

## Chapter 7 WORKING LIVES

### **Themes in this chapter**

- Employment profile
- Recruitment
- Recognition/ progression
- Equality initiatives
- Reporting discrimination
- Handling discrimination
- Changing behaviour
- Promoting Black and Minority Ethnic business
- Institutional racism

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we look at Black and Minority Ethnic working lives.

The employment profile in this chapter illustrates the breadth of skills and experience that the participants contribute to the services that are provided in Devon and to its economy. No stereotype can be drawn from this profile. It indicates that matters of equality of opportunity and good race relations are relevant to all employers – not just one sector.

The accounts of experience of prejudice and discrimination in the work place raise issues of concern for employers to reflect and act upon, in order to promote good practice.

Problems experienced by business proprietors are also relevant to the Police and to Authorities responsible for promoting the business economy. The accounts in this chapter will also be of interest to isolated individuals experiencing discrimination. All too often, without the confidence that their experience is not an isolated anomaly, people feel alone and reluctant to pursue the issue with their employers. It also raises issues for management of race equality initiatives in organisations and Black and Minority Ethnic staff participation in them.

**Table 6.1 Employment profile of the participants in this research**

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>No. of people</b>	<b>Including.....</b>
<i>Senior/ Professional</i>	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Accountants and finance managers.</li> <li>● Civil engineer</li> <li>● Doctors</li> <li>● Finance Manager.</li> <li>● Health manager</li> <li>● Religious leaders / clerics</li> <li>● Lecturers</li> <li>● Management Consultant</li> <li>● Nurses</li> <li>● Opthamologist</li> <li>● Pharmacist</li> <li>● Social workers</li> <li>● Teachers</li> <li>● Voluntary sector organisation managers</li> </ul>
<i>Student</i>	31	School/FE/HE
<i>Skilled</i>	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Housing advice officer.</li> <li>● Artist</li> <li>● Dance teacher.</li> <li>● Electrician.</li> <li>● Finance officers.</li> <li>● Local authority officer.</li> <li>● Mechanics</li> <li>● Musician</li> <li>● Personnel Administration Assistant.</li> <li>● Post mistress</li> <li>● Travel sales consultant</li> <li>● Union workers</li> <li>● Youth Workers</li> </ul>
<i>Restaurateur</i>	16	

<i>Unskilled</i>	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Au pair</li> <li>● Care assistant</li> <li>● Checkout worker</li> <li>● Meat factory workers</li> <li>● Inmate</li> <li>● Learning support assistant in school.</li> <li>● MacDonalds worker</li> <li>● Stall holder</li> <li>● Waitress and chamber maid.</li> </ul>
<i>Retired</i>	13	Including WWII WAAF Engine Fitter.
<i>Housewife/ Mum</i>	11	
<i>Business owner</i>	8	
<i>Asylum Seeker</i>	6	
<i>Unemployed</i>	5	
<i>Inmate</i>	1	
<i>Traveller</i>	1	
<i>Not stated</i>	13	

When we compared skills and qualifications with present employment, we found that 16 women and 10 men were either unemployed or working well below their skills level. A further 3 women had given up skilled or professional posts and were Mothers at home (i.e. a total of 18.5% not using work skills ‘n’=157.)

Of the 26 people not working at their skills level, 12 speak English fluently or as their first language, 11 have good English skills and 3 have a poor command of English. This raises a number of points of concern about Black and Minority Ethnic equality in the workplace. Factors involved include: difficulty in getting experience, skills and qualifications recognised in the UK; lack of familiarity with UK procedures for applying for jobs and for interviewing; the effects of discrimination.



## Experience of discrimination and prejudice in the workplace


31 people described experience of prejudice and discrimination in their work setting. 23 of these were employees.


The Participants drew attention to some key issues arising out of their experience, relating to:


- Recruitment
- Difficulties in proving discrimination and its racial premise.
- Poor handling of reported discrimination
- Appropriate recognition/ career progression
- Taking part in equality initiatives

The following accounts illustrate those themes in the boxes below. Each theme is followed by a commentary.

### **Box 1 Recruitment**

 *I feel that when my husband and I go for jobs we don't get as far as our qualifications [PhDs] deserve. Our names work against us. We expect discrimination because of the effect of top-down politics which lead to entrenched discrimination in the system. So you can expect your own chances to be affected. We accept it rather than moan about it. Other friends have been really badly abused.*

 *The Chief Exec is keen on awareness about discrimination in general but no-one is able to deal with actual cases. For example, a job application was refused for consideration by a manager, because he “didn't want that sort of person working for us”. This allegation was made by someone from outside the organisation. All three of my sons got discriminated against because of their surname. Two of them have worked for the organisation and yet been refused interviews on the basis that they might be related to me! My wife was also turned down 5 times for jobs in the organisation despite being overqualified. The fact that she had been originally employed by them before she was married to me is what makes me wonder.*

 *I was turned down three times from a Justice of the Peace application. Pathetic excuses. The particular clerk of court had particular racial bias. I'll apply again. The Magistrates service is now calling out for BME people but I had wanted to do it under my own merit. It's a shame.*

