

Barriers in accessing homeless provision and service needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in London

Summary of Findings



Survey and Interviews with homeless individuals



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Introduction

This Summary of Findings details the experiences of sixteen homeless individuals from BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) backgrounds. ROTA is carrying out fieldwork with these clients in order to gain evidence on barriers to accessing services and service needs of homeless people from BAME groups. The fieldwork is carried out for ROTA's Equal funded project "Linking services for BAME homeless individuals". This project is part of the 'Tackling Multiple Disadvantage in London by Improving Employability' (TMD) programme, which is run through a cross-sector partnership led by the charity Off the Streets and Into Work (OSW). The core partners include Cardboard Citizens, Connection at St Martin's, Depaul Trust, Greater London Authority, Groundswell UK, Prospect Us, Race on the Agenda, St Mungo's and Thames Reach Bondway.

The TMD programme targets individuals facing multiple disadvantage in the labour market who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, in temporary accommodation, or have been recently resettled. Running until the end of 2007, it intends to test routes out of inactivity and worklessness. It will provide innovative and individual options, in a city with current and projected skills shortages, but where there is less incentive for those on benefits to work than anywhere else in the country, and where mainstream measures have had the least impact.

The overall aim of ROTA's project is to enhance access to appropriate training and employment services for homeless individuals from BAME groups. In order for this to be achieved BAME individuals need to be able to access support that best meets their needs and empowers them to enter or return to the labour market. There may be barriers to BAME people in using some generic homeless provision; there may also be a lack of knowledge within some BAME services of the support available within the homeless sector.

As there is limited information available on the specific service needs of BAME homeless people, and insufficient knowledge/links between the BAME and homelessness sectors, it is essential to carry out research on these issues and to build new links and referral routes across services. This would ensure that support and services tailored to people's needs are available and would lead to improved levels of employment for BME homeless individuals.

Linking Services for BAME Homeless Individuals will result in mapping of BAME training provision; individuals receiving support in testing out the links between BAME and homelessness provision over a period of a year; greater awareness of the needs of BAME homeless individuals within the homelessness and BME voluntary sectors, and between these sectors themselves.

Who we are

Race on the Agenda (ROTA) is a social policy think tank that has been active since 1984. We work with London's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities towards achieving social justice by the elimination of discrimination and promotion of human rights, diversity and equality of opportunity. We achieve these aims by informing London's strategic decision-makers about the issues affecting the BAME voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the communities it serves and by making government policy more accessible to London's BME organisations. **MiNet**, the regional BAME network joined ROTA in 2002. Its focus is on strengthening the voice for London's BAME VCS in the development of regional policy

Methodology

ROTA's project is split into three phases:

Phase 1: Desk research

- One chapter introducing the policy and legislative context of the project, by addressing all the latest and historical policy and statutory changes around homelessness at three levels: European, UK and London. In particular,
 - EU level: most significant/ relevant European policies, primary and secondary (directives, regulations etc) legislation relating to homelessness and BAME groups including employment, equal opportunities, housing, social inclusion and community cohesion. The Equal principles and objectives will also need to be reviewed.
 - UK level: most significant/ relevant UK policies and primary legislation relating to homelessness and BAME groups including employment, equal opportunities, housing, social inclusion and community cohesion.
 - London level: most significant/ relevant policies/ statutes relating to homelessness and BAME groups in London (e.g. Government Office for London, the Greater London Authority, London Boroughs, Central

Government particularly the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Home Office).

- A literature review chapter covering the major theoretical arguments around homelessness & BAME groups especially in relation to London. In particular:
 - Barriers and any other issues faced by BAME groups trying to access homeless provision;
 - General issues faced by BAME homeless individuals especially in relation to London;
 - Any available information on the relationship between mainstream homeless organisations and BAME organisations;
 - Any available information on the service needs of BAME homeless individuals;
 - Any available information on awareness raising initiatives around the needs of BAME homeless individuals.

