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Research Insights item

Author: Dr Patricia Neville, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences, Bristol Dental School, UK.

Why did you decide to undertake this study?

In 2017 I began researching UK dentistry from a diversity lens. My work is premised on two questions- is the demographic composition of UK dentistry representative of the multicultural and globalised UK population? Is UK dentistry a welcoming and inclusive profession for historically underrepresented and minoritized groups? This 2022 study on the ethnic composition of UK dentistry represents an update on 2018 research (Neville 2018).

Did any of the results surprise you?

Discussions about racism in health service delivery and UK society have risen to the top of the political agenda. Despite this, the study's findings identified consistent blockages in the dental pipeline for those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Dentistry is one the most ethnically diverse undergraduate programmes in the UK, appealing especially to those from British Asians backgrounds. However, dental academia is configured as a 'white space' with more white staff occupying positions of seniority/power and those from ethnic minority backgrounds overrepresented at junior levels. One ethnic minority group signaled out for exclusion at all levels of the dental pipeline are those from Black British backgrounds. These findings suggest that UK dental academia and dental education are exclusionary sites for those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

What do you think the next steps should be considering your findings?

This research presented a quantitative assessment of the BAME leaky pipeline in the UK. While statistics are useful in identifying and determining trends in the data, it falls short on explaining why these blockages appears to disproportionately disadvantage minoritized groups, especially people from Black British backgrounds. Qualitative research is needed to provide 'thickness' or depth to the statistical data by incorporating the voice and lived experiences of those from minoritized groups in dentistry.