and experiences shaped by our backgrounds. This awareness can be seen as the first step for managers towards understanding nuances in risk factors and approaches to promoting wellbeing across ethnicities.

A culturally aware manager is one who recognises the necessity to create and provide a system of support for Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees built on intentional connections and relationship-building. It is established through three types of connection: psychological, relational and visible.

1. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONNECTION

The foundation of psychological connection is the employer's awareness of the unique experience that impact the wellbeing of Black, Asian and ethnic minority women, and the desire to support, engage and endorse.

It is important that an employer's desire is to support, engage and endorse (SEE) the unique experience that impacts the wellbeing of Black, Asian and ethnic minority women. Psychological Connection requires introspection before one can effectively SEE another. The employer and manager must be curious, willing and open.

Managers' should be curious about:

The Lived Experience

It is important that employers possess a genuine curiosity, an honest desire to know and be informed about the Black, Asian and ethnic minority woman's challenges and lived experience. It has been extensively reported in the media that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on some ethnic minority communities.¹⁵

Almost 2 in 3 (58%) of Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees have experienced non-inclusive behaviours in the workplace¹⁴

Employers can create listening circles or open up one to one conversations. It is important to ensure that these sensitive discussions are handled with care in a private area, with respect for the employee. For detailed guidance, managers can utilise the BITC Let's Talk About Race booklet and Mental Health for Employers Toolkit – which features a mental health conversation starter.

The Voice

Assure your employees that their voice is being listened to and that their voice is valued. Ensure that your employees know that you want them to speak up so that you can effectively support them. The BITC Everyday Inclusion: what really works? report cites that intergroup dialogue can be a powerful tool to encourage employees to share their experiences. Reverse mentoring can also lead to greater shared understanding (see BITC's What is Reverse Mentoring? factsheet).

The Narrative

Managers must come to conversations actively listening and prepared to understand. Managers must also have open minds to listen and learn, and not assume knowledge of issues. Due to stereotype messaging and assumptions from the media on challenges within culturally diverse communities, Black, Asian and ethnic minority women are often marginalised on account of gender and ethnicity. As a result they are often overlooked and invisible to employers and policy makers and their stories are not heard. The curious manager will not be dismissive of what is shared, but will be invested in developing a culture of respect for the lived experience and will commit to follow-up with action and practical support as appropriate.

“One of my colleagues reported racism at work, instead management mistreated him and he ended up with depression. That's why I don't report anything about it because I know I will be victimised”¹⁶

Black African employee – BITC Equality, Diversity and Racism in the Workplace 2016

Managers should be open and willing to discuss any issues presented. It is important for managers to ask as many questions as they need to ensure they understand any issues raised and the impact of these issues on their employees' wellbeing. Culturally aware employers will understand that this is an important part of the work to shift workplace culture.¹⁷ Leaders, managers and teams should create an environment so that employees feel they can initiate a conversation about their mental health or wellbeing at any time. Our Mental Health for Employers Toolkit features practical advice for navigating these sensitive conversations. There are some key calls to action for employers summarised in the most recent BITC Mental Health at Work report 2020.¹⁸

Following a conversation, managers should agree supportive actions so that Black, Asian and ethnic minority women know that they are not just heard but listened to. These issues will build trust and ensure other incidents are reported and dealt with.

With 33% of Black employees believing their ethnicity will be a career blocker compared to 1% of White employees, race is fundamental to the Black, Asian and ethnic minority woman' experience at work.

The emotiveness of the topic is acknowledged. The Race at Work 2018 Scorecard Report found that employees said that their employers were not comfortable talking about race (38%), religion (35%) or social background (33%). Inevitably employers will experience being uncomfortable with what they are learning and listening to. This will be for various reasons. However, the discomfort is not permanent. It is important for managers to learn to sit with the discomfort and work through it.¹⁹

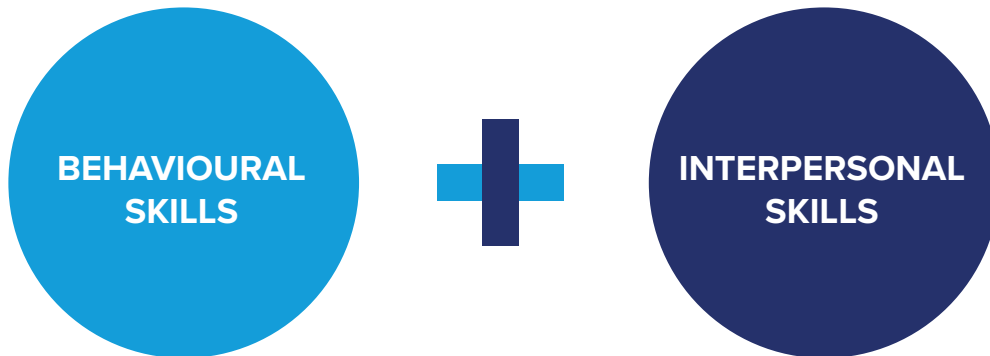
When piloting the contents of our self-care toolkit for Black, Asian and ethnic minority women, we asked if tapping into one's faith (if one is followed) helps, 84% responded yes and the remaining 16% of people responded with "don't know". These are important aspects that need to be explored to transform the way we think about mental health.

The largest religion in the 2011 Census for England and Wales was Christianity with 33.2 million people, (59.3% of the population) being followers. Muslims were the next largest religious group with 2.7 million people (4.8% of the population). 14.1 million people in England and Wales said they had no religion, around a quarter (25.1%) of the population.

