RACISM AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Findings from the Evidence for Equality National Survey

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First published in Great Britain in 2023 by

Policy Press, an imprint of
Bristol University Press
University of Bristol
1–9 Old Park Hill
Bristol
BS2 8BB
UK
t: +44 (0)117 374 6645
e: bup-info@bristol.ac.uk

Details of international sales and distribution partners are available at
policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4473-6884-7 paperback
ISBN 978-1-4473-6885-4 ePub
ISBN 978-1-4473-6886-1 ePdf

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Cover design: Andrea Pazos
Front cover image: Andrea Pazos
Bristol University Press and Policy Press use environmentally responsible print partners.
Printed in Great Britain by CMP, Poole

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Acknowledgements

We extend sincere thanks to all those who took part in the EVENS Survey. We hope that you see some of your stories in the pages of this book and that the evidence here and in the EVENS dataset will be part of the movement to effect change.

The EVENS researcher team at CoDE were unfailing in their dedication to this project. They worked with exceptional skill, imagination, tenacity and collegiality. Sincere thanks to Andrea Apricio-Castro, Neema Begum, Magda Borkowska, Daniel Ellingworth, Joseph Harrison, Angelo Moretti, Nico Ochmann, Michaela Šťastná and Harry Taylor. You are fine researchers indeed.

We are grateful to our CoDE colleagues for encouragement and for providing such a rich environment for scholarship. Thankyou to Emma Tsoneva and Hazel Burke for keeping the project mechanics running smoothly. Thankyou to CoDE Director Bridget Byrne and Co-Director Claire Alexander for your ongoing support for EVENS.

The EVENS Voluntary and Community Sector partners brought such energy and enthusiasm for this project and reminded us throughout of the fundamental motivation for producing evidence for equality. Thankyou to Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS), Business in the Community, Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales, Friends, Families and Travellers, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, the Migrants Rights Network, the Muslim Council of Britain, NHS Race and Health Observatory, Operation Black Vote, the Race Equality Foundation, The Runnymede Trust, The Stuart Hall Foundation and The Ubele Initiative.

Words of Colour, led deftly by Joy Francis, produced the superb EVENS design and branding and led the strategic communications through survey recruitment with drive and dexterity. Thankyou.

The Ipsos team who managed the survey implementation were wholly committed to producing high quality data, and with eagerness to develop the innovative aspects of EVENS. It was a pleasure working with you.

Thanks go to the University of Manchester Ethics Committee for their careful consideration of the EVENS project and for their responsiveness to the many amendments to the ethics application.

We thank those who gave comments on drafts of this book particularly Bridget Byrne, Stephen Jivraj and Georgia Haire.

Thank you to Andrea Pazos for the cover design and production of tables and figures and for never hesitating in responding to the many and varied comments from the EVENS team.

We are obliged to Shannon Kneis, Anna Richardson, Annie Rose and colleagues at Policy Press/Bristol University Press and Newgen Publishing for careful work to bring this book to fruition.

We acknowledge the UK Data Service for providing the platform for EVENS data access and for user support.

The EVENS project would not have been possible without funding from the UKRI Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). EVENS was funded via the CoDE grants 'Exploring racial and ethnic inequality in a time of crisis' (ES/V013475/1) and 'The social, cultural and economic impacts of the pandemic on ethnic and racialised groups in the UK' (ES/W000849/1).

Heartfelt thanks go to all those who promoted the EVENS Survey and have supported the broader project. NRF is grateful for the Riverside hideaway which provided a haven for overseeing the project (as well as a break from home schooling during lockdowns); and to Alan, Freya, Laurie and Xander for always findings ways and enthusiasm for what needed to be done. LBS is thankful for the support and love from Teo, Nuria, Tati, and abuela.

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St Andrews, Manchester, London
November 2022

Note on the figures

Table 2.3 and Figures 4.1, 4.3, 6.1 and 7.2 have been published in a font size smaller than our house style. To see full-sized versions of these figures, please visit https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/ethnic-inequalities-in-a-time-of-crisis.

To find out more about CoDE, EVENS and how to access the EVENS data see www.ethnicity.ac.uk

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Conclusion: ethnic inequality, racism and the potential for racial justice

James Nazroo, Nissa Finney, Laia Bécares, Dharmi Kapadia and Natalie Shlomo

Introduction

The Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) was commissioned, and designed, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of a broader programme of work that the ESRC Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) was undertaking. By this time, a clear pattern of ethnic inequalities in COVID-related risk of mortality had been documented, inequalities in relation to other social and economic outcomes as a result of the pandemic were beginning to be identified, and social and political protests both led, and inspired by, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement were at their peak in the UK. Consequently, as described in the Introduction to this volume, the research agenda established by CoDE was as follows:

1. To document new and changing forms of racial and ethnic inequality in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it.
2. To explore emergent forms of social, political and cultural mobilisation around racism and racial inequality during and following the resurgence of the BLM movement.
3. To examine responses within particular social arenas and from institutions (education, health, housing, welfare, culture, employment and businesses, and policing) to the COVID-19 pandemic and BLM.
4. To work with community, policy and third sector partners to understand how racial and ethnic inequality was being addressed during the pandemic, and to formulate future plans for addressing racial injustice.

