This study reviews literature and datasets to establish the main patterns, themes and issues from research on ethnicity and poverty in Scotland and to identify key sources of statistical information.

Key points

- All minority ethnic groups in Scotland appeared disadvantaged on one or more poverty indicators. Length of UK residence, legal status, belonging to a travelling culture and religion were factors in economic, social, material and environmental deprivation.

- On income-based measures, Pakistanis/Bangladeshis and black households had higher rates of poverty than other ethnic groups.

- Key findings were:
  - high unemployment rates in certain minority ethnic groups;
  - mismatches between educational qualifications and types/levels of employment, and the potential for employment discrimination;
  - high incidences of homelessness and housing need in certain groups;
  - links between disadvantaged economic status, ethnicity and poor health; and
  - fear of racial harassment in certain areas.

- More use could be made of existing census-related and administrative datasets to monitor poverty and ethnicity. Qualitative research is also essential for examining the relationship between poverty and ethnicity in Scotland, because of the small numbers of people involved in many areas and the distinctive experiences of diverse groups.

- The authors conclude that causes, experiences and routes out of poverty among minority ethnic groups in Scotland are under-researched. Future research needs to include these groups along with the majority population, and examine them in their own right. More focused, strategic attention to addressing poverty among minority ethnic groups is needed, including:
  - initiatives to increase access to education, training, employment and affordable childcare;
  - closer links between the equality and child poverty agendas;
  - ongoing review of attitudes towards minority ethnic communities and the potential for discriminatory employment practices.
Background

This study reviewed literature relating to poverty and ethnicity in Scotland published since 2001, when the last audit of ethnicity-related research was carried out (Netto et al., 2001, Audit of Research on Minority Ethnic Issues in Scotland from a ‘Race’ Perspective, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive). Statistical datasets were also reviewed to identify potential sources of information on the causes and impacts of poverty.

The minority ethnic population in Scotland is distinctive within the UK in its size, composition and settlement patterns. Census data indicates that the minority ethnic population is about 2 per cent, but this is likely to be an underestimate. The minority ethnic population includes Pakistanis, Chinese, Indians, Africans, A8 migrants (from the eight eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004), Gypsy Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees, Irish Catholics and other communities. They are concentrated in the four main cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee, but also dispersed across Scotland, including remote parts of the Highlands and Islands. Considerable diversity exists between and within minority ethnic communities, in terms of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, length of residence in the country, and legal and generational status (whether first generation, second generation etc).

Key findings and implications for policy and practice

All minority ethnic groups appeared to be disadvantaged on one or more indicators of poverty. Analysis of income-based (ten-year pooled Households Below Average Income) datasets, for example, revealed that Pakistanis/Bangladeshis and black households in Scotland had higher rates of poverty than other ethnic groups. Qualitative research illustrated specific forms of disadvantage (not captured through survey data) experienced by other minority ethnic groups, notably among A8 migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and Gypsy Travellers. For example, destitution is a major concern among individuals whose claim for asylum has been refused, while among Gypsy Travellers, the poor conditions of some site amenities contribute to environmental deprivation.

Lack of good quality, accessible, affordable housing

A high incidence of homelessness and evidence of considerable housing need in certain minority ethnic groups has been documented, along with the inaccessibility of many homelessness agencies to these communities. Minority ethnic groups were under-represented in social housing and over-represented in private-rented housing, suggesting that social housing providers need to do more to ensure proportionate representation in lettings. Although rates of owner-occupation are high, some of this is in poor quality housing. This suggests the need to review local housing strategies and ensure that minority ethnic communities are included in initiatives to improve access to good quality housing.

Inequalities in educational attainment

The review found some evidence to suggest that children from some minority ethnic backgrounds are outperforming the majority population in schools, even in deprived areas. However, many schools may still be in the developmental stages of implementing race equality policies and practices. A specific concern was the low educational attainment of Gypsy Traveller children, suggesting the need for sustained activity in this area.

Minority ethnic young people in Scotland appeared to be over-represented in further education and under-represented in higher education. This indicates a need to pay more attention to tracing the educational patterns of young people moving from secondary school to further and higher education, with particular attention to transition points.

Barriers to employment and employment practices

There was some indication that educational qualifications do not match types and levels of employment in certain minority ethnic groups. High unemployment rates, strongly gender-biased employment patterns in certain groups and lack of knowledge regarding the extent to which self-employment (high in certain groups) is a positive choice or an alternative route to employment were also areas of concern.

This suggests that initiatives to facilitate access to education and training and increase the availability of affordable childcare need to engage more proactively with individuals from minority ethnic communities. The potential for straightforward discriminatory practices to continue suggests that greater effort needs to be invested in holding organisations, particularly large public ones, to account in reporting on the ethnic composition of their workforce at various organisational levels.

Health inequalities and public health

The review found some evidence that economically disadvantaged groups report poorer health than less disadvantaged
Main knowledge gaps and research required

A major gap in knowledge is a coherent picture of the relationship between various aspects of poverty, including in-work poverty, within minority ethnic groups. Most of the review findings emerged from studies whose primary focus was not poverty. This is of concern, given that implications for anti-poverty policy and practice initiatives have not been directly considered.

There has also been a lack of longitudinal studies of routes into and out of poverty, or its persistence, and its experience at household level. The relationship between employment patterns, gender roles and cultural norms for child-rearing and care of older people is also not known. How far discrimination restricts entry to, and progression within, the workplace has been under-researched. All of these areas would merit consideration in future research.

