# Young Bangladeshi people's experience of transition to adulthood

# Young Bangladeshi people's experience of transition to adulthood

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# Acknowledgements

# Introduction

This report presents the major issues that Bangladeshi young people in Newcastle identify as having an impact on their growing up in the city. We set out to establish individual and collective experiences, personal meanings and the cultural location of Bangladeshi people in Newcastle. More specifically we give voice to a group of young people that are rarely heard and present their accounts on a wide range of areas. We were mindful to select the issues that they wished to be heeded by those responsible for developing and implementing social and public policy in the local region. One of the main reasons why many policies prove unsuccessful is due to the lack of information on ethnic minorities. We need information on young Bangladeshis in order to identify potential problems, approximate support and evaluate policy impacts. Establishing a profile of their experience is an important task because of the major policy implications. We need to know about their specific needs so that public policy makers, as well as individual institutions, can target limited resources in a more strategic fashion at this highly disadvantaged minority ethnic community (Eade, 1996; Eade and Garbin, 2002).

## Objectives

The project sets out to answer the following questions.

- How do young Bangladeshi people experience the transition to adulthood, in relation to areas such as family life, work and peer group interaction?

- What is the impact of gender on young Bangladeshi people's life chances and opportunities within the home and the wider society?

- What are the differences and commonalities between young Bangladeshi people and young white people?

## Methodology and fieldwork

The research involved four phases. Phase one examined secondary, local and national demographic data. Phase two involved interviews with 60 Bangladeshi young people in the same age range (30 male and 30 female) aged between 16–18 years old. Phase three involved a comparative component and drew upon interviews with 40 white young people (20 male and 20 female) to illustrate the differences and commonalities of young Bangladeshi and young white people's transitions to adulthood. Phase four examined the perspectives of service providers and community workers in the local region.

The important task was to utilise the existing networks that the research team had already established in the region. These networks involved representatives from the areas of education, training, health and housing. They also included a number of young people in Newcastle and around the country. These representatives helped identify the different institutions that we approached to access our sample. It was important to the research team that a number of institutions from a range of areas within Newcastle should be accessed. The various institutions approached included further education colleges, sixth forms, training providers, youth clubs and support agencies (such as drug advice and language-related projects). Following interviews with the key representatives of these institutions, the viability of conducting research was evaluated and the young people were targeted and informally approached by the research team. There were also a number of existing contacts with Bangladeshi young people established in Newcastle that were accessed outside of these sampling parameters. Indeed, as the research progressed young people were contacted through other interviewees, a process known as snowballing or convenience sampling.[1]

The samples that we gained are shown in the tables below.

### Place of birth

The Bangladeshi sample displayed different traits of migration and settlement. The sample could be broken down into a core group and a more recently arrived group.

In contrast, the white sample was more homogeneous regarding place of birth. The breakdown is as follows.

**Table 1  Bangladesh sample: place of birth**

|  | Newcastle upon Tyne | Other UK counties | Bangladeshi | Other countries | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 14 | 5 | 10 | 1 | 30 |
| Female | 15 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 30 |

**Table 2  White sample: place of birth**

|  | Newcastle upon Tyne | Other UK counties | Other countries | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 16 | 3 | 1 | 20 |
| Female | 18 | 0 | 2 | 20 |

*Age distribution*

The research aimed at gaining access to a group of young people aged 16–18. The breakdown is as follows.

*Post-16 trajectory*

Tables 4 and 5 show the life-course trajectories of the Bangladeshi young people and their white counterparts after compulsory schooling. Young people were asked to name their primary occupation. However, many will have been working as well as training and/or being in education.

It is interesting to note that Bangladeshi females were much more likely to describe themselves as being in education in comparison with Bangladeshi males, or indeed white males and females.

## From Bangladesh to Newcastle upon Tyne: a story of social exclusion

The general reasons for migration are well established, involving economic necessity, social opportunities and career advancement (Mac an Ghaill, 1999). The

**Table 3  Age distribution**

|  | 16 years old | 17 years old | 18 years old | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bangladeshi | 18 | 22 | 20 | 60 |
| White | 13 | 13 | 14 | 40 |

**Table 4  Post-16 profile: Bangladeshi sample**

|  | Education | Employment | Training | Not in education, employment or training | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 14 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 30 |
| Female | 24 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 30 |

**Table 5 Post-16 profile: White sample**

|  | Education | Employment | Training | Not in education, employment or training | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 12 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 20 |
| Female | 11 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 20 |

post-war migration of Bangladeshis to Newcastle occurred at a time when manufacturing industries were expanding and retail factories in the west of Newcastle became a key source of employment. However, the Bangladeshi community, along with working class white men, became the first employment casualties of the manufacturing downturn during the 1970s. The resulting restructuring of Newcastle from a manufacturing to a service sector city has resulted in a transformation of the social and economic location of Bangladeshis in the Newcastle community. Inevitably, these social and cultural transformations are impacting on young people's lifestyles (Allen, 2000). Simultaneously, the changing meanings and processes of work, family life, schooling and cultural heritage by developing minority ethnic communities are a major contributing factor to wider changes in post-industrial societies. For example, some of the young people were aware that what the media call 'cities of the future' were identifying the presence of minority ethnic groups as primary evidence of cities' progressive claims about modernisation, marked by cultural diversity, difference and inclusivity (Goodwin and Cramer, 1997).

The demographic profile of the Bangladeshi community in Newcastle depicts an ethnic group that is as distinctive from other south Asian communities as it is from white communities. As Eade (1996) points out, at a national level, based on 1991 statistics, the Bangladeshi community in Newcastle is more likely to be working class, go to state schools and live in council or rented housing. Compared with other minority ethnic groups in Newcastle, Bangladeshis have the lowest household income, the highest number of persons per household rooms, highest levels of unemployment and multi-family households (Banks of the Wear, 1996; Cameron and Field, 1997). More recently, a report from the Social Exclusion Unit (2004), *Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking Stock and Looking to the Future*, has highlighted the persistent inequalities, including low income, unemployment, educational underachievement and limited access to health care among Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

Results from the 2003 Census indicate that the North East has lower than average proportions of ethnic minorities and has the least number of people born outside the European Union (EU) living in the region (one in twenty). Historically, the Newcastle community has primarily migrated from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. The young people in our study described this as a more rural, religious and traditional area of Bangladesh. Although having a distinctive dialect called Sylheti, Bangladeshis tended to refer to their language and their family background as Bengali. Given that Bangladesh was not ceded from Pakistan until 1971, the real extent of the migration patterns is not fully known. It is important that the Bangladeshi community in Newcastle are not thought of as representing Bangladeshis' experiences nationally.

Although we can draw this general picture of the background to the Bangladeshi community, there is much evidence from the young people themselves to suggest that this is not the whole story and a consideration of their experiences and meanings is necessary for a more incisive and accurate perspective.

## Young Bangladeshis in Newcastle upon Tyne

The Bangladeshi community has been recognised as one of the youngest and fastest growing communities in the UK. Research in Newcastle illustrates that the Bangladeshi community shares this same characteristic. Census data suggest that the Bangladeshi community has almost doubled from 0.6 per cent in 1991 to 1 per cent in 2001. This is in the context of a decreasing population of Newcastle, popularly reported as the 'brain drain'. Over the last 40 years Newcastle's population has dropped by over 100,000. From Census data, the Bangladeshi community appears to be the third largest minority ethnic group in Newcastle behind the Pakistani and Indian communities (Table 6).

However, in a recent study, Cameron and Field (2000) researched over 300 Bangladeshi households in Newcastle and found that under three quarters of the population was under 30. Our research suggests a similar pattern. By looking at children in education, the profile changes dramatically (Table 7).

Bangladeshi young people outnumber their Indian counterparts by three to one. Although the Pakistani children are still the main minority ethnic group, the ratio between them and the Bangladeshi community has been considerably reduced. From these statistics, it appears that Newcastle will have a changing demography of minority ethnic groups and this may have major resource implications in terms of the available support for this increasingly visible group of young people.

**Table 6  Newcastle population 2001 ethnicity (per cent)**

|  | Pakistani | Indian | Bangladeshi | Chinese |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 1.87 | 1.19 | 1 | 0.72 |

**Table 7  Newcastle ethnic population by state* school places**

|  | White UK | Bangladeshi | Indian | Pakistani | Chinese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 34,901 | 909 | 321 | 1,162 | 220 |

*Numbers in private schools were not available.*

## Understanding Bangladeshi young people: the importance of meanings

One of the underlying features of young people's experiences is that it is not self-evident what growing up means. Existing studies contain a highly ethnicised version of transition to adulthood, a version based on white ethnic majorities (see Appendix 1). In order to address this limited approach, our exploration of young Bangladeshi people's experiences included examining the structure and roles of minority ethnic families, educational barriers, parental demands on a younger generation and lifestyle similarities/differences with their white peer groups. At the same time, this study does not view the Bangladeshi community as a social problem, measured against the norm of the white majority population. Instead, we aimed to discover not simply what Bangladeshi young people were doing in terms of growing up, but rather what doing that meant to them.

## Note

1   Of those approached, all agreed to be interviewed. However, a small number of people did not attend the interviews and some interviews were interrupted. In such cases, the person was replaced. In all cases, even with those recently arrived from Bangladesh, being interviewed in English was not a problem. The interviews were conducted in a range of places that included the target institutions as well as their family home and leisure spaces, such as snooker halls and parks. Of interest was the overall keenness of the young Bangladeshis to visit the university to be interviewed. Frequently what was designated a 60-minute interview often turned into a catalyst for a broader two-hour conversation and discussion. After the interviews, contact details were exchanged to enable follow-up interviews. The interviews were transcribed and the themes generated have shaped the main sections of this report.

Another feature of this report was contacting local representatives working with young people. The research team made a number of speculative contacts with a wide range of organisations and conducted follow-up telephone enquiries. From this, a number of interviews that were directly relevant to young people took place. These were all conducted at the representatives' premises. At the same time, a series of questionnaires were sent out to other agencies involved in the collection of information on the Bangladeshi community.

# 1 Family life and intergenerational relations

There is a long history of race-relations experts informing policy makers of the assumed cultural conflict and identity crisis experienced by young Asians in Britain (Community Relations Commission, 1976; Cashmore and Troyna, 1982). They are projected as being 'caught between two cultures', which necessarily leads to psychological problems or the need to choose between their parents' traditional culture or that of Western culture in their place of residence. More recently, following riots in the north of England, social commentators claimed that a major cause of the disturbances was an increasing generational gap between Asian parents and their British-born children (Hencke, 1999; Ward, 2002; Harris and Wazir, 2002).

