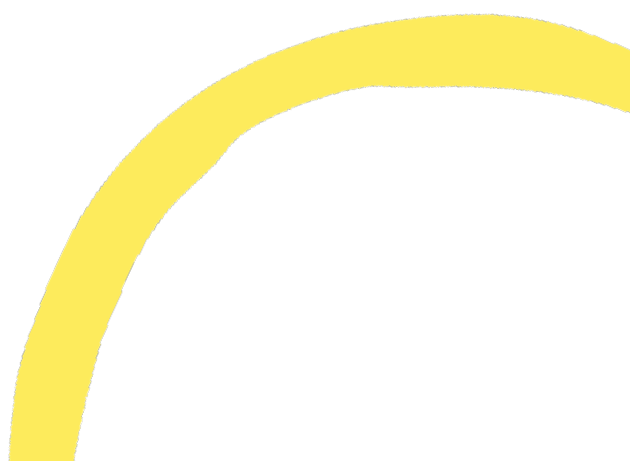


# Survey data: What are students' experiences of racial harassment?

We commissioned IFF Research to poll students on their experiences of racial harassment at university. This was a repeat of polling commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2019, to allow for comparison between the two years, and was conducted online.

There were 828 respondents in total. The survey covered:

- personal experience of racial harassment
  - effects of experiencing racial harassment
  - witnessing racial harassment
  - perceptions of racial harassment at university, including whether it was a problem and how well their university handles it
- 

## Demographics of students surveyed

- 54% of the students were from ethnic minorities (including white minorities)
- 15% of the students were Black, 19% were Asian and 20% were mixed/other
- 67% of the students were aged 18–21 and 18% were aged 22-24
- 71% of the students were studying in England, 22% were studying in Scotland and 6% in Wales
- 83% of the students were studying at undergraduate level
- 71% of the students were female and 26% were male

For the analysis, the data has been weighted using [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) data by ethnicity, level of study and gender to ensure results are representative of the student body as a whole.

Further information about the demographics of the students surveyed can be found at [Annexe A](#). In the report, students from ethnic minorities includes those from white minorities.

**FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT DEMOGRAPHICS: [ANNEXE A](#)**

# Experience of racial harassment

15% of students had experienced some form of racial harassment since starting their course (compared to 13% in 2019). This figure is higher among students from an ethnic minority background (24%, the same as in 2019).

For Black students, this figure rises to 45%. This is a notable increase from 2019, when 29% of Black students said they had experienced racial harassment.

Men were more likely to report experiencing racial harassment than women (19%, compared to 10%). Older students were also more likely to report having experienced racial harassment, with 21% of students aged 25+ saying they had experienced racial harassment at university.

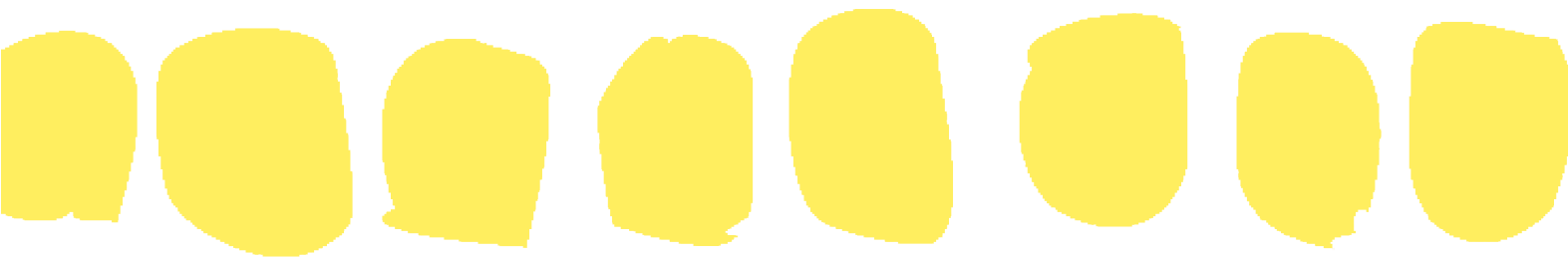
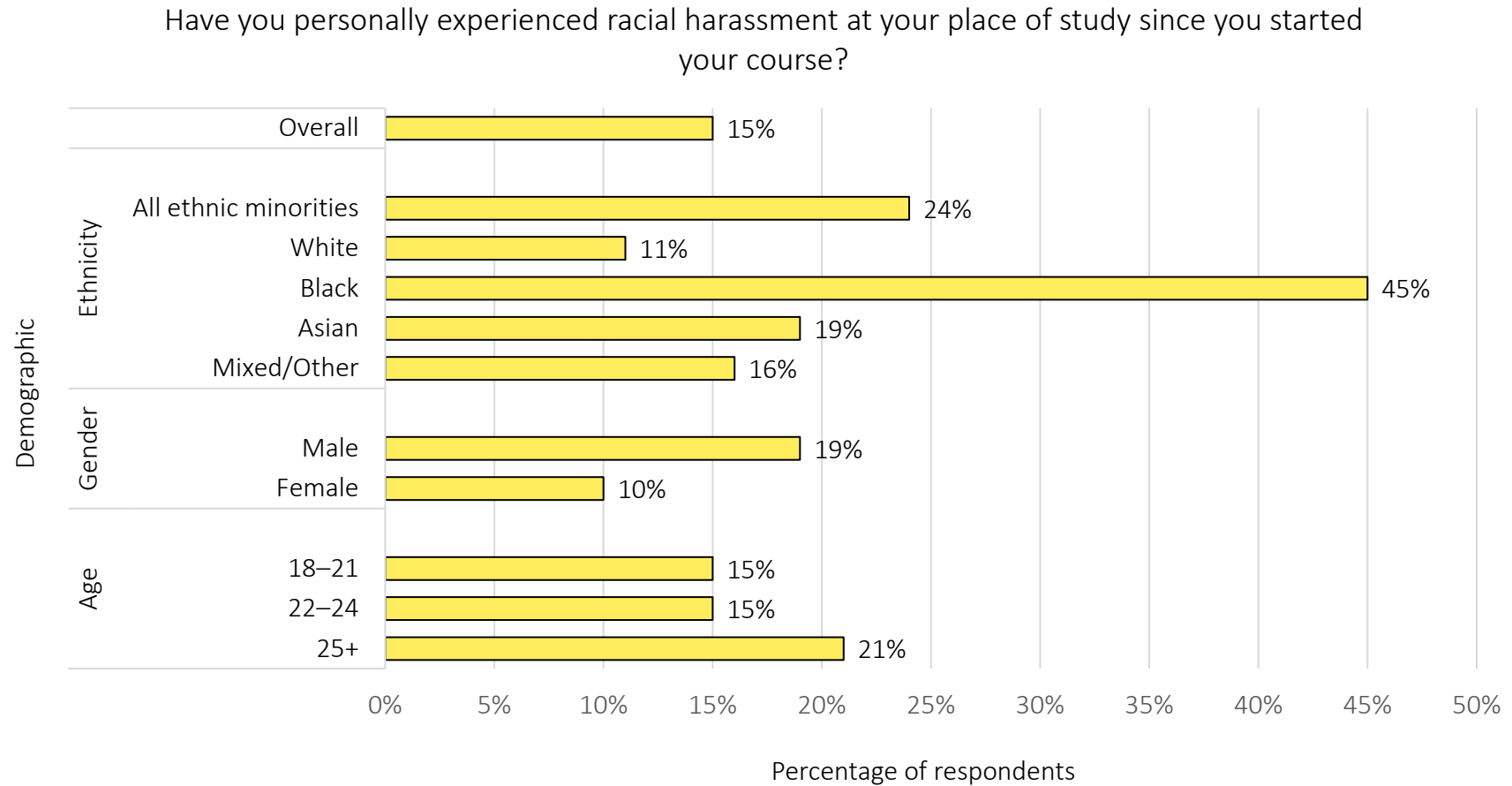


FIGURE 1: EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL HARASSMENT BY DEMOGRAPHIC



Base: C2 Have you personally experienced racial harassment at your place of study since you started your course? (828)

The incidence of racial harassment was higher among students at Scottish universities (25% since starting their course) compared with English and Welsh universities (12% and 7% respectively). This is in contrast to previous polling commissioned by the EHRC, which showed a higher incidence of racial harassment at English universities than at Scottish and Welsh universities.

