

My life in Brighton

A window into Black Asian and minoritised ethnic people's experiences of Brighton and Hove



Bridging Change CIC

Funded by:

Communities, Equality and Third Sector Team, Brighton and Hove City Council

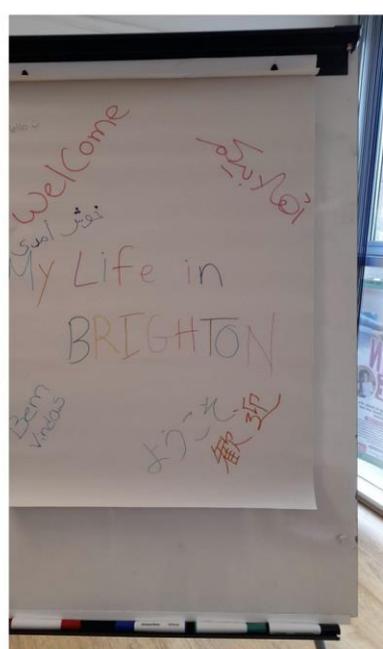
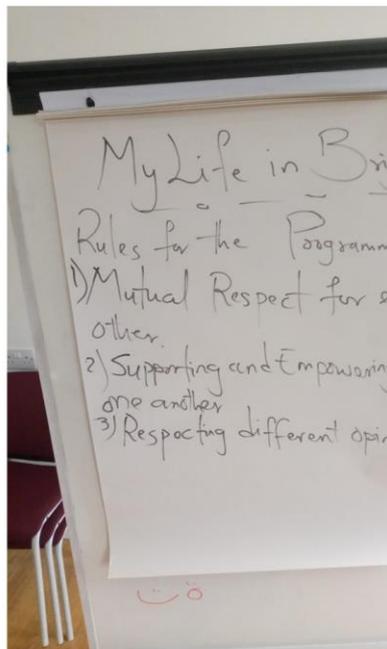


Introduction

Bridging Change created a series of coffee mornings that would with the support of experienced facilitators through the encouragement of guided conversations that hoped to discuss a wide range of issues which may touch on:

- what it was like to live in Brighton and Hove;
- what makes them feel at home;
- what skills they bring to Brighton and Hove;
- their aspirations, their dreams, the barriers that make it difficult to realise their aspirations;
- experience of finding work, housing, a community, activities and experiences of their children;
- what changes they would like to see;
- what would help improve their lives;
- what strengths they possess as a community and common interests and/or
- how they as a group can respond to challenges and create social improvement.

There were twelve sessions in total, six for each of the two groups. Bridging Change had two facilitators, Sara Alsharif and Osemudiamen Gabriel Akhimien to work with the two the groups – one that was open to anyone who identified as female and for anyone who identified as male – the groups were self-selecting and an open call and flyer went out through newsletters, other organisations, posters, word of mouth and through social media, primarily Twitter and LinkedIn for a “men’s” and “women’s” group. The brief of the facilitators was to create sessions that were safe spaces for people to be able to express how they experience Brighton and Hove, how they express their cultural, ethnicity and religion in Britain through creative means – example – art, poetry, cooking, craft, design or through storytelling. The sessions were an opportunity for participants to have space to share and to learn about each other, to build cohesion within the group and build pride in their background.



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It was important that these groups remained enjoyable and if participants wished to speak about their experiences of prejudice and racism than this was enabled, however, facilitators were mindful that these experiences can be very triggering, and they were sensitive in creating a safe space where people did not feel pressured to speak about racist incidents if they did not wish to.

The groups were open to anyone who identified as Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic. The groups as a result were very diverse and they had intersections across gender, religion and faith, sexuality and disability.

Introductory meetings – were about getting to know on another, set ground rules for the first meeting and subsequent meetings.

The facilitators ensured that participants had control over whether they were in pictures. There were ice-breakers activities (which mostly involved artwork) and conversations which were intended to grow familiarity within the group.

The groups included a broad variety of ethnic groups who spoke a wide range of languages which extended beyond their particular ethnic group (see demographics), as illustrated in a short welcome sign activity where the group created a welcome sign in all the languages that they knew

Over the weeks the facilitators explored a variety of themes including: isolation, masculinity, living in Brighton and Hove, welcoming spaces and experiences of racism, family, mental health, lone parenting, food, they expressed themselves through art projects.



