



Forgotten voices:
Policing, stop and search and the
perspectives of Black children

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Glossary:

Adultification: When ideas of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children, determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. Adultification is founded on discrimination and bias, relating to a child’s personal characteristics or lived experiences.¹

Appropriate adult: An adult, most commonly a parent or guardian, whose role it is to “safeguard the rights, entitlements and welfare of juveniles and vulnerable persons” by providing support to the child or vulnerable adult, and scrutinising the actions of the police officer, as enshrined in PACE Code C 2019.²

Child: Every person under 18 years old.³

Extra-familial harms: Any risks to the welfare of children that occur outside of the home.⁴

Mixed ethnicity: Individuals with parents from different ethnic groups. For this report, we have referred to the Mixed ethnicity children in our focus groups as Black and Mixed ethnicity children, as they were specifically from Black and Mixed backgrounds. Our polling samples were not large enough to conduct robust analysis on Black and Mixed ethnicity children specifically, and so our survey results refer to the experiences of all children in our sample from any mixed ethnicity background.

Racial disproportionality: The overrepresentation of a racial group in the criminal justice system compared to the number of people in the racial group as a whole.

Safeguarding: Policies and procedures to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm, and promote the best possible outcome for them through safe and effective care.⁵

¹ Davis, J. and Marsh, N. (2020). ‘Boys to men: the cost of ‘adultification’ in safeguarding responses to Black boys’, *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 8(2), pp. 255-259

² Home Office (2020) *PACE Code C 2019*. Statutory guidance.

³ The United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

⁴ Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (2021) *Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership: Multi-agency guidance on extra-familial harm and child exploitation*.

⁵ Department for Education (2022) *Working together to safeguard children*. Statutory guidance.

Executive Summary

Introduction

In our previous research, focusing on adults, we found that despite support for the use of stop and search powers in principle, there were deep misgivings among Black adults about the way stop and search was carried out in practice, as well as the general service and treatment they received from the police. For Black children, these misgivings were amplified. They have less trust in the police than children from every other ethnic group, and less trust than Black adults do.

This report, which is the second of three publications related to our research project, focuses specifically on the views of children and teenagers. It is based on findings from three focus groups with predominantly Black or Black and Mixed ethnicity children, and a survey of 1,542 ten to 18 year olds, 100 of whom were Black.

1. Black children are the only ethnic group where children have less trust in the police than adults

Our findings suggest that Black children's trust in the police is alarmingly low, with just 36 per cent saying they trust the police, compared to 73 per cent of all children in our sample. Trust is particularly low for children from Black Caribbean communities, compared to Black African communities; and Black children are the only group of children who have less trust in the police than adults of the same ethnicity. Only 28 per cent of Black Caribbean children, and 40 per cent of Black African children agreed that they trust the police, compared with 35 per cent of Black Caribbean adults and 51 per cent of Black African adults. This would suggest that the 'confidence gap' in policing between Black communities and the rest of the population is likely to get wider, rather than narrower, unless urgent corrective action is taken: children, young adults and Black people who are the second or third generation of their family to live in the UK, all have substantially less trust in the police than those who are first generation. Additionally, Black African adults are more likely to be the first or second generation in their family to live in the UK, compared to Black Caribbean adults, who are more likely to be from the second, third or fourth generation. This suggests that in future generations, Black adults will have closer levels of trust to current Black Caribbean communities (35 per cent) than to Black African communities (51 per cent).

2. Most Black children do not trust the police to treat people fairly, and less than half feel safe around police officers

Within our focus groups and polling, Black children had concerns over the service they would receive from the police and if they would be treated fairly. The majority (60 per cent) did not trust the police to treat people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds fairly, or to conduct stop and search fairly (55 per cent). Findings from our focus groups indicate that perceptions 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 if they would go to the police if they were in danger and needed help. 17 per cent of all Black children and nearly one in four Black boys (24 per cent) would not tell the police if they had been threatened with a weapon in their local area.

3. The majority of children feel safer knowing that the police are conducting stop and search; but less than half of all children trust the police to stop and search people fairly

Children's views on the use of stop and search powers are complex. The majority (61 per cent) of children agreed that knowing that the police are stopping and searching people in their area would make them feel safer. However, this figure varies greatly by ethnicity: the same proportion (36 per cent) of Black children agreed that they feel safer knowing that stop and search is being used, as those who feel unsafe. This is compared to the clear majority (64 per cent) of White children who would feel safer. Over a third (34 per cent) of children in our sample felt that what they knew about stop and search had made them trust the police less. When broken down by ethnicity, it is clear that perceptions of stop and search have eroded the trust of Black children the most: 63 per cent of Black children strongly or slightly agreed that they trusted the police less, as a result of what they knew about stop and search.

4. The experience of being stopped and searched is more traumatising for children than it is for adults

Our findings show that children find the experience of being stopped and searched traumatic, and that it lowers their trust in the police. In our survey, just over half (53 per cent) of children who had been stopped and searched felt that the police officer had treated them with respect, and only 48 per cent agreed that the police officer had properly explained their rights to them when they were searched. Half of all children who had been stopped and searched stated that they trusted the police less as a result of this experience. 52 per cent of children agreed that they had felt humiliated and embarrassed by the experience and half found the experience traumatic.

5. Black children are more concerned about racism and disproportionality than adults, and most feel that the police unfairly target Black communities

While both adults and children are concerned about issues of racism and disproportionality, our findings suggest that children are more concerned about this than adults. Negative experiences that children, their relatives and friends have with the police, alongside prominent examples of discrimination from police officers in the media, are contributing to declining trust in the service. 76 per cent of Black children believed that the police unfairly target Black communities, and when asked their opinions on what the police should do to improve stop and search, 73 per cent of all children agreed that the police should address racial disproportionalities in the way the tactic is deployed. That finding was echoed across all three focus groups, where children saw addressing

and reducing disproportionality as one of the most critical factors to rebuilding trust in the police, and improving the use of stop and search as a police tactic.

Conclusion

The findings from this research indicate that, overall, children are conflicted about the use of stop and search. Within our focus groups and polling, many children stated that they would feel safer knowing that stop and search powers were being used; however, less than half of all children trusted the police to use these powers fairly. For Black children, it is clear that many do not feel safe around the police and do not trust that police officers would treat them fairly or use stop and search powers appropriately. In addition, children who have been stopped and searched have lower levels of trust in the police, are less likely to feel safe around police officers, and are substantially less likely to talk to the police if they had been threatened with a weapon in their local area. That raises safeguarding concerns over how best to protect vulnerable children from harm.

Introduction

In our previous research conducted on adults, we found that despite support for the use of stop and search powers in principle, there were deep misgivings among Black adults about the way stop and search was carried out in practice, as well as the general service and treatment they received from the police. This showed that when looking into adult's perspectives on stop and search, it was important to not just look at stop and search, but at all the interactions between the public and policing.

However, adults are not the only people to interact with the police, either through stop and search, or within other contexts. When looking at the use of stop and search, and at policing more broadly, the voices of children are too often forgotten when discussing the use of powers. Furthermore, the disproportionality in the use of stop and search and its impact on children, particularly Black children, is even less understood. As part of this research, we wanted to better understand children's experiences and perspectives of stop and search and policing, by speaking to them directly. In order to ensure children's voices are heard, we conducted polling and focus groups to understand children's attitudes towards and experiences of stop and search and policing. This report, which is the second of three publications related to this research, focuses specifically on our child findings.

Context

Current statistics on the use of stop and search powers on children

Nearly one-fifth (19 per cent) of all stop and searches conducted in 2021/22 were of those aged between 10 and 17. In 2021/22, there were 70 stop and searches conducted for every 1000 males aged 15-19.⁶ Among 15-19-year-old males from ethnic minority backgrounds, this rate doubles, increasing to 140 searches per 1,000.

Children under 10 may also be stopped and searched in exceptional circumstances,⁷ despite being under the age of criminal responsibility in the UK. Between 2021/22, 70 stop and searches were conducted on children under the age of 10. 20 per cent (14) of these searches were conducted on children from an ethnic minority background.

When looking at the reasons for searches, 44 per cent of stop and searches on 10 - 17 year olds were for drugs, and 28 per cent were for offensive weapons. Despite section 60 searches⁸ making up 1 per cent of all searches conducted on 10 - 17 year olds, this age group accounted for 30 per cent of all section 60 searches.

⁶ Home Office (2022) *Police powers and procedures: Stop and search and arrests, England and Wales, Year ending 31 March 2022*. National statistics.

⁷ Home Office (2022) *Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) codes of practice*.

⁸ Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) allows police officers to stop a person without reasonable suspicion, in a limited area, for up to 24 hours, if they reasonably believe that serious violence may occur imminently or that weapons are being carried in the area. 28 per cent of all section 60 searches were carried out on Black people, rendering them 17 times more likely to be subjected to section 60 searches than White people. 3.4% of section 60 searches resulted in an arrest in 2021/22.

Legislation and guidance on the stop and search of children

An appropriate adult (which may include a parent or guardian) must be present during More Thorough Searches⁹ (strip searches) of those aged 17 or under. The role of an appropriate adult as enshrined in PACE Code C is to “safeguard the rights, entitlements and welfare of juveniles and vulnerable persons”. There is no legal requirement, however, that an appropriate adult be present for the stop and search of children. In their super-complaint about the use of Section 60 searches, the Criminal Justice Alliance raised concerns about the impacts on safeguarding: “*This means that safeguards to protect the interests and welfare of children are at a minimum when they are stopped and searched and arguably even more so when searched under s.60 powers where there is no need for reasonable grounds.*”¹⁰ While there is guidance issued by the College of Policing within Stop and Search authorised professional practice¹¹, there is no specific legislation on stop and search—aside from strip searches¹²—applicable to children. StopWatch’s Stop and search guide for parents and children¹³ states that officers are only given basic professional guidance that: ‘*it is important for the officer to remember that a child should be treated as a child first and foremost, even if they are known to the police or appear older. If that child or young person is putting themselves in a situation where they may be at risk of harm, then that should be the officer’s priority.*’ The guide also states that ‘*Officers are also advised to give consideration to the safety and welfare of any child stopped and to follow their force’s safeguarding policies.*’

Children are currently not recognised as a distinct vulnerable group, and “do not at least benefit from special safeguards, other than those in respect of those who may already be identified as ‘victims’ or especially vulnerable.”¹⁴ StopWatch has called for a higher standard of reasonable doubt for stop and searches of children, additional data recording requirements for searches involving children, and the presence of an appropriate adult at all searches— not only More Thorough Searches.¹⁵ Similarly, the Criminal Justice Alliance has pushed for stronger safeguards in the use of Section 60 powers, recommending that they either be repealed, or that if they were to be retained, the government should introduce stronger safeguards to protect against the harms caused¹⁶.

Evidence on the effectiveness of stop and search

Stop and search is often put forward as an important answer to rises in violent offences, particularly knife crime. However, previous evidence on young people’s experiences of policing strongly suggests that the use of stop and search powers increases distrust and negative

⁹ More Thorough searches are where an individual removes more than an outer coat, jacket or gloves, e.g. a T-shirt and ‘More Thorough Searches with Intimate Parts of the Body Exposed’ are where an individual is required to remove all or most of their clothing. Source: Parliament. House of Commons (2022). Police powers: Strip searching.

¹⁰ Ali, A, & Champion, N. (2021) More harm than good: A super-complaint on the harms caused by ‘suspicion-less’ stop and searches and inadequate scrutiny of stop and search powers. Criminal Justice Alliance.

¹¹ College of Policing (2016). *Authorised Professional Practice: Stop and search: professional*

¹² Home Office (2019) PACE Code C (Revised).

¹³ StopWatch (2017). *Stop and search: a guide for parents and children.*

¹⁴ Flacks, S. (2017) *The stop and search of minors: A ‘vital police tool’?*

¹⁵ StopWatch (2016) *The Policing of Children in England and Wales and International Human Rights Standards Submission to Committee on the Rights of the Child from StopWatch.*

¹⁶ Ali, A, & Champion, N. (2021) More harm than good: A super-complaint on the harms caused by ‘suspicion-less’ stop and searches and inadequate scrutiny of stop and search powers. Criminal Justice Alliance.

sentiment towards the police¹⁷. In their 2020¹⁸ study on stop and search, procedural justice and young people across England and Wales, Murray et al argue that “there is very little demonstrable proof that [stop and search] deters offending or reduces crime”. This finding is echoed by research by Matteo Tiratelli, Paul Quinton and Ben Bradford, who, using 10 years of police and crime data, found little evidence to suggest that stop and search is effective in preventing or reducing crime.¹⁹ Their research identified that stop and search could have a limited deterrent effect on drug offences, but discussed several other possible causes for this relationship. The study also found that increasing the amount of stop and searches “is likely to have *at best* a very marginal effect on emerging crime problems”. These findings are accompanied by growing evidence that the practice damages public-police relations when used frequently and indiscriminately. Taken together, these findings suggest that regardless of the volume, the use of stop and search powers can damage trust in the police, confidence in police legitimacy and can result in increased offending behaviour among young, vulnerable and disenfranchised groups. This is particularly true for men and boys from ethnic minorities and/or working-class backgrounds.²⁰

Child Q and the strip searches of children

In March 2022, a child safeguarding practice review criticised multiple aspects of the strip-search of a menstruating, 15-year-old Black schoolgirl (Child Q) at her east London school by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).²¹ Subsequent media coverage and public anger led to increased awareness and scrutiny of stop and searches – particularly More Thorough Searches – of children. The review concluded that the search “should never have happened and there was no reasonable justification for it”.²² It also found that there was no appropriate adult present during Child Q’s strip search, that racism was likely an influencing factor in the officer initiating the search and it constituted a safeguarding failure.

Subsequent enquiries have shown that Child Q was not an isolated incident, and it was reflective of wider issues in the treatment of children during stop and search. Children comprised 5 per cent of all strip searches in the 2021/22 period, and 35 per cent of those searches were on Black children, a figure 16 per cent higher than the proportion of adults strip searched who were Black (19 per cent) in 2022.²³ The Children’s Commissioner for England found that nearly one-quarter of strip searches on children between 2018-2020 conducted by the MPS were done so without an appropriate adult present.²⁴ The Commissioner recommended that the Home Office amend PACE 1984 legislation to ensure that uses of More Through Searches of children are only used when

¹⁷ McAra, L., & McVie, S. (2005). *The usual suspects? Street-life, young people and the police*. *Criminal justice*, 5(1), 5-36.

¹⁸ Murray, K., McVie, S., Farren, D., Herlitz, L., Hough, M., & Norris, P. (2021). *Procedural justice, compliance with the law and police stop-and-search: a study of young people in England and Scotland*. *Policing and Society*, 31(3), 263-282.

¹⁹ Tiratelli, M., Quinton, P., & Bradford, B. (2018). *Does stop and search deter crime? Evidence from ten years of London-wide data*. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 58(5), 1212-1231.

²⁰ Crutchfield, R. D., Skinner, M. L., Haggerty, K. P., McGlynn, A., & Catalano, R. F. (2012). *Racial Disparity in Police Contacts*. *Race and Justice*, 2(3), 179–202

²¹ City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (2022) *Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Child Q*.

²² City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (2022) *Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Child Q*.

²³ Home Office (2022) *Police powers and procedures: Other PACE powers, England and Wales, Year ending 31 March 2022*. National statistics.

²⁴ Children’s Commissioner (2022) *Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service – new analysis by the Children’s Commissioner for England*.

absolutely necessary, and where an appropriate adult is present.

The MPS has since introduced a pilot scheme where any strip search of a child requires approval from an inspector.²⁵

Existing literature on children, policing, and stop and search

The review of Child Q highlighted adultification as a significant feature, and recommended the rollout of multi-agency adultification bias training.²⁶ Davis and Marsh (2020), defines adultification as “When ideas of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children, determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. Adultification is founded on discrimination and bias, relating to a child’s personal characteristics or lived experiences. Adultification is a persistent and ongoing act of dehumanisation, which explicitly impacts Black children, and influences how they are safeguarded and protected.”²⁷ As a consequence of adultification, Black children are more likely to be assumed to be engaging in criminal or deviant behaviour, and are not afforded the protection of a presumption of innocence or vulnerability like White children²⁸.

There is a large body of evidence exploring children and young people’s relationship with policing, and in particular, the way in which early negative experiences with policing may erode their trust and confidence, that may in turn damage the legitimacy of policing.²⁹ Experiences and perceptions of racial disproportionality may particularly build distrust among Black children and Mixed ethnicity children.³⁰

Furthermore, academics have suggested that the premature labelling of deviance may actually encourage offending (Bradford, 2015); McAra and McVie’s 2005 study found that once individuals had been warned or charged by police, they were significantly more likely to be arrested than others who have committed a similar offence but did not engage with the police.³¹

The IOPC’s National Stop and Search Learning Report (2022) found that the cumulative impact of frequent exposure to stop and search may be significant for young children;³² the report asserted that feelings of humiliation, trauma, and victimisation from stop and search encounters that are not conducted professionally nor sensitively may have an “impact on a child’s sense of safety, stability and bonding”, and recommended that further research into the experiences of Black children, Mixed ethnicity children and young people during stop and searches be commissioned.

²⁵ Howie, M. (2022) *Met inspector will have to green-light strip searches in two London boroughs in wake of Child Q uproar*. Evening Standard.

²⁶ City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (2022) *Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Child Q*.

²⁷ Davis, J. and Marsh, N. (2020). ‘Boys to men: the cost of ‘adultification’ in safeguarding responses to Black boys’, *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 8(2), pp. 255-259.

²⁸ Davis, J. (2022). Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding. His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation

²⁹ McAra, L., & McVie, S. (2005). *The usual suspects?: Street-life, young people and the police*. *Criminal Justice*, 5(1), 5–36.

Murray, K., McVie, S., Farren, D., Herlitz, L., Hough, M. & Norris, P. (2021) *Procedural justice, compliance with the law and police stop-and-search: a study of young people in England and Scotland*, *Policing and Society*, 31:3, 263-282,

³⁰ Crutchfield, R. D., Skinner, M. L., Haggerty, K. P., McGlynn, A., & Catalano, R. F. (2012). *Racial Disparity in Police Contacts*. *Race and Justice*, 2(3), 179–202.

³¹ McAra, L., & McVie, S. (2005). *The usual suspects?: Street-life, young people and the police*. *Criminal Justice*, 5(1), 5–36.

³² IOPC (2022) *National stop and search learning report (April 2022)*.

The Criminal Justice Alliance's 2017 survey of 503 Black, Asian, and minority ethnic 16-30-year-olds also found that for two-fifths of the young people surveyed, stop and search had reduced their trust and confidence in the police, and that stop and search is frequently "the most confrontational encounter a young person will have with the police", where "when a search is not carried out with basic levels of decency and sensitivity, it can have a lasting effect on a young person and can make them feel 'victimised', 'humiliated', even 'violated'".³³ The University of Edinburgh similarly found that children perceived their experience of being stopped and searched as broadly negative, finding the police unprofessional, disrespectful, and found a statistically significant connection between children who had been stopped and searched, and more negative views on and trust in the police,³⁴ a finding echoed by the Police Service of Northern Ireland's survey of 16 year olds.³⁵

It is clear that despite the growing body of evidence surrounding the experiences of Black children and Mixed ethnicity children with stop and search, in line with the IOPC's recommendation, we found that this field remains under-researched in proportion to the extent to which it may impact both Black children and Mixed ethnicity children directly, and their trust in the police more broadly.

