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Sampling minority ethnic older people in Britain

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ABSTRACT
The study of minority ethnic older people in Britain is hampered by the lack of a reliable sampling frame. There are few national studies and most research projects are small and involve localised samples. The infrastructure for doing research with such population groups is poorly set up. This article attempts to address the needs of practitioners by reviewing the use of common sampling frames and approaches, pointing out caveats, and highlighting potential. More recent and innovative sampling approaches are also discussed. The article deals with issues of bias, reliability, perspective and geography. Recommendations for improved practice include being more transparent in reporting the derivation of samples, making more efficient use of existing data sets, better ways of working with community organisations as well as more effective collaborative research. It is also argued that various authorities and funding bodies should increase investment in this area, especially given the projected absolute and proportionate increases in minority ethnic older people in Britain.

KEY WORDS – minority ethnic older people, Britain, sampling, bias, reliability, geography.

Introduction

This article reflects on some methodological issues in research with older people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Britain. Many working in this field believe that normal research approaches and techniques cannot be applied to these populations uncritically or without modification. Only a limited and inadequate infrastructure for research with minority ethnic older people currently exists, and until it is improved 'it will remain difficult for researchers to meet the standards achieved by similarly resourced researchers investigating other issues' (Nazroo and Grewal 2002: 3).

Patel (1990) argued 13 years ago that there was too little British research on minority ethnic older people, while Manthorpe and Hettiaratchy (1993)

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TABLE 1. *Examples of principal British studies of minority ethnic group older people*

Location	Publication	Organisation	Population studied
Birmingham	Bhalla and Blakemore (1981)	All Faiths For One Race (AFFOR)	169 South Asians, 179 Afro-Caribbeans, and 52 white respondents of pensionable age
Nottingham	Berry, Lee and Griffiths (1981)	Nottingham Social Services Department	148 Afro-Caribbeans either approaching or over pensionable age
London and Manchester	Barker (1984)	Age Concern England	619 people from West Africa, South Asia, and the West Indies aged 55 and over
Bristol	Fenton (1986)	University of Bristol	98 Afro-Caribbeans, 104 South Asians, and 52 white people who were either 'middle aged' (45 to 60 years old) or of pensionable age
Leicester	Donaldson (1986)	Department of Community Health, University of Leicester	726 South Asians aged 65 years and over
Coventry	Holland and Lewando-Hundt (1987)	Coventry City Council	1163 Asian and 71 Afro-Caribbean older people aged 55 and over
Glasgow, London and S. Yorkshire	Yu (2000)	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	100 Chinese older people aged 65 and over

found a dearth of rigorous studies. The subsequent decade has not produced substantial change. Most studies tend to be small and localised, thus severely limiting the degree to which findings can be generalised. The lack of national studies also makes it difficult to assess the distinctiveness of local conditions (Butt and Mirza 1996: 5). Several important studies have however now reported, and brief details of the most prominent are given in Table 1.

There are several consistencies in the findings of these and other studies despite their methodological differences. Minority ethnic older people in general, for instance, have poorer health, live in poorer quality housing, and have lower incomes when compared with their white majority counterparts. This is also true of a few 'white' minority ethnic groups such as the Irish (see Norman 1985: 22; Chance 1996). While community studies on minority ethnic older people have yielded valuable insights, Blakemore

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and Boneham (1994) have questioned whether such a style of research is the best way forward. Despite various creative approaches, a pervasive and intractable problem is to derive representative samples of minority ethnic older people in the absence of a comprehensive and reliable sampling frame. This paper argues for more concerted attention to this problem and its resolution.

