



IOPC Race discrimination report

November 2024

“Police officers act with fairness and impartiality. They do not discriminate unlawfully or unfairly.”

Standards of Professional Behaviour for police officers
(Equality and diversity)
from *The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020*

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Foreword



There is a long and well-documented history about race discrimination in policing. This history has led to a lack of trust and confidence in the police and is shaped by watershed events including the

racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 and the subsequent inquiry and report by Sir William Macpherson.

In that report, Macpherson affirmed the experiences of the Lawrence family and many other people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities regarding their interactions with the police. His recommendations led to significant reforms in policing and contributed to a broader awareness and effort to address race discrimination and racial bias.

It is within this context that the importance of an independent police complaints system, recommended by Macpherson, becomes evident. It marks a significant chapter in our history at the IOPC and the importance of learning and accountability.

While policing has made progress to ensure all communities are treated fairly, there are still significant issues within policing regarding race. This is evident from our work, the work of others, the statistics surrounding disproportionality and from what communities tell us.

Our work on race discrimination has focused on exploring, challenging and addressing these issues and the impact they have on public confidence in policing and the police complaints system. It has been a learning journey, helping us to improve both our own work and policing practice. Part of that learning is to speak in a

language that resonates with communities. It builds trust, encourages engagement and more importantly helps us to keep making progress.

This report brings together our body of evidence and calls for change. This is supported by updated IOPC guidelines for handling allegations of discrimination and a toolkit for complaint handlers. Collectively I hope that these products will serve as an important resource for driving further improvements in policing and police complaint handling. Fostering a better understanding of race discrimination and its impact while guiding actions towards meaningful change.

I want to thank the many individuals, groups, communities and stakeholders for sharing their experiences and views. I would also like to thank our Race Discrimination National Advisory Group and our Youth Panel members for their candid and helpful feedback.

It is incumbent upon all of us to actively combat discriminatory attitudes and behaviours to strengthen public confidence in policing. By doing so, we can ensure that everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, feels protected and respected, has a service that meets their needs, and enables the police to perform their duties effectively.

Rachel Watson
Director General

About the IOPC

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is the police complaints watchdog. We are not the police and are completely independent of them.

We set the standards for the police complaints system. We make sure the police investigate complaints about themselves properly. Additionally, we carry out an independent review of the handling of specific police complaints if people are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been dealt with. We also independently investigate the most serious and sensitive incidents involving the police ourselves.

Through our work, we hold the police to account when things go wrong. We have legal powers to make learning recommendations under the *Police Reform Act 2002* and recommend changes to prevent the same mistakes happening again. We promote high standards of professionalism and accountability in policing, using our evidence to help policing drive improvements in police practices for the benefit of the public and the police.

Terminology used in this report

Throughout this report we use the terms Black, Asian and minority ethnic which includes White minorities such as Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities. However, we recognise that language and terminology evolve, there are many different ethnic groups, and their experiences are not the same. The terms Black, Asian and minority ethnic are used with an awareness of the diversity and experiences within these communities. The intersection of race and ethnicity with gender, age, disability, and other identities further shape individual experiences.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

In the course of our work, we have been pleased to hear about strategies and initiatives to tackle race discrimination in policing. Although we must wait and see evidence of their impact, we welcome these efforts. You will find them highlighted throughout the report like this.

Executive summary

Race discrimination has been a significant issue in policing for many years. It underpins the creation of our predecessor, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) following Sir William Macpherson's inquiry and subsequent report into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence.

By ensuring that serious complaints and conduct matters are handled impartially and thoroughly, we play a vital role in driving improvements in policing through learning and accountability.

However, tackling race discrimination in policing is a complex and highly sensitive issue. The historical backdrop of racial bias and discrimination in policing has led to deep seated mistrust between affected communities and the police, which becomes prominent during critical moments in policing. The murder of George Floyd by a US police officer and the Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020 served as a catalyst, sparking greater scrutiny of policing in England and Wales.

We repeatedly hear through our engagement work that Black communities in particular feel over-policed as suspects and under-protected as victims. This is attributed to a perception of ongoing race discrimination, evidenced by our engagement with communities and stakeholders.

Disproportionate use of police powers, such as stop and search and use of force, contribute to this ongoing perception,

particularly when no explanation can be provided for the racial disparities that exist. These disparities, reported each year without a definitive explanation, suggest the potential presence of underlying systemic issues and structural inequalities.

While we recognise that policing has taken meaningful steps towards ensuring that all communities receive fair and impartial treatment, there are still considerable issues involving race within policing. Our findings, along with data on racial disparities and feedback from both communities and stakeholders, provides clear evidence and there is broad consensus both within policing and wider society that these systemic problems still exist. However, there is a reluctance in some quarters to use the phrase 'institutional racism'.

Macpherson was clear on what institutional racism is - a collective failure to provide an appropriate professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. We think it is important that those communities who are most affected by these systemic issues should be listened to and they are clear: language matters.

The aim of this work is not to make political statements, brand all police officers as racist or disregard the valuable progress that has been made. This is about being clear that a problem still exists and to talk about it in a way that resonates with those communities most

affected, so they feel heard and confident to work with the police to continue to make progress. It is only by working with those communities that policing can hope to achieve Macpherson's aim to eliminate racist prejudice and disadvantage and to demonstrate fairness in all aspects of policing.

This report brings together our thematic work to explore, challenge and address race discrimination in policing. Alongside this report we have published revisions to the guidelines for handling allegations of discrimination, that were originally created by the IPCC, and a toolkit for police complaint handlers. We are sharing the learning from our work to help forces take action to rebuild trust and confidence in policing and the complaints system.

Our [earlier publications](#) - focusing on Taser, stop and search and complaint handling - in conjunction with our independent investigations and reviews, form part of our ongoing effort to help policing drive improvements in this long-standing area of concern.

Our evidence base and methodology

Our work on race discrimination involves over 300 IOPC investigations and reviews of certain complaints where race discrimination is a potential factor to be considered. Our reviews of complaints are where people are dissatisfied with how they have been handled by the police.

Together with our cases, our evidence brings together:

- views and concerns expressed by community groups and stakeholders to the IOPC through our engagement work
- data from our public perceptions tracker and stakeholder surveys, and
- other published data and research

Owing to the nature of our work, which focuses on the most serious and sensitive matters, we often witness policing first-hand when issues arise. These often relate to complaint or conduct issues that focus on the individual actions of police officers and staff. We accept that this does not provide a fully representative picture of policing, hence the inclusion of broader evidence. However, the cases that we independently investigate, and review have considerable influence on public confidence and offer a substantial opportunity for learning and improvement.

Through our collective evidence, we found that:

- Race discrimination is not fully understood and is sometimes too easily 'explained away' within policing as something other than discrimination.
- Where the public feel they have been discriminated against, it leaves a profound impact on them, especially on children, which is not always understood or accepted by the police.
- The perception of race discrimination and bias in some police practices such as stop and search and use of force

undermines the legitimacy, trust and confidence in policing.

- Deep-seated distrust in policing among some Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities can extend to low confidence in the police complaints system. This can further undermine confidence if complaints and/or investigations are not handled effectively or are perceived to not be handled effectively.

We welcome the increased focus of the [Police Race Action Plan](#) to address racial disparities and race discrimination within policing. We found evidence of both local and national policing initiatives (some of them newly implemented and others more developed) designed to tackle racial disparities, improve cultural competence in police practices, and improve standards in the handling of police complaints involving discrimination.

However, more work is needed to demonstrate policing is fair and improve trust and confidence levels among Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who want to see tangible changes, particularly in frontline policing.

We hope that this report serves as a valuable resource to support and guide further progress in policing practices.

Our call to action is for policing to:

- Implement focused and measurable change for local communities regarding:
 - Racial disparities and the use of police powers, particularly those involving children. (In this report, the term children is defined as those under 18 years old). This should include a focus on improving stop and search, use of force and strip search practices, by providing effective safeguards to mitigate adultification bias and ensure fair treatment.
 - Police handling of complaints involving discrimination – ensuring that complaints are handled effectively first time in accordance with the revised ([IOPC guidelines for handling allegations of discrimination](#)).

Our commitment at the IOPC is to:

- Collaborate with policing, police and crime commissioners, mayors and other key stakeholders to improve trust and confidence in policing and the police complaints system. Providing support to improve the handling of allegations involving discrimination.

Adultification bias

Adultification bias is a form of bias where children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are perceived as being more ‘streetwise’, more ‘grown up’, less innocent and less vulnerable than other children. This particularly affects Black children, who might be viewed primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support (Davis and Marsh, 2020; Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019). Children who have been adultified might also be perceived as having more understanding of their actions and the consequences of their actions. *NSPCC, Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities (2022).*

“The elimination of racist prejudice and disadvantage and the demonstration of fairness in all aspects of policing has still not been met twenty-two years on, and we have identified areas where too little progress has been made because of a lack of focus and accountability on issues of race.”

Home Affairs Committee, [Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on](#)

Introduction

Background and historical context

At the IOPC, we encounter a variety of cases covering a wide range of issues. Areas of concern also emerge from conversations we have with communities and stakeholders. Discrimination in policing is one of the most frequently raised concerns by communities and stakeholders through our engagement work. Matters involving race specifically are a particular concern. They often come to the forefront during pivotal moments in policing, such as high-profile incidents or public protests.

2020 saw global protests following the murder of George Floyd by a US police officer. These protests around the world, including the UK, about systemic racism and racial disparities prompted renewed scrutiny of policing practices in England and Wales and the treatment of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. It accelerated our efforts to bring forward plans to launch our focus on race discrimination in policing in September 2020 to explore, challenge and address these concerns within policing and share learning to improve policing and police complaint handling.

Institutions must be able to challenge themselves and be held publicly to account for addressing racism within structures or policies as well as within individual attitudes.

