

# **BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY CHILDREN AND POVERTY: EXPLORING THE ISSUES**

Edited by Claire Kober

**END CHILD POVERTY**  
once and for all

End Child Poverty is a broad coalition of organisations and individuals committed to ending the scandal of child poverty in the UK. We work to keep Government to its pledge to eradicate child poverty by 2020, to highlight the multi-faceted nature of poverty, and to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard in the child poverty debate.

Children born into poverty have a lower birth weight, higher infant mortality and poorer health. As they grow up they are less likely to stay on at school and will have fewer qualifications. In adulthood they will be lower paid and experience unemployment and they are likely to die younger.

Ending child poverty means addressing income poverty, but it is also means tackling health inequalities, poor education outcomes, lack of employment, affordable housing and support for families.

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# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iv
About the authors .....	v
Foreword .....	vi
<i>Trevor Phillips</i>	
Ethnic minority families – poverty and disadvantage .....	1
<i>Alan Marsh and Jane Perry</i>	
Ethnic minority groups and the labour market .....	10
<i>Jane McLuckie-Townsend</i>	
Not seen and not heard: the case of young women from Bangladeshi and Pakistani origins .....	15
<i>Mandana Hendessi</i>	
Looking forward – Newham .....	18
<i>Trevor Blackman</i>	

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of End Child Poverty or its members.

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# Foreword

This is an exceptional report. It should be compulsory reading for everyone in public life. It charts the consequences of high levels of inequality among ethnic groups and the devastating impact that this has upon children.

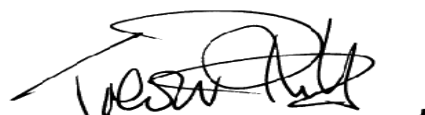
Nearly 70 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children live in a household with an income lower than 60 per cent of the national median. And with this comes poor and overcrowded housing, which then has an impact on educational attainment levels, which in turn impacts massively on employment prospects.

Poverty among children lays the foundations for the future that they will encounter. A childhood marred by poverty is likely to result in an adulthood lacking in opportunity in all aspects of life. Tackling this problem must be an immediate priority for all concerned with the future of Britain.

We welcome the Government's strategy to end child poverty within 20 years and their phased approach to tackling this. We also commend the work of the *End Child Poverty campaign*.

However as this study indicates, a universal approach which aims to achieve a situation that is better overall will not necessarily lead to a situation that is better for all. Some groups of children in some ethnic minority communities experience disadvantage and entrenched levels of poverty which in some instances warrants a dedicated focus to shift the equality gap between these children and all others.

The value of this report is in mapping the terrain accurately in relation to some groups. It should galvanise us to complete the map, and most of all, to act.



**Trevor Phillips, Chair, Commission for Racial Equality**  
October 2003



# Ethnic minority families – poverty and disadvantage

*Alan Marsh and Jane Perry*

This chapter reviews evidence of the extent to which Britain's ethnic minority families with dependent children are 'in poverty'. Do they share 'markers for disadvantage' such as greater rates of worklessness, social tenancy, lack of education, and so on that we know are associated with persistently low incomes, which may leave them and their children prone to hardship?

## Background

During the final quarter of the twentieth century the average British family with dependent children became about 40 per cent better off in real terms. During the same time, the proportion of British children who were 'in poverty' according to the income-based measures commonly used (and there were many of these to choose from) rose from 5–10 per cent in the early 1970s to 30–35 per cent in the mid-1990s. How Britain achieved these two outcomes during the same period will preoccupy social historians of the future. It has certainly preoccupied the Labour Government since it took office in 1997 and policies to increase the incomes of the poorest families have been its strongest feature. Families with children in the lowest 20 per cent have seen their real incomes rise by about £30 a week through increases in benefits and tax credits, though the scale of inequality between the richest and poorest fifths has narrowed only a little.

Several kinds of economically vulnerable family have been caught in the maw of these developments. If for example the bottom 30 per cent of the income distribution among British families were taken to represent the poorest families, Piachaud and Sutherland estimated that this cut-off point would capture:

- 86 per cent of all workless families;
- 79 per cent of all single lone parent families;
- 73 per cent of all large families;
- 68 per cent of all young mothers;
- 66 per cent of all formerly partnered mothers, and
- 65 per cent of all ethnic minority families<sup>1</sup>.

To say that Britain's ethnic minority families – taken as a whole – are 'as poor as divorced mothers' is a striking statement. Before the 1990s, the importance of ethnic origin as a factor in *income-based* poverty received relatively little attention<sup>2</sup>. However more recent research has shown that all ethnic minority groups have high rates of income poverty compared to the general population. There are however wide differences between ethnic minority groups<sup>3</sup>. And there are other 'markers for disadvantage' that go to make up a socially constructed definition of what it means to be 'in poverty' in modern Britain. The series of surveys carried out for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) by the Policy Studies Institute<sup>4</sup>, for example, showed the extent to which persistent low income is associated with social tenancy, with a lack of educational qualifications and prior work experience, and with cohabitation among young couples.

## Ethnic diversity in Britain

Ethnic minority communities in Britain are growing at a faster rate than the population overall. The 2001 Census shows that 12 per cent of the population described themselves as other than 'White British'. Four per cent came from other White ethnic groups (1.2 per cent were

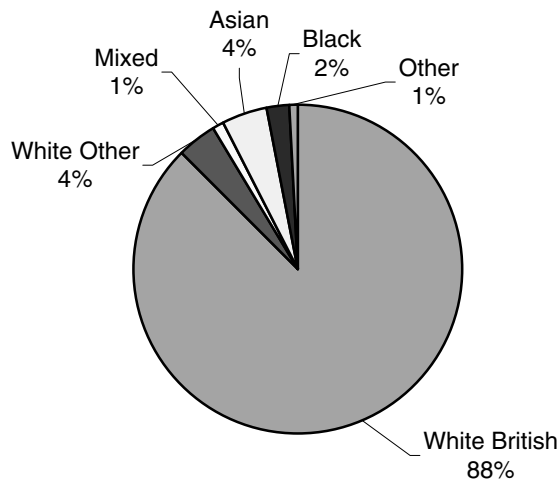
Irish); 4 per cent were of Asian origin (2 per cent Indian, 1.5 per cent Pakistani, 0.5 per cent Bangladeshi); just over 2 per cent said they were from 'Black' backgrounds (1.1 per cent Black Caribbean, 0.9 per cent Black African, 0.2 per cent Other Black groups). One per cent said they were of mixed origin (shown in the expanded section of Figure 1.1).

