

**JRF programme paper:
Poverty and ethnicity**

Social networks, poverty and ethnicity

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This paper:

- sets out current thinking on social networks;
- considers the evidence on how networks affect people's experience of poverty and their ability to access resources and opportunities; and
- explores the relevance of ethnicity to social networks reflection and shaping of different cultures and socio-economic status.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) commissioned this paper as part of its programme on poverty and ethnicity which aims to understand the underlying reasons for variations in low income and deprivation among different ethnic groups in the UK and the problems caused. It also aims to contribute towards solutions to these problems.

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This paper was commissioned to inform the work of the JRF poverty and ethnicity programme, which aims to understand the underlying reasons for variations in low income and deprivation among different ethnic groups in the UK and the problems caused. It also aims to contribute towards solutions to these problems.

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Introduction

This paper briefly reviews evidence and current thinking about the links between social networks and poverty, and explores how dimensions of 'race' and ethnicity affect how these operate for people living in the UK.¹ It focuses mainly on the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)² communities and identifies how social network effects contribute to the occurrence of poverty, coping strategies and routes out of poverty.

Ethnicity is defined in this paper as pertaining to shared origins, culture, history and language.³ We are mindful of the 'ethnic penalty' associated with racial stereotyping, racist attitudes and discrimination that cannot be explained away by reference to class background or immigration.⁴ There is plenty of evidence, not least from government statistics (CLG, 2009a; Gilchrist, *et al.*, 2010a; Hills, 2010) that BAME people experience widespread inequality in treatment, outcomes and opportunities. However, the picture is complicated by a range of other factors relating to gender, age, class and so on. In particular, outcomes in many areas of social policy vary markedly across different ethnic groups (EHRC, 2010), and there are many instances of white working class communities also faring badly (Sveinsson, 2009).

Poverty is multi-faceted, complex and changing (Walby, 2009). It leads to social exclusion because poor people often lack the financial means to participate in the everyday activities characteristic of the society in which they live. We recognise poverty as having relative as well as absolute dimensions, and this is particularly salient for some migrants arriving from developing countries. The standards of material consumption will be considerably higher than they are accustomed to, while the welfare services and benefits provided to poor households are unlikely to have been available back home. For many the root causes of poverty experienced here find their origin in economic and political structures that reflect Britain's position in relation to globalisation (McGrew, 2010; Diamond, 2010).

Networks for access and exchange

Social networks comprise family, friendship, work-based and informal community relationships. These in turn are mediated through various forms of communication and connection, from face-to-face interaction to cyberspaces that transcend geographical distance. Social networks support extensive, complex and dynamic systems of exchange, influence and interaction. They affect life chances and outcomes because informal relationships link individuals not only to others in their immediate social realm, but they reach beyond this via the contacts of friends and acquaintances (Christakis and Fowler, 2010). These patterns shape how incomes, assets and resources are acquired and shared. They are crucial to understanding how social capital is held and mobilised, enabling people to access information and to organise collectively around common concerns. One way of thinking about social networks is to distinguish between horizontal ties, connecting peers to one another, and vertical ties which connect people at different levels in society, such as a tenant and the manager of housing services. The terms 'bonding' and 'linking' capital capture this difference, while 'bridging capital' is said to connect people with dissimilar interests and backgrounds, for example from different ethnic communities (Woolcock, 2001). Granovetter's notion of 'weak' and 'strong' ties is relevant to

understanding how different communities are internally connected and the extent to which they have links with others from different backgrounds that might lead out of poverty, for example through employment (Granovetter, 1973; 1974).

Social networks expand a person's asset base because they can use their relationships to engage with others to share resources, gain opportunities, improve their livelihood, develop entrepreneurial initiatives or challenge dominant assumptions. Collectively, high levels of social capital are associated with broader social goods, such as lower crime rates, and better health and well-being (Halpern, 2005; 2010). However, different communities customarily use their networks in different ways and this may vary between different ethnicities, and between rural and urban settings (Brook Lyndhurst Consultancy, 2010). Suggestions that areas with high ethnic diversity have lower levels of social capital, community cohesion and neighbourhood satisfaction (Putnam, 2007; Goodhart, 2004) have not been borne out by recent research (Twigg, *et al.*, 2010) It is likely that perceived 'liveability' (or quality of community life) reflects place-related features such as friendliness, ease of interaction, nature of public spaces, accessibility of local events and amenities that enhance and extend social networks (Worpole and Knox, 2007; Rowson, *et al.*, 2010). Other factors such as proximity, familiarity or convenience of contact affect how ideas, resources and opportunities are accessed and diffused throughout social networks.