EVENS encapsulated each of these objectives, working in partnership with key race equality and voluntary sector organisations to produce evidence on the extent of, and responses to, ethnic inequalities with the intention of informing action.

Nevertheless, the sociopolitical environment at the time when the pandemic started (only three years prior to the publication of this volume) meant that state and, to a lesser extent, public sector and private

institutions were unwilling to recognise the importance of racism in shaping ethnic inequalities within British society. Reflecting the active downplaying of inequalities, initial reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent setting of the policy framework to respond to it were inattentive to the variation of risk across segments of the population, even according to age. Public health surveillance systems were not capable of documenting ethnic inequalities in COVID-related mortality, so these ethnic inequalities were only, and eventually, pushed onto the agenda by a growing public and media recognition that a large proportion of the NHS and care staff who were dying were from an ethnic minority background. Research evidence was slow to emerge and required innovative use of various forms of administrative data (ICNARC, 2020; Nazroo and Bécares, 2020; Platt and Warwick, 2020). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) moved quickly to fill this gap, ambitiously linking mortality records (which do not contain data on ethnicity) with census and NHS records (which do contain data on ethnicity) to estimate ethnic differences in risk of COVID-related mortality (ONS, 2020). These analyses showed large inequalities for all ethnic and religious minority groups (with the sole exception of Chinese women).

Despite this evidence, public health responses to the pandemic have, in general, failed to address the question of inequalities in outcomes. They also did not take seriously the possibility that the policies put in place to manage the pandemic would have unequal negative impacts in relation to economic, social, psychological and health outcomes, even though they recognised this possibility. In relation to ethnicity, this, in part at least, reflected an ongoing denial of the significance of racism to ethnic inequalities in outcomes (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021; Race Disparity Unit, 2022). Rather ethnic 'disparities' in the risk of COVID-related mortality were (and are) seen as a consequence of particular geographical and economic locations of ethnic minority people, differences in living arrangements (presented largely as a result of culturally informed preferences) and varying levels of risk generated by differences in the patterning of chronic illness, biology and underlying genetics. There is, of course, evidence for each of these explanations (ONS, 2020; ONS 2021c) – with the exception of genetics, where the evidence was drawn from laboratory settings (Downes et al, 2021) and did not translate into social settings (Singh et al, 2021), and living arrangements, where the contribution to ethnic differences was negligible (ONS, 2020). However, there is no evidence for the reductionist interpretations of these explanations – that differences were and are the inevitable consequence of the inherent cultural and genetic properties of ethnic minority groups, so beyond helping them to help themselves, nothing can be done about it. Nevertheless, public health responses were framed within such a cultural deficit model, one that locates both the problem and the solution in the behaviour of those ethnic groups at greater risk. So, for example, community leaders were mobilised to promote

lockdown and social isolation policies, and to promote the value of vaccinations and reduce vaccine hesitancy.

The Framing of EVENS

In this context, the framing of EVENS was distinct. As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, EVENS was focused on the question of racial justice and how ethnic inequalities, underpinned by structural, institutional and interpersonal racism (Jones, 2000; Nazroo et al, 2020), shaped experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and in turn were themselves shaped by the pandemic and the policies put in place to manage it. To do this, and to do it within a reasonable timeframe, while maintaining a robust scientific approach to the generation of evidence, EVENS was necessarily innovative in a number of ways. Three dimensions of this innovation were particularly important: the approach to data collection, population coverage and topic coverage. These innovative features were anchored by several principles that shaped the design, which were as follows:

- The survey design would allow statistical inference to be made.
- Questionnaire coverage would be developed in collaboration with academic and non-academic users of the data.
- The survey could be conducted within a short timeframe.
- The mode of survey delivery could accommodate social distancing, shielding and other lockdown measures.
- The achieved sample would cover a wider range of ethnic groups than that typically achieved in ethnically boosted surveys.

