

Addressing ethnic inequalities in child protection practice: Why it's time we move beyond the research

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Areas of focus

An introduction: key messages in the webinar



Research studies since 2000



Child sexual abuse in British South Asian communities



Transformational change: a proactive approach to addressing inequalities

An introduction: key messages in the webinar

- I wish to acknowledge that ethnic inequalities in UK child protection practice have been documented by many before me and particularly across the last 20 years (predominantly but not exclusively, Professors Lena Dominelli, Claudia Bernard and Prospera Tedam)
- I want to acknowledge the emotional nature of undertaking research which exposes inequalities and thank all those who have tried and continue to do so
- I seek to revisit, re-emphasise and re-energise our efforts in addressing ethnic inequalities in child protection so that the impact upon children and families remains central to our practice
- I want to emphasise that ethnic inequalities should remain a serious cause for concern and the subject demands due attention
- There is a mismatch between knowing why inequalities need addressing and why they are not being addressed
- We must continuously reflect upon why progress remains inadequate and ineffective at large and what needs to happen to move practice and policy forward
- Legislation and professional codes of practice stipulate that services need to be equally delivered to all service users, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation and socio-economic background (Children's Act 1989, 2004; Working Together to Safeguard Children HM Government 2018; Keeping Children Safe in Education Department for Education 2022; Equality Act 2010; BASW Code of Ethics for Social Work)



Research studies since 2000

Child safeguarding practice and services

- Over-representation of Black children in the child protection and care system (Welbourne 2002; Barn 2007; Owen and Statham 2009; Tilbury and Thoburn 2009; Laird and Tadam 2019; Webb et al. 2020)
- Under-representation of children from South Asian communities in the child protection and care system (Ahmed 2005; Tilbury and Thoburn 2009; Webb et al. 2020)
- Professional (unconscious) prejudices against Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities (Allen and Hulme 2021)
- Race and ethnicity reported as significant in discussions about ethnic inequalities in child protection (Webb et al. 2002; Harrison and Turner 2011; Bernard and Harris 2016; Bywaters et al. 2017; Kirton 2018; Bernard and Harris 2019; Laird and Tadam 2019)
- Service users have been reported as feeling 'demeaned and degraded' (Ahmed 2005, p.93) and 'misunderstood and misinterpreted' (Featherstone and Fraser 2012)

- Bernard (2001) researched the experience of Black mothers whose children had been sexually abuse and found that they experienced barriers to reporting child sexual abuse (CSA), based upon race and ethnicity (e.g. distrust of services)
- Davies (2019) reports on the dearth of research examining the experiences of British Black girls and CSA
- Jassal (2020; 2022 forthcoming) documents the experiences of British South Asian females and CSA and highlights the paucity of research in this area
- Allnock et al. (2012) found that CSA services appeared to be less available/accessible to minoritised children and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2015) reported that children from minoritised communities are known to receive a poorer quality of CSA services than their peers
- Limited access to interpreting services and the need for greater consideration of language barriers (Qureshi et al. 2000; Chand 2005, 2008; Gilligan and Akhtar 2006)
- Bhatti-Sinclair and Price (2016) and Bernard and Harris (2019) discuss that Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews lack critical analysis of race and culture which limits an effective assessment of the *significance* of race and cultural issues



Ethnic inequalities in school exclusions and criminal child exploitation (CCE)

