

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BAME BRITONS

Since the initial outbreak of coronavirus, the impact has been disproportionate for Black and ethnic minority Britons, from worse health outcomes and higher rates of serious disease and death to locking down in poor quality, overcrowded housing, and widening education attainment gaps due to algorithm-based grading and digital poverty.

HOPE not hate Charitable Trust commissioned FocalData to carry out a representative weighted poll of 1,014 BAME Britons between 10-14th January 2021, and a weighted, nationally-representative poll of 2,879 people carried out between December 22nd - December 30th 2020 to better understand the impact of the pandemic, where inequalities are widening, and what it might mean as Britain emerges from lockdown.

A DISPROPORTIONATE HIT

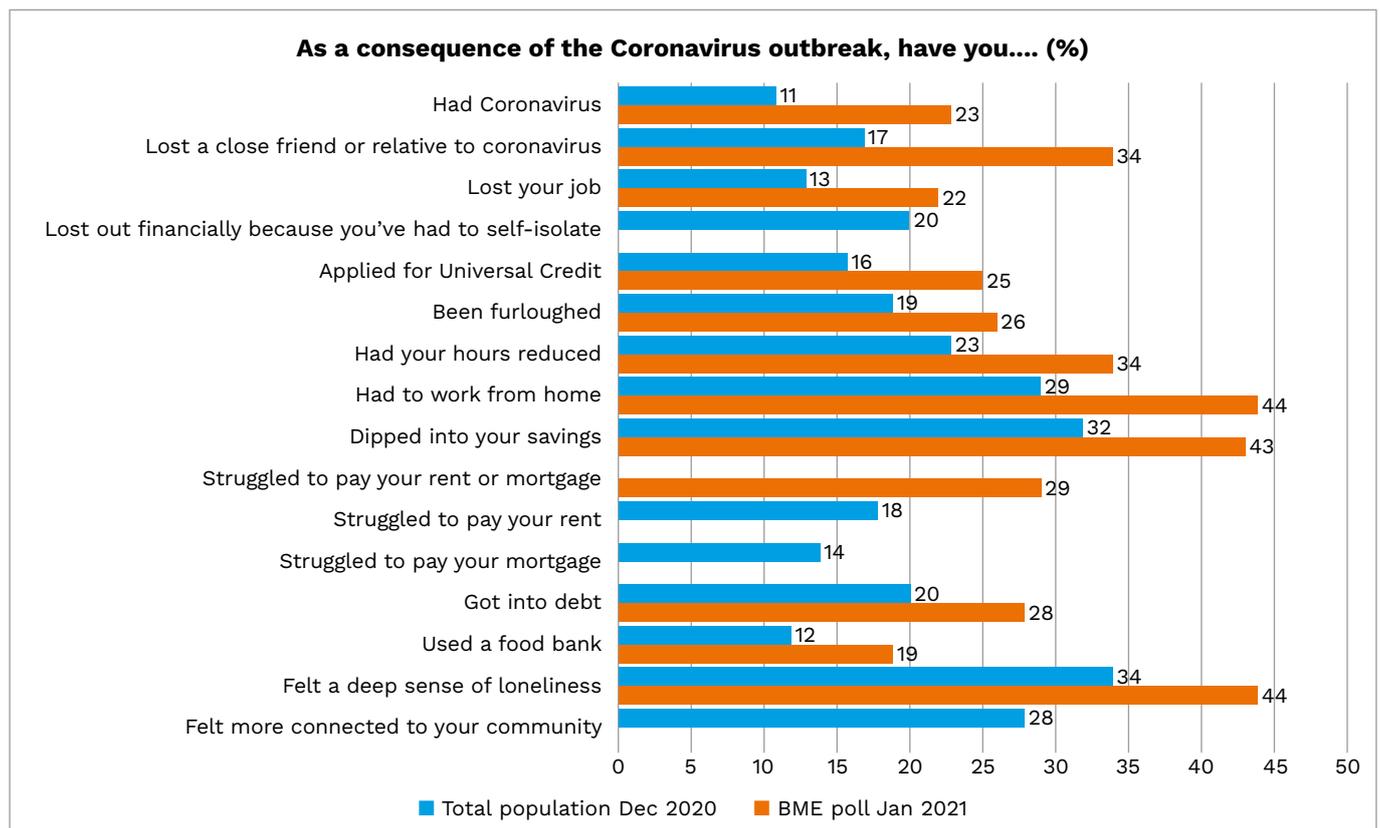
In July last year, a HOPE not hate poll of the UK's BAME population¹ found widespread anger at how the government has handled the response to covid-19, and frustration about the weight of the impact on people from BAME backgrounds. But we also found that the impact of lockdown, and the

economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak serve to reinforce racial disparities. Our research showed that just 37% of BAME Britons felt confident that the UK was fully prepared to deal with a second wave of Coronavirus.

And this has borne out, as the second wave has hit BAME Britons much, much harder.

Comparing our December 2020 poll of the total population to our January 2021 poll of BAME Britons, it's apparent that BAME Britons are not only more likely to report having had the virus or having lost a friend or family member to the virus, but also to have been disproportionately impacted by the financial implications of the coronavirus restrictions.

Our poll finds that 35% of Black and Asian respondents say that they have lost a close friend or family member to the virus, while less than half as many white respondents said the same (14%) in our nationally representative poll. A quarter of Black respondents (24%) and more than one in five Asian respondents (21%) say they have had the virus themselves, more than twice as many white respondents in our national poll (10%).



As a consequence of the Coronavirus outbreak, have you...					
	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other BME	White (Nat poll Dec 2020)
Had Coronavirus	21%	24%	25%	27%	10%
Lost a close friend or relative to coronavirus	35%	35%	30%	30%	14%
Lost your job	22%	21%	24%	19%	12%
Applied for Universal Credit	23%	30%	30%	23%	15%
Been furloughed	26%	24%	29%	29%	18%
Had your hours reduced	34%	32%	42%	29%	20%
Had to work from home	43%	49%	41%	43%	26%
Dipped into your savings	46%	38%	41%	37%	30%
Struggled to pay your rent or mortgage	28%	26%	32%	38%	<i>*Data missing</i>
Got into debt	25%	34%	26%	32%	18%
Used a food bank	17%	25%	19%	20%	11%
Felt a deep sense of loneliness	45%	40%	48%	39%	31%

And the economic impact of coronavirus restrictions has also hit BAME Britons much harder. Almost a third of Black respondents say they have been furloughed (30%) or applied for universal credit (30%) and one in five Black (21%) and Asian (22%) respondents say that they have lost their job as a result of the virus outbreak. By contrast, our nationally representative poll found that half as many white people had applied for universal credit (15%), lost their jobs (12%) and far fewer white respondents had been furloughed (18%). A third of Black (32%) and Asian (34%) respondents say their hours have been reduced, while 20% of white respondents said the same.

This reflects broader systemic racial inequalities, whereby even before the pandemic hit people from ethnic minority groups were more likely to be in insecure employment or to become unemployed, as well as having less of a financial safety net than white Britons². And certain ethnic minority groups are heavily concentrated in sectors that have been wiped out by lockdown measures, for example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are overrepresented in the passenger transport (taxi driving) and food and beverage sectors. The impact is made even greater as workers from the groups are relatively likely to be the sole earners in their households³.

The economic hit of the pandemic has rapidly accelerated these inequalities, and pushed many into precarious and desperate situations. Shockingly, a quarter of Black Britons (25%) say they have used a foodbank as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, more than twice that of our nationally

representative poll where 12% overall, and 11% of white respondents said they had.

And all of this has a further social impact. BAME Britons are less likely (42%) than the general population, according to our December 2020 poll (51%), to say that they feel more connected to their communities as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, and more likely (44%) than white Britons (31%) to have felt a deep sense of loneliness.

