

# Poverty and ethnicity: A review of evidence

Round-up  
Reviewing the evidence

May 2011

There is considerable disadvantage in many areas of life for people from across many ethnicities. There are some common experiences within and between people in these groups but also important variations between groups that are often considered as similar and within every ethnic group. So what are the most influential factors and which issues need further investigation?

## This paper:

- summarises current evidence on poverty and ethnicity in six areas: education, work, caring, social networks, the role of places and inequality within ethnic groups.
- identifies key gaps where greater understanding could support more effective action on poverty across ethnicities.

## Key points

- 'Intersectionality' is vital: in order to understand how ethnicity affects people's experiences and outcomes. It is also necessary to consider other aspects of identity such as gender, age, religion, disability, health and location.
- Outcomes for individuals come from the interaction of two broad sets of factors:
  - informal processes – the texture of everyday life, the decisions and assumptions of individuals, communities and organisations;
  - wider structures – labour markets, housing options, services, geography, social norms.
- There are many issues which are understood only partially. Four areas emerged for further investigation:
  - caring and earning: the changing ways families across ethnicities and locations are managing their caring and economic needs; the implications of this for informal and formal care services, labour market policies and the future of family and community life;
  - how ethnicity affects in-work poverty: in particular the part played by informal workplace culture and the effects on access to, and use of, training and qualifications, development and progression in work;
  - how social networks are linked to escaping from poverty: how this is changing for new generations and new groups; the evolving role of digital networks; the potential role of links between low and higher income people within ethnically based networks;
  - the influence of the places people live and work in: why this varies so much around ethnicity and how understanding it can lead to more effect local and national action on poverty.

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## Introduction

There is a tension running through all of this research between the reality of common experiences *among* people from some ethnic backgrounds and the wide variations and nuances that also exist *within* and *across* such groups.

There are definite patterns of disadvantage for people from minority ethnic backgrounds which need to be acknowledged and tackled. For instance, poverty is higher among all black and minority ethnic groups than among the majority white population. Men and women from some ethnic groups are paid less on average than those from other groups who have similar qualifications, experience and so on. There are also some broad patterns of difference in how people across different ethnicities appear to approach various life choices. One example often quoted is the greater tendency of women from some South Asian backgrounds to say that they wish to take care of the home and family rather than do paid work outside the home. Another is the higher numbers of young people from some minority ethnic groups who go to university. There are also commonalities of experience, particularly in terms of discrimination and racism.

But as soon as nearly every issue is examined in more detail, such broad patterns start to break down. Discussing issues in relation to 'minority ethnic groups' as a whole almost immediately becomes untenable due to the enormous variation between them. Even considering a smaller set of ethnic groups is very often also problematic. Some ethnic groups do appear to be more unified in terms of outcomes and behaviour than others. For instance, Bangladeshi people have the smallest spread of incomes and the highest poverty. There is also some consistency in patterns of work and caring, in particular of high numbers of women being out of the labour market. However, even this group is by no means homogenous. The patterns of women's work and aspirations are changing fast between generations and depending on qualification level. They also vary across the country. For other 'groups', such as Chinese people, the variations of income as well as many other factors are so wide as to bring into question when it is useful to use this single group as a focus for analysis. In addition, information about people from some ethnic backgrounds – particularly white minorities, newer migrants and small groups – is not separately available in many official data sets and research.

## Background

Since 2005, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has funded a number of research projects exploring the links between poverty and ethnicity. More recently, a series of reviews and studies were commissioned in order to feed into the scoping of a major new programme focusing specifically on understanding how poverty and ethnicity interact. These were intended to distil from current evidence what is currently known about a number of key issues and which gaps in knowledge and understanding are most significant in relation to tackling poverty. This *Round-up* draws together the findings of the scoping work, carried out in 2010.

The research focused mainly on three areas of life that have enormous impact on whether and how people experience poverty: education, work and unpaid caring. It also examined two of the underlying issues that help us to understand how and why outcomes in all of these areas vary so markedly – social networks and the role of places. Alongside this, the research looked at the question of inequality within a range of ethnic groups. It also included qualitative research with a number of communities to understand their day-to-day experiences.

## The research

**This paper draws on the following reports from JRF's poverty and ethnicity programme (all published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York)**

Athwal, B., Quiggin, M., Phillips, D. and Harrison, M. (2011) *Exploring experiences of poverty in Bradford*.\*

Chouhan, K., Speeden, S. and Qazi, U. (2011) *Experience of poverty and ethnicity in London*.\*

De Lima, P., Arshad, R., Bell, A. and Brauholtz-Speight, T. (2011) *Community consultation on poverty and ethnicity in Scotland*.\*

Garner, S. and Bhattacharyya, G. (2011) *Poverty, ethnicity and place*.

Gilchrist, A. and Kyprianou, P. (2011) *Social networks, poverty and ethnicity*.

Hirsch, D., Phung, V. and Manful, E. (2011) *Poverty, ethnicity and caring*.

Hudson, M. and Radu, D. (2011) *The role of employer attitudes and behaviour*.

Netto, G., Sosenko, F. and Bramley, G. (2011) *A review of poverty and ethnicity in Scotland*.

Platt, L. (2011) *Inequality within ethnic groups*.

Tackey, N. D., Barnes, H. and Khambhaita, P. (2011) *Poverty, ethnicity and education*.

\* The three consultations involved people from a range of ethnic backgrounds including white British, white Scottish, Bangladeshi, African Caribbean, Somali, Chinese, East European and Gypsy/Travellers.

