



YOUTH ACCESS

Championing Youth Advice and Counselling

Equity scoping

Addressing inequity in service provision for

**Black young people and young
people from racialised communities**

February 2024

About Youth Access

Youth Access exists to ensure that every young person has access to the support they need, when and where they need it, to thrive on their journey into adulthood.

Alongside our member network of 128 youth advice and counselling services, we champion young people's right to access high-quality services providing a range of support, from mental health and wellbeing to housing and employment, all under one roof, in their local community.



Introduction

All young people deserve access to support that respects their rights and meets their needs. Yet, too often, the very systems created to support young people perpetuate inequality and reproduce systems of oppression. Put simply, many young people remain under-heard and under-served, facing barriers to services often not designed for or reflective of them.

Addressing entrenched inequalities in service access and experience is complex, requiring a sophisticated understanding of the needs, cultures and help-seeking behaviours within each specific group as well as the reasons for the shortcomings within services.

This is one of five accompanying briefings covering the key findings from our equity scoping review, which focus on addressing inequity in service provision for the following young people:

- **Black young people and young people from racialised communities**
- **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people**
- **Refugee and asylum-seeking young people**
- **Trans and gender-diverse young people**
- **Deaf young people**

Whilst young people with shared identities or with shared experiences often have a distinct pattern of needs that must be understood in depth by any service attempting to address their marginalisation, our broader mapping also identified some common factors useful to consider in developing an appropriate approach. These findings are featured in our [overview report](#).

About

Black young people & young people from racialised communities

Young people from racialised communities refers to broad groups of young people from different ethnic, racial and cultural communities who are often marginalised by the white-majority systems in the UK.

The evidence review and insights from services identified that young people from racialised communities are often considered collectively in statistics and in some service provision, which made the disentanglement of the experiences of specific racial or ethnic groups for the purpose of this scoping challenging.

In this briefing, we have aimed to seek more detailed data and insights wherever possible to better recognise and understand the experiences of different racialised groups.

Whilst Black young people are included within the broad umbrella term of racialised communities, the title of this section reflects that the majority of the findings from the evidence review and scoping of specialist provision relates specifically to Black young people.

Black young people often experience the sharpest end of racialisation (Cabinet Office, 2018) with the continuing legacies of oppression, colonialism and the slave trade impacting societal structures and institutions, and Black people's experiences of anti-black racism, discrimination and colourism. It is also important to recognise Black young people are also not a singular homogenous group, with Black African and Black Caribbean people for example having distinct histories and experiences.

Additional insights relating to other racialised communities, such as the Orthodox Jewish Community, are also featured as helpful examples of shared practice to draw on. The title of this section also serves to differentiate this section from the accompanying sections on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people and refugee and asylum-seeking young people.

In the 2011 Census, 21.5% of 10-19 year olds in the UK classified themselves as falling into a category other than white British. The largest non-white minority group was mixed ethnicity, followed by Pakistani, Indian and African (Black African/Caribbean/Black British) (AYPH, 2022).

Service needs

When looking at the service needs, experiences and barriers relating to young people from racialised communities, it should be remembered that there is considerable variation between ethnicities. Where possible data that is specific about the community or people in question is provided.

Inequality and racism

- Black and racialised young people are more likely to experience poverty, debt, housing issues, class inequality and institutional discrimination (YoungMinds, 2023). Mental health, personal and legal difficulties can be exacerbated by the health, social, cultural and economic inequalities that young people from racialised communities experience.
- Young people from racialised communities report experiencing racism in their everyday life, including negative school experiences and limited access to services where they live.

26%

of racialised young people, including 37% of young Black young people, report experiencing institutional discrimination

(YoungMinds, 2023)



Education

In some parts of England, exclusion rates are up to 6 times higher for Black Caribbean pupils than their white classmates

(Department of Education, 2020)

- 70% of young people surveyed who experienced racism in school stated that the experience had an impact on their wellbeing (Mind, 2021).
- Experiences of discrimination can lead to feelings of disengagement and a lack of trust in the education system, which can contribute to lower attainment rates.



Employment

- In 2020, 5.8% of white young people were not in employment, education or training, compared to 5.6% Black young people, 3.7% Chinese young people and 2.7% Asian young people (AYPH, 2023a).
- Young people from racialised communities can feel that their ethnicity or race is a barrier to gaining employment, can be treated differently to their white colleagues and may experience racial abuse in the workplace (Leaders Unlocked, 2021).
- 23% of Black, Asian and racialised young people, including 30% of young Black people, reported not having the same work opportunities as other people, compared to 16% of white young people. (YoungMinds 2023).