- ☞ *The job market is not mobile – people tend to stay in jobs because they are afraid of not getting another job. Businesses here have the upper hand over workers over pay and welfare. The worst thing is getting jobs – you have to struggle to get any job worth keeping. Who you know in local government employment is more important than your abilities – people here especially opt for their own.*
- ☞ *My youngest son got passed over from interview by an aeronautics company in the South West because of his name. He only got taken on when a local politician encouraged them to give him a job. The middle child also had a big problem in getting interviews because people assumed his English was inadequate. That's what the employment agencies said. Despite his degree at Oxford!*
- ☞ *People who are clever may not be able to express themselves properly in English, especially at interview.*

### **Case Study**

A Black British woman and her growing family moved to Devon to live in the countryside. In London she had been working for a Public Body as a finance officer, a post for which she was fully qualified and experienced. After the move, she got a temporary job within a Public Body and then applied for two, more senior, permanent positions within the organisation—the same seniority as her post in London. In neither situation was she invited to interview. In both cases, she observed that less qualified people were offered the posts. A friend felt that the participant had been discriminated against and suggested that she should make a complaint. The participant herself also felt that discrimination may have been at play but felt she had no hard proof. However, she noted that people in the organisation would have known that she would have been making an application for a permanent position. She also has no way of knowing whether the ethnicity monitoring form she filled in was processed alongside her application. When she applied for her temporary post, she did not fill in an ethnicity monitoring form. Despite many reasons for doubting the fairness of the selection process, the participant did not complain. She felt to have done so would have jeopardised her temporary position and made her working relationships within the organisation difficult, especially as a complaint would have related to the appointing officers, one of whom is a senior colleague in her temporary job. Near the end of her contract she was later asked by the same appointing officer to apply for the same job as she had been rejected for, in another area.

## Comment

These cases illustrate some of the difficulties people can experience before they even get into a job. A particular problem is the difficulty in proving discrimination. Common features of problems in relation to recruitment were:

- Suspicion of ethnicity monitoring processes and concern that personal data may be mis-used.
- Concern that a person's name will render them vulnerable to prejudice, regardless of ethnicity monitoring.
- Poor communication on the part of employers about the function and transparency of the equal opportunity process in selection, arising from poor employer understanding of the principles of ethnicity monitoring and race equality.
- Applicant's exclusion from privilege to the very information about selection decision making which would independently establish whether perceived discrimination was real, except through redress to the courts.
- Applicants' heightened sensitivity to discrimination based on previous experience of prejudice (either within or external to the workplace) in contrast to poor employer awareness of the mechanisms of prejudice and inability to identify institutional racism.
- Reluctance to raise suspected discrimination with an employer due to the belief that short of re-dress to the courts, appointments will not be reviewed.
- Perception that employers are reluctant to employ people who are 'different' or 'outsiders', and often prefer to recruit internally from their [White British] workforce.

When we asked participants about the best way of promoting race equality and good race relations, 14 comments were raised in relation to employment. These comments ranged from the general need to eliminate racism in employment and to improve recognition of merit in terms of access to jobs and promotion, to more specific recommendations relating to recruitment:

<b>Box 2 Promoting equality in recruitment</b>	
<p>➤ Positive action on recruitment, e.g. <b>welcome statements</b> and guidance for employers on how to phrase and use them.</p> <p>(The example opposite has been sounded with Living Options and with the Intercom Trust.)</p>	<p>E.g. “This organisation sets equality of opportunity at the heart of its values, is working to address this in its functions and to reflect diversity in its workforce, and welcomes appropriately skilled candidates of any background, from all ages and religious, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity.”</p>
<p>➤ Separation of <b>ethnicity monitoring</b> forms from job applications (separate envelopes and removal of all personal details from application form )</p> <p>➤ <b>Explaining to applicants</b> how ERKM (ethnicity record keeping &amp; monitoring) is handled and why it is done.</p>	<p>☞ <i>The main problem is we can't tell why there are problems with job applications. So it would be best to de-personalise all personal details from application forms.</i></p> <p>☞ <i>There should be separate ERKM envelopes which are not opened until <b>after</b> the interview - that's a good idea.</i></p>
<p>➤ Allowing people to <b>describe their ethnicity in their own terms</b> on ethnicity monitoring forms.</p>	<p>(For more details on ethnicity and identity see chapter 4)</p>
<p>➤ Setting targets for <b>proportional workforces</b> – for nationally advertised jobs, national census proportions should be used rather than local percentages.</p>	<p>☞ <i>Under the Race Relations Amendment Act it states that public bodies must be representative of the <u>British</u> community and in all levels of management structure. This doesn't mean representative of the <u>local</u> community.</i></p>
<p>➤ <b>Supporting Black and Minority Ethnic people in finding work.</b></p>	<p>☞ <i>I was naive at first and didn't know the ways of the west. I applied for loads of jobs and didn't get them. I had no experience of job applications.</i></p>

