

Celebration & Dissemination Mental Health Young BME Prisoners – 22nd January 2009

*Partners of Prisoners and Families
Support Group*

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Background...

- POPS is a charity which was set up to provide information and support to prisoner's families.
- POPS undertook a project based in HMP YOI Hindley with young Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) prisoners. The project was funded by the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) and supported by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN). The project was set up to explore mental health issues within BME prisoners.
- The project intended to provide the prisoners, who agreed to take part in it, with a greater understanding of mental health issues, treatment services and research methods

Aims and Objectives...

- To understand why fewer BME prisoners choose to access mental health services in prison.
- Explore the mental health needs of BME prisoners.
- Informing future service development in partnership with the statutory sector and other voluntary organisations.

Design...

- POPS recruited 10 BME prisoners from Hindley prison who volunteered to work as peer researchers.
- UCLAN provided training for the peer researchers in research methods and mental health. With the support of POPS, the peer researchers were equipped with enough information and support to carry out a research project.
- 2 methods were used to collect information:
 - Self completed questionnaires
 - Unstructured interviews

Figures...

- Altogether 28 inmates were approached over a period of 6 months.
- 12 prisoners completed one to one interviews.
- 16 self completed questionnaires were carried out with prisoners who chose not to be interviewed.

Findings...

- **Key findings included:**

Racism

Food affecting mood

Black and Minority Ethnic prison staff

Specific support for BME families

Findings cont...

Racism:

Racism had a huge impact on the well being of some inmates, leading to feelings of annoyance and isolation. Most of the BME prisoners did not feel uncomfortable about being in a prison in which the majority of inmates were of White British origin, but they were unhappy with the racist behaviour and comments of some White British prisoners.

Findings cont

Food affecting mood:

The men strongly disapproved of the quality of the food served up to them in Hindley. Complaints varied from the prison not serving halal food, not offering enough food specific to BME groups and offering bland alternatives to traditional BME food. Some of the men talked about how the quality of the food affected their well being and mood.

Findings cont

Black and Minority Ethnic staff:

Most of the men welcomed the idea of having more BME prison staff at Hindley. The men feel that BME staff will have a better understanding of the religious needs of some of the prisoners and are better able to empathise with the cultural needs of BME prisoners. Comments included;

“They (BME staff) know about our culture so we can talk about things that they can relate to”

“They understand us better”

Findings...

Support for BME families:

It was very important to the prisoners that their family members are kept informed as much as possible. The prisoners talked about the importance of family support being in place so that their families are aware of how the prisoner is doing and also that the family have some type of peace of mind. Comments included:

“Bring in Family support officers”

“Interpreters for families where English is not their first language”

Barriers...

Volunteer Dropout:

As with any form of research, when volunteers are recruited, there is a chance that a number of people will eventually dropout. The original group of volunteers began as a group of 10 prisoners but this number eventually fell to 3 prisoners. This arose due to some of the volunteers being released from prison or transferred to another prison before the end of the project.

Barriers cont...

Time constraints:

The regime in prisons dictates that the prisoners would leave their cells at 8.30am and return to their cells at 11.30am before having lunch, going through role-call and returning to their cells. They can leave their cells again at 2.00pm before returning to them again at 4.30 pm. The support and work that POPS could do with the prisoners was restricted to between the aforementioned times.

Barriers cont...

Using Questionnaires:

Self-completed questionnaires are very efficient as a way of collecting a large amount of data in a short space of time. However, even though questionnaires are affective, the quality of the answers is not always reliable as some questions may have been misunderstood. To equal out the limits of the questionnaires, interviews were also carried out which capture more detailed information.

Recommendations...

- **More BME prison officers**
- **Interpreters working with families of non English speaking prisoners**
- **Greater promotion of Mental Health services in Hindley Prison**
- **Peer Support around Mental Health**

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