Physical

health



- Young people from racialised communities are more likely to have poor health than the overall population. There are particular concerns about the health disparities faced by Gypsy and Traveller young people and Black young people (AYPH, 2023a).
- Young people from racialised communities may experience barriers in accessing affordable and suitable housing, and may be more likely to live in overcrowded or substandard conditions.

Mental

health



- Young people from racialised communities are disproportionately exposed to many known risk factors linked with mental health problems. These include being excluded from school, being in care, being involved in the criminal justice system, and being homeless (Youth Justice Board, 2019; Day et al., 2020).
- Men and women from African-Caribbean communities in the UK have higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide risk, and are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia (Khan et al, 2017).



Criminalisation

- Black young people are more likely than young people from all other ethnic groups to be stopped and searched (Home Office, 2022), arrested, held on remand, sentenced to custody, assessed as at risk of serious harm, and to re-offend (Youth Justice Board, 2021).

>40%

of young people in the youth justice system in England and Wales are from racialised communities

(Taylor, 2016)

- Many young people from racialised communities feel targeted and harassed by the police; and feel they aren't taken seriously when reporting crimes (Leaders Unlocked, 2021).
- In 2020/21, 790 per 100,000 Black young people aged 10-17 were cautioned or sentenced, compared to 245 per 100,000 white young people (Youth Justice Board, 2022).

Barriers to access to services

Young people from racialised communities are less likely than their white peers to access a range of services, notably mental health services (Education Policy Institute, 2017), and encounter a large number of barriers which may delay them from getting the help they need when they most need it. Much of the available evidence relates to mental health services, but is replicated across other service areas.

- Cultural factors in the family and community can lead to **stigma** being attached to both talking about mental health and accessing mental health services, with similar stigma attached in some communities to sexual health services. Therapy may be seen by young people as for white, middle-class people.
- Young people may avoid the stigma attached to statutory mental health services and fear being permanently labelled, locked in and medicated without hope of getting better. Some Black young people have identified the use of diagnostic terms, labels and the term 'mental health' itself as a major barrier to engagement as they **imply illness** or that there is something wrong with you (42nd Street, 2017a).

Young people from racialised communities report poor awareness of where to go or how to access mental health support.

- Young Black people and young people from racialised communities may also lack **trust** in professionals and services. This can be based on perceptions that they may be treated differently by services based on their colour or race and not be seen as an individual (Centre for Mental Health, 2022b), or related to concerns about confidentiality.
- Young people from racialised communities are more likely to expect **bad experiences** from mental health services, perceiving the mental health system to be unhelpful, racist, and untrustworthy. This in turn delays seeking help for mental health problems (Centre for Mental Health, 2022a; Street, 2005).

Previous experiences of racism, inequalities and oppression within their everyday lives can shape young people's expectations of services. Micro-aggressions can have a profound impact on how young people view themselves within society and how they interact with professionals.

(AYPH, 2023b)

- **Mistrust** of mental health services within some African and Caribbean communities can result from a fear (backed up by statistics) of being at greater risk of being sectioned and subject to coercive treatments (Keating et al, 2002).
- Many young people may not feel comfortable to leave their local area and travel to services in another area of town. Young people from racialised communities are more likely to live in **disadvantaged neighbourhoods** with high crime rates, far from services. Cost, unfamiliarity, previous experiences of crime or racism, or lack of permission from parents to travel into other areas of town without them, can prevent young people from making the journey to access a service.

Service experiences

- Black young people and young people from racialised communities aged 16-25 have reported delays to accessing treatment, with impacts on anxiety/stress, extreme pain, complications during medical procedures and lack of support (Leaders Unlocked, 2021).
- Young people from racialised communities are known to experience different treatment pathways, higher levels of coercion and poorer long-term outcomes after entering the statutory mental health system.
- Young people from racialised communities are more likely to access CAMHS through compulsory than voluntary care pathways. Black and Asian young people are twice as likely to access mental health support via court orders (Edbrooke-Childs and Patalay, 2019), whilst Black young people are ten times more likely to be referred to CAMHS via social services, rather than through their GP, compared to white British children (Kapadia, et al., 2022).

Black young people represent only 5% of the total population in CAMHS, even though they represent nearly a fifth of the general population of this age. Yet Black and mixed-race young people represent 36% of the population detained in acute mental health services.

(Thomas, 2022).

Methods of improving access and service quality

The evidence review and interviews with managers and practitioners in frontline organisations identified a number of ideas for ways of improving access to information, advice, counselling and support and the quality of services for young people from racialised communities.

Decide which groups to target

Services may wish to analyse their service data against their area's community profile in order to help identify groups they are not currently reaching.

