

**JRF programme paper:  
Poverty and ethnicity**

# Exploring experiences of poverty in Bradford

**Bal Athwal, Mike Quiggin, Deborah Phillips and Malcolm Harrison**

**May 2011**

This paper:

- examines poverty in three specific communities in the Bradford district (Bangladeshi, African Caribbean and white residents on an outlying estate);
- looks at how ethnicity affects their experience; and,
- explores the commonalities and the differences in these experiences and the consequent implications for public policy.

**The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) commissioned this paper as part of its programme on poverty and ethnicity which aims to understand the underlying reasons for variations in low income and deprivation among different ethnic groups in the UK and the problems caused. It also aims to contribute towards solutions to these problems.**

ISBN 978 1 85935 809 2

© Bradford Resource Centre Limited 2011



**JOSEPH ROWNTREE  
FOUNDATION**

[www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

This paper was commissioned to inform the work of the JRF poverty and ethnicity programme, which aims to understand the underlying reasons for variations in low income and deprivation among different ethnic groups in the UK and the problems caused. It also aims to contribute towards solutions to these problems.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy-makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of JRF.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation  
The Homestead  
40 Water End  
York YO30 6WP  
[www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

This report, or any other JRF publication, can be downloaded free from the JRF website ([www.jrf.org.uk/publications/](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/)).

© Bradford Resource Centre Limited 2011

First published 2011 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

All rights reserved. Reproduction of this report by photocopying or electronic means for non-commercial purposes is permitted. Otherwise, no part of this report may be reproduced, adapted, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

ISBN 978 1 85935 809 2 (pdf)

Ref: 2603

Contact:  
Helen Barnard  
[helen.barnard@jrf.org.uk](mailto:helen.barnard@jrf.org.uk)

# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
Executive summary	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 1</b> Introduction	<b>5</b>
<b>Section 2</b> Methodology	<b>6</b>
<b>Section 3</b> Living in poverty: Everyday experiences	<b>11</b>
<b>Section 4</b> Supporting people in poverty	<b>17</b>
<b>Section 5</b> Work: Meaning and experiences	<b>20</b>
<b>Section 6</b> Neighbourhood: Contextualising the experience	<b>27</b>
<b>Section 7</b> Exploring ethnic differences	<b>30</b>
<b>Section 8</b> Conclusions and recommendations	<b>35</b>
About the authors	<b>42</b>
Acknowledgements	<b>42</b>

## Executive summary

This project aimed to further understanding of the experience of poverty for different ethnic groups living in Bradford. The research involved people from Bangladeshi, African Caribbean and white British backgrounds. Participants were asked about their perceptions of poverty, their daily lives, their experience of work, the strategies they used to get by, their experience of community, statutory public services and their aspirations.

The project incorporated focus groups and one-to-one interviews with individuals from the three ethnic groups. Interviews were also carried out with local key informants involved in local policy development and local public service delivery.

Most participants across ethnic groups were reluctant to describe themselves as living in poverty. Although all said that they lived on a low income and faced considerable difficulties, the majority felt that the term poverty was not applicable to their situation when compared to absolute poverty in other parts of the world. However, all participants felt that they were among the poorest households in the UK.

There was much in common in the daily experience of all three groups. The struggles that were faced included difficulties in getting by on a low income, particularly in view of recent cost of living increases, meeting sudden additional household expenditures such as repairs and having little or no income to spend on treats for children or leisure pursuits. Many participants felt that they lived more stressful lives as a result of living on a low income. Participants tended to view secure and appropriate employment as an important potential route out of poverty, but several commented on the difficulty in finding suitable and viable work opportunities in the current economic climate.

There were, however, several differences in experiences and perceptions across the three ethnic groups.

- African Caribbean people felt that they were more disadvantaged in terms of resources and opportunities. They mainly attributed this to the relatively small size of their community and their geographical dispersal.
- The Bangladeshi participants felt that they enjoyed a strong sense of community within their neighbourhoods. Bangladeshi women often commented on their extensive caring responsibilities and pressures arising from this. The Bangladeshi men were acutely aware of having restricted employment opportunities as a significant number of them were employed within the restaurant trade.
- The white British participants felt that they faced considerable disadvantage because of the negative reputation of their estate. They felt that this was a barrier to employment and sometimes felt isolated due to the estate being a considerable distance from the city centre. Several white participants acknowledged that other groups had experienced discrimination in the past

and that this had been addressed by appropriate measures, however they felt that such measures had served to exclude them.

Overall the study confirmed the importance of key commonalities running across the groups, as well as differences between them. Socio-economic circumstances were often crucial, and it was clear that financial and institutional environments and constraints played significant roles in affecting all groups. This was evident in a variety of perceptions from informants, ranging from concerns about the inadequacies of job-related services to reservations about private landlords. Further studies would need to give full recognition to environmental factors of these kinds, set alongside the diversity and similarities of individual responses and strategies, and the effects of inter-personal obligations and dependencies.

# Introduction

This report outlines a short research project which looks at the differences in experiences of poverty in three ethnic communities in Bradford; African Caribbean, Bangladeshi and white British.

The research aimed to increase the evidence base and knowledge surrounding the relationship between poverty and ethnicity by seeking to understand experiences and perceptions of low income and deprivation among these ethnic groups and the issues arising from this.

The research objectives were to explore the following:

- how people from different backgrounds understand and live with poverty on a day-to-day basis, and how the experience of poverty impacts on other aspects of life;
- people's experience of local services and resources;
- to what extent and how different groups' identity impacts on the nature of poverty experienced in terms of: perceived risk of experiencing poverty, routes into poverty, types of poverty and duration and recurrence of poverty;
- the strategies people deploy in order to cope with their poverty, exploring what resources people have available to them;
- the perceived impact of particular negative factors such as debt (and its incidence, causes and character) and the coping problems and options around household crisis.

# Methodology

This chapter outlines the different phases of this research project, the selected methods, the communities that were researched, the definition of poverty used and the intended benefits of this work.

The research adopted a mixed methods approach incorporating focus groups, interviews and forums. Initial discussions with key informants enabled us to develop a broad understanding of the interaction of ethnicity and poverty in the district. Focus groups were used to scope the range of issues that needed further exploration. This was followed by one-to-one interviews to explore personal and individual experiences and to get a deeper understanding of the issues, particularly those that participants may have felt unable to articulate in group discussions. Forthcoming forums will provide opportunities for research participants to compare experiences of public services and government anti-poverty and regeneration initiatives, make recommendations for service improvement and consider opportunities for community activism.

This research explored the experiences of Bangladeshi people, African Caribbean people and residents on a traditionally white estate. These three groups could be said to feel themselves to be under-represented in terms of voice because of their position either as minorities within a minority or as falling outside the conventional remit of policy development for minorities.

## Key informant interviews

During the initial stage of the research we interviewed local stakeholders/decision-makers (key informants) to help inform and focus the research in the Bradford context and to identify local initiatives and resource issues. The 14 key informants we consulted included local politicians, community centre co-ordinators/managers, board members of the local strategic partnership, experienced community activists, representatives of the local business community and the local media.

We asked key informants how they thought poverty manifested itself in Bradford, how it varied across ethnic groups, what interventions had been developed to deal with poverty and to what extent these initiatives had been successful.

## Research with community members

We approached local community organisations providing services for people on low incomes as well as activists working in the selected localities or ethnic communities to facilitate contact with possible research participants.

Bradford's Bangladeshi community is highly concentrated in specific areas. The 2001 census shows that people of Bangladeshi family origin make up 1.1 per cent of the population of the Bradford District (0.6 per cent of the population of England). This research was undertaken within the Cornwall Road area in Manningham, where Bangladeshi people made up just over 50 per cent of the population. There are a

number of voluntary sector agencies serving the community in this neighbourhood and we used a particular centre as a basis from which to work, mainly because there was easy access here to male and female Bengali-speaking interpreters.

Since the early 1980s African Caribbean people have been much more geographically dispersed in the Bradford district. In 2001 people of Black African Caribbean or dual heritage (White and Black Caribbean) origin made up 1.2 per cent of the population in the Bradford district (1.6 per cent of the population of England). Most of the African Caribbean participants lived in one of the neighbourhoods (West Bowling or Little Horton) where the African Caribbean population had been originally concentrated. We used community organisations (mainly based in West Bowling and Little Horton) that had a history of working with the African Caribbean population in Bradford to make contact with potential research participants.

We drew our sample of white residents from Ravenscliffe, a traditionally white estate. This is an area with about 3,000 residents, 95 per cent of whom described themselves as White at the time of the 2001 census. Ravenscliffe is one of the most deprived areas of the city and typical of the outer city estates. We primarily used the local community centre to make contact with white residents from the estate.

We tried to ensure that our sample incorporated men and women of varying ages, employment status and household composition. Roughly half the Bangladeshi people we spoke to were from the original 1960s to 1980s immigrant population; more than a quarter were UK born and the remainder were newly arrived spouses. Three-quarters of the African Caribbean people we spoke to were UK born. We found the majority of African Caribbean women we spoke to were single parents and all the white women we spoke to were unemployed.

