

Disrupting the Discourse on Racial Disparities and Disproportionalities:

Reframing narratives, shifting power,
advancing equity

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**What are the
common/dominant
discourses about the
experiences of racially
minoritised children?**



Disclaimer

I am speaking in this presentation as myself, as an academic, researcher, and with lived experiences of being a person of colour.



I am not representing the views of the Association of Child Protection Professionals (AoCPP), the Centre for Child Protection or the University of Kent.



Definitions

Race

Intersections of
ethnicity,
nationality, religion

Racially Minoritised

Disproportionalities

Inequalities

Disparities

Inequity

‘There has been widespread concern in England concerning the exclusion of Black pupils from schools for decades. Despite such concern however, and public opinion, the exclusion of Black children appears to have a continued upward trajectory’.

(Stewart-Hall et al. , 2023, p.225-226).

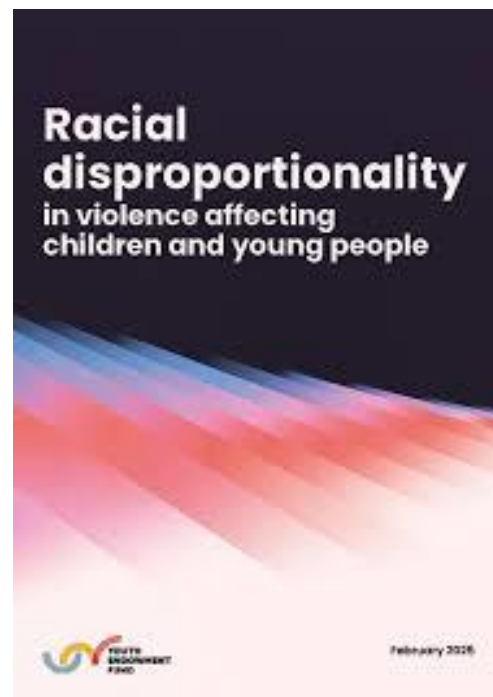
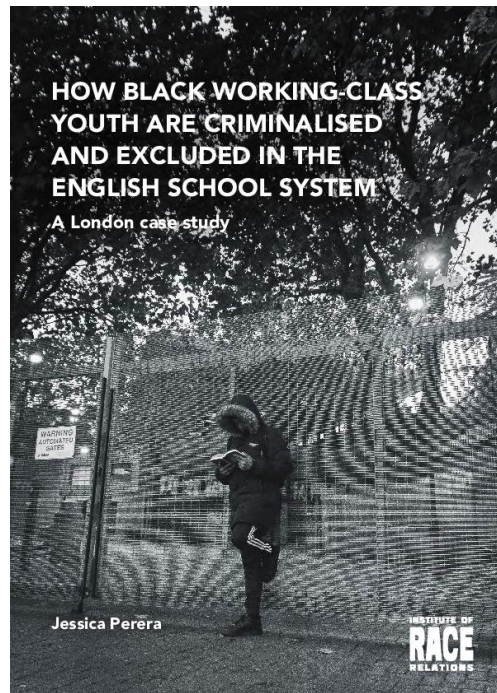


Moving from....to...


- Racial disproportionalities and disparities exist
- There is an over- or under-representation of racially minoritised children
- There are language barriers but a lack of interpreting services
- They are 'hard to reach/engage'
- Resources are limited
- Training/cultural competency need to improve

- Why do these disproportionalities and disparities exist?
- How are they strengthened and sustained?
- What can we do so that the dominant discourses transform into something more action-oriented and lead to transformational change?





Foundations
What Works Centre for Children & Families

 Department
for Education

PARENTING THROUGH ADVERSITY

Parents of babies & children 0 to 10

Practice Guides support the Children's Social Care National Framework (CSCNF). They set out the best available evidence to support senior leaders in local authorities to drive the conditions for effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed and delivered.

Senior leaders include but are not limited to Directors of Children's Services, Directors of Public Health, Local Authority Chief Executives, Elected Members (including Lead Members for Children's Services), children's services commissioners, heads of services, and other senior leaders involved in developing and commissioning services.

This Practice Guide relates to all outcomes of the CSCNF. The enablers of the CSCNF (leadership, workforce, multi-agency working) have a role in supporting delivery of the Guide's key principles and recommendations.

The Guide is also relevant to agencies that can commission, fund, and deliver parenting support in local areas, such as NHS Integrated Care Boards and voluntary, community and faith sector organisations.

1. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-framework>

foundations.org.uk



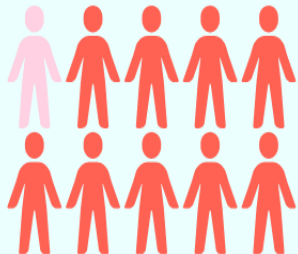
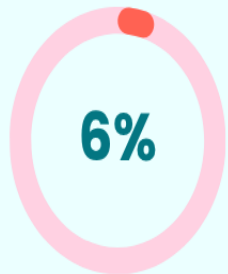
‘A lot of people like me...they don’t have their voices heard, especially in the Asian community. A lot of it is very hidden. Older family members will tell you, “Don’t tell people”, because of the whole stigma around honour, shame and so on. A lot of BME children are at risk and I don’t think anyone realises how much at risk they are’.

