



**University of
Sunderland**

Harvey-Golding, Louise, Phillips, Carrie, Simpson, Diane, Smiles, Julie, Wysocka, Julia and Chantkowski, Michal (2024) 'They see us as an easy target': discrimination and hate crime against Eastern European women living in the UK. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*. pp. 1-17. ISSN 2398-6808

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/17445/>

Usage guidelines

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

Key messages

1. Findings explore the intersecting gendered and racial discrimination towards Eastern European women, living in the UK, providing a descriptive account of the distinct forms of gender-based discrimination and violence they face.
2. The discrimination and hate crime faced by Eastern European women, living in the UK, is rooted in the historic and current racialisation, sexualisation and othering of Eastern European women.

Title

“They see us as an easy target” – Discrimination and Hate Crime towards Eastern European women, in the UK

Abstract

Anti-immigration sentiment, discrimination and hate crime, towards Eastern Europeans in the UK, has increased in recent years. Prior to Brexit, European Union (EU) citizens were afforded with free movement, including rights to live and work in the UK, but in 2020, those without residency status, were subject to strict immigration laws and restrictions on living and working in the UK. Research shows that punitive immigration policies have a disproportionate impact on migrant women, increasing their risk of discrimination, exploitation, and gender-based violence. However, whilst the UK Government ratified the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, a treaty, otherwise known as the ‘Istanbul Convention’, into law in 2022, they opted out of Article 59, which specifically protects migrant women. Existing research into discrimination, exploitation, and gender-based violence towards migrant women, in the UK, largely focuses on Black and minority ethnic (BME) women. This article reports on findings from a mixed-methods, descriptive study, on the specific experiences of Eastern European women, living in the UK. Findings explore the intersecting gendered and racial discrimination towards Eastern European women, in the UK, providing a descriptive account of the distinct forms of gender-based discrimination and violence they face.

Key words: Eastern European women; Gender-based violence; Violence against women and girls (VAWG); Istanbul Convention; Brexit and migration

1. Introduction

In recent years, discourses on migration from Eastern European countries have become increasingly hostile within the UK (Harris, et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019). Populist narratives, propagated in politics and the media, including threats to national identity and costs to economic resources, such as employment opportunities, wages, welfare, housing, and public services, have contributed to anti-immigration sentiment (Elgenius & Garner, 2021; Rzepnikowska, 2020; Wadsworth, 2015). The 2008 economic recession and subsequent austerity measures, including cuts to welfare and funding for public services, alongside UK Government legislation (Immigration Acts, 2014; 2016) and initiatives (Operation Vaken) (Home Office UK, 2013) have exacerbated these tensions. During the lead up to the Brexit referendum, politicians and the media amplified the issue of immigration within public

debate, with populist rhetoric about migrants exploiting the welfare state, draining resources in health care, and being involved in criminality (Lecka et al., 2021; Rzepnikowska, 2019; 2020; Lumsden et al., 2019; Burnett, 2017). An Ipsos MORI poll (2016) highlighted immigration was a significant factor influencing voting patterns in the EU referendum. The outcome of the EU referendum is considered to have been strongly influenced by increased anti-immigration sentiment within the UK (Lumsden et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Benedi Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2020). Since Brexit, the concessions afforded by being white and European in the UK have diminished (Sime et al., 2022; Tereschenko et al., 2019). Migrants from Eastern European countries have progressively been portrayed as ‘outsiders’, constituting an economic and cultural threat, placing them in increasingly marginalised positions (Sime et al., 2022; Tereschenko et al., 2019).

The rise in racist and xenophobic hate crime, following the UK Government’s announcement of a referendum on remaining in the EU, has been reported widely (Virdee & McGeever, 2018; Lumsden et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Benedi Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2020; Komaromi & Singh, 2016). In July 2016, four weeks after the referendum result, the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) announced that more than 6000 hate crimes had been reported across the UK. Following the referendum, in June 2016, the number of police recorded racially aggravated offences increased by 41% from the previous year (Corcoran and Smith, 2016). Reports highlighted that those targeted were both Black minority groups and white European migrants (Virdee & McGeever, 2018; Komaromi & Singh, 2016). Whilst anti-immigration hostility towards Eastern European migrants, living in the UK, existed before Brexit, studies suggest populist rhetoric surrounding Brexit legitimised pre-existing hostilities towards this substantial minority group (Lumsden et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019). Reports detail increased verbal abuse, threats, harassment, physical assault, and damage to property towards Eastern European minorities, living in the UK, during and after the EU referendum (Lumsden et al., 2019). Authors of previous studies have claimed that the Brexit campaign created an environment where hostility and hatred towards European migrants is routine and normalised (Lumsden et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019). Studies have also reported that Eastern European migrants perceive themselves to be more vulnerable to racist hate crime, direct discrimination, social exclusion, and unfair treatment, post-Brexit (Benedi Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2020). A recent study by Sime et al., (2022) reported that young Eastern Europeans, living in the UK, post-Brexit, had used strategies to ‘blend-in’ to avoid racial discrimination and hate crime, repressing characteristics of their identity, such as accents, ‘foreign sounding’ names, wearing cultural clothing and eating certain foods.

During 2004 and 2007, the European Union (EU) incorporated more Central and Eastern European countries, granting more citizens free movement and access to the labour market. Women from Eastern European countries comprised over half of Eastern European migrants during this period (Home Office, 2009). Subsequently, Eastern European people have become a substantial minority group within the United Kingdom (UK) (Sumption & Walsh, 2022). According to the most recent publicly available data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2021), Poland is the top EU country of birth (23% of all EU migrants living within the UK), followed by Romania (12% of all EU migrants), Lithuania (5% of all EU migrants) and Bulgaria (4% of all EU migrants). Before the EU referendum result and subsequent implementation of stricter immigration laws, free movement regulations allowed EU citizens the rights to live and work in the UK (Costello & Hancox, 2014). However, in

January 2020, rights to free movement in the UK ceased, and EU citizens were subject to more restrictive immigration laws and visa requirements, in line with citizens from non-EU countries (Gower et al., 2022). Whilst new immigration laws did not apply to EU citizens and family members with British residency, those without were required to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), which allows holders rights to live and work in the UK, access welfare benefits, and apply for UK citizenship (UK Government, 2020). Pre-settled status is a temporary measure, valid for 5 years, with restrictions on accessing certain benefits such as Universal Credit (UK Government, 2020). Holders are required to apply for settled status before expiry if they wish to live and work in the UK (Home Office & UK Visas and Immigration, 2020). To apply for EUSS, applicants must submit five-years' worth of documentation, such as P60s, payslips and bills (UK Government, 2020).

Several authors have highlighted a disparity in the challenges faced by women applying for EU Settled Status, compared to men (e.g., Yong, 2022; Duda-Mikulin, 2020; Guerenó-Omil, et al., 2019; Shutes & Walker, 2018). Women are more likely to be caring for children, not engaged in employment, or in low paid, insecure employment, such as zero-hour contracts, and are therefore less likely to have the resources or evidence to satisfy the requirements of EUSS. Insecure immigration status also places migrant women at increased risk of being subject to domestic abuse and other forms of exploitation and violence, especially those with 'no recourse to public funds' who are excluded from welfare rights and services (Yong, 2022; Duda-Mikulin, 2020; Guerenó-Omil, et al., 2019; Shutes & Walker, 2019). Migrant women in controlling and abusive relationships, and those estranged from abusive partners, may not have easy access to their identification documents, or may rely on their partner for evidence, which makes meeting the criteria of the EUSS more difficult for some women (Sumption & Fernández-Reino, 2020). Despite this evidence, the UK Government have not committed to Article 59, in their 2022 ratification of the Council of Europe Treaty, Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which protects migrant women from violence and domestic abuse, with specific protections for those whose residency status is reliant upon an abusive partner (Coleman, 2002; Venis, 2022). The UK Government's decision to opt-out of Article 59 has been criticised by human rights organisations for creating a two-tier system for victims of gender-based violence, which discriminates against migrant women, increasing their vulnerability towards exploitation, domestic violence and abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence (Amnesty International UK, 2022).

Existing research into the experiences of migrant women living in the UK largely focuses on the experiences of migrant women in general and BME women with fewer studies focusing on the specific experiences of Eastern European migrant women. Whilst evidence is emerging in this field, research is still within stages of infancy, and gaining knowledge on the impact of Brexit and Covid-19 restrictions on Eastern European migrant women, living in the UK, requires attention. Furthermore, research with Eastern European women, tends to focus on the experiences of Polish women, with fewer studies with Eastern European women from other countries.

The central aim of the current study was to increase knowledge on the distinct experiences of Eastern European women, living in the North of England UK, in terms of discrimination and hate crime. The Equality Act (EA) (2010) and hate crime legislation and policy, in the UK, provided a framework for exploring discrimination and hate crime, towards Eastern European

women, living in the UK, from an intersectional lens. The EA (2010) prevents discrimination of individuals due to ‘protected characteristics,’ including race (or nationality), sex, disability, sexuality, marriage/civil partnership, religion/ belief, gender reassignment, and age, in employment, education, health care, consumer services, housing, and public services. UK Law also recognises hostility or prejudice, towards any individual or group, based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity, as potential hate crimes (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998; Sentencing Act, 2020). The exclusion of sex and/or gender, as a characteristic of hate crime, was a methodological limitation for this study when exploring hate crime using this legislation. This limitation was minimised via the use of the principles of the EA (2010), which includes ‘sex’ as a protected characteristic for discrimination, and the overall focus on women for this study. This study was approved by the University of Sunderland Ethics Committee.

2. Method

The study employed a mixed methods descriptive design, including an online survey with Eastern European women, and semi-structured interviews with Eastern European women and service providers, working with Eastern European women. Data collection for this study was underpinned by the fundamental principles of the EA (2010) and hate crime legislation and policy in the UK, which provided a framework for exploring discrimination and hate crime, from an intersectional lens.

Initially data were collected using an online Qualtrics survey during March and June 2021. The survey comprised of predominantly closed-ended and multiple-choice questions using the principles of the EA (2010) and hate crime legislation and policy. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to recruit N=127 Eastern European women (mean = 35 years; range 18 to 62) for the online survey, which was circulated on social media and by local agencies supporting women and girls, migrants, and / or minoritised populations. Most participating women were of Polish origin (68%), followed by smaller proportions of women from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Russia, Latvia, Albania, Lithuania, Moldova, and Serbia. Over half of the women (60%) held higher education qualifications, and 79% were in employment or self-employed, predominantly undertaking occupations, such as housekeeping, cleaning, hospitality, domestic, care, factory/production, customer service/sales, and food and drink services. Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and averages to gain a descriptive quantitative illustration of Eastern European women’s experiences discrimination and hate crime.

