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Black and Asian probationers: Implications of the Home Office study

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Abstract This article presents the main findings of a survey of Black, Asian and mixed heritage men supervised by the probation service in 2001–2003. It discusses the long-standing concern that minority ethnic groups may be subject to discriminatory treatment in the criminal justice system, and examines the probation service's response to this concern. In the presentation and discussion of the findings, comparisons are made where possible with predominantly white probation samples. These suggest that minority ethnic offenders in the sample had received the same community sentences as white offenders with higher levels of criminogenic need. The possible meanings of this finding are explored, along with the implications of respondents' views of what constitutes helpful probation practice.

Keywords discrimination, ethnicity, programmes, social exclusion, supervision

Background and context

This article discusses the findings of a study of Black and Asian men who were under the supervision of the probation service in England and Wales in 2001–2003. Our focus is on those findings which may have particular relevance for probation practice and policy. The research report from which the article is drawn (Calverley et al., 2004) is available on the Home Office website for readers who require fuller details of the conduct and results of the research. The research was commissioned in the context of widespread and long-standing concern that people from minority ethnic groups tend to be subject, at all stages of the criminal justice process, to treatment that has disadvantaging effects even if it does not reflect overt racist discrimination (Phillips and Brown, 1998). Section 95 of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, requiring the Home Office to publish annual reports intended to help those involved in the administration of justice to avoid discrimination ‘on the ground of race or sex or any other improper ground’, reflects this concern. There is consistent evidence that Black and minority ethnic people, already disproportionately likely to be disadvantaged by poverty, unemployment and low educational achievement, may be further disadvantaged by the decisions made about them in the criminal justice system. They are more likely to be stopped and searched than whites, more likely to be arrested as a result, more likely to be charged – and charged with more serious offences – and more likely to be remanded in custody. They are more likely to be acquitted, but, if found guilty of offences of violence, more likely to be sentenced to custody (Phillips and Brown, 1998; Home Office, 2004). The Home Office itself recognized, during the course of the research, that the differences ‘are such that it would be implausible to argue that none are due to discrimination’ (Home Office, 2002a: 10).

Race and probation practice

The probation service, while formally committed to anti-racism – and sometimes accused of an excess of political correctness as a result (Sibbitt, 1997) – has been criticized for its failure to turn formal commitment into effective action. Since 1999, for example, Section 95 reports have not included figures on the ethnicity of the probation caseload because of the poor quality of data obtained from areas’ monitoring systems (Home Office, 2004). Introducing a report on the service’s work on race issues in 2000, the then Chief Inspector of Probation was ‘dismayed by many of the findings’, especially those that suggested disparities between work with white and with minority ethnic offenders (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2000: 1). The follow-up report was more positive, identifying a range of improvements in practice but noting continued deficiencies in monitoring, PSR quality, definitions of racist incidents, and staff support (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2004).

Generally, probation policy and practice on minority ethnic offenders have developed inconsistently and patchily. For example, HM Inspectorate of Probation (2000) noted that anti-discriminatory practice was stressed in the 1992 version of National Standards, was much less prominent in the 1995 version, and reappeared

in the 2000 version. At the level of practice, several accounts exist of local projects, including the production of resource packs and training materials, which remained local and, typically, dependent on the enthusiasm of a few committed individuals (Kett et al., 1992; Jenkins and Lawrence, 1993; de Gale et al., 1993; Briggs, 1995; Johnson et al., 1996; Butt, 2001; Durrance et al., 2001; Williams, 2001). A recurring theme in these accounts is the question of whether there should be separate provision for white and minority ethnic offenders, and, if so, whether minority ethnic groups should be further differentiated, for example by running separate programmes for Blacks and Asians. In the summer of 2000 Powis and Walmsley (2002) surveyed programmes for minority ethnic groups and identified 13 programmes that had run at some time, five of which were currently in existence. They found no programmes that were sufficiently evidence-based to meet the criteria for accreditation, a lack of consensus on the issue of mixed or separate groups, and variations in the definition of ethnicity. They concluded that while staff were positive about the programmes there was not enough evidence to justify a decision for or against separate provision. They recognized, however, that there were plausible arguments in favour of separate provision, such as those later advanced by Durrance and Williams (2003), who suggest that empowerment is a potentially valuable approach in working with people whose self-concepts may have been damaged by prolonged exposure to racism.