**The children**

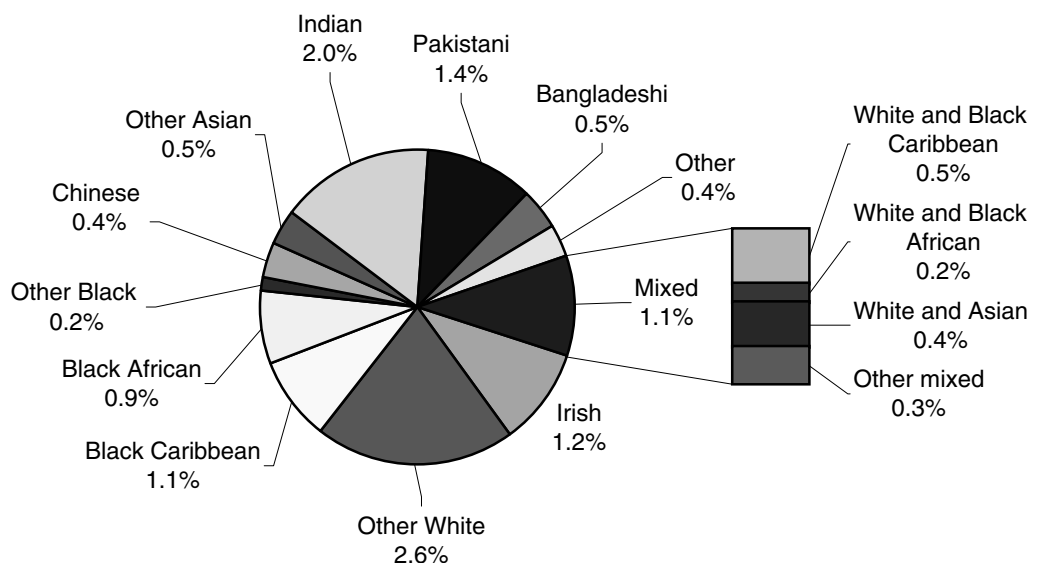
Ethnic minority groups differ in their demographic characteristics and are not distributed randomly around the United Kingdom. A key difference is that they are younger and earlier marriage and child bearing mean that some groups, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, have proportionately far more children than others (Figure 1.2). Overall, ethnic minority groups are also more likely to have large families than whites. However Black-Caribbean families are more likely to only have one child than are white families (although also slightly more likely to have three or more)<sup>5</sup>. The combined effect of these differences is that the relatively high levels of poverty among ethnic minority groups will affect children disproportionately.

**Figure 1.1 The ethnic diversity of Britain in 2001**

Whole Population

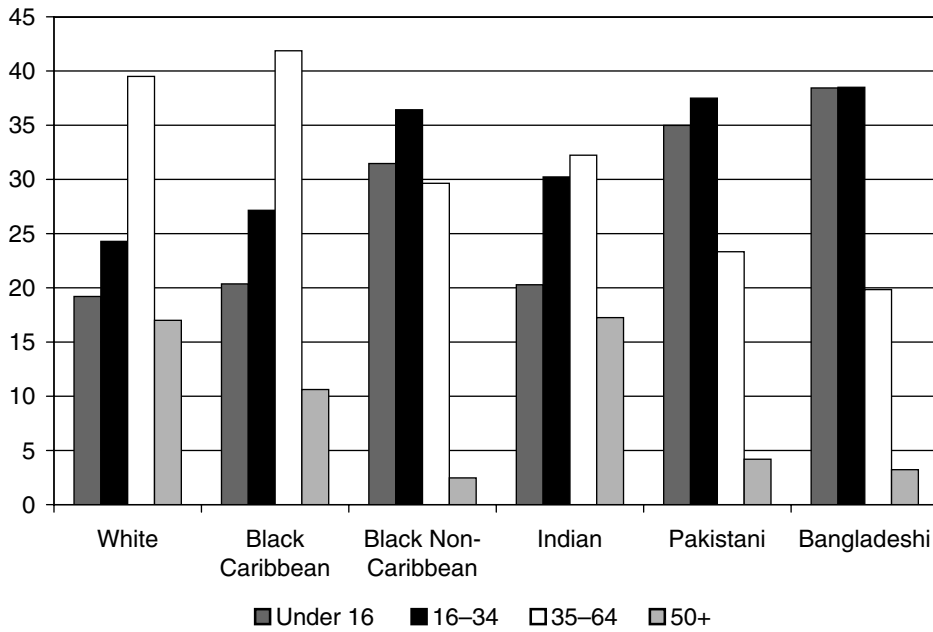


Ethnic minority groups



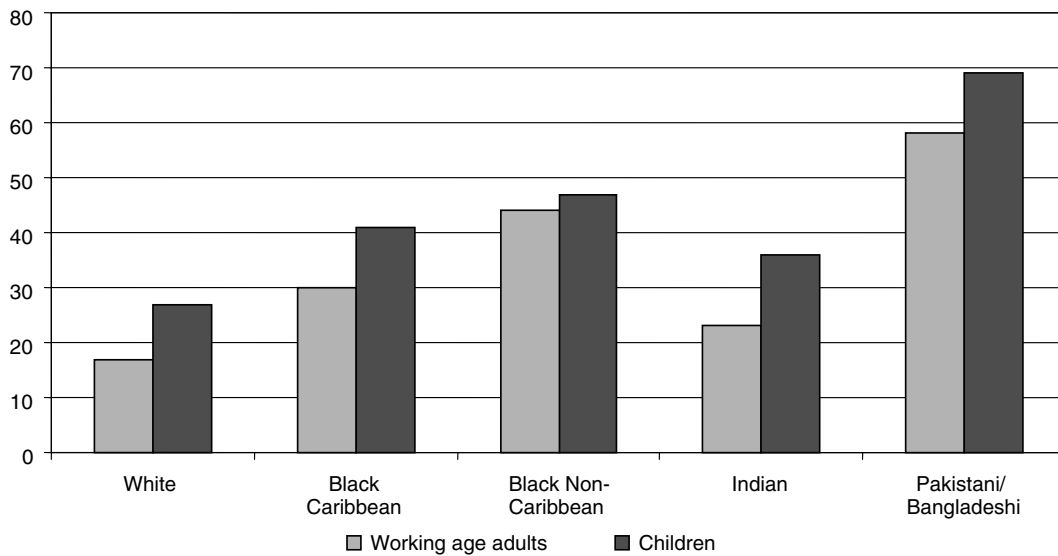
Source: 2001 Census (authors' own analysis)<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1.2 Age profiles of white and ethnic minority groups**



Source: 2001 Census (authors' own analysis)<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1.3 Percentage with household income lower than 60 per cent of the median**



Source: Households Below Average Income (after housing costs, including self employed) (authors' own analysis)<sup>8</sup>

**Measure of poverty**

*1. Differing incomes*

By income definitions, child poverty rates are higher than overall poverty levels (19 per cent of all working age adults, but 30 per cent of all children live in households below the poverty line – (Figure 1.3). The extent of child poverty among some ethnic minority groups, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, is startling. Almost seven out of ten

Bangladeshi children live in households with incomes below 60 per cent of the national average (median) compared with fewer than three out of ten white children.