## **Focus groups**

During the first stage of our research we carried out eight focus group discussions; one each with Bangladeshi men and Bangladeshi women, one each with white women and with white men, two each with African Caribbean men and with African Caribbean women. We carried out two focus groups each with African Caribbean men and women because we were unable to recruit enough participants to the initial focus groups sessions with that group. The focus groups ranged in numbers from three to ten participants. We consulted 44 people through focus groups; six African Caribbean women, seven African Caribbean men, six white women, ten white men, eight Bangladeshi women and seven Bangladeshi men.

Two of the men living on Ravenscliffe were of dual-heritage (one was of white and black heritage and the other was of white and Asian heritage). We felt that it was appropriate for us to include these men when researching white residents in Ravenscliffe because that was the group with which they most strongly identified. In this report their contributions are identified as coming from white men to maintain anonymity.

The focus groups were divided with respect to ethnicity and gender in order to focus the discussions but also to provide an environment where participants had the space to speak openly about their situation (particularly as discussions included comment regarding other ethnic groups).

The focus groups broadly explored the daily experiences and challenges the participants faced, how these were negotiated and how useful they found local services and government initiatives.

## Individual interviews

The second stage of the research consisted of on-to-one in-depth interviews with 18 participants (six participants from each ethnic group with equal numbers of men and women). We recruited a different set of participants from those involved in the focus groups to incorporate a wider research sample. Efforts were made to ensure that the interviews filled gaps in terms of groups unrepresented in the focus groups. Using a separate set of participants in the second stage also allowed us to test the validity of data generated in the first stage.

The interview questions explored further the key issues raised during the focus group discussions. The one-to-one interviews were also used to ask participants directly about their views on poverty in relation to ethnicity.

As part of the interview process we asked interviewees to draw a timeline covering recent years to indicate significant events and the degree to which they affected their lives positively or negatively. This was a useful exercise in both allowing the participants to steer the direction of the conversation and also encouraging them to reflect on the factors that led to changes in their circumstances. The tool was not necessarily designed to collect new data but to facilitate engagement. Participants appeared to appreciate the time to think through phases of their life.

## Focus group and interview participants

		African Caribbean	Bangladeshi	White British
<b>Women</b>		9	11	9
<b>Men</b>		10	10	13
<b>Age</b>	Under 25	1	0	2
	25–40	7	11	16
	41–55	10	2	3
	Over 55	1	8	1
<b>Work</b>	Economically inactive	4	4	4
	Self-employed	1	0	1
	Unemployed	7	7	13
	Employed full-time	0	2	3
	Employed part-time	6	5	1
	Retired	1	3	0
<b>All</b>		19	21	22

## **Community forums**

We have not yet carried out the third stage of our work – two planned community forums. These events are scheduled to take place later in 2011.

The forums will include participants from both the focus groups and interviews (twelve men and twelve women). The forums will be mixed in terms of ethnic group but divided by gender. Bringing ethnic groups together will allow participants to gain a better understanding of the experiences of people from different groups, help dispel misconceptions and preconceived views and possibly alleviate tensions relating to allocation of resources and services to particular groups. The decision to divide the forums by gender was taken to enable fuller participation by all groups, particularly Muslim women.

The key focus during this stage will be the experience of services and initiatives; specifically what could be done to improve quality and reach and what gaps there are in current provision. The findings from this stage will consolidate the policy implications of the research and sharpen recommendations to service providers and decision makers.

## **Definition of poverty**

For the purposes of this research people in poverty were defined as those who have precarious livelihoods or restricted lives, particularly as indicated by the following elements:

- unemployment;
- low income (60 per cent of median income and below is a widely used measure and one which we adopted for this research);
- insecure employment;
- difficulty in accessing adequate public services and leisure opportunities;
- inadequate support for ill-health and disability;
- living in a deprived and isolated neighbourhood and/or a neighbourhood with poor infrastructure;
- disempowered by discrimination (including exclusion from resources and decision-making within households), insecurity, poor institutions or weak community organisations;
- disadvantaged by lack of opportunities for engagement and participation in important aspects of life.

(see <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/335642-1124115102975/1555199-1124138742310/method.pdf>)

## **Community benefits**

The research was designed to be of benefit and to 'give something back' to the individuals involved by:

- making the research process enjoyable, interactive and engaging (e.g. by inviting participants from the first two research stages to discuss ways forward through participating in a community forum);
- giving individuals who may not otherwise have 'a voice' a chance to share their experiences, raise issues, find strategies/solutions to improve their lives and have them fed back to local service providers and policy-makers;
- making payments for their contribution and time;
- bringing individuals from different ethnic groups together to share experiences, livelihood strategies and build strength (possibly in the form of community/social action);
- feeding back research findings and leaving the participants with evidence from the project which could be used as a tool in applying for funding/resources for the community or to campaign for policy change;
- empowering participants: during the course of the research those involved will have the chance to reflect on their circumstances, highlight issues and identify solutions.

## **Analysis and reporting**

All group sessions and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were then organised using NVivo data analysis software. Key themes/issues were identified from the initial activities (interviews with key informants and focus groups with community members). The themes and issues identified from the initial stages were verified and explored further in the interviews with community members.

The following sections present the key findings from the period of key informant and group consultation. The data presented combine evidence from our key informants, focus group participants and interviewees as appropriate.

## Living in poverty: everyday experiences

This section looks at what poverty meant to research participants, their everyday experience, the impact of debt and the strategies they used to get by.

### Meaning of poverty

Research participants were asked to describe what it meant to be poor or to be living in poverty. Some people did readily identify their own circumstances as living in poverty and all participants clearly identified themselves as living on a low income. Many participants talked specifically about relative poverty; comparing poverty in the UK to poverty in other parts of the world. It was frequently stated that 'real' poverty was about the struggle for basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. This perception was common among all three of the groups we spoke with but particularly prevalent in the responses from the Bangladeshi people who often contrasted their situation with the lives of family members in Bangladesh.

However, when it came to the practicalities of daily living they frequently saw their own deprivations in terms of constraints and pressures that interfered with normal expectations they might have for themselves, their children, or their networks. Restrictions and barriers were experienced and recognised across all three groups, with choices tightly bounded by economic problems, despite the distinctiveness of each group.

The Bangladeshi women's focus group was particularly aware of poverty in an international context. As one woman said:

*... most people within our Bengali community, if you ask them about poverty, what they would say, as long as you've got a roof on your head and you can feed yourself three times then you're not in poverty ... when you say to anybody in here [the community centre] what is poverty automatically you have an image of ... a family in Bangladesh, people begging on the streets ... or even here ... homeless people.*

White interviewees also referred to the concept of relative poverty:

*... I wouldn't say I am living in poverty – people who live abroad in third world countries have poverty. We've got a roof over our heads and I've got food in my belly, they haven't – that's what I class as poverty, but I am still in poverty because the money that we have isn't enough to live on ... [White woman interviewee]*

One woman said that she could see that in comparison to other communities around the world she was relatively well off, but in comparison to other people in the UK she felt that she was living in poverty.

*... In this country, I am living in poverty but in another country I am quite rich compared to some. [White woman interviewee]*

Living in poverty or on low income was further characterised by participants as not being able to take the children out, not being able to afford decent accommodation, living in deprived surroundings, not having choice or freedom, all aspects of daily life being a struggle and a poor quality of life where each day is the same as the last.

*... everyday's a struggle just to get through the day really ... so basically for me it's just like work, home every day. [White man interviewee]*

One participant asserted that it was fundamentally:

*... all about money ... is all I can say, it's all about money ... [White man interviewee]*

Both the African Caribbean women and the Bangladeshi women who took part in the focus groups said that a low-income life was what they were used to; they had never known anything different. The African Caribbean women who made this observation were all UK born; the Bangladeshi women were a mixture of those born in the UK and those born in Bangladesh.

## **Daily life**

In describing daily life on a low income the research participants often spoke of the difficulties of household budgeting, recent significant increases in the cost of living, the anguish of being unable to meet children's expectations and their inability to afford leisure pursuits or social life.

We asked interviewees to describe the difficulties they and/or their household faced during an average day. People lived close to the margins, with the possibility of slipping into debt a frequent risk, especially in the face of unanticipated demands on resources. This led to stress in daily living. Although not having paid work was seen as problematic in many cases (and several informants felt or saw pride in working), paid employment was not necessarily always seen as resolving financial difficulties, and may bring with it other kinds of household stresses. These potential stresses included the need to organise appropriate childcare and transport to work.

Possibilities for longer-term financial planning for many informants seemed minimal, and coping strategies were consequently sometimes about little more than taking one day at a time.