A higher proportion of postgraduate students said they had experienced racial harassment than undergraduate students (32% compared to 11%).

# Nature of racial harassment experienced in 2021–22

Just over one in 10 (12%) of students said they had personally experienced racial harassment since the start of the 2021–22 academic year. This is a slight increase from EHRC’s 2019 polling, which found that 8% of students had personally experienced racial harassment.

78% of the students who said they had experienced racial harassment since starting their course said that they had experienced it during 2021–22.

We asked students how many times they had experienced racial harassment during 2021–22. Just over half (55%) of students who had experienced racial harassment said that they had experienced it multiple times.

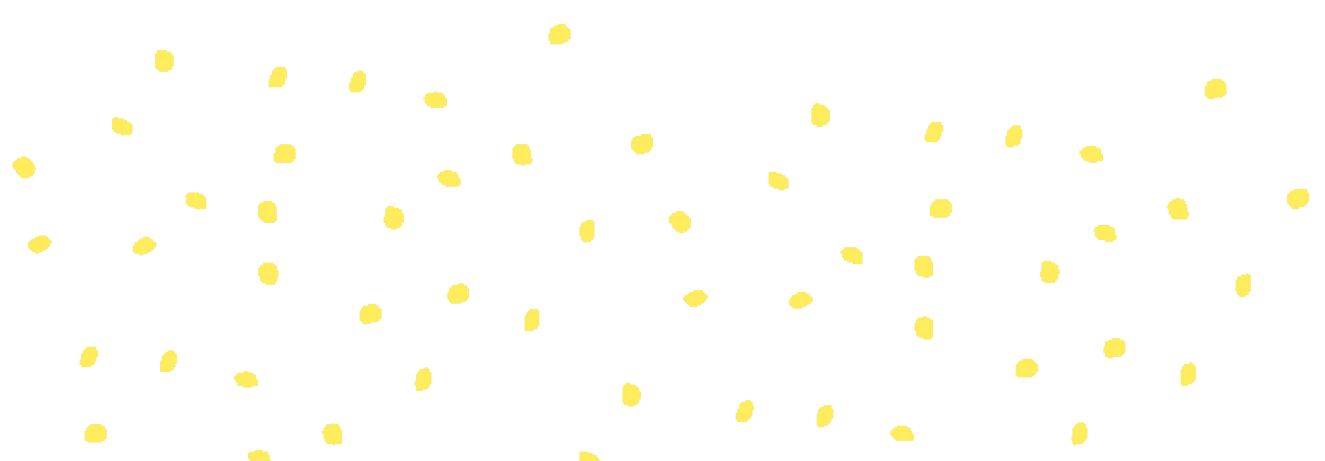
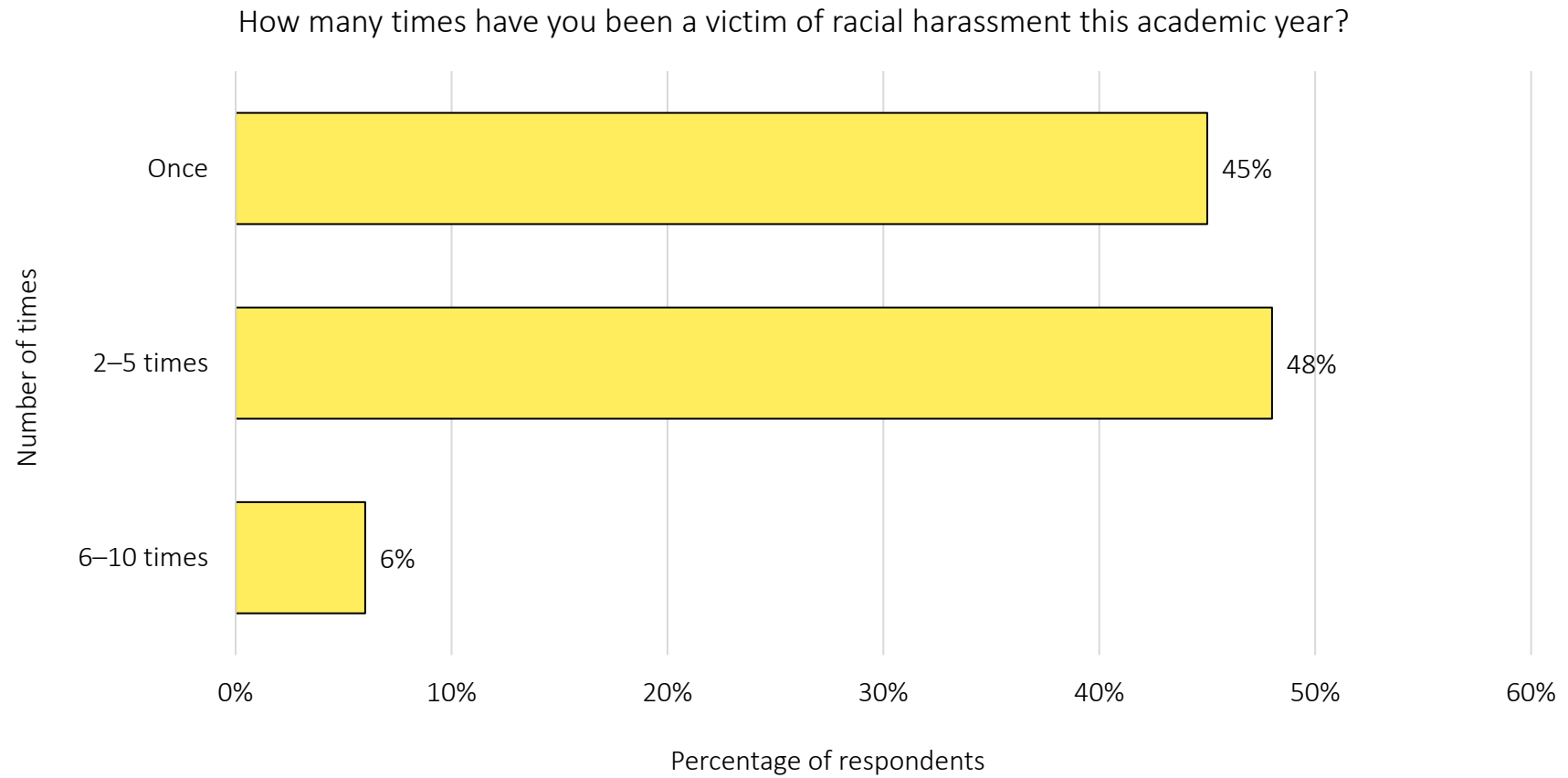


FIGURE 2: FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS OF RACIAL HARASSMENT IN THE 2021–22 ACADEMIC YEAR (OF THOSE WHO EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE INCIDENT)



Base: C4 How many times have you been a victim of racial harassment in this academic year? (98)

# Types of harassment

The most common form of racial harassment experienced by respondents was racist name calling, insults or 'jokes', with more than half (55%) of those who had experienced racial harassment saying they had experienced this. This was also the most common form of racial harassment students experienced in the 2019 EHRC survey and at a very similar level (56%).