It is especially important to understand these experiences in light of the indirect effects, stop and search powers can have on community trust and confidence in the police, across generations. Using data from the 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities examined the level of confidence different ethnic groups placed in the police. They noted that out of the ethnic groups experiencing the highest rates of stop and search that year; that there was a noticeable drop in confidence in their local police service, for Black Caribbean people (54 per cent) compared to Black African people (69 per cent). This drop was—in part—attributed to "the intergenerational memory that members of Black Caribbean communities in particular have of unfair and excessive policing in the past".³⁶

³³ Keeling, P. (2017) *No respect: Young BAME men, the police and stop and search*.

³⁴ Murray, K. (2016) *Understanding and Preventing Youth Crime survey (UPYC) Early Findings: Stop and search in Glasgow and Edinburgh*. Scottish Institute for Policing Research.

³⁵ Topping, J., & Schubotz, D. (2018). *The 'usual suspects'? Young people's experiences of police stop and search powers in Northern Ireland*. (120 ed.) (Ark Young Life and Times Survey 2018).

³⁶Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. (2021). *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report*.

Aims and objectives of this research:

This research sought to further build understanding of attitudes towards stop and search in the context of disproportionality and policing as a whole, specifically focusing on children from Black and mixed ethnicity backgrounds. The findings consist of the largest survey of Black and Mixed ethnicity children aged 10 to 18 in England and Wales, as well as three focus groups with children.

This project set out to:

- 1) Better understand the evidence base around the use of stop and search on children
- 2) Capture perspectives and experiences of the stop and search of children, from Black and other ethnic minority groups to understand if, how, where and why that differs to the general population
- 3) Better understand what contributes to disproportionality in the use of stop and search on children

Methodology

Our approach and method:

This research followed a mixed-methods design, including focus groups and a nationally representative survey. Where applicable, findings from our child survey and focus groups were compared to those from our research on adults in order to highlight the distinct experiences of children.

Focus groups

Three focus groups were conducted, predominantly with children from Black or Mixed ethnicity backgrounds. Convenience sampling³⁷ was used to ensure focus groups were carried out with children who had knowledge or lived experience of stop and search and were comfortable taking part in the research. At all times a safeguarding stakeholder was present in order to respond to any needs or vulnerabilities expressed during the focus groups. These stakeholders were allowed to participate within focus group discussions in order to let the children feel safer when disclosing.

- 2 focus groups were held within a secondary school
- 1 focus group was held with a youth group
- In total, 25 children took part across three focus groups: 21 of these children were from Black or Black and Mixed ethnicity backgrounds

The focus groups with children involved discussions around:

- How safe children felt in their local area
- General perceptions of the police
- Views on the use of stop and search powers
- Views on what could work to build trust in the police and their use of stop and search

Participants were reimbursed £20 for their time - as a voucher. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim following each session.

The survey

1542 children were surveyed online, consisting of a nationally representative (UK) sample of 1508 children and a boosted sample to include 100 Black children. Fieldwork was conducted from the 12th July – 16th August 2022.³⁸ Response data from participants was collected by WALR. This data was cleaned by data analysts at Crest, before being processed into a set of data tables, broken down by key demographic variables. The data tables were interpreted and analysed in order to communicate the findings and produce the visualisations included within this report.

³⁷ Convenience sampling refers to an approach in which selection is made purely on the basis of who is available. Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. sage

³⁸ The polling took place in July 2022, 4 months after the release of the safeguarding practice review of Child Q. For the purposes of this research, we did not ask respondents about Child Q directly; however, several participants in our focus groups did discuss Child Q unprompted.

Limitations of our research

Survey sample size:

This survey of 1542 children (including 100 Black children) was the largest survey feasible to conduct with children via an online approach (using a panel aggregator to reach the widest possible number of individuals). While this is, to our knowledge, the largest survey conducted to date on Black children's views on policing and stop and search specifically, we are aware that the sample size is still not large enough to equate significance to some of the findings. It is also important to note here, that 154 of the participants within our survey were 18 years old.

Additionally, our sample of children who have been stopped and searched (101 children) is too small to be reliably broken down by ethnicity: 70 White children, 20 Black children, and 8 Mixed ethnicity children had been stopped and searched. These findings by ethnicity should therefore only be taken as indications of possible trends and reflections of our findings, instead of national trends.

Relying on self-reported data

Similarly to our adult survey, our quantitative polling here uses self-reported data. A key limitation of relying on self-reported data is that it makes it difficult to distinguish between the participants' actual views and those they deem to be the social norm³⁹. Additionally, people have a tendency to under-report counter-normative behaviours, for example, being caught with a prohibited item after a stop and search.⁴⁰ Respondents who had been stopped and searched were asked directly whether or not an item had been found on them during the search, and if so, were asked to detail what had been found. Despite the tendency to under-report, nearly a fifth of respondents (17 per cent) stated that an item had been found on them as a result of the search. This is roughly in line with the latest figures for 201/22, where 25 per cent of stops and searches on adults resulted in a positive outcome.⁴¹

Boosted sample

To ensure we gathered the views of a large sample of Black children, we boosted our sample to include 100 Black children. The boosted sample is therefore not nationally representative of the population in England. Where attributing overall views or support, the nationally representative sample (1508) is used to control for this.

Focus groups

Focus groups were conducted in London and convenience sampling was used when recruiting child participants. As a result, these focus groups were not nationally representative. All children who were interested in taking part, regardless of ethnicity, were invited to attend; however, most children who participated were from Black or Mixed ethnicity backgrounds. We did not record ethnicity beyond what the children disclosed during the groups.

³⁹ Brenner, P. S., & DeLamater, J. (2016). *Lies, damned lies, and survey self-reports? Identity as a cause of measurement bias*. *Social psychology quarterly*, 79(4), 333-354.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Home Office (2022) *Police powers and procedures: Stop and search and arrests, England and Wales, Year ending 31 March 2022*. National statistics.

Findings

Chapter 1: Views on the police

Findings from both the focus groups and survey show that, overall, children have higher levels of trust in the police than adults; however, Black children (and particularly Black Caribbean children) have distinctly lower levels of trust and confidence in the police compared to other children and adults. There are a combination of complex reasons why Black children have less trust in the police compared to other children and adults. Within our focus groups, many children described that they wanted to trust the police but felt unable to do so, either due to their own negative experiences interacting with the police, or those of friends, family members or people with the same background as them on social media. This section discusses our findings regarding trust and confidence in the police.

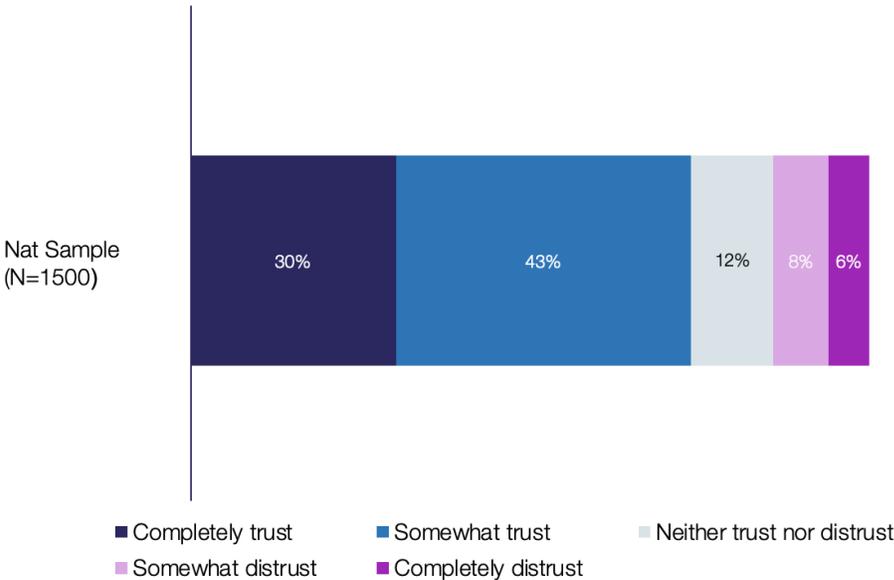
Trust in the police for Black children is alarmingly low

General views on trust in the police

Seventy-three per cent of all children in our survey said they trusted the police, a figure 11 per cent higher than in our adult survey (62 per cent). Approximately 1 in 7 children (14 per cent) in our nationally representative sample stated that they actively distrust the police (either somewhat or completely distrust) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Responses to “In general, how much would you say you trust the police?” (Child)

*Completely trust & somewhat trust; neither trust nor distrust; somewhat distrust & completely distrust

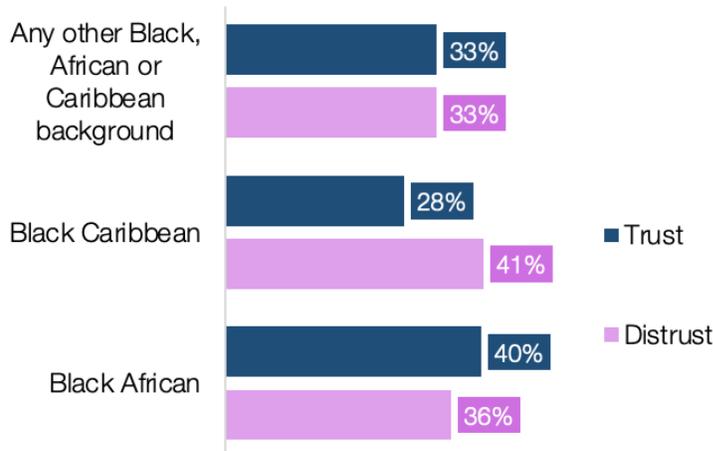
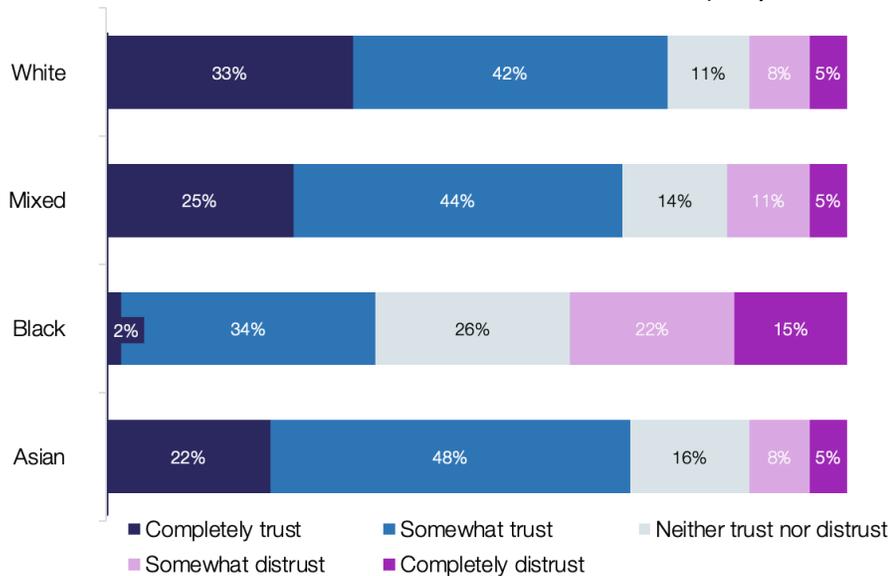


Ethnic differences in trust in the police

Only 36 per cent of Black children trusted the police compared to 75 per cent of White children⁴² (Figure 2). Trust in the police was particularly low for Black Caribbean children: only 28 per cent trusted the police compared to 40 per cent of Black African children. Black children were also the only group where more children distrusted the police than trusted: 41 per cent of Black Caribbean children and 36 per cent of Black African children actively distrusted the police. These children also had less trust in the police overall than adults: 46 per cent of Black adults in our adult sample stated that they trusted the police (35 per cent of Black Caribbean adults and 51 per cent of Black African adults).

Figure 2: Responses (split by ethnicity) to “In general, how much would you say you trust the police?” (Child)

*Completely trust & somewhat trust; neither trust nor distrust; somewhat distrust & completely distrust

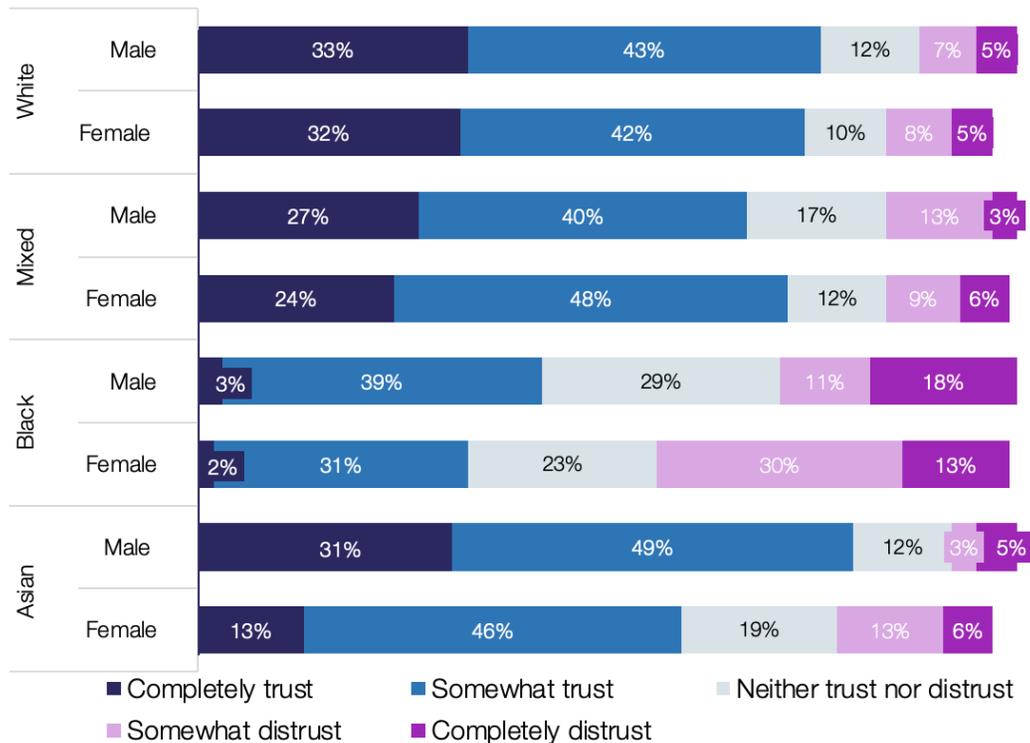


⁴² For White children, 32.45 per cent completely trust the police. This has been rounded up to 33 per cent.

Gender differences in trust in the police

Overall, girls had lower levels of trust in the police (29 per cent completely and 43 per cent somewhat trust) compared to boys (32 per cent completely and 43 per cent somewhat trust); however, these differences were minimal when looking at our nationally representative sample. There was more variation in levels of trust when segmenting further by gender and ethnicity (Figure 3). Black girls had the lowest level of trust in the police among all children; only a third of Black girls trusted the police compared to 43 per cent who actively distrusted the police. Black boys were more likely to trust the police (42 per cent) than distrust (29 per cent), and had higher levels of trust overall than Black girls.

Figure 3: Responses (split by ethnicity and gender) to “In general, how much would you say you trust the police?” (Child) *Completely trust & somewhat trust; neither trust nor distrust; somewhat distrust & completely distrust



Differences in trust by age

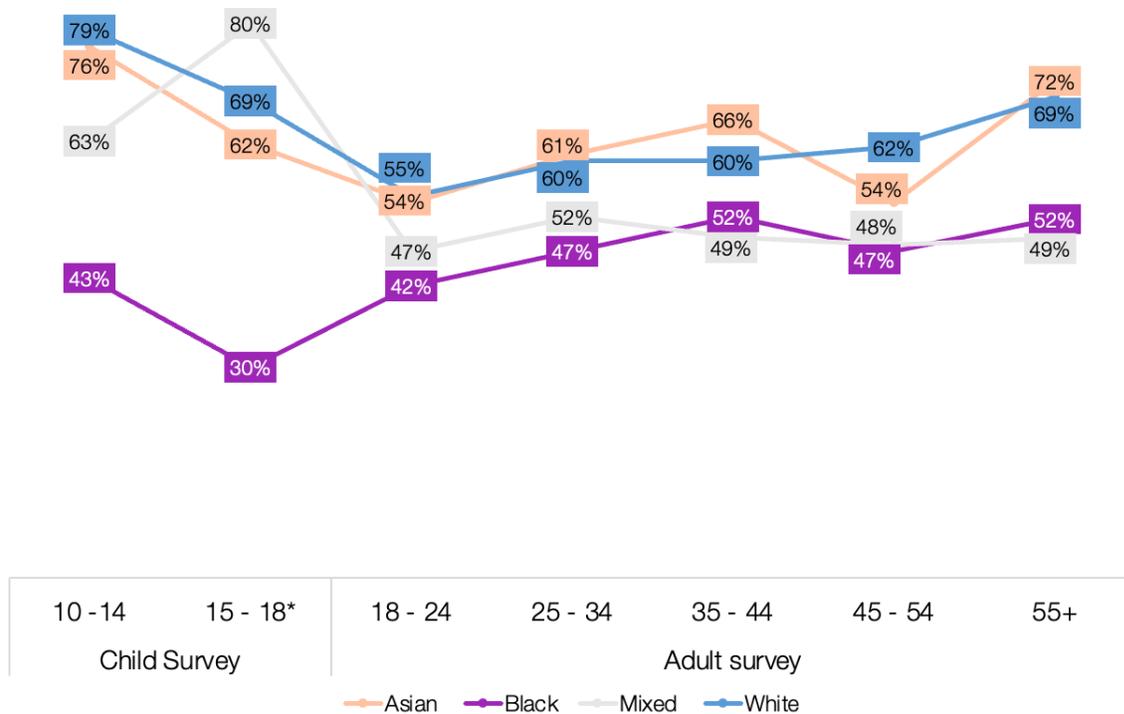
Trust in the police was lower for older children compared to younger children: 77 per cent of 10-14-year-olds in our nationally representative sample trusted the police compared to 66 per cent of 15-18-year-olds. Trust in the police was considerably lower for Black teenagers; where less than a third (30 per cent) of Black 15-18-year-olds trusted the police.

Differences in trust by age and ethnicity

Findings from our previous research⁴³ indicated that, within Black communities, the average level of trust in the police is being held up by 1st generation, Black African adults. For children, trust in the police is lower for Black children than adults and this is likely to decline in future generations. Our findings suggest that despite increasing with age overall, Black African children’s trust is likely to converge with Black Caribbean children’s trust in adulthood and further generations.

Figure 4 shows that, for all ethnic groups other than Mixed ethnicity, trust in the police drops sharply from the ages of 10-18, rising again as participants get older. Despite this, Black children have substantially less trust from the age of 10 to 18 than any other ethnic group. Crucially, the key difference between Black children and children from other ethnic groups is that Black children trust the police less than Black adults do (36 per cent of Black children trusted the police, compared to 46 per cent of Black adults), whereas the opposite is true for all other children.

Figure 4: Responses (split by ethnicity and age) to “In general, how much would you say you trust the police?” (Adult / Child)



Taken together, these findings imply that trust within Black communities and particularly Black children will decline, as further generations will likely have lower trust than their predecessors and are unlikely to see substantial increases with age. As Black communities become more and more diverse, it is likely that the experiences and perspectives of Black African and Black Caribbean children will become more similar.