The research project

Our research was intended to fill some of the gaps identified by Powis and Walmsley (2002) and to provide an empirical basis for decisions on the best form of provision for minority ethnic offenders. We aimed to collect systematic information on the criminogenic needs and problems of Black and Asian offenders and to explore their experiences of contact with the probation service. We aimed to conduct 500 interviews with offenders, and succeeded in interviewing 483. They came from 17 probation areas, covering all parts of the country, including entirely urban and partly rural areas, and areas with high, medium and low proportions of minority ethnic people in the total population. It proved difficult, especially in areas with medium and low minority ethnic populations, to find as many interviewees as we had hoped, mainly because of defects in recording and monitoring data, and the final sample contained slightly more interviewees from areas with high minority ethnic populations than had been planned. Nevertheless, a higher proportion of the known minority ethnic offenders were interviewed in the areas in the medium and low categories, and the figures that follow are based, unless otherwise stated, on a weighting of the actual number of interviewees to ensure as far as possible that the responses are representative of the total minority ethnic population on probation in 2002. The original aim had been to interview 300 offenders who defined themselves as Black and 200 who defined themselves as Asian. In the event, 241 interviewees defined themselves as Black, 172 as Asian, 57 as of mixed heritage, and 13 in some other way. Of the total, 236 (48.9%) were or had been on orders requiring participation in a programme, against an

original target of 200. The differences between what was planned and what was achieved reflect the complexity of definitions of ethnicity, the growing proportion of supervisees who are required to attend a programme, and the apparently greater success of areas with large minority ethnic populations in identifying and keeping track of Black, Asian and mixed heritage offenders.

The sample

Table 1 shows the unweighted numbers of interviewees in different ethnic groups.

Table 1 Ethnic composition of the sample

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Black African	60	12.4
Black Caribbean	146	30.2
Black other	35	7.2
<i>All Black</i>	<i>241</i>	<i>49.9</i>
Pakistani	74	15.3
Bangladeshi	12	2.5
Indian	62	12.8
Asian other	24	5.0
<i>All Asian</i>	<i>172</i>	<i>35.6</i>
Mixed heritage	57	11.6
Other	13	2.7
Total	483	100.0

The mean age of the respondents was 29.7 years, and their age distribution was close to that of the probation population as a whole. The great majority (83%) said that they were British; 45 per cent said they were Christians, 16 per cent that they were Muslims, and 27 per cent that they had no religion. Seventy-six per cent of interviewees, and 83 per cent of those who defined themselves as Black, came from the areas with a high proportion of minority ethnic people in the population. Eighty-nine per cent were or had been on probation or community rehabilitation orders. Fifty-six per cent of the total sample said that this was not their first experience of probation, and 30 per cent of these had previous experience of post-custodial licences. Overall, 11.6 per cent had failed to complete their order or had been subject to breach action. Table 2 shows that interviewees tended to receive longer orders than the probation population as a whole.

One explanation of this finding could lie in differences in the offences that led to the making of the orders. A higher proportion of the interviewees than of all men who received community rehabilitation orders in 2001 were sentenced for offences of violence (17.5% against 9.5%) and robbery (6.4% against 0.3%), and

Table 2 Length of orders given to all probationers in 2001, and to the interviewees

<i>Length of order</i>	<i>Persons starting probation in 2001</i>		<i>Interviewees</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Under 12 months	6657	12.2	29	6.1
12 months	29,094	53.4	216	45.9
13–24 months	17,572	32.3	208	44.2
25–36 months	1147	2.1	18	3.8
Total	54,470	100.0	471	100.0
Average length	15.9		16.8	

Source: Home Office (2002b). Tables may not total to 483 because some interviewees did not answer the question

a lower proportion were sentenced for summary (mainly motoring) offences (29.5% against 39.6%) (Home Office, 2002b: Table 3.4). But, while the discrepancy in the figures for robbery is striking, it is important to remember that the seriousness of an offence cannot be simply inferred from its legal type, and it is possible that some interviewees interpreted as robbery what was in fact theft from the person. Another explanation is that the findings result from differential sentencing, a possibility considered later in the article.