- ☞ *It costs lots of money to translate your own qualification papers and CVs into English. People need help with this and need a way of getting translated certificates certified.*
- ☞ *I am a surveyor. But I can't get a professional job here – they don't recognise my diploma. They think I stole my diploma.*
- ☞ *[My friend's] mother is a doctor but had difficulties getting a job because of her European qualifications not being recognised.*
- ☞ *Now I'm getting into music and would like to get into performance and I need someone to assist me to find a way to work everyday. I want to do a one day exhibition of my paintings. I went to the arts centre for advice in Exeter as to how to establish my talent but they said go do it yourself. So I just play in the street and do fire dancing. It's difficult to sell myself in English. We need assistance and an advocate to establish us. Someone who will really promote us.*

### **Comment**

Improved recruitment was also seen by several participants as a long-term means of promoting good race relations in Devon society in general, by virtue of the inherent familiarization with difference that an increased Black & Minority Ethnic workforce would bring about:

- ☞ *Race relations will improve if more Black & Ethnic Minority people are encouraged to come to Devon and thereby White people will become more accustomed to Black people: people may be indoctrinated from birth but will change as a result of one to one relationships. However racism in job opportunities will have to be overcome to achieve this.*
- ☞ *Attitudes change e.g. when a white person finds themselves in position of having to depend on a Black person's help.*

But in addition to the problems of discrimination in recruitment, participants identified other factors that work against the retention and attraction of skilled workers to the area:

- ☞ *The worst thing about life in Devon is that job pay is poor for most people. I earn 3 times more than my husband who is a teacher. Things would be better if we were more of a meritocracy.*

☛ *Improving the pay scales would make life in Devon better. I can't live here even on one and a half jobs. I can't save anything and there's no spare time. More job opportunities with interesting roles would help. There's too much admin in the jobs and not enough challenge. It's very difficult to further your career here. You need to attract more young people to work here through good jobs. I only see young holiday-makers in the summer. Devon is classed as cheap labour so young people won't move here. The area is classified as a holiday area, not a good place to work.*

### **Box 3 Appropriate recognition/ career progression**

#### **Case study**

☛ *Now I work with 4 or 5 thousand [customers]. It's a difficult job. I had to push for progress and promotion but it hasn't been given to me. I had to ask and argue for recognition. This didn't happen to other staff. I tried to create hell about it a number of years ago when I got to the point where I felt that if I lost the job, what the hell. My senior manager discriminated against me. He then moved to another job. In the last couple of years I've raised the issue again with my Line Manager who approved the idea of re-grading me. Many extra duties had been put on me. Other officers in the past who'd been given extra duties got extra pay. I applied for this but was told no, I was not eligible.....I took the re-grade issue to the Head of Team via my Line Manager, but the Head of Team said I could pursue it if I wanted to but that it wouldn't get past committee level. No written justification was given for this decision.*

This participant noted that his own experience was set within a wider lack of commitment in the organisation to race equality. ☛ *Colleagues have said "what do we need a Race Equality Scheme for – we're not racist", when info about the RES arrives on the computer. People don't want to go into it. It's a fact that people in [the organisation] are discriminated against. The atmosphere is even that the White Brits from the North of the UK get told why don't they go back to the North - I heard this in the office. I have heard so many people complain about incomers.*

#### **Case Study**

One participant worked as a Manager for a company, but left because of the combined effects of prejudice and poor senior management – the branch was run down when she arrived, and the chain had just sacked previous manager there. However, management colleagues at the branch didn't like

the fact that the participant, a Black woman, arrived with ideas for improving the business. The local colleagues clashed with her and called in Regional Management. 🗨️ *When people look down on you it doesn't bring out the best in your performance. No matter what I did, and even despite doubling turnover, the company wouldn't recognise my abilities. Their attitude was due to incompetence and prejudice.* By contrast, the participant has had a positive experience at her subsequent, more senior post at another business where her employer was familiar with the country in which she had been born. She described how the respect and understanding her new employer shows towards her has restored her confidence.

### **Comment**

Another Specific Duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) is the Employment Duty to monitor by ethnicity a number of key indicators including:

- The numbers of staff in post
- Applicants for employment
- Applicants for training
- Applicants for promotion.

Where Public Bodies employ 150 or more full time staff, they must also monitor by ethnicity the number of staff who :

- Receive training
- Benefit or suffer detriment as a result of performance assessments
- Are involved in grievance procedures
- Are subject to disciplinary procedures
- Cease employment

These indicators demonstrate the requirement to ensure that Black and Minority Ethnic Staff are getting the recognition they deserve. Some organisations are trying to increase the level of Black and Minority Ethnic applications by enabling candidates to talk to existing Black and Minority Ethnic staff. This could work to the detriment of an organisation's objective if staff feelings about the organisation is that they are undervalued and their concerns sidelined.

The Duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) to produce a Race Equality Scheme has recently thrown many Public Bodies into consternation and many have turned to their Black and Minority Ethnic employees for help in meeting their obligations. This puts Black and

Minority Ethnic staff into difficult positions if their own experience has never been discussed or addressed. This research indicates that many people do experience discrimination or insufficient professional recognition as employees, have concerns about race equality in the workplace and that most experience some form of prejudice in their lives. Such an invitation to sit on Corporate Race Equality Steering Groups may therefore expect many Black and Minority Ethnic staff to put themselves under a spotlight and speak from experience to an audience which they may feel is ill prepared to listen sensitively or receptively. A further problem is that in the absence of Black and Minority Ethnic self-organised representation in rural areas (see chapters 5 & 12 relating to networks) individuals find themselves uncomfortably labelled as race equality experts by virtue of their ethnicity. Chapters 3 & 5 illustrate the huge diversity of ethnicity, experience and outlooks in rural Devon. A clear consequence of this is that no individual can speak with authority on behalf of the Black and Minority Ethnic population – especially if there has been no mechanism for them to consult with a wide range of other Black and Minority Ethnic rural dwellers. However, individuals can provide insight into what it is like to be a minority member of staff, based on their own experience. Black and Minority Ethnic staff will already have made their own informal assessment of the preparedness of their organisation to promote race equality and will be wary about whether their ideas and concerns will be taken seriously. Employers need to work hard to demonstrate their own commitment to addressing discrimination and awareness in their organisations in order to gain the trust and full participation of Black and Minority Ethnic members of employer equality initiatives.

#### **Box 4 Participation in employers' race equality initiatives**

*☞ I think the Chief Exec. is keen to get things done but I think the organisation prefers to see national legislation before writing its own schemes - so it follows, not leads..... they're not dealing with the surrounding issues or the big issues. It's very hit and miss. There's lots of political correctness - people have to be seen to be doing the right thing. But the group set up to look at race in the organisation was cut off in mid air..... meetings went on with select staff behind closed doors and big or difficult issues were not dealt with..... bits of paper are being produced just to pass the assessment, meaning that laws are made but there is no implementation. I said this to the inspectors saying that much more consultation with staff needs to take place and more two-way dialogue.*

*☞ I don't like standing out here and that people think I am a race expert. I don't like it that everyone recognises you here and being questioned. People don't realise that minority ethnic people are not homogeneous.*

*☞ I think the duty to assess impact will hit the problem of 'we don't need this'. If this attitude proves to exist I'll feel very lost.... It's especially a problem as most of them who are senior won't have had experience of work in multicultural areas. They'll probably get their ideas from the telly.*

One participant described being worried about opening up....and being considered too controversial. *☞ I'm worried I'll be sacked for being too difficult. But I'd like to open up for the sake of my children and others.*

### **Tackling the invisible problem**

The research indicates that those who have felt discrimination in their working lives will not have raised a complaint of racial discrimination with their employers. A notable feature of participants' experiences of discrimination at work and in finding work was the reservation about applying a racist label to the discrimination they described.

#### **Box 5 Difficulties in proving discrimination and it's racial premise.**

*☞ I didn't like the [factory] job because people were very rude. I didn't speak very much English. Maybe because I was foreign people looked at me differently, and made rude jokes, and insisted I should tell them about my private life and sex life. Maybe they were just having fun or maybe they were making these jokes just because I am a foreigner – they didn't say these things to other British workers. Maybe because English people would have the answers to shut them up.*

*☞ Life here has its moments - I had a big office but the boss wanted it for 'multiple occupancy' but it is still vacant 4 months later. I got moved very suddenly to a small office while I was on leave. I complained. I think the boss is 'showing the Black fellow – who is only a lecturer- who the boss is'. A colleague wrote to the boss saying she thought it was unreasonable treatment. I didn't want to make a big issue of it. I'm not sure if it's race related but past experience shows people have all sorts of hidden agendas which influence their attitudes.*

*☞ It only started again [after childhood] when I started work - you know, the hidden racism - not being put forward, having to fight for every decision is a little bit harder, maybe also because I'm a woman.*

☞ *Most people are welcoming to me, for example ladies at the job centre and social services who help disabled people like me. I went for an interview with the District Council as a clerk but didn't get it. I think it was because my speed typing and English are not good enough. They also wanted someone who could drive - and I can't because I am disabled, I don't own a car and can't drive. I also went for a job at the local hotel. But there were too many more highly qualified people. Also the toilet wasn't suitable for disabled access and I couldn't go to the loo. I have applied to the High School library but didn't get an interview. I also applied for a receptionist job at the hospital but got no reply. I also applied to a local farmer for fruit pickers but was unsuccessful. I also got a rejection letter from the local travel agent. I applied to the surgery but there were too many applicants. So I'm feeling depressed. I don't know if I'm being rejected because I'm Black or because I'm disabled.*

☞ *In the job I moved to for career progression I left after one year because I fell out with a female colleague who made life hell for me... The company took the woman's side. I had worked very hard for them. They didn't want to hear my side of the story. I feel real resentment. It was a small firm - very cliquy. All the others were there since the inception of the firm. They didn't like it that I was proud of being Indian. I got very depressed with this. I didn't want to leave that way - they dismissed me. They were very sly. The problem I had at the job could be racism - they just didn't like me being different. I heard that the woman I fell out with had trouble with the previous 2 other staff.*

☞ *Institutional racism exists... At first I wasn't acknowledged at meetings - I was the only Black person.*

☞ *In Cornwall I applied for 200 jobs and lots came back saying I was over qualified... lots of organisations are going through the equal opportunities motions only. I couldn't prove racial discrimination but they would tell from my middle name - it shows I'm Chinese. I saw a programme to enable NHS women staff to become more confident. I went to the interview to become a coach. I didn't get selected because the NHS said they were 'worried' about me not being covered in the practice. Discrimination also might have been a part of their decision to refuse me.*

One Asian male, an accountant with years of experience, tried for years to find a position when he moved to Devon, but without success. He assumes that employers here have discriminated against him as a single parent.

