

# The disadvantages experienced by minority ethnic groups in british society



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Society is made up of a number of social divisions including age, sex, ethnicity, income, wealth and sexual orientation. Many theorists and critics have their own definition of social divisions. For example, Bilton et al (2002, p. 70) states: " In broad terms, the concept of social divisions refers to ways in which, either as individuals or more commonly as members of social groupings, we construct social differences among ourselves.

... " There has been a growing interest in the study of ' race' and ethnicity in Britain over the course of the twentieth century. I, therefore, intend to discuss the difficulties faced by ethnic minority groups in Britain.

It is also important to examine how ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged from access to other social rights - such as the rights to housing, education and employment (Ginsburg, 1998; Macey, 1995), which is what I intend to discuss throughout this essay. However, we must start by considering what constitutes ethnic difference? One clear method used is seen in the 1991 Census which asked respondents for the first time to classify themselves in ethnic terms. The following scheme was the one finally adopted: A variety of explanations for the disadvantage suffered by members of minority ethnic groups in the labour market have been reviewed by the various studies conducted under the auspices of the PSI (or its predecessor Political and Economic Planning; Daniel 1968; Smith 1974; Brown 1984; Jones 1993; Modood et al. 1997).

All have shown that when matters such as language competence, skill levels and qualifications are controlled for, there remains a residue which is not explained by such factors. As a result, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion

that discrimination on the part of employers plays a significant part in the labour market placement of minority ethnic groups. Discussion of racial inequality has often become caught up in debates. Disputes also relate to what terms should be used to describe various ethnic groups.

Terms like 'coloured' (now thoroughly discredited) or 'black' can be attacked as being themselves racist. 'Race' as a common-sense usage refers to the idea that human beings can be divided into sub-groups and distinguished by biological differences. Such differences can be distinguished by biological difference. Such differences can be seen as 'phenotypical' (relating to physical appearances such as skin colour or hair type) or 'genotypical' (relating to underlying genetic differences. Miles has consistently argued (1882; 1989) that we should reject the concept altogether.

He states that it is an ideological construct: its use only serves to give respectability to discredited racist ideas. (Race and Ethnicity, p. 121). Ethnic groups may be defined (or define themselves) on the basis of language, religion or nationality, but the idea of shared culture is perhaps the crucial issue. (Race and Ethnicity, p.

122). They represented themselves as shouldering the 'white man's burden', the task of 'civilizing' backward peoples and leading them towards enlightenment, abandonment of superstition, modernization and economic development. At the same time, warfare and ethnic conflicts in various parts of the world over the last few decades have entailed the movement of refugees into various parts of Europe and North America. For example,

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British governments allowed the Asian communities expelled from East Africa in the 1970s to take up residence in Britain. In Britain and America since the 1960s there have been sporadic outbreaks of rioting involving issues of 'race'. In Britain the Notting Hill and Nottingham 'race riots' of 1958 fed into popular unease about race relations.

Such popular fears were fuelled through the 1960s by the acts and campaigns of politicians. Incomer migrants enter the labour market on disadvantaged terms, reflecting their relative powerlessness. Those who do have qualifications and training for higher occupational positions often find these devalued or disregarded in their new country. As migrant populations became settled, the new generation can compete for upward mobility through mass education systems of the West and some achieve it. Members of racialized minorities are highly vulnerable to unemployment especially younger people, as shown in table 5. 1.

In 1994 28 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis and 26 per cent of Afro-Caribbean's were unemployed (Social Trends, 1995). Afro-Caribbean women. Within afro-Caribbean families and communities, women have traditionally been seen to occupy an influential role. They usually work full-time, often assuming responsibility as bread-winners in what is seen as typical Caribbean family form, the matrifocal or woman-headed family. (The majority of British Afro Caribbean families, of course, are of the conventional nuclear kind). Young women are strongly encouraged by their families to work hard at school and develop careers and appear more committed to educational achievement than their white peers (Mirza, 1992).

