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Research Paper

Systemic Bias, Psychological Safety and Professional Outcomes for Indian Women in the United Kingdom

Vridhi Sharma[1]*

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to understand the impact of systemic bias on the professional outcomes of Indian women working in the United Kingdom, exploring their perspectives and experiences with implications on psychological safety. Individuals from marginalised backgrounds experience underrepresentation and often have their employment prospects hampered due to their ethnic background. Despite emerging workplace diversity, an environment with strong decision-making and problem-solving regarding professional conduct needs to be more cohesive. This paper particularly attempts to understand how systemic bias affects the professional outcomes of Indian women, affecting their psychological safety. The study is an attempt to gauge their experiences while understanding the functionality of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in their workplaces in the United Kingdom. Further research is required to garner the perspectives of individuals of Indian or South Asian origin, with varied citizenship status and gender differences, working in the United Kingdom, who might reflect slightly distinct views.

Keywords: *Systemic Bias, Psychological Safety, Indian Women, Job Prospects, Professional Outcomes*

Organisations and institutions have often existed with loopholes that affect the professional development of individuals who work in those. Instead of bolstering individuals' professional capacities, they may tacitly hamper them. Systemic or institutional bias in the workplace often manifests through misguided laws and policies that facilitate the marginalisation of certain social groups. This is relevant in seeking opportunities while fostering career advancement that is restrained due to systemic bias. It posits a propensity to hamper the professional growth of individuals by impacting their occupational status since it can permit the dominant social group to pursue those opportunities as opposed to the group with a marginalised status for their racial, ethnic, gender, disability, or other background (Jana & Diaz, 2018).

There are laws, policies and programs to address the implications of discriminatory acts while facilitating their prevention to ensure that unfair treatment is not meted out in personal and professional settings. The Equality Act 2010 in the UK guarantees and protects individuals from direct and indirect race discrimination, harassment and victimisation with

[1]Research Scholar
*Corresponding Author

protocols established to safeguard the interests of individuals from marginalised groups (Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), 2013). Additionally, the Ethnicity Pay Gap Reporting audits the hourly pay between different groups with the features of doing the same job to understand and address the experience of pay gap incurred by individuals from ethnic minority and disability groups due to their barriers accessing work and career progression (EHRC, 2017). In the UK, the Public Sector Quality Duty (PSED) requires the publishing and monitoring of compliance to rectify cases of discrimination and harassment as an equality duty to eliminate unlawful forms of discrimination (EHRC, 2023). While the scope of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has become pervasive and has been amplified in its workings and practices through numerous policies and programs introduced in the workplace, organisations still tend to face a relentless impact of systemic bias (Banaji et al., 2021).

Psychological safety is a shared belief that one will not be penalised for speaking up and uninhibitedly asking questions, voicing their thoughts or making mistakes in professional settings (Edmundson, 1999). It entails practices that enable employees in the workplace, to feel included with the safety to contribute with their competencies and be able to challenge the status quo, work efficiently and grow. To ensure smooth operations of workplaces with inclusive practices for employee beneficence and organisational growth, a sustainable systemic change is required to initiate fair and equitable treatment of all individuals in a professional setting, regardless of their background or status.

Systemic bias is the process through which the 'institutional culture, norms and procedures exclude people based on their social identity and background, in both intentional and unintentional ways' (Cooperdock et al., 2021). This bias tends to manifest in the form of explicit or implicit attitudes that are potentially racially motivated, influencing the performance of individuals involved in specific contexts and limiting their prospects of growth (Banaji et al., 2021).

A study demonstrates the effect of managing diversity at work, particularly elucidating how psychological safety holds the key to racial differences in employees' performance in the workplace (Singh et al., 2013). It discusses the importance of integrating a diverse climate for the employees to perform well, explained in the context of developed nations, and through the investigation, it is understood that psychological safety is integral to inspiring employee confidence in decision-making and enabling high-performance behaviours. This study explains employees' experiences from marginalised groups, presenting the differential impact they face due to stereotypes and acts of racial discrimination and how the prevalence of psychological safety can help mitigate prejudice and tackle the racial glass ceiling and negative stereotyping (Bush et al., 2007).

Another study found that racial minorities in the workplace tend to report more discriminatory incidents and succumb to a subordinate status in the absence of a pro-diversity climate (Zhu et al., 2021). Therefore, to attain professional mobility beyond racial identity, a professional in the workplace assimilates. However, a diverse environment is paramount to help succeed in in-role operations without taking on extra-role duties to attain respect, recognition and career progression. A diverse environment amplifies the employees' productivity in their career aspirations, a pre-condition to attaining advanced professional outcomes (Hartel et al., 2002).

