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Police Research Series
Paper 136

Attitudes of People from Minority Ethnic Communities towards a Career in the Police Service

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Police Research Series

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Editor: Carole F. Willis

Home Office

Policing and Reducing Crime Unit

Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

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Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC Unit) is part of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office. The PRC Unit carries out and commissions research in the social and management sciences on policing and crime reduction, broadening the role that PRG played.

The Police Research Series presents research material on crime prevention and detection as well as police management and organisation issues.

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Foreword

As one of the actions arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the police service of England and Wales was set challenging targets for recruitment from minority ethnic communities by the Home Secretary in 1999. The research presented here provides forces with an authoritative basis for deciding where to focus, and how to organise, the efforts they are making to reach those targets. The report underlines the impact which service delivery, and perceptions in relation to minority ethnic progression into the senior ranks, have on the attractiveness of a police career. Another important message is the need for national advertising to encourage potential applicants to feel that the police service is serious about wishing to recruit them. The findings from this research were fed into the earliest stages of developing the first national recruitment campaign for the police service, launched in August 2000.

Carole F. Willis
Head of Policing and Reducing Crime Unit
Research, Development and Statistics Directorate
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Executive summary

Whilst there are now more people from minority ethnic communities in the police service compared with ten years ago, the proportions remain low. This research was commissioned by the Home Office in the light of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (1999). In response to the recommendations in the report, the Home Office had drawn up targets for all police forces in England and Wales in their recruitment of people from minority ethnic communities to reflect the proportion in the economically active population locally (see Race Equality - The Home Secretary's Employment Targets, 1999). However, little up-to-date information was available about the attitudes of people from different minority ethnic communities towards a career with the police. This research sought to identify the main factors influencing people's attitudes towards a career in the police service and to examine how these might influence recruitment strategies.

The study adopted a wholly qualitative methodology and was carried out between January and May 2000. Thirty-two focus groups were undertaken, involving a total of 290 people aged 18-30 from different minority ethnic communities. Each focus group was held with people who had selected the same option from a list of ethnicity classifications. All the researchers involved in facilitating the focus group discussions were from minority ethnic groups themselves.

Key findings

Men and women from different minority ethnic communities, of different age groups, and living in different geographical areas were more similar to each other than different in their attitudes towards a police service career. Highlighted where relevant are the findings which seemed to differ for men and women, and for different minority ethnic groups, for example Pakistani and Bangladeshi women or black Caribbean respondents. Also highlighted are differences related to religious belief for practising Muslims.

Career expectations and perceptions of working in the police service

- Respondents put forward a host of attributes that they looked for in a job or career. Good pay and satisfying work were foremost in their minds, but a career with good prospects and getting on with their colleagues were also important. Pay was not necessarily the most important criterion. In terms of police work, safety was also an important factor. Practising Muslims were concerned that their need to pray be accommodated at work, and some had selected their current job on this basis.

- There was very limited awareness of what police work actually involved, but a desire to know more. People tended to associate policing with the role of police officer on the beat and knew little of other types of work, such as for support staff, in the service.
- The job of police officer was attractive to some respondents because it was thought to offer variety, challenge and excitement, whilst others saw it as a career with financial security. Respect and status were sometimes associated with the job and regarded as desirable. Some, particularly women, saw policing as an opportunity to work with their local community and contribute to society.
- A variety of skills were seen as desirable in the police including good communication skills, fairness in the conduct of their work, respect for the people they come into contact with, and the confidence to do the job. However, respondents perceived a fair degree of mismatch between these personal qualities and those presented by police officers.
- Asian women perceived a special contribution that they could make in supporting women experiencing domestic violence, and in terms of their interactions with Asian women generally, during police work.
- Attractive aspects of police work could, however, be far outweighed by the drawbacks envisaged. Respondents were discouraged by the following perceptions:
 - The thought of having to work in a racist environment, having to face prejudice from both colleagues and the general public on a daily basis.
 - The isolation of minority ethnic police officers in a predominantly white male culture leading to them having to deny their cultural identity in order to fit in.
 - The danger of the job and having to deal with unpleasant situations coupled with a lack of confidence in (racist) colleagues assisting them in circumstances where their life or physical safety were at risk.
 - The anticipated reactions of friends or family, who they thought might be disappointed, fearful for their safety, and perhaps hostile; they also felt that minority ethnic police officers might be put under unreasonable pressure to reveal sensitive and confidential information.

- Concerns over pressure from the local community to decide where their loyalties were and, for Asian Muslim women with strong religious beliefs, whether the job was appropriate for a woman.
- Black and Asian women were anxious about being subjected to both sexism and racism if they joined the police.
- A perception that minority ethnic police officers have little or no promotion prospects, which in turn would limit their chances of getting the financial rewards associated with the higher ranks of the police service.
- On balance, other jobs were perceived to offer respondents greater opportunities, particularly in terms of promotion and pay, and without the fear of danger or racism.
- Support staff jobs in the police were not associated with racism or danger and, therefore, had an appeal for some respondents in terms of future career plans. They also thought such jobs would offer an opportunity to be respected for their expertise in a particular field.

People who had previously considered a police career

- Some people had decided against a job with the police, partly because of misconceptions, for example regarding the height limit, but also because they had been put under pressure by their families. Fear of abuse from the general public was also a deciding factor, as was a belief that they would not get through the training. In some cases other jobs were more attractive. Respondents also believed people from minority ethnic communities were not getting a positive response when they applied.
- A few people in each of the 32 focus groups said they had tried to apply to join the police and remarked on the difficulties they had experienced in accessing the recruitment process, with a lack of follow-up and feedback at key points. A few felt that racism had been a deciding factor in their unsuccessful applications.

Views of the police organisation, its staff and service delivery

- Respondents talked about a prevailing police culture that was predominantly white and male, and excluding of those who were different. There were varied opinions as to the level of racism in the police, and in particular whether it was any more prevalent than in wider society, but its existence was not questioned. Perceptions ranged from 'inherently racist' to 'an intransigent minority'. However,

respondents agreed that the power vested in the police, and the responsibilities they have, meant that the police had to be seen to be better than other institutions.

- The police were thought not to understand people who had different cultures from their own, and to stereotype people from minority ethnic communities. Moreover, respondents perceived the police to make little effort to understand different cultures among their local community.
- Negative perceptions of the police were based on personal experiences both as victims of crime and as a result of the police tactic 'stop and search'. Respondents were concerned about their experiences, particularly the attitudes of police officers, which were sometimes put down to racism on the part of the police. References were also made to experiences of friends and family and the impact of the mass media, for example, in relation to police corruption and the Stephen Lawrence case.
- Respondents were keen not to generalise the bad experiences they had with the police to all police officers. There were accounts of positive experiences with both helpful and supportive police officers, but negative experiences appeared to be more memorable. Even so, a positive experience had led a respondent to consider joining the police. The skills and qualities which respondents had outlined as desirable for police officers were not thought to be common in those working in the Service.
- There was little awareness of any steps the police might have taken to tackle racism in the police, leading respondents to question the Service's commitment to dealing with discrimination and prejudice. This perceived lack of action led respondents to believe that minority ethnic police officers dropped out of the Service because of racism both from their colleagues and the general public. There was also a perception that racism lay behind the lack of minority ethnic faces among the senior ranks.

Strategies suggested by respondents to encourage people from minority ethnic communities to join the police

- Some respondents emphasised that racism in the police would need to be tackled before they would consider police work – this was a recurring theme. Many of their suggestions are already in place, or being introduced by forces, highlighting public lack of awareness of the attempts made by the police to attract applicants from minority ethnic communities. Respondents' suggestions are listed below:

- The police need to be seen to take steps to deal with racism.
- Racism should be severely dealt with and an independent panel should oversee how racism is handled in the police.
- The recruitment process needs to identify and exclude racists.
- Training needs to address racism directly.
- The way police stops and searches are handled needs to be addressed.
- The police need to raise their awareness of other cultures.
- More people from minority ethnic communities should be recruited and promoted on merit.
- Support structures should be available for minority ethnic police officers, particularly those experiencing racism.
- Police officers should be able to choose where they work (within or away from their local community).
- Different cultural needs should be accommodated and understood, such as adaptations to dress and places to pray.
- Respondents felt the recruitment process needed to be overhauled by:
 - Making information about recruitment more accessible;
 - Providing more information about police work and training;
 - Talking to potential recruits face-to-face;
 - Being more proactive in schools and colleges;
 - Presenting police work as a career rather than a job; and
 - Re-thinking the recruitment advertising used by the police.

- Respondents in Bangladeshi, black, Indian and Pakistani groups remarked on the appeal of television adverts for Army recruitment. The focus on intellectual abilities and the challenge to the individual, as well as using actors from minority ethnic communities, were viewed positively.

Views of the Home Office targets

Respondents were asked for their opinion of the targets set by the Home Office for the recruitment of people from minority ethnic communities.

- Respondents felt that increasing the numbers of officers from minority ethnic communities (which might require a focused campaign) in the police would be an attraction to people to join in itself. However, participants were keen to emphasise that seeing more people from minority ethnic communities in positions of influence in the police would send a clear message that promotion was a real possibility.
- Respondents were cynical about the sentiments behind the targets, but some felt that issues such as racism were at last being openly addressed. The targets were a start.
- There was a strong view that it was more important for the police to recruit people with the right personalities and attitudes, regardless of their ethnic background. Respondents were also keen that people like themselves should be seen to be recruited on merit rather than for reasons of positive discrimination.

Key implications for police recruitment strategies

- Respondents in the study did not dismiss the police service as a career, although forces have to overcome perceptions of unchecked racism. Current recruitment strategies reflect the suggestions made by respondents but forces need to work with their local communities to ensure that local people, and particularly potential recruits, are aware of the initiatives they have put in place.
- Respondents' attitudes to the police as an employer were clearly linked to their views of the service delivered by the organisation. Recruitment should therefore be seen as the responsibility of all employees of the service and not just those employed as specialists in human resources. Participants' views were informed by personal experience of policing tactics such as stops and searches, or as victims of crime, but also through indirect knowledge of police activity from family and friends, and the local and national media.

- Thorough monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are needed to identify and address any problems applicants experience with the recruitment process, once they reach the stage of expressing an interest in a police service career.
- National advertising, and carefully targeted local advertising, were found to be important in order to convince respondents that the service was serious about wishing to recruit them. Local advertising might also be used to promote initiatives which address respondents' concerns about policing tactics and joining the service.

Contents

	Page
Foreword	(iii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Executive summary	(v)
List of tables	(xiv)
1. Introduction	1
Background	1
What is known about attitudes towards the police service as a career	1
Aims	3
Research design	3
Police culture and racism	7
Report outline	7
2. Working in the police service: a potential career?	9
What were people looking for in a job?	9
Understanding of policing	10
Policing as a career	10
Policing compared to other careers	17
Personal qualities needed in the police service	18
Respondents who had considered a police career	19
3. Respondents' views of the police and service delivery	22
Respondents' experiences of policing	22
Police cultural awareness	25
Desirable qualities in police officers	26
Desirable and actual police qualities: the impact of police culture	28
Perceptions of racism in the police	28
4. Encouraging people from minority ethnic communities to join the police service	30
Tackling racism, poor communication and cultural awareness	30
Supporting police officers from minority ethnic communities	34
Improving recruitment strategies	37
Views of the Home Office targets for police forces	41

5. Conclusions	45
The police service as a potential career	45
Police officers and police culture	45
Encouraging potential applicants	46
Current police recruitment strategies	47
References	51
Appendix 1 The topic guide	54
Appendix 2 Sample characteristics	60
Appendix 3 Conduct of the research	64
Recent PRC publications	67

List of tables

Table No.	Caption	Page
1	Sample characteristics	5

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Background

In the last decade there have been changes in the profile of recruits into the police service. The average age of recruits has gone up over the last 25 years from 19 to 25 years old¹ and the gender and ethnic composition of the police service overall has altered gradually, with more women and greater numbers of people from minority ethnic communities. Even so the proportions of those from minority groups remain low. By way of example, people from minority ethnic communities constituted just over 3 per cent of police officers in London in 1999². This was far behind the percentage of the population of working age living in the same area, which was 22 per cent in 1992 according to the Labour Force Survey, and had risen to 25 per cent in 1999.

¹ Source: data collected for Bland et al's (1999) study on the career progression of ethnic minority police officers; median average.

² This had risen to just under 4 per cent by March 2000.

The proportion of officers from minority ethnic communities in the police service has been under public scrutiny since 1981 and the report of the Scarman inquiry into the Brixton Disorders. More recently, in response to the report of the inquiry into matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence (1999), the Home Office drew up an action plan, part of which was announced by the Home Secretary in April 1999 (The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: The Home Secretary's Action Plan). The announcement focused on the introduction of targets for all police forces in England and Wales in their recruitment from minority ethnic communities; targets were also set for retention and progression. The targets have been set over a ten year period according to proportions of the economically active population in local force areas and are intended to ensure that by 2009 all forces reflect their local minority ethnic population.

At this time, there was little up-to-date research on attitudes towards a police service career, nor was there very much available data on how attitudes might vary across different minority ethnic communities. The Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (Research Development and Statistics Directorate) commissioned BMRB Qualitative to carry out focus group research which would explore the factors influencing these attitudes with a view to assisting forces in meeting the targets set for recruitment.