⁴³Evans, A., Olajide, P., & Clements, J. (2022). *Crime, policing and stop and search: Black perspectives in context*.

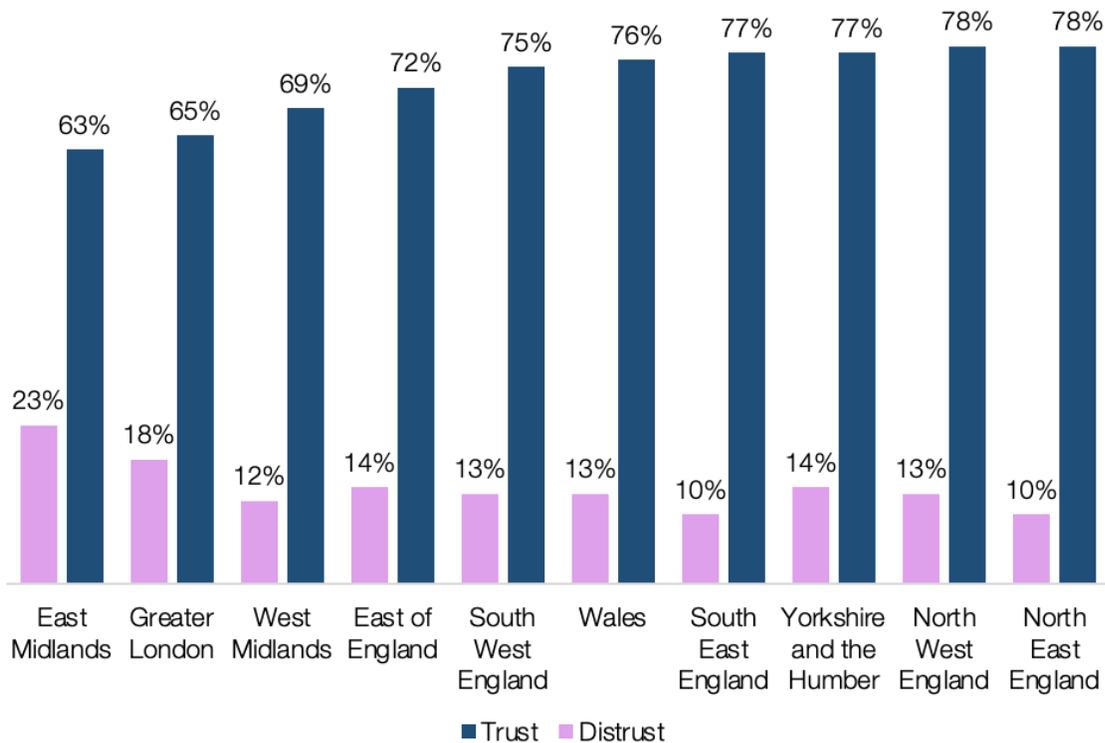
This suggests that, without change, trust for Black adults in the future may be more likely to be closer to 36 per cent (Black Caribbean adults) than 51 per cent (Black African adults).

Differences in trust by region

Trust in the police was lowest among children in the East Midlands (63 per cent) and Greater London (65 per cent) (Figure 5), which follows regional trends in trust observed in our adult survey (trust was lowest in London at 58 per cent, followed by East Midlands at 60 per cent). In our child survey, just over a third (34 per cent) of Black children in Greater London trusted the police compared to 38 per cent who actively distrusted the police.

Figure 5: Responses (split by region) to “In general, how much would you say you trust the police?” (Child)

*Completely trust & somewhat trust (grouped together); completely distrust & somewhat distrust (grouped together)

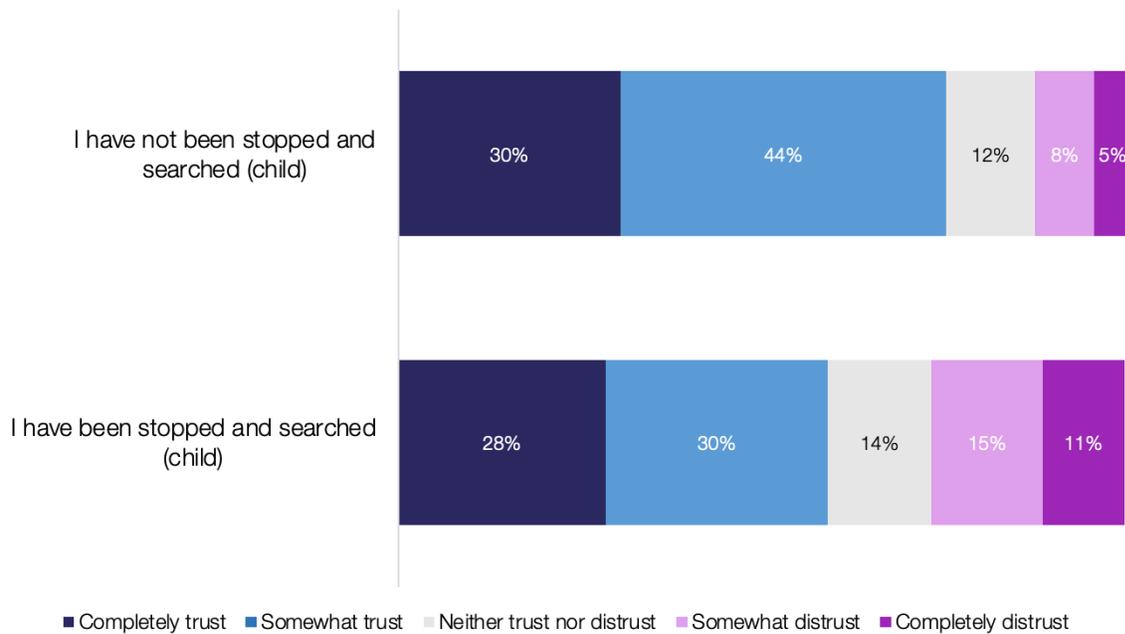


Differences in trust for children who have or haven't been stopped and searched

Overall, children who had been stopped and searched were less trusting of the police.⁴⁴ 58 per cent of children in our nationally representative sample who had been stopped and searched trusted the police compared to 74 per cent of children who had not been. While the sample size of children who had been stopped and searched was too small to break down further by ethnicity, findings from our regression analysis within our adult survey show that respondents who have been stopped and searched, have significantly lower trust in the police compared to those who have not been stopped and searched.

Figure 6: Responses (split by whether they have been stopped and searched) to “In general, how much would you say you trust the police?” (Child)

*Completely trust & somewhat trust; neither trust nor distrust; somewhat distrust & completely distrust



Reasons for low trust in the police among Black children

Findings from our focus groups with children in London suggest that children have conflicting views on the police and the trust that they can place in them due to concerns about racism and discrimination, the use of stop and search, and how police officers would engage with members of the public, particularly young Black people.

⁴⁴ 101 children within our sample had been stopped and searched. When split by ethnicity, the sample sizes were too small to make reliable conclusions about the impact of ethnicity on trust in the police.

Contentious examples of racism and discrimination within policing, alongside the use of police powers, were described by children across the focus groups, unprompted, as reasons why their trust in the police had declined as they had grown older. These children now felt unsure as to whether they could truly trust the police:

"I don't trust them to be honest. I think that they try and portray themselves as something that they're not and so they put out there that they're like, good and they're doing all of this training. And then I feel like when people finally start to trust them (...) then something else happens like the whole Chris Kaba incident, and so I feel like they're contradicting, they say one thing but their actions are doing another"
 Child Participant, Focus group 3, (ages 11 - 14)

"The Student Q thing, it's like, what the hell is this? Like this is London, this is England, this is not America."
 Child Participant, Focus group 1, (ages 10 - 17)

"I think personally with the police it's kind of hard because like [redacted] said, that they portray themselves in such a good way. It's kind of like, you want to trust them, but when you do have things like, Chris Kaba, it can be like, really hard. I'm trying to trust them."
 Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

These findings are in line with our nationally representative survey, where Figure 7 shows that trust in the police among children is highest in relation to the police's functional duties, for example investigating crime (64 per cent) and responding to emergencies (79 per cent) - but is lowest in relation to the fair use of stop and search powers (48 per cent) or the fair treatment of people from diverse backgrounds (55 per cent).

Figure 7: Responses to "How much do you trust the police to carry out the following tasks?" (Child)

*Completely trust & somewhat trust; neither trust nor distrust; somewhat distrust & completely distrust

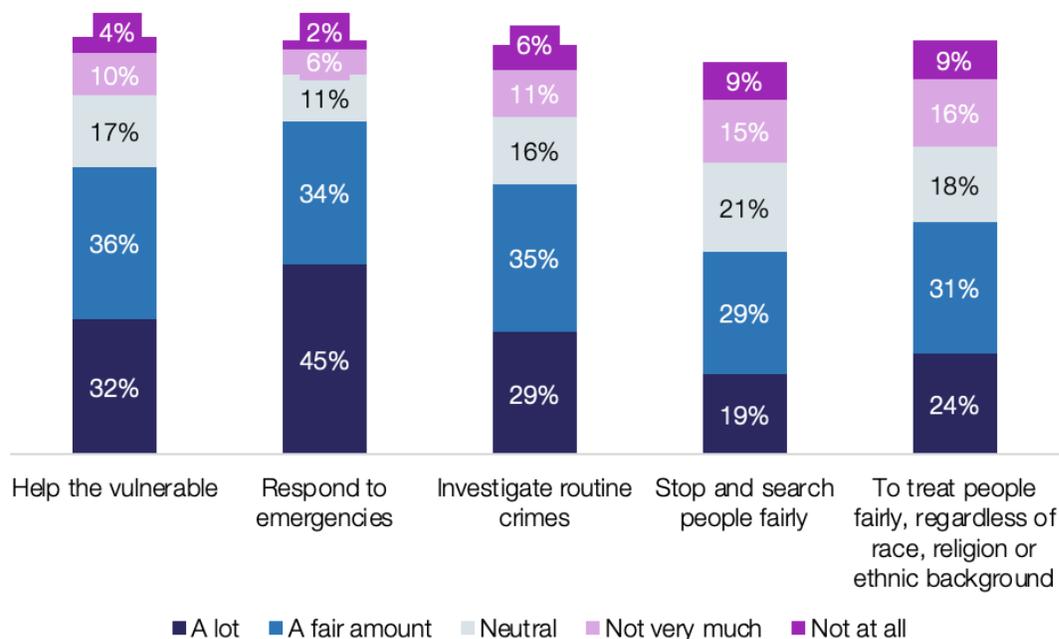
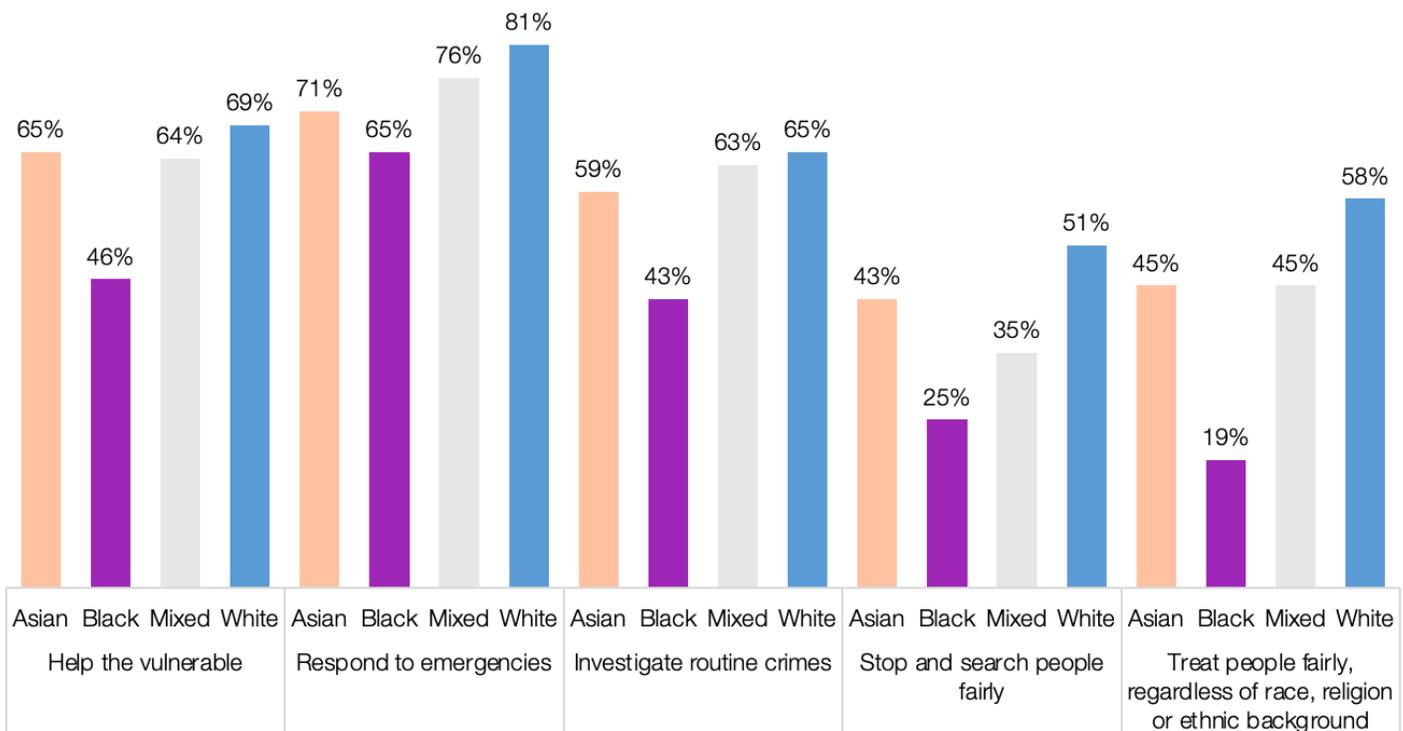


Figure 8 shows that when split by ethnicity, the majority of Black children (65 per cent) trusted the police to respond to emergencies; however, less than half trusted the police to help the vulnerable (46 per cent) or investigate routine crimes (43 per cent). Additionally, only a quarter of Black children trusted the police to stop and search people fairly and less than 1 in 5 trusted officers to treat people from different backgrounds fairly.

Figure 8: Responses (split by ethnicity) to “How much do you trust the police to carry out the following tasks?” (Child) *Completely trust & somewhat trust grouped together



Black children do not feel sufficiently protected or safe around the police

Across our focus groups, there was a strong theme of children trying or wanting to trust the police but feeling unable to do so. This was due to the negative experiences either they or others had had with the police, including the experiences of friends, family members, or experiences they’d seen online.

"You can't really [trust the police] because time after time, they've proven you can't really trust them. Because look what happened when somebody trusted them, and they made themselves vulnerable, and then they ended up not in a good place. And also, I saw this incident on Snapchat about how when (...) the police came, and then the Black guy was arrested, and then the White person, they were like telling them, 'oh are you okay?' When it was a fight, and both of them are gonna be affected."

Child Participant, Focus group 3, (ages 11 - 14)

"I personally feel that [if] I'm in a situation where, for instance, if somebody was coming into our school right now and started attacking the students, we would call the police, right? And they'd be there. Like, I know the police can do their job when they need to. Obviously, there's some incidents, for instance, that if there were two boys fighting and they've got blood on them, especially Black boys, the police might come and take the mick and arrest both of them, even though one of them's a victim, one of them's not. So in some situations where you're like, okay, the police might come and help, some situations where you're like, oh, I don't really know. Should I get out my phone when they get here? Yeah, that kind of thing."

Child Participant, Focus group 3, (ages 11 - 14)

As a result, the children in our focus groups expressed that they were unsure of whether or not they would call the police if they needed help and whether they could trust the police to help them, particularly in situations where they did not see imminent danger.

Black children have doubts about the police's ability to protect them

Most children in our focus groups described a fundamental distrust in the police's ability to protect them. Several participants expressed fears that encounters with the police could in fact endanger their lives through escalation of routine police interactions.

Several children said they would be unlikely to call the police if they either witnessed or were the victim of a crime, especially due to a fear that officers would mistake them for the perpetrator.

One child described an experience during the peak of the coronavirus pandemic when police officers had come to their family home looking to question their brother. Their brother was arrested, and then later released, without further action:

"They [the police] just started taking the mick like abusing their power, like completely disrespecting my family because it's like, you're coming here to accuse someone of something, like at least have respect about the way you're going about it. There's COVID going around, you're coming in here with no mask trying to force my brother to come to you. Rushing into my room, like that's where I sleep as well."

"I was just standing there because I'm –it's sad to say– but I'm used to it, you know. I was just standing there. But then I was thinking about my little brother, and my other sister (...) I saw my brother crying, and it felt like, I didn't have any emotions in the moment, because it's like, I'm sadly used to it (...) And it's like, I remember I didn't sleep that night, I had school the next day, I didn't sleep. And my dad went to go see my brother in the cell they kept him. I remember he was just crying, saying he hated how my little brother had to see that."

"And it kind of scares me, because like, what if he's in a situation when it's life or death? Who's he supposed to call? Because we might not be there or get there in time. And obviously, he doesn't feel safe with the police"

Child Participant, Focus group 3, (ages 11 - 14)

This child also described their concern that, following this experience with the police, their brother would not call the police even in a life-and-death situation. They now felt responsible for keeping him safe, and feared not arriving in time to protect him, were he in danger.

For both child and adult participants in our focus groups, there appears to be a direct correlation between negative interactions with police officers and low confidence in the police as a whole. Within our child focus groups, this lack of confidence made children question who they could turn to if they were in danger and needed help.

