



What Works *for*
**Children's
Social Care**

Responding to the Outcomes for Black Children in Care: A Rapid Evidence Review Synthesis report

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Introduction

This report summarises young people's responses to Outcomes for Black Children in Care: A Rapid Evidence Review Synthesis. The main aim of the rapid review was to understand whether outcomes for Black children in care in the UK differed from children from other ethnic groups. In light of the topic matter, it felt remiss not to consider the views of Black young people with experience of the social care system and present their responses to the findings of the review. The views provided here are the young people's own and may not represent the views of What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC).

A roundtable was arranged with four Young Advisors who have worked with WWCSC previously, one of whom is currently an intern at the organisation. The round table was facilitated by the participating Young Advisors to encourage open and honest conversations uninfluenced by members of staff from WWCSC.

In light of the findings of the rapid review, the aim of the roundtable discussion was to facilitate meaningful conversations about racial disparities within the care system using the personal experiences of the Young Advisors. To make the roundtable a nuanced and expansive conversation, instead of focusing solely on the experiences of Black young people experienced in care, we extended an invite to all minority groups in the Young Advisors group.

The ethnic backgrounds of the contributors was as follows:

Berbert identifies as Black British, Princess' ethnic background being Black African, Faith's ethnic background being Nigerian and Shab's ethnic background being British Afghan. Practice Development Manager Bev Curtis, who helped to coordinate the round table, has an ethnic background of White British origin.

The following is a summary of the key themes that emerged at the roundtable event.

Lack of data



Young people were initially surprised by the lack or limited availability of data on the ethnicity of children in care. Discussions took place as to why this was the case and whether differences in the experiences of young people from ethnic minorities had been thought about previously in research.

Based on their own experiences the group felt that a key area to investigate was the establishment of comparative data between the experiences of Black girls and Black boys, as they felt differences existed in that capacity.

One member of the group highlighted the lack of data about the ethnic background of the researchers who conducted the studies, as it was felt that it could have influenced the research output and the conclusions drawn from it. More specifically, the group felt researchers may not have represented the racial groups they were trying to analyse and this may have biased the findings. The group also mentioned that people with lived experience of care should be involved in research because they felt that they are in a better position to identify important research questions in need of investigation.

Placement Stability

The rapid review highlighted that one study with a high risk of bias found there was no difference in absconding behaviour between Black and White young people. With regard to placement moves, two studies suggested that Black children in care experience a similar number or even lower placement moves than White children in care.

During this discussion the topic of matching children in foster placements was brought up. One member felt that too much focus was placed on cultural matching which may not always meet the interests of the child and would not necessarily stop that child experiencing racism or prejudice.

The conversation then moved onto experiences of racism in foster placements and two young people highlighted how they had previously reported instances of racism they had suffered to their social worker but without an end result. They felt that young people continue to remain in placements where they experience racism, therefore using placement moves to measure children's experiences would not provide a holistic understanding of how Black children experience care. They felt there was a need for more training for social workers to address racism within foster placements.

Reunification

The rapid review found there was a lack of evidence on differences in reunification outcomes between Black children in care and other ethnic groups in the UK.

A general discussion with the Young Advisors led some to believe that there was a greater degree of reunifications among non-White children compared to White children due to cultural differences. They went on to explain that children from ethnic minorities were more likely to be brought up in collectivist cultures whereas White children were more likely to be brought up in individualistic cultures. This they believed helped children of ethnic minority backgrounds because their communities would more likely support birth parents raise children through a community collective.



Additionally, it was highlighted that members of Black and Asian communities would feel immense shame if their children went into care and that they would be judged negatively by their community if that happened. It was felt families would work very hard to get their children back into their own care and due to that effort they would more likely be accepted as part of the community. There was also an extended conversation about the general mistrust that members of Black and Asian communities have towards social workers and the care system, with shame being attached to anyone involved with social care.

Health

The rapid review found limited evidence on physical health with no differences in long-term health outcomes between Black and Asian care-experienced young people and mixed evidence for differences between Black and White care-experienced adults. There were also no studies that investigated mental health outcomes for Black children in care.

The group discussion highlighted the different views that certain African communities have toward mental illness and that within certain communities it may be considered a spiritual issue. They also mentioned that young people in care who belong to communities where understanding of mental health is disputed may not tell their social workers about any concerns they had regarding their own mental wellbeing for fear of their families finding out.

Education

Studies suggest higher educational attainment for Black children in care compared to White children in care when looking at A levels and KS4 (GCSE) scores, but mixed evidence when comparing educational attainment for Black and Asian children in care.

The group believed that these results showed a gap between preconceived ideas about certain ethnic groups of people and reality. With Black students in care outperforming White students in care, the evidence presented on the surface dispels the preconceived notions that Black students are less likely to achieve academic success than their White counterparts. They also mentioned that immigrant families and second generation immigrant families often impose academic pressure on their children to succeed.

However, despite Black children showing higher levels of attainment in education, they believed it was unclear whether this resulted in better employment opportunities for young Black people.

Socio-economic factors

The group discussed the disproportionate numbers of Black children in care and how they primarily come from the most deprived communities. The lack of any meaningful research in this area was mentioned by the group to be disappointing, although not surprising.

Research on racial disparities within the care system often focuses on comparing White children with Black children. The group saw this as highly simplistic, and that it failed to recognise the range of ethnic groups that make up these two groups of people. It was recommended that more effort and research needed to be placed into understanding outcomes for other ethnic minority groups too. With clear differences in educational attainment between Black Caribbean students and Black African students in the English



educational system, the Young Advisors believed it could prove helpful to see if this is reflected in the care system, and if so, what the reasons behind this were.

Final thoughts

In light of the findings of the Outcomes for Black Children in Care: A Rapid Evidence Review Synthesis, we felt it was important to consider the views of young people who belonged to ethnic minorities with experience of the social care system and present their responses to the findings of the review. A range of views were established, with young people being surprised by the lack or limited availability of data on the ethnicity of children in care. They provided personal insight into why evidence showed Black children were more likely to have similar or in some cases better placement stability than White children in care and how conscious and unconscious racism may result in misleading data. They also highlighted why they felt there was a greater degree of reunifications among non-White children compared to White children and they discussed the differences that certain cultures have towards mental illness and the impact that could have on children. Additionally, they discussed why ethnic minorities may do better educationally and how potential biases based on socio-economic factors went unrecognised in the review.

Most importantly, the young people reiterated the findings of the report - that more research was needed to investigate the outcomes of not only Black children in care but also children who belonged to other ethnic minority groups, particularly around reunification, placement stability, health, gender and cultural differences. Just like the Young Advisory Group, we believe that investigations into these areas will result in well-informed and specified data.



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