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Wynetta Devore
Syracuse University

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Responses to Aging in Great Britain: The Black Experience

WYNETTA DEVORE
Syracuse University

Ethnic minority persons who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean and Asia in response to the call for workers are now elderly. British social workers have not responded well to their needs. This article examines recent progress in social work education and practice in West Yorkshire. It examines research related to elderly needs conducted by the Kirklees Metropolitan Council. Also examined are anti-racist, ethnic-sensitive education and practice models developed by faculty and practitioners.

Arriving in Britain

In the era following the second world war, the British economy, short of labor, looked to former colonies for able-bodied persons who were willing to come to England, the Motherland, for employment. Early in 1948 young immigrant males from Jamaica found employment in foundries, on the railways, as farm workers, clerical workers in the Post Office, in coach building and plumbing (Fryer 1984).

In the years that followed, more young West Indians went to Britain. Many from Barbados, Trinidad, and Jamaica were recruited by London Transport. West Indian nurses were invited, as were skilled workers for the hotel and restaurant industries (Fryer 1984).

At the same time, rural workers from India and Pakistan accepted the invitation to come for employment. This group, and others, was influenced by the "push-pull" phenomenon that often accompanies immigration. The push, unemployment in India and in the British West Indies; the pull, the promise of employment in Britain. Young men and women left their homes to escape high unemployment, low wages, and chronic lack of opportunity (Fryer 1984).

Blakemore (1985) explained that the Caribbean and Asian response to the labor shortage in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 60s would increase Britain's population of minority elderly quite rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed these young workers did mature and now form a cohort of ethnic minority elderly in Britain. It is anticipated that by the year 2000 there will be approximately 300,000 minority elders in the United Kingdom as a whole (Victor 1987, Mays 1983). These were not the first nonwhite persons to arrive in England.

Historical Perspectives

Despite the generally accepted view that the multicultural history of England began with the building of the British Empire, Fryer (1984) suggests that Africans were in Britain even before the English came. As soldiers in the Roman imperial army, they occupied the south of England for at least three and a half centuries. Various accounts give evidence of a Black presence in the Courts of the Monarchy as entertainers, musicians, dancers and servants. They were also to be found serving in the homes of titled and propertied families.

Although it was entertaining to have Blacks at Court, Queen Elizabeth hardly approved. In July 1596, noting a concern for the increase in this population, she declared that there are "ti manie" infidel Blackmoores in the country, taking food from the mouths of her subjects. It was her pleasure "that those kind of people should be expelled from the land. (p. 11) Thus the tone for the future, indeed the present, was set.

More recent history is of concern here. We are more familiar with the glory and demise of the British Empire. Fact and fiction have presented a dismal picture of relationships between conqueror and the conquered on several continents. Wars in this century changed the population of England as Black members of the Empire came to the Island to live filling non-skilled positions necessary for the support of the general population.

Not surprisingly, the experience of those people who came from the Caribbean, India, and Pakistan and elsewhere were negative. Many came with great hope, encouraged by the British Nationality Act of 1948 which confirmed the rights of citizens

of the United Kingdom to enter Britain freely. The Victory of World War II and the establishment of the welfare state had produced a sense of optimism and confidence in the ability of the British system to solve social problems and to open its doors to members of British Commonwealth countries.

The migration was such that by the mid-1970's a significant number of Blacks had been born in Britain. Earlier generations of their families had not been welcomed as the racism of the sixteenth century was compounded by twentieth century economic fears. Racism was denied. Rather, as was the case in the Elizabethan era, overpopulation was presented as the dominant issue." . . . the fewer Black people there were in this country the better it would be for 'race relations" (Fryer, 1984, p. 381).

The optimism of the post World War II period was slowly replaced as more restrictive immigration legislation was passed. The Immigration Control Act of 1961, was intended to restrict immigration of Blacks but was couched in terms of workforce needs and began to depict commonwealth people as aliens. At the same time anti-discrimination legislation, the Race Relations Act of 1968 was passed. Some viewed this as a curious effort to justify limitation of immigration by suggesting that this legislation would help Blacks already there.

According to this act, discrimination on the basis of color, race or ethnic or national origins is unlawful in areas of employment, housing, granting of credit and insurance. Funds were to be made available to local authorities to assist voluntary organizations in providing service to enhance equality of opportunity. At the same time, legislation analogous to what has been termed affirmative action in the United States began to be passed. Making estimates on the basis of diverse information available suggests that by the mid 1980's approximately 4 percent of the population was considered Black. Of that number, substantial segments are concentrated in urban centers such as London and in specific segments of that and other cities. So much so, that in some sections such as London's Hackney half of the clients of the Department of Social Services are Black.