Identities and cultural tendencies

Various aspects of identity play a role in the likelihood of people connecting and forming social relationships with others. The patterns of connections reflect a multitude of factors, some operating at the level of the individual, others associated with cultural, economic or political dimensions of society (Wetherell, 2009; Gilchrist, *et al.*, 2010b). Increasingly, kin and friendship networks span national boundaries and are facilitated by the growing accessibility of the internet and Web 2.0 technologies. Notwithstanding the 'digital divide', cyberspace may provide an alternative arena for re-configuring social networks because ethnicity should have less bearing on how people interact virtually – although it appears that the ethnicity of avatars (artificially generated identities with designated characteristics in virtual communities) affects people's willingness to respond positively to requests from 'dark-skinned' characters (Christakis and Fowler, 2010, pp. 262). Online services are likely to grow and it would be helpful to know more about how ethnic and economic differences affect communities' willingness to use these.⁵

Social conventions create both barriers and biases in the constellation of ties that have a changing significance and function at different stages in our lives. There is substantial evidence that bridging or 'weak ties' linking people with non-similar interests and backgrounds are essential in mediating the 'small world effect'⁶ that helps people to find jobs, partners and resources outside their usual community boundaries and enable them to integrate into wider society. The 'small world effect' refers to network configurations where a tightly connected cluster is able to extend its reach to other clusters if it contains at least one long range or boundary spanning link. Potentially this has the effect of widening horizons and opening up opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Cultural traditions and structural inequalities (including racism) affect the shape and patterns of community networks, for example, in relation to the proportion of mutual (close-knit) connections among members. This often appears as the tendency, known as homophily, for people to associate with those who share some resemblance or common experience (Krebs and Holley, 2006). This ‘sticking together’ may be a cause of social exclusion, cultural fossilisation and social stratification through an over-reliance on strong ties and bonding capital (Sumption, 2009; Phillipson, *et al.*, 2004; Phillimore, *et al.*, 2010) .

For recent migrants and settled communities experiencing racist hostility, it is not surprising that ethnicity supplies a potent and convenient rationale for ‘identity’ that cuts across generations, gender and locality, enabling people to lead ‘liveable lives’ and assert a positive sense of community (Gilchrist, *et al.*, 2010b). Systematic analysis of the social networks of geographical or work-based communities reveal how ethnicity remains a factor in separating different ethnic groups into economic niches and the ways in which culture or racialised biases maintain BAME individuals and groups on the periphery of mainstream labour and business markets (Greve and Salaff, 2005; Hofmeyr, 2008). Studies of Hispanic entrepreneurs in the southern United States indicate that a lack of social resources and institutional capacity restricts the rates of entrepreneurship among some ethnic communities (Wang and Li, 2007). It is likely that similar factors operate in the UK, rendering such communities more vulnerable to poverty. However, there has been little research in the UK exploring this, although work has been carried out in Canada, South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Catalonia as well as in the United States.

Networks and their impact on poverty

An individual’s position in a network impinges on many aspects of their lives, with many positive benefits and some negative effects. Generosity, goodwill and resources tend to flow disproportionately towards people who are central or well-connected, and this advantage is further boosted by generalised and reciprocal altruism – the more you give, the more you get. This means that for people who are already on the economic periphery, their social networks tend to magnify poverty and other forms of disadvantage (Christakis and Fowler, 2010, pp. 167).

Within family networks, short-term ‘borrowing’ is used to tide people through crises and intermittent financial hardship, but such arrangements occur only rarely between trusted neighbours or workmates (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). Micro-finance schemes such as credit unions and ‘money-go-round’ lending circles operate to fill this gap, though they are necessarily more formalised. The Grameen Bank works through lending money via small groups of (usually) women, but more importantly encourages links between those groups so that inter-group and intra-group processes of competition and collaboration lead to better economic growth and sustainability (Yunus, 2010). These boundary-spanning connections are vital in spreading entrepreneurialism and innovation to the wider society because they challenge embedded thinking and import fresh ideas. Similarly, vertical linkages operating through economically successful role models from the same ethnic background or within the same community have been shown to inspire young people in their thinking about future prospects (CLG, 2009b), as well as providing routes out of crime, disaffection and unemployment.

