

Millennium Cohort Study Briefing 2

Ethnicity and social capital among mothers

Based on Chapter 3 of *Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): The first five years*

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About these briefings

This Briefing is one of 14 that distil the key findings of the first three surveys of the Millennium Cohort Study, as collected in *Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): The first five years*.

The study has been tracking the Millennium children through their early childhood and plans to follow them into adulthood. It covers such diverse topics as parenting; childcare; school choice; child behaviour and cognitive development; child and parental health; parents' employment and education; income; housing; and neighbourhood.

It is the first of the nationwide cohort studies to over-sample areas with high densities of ethnic minorities and large numbers of disadvantaged families.

For the first survey, in 2001–2, interviewers visited the families of nearly 19,000 children aged 9 months throughout the United Kingdom. It established the circumstances of pregnancy and birth, as well as the families' social background. The second survey recorded how nearly 16,000 cohort children were developing at age 3. The third survey, when they were age 5, involved almost 15,500 children and provided a uniquely

detailed account of their physical, cognitive and social development in the year they entered school.

The study is housed at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London. It was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council, whose funding has been supplemented by a consortium of government departments.

Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): The first five years, edited by Kirstine Hansen, Heather Joshi and Shirley Dex, The Policy Press, 2010, can be ordered via www.policypress.co.uk

Introduction

Social capital is a concept that has provoked great discussion and attracted the interest of policy-makers in many nations. It has many definitions, but in the context of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) it is James Coleman's that is perhaps most helpful. He describes social capital as the set of resources generated in 'family relations and in community social organisation ... that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person' (Coleman 1994: p.300).

This Briefing focuses on MCS families' social resources, as reported by the mothers. Their social and support networks, and experiences of their local areas, will be relevant to their children as they grow up. We look at this issue through the lens of the mother's ethnicity because social capital is seen as particularly important for minority ethnic groups. Why should this be so? The disadvantages faced by many minority groups can be counterbalanced by high levels of social capital within the home and community. For example, economically disadvantaged minority ethnic communities may still encourage high educational aspirations. Conversely, previous research shows that strongly bonded social groups can foster an anti-achievement culture. A further concern is that while tightly-knit minority groups may have 'bonding' social capital they may lack 'bridging' capital, in the shape of links with other ethnic groups.

This may reinforce their labour-market disadvantage.

This Briefing also considers why minority ethnic groups may prefer to cluster together. We focus on families' social ties and trust within the neighbourhood, experiences of racism, religious affiliation, and attitudes towards 'mixed-race' schooling.

Ethnicity, nationality, language and religion

Eighty per cent of black Caribbean MCS mothers were born in the UK, compared to 27 per cent of black African mothers (Table 1). Bangladeshi mothers were the least likely to be born in the UK (9%), substantially less than Pakistani (41%) and Indian mothers (49%). This reflects the dates of the main migration streams into the UK and also the practice of transnational marriage by South Asian groups. Ninety per cent of Bangladeshi mothers and 72 per cent of Pakistani mothers had partners who were not UK-born.

Forty-three per cent of Bangladeshi mothers and 27 per cent of Pakistani mothers (Table 2) spoke either mostly or exclusively in a language other than English at home – less than 2 per cent exclusively. The lack of fluency in English that these figures appear to reflect may restrict their interactions with the wider society, including their children's schools.

It is also significant that 44 per cent of Pakistani and 41 per cent of Bangladeshi mothers had no qualifications, compared to 8 per cent of white and 10 per cent of black Caribbean mothers.

MCS surveys confirm that religion is strongly tied up with ethnicity. White mothers interviewed when their child was aged 5 were by far the most likely to say they had no religion (43%), with the majority of the remainder divided between Protestants (35%) and Catholics (12%). Black African and black Caribbean mothers were the most likely to identify themselves as Christian although there was also a substantial Muslim minority (26%) among black African mothers. Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were almost exclusively Muslim, whereas Indian mothers were divided mainly between Hinduism (41%), Sikhism (34%) and Islam (13%).

Weekly religious attendance was more common among Sikh (32%) and Catholic mothers (31%), whereas only 13 per cent of Protestant mothers attended religious services weekly, and 61 per cent did so rarely or never. Muslim women were, however, the most likely never or rarely to attend religious services (65%). Islam traditionally encourages women to remain at home, and many British mosques still do not permit entry to women. To the extent that mosques form focal points for Muslim communities, exclusion from the mosque may contribute to social exclusion for these mothers.

Family structure and size

Family structures vary considerably between ethnic groups. Half of the black Caribbean mothers and 40 per cent of the black African mothers were lone parents. However, the vast majority of Bangladeshi (93%), Indian (90%) and Pakistani (86%) mothers lived in married-couple families in 2006. White mothers were the most likely to be cohabiting (18%).

