

‘Race’, crime and justice in the North East Region

Gary Craig, Maggie O’Neill, Bankole Cole, Georgios A. Antonopoulos, Carol Devanney
and Sue Adamson with Paul Biddle and Louise Wattis

A research team from three Universities in the North East Region (Durham, Northumbria and Teesside) explored the issues relating to the increasing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) populations in the Region and their experience of racist crime, using a mixed methodology involving community consultations, individual interviews, analysis of demographic data and examination of police data.

The team found:

- The regional non-white British population has grown significantly in the past decade to nearly 200,000, more than 7.5% of the total regional population.
- This population is characterised by rapidly increasing diversity and includes not only long-standing settled BME populations such as those of African-Caribbean, Chinese and South Asian origins, and Romani populations, but a wide range of ethnic groups coming to the region more recently as refugees, migrant workers – many from East and Central Europe – and irregular workers.
- This population has steadily developed networks of representative organisations giving BME people a range of voices but many of these organisations are now threatened by funding cuts, and some are struggling to survive at all.



Consultation Meeting. With permission from RRFNE [Regional Refugee Forum North East]

- The key issue identified by BME people is the continuing experience of racism, at individual and institutional levels, within the public and private sectors, with particular concern relating to aspects of the criminal justice system (CJS). There remains a lack of trust that the police and other agencies deal with racist incidents effectively in terms of recording, responding to, monitoring and tracking incidents to assemble an accurate picture of racism in the region.
- Racist incidents are not restricted either to areas where there are high levels of BME settlement or to the urban areas in the region. Racism is thus an issue for all public and private agencies in the region and the team recommends action on a number of fronts.

Background

This study emerged from discussions between social policy and criminology academics based at Durham, Northumbria and Teesside Universities, together with a representative of the Ministry of Justice.

There was a common recognition that this is an urgent area of work in the North East Region as relatively little appeared to be known about the profile of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups (including refugees and asylum seekers) and the criminal justice issues they face, although anecdotal evidence suggested both that the BME population had grown significantly over the recent past (albeit from a level which was low relative to that in the UK as a whole), and that the issue of racism was one which continued to affect them, both in individual and institutional settings.

The research summarised here represents the outcomes of a collaborative study undertaken between the three Universities, funded largely by the Ministry of Justice with supplementary support in cash and kind from the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. The study commenced in July 2011. A consultative seminar in November marked the end of the fieldwork phase. The report was completed in early 2012.

The research approach

The overall aim of the study was to map, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the BME population in the region and the social, economic and criminal justice issues that it faces, in order to make recommendations for policy and practice, to make a significant difference to the lives of BME groups in the North East Region.

The research team wanted to know:

- what was the demographic profile of the BME population in the North East Region?;
- what were the key issues affecting BME groups including refugee and asylum groups in the North East Region?;
- what are the key issues affecting generalist grass roots community groups and what are their understandings of 'race', diversity and the experiences of BME groups?;
- what does the race hate crime data tell us?; and
- what are the key messages from analysis of these data sets for the region?



The research involved two major community consultations, one held under Chatham House rules, individual interviews with BME-led and generalist community groups, and analysis of police and demographic data.

The regional context

The North East Region consists of ten unitary largely urban authorities (Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland) and two other major authorities, Durham (which is a mixed urban/rural unitary authority) and Northumberland, now also a unitary authority incorporating six largely rural formerly second-tier authorities. Northumberland is thus substantially rural with some remote areas.

For historical reasons, largely to do with the nature of the local labour market, the BME population of the region is small relative to that of the UK's major urban centres, although it has been growing in recent years, partly as a result of the designation of two cities as refugee dispersal areas, and of the immigration of foreign workers.

'We try not to take things personally but we are often shown that this is not your country...'

Community feedback

The key issue facing BME organisations and their constituent populations, was clearly the continuing high levels of racism at both individual and institutional levels. The feedback from interviews, the Chatham House seminar and the regional refugee consultation all pointed to the difficulties minorities have in terms of accessing services effectively, obtaining redress for poor services, and in believing that their needs are taken seriously when they are able to organise to press for improvements.

This applied as much to the criminal justice system as elsewhere. Not only does feedback from participants in this study point to this deficit in working practices and in policy (issues which were confirmed at the Chatham House seminar by those responsible for delivering services), but as the police data across the region shows (however incomplete and inconsistent that data is), there remain significant levels of racist assault and abuse across the region, and which is not limited to areas of higher than average BME population settlement. Racism, in short, is an issue for everyone across the region, however remote from the centres of BME settlement.