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Empowering identity expression in the workplace can be mediated through psychological safety because fear is not an effective motivator for individuals since brain science exemplifies the propensity of fear to inhibit learning and cooperation (Edmondson, 2002). Additionally, lower-status members display a tendency to show less safety-related behaviours as opposed to higher-status members. Leaders can enable psychological safety in the workplace and frame the nature of work for employee success (Silvas, 2016). Organisations must set goals and emphasise the purpose of employee duties, with situational humility and destigmatising failure while penalising boundary violations. This ensures the employees' psychological safety and well-being with professional growth.

Consequences of professional stigma implicate an upsurge in discriminatory policies, racial and gender inequality, and structural disparities. Asian and Hispanic women face more difficulty expressing their femininity since a more submissive stereotype has been ascribed to them (Keplinger & Smith, 2022). Additionally, under acculturative stress, another study demonstrates how South Asian immigrant women in Canada incurred a larger sense of intergenerational conflict, insecurity, and discrimination when resettlement must be facilitated, leading to physical, cognitive, and functional impairment (Samuel, 2009).

In the UK, with the enhanced scope of socioeconomic mobility for different sections of society, the unemployment rate for South Asian women is higher for managerial work since cultural influences play a role in guiding their professional behaviours (Rana et al., 1998). With added household cultural pressure, South Asian women find it more challenging to strike a work-life balance. Thus, their performance incurs outcomes when their psychological safety is impacted in the workplace. Their aspirations to progress professionally are often impeded by the unwarranted influence of discrimination, with added pressures of acculturation (Kaushiva & Joshi, 2019). Moreover, due to the prevalence of stigmatisation of women in general, it can be shown that 61.4% of women participated in the labour force worldwide as opposed to 90.6% of men (International Labour Organization, 2023).

A study commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission demonstrated that many women from the Black and Asian Ethnic Minority (BAME) community are qualified and ambitious. However, they still face more difficulty securing substantial employment opportunities than their counterparts in developed nations like the United Kingdom and the United States (Bradley et al., 2017). This fact holds unless a subscription exists to merge their identities with the culturally normative organisational practices of 'White behaviour' beyond one's gender and racial background. This creates a foundation for inequality and power differentials in professional settings (Arifeen & Syed, 2019). Moreover, due to a lack of diversity in the workplace, an employee's ability to perform is impaired, which can be tackled with the support of organisational policies. Thus, implementing strategies to mitigate the bias's impact by fostering a culture of DEI is vital (Mataeo et al., 2020).

Systemic bias in the workplace results from the dissimilarities in race and ethnicity when one interacts with systematic sources of bias intersectionally (Bielby, 2000). Organisational policies can structurally impede professional growth. Job outcomes are often type-casted based on one's race and facilitate gender labelling when it comes to specific professional roles. Systemic bias is prevalent in internal processes, i.e. related to hiring, profiling, job analysis, payment compensation and promotion. Explicitly, it is found through structural segregation and blatant discrimination. This was reported by the Equality and Human Rights

Commission (EHRC) in the UK, explaining how employment rates for ethnic minorities were higher at 12.9% compared with 6.3% for White individuals. In Britain, fewer individuals from minority backgrounds worked in leadership positions, as discerned through Race Report Statistics under EHRC (EHRC, 2020).

In the absence of psychological safety, workplace bullying in professional settings can surge, facilitating a power imbalance, and potentially leading to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Spring, 2010). A climate of psychosocial safety in the workplace is crucial to prevent the perpetuation of potential power imbalances, burnout, anxiety, stress and impact on self-esteem, especially in settings with high levels of competition, leading to job insecurity and powerlessness. Workplace bullying entails environmental cues that reinforce negativity and impact performance and are, thus, required to be mitigated by enabling a participatory decision-making style to foster occupational health over degeneration.

Workplace bullying, in the context of developed nations, propounded in a study in New Zealand, elucidates its prevalence in sectors of health, education, hospitality and travel, causing employees to quit while breeding absenteeism and psychological strain (Bentley et al., 2009). Individuals from minority groups are perceived to be at a more considerable risk of being discriminated against and bullied based on ethnicity, gender or disability (Lewis & Gunn, 2007). Workplace bullying can be mitigated with supportive supervision, i.e. through role clarity and conflict management to reduce psychological strain and improve employee professional outcomes. Professional practice of constructive criticism can foster productive interpersonal interactions with capacity-building over the sole performance of job duties (Gardner et al., 2013)

A study highlighted the prevalence of microaggressions in the workplace hurled on the grounds of one's marginalised social identity through verbal, behavioural and environmental factors (Metinyurt et al., 2021). This study conducted a meta-analysis and demonstrated a heightened level of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress while subsequently affecting self-esteem to dampen individuals' job outcomes and promotional propensities in light of the racism experienced on a micro-level. Another study highlighted how the emphatic participation of individuals in heterogeneous settings through intergroup relations can stimulate enduring attitudes to promote cultural heterogeneity and social inclusion (Prasch et al., 2022). This highlighted the procedures to streamline social interactions based on contextual variances. The study essentially entailed the gamification of an intervention directed to propel the participants in a survey to dismantle their general assumptions, preconceived notions and stereotypes they tacitly exhibit towards other social groups, perpetuating marginalisation and, in exchange, replacing them with the recognition and sharing of intercultural experiences to foster inclusion.

