

Experiencing Ethnicity: Discrimination and Service Provision

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

The main findings are:

Here, Kusminder Chahal brings together lessons from this wide range of projects. The current *Foundations* presents a wider dimension in subject matter than the earlier one but still highlights similar issues.

The research projects reviewed in this *Foundation* indicate:

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

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