Whilst there is evidence of generalist organisations campaigning against racism in the region, there is much more to be done and this work would be given a strong public boost if every organisation in the region were to review its own policies on equality and diversity to ensure that, in spirit and in practice, the issue of racial discrimination were properly and publicly addressed.

The police have, perhaps, a particular responsibility in this area and it is disconcerting to find that the data that is collected in this territory, which could underpin much better public understanding of the scope and extent of racism in the region, is collected in such an apparently

haphazard fashion between the three police forces. The team managing this study not only had some difficulty obtaining such data as is available – and ought to be easily available publicly – but found that the data was often not consistent between the three police forces. One obvious step here would be that the three forces meet at a high level and agree to make their data collection effective and consistent so that comparable data, using what are commonly agreed definitions, can be examined between police forces, between areas and over time. This is clearly also an issue for the Ministry of Justice to continue to pursue with the Home Office. In addition, the high incidence of inadequate data – apparently reflecting the failure to record data properly - is worrying since this suggests ineffective and wasteful data collection processes and may mask some important trends.

At an inter-agency level, there is clearly a need also, as respondents to our consultations additionally confirmed, for better detailed tracking of ‘racist’ cases, from initial reporting of incidents and apprehension of offenders, through to the prosecution and sentencing of offenders, to ensure that the victim’s needs are understood and responded to effectively. At present, there are substantial levels of distrust between minority populations and aspects of the criminal justice system, the police in particular. Minorities do not feel that their issues are addressed effectively. There is a sense that the response of the police often appears not to take the issue of racism seriously.

The detailed qualitative tracking of a sample of racist incidents and their treatment through the criminal justice system could be one way in which minorities’ experience is better understood and the practices of the differing elements of the criminal justice system can be improved on. Until minorities feel their issues are treated sensitively, respectfully and seriously, we are faced with a circular problem: a lack of respect by

minorities for the police and aspects of the criminal justice system (which also reflects, in some cases, their experience before coming to the UK) will mean that minorities remain reluctant to report racist incidents to the police, and this under-reporting will lead to a continuing downgrading of the seriousness of the issue.

Some of the other issues identified during discussion with BME groups and others which highlighted the ways in which racism operates in the region included:

- Racist bullying in schools
- The appearance of racist graffiti on walls and doors of housing
- Difficulties in accessing work and training; and underemployment when accessing work (for example, not recognising qualifications and experience obtained abroad)
- Lack of help from business support organisations when trying to set up small enterprises
- Inadequate interpretation and translation facilities when accessing services, such as GP services and other forms of primary health, hospital and public health provision, and even in some advice services
- Poor levels of provision for women-only services such as health and recreation
- Inadequate provision for or understanding of the needs of minority elders
- Generally hostile and sometimes inflammatory tones towards immigration and migrants adopted by some media
- A weakening of cultural identity, with a lack of effective minority role models in leadership positions
- Poor recruitment practices amongst public and private bodies leading to under-representation of minorities in those bodies
- Discriminatory lending and mortgage practices amongst banks and building societies for those wishing to buy houses or start up businesses.

Police data

Analysing data from the three police forces in the region proved difficult particularly in relation to drawing comparable assessments between the three force areas, because of incomplete and inconsistent data. The data that was available showed:

- Racist incidents occurred throughout the region and whilst there were greater levels of occurrence in those areas where there were higher levels of minority settlement, racism remained an issue in both rural and urban areas and in areas of high and low minority settlement.
- There is no indication that the North East presents a picture of the pattern, type and nature of racist offending that is distinctly different from that in other UK police areas.
- Of particular concern is the inconsistency between the police forces' data and the significant number

of missing data. The answer to this problem may require better liaison between police forces and guidance from relevant government departments. Given that minority ethnic people are least likely to report crimes committed against them, the impact of missing data in understating the real nature and extent of racist offending in the region should not be underestimated.

The full report **'Race', crime and justice in the North East Region**, by Gary Craig, Maggie O'Neill, Bankole Cole, Georgios A. Antonopoulos, Carol Devanney and Sue Adamson with Paul Biddle and Louise Wattis, is available by sending a large A4 stamped addressed envelope to 'Race' report, SASS, Durham University, Elvet Riverside II, New Elvet, Durham DH1 3JT



Contact

Professor Maggie O'Neill
School of Applied Social Sciences
32 Old Elvet
Durham
DH1 3HN

Professor Gary Craig
School of Applied Social Sciences
Elvet Riverside 2, New Elvet
Durham
DH1 3JT
gary.craig@durham.ac.uk

sass.enquiries@durham.ac.uk

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