The number of children in households (including stepchildren) also differs by ethnic group. Two-thirds of Bangladeshi and Pakistani mothers had three or more children, compared to a third of white mothers.

Table 1
Country of birth and mothers' ethnicity

	Mothers' ethnic group								Total
	White	Mixed	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Black Caribbean	Black African	Other	
Country of birth									
UK born (%)	95.5	69.7	48.6	40.5	8.5	80	27.3	20	90.6
Not UK born (%)	4.5	30.3	51.4	59.5	91.5	20	72.7	80	9.4
Number of mothers	11,552	111	328	535	204	154	237	222	13,343

The prevalence of extended, rather than nuclear, family units varies by ethnicity too. Indian (24%), Bangladeshi (15%) and Pakistani (16%) mothers were more likely to live with a grandparent of the cohort child than white mothers (2%).

Neighbourhood ethnic composition

In 2000/1, MCS families were sampled disproportionately from electoral wards with high minority ethnic populations and from other disadvantaged wards. Bangladeshi mothers were most likely to be drawn from wards with high minority ethnic populations (85%), whereas black Caribbean mothers were most likely to live in other disadvantaged wards in England (34%). By 2006, the pattern of ethnic segregation persisted.

White mothers lived in wards where, on average, 96 per cent of residents were white (2001 census). The equivalent percentages for other ethnic groups were much smaller but still indicate a degree of ethnic segregation: Pakistani (21% of their own ethnic group), Indian (15%), Bangladeshi (13%), black African (9%) and black Caribbean (8%).

Neighbourhood ties and trust

As part of the MCS age 5 survey, mothers were asked four questions about their neighbourhood:

- Is this a good area for raising children?
- How safe do you feel in the area?
- Are you friends with other parents in the area?
- Do you have other friends and family in the area?

The responses tell us something about their social ties and levels of trust.

White mothers were most likely to believe that their area was excellent for bringing up children (35%), followed by Indian mothers (30%). Mothers from other ethnic groups were much less likely to share this view. Answers to the question about feeling safe also varied by ethnicity. Mothers of black Caribbean, mixed and black African origin were substantially less likely than other groups to say they felt very safe. When asked about their social networks

in their neighbourhood, 90 per cent of white mothers said they were friends with local parents. The figure was lower for other ethnic groups and black African mothers were least likely to be friends with local parents.

Mothers were also asked whether they had other friends and family in the area. Bangladeshi (56%) and Pakistani (53%) mothers were the most likely to have both friends and family in the local community. This may show the positive side of residential concentration. Just over half of white mothers also had both friends and family nearby, compared to 36 per cent of black Caribbean mothers and only a quarter of black African mothers.

Experiences of racism

Mothers were asked at the age 5 survey whether they had received verbal racist insults in the previous 12 months, whether they thought they had received racist treatment from shop staff within the same period and whether they had ever been treated unfairly because of their ethnicity. These questions were not asked of mothers of white-British, white-Irish, white-Welsh, or white-Scottish ethnicity. The majority of minority ethnic mothers said that they had never experienced any racist insults or treatment (Figure 1). However, a substantial minority of mothers from non-white groups said they had received racist treatment from shop staff. Black Caribbean (70%) and black African (68%) mothers were the least likely to report that they had experienced no unfair treatment because of their race.

Mothers in disadvantaged wards in England were significantly more likely to report experiencing racism than those in more advantaged English wards. The analysis of MCS interview data also revealed that the higher the proportion of white residents in a ward, the higher the chances that minority ethnic mothers would experience racism.

Attitudes to ethnically integrated schooling

Mothers in England, Scotland and Wales were asked about their attitudes to mixed-race schooling. The majority agreed that they would not mind if their child attended a school where half the pupils were from another race (25 per cent of mothers

Table 2
Language spoken at home when the child was aged 5

	Mothers' ethnic group								Total
	White	Mixed	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Black Caribbean	Black African	Other	
English spoken									
Entirely (%)	97.7	77.8	30	13.9	(6.1)	94.8	41.3	38.7	91.9
Mostly (%)	1.3	(13.5)	31.4	25.3	13.7	(4.5)	28	17.1	3.2
Half and half (%)	0.6	(2.2)	23.3	34.2	36.8	(0)	17.3	18.3	2.6
Mostly other language or no English (%)	0.5	(6.6)	15.3	26.6	43.3	(0.7)	13.4	26	2.3
Total	12,685	138	366	619	244	189	301	252	14,794

The percentages in parentheses relate to samples of fewer than 30 respondents.