## Intersectionality

A key concept underlying all of the research findings is intersectionality. People's experience is not shaped by one aspect of their identity alone but by a combination of elements. Gender, age, religion, disability, health, location and migration history can all be as important as ethnicity. They can change how ethnicity affects people's self-perception and treatment by others. In addition, class, skills and qualifications, personal outlook and experience can change the meaning that such demographic characteristics have. The experience of a middle class, third generation, Indian, Hindu woman with a degree, living in Milton Keynes may have little in common with a second generation, Indian, Muslim woman, with a level three qualification, living in Bradford with a disabled husband and two children. Research and policy have started to take this on board, particularly in relation to considering gender and religion alongside ethnicity. For example, the experiences of Muslim women in the workplace have been explored to some extent. However, much of the existing research focuses on a particular range of minority ethnic women and there is little work going beyond this or looking at other dimensions as well, such as age or disability.

## Day-to-day living and social structures

This research reflects two themes of broader poverty research and starts to show how ethnicity affects them:

- the centrality of informal processes in shaping poverty outcomes: the texture of day-to-day life, the decisions and assumptions that people make as individuals, in families, as managers, employers and service providers and the interaction between people;
- the wider structures that shape, enable and constrain these decisions: labour markets, housing options, service provision, geography and social norms.

Across each of the areas we examine, it is clear that individuals' outcomes are a product of the interaction of these and that ethnicity is one factor among many that affects them. If we are interested in improving outcomes, we therefore need to think in detail about the key points in people's lives where different decisions and opportunities are possible. We also need to understand how wider structures (such as the labour market, public services and social norms) affect the likelihood of changing these day-to-day processes and what can be done to achieve this. A much more sophisticated examination of the way in which ethnicity affects people's circumstances, decisions and outcomes should lead us towards more effective solutions to poverty for people of all ethnicities.

## Geography and localism

The complexity of this territory is greatly increased when we start to consider how both day-to-day living and structures vary between places. National averages, whether in employment, income or other areas, often hide great variations for the same group in different places. Likewise, qualitative research has shown that social norms around issues such as caring can vary depending on the specific composition, history and circumstances of people in an area, and the options available to them in terms of services and jobs.

This is positive in that it suggests that outcomes and choices are not determined by intrinsic characteristics or attitudes but differ depending on circumstances that are malleable. However, it also makes it much more complicated to address issues from a national policy perspective. Elements of this research point towards the need for a far more local approach to policy-making, tailoring solutions to particular sets of people, their history and an area's circumstances. Providing evidence and ideas to local players, and motivating and monitoring them, are likely to become ever more important to all those attempting to address poverty. Increasing our understanding of the role of ethnicity may push us further in this direction.

# Education

The research carried out by Tackey *et al.* showed that ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender are the three characteristics that seem to affect educational experiences and results most. Of these, socio-economic status is the largest driver of differences in performance. For example, at secondary school the differences between poorer and richer children are three times as great as the differences between children from different ethnic backgrounds who are equally disadvantaged (Gillborn, 2008). Gender gaps are also significant and appear within every ethnic group. However, the relationship between ethnicity, other factors and education is not consistent; it varies depending on age and stage.

## Primary school

Children from some minority ethnic groups, including Indian, Bangladeshi and Chinese children, tend to start primary school with lower attainment than white British pupils. However, there are very striking differences in the progress that children from different backgrounds make at primary school, which leads to a very different picture by the time they reach secondary school. Chinese and Indian pupils tend to make the most progress in primary school, with Indian pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds making the fastest progress of all (Strand, 1999). These two groups have the highest performance overall, and are also the most successful at escaping low achievement (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). Black pupils with high attainment at age four, and white pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds make less progress than expected during Key Stage 1. In particular, more able black Caribbean pupils make relatively poor progress, compared to white children with similar levels of ability (Strand, 1999). Overall, at primary school, children of mixed white and Asian heritage do best and children from mixed white and black Caribbean backgrounds do less well than average (Tikly, *et al.*, 2004).

## Secondary school

At secondary school one of the most noticeable trends is the decline in the achievement of black Caribbean students, in particular boys. A number of explanations have been suggested for this. There is evidence of low teacher expectations (Gillborn, 2008) with an underestimation of their academic ability because of perceived behaviour issues, and disproportionate placing of these pupils into lower ability groups or 'tracks' early in their educational careers (Strand, 2010). The picture for black African pupils is more mixed, but overall they, along with Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people, achieve higher GCSE scores than equivalent white students, although not as high as pupils from Indian and Chinese backgrounds. White British boys from low socio-economic backgrounds make the least progress at secondary school and have very low levels of achievement (Strand, 2008). Young people from the Traveller group have the lowest achievement at secondary school – one in five of those who take GCSEs achieve no passes (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007).

## Education after 16

At the end of compulsory education, young people from minority ethnic groups and those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to attend further education colleges rather than school sixth forms compared with those from white backgrounds and richer homes (Connor, *et al.*, 2004). This is significant as it seems to affect not only access to university but also their degree attainment and subsequent performance in the labour market. Overall, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people achieve fewest qualifications between the ages of 16 and 18 (Tolley and Rundle, 2006). There is particularly low take-up of apprenticeships and vocational qualifications by minority ethnic groups, and also poor progression for those who complete such qualifications (DCSF/DIUS, 2008; Fuller and Davey, 2010).

Minority ethnic groups are generally over-represented in higher education, apart from black Caribbean men (Torgerson, *et al.*, 2008). White men from lower socio-economic groups are also under-represented (Aynsleya and Crossouard, 2010). However, there are important differences in the benefits of degrees once graduates leave university, and these tend to work to the disadvantage of people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The institution attended, choice of subject, level of attainment and route into university all influence how valuable a degree is perceived to be by employers (Ramsey, 2008). Minority ethnic students tend to be concentrated in newer universities in urban areas. A number of factors seem to influence this, including their residential concentration in those areas (minority ethnic students are more likely than white students to study in their home town), differences in entry requirements, the courses available, preferences for living at home or in a diverse area, student views about particular universities and apparent bias in admissions at some universities. In particular, high tariff universities have a strong bias towards 'traditional' entrants (with A levels, applying from school), who are less likely to be from an minority ethnic background (Purcell, *et al.*, 2009).