A research entailed an ecosystems approach to ensure practice-based and value-based models to mitigate the impact of intergroup differences that create workplace exclusion for diversity management (Barak, 2000). These are reparative measures for organisations to streamline their diversity management processes with intersectionality to reorganise the demographic trends and decision networks that detrimentally influence the inclusion and safety of the employees. Another study highlighted the psychological state of migration from the Indo-Pakistani region, tracing how the sociocultural differences impact the mental health of the migrants across two generations (Furnham & Sheikh, 1993)

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The importance of acculturation from the perspective of immigrants from South Asia has been witnessed in a study in the context of professional settings in Australia by facilitating an immersion with a culture's symbolic and physical features instead of upholding a separate cultural identity to utilise the professional capacities and skills. Acculturation involves social, psychological and cultural changes that arise from moving from one culture into another through adaptation while incorporating their values, beliefs and customs (Worthy et al., 1992; Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2023). Consequently, another research focused on enhancing intergroup relations by introducing the concept of 'tolerance' instead of mere acceptance to prevent a dominant social group from harming another and streamline acculturation.

A study highlighted the concept of perceived threat without experiencing harm from marginalised groups, which reduced upward structural mobility for them (Verkuyeten, 2020). Hence, leading to an avoidance of uncertainty in dealing with individuals from the outgroup, which cultivates an endorsement of discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants with an abstract concern about having the dominant cultural identity and values threatened, i.e. through symbolic threat (Stewart et al., 2019). It also highlighted how attitude and behaviour posit a tendency to guide a prejudicial orientation, combated by revamping personal standards and merging egalitarian values and beliefs as an approach guided by rationalised premises to limit the perpetuation of intolerance and discrimination.

The literature review outlined above shows that different conceptualisations of bias in workplace settings influencing the professional prospects of individuals from other marginalised social groups, where the dominant social group persists in exerting influence. It can be understood that systemic bias has been studied through different measures; however, these studies have not contended the implication of this bias in terms of how it affects the psychological safety of the target group of Indian women, i.e. facing a dearth in terms of covering the elements of context, involving this particular ethnic group.

This study attempts to cover the gap in the literature by applying a qualitative method to gain deeper insights directly from Indian working women in the UK, who are representative of the population of individuals from whom data has to be gathered. While some studies focus on the Asian and South Asian diaspora to understand their psychological safety involving job meaningfulness, the impact of the systemic bias on their professional outcomes remains an underresearched problem. Thereby, desisting prominent professional and social change in advancing opportunities for a significant population of the marginalised section in a developed nation (Paramasivam, 2023). Women worldwide experience the ramifications of marginalisation (Scott, 1985). However, holding an identity of double marginalisation, i.e. being a woman and a woman of colour, i.e. Indian origin in a developed context, adds to the pressure while navigating their social and professional identities in society and workplaces (Holvino, 2010).

Hence, a lack of understanding corresponding to the intersections in identity to postulate discordance in professional outcomes is examined to account for Indian women's experiences. Since this study posits a reflexive approach to understanding their experiences, it also caters for the well-integration of DEI policies corresponding to the phenomenon to understand if any gaps in policy and practice exist, which cater to the systemic bias.

This study posits real-world implications with further premises to investigate systemic bias in professional settings for different ethnic groups and establish a ground for in-depth exploration of the subject with this sub-group of South Asia. Systemic bias remains an unresolved problem since it is dismissed or lacks blatant visibility. Hence, this research attempts to transcend the general understanding of its impact and singularly explores the subject to unravel the unique experiences of Indian women.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

To understand the ways in which the systemic bias pans out in the context of the workplace, and consequently, impacts the professional outcomes and prospects for Indian women working in the United Kingdom. This is pertaining to psychological safety is understood in terms of how they're affected due to their environment being or not being inclusive, and diverse.

