

Ethnic minority representation at work - research methods working paper

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Methodology used for the study

The aim of the project was to explore the influences of identity, community and social network in determining how minority ethnic workers seek support for problems at work.

With this aim we interviewed a total of 249 people including 64 key respondents and 185 workers. In an attempt to understand social networks in some detail, and the context in which people live their lives, the research focused on three London boroughs (although it is accepted that these communities are not geographically bounded- either in terms of work or home life).

London was chosen due to the fact that almost half of the UK's minority ethnic community live in the capital and many social networks are long established. The boroughs provided a geographical research framework as useful contextual, quantitative data is collated at this scale (e.g. Census data) and community activity and support networks are often found organised at the scale of local boroughs. We chose to conduct in-depth qualitative case studies of three locally based ethnic groups, Kurdish in Hackney, South Asian (originating from the Indian sub-continent) in Ealing and Caribbean in Lambeth. These were specifically chosen as in Ealing and Lambeth, the ethnic groups represent the largest minority ethnic group in the boroughs with well-established social networks. The Kurdish communities, although not the largest, represent a significant under-researched ethnic group located in a particular geographical area within the borough of Hackney. In addition, the research team had established contacts in these areas, which facilitated access to hard to reach respondents. The rationale for the choice of ethnic group by borough allows for an exploration of a range of issues that may influence the way minority ethnic workers access support for work related issues and these are noted below:

- The groups represent long-established (Caribbean, followed by Indian) and more recent (Turkish-speaking) BME communities in the UK. The Kurdish community also has a high percentage of political refugees.
- Caribbeans in Lambeth and Indians in Ealing are the largest minority ethnic groups in the boroughs and although there are no specific figures on the Kurdish population in Hackney, it is estimated from other data (percentage of Kurdish school children), that they represent one of the largest minority ethnic groups and form a substantial community in specific parts of the Borough (and the largest Kurdish community in the UK). Thus in each group there are numbers to enable the team to consider variables such as gender, age and occupation.
- They also have distinct and different characteristics in terms of trade union membership (Caribbeans have the highest UK union density; trade union membership among the Kurdish community is relatively unknown and undocumented; although Indian workers have, in parts, strong trade union membership, they have often, in addition, used well-established social and cultural capital to support workers).
- Each of the communities has their own religious (e.g. Alevi, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu), political and secular traditions, which allow for an exploration of why, how and what these contribute to providing support within each community.
- The labour market position of each community is quite distinct, although not homogeneous, ranging from concentrations in local government, the health service and London Transport

(Caribbean in Lambeth); Heathrow airport related employment (Indian in Ealing); food processing and small businesses (Kurdish in Hackney).

- The groups exhibit different gendered divisions of labour and distinct gendered differences in trade union membership and activity. This also applies to the age of workers – particular differences between first and second and third generations – and the alienation of young workers.

These factors allow for an exploration of the complexity of how social networks operate in these different social and geographical contexts. The three ethnic groups will allowed us to theorise similarities and differences, while at the same time to explore the factors leading to differences.

Interviewees (key respondents and workers) were selected from multiple access routes, e.g. through trade unions, community centres, faith organisations and advice agencies. Hard to reach workers were approached by leafleting and hanging out outside community spaces, factories, shops, attending union meetings, joining picket lines etc. Information on the research was also circulated through posters in different languages, emails, local newspapers and social networking sites. A BBC Radio London phone-in show was also used to reach workers more widely.

We had to use more focussed methods to find workers who were unrepresented in our sample. For example, we found that male workers from Lambeth were reluctant to speak to us about their work experience and concerns. All the responses to posters and emails were from women workers. We approached two researchers (including one male researcher) from the community to do the interviews and they were able to find male workers by a process of snowballing. Younger workers from Ealing were approached through colleges, and public sector workers who were less forthcoming accessed through Unison. We made an effort to get a cross section of workers according to sectors, workplaces, gender, union, non-union, age, etc.

All the participants were informed about the research and assured full confidentiality before seeking their consent. They were also offered a small fee for participating. Some interviews and focus groups were conducted in languages other than since the research team spoke many of the languages spoken by the communities interviewed. Sixteen interviews were conducted in Kurdish and 19 in combinations of Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi and English. We were able to conduct 64 key respondent interviews and 185 worker interviews. Table 1 enumerates the total research participants.

Table 1: interviews and focus groups conducted as of November 2008

	Key respondents (10)	Individual interviews (30)	Focus groups (5)
Hackney	21	29	32
Lambeth	19	38	26
Ealing	20	33	30
General	4 (no targets)	Na	Na

(Targets in brackets)

Table 2 lists the organisations from which key respondents were interviewed. We interviewed well over the target number of key respondents (ten from each borough) because we found a wider range of local people to speak to than we had anticipated.