Participants from the first session

Creating safe space

Bridging Change was keen to ensure that the coffee mornings were safe spaces which were led by the participants, which would be conducive for frank and honest discussions. The right facilitators within the right structures and ethos was important in creating a safe and welcoming space that participants would return to and be very much led by participants.

Ensuring that the session were at no cost so there were not additional barriers put up on individuals, that refreshments, snacks, including fresh fruit were provided.



Sharing some stuffed aubergine



One of the women's sessions

Food was discussed amongst the women and they agreed to share food they may have from home.



Coffee morning discussions from the women's group

Positive spaces and places

Positive, welcoming and safe spaces were an important issue that was discussed by respondents. It enhanced Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic wellbeing and sense of belonging to Brighton and Hove.

“A place to relax.”

“A free place to go out on a cheap outing.”

“Spirits of Brighton and its connection to nature.”

The respondents particularly enjoyed the sea, green spaces and appreciated being able to view the sea around Brighton, there was particular appreciation of the sea. There were connections around healing physically, mentally and spiritually.

“Sit there [on the beach], look and see feeling the connection - cleansing our souls”

“See the sea, all over Brighton and Hove, from Western Road.”

“I like the parks a lot and Devil's Dyke and Queens Park.”

“Brighton is a lovely city to live in. One of the primary attractions is the beach.”

Participants particularly welcomed the safe space for the coffee mornings, which they enjoyed. It was a space they felt had not been provided elsewhere which was dedicated to speaking and connecting with others who would share a sense of what it meant to be a Black, Asian or another racialised ethnic person who shared some of their issues day-to-day. There were discussions around future meetings and activities that are shared in the section 'Future Activities'.

Unwelcoming spaces and places

There were places that respondents felt unwelcomed and avoided, other places that they felt was not geared up to welcome them or places that felt prohibitive as they did not have appropriate services. Respondents actively identified places that were minoritised ethnic friendly. Some described being “not allowed” to enter spaces or feel afraid or intimidated. Including restaurants, cafes and pubs.



“It is not allowed for anyone Black to go inside.”

“Through their behaviour they make you feel offended, neglected and wastes your time, through bad manners.”

“Language barriers prevent me from complaining.”

“Institutional barriers.”

“Feeling foreigner, stranger so you don't know your right the feel of being frightened and intimidated.”

Esmail

Esmail, not his real name, described an incident that happened in 2020, during a period when the COVID-19.

"I had this incident that occurred in 2020, when the COVID-19 was at its peak and I was shopping for food at ASDA during the reduced to clear session. While I was shopping, I noticed a man looking at my shopping basket, and I said to the man, "if you are looking for the same item in my basket, they are at that shelve." The man called me, "a greedy man". I thought he was joking so I laughed. But this man repeated it three times [on three different days]. The third time he said that I "go to your own country". The man was so threatening this time the security guard had to contact the police. The police told the security guard to just forget about the case because there is not much evidence to back up my claim. I said that this was not true because there were so many witnesses present. The man was speaking to me in a condescending tone as if I was lying about the incident. The police arrived on the scene and grabbed our names and numbers before escorting us outside.

The police later called me and began questioning me about the amount of items in my basket and why he had so much food, as well as accusing me of being confrontational with the man. It wasn't true, and there was video evidence to back me up. The police informed me that they no longer have access to the video from the day of the incident. I feel more anger towards the police than the man that harassed me because of how they handled the issue."

There was a specific issue around mainstream food establishments such as KFC and MacDonalds. A mother of three children said that she was Muslim, and she was keen that they should always eat halal meat, and that, "My kids are always craving McDonalds and KFC, but they cannot eat it because it is not halal for us. I wish they could provide something like that for kids from different beliefs, as they provide veggie and vegetarian meals".

"I went to a shop and they denied having a table free in the fish and chip shop for the me and my daughter because they had fully booked while it had only three tables occupied."