Most people described pressures arising from not being able to adequately meet their household costs. It was generally stated that the cost of living had notably increased over the past couple of years. Participants spoke of the struggle to pay utility bills, run a car, pay for public transport and buy food and clothing. It was common for participants to say that the main frustration was living within a constrained budget. For many, all of their income was swallowed up by essential living costs, leaving no flexibility for unforeseen expenses such as household repairs or for small one-off expenses (sometimes described as 'extras' or 'luxuries'). These observations were made by participants across the ethnic groups.

One white man, for example, observed:

*... not being able to do things ... that people who are working class [can afford] ... you see how they live now ... they've got nice cars ... nice big houses ... can go out at weekend ... nice clothes and that ... you know, you just can't do it ... and that gets you down, doesn't it ... not on the dole ... it's just not enough is it?*

*... Besides food there's nothing else that he can spend the money on ... that's like an everyday need ... there's very little left for other type of stuff.*  
[Bangladeshi man through interpreter]

*On a typical day ... Making sure I've got food in my house ... that's something to think about.* [African Caribbean woman]

Another key strain, particularly for women, was the problem of managing children's expectations. The women from the white focus group said that trying to make sure their children did not miss out on small luxuries (sweets, branded goods and computer games were often mentioned) was their main priority. The Bangladeshi mothers said that although they felt the pressure to meet their children's wishes, they put household bills first and children were expected to understand why this was necessary. The majority of women spoke of wanting to provide for their children and feeling sadness and sometimes guilt at not being able to give their children what they asked for. The African Caribbean women all agreed that this was the biggest obstacle to their budgeting. There were references by the white and African Caribbean women to wanting to give their children everything they could especially if they were an only child and also if the father was absent from the household.

*... they're always saying, 'Mummy did you get paid today?' ... 'Can I have an ice-cream?' and I say, 'No 'cause I can't afford one' and they're only 50 pence. It's not nice is it?* [White woman interviewee]

*I will not let my children miss out, I would rather go get a loan and take the consequences afterwards.* [White woman focus group participant]

One man said that the main difficulty he encountered in daily life was the reaction he received from other people and what he felt was their negative perception of him.

*... it's the way people look at me what gets me... They've already made their mind up, you know, before they even know anything about you.* [African Caribbean man]

Interviewees, particularly Bangladeshi people, also said that they felt they spent a large proportion of their lives working, which affected their quality of life.

*Well you are constantly having to work. I think your life ... you should work, I do believe you should work but there should be a balance, you don't live to work ... it does stop you from doing things ...* [Bangladeshi woman]

*... all me and my brother seem to be doing is just work, work, work and there's no kind of enjoyment ... having to work in order to survive and the impact it*

*has on my family is like we just seem to be getting by every day. [Bangladeshi man]*

Stress and worry were highlighted as significant consequences of living in poverty by several participants. Many participants, especially women, said that they often had sleepless nights worrying about money. Several of the African Caribbean and white women who took part in the focus groups described their life as a constant state of anxiety.

*... I just think about it when I get up every day. [African Caribbean woman]*

*... I have sleepless nights because I worry about where the money's gonna come from to pay this bill ... [African Caribbean woman]*

Another major impact of living in poverty or on a low income was the inability to socialise or go on holiday; this issue came up repeatedly, and was often associated with mental well-being. Participants also spoke of feeling embarrassed at not being able to afford to go out and hiding this from friends and this then leading to further isolation, particularly from friends who weren't living in poverty (this appeared to be more of a concern for men).

*I've got no life really, both of us, it is just, you know, doing what we have to do out of here then come back in and that's it, close doors, so weekend's pretty the same really, just stay in ... [White man]*

*Socialising, I think that's one of the things ... Not having an income, to be around your friends ... you kind of don't want to be around people all the time, because of that feeling of, I don't know, not self-worth ... I don't want to feel like I'm reliant on people, I'm a man, I'm independent ... I'd say I'm a lot less sociable ... [African Caribbean man]*

*... The crowd that I have grown up with, some of them have got full-time jobs, some of them haven't got a job so we can't stick together because of money ... [Bangladeshi man focus group participant]*

## **Debt**

Another key impact of living in poverty or on a low income was the necessity to borrow. Many people said that they regularly borrowed, specifically from family and friends, to meet everyday costs.

Debt was a widespread problem spanning all three groups. However it seemed potentially to have more serious consequences for the white and African Caribbean residents. The Bangladeshi population were more likely to borrow from friends and family whereas the white residents commonly spoke of borrowing from unregulated doorstep lenders. The Bangladeshi residents did not report the presence of doorstep lenders in their neighbourhood. The African Caribbean residents spoke mainly of being in arrears with utility bills, rent and having to pay back Social Fund loans. The

African Caribbean community also sometimes spoke of borrowing from doorstep lenders. However, this was seen as a last resort.

Everyday experiences of debt, and possibly also a willingness to talk about debt, appeared to differ between gender and ethnic group. For example it was Bangladeshi men who raised the issue of debt. However, among white participants it was more of a concern among women and a great source of stress. This could be linked to household composition as the majority of the white women we spoke to were the heads of single-parent households, whereas the Bangladeshi women were mainly married or living with parents and tended not to be responsible for the overall income flows into the household, although maybe responsible for daily household budgeting.

*... I'm in twenty-two-and-a-half grand's worth of debt. People knocking on my door and taking stuff off us, that's a big worry. [White woman]*

*We're in a lot of debt ... We pay one and miss one and pay one and miss one. We borrow loans off of Provident to pay somebody and then we owe money for Provident. It's just a never-ending circle ... [White woman]*

*And you borrow a lot and you end up getting yourself into bad situations because banks won't lend you so you end up borrowing off these loan sharks off the estate and you just end up paying more back than you've borrowed ... I only owe him £30 now but I borrowed £50 off him and it were £25 interest but if you pay the £25 interest one week ... if you give him the £25 interest he puts it back on the week after ... because he knows you can't pay the full £75 ... There's a few of them on estates ... 'cause they prey on vulnerable people don't they. [White woman]*

The African Caribbean women felt the impact of borrowing from family and friends on their self-esteem and appeared to be the most worried of the three groups about getting into debt; in fact this was the main source of stress for them.

*... It's dehumanising, it's embarrassing ... it's like you're three years old and you have to go, can I have a tenner, can I have a fiver? [African Caribbean woman focus group participant]*

*... a lady what come round ... their interest is so high ... I think because they go door-to-door, they know that they can ... because they don't check you out or nothing. Where a bank checks to see if you have a CCJ and all that, but they don't. [African Caribbean woman]*

## **Coping**

Few participants revealed any tangible strategies for coping with their situation. Some participants said that family support was a source of reassurance that enabled them to cope better on a daily basis. Several people said that they coped by trying not to think too much and just taking one day at a time. Some Bangladeshi participants said that they found strength and comfort in their faith. Some simply seemed resigned to their situation. A couple of women in the white and African

Caribbean focus groups stated that they had no choice but to cope for the sake of their children. Participants also said that they were grateful for what they did have (this was mainly in reference to family, friends and work) and that they coped by reminding themselves that there were people in worse situations.

*If I didn't have family about, I really would be living in poverty. [African Caribbean man]*

*I don't think about it too much, 'cause it would depress you and then you won't go nowhere. [African Caribbean woman]*

*You have to don't you? You have to cope. It's hard but at the end of the day I've put myself in this situation haven't I? If I'd have gone to school and got qualifications and stuff ... There's people worse off ain't there? There's people who live on the streets and I just ... you have to cope otherwise you just end up feeling sorry for yourself and taking drugs or sit depressed, crying the day away ... [White woman]*

*I just have to take it one day at a time ... [African Caribbean woman]*

*For me, I just ... I cope, I'm grateful for the fact that I've actually got a job, so ... it's trying to keep my spirits high and I always have to think about the future and think about looking to get a better job, to think about maybe going into a different career, so that's ... I just think things can get better and I try to stay positive ... I think my faith helps a lot as well ... [Bangladeshi woman]*

## Supporting people in poverty

This section explores participants' interaction with public and community services. Participant experiences were mixed. Most comments referred to local community centres, NHS services and Jobcentre Plus.

Participants were asked to consider public services and government initiatives that they had accessed. There were some clear commonalities across groups when considering the impact and behaviour of some of the institutions with which people have to deal. Private sector institutional practices in relation to debt are important. Households unable to turn to friends or kin might find themselves facing mounting debts that could never be resolved. On the public services side, the employment and training services were sometimes seen very negatively. Several participants across all ethnic groups observed that work and training services seemed 'pointless' with advice seen as second-rate or irrelevant, and with few positive incentives. As far as financial support was concerned we had very little to tell us how far 'non-take-up' of deserved benefits might have varied by ethnicity, age or household type.

Bangladeshi people in Manningham and the white people on the Ravenscliffe estate spoke highly of their local community centres. However it should be noted that for both these groups, interviewees were largely recruited with the help of community centres and research participants were regular users of the services and facilities at those centres. The majority of the African Caribbean participants we spoke to did not appear to use local community centres in the same way and in fact felt alienated from particular centres – they expressed a lack of ownership and felt that services were geared towards Asian people. We spoke to African Caribbean participants from several areas within the Bradford district and the lack of contact with local services was a consistent theme.

