



EDITORIAL: RACE EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION

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Abstract

Welcome to this issue of the British Journal of Community Justice.

The papers in this issue highlight current and long-standing concerns about race equality in the criminal justice system and the challenges in identifying and addressing community tensions. Issues which influential 2017 Lammy Review brought to the fore. Our papers do not directly touch on the issue of policing, but it seems remiss not to mention the recently published Casey Review report (Baroness Blackstock 2023) into standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police (the Met). The finding that the Met is institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic is damning and profoundly dismaying. The issue of race equality and justice is not new. It suggests that lessons have not been learnt from the Scarman Report into the Brixton riots, over forty years ago; and the MacPherson report (1999) which first found the Met to be institutionally racist. The Met and policing more generally does not constitute the totality of the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Nevertheless, the Casey Review is totemic and warns against the dangers of complacency, self-regard and “turning a blind eye” to the issue of race and other equality concerns across the criminal justice system.

The papers in this issue

Our first paper by Anthony Goodman provides a detailed account of discrimination in criminal justice, “its history, policy and practice over time.” Focusing on probation, it documents the numerous studies and initiatives which have addressed the overrepresentation of black and ethnic minority people in the criminal justice system and thus supervised by the probation service, and the underrepresentation of black and ethnic minority staff in the service. Both groups have consistently been found to have a poor experience within the service. The paper reflects on anti-racist practice and research since the 1970s, recognising that the most recent 2021 HMIP race equality thematic inspection, “like its two predecessors, in 2000 and 2004, details how people of colour, both probation professionals and clients have reported being disadvantaged.” Goodman argues that the reunification of the Probation Service and the subsequent HMPPS Action Plan offer an opportunity to remedy this, if “practitioners hold anti-oppressive practice at the centre of professional practice” alongside the “need to build and develop trusting relationships with their clients.”

Our second paper by Kevin Ball, Avtar Singh and Trevor Worsfold from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) offers additional analysis of the material collected for the 2021 inspection, examining race equality in probation services in England and Wales from the perspective of procedural justice. The authors offer insights into the experiences of black and minority ethnic individuals on probation and probation staff set against the context of the critical race equality thematic inspection undertaken by HMIP in 2021. They identify that "the key elements of procedural justice – voice, neutrality, respect and trust – are often missing from both the supervision of ethnic minority people on probation and the treatment of ethnic minority probation staff members". Reunification is seen as an opportunity for change with the authors arguing that procedural justice is a "useful tool" to make progress on race equality as it aligns with probation values and best practice in supervision.

In our third paper, "Conspicuous by the absence..." by Paula Maclean and Laura Caulfield adds further to discussions in the previous papers by aiming to "illuminate the mistreatment, neglect, discrimination, and oppression" of Black women in the criminal justice system. Through in-depth interviews with eight Black women who had spent time in prison, their paper gives expression to the voices and experiences of this marginalised group, highlighting "participant's experiences of racism and discrimination on a personal and institutional level". They find that the "poor treatment and negative experiences" of Black women are due to "intersectional factors such as race, gender, religion, and class."; and propose ways to minimise exclusionary practices, in part through "integrating Black women's narratives into solutions." These women's detailed reflections on their experiences underscore the need for greater recognition and better treatment of Black women in contact with the CJS together with models for resettlement and rehabilitation that recognise the impact of structural inequalities,

Our final paper by Ben Foster, Matthew Williams and Pete Burnap takes a wider view of the issues by examining a multi-agency partnership model for cohesion delivery which has emerged in Wales. This aims to promote community cohesion in part through tension monitoring "understood as the regular inspection of potential community tensions, with the aim to detect, prevent or quickly respond to them." The authors present quantitative and qualitative analysis which seeks to map and assess the efficacy of the cohesion delivery network (CDN) established to operationalise the Welsh Government's tackling hate crime framework. They find a "lack of a coherent and cohesive plan for all partners to follow" which weakened coordination and cooperation between partners and the "tokenistic involvement of community groups in the CDN"; and call for open discussion as a way to address these problems.

All of our authors see opportunities for their findings to inform developments that lead to a less discriminatory criminal justice system, and we hope these papers provide you with insight and challenge your thinking.

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