Ethnic minorities

The 1991 United Kingdom Census was the first to include a question on ethnic identity but did not record information on white minority groups, reflecting a tendency to interpret 'ethnic' as 'non-White' (Bonnett 1996). Thus the Irish, with well over 200,000 people over pensionable age, were not distinguished by the 1991 Census even though they constituted by far the largest minority ethnic group (on the basis of nativity and, for some, nationality). They accounted for around 4.6 per cent of the total population and 11.5 per cent of the population of Greater London (CRE 1997*a*). White minority ethnic groups can be disadvantaged. A report by the *Commission for Racial Equality* (1997*b*) found that most of the Irish-born population were in the most deprived social classes. On certain indicators of living standards, Irish-headed households were well below the average level established in the 1991 Census, and close to that of the Black-Caribbean population. On the basis of a shared history of discrimination and racism, Rolston (1999) aligned the Irish with 'black' minorities. Similar experiences have also been noted in the Greek-Cypriot and Polish older populations (see Norman 1985; Bowling 1990), leading Mac an Ghaill (2000) to argue strongly against the current 'colour paradigm' in British sociology which 'over-racialises' the representation of non-white groups while 'under-racialising' white minorities.

Minority ethnic older people

The 1991 Census also showed that ethnic minorities generally have a more 'youthful' profile when compared with the white majority. The Bangladeshi and Pakistani populations had the most youthful profiles while the Cypriot and Polish communities were substantially older (Norman 1985). Bowling's (1990) report on older people from Eastern Europe in Berkshire, for instance, noted that between December 1987 and April 1988, the Polish community in Reading suffered a bereavement a week. While the numbers of older people from ethnic minorities remain small, the projected

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increases are for considerable growth in both absolute and proportionate terms. It is generally accepted in the literature that 'ageing' processes become apparent at a younger age in minority ethnic populations through a combination of low socio-economic status, poor living environments and poor health throughout life, not just in old age. For such groups, 55 or even 50 years have been suggested as appropriate (albeit still arbitrary) age thresholds for 'old age'. This has been closely aligned with the theory of 'double jeopardy', first advanced by Dowd and Bengston (1978: 427).

Sampling frame

While there is abundant literature on the general orientation and approach of research with older people (*e.g.* Fennell, Phillipson and Evers 1988; Peace 1990; Victor 1994), relatively little has been written on the methodological issues associated with the conduct of representative surveys. In one of the few reviews of such methods, Hoinville (1983: 224) argued that 'some of the most temptingly appealing sampling methods can be used only in limited circumstances or, on close examination, prove to be unworkable'. There is even less guidance for health and social welfare practitioners attempting to sample older people from minority ethnic groups.

Although the British census has recorded data on 'ethnic' background since 1991, statistics are not available at the local level for the older population, depriving researchers of an important component of a sampling frame. Blakemore and Boneham (1994) suggested, however, that there is widespread avoidance of census enumeration in the Black-Caribbean community. Drawing on experience from the 'All Faiths For One Race' (AFFOR) project, which found a significantly larger number of older black people 'on the ground' than expected from census data and local authority population estimates, the authors concluded that 'single older black people sharing a house with others [can] be easily missed' (Blakemore and Boneham 1994: 65).

Constructing a nationally representative sample of minority ethnic communities is extremely difficult and costly without a comprehensive and reliable sampling frame (Brown 1984). Due to the predominant health and social care orientation of much existing research on minority ethnic older people, it is not uncommon to find researchers using general practitioners' (GP) registers, Family Health Services Authority (FHSA) lists, family practitioner committees (FPC) records, hospital and community health services records, social services records, and other health- and service-related records as sampling frames, although the maintenance of age-sex registers and ethnic records can be highly uneven (see Pharoah 1995).

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Social services records

Hoinville's (1983) review of research with older people in Britain using various community health or social services' lists as sampling frames concluded that such methods risk leaving out significant sections of the older population, depending on the type of records used. These problems are compounded for minority ethnic older people. Many studies attest that this population suffers from a lack of knowledge of formal services and organisations. Uptake has consistently been shown to be low because of a combination of poor information and difficulties of access. Chiu's (1989) study of Chinese older people found that approximately 90 per cent of the respondents had not received any help from social workers, home helps, community nurses or meals-on-wheels even when their needs were apparent. Such under-utilisation of services has been documented for other minority groups (including white populations) (see Norman 1985). There are both demand- and supply-side impediments to the utilisation of formal services by minority ethnic groups (Norman 1985; Home Office 1989).

