



## Community Safety: Working together to tackle racial incidents in the UK

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The Home Office consultation paper 'Strength in Diversity' says that the United Kingdom has a long tradition of successful migration and integration that has brought and continues to bring real economical and social benefits, which are shared by all. Today, Britain is, culturally and ethnically, a diverse country, reflecting the fact that modern communities have a far more complex mix of backgrounds within them, including different races, faiths and nationalities. According to the 2001 Census, 8 per cent of the population describe themselves as a member of an ethnic minority and 5 per cent as belonging to a minority faith. Britain has come a long way from the days when racism was openly displayed in public. There are now strong anti-racism messages throughout society. However, the paper confirms that black and minority ethnic communities are still experiencing racist abuse and harassment, that there has been a rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and that for members of Gypsy and Traveller communities, overt racism is still a fact of day to day life. (Home Office, 2004: 3-10)

The main part of this article will start with definitions of the terms 'race', 'racism', 'racial incident' and 'racial harassment'. This will be followed by a brief examination of the context of community relationships in the UK, an extent of racial harassment and some aspects of victimisation. Throughout the analysis of the evidence drawn from various academic sources, the article will discuss the notion that it is unnecessary to involve a number of agencies in tackling racial harassment as crime and disorder audits often show that, statistically, racial harassment is not a significant problem. The evidence presented in this article will lead to a conclusion that despite perceived statistical insignificance within the overall recorded crime, racial harassment should be tackled by multi-agency partnerships to ensure a holistic approach to eliminating the causes and consequences of this type of crime.

The concept of 'race' is highly contentious because of its association with the now discredited theories of 19th-century anthropologists and psychologists about supposed racial superiority. Instead, ethnicity is often used as a preferred descriptive label to comprehend and analyse distinctive social grouping within modern society. (Department of Criminology, 2004:2-21) However, as Fenton (1999) pointed out, the concept of race should not be totally abandoned because it has relevance for many people, and 'racial division within society, regardless of accuracy or basis in fact, is highly influential in public and institutional discourse resulting in the inability to ignore race as a factor'. (As cited in Department of Criminology, 2004:2-21) The Oxford Compact English Dictionary's definition of race will be used for the purpose of this essay. The Dictionary defines race as 'each of the major divisions of mankind, having distinct physical characteristics; a group of people sharing the same culture, language etc.; an ethnic

group'. (Oxford Compact English Dictionary, 2003:933)

The Department of Criminology (2004, 2-21) defines 'racism' as a form of prejudice and as an expression of aggressive or violent behaviour towards individuals and groups in an attempt to oppress, dominate, coerce, ostracise or eliminate them due to their perceived ethnicity or race. The definition of 'racial incident' set out in the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999) states, that a racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or by any other person. Recommendation 14 of the report proposed that this definition should be universally adopted by the police, local government and other relevant agencies. All partnerships and their member agencies are encouraged to adopt the Inquiry definition as a new 'national' definition, as it paves the way for recording comprehensive national statistics, common reporting systems and improved inter-agency working. Since 1999, this definition has been adopted by the police service and other agencies involved in crime and disorder reduction partnerships. The Public Order Act 1986, The Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and other pieces of current legislation have identified behaviour that could be regarded as racial harassment. This can be summarised as verbal or written abuse, other behaviour designed to intimidate, physical attacks on the person and attacks on their property. The distinguishing characteristics that turn abuse, vandalism or assault into racial harassment are the motives of the perpetrator – racial hatred – and the impact on the victims – fear, distress and isolation.