The class of degree affects how it is valued by employers. Overall, minority ethnic students are less likely to achieve a higher degree class than white students. Exceptions to this are the 'other black', 'mixed' and 'other' groups (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). One of the key reasons for the lower likelihood of some students to gain a first class degree seems to be their path into university. Those who go to university with A levels or Highers are more likely to achieve a higher class of degree than those with other qualifications (Richardson, 2008).

Overall, young people from many minority ethnic groups have relatively greater success in education than white young people from similar economic backgrounds. There are serious concerns, though, about the performance and treatment of black Caribbean and Traveller children. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the low achievement of many children from poor, white British backgrounds should also be a major focus. It is also clear that, despite their educational success, unemployment, low pay and in-work poverty are major problems for people across several ethnic minority groups, as well as large numbers of white British people.

## Employment

The effectiveness of paid work as a route out of poverty is unequal across different groups in society (Platt, 2007). This arises in part from different levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. However, it is also due to differences in the extent to which paid work actually lifts families out of poverty when they do get it. There is strong evidence that in-work poverty is higher for some ethnic groups than others (Palmer and Kenway, 2007).

There are many reasons for this. Different levels of pay play an important role, and are not fully explained by differences in qualification level and job type (Blackaby, *et al.*, 2002). In some cases there has been considerable research into the patterns of differences across some factors including:

- the type of jobs people get; pay and hours, sector segregation, working below qualification level, high levels of part-time work and self-employment;
- retention and progression within work.

However, there is much less understanding of why there are differences in all of these factors and, crucially, how these patterns may be disrupted in order to reduce in-work poverty across different groups.

One important factor is employer attitudes and behaviour: how employers operate in terms of recruitment, pay, flexibility, training, promotion, retention and culture. This varies by sector, workforce diversity, location, size and other factors. However, this must be understood in the context of decisions by individuals about the work they try to do, including around sector, location, employer, job level and type. In addition, it will interact with the ways in which location and networks affect opportunities.

A study published by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2009 showed that discrimination is evident in recruitment (Wood, *et al.*, 2009). However, research carried out by the Equal Opportunities Commission's Moving on Up investigation had also earlier highlighted the key part played by workplace culture in affecting the role and experience of work for people from different backgrounds (EOC, 2007). This work started to uncover the more nuanced, inadvertent behaviour that contributes to the employment gaps facing Bangladeshi, Pakistani and black Caribbean women in particular. More recently, the Department for Work and Pensions' Ethnic Minority Advisory Group has also been examining the role of employers and the potential for policies in public procurement to affect behaviour.

The research by Hudson and Radu (2011) focused particularly on the behaviour and practices of employers, while acknowledging that this is only one part of the picture. It identified several stages at which ethnicity can be a major, and disadvantaging, factor: recruitment, promotion, training and retention. Workplace culture is important in shaping outcomes around all of these stages.



## Recruitment

There is evidence of less favourable treatment of people from many ethnic minority backgrounds in recruitment processes from a number of studies (Wood, *et al.*, 2009; Heath and Cheung, 2006; Hoque and Noon, 1999; Noon, 1993). A further body of evidence exists which indicates that larger employers are less likely to discriminate than small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This supports other evidence of relatively poor promotion of equality and diversity among SMEs (for example Task Force on Race Equality in the Private Sector, 2004). Heath and Cheung (2006) show that this position has hardly changed over the past 20 years and that there are higher levels of discrimination in the private sector than in the public sector.

More recently, as discussed above, evidence has been gathered through testing recruitment procedures (submitting matched job applications from white and minority ethnic applicants). Research by Wood, *et al.*, (2009) found that net discrimination in favour of white names over equivalent applications from candidates from a number of minority ethnic groups was 29 per cent. Standardised application forms were used in 79 per cent of public sector applications, compared with six per cent in the private sector, which may suggest unfair practices in the private sector.

## Retention and advancement

In relation to retention and advancement, there seems to be limited evidence examining the role of ethnicity. There is some evidence of the over-representation of some minority ethnic groups in now declined industries (Robinson, 1988; Iganski and Payne, 1999; Social Exclusion Unit, 2004; Robinson and Valeny, 2005). There is also considerable evidence of the barriers experienced by women from some minority ethnic groups when trying to enter work and progress within it (for example Botcherby, 2006; Bradley, *et al.*, 2007; Tackey, *et al.*, 2006; Yeandle, *et al.*, 2006). In particular, studies have explored the experiences of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black women. One survey found that minority ethnic women were three times as likely as white women to be asked about marriage or children at a job interview (Botcherby, 2006). The evidence points to a number of warning signs of an unsupportive work culture for black and Asian women. These include complaints about black women being aggressive or Asian women not putting themselves forward, suggesting the influence of cultural stereotypes, and no-one speaking up when a visitor assumes that a black or Asian female employee is the secretary (examples from EOC, 2007, p 26). However, less is known about the experiences of people from these ethnic groups with other characteristics, such as disabled or older people, or people from a range of other ethnic groups.

## Training

Likewise, there is a dearth of research on access to training and ethnicity. Notable exceptions are Owen, *et al.* (2000) who studied BME participation and achievement in the labour market and research from the Black Training and Enterprise Group which highlighted the longstanding under-representation of BME groups, women and disabled people in apprenticeship schemes (BTEG, 2008).