Pension records

Pension records were considered and rejected as a sampling frame for a large survey by *Age Concern England* (Hoinville 1983: 226). They are even less satisfactory for the sampling of older persons of minority ethnic background. Studies on the socio-economic status of minority ethnic older people point to their relatively disadvantaged and excluded pension position. The AFFOR study in Birmingham, for instance, demonstrated that 32 per cent of their sample of black and minority ethnic older people did not receive a full state pension because of their particular employment and migration histories. The situation is even worse for women, particularly those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, because of the absence of a complete formal employment history (Hancock, Jarvis and Mueller 1995; Ginn and Arber 2000). Quite apart from the low level of pension entitlement, Nesbitt and Neary's (2001) study of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and white men in Oldham found that the older members from the first two groups had the least knowledge about how the pension system worked.

Benefit claimants lists

The take-up of benefits among people from various minority ethnic groups is lower than that of the general population despite the fact that there is a higher incidence of poverty amongst the former. Research

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conducted by Tarpey (1984) on Greek-Cypriots living in Islington, London, found that two-thirds of older people were not claiming all they were entitled to. Bloch (1993) found that many minority ethnic people were not aware of their welfare rights and entitlements. Many also experienced considerable difficulty in making a claim. Law *et al.* (1994) revealed various reasons for non-claiming or under-claiming among various minority ethnic groups. These differences aside, Berthoud (1997) maintained that the social security system in Britain is structured in a way that disadvantages people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

GP registers of National Health Service patients

GP registers are commonly used to derive samples of older respondents since well over 95 per cent of the older population are registered with a National Health Service general medical practitioner (Murphy 1987: 2). Unfortunately, GP lists are notoriously inaccurate as a result of delays in removing patients who have died or moved away. Fernando's (1977) survey of older people in Clackmannan found that around 14/15 per cent of older people on a list may have died, moved away, or have been registered twice over. Bury and Holme (1991) argued that because at the time GP remuneration was partly dependent on the age structure of their patient list, there was an incentive to allow inflation of the very old population.

Johnson and Cross (1983) suggested that 99 per cent of all Asians and Black-Caribbeans are registered with a GP (cited in Atkin *et al.* 1989: 4). The *Black and Minority Ethnic Groups Health and Lifestyles Survey* (Rudat 1994) and Nazroo's (1997) review of the relevant literature yielded very similar figures. Many researchers have, however, reported considerable problems in using GP lists to generate samples of minority ethnic older people. Bowes and Dar's (2000*a*, 2000*b*) research in Scotland, and a study in Liverpool by Boneham *et al.* (1997) resorted to the usual practice of 'snowballing' despite using GP lists.

GP lists may be especially inaccurate in inner city areas, where minority ethnic groups are disproportionately found, Black-Caribbeans in particular (Smith 1989). A health study of Black-Caribbeans by Chaturvedi, McKeigue and Marmot (1993) found that only 66 per cent of a sample compiled from GP lists was resident at the specified addresses. Another caveat about such lists' veracity arises from poor quality 'ethnic' record-keeping. The feasibility and willingness of primary care practitioners to record ethnic identity is still a matter of vigorous debate (see Pringle and Rothera 1996; Nazroo 1997). The demands for confidentiality following the enactment of the *Data Protection Act 1998* and the growing importance of

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ethical approval has also impacted on the ease of accessing GP lists (see Tinker 2001 for a discussion of the experience of Economic and Social Research Council *Growing Older* research programme investigators with ethical committees).

