

foundations

Analysis informing change

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Experiencing ethnicity:

Discrimination and service provision

In January 2000 a *Foundations* - 'Ethnic diversity, neighbourhoods and housing' - brought together some key issues arising out of research projects supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation relating to ethnicity. The review identified a persistent lack of recognition of the circumstances of groups and individuals that make up minority ethnic communities and the fact that they are often ignored in policy and practice responses.

Since January 2000 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has continued to support a range of research projects on the generic subject of 'race' and ethnicity. A particular initiative has been the Race Equality and Disability Programme. These projects - on subjects as diverse as racial harassment, age, the experience of the black voluntary sector, the experience of both self-employment and positive action programmes - have contributed to a body of research-generated knowledge that can inform change in both policy and practice. Here, Kusminder Chahal brings together lessons from this wide range of projects. The current *Foundations* presents a wider dimension in subject matter than the earlier one but still highlights similar issues.

The research projects reviewed in this *Foundations* indicate:

- Black and minority ethnic service users felt mainstream services were often inappropriate for their needs and that services made assumptions based on stereotypes and prejudice about what the needs of these users may be or what they may want to access.
- The experience of racial discrimination and prejudice in mainstream service provision often meant that what minority ethnic users were asking for were specialist, culturally competent services.
- There were few black and minority ethnic staff in mainstream services and some of the services had made little attempt to change this.
- There was a general desire for more information about services and entitlements from service providers. For example, very few disabled people had any knowledge of direct payment schemes.
- Religious and cultural identity was very important to many people from minority ethnic communities but it was rarely responded to by mainstream service providers.
- Common myths about informal family networks looking after each other cannot be taken for granted. The research showed that although informal support is available in certain circumstances, this cannot be relied upon.
- People sometimes experienced discrimination and prejudice within their own community and faith groups.
- The differences between the experiences of men and women were often sharper than the differences between different ethnic groups.

Introduction

This *Foundations* draws on research undertaken since 2000 on a range of subjects including disability and social care, young people, family and individual support, older people, racial harassment, employment and business development. Following on from a previous *Foundations*, published in January 2000, it highlights some similar themes, for example, the persistence of racist experiences, inadequate support and service responses to meet the diversity of need, and the continued need for recognising diversity within and between minority ethnic groups.

Legislation and policy context

In the past five years four major events have influenced change in legislation, policy and practice development and, to a certain extent, perception of minority ethnic communities:

- The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, published in 1999, was described as a high-water mark in race relations in Britain. The report's often-quoted definition of institutional racism (see Box 1) has been adopted by many organisations as the measure of where their service lies or how far it would like to be away from that charge.
- The change in race equality legislation (although still defined as race relations) and the general expansion of equalities legislation has become a key driver in influencing organisations' recognition of the need for change. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 extends the application of the Race Relations Act 1976 to the police and other public authorities and strengthens the duty placed on local authorities and other public bodies to carry out their functions having due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good race relations.

- The riots in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham in 2001 resulted in two national reports that raised the issue of segregation with a policy solution of cohesion. The discourse on segregation has focused primarily on how people of South Asian origin segregate themselves from people who are white-British, suggesting that cohesion will evolve through this group integrating with white society and values. This limited view of segregation fitted with common stereotypes of how certain minority ethnic communities isolate themselves from mainstream society. As critics have stressed, this limited view compromises the drive to recognise cultural diversity and ignores the process that has led to South Asian youths being stigmatised and criminalised.
- The terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001 increased hostility against British Muslims but also against other minority ethnic communities and brought to the forefront a debate about, and response to, religion as an identity, that requires recognition and protection within a secular and diverse society.

Box 1: What is institutional racism?

“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people.”

Source: Macpherson (1999)

Findings from the JRF research

The findings from the research supported by JRF on race and ethnicity raise important questions about how services are responding to the needs of minority ethnic communities. Much of this research has been undertaken during a period of legislative change and the implementation of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Although it can be anticipated that changes may have occurred in practice since some of this research was published, the *Foundations* offers a useful insight into the experiences of people and their expectations in terms of service delivery and outcomes.

