

CARJ:Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

In the summer of 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson appointed a Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, to examine 'why so many disparities persist' and 'what can be done to eliminate or mitigate them'. The Commission was specifically tasked to look at 'race and ethnic disparities in education, employment, crime and policing and health.' The Commission's Report was published on 31 March 2021 with headlines saying that the UK should be seen as an 'international exemplar of racial equality' and 'there was no evidence of institutional racism'. Throughout its Report the Commission is suggesting that, given the progress that has been made and given the complexity of inequalities based on race, class, geography and other factors, we should be taking steps to improve outcomes for all rather than concentrating too much on race. The Commission looks carefully at four areas.

Education. The Commission sees education in recent decades as a success story, with young people from ethnic minority communities achieving in school and going on to university. A few groups (eg Caribbean, Pakistani, Gypsy/Roma/Traveller, poor Whites and some mixed groups) still under-achieve and some of these are over-represented in exclusions. Under-achievement is due to many factors including poverty, geography, and family structure. The Commission has a number of recommendations to support all young people in education.

Employment, Fairness at Work and Enterprise. Employment for Black people and Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups is significantly lower than for White and Indian groups. A relatively small pay gap between white and ethnic minority groups remains. Ethnic minorities are making progress up the professional and occupational class ladder, but less so at the top. The Commission recommends further attention to the pay gap, promoting fairness at work and supporting young entrepreneurs.

Crime and Policing. Ethnic minorities are disproportionately both victims and perpetrators of crime. Black people especially are disproportionately victims of violent crime and homicide. For every young white victim of homicide there are 24 Black victims. Class B drug offences account for almost half of crime committed by ethnic minorities. Stop and search statistics need more careful analysis. Assaults on police officers are increasing and there are assaults on ethnic minority police officers including by people from similar backgrounds. No police service is ethnically representative of the population it serves. The Commission recommends work on establishing trust, supporting young people away from crime, encouraging ethnic minorities to work with the police and improving diversity in the police while giving them the skills to better serve a diverse community.

Health. The Commission rejects the generalisation that ethnic minorities have worse health outcomes than white people. The situation is extremely complex.

Ethnicity is not the main cause of health inequalities in the UK.

Deprivation, geography and exposure to health risks play an important

part. More needs to be done to explore health risks like family structure, social networks and unhealthy behaviour. There is no strong evidence of racism in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness.

The summary above is only suggestive and we encourage readers to read the full Report by following the link

below. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities>

Criticism of the Report – Institutional Racism

The Report is rich with data, but its interpretations and reflections go beyond the data and are questionable. However, many of its recommendations should be given thoughtful consideration. The Report has met with a chorus of criticism from reputable sources. We share many of these criticisms, and we are especially concerned about the Reports' sceptical discussion of 'institutional racism'.

The Scarman Report into the Brixton disorders (1981) defined institutional racism narrowly and denied its existence. Almost twenty years later, the Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, headed by Sir William Macpherson, finally looked carefully at the issue of 'institutional racism'. The Macpherson Report concluded that 'institutional racism ... exists both in the Metropolitan Police Service and in other Police Services and other institutions countrywide.' (6.39) Macpherson defined 'institutional racism' as:

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and

professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. It persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership." (6.34)

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales welcomed the Macpherson Report and urged Catholic organisations and institutions to review themselves and ‘look again at how they could better serve minority ethnic communities in our society.’ <https://www.carj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Serving-a-Multiethnic-Society.pdf>

The recent Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities acknowledges the earlier Macpherson Report and its definition of ‘institutional racism’, but is sceptical about the current use of the term. We prefer the positive approach of the Bishops to the Commission’s scepticism. We would suggest that organisations and institutions might be expected to take some responsibility for offering an appropriate service to our diverse society – along the lines of the ‘public sector equality duty’.

Some Critics of the Report

The following are a few of the critics with a link to their statements:

The Runnymede Trust

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/sewell>

Muslim Council of Britain

<https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/mcb-responds-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities-report/>

NHS Providers

<https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/news/to-pretend-discrimination-does-not-exist-is-damaging>

British Medical Journal (BMJ)

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/03/31/structural-racism-is-a-fundamental-cause-and-driver-of-ethnic-disparities-in-health/>

Simon Wooley Baron of Woodford

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/01/sewell-report-no-10-racism-protests>

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/01/doreen-lawrence-says-no-10-report-gives-racists-the-green-light>

David Olusoga

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/02/sewell-race-report-historical-young-people-britain>

British Sociological Association (BSA)

<https://es.britsoc.co.uk/bsa-response-to-commission-on-race-and-ethnic>

[disparities/](#)

Open letter from 399 Academics

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EQwtYRfT6Mxx-30T-FGthcA5eaf8M5YuJSXBNnyN-Ww/edit>

The King's Fund

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/press/press-releases/kings-fund-responds-commission-race-ethnic-disparities-report>

CARJ, 9 Henry Rd, London N4 2LH. 020 8802 8080. Info@carj.org.uk. The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is an independent charity committed to working with others of diverse backgrounds and beliefs to bring about a more just, more equal, more cooperative society. CARJ Briefings are primarily intended to give readers accurate and relevant background information on current issues. Occasionally, a position or argument may be put forward provisionally for reflection and further discussion.

