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BME SEX OFFENDERS IN PRISON: THE PROBLEM OF PARTICIPATION IN OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR GROUPWORK PROGRAMMES – A TRIPARTITE MODEL OF UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

This paper addresses the under representation of Black and minority ethnic (BME) sex offenders in the sex offender treatment programme (SOTP) of the prisons of England and Wales. The proportional over representation of BME men in the male sex offender population of the prisons of England and Wales has been noted for at least ten years. Similarly the under representation of BME sex offenders in prison treatment programmes has been a cause for concern during the last decade. This paper presents current demographic data relating to male BME sex offenders in the prisons of England and Wales. The paper draws together a wide range of social and cultural theories to develop a tripartite model for understanding the dynamics underlying the non-participation of BME sex offenders in therapy.

Key Words: Black and Minority Sex Offenders, Offending Behaviour Programmes

Introduction

This paper builds on earlier work of one of the present authors (Cowburn 1996) and begins to develop a theoretical approach for understanding what may inhibit the participation of male Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) sex offenders in the sex offender treatment programme (SOTP) of the Prison Service of England and Wales.

Terminologies in relation to ethnicities and race are fraught with conceptual difficulties (Aspinall 2002). Aspinall (2002: 803-805) has cogently highlighted the limitations of

what he calls 'pan-ethnic' groups, such as BME. He refers to such groupings as "statistical collectivities" (p. 803) and suggests that "the groups thus defined will be nothing more than meaningless statistical collectivities that do not represent any of the constituent groups within the term" (p. 811). As Aspinall has pointed out (2002: 804-805), this term is currently used by a number of Government departments in the UK. The British Government's Central Office of Information (Central Office of Information (COI) 2005) uses the term, as does the Prison Service of England and Wales (H. M. Prison Service 2005). At the outset this paper will use the term BME. However, toward the end of the paper difficulties with the term will be highlighted when analysing issues related to the diverse cultures contained within the term BME. Where we use the terms 'Black' and 'White' to denote race (as defined only by skin colour) we use capital letters to denote the ideological constructs implicit in the terms. However where cited sources use the terms we reproduce the original typographic case. Where issues specific to particular ethnic groups occur, the group will be identified.

In order to establish the over representation of BME male sex offenders in the population of sex offenders, this paper presents demographic data relating to male BME sex offenders in the prisons of England and Wales. The paper draws together a wide range of social and cultural theories illuminating the dynamics underlying the non-participation of BME sex offenders in therapy and presents a tripartite model for understanding for understanding this phenomenon. Presentation of the model, which in turn addresses social, cultural and therapeutic issues, forms the substantive part of the paper.

BME Sex Offenders in the Prisons of England and Wales 1989-2007: a Longitudinal Profile

In order to establish the enduring nature of the profile of male BME sex offenders, this section presents data from an earlier paper by one of the present authors (Cowburn 1996) along with recent data provided by the British Prison Service (H. M. Prison Service 2007) in relation to the sex offender population in England and Wales.

Currently, there are 8,106 male sex offenders in the prisons of England and Wales (H. M. Prison Service 2007). In 1989, the number was 3,000 and this had increased in 1995 to 3,528. In twelve years the population has more than doubled. Within this increase it is apparent that the proportion of BME men in the prison population has increased significantly. Tables 1 & 2 show that in this period the proportion of BME men in the prison population of sex offenders has risen from 12.2% in March 1989 to 17.7% in May 2007. In the first table, the category "Black" refers to prisoners who identify themselves as "West Indian, Guyanese or African"; "South Asian" refers to prisoners who identify themselves as "Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi" and "Chinese and Other Asian" refers to prisoners who identify themselves as "Chinese, Arab or Mixed Origin". In 2001 the classification of ethnic groups was reorganised by the Office for National Statistics and all Governmental data sources changed in line with this. Therefore the ethnicity classification for Table 2 is based upon this.