Our approach to data collection was, of course, shaped by social distancing policies and the movements into and out of lockdown as the COVID-19 pandemic evolved. This precluded face-to-face recruitment of participants and in-person interviews, which led to the decision to use online, social networking and campaigning approaches to recruitment, and to do this in partnership with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations serving ethnic minority populations, and to primarily collect data using online and telephone methods (some interviews with Roma and Gypsy/Traveller participants were conducted face to face).

This also allowed us to think innovatively about population coverage. Traditional approaches to sampling ethnic minority people for surveys involve focusing fieldwork in areas with a high proportion of ethnic minority residents and the (often indirect) screening of a large number of households to identify eligible sample members. As well as requiring considerable resources, such an approach does not cover, or sample, people living in areas with smaller proportions of ethnic minority residents, an issue that is

particularly important in relation to the inclusion of those living in areas that are wealthier and that are more rural. In addition, it also typically results in a focus on larger, geographically more concentrated and more visible ethnic minority groups – Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups. By taking an online and campaigning approach to sampling, we were able to recruit anyone who defined themselves as a member of an ethnic minority group, regardless of which group or where they lived, and to (slightly) broaden the ethnic minority groups covered beyond UK 2021 Census categories to include both a White Eastern European group and a Jewish group. This led to EVENS having unrivalled coverage of ethnic minority people living in Britain, even if the statistical theory and approach lying behind this were complex (and innovative), as was outlined in Chapter 2.

These two innovations in sampling and population coverage led to EVENS generating a non-probability survey, one where participants have an unknown (or even zero) probability of inclusion. Even if such samples are framed within quotas to ensure that they cover key demographic characteristics (say, age, gender and region of residence), they are typically not seen as appropriate to use when making generalisations about the population as a whole, so to draw statistical inference. This is because of unknown biases resulting from characteristics that are associated with a likelihood to take part in the survey. However, methods have been developed to compensate for selection bias in non-probability samples (Elliot and Valliant, 2017; Chen et al, 2019; Saunders and Shlomo, 2021), and we further developed and applied these methods to generate survey weights that can be used to enable statistical inference to be drawn. This approach, which was described in Chapter 2, involved using a quasi-randomisation approach to calculate survey weights that are based on propensity score matching to integrate the non-probability sample with a probability reference sample, alongside calibration to population benchmarks. This thereby compensates for selection and coverage biases.

Nevertheless, in practice these innovations also led to three important limitations with the survey. First, the speed with which the survey was conducted, coupled with a reliance on online recruitment and interviewing methods, meant that the EVENS data have relatively few participants aged older than 65. This gap could not be corrected using statistical methods, so the analyses in this volume are restricted to those aged 18-65. This is important, because there are likely to be differences in the level and nature of ethnic inequalities across generations and age groups. In effect, this means that it is possible that the findings presented here understated the extent of ethnic inequalities in Britain. Second, the survey implementation was designed to allow ethnic minority and White British people to be interviewed over the same period, something that was crucially important as the COVID-19 pandemic and policies to manage it evolved during the

period of fieldwork. However, because they were sampled in different ways (see Chapter 2), aligning the timing of the recruitment of the two samples proved very difficult, with the White British sample recruited relatively early in the EVENS data collection period (during the second lockdown), and the ethnic minority sample recruited at a fairly even rate across the whole period, with an additional sample recruited at the end of the period (in October and November 2021). Third, the statistical approach to weighting has been experimental, and occurred before the 2021 Census findings on the ethnic composition of the UK population were made available. This means that the weights used for the analysis reported here are provisional, although they will be finalised in time for the release of the data for general use.

The final important innovation implemented by EVENS was in relation to topic coverage. Here, the experiences of ethnic minority people were centred in the design process, rather than adopting a more generic approach to topic coverage. So, the questionnaire had sections on identity, citizenship and belonging, on experiences of racism and discrimination, and on participation in politics, civic activities and protest. In addition, other more traditional sections, such as those on housing, education, employment and health, were tailored to enable a focus on ethnic inequality. Importantly, to ensure that the questionnaire content was relevant to the lives of the very diverse ethnic groups covered in the survey, it was co-designed with our partner VCSE organisations, who made substantial and important contributions to questionnaire content. This, then, allowed us to generate an interdisciplinary data source that could be used to investigate a wide range of research and policy questions.

