

## Article

# Hate Crime during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of an Ethnically Diverse University Student Population

Lieve Gies <sup>1,\*</sup>, Mayuri Gogoi <sup>2</sup>, Christopher D. Bayliss <sup>3</sup> , Manish Pareek <sup>2</sup>, Adam Webb <sup>3</sup> , Neil Chakraborti <sup>4</sup> and Emily Wertans <sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> School of Media, Communication and Sociology, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK

<sup>2</sup> Department of Respiratory Sciences, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK

<sup>3</sup> Department of Genetics and Genome Biology, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK

<sup>4</sup> School of Criminology, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK

\* Correspondence: lg149@leicester.ac.uk

**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a rise in reports of hate crime against East and Southeast Asian minorities. Political rhetoric blaming China for causing the pandemic was tantamount to a ‘permission to hate’, making COVID-19 a catalyst of hate crime against Chinese people which also fuelled overt prejudice against other ethnic minorities. Researching experiences of hate offences in an ethnically diverse university student population in the United Kingdom during COVID-19, this qualitative study found that actual reported cases potentially underestimate the problem of hate crime. Analysing data from semi-structured interviews, we argue that a focus on reported cases alone risks obscuring the full extent of pandemic-related harassment and the insidious nature of hate crimes more generally. Minority ethnic interview participants lived with varying degrees of fear of victimisation, even if they were not personally subjected to any actual incidents during the pandemic. Accounts of pre-pandemic experiences, along with vicarious experiences involving victims with similar characteristics as interview participants, confirm the status of hate crime as a ‘message crime’. Third-party bystander accounts involving the victimisation of others whose identity research participants did not share afford additional insights into the nature and extent of pandemic-related hate.

**Keywords:** hate crime; racism; ethnicity; higher education



**Citation:** Gies, L.; Gogoi, M.; Bayliss, C.D.; Pareek, M.; Webb, A.; Chakraborti, N.; Wertans, E. Hate Crime during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of an Ethnically Diverse University Student Population. *COVID* **2023**, *3*, 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.3390/covid3020010>

Academic Editor: Andrea Fiorillo

Received: 17 November 2022

Revised: 12 January 2023

Accepted: 13 January 2023

Published: 28 January 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 was marked by an increase in geopolitical tensions between China, where the novel coronavirus was first detected, and the West. There was intense speculation that the causative agent, SARS-CoV2, was man-made and had been allowed to escape from a laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China [1]. Then United States (US) President Donald Trump made no qualms about blaming China and stigmatising Chinese people by publicly referring to COVID-19 as the ‘Chinese virus’ [2]. Tantamount to ‘a permission to hate’ [3,4], this kind of discourse made COVID-19 a catalyst of hate crime against Chinese people in different parts of the world. This rise in hate crime extended to other East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) minorities [5], with perpetrators mistaking members of these communities for ‘Chinese’ and associating their physical appearance with ‘the perceived phenotype of “Chineseness”’ ([6], unpaginated.) Reports of a rise in hate crime against other ethnic groups suggest that the pandemic more generally intensified racism and xenophobia, a phenomenon that has its historical antecedents in previous pandemics [7,8]. The existential threat posed by the pandemic and the heightened state of anxiety it unleashed have been cited as factors

fuelling an increase in overt prejudice and stereotyping of people from minority ethnicities who were collectively blamed for causing the global health emergency [9].

The dangers posed by COVID-19 and the implementation of drastic public health measures to prevent infections have resulted in increased anger and frustration both in private and in public [10]. The mask mandate and its politicisation have been a flashpoint triggering abuse of shop workers and other key workers during the pandemic [11,12]. COVID-19 vaccination policies further aggravated an already tense public debate about the severity of the pandemic. While we may therefore hypothesise that COVID-19 is linked to a general rise in harassment, it is also important to stress that many forms of hate are fundamentally rooted in pre-existing inequalities. Incidents of harassment cannot simply be attributed to the pandemic but are also attributable to characteristics such as ethnicity, race, gender and economic status.

Harassment occurs in many different settings, including universities where it compromises institutions' aspirations to be dynamic, cosmopolitan seats of learning which thrive on a diversity of talents [13]. In the United Kingdom (UK), tackling harassment in higher education was already a policy priority before the pandemic [13,14]. The purpose of the current study was to examine experiences of hate crime during the pandemic in an ethnically diverse student population. The specific aim was to establish the extent and type of harassment individual students experienced. More than 50% of undergraduates at the University of Leicester (UoL) (UK) are from a minority ethnic background, making the UoL an exceptionally diverse and inclusive institution. The University also has a vibrant community of international students, including a substantial number of ESEA international students. Moreover, during the early phase of the pandemic, the city of Leicester was one of the worst affected by COVID-19. In-person teaching at the UoL, along with all in-person extracurricular activities, was suspended in line with national lockdown requirements. Students were able to attend online teaching delivered via MS Teams and other electronic platforms. However, it should be noted that Leicester was placed in lockdown for longer than any other UK city, making it a place where everyday life was more severely disrupted than in other parts of the country [15]. The impact on university students who were living in or attending universities in Leicester made the UoL a particularly relevant research site for studying how minority groups perceived COVID-related biases.

The contribution of this study is the generation of knowledge about hate crime which is also relevant for non-student populations. Our findings suggest that actual reported cases potentially underestimate the problem of hate crime. Analysing data from semi-structured interviews, we argue that a focus on reported cases alone risks obscuring the full extent of pandemic-related harassment and the insidious nature of hate crime more generally. Third-party bystander accounts involving the victimisation of others whose identity research participants did not share afford additional insights into the nature and extent of pandemic-related hate which has implications for our understanding of hate crime beyond the pandemic.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### *2.1. Literature Review*

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already a surge in hate crime in different parts of the world. In Europe, the upward trend prior to the pandemic can be attributed to the rise of populist parties, while, in the US, an important factor was the election of President Trump [16]. In the UK, the 2016 Brexit (the UK's exit from the European Union (EU)) referendum became an important trigger of hate crime [16], although the sharp rise in recorded hate crime in England and Wales specifically dates back to 2012. The Crime Survey of England and Wales revealed a marked increase in racially and religiously aggravated offences between 2013 and 2017 [17]. Official crime figures only tell part of the story as many victims of hate crime fail to report incidents to the police [17]. When COVID-19 struck, social media, which were already a hotbed of hate speech [18], offered a

fertile ground for hate targeted at specific groups who were being blamed for causing and exacerbating the pandemic [19].