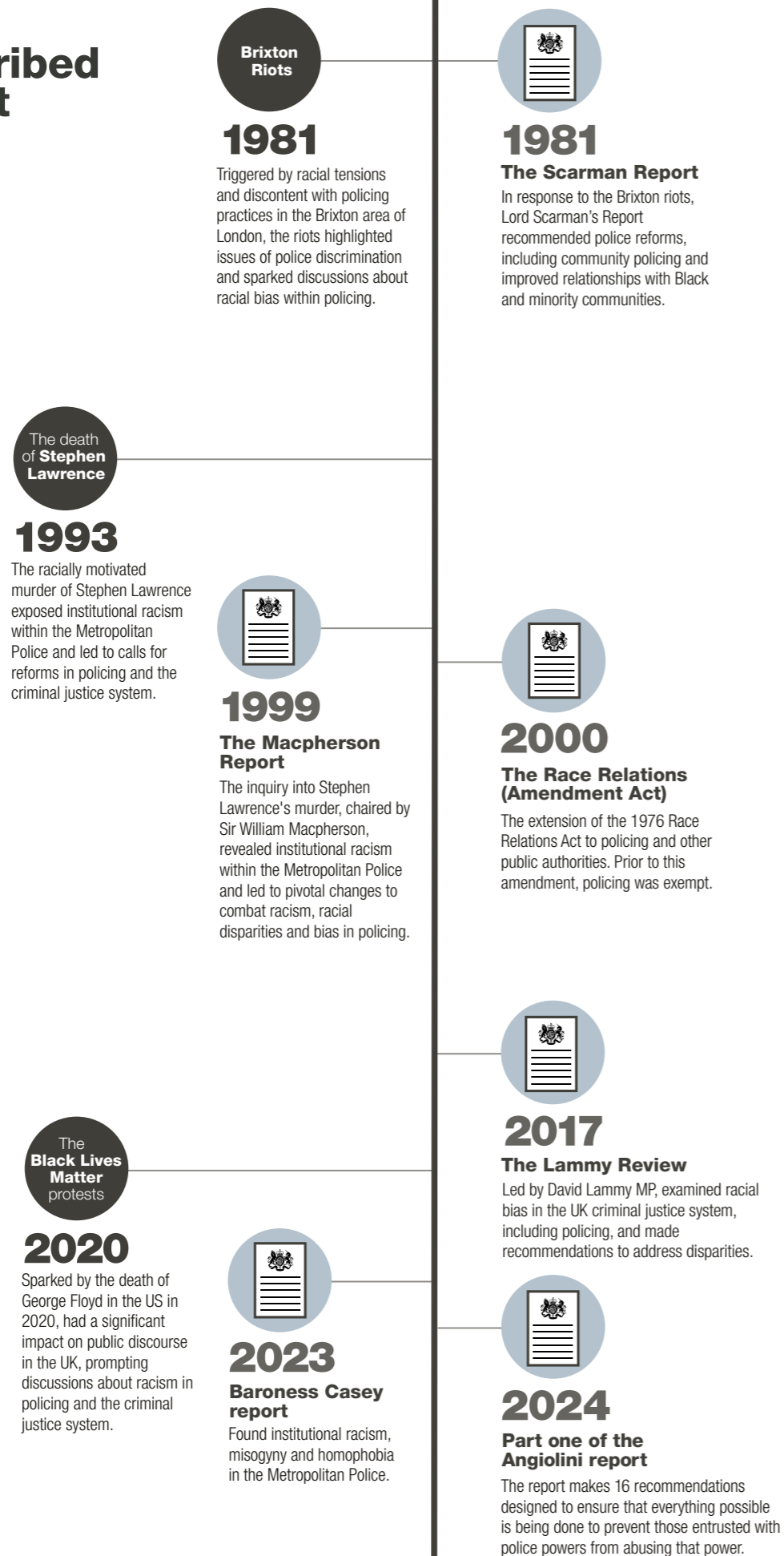
Home Affairs Committee

[Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on](#)

We know that race discrimination, bias and the disproportionate use of some police powers undermines public confidence. It is a long-standing area of concern shaped by key events, changes in legislation and various reports spanning decades. From the Scarman report in 1981, the Macpherson report in 1999, to Baroness Casey’s review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service in 2023. It lies at the heart of ongoing distrust among some communities that is rooted in historical experiences of overt racism in policing (see the government policy paper [Inclusive Britain: government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities](#)). This was further highlighted by the police being exempt from the *Race Relations Act 1976* until the year 2000 when the Act was amended to include policing and other public authorities. These long-standing challenges are acknowledged in the National Police Chiefs’ Council and College of Policing’s [Police Race Action Plan](#). They also form part of the history of our predecessor, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

Following the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, Sir William Macpherson recommended that *“the Home Secretary, taking into account the strong expression of public perception in this regard, consider what steps can and should be taken to ensure that serious complaints against police officers are independently investigated. Investigation of police officers by their own or another Police Service is widely regarded as unjust, and*

Timeline of events described in this report



does not inspire public confidence.” (Recommendation 58 – The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry 1999).

Race discrimination refers to the unfair treatment or prejudice against individuals or groups based on their race or perceived race. It can manifest in many forms, including unequal treatment of individuals, harassment, stereotyping and institutional racism – the latter defined by the late Sir William Macpherson in respect of policing.

Disproportionality in the use of police powers refers to the situation where certain groups of people are affected by police actions more than others, relative to their proportion of the population. This means certain groups may be overrepresented or underrepresented in police interactions.

We have observed the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups who are disproportionately affected by the use of some police powers such as stop and search or use of force. These racial and ethnic disparities are reported each year without any real explanation of their cause, despite leaving a profound impact on individuals and communities. The broader structural issues that influence these incidents are often overshadowed by focusing on individual actions. This can lead to a lack of understanding of the root causes and consequently, less effective solutions to address these issues.

We have also noted from our work that the more nuanced forms of race discrimination and bias are not always fully understood or too easily ‘explained away’ within policing. Sir William

Macpherson defined this as being “*seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.*” (The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 1999).

The more subtle forms of race discrimination in policing can be hard to identify and prove conclusively. Lack of direct evidence can make it challenging to address concerns effectively and may lead to defensive reactions. This can deflect attention from the necessary steps to address discriminatory practices and behaviours perceived. Instead, the focus shifts to questioning individuals’ intentions and character rather than addressing the actions and behaviours themselves, and their impact. These challenges can hinder meaningful dialogue, opportunities for learning and efforts to achieve more equitable outcomes. It is essential that all communities feel both protected and respected by the police and have a service that is regarded as fair and impartial. This helps build positive relationships between the police and communities leading to improved outcomes for everyone involved.

“...policing needs to accept that the job can also attract predators and bullies – those who want power over their fellow citizens, and to use those powers to cause harm and discriminate. All of British policing needs to be alive to this very serious risk. It needs to keep them out when they try to get in, to root them out where they exist, and to guard against the corrosive effects that their actions have on trust, confidence and the fundamental Peelian principles of policing by consent.”

Baroness Louise Casey

The Baroness Casey Review

While policing has made some progress over the decades in implementing the 70 recommendations outlined by Sir William Macpherson to reform the police and tackle institutional racism, there remains significant work to be done. Many people within policing and police accountability lack first-hand experience of race discrimination and may not fully understand biases against groups that are different from their own. However, they are primarily responsible for exercising police authority, investigating race discrimination and determining outcomes, which poses a real challenge. Therefore, addressing matters involving race is key area for learning and development.

Legislation and policing principles

The police have a responsibility to respond effectively when discriminatory practices and behaviours are perceived, observed or reported. This is supported by a clear legislative framework that guides policing practices. Ongoing vigilance is vital to ensure that the law and policing principles are consistently upheld.

In England and Wales, the key legislative frameworks and policing principles that guide policing in respect of discrimination include:

- **The Equality Act 2010:** This prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on protected characteristics such as race. It is a legal duty for policing that followed Macpherson’s recommendation “that the full force of the Race relations legislation should apply to all police officers”. (The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 1999).
- **The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED):** Outlined in the *Equality Act 2010*, this requires all public bodies, including policing to take proactive steps to prevent discrimination, promote equality and foster positive relationships with all members of the community, regardless of their protected characteristics.
- **Human Rights Act 1998:** This incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms including Article 2 (right to

life) and Article 3 (prohibition of torture and inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment). These rights impose obligations on policing to ensure that their actions are non-discriminatory and respect human rights.

- **The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020:** These regulations outline the standards of professional behaviour expected from police officers. These regulations cover areas such as equality and diversity, honesty and integrity and authority and respect. Breach of these standards can result in disciplinary action, including dismissal from the police force.
- **Code of Ethics:** The College of Policing has developed a Code of Ethics for policing in England and Wales, which sets out the principles and standards of professional behaviour expected of police officers and staff. The Code includes provisions related to fairness, respect and non-discrimination.

Our evidence base and methodology

This report brings together our findings to help policing drive improvements in policing and police complaint handling on matters involving race discrimination. Our body of evidence includes:

- over 300 IOPC cases (investigations and certain complaints that came to use for review - where people were dissatisfied with how their complaint had been handled by the police)
- views and concerns expressed by community groups and

stakeholders to the IOPC through our engagement work

- data from our public perceptions tracker and stakeholder surveys
- published data and research

Our response is to look beyond individual encounters to identify trends and patterns and raise awareness of key findings to support changes in police practice. We are encouraging an open and responsive policing culture and helping to ensure that we have a police service where all communities feel protected and respected by the police.

Our evidence base focuses on police interactions with members of the public from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. It does not capture the experiences of police officers and staff from these communities but recognises that some of the issues raised in the report may mirror their concerns. While not within the scope of this work, it remains essential for policing to proactively confront and address race discrimination and bias within the workplace.

We accept that our work does not provide a fully representative picture of policing. We typically only observe policing for the most serious and sensitive incidents where issues have arisen. These often relate to complaint or conduct issues that focus on the individual actions of police officers and staff. However, the cases we independently investigate, and review are often those which have a significant impact on public confidence with the greatest potential for identifying and sharing learning.

“Policing needs to grasp fully the extent of the cultural problems it faces and the way that this affects the public it serves. It needs to do more than make further changes to policies, guidance and training, although these are important and worthwhile.

All policing leaders need to rethink fundamentally how they lead their organisations to ensure that certain types of behaviour, from the unacceptable to the criminal, are never tolerated.”

(The Angiolini Inquiry, 2024)

Perspectives on race discrimination and bias

Listening to the views and concerns expressed by complainants, community groups and stakeholders to the IOPC through our engagement work is a vital element within our body of evidence. It has shed light on systemic issues and concerns not always reflected in data-driven analysis, but equally important for learning outcomes.

Our cases have predominantly featured young Black men and boys, but we know from our engagement work, investigations and reviews of complaints that women and girls and other ethnicities are equally affected by race discrimination. The intersectional experiences of race and gender and other protected characteristics highlight multiple forms of discrimination that policing must understand and address to better serve diverse communities. This is borne out by [Part 1 of Lady Eilish Angiolini’s report into the rape and murder of Sarah Everard](#).

Recommendation 14:

Positive culture and elimination of misconduct or criminality often excused as ‘banter’

With immediate effect, every police force should commit publicly to being an anti-sexist, anti-misogynistic, anti-racist organisation in order to address, understand and eradicate sexism, racism and misogyny, contributing to a wider positive culture to remove all forms of discrimination from the profession. This includes properly addressing – and taking steps to root out – so-called ‘banter’ that often veils or excuses malign or toxic behaviour in police ranks.

The limitations with data on race discrimination in policing stem from various factors including, but not limited to, measurement and engagement challenges in collecting and analysing data, police-driven reporting and data quality. These limitations are further evidence of the problem and are made more difficult when the perception and experience of discrimination is subjective. We also know that where data is collected and published on police interactions with the public, such as stop and search statistics, arrest rates and use of force incidents, these may not always capture the full extent of any issues related to racial disparities or discriminatory practices.

Through our engagement with complainants, families, communities and stakeholders, we have gained a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of race discrimination, and how some people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities perceive policing to be discriminatory. Some of the personal experiences shared with us and reported publicly are summarised below.

Feeling over-policed as suspects

“Feel if there was a White and Black young person all dressed in black, the police would stop the Black person, as Black is perceived as dangerous.”