*Table 1. Ethnic Profile of the number of male sex offenders in Prisons of England and Wales –
1989 & 1995*

Ethnic Group	Number of Prisoners (1989)	Percentage of sex offender population (1989)	Number of Prisoners (1995)	Percentage of sex offender population (1995)
White	2608	86.8	3080	87.30
Black	235	7.8	312	8.84
South Asian	99	3.3	86	2.44
Chinese & Other Asian	34	1.1	21	0.6
Not recorded	24	0.8	29	0.82
Total	3000	100	3528	100

*Table 2. Ethnic Profile of the number of male sex offenders in Prisons of England and Wales –
May 2007 (H. M. Prison Service 2007)*

Ethnic Group	Nummber of Prisoners	Percentage of sex offender population
White	6635	81.9
Black	806	9.9
Asian	456	5.6
Mixed/Other	180	2.2
Not recorded	29	0.4
Total	8106	100

Table 3. Population of England and Wales by Ethnicity (National Statistics 2003)

Ethnicity	Percentage of population England and Wales
White	87.5%
Mixed	1.4%
Asian or Asian British	4.4%
Black or Black British	2.2%
Chinese	0.4
Other ethnic groups	0.4

In order to illustrate the nature of the over representation of BME groups in this
population, Table 3 shows the proportions of ethnicities in the general population of
England and Wales in 2002

The most significant over representation is of Black people, who are 2.2 per cent of the general population in England and Wales and 9.9 per cent of imprisoned male sex offenders. This issue will be addressed further in the sections that consider the social dimension and therapeutic issues.

The age patterns of the BME groups are very different to the White group. Table 4 shows the age breakdown of the different ethnic groups in prison. Looking at the age profile of the general population of male sex offenders, 55.4% are aged over 40 years old. However, in the White group 61.3 per cent are aged over 40. The BME groupings present a very different picture: only 31.3 per cent Black, 21.1 per cent of Asian male sex offenders being over 40. Moreover, only 4.4 percent of the White group is aged under 21, whereas 10.8 per cent of the Black group and 6.1 of the Asian group are aged under 21. In the ethnic profile of the age groupings, BME sex offenders are hugely over represented in the younger groups (for example, in the 21-29 year old group, Black offenders are 16.8 per cent of this group and Asian offenders are 13.2 per cent – together they represent 30 percent of the whole group).

Table 4. Ethnicity by age in years of total number of sexual offenders in England and Wales prisons at start of May 2007

Ethnic Group	Age in Years At conviction for current offence(s)				
	Under 21	21-29	31-39	40+	Total
White	290	904	1372	4069	6635
Percentage of ethnic group	4.4	13.6	20.7	61.3	100.0
Percentage of age group	68.4	66	75.8	90.1	
Black	87	230	237	252	806
Percentage of Ethnic group	10.8	28.5	29.4	31.3	100.0
Percentage age group	20.5	16.8	13.1	5.6	
Asian	8	181	151	96	456
Percentage of ethnic group	6.1	39.7	33.1	21.1	100.0
Percentage of age group	6.6	13.2	8.3	2.1	
Mixed/Other	19	56	49	56	180
Percentage of ethnic group	10.6	31.1	27.2	31.1	100.0
Percentage of age group	4.5	4.1	2.7	1.3	
Total	424	1371	1809	4473	8077
Percentage of total population	5.2	17.0	22.4	55.4	100

The different profile of the male BME sex offender group in prisons is further distinguished by consideration of the types of offences for which the various groups are most commonly convicted. As in 1989 (Cowburn 1996), the majority of BME offenders are serving sentences for sexual offending against adults, in particular for rape. Table 5 summarises offence type data. Offences against adults includes the following offences: rape (1956 Sexual Offences Act, rape), rape (2003 Sexual Offences Act), indecent assault, attempt to commit rape, attempt to commit buggery, buggery, other sexual offences, sexual assault (Sexual Offences Act 2003), indecent assault on a man (1956 Sexual Offences Act), indecent assault on a woman (1956 Sexual Offences Act), indecent exposure, exposure (2003 Sexual Offences Act, burglary with intent to commit rape, assault by penetration (Sexual Offences Act 2003). The offences against children include: rape on a child (1956 Sexual Offences Act), abuse of position of trust: sexual activity in the presence of a child (Sexual Offences Act 2003), unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl aged between 13-16, assault of a child under 13 by penetration, rape on a child under 13 (Sexual Offences Act 2003), indecent assault on a child, buggery with a child under 16 (Sexual Offences Act 1956), sexual activity with a child (2003 Sexual Offences Act), possession of indecent photograph of a child, indecent photographs of children, sexual assault of a child under 13 (Sexual Offences Act 2003), inciting a girl under 13 to have incestuous relations, causing a girl under 13 to engage in sex, incest, unlawful intercourse with a girl under 13, and gross indecency with a child.