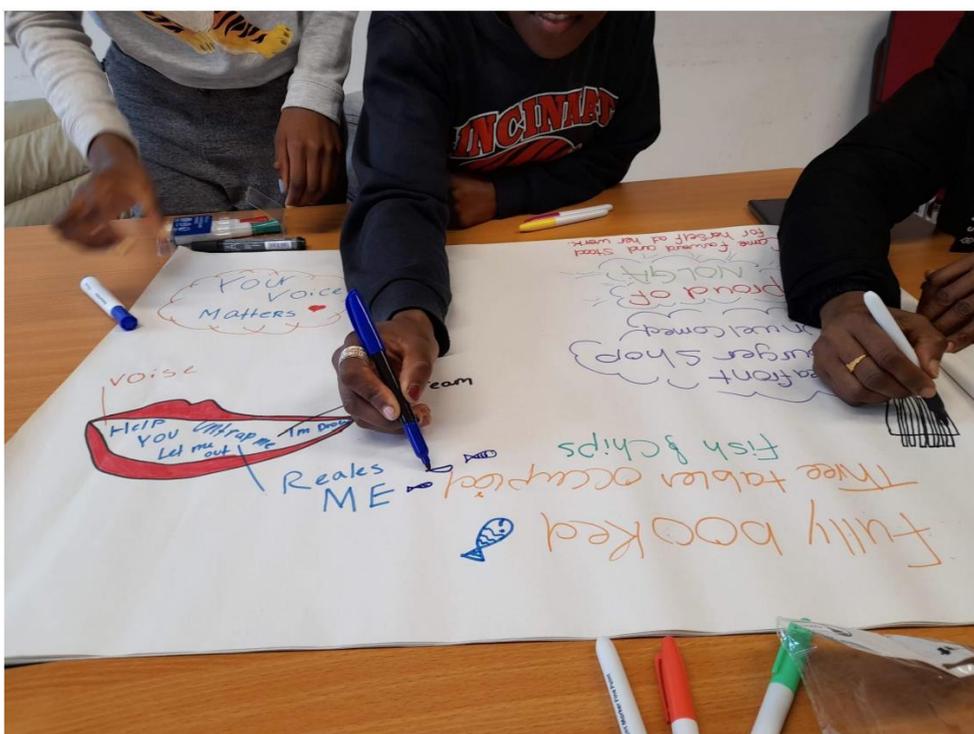
"I went to a burger shop by sea on a sunny day to get some burgers for my children. When ordering the burger, I asked if this meat was beef or ham. The man in the shop kept asking her, "what you are saying". I just didn't order anything because the man did not answer my question. I am so frustrated from this attitude."

Another problematic issue was transport, specifically on the buses - an issue picked up by several respondents, one recalled her experiences when taking the No.X bus route and how the driver would treat her differently:

Maya

“She [the bus driver] usually ignores me. I was standing at the station once, and the driver closed the door and when I asked the driver to open the doors, she refused to let me on the bus. I notice that on my usual trip on this same line [route] I noticed that the driver was re-opening the door to other people. I also noticed that this driver doesn't respond to me when she says, Thank you to her.”

“The same happened to my daughter who knocked the door and the bus driver said, no, the same situation happened with different people [white people] and the door was opened for them.



Seeking inclusion

“Brighton's inclusiveness is selective, they are not always inclusive, they choose when to be inclusive.”

The women's groups discussed the impact of cultural differences and the impact it had with their interactions with services who did not understand them or see things from their perspective. Education and social services were specifically mentioned as concerns. Another area identified from discussion was the impact of language barriers and accents. This meant it made people nervous about speaking in a language other than English in a public space. People's reactions often made them feel awkward and uncomfortable. Some of them expressed that when they spoke in English it still felt like they were outsiders.



The men's groups also discussed racism in Brighton. They felt racism was often subtle and something that others who do not experience racism do not understand. The men's group also discussed the impact that racism has on mental health and strategies to support them

“Racism is carried out in such a subtle way.”

“When we experience racism it is downplayed and regularised.”

Work

Participants spoke about training, education and work, which was an significant issue for them. The groups spoke about the frustrations of finding good quality work that reflected their education and work experience, having worked outside of the United Kingdom, they felt this was not valued in the Britain. One of the men spoke of the frustrations of finding work and how little his own experience and education was valued.

“As a Black minority a skilled worker, I find it difficult to find work because, regardless of the years of experience I gained back home, in the United Kingdom I am perceived as having no experience at all, and I must obtain a qualification in the United Kingdom in order to find work. This is very frustrating and exhausting procedure at times.”

However, the groups shared how they drew strength from these discussions. One of the participants from the women’s group shared that she worked within “a racist work environment” and that her colleagues excluded her from everything. She returned to say that she felt able to go to her manager and complain. The manager was understanding and supportive of her.