## Understanding generations

The young Bangladeshi people in Newcastle offered a more sophisticated analysis; identifying positively, while at times critically, with Bangladeshi culture, they presented an empathetic assessment of their parents' demands upon them. As we stress throughout this study, we need to listen to young people's own understandings; they are not reducible to their choosing either the traditional or Western ways. Rather, they suggest a more 'messy' reality, marked by internal (generational) tensions, complexity and ambiguity. In fact, the young people's accounts revealed a full range of emotions: pleasure, fear, pain, confusion, ambition and hope. Most importantly, their focus suggested that issues of transitions rather than traditions were the most important questions that they and their parents face on a day-to-day basis. They felt that the latter needed to be addressed within the Bangladeshi community itself, while the former required urgent support by outside agencies, such as the local authority (Ang-Lygate, 1997).

> You see some of the younger ones going away from our culture, but as they get older, they'll understand more. But the main thing is that most young people understand the older generation. It's not a question of totally accepting or rejecting our culture. It's young people's culture as well. It's more adapting to things, like at school, things are a lot more Western but at home you feel good with the family way, the traditional way of doing things.
> *(Minati)*

> Every community changes over a few generations. We'll work out among ourselves all the traditional stuff. But there's a suspicion that's all those outside the community really care about. Teachers, local government people, whoever, they should come and ask the young people. We can tell them lots of ways of

supporting us, through schools, training, preparing for university, bad housing, health, everything. And our parents, the Bangladeshi community has not been in England long and need support.
*(Haamid)*

For the young Bangladeshis, family life was of central importance, both in terms of social organisation and inter-personal meanings. The young people described a supportive environment that included a closeness to brothers, sisters and familial cousins, who provided emotional, social and financial support to each other.

I think if there was ever a time when people need their family it's when they're young, like that's a massive step from being a young kid to becoming an adult. That's the biggest step … and you need your parents' support as obviously you make mistakes.
*(Tarun)*

My brother always supports me, looks after me. Gives me money and good advice. I would share everything with him. I think that's the way it is in our community.
*(Nadim)*

## Growing up in the family

The young Bangladeshi and the young white people in Newcastle displayed a wide range of meanings about growing up in Britain at the start of the 2000s. Both groups had shared, nuanced understandings of moving out of boyhood or girlhood as a complicated, unfinished process that is very much shaped by specific contexts and relationships. They suggested, as an example of this complexity, that they were often treated simultaneously as a young man/young woman (by friends) while remaining the 'baby of the family' (among parents and grandparents).

When you're grown up you have a lot more responsibilities. That's why I think in our community we're more grown up than white kids. Because for us you have a lot of responsibilities from a young age. So, in a way you are grown up and not grown up at the same time.
*(Kasim)*

Within the context of a general picture of supportive parent–child relations within contemporary Bangladeshi households, different lifestyles were being developed by young people. Nadia was one of a number of young women and men, whose lifestyle trajectory was that of an articulate, socially mobile young person, who

rejected official explanations of minority ethnic life. Such interviewees had a strong sense of the need for them, as a younger generation, to develop modern solutions to social issues that they had inherited. Nadia questioned the organisation of family life in the West. Alongside Nadia and similar interviewees, Aadil was typical of a number of young men and women who adopted a more traditional outlook. He stressed the need to maintain the community's values, which he felt was threatened by living in England. Whereas Nadia emphasised the need to address cultural change, Aadil stressed the need to respond to the maintenance of cultural continuity.

> We're all going through lots of changes and it's difficult, for our parents and us. But I think there is a lot more pressure as you grow up. You've got a lot more people to look after. And that is right. But in some ways it doesn't fit into Western ways. But, you know, maybe it would be better if the Western ways changed and they looked after their families. Maybe they're the real problem, not our way of life. That's what our generation have to sort out.
> *(Nadia)*

> I am more with our tradition, our religion than others. I want to pass on to my children everything my parents and grandparents have taught me. What you believe in doesn't change just because you're in another country. Like our families really care for each other. Our whole life is based around the family and that's right.
> *(Aadil)*

We were particularly interested in exploring if they felt that their role in the family had changed as they had grown older, As with the white young people, the Bangladeshis emphasised that becoming an adult was marked by more responsibility, inclusion in decision making and increased personal freedom.

> Yeah, definitely. As I grow up my mum involves me more, like, decisions and all that. Like, the holidays and, if you don't want to go somewhere my mum wouldn't force us or take us. If you don't like something then it's alright, we get a say, but when you're little, it's up to your parents.
> *(Saleema)*

However, there also appeared to be striking differences between the young Bangladeshis and the young whites in relation to family life. For the latter, family life tended not to be talked about as a central influence on their growing up. Rather, young white people spoke of the changing nature of families compared with earlier generations. This change included the emergence of a wider range of family lifestyles as well as seeing family life as less permanent than in the past. These

changes were not seen as necessarily negative but as a natural part of the way things were for their generation.

> There's no normal families anymore. My grandad says in his day everyone was normal, two parents who lived together for life, and that was it.
> *(Amanda)*

> I think the Bangladeshis, they have really strong families. I don't think it's like that for us (white people). I think we're more individuals. You have a family when you're young but then you go off to university, then start work, then start your own family. So you're away from your original family quite a lot.
> *(Brian)*

As indicated above, we used comparative material on young white people, to highlight cultural differences and similarities with young Bangladeshis. However, such comparisons have their limitations. For example, we felt that the above comparison might suggest a misleading image. We suggest that the real difference may be the emotional language used to talk about domestic life that young Bangladeshis, both male and female, have available to them. Equally important, the comparison can draw attention away from real differences among the Bangladeshis and among the whites, while underplaying lifestyle similarities between different sectors of the ethnic groups. As David indicates below, one such similarity was that some young white people from a traditional working class background reported similar emotional attachments as the Bangladeshis to their family of origin.

> My family are really important to me and a lot of my friends; the one's I used to hang around with. Then I moved schools and started to hang around with more middle class ones, I suppose. Their families don't seem so close, so important. They talk all the time about being independent. And they choose universities far away from their families. Like, I'd like to go to the local one, so I can stay in touch with my parents and brothers.
> *(David)*

## Leaving home

Much work in this area has highlighted how, for white young people, leaving home is a key feature of acquiring adult status (Jones, 1993). Although for some Bangladeshi males and females leaving home did mean gaining an independent status, for most of them it was not seen as a strong indicator of marking a shift into adulthood. The parental home was seen as acting as a constraint on youthful behaviour and as a

support mechanism against the pressures that faced young people, such as drink and drugs.

> It's when they become independent, learn to look after themselves when they leave home because they're not under their parents' care anymore.
> *(Saleema)*

> I think in some ways it is and it isn't. Once you leave home, once you become free … you're not under any restrictions in what you're doing. You can go out one night, stay up till five o'clock in the morning, drink, whatever, drugs, do anything once you are free.
> *(Jawad)*

> To leave home is becoming adult? No. In our Asian community, you should not go and leave home, and like live by yourself. We wouldn't like to do that. If they're not married, they're going to live with their families … it's natural.
> *(Navin)*

In contrast, many young white people, for whom the parental home represented constraint rather than support, spoke of leaving home as a major indicator of independence. Also, whereas the Bangladeshi young people spoke of the naturalness of living at home as they got older, the young white people stressed their parents' expectation that they would leave at a certain age. At the same time, as Lee points out below, one of the effects of recent changes in the local housing market in Newcastle, is that white working class young people will be forced to share the family home for a longer period.

> I think it's important, leaving home, yeah, 'cos it would make you realise what you have to do on your own … I do not know any older people that live at home. When you think of Asian people, their parents are pulling them back into the house and our parents are pushing us out.
> *(Patricia)*

> But things are changing. You wouldn't be able to get a house from the council these days and probably for us (younger generation) it'll be a lot harder to buy a first house. So, more of us will be forced to stay longer. The middle class kids' parents will probably buy them houses. But that wouldn't happen with most of us, would it?
> *(Lee)*

## Conclusion

There is an urgent need for those in authority to listen to young people's own understandings of growing up in the city of Newcastle. The young people's accounts illustrate the need to take seriously the question of ethnicity in policies on youth transitions. For example, what does it mean to be a child or to be an adult in different cultures? For the young Bangladeshis, leaving home and starting work were not strong indicators marking a shift to adulthood. However, for young white people, leaving home and paid work were major indicators of gaining adult independence.

# 2 Transition through education

Wrench *et al.* (1996, p. 30) inform us that in the late 1980s, the Home Affairs Committee (House of Commons, 1987) identified key aspects that were impacting on Bangladeshi children's schooling. It included difficulties with English language, missed schooling through changes in accommodation, extended visits to Bangladesh and children having to act as interpreters for parents, the poor schooling background in Sylhet, poverty and overcrowding at home, racial hostility, low teacher expectation, frequent changes of teachers and cultural practices such as fasting during Ramadan.

Most of the research findings and government reports on Bangladeshi students have been collected in places, such as Tower Hamlets, that have a large Bangladeshi population (Hutchinson and Varlaam, 1985; Tomlinson, 1990). A primary problem is the failure of statistical data to differentiate Bangladeshis from other Asian groups. Another point is that, as a result of more recent migration, Bangladeshis have spent less time within the British education system than any other Asian group. As Jones (1993) argued, in his book on *Britain's Ethnic Minorities*, this may be a central contributory factor to Bangladeshis and Pakistanis continuing to be positioned at the bottom of league tables on academic achievement. More recent studies and government reports have confirmed this pattern (Mac an Ghaill, 1999; Gillborn, 2000).

## Disruption

Many of the Bangladeshi young people in our sample felt that their primary education was ethnically segregated, as most of them attended Asian-majority schools. A key issue that emerged here concerned the effect on their primary educational experience of the disruptions to their schooling, trips to Bangladesh, moving cities within Britain and moving schools within the region.

> The teachers were okay. Before middle school they didn't really understand, you know, that I wasn't at the same level as the other ones. I had moved around to the different schools. I couldn't tell them then, I needed more help.
> *(Aasim)*

## Multi-cultural curriculum

Among the Bangladeshi young people there were strong feelings about the need to implement a multi-cultural curriculum (Mac an Ghaill, 1988). Of particular importance for them was the need to learn about the lives of different ethnic groups as a means of integrating the wider community. They illustrated this by arguing that one of the lessons that could be learnt from the north of England riots was that ethnically

segregated schools contributed to a lack of mutual understanding between minority and majority ethnic communities.

> It's important for all kids, all schools, to know about each other's cultures. That's what I really think. They hardly did anything about Asians all through my going to school. There was a bit more in the primary. I remember. They should, shouldn't they? It would help bring everyone together, wouldn't it? Like when they had the riots in the North, no-one mentioned, the whites and the Asians, they go to different schools, separate schools. That can't be right.
> *(Punita)*

The students' views appeared to be very much influenced by the type of school they had attended. For example, Tarun raised key questions about the sensitivity of how to introduce multi-cultural education within a white-majority school. This has a particular impact upon the few minority ethnic students, who may feel highly vulnerable.

