

**‘Warm Beer and Invincible Green Suburbs’?  
Examining the Realities of Rurality for  
Minority Ethnic Households**

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by

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## **Abstract**

Popular constructions of rural England have perpetuated images of idyllic, problem-free environments which have tended to mask the exclusionary processes that marginalise particular groups of rural 'others'. This includes minority ethnic 'others' whose experiences of rural life have been largely overlooked by academic studies. Previous research into 'race'-related issues has focused almost exclusively on the more urbanised areas of the country which typically contain larger minority ethnic populations, but such a focus has to some extent overshadowed the difficulties facing minority ethnic households living in rural areas where communities are traditionally less transient and feelings of isolation and alienation may be at a premium.

The research upon which the thesis is based is drawn from predominantly qualitative material elicited from studies of rural towns and villages based in three English counties. The perceptions of minority ethnic groups are examined to identify their feelings about rural life, fear of racist harassment and experiences of victimisation, while the attitudes of established white rural communities are also assessed in an analysis of notions of community, identity and 'otherness' in a rural context. In addition, the thesis considers the way in which statutory and voluntary agencies respond to the needs of minority ethnic rural households and to problems of racist victimisation.

The research findings illustrate the disturbing nature, extent and impact of racist victimisation in rural environments, and it is suggested that the 'invisibility' of the problem is compounded by weaknesses in agency responses and by the enduring appeal of idyllicised constructions of rurality. At the same time though, the status of 'other' may not be a permanent affiliation for all rural minority ethnic households, but instead is likely to be a more transient condition contingent to some extent upon individual circumstances and particular environments. Consequently, the thesis contends that the significance of racialised 'othering' in the rural will only be fully appreciated through a more nuanced conceptual understanding of the rural 'othering' process, and through a more holistic research agenda that takes account of the increasing diversification of rural space.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Understanding the ‘Rural’**

At first glance a study of minority ethnic experiences of the rural may seem an unusual site of enquiry, particularly when taken in the context of a long tradition of academic research which has tended to focus on more urbanised environments when accounting for the perceptions of minority ethnic communities. The presence of ethnic minorities in the rural has been largely overlooked as a result of the potent imagery often associated with the English countryside, a vivid illustration of which can be seen in the following comments, referred to in the title of this thesis, which former Prime Minister John Major famously used to describe his vision of Englishness during his time in office: ‘County grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs ... and old maids cycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist’ (Major, 1993 quoted in Garland and Rowe, 2001: 121). Such introspective, and arguably retrospective, depictions evoke seemingly comforting recollections of a ‘better’ England, an England steeped in tradition and free of the problems associated with contemporary society. That such depictions tend to rely upon the kinds of nostalgic images typically associated with rural towns and villages is especially telling, as these eulogies to traditional values appear to leave little room for ‘non-traditional’ groups such as ethnic minorities. Indeed as we shall see, popular constructions of rural England afford little recognition to the growing minority ethnic rural population, and this has significant implications for the way in which ethnic minorities can be perceived within rural communities.

As a way of addressing the relative lack of research into rural minority ethnic experiences, this thesis investigates relationships between white and minority ethnic rural households and explores issues of racialised ‘othering’ and victimisation within rural towns and villages based in three English counties. Chapter Three describes the research methodology and how the study was conceived, designed and implemented, while Chapters Four and Five examine perceptions of belonging and the process of racist victimisation respectively as experienced by research participants in this study. The problem of rural racism is shown to be a significant and distressing issue for many of the minority ethnic research participants, and Chapter Six goes on to examine

how local agencies and policy-makers respond to the problem and the extent to which these responses meet the needs of minority households. Before discussing the findings and implications of the actual research itself though, consideration is first given to how the term ‘rural’ has been utilised and conceptualised within political, popular and academic discourse. Chapter Two then explores the concept of victimisation, and more specifically the notion of racist victimisation, to establish a more nuanced recognition of the processes through which minority ethnic households can fall victim to different forms of racism. Taken together these initial chapters provide a logical framework from which we can begin to locate the specific difficulties facing rural minority ethnic households, and to understand the experiences of victimisation and racialised ‘othering’ identified within the towns and villages selected for the purposes of this particular piece of research.

Developing a clearer understanding of the term ‘rural’, and of how it has been conceived within academic, political and popular discourse, is an important first step towards appreciating the significance of rural racism. The research upon which this thesis is based aims to identify the patterns of ‘othering’ that can result in minority ethnic households being marginalised from mainstream rural communities, and as we shall see in later chapters the research examines the perceptions of, and relationships between, minority ethnic households, white residents and local agencies as a way of analysing the nature, extent and impact of this ‘othering’ process. However, in order to fully comprehend the rationale for studying the dynamics of this process in an explicitly rural, as opposed to urban context, we need first to understand the distinctiveness of rural place and space, not simply geographically but with reference to the way in which rurality has been polarised conceptually from urbanity in terms of its history, demography and character. As traditional distinctions between the nature of rural and urban space begin to dissipate as a result of the increasing diversification of rural environments, higher rates of rural in-migration and the upward trend in the development of rural land, conclusive definitions of what is, and what is not *rural* are increasingly hard to settle upon. Nonetheless, in the absence of an overarching definition the rural has commonly been conceptualised in terms of belonging, nationhood and identity, and as we shall see throughout the remainder of this chapter conceiving of the rural in this manner has had long-standing implications for the way in which minority ethnic ‘others’ are perceived to fit within such a framework.



## Conceptualising rurality

In order to study issues of racism in a rural context consideration should first be given to what is meant by the 'rural'. Although most people may have their own generalised conception of the term, its true complexities and ambiguities cannot be fully understood in the absence of a suitable conceptual framework (Robinson, 1992). The most recent definition of rurality offered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) consists of two parts, the first being the settlement morphology which applies to all places with a population of under 10,000, and the second referring to the wider geographical context in which individual settlements are located, and specifically the extent to which this wider area can be said to be 'sparsely' populated or not (DEFRA, 2004; The Countryside Agency, 2004a). Under this definition, 19 per cent of the UK's total population live in a rural area, and six per cent reside in rural areas where the surrounding environment is especially sparsely populated, while 2001 Census figures reveal the rural 'non-white' population to be between 0.2 and 2.4 per cent (Dhillon, 2006)<sup>1</sup>.

DEFRA's definition is helpful to some extent in describing the official parameters of what is rural and what is not; indeed, the selection of rural case-study areas within this particular piece of research was informed by the DEFRA definition in the sense that care was taken to ensure that each town or village fitted within the formal classification of rurality. However, official definitions reveal little with regards to the nature of rural space and the characteristics which influence popular classifications of what constitutes 'the rural'. The term is often loosely employed to refer to non-urban or peripheral environments, but as Scott, Hogg, Barclay and Donnermeyer (2007: 3) suggest 'there is no absolute or definitive distinction between either the conceptual or geographic boundaries of urban and rural areas, or metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas'. Changes to geographical landscapes, together with evolving social, political and economic structures will all necessarily impact upon interpretations of rurality, and yet credible attempts to analyse the meaning of rurality have been broadly lacking from contemporary criminological