Sample for Tables 1 and 2: All mothers (natural, adoptive, foster and step) who completed the main interview at MCS3 (the age 5 survey) and for whom ethnicity, and in Table 1 country of birth, was classified. All tables in this Briefing display unweighted observations, and percentages weighted to maintain proportions underlying the MCS sample design and to adjust for different drop-out rates to age 5.

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strongly agreed and 30 per cent agreed). Although this was asked in a self-completed questionnaire, some mothers may have been wary of answering this question in any other way. White mothers were least likely to agree (12% disagreed and 5% disagreed strongly).

When a number of factors were considered together, tolerant responses to ethnically mixed schooling appeared more likely where mothers had higher degrees; no religious affiliation; low income; or were not legally married. Tolerant responses were also more likely for mothers in all minority ethnic groups (except black Caribbean) and for those living in disadvantaged wards, despite, or perhaps because of, these being more ethnically diverse than 'non-disadvantaged areas'.

In Northern Ireland, an equivalent question was asked regarding religion. Sixty-three per cent of Protestant mothers and a similar proportion of Roman Catholics (65%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they would not mind their child attending a school where half the children were from a different religious background.

Conclusions

It is sometimes suggested that ethnic diversity leads to lower levels of neighbourhood social capital, in terms of social ties and trust (Putnam 2007). The debate on ethnic residential segregation in Britain has consequently focused on the supposed reluctance of certain groups to integrate. This Briefing highlights some of the reasons that minority ethnic mothers may have for clustering in particular areas. Avoiding racism may be seen as a 'push' factor, while social ties and trust within the neighbourhood can be a 'pull' factor. This raises questions about whether ethnic residential clustering is an unequivocally 'bad thing'.

Our findings on the effect of ethnic residential segregation on attitudes to mixed schooling are not clear-cut either. Mothers in non-disadvantaged wards in England were less likely to accept the idea of mixed-race schooling than either mothers in disadvantaged wards (where mixed-race schools are more common) or mothers in Scotland and Wales (who may have

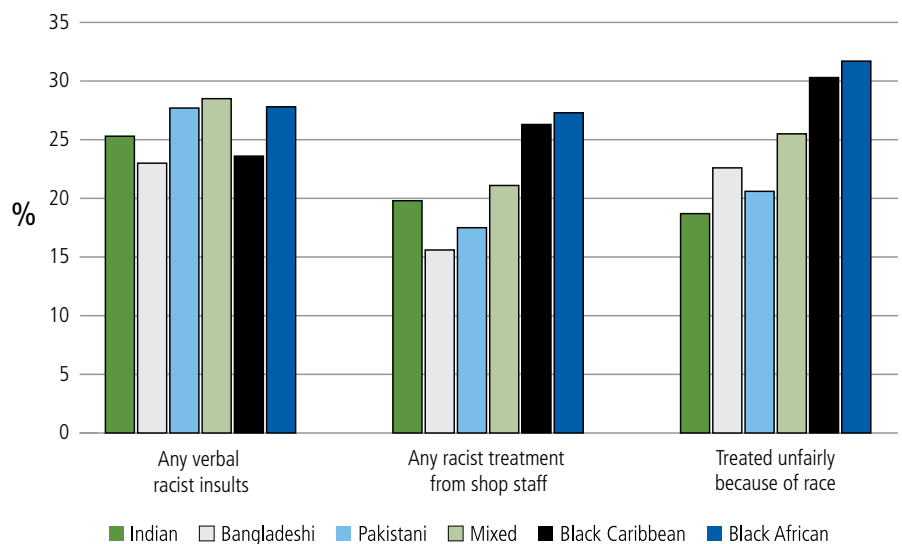
Key statistics

35 per cent of white mothers and 30 per cent of Indian mothers said that their home area was an excellent one in which to bring up children.

56 per cent of Bangladeshi mothers said they had both friends and family in the local community even though only 9 per cent of them were born in the UK.

65 per cent of Roman Catholic and 63 per cent of Protestant mothers in Northern Ireland said they would not mind if their child attended a school where half the pupils were from a different religious background.

Figure 1
Mothers' experience of racism in 12 months to MCS3 (age 5 survey)



regarded this as a hypothetical question because these countries have relatively small minority ethnic populations). Nevertheless, the proportion of white people living in a ward had no impact on responses to this question.

Future MCS surveys will be able to track the impacts of some of the forms of social capital discussed here. Research questions could include: the impact of mothers' perception of neighbourhood safety on children's freedom of movement and health; the effects of a mother's social networks on her wellbeing and her children's; and mothers' experiences of racism and children's wellbeing. It will also be possible to compare mothers' attitudes to racially mixed schooling and cohort

members' political attitudes; and mothers' social capital and children's educational attainment and eventual occupations.

References

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- Putnam, R. D. (2006) 'E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30 (2), 137–174.