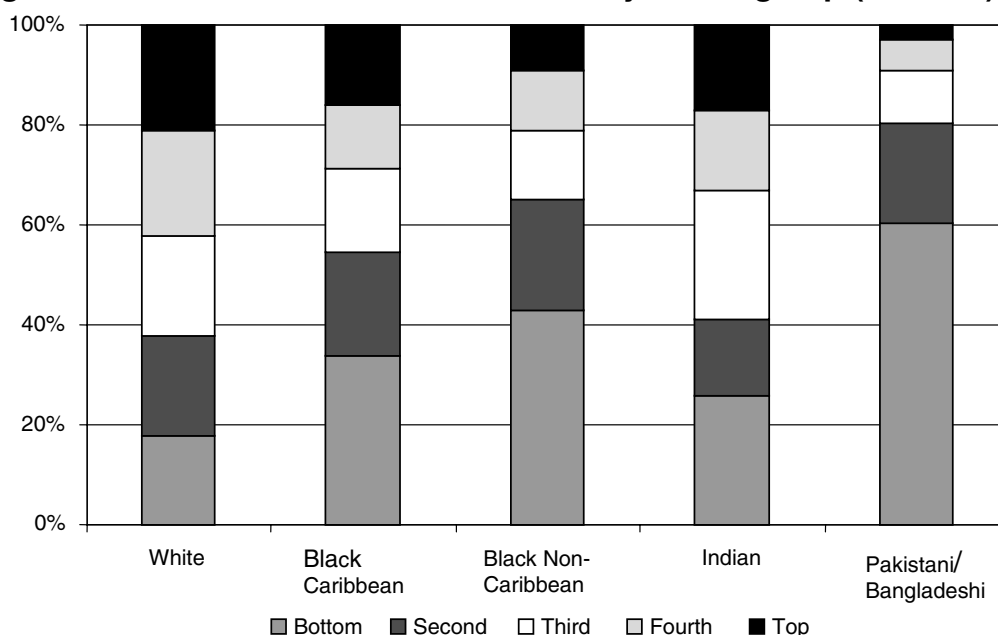
Figure 1.3 illustrates high levels of poverty among all ethnic minority groups, but also the extent of differences between them. The risk of poverty for Caribbean and Indian families are closer to, but still higher than, the risk for white families. Forty-one per cent of Black Caribbean children, and 36 per cent of Indian children were living in households with an income less than 60 per cent of the median.

One of the clearest demonstrations of income disparities between children in different groups is the proportion of each who fell into the bottom fifth of the income distribution of the whole population (Figure 1.4). All ethnic minority groups have a disproportionate percentage of individuals in the lower income bands, but this differed considerably by ethnic group: only 18 per cent of white children fell within the bottom quintile of the overall income distribution compared with 61 per cent of Pakistani/Bangladeshi children, 43 per cent from Black Non-Caribbean groups, 34 per cent of Black Caribbean children and 26 per cent of Indian children.

At the other end of the distribution, Figure 1.4 does show a considerable amount of prosperity among some ethnic groups: 17 per cent of Indians and 16 per cent of the Black Caribbean group had household incomes which fell in the top fifth of the income distribution for the population as a whole, little short of the white proportion among this richest group. So to this extent some ethnic minority groups now share degrees of inequality that have come to characterise the white population of Britain.

These findings are supported by a recent paper by Richard Berthoud, who shows that better off Chinese and Indian families tend to have higher incomes than those in any other ethnic group (including whites) and that there are also indications of prosperity among members of the Indian community. However, at the other end of the scale, both Indian and Chinese groups recorded more households in poverty than whites. Berthoud's analysis also showed clearly the remarkable compression of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi incomes into the lower parts of the distribution: nine out of ten had incomes below the national average<sup>9</sup>.

**Figure 1.4 Quintile distribution of income by ethnic group (children)**



Source: Households Below Average Income (after housing costs, inc self employed) (authors' own analysis)<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Worklessness

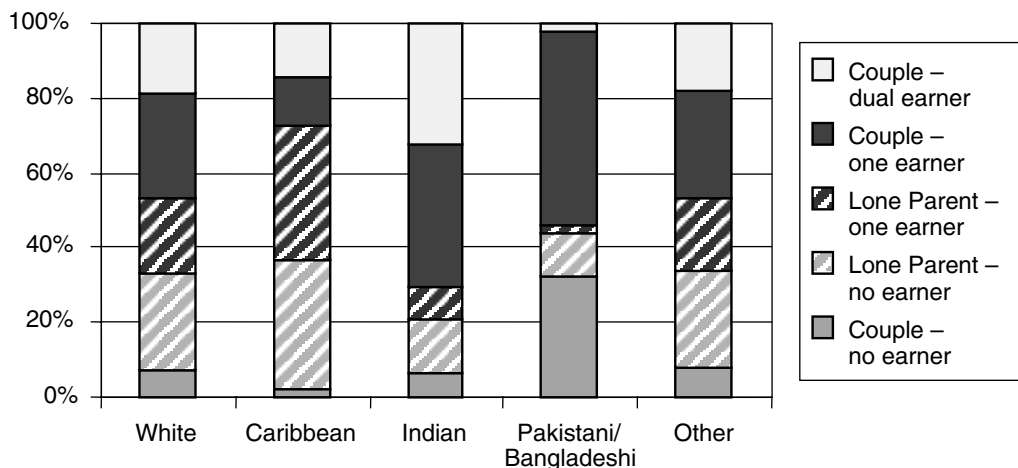
The 1993 Fourth Survey of Ethnic Minorities in Britain, as well as other research over the last decade, showed that the low incomes and uneven income distributions among ethnic minority groups are a result of worklessness (high male unemployment and low rates of women's employment), low pay for those in work and the differential impact of the benefit system for those out of work<sup>11</sup>.

However, patterns of poverty differ among ethnic minority groups and these patterns do not necessarily follow those commonly associated with white families amongst whom poverty is often more closely related to age and family structure.

Figure 1.5 shows the combined family and work status of low/moderate income families interviewed as part of the Families and Children Study (FACS 2002). This reveals some striking differences in family structure and work patterns between different low income families among ethnic groups:

- Ethnic minority groups differ according to the proportion of low/moderate income families with no adults in work of 16 hours a week: 44 per cent of Pakistani/Bangladeshi, compared to 33 per cent of white families and 36 per cent of Caribbean families.
- Pakistani/Bangladeshi low/moderate income families had a very low percentage of dual earner couples (only 2 per cent) and by far the highest rate of workless couples with children. This is rare; unemployment among couples with children is down to 6 per cent among all families and is usually associated with disability. This may reflect a belief among some Asian families that women should stay in the home, but may reflect wider labour market disadvantage, particularly low literacy/education levels, and the tendency for Bangladeshi women to marry much older men.
- For Indian families low incomes are more a product of low pay than worklessness – only 20 per cent of Indian low/moderate income families were workless (much lower than any other group), and they in fact had a higher rate of dual earners than white families (32 per cent compared to 19 per cent).
- Caribbean low/moderate income families had much higher rate of lone parenthood even than white low/moderate income families – 70 per cent were lone parents (compared to 46 per cent of white families). However Caribbean lone parents were more likely than white lone parents to be in work.

**Figure 1.5 Family/work status of low/moderate income white and ethnic minority groups**



Source: Families and Children Study (2002) (authors own analysis)<sup>12</sup>

The consequence of high levels of poverty and inequality within and between ethnic minority groups is that their children acquire many of the other ‘markers for disadvantage’ shown to be associated with low incomes. This can be demonstrated over a whole range of characteristics, but just three are briefly illustrated: housing quality, hardship and educational qualifications.