Mental health

Mental health was a very sensitive issues, the men’s group in particular discussed the difficulties in acknowledging mental health issues, particularly around stress, but also around other challenges in their lives. One of the men shared that he had mental health issues and would benefit from meditation sessions to help find inner peace and to deal with his mental health. Another man explained how he was a carer for his wife, who required a lot of support and he also a lot of childcare responsibilities as well as going to work outside the home, he shared how this was impacting his mental health. The group felt there needed to be more emphasis on men’s mental health.

“We do not pay attention to our physical and mental health; we overwork ourselves and do not take care of ourselves.”

“The best medicine for stress is rest; the best method to manage stress is to schedule time for relaxation, such as sleeping and eating well, so that your energy may be replenished.”

“I have low self-esteem because I complain of racial harassment.”

The group discussed the physical and mental stress that men who experience racism face and possible ways to cope.



Women's group

“Changes I would make if I were the Mayor of Brighton and Hove”

Nursery for kids below two years.

Medical services in different languages.

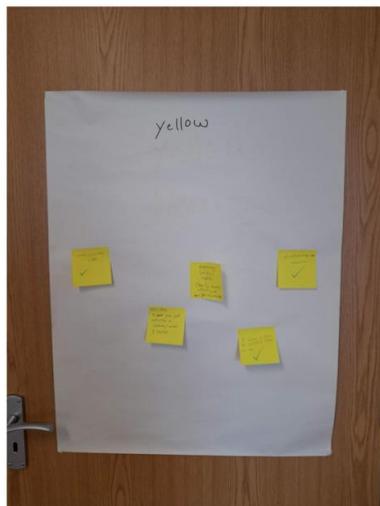
Worship places near the house (Walking distance)

An explanation for citizens' rights everywhere, especially for foreigners.

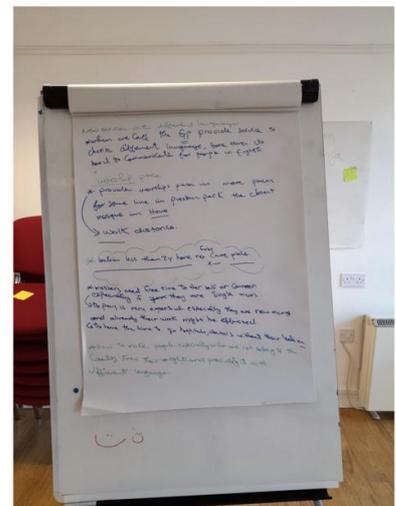
To change some decisions, the suggestions included:



New Decisions



The decision to change



The plan to make change

Men's group

"Changes I would make if I were the Mayor of Brighton and Hove"

"I would alter the curriculum because education plays such an important role in society. The type of education a youngster receives will impact the type of adult he or she becomes. I would develop a more inclusive and multicultural curriculum."

"I would change the management structure so that there is a healthy relationship between the leaders and the people, that the people have access to their leaders, and that the leaders are more accountable to the people. In addition, people of all races and ethnicity will be well-represented."

"I would change the media; I would examine the information that is shown to children in the media because children are exposed to unhealthy stuff on social media."

"I would encourage societal diligence, morality, inclusivity, and multiculturalism."

"Racism of any kind should not be tolerated."

"We would like these sessions to be continued!"

"It needs to be changed – the whole UK education system"

"People need to understand difference . . . of nationalities, religion, customs, education."

Future activities

Participants suggested many activities like:

- “Brighton has no other safe spaces for men, a monthly meetings for the group, talking about anything and they could select topics to discuss.”
- “Social outing for the adults.”
- “Storytelling activities for kids.”
- “Monthly kids activities, led and organised by different parents every time.”
- “Building capacity sessions/training sessions to support employment opportunities”
- “New services with different languages.”
- “When you call the GP - having an option to communicate/ select different languages.”
- “Food from all over the world is available in Brighton, however it is pricey. It would be good for it to be cheaper.”



Suggestions



'Four paintings'

Reflections

Inclusion

There was a clear willingness for participants of this project to be more involved and included within Brighton and Hove life. Many participants expressed how they valued the city but also the barriers they faced in their day-to-day lives. They hoped that the city could create a culture of openness towards a diversity of perspectives and insights in interactions with minoritised ethnic groups.