Ethnic minority groups experience disadvantages in a number of areas for example, employers attribute characteristics to Afro-Caribbean and Asian applicants which are used to exclude them from better jobs (Wrench and Lee, 1978). Teachers stereotype Afro-Caribbean boys as lazy, troublesome and non-academic, Asian boys and girls as hard-working but over-ambitious (Brah, 1986; Mirza, 1992). For example, the 1989 Gifford Inquiry into racial discrimination in Liverpool found that black people were confined to certain parts of the city and were targets of hostility and abuse if they moved outside them. Few of Liverpool's 30, 000 black inhabitants held jobs in visible 'white' areas such as city center shops.

Most shocking of all, while the city council claimed to be an 'equal opportunities employer', only 490 out 30, 410 council employees were black. Nationwide, Asians in particular have been the target of increasing harassment and attacks. For example, submitting job applications from candidates matched in every way except ethnic origin. Using this method Brown and Gay revealed continuing systematic discrimination, despite the many years of race relations legislation. They found that white applicants were more than 30 per cent more likely to be treated favorably than those of minority ethnic origin.

(Brown and Gay, 1985). Another disadvantage some ethnic minority groups face is indirect discrimination where there are occupationally unnecessary dress requirements that members of some groups cannot comply with for religious or other reasons. Indirect discrimination maybe deliberate but it may also be unintentional and unrecognized. (Mason, 2000). In comparison,

the Chinese population suffers similar disadvantages in Britain in terms of social exclusion.

They themselves reinforce the suggestion that the social exclusion suffered by the Chinese is not a problem – it is merely a form of ethnic self-determination. However, since many Chinese who work in the catering industries are less qualified than the average person in Britain, thus they are at an instant disadvantage as they lack the ability to change to other occupations even if they are not satisfied with their jobs (Cheng, 1996). According to Owen (1994), the health of old Chinese people deteriorates much faster than the same aged people in mainstream society. Song (1997) discovered that the self image of some young Chinese is affected by their involuntary participation in family based take-away businesses.

Social exclusion may also be caused by the existence of psychological and institutional barriers which block people from participating actively in society. According to the 1991 UK census, 70 per cent of Chinese men and 50 per cent of Chinese women were defined and economically active. Of these, 88 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women were in paid employment (Cheng, 1996); their unemployment rates were the lowest when compared to other ethnic groups (Modood et al. , 1997). More over, the average earnings of Chinese families were higher than any other group, including the white group (Berthoud, 1998). Furthermore, the Chinese were the highest qualified ethnic group in Britain, with 26 per cent having university degrees or professional qualifications in 1997, suggesting that many of them have had high employability (Chan, 1999).

Recent studies argue that many Chinese people were unwilling to contact the police and were unwilling to respond to the 1991 UK Census because of their traditional habit of having deep suspicion of authority (Victim Support, 1997). This therefore disadvantages them as they are unable to use the facilities to their advantage. Variations in patterns of health across and within ethnic groups are a reflection both of the social position of these groups and of the individual experiences of members of ethnic minority groups. Modood et al, 1997). The Health and Lifestyles Survey also suggested that ethnic minority groups reported poorer health than whites, with non-whites being almost 25 per cent more likely than whites to say that their health was fair or poor, although ethnicity for this survey was assessed only through interview observations (Benzeval, Judge and Solomon 1992). Regional studies in Bristol and Glasgow confirm these reports of poorer health among ethnic minority groups (Pilgrim et at.

1993; Williams, Bhopal and Hunt 1993). As far as general health is concerned, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were particularly disadvantaged compared with whites, having reported a 50 per cent greater risk of fair or poor health. A number of factors may play an important role in determining ethnic variations in health. They can be a result of cultural differences between ethnic groups, biological differences. Cultural factors relating to health, such as diet are also difficult to estimate so, with the exception of smoking, no attempt was made. Afro-Caribbean's are twelve times more likely to be diagnosed as schizophrenic than white people.

Black British are over-represented in the prison population: 24 per cent of women in prison are remanded in custody in 1989 were from ethnic minority  
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ethnic groups, and in 1991 15 per cent of prisoners in England and Wales were black (Skellington and Morris, 1992). Capitalist exploited racial divisions to manipulate and divide the working class. In this view, racism is seen as a product of capitalism and serves to shore up capitalist power. Miles does not believe that 'race' has any 'real' existence; but he believes that the stigmatizing of ethnic groups by inputting racial differences to them allows them to be discriminated against and used to fill the kind of jobs that are rejected by the white majority. Another concept, also utilized by Miles, is the notion of 'migrant labour'.

