

Working with Cultural and Religious Diversity

Claudia Bernard

This chapter considers:

- factors that impact on minority ethnic children's abilities to achieve their potential
- religious beliefs and culture in safeguarding work
- safeguarding in the context of religion and cultural practices
- engaging children and families.

Introduction

As the UK becomes an increasingly multicultural and multifaith nation, professionals working with children face considerable challenges attempting to understand the particular safeguarding issues arising for diverse groups of children. Few would deny that as the population of minority ethnic children has become more culturally and ethnically diverse, there are emerging safeguarding issues that take complex forms. This culturally diverse population includes children of varying ethnicities who have recently migrated from different countries in Africa and Asia, and second and third generation British-born children of Caribbean, African and Asian descent (many of whom are of mixed heritage), as well as newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors from sub-Saharan Africa, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq among other places (see also Chapter 22). Additionally, Garland, Spalek and Chakraborti (2006) note that in Britain, 'Muslims belong to a diverse range of ethnic and national groups, including Afghan, Arab, Iranian, Indian, Kosovan, Kurdish, Turkish and Somalian communities' (p.427). Overall, because there are minority ethnic children of such diverse cultural backgrounds, their needs will be highly differentiated, and most notably, there is a much broader range of child protection concerns for them (Barn 2001). Though it has long been recognised that there is a certain level of commonality in all children's experiences of abuse and neglect, there is still a tendency to homogenise minority ethnic children in child welfare debates and not pay sufficient attention to the myriad inequities, unique experiences and vulnerabilities that children from diverse cultural backgrounds face in the child welfare system (Goggin, Werkmeister Rozas and Garran 2015). For the sake of clarity, the present chapter focuses on the needs of black and Asian groups, although some of the points made are transferable to other contexts.

There have been a number of high-profile child death inquiries involving black and minority ethnic children in Britain in recent years. These inquiries highlighted the fact that race, culture and religion influenced the way that professionals engaged with the caregivers and families of the children, including, for example, Victoria Climbié (Cm 5730 2003), Khyra Ishaq (Radford 2010), Hamzah Khan (BSCB 2013) and Shanay Walker (Wiffin 2017). It is worth noting at this point that the role that culturally based stereotypes and racism played in these cases has also been highlighted in the literature (Cooper 2005; Rustin 2005).

According to Brandon *et al.*'s (2012) analysis of serious case reviews, child protection workers sometimes lack the knowledge and confidence to work effectively

with families from different cultures and religions. Typically, there is a lack of critical assessment of race, as well as a lack of a critical look at the role that religion and culture play in the lives of minority ethnic families. This can lead to professionals overlooking or not understanding the situations that may put children at risk (Bhatti-Sinclair and Price 2015; Hutchinson *et al.* 2015; Sidebotham *et al.* 2011; Turney 2016). In light of this, it has been suggested that for some professionals, the desire to be culturally sensitive can result in not questioning taken-for-granted assumptions or stereotypes. This may result in an acceptance of lower standards of care (NSPCC 2014). In essence, because there are anxieties about engaging with ‘race’ or cultural issues, these can often present barriers to addressing the child protection issues arising for black and ethnic minority children.

In this chapter, I will explore some of the issues that arise for minority ethnic children and young people and their carers in the child protection system. Specifically, my goal here is to explore the broader issues affecting minority ethnic children exposed to different types of harm and parenting behaviours. I look particularly at some of the safeguarding concerns for minority ethnic children and signpost some of the primary factors that have an impact on parental behaviours and responses. Furthermore, I emphasise some of the intersecting dynamics of culture and religion to illuminate some of the challenges and opportunities for practitioners to engage in effective helping relationships with minority ethnic families when children need to be safeguarded from harmful practices. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on the knowledge, skills and tools needed for responsive intervention with minority ethnic children and their families.