## Comment

Far from ‘playing the race card’, the participants’ comments above illustrate the background to their reluctance to report or demand thorough investigation. The experience that most participants reported in the research was typically non-overt discrimination and therefore by its nature hard to evidence or to prove as racially aggravated. This was a cause for real frustration and shattering self-doubt for many participants. The effects of their experience notwithstanding, many participants evidently felt that in order to deal with the non-overt character of the oppression they experienced they were obliged to engage in a specious argument about its validity, centring on the question ‘**was there intent to be racist?**’ - this question taking an unhelpful precedent over the more relevant analysis of ‘**what is the specific nature of the impact on this Black/Minority Ethnic Person?**’

The diffidence about identifying discrimination as racist, is partly a consequence of the subtle nature of racism and a function of second-guessing on the part of victims about the unsympathetic reaction they would expect from their employers; It is partly a consequence of a poor understanding of the mechanisms of institutional racism, by both employers and Black and Minority Ethnic employees.

In the face of the difficulty of evidencing perceived discrimination and furthermore labelling it as racist and getting employer support, most participants find other self-reliant strategies of coping with the situation. Some leave their jobs, some try to ignore the problem, others just keep trying to find work or to gain acceptance at work. Chapter 6 describes some of the typical responses to experience of racism and the ways that people adopt to cope. One European fluent English speaker described the extraordinary lengths he was expected to go to, to overcome discrimination: *☛ People were disconcerted that a foreigner was in a position of influence to tell them what to do..... people were even suggesting I should change my name.*

The self-reliant strategies are not without cost. Participants described the personal consequences in terms of negative impact on health and mental well being, low income, inability to use skills, sense of isolation, and for some, the decision to move away from the area or loss of a job and income.

One of the comments often made about experience of discrimination is the notion that a non-Black and Minority Ethnic person might also have experienced discrimination from the same perpetrator in the same setting.

While this notion is valid and often true there is a dangerous assumption which often accompanies it: the notion that ‘this situation could well affect someone else too’ is often translated into the notion that ‘therefore it doesn’t matter that it happens to me [to a Black person]’. The fact that a perpetrator of discrimination may not reserve his or her negative attention exclusively for Black or Minority Ethnic people does not discount its effect. For example, a homophobic may well be a racist too or a person who has little awareness of the experience of disabled people might well also be ignorant about that of ethnic minorities.

If the burden of proof relies upon evidencing that racist thoughts were operating in a person’s head or on an organisation’s unspoken values, very few cases of racism will ever be successfully tackled. As one participant cautioned:

☛ *It's the stuff you can't prove that's the real problem.*

When both employers and those who experience discrimination, focus on **intent**, the outcome is that, where discrimination does exist, it is unlikely to be reported or addressed.

Under the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), the law does not look for **intent**. It looks for **impact**. This is an important concept in tackling inequality and it is also at the heart of the concept of Institutional Racism. It has big implications for the way that employers have to think about discrimination. The concept of focusing on Impact Assessment is enshrined in law as a Specific Duty on Public Bodies under the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). The shift away from relying on evidence of intent is also a key outcome of the McPherson report of the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The report recommends that a Racist Incident should be defined as stated follows:

**Box 6      Racist Incident: The McPherson Definition**

‘A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.’ (Rec.12)

‘The term *racist incident* must be understood to include crime and non-crime in policing terms. Both must be reported, recorded and investigated with equal commitment.’ (Rec. 13)


‘This definition should be universally adopted by the police, local government and other relevant agencies.’ (Rec.14)

McPherson also set out the definition and mechanisms of Institutional Racism and is provided together with a discussion paper about it as a tool in Box 10 at the end of this chapter.

The diffidence on the part of those experiencing discrimination underlines the necessity for employers to *encourage* identification of problems, with a focus on the impact a person is experiencing and to *be open to being found wanting as an institution*. Employers who see complaints and Impact Assessment procedures as being means for disproving perceptions rather than acknowledging them will be unable to begin honest assessment or promotion of organisational race relations.