Historically, epidemics and other public health emergencies have been associated with an increase in societal tensions and hatred towards marginalised groups, although Cohn [20] argues that they also have the power to bring societies closer together. Jewish communities, for example, have been blamed for the COVID-19 pandemic, but the targeting of this group can be traced back as far as the Black Death [21]. Stigmatisation is a common feature of the collective response to outbreaks of infectious disease in both the distant and recent past, the AIDS/HIV pandemic of the late 20th century representing a striking contemporary example [22]. A very similar pattern of prejudice, stigmatisation and distrust towards entire communities emerged during COVID-19.

Hate crime consists of a wide range of actions and behaviours, including harassment [23], and victimises people for a variety of reasons. Put simply, 'hate crime can mean very different things to different people' ([24] p. 500). Gray and Hansen [9] define hate crime as a crime targeting victims on account of their perceived membership of a particular group. Perry ([25] p. 10) sees hate crimes as 'acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed toward already stigmatized and marginalized groups', identifying power and oppression as central drivers of hate crime. Victimisation, then, occurs both at an individual and at a group level, with individuals often being randomly targeted for no other reason than their apparent membership of a particular group. Hate crime has been labelled a 'message crime' which seeks to intimidate and control not just directly targeted victims but anyone who shares their identity. Its 'distal effects' ([26] p. 47) are capable of generating tension and distrust between different communities, as the 'message' of hate crime potentially travels very widely in a media age [27].

These frameworks are particularly useful not only in highlighting the role of power and group identity in the context of hate offences but also in centralising the concept of difference [24]. However, more recent interpretations have sought to give explicit acknowledgement to the more everyday experiences of harassment faced by victims, which are not necessarily motivated by deep-seated hatred. In an attempt to capture these more 'mundane' or 'ordinary' experiences, Chakraborti and Hardy [28] describe hate crimes as acts of violence, hostility and intimidation directed towards people because of their identity or perceived 'difference'. Framing hate crime in these broad terms resonates with domestic policing policy within England and Wales, which recognises that hate crimes might not be criminal acts in themselves but includes non-criminal incidents, which can have damaging impacts upon the victim, their family and wider communities [29]. Similarly, contemporary scholarship and policy have recognised the intersectionality of hate crime in which a specific combination of identity characteristics is capable of reinforcing a person's (perceived) vulnerability to hate crime [30].

When we treat hate crime as a fluid and evolving category, it allows for the inclusion of incidents which specifically emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, a prominent example being verbal abuse targeted at members of the public and key workers for trying to enforce the mask mandate. The pandemic may have merely exacerbated an existing problem—harassment in the workplace—but, at the same time, belonging to a minority made the abuse significantly worse. Thus, there is powerful evidence that minority ethnic groups have experienced a marked increase in hate crime during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the studies pointing to a rise in xenophobia is a Google Trends analysis in the US focused on the early stages of the pandemic. It uncovered a strong correlation between Internet searches about the coronavirus and searches involving racial slurs against Asian but also Hispanic Americans [19]. Gover, Harper and Langton [7] explain that pandemics are, historically speaking, triggers for the increased stigmatisation and othering of people of Asian descent in the US. They argue that COVID-19 has enabled racism and a fear of foreigners to spread, which in turn may be related to an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic. Their arguments resonate with a review by Tessler, Choi and Kao ([8] p. 636) exploring how a long history of treating Chinese and Asian Americans as 'the

physical embodiment of foreignness and disease’ made them a target of pandemic hate crime. A study of Chinese university students in the US found that this group reported higher levels of perceived discrimination and anxiety during COVID compared to their pre-COVID peers [31]. Exposure to negative media reports about China and Chinese people provides a possible explanation for differences in perceived discrimination between pre-COVID and COVID student cohorts. Discrimination during the pandemic has also been a problem within China. More specifically, He et al. [32] note how people from Wuhan and the wider Hubei province, the epicentre of COVID-19 in the early days of the pandemic, suffered social exclusion and aggression elsewhere in China.

The first reported incident of COVID-related hate crime in London (UK) involved a victim who was in fact Thai, a reminder that racial violence during the pandemic has been targeted at several ethnic minority groups [6]. An analysis of crime figures from the Metropolitan Police showed an increase in hate crimes against Chinese people in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic [9]. By contrast, the study found no increase for other ethnic groups. However, interviewing Chinese, Iranian and Italian immigrants in the UK, Yen et al. [33] argue that COVID-19 exacerbated the discrimination of immigrants who were disproportionately affected by the virus and faced especially challenging circumstances, such as rising hate crime, a greater exposure to the coronavirus, worse health outcomes, social isolation and anxiety. The study cites media accounts of racism during the pandemic as a particular cause of worry and anxiety for interview participants.

A 2020 report commissioned by the UoL, where the present study was also conducted, cites Brexit and COVID-19 as ‘trigger events’ leading to an increase in the racially motivated harassment of students [14]. Considering the impact of the COVID pandemic on anti-Asian racism, Yu [34] detects a changing trend in international student mobility, with students from Mainland China opting for alternative destinations, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, which they deem safer than the US. There are no indications as yet that UK universities are similarly affected, although there was a slight reduction in first-year non-UK-domiciled Chinese students in 2020/21 [35]. In the period 2014–2019, UK universities saw the number of Chinese students grow by 34% [36] and in 2021/22 the number of Chinese applicants grew to such an extent that, for the first time, it exceeded the total number of applicants from the EU. These figures may be an early sign of Brexit’s negative impact on student recruitment [37], but they are also an indication that Chinese students continue to want to study in the UK. Tackling racism and xenophobia is not only imperative for human rights and equality reasons but also to safeguard the ability of the UK’s university sector to recruit international students.