Phase 2: Fieldwork with BAME homeless individuals (interviews, focus groups, questionnaires) and with BAME and mainstream homeless organisations

We shall employ three data collection instruments. The findings in this document originate from data collected through a questionnaire. The survey evidence will inform themes and questions for focus groups with clients. Finally, a six month longitudinal study involving monthly follow-up phone interviews with clients will map their experience of using homeless services to provide routes into education, training or employment.

Phase 3: Report, toolkit, dissemination and policy influencing

Sampling

The sample of homeless clients covers Black, Asian, European and Irish ethnic minority communities in London, and their ages range from 18 to 60. We found that strict quota sampling was challenging since clients were highly mobile, and three potential clients were unable to join the sample group as we did not have contact details for them.

Two of the four women in the sample group are rough sleepers and both are in their 40s; the other two women are accommodated in hostels and are ages 18 and 19.

The majority of those that responded to our invitation to join our project are males of African descent which has resulted in a sample group with a high number of Black male respondents (a breakdown of interviewee demographics can be found in the appendix). However, this group reveals the most interesting findings in the report concerning gender and 'race', and access to and use of homeless

services. Data gathered from these individuals provides considerable evidence with regards to:

- Differences in experience of homelessness between BAME groups; in particular service delivery
- Perceptions of particular groups and specifically, culturally based notions of what constitutes acceptable behaviour.

The following statement by an African Caribbean male respondent captures what has been reported by other African Caribbean clients:

Lack of understanding from provider's staff. How to deal with BAME person without stereotyping the person with "you're intimidating", or "you're aggressive". Lack of BAME promotion with service providers.

Another remarked that:

Being a Black male seems to intimidate certain sections of society that have influence on my life. These people are ignorant to my needs and don't want to make the effort to understand my needs. Therefore, when I ask for help it is easier for them to pass the buck than to actually do something

In contrast to the experiences of the Black men surveyed, the data collected shows that although one Irish respondent felt that his ethnicity 'has not caused the problem but has not made it any easier' for him to progress into permanent accommodation and work; he, like all the other non-Black respondents, reported that they had no direct experience of being discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity.

Four clients reported that they had positive experiences with service providers, and one explained that

I have had a good experience with the London Irish Centre because of the numerous appointments I have missed and went back to the Irish Centre and they have gotten me more appointments without being upset.

The main concerns for the majority of all clients surveyed are

- Dissatisfaction with service delivery by temporary accommodation providers
- Poor staff – client relations
- Advice and support tends to be very patchy and the key worker system usually has little impact on their needs

- Difficulties and frustration with regards to securing permanent accommodation
- Insensitivity on the part of service providers, in particular with regard to gender and 'race'.

... To work with a team of people who have my best interests in mind and can emphasise with my situation and can talk to me straight without hidden meanings

Better communication between agencies would be useful, as would a more positive profile for housing benefit among landlords. HBaccepted.co.uk is a website that could be useful for homeless people but a lot of landlords on the site don't take housing benefit. A more accurate government sponsored website would be useful

For me its, in some respects, it's a lack of respect. Some people do deem you, because you're homeless, down there and find it hard to hard to accept when you talk up for yourself, they find that hard to deal with because you're down there. Some organisations don't take into consideration what you've achieved in your life before you were homeless.

The Equal team has noted that nearly all respondents reported having a sense of powerlessness about changing their situation, as well as high anxiety about the future. One female rough sleeper, age 42 reported that her biggest concern about her situation is that "I might be in this same situation when I am old and in my 60s".

The majority of our sample group responded positively when asked about their involvement in the Equal project. One respondent commented that "ROTA is doing a good job; it's like they've read the book about my life and are trying to help me address some of these things"

Finally, we note the similarity of our clients' observations about the quality of service provision with that of homeless women cited in the Crisis research report on the experience of homeless women. That is, the important thing about service delivery is not so much the delivery, as clients appreciate that their needs can not always be met in the short run, but *how* it is delivered. For example the treatment they receive from staff etc.

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deal with because you're down there. Some organisations don't take into consideration what you've achieved in your life before you were homeless.