Sample

The sample consisted of 10 female participants, recruited from a pool of 135 who filled in the Google Form to gauge their demographic details and, consequently, recruited participants for the core study. All the participants' demographic and personal details were pseudonymised, and each participant was assigned a participant ID. Purposeful sampling was facilitated for the study. The participants chosen are Indian Women only (i.e., British-born Indian Origin or Indian Expats/Immigrants), out of which Indian-origin Expat Women participated in the study. The participants had at least 2 to 5 years in the United Kingdom, and this criterion was essential to generate rich data and comprehensively explore their experiences over time to understand their professional trajectory and the consequent outcomes. All participants were above the age of 18 years and residents or citizens of the UK. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with the participants. Each participant was recruited with informed consent, was debriefed with instructions in the information sheet and compensated with a £10 Amazon shopping voucher for their participation.

Participants and Design

The design involved an analytic approach, i.e. thematic analysis with primary data entailing a demographic questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews for data collection. Each participant was assigned a participant ID for demographic description, and their details were saved via pseudonymisation. The variables incorporated in this study entail understanding the impact of the systemic bias on the professional outcomes of Indian women working in the UK to gauge their experiences and perspectives and understand how this outcome is affected by the influence of psychological safety. These individuals were chosen based on the eligibility criteria of the research and the demographic information provided. For this study, purposeful (Palinkas et al., 2015) and snowball sampling were applied to recruit participants based on their ethnic background, nationality, gender, age group, and employment status to underscore the participants' demographic details (see **Table 1**). Participants were chosen to ensure that the sample entails details of individuals of Indian ethnic origin who have experienced systemic bias in different ways and are currently working and residing in the UK out of the broader population to account for how it impacts their professional outcomes. All 10 participants were included in the coding stage to facilitate the inductive thematic approach, illustrating themes for further discussion

(Creswell, 2013). These 10 were chosen for this study to comprehensively understand Indian women's experiences corresponding to the aim (see **Table 1.**).

Table 1. Demographic Background of Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Ethnic Background	Nationality	Age Group	Employment Status
ID-001	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-002	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-003	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-004	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-005	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-006	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	30-45 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-007	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Origin (different Citizenship)	30-45 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-008	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-009	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time
ID-010	F	Asian or Asian British	Indian Expat	18-30 years	Employed Full-Time

Procedure and Materials
Data Collection
The first stage involved participant recruitment through social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp (using friends and community networks) and Instagram. Out of 135 signups, 10 women were invited for audio and video interviews who followed the required criteria. Participants were provided with study information and an opportunity to ask questions. Followed by reading the study information, participants provided their informed consent during the 30 to 45 minute interview. Each participant was asked 20 questions. The questions involved exploring the experiences and perspectives of these individuals concerning their workplace experiences with systemic biases affecting their psychological safety. While conducting the study, with the consent of the participants, notes and recordings of the interview were taken.

Data Analysis
Thematic analysis used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, which was applied concerning the responses and crucial statements elicited by the participants to generate data. The steps involved in their analytic framework entail covering 2 levels of themes, i.e. semantic and latent themes. Semantic themes highlight the surface-level meanings in the data, and correspondingly, latent themes explore underlying ideas and conceptualisations discerned through the themes. The six-step approach first involves data familiarisation to gain exposure to the complete data, followed by the second step incorporates its systematic organisation backed by line-by-line coding. The third step highlights the overlap between the coding process and the development of preliminary themes. The fourth step focuses on the modification and the official development of preliminary themes, accompanied by the production of sub-themes. The fifth step in this approach is guided by the definition and

identification of the core element of the data, entailing an analysis with supporting quotes. The sixth and last step involves writing up various examples concerning the study area.

This method was chosen to systematically identify, organise, analyse, describe and report the themes discovered from the data and interpret them for thematic analysis (Nowell, 2017). Consequently, a report was curated incorporating a description of analysed patterns and themes commonly discovered in the data through thematic analysis. Lastly, a descriptive passage was generated that identifies the essence of the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants post-data auditing. Given the nature of the study, employing reflexive thematic analysis was crucial, wherein a set of codes was created based on the line-by-line transcribed data extracted from the interviews, followed by a systematic approach to analysing the qualitative data and identifying patterns for understanding how the systemic bias affects the psychological safety, and therefore, impacts the professional outcomes for individuals through open-ended questions, with some prompts under each question. The record of data analysis with themes (with the sub-themes that were integrated as themes in the final table).