What is known about attitudes towards the police service as a career

A variety of suggestions have been offered as to why the numbers of serving minority ethnic police officers in Britain remains low (see, for example, Wilson et al, 1984; Doyle, 1991; Oakley, 1996; Holdaway and Barron, 1997; GMP undated). In the United States, statutory quotas imposed on police forces were shown to lead to substantial increases in the proportion of officers from minority ethnic backgrounds (Leinen, 1984) although not to representative levels across the country and across the police organisation (Polk, 1995).

INTRODUCTION

Possible explanations for the situation in Britain have included: the police service being perceived as a racist organisation; the lack of minority ethnic role models; the negative impact of policing tactics (such as stops and searches) on minority ethnic communities; negative reactions from family or friends and people from specific communities having career aspirations that make the choice of a career with the police less likely. The negative attitudes held by young people in general towards the police (see, for example, Harkness et al, 1995) seem to be stronger for young people from minority ethnic communities (Aye Maung, 1995).

Nearly 20 per cent of respondents, including those from minority ethnic groups, had considered joining the police force according to Smith and Gray's survey in 1985 of London residents (n=2,420). For those who had not, the most commonly cited reasons were 'prefer other work' and 'other objections to nature of work' both of which merited further exploration. Racism was not specifically highlighted as a contributory issue.

Holdaway and Barron's (1997) study of officers who resigned from the service noted that the material attractions of a police career were similar for police officers from ethnic majority and minority communities. This finding has been stable over time; Holdaway had earlier noted the similarities in his 1991 study, and cited the findings of several studies, including that of Wilson et al, with a national sample of officers from minority ethnic communities (MIL Research Ltd, 1979; Wilson et al, 1984 cited in Holdaway, 1991).

Other research conducted for the fire service (Bucke, 1994), provides comparisons between the police service and other public sector work. For respondents from minority ethnic groups, the most important general qualities sought in employment were satisfying work, followed by good pay and equal career opportunities. A low proportion of minority ethnic respondents viewed the police and fire services as employers with equal opportunities for minority groups (around 20 per cent). Expectations of racism from colleagues and when dealing with members of the public were worse for the police service, with over half the respondents believing they would encounter racism from the public and colleagues, compared to around a quarter for the fire service.

Bucke's study also looked at differences between people from different minority ethnic communities in terms of their preferences when asked to choose between the fire service, the police, the armed forces and nursing. The fire service was first choice of career for nearly half the male 'Afro-Caribbean' respondents, with less than 5 per cent picking the police service as first choice. However, the police service was more popular than the fire service with men and women from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds.

This research set out to explore the factors which influence the current attitudes of people from different minority ethnic communities towards careers in general and in particular, towards the police service. Attempts were made to draw out suggestions as to how the service might overcome barriers which respondents felt existed.

Aims

The research had two key aims:

1. To identify the main factors influencing the attitudes of minority ethnic communities towards a career in the police service
2. To assess how future force recruitment strategies might best help meet targets set for minority ethnic recruitment

Research design

This research adopted a wholly qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, are ideal for exploring complex issues. They are perhaps the principal method where the data required relates to deeply embedded and possibly sensitive material, such as that needed here. Focus group discussions were felt to be the best way to obtain useful data on the subject of a career in the police. The dynamics of a group discussion facilitate the development of ideas on a subject which respondents may not have previously considered. The discussions are led by moderators or facilitators who are trained to use the dynamics of the situation to explore, in detail, the range of views, beliefs and attitudes held by the participants.

The fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2000. Each focus group discussion lasted between 1½ to 2 hours. All the researchers involved in facilitating the focus group discussions were from minority ethnic groups themselves, as it was felt that people would feel more comfortable in talking freely, particularly around the sensitive topics that the discussion might cover.

The discussions were guided by the facilitator using a topic guide, or aide memoire, that allowed questioning that was responsive to the issues arising. Special care was taken to ensure that all views had a full opportunity to emerge, with the use of the topic guide ensuring that the same issues were covered across all the discussions. A copy of the topic guide can be found in Appendix 1. All the group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The tapes were confidential and available only to the research team.

INTRODUCTION

The 32 focus groups were conducted in five different locations around England and involved a total of 290 people from different minority ethnic groups. They were conducted in a non-threatening and congenial atmosphere, either the recruiter's own home or a community venue, whichever was the most convenient and appropriate. The average number of people in each group was nine. As well as ethnic background, region and gender, group participants were controlled for age (to reflect minimum joining age and main recruitment target group) and level of qualifications, to reflect the police service intake (see Table 1 for details). In order to allow for single sex groups without restricting other selection criteria, a greater number of groups were conducted with people from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds.

The findings from this study present a host of factors which were pertinent to respondents' attitudes towards a police service career. However, the research was not looking to produce statistics, but to identify the range of issues which seemed most important to people when considering or excluding a career in the police. Further research would be needed if the aim was to measure the extent of the views described in this report on a national basis. The study did not include white participants, given resource implications and considering that they were not under-represented in the service, did not need to be targeted by police forces, and because previous research had explored the motivations and experiences of white recruits in some detail (see Fielding, 1988).

Group discussions have known advantages, presented here, and disadvantages which are presented in the following paragraph. Firstly, they provide an ideal forum for generating ideas. The dynamics of working in a group together and exchanging views and thoughts on the research issues encourages participants to think creatively and generate solutions. Secondly, the exposure to other's views on the research questions can help participants to explore the issues from different perspectives. The discussion format enables participants to challenge the views of others and question the basis of their own views, leading to more penetrating and insightful responses (see for example Morgan, 1997).

Disadvantages of focus group discussions are that strong personalities can dominate, and those who are less confident or hold a minority viewpoint may feel inhibited in sharing their views. Also, the group may react negatively to the subject matter. However, skilled moderators can overcome this as far as possible by encouraging quieter people to express their views and encouraging participants to consider both negative and positive aspects of an issue.

Table 1: Sample characteristics	
Respondents	Number
Ethnic background	
Black Caribbean	34
Black African	32
Indian	65
Pakistani	59
Bangladeshi	39
Chinese	23
Turkish	19
Greek	19
Age	
18-21	105
22-25	90
26-30	95
Sex	
Male	156
Female	134
Employment experience (excluding casual work)	
None	93
Less than 5 years	127
Over 5 years	70
Highest educational qualification	
5 GCSEs or equivalent	77
'A' level or equivalent	98
Studying for a degree	50
Degree	65
Geographical location	
Inner London (Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Camden) and Outer London (Southall, Southgate, Palmers Green)	185
Bradford	38
Manchester	17
Birmingham	50
Total	290

INTRODUCTION

Classification of ethnic background

The classifications of ethnic background used in this study were based on those used in the official statistics such as the Census, with an important distinction. The research steering group felt that it would be unsatisfactory to conduct groups of mixed ethnic background under the 'other' classification, but wanted to include a group of individuals from a single self-defined ethnic background to provide a comparison to the main ethnic groups represented.

After discussion with members of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Positive Action Team, and with a representative of the National Black Police Association, it was agreed that groups would be conducted with people from Turkish and Greek backgrounds. This decision was taken given that, within the MPS, officers from these groups have successfully argued that they should be monitored as part of the force's minority ethnic strength, although they would normally be included under a 'white' category within official classification systems. The tribunal case for racial and sexual discrimination against the MPS, involving a member of staff from a Turkish background (*Locker vs The Commissioners of Police for the Metropolis*, 1993) provides further indication that staff from this group might be subject to prejudice and discriminatory behaviour within the service. Turkish and Greek communities are also recognised as distinct within the approaches to recruiting taken by the MPS.

CRE guidance suggests that ethnic classification should not be based on nationality, but on ethnicity. We should therefore emphasise that the terms 'Bangladeshi', 'Chinese', 'Greek', 'Indian', 'Pakistani' and 'Turkish' are used when referring to people who identified with these labels as indicative of their ethnic background, rather than as representative of their nationality. The term 'Asian' has been used to group respondents from Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani backgrounds where findings were the same across these classifications but differences are drawn out where relevant. The distinctions are important given that, for example, the socio-economic profile of people from Indian backgrounds is known to be different to people from Bangladeshi backgrounds.

Respondents were asked to pick as many options as they felt best described themselves from the list they were presented with (which included an 'other' category). The list included 'British' to recognise some people's desire to include 'British' as part of their identity. The scope of the research meant that it would not be possible to provide separate focus groups for every possible combination of answers to the ethnicity question. However, the recruiters were explicit about the composition of the focus groups and offered people the opportunity to take part in the focus group discussion of their choice. People of dual heritage or 'mixed' ethnicity were therefore able to choose a focus group according to their preference.

Police culture and racism

The terms police culture and racism were used by respondents in the focus groups. These terms arose spontaneously, they were not the result of specific questions asked by the research team. The focus group guide did not set out to define any specific terms or to restrict respondents' use of language. In this report the terms police culture and racism are used where the respondents in the groups have used them. They cannot therefore be tightly defined but rather must be understood in the context of respondents' contributions to discussions.

Nonetheless, readers may bear in mind the following definition of institutional racism set out in the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (drawing on submissions from the Metropolitan Black Police Association and Ben Bowling):

'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 disadvantage minority ethnic people.' (The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 1999.)

Similarly, readers may bear in mind key aspects of police sub-culture which have been identified in previous studies: the sense of mission; the desire for action and excitement; an Us/Them vision of society with a racist element; authoritarianism; conservatism; and cynicism (see Fielding 1988; Reiner 1992; Waddington 1999).

Report outline

This report is divided into five chapters. Following this overview of the aims of the research, and research methods used (described in more detail in the Appendix), two chapters explore the main factors found to influence respondents' attitudes towards the police service as a career. Chapter 2 looks at factors related to the police service as just one of many competing potential employers in the labour market. It begins by looking at career aspirations in general, followed by respondents' understanding of what the job of policing involves. Their ambitions are then related to their understanding of police work. This chapter also explores their awareness of jobs other than police officer roles available in the police service. Possible gaps in knowledge and any misconceptions among respondents regarding police work are described, as are the types of concern which need to be addressed if recruitment strategies are to reach potential police recruits from minority ethnic communities.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 presents factors influencing respondents which arise from their understanding and experience of police service delivery. It describes respondents' views, experiences and perceptions of the police organisation and its staff. The aim of this chapter is to provide a context in which to set respondents' many suggestions for how the police could go about recruiting more people from minority ethnic communities. Their ideas cannot be seen independently from their views of the police – they are very much intertwined. It is our belief that a detailed understanding of why respondents' perceptions exist will enable the police to develop recruitment strategies that can be both sensitive to the needs of new recruits from minority ethnic communities, but also to help explain any initiatives to existing police officers.

Chapter 4 describes the various suggestions they made with regard to how people from minority ethnic communities could be encouraged to join the police. These ideas were gathered by exploring which aspects of the police they found attractive or off-putting (for them personally), what steps might be taken more generally, and through an exploration of advertising material used by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)³. In particular, this section looks at the experiences of people who had already considered a career in the police service.

Chapter 5 draws the findings together, and relates them to current police recruitment strategies and means of evaluating success. Information in this chapter is drawn from work carried out by Home Office staff.

³ *The material was selected to provoke discussion rather than as a model example of advertising. The research team did not wish to rely on memories of advertising campaigns and also wanted to use the same stimulus in all the groups rather than using local advertising in each case. The MPS campaign was up-to-date and already in the public domain.*

2. Working in the police service: a potential career?

This chapter begins by exploring respondents' views on work and careers more generally in order to clearly identify whether there were key discrepancies between what people from minority ethnic communities look for in a job and what the police service offer. Respondents' understanding of what the police officer role entails is presented here, with a view to exploring which aspects of the job could be potentially discouraging to people from minority ethnic communities and uncovering any misconceptions. The key aspects of respondents' views of policing as a career are then examined.

Racism was a key consideration, and respondents' understanding and experience of racism in the police service is explored in some detail in the next chapter 'Respondents' Views of the Police'.

This research was not looking to provide statistics on how many people would consider joining the police, rather it sought to explore the main considerations to be addressed for people from minority ethnic communities when asked to think of the police as potential employers. The broad trend of response in the focus groups is set out in the section entitled 'Policing compared with other careers' and mention is made of their view of support staff or non-operational roles compared to operational police officer roles⁴. Some respondents came to the focus groups having already considered a job with the police as a career option and their experiences are set out in the final section of this chapter.

What were people looking for in a job?

Aspirations and career expectations mentioned by the respondents were similar to those mentioned in research discussed earlier (Holdaway and Barron, 1997; see also James, 1992) which suggests that people from minority ethnic communities would not automatically rule out working for the police from potential future careers – were it not for other barriers to entry perceived by respondents.

Respondents were asked to suggest any important attributes in choosing a job and then to pick out those that were most important. A host of attributes were mentioned including good pay, job satisfaction, long-term prospects, stress-free work, getting on with your colleagues, helping others, safety, doing interesting work, variety, sociable hours and flexibility.

Some cultural issues were also important, for example, understanding and accommodating a person's need to pray several times a day - a factor which appeared more of an issue for both male and female respondents in Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups. Both male and female respondents in Indian, Pakistani,

⁴ Operational police officer roles include patrol, community beat, detective work, taskforce and territorial support. Non-operational police officer roles include training and more administrative positions such as crime desks. The service has been increasingly civilianised and the distinction between police officer and support staff roles is sometimes unclear. Roles in which both police officers and support staff are employed, include Scenes of Crimes Officers (SOCOs) and communications staff in control rooms.

