

Policy recommendations on building culturally responsive support services post-pandemic

Key Insights

- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed pre-existing structural inequalities and racial disparities in British society.
- Children's services providers should adopt an intersectional, culturally responsive approach to address policies and practices that adversely impact Black, Asian and minority ethnic users.
- Youth services should be co-produced together with young people, providing safe spaces and culturally responsive mental health support.
- National and local government must ensure long-term investment in place-based community services.
- The police, along with social care, education and health services need to address racial discrimination and build trust in BAME communities and service users.



Recommendations Children's and Youth Services Providers

Understand how policies and practices may impact BAME communities adversely

All interviews with practitioners of colour, who worked closely with Black and Asian groups, highlighted the urgency around change within support services.

Some of the key areas mentioned included recognising individuals' needs and circumstances on a case-by-case basis; the importance of cultural sensitivity; tackling stereotyping and unconscious bias/racism; and stepping in to fill the gaps between the home and access to support from social/welfare services.

All professionals emphasised the need for a more intersectional approach to better understand Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and support their needs.

For instance, one teacher drew attention to the intertwining of poverty and race, or classism and racism and how this impacted a child's ability to progress particularly during situations like the pandemic.

Culturally responsive approaches that account for differences within and between cultural groupings, religious belief systems and values, were raised as important to improving service delivery.

Children's services providers must adopt an intersectional approach for understanding and

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and amplified deep-rooted structural inequalities and racial disparities in British society, with significant evidence that Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people were impacted adversely by the pandemic compared to the rest of the population¹⁻⁵.

Early on in the pandemic, an increase was seen in racism and discrimination aimed at racially minoritised people, who were perceived as being potential spreaders of the virus⁶. At the same time, racially minoritised people faced higher rates of being questioned or fined by the police for breach of 'COVID rules'⁷.

This policy brief offers recommendations for policymakers and service providers, outlining how to 'build back better' in a culturally responsive way that meets the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic families. It is based on a study that examined the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial discrimination on the lives of BAME children, young people and families across the UK.

The study is part of a larger ESRC/UKRI funded project **Co-POWeR - Consortium on Practices of Wellbeing and Resilience in Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Families and Communities**.

addressing how their policies and practices impact Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people, families and communities adversely.

Co-produce youth services with young people

Several young people spoke about youth club support, including sports groups such as football, boxing, and horse-riding, during the pandemic. Youth clubs and centres were identified by these participants as crucial, not only to provide support and sense of community to young people, but also as an alternative to crime, which they felt was often perceived as the only option for struggling youths.

Further findings from this research also point to the positive impact of engagement with issues related to racial identity and politics in social groups and in the classroom. Notable examples of thoughtful engagement with race and racism in education settings included a Black Lives Matter book club hosted by one school and the introduction of a diversity prefect at another school.

Youth services should be co-produced with young people and include provision of safe spaces and community-based youth and mental health workers accessible to local Black, Asian and minority ethnic children and young people.



Recognise the importance of 'insider' workers

'Insider' workers often had knowledge of the cultural differences and needs of the communities they served and were able to assist and empower their service users. In many instances their support at grassroots level delivered the services that government structures and systems failed to do. For example, a female participant spoke about the support she received from a black women's group. The community worker and group founder did educational work around vaccine take-up, resulting in the majority of women getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

One young person also described their experience of receiving therapy, emphasising the importance of having a counsellor with understanding of their own community. Children's and youth services providers should recognise the importance of and support grassroots level 'insider' workers

with shared knowledge and lived experiences of the community that they serve.



National and Local Government

Ensure long-term and sustained investment in place-based community services

Many participants reported that they often felt unable to access or receive help from the government and state institutions and felt that their primary source of material and financial support were family members and their local community. Support received from community and religious networks at grassroots levels was seen as more selfless, non-judgmental and empathetic.

Some young participants also stressed the importance of government investment in youth clubs supporting racially minoritised young people.

National and local government must ensure long-term and sustained investment in place-based community services, that offer early help and culturally appropriate support tailored to meet the needs of local Black, Asian and minority ethnic population groups.

This includes investment in the development of community support networks and youth clubs which constitute key sources of support for ethnic minority young people in Britain.

Police Services

Understand and address issues of racism to build trust in communities

Professionals that were interviewed highlighted how police treatment and stereotyping of young people, particularly Black young males, has become normalised within the community. Most of the young people in the sample told stories of the policing they experienced during the pandemic. The common experience of being stopped and questioned by the police during lockdown affected participants' feelings of safety and often made them feel less able to go outside to exercise or get fresh air during the lockdown.

Particularly stark accounts included that of a 17-year-old participant who was followed by a police car for ten minutes

when he was out jogging and of a 13-year-old participant who was put in handcuffs and unfairly accused of stealing a bike.

The police, as a key statutory safeguarding partner, should find innovative ways to actively engage with Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people and families to understand and address issues of racism for building trust in those communities.

Social Care, Education and Health Services

Address racial discrimination and lack of trust experienced by service-users

Racism and racial discrimination were often described in relation to accessing support in relation to food, health, employment, social services and schools. For some interviewees there was a fear around accessing support services due to previous negative experiences of discrimination, and impacts on residency applications, or the possibility of losing their children to social services.

Participants for whom English was a second language also spoke of the difficulties they experienced with the lack of face-to-face communication.

A Bangladeshi single mother recounted how she found home schooling particularly challenging due to her difficulties with the English language, having no internet or laptop and not receiving adequate support from the school. Others spoke of being asked questions about their ethnicity when trying to book a GP appointment over the telephone or when speaking to the emergency services.

Children's social care, education and health services must engage with Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people and families to address racial discrimination and lack of trust experienced by many who use their services.

Research Background

This research was produced as part of a collaboration between academics from the Royal Holloway, University of London, Goldsmiths, University of London and University College London.

Researchers worked in partnership with a youth panel made up of 10 young people, aged 16-20, representing different racially minoritised groups. The findings are based on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with children (12 years+), young people, parents and other family members, and professionals from community and statutory organisations, totaling 140 participants.

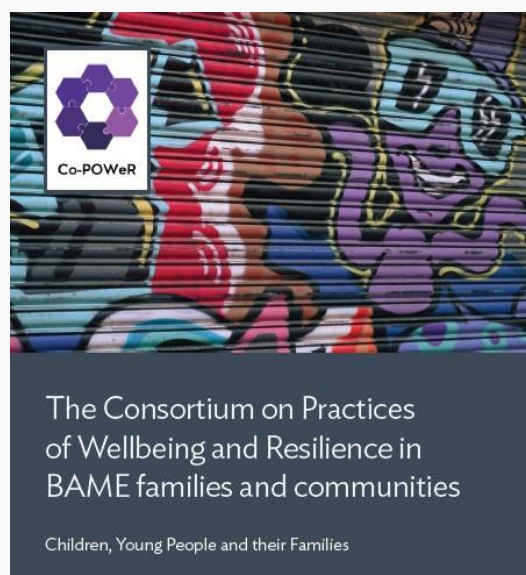
The sample of participants were selected from several regions across England and Wales, including London, Yorkshire, the Midlands, Essex and south Wales.

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The full report by the Co-POWeR consortium can be accessed here:



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