Use of mainstream homeless and Black Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) organisations

- ❖ Thirteen out of the sixteen interviewees have used or are using a mainstream homeless organisation. The mean client rating of these homeless organisations is 2.9 out of 5.
- ❖ Three interviewees have used the services of a voluntary BAME organisation, and many of the respondents have stated that they were unaware of such organisations

Access to Services

- ❖ Nine out of sixteen interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing support or advice on claiming benefits.
- ❖ Seven interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing support or advice on employment
- ❖ Five interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing support or advice on counselling
- ❖ Four interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing support or advice on financial services including debt advice
- ❖ Four interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing support or advice on drug use
- ❖ White clients may have shorter waiting times when being seen by staff than service users from other ethnic backgrounds.

One female Filipino interviewee stated that her and her friends of “an ethnic background” had to wait longer to be seen by staff at one hostel than white clients.

- ❖ Interviewees were not able to access homeless accommodation places due to not receiving benefits, leaving a short-term prison sentence or not meeting general criteria.

If you're in prison for under twelve months, the government is not obliged to house you so, therefore, it's straight back out onto the streets again

- ❖ Inability to move from hostel to permanent accommodation due to eviction from hostels.

Two interviewees had been evicted from a hostel and five admitted that this was a concern.

You can be there in the hostel system for two years, just about to get your flat, and you can get kicked out...and all that two years behind the hostel doors doesn't count for anything

I am a veteran of this hostel game and am tired of the whole thing. I am slightly anxious as I do not wish to have to start all over again from scratch should I get evicted from my hostel for reasons not of my cause

Cultural Barriers

- ❖ Staffs, in particular, white staff, frequently view animated discussions by a group of people of African descent, as aggressive and unacceptable behaviour, leading to eviction from hostels and delaying eligibility for permanent accommodation.

Four interviewees of African and Caribbean background reported staff responded to them as Black males with insensitivity, and that their cultural tendency to be fairly animated in their communications, including body language, was frequently deemed as aggressive. One interviewee was evicted for this reason and another stated that

Being a black male seems to intimidate certain sections of society that have influence on my life. These people are ignorant to my needs and don't want to make the effort to understand my needs. Therefore, when I ask for help it is easier for them to pass the buck than to actually do something.

- ❖ Poor interpretation or lack of imagination when dealing with African and Caribbean, in particular male clients, and the perception of black men as intimidating, often leads to staff abstaining from providing help and engaging positively with these clients.

Four interviewees of African Caribbean background made the above point and claimed that hostel staff did not know how to deal with people from BAME backgrounds.

- ❖ Five interviewees claimed that their BAME background affected their situation as a homeless person.
- ❖ African Caribbean staff may have a better understanding and tolerance of the cultural mannerism of clients from their own ethnic group than staff from other ethnic backgrounds.

One African Caribbean interviewee stated that most African Caribbean staff members were less likely to confront clients who were acting in an “animated” fashion than white staff. He also stated that he had met very few African Caribbean managers in “big positions” in the homeless sector.

- ❖ There is a need for staff training in cultural diversity.

More than one African Caribbean interviewee made the above point. In particular, one said training is needed to “understand BAME”. The context of the conversation indicated he was talking about tolerance and understanding of cultural difference.

Advice and Information

- ❖ Some hostel staff do not care about their client’s needs and do not empathise with their situation.

Seven interviewees made the above point. However, four other interviewees, including one citing criticisms above, also gave examples of exemplary hostels with caring and competent staff. This indicates that the quality of staff at homeless accommodation services in London is, to some extent, inconsistent.

- ❖ Lack of good quality advice & information and inconsistent advice from staff in some hostels.

Four interviewees made the point above. They claimed that that they receive conflicting advice from different members of staff and may need to talk to several members of staff in order to be fully informed on an enquiry.

Benefits

- ❖ Nine out of sixteen interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing support or advice on claiming benefits.
- ❖ Benefit payments are cut if you do not follow the rules laid down by homeless service providers thus making you homeless by virtue of not being able to afford accommodation.