Factors that impact on minority ethnic children’s abilities to achieve their potential

Children from minority ethnic backgrounds face particular difficulties because they are typically members of socially disadvantaged groups. As described in Chapter 28, factors such as poverty, poor housing and unemployment make parenting challenging irrespective of race or culture. However, studies have overwhelmingly identified that minority ethnic children are more likely to be:

- living in families affected by factors caused by structural inequalities, such as household poverty
- with parents who are unemployed or working in low-paid, zero hours contract jobs
- living in economically deprived neighbourhoods
- experiencing food insecurity and financial worries.

All of these have detrimental effects on children’s health and wellbeing (Barnard and Turner 2011; Bywaters *et al.* 2015 [AQ]; Hirsch 2007, RCPCH and CPAG 2017; see also Chapter 28).

Some authors suggest that because children from certain ethnic minority groups (e.g. African, Bangladeshi, Caribbean and Pakistani) are disproportionately affected by material deprivation (Jivraj and Khan 2013; Modood and Berthoud 1997), parents from these groups struggle to adequately care for their children, thus elevating the risk of child welfare interventions (Barn 2001; Bywaters *et al.* 2016; Stokes and Schmidt 2011). This is not to imply that all minority ethnic parents from materially

deprived backgrounds will provide poor parental care to their children. On the contrary, what I suggest is that for some parents from these groups, poverty and economic stressors mean that they are more likely to suffer from physical and mental health difficulties, which has major consequences for the quality of life for families (Bellis *et al.* 2014). Clearly, this is a major factor in parenting difficulties (RCPCH and CPAG 2017; Stock *et al.* 2017). Additionally, research suggests that some of these parents will be less able to help their children navigate the school system (Hirsch 2007). For instance, some parents may not have English as their first language so may have difficulties communicating, whilst some who were not born and raised in the UK would not have gone through the education system themselves so have little understanding of how it works and may not feel confident to get involved in their child's school (see also Chapter 9).

Many studies have also highlighted that minority ethnic children disproportionately face a range of childhood stressors, including:

- being exposed to domestic violence
- parental mental health difficulties
- parental substance and alcohol misuse
- peer-on-peer abuse and gun and knife crime
- risks of physical and sexual violence from living in gang-affected neighbourhoods (Beckett *et al.* 2013; Bernard 2016; Keating and Brown 2016; Pearce 2011, 2014 [AQ]; Pearce *et al.* 2009 [AQ]; Thiara and Gill 2012)
- that some minority ethnic children are subjected to human trafficking for domestic servitude or sexual exploitation (Bokhari 2009; Gupta 2016; NCA 2017; Stobart 2006; see also Chapters 21 and 22).

These findings point to the importance of recognising how all of these factors will have a major bearing on children's abilities to achieve their full potential. Of particular consequence is that minority ethnic children's exposure to adverse childhood experiences elevates the risk of physical and mental ill-health problems in adulthood (Bellis *et al.* 2014; Bywaters *et al.* 2016). It is therefore imperative for practitioners to have a critical understanding of the role that structural inequalities have in significantly increasing minority ethnic children's vulnerabilities and, most importantly, limit their opportunities to grow up in a safe environment.

The issue of the effects of racism on parenting and minority ethnic children's psychological wellbeing is also being given increasing attention. Research has suggested that racism and racial discrimination can undermine some parents' capacity to parent well because of the stressors created (Becares, Nazroo and Kelly 2015). Gunaratnam (2014) reminds us that 'racism blights and complicates childhood and parenting and we know little about the corrosive damage of the long-term effects of living with racism on children'. Additionally, findings from the Millennium Cohort Study, which included mothers of Black Caribbean, Black African, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian backgrounds, reported that their experience of racism affected the physical and mental health of their children (Kelly, Becares and Nazroo 2013). This study found compelling evidence linking racism with poorer health and development in children, and highlighted that children living in areas where the mothers described racism as commonplace were more likely to have social and emotional difficulties and perform worse in tests at school (Kelly *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, Kelly *et al.* (2013) found that children with mothers who had