The experience of minority ethnic communities

Stereotypes and assumptions

The use of assumptions and stereotypes in service provision and delivery was quite apparent in the research data. Whether these are imagined or real they have consequences for how communities and individuals respond:

“They tend to give white people more support in the way that they’re living on their own, but because you’re living in a family, and you’ve got a lot of family, they always think that you’ve got a lot of support, so they just don’t want to know.”

(Evans et al., 2001)

“Black service users and carers in contact with statutory services felt undervalued and misunderstood and usually chose to withdraw from active participation. Those remaining engaged with mainstream services often felt they found themselves amidst a patronising environment and shaped by stereotypical attitudes.”

(Rai-Atkins, 2002)

Such stereotypical attitudes included: South Asian and Chinese families ‘look after their own’, implying there were social and family networks in place to offer support; South Asian people are not interested in certain mental health services, for example, counselling; language is a barrier to accessing services; assumptions that minority ethnic communities are homogeneous; assumptions that South Asian social workers may find it difficult to maintain confidentiality within the communities they serve.

Prejudice and discrimination

The use of assumptions and stereotypes often operated alongside users feeling they were being racially discriminated against. Black schoolgirls often felt that some teachers were operating within a racist frame of reference:

“Say there’s a big group of us, like five black kids and six white kids, you can guarantee they’ll pick out the black before they come to the white. They always think the black kids are bad ... have done something before the white kids have.”

(Osler et al., 2002)

Evidence highlighted that teachers had poorer expectations of black students (Barn, 2000) and other research suggested that particular problems faced by minority ethnic young people were often ignored by careers officers, some holding on to the perception that not being in education, employment and training was “a largely white, working-class, male problem” (Britton et al., 2002).

Racial discrimination and stereotyping were also seen as barriers operating to stifle career development of black and minority ethnic staff and that the operation of a ‘glass ceiling’ was evident (Julienne, 2001).

Racial harassment continues to be an experience raised in a number of different reports and affects how services and relationships are perceived. Some people mentioned the racial discrimination and harassment they experienced in mainstream service provision. Often a person’s ethnic identity and/or religious identity separated them from other service users and as a consequence they developed a range of coping strategies:

“I can see that one woman is racist just by the way she reacts and doesn’t seem to want her kids to play with mine ... I don’t eat or anything at the refuge. I just sleep there, get the kids ready in the mornings, and spend the rest of the time out.”

(Davis et al., 2002)

“I feel better mixing with my own.”

(Bignall et al., 2002)

Discrimination within own community

For disabled people, the experience of discrimination in their own communities led to a sense of isolation and lack of social contact. Many felt attitudinal discrimination in their own communities to disability and impairment and inaccessible community and religious buildings denied them the opportunity to participate in religious practice:

“They’ve got a ramp going into the mosque, but once you are in it, to get to the top floor where they pray and hold out, you have to go up two flights of stairs.”

(Vernon, 2002)

Mono-cultural service provision

Minority ethnic users often complained of services not being able to meet their needs, whether these were language, religious, cultural or because of racial discrimination:

“If I were a social services boss then I should go to university to learn about different religions, about the cultural backgrounds.”

(Vernon, 2002)

In services that were perceived to cater primarily for white people, minority ethnic people were expected to fit in with existing provision. Cultural stereotypes held by workers acted as a barrier to accessing the service. Services were often viewed as mono-cultural and were found to have some, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- an unrepresentative workforce or no minority ethnic staff;
- limited or non-existent policies and practice guidelines relating to working with minority ethnic users;
- few or no minority ethnic users accessing the service;
- limited relationships with the minority ethnic voluntary sector;
- staff had limited or no awareness or confidence working with diversity;
- limited or non-existent information available about services.

Lack of information

A common message from the research was that there was a general need for appropriate and targeted information about what services were available for users and potential users:

“Service users could not achieve the outcomes they wanted if they were not aware of the services available to support them. A lack of information often led to low expectations of the outcome that could be achieved.”

(Shaping our lives National User Network et al., 2003)

Individuals and families who were unable to locate a service because of lack of knowledge or poor information could easily be blamed for this:

“An institutionally racist approach to service delivery would locate the responsibility for finding out about and accessing services with families themselves.”