“I understand that sometimes when I’m stopped and searched police are just doing their job, but sometimes it can be way too aggressive.”

“I feel I get profiled a lot more because I’m a young Black boy even though I don’t do anything wrong.”

Feeling under-protected as victims

“It took the murder and rape of Sarah Everard to highlight issues Black communities have been voicing concerns about for years.”

“Black women in domestic abuse situations felt their lives did not carry the same value as the lives of other women and this was evident in the way they are policed and treated by the police.”

“I don’t trust them [the police] to look after me or my children.”

“Disgusted, we were raised to believe that the police are there to protect us but it’s in fact the opposite. Now not only do minorities not trust the police, but women cannot trust the police.”

Feeling unfairly treated

“I’ve been stopped many times, sometimes they have been ‘good’ stops, where I’ve been treated fairly and apologised to, and I understand the reasons, however sometimes I’m not treated fairly.”

Feeling fearful

One young person explained that if an officer came up to them then they would naturally have their guard up waiting for something to happen, and that they know other people actually run away because “naturally in our (Black) communities we don’t feel safe around the police.”

When a description of a suspect is circulated to officers, e.g., young Black person, dark clothing, it often pertains to most Black youths in school uniform. The young people fed back that they don’t feel comfortable wearing clothing that would make them stand out, even if it makes it easier for police to eliminate them.

Our [2023/24 Public Perceptions Tracker](#) raises concerns about confidence levels in the police. For people who identify themselves as Black, 45% were positive. Those of Asian and mixed heritage accounted for 44%, while White individuals represented 48%. These confidence levels must be addressed.

“We know that the police treat Black people differently. I just want to say it frankly... That is the reality... I was asked when I was going to come here if I had direct experience and it blew my mind, because living in a community where you know your community is treated differently, there is none of us that do not have direct experience”.
(Witness to the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry)

“We have an institutionally racist police force in the context of an institutionally racist society. It is not the only institution and training isn’t just required there, it has to be everywhere. It is not just about training; it is about taking on responsibility that this might not affect me or my children, but it is actually my responsibility to do something about this, because the weight cannot be on Black and ethnic minority communities to move this forward when we are also dealing every single day with the actual impact of living with it.

Somebody else has to take some leadership on this and [say], “We are going to do something, as White people, as the White community, the dominant group in society”, to say, “We are going to make a change to acknowledge these institutions are racist and make a difference there”, because we can’t do that. We do not have the power to do it. We can come here and drain ourselves by telling you about our lived experience, which is traumatic to do and does take away energy from us, but what are you going to do with it afterwards? It is your job to push it forward...”
(Witness to the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry)

“The stereotyping of young Black men as ‘dangerous, violent and volatile’ is a longstanding trope that is ingrained in the minds of many in our society.”

Report of the Independent Review of Deaths and Serious Incidents in Police Custody
- Rt. Hon. Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, 2017

Unexplained racial disparities in use of powers

Racial disparities in police use of powers in England and Wales have been a subject of ongoing concern and analysis. Numerous studies, reports and official data sources (Home Office, 2024) have shown consistently that people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately affected by certain police powers and practices compared to their white counterparts. Stop and search and police use of force are notable areas of concern that fuel distrust in some communities that the police use their powers fairly and effectively. They are indicative of the cases referred to us about potential race discrimination. As such, they have formed the basis of our findings where people from a Black ethnic background represent a considerable proportion of our cases compared to other ethnic groups.

Key issues that we have identified relate to:

- Some police officers exercising their stop and search powers based on racial stereotypical assumptions, rather than on ‘reasonable suspicion.’
- Instances of excessive police use of force and potential biases when force is deployed.
- Instances when the police response to Black children (for the purposes of this report, defined as those under 18 years old) could be perceived as an indication of adultification bias. Adultification bias refers to the tendency to perceive children, especially Black children, as older and more mature than they are, leading to unfair treatment, harsher

discipline and diminished support and protection.

- Unexplained hostility and a lack of courtesy and respect during police encounters.

We have noted the disproportionate use of some of the most intrusive policing powers on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and the inability of police forces to provide explanations for this disparity. We have observed that police forces may not fully understand the impact of the disproportionate use of these powers on individuals and communities, nor do they always fully recognise how structural inequalities can influence the policing response (see His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services report [‘Disproportionate use of police powers’](#)).

The use of police powers is largely discretionary, meaning that officers have some degree of choice in deciding when and how to exercise their authority. While officers are guided by laws, regulations, policies and procedures, they often have discretion to interpret and apply these rules in specific situations using the national decision-making model (NDM). The NDM is a framework to guide decision-making processes for police officers and provide a structured approach before actions are taken. It is designed to promote fair and effective decisions, but it does not explicitly guard against discriminatory decisions. It is reliant on police officers applying the model in a manner that is consistent with legal requirements, policies and professional standards.

It is essential that policing enhance its understanding of racism, race discrimination and bias to effectively recognise and address where it persists. We therefore welcome policing's commitment to become anti-racist (that is, proactively opposing racism) and deliver an anti-discriminatory service through the Police Race Action Plan.

Stop and search powers and stereotypes

Stop and search powers must be used fairly (...) and without unlawful discrimination.

Fair decision making in stop and search matters because it affects how people perceive the police – not just the individual who is searched, but also groups and wider communities of which that individual is a member.

College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice

Our [national stop and search learning report](#), published in April 2022, recognises the value of the police having a power that allows them to detain a person who is not under arrest, and to search them or their vehicle for an unlawful item. However, our evidence from a review of 37 cases, alongside existing data and research, suggests some police officers exercise their powers based on racial stereotypical assumptions and not on the basis of 'reasonable suspicion'. This is unlawful and discriminatory.

'Reasonable suspicion' is an objective test that allows police officers to search individuals when they have a reasonable belief that they will find the item searched for, and it is a reasonable belief given the information available to them. However, in some of our investigations, we have found officers stopping and searching individuals without reasonable grounds.

The smell of cannabis as sole grounds for a stop and search or the main reason for suspicion, alongside weak or vague intelligence, has featured in some of our investigations. This reinforces a commonly held belief among communities that the smell of cannabis is being used as an 'excuse' to conduct a stop and search, especially when no cannabis is then found on the individual.

Research suggests that those most likely to be policed for cannabis possession are young, ethnically minoritised urban males belonging to 'suspect' groups with evidence of discretionary practices in officers' decisions about who to approach, search and arrest which can indicate discrimination. The original interest in individuals or vehicles is not related to cannabis possession but based on racial stereotypical beliefs about people from ethnic minorities. Such as Black people in nice cars are likely to have acquired it through criminal activity or a Black person in a wealthy area is likely to be engaged in suspicious activity. Officers will then use the smell of cannabis in an attempt to justify the stop and search. (Grace, Lloyd & Page, 2022).

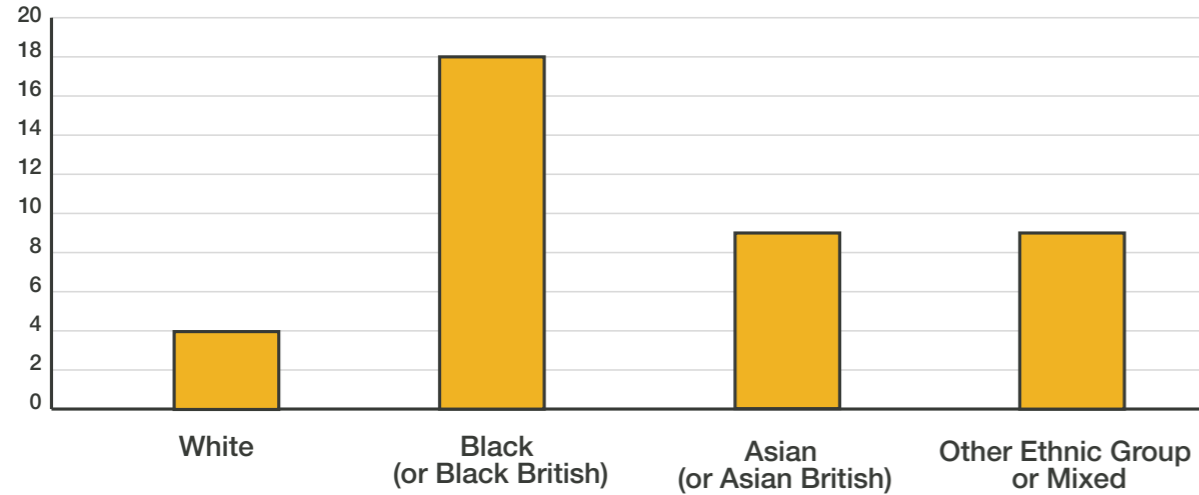
HMICFRS' review of stop and search found drug searches contribute substantially to racial disparities in the use of stop and search. Drug searches on Black people, and particularly possession-only drug searches, had a higher rate of weak recorded grounds than equivalent searches on White people (HMICFRS, 2017).

In the year ending March 2024, Home Office data shows there were 530,093 stop and searches conducted under section 1 of the *Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE)* by police in England and Wales (including British Transport Police). The police conduct a section 1 PACE stop and search for various reasons, including having reasonable suspicion that an individual may be in possession of drugs or a weapon. Of the 530,093 searches undertaken, 59.6% were on suspicion of drug possession and 15.9% were for offensive weapons. 14.3% resulted in an arrest.

People who self-defined their ethnicity as Black, Asian or 'mixed or other' (or were perceived by the officer to belong to one of those ethnicities, if not stated) were stopped and searched at a higher rate than their White counterparts, with rates of 5x, 1.5x and 1.7x respectively (Home Office 2024). Black people continue to experience the highest rate of searches, although we have seen a reduction in the disparity rate from 5.5 in March 2023.