Criminogenic needs and problems

The instrument used to measure criminogenic need was the CRIME-PICS II questionnaire (Frude et al., 1994). Its advantages are that it is relatively quick to administer; it relies on offenders' responses rather than interviewers' judgements; it has been widely used in probation research, including 'pathfinder' evaluations, and thus allows for comparisons with other probation samples; and it is known to be related to the risk of reconviction (Raynor, 1998). Four possible comparison groups were identified, of which the most useful was the original validation sample (the 'white comparison group') for CRIME-PICS II (Frude et al., 1994), since this was known to consist almost entirely of white males. Table 3 compares the present sample with this group, on the four dimension measured by CRIME-PICS II: General attitude to offending (G), Anticipation of reoffending (A), Victim hurt denial (V), Evaluation of crime as worthwhile (E), and Problems (P).

The survey sample scored lower than the white comparison group on all scales, with the single exception of Asians on the V scale. This is the key finding from the comparison, but there are also differences within the sample that are worth noting: Black respondents scored slightly but not significantly higher scores than the sample as a whole on all scales except P; Asians scored significantly lower on G,

Table 3 CRIME-PICS II scores compared

Scale	Full weighted sample	Black	Asian	Mixed heritage	White comparison group
Weighted N (unweighted N in brackets)	482 (482)	308 (240)	86 (172)	72 (57)	(422)
G	38.28	38.48	35.66**	40.61**	44.84**
A	12.20	12.27	11.15**	13.16*	13.89**
V	8.04	8.09	8.74*	6.79**	8.58**
E	10.50	10.59	9.73**	11.14	12.03**
P	26.62	26.33	26.86	27.36	28.62**

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$

Note: For the Black, Asian and mixed heritage groups the asterisks refer to the significance of the difference between the group and the remainder of the sample; in the final column, the asterisks show the significance of differences between the full sample and the white comparison group

A and E, but higher on V; and mixed heritage respondents were significantly higher on G and A but low on V. The only problem areas for which respondents reported greater difficulties than the white comparison group were relationships, housing (particularly among Blacks), health (particularly among Asians), and not feeling good about oneself (particularly among those of mixed heritage). When those on orders with a programme requirement were compared with those not required to attend a programme, the programme group was found to have lower levels of crime-prone attitudes and beliefs and self-reported problems. There were significant ($p = < 0.05$) differences among the groups in the proportion who did have a programme requirement: the figures were 51.5 per cent of Blacks, 39.5 per cent of Asians, and 66 per cent of mixed heritage respondents. This finding may have reflected differences in OGRS scores, which were available in only a minority of cases but were noticeably higher for mixed heritage offenders than for the other groups.

These findings are in line with those of previous studies (Merrington, 2001; Clark et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2003) that have compared the criminogenic needs and problems of white and minority ethnic offenders. They suggest that Black and Asian offenders tended to receive the same community sentences as white offenders with higher levels of criminogenic need. One possible explanation of this finding is that it is a result of differential sentencing, which would mean that some comparable white offenders were receiving less serious sentences, and that some minority ethnic offenders were more likely than comparable whites to receive sentences above the community penalties range. Overall, the findings on criminogenic needs and problems suggest the need for a balanced provision of services: as well as aiming to influence attitudes and beliefs, services also need to address

social and personal problems and disadvantage. We turn next to the nature of the disadvantage experienced by the interviewees in the sample.

Social exclusion and disadvantage

The Black and Asian interviewees had experienced, to varying degrees, exclusion and disadvantage in three main areas, which we can categorize as economic, educational and geographical. These are discussed in turn, with comparisons with studies of mainly white offender populations where these are available.

The 2001 census, like every survey before it, found higher rates of unemployment among Black, Asian and mixed heritage men than among whites, the rate being over twice as high for Black and mixed heritage groups as for whites (Office for National Statistics, 2003: 134). It is not surprising, then, that there was a high rate of unemployment among the interviewees: 65.9 per cent said that they were unemployed, 9.2 per cent that they were unavailable for work because of ill health or for other reasons, 16.6 per cent said they were in full-time work, and 8.3 per cent said they were in part-time or casual work. Their own earnings were the main source of income for 22.7 per cent of the sample, while 69.2 per cent were dependent on state benefits. Many respondents attributed their unemployment to racist discrimination in the labour market, and some added that the possession of a criminal record was a further disadvantage:

Loads of my Black friends, like me, don't have jobs. It's very hard to get a job if you're Black, and even worse if you've been in prison. And another thing, even if you do get a job it's nearly always a shit job that doesn't pay well or is boring.