Poverty can help to foster resentment of other groups, which may be expressed racially. Some of the African Caribbean women felt that Asian people were given preferential treatment and had built up resources which excluded them. A woman described her experience in a local advice centre:

*You walk in, everything goes quiet, just stare at you as if to say, 'What you doing here?' ... the last time I went to that advice service I was told it wasn't for me.*

She contrasted this with the experience they had at a local community centre:

*It feels better in the sense of community ... Because everyone from different nations are going into that one, and you're not feeling funny ... going in. So you've got eastern European, you've got Asian, you've got white, you've got African Caribbean. You don't feel funny in that one. So I do access a lot of stuff at that one...*

Other services most frequently commented on were the NHS and Jobcentre Plus. Bangladeshi residents were more likely to speak of the NHS than any other public service. Those that commented felt that the treatment they received was not

adequate; issues included waiting times (particularly in the case of emergencies), failure to diagnose and readiness from doctors to prescribe without full consultation. One woman said that she felt her doctor knew what he wanted to prescribe for her as soon as she walked into his surgery. Unfavourable comparisons were made by one woman with the level of service in Bangladesh. Most of the research participants did not explicitly link poor service provision to poverty. However one of our interviewees, in making an unfavourable comparison of the NHS with health services abroad, unambiguously made this link:

*I've just come back from a holiday in Spain and I went to the doctors and my dad had to pay for the doctors for me and the treatment I got there was completely different. My dad lives out in Spain ... the service that we got was better ... And the thing is, right, the specialist actually asked me, yeah, 'Where do you come from in England? Is it a poor area? Is it a poor city?' And I says 'well it's inner city, so there's poor people' ... she says 'there you go. That's why you're not getting the treatment that you need'. [African Caribbean man]*

Some focus group participants felt that the Jobcentre Plus service was unhelpful. One white man said that a visit to the job centre made him very anxious because the staff were unfriendly and the other claimants were intimidating. An African Caribbean man made a similar observation.

*They're just rubbish. They look down their nose at you when you go in there. They just think, oh another dole dossier come to sign on ... That's what really boils my skin ... I didn't even sign on because I just ... I don't like going in there. I'd rather go without the money than actually go in there.*

A Bangladeshi man compared the manner in which he had been treated by the job centre with the service he enjoyed from Working Tax Credit advisors.

*I had to apply for jobseekers once ... after having a 45 minute interview over the phone then actually going to the job centre ... experience the whole of it, I actually wrote a letter two weeks later I said can you cancel my claim ... It was just disastrous seriously ... then I got a part-time job and I applied for tax credit and the tax credit was sorted out within, I don't know, within 5 or 6 days.*

A white woman described the way that Jobcentre Plus dealt with her son.

*The job centre will give you a job [after signing on] for six months and it will be working within the community, picking litter up, cleaning gardens doing whatever, so he says he'll do anything, he says 'I'm not bothered' [The job centre advisor points out that] it's minimum wage but at the six months you will have a certificate, he said 'mum, a certificate for picking litter up' ... he's a fully qualified football coach, he's got his A-levels in drama and they're gonna send him picking rubbish up.*

*The only advice they give you from the job centre is more or less, get your girlfriend pregnant and that's what they say. 'Isn't she expecting?' 'No'. 'Could she be expecting soon? You get a lot more money' ... I think they're rubbish to*

*be honest ...* [African Caribbean man interviewee]

There was a widespread view that Jobcentre Plus training schemes did not help people improve their employment chances. Respondents attended these courses because they were compulsory but found them irrelevant. Negative comments were also made about the training providers, who were thought to be poorly trained and not committed to helping participants. Participants felt that tutors were purely interested in tick-box exercises to evidence service take-up rather than achieving real results in helping people to find decent employment.

*It's like the tutor is plucked from outside ... there's no interaction ...* [African Caribbean woman]

*... it seemed like they had a quota to hit, like they had to get so many people through the door because they was more interested in just writing down paperwork ... Two, two-and-a-half hour sessions and I got to speak to someone for five minutes. The rest of the time was all just sat there, pointless little exercises. It was a load of rubbish.* [African Caribbean man]

In sum, for many, contact with service providers was felt to be a demeaning and frustrating experience.

## Work: Meaning and experiences

Work was very important to most of our research participants, being seen as not just a source of income but also related to feelings of self worth. Barriers to securing employment had included lack of experience and qualifications, insufficient childcare and for some racism and nationality status. In addition, since the onset of the recession, competition for jobs had made it yet more difficult to find work.

### The meaning of work

The majority of people we spoke to thought that work was the key factor in improving their life. Participants viewed work positively but were also keen to stress the importance of secure decent work as opposed to any work. Several people said that work was about more than financial gain, associating employment with self-esteem and confidence. The value that our research participants placed on work contradicts the widespread impression that many people make an active choice to remain on benefits and avoid working.

*... he respects that in this country work is one of the most important parts of life. [Bangladeshi man through interpreter]*

*... what else is there if work don't improve life? What does? [White woman]*

*... I know money's not everything ... you need to be still valued as a worker ... it's got to be a good reflection in terms of the economy, your qualifications they've got to be a match ... [Bangladeshi woman]*

African Caribbean women described the importance of work to their sense of self-worth.

*It's something to be proud of to be working.*

*You want to be able to tell someone about what you do*

*I think ... I think sometimes I've got less confidence in myself than I should have, but I think that's because ... when you're out of work, working life's so different to being sat at home all day.*

Bangladeshi women were also certain that employment made a major difference to their self-esteem but explained how lack of opportunity for initial experience held them back and how the decline of home-working and sweatshop working had meant a decline of opportunity for them. The Bangladeshi women also said that work gave them financial independence and the opportunity to have a life outside of the household.

*It's for your morale isn't it? Your self-esteem, it goes down if you've worked so hard for something and then you can't get a job that you want.*

*Since I've started working it's helped me a great deal I think financially as well as me being independent and getting out. So it's helped me a lot in that way and I've gained a lot of confidence.*

*... work is not just financial ... it improves everything – you've got a life outside of the home ... you're bringing some money into the house ... you know to yourself that you are contributing ... it's better than feeling you are not doing anything at all.*

*Yeah I think a lot of ladies they wanted to go to work but there is no job available where like educated people they are not getting the jobs so how can the unexperienced people get the jobs?*

*... they ask 'have you got the experience' ... There's no work out there so how to experience [laughs] ...*

*Before they used to work in a factory, sewing, there is nothing now like that.*

*Yes, they used to work at the onion factory.*

The participants from the African Caribbean men's focus group felt that long-term worklessness resulted in a loss of social skills needed for employment.

*... you're in poverty. You've got no job. Your personality changes. You might have had certain friends before, you might have worked before, you've got other, all these friends, but you've got no money, you can't go out with these people any more and all that kind of stuff ... And some people that I know, I don't know, they've actually, they just kind of turn inward and kind of they don't want to know nobody on the outside and kind of literally change, as a person ... Their confidence has gone worn down, that kind of stuff ... It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy ...*

One respondent felt that employment took away the temptation to get involved in criminal activity as a means to support yourself.

*Work keeps you on the right path ... [African Caribbean man]*

One white woman spoke of living on benefits.

*... the benefits we get are good but I think we're still on a low income... I am grateful that we get Housing Benefit and everything else but I would prefer to have a good job and have more income ... [White woman]*

We asked participants what type of work they felt was available to them. There was discussion of a range of features of work including pay rate, job security, the nature of work and location. Participants mentioned constraints linked to experience, qualifications and working during school hours.

Many participants (of all ages and groups) felt that their lack of experience was a major barrier to their chances of securing employment. The barrier to getting into work was described as a conundrum; not having work experience because of being unemployed and not being able to get a job due to a lack of work experience.

*... if you haven't worked for a long time and your skills and experience are not up-to-date ... I don't think it's that people don't want to take that step, I think sometimes people can't even afford to do work, you know? [African Caribbean woman focus group participant]*

Bangladeshi men explained their poor employment prospects. Although Bangladeshi men appeared to be able to readily find work, this work was overwhelmingly limited to low-paid work in the restaurant industry. This was most commonly stated by older men or those not born in the UK.

*... a lot of the restaurant owners are not even paying minimum wages, the problem is as well a lack of education within our community which gives us only a very small sort of sector we can really look for workwise and we can't really diversify and look for different sectors ...*

*... there wasn't anything else that was available to him at the time, you know [with respect to working in the restaurant trade]. He's aware of other jobs but he couldn't get it because of his educational background and, you know, coming over as a non-UK citizen. [Bangladeshi man through interpreter]*

Bangladeshi men felt that they had easier access to employment than white people because of the extent of casual and informal work in the restaurant trade. There was no need for them to speak English or complete employment application forms; jobs, however, may be of poor quality. Yet some Bangladeshi men felt that England was the land of opportunity because of the access to education, saying that younger UK-born Bangladeshis had 'no excuse but to go through education and do well for themselves ...' Lack of education was seen as the main barrier to work outside the restaurant trade.

