

**4th - 5th December: Goodenough College: Interdisciplinarity**

**Title: Ethnic diversity in UK social science and public policy research**

**Principal investigator on project:** Dr. Sarah Salway (SHU)

**Workshop leader:** Dr. Peter Allmark, Sheffield Hallam University (SHU)

**Research team:** Professor George Ellison (St George's, London), Dr. Gina Higginbottom (University of Alberta), and Professor Kate Gerrish (SHU).

**Introduction**

Today's workshop arises from a research project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), "Ethnic diversity in UK social science and public policy research: a consultation and development exercise to produce guidelines for sound scientific and ethical practice". This project will use a series of review and consultation exercises to consolidate expert opinion and to explore the desirability and feasibility of developing guidelines to support commissioners of research, investigators, applicants and peer reviewers consider when and how ethnic diversity should be included in research projects that are relevant to social policy.

**Please note:** We would like to audiotape the large group discussion for use in writing a report from this workshop. Peter Allmark will ask for group permission but if you have an objection you might like to make this known to him beforehand. If anyone does object, Peter Allmark will not record anything.

**Background**

Across a range of indicators relevant to social policy and welfare, minority ethnic groups continue to fare worse than the majority 'White – British' UK population.<sup>1</sup> This is true, for example, in terms of employment and health (Blackaby et al. 2005, Cooper 2002, Propper et al. 2005). However, there is extensive diversity both within and between the minority ethnic groups classified (and thereby

---

<sup>1</sup> In this abstract we use the terminology of the UK 2001 Census: white-British, white-Irish, black-Caribbean, black-African, black-other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and other. We use this in the absence of any widely agreed, acceptable nomenclature.

recognised) by the UK Census, so that generalisation across these minorities (and also across the majority 'White - British' population) can be misleading.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (Great Britain, 2000) has made it unlawful for any 'public authority'<sup>2</sup> to act in any way that constitutes 'discrimination'.<sup>3</sup> The Act further places legal duties upon public bodies, in carrying out their functions, to consider the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different racial/ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> Further, most public authorities are also bound by specific duties, such as publishing a race/ethnicity 'equality scheme' or a dedicated policy setting out how they will meet the general duty (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2007). Certainly, the Commission for Racial Equality's (now merged into the Equality and Human Rights Commission) ongoing formal investigation into the Department of Health indicates its intention to use its powers to identify failures in such duties across a range of public policy arenas (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2007).

Given that expectations of evidence-based social policy and practice are now the norm (Black 2001, Pawson 2002, Sanderson 2002, Young et al. 2002), these duties require a research evidence base that draws on and is relevant to the ethnic diversity of the whole UK population. For example, the need for such an evidence base has been formally acknowledged by the UK Department of Health in its Research Governance Framework for health and social care in which it sets out general principles that should apply to all research (Department of Health 2005):

---

<sup>2</sup> A public body authority is a body named, defined or described in schedule 1A to the Race Relations Act or, depending on the context, a body named, defined or described in one of the schedules to the Race Relations Act 1976 (Statutory Duties) Order 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Direct discrimination consists of treating a person on racial grounds, less favourably than others are, or would be, treated in the same or similar circumstances. Segregation of a person on racial grounds is to be regarded as treating him or her less favourably. Indirect discrimination occurs when a person applies a requirement or condition which is such that the proportion of persons from the same racial group who can comply is considerably smaller than persons who are not of that racial group; and it cannot be shown that the condition is justified irrespective of the racial origins of the person concerned; and it is to that person's detriment that he cannot comply.

<sup>4</sup> Five different terms are used in section 3(1) of the RRA: these are "colour," "race," "nationality," "ethnic origins" and "national origins". Here we introduce the term "race/ethnicity" simply to highlight the fact that the terminology used in this area is complex. Racial terms tend to be used to signify something like a group with a common genetic heritage; ethnic terms something like a common cultural heritage.

*'Research, and those pursuing it, should respect the diversity of human society and conditions and the multi-cultural nature of society, Whenever relevant, it should take account of age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture and religion in its design, undertaking and reporting. The body of research evidence available to policy makers should reflect the diversity of the population' (Para 2.2.7)*

While other government Departments have not developed similarly explicit general principles, many are showing increasing commitment to strengthening the evidence base relating to minority ethnic groups, for instance via specific programmes of research (e.g. the Department for Work and Pensions' work on ethnic minority employment disadvantage) (Department for Work and Pensions, 2007) and initiatives to ensure 'ethnic monitoring' (e.g. Department for Education and Skills' work to support schools in this endeavour) (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007 ).

*'Effective use of data will help to ensure that disparity of attainment is actively tackled and that pupils can meet their full potential. Effective policies are undermined by lack of data. This has recently been vividly described as "no data no strategy"'*

Some professional bodies (such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists) (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2007) and voluntary funders of research (including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007) have also expressed a commitment to 'mainstream' ethnic diversity within the research they commission or support.

However, despite the apparent increased awareness of the need for (and right to) including and representing all ethnic groups in research that influences knowledge, policy and practice, it is clear that the majority of funded social policy research currently conducted within the UK focuses predominantly on the majority 'White – British' population and fails to consider ethnicity as a variable of analysis.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, amongst other relevant legislation, the Health Revitalization Act of 1993 now requires that women and members of minority groups be included in all research projects funded by the National Institutes of

---

<sup>5</sup> For instance: preliminary investigation of ESRC awards database indicated that fewer than 7% of awards made since 1st of Jan 2002 referred to race or ethnicity in their abstract.

