



Listening to Minority Ethnic Parents

Their worries, their solutions

National Family & Parenting Institute Survey
conducted by MORI
October 2001

Parents worry. They worry whether they are doing a good, or good enough job, and they worry about what kind of world their children will grow up in. They worry about things within their control, and outside their control. The majority of parents want to do the best for their children in a rapidly changing world, yet never before have the pressures of the outside world impinged so much on family life, from changing patterns of work and the high level of family poverty to the increase in divorce and pressures on relationships.

In July 2001, the NFPI commissioned MORI to ask parents what is troubling them. We also asked them their views on successful families, and what makes a family strong. We asked a wide range of parents, including parents on high and low incomes; lone parents; parents living in different parts of England and Wales; parents working full and part-time, parents staying at home to look after their children and unemployed parents. We were interested to see the commonalities and differences in parents' views. There is a danger both in talking about parents and in planning services for parents, either to assume a commonality of interest between parents, or to over-emphasise the differences. Clearly, one size does not fit all.

The survey (*Listening to parents, Their worries, their solutions, NFPI, October 2001*) identified many broad themes of common concern, with some geographical and social variations. However, the main survey interviewed a relatively small number (53) of black and ethnic minority families, too few to look at common areas of concern or to highlight differences.

We commissioned MORI to run a further booster survey with 62 other minority ethnic parents so that we could get a wider snapshot of the thoughts and anxieties of black and ethnic minority parents. The survey was not able to look at the concerns of different ethnic groups – further research would be needed to discover in greater detail the common and differing priorities of different groups of parents.



The information from this survey provides a snapshot of the kinds of issues and concerns troubling minority ethnic parents today. We hope that it will help inform organisations providing family support services to parents. This briefing does not specifically address the issue of support and services for black and minority ethnic parents. The National Family and Parenting Institute has recently carried out an audit of family support services in England and Wales. It found that only 2 per cent of services nationally targeted parents of specific ethnic groups, although clearly other services were known about and used by minority ethnic parents. However, access to those services could also be an issue, not only because of language, but also because mainstream services may fail to take appropriate account of cultural commonalities and differences. There is a clear need to develop ways of giving support to minority ethnic families which are sensitive to, and reflect the culture of, different ethnic groups in the UK.

Key Findings

- Black and minority ethnic parents are most worried about managing children's behaviour and making ends meet.
- Almost a quarter of families were concerned about their child's education – a similar proportion to white families.
- Attitudes to discipline were similar in both groups. Both minority ethnic and white parents valued setting a good example and making children feel happy and loved. A small proportion advocated smacking.
- Questions on what makes a successful family drew out some differences. Black and minority ethnic families were more likely to highlight having enough money and a decent place to live as important factors, although all parents agreed that sharing time together and communicating well were most important.

Family life

Parents in both surveys were asked to tell the interviewer, without prompting, their concerns about family life and broader issues in society today. On the whole, black and minority ethnic parents identified

similar worries to white parents. Alcohol and drugs were a source of concern to 16 per cent of families (compared to 21 per cent from the larger survey), but it was not the main worry. Over a quarter of black and minority ethnic families (27%) worried about children's behaviour. The second most common concern was making ends meet – a worry for 21 per cent of black and minority ethnic parents, compared to just 13 per cent of other parents. The table below compares responses from both surveys.

Main concerns as a parent about family life today		
	Black and minority ethnic parents	Other parents
Children's behaviour	27%	20%
Making ends meet	21%	13%
Standards of education	17%	8%
Children being attacked	17%	19%
Risks from drugs and alcohol	16%	21%
Juggling work and family	10%	11%
Too much TV or computer	9%	8%
Erosion of family values	4%	8%

Parents were then asked about being a parent, and the problems that concerned them in their parenting. Anxiety about their children's education stands out as a concern for both black and minority ethnic parents – about a quarter of both sets of parents put education as their biggest worry.

Twenty-two per cent of black and ethnic minority parents were concerned about being able to provide for their children, reinforcing the anxiety also expressed about being able to make ends meet. This does not appear to be such a concern for other parents – 14 per cent were worried about that issue, although the percentage ranged from 7 per cent of AB parents to 18 per cent of DE parents.

Other worries received different priority between the two groups. Only 7 per cent of black and minority ethnic parents were concerned about not spending enough time with their children, compared to 14 per cent of other parents. 11 per cent of black and minority parents were worried about their children growing up too fast, compared with 18 per cent of other parents.