### 3. Housing

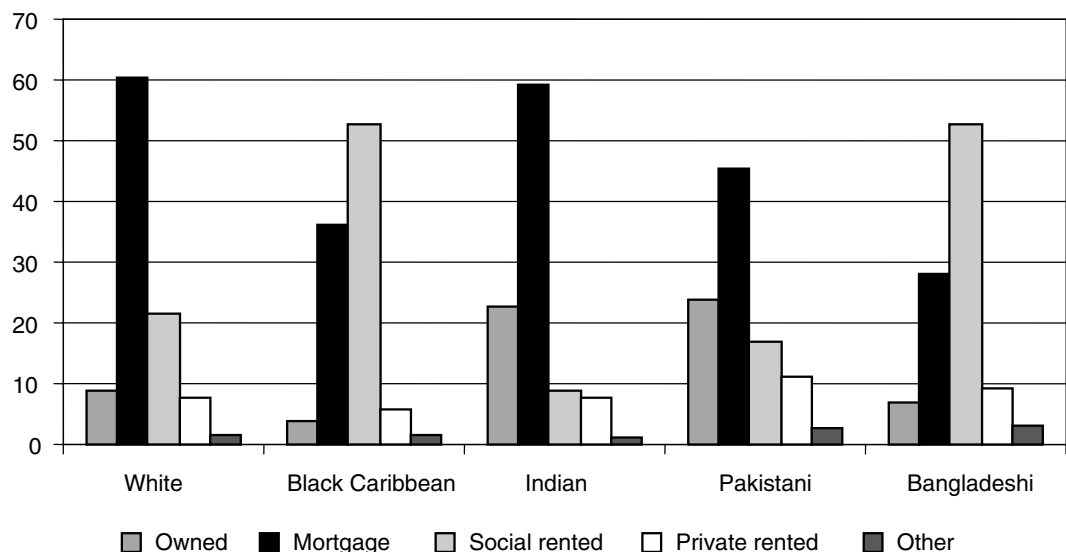
Figure 1.6 shows that, overall, 69 per cent of white children lived in owner-occupied households, 21 per cent lived in social rented accommodation and 8 per cent in private rented. This contrasts with Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi children, more than half of whom lived in social rented accommodation. However children from Indian families were more likely than white children to live in owner-occupied accommodation (91 compared with 69 per cent). Rates of household owner-occupation for Pakistani children followed closely behind (24 per cent and 46 per cent respectively).

Research has consistently shown social housing as a negative ‘marker for disadvantage’, closely associated with poor employment outcomes, poor health and a range of other outcomes linked to poverty. However, achieving owner-occupation may be only part of the story: the same Census data shows that only 9 per cent of white children lived in overcrowded accommodation, compared to 56 per cent of Bangladeshi children, 30 per cent of Black Caribbean children, 36 per cent of Pakistani children and 26 per cent of Indian children.

### 4. Hardship

Markers for disadvantage lead to persistent low incomes that raise families’ risks of hardship. A key outcome measure currently used in the DWP’s Families and Children Study is the ‘hardship measure’. This is a complex measure including going without essentials that most people agree families should not go without, living in poor and overcrowded housing, getting into unmanageable debt, and so on. Figure 1.7 shows that children from ethnic minority groups, particularly Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean families, were much more likely to be experiencing severe or moderate hardship than children from white families. Children from Indian families appear to be more likely than white children to be experiencing moderate hardship but slightly less likely to have fallen into severe hardship.

**Figure 1.6 Housing tenure by ethnic group: dependent children**



Source: 2001 Census (authors’ own analysis)<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Educational outcomes

Figure 1.8 shows a second outcome measure: trends in educational achievement by ethnic minority groups over the last decade. This shows that, whilst 52 per cent of white 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSEs (Grades A\*–C) in 2001, they were outperformed by Indian pupils, 60 per cent of whom achieved five or more passes. However, Figure 1.8 shows that, although standards improved across all groups, children from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean groups were much less likely to achieve Level 2 qualifications by the end of Year 11 (age 16).

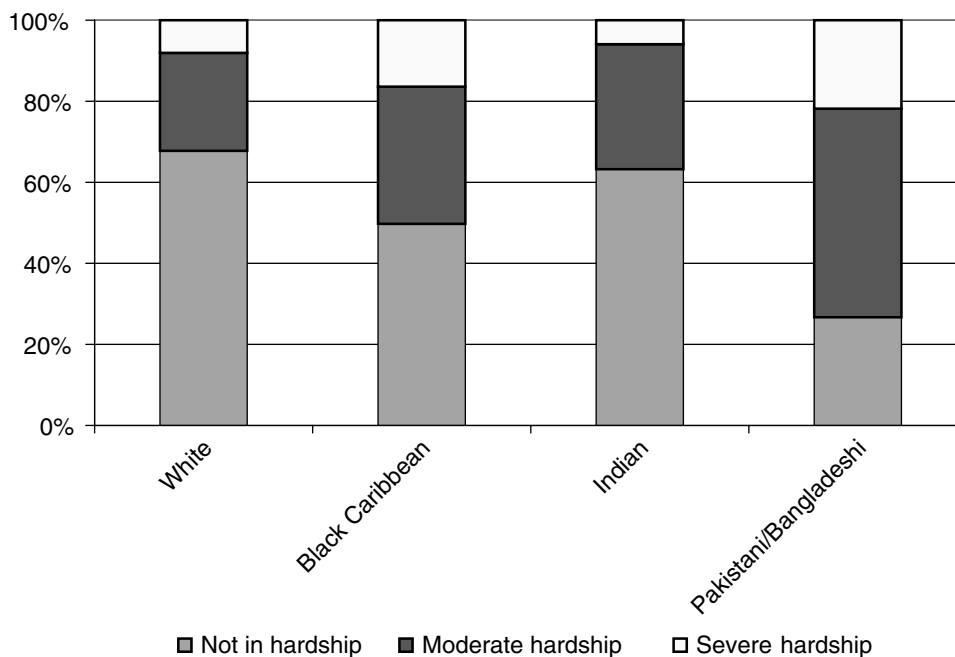
The Youth Cohort Studies show a different picture in the destinations of children after age 16 when ethnic minority children are *more* likely to stay on at school. In 2001, 69 per cent of white children continued in full-time education compared to 77 per cent of Pakistani children, 79 per cent of Bangladeshi children, 82 per cent of Black children and 91 per cent of children from Indian families. This suggests that early disadvantage may not necessarily have the same impact on the educational careers of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. Ethnic minority families are more willing to encourage continuing education, even if they have small family incomes to support them. It may also be true that white children who want to leave school at 16 find it easier to get a job.

### Conclusion

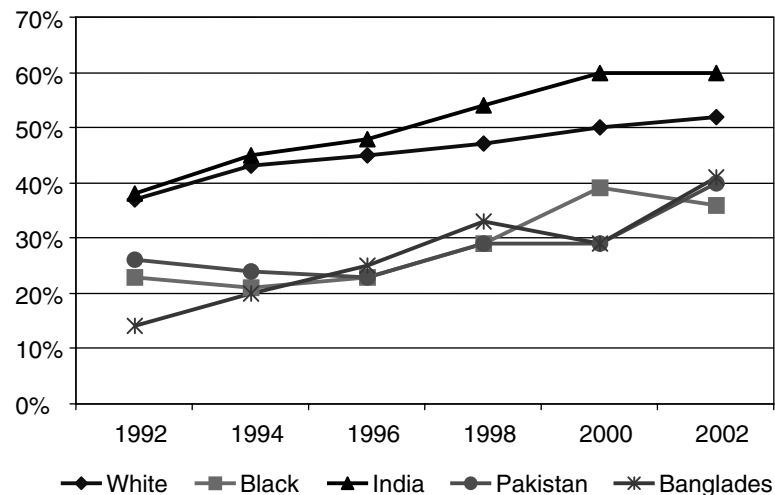
These data show that ethnic minority children are more likely than white children to live in households marked by disadvantage, persistent low income and to be prone to hardship. In summary, three points seem most important:

- Indian children live in families that are now on a par with white families *on average*, but still contain a low income group vulnerable to low wages and unemployment.
- Black Caribbean families have progressed unevenly. Higher rates of poverty among black children may be due mainly to their greater tendency to have only one resident parent. This is true even though black lone parents are more likely to have paid jobs compared to white lone parents.

