

A Systematic Review of the Literature on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in sport and physical recreation

Summary

Review conducted by Jonathan Long, Kevin Hylton, Karl Spracklen, Aarti Ratna and Stephen Bailey of the Carnegie Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University

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Foreword

As society becomes more diverse and issues of integration become more challenging we are faced with complex community development and equality issues which are at the forefront of helping to promote the inclusion of all groups. The need to open up the benefits of sport in the UK to all sectors of society is widely acknowledged and has become an increasingly important issue over the past few years.

A commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity in sport and physical recreation across all groups in society is a tenet of policy and programme design for the sports councils. This commitment has been reflected in the development and implementation of the Equality Standard for Sport and other initiatives to encourage governing bodies and other delivery agencies to address inequality and promote participation and inclusion.

In order to inform their policy and practice in this area, Sporting Equals and the Sports Councils commissioned Jonathan Long and colleagues from the Carnegie Research Institute to review what is known about participation in sport and physical recreation by BME communities in the United Kingdom, and to identify how participation opportunities to such communities might be extended and improved.

While a combination of legislation and wider action has brought us a long way, research suggests that inequality and discrimination persist in the provision of and access to sport and physical recreation opportunities by black and ethnic minority (BME) communities¹. These communities are poorly represented at decision making levels and for a number of reasons are excluded or face a range of barriers to sports participation.

There is significant variation in terms of ethnic composition between the home countries. However, research indicates a number of common barriers to participation in sport and physical recreation for BME communities throughout the United Kingdom. Key barriers include: material constraints, concerns about racial discrimination, and access to culturally-appropriate sport and physical recreation opportunities.

- *Socio-economic status has been demonstrated to be a major factor in the inclusion in, and exclusion from, regular and higher levels of sport participation. Being a member of a BME community is associated with higher incidences of disadvantage stemming from long-term unemployment, low income, poor living conditions and poor health, which act as material constraints on participation.*
- *Research demonstrates the damaging impact racism has on participation in sport by people from BME communities. Racial and ethnic barriers have been the focus of a small body of research that has considered the dynamics of ethnic differences and identities and relations in and through sport. It is generally*

¹ At a macro level, a number of surveys (e.g the Active People Survey, and the Sports Equity Index) indicate lower levels of participation among BME communities when taken together and compared with white groups.

agreed that the experiences of BME communities in sport are mediated by racism.

- *Evidence shows that a lack of cultural understanding and awareness of the needs of BME communities in sport and physical recreation, and, in some cases, a lack of consultation with BME communities in the development and provision of culturally-appropriate facilities and services can be a barrier to participation.*

The ensuing report provides a valuable analysis of research and policies regarding participation in sport by BME communities, the nature of barriers that may deter participation and the support that may facilitate participation.

Our thanks go to Jonathan Long, Kevin Hylton, Karl Spracklen, Aarti Ratna and Stephen Bailey for producing this important review which we hope will improve the development of policy and practice to increase the participation of BME communities in sport and physical recreation.

The Review

The Carnegie Research Institute was commissioned by Sporting Equals and the Sports Councils to conduct a systematic review of the literature on participation in sport and recreation by Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. The brief was to focus on UK material from the past ten years, to compile an electronic, bibliographic database and use that to assess the policy significance of existing knowledge in the drive to widen and increase participation.

Although the field might still be considered under-researched over 300 items were identified. Judgements were made on the quality of the research on the basis of the methodological and theoretical soundness and the credibility of the link between the conclusions and the data. The various items were collated in an electronic, bibliographic database and coded as: substantive research of good quality; related public statistics and policy documents; and other related materials of interest.

The research, policy and practice contained in this body of work is set within an expanding national and international framework of policy and legislation concerned with human rights and principles of equity. The sports councils and Sporting Equals have played a significant part in this through initiatives like the Equality Standard. They have not been acting in isolation, but have received support from other sports bodies with initiatives both to challenge discrimination and inequality and to promote participation and inclusion. Nonetheless, there still seems to be a measure of disconnection between research, sports policies and equality policies. Indeed, sports policies are sometimes based on limited representations of racism and so are inhibited in the way they address racial equality.

Key Findings

The non-white population of the UK is still a small minority (92.1% white at the 2001 Census), but the steady increase in Black and minority ethnic groups is set to continue over the period 2001-2020. There is enormous variation in ethnic make-up across different parts of the UK: Scotland, Wales and particularly Northern Ireland are much 'whiter' than any English region. In terms of the non-British population other non-white groups are significant (including the Irish they amount to a further 4.4% of the population in England in 2005, for example), though given scant regard in the research literature. The numbers from Black and minority ethnic communities is increasing. Estimates for the UK in 2020 suggest 11.4% will be non-white, though still with large regional variation (at one extreme is Outer London at 35.5%).

Despite legislation, campaigning and education, racism persists. In the British Social Attitudes Survey (2006), 30% of respondents described themselves as very or a little bit prejudiced against people of other 'races' (and those are the ones with sufficient insight to recognise it). That is not as high as the 39% in 1987, but an increase from the low of 25% in 2001. And in the Citizenship Survey (England and Wales, 2007) 56% reported racial prejudice to be increasing.

Participation data appear to confirm the relatively low levels of participation among BME communities. For a range of key performance indicators non-white respondents record lower levels of involvement than white. However, when ethnic

groups are disaggregated the 'mixed' ethnic groups show consistently higher levels of participation. At the same time the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities show consistently low levels of participation until individual sports are examined, when relatively high proportions of males can be seen to play football (true also for other BME communities and for women as well as men) and cricket, for example. Even these figures are not quite what they seem as the higher participation can in large part be explained by the younger age profile of BME communities. In terms of sports participation gender disparity is greater among BME communities.