experienced racism first hand were around one-and-a-half times more likely to be obese than children of mothers who had not. The key message here is that minority ethnic children have to navigate a world where racialised microaggression is part of their daily lived reality. For example, some commentators have noted that black boys in particular are confronted with subtly communicated messages that demonise them, which means that by the time they reach adolescence, they have already internalised the idea that some people may view them as a threat and will respond to them with fear (Cushion, More and Jewell 2011; Sellers *et al.* 2006; Wright Maylor and Becker 2016). Perhaps more importantly, these findings reinforce the salience of understanding the conditions of minority ethnic children's daily lives and should be an essential focus for practice interventions. For this reason, some commentators argue that racism creates a pernicious undermining of children's emotional and psychological wellbeing (Kogan *et al.* 2015). At the same time, for minority ethnic children, any maltreatment they experience in the familial environment takes place in a societal context that stigmatises their identities, marginalises their experiences and fosters a racialised deficit-perspective of their families (Bernard 2002). In short, not only are minority ethnic children exposed to multiple forms of maltreatment, but their abuse experiences are made even more difficult because they have to make sense of them in a context in which they are also dealing with race-related stressors (Bernard 2002).

Yet the concept of how minority ethnic parents enable their children to deal with racism and Islamophobia is under-examined in research (Gunaratnam 2014). It has to be recognised that in functioning families, emotionally responsive parents will have a key role to play in mitigating the effects of racism on their children (Threlfall 2016 [AQ]). It is worth noting here that supportive parents or other significant trusted adults may be effective in boosting the resilience among minority ethnic children experiencing difficulties (Das 2010; Kogan *et al.* 2015). As such, recognition of these factors is essential for elucidating the nuances of parental care and support for minority ethnic children. Consideration of the factors that interplay enables practitioners to better understand the strategies families may use to resist oppression and help their children navigate racially hostile environments. To this end, in order to undertake effective assessments of families' functioning, it is essential to understand how parents utilise their cultural knowledge to help their children build resilience for dealing with racism.

Religious beliefs and culture in safeguarding work

In this section, I consider some issues concerned with the intersection of culture and religious beliefs in the context of safeguarding. As well as illuminating the beneficial role that religion and faith play in families' daily lives, I will also identify the particular safeguarding concerns that arise for some groups of minority ethnic children as a consequence of practices rooted in cultural and religious beliefs.

The beneficial effects of religion and faith for some children and their families are widely recognised. As a number of commentators have noted, religion and faith may be a key reference point for families, playing a major role in their daily lives and essentially functioning as a source of resiliency (Ashencaen Crabtree, Husain and Spalek 2008; Benavides 2017; Furness and Gilligan 2010b [AQ]; Pathan 2016). It is therefore important not to underestimate that for some practising members of religious faiths, formal places of worship can offer practical help and support for parents who are struggling and may provide a buffer for chronic stressors which

enhances psychological functioning (Al-Krenawi 2016; Butler-Barnes *et al.* 2016; Hodge 2017). Bowen-Reid and Harrell (2002), note that places of worship can provide important social support and some minority ethnic families may see them as a place of safety and connection, and as a place in which to deal with race-related stressors.

Moreover, membership of a religious congregation can give direction and provide a sense of community, with opportunities for involvement in positive environments, which play a critical role in cushioning the adverse effects of racism and discrimination (Suárez and Lewis 2013; Willis 2006). Research suggests that religion and faith can provide a sanctuary from the subtle racial microaggressions that are common experiences for minority ethnic families (Willis 2006). For some groups of minority ethnic families, their religion powerfully shapes their ethnic identity and fosters cultural pride as members of a particular community in a social environment where they may feel excluded or marginalised. Furness and Gilligan (2010b [AQ]) and Scourfield *et al.* (2013) have highlighted the importance of understanding that religion and religious beliefs may be essential facets of an individual's ethnic identity, reflecting their cultural values and contributing to their social status within their communities.