(Flynn, 2002)



Being unable to negotiate and access services (particularly social services and benefit systems) led to individuals missing out on benefits and services:

“A Vietnamese man had been part of an official refugee programme, but no one told him about Disability Living Allowance. As a result he missed out on 22 years of disability-related benefits.”

(Roberts et al., 2002)

Direct payments to disabled people were often unheard of. Thus a route to user-defined outcomes and a sense of independence was lost. Poor knowledge of entitlement and information about services was not simply because of a language need. In one study all the participants were fluent in the English language or in British Sign Language and still lacked appropriate information (Vernon, 2002). An end outcome of poor knowledge of services and entitlements was that many gave up on trying to get a service:

“I do not know who the service providing agencies are. I'm disabled and sitting at home.”

(Roberts et al., 2002)

Service providers may need to identify how they are publicising their services and initiatives to reach a broad range of communities, taking into account language and cultural issues pertinent to the communities. Monitoring of take-up of services by ethnicity, where services are publicised and how users hear about the service could be crucial to establishing a picture of how and when information is accessed and utilised and what the key differences are between all ethnic groups.

Unmet need

Specific cultural needs relating to gender, religious and ethnic identities were often unmet by service providers. Much of the research indicates that such identities were very important in a range of situations, for example, for young people in kinship care placements:

“You have your own culture, so I think it is important to live with someone who knows about your cultural background.”

(Broad et al., 2001)

As a result of being exposed to racism, some young people in the process of leaving care had given more thought to their identity than their white counterparts. However, there was little evidence that service providers paid much attention to this with care leavers (Barn et al., 2004). Similarly, religion was an important aspect in the lives of disabled people. However, often their needs were overlooked by both mainstream services and religious communities (Vernon, 2002).

The needs of minority ethnic women and some minority ethnic communities were often made invisible because they were either seen as politically insignificant or numerically small or dispersed. The research seems to imply that need is a service-led concept rather than one that has been developed by the users that would lead to positive outcomes for them. As a result, the research findings indicate a high level of unmet social, care and identity needs.

Formal family support was often demanded. In some of the research parenting support, within a culturally appropriate framework, was requested but not forthcoming. A review of parenting programmes found very few culturally sensitive parenting programmes available in the UK (Barlow et al., 2004).



Informal family support and independence

Family support exists across minority ethnic communities but cannot be taken for granted by service providers. Chinese older people felt ignored by service providers because of preconceived ideas and myths of family support – a common theme evident across the research findings (Chau et al., 2002; Yu, 2000; Flynn, 2002).

Informal family support in many situations was a valued activity – advice and encouragement in establishing a business; encouragement for career progression; young people caring for disabled members of a family; extended members of a family helping with the care of young people in need. However, such positive aspects of family support did not mean that all needs were met by the family network and often there was a gendered difference in whether support was required or the form it took.

Family support can both enable and restrict independence. It can be restricted, for example, by culturally specific views on the position of women or ability of disabled people. However, it can be enabling in that positions of responsibility that are given within a family encourage ‘interdependence’ and ‘mutual dependence’. It was important to reciprocate for help received from family members and contribute to family life. This helped with self-esteem and self-confidence.

Independence, therefore, within a culturally specific context may not mean living separately from the family network but in close proximity and collaboration with them. Again, such a change in mainstream thinking would offer potentially different outcomes.

Service response issues

Faith communities and the minority ethnic voluntary and community sector

The Government has described faith communities as “a good point of entry into involving the local community” (Farnell et al., 2003). This is also true for the minority ethnic community and voluntary sector. This sector has grown and offers a range of services to communities of interest. A case study highlighted that there were 700 and 3,000 ‘black’ non-government organisations in Leicester and London respectively and that often these organisations are seen in a limited capacity of service deliverers and not actually involved in civic participation (Chouhan, 2004). Whilst this is debateable, this and other research clearly highlights that the minority ethnic voluntary sector is viewed positively by users (for example, Chahal, 2003). Much

Box 2: Creating an inclusive service

A service that is adequately responding to the diversity of its users should ensure at least the following:

- have knowledge of the local community, including an ethnic, religious, gender and age profile;
- consult and build trust between services and minority ethnic communities;
- be a visible and proactive service provider;
- undertake effective ethnic monitoring of users and non-users;
- have adequate resources and minority ethnic staff;
- have appropriate and accessible information about the service which is disseminated;
- be able to respond to linguistic, religious, gender and cultural identity needs;
- not work from assumption or stereotype;
- have strong leadership that is open to new ideas and flexible to change.

of this sector has developed as a result of minority ethnic users being excluded, feeling and often being misunderstood and receiving a poor service response from mainstream organisations. However, the minority ethnic voluntary sector is over-stretched and under-resourced, marginal to local policy debates and often involved in their own community politics (Craig et al., 2002).