## **Racism at work**

The only people who spoke of experiencing racism at work were African Caribbean men and women. It is possible that the Bangladeshi people we spoke to were relatively insulated from this by high levels of male employment in the restaurant trade and home-working for women. Two African Caribbean interviewees described their feelings of unequal treatment in the following ways:

*... as a young African Caribbean man you're always going to run into that ... I've experienced it all my life ... Going for jobs, you see it sometimes ... I get there and ... you kind of know, oh right Ok, not pleased. But there's nothing you can do about that...I've had the feeling before that maybe they've hit their certain quota of how many African Caribbean males they've got in the company ... we've hit that, we don't need any more ... you kind of get used to that in your life. [African Caribbean man]*

*African Caribbean workers, yes. And we'd always say, 'Why are you always giving us the hard part and you're giving all the rest of them the easy part, where they can just sail on and earn their money?' We were struggling to earn our money because the task was so hard. So we did bring it up and we were saying, 'I think it's a racist issue'. We did bring it up and they had to have a meeting about it. [African Caribbean woman]*

Racism at work was described by one African Caribbean respondent as an 'invisible barrier'.

## **Nationality status and work**

The research team from Bradford Resource Centre was involved in another research study at the same time as this project, looking at the impact of the recession on people living in poverty in the Bradford district. As both projects were funded by JRF it was agreed that data would be shared where appropriate. One issue that arose in the other project (Recession, Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods in Bradford) was the impact of nationality status on work. We found this to be an issue for two African Caribbean residents.

An African Caribbean man said:

*Because I didn't have a British passport they had to cancel the contract ... then the big break, it flopped because of me citizenship ... my boss said to me at work, he says, they asked me for my passport, right and I said I didn't have one but they says 'Have you got a driving licence?' So I said 'Yes' and I took it to work, gave them it ... But when they found out I didn't have a passport they had to terminate my contract. And I think it's wrong really, because I've been here in this country, what, 40 years now ...*

We asked one of our key informants, an immigration advice worker, whether this was a significant issue and if he could explain the background.

*[It has] ... a massive effect... it attacks and undermines their whole being here. ... It's reported to me very frequently ... at least half a dozen cases in the last few months ... people come to the United Kingdom often as children on their parents' passports. Their parents were perfectly free to come here ... people who came over in the '60s and perhaps even the '70s are affected ... many people came with a right of abode ... they went to school, they then had jobs, they married, they had children, they just lived as British as any of us ... they have the right of abode and they are British. The difficulty is that they can't prove it ... Since at least 1993 ... what you gradually got was a restriction on employing people from abroad subject to immigration control ... and now a hefty and massive fine can apply to an employer who employs someone who hasn't got permission to work. ... They've been here for so long, they have paid full national insurance contributions and they have paid in every way ...*

Proving right to reside and acquiring British nationality was an expensive process which is a major barrier for people living in poverty resuming or entering employment.

## Finding work

Respondents felt that finding work was becoming harder in the current economic climate. There was a shortage of jobs and respondents believed that the criteria used to select candidates had become tougher in a labour market where there was generally more competition for jobs. The difficult nature of labour markets for low-income groups is often well understood, as in the local acknowledgement that there is a kind of negative cycle through which those without experience cannot obtain the very jobs that would give them that experience, because their lack of experience prevents them being taken on.

The white and African Caribbean participants also pointed to increased competition from migrant workers.

*... all the agencies now, yeah ... it's all full of Polish people ... Polish are there straight away ... so it is hard to get a job now [White man focus group participant]*

*Yeah, I have been looking round but the job market at the moment is not how it was like a year and a half ago ... Where there used to be 30 pages a month before this, we're down to about five jobs. And it's difficult to find that. But I won't say there's not jobs, there are jobs, it's just a matter of finding the right one and applying for it. [Bangladeshi man]*

African Caribbean and Bangladeshi people mentioned that they had often obtained jobs through family and friends.

*Well I worked for my dad, I just ... I just had jobs like a pub job, you know, easy jobs where I don't have to go home and write reports and write this up and do that, I just had easy jobs, and mainly working in pubs and casinos, just because it's easy [African Caribbean woman focus group participant]*

In the present climate, job seekers faced multiple barriers; being inappropriately qualified, lacking experience, having a bad credit rating and a criminal record were all mentioned.

*... jobs and stuff that came dime a dozen and I've done them when I was a lot younger. And I don't know, they say that I'm over-qualified or not fitting the role because some of the work experiences that I've done ... You've failed the credit check ... [African Caribbean man]*

*... my brother is looking ... he's a graduate and he's looking for work and he's really struggling to find work ... [Bangladeshi woman]*

Language was also a barrier for some Bangladeshi people. Bangladeshi women said that this limited women to certain roles where you are not required to speak much. Examples given included dinner supervisors and lollipop ladies. Home working was also a common option for Bangladeshi women for the same reason. It was felt by all Bangladeshi participants that language classes needed to be more widely available.

*Yeah, and it also depends on your language skills as well. If you've got poor language skills then the options available to you are extremely limited especially with the current climate whereas before maybe you could have even found something within factories. But now with the current climate like you've got people with language skills struggling for jobs so if you haven't got any language skills then you've got even less chance [laughs] than what you would have had before.*

Key informants told us that they suspected that there was a high level of activity in the illegal and informal economy which occasionally distorted official poverty statistics.

*... you've got people who you would expect to be in poverty who are not in poverty because they've found something else to do, they've found another way of working. So they're either disengaged and living off the proceeds of crime, so on paper they're in poverty because they're on benefits, so they're on benefits and they're in poverty because the amount of money they've got coming in is not enough to pay for their outgoings.*

White women involved in the focus groups described how they sometimes considered turning to the illegal economy despite the risks. The women said that there was more risk to such a strategy since the benefit fraud reporting system was established. When asked if the women felt it was easier for them or for men to get cash-in-hand work they said it was far easier for men.

*If I could get work cash-in-hand I'd have gone out and done it ... I've done cleaning unofficially.*

*Easier for men ... definitely, they could do demolition, building, site work, labouring ...*

African Caribbean men also talked about illegal work.

*Well, it's by choice, but I'm breaking the law as well. 'Cause I shouldn't. I don't declare it.*

*I can't win really, but obviously I'm breaking the law. I know that. But obviously I keep that quiet, 'cause it's hard for me to get a job*

African Caribbean men talked about hardship arising from having insufficient income and the consequent temptations of working in the informal economy

*... it can make you go down the wrong road as well. 'Cause if you aren't employed, you can't get any money and you've been trained, you can't get a job. A little way might come, an illegal way now, and you'll probably go that way. Well, obviously at some point you're going to get caught, and then you're in deeper shit ... it just goes from there...*

## **Childcare and employment**

Many of the women across the groups reflected upon the difficulties of balancing childcare and employment. The issues the women spoke of included access to safe and affordable childcare, flexible hours of employment and the option to stay at home

*... It's just not worth it to work with two kids. Whatever you're earning you're just going to pay out in childcare ... But I suppose if I went out looking for a job somewhere I probably will find it hard 'cause there's not much about. And then if you wanted school times it's hard to work them. [White woman]*

*She [partner] mentioned about getting a job to make ends meet but I think there would be a more damaging affect on the family because we wouldn't see each other ... Some parents just don't bother with the kids and work all hours God sends. [White man]*

*... when you've got small kids it should be up to you when you feel like you want to go back to work because looking after three kids is a full-time job anyway. [White woman]*

*... I've got three children and my mum looked after my first two and then for my third because she's getting quite old I couldn't really expect her to look after them so then I had to kind of stop working and look after my third so from then I haven't been working and that's about since he was born, it was two years ago. [Bangladeshi woman focus group participant]*

One white woman said:

*I think for women with children getting back to work gives you more self-esteem, you feel good about yourself, you can provide for your children but what you need, these people that go back to work that have got kids, you need to have a proper babysitter ... so you know that they're safe.*

## Neighbourhood: Contextualising the experience

One factor that potentially affected groups across ethnic 'divides' was neighbourhood, in terms of environmental, social and economic features. Therefore we wanted to explore with participants the contribution of place to experiences of poverty. We asked about the extent to which people from deprived areas faced prejudice and penalties in terms of living costs. Participants mostly felt that the level of deprivation in their neighbourhood and more positively the strength of community feeling in the area had a significant impact on their life chances and affected the likelihood of them escaping poverty.

Points raised in discussions about place-related deprivation included poor educational opportunities, job prospects, insurance costs and negative external perceptions and stereotypes. White households seemed especially affected by the conditions faced locally in Ravenscliffe. On the other hand, the scattering of the African Caribbean group seemed to point up the potential merits of clustering, and the opportunities they had lost for constructing locally-based resources through networking and solidarities in everyday lives (see also *African Caribbean people* below). Such networking and local strength seemed to be present to some degree for the Bangladeshis, although they also shared the common problems of poor economic conditions and services.