It is also possible that regularly attending a place of worship may provide individuals with a supportive network of friends, and an arena of support outside the family, which could be a protective factor for children (Boynton and Vis 2017). For example, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may be alone, come from non-English speaking backgrounds, and not know where to get help from, so their first port of call might be a church, mosque or other place of worship. Likewise, for new migrants, parenting in an unfamiliar culture will often be a generally daunting experience. It is suggested that pastors, imams and other religious leaders have a big influence in decisions that parents may make about their children (Hutchinson and O'Leary 2016). Further, for groups with limited access to social capital, formal places of worship can function as an arena to help families build social connections and strong supportive social networks for the challenges they face in their daily lives (see also Chapter 29), and can be sources of motivation for creating positive changes in their children's lives (Furness and Gilligan 2012). Practitioners therefore need to understand how religious beliefs, and in particular membership of a religious congregation, may be a major part of parents' coping resources and help-seeking strategies. In sum, these findings attest to the importance of appreciating the role that religion and faith play in buffering some minority ethnic children and their families from the effects of adversity.

Safeguarding in the context of religion and cultural practices

While it is true that religious beliefs and cultural traditions can function as a mediating factor for the racially stressful environments encountered by minority ethnic families, a growing body of evidence has emphasised that they can also increase the risk of distinctive forms of ill-treatment for some children. For example, researchers and campaigners have highlighted harmful practices that raise safeguarding concerns for minority ethnic children, disproportionately affecting girls and including female genital mutilation (Harris 2016; Monahan 2007; Roach and Momoh 2013), child brides and forced marriage (Alijah and Chantler 2015; Gupta 2016), honour-based abuse (Anitha and Gill 2009; Gill and Brah 2014) and breast ironing or breast flattening (Tapscott 2012; Tchoukou 2014). Parents may see these

cultural practices as rites of passage, or part of identity formation, as well as providing a sense of belonging, and will therefore see their behaviour as meeting their children's cultural needs (Monahan 2007; Roach and Momoh 2013).

Latterly, there has been growing concern about harmful practices where religious beliefs, underpinned by cultural traditions, play a key role in accusations of witchcraft branding or spirit possession (Briggs *et al.* 2011; Costello *et al.* 2013; Dorkenoo, Morrison and McFarlane 2007; Gilligan 2008; Secker 2012; Secker and Rehman 2013; Stobart 2006; Tadam 2016; Tadam and Adjoa 2017). For example, Secker's (2012) assertion that religious beliefs play a key role in increasing witchcraft accusations against children is very pertinent here. As such, it is important to consider how some parents might use religious and cultural beliefs to justify behaviours that are harmful to children. Moreover, AFRUCA (2015) and Tadam and Adjoa (2017) refer to the need for practitioners to understand that some children with disabilities may be scapegoated as parents may believe that they have brought a curse on the family in the form of their disability. In addition, 'children living away from home in private fostering situations as well as in domestic servitude situations may also be scapegoated' (AFRUCA 2015, p.12). As there may be under-reporting of this type of abuse, eliciting a precise picture of what is going on for children will be problematic (Tadam 2016), and research suggests that extended family members may play a critical role in keeping the problem hidden (Secker 2012). It needs to be emphasised that children living in close-knit communities may find it difficult to go outside of their families for help. It is thus important to recognise that, where communities hold attitudes about alleged practices such as spirit possession or witchcraft, parents or other caregivers may strongly believe that they are doing what is best for their children (AFRUCA 2015; Tadam 2016).