### **Box 7 Poor handling of reported discrimination**


#### **Case study.**

 *I applied for the job after several years work with another organisation, for promotion and more pay - it was a bad move. I wish I'd stayed with the other job. They didn't want me to leave - and tried to keep me but couldn't because they couldn't match the money. It was nice to feel valued [by the previous employer]. The organisation [present employer] is now restructuring. I have done many years of service [in this sector]. Relations at work were always good until my boss started treating people badly, especially me. A senior member of staff said that he'd been on interview panels where people had not been appointed because of race. I have to work twice as hard for promotion as do other BME staff.... I was told by my boss that I had to take early redundancy..... I proposed a means of saving hundreds of thousands of pounds to prevent early redundancies and the boss passed it off as his own idea..... I don't enjoy work now because of the relationship with my boss....There's been a long history between us and it's still not resolved. I think he's racially prejudiced against me. I wrote to the Chief Exec' when my boss proposed redundancy He wrote back saying it wasn't compulsory and their choice of me for redundancy was not based on my boss' prejudice. He said " I don't like people playing the race card but in this instance I don't think you have". This response makes it impossible for me to allege racism! .....My boss gives me the hardest tasks - he's trying to set me up to fail. He's always trying to test and fault me. He behaves like a head-teacher and treats his colleagues like schoolchildren. Racists don't see themselves as such and even if they did they wouldn't admit it, especially to a senior. Attitude surveys are no good - the proof of this is that when the CE asked my boss if his decision was based on prejudice of course he said "no"! Now why are the BME numbers of staff in the organisation so low!!! Everyone in the*

*department who feels victimised by the boss is looking to me to take the issue up with senior management - they reckon I've got nothing to lose because I have other forms of income! But I don't want to rock the boat because I feel I'll be forced to take early redundancy.*

### **Case Study**

One participant described how he would like to see his organisation improving on its race equality performance but that he experiences difficulty in getting his views taken on board. He's also recently been rejected for promotion – unfairly he feels - and is also aware that another BME colleague's family members feel they have experienced discrimination in applying for work with the organisation.

 *Some people find it difficult to talk to me and so cut me out of decision making processes because I say controversial things. The organisation is keen on general awareness about discrimination but no one is able to deal with actual cases. The sole objective for the organisation seems to be to get things right on paper, but it's very hit and miss what gets dealt with in practice. You raise a point and get told 'you've made your point, it will be dealt with' and then no action gets taken. I feel like I'm banging my head against a glass ceiling – with the issues and professionally - because I'm raising the issues, because they don't want to hear the issues, and because I'm Black. Black and Minority Ethnic people get labelled as trouble-makers irrespective of their skills. I'm passionate about these things because I don't want my kids to go through the sort of things I've experienced.*

### **Comment**

We have demonstrated how many people will not be able to get over the first hurdle of finding enough confidence to take up a case of discrimination with their employer, especially when it is not overt. These case studies illustrate a second hurdle, that of not being taken seriously, or being dismissed, when a case is raised. People who make the decision at the first hurdle that their case will not be heard are not being neurotic.

Poor handling of a reported incident is a guaranteed way of breaking the trust and confidence of Black and Minority Ethnic staff. Moreover, if the expectation is conveyed that no more should be heard on the subject, it is a muzzling of staff for the present and the future. That is an act of institutional racism in itself.


The problems of under reporting of racist incidents to the police are well documented. Chapter 6 looks at the way in which people tend to cope with racism and some of the background to under-reporting. Most of the participants had not made formal reports of their experience. The problem of under-reporting is also an issue for employers, and one that can only be addressed if employers:

- a. Accept that if there has been no meaningful training and development in issues of equality and diversity in an organisation and, its systems and norms are born out of the dominant culture of a White workforce, a review of whether unidentified and institutionally discriminatory practices are at work, is needed.
- b. Learn more about the way in which institutional racism operates
- c. Set in place advocates who are able to gain the trust of staff and take tangible action to address their experience.
- d. Let staff know that diversity is valued, through a change in behaviour in its management and workforce, supported by training.

### **Box 8 Inappropriate behaviour and language**

One Black participant described how, whilst senior officers are supportive, there has been a generally awkward atmosphere among his peer colleagues when using language that refers to ethnicity. This wariness among staff has made things uncomfortable, and he feels this could have been avoided if colleagues were more confident and relaxed about working with staff of different ethnicities. An example of lack of confidence in using race equality language was during an in-house training session that he attended in which the training officer clearly felt very uncomfortable using the phrase ‘Black person’. On another occasion, when looking at staff rosters, a staff member was commenting on the problem of finding someone to cover a shift. At that point the participant came into the office and the staff member announced “ah, here’s a nigger among the woodpile”. He immediately challenged the staff member, who apologised and backed down. The participant felt that the staff member concerned must have confused his arrival in the office with the fact that the officer couldn’t ‘see the wood for the trees’ on the roster – “*a mental blip*”. The scenario had been overheard and was brought up for discussion at the participant’s appraisal, but he wanted the matter closed. Nevertheless, whilst the staff member concerned is now “as nice as pie” the participant remains wary after this and other events.