Despite the success of the UK's vaccine rollout so far, and the near avoidance of a double dip recession, the picture is less rosy for those who have borne the brunt of this unequal hit. In our nationally representative poll, more than half of respondents (54%) felt that the coronavirus outbreak is exposing great inequality in British society, while only 19% disagreed.

With the end of the furlough scheme drawing nearer, large scale unemployment twinned with a return to austerity seem increasingly likely. If this is the case, Britain's inequality gap is set to rise, and almost certainly harden pre-existing racial disparities.

AN UNEVEN RESPONSE

The uneven impact of the coronavirus outbreak has fed scepticism among BAME Britons about how the pandemic has been handled. Our polling shows that the vast majority of BAME Britons do not think that Boris Johnson has handled the Covid-19 pandemic well (68%) while 32% think he has. Even among BAME Britons who voted Conservative at the last election, only half felt that Johnson had done a good job of dealing with the pandemic (52%).

In June, as the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on BAME Britons was becoming clearer and the Black Lives Matter movement had so loudly brought issues of systemic racism in Britain to public discussion, the Prime Minister announced a new cross-party Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, to look at *“all aspects of inequality – in employment, in health outcomes, in academic and all other walks of life”*.

Yet our polling of BAME Britons shows that a majority (63%) do not expect Boris Johnson to deliver on his promise to tackle racism and inequality and half (48%) of BAME Britons feel that the government has not done enough to protect BAME communities specifically from the threat of Covid-19. A quarter are uncertain (26%) while a smaller minority 19% disagree with this statement.

And many feel that the Government’s response to the impact of the pandemic in feeding racial disparities is indicative of a broader distance between those in power and minority ethnic groups. Only a third of BAME Britons say that politicians listen to people like them, with only 13% agreeing strongly with the statement; 37% disagreed. BAME women were less likely to feel listened to by politicians (29%) than BAME men (39%).

The consistent racial inequity that we have seen throughout the pandemic – across measures of health and education outcomes, and as our polling shows, employment, financial security, housing and general wellbeing – are not random. It is clear that more needs to be done to address systemic discrimination which underpins these growing gaps.

BUILDING BACK BETTER MEANS BUILDING BACK FAIRER

The coronavirus outbreak has brought unprecedented changes to the lives of all Britons, but as cases plummet, the vaccine rollout picks up pace and the Government outlines its path out of national lockdown, the phrase ‘build back better’ has become the Government mantra to getting the economy back on track.

But there is no way that the government’s attempts to build back can be ‘better’ unless they are also fairer. Despite the inequalities exposed by the pandemic, there has so far been little effort to stop Covid-19 hitting minority ethnic communities hardest.

Much of the measures that would do so have universal benefits. Extending the furlough scheme to avoid a cliff-edge fall in employment, increasing the safety net for those who need it by eliminating delays and increasing payments of universal credit and extending the residential eviction ban in England will all go some way to support those who have been most impacted by the pandemic, as our polling suggests, minority ethnic groups will disproportionately benefit as they have been put most at risk.

But a longer term plan is needed to ensure to build back fairer. Our polling sends a clear message to the commission that they must do more to listen, and respond to Black and ethnic minority groups who have been clear about how about how racism shapes their everyday experiences, and our society as a whole.

While there is a very public debate about the usefulness of the administrative term ‘BAME’, our poll findings speak to both sides of the issue. By specifically sampling ‘BAME’ individuals, our survey was unique in giving us a large enough sample within which to examine differences in opinion between communities, generations and origins, while being weighted to be representative of Britain’s BAME population as a whole. Though the smaller sizes involved at this level of analysis warrant a level of caution, this allows us to better understand experiences and opinions beyond BAME/white binaries.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BAME-report-2020-08-v3-00000003.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>
- 3 https://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/Covid-19_and_Inequalities.pdf