A further important area that will bring families into conflict with child protection services is in the use of physical punishment. Child protection data shows that African children, in particular, are disproportionately represented in child protection services for physical abuse. It is suggested that some Christian parents may use the Bible to defend their actions, and indeed may strongly believe that physical chastisement is part of the correct method for raising well-behaved and disciplined children (Frosh 2004; Heimlich 2011). We can see the way these ideas were played out in the case of Shanay Walker, a seven-year-old dual heritage child (her mother is listed as white and her father as an 'ethnic minority' [AQ]), who died from a brain injury as a result of the physical violence suffered at the hands of her guardian (her paternal aunt) and her paternal grandmother (Wiffin 2014 [AQ]). Both the aunt and grandmother were jailed for child cruelty' [AQ]. In the serious case review, reference is made to the possibility that some of Shanay's treatment may have had something to do with the aunt's 'cultural heritage', though the term is never unpacked, so we do not know what it refers to in this instance. Both the aunt and grandmother are of Black Caribbean origin. The aunt's parenting style is referred to as harsh and punitive, and it is noted that she drew on the guidance and support of 'spiritual guardians' from her church to implement a strict parenting style and to discipline Shanay for her 'behavioural and conduct problems'. Despite Shanay repeatedly presenting at school with bruises and other injuries, the professionals involved did not ascertain the actual nature of the aunt's 'strict discipline' methods. Of importance here is that the serious case review emphasised that some congregation members of the church the aunt attended, including the church safeguarding lead, had knowledge of her mistreatment of Shanay but failed to report the mistreatment to children's social care, thus

condoning the guardian's 'harsh parenting style which included physical disciplining' of this vulnerable little girl.

What is highlighted most powerfully in this situation is that the church did not function as a place of safety for Shanay; its active collusion with the guardian instead placed her at increased risk of significant harm. The serious case review thus concluded that the professional judgements made did not distinguish between 'what constitutes effective approaches to discipline as opposed to punishment' (p.48). Consideration of these issues is extremely important as they have to be balanced against the pervasive negative stereotyping, which contributes to general perceptions that African and African-Caribbean parents have generally more authoritarian parenting styles and are thus seen as more likely to use physical punishment to discipline their children (Laird 2008; Thorburn *et al.* 2000 [AQ]). Notwithstanding this view, it should not be assumed that all African or African-Caribbean parents use harsh parenting techniques, and practitioners will ultimately need to engage with and talk to parents concerning the methods they use to discipline their children (AFRUCA 2015; see also Chapter 7).

A final point to note in connection to other forms of maltreatment, such as child sexual abuse, is that for some groups, family honour and reputation may take precedence over children's safety and may silence disclosures of child sexual abuse (Aronson Fontes and Plummer 2010; Gilligan and Akhtar 2006; Humphreys, Atkar and Baldwin 1999, Hutchinson and O'Leary 2016; Sawrikar and Katz 2017). Research shows that Asian children are under-represented in the data on child sexual abuse (Gilligan and Akhtar 2006). It has been suggested that some that Asian families place a high value on preserving family honour, and as a result women and children may be reluctant to talk about sexual abuse outside the family because of the possible ramifications (Humphreys *et al.* 1999; Hutchinson and O'Leary 2016).

It is important to acknowledge here how cultural norms are underpinned by gender-based ideologies that emphasise specific expectations for Asian girls and women (Siddiqui 2013). Appreciation of these issues is fundamental for increasing understandings of the nuances of a patriarchal and paternalistic familial environment for different groups of minority ethnic children. Thus, an intersectional approach¹ provides a framework to capture the connections between myriad forms and manifestations of oppression that coalesce for minority ethnic children. The lens of intersectionality can help to develop insights into the gendered cultural expectations which are at the heart of girls and women's experiences in their families. As Krumer-Nevo and Komem (2015) remind us, whilst it is imperative to understand how cultural beliefs influence parenting, attention also needs to be focused on how cultural norms intersect with gender to frame minority ethnic children's experiences within their families.