Table 5. Ethnicity and offence type (May 2007) (H. M. Prison Service 2007) NB 29 ethnicity not recorded

Ethnicity	Offences against Adults	% of offences against adults	Offences against Children	% of offences against children
White	3652	75.8	2983	91.6
Black	660	13.7	146	4.5
Asian	368	7.6	88	2.7
Mixed/Other	139	2.9	41	1.2
Total	4819	100	3258	100

Just over 59 per cent of the male sex offenders in prison are serving sentences for offences against adults. In this group the proportion of BME offenders is significantly higher than in the group that have offended against children (Black and Asian offenders constituting over 20 per cent of the group, compared to just over 7 percent for the group with child victims).

Emerging from the data presented in this section are two issues that will be taken forward and addressed in the tripartite model for understanding factors that may influence BME sex offenders involvement (or not) in the SOTP - the issues of age and ethnicity and also offence type and ethnicity. However, before this model is presented the issue of the BME sex offender and the SOTP will be clarified.

BME Sex Offenders and the SOTP

The under representation of BME sex offenders in prison treatment programmes is not a recent phenomenon (Cowburn 1996). In the late 1990s, Beech et al (1999) noted that the Prison Service of England and Wales:

> …set up a 'SOTP Multi-Racial Advisory Group'. The purpose of which is to 'improve the accessibility and relevance of the SOTP to all prisoners and eliminate discrimination within treatment' by coordinating/arranging training to raise awareness in working with diversity; coordinating/arranging research and turning research recommendations into action; receiving and responding to specific or general enquiries or concerns from anyone involved in the programme or its Throughcare, about multi-racial relevance or discrimination.

However, despite these efforts the situation of under representation has not changed. In the 2007 Impact Assessment of the SOTP (H.M. Prison Service 2007) p. 2, it is noted:

> It has been established from the last year of monitoring that Black and Asian groups are under-represented on SOTP. Black and Asian prisoners appear less likely to start SOTP than should be expected given the national population. They have higher drop out rates than White prisoners.

> The remainder of this paper is concerned with this issue, it suggests that it can be understood by looking at three distinct dimensions – the social, the cultural and the therapeutic. These dimensions comprise a 'Tripartite model for understanding the under representation of the BME sex offenders in prison treatment programmes'.

Tripartite Model for Understanding the Under Representation of the BME Sex Offenders in Prison Treatment Programmes

Previous attempts to understand why BME sex offenders do not participate in the SOTP have restricted their inquiries to asking BME men who have taken part in the treatment programme about their experiences (Akhtar 2001, Parker et al 1999, Patel 1997, Patel and Lord 2001). Whilst this line of inquiry is important (and is included in this paper), this paper widens consideration beyond the views of individual group participants. To develop theory concerning this issue, it is important to consider three areas: the social, the cultural and the therapeutic. The views of individual sex offenders will be included in the section that addresses therapeutic issues.

Social Issues

The social issues addressed here related primarily to Western society and in particular Britain. There are three social issues that appear to be of significance: (i) BME experiences of the criminal justice system, (ii) White constructions of both the BME sex offender and acts of sexual coercion undertaken by Black men, and (iii) social hostility to the known sex offender.

The BME community is more heavily policed and proportionately more frequently and repeatedly convicted than the various White communities (Blink 2005) (statistics cited from Home Office 2005). This disproportionate attention has led to parts of the BME communities being suspicious of the police (MacPherson 1999, Reza and Magill 2006), the courts (Reza and Magill 2006, Hood 1992) and the Prison service (Cheliotis & Liebling 2006).