The Census revealed that in 2001 the size of the minority ethnic population in the United Kingdom was 4.6 million or 7.9 per cent of the total population. Indians were the largest minority group, followed by Pakistanis, those of Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black Caribbeans, Black Africans and Bangladeshis. The remaining minority ethnic groups each accounted for less than 0.5 per cent but together accounted for a further 1.4 per cent of the UK population. ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)) According to Lemos (2004), community relations in multicultural Britain have generally been peaceful, although tensions between different ethnic groups occasionally result in violence such as summer 2001's race riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. The Cantle Report, published following these events, covered many examples of well-documented conflicts between the white and black and minority ethnic communities in urban settings. Lemos (2004) pointed out, that as well as tension between white majority and black and Asian ethnic minorities, conflicts sometimes occurs between different minority ethnic groups, which was something of a taboo subject in the past. According to Lemos, participants of numerous studies reported conflicts between, for example, Asian and Somali communities in West London, between people in Birmingham who trace their heritage to Jamaica and Gambia and between Asian and Portuguese people in Peterborough and East Anglia. These conflicts attract less attention and are much smaller than "riots", but practitioners suggest that conflict between communities is increasing. (Lemos, 2004:12)

Although, there may always have been some tensions between minority groups, they rarely developed into the large-scale conflicts. However, the context of race relationships has changed dramatically in recent years. The immigrants who arrived during the 1990s are from a far more diverse range of backgrounds than the former colonies in the West Indies, Southern Asia and parts of anglophone Africa. Nowadays, the migrants are also likely to come from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe or from Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East. Such changes in the character of immigration resulted in some neighbourhoods' well-

established ideas of multicultural communities being superseded by communities with far greater cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. In such communities, the historical ties hardly exist and the bonds and ties of community organisations in civil society have still to fully form. The 2000 report of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) on Minority Ethnic Issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal stated that there is a significant lack of data about people from minority ethnic communities. However, the available data confirms that some groups experience disproportionate disadvantage across the board and others experience it in some areas. In comparison to their representation in the population, people from minority ethnic communities are more likely than others to live in deprived areas, be poor, be unemployed, compared with white people with similar qualifications. They are also likely to suffer ill health and live in overcrowded and unpopular housing. They also experience widespread racial harassment and racist crime and are over-represented throughout the criminal justice system, from stop and search to prison. (SEU, 2000:17)

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as amended by the Police Reform Act 2002 placed a duty on specific agencies, known as responsible authorities, to work together and with other agencies within the community, to tackle crime and disorder and the misuse of drugs. Working in partnership, these authorities are required to carry out an audit every three years to identify the extent of these problems within their communities; then to develop and implement strategies that deal effectively with them. Recorded crime figures form a major part of the crime and disorder audits. However, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the causes, impact and consequences of crime and disorder other sources of data are also considered for audit purposes. In cases of racial violence and harassment, the official figures on the extent of these crimes are based on police statistics and the British Crime Survey (BCS). These can be supplemented by a number of small-scale studies in local areas where racial violence and harassment is known to be a problem. However, the 2000 report of the Social Exclusion Unit pointed out that current methods of measurement and local surveys do not reflect the real scale of the problem. It happens because those who are the most at risk of victimisation – people from minority ethnic communities – in general, make up a small proportion of people living within an area. Under-recording of the racist incidents also makes an impact upon our knowledge about the extent of this problem. Findings of the Home Office Research Study 154 shows that there is a marked gap between the racially motivated crimes which BCS respondents say they reported to the police and the racial incident figures which the police record. According to the survey, in 1992 an estimated 50,000 such incidents would have been reported by Afro-Caribbeans and Asians alone, whereas the police figure for all groups was less than 8,000. (Home Office, 1994:11) Percy (1998) pointed out, that under-recording of reported incidents can occur because agencies fail to record or fail to recognise them as racially motivated. The effect is that the true scale of the problem is not reflected in agency data and there are a number of reasons why police figures do not match the British Crime Survey: when reporting to the police, victims may fail to mention evidence or perceptions of racism; when racist allegations are made, some incidents may not be recorded by the police; some incidents may be recorded by the police but not as racist. Percy argued that this is not exclusive to the police service and the same reasons for under-recording could be applied to other agencies.