Electoral registers

Electoral registers are another potential sampling frame. These are annual compilations of those who register to vote. Certain minority ethnic groups are systematically less likely than the general population to register. While rates of registration have improved through time, particularly for the Asian population, among whom non-registration decreased from 27 per cent in 1981 to 15 per cent in 1991, in general minority ethnic groups still have low rates of registration (Anwar 2001: 535–6), although the extent of under-registration is often exaggerated (Saggar 1998). Although a few studies of minority ethnic older people in Britain have used electoral registers as a sampling frame (*e.g.* Holland and Lewando-Hundt 1987), others have claimed that they do not provide satisfactory coverage of the target populations (*e.g.* Donaldson and Odell 1984). Extensive reviews and field tests prior to the third *National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* (NSEM) in Britain by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) concluded that electoral registers would be unreliable in many areas (Brown 1984).

The reliability of electoral registers is also prejudiced by differential rates of registration in inner city areas, particularly in inner London among Black-Caribbeans and Asians among whom the non-registration rate is almost double that of the white majority (Smith 1993). Given the tendency for such groups to be concentrated in large metropolitan areas and particularly their inner areas, the use of electoral registers to generate a representative sample is highly suspect. The reliability of records such as electoral registers can also be prejudiced by differential geographical mobility. The third NSEM documented a higher rate of geographical moves among minority ethnic households than white households. This was especially so for the Bangladeshis (Brown 1984: 56). Robinson (1993) also argued that the Pakistanis are highly mobile, reflecting their need to seek out employment opportunities.

Screening lists and records

The use of lists such as electoral registers and increasingly the Postcode Address File relies on the ability to screen the addresses, so as to eliminate not only those that do not contain older persons but also those who are not of minority ethnic background. Hoinville (1983) has discussed screening

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for older persons using electoral registers, and Ginn, Arber and Cooper (1997) have outlined the comparable procedure for the Postcode Address File. For both lists, however, another screening step is required to yield a representative sample of older people from minority ethnic backgrounds, for neither list records ethnic group.

There have been several attempts to identify the ethnic background of respondents on the basis of names. Studies have shown that this is feasible for certain groups. For instance, Atkin *et al.*'s (1989) research in central Birmingham found that only one per cent of a sample with non-Asian names turned out to be Asian by nativity or origin. Conversely, six per cent of the Asian-name sample were found to be non-Asian in origin or self-identification. This approach can, however, add considerably to the time and cost involved. It is not surprising that, given the geographic distribution of minority ethnic groups, a spatially-clustered sampling method is usually employed to minimise screening. The focused enumeration method of screening has been successfully used for selecting a sample of minority ethnic respondents (see Brown 1984), and there is huge potential for extending its use to screen for older people from such backgrounds; although Hoinville (1983: 228) warned that there were risks for 'it requires knowledge by neighbours for it to work successfully'.

Name recognition has not only been done manually, most commonly for South Asians (Nicholl, Bassett and Ulijaszek 1986) and those of Chinese-origin (Chan 2000), but also with the help of computer software in the case of South Asian names (Harding, Dews and Simpson 1999). The 'Nam Pehchan' computer algorithm holds a dictionary of 2,995 South Asian names and has been successfully used to identify their bearers in the community. Similar software may be developed to detect Chinese names. Unfortunately, neither the manual nor computerised name-recognition procedures can help identify Black-Caribbeans (Richards and Brayne 1996). Researchers have had to employ alternative methods. Richards *et al.* (1996), for instance, developed a register of Black-Caribbean and white people aged 65 and more years residing in the community by means of direct household enumeration. Most methods for developing representative samples are very demanding on resources and time and suitable mainly for small studies. They are not practical for the large-scale and national studies that are required.