Subsequently, a pragmatic convenience sampling method was used to recruit Eastern European women for small group interviews, during July and August 2021. All survey participants were provided with the opportunity to take part in small group interviews. Twenty-five women expressed an interest in participation, and a total of N=6 women agreed to take part. Demographics are not reported due to the small sample, in order to retain participant confidentiality. Interview schedules comprised of open-ended and probing questions, with a focus on Eastern European women’s experiences of discrimination and hate crime, using definitions from the EA (2010) and hate crime legislation. Considering the sensitive nature of the pertinent issues, small, semi-structured group interviews, consisting of two Eastern European women and two female researchers were undertaken. Group interviews

took place when there were Covid-19 and social distancing and were therefore undertaken virtually via Microsoft Teams, and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Finally, a purposive sampling method was used to recruit service providers to take part in semi-structured interviews, during September and October 2021. Twenty statutory and voluntary health care and support services, providing support to local Eastern European women, were invited to take part. A final sample of N = 4 service providers, from three voluntary organisations, within the North East of England, UK participated. Two service providers were from led-by-and-for (minoritised communities) voluntary women's organisations and one organisation was a generic women's voluntary organisation who had experience working with Eastern European women. Service provider interview schedules comprised of open-ended and probing questions, relating their experiences working with Eastern European women with a focus on discrimination and hate crime towards this population. Interview schedules were designed using the principles and definitions in the EA (2010) and hate crime legislation and associated policy. Individual interviews were considered the most appropriate method of data collection for service providers, as opposed to group discussions, as these participants were from individual organisations. Interviews were undertaken virtually via Microsoft Teams, due to Covid-19 restrictions, and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Transcripts were the main units of analysis from the small group interviews with Eastern European women and interviews with service providers. Transcript data were analysed using a six-stage thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved an in-depth line-by-line reading of the transcripts, during which sections of text were delineated with codes attributing meaning. Subsequently, a master list of codes was created, and these codes were refined into preliminary themes using a constant comparative method. Preliminary themes were further refined into master themes and sub-themes via further comparative analyses. Data analysis concluded at the point of saturation, whereby no new information was emerging from the analysis processes, generating well developed and cohesive themes and sub-themes, with sufficient variation.

3. Results

3.1. Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women

The definition of discrimination for this study was underpinned by the EA (2010), which is UK legislation preventing discrimination of individuals in employment, education, health care, consumer services, housing, and public services, because of race (or nationality), sex, disability, sexuality, marriage/civil partnership, religion/ belief, gender reassignment, and age

3.1.1. Survey Results

Survey results showed that Eastern European women living in the UK face discrimination across all areas of their lives, and this is predominantly due to race (or nationality) and sex.

Thirty-six percent of women reported discrimination in employment. Over half (54%) of these women reported that they were discriminated against by employers/at work due to their race (or nationality), followed by 27% who were discriminated against by employers/at work because of their sex. Smaller proportions of women were discriminated by employers/at work

due to their religion/beliefs (8%), pregnancy and maternity (8%), age (8%), marriage/civil partnership (5%) and disability (5%).

A quarter of women stated they had experienced discrimination by a business, organisation, or service provider. Of these, 68% of women stated that discrimination by businesses, organisations and service providers was motivated by race (or nationality). This was followed by (20%) of participants who stated that this discrimination was motivated by sex. Smaller proportions of women stated that the discrimination was motivated by age (12%), religion and/or belief (8%), pregnancy/maternity (8%), marriage/civil partnership (4%), and disability (4%).

Fourteen percent of women reported that they had experienced discrimination by health care providers. Of these, over half of respondents (57%) reported that discrimination by health care providers was due to race (or nationality). Smaller proportions of respondents reported that they were discriminated against by health care providers due to sex (14%); religion/belief (14%), pregnancy/maternity (14%) and age (14%).

Nineteen percent of women stated that they had been discriminated against by an estate agent, housing provider or landlord. Of these, 58% of women stated that discrimination by estate agents, housing providers, landlords etc. was due to race (or nationality). Smaller proportions of respondents stated that this discrimination was due to pregnancy/ maternity (11%), sex (5%), religion/belief (5%) and age (5%).

Ten percent of women stated that they had experienced discrimination from education providers. Of these, 80% stated that they were discriminated against by education providers because of their race (or nationality). Following this, 20% of respondents stated they were discriminated against by education providers because of their sex, and 20% stated the discrimination was due to religion/belief. Smaller proportions of respondents stated that discrimination by service providers was due to marriage/civil partnership (10%), disability (10%) and age (10%).