A final piece of context for EVENS is to place it within the history of national surveys of the lives of ethnic minority people living in the UK. Although there have been many surveys of ethnic minority people, the majority have not been national, and while there have been many national surveys that have oversampled groups of ethnic minority people, many have either had a particular topic focus (such as the 1999 and 2004 Health Surveys for England (Erens et al, 2000; Sproston and Mindell, 2006) or have had a more generalist focus rather than one specifically framed around the question of ethnic inequality. The exceptions are the four surveys carried out by the Policy Studies Institute and its predecessor, Political and Economic Planning. The first of these, entitled *Racial Discrimination in England*, was conducted in the mid-1960s (Daniel, 1968) at what now seems like a relatively early phase of migration from Commonwealth and former Commonwealth countries. This was also a time when overt discrimination against ethnic minority people was commonplace, having just only been subjected to legislation by the first Race Relations Act, which in December 1965 made discrimination on the grounds of 'colour, race, or ethnic or national origins' in public places an offence. The second survey was entitled *Racial Disadvantage in Britain*

(Smith, 1977) and was carried out in the mid-1970s. Its findings suggested that ethnic inequalities had not improved over the previous ten years, despite the introduction of legislation and the relative economic prosperity of the time. The third survey, which took place in the early 1980s, shifted titles and was called *Black and White Britain* (Brown, 1984). It was set in an era of industrial decline, high rates of unemployment and, as its title implies, when anti-racist movements were framed by the notion of political blackness.[1] The fourth survey was conducted in the mid-1990s (Modood et al, 1997), a time when the emerging success of some non-White ethnic minority groups was becoming visible, most notably that of those Indian people who had initially settled in East Africa, but had been forced to migrate from there in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its title reintroduced the term 'disadvantage', but in a more qualified sense, it was called *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*. If we place EVENS as the fifth in this trajectory of surveys, we can see that, like its predecessors, it: reflected the historical context in which it was carried out; was innovative in its approach to data collection; expanded the range of ethnic groups under consideration; and expanded the topics it covered. Unlike the predecessor surveys, we move away from the word 'disadvantage' in the title of this report, and explicitly reference 'racism' and 'inequality'. By placing EVENS as the fifth in this series of important surveys, our purpose, in part, is to emphasise the importance of such surveys in documenting ethnic inequalities and how they are shaped by racism. We will return to this point later in the chapter. Before then, we provide a summary of some of the key messages that have emerged from this volume.

Key findings

Experiences of racist assault and racial discrimination are widespread

A newly developed measure capturing direct experiences of racism was implemented in the EVENS questionnaire. Conceptually this overlapped with other measures, and some of the items were drawn from existing studies, but it was distinct in covering all of the following: racial assault (verbal, physical and damage to property); racial discrimination in institutional settings; racial discrimination in social settings; and expectations of racial discrimination. Crucially, it captured experiences at different time periods across participants' lives. In comparison with studies that focus only on some dimensions of experience or only on particular time points in a participant's life (for example, the last year), the findings using this more comprehensive set of measures show that ethnic minority people experience strikingly high levels of exposure to racist assault and racial discrimination.

Over a third of ethnic minority participants reported having experienced one or more racist assaults (verbal, physical or damage to property) over their

lifetimes, with one in six reporting having experienced a physical assault. Responses from ethnic minority participants also indicated widespread experience of discrimination within institutional settings – close to a third of ethnic minority people reported experiencing racial discrimination in education, a similar proportion reported racial discrimination in employment, and around a fifth reported experiences of racial discrimination when seeking housing. Considering social settings, close to a third of ethnic minority participants reported experiences of racial discrimination in public, and almost one in six ethnic minority people report experiencing racial discrimination from neighbours. Moreover, more than one in five reported experiencing discrimination from the police.

Of course, the extent of these experiences of racism and racial discrimination varied across the groups covered by EVENS. Gypsy/Traveller, Roma, Jewish and the five Black ethnic groups reported very high rates of experiencing racism. For example, over half the respondents from the Gypsy/Traveller, Jewish and Any other Black ethnic groups reported having experienced a physical racist assault, while racial discrimination from the police was reported by more than two fifths of the Black Caribbean and Any other Black ethnic groups, and by more than a third of the Roma and the Gypsy/Traveller ethnic groups. Racial discrimination in public places was experienced by close to half of the Gypsy/Traveller and the Black Caribbean ethnic groups, and more than two fifths of the any Other Black and White and Black Caribbean ethnic groups. In contrast, experiences of racist assault and racial discrimination were much lower for the White Irish, White Eastern European and Any other White ethnic groups, perhaps indicating the importance of being able to present as, and being socially assigned as, White. Nevertheless, people within the first two of these groups did report substantial experiences of racism, with, for example, more than one in ten of the White Irish group and more than one in 20 of the White Eastern European group having reported experiencing a racist assault, and two fifths of the White Irish group and a third of the White Eastern European group having reported experiencing discrimination within one of the institutional and social settings covered by the questionnaire.