(Laila).

(Jassal, 2025, p.14).



Racial disproportionalities affecting children



Asian children are less likely to be referred to mental health support, making up 6% of referrals in 2023/24, but representing 12% of the population (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

Black children make up 6% of the population but account for 10% of arrests (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025).

There is a need for more research relating to East Asian, Southeast Asian and African heritage children who have been sexually abused.

(Dhaliwal, 2024).

Police are more than six times more likely to strip-search black children.

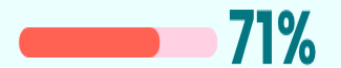
(Runnymede Trust, 2024).



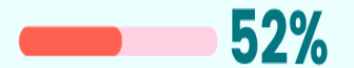
The rate at which Chinese children accessed secondary NHS mental health services (specialist care beyond GP-level, including CAMHS and similar) in England (Department of Health, 2024).



A recent poll of nearly 1,000 UK social workers found that almost $\frac{3}{4}$ believe that racial bias within social work "affects child protection practice a lot" (Community Care, April 2025).



A poll of 1,000 six to 15-year-olds found that more than half of 13-year-olds had heard someone be racist at school (Gayle, 2020).



There is an under-representation of South Asian children in child sexual abuse referrals.

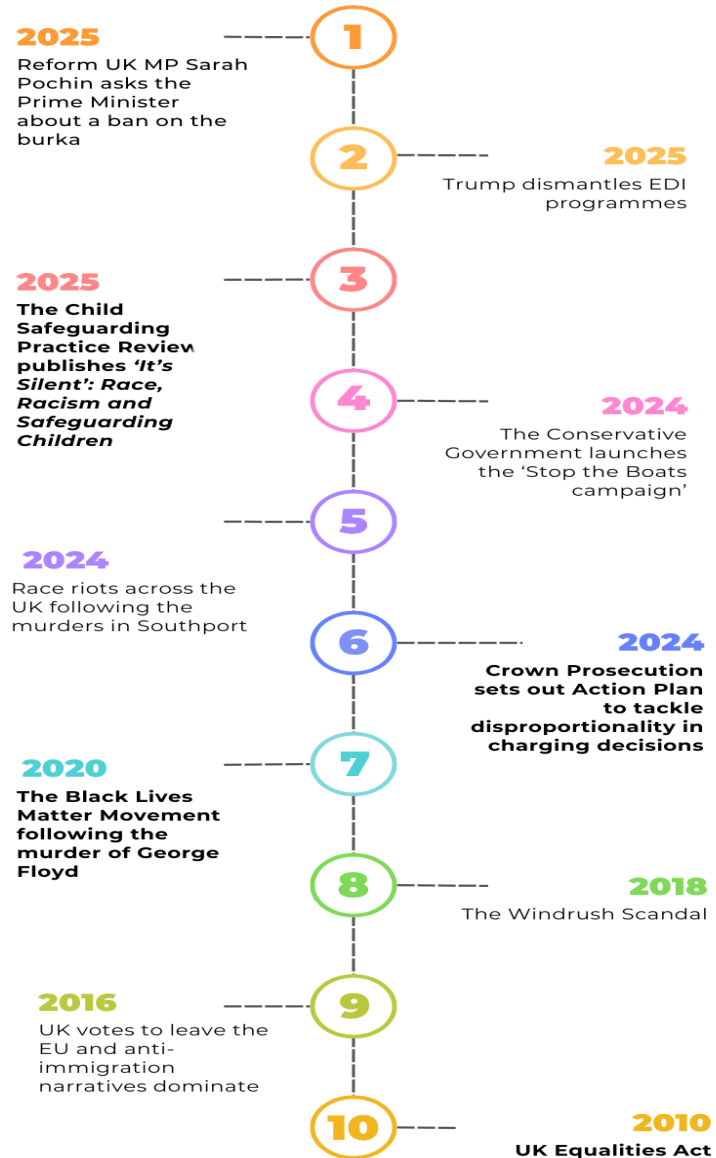
(Scott, 2023; Jassal, 2025).

Black children in foster care receive fewer routine/preventive check-ups yet more treatment for chronic conditions.

(Radney et al., 2024).



HISTORICAL EBB AND FLOW OF RACISM



The pernicious nature of racism: a normal day in the gym

Everyone in the women's only exercise class is getting on quite nicely, chatting with the female instructor throughout. When the class finishes, two women are alone with the instructor, continuing to talk about family life, children, education etc.

Jenny



1. My son is very educated and clever, but where he works, he is at the bottom.

4. No. He doesn't tick the box. He's not....I just told him to say he's XXXXX

2. What do you mean?

3. He doesn't tick the box? He's not...

Priya



Lisa



Reflect on what you think about this scenario.