Black Caribbean and Black Other, mixed heritage and Bangladeshi respondents had the highest levels of unemployment in the sample, and Indian and Pakistani respondents the lowest (more than 10% below the sample average). The same pattern emerged for many of the measures of disadvantage discussed below. The rate of unemployment can be compared with the 54 per cent found by Mair and May (1997), whose sample of offenders on probation was predominantly white. While high unemployment rates are found in all studies of known offender populations, the rate for the Black and Asian sample is still strikingly high.

Similarly, a much higher proportion of known offenders have no educational qualifications, compared with the population as a whole. Thirty-seven per cent of interviewees said they had no qualifications at all; the qualifications of those who had any were usually at the most basic level. The proportion who had no qualifications is lower than the 41 per cent found by Mair and May (1997) and much lower than the 80 per cent, based on estimates by probation officers, found by Stewart and Stewart (1993), but the figure disguises the fact that many had obtained their qualifications after leaving school, in training schemes or in prison. Respondents were more likely to give negative (40.8%) than positive (35.3%) accounts of their experiences at school, with some notable variations among ethnic categories: a majority (56%) of Black Africans described their feelings about school as generally positive; at the other extreme were Black Caribbeans (27%)

and Black Other respondents (24%). Only 12 per cent of Black Africans reported experiencing racism at school, compared with 19 per cent of Black Caribbean, 14 per cent of Pakistani, 23 per cent of Indian, 24 per cent of mixed heritage, and 33 per cent of Bangladeshi respondents; the figure for the whole sample was 20 per cent. Fifteen per cent of the total sample said that they had been suspended from school; again there were variations within the sample, with Black Caribbeans the most likely to have been suspended (22%) and Indian respondents the least likely (3%). Twenty-six per cent of the sample reported having truanted from school, with a range from 19 per cent of Pakistani to 33 per cent of Bangladeshi and Asian Other respondents. Education had also been disrupted by the experience of local authority care: 19 per cent of the sample said that they had been in care (Mair and May, 1997) found a figure of 18%), with a range from 3 per cent of Indian and Pakistani to 35 per cent of mixed heritage respondents.

Geographical or environmental disadvantage was inferred from housing tenure and type of neighbourhood. Almost two-thirds (64.4%) of the sample said that they lived in rented or supported accommodation; 18.6 per cent said they owned or were buying their accommodation; 12.7 per cent were in temporary accommodation such as a hostel, or were staying with friends or relatives; and 4.3 per cent said that they were of no fixed abode. The proportion who were owner-occupiers is much lower than the national average of 69 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2004), but similar to the figure that can be inferred from the discussion of housing in Mair and May (1997); the figure of 12.7 per cent in temporary accommodation is slightly higher than Mair and May's figure of 7 per cent. The 'temporary' status could be a lasting one:

I left home when I was 17. Since then I've been in hostels. [I am] 25 now – that's a long time. Because I've been moving from hostel to hostel I've been meeting new people who are into stealing and crime . . . If I had my own flat I wouldn't be doing any stealing or getting into trouble.

Not all respondents described the area in which they lived, but 20 per cent of those who did said it was a poor, high crime area, and another 13 per cent described it as an 'inner city' area. Almost two-thirds of respondents, however, said that they liked where they lived, and just over a fifth said that they did not. Areas were liked when respondents perceived them as friendly and when they knew many people there; reasons for disliking an area were that there were problems associated with drugs and crime, and high unemployment:

Nearly everyone here is into some sort of drugs. No one talks 'successful talk'. There's 18 year-olds who talk like it's the end of their life. Too much depression floating around.

Experiences of criminal justice

So far, the emerging picture of Black and Asian men on probation resembles other probation populations in experiences of social exclusion and disadvantage. Much

research suggests, however, that Black and Asian men may well be further disadvantaged as a result of discriminatory treatment in the criminal justice system. Interviewees were asked whether they felt they had been treated fairly by different personnel at various points in the criminal justice process. The results are shown in Table 4.

The most common complaints about the police and prison staff, the two groups most often cited as the sources of unfair treatment, were that they 'picked on' the respondent because of his colour, used demeaning language, and used unnecessary force. The police were also accused of making unfair assumptions of guilt and excessive use of stops and searches. Overall, those who reported most experiences of discrimination had significantly higher scores on the CRIME-PICS II P scale for problems than those who reported the fewest experiences of discrimination, which may indicate that discrimination contributed to their problems. Black and mixed heritage respondents were significantly more likely than Asians to report that they had been stopped and searched for no reason. Stops and searches that were seen as unjustified left many (50%) respondents feeling angry, annoyed, ashamed or embarrassed, and 20 per cent considered that the motivation for the searches was racist. Only 12 per cent took the view that the police were only doing their job, or said they did not mind being stopped and searched.