> Like I was the only one in class, the only Asian. Early on I wouldn't've liked it. I wouldn't've felt comfortable with all the multi-cultural stuff. Even when there was a bit, the teachers would ask me questions. Like I was a big expert on everything. And then the other kids would make fun of you, out of the class. And then you wish that it could be more private. Now, I probably think it would be good but I don't know how you would do it, if there is only a few Bangladeshis or black people there.
> *(Tarun)*

## Teacher attitudes and support

During the last 40 years, government reports and academic studies have highlighted issues of teacher–student interaction and, more specifically, teacher attitudes as of central importance to white working class children's experience of schooling (Willis, 1977). More recently, government ministers have spoken of the educational failure of white working class boys as one of the major social problems for society. A number of studies have traced the high levels of dissatisfaction, alienation and suspensions from school among white and minority ethnic young men, which in turn, is manifest in terms of high truancy rates and subsequent involvement with anti-social behaviour. Such a response to secondary education was evident among only a small minority of young men and women within the Newcastle sample. It was raised mainly by white working class male students with reference to friends who had left education, or as part of their own history prior to adopting a more pro-school attitude. They reported that one of the main factors in their change of attitude was the changing behaviour of teachers towards them, in terms of treating them in a more adult way.

I was really bad in the first two years and went around with the worst kids in the school. It just changed. A lot of them got suspended or just left. And then the big thing was that some of the teachers, particularly Mr Harris, the English teacher, he started talking to me more like an equal, with more respect. He wasn't like a teacher really. Now I would always go to him for advice on anything.
*(Patrick)*

Interestingly, among some of the Bangladeshis, safety was a key issue in relation to teacher attitudes towards them. Primary and secondary schooling was experienced positively in social terms, with teachers identified as important in creating a safe environment. For example, they reported that their schooling was free from bullying.

Like in the news you hear a lot about bullying in schools these days. But in our school the teachers wouldn't tolerate it. Everyone just knew that was the main rule. So, you could really look forward to coming into school.
*(Kasim)*

However, in academic terms, both Bangladeshi and white students' experiences were mixed. For example, the young people provided different accounts of teacher support, with some finding them very helpful, while others felt that the teachers had little interaction with them.

The teachers were like everywhere, some good, some bad. But the thing is it's the whole atmosphere of the school. The teachers generally didn't think of it as an academic school, probably because of the area and everything. Like all of them live in posher places, not around here. Like they wouldn't send their own kids to a school like this. And definitely they don't push you very hard to work to your best.
*(Mandy)*

The teachers have always been very good. I don't think it's about the teachers. The first thing is are you working or not, are you co-operating, doing your homework and everything. It's up to you. If you work hard, the teachers will give all the support. If you don't, it's your own fault.
*(Rafiqa)*

Some of the Bangladeshi students made a specific contrast between their parents' high expectations of school achievement compared with that of their teachers. There was considerable commitment by Bangladeshi young people and their families towards education. More importantly, this commitment was demonstrated by people from different social and economic backgrounds. It is also important to note that the

lack of a universal education system in Sylhet and low rates of literacy were significant factors in the Bangladeshi experience of migration to Britain (Wrench *et al.*, 1996).

> I've talked with my cousins in other places and we agree, that their schools push you more on the academic side. Here you have to do a lot of it yourself. This is not the school to get the best results, the top marks. Like most of our parents have very high expectations of our education and are fully supportive … They try and put pressure on their kids to do really well at school. But you couldn't say that about the teachers.
> *(Darsa)*

Findings among the young white students seemed to follow the established co-relation between social class and parental attitude to education. There was a strong tendency for white middle class students to report that their parents 'pressurised' them to achieve the highest academic results. Among white working class parents, the picture was more varied, with a majority of students reporting that 'while their parents would like them to do well, it was really up to them'. This was most evident in relation to parental attitudes to higher education, which is explored further below.

> I think compared to Asian parents, our parents would think of other things, like are you happy, or do you really want to be in education. They would support you, or might even want you to go on, but they're not going to think it's the end of the world if you don't come out with top results. I mean have a life!
> *(Rachel)*

Among the students, there was a general consensus that teachers did not understand the cultural specificities of the Bangladeshi community in Newcastle. Particularly significant here was demands on young people's time as a result of attendance at the mosque after school (reading the Koran and learning languages). Also, they spoke of the support that is expected of them within the family, such as accompanying mothers or fathers to official meetings with representatives of the local authority. While for them, this was evidence of more adult behaviour, they felt that their teachers were unaware of these responsibilities that they carried.

> I have more responsibility, I have to take my mum to the council office or have like, you know, to do things like fill in forms, stuff like that. I feel as that I'm older.
> *(Aadil)*

I think that would be a main thing, for teachers to understand the responsibilities that most Asian kids have at home … I don't mean as a problem, like that's for us, in the community to work out. I mean, more that we're more grown up, because of our experiences but they still treat us like little children.
*(Nawfar)*

Alongside the teachers' general cultural stereotyping of the Bangladeshi community, young women spoke of their experiences of gender stereotyping. For some, their teachers operated with general cultural assumptions about Muslim society being intrinsically more sexist than white society.

In this society the Muslim girl is seen as at the bottom. So, it's not that the teachers are particularly bad but they just reflect the general society. All the time at school you have to work hard to get on but also, you have to work hard dealing with what teachers think of you. I don't think boys have to deal with this in the same way.
*(Purnima)*

Others, including young men, presented a more complex picture of gender interactions that included issues of social class and the self-presentation of being a Muslim in Britain. At the same time, there was a general view held by females and males that the former were expected by teachers to achieve better examination results (Archer, 2003).

Yeah, some of the teachers have the simple stereotype, if you're a Muslim woman, you are oppressed, wearing the veil and all that and, of course, you won't go to university. But you notice other things as well. Like teachers will always prefer posh girls, Asian or white. I think they see them like their own daughters. Then again a lot of teachers now have seen Asian girls getting to university, so the stereotypes have to change a bit. So, then they divide us up into the traditional ones and the more Western ones, like them. And, I think they give support to the ones they think of as more Western.
*(Nadia)*

Of course there are bad stereotypes of Muslim girls. But then again in this school you get to know early on the teachers think more of the Bangladeshi girls than the boys and just generally that girls are expected to do better and get on.
*(Yamail)*

## Conclusion

There is a need to acknowledge young Bangladeshis' specific experiences of the British education system. Most importantly, as result of more recent migration, they have spent less time than any other Asian group within the British education system. The young Bangladeshis in Newcastle identified several key elements that have impacted upon their schooling, including the use of English as a second language, adjusting to new schools through changes in their parents' search for employment and accommodation, poverty and overcrowding at home. These elements may be a central contributory factor to the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities continuing position at the bottom of league tables on academic achievement, as recent studies and government reports have confirmed (Ofsted, 2004).

# 3  Post-16 destinations: further education, training and work

National data suggest that Bangladeshi young people leave school with relatively fewer qualifications than young white people (Dale *et al.*, 1999). As Tables 4 and 5 suggest, our sample provides a complex picture. A greater proportion of Bangladeshis females are in further education than Bangladeshi males and young white people. Alongside this, there were proportionately less Bangladeshi males than white males in further education. The majority of both the Bangladeshi and white samples were still in education, studying for A-levels, AS-levels or GCSEs. Those who said they worked full-time were employed mainly within the service sector, such as customer services, catering, sales and retail. Those in training tended to be in technical and computing orientated areas. Whilst our sample indicated that they had relatively fewer qualifications and that their grades were disproportionately distributed, for the Bangladeshi community education was of major importance.

Assessing the nature of young Bangladeshis' experience of further education, a key question continues to emerge: why are young men's educational ambitions not being realised in terms of attainment? In other words, Bangladeshi young people tend to invest in education and yet this investment is not paying off in terms of their overall educational performance.

From the information that we have gathered through personal correspondence with the Learning Skills Council and our own research we found that a significant proportion of Bangladeshi young people do not correspond with a normative model of post-16 two-year A-level study. In the course of this research, we contacted six local colleges, two of which suggested that Bangladeshi experience was 'not that relevant', arguing that their educational needs could be accommodated under the category of Asian. The further education establishments that were forthcoming with information did not have it to hand. In one case, an administrator identified Bangladeshi students simply on the basis of names. It was thus quite difficult to capture the attainment levels of Bangladeshi young people in particular further education establishments.

Among both Bangladeshi and white young people, some reported they had a more positive experience in further education than at secondary school. This experience was generally understood through the relationships between them and their lecturers.

> What do you mean treat you differently?
> *(Interviewer)*

> Treat differently, in terms of making decisions and choices. Change in
> relationships … Like you just don't get detentions in the sixth form, there's more
> trust there I think.
> *(Ali)*

> Just the way they speak to you, like they are more friendly and they talk about
> going out drinking and stuff and they wouldn't do that in the lower years.
> *(Sharon)*

## Training and employment experience

Given that the majority of the interviewees were in further education and training, it
was difficult to gain a picture of the employment patterns of Bangladeshi young
people. Many pointed out that their families tended to have a different relationship to
the local economy than other minority ethnic groups. Certainly, for an older
generation this community is much more insular and segregated in terms of their
work, housing and leisure. Many of the young people reported that their parents
worked within close proximity to their family, friends and neighbours, thus providing a
picture of community self-sufficiency. However, the young people in this study
represented themselves as less segregated. For example, a proportion of the young
people travelled across the city to attend school.

Although the Labour Force Survey (2000) lacks detailed figures on the Bangladeshi
community, the national picture of this minority ethnic group mirrors the trends found
in our sample's family background, as reported by the young people (see Appendix
2). The majority of the Bangladeshi young people's fathers were engaged in low
status work, such as jobs in restaurants and taxi firms, or were unemployed. The
young people identified a differentiation within the Bangladeshi community between
local workers and entrepreneurs with higher status. Although the young people
tended to describe their mothers as housewives, when asked for more details it
appeared that many of their mothers worked part-time in home-working, care work or
retail (shop) work. A study by the Banks of the Wear (1996) suggested that the
Bangladeshi unemployment rate in Newcastle in some areas was 40 per cent,
compared with Pakistani 22 per cent and Indian 18 per cent. They further argued
that the specific community in the West End was experiencing multi-levels of
deprivation.

Many of the young Bangladeshi people themselves talked about the work they were
involved in and it generally consisted of working in the service sector. The working
experience for Bangladeshi young people in general reflects a general national
pattern. Bangladeshi young women have the lowest levels of economic activity at all

stages of their lives, working in jobs that have low socio-economic status. At a local level, it was argued by one employment officer that young women's experience of work is marked by a general move towards community work.

