

CARERS look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. The care they provide is unpaid.

Policy Briefing

Black and Minority Ethnic Carers

- * Approximately 5% of the total UK population are from black and minority ethnic communities.
- * This means there may be as many as 285,000 black and minority ethnic carers in the UK.
- * Demographic changes in the next ten years will mean increased caring responsibilities for black and minority ethnic families.
- * According to the 1991 census, the highest proportions of black and minority ethnic groups reside in London.

The Current Situation

All carers face difficulties such as a need for recognition, respite, information, flexible services and often have low-incomes. However, black and minority ethnic carers also face additional barriers which are:

1. Gaining equal access to support services
2. Cultural and language differences
3. Access to information/support from organisations

1. Gaining equal access to support services:

The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) recently carried out an inspection of community care services for black and minority ethnic older people. This reported that black and ethnic minority people are liable to suffer significant disadvantage in gaining access to community care services.

This was due to:

- * lack of choice of services available
- * inappropriate services available often due to lack of consultation
- * lack of information on help available
- * lack of staff skilled in anti-discriminatory practice and cultural sensitivity

“The inaccurate assumption that ‘they look after their own’ has to be challenged by those with responsibility for developing services because this is often used to justify inadequate provision or low take-up.” (SSI (1998) They look after their own, don’t they? HMSO: London)

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2. Cultural and language differences

Some carers also face problems due to different cultural needs and the fact that English is not their first language. For these reasons, black and minority ethnic carers sometimes require specific rather than special services due to cultural differences. For example, a Punjabi speaking sitter or a prayer room for Muslims at a day centre. However, black and minority ethnic carers should not be lumped together as one group. It is necessary to note there are many different cultures and differing needs represented within this group.

The recent SSI inspection of local authority support for carers found that, despite efforts, social services departments had not been able to provide services that were culturally adapted to users' and carers' needs. However, the inspection did find some examples of good practice.

The Race Equality Unit carried out a recent study involving user-led organisations and black and minority ethnic workers investigating services for black and ethnic minorities. This survey identified a continuing gap in service development with specific services being developed, usually by black voluntary organisations, with apparently limited work being done to transform mainstream provision.

"There has been a tendency for the special needs label to be applied too readily to minority ethnic groups, which tends to consign to minority ethnic groups as deviant status and which marginalises any provision...". (Atkin, K. & Rollings, J. (1993) Community Care in Multi-Racial Britain: A Critical review of the literature. HMSO: London)

3. Access to information/support from organisations

Typically, black and minority ethnic carers tend to use local black and minority ethnic community organisations for support preferring the accessibility and appropriateness of the services provided.

"I don't understand English. Whenever I receive an English letter or have any problems, I go down to the community centre and ask for help."

Many of these organisations deal with a variety of issues and advice on caring may not be a priority. Additionally, the term 'care' is not familiar within black and minority ethnic communities.

Therefore, it is necessary for mainstream organisations to consciously reach out to black and minority ethnic carers and provide the necessary information and support.

Other issues include:

- * Lack of joint working between health, social services and voluntary organisations

- * Racism
- * Not taking the issue of black carers seriously

Carers UK's View

Voluntary organisations and statutory agencies are beginning to recognise the importance of supporting carers in their caring roles. We welcome the Government's pledge in the Social Services White Paper, Modernising Social Services, for better targeted services for people from ethnic minorities. However, this needs to be developed much further to improve the lives of black and minority ethnic carers.

This could be achieved by the following:

- * A government funded national study looking at the needs of black and minority ethnic carers.
- * Ensuring that support for black and minority ethnic carers should become a mainstream issue for all relevant agencies.
- * Involving black and minority ethnic carers in the consultation/planning process in order to develop the most appropriate services.
- * Long-term funding from statutory authorities to support black and ethnic minority carers.
- * Making information easily accessible and available in different languages.
- * Identifying the needs of local black and ethnic minority populations and ensuring this contributes towards future planning of specific services, meeting their language and cultural needs.
- * Ring-fencing specific resources to support black and minority ethnic carers.
- * Monitoring services.
- * Supporting black and minority ethnic organisations to understand the needs of carers.

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