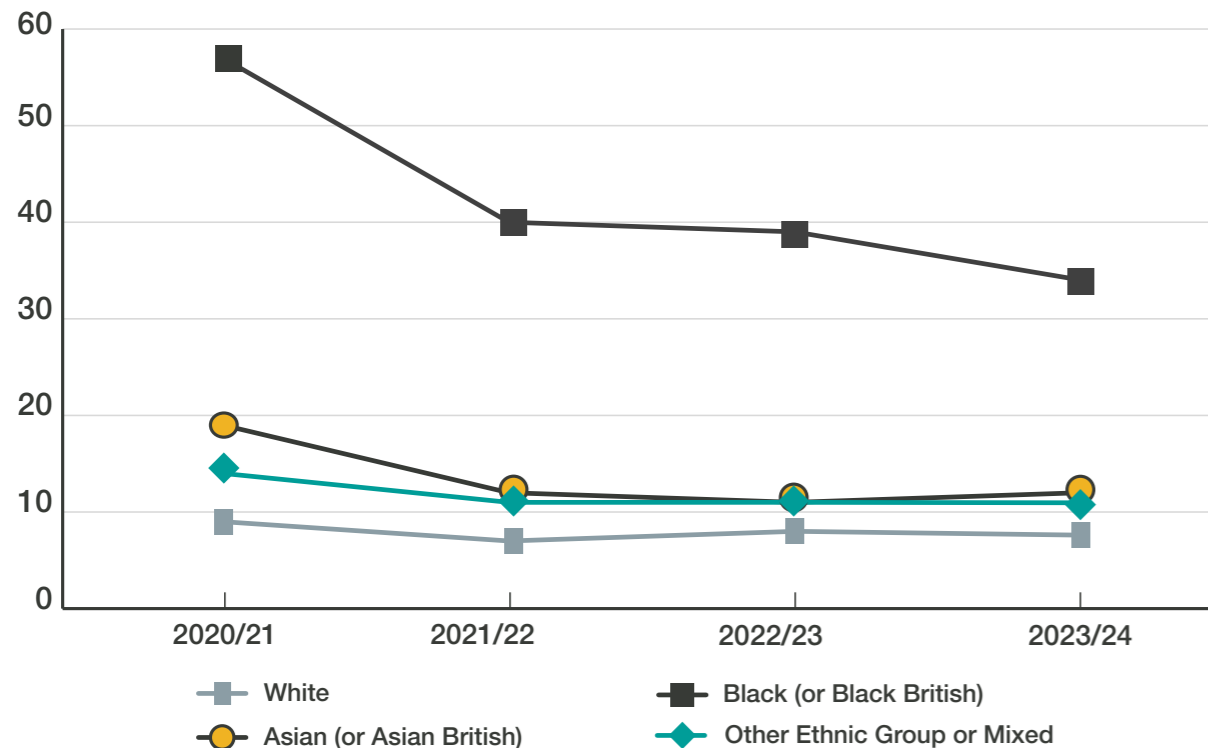
New analysis by ethnic group on whether an outcome was linked to the stop and search shows individuals who self-defined their ethnicity as either Black or 'mixed or other' (or perceived by the officer to belong to one of those ethnic groups, if not stated) had an arrest rate of 15.9%. White people had an arrest rate of 13.9%, and Asian people had the lowest arrest rate of 12.8%. 70.9% of Black people had 'no further action'. For Asian people it was 69.9%, followed by 69.6% for White people and 67.4% for people identified as 'mixed or other'.

Stop and searches for drug possession per 1,000 population by self-defined ethnicity or officer-defined ethnicity*, England and Wales, 2023/24



*Home office data states self-defined ethnicity was 'not stated' for approximately one in every five searches of people. Where the self-defined ethnicity of the person searched is not stated, officer-observed ethnicity is used instead. This reduces the proportion of stops with unknown ethnicity from 19.3% to 1.6%.

Stop and searches per 1,000 population, by self-defined ethnicity or officer-defined ethnicity, England and Wales, 2020/21 to 2023/24



Persistent racial disparities in the use of stop and search practices undermine the principles of fairness and equality that are fundamental to effective policing and public trust. The lack of explanation can exacerbate feelings of distrust and injustice among affected communities.

Research conducted by Crest Advisory found that although Black people generally support the principle of stop and search, there were serious concerns about the way some searches were carried out in practice, as well as the general service and treatment they receive from the police. Black Caribbean and mixed ethnicity adults were more likely to say they found the experience of being stopped and searched traumatising and humiliating.

The perception of racism and inequality, both in the use of stop and search, and in the police's general engagement with Black communities has negatively impacted whether Black children feel safe around the police, or whether they would go to the police if they were in danger and needed help. 66% of young Black people said they would call the police if in danger compared with 87% of White children and teenagers. (Crest Advisory, 2022).

530,093

stop and searches
section 1 PACE
in year ending 31 March 2024.

Individuals from a **Black or Black British** background were searched at a rate

5

times higher than that of those from a White ethnic group.

Asian or Asian British were searched at a rate

1.5

times higher than that of those from a White ethnic group.

Individuals identifying as **other ethnic group or mixed ethnicity** were searched at a rate

1.7

times higher than that of those from a White ethnic group.

Information the year ending March 2024, based on a combination of self-defined/officer-observed ethnicity (where self-defined ethnicity was not stated)

Our [national learning report](#) on the subject calls for stops and searches that are fair and respectful. We made [18 recommendations](#) to the College of Policing, Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council to improve the use of stop and search and safeguard communities from stop and searches influenced by racial stereotyping and bias.

One of the recommendations was the recording of data on the use of Section 163 powers of the *Road Traffic Act 1988*. Section 163 powers grant police officers the authority to stop any motor vehicle. We are aware of concerns about a perceived disproportionality in its use which can lead to the use of stop and search powers under section 1 of PACE if there are reasonable grounds to suspect officers will find the item searched for. There is currently no mandatory requirement to collect data on the use of this power.

In our report, we highlighted that we have seen Black and other minority ethnic men stopped in their vehicles owing to:

- Being present in an alleged drug hotspot.
- Driving a type of car associated with drugs dealers.
- Being Black in an area where 7-month-old intelligence indicated that Black men were involved in drug dealing.
- Twice driving past a location that police were monitoring in connection with drugs offences, in a car registered in a different area.
- Driving a car not registered in the area.
- Looking at officers in a 'certain way' and being outside during a period of Covid-19 restrictions.

Police officers are not permitted to stop a vehicle based on protected characteristics, including the race, age or religious dress of the driver or passengers.

Case example

Three police officers stopped and searched an Asian off-duty police officer and their friend in a high-end car. The off-duty officer was told they were stopped and searched due to their manner of driving, police intelligence linked to their car, and the smell of cannabis. The officers were unaware the driver was an off-duty police officer and it was not until they were searched that one officer found their police warrant card and questioned why they had not told them straight away.

An officer handcuffed and searched the off-duty officer, whilst other officers searched the car and their friend, and nothing was found. The off-duty officer questioned the intelligence linked to their car and denied the smell of cannabis. Later, it was established at the scene the intelligence was incorrect.

The off-duty officer reported the incident to the police, and a conduct referral was made to the IOPC.

Following our investigation, we concluded one officer should face a misconduct meeting where a breach of honesty and integrity regarding the smell of cannabis was proven. The officer received a written warning which will remain on their record for 18 months.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

We are pleased to hear that forces have begun recording the ethnicity of people subject to vehicle stops as part of the Police Race Action Plan. The recording and publication of this data for all forces is vital for transparency, accountability, and improvement.

It is also encouraging that chief officers share local strategies and initiatives to improve the use and scrutiny of stop and search. The sharing of local initiatives was in response to our stop and search national report, where we asked chief officers to evaluate local stop and search practices in line with our national recommendations. All 43 police forces in England and Wales

responded to our survey. Examples of positive and innovative practice centre around improvements to policies, guidance, training and scrutiny. They provide an opportunity for police forces to share local practices and learn from others. The local police practices listed below highlight some of the initiatives which can also be found in other police forces.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

Examples of police initiatives to improve use of stop and search

Hertfordshire Police has introduced disproportionality ‘deep dives’ to identify locations where there is apparent disproportionality and better understand the use of the powers, and to assess whether there are any behaviours displayed by the searching officers which would cause concern.

Essex Police has adapted the GOWISELY mnemonic to also include ‘R’ for Reassurance and Safeguarding, the purpose being to familiarise officers with the need to provide reassurance to everyone stopped and searched, specifically where the search ended with a negative result. This reassurance includes a full explanation of the reasons for the search and an apology, where appropriate, for any inconvenience or embarrassment caused. (GOWISELY is an acronym for the information police officers should provide prior to commencing a stop and search as per the College of Policing [Authorised Professional Practice](#)).

British Transport Police ‘use of force’ reports are scrutinised in public meetings held by the Police Standards and Integrity Committee (PSIC) of their Police Authority Board. These meetings are live streamed on YouTube. Each use of force is recorded on a digital use of force report and scrutinised

for trends, which are referred to their Independent Advisory and Scrutiny Group and to the Police Standards and Integrity Committee.

In Gwent Police, every stop and search involving someone from a Black or ethnic minority background is reviewed by a sergeant within the force Continuous Improvement Department. They check the quality of the grounds and powers used. Feedback on themes is communicated to the force and individual officer feedback is delivered in person and via the Coercive Powers Quality Improvement group.

North Wales Police has an internal mechanism (Safe Call) for confidential reporting of inappropriate behaviours.

West Mercia Police aftercare policy ensures every child or young person is visited by a youth intervention officer within ten days of being stopped and searched to explain why the search took place and to establish whether any further support can be offered.

In West Yorkshire, police officers use a QR code during stop and searches to provide the person stopped with the opportunity to feedback and/or complain on an individual experience.

In collaboration with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and with the support of Chief Constable Amanda Pearson, former NPCC lead for stop and search and Assistant Chief Constable Andy Mariner, current NPCC lead for stop and search, we have shared the initiatives from each police force with their respective Police and Crime Commissioner to facilitate continued improvements. A summary of the responses received from forces can be found [on our website](#).

It is important that the police can demonstrate the impact of their actions in improving the use and scrutiny of stop and search, and that initiatives put in place are resulting in change that makes a real difference to their communities.

Stop and search can be one of the most confrontational interactions an individual may experience with policing and is very often young people’s first encounter with policing. In our stop and search report, we highlighted the enduring impact reported by complainants. The significant effects on a young child who may subsequently experience repeated stops and searches throughout their lifetime can have long-lasting effects.

Research from Crest Advisory shows the experience of being stopped and searched is more traumatising for children than it is for adults. 25% of Black children and teenagers said they trust the police to use stop and search fairly, compared with 51% of those who are White. 64% of White children and teenagers said knowing police are stopping and

searching people in their area made them feel safer – but only 36% of young Black people said it did. (Crest Advisory, 2022).

Young people, particularly young people from a Black ethnic background, represent a large proportion of our stop and search cases. In the year ending March 2024, Home Office data shows (where the age of the person was provided) that one-fifth of all searches were on people aged 10-17 years with 9.9% of searches resulting in an arrest. 101 searches involved children aged 9 or under (an increase from 65 searches in year ending March 2023). Children aged between 10 and 17 made up 60.9% of criminal damage searches and 13.1% of drug searches.

Young Black males aged 10-17 (self-defined as Black or officer-defined) had the highest rate of stop and search at 106.3 per 1,000 people, compared to their White counterparts and other ethnic groups of the same age. For young White males aged 10-17, the rate was 27.1, while for Asian individuals and those from mixed or other ethnic groups the rates were 21.0 and 27.3 respectively (Home Office 2024).

There is a significant risk to public confidence unless the police can properly rationalise the use of stop and search to the public and demonstrate effective scrutiny of its use - particularly within the communities most disproportionately affected. Our position on stop and search is set out in our statement below.

IOPC position statement on stop and search

We recognise that, when used correctly, stop and search is an important policing power. It allows officers to detain a person who is not under arrest, and to search them or their vehicle for an unlawful item.

But it is one of the most contentious and intrusive policing powers and its disproportionate use against people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly young Black men, has damaged relations with those communities for many years.

Consequently, any failure to properly rationalise its use, or demonstrate effective scrutiny, significantly risks damaging public trust and confidence, particularly within the communities most disproportionately affected.