Of the other main religious groups: 817,000 people identified themselves as Hindu (1.5 per cent of population); 423,000 people identified as Sikh (0.8 per cent); 263,000 people as Jewish (0.5 per cent) and 248,000 people as Buddhist (0.4 per cent). It is important that managers create the safe environment for employees to discuss their religion if they wish.

“Following a conversation, managers should agree supportive actions so that Black, Asian and ethnic minority women know that they are not just heard but listened to. This will build trust and ensure other incidents that are reported are dealt with.”

2. RELATIONAL CONNECTION



Relational connection is that which is felt as authentic. Employers must continually develop the behavioural skills of their managers and enhance interpersonal skills that foster trust, confidence and safety.

Key behavioural skills include:

- **Active listening**

Purposeful attention and observation being given to not just what is being said, but what is not being said.

- **Empathy and compassion**

Putting yourself in other people's shoes. Seeking to understand from the perspective of the employee.

- **Unconditional positive respect**

Acceptance and support of the employee that is not conditional based on what they share.

- **Genuineness and authenticity**

Being authentic by communicating and acting in alignment with your values.

- **Immediacy**

Using the immediate situation as a mirror to discuss difficulties that may exist within the workplace as well as externally.

- **Humility and transparency**

Acknowledging that it is OK not to know. Being honest and open about not knowing while communicating the steps that will be taken to find answers.

Key interpersonal skills include:

- **Awareness of yourself and others**

- **Compassion for others**

- **Clear communication**

- **Collaboration**

- **Humility and being honest about not having all of the answers**

“Acknowledging that it is OK not to know. Being honest and open about not knowing while communicating the steps that will be taken to find answers.”

3. VISIBLE CONNECTION

The foundation of visible connection is to gain an understanding of the employee's difference and how that difference translates into the everyday lived experience.

(a) Create visible connection – The employer should take action to offer meaningful support and demonstrate genuine concern for the holistic wellbeing of the employee. Black, Asian and ethnic minority women must feel cared for, and that their contribution is valued so that they feel a part of their team and buy into the vision of the organisation.

Managers should be aware of the barriers to career progression and the negative impact on an employee's mental health if they feel trapped and overlooked. The Race at Work 2015²⁰ and 2018²¹ surveys found that progression is very important to Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees with 70% saying this. Employers have the means to create opportunities that will advance the interests of Black, Asian and ethnic minority women and position them for leadership opportunities.

Employers can:

- Identify the expertise and skills of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women, acknowledge good ideas and attribute them.
- Seek to share career goals with sponsors and decision makers, liaise with line managers who know their staff better than anyone else.
- Recognise underrepresentation of ethnic minority women, particularly in management positions. When advertising vacancies externally, use inclusive language, share details on representative platforms and ensure ethnically diverse employees are part of the recruitment process from start to finish.
- Be informed and respectful of significant cultural holidays and be willing to give employees the time off to attend celebrations and related events.
- Adopt and follow the BITC 8-point Route map²² to a more gender equal future.
- Be and Age Friendly²³ Employer.

(b) Create safe spaces – There is a great need to provide spaces for open and honest communication, spaces that are supportive and confidential. The BITC Race at Work Black Voices report²⁴ found that only 66% of Black employees said they could be themselves at work. Employees must experience an environment that feels secure so that they can bring their authentic self and feel accepted and valued.

Employers should wherever possible:

- Ensure there is a designated secure network available to Black, Asian and women to access support.
- Be mindful of stereotyping and biases that inhibits Black, Asian and ethnic minority women from bringing their authentic selves to work.
- Ensure employees are clear about who to go to, when support is needed, they can speak freely to without fear of repercussion.
- Reassure employees they have been heard by following up with thoughtful action. Following up demonstrates positive regard and respect.
- Be honest about not having all the answers and that it is acceptable to be unsure or just not know. It is important do this without putting the onus on the employee. Instead, make it clear how you intend to seek out solutions.

(3) Education and Training – Managers must have a personal commitment to training and learning, so that they can better support and advocate for Black, Asian and ethnic minority women. This will be further reinforced by a commitment from their organisation to pursue long-term positive change in behaviour.

Some practical ways to do this include:

- Understand how daily micro aggressions affect the psyche, and contribute to employees feeling undermined and demotivated.
- Pursue knowledge and understanding of racial inequity by research, enrolling onto experiential training programmes, reading and listening to webinars and podcasts.
- Be culturally sensitive, have knowledge of the particular health issues common to Black, Asian and ethnic minority women.

You can find more examples of insight and practical action in our Anti-racism and allyship guidance.

“It is very subtle but often managers will randomly exchange my religious identity for another e.g. Muslim for Hindu etc. They know what my religion is [...] I am often left out of social meetings. Because it is so subtle it is difficult to pin point [sic] but I know it exists due to the number of times it happens from the same people”²⁵

**BITC and Manchester University Equality,
Diversity and Racism in the Workplace 2016**



REFERENCES & END NOTES

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You might also like to:

- Find out more about our Race Equality work
- Learn more about our advisory services
- Join us for one of our upcoming events

Talk to one of our expert team today to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further, and drive lasting global change.

Resources referenced within this guide:

Ethnicity Facts and Figures data

Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS)

Black, Asian and Minority Women, Mental Health and COVID-19

Everyday Inclusion – What really works?

Mental Health at Work 2020

Let's Talk about Race

Race at Work 2015

Race at Work 2028 Scorecard Report – McGregor-Smith Review one year on

Route map to a more gender equal future

Be and Age Friendly Employer

Age and Mental Health at Work

Race at Work Black Voices Report 2020

Anti-Racism and Allyship in the workplace: A Brief Guide

BITC Equality, Diversity and Racism in the Workplace 2016

Footnotes:

1. Ethnicity Facts and Figures: Common mental disorders (2017)
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