**Figure 1.7 Hardship among children from ethnic minority groups**



Source: Families and Children Study (2001) (authors' own analysis)<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 1.8 Attainment of five or more GCSE grades A\*–C in Year 11**

Source: Youth Cohort Study (2001) (authors' own analysis)<sup>15</sup>

- Most strikingly, children in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (together with smaller numbers of Black Africans) appear to be in trouble. The majority of Bangladeshi families have every marker for disadvantage. Their incomes are so compressed into the lower part of the distribution that it is possible to wonder if the figures are right; but they are. As a result Bangladeshi children experience far more hardship than other groups.

All this may have different effects on children in different groups – Indian children's average achievement at GCSE now outstrips that of white children, and even Pakistani/Bangladeshi children do not appear to do as badly as their poverty would predict. Early evidence for these groups shows that – unlike low income white families – Asian children are growing up in families where high rates of poverty are accompanied nevertheless by high expectations of their children. Black Caribbean children on the other hand, and the boys in particular, give greater cause for concern, showing far more of the poor educational outcomes commonly associated with disadvantage and hardship in childhood.

## Notes

- 1 See Piachaud, D and Sutherland, H 'How Effective is the British Government's Attempt to Reduce Child Poverty?' Case Paper No. 38, March 2001.
- 2 Whilst the first three national surveys of ethnic minorities (Daniel, 1968; Smith, 1976; Brown, 1984) highlighted the disadvantaged economic position of ethnic minority groups, they were not able to provide a direct measure of the income of ethnic minority households. This was only rectified during the 1990s, when data from the Fourth National survey of Ethnic Minorities in Britain and the Family Resources Survey provided both information on household incomes and ethnicity.
- 3 This chapter draws particularly on findings from the following research: Berthoud, R (1998) 'The Incomes of Ethnic Minorities', ISER Report 98-1, University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research; Berthoud, R (2002) 'Poverty and Prosperity among Britain's Ethnic Minorities' *Benefits* 33:10 (1); Modood, T, Berthoud, R, Lackey, J, Nazaroo, J, Smith, P, Virdee, S, Beishon, S (1997) *Ethnic minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*, Policy Studies Institute; Platt, L, (2002) *Parallel lives: Poverty among ethnic minority groups in Britain*, CPAG.
- 4 See for example Marsh, A, McKay, S, Smith, A, and Stephenson, A 'Low Income Families in Britain: work, welfare and social security in 1999', DSS Report No. 138.
- 5 For further discussion see Platt (2002).

- 6 Census 2001 National Report for England and Wales.
- 7 Census 2001 National Report for England and Wales.
- 8 DWP (2002) Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution form 1994/5 to 2001/2.
- 9 Berthoud, R (2002) Poverty and Prosperity among Britain's Ethnic Minorities. *Benefits* 33:10 (1).
- 10 DWP (2002) Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution form 1994/5 to 2001/2.
- 11 In addition to the references given above, see also: Berthoud, R (2000) 'Ethnic employment penalties in Britain', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26: 3 (219–416); Karn, V (1997) Employment, Education, and Housing among the Ethnic Minority Populations of Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census, Vol. 4. HMSO; Owen, D, Reza, B, Green, A, Maguire, M, Pitcher, J (2000) 'Patterns of labour market participation in ethnic minority groups', *Labour Market Trends*, November; Platt, L, and Noble, M, (1999) *Race, place and poverty: Ethnic groups and low income distributions*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Twomey, B (2001) 'Labour market participation of ethnic groups', *Labour Market Trends*, January.
- 12 Low/moderate income = non-working, or working 16+ hours a week but earning less than Working Families Tax Credits eligibility limit plus 10 per cent. For further details see Marsh, A and Perry, J (2003) Families and Children Study: Family Change 1999–2001 DWP Research Report 180 and Vegeris, S and Perry, J (forthcoming) Families and Children Study: Report on Living Standards and the Children.
- 13 Census 2001 National Report for England and Wales.
- 14 Low/moderate income = non-working, or working 16+ hours a week but earning less than Working Families Tax Credits eligibility limit plus 10 per cent. For further details see Marsh, A and Perry, J (2003) Families and Children Study: Family Change 1999–2001 DWP Research Report 180 and Vegeris, S and Perry, J (forthcoming) Families and Children Study: Report on Living Standards and the Children.
- 15 Youth Cohort Study: The activities and experiences of 16 year olds: England and Wales 2002: DfES Statistical First Release (February 2002).

# Ethnic minority groups and the labour market

Jane McLuckie-Townsend

This chapter summarises some of the evidence about labour market disadvantage for minority ethnic groups and considers the implications for levels of poverty among some of these groups. It also looks at how current and future DWP policy will help to tackle this continuing inequality and outlines the strategy for cross-government action.

## The employment problem

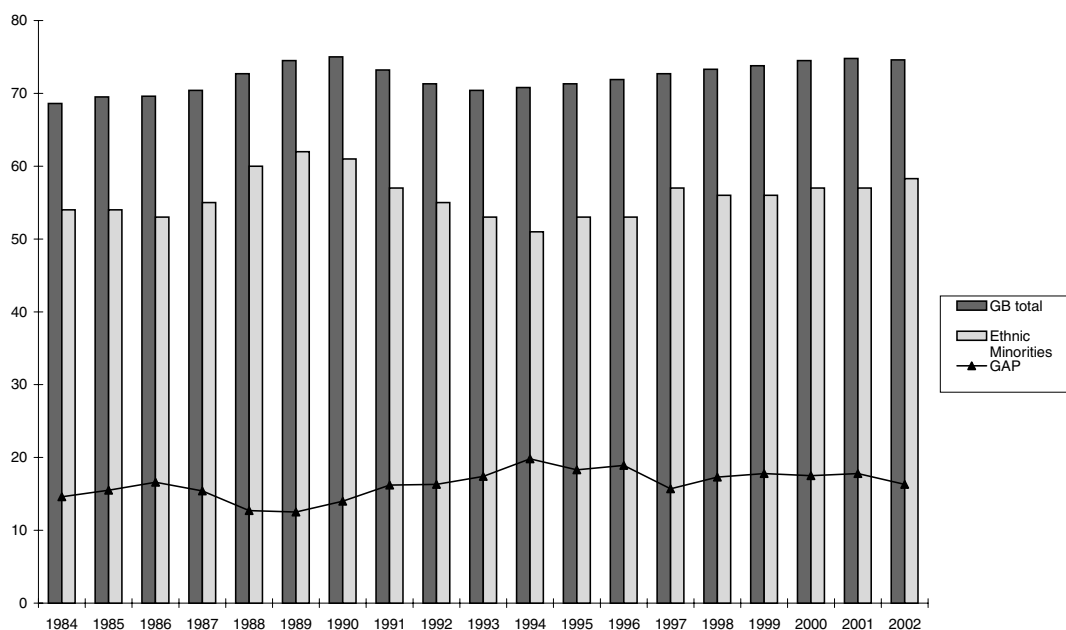
Figure 2.1 shows the employment rate of the working age ethnic minority population and the gap relative to the whole population.