## Migrant workers

Although many migrant workers come to the UK with high skill levels and good qualifications, research suggests that they often have to take lower-paid jobs (Low Pay Commission, 2010; Green, *et al.*, 2005) with the key issue being a failure by UK employers to recognise overseas qualifications (for more discussion see Haque, 2010; Erel, 2009; Battu and Sloane, 2002). Recent migrant workers are often hidden in UK statistics and are not always included in discussions about ethnicity and employment. However, there is evidence that migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to low-paid, low status work. Research indicates that migrant workers at the lower end of the labour market are concentrated in occupations where wages are much lower than average (Green, *et al.*, 2005) with age, gender and site of work (for example domestic work) all affecting the level of vulnerability (Kofman, *et al.*, 2009).

## Improving workplace experiences and outcomes

There has been considerable examination of what could be done to improve the workplace experiences of people from ethnic minority groups. This has largely focused on suggestions around tackling discrimination, positive action, leadership, accountability and monitoring and reviewing workplace practice and tailored employer support.

Research studies point to the need to address informal workplace custom and practice which contribute to unfair discrimination. Possible improvements include employers using standardised job application forms rather than CVs (Wood, *et al.*, 2009); greater flexibility within competency frameworks to allow foreign work experience to be accounted for (Roberts and Campbell, 2006); holistic support for new immigrants (Haque, 2010); and scrutiny of promotion interview practices to support fair treatment of ethnic minority people (Roberts, *et al.*, 2008).

There is some evidence to suggest that positive action can play an important part in improving employer practices (Dhami, *et al.*, 2006); however, other research suggests the impact is limited if not accompanied by a broader change in corporate culture (Bhavnani, *et al.*, 2005; Essed, 1996). In Britain, there does not seem to be a great deal of willingness to make special provision for disadvantaged groups, apart from encouragement for some to apply for jobs (Walsh, 2007). The Equality Act 2010 allows employers to voluntarily appoint under-represented groups under specific circumstances. However, international evidence on *voluntary* positive action policies suggests they have limited impact (Dhami, *et al.*, 2006). Evidence from the USA (Dhami, *et al.*, 2006) and from recent government pilots in the UK (Tackey, *et al.*, 2006) suggests that there may be some promising evidence on the value of using public procurement as a lever to influence the behaviour of the private sector, for example by requiring suppliers to have equality and diversity policies. However, it is not yet clear whether the pilots that have so far been carried out in the UK have succeeded in changing employers' practices.

Within the literature, employer leadership, commitment and accountability is a recurring theme, with the suggestion that diversity needs to be given the same status as other business priorities (for example IPPR, 2004; CRE, 2007). Finally, research highlights the need to provide tailored guidance and support to individual SMEs to enable them to work more closely to embed fairer workplace practices (for example CRE, 2007; Tackey, *et al.*, 2006; IPPR, 2004).

Recent studies focusing on particular groups of minority ethnic women and labour market disadvantage convey the importance of recognising that gender and faith need to be part of any intervention to tackle race equality (EOC, 2007; Bungawala, 2008; Ahmad, *et al.*, 2003). They have a number of implications for employer practice. They also suggest the need to extend this approach beyond women and the particular groups who have so far been its focus. The work highlights the need to develop 'cultural intelligence' in the workplace (EOC, 2007; Roberts and Campbell, 2006; Roberts, *et al.*, 2008); the importance of measures to transform organisational culture such as upskilling managers to better relate to employees from diverse backgrounds (EOC, 2007); and the role of employers in improving flexible working arrangements (Palmer and Kenway, 2007). This last was reinforced by the findings of the community consultations carried out for this programme. Women across all of the communities involved described considerable challenges in balancing work and family life. Most identified the inflexibility of employers and a lack of affordable childcare as key barriers to work.

## Caring

Hirsch *et al.* examined the complex ways in which family responsibilities and economic outcomes interact. In relation to poverty the two key issues are for families to have enough income to be out of poverty as well as to care for family members (adults and children) in a way that all parties feel is appropriate. Income from benefits and other sources can often be vital, but escaping poverty usually requires a family to be able to earn a sufficient amount. Ethnicity is important in all of these for a number of reasons:

- Employment rates overall and among women vary across ethnic groups. This is affected by patterns of education and occupation and also choices about work and care.
- Attitudes towards unpaid caring, professional care services and paid work are not consistent across ethnicities.
- The level of resources available to people in different groups and communities may vary, including in relation to social capital and the degree to which extended families, friends and neighbours help to meet care needs.
- People from some ethnic groups may be less likely to access professional care services due to a lack of cultural sensitivities in the service and/or a lack of information and networks connecting them to it.



## Drivers of demand

One important factor influencing patterns of caring is the number of people needing care and the type of care required. Demand for the care of children is obviously influenced by the number of children in the family. Adult care is affected by how many adults have poor health or disabilities, and the nature of these conditions. Some general patterns emerge from the data regarding both health and family size and formation. Bangladeshi and Pakistani families tend to be larger and start when parents are younger. There are higher rates of poor health among Bangladeshi and Pakistani women and older Bangladeshi people in particular. These poorer health outcomes among older Bangladeshis increase the pressure on elder care. There is above average limiting longstanding illness among most other minority ethnic groups although it is lower for Chinese people (Butt, 2007). Newer economic migrants are less likely to have dependents in the UK, as older people and sometimes dependent children are still in the country of origin.

However, many of these factors are changing. Among many groups that have previously been unusually dominated by younger people there are now rising numbers of older people. In 2001, 38 per cent of Bangladeshis in the UK were under 16 and just three per cent over 65; for black Africans, it was 30 per cent and two per cent respectively (Dobbs, *et al.*, 2006). Research projecting the population of Birmingham has illustrated how this is likely to change. By 2026, it estimates that the number of Bangladeshis over 65 will almost triple, the number of Africans over 65 will rise fivefold and the number of white people over 65 will decline. Currently one in eight people over 65 in Birmingham are from minority ethnic groups. By 2026 it is projected to be one in four (Simpson, 2007). At the other end of the life course, the average number of children in South Asian families in Britain is declining (Markkanen, *et al.*, 2008). In the UK as a whole, changes in the profile of the population will lead to a shift in demand for care from children to older people. This trend is likely to be even more pronounced in many minority ethnic groups.