Black children are less likely to call the police if they were in danger than any other ethnic group

The findings from our focus groups were confirmed by our nationally representative survey. Overall, 86 per cent of children said they would call the police if they were in danger (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Responses to “I would call the police if I felt I was in danger” (Child/Adult)

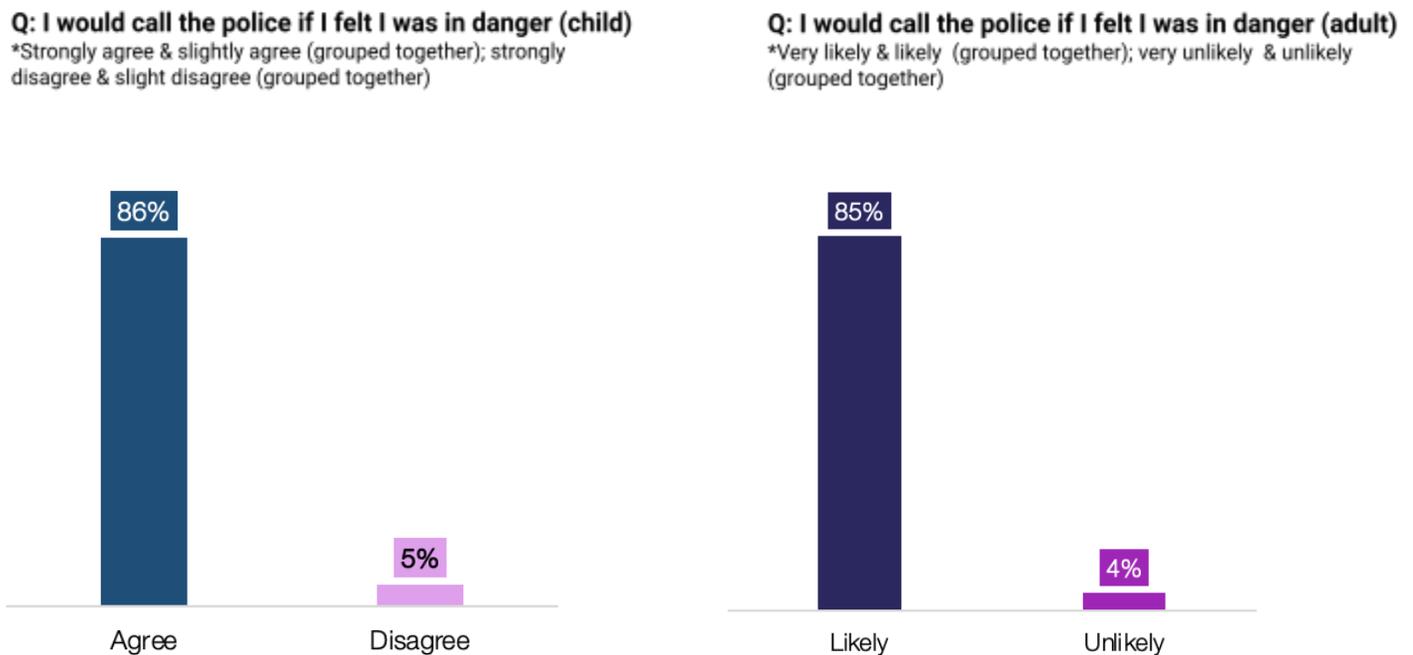
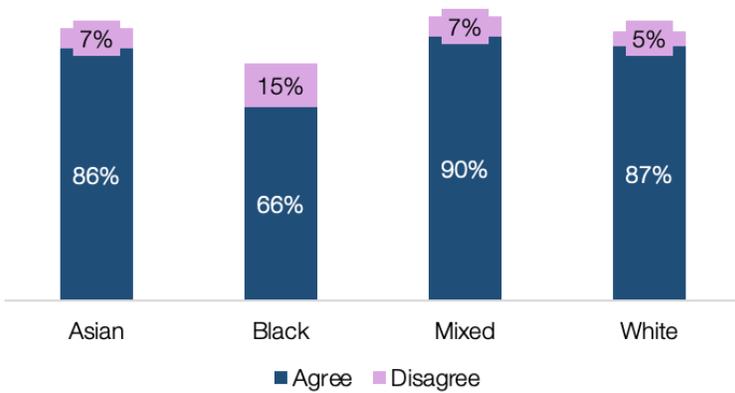


Figure 10 shows, however, that Black children (66 per cent) were substantially less likely to say they would call the police if they were in danger compared to White children (87 per cent), and to Black adults (76 per cent). Just over half (56 per cent) of Black Caribbean children say they would call the police if they felt they were in danger, compared to 73 per cent of Black Caribbean adults. This 17 per cent gap is substantially larger than the 7 per cent gap between Black African adults and children.

Figure 10: Responses (split by ethnicity) to “I would call the police if I felt I was in danger “ (Child/Adult)

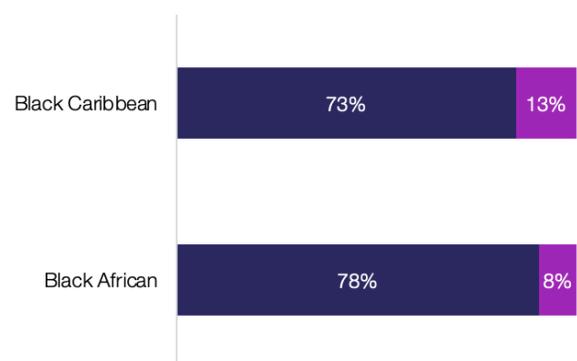
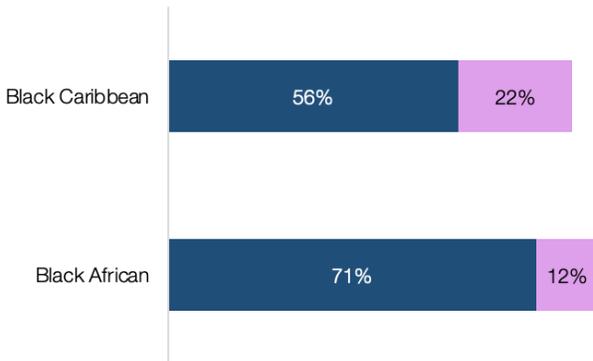
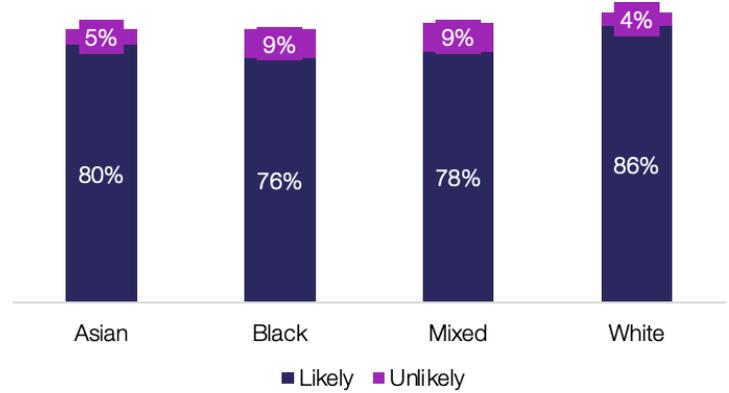
Q: I would call the police if I felt I was in danger (child)

*Strongly agree & slightly agree (grouped together); strongly disagree & slight disagree (grouped together)



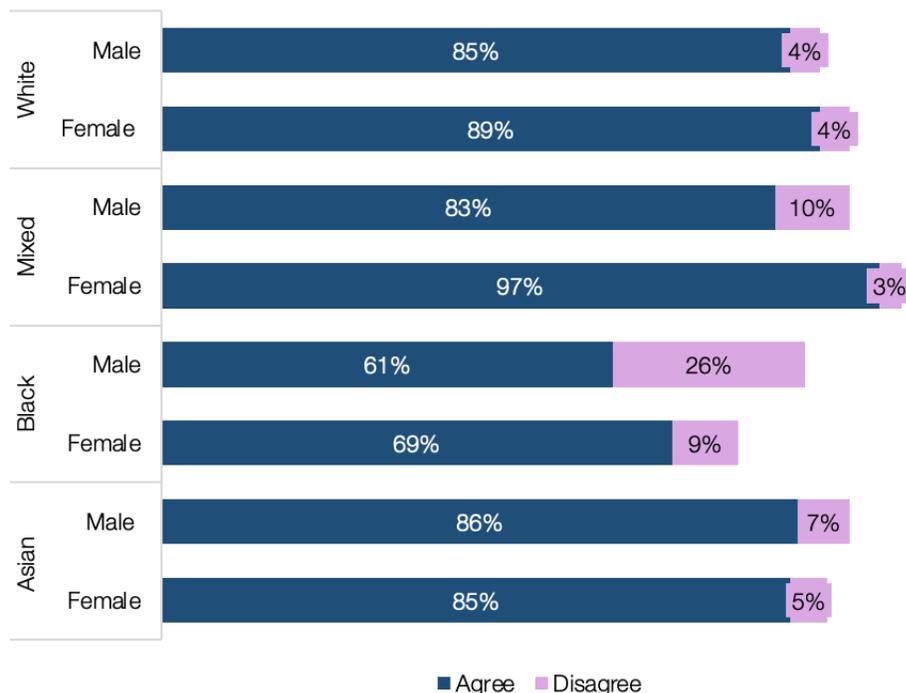
Q: I would call the police if I felt I was in danger (adult)

*Very likely & likely (grouped together); very unlikely & unlikely (grouped together)



When split by gender (Figure 11), Black girls (69 per cent) were more likely to agree that they would call the police if they were in danger than Black boys (61 per cent). Over 1 in 4 Black boys (26 per cent) would not call the police if they were in danger compared to 9 per cent of Black girls and 4 per cent of White boys.

Figure 11: Responses (split by gender and ethnicity) to “I would call the police if I felt I was in danger” (child) *Strongly agree & slightly agree (grouped together); strongly disagree & slight disagree (grouped together)



Black children feel less safe around the police than all adults and other children

Within our child survey, nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of children in our nationally representative sample said that they felt safe around the police. Black children were substantially less likely to feel safe around the police compared to other children; only 40 per cent of Black children (47 per cent of Black African and 25 per cent of Black Caribbean children) agreed that they felt safe around the police compared to 75 per cent of White children. Black Caribbean children were the only group more likely to feel unsafe (35 per cent) around the police than safe. This finding is not in line with the general polling results (that children feel more safe around the police than adults), suggesting that there are factors affecting feelings of safety that are specific to Black children.

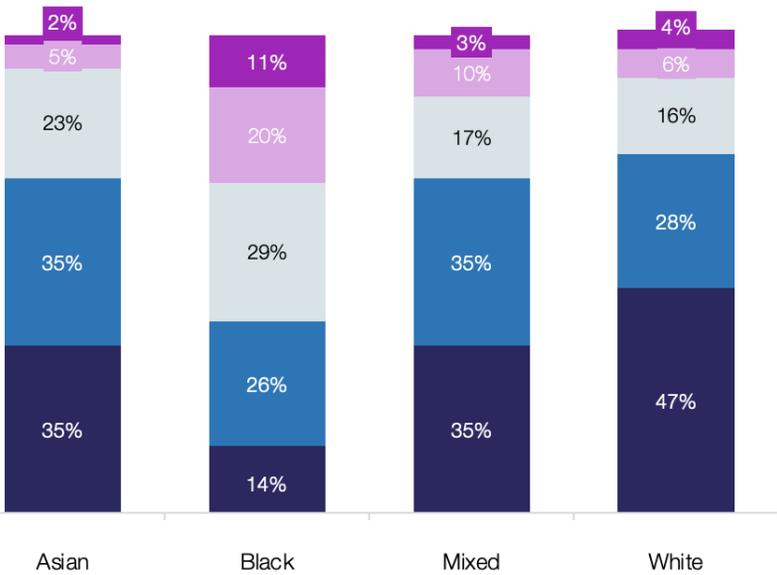
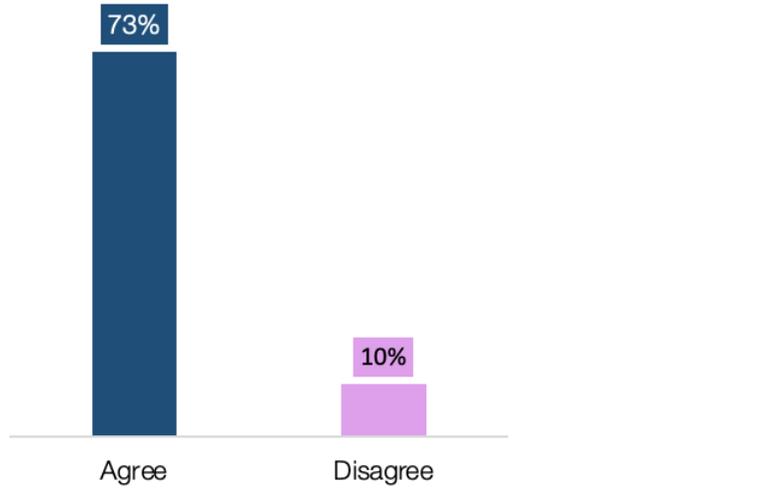
To compare feelings of safety between children and adults, we analysed the answers to questions on whether children feel safe around the police, and whether adults feel safer when they see a police officer.⁴⁵ Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of adults agreed that they felt safer when they saw a police officer. Black children were the only group of children that were less likely to agree that they felt safe around police officers than their adult counterparts.

⁴⁵ It is important to note here that while these premises are similar, they are not exactly the same. The difference in the wording of these questions means they can be used as comparisons, but are not exact substitutes.

Figure 12: Responses (split by ethnicity) to "I feel safe around police officers" (Child) and "I feel safer when I see a police officer" (Adult)

Q: I feel safe around police officers (Child)

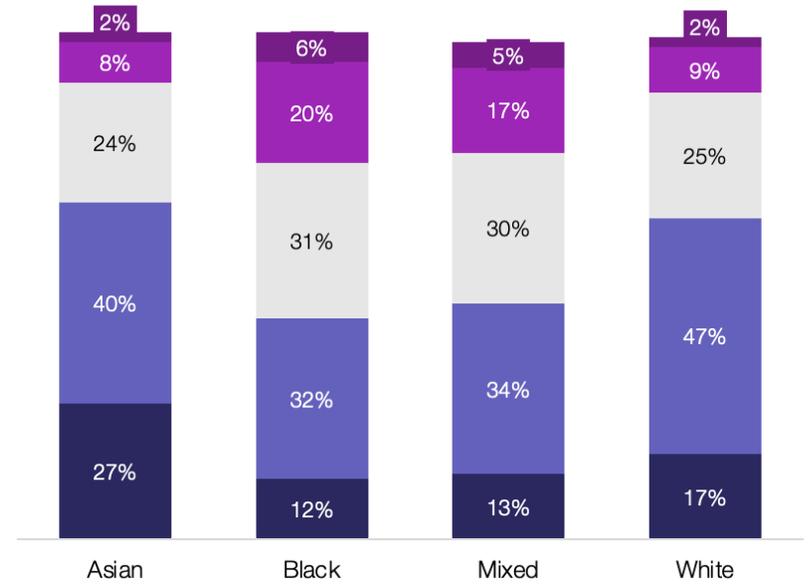
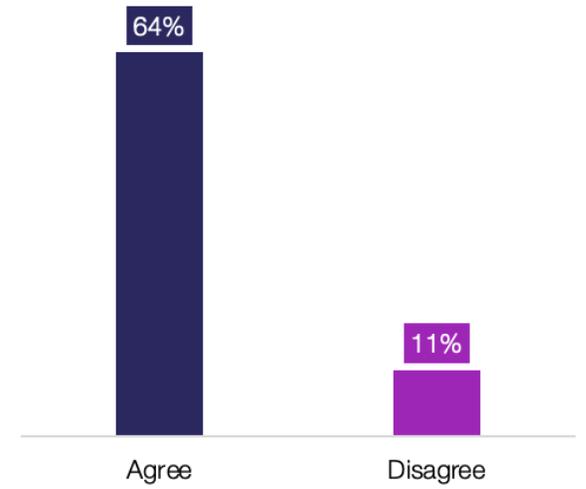
*Strongly agree & slightly agree (grouped together);
strongly disagree & slightly disagree (grouped together)



■ I strongly agree ■ I slightly agree
■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ I slightly disagree
■ I strongly disagree

Q: I feel safer when I see a police officer (Adult)

*Strongly agree & slightly agree (grouped together); strongly disagree & slightly disagree (grouped together)

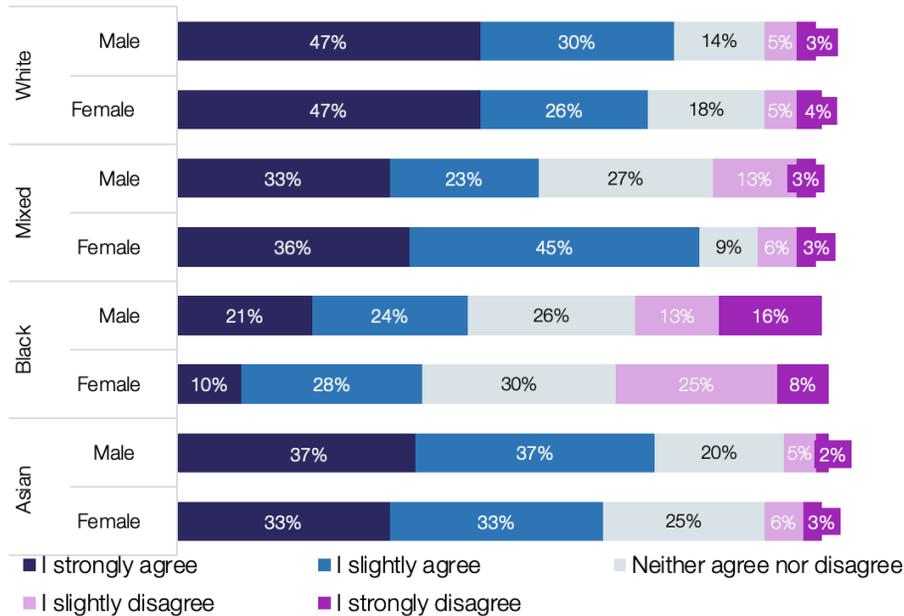


■ Strongly agree ■ Agree
■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree
■ Strongly disagree

When split by gender and ethnicity, less than half (45 per cent) of Black boys felt safe around the police, compared with only 38 per cent of Black girls. A third of Black girls felt unsafe around police officers compared to only 9 per cent of White, Asian or Mixed ethnicity girls.

Figure 13: Responses (split by gender and ethnicity) to “I feel safe around police officers”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree;; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Findings from our focus groups suggest factors such as adultification, discrimination, and the use of stop and search powers contribute to Black children’s lack of trust in the police and low feelings of safety.

"Different classes of people (...) People who live in the nice houses, they think the police are there to protect them. People who live in the ghetto are mostly thinking that the police are out to get them. They know that they're gonna get stopped."

Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

"I just felt so violated (...) And you know they're quick to... I thought I don't want to be a statistic. It's that intimidating thing that I don't like. Because it's like, what can you actually do? And the more we do it'll be like we're resisting and blah blah blah."

Child Participant, Focus group 3, (ages 11 - 14)

"And it's like, police are supposed to protect us. If we're in a situation and we don't feel comfortable calling them, who's going to help us? (...) Like, you're supposed to be keeping me safe, but you're the ones even killing my people as well. It's kind of crazy."