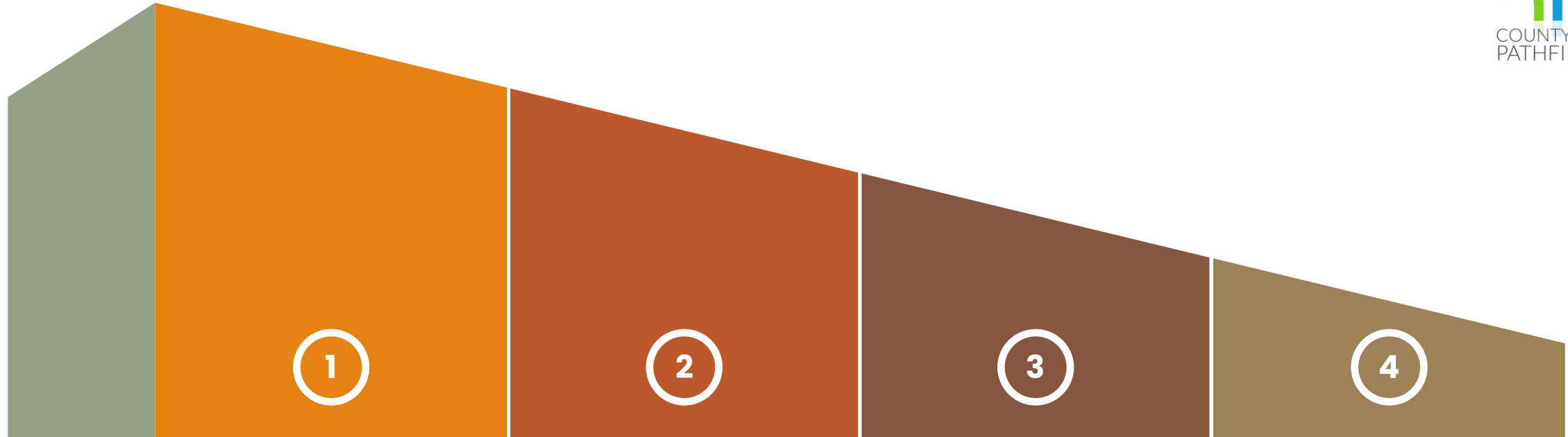


- Youth Justice Board (YJB) selected four local authorities to be part of a county lines (CL) pathfinder project; areas identified by the National Crime Agency (NCA) as areas with high numbers of CL feeding into them
- Quantitative data collated from the four areas (2018-20) mapping school exclusions against a number of variables such as ethnicity, gender, age, SEN and types of exclusion
- Qualitative data collated from three focus groups attended by twenty-seven professionals working with excluded children and young people and who may become vulnerable to CCE exclusion
- Similar patterns emerged across all four areas in terms of ethnic disproportionalities evidencing that children and young people most at risk of exclusion were Gypsy Roma Traveller, White Irish Traveller, Mixed White Black, and Black Caribbean
- Other minoritised ethnic backgrounds were disproportionately excluded, but to a lesser degree

Quantitative data category	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	National data (Permeant Exclusions)
Highest disproportionality group	GRT	GRT	Not obtained/refused followed by <u>White Irish Traveller</u>	<u>White Irish Traveller</u>	GRT
2 nd highest disproportionality group	Mixed White Black	<u>White Irish Traveller</u>	GRT	Black Caribbean	<u>White Irish Traveller</u> *
3 rd highest disproportionality group	Black Caribbean	Mixed White Black	Black other	GRT	White/Black Caribbean* Different term used to data provided
4 th highest disproportionality group	<u>White Irish Traveller</u>	Black Caribbean	Mixed White Black	Mixed White Black	Black Caribbean



Focus group findings



LIMITED UNDERSTANDING

Children and young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds being disproportionately excluded from school, is insufficiently highlighted, examined or understood.

CUTS TO SERVICES

Specialist (culturally appropriate) services, where available, can be effective in supporting children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds but not always available or easily accessible.

LATE INTERVENTION

Agencies supporting excluded children and young people can feel overwhelmed, with early interventions not being comprehensive enough.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Professionals find it difficult to talk about race and racism and although agree that these disproportionalities are concerning, have limited ideas and plans about how to address them.