3.1.2. Small Group Interview Findings

Eastern European women described experiences of discrimination in employment, education, and their public and personal lives. Women discussed facing precarity in access to employment opportunities and worker's rights, due to nationality, sex, and caring responsibilities,

On the Polish side, people are used by their employers. The women are fired because of their pregnancy. [...] I got any kind of job because I can't afford to be without work. I can't afford to be without work. I have two kids and I'm a single parent. So, I couldn't be without work. I just found anything. Just literally anything. Yeah, and that was one of the worst. (P5)

Moreover, Eastern European women described facing persistent discrimination and harassment within the workplace. Women described being targeted for discrimination and harassment by colleagues, due to their race/ nationality, including being subject to racial slurs, e.g., *Polish assassin*, and singled out/ treated differently to colleagues. In addition, Eastern European women also described being discriminated against because of their sex and subject to sexual harassment by male colleagues in the workplace. As one woman conveyed,

He was undermining me, belittling me and I was his punch ball for everything, because I was foreigner, and I was a woman. It was sexual harassment too. He was talking about his penis. He started the conversation always when nobody was in the room. I said to him, 'I don't want to hear it,' and he was continuing that conversation. It's happened a few times. I complained they said he was joking. (P5)

Eastern European women described lacking support and access to recourse from employers when reporting discrimination and harassment by colleagues in the workplace. When reporting discrimination and harassment by colleagues in the workplace to employers, Eastern European women described how this resulted in further victimisation and harassment. One woman shared her story of workplace victimisation and harassment,

He came when nobody was in the room. That was his tactic. I started crying and he said it's my fault. I said he shouldn't talk with me without a witness. He said, I will talk with whoever I want, nobody is going to do anything. Every time I was complaining, it never went resolved, never he was told off. There were ten grievances from me about his behaviour and he only got a verbal warning. (P5)

Educational settings were a further space where Eastern European women described experiencing discrimination. Women discussed experiencing discrimination by both peers and educators in educational settings, including being subject to racial and sexist slurs, e.g., *Bulgarian/ Russian Bitch*, and singled out/ treated differently to their peers. One woman described her experience of discrimination in higher education,

The final experience I had was during my masters [degree]. There was a lecturer, senior lecturer, who was quite racist towards me. She always had a problem with me. She said that I speak in whiney and high voice. Everything I did was a problem. She would give me a bad look for going to the toilet. There weren't any problems with anyone else, just me and another student who was Black. We got told off everything like we were children. (P3)

Additionally, Eastern European women discussed the persistent and normalised discrimination and harassment they received in their public and personal lives. Women described facing racist and sexist discrimination and harassment (including sexual harassment) routinely as part of their public and personal lives. One woman described her experiences of these types of discrimination and harassment in public, "They use, 'I'm a Polish prostitute'... 'she's a prostitute.' I remember my little boy was asking, 'What does that mean?' I said, 'Listen, don't listen, just ignore them.'" (P6) Another woman talked about her experiences being subject to racial and sexist stereotypes, via loved ones and family members, "His neighbours said to him [EE women's partner], 'you know, Eastern European women are good looking but most of them are prostitutes.'" (P4)

Eastern European women discussed being seen as '*easy targets*' for sexual harassment in public spaces due to being labelled by pervasive sexist and racist stereotypes. Two women discussed their experiences being subject to racial and sexist stereotypes and harassment in public spaces,

They think we're easier targets, we're more vulnerable. They think we're poor. People have said to me, when I've been clubbing, 'I'll get you drink... whereabouts you from... Bulgaria? Isn't it like, 20 pence a pint [drink]... oh you're lucky here? Look,

I'm rich. Comments like that, which at the time you're not really analysing them, but afterwards you start to think about them, and you start to realise that comment was about Eastern European women being prostitutes. (P3)

I've heard it a few times, from my boyfriend's friend... from other people. They think that we have lower standards of view, so we will accept anything or anybody. Some people think that we have nothing to go back to. I've been asked if we have central heating in the houses. (P4)

Eastern European women described avoiding certain public spaces and changing the way they dress to evade racist and sexist discrimination and sexual harassment in public. As one woman explained, "I'm not going clubbing, pubbing, anything like it, anymore. Every time, I felt so uncomfortable and especially by sexist men. I'm not wearing makeup, and instead wearing my glasses, hoody, men's clothes, because that's not making attention." (P6)

3.1.3. Service Provider Interview Findings

During interviews, service providers working with Eastern European women also discussed routine discrimination towards Eastern European women living in the North East of England, UK. Employment was highlighted by service providers as an area where Eastern European women face disproportionate discrimination. Service providers stated that there are limited employment opportunities for Eastern European women, due to English language bias leading to skewed assumptions about women's knowledge and skill levels,

This person really wanted to take part in fire warden training, they said to her 'oh no, you can't do it', 'why not?', 'well, your English is not that good.' She said 'well, I think it's good enough, I think I can do it.' So, I had to complain for her to access this training, and she did it, she passed it no problem. It's just like opportunities being taken away, taken away from them. (S1)

In addition, service providers reported Eastern European women are often employed in low paid and precarious employment, such as cleaning, hospitality, and production; roles which were adversely impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in job losses for Eastern European women,

Many people started being furloughed [at the beginning of the pandemic]. They started being dismissed from work because there was not a lot of work. As we know, and it was very often the Eastern European community, because they work in hospitality and production, kind of low-skilled jobs, so we were seeing a big rise in Universal Credit applications, the need for Universal Credit applications, job searching. (S1)

Furthermore, service providers reported that discrimination from colleagues and employers within the workplace is a normalised and routine aspect of Eastern European women's working lives. Service providers explained that Eastern European women lack support and recourse for reporting discrimination in the workplace and fear losing their job due to the precarity they face in employment, "Quite often women, especially women, they're just trying to ignore it, just like 'I just need to get on with it because I'm going to lose my job, what am I going to do?'" (S1)

3.2. Hate Crime Towards Eastern European Women

Hate crime is defined using UK hate crime laws and associated policy. A hate crime may include including verbal abuse, intimidation, threats and harassment, physical assault, and property damage, motivated by race (or nationality), religion, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender identity.

