Experiences of children and young people from ethnic minorities in accessing mental health care and support: rapid scoping review

Helen Coelho,1† Anna Price,2† Fraizer Kiff,1 Laura Trigg,1 Sophie Robinson,1 Jo Thompson Coon2 and Rob Anderson2*

1Peninsula Technology Assessment Group (PenTAG), Institute of Health Research, University of Exeter Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
2Exeter HSDR Evidence Synthesis Centre, Institute of Health Research, University of Exeter Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

*Corresponding author R.Anderson@exeter.ac.uk
†Joint first author

Disclosure of interests

Full disclosure of interests: Completed ICMJE forms for all authors, including all related interests, are available in the toolkit on the NIHR Journals Library report publication page at https://doi.org/10.3310/XKWE8437

Primary conflicts of interest: Rob Anderson was a member of the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health and Social Care Delivery Research (Researcher-Led) Prioritisation Committee (2016–July 2019). Jo Thompson Coon is a member of the NIHR Health Technology Assessment General Funding Committee (2018–present). In addition, Jo Thompson Coon was partly supported by the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration South West Peninsula.

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published July 2022
DOI: 10.3310/XKWE8437

Plain English summary

Mental health care for young people from ethnic minorities
Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2022; Vol. 10: No. 22
DOI: 10.3310/XKWE8437

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
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The problem

Mental health problems are common among children and young people in the UK. Compared with white British young people, those from ethnic minority backgrounds often have greater difficulty accessing mental health support and poorer engagement with services. They may also prefer different types of support, perhaps because of cultural influences.

Our aims and methods

We aimed to discover the amount and type of research that exists on the experiences of children and young people from ethnic minorities (non-white British) when they are seeking or receiving care for mental health problems. We also aimed to summarise the studies' findings. We searched for studies based on interviews or group discussions with young people experiencing mental health problems and accessing services. Studies about the experiences of their parents/carers or those involved in providing care were also included.

What we found

We found 22 relevant studies published from 2012 onwards. There were studies of refugees/asylum seekers (n = 5) and university students (n = 4) and studies among young people experiencing particular mental health problems: schizophrenia or psychosis (n = 3), eating disorders (n = 3), post-traumatic stress disorder (n = 3, all of asylum seekers), substance misuse (n = 2), self-harm (n = 2) and obsessive–compulsive disorder (n = 1). There were also three studies of ethnic minority young people receiving particular talking therapies.

Most studies had been carried out in young people or their parents from a range of ethnic backgrounds. However, nine studies were about young people from particular ethnic groups: asylum seekers from Afghanistan (n = 2), and black and South Asian (n = 2), black African and black Caribbean (n = 2), South Asian (n = 1), Pakistani or Bangladeshi (n = 1) and Orthodox Jewish (n = 1) people.

The studies also suggested factors that may negatively affect ethnic minority young people's care-seeking and access to mental health care, such as lack of understanding of mental health problems, low trust in care professionals and social stigma.
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This report

The research reported here is the product of an HSDR Evidence Synthesis Centre, contracted to provide rapid evidence syntheses on issues of relevance to the health service, and to inform future HSDR calls for new research around identified gaps in evidence. Other reviews by the Evidence Synthesis Centres are also available in the HSDR journal.

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HSDR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number NIHR135075. The contractual start date was in June 2021. The final report began editorial review in October 2021 and was accepted for publication in February 2022. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HSDR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, the HSDR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, the HSDR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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