Networks operate as reference groups, establishing expectations about what can be achieved and what is acceptable to other members of the community. People's sense of their own poverty is derived by comparing their prospects with those around them. While community networks hold received wisdom about the causes and consequences of poverty, they also provide positive feedback, coping mechanisms and encouragement. They carry tales of success in careers, education and business, often associated with triumph over adversity. This can result in an epidemic of rising aspirations, entrepreneurialism and relative prosperity.

The attitudes and achievements of others in the network influence individuals as well as setting benchmarks for everyone. For some communities they can ingrain claustrophobic cultures of low ambition, worklessness and demoralisation. However, 'positive deviance' can help break harmful conventions by spreading beneficial patterns of thinking and behaviour through 'contagion' effects (Zeitlin, 1990; Fowler and Christakis, 2009; Ormerod, 2010). 'Catalytic individuals' (sometimes termed connectors and mavens) play a crucial role in the spread of innovation and new social norms, using their position in the networks and high levels of credibility to persuade, advise and encourage adaptation (Gladwell, 2000; Brook Lyndhurst Consultancy, in press; Bacon, *et al.*, 2008) .

The altruism and sense of 'shared fate' characteristic of most social networks provides a sound basis for collective action and shared care within and between communities. There are at least two aspects to this: a) recruitment of participants to carry out joint ventures that benefit the wider community (e.g. refurbishing a house for use as a Sikh temple) and b) mobilisation of network members to help each other in turn by pooling labour for specific occasions such as catering for a wedding. Although mutual collaboration in such cases is driven largely by necessity – due to the scale of the task, lack of private funds or unavailability of paid labour – it also serves to maintain solidarity among those involved, which can be crucial in hard times.

Networks may also provide the mechanisms by which community members and allies are galvanised for more critical forms of collective action, aimed at tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. They draw together campaigning alliances and, if sufficiently diverse, these underpin the development of new forms of progressive leadership that challenge the old order within communities, as well as questioning wider structural inequalities.

The relevance of ethnicity

The circumstances of different ethnic groups (their histories and intentions relating to migration and settlement; the quality and extent of cultural infrastructure; and previous experience of social and economic exchanges 'back home') may affect people's propensity to socialise with others outside the community or the extent to which help is proffered (or accepted) by neighbours. Some ethnic communities may be more inclined to invest in behaviour that promotes the common good or conforms with moral conventions. This may vary according to the cultural significance of different kinds of events. For example, there is a greater tendency of black (African-American) communities to rally round after the death of a spouse, and this mitigates the 'widower' effect which generally renders the bereaved husband more liable to illness and death (Elwert and Christakis, 2006). (Similarly, in some cultures

weddings are communal events; rather than attendance being restricted to extended family and friends, they become opportunities for networking on a grand scale).

There is also evidence to show the vulnerability of individuals from some BAME communities to social isolation, linked, for example, to higher levels of mental illness in South Asian women (Sashidharan, 2003; Smaje, 1995), substance misuse among young men of African Caribbean origin (Canning, 1999), and alcohol abuse and physical neglect experienced by older members of migrant Irish communities. Voluntary associations based on ethnicity or religion, sometimes referred to as 'single identity groups' can provide vital emotional and practical support, but conversely they may inadvertently reinforce 'grievance narratives' or deter engagement with mainstream services. There can be significant variations in the extent to which community networks either aid or inhibit access to information and provide sources of support for the long-term ill. For example, in one study Pakistani networks were shown to be particularly effective for information exchange as compared to Ghanaian networks (Salway, *et al.*, 2007).

For many people, ethnicity is clearly a salient dimension of their social networks. In recent surveys nearly half the population living in England report that they do not have friends from other ethnicities (DCLG, 2010). Several factors are said to hinder integration, including lack of social contact, different values or cultures and lack of understanding, but unexpectedly, the effect of this 'clumping' on employment rates is not completely negative. For individuals, there is an advantage in living among people who share your ethnic background because you are more likely to hear of job opportunities or to be recommended for employment (Patacchini and Zenou, 2008). However, there is contrasting evidence that an area's economic development is correlated with the diversity of residents' connections (Eagle, *et al.*, 2010). This poses an interesting paradox for policy-makers and planners, as well as communities themselves. On the one hand, encouraging a mix of experiences and cultures may present a strategy for tackling wholesale poverty in disadvantaged neighbourhoods through raising rates of earned income. In theory the creation of viable jobs and businesses will open up employment possibilities for everyone, but at the same time informal social networks among particular ethnic groups are likely to be attenuated, thereby diminishing the chances of being recruited locally. It would be interesting to explore further whether this kind of indirect discrimination can be averted through simultaneous strategies for promoting greater cohesion and encouraging education and enterprise among BAME communities.