We repeatedly hear from complainants and others about their negative experiences of being stopped and searched - largely around a perceived lack of legitimacy - and the dissatisfaction and resentment that can be caused. Research shows that this can create marginalisation, exclusion, trauma, and ultimately a loss of trust in the legitimacy of policing. In some circumstances, it can even hinder the flow of the crime-related intelligence from witnesses.

In our national stop and search learning report, we used evidence from our cases and engagement work to build upon existing research to identify common themes, patterns, and issues. This evidence informed 18 recommendations that highlight opportunities to increase public confidence by improving the use and scrutiny of stop and search at a local and national level.

We believe action must be taken to improve policing practice so that people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds are not disproportionately impacted by stop and search.

To eliminate stereotyping, bias, and disproportionality

People from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds must be safeguarded against being stopped and searched because of decision-making based upon assumptions, stereotypes, and racial bias.

To ensure legitimacy

Aspects of PACE Code A and Authorised Professional Practice (APP), which dictate how stop and search is used, should be reviewed and embedded to increase the perceived legitimacy of stop and search as a policing power.

The reliance on smell of cannabis alone as grounds for a stop and search should end, as set out in APP because of its disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

Police officers need to be supported to improve their communication and de-escalation skills so that stop and searches, from the first point of contact through to the end of the encounter, are conducted professionally and with respect and courtesy.

To stop the use of force when it is not appropriate or necessary

Handcuffs and other uses of force must only be used when it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so.

To drive transparency and scrutiny

There needs to be a review of how powers used alongside stop and search are recorded nationally to provide greater transparency and identify any systemic issues that need to be addressed.

Body-worn video should be used to capture an officer's commentary leading up to the person being detained for a search, the conduct of the search itself, and the subsequent conclusion of the encounter.

There needs to be more effective scrutiny of stop and search use at a supervisory, community, force, and national level.

To develop and use insight into the historical use of stop and search to break the cycle of trauma faced by those who are disproportionately affected.

The damage caused by traumatic stops and searches needs to be better understood to enable meaningful action to be taken to minimise such trauma in future.

Strategic decisions about stop and search policy and practice should consider the potential for causing trauma to both individuals and communities.

A trauma-informed approach to stop and search should be taken by officers of all ranks.

Policing must ensure that use of stop and search is informed by an understanding of the historical issues that certain communities have experienced with the disproportionate use of this power.

Our aim is to support change and improve policing practice. We will continue to work with policing, and others, to better understand concerns about the use of stop and search. We will use our evidence to provide recommendations, driving change where it is needed to help improve public trust and confidence.

Examining police use of force

Use of force is an important part of police work to maintain public safety and/or protect police officers and others. It is a distinctive aspect of policing embedded in law and must be exercised reasonably, proportionately, and only when necessary to achieve a legitimate purpose. ‘Use of force’ tactics range from restraint measures such as handcuffing and incapacitant spray to the use of Taser and firearms. However, its use raises complex considerations as it involves decisions about when and how to apply force and the potential impact on the rights and wellbeing of those directly affected.

We have identified a recurring pattern in our cases involving the over-representation of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds who are subjected to the use of force. This pattern is supported by Home Office data, which consistently shows the disproportionate use of this power year after year, sometimes resulting in fatal outcomes.

Research highlighted by HMICFRS revealed the likelihood of officers drawing equipment or weapons and using unarmed force (but not using equipment or weapons) was higher when the person was identified as Black than when they were identified as White. HMICFRS also highlights how force is disproportionately applied with the use of Tasers and compliant handcuffing and states the reasons for this are unclear (HMICFRS, 2017).

Unclear reasons for racial disparities may indicate that systemic biases could

be a contributing factor as part of wider structural inequalities. This is a potential driver that can influence decision-making and outcomes in ways that disadvantage certain groups.

Community groups and stakeholders frequently raise concerns about race discrimination and racial disparities in relation to use of force. There is particular concern about the stereotyping of young Black men and boys and the impact of bias that can influence the beliefs, actions and decisions of police officers.

Research suggests that stereotypical perceptions of Black people as dangerous, violent, volatile, and having ‘superhuman’ strength may be contributing to the disproportionate use of force and restraint against such individuals. The overlap of race and mental health can also increase the risk of higher levels of use of force and restraint (Report of the Independent Review of Deaths and Serious Incidents in Police Custody - Rt. Hon. Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, 2017). It is an area of concern linked to bias where there is growing research exploring the formation of suspicions that lead to police interactions (see [The formation of suspicions: police stop and search practices in England and Wales](#) and [The role of prejudicial stereotypes in the formation of suspicion: An examination of operational procedures in stop and search practices](#)). This includes the study of factors that may influence use of force decisions, such as ethnicity, gender, mental health and other organisational factors (Dymond, Boyd, Quinton, 2023).

“The stereotyping of young Black men as ‘dangerous, violent and volatile’ is a longstanding trope that is ingrained in the minds of many in our society.”

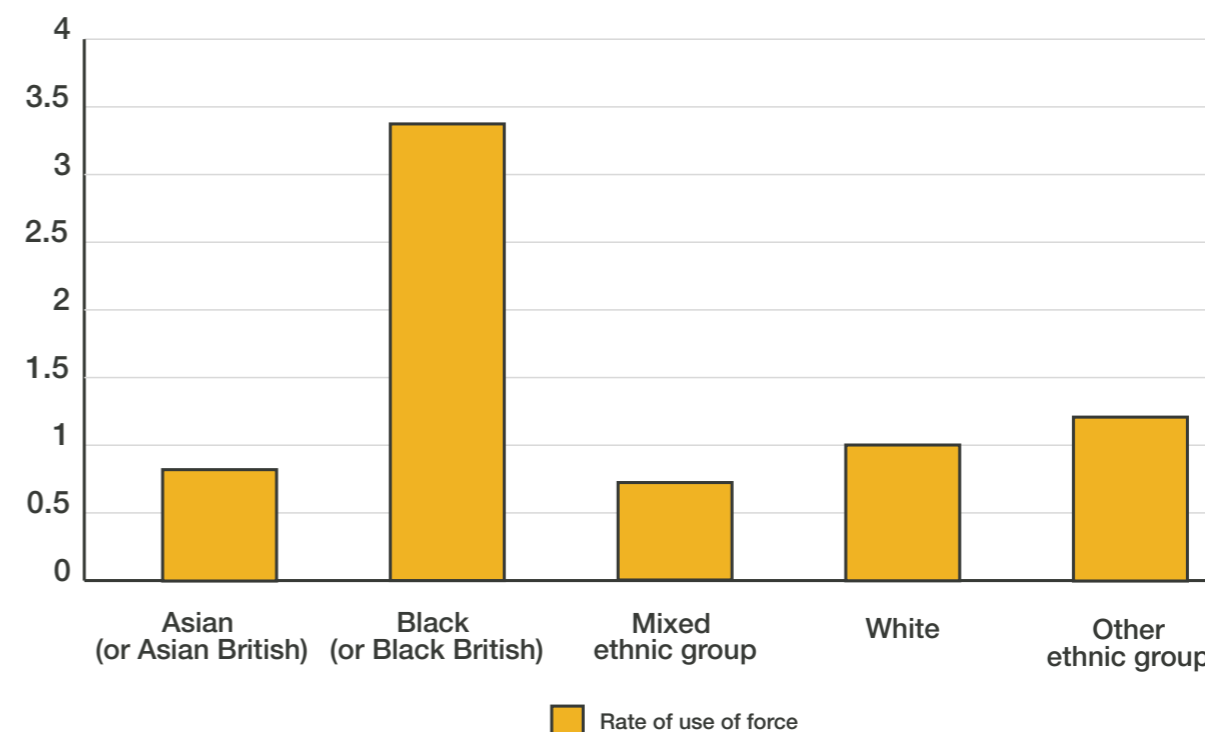
Report of the Independent Review of Deaths and Serious Incidents in Police Custody - Rt. Hon. Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, 2017

In the year ending March 2023, Home Office data shows there were 659,372 recorded incidents in which a police officer used force. Restraint tactics were the most common type of force used (78%) and most of these tactics involved handcuffing (77%). People from a Black ethnic group experienced use of force at a rate 3.4 times higher than those from a White ethnic group. People from an

Asian or mixed ethnic group experienced use of force at a lower rate (0.8). Other ethnic groups experienced use of force at a slightly higher rate than their White counterparts at 1.2 (Home Office, 2023).

In our [national stop and search learning report](#), we highlighted that, following a review of our cases, we frequently see police officers routinely or swiftly resorting to handcuffs and other force to ensure compliance when engaging with people from a Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic backgrounds. We know from our findings that when stop and searches are perceived as unjust or motivated by bias, they have the potential to heighten tensions. These tensions can increase the chance of confrontation and resistance, ultimately increasing the risk of use of force and/or arrest.

Rate of use of force by ethnic group (April 2022-March 2023)



Case examples

A 12-year-old Black child, who had a plaster cast on one of their hands, was placed in handcuffs within 20 seconds of the officer getting out of their police vehicle. This was despite the child being compliant and polite from the outset and before being given the opportunity to explain that they were running an errand for their mother.

The stop and search of a Black man, which escalated to use of force including handcuffs and incapacitant spray, happened within one minute of the encounter starting. This meant there was insufficient time for officers to cover all the elements of GOWISELY.

GOWISELY Explained

- G** **Grounds** - A clear explanation of the officer's grounds for suspicion, e.g., information, intelligence, or specific behaviour of person
- O** **Object** - A clear explanation of the object and purpose of the search in terms of the article being searched for
- W** **Warrant card**, if not in uniform, or if requested
- I** **Identity of the officer(s)**: name and number or, in cases involving terrorism or where there is a specific risk to the officer, just warrant or collar number
- S** **Station** to which the officer is attached
- E** **Entitlement to a copy of the search record** within 3 months
- L** **Legal power** used
- Y** **You are detained for the purposes of a search**



Source: College of Policing

A Black male standing with a bike on a residential road was approached by a police officer asking what he was doing there. A brief exchange occurred and within 20 seconds the police officer decided to detain the male for a search under the *Misuse of Drugs Act*.

The male was surprised at this decision and did not wish to comply. He was then restrained for being persistently non-compliant and arrested for affray. He was strip searched in custody and no items were found. He was later released with No Further Action.

A group of three non-uniformed officers in an unmarked vehicle stopped and searched a man sitting in his parked car near his house which is near a crime hotspot. The officer claimed they could smell cannabis coming from the car. No cannabis was found.

The man, a Polish national for whom English was not his first language, was pulled from the car, taken to the ground, handcuffed and PAVA (incapacitant spray) sprayed in his eyes. He was arrested for obstructing police, but later de-arrested. The man told our investigation that he was scared for his life during the struggle with the officers as he thought he was about to be robbed and they had not identified themselves. He resisted them and attempted to get away when they began to use force. One officer struck the Polish national several times.

At a misconduct hearing, the panel found officers had breached the police standards of professional behaviour in respect of: honesty and integrity; authority, respect and courtesy; duties and responsibilities; use of force.

The panel found one officer's actions amounted to gross misconduct and he was dismissed without notice. He has also been barred from working in policing in future. The second officer was given a written warning as the breaches were found to be at misconduct level. A third officer will attend an internal misconduct meeting.