Also not known is how well public services are addressing poverty in different sections of the population. Little is known about the recruitment and progression of minority ethnic communities within the public services workforce, mechanisms for consulting with minority ethnic groups, or their usage of and satisfaction with services. For instance, more needs to be known about the effectiveness of measures taken by local authorities and (other) social landlords in addressing housing need in minority ethnic communities, or whether levels of homelessness within these groups have changed over time. Further research needs to be directed towards a wide range of public services, to increase understanding of their effectiveness in countering poverty among various groups. This would need to include a study of benefits take-up – currently low in certain groups – and the inclusivity of entry into work initiatives.

In education, existing statistical data could be interrogated and supplemented by qualitative research with schoolchildren (or school leavers) from specified minority ethnic groups within a range of schools in selected areas (with varying levels of deprivation). This would need to cover aspirations for higher education and employment. Research evaluating the policies and practices of educational authorities and schools in developing accessible, relevant education for Gypsy Traveller children would also be useful.

Given the lack of research into routes out of poverty, a major study into the employment (and unemployment) experiences and aspirations of people from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds would be valuable. It could examine their career aspirations, educational qualifications, current and previous experiences of employment, and the nature of discriminatory practices experienced in the workplace. An exploration of employment discrimination – including at the stages of recruitment and within the workplace – and various levels of organisational hierarchy, would also provide useful insights.

Better information-sharing among major public bodies, linked to a political commitment to invest in community relations work – particularly in deprived areas – is vital for ensuring safe spaces for all who reside in the country. This suggests a need for current, reliable information on the extent and nature of racial harassment at local level, to inform community development and policing activities.

Tackling racial harassment

A dominant theme in much of the literature was vulnerability to racial harassment. Certain groups appeared to be particularly vulnerable, including Gypsy Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees. However, little is known about the extent of the phenomenon at the local level, and what can be done to ameliorate it. Challenging questions include: to what extent is Scotland genuinely welcoming of migrants or minority groups? And to what extent do trends at local levels reflect wider exclusionary trends in political discourse?

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Linking the equality and child poverty agendas

Many of the review findings – including the need to improve conditions within the home and neighbourhood, enhance access to appropriate (levels of) education and widen employment opportunities for adults – are relevant to addressing child poverty in Scotland. Greater collaboration between organisations working on child poverty and those working with minority ethnic groups is needed to counter child poverty in these communities.

Public health policy needs to be informed by greater understanding of the complex relationships between ethnicity, ill-health and poverty. The evidence highlighted the need for information-sharing across (mental) health, housing and social care about individuals from economically disadvantaged minority ethnic communities, including asylum seekers and Gypsy Travellers.

Poverty, aspirations, educational qualifications, current and previous experiences of employment, and the nature of discriminatory treatment within the workplace – and various levels of organisational hierarchy, would also provide useful insights.

ones, with some of these differences being age-related. There was also evidence that poverty can exacerbate poor health (for example, through poor living and environmental conditions) and hinder access to health services.

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Understanding of the relationship between poverty and health could be furthered by exploring the feasibility of using the Census and other datasets to explore the relationship between poverty and key health conditions (including mental health) for certain minority ethnic groups. Qualitative research examining the relationships between poor health, economic disadvantage and the accessibility and appropriateness of housing, health and social care services is also needed.

Little is known of the relationships between majority and minority ethnic groups, apart from incidents of racial harassment. Action research into such relationships at local levels, including in deprived areas, would be useful in identifying and addressing areas of tension.

**Exploiting potential sources of information**

The Census and related specialised datasets remain a key source for profiling the characteristics of the minority ethnic population in Scotland where numbers are relatively small. However, it is important to consider other sources, given the frequency of the Census and lack of information relating to income poverty.

Large-scale official surveys are of limited value in providing robust evidence on the conditions facing small ethnic groups within the population. Despite this, the Scottish Household Survey and Labour Force Survey are potentially useful. Administrative data is of growing use in monitoring aspects of poverty, notably at small area level. This could be exploited to provide information on benefit take-up and employment, educational experience and attainment, and aspects of health.

**Conclusion**

Although the nature, extent and duration of poverty in minority ethnic communities in Scotland have not been the explicit focus of research attention, this review has revealed a number of critical issues of concern. A wide range of studies have established various facets of poverty in minority ethnic communities, including income poverty and in-work poverty.

However, gaps in knowledge have hindered the development of informed policy-making, service planning and resource allocation. Future research needs to exploit existing datasets and use qualitative research to reveal the specific vulnerabilities to, and experience of, poverty among diverse minority ethnic groups, as well as possible routes out of poverty.

The implications of this review need to be considered within the policy framework for tackling poverty and income inequality in Scotland and at UK-wide level. The disproportionate representation of some minority ethnic communities in low pay is highly relevant to the anti-poverty strategy of targeting support for those in the lowest income deciles. The findings of this review strongly suggest a need to systematically and proactively include minority ethnic communities in wide-ranging anti-poverty initiatives and strategies at both national and local levels within Scotland. At UK-wide level, distinctive features of the make-up of the minority ethnic population, its size and patterns of settlement merit consideration.

**About the project**

This study will inform the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s research programme on poverty and ethnicity.

The literature review included elements of the systematic review process, including rigorous searching of electronic databases and the grey literature (material produced by non-commercial publishing sources such as academic and government bodies), and appraisal of the quality of studies.

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**For further information**

The full report, *Poverty and ethnicity in Scotland: review of the literature and datasets* by Gina Netto, Filip Sosenko and Glen Bramley, will be available as a free download at www.jrf.org.uk from April.

Published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6RF. This project is part of the JRF’s research and development programme. These findings, however, are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. ISSN 0958-3084

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