> I think a lot of people in that community want to work in their community. Main objective is to get community development work. A lot of them have a real empathy, within the Bangladeshi community. Rather than go on and get rewarding jobs, Bangladeshi young people tend to take side steps, just to get in on the community work.
> *(Work and skills training provider)*

Currently in Britain the meaning of work is changing (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003). For example, it is no longer a simple marker of transition from childhood to adulthood, as different social communities have specific experiences of this change. We were particularly interested in what the young Bangladeshis understood by work. Although they expressed a diverse range of views, they shared a distinction between paid and unpaid work and between working within and outside the family. These distinctions are important in informing Bangladeshi male and female perceptions of work as not necessarily constituting a key marker of adult status.

> I mean when you've got a job, got a permanent job and when you bring in serious money into the house, that's when, you know, that's when serious responsibilities are coming in. That's when your life is serious.
> *(Ali)*

> Well, it depends what kind of job really. If it's a part-time job, just for a little bit of extra money, I wouldn't really regard that as too adult. I had a part-time job once … And there are lots of jobs you do when you are a kid that you don't get money for. So, you don't have to be grown up to have a job.
> *(Quabeel)*

While many of their white peers also had part-time jobs, the involvement in work (domestic and commercial) from an early age appeared to be more intensified for the young Bangladeshis, in terms of family expectations and hours worked and to involve a larger number of them. Of particular significance in their lives was responsibility for younger members of the family. Both females and males were involved in this but the former appeared to carry a disproportionate responsibility.

> You wouldn't think of it as work. It's just your normal life, looking after the younger ones. Like I go over and look after my sister's children everyday. But maybe we don't divide things up into work and not work because I can see,

yeah, people who say this is work. Like, for example, you've got to be just as responsible, be on time to collect them and all the other things that go with it.
*(Nadia)*

A second central feature for many of them, which included males and females but with the former disproportionately represented in this public arena, was work in restaurants, which were in some cases family businesses. The young people raised a number of issues about working in restaurants. On the negative side, they worried about the effect on their school work of the long hours that they worked in restaurants. On the positive side, they felt that the experience of working with the public had been a major factor in their gaining self-confidence. In some cases, part-time work in the family business may provide opportunities for full-time work.

I know somebody who is like twelve or thirteen years old, a boy, and he works in a restaurant, and most of … young people I know like they work … They go to school and also at night they go to work.
*(Anouar)*

I think it's harder to work for someone you know and, you can't actually quit the job if you want to because it causes problems. If it's the family, there's more responsibility and you can't actually say, argue with them. You know, they're older, they're an older cousin, brother.
*(Aadil)*

I've worked in the takeaway since I was thirteen. My uncle says I can have a full time job there, if that's what I want. I think he knows I've learned more there about real life, a lot more than at school. I really admire how he came over and set up a business, and he's had hardly any proper education but he knows more than the teachers.
*(Kareem)*

## Conclusion

There is a need to understand the specific socio-economic relationship of the Bangladeshi community's migration and settlement in Newcastle. Compared with the usual migration pattern of minority ethnic groups into Britain, the Bangladeshi community has not operated as a replacement workforce in relation to their white counterparts in the lowest paid jobs in the city, but rather can be described in terms of an 'ethnic niche', that is being ethnically bounded. Bangladeshi young people pointed out that their families tended to have a different relationship with the local economy than other minority ethnic groups. For an older generation, this community

is much more insular and segregated in terms of their work, housing and leisure. Many of the young people reported that their parents worked within close proximity of their family, friends and neighbours, thus providing a picture of community self-sufficiency. However, the young people in this study represented themselves as less segregated. For example, a proportion of the young people travelled across the city to attend different schools. Interestingly, in terms of future internal migration within Britain, compared with the Bangladeshis, the young white people tended to understand their future lives as more likely to be living away from Newcastle.

# 4  Cultural belonging: migration, relocation and settlement

Bangladeshis have a specific profile within Britain, as the most recent community of the post-war transnational movement of people to Britain (Wrench *et al.*, 1996; ONS, 2000; Eade and Garbin, 2002). A number of the young people we interviewed were born in Bangladesh, while others spoke of visiting Bangladesh, for example for family marriages and funerals. They also made references to memories of ways of life in Bangladesh, indicating a real sense of cultural belonging to their country of birth or that of their parents.

## Racism, racialisation and local belonging

A major finding that emerges from interviews with young Bangladeshi and young white people is the complexity of the impact of race and ethnicity on people's lives in Newcastle. The city is considered by social commentators and policy makers, both inside and outside the region, as a white area. Most Bangladeshi young people shared a mutual sense of difference with white people, having grown up in ethnically segregated areas, involving separate housing, workplace and social activities. Hence, most of them had not sustained any inter-ethnic childhood friendships (see below).

The young Bangladeshis provided a unique perspective on the development of a 'multi-cultural' Newcastle. Their accounts illustrated the central importance of their local cultural understanding in making sense of issues of racialisation, ethnic identity formation and a sense of cultural belonging. As indicated above, Bangladeshi young people's cultural biographies included a wide experience of movement around Britain, resulting from former places of residence and visits to relatives. A key element of this geographical mobility involved a comparative perspective on life in places with significant populations of Asians and other minority ethnic communities, such as London, Birmingham and Manchester. In the context of these experiences, they provided a fascinating insight into life as an invisible minority ethnic group within a largely white city.

> In London there was a lot of Asian people. But there isn't up here. There, the feeling is really, really different. Like there're whole areas where black, Asian people belong. My cousins, friends, they're more relaxed, more accepted, say than here.
> *(Nadim)*

You go to some places, northern towns, I don't like … They remind you of a ghetto but in Manchester and Birmingham, our relations live there. They seem to be the best compared to here and the north … a good mixture, a good attitude by everyone, all different communities. You go into town there and you feel safe.
*(Kasim)*

These Bangladeshi young people describe incidents of racial discrimination and offered a range of explanations. However, most of them, unlike their peers in more established multi-cultural areas, tended not to use anti-racist language, to explain their negative experiences of white institutions or individual white people. For a smaller number, such as Aadil, racism represented a more systematic social exclusion of minority ethnic lifestyles (Benjamin, 2004).

Race does matter but it depends what area you live in. If you live in an Asian area, race won't be a problem. If you live where we live now, I hate it because if you go on the streets there's no Asian people, and you get that look. It's not a bad look but you know if someone looks at you in that way, it's that you're in the wrong place, you're totally in the wrong place. They don' have to say anything, it's just the way they look.
*(Aadil)*

Not really, not bad. There was some racism when I was living in *[local area]*. Just people that lived in the area.
*(Sonia)*

From school, you had to go and do this activity. We had to go to an old people's home and see how they socialise. And the old lady says to one of my friends, 'oh what she got that on for?' And she goes, it's about my religion and she said, 'oh she shouldn't be in this country'. But that's an old person's view as when she was young, she would not have seen much black people there, so I understand her saying that. But if someone in the street, a young person said something to me I would probably say something back. I would say that I have been here all my life, what is it to do with you and I am not harming you in any way.
*(Kamilah)*

Local community workers, employment and education officers shared this latter perspective, tending to understand and make sense of Bangladeshi young people's problems through a discourse of racism. Even when the young people themselves did not account for it as an explanation, professionals working with young people continued to use this way of thinking as an appropriate and useful explanation.

Main difficulties for young people getting a job? Racism is an issue. I don't think actually that it is something that actually they see as an issue. I don't have many coming to me saying that I can't get a job because I'm black or I can't get a job because I am Asian. So that doesn't really come out … but I think it still is an issue.
*(Employment adviser)*

In the following account a young Bangladeshi, Jaideep, provided an interesting case study of the experience of, and response to, racism within Newcastle. He spoke of how young people first encounter racialised practices. He also indicated the specific dynamics of how racism operates, in terms of specific places and at specific times. Like him, a number of young Bangladeshis spoke of having learned to avoid areas of the city, where there is likely to be trouble.

When I was younger I have experienced racism in general. Quite a bit. Now, I can allocate places where I'm likely to get racism so I try and stay out of it. The first time I became aware of racism was when I was about eight, this kid in school called me a black 'b' *[astard]*, then I reported it to the teacher. I didn't understand it at first; why he went 'black' and 'b'. The teacher took serious actions about it then, spoke about it to my family and they said 'oh well, one day we'll tell you, they talk about your colour', and it's just, my mam said it's only narrow minded people who would do it and you won't find many of them. She is right, I haven't found many of them, but I have found a significant number of them … I avoid certain places or even town *[central Newcastle]*.
*(Jaideep)*

Jaideep was an exceptionally talented football player, who practised three to four hours a day after school. Feeling the pressure of two brothers at university, he hoped to be successful as a professional footballer. His brothers and sisters were supportive. But, he found difficulty in explaining it to his parents, who worried that it would get him into trouble. He understood their position, as he believed that even when he played really well that he had never been chosen for anything.

I've been to trials and things like that, so, at times my dad goes, 'I told you', and I'm like, what can I say? … I've had a really bad experience at *[a premier division football club]*. I went there for trials. I was the only Asian person there. Even from the start the coach came up to my brother and said, 'not many of the Asian lads play football', so I felt really bad from the start and I was, well, okay then, they're all really looking down at me.
*(Jaideep)*

Did you feel they just knocked you back for no reason?
*(Interviewer)*

It's like you just keep playing at the normal rate, but it's, like, league games, I really give everything I have, but when I was at *[a premier division football club]* it was like, some of the people, I could hear them talking, like, in jokes. My brother was there, isolated, and I could see him just getting frozen out, whereas some parents were really supportive; I scored the second goal. It was really good. At the end of the game the parents were saying, 'if anybody gets picked it should be you'. I look at it and I see by miles I was playing really well compared to the rest of them. For some reason two weeks later I get a letter saying you're not to the standards we require. And that's it.
*(Jaideep)*

What about the future?
*(Interviewer)*

Well the season starts again. I continue to play on, say, I just believe in keep trying, trying, trying.
*(Jaideep)*

During this research project a number of events occurred that highlighted the juxtaposition of the Bangladeshi community's cultural invisibility within Newcastle with an increasing political visibility at national and international levels. For Bangladeshis, their own lives were caught up in relation to central government and media responses to asylum and immigration policy. Equally significant, internationally, they felt that Islamaphobia had increased as a result of the attack on the World Trade Centre in the USA, and the invasion of Iraq. Many of the interviewees used such events to demonstrate and articulate their own experiences.

Do you think post September the eleventh that it's got worse in any way for Bengalis generally?
*(Interviewer)*

Around September the eleventh, I don't think a lot has changed. There was quite a lot of tension at the time and all communities were affected, not just the Bengali community. The Sikh community was also affected, I suppose a lot more … because they have the turban on and quite a lot of them have beards and what were you seeing on television? You know, people with long beards and turbans. It's … the tension I suppose it's still there but among the young not

really. I wouldn't say the young people were a little worried … the second, third, probably the fourth generation who knew the consequences and knew what was happening were worried. But whereas for young people I would say that there was a lot of concern, especially now. Since then there is, I am coming across it. But there's a sense of over the last ten years around the country of an anti-Islam, anti-Muslim feeling. Say for example a new term of abuse, rather than 'Paki' would be 'Taliban'. Calling kids 'Taliban'.
*(Youth community worker)*

On some occasions, such experiences took on a notion of Islamaphobia, as a marker of social difference and cultural identity.