Bangladeshi and Chinese groups, talked about status being an important aspect of a job, something on which a great deal of emphasis was placed by their parents.

Understanding of policing

Respondents, across all minority ethnic groups, had limited awareness of what the police actually do beyond a general idea of protecting the community from crime. However, some respondents, scattered across all of the groups, mentioned more specific roles and responsibilities. Spontaneous responses revolved around police officers on the beat, paperwork and investigating crimes. Associated with this view was a high perception of danger and risk, as well as having to deal with upsetting, difficult and potentially life-threatening situations.

'They do put their lives at risk, when they go to answer calls. I mean they're constantly answering calls, they don't know what they're going to meet when they go and answer a call.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Whilst the police service employs people to undertake a variety of jobs from accountants to personnel officers, there was little knowledge of jobs carried out by 'civilian' or support staff among the respondents. Some, particularly those who were interested in joining the police, had a better understanding of the range of jobs available and mentioned forensics⁵ and administration jobs. Respondents in Asian groups surmised that the police had to operate just like any other organisation and therefore presumed a need for other support jobs.

⁵ Scenes of Crime Officers (SOCOs) can be support staff or police officers.

Respondents did not seem to be aware that police officers could specialise, and therefore not work on the beat, after completing their two years probation. In general, they were not aware of the distinction between operational and non-operational officer posts. However, in many forces there are now far fewer non-operational posts for police officers than in the past, due to increased 'civilianisation' of posts which do not require police powers.

Policing as a career

Attractive attributes of the police career mentioned were variety and excitement, respect and status, financial security and wearing a uniform. Some other key career choice considerations mentioned above were of particular pertinence to people's views on the police as a potential career – these included job satisfaction, pay, promotion prospects and getting on with your colleagues. These elements, as well as the opportunity to work with the local community, were seen to have both attractions and drawbacks in relation to policing. Respondents also had concerns

around accommodation of their religious and cultural needs. Some aspects of police work which had not been raised in relation to other careers were raised as negative features of the work, including racism, sexism, danger and working hours.

Attractive aspects of policing as a career

- Variety in work was thought to be important and some respondents in all the groups were attracted to the police service because they saw the police officer role as one which offered variation and provided a challenge. Some were drawn to the excitement they thought would be involved, for example, when driving police cars – a view often expressed in the Asian groups.
- The job of police officer was also seen as one that could offer the respect and status that some respondents sought, particularly in Indian and Pakistani male groups.
- Respondents in black, Asian, Greek and Turkish groups perceived working in the police service to offer a career with long-term financial security.
- Some respondents from the Indian and Pakistani male groups, across the age ranges, liked the idea of wearing a uniform.

Pay

Not surprisingly, having a good salary was important to respondents, particularly men, although other job attributes were also important. Respondents were asked for their reactions to how much the police were paid. An approximate starting salary of £18,000 was indicated; roughly what recruits to most forces received, at the time of the research, after initial training, which could be 18-32 weeks depending on the force⁶.

Initial reactions to the salary were positive, but on reflection respondents felt that the pay needed to be higher to reflect the level of danger and risk associated with police work. Though differences might have been expected, there were no noticeable variations in views towards pay between ethnic groups or geographical regions.

'[The police don't get enough money.] Not for the rubbish they take.'
(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

⁶ This was chosen as a suitable midpoint between the starting salary of approximately £16,500 and the post probation salary of approximately £19,500 which constables would usually reach two years after joining.

Promotion prospects

Having a job with promotion prospects was very important to respondents from all ethnic groups, and regardless of gender. Respondents noted that working one's way up the ladder brought with it many advantages, not least in terms of financial rewards, but also status, responsibility and respect.

'Prospects. I wouldn't stay in a job if I knew I had no future in it.'

(Chinese focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Camden)

However, male and female respondents in black Caribbean (and the university student group), black African, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups perceived the police as a job where their career goals would not be realised, either because it would take longer for a person from a minority ethnic community to get to the top or, more significantly, they would not be allowed to reach the higher echelons of the police at all:

'In the past couple of years there've been cases on the news where they are saying there's been really good cadets - they were [saying] they should be going up the ranks - but they've been denied promotion simply on the grounds that they're Asian.'

'They get to a certain level then there's this unofficial ceiling there that comes in.'

(Indian focus group, men, 25-30, Bradford)

Concern over not realising career goals was less emphasised by respondents in Turkish, Greek and Chinese groups which might suggest they were less negative about the potential for them to reach higher ranks.

Both male and female respondents in all groups pointed to the lack of minority ethnic faces in senior positions in the police, including both 'visible' and 'less visible' minority ethnic officers (they wondered how many such people there actually were) and judged from this that their promotion prospects would be limited. However, it was suggested that this could relate to the low number of police officers from minority ethnic communities overall, in that there was not the 'pool' of people to promote from – something that might change as numbers increased. Whilst respondents were impressed with the potential to earn a good salary from working for the police, people in all the groups did not believe they would be promoted to the ranks with the best financial rewards.

'You won't get us in there unless we can see ourselves progressing basically, do you see what I mean? If we cannot see black people moving up fast, on the fast track of the police force then you ain't going to get no brothers there that want to do it.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Getting on with colleagues and cultural acceptance

Respondents from all groups remarked on the social aspects of work and the importance of getting on with colleagues. If the atmosphere was right at work then other problems could be handled more easily.

'The actual people you work with makes or breaks a job. That's what makes or breaks whether you get job satisfaction at the end of the day or not. And what you're actually doing sometimes can be insignificant, not insignificant, but if it's a stressful job it is helped a great deal if you are working with your colleagues, it's much more relaxed, more easy going and that's a big thing.'

(Pakistani focus group, men, 25-30, Birmingham)

There were also important issues related to how colleagues treated them, particularly being respected by management, but also being valued for their personal identity and skills:

'Where I work, what I really like is that my colleagues they value me as a person. They value me for who I am. I'm a Bangladeshi person, I'm Muslim and ... there's no discrimination. They treat me with respect and they value who I am and where I come from and that I have something to contribute and you know [that] I can bring skills from my background into the job.'

(Bangladeshi focus group, women, 25-30, Manchester)

Concerns about not being respected as a minority ethnic officer were particularly raised by male respondents in black Caribbean and Asian groups.

Aware that there were few people from minority ethnic communities in the police, respondents feared being isolated by their white colleagues. They wondered whether they would be treated as an equal, and whether they would be able to fit in with the police culture. Some respondents were concerned that they would have to deny their own cultural identity in order to fit in – that is present themselves as culturally 'white' – a view most strongly expressed by respondents in Asian and Turkish groups.

Religious and cultural considerations

Practising Muslims were concerned that shift-patterns would disrupt prayer times. Asian Muslim women were concerned about having to wear trousers as part of the uniform and whether they would be able to wear a head scarf.

Women from Muslim backgrounds, despite foreseeing a number of problems in joining the police, did not necessarily see these as insurmountable. There was concern, however, that police work would be seen by others as a man's job and inappropriate for a woman. They explained that this was because men were expected to take on a protecting role, like the police.

'The police officer ... role is ... to protect the society. To protect them, and in Islamic terms the male is the protector. He is the one that provides for the woman and so in that sense you can't put a woman in that role.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

Religious prohibitions around men and women touching could make it difficult for a practising Muslim woman to go about her duties. Even so, some respondents were keen to stress that it could be conceivable for taboos to be broken if their job made it difficult to do otherwise, for example, a doctor. This issue was hotly debated, with some respondents considering the idea of a Muslim woman joining the police as 'against Islam' (as they would be required to interact with men), whilst others had already considered the police as a potential career not seeing such taboos as barriers.

Working with the local community

People in all the groups, but particularly women, were attracted to the idea of working with their local community.

'Yeah, that I might make a difference as a black person. That's what would attract me, that I'm doing something for my community.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

Women talked about their interest in helping the victims of domestic violence, seeing special benefits in being able to understand the needs of their local community.

Despite concerns about certain aspects of the policing role for Muslim women, there were perceived advantages. A Muslim police woman would know about certain customs, and could perhaps have intervened in a situation described in the following section which, according to respondents, escalated into a riot. Similarly in

cases of domestic violence, an Asian woman would understand the particular sensitivities that another Asian woman might face in terms of social standing and dignity.

'[In a] domestic violence case – [an Asian woman] wouldn't admit it completely to an Asian [male] officer. She would feel that, you know, she'd think he'd be judging her. Only a woman can tell that, you know.'

(Bangladeshi focus group, women, 25-30, Manchester)

However, respondents in black African, Asian (including Asian students) and Chinese groups also commented on how a person's family and friends might be disappointed if they joined the police because it was not perceived to be a job with high status. Male respondents in black Caribbean and Indian groups thought they might be subjected to anti-police feeling and accused of becoming 'white'. Others, across all the groups, remarked on the difficulties of working in the local area where they might potentially have to arrest someone they knew socially. One woman drew an analogy with her experiences as a doctor's receptionist and the pressure she had been put under to reveal information about family members and relations:

'I worked in a doctor's surgery and I got a lot of ... well unfortunately the whole of my family was at that doctor's surgery, registered there and everyone wanted to know who was pregnant and who wasn't and whatever. And I said no to them and a lot of them were like [angry], you know, but I've said no to them.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

Some Pakistani men were concerned about having to swear allegiance to the Queen as a police officer. This debate focussed on people sometimes having divided loyalties and they anticipated being placed under considerable pressure to 'own up to' their loyalties by relatives and friends.

'You'd have a ... professional responsibility to your job, and then you'd have a different responsibility to your community people - especially if they're friends - and [the police] have to be very sensitive to [that].'

(Bangladeshi focus group, women, 18-24, Birmingham)

Racism

Generally, respondents in all the groups expressed deep reservations at the thought of having to work in what they saw as a racist environment, 'day in-day out'. They felt they would be subjected to racist abuse from many angles: from racist colleagues and from the general public. They were not prompted with questions asking specifically about racism.

'You're fighting too many battles. You're not only fighting with your colleagues, you're fighting with the system, and you're also fighting the public to do your job. To be in the police force you're not just taking on the one job, you're taking on everything.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

The next chapter of this report explores the views of respondents towards the police service in general, which entails a particular focus on their views of racism in the police service.

Sexism

Black and Asian women commented on female police officers having to contend with sexism from male colleagues. They were not prompted to talk about sexism by a specific question in the topic guide. They felt that they would be subjected to abuse not only because they were female but because they came from a minority ethnic community:

'At the end of the day she is a white woman, she is being harassed, she's spoken out. She was a white woman and she lost the [sexual harassment] case. So what chance have we Asian women got? We're coloured and we're women. That's two things as a bad point for us.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

Muslim Asian women also remarked that they would be subjected to a particular kind of taunt due to their style of dress, which includes full-length garments and head coverings.

Danger and unpleasantness

Safety was not a key issue for respondents when they spontaneously talked about key attributes they looked for in a job. However, it became an important issue for respondents in all of the groups when they considered police work, which they saw as not only dangerous and risky, but also unpleasant. Women made references to not wanting to work late at night, for example, a Bangladeshi woman commented that she would need to make sure she had transport home if a job entailed working late nights. Some people, across all the groups, found the idea of long hours and shift work off-putting in general.

The dangerous and unpleasant aspects of police work were not only off-putting in themselves, but were coupled with a sense that, if exposed to danger during police work, members of minority ethnic groups could not rely on the support of colleagues

who might be racist towards them. Respondents in black Caribbean, Pakistani and Turkish groups commented on the bonds that police officers were likely to have when working together, and that these would be crucial at times of danger.

'The atmosphere has got to be right when you go to work, these are the people that you're working with, if your [police] colleagues don't like it then what about the next time you're on the street and you're getting your head shoved in? Well they'll just turn a blind eye, you know. It's not like any other office job, if you don't like someone you can say "oh bollocks, I won't talk to them for a week". It doesn't matter. This chap that you don't like, you could be on the front line with him, you could be relying on him to save your life.'

(Pakistani focus group, men, 18-24, Bradford)

Policing compared to other careers

Whilst people could see benefits to joining the police, for respondents in all the groups these were far outweighed by the factors that would put them off. In all, it seemed that respondents felt the negative aspects, particularly racism, meant that police work was not attractive – there were easier ways to make more money.

'And when you think about it, it's quite a risky job as well, full of danger. I mean, say you are getting the same [pay], would you rather sit in the office? Why have the risk.'

(Chinese focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Camden)

Other jobs were seen to offer respondents the opportunity of promotion, and therefore a higher salary than the police could offer, without the danger.

Support roles in the police service

Whilst some respondents had reservations about joining the police service as a police officer, people in Asian and Chinese groups did not make the same connections with other jobs in the police. Desk-based jobs, or those requiring specialist skills, like information technology, were not associated with racism or danger, and were therefore attractive. The low risk of danger was particularly appealing to women.

As has already been described in this report, respondents were concerned about the racism they felt they would be subjected to in the police, but this very much related to the job of an operational police officer rather than other jobs. This was partly because (direct) racism was thought to be particularly marked on the streets – both from the general public and other police officers. However, a few respondents in

Chinese and Greek groups and in the black student group did not perceive other jobs in the service to be so likely to provide job satisfaction.

'I'd say if you become a policeman, you look at all the other jobs [in the police], they're not as challenging. They're boring compared to theirs really, aren't they? Knowing that you're working for the police and then these people are out stopping crime, and you're sealing envelopes or whatever.'

