Better
Housing
Briefing

8

Black and minority ethnic young people and housing

Deborah Phillips

Race
Equality
Foundation

Key messages

1 Social housing is becoming increasingly important for black and minority ethnic young people, but they worry about their choices

2 Black and minority ethnic young people would like to live in a wider range of locations than their parents generation, but they face obstacles

3 There is a growing diversity of needs and preferences among black and minority ethnic young people, but some young people feel that these are overlooked

4 Supported housing can reduce the risk of homelessness among vulnerable young people

5 Resources can be targeted through local research.

Introduction

This briefing looks at the housing experiences, needs and aspirations of black and minority ethnic (BME) young people aged between sixteen and twenty-five. It aims to inform housing providers of ways of improving services to this diverse group. Young people s transition from family home or care institution to independent living is often accompanied by other crucial transitions: from school to work, from child to parent. These new life stages can be full of pitfalls for all young people, although evidence suggests that BME young people are among the more vulnerable because of discrimination, unemployment, low wages and inadequate service provision (Harrison *et al*., 2005).

This paper argues that we need to listen more closely to the voices of young people in order to design and deliver improved housing services. This is consistent with recent policy directions towards a more consumerist approach to public service provision. A key objective of the Cave (2007) review of social housing regulation, for example, is to strengthen power, consultation and choice for all tenants, but there is also increasing recognition of the importance of listening to young people in particular. National and European policies on youth stress that policy makers are responsible for engaging young people as stakeholders, and should strive to involve them in decision making. Taking account of, and addressing, the specific housing needs of young BME people should be an important part of that process.

This briefing draws attention to key issues of choice, affordability, diversity and the prevention of homelessness among young BME people. The evidence base is variable. There are some excellent studies of BME young people, but much research overlooks, or does not adequately represent, the ethnic dimension to housing need.

Social housing: an increasingly important option   **1**

There is a crisis of affordability for all young people, but BME young people, especially in London and the south-east, are disproportionately affected. For example, the Housing Corporation (2000) reports that the proportion of young people who are able to take up even low-cost ownership options has decreased steadily since 1995 (from 12 to 7 per cent) because of financial constraints and policy changes. These trends in affordability, together with a growing demand among young people for independent living, have increased demand for social housing from BME communities. The result has been a rising diversity of demand and greater need for information about social renting options and support available to young people.

This growth in demand is evident for all minority ethnic groups, but perhaps the greatest pressure for new household formation lies with British Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, because of their youthful age structure and the high incidence of overcrowding. However, young people from these groups also occupy the weakest position in the housing and job markets. They may therefore encounter particular difficulties in securing decent, affordable accommodation in their preferred locations.

Studies in Bradford, Oldham and Rochdale have explored BME young people's views of social rented housing (Harrison *et al*., 2005; Simpson *et al*., 2007). This research found that African Caribbean young people, many of whom came from families with a tradition of social renting, were much more familiar than their South Asian counterparts with social renting options and how to apply for housing. Even so, some were sceptical as to whether they would get access to better areas of housing. Others felt that, despite race equality policies, African Caribbeans did not always get a good deal. This raises important issues related to trust and transparency in service delivery. The research also found that young people of South Asian origin are increasingly turning to social renting, either as a stepping stone to ownership or because it is their only realistic housing option. Some housing providers nevertheless still believe that Asians are not interested in renting, and so have not fully consulted with this population about their needs. The evidence suggests that young Asian people have a number of worries about social housing providers and the type of property available to them. For example, young people in Bradford, Oldham and Rochdale were worried about property size, location, rents and the risk of racist harassment on predominantly white estates.

The evidence points to a need to engage more fully with young BME people as social housing applicants and tenants, and to explore their housing requirements. Black and minority ethnic young people make up a disproportionate number of tenants in the housing association sector (Housing Corporation, 2000). However, an uncomfortable fact is that the younger the household, the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with their housing association accommodation, the services offered and their landlord. A common complaint is that landlords do not fully consider young BME people's specific cultural needs, or how these might differ from the older generation (Harrison *et al*., 2005).