## Caring and earning – options and trade-offs

The interaction between poverty and caring arises from a combination of the options available to individuals and families and the ways in which people make choices. In particular, there are trade-offs between time spent in paid work and time spent in unpaid caring. Decisions about this are affected by many different factors, perceptions and attitudes. One issue is how people view family obligations and care-giving. There is evidence of differences across ethnic groups in how they view the role of caring for family members. One study found that care-giving tended to be viewed as ‘natural, expected and virtuous’ among South Asian but not white British participants, with black Caribbean people more divided in their views (Sen, 1980). Where people view family care-giving as a central obligation, they may make choices that result in a low income, even if using formal care might have allowed them to increase the family’s income and reduce hardship.

However, it is important to remember that such ‘choices’ are made in the context of a specific set of circumstances and options. In practice, many low-income families may find it very difficult to achieve a situation where they have a decent income and can provide necessary care. The type of work available is a crucial issue here. The jobs open to people in such families may not pay enough to allow them to afford formal care, particularly care of a sufficient quality. In addition, flexibility at work helps many carers to combine work and care, but can be less available to those in poorly-paid work. Likewise, formal care services vary greatly between local areas in availability, type, flexibility and quality. Finally, the support networks available to families may be a key factor in enabling them to combine care and work. It has often been assumed that people in poor communities and from some minority ethnic groups have stronger support networks, both within extended families and the wider neighbourhood. However, the evidence suggests that support networks among these groups, like those for other sections of the population, are diverse. Many people living in poverty lack social capital, with groups such as new migrants being especially vulnerable.

All of these factors can be described as ‘capabilities’ enabling or restricting people’s ability to ‘enjoy fulfilling lives’ (Grant, *et al.*, 2006). Many low-income families become stuck in a situation where caring responsibilities prevent them from participating or progressing in work. This can then limit the extent to which they can build up resources such as savings, skills and social capital, which could lead to better choices in relation to balancing caring and earning. Some carers find it very difficult to enter work at all, others take low-paid, part-time jobs, often working below their skill level in order to allow time for their caring responsibilities.

## Ethnicity and caring

There is some evidence about patterns of care-giving and use of formal care across some of the larger ethnic groups. South Asian families tend to be larger, women often marry and have children earlier (Markkanen, *et al.*, 2008; Aston, *et al.*, 2007), there is less use of paid carers for both children and adults (Cabinet Office, 2003; Aston, *et al.*, 2007) and fewer women are in paid work (Labour Force Survey, second quarter 2010, data supplied by DWP). By contrast, African-Caribbean mothers are more likely than average to be lone parents, use formal childcare (Bell, *et al.*, 2005; Stanley, *et al.*, 2006; Dex and Ward, 2007) and be in paid work. There are also big differences in terms of community support networks between settled ethnic communities and new migrants. Within established minority ethnic groups there is also considerable diversity in attitudes and practices (see for example, Jutla and Moreland's research with the Sikh community [2009]).

Research does not suggest that there is a generalised cultural resistance to using paid care among particular ethnic groups. There does appear to be evidence that people in some ethnic groups have a greater tendency to believe that families should play the main role in care rather than using professionals, although this is not universal within those groups. Where there do seem to be cultural barriers to paid care, the evidence suggests that these are often focused on specific instances where people are concerned that a service will not be culturally sensitive, for example in considering religious values or language needs.

Geography is a very important influence on patterns of care and work. In particular, local labour market opportunities and the distribution and quality of health and care services that people have to draw on are extremely variable. In theory, policies of increasing personalisation and choice in care services could help people to create a better fit between care preferences and the services available. However, this is taking place in a context of increasing demand and decreasing resources, raising questions about how far greater choice of support will become a reality.

## Gaps in the evidence

Our current understanding of the relationship between caring, earning and poverty and how this is affected by ethnicity is constrained by a lack of detailed evidence. In particular, general information is available about some major ethnic groups, but this does not tend to be very detailed or nuanced, and little is known about smaller and newer groups.

Increasing our knowledge would facilitate better designed and targeted services, both in relation to care and work. To achieve this we need to explore variations and changes in attitudes to care and work. This will require consideration of several evolving issues, including:

- perceptions of the acceptability of formal services and the feasibility of combining work and care with some paid-for support;
- generational changes in aspirations and in attitudes towards different modes of care;
- changes in labour market opportunities especially related to rising qualifications;
- pressures on older people to continue working for longer, which could affect family and community networks; and
- an ageing population, which could place ever greater pressure on families' capacity to care.

## Social networks

Gilchrist and Kyprianou (2011) demonstrate that the social networks and relationships that people have play a major part in shaping their experiences and opportunities. Links with family, friends, work contacts, neighbours and others can be important sources of information and resources (material, financial and emotional) as well as providing the basis for collective organisation. A useful distinction in relation to poverty is between strong and weak ties, or bonding and bridging capital (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties tend to be with family and close friends, people very like oneself, and are often a key source of day-to-day support and help in 'getting by'. However, such ties can be less effective in connecting people to opportunities that could change their situation and help them to get out of poverty. Weak ties, or bridging capital, can connect people to those who are not like them and who can provide access to new opportunities or ideas (Granovetter, 1974; Woolcock, 2001).

Social networks are also very significant in influencing attitudes, shaping expectations about what can be achieved while offering coping mechanisms and encouragement. They can communicate experiences of success in business, careers or education and thus raise aspirations. However, the attitudes created and sustained by networks can also be negative, with evidence of cultures of low aspiration and demoralisation in some places. Attitudes to education, work and caring can also be strongly influenced by the collective knowledge and beliefs disseminated through people's networks.