(Greek focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, Southgate)

Personal qualities needed in the police service

Some respondents had met police officers with the sort of qualities they felt they should have, for example being friendly. There was a sense from others, however, that the sorts of skills they wanted to see being exhibited by all police officers were not apparent. These desirable skills fell into four main categories: communication, fairness, respect and confidence. Some of the reasons behind the perceived gap between desirable and actual qualities are discussed in the next chapter on respondents' views of the police.

Respondents in all of the groups felt the police needed to exhibit a wide range of people skills which included being approachable and friendly, but also showing empathy, patience and understanding.

'If say for example, a little girl had been raped or something like that. How would you deal with that - you have got to be a certain type of person to be able to go into a situation like that and deal with it.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Allied to the respondents' sense of policing being a dangerous job, they felt that police officers needed to be courageous people who could go about their work confidently. Respondents commented on the need for police officers to come across as assertive and decisive. It was judged by some that this sort of attitude would come from people who had experience of life.

Across all the groups, some respondents felt they possessed the qualities they had identified as desirable for police officers. Those mentioned included confidence, honesty, patience, intelligence, compassion and motivation. In terms of skills, some Asian respondents mentioned the ability to speak one or more languages other than English as something they could offer. A Pakistani woman felt that her awareness of the delicacy of situations of domestic violence would enable her to handle them with particular success.

Other respondents, across the range of ethnic groups, felt that they lacked some of the qualities identified as desirable for police work, particularly people skills and confidence. People skills that were mentioned included patience and open-mindedness. In terms of confidence, some respondents felt that they were not mentally tough or brave enough to deal with some of the difficult and dangerous situations that might be encountered as a police officer.

Respondents who had considered a police career

Despite the tendency for respondents not to perceive the police as a career of choice, a few respondents in each focus group were keen to join and had considered it as a viable option before taking part in this study. These respondents reflected all of the ethnic groups involved in the research, although those few black people who had considered the police as a career option (whether Caribbean or African in terms of identity) had only considered support staff posts and had not gone as far as applying.

Reasons for not applying

Some had decided against a job with the police, perhaps because of misconceptions (for example, believing the height restrictions still to be a barrier), but also because they had been put under pressure from their families not to join the police. Fear of abuse from the general public was also put forward as a deciding factor against becoming a police officer, but also a belief from one respondent that they would not get through the training. For others, the attraction of other jobs they had considered was greater. Some respondents in all of the groups also believed that people from minority ethnic communities were not getting a positive response when they did apply – a view which stemmed from both personal experiences of applying, experiences described by friends and media reports:

'A lot of people from ethnic minorities who actually go into the police force, there's articles in the paper that they're discriminated. They're trying to make a difference and they still face the hardship. I'm not saying that's the only place you face hardship, because I'm from an ethnic minority, but I think that kind of really stands out. Some people have actually tried to go into them forces and been kicked back.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

The experience of respondents who had applied

Those who had put in applications to join the police appeared dissatisfied with the process. Some had experienced difficulties tapping into the recruitment system because there were only set dates to apply in their area, and it was not that easy to find out when those dates actually were:

'They put it in the [local newspaper] and if you've missed the date, you've missed the date and that's it. They don't put your name down on a waiting list to say "yes, okay, here's the application form, you've got a closing date, this is it". No, they don't do that - but that's ridiculous.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

Respondents remarked on the difficulty of finding an obvious place to express an interest in police work; comparisons were made with the army recruitment offices respondents had noticed. Others had made applications but received no response from the police, and when this occurred a second time became suspicious as to whether their ethnicity had played a part:

'Basically I've applied twice and they rejected me because my surname is [Chinese]. ... They didn't bother sending me an application form. First of all I phoned them up and said that I was quite interested in the job and I gave them my details. First name and then they asked for my surname after all my information and then I said [Chinese name] - they didn't bother to contact me back.'

(Chinese focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Camden)

Another respondent had made a number of applications to join the police and had reached the interviewing stage. She became concerned that wearing Islamic dress had been a factor in her lack of success when an Asian friend wearing western style clothes was offered a job. When she sought a reason for her lack of success she was dissatisfied with the response. The lack of follow-up regarding applications and interviews caused much dissatisfaction among people who were considering joining the police.

'I applied, I did actually apply, I was keen, but they turned my application down. ... I tried again, after I turned 21 and they'd taken all the new recruits and they weren't taking any more. Then I applied for another job from the newspaper to work in the police station ... but they didn't take me on. And I did telephone the person who was interviewing because I wanted to know why because one of my friends, we both had the same qualifications, everything the same and she got it and I didn't. And he had no explanation. ... he had no reason why. ... we went down just to look around, I was wearing my headscarf and she wasn't and I think I got discriminated against. She was really Western - she's Asian - but she's really Western. I think I was discriminated. I was really angry, that's why I telephoned him.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

Recruitment practices in the police service are known to vary from force to force. At the time of the research some had rolling programmes and advertised regularly, some had fixed dates to advertise and recruit, others stopped recruiting for up to a year at a time. Some had expression of interest forms for potential recruits available in police stations and follow up mechanisms for applicants, others did not. These differences make it impossible to say whether the experiences of respondents in the groups were related to any specific known recruiting practice.

Although a career with the police service was not written off by respondents, many had deep reservations about applying. These were usually related to their views of the police more generally, as service providers or law enforcers. The next chapter explores the respondents' views, and attempts to draw out how their attitudes were developed and informed.

3. Respondents' views of the police and service delivery

The attitudes of participants in the focus groups towards the police service as an employer were strongly influenced by their views of the police more generally (see Holdaway, 1991). This chapter explores the views of the police expressed during the discussions and tries to draw out the different experiences and sources which informed these views, including direct personal contact with officers, information from family and friends, and mass media coverage.

Whilst respondents had many ideas on how people like themselves could be encouraged to join the police, described later in this report, many of their suggestions were linked to how the police presented themselves to the public, and in particular to people from minority ethnic communities. Consequently this chapter describes respondents' perceptions of the police in depth in order to provide a better understanding of what recruitment strategies would need to be introduced if the police service are to recruit more people from minority ethnic communities.

Respondents' experiences of policing

Respondents in all of the groups, and across all ages, described mixed experiences with the police, but negative experiences were more memorable and seemed to have a stronger influence on their perceptions of the organisation as a whole. Some of these incidents had occurred years before but were still remembered because of the strong impact on the respondent.

'There's so much hatred in the police force. Before I was never negative about [the] police and from a bad experience, I can't stand them. And if someone like me who is so open minded - like I was - can change, then oh god.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Men in all but one of the groups talked about negative personal experiences, particularly when they were stopped by the police. Respondents in Chinese groups appeared to have fewer experiences of being stopped by the police. Women in all of the groups also described situations that had been disappointing when they or their families were victims of crime and had looked to the police for help. Some of these experiences may or may not have been different from those experienced by the ethnic majority, but they had made a significant impact on respondents – and in some cases they felt racism had played a part. Negative experiences were linked to racism by respondents in all of the groups, but less so by people from Chinese backgrounds.

'It's like a couple of months ago ... I park in front of my neighbour's house, not blocking the drive or anything. So I'm walking across there, she comes out, starts hurling racial abuse at me, I didn't say anything back to her I just thought I'd go down to the police station to see what could be done about it. When I'd explained to them and they go "so what do you want us to do about it?". I looked on as if to say "well what can you do about it?" and they go "ok then we'll send somebody round" and blah de blah. They didn't turn up. Three weeks later I was back and said it again and they said exactly the same thing "what do you want us to do about it?".'

(Indian focus group, men, 18-24, Birmingham)

Respondents in all the groups talked about situations they had observed, in public, where they were deeply concerned over the way in which the police behaved towards someone from an minority ethnic group, whether the same as or different to their own.

'... I was only about 8 and I was looking through the window [of my dad's shop] and there was this black man standing there. I think he was just talking to his mate and his mate went off, I think he went to light a cigarette and these two police went up to him. I won't forget it, and they were stamping on his foot, really stamping on his foot and putting their heel in and they were like pushing him and things.'

(Greek focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southgate)

Although experiences, particularly of stop and search may vary according to where people live (Miller et al, 2000) this will not necessarily mean that views of the police outside urban areas, for example, will be unaffected. Other research suggests that perceptions of the police held by young people from minority ethnic backgrounds' are affected by events beyond their local area (Bland et al, 2000).

Police stops and police searches

Of particular concern to respondents, especially the young men, was the use of what they referred to generically as 'stop and search' by the police. They complained about being stopped on a regular basis, sometimes several times in a day, apparently without reason. This made respondents, particularly black and Asian men, and to a slightly lesser degree men from Turkish and Greek backgrounds, feel targeted by the police.

'You tell me what white driver carries every single one of his documents and about six different ID checks in his car? None.'

(Pakistani focus group, men, 18-24, Southall)

Men also described experiences of being stopped that they had found intrusive and threatening.

'We've had that done to us, how many times. Stoke Newington, it was my brother's birthday, we got stopped, searched, taken out the car, put into a meat wagon twice in about 45 minutes. We got stopped, went down the road, came back up stopped by another lot. Socks off the lot, everything, in a meat wagon. We were strip searched for no reason at all.'

(Turkish focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, Palmers Green)

Whilst people in all groups were concerned about the number of times they were stopped, they were particularly upset about the way in which the stops were handled by the police. Men in all of the groups described experiences where they had found the police officers patronising and offensive. Some respondents, particularly in the Asian groups, talked about the police appearing to have low expectations of them – both intellectually and in terms of attitude; they found this insulting. British Crime Survey findings indicated that black and Asian respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied with the way their contact with the police was handled by officers (Bucke, 1997).

A few young male respondents remarked on the extent of police response, what they termed 'overkill', when officers came into contact with people from minority ethnic communities:

'It was night time, and me and my friend were just walking. But I think if we had been two pale people, yeah two white people, I think they probably would have [just] stopped ... but they must have radioed through, got some backup ... three cars came all at once and they mounted the kerb, told us, "stand back there, hands up". And we had to stand up against some shop front and I was like "is there any need for this?" ... we're just going to the shop. And that is just typical, that is just the kind of typical things.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Essentially people felt that the use of 'stop and search' had undermined their trust in the police – a view particularly expressed by male respondents in black, Asian and Turkish groups:

'This is the thing. I think if the police force wants to be more effective it has to learn to work with the community that [it] is working [with]. It has to learn to develop some sort of relationship, do you know what I mean? Because like with the

stop and search thing, what happens with things like that is less people report crimes, people have less trust in the police - maybe with like the white community at large the connections better - but with ethnic minorities, the relationship [with] the police is really bad. I don't trust them at all.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, Southwark)

Recent research suggests that searches are more likely to have a negative impact than stops on people's attitudes (Miller et al, 2000 and that negative impact can be minimised if the officer is seen to be polite and respectful (Fitzgerald, 1999; Stone and Pettigrew, 2000).

Police cultural awareness

Participants felt the police stereotyped people from minority ethnic communities, for example, by not expecting a woman in traditional Muslim dress to understand English. There was an over-riding sense that police officers did not understand people who had different cultures from their own. Respondents felt it was important for the police to increase their understanding, both for improved community relations and to engender more sensitive policing. They perceived little effort on the part of the police to raise their awareness of the needs of local communities. A few people described situations where a lack of understanding had led to situations becoming far more serious than was thought necessary.

'I was at my mum's house. My mother, there was shouting, you know what it's like African ... all that noise and all that. And the police came to the door and said, "what's all that shouting?" ... It's pretty loud but they're just talking, you know. We just happen to talk loud. They just said that they heard from someone outside that there was screaming. But we had all been just having a conversation. Before I knew it this police woman sort of barged through the house. I thought "ah" ... [one thing led to another and] I was arrested for that.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

Respondents explained that a man touching a woman was considered taboo for some Asian Muslims. They described an incident during which a male police officer had tried to physically move a woman who had intervened when her brother was stopped by the police in the street; respondents said this action led to a riot developing. Respondents disagreed as to whether the woman's clothing was torn, but on the whole were left feeling angry with the situation, and it was felt that the misunderstanding about social/religious customs had been the cause of the disturbance.

'We're all different, I mean each religion has a different culture. You know, what can be done and what can't be done. Like a ... [male] police officer, whether it's Asian or white, can't touch an Asian woman. You know, no matter what she's done because it's not allowed in our culture for anyone else to touch our women. Yet they won't understand that unless they are taught that. They need to be taught by each culture and the way we live really.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

This is a difficult area for the police service to address, given that English common law grants officers the absolute authority to intervene by physical means, and the common law power of arrest imposes a requirement on officers to lay their hand on the upper body of the arrestee (usually the shoulder). There may be a need for increased dialogue with local communities on this specific point.

Respondents felt that the desire for police officers to be more aware of cultural needs/differences was somewhat idealistic. However, a group of Bangladeshi women described their relationship with a white male police officer who, they felt, had gone out of his way to learn about their culture to the extent that he had learnt their Bangladeshi language. He appeared to spend a lot of time talking and interacting with the local community and his efforts were greatly welcomed - the women felt they could turn to him if they needed. Even so, these respondents felt this police officer was exceptional.

'Most police officers I've found unapproachable but this is this community police officer he is like a one off ...he has learned the Bangla language and has really integrated into our community but that's just like one in like thousands ...He actually went to Bangladesh and learned the language.'