Child Participant, Focus group 3, (ages 11 - 14)

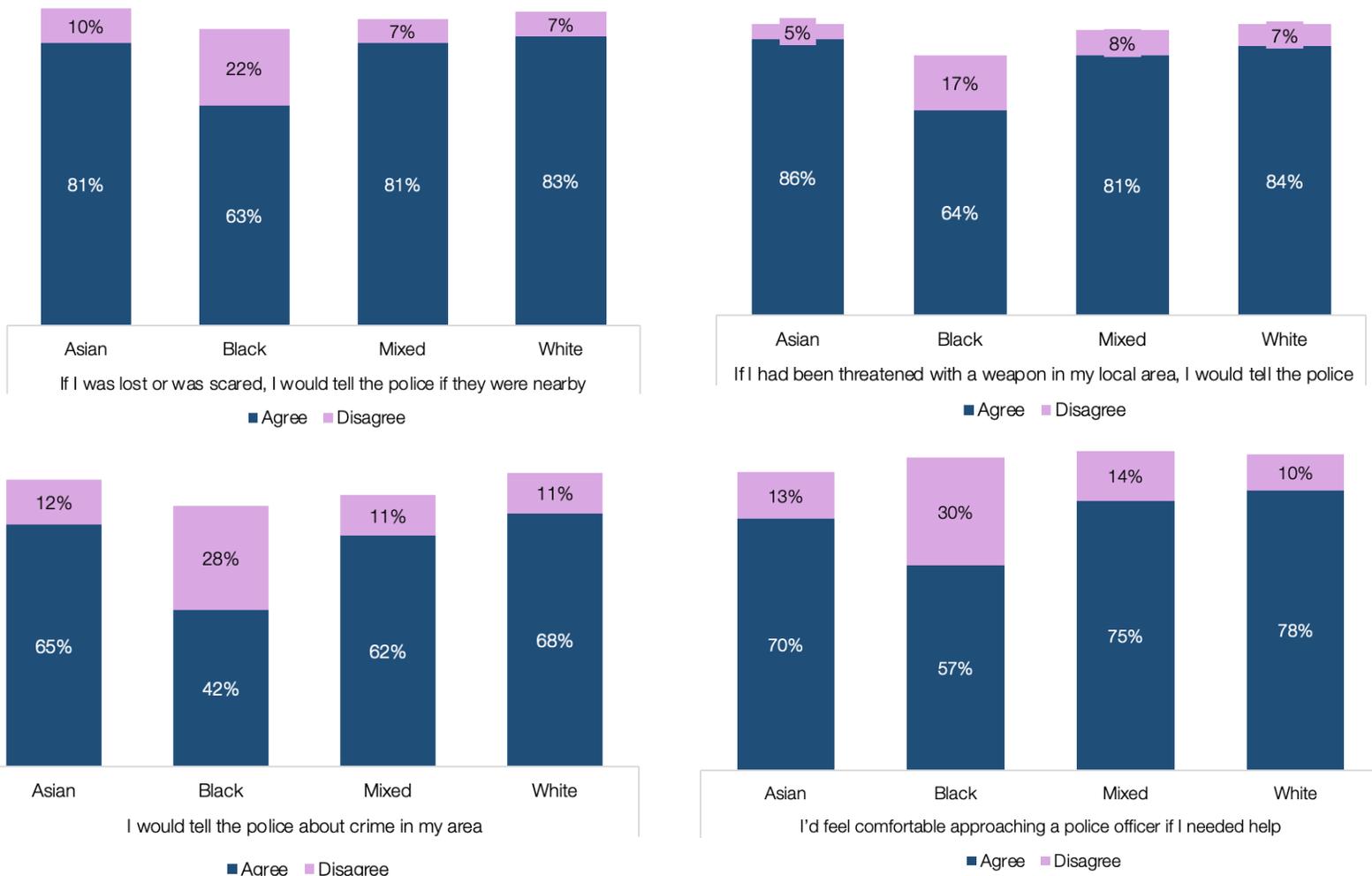
Within both our nationally representative adult and child surveys, people who had been stopped and searched were less likely to feel safe or safer around the police, than people who had not been stopped and searched. 62 per cent of children and 55 per cent of adults who had been stopped and searched felt safe or safer around the police compared to 73 per cent of children and 65 per cent of adults who had not been stopped and searched.

The impact on safeguarding

Black children's lack of trust and feeling of safety towards the police are likely to impact the ability of statutory authorities, including the police, to safeguard Black children from extra-familial harms⁴⁶. Less than two thirds of Black children said they would tell the police if they had been threatened with a weapon in their local area, and only 57 per cent said they felt comfortable approaching a police officer if they needed help.

Figure 14: Responses (split by ethnicity) to “What do you think about the following statements?”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree (grouped together); strongly disagree & slightly disagree (grouped together)



⁴⁶ Firmin, C., Wroe, L. W., Davis, J., Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, D., Morris, K. and Saar-Heiman, Y., (2021). *Building Safety Safeguarding black young men and boys in Lambeth*.

Across the four scenarios provided above (Figure 14), 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. Nearly 1 in 4 Black boys (24 per cent) said they would not tell the police if they had been threatened with a weapon in their local area compared to 13 per cent of Black girls and 7 per cent of White boys.

Seventeen per cent of all children who had been stopped and searched stated that they would not tell the police if they had been threatened with a weapon in their local area compared to 6 per cent of children who had not been stopped and searched.

Within our focus groups, children expressed that they were unsure whether they would, or could, go to the police if they needed help:

"Looking back at the history between like Black people and the police, like the origins of the slave catchers. I feel like that's why there's a lot of distrust amongst Black people for the police, because they're the authority but like, it's not authority for you, if that makes sense? It's more like, in pursuit of you, whether it's to go to jail, or like based on stereotypes for example"

Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

"When I'm in the presence of the police, I mostly, even if I'm a victim, I feel interrogated, instead of, you know, helped by the police. Which is mad because police in this country, it depends who you are, you know, they approach you differently depending on who you are. (...) Let's use my brother, for example. He is a Black male, young male in this country. If he was to call the police most times, they'll think he is the aggressor. They already kind of have an image of him."

Child Participant, Focus group 3, (aged 11 - 14)

Overall, findings from this chapter show that, while children generally have higher levels of trust in the police than adults do, Black children have lower levels of trust in the police than other children or Black adults. This indicates that Black children have a unique perspective on policing that is more negative than that of other children or adults. Findings from our focus groups show that children want to trust the police, but feel unable to due to concerns about racism and the use of stop and search. Additionally, a substantial number of Black children do not feel safe around the police, which raises safeguarding concerns over who and where children can go to for help if they find themselves a victim of extra-familial harm.

In most cases, children are likely to have had less lived experience with policing compared to adults, and the limited contact most children will have had is likely to have been police initiated,⁴⁷ for example through stop and search. While both adults and children were concerned about the use of stop and search in practice, for Black children, these concerns were amplified: most children within our focus groups and polling sample did not trust the police to treat people fairly or use stop and search fairly. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁷ Skarlatidou, A., Ludwig, L., Solymosi, R., & Bradford, B. (2021). *Understanding Knife Crime and Trust in Police with Young People in East London*. *Crime & Delinquency*, 0(0).

Chapter 2: Views on stop and search

The majority of children in our survey and focus groups demonstrated a high level of knowledge about stop and search as a police tactic, largely acquired at an early age through school, family, or friends. When asked about their views on stop and search, it is clear that a general understanding of children’s perceptions is impossible to derive; there is no consensus among ethnic groups as to whether children feel safer with the knowledge that the police are stopping and searching people in their area, whether they believe that the police use stop and search fairly, or whether they trust the police less because of what they know about the tactic.

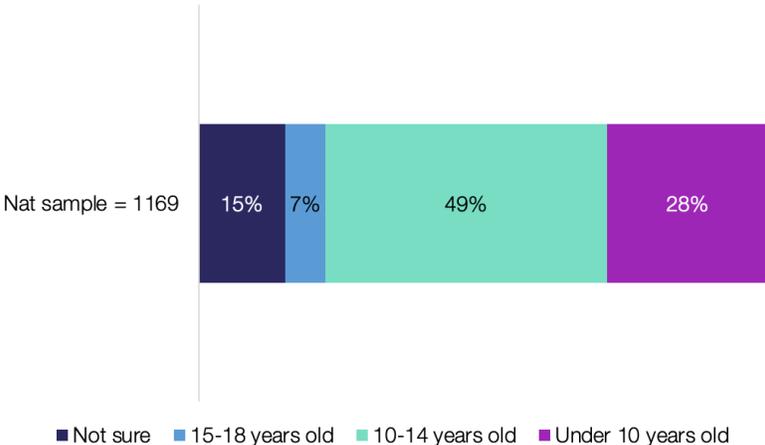
Compared to other children, Black children were far more sceptical of the ability of the police to treat people fairly regardless of their ethnicity. They were also less likely to feel safer with the knowledge that police are using stop and search. Black children were more likely to trust the police less because of what they know about the tactic as opposed to their White and Asian peers.

Knowledge of stop and search

Twenty two per cent of children surveyed said they did not know what stop and search is⁴⁸. For the 78 per cent of children who did, the practice was commonly defined using words and phrases such as “randomly”, “suspicious”, “drugs”, and “weapons”. Six children identified that searches must have reasonable grounds. In our survey, over three-quarters (77 per cent) of children reported that they were under 14-years-old when they first heard about stop and search, a rate relatively consistent across ethnic groups (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Responses to: How old were you when you remember first hearing about stop and search?

*Please tick the box that most applies.



Children were most likely to have first heard about stop and search through school (26 per cent),

⁴⁸ Based on free-text answers to: ‘In your own words, please describe what stop and search is’. Those that selected ‘I don’t know’ fell into this category.

family (20 per cent), and news outlets (14 per cent). Very few of our sample had first heard of stop and search through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram or Facebook/Messenger.

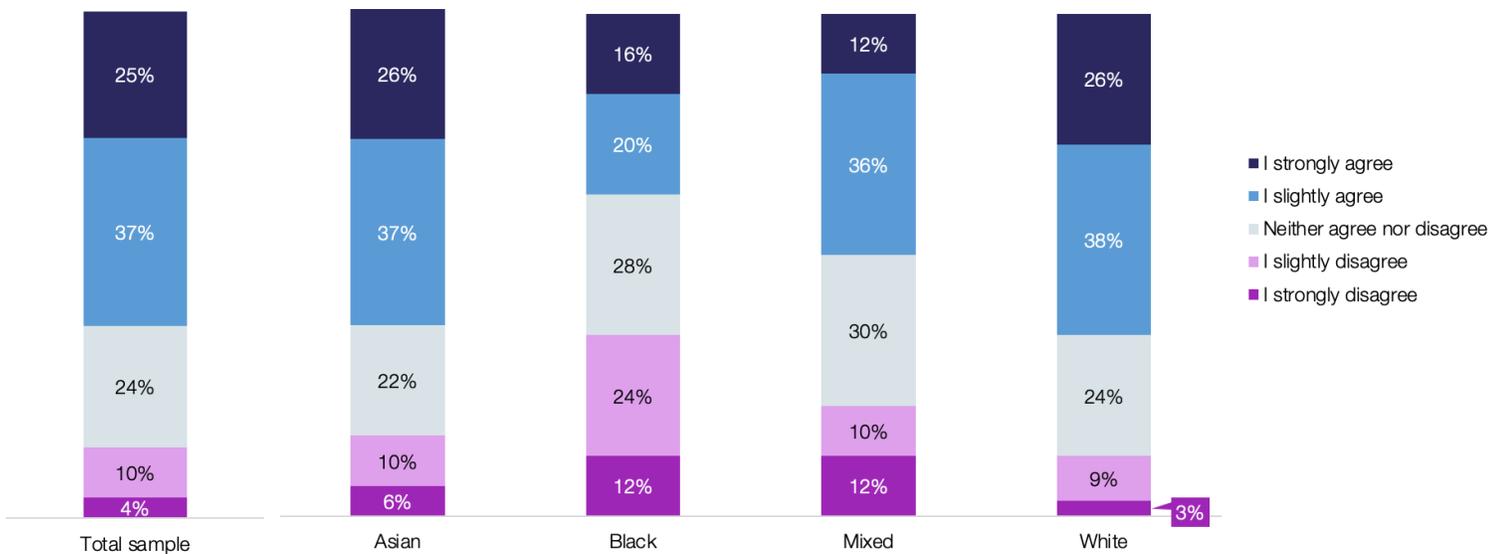
Views on stop and search

Views on stop and search and feelings of safety

The majority (62 per cent) of children agreed that knowing that the police are stopping and searching people in their area made them feel safer; however, this figure varies greatly by ethnicity. 64 per cent of White children reported that they feel safer with the knowledge that police are stopping and searching people in their area, compared to only 36 per cent of Black children (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Responses to “Knowing that the police are stopping and searching people in my area would make me feel safer”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree;; strongly disagree & slightly disagree

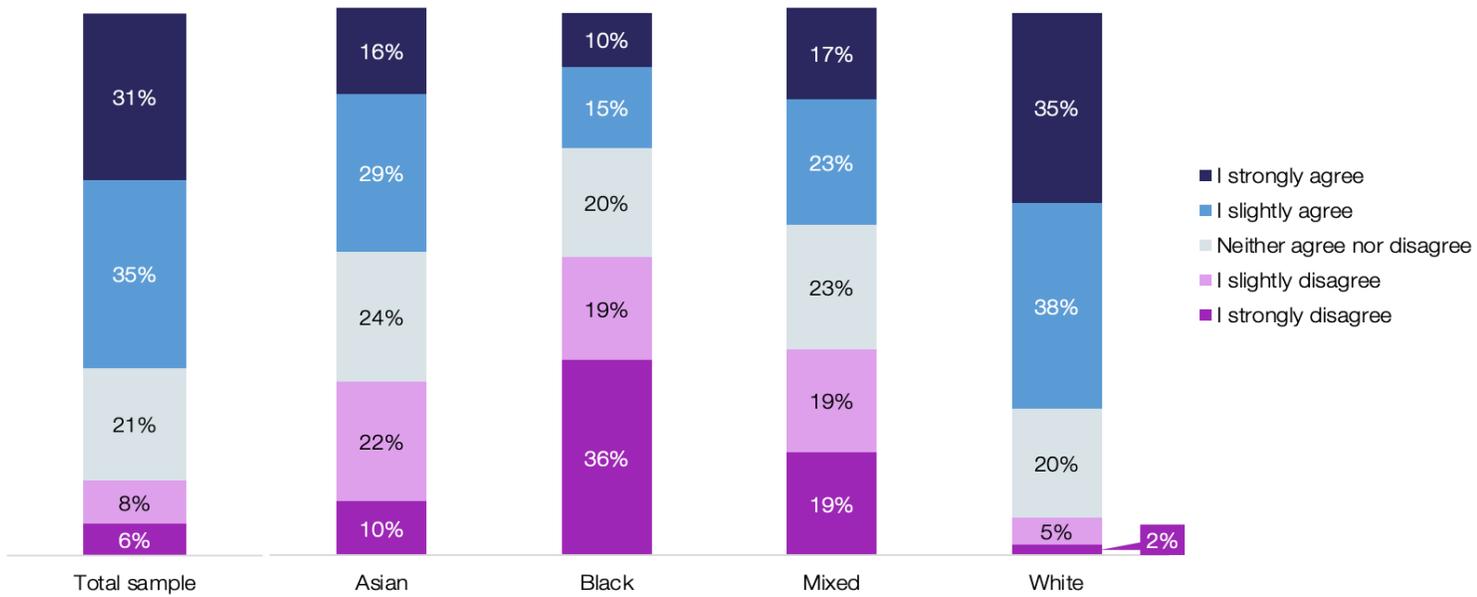


Trust that the police treat people fairly

While 66 per cent of our nationally representative sample of children strongly or slightly agreed that the police treat people from their background fairly, this number falls to 25 per cent for Black children (Figure 17). More Black children strongly disagreed (36 per cent) that the police treat people from their background fairly than they strongly or slightly agreed (25 per cent).

Figure 17: Responses to “The police treat people from my background fairly”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree;; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Children from our focus groups described their belief that while stop and search was a useful tactic in order to reduce or prevent crime, the racial disproportionality in its use renders it less effective:

"I think that overall, stop and search is a good thing. Because at the moment there's a lot of knife crime, there's a lot of unnecessary death. I feel like, if police are stopping and searching people, it's a good thing. but then at the same time, they get carried away with it, and then everyone they see is a potential gang member. And it's just not the case."

Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

"I think it is a good idea, stop and search. But I don't like the idea of like, assuming who is like the suspect and then realising that it's mostly just their ethnicity. Like it's their job, I get that. But like, even like, once you say (...) like they speak in an infantilising tone. You shouldn't do that, like speak formally."

Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

Several children also connected the use of stop and search to a potential increase in criminal behaviour, through worsening relationships between those who have been stopped and searched and the police, as well as the unnecessary escalation of stop and search encounters by the police.

"I think that the mission of the police and the goal of the police, which is to stop crime, that's a good thing. But the way that they go about it, especially in places like London, where you hear all these horror stories of how people have been treated by the police, that's just an entirely different thing to try and solve crime. If anything, at the end of the day [it] would cause more crime rather than less because people feel so scared of the police that they end up doing things outside of the law, and like try to disconnect themselves from it as much as possible."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"I find the way they talk to suspects really infantilising and patronising, and it's like if you're talking to someone in that manner, that's what you're gonna get, it's gonna escalate. And I feel like once you get to the escalation, it's like there's more charges piling, piling up. And it's like, you're just poking at them, like for fun."

Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

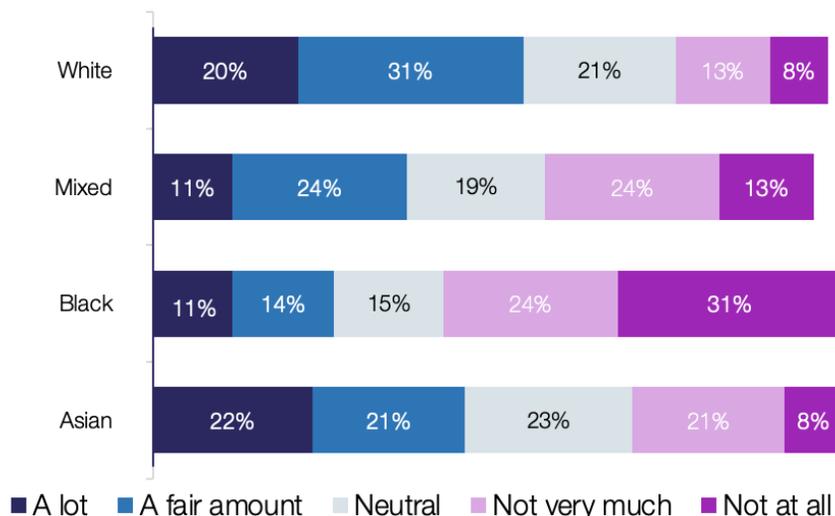
"Sometimes I feel like boys, they may be like, they give like attitude to it, which is understandable. It's like, you could have sometimes avoided that before a whole different thing happens. It's also not their fault, because they've seen this type of stuff, so it influences them to act that way."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Trust that the police use stop and search fairly

Within our survey, Black children had substantially less trust than other children in the police to stop and search people fairly. Only 25 per cent of Black children trusted the police to stop and search people fairly, compared to 51 per cent of White children. Over half of Black children (55 per cent) did not trust the police to use stop and search fairly (Figure 18). These findings were consistent for both Black boys and girls, as well as for Black African or Caribbean children.