Spaces and place

There is a growing need for ethnic minorities to have safe space created that can act as a place for meeting, accessing advice and guidance relevant to ethnic minorities as well as promoting minoritised ethnic community activities and opportunities to help strengthen the community. It could be about being creative about promoting spaces to groups not currently using the space or refreshing the offer.

Racist incidents were identified as a significant issue for minoritised ethnic people which required further investigating in various aspects of people's lives. The importance of a good experience on public transport would be vital – being treated with respect and equity whilst using the buses in particular.

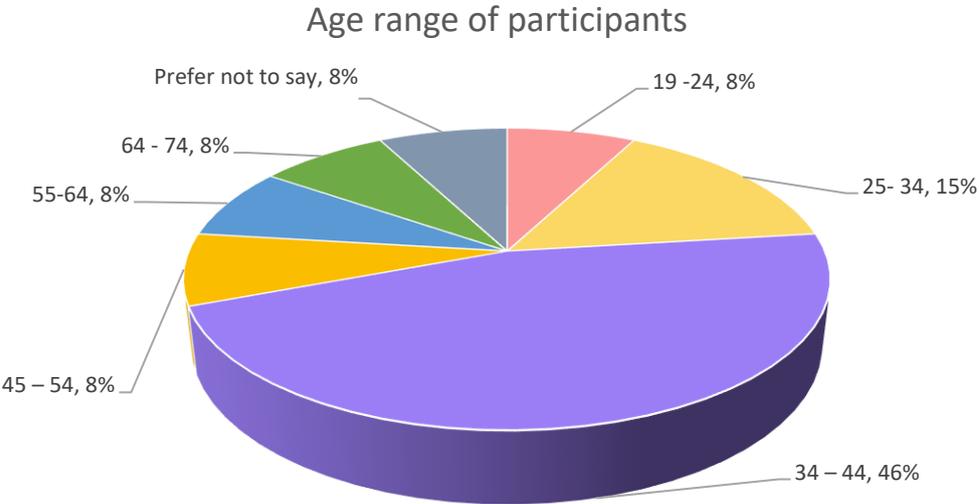
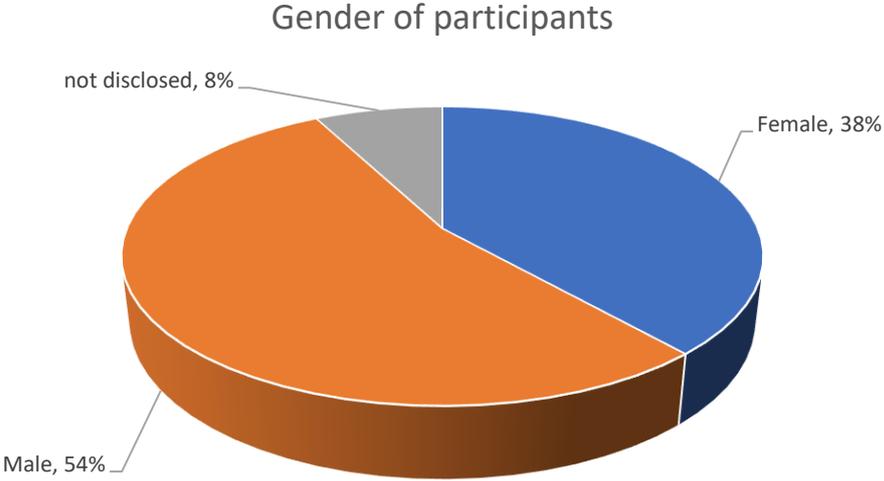
Community development

To flourish, community development needs to invest time and energy in the communities and grow trust particularly in regards to education, training and employment, mental health and physical health. Genuine partnerships with existing Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic groups as well as emerging and struggling groups, beyond short-term consultations will create opportunities and partnerships. For these partnerships to grow there needs to be a more co-ordinated approach from Councils and voluntary groups towards Black Asian and minoritised groups and individuals. An overall strategy and action plan to drive a programme of work which is adequately resourced and funded would help establish meaningful partnerships.