3.2.1. Survey Results

Survey results showed that Eastern European women, living in the UK experience hate crimes, primarily motivated by race (or nationality).

Almost half of women (46%) reported that they had received verbal abuse. Of these, 56% of women stated this was motivated by their perceived race and/ or nationality. Following this, 16% of women stated that verbal abuse was motivated by their religion/beliefs and 4% stated it was motivated by their sexual orientation.

Thirty-two percent of women stated that they had received intimidation, threats and harassment. Of these women, 83% reported that acts of intimidation, threats or harassment were due to race and/or nationality. A smaller proportion of women stated that these acts were due to religion (10%), sexual orientation (7%) and disability (3%).

Twelve percent of women stated they had experienced physical assault. Of these women, 73% stated that the physical assault was due to their race and/or nationality. Nine percent of respondents stated that the physical assault was due to their religion.

Eighteen percent of women stated that they had experienced property damage. Of these women, 82% stated that this was due to their race and/ or nationality.

3.2.2. Small Group Interview Findings

Findings from small group interviews provided illustrative accounts of Eastern European women's experiences of hate crime. Eastern European women described being subject to racially motivated hate crime in public, including verbal abuse and physical assault. Women recounted that racially motivated hate crimes towards them had increased with the Brexit campaign. Women reported that Brexit had increased anti-immigration sentiment towards the Eastern European community in the UK, in terms of both severity and frequency of the discrimination and hate crime they experienced. One woman shared her story of being a victim of racially motivated and anti-immigration hate crime in a busy public space,

“The most traumatizing was when I was on my way home. There was a group, next to the train station and they started the whole, ‘Brexit, get out of here!’ Then there’s something flying, and it hit me. It was a bottle of water, but I thought it was something else, like bodily fluid. That shook me because they were all men, and about six of them.” (P3)

Likewise, Eastern European women perceived that the Brexit campaign had encouraged and emboldened members of the public to enact racist and anti-immigration sentiment in public spaces towards migrants. For instance, one woman claimed, “It [Brexit] made some people feel more empowered. They feel they have the right to be this way towards some people. So, some people were showing it more, like it was OK to be harassing people, for example.” (P1)

Eastern European women discussed perceiving acts of racist hate crime as routine and normalised aspects of their public lives, which they rarely reported to the authorities. As one woman, who experienced racist verbal abuse in public shared, “I didn’t report it. I feel like it’s something just small” (P2) Moreover, women described avoiding reporting racist hate crime to avoid further trauma from the reporting process. For instance, one woman explained why she chose not to report racially motivated physical assault and property damage, “I didn’t want to think about it anymore. I didn’t want to be like affected by it even more than I was, so I just tried to forget about it” (P5)

Eastern European women who participated in the small group interviews acknowledged that being white and European allowed them to be inconspicuous, which afforded them with the ability to avoid being detected as ‘foreign’. However, women described that speaking with an accent or in their first language, revealed their identities and potentially exposed them to racial discrimination and hate crimes. To avoid being subjected to racially motivated hate crimes in public Eastern European women described staying silent in public spaces where they felt vulnerable. For example, one woman disclosed, “People realise I’m not from here when I start speaking. On the metro, I prefer to not say anything. I know that if I start talking, I will hear abusive language and something against my nationality.” (P1)

3.2.3. Service Provider Interview Findings

Interviews with service providers also highlighted the existence of hate crime towards Eastern European women. Service providers were able to provide multiple examples of particularly serious racially motivated hate crime incidents towards Eastern European women. For instance, one service provider described,

It’ll be strangers, it’ll be neighbours, and often it’s children. It’s antisocial behaviour that will start with some verbal abuse, or things being chucked at someone’s house, and then the kids will come back again, back again. Then it will turn to sometimes violence, sometimes just awful, awful things. There was a family in [local area] who had their car smashed up recently by a group of children, just because they were Polish. (S1)

Service providers discussed encouraging Eastern European women to report racially motivated hate crime to the police, despite the likelihood that women would not report incidents to the authorities. For instance, one service provider stated,

When we have those situations (racial abuse) and we’ve encouraged women to report that to the police and support them to report that to the police. There’s a lot of disillusionment and feelings that nothing’s going to change if they report it to the police. (S2)

Additionally, service providers claimed that Eastern European women lack recourse when reporting even very serious racist hate crimes to the police. For example, one service provider explained, “She was with a one-year-old baby, she had rocks chucked at her. She was being called, ‘Polish bitch’ ... ‘go back home,’ and this happened on multiple occasions. When she reported it to the police, they said they can’t do anything.” (S1)