## 2.2. Method and Research Design

This study used semi-structured interviews to address the following key research questions: (1) Did participants experience harassment during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) What was the nature of the harassment encountered by participants? and (3) What were the specific characteristics targeted by perpetrators? The qualitative study was conducted in a follow-up of a questionnaire survey which was administered to 10,869 undergraduate students in June 2021. The questionnaire data forms the object of a separate analysis and presentation [38]; only interview data are reported in this article. To strengthen our findings, we also conducted a secondary analysis of a pre-existing qualitative data set—also involving semi-structured interviews—which was collected exclusively from Chinese international postgraduate students.

A total of 827 students completed the original questionnaire, representing a response rate of 7.6%. Our survey respondents were young (94% were aged between 18 and 25), ethnically diverse (25% Asian, 8% Black, 58% White, 9% Other) and included 86 international students. Women held the highest response rate (11% above the level for UK universities and 14% above the UoL level).

The main interviews were conducted between July and September 2021. Through a specific question in the questionnaire, 187 survey participants expressed an interest to take

part in the follow-up interviews. All of these students were sent an email with an invitation and further information about the qualitative study. A total of 39 students responded to the invitation and 34 students effectively took part. The relevant demographic information can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of interview participants.

Demographic Characteristic	N (%)
Sex	
Female	21 (61.7%)
Male	13 (38.3%)
Ethnicity	
White (including non-British White)	19 (55.9%)
Asian	10 (29.4%)
Black	2 (5.9%)
Other	3 (8.8%)
Age	
≤22	20 (58.8%)
22+	14 (41.2%)
Year of study	
First (including Foundation)	13 (38.3%)
Second	14 (41.2%)
Third	7 (20.5%)
Course	
Humanities	12 (35.2%)
Law	4 (11.8%)
Life Science	8 (23.5%)
Medicine & allied	4 (11.8%)
Natural Science	4 (11.8%)
Social Science	2 (5.9%)
Residence status	
UK student	26 (76.4%)
UK-based international students	4 (11.8%)
Non-UK based international students	4 (11.8%)

Ethics approval was obtained in respect of both the survey and the interviews from the UoL's Medicine and Biological Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference number 29522). Individual participant consent was sought separately for the survey and the interviews. Before the start of each interview, participants were presented with a consent form outlining the voluntary nature of participation and participants' right to withdraw at any time; data management procedures relating to the recording, storage and processing of interview data; and the safeguarding of confidentiality and participants' anonymity. Consent was secured verbally and recorded before the start of each interview. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams.

Interviews lasted for an average of one hour and participating students were offered a £10 gift voucher as a token of appreciation. A piloted topic guide was used to conduct the interviews (see supplementary materials). Probe questions were adapted to make it possible to explore emerging topics in the individual interviews. Interviews were recorded with prior permission from the participants and transcribed either through Sonix, a transcription software, or manually by a professional transcriber. The transcripts were all anonymised.

The interview questions were open-ended and conducive to a wide-ranging discussion of students' experiences and perceptions of harassment during the pandemic (see supplementary materials). The semi-structured interview format also afforded participants an opportunity to elaborate on specific incidents. Another advantage of the interview format is that it enabled participants to relate their experiences of witnessing the harassment of others, for example, other students or work colleagues. This provided the research



team with an altogether different perspective on the issue, revealing nuances in participants' understanding of harassment and their assessment of the impact of the pandemic on discrimination and hate more generally.

Two researchers (LG and MG) were each allocated specific parts of the interview data to code with the aim to unlock and provide a comprehensive analysis of participants' lived experiences of the pandemic. For the purpose of data presentation and to safeguard individual anonymity, participants were all assigned pseudonyms. The research team held regular meetings to enhance the reliability and robustness of the individual coding books as well as ensure consistency of interpretation across all the interview data. The interview data on harassment was coded following the procedure set out by Auerbach and Silverstein [39] who recommend starting the process by identifying repeating ideas and subsequently increasing the degree of abstraction by articulating themes and grouping these together into constructs linked to theory and existing literature, before finally arriving at an overall theoretical narrative which addresses the original research concerns, in this case, students' experiences of harassment. In terms of theory, we adopted a grounded approach allowing theoretical explanations to emerge from the data rather than mapping the data onto pre-existing categories [40].

Following an initial assessment of the data, we observed that only 2.5% of survey participants identified as Chinese, which is an under-representation of the number of Chinese students who were enrolled at the UoL in the 2020/21 academic year (13.6% of the overall UoL student population). A possible explanation is that, following the suspension of most in-person teaching during the 2020/21 academic year, a large number of Chinese international students returned to China, which left them feeling disconnected from campus life and thus less inclined to participate in our research. The possible triggering effect of participating in a survey about their pandemic experiences may also have been a factor for some of these students. A useful complement to our findings consists of an analysis of semi-structured interviews with 10 Chinese international postgraduate students studying at the UoL in the spring of the 2019/20 academic year, a period which coincided with the UK's first national COVID-19 lockdown. The project's focus was on Chinese international students' understanding of human rights. Several participants referred to their experiences of hate crime in the early days of the pandemic as something that had influenced their opinion about human rights [41]. Relevant data was re-coded for the purposes of the present project.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Chinese Students' Experiences of Harassment

Two Chinese students participated in the 2021 interviews; neither of them reported experiencing harassment during the pandemic. However, Zhen, one of the two students, explained that she went to extreme lengths to avoid having to go out, mainly for fear of contracting COVID-19 and less because of a fear of harassment. Wei, the second student, did not have any such issues. When it came to COVID-related hate crime, he reasoned that 'there will always be horrible people doing horrible things', adding that harassment of Chinese people was not a 'pandemic problem' but a 'racism problem'.