Oh, honestly I feel like … 'cos of September the eleventh, yeah? Well, they have always hated Muslims but it's worst now, as they want to know everything. OK, I don't really care if they want to know everything, but it is the fact that they treat you differently on the streets now. If they see you with your head scarf they look at you like you are a terrorist … But honestly, if someone said to me about me being a terrorist, I would either say something back or nothing, I wouldn't go and take my scarf off 'cos I was scared. I would say like I would die for my religion, I honestly would, 'cos yeah I don't care what people say about it.
*(Kamilah)*

## Young white people: a non-racist stance/young Bangladeshis: a multi-cultural self-identity

Most of the young white people that we interviewed did not seem to be interested in Bangladeshi young people or their way of life. For example, when they were asked, if they thought Bangladeshi youths grew up differently to white youths, the latter claimed not to know. Peter's experience was common among white young people, where friendships formed with young Bangladeshis at primary school or early secondary school were not sustained in their late teenage years.

I don't really know any of them around where I live. I know a few here, aye. But just 'hi' and 'bye' kind of thing … I wouldn't like really see them outside of school or anything … Funnily enough, I haven't seen them clubbing or drinking.
*(Liz)*

Yeah, I've got some friends at home who are Asian. I used to see them quite regular but I haven't seen them for a while so I haven't been socialising with them. We usually just used to play football, we never really went anywhere … I wouldn't know what was going on with them now as I haven't seen them for a while.
*(Peter)*

The young white people saw local minority ethnic segregation as emanating from Asian youths' choice not to integrate with them. They felt that this was a natural development as the cultural and particularly religious differences began to make an explicit impact on their young adult lives. However, the white interviewees stressed that they did not feel any racial animosity towards Asian or black people. They cited support of the *Kick Racism Out of Football*, sponsored by Newcastle Football Club, as evidence of their own non-racist stance. In fact, they stated explicitly that racism was morally wrong and was less evident among younger people.

> You have separate groups everywhere in life. The white kids and the Asians they've just got their own friends, their own groups and you stay in them, don't you? But it's not what you hear about other areas. It's not a tension, a racial tension thing. Like I would not be a racist. All my friends, we would not be for racism. It's just we're in our own groups. It's the way it is.
> *(James)*

> Yeah, they're some Pakistanis and that where I live. But we don't hang about together. Don't know why really … I think, well probably it's their religion and things. Well, they have less freedom from their families. I think they keep to themselves a lot more than the whites … I don't know if it can change, 'cos I think most young people are not prejudiced against Asians. It's like that's more for older people, like my uncle, he is.
> *(Susan)*

In contrast to the young white people's assumption that young Bangladeshis initiated a segregated lifestyle, the Bangladeshi sample described more contact with white young people.

> The people I hang out with I didn't look at them and say I would hang around with them because they are black. Most people it's their personality; 'What sort of personality are you? What do you like?' That's not an issue to me, you know, white, black, whatever.
> *(Mourad)*

> A few of my friends are going out with other people. Some of them go out with white people and some of them go out with Asian people. It doesn't really matter.
> *(Saleema)*

Majority ethnic groups traditionally often know little about minority ethnic groups. However, as the young Bangladeshis in the following quotations illustrated, in contrast to the young white people's disinterest in minority ethnic groups, young

Bangladeshis highlighted the advantages of being a member of an minority ethnic group that enabled them to be acquainted with different cultures. This provided a self-reflexivity about choices available to them, in terms of developing future lifestyles. Social theorists argue that this kind of self-reflexivity is increasingly demanded of individuals in contemporary societies that are marked by the need continually to adapt to ongoing economic and social changes (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

> I think it makes it good and it's easy because you get to learn different views about all sorts of things, not just stick to one thing. If we were just brought up in a Bengali family and suddenly went to a place where loads of white people live, we wouldn't know how to behave. But now we're mixed, so now it's good.
> *(Saleema)*

> Probably for white people, they only know one way of life but for us we know how they live and we've got all our own cultures.
> *(Tarun)*

## Inter-ethnic relations

Another aspect of the complexity of inter-ethnic relations is that there was a real sense among young Bangladeshis of being at the bottom of the minority ethnic hierarchy within Newcastle. Ramesh (2003, p. 26) has spoken of these inter-ethnic differences:

> A quick glance at the list of wealthy Asians highlights upwardly mobile British Hindu and Sikh entrepreneurs. While Indians get better grades than most other ethnic minorities and the white majority, they suffer high rates of unemployment. But British Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have it worse. The rising tide of interest in Bollywood and Pashmina shawls has not lifted their boats.

One way that the inter-ethnic hierarchy was expressed in Newcastle was in terms of a comparison with the local Pakistani community. This was not reported in negative terms, but rather it was explained that the latter was more settled and had better representation within the Asian community and at a local authority level.

> Because the Bengali community is I suppose the youngest community among the BME *[Black and Minority Ethnic]* groups and there is a large number of young people who are coming out of school either with some qualifications or without qualifications and disappearing. The Bengali community in Newcastle are so far behind the Pakistani and the Indian community. They haven't been

able to get their points across to the policy makers. The Pakistani community, they've had to struggle and they have struggled for a long time. I would say the second and third generation have slowly started moving away from the traditional business-type environments and moved into the voluntary sector, the local authorities. Whereas, for the Bengali community, it's only now I would say a very small number of people are moving into the voluntary sector.
*(Community worker)*

## Conclusion

There is an urgent need for a wide public debate and strategic action on how Newcastle, which is often portrayed as a white city, develops its own understanding of the relations between the white and Bangladeshi populations in a rapidly changing world. A major finding that emerged from young Bangladeshi and young white people was the complexity of the impact of race and ethnicity on their everyday lives. Most Bangladeshi young people shared a mutual sense of difference with white people, having grown up in ethnically segregated areas, involving separate housing, workplace and social activities. They also saw themselves as bottom of the minority ethnic hierarchy in Newcastle. Young white people's experience of ethnic segregation was marked by a lack of interest in minority ethnic cultures, including that of Bangladeshi peers with whom they mixed at school. Hence, there is a need for multi-cultural policies to be inclusive of the indigenous population alongside minority ethnic communities, in contributing to an emerging notion of citizenship.

# 5 Lifestyles: gender matters

As indicated above, an aim of this report was to explore how gender differences impact, within the wider society and the home, on young Bangladeshi people's life choices and opportunities. Hence, throughout the report we have addressed this issue, as well as providing a specific focus in this section. Earlier research in this area has focused upon females, critically examining the disadvantages that they have experienced at structural, cultural and inter-personal levels (Ghuman and Gallop, 1981; Mirza, 1992). The interplay of patriarchy and racism is explored in the public spaces of state policy, media representations and institutional arenas. This is accompanied by studies of gender differentiation within the home that works to the disadvantage of women as wives, daughters and daughter-in-laws (Bhatti, 1999). In our study, young women report the continuity of these gendering constraints on their lives that serve to close down future opportunities.

> Here, in Britain, there are lots of stereotypes of Muslim women. They've all got worse recently. So, if you go for a job or try and get decent housing, you will not be treated equally. Or, even walking down the road in a lot of cities in this country, you are not going to be safe. You are a target of all their stereotypes, which holds us back all the time. This is true for a lot of women but it's even more for Asian women. You are a target of all their prejudice. So, if you go out of your own area, you have to ask, 'am I safe here?'
> *(Sajjad)*

> I just feel as if I was being taken advantage of at home, do you know what I mean, because it's like I do a lot of the housework and I felt I was always being taken disadvantage of. I wasn't treated equally.
> *(Minati)*

A male community worker confirmed this picture with reference to social interaction within the home. He felt particularly that Bangladeshi young women who were not born in England, and more specifically daughter-in-laws, were vulnerable to existing domestic arrangements.

> It's harder for all young Asian girls whether they're Bengali, Pakistani or Indian. If you look at a young woman, a Bengali or a Pakistani woman, if you look at the environment she came from, say if she came here to get married, back home she would have the freedom to go to college or university or school … the freedom to move around within her own circle. Once they get here, they're stuck in that bloody house. They're allowed to go to college or somewhere to learn English. It's the internal community pressure that people put on a young person or their family. It's hard for parents too … trying to find a balance. The ones who have educational background and can understand the environment they're living

in, can understand the needs of their children, will probably dismiss that and say you know, 'our children are going out to improve themselves, they're going to college, university or they're working. They're not doing anything wrong'.
*(Community worker)*

Alongside these accounts of gender discrimination, there is also evidence of social and cultural changes impacting on young women's and young men's lifestyles (Haw, 1998). We found a range of views among the young women and men, as well as community and youth workers, about the pace and direction of the changes taking place. Along a continuum from optimists to pessimists, some stressed the changes taking place within Bangladeshi homes were not matched by changes within the wider society. Others felt that while Bangladeshi men were slow to change from traditional gender stereotypes, outside agencies such as schools and universities were opening up opportunities for young women and young men (Clarke, 2004).

Some say, it's all the racist stereotypes that is the worst. I accept that it can be bad for some people and I've had some of those experiences and it's really bad for our mothers' generation. But you also have to say that Bangladeshi men have to catch up with the modern world.
*(Raniya)*

The thing is we often can't do much about changing the attitudes outside the community. But we should be able to do something inside it. I think that things are changing in Bangladeshi homes, yes, some more than others. But going to university gives us, especially Bangladeshis because they're so few of us there, big opportunities, for boys as well as girls. But the way I see it the girls are taking advantage of this more than the boys. And people outside the community talk about tradition holding them back. But the thing is, they have learnt all this macho stuff in this society, our fathers aren't like that.
*(Yamail)*

## Tradition/marriage/religion

Bangladeshi young people felt that those outside the community did not understand the significance of arranged marriages, and that this can lead to religious and racial stereotyping. Most of them had positive views about future marriages and did not reduce it to a choice between love versus arranged marriages. Rather, they stressed their opposition to forced marriages. At the same time, they had a diverse range of views about sexual relationships, emotional support and the meaning of marriage, reflecting diverse styles of gendered behaviour. Some tended to emphasise its centrality to their culture, others made a distinction between religious and traditional

demands, while some spoke of the way that parents used it as a form of social control, 'if you mess about at school, you will have to get married'. The main picture that emerged from our interviews is the changing nature of married life and the way different families arranged marriages.