We carefully considered whether there were any learning opportunities arising from the investigation. We make learning recommendations to improve policing and public confidence in the police complaints system, and prevent a recurrence of similar incidents.

Our investigation also identified the following organisational learning for the force:

- Plain-clothed officers and their supervisors should be reminded of the perception to members of the public when non-uniform or non-business casual clothing, such as shorts, tracksuits, t-shirts and trainers, are worn on public-facing assignments.
- Officers should be reminded that particular attention should be paid to early identification of their police status in these circumstances, and prior to the exercise of police powers.
- Officers should be reminded that police vests must be worn overtly or covertly depending on the officers' roles.
- Formal training for covert police officers should include the purpose of the role and how to effectively use plain clothed policing to obtain evidence and intelligence.



Other types of force used by the police such as Taser and firearms heighten concerns within Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities regarding race discrimination and bias, owing to the prevailing racial disparities that exist.

Compared with other tactics, people from a Black ethnic group were involved in proportionally more incidents involving the police use of less lethal weapons such as Taser (16%) and firearms (24%). People from an Asian or mixed ethnic group were involved in proportionally fewer incidents involving the use of less lethal weapons (6%) and proportionally more incidents involving the use of firearms (13%). This compares to people from a White ethnic group who were involved in proportionally fewer incidents involving the police use of less lethal weapons (71%) and firearms (54%) (Home Office, 2023).

In our [review of Taser](#) we raised concerns about the risks associated with Taser use, particularly in the context of deaths and serious injuries, their use against children and vulnerable adults and the disproportionate use of Taser on Black men.

Taser provides protection and safety for both police officers and the community in dangerous and challenging situations. However, its disproportionate use on Black men raises questions. Through our engagement with stakeholders and community groups there is some disparity between community expectations about when a Taser should be used and the situations in which a Taser can be used under current national guidance. This disparity highlights a bigger issue wherein there is a disconnect between how policing views its actions and how people experience them.

Key findings from IOPC Taser report on disproportionality

Black people are **less likely** to be subjected to a Taser discharge than White people

but **more likely** to be involved in cases where the Taser was aimed or red-dotted.



Black people are **more likely** to be Tasered for **prolonged periods** than White people.

In the majority of cases involving either allegations of discrimination or common stereotypes and assumptions, there was evidence that the individual concerned had **mental health concerns** or a **learning disability**.



Independent research initiated by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and commissioned by the College of Policing explored the potential causes of ethnic and racial disparities in the police use of Taser and highlighted the influence of racism. The study suggests it may be a *“combination of societal issues and institutional policing priorities, policies and practices which are systematically and disproportionately affecting Black and other ethnic minority communities in deprived [areas], relative to the populations of more wealthy surrounding, predominantly White areas.”* It concludes that while individual officers make decisions to use Tasers, those decisions are not solely determined by the individual officer's judgement. Instead, they are influenced by broader institutional processes and responses to situations categorised as posing a threat or risk. (Bradford, Stott et al, 2023).

We recognise the challenging situations that police officers find themselves in, where decisions need to be made quickly and it is necessary and appropriate to use force.

Assessing the level of resistance from a subject can be complex and the uncertainty of situations can make it difficult to determine the appropriate level of force to use. However, the primary responsibility for using force rests with individual officers. It is a defining characteristic of policing established in

law and must be exercised reasonably, proportionately, and only when necessary to achieve a legitimate purpose.

Each year, individual officers undertake public and personal safety training (PPST) to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to manage situations involving physical and non-physical conflict safely and effectively. This includes the use of de-escalation and communication tactics. These tactics are vital in preventing situations from escalating into violence or confrontations, minimising the need for force. By prioritising communication and de-escalation techniques, police officers can often achieve peaceful resolutions without resorting to physical intervention. This helps build trust and ensures interactions with the public are conducted with empathy, respect, and cultural sensitivity.

Where the power dynamic rests with officers, a greater understanding by them of the range of tactics and tools at their disposal which includes communication and de-escalation techniques is an important consideration.

The revised **Code of Ethics** clearly sets out the expectations for police officers and staff whose duty is to act in the public interest and ‘think about how [their] actions might be interpreted or perceived by others when taking decisions.’ (Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing)

Case example

We investigated nine complaints about a Black man who was repeatedly tasered during his arrest, while a child was with him. We were aware of concerns about the disproportionate use of Taser on Black men and set up a community reference group to understand the impact of this case. Through our discussions, we noted a disparity between some expectations about when a Taser can be used, and how national guidance allows it to be used.

We examined the actions of officers during and after the man's arrest, their use of force, and whether the man was treated less favourably because he was Black. We concluded that officers had acted in line with the relevant policies, guidance and procedures. We also found no evidence to suggest the complainant's ethnicity was a factor in the decision to use force against him.

However, we identified several areas of learning for the force as well as changes needed at a national level. This included a recommendation, accepted by the police force, to ensure that officers are aware of their language when justifying their use of force. They should not refer to commonly held stereotypes that may make their actions seem discriminatory.

We recognise there will be situations where use of force becomes necessary. However, transparency and fair decision making is vital to ensure that the public, especially communities that are disproportionately affected, view the police as legitimate and trustworthy. This can be achieved through meaningful engagement between the police and communities supported by local and national oversight.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

The increased focus and oversight of Taser use led by Chief Constable Lucy D'Orsi, NPCC lead for Less Lethal Weapons is welcome. We have seen changes to the police training curriculum led by the College of Policing and new NPCC guidance and

technology to facilitate a review of Taser use at a local level.

We also welcome the ongoing commitment to this area of policing with work led by the NPCC to respond to the findings of independent research to explore the social, ethnic and racial disparities that exist in the use of Taser. This national project aims to enhance the use and scrutiny of Taser, incorporating the perspectives of young people through an advisory function established by our stakeholder engagement team.

Adultification bias

Evidence from some of our cases involving stop and search, use of force and strip searches raise concerns about the police response to Black children defined as adultification bias. This is when innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children, by those in positions of power and authority. Adultification can affect all children but adultification bias is founded on discrimination and bias that explicitly impacts Black children and influences how they are safeguarded and protected due to racialised stereotyping (Davis, J and Marsh, N (2020)).

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) describes adultification in the following way:

Adultification is a form of bias where children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', more 'grown up', less innocent and less vulnerable than other children. This particularly affects Black children, who might be viewed primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support (Davis and Marsh, 2020; Georgetown Law Center

on Poverty and Inequality, 2019). Children who have been adultified might also be perceived as having more understanding of their actions and the consequences of their actions. (see 'Safeguarding children from Black, Asian and minoritized ethnic communities')

It's crucial that officers and staff understand how adultification can influence their decision making, leading to unjust and discriminatory treatment of children. In some of our cases involving stop and search and use of force, we have seen how officers either assumed that a child was older than they were, and therefore did not apply appropriate safeguards; or they knew that a child was under 18 but still failed to apply appropriate safeguards. Communities and stakeholders view these actions as being guided by racial stereotypes about the perceived likelihood of criminal behaviour among Black children. Specific concerns include the lack of consideration of safeguarding risks and the proportionality of police actions which could suggest that children are being held to the standard of an adult rather than of a child.



Case example

A 14-year-old Black child was taken to the floor by two officers responding to a report of a 13-year-old boy being robbed at knifepoint by four secondary school children. Their grounds for detaining the boy were that they believed he was one of the suspects.

We received a complaint that alleged officers used excessive force in restraining and handcuffing the boy, taking him to the floor, kneeling on his back and that his treatment was motivated by discrimination on the grounds of his race and age.

We found two officers should face disciplinary proceedings for alleged breaches of the police standards of professional behaviour relating to:

- their use of force in handcuffing the child
- orders and instructions, and honesty and integrity, relating to the officers' actions and comments made during the stop and search
- equality and diversity, for allegedly discriminating against the child because of his race and age.

An independent panel found that the officers' actions amounted to misconduct for breaching the police standard of professional behaviour relating to use of force for handcuffing the boy for longer than was necessary; and for equality and diversity for failing to make reasonable adjustments for the child.

It was proven that individual officers had also breached the police standard of professional behaviour relating to integrity and authority, respect and courtesy. As part of our investigation, we identified learning for the force, mainly in relation to its policy on visual identification of suspects and its implementation for officers.

We reviewed a series of IOPC investigations involving searches of children, both inside and outside of custody, that involved the exposure of intimate body parts (EIP). We identified gaps in guidance that put children at risk and recommended a review of national guidance and training around these searches.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

We are pleased that the Home Office consulted on proposed amendments to PACE Codes A and C relating to

searches of children which expose intimate parts. Many of the proposed amendments align with the 10 national recommendations we have issued to the Home Office, National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing to enhance safeguards for children who are subject to such searches.

The police have specific responsibilities under Sections 10 and 11 of the [Children Act 2004](#) to protect children. They are one of three statutory partners within local

safeguarding partnerships dedicated to children's welfare. The others include local authorities and integrated care boards.

Policing young people effectively includes protecting them from victimisation. This is especially important given that young people can be vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and harm. It is important for policing to understand the power dynamics in their interactions with children and mitigate the risk of adultification bias by ensuring the welfare and safeguarding needs of children takes precedence.

In focus groups led by Crest Advisory, Black and mixed ethnicity children said they wanted to trust the police but felt unable to do so because of negative interactions they or people close to them had experienced or viewed online. Black children were substantially less likely to seek help from the police or communicate their concerns to the police if they were at risk than children from any other ethnic group (see '[Forgotten voices: Policing, stop and search and the perspectives of Black children](#)'). The low confidence levels reported by Black children, especially those from Caribbean backgrounds, warrant particular attention.

"We have to be able to have faith in the police. They stand in the way of danger for us. We need to be able to tell our children to go to them when they are in danger. We give the police exceptional powers and we trust them to use them responsibly. That is how policing by consent works."

*Baroness Louise Casey
The Baroness Casey Review*

Members of our Youth Panel highlighted the importance of the police understanding and responding more effectively to trauma – including the trauma that can be caused by the police. In their [national survey report](#) published in May 2024 they recommended that all officers receive mandatory training in trauma-informed approached and de-escalation skills to help officers communicate and engage with young people effectively and improve interactions such as stop and search.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

We are encouraged by the NPCC Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024-2027 that seeks to create a culture of child-centred policing across England and Wales that is lawful, effective, fair and reduces trauma. In the strategy, we welcome the focus to respect and recognise the needs, vulnerabilities and diversity of children under 18 irrespective of presented or assumed levels of maturity and age. Efforts to ensure policing is procedurally just, unbiased, inclusive and anti-racist are also encouraging. The child-centred approach to policing seeks to actively identify disparity in the policing of children and young people across a range of factors, including race, with a view to explain why disparity exists, or to reform practice.

Child-centred policing:

- Is seen as legitimate as it is lawful, effective and fairly applied in line with our values, the Code of Ethics and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Reduces trauma for children and young people when all practice and contact is culturally competent, empowering, collaborative, provides choice, is trustworthy and brings safety. (NPCC Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024-2027)

The absence of courtesy and respect

Police officers act with self-control and tolerance, treating members of the public and colleagues with respect and courtesy. Police officers do not abuse their powers or authority and respect the rights of all individuals.