The next most prevalent forms of racial harassment were:

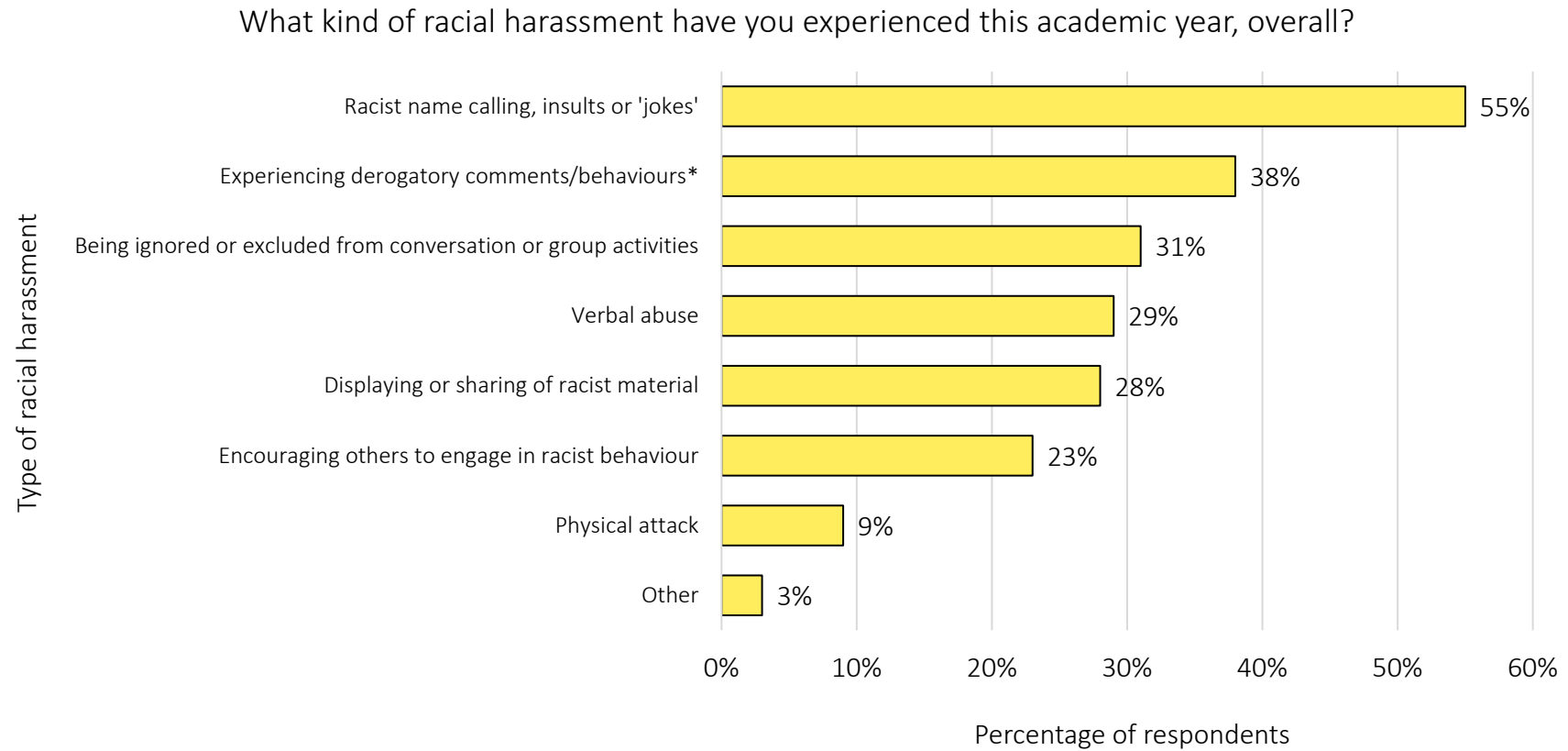
- experiencing derogatory comments or behaviour, experienced by almost four in 10 (38%) students who had experienced racial harassment in 2021–22
- being ignored or excluded from conversation or group activities, experienced by just under a third (31%) of students who experienced racial harassment in 2021–22

29% reported experiencing verbal abuse and 28% said they experienced the displaying or sharing of racist material. All of these are at very similar levels to the 2019 EHRC survey.

One in 10 victims had experienced a physical attack (9%). This is half the level of victims who reported experiencing a physical attack in the 2019 EHRC survey (20%).



FIGURE 3: TYPE OF RACIAL HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED IN 2021–22



Base: C5. What kind of racial harassment have you experienced this academic year, overall?

\*Full text in question: Experiencing derogatory comments/behaviours. For example, having surprise expressed by others for being on a particular course or having your work overly scrutinised (sometimes referred to as micro aggressions).

When broken down by demographic, some differences in the experiences of different groups of students can be identified. Although these involve smaller number of students, they are all statistically significant. They include:

- 49% of Black students said they had experienced being ignored or excluded from conversation or group activities. This was higher than for other ethnic groups and 34% of students from ethnic minorities overall.
- 57% of Asian students said they had experienced derogatory comments/behaviours (microaggressions). This was higher than for other ethnic groups and 52% of students from ethnic minorities overall.
- 47% of Black students said they had experienced verbal abuse. This was higher than for other ethnic groups.
- Female victims of harassment were more likely to have experienced being ignored or excluded from conversation or group activities (47%) than male victims (25%).
- Male victims were more likely to have experienced encouraging others to engage in racist behaviour (29%) than female victims (5%).

# Reporting racial harassment

Four in 10 students (42%) who experienced racial harassment in the 2021–22 academic year reported it to their university. This is an increase of 9% from the 2019 EHRC survey (33%).

As in the 2019 EHRC survey, Asian students were less likely to report racial harassment than other groups (only 21% reported experiences of racial harassment to the university), although this is an increase from 11% in 2019.

Of the 41 students who reported cases of racial harassment to their university:

- 9 said the university referred the matter to the police
- 6 said the university investigated and took action against the perpetrator
- 13 said the university investigated but took no action due to lack of evidence
- 7 said they were asked to attend mediation with the perpetrator
- 7 said they withdrew their complaint
- 11 said their report or complaint is still open and being looked into
- 10 said the university took no action at all

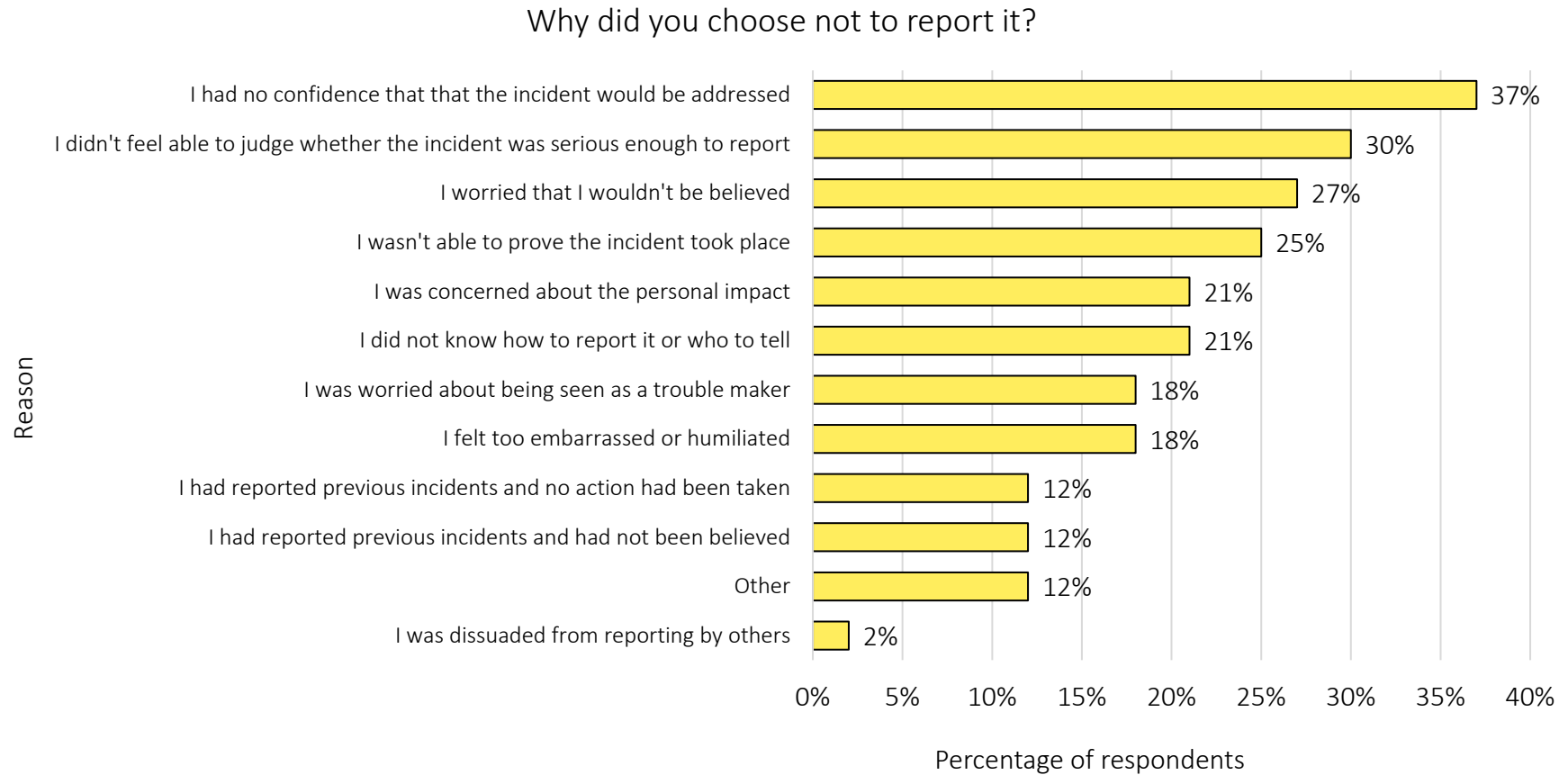
## Barriers to reporting racial harassment