Resources 1

Harrison, M. and Phillips, D. (2003) *Housing and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities: Review of the evidence base***, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.**
This publication provides an overview of research in the field of housing, race and ethnicity, and analyses the policy relevance of findings. The discussions have implications for young people and include examples of innovation and good practice.

National Youth Homelessness Scheme
www.communities.gov.uk/ youthhomelessness/
This website provides a resource for local authorities and their partner organisations in preventing and tackling youth homelessness. It reviews good practice, provides a network for information exchange and reports on current projects.

Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice (IGP Programme)
www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/ show/nav.477
The Housing Corporation has funded a number of innovative multimedia projects designed to reach young people and inform them about housing and benefit services (CDs and videos).

2   Obstacles to widening the range of locations

The tendency for BME groups to cluster within certain areas of a city, or to opt for particular locations within the social rented sector, is well established. Many young BME people value the close contact with family and community that ethnic clustering can bring, but some are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the overcrowding, poor neighbourhood conditions and lack of privacy that can be associated with living in community areas (Phillips et al., 2007). They are thus willing to consider living in a much wider range of locations than their parents generation in order to access better housing, although there may be significant obstacles to achieving this.

First, housing managers and those giving support and advice to young people may still hold stereotyped views of BME people s housing preferences. This means that young people may be directed to areas traditionally associated with their ethnic group. Second, BME young people (especially young women) may worry about isolation and harassment in some areas. Also, established white residents may be unwelcoming to BME newcomers, particularly if they feel that housing priority is apparently being given to outsiders rather than to their own families. The third obstacle relates to the power of racist harassment, or fear of harassment, to deter BME young people from moving to areas perceived to be white and hostile (Phillips et al., 2007). Research in Oldham and Rochdale indicated that anxieties about racism and racist harassment present an obstacle to sustained ethnic mixing at the neighbourhood level (Simpson et al., 2007). Some neighbourhoods and housing estates were perceived to be out of bounds to Asians in particular, but also to African Caribbeans. Other research has highlighted similar concerns among BME young people across a range of localities (Chahal and Julienne, 1999; Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance, 2002).

The problems associated with racist harassment have been widely acknowledged within the social housing sector. Harassment nevertheless still presents a major barrier to widening BME people s housing choices (Chahal, 2007; Law, 2007). Chahal has indicated the key ingredients for an effective strategic response, but we also need to bear in mind broader events and trends that help to sustain racism. Some media and political commentaries on asylum seekers and on Islam, for example, may contribute to a climate of hostility. Policy interventions should seek to tackle this at the local level as part of a wider housing strategy.

Opening up housing choices in areas with a long history of ethnic segregation can prove challenging, but there are some success stories. The advent of choice-based lettings has helped to widen access to social renting for minority ethnic households, and to open up new areas. Its impact has, however, been mixed across localities, and harassment can undermine the success of tenancies (Law, 2007). There are nevertheless examples of projects that have successfully supported BME households moving into non-traditional (white) neighbourhoods. The Canalside Community Induction Project in Rochdale has been heralded as a model of good practice in community integration in an area perceived as unwelcoming to minority ethnic groups (Blackaby, 2004). Integration initiatives included providing good information and support, and organising community activities. An evaluation of the project highlighted the importance of community participation and the employment of front-line staff, who engaged with the incoming and receiving populations over an extended period. There are also, however, other lessons to be learned from this scheme. When the project ended, tensions recurred, pointing to the need for continuing support in fragile communities.

3   Is the growing diversity of needs and preferences being overlooked?

The recent era of a super-diversity of migrant groups has presented housing providers with new challenges. The term black and minority ethnic now includes not only those young people whose communities have lived in Britain for several generations, but new groups from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds and migration

experiences. These migrants are living in a wider range of localities (urban and rural) than ever before. This diversity has brought different life experiences and life chances for young people, which have helped to shape their housing needs. In addition, each group is in itself differentiated according to gender, disability, sexual orientation, and so on, all of which have a bearing on housing needs and aspirations. Housing needs studies have highlighted the diversity of demands as well as commonalities of experience (Harrison and Phillips, 2003, provide an overview). Nevertheless, despite good intentions, public policies and practices may fail to keep up with the rapid pace of change in cultural diversity.