Geographical distributions and sampling

The geographic distribution of the minority ethnic populations in Britain (see Owen 1992; Peach 1996) has meant that they are often sampled using

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a stratified sample produced by the method of 'probability proportionate to size', whereby the probability of an area's inclusion is proportionate to the size of its minority ethnic (rather than its total) population (see Brown 1984; Smith and Prior 1996). It generates and reflects a pronounced urban bias in the populations' locations, as in a report on black and minority ethnic groups in England conducted by the Health Education Authority (Rudat 1994: 15–16). Minority ethnic groups that are not spatially concentrated (particularly those in non-metropolitan areas) tend to be poorly sampled using such procedures. The Chinese, for instance, have a dispersed settlement pattern that makes their correct representation particularly difficult. They have been left out of various surveys and remain virtually invisible for this reason (Jones 1998). The same can be said for white minority ethnic groups such as the Jews (Waterman and Kosmin 1986).

Idiosyncracies in the geographical distribution of a minority group can have a strong influence on the kind of information that is collected about it and on the general understanding of their circumstances that develops and spreads. While, for example, it is widely assumed that racial violence and harassment is not a problem in areas of low or medium minority ethnic concentration, Virdee (1997: 271) argued that minorities living in such areas may be even more at risk as a consequence of their isolation from co-ethnics. Indeed, Seagrave's (1989) work for the Home Office demonstrated that the highest increases in racial harassment were found in some non-metropolitan areas, whereas in several of the country's major conurbations there were decreases. Henderson and Kaur (1999) and Jay (1992) also provided evidence that rural racism in Britain is a problem. The inclusion in research of individuals living in areas of a scattered and low-density ethnic minority population produces high costs (associated with finding and contacting subjects) and problems of confidentiality. In areas where minority ethnic groups are under-represented, it is possible that the views of a small but highly visible group can be easily identified. The onus is on the researcher to ensure that anonymity is maintained.

On the other side of the coin, the urban (and often inner city) bias of sampling ironically leads to an often invisible and numerically small group being sampled, predominantly from those areas of the country in which they are not (or are least) a 'minority'. An analysis at the level of electoral wards of the 1991 census data revealed that, 'at least 60 per cent of all the ethnic minority groups (including the Irish-born) are found in wards that contain only 30 per cent of the total population – and for the Indians, Black-Caribbeans, Black-Africans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, about 70 per cent are found in wards which contain less than 10 per cent of the

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population' (Peach 1996: 14). The urban sampling bias systematically taps the areas in which minority ethnic groups are numerically dominant, and in which the experience of ageing *prima facie* will be very different from elsewhere. Using an index of ethnic isolation, Peach (1998: 1674) found that the probability of a Black-Caribbean person meeting a co-ethnic in Greater London was nearly three times the random probability from the Black-Caribbean percentage of the London population.[1] The corresponding probabilities for Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis were 4, 5.5 and 18.5 times respectively. The social contact implications of residential concentration were borne out by the data collected in the fourth PSI NSEM, for 87 per cent of Pakistanis, 78 per cent of Bangladeshis, 71 per cent of Indians, and 62 per cent of Black-Caribbeans considered their neighbourhoods to score well as offering possibilities of meeting people of their own ethnic group (Lakey 1997: 192).

Community organisations as gateways of access

The many difficulties that prevent the construction of an adequate and reliable sampling frame for minority ethnic older people has led to a severe dearth of research on hard-to-access groups and a relative abundance of research on the easy-to-reach. This is particularly so where community organisations of specific minority ethnic populations exist and offer a convenient means of access to their members. A few projects on minority ethnic groups in the Economic and Social Research Council *Growing Older* programme reported complaints from certain groups of being over-researched (Afshar *et al.* 2002; Warren, Cook and Maltby 2002). This is not a new complaint, for Thomas's 1990 study of Afro-Caribbean older people raised the same issue. When describing her intended social work placement research at a West Indian Centre, Thomas was told by the centre supervisor that, 'too many people have come to ask permission to research into the life histories of these elders, and they simply are fed up with the topic'. An older member at the centre also warned that 'we hope you are not one of those who want to come and ask endless questions. If you are, forget it! We have given enough already' (Thomas 1990: 8–9).