Bangladeshi people on the whole spoke very highly of the neighbourhood they lived in:

*... we've got quite a close-knit community here ...* [Bangladeshi man]

Both residents from Ravenscliffe and research participants living in other areas frequently commented on the negative aspects of Ravenscliffe estate. These included anti-social behaviour, racist abuse towards non-white residents, drugs, general disrepair and feeling unsafe in the area. Residents sometimes said that Ravenscliffe was no worse than other traditional white estates and when they wanted to escape the negative labelling of their estate they described it as Greengates (an adjacent, slightly more prosperous area).

*There's an area called ... Ravenscliffe ... that's where loads of, like, bad stuff happens ... I don't go down there, I'd never move nowhere near there.* [African Caribbean man]

*... it's a peaceful area during the day, you wouldn't think of 'owt but as soon as half past seven comes they just come from nowhere and they're out 'til ... about half one in the morning ... It's very bad to go out at night time. I wouldn't like to go out at night time ... because it ain't me, living on Ravenscliffe ...* [White man]

*It's always idiots about on motorbikes and stuff like that, I don't want to be around that, I don't want to be around drugs, I don't want my children to be around drugs ... It is not suitable for young kids around here, because no one cares ... The estate is going downhill fast.* [White man]

*... all Afro-Caribbean's that have moved on [to Ravenscliffe estate] they seem to struggle ... mud bombs ...the cars getting smashed windows and stuff ... It's not just Africans, it's the Asians and everyone else. As soon as they come on here they see a different colour, that's it abuse ... The Polish as well, they've started on them as well ...*

Ravenscliffe was described as a 'no-go' area for Asian families by a couple of residents. (The estate was on the national news in 2001 when some of the local youth mounted a disturbance in response to what they perceived to be an Asian riot the night before in Bradford city centre.)

*... I know me girlfriend doesn't really understand because she's not from Bradford you see. Living up Greengates everyone knew Ravenscliffe as a dump ... you wouldn't see an Asian family on Ravenscliffe ... [White man interviewee]*

What about Caribbeans, African Caribbeans? [Interviewer]

*... I've seen quite a few of them yeah ... I don't think they're a problem with white people. I think white people see Asians as bad news ... this year it's creeping in ... the Polish people ... But I don't think you'll ever see an Asian family ... [White man continued]*

Participants were asked if they thought that the area they lived in affected their life chances. White and African Caribbean participants said that they felt neighbourhood affected employment prospects.

*... As soon as you mention you live on Ravenscliffe I don't think many people want to employ you ... Because it's well known for being a bad estate... I think we're all tarred with the same brush ... no-marks ... druggies or drinkers ... [White woman]*

A Bangladeshi woman felt that neighbourhood had an effect on well-being.

*... just seeing a bit of a green, it just does so much for you physically and mentally. ... I just think it's quite grim in terms of litter, in terms of the fact that you're so overcrowded, there's not much green, the buildings are quite run down ... [Bangladeshi woman]*

Participants also felt that area affected educational attainment, insurance rates and other people's perceptions of you.

When respondents were asked to comment on whether they felt a part of their local community, Bangladeshi men said that they were part of a community and felt that the community centres were important elements in sustaining community.

A Bangladeshi woman referring to her job at a community centre said:

*Since I started this job I feel like a part of the community. Otherwise before I wasn't really into the community thing, I wasn't really doing anything at all. It would have just been with some of the mums and that's it.*

Some African Caribbean women didn't feel part of a community – for example one said:

*I don't think I want to put myself in the community, I'm not that community type of person. But in another way, I just ... I've got a close circle of friends, I've got close friends, I've got mates that I also hang about and I've got my family, so I don't put myself in the community ... I just about say hallo to the neighbours.*

However they agreed that some areas felt more conducive to the formation of a community, for example West Bowling, and this was because the area was more mixed and because there were more community activities.

*It's very diverse ... they'll just do things ... sports days.*

*... there's a lot more volunteers in West Bowling and who live in West Bowling, you know? And I think that's what brings community together, because they do work really well.*

## Exploring ethnic differences

This section looks more directly to relationships with ethnicity itself, commenting in turn on each of the three groups involved in this research.

### African Caribbean people

The group who were most certain that they faced disadvantage because of their ethnicity/identity were African Caribbeans. They felt marginalised by the Asian communities in Bradford, who they perceived to have too much power and to be over resourced.

*... that's what we got, we're not ethnic because we speak English. The majority of us aren't ethnic, and that's what they told us, that's what the council people told us. When we went for grants and everything to open our business and everything. [African Caribbean man focus group participant]*

African Caribbean participants felt that they were more disadvantaged than other ethnic groups because their community in Bradford had been dispersed following the demolition of Newby Square, an area of housing where most residents were African Caribbean, in the early 1980s. It was felt by a few participants that the dispersal was a deliberate state policy to undermine and break down African Caribbean solidarity, which at the time was seen by some as a threat to law and order. The African Caribbean residents felt that dispersal in Bradford increased the likelihood of them being in poverty, for three reasons. Firstly it undermined their ability to network, thus reducing business opportunities. Secondly it reduced their ability to act collectively and so reduced their political power. They pointed to more geographically concentrated Asian groups as having successfully deployed their resources at a local level, for example to elect local councillors. Thirdly, their lack of presence in any particular neighbourhood reduced their ability to get grant aid for community projects.

*What we lack, right, is the Caribbean atmosphere, we've always lacked it from 1974, right when Newby Square and all these places were active and we was a strong community, right, black, white, Asians were a strong community, right? We had this Caribbean atmosphere, we was focusing on it and we was branching out, we was doing the schools, we was doing the shops, we were doing everything. When it got chopped down and everything, then you got these smaller groups like Bradford black project and so and so project, the West Indian and African Caribbean projects and everything, and all other branches, right? That's where the separation came for our community because they never came back together ... we need that Caribbean atmosphere to come back into our community, to make our community a lot stronger and more believable to the public.*

One African Caribbean man compared the community in Bradford to that in Leeds.

*... I know at one point, maybe in my mother's generation ... there was like a large African Caribbean community ... they split everybody up apparently and*

*moved everybody about so there wasn't that kind of unity ... that's one of the things that attracted me to Leeds because there was that unity coming from a large African Caribbean area ...*

The absence of a strong and focussed community was held to mean that there was a lack of bargaining power:

*... we've been asking for years, and we've always been knocked back and knocked back, it's some excuse, some excuse ... but other nationalities get it. They get food ... we've asked for our food to be in there [in schools], remember? ... every time we've tried to do something, there's some kind of excuse for our different culture like knocked back every single time.*

The African Caribbean men thought that they suffered the impact of racism from schooldays onwards, although there had been some improvement in recent years.

*... well when I was at school, it started from there. There was like a minority of West Indians ... So, to me, I don't want to put it on racism again, but that's where it started from. 'You, stops talking.' 'You, get up.' 'You get out of the class' ... that's how it reflected back. ...*

*... You have to work three times as hard, don't you?*

*... Or you did have to, and then that was the '70s for me ... It were rough in those days, compared to how it is now.*

*Yeah, yeah. And that's why when we left school it was all on dole...*

However one informant felt that there had also been a decline of professionalism in the teaching profession particularly with respect to African Caribbean boys.

*My teacher at school, when I were at school, yeah, when I was 15, my teacher said to me, 'Listen, ... I'll tell you what'll happen to you. You're going to leave school, you're going to be on the dole, you're going to go to prison, you're going to do that' ... it were true. I left school, I were on dole, I went to prison ... he knew ... he knew how the system worked ... He knew it, unless you was really strong and fortunate not to get into that crowd and that ...*

*... significant sections of the teaching profession who have contempt for working class kids and their parents and who really are unabashed in their stereotype, stereotyping of African Caribbean boys and who exclude as a first resort ... some of the people that are teaching in some of the secondary schools shouldn't be teaching at all, right, and they give the impression they don't want to teach, that it's really ... the profession has been degraded, there's workload issues, pressure issues and so on and some of them are taking it out on the kids and their parents.*

The African Caribbean women identified the need for activities that valued their culture as a way to build self-confidence and improve educational achievement for young people.