Figure 18: Responses (split by ethnicity) to: How much do you trust the police to stop and search people fairly *A lot & a fair amount; neutral; not very much & not at all



In our focus groups, children discussed how stop and search is carried out by the police in their local area, and whether they believed it was being used fairly. Several children felt it was better for the police to stop and search people if they did it with reasonable grounds, (and it had an impact on reducing crime) rather than repeatedly searching the same people with no clear reason for doing so:

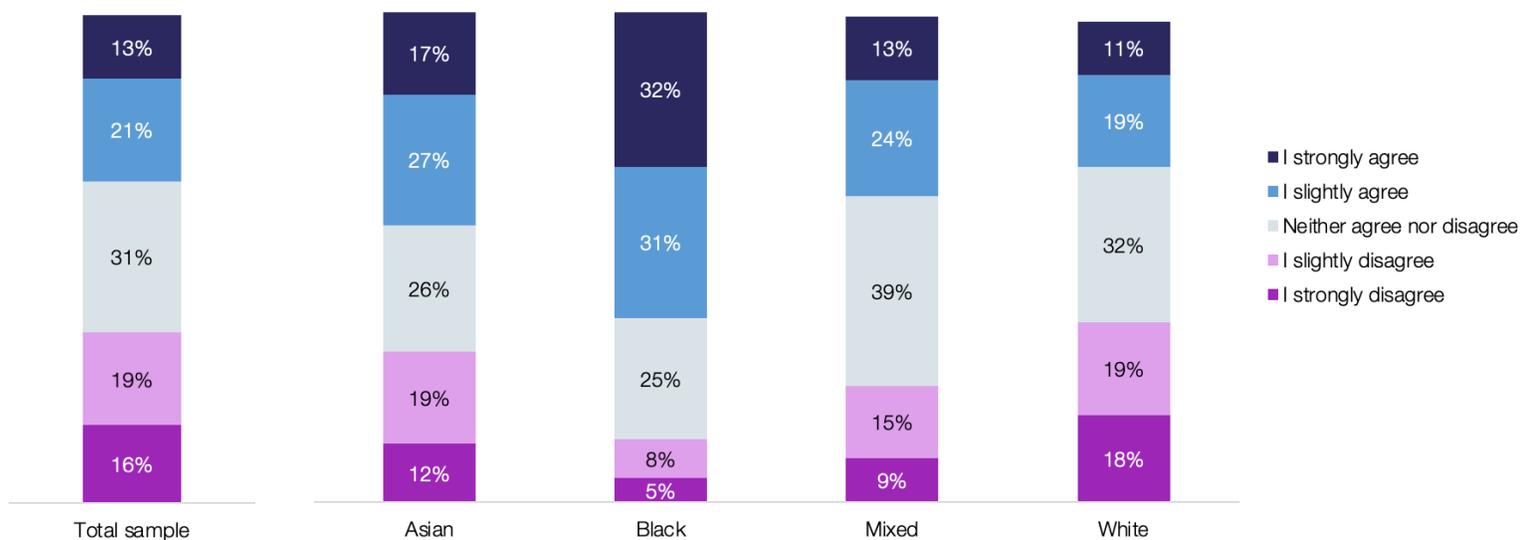
"(...) if they [the police] are doing their job, of course. Like, it's better than you actually having drugs and they don't stop and search you (...) They at least have a goal, right? At least if it's quick, not like hey let me search you more than once in the same area."
 Child Participant, Focus group 1, (ages 10 - 17)

"I don't see the problem people have with stop and search, I feel like it's normal but it's like... it could be for no reason sometimes but you never know who has what (...) they should take the chance and do the stop and search. I think it's better to do that than complain about it"
 Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

Knowledge of stop and search and trust in the police

Over one-third (34 per cent) of the total sample felt that what they knew about stop and search had made them trust the police less (Figure 19). When broken down by ethnicity, it is clear that knowledge and perceptions of stop and search have eroded the trust of Black children the most, where 63 per cent of Black children agreed that they trusted the police less, compared with 44 per cent of Asian children, 37 per cent of Mixed ethnicity children and 30 per cent of White children.

Figure 19: Responses to “What I know about stop and search has made me trust the police less”



"I don't trust the police, but like if I see that they stop targeting us, they've targeted people that are actually doing these things, then the people who are innocent will trust them"

Child Participant, Focus group 1, (ages 10 - 17)

"I feel like, they obviously started stop and search because knife crime was going on in the streets, it was a big thing that's going on. And the stop and search was initially to take knives off the street, to take weapons off the street. I feel like it's just turned into a whole other thing at this point, it's just stopping and searching any Black boy that they see (...) If they had stayed on track for what they were trying to do, which is take the knives off the street, I feel like less boys would be abused by the police. Less boys would be interrogated."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Overall, our findings indicate that Black children have far more negative perceptions of stop and search than White and Asian children. Black children feel less safe as a result of its practice, do not believe that they are treated as fairly, and trust the police less based on their knowledge of stop and search. While there is some support for the use of stop and search powers among Black children, our focus group findings indicate that this trust is curtailed predominantly by perceptions of the racial disproportionality of its application.

Chapter 3: Experiences of stop and search

Type and frequency of stop and search experiences

From our survey of 101 children that had been stopped and searched, and focus groups, our findings indicate that children’s experiences of stop and search are similar to those of adults. Over one quarter of all children believed that they were not treated with respect (27 per cent), nor were their rights sufficiently communicated by the police officer during their stop and search (25 per cent). Over half of all children found their experience of being stopped and searched traumatic (50 per cent), humiliating, and embarrassing (52 per cent).

Similarly to our adult sample, Black and Mixed ethnicity children reported having more negative experiences of stop and search compared with White children. Unlike our adult sample, however, White children were slightly more likely to have found the experience traumatic (48 per cent) than Black children (45 per cent) (Figure 20), indicating that the potential long term impact of stop and searches on children from all ethnic groups should be recognised.

Due to our limited sample size of children who have been stopped and searched (70 White children, 20 Black children, and 8 Mixed ethnicity children), when broken down by ethnicity, the findings from this chapter should be taken only as reflections of the experiences of the children in our sample, not indicative of broader trends in children of a particular ethnic group’s experiences of stop and search (Figure 20.) The total sample breakdowns (n=92) do not include ethnicity-boosted data and can therefore be considered nationally representative.

Figure 20: Ethnic and gender breakdown of ‘yes’ responses to ‘Have you ever been stopped and searched by the police’.

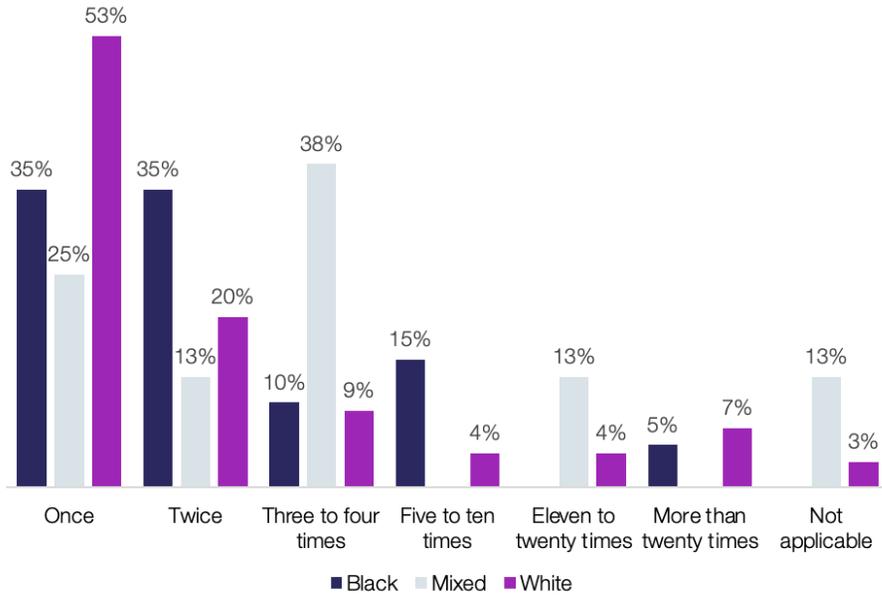
Breakdown of stop and search by gender and ethnicity	Female-Asian	Female-Black	Female-Mixed	Female-Other	Female-White	Male-Asian	Male-Black	Male-Mixed	Male-Other	Male-White	Non-binary-White
Total: 101	1	7	4	1	20	1	13	4	0	49	1

Within our boosted sample, 20 per cent of Black children had been stopped and searched, compared with 13 per cent of Mixed ethnicity children, 6 per cent of White children, and 2 per cent of Asian children. Over half (55 per cent) of children in our nationally representative sample who had been stopped and searched also had friends or relatives who had been stopped and searched.

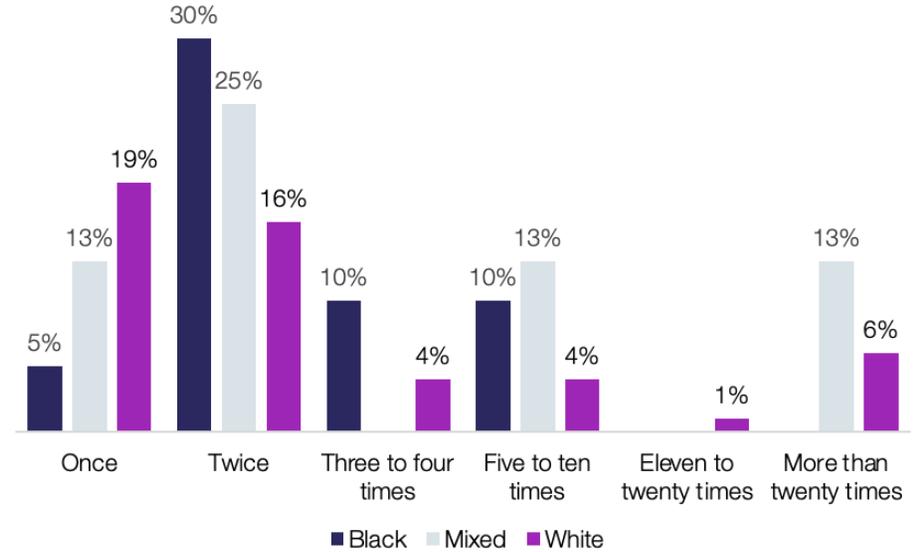
Thirty eight children had been strip-searched while in police custody, and seven of these children were Black. Out of the 38 children, six reported having been strip-searched by the police more than ten times, while two children stated they had been strip-searched in police custody more than twenty times. 36 children had been strip-searched in another location (for example, a police van), and six of these children were Black (Figure 20).

Figure 21: Responses to: Please tick all of the following statements that apply to you.

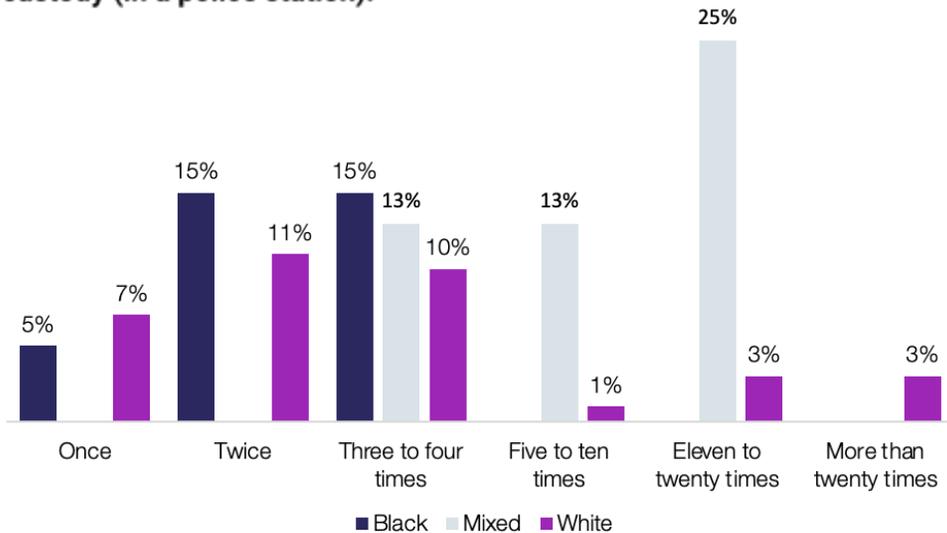
Q: I have been stopped and searched in the street:



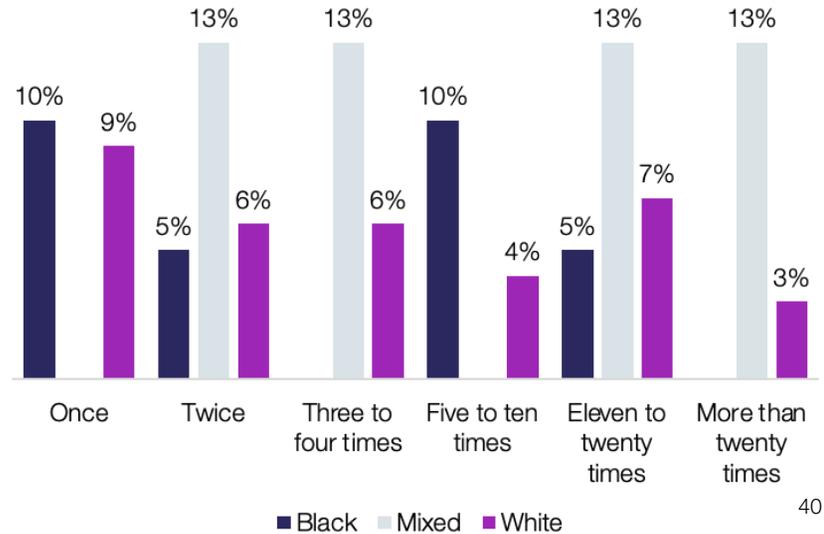
Q: I have been stopped and searched in a vehicle



Q: I have been strip-searched (removing clothes) in police custody (in a police station):



Q: I have been strip-searched (removing clothes) in another location (e.g. a police van):



One child in our focus groups described having been subjected to the use of force during a stop and search, where a large group of officers drew their Conducted Energy Devices⁴⁹ on the child despite their display of full cooperation. The child was subsequently strip searched, and lacked a clear understanding of the grounds for the search:

"So I was coming back from tuition. I was walking down the road. And I pulled up my trousers. I just readjusted my trousers. And then all I hear is a shout. I turn around, and there's a police van. I don't think anything of it. I keep walking. And then the police van pulls up alongside me. And then it's like five people in the van just come out. They were holding tasers at me, they said 'oh, don't move. Don't move. Put your hands up'. I'm thinking, what is going on? I don't know what I've done. (...) And then they're like, 'Oh, we think you've put something in your trousers or in your waistband. Have you done that?' I said no. One of the guys, one of the police officers, they were fine. He was reading me my rights. The other guy was like 'is it weed? Is it weed? If it's weed, we can let you off because we're not looking for that.' I was like, 'I don't have either of those on me, I just came back from tuition'. I didn't have my bag on me, 'if I had my bag I could show you my books because I just came back from tuition'. They said 'we're gonna have to pat you down'. They took me into a van, took off my Jordans. They creased my Jordans, looking for stuff. I was like, what is going on?"

Child Participant, Focus group 2 (ages 14 - 16)

Use of force and positive outcomes during stops and searches

17 per cent of our nationally representative sample of children said that when they were stopped, the police had found the item that they said they were looking for (Figure 22). 32 per cent reported that they had been handcuffed during their stop and search, even when they felt like they were complying with the officer's instructions and not hindering the search (Figure 23).

Figure 22: Responses to "When you have been searched, did the police find the item/object they told you they were looking for?"

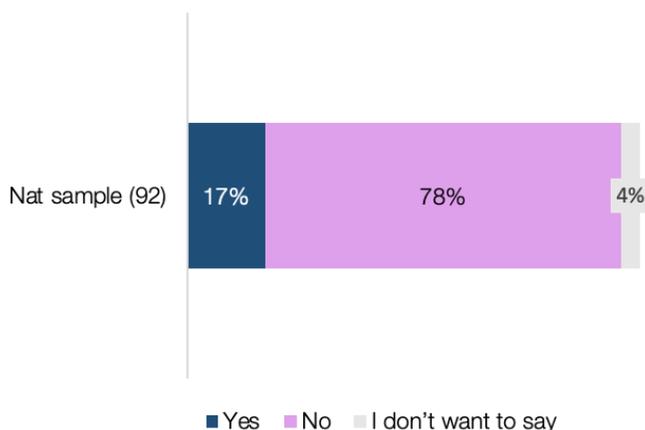
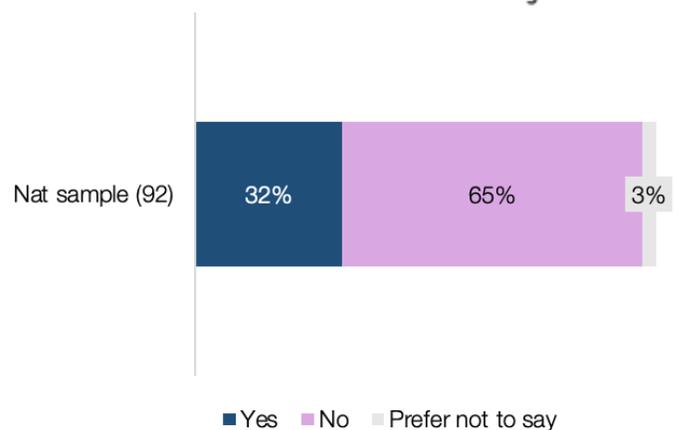


Figure 23: Responses to "Have you ever been handcuffed during a stop and search, even when you felt you were complying with the officer's instructions and were not hindering the search?"



⁴⁹ A less-lethal weapon "designed to temporarily incapacitate a subject through use of an electrical current that temporarily interferes with the body's neuromuscular system and produces a sensation of intense pain", i.e. a TASER™ CED.

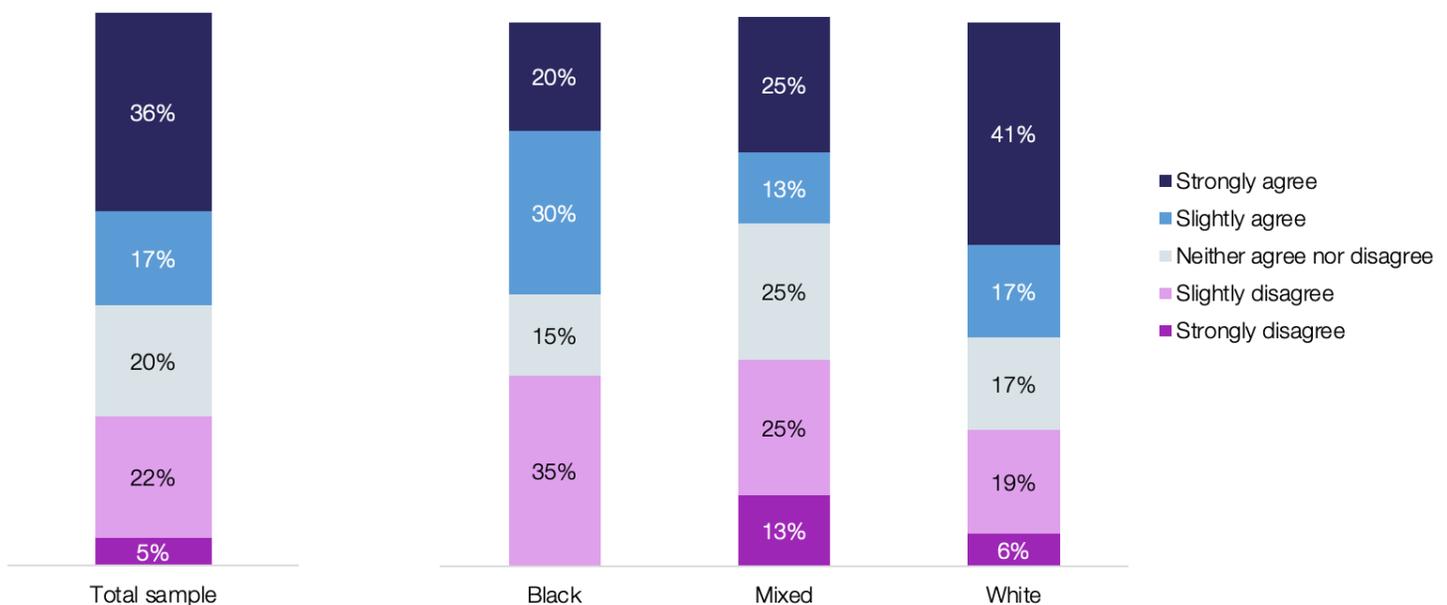
Quality of stop and searches

Disrespectful conduct from police officers during stop and search experiences

Over half (53 per cent) of all children who had been stopped and searched, felt they had been treated with respect by police officers during the search. 27 per cent of children who had been stopped and searched believed that they had not been treated with respect during the search. When broken down by ethnicity, this rises to 35 per cent for Black children, and 38 per cent for Mixed ethnicity children (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Responses to “The police officers treated me with respect during the search”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Children in our focus groups also described feeling disrespected by the approach of and communication during stop and search encounters:

"I came back from football, and the police were searching my house. Obviously I had a bag, so they came over and started searching me and going through my bags, and thought that I had like, drugs (...) Afterwards they explained. (...) I felt like not good, they did not have a warrant. And they were actually being really rude as well, there was a police officer screaming in my face."