Ages and stages of child development

Anxieties and worries about the different ages and stages of child development tend to be universal. All parents said they found teenage years the most difficult, particularly early teenage years. Amongst black and minority ethnic parents, three in ten parents say that found the years 11-14 difficult, and a quarter found 15-18 difficult. These figures are similar to other parents.

Black and minority ethnic parents were, however, a lot less likely to say that they find birth and the month immediately afterward difficult (5%) than other parents (11%).

A significant minority of parents in both groups (a fifth) said they had not found any age or stage of child development to be particularly difficult.

Successful families

All parents, whatever their background, said that the top three most important factors for successful families are sharing family time, parents having a good relationship and being able to discuss difficulties with partners.

Black and minority ethnic parents were, however, more likely than other parents to talk about having basic decent living conditions and informal, supportive networks: 17 per cent talked about having enough money (compared to 13%); 10 per cent talked about having a decent place to live (compared to 4%); and 20 per cent talked about having family or friends to ask for help (compared to 12% of other parents). It is interesting to note that few new parents from minority ethnic backgrounds found birth and the early months particularly difficult, and to speculate whether the greater importance attached to help from family and friends might be a factor.

Other suggestions made by parents showed no difference between minority ethnic families and other families. They included: setting and enforcing family rules (11%), sharing responsibility for housework and childcare (8%), mutual respect (3%), discipline (2%) and trust (3%).

Telling right from wrong

Parents were asked to choose from a list actions which they thought would help to teach a child the

difference between right and wrong. Parents could choose more than one option. Black and minority ethnic parents showed the same views and attitudes as parents from the larger survey.

Parents themselves setting a good example (69%), making children feel happy and loved (57%), spending time with children (53%) are the three most important strategies for minority ethnic parents.

Like parents from the larger survey, about 43 per cent highlighted rewarding good behaviour, about a quarter of minority ethnic parents chose grounding their children, about 13 per cent chose smacking. Again, like parents from the larger survey, these figures seem to show evidence of a trend in parents' attitudes towards disciplining their children. Parents generally appear to support more positive methods, based on communication and praising their children. However, minority ethnic parents' primary concern is about managing their children's behaviour, and as with the larger survey, this may suggest a level of anxiety about bringing children up without recourse to punitive methods of discipline.

The National Family and Parenting Institute has recently published a report, *Understanding Discipline*, which reviews the research on what works and what does not work in managing children's behaviour. It found that children fared best with an authoritative approach to parenting, which combined affection and firm boundaries with an encouragement of children's independence.

This snapshot of the dilemmas faced by minority ethnic parents, like all parents, on the right ways to discipline children, suggests that more information on alternative ways of managing children's behaviour might be helpful, to enable parents to adopt non-punitive methods with confidence.

Information and advice for parents

The results from this survey suggest that black and minority ethnic parents have a slightly different attitude towards receiving information than the generality of white parents. They appear to be more open to the need for information and advice about parenting. When asked about receiving information on child development, only a third said they did not need any information compared to almost half of other parents. They also were more likely to want information about teenage years: 25 per cent wanted information on the years 11-14, compared to just 14 per cent of other parents.

On the whole, black and minority ethnic parents find the same sources of information about parenting as useful as white parents. Most (56%) favoured family or friends. Like parents from the larger survey, they liked local sources of information: playgroups or school (25%), doctors' surgeries (30%), local libraries (29%). They are, however, less likely to find the Internet useful (9% compared to 14% of other parents.)

In general, awareness of organisations providing information and advice to parents tends to be lower among black and minority ethnic parents, but a smaller proportion said they would not use any organisation providing information (25% compared with 35% of other parents). Although a smaller proportion, this figure is still significant. The survey did not ask parents their reasons for refusing information, but further work needs to be done to find out. As with most parents, those who would use an organisation choose a Citizens Advice Bureau (31%). Again, reasons for choosing Citizens Advice Bureaux were not explored in the survey, but some factors might include easy accessibility, no or low cost, no specific focus on parenting, no stigmatisation or fear of being accused of failure, and whether the image of the organisation, the experience of users and its reputation through word of mouth give people confidence in the service they will receive.

Conclusions

On balance, similarities between black and minority ethnic parents and the other parents outweigh the differences. Concerns tends to be similar, albeit with a different emphasis on providing a decent standard of living for their children – a concern that reflects the economic reality for many black and minority ethnic families.

References

National Mapping of Family Services in England and Wales, A consultation document, National Family and Parenting Institute, July 2001

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