

We hear you: challenging racist microaggressions



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International Medical Graduates (IMGs) currently make up approximately a fifth of all licensed doctors in the UK. They are integral to the daily running of the NHS.

However, their experience at work can be markedly different to that of their colleagues, with much of this disadvantage driven by the racist microaggressions they experience.

Racist microaggressions are defined as patterned behaviours that (intentionally or unintentionally) undermine, belittle, stereotype, or insult those in minority ethnic groups.

Microaggressions are the most common form of covert, interpersonal racism and are often minimised as simple verbal mistakes or cultural missteps. Studies have shown that these 'subtle racist' interactions cause significant distress. Moreover, the term 'micro' doesn't mean the impact on the victim is small.

The latest annual member attitude survey by MDDUS found that many healthcare professionals experience or witness persistent racist microaggressions at work and, worryingly, that they lack confidence in the procedure to report these abuses. That means thousands of these incidents go unreported across the country every year.

Examples include patients asking for another doctor because they assume that foreign doctors or those from a minority ethnic background cannot treat them as well as white British doctors. Other comments might be less explicit, but totally unfounded assumptions of incompetence remain.

This report not only sheds a light on the experiences of our members, and in particular the many International Medical Graduates (IMGs) employed by the NHS, but also offers insights into the UK public's broader awareness of, and concern about, this matter.

Both surveys contribute valuable data to our understanding of this critical issue and will help inform the work we do to support our members and be a catalyst for positive change.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



58%

of International Medical Graduates report having been subject to racist microaggressions

33%

of members in the medical field report having been subject to racist microaggressions

72%

of International Medical Graduates who experienced racist microaggressions did not report them

64%

of members in the medical field report witnessing racist microaggressions against colleagues

66%

of International Medical Graduates did not report incidents of racist microaggressions because they had no confidence their concerns would be taken seriously

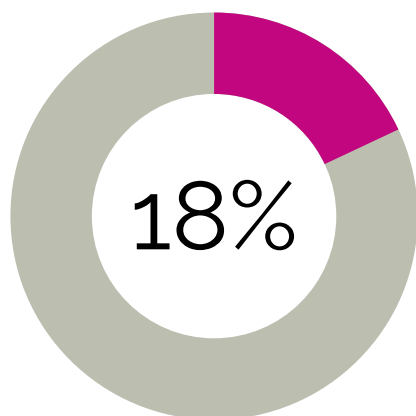
62%

of members in the medical field who reported witnessing racist microaggressions against colleagues did not report them

Familiarity and concern

Around a third (34%) of the public report to being familiar with the concept of racist microaggressions.

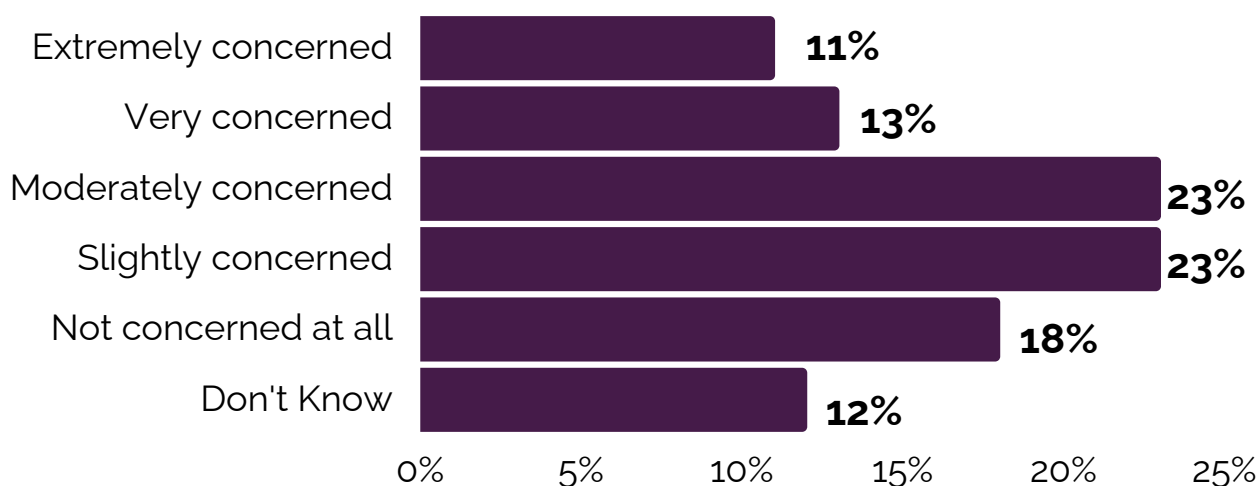
Familiarity is higher among those of black (61%) and Asian (49%) ethnicity than among white ethnicity (30%).



of the public report not being concerned at all about racist microaggressions towards healthcare professionals

Around a quarter (24%) of the UK public report being either extremely or very concerned about racist microaggressions towards healthcare professionals. A further 23% report being moderately and slightly concerned respectively. Worryingly, just less than a fifth (18%) report not being concerned at all.