Young people have criticised housing providers for failing to respond to the specific needs of younger people, which are often distinct from the needs of the wider BME communities. There is a strong case for extending participation mechanisms beyond traditional modes of consultation, which often focus on established (older) community leaders and organisations, in order to open channels for listening to the diversity of young peoples voices. The needs of smaller groups in particular are often overlooked. For example, small Bangladeshi populations are often incorporated into the housing needs assessments of Pakistani or Asian populations. Yet young Bangladeshis can have different expectations about service provision and different housing needs because of particularly high unemployment rates and affordability problems (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2005).

Our knowledge base on some dimensions of difference, such as gender and disability, is growing, but there are still important gaps in understanding housing needs at the local level. We know, for example, that over two-thirds of young heads of new households in the housing association sector are female (the proportions are similar across ethnic groups), but housing needs information is rarely disaggregated by gender (Housing Corporation, 2000). Harrison and Phillips (2003, p. 60) recommend that more work needs to be done to understand the housing experiences of young black men and their interactions with housing providers. In addition, Ahmed and Sodhi s (2000) research in Rochdale highlights the need to consult with BME women about the provision of supported housing, especially in relation to domestic violence. Women s needs and preferences vary greatly across age groups, and the authors argue for an increased range of provision that is sensitive to generational differences.

Several recent studies have also shed light on the inadequacy of service provision for disabled BME young people. Ethnic stereotypes mean that practitioners sometimes overestimate the willingness of relatives to care for young disabled people, and thus misjudge the demand for supported housing from ethnic groups. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation study of disabled young people making the transition into independent living found that BME young people can be particularly disadvantaged (JRF, 2002). Service providers often knew little about their needs and views, and young people and their carers found it difficult to get information about housing and support options. The researchers noted that relatively little was known about the experience of young South Asian disabled people and their families. Additional work by Bignall and Butt (2000) and Hussain et al. (2002) reports that many young disabled people, and particularly those from BME groups, felt that institutions and professionals often had low expectations of their abilities and potential, which inhibited their choices and their chance to achieve independence.

4 Supported housing can reduce the risk of homelessness

Evidence suggests that BME young people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness because of the disproportionate numbers who face problems of debt, unemployment, family disputes and overcrowding (Gervais and Rehman, 2005). Young asylum seekers and refugees are also vulnerable because of insecure housing and destitution. The homeless charity Centrepoint reports that 57 per cent of the young users of its hostel and other services are of BME origin. Commentators have observed that there is also much hidden youth homelessness among minority ethnic groups in general, and among Asians in particular, with many young people living in severely overcrowded households or sharing with friends (Steele, 2002; Centrepoint, 2005; ROTA, 2007).

There are a number of examples of supportive practices designed to reduce the risk of homelessness and to ease young people s transition to independence. In 2007, Islington Council introduced improved measures to help resolve family disputes, provide better information about benefits, give greater access to translators, and help those suffering from mental ill health or substance abuse. Some service providers also give help to those wishing to try out living independently, with support, before attempting to survive completely on their own. This can be of particular benefit to care leavers, who make the transition to independence at a very young age. Centrepoint (2007) reports that even with the introduction of new measures to assist young people leaving care, homelessness remains a significant problem. However, two reports (Lovatt and Whitehead, 2006; Smith and Browne, 2006) have endorsed the positive interventions of the UK Foyer network in supporting homeless 16- to 25-year-olds. Over 130 Foyers across the UK work with at risk young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and some are heavily used by BME young people (e.g. 90 per cent of Camberwell Foyer s users are from a minority ethnic background). The network s aim is to intervene in the no home-no job-no home cycle by integrating accommodation with training, job search, and personal support. In a study entitled *What Happened Next,* Smith and Browne (2006) followed up on young people who had left Foyer projects. Their report highlights the importance of continuing support in the first six months of a new tenancy; the need for better mental health services for young people; and the desirability of extending support offered through corporate parenting , beyond those who have been in care, to other vulnerable young people.