Although it is largely an unexplored area, it is likely that the BME experience of and response to community policing and the courts will inform BME responses to the experience of prison. Cheliotis and Liebling (2006), for example, in their study of over four thousand prisoners noted that BME prisoners rated the quality of race relations more poorly than their White counterparts, but of particular note (given the profile of the BME sex offender group presented above) is that young BME prisoners rated race relations as particularly poor (Cheliotis and Liebling 2006: 299). Following the interest in the young BME prisoner, Wilson (2003) reports on ethnographic interviews undertaken with fifteen young imprisoned Black men aged 16-17. The focus of the interviews was "… what [the interviewees] thought about being 'young', being 'black' and finally being 'young, black and in prison'". All of the interviewees described their response to prison in terms of 'the Game'. 'The Game' seems to be a term that encapsulates the young men's ways of dealing with the Criminal Justice System in the community and in custody. It was acknowledged that 'the Game' is played slightly differently. 'The Game' has two modes of 'play'; that is, two ways of responding to and coping with prison authorities – 'Keeping Quiet' and 'Going Nuts'. As a strategy, 'going nuts' was used as a last resort and generally indicated that the inmate had (almost) lost control of his situation. However, the other strategy was more commonly used; Wilson (2003: 419) describes 'keeping quiet' thus:

> 'Keeping Quiet' is the first part of 'the Game', although it should be noted that, as one interviewee put 'we're not actually quiet'. Rather it meant 'biting your tongue', 'holding fire' or 'sucking it in' rather than being silent. Thus 'keeping quiet' did not imply a passive response to authority, but was rather a prelude to seeking solace of other black friends on the wing as a way of sharing information and confirming, 'the Govs had taken liberties'. 'Keeping Quiet' was in short a form of intelligence gathering and a prelude to inter-group communication about individual members of staff. In this way the interviewees could establish which of 'the Govs' were 'safe' and which were not, thus allowing them to adapt 'the Game' to a micro level. Of course, sharing this information had the added advantage of further cementing group loyalty.

The implications of this strategy are two-fold; firstly it implies that some Black prisoners do not engage with prison programmes and secondly, this strategy of non-involvement is nurtured and supported by the Black community in prison. This research is particularly pertinent, given what has already been noted about the age profile of the BME sex offender in prison.

The other social issue of importance is how White authorities, through discourse, create a negative image of Black male sexuality as predatory and dangerous. In the 1980s and the 1990s Black feminist writers in the United States of America (Collins 1991, Davis 1981, Hooks 1982) noted that within the (White) criminological and legal discourse, a stereotype of Black male sexuality was constructed as being predatory, dangerous and (most importantly) out of control. A key part of this myth, it is argued, is the Black man's powerful sexual desire for White women. Collins (1991:177) articulates this as "Depicting African-American men as sexually charged beasts who desired White women created the myth of the Black rapist". These writers highlighted how Black men have been disproportionately prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned (or executed) for offences of rape and sexual assault of adult females. For example, between 1930-1967, 455 men executed in the USA on the basis of rape convictions, 405 of them were Black (Davis 1981: 172). This construction, they argue, provides the justification for, and thus enables, wider policing and oppression of the Black community in the United States. Research by La Free illustrates how this racist construct has affected penal processes in the United States. La Free (1980) studied a maximum-security prison in the USA and found that Black rapists did not receive longer or harsher sentences than their White counter-parts unless they had raped a White woman in which case their sentence was significantly longer and was served in harsher prisons. Whilst, this research clearly refers to the USA it has clear relevance to the treatment of British BME sex offenders.

A significant element in the construction of the myth of the Black rapist is the interracial nature of rapes. In exploring this issue we draw on literature which constructs Black sexuality as deliberately focussed towards White victims. A key construction is that of the Black man as preying on White women for a variety of reasons. South and Felson (1990: 72) have summarised these reasons as follows: "black deprivation and politicalization, black men's sexual access to White women, macrostructural opportunity and the attributes of victims that promote interracial social interaction". Whilst a thorough explication of these interpretations is not possible within the remit of this paper, it is relevant to note that South and Felson (1990: 71) having reviewed data from 1,396 rape cases in the United States concluded that "the racial patterning of rape is most strongly influenced by opportunities for interpersonal contact between whites and blacks."