By contrast, 3 of the 10 students we interviewed in 2020 reported being personally harassed during the pandemic. For example, in the following exchange, Fen explained that she had experienced a marked change in public attitudes since the start of the pandemic:

From the beginning of the coronavirus, ( ... ) they didn't punish me or hurt me ( ... ) they just used some words to hate me. ( ... ) And you know what? I'm afraid of going out privately, individually, because I always wear a face mask when I go out, but sometimes I feel afraid. So, I call my roommate or my neighbour to come with me to do some shopping. (*Fen, female, Asian-Chinese*)

Huang, another participant from the 2020 study, encountered anti-Chinese bias online, but he insisted that this had been a one-off incident:

Someone sent me a message, ‘virus’ I don’t know, I don’t know who sent it, but he sent me ( . . . ) the word ‘virus’ as an Instagram. (*Huang, male, Asian-Chinese*)

Wen, who is also from the 2020 cohort, described an incident that could be interpreted as a form of hate speech. However, as is clear from this excerpt, he was adamant that he did not regard it as such:

As an ethnic Chinese, I don’t see any difference in Leicester. [ . . . ] it may be because Leicester is a city which is culturally diversified. Maybe on only one occasion, I encountered a drunk guy out, going: ‘Coronavirus’. But ( . . . ) OK, he yelled at me, OK. He even yelled at a young baby. I know that he is drunk; he is not discriminating me so ( . . . ) it just he was drunk and he had a bit [too much] he went: ‘Coronavirus’. And he yelled it at the baby. [ . . . ] If he was not drunk, OK, I would feel offended. (*Wen, male, Asian-Chinese*)

This excerpt reveals a careful assessment of the circumstances: Wen did not feel targeted because the potentially offending words were also directed at a baby (who did presumably not have an ESEA background) and because they were uttered by a person who was inebriated. Had these mitigating factors not been present, then the utterance would have caused offence. Contrasting this account with Huang’s experience of the word ‘virus’ on Instagram, we can see how much context matters to victims in establishing whether a line has been crossed.

### 3.2. Targeted Characteristics and Forms of Harassment

Only a small number of participants identified as a victim of hate during the pandemic. We can distinguish between participants who experienced hate as a result of a combination of pandemic and other factors, and participants who attributed their experiences solely to COVID-related issues. The first and largest category involves participants who felt targeted because of their race, gender and age. Consider the following interview excerpts:

[S]o once I went out to the shops. ( . . . ) I normally keep a mask in my jacket ( . . . ) but that one time I didn’t so I just thought you know I’m just going to try my luck anyway ( . . . ). If I have to go back, I’ll go back, so walked in, ( . . . ) I did get approached by a man who was obviously a grown man, different race, and he was very very discriminatory to me for not having a mask on. He was shouting and yelling out all these racist things which obviously didn’t make sense considering that there was a lot of other people in that shop that didn’t have masks that were male and that were white but they were not approached in the exact same way but obviously because I am a woman and I am black, he felt like I must have been an easy target. ( . . . ) So I would say that would be my one experience of any kind of racism regarding the pandemic, yeah. (*Valerie, female, ethnicity ‘prefer not to say’*)

I’m a woman. I have the benefit unfortunately in society of being white, but you do get prejudiced being a woman. And I think I can’t fully say, because I’ve only ever worked in a supermarket during the pandemic, but I do get a lot of backlash for being a little girl telling them to put on a mask. I’ve had that said to me: ‘You’re just a little girl, you can’t tell me what to do’. And my colleague will, say who’s a boy of the exact same age—they still don’t like it but he doesn’t get the same backlash—it’s a ‘Well why should I’, rather than an attack on something else about him. (*Laura, female, White-British*)

I’d be having a conversation with them, just random people and then they’d be like: ‘Oh yeah but it’s your generation spreading it’ and I’d be, I was like: ‘But I’m literally working at a hospital. I’m doing everything I can do to not spread it around. I’m literally cleaning to not spread it around’, but they just did not seem to get that in their heads. And my grandad was doing it too. (*Martha, female, White-British*)

By contrast, only three participants attributed their experiences of hate to COVID-specific issues alone (e.g., COVID restrictions). For example:

I'd say the only time I've had hatred either some of my views regarding lockdown policy when I've called for, as I said, the unlocking and for more leniency and for more support for certain sectors. That's the only time I've ever experienced it. (*Robin, male, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups—White and Asian*)

These findings suggest that social inequalities have been a key driver of harassment and discrimination during the pandemic. Disputes over measures such as social distancing and mask wearing may have given rise to situations in which harassment occurred, but research participants felt mostly singled out because of specific characteristics that were unrelated to the pandemic.

The interview excerpts above illustrate that verbal expressions of harassment can take on several forms, including overtly racist abuse and derogatory comments regarding someone's gender and age. Discrimination specifically was also on a few occasions associated with COVID policies such as the vaccine passport and the prioritisation of older age groups for the vaccination programme, which meant that younger people had to wait longer to obtain the vaccination certificate that afforded them specific freedoms, such as the freedom to travel abroad without the need to quarantine in the country of destination. For example, this participant said:

I feel a bit of discrimination in terms of the COVID passport, like that feels like a bit of an attack on freedom. (*Tom, male, White-British*)

### 3.3. Pre-Pandemic and Vicarious Experiences of Hate Crime, Discrimination and Harassment

The in-depth accounts provided by interview participants reveal that students from ESEA and other Asian communities deployed a range of strategies, including cognitive filtering and self-imposed physical isolation, to avoid becoming a victim of harassment during COVID-19. In some cases, this curtailed individual freedom to such an extent that avoidance should be considered a specific hate-related harm in the context of the pandemic. At the same time, such stories serve as a powerful illustration of how hate sends a message that has a long-term impact on both primary victims and the communities to which they belong. Fear of becoming a victim of harassment during the COVID crisis had two principal drivers: interview participants' prior personal experiences of harassment and vicarious experiences involving the victimisation of others with whom they strongly identified. A specific source of vicarious experiences are mediated experiences, triggered by negative media representations of specific identity characteristics.