(Bangladeshi focus group, women, 25-30, Manchester)

Other positive experiences with individual officers included that of a young woman who had been the victim of racism. She had been led to consider the police as a potential career through her contact with the police officer who supported her during the subsequent court case. Again though, such positive experiences seemed to be either less common or less memorable when compared to other experiences with the police.

Desirable qualities in police officers

Whilst some respondents in all the groups described many contacts with the police that were disappointing, they were also keen not to generalise, but undoubtedly negative experiences left lasting memories.

'I think it's some people who, like you say, want to give something back to the community. There are some genuinely genuine people who want to give something back to the community, by protecting them or whatever. I think there are also a lot who abuse that, abuse that power.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

It is likely then that respondents' experiences will have influenced their perceptions of the police. When they were asked how they saw the police, their interactions with officers, both positive and negative, resulted in a host of words being used that went from 'hostile' and 'bullies' on the one hand to 'approachable' and 'wanting to help people' on the other.

Some respondents, in all of the groups (regardless of age), had met police officers with the sorts of qualities they felt they should have, for example being friendly. However, there were also occasions where a police officer had been friendly during a passing contact but perhaps misjudged the situation.

'I think what they [the police] say hurts more. "Curry head" or like "what have you cooked today, curry?". Like I was cooking once for the kids in the children's home and this white police officer walked in and he said "what are you making, curry?" and I wasn't making curry, I was making pasta, and I said "no I am making pasta, would you like some" and he felt really stupid. I mean remarks like this that we cook curry all the time.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 18-24, Southall)

There was a sense from other respondents, from all groups, that the types of skill they wanted to see exhibited by all police officers, including communication, fairness and respect, were not apparent. Although respondents talked about the need for officers to be authoritative and decisive, these attributes received less emphasis.

Police officers in particular were thought to need good communication skills which would enable them to interact sensitively with people from different backgrounds and cultures. Coupled with the need to communicate effectively was a desire for police officers to listen carefully.

Respondents wanted the police to show fairness and an objective, rational, approach to their work, and this was manifested in two distinct ways. Firstly, concern over racism among the police led some respondents to talk about police officers needing to be tolerant and open-minded. Secondly, there was a perception

among some black, Asian and Turkish respondents that the police were corrupt and a corresponding desire for a more honest and genuine approach to give a sense of integrity to the police.

A respectful attitude combined with a polite and patient approach was considered desirable. This partly stemmed from experiences where respondents had judged the police officers to have been rude and disrespectful to them, particularly relating to 'stop and search'. A few young (aged 18-21) Asian respondents had made complaints to the police regarding behaviour they found offensive.

Desirable and actual police qualities: the impact of police culture

The mismatch between respondents' experiences with the police and the qualities they saw as desirable for any police officer seemed to stem from their perceptions of 'police culture' – a term mentioned spontaneously by respondents. Respondents had two explanations of the development of negative aspects of police culture. Firstly, some respondents across all the groups felt that the police recruitment process was not focusing on the right qualities and therefore it was possible for the wrong types of people to get into the police. Secondly, there was a belief that people joined the police with the right characteristics but that the police culture 'forced' them to change - a view most strongly expressed by black and Asian respondents. This was thought to affect people from minority ethnic communities more markedly because they might have to 'hide their culture' in order to fit in. In fact, the notion of 'fitting in' was quite telling in that people's perceptions were of the police wishing to present an image of 'sameness' and unity.

The image of sameness in the police service was seen as white and male, and consequently unwelcoming to anyone who did not fit into this category, particularly people from visibly different minority ethnic communities, and women. In this way, police culture was seen as army-like and for some respondents the highly institutionalised nature of the police was at the root of the problems they perceived.

Perceptions of racism in the police

The perceptions of police culture as exclusive were closely related to respondents' impressions of the police as racist. People described images (sometimes based on experiences described by minority ethnic police officers known to them) of police canteens where all the white police officers would be eating together whilst the few black and Asian officers would be sitting apart from the main group. However, whilst elements of racism were believed to exist in the police, as in the wider society, there were mixed views over its extent. Some saw the police as an 'inherently racist' institution, whilst others thought the racism came from an intransigent minority.

There was also a belief that racism in the police was now better hidden, because it was seen as less acceptable than used to be the case. Even so, others, particularly black and Asian respondents, felt that whatever the extent of racism it could not be tolerated in an institution with so much power and responsibility – in effect respondents felt the police had to be better than mainstream society, and seen to be so.

Respondents' views stemmed both from personal experiences of racism or racist comments being expressed by police officers, and from news stories in newspapers and on the television. Comments on promotion prospects and sexism in the previous chapter show this tendency. Particular reference was made by respondents in all the groups to the case of Stephen Lawrence, which was seen by some to be a catalyst in terms of addressing racism in the police.

The lack of knowledge people had about policing meant that people seemed to have some reliance on media stories and television programmes as one of the few sources of information available to them, coupled with their own or friends' personal experiences.

'Everything that we see on television affects the way that we see the police. And I mean these programmes like City Central and the Bill and all these other things, that's how people see the police a lot of the time. And okay, they might try and show them like honest people, but they also show dishonesty. Do you know what I mean? And I don't think it comes over very nice. I don't want to be a policeman.'

(Greek focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southgate)

Little information appeared to be drawn from the police themselves. The intense media scrutiny respondents had observed in relation to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was also put forward as a reason why the police needed to be seen to be tackling racism within the Service.

Respondents were convinced that racism affected police officers from minority ethnic communities in two key ways. Firstly, people felt that racism caused new recruits to drop-out of the police service, and secondly, that they were not making it into the senior ranks of the police because of their ethnic background. New recruits leaving the police appeared to be more of an issue in the black groups, and related to racism from other police officers, as well as officers being subjected to racism from the general public. Both men and women (from all the ethnic groups) expressed the belief that police officers from minority ethnic communities were 'blocked' from the senior ranks. These sorts of views are explored in the next chapter of this report with regard to how potential barriers to recruiting more people from minority ethnic communities into the police could be addressed.

4. Encouraging people from minority ethnic communities to join the police service

Respondents were asked to make suggestions for how more people from minority ethnic communities could be encouraged to join the police. Some of their ideas were not new, but equally their lack of knowledge of what was being done by the police indicated a need for the police service to make people more aware of the initiatives that are in place⁷. Suggestions fell largely into three categories: tackling racism, poor communication and cultural awareness; providing support to officers from minority ethnic communities; and improving recruitment strategies.

⁷ See chapter 5 for an overview of actions taken by forces.

Respondents' ideas were gathered by exploring which aspects of the police they found attractive or off-putting (for them personally), and what steps might be taken more generally.

Respondents suggestions in terms of what could be done regarding recruitment were largely based on a somewhat limited understanding of how the police operate. However, the group of respondents who had considered a career in the police before attending a focus group were able to shed some light on the current police recruitment process, identifying ways in which they felt it could be improved.

A specific focus was placed on advertising and how that could be used for recruiting people from minority ethnic communities. The discussions in the groups focused on three posters targeted at people from minority ethnic communities and used by the Metropolitan Police Service.

Two other issues were considered pertinent to encouraging more people from minority ethnic communities to join the police. Firstly, there was a belief that just seeing more people from these communities join the police would persuade others to join. Although it was recognised that some people would need to be prepared to 'pave the way' first, it was also felt that a concerted campaign among minority ethnic communities by the police could create the needed quorum of police officers. Secondly, respondents wanted to see more people from minority ethnic communities in senior positions in the police. Despite this interest in increasing minority ethnic presence in the Service, there was little awareness of the Home Office targets, and reactions to these are set out in the final section.

Tackling racism, poor communication and cultural awareness

The most important discouraging factor to overcome was racism, and many of the respondents' suggestions revolved around how they felt it could, and should, be tackled by the police. As was mentioned earlier in this report, some respondents felt that it would take a complete shift in police culture to begin to deal with the racism

they perceived in the police. For example, a respondent remarked on the institutional nature of the police and a military-style approach as being at the root of the problem. This perspective fits in with the mismatch described in Chapter 3, where respondents' experiences of the police suggested that some police officers were not exhibiting the sorts of qualities people from minority ethnic communities felt the police ought to have. The contrast was between images of uniforms, arrogance, bullying and racism (traditional images of the military) versus communication and friendliness.

'The culture that they have at the police station ... its quite macho ... and it's an oppressive regime.'

(Greek focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southgate)

Respondents' expectations were not high, there was some agreement around the view that racism had been around for a long time and that it was going to take a long time to deal with it. Even so, the suggestions made by respondents were practical ones and there is evidence that some of their ideas in fact reflect initiatives already under-way in some police forces. Respondents wanted to see genuine steps being taken by the police to deal with racism within the Service as they believed it to be a major factor in dissuading people from minority ethnic communities to consider the police as a potential career.

'Being a police officer isn't something that appeals to me. However, if there was less racial discrimination, I would consider it.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

The types of suggestions for dealing with racism in the police service are described below.

Racism in the service should be publicly countered

Respondents were unsure what the police had done to counter racism, leaving them to assume that little, if anything, was being done. They were concerned that any steps should be genuine and meaningful, and felt that the police needed to show people what they were doing if they were to acquire their trust and attract them towards a job with the police. Coupled with this view, was a belief that the police should establish a framework for dealing with racism, for example, by having an equal opportunities statement. Respondents were not aware, therefore that all police forces in England and Wales have equal opportunities statements.

Discipline structures are needed to deal with racism

Respondents felt that police officers found to be racist should be dismissed from the police. Some thought legislation would be required to deal with racist police officers.

People had concerns over the police service policing themselves, and suggested that an independent panel, made up of community representatives, be set up to handle racism in the police⁸.

⁸ See report by KPMG (2000) for a feasibility study of an independent complaints system.

'If an employer is being racist, we have what we call an industrial tribunal, what do we have at the police force? Nothing.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

'Racist police need to be treated not as a police officer, but as a civilian and if they do wrong then they do the time, they don't get time off on sick leave and get suspended pay and all that crap that goes with it. ... There should be police cameras all over the station there should be recorders everywhere. An independent watch dog as well that is not associated with the police force or with any sort of organisation ... an independent watch dog.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Although there have been a few cases where officers have been dismissed, respondents were not aware of them, and perceived there to be many cases where officers were not disciplined. Their comments suggest that they were either not aware of the discipline systems already in place, or did not feel that they were sufficient.

Racist recruits should be identified and excluded

It was suggested by people from different ethnic groups (particularly those taking part in the black and Asian focus groups) that there should be some kind of 'psychological profiling' of potential recruits, followed by careful monitoring of racist tendencies during the early phases of police training. Such respondents expressed concern that people who were racist could pretend to be otherwise in order to join the police, and therefore, the recruitment process would need to go beyond asking potential recruits about their attitudes towards people from minority ethnic communities. For example, it was proposed that indirect 'testing', perhaps involving some kind of task, be used to identify racist views.

'Maybe when [potential recruits are interviewed] ... get an idea whether this person is open minded or not. ... maybe a psychologist, or whatever, sit in on the interview.'

(Greek focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, Southgate)

However, the reliability of such testing was queried in the Asian student focus group, with a respondent feeling that 'everyone is a good actor'. Even so, others felt that certain checks should be made on a potential recruit's background and attitudes, to include membership of racist organisations, but also their cultural awareness.

Racism should be directly addressed in training

Respondents in all groups, regardless of age and sex, felt that police training needed to address racism 'head-on', ensuring that new police recruits considered and understood cultural issues. Initial training would need to be updated further into a police officer's career. There was also a belief that currently serving police officers could benefit from training around issues related to racism, to enhance their understanding of the minority ethnic communities they worked with. Respondents felt that training needed to focus on ridding police officers of their preconceptions about certain cultures (for example, stereotypes).

'I think it's the way they do the training ... because police officers - considering that they're supposed to be on the beat and dealing with people from all walks of life - they have not taken into consideration to learn about different cultures. They have not taken into consideration saying "listen imagine yourself as a black person and someone comes up to you and says whose car is that?, how would you feel".'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

It was also suggested that the police should use trainers who are from minority ethnic groups themselves. This suggestion, and the emphasis on the need for training in general, again indicated that respondents were not aware of police service action in this area, ie that forces carry out race awareness training, and use trainers from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Police handling of stops and searches should be addressed

Young male respondents were concerned, not only with the number of times they were stopped, and searched, but also about the experience being unnecessarily negative. It was not so much being stopped, although this could be an irritation, but the attitude of some police officers during the encounter. This fits with other research findings on the subject of stops and searches, where respondents suggested that officers should be more polite and respectful (eg Fielding, 1999). Respondents complained about police officers who were patronising, arrogant and unnecessarily aggressive. There was also suspicion that the reasons given by police officers for stopping someone were concocted rather than genuine, leading people to feel targeted because of the way they look. Respondents in all groups, but particularly

black and Asian men, felt they had been targeted and stopped because of the clothing they wore, their age (particularly younger respondents) and their skin colour – a view also expressed by those Turkish respondents who said they had a dark complexion.

Police officers' cultural awareness should be improved

A recurring theme throughout this research was a desire for police officers to have a better understanding of cultures other than their own. Respondents believed that if awareness of other cultures could be raised it would have a significant effect on community relations. Examples were given of how interactions could be better handled if some simple ideas were better understood (for example, respecting how people should or should not be touched). Respondents felt that police officers needed to spend more time with people from minority ethnic communities in order to understand their customs and needs.