Although there is no equivalent research or theorising in the British context, Cowburn (1996) noted that the demography of the sex offender population in the prisons of England and Wales in the mid 1990s could lead to an impression that most Black and Asian offenders were rapists. Moreover, he suggested that these offences were viewed by the judiciary to be particularly dangerous because they received disproportionately harsh

sentences (in comparison to similar White offenders). The current data presented above appears to corroborate this.

A further facet of this complex construction of Black sexuality as racially motivated arises from the North American literature on the sexual behaviour of Black men within the prison system itself. Clearly, the findings from research in this area require a degree of caution in their interpretation as most researchers in this area stress that, due to racism and the hidden nature of the act, obtaining an accurate assessment of the extent and nature of sexual assault in prisons is fraught with difficulty. However, Knowles (1999: 275) argues that research on male prison rape in the USA illustrates that Black men are purposely predatory towards White men and that "The oppressive characteristics of race relations in the society as a whole penetrates the relationships between whites and blacks inside prisons". Citing forty years of research he argues that "blacks continually and almost exclusively rape whites in prisons" (Knowles 1999: 268). Drawing on existing research to explore why this might be Knowles reveals a complex inter-relation of factors, relating to the performance of masculinity (Rideau and Wikberg, 1992), the relationship between performed masculinity and one's status within the prison power structure (Scacco, 1982) and the possibility of retaliation for victimisation in the external social world through sexual attack and domination (Scacco, 1975). Whilst such research offers a valuable window into the complexity of constructions of Black sexuality, it should be noted that the racial victimisation outlined does not appear to be duplicated in the British prison system. Thus, notions of Black sexuality as being universally predatory towards Whites is questionable. Indeed O'Donnell (2004) suggests that sexual assault and rape within the British prison system is rarely heard of despite persistent attempts to explore it (Power et al 1991, McGurk et al 2000, Edgar et al 2003). Similarly, the conclusions of such research illustrate a challenge to the construction of Black sexuality as 'out of control'. Rather, it appears that, at least in the USA, Black prisoners specifically employ sexual domination as a strategy for negotiating identify, power and status within the prison system.

The final area to be considered in this section is the hostility accorded to the known/convicted sex offender. Media representations of the known/convicted sex offender tend to distort the image of who is a sex offender – images of 'perverts' and 'paedos' dislocated from, and yet threatening, communities prevail in the tabloid press (see for example Greer 2003, Kitzinger 2004) and in doing so they also exacerbate the hostility felt towards known/convicted sex offenders (see for example Allison 2000, Cowburn and Dominelli 2001, Kitzinger 1999, Pascoe-Watson 2006). Such is the extent of the hostility that vigilante groups have taken violent actions against known sex offenders and people whom they believe to be sex offenders (Allison 2000, Cowburn and Dominelli 2001). Community reactions can be very extreme. The costs of admitting and talking about sex offences can be very high.

Cultural Issues

There are two issues of prime importance here: cultural constraints in talking about sex and also how an individual's identity and personal change are construed. The ways in which non-western cultures approach issues of gender and how sex is (or not) discussed may affect how willing a person may be to participate in groups where there is an expectation that the detail of sex offences is shared and discussed. Similarly, assumptions about what constitutes an individual identity and change within the individual vary across cultures and may therefore create problems for people who do not experience themselves as unitary and autonomous individuals.

In 1989, Audrey Droisen suggested that the under reporting of sexual abuse in Black and Asian families could be understood by considering the interplay of the shame felt by victims and families and fear of racist treatment by social work and criminal justice authorities (Droisen 1989). Whilst there is no automatic link with the underreporting of sexual abuse and BME sex offenders' reluctance to discuss their sexual offending, some of the cultural inhibitors may be similar.

In their review of the difficulties in talking about sexual abuse in South Asian communities, Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) highlight the power of shame (*sharam*) as a silencing force, particularly in the context of the wider cultural issues of '*izzat* (honour/respect), and *haya* (modesty). Although these concepts may have variable interpretations in different parts of the Indian sub-continent, they are common to most South Asian communities (Ballard 1982, Sooch et al 2006), and the one common dimension across ethnicities is the importance of the *community* as a context for evaluating and talking about sexual behaviour.

