

Collaborative Group for Learning Disability
Research in the North West

Research Digest

Responsive Services for Learning Disabled People from Minority Ethnic Communities



This paper reports the results of a postal questionnaire survey carried out to explore the responsiveness and appropriateness of services for learning disabled people from minority ethnic communities within the North West of England.



Twenty one learning disability service commissioners or service providers completed the questionnaire.



Results indicated that legislation and guidelines and organisational culture both played a role in how services respond. An important theme was the regularity of respondents stating that new services were currently being developed.



Individual staff members and good organisational support were most cited as the factors that facilitate effective policies, practices, and procedures. Problems regarding funding were most frequently cited as barriers to effective policies, practices, or procedures.



The responses indicate marginalisation as a core theme. It is important to ensure every aspect of service development aims to meet the needs of people from minority ethnic communities.

The Study

This study reviews the impact of the recommendations from existing studies on current service responsiveness to the needs of learning disabled people from minority ethnic communities and their carers. The study focuses on service delivery within the North West of England.

Specifically the study aimed to gain a picture of the range of services available and of who uses the services; to explore the level of commissioner and provider knowledge about ethnic minority users of services; to identify any specific policies, procedures or practices regarding meeting the needs of learning disabled people from minority ethnic communities, and what has made these effective or ineffective.

Participants

Ninety eight learning disability service commissioners, service providers and non statutory organisations in the North West of England were sent a questionnaire.

Eighteen participants were involved in the study. Three of the respondents were eligible to complete both the provider and commissioner questionnaires, making a total of 21 responses, 12 from providers and 9 from commissioners. The nature of services provided by the respondents included: health, social, residential, day, respite, domiciliary, field, advocacy, advice/support, direct payments, adult placements, befriending, media, quality, research and service development. The providers operated under the following organisations: local government (N=8), NHS (N=4), voluntary organisations (N=2) and private/commercial organisations (N=1).

Methodology

A postal questionnaire was used to collect data. The fixed-choice questions were used to gather demographic information. The open-ended questions were used to obtain details of any specific practices and were developed using the areas for service development identified in previous research.

The quantitative data was presented as tabulations and frequencies. The information from the open-ended questions was analysed by two researchers by reading and re-reading the responses and grouping them into themes.

Findings

- Much of the work described by respondents was governed by legislation and/or local guidelines. Specifically, respondents referred to the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 1996, the Sex Discrimination Act, local council's Race to Equality Scheme, Welfare to Work, and the Council Community Care Plan. No respondents referred to the Department of Health (2001) Learning Disabilities and Ethnicity paper. The framework for Action on Ethnicity (Valuing People Support Team, 2004) did not appear until after data collection.
- Organisational culture plays a part in how services respond to the needs of people from minority ethnic communities. Providers reported that work with learning disabled people, families, parents and carers was often not governed by policy, but was part of the culture of the organisation. One respondent used the term, "No policy but part of culture". This was often the case, whereby, it was a general acceptance that equality issues were important, but that there was not a specific policy in place. An example of how 'no policy but part of culture' operates can be seen in terms of recruitment of staff. One respondent referred to the fact that they aimed to recruit from the local area, which leads to a roughly equal number of applicants from a similar background to their client group. More generally, many providers responded

that their organisations were committed to person centred planning and the individual assessment of need took account of cultural differences.

- Service providers had set up their own programmes, staff teams or services such as an ethnic minorities women's advocacy group, a health promotion session for Asian women, a single sex supported living scheme, but also 'cultural development workers' and links with independent providers to advise if service delivery was culturally sensitive. Service providers also reported a number of programmes that had been established for parents, families or carers. Examples of these were a parent support group, specific teams with language support, an Asian carers' group that provides breaks for carers, a development worker whose role is to promote access & develop good practice, and a Carers' Forum (Black & Asian).