*... the youth service, which we were talking about for the young black females and males ... now their focus is not on African Caribbean work anymore. So you're not getting black workers working with black young people. In fact, you're hardly getting them doing anything to do with African Caribbean ... That element is not there anymore. So for me, you know, I feel kind of scared because for my children there's nobody there, you know, for my two daughters growing up ... There's nothing like that in Bradford any more because we've been dispersed that much, we're all in little pockets which being a little pocket is not enough.*

When asked what impression she had of other communities, an African Caribbean woman said:

*... not to be awful or anything, the ones on Ravenscliffe, they don't actually want to do anything with themselves ... and African Caribbeans don't really get a chance to do anything ... and I'm not too sure about Bangladeshis ... I don't really expect them to be in poverty, to be honest ...*

One of the African Caribbean men felt that each wave of immigrant communities had the same aspiration, saying that:

*... they all come to this country looking for a bit of a better start in life, because their countries are under-developed, but when they get here they realise they just have to either graft for half the minimum wage or go on benefits ...*

He believed that this was the result of class discrimination rather than racism:

*I think low class white people are treated the same as us. They're looked down on... in the inner city basin we're all in one bucket. We're all looking for a crumb off the same plate.*

## **Bangladeshi people**

The Bangladeshi women spoke of extensive caring responsibilities. They described the balancing act of household chores and caring responsibilities as at times overwhelming. These responsibilities raised the question of whether or not there was space in their lives for becoming economically active. Women who could drive and speak English felt the strongest pressures. They experienced an internal struggle between their need to support other family members and resentment at the demands made upon them. This pressure, coupled with a perceived lack of appreciation of them being exhausted by men in the family, was a source of extreme frustration and anxiety.

*...sometimes I don't even know what I'm doing. Am I cooking? Am I doing this? Sometimes I just have to leave everything and just go. If the school*

*phones and says the kids are ... I have to pick them up. So you just leave everything and go to them. If my mum and dad have got an appointment in the same day you are rushing around trying to juggle things.*

*I have three children and they go to the school all of them at different times and I have to drop three off at three different times and pick them up at different times and then they go for Islamic studies as well afterwards. It's quite stressful and then you have to fit everything else in between as well.*

*And then your brother says, 'Oh you sit at home all day' because they're at work thinking you just sit at home all day not doing anything and I'm like, 'You should be in my shoes for a day!'*

*But you have to do it. We can't say, 'I stop' or I can't say to my mum, 'I can't take you anymore'.*

A Bangladeshi woman described the prejudice directed towards Muslims. She also highlighted the particularly marginal status of Bangladeshis, pointing to the relative success of some parts of the Pakistani and Indian communities that had allowed them to break the cycle of poverty. Some reference was also made to the way in which Bangladeshis could feel a minority within a minority, a feeling exacerbated by racism from Pakistani people.

*... I think if you're like a different skin colour, if you're wearing a headscarf, the way you dress you do get a judgement ... they've got a particular stereotype ... [of the] Asian community, that they're really stupid or they're terrorists ...*

*... the Pakistani community and the Indian ... there's quite a few people that have managed to break out of the cycle and they've done really well in terms of businesses and they've succeeded. And slowly the Bangladeshi community have been doing that but again, I think for some bizarre reason they are struggling more so than the other communities ... there's a lot of racism within the Asian community from Pakistanis ... they [Bangladeshis] are kind of the minority community they do feel a bit inferior.*

A Bangladeshi woman spoke of the additional financial costs of maintaining identity and religion within their community, pointing to the way:

*... our children ... after school they go to the local mosque, that's another expense. And my daughter going to a Madrasa so I have to pay her annual fees as well ... so that's another £1,200 on top ...*

Another woman spoke of the strengths and weaknesses of maintaining such a community. Yet another spoke of the price paid in being ostracised by it.

*[we] tend to stay together ... you don't see Bangladeshis spread out ...and that's good because you get a sense of a community but it's also like a barrier as well and potentially it restricts them later on ...*

*They see you in a different way because you're separated, your husband's left you ...*

Bangladeshi people continued to send money to relatives in the sub continent, particularly in households where one partner was a very recent immigrant. The extent to which remittances were sent to Bangladesh has reduced a little over the years as obligations had declined with time. None of the African Caribbean participants reported any such commitments.

## **White British people**

White people living in Ravenscliffe felt that other ethnic groups had the advantage of well-maintained kinship networks which provided some protection against the impact of life on a low income. Some also felt that there was complacency and a lack of drive on Ravenscliffe – that local people were not prepared to take the work that was most available:

*... their attitude is I won't get out of bed for £20 a week, that sort of job. And they won't accept a job they don't like...*

Some white participants in the research recognised that the other ethnic groups had suffered from discrimination in the past but felt that the impact of measures taken to overcome this had resulted in the pendulum swinging against white people. They felt that public services and welfare benefits were more readily available to Asians in particular. This was partly because service providers were afraid to be accused of racism.

*... I don't mean this in any racist way but I think sometimes they have a bit more help than what we do ... like how they get their benefits because there's all this thing of they daren't be racist, they like go over the top a little bit more ... [White woman interviewee]*

## Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter summarises the main report findings and makes recommendations for policy reform and possible further research.

### Poverty and ethnicity

Although ethnic differences in the experience and understanding of poverty did emerge, there were many commonalities between groups in terms of the perceived impact of poverty on everyday life, on individuals' health and the well-being of the family. If there are penalties attached to ethnic affiliations and identities today in Bradford, these look fairly complex, and may well be paralleled in some circumstances by important positive benefits.

There are certainly valued resources available to some households in terms of clustering, kinship networks, a sense of 'home territory' and faith affiliations. Ethnically-based networks and family can be very valuable in times of economic difficulty, and perhaps (as some informants suggested) may even affect job opportunities. Even so, there may be costs as well as gains from participation, including expenses that were mentioned in connection with faith education and time spent by women on family obligations. Any attempt to explore the interaction of poverty with ethnicity and the extent of an ethnic penalty is complicated by, for example, the household composition and numbers of wage earners per household.

Racism clearly still has potential to destabilise and damage. Only African Caribbeans, however, spoke very directly of racism as a contributing factor to their poverty and life chances, while informants more generally noted also the significance of other variables such as language skills. The increasing diversity and fragmentation that has been seen in Bradford also suggests the need to consider the particular possibilities for exclusion faced by new migrants.

### Poverty subsidised?

The group identified by key informants as the most impoverished was the Bangladeshis. In contrast Bangladeshis themselves did not feel that they experienced a high rate of poverty in relation to the other two groups involved. It was common for Bangladeshis to say that they felt that the extended networks and informal employment opportunities that existed for their community made life easier for them. As one key informant pointed out, if these support mechanisms were reduced then the underlying poverty would be felt more keenly. A number of key informants said that they thought that these support systems were weakening, however, partly because of career ambition among the younger generation. Public policy can no longer take the extent of this unpaid informal caring for granted.

Differences in household structures had an impact on the way that poverty was experienced. Bangladeshis appeared to thrive best living in extended households living under the same roof, although some women talked of the care burdens that they experienced and the difficulty of combining these obligations with work. People

excluded from these household structures felt this loss acutely. These structures, however, were clearly changing. Key informants told us that older members of the household had lost power as younger members obtained professional jobs and became the main providers of household income and effectively the heads of households. Again, public policy can no longer assume these support structures will be maintained over the long term.

## **Neighbourhood and community**

The physical environment of Ravenscliffe estate appeared more derelict than the other areas in which Bangladeshi and African Caribbean research participants lived. Ravenscliffe participants were the most likely to say that area affected life chances. Living a considerable distance from the city centre, these residents also felt physically isolated.

Much of the deterioration of Ravenscliffe's physical environment is due to anti-social behaviour. Local views pointed towards benefits that might arise from environmental projects that built ownership in the local area and provided diversionary activities for local unemployed young people. It was believed that a comprehensive environmental regeneration programme would ideally incorporate a trainee scheme to help local residents develop skills needed to carry out improvements and, in so doing, provide meaningful employment. Such an initiative would need to be developed in consultation with the community to give the local residents input.

A persuasive understanding was that the benefits of regeneration lie not only in job creation and environmental improvement, but could lead to a reduction in concerns around safety, change outside perceptions of the area and arguably improve the mental and physical well-being of residents. One key informant felt that, were he in receipt of welfare benefits, he would:

*... sooner mow a border ... dismantle a burnt-out car, help an old person ... fix their gate ... doing that for my benefit payment because that gives me some belief in myself and something to keep myself active, my brain active and keep me moving, than to sit and believe that there's nothing out there ...*

He then went on to say that such a scheme should be linked to well-resourced and remunerated training.

*... in the old days of the YTS schemes where you got kids on thirty quid a week who are just getting something out of, getting up and coming to work everyday and doing something useful ... the effect that had on youngsters who were just able to have some purpose and some reason, and that in itself just helps to lift aspirations ... They're expensive schemes, but in the long run they have huge benefits for society ...*

## **Community engagement and targeting resources**

Bangladeshi people expressed a sense of disempowerment in the face of the numerically larger Pakistani population, who were thought to be better able to

mobilise and exercise political influence. It was thought that public resources were geared towards Pakistani people in the district. Policy-makers need to demonstrate more clearly that resources are targeted according to need, irrespective of ethnicity. They also need to recognise that some service providers will come to be seen as meeting the needs of particular groups (and may very well do that effectively) and therefore additional services may be needed for groups that otherwise feel excluded.