Data analysis involved data familiarisation in comprehending the data aggregation through the interviews to distinguish the outcomes of systemic bias impacting the developments within the professional setting where Indian women are employed in the United Kingdom. Post this step, the data was systematically organised to help generate initial codes by thoroughly reading the transcribed data line-by-line and extracting crucial excerpts from it to assign codes to the relevant data that caters to the aims of the study. Subsequently, themes were curated based on the codes generated, aligned with the research question and objective of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

These codes were consequently prescribed to the themes generated and categorised based on the common element they shared corresponding to their respective theme. In order to ensure the correct codes were listed under the suitable themes, and given that the nature of specific themes was similar, they were merged. The codes were dissections of the text that were converted into manageable segments backed by theoretical interests (Stirling, 2001). Once this milestone was achieved, it was ensured that all codes generated themes corresponding to developing a theoretical flow for the study and comparing those themes and patterns to existing theory. The thematic list was designed in this process, entailing the definition and description of the themes to distinguish each theme from another (Guest et al., 2011).

To prevent an overlapping of themes, the objective of merging them was facilitated, consequently catering to the research question and aim of the study. All the codes were incorporated in a concise manner; however, while extracting them from the virtual interview transcriptions, they were modified to demonstrate an alignment with the themes curated concerning the codes and quotes drawn from the interview transcriptions. Therefore, testifying to the findings within the thematic structure and flow while highlighting the intricacies of the research objective.

RESULTS

8 salient themes were generated from the codes discerned through the participants' responses to questions asked in the semi-structured interview. A significant amount of data was obtained to incorporate the themes, accentuating the prevalence of systemic bias and its

active and tacit implications on psychological safety and professional outcomes. **Table 2**. describes the emerging themes with codes.

Table 2. Description of Emerging Themes

Themes	Example Code	# of participants
Psychological Safety	Lack of Psychological Safety and Support and Unsafe Taking Risks (ID-008)	4
Professional Outcomes	Biased Behaviour Affecting Professional Outcomes (ID-001)	3
Job Prospects	Job Prospects Hampered due to Migrant and Visa Status (ID-005)	6
Status-Quo Maintenance Pressures	Higher Pressure to Conform to the Status-Quo and Difficulty Taking Risks (ID-004)	5
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Gap in Organisational policies in terms of Practice for DEI/EDI Initiatives and Lack of Representation (ID-007)	7
Forms of Unfair Treatment	Prevalence of Stereotyping, Bias and Preferential Treatment (ID-007)	7
Systemic Bias	Hampered Prospects of Career Advancement due to Workplace Practices (ID-008)	7
Workplace Environment and Culture	Prevalence of Slight Blame Culture (ID-006)	4

Psychological Safety:

Participants noted an effect of the absence of psychological safety entailing inclusion, learner, contributor and challenger safety in the workplace. This is coupled with the presence or absence of feeling included despite their ethnic background to actively take up or avoid taking up risks in the workplace. The code, 'Lack of Psychological Safety and Support and Unsafe Taking Risks (ID-008)', demonstrates one of the prominent intricacies of this theme, rendering a lack of safety to express and communicate freely and take up decisions without fearing their consequences in the workplace.

Professional Outcomes:

Participants elucidated their professional experiences regarding how their outcomes were affected due to their ethnic background while incurring the ramifications of systemic biases affecting their job performance and security. Here, consistently, we discerned an impression of insecurity amongst most participants, which can be interpreted through the code, 'Biased Behaviour Affecting Professional Outcomes (ID-001), displaying the overall impact of the bias and workplace dynamics on the same.

Streamlined or Hampered Job Prospects:

The code, 'Job Prospects Hampered due to Migrant and Visa Status (ID-005)' implies that in the UK, the segment of Indian women interviewed has expressed their experiences and perspectives on facing insecurity and difficulty in seeking jobs here due to their migrant and visa status and the rampant uncertainty in the job market, which amplifies their grievances and has previously or at some point affected them adversely.

Status-Quo Maintenance Pressures:

This implied the effect on participants due to risk aversion, organisational inertia and resource constraints, and the power dynamics in the workplace. The code, 'Higher Pressure to Conform to the Status-Quo and Difficulty Taking Risks (ID-004)' demonstrates that the pressure to perform and deliver proficiently in their job role is higher on Indian women working in the United Kingdom due to the existing load of retaining their job and because of this, they fear exploring the venture of taking up unmitigated risks.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion refers to an organisational framework that seeks to promote fair treatment of all employees through policies and programs despite their background. The code, 'Gap in Organisational Policies in Terms of Practice for DEI/EDI Initiatives and Lack of Representation (ID-007),' states a dearth of sufficient representation of individuals from diverse backgrounds despite staunch claims in the organisation. Thereby demonstrating a gap in the prevalence of these policies and their practice in professional settings.

Forms of Unfair Treatment:

The code, 'Prevalence of Stereotyping, Bias and Preferential Treatment (ID-007)' indicates that there is a prevalence of unfair forms of treatment that the participants have experienced through stereotyping and prejudice, preferential treatment, discrimination, exclusion and having incurred a different treatment due to their ethnic status and background.