Context, and the ways in which this shapes the racialisation of particular ethnic groups, is, of course, crucial. Experiences of racism continued throughout the pandemic, with around 14% of ethnic minority people reporting experiencing some form of racist assault, and over 10% reporting experiencing racial discrimination in public settings. Notably, the risk of experiencing racial discrimination for people in the Chinese, Other Asian and the White Eastern European groups increased during the pandemic relative to the other ethnic minority groups included in the survey. Indeed, for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, people from the Chinese ethnic group, alongside those from the Roma and the Gypsy/Traveller ethnic groups,

had the highest rates of reporting increased police activity within their community and the highest rates of reporting being stopped by the police.

Ethnic minority people report high levels of engagement in political and civic life

EVENS included coverage of levels of political trust, interest in politics, political affiliation, and support for BLM. BLM is, of course, a direct response to the widespread experiences of racist assault and racial discrimination just outlined and EVENS found high levels of support for BLM across most ethnic minority groups included in the survey. More than three quarters of participants in the Black Caribbean, Black African, Arab, White Irish, Pakistani and Indian groups expressed support for BLM, as did almost three quarters of the Bangladeshi group, around two thirds of the Jewish, Chinese, Any other Black and the various mixed ethnic groups, and just over half of the White British ethnic group. Lower levels of support for Black Lives Matter were found among people from Roma, Gypsy/Traveller and White Eastern European backgrounds, but nevertheless more than a quarter of the Roma group and close to two fifths of the Gypsy/Traveller and White Eastern European groups did express support. It is also important to note that only a small minority of people in each ethnic group reported that they opposed BLM.

We do not know from these analyses why there was variation in support for BLM across ethnic groups. This, in part, might reflect the salience of experiences relevant to the movement, with those groups experiencing the highest levels of racism and of racial discrimination from the police possibly more like to support BLM. It might also reflect the extent to which experiences of racism for a group are recognised and validated by the public at large, as well as within the movement. So, for the Gypsy/Traveller and the Roma ethnic groups, it may be that, despite high levels of exposure to racist assault and racial discrimination, there is a sense of their experiences not being picked up by and represented within the campaigning activities of BLM.

Interestingly, despite experiences of racism, and social and economic disadvantage, most ethnic minority people reported higher levels of trust in national, regional and local governments compared with White British people. Similarly, other indicators of political engagement, such as interest in politics and having a political party affiliation, did not indicate a political alienation of ethnic minority people. So, as for the measures of trust, people in most ethnic minority groups had higher levels of political engagement than their White British counterparts. The exceptions were the Roma, Gypsy/Traveller and White Eastern European ethnic groups, mirroring the findings for support for BLM and suggesting that such support might be an element of wider political engagement in British politics.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the wider coverage of ethnic minority groups in EVENS compared with other surveys, the findings demonstrate considerable variation across groups in terms of affiliation to political parties. The Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean ethnic groups reported the highest support for the Labour Party. Relatively high rates of support for Labour were also found among the Indian, Arab, and the various mixed, Other Asian and Roma ethnic groups. The Conservative Party had the highest share of support from the Jewish group, but also had relatively high levels of support from the Chinese, Any Other Black and Any Other ethnic groups, while the highest levels of support for the Liberal Democrats were found for the White Eastern European, Chinese and White Irish groups.

Ethnic minority groups face ongoing economic inequalities

When considering economic inequalities, it is important to pay attention to both a full range of outcomes, covering different dimensions of economic wellbeing, and how these vary differentially across ethnic minority groups – a nuanced account is needed. EVENS has the necessary comprehensive coverage of both ethnic groups (as already detailed) and outcomes. For example, it allowed us to assess labour force participation rates and employment rates (both covering the whole population aged 18–65), unemployment rates (focused on only those who were in the labour force), precarious employment, financial situation (including financial hardship and worries about finances), level of education and changes in these outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to document the different patterns found for women and for men.

One of the most striking findings from EVENS is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, ethnic inequalities in labour market outcomes did not increase substantially. So, labour market changes occurring during the pandemic, such as change in occupation, movement into unemployment, furlough, increased working hours and pay reduction, did not vary greatly across ethnic groups. However, we also did not see a decrease in ethnic inequalities; they persisted into the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Pakistani women and men continued to report high unemployment rates relative to White British women and men, and Bangladeshi, Gypsy/Traveller and Roma men had a higher risk than White British men of being in precarious employment (that is, with temporary and zero-hours contracts, or solo self-employed). Precarious employment is a particularly important outcome in contemporary labour markets, indicating insecurity of employment (Clark and Ochmann, 2022). It may be that the government's job retention scheme (furlough) coupled with the employment sectors within which ethnic minority workers are concentrated (such as health and social care, and transport and delivery

services) mitigated the risk of an increase on average in ethnic inequalities in the labour market, without reducing these inequalities.