Standards of Professional Behaviour for police officers

(Authority, respect, and courtesy)

from the [Police \(Conduct\) Regulations 2020 Schedule 2](#)

Another theme that we have identified in some of our cases involving race discrimination, is a notable absence of courtesy and respect, including a lack of care/empathy in the policing approach. This theme covers a wider range of scenarios where the subject or victim is from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background. Behaviours exhibited include rudeness, dismissiveness, excessive use of force, verbal abuse or failure to listen to concerns.

Courtesy and respect are a policing standard of professional behaviour. However, a breach of this standard

observed by community members who already have a history of distrust in policing can exacerbate tensions between the public and the police. From our engagement with communities from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, we know that when officers display uncivil behaviours that contradict their expected standards, it is often perceived as discriminatory and undermines legitimacy. Community members and stakeholders have told us that such negative interactions are a subtle form of discrimination that may be considered low level but have the same level of impact as overt discriminatory behaviour. These behaviours reinforce negative stereotypes and experiences of race discrimination.

It can be challenging to differentiate between poor service delivery and unfair/discriminatory behaviour. They sometimes appear similar and occur because of similar issues, such as lack of training. However, when a lack of courtesy and respect is shown to communities affected by discrimination, it can perpetuate a cycle of negative interactions and escalate situations reinforcing distrust. Situations involving a lack of courtesy and respect are missed opportunities to demonstrate a fair and respectful approach to policing.

Failures to adequately support victims of crime from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds

“The relationship between policing and Black communities has been damaged by evidence of racism, as well as failures in protection and support experienced by many Black people over the years”.

The Police Race Action Plan

Families from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds have voiced dissatisfaction with the police response in supporting them as victims, alleging race

discrimination being evident in the actions, attitudes and behaviours displayed. It is an area of concern acknowledged by the Police Race Action Plan.

In some of our cases, we have found the level of service provided by forces to be unacceptable. Poor service delivery has been a factor in some police handling which can be perceived as discriminatory by individuals and communities who have little to no confidence in policing. During a time of considerable anguish and distress, any shortcomings by policing lend additional weight to existing concerns from individuals and families on whether they are being heard and taken seriously.

Case example

After conducting an independent investigation into complaints regarding a force’s handling of a missing person case involving a young Black man, we issued a series of recommendations aimed at improving the level of service for people making missing person reports. The force accepted each of our recommendations.

Our investigation considered whether the ethnicity of the missing person or their parent played a part in the way the initial reports of their disappearance was handled. We found that officers provided an unacceptable level of service provided to the mother of the missing person who tragically died. They were misinformed that their concerns had been forwarded to the appropriate team handling the missing person’s report and that the police were looking into the case, when the report remained closed on the police system and their information was not being passed on. There was also very little understanding of the missing person’s medical condition that is more prevalent among people from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background, and the officer failed to note the concerns raised by the missing person’s GP.

We recommended the force carry out a dip sample review of missing person reports which had been classified that the person in question was not actually missing. This was to check that the reports are being correctly assessed, after our investigation found other instances where cases had been incorrectly classified in that way.

Case example

A Black woman was working as a live-in nanny for an Asian family. An altercation occurred between the woman and her employer, who is an Asian man, which resulted in the police being called to the home address. The Black woman reported that she had been assaulted by her employer. However, the attending officers did not put this allegation to the Asian man, and while the Black woman pointed out her injuries to the officers, they maintained that the matter was a civil dispute not a criminal issue.

Despite both the Black woman and Asian man calling the police, the officers threatened to issue only the Black woman with a ticket for wasting police time. Body worn video shows that upon leaving, the officers told the Black woman that they did not want to be called back but told the Asian man to call if he had any issues. The officers labelled the Black woman as belligerent and uncooperative.

The Black woman later attended a police station to report being assaulted by her employer; she was identified as having injuries and treated at hospital.

The complaint, made on behalf of the Black woman states that she was a victim of modern slavery but signs pointing towards this were ignored. Officers dismissed the Black woman's report of an assault by not questioning the employer. Her report highlighted that bruising may be more difficult to see due to her 'having black skin.'

Following our independent review of the evidence available, we concluded that there was no evidence of officers using overtly racist or sexist language. However, their language and tone towards the Black woman was significantly different to that used to address the Asian man. We found that there was evidence pointing towards discriminatory behaviour based on sex and race, including the officer applying stereotypes associated with Black women.

The officer was directed to undergo reflective practice, a process for handling police practice that requires improvement.

The sharing of inappropriate, offensive, and discriminatory content on social media

Police officers sharing inappropriate, offensive and discriminatory content on social media is an area of growing concern. It undermines trust and confidence in policing and for members of the public can indicate discriminatory attitudes are tolerated, acted on or even endorsed. The reputational damage can be significant and lead to further negative perceptions of policing.

Findings from our 2022/23 Public Perceptions Tracker show police sharing of inappropriate messages, racism and misogyny within the police has led to an increase in negative sentiment towards the police. Calling out and addressing discriminatory behaviour is essential to build trust, promote fairness and demonstrate a commitment to treating all communities with dignity and respect.

Operation Hotton – investigations into discrimination, misogyny, harassment and bullying involving officers predominantly based at Charing Cross Police Station. In nine linked independent investigations, we found evidence of discriminatory and offensive mobile phone messages between officers predominantly based in a single police station. Black and Asian police officers spoke of being ostracised.

We found messages that evidenced repeated mocking of non-Christian religions, the Black Lives Matter movement, people with disabilities, racism and homophobia.

[Our learning report](#) made fifteen learning recommendations to tackle underlying cultural issues, bullying and discrimination. It highlighted the importance of calling out inappropriate behaviours and contained examples of the messages shared by some officers. While we acknowledged that publishing these messages was likely to offend and upset the public, we felt it was necessary to promote transparency and provide context for the recommendations we were making.

Case Study

An officer involved in a WhatsApp conversation where racist and misogynistic messages were shared was dismissed without notice following an IOPC 'directed investigation'. In a directed investigation we direct and control the investigation using police resources.

We received a referral from a force after a separate directed IOPC investigation found evidence of concerning phone messages between an officer and their colleague whom we will call Officer A and Officer B.

As part of the separate investigation, messages were obtained from the phone of Officer B who was sentenced over offensive social media posts, including racist material. A disciplinary hearing subsequently found they would have been dismissed had they not already resigned.

The messages obtained from the phone showed a WhatsApp conversation between this individual and the Officer A, which began before they joined the force.

The evidence showed that even after Officer A became a police officer, they failed to challenge offensive messages containing racist comments and a joke about rape. They also sent messages referring to female colleagues that were considered misogynistic.

The messages also showed Officer A was aware of Officer B's racist views prior to them joining the force. Officer A failed to raise concerns about this.

Upon receiving the investigator's report, we determined Officer A had a case to answer for gross misconduct in respect of alleged breaches of the police standards of professional behaviour regarding: authority, respect and courtesy; equality and diversity; discreditable conduct; and challenging and reporting improper conduct.

At a gross misconduct hearing, Officer A admitted sending and responding to offensive messages, as well as their failure to report the messages they received.

The panel found the case proven at the level of gross misconduct and they were dismissed without notice.

"Behaviour like this undermines the efforts of the vast majority of officers, who work incredibly hard in challenging circumstances to keep us safe. That is why it is so important for colleagues to challenge and report such views where they come across them."

IOPC Regional Director

This emerging theme led to us [we wrote to to the NPCC](#), asking them to remind police officers that such behaviour from serving police officers is unacceptable and remind them of their obligations under the police Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Behaviour. However, this ongoing trend persists.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

We welcome the revised [Code of Ethics](#) that clearly sets out the high expectations demanded from police officers and staff. This includes guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing and represents a positive step towards improving actions, behaviours and standards.

Serving in the public interest and building trust is to be taken seriously and we welcome the increased emphasis on this aspect in the Code of Ethics guided by principles including respect and empathy. It addresses themes we see in our work with a specific reference to "ensuring that the behaviour and language of police officers and staff is "not discriminatory, abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying or victimising to the general public...or [their] policing colleagues. This includes when communicating digitally (including email, SMS and other digital platforms) and when using social media, both inside and outside of work."

This increased focus on how police officers and staff behave is strengthened by the introduction of a national reporting service for the public to report corruption and serious abuse by individuals within policing. [The Police Anti-Corruption and Abuse Reporting Service](#) covers information relating to officers, staff and volunteers who engage in racist, homophobic, misogynistic or disablist conduct, on or off duty, in person or online. It has the commitment of all police chiefs and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to reform police standards and improve attitudes and behaviours.

Chief constables must demonstrate robust leadership that is reflected at every level with greater supervision and accountability to lead the necessary changes in how policing operates today.

“It is vital that police forces and police leaders take more public ownership of mistakes and misconduct, and let the public know what is being done to reform policing... A culture of staying silent in the public eye is damaging trust and this needs to be changed.”

Recommendations from IOPC Youth Panel National Survey Report, May 2024

Handling allegations of race discrimination in police complaints

The police complaints system is an important part of police accountability and essential for learning and improvement. It provides the public with a channel to voice concerns about how someone has been treated or the service they have received, which provides valuable insights and opportunities for improvements. However, despite the level of concerns raised through our engagement work about race discrimination within policing this is not reflected in the number of police complaints.

In 2023/24, our [annual report on police complaints statistics for England and Wales](#) showed that over 85,000 complaints were logged against the police involving around 151,000 allegations. Discriminatory behaviour accounted for 3% of all allegations, and half of that percentage related to race discrimination.

Most complaints are handled by the police with no IOPC involvement. Our role is to investigate the most serious complaints and incidents and set the standards by which the police should handle complaints. However, we are seeing low levels of confidence in police complaint handling with a decline in confidence levels among all groups.

Our 2023/24 Public Perceptions Tracker shows over half of the public lack confidence that the police deal fairly with complaints made against them. 55% of Black and White participants were not confident in the process. For Asian and mixed heritage participants it was 45% and 48% respectively. Views from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities on the police complaints

system were shared with us through our engagement work.

“The process of complaining is degrading, traumatising for people... People have become desensitised to the whole process.”

“Why would people complain to the people/service who have wronged them, and trust that they will investigate their complaint fairly? Most people from the community wouldn't even enter this arena.”

“Complainants need confidence that the person we are complaining to understands the complainant.”

“The only way to support this is through advocacy.”

“A history of failures to hold the police to account (e.g., Stephen Lawrence case) makes it seem pointless for the public to complain.”

In 2022, we conducted a review of IOPC appeals and reviews to gain insight into the handling of complaints involving race discrimination. The data showed only a small proportion of complaints resulted in a formal disciplinary sanction for the police officer and/or staff member.

We were concerned about the potential dismissal of ‘perception-based’ complaints and how this can further erode trust in policing. Complainants often

described this as ‘double discrimination’ or being ‘doubly dismissed’. Having made the effort to make a complaint regarding race discrimination, their experience was further dismissed in the handling of the complaint, which led them to seek a review.

