



Research Inspired by Service Experts

Are ethnic minority children and young people treated differently in CAMHS in terms of the services or treatment they receive?

- There is little evidence that the services or treatment offered to ethnic minority children and young people differs from the White population.
- Members of ethnic minority communities often hold assumptions about mental health and CAMHS practitioners which may stop them from engaging with services.
- CAMHS practitioners need to understand the cultural differences and perceptions of mental health in order to properly engage and treat children and young people from ethnic minority groups.



Ethnic minorities

Ethnicity refers to people's race, beliefs, traditions and language. If you are living in a country where most people are from a different ethnic group to you, then you might consider yourself an ethnic minority. In the United Kingdom, the government uses the term "ethnic minority" to refer to anyone who is not part of the White British group;¹ this is the definition we have used in this review.



What did we find?

The United Kingdom (UK) is an ethnically diverse society with roughly 13.8% of the population being from a minority ethnic background.² This diversity is reflected in the number of children and young people using CAMHS services, where 77% identify as White British, 3% White Other; 4% Mixed ethnicity; 3% Asian; 4% Black; 1% reporting another ethnic identity and 6% not stating an ethnic identity.³

Guidelines and standards have been published for mental health practitioners in the UK saying that they should take into account the ethnicity of their patient and its impact on their wellbeing and potential intervention choices.^{4,5}

Citation Top Tip

If you see a little number above a word **like this¹** then go to the references section at the end of this report to see the source of the information.

Fit for purpose?

Despite this, CAMHS services have been slow to address the needs of young people and their families and some people have said that CAMHS is a culturally inappropriate service.^{4,5}

Stigma, low awareness of mental ill health and mistrust in clinicians may be more prominent in ethnic minority communities.⁷ CAMHS practitioners need to understand what people from different cultures think about mental health in order to help children and young people.

There is a lot of research looking at challenges that ethnic minority young people have in accessing and engaging with CAMHS.⁷⁻⁹ However, we found little research that focuses specifically on how services and treatment might be different or could be tailored to meet the needs of ethnic minority young people and their families.



Lack of awareness

Mental health services for ethnic minority children are poorly developed. These groups are under-served and encounter more barriers to treatment than their white counterparts.⁹ Experiences of CAMHS can be inappropriate or alienating due because of things such as differences in cultural values and a lack of awareness and faith in professionals and services.⁹

One study suggested that minority ethnic children and young people may experience different, more intimidating treatment as a result of the racial stereotypes held by professionals.¹⁰ Another study reported that young men believed that they would be treated differently by mental health services based on colour or race.⁸

These findings demonstrate that many ethnic minority young people and their families may already have beliefs about mental health services, and more needs to be done to address these challenges.

Staffing considerations



Studies have shown that young people feel that staff have limited or no awareness and understanding of different ethnic, religious and cultural needs.¹⁰ There is some evidence that CAMHS practitioners may change their approach in order to establish better relationships with their culturally diverse patients faster, thus meeting their needs more effectively.¹¹ This might be through methods such as community outreach, providing walk in centres, and understanding the importance of cultural norms in relation to family, food, or religion to build relationships with their patients.^{6,10}

There are also a number of staff training schemes, such as transcultural communication training and cultural competence, being adopted by CAMHS to improve communication and understanding between practitioners and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds.¹¹

Furthermore, recruitment of a diverse workforce may result in more understanding of the issues that affect these communities and provide a more holistic service.

One study which spoke to young people from ethnic minority groups found that some preferred practitioners from similar ethnic backgrounds as they may have first-hand experience of the difficulties they face, allowing them to recommend treatment for specific challenges.¹²

However, there was also the feeling that ethnically similar practitioners may make more assumptions based on the belief that they shared the same thoughts, values and experiences.¹² This research actually found that the young people felt it was more important for the practitioners to be able to demonstrate empathy and an appreciation of how an ethnic background may impact on their difficulties, rather than the ethnicity of the practitioner themselves.¹²

Other studies have also highlighted the importance of a diverse workforce in engaging and supporting ethnic minority communities.^{2,8,13}



Language

Language and communication have also been highlighted as challenges for ethnic minority communities as English may not be their first language.¹⁰ Interpreters or bilingual clinicians may be used to improve treatment options for such young people and their families.¹⁰ Translation of information sheets and self-help materials also make treatment more accessible and appropriate of these individuals.¹⁰



Choice

Some research has been conducted to find out what young ethnic minority people would like to see in terms of services and treatments offered by CAMHS.

In one study, young people wanted to be offered a range of treatment options so they could choose what suited them. They felt that all mental health conditions were viewed as the same and wanted to show the importance of identifying individual root causes and potential interventions that might be more applicable to ethnic minority groups.¹³



This summary found little evidence that the services or treatment offered to ethnic minority children and young people differs from the wider population. Despite this, many studies discussed the importance of CAMHS practitioners understanding the cultural differences and perceptions of mental health in order to properly engage and treat ethnic minority groups.

Offering alternative and flexible treatments which take into account cultural difference may help to break down these perceived barriers between mental health services and ethnic minority groups.

This summary found evidence predominantly for Black and Asian ethnic groups but there was less evidence about the experiences of Roma, Gypsy and Irish Traveller and Chinese groups, highlighting that these groups may be underrepresented in current research.

What did young people ask us?

Children and young people were asked about their experiences of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Devon. From their experiences, a list of questions was created, and we were asked to find evidence to help answer these questions.

One of the questions we were asked was, "Are ethnic minority children and young people treated differently in CAMHS in terms of the services or treatment they receive?". They wanted to know what evidence there is to better understand if CAMHS services and treatments differ for a child or young person from an ethnic minority background.



What did we do?

To answer this, we searched several databases including MEDLINE, APA PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The findings from these searches were then summarised. The searches were last updated in November 2022.

Scientific databases used:

MEDLINE: Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online database
[APA PsycINFO: American Psychological Association Psychological information database]

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