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## Rethink Policy Statement 28

### Culture and race

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#### Summary

Mental health services should identify and meet the specific needs and concerns expressed by black and ethnic minority service users and their carers.

Rethink does not accept that any individual group in Britain has a greater inherent susceptibility to severe mental illness than other groups.

Any discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity in mental health services must be eliminated.

#### 1. Concerns about care and treatment

Evidence shows that black and minority ethnic groups have a different experience of treatment and pathways to care:

- Rate of detention under the Mental Health Act is 33-44% higher than average for black men (from different groups)<sup>1</sup>.
- Rates of seclusion whilst in hospital were 50% higher in African Caribbean Males<sup>2</sup>.
- Men from Indian and Chinese groups had lower admission rates than average by 21% and 46% respectively<sup>3</sup>.

A report by Nazroo (2007)<sup>4</sup> suggests that difficulties accessing appropriate care, or reluctance to engage with services due to possible ill treatment, can result in some groups receiving little or no care or treatment. This makes these groups more vulnerable to crisis and compulsory detention.

#### 2. Cultural awareness

It is essential that support and care are provided in a way that is culturally appropriate for being from ethnic minority backgrounds. This is particularly an issue for people from some Asian communities, where beliefs about mental health and treatment are not compatible with the western, medical approach. Diagnosis of mental illness should also take into account cultural interpretations of symptoms.

Health professionals and staff should be trained to develop their understanding of the cultural awareness. Recruitment policies should also ensure equal opportunities for ethnic minority groups, and actively encourage them to apply.

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<sup>1</sup> Mental Health Act Commission (2005) *Count Me In Census*

<sup>2</sup> Mental Health Act Commission (2005) *Count Me In Census*

<sup>3</sup> Mental Health Act Commission (2006) *Count Me In Census*

<sup>4</sup> Nazroo, J. Y. (1997) *Mental Health and Ethnicity: Findings from a National Community Survey*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Health services should also identify barriers to treatment or particular needs of different groups, as required by the Disability Equality Duty, by involving them in the planning and delivery of services.

The *Human Rights Act*<sup>5</sup> also gives people the right not to be treated unfairly because of their race, colour, religion, sex, political views or any other status. This article protects people when they are exercising their other rights under the *Convention on Human Rights* eg, Article 5 on the right to liberty and security.

### 3. Outreach

Services should be provided in environments where people from black and minority ethnic communities can be confident of being understood and free from discrimination.

Rethink is committed to developing this model of services in the future, having already launched a project based in a Birmingham Mosque<sup>6</sup> identifying the needs of the local community.

People who have difficulties speaking English should have access to staff or advocates who speak their language, or to interpreters.

Related Rethink policies

- 1 Secure services for people with severe mental illness – 17
- 2 Involving service users and carers in mental health services – 20
- 3 Advocacy and appropriate adult services – 29
- 4 Spiritual needs of people with severe mental illness – 40
- 5 Second opinions – 44
- 6 Compulsory treatment and care – 53
- 7 Cultural diversity – 62
- 8 Police involvement in the control and restraint of people with severe mental illness – 2

Related Rethink factsheets:

- 1 Advocacy
- 2 Black and minority ethnic (BME) issues
- 3 Detention under the Mental Health Act
- 4 Physical health and nutrition
- 5 Second opinions
- 6 Spirituality and severe mental illness

Last updated: February 2008

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Act, 1998, Article 14

<sup>6</sup> Rethink (2007) Our Voice