Furthermore, service providers reported that anti-immigration sentiment in the UK, during and since the EU referendum, had increased the frequency and severity of hate crimes

towards Eastern European women. Service providers considered that the Brexit campaign and associated media and Government narratives about migrants contributing to job shortages and financial instability in the UK had increased hate crime towards all minority communities in the area,

Socio-economic deprivation plays a really big part in everything. Communities feel that other communities are causing job shortages and financial turmoil. That is something that's often pushed by the media. It's pushed by the Government. It was a massive push behind the campaign around Brexit and I think that has definitely fed into levels of hate crime across multiple different communities. (S2)

Moreover, service providers discussed the negative impact of anti-immigration sentiment on Eastern European women's wellbeing. For instance, as one service provider explained, "People get asked, 'When are you going back home?' And they think it might be funny, but when people experience that kind of bullying or harassment on a daily basis, it has a big impact on their wellbeing." (S1)

Discussion

This paper provides a descriptive account of the discrimination and hate crime experienced by Eastern European women, living in the North East of England, UK. Data collection was underpinned by the EA (2010) and UK hate crime laws and associated policy, as a framework to define discrimination and hate crime, and as a lens to explore the intersectional mechanisms of discrimination, and hate crime, towards Eastern European women, living in the UK. Findings from this study show that Eastern European women, living in the UK, are subject discrimination (including harassment and sexual harassment), which pervades every area of their personal and professional lives, and is largely due to race (or nationality) and sex. Findings also show that Eastern European women, living in the UK, experience hate crimes, including verbal abuse, intimidation, threats, harassment, property damage, physical assault, primarily motivated by race (or nationality).

A key theme in findings from the current study was the intersectional discrimination faced by Eastern European women, primarily relating to their race (or nationality) and sex. Eastern European women reported being subjected to racial and sexist discrimination (including harassment and sexual harassment) in employment, education, and other areas of their public and private lives. Wider research has also reported on the 'double discrimination' faced by migrant women, due to the virtue of being both 'foreign and female', often resulting in lack of employment opportunities, over representation in gendered roles, low pay, poor working conditions, and increased risk of exploitation and sexual harassment (Rydzik, et al., 2012; Hoel & Einarsen 2003; Adib & Guerrier, 2003). Moreover, findings from the current research highlight that discrimination towards Eastern European women, often involves overt sexualisation. According to the wider literature, this may derive from stereotypes, relating to trafficking and sexual exploitation of women from Eastern Europe and post-soviet countries (Sime et al., 2022; Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020). Previous studies have also explored the socially constructed positioning of Eastern European women, which sexually objectifies them, whilst simultaneously presenting them victims of trafficking, exploitation, patriarchal culture, and social deprivation (Sime et al., 2022; Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020; Sverdljuk, 2009).

A further key theme, in this study, was Eastern European women's experiences of hate crime, largely motivated by race (or nationality). Eastern European women, who participated in this study reported an increase in anti-immigration sentiment and racial hate crimes, in line with the EU referendum campaign and result, which is a theme highlighted across the wider literature (e.g., Gower, et al., 2022; Sime, et al., 2022; Benedí Lahuerta & Iusmen, 2020; Duda-Mikulín, 2020; Rzepnikowska, 2020; Lumsden, et al., 2019; Burnett, 2017; Meleady, et al., 2017). Whilst racism and xenophobia, towards Eastern European people living the UK, certainly existed pre-Brexit, the evidence is clear that anti-immigration sentiment and racist discrimination towards the Eastern European community, increased and was emboldened, as a direct consequence (Virdee & McGeever, 2018; Lumsden et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Benedí Lahuerta & Lusmen, 2020; Komaromi & Singh, 2016). The Brexit campaign endorsed anti-immigration rhetoric such as 'taking back control' of Britain's borders and restricting free movement; marginalising and reframing EU migrants as 'other' (Van Der Zwet et al. 2020; Outhwaite, 2018). Following Brexit, migrants from Eastern European countries, have been increasing positioned as 'outsiders' who pose economic and cultural threats to the UK (Sime et al., 2022).

Anti-black discrimination is a salient feature of research into racial discrimination and hate crime, within the UK, although there are an increasing number of studies into discrimination towards white racialised groups, including Eastern European minorities (e.g., Meleady et al., 2017; Virdee & McGeever, 2018; Duda-Mikulín, 2019, 2020; Lumsden et al., 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Benedí Lahuerta & Iusmen, 2020; Martynowska et al., 2020). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) posited that racist discourse extends beyond just racial differences and may refer to those who have been socially constructed as having a different origin, and are labelled by terms such as foreign, migrant and minority. Tereschenko et al., (2019) argue that Eastern European migrants are socially positioned 'at the margins of whiteness', socially constructed as 'other', and not belonging; a sentiment that has increased post-Brexit. Women, who participated in this study, recognised that being both white and European enabled them to assimilate more easily in public spaces, which was used as a strategy for avoiding potential racial discrimination or hate crime. Likewise, a study with young Eastern European young people, living in the UK, post-Brexit, reported they used strategies to 'blend-in', by repressing aspects of their identity, such as accents, 'foreign' sounding names, and traditional foods and clothing, often with significant emotional costs (Sime et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the findings presented in this paper highlight Eastern European women, living in the UK, face distinct form of gender-based violence, which includes routine and often normalised discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment) and hate crime due to race (or nationality) and sex, that pervades all areas of their lives. This gender-based violence and discrimination towards Eastern European women is rooted in the racialisation, sexualisation and othering of Eastern European women. This article contributes to a body of emerging evidence into the experiences of Eastern European women living in the UK, in terms of discrimination in employment, health care and service provision (e.g., Richards et al., 2014; Madden et al., 2017; Guerenó-Omil et al., 2018; Crowther & Lau, 2019; Duda-Mikulín, 2020) and wider research into the racialisation and sexualisation of Eastern European women (e.g., Sime et al., 2022; Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020; Sverdljuk, 2009). Further research is required to gain a more comprehensive knowledge on the experiences of