#### 3.3.1. Personal Experiences of Harassment outside of the Pandemic

Starting with personal experiences of harassment prior to the pandemic, Hui, a Chinese international student from the 2020 cohort, explained how previous experiences made him fearful that it could happen again during lockdown:

The second day I came to Leicester, when I was walking on the street and a white man came across me and they said is that he did some bad words in Japanese. ( . . . ) This happened before coronavirus. ( . . . ) And during the corona crisis, I heard from many my friends, the Chinese friends here, they [were] abused on the street, although I, I haven't met this ( . . . ) Because [ . . . ] they have been abused so I am afraid to be abused too. (*Hui, male, Asian-Chinese*)

A particularly harrowing account of pre-pandemic racism came from another ESEA student who spoke extensively about her life-long experiences. Her memories of discrimination and harassment dated back to her early childhood. Annie talked about her family's treatment at a popular seaside resort in the UK, explaining how they were denied access to facilities at their accommodation and how the behaviour of other holidaymakers affected her:



Oh, outside of the pandemic, definitely growing up, I think, for example, for me and my family go on holidays within the UK. ( ... ) On the beach we set up some chairs and then this family made some racist comments and then moved away and moved all the tents away to a few feet further from us for some reason. (*Annie, female, Asian-British Any Other Asian Background*)

She also spoke of racism associated with being mistaken for Chinese, commenting that racism against ESEA people was often dismissed by society:

And growing up. And I had people normalising using slurs around me. So common ones for East Asians, ( ... ) is the word ch\*\*\*. ( ... ) Everyone assumes you are Chinese. So people refer you to that. One time I was running for the bus and then someone was like, oh, there goes Jackie Chan. ( ... ) If you were to use slurs to other minorities, it would be taken more seriously or people would be like: 'Oh, you can't say that'. But if you're East Asian, suddenly: 'Oh, it's just a joke'. You go you have to take it as a joke. It's just casual humour is just banter or whatever is just. Yeah. Different standards I feel like. (*Annie, female, Asian-British Any Other Asian Background*)

There is an obvious reason why Annie did not experience any racial abuse during the COVID pandemic. Worried by social media stories of harassment targeted at Chinese and other ESEA communities, she actively avoided places or situations in which she would be vulnerable to harassment:

I just think [big UK city where she lives] is pretty pretty multicultural anyway so I'm lucky in that sense. But personally, I wouldn't go to any less diverse areas during this pandemic. Like, I wouldn't want to go to the beach because I have experienced racism outside of a pandemic in those areas. I can't imagine what it would be like during a pandemic when hate crimes are more high. (*Annie, female, Asian-British Any Other Asian Background*)

What Annie's story vividly illustrates is that someone does not have to have experienced harassment and abuse during the pandemic to be profoundly affected by it. Racial discrimination had been such a major problem prior to COVID-19 that she wanted to avoid being harassed during the pandemic at all costs. Not or rarely leaving the house during lockdown is a way of reducing direct victimisation. This is especially so when potential victims also limit their social media use and remove themselves from potential online abuse. Such pre-emptive behaviour matters when piecing together a picture of the extent of the problem of harassment, especially considering that several participants talked about feeling more fearful during the pandemic without experiencing any specific bias or abuse during this time. For example, Kayan, a male student of Indian background disclosed that he felt particularly self-conscious at the time when the so-called 'Indian' (i.e., Delta) variant was rife in the UK.

Qian, a Chinese international student from the 2020 cohort, explained how she became very self-conscious about socialising with non-Chinese friends during the pandemic:

The funny thing is when I was going out with my friends, supposed to, but an outbreak happens and because I'm a Chinese, I feel very awkward to say: 'Hey, let's go out' ( ... ) It's not, it's not embarrassed, but just I feel a bit more uncomfortable. And I probably assume people would think, because let's say they have like family, you know, [fear they would] get this virus or whatever. It's really difficult not to think that they might have that kind of perspective. But I mean, individually, I didn't get a lot of racism. But when people are talking about this matter, it's really difficult not to say: 'Oh, China, blah, blah, blah'. So even though it may not be personal or whatever for China, but the thing might sound something like that. (*Qian, female, Asian-Chinese*)

The interviews also provide an insight into the coping mechanisms participants used to protect themselves against the impact of harassment and discrimination. Examples

include not leaving the house, avoiding certain areas, only going shopping with friends, but also cognitive filtering, as in the following example:

I wouldn't be surprised if people have thought things about me or said things about me behind my back, laughed at me, pointed at me when I didn't notice, all of those things and I think sometimes because I'm usually in my own world, I'm a person who, I like to daydream and just mind my own business and stuff, I think that I would be less likely to notice those things than other people who are very aware of their surroundings and they're sharp and they take on things more, so yeah, I have definitely been mistreated before because of my ethnicity and my religion, but nothing so recent and I think during the pandemic obviously because we've not been out as much, we've not encountered as many incidences like that, yeah. (*Ellie, female, Asian-British Indian*)

In this particular account, 'daydream[ing]', 'mind[ing] [one's] own business' and not 'noticing' stand out as pragmatic ways of coping with potential harassment and abuse.

### 3.3.2. Vicarious Experiences of Harassment

The interview data suggest that it was not just personal experiences of harassment that made participants feel vulnerable during COVID; another important factor was the experiences of others whose identity interview participants shared. These indirect experiences matter, as Smith [42] points out, as they are an integral part of the controlling impact of hate crime on communities at large. Three Chinese international students from our 2020 cohort reported that friends had been harassed during the pandemic, as in the following excerpt:

My friend. She. She met [harassment]. But not me. And I'm a lucky person ( . . . ) [They] were screaming. They ( . . . ) said: 'F\*\*\* off back to China'. (*Ling, female, Asian-Chinese*)

Social media played a particular role in enabling participants to monitor their environment for signs of hostility towards their community:

Well, to be honest, I haven't been out that much in the pandemic and, even if I did, it would be where no other people are like in the park, I don't really come across anyone there, but because of social media I have been worried to go out from what other people have told me or shared, people, especially being Asian, people call them coronavirus or blame them for COVID and so it has worried me to go out because I would be blamed or be shouted at. And I do get anxiety about that. (*Annie, female, Asian-British Any Other Asian Background*)

In some cases, prejudice channelled through the media was experienced as a 'permission to hate' the community to which participants belonged. Zhang, a Chinese international student from the 2020 cohort, felt particularly aggrieved by what she described as 'double standards' in the New York Times' online reporting of lockdown in China, which the website represented as being excessive, and lockdown in Italy, which it portrayed as a measured and proportionate response to the pandemic:

Sometimes the Western media have a lot of double standards. Yes. But China, by using human rights [against it], saying, you know [but] when they talk about what happens in most other Western countries, even if they do the same thing, they just say: 'OK, [they] are doing something good'. (*Zhang, female, Asian-Chinese*)

A similar account was given by Zara, an Asian-British Indian student:

Like, looking at media articles and things like that, I definitely think like East Asian communities were affected far more by lockdown regulations and being—they had the regulations imposed on them a lot more. And, yeah, I think it was hard on the East Asian community, especially because the racism that's naturally within this country ( . . . ) And then also the South Asian community getting blamed for spreading the virus and, like, when you look at pictures of even just,

yeah, thinking about subtle racism, like pictures of—whenever on news articles there's like pictures of oh coronavirus is in this area, very often in those pictures it was South Asian people or East Asian people ( . . . ) And quite often, yeah, the South Asian community was just blamed for it, like: 'oh they spread it, they're dirty' and things like that. (*Zara, female, Asian-British Indian*)

While media bias is a very different experience from physical attacks or verbal abuse, in the context of COVID-19, several participants manifestly felt unsafe because of media reports accusing their communities of causing or exacerbating the pandemic.