The positive benefits of a strong minority ethnic voluntary and community sector was apparent in many of the reports. The range of services provided by the sector is vast and stretches from offering services to promote religious identity through to offering services to specific groups (for example, women) or for particular social problems (for example, racial harassment). The key aspect of the sector is that it focuses on the specific needs of a group and often an individual; often in sharp contrast to the mono-cultural service received from mainstream providers.

Box 3: Valued attributes of minority-ethnic-specific services

- Empathy and understanding – The response to the user is from a non-judgemental perspective.
- Developing culturally specific and identity conscious services – This can reduce isolation and language barriers and enable effective communication.
- A safe and empowering environment – Assumptions and stereotypes are reduced or non-existent, oppression and racism are recognised and responded to.
- Responding to failings in mainstream provision – Offering a service that cannot be received elsewhere.
- Signposting – The sector is able to respond to the needs of its users and offer relevant information to proceed with the issue at hand.
- Advocacy – Offering representation often to the most disenfranchised people in society.

The barriers to a sustainable black voluntary sector include:

- *Short-term funding* – Poorly understood and poorly funded sector. Often the sector is funded because of political reasons rather than the needs of the community the sector serves. Funding can often be denied because the organisation is faith-based and the funder fails to see the high-impact community work being undertaken.
- *Threat* – In some cases it was perceived that funding has been withdrawn because a project has been critical of the performance of a local authority.
- *Invisibility within the sector* – Funding favours particular types of organisations: usually larger and more professional. Often smaller interest groups, for example, women's groups and support groups in areas with small minority ethnic communities, tend to get overlooked.

Staffing and training

The development of a culturally relevant service requires staff from minority ethnic backgrounds and training for all staff on the relevance of responding to and understanding diversity. Implicit within these strategies are effective links with local communities and policy and practice guidelines that inform the work of services. The introduction and monitoring of race equality schemes for public authorities and equality and diversity training across organisations are critical to the successful development of their services.

The needs of women

The differences between men and women were often more acute than the differences between ethnic groups. For example, the limitations put on women by families because of cultural rules often restricted disabled women in their desire for independence. In some instances service providers had to work closely with families to overcome fear and misunderstanding. Generally, however, recognising and responding to the needs of women was often neglected by service providers, faith and community organisations.

Recognising oppression

How do both mainstream and specialist services respond to multiple identities and oppressions? Challenging prejudice, assumptions and discrimination requires service sectors to recognise how they may be ignoring the range of different identities people hold and how these can interplay to exclude service users.

Ethnic monitoring

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires public authorities in England and Wales to produce race equality schemes. These schemes are required to assess the adverse impacts of their policies on different communities. Ethnic monitoring is crucial at different levels of service access, provision and delivery. However, some of the research continues to highlight a general weakness and avoidance in collecting this information:

- the ethnicity of care leavers is still unavailable, although the Department of Health plans to provide this data in the near future;
- having a policy requiring the systematic recording and monitoring the ethnicity of service users did not ensure it happened in both statutory and generic voluntary agencies;

- counselling agencies in the voluntary sector did not carry out ethnic monitoring of their clients or of take-up of services. Thus valuable information about the nature of problems faced by black clients, their routes of referral and their satisfaction with the service was not available;
- often the strategy adopted for ethnic monitoring means that certain communities are classified under generic labels such as ‘Asian’ or ‘Black’; as a consequence the needs of different groups are made invisible and unmet.

Box 4: Principles for ethnic monitoring

Service providers can only tell if they are making progress in making their services available to all sections of the population by ethnic monitoring and by seeking the views of people from minority ethnic communities. Information that can be extracted from ethnic monitoring includes establishing:

- who accesses the service;
- how users found out about the service;
- whether the service met their specific needs;
- whether the service was appropriate to the needs of diverse communities;
- what changes should be made to the service;
- how changes can be made and what partnerships are required.