## Social networks and ethnicity

Ethnicity is an important factor in many people's social networks. Nearly half the population of England say that they do not have friends from other ethnicities (DCLG, 2010). Much of this is driven by the lack of diversity among the connections of the white British population. However, there is also an ongoing debate about the varying propensity of people from minority ethnic and migrant communities to connect with people from the same background. The tendency of people to associate mainly with others like themselves is demonstrated not only in relation to ethnicity (Krebs and Holley, 2006); class and other factors also tend to shape networks. However, it is clear that the circumstances of different ethnic groups may affect their inclination to socialise with people outside their own community. These circumstances include migration histories and intentions and also current experiences, in particular racism and discrimination. Racial inequalities and prejudice over generations has tended to disproportionately concentrate people from minority ethnic groups into deprived neighbourhoods. Open and implicit racism limits the opportunities of many people from minority groups (Epstein and Heizler, 2009). Staying in a neighbourhood where people feel safe and investing in supportive networks with those from a similar background can be very important strategies for survival and well-being.

Networks based on shared ethnicity can work in many different ways, both positively and negatively. There is evidence of some ethnic communities mobilising networks to provide support for people experiencing specific life events. For example, research suggests that African-American communities have a greater tendency to 'rally round' after a death of a wife and this reduces the risk of the bereaved husband also experiencing illness and death (Elwert and Christakis, 2006). By contrast, greater social isolation is linked to higher levels of mental illness among South Asian women (Sashidharan, 2003; Smaje, 1995), substance misuse among young men of African-Caribbean origin (Canning, 1999), and alcohol abuse and physical neglect by older members of migrant Irish communities. Networks among minority ethnic communities have been shown to be very variable in their effectiveness as conduits of information and access to support. One study with people with long-term illnesses showed that Pakistani networks were more effective in this respect than Ghanaian networks (Salway, *et al.*, 2007). The role of voluntary groups based on shared ethnicity or religion can also be mixed. Such groups often provide very significant emotional and practical support. However, they may reduce the likelihood of those in contact with them engaging with mainstream services. They can also unintentionally strengthen 'grievance narratives' for some groups.

Likewise, the overall effects of community networks on employment are complex. Inter-personal networks often provide access to jobs for those who are struggling to find them. However, such jobs tend to be focused in specific industries and may be low paid, with few opportunities for progression. One example of this is the over-concentration of Pakistani men in taxi driving and of Bangladeshi men in the restaurant trade (Wood, *et al.*, 2009). For young people, these employment networks can act to restrict choices and aspirations. However, they can also spur people to try to escape their parents' experiences and, in the short term, they can protect against youth unemployment. It is important to remember however that these patterns are not simple. Young people's trajectories after school are affected by many factors including their educational experience, qualifications and class (Lew, 2010).

As is discussed below, there is evidence of some 'clumping' of people from certain ethnic groups in particular areas. This can have two conflicting effects. Individuals may gain from living near people from the same ethnic background because they are more likely to hear about jobs or to be recommended for employment (Pattacchini, *et al.*, 2008). By contrast, there is evidence that an area's overall economic performance is linked to the diversity of its residents' connections (Eagle, *et al.*, 2010). This creates a tension. It suggests that encouraging a mix of people may help to tackle poverty in deprived areas, creating businesses and jobs that provide opportunities for everyone in the area. However, this process may weaken the informal networks which help local people, particularly those from some minority ethnic groups, to have access to those jobs.

## Transnational networks

Transnational networks are an important part of the experience of many minority ethnic and migrant groups. These can be sustained for decades and support 'chain migration' with earlier migrants supporting newcomers with information, financial and practical help. However, there is also evidence that migrants who maintain strong links with 'home' and have obligations in sending remittances or paying back loans may be more vulnerable to being exploited and consequently having very low living standards. This vulnerability can be reinforced by isolation from connections and organisations outside their workplace. In one study of Lithuanian and Polish workers, many described poor working conditions, no contracts and being paid less than the minimum wage (Anderson, *et al.*, 2007). Evidence and discussion of remittances is focused heavily on its effect on poverty in 'home' countries; much less is known about how migrant workers make decisions regarding remittances or how this affects their living standards in the UK. However, there is evidence that strong connections between places of residence and 'home' countries provide transnational networks that support businesses in the UK (Kariv, *et al.*, 2009).

## Digital networks

Networks of family and friends are now commonly using the internet and Web 2.0 technologies. The extent to which the growth of online interaction may reconfigure social networks and change the role of ethnicity is unknown. However, increasing virtual contact may provide the scope for ethnicity to affect interactions less than in the real world. The 'digital divide' may have a strong bearing on who has access to such opportunities, however. It would be useful to know more about how ethnicity and other factors affect people's access to the internet and their willingness to use such services.

## The role of place

Garner and Bhattacharyya (2011) explore the relationship between place, location and poverty. The place that somebody lives is important in relation to poverty in many ways, not least because it affects the type of labour market opportunities and services that are available. There are some clear geographical patterns as regards ethnicity.

## Ethnicity and where people live

First, London is home to disproportionate numbers of people from minority ethnic groups with especially high proportions of black Africans, African Caribbeans and Bangladeshis. The Chinese are the most equally dispersed group in England across both rural and urban areas. A higher proportion of Pakistanis live outside London in the Midlands, West Yorkshire and towns and cities in the North West (figures from Census 2001). The Indian population is concentrated more in London but also in the Midlands, North West and West Yorkshire (Lupton and Power, 2004).

When considering cities with high proportions of minority ethnic people, there are three main types (the data is for England; data for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland does not enable the development of these typologies):

- *white + one other* – such as Bradford, Burnley and Rochdale (white + Pakistani); Leicester, Coventry, Bolton and Preston (white + Indian);
- *white + two others* – such as Blackburn, Birmingham, Huddersfield and Derby (white + Indian + Pakistani);
- *white + many others* – such as London, Luton, Oxford and Milton Keynes.