Table 2: Key respondent organisations interviewed

Hackney	Lambeth	Ealing
Hackney Law Centre	TUC Race Relations officer (past)	Ealing Trades Union Council
DayMer	TUC Race Relations officer (present)	Indian Workers Association x 2
Unite	Lambeth Unison X 2	Southall Rights
Kurdish Advice Centre	Black Workers for Justice	Ealing councillors x 3
Halkevi	Lambeth Trades Union Council	GMB full-time officials x 2
Kurdish Human Rights Project	Brixton Advice Centre	Hounslow Law Centre
Hackney Advice Forum	Lambeth Law Centre	Southall Community Alliance
Alevi Cultural Centre	Movement for Justice	Migrant Advocacy Advisory
Kurdish Community Centre	South London Citizens	Ealing Unison Branch
Duncan Lewis Solicitors	Ex Unison BWG convenor	Hillingdon Law Centre
Fed-bir	Merton Citizens Advice	Ealing Race Committee
Dowse and Co solicitors	Black Training and Enterprise Group	Park Av Gurdwara
DayMer	Lambeth local Gov TGWU	Ealing Law Centre
Hackney Citizens Advice	Rev, St Matthews Brixton	IWA (GB)
Kurdish Cultural Centre	Equalities officer Lambeth Unison	Ealing and Hillingdon Citizens Advice
Kurdish Museum project	Streatham Citizens Advice	Law for All
Hackney Councillor	Lambeth Councillor	Race Equality Council
Youth Parliament	West Indian Standing Conference	LONDEC/SAS
Learning Trust		Gate Gourmet shop steward
DayMer advisor		

Each participant was required to complete a survey questionnaire prior to interview to identify the problem they had experienced and record demographic and employment-related data (industrial sector,

union membership, wages, size of workplace, length of time in job, etc). These details were processed using SPSS.

Analysis of the interviews entailed dividing the raw data into ten major themes identified from the research questions and the original literature review - each of which being further sub-divided to allow for more nuanced analysis. Qualitative analysis package Nvivo was used for the purpose.

Basic statistics on worker interviewees

We interviewed 100 workers in individual in-depth face-to-face interviews and 88 workers took part in our focus groups. Three of our individual interviewees also took part as focus group participants, hence the total number of research participants was 185. The following data is provided on the 185 workers (although it should be noted that some workers did not fully complete the questionnaire and therefore for a few questions we do not have complete data.

Table 3: Number of workers and key respondents interviewed

	Lambeth	Ealing	Hackney	Total
Focus group participants* (includes 3 duplicates)	26	30	32	88
Worker interviews	38	33	29	100
Total workers (excluding duplicates)	63	61	61	185
No. of focus groups	6	5	5	

* Three of our focus group participants were also interviewed individually

The next three tables give information on gender, sector of work, age and qualifications of the research participants. By sector of work, Caribbean community in Lambeth are more in the public sector. As seen in table 5, younger workers are represented more in Hackney than in Lambeth and Ealing. Kurdish workers in Hackney are a new migrant community and are found in the younger age groups – mainly in the 20-39 age groups.

Table 4: Total number of workers interviewed by gender and sector of work

	Workers interviewed (n)	Gender (male/female)	Public/private/PrS-PS*
Hackney	61	36/25	21/35/4
Lambeth	63	27/36	42/12/3
Ealing	61	28/33	19/33/9
Total	185	91/94	82/80/16

(*PrS-PS = Private sector operating in the public sector)

Table 5: Age/s of workers interviewed

Age group	20-29 (n)	30-39 (n)	40-49 (n)	50-59 (n)	60-64 (n)	65+
Hackney	28	25	6	2	0	0
Lambeth	11	15	27	8	0	1
Ealing	14	14	13	13	3	4
Total	53	54	46	23	3	5

Table 6: Qualifications

	Hackney	Lambeth	Ealing	Total
NCQ level 1 or equivalent	5	4	2	11
O level/GCSE or NVQ level 2 or equivalent	4	15	16	35
A level/GCSE or NVQ level 3 or equivalent	13	8	12	33
Degree or NVQ level 4 or equivalent	24	19	20	63
Masters degree or postgraduate level 5 or equivalent	10	13	8	31
No qualification	3	2	1	6

Workplace size

One aspect that is perhaps relevant to the resolution of work-related problems is the size of the workplace. It is generally assumed that smaller workplaces have greater difficulty in resolving difficulties with workers – even more so since the introduction of the Dispute Resolution Regulations (2004) contained in the Employment Act 2002, where recent evidence suggests that the Regulations have formalised disputes such that they are less able to be resolved amicably than was previously the case (ref). Table 7 shows interviewees by workplace size. In Hackney Kurdish workers tend to work mainly for small locally based, family owned firms and this was reflected in our interviewees. In Lambeth 42 of our interviewees worked in the public sector for the local authority or the NHS where the workforce is over 500+ but this is not in the data given by the interviewees on the pre-interview questionnaire. This is perhaps due to the fact that respondents tend to think of the size of their workplace as their own office or department –rather than the overall employer.