Systemic Bias:

This theme is adequately demonstrated through the code, 'Hampered Prospects of Career Advancement due to Systemic Bias and Practices (ID-008),' elucidating the gaps in recruitment, hiring, and decision-making along with inadequate career advancement and growth opportunities due to the prevalence of the systemic bias, wherein, the participants explained their adverse experiences in terms of job outcomes concerning the same.

Workplace Environment and Culture

The code, 'Prevalence of a Slight Blame Culture (ID-006),' indicates that the participants incurred a differing experience in their workplace due to the culture and environment being conducive to amplifying an unhealthy, hierarchical blame culture. This was faced by the participants differently.

Key Findings

One participant shared her experience as the only Indian working in the organisation, indicating an underrepresentation. While a few workplaces were conducive to enhancing their hiring and recruitment practices through a diversified approach, a dearth was pertinent in high-run roles. Some workplaces fostered DEI; however, due to the gaps, there is a prevalence of tokenism, which cultivated representational pressures in the workplace, witnessed in the statement by ID-007, 'If you want anything, you just gonna have to do double the work as a POC.' This indicates higher performance pressures and lower job security for Indian women than their British counterparts, leading to tokenism.

The participants were asked questions like, 'Do you feel that there are more women colleagues in the workplace who are of your ethnic background?', 'How can professional settings be made safer and inclusive if there is anything that could be done in your workplace?' and 'Do you think any preferential treatment is meted out towards you or your

colleagues concerning collaboration, performance and decision-making in your workplace?'. These questions gauged responses to understand diversity management in the workplace and whether psychological safety was prevalent in making colossal decisions, amplifying performance and collaboration for critical tasks and duties in the workplace.

ID-007 also reported a water-tight hierarchical workplace structure with an unfair allocation of opportunities, stating that in professional settings like a law firm, individuals feel more 'comfortable seeing a White male in a leading position as opposed to a Brown woman' while discussing how she has witnessed explicit and implicit discrimination while seeking opportunities despite her competency and qualifications, i.e. coming from Imperial College London, and being 'passed on for promotions' without fair reasons.

Biased behaviour and preferential treatment in the workplace were witnessed due to ostensible reasons, such as 'language barriers', that fostered the exclusion of ID-003 from the social sphere. She mentioned a gap between the role assigned and performed duties. Despite being professionally fluent in English and competent with long years of work experience, she was denied an opportunity to take up several client-facing responsibilities because English was her second language.

Unprecedentedly, 'positive stereotyping' was witnessed, particularly towards women working in the banking industry, who spoke about a 'selection bias' towards Indians (Chan, 2019; Coates & Carr, 2005). ID-002 reported that when complex issues surged in the workplace, Indians were relied upon to address the issue, which often worked in her 'favour'; however, it still holds as a positive stereotype. Many participants struggled to fit in during informal gatherings and incurred cultural isolation and assimilation-related pressures. They felt safe and included interacting with individuals from the same ethnic group or the South Asian community with more ease due to cultural resonance.

Across most experiences, a lack of robust psychological support and framework was witnessed, corroborated in the statement by ID-008, claiming that because of her 'intimidating environment,' she felt that she could not raise complaints since her colleagues employed in higher designations were 'four Britishers' who were friends. She reported that for this reason, an environment of favouritism was cultivated that barred other qualified and talented employees, including herself, from seeking professional growth in the workplace. This indicated preferential treatment with a lack of transparency and professionalism. She also reported that the workings of reward system were not explicit. She expressed that this disparity predominantly existed due to 'unsaid racism'. Similarly, in another case, a woman working in the field of research claimed that she was denied an opportunity in her job role, stating that a 'fair reason' was not given for it despite seeking redressal.

While systemic bias persists in operationalisation within the professional hierarchy, ID-009 described her experience in discovering it during the hiring and recruitment practices of most workplaces she applied to while looking for jobs in the UK. She stated that during the recruitment process for a DEI role, the performance measurement was not inclusive and incorporated a 'Western inclined' approach wherein, for this job role, 'two White European males' were hired. After reporting this issue to the concerned organisation regarding how she did not posit a knowledge gap in her competence, no redressal was sought for her complaint. While the participant reported some progress in cultivating diversified hiring and

recruitment practices in her current workplace, it can be discerned that there is a flagrant gap in the recruitment practices catering to systemic bias.

Another manner in which the systemic bias manifested was an assumption being made about a participant's job role in terms of performance delivery and extra workload being facilitated. ID-006 stated that she was required to work longer hours and witnessed that 'highly-skilled work in normal salaries and increasing hires from India with the expectations of longer hours of work' felt unfair and required some form of address. In another case, when it came down to making conjectures about her job role, a participant mentioned, 'I'm the lawyer working on the case, and I'm still expected to make tea for everybody', which was a gross assumption and expectation concerning her job role and responsibilities.