Impact of racial prejudice and discrimination

In circumstances characterised by endemic racist and xenophobic attitudes, ethnicity continues to be a factor in how people relate to each other and to formal institutions. As a consequence of both racial inequalities in housing and prejudice operating over successive generations of migration, BAME residents are disproportionately represented in particular neighbourhoods that are high on the index of multiple deprivation (for example Robinson, *et al.*, 2007).

Racism, whether openly hostile or lurking in institutional cultures and practices, limits the opportunities and life choices individuals make. Therefore active participation in ethnic community activities and staying in a neighbourhood area where you feel safe makes sense because they ensure access to familiar cultural goods and supportive

social networks. However, this pragmatic strategy might prevent you from taking advantage of new employment opportunities or moving to a more prosperous area (Epstein and Heizler, 2009). Discrimination in recruitment can result in employment segregation, leading to job security but little prospect of promotion. For example, the over representation of men of Pakistani origin among taxi drivers in this country is an example of the ambivalent effects of ethnic networks in sustaining livelihoods (Wood, *et al.*, 2009). For second generation young people, ethnic networks can be beneficial in terms of employment, but also limiting in the longer term, restricting their choices and aspirations for education and careers. However, this is not straightforward and the impact on post-school options is also affected by class and the nature of schooling experienced (Lew, 2010).

Common experiences of overt and covert discrimination encourage people to connect to find solidarity and to organise resistance to the oppression and structural inequalities that deny them opportunities and access to fair remuneration (Sivanandan, 2008). In the past or in situations where this hasn't been forthcoming, communities have resorted to informal networks to acquire resources for investment through mutual loan arrangements, such as the *pardoner*, *biraderi* or *kommittee* systems used by early migrants to buy houses or set up businesses. Trust and potential loss of reputation for defaulters ensure that these are repaid in due course so that the capital is available for successive members of the community.

Migration networks – segregation and solidarity

Social networks formed through kinship and close community ties often display resilience capable of spanning physical separation over decades and facilitating patterns of chain migration, with pioneers providing intelligence, financial and practical support to new migrants (Boyd, 1989) (For an overview of the evidence on the benefits and detriments of migration see De Haas, 2010). Patterns of economic activity pursued by some migrant communities, such as in the restaurant and retail sectors, are sustained through both formal and informal social and entrepreneurial networks, sometimes termed ethnic social capital (Tata and Prasad, 2010). For example, many Greek Cypriot migrants started up fish and chip bars across London and the south east helping one another with loans, advice and information about suppliers (Kyprianou, 2010). For relatively widely dispersed ethnic groups, especially where there are difficulties around language and political status (Bauer, *et al.*, 2005) these networks can be of particular importance by maintaining cultural traditions and social ties, as well as providing the potential for economic collaboration (Fadahunsi, *et al.*, 2000) for example among the Tamils, Yemeni or Kurdish communities. However, sustaining financially marginal businesses may limit the choices open to some family members, but also stimulate 'higher' aspirations for the next generation. Their experience of working long, anti-social hours in the catering industry provides the motivation for a more congenial livelihood, though this may only be realised as relative economic security is achieved.

A continued orientation to 'home' and the financial obligations of sending back remittances and paying back loans may result in a higher tolerance to economic exploitation and low living standards, a situation which is exacerbated by their relative isolation from local institutions outside of work. For example, a TUC study of Lithuanian and Polish workers found that many reported difficulties with their

employers, with poor working conditions, below minimum wages and no contracts (Anderson, *et al.*, 2007). First generation migrants, especially if they view poverty in absolute terms or see migration as a temporary venture, can be particularly susceptible (Chappell, *et al.*, 2010). The evidence on remittances is overwhelmingly concerned with demonstrating how it alleviates poverty in the 'home' countries. A high proportion of remittance transactions use informal (often ethnically specific) networks and unofficial financial channels, such as hundi or hawala (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2003; Ballard, 2004) but little is known about the complex decisions that determine what proportion of migrant workers' incomes is sent back and the impact that this has on their standard of living while in the UK. Nevertheless, the well-maintained connections between the resident and home localities provide transnational networks that underpin business growth and survival in the UK (including the import of 'ethnic' goods for local consumption) (Kariv, *et al.*, 2009) or support 'social development' in the communities of origin (Oucho, 2008). For example, one small community group raised £20,000 towards the building of a school back in Pakistan (Phillimore, *et al.*, 2010)

