



Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

EQUALITY & RACE (ETHNIC OR NATIONAL ORIGIN, COLOUR OR NATIONALITY) FACTSHEET

Introduction

Race is a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act 2010. This means a person is protected by the law from discrimination relating to your ethnicity, nationality or colour. Wales is less ethnically diverse than other parts of the UK. 87.5% of the British population identify as 'white British' but this figure rises to 95% in Wales. Since the last census in 2001 the minority ethnic population in Wales has remained constant. 2011 census data indicates there are an estimated 27,000 older minority ethnic people in Wales.

The issues

The older minority ethnic population in Wales is a marginalised group. Public service providers and policy makers have assumed the needs of this section of the ageing population will be met by families and communities. They have also often labelled this group as 'hard to reach'.

Many of these assumptions about socio-cultural customs and conventional approaches to caring for older members of certain ethnic or religious groups are increasingly less relevant. Economic forces and shifts in kinship arrangements have led to traditional means of meeting elders' needs no longer being easily accommodated.

There is a degree of understanding of the need for translation and interpretation services for some groups. However, the issue of the appropriate use of terminology is a matter that has blighted race relations. For many ethnic and religious groups the term 'elder' is used to ascribe status and respect. Similarly, although there is debate amongst commentators on the 'political correctness' of this term, many

older Afro Caribbean people will refer to themselves as 'coloured'. The most common manifestation of this problem surrounds the ongoing discourse on use of the terms BME (black and minority ethnic) and BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic). The use of either can most simply be decided based on the audience mix but the point is that terminology can become central to failures in engagement and poor or non-existent service delivery. Fear of getting it wrong can frequently lead to complete inaction leaving some older minority ethnic groups unaware of even basic services.

Older minority ethnic people are vulnerable to discrimination on many levels (multiple discrimination) as they get older but because they may have accepted the prejudice they have experienced all their lives and are far less likely to report either race or age discrimination. The psychological scars of a lifetime of discrimination may also come into play here. Cultural and religious considerations are often overlooked in health and social care settings and not recognised as the reason for distress, depression, anxiety and weight loss.

Many older minority ethnic older people encounter difficulties with pensions and the impact of high rates of unemployment and low pay accompany them into old age. 35% of older Bangladeshi and Pakistani people are in the top two groups of the poverty distribution.

Conclusion

In Wales' capital city there is an eleven-year difference in life expectancy between the more affluent wards in the north of the city and wards in the south, where large sections of the minority ethnic population live.

Rhetoric and the emergences of a hierarchy of equalities have led to the false assertion that we have achieved a great deal more than we really have in race relations. Older minority ethnic people are potentially most at risk of suffering the consequences of this misconception.

To see the evidence base for this factsheet and further resources visit www.olderpeoplewales.com