Child Participant, Focus group 1, (ages 10 - 17)

Lack of professionalism

When asked about whether the police officers searching them had been professional during the stop and search, 49 per cent of all children believed that the officer who stopped them had been unprofessional, rising to 76 per cent for Mixed ethnicity children. This is compared to 50 per cent of

Black children and 40 per cent of White children, who believed that the officer who had stopped and searched them had behaved unprofessionally.

Across our focus groups, several children discussed their perceptions and experiences of police officers treating people in an arrogant, aggressive, and unprofessional manner:

"There's almost like an arrogance in the police. And it's almost like, we're going to, we don't have to talk to you properly, we're going to talk at you, not to you. Sometimes it's almost like a wind up as well."
 Child Participant, Focus group 2, (ages 14 - 16)

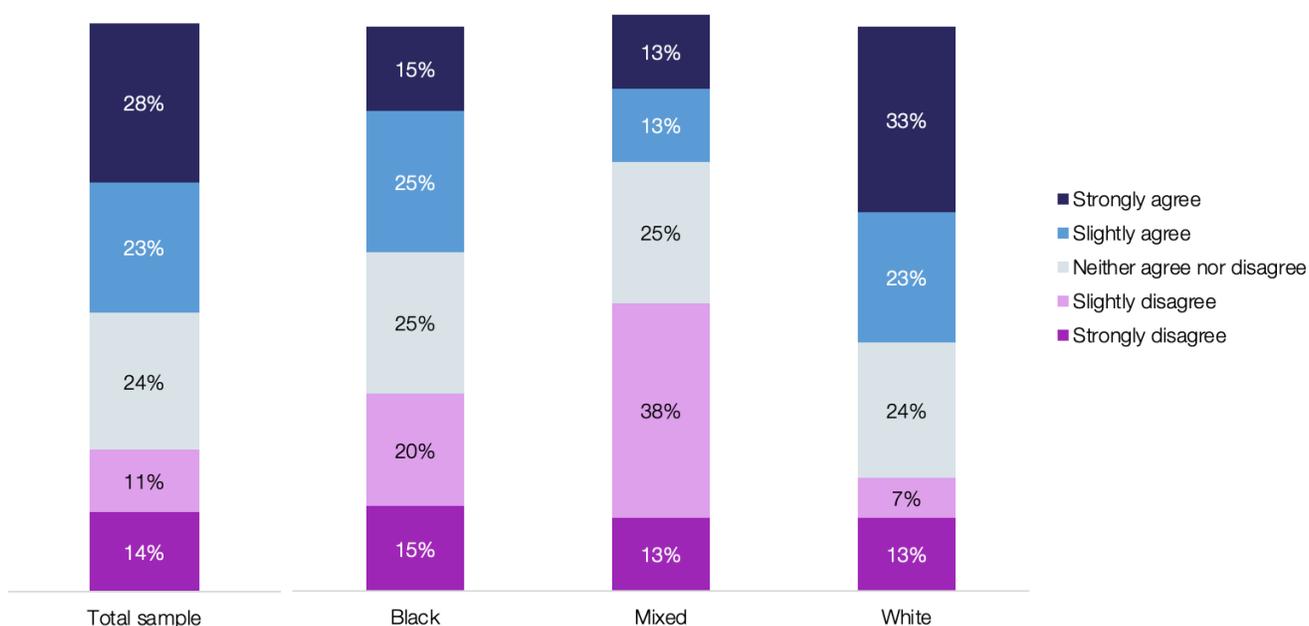
"I feel like the police should just change the way they approach these young men. Sometimes you ask these young men when they first got stopped and searched, and they'll be like oh I got stopped and searched when I was nine, which is crazy. And the way the police approach this nine year old is just like very, very unprofessional. So obviously if you change the way you approach young men, maybe they got stopped and searched like for the third time, their approach to you will be different as well."
 Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Poor communication during searches

Just over half (51 per cent) of children who had been stopped and searched believed that the officers had properly explained their rights to them. This proportion was lowest among Mixed children, where only 26 per cent believe they had had their rights properly explained to them, and highest among White children (56 per cent) (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Responses to “The police officers properly explained my rights to me”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Similarly, 67 per cent of children reported that they did not have a clear understanding of why they were being stopped. This finding was relatively consistent for both Black and White children however, of the 8 Mixed ethnicity children who were stopped and searched, all 8 agreed that they did not have a clear understanding why.

It's important to note here, that when asked if the officer had explained to them why they were being stopped, the majority of children (63 per cent) agreed that they had received an explanation, and this was consistent for both Black and White children. This highlights that while the majority of children did receive an explanation from the police officer searching them as to why they were being searched, that they still did not understand the reason for the search. This lack of understanding on why they were searched can affect how children feel during the encounter.

One child in our focus groups highlighted the difference that transparent communication around why officers were searching a person would make to the experience of being searched:

"I don't know if there's a right reason, but I know that there should be a right way of going about it. I think that you should, before you even like lay your hands on them, I think that you should explain the reason why you've decided to search them, explain that if that area is in a certain like section, whatever. Don't just like oh, like put your hands in the air, because it's automatically like criminalising and like you've done something wrong and I suspect you of doing something, when if you like lay out the reasons behind your thinking, then maybe the person that is a victim of it won't be as upset because they have some understanding of why they may think the way that they're thinking."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Another child in our focus groups described an interaction with a police officer who had stopped and questioned the child and their group of friends, but refused to answer the child's questions about the grounds for the stop:

"It was during Eid (...) Apparently someone burgled into a house. So my friends are coming back, it's dark as well because it finished late, we're coming back from the mosque. And he just comes up to us, says 'oh, you guys are looking suspicious. Where have you been?' We told him, we went to the mosque and we came out. And then he was like, 'oh, we just want to talk to you'. 'Sir, am I being detained?' He said, 'well, if you carry on talking in such a rude tone that you'll be going home in the back of a police car'. I said 'but you're not answering my question. Am I being detained?' He said (...) 'If you carry on, you will be.' And I just walked away and he didn't do anything."

Child Participant, Focus group 2 (ages 14 - 16)

The impact of being stopped and searched

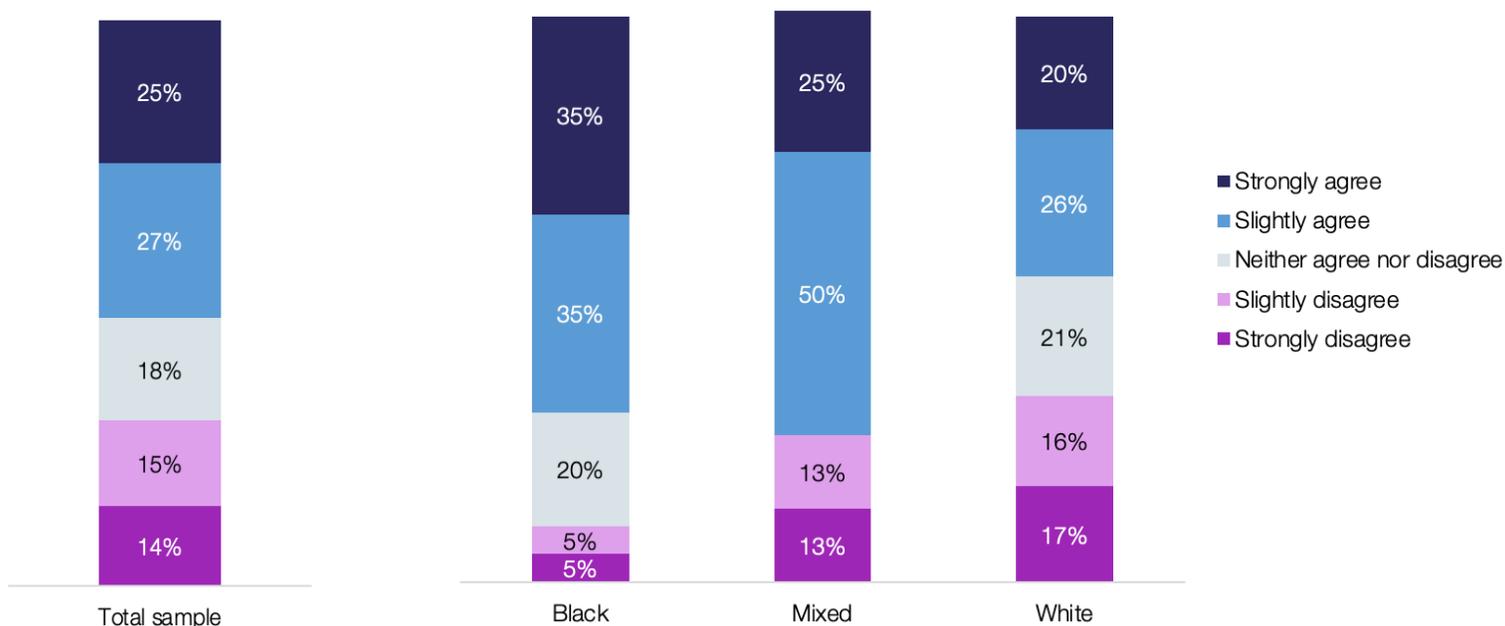
Humiliating and traumatic experiences of being searched

We asked children who had been stopped and searched about the impact of being searched. Over half (52 per cent) of children found the experience humiliating and embarrassing. When broken

down by ethnicity, Mixed ethnicity children had felt humiliated and embarrassed the most (75 per cent), followed by Black children (70 per cent), and White children (46 per cent) (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Responses to “The experience of being searched made me feel humiliated and embarrassed”

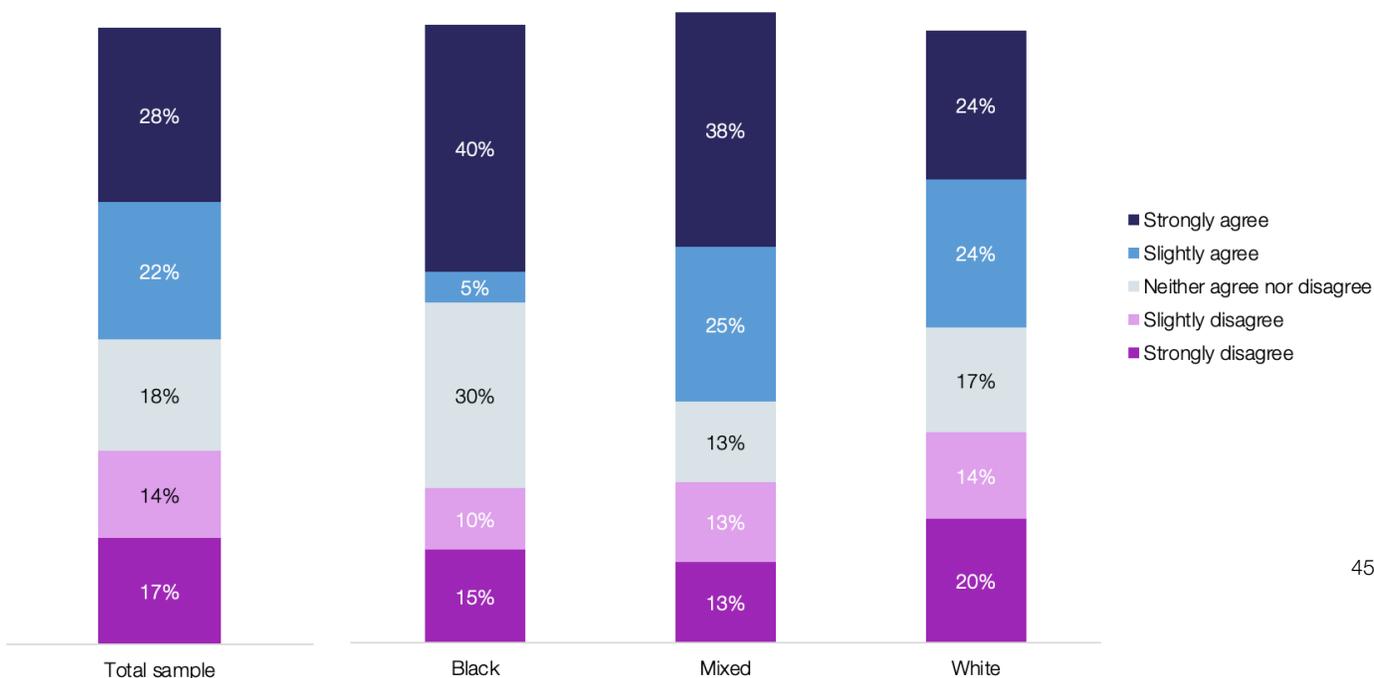
*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



A similar proportion of children who had been stopped and searched found the experience traumatic (50 per cent), a finding relatively consistent across Black (45 per cent) and White (48 per cent) children, while 63 per cent of Mixed children reported feeling traumatised (Figure 27). Comparing the total nationally representative samples, children were 5 per cent more likely to have found the experience of being stopped and searched traumatising than adults.

Figure 27: Responses to “The experience of being searched was traumatic”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Similarly, several children from our focus groups described traumatic experiences of being stopped and searched at a young age, while others reflected on the experiences of their family members.

"My cousin said, because he was quite young, he was only 12. He said it was quite traumatising, he was just trying to go home. Because he was by himself. He was trying to go home. He wasn't doing anything, and getting stopped and searched, of course, having nothing on him, it's quite traumatising for somebody just trying to get home peacefully."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"Stopped outside of school in front of lots of peers. Now have anxiety due to the embarrassing situation"

Survey respondent (Child)

"It made me feel angry and made me see the police in a different light. I felt the police were only using the Stop and Search rule to victimise and harass me and my friends just because some of my friends are Black."

Survey respondent (Child)

As well as direct negative experiences, stop and searches observed through social media were also described as traumatic, to the point where some children felt desensitised to the trauma of watching media content. Several children said they would frequently see Snapchat videos of young Black men and boys being stopped and searched with force, or where they perceived that the search had been conducted without reasonable grounds, and that the individual searched had experienced racism from the police:

"There's a thing where I see it so often, it's just like, it becomes a normal part of your life. You see on social media a lot, especially on Snapchat, mostly Black males posting them getting stopped and searched. I have a lot of friends that've been stopped and searched. And they don't really like the police, obviously, because they've been interrogated by them many times. I just feel like their experience being stopped and searched has been very negative."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"I feel like there should be more like times reported to people where police are actually helping young Black boys. And so it's put more on like things like Snapchat and stuff. Because most of the time people are hearing it from Snapchat, and most of the time it's like, oh RIP this person because they've been hurt by the police or something."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Children across focus groups believed that officers are unaware of the trauma that people, especially Black children, who have been stopped and searched can experience. Many pointed to adultification as a cause of this disregard, where officers believe young Black boys to be more emotionally resilient than they are. No child shared a direct or indirect experience of stop and

search where an officer had apologised for the inconvenience, or acknowledged the potential discomfort of the encounter:

"I feel like sometimes these police officers, they think, I think more times they think these boys, (...) should be able to get through it. And they've been through it already, this shouldn't be too hard for them. So when they stop and search them, they use all this aggression, because they feel like these boys should be fine with it. But they don't understand that this actually affects boys, affects these young Black men. I don't think they're understanding of the impact they have."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"They don't really think about what sort of trauma they're gonna deal with here on, and it's kind of embarrassing. Like, I must have been on the bus one time. And it was in like [redacted], and there was like bare policemen around just for like, one single person. And it's kinda like, it questions, how do you feel threatened, when you go to the person and you suspect them or something, and you bring out all these people, and the next thing you know, they don't have anything on them. Like no apology, nothing, you just walk away and that person has to deal with that trauma, which sadly, sometimes leads to stuff happening to them. So I feel like they're very careless with it."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"I also feel that like, they are quite insensitive, they don't really understand what that can do to someone. Like, for example, I think I was coming back home. And like I said, I live in a bigger estate and on the other side of this estate, was a man literally like two metres away from his door, about to come back home, gets stopped and searched by two police officers just driving past in a police car. And then he's like, I've got to get home, I've got to do this, I have children. Meanwhile, he's like, on the verge of tears with his arms in the air, can't do anything. And I feel like they don't understand what that can do to someone. And they just do it sort of as they please. They don't think about, like the effects of what they do."

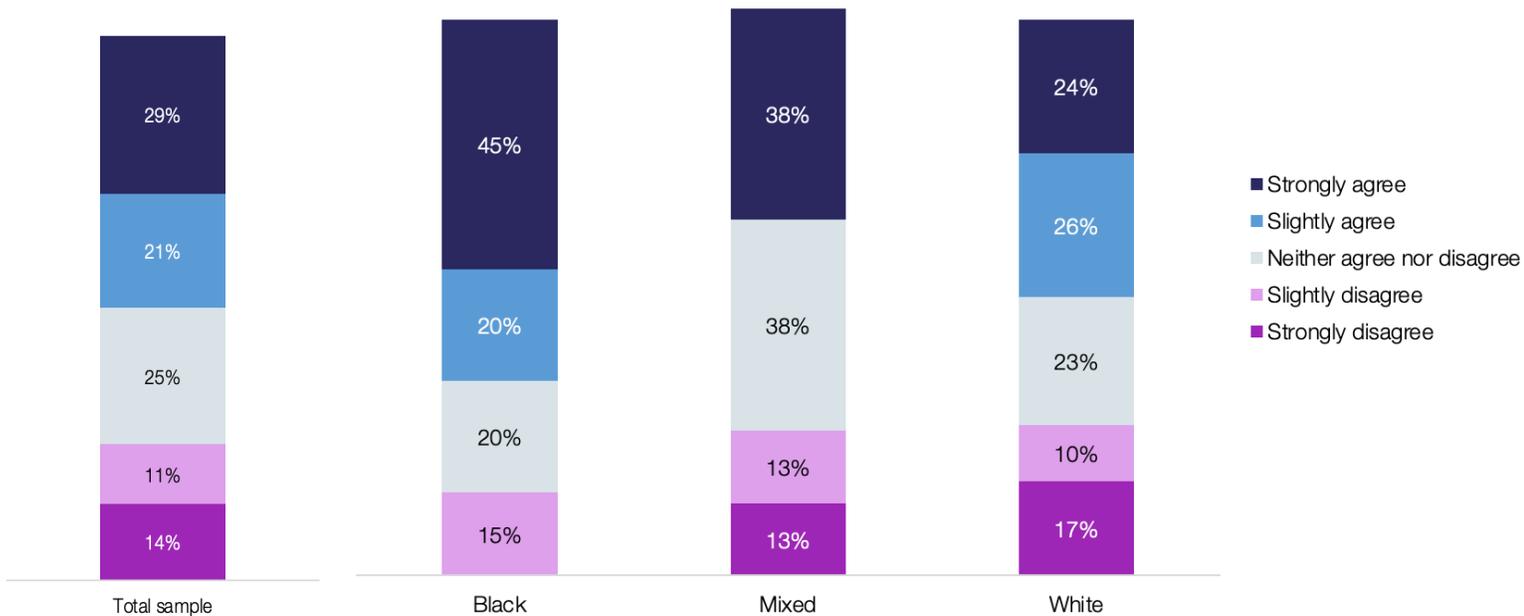
Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

The impact of being searched on children's trust in the police

Being stopped and searched had a clear impact on children's trust and confidence in policing; 50 per cent of children believed that they trust the police less after their experience of being stopped and searched (65 per cent of Black children, 50 per cent of White children, and 38 per cent of Mixed ethnicity children) (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Responses to “The experience of being searched has made me trust the police less”

*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Children across the focus groups described the impact of direct or indirect experiences of stop and search on their trust in the police. One child highlighted the isolating consequences of the normalisation and desensitisation to stop and searches, where Black children may subsequently feel unsupported by and unsafe around the police:

"I was coming out of the shop. And the policeman said, 'come out of the shop' and then the police guy went all the way around and came back and stopped me and said when I came out of the shop, I put something in my pocket. Yeah, I came out of the shop? You took that as a reason to search. I felt so violated, I was thinking this ain't right. But if I do anything, they're gonna say I'm violent (...) Then what happened halfway through it, they were on the radio, and then they're like okay bye and just went. I was like oh, wait a minute. You just done what you did and then went off like that. It's so wrong, but there was no one to complain to, no one at all. I thought, next time be more prepared. Like at least save the pain. Let's at least educate myself."