The picture is not positive in relation to ethnic inequalities in finances. On average, ethnic minority groups fare well in comparison to the White British group in relation to educational attainment (although this is markedly not the case for the Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Gypsy/Traveller and Roma ethnic groups). Some ethnic minority groups (the Jewish, Any other White and Indian ethnic groups) fare well in relation to having professional and higher administrative managerial jobs compared to White British people (though Roma, Gypsy/Traveller, Mixed White and Black Caribbean and White Eastern European people are much more likely to be in semi-routine and routine occupations). However, substantial ethnic inequalities are apparent in relation to financial situations. This is marked by higher proportions with financial difficulties (further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – many ethnic minority groups reported close to double the rates of financial difficulties in the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period), high rates of benefits receipt (indicating high levels of financial hardship) and high rates of being worried about finances. Of course, the financial situation should relate directly to educational level, labour market participation and type of job held. The fact that we do not see as straightforward a translation of academic and labour market resources into financial wellbeing for ethnic minority groups as we see for White British people points to both the need to consider the complexity of underlying processes and, as previously discussed, the ways in which processes related to racism impact on outcomes. Therefore, it is worth noting that despite the relative stability of occupational outcomes for ethnic minority people compared with White British people after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, all ethnic minority groups experienced more income instability than the White British group during this period. Ethnic minority groups were more vulnerable to the negative financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the White British group, in addition to experiencing longstanding inequalities prior to the pandemic.

Ethnic inequalities persist in housing circumstances, but ethnic minority people have and retain strong attachments to their place of residence

Findings from EVENS evidenced inequalities in five inter-related dimensions of housing: household tenure, household types, overcrowding and space, residential mobility, and levels of belonging. The findings demonstrate distinct levels of material deprivation across almost all ethnic minority groups compared with the White British group, the exceptions being the White Irish, Jewish and, to a lesser extent, Indian ethnic groups.

In terms of tenure, findings from EVENS show that no ethnic minority group had a higher rate of home ownership (without or with a mortgage) than the White British group. The lowest rates of owning a home were found for the White Eastern European, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Black African and Arab groups, who also had high rates of renting. Renting indicates a level of housing instability and could be especially damaging during the COVID-19 pandemic when paired with the financial hardships and uncertainties described earlier.

Levels of overcrowding, and consequent pressure on space in households, were higher within ethnic minority groups than White British groups, and this is a particular issue for three-generation households that are more common in the Pakistani and Roma ethnic groups. In contrast, the rate of living in detached housing was highest for the White British, Arab, White Irish and Indian ethnic groups, who were three times more likely to live in such housing than the Black African, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi ethnic groups. Ethnic minority people were disadvantaged in terms of access to outdoor space at home. White British people had the highest rates of access to outdoor space at their property, while Arab, Chinese and Other Black people were four times more likely than White British people to be without outdoor space at home. Given its coverage of the experiences of Gypsy Traveller and Roma people, EVENS has also been able to uniquely document that the majority of Gypsy/Traveller people (almost three in five) and just over a quarter of Roma people lived in caravans and mobile homes.

Moving house during the pandemic – an indication of housing precarity - was considerably more likely for Roma, Jewish, Other White, Indian, Mixed White and Asian, and Other Asian people, compared with White British people.

In terms of the local area, lack of access to open space was reported by more than one in ten people in the Pakistani, Mixed White and Asian, Chinese, Other Asian, Mixed White and Black African, and Other Black ethnic groups, compared to only one in 20 of the White British group. However, despite the on average poorer housing experiences of ethnic minority people, there was a widespread sense of belonging to the local area. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian people were significantly more likely to report feelings of belonging to their local area than White British people. Interestingly, for all ethnic groups, apart from Roma, the majority of those who reported a change in belonging during the pandemic experienced increased attachment to the local area.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted on some dimensions of ethnic inequalities in health

It has been well documented that the COVID-19 pandemic led to much higher risks of mortality among ethnic minority groups than among the

White British group. This is mirrored and further detailed in findings from EVENS. The odds of COVID-19 infection were higher compared with the White British group for the Gypsy/Traveller, Bangladeshi, Mixed White and Black African, Pakistani, Black African, White Eastern European (uniquely reported in the EVENS), White Irish, and Indian groups. Data from EVENS also demonstrated higher levels of COVID-related bereavement among many ethnic minority groups compared with the White British group, reflecting high mortality rates and indicating not only ethnic inequalities in mortality, but also ethnic inequalities in relation to the impact of the silent 'pandemic of grief' that occurred throughout the period.