When looking at white UK poverty, there is less concentration in London and a more even spread across the country and in rural and urban areas (Milbourne, 2010). In cities with smaller minority ethnic populations, the white working class population tends to be in the inner city. In cities that are more mixed, white working class groups are concentrated further out from the centre.

Overall, the proportion of minority ethnic people living in deprived neighbourhoods across England is about twice as high as those living elsewhere. This is particularly important as some research suggests that the effect of living in a deprived area appears to impact more disadvantageously on minority ethnic groups than on white British people. For example, Clark and Drinkwater's (2007) examination of trends between the 1991 and 2001 Census shows that living in places with higher index of multiple deprivation (IMD) scores had negative effects on labour market prospects, with job prospects reduced proportionately more for people from minority ethnic backgrounds. This pattern is also true for women, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi women most affected (Yeandle, *et al.*, 2006). Nunn, *et al.*, (2010) suggest that a 'postcode selection' may play a part in employer decisions but this issue requires further research. An exception to this is London, where there is more ethnic balance across deprived areas (figures from Census 2001).

## Linking places, ethnicity and poverty

There seems to be a complex relationship between living in particular places, poverty outcomes and ethnicity. For example, new towns in the south and east appear to be more prosperous places for minority ethnic people to live (ODPM, 2006). Research examining the impact of segregation shows some interesting and unexplained variations. Evidence from the ODPM report on English cities (2006) highlighted the most segregated towns in England and the distribution of Asian and black populations by deprived and non-deprived areas:

Table 1: Distribution of Asian and black populations between deprived and non-deprived areas, 2001 Census.

	Asians	Black people
Concentrated in less deprived areas	Milton Keynes, Oxford, Leicester, Northampton.	Milton Keynes, Blackburn, Gloucester, Peterborough.
Heaviest concentration in most deprived areas	Derby, Peterborough, Bradford, Preston.	Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Preston.

Source: ODPM, 2006, pp.150–51.

However, this overall picture raises questions about local characteristics. For example, why is Peterborough best for distribution for black people and worst for Asians? Further detailed qualitative research is needed in order to fully understand local contexts (such as patterns of settlement and local labour markets). Findings from the ODPM report also suggest a link between the degree of segregation and size of the BME settlement, namely as the non-white population increases as a proportion of a town's total population the level of segregation also increases. The report also points to different patterns of segregation between white, Asian and black people across different towns and cities in England.

Studies looking at the local context produce more complex and nuanced pictures of the impact of a variety of factors on labour market participation. Yeandle, *et al.*, (2006) compared the performance of women from a range of ethnic groups in five local labour markets and found many different experiences. For example, across all five areas the percentage of Pakistani women aged 25–44 looking after children was lower than the national average and levels of full-time employment much higher. Bangladeshi women were over-represented in some types of jobs such as childcare and sales assistants. The history of communities in different places can be an important explanatory factor in this. Some patterns of concentration of minority ethnic groups arise from migration and clustering around employment opportunities such as early Pakistani migrants settling in northern industrial towns (Kalra, 2000) or Indian Sikh communities settling in the West Midlands (Singh and Tatla, 2006). Industrial decline in these regions has impacted on levels of employment within these communities and sometimes on particular groups within them. However, the clustering of particular groups in certain industries and levels of work was very variable between areas, leading to differences in outcomes when labour markets changed.



## Immobility and clustering

Much research on poverty has discussed the immobility of people living in deprived areas in terms of moving to find work elsewhere (Taylor, 2008). Cheshire (2007) argues that, in general, low-income groups (including minority ethnic communities) cluster together and that this can offer economic opportunities such as informal avenues into work or consumer services more likely to accommodate the needs of poor residents (such as providing informal credit). One group which may benefit from such clustering is minority ethnic entrepreneurs. However, there is concern that such enterprises are concentrated into a small number of business areas which are highly competitive, overcrowded and labour intensive with low profit margins, such as restaurants and small retailers (Ram and Jones, 1998; Smallbone, *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) suggest that immigrant entrepreneurs' choices are shaped by the opportunities that surround them, including where they can obtain premises, and the barriers that exclude them from some sectors (including racism or saturation by existing businesses).

## Housing

Housing is a key factor in how people come to be located in an area and whether they stay or leave. Living in social housing is also an indicator of overall poverty. Different ethnic groups have different patterns of housing tenure. Indian and Pakistani groups have high levels of home-ownership; Indian groups are more likely than any ethnic group (including white groups) to own their own homes. Other groups, such as black Africans, have very low levels of home-ownership and are more likely, as are Chinese and non-British white groups, to rent from the private sector (Markkanen, 2009). Figures for 2001–2006 suggest a growing number of Indian and Pakistani people are entering social housing which may alter the future balance of social housing among these groups. Battu *et al.* (2008) discovered two parallel trends in relation to housing tenure and movement into employment. Home-ownership is a constraint for the employed, preventing moves to employment further away, and public renting is a constraint on the unemployed, preventing moves into employment in distant labour markets. These trends both affect people in a range of ethnic groups. The changing distribution of housing use among different ethnic groups is likely to affect patterns of work and earning as well as of residence.

## Inequality within groups

Platt (2011) argues that, in focusing on inequality *between* ethnic groups we risk ignoring inequality *within* ethnic groups. The recent National Equality Panel report (Hills, *et al.*, 2010) shows that there are great inequalities within minority groups, often as large as, and sometimes larger than, inequality in the population as a whole. When thinking about inequality as *between* groups and *within* groups, the report shows that it is inequality *within* groups that accounts for almost all income inequality. Therefore, it suggests that for those attempting to tackle income poverty, reducing inequality *between* ethnic groups would do little to address overall levels of income inequality. This is supported by research focusing on minority ethnic women's income and poverty (Nandi and Platt, 2010). Nevertheless, measures to address poverty – and differences in poverty across groups – are disproportionately likely to benefit minority groups. These do also go some way to address inequality within groups, even if they cannot be expected to affect overall income inequality.