On the other hand, ID-010 mentioned that the policies on DEI programs were strong in terms of the policy integration and approach in her workplace, i.e. the healthcare sector; however, she witnessed that most women were imparted low-run roles as compared to their male counterparts, who were seen in high-run job roles, thus highlighting a gap in practice. She stated that in her experience, women are expected to be more 'hands-on with care' than men, who are more employed in medical management and senior managerial roles, such as psychiatry. She is the only Indian working in this professional setting, highlighting an underrepresentation of Indian women. She witnessed how specific outcomes in seeking increments and career growth were hampered due to her migrant status, the currently existing job uncertainty, and a lack of visa sponsorships, due to which she feels an added pressure to put in extra work to claim her rewards and recognition.

DISCUSSION
Implications
Systemic bias is a robust predictor of individual behaviour, reflecting the ongoing conjectures of the same in a given context based on specific regularities concerning forms of prejudice, discrimination and preferential treatment manifested as loopholes in the system or regularities in an environment (Payne & Hannay, 2021). The study aimed to understand the influence of systemic bias on the psychological safety of Indian women working in the United Kingdom to impact their professional experiences; the themes that emerged during the analysis helped us comprehend the factors influencing this phenomenon (Kashdan, 2010).

Correspondingly, many demonstrated a fear of acceptance due to ethnic differences on a micro-level in terms of being included. They felt unsafe while taking professional risks in the workplace, small or big, due to the prevalence of low mistake tolerance in their respective professional settings, potentially hampering their prospects of facilitating career advancement opportunities. Moreover, it is found that due to uncertain nature of their visa status and migration concerns, they felt that their job prospects could have been improved with stability in this domain or that their job security was threatened in its absence, affecting their psychological safety.

A tokenistic representation was prevalent across most experiences and catered to the systemic bias for fulfilling workplace diversity quota (Yoder, 1991). This is facilitated without addressing problems within the professional system that breed non-objective tendencies for hiring talent, thereby inhibiting professional outcomes for these individuals and affecting their psychological well-being and safety (Bhugra, 2004). Homogeneity in

professional groups can foster groupthink, ultimately impair organisational decision-making (Knippenberg et al., 2013). When heterogeneity is promoted in the workplace, multiculturalism, problem-solving, decision-making, and creativity are channelled and professional duties are enhanced.

Professional outcomes for Indian women working across different industries like research, banking, law, management, and healthcare exhibited distinct experiences influenced by their industry and the varied nature of systemic bias in their workplaces. Some industries were primarily male-dominated as opposed to others, taking the banking industry as an example, magnifying the systemic bias's impact. Since Indian women hold a double marginalised status, i.e. being women and a person of colour, small disparities affect their psychological safety and tamper with their ability to perform without being judged as 'inferior' or 'incompetent' (Singh et al., 2013)

An anomaly discerned was that some participants employed in different professional settings did not transcend their job role and duties to comprehend the operationalisation of policies and programs that were subsisted to safeguard their interests since they did not feel at ease questioning the authorities regarding specific performance management and decision-making objectives. Thus, insinuating a dearth of psychological safety in their organisations in terms of seeking support, highlighting the organisations' lack of communication and transparency regarding these specific policies and programs.

The interviewed participants highlighted that the pressure to conform to the status quo was higher for them in all professional settings; however, it levied heavier on some participants, who felt difficulty venturing into significant opportunities due to the fear of dire consequences affecting their professional outcomes. Additionally, their job status was determined by organisational inertia and risk aversion tendencies due to their ethnic status, which invariably impacts psychological safety, which is a principal motivator of employee performance and success (Edmondson, 2002). Thus, necessitating the need to cultivate a pro-diversity climate. This creates a differential burden of conformity on employees to adhere to the organisational values in their job role instead of their White counterparts (Cox & Blake, 1991). The disparity in employment, fear of losing the job, and the right to work in another country creates a susceptibility to suffering from hampered psychological safety and well-being or a flare-up in mental health conditions (Reichert & Tauchmann, 2016). While most policies and programs pertaining to DEI are effective in professional administration in some workplaces in the United Kingdom, a gap in its practice still requires redressal.

Through the data collected, it can be testified that Indian women, as women of colour, are increasing their participation in the workforce in the developed context; however, the cultural conditioning due to pre-existing social norms and expectations of Indian women, who are conditioned to perform equally well in the workplace and households, is a barrier to their professional growth (Diaz & Greene, 1995; Anand & Cochrane, 2005). This dual burden to perform with acculturation pressures on the work front with a dearth of supportive policies and psychological safety posits dire implications on their professional competence. Thus, impacting career growth. In previous literature, South Asian women in the UK reported finding it more challenging to strike a work-life balance than their counterparts of different ethnic backgrounds (Rana et al., 1998).