- When asked about interpreters, providers reported that they often have Urdu & Gujarati speakers on their teams and many reported that they do not come across a need for anyone external, but will use interpreters when necessary. Also in some cases, literature is published in the main languages of ethnic groups in the borough. Respondents generally referred to the fact that the proportion of staff from minority ethnic communities reflected or aimed to reflect the population figures. This was not always the case and some providers singled out groups who were underrepresented.

- Respondents frequently stated that they were currently revising their policies regarding provision for people from minority ethnic communities.

- Despite these ongoing revisions of aims of organisations and the development of specific programmes, there are still some absences in service provision. In some instances it was reported that the service did not have any specific policies, procedures or practices.

Initiating and Monitoring Change.

- The initiative for the above policies, procedures or practices came from a variety of sources. The two responses that were the most common were that the initiative had come from a) feedback from existing service users/carers or parents and b) from managers and staff who were dissatisfied with the current response.

- Respondents were asked to explain how these policies, procedures and practices were monitored. The most common answer was that monitoring was sporadic. However, despite this it was apparent that monitoring was indeed taking place in some areas through liaising with community groups, or in some smaller organisations managers were able to have individual contact with families enabling ongoing monitoring.

- Policies, procedures and practices that were reported to have worked well included the recruitment of carers from ethnic minorities, the council Racial Equality Scheme, liaising with carers and an action research group. These areas were thought to be working well were due to partnership working; external facilitation; and commitment and enthusiasm from both staff and senior management.

Facilitators & Barriers

- Individual staff members and good organisational support were most cited as the factors that facilitate effective policies, practices and procedures. Problems regarding funding were most frequently cited as barriers to effective policies, practices, and procedures.

- A variety of topics were mentioned where there were difficulties in being responsive to people from minority ethnic communities. There were a few quite broad responses stating the “uptake of services by service users from ethnic minorities”, “lack of vision from the service – working from numbers rather than impact”. Other difficulties included the question of whether services were being really culturally sensitive and not just paying lip service to provision; and the recognised danger of starting initiatives with short-term funding.

Implications & Conclusions

- This study demonstrates the important role of legislation and guidelines, organisational culture and focused service provision for developing services for learning disabled people from minority ethnic communities.

- This study has shown that despite many services having targets to achieve in terms of employing staff from minority ethnic communities, it is still an area where respondents reported difficulties.

- In terms of the recruitment of bilingual staff and interpreters respondents were more positive and interpreters were used and service’s literature was produced in different languages.

- Past research has concluded that almost all learning disabled Asian adults live with their families. This leads in turn to specific service requirements whereby in many instances main carers are mothers who cannot communicate in English. In this study respondents reported on a number of new initiatives that aimed to support families and carers suggesting that improvements have been made in this sphere.

- Providers reported using a variety of sources to gather information about the numbers of learning disabled people from minority ethnic communities. Furthermore respondents commonly reported that monitoring was sporadic. This supports previous research that has stressed the need for accurate and ongoing information from and about minority ethnic communities to meet their needs.

- The respondents detailed evidence of a number of policies and projects being carried out at locally. These projects demonstrate the widespread perception of the issue of meeting the needs of minority ethnic communities as still being something that needs to be added on, rather than seeing it as a central theme of service development.

- The results of this survey have demonstrated a need for routine collection of information about people from minority ethnic communities to ensure uptake of services. The study highlights the need for long-term funding for initiatives for learning disabled people from minority ethnic communities. It is hoped that the examples of good practice discussed in this report could be replicated in local areas.

- While these results can be used to demonstrate trends across services in the North West, they do need to be treated with caution because of the bias towards respondents who had instigated specific policies for people from minority ethnic communities. This means that the results could describe a “best case” scenario.

The Researchers

Dr Sue Caton*, Samantha Starling**, Dr Mark Burton**, Dr Sabiha Azmi***, and Melanie Chapman**

*Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Hathersage Road, Manchester

**Manchester Learning Disability Partnership, Mauldeth House, Mauldeth Road West, Chorlton, Manchester

***Birmingham Learning Disability Services. South Birmingham Primary Care Trust. Greenfields, Monyhull Hall Rd, Kings Norton, Birmingham



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