A lack of confidence that the incident would be addressed was the most common barrier to reported cited by students (37%). This was also the most common barrier cited in the 2019 EHRC report, although this was cited by almost half of those who experienced racial harassment in 2018–19 (46%).

This was followed by the victim feeling unable to judge whether the incident was serious enough to report (30%).

As well as this, 27% of students said they were worried they wouldn't be believed and 25% of students were concerned about lack of evidence.

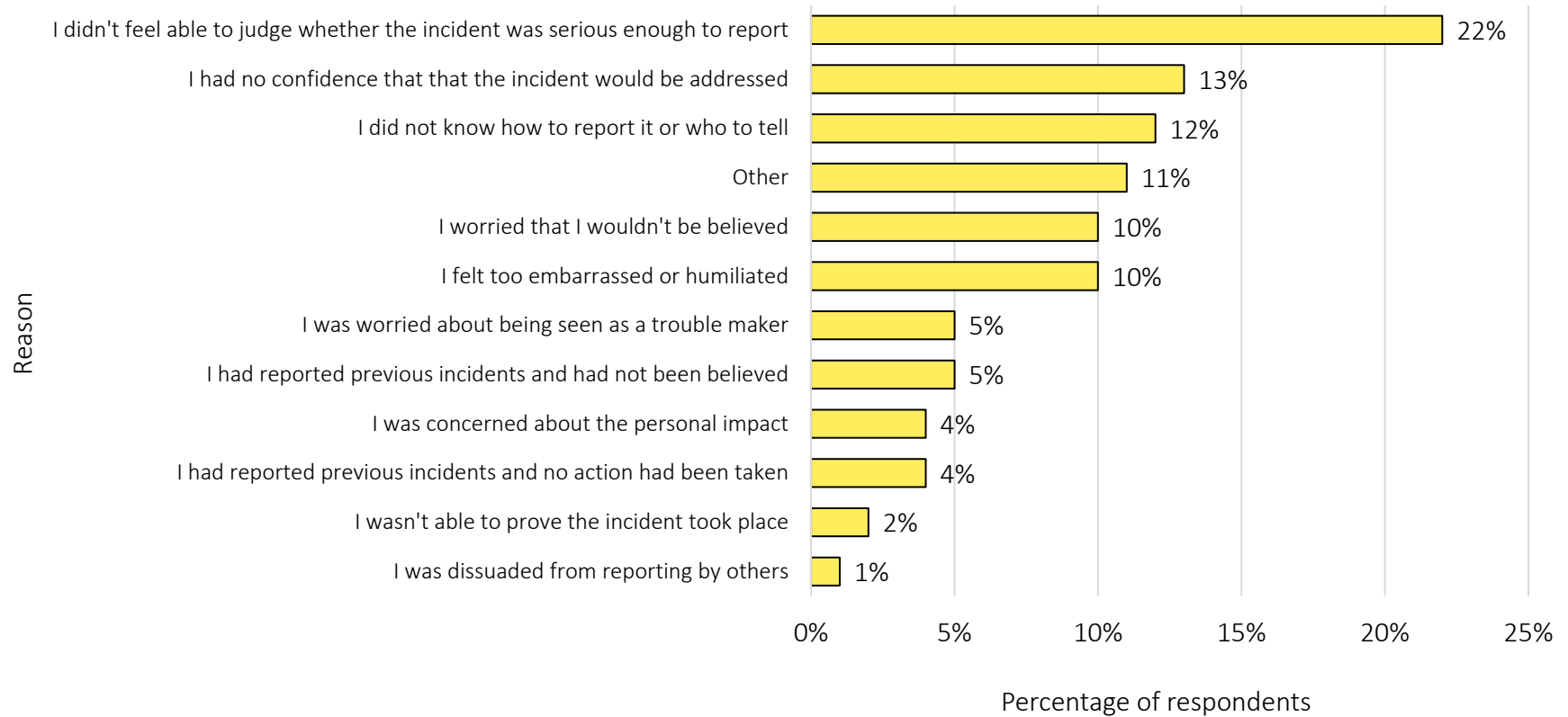
FIGURE 4(A): BARRIERS TO REPORTING RACIAL HARASSMENT



Base: C8 Why did you choose not to report it?

FIGURE 4(B): BARRIERS TO REPORTING RACIAL HARASSMENT

Of these, which had the biggest influence on you to not report the incident?



Base: C9 of these, which had the biggest influence on you to not report the incident?

We asked students about which single barrier was the biggest deterrent to reporting. 22% said that they didn't feel able to judge whether the incident was serious enough to report. This is very similar to the original EHRC report, which found that 23% of students said this was the most important reason.

However, in the EHRC report, the biggest single barrier identified was lacking confidence that the incident would be addressed (24%). The percentage of students saying this was the biggest barrier has decreased to 13%.