Engaging children and families

What, then, are some of the barriers and facilitators to parental engagement and developing mutually respectful relationships with families? As noted above, there is a broad array of issues that bring religious beliefs and cultural practices into conflict

¹ Intersectionality refers to the interplay between multiple social categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability and other markers of identity to affect the relational and contextual nature of black people's lived experiences (Crenshaw 1994).

between the needs of children and the rights of their parents. When there are child protection concerns, a key issue that practitioners will have to help parents grapple with is how their cultural values may be in conflict with the cultural norms and laws of the majority society. Where parents' child-rearing practices are buttressed by cultural and religious beliefs which are not in line with UK law, making accurate assessments can be complex and challenging (see also Chapters 9 and 10). Barn and Kirton (2015) and Bernard and Thomas (2016) point out that culturally based assumptions about race permeate interventions in social work, which can ultimately lead to inaccurate assessments of risk. Developing an effective helping relationship in situations where parents might use a cultural defence to evade scrutiny presents a number of complexities that practitioners will have to deal with in order to assess indicators of actual or future harm. Social workers, in particular, have to engage parents in difficult conversations, in situations where emotions and anxiety levels will be high, and where there is a strong likelihood of misunderstanding. One obstacle in cultivating effective helping relationships is that professionals' anxieties about engaging with race and cultural issues may present barriers to appropriate interventions for groups of minority ethnic children. It is therefore important to consider how these issues may impact practitioners' abilities to interact with minority ethnic parents and appropriately interpret their experiences, behaviour and coping strategies. Research has indicated that religion and culture significantly influence the ways of understanding and responding to various forms of maltreatment experienced by minority ethnic children (Connolly, Crichton-Hill and Ward 2006; Humphreys *et al.* 1999; Gilligan 2009; Hutchinson and O'Leary 2015 [AQ]; Webb, Maddocks and Bongill 2002; Welbourne and Dixon 2015). For example, in situations of neglect, there may be a reluctance to make professional judgements on patterns of parental behaviour when they are deemed to be cultural practices (Brandon *et al.* 2014).

Perhaps most problematic for professionals is how to challenge culture-specific practices that are harmful to children without pathologising all of parents' caregiving practices (Bernard and Gupta 2008; Gilligan 2017; see also Chapter 7). With children and families coming from such diverse cultural backgrounds, practitioners will have to navigate between appropriately assessing risks for children in a cultural context whilst being mindful of risk factors, which may require challenging parents where a cultural defence might be used to justify their actions. Thus, there is the difficult but necessary task of distinguishing between cultural assets that can enhance parents' resourcefulness for caregiving in adverse circumstances, and parenting that is harsh and abusive where parents excuse their behaviour on the grounds of culture. This is an extremely important distinction to be made because not only must practitioners find ways to engage with parents so that they can explain and account for their actions, they must also be sensitive to culture-specific parenting styles. To this end, professionals must be able to subject cultural practices to scrutiny as a necessary part of the assessment process if they are to understand what is going on for children. Regardless of the parents' intent, the child's right not to be harmed is paramount. The statutory framework set out by the Children Act 1989 states that children must be protected from significant harm, and the welfare of the child is paramount. Ultimately, practitioners must be able to confidently unravel and reveal what it is like to be a child living in any given situation, and identify potential risks and protective factors.

A point worth noting here is that despite social work's stated commitment to promoting social justice, it remains the case that there are still anxieties about addressing race and cultural issues in practice interventions (Burman, Smailes and

Chantler 2004). We need to grapple with the notion that practitioners may be uncomfortable engaging with race, for in order to develop facilitative relationships with children and families, practice must be sensitive to racial and cultural differences, and also be adept at working imaginatively with different parenting practices that may be in conflict with the dominant culture. Indeed, consideration of this factor points to the importance of practitioners receiving the right kind of supervision to develop the skills and knowledge for engaging with the complexities that arise in this area of practice. Therefore, high-quality reflective supervision can help practitioners disentangle race, ethnicity and culture, and most importantly, uncover and work with implicit and explicit assumptions about minority ethnic children and families. In essence, attention must be given to cultivating practice environments that foster discussion of race and cultural issues as understandings of these factors are crucial to interventions that can make a positive difference to the care and protection of vulnerable minority ethnic children.

