The placement of looked after minority ethnic children

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Care population in England at March 31st 2009

- 60,900 children and young people in care.
- 62% looked after because of abuse and neglect and most in care under a legal order.

- 62% in stranger foster care, 11% relative foster care, 13% residential, 7% placed with parents.

- 38% aged under 10 years old.

- About 3,000 adopted – 5% of care population
Why it might be hard to achieve good outcomes for these children

- Children come from high risk backgrounds – genetic, pre-birth and after birth environment.
- High levels of mental health problems.
- Two-thirds at least one physical health complaint.
- Age at entry to care
Policy objectives focused improvement in 4 areas

- Education
- Leaving care
- Stable placements
- Ensure voices of children in care are heard
A very brief history.....

- 1950    Assimilation
- 1970s   Multiculturalism
- 1980s   Anti-racism
- 1990s   Community cohesion
Race, ethnicity and culture

- Debates about meanings.
- Race – biology.
- Ethnicity - culture, religion and kinship.
- Culture – fluid, passed down, constantly changing
Ethnicity of children in care in England

- 76% white
- 8% mixed
- 5% South Asian
- 7% black
- 3% other
Child protection concerns

- The deaths of Black children.
- Services not meeting family’s needs?
- Interpreters inadequate?
- More likely to be placed in care rather than have family support?
Deaths and serious injury

- Reluctance to act.
- Cultural relativism.
- Lack of knowledge
Race and ethnicity

- Give due consideration to the child’s religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.’ Children Act 1989

- Placement decisions consider the child’s assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family.  Fostering Standards 2002
Aims of our study

- Examine whether social workers made different decisions and plans for white and minority ethnic children.

- Sample from three English LAs: 189 minority ethnic children and 48 white.
Findings

- No evidence of a different response initially because of ethnicity.

- The differences that were apparent were because of the characteristics of each group.
Asian children

- More likely than other children to be living in a two parent family.
- Parents likely to be born outside the UK.
- Entered care at a young age, particularly because of ‘family honour’.
- Decision making slower for these children.
Black children

- Parents of African children likely to be born outside the UK.
- Came to the attention of Children’s Services later.
- Entered care later and this affected pathways
Mixed ethnicity children

- Majority of children were of mixed ethnicity.
- Majority of their mothers were white or of mixed ethnicity.
- These mothers more disadvantaged and more adverse circumstances than other mothers.
## Characteristics of white mothers by child’s ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White mums with white children n=32</th>
<th>White mums with mixed ethnicity children n=39</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any child with FASD/drug withdrawal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>P=0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a partner at home</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>P=0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/substance abuse</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>P=0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever in care</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>ns</td>
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</tbody>
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Assessment

- Large number of kin assessments, sequential and contributing to delays in decision-making.

- Assessments poorer for minority ethnic children.
Families

- Mental health problems, domestic violence prevalent across all groups.

- Mixed ethnicity children had least support from their extended families.
Complexity of trying to find a ‘same race’ placement

- Ethnicity complex - particularly mixed
- Very few adults in the community to ‘match’ with.
- What was being ‘matched’?
Mixed Ethnicity ‘Other’ Category

- White/Vietnamese
- African/Caribbean
- White/Asian
- White/Caribbean
- White/Chinese
- White/Kosovan
- Mixed ‘other’
B presents as a child of mixed heritage. His mother is white British and his father’s ethnic origin is European Asian. Birth father’s mother is Chinese/Spanish – dual heritage, whilst his father is Portuguese/Irish – dual heritage. B is currently living with White foster carers in a predominantly white community…… Ideally B should be placed with a family which reflects his racial origin.
Ethnicity and culture

- Ethnicity as a category.

- Ethnicity as a problem.

- Culture not identified but assumed to be the same as ethnicity.
Conflict and disagreement

- Initial placement with white foster carers who later applied to adopt.
- Siblings with fathers of different ethnicity.
- High turnover of social workers.
- Kin assessments.
While it is an inescapable fact that the child is black and my family is white…I believe providing love, warmth and security must be a priority at this stage. ..child should not be moved to a placement with a black family simply to ‘colour’ match him. I know the LA have always taken the view that this placement is not culturally appropriate but I struggle to see how another foster placement, which will meet the criterion, will be found
Matching research

- Existing evidence on the effectiveness of matching is very thin.
- Assumption that minority ethnic families can help child deal with racism.
- Child’s ethnicity is not related to placement breakdown.
- A non-matched placement brings additional challenges for the carers.
Carer characteristics

- Willingness to work with the agency
- Commitment to the child
- Flexible and relaxed approach to parenting
- Open communication
- Well prepared by the agency
- Click or fit with the child

- No difference in disruption rates for ‘matched’ and ‘trans-racial’ placements
Lack of research evidence

- We know very little about how English families can be assessed as ‘culturally competent’.
- What are the outcomes for mixed ethnicity children growing up in ‘black’ ‘white’ and ‘mixed’ families?
- How can families be advised on managing racism?
References

- See [www.adoptioninstitute.org](http://www.adoptioninstitute.org) on finding families for African American children.
- Selwyn, J. et al. (2010) *Pathways to Permanence*, London, BAAF.