This raises an ethical question that researchers have to confront, about the collection or 'mining' of data from disadvantaged and over-exploited subjects. Restraints on resources and time mean that researchers are apt to adopt 'least cost' paths to generate outputs and achieve certain targets. When seeking to understand the circumstances and viewpoints of minority ethnic older people, researchers need to take time to build up trust and

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rapport with the subjects. Dedicating generous amounts of time to the 'frontline' and really getting to know the subjects is not however always practical or enthusiastically pursued by researchers. Dockery (2000: 101) put forward the case for participatory research, and argued that 'research which is not participatory … has created feelings of frustration and anger within those communities left behind'. The research enterprise can be perceived as being manipulative and exploitative. Potential respondents may feel that they exercise no control over the process or outcome of research, and play no part in the interpretation and ownership of 'data' or what is done with it. Apart from the ethical issues, the sampling of minority ethnic older people through community organisations poses methodological problems. Victor (1994: 51) observed that, 'samples of older people drawn from membership lists of clubs and organisations will usually over-represent the healthy and the middle class. Studies based upon lists derived from those in institutions or receiving social services will over-emphasize the chronically ill and dependent'.

It may be easier to circumvent such problems in areas where there are diverse community organisations that cater for the various social, cultural and welfare needs of minority ethnic older people. Different sub-groups of a minority ethnic population could be in touch with different community organisations, so sampling across several may yield a more robust sample. Yu's (2000) study of Chinese older people in London, Glasgow and South Yorkshire employed many sampling points including casinos, social centres, luncheon clubs, Chinese churches, and even McDonald's restaurants. McLeod, Owen and Khamis's (2001) study of black and minority ethnic-led voluntary and community organisations produced a cautionary finding, that less than 30 per cent of those interviewed from a minority ethnic background were able to name a black or minority ethnic voluntary or community organisation. The implication is that those who are in touch with such organisations are unrepresentative of the wider population.

Perspective and sampling

Minority ethnic groups are often excluded from 'general population' research through a combination of methodological problems and the perceived high cost of their inclusion (Rai 1995: 45). On the other hand, studies that focus on minority ethnic groups tend to view the subjects as being different (and thus worthy of exclusive attention) or problematic (most often deprived or disadvantaged). In studies of older minority ethnic people, perhaps particularly those conducted by health and social service

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providers, the tendency to pathologise old age is commonly compounded by a tendency to pathologise minority ethnic status. The discourse of 'special needs' and 'deprivation' reinforces the power imbalance between researcher and the researched. While ethnic minorities may be disadvantaged in many ways (see Modood *et al.* 1997), the pervasive negative assessment of their conditions tends to disempower the subjects despite the best of intentions. Blakemore and Boneham (1994: 15) argued that this created an unhelpful image of 'passive victims' which was 'condescending and undervalues [the] achievements and individuality' of minority ethnic older people.

Moreover, the focus on disadvantage can blind us to the experiences of those who do not fit the model. The AFFOR study in Birmingham found that while only four per cent of older whites had a weekly income above the average in the area of study, nine per cent of older Black-Caribbeans and 15 per cent of older Asians reported higher incomes (Bhalla and Blakemore 1981). A needs-driven research perspective has led to the sampling of minority ethnic respondents from 'deprived' areas, particularly inner cities. 'Blacks are pathologised once via their association with the "cultures of deprivation" and the decaying "inner cities" and again as the bearers of specifically *black* cultures' (Lawrence 1982: 56 – original emphasis).