# Emotional impact of racial harassment

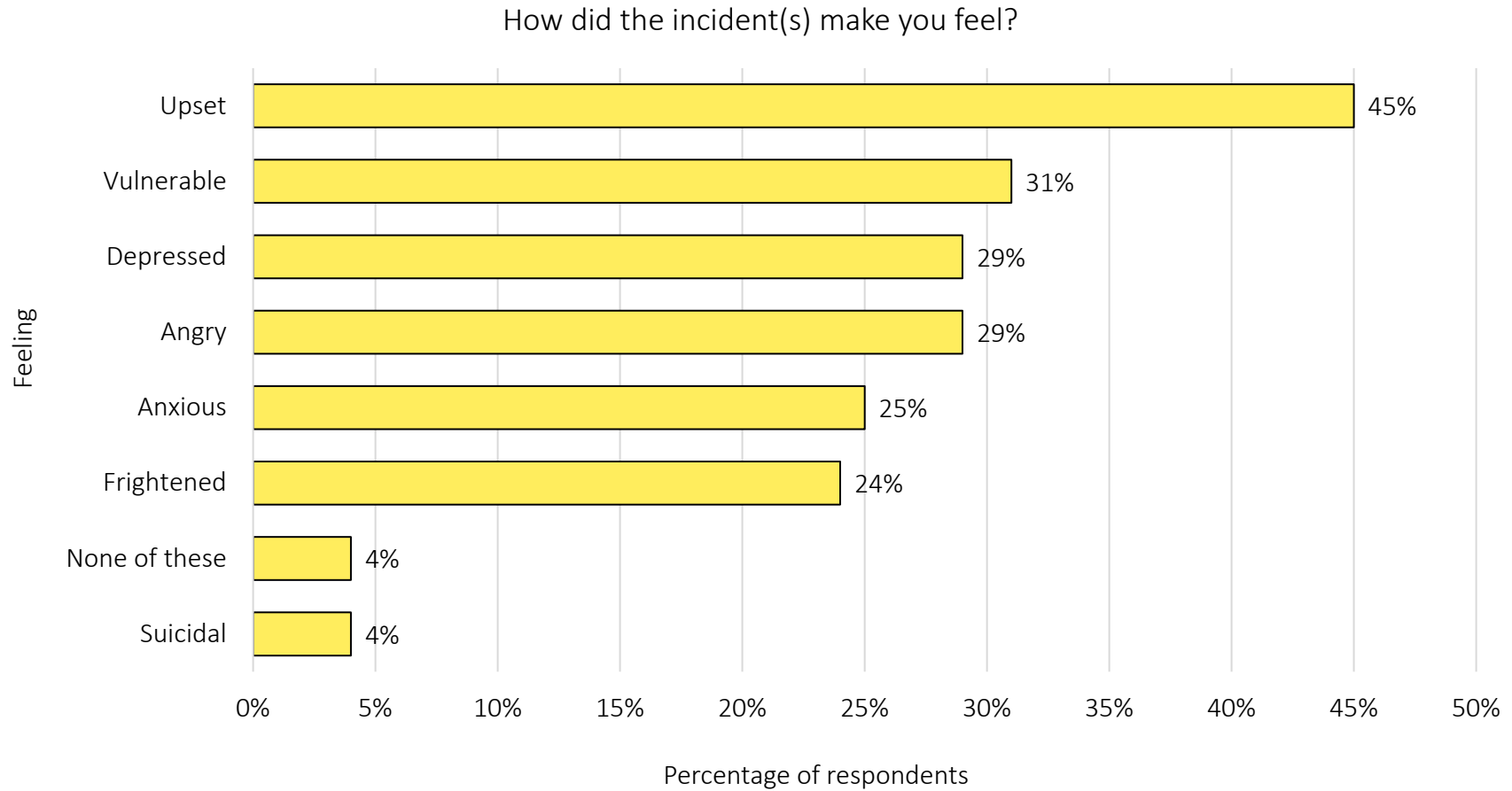
Students were asked how they felt as a result of being racially harassed. The emotions cited most frequently by students who had experienced racial harassment in the 2021–22 academic year were upset (45%) and vulnerable (31%). 29% of students said they felt depressed and 29% said they felt angry.

Asian students were more likely than students of other ethnicities to say that the experience made them feel anxious (48%). Female students were more likely than male students to say that the experience made them feel anxious (40% vs 20%) or upset (65% vs 38%).





FIGURE 5: EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF RACIAL HARASSMENT



Base: C10 How did the incident(s) make you feel? (98)

# Witnessing racial harassment

Students were asked whether they had witnessed any incidents of racial harassment of others. Almost a quarter (23%) said they had witnessed racial harassment of others since starting their course. This is a slight increase from 2019, when 21% of students said they had witnessed racial harassment.

77% of students who had witnessed racial harassment since the start of their course said that they had witnessed it during 2021-22.

Students from ethnic minorities were more likely to have witnessed racial harassment since the start of their course (31%) compared to students who are not from ethnic minorities (19%).

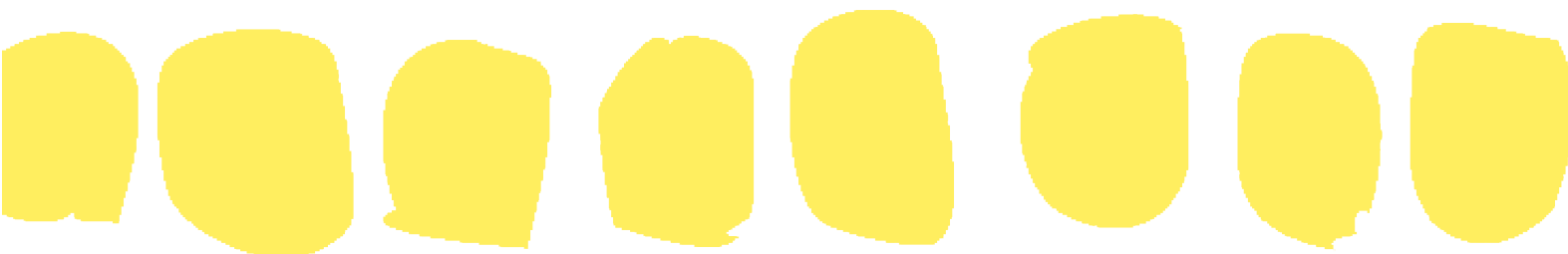
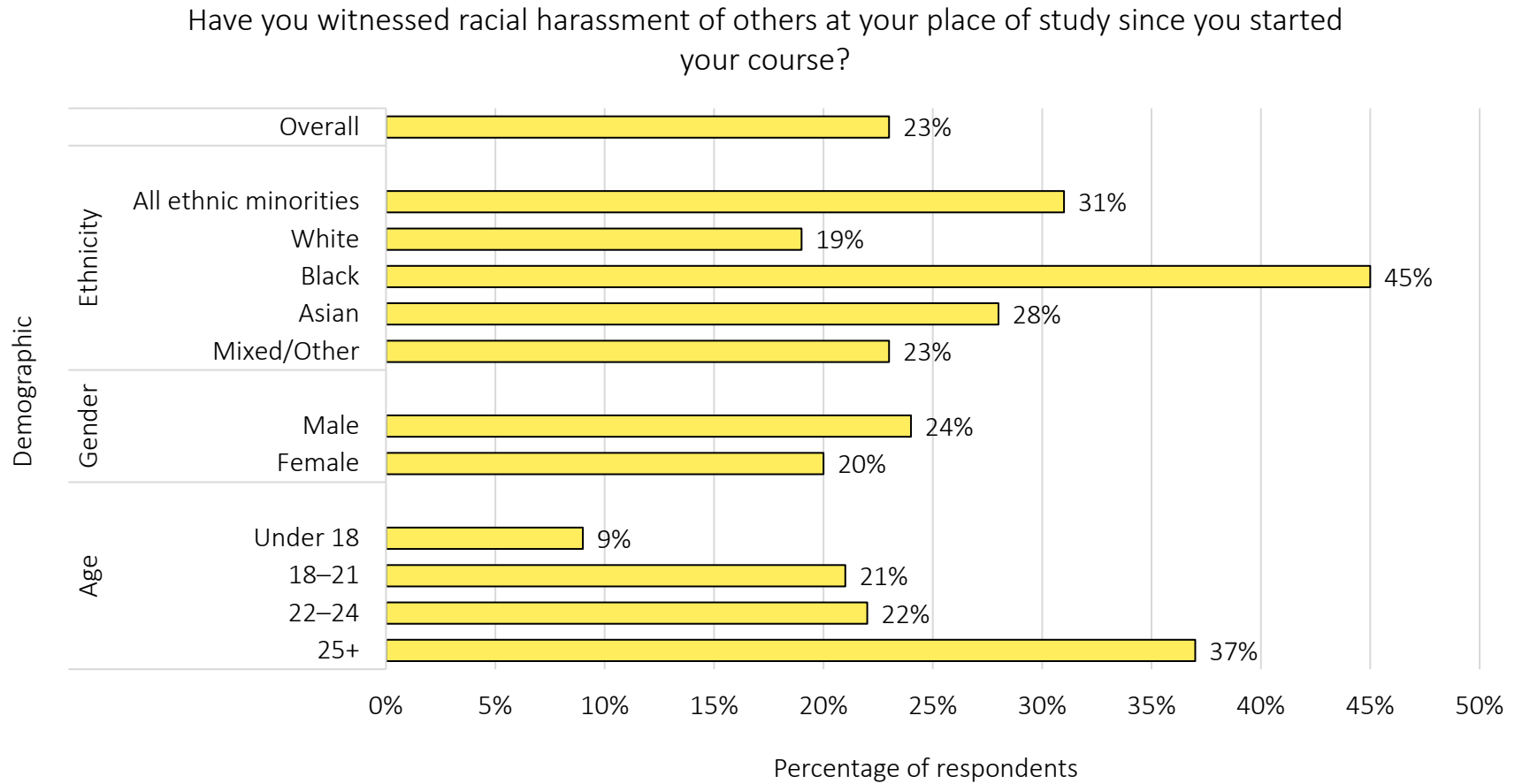