It is argued that colonial powers and capitalist employers both used migrant labour as a source of cheap, highly exploitable labour. Castles and Kosack (1973) employed this concept to analyse the situation of ethnic minority workers in Europe, epitomized by the Turkish and North African; guest-workers' in Germany. Migrant labourers, they argue, are used as an international reserve labour force to supplement the indigenous proletariat, especially in the 'dirty' jobs which are hard to fill. Because of their migrant status such workers can be expelled to their countries where their labour is no longer needed, without any cost to the state (it does not have to pay them unemployment benefit for example).

Research carried out by Rex and Moore in the Sparbrook area of Birmingham, was used to formulate the idea of distinct 'housing classes'. The study found that black immigrant groups were confined to certain types of housing (decayed inner-city properties, rented accommodation and lodging houses); access to housing was bringing the different ethnic groups into conflict with each other as an aspect of 'class struggle' (Rex and Moore, <https://assignbuster.com/the-disadvantages-experienced-by-minority-ethnic-groups-in-british-society/>)



1967, p. 273). In another study, with Tomlinson, of Asian and Afro-Caribbean's in Birmingham, Rex suggested that black minorities may form a distinct under class because of disadvantage in the key areas of employment, education and housing (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979). Afro-Caribbean's and Asians are more likely to live in run down inner-city areas where services are over stretched: in some cases such areas may approximate to the 'ghetto' areas of North American cities.

In Britain 60 per cent of Bangladeshis and 47 per cent of Pakistanis are reported to be living in overcrowded conditions as opposed to only 3 per cent of whites (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). In London, ethnic minority members, especially the young, are four times as likely to be homeless as whites. Recent research shows some of the complexities about racism in schools. The Black Child School Report (1997) produced by Amenta Marketing, which specialises in researching lifestyles and attitudes among ethnic minorities.

In the UK, career interviews with 374 children of African and African-Caribbean descent aged between 11 and 13 years at schools in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham and Bristol. These were small samples in each city and it is not clear how they were selected so representativeness is likely to be a problem here. However, as Giddens, (2001, p. 251-2) states that racism is the belief of the superiority or inferiority to others on the basis of racialised differences.

Thus, twenty-two percent of the sample reported racism by a teacher in the previous month and 15% claimed to have suffered racism from pupils during

the same period. Also, 38% of the sample are reported to have liked the idea of attending a black-only school. On the other hand, in the United States a significant section of Black workers and their families is matching and surpassing white achievement and many black young, educated, married couples are doing as well as and sometimes better, than their white counterparts (O'Hare et al. , 1991).

In England, as well as the United States, some evidence suggests that Black women are achieving better than white women and even better than some white men (Farley and Allen, 1989; O'Hare et al. , 1991; Mirza, 1992). Sports in general and certain sports like athletics, boxing, American football and basketball, reflect these impressions of Black success. In 1983 Blacks won 14 of the 33 medals available in running races at the World Championships; in 1987 they won 19 (Burfoot, 1992; 89).

Key successes in the 1980's included: in athletics those of Linford Christie, Jackie Joyner-Turner, Carl Lewis and Tessa Sanerson; In basketball Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson; in boxing Larry Holmes, Mike Tyson, Frank Bruno and Chris Eubank. Thus, successes in these areas tend to suggest the end of racialised barriers and the advent of a truly meritocratic society. (Small, 1994). Though, it is argued that they are channeled and encouraged into this area.

In conclusion, from the above discussion, it is indisputable that ethnic minorities experience a number of disadvantages. Though, albeit, some of these disadvantages are not helped by themselves such as taking an active approach to learn the English language and other reasons beyond their

control. However, it is increasingly evident that these disadvantages are being turned on their heads with a number of successes by individual ethnic minorities. Though, I believe, improvements have been made and society is moving on in the right direction, there is yet still room for development.