'I mean touching really - like shaking hands like - it's seen as something polite. But for a Muslim woman they wouldn't want to shake hands with a man. ... when a police officer's gone to shake hands with a woman, she's took a step back and he probably thought she was being impolite or something but it's she's not meant to do that.'

(Bangladeshi focus group, women, 25-30, Manchester)

On the other hand, police officers also needed to recognise just how very different people can be, even though they share a common culture, rather than expecting people to conform to stereotypes.

Supporting police officers from minority ethnic communities

Respondents made a variety of suggestions that related to the needs of people from minority ethnic communities specifically. Just knowing that support would be available to people like themselves was key to encouraging people to want to join the police.

More people from minority ethnic communities should be recruited and promoted on merit

It was felt that if there were more people from minority ethnic communities in the police, then it would provide a base for police officers to turn to if they needed support, especially if they were subjected to racism. There was a sense that 'strength in numbers' would in itself act as a counter to racism, a view which was echoed in all the groups.

Respondents felt that if there were more senior police officers from minority ethnic communities it would change how racism was handled by the police. It was felt that a police officer who was from a minority ethnic community would take reports of racism more seriously than his or her white counterparts, and would make a point of using his or her influence in dealing with such situations. Respondents in black and Asians groups, in particular, believed that racist police officers would be more cautious about expressing their views if their senior officer was someone from a minority ethnic community.

Information on support structures should be provided

Respondents wanted reassurance about the types of support structure that would be in place should they be subjected to racism. They discussed the need for a telephone helpline for police officers experiencing racism from colleagues. There was concern that any incidents should be carefully investigated to ensure justice both for the accuser and the accused. This idea came from a debate, between respondents in Asian groups, over whether individual police officers could rely on their line-managers when reporting racist incidents versus the need to speak to someone they knew who would believe what they were saying (given the seriousness of the situation).

Officers should be allowed a choice of working area

Respondents had mixed views over working in their local area. Some, across all groups, were concerned that if they did work locally, they might be put under pressure by the local community and they could foresee difficulties if they had to arrest someone they knew. Some respondents thought it was police policy to have police officers working away from their local area. By contrast, other respondents felt a key advantage of having more people from minority ethnic communities join the police was that they could not only work with their local community but also better understand their needs – culturally and in terms of language. For some, the answer was to offer people a choice over whether they worked in their local area or further away – a view expressed in Asian groups:

'I think it should be left to the choice of the person. You know, if they are having problems then I think they should have the chance of being easily moved away than having to wait on a waiting list. ... The family is harassed as well, not just the husband or the wife that's gone into the [police] job, it's the whole family.'

(Pakistani focus group, women, 25-30, Bradford)

This is no longer a matter of force policy⁹ and the service would be unlikely to assign recruits to areas if they requested not to work where they had friends and family living.

⁹ Officers used to be assigned away from their local area as a matter of policy, according to the views of the Chief Constable.

Religious and cultural needs should be accommodated

There were certain cultural needs that some respondents felt would need to be accommodated to make it possible for them to consider joining the police. For religious Muslim women, the police uniform would need to be adapted, for example, so that they could wear a head scarf. It was understood that the scarf may need to be kept shorter than normal, but that adjustments such as this could be acceptable. Trousers were another part of the uniform they expressed concern about. However, a form of precedent had been noted for changes in the uniform in terms of how Sikh police officers' needs had been accommodated:

'You see nowadays, and recently on the television, you see Sikh police officers wearing turbans where before in the past they've all had to cut their hair because of the helmet. The same in the Army, the armed forces, and now its okay to wear a turban because they accept the culture you see.'

(Indian focus group, men, 25-30, Bradford)

For all religious Muslims, respondents felt the police would have to make special arrangements in terms of prayer. This might be by setting aside a room specifically for this purpose, but also recognising that shifts and ways of working would need to allow people time to pray. Respondents were keen to emphasise that colleagues would need to understand that praying was not an excuse for a break but a need.

'[They need to] understand the fact that some people are really serious about ... their religion. And I think the job [of police officer] would appeal to them if they knew that they had somewhere to go and pray. And for the people who they are working [with] - them not to view it as "oh it's a break for them" or you know "it's not fair".'

(Bangladeshi focus group, women, 25-30, Manchester)

Even so, it was remarked that in certain situations, for example, officers involved in an incident on the street, it would be acceptable (on religious grounds) for officers not to stop and pray.

Another issue that was important for Muslim women with strong religious beliefs, was the way in which they would be expected to interact with men – either colleagues or the general public – something they felt the police would need to think through. The restrictions here might mean that women with these beliefs could be recruited for support staff roles, but not operational police officer roles.

Improving recruitment strategies

Respondents had many suggestions for how recruitment could be handled by the police. Respondents felt that the police needed to market themselves better. There was little awareness of what the police were doing with regard to recruitment, and the approach taken by the army was welcomed, especially targeting advertising at minority ethnic communities (people referred to television advertisements). The respondents had highlighted their interest in jobs with promotion prospects and some emphasised that the police should present opportunities as careers rather than just jobs.

Essentially respondents were looking for a proactive, face-to-face approach from the police – who they felt should be reaching out to people from minority ethnic communities. An ‘open-door’ policy was described, again comparisons were made with the high street army recruitment offices, that would make the whole recruitment process more accessible and seem fairer than it currently appeared to be to respondents.

The recruitment process should be made more accessible

Respondents felt there was no obvious route of access into police recruitment – people were unsure where to go if they wanted to apply to the police and the process seemed difficult and inaccessible to those who had tried to apply. Their ideas suggested a need for the police to be more explicit about the recruitment process as a whole, but also to provide information about any steps that have been taken by the police to make the system fairer, as respondents were questioning the impartiality of the present system.

One way of highlighting fairness would be to instigate a system for following-up applications and interviews, with feedback for unsuccessful candidates, so people would know what to expect and when (that is, drawing in a level of accountability). In that some respondents showed their determination by repeated, but unsuccessful, applications to join as police officers, the organisation could respond by considering their employment in support staff roles.

More information should be provided about police work and training

People wanted to know more, both about the jobs available through the police, and what the job of a police officer actually involves.

‘I would be interested to listen to a talk on what the police force entails and whatever, just for general interest.’

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

There were many questions asked about the length of police training and what would be required of new recruits. There were two main reasons why respondents were interested in these details about police training. Firstly, they wanted to know whether the starting salary would start from day one, or only after they had finished training. Respondents wondered whether it would take weeks, months or years to reach the £18,000 salary mentioned in the focus groups; if it took a long time they were likely to prefer other jobs. Secondly, respondents, particularly those in Asian groups, wanted more details about the training, because they were unsure of the fitness levels required to complete it.

Another issue that would need to be addressed was people's deep concern over the danger associated with police work. It was suggested that new recruits would need training to deal with the danger because respondents did not know what sort of training (if any) they would get. Their concerns could be addressed with more information. The emphasis on danger in the groups suggests that the police service could do more to explain the actual levels of risk involved in ordinary patrol and response work¹⁰.

¹⁰ British Crime Survey findings suggest that police officers are more at risk of assault overall than other occupational groups such as nurses (Budd, 1999). However, the proportion of assaults on police officers classified as serious or resulting in sickness absence is similar to that for nurses (Source: HMIC matrix, Health and Safety Executive and Department of Health) and affected just under two per cent of operational police officer strength in 1999/2000. There were five fatal assaults in total in the six year period between 1993 and 1999. Research conducted by the Police Complaints Authority (2000) suggests that police assault rates are going down. The decrease may be connected to the use of CS spray and improvements in equipment and training. More detailed information on the circumstances in which assaults occur can be found in a previous Police Research Series publication (Brown, 1994).

Support staff jobs were attractive to respondents, particularly those people in black and Asian groups, as they were not associated with racism or danger, and some wanted to know about the range of jobs available. However, they would also need to know if they would be required to undertake police officer training (or spend time 'on the beat') before taking up such jobs. The negative associations that some had made with the job of police officer could potentially deter people from considering other jobs in the police service if they thought they might have to be a police officer first. The distinctions between support staff roles and non-operational police officer roles are blurred, and can therefore confuse potential applicants.

The police need to talk to potential recruits face-to-face

Respondents suggested a variety of recruitment initiatives that would involve personal interaction; examples included work experience with the police, being shown around police stations, and having discussion groups where they could meet police officers from different ethnic groups who could answer their questions. Respondents wanted to hear police officers, particularly those from minority ethnic communities, talk about their work. It was felt important to have recruitment officers from minority ethnic communities; an example was given of a Sikh man involved in recruitment for his employers, the RAF, which Sikh respondents had noticed and welcomed.

Police staff need to be more proactive in schools and colleges

Respondents remembered visits from the police whilst they were at school, but some felt that this was when they were much younger and thought the police could be more proactive in schools and colleges around the times when young people were typically thinking about potential careers. It was felt that the police could benefit from handing out recruitment leaflets in schools and colleges, and again comparisons were drawn with the army and its approach to recruitment. It was also suggested, by those respondents who were currently studying for a degree and those engaged in employment, that the police could run training days in schools and colleges to give young people a flavour of what the job entails, and possibly attract new recruits in the process.

Recruitment advertising needs to be reviewed

Respondents were shown posters used by the Metropolitan Police Service to stimulate ideas about advertising and how it could be used to target people like themselves for a potential career with the police. Respondents wanted a direct approach that would be eye-catching but not shocking. They highlighted the need for any posters to be kept simple with only a minimal amount of text and keeping the focus on pictorial images that had clear messages. A recurring suggestion was the idea of showing police officers from different ethnic groups, including white, working together as a team. Another idea, suggested by black and Asian respondents, was to show a senior policeman or woman from a minority ethnic community in the advertising to show that promotion was a possibility.

Respondents wanted to be able to relate to the advertising:

'I mean you need to make people feel that you are talking to me. When I look I don't feel connected to any of these adverts.'

(Chinese focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Camden)

Some respondents, regardless of their ethnicity, found posters that reached out to them personally more appealing than a focus on ethnicity. One woman referred to an advert she had seen in the past:

'The child one worked, the other campaign with the old man, his daughter has just been raped. The father, he wants to go out and kill the person, you've got to tell him to put the law into your hands, how do you do it? To me, that's psychological, you're going to say to this man, like you're saying to yourself, "shit, my child has just been raped, how is that person going to talk to me, whether I'm black, white,

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO JOIN THE POLICE SERVICE

Indian, whatever, how is he going to talk to me and tell me not to go out there and find that person?" Do you know what I mean, it's got nothing to do with colour, go for the heart.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

Preferences were mixed around the method of advertising with some feeling that it was important that money be spent on expensive approaches like television, whilst others preferred attention to be focussed on more face-to-face recruitment methods.

Some respondents felt that any recruitment campaigns needed to be far-reaching, including media targeted at particular ethnic groups, for example, minority radio stations or newspapers. They wanted to emphasise that it was important not to stereotype people in terms of dress, speech or behaviour.

Some Indian and Pakistani respondents thought that any posters should be translated into various languages in order to obtain the support of the older generation, as there was a belief that without their parents' backing it would be difficult for young people who wanted to join the police.

People in black and Asian groups remarked on the Army television adverts saying that they were appealing - with a focus on intellectual abilities as well as using actors from minority ethnic communities. Some respondents liked the challenge which appeared in the army adverts and felt the police could adopt this approach.

'The Territorial Army [adverts], the way they actually pose like a little problem and say what would you do. If you look at the TA, you can't see because they are all wearing fatigues and combats, you can't tell who's male and female, you can hardly see the colour of them because of all this green paint all over their face. And it gives them a question, "Do you think you can do that? Do you think you can handle that?" ... It takes it away from the colour. ... Hell, I wanted to join the TA after I saw that advert. It was like yeah man I want to go out there. I saw the mines, I saw the truck and I was like yeah man, this is what you do. And I actually took the number and thought yeah man I'm going to join the army. Because there was a problem there and I could solve it you know - it was a challenge you know what I mean.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

The direct approach taken by the Benetton posters were also mentioned as one that could be adopted by the police – respondents liked the emphasis on diversity depicted by the company (although there were qualms about misinterpretations and ethics).

'[Benetton has used] very ethnic, very African images ... They're using that new chap from, that black rapper from, [the music group] Faithless ... for their advertising campaign ... no looks, nothing, its just that image that comes across. I think if the police were to have a look at that, they could get some ideas.'

(Pakistani focus group, men, 25-30, Birmingham)

Other initiatives

Respondents talked about the police having dialogues with community and/or religious leaders ('it's cheesy, but it might work'), but they also felt getting good feedback from people they knew who worked in the police would inspire interest. In a few areas, particularly in northern England, people knew of local schemes where the police were interacting more with young people, but whilst such steps were welcomed, there was no mention of similar initiatives by respondents living in other parts of the country.

Some respondents thought that television could be used to greater effect:

'You know there is another way of like advertising – The Bill. In The Bill, you see, what coloured people do you see in there? ... I mean if the Met did decide to help fund the Bill to hire a Chinese actor as a police officer - they would probably get more people joining the police force.'

(Chinese focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Camden)

'Make a black version of The Bill.'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

As mentioned earlier, images of the police on television had a great deal of impact for respondents. Documentaries and drama series both tend to exaggerate the amount of physical action and incident in police work. This tendency, along with the media attention accorded to the death on duty of any police officer, may be partly responsible for respondents' perception of police work as highly dangerous. Initiatives which address false impressions on this issue might be of value.