Health and that a “clear and compelling reason” be given for inadequate representation of these populations (Corbie-Smith et al. 2003). In the UK there is currently no explicit *legal* requirement to include minority ethnic participants in publicly-funded research intended to inform social policy decisions affecting its ethnically-diverse population. Furthermore, where research does include samples or participants from minority ethnic groups there is little evidence of consensus on how best to conceptualise ethnicity (including minority and majority ethnicities), or how ethnic data ought to be measured, analysed and reported - all of which raise practical, analytical and ethical issues.

While it seems entirely sensible to produce evidence that reflects the experience of the UK’s diverse population, and thereby informs improvements in services for all, in practice the ethical and scientific arguments around whether and how to incorporate ethnicity into policy-relevant social research are complex and subject to heated debate.

In particular, it is important to highlight the various ways in which untheorized or insensitive inclusion of data on racial/ethnic groups can lead to potentially negative consequences (Ellison 2005). Historically, gross abuses of human rights have occurred in the name of scientific enquiry where minority groups have been exploited as the subjects of research, including the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment in the US (Gamble 1997) and, in the European context, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War (Weindling 1996) resulting in the development of the Declaration of Helsinki.

In addition, if social policy research is to be useful, there are important scientific issues to be addressed in relation to: setting research priorities and the identification of research questions; sampling/recruitment; measurement/operationalisation (of ethnicity itself and other variables cross-culturally); collecting material and conducting fieldwork; analysis (how to ‘unpack’ this multi-faceted concept; how to identify routes of causation; whether to focus on inequalities or absolute levels, and so on); as well as reporting and representing the findings of research (Ellison et al. 2007).

### **Today's workshop**

Today's workshop has two main aims. These are:

- To help participants clarify their own ideas and beliefs concerning ethnicity and social science research using discussion methods focused around vignettes;
- To discuss whether guidelines for social science and public policy research would be a feasible and useful outcome of the JRF project.

The workshop is structured as follows:

A short presentation giving the background to the project, Ethnic diversity in UK social science and public policy research: a consultation and development exercise to produce guidelines for sound scientific and ethical practice.

Group work: Structured around vignettes. Workshop participants will be put into groups of around six members. They will then be presented with a series of case scenarios. With each one we aim to bring out specific issues and questions. The group work will be structured towards meeting the two aims of the workshop. It will involve a mixture of small group and large group discussion. If those attending give their permission, the large group discussion will be audio-taped.

The following are some of the questions and issues we seek to discuss in the workshop.

When should social science and public policy researchers take specific steps to include specific ethnic groups in their samples? When should they take steps to do a separate analysis of these groups?

What helpful and unhelpful assumptions might underpin research in which ethnicity is a primary focus?

## References

Black, N. (2001). Evidence based policy: Proceed with care. *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)*, **323** (7307), 275-279.

Blackaby, DH, et al. (2005). Born in Britain: How are native ethnic minorities faring in the British labour market? *Economics Letters*, **88** (3), 370-375.

Cooper, H. (2002). Investigating socio-economic explanations for gender and ethnic inequalities in health. *Social Science & Medicine* **54** (5), 693-706.

Corbie-Smith, G., et al. (2003). Influence of race, clinical, and other socio-demographic features on trial participation. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, **56** (4), 304-309.

*Department for Children, Schools and Families* (2007). [Online] Last accessed 6th November 2007 at:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/collecting/>.

*Department for Work and Pensions* (2007). [Online] Last accessed 6th November 2007 at: <http://www.emetaskforce.gov.uk/reports.asp>.

Department of Health (2005). *Research Governance Framework for Health And Social Care*. 2nd ed. London, Department of Health.

Ellison, G. T. H. (2005). 'Population profiling' and public health risk: When and how should we use race/ethnicity? *Critical Public Health*, **15** (1), 65-74.

Ellison, G., et al. (2007). Racial categories in medicine: A failure of evidence-based practice? *PLoS Medicine*, **4** (9), e287-e287.

*Equality and Human Rights Commission* (2007). [Online]. Last accessed 6 November 2007 at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/pages/eocdrcre.aspx>.

Gamble, V. N. (1997). Under the shadow of Tuskegee: African Americans and health care. *American Journal of Public Health*, **87** (11), 1773-1778.

Great Britain (2000) *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*. London, Stationary Office.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007). [Online] Last accessed 6 November 2007 at:  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/research-funding/apply/default.asp#goodproposal>.

Pawson, R. (2002). Evidence-based policy: The promise of realist synthesis'.  
*Evaluation*, **8** (3), 340.

Propper, C., et al. (2005). Local neighbourhood and mental health: Evidence from  
the UK. *Social Science & Medicine*, **61** (10), 2065-2083.

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2007). [Online] Last accessed 6 November 2007 at:  
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/raceequality/collegeracerelations.aspx?theme=print>).

Sanderson, I. (2002). Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy  
making. *Public Administration*, **80** (1), 1-22.

Weindling, P. (1996). Human guinea pigs and the ethics of experimentation: The  
BMJ's correspondent at the Nuremberg medical trial. *British Medical Journal*,  
**313** (7070), 1467-1470.

Young, K., et al. (2002). Social science and the evidence-based policy movement.  
*Social Policy and Society*, **1** (03), 215-224.