During our review, we found there was an indication that complaint handlers sometimes struggled to address more nuanced racial discrimination complaints, particularly where the alleged discrimination was not obvious - or ‘overt.’ The way police officers or staff fulfil their duties had been given appropriate attention, but the discrimination aspect had not.

Complaints are an opportunity for improvements and should be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly to address any valid concerns. Learning outcomes are a key part of this process, as they demonstrate that concerns are acknowledged and used to improve policing practices. In the case of race discrimination, the ability to identify and understand how it presents is equally important to ensure concerns that are raised are not too easily ‘explained away’.

Case example

We upheld a review of a force’s handling of a complaint regarding an officer’s actions where excessive force was used during an arrest.

Several people were ordered to leave a pub by officers attending reports of a fight at the premises involving a large number of people. One of the attending officers used CS spray during the arrest of a Black man at the scene.

The force’s investigation into the complaint found the officer had a case to answer for gross misconduct in respect of their honesty and integrity, and discreditable conduct. However, the complainant requested a review of the decision that the officer had no case to answer in relation to their use of force, and equality and diversity.

We reviewed the force’s investigation report, and the relevant evidence, including footage of the incident. We considered there was sufficient evidence that the officer’s use of force was disproportionate in the circumstances.

The officer’s justification for using an incapacitant spray – which was that the man had attempted to attack them with a glass – was not supported by the video footage. The complainant faced no charges in relation to their arrest.

We also considered the treatment of the man, who was the only Black man present, and the only person subjected to the use of force, as well as some of the language used by the officer in relation to the man following the incident, which could indicate that he was treated less favourably due to his race.

We determined the panel should also consider whether the officer had breached the standards of professional behaviour in relation to equality and diversity.

The panel found gross misconduct proven in respect of the officer’s use of force; honesty and integrity; and discreditable conduct. The panel found the case not proven in respect of equality and diversity. As a result, the officer was dismissed without notice.

While the panel was satisfied in this case that the complainant was not treated unfavourably due to his race, the officer’s excessive use of force, and misleading statements when trying to justify their actions, fell far below the standards expected of a police officer.

In December 2022, we published a special edition of our [FOCUS magazine](#) to help police forces improve their handling of complaints involving race discrimination. We highlighted the most common barriers to effective complaint handling of race discrimination allegations. Recognising the challenges when discrimination and/ or bias relates to a protected characteristic where the subtleties may be different to the complaint handler. Key areas of focus included:

- Answering the complaint in a way that is not dismissive.
- Reviewing the evidence through constructive challenge of potential views.
- Promoting a culture of learning and reflection.
- Safeguarding complainants from any discriminatory impact being felt within the complaints process.

We held a series of regional workshops with complaint handlers to share learning and understand their additional challenges when handling complaints involving discrimination. This informed our revisions to the guidelines on handling allegations involving discrimination.

Effective handling of complaints plays a pivotal role in restoring lost confidence. When people believe there is an effective mechanism for addressing policing concerns, their confidence in the overall service can be positively influenced.

Our 2023/24 Public Perceptions Tracker shows that despite low levels of confidence in the police to deal fairly with complaints, the likelihood to complain

was 58%. For Black participants this was 60%, increasing to 62% for participants who identify themselves as 'mixed'. For Asian participants 63% were likely to complain and for White participants it was 64%.

It is important to use language that is empathetic and not defensive or dismissive, and that acknowledges how the interaction with police left the complainant feeling - and the impact they say it has had. It is important the complainant feels they have been listened to – their negative experience of interaction with the police may not be their first, and the responses received may feel repetitive if standard phrasing is used.

Through our oversight function, which reviews how the police handle complaints, we have seen how some forces have introduced mechanisms to quality assure their handling of complaints involving allegations of race discrimination. We welcome the positive engagement and the local initiatives shared with us.

THE IOPC WELCOMES

Examples of police initiatives to improve handling of complaints involving race discrimination

Lancashire Constabulary has introduced a complaint advisor role to conduct reviews of all discrimination complaints to identify themes and trends. These reviews have led to training complaint handlers being more able to identify complaints about discrimination where the discrimination element has not been obviously articulated, and to better understand the complainant's perspective.

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire forces have worked closely with an independent advisor from their scrutiny panel to devise a framework to assist complaint handlers. The framework takes the user through a structured thought process to improve the recognition and response to discrimination matters including outcomes to address discriminatory behaviour.

Avon and Somerset Local Policing Board provides external scrutiny through its Independent Residents Panel who are all volunteers representing communities of the geographical area. Their role is to act as a critical friend to the Police and Crime Commissioner and the police force by providing feedback on completed complaint files. Using the evidence that is available to them they review complaints against the

police from a local citizen's viewpoint. This allows them to challenge how the police address more nuanced complaints - to help improve and develop cultural intelligence.

We will continue to work closely with forces to support improvements in local complaint handling. Efficient resolution of complaints can prevent further harm and foster trust in the police complaints process. This is reinforced by our [revised guidelines for handling allegations of discrimination](#). The revisions incorporate insights gained from our focus on race discrimination and set the standards that complainants, families and other interested parties should expect when allegations of discrimination are made against the police. They are also the standards that we will hold police forces to when we make decisions and the standards that we apply when we carry out our own investigations.

We are committed to improving the experience of people who access the police complaints system and ensuring that complaints are handled effectively and consistently by police forces across England and Wales, including ourselves. Listening and responding to the voices of our service users helps to ensure that we are responsive to their needs and concerns. It is essential, particularly for individuals, groups, families and communities who feel discriminated against to rebuild confidence in policing and the police complaints system.

Conclusion and call to action

Since 2020, we have seen a renewed focus by police forces in England and Wales to address race discrimination in policing supported by the Police Race Action Plan. However, a swifter rate of change that addresses the differing experiences and outcomes between Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and their white counterparts must be addressed to restore trust and confidence among communities affected.

Breaking the cycle of distrust between communities and the police requires a collective and collaborative effort that is rooted in action and meaningful engagement, particularly for children. When children continue to experience, witness or perceive discriminatory and disproportionate practices, it validates and deepens the mistrust that is often passed down from prior generations. This ongoing cycle can reinforce negative attitudes towards policing, making it harder to rebuild relationships and work collaboratively.

Our call to action for policing to address racial disparities by improving the use of police powers on children takes a crucial step towards building a better foundation for policing and community relations. Equally, when discrimination complaints are handled with greater care and effectiveness, it helps rebuild public confidence and create a more trusted service.

Where race discrimination is experienced or perceived, the responsibility falls on policing to proactively address it at every level through robust leadership,

supervision and complaint handling. By demonstrating a genuine commitment to improve in this area, policing can rebuild relationships with the communities it serves and have a service that all communities respect and trust.

Our call to action is for policing to:

- Implement focused and measurable change for local communities regarding:
 - Racial disparities and the use of police powers, particularly those involving children. This should include a focus on improving stop and search, use of force and strip search practices, by providing effective safeguards to mitigate adultification bias¹ and ensure fair treatment.
 - Police handling of complaints involving discrimination – ensuring that complaints are handled effectively first time in accordance with the [revised IOPC guidelines for handling allegations of discrimination](#)).

Our commitment at the IOPC is to:

- Collaborate with policing, Police and Crime Commissioners and Mayors to improve trust and confidence in policing and the police complaints system. Providing support to improve the handling of discrimination complaints.

1. Adultification bias is a form of bias where children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', more 'grown up', less innocent and less vulnerable than other children. This particularly affects Black children, who might be viewed primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support (Davis and Marsh, 2020; Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019). Children who have been adultified might also be perceived as having more understanding of their actions and the consequences of their actions. NSPCC, *Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities* (2022).

IOPC publications covering the themes of this report

The following publications reflect the learning derived from our investigations and reviews of complaints and are designed to support policing in making improvements.

- **11 opportunities identified for the Metropolitan Police Service to improve stop and search** (October 2020)
- 17 national learning recommendations to improve Taser use following our **thematic review of Taser** (August 2021). We address concerns about the disproportionate use of Taser against Black men and boys, and people with mental health issues.
- **Operation Hotton – A learning report** with 15 recommendations to tackle underlying cultural issues, bullying and discrimination among serving police officers from the Metropolitan Police Service. (January 2022)
- 18 national recommendations made in our **national stop and search learning report** on a series of issues, including disproportionality, bias and trauma. (April 2022)
- An issue of our **FOCUS magazine** dedicated to the handling of complaints involving race discrimination – particularly where the alleged discrimination is not obvious or ‘overt’. (December 2022)
- **A national stop and search survey report** summarising local stop and search practices to improve the use and scrutiny of stop and search (October 2023).
- **Guidelines for handling allegations of discrimination** (November 2024)

References

- **The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 - Schedule 2**
- **The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry** - Sir William Macpherson of Cluny
- **The Baroness Casey Review** - a review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service.
- **College of Policing Code of Ethics**
- **The Macpherson Report: twenty-two years on – Home Affairs Committee**
- **Inclusive Britain: Government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities – UK Government Race Disparity Unit**
- **Police Race Action Plan – National Police Chiefs’ Council**
- **The Angiolini Inquiry – Part 1 Report - February 2024**
- IOPC – Yonder, **Public Perceptions Tracker Summary Report, 2023/24**
- **Oral Evidence - The Macpherson Report: twenty years on - House of Commons Affairs Committee**
- **Police powers and procedures: Stop and search and arrests, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2024 - Home Office**
- **Disproportionate use of police powers – A spotlight on stop and search and the use of force - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services**
- **Police Street Powers and Criminal Justice: regulation and discretion in a time of change – Geoff Pearson and Mike Rowe**
- **What discretion do you need?’ Factors influencing police decision-making in possession of cannabis offences - Sharon Grace, Charlie Lloyd, and Geoff Page**
- **The Colour of Injustice: ‘Race’, drugs and law enforcement in England and Wales – Michael Shiner, Zoe Carre, Rebekah Delsol and Niamh Eastwood**
- **The role of prejudicial stereotypes in the formation of suspicion: An examination of operational procedures in stop and search practices - Rashid Minhas and Dave Walsh**
- **Crime, policing and stop and search: Black perspectives in context – Crest Advisory**
- **Police use of force statistics, England and Wales: April 2022 to March 2023 – Home Office**
- **Report of the Independent Review of Deaths and Serious incidents in Police Custody - Rt. Hon. Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC**
- **Police Use of TASER: Multi-Level Predictors of Firing and Drawing in One-to-One Use of Force Incidents - Abi Dymond, Katharine A. Boyd and Paul Quinton**
- **Taser and Social, Ethnic and Racial Disparities research programme – Keele University**
- **Safeguarding children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities – NSPCC Learning**
- **Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding – Jahnine Davis, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation**
- **Boys to men: the cost of ‘adultification’ in safeguarding responses to Black boys – Jahnine Davis and Nicholas Marsh**
- **IOPC Youth Panel national survey report - May 2024**
- **NPCC Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024-2027**



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More information

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Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ffôn yn y Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn y Gymraeg hefyd.

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