Views of the Home Office targets for police forces

As highlighted in the introduction to this report, the Home Office has introduced targets for each police force with regard to the numbers of people from minority ethnic communities working for them. Whilst there was little awareness among respondents of the targets, the idea did come up spontaneously in some of the groups:

'I think the ethnic composition of the police force should reflect that of the population.'

(Chinese focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Camden)

In each focus group, part of the discussion focused on people's views of the targets. Respondents' views were mixed, across and within the seven groups. Some people felt the targets were needed and emphasised the need for there to be a balance of different ethnic groups reflecting the communities of different areas (as is the aim with the targets). However, there was also some cynicism over the sincerity of the targets, with some respondents judging them to be a 'hypocritical' publicity stunt and tokenistic:

'They are just trying to keep the public quiet.'

(Pakistani focus group, men, 18-24, Southall)

Although some respondents, particularly those in black and Asian groups, expressed disappointment that it had taken the Inquiry into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence for the targets to be introduced, there was also a belief that various issues were now being openly discussed and attempts were being made to address long term problems.

'It's a bit hypocritical, okay - in the sense of okay, if it wasn't for the Stephen Lawrence case, then these new initiatives wouldn't have been pushed. But then, we should use it as an opportunity to use to our advantage.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 25-30, Southwark)

The targets were seen as a starting point.

'In America when like civil rights movements with the schools, the first people that started going to schools, they were token people. They just sent them out as a token gesture saying like, "we'll bring people into the [white areas], we're trying to move segregation out". They were the token people, but everything has to start with something doesn't it?'

(Black Caribbean focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, central London)

However, there was also a strong view that it was more important for the police to get people with the right kinds of personalities joining the police, regardless of their ethnic background. Black and Asian respondents made a point of saying that people should be recruited on merit, which fits with findings from previous research (Holdaway and Barron, 1997):

'When you get a job, you get it on your merits ...and not just because the government says we've got to sort it.'

(Indian focus group, men, 25-30, Bradford)

'Anyone could be in the police - as long as they treat everyone equally.'

(Indian focus group, men, 18-24, Birmingham)

Other respondents talked about a need for more people from minority ethnic communities but stressed that they should have the right personal characteristics:

'More Asian people of the right calibre and the right attitude.'

(Pakistani focus group, men, 25-30, Birmingham)

Respondents agreed with the idea that there needed to be more people from minority ethnic communities in the police for a host of reasons, many of which have been highlighted earlier in this report:

- to work with local minority ethnic communities with regard to policing issues;
- to increase cultural understanding and inspire confidence among minority ethnic communities (for example, being able to speak the languages spoken by these communities);
- to reduce the sense of isolation for new recruits from minority ethnic communities;
- to calm down potentially volatile situations based on cultural misunderstandings;
- to reduce the sense that being stopped and searched related to the colour of your skin; and
- to make racist police officers more cautious about expressing their opinions.

Another advantage put forward by respondents was in fulfilling the need to have more people in the lower ranks from which to select, on the basis of merit, those deserving of promotion to senior positions in the police.

There was a view that having more officers from minority ethnic communities in high ranking positions in the police service would make a more dramatic difference to concerns over racism, but would also send a clear message that promotion was a possibility for people from minority ethnic communities considering joining the police.

Even though they perceived advantages to having more police officers from minority ethnic communities, particularly to work with the local community, other respondents, including some of those who had expressed an interest in joining, wanted to emphasise that people should join the police to help society as a whole – a view raised in black African, Indian and Chinese groups:

'But it should not be a racial issue. There's no point in black people joining the police force purely to solve black people's problems. You've got to look at mankind ... you can't fight fire with fire. And you'll be doing the same things that the white police officers are doing in the reverse way. If the black people enters the police force they must enter not for the sole reason of serving the needs of black people, but for serving the needs of all people.'

(Black African focus group, mixed sex, 18-24, Manchester)

5. Conclusions

The police service as a potential career

The police service was certainly not dismissed outright as a potential employer by respondents. People in the focus groups had considered working as a police officer, and many respondents who were not attracted to police work, were interested in other support roles in the Service. However, respondents felt that they would be facing very specific problems if they joined the police because they were from minority ethnic communities. They anticipated being isolated in the police and being subjected to racism, not only from colleagues but also from the general public, and there was a sense in which they felt that they would be more at risk in dangerous situations. On top of this, they expected a level of hostility from people from minority ethnic communities (particularly their own cultures). Respondents in black and Asian groups sometimes had negative attitudes towards minority ethnic police officers themselves, even though they noted that these people were likely to be facing an uphill struggle in their work.

The research identified a set of core themes which were common to all the minority ethnic groups involved: Bangladeshi, black African, black Caribbean, Chinese, Greek/Greek Cypriot, Pakistani, Indian and Turkish/Turkish Cypriot. The issues may have been described differently, but it was clear that people from minority ethnic communities perceived a need for similar issues to be addressed. (It may be that some of these issues are also the concerns of the ethnic majority, but this would need to be explored with further research.) The commonality across respondents might be because racism was a unifying experience, although the extent of experience and perception varied from group to group.

However, Asian Muslims described themselves as having very particular cultural needs that would need to be carefully considered if they were to join the police. These respondents tended to be religious people who needed to wear a certain style of dress or who needed time and space to pray. Even so, some people in this position had applied to join the police and others felt that their needs were not insurmountable – with dialogue, there could be ways of accommodating their needs into the job successfully.

Police officers and police culture

The people who took part in this study came with a series of reservations about the police based on personal experiences, but also images presented in the media. They were deeply concerned about racism in the police and a culture that seemed to exclude them, both from the job and in the community. Respondents perceived not only a lack of understanding among the police when it came to cultures other than their own (principally, white British culture), but little desire on the part of police service staff to be sensitive to the needs of others.

CONCLUSIONS

Police culture itself was felt to be at the root of many problems. The culture of the police was thought to encourage racist attitudes, and this, coupled with a belief that the sorts of characteristics described by respondents as desirable but perceived as often lacking in the police, suggested a re-think of the police's image. Many suggestions were made as to how a more gentle and respectful approach could be adopted with much more interaction between the police and the local minority ethnic population in the areas in which they worked.

However, respondents were keen not to generalise negative opinions to all police officers and positive experiences were described. Of particular note were experiences that suggested that steps made on the part of the police could make an impression on people from minority ethnic communities. Two examples stood out. Firstly, a police officer who had gone out of his way to understand the culture of local residents and who appeared to be valued by the local community, and secondly, a positive experience that had led a young woman to seriously consider joining the police. Even so, there were a variety of issues that respondents wanted to see addressed, particularly racism.

Encouraging potential applicants

Some issues were central to how the police move forward with recruitment of more people from minority ethnic communities, but they were also thought to be key to retaining people in the service once they joined. Respondents' experiences and their desire for information from officers currently working in the service show that recruitment is influenced by all staff, and cannot just be seen as the responsibility of human resource specialists. The low levels of awareness of steps the police have taken to date made respondents emphasise the need for the police to market themselves more effectively and to publicise any strategies widely. This was regarded as crucial; if respondents could not see any action, they could have little confidence in the police's commitment.

It was notable that respondents often made reference to the approach taken by the army in terms of recruitment. Their suggestions for the police sometimes drew on contacts they had with the army, for example, talks in school and leaflets.

Respondents made a host of suggestions and provided the reasoning behind their ideas. The main problem was identified as racism in the police and it was felt that radical steps would be needed to tackle it. The knock-on effects were felt to be immense, not only in terms of relations between the police and community in general, but also for respondents' image of what work in the police would be like for someone from a minority ethnic community.

To an extent, respondents felt that increasing the numbers of people from minority ethnic communities would address problems like isolation and feeling unprotected in vulnerable situations. However, they felt that having more senior officers from minority ethnic communities would be more influential than increasing the numbers overall. This was not only because such people would be expected to deal more effectively with racism, but because respondents wanted to have a career with prospects and they needed to see people from minority ethnic communities in high ranking positions to prove that they too could advance through the ranks.

Even though some were sceptical about whether changes would take place, the Home Office recruitment targets were welcomed as a step in the right direction. However, some respondents were keen to emphasise that new police officers should be recruited on merit, regardless of their ethnic background.

Current police recruitment strategies

As we mentioned earlier, strategies suggested by respondents are already being used by some forces. Home Office research staff gained this information from their involvement in a seminar on recruitment, retention and progression of minority ethnic staff (see below) and from contact with a small number of forces to find out about their approach to meeting recruitment targets. Approaches already being adopted include face-to-face contact at career fairs and using volunteer contact officers for outreach at borough level, open evenings, familiarisation events and access courses for candidates. Lack of information was a key theme in this study, so initiatives which provide more information face-to-face, for example: about support for recruits; how racism is tackled; length and content of police officer training; dangers faced by officers and how they are equipped and trained to deal with these, seem most likely to be well-received by potential recruits.

The Home Secretary's 25 point action plan also contained elements which mirrored some of respondents' concerns and suggestions for improving recruitment. None of the contents of the action plan, including the targets, seemed to be common knowledge amongst respondents in the study. Once again, lack of information may create an impression that nothing is being done to tackle issues of concern to respondents. The action plan aimed to eliminate all discriminatory practices in the police service in England and Wales and make it more attractive to all groups that are currently under-represented. It included the following actions:

- a complete review of all police service recruitment procedures, with a view to eliminating any discriminatory practices;

CONCLUSIONS

- a race relations/cultural audit to be conducted by all forces;
- Chief Constables to support and promote the existence of support networks for all minority staff;
- exit interviews to be conducted for all staff who resign from the service; and
- police authorities to seek progress reports on recruitment, retention and progression.

Force strategies also reflect differences according to whether they have mainly rural, or urban populations and the extent to which people from minority ethnic groups might live in communities, or in isolation in their force area. There were few differences found according to geographic region in this research, although it was carried out in mainly urban areas. There is some research evidence to suggest that key influences on attitudes of people from minority ethnic communities cross geographic boundaries and should be understood in a national context (Bland et al, 2000). Forces may have to overcome perceptions which do not necessarily reflect the experiences of potential applicants in their local policing area.

Although forces develop their detailed plans with local circumstances in mind, some basic common principles have also been suggested. The following steps were highlighted in the report of the seminar about recruitment, retention and progression of minority ethnic staff mentioned above, which was held with equal opportunities, recruitment and career development professionals, at the Police Staff College, Bramshill in October 1999. They are included here for reference purposes:

- **Monitor:** It was suggested that forces could not begin to meet targets for staff from minority ethnic backgrounds unless they identified at which point difficulties were occurring in the selection or promotion system.
- **Audit:** Once problem areas in force processes had been identified, there was a need for them to be audited – for example by the local Council for Racial Equality, the force branch of the Black Police Association or equivalent, or another relevant staff group or outside organisation. Individuals who had taken part in the processes recently could be consulted.
- **Implement:** Only once monitoring and auditing had taken place, it was argued, could changes in procedure be implemented.

- Monitor: It was emphasised that monitoring had to continue after implementation if forces wished to be able to identify whether the changes they made to their processes were having an impact on problematic areas identified through initial monitoring.

Although this process could help forces to evaluate their approaches, monitoring information in itself would not be sufficient for a thorough evaluation. Forces might wish to follow-up samples of candidates who drop out of the process in order to gain structured feedback from them. They might also need to maintain awareness of changes in, for example, the local labour market or multi-media advertising opportunities and take account of these by altering recruitment strategies. If forces wanted to focus their campaigns carefully and ensure cost effectiveness, they would need to be able to determine:

- whether an initiative achieved its aim and produced the expected outcomes;
- which aspects of the initiative led to its success or failure; and
- what implications this has for future recruitment strategies.

This would require substantial attention to data collection and analysis, indeed this would have to become a principal part of the recruitment strategy.

The experience of the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) Positive Action Team provides an example of how careful monitoring and auditing can focus attention. The team found that it was essential to uncover problems in the administrative aspects of the recruitment system, such as lack of rapid follow-up of those who expressed an interest. If potential applicants were not followed up swiftly, the impact of outreach work and advertising material was wasted.

The experiences of some of the respondents in the research show that applicants who had taken one step towards the service could easily become convinced that it was uninterested in their candidature. The service needs to be sure that candidates, once they have been attracted to apply, are conscious of the interest the organisation takes in them. According to the MPS experience, encouragement throughout the application process can help to ensure that candidates do not drop out of the system prematurely.

However, perhaps the most important message from this research in terms of strategy is that whatever they choose to do, police forces need to publicise the

CONCLUSIONS

initiatives they undertake. Respondents in the focus groups were for the most part unaware of the initiatives taking place in their respective force areas or in any other force, nor were they conscious that they might expect some support or encouragement in the application process. The findings of this study suggest that potential applicants need to feel that the service recognises the barrier which racism represents for them.

The key messages from this research have been fed into the development of a national recruitment campaign which may go some way towards reaching out and encouraging people from minority ethnic communities to consider the police service as a career in the future.

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Appendix 1 The topic guide



Topic Guide

The views of people from ethnic minorities towards a career in the police service

Aims of the study

1. To identify the main factors influencing the attitudes of people from minority ethnic communities towards a career in the police service; and
2. To assess how future force recruitment strategies might best help meet targets set for minority ethnic recruitment.

