Conclusion and Recommendations

Strategic recommendations

• Failing to identify, challenge and redress the young people’s experiences of the youth justice system – should be present in all agencies of the justice system. The youth justice system should take into account the perceptions about their day-to-day encounters with justice agencies in the community and custody, and the strategies they employ in relation to community service.

The over-representation of black young people in the youth justice system is well documented. Yet relatively little is known about how young black people experience and perceive the youth justice system. The Just Justice research project has sought to fill this gap by exploring young people’s perceptions about their encounters with justice agencies in the community and custody, and the strategies they employ in relation to these agencies.

Just Justice comprises of a collection of four studies, edited by Professor David Wilson and Gwyther Rees, with conclusions and recommendations by Elizabeth Lovel and Professor David Wilson.

• Serve and Protect? Black young people’s experiences of policing in the community

• Play the game: The experiences of young black men in custody

• Dreaming of despair? A retrospектив post-custody study

• Acting Stagnant? Young black people and the youth justice system

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March 2006
Charity Registration No. 221124
Almost 200 young people does not seek to verify young people’s claims of racism – to do so may risk the sense of alienation many black young people feel when asked to ‘play the game’. Following recommendations from Macpherson (1999), a racist incident is understood as being ‘any incident which is perceived to be a victim by the victim or any other person’.

Key Themes

Experiences of racism

Just Justice highlights the experience of racism that black young people interviewees feel they have suffered in all areas of their lives. They report racist encounters with members of the general public, neighbours, their peers, carers, law enforcement authorities and by doing so find better solutions.

The research also suggests an emerging triad burden for those who are young, black and Muslim in a post-9/11 and 7/7 world, with some participants believing that being Muslim complicates the racism they experience, especially in realms of the world and name-calling they are subjected to.

‘I’m black, you know, and my skin colour. ’

The strategies of ‘keeping quiet’ and ‘going nuts’ were used in the perceived absence of official channels of complaint. In many cases young people say they will not report racist incidents or make complaints because they either are unaware of official complaints procedures or because they lack trust in individuals and the system.

The Government’s ‘Respect’ agenda highlights the importance of building relationships with young people and the racism they suffer on an individual and community level, raise questions about the appropriateness and efficacy of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Notes


Implications for new enforcement measures

The complex difficulties experienced by black and Muslim young people and the racism they suffer on an individual and institutional level, raise questions about the appropriateness and efficacy of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour.

In using official channels of complaint and protection from racism.

What’s that?’

Young person in custody quoted by Wilson.

What are your feelings about the Government… do nothing about it. ’

If the strategy of ‘keeping quiet’ fails, or if the young people interviewed do not adopt a second behaviour described by Wilson, they feel that their risks are too great to contain their anger and fight back against racism.

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Almost 200 young people participate in the research, University of Justice Policy and Research, University of Central England. The study was broadly ethnographic and is based on interviews with, and participant observation of, black young people.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of the report the term ‘black’ has been used to include any person likely to experience racism in British society because of their non-white skin colour. About 200 young people aged between 10 and 18 contributed their views to the research project.

Just Justice does not seek to verify young people’s claims of racism – to do so may only create the sense of alienation many black young people feel when asked to ‘prove’ that they are being victimised by racism. Following recommendations from MacPherson (1999), a racist incident is understood as ‘any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’.

Key Themes

Experience of racism

Just Justice highlights the experience of racism that black young people interviewed feel they have suffered in all areas of their lives. They report racist experiences with members of the general public, neighbours, their peers, carers and professionals within the justice agencies. The study provides many examples of different types of overt racism from name-calling to physical assault. It highlights the blatant disregard and inaction by authority for the rights of these young people and in particular in post-custody work. The fact that the professionals may be white and the young people need not be considered an issue. But in fact, the young people reacted particularly positively when they believed they had found someone who ‘was their own’.

The impact of racism on black young people

Young people interviewed exhibit deeply held negative feelings about the world around them. They also display a sophisticated and wide range of the use and abuse of power, both institutional and at individual level; fear in the face of powerful, adult authority; and a lack of trust in those who should really be there to care for and protect them.

DRA – Don’t Trust Anyone!

A catch used by young people quoted by Hill

An exception to the lack of trust was demonstrated towards the professionals of the study in particular in post-custody work. The fact that the professionals may be white and the young people need not be considered an issue. But in fact, the young people reacted particularly positively when they believed they had found someone who ‘was their own’.

The probation officer has helped in a lot of ways and has an understanding of my needs.

Young person quoted by Ofutu

Young black people’s survival strategies

Just Justice powerfully reveals that young people are not passively in the face of racism but rather have developed strategies for survival in other words they ‘play the game’. All four themes identified in the research are explored: keeping quiet; going nuts; keeping your peace.

Keeping your peace

Young people described by young people quoted by Hill

Young people described by Ofutu as ‘going nuts’ or by Wilson as ‘going mad’. In other words, there is a point beyond which people are unable to contain their anger and will fight back against racism.

If we report racist things they never do anything, so why should I bother? Why should we get involved? We never have got to do it ourselves.