Table 7: Size of workplace

Size of workplace	<25 (n)	25-49 (n)	50-249 (n)	250-499 (n)	500+(n)
Hackney	30	10	6	2	11
Lambeth*	10	7	5	1	33
Ealing	3	13	15	10	19
Total	43	30	26	13	63

The majority of our interviewees were in full-time work and working with permanent contracts – and this is similar across the three groups (see Table 8).

Table 8: Full-time/part-time work – permanent/temporary contract

	Full-time (n)	Part-time (n)	Permanent contract (n)	Temporary contract (n)
Hackney	41	20	48	12
Lambeth	50	7	50	6
Ealing	45	16	54	7
Total	136	43	152	25

Table 9 shows that a large number of workers worked over 55 hours a week. This was particularly true amongst Kurdish workers in Hackney. From Table 10 we can see that a large number of Kurdish workers were paid their wages in cash by their employer.

Table 9: Hours worked per week

	0-17 (n)	18-24 (n)	25-34 (n)	35-44 (n)	45-54 (n)	55+ (n)
Hackney	10	4	7	25	4	10
Lambeth	2	0	6	42	4	7
Ealing	1	4	11	37	6	2
Total	13	8	24	104	14	19

Table 10: Are you paid in cash?

	yes (n)	no (n)
Hackney*	13	40
Lambeth	1	53
Ealing	6	53
Total	20	146

Table 12: What is/was your salary before tax?

	£0-10,999 (n)	£11,000- 19,999 (n)	£20,000- 29,999 (n)	£30,000- 39,999 (n)	£40,000+ (n)
Hackney	24	18	11	5	3
Lambeth	13	8	22	13	5
Ealing	21	23	9	6	2
Total	58	49	42	24	10

Table 13: How long have you worked in your job?

	0-2 years (n)	3-5 years (n)	6-9 years (n)	10+ years (n)
Hackney	30	16	11	4
Lambeth	22	15	6	19
Ealing	18	15	11	16
Total	70	46	28	39

Trade union membership

As might be expected given the fact that trade union membership is highest in the public sector, we find that Lambeth interviewees – who were mainly working in the public sector – were more likely to be members of trade unions. Conversely, union membership is low amongst Kurdish workers who are mainly working in small family owned businesses. Reflecting previous research on reasons for non-membership (Waddington and Kerr 1996; 1999), there is a greater propensity among our interviewees for non membership as a result of the fact that workers either do not have a union in their workplace, or if they do, that no-one has asked them to join. Few of our interviewees, although many were critical of unions, stated they did not wish to join a trades union.

Waddington, J and Kerr, A (1996) 'Membership retention in the public sector.'. *Industrial relations Journal*. Vol. 30:2. pp.147-165. Waddington, J and Kerr, A (1999) 'Trying to stem the flow: union membership turnover in the public sector.' *Industrial relations Journal*. 30: 3: 184-196.

Table 14: Trade union membership

	Trade union member - yes (n)	Trade union member - no (n)	Reason for not joining: no trade union (n)	Reason for not joining: no-one asked me (n)	Reason for not joining: do not wish to (n)	Reason for not joining: no TU & no one asked	Reason for not joining: no TU & don't want to join	Reason for not joining: other
Hackney	9	51	23	13	3	9	0	1
Lambeth	33	29	7	8	5	1	0	3
Ealing	39	22	4	8	4	1	1	0
Total	81	102	34	29	12	11	1	4

Of those interviewees who were not members of trades unions, only 15 had been a union member in the past. There were also distinct differences between communities about country of birth length of stay in the UK in the borough.

Table 15: Were you born UK?

	yes (n)	no (n)
Hackney	0	60
Lambeth	51	11
Ealing	7	54
Total	58	125

Table 16: What year did you come to the UK?

	1950-1969 (n)	1970-1980 (n)	1981-1999 (n)	2000+ (n)
Hackney	0	0	37	17
Lambeth	6	1	3	
Ealing	5	13	10	22
Total	11	14	50	39

Table 17: How long have you lived or worked in the borough

	0-2 (n)	3-5 (n)	6-9 (n)	10+ (n)
Hackney	8	8	15	30
Lambeth	5	4	4	49
Ealing	14	10	9	28