Therefore, this study incorporates the application of previous studies to generate new information, testifying to the prevalence of systemic bias and adding to the existing knowledge regarding the subject. When marginalised identities co-mingle, i.e. in terms of ethnic background and gender status, this bias amplifies, recognising varied forms of unfair treatment as a sum (Payne et al., 2017). Understanding the implications of systemic bias through a diversified approach can be fostered by comprehending the impact of intersectional discrimination. Subsequently, facilitating the provision of administrative resources and psychological support framework to assist individuals from marginalised backgrounds.

The policies targeted towards diversity, equity and inclusion should be reframed as strategies, focusing on ethnic minorities as assets over deficits or mere diversity hires in their respective organisations since a gap in the policies mulches the systemic bias (Bowleg, 2021). It facilitates the identification that professionalism in the workplace is affected by the principles of status-quo maintenance, which require a more heterogeneous approach in dealing with the application of DEI in terms of its actual practice to ensure mitigation of the systemic bias's impact (Blanton et al., 2021).

This indicated that diversity is concentrated at the lowest levels of a professional setting, which hampers growth. Additionally, the study establishes a ground to explore roughly understood issues corresponding to certain factors, i.e. psychological safety and support in enabling professional decision-making to ensure a fair and effective assessment systemic is created to assist talented individuals to exhibit their potential in its best capacity despite their racial, ethnic or gender background.

Limitations
While this study highlights the perspectives of expats of Indian origin and background, there prevails an aperture in identifying the perspectives of British-born individuals of Indian origin, whose experiences might differ from that of expats due to nationality differences, cultural assimilation and familiarity. Further exploration can be facilitated to gauge the experiences of the larger Indian population working in the UK. While there are fissures in the functionality and implementation of DEI in practice, some participants claimed to have benefited from the policies conducive to its cultivation while performing well despite their workplace culture and environment.

The study does not demographically incorporate the occupational background of the participants; however, for discussion purposes, the details regarding their professional background were highlighted. Since the thematic analysis was conducted, it entails identifying and grouping themes, creating a possibility of oversimplifying complex information relying on the researcher's interpretation. This could potentially breed a conceivable bias in interpretation due to subjectivity. The participant's assumptions and perceptions could influence the semi-structured interviews to tamper with the same. The study incorporates a sampling bias, i.e., a small sample size, which does not comprehensively qualify for the entire population of Indian women working in the UK and limits generalisability.

Further Research
This study can be amplified and provides an eclectic approach to understanding how the implications of systemic bias can be utilised to address gaps in policies and programs to

intricately diversify and democratise how DEI can be cultivated with more representation in the workplace. It is imperative to design fair recruitment and hiring assessments to enhance and assort their practices and allow candidates to demonstrate their potential based on their talent and competencies for equitable inclusion (Tai et al., 2021). However, further research can be facilitated into comprehending the perspectives of Indians or the South Asian diaspora working in the UK, entailing both populations of men and women to address and incorporate their perspectives and experiences into fostering a better DEI framework. Additionally, information can be gauged from individuals of a specific occupation, i.e. professional background, for further insights. An experimental approach can garner insights and facilitate the generalisability of results with a bigger participant pool.

CONCLUSION

Systemic bias persists, and the data suggests a demand to fill quota to foster diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, but not necessarily on the grounds of talent. The ethnic background of individuals of Indian origin imparts a marginalised status to the social group in professional settings. The systemic bias persists and can often surface blatantly in the form of prejudiced or discriminatory behaviour. The lack of transparency and communication indicates its prevalence in workplaces. While organisations strive to integrate a diversified approach to enhance professional practices and abstain from incorporating a biased approach in workplace policies, programs and conduct, a disparity evidenced through their implementation gap posits dire professional outcomes for marginalised groups (Creegan et al., 2013). Thereby impacting their long-term professional growth and career trajectory in their respective fields.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually for this study. The thematic analysis in line with the research topic, gauged insights through their responses, gestures and subtle cues to understand their perspectives. The results were interpreted by incorporating the influence of systemic bias on professional outcomes. The implications, further research and limitations of the study have been considered.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement
The data that support the findings of the study is available in the Durham Repository Online (DRO) upon reasonable request only. Any additional findings of the study related in the Supplementary Material or upon request from the corresponding author.

Ethics Statement
This research project has received ethical approval from the Ethics Sub-Committee in the Department of Psychology at Durham University. Virtual informed consent for participation has been taken for this study to ensure compliance with the GDPR ethical guidelines.