The 2000 report of the Social Exclusion Unit pointed out that racial harassment and racially motivated crime are also significantly under-reported. According to the BCS, 382,000 racially

motivated offences took place in 1995, of which 143,000 were committed against black and minority ethnic people. (Percy, 1998) However, only 12,220 of racist incidents were reported to, and recorded by, the police. (BCS and Home Office: 2000) One survey found that over half of Caribbean and South-Asian victims did not report racist harassment, and another that only 5 per cent of racist incidents were reported to the police. According to the report of the Inter-departmental Racial Attacks Group (Home Office:1996), the reasons why victims of racist crime may not report incidents include: suspicion that the organisation will not treat the incident seriously; belief that the agency will not be able to take effective action to deal with the incident; fear of reprisal if the perpetrator knows they have reported the incident to the authorities; victims may not know the best organisation to contact, or the best person inside the organisation. The above evidence shows that the official police records of racial incidents which are used for crime and disorder audits are not able to reflect the real extent of the problem. They rather reflect the tendency for such offences to go under-reported and under-recorded. It can be argued that reporting and recording even one in two racial incidents will significantly increase the proportion of racist crime within all recorded crimes.

The analysis of victimisation gives another perspective on the extent and seriousness of racist crime. The British Crime Survey showed that about 4 per cent of black people, 5 per cent of Indians and 8 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis experienced one or more racist crimes during 1995. By comparison, the risk of being a victim of racially motivated crime for white people was much less - at 0.5 per cent. This tendency remained evident in the findings from the 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 British Crime Surveys. A study of victims within the British Crime Survey (2000) showed that all participants had experienced verbal abuse, 70 per cent had suffered intimidation and 47 per cent physical attack. Some participants also felt that break-ins they had experienced were racially motivated. Other types of harassment reported included: litter, eggs, rubbish and even stones thrown at the victim's home; knocking or kicking front doors; racist graffiti; bullying and threatening of children; racist telephone calls; damage to property (home/car/garden), for example, broken windows and animal faeces smeared on the door. It was estimated, that 13 per cent of people from an ethnic minority had been subjected to some form of racial harassment in the last 12 months. Three-fifths of the people who had been subjected to racial harassment said that they had been victimised more than once in the past year. Nearly a quarter were victimised five or more times in the past year. The 2000 British Crime Survey revealed that people from ethnic minorities worry more about crime than white respondents. For example, 60 per cent of Asian respondents, 51 per cent of black respondents and 12 per cent of white respondents were fairly or very worried about racially motivated assaults. This finding was true even when the sorts of areas in which respondents lived and their direct and indirect experiences of crime were taken into account. (Clancy et al: 2001:1)

The 1996 Home Office Research Findings 39 revealed that, in general, minority victims in all groups are no less likely than whites to report offences to the police; and in some cases they are even more likely to do so. However, minority victims are much less satisfied with the police response. Whereas a third of whites were very or fairly dissatisfied, this rose to 40% of Afro-Caribbeans, 45 per cent of Indians, and 50 per cent of Pakistani victims. For incidents which victims thought to be racially motivated, dissatisfaction among minorities was higher still, at 54 per cent for both Indians and Pakistanis and 62 per cent for Afro-Caribbeans. (FitzGerald and Hale, 1996:3) Statistics on race and the Criminal Justice System show that in

1999/2000, only 39 per cent of racially-aggravated harassment was cleared-up by the police compared with 78 per cent of non-racially aggravated offences of harassment. (Research, Development and Statistics Directorate: 2000) It comes as no surprise that in 2000 only 33 per cent of victims of racially motivated incidents thought that the police did a good job. (Clancy et al, 2001:4)

FitzGerald and Hale (1996), and Lemos (2000) argued that the experience of racist crime and racial harassment can take a devastating physical, emotional and social toll on victims. Anger, insecurity, stress and depression are common, especially among people who are experiencing persistent harassment. The Childline (1996) analysed the calls to their helpline by children suffering racial bullying. These children had been punched, kicked, threatened, spat at and beaten, sometimes sustaining serious physical and suffering considerable stress injuries. A distinguishing feature of racial harassment is that the whole family is affected including the children, even when not all the family members have been attacked. As Lemos (2000) pointed out, the long-term impact on children in families that have been persistently racially attacked has not been researched and only recorded anecdotally. Bearing in mind the possibility that location could be a factor in the likelihood of being attacked – it is also possible that the impact of racial harassment in the early years can have long lasting harmful consequences, which will impact on educational achievement and, therefore, economic opportunity in adulthood. Tajfel (1978) and Wilson (1999) noted that the result could be that the children, when they become adults, do not have the resources to move to a different neighbourhood. And, because they may also have feelings of vulnerability or inferiority because of their childhood experiences, they may themselves become adult victims of racial harassment. There could be a danger of multi-generational deprivation or social exclusion, and the two could be intertwined. (Lemos, 2000:7) Racial harassment and racist crime also play a significant part in preventing minority ethnic communities from obtaining good quality housing. They have also been major causes of the decline in the number of neighbourhood shops over the last decades. (DETR:1999)