Eastern European women living in the UK, particularly women from more hard-to-reach populations.

This paper provides a unique contribution to the literature on the experiences of Eastern European women living in the UK, in terms of their distinct experiences of discrimination and hate crime. However, it is not without limitations. The exclusion of sex and/or gender from UK hate crime policy and legislation was a limitation within the framework used for data collection on hate crime for this study. Furthermore, the ability to generalise findings is reduced due to the study being undertaken within one area of the North-East of England. However, it should be noted that the aim of this study was not to infer causality or wide-ranging generalisation, but instead to present a descriptive overview of the experiences of Eastern European women living in the UK, in terms of discrimination and hate crime. The findings may be transferable to other similar minority groups of women and may have relevance to those involved in working with minority groups of women. Findings may also be informative to policy makers and campaigners for rights for migrant women, in the UK, particularly in light of the UK Government's decision to opt-out of Article 59 of the Council of Europe Treaty, Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

This work was supported by the Tyne and Wear Growth and Resilience Fund and ICOS (International Community of Sunderland).

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

References

Amnesty International UK, 'Briefing: Removing the Reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention' (November, 2022). <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/amnesty-international-uk-remove-reservation-article-59-istanbul-convention>

Adib, A. and Guerrier, Y. (2003) 'The interlocking of gender with nationality, race, ethnicity and class: The narratives of women in hotel work' *Gender, Work & Organization*, 10 (4): 413 – 432.

Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davis, N. (1983) 'Contextualizing Feminism — Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions' *Feminist Review*, 15(1): 62–75.

Benedí Lahuerta, S. and Iusmen, I. (2020) 'EU nationals' vulnerability in the context of Brexit: the case of Polish nationals' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47 (1): 284 – 306.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology' *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2): 77–101.

Burnett, J. (2017) 'Racial violence and the Brexit state', *Race and Class* 58 (4): 85–97.

Coleman, C. (2022) *Istanbul Convention: Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/istanbul-convention-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence/>

Corcoran, H. and Smith, K. (2016) *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2015/16. Statistical Bulletin 11/16*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/559319/hate-crime-1516-hosb1116.pdf

Costello, C. and Hancox, E. (2014) *The UK, EU Citizenship and Free Movement of Persons*. https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PolicyPrimer-UK_EU_Citizenship_Free_Movement.pdf

Crime and Disorder Act 1998, c. 37. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/contents>

Council of Europe (2014) *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/548165c94.html> [accessed 13 January 2024]

Crowther, S. and Lau, A. (2019) 'Migrant Polish women overcoming communication challenges in Scottish maternity services: A qualitative descriptive study' *Midwifery*, 72: 30–38.

Duda-Mikulín, E.A. (2019) *EU migrant workers, Brexit and precarity EU migrant workers, Brexit and precarity*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Duda-Mikulín, E. A. (2020) 'Gendered migrations and precarity in the post-Brexit-vote UK: the case of Polish women as workers and carers' *Migration and Development*, 9 (1): 92 – 110.

Elgenius, G. and Garner, S. (2021) 'Gate-keeping the nation: discursive claims, counter-claims and racialized logics of whiteness' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44 (16): 215-235.

Gower, M., Fella, S. and Jozepa, I. (2022) *After Brexit: Visiting, working and living in the EU*. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9157/CBP-9157.pdf>

Guereno-Omil, B., Pavlova-Hannam, G. and Hannam, K. (2019) 'Gendered work and leisure mobilities of Polish migrants in the North East of England' *Tourism Review*, 74 (5): 1025–1037.

Harris, C., Gawlewicz, A. and Valentine, G. (2019) 'Attitudes towards immigration: responses to the increased presence of Polish migrants in the UK post 2004' *Migration and Development*, 11 (1): 1–20.

Hoel, H. and Einarsen, S. (2003) *Violence at work in hotels, catering and tourism*. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@sector/documents/publication/wcms_161998.pdf

Home Office (2013) *Operation Vaken: Evaluation Report*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254411/Operation_Vaken_Evaluation_Report.pdf

Home Office (2009) *Accession monitoring report May 2004–March 2009. A8 countries*. <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/uploads/Accession%20monitoring%202004-2009.pdf>

Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration (2020) *New immigration system: what you need to know*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-immigration-system-what-you-need-to-know#full-publication-update-history>

Ipsos MORI (2016) *Immigration Is Now the Top Issue for Voters in the EU Referendum*. <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/immigration-now-top-issue-voters-eu-referendum>

Komaromi, P. and Singh, K. (2016) *Post-referendum racism and xenophobia: The role of social media activism in challenging the normalisation of xeno-racist narratives*, <https://irr.org.uk/app/uploads/2016/07/PRRX-Report-Final.pdf>

Krivonos, D. and Diatlova, A. (2020) 'What to Wear for Whiteness? 'Whore' stigma and the East/West politics of race, sexuality and gender' *Intersections- Eastern European Journal of Society and Politics*, 6 (3): 116 – 132.

