
*Freedom To Speak Up in the Black Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME)
Community*

*“The taboo practice amongst BAME staff”: breaking the
myth*



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Recalling a conversation, I had with a colleague back in 2017, I complained on how I felt about the practices and situation around my then work practices and my desire to speak up and initiate change and the response from my colleague was “Victory, do not stir trouble for yourself, you are

in a foreign country, and you have a good job, do not make yourself a target”.

On another occasion, I overheard two BAME colleagues discussing in a local dialect on how they disagree with their departmental priorities and how they think this will negatively impact the quality of care their patient receives but were too scared to speak up due to being overlooked, the issue of gaslighting and being tagged “A troublemaker” or just not knowing who to turn to for help or support. Furthermore, in some cultures, it is seen as a taboo to speak up in what can be seen as “criticizing the management or leaders” or “Lack of subordination to the hierarchical system” while others just focus on the “be grateful for your opportunities as a minority and keep shut concept”. This corresponds with the study from the National Guardian Office that shows ethnicity plays a role in the ability to speak up and staff still facing barriers to speaking up in their workplaces. When members of the BAME healthcare force were informally asked about speaking up, reoccurring themes were the fear to speak up due to the fear of gaslighting, fear of being misunderstood and overlooked, reprisals and getting into trouble. This is highlighting the norm of the taboo on speaking up and the barriers faced by the minority ethnicity group in speaking up and raising concerns.

The freedom to speak up team within the NHS aims to give everyone an equal opportunity to advocate for good practices and speak up without fear. As a member of the BAME community and a freedom to speak up champion, my aim is to bridge the gap in knowledge, communication, signposting and exposing members of the BAME community to the support available to speak up freely without the fear of being judged or punished or the fear of negative consequences from speaking up. This I aim to achieve by bursting the myth on speaking up through representation, cultural sensitivity, awareness and fostering a positive culture of speaking up amongst the BAME community.

As a healthcare professional, I have seen firsthand the catastrophic impact of not being able to speak up and as a BAME staff, I have also seen how difficult it is to speak up due to "Having more to lose" mindset, being at increased risk of victimization and career detriment. This is a common theme of occurrences as even the Francis Report (2015) documented this as one of the roadblocks to speaking up and raising concerns. We are aware of how much we have grown in diversity across the health care sector, think about it for a moment and imagine if every member of staff who identifies as BAME is unable to speak up and challenge practice? This will have a catastrophic impact on the quality of care we provide to our patients as well as the wellbeing of the great proportion of the staff who provide this care.

As a last word, Remember "Your difference matters" and it is a good thing too, there is strength in diversity so do not let your difference stand in your ability to advocate for your patient, you are a strong part of the Healthcare sector and just like everyone else you should be able to speak up without fear, so let's break the myth and reverse "The Taboo" of speaking up into a "Positive Culture" of speaking up and remember there is a Freedom To Speak Up team is only a click away, ready to provide the support you need.