Research suggests that the impact of racially motivated crimes on victims may be even greater than that of other crimes. Chahal and Julienne (1999) pointed out that harassment in or around the home can produce conflict between members of the family and create social isolation (for example, friends may no longer visit, while victims are often afraid to leave their home unattended). It can force victims to deny their children the freedom to play and it can damage the physical and emotional health of all members of the household. Often families live in a state of virtual siege in their own home. Madood et al (1997) argued that some 14% of the ethnic minority population reported having taken measures to avoid being racially harassed. These measures included avoiding going out at night, making homes more secure; restricting visits to shops; stopping children playing outside; not going out alone; avoiding 'white areas'; changing travel routes and stopping going to certain pubs. Chahal and Julienne (1999) added an acceptance of "low level" harassment as somehow "normal" to the list of avoidance strategies.

Study of the London Research Centre (1993) revealed that a significant amount of racist crime and disorder takes place in or near the victim's home. For example, one in 14 of all ethnic minority households across London have suffered some form of racist harassment in or near their present accommodation. According to Bowling (1998), the risk of racist crime

increases with social exclusion and low income: people living in poorer areas tend to be more at risk than people living in more affluent areas. However, racist incidents can happen anywhere. Rutter et al (1998) pointed out that crime and racial harassment as a manifestation of anti-social behaviour can occur in contradictory locations for example, high status non-family areas in inner-cities, including the homes of the rich and more 'twilight' areas of privately owned buildings in multiple occupation; multiracial areas, where poor private rentals mixed with owner-occupation in the inner-city; the poorest council estates located either in the inner-city or outer-ring of conurbations. However, racially-motivated crimes are not just confined to big cities. They occur in rural areas too. A series of research studies conducted during the last 15 years gave evidence of the intolerance of diversity and racism in the countryside. (Department of Criminology, 2004:7-7) According to Rutter et al (1998), it would appear that the key factors in predicting where incidents of a racial nature are located might not simply be deprivation and exclusion, but also a lack of community cohesiveness and normative rules.

As argued earlier, racially motivated incidents can be markedly greater than offences that are not racially motivated. The effects can continue for a long time afterwards and they can create a climate of fear among significant sections of minority ethnic communities. (Modood et al: 1997) People trying to deal with racial harassment or racially motivated crime often feel that the service providers are, at best, incompetent and, at worst, indifferent. And there is evidence that racial harassment and racist crime have not always been treated with the seriousness they deserve, and that victims and witnesses have not been adequately protected. (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000:33) Attempts to improve inter-agency co-operation to deal with racial attack and harassment have, in the past, been not very successful due to disagreement on the definition and scope of what should constitute a racist incident. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report (1999) not only provides a common definition of racist incident for all agencies, but also sets a national standard of partnership working to deal with racial attack and harassment. The Report calls on the Home Office, in consultation with Police Services, local Government and other agencies to create a comprehensive system of reporting and recording of all racist incidents and crimes. Recommendation 13 of the report proposes that this should include crimes and non-crimes in policing terms. Recommendation 16 proposes that all relevant local agencies and communities should be encouraged to report racist incidents 24 hours a day and at locations other than police stations. Recommendation 17 suggests that all agencies should ensure that information about racist incidents is available to all agencies. In his action plan following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the Home Secretary introduced a new performance indicator in relation to the degree of multi-agency co-operation and information exchange. (Lemos, 2000:11)

A multi-agency approach to tackling racial incidents has long been promoted. The House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee recommended in 1986 that all police forces and local authorities should give serious consideration to the establishment of a multi-agency approach to racial incidents. (Lemos, 2000) The Home Office guidance on multi-agency working was introduced in 1989. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) also reinstated the importance of the multi-agency working: 'The police service alone cannot be effective in combating [hate crimes]. The active support of police authorities, local authorities, other partner agencies, groups, leaders, communities, witnesses and victims is essential to effective pre-emption (changing attitudes), prevention

and investigation. By concerned joint efforts against hate crimes we can turn the tables, to include the excluded and liberate the fearful.’  
(As cited in Lemos, 2000:11)

The findings of the research into good and innovative practice in dealing with racial harassment, commissioned by the Race ActionNet in 2000, could be used to support the notion about the effectiveness of the multi-agency approach to tackling racial harassment. According to Lemos (2000), the multi-agency forums have become part of wider crime and disorder strategies. They are often operating on three levels: producing inclusive and coherent level strategies for preventing and dealing with racial attacks; co-operating on policy and practice, such as common reporting systems or sharing information about suspected perpetrators; and co-operating on dealing with individual cases. The multi-agency approach proved to be effective in organising awareness raising campaigns for example, dissemination of information for potential victims on prevention, reporting and support arrangements; work with children and young people to deter attacks and raise their awareness of the impact and consequences of racial attacks both on the victims and perpetrators; reinforcing and reminding tenants of their responsibilities under the tenancy agreement not to harass people or to cause a nuisance. Using third party reporting centres, such as advice centres, places of worship, community associations, GP surgeries and public buildings facilitated the receipt of reports from people who otherwise were unlikely to report racial incidents to other agencies. These reports were then passed to the agency, which had the capacity to act, usually either the police or the landlord. Common reporting forms and a central database proved to be useful for ensuring the consistence of a recording standard across the agencies and for the monitoring purposes. Pulling together resources of different agencies provided an opportunity to effectively support people experiencing racial harassment (for example, by providing with advice and counselling, improving security at home and on the street, organising temporary or permanent re-housing or issuing mobile phones to make it easy for victims to contact the police). It also helped to co-ordinate actions against perpetrators by using criminal legal provisions and civil remedies for racial harassment and attacks (for example, injunctions and possession proceedings). The finding of the Race ActionNet survey revealed that these actions were greatly valued by people experiencing racial harassment. (Lemos, 2000:14)

The research project commissioned by Suffolk County Council and associated partner organisations to investigate the effectiveness of services provided by local voluntary and statutory agencies to victims of racial harassment in the county’s Rural Priority Area (RPA) also provides valid arguments to support the concept of multi-agency working. For example, its findings highlighted that for the problems of racial harassment to be tackled effectively, a fully informed multi-agency response is required that utilises the knowledge and services of all potential sources of help. Most of the agency workers interviewed during the research expressed a high level of satisfaction with the way in which they responded to incidents of racial harassment, citing the multi-agency approach as an important requirement in meeting victims’ needs. (Department of Criminology, 2004: 7-15, 16) The research has highlighted not only the range of services that are offered to victims of racial harassment, but also the willingness of different agencies to partnership working against the problem that is very complex and which has very serious and far-reaching implications.

A multi-agency approach to tackling racism allows agencies to benefit from the added value of

the wider knowledge of other service providers by learning more about the scope and impact of racial harassment, and ways of providing a more informed response to victims. (Department of Criminology, 2004:7-38) The multi-agency approach also allows for timely and effective actions against perpetrators of racial harassment and helps to restore confidence in the Criminal Justice System and to reduce the fear of crime amongst the ethnic minority communities. Bearing in mind that racial harassment and racist crime are still widespread, under-reported, under-recorded and not always treated seriously (SEU, 2000:49), the multi-agency approach provides a unique opportunity to improve the way in which the police and other agencies handle reports of racist or religiously-motivated incidents, and to give this problem all the attention it deserves. It also allows for the development of and the implementation of strategies which help minority ethnic groups to obtain greater opportunities and to consistently build cohesion and foster understanding between people from different cultures.

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