Background

- About BMRB, independent research agency
- About the project
- Home Office targets to increase recruitment of people from ethnic minorities into the police service
- Project funded by the Home Office
- This is one of a number of groups being conducted around the country
- Stress we are not looking to recruit people to the police – people in the group may have strong feelings about this either way – this is fine, we are trying to find out what people really think but would ask that people respect the views of others during the discussion
- Confidentiality and tape-recording

Introductions (briefly)

- First name, age, any children/people they look after, work history
- What would be their ideal job, what kind of job sector would they like to work in (for example, financial services, IT, retail and advertising, public sector/community)

Job aspirations (briefly)

- What sorts of things do they look for in a job
- What factors are important to them

Probe for:

- Money
- Security
- Status
- Hours / flexibility
- Contributing to society
- Interesting work
- Exciting work
- Work that has a lot of variation

Understanding of what being a police officer entails

- What do they think police officers do
- What does the job involve
- What sorts of jobs might they do
- Do they know that the police service employs people to do other jobs (that they don't just employ police officers)
- What other jobs are they aware of

Probe for:

- Administrative
- Forensic
- Special constables
- Personnel
- Equal opportunities officer
- Crime analyst / researcher
- IT specialist
- Finance officer
- Occupational psychologist

Attitudes towards the police service as a career

- What sorts of people become police officers
- Do they have a sense of a certain sort of person (or personality) joining the police
- What sorts of people ought to be police officers (what qualities should they have)
- Do they (themselves) have these qualities
- Do they have any idea what policemen get paid
- Do they see it as a well paid job
- Show pay scales and allowances and probe for reactions – are they as expected
- Having seen what the police actually get paid – do they consider it to be a well paid job
- What sorts of things would attract them to being a policeman or woman
- What things would put them off being a police officer

Probe for:

- The hours involved
- Pay
- Danger of the job
- Dealing with unpleasant situations

Contact with the police

- What sorts of contacts have they had with the police in the past

Probe for what happened and how the police officers came across to them:

- Visit at school
- At a political demonstration
- 'Stop and search'
- As a victim of crime
- Did their experiences change their view of the police at all
- Do they know any police officers
- Do they know any police officers from ethnic minorities
 - How are such people seen by people like themselves
 - Are they treated any differently because of their job
 - Is their job an issue at all

If racism arises as an issue, ask:

- How much racism do they think exists in the police service
- How do the police compare to other employers / organisations

If the police service is perceived as racist:

- In what ways could the police be thought of as a racist organisation
- Lack of high-ranking officers from ethnic minority groups
- Lack of representation throughout the police service as a whole
- Having racist stereotypes about the people they are policing (for example, the use of tactics like 'stop and search')
- Has the level of racism changed over the years
- What has changed / what has not
- What do you think can be done to prevent or remove racism in the police service – what steps/actions would have to be taken

Approaches to recruitment

- If a friend or family member were considering applying to the police service, what would your advice to them be
- Would this advice be the same if their friend were white
- Would they consider applying to join the police service, either as a police officer or in any other capacity (probe reasons for and against)
- What would make you more likely to apply

Probe for

- The police adopting a personal approach to recruitment (face-to-face)
- Changing policing style
- Better advertising
- Changing the conditions of employment (such as pay, shift-work, career opportunities and so on)
- What do they think of the police being set targets to recruit more people from ethnic minorities

- What sort of a difference would it make if there were more [say ethnic group] people in the police
- What would be more important, numbers on the beat or seniority - would it make more of a difference if the Chief Constable or Commissioner was [say ethnic group]
- Or from another ethnic minority group
- Would the police service need to change in any way to attract more [say ethnic group] people

Reactions to advertising/recruitment material

- Given the wide range of issues discussed, what impact do you think advertising can have on encouraging [say ethnic group] people to apply to the police service
- Explain that we would like to hear their views on some posters that have been used. Distribute poster 1, probe as below. Repeat for poster 2

Probe for each poster

- What do they like about the poster
- What don't they like about it
- What seems to be the message
- Are the images stereotypical
- Could it be improved
- Do they think it would appeal to people like themselves
- Comparing the different posters
 - Do they have a favoured approach
 - What aspects do they think 'work', what don't work
 - Should the police be taking a completely different approach

Appendix 2 Sample characteristics

Sample characteristics

Clearly, the main focus was on ethnicity, but the research also took into consideration a range of other attributes thought to have a bearing on people's views on careers and the police: age, gender, educational achievement, employment experience, and geographical region. These are described below.

Ethnicity

The research included people from the main minority ethnic communities living in England and Wales (based on statistics from the 1991 UK Census):

- Black Caribbean;
- Black African;
- Indian;
- Pakistani;
- Bangladeshi; and
- Chinese.

The research also included people from ethnic groups who might be classified as 'white' in official statistics but were agreed to form recognisable minority ethnic communities for this research:

- Turkish (including people from Cyprus); and
- Greek (including people from Cyprus).

It was decided at the outset not to include people from the ethnic majority as the purpose of the research was to explore the views and needs of people from minority groups to identify ways in which people could be encouraged to join the police. Whilst comparisons would have been interesting, for example, to explore which issues held for all groups of people, including the white ethnic majority, and which were specific to minority ethnic communities, it was felt that this was beyond the remit of this particular research project.

An important aspect of the research was to allow different cultural needs and experiences to be explored in depth. That is, not to assume that all people from minority ethnic communities would have similar views. What emerged was a set of core issues, but with some specific matters of pertinence to certain groups of people. Hence, each focus group was with people who described themselves as having the same, or similar, ethnic background. So, for example, people who described themselves as 'black Caribbean' took part in a discussion with other people who described themselves as 'black Caribbean'. In this way the groups were homogeneous. In a few of the groups people may have origins from different countries even though they described themselves similarly when presented with a list of options. For example, within the 'Chinese' focus group there were people whose families had come from Hong Kong, Singapore, and France. Equally though, other broad categories like 'black African' tended to reflect the local population in the area where the focus group was held, for example, in Southwark all the participants were people with links to Nigeria rather than a variety of African countries.

Religion

Religion was also a factor which needed to be taken into account. The methodology (focus groups with people from particular ethnic groups) was explained to respondents making it clear that they would be joining a group of people who had described themselves similarly. This was done to give people the option of switching group. For example, someone who described themselves as 'Indian' may have preferred to take part in the 'Pakistani' group because they were Muslim. In reality, we found that the focus on certain locations, such as Southall, meant that religion tended to be reflected among the communities living in that area and that the groups were homogeneous in terms of both ethnicity and religion, for example, a group of Indian Sikh men.

Gender

Another key consideration was gender. Previous research had suggested that for certain ethnic groups it would be difficult to hold groups that included both men and women. For each of the Asian categories (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) groups were held which were either all-female or all-male. The findings presented in this report, and our experiences of the recruitment process, confirm that this was the correct research design. This also provided an opportunity to explore gender as a distinct issue, for example, whether women have different views on joining the police from men. When considering research among people from minority ethnic communities, gender may well be an issue worth exploring further.

Age

New recruits to the police service are 25 years old on average (data from Bland et al, 1999). This research focused on the views of people aged between 18 and 30, the ages when people are most likely to be thinking about their career aspirations.

Educational achievement

Although there is no official minimum qualification for entry to the police, it was understood that 5 GCSEs at grades A-C was the level of education often used by police forces. Respondents were divided into four categories reflecting different educational attainment levels they had reached (that is, their highest level of education):

- GCSEs (mainly grades A-C) or equivalent
- 'A' level or equivalent
- Studying for first degree
- Degree

Employment experience

People with different types of work experience were included in the study as it was anticipated that those with established careers or jobs would think about the concept of joining the police quite differently from those just starting out in the world of work. We categorised people around having never worked, those with less than 5 years (full time) work experience, those with 5 years or more work experience and students. In reality the sample only included a few unemployed people as with 5 GCSEs at A-C respondents were not only more likely to have gone on to further education but also to find it easier to get a job compared with people with fewer qualifications. Number of years of work experience also reflected age, with younger people, not surprisingly, having less work experience than older participants.

A special focus was placed on students studying for their first degree who would be eligible for the Accelerated Promotion Scheme for Graduates (APSG) on completing their studies. Whilst students took part in the other groups, two focus groups were held just with people studying for their first degree; one with Asian students (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and the other with black students (black Caribbean and black African).

Geographical region

The research reflects the views of respondents living and/or working in different parts of England. The sample was drawn from the south, the midlands and the north:

- Southern England (inner London – Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Camden, central London [but drawing in people living in other places, like Harlesden]; and outer London - Southall, Hayes, Palmers Green, and Southgate)
- Midlands (Birmingham)
- Northern England (Oldham and Bradford)

Appendix 3 Conduct of the research

Conduct of the research

The research team

The research team consisted of four qualitative researchers experienced in the facilitation of focus groups. All four came from different minority ethnic communities. Wherever possible the ethnicity of the group facilitator was matched to the ethnicity of the people taking part in the focus group. Half the groups (16) were matched using broad categories of ethnic background, such as 'Asian' or 'black'. Using more specific matching would categorise 7 of the 32 groups as matched – that is the researcher had the same cultural background as the respondents, specifically black African, Indian and Turkish.

Matching was not always possible because of the low number of specialist qualitative researchers from minority ethnic communities, in spite of efforts to identify such people to be involved in the research. However, we felt there were some advantages for the research in having 'un-matched' as well as 'matched' groups.

Where the ethnicity of the facilitator and the group were matched, for example 'black African', we felt participants might feel more comfortable describing certain experiences they felt the facilitator could relate to and hence the discussion might go into more depth. Equally though, in groups where the ethnicity of the researcher was not matched to the participants, we felt that there would be scope to explore assumptions more effectively as respondents would have to explain issues to the researcher that would need to be understood by policy makers.

The researchers explored the issue of 'matching' at the end of the discussions. It was recognised that responses could well be limited by the situation (for example, not wanting to offend the researcher), however we feel it worthwhile relating their views here. The general perception was that the ethnicity of the researcher was perhaps less important than their professional skills in terms of making people feel comfortable and able to express themselves as fully as they might wish. Some respondents (particularly Muslims) felt that it was perhaps more important to match the gender of the facilitator to the group – which we tried to accommodate within the scope of the research.

Recruitment

The recruitment of people to take part in the research was undertaken by BMRB's specialist team of recruiters, which includes people from minority ethnic communities. A variety of recruitment methods were adopted to avoid bias, including approaching people 'on the street' as well as via community groups.

Participants were also asked to put BMRB in touch with others who might be interested in taking part in the research (a technique often referred to as 'snowballing'). It is usual practice to offer an incentive to people taking part in qualitative research, as it is understood that people are giving up over an hour of their time and, in the case of focus groups, having to travel to a local venue – often in the evening. Taxis and childcare were organised and paid for by BMRB as appropriate, and a 'thank you' of £25 was given to each person attending a discussion.

A screening questionnaire was used to ensure that each respondent was eligible to take part. The questionnaire adopted a new approach to questions on cultural identity. Respondents were asked to pick as many options as they felt best described themselves from the list they were presented with (which included an 'other' category). The list included British to recognise some people's desire to include 'British' as part of their identity. Unfortunately the scope of the research meant that it would be impossible to include every possible combination of answers to the ethnicity question. However, the recruiters were explicit about the composition of the focus groups and offered people the opportunity to take part in the discussion of their choice.

Analysis

Material collected through qualitative methods is invariably unstructured and unwieldy. Much of it is text based, consisting of verbatim transcriptions of interviews and discussions. The content of the material is usually in detailed and micro form (for example, descriptions of experiences, inarticulate explanations). The primary aim of any analytical method is to provide a means of exploring coherence and structure within a cumbersome data set whilst retaining a hold on the original accounts and observations from which it is derived.

Qualitative analysis is essentially about detection and exploration of the data. We 'make sense' of the data by looking for coherence and structure within the data. The BMRB analytical procedure works from verbatim transcripts and involves a systematic process of sifting, summarising and sorting the material according to key issues and themes. BMRB use a set of content analysis techniques, known as 'Matrix Mapping', to ensure an optimum synthesis of findings from the verbatim data.

'Matrix-Mapping' begins with a familiarisation stage and includes a researcher's review of the audio tapes and/or transcripts. Based on the coverage of the topic guide, the researchers' experiences of conducting the fieldwork and their preliminary review of the data, a thematic framework is constructed. The analysis then proceeds

by summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework using a range of techniques such as information matrices. When all the data have been sifted according to the core themes the analyst begins to map the data and identify features within the data: defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomenon, creating typologies, finding associations, and providing explanations.

The mapping process is similar for both individual interviews and group discussions. The analyst reviews the summarised data; compares and contrasts the perceptions, accounts, or experiences; searches for patterns within the data and seeks explanations within the data set. Piecing together the overall picture is not simply aggregating patterns, but it involves a process of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues, and searching for structures within the data that have explanatory power. This report has been informed by a full content analysis of the audio tapes and transcripts, with verbatim quotes being provided, where appropriate, to illustrate and illuminate the findings.

The role of qualitative research

Qualitative methods use small, purposively selected, samples. A qualitative approach is designed to provide understanding about, and illumination of, a set of issues. It cannot provide statistical evidence that can be generalised, numerically, to a broader population. Rather than measure the frequency, or extent, of issues, qualitative research seeks to define, describe and explain the range of emergent issues. With a rigorously constructed purposive sample, the findings from qualitative research are generalisable across the underlying study population.

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