A high level of perceived unfair treatment in contacts with the criminal justice system is liable to reduce the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of those who experience it as unfair. According to Tyler (2001), people who have faith and confidence in the fairness of the law and legal institutions are more likely to feel an obligation to obey the law. Fair treatment can therefore encourage the development of a culture in which the dominant attitudes and beliefs are favourable to law-abiding behaviour; conversely, unfair treatment will reduce the sense of obligation to comply. This will, among other things, have implications for compliance with community penalties (Bottoms, 2001), and it is to respondents' experiences of probation that we now turn.

Table 4 In your experience with the criminal justice system, have you been treated fairly by . . . ? (%)

	Yes	No	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
The police	26.6	62.0	9.2	2.2
Your solicitor	79.4	11.8	7.0	1.8
Court staff	67.7	14.3	13.0	5.0
Magistrates	53.3	37.2	5.0	4.5
The probation officer who wrote your report	78.3	9.8	10.2	1.7
The probation officer in court	53.0	6.7	16.2	24.1
Judges	42.8	24.6	5.6	27.0
Prison staff	28.9	24.1	4.8	42.2

Experiences of probation

The research explored interviewees' experiences of probation and groupwork programmes, with a particular focus on whether supervisors and the content of programmes addressed the needs and experiences of Black and Asian offenders; this is an important aspect of 'responsivity' and thus a potentially important contributor to effectiveness. The great majority (77% of the 97% who answered the question) said that they had seen a supervision plan (compared with 66% in Mair and May's [1997] study); only 57 per cent, however, of those who were able to answer the question said that their views had been taken into account when the plan was drawn up, compared with the 75 per cent reported by Mair and May. Thirty per cent of those who gave an answer said that they had talked with their supervisor about their needs and feelings as a Black or Asian offender. The great majority (86%) said they had been treated fairly by their supervisor: they were treated with respect, and as a 'normal' person; their supervisor was someone they could talk to, who listened, and who was helpful.

In the unweighted sample, 72 per cent of 'main' supervisors were white, 22 per cent were Black, 6 per cent were Asian and under 1 per cent were of mixed heritage. In areas with high minority ethnic populations, 27 per cent of respondents had a Black, and 6 per cent an Asian, supervisor. According to the Home Office (2002b), 89 per cent of all probation officers on 31 March 2002 were white, 7 per cent were Black and 2 per cent were Asian; it appears, therefore, that at least some areas were operating a policy of allocating minority ethnic offenders to minority ethnic supervisors. Thirty-five per cent of respondents said that having a minority ethnic supervisor had made, or would have made, a positive difference; 56 per cent said that the supervisors' ethnicity was irrelevant, 10 per cent did not know, and 2 per cent were opposed to the idea of matching by ethnicity. This was one question where the ethnicity of the interviewer may have made a difference: interviewees were more likely to favour a minority ethnic supervisor when their interviewer was from a minority ethnic group, but the impact of this on the overall findings is limited, since a substantial majority of interviews were carried out by minority ethnic researchers. A preference for a supervisor from a minority ethnic group was usually based on the belief that a shared culture would increase understanding:

When I'm trying to explain things in my own slang he knows what I'm saying. I'd prefer to have a Black supervisor but I don't really mind. I think it's easier and more comfortable. Sometimes you talk about deep stuff and a white person wouldn't understand my upbringing. I don't know how they can help you if they don't know your way of life.

When asked what made a good supervisor, however, only 3 per cent of respondents defined this in terms of ethnicity. Interviewees were much more likely to say that a good supervisor was easy to talk to and willing to listen, understanding and sympathetic. There was no indication that in practice the ethnicity of the supervisor was significantly related to the perceived helpfulness of supervision, or to the likelihood of breach.