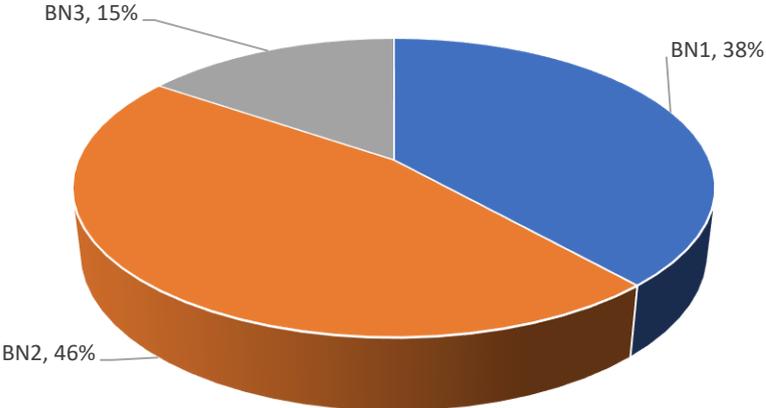
Demographics

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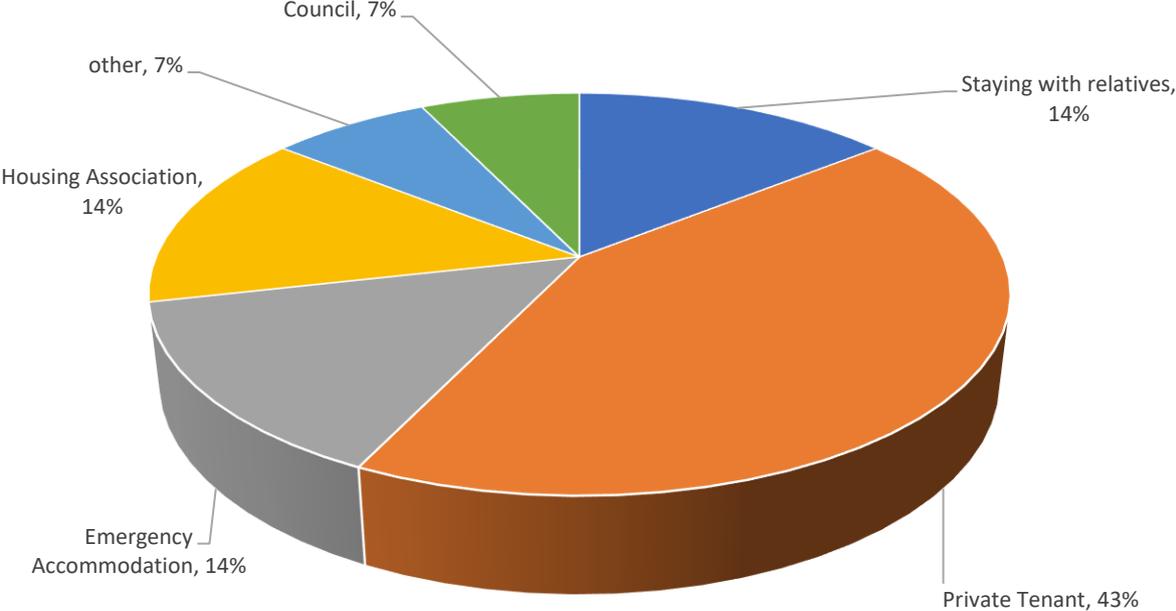
Below is a breakdown of ethnicity, age, gender, household make up and other data of the participants attending the sessions.