Historic and structural divisions within ethnic communities continue to be played out through the social networks of migrant communities (Zadeh and Ahmad, 2009). Clan loyalties, tribal disputes and rural/urban differences from the country of origin may distort access to both local political influence and access to resources within Britain because they foster separation rather than enabling groups to co-operate around shared concerns and facilities (Griffiths, 2000). The extent to which these networks act as 'closed' structures also helps shape the choices that individual members make and determine the opportunities open to them. For some ethnic groups, such as Travellers and Gypsies, the insularity of social networks is maintained not only by lifestyle, but also the frequent hostility of the 'settled' community (Holloway, 2005).

The lack of security, economic privation and hostile political environment experienced by refugees and asylum seekers has seen the emergence of refugee community organisations in response to asylum-seeker dispersal programmes. These are largely semi-formalised defensive networks, as opposed to formalised constituted organisations concerned with fostering integration. Cultural expectations and social obligations to compatriots can inhibit adjustment to the new environment, especially for first wave settlers. This results in a tendency towards segregation as opposed to integration, which may limit people's choices and range of connections. However, by making links with friends from other ethnic backgrounds, young people are in a better position to manage the psychological transitions associated with migration: the letting go of traditional ways and opening up of new opportunities. Notwithstanding the benefits, this may in turn lead to inter-generational and gender tensions as younger members of the community develop their own more diverse networks (Epstein and Heizler, 2009).

Peer pressure and prejudice

Young people experiencing a sense of alienation and social exclusion sometimes find status, protection and identity through gang membership, with some evidence to suggest that these networks are based primarily on locality, while only partially reflecting the ethnic makeup of an area. Criminalised networks stalk marginalised communities, acting as informal economies around (for example) drug and sex

trafficking. These networks can operate transnationally, often along ethnic lines (Bovenkerk, 2001; NCIS, 2005) and provide their members with relative material wealth but may compromise personal safety. While they may lift some individuals out of poverty, they probably also have a detrimental impact through the exploitation of community members and disruption of more legitimate employment or entrepreneurial trajectories.

The perceived marginalisation and stigma felt by residents on traditionally white poor working class estates, particularly those located in areas experiencing de-industrialisation, have increasingly become the subject of both a media and political focus sharpened by concerns about high levels of anti-social behaviour and the racialisation of local issues such as school intake and housing policy (Pearce and Milne, 2010). The introduction of migrants and their apparent acceptance of 'poverty wages' can further fuel resentment and tension that the far right has become adept at exploiting. Networks based on mutual self-help form as residents turn to each other, explaining their situation in terms of abandonment by the 'politically correct' authorities and formulating 'English-ness' as a neglected ethnic minority (Clarke, *et al.*, 2009). These closed networks are potent repositories for myths and rumours, stoking hostility and resentment towards incomers, while further reducing possibilities for integration and mutual support across ethnic differences. As well as undermining cohesion, this entrenchment restricts the economic opportunities of both white and minority ethnic communities through mutual discrimination. It reduces people's motivation to overcome barriers to advancement through peer pressure, reduced levels of educational qualifications or lack of successful role models within immediate social networks.

Implications for policy and practice

As we have seen, social networks operate in ways that are both enabling and restricting of people's life chances and actual livelihoods. For communities living in the UK, ethnic dimensions relating to language, culture, patterns of settlement and orientation 'back home' affect how networks are configured and how they are used to avoid or to survive poverty. Networks also underpin economic and collective resilience, reinforcing a shared capacity to recover from setbacks and to adapt to changing circumstances (Edwards, 2009; Simmie and Martin, 2010)

Strong social bonds play an important role in people's willingness to share resources and effort when money is in short supply, thus ensuring at least minimal levels of well-being. Social capital theorists might, however, argue that bridging and linking connections are the key to enabling people to 'get on', rather than simply 'getting by'. The recession and cuts in public spending (especially welfare benefits) are already generating hardship and worklessness disproportionately amongst BAME communities (EHRC, 2009). Social networks will be necessary to combat and cope with rising levels of poverty, but could also be the focus of policy interventions designed to tackle inequalities, widen opportunities and maintain cohesion (Ormerod 2010). The integrated approach to equalities enshrined in the 2010 Equality Act favours this more nuanced view of people's lives, but has been criticised by some BAME commentators. Despite important work on 'good relations', recent research pays scant attention to social networks. (The latest triennial report from the EHRC

refers to refugee parents using informal networks to find information about childcare and acknowledges that social networks increase levels of political engagement).