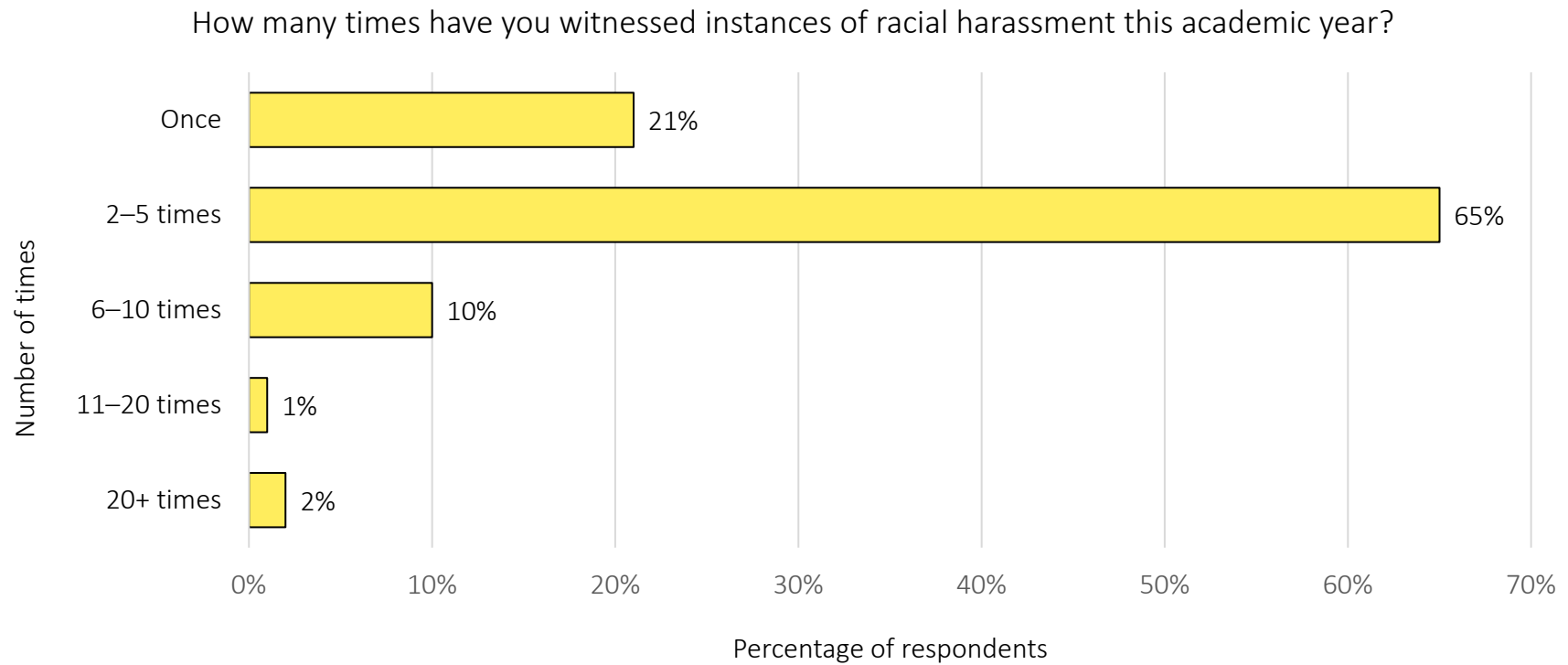
FIGURE 6: WITNESSING RACIAL HARASSMENT



Base: C12 Have you witnessed racial harassment of others at your place of study since you started your course?

Almost four fifths (78%) of students who had witnessed racial harassment in 2021–22 had witnessed more than one incident. Most students said they had witnessed racial harassment 2–5 times (65%).

FIGURE 7: FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS OF RACIAL HARASSMENT WITNESSED IN 2021–22 (OF THOSE WHO WITNESSED AT LEAST ONE INCIDENT)

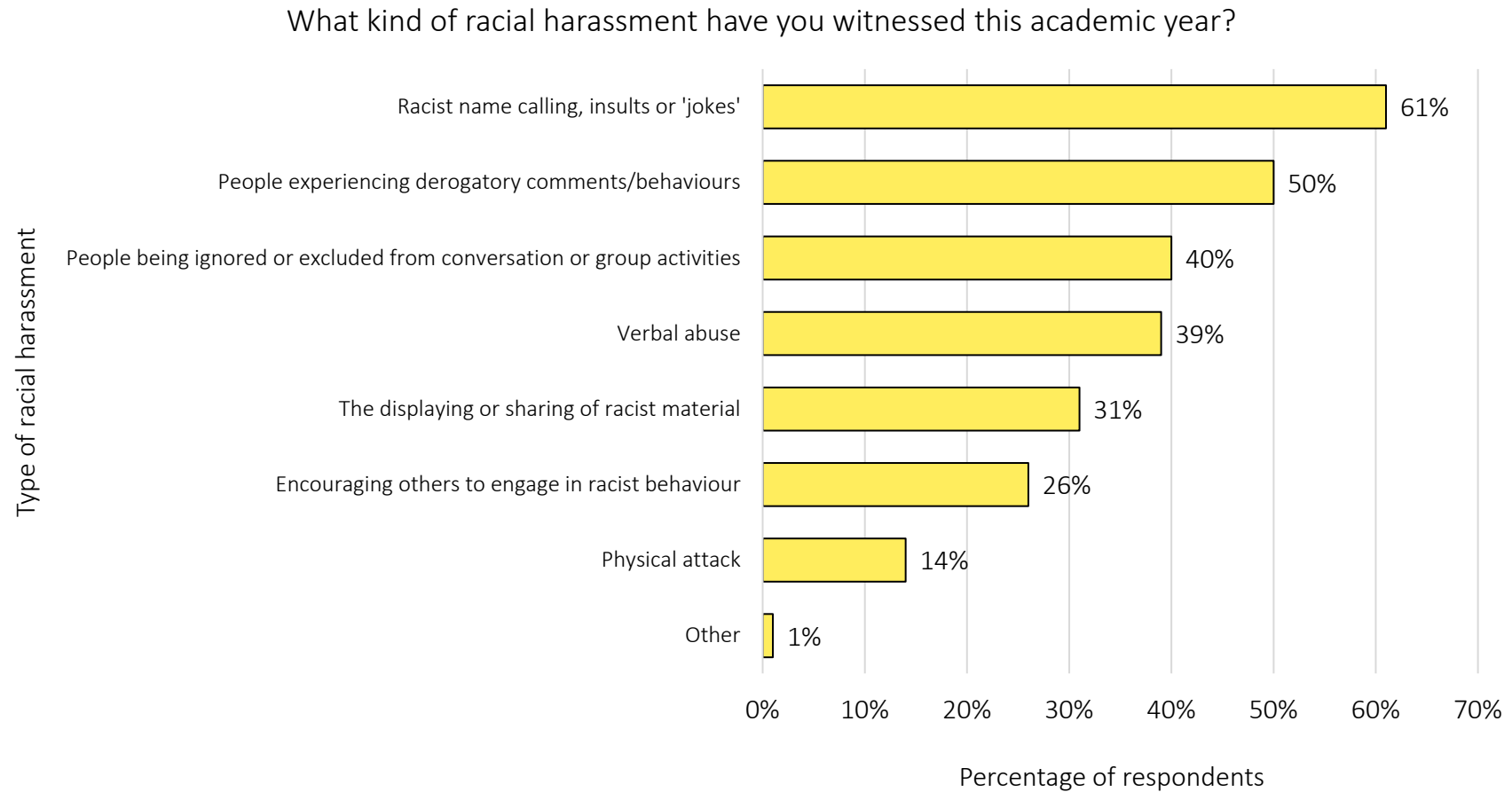


Base: C14: How many times have you witnessed instances of racial harassment?

The most common forms of racial harassment witnessed in 2021–22 were racist name calling, insults or ‘jokes’ (61%) and derogatory comments or behaviours (50%). This is in line with the 2019 survey, which also found these to be the most common types of racial harassment witnessed. Female students were more likely to say that they had experienced racist name calling, insults or ‘jokes’ (73% vs 52%).

In the 2019 survey, 14% of students who had witnessed racial harassment said they had witnessed encouraging others to engage in racist behaviour. In this survey, this has increased to 26%.

FIGURE 8: TYPE OF RACIAL HARASSMENT WITNESSED IN 2021–22



Base: C15. What kind of racial harassment have you witnessed this academic year? (Of those who witnessed racial harassment in 2021-22)

43% of students who had witnessed racial harassment in 2021–22 said that they had reported it to the university. This is an increase from the 2019 survey, in which 27% students who said they had witnessed racial harassment in 2018–19 said they reported it.

66% of students studying in Scotland said they had reported racial harassment, higher than those studying in England and Wales (27% and 35%), although it should be noted that the base sizes for Scotland and Wales are small.

# Worry about racial harassment

We asked students about how worried they were about being personally subjected to racial harassment at their place of study (on a 10-point scale where 1 is 'not worried at all' and 10 is 'extremely worried').

The majority of students (66%) said they were not at all worried (scores of 1–2).

79% of students who are not from ethnic minorities said they were not at all worried, in comparison to 38% of students from ethnic minorities.

Ethnic minority students were more likely to say they were worried (17% gave scores of 7–10) compared with students not from ethnic minorities (6%).

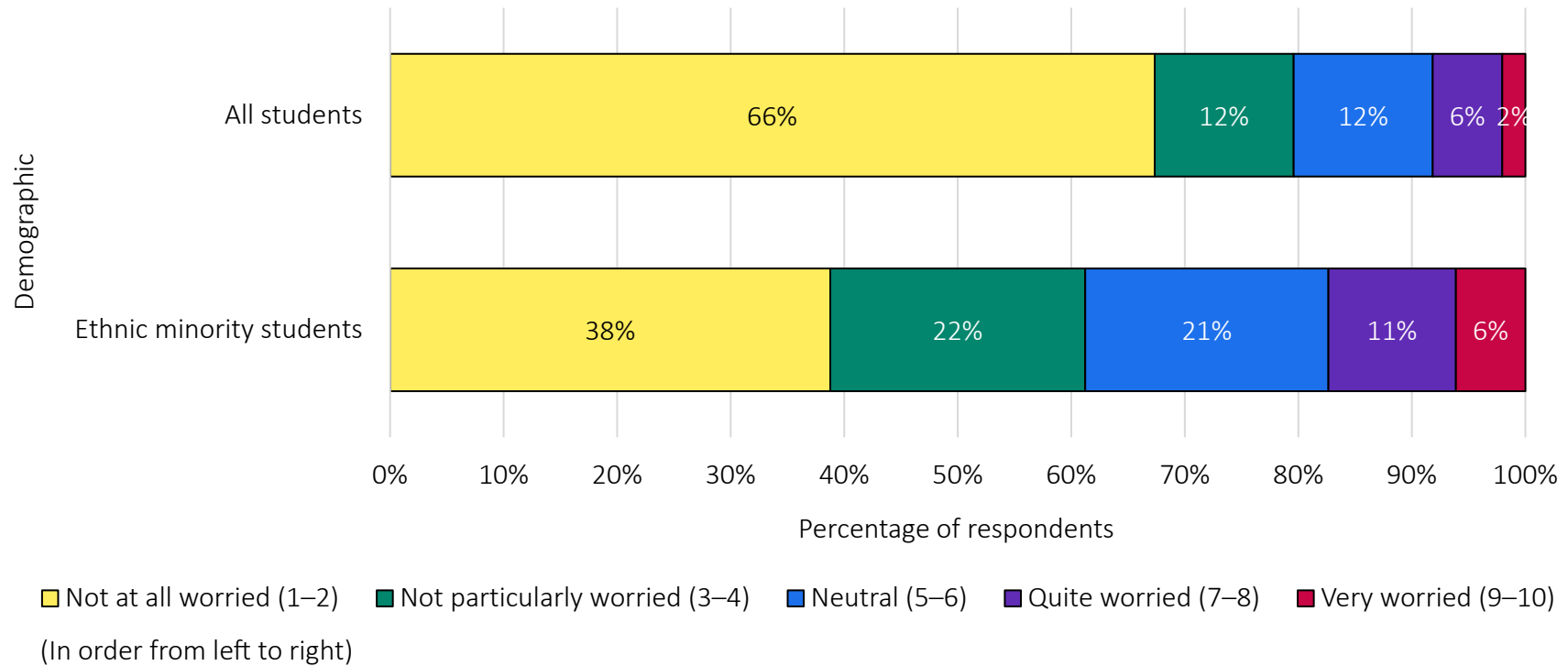
The proportion of ethnic minority students who said they were worried (scores of 7–10) has increased from the 2019 survey (17% in 2023, compared to 11% in 2019).





FIGURE 9: PERSONAL WORRY ABOUT RACIAL HARASSMENT

On a scale from 1 to 10, how worried are you about being personally subjected to racial harassment at your place of study?



Base: C17. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'not worried at all' and 10 means 'extremely worried', how worried are you about being personally subjected to racial harassment at your place of study?

# Views on universities and racial harassment

Students were also asked how much of a problem they felt racial harassment was at their university. As in the previous question, this was measured on a 10-point scale.

A quarter (25%) of students said that their university did not have a problem with racial harassment at all (scores 1–2). This is lower than in the 2019 survey, where around one in three (35%) said that their university didn't have a problem with racial harassment at all.

21% of students gave a score of 6 and above.

Just over one in 10 (12%) said they didn't know if racial harassment was a problem at their university.