Evidence suggests that 16- and 17-year-olds (which includes care leavers) are particularly vulnerable to street homelessness (DCLG, 2007; Shelter, 2007). Restrictions in levels of Income Support and Housing Benefit for under 25-year-olds, and lack of entitlement to Income Support for most 16- and 17-year-olds, place these young people at risk. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to accommodate young people and children in need . The Homelessness Act 2002 also stipulates that local authorities must deem 16- and 17-year-olds (and 18- to 21-year-olds) leaving care to be in priority need of housing. Nevertheless, many social landlords are reticent to let to 16- and 17-year-olds because of concerns about minors sustaining a tenancy. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has produced a briefing paper which explains that, although there are some complications, the law in England (as in Scotland) does allow 16- and 17-year-olds to hold tenancies, and landlords can recover unpaid rent in the normal way (DCLG, 2007). This DCLG briefing outlines steps that landlords can take to ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds have successful tenancies. The Rainer (2007) report, *Home Alone*, also finds evidence of inconsistencies in the treatment of care leavers across authorities, and notes that many young people are not receiving the support they are entitled to under the legislation. It identifies gaps in provision and provides examples of promising approaches to addressing these.

Supported housing for homeless and vulnerable young people may take the form of host family placements, hostel placements and self-contained placements, with floating support. In some authorities, support includes a one stop shop approach for 16- and 17-year-olds, which provides advice and assessment on housing-related matters. However, Steele (2002) observes from his research in Nottingham and Oxford that BME young people can feel excluded from relevant services because of the inability of organisations to respond to their cultural and age-related needs. The young service users were mostly in favour of developing strategies for more culturally responsive mainstream services, such as the employment of more front-line BME staff and better family mediation services, rather than measures specifically targeted at BME young people. They nevertheless acknowledged that targeted services might be important in the short term.

Housing providers can get advice on implementing supportive strategies from the Centrepoint Partnering scheme. Also, the Department for Education and Skills commissioned work in 2007 to identify models of best practice (DfES, 2007). The national Supporting People Outcomes Framework is building up information on what works and benchmarks for service evaluation.

Resources can be targeted through local research   5

Investment in local research can help to target resources where needs are greatest. In 2005, for example, Wolverhampton City Council researched the history of failed tenancies among young people. This revealed that the greatest failure was among young single men under twenty with few social networks to provide them with support. The research found that young men s tenancies were most likely to fail in their first year, which impacted on their health, well-being and capacity to work. This enabled the council to focus its resources in a way that aimed to disrupt the tendency for this group to move in and out of homelessness.

The Housing Corporation, as part of its innovation and good practice guidance, recommends the development of a housing strategy targeted at young people (Housing Corporation, 2002). The approach taken by Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) provides an example of how such a strategy can help to identify the specific needs of BME young people. A quarter of people under twenty-five in Oldham come from BME groups, mostly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. Housing options here are limited (most cannot afford home ownership) and there has been growing overcrowding, a rise in young single homelessness, and a growing waiting list for social housing. Against this backcloth, a review of young people s housing and support needs was undertaken by a multi-agency group, which highlighted important gaps in housing supply and service provision. This led to the development of a five-year multi-agency strategy based on a review of young people s needs and the development of housing-related support for particular ethnic groups (OMBC, 2005).

Conclusion

Housing organisations need to provide a culturally competent service to their young BME population, and address the emerging preferences of a diverse group of younger people. To do this, a range of issues must be considered as a framework for policy and action. It is important to: document the changing aspirations of BME groups across the generations; document housing and service needs within and across new and more established groups; evaluate institutional cultures which might make assumptions about preferences; and improve communication and consultation with young BME people. This will help to improve housing outcomes and instil a climate of trust and confidence in the responsiveness of housing providers.