The employment rate of members of ethnic minority groups in the UK has been consistently below that of the population overall. The gap between the rates is 17 percentage points and has not varied much in the last decade (Figure 2.1). The gap is considerably larger than that between African Americans and the population as a whole in the US, which is currently four percentage points.

There is a disparity between different groups and genders. For example, the Indian employment rate is 69 per cent, compared with an employment rate of 39 per cent for Bangladeshi groups. The employment rate for Bangladeshi women is as low as 16 per cent. On the other hand, Black Caribbean men have an employment rate of 63 per cent which is close to the rate for Black Caribbean men (67 per cent) and higher than for Bangladeshi men and the remaining black male groups.

Inactivity rates are part of the overall picture. The inactivity rates are high for many ethnic minority groups, both male and female, but particularly for females. This reflects a wide variety of factors: staying at home to look after children, being a student, sickness or

**Figure 2.1 Total GB versus ethnic minority group employment rates 1984–2002 (working age, Labour Force Survey Spring Quarters)**



disability. The combined affect of unemployment and inactivity is that 71 per cent of Pakistani women and 84 per cent of Bangladeshi women are not in employment. These are very high rates.

## Implications for poverty

Low employment for ethnic minority groups leads to poverty; ethnic minority households are more likely to be deprived than white households, even after controlling for a range of other factors (Table 2.1). Half of Pakistani families where at least one adult is working are poor. This is a higher rate than amongst white families where no one is working. Table 2.1 illustrates that 43 per cent of white people living in a household where no one is working have a low income compared with 50 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis living in a household where someone is working.

When deprivation indices are calculated ethnic minority groups are much more likely to be deprived even after other factors have been taken into account<sup>1</sup>. Bangladeshis, blacks and Pakistanis are the groups most affected. Deprivation has a number of components:

- **Housing.** Members of ethnic minority groups are more likely to live in poor quality housing. Whilst the numbers are similar for whites and Indians, over three times as many people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin live in unfit housing. As a recent Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) document states:

There is a significant amount of poor condition owner occupied stock in run down neighbourhoods, where owners can neither afford to improve their property, or move away. Much of this is located in the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the East and West Midlands, which also tend to be areas where ethnic minority households (particularly Pakistanis) have bought property. The low demand for this type of housing means that households are often trapped in areas with rising crime, economic decline and poor services. Others may simply abandon property, adding to the spirit of decline<sup>2</sup>.

- **Health.** Members of minority ethnic groups have significantly lower health status than whites. About 40 per cent of Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshis have poor health whilst this is the case for only a quarter of Indians, African Asians and Chinese<sup>3</sup>. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have a greater risk of heart disease than whites, whilst Caribbeans have the highest rates of hypertension.

- **Education and childcare.** Children from workless or low income households are disadvantaged in a number of ways as they grow up and are likely to be low achievers at school as a result. The link between affordable childcare and employment is important and affordable childcare is much less likely to be available in these disadvantaged areas.

All this means that poverty and worklessness among ethnic minorities is self-perpetuating. If people are unable to move to areas where there is a demand for labour their chances of

**Table 2.1 Percentage of people in households below 50 per cent of the national average income**

	White	Caribbean	African	Indian	Pakistani/ Bangladeshi	Chinese	Other
All Households	16	20	31	22	60	28	26
Working	9	8	9	15	50	18	14
Pensioner	23	29	–	–	–	–	–
Non-working	43	42	54	54	72	–	54

Source: Berthoud (2002)<sup>4</sup>

successfully gaining employment are reduced. If they are in ill health and/or poorly served by health services, their chances of entering or staying on inactive benefits are hugely increased. And if parents are workless, children are less likely to succeed at school and escape poverty.

### **Tackling the employment gap – DWP strategy to address the problem**

It is clear that ethnic minority group disadvantage is the product of a number of factors, which are likely to differ significantly between different ethnic groups and by location. Broadly, there is a consensus in the research literature that three factors are likely to be particularly important:

- **human capital** – most ethnic minority groups (though not all) have lower average levels of education and skills than whites: this is likely to lead to lower levels of employment, and lower pay for those in work;
- **geography** – ethnic minority populations are concentrated in disadvantaged areas;
- **ethnicity** itself – in particular, there is considerable evidence that members of ethnic minority groups are discriminated against in seeking employment. Some ethnic minority groups may also face cultural barriers to participating in the labour market, especially women.

It is hard to judge the significance of each of these factors, which will, in any event, vary according to the individual; for a highly educated Indian with poor employment outcomes, human capital is clearly not the cause of disadvantage and other factors must account for the problem.

A successful strategy must address each of the issues of geography, human capital and discrimination. There is no one-size-fits-all policy. The diversity of members of ethnic minority groups, and their barriers to work, mean that policies, while addressing each of the main barriers to work, must be targeted by geography and ethnic group.

### **What DWP is doing**

Current departmental action to meet the target is primarily delivered through Jobcentre Plus programmes and services, some of which have a geographical and ethnic minority group-specific focus. These include New Deals, Employment Zones, Action Teams and Ethnic Minority Outreach.

- New Deal for young people was the first programme to have a strategy for ethnic minority groups. It made New Deal partnerships look closely at how they delivered the programme and find new ways to reach different communities.
- The 15 Employment Zones have a remit to help address local barriers to work for long-term unemployed people, including those from ethnic minority groups. Success in this area is hard won, but Employment Zones do appear to be effective at placing people from ethnic minority groups into work. In addition, some of the 63 Action Teams were designed with a specific focus on particular ethnic minority communities. Both EZs and ATs provide a vehicle for experiment and innovation, resulting in good practice which can be extended across the whole network. Some valuable themes have already begun to emerge:
  - the proportion of staff from ethnic minority groups should reflect the people who live in the area;
  - the Personal Advisers employed need to speak the languages of the people they help;

- community groups should be engaged to help overcome ethnicity related cultural and religious barriers.
- Ethnic Minority Outreach was launched in April 2002 in the five main conurbations which house 75 per cent of the ethnic minority population using community based groups to deliver help to clients who do not currently use Jobcentre Plus services.
- Jobcentre Plus is using its target setting process to provide a greater focus on 258 wards with both high levels of disadvantage and high ethnic minority populations. Job entries from people living in these areas attract a premium, encouraging Jobcentre Plus to improve their performance in these areas.
- Additional Specialist Account Managers are being recruited to increase the capacity of Jobcentre Plus to open up further employment opportunities by persuading employers of the business case for diversity in areas of high concentration of ethnic minority groups. They will offer friendly, practical advice to help employers meet their recruitment needs, raising diversity issues in a low-key and informal manner.
- £8 million has been made available from April 2004 to enhance the ability of Jobcentre Plus to help ethnic minority communities in specific locations in areas with high rates of ethnic minority unemployment and inactivity. District Managers will draw down funds from a 'flexible pot' and will work with specialist account managers to identify the skills requirements of employers from under-represented sectors, and with intermediary organisations to equip jobless people from the target community with the job-specific skills.

## Cross-Government Strategy

DWP alone cannot narrow the employment gap. We have not yet evaluated fully all the policies outlined above, but we cannot expect them to make a significant dent in our Public Service Agreement (PSA) target. Real progress requires a coherent joined-up programme across government to address the three key factors we have identified:

- with the **Department for Education and Skills** – to drive up attainment at school and in further and higher education;
- with the **Department for Trade and Industry** – on employment rights and employer discrimination, and on promoting the business case for a diverse workforce and for improving recruitment and promotion practices;
- with the **Home Office** – who take the lead on tackling racism and community cohesion, and (through the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000) tackling institutional racism in the public services;
- with the **Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit** – to ensure that the links between ethnicity and geography feed through into area-based policies and the wider Neighbourhood Regeneration agenda.