It was not just racial prejudice but also prejudice against young people in the media that made some interview participants feel targeted. Negative media comments blaming young people for the severity of the COVID pandemic felt as a personal attack to Fiona:

I think there was sort of not directly, you know, but there was this kind of idea of young people being selfish. I do remember that was kind of something that went around on social media from the older people, that was like: 'Oh young people don't care, they don't social distance, they don't this, they don't that'. And I think that was probably the only time where I felt sort of personally sort of attacked for things that I wasn't even doing. I was being sensible and there's this kind of like tar the younger generation with the same brush kind of got a bit frustrating. (*Fiona, female, White-British*)

### 3.4. Bystander Experiences

In addition to affording an insight into the experiences of participants who had personally suffered harassment during the pandemic, either because they were directly targeted or were anxious about being targeted, the interviews also shed light on participants' experiences of the victimisation of others whose identity they did not share. We put bystanders in a separate category because they are in a very different position from victims who directly or vicariously experience hate crime: bystanders are passive observers whose personal safety is not impacted by the incidents of hate offences they witness, although this does not rule out other effects, such as feelings of moral indignation.

The bystander experiences which interview participants described can be grouped into two main categories: (1) harassment of individuals who were known to the interview participants and (2) harassment of strangers. The first category encompasses family, friends, acquaintances and work colleagues, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

My sister-in-law, she lives in [name of place] and she's of Indian descent, and sometimes because of the Delta variant people give her weird looks or stay away even though it's got nothing to do with it, it's just because of the stigmas associated. (*Lydia, female, White-British*)

My friends are both Malaysian. Some people have [said] something like at the beginning, like: 'Oh, don't go near [friend's name], like she's got COVID' and that kind of thing, which is like a joke. But it's not very funny because it's racist. I think [friend's name] was a bit offended, but just kind of like she's such a sweet girl. I think she just can't take it like a pinch of salt. Well, [name of other friend] was quite sassy. She was like: 'Come here, I will cough on you' ( . . . ). I know they got a bit of [harassment] [to] do with COVID. (*Cath, female, White-British*)

It's at work. I don't work in the nicest area. A lot of our security guards are Sikh and specifically Indian and they get called a lot of—I don't feel comfortable saying them—but you can think of what they've been called multiple times—and it's usually because of asking to follow COVID restrictions and it's usually from white middle-aged men. (*Laura, female, White-British*)

Witnessing strangers being harassed was mentioned by these participants:

I've also seen it happen more during COVID towards you know Chinese, Korean, Japanese you know people where they say you look Chinese and they may not

even be Chinese. I've heard people say things and it's awful. (*Abigail, female, White-British*)

I know in [name of place] there's a kind of football college that a lot of international students go to and at the start of the pandemic there were some Chinese students and people were like throwing eggs at them, which is of course horrible, and it's like: 'Why you associate [COVID] with them just because they're from the country [it] originated at'. (*Lydia, female, White-British*)

In some cases, knowledge of harassment came from secondary sources, as in the following accounts:

I heard that some Chinese students did experience that [harassment, bias and discrimination during the pandemic], which is really sad ( . . . ) I just read it in the letter sent by the Vice Chancellor that this incident happened and we are supporting them. (*Mariam, Female, Asian/Asian British—Indian*)

I've never witnessed it first-hand but especially at the start [of the pandemic] there was a sense of it being a 'Chinese virus' kind of thing. I think probably up till March 2020 and then after that lockdown it wasn't a Chinese virus anymore, it was a worldwide virus, so I guess that kind of phased out. But yeah, I mean I heard things at the start of the pandemic, yeah. (*John, male, White-British*)

The Black Lives Matter movement, which came to particular prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the killing of George Floyd in the US, was repeatedly referenced as a prominent example of racial bias which participants had witnessed through a media lens:

Obviously with the Black Lives Matter movement and those kinds of things, we saw a lot of social media posts and all those kinds of things. So, in that an aspect and to be fair it did incite conversations within my friend group and within my family, which were interesting. But I think that, in that aspect, yes, that's it. (*Jasmine, female, Asian/Asian British—Indian*)

While participants expressed sadness, shock and dismay regarding the incidents of hate that they witnessed either up close or at a distance, the excerpts above confirm that they were primarily passive observers. There were no reports of any specific interventions in response to such incidents, although it should be stressed that interviewees were not explicitly asked about their reactions. Nevertheless, these bystander stories do speak of an awareness that discrimination and harassment are a major issue in wider society, albeit not necessarily within the university itself which participants regarded as relatively inclusive and diverse. For example, this participant specifically referred to the inherent diversity of the student body:

I think it's quite a diverse university anyway, so there isn't really much of a majority of any particular race or background. So, I think I haven't seen any [harassment] in my personal experience. (*Zach, male, White-British*)

#### 4. Discussion

This project set out to study university students' experiences of hate offences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study builds on Chakraborti and Garland's [24] conceptualisation of perceived vulnerability and difference as key drivers of hate crime. This approach has the advantage of being inclusive of many different types of hate crime, including hate specifically associated with COVID-19. Our findings show that only a few participants identified as a victim of hate during the pandemic. Nevertheless, an important contribution of our study is that it led to the identification of a much wider harassment problem than can be gleaned from just considering actual reported cases. Indeed, a key insight from our research is that a focus on such cases alone risks obscuring the full extent of pandemic-related harassment and the insidious nature of hate crime more generally. As Yeh [6] points out,

ESEA people were already withdrawing from mainstream society long before lockdown was imposed, often at the expense of their own livelihoods, due to a fear of being victimised in a geopolitical climate of heightened permissiveness to hate. Our interview findings illustrate how profound the impact of hate crime is, confirming its status as a 'message crime'. First, the impact is long lasting—permanent even—as is clear from participants' stories of historic harassment occurring a long time before the pandemic, creating a learned behaviour whereby individuals develop avoidance strategies. These strategies ranged from practical measures such as not leaving one's house or neighbourhood to cognitive filtering to limit one's exposure to harassment. Second, hate crime's ripple effect means that it affects entire communities and not just directly targeted victims. Our interviews have highlighted the significance of vicarious experiences, with social media acting as a space where members of a targeted community share their direct experiences. This information can lead to the development of avoidance behaviours. Biased and discriminatory comments conveyed through the media are also capable of influencing individuals' risk calculus.