It is hardly surprising that those termed Blacks in the British system are disadvantaged in respect to education, income, and equality of access to social services. Interviews carried out by

the author in 1989 with leading social work educators and practitioners suggested that British Blacks were dealing with a post colonial phenomenon, where need for increasing power is among the main issues.

Few professionals interviewed disagreed with the view that racism is all pervasive. Many presented a common theme that challenged the British myth that it is a white, unicultural society.

Invisible Generation

Scant attention has been paid to this minority population as it moved into old age. Indeed, the aged in general have not fared well in British social work and other social science areas. The first suggestion that social workers might take a look at practice with the elderly came from the British Association of Social Workers in 1973. However, it was not until 1977 that a working party published "Guidelines for Social Work with the Elderly" in an issue of *Social Work Today* (BASW 1977).

The very detailed work defined the elderly and work with them. Essential areas of knowledge were identified, as well as the values, attitudes, and skills that would support practice. Special attention was paid to practice in a variety of settings, including home, residential, and hospital care.

Appendices focused on aspects of physiological aging and statutory provisions for the elderly. At no place does this document call to the attention of the social worker the influence that race and/or ethnicity, the migration experience, or social class may have on the aging process.

Our concern here is with ethnic minority elderly, so it is important to note that this significant practice document failed to take into account the various aging experiences in the United Kingdom. This neglect is evidence of a narrow view of practice based on apparent assumptions that the aging process is universal. The reality overlooked was the experience of aging in Scotland was different than the experience in Wales or England, and the minority experience would be different for each group in each country.

In 1978, a year later, Bosanquet painted a portrait of old age that showed the economic condition of elderly. Although the

data presented spoke to income and spending habits of pensioners, again no attention was paid to the variation in well-being that could be related to membership in majority or minority ethnic groups.

By the 1980s greater attention was being paid to the experiences of the elderly in general, and minority elderly in particular. Thomson (1984) considered social welfare responses in that time period and noted the decline in the value of pensions for the elderly, concluding that benefits were not as valuable as allowance distributed under the nineteenth century Poor Law. As the British society grew richer it was more willing to use its increased wealth to increase the relative position of the elderly. The claim was that in the late twentieth century Britain was over-burdened with elderly dependents and therefore unable to be as generous as it would like. Although not identified, among this population were members of ethnic minority groups.

The household structure of the elderly population was examined by Dale, Evandrou and Arber (1987). Their examination revealed a fall in the proportion of the elderly who were living with others as well as the fall in the age of marriage, suggesting that young people were leaving home to marry at an earlier age. The work also found that the vast majority of single elderly living alone were women. In each instance, the conclusions would have been greatly enriched if consideration had been given to the influence of ethnicity in family lifestyle and structure, particularly as it related to Caribbean and Asian and families.

In 1981 the ethnic minority population was but 87,117, less than one per cent of the elder population. Not only were these persons largely ignored in the literature but by service providers as well (Boneham 1989). Although there had been an increased emphases on community care and services it appeared that racism and ageism slowed progress. In addition these were issues related to integration or segregation, the appropriate role of the family, and the roles to be assumed by voluntary or state agencies.

The paucity of work related to the minority elderly led practitioners and others to examine the work of gerontologists in the United States (Boneham 1989). A comparison of inequalities in old age between Britain and the United States emphasized

the lack of research in Britain. However, Blakemore (1985) concluded that with the evidence at hand Britain's population of Asians and West Indian aging suffered from depressed incomes in retirement because of problems related to pension contributions during their work years. He also noted that assumptions and myths about family support placed Asian elderly in a vulnerable position, leaving them in double jeopardy, old and lonely.

Mays (1983) conducted a review of the literature related to members of ethnic minority groups in Britain. The first study identified, a qualitative study, was conducted among West Indians in Leicester; the second, conducted in Birmingham, included Asian, Afro-Caribbean, and white elderly; the third, a survey of elderly and late-middle-aged West Indians, was conducted in Nottingham. In his conclusions Mays identified two contrasting assumption about elderly Asians in Britain, the first, that the culture and lifestyle of Asian families will continue to support the elderly without the need for social services. The second assumption is that migration will erode traditional practices and values supportive of the elderly.

Mays's review was of research conducted during the 1970s. More recent work by Sammy Chiu (1989) provides a more current portrait of the elderly and their families. He suggests that the move from an agrarian life in China to a cosmopolitan life in London changed the role of the elderly, who have the knowledge needed for success in farming. As they age in the city they often have need for formal and informal health care. They have little knowledge of available services and many would be reluctant to receive services because "they didn't understand us."

The most important source of assistance for this group of elderly Chinese was their family. The question to be considered is, whether the family is able to care for them. While families may provide most of the care needed, constraints must be recognized. Economic needs of families call for sons and daughters to work long hours. They are not available to provide the care. Those who were early migrants have had time to establish relationships with their grandchildren, and language is less likely to be a problem. More recent immigrants have had little time to develop relationships with adolescents who speak English and very little Chinese. Chiu's (1989) work begin to question old as-

sumptions about ethnic dispositions in the Chinese family. This work advances practice considerations far beyond the BASW statement in 1977, which rendered minority elderly invisible.

The Current State of the Art

Paper 30

The most significant impact on practice in relation to attention to ethnic minority groups in Britain was CCETSW (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work) Paper 30 (1989). This document set forth the requirements and regulations for the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW).

This Paper identifies the areas of knowledge, values, skills, and measures of competence expected of a qualified social worker. The significant difference is the call for attention to be paid to many areas of diversity in relation to the essential knowledge base, values for practice, and the skills needed for competence. Expected knowledge includes "an understanding of the range of human needs, especially those of vulnerable, disadvantaged, and stigmatized groups" and "transcultural factors which affect clients' needs and social work practice" (p. 14).

Qualified workers are expected to be able to develop an awareness of structural oppression related to race, class, and gender; understand and counteract the impact of stigma and discrimination on grounds of poverty, age, disability, and sectarianism and recognize the need for and seek to promote policies and practices which are non-discriminatory and anti-oppressive (p. 16). Most certainly, then, the practitioner is expected to be able to practice with sensitivity with ethnic minority individuals, families, and communities. A declaration of the need for ethnic sensitivity gives no assurance that practice will change significantly in the immediate future. Change in attitudes and practice responses comes slowly, although progress is evident in social work education as students learn from experiences in ethnic differences and sensitive practice responses.

The Kirklees Black Elders Survey 1989–1990

Prompted by the lack of current research related to the needs of Black elderly, the Race Equality Unit of Kirklees Metropolitan Council instituted a study of the experiences of the Black

elderly in this West Yorkshire community. Rather than pursuing the practice of making people fit into the services provided the survey provided information related to the needs of the Black elderly. The expectation was that the goal of ethnic sensitive practice might be accomplished.

The Black community of Kirklees consists primarily of Indian and Pakistani Muslims, India Sikhs, and Afro-Caribbeans. The elderly respondents in this survey were born in India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean having arrived in the United Kingdom between 1955 and 1969. They had not expected to spend the rest of their lives there but at this time in their lives they expect to spend the rest of their lives in the United Kingdom. This response is similar to Mays' (1983) findings in relation to the expectations and experiences of South Asians in Britain.

Health is a major issue for aging persons across ethnic groups. This group of Black elderly had physicians that were available to assist with health concerns. In addition they could count on family and/or neighbors to assist when necessary. Primary complaints were poor eyesight, arthritis, and difficulty with walking. At the same time many reported that they were able to help someone else with their daily tasks. In instances of their own needs 45% could count on family members help with using the stairs, shopping, or washing and ironing. However 12% stated that no one helped them out.

Using national representative data from the general household survey for 1980, Dale, Evandrou and Arber (1987) discovered a fall in the proportion of elderly living with others. The more recent Kirklees study found that 70% in the elderly Black population lived with others, with between two and fourteen persons in the household. Support systems in the community were strong, with 82% of the respondents stating that they had close friends who lived in the vicinity.

These findings in relation to awareness, understanding and potential use of services were similar to the finding of others (Mays 1983, Atkin, Cameron, Badger and Evers 1989, Chiu 1989). Seventy six percent of those interviewed were not able to tell the interviewer what services were provided for the elderly by the Council's Social Service Department. These services included social work, equipment and home appliances, home

care, day care, residential care and meals on wheels. Only 8.5% received services, and of these, 5% received services from social workers. However, when services were described, 50% thought that the services might be useful.

Language continues to be a barrier to the delivery of services. The survey was conducted in English, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Urdu. A majority of respondents could read and write in their mother tongue, however they could not read English as a second language. They felt that it would be useful to have information from social service, printed in languages other than English.

Recommendations to the Council based on the findings of this survey should move social service delivery in a direction that is more ethnic sensitive to the ethnic reality of this population. The list of recommendations is quite comprehensive. Some of the more significant listed here ask that:

the report and future reports be available in ALL community languages;

information related to personal services (forms, signposts, leaflets) be printed in ALL community languages;

training for professional staff, especially those having regular contact with the public become available. The training to include; community languages, the use of interpreters, ethnically sensitive practice, eliminating racism, ethnic monitoring and record keeping;

personal service continue to provide ethnically sensitive service and develop such environments in elderly people's homes, day care, home service and social work provisions;

the attention of ALL Executive directors and Heads of Services be drawn to this reports and it's recommendations and their pertinence to their own service provisions.

Change in the delivery of service will require that these and other recommendations become agency policy. Indications are that the Black population of elderly will grow in Kirklees as it will in all of the United Kingdom.

The Northern Curriculum Project

The Kirklees Council social service delivery system may look to the "Northern Curriculum Development Project on Anti-Racist Social Work Education" as they attempt to implement the recommendations made following their survey. This project helps educators and practitioners move toward the development of anti-racist practice and education. Organized by CCETSW, the project represents a commitment to provide support for classroom and practice teachers as they work with students toward education and practice that is anti-racist and ethnic sensitive. Competencies developed by students help them to fulfill the requirements for the Diploma in Social Work set forth in Paper 30.

Improving Practice with Elders

One of the six training packs produced by the project was devoted to *Improving Practice with Elders* (Ahmad-Aziz, Froggatt, Richardson, Whittaker and Leung 1992). This group was multi-ethnic and diverse in age, gender and social work experience, as were others in the project. Experience was gained in direct practice, community work and management, and as lecturers in college social work training programs.

The authors aim to educate and train for "anti-racist practice" with the elders by looking at specific areas of learning, with a view toward helping people working in social organizations develop areas of competence presented in CCETSW Paper 30 (p. 11).

Training is centered on 1) the legal framework for social work involvement with Black elders; 2) the organizational context which provides the structures, policies and procedures within which social work is practiced and services are provided, and 3) assessment, decision making, and counseling skills (p. 12).

Trainer and students are provided with aims, learning objectives, and case studies for each section, along with a range of resource papers as background to support the material under discussion. For example, the unit on the legal framework for practice with the elders includes aims, objectives, areas of

competence to be achieved, along with areas to be covered in the future. A case study provides an opportunity for students to explore the legal and practical implication for a Bengali speaking family that takes responsibilities for bringing an elder relative to the United Kingdom. Discussion questions follow the case presentation (p. 21-24). A final resource paper provided a discussion on legislation.

This well organized training program is important in the history of social work education in the United Kingdom. Indeed it has enriched social work education and practice. Core groups of college lecturers and agency based professionals who participated provide students the benefit of the experience. A CCETSW steering committee managed the project and each group was provided with a staff resource person.

One may say that the art of anti-racist, ethnic sensitive practice with ethnic minority elders is now well along in its development in the United Kingdom. Legislative thrusts and the efforts of CCETSW have facilitated efforts to enhance practice with this group. Yet, there is much to be done. Other council's like Kirklees must look to their minority clients and potential clients for direction. These may be elderly persons, the group considered in this work, children and their families, children and adults in residential care, or special population groups. Educators must be able to provide education and training that accepts the competencies that lead to the diploma, relying on the knowledge base, values, and skills needed for anti-racist, ethnic sensitive practice.

The Next Generation

Individuals who migrated from Asia and the Caribbean in the 1940s and 1950s may be counted among the aging minority population. Earlier, population expectations for the year 2000 were mentioned. By that time there are likely to be 300,000 minority elderly in the United Kingdom (Victor 1987, Mays 1983). They have lived through and contributed much to the struggle to achieve a place in British society, residing in communities throughout the United Kingdom; Belfast, Cardiff, Liverpool, Leeds, Lemington, Birmingham, Nottingham, and, of

course London (Ahmad-Aziz, Froggatt, Richardson, Whittaker Leung 1992, Fryer 1985, Mays 1983, Boneham 1989). The new generation of minority elders have lived in younger cohorts in the same time period.

They, along with the older cohorts, provide possibilities for continued explorations into the minority experience of aging in the United Kingdom. The work has only just begun.

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