Young person quoted by Sharp

I make takers into my own hands. You see, most of the nastiest the teenage crimes happen is because the schools, the police authority, the Government... no matter what, as the teenagers feel they have to take matters into their own hands... You have to choose. If you’re either bullied or you resort to revenge. You can’t escape your entire life simply being bullied, feeling like you are nothing.

Young person quoted by Ofutu

There is also potentially an emotional price to pay for keeping quiet. These young people are not passive because they are happy with the treatment that they receive but rather do they not feel able to assert their right to demand or challenge treatment which they believe to be unfair. Racism is a form of power and the absence of black professionals in schools and the justice agencies as significant for the black young people interviewed.

If every child really matters, the youth justice system must, at all points and in all decision-making, prioritise children and young people’s safety and welfare.

The realisation of the need to protect oneself is based on a simple equation of rights and responsibilities. It does not produce the desired outcomes for black young people or the black communities.

Implications for new enforcement measures

The complex difficulties experienced by the black young people interviewed and the racism they suffer an individual and institutional level, raise questions about the appropriate efficiency of the system and the ability to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The Government’s ‘Rapporteur’ accepts that black young people are victims of institutional racism and that the black young people interviewed are not just individuals. However, that they are neither passive because they have got to do it themselves as perpetrators of crime.

What these young people are telling us is that the current methods of recording racist incidents frequently fail to pick up that the current methods of recording racist incidents frequently fail to pick up that... on what is really happening, because they are young people wanting to protect themselves, seeking to ask young people proactively what is happening in their world.
The study was commissioned by The Children’s Society and funded by the Big Lottery and conducted by researchers at the Centre for Crime Justice Policy and Research, University of Central England. The study is both broadly ethnographic and is based on interviews with, and participant observation of, black young people.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of the report the term ‘black’ has been used to include anyone who identifies as being black or of black background. Of the 200 young people interviewed for the study 104 were male and 96 were female. The age range was 10–16 years.

Just Justice does not seek to verify young people’s claims of racism – to do so may simply repeat the same tired version of stories many black young people feel when asked to clarify the nature and reasons behind the racism. Following recommendations from Macpherson (1999), a racist incident is understood as being ‘any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’.

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Experiences of racism

Just Justice highlights the experience of racism that the black young people interviewed feel they have suffered in many aspects of their lives. They report racist encounters with members of the general public, neighbours, their peers, carers and professionals in education, the police, health and welfare services. The study provides many examples of different types of racist racism from name-calling to physical violence. There are some reports of blatant disregard and inaction by authority for the needs of the young people’s claims of racism – to do so may simply repeat the same tired version of stories many black young people feel when asked to clarify the nature and reasons behind the racism. Following recommendations from Macpherson (1999), a racist incident is understood as being ‘any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’.

The impact of racism on black young people

Unsurprisingly, the young people interviewed exhibit deeply held negative feelings about the world around them. They also display a sophisticated understanding of the use and abuse of power, reflecting their many experiences of racism and anger at unfair treatment; fear in the face of powerful, adult authority; and a lack of trust in those who should really be there to care for and protect them.

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The Children’s Society believes that these recommendations will help to address the problems that have been identified in Just Justice. It is only through doing so that we will see an improvement in black young people’s experiences of the youth justice system, fewer black young people getting into trouble with the law and more of them achieving positive outcomes in their lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Strategic recommendations

• Pacing to identify, challenge and redress children’s racial experiences is a failure to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people who suffer the indignity and physical and emotional impact of racism. Joint action to protect children from racist abuse, harassment and discrimination should be planned and addressed under the ‘Staying Safe’ in the Children’s Society 2004.

• In order for the Youth Justice Board to act on the need to reduce local disproportionate sentencing for black young people, all agencies, including schools, police, courts and prisons must play their part in addressing racism.

• Educating children from an early age about the promotion of diversity and anti-discriminatory behaviour has the potential to make a huge impact on the reduction of offending. All children, regardless of their situation or type of school, should receive such educational programmes.

Procedural recommendations

• Complaints procedure and racist abuse. These systems should allow black young people’s experiences to be captured and acted upon by proactively involving young people whether they have felt discriminated against or subject to racism. This may involve invigorating the presumption that proof needs to be provided before validating an incident.

• Research methods used for Just Justice and the young people’s accounts of their coping strategies and experiences of an incident. Research methods used for Just Justice and the young people’s accounts of their coping strategies and experiences of an incident.

• Organisations have a duty under race relations legislation to recruit under an anti-discriminatory framework of equal opportunity. Further definitions of strategies are required to encourage greater representation of black staff at all levels within every agency of the youth justice system including the police, courts and prison service.

• Research and evaluation of the justice system should pay particular attention to the importance of black young people and the promotion of equal treatment. Methodologies for research and evaluation should build on the need to seek out black young people’s voices proactively in ways that enable them to feel safe about speaking out.

• Targets for professionals working with young people in contact with the youth justice system should take into account the time needed to develop and sustain trust with vulnerable black young people. Timescales should be flexible and of a realistic length to incorporate time to build trust.

• Involving black young people in the appointment and training of staff within justice agencies would be a powerful way of ensuring that these young people’s voices are heard, promoting positive images of young people and enabling the development of open and trust between young people and professionals.