The cost of pursuing avoidance strategies is not just to the individual who, among other things, suffers a loss of personal freedom, social isolation, mental health issues and poorer educational attainment; there is also a cost to wider society [43]. Fear of hate crime creates distrust and harms community relations, as Perry ([25] p. 48) explains: 'Cultural groups that are already distant by virtue of language differences, or differences in values or beliefs are rendered even more distant by virtue of the fear and distrust engendered by bias-motivated crime'. This, in turn, may set in motion a vicious cycle whereby groups who isolate themselves because they are fearful of hate crime are met with more hostile attitudes, a typical example being migrant groups who are perceived as unwilling to integrate into society by other groups [26].

The ripple effect of hate crime is also reflected in the role of bystanders acting as onlookers or observers. Several of our interview participants reported that they had witnessed the harassment of others whose identity they did not share, describing such experiences as shocking and injurious. An emerging topic in hate crime scholarship [42,44] concerns the way in which the presence of bystanders impacts the dynamics of hate crime. It has been argued that bystanders can make a positive difference, for example, when they decide to call out hate and express solidarity with targeted victims [42]. By contrast, bystanders' indifference or failure to act has been highlighted as something that is potentially complicit in furthering exclusion and discrimination [27]. The fact that several participants in our research reflected on their bystander experiences serves as an indication of their awareness that bias and discrimination are unacceptable and should not be happening.

In addition to its contribution to a growing body of evidence demonstrating the ramifications of COVID-19 for individual experiences of hate crime, our study confirms the importance of approaching hate crime as a message crime. It also supports a research agenda which aims to understand the role of bystanders more fully. Our research was conducted within an institution that boasts an exceptionally diverse student population, allowing us to gain an understanding of pandemic experiences of hate across a wide range of student identities. Considering that hate intersects with structural inequalities, our findings are likely to apply to other settings. Generating additional quantitative and qualitative data to compare experiences during and outside of the pandemic would help to develop the different categories we identified through our interviews. Further research is indicated in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the bystander role and the conditions that are required for translating moral indignation into acts of 'civil courage' aimed at challenging hate [44]. In a similar vein, a research agenda foregrounding the impact of vicarious experiences would unlock ways in which the value of the 'message' of message crimes can be reduced for victims and their wider communities.

**Supplementary Materials:** The interview topic guide can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/covid3020010/s1>. UNICOVAC Interview topic guide.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, L.G., C.D.B., N.C., M.P. and E.W.; funding acquisition, C.D.B., L.G. and M.P.; methodology, L.G., N.C. and E.W.; data curation, L.G., M.G. and A.W.; formal analysis, L.G. and M.G.; supervision, L.G.; writing—original draft, L.G.; writing—review and editing, L.G., N.C., E.W., M.G., A.W., M.P. and C.D.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, grant number ES/W00299X/1.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the University of Leicester (UoL) Medicine and Biological Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference number 29522; 19 May 2021).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical reasons.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank all the students who participated in the interviews.

**Conflicts of Interest:** All other authors declare that they have no known financial interest or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

## References

1. Maxmen, A.; Mallapaty, S. The COVID lab leak hypothesis: What scientists do and don't know. *Nature* **2021**, *594*, 313–315. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2. Viela-Gaudefroy, J.; Lindaman, D. Donald Trump's "Chinese virus": The Politics of Naming. The Conversation. 2020. Available online: <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
3. Bowling, B. Racial harassment and the process of victimization. *Br. J. Criminol.* **1993**, *33*, 231–250. [CrossRef]
4. Williams, Y.R. Permission to hate: Delaware, lynching, and the culture of violence in America. *J. Black Stud.* **2001**, *32*, 3–29. [CrossRef]
5. End Violence and Racism Against East and Southeast Asian Communities. Data on Hate Crimes against ESEA People in the UK. 2021. Available online: <https://evresea.com/data> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
6. Yeh, D. COVID-19, Anti-Asian Racial Violence, and the Borders of Chineseness. *Br. J. Chin. Stud.* **2020**, *10*. [CrossRef]
7. Gover, A.R.; Harper, S.B.; Langton, L. Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality. *Am. J. Crim. Justice* **2020**, *45*, 647–667. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
8. Tessler, H.; Choi, M.; Kao, G. The Anxiety of Being Asian American: Hate Crimes and Negative Biases During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Am. J. Crim. Justice* **2020**, *45*, 636–646. [CrossRef]
9. Gray, C.; Hansen, K. Did COVID-19 Lead to an Increase in Hate Crimes Toward Chinese People in London? *J. Contemp. Crim. Justice* **2021**, *37*, 569–588. [CrossRef]
10. Smith, L.E.; Duffy, B.; Moxham-Hall, V.; Strang, L.; Wessely, S.; Rubin, J.E. Anger and confrontation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A national cross-sectional survey in the UK. *J. R. Soc. Med.* **2021**, *114*, 77–90. [CrossRef]
11. Farrell, S. Face Mask Rules: Retailers "Extremely Concerned" about Abuse of Staff. The Grocer. 2021. Available online: <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/people/face-mask-rules-retailers-extremely-concerned-about-abuse-of-staff/662330.article> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
12. Kernow, C.C.G. Cornwall's NHS Plead Please Don't Spit at Our Staff. 2022. Available online: <https://www.kernowccg.nhs.uk/staff-abuse/> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
13. Universities, UK. *Tackling Racial Harassment in Higher Education*; Universities UK: London, UK, 2020.
14. Wertans, E.; Chakraborti, N. *A Catalyst for Change: Recognising and Responding to Students' Experiences of Harassment*; Centre for Hate Studies, University of Leicester: Leicester, UK, 2020; Available online: <https://le.ac.uk/-/media/uol/docs/research-centres/hate-studies/research-reports/a-catalyst-for-change-pdf.pdf> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
15. Rashid, R. *Leicester: The City That Suffered the Longest*; ITV News: London, UK, 2021; Available online: <https://www.itv.com/news/central/2021-02-23/leicester-the-city-thats-suffered-the-longest> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
16. Chakraborti, N.; Clarke, A. Demystifying hate crime in an age of crises. In *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*; Liebling, A., Maruna, S., McAra, L., Eds.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, in press.
17. Ozalp, S.; Williams, M.L.; Burnap, P.; Liu, H.; Mostafa, M. Antisemitism on Twitter: Collective efficacy and the role of community organisations in challenging online hate speech. *Soc. Media + Soc.* **2020**, *6*, 2056305120916850. [CrossRef]