As well as suggesting that inequalities between ethnic groups have little effect on overall inequality within society, these findings also show that the experience of minority ethnic groups is highly heterogeneous. This does not mean that we should not be concerned about poverty differentials across ethnic groups. Drawing attention to heterogeneity within minority ethnic groups can help us understand their experiences of poverty and disadvantage.

Data on poverty rates and inequality in household income by ethnic group reveal a complex picture and no clear association between poverty and inequality across groups. For example, there is least inequality among Bangladeshi households and most among Chinese households. While lower inequality within the population would tend to reduce poverty rates, it is not the case that lower inequality is necessarily associated with lower poverty for minority groups. Indeed, there is a link between the low inequality and high poverty levels among Bangladeshi households, but there would also appear to be a link between the high inequality and above average poverty among Chinese households. The relationship between inequality and poverty varies across ethnic groups.



## Patterns of inequality and poverty

Examining the range of incomes in particular ethnic groups may provide some insights into the extent to which it is useful to think of them as groups and into the best directions for tackling poverty within them. Four groups have been considered in this research in more detail: Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and Caribbean.

The Bangladeshi group shows a very consistent pattern of inequality and relative income. They have the lowest income inequality and are consistently the worst off. They have the highest poverty rates of all groups and only 25 per cent have incomes that are among the top half of incomes overall. This suggests that it makes sense to identify Bangladeshis as a group when investigating disadvantage.

In contrast there is a wide spread of income across the Chinese population with significant numbers achieving incomes at the top of the distribution. While this makes average income and earnings high, inequality levels are also very high and poverty rates are also above average. In terms of understanding poverty rates, it may be that those who are disadvantaged represent the experience of a sub-section of the Chinese population which warrants further investigation through qualitative research.

Among Indian people, there are high levels of earnings and also high inequality in income and earnings (though not as striking as for the Chinese group) and above average poverty rates. In order to explore the causes of these poverty rates and the extent of inequality it may be helpful to investigate the experience of different sub-sections of the group or differences in generation. For example, some research looking at religion alongside ethnicity has suggested more advantaged groups (Hindus) and less advantaged groups (Muslims) with a more complicated relationship for Sikhs (Longhi, *et al.*, 2009; Platt, 2005). It may also be worth considering what the key differences are in income or household composition between better and worse off, the better to understand routes out of poverty.

Finally, the Caribbean group has relatively low levels of inequality but not lower poverty rates. Incomes are relatively concentrated in a narrower range than the incomes of other groups with fewer people with high incomes and substantial numbers with lower incomes. Some of those on these low incomes fall below the poverty line, while others are just above it. We might gain a better understanding of the experience and dynamics of poverty for this group by exploring the spectrum of experience for those who cluster at this income level.

For all groups, the composition of their incomes and how these are distributed across different sorts and sizes of households (families with children, with older adults, lone parents and couple families) merits further investigation. By these means it would be possible to unpick how household strategies both result in, and allow families to escape from, poverty or severely low incomes, and the implications for different household members.

## Intersectionality

As discussed earlier, the idea of intersectionality is also helpful in developing understanding of the meaning of groups and the drivers of both inequalities and poverty (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). While there is substantial evidence on gender inequalities and some on religion and ethnicity (Longhi, *et al.*, 2009; Khattab, 2009) other issues such as age and disability have received less attention.

## Conclusion

In examining the current state of the evidence about poverty and ethnicity, this research has highlighted a wide range of questions for which we have few answers, and many issues which are understood very partially. An overall theme is the lack of detailed knowledge about the ways in which people across a range of ethnicities and other dimensions make decisions and respond to the opportunities and constraints facing them.

Four areas stand out for further investigation:

- The changing ways in which families across ethnicities manage caring and earning, the implications of this for informal care and formal care services and the way in which such developments can affect labour market participation and success.
- The links between in-work poverty and ethnicity, particularly the role of informal workplace culture in relation to qualifications, training, development and progression.
- How differences in social networks affect people's opportunities to escape poverty, how such networks are changing for new generations and new groups and the evolving role of digital networks. This includes considering the role of ethnically based networks and in particular how far low-income people from ethnic groups which are very economically unequal have links with those who are more economically successful, and the impact of this.
- The influence of places and local labour markets on people with different ethnicities, why this varies so much and how it can inform local and national efforts to promote employment and reduce in-work poverty.

Reviews of the existing literature have also highlighted weaknesses in the evidence relating to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and insufficient exploration of much of England outside London and other major cities. It has demonstrated the importance of considering all the issues raised across a broad range of ethnicities – settled, minority ethnic groups; newer groups; and white ethnicities. A consistent theme has been the greater insights and more effective policy development that are possible when other dimensions are considered in addition to ethnicity. In particular, research examining ethnicity, religion and gender together have pointed towards much more nuanced policy in relation to enabling minority ethnic women to enter and succeed in the workplace. This suggests that extending this kind of knowledge to other groups and dimensions of identity may enable more effective policies and practices to be developed. Finally, the very varied impact of places on people from different ethnicities suggests that thinking locally may present greater opportunities in some cases than developing very broad national approaches.

## About this paper

This *Round-up* draws on the JRF's programme of research on poverty and ethnicity, managed by Helen Barnard, Programme Manager, Policy and Research Department at JRF. The programme aims to understand the underlying reasons for variations in low income and deprivation among different ethnic groups in the UK and the problems caused. It also aims to contribute towards solutions to these problems. A second phase of research will run from 2011–2015.

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