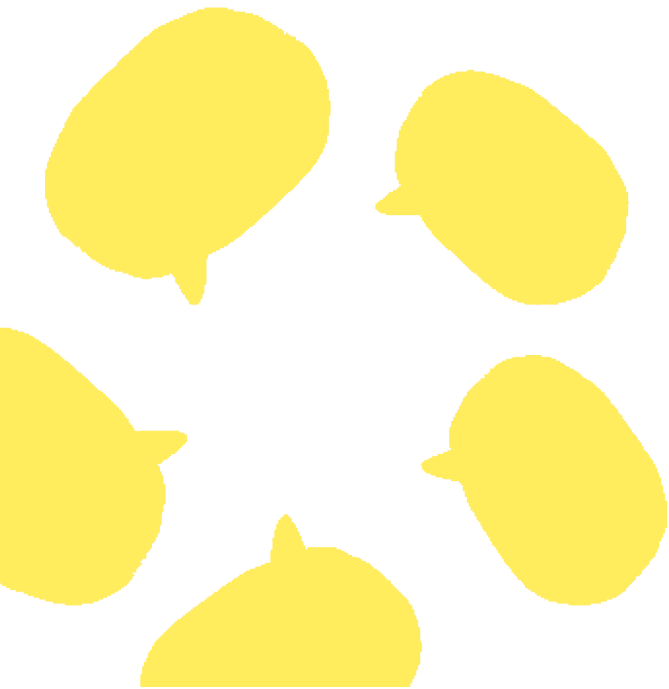
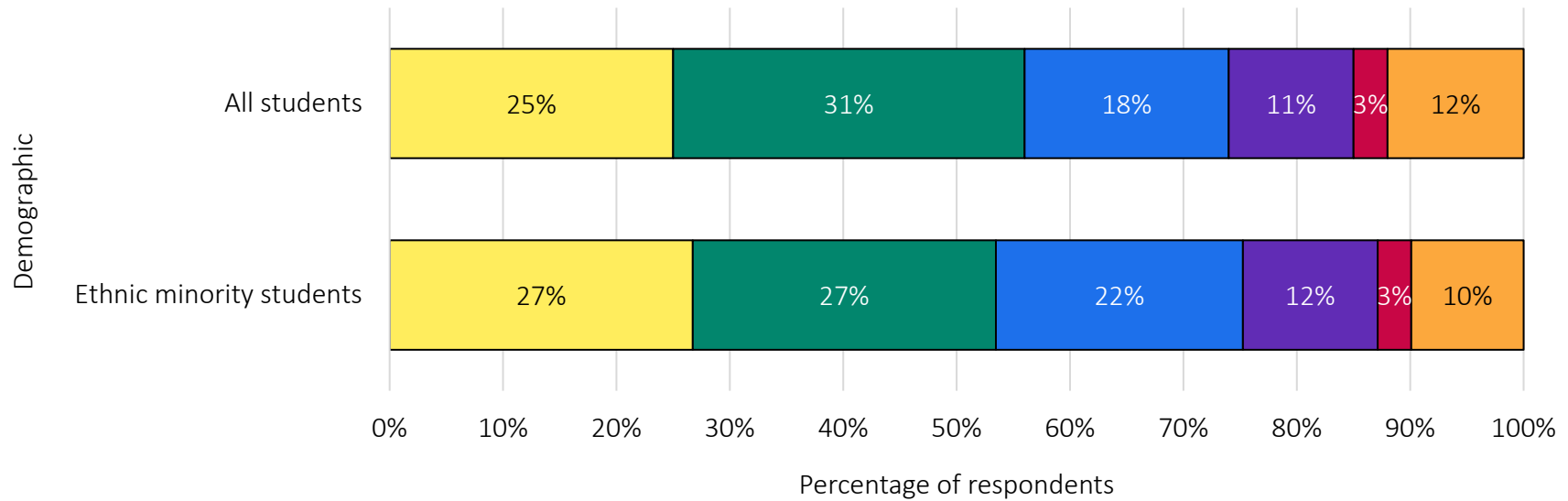


FIGURE 10: EXTENT TO WHICH RACIAL HARASSMENT IS A PROBLEM AT THE STUDENT'S UNIVERSITY

On a scale from 1 to 10, how much of a problem do you think racial harassment is at your university?



- Not a problem at all (1-2)
- Not particularly a problem (3-4)
- Neutral (5-6)
- Somewhat a problem (7-8)
- A huge problem (9-10)
- Don't know

(In order from left to right)

Base: C18. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 mean 'not a problem at all' and 10 means 'a huge problem', how much of a problem do you think racial harassment is at your university?

Students were asked how well they thought their university was tackling the issue of racial harassment (also on a 10-point scale).

A third (34%) of students selected 'don't know', a slight decrease from the 2019 survey (39%).

13% of students said they thought their university was tackling racial harassment very well (scores of 9–10). This is in line with the 2019 survey, in which 14% of students said they thought their university was tackling racial harassment very well.

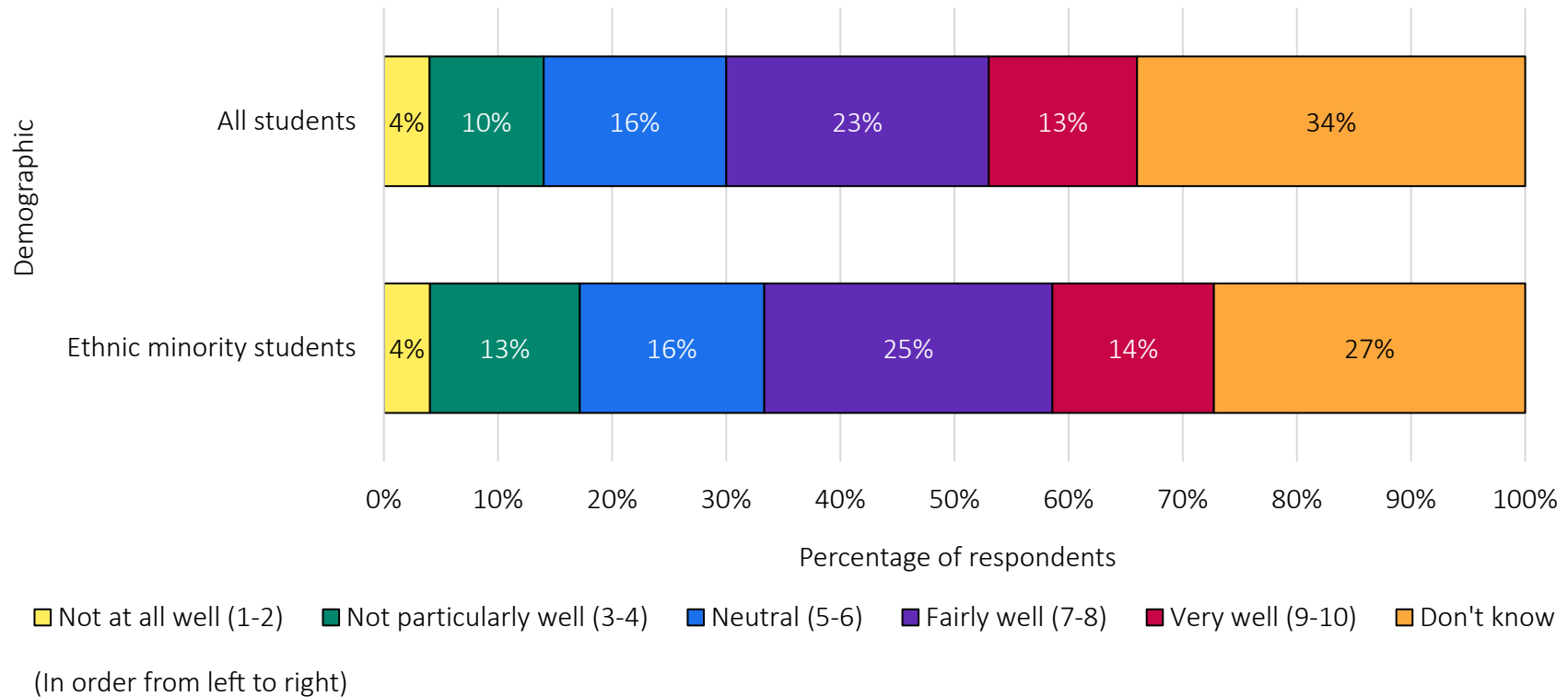
Around a quarter said they thought their university was handling the issue fairly well (scores of 7–8) in both the 2019 and 2022 surveys.

Only 4% of students said that their university was not handling the issue at all well (scores of 1–2).

A higher proportion of students who are not from ethnic minorities selected 'don't know' (36%) than students from ethnic minorities (27%).

FIGURE 11: PERCEPTION OF HOW WELL THE STUDENT’S UNIVERSITY IS TACKLING RACIAL HARASSMENT

On a scale from 1 to 10, how well is your university tackling the issue of racial harassment of students?



Base: C19. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means 'not at all well' and 10 means 'very well', how well is your university tackling the issue of racial harassment of students?

# Annexe A: Numbers of students surveyed across key demographics

## Ethnicity

	Number	Percentage of sample
White	383	46%
Black	122	15%
Asian	161	19%
Mixed/Other	162	20%
Summary: ethnic minorities (including white minorities)	445	54%

## Age

	Number	Percentage of sample
Under 18	27	3%
18–21	556	67%
22–24	147	18%
25+	97	12%
Prefer not to say	1	*%

## Country

	Number	Percentage of sample
England	592	71%
Scotland	183	22%
Wales	53	6%

## Tariff

	Number	Percentage of sample
High tariff	189	23%
Medium tariff	54	7%
Low tariff	60	7%
Not applicable	525	63%

## Level of study

	Number	Percentage of sample
Undergraduate	690	83%
Postgraduate	138	17%

## Gender

	Number	Percentage of sample
Male	218	26%
Female	587	71%
Other	14	2%
Prefer not to say	9	1%