Law Commission (2021) *Hate Crime Laws: Final Report* (Law Com No 402, HC 942). <https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/hate-crime/>

Lecka, I., Pantyley, V., Fakeyeva, L. and Cruceanu, A. (2021) '“East” in Europe—health dimension through the lens of the UK daily mail and statistical facts' *International Journal Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18 (7): 3705.

Lumsden, K., Goode, J. and Black, A. (2019) 'I will not be thrown out of the country because I'm an immigrant': Eastern European migrants' responses to hate crime in a semi-rural context in the wake of Brexit' *Sociological Research Online*, 24 (2): 167–184.

Madden, H., Harris, J., Blickem, C., Harrison, R. and Timpson, H. (2017) "Always paracetamol, they give them paracetamol for everything": a qualitative study examining Eastern European migrants' experiences of the UK health service' *BMC Health Services Research*, 17 (604): 1–10.

Martynowska, K., Korulczyk, T. and Mamcarz, P.J. (2020) 'Perceived stress and well-being of Polish migrants in the UK after Brexit vote' *PLoS ONE*, 15 (7): 1 – 15.

Meleady, R., Seger, C.R. and Vermue, M. (2017) 'Examining the role of positive and negative intergroup contact and anti-immigrant prejudice in Brexit' *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 56 (4): 799–808.

NPCC (2016) *Hate crime is unacceptable in any circumstances say police*, 27th June. <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/hate-crime-is-unacceptable-in-any-circumstances-say-police>

Office for National Statistics (2021) *Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality: individual country data*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationalityunderlyingdatasheets>

Outhwaite, W. (2018) 'Migration Crisis and "Brexit"', in: C. Menjivar, M. Ruiz and I. Ness (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 93 – 110.

Richards, J., Kliner, M., Brierley, S. and Stroud, L. (2014) 'Maternal and infant health of Eastern Europeans in Bradford, UK: A qualitative study' *Community Practitioner: the Journal of Community Practitioners and Health Visitors*, 87 (9): 33 – 36.

Rydzik, A., Pritchard, A., Morgan, N. and Sedgley, D. (2012) 'Mobility, migration and hospitality employment: Voices of Central and Eastern European women' *Hospitality & Society*, 2 (2): 137-157.

Rzepnikowska, A. (2019) 'Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45 (1): 61–77.

Rzepnikowska, A. (2020) 'Migrant experiences of conviviality in the context of Brexit: Polish migrant women in Manchester' *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, 9 (1): 65-83. Available at: doi: 10.17467/ceemr.2020.05

Sentencing Act 2020, c. 17. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/17/contents>

Shutes, I. and Walker, S. (2018) 'Gender and free movement: EU migrant women's access to residence and social rights in the U.K.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44 (1): 137–153.

Sime, D., Tyrrell, N., Käkälä, E. and Moskal, M. (2022) 'Performing whiteness: Central and Eastern European young people's experiences of xenophobia and racialisation in the UK post-Brexit' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48 (19): 4527-4546.

Sumption, M., and Fernández-Reino, M. (2020) *Unsettled Status – 2020: Which EU Citizens are at Risk of Failing to Secure their Rights after Brexit?*

<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/reports/unsettled-status-2020/>

Sumption, M. and Walsh, P.W. (2022) *EU Migration From and to the UK. Migration Observatory Briefing*, 15th February. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MigObs-Briefing-EU-migration-to-and-from-the-UK.pdf>

Sverdljuk, J. (2009) 'Contradicting the 'prostitution stigma': Narratives of Russian migrant women living in Norway', in: Keskinen, S. Tuori, S., Irni, S. and Mulinari, D. (eds) *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, 'race' and ethnicity in the Nordic region*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 137–154.

Tereshchenko, A., Bradbury, A. and Archer, L. (2019) 'Eastern European migrants' experiences of racism in English schools: positions of marginal whiteness and linguistic otherness' *Whiteness and Education*, 4 (1): 53-71.

UK Government (2020) *Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (settled and pre-settled status)*.

<https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>

Van Der Zwet, A., Leith, M. S., Sim, D. and Boyle, E. (2020) 'Brexit, Europe and othering' *Contemporary Social Science*, 15 (5): 517-532.

Venis, J. (2022) *Violence against women: UK ratifies Istanbul Convention but excludes protection for migrants*. London: International Bar Association. <https://www.ibanet.org/>

Virdee, S. and McGeever, B. (2018) 'Racism, Crisis, Brexit' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41 (10): 1802–1819.

Wadsworth, J. (2015) *Immigration and UK Labour Market (CEP 2015 election analyses series)*. <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/ea019.pdf>

Yong, A. (2022) 'A gendered EU Settlement Scheme: Intersectional oppression of immigrant women in a Post-Brexit Britain' *Social & Legal Studies*, 0 (0).