The research process

Generally the research reviewed did not have a comparative component and it is thus difficult to show whether other service users or people in other communities experience similar or very different problems. Minority ethnic communities are presented as a very distinct research group who require a distinct service response.

Minority ethnic communities are over-researched in some areas (see, for example, Butt et al., 2004) and under-researched in others (see, for example, Barn forthcoming). What is clearly evident is the gap between research as an activity and developing ideas and influencing action in practice. A response is required from policy-makers, service planners and practitioners to the findings of research. Cynicism is beginning to envelope the research process as more and more minority ethnic communities are being defined as in need of investigation:

“Black communities are tired of taking part in research that asks them what they want from services, only to find nothing happens until five years later when they are asked the same questions over again.”

(Flynn, 2002)

However, the common themes that have emerged from this review suggest that service providers, commissioners and the minority ethnic voluntary, community and faith sectors need to take a closer look at how they are responding to their local communities and the barriers that prevent access to, and provision of, effective services.

Conclusion

The need for diversity and the diversity of need

Underlying much of the discussion in the research reports is a number of themes that require fuller exploration, for example, the way in which assumptions and stereotypes continue to inform service development and response; who provides the most appropriate service to minority ethnic communities; the barriers facing the black voluntary sector; the position of and response to minority ethnic women; the role of religion and cultural identity in service outcomes; and the most suitable method for collecting and disseminating research. Across all of these is the legal requirement that public authorities have to ensure that their services are responsive to the needs of *all* communities and how they are promoting community cohesion.

Box 5: Initial questions service providers could ask

- Do we understand the diverse needs of black and minority ethnic communities?
- Do our services meet the diverse needs and aspirations of black and minority ethnic communities?
- Do we provide an appropriate and professional service to black and minority ethnic communities?
- Do we achieve equally high outcomes for all ethnic groups in all our various activities?

Source: Williams (1999)

Box 6: In-depth questions service providers could ask

- What are our overarching aims for racial equality?
- What is our baseline? Where are we now, and what have we achieved?
- Which of our major functions, services and policies have most potential impact on racial equality?
- How well do these currently promote racial equality or work against it?
- What changes can be made that will improve this position?
- What specific outcomes or targets should we be aiming for?
- How can we best keep the situation under review, and continue to monitor impact?
- How can we make clear, both internally and externally, what we are doing?
- What do we need to do to develop our capacity to deliver?

Source: Commission for Racial Equality (2003)

The research projects clearly highlight a need from primarily mainstream services but also from service providers within minority ethnic communities to develop strategies to increase the accessibility and appropriateness of services. The sheer volume of research supported by the JRF that points to very similar themes indicates a need for wholesale revision of how services are responding to their users and potential users and indeed how minority ethnic communities and users are perceived by services. The research seems to suggest that what is needed is less research but more evaluation of service provision and of whether the needs that minority ethnic users have identified for themselves are being met.

A revision of service provision and the needs of a user may have to consider:

- funding more minority-ethnic-specific services if these are able to achieve the outcomes defined by users;
- the complexity of a user's identity beyond ethnicity;
- a better trained and more responsive workforce to diversity that can facilitate prejudice reduction;
- effective and sustainable partnerships with the range of minority ethnic communities in localities;
- developing strategies to recruit and retain minority ethnic staff;
- positive action measures that enable a minority ethnic management class in the care sector to emerge and promote the benefits of a culturally competent service and workforce through training, policies, practice guidelines and effective leadership.

All of the above need to be underpinned by monitoring and evaluation of service provision, delivery and access.

About this Foundations

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How to get further information

This *Foundations* is based on the following projects supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Where indicated, a four-page summary of the *Findings* of the study is available from the Foundation, via our website www.jrf.org.uk or in print by calling 01904 615905 or emailing publications@jrf.org.uk.

Reports published by the JRF are available from York Publishing Services Ltd, 64 Hallfield Road, York YO31 0ZQ, Tel: 01904 430033, Fax: 01904 430868 or through the Foundation's website, www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop (more recent reports are also available for download free of charge from the website).

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