Nevertheless, these ethnic inequalities in outcomes directly related to COVID-19 did not straightforwardly translate into ethnic inequalities in mental health and wellbeing. Levels of anxiety and depression were lower among people in the Black African, Chinese, White Eastern European and Any other Asian groups compared with the White British group. Similarly, people from the Gypsy/Traveller, Roma, Chinese and Black African ethnic groups were less likely to experience loneliness during the pandemic than the White British group, while the Roma, Bangladeshi, Black African, Pakistani and Indian groups had a lower chance of experiencing an increase in loneliness during the pandemic than the White British group. In contrast, a notable finding from EVENS was that a higher risk of depression and anxiety was found for the Arab group. There is very little additional evidence on the mental health of Arab people in Britain, which is a diverse population with complex and often traumatic migration histories.

We do not yet know, of course, what the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be on ethnic inequalities in health. In addition to the immediate direct effects of COVID-19 infection on health, measures introduced to manage the pandemic will have both short-term and long-term impacts on social and economic inequalities experienced by ethnic minority people. As discussed earlier, these impacts are patterned in complex ways across ethnic groups and across outcomes, but their general impact is to amplify ethnic inequalities. Such an amplification of socioeconomic inequalities, shaped by structural, institutional and interpersonal racism, is likely to increase ethnic inequalities in health.

Ethnic minority people have strong affiliations to both ethnic and national identities

This chapter has, to a certain extent, illustrated why the question of ethnic identity is so important. The ways in which ethnic identities are shaped by processes related to racism and, consequently, how this results in inequalities is a central component of the experiences of ethnic minority people in Britain. However, ethnic identity is also an important component

of self-identification and affiliation to a group. EVENS demonstrated that across ethnic groups, ethnic identity was reported to be an important part of personal identity. This was particularly, but not only, the case for Black African, Black Caribbean, Pakistani, White Irish and Jewish groups, and least likely to be the case for the White British, White Eastern European and White Other groups.

In addition to felt identity, EVENS participants were asked how often they participated in practices relating to their ethnicity – the clothes they wore, the food they ate, and activities in general. Most people from ethnic minority groups reported regularly participating in such practices, while those in the White British group were the least likely to report participation, followed by White Irish and White Eastern European people. This perhaps signals the importance of such practices to one's sense of identity, particularly for those who were not members of White groups.

It is striking, though, that in addition to a strong affiliation to ethnic identity, EVENS data, along with data from other studies, show that ethnic minority people in Britain – people who have been racialised and minoritised within everyday contexts – remain strongly affiliated to a British identity. The sense of belonging to British society is very high across all groups, but particularly high among the Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Black African, Black Other, Arab and Jewish ethnic groups, as well as the White British group. The findings reported here for White Eastern European, Arab and Jewish people are particularly noteworthy – these populations have not been covered in other studies of national and ethnic identities.

In contrast to Britishness, a strong sense of belonging to English, Scottish and Welsh societies is less common among people from ethnic minority backgrounds compared with White British people. This might be a consequence of lower levels of inclusiveness for English/Scottish/Welsh national identities compared with the British national identity. For example, it has been suggested that the construction of Englishness is based more on an 'ethnic' rather than a 'civic' conceptualisation of identity (Leddy-Owen, 2014), so is more likely to be considered in terms of ancestry and Whiteness rather than citizenship. In this regard, it is interesting to note that EVENS data indicate that White Eastern Europeans are almost equally likely to report a strong sense of belonging to British and English national identities.

EVENS was also unique in including an open – free text – question on ethnic identity, asked before other questions on ethnic group membership and strength of ethnic and national identity. A meaningful proportion of participants chose not to answer this question – about a third across all groups – and a further substantial proportion used variants of official or administrative terms to describe their identities – about half across all groups. The common use of administrative language to describe their ethnicity by EVENS participants is likely to reflect how embedded these terms are in

everyday life in Britain, but also demonstrates how official categories do represent at least part of how we conceive of our identities – there was extensive development work to produce and consequently refine these categories. Responses from the remainder of the sample (about one in five) illustrate how people tend to think about their ethnicity when they are not bound by, or go beyond, predefined categories. In some cases, this was a reflection of the inadequacy of administrative categories to reflect the complexity of people's identities, including complex migration histories and families with multiple ethnic origins. It also reflected the importance of subnational places to people's identities and the complex ways in which ethnicity is related to experiences of persecution and oppression.