18. Burnap, P.; Williams, M.L. Us and them: Identifying cyber hate on Twitter across multiple protected characteristics. *EPJ Data Sci.* **2016**, *5*, 1–15. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
19. Vachuska, K. Initial Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Racial Prejudice in the United States: Evidence from Google Trends. *SocArXiv* **2021**. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
20. Cohn, S.K., Jr. *Epidemics: Hate and Compassion from the Plague of Athens to AIDS*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2018.
21. Gilman, S.L. Placing the blame for COVID-19 in and on ultra-orthodox communities. *Mod. Jud.* **2021**, *13*, 1–30. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
22. Fischer, L.S.; Mansergh, G.; Lynch, J.; Santibanez, S. Addressing disease-related stigma during infectious disease outbreaks. *Disaster Med. Public Health Prep.* **2019**, *13*, 989–994. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
23. MacDonald, S.J. “Community fear and harassment”: Learning difficulties and hate crime in the north-east of England. *Disabil. Soc.* **2015**, *30*, 353–367. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
24. Chakraborti, N.; Garland, J. Reconceptualizing hate crime victimization through the lens of vulnerability and difference. *Theor. Criminol.* **2012**, *16*, 499–514. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
25. Perry, B. *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes*; Routledge: London, UK, 2001.
26. Perry, B. Exploring the community impacts of hate crime. In *The Routledge International Handbook on Hate Crime*; Hall, N., Corb, A., Giannasi, P., Grieve, J., Eds.; Taylor and Francis: London, UK, 2014; pp. 47–58.
27. Keel, C.; Wickes, R.; Benier, K. The vicarious effects of hate: Inter-ethnic hate crime in the neighborhood and its consequences for exclusion and anticipated rejection. *Ethn. Racial Stud.* **2022**, *47*, 1283–1303. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
28. Chakraborti, N.; Hardy, S. *Blood, Threats and Fears: The Hidden Worlds of Hate Crime Victims*; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2019.
29. College of Policing. *Authorised Professional Practice Guidance on Hate Crime*; College of Policing: Ryton-on-Dunsmore, UK, 2020.
30. Campbell, R.; Sanders, T. *Sex Work and Hate Crime*; Palgrave: London, UK, 2021.
31. Haft, S.L.; Zhou, Q. An outbreak of xenophobia: Perceived discrimination and anxiety in Chinese American college students before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Int. J. Psychol.* **2021**, *56*, 522–531. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
32. He, J.; He, L.; Zhou, W.; Nie, X.; He, M. Discrimination and Social Exclusion in the Outbreak of COVID-19. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2020**, *17*, 2933. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
33. Yen, D.A.-W.; Cappellini, B.; Yang, H.-P.; Gupta, S. Coping with Coping: International Migrants’ Experiences of the COVID-19 Lockdown in the UK. *Br. J. Manag.* **2021**, *32*, 1219–1241. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
34. Yu, J. Lost in Lockdown: The Impact of COVID-19 on Chinese International Student Mobility in the US. *J. Int. Stud.* **2021**, *11*, 1–18. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
35. HESA. Chart 6-First Year non-UK Domiciled Students by Domicile 2006/07 to 2020/21. 2022. Available online: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/chart-6> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
36. Jeffreys, B. *UK Universities See Boom in Chinese students*; BBC News: London, UK, 2020; Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51149445> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
37. Khotia, K. *Chinese Applicants Overtake EU as Brexit Raises UK Student Fees*; Bloomberg: New York, NY, USA, 2021; Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-03/china-ousts-eu-as-brex-it-sparks-fee-changes-at-u-k-universities> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
38. Webb, A.; Gogoi, M.; Weidman, S.; Woolf, K.; Zavala, M.; Ladhani, S.N.; Pareek, M.; Gies, L.; Bayliss, C.D. Cross-Sectional Study of University Students’ Attitudes to ‘On Campus’ Delivery of COVID-19, MenACWY and MMR Vaccines and Future-Proofing Vaccine Roll-Out Strategies. *Vaccines* **2022**, *12*, 1286, 1287. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
39. Auerbach, C.F.; Silverstein, L.B. *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*; New York University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2003.
40. Bradley, E.H.; Curry, L.A.; Devers, K.J. Qualitative Data Analysis for Health Services Research: Developing Taxonomy, Themes, and Theory. *Health Serv. Res.* **2007**, *42*, 1758–1772. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
41. Gies, L. Freedom and patriotism in times of pandemic: Chinese international students’ readings of human rights criticism during the UK’s first COVID-19 lockdown. *J. Comp. Int. High. Educ.* (forthcoming).
42. Smith, J. Bystander Experiences of Online Gendered Hate. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology*; Powell, A., Flynn, A., Sugiura, L., Eds.; Palgrave: London, UK, 2021; pp. 395–413.
43. Benier, K. The harms of hate: Comparing the neighbouring practices and interactions of hate-crime victims, non-hate-crime victims and non-victims. *Int. Rev. Vict.* **2017**, *23*, 179–201. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
44. Iganski, P. Civil courage as a communicative act: Countering the harms of hate violence. *Pragmat. Soc.* **2020**, *11*, 316–335. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.