> It'll be arranged by my dad 'cos everyone in my family has an arranged marriage. Yeah, recently they set this person up for marriage and they asked me first! I said I still want to study.
> *(Navin)*

> If they're getting married, as they arranged for, you know, love or whatever, it's in our tradition *[that]* you can't do it. In our religion you can do it. But, actually, in the religion you can … it's tradition; that's all it is, which I hate. My brother got married. About one and a half years he went back to Bangladesh and got married, so he's got a child at the moment, but, like, he's for the tradition … You have to be for the tradition … to keep the family's pride.
> *(Aadil)*

> I would want to have an arranged marriage. My second sister's going to get married, right? Obviously they're gonna know I'm available so people are going *[to]* come, they're going *[to]* say 'I would like your daughter, blah, blah, blah', right?' My mum's gonna check the guy out, see if, you know, if he's okay for me, if he's you know decent, if he can keep me happy, if he can you know take the responsibility of me. If he can, I'll just say 'Do you like this person? This is him, blah, blah, blah, blah'. If I say yes then we're gonna see each other. If we like each other, it's gonna go ahead. If I don't then it's not gonna go ahead.
> *(Minati)*

## Friendships, relationships, peer groups and social support

For the young Bangladeshis, both females and males, friends were of major importance in terms of personal happiness and a primary support network. They suggested a strong sense of having friends from the local neighbourhood for life. Females visiting each other's homes was a main social activity, which was seen as safe by them and their parents. For the males, a negative aspect of male friendship was peer pressure. For example, some claimed that male peer groups' involvement in 'gangs' and criminal practices was influenced by 'acting big' in front of your friends.

> Mostly in my free time I've got a friend. I've got a really close mate who lives only five doors away so most likely my free time, I'm, do you know, over her

house; have a laugh with her. In my spare time I also listen to music or spend time doing homework.
*(Minati)*

You couldn't live without your friends. But the downside for some of my male friends is that they get into gangs and they put real pressure on each other to act real macho.
*(Raqib)*

A key issue that emerged during the research was the fact that for Bangladeshi young people attending multi-ethnic/white majority schools, their friendship groups were shaped by a social geography based on ethnicity. In contrast, white young people were more likely to maintain friendships across the school and home divide.

My friends from where I live, they're much different from my school mates because my friends who live in *[my area]* I see them all the time. They're always there, you know? When I'm here, after school, I won't come out and see my school friends because they live in *[another area]* and it's far coming here.
*(Ali)*

Loads of white friends but that's in lessons and stuff, but not like at lunch time and stuff; mainly stay with Asians, but, like, in lessons and that; stay with English kids.
*(Kamilah)*

I've had the same mates since I started primary school, since I was a bairn. I've grown up with 'em. We all hang around now like in the computer room and the balcony and stuff. We're all like around my area.
*(Edward)*

In contrast to white young people, both male and female Bangladeshis felt that there was little pressure from friends to have a boyfriend or girlfriend as a sign of being a grown up.

There is real pressure on everyone, to be going out with someone, to be seen to be more adult and move away from childish things. It's one of the most important things to talk about, like who you are with.
*(Chris)*

Most of my friends are in the same situation as I am so they'd understand not to pressure you and all that. Yeah, definitely we'd probably talk to them *[young men]* but not like ask them out and stuff.
*(Saleema)*

## Health and bereavement

Generally, people in Newcastle are recorded as having higher levels of ill health than other areas of England and as a result is designated as a Health Action Zone (HAZ). One of the responsibilities of a HAZ is to target cardiovascular disease, which is a main cause of death in the UK. The North East, in particular, has a significantly higher incidence of this disease than other regions in England and Wales. Furthermore, south Asian communities in general have a higher rate of premature death than other minority ethnic groups, 46 per cent higher for men and 51 per cent higher for women (ONS, 2000). In Newcastle, Bangladeshi men demonstrated the highest level of risk compared with other minority ethnic groups in Newcastle (Bhopal *et al.*, 1999). Hence, it is not surprising that many of the Bangladeshi young people in our study reported experience of family death. This is also partly explained by the multi-generational profile of the Bangladeshi households. Of specific surprise were those who spoke of the early death of a father or an uncle. However, their experiences were recalled as combining a sense of trauma and more positively in terms of increasing maturity.

> I was eight when my dad died … I remember that day as if it was yesterday … He had heart problems and liver problems. He died in the house, in the morning, in my brother's arms. I don't want to talk about it … His brother died soon after that as well and he lived over the road … I was watching telly upstairs. I wasn't there, I just felt guilty. I just wish I was there.
> *(Kamilah)*

Equally significant, among the young people there was frequent talk of family illness, and among females of responsibility for looking after ill members of their family.

> No. She has an illness, I don't know what it is because the doctor is stupid, because, like, her face swells up and she has headaches and stuff so she doesn't get out a lot. It's not always, it's like sometimes … It's worse now than it used to be which is so annoying as she keeps me up all night. Because if she is in pain she wants things; massage for back, massage for head, get up and make us a cup of tea in the middle of the night. But I don't mind doing it, just when I'm half dead, you know?
> *(Azeeza)*

Few of the young white people spoke of family deaths. However, a main traumatic experience for many was their parents' divorce. Interestingly, as with the Bangladeshi experience of early deaths, the young white people had mixed reactions to their parents' divorces, often seeing them as a means of developing maturity at an early age.

They broke up when we were little. I was about four. I never see my dad and that can be really bad. I don't like it and other kids I know, it's a real issue, a real problem. But, like everything in life, there is other sides to it. Like for our family, the kids have grown up more, more quickly.
*(James)*

A key feature of young people and health has been in terms of what has been labelled a 'culture conflict' between Western and Asian lifestyles (Glover *et al.*, 1989). Therefore, ethnicity has been identified as a key variable in health patterns. Furthermore, Waugh-Bryant and Lask (1991), based on the evidence of four south Asian girls, argued that 'culture conflict' was precipitatory to their ill health. However, work by Ogden and Elder (1998) suggests that young Asian girls are less likely to experience body image health-related issues compared with their white counterparts. Young Asian girls appear to show less concern with calorie intakes and less body dissatisfaction. This was borne out in the accounts of young Bangladeshi people.

Absolutely massive impact on people (depression and eating disorders), you know. I would say it is probably more common with white people because I feel like they always want to dig people and stuff. And there is always that pressure to look beautiful and that.
*(Anouar)*

A recent report by the Department of Health (ONS, 2000) has analysed data on mental health. It suggests that Bangladeshi men and women experience low level rates of depression. However, a significant number of young people mentioned the importance of depression in their own lives or people they knew. It may be that different understandings of depression are being used here.

Yeah. Eating disorders not so much but depression, yeah … Depressed about their family situation because you do still have problems, like, whether they want their daughter to get married in Bangladesh but the daughter doesn't want to get married. Therefore she's depressed why she has to marry this guy. The youth has *[food]* problems, they might have growing problems, stuff like that. There's so many problems.
*(Minati)*

Furthermore, such studies appear to offer a limited insight when they examine health as an isolated variable. In our study, young people tended to place health issues in their community in the context of broader social practices.

## Conclusion

Presently in Britain, major debates are taking place about the changing roles of men and women, particularly with reference to the relationship between family life and the workplace. Within this more general context, there is a need to implement institutional policies and professional development on gender stereotyping of Bangladeshi young people. At the same time, we need to redefine changing masculinities and femininities for the modern age, which will articulate and build upon values within the Bangladeshi community. The research suggests continuing constraints on young women's lives that serve to close down future opportunities, while young men told of peer pressure to act out particular styles of masculine behaviour to prove their manliness. Alongside this, young people reported a paradox around gender stereotyping. For example, teacher gender stereotypes of Muslim girls were accompanied by teacher expectations that girls would achieve better examination results than boys.

At the same time, there is a need to address Bangladeshi young people's experiences of early death of male members of the family. One of the most surprising findings in our research was the number of young people who spoke of early deaths of male members of their family. In their accounts they remembered the sense of trauma combined with a more positive experience of increased maturity. In contrast, young white people reported a similar combination of experiencing a sense of trauma and increased maturity at an early age resulting from parental divorce.

# 6 Representing young people

This section is based on the fourth phase of the research that involved interviews with various agencies that worked with young people. We interviewed local people who were involved in issues concerning the Bangladeshi community or minority ethnic groups in general. These included local community representatives, careers advisers, police officers, work and training skills providers and community workers. This proved to be very productive in giving a real sense of how service providers were making sense of the young Bangladeshis' social situations and also an insight into the nature of ethnic monitoring. Compared with community representatives and service providers in established multi-cultural regions, people in Newcastle stressed the cultural specificities of community care and policy making in a city that has traditionally been seen as predominantly white.

The first concern that this section deals with is how service providers and community leaders viewed the young people with whom they were working. A main focus of this phase was to consider what practical interventions might work in terms of supporting transitions for young Bangladeshi people in Newcastle. Overall, there was a general consensus among service providers about the difficulty of getting access to, and providing services to, the Bangladeshi community, and more specifically to Bangladeshi young people. A recent report from the Social Exclusion Unit (2004), *Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking Stock and Looking to the Future*, suggests a similar pattern. It found that government programmes such as the New Deal have had limited success in challenging inequality.

There were a number of shared explanations for limited access reported in our study, which ranged from young people's general lack of knowledge of the local agencies and their aims, to a lack of funding and resources to sustain existing initiatives. At the same time, the interviews revealed a number of differences regarding how young people were perceived. Of key importance was that these representations were crucial to how different agencies were relating to and working with the young people. In other words, understandings about the nature of young people themselves determined the types of support being offered to young people. For example, a health advisory agency operating an outreach policy explained the difficulty of maintaining levels of support.

> It's really frustrating *[outreach work]*. There's a younger generation *[of Bangladeshis]* growing up on the streets, hanging around in cars, drinking … we're basically losing contact with them. It is getting more difficult to keep in touch with them. They hang around in large groups and you can see the younger kids getting involved. And you say, 'This is what we can do for you' … they don't want to know. But it is the younger ones growing up with them that we are most worried about, they tend to follow their lead.
> *(Health advisory agency worker)*

This corresponded with a predominant theme running throughout the accounts of agency workers who argued that young people were disconnecting themselves from existing help and support. Importantly, this disconnection was often talked about as a moral responsibility both to themselves and their community. As a result, some support agencies understood young people through a contemporary discourse of alienated Asian youth and threat to the social order. Social order in this sense not only implicated the culture of majority ethnic groups but also a perceived failure of Bangladeshi young people to take up their parents' norms and values.

> We are part of an organisation that provides training and skills. We offer a couple of courses and the Bengalis seem to do it for about two weeks and then get bored. They give in. It's how they are these days. They just lack the respect that others like their parents would have … they are time wasters … not interested.
> *(Work and skills training provider)*

> Does that change the way that you work with them?
> *(Interviewer)*

> Yes, it does. Why put the effort in when they are not going to be around in a couple of weeks? It's a matter of trust.
> *(Work and skills training provider)*

This common sense understanding of Bangladeshi youth echoed traditional British representations of a disenchanted white underclass (Griffin, 1993). Therefore, the risks surrounding young people are seen as a result of their own inability to listen. More importantly, support workers' approaches to young people were marked by frustration.