Characteristics specific to inner cities can make the experience of minority elders different, as Blakemore (1983) demonstrated in his comparative study of ageing in inner city Birmingham. Indeed, Phizacklea and Miles (1979) explored the construction of working-class 'racism' in inner city areas in Britain by anchoring their discussion in the peculiar socio-economic and demographic structure of such areas. The continued focus on inner cities deflects attention from the dispersal of certain groups as evinced by the 1991 census (OPCS 1993, Table 6; Peach 1998: 1,667). Bowes, McCluskey and Sim (1989) similarly found that many minority ethnic families were moving outside the city boundary of Glasgow into suburban districts. Research by Birmingham City Council (1998) found considerable outward mobility. While the tendency to move out of ethnic enclaves is strongest amongst the younger generations, the research documented that 42 per cent of Asians aged 60 and more years expressed a desire to move and indicated a greater preference for outer-city or out-of-Birmingham locations. As Bauman's (1996) study in Southall, London, demonstrated, a desire to 'move up the road' was a euphemism that links geographical out-movement with social advancement. While the upward mobility of certain groups requires more attention, there remain very real impediments to the social advancement of minority ethnic groups in Britain.

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Other sampling approaches

Existing data sets

Many have highlighted the utility of existing data sets for social gerontological research (Fennell 1990; Evandrou 2000; Evandrou *et al.* 2001). These, however, have limited utility for the study of minority ethnic older populations, since many national surveys do not include a large enough sub-sample of either older or minority ethnic people. Existing surveys can be of use in another way: as a potential sampling frame onto which surveys of minority ethnic older people can 'piggy-back'. One of the projects in the ESRC *Growing Older* programme derived a sample by 'piggy-backing' on the *Family Resources Survey* conducted by the Department of Social Security (Moriarty *et al.* 2001; Sin 2001). Using national surveys as sampling frames is not however straightforward. As Fennell (1990: 73) cautioned, 'an important proviso in making use of existing data sets is to know how the original samples were drawn and with what response'. Response rates for minority ethnic groups in national surveys tend to be comparatively low (Owen 1993; Simpson 1996), and Ginn and Arber (2000: 68) have argued are especially low for the oldest and for women.

Consideration of the attrition rates for follow-up studies is also important. Protocols have to be devised which ensure valid procedures of securing informed consent of any potential respondents and for their particulars to be made available for any follow-up studies. Researchers have to ascertain how minority ethnic respondents were contacted and interviewed for the 'parent' survey, and whether this has implications for the composition of the sample. For instance, if all or most of the minority ethnic respondents were interviewed in English for the 'parent' survey, what implication does this have for the characteristics of those who agreed and did not agree to take part? Researchers thinking of 'piggy-backing' on national surveys have to be prepared to set aside time and financial resources to negotiate the complexities of securing access to potential samples. They also need to assess critically the appropriateness of various surveys for their particular studies.

An innovative but controversial method of generating a sample of older people has recently been described by Scharf (2002). The MONICA method is used by the market research company CACI to generate a random list of names and addresses of people likely to match specific age requirements using the electoral register. This is done by placing people in a series of narrow age bands according to their first names. This works on the assumption that certain types of names are more prevalent amongst certain age cohorts. For example, it is unlikely for someone aged 60 and

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more years to have the first name of 'Kylie'. More information on this method can be gleaned from the CACI website (www.caci.co.uk).

MONICA is in some ways similar to the Nam Pehchan programme. Both use some form of name recognition. At present, there is no information indicating the extent to which MONICA has been or can be used to identify the names of older members of minority ethnic groups. Its use by CACI on the electoral register, however, compromises its utility in this area because of the previously cited reasons. As yet, MONICA is not a widely used method and its validity awaits proper assessment.

Discussion

The logistics of overcoming the problems associated with sampling older people from minority ethnic groups cannot be easily dismissed whether one seeks a probability or non-probability sample. This article has outlined a few of the common and more unusual methods. There is often a fear that the extra costs involved in sampling such population groups will be forbidding, and happenchance evidence suggests that such costs are often not entered in research proposals for fear of reducing the chance of approval. Statutory organisations and funding bodies have to recognise that such costs are not 'inflated' or 'excessive' but rather legitimate and necessary. This is especially so given that all projections indicate a rapidly rising population of minority ethnic older people. The paper now turns to some ways in which a few of the issues raised here may be addressed.