The implications of these findings for the policy agenda within Britain and beyond

The evidence presented in this volume points to four key conclusions:

1. Ethnic inequalities remain for a wide range of economic, social and health outcomes. They were present before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and either persisted or increased during the pandemic.
2. These social, economic and health inequalities operate jointly across people's life courses. While some might show evidence of some improvement – for example, outcomes related to education – these improvements are not translated into improvements in other domains of people's lives.
3. Despite this, ethnic minority people are able to maintain both a strong sense of affiliation to their ethnic identity and to a national British identity. They also maintain a strong engagement in political and civic life, reflected, perhaps, in a strong attachment to their places of residence.
4. Underlying both these inequalities and the nature of ethnic identities are pervading and very common experiences of racism and racial discrimination.

These summary conclusions do not, of course, reflect the depth, breadth and nuance of the evidence produced by EVENS, and the variations it shows across and within ethnic groups, including those documented for the first time by the study. Nevertheless, they do tell the story of ethnic inequality and how it is shaped by processes related to structural, institutional and interpersonal racism. This evidence is at odds with the conclusions and recommendations made by the report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021) and the UK government's response to that report found in *Inclusive Britain* (Race Disparity Unit, 2022). Both of these downplay - indeed, deny - the significance of racism to our society, and

instead emphasise individual, cultural and group deficits within an imagined framework to promote social mobility. The ambition seems to be to even out inequalities across population groups and places (but not to reduce inequality) without paying attention to the fundamental causes of these inequalities. This is, perhaps, not surprising in relation to the recent and current political context in the UK, where we are faced with a series of ongoing and evolving policies related to culture, citizenship, community, segregation and migration that are populist and disregard the evidence base. Such policies further and fundamentally undermine the social status of ethnic minority people and communities, reinforce processes of racialisation, and have a strong potential to negatively impact on and reinforce the social, economic and health inequalities documented here and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the stark ethnic inequalities seen in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent resurgence of BLM, has raised awareness of the significance of ethnic inequalities across the full range of social, public and private institutions in the UK. Questions have been asked about everything from deaths in custody, unequal health outcomes and failures of education systems, to the ways in which histories of colonisation, slavery and empire are embedded in our cultures and celebrated by our monuments and in the commemorations of our history. Indeed, during the BLM protests in 2020, we had a series of public statements in support of race equality from a large proportion of private, public and governmental organisations. These are, of course, the institutions that shape lives, both in terms of their provision of key services and because they provide employment opportunities for the majority of the workforce. They also bring together and amplify structural and interpersonal racism, and make them more salient (Nazroo et al, 2020). However, they are semi-autonomous and at arm's length from government, so are spaces where meaningful change can happen.

The positive note – one that has framed the design and conduct of EVENS – is that a careful and critical documentation of ethnic inequalities can lead to a contextually relevant and theoretically informed analysis of the causes of these inequalities. This book is the beginning of such a descriptive mapping of ethnic inequalities. The evidence generated by such work can then be translated into action by the leadership teams of those institutions who want to change the ways in which their organisations generate and amplify, rather than mitigate and redress, ethnic inequalities. This is an ambitious task; it requires thinking critically about the functions of institutions, acknowledging how such functions are rooted in the colonial histories of institutions, resulting in interconnected systems of structured racial inequity, and setting about to transform those functions and the way in which they are implemented using a model that is informed by a decolonisation agenda – in other words, an agenda that acknowledges the existence, purpose and

workings of racism in shaping the lives of its citizens and sets out to actively promote racial justice.

Here, of course, we run the risk of falling into the trap of *The Cruel Optimism of Racial Justice* (Meer, 2022). Meer argues that 'there is no likely end to the struggle for racial justice, only the promise this heralds and the desire to persevere, even despite knowledge of likely failure' (Meer, 2022: 1). This 'knowledge of likely failure' results from the evidence demonstrating that there has been little, or no, improvement in ethnic inequalities in Britain or elsewhere in the Global North. However, 'the desire to persevere', to combat racism, remains a powerful motivation for action. Consequently, our aspiration is that evidence on ethnic inequalities, generated by the innovative EVENS survey, coupled with informed critical analysis, such as that provided in this volume, can provide the framework to support the transformation of institutions, broader policy and society.

Returning to the questions laid out in the Introduction to this volume, the evidence generated by EVENS cannot tell us what a racially just society would look like. However, it does document the substantial ethnic inequalities in outcomes across a range of domains of life – Britain is not close to being a racially just society. EVENS has also demonstrated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, ethnic inequalities were maintained in many areas and extended in other areas. Perhaps a lesson to be learned is that during such crises – the current 'cost of living' crisis is another – the emphasis should be on policy interventions that take the opportunity to mitigate inequality.

Note

[1] 'blackness' is not capitalised here because, although it refers to the quality or state of identifying with Black ethnicities, it depicts identification with a socio-political movement that spans ethnicities, groups and categories, and is not considered a proper noun.