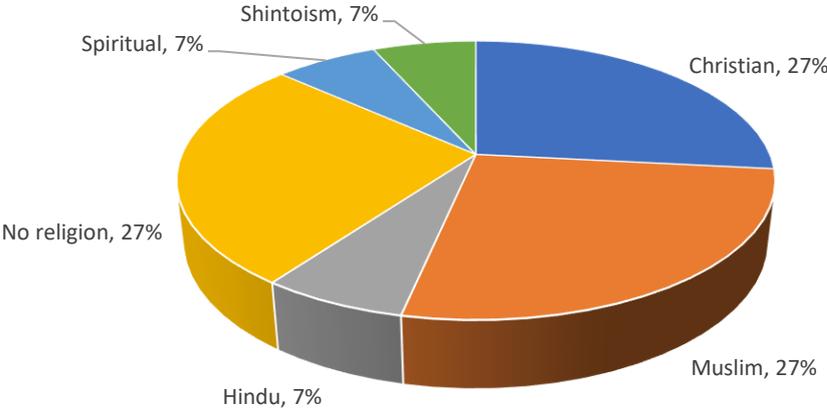
Where participants live



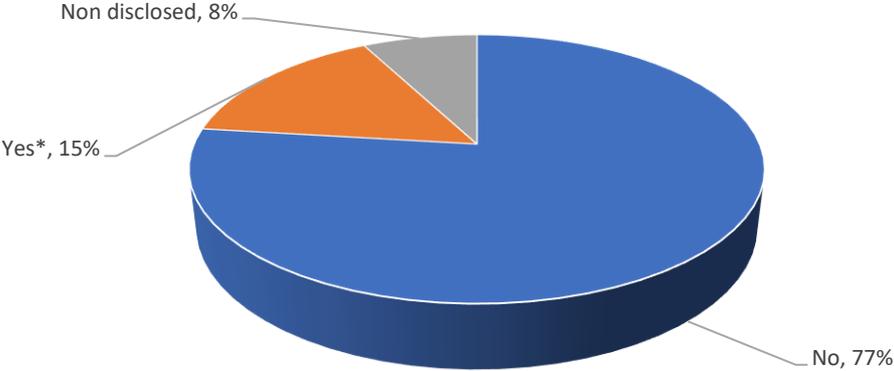
Housing arrangement of participants



Religious affiliation/belief of participants

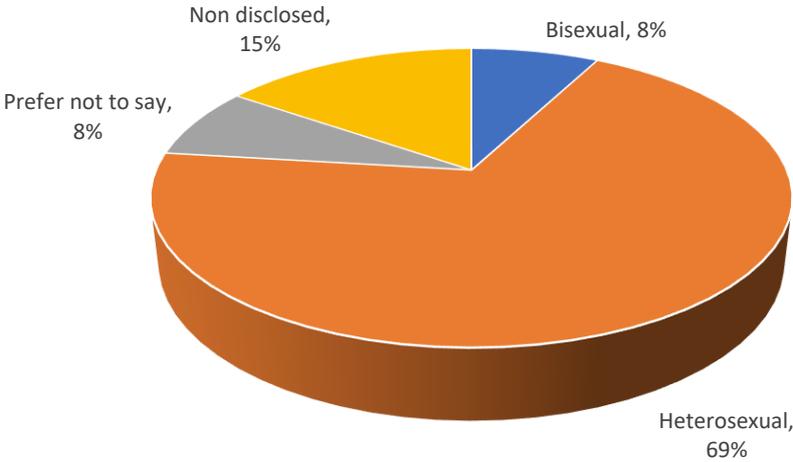


Whether participants have a disability or a long-term health condition

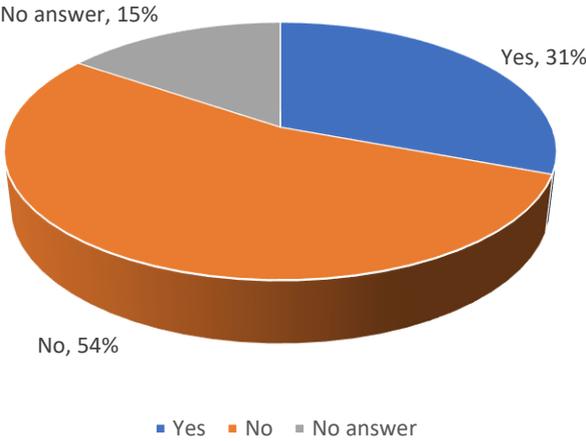


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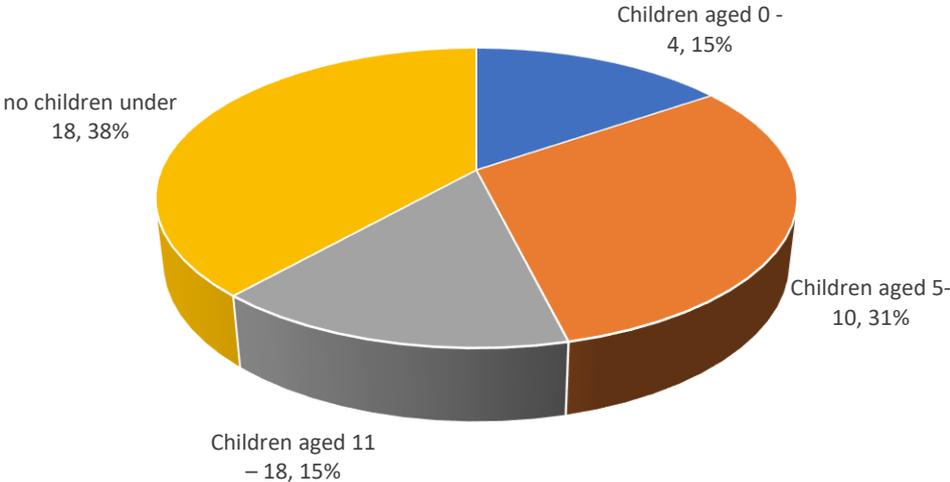
Sexuality of participants



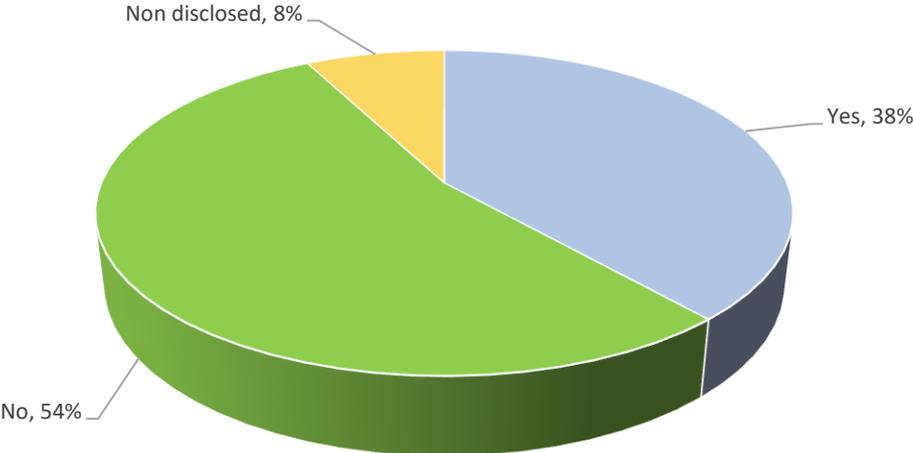
Participants with caring responsibilities