References

- Ahmed, A. and Sodhi, D. (2000) *The Housing and Support Needs of Women, Especially Those from Ethnic Minorities*, Rochdale: Rochdale Women's Housing Aid Group.
- Bignall, T. and Butt, J. (2000) *Between Ambition and Achievement: Young black disabled people's views and experiences of independence and independent living*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Blackaby, B. (2004) *Community Cohesion and Housing: A good practice guide*, London: Chartered Institute of Housing.
- Cave, M. (2007) *Every Tenant Matters: A review of social housing regulation*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- Centrepoint (2005) *Centrepoint Solutions: Helping you to tackle and prevent youth homelessness*, London: Centrepoint.
- Centrepoint (2007) *Care Leavers: A place to call home – Care leavers' experience of finding suitable accommodation*, London: Centrepoint.
- Chahal, K. (2007) *Racist Harassment and Housing Services*, Better Housing Briefing 2, London: Race Equality Foundation.
- Chahal, K. and Julienne, L. (1999) *'We Can't All Be White': Racist victimisation in the UK*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2007) *Tackling Youth Homelessness*, Policy Briefing 18, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2007) *Care Matters: Time for change*, Cm 7137, London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Gervais, M. and Rehman, H. (2005) *Causes of Homelessness Amongst Ethnic Minority Populations*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance (2002) *Towards Effective Policy and Practice for Black and Minority Ethnic Young People*, www.gara.org.uk/gara0502_web_pdf/RRR%2001%20Towards%20effective%20policy%20For%20Black%20and%20Minority%20Ethnic%20Young%20People.pdf (last accessed January 2008).
- Harrison, M. and Phillips, D. (2003) *Housing and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities: Review of the evidence base*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Harrison, M., Phillips, D., Chahal, K., Hunt, L. and Perry, J. (2005) *Housing, 'Race' and Community Cohesion*, Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing.
- Housing Corporation (2000) *Young People and Housing Association Housing*, Housing Corporation Sector Study 5, London: Housing Corporation.
- Housing Corporation (2002) *Young People and Housing Associations: The big picture*, London: Housing Corporation.
- Hussain, Y., Atkin, K. and Ahmad, W. (2002) *South Asian Disabled Young People and Their Families*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (2002) *Moving into Adulthood: Young disabled people moving into adulthood*, JRF Foundations 512, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Law, I. (2007) *Housing Choice and Racist Hostility*, Better Housing Briefing 4, London: Race Equality Foundation.
- Lovatt, R. and Whitehead, C. (2006) *Launch Pad for Life: An assessment of the role of Foyers in housing association provision*, London: Housing Corporation.
- Mac an Ghaill, M. and Haywood, C. (2005) *Young Bangladeshi People's Experience of Transition to Adulthood*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) (2005) *Young People's Housing Strategy, 2005–2010*, Oldham: Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Phillips, D., Davis, C. and Ratcliffe, P. (2007) 'British Asian narratives of urban space', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, NS32, 2, pp. 217–34.
- Race on the Agenda (ROTA) (2007) *The Visible and Hidden Dimensions of London's Homelessness: A black, Asian and minority ethnic account*, London: Race on the Agenda.
- Rainer (2007) *Home Alone: Housing and support for young people leaving care*, London: Rainer.
- Shelter (2007) *Good Practice Briefing: Tenancies for minors*, www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/490590 (last accessed January 2008).
- Simpson, L., Phillips, D. and Ahmed, S. (2007) *Oldham and Rochdale: Race, housing and community cohesion*, Report to the Oldham and Rochdale Housing Market Renewal Programme, www.ccsr.ac.uk/research/documents/CCSRRacehousingandcommunitycohesionFeb07.pdf (last accessed March 2008).
- Smith, J. and Browne, O. (2006) *What Happened Next?*, London: Housing Corporation and Foyer Federation.
- Steele, A. (2002) 'Black youth homelessness' in Somerville, P. and Steele, A. (eds) *Race, Housing and Social Exclusion*, London: Jessica Kingsley.

Deborah Phillips is a Reader in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the School of Geography at the University of Leeds. She has researched widely on race and housing issues and has recently conducted a study of the housing needs and aspirations of young black and minority ethnic and white people in Oldham and Rochdale.

Readers
Isobel Anderson
Lorraine Gilbert
Kathleen Kelly

We welcome feedback on this paper and on all aspects of our work. Please email *briefings@racefound.org.uk*

Race Equality Foundation