Child Participant, Focus group 2 (ages 14 - 16)

"I feel like with that, people, especially young, vulnerable people are getting stopped and searched more and more for the wrong reasons. Especially, you've seen how they like to pick out Black people, young Black men, young Black women. And not only is it really wrong, but it can really hurt someone. When it gets to a point where it gets normalised then that can sort of damage the reputation of the police a lot. And it can make people feel unsafe, and like they've got no one to go to."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Findings from both the focus groups and the survey suggest that a large proportion of children across all ethnic groups who had been stopped and searched did not experience effective communication or respect from police officers. An even greater number of children reported experiencing lasting negative effects of the search, including long-term impacts on trust in the police.

Despite experiencing a generally higher quality of communication and respectfulness from officers during stop and searches, White children were slightly more likely to report having felt traumatised by the interaction. This may, in part, be a product of desensitisation in Black children, as a coping response for frequent negative police encounters, where experiences become normalised as a result of an increased frequency of witnessing, or being subject to these negative encounters with the police.⁵⁰ This response is well-documented, and a previous review of literature found that Black boys may be less likely to consider the resultant effects a mental health issue, and may instead opt to minimise the impacts of the experience in order to better cope.⁵¹

Results from our adult survey show that the trauma associated with being stopped and searched can linger, continuing to affect adults long after their experience. This trauma can have lasting impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of adults and children. Adults in both the adult survey and focus groups frequently discussed the exchange of this trauma across social circles, families, and generations, through telling the story of their experience, or providing warnings in light of this experience.

Further research is needed in this area to understand the lasting negative impact stop and search has on the mental health of children. It is clear, however, that negative direct and indirect experiences of stop and search –at least in part– contribute to lower levels of trust among children in policing more generally.

⁵⁰ Jindal, M. et al. (2022) *Police Exposures and the Health and Well-being of Black Youth in the US: A Systematic Review*. *JAMA Pediatr.*, 176(1):78-88.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

Chapter 4: Disproportionality and racism

This chapter focuses on disproportionality, and explores findings from our polling and focus groups with children. Less than half of all children from ethnic minority backgrounds trust the police to treat people fairly, regardless of their background, and all children, regardless of ethnicity, are more likely to agree than disagree that the police unfairly target Black communities.

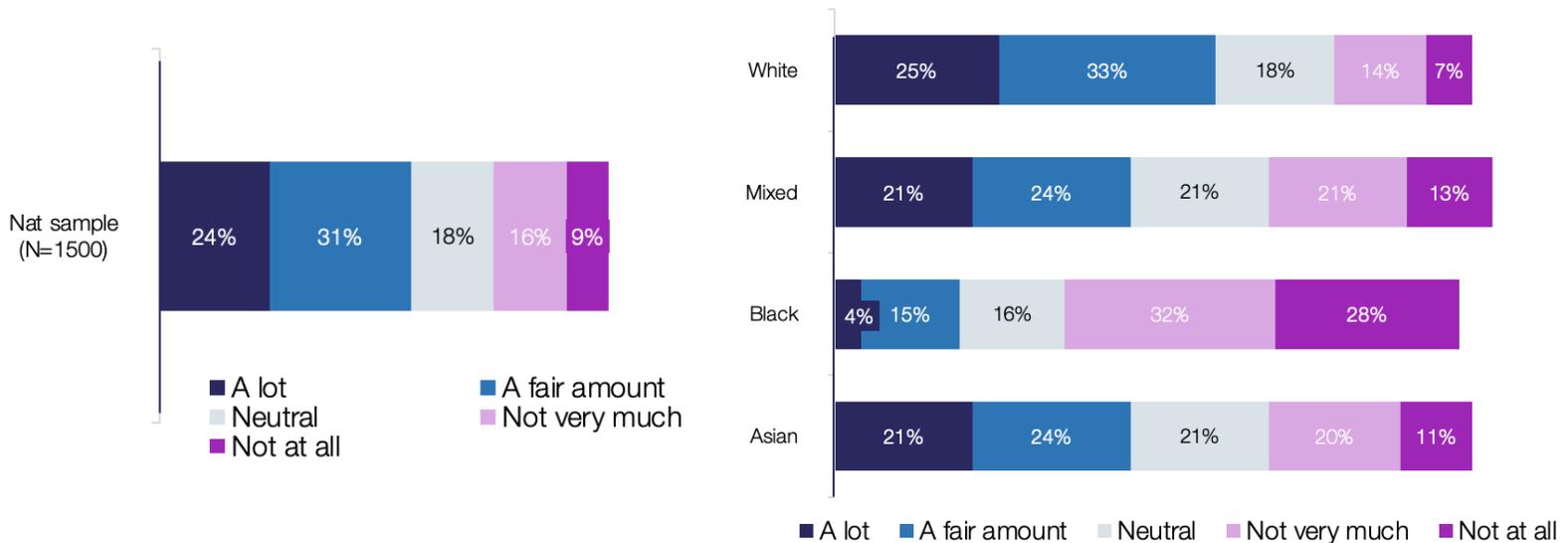
Views on disproportionality and stop and search

Within our nationally representative sample, just over half of all children (55 per cent) were confident that the police would treat people fairly, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Black children had even less trust that the police would treat people fairly: only 19 per cent of Black children (21 per cent of Black African children and 19 per cent of Black Caribbean children) trusted the police to treat people fairly regardless of background, compared to 60 per cent of those who did not. Black boys were more likely to trust the police to treat people fairly (24 per cent) than Black girls (17 per cent) (Figure 29).

Trust that the police will treat people fairly

Figure 29: Responses (split by ethnicity) to “How much do you trust the police to to treat people fairly, regardless of race, religion or ethnic background”

*A lot & a fair amount; neutral; not very much & not at all

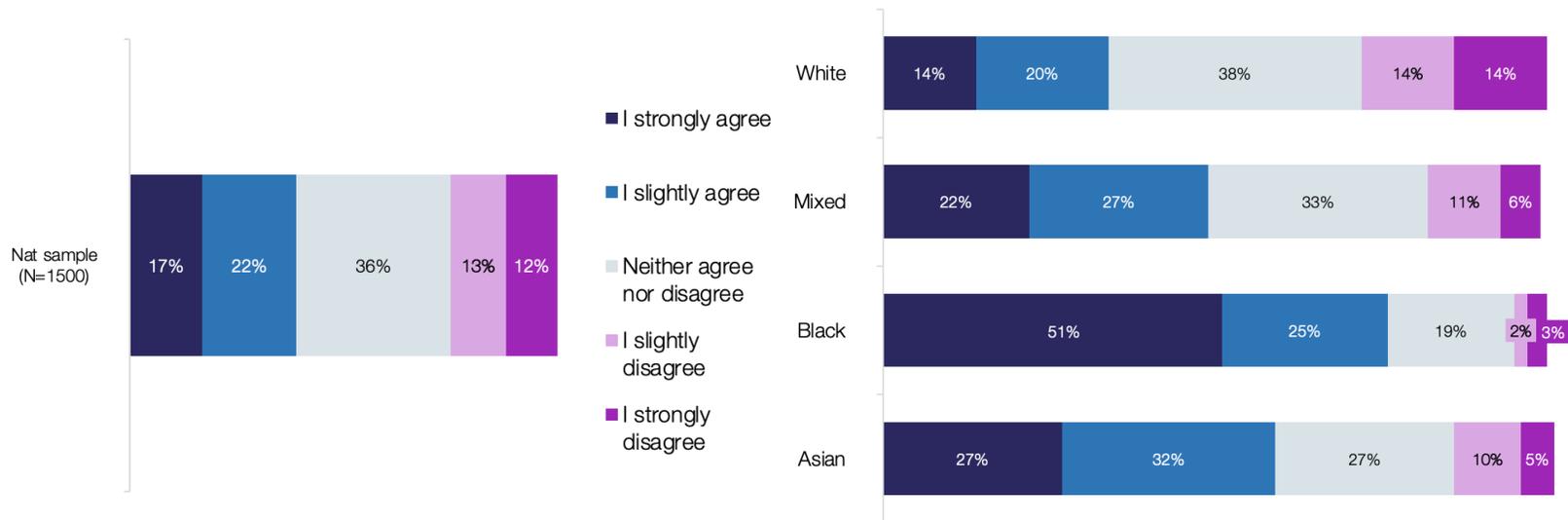


By contrast, in our nationally representative sample, more children agree (39 per cent) than disagree (25 per cent) that the police unfairly target Black communities. When broken down by ethnicity, 76 per cent of Black children agreed that the police unfairly target Black communities, compared with 35 per cent of White children⁵² (Figure 30).

⁵² 34.9 per cent of White children agreed that “The police unfairly target Black communities”. This has been rounded up to 35 per cent.

Figure 30: Responses (split by ethnicity) to “The police unfairly target Black communities”

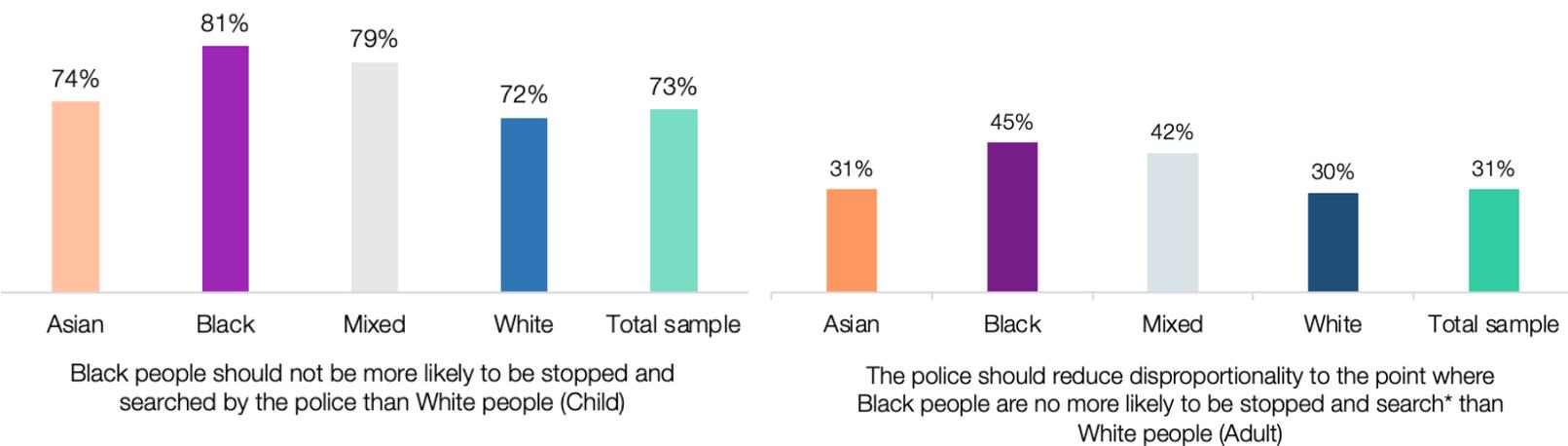
*Strongly agree & slightly agree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly disagree & slightly disagree



Tackling racial disproportionality in stop and search

Within our survey, children were given the opportunity to select different ways in which the use of stop and search could be improved. The options provided within the polling were informed by themes from our focus groups with both adults and children.⁵³ These options will be discussed in more detail within our recommendations report. Within our survey, 73 per cent of children agreed that the police should address racial disproportionalities in the use of stop and search (Figure 31).

Figure 31: What should the police do to improve the way they deal with people around stop and search? (Adult / Child)



⁵³As part of a series of options given in response to the question “What should the police do to improve the way they deal with people around stop and search?”, adults were given the following statement: The police should reduce disproportionality to the point where Black people are no more likely to be stopped and searched than White people. Children were given the following statement: Black people should not be more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than White people.

While both adults and children are concerned about disproportionality in the use of stop and search, children are substantially more likely to think that the use of stop and search powers would be improved if this disproportionality was addressed. Across all ethnicities, 73 per cent of children believe that addressing racial disproportionality in the use of stop and search would improve it, compared to 31 per cent of adults (Figure 31).

Children who were surveyed were given the option to add free text comments about what they believed would be needed to reform or improve the use of stop and search powers. For many, addressing racial disproportionality in the use of stop and search was a key priority:

“The system needs changing to ensure that stop and searches aren’t carried out in racist ways”
Survey respondent (Child)

“Stop unfairly targeting Black people”
Survey respondent (Child)

“They should be aware of racism and not only target people of colour. Get facts first and then do it.”
Survey respondent (Child)

“Do better background checks so racists, homophobes and just horrible people don’t get recruited to the police”
Survey respondent (Child)

Across all three focus groups, children discussed their belief that White people’s criminal behaviour is under-policed in comparison to Black people’s, leading to different and disproportionate experiences with the police between ethnic groups:

“Me and my cousin were having a fight with this other guy. And someone called the police. By the time they called the police we were already walking away. And as soon as they came out of the van, they came up to us and put us in handcuffs. Well, no, they put me in handcuffs, my cousin is White. So they put me in handcuffs immediately. My cousin’s fine. They said, ‘Oh, we’re searching you for knives’. And then the people were saying, ‘Oh, no, but it was him as well’. And they said ‘oh just stand back, we’re only looking at this person. That’s who we’ve identified”
Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

“But White people do drugs too.”
Child Participant, Focus group 1 (ages 10 - 17)

“Maybe if they searched everyone, it wouldn’t feel that bad.”
Child Participant, Focus group 1 (ages 10 - 17)

"Even White people are violent people. So I think it's kind of unfair, that Black people and Black communities or ethnic people, ethnic communities that are being targeted when there's White people that go to football games with just the intent to try and kill or hurt someone. So I think that's another big thing that needs to be tackled."

Child Participant, Focus group 2 (ages 14 - 16)

Children in all focus groups expressed their belief that despite the intentions of the police when using stop and search as a tactic, the decision of who to stop and search, and how to conduct the search, is dominated by racist assumptions among police officers:

"It's so obvious that the police still like just as much count race as a factor and get to be able to stop and search. Like I know, I'm Mixed race, I know that if I was a couple of shades darker, I would have definitely been stopped and searched at some point. Because I'm not, I haven't. And you know, I've got White people on one side of my family, Black people on the other side of my family, and one side hasn't been stopped and searched, one has. And you can see exactly why that happens. And it's obviously because of race."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"Don't base it on, oh, you're Black but everything about the description doesn't match, so that should be a reason I should suspect them. So suspect it on the description"

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

"When the police stop you in the street and search you for anything that might be on you, like drugs or something, or a knife. Most of the time, you probably haven't got anything on you. And they're just like, they just have to do it as part of their job. But sometimes, the reason why it's got kind of a bad reputation is because they've decided who to stop and search based on things like their race and their gender. It's like obviously [that] should not be the reason why you stop and search them."

Child Participant, Focus group 3 (ages 11 - 14)

Overall, the survey's findings indicate that the racial disproportionality in rates of stop and search, and the way in which searches are conducted, is of concern to children across all ethnicities. When segmented by ethnicity, this concern is most pronounced for Black children. In our focus groups, Black children and Black and Mixed Ethnicity children spoke of a desire to be treated 'fairly' by the police and in proportion to their White peers. Children of all ethnic backgrounds are concerned about racial equality, both within policing and in stop and search. Addressing racism in policing is seen as a crucial step to improving the use of stop and search and winning back trust in the police, particularly for Black children.

Conclusion

Our research indicates that Black children have disturbingly low levels of trust in the police. We know that there is already a large confidence gap in policing between Black adults and the rest of the population, but these findings suggest that unless urgent corrective action is taken, this gap is likely to widen.

What makes these findings so startling is that based on previous studies and our own research, we would expect children to generally be more trusting of the police and other authority figures than adults. However, for Black children, levels of trust in the police are even lower than for Black adults, and 37 per cent lower than the national average. For Black Caribbean children, the findings are even more stark: only 28 per cent said that they trusted the police, compared to 41 per cent who actively distrust the police.

The differences in perceptions between Black African and Black Caribbean children are worthy of greater attention. One possible explanation may be that we are witnessing a generational effect: because Black African citizens are more likely to be the first or second generation of their family to live in the UK, they and their families are less likely to have experienced negative interactions with policing compared to Black Caribbean citizens who are more likely to be the second, third or fourth generation. Such a trend would represent an extremely worrying development, implying that without policy change, Black adults' trust in the police will in future generations decline towards the lower levels of trust already seen within Black Caribbean communities.

Children's views on the use of stop and search powers are inevitably complex. Children's natural inclination to trust authority figures⁵⁴ undoubtedly contributes to the fact that they are more trusting of the police than adults, and that most feel safer knowing that the police are stopping and searching people (although less than half trusted the police to use stop and search fairly). However, it is worrying that the Black children we spoke to were equally likely to feel unsafe as to feel safe if stop and search was happening in their area, and that what they know about stop and search made them trust the police less. This suggests a failure to ensure Black children have the same experiences of policing as White children.

Our findings indicate that stop and search undermines childrens' trust in the police, whether it is experienced directly through being stopped and searched personally or indirectly by witnessing friends or relatives being searched, or vicariously by seeing online footage of stops. Many children find the experience of being stopped and searched traumatic, and further analysis is required to understand the long-term effects of this trauma, on children's wellbeing, safety and experiences of childhood.

⁵⁴ Tyler, T. R., & Trinkner, R. (2017). *Why children follow rules: Legal socialization and the development of legitimacy*. Oxford University Press.

There are grave implications for safeguarding and protecting vulnerable children, particularly vulnerable Black children, if children do not trust the police enough to protect them or alert officers if they are in danger.⁵⁵ More broadly, a lack of trust hampers police efforts to provide community reassurance, gather information, carry out investigations and detect crimes.⁵⁶ Urgent action must be taken by the police to rebuild trust in the service, giving children and teenagers the confidence that if they feel threatened or at risk, officers will be there to protect them, regardless of their appearance, the clothes they are wearing or the colour of their skin.

⁵⁵ Ali, A, & Champion, N. (2021) More harm than good: A super-complaint on the harms caused by 'suspicion-less' stop and searches and inadequate scrutiny of stop and search powers. Criminal Justice Alliance

⁵⁶ Keeling, P. (2017) No respect: Young BAME men, the police and stop and search.