Izzat is linked to how a family is perceived in the wider community and it crucially affects the social status and reputation, both of individuals and families within communities. Closely linked to *Izzat* is sharam, which again emerges in social relations. *Sharam* is linked to haya (modesty) insofar as when a person's (usually a woman) modesty is compromised then *sharam* usually follows and thereafter *Izzat* of both an individual and family is jeopardised. The specific manner in which these concepts interact in relation to male sex offenders talking about their offences has not yet been the subject of research. However, Yip (2004: 338) and Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) have both noted how a hegemonic, heteronormative discourse in relation to sexuality shapes what sexual behaviours can and cannot be spoken about. Sexual behaviour that is considered to be deviant cannot easily be discussed (Yip 2004: 343).

Although there may be less prominence given to one particular cultural framework in other BME communities, the importance of the community context in understanding and interpreting individual behaviours has been highlighted by Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (2000). Using the work of other authors, they have highlighted the importance of community in Black African (Sinha 1993) and Chinese communities (Yang, 1997). It

may be that these communities also have an inhibiting effect on individuals and how they talk about sexual coercion.

In considering the notion of what is an individual and how they change, cultural specificities are important. Within Western societies since the eighteenth century there has developed a notion of the individual as a "unified, monolithic, reified, essentialized subject capable of fully conscious, fully rational action, a subject assumed in most liberal and emancipatory discourse" (Lather 1992: 103). This concept of the individual contrasts sharply with non-western understandings of the individual (Owusu-Bempah and Howitt 2000, Yip 2004, Gilligan and Akhtar (2006).

Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (2000: 114) suggest that western perspectives on the individual construe many dimensions of development – for example, emotion, personality, and health – in a very different way from other world cultures. They note (2000: 114) that:

> While Western psychology is concerned with the personality growth of the individual, Asian and African psychologies are concerned with one's harmony with other human beings, society, nature and the cosmos …

They suggest that the individualistic assumptions behind western psychology have the potential to harm people from non-western cultures (2000: 115).

Therapeutic Issues

Clearly, as the previous section has shown, therapies and therapeutic approaches are 'cultural issues'. Therapies emerge as embodiments of how specific cultures understand what it is to be a person and what remedies are available to the person who is unhappy and possibly harmful to others in the community. However, this section concentrates on three areas: initially the cultural relevance for BME sex offenders of the SOTP is considered; the research that has investigated BME sex offenders experience of the SOTP is then reviewed; and the section closes by considering issues related to treatment delivery.

This paper has suggested that the notion of the individual that underpins cognitive behavioural programmes is essentially a Western notion. The individual is constructed as rational and unitary – capable of independent thought and action - and, inevitably, totally responsible for her/his actions. Additionally, the individual is construed as being motivated to maximise his/her pleasure and comfort (see for example the discussion of sex offenders and their rights to 'human goods' in Ward et al 2007). Thus, cognitive programmes focus on the links between feelings, thoughts and actions within the individual (offender). This focus may be inadequate or inappropriate for working with people whose sense of self is inextricably bound up to families and the various communities within which they live. Whilst the BME sex offender may successfully learn the language of Western cognitive-behavioural therapy, the question of how relevant this will be to his survival in a non-western community is yet to be asked.

However, without doing so, the quest for greater BME participation in the SOTP may be inappropriate – if the aim of such work is to help people live in diverse communities without committing further offences. More work with specific ethnic communities inside and outside the prison may be an essential part of developing programmes that are culturally relevant and assist offenders to reintegrate into their communities in ways that help them to avoid re-offending.

Additionally, however, it is important to note that the age and offence profile of the BME sex offender marks them out as different to White sex offenders. Groupwork programmes that cater primarily for men who have offended against children may be unable to reach the younger BME man who has offended against adults.

In trying to understand the persistent non-participation of BME sex offenders in the SOTP, attention has focused on treatment delivery and treatment outcomes. In relation to treatment outcomes, Webster et al (2004) sought to explore treatment effectiveness of the SOTP on BME and White sex offenders. They compared 52 BME and 52 White sex offenders on a range of pre and post programme psychometric assessments. They found no difference in the levels of post programme treatment efficacy.