The recently established cross-cutting Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force will be key to encouraging greater inter-departmental working and ensuring that Departments mainstream race issues in their policy development. The Task Force has been set up ensure that the 28 recommendations in the Strategy Unit report, Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market (March 2003) are implemented. It is led by Des Browne MP, the Minister of State for Work, and supported by a secretariat within DWP.

**Notes**

- 1 Kershaw, A, Drew, D and Grimsley, M (1999) Deprivation and ethnic cleavages: evidence from the 1991 UK Census Sample of Anonymised Records. Paper presented at the Spring conference of the International Sociological Association, Warsaw, 5–7 May 1999.
- 2 DTLR (2001) *Addressing the housing needs of black and minority ethnic people*, HMSO.
- 3 Nazroo, J (1997) *The Health of Britain's Ethnic Minorities: Findings of a National Survey*, Policy Studies Institute.
- 4 Berthoud, R (2002) *The Incomes of Ethnic Minorities*, Institute for Social and Economic Research, The University of Essex.

# Not seen and not heard: the case of young women from Bangladeshi and Pakistani origins

*Mandana Hendessi*

In 1998, the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) published the results of their comprehensive and groundbreaking research on ethnic minority groups in Britain<sup>1</sup>. Most striking was the proportion of young women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin who left school without qualifications: 52 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. The figures are enormously high, when compared with that for young white women – 26 per cent. Sadly, the figures have changed little since, leading to economic inactivity as high as 70 per cent for adult women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin<sup>2</sup> – a cycle of poverty and deprivation which will continue to have a spiralling effect, unless sustainable solutions are found.

These under achievement figures were a far cry from newspaper headlines of ‘girls outperforming boys’. Whilst attention has been given to boys falling behind girls in GCSE results (nationally), a disparity of such magnitude as the ‘without qualifications’ figures has been overlooked. Young women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin are falling behind everyone else and no one seems to worry or care about their under achievement.

It is as if they were an invisible group; it did not matter much if they did or did not achieve: they are not a burden on the national purse – they are neither ‘young offenders’ nor causing nuisance and ‘anti social behaviour’ in the neighbourhood, and they are rarely ending up as single teenage mothers relying on state benefits.

## **Causes of under achievement**

Research evidence suggests that poverty is one of the key factors leading to educational under achievement in young people. Bangladeshi and Pakistani families are amongst the poorest in Britain<sup>3</sup>. In addition to poverty, family and cultural norms and values are another factor causing under achievement, particularly for girls and young women. For many Bangladeshi and Pakistani families in Britain, the dominant cultural values advocate early marriage and motherhood – a woman’s primary role in life is considered to be a good wife and mother, for which she would not need formal education. Seventy-three per cent of Bangladeshi and 60 per cent of Pakistani adult women have no formal qualifications<sup>4</sup>.

When parents place little value on educating girls, they are not likely to encourage their regular attendance at school: household chores come first and school second, reinforcing the traditional gender division. If they are themselves poorly educated, they are less likely to motivate their children educationally. If they are poor, they are less likely to have the enthusiasm or the energy to support their children with schoolwork or help them resolve difficulties at school. If, in addition, there are crises such as domestic violence, the girls may well be too worried and preoccupied with their mother’s welfare and safety, unable to concentrate on their education. Falling behind could bring about further apathy and low self-esteem.

This form of self-exclusion is rarely recorded as ‘truancy’, as it is often backed up by sick notes and excuses. It is a form of self-exclusion, which is rarely acknowledged as an issue for the school, the family, the education authority or the government.

## **Not in education, employment or training, but in wedlock**

Many young women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds leave school without qualifications because they are coerced into early marriage. Although, in the absence of

research evidence it is unknown how many, ethnic minority women's organisations running helplines and advice sessions have reported a large number of calls and visits from distraught young women who have been forced to leave school to get married and have children.

The price they pay for defying early marriage is physical and psychological torment and violence. Women's organisations such as Southall Black Sisters and Newham Asian Women's Project are often organising places of safety for young women who have been physically and mentally battered and bruised by their parents and older siblings for refusing to consent to marriage. This is often the only chance these young women have to think options through in a safe and supportive environment, and many do despite the enormous challenges facing them.

## **Facing the facts**

Neither the state, nor ethnic minority communities, with the exception of women's organisations, have been brave enough to face the facts in the case of young Asian women's educational under achievement, its causes and devastating effects. They have been complicit through their inactivity. The government institutions, ranging from education to social services by and large have been obsessed with 'multiculturalism', where they have overlooked oppressive cultural norms and values in ethnic minority communities in the interest of 'tolerance'. In some cases, ethnic minority children and women have paid with their lives for this profound neglect (a recent example being the tragic case of Victoria Climbié).

Ethnic minority communities, on the other hand, have built a wall of denial around themselves, pretending that all is well and good and that they can always be self-sufficient and tackle 'their own problems' themselves. Both tendencies are symptoms of racism in society, and of a society too ready to blame.

The educational under achievement of Bangladeshi and Pakistani young women is a social issue that should concern all of us. The lid must be lifted on it. It needs to be examined openly and honestly and addressed effectively. It is a complex issue and there are no 'quick fixes'. It requires commitment from a multitude of stakeholders – schools, parents and carers, social services, youth workers, community groups and the Connexions Service – who must work together to provide adequate support to enable:

- parents to recognise the value and importance of education for young women through becoming more involved with the school and the curriculum; and
- young women to make informed choices in their lives.

However, first and foremost, the voices of young Asian women must be heard. They have to be given the opportunity to become visible. Ethnic minority women's organisations have for some time played such a catalytic and facilitative role. However, they are still too few and far between and the existing groups have little core funding to sustain service and project development. Government departments are often too keen to involve ethnic minority women's groups in research and consultations, but not so enthusiastic when it comes to raising their level of funding.

There should be more funding available through the DfES and the Home Office for community development in ethnic minority communities, promoting the setting up of new projects by women, particularly young women's projects, as well as supporting the existing ones to expand and reach out to many more isolated young women.

**Notes**

- 1 Modood, T, Berthoud, R, Lakey, J, Nazroo, J, Smith, P, Virdee, S, Beishon, S (1998) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*, Policy Studies Institute.
- 2 Dench, S, Evans, C, Meager, N, Williams, M, Willison, R (2002) *Key Indicators of Women's Position in Britain*. Women & Equality Unit, DTI.
- 3 Rahman, M, Palmer, G, Kenway, P (2002) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 4 Modood, T, Berthoud, R, Lakey, J, Nazroo, J, Smith, P, Virdee, S, Beishon, S (1998) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*, Policy Studies Institute.

# Looking forward – Newham

*Trevor Blackman*

With 56 per cent of residents belonging to a ethnic minority group, Newham is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse boroughs in Britain. It is also one of the most deprived and most profiles of the borough focus almost exclusively on the deprivation, social exclusion and poverty faced by a large percentage of the local population. The facts are stark – residents display features typical of a disadvantaged community such as low incomes, low levels of qualifications, low skills base, poor housing, and poor health. The Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>1</sup> ranks Newham within:

- The top 3 per cent of wards for deprivation in housing;
- The top 6 per cent for unemployment;
- The top 5 per cent for income deprivation;
- The top 4 per cent of educationally deprived wards;
- The top 5 per cent for child poverty.