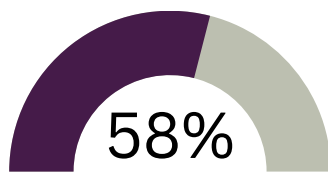
Reported public concern relating to racist microaggressions against healthcare professionals



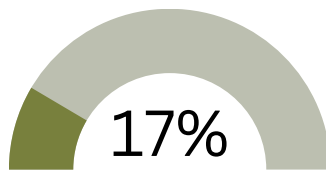
When asked about public perception, around a fifth (22%) of MDDUS members surveyed said they felt the public believes there is an issue of racist microaggression towards medical professionals. Conversely, two-thirds (68%) of members felt that the public would not believe there was an issue.

Prevalence of racist microaggressions

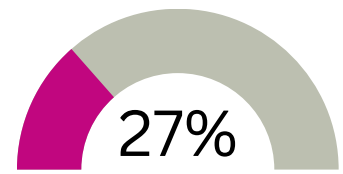
Around a third of members surveyed (32%) report having been subject to racist microaggressions since they began practising medicine or dentistry. This figure is 33% in the medical field and 28% in the dental field. This figure is higher among International Medical Graduates (IMGs) at 58%. Three-quarters (76%) of members in the medical field who experienced racist microaggressions did not report them and 72% of IMGs did not report these incidents.