However, in relation to treatment delivery, Patel (1997) carried out research with 24 ethnic minority men who had just completed the SOTP programme. She found that most BME group members felt that the group facilitators treated them differently to White group members, with some reporting feeling victimised, stereotyped or patronised. Moreover, BME group members reported that they felt that cultural differences relating to their offence were minimised or ignored.

Following this research, the Prison Service instituted a Race Awareness training programme for all SOTP facilitators and adapted their programme allocation criteria to recommend that single BME prisoners should not be placed in a group where the other group members were White. A follow up study in 2001, in 14 different prisons found that where Black and ethnic minority ethnic prisoners had been the sole BME members of a group they felt that issues relating to race and culture adversely affected treatment (Akhtar 2001). The men indicated that more BME facilitators would be helpful and that facilitators required more awareness of racial and cultural differences.

In 2001, Patel and Lord found similar concerns from BME sex offenders, particularly in relation to a lack of cultural awareness on the part of White programme facilitators. This was identified as a specific deterrent to participation in groupwork.

More recently, Wakama (2005) explored the experience of treatment with Black and Asian sex offenders and White facilitators. Both groups agreed that there was difficulty in understanding the diverse cultural values and lifestyles and their impact on offending.

A common complaint of BME sex offenders in the research cited above is that the people delivering the programme lack an awareness of BME cultures, and are thus unable to communicate effectively with them. This raises issues in relation to both the ethnic make-up of staff teams delivering the SOTP and the training needed to support this group of staff.

Whilst some of the research indicates that some BME offenders prefer to work with BME staff, this should not be taken as common experience that is unproblematic. Gilligan and Akhtar (2006: 1373) have noted that one of the most important things for workers to be aware of, when working with Asian families, is the consequences of disclosing abuse and to be able to discuss these issues openly. The issue of the ethnicity of the worker was shown to be less important than their professional competence, and in fact, matched ethnicities clearly had some problems.

Participants urged agencies to give families choice about the identity of their worker. The woman speaking on behalf of group Z commented:

> Some people think 'yeah they prefer an Asian worker, an Asian female or Asian male', but maybe some families might think 'hang on a minute, an Asian worker, they may know all my community and they won't keep the confidentiality', so they might feel a lot happier having a white worker. So we need to think about that and give them that choice.

The issue of confidentiality and the community may also apply to whether or not it is suitable to run groups solely for BME participants. Such issues require detailed consideration that could involve consulting with the BME group of offenders themselves.

The recent Impact assessment of the SOTP highlights the need for staff delivering the programme to be provided with training "in diversity awareness, sensitivity and communication" (H.M. Prison Service, 2007: 5). This is clearly an important area, however the issue of diversity is complex and multi-faceted. To return to the point made at the start of this paper, the definition BME is a pan-ethnic term, which creates a 'statistical collective' but does not relate to any specific ethnicity. At the beginning of this paper, it was highlighted that Aspinall (2002) doubted the conceptual validity of the term BME. The term has been used throughout this paper. It has proved useful in highlighting issues that may be common to a variety of ethnic groupings (e.g. racism). However, as a tool for the analysis of cultural issues the term clearly lacks precision.

Whilst BME cultures may share certain features (e.g. non-unitary concepts of the individual) the ways in which cultures are manifested and dynamically exist require a more specific understanding of cultures and how they impact on individuals within them. To develop training that the impact assessment identifies requires materials that move beyond the composite term 'BME' and identify and explore the diversity of the cultural contexts of each ethnic group. The importance of issues related to shame and honour and

the particularly the individual in their community will need to be carefully developed. Whilst anti-racist programme delivery requires there to be consideration of ethnic diversity in relation to the make up of groups (in order to avoid racist dynamics developing), ethnically sensitive therapeutic practice requires significantly more thought and planning.

Summary

This paper has presented an ethnic profile of the male sex offender population of the prisons of England and Wales. It has considered why BME sex offenders continue to be under represented on the Sex Offender Treatment Programme. It has presented a tripartite model to begin to explain the apparent reluctance of BME men to join therapeutic groups in prison – in turn; the model has explored social, cultural and therapeutic issues. Clearly, developing measures that will encourage BME sex offenders to participate in treatment is an urgent issue that requires further exploration and research.

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