However, these statistics, whilst accurately portraying many of the challenges faced by the people of Newham, cannot illustrate the huge amount of regeneration work going on within the borough, not least through the West Ham and Plaistow New Deal for Communities (NDC) project.

Newham is also characterised by its young population: 28 per cent of residents are aged under 16, the highest proportion of all the London boroughs<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, as well as the socio-economic profile of the population, the Youth Team in Newham has developed an ambitious strategy for young people aged 5 to 24 years, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that the needs of disabled and ethnic minority children are catered for.

## Meeting the challenge

In recent years the problems facing socially excluded young people have been afforded a greater priority by opinion formers working in a range of sectors. Since 1999, the West Ham and Plaistow NDC has identified the need to develop and improve play and youth provision in the area in order to place all children and young people firmly on the local regeneration map. In developing a strategy for young people, the Youth Team needed to take the following into account:

- over 60 languages are spoken in local schools;
- in 1999, 34.6 per cent of pupils achieved five or more A\*–C GCSEs compared to 47.9 per cent for England as a whole;
- of the resident population aged 16 to 74, 34 per cent had no qualifications;
- the number of homeless acceptances in 1998/1999 was 1,383, compared to the London average of 803;
- the borough comprises a very high percentage of lone parent families;
- unemployment continues to persist well above the average for London and nationally;
- in 2000, 8,092 residents were registered as unemployed;
- the unemployment rate was 8.6 per cent – the third highest in Greater London<sup>3</sup>.

We have placed a lot of emphasis on improving attendance and behaviour in schools as a means of boosting the achievements of local children and young people. Levels of school exclusions in the borough have reduced significantly from 66 in 1998/99 to 41 in 2000/01<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, progress has been made in reducing unauthorised absences, decreasing to 1.7 per cent for primary and 2.3 per cent for secondary in 2000/01. However, there is still a great need to focus time and resources in this area to ensure a positive decrease.

## **The NDC Youth Team strategy**

Our strategy uses play and youth work to provide social benefits for children and young people allowing them to mix with their peers and to exercise free choice. In doing so, their self-confidence and feelings of self-worth are increased. At this level, the assumed benefits are largely individual in the first instance but they do have widespread social benefits, including social cohesion and the building of community networks.

As part of the Policy Action Team report on Young People, the government identified both the need to 'drive forward investment' in services for children and young people and the need for 'the voluntary and community sectors to contribute'<sup>5</sup> to this work by having locally-led services working in partnership with local authorities and other sector providers.

Newham has a great need for coordinated play and youth work and therefore the NDC strategy links into the activity being developed through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Newham's Transforming Youth Work/Connexions Strategies, Newham Youth Service Strategy and the Crime and Disorder Strategy (with focus on Section 17), which all have children and young people as key priorities. The success of this strategy has depended thus far on the integration of work across these and other programmes.

The overarching aim of the Youth Team strategy is 'to build a framework of services in which children, young people and their families can flourish'.

More specifically, the strategy is based on three fundamental objectives:

- Strengthening targeted support services – so that vulnerable children and young people are better supported.
- Improvement of mainstream services – so that all children and young people are better served (especially ethnic minority groups and disabled young people).
- Establishment of new services that are firmly rooted in the 'wants' and 'needs' of young people. Ensuring the notion of Community Cohesion is embraced by all stakeholders, strengthening the involvement of children and young people in decision-making forums.

We are committed to ensuring that all children living within the NDC area have access to appropriate health services, educational opportunities, decent leisure facilities and training and participation opportunities. Fundamental to our strategy is our belief that the local community must contribute to the area's future prosperity.

### *A five-strand approach*

We have adopted a five-strand approach to meet the objectives of the NDC youth strategy.

## **Participation**

We take a rights-based approach to our work with children and young people, who are involved in both our service design and delivery. Involving young people at this level improves service access and uptake; it also ensures effective communication between

service providers and services users. To date we have established four youth forums in our youth projects. Our aim is to eventually provide the young people involved with the knowledge, skills and confidence to enable them to be co-opted on to the NDC board.

Too often services are designed without taking into account the specific needs of ethnic minority young people. Service opening times and gender mix are factors that many members of the community particularly take into account when considering the suitability of extra-curricular activities for their child.

Together with Leon Robinson, a black historian and Stephen Bourne, a writer, we have developed workshops and materials for secondary schools and youth clubs on black history aimed at young African and Caribbean males. This is a subject that has been neglected by schools in the past and thus far the young men involved are responding well. As another strand of this work we also engage Asian young women in physical activity in partnership with West Ham United football club.

Observers have identified that educational institutes, i.e. schools and youth clubs, are key access points for intervention with children, young people and their families. Teachers can often identify the early signs of anti social behaviour and low aspiration in children and young people. In Newham there are good examples of prevention work in schools, but this is usually short lived since it is aimed at secondary school students and therefore misses what many teachers feel is the ideal time to intervene and work with the child and their family, namely when they are at primary school. The acknowledgement that primary schools are well placed to pick up early signs of exclusion has informed the first level of our prevention strand.

### **Teenage pregnancy**

This strand of the strategy links directly to the government's goal to 'halve the rate of conception among under 18s in England by 2010, including a firmly established downward trend in the conception rates for under 16s'<sup>6</sup>.

By working with voluntary groups, social services, education and health departments we plan to reduce the numbers within the NDC area relating to both the under 18s and under 16s. We also work to help young parents return to education and eventual employment.

### **Health**

Recently expressed concerns over the reduction in physical activity and general energetic play among children and young people, as well as the increase in obesity and mental health problems, is a driving force of this strand. The provision of play and youth programmes that allow for physical activity benefits both the physical and psychological well-being of all children and young people.

### **Provision**

Many of the young people in the NDC area live in accommodation where there is no facility to play and this makes estate-based provision essential. Such provision is popular among parents, who are able to observe their children playing. Parks and green spaces in estates are ideal and they help to promote a sense of security among children and their parents alike. *'...space is a basic resource that children need in order to play. It is by this measure that we can begin to judge how seriously a community is attending to the needs of its children.'*<sup>7</sup>

## **National Standards: Out of school provision**

All NDC Youth Team provision meets national standards as outlined by the government via Ofsted inspectors. We also offer accreditation for many of the activities that the Youth Team provide to ensure that young people gain benefit from involvement.

## **Conclusion**

In deprived areas like Newham, shortage of money is often the main barrier to young people's involvement. Therefore, all of our activities, trips, training, and necessary equipment is either heavily subsidised or free of charge to young people.

We work with children and young people to develop their confidence, life skills and opportunities. We aim to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and hopelessness, working to build aspirations and expectations, so as to provide our young people with a brighter future.

## **Notes**

- 1 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Indices of Deprivation 2000*.
- 2 Office of National Statistics, *Neighbourhood Statistics 2001*.
- 3 Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey 1995/96.
- 4 Newham Education Development Plan 2002–2007, p 27.
- 5 National Statistics [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk).
- 6 Social Exclusion Unit, *Teenage Pregnancy Strategy*, 1999.
- 7 Guddenemi, M and Jambor, T (eds) *A Right to Play*, Little Rock 1992.