

WHY RACE EQUALITY IS POOR IN RICH LONDON

By Maxine James and Ade Sawyerr

EIGHT YEARS after the passing of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Londoners still have no comprehensive information on how the implementation of the Act has addressed race inequality in the capital.

People of Asian, Caribbean and African descent represent almost a third (29 percent) of London's population, yet there are still glaring inequalities in the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.

Inequalities in political representation, health, education, employment, housing, transport and the criminal justice system impact on the lives of these people on a daily basis.

DUTIES

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 placed general and specific duties on public bodies to eliminate unlawful race discrimination, promote equality of opportunity between persons of racial groups and promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.



EDUCATION

WHEN EXPERTS discuss underachievement in education, they often talk about it in relation to Asian, Caribbean and African young people, as if it is an inherent characteristic of these groups.

But recent studies such as *Tell it like it is*, which has a foreword by Doreen Lawrence, reminds us that poverty and racism are still at the heart of why African Caribbean and some Asian children are not making significant progress in the school system.

The facts suggest that over two thirds of children from African Caribbean and Asian backgrounds attend school in London, where they make up 20 percent of pupils in the maintained school system in outer London and 31 percent in inner London schools.

In the secondary school system they are disproportionately more likely to end up in local authority schools, instead of the higher achieving and better-managed religious schools.

A large number, 40 percent, attend academies that have yet to show improvements on the schools they replaced and tend to have the worst results countrywide.

In the latest GCSE league tables nine out of 11 academies were in the bottom 200 schools in England. African Caribbean children are three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school.

There is also inequality among teaching staff. Black teachers, though better qualified, (55 percent of the main-

But government initiatives at national, regional and local levels in the years since these ideals were conceived have had no discernible impact.

This suggests that either race equality initiatives are not working as anticipated, or the law does not provide strong enough sanctions to discourage individuals and organisations from breaking the law.

Statistics show that despite what may be seen as gains in race relations, there is a need for further action.

CHANGING TIMES: But how far has equality come in the capital?

have degrees compared to 49 percent of the mainstream population), account for less than 7.4 percent of teaching staff, 4.9 percent of managerial staff and 1 percent of principals.

HEALTH

DISEASES ASSOCIATED with poverty, such as tuberculosis, which were supposed to be eradicated decades ago, are creeping back into wealthy Britain, and mostly affecting BME (black minority ethnic) communities.

Cases of HIV and AIDS among heterosexuals is far higher within certain African communities, as are the incidences of sexually transmitted disease.

There are not only inequalities in health problems, they also exist at points of referral and treatment. Inequalities are particularly noticeable in the area of mental health.

Findings of the First National Census on Mental Health Hospitals revealed that unprecedented levels of racism had adverse effects on African and Caribbean patients in the system.

Referrals by the police and courts were almost double the average for black people.

Black patients were more likely, by as much as over 40 percent, to be detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Data also shows a higher proportion of BME mental health patients dying of unnatural causes.

JOBS

THE EMPLOYMENT rate is 59 percent for the ethnic minority population, but as high as 77 percent for the white population.

Ethnic minority people are twice as likely – 6.85 percent – to be unemployed than whites, at 3.4 percent.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

THERE IS an over-representation of black victims and perpetrators, and black people are under-represented in the administration of justice.

Home Office statistics show that Caribbean people are eight times more likely to be stopped by the police than white people.

Black people are six times more likely to be given a custodial sentence than whites, are more likely to be refused bail, and more likely to be tried in Crown Courts.

Caribbean people, however, are more likely to have their cases discontinued before trial because they have been inappropriately charged, and more likely to be acquitted because they should not have been charged in the first place.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

THE PROPORTION of people from Asian, Caribbean and African communities in Parliament is 2.3 percent, 15 out of 659 seats. The proportion of Members of the European Parliament is 1 percent.

If representation in these institutions reflected the 9 percent of BME people nationally, this would translate to 60 Members of Parliament from Asian, Caribbean and African backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

THE LAW is failing to make a real impact on race inequality. If race equality is to be achieved in this country it is vital we get things right in London.

More information is needed on organisations that seek to implement and comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 – how they are going about it, what targets they are setting and to what extent the targets are being met.

With almost one third of the population of London from minority ethnic communities, the State of Race Equality in London conference should be an annual event. The prospect of yearly reporting and yearly assessment will be a spur to improvement.

The Government should consider extending the Act to all organisations, including the private and voluntary sector, as well as political parties and independent schools. It is essential to achieve race equality in all sectors.

There is a lot more work to be done on race equality to ensure that all in the community are able to benefit equally in the gains of London – one of the richest cities in the world.

In the eyes of a large number of African Caribbean and Asian people, the glass is not half full, it is still half empty.