• Recommendations by Elizabeth Lovell and Professor David Wilson.

• ‘Serve and Protect?’. Black young people’s experiences of policing in the community.

• ‘Dreaming of despair?’. A retrospective post-custody study.

• ‘Acting Stronger?’. Young black people and the youth justice system.

A copy of the full research report can be downloaded at www.childrenssociety.org.uk

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The over-representation of black young people in the youth justice system is well documented. Yet relative little is known about how young black people experience and perceive the youth justice system. The Just Justice research project has sought to fill this gap by exploring young people’s perceptions about their experiences of encounters with justice agencies in the community and custody, and how policies and strategies they employ in relation to these agencies.

Just Justice contains four connected studies. Three of these studies explore different aspects of the youth justice system: looking in at young black people’s experiences of policing in the community and custody; their retrospective views after leaving custody. The fourth part is a study following young people’s contacts with the system over a period of time.

The Children’s Society believes that only by listening to young people can we fully understand and seek more effective solutions to the challenges they face. By going back young people’s voices, Just Justice makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of what it means to be young and black in England, as well as contributing to our understanding of the way in which black young people experience the youth justice system.

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Just Justice
A study into black young people’s experiences of the youth justice system

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Yet relatively little is known about how young black people experience the youth justice system. The Just Justice research project has sought to fill this gap by exploring young people’s perceptions about their interactions with justice agencies and assessing strategies they employ in relation to their experiences and perceptions about their day-to-day encounters with justice agencies in the community and custody. A copy of the full research report can be downloaded at www.childrenssociety.org.uk

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A study into black young people’s experiences of the youth justice system

The Children’s Society believes that these recommendations will help to address the problems that have been identified in Just Justice. It is only through doing so that we will see an improvement in black young people’s experiences of the youth justice system, fewer black young people getting into trouble with the law and more of them achieving positive outcomes in their lives.

Strategic recommendations
• Building capacity, challenge and reshape children’s race equality so it is a failure to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people who suffer the indignity and physical and emotional impact of racism, direct action to protect children from racist abuse, harassment and discrimination should be planned and addressed under the ‘Stop Racism’ outcome in the Children’s Society.
• In order for the Youth Justice Board to meet its targets to reduce local disproportionality in sentencing for black young people, all agencies including schools, police, courts, prisons and prisons must play their part in addressing racism.
• Educating children from an early age about the promotion of diversity and inclusive, anti-discriminatory behaviour has the potential to make a huge impact on the reduction of offending. All children, regardless of their situation or type of school, should receive such educational programmes.

Procedural recommendations
• Complaints procedures and racist incident monitoring systems – which should be present in all agencies of the youth justice system – should be reviewed and informed to actively promote young people’s right to complain. These systems should allow young people’s experiences to be captured and acted upon by proactively asking young people whether they have felt discriminated against or subject to racism. This may involve involving the young person in the complaint and facilitating the correct procedures that need to be followed before validating an incident.
• Research methods used for Just Justice and the young people’s accounts of their coping strategies to identify potential racism in their peer group and community; agencies’ strategies for building trust and engagement with black young people should respect and build upon these ‘safety’ structures. Such work may include black peer group work and black community mentoring schemes.
• Research and evaluation of the justice system should pay particular specific attention to the experience of black young people and the promotion of equal treatment. Methodologies for research and evaluation should build on the need to seek out black young people’s voices proactively in ways that enable them to feel safe about speaking out.
• Targets for professionals working with young people in contact with the youth justice system should take into account the time needed to develop and sustain trust with vulnerable black young people. Timescales should be flexible and of a realistic length to incorporate time to build trust.
• Involving black young people in the appointment and training of staff within justice agencies would be a powerful way of ensuring that those young people’s voices are heard, promoting positive images of young people and enabling the development of strong and trust between young people and professionals.
• Organisations have a duty under race relations legislation to recruit under an anti-discriminatory framework of equal opportunity. Further deliberate strategies are required to encourage greater representation of black staff at all levels within every agency of the youth justice system including the police, courts and prison service.

Joint action to protect children from racist abuse, harassment and discrimination should be planned and reviewed and reformed to actively promote young people’s right to be free of racist abuse, harassment and discrimination, and to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people who suffer the indignity and physical and emotional impact of racism. Direct action to protect children from racist abuse, harassment and discrimination should be planned and addressed under the ‘Stop Racism’ outcome in the Children’s Society Act 2004.

The first part of the report is a study following young people in contact with the youth justice system over a period of time. The second part explores the different aspects of the justice system – police, courts and prison service – encountered by black young people, including schools, police, courts, prisons and prisons. The third part is a study into the perceptions of young black people in custody, looking in turn at young black people’s experiences of policing in the community, their experiences of custody, and their retrospective views after leaving custody. The fourth part is a study following young people’s contacts with the system over a period of time. The Children’s Society believes that only by listening to young people can we fully understand their experiences and seek more effective solutions to the challenges they face. By going back black young people’s voice, Just Justice makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of what it means to be young and black in England, as well as contributing to our understanding of the way in which black young people experience the youth justice system.