Significantly, the generally lower levels of involvement by BME communities are not confined to active participation, but extend to spectating, volunteering and administration (particularly on the part of Asian groups). The balance is more even among coaches, but the Asian groups are still under-represented. BME communities are under-represented in official positions within sports organisations. Hence the prevailing whiteness of the institution and culture of sport establishing a set of norms that deter participation by the wider community.

The various research studies confirm the presence of racism in sport and PE and demonstrate its damaging influence on individuals and on participation in sport, though with varying assessments of its significance. They challenge the convenient blaming of a small number of hooligan fans or unrealistic expectations of minority ethnic groups. People working in sports organisations need to have a more sophisticated understanding of racisms in order to promote racial equality.

Anti-racism is still an arena of variable practice and levels of commitment and there is currently a lack of evidence around what works.

Research has drawn attention to a measure of denial of racism that contributes to racism being overlooked. Assessing the construction of sport, some researchers argue that it might be more profitable to address the everyday whiteness of sporting cultures and organisations.

Being a member of a BME community is associated with higher incidences of disadvantage stemming from long-term unemployment, low income, poor living conditions and poor health, which act as material constraints on participation. However, important though it is, ethnicity is not the sole defining criterion. It is the way ethnicity intersects with gender, class, income, disability, age, religion and other factors that shapes sporting opportunities.

Media portrayals and racial stereotypes held by people in the sporting world construct a barrier to fulfilling participation. Stereotypes do not have to be negative to restrict opportunity.

Research has highlighted shortfalls in sporting capital (e.g. in the form of knowledge and contacts) that may frustrate involvement, and it also demonstrates the importance of building capacity so that those from BME communities are better able to contribute to provision.

Opportunities for women-only participation are identified as desirable, but there is a more ambivalent assessment of separate leagues for ethnic groups because they

may frustrate the development of talent and progression. Clubs dominated by people from BME communities are often seen as being separate, even when they integrate a range of ethnicities. Nonetheless, the research evidence calls for targeted provision that is sensitive to the needs of BME communities, not just to secure increased participation in sport but also to promote community development.

The short-term nature of many projects is identified as a challenge to developing sustained participation never mind wider sporting and social impacts.

Clear examples are now available to demonstrate good practice in consulting with BME communities to ensure appropriate facilities and services. Some examples of good practice may be overlooked because they lack rigorous empirical evidence to substantiate their work. These need to be carefully assessed to determine what should be passed on to others. Poor dissemination of these ideas means wheels have to be reinvented. There is a need for this knowledge to be disseminated so that expertise can be developed amongst practitioners.

Recommendations

The report arrives at 25 recommendations for policy, practice and research.

Policy

Policymakers around the UK should evaluate carefully what they can take from the research conducted elsewhere in the UK and how best to apply that to their own particular demographic, social, cultural and political settings.

A higher profile should be afforded in policy documents (and annual reports) to the diverse cultural and religious needs of BME communities.

Sport administrators need to make sure that mainstream equality policies are integrated into sport.

The Sports Councils should help to sustain Sporting Equals in working with National Governing Bodies and other sport organizations/providers to promote racial equality and a wider understanding of racism.

Funding for less established groups should be prudent but not overly-bureaucratic to prevent the cost of monitoring grants exceeding the grant itself.

A stipulation of funding should be the incorporation of an evidence-based report on good practice in relation to BME populations (and other equity areas). What is learnt from this should be disseminated.

To have more general value, auditing of staff employed from BME groups needs to be collated.

Policy should reflect a willingness to take risks and innovate.

Practice

Arrange training for policymakers and practitioners on intersectional issues and the complexities of BME issues. Training is needed to offer those working in sport an understanding of the needs of other ethnic communities, and to encourage an appreciation of their own responsibilities to challenge forms of exclusion and discrimination.

Consider how the sporting capital of those from BME communities can be increased to facilitate progression from casual participation into sports organisations.

Encourage dialogue with BME communities and empower members of the local community to help plan, organise and deliver sport and physical recreation programmes.

Ensure that racial equality objectives in policies are converted into practice where diversity should be monitored.

Train sports facilitators from BME communities because research repeatedly shows the advantage of having schemes run by 'insiders'.

Good practice and successes should be regularly disseminated internally and externally.

Research

Develop and maintain an evidence-based good practice database that covers policy, practice and research.

More research to explore the experiences of BME girls and young women.

Repeat the Sports Equity Index using Active People Survey data, and conduct multivariate analysis of the Active People Survey to examine how socio-demographic factors act in concert to determine participation.

Supplement with qualitative research to offer explanations for the significant differences revealed by the quantitative data

Develop a 'toolkit' to facilitate research on issues of 'race', racism, racialisation, ethnicity and other intersecting oppressions.

The creation as well as the interpretation of large scale data sets needs to be informed by an understanding of how 'race' is constructed in our society.

Non-traditional research techniques should be shared and promoted with practitioners, particularly with a view to developing action research in conjunction with local communities.

Ascertain the impact of a host society's culture of sport and physical recreation on the sport needs and practices of refugees / asylum seekers. More research is required on sport's claims to be a tool for conflict resolution.

The sports councils should pool their resources to support research for those areas largely overlooked – e.g. the needs of black elders and non-British white minorities; appropriate provision in rural areas; the positive drivers that lead to relatively high levels of participation by 'mixed' groups.

The sports councils should consider making a joint approach to government departments like DCMS, DH, DCLG or the research funding organizations to pursue part of this programme.

Further Information

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<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/carnegie/cr1.htm>

<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/carnegie/8499.htm>

Sporting Equals

UK Sport

Sport England

Sport Scotland

Sport Northern Ireland

Sports Council Wales / Cyngor Chwaraeon Cymru

The full report is at:

The bibliographic database is at: