
The following essays complement other sections particularly education. They add depth and qualitative understanding and insight to the available statistical data. They also identify important categories that need to be pursued via research and the need for specific data relevant to Black Muslims.

BLACK MUSLIMS AND THE POLICE

BY SAFFIE JALLOW AIDARA

INTRODUCTION

I became active in politics in the 1980s, at a time of enormous turmoil—there were riots in Brixton, Liverpool and Bristol, “Scrap sus” was a huge issue and young Black men were seen as the enemy within, just as young Muslim men are today. - Diane Abbott (2008)

British society tends to believe in the myth that it is only in America that Black communities face racial bias in their interactions with the police. As Abbott argued against the dismantling of civil liberties by the government in the name of fighting terrorism, categorically, Black men and the Muslim men in this quote are seen as separate. This essay brings together these categories and explores how race and religion intersect.

In particular, this essay discusses Black Muslims and their interaction with the criminal justice system in the UK and the role different factors play in shaping the interaction such as poverty, education and socio-economic factors. The paper will also document the issues faced with stop and search and highlight the experiences of Black Muslims who have experienced it, with the aim of understanding how their religion affects their interactions with institutionally racist police forces.

The experiences of three Black Muslim in London illustrate what statistical data has shown (Shiner et al 2019). Adding a layer of complexity, the engagement of these men with police illustrate how faith is an important variable that shapes the experiences of Black British Muslims. This essay makes the argument that Black British Muslims are an important demographic whose experiences are obfuscated by the way categories are determined and data is currently collected in the UK.

POVERTY

There are a vast number of factors which affect the way communities engage with the criminal justice system and, specifically, the police. Poverty remains a key determining factor in terms of a person's likelihood to stay in education, gain good employment and ultimately whether or not they will engage with the criminal justice system as a defendant in their lifetime.

There is an overrepresentation of Black people in the poorest households in the UK. Even though Black people make up less than 4% of the population, they represent 40% of the

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poorest households.⁹ In terms of comparison, income poverty amongst the white population stands at the lowest rate amongst the ethnic groups at 15%.¹⁰

The Nuffield College Centre for Social Investigation highlighted the lack of data in regard to the connection between poverty and religion in contrast to the well documented link between poverty and ethnicity (Heath and Li, 2015). The working paper found that there were major differences in the prevalence of poverty between people of different religious affiliations. Muslims were the most likely religious group to be found in poverty with 50% living in poverty.

It is important to note that the authors of the study were aware that people from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani community had high incidences of poverty and therefore it may be difficult to identify whether it was the same people being identified. The Nuffield study concluded that, even when ethnic differences were accounted for, Muslims were still more likely to live in poverty than any other religious group or those with no religious affiliation at all. The paper states “we estimate that, after allowing for the effects of ethnicity and other factors such as age profiles, the size of this increased risk of Muslims experiencing poverty is approximately 20% (compared with Anglicans). The equivalent figures for Sikhs and Hindus are 10% and 7% respectively.”

From studies that show how being Black and being Muslim are factors that increase the likelihood of a person living in poverty, one inference from these studies is that the same is true for Black Muslims who are at the intersection (that is to say the double disadvantage) of being both Black in ethnicity and Muslim in faith. As mentioned earlier, living in poverty has significant effects on a person's life chances and one of these areas is in education and social mobility.

EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

There is plenty of evidence of the impact education has in regard to social mobility. Similarly, education is a predictor of income (Walker 2013). This appears to hold true for ethnic minorities in Britain, though much of the data on the educational attainment of Muslims focuses on Muslims who are South Asian.

It is very difficult to find the outcomes for Black Muslims in the UK. Much of the published data focuses on children from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi population. A very large improvement for Bangladeshi students occurred in the years from 1991 to 2003, but in 2003 they were still below the White British average. However, by 2013 Bangladeshi students were achieving above the White British average and this is despite Bangladeshi students being one of the most socio-economically deprived communities in England. The same was true for Pakistani pupils who also improved substantially. In 2003 their chances of achieving 5 A-C grades at GCSE were only two thirds the odds for White British students. However, the gap has closed steadily and achieved parity with White British students in 2011 and currently their odds of achieving 5 A-C grades do not significantly differ from White British students (Strand 2015).

⁹ 46% of all people living in families where the household head is Black/African/Caribbean/Black. See Social Metrics Commission (2020)

¹⁰ Where the head of household identifies as white. See Francis-Devine (2020)

Whilst this sounds like good news for the Muslim community, an interesting report from The Social Mobility Commission (2017) titled ‘The Social Mobility challenges faced by Young Muslims’ found that:

young people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds are more likely than ever to succeed in education and go on to university than other groups - particularly girls. Despite their successes, however, Muslims experience the greatest economic disadvantages of any group in UK society.

The report highlighted that even though these groups were now taking paths leading to a higher level of education, economic disparity remains.

The outcomes for Black pupils in the UK education system is well researched. Strand (2015) found that:

In 2003 the odds for Black Caribbean pupils achieving 5 A-C grades were less than half the odds for White British pupils (32.9% vs. 51.3%), and for Mixed White and Black Caribbean and Black African pupils only two-thirds the odds for White British pupils (39.9% 40.7% respectively). In 2013 Black African pupils achieved slightly above the White British average. Both Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean students have closed the gap with White British students, from 18 percentage points in 2003 to just 2 percentage points (80.4% vs. 82.7%) in 2013, although a small gap remains.

What these statistics show is that Black pupils (including Black Muslims) are not on a par with the White British population just yet when it comes to educational attainment. Muslims have been shown to be less likely to be awarded first class degrees and this is a pattern which has also been seen with Black students at university who, even with more engagement with their studies, attain lower grades than their white British counterparts.

Problems persist for Black and Brown people in the workplace with the McGregor Smith Review highlighting that all BME groups were more likely to be overqualified and yet less likely than their White counterparts to be promoted (2017). Operation Black Vote (2020) also carried out a report on race inequality in the workplace (Bowyer et al 2020) and found that BAME adults are 58% more likely to be unemployed than their White counterparts but the authors recommend looking within categories because labour market experiences differ among ethnic groups. “For example, although 25-year-olds from Pakistani, Black African, Other (which includes Chinese, Arab and any other Asian group) and mixed-race backgrounds were more likely to be unemployed than their White peers; Indian, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean adults were no more likely to be out of work” (Bowyer and Henderson, 2020).

This is a crucial point. Data on Black Muslims can only be inferred from studies related to Muslims or Black people generally. There is clear evidence of both Black people not performing at the same level as their White counterparts at GCSE level whilst a large group of Muslims of Pakistani and Bangladeshi background are. At university, we see Black students and Muslim

students not attaining the same grades and with the reports showing the greater likelihood of unemployment and underemployment (Adams, 2020). The only conclusion is that the picture for Black Muslims is a complex one and one that, again, needs further targeted research. It is imperative that the Black British Muslim condition and experience is documented (Busby, 2019).

Title: Stop and search rate per 1,000 people, by ethnicity. Location: England and Wales. Time period: April 2018 to March 2019. Source: Police powers and procedures, England and Wales year ending March 2019 | Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK

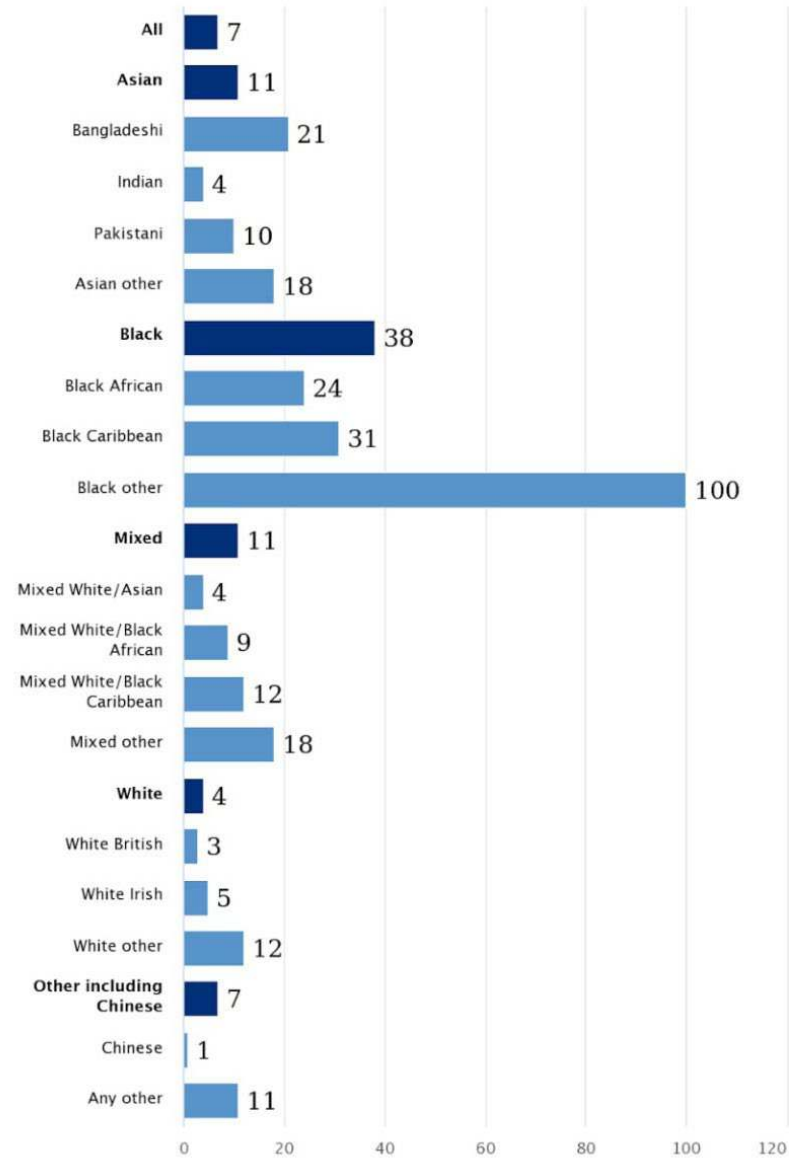


Figure 1: Stop and Search Rate by Ethnicity

STOP AND SEARCH

The statistics in regard to Black people and the way that they experience disproportionate stop and search rates has been a matter of concern for decades. In 2018/2019, 22% of stop and searches were carried out on Black people in England and Wales and this is despite them only making up just over 3% of the population. In contrast, White people made up 59% of stop and searches whilst representing 87% of the population (Ministry of Justice, 2018). More recent data backs up this trend:

This graph highlights between April 2018 and March 2019 for every 1000 white people, there were 4 stop and searches. The number was 38 in regard to Black people (Home Office, 2020).

Hargreaves (2018) offers important insight into the experience of British Muslims. The study revealed that whilst being Muslim only increased the likelihood of a person being subjected to a foot stop by the Police by just 1%, once stopped a Muslim was eight times more likely to be searched. It was also clear from this study that British Muslims were less likely to be stopped if they were in a vehicle. The picture from this article therefore is quite complex and reveals that many different factors can come into play for British Muslims in regard to police interactions.

There is substantial data in regard to Black people and, separately, people who identify as Muslim. Therefore, coming to a view on the experience of Black Muslims and their engagement with police can be quite difficult but the experience of three Black Muslim men sheds some light on the policing of Black Muslim men.

INTERVIEW 1: BLACK MALE, BIRMINGHAM, 34 YEARS OLD

My parents are from Trinidad and Barbados. I grew up in Handsworth, Birmingham. An area with a predominantly Black and Asian population. I had issues with the police from when I was 17 years old until my early 20s. I had an advantage amongst my peers in that my mum worked for the courts and would tell me how to behave if approached. My interactions with the police have always been bad, I feel they try to draw you out and as a Black boy it is your job not to give them an opportunity to put cuffs on you.

One specific incident I remember is my friend and I in the town centre. I went into the McDonalds as he carried on walking ahead. When I came out I saw he was talking to two policemen. As I walked over the police officer said “Oh we have another one”. As I said, my mother had told me how to act so I greeted him with a hello and asked him how he was doing. He asked what I had in my bag and I told him CDs of the Rat Pack. He opened the bag and pulled out the CD and I could see he was genuinely shocked. He asked if I was into this sort of music and we went on to have a conversation and he let us go. Whilst this was a good outcome for my friend and I, I found it really disheartening for him to be so shocked that I was interested in that sort of music; it shows that the police have a specific view of Black men and boys. I also had to treat him in a civil way for him to change his attitude towards me as the first thing he said was ‘Oh we have another one’. It’s clear there is no respect for certain citizens they serve from the offset.

Now the contrary story I have to that is when I got stopped 16 times in one day. It used to be the case that if you produce the slip that they give you, they are not supposed to search you again. I collected 16 slips and I wish I kept them. It is interesting to me that this all happened before I reverted to Islam. I think it is being a young Black male that makes you a target as they do not look at us and think we can be Muslim.

INTERVIEW 2: BLACK MALE, LONDON, 36 YEARS OLD

It is my view that you are targeted because you’re Black and they don’t know you’re Muslim. There is a distinctive look of a Muslim in the Asian community that everyone is familiar with but the majority of police are ignorant about Africans and Caribbeans being Muslim.

INTERVIEW 3: BLACK MALE, LONDON, 31 YEARS OLD

One incident I had with the police was when I was 16. I had been finding my identity as a Black Muslim around this time. I accepted that I was Muslim first and I started wearing a kufi¹¹, carrying ‘Fortress of a Muslim’¹² and my attars¹³ everywhere. I was coming back from College and going through Waterloo station and British Transport Police was there and the barriers were open and everyone was walking through. They stopped me and my friends and they saw I have a zone 2 travelcard and Waterloo is in Zone 1. They straightaway notified the police that was there and three policemen ran over, grabbed me and put me up against the wall. This was not too long after Jean Charles De Menezes had been killed and I remember being so scared.

They were shouting questions in my face like where are you coming from? Where are you going? But the questions were coming so fast that I couldn’t even get answers out. They went through my pouch and asked me what the attars was? I asked them to just smell it. They told me they were searching me under the Terrorist Act and at that point my heart sunk even though I knew I was not involved in that. My other friends were there and no one else got the treatment I did. The way they ran up to me and manhandled me was bad but the hostility grew after they realised I was Muslim.

The cases above suggest faith shapes how Black men are treated during stop and searches. In particular, the third individual spoke about the hostility towards him grew when they saw the Islamic items he had in his possession and assumed terrorism. There is evidence that Muslims are more likely to be searched once stopped. In an arena where Black men are stopped so frequently, further research is needed on what role faith plays in how they are treated.

CONCLUSION

There is work to be done in gathering more information on the lives of Black Muslims in Britain. My research shows that whilst some relationships and phenomena can be inferred, there are a number of complex social and cultural factors at play and therefore the lives of Black Muslims cannot be seen to mirror that of our South Asian Muslims. The only way we will be able to get a clear view is for the data about Muslims to be disaggregated; this requires a focus on Muslims not being seen as one racial entity but a faith followed by many races.

¹¹ Cap

¹² Book of supplications

¹³ Frankincense



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FROM CHARGE TO CONVICTION - THE BLACK MUSLIM'S EXPERIENCE OF THE BRITISH JUDICIAL SYSTEM

BY FATIMA MUHAMMED