Child sexual abuse in British South Asian communities

- Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a widespread form of abuse, effecting 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys by the age of 16 (IICSA 2022) and it remains a challenging area of child protection practice as shame, guilt, fear and confusion prevent disclosures (Martin et al. 2014; Dubowitz 2017; Kelly and Karsna 2018)
- Reporting of CSA has been documented as being particularly low from Britain's South Asian communities (Gilligan and Akhtar 2006; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report 2013; Office of the Children's Commissioner 2014, 2015; Begum 2018; Gill and Harrison 2019; IICSA 2020)
- Moghal et al. (1995) reported on lower than expected South Asian CSA referrals and that professionals appeared to be less interventionist with South Asian families:
'The difference in those reaching case conference and being registered as sexual abuse between the Asian and Frothingham cohort [white] suggests that in the former evidence had to be overwhelming before a case conference was held. Professionals may be less keen to act where Asian children are concerned unless they are sure of their facts' (Moghal et al., 1995; p. 347)
- Need for professionals and support services to more carefully consider the culture of South Asian communities when responding to CSA (Gilligan and Akhtar 2006) and more recent research continues to argue the need for culturally sensitive approaches to CSA (Gill and Harrison 2019; IICSA 2020; Jassal 2020; Jassal 2022 (forthcoming); Ali et al. 2021).
- A higher proportion of Truth project participants of Asian ethnicity (73%) did not disclose at time of abuse, compared to White (66%), Black (68%) Mixed ethnicities (65%) (IICSA 2022)



Current research study

- Guided conversations with 15 British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA
- Aged between 21-61, from the North, Midlands and South of England
- Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani ethnicity
- The narrative of *shame and honour/sharam and izzat* as a significant barrier to disclosure and reporting; a set of cultural norms around expectant social behaviour, generally of females (Gill 2004)
- The constructs of shame and honour have been reported as a factor in the low rates of disclosure and reporting of sexual, domestic and honour-based abuse and violence perpetrated by males against females across South Asian communities (Gilligan and Akhtar 2006; Thiara and Gill 2010; Gohir 2013; Gill and Brah 2014; Cowburn et al. 2015; Aplin 2017; Harrison and Gill 2017; Idriss 2017; Mansoor 2017)
- The study sought to extend this body of knowledge by exploring these constructs in the context of South Asian victim/survivor experiences of CSA in Britain
- Highlights that we need to have a much wider research base to explore and report on the lived experiences of minoritised ethnic victims/survivors of abuse

Findings about ethnicity

- The Inquiry's research report on child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities had noted that *'Cultural stereotypes and racism can lead to failures on the part of institutions and professionals to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse'* (IICSA 2020) with one male focus group participant stating: *"I did a lot of bad things; I was playing up, and I think it should have been picked up on that something's wrong ... But I think if a child of colour or black kid or Asian kid maybe plays up and, you know, does things and gets violent or whatever, it's sometimes seen as typical"* (IICSA 2022, p.18).
- In some areas, the treatment by staff of children in care who were from ethnic minority communities was racist, hostile and abusive. It showed little sensitivity to particular cultural needs such as diet, hair care and clothing
- The police and social services did not record the ethnicity of victims and alleged perpetrators, as evidenced in the case studies included in the IICSA Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report
- Analysing any pattern or trends in respect of the ethnicity of victims and survivors or perpetrators is difficult due to the paucity and inadequacy of this data – critical to better understanding offenders and victims *"because community, cultural, and other factors are clearly relevant to understanding and tackling offending"* (IICSA 2022, p.147)



The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

October 2022

 INDEPENDENT INQUIRY
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Further findings

Following consultation with over 100 specialist support services for minoritised communities, six issues were expressed:

Services to victims and survivors were mistrusted and considered to be inadequate;