A further complicating factor is that practitioners may struggle to identify strengths and empathise with the struggles of minority ethnic parents because of preconceived ideas that label these families as deficient. There is a tendency to focus on deficits with minority ethnic families, thus undervaluing the attributes, inner resources, and cultural assets of the family. This focus on deficits may create an obstacle to parental engagement (Bernard and Gupta 2008; see also Chapter 7). Practice models such as Signs of Safety therefore offer useful tools for working with families to keep children safe. A solution-focused approach, Signs of Safety principles can be used to establish constructive working relationships with parents to hold them accountable and focus on strengths as a means of finding solutions (Turnell 2012; see also Chapters 4 and 7). A key element of strengths-focused practice is its capacity for fostering a climate of cooperation between the professional and the family. The basic principle of the Signs of Safety approach is the explicit and careful focus given to the goals of the two key components of the process, namely the family members and the practitioner (Turnell 2012). In particular, it could be helpful for assessing parents' past history, as well as their parenting style, and professionals might be better able to identify elements of strength that might have gone unrecognised. Most importantly, it can help the team supporting the child to find out what is working well, despite the current concerns.

Exploration of the strengths of the family can help to create the sense that there are, in fact aspects of family life and experiences that can be built on to resolve the current difficulty (Bernard and Thomas 2016; see also Chapters 9 and 11). Furthermore, the tools for engaging children can be used to ensure that their voices are at the centre of the assessment (see also Chapters 5 and 6). It allows practitioners to find out from children what they value about their families and what will need to change to ensure their safety. For engagement with the family to take place, they will need to be reassured that the practitioner is bringing a balanced perspective to the situation and is not simply preoccupied with deficits (Bernard and Thomas 2016). In order to develop meaningful relationships of trust with families when working cross-culturally, it is vital that professionals are open to questioning their beliefs and assumptions about races and cultures different from their own, to consider how such beliefs might unconsciously bias their views about the caregiving of minority ethnic parents and the familial environments of minority ethnic children. A respectful dialogue is essential to enable culturally sensitive interventions that are empowering and build on families' strengths. Indeed, openness and reflexive thinking is needed to help practitioners be in touch with how culturally deficit thinking, culturally based

stereotypical assumptions, and unconscious and unintentional biases may influence their interventions. Crucially, to ensure that children are protected from harm, professional curiosity and maintaining a position of enquiry is critical for achieving a balance between being culturally sensitive without resorting to forms of cultural relativism (Bernard and Thomas 2016).

Summary

This chapter has overviewed some key issues regarding safeguarding concerns for minority ethnic children, with particular attention being given to the impact of cultural and religious beliefs. In particular, the chapter has highlighted that minority ethnic children are disproportionately affected by adverse factors created by socio-economic inequalities, coupled with unique forms of abuse that are rooted in religious and cultural beliefs. These various factors present complex challenges concerning thresholds for interventions for child protection. Thus, some groups of minority ethnic children have very complex needs and live in familial contexts which are further exacerbated by their material circumstances. It has been argued that taking account of how culture, religion and race intersect for minority ethnic children will enable professionals to better understand the issues that may surface for this diverse group of children, so that practitioners themselves do not compound inequalities in their interventions. Whilst it is important to further professional understanding of the role of religious beliefs and cultural traditions as sources of resilience for minority ethnic children and their families, it is also necessary to recognise the ways in which they may compound risk and vulnerabilities. In the multiracial, multicultural and multifaith contexts of contemporary Britain, where there is heterogeneity of parenting styles and different cultural beliefs and attitudes towards child-rearing, questions about what is good enough care are brought into sharp focus. For child-centred and culturally sensitive interventions, it is essential that practitioners have the skills, knowledge and confidence for the trust building that is necessary to enable difficult conversations to take place in situations marked by ultimately opposing views about what constitutes harmful behaviour.

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