This, however, was only one theme to emerge from the interviews. Another was a more sympathetic view of Bangladeshi young people. This view suggested that the disconnection of young people from agency advice and support was a result of broader community and authority structures. This meant that existing informal community mechanisms that had been successful in the past were no longer effective.

> I mean, it's difficult for me to sit here and talk about the next generation when we see the present generation really going astray in a way because there is no clear direction, no clear positive role model … Young people have had a hard time, but something good will come out of that. I'm sure they will have learned from the mistakes and pass on a positive or make a positive environment for their children.
> *(Community worker)*

From this perspective, support workers saw their role as activists: challenging and contesting existing support structures and fighting for resources. In such accounts, Bangladeshi young people were often understood as victims of an unfair, often racist, system. At the same time, such a view also placed the Bangladeshi community in the context of competition for scarce resources with other minority ethnic groups.

> The present situation, really depends which community you're from. If you're from the Bengali *[Bangladeshi]* community, there is no clear direction from the so-called community leaders or in some cases their own parents. They are having a hard time. I can see them having a hard time for the next five to ten years. But, over the next five to ten years they will stand up and say 'enough is enough', you know, 'It's about time we were treated equally. It's about time we had access to the services that you keep on shouting about'. Whereas the Pakistani community …
> *(Community leader)*

A third view could be evinced from those supporting the Bangladeshi young people and that was one of conformity. This position suggested that the relationship of young people to support agencies was closely connected to their relationship with their parents, or more specifically, to their parent(s') culture.

> As for the younger people there are one or two streets you get the small BME kids playing cricket and football. But they tend to keep themselves to themselves, and we tend to have a lot less problems with black minority ethnic children because they are brought up stricter. They are brought up to respect their family and people of authority and like when they see you and they say hello and you say hello back they think that it is great. They are usually in school and at the Mosque and they are like there to learn. They are the ones that take full advantage of the adventure playgrounds; 90 per cent of the kids that use it are the BME kids. The white European kids just roam the streets, write graffiti, cause damage and are a bit of a nightmare.
> *(Community police officer)*

Other agency workers echoed this point by suggesting that Bangladeshi parents were more accessible and approachable than the parents of young white people. This was often framed in terms of minority ethnic communities having a 'shared interest' or 'common goal', whereas white parents were simply 'out for themselves'. As a result, it was common for many of the agencies to present themselves in partnership with Bangladeshi parents. This led to the suggestion that the parent generation was more attentive and more concerned about potential social issues.

For example, one teacher suggested that the recent criticisms of 'overbearing' Asian parents are unjustified.

> They don't seem to be a problem ... not all at. The opposite. They want what is best for their children. I think that we are more on their wavelength than their kids.
> *(Sixth form teacher)*

However, some suggested that such care could have a negative effect on young people's social development. More specifically, in relation to Bangladeshi girls, this care was seen to determine, and therefore limit, both their choice of employment and where they worked.

> The other problem that I think we have is that we go all over the city to get employers' clients. And usually with young Asian women, they don't like to travel. They want to stay local. Especially those of an apprenticeship type age for example. I have got one example in mind of one client who came to us and went to an organisation for a modern apprenticeship. I mean she was very bright, and she was very keen and she was offered three different positions and she turned them all down. She wanted to work in admin. And one of them was a very good job in a solicitor's office and there was a job at the end of it. It was in the city centre, but she turned it down because her parents didn't like the idea that she was actually travelling in to the city and back. They were frightened.
> *(Work and skills training provider)*

It should be added that, although there was a range of views about young Bangladeshi people, underlying these views there was often an enthusiasm, energy and commitment to helping not only young Bangladeshi people but young Newcastle people in general.

## Young people and service providers

The young people often saw support from, for example, youth and community workers as inter-related with their families and community. As a result, interactions with various agencies and community structures were often understood as making private concerns public. This meant that disclosures, either emotional, physical or even financial, could be interpreted as highly problematic. For many of the young people, it was the idiosyncrasies of the people in the agencies that were fundamental to whether they engaged in their services. This meant that to seek out support was not simply an individual private action, but was understood as a public statement. A local community worker picked up on the earlier points made by Mourad and

suggested a central role that youth and community workers could make in terms of mediating between parents and their children.

> The main thing the Bengali community needs more than anything is confidence … How do we bring the English and the Bengali cultures together? But the thing is with the young people, it's like when their parents pressure them like 'you have to get married at such an age' or 'you're either a lawyer or you're a restaurant worker'. They don't realise there's other educational courses they can take. That's when the young people start rebelling against their parents. So they might retaliate in a negative way and that's the wrong thing and that's when community workers and leaders come in. We need to make the parents understand.
> *(Young people's community worker)*

The above understandings have an effect on how young people relate to service providers. This was forcefully illustrated in an interview with a Bangladeshi youth worker.

> I think as a youth worker they give me too much respect. It's like they respect me, so they won't come up to me and talk to me about their problems. They won't smoke in front of me, for example. I think they should at least, first smoke in front of me. I think it would break down barriers and I can forge a relationship. In the last couple of months, after a rape case we identified that these young people *[who knew about the rape]* used to come to our club and we didn't have a clue about what's going on. Why did they not come and talk to us? And we go like 'we are youth workers, they respect us, so that means they won't talk openly in front of us about what they're doing'.
> *(Iskandar)*

He highlighted the complexity of the notion of respect that had a high value within the extended family network and within youth culture. The different interpretations of respect may at times produce a breakdown in the support that youth workers can offer. This was due to young Bangladeshis feeling that they could not discuss their problems with them because they had too much respect for them. This may have particular effects for young men. In our own work on young masculinities, many of the white young men informed us that that they did not have a safe space or anyone they could trust to discuss emotional issues in their lives. This emotional illiteracy has been linked to the recent increase in young male suicides (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003). A major paradox emerges here. The positive value of respect by families and community leaders is therefore operating to disconnect young people from the very services that could be used to cultivate respect.

## Ethnic monitoring

With the service providers, another major area to emerge was that of ethnic monitoring. All strategies of monitoring minority ethnic groups have limitations because of the tension between institutional definitions and self definitions. However, there were a number of themes voiced by service providers about the specific nature of gathering material on the Bangladeshi community. As pointed out above, part of the difficulty in researching the Bangladeshi community in Newcastle was the relative absence of information. Often, service providers included Bangladeshis within the general category of 'Asian' and, occasionally, Bangladeshi young people were identified as 'Black'. Such strategies were often politically motivated, rather than descriptively appropriate.

Such dilemmas have a major impact on how information on, and thus understandings of, the Bangladeshi community arise. For example, research strategies in the Newcastle area tended to rely on older census categorisations. This results in the Bangladeshi community being conflated with other south Asian communities and at times with African Caribbeans. As a consequence, this has the effect of hiding the real needs of the community. Census information over the last decade has been sketchy. This is often a result of low population numbers or return rates. As a result, service providers argued that a lack of information and knowledge about the community has led to a lack of support for the Bangladeshi community. A worker on a city-based equality organisation responded in the following terms to the question: does research and documentation exist on the different ethnic groups across Newcastle?

> I also think that people confuse the needs of a community with its size but this does not mean that its needs are being met, in fact the needs of smaller isolated groups are often overlooked. Policy makers often weigh up the needs of a community to its size and often on how vocal it makes itself. The Bangladeshi community in Newcastle has remained relatively silent until recently, linked to this is possibly the idea that the community itself is larger than they previously assumed.
> *(Local equality officer)*

Therefore, due to the conflation of ethnic categories and a presumed low level of population in the community results in a presumed low level of need. In turn, a reduced perceived need becomes a justification for a lack of research and information. Thus, it is assumed that statistically insignificant groups do not merit resources.

> … they do get quite a lot of money in from the local authority as well as New Deal to work with the BME communities and the refugees but we don't see it. I mean I've been working for the last four years basically in the heart of the community. I don't see any improvements.
> *(Community worker)*

This was echoed by a careers adviser who worked specifically with minority ethnic groups. She saw the lack of ethnic monitoring in the Newcastle area as specifically due to a lack of awareness of service providers.

> In Tyneside, I think that we are very much behind the rest of the country with regards to issues regarding race. This includes awareness, needs provisions, training, monitoring, etc., and I think that this practice in Tyneside is wide and across all agencies. This is five or six years after the Lawrence Inquiry and the McPherson Report.
> *(Careers adviser)*

> What is your understanding of why there is so little data available on the Bangladeshi community for example?
> *(Interviewer)*

> I believe it is to do with lack of commitment on behalf of the different agencies who are meant to be monitoring such issues. I think also that some agencies may need to update their cultural awareness training.
> *(Careers adviser)*

The following example demonstrates how ethnic monitoring can work in Newcastle. In an interview, another careers adviser maps out what he argues is an everyday practice of ethnic monitoring.

> Do you have a particular arrangement with schools regarding the information they send you about young people from the ethnic minorities?
> *(Interviewer)*

> Yes. The arrangement is that they send us information on ALL young people approaching the school leaving age … The problem regarding the ethnic minorities is that the schools will only send ethnic data that they feel is important based on the records that they have to keep. So they may send us certain information on the ethnicity of an individual, like what his or her first language is, from that we will then have to guess their ethnicity. Now I'll be the first to admit that cultural awareness in this organisation, like many others, may need to be

improved, and as a result we will often guess the ethnic background from the limited data that we may have received from a school. We can either adopt this approach or resort to using the all-inclusive term 'Asian' as we did in our 'Tyneside Destinations 2000 Report'.
*(Careers adviser)*

In conclusion, we suggest that the Bangladeshi community remains a hidden minority ethnic group. It is a theme of monitoring that requires further investigation.

## Conclusion

There is a need to address service providers' difficulties in getting access to and providing services to the Bangladeshi community and more specifically to Bangladeshi young people. The research identified a number of explanations for this that ranged from young people's general lack of knowledge of the local agencies and their aims, to one of lack of funding and resources to sustain existing initiatives. At the same time, the interviews revealed a number of differences of how young people were perceived. Of key importance was that these representations were crucial to how different agencies were relating and working with the young people. In other words, understandings about the nature of young people themselves determined the types of support being offered to young people.

Alongside this, there is an urgent need for a younger generation of Bangladeshis to be actively involved in representing their community in relation to local planning, the provision of local authority support and other community-based issues. Participants in this research have emphasised that they are a younger generation that are experiencing a strong sense of vulnerability and risk. Existing relationships between their community and local government officials exclude them. Making these concerns central to future policy initiatives is crucial.

# Conclusion

In the report we have addressed key local issues of concern arising from the study of Bangladeshi young people's transition into adulthood in the region of Newcastle. At the same time, while carrying out the research, a number of issues emerged that have significance for other 'invisible' minorities in other contexts and the national policy agenda.