Let's start reframing the discourses

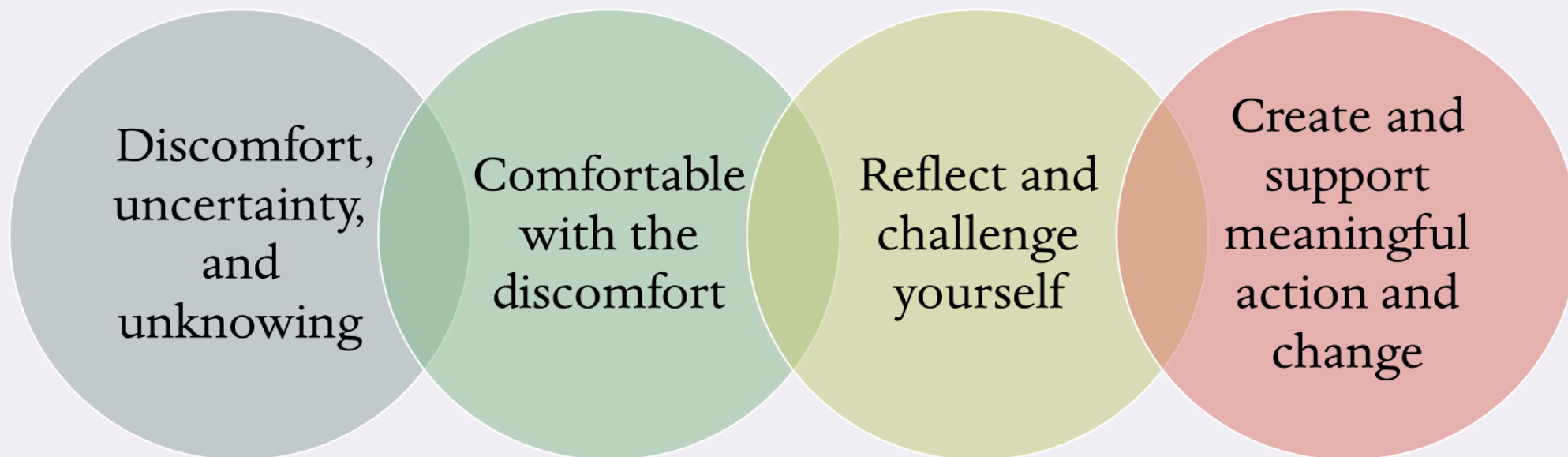
Traditional Frame

- "At-risk youth"
- "Lack of engagement"
- "Cultural barriers"
- "Lack of reporting"
- "Lack of integration"

Disruptive Frame

- "System-impacted youth"
- "Institutional exclusion"
- "Lack of cultural humility"
- "Institutional apathy"
- "Develop understanding of racial trauma"

Courageous conversations



AoCPP Special Interest Group 'Culture in Child Protection'
Next meeting 16 July @ 9.30am

‘Professionals do not have to be completely free of racism or bias to be anti-racist’.

(Association of London Directors of Children’s Services, 2018, p.15).



The stunting of courageous conversations

Lack of practitioner confidence to discuss issues concerning race and racism

Defensiveness or 'white fragility' (DiAngelo, 2018) can emerge, even amongst those who consider themselves progressive

Stunts honest dialogue about racism, diverting attention on their own feelings of victimisation rather than on those who are racially minoritised

This diversion fails to effectively serve the needs of children, and increases the dangers and risks to them

- 1. Reflect on our own anxieties and fears about talking about race.**
- 2. Do we know about our unconscious biases, and how are we mitigating against these?**
- 3. Is our organisation supporting us to make effective changes?**


Replace defensiveness with open and honest conversations, addressing anxieties, concerns and fears.

The responsibility of practitioners and organisations

Have we read the reports on disproportionalities and how does this inform individual and organisational practice?



How do we explore the lived experiences of racially minoritised children and young people? Do we know how race and ethnicity, and other intersections, impact them? Do we know enough about racial trauma (Cénat, 2022)?



As leaders are we naming these issues and taking ownership and responsibility to recognise and address race and racism in safeguarding practice? e.g. workforce culture, hiring practices, policies, recording ethnicity data.

Concluding thoughts



Deep inside all of us there is a sense of what is right and wrong



Conversations about race are deeply emotional but we need to remember that conversations and discourses shape perception, which shapes practice and policy



Conversations which interrogate, reframe, and lead to action



Doing nothing, should never be an option

Further reading

- Association of London Directors of Children's Services (2018). *Adolescent Safeguarding in London: A Handbook for Collaboration*. Available at: [Adolescent Safeguarding Handbook – LIIA](#) [Accessed 08 June 2025].
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- Radney, A., Lee, J.Y., Xu, A. et al. (2024). Racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare utilization among children in U.S. foster care: Recommendations to challenge the status quo based on a scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 162.
- Runnymede Trust (2024). *Ending the use of strip search against children*.
- Scott (2023). *Key messages from research on intra-familial child sexual abuse*, 2nd ed. Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.
- Stewart-Hall, C., Langham, L., & Miller, P. (2023). Preventing school exclusions of Black children in England – a critical review of prevention strategies and interventions. *Equity in Education & Society*, 2(3), 225-242.
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- Youth Endowment Fund (2025). *Racial disproportionality in violence affecting children and young people*.

**Thank
You.**