In order to devise effective strategies, we need to know more about how social networks differ between different ethnic communities and how they are used to organise mutual support and to challenge forms of discrimination that lead to poverty. This can be considered both in relation to networks of compatriots settled in the UK and to the ties that orient migrants towards their countries of origin. It would also be of interest to investigate whether, and how, networks formed primarily around ethnic identity inhibit or encourage social mobility.

Potential avenues for research

Generally, it would be useful to discover whether the network effects observed among ethnic communities in other countries in relation to economic performance are also operating in the UK. What influence do patterns of settlement and remittance levels have on enterprise and employment for migrants and subsequent generations? What has been the experience of migrant workers from the A8 accession countries? How can policy encourage the development of 'weak ties' and the 'small world effects' of informal networks so that information, resources and opportunities can be accessed through people who have achieved high economic status, as well as transferring these aspects of social capital across ethnic community boundaries? What is the relationship between people who achieve economic success and others in their community of origin? Is shared ethnicity a meaningful basis for assistance and encouragement?

This can be explored in relation to solidarity and experiences of community organising, for example against poor employers or discriminatory housing allocation. Are there variations between communities and how do other dimensions of identity, such as class, gender and age, affect these? Do networks for campaigning and mutual support operate across ethnic communities, and if so, what factors determine their effectiveness and extent? Has this changed over time and how has it been affected by growing use of internet and social networking by young people to influence or move beyond their family and community expectations?

In terms of the current economic and political circumstances, it may be important to consider whether the recession has affected the abilities of BAME and white working class communities to sustain social networks, and, if so, how? What role do networks play in maintaining collective efficacy, or a shared belief that by working together, people can overcome discrimination and disadvantage? Are there implications for cohesion and equalities?

Overall, how can a social networks approach be used to inform policy and practice designed to:

- mitigate the effects of poverty especially among BAME communities;
- reduce the occurrence of racial inequality and relative poverty; and
- assist people to overcome disadvantage and escape from poverty?

Conclusions

There has been growing interest and a steadily accumulating body of evidence on social networks and the effects that these have on a whole range of behaviour and outcomes. Methodologies are still developing and not all are adequately able to investigate and present the nature of the relationships or the transactions that they convey (Burnage, 2010). Nevertheless, techniques that measure and map the network aspects of social capital offer fruitful insights into how different communities access resources and opportunities or are hindered from doing so (Morrissey, *et al.*, 2008).

Formal and informal connections shape people's lives at micro (individual), meso (community) and macro (society/economy) levels and, if possible, research should adopt an approach that allows findings to be compared and integrated. This should reveal some of the complexity and dynamism of social networks in relation to both poverty and ethnicity.

Notes

- 1 While 'race' has overwhelmingly been rejected in biological sciences as a meaningful or useful category, it still has a 'common sense' usage in defining population groups by their self-evident physical differences in relation to skin colour, facial characteristics, etc.
- 2 The terminology used to describe 'race' and ethnicity is a contested area; we have used BAME in this paper as the acronym that is now most broadly acceptable. However, we recognise that there are inherent difficulties in how ethnic groups are defined or categorised e.g. 'Asian' encompasses many different population groups that in themselves can be regarded as discrete ethnic groups.
- 3 To an extent 'ethnicity' can be used as a euphemism for 'race', but as a concept it has a legal definition and a sociological meaning beyond supposed genetic differences. Ethnic groups may define themselves, or be defined by others in relation to two essential criteria: a long shared history that the group is conscious of and a cultural tradition including family and social customs. In addition an ethnic group may also be defined in relation to religious observance, common geographical origin or descent from a small group of ancestors, language and literature, and by being a minority or being oppressed by a dominate group within a larger community. See House of Lords ruling *Mandla v. Dowell Lee* (1983).
- 4 The term refers to the residual disadvantage that can be attributed to ethnic background (Platt, 2007).
- 5 A study investigating the perceptions of a marginalised (Somali) community found a willingness to engage with the concept of eHealth and perceived the internet as beneficial (Flynn and Flynn, 2008).
- 6 This phenomenon was first noted by Milgram (1967). It has since been explained by, for example, Strogatz (2004).

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