A minority ethnic council worker told us:

 *Prejudice also affects staff who suffer abuse from the public. I saw a*

*colleague [Asian] directing road work in Exeter on Saturday - I saw 5 comments of racial abuse being made by the public.*

A participant described concern for a friend who had confided in him:

☞ *A friend working for the health service was told to go back to her country - she's a receptionist.*

☞ *My wife has only experienced one incident, on September the 11th - the following day she went on site and a woman approached her at a bus stop and said 'It's bad taste for your employers to send you out at this time'. Her employer came and told the woman that she was racist.*

A White European participant with an excellent command of English told us:

☞ *I sometimes get a reaction because English is not my first language. It's enough to pronounce one word wrong and people who don't speak other languages laugh at me. The Brits have very little tolerance of staff with accents. They make lots of jokes about my pronunciation and spelling- it's silly of them. They don't understand that we're trying. I cope by making a joke out of it, but it can really get to me. I have 1000 people to co-ordinate. If there are several comments a day it can really bring a person down.*

## **Comment**

This chapter has illustrated the situations in which people have experienced prejudice and discrimination. The incidents which involve overt racist language are less common and are more easily dealt with if organisations are committed to:

- Providing good training
- Ensuring managers take professional responsibility for confronting bad language and behaviour
- Prepare colleagues and managers to take action to back up staff who experience prejudice from the public

Subtle and institutional channels of discrimination are far harder for victims to fight. Prevention is much better than cure. This is why the work of promoting race equality in institutions, with an understanding of the concept of institutional racism, is so important.

In this chapter we have heard about work settings as diverse as trades, factories, uniformed services, public bodies, shops, educational and health establishments.

Another setting in which racist abuse was reported was small, proprietor-run businesses:

**Box 9 Proprietor experience of discrimination and prejudice in the workplace**

**Case notes**

A snack bar owner experienced harassment, with the problems arising usually after pub chucking-out. In particular a very abusive guy - well known to police, had been in custody - persistently harassed the snack bar owner. The snack bar owner has suffered taunting with a screwdriver and verbal abuse. The police became acutely aware of the problem and allocated the snack bar an incident reporting 'Red Flag' so that calls from the bar would be handled immediately. Ultimately the key offender was taken to court.


**Case notes**


A taxi cab driver was assaulted by a customer who poured curry all over him in response to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. To halt the abuse police installed a surveillance camera in the taxi.


**Case notes**

A Kebab take-away owner experienced all-night harassment from Marine who was persistently abusive and roamed around the shop and into the property in attempts to intimidate and provoke the proprietor.

A Chinese restaurateur felt:

 *We are being looked down on, people think they can walk over us.*

 *One or two staff have had problems with groups of local young trouble makers - there are some people who are causing trouble for everyone. There was verbal abuse towards the staff outside the restaurant. The police got involved. I've also seen lots of fights in town because the restaurant was next door to the nightclub.*

 *I know a Greek chap who owns the kebab shop by the nightclub - he gets lots of abuse from drunks*

☞ *My reception here was terrible - lots of racism. People looked at me differently – there were only two Asian families. There was lots of swearing and pushing around at the restaurant, breaking windows and banging doors, 'why don't you go back to India'. National Front very active. But now society is very American. Very multi-cultural. People know that and are more accepting. The changes in attitude have happened since 1985.*

One Asylum Seeker participant expressed concern for a friend:

☞ *There is an Iranian here with a pizza/kebab shop. He's been here for 22 years but he still gets treated the same as us. Local people don't respect him - especially the young. He had to change his car three times because of vandalism motivated by people's prejudice about his accent. He gets lots of insults. If I were him I would not do business here. In London it would be OK to do business because even the English are foreigners there!*

Vulnerability in a person's own business not only threatens a person's own livelihood, but that of staff too. Proprietors of 'open-to-the-public' businesses have no idea where the next attack will come from. Foreign food businesses account for both the majority of Black and Minority Ethnic businesses and the businesses open in rural areas alongside pubs and nightclubs. They are especially vulnerable to uninhibited expressions of prejudice from the public. This adds weight to the argument made by participants in chapter 12 for measures to raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviour in society. As chapter 12 describes, this is an issue which many public bodies can affect, and is a particular opportunity for proactive race equality initiatives by Community Safety Partnerships.

☞ *The UK is accepting culture in terms of food - curry is the number 1 food in UK food consumption! But they're not accepting the way people live. Don't take it for granted that you have an Indian restaurant and that you can get the food and that's it. There's more to it than that.*

The value of Black and Minority Ethnic businesses in Devon is described in the Prosper report '*Mapping Ethnic Minority Owned Businesses in Devon & Cornwall*'. The report found that financial turnover in Devon and Cornwall of Black and Minority Ethnic businesses amounted to £50.7 million in 1999. Foreign food outlets in particular accounted for the majority of the businesses that Prosper identified, and provide a central service to leisure and tourism consumption. But 1 in 5 of the businesses surveyed by Prosper reported incidents of racial harassment, and it was also


noted that a number of businesses perceived institutional racism from organisations who were in a position of power to impede their business development. The report also found that strikingly few businesses were active in business membership organisations or received business support. For some types of businesses this is due to the working hours which make evening meetings difficult to attend: other isolating factors include mistrust, lack of familiarity with the systems involved, and language access problems on the part of some older proprietors. It also follows that, if businesses feel under attack from the general public, much confidence building needs to be done by public and community-business organisations to gain the trust and participation of Black and Minority Ethnic proprietors and staff.

Black and Minority Ethnic businesses are part of the economic engine in Devon and an important service and asset – whether local foreign food restaurants or major micro-technology manufacturers. The Prosper report recommends that business support and economic development agencies should act on 8 points:

1. Raise the profile of Black and Minority Ethnic business
2. Emphasize the role of the Black and Minority Ethnic business population in the modern image and marketing of Devon
3. Develop a business support strategy that promotes Black and Minority Ethnic food and culture businesses in tourism and gains their participation in promoting the tourist sector
4. Support and develop networking initiatives for Black and Minority Ethnic businesses. (See chapter 12 to look at the variety of benefits of establishing rural networks)
5. Improve ethnic monitoring of business support
6. Ethnic awareness training for business support agencies and advisors
7. Improve communication and outreach to Black and Minority Ethnic businesses with more face to face contact and multi lingual materials

As well as recognizing the economic value of Black and Minority Ethnic businesses, specifically as a driver in tourism and leisure, Black and Minority Ethnic tourists and visitors should also be considered a part of the economy. In the course of the research we heard of a very direct link between Black and Minority Ethnic businesses and customers in the form of a hotel owned by a Black proprietor, who marketed directly to Black urban dwellers through the Black press. In chapter 3 we also look at how Black and Minority Ethnic people have moved to Devon, bringing their skills and finance, having been impressed during holidays here. However,

we also heard of an example of urban Black and Minority Ethnic fear of rural racism:

 *I had a friend [Black male 28 years old] come to visit from London. He was very frightened that he would be attacked in "redneck farmer Devon" - he found he'd lost our phone number when he arrived at the bus station and was so afraid he made straight for the police station.*

Examples like this raise the importance of positive marketing of race equality in Devon, both to attract Black and Minority Ethnic tourism and to ensure that tourists' experience is good, by working hard to change attitudes among the public by promoting cultural diversity and tackling racism.

### **Box 10 Institutional Racism– useful definitions and background**

#### **Key Components of Institutional Racism**

The Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (The Runnymede Trust, 2000 p.74) identified interacting components of “institutional racism” and these provide a useful template for any analysis:

**Indirect discrimination:** Members of the Black and Minority Ethnic communities do not receive their fair share of the benefits and resources available from an organisation and do not receive a professional, responsive and high quality service. They do receive more than their fair share of penalties and disadvantages.

**Employment practices:** Members of the Black and Minority Ethnic communities are not recruited to the extent that could be reasonably expected, or having been recruited, receive less than their fair share of promotion, training and career development opportunities.

**Occupational culture:** Racist arguments, stereotypes and assumptions go unchallenged in everyday conversation and affect how the organisation treats members of the public. There is cynicism about so-called political correctness and little or no emphasis on reducing inequalities and valuing diversity. Black and Minority Ethnic staff feel that they do not really belong in the culture of the workplace. Their world views, culture and experiences of racism are not acknowledged.

**Staffing structure:** Senior management positions are disproportionately held by White people.

**Lack of positive action:** Few or no efforts have been made to recruit black

and Minority Ethnic staff to senior positions or to involve them in major decision making.

**Management and leadership:** The task of addressing institutional racism is not regarded as a high priority for leaders and managers, either personally or professionally, and is seldom or never considered in mainstream decision making.

**Professional expertise:** Few members of an organisation's staff have skills in intercultural understanding and communication and in handling and defusing situations of actual or potential conflict and tension.

**Training:** Few staff have received relevant high quality training. They do not understand the concept of institutional racism and do not know what they themselves can do to address it.

**Consultation:** Organisations do not listen to, let alone seek out, the views and perceptions of Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

**Lack of information:** Organisations do not systematically examine the impact of their policies and practices in order to judge whether or not they have a negative impact on Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

### **MacPherson Working Definition**

MacPherson defined Institutional Racism as, "*The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service for people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen and detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour, which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping, which disadvantages minority ethnic people.*" (Report into the Murder of Stephen Lawrence, 1999)

Two distinct strands can be identified in the definition of institutional racism. The first, by direct allusion to "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service", along with the later reference to "processes", identifies what may be termed "systemic" factors which, in their result, produce outcomes in terms of service delivery and employment which are less favourable to one ethnic group than another. The second strand, contained in the reference to "*unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping*" refers to pervasive, unconscious discrimination on grounds of race.

These strands are closely inter-linked, both leading to the less favourable treatment of ethnic minorities. It is almost certain that an organisation that fails to institute good race equality practices may also be an organisation in which unconscious discrimination persists. This conclusion does not provide any grounds for assuming that all (or indeed any) of the staff of a

public body is “racist” in the everyday sense of the word. What is essential is that the concept of “institutional racism” is properly and fully understood so that its manifestations may be identified and corrected. Some may find it difficult to accept that both strands of “institutional racism” might exist in an organisation made up entirely of individuals who genuinely believe that they are not racist in any way.

Ref: Chris Taylor, Granard Associates.

This handbook and supporting tools ✂ can be accessed at [www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)