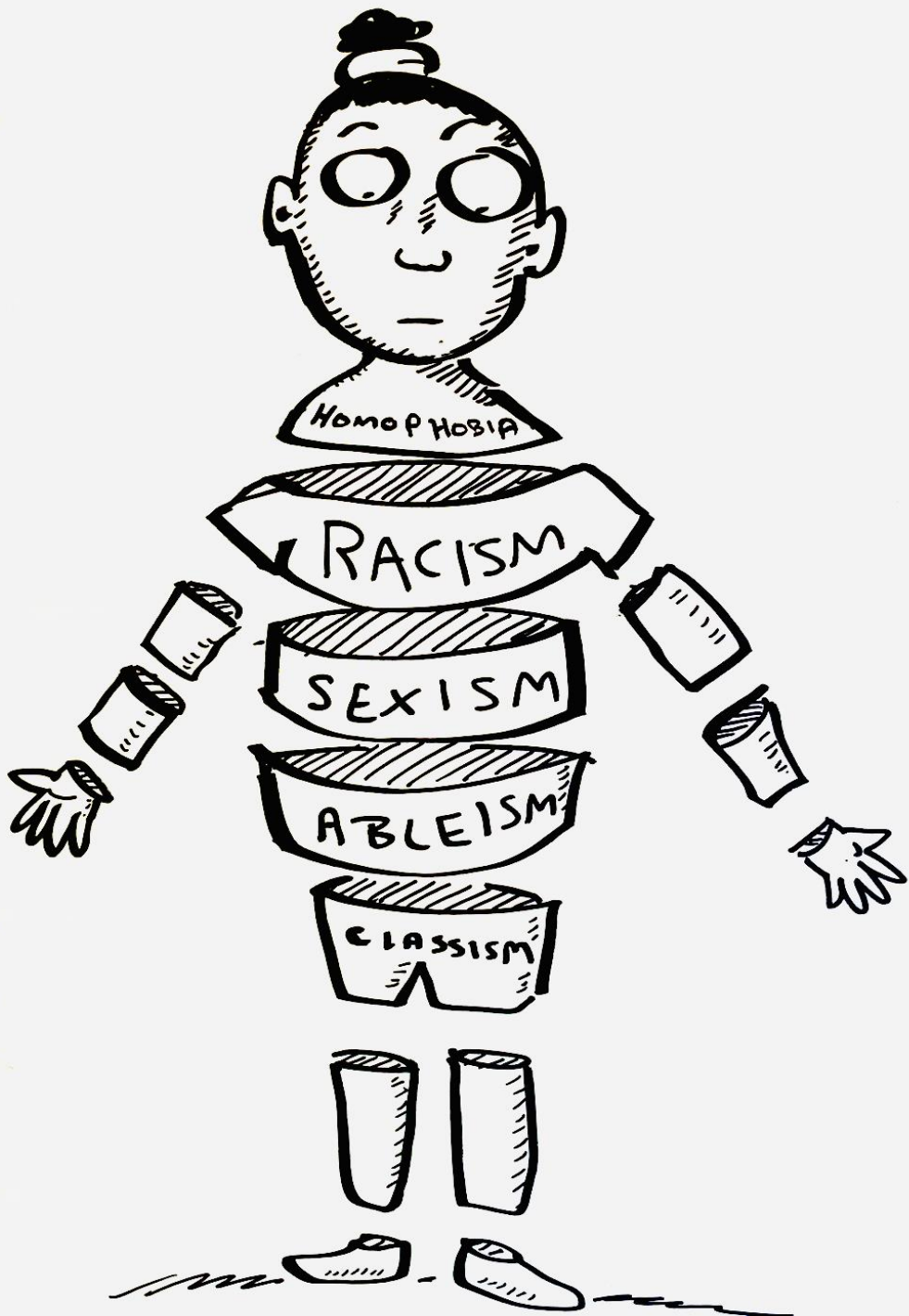
language was a barrier to disclosure of child sexual abuse – interpreting services were poor;

there were additional barriers to disclosure in closed communities, particularly in relation to religious and internal support – the Inquiry was told that community leaders sometimes restrict access to external support services in order to protect the community and culture from outside influence or harm;

some organisations did not recognise or support the cultural and religious needs of victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities;

some organisations told the Inquiry how shame and honour within communities can silence victims and survivors;

some victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities were removed from school relationships and sex education programmes and did not understand the concept of sexual activity – this, in turn, inhibited disclosure.