Capacity-building work would benefit all three groups, but particularly newly arrived spouses among the Bangladeshi population, young white women and African Caribbean youth. All three groups appeared to be disengaged from civil life and have relatively little political influence. This is evident from their lack of knowledge and understanding of local governmental structures, and a feeling of powerlessness to influence change.

African Caribbean groups in Bradford appeared to be under-resourced. There no longer seemed to be a community infrastructure to specifically support them. The absence of such a network hampers African Caribbean people from effectively engaging or using community and voluntary organisations (or establishing organisations run by African Caribbean people for African Caribbean groups). These grassroots organisations are important because they draw down and target resources for groups and help build the capacity of individuals (improving access to services, employment chances for individuals and prosperity for the group as a whole).

As observed above, many research participants felt isolated because they did not have adequate income to pay for leisure activities. It was also observed by respondents that most state subsidised social activity was targeted at young people or parents and children. Therefore activities for all groups should incorporate more opportunities for leisure and socialising. These should not just be connected to children and parent groups although those are also essential.

## **Work**

All participants agreed that secure and rewarding employment was the best route out of poverty and the best way to find employment was to get occupational training in skilled work.

Employment opportunities appeared to be different for different groups. Many of the African Caribbean participants were in part-time casual employment, for example in the voluntary sector or working for agencies; Bangladeshi men predominantly worked in the restaurant trade, and a large proportion of white people on Ravenscliffe were in receipt of unemployment benefits. The research highlighted the poverty that was experienced by people both in and out of work. It also suggests that different support strategies might be needed to help different groups move out of poverty. For example Bangladeshi people need more opportunities to network outside their own communities to give them an opportunity to diversify beyond work in Asian restaurants. African Caribbean men in particular need the skills to access secure full-time employment and reassurance that they would not be disadvantaged in the competition for work by racism. Ravenscliffe residents found it difficult to get

on the job ladder at all and would certainly benefit from more local job opportunities in view of the isolation they experienced.

A key informant, talking about Bradford's Asian populations pointed to the disadvantages of insufficient networking horizons.

*... I'd say it's been a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in some ways, and the understandable ghettoisation of communities based on the back of that where people wanted to stick with what they know, has kind of made that worse in some ways because there is quite a good tradition of people helping each other out and working together [to] keep themselves alive, and fed and watered. But that hasn't helped to create a better integration which would have led to more opportunity ... There isn't enough social integration on a day-to-day basis. People don't mix well enough with each other so they don't learn about the opportunities, if you like, in very simple terms.*

Conditions of employment in the restaurant trade employing Bangladeshi workers appear problematic. This industry is a lifeline to many Bangladeshi families but it is likely that there is room for improvement in ensuring fairer wages and proper working conditions.

Expectations of social mobility varied with age in all three groups. Younger people tended to be ambitious. Older people did not expect to regain the status that work had brought them in the past and they associated this with the demise of manufacturing industry. However, they were indignant at being excluded from some training opportunities. It seems clear that job centre training schemes deserve further investigation with a view to improvement, one development option perhaps being a focus beyond job readiness training (especially in a climate where there is a shortage of jobs). For those people who are long-term unemployed or have persistent cycles of unemployment a holistic approach to gaining work which incorporates tailored mentoring and counselling could prove to be beneficial.

## **Gender**

A number of comments were made that showed the significance of gender, and this could cut across ethnic differences as well as be entangled with them. The theme of work as a source of self-worth and independence was found in all groups. The decline of some specific types of employment may, however, have implications more marked for one group of women than another. It could be beneficial to investigate further the inter-relationships between changing employment opportunities, gender and ethnicity.

One key informant pointed out that African Caribbean women had been successful in securing public sector professional jobs which were now at risk in view of impending reductions in public spending:

*... a good proportion of those women are the main breadwinners and single parents for the families so if they get hit in these public sector cuts, it could*

*have a serious impact on African Caribbean households because in a significant proportion of those cases ... the woman is the single parent ...*

There were a high number of single-parent households in poverty in the African Caribbean population. We were conscious of the absence of women with partners in our sample had little success rectifying this. It seemed from the views expressed to us that welfare benefits and tax regimes needed to fully resource the cost of pressures women face, for example childcare. Women continue to carry the majority responsibility for caring responsibilities and are often left without adequate support in low income households.

## **Social mobility**

It seems to be difficult to move out of poverty in all three of the groups we looked at. Most of our participants said that they had been living on a low income for most or all of their lives. Bangladeshi women were quite philosophical about this and said that they didn't miss what they had never had. However, they still had aspirations for a better lifestyle and more rewarding work experience. African Caribbean people were angry about being trapped at the bottom end of the earnings pyramid. Similarly, generations of Ravenscliffe residents felt excluded from secure well-paid employment.

Key informants alluded to benefit dependency, for example:

*The lady that cleans my office ... is pretty brassed off that's she's getting up at five o'clock in the morning and coming to work in here and probably ending no more than twenty quid a week better off than she would be if she sat at home claiming benefit like the next door neighbour.*

In our research we did not encounter anyone who had made a positive choice to remain on benefits. All of our research participants believed the way to improve their lives was by ensuring that someone in the household secured reasonably well-paid employment. This was true for all three groups we spoke to. Almost all of our interviewees commented on the practical difficulties of pursuing and sustaining reasonably paid work, and the stresses this brought for their households. There is no reason from our material for supposing that either ethnicity or culture are central variables here. Rather than discovering a cycle in which attitudes about dependency are transmitted across the generations, we found situations where there is sometimes very little in the way of financial and other salient resources which can be passed on, alongside the persistence of very restricted opportunities in education or employment.

The research participants repeatedly said that both benefit levels and wage rates for low-skilled work were not high enough to sustain an adequate standard of living and that this disparity has worsened during the recession. People living on a low income are constantly trying to make ends meet one way or another. This requires much time and energy that they might otherwise use to secure reasonably paid employment. One implication would seem to be that both benefit levels and minimum wage levels need to be higher to provide the means to allow people in low-income

households an adequate standard of living as a base from which to climb out of poverty and accumulate resources.

Men and women felt the pressures to act unlawfully in order to survive. The potentially 'rational' nature of such survival strategies for many poor people needs keeping in mind, along with all the threats that such rationality poses to the security of households that contain dependent children as well as adults.

## **Public services**

Experience of public services was mixed. Some local community centres were very well used and seen as a valuable resource. By contrast, many of the participants were particularly disappointed with centre training. Those participants who talked about the police were unimpressed. A significant number of participants thought that the health services were difficult to access. Given the increase in both police and NHS expenditure and the increase in community engagement by both the police and NHS, it is disappointing that the experience of these low-income households was so poor.

English language skills were an issue for older Bangladeshi people and newly arrived spouses. Service providers commented that inadequate resources were available to address this problem. Local voluntary sector organisations reported a reduction in funding during the last few years for English language skill classes despite the continued need for such services. The Bangladeshi participants saw English language skills as a key to increasing the quality of everyday life, increasing their ability to participate in society and increasing employment prospects.

## **Credit and debt**

Bangladeshi people were more likely to seek financial support from within the family than other groups and thus less likely to find themselves in debt to outside agencies. However, key informants reported that there was an increase in the use of debt advice services by Asian groups in Bradford. It was thought that this was mainly due to the inability of extended family networks to manage the level of debt that is now emerging. The white and African Caribbean people involved in the research (especially women) were more likely to use doorstep lenders. There is a clear need for credit facilities tailored to the needs of low-income households.

## **What would help**

When asked what would help them, there was agreement across all groups that increased benefit levels and access to better paid and more secure employment, better advice and guidance to access existing services and more access to education would be useful. African Caribbean people also spoke of the need for more business support. Ravenscliffe residents also mentioned the option to move off the estate.

## **Conclusion**

Overall the study confirmed the importance of key commonalities running across the three ethnic groups, as well as differences between them. Socio-economic circumstances were often crucial, and it was clear that financial and institutional environments and constraints played significant roles in affecting all groups. This was evident in a variety of perceptions from informants, ranging from concerns about the inadequacies of job-related services to reservations about private landlords. Further studies would need to give full recognition to environmental factors of these kinds, set alongside the diversity and similarities of individual responses and strategies, and the effects of inter-personal obligations and dependencies.

## **About the authors**

### **Bal Athwal**

Community Development Worker and Social Researcher based at Bradford Resource Centre & Community Statistics Project.

### **Mike Quiggin**

Community Development Worker and Social Researcher based at Bradford Resource Centre & Community Statistics Project.

### **Deborah Phillips**

Reader in Ethnic and Racial Studies at the Universities of Leeds and Oxford.

### **Malcolm Harrison**

Emeritus Professor in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all research participants for their time, honesty and openness. Thank you also to key informants for their knowledgeable contributions and to all the local organisations that helped to make this project happen. In particular, thanks to staff at BEAP and The Gateway Centre.

We would also like to thank Helen Barnard for her patience, support and guidance.