58%
of IMGs surveyed have been subject to racist microaggressions



17%
of IMGs reported the incident(s) they experienced

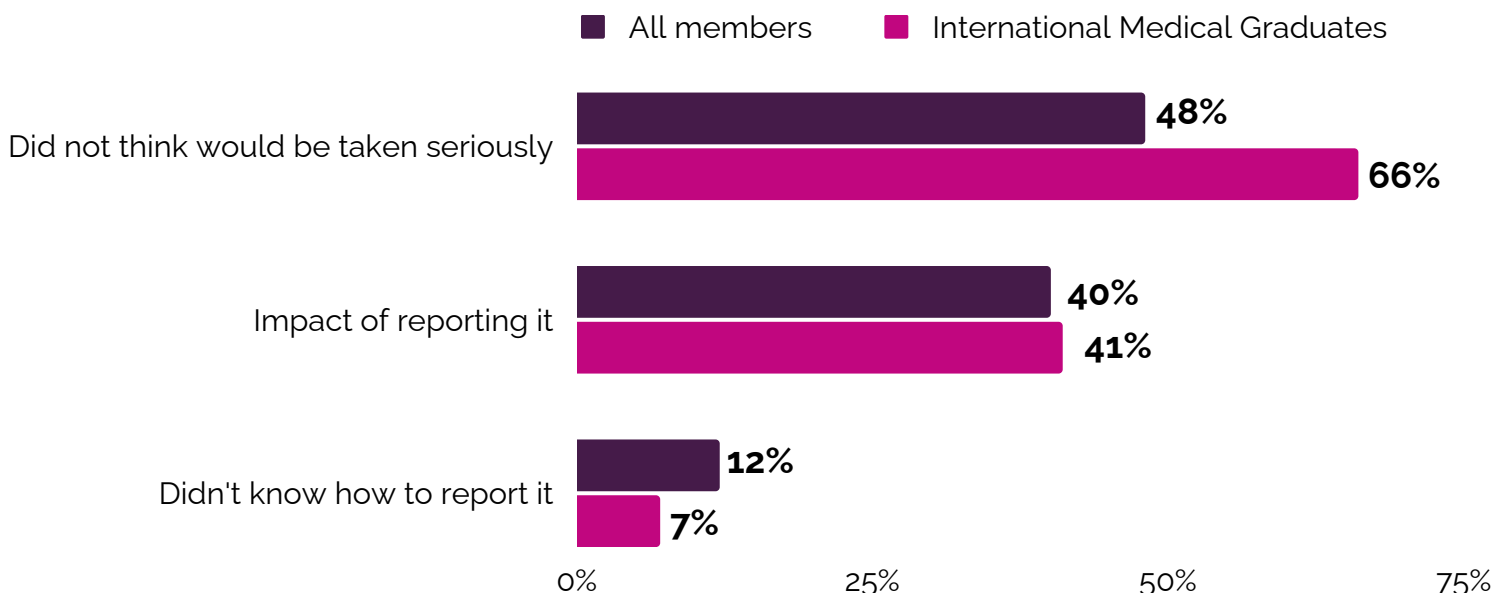


27%
of IMGs who reported incident(s) believe they were dealt with appropriately

In terms of perceived prevalence among the public, more than a quarter (27%) of the public believe that racist microaggressions against healthcare professionals are frequent, with 9% believing them to be very frequent. A similar proportion (26%) think that they occur occasionally, while 19% believe these to be rare or very rare.

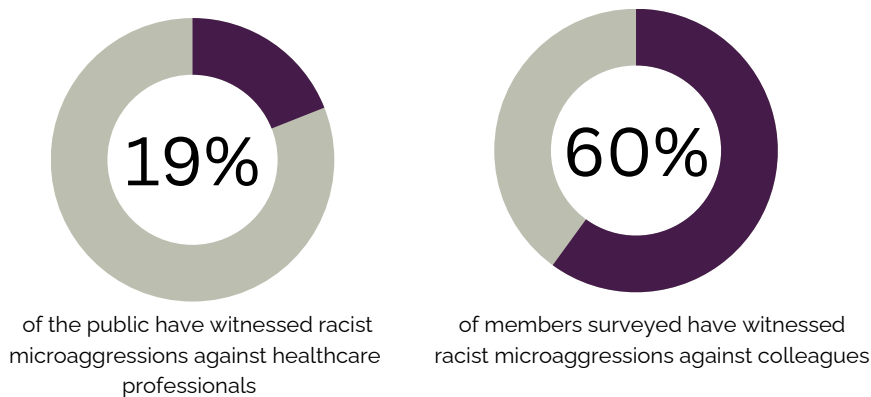
Among members who had experienced racist microaggressions but did not report the incidents, around half (48%) said that they did not think that their report would be taken seriously - this was higher among International Medical Graduates (66%). Two in five (40%) said that they were worried about the impact reporting incidents may have on them or their job, and 12% said they did not know how to report incidents.