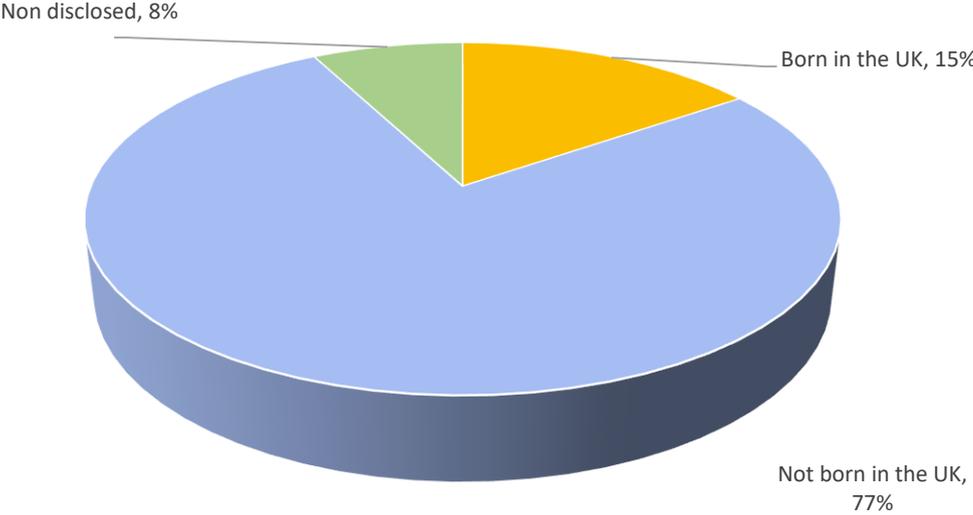
Unpaid responsibility for children



Whether participants are refugees/asylum seekers



Participants born in the UK



Countries participants were born in?

-
- Angola
 - Egypt
 - Hong Kong
 - India
 - Japan
 - Libya
 - Nigeria
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Syria

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Special thank to all the participants who took part in this project to help grow our understanding of what it is like to live in Brighton and Hove.