A female rough sleeper made this claim. This point needs further clarification/verification.

- ❖ Difficulty in budgeting, as a rough sleeper, when benefits are received every two weeks rather than weekly.

Point made by a second female rough sleeper.

Employment

- ❖ All interviewees are interested in securing employment.
- ❖ Seven interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing employment services or advice on these services
- ❖ One interviewee claimed that lacking permanent accommodation did not put you in the right frame of mind for seeking employment
- ❖ Individuals from an African and Caribbean background stated that their ethnic background had influenced their job situation.

Five interviewees agreed with the above statement. One African Caribbean interviewee claimed that potential employers perceived black men as work shy and drug users.

Training

- ❖ Eleven of the sixteen interviewees are interested in educational training
- ❖ Two interviewees have experienced difficulty accessing education services or advice on these services
- ❖ Eight of the sixteen interviewees have no school or college qualifications
- ❖ Seven of the sixteen interviewees have never been on a training programme

Drugs and Alcohol

- ❖ Nine interviewees have a drug problem
- ❖ Four interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing drug use services or advice on these services
- ❖ Three interviewees have an alcohol problem
- ❖ One interviewee experienced difficulty accessing alcohol services or advice on these services

Abuse and Mental Health

- ❖ Three interviewees have a mental health problem and one has reported having had difficulty in accessing support from mental health services or advice on these services
- ❖ Eleven interviewees cited harrowing experiences leading to them becoming homeless, most commonly separation from spouse/children and being evicted by parents. Seven interviewees have suffered domestic abuse and/or other types of abuse.

Five out of the sixteen interviewees have experienced difficulty in accessing counselling services or advice on these services

- ❖ One interviewee has experienced difficulty in accessing domestic violence services or advice on these services
- ❖ Feeling insecure at cold weather night shelters and day centres due to male staff and homeless clients propositioning female clients for sex. The problem is exacerbated by mixed sleeping areas in night shelters.

Above was mentioned by one female interviewee.

- ❖ Women only night shelters, day centres and hostels are needed to ensure female clients are not propositioned for sex by male clients and staff. At the least, an end to mixed sleeping areas in night shelters.

Above was mentioned by one female interviewee.

Life Skills

- ❖ There is a need for life skills training to prepare clients to make the adjustment from hostel to independent living in permanent accommodation.

One interviewee claimed that the lack of life skills problem is exacerbated by hostels not providing clients with the capacity to run their day to day life- cooking, cleaning, basic DIY and paying bills. Clients become institutionalised, dependent on the hostel system.

Client involvement in policy decision-making

- ❖ Service user involvement in policy decision making.

Three interviewees expressed the above need.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Clients' Profiles					
Name	Sex	Ethnic Group	Age	Special Needs	Currently living
Client 1	Male	Black British	36-45	Mental Health Drug Use	Hostel
Client 2	Male	Black British	36-45	None	Hostel
Client 3	Male	Black British	36-45	None	Supported housing
Client 4	Male	Black British	36-45	None	Friends and family
Client 5	Male	Black British	36-45	Ex-Drug Use	Supported housing
Client 6	Female	Black British	18-25	None	Supported housing
Client 7	Female	Black British	36-45	Drug Use Alcohol Use	Sleeping rough
Client 8	Male	Nigerian	36-45	None	Hostel
Client 9	Female	White and African	46-55	Physical Health	Sleeping rough
Client 10	Male	Indian	26-35	Physical Health	Sleeping rough
Client 11	Male	Italian	26-35	Drug Use Alcohol Use	Sleeping rough
Client 12	Male	Polish	26-35	Drug Use	Sleeping rough
Client 13	Male	White Irish	26-35	None	Cold Weather Shelter
Client 14	Male	White Irish	18-25	None	Hostel
Client 15	Male	Caribbean	42	Drugs & Alcohol	Sleeping rough
Client 16	Female	Filipino	18	None	Hostel