## Culturally invisible minority ethnic groups

Recent social and cultural changes, involving global economic restructuring, advanced technological communications and increasing cultural exchange, have highlighted a wide range of processes of social exclusion and marginalisation that have challenged older models of racial inequality between black and white communities. Within a British context, four main issues have been of particular significance in suggesting a more complex picture, the reconfiguration of the UK (the development of a new settlement between Britain and Northern Ireland, the establishing of a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly), the rise of racism across Europe, the intensification of Islamaphobia and the arrival of new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. At the same time, we have seen the emergence of a diverse range of minority ethnic community mobilisations challenging their cultural invisibility within different regions of the country.

A number of interconnecting issues are identified as resulting in cultural invisibility. These include the absence of official categorisation of minority ethnic groups, the size of the community, how recently it has settled in Britain, its geographical location within a predominantly white region and its level of political representation. The concept of cultural invisibility is critical, as established minority ethnic groups are being displaced by high profile media stereotypes about refugees and asylum seekers. At the same time, the notion is of significance for inter-ethnic relations among minority groups, who operate with their own internal social hierarchies that can result in a reinforcement of cultural 'invisibility' and accompanying social exclusion for those at the bottom.

## Ethnic monitoring

In order to identify the specific needs of 'invisible' minority ethnic groups, we must immediately address the lack of official information, particularly with reference to the inadequacy of ethnic monitoring. Two main points emerge here. First, service providers often place 'invisible' minorities in more general categories, such as the Asian community or classify them as Black. Our research demonstrates that the use of these terms tends to conceal the specific experiences of the most recent minority ethnic communities in specific regions. Historically, this is illustrated in the information made

available in the Census. Using the more general ethnic categories, alongside low return rates, has resulted in the invisibility of the Bangladeshi population in Newcastle. Although the Census in 2001 addressed this issue, the use of more sensitive categories is not consistent across public services. Second, the level of minority ethnic need is often associated with the size of the community and its ability to articulate its need. In short, statistically insignificant groups tend to be ignored.

## How we live with ethnic difference at the start of the 21st century

Issues of racism, racialisation and cultural belonging have to be addressed in regions that traditionally have little experience of minority ethnic groups. In such places, white institutional figures, such as teachers and employers, often adopt older stereotypical images of minority ethnic young people as being 'caught between two cultures', thus assuming that they experience cultural conflict and identity crisis. In short, they are presented as a social problem. We found that young people offer a more sophisticated analysis, identifying positively, while at times critically, with minority ethnic culture. They presented an empathetic assessment of their parents' demands upon them that were not reducible to their choosing either traditional or Western ways. They provided insights into a more 'messy' reality, marked by internal (generational) tensions, complexity and ambiguity. Most importantly, they suggested that issues of youth transitions rather than cultural traditions were the most important questions that they face on a day-to-day basis. They felt that the latter needed to be addressed within minority ethnic communities themselves, while the former required urgent support by outside agencies, such as the local authority.

At the same time, the specific cultural dynamics of a predominantly white city were illustrated in relation to young people's responses to anti-racist discourses that are prevalent in other parts of Britain in which multi-culturalism is established. Young Bangladeshis described incidents of racial discrimination but tended not to use anti-racist discourses to explain negative experiences of white institutions or of individual white people. Similarly, young white people referred to themselves as non-racist rather than anti-racist. At a national level, we need to address the geographies of racism within such cities that have become 'no-go' areas for minority ethnic young people, while understanding the more subtle forms of institutional racism, inter-ethnic exclusions and xenophobia. Most importantly, regions with relatively small populations of minority ethnic groups cannot simply adopt multi-cultural and anti-racist policies developed in metropolitan cities, such as London or Birmingham, with established multi-cultural communities. Rather, they must develop policies premised on the principles of local needs and social inclusion. In our study a number of white people had a similar profile to the ethnic minority young people in terms of low socio-economic status, low educational achievement and poor housing. While racial

exclusion works through these existing structural barriers to equal opportunity, there is a need for a public strategy of diversity across local authority departments that operates with a principle of inclusivity, addressing the shared experiences of those who are socially disadvantaged. White working class young people, alongside young Bangladeshis, need to feel they are contributing to an emerging notion of citizenship, which addresses how we live with difference, while addressing the complexity of the interconnections between ethnicity, age, social class and gender inequalities within specific localities.

## Diversity of Muslim community

During this research project a number of events occurred that have given ethnic minority culture and, more specifically, religion a high social, cultural and political profile. At a national level, the occurrence of the Asian riots in the north of England, the continued visibility of the British National Party and the systematic political intervention into asylum and immigration policy have maintained the visibility of minority ethnic communities. Internationally, the attack on the World Trade Centre in the USA, the forced dissolution of the Afghanistan Government and the invasion of Iraq have provided a new forum for the discussion of race and ethnicity in the 21st century. In British race relations literature, Islamisation and Islamaphobia are central terms in a new vocabulary to describe inter-ethnic relations between social majorities and minorities. Most importantly, our study in Newcastle illustrates the diversity of experiences of young Muslims, thus enabling us to avoid homogenising a social group, who at a national level display a wide rage of responses to contemporary changes, which are experienced within the conditions of different regional areas (Modood, 1994).

## Multi-cultural education in 'white majority' regions

Schools in 'white majority' areas need to develop and implement a multi-cultural curriculum. Of particular importance is the opportunity of learning about the lives of different majority and minority ethnic groups as a means of integrating people in the wider community. This may be illustrated by one of the lessons that could be learnt from the recent north of England riots, where ethnically segregated schools contributed to a lack of mutual understanding between the different communities. Key questions emerge in this sensitive policy area concerning the specific impact of introducing multi-cultural education in schools with only a few minority ethnic students, who may feel highly vulnerable. There is also the issue of teachers' understanding the cultural practices of minority ethnic groups. These may include family visits to their parents' place of birth during term time, arrangements for fasting during Ramadan, demands on young people's time as a result of attendance at the mosque after school (reading the Koran and learning languages), as well as support

that is expected of young people within the family, such as accompanying mothers and fathers to official meetings with representatives of the local authority.

There is also an urgent need to develop whole school policies to address what the literature on the schooling of minority ethnic young people reports as the serious anomaly between the parents' (high) expectations and the teachers' (low) expectations of young people's school achievement. The same literature has found considerable commitment by many minority ethnic young people and their families towards education. More importantly, this commitment is demonstrated by people from different social and economic backgrounds. In contrast, the profile of young white working class students confirms the strong association in Britain of low socio-economic family status, disinterest in formal schooling and low academic achievement. This is most evident in relation to expectations and aspirations to higher education. Schools also need to develop more effective partnerships with parents in order to enable full support for all young people.

## Relationship between local policy makers and local communities: a new generation

There is a need to address service providers' difficulties in getting access to, and providing services to, 'invisible' minorities and, more specifically, to young people. The research identified a number of explanations for this that ranged from young people's general lack of knowledge of the local agencies and their aims, to one of lack of funding and resources to sustain existing initiatives. At the same time, the research revealed a number of differences of how young people were perceived. Of key importance was that these perceptions were crucial to how different agencies were relating and working with the young people. In other words, understandings about the nature of young people themselves determined the types of support being offered to young people.

There is also an urgent need to appoint youth leaders from 'invisible' minorities to support young people. The latter often see existing structures of official support as inter-related with their families and community. As a result, interactions with various agencies and community structures are often understood as making private concerns public. This means that disclosures, either emotional, physical or even financial, may be interpreted as highly problematic. At the same time, young people, while respecting the older generation of community leaders, feel that they often do not fully appreciate the specific pressures of growing up in Britain at the start of the 21st century. They claim that younger community and youth workers could play a central role in mediating their particular needs in relation to official agencies and parental demands upon them.

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# Appendix 1: Ethnicity and youth transition

In order to examine the specific experiences of young Bangladeshi people, the project builds on existing work on transitions into adulthood (Campbell, 1993; Morrow and Richards, 1996). A number of key areas have been identified: defining adulthood, the move from education to training and work, leaving one's family to set up an independent home, becoming involved in sexual relationships, preparing for marriage/ cohabitation and parenthood (Jones and Wallace, 1992; Morrow and Richards, 1996). Importantly, these studies of transition contain a number of conceptual limitations. Primarily, work in the area has posited lifestyles, stages and careers in terms of a transition or movement from one stage to another. In many ways completion of full-time education, the movement into the labour market, leaving home, and having children have become indicators of growing up and becoming an adult. They contain both a notion of change and transformation that has been grafted onto the category of youth. Bob Coles (1995) in *Youth and Social Policy* has reconceptualised the notion of transition beyond the one-dimensional element of the labour market (MacDonald, 1996). Similarly, Johnston *et al.*'s (2000) work on young people highlights the need for a more sophisticated framework that locates notions of inclusion and exclusion within broader social relations. In so doing, we might avoid the tendency to construct social minorities as social problems. Rather, placing them within conditions of the early 2000s, we are provided with productive insights at an explanatory level into youth lifestyles that are engaging with issues of risk, individualisation, social discrimination and cultural belonging (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

# Appendix 2: Occupations and ethnicity

**Table A1: Parents' occupations**

|  | Bangladeshi fathers | Bangladeshi mothers | White fathers | White mothers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Manufacturing | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Construction | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Transport | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Retail: sales | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Retail: restaurants/hotels | 11 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Banking/finance/insurance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Public administration | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Social welfare: education/health | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Technical: electrical, computing | 5 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Service: domestic/care | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Unemployed | 15 | 4 | 11 | 11 |
| Economically inactive | 0 | 28 | 0 | 12 |
| Incapacity | 9 | 4 | 3 | 1 |

*Uneven numbers due to family make up.*

**Table A2: Occupation by main ethnic group, Great Britain**

|  | Total | Non-white | White | Black | Indian | Pakistani/ Bangladeshi | Mixed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Managers, etc. | 16.2 | 15.1 | 16.3 | 10.9 | 17.5 | 14.1 | 17.7 |
| Professional | 10.8 | 12.6 | 10.7 | 7.7 | 15.2 | 11.9 | 15.9 |
| Associate professional/technical | 10.7 | 12.0 | 10.6 | 15.4 | 9.5 | 6.4 | 14.6 |
| Clerical, secretarial | 14.7 | 14.3 | 14.8 | 17.8 | 15.6 | 10.3 | 11.1 |
| Craft and related | 11.7 | 7.4 | 12 | 7.9 | 8.4 | 8.0 | 4.9 |
| Personal | 11.0 | 11.7 | 10.9 | 16.6 | 4.6 | 14.0 | 13.3 |
| Sales occupations | 8.3 | 9.6 | 8.2 | 7.2 | 11.6 | 12.2 | 8.2 |
| Plant and machine | 8.8 | 9.9 | 8.7 | 8.1 | 12.5 | 15.6 | 5.2 |
| Other/occupations | 7.7 | 7.4 | 7.7 | 8.3 | 5.1 | 7.6 | 9.2 |

*Source: Labour Force Survey (2000).*