Two of the Youth, Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) interviewed had established services to meet the needs of young people from diverse racialised communities, whilst two had developed projects and services targeting more specific groups (namely, Black young men, Black young women, and young people from the Orthodox Jewish community). All services reported considerable success, but targeting different groups requires very different approaches.

The benefits of working with diverse groups include that it enables young people to talk more openly in group settings about taboo subjects such as mental health and issues in their communities without fear of that getting back to their family or community, whilst targeting a specific group enables a more tailored and specialist approach. (It should be noted that the YIACS working with diverse groups also conducted some targeted work with specific groups.)

Start with research

42nd Street recommend conducting peer research before launching into a new project or service. This had worked well with both Black young men and young people from the Orthodox Jewish community. Young people went to their peers' youth clubs, homes and other social hangouts and listened. It takes time, but develops an understanding of the specific needs of young people from the relevant groups and helps to change the way the service is perceived by the relevant communities.

Give young people power

Young people should be given a seat at the decision-making table and consulted at every level of the project. Programmes that are co-designed and co-produced with young people from racialised communities are more likely to meet their needs. This also helps to develop a core group of young people who can champion the project.

Break down stigma and increase mental health awareness

Initiatives focussed on mental health should be designed to increase awareness and knowledge about mental health, break down the stigma in communities about mental health and therapeutic services, challenge the negative language around mental health, and normalise mental health difficulties. They should also promote healthy help-seeking behaviours to encourage young people to access mental health support, and empower young people to take positive messages about mental health and relevant services into their communities.

Develop cultural confidence

It is important to develop young people's belief and trust in their own cultural values, traditions and practices in order to help them to maintain a strong sense of identity and self-worth. This can be done by educating young people about their heritage, celebrating Black culture and challenging racist stereotypes that affect their wellbeing.

Offer a range of interventions and methods of engagement...

A range of interventions should be offered to young people so that they can choose what suits them. This might include:

- 'Somebody to talk to' to 'get things off their chest'
- Accessible, practical information on how to maintain and improve general wellbeing
- Group work – being part of a group 'working things out together' can be an important part of getting support for some young people
- Talking therapies
- Advice and guidance
- Youth work support – a relaxed space where youth workers can have conversations, but not a counselling session
- Educational sessions, e.g. training or discussions regarding 'mind health' (not 'mental health')
- Social activities – e.g. group-led activities that boost mood (see 42nd Street's Fix Up Food and Mood sessions)

...In a range of places

Build a representative and culturally aware team

Services should actively seek to hire more practitioners and managers from the racialised communities they seek to serve.

Where services are targeting specific racialised groups, such as Black young men, it is important to have staff who can act as positive role models from those communities, as it helps to build trust and a positive reputation with young people, their families and their communities. This may be less important, or, it was argued by one interviewee, even a disadvantage, where the service is targeting diverse communities, with young people often seeking acceptance, empathy and understanding rather than specific expertise about their particular community.

Diversifying the team may require taking a different approach to positive recruitment that avoids advertising through mainstream media (such as The Guardian or Charity Jobs) and prioritises engagement skills alongside mental health training. It should be noted that counselling training has become a very academic route, which can be a barrier to people from communities that have been failed by the education system.

The wider staff team should receive regular anti-racism and cultural competency training to remove any negative stereotypes, raise awareness about racism and improve understanding of racialised communities.

Develop culturally sensitive comms

Young people want clear information and videos about how the service can help, and want to see that a service is culturally aware. It is important to ensure that all promotional materials include positive images of young people from a range of backgrounds and examples of the positive experiences and success stories of young people who have used the service.

Provide assistance with travel

It is important to make young people feel comfortable coming into town to drop-in services, away from their safe spaces. Where services are able to meet young people near their homes and escort them, or pay for transport to their premises, this can facilitate access.

Capacity-build communities

Interviewees stressed the effectiveness of using creative approaches which empowered young people and gave them a voice, e.g. supporting young people to develop a manifesto, lead a campaign, make a film or express themselves through art or music.

Get parents on board

When working with young people from some racialised communities, it is essential to get parents on board with the work, otherwise it can be difficult to break down cultural barriers.

Improve data collection

Even where services are effectively supporting certain groups, there are likely to be others that remain underserved. For example, few services appear to see many young people from East Asian communities. Services may need to improve their collection and analysis of service data on young people's ethnicity and outcomes, so that the effectiveness of initiatives and continuing gaps can be identified.

Evaluate

Valid and reliable evaluations should be conducted to better understand the impact of interventions and initiatives on young people from racialised communities, and to inform the implementation of such programmes. The use of peer researchers is recommended as part of this process.

Key sources & further reading

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