Transparency

Given the recognised problems in this field, it is of concern that some studies have been presented as if sampling was unproblematic. There can be a lack of transparency in the reporting of the research process. Issues pertaining to sampling frame and sampling method should merit lengthier discussion as this facilitates the interpretation of findings by various users of the research.

Lodging data

Those working in the field should also be encouraged to lodge research material at the *UK Data Archive* at the University of Essex. A centralised archive will facilitate access by other researchers and will be most helpful, particularly since research in this area often seems impenetrable. The wheel does not have to be reinvented each time research is undertaken,

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particularly if good quality material already exists. Moreover, valuable material can be gleaned from secondary analyses of existing data sets. Given the difficulty in securing samples, there ought to be more efficient use of existing data sets. A caveat is to beware of the over-reliance on secondary analysis or data sources of questionable quality.

Working with community organisations

There seems to be a lack of knowledge and contact between academic researchers and various community-based voluntary organisations. This has several implications. First, limited awareness of the range of minority ethnic community organisations means that researchers have a tendency to approach repeatedly the same organisations. Second, the lack of interaction between the two parties impacts on the willingness of such organisations to co-operate with research. One way to open up the linkages would be for research findings to be fed back not only to the community organisations used to provide samples but also more widely. Participatory research should seek to include respondents at all stages of the research enterprise, from the setting up to the eventual dissemination of results.

Greater awareness of the directories of minority ethnic community and voluntary organisations is needed, coupled with regular dissemination of such information to ensure that an up-to-date database can be compiled and accessed by those working in the field. One can envisage the setting up of a co-ordinated system and central database. The frequency with which different organisations are contacted for research purposes should be tabulated so that researchers can avoid over-burdening those with numerous 'hits'. This form of a centralised and disseminated database would not be totally dissimilar to the *Local Authorities' Race Relations Information Exchange* (LARRIE), which issues regular comprehensive databases of existing literature in all relevant local authorities.

Collaborative research

There are several institutions and organisations with experience and expertise in conducting research with minority ethnic populations. The REU (formerly the Race Equality Unit of the *National Institute for Social Work*) springs to mind. Closer links should be forged between academic researchers and such organisations, especially since the latter have a wealth of knowledge and good working knowledge of appropriate contacts. They also provide a valuable link to grassroots practitioners, thus facilitating the dissemination of information.

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Conclusion

The sampling of older people from minority ethnic backgrounds is often underlain by certain assumptions that need to be made explicit. An often implicit needs-driven research perspective (*e.g.* using health- and service-related records) coupled with the practicalities of sampling (*e.g.* using the 'probability proportionate to size' method) run the risk of unwittingly reinforcing racist and ageist pathologisation. Blakemore (1989: 158) argued that 'minority ethnic groups should not be seen as exotic specimens of ageing but rather should help underline the point that all members of society possess ethnic and racial identity'. The methodological issues involved in sampling older people from minority ethnic groups should not be regarded as an esoteric 'specialist' discipline. 'Black' research must not be thought of as the preserve of 'black' researchers, since there is a very real risk for both the individuals and the discipline to be marginalised and regarded as non-mainstream. Many of the issues are extensions of the principles and practice of well-designed and appropriate research practice in general. They should therefore be incorporated into both under- and post-graduate curricula, which at the moment are woefully inadequate in preparing current and future practitioners for such work.

It is vital for researchers to be more reflective and reflexive in the way they go about research. Bourdieu (1977) argued that researchers should stand back and scrutinise the relationship between the methodology and the information it collects. This will not only help us to conduct more rigorous research but will also contextualise the consumption of the products of research. The challenge is to 'confront the mundane *messiness* of empirical research by addressing the practical, ethical and epistemological issues which present themselves during the research process' (Devine and Health 1999: 3, original emphasis).

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NOTES

1 Peach used the P* index which measures the extent to which minority and majority group members physically confront one another by virtue of sharing a common residential area. P* can be used to measure the extent to which members of a minority group are exposed to members of the majority group, as well as the extent of isolation of a particular ethnic group (see Sin 2002).

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