As noted earlier, just under half of those interviewed were on orders requiring participation in a programme. Ten per cent of these had been on programmes exclusively for minority ethnic offenders, of which the most common was 'Think First for Black and Asian Offenders'. Those who had been on such programmes were significantly more likely than those not on specially designed programmes to say that the group leaders were aware of their needs and feelings (77% against 40%, $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, respondents who had been the only minority ethnic member of a programme group reported feelings of discomfort and isolation. Most (66%) programme participants who responded said that the ethnic composition of a group was important, and 87 per cent of these thought that it should be mixed. Just 8 per cent of those who thought that ethnic composition was important thought that groups should consist solely of minority ethnic people; thus, despite the positive views respondents had about the leaders of such groups, there was very little support for the idea of separate provision for minority ethnic offenders. The opposite view was much more strongly and frequently expressed:

[The composition of the group] has got to represent life out there, hasn't it? If you were . . . in a group with no Black people you'd feel out of place. [There would be] no-one to relate [to] on your level or understand about being Black in this country. [At the] same time if you went in a group and they were all Black you'd think, 'Why do only Black people get these courses?' [Groups] need to be mixed.

Generally interviewees felt that they had been treated fairly on programmes, that the point of the programme had been explained to them, and that the programme had changed the way they thought about and approached problems.

On the whole, then, interviewees' accounts of their experiences of probation were positive: 63 per cent of the 96 per cent who responded described their contact with the probation service as helpful, 21 per cent said it was partly helpful and partly not, and 16 per cent described it as unhelpful. The figure of 63 per cent can be compared with 87 per cent in Mair and May's (1997) study, 71 per cent in Mantle's (1999), and 52 per cent in Farrall's (2002). The proportion of respondents who found their experience of probation helpful rather than not is thus in line with the findings of other studies, though towards the bottom end of the range. But it should be remembered that a substantial minority (35%) of interviewees thought they should have a supervisor from a minority ethnic group, and some of those who found themselves the only Black or Asian member of an otherwise white group felt isolated and uncomfortable. For some Black and Asian offenders, equality of outcome does not simply mean that they should be treated the same as their white counterparts.

Conclusions

The results of the quantitative assessment of criminogenic needs were that Black, Asian and mixed heritage groups all showed less evidence of crime-prone attitudes than comparable white offenders, and, to a lesser extent, had lower levels of self-reported problems. Within the sample, the highest levels of needs and

problems were reported by respondents of mixed heritage, and the lowest, on all but one scale, by Asian respondents. These findings give no support to the idea that offenders on probation from minority ethnic groups are likely to have distinct or greater criminogenic needs than white offenders. They are, however, compatible with (though they do not demonstrate) the existence of differential patterns of sentencing which mean that some comparable white offenders receive less serious sentences (below the community penalties range), and some minority ethnic offenders are more likely than comparable whites to receive more serious sentences (above the community penalties range). This possibility ought to be further investigated, and suggests that there is a need for continued commitment to anti-racism in sentencing and in pre-sentence report preparation. These findings also suggest the need for a balance to be struck: between services designed to change attitudes and beliefs, and services designed to meet needs and alleviate problems.

The exploration in interviews of experiences of disadvantage and exclusion showed that in many ways minority ethnic offenders on probation resemble the total probation population: they are disadvantaged economically, educationally and environmentally, compared with the general population. Early disadvantage was in many cases compounded by involvement in the criminal justice system, in which many respondents experienced what they considered to be unfair treatment, especially from police and prison staff; and they often attributed the unfairness to racism. This perception has important implications for the legitimacy of criminal justice in the eyes of minority ethnic people, and for the prospects of compliance with the requirements of probation supervision.

In terms of probation practice, and specifically of programmes, our findings tend to support the running of ethnically mixed groups rather than separate groups for minority ethnic offenders. There was very limited support (only eight respondents) for the idea of separate provision. On the other hand, there could be difficulties for some offenders, in areas with relatively small minority ethnic populations, in being the only non-white member of a group. Since it would be plainly indefensible to exclude minority ethnic people from programmes in such areas, the question of programme participation in such cases needs to be discussed on an individual basis.

The study found a range of experiences and views between and within the three categories of Black, Asian and mixed heritage offenders. This suggests that minority ethnic status should not in itself be treated as a defining identity from which other characteristics, including needs and problems, can be inferred. Respondents repeatedly said that they wanted to be treated as individuals, as 'normal' people, by staff who listened to them and respected their views. Practice therefore needs to be informed by awareness of diversity, while avoiding unwarranted assumptions about what diversity implies.

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