Reasons for not reporting incidents of racist microaggressions



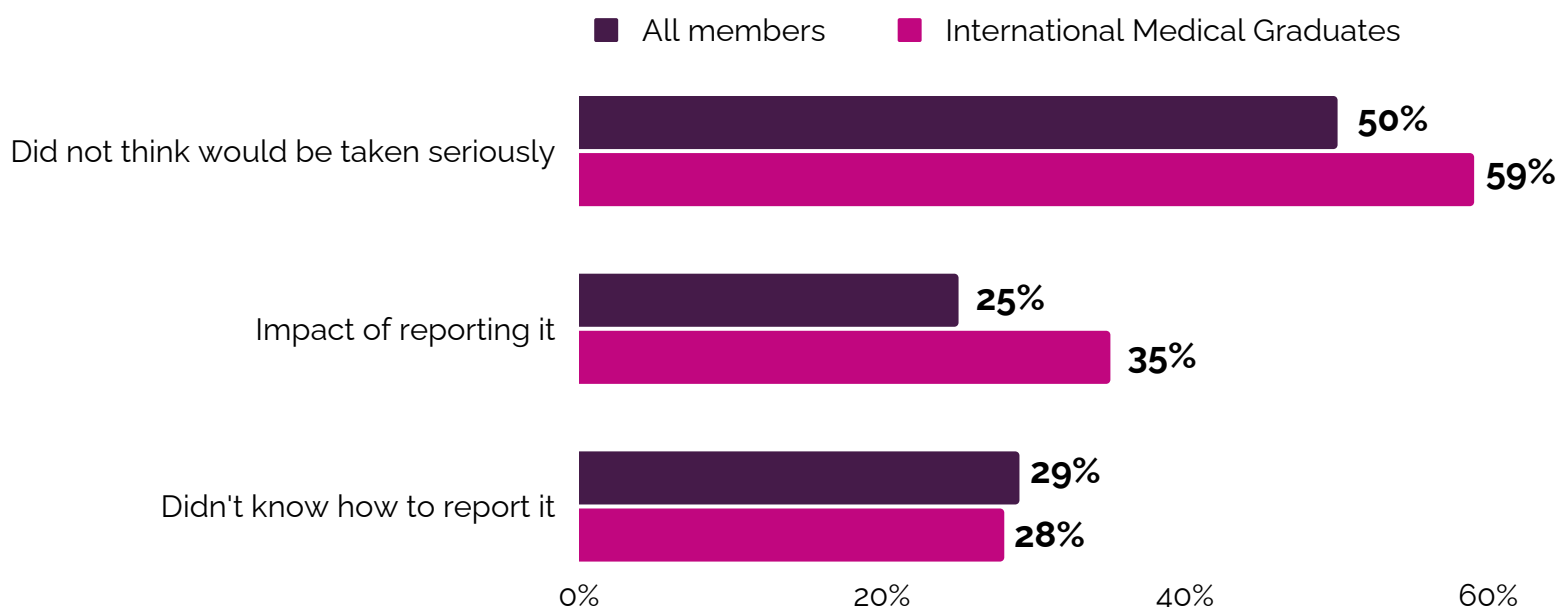
Witnessing racist microaggressions

The public survey found that around a fifth (19%) of the public report having witnessed racist microaggressions against healthcare professionals, while 66% have not. The most common microaggressions reported by the public are language proficiency comments, stereotyping, dismissive behaviour, and racial jokes or slurs. Four in five (80%) of public respondents would consider reporting these incidents, but only 45% knew how.



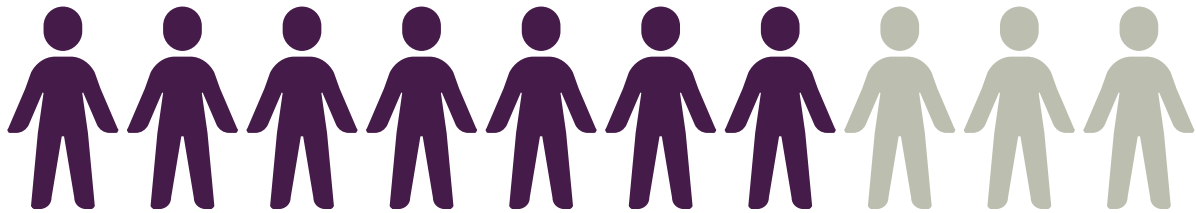
Six in ten (60%) members report witnessing racist microaggressions towards colleagues, with higher rates in the medical field (64%). Only 24% of witnesses reported the incidents, and of those who did, 43% felt this was dealt with appropriately. However, International Medical Graduates were slightly less likely to think these were handled appropriately at 39%. The most common reason among all members and International Medical Graduates for not reporting incidents was a belief that they would not be taken seriously.

Reasons for not reporting witnessed incidents of racist microaggressions



Public views on impact and addressing racist microaggressions

Seven in ten (70%) of the public say that they are not aware of initiatives and/or organisations in the UK that aim to address and combat racist microaggressions in healthcare settings.



When asked to consider the potential consequences for healthcare professionals who experience racist microaggressions in the workplace, the most commonly cited reasons among the public are increased risk of leaving the healthcare profession (48%), increased stress and mental health challenges (45%), decreased job satisfaction and motivation (43%) and decreased sense of belonging and inclusion in the workplace (38%).



of the public think that experiencing racist microaggressions increases the risk of healthcare professionals leaving the profession

When thinking about steps or actions that should be taken to address, reduce and respond to racist microaggressions against healthcare professionals in the UK, the most selected actions by the public are stronger penalties for offenders (45%), clearer workplace policies and reporting mechanisms (40%), improved education and awareness programs (34%) and increased diversity and inclusion training (32%).

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Two separate surveys were conducted as part of this work.

The first survey, conducted by Survation for MDDUS, gathered responses online from 2068 healthcare professionals who are members of MDDUS, between 1 and 12 September 2023.

A second survey, by Diffley Partnership for MDDUS, targeted the public across the UK. Conducted online between 14 and 24 September 2023. The survey received 2020 responses from adults aged 18 and above, using the Survation online panel.

About MDDUS

The Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland (MDDUS) is a mutual organisation that protects the professional interests of more than 56,000 doctors and dentists across the United Kingdom, offering access to indemnity, support and legal advice.