Theory of intersectionality

- Intersectionality theory enables a deeper insight into people's identities and lived experiences
- The term was coined in 1989 by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap
- Understands that people's identities and interactions with the world are layered and multi-faceted, and that forms of discrimination like racism, sexism, ableism, classism and homophobia can be experienced simultaneously
- Intersectional approaches strengthen social work practice and enable us to explore combinations of discrimination

Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics

Kimberle Crenshaw
Kimberle.Crenshaw@chicagounbound.edu

To access the seminal
paper:

<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>



- Gender and race were seen as mutually exclusive through a ‘single-axis framework’, leading to an insufficient exploration of the lived experiences of Black women and she discussed ‘*how black women are theoretically erased*’ (p.1)
- Black women were experiencing discrimination in a number of ways, which can be similar *and* different to the experiences of Black men and White women, leading to Black women experiencing ‘*double discrimination*’

Importance of intersectional approaches in child protection

- How are we *'Ascertaining the wishes and feelings of children'* (Children Act 1989)?
- Evidence illustrating the need for safeguarding practitioners to develop skills and knowledge when exploring the lived experiences of children and their inner world (Laming 2009; Munro 2011; North, 2014; Ferguson 2014; Ruch, 2014; Handley and Doyle 2014; North East Lincolnshire Local Safeguarding Children Board 2017)
- Furthermore, there needs to be a greater understanding of the intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, class, sexuality, disability (Middel et al.; Webb et al. 2020; Jassal 2020; Jassal 2022 *forthcoming*)

Transformational change: a proactive approach to addressing inequalities



Micro level: the individual practitioner

- A need to critically reflect upon our commitment and capacity to be child-centred and keeping children safe
- What do we already know about inequalities and what are we, as individual practitioners, doing to address this?
- What do we understand by cultural competency and are we able to self-assess our levels of cultural competency?
- What will support us to strengthen our practice?

Meso level: the organisation

- What are the organisational barriers to achieving effective practice?
- Is there an organisational environment where inequalities are openly discussed, reviewed and evaluated?
- How does it assess practitioner competency when working with minoritised children and families?
- Does supervision practice and supervisory models allow for sufficient exploration of reflecting upon such issues?

Macro level: society and policies

- How effective is legislation and professional codes of practice, stipulating that services need to be equally delivered to all service users, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation and socio-economic background (Children's Act 1989, 2004; Working Together to Safeguard Children HM Government 2018; Keeping Children Safe in Education Department for Education 2022; Equality Act 2010; BASW Code of Ethics for Social Work)?
- There is a plethora of research evidencing that minoritised ethnic children and families are significantly impacted by socio-economic factors and poverty – how do national responses and failures to adequately address inequalities impact child protection practice and policy?
- What are the mechanisms of translating national inequalities into local action?

Concluding points

- Ethnic inequalities in child protection have been widely reported over a long enough period of time, to now be embedded into the fabric of child protection practice and policy
- Inequalities continue to be significantly present in various forms and continue to impact the lives of children and families in disproportionate and unequal ways
- The time is surely here to take a far more proactive approach in addressing inequalities, learning from best practice examples and integrating learning into local, regional and national practice and policy
- The subject requires discussion and action at local, regional and national level
- Please do not let this webinar become another means of communicating what we already know, without having created a desire and objective to address these inequalities wherever and however you can

Thank you for
listening

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Questions

The background features a dark, textured surface with numerous question marks of varying sizes and shades of gray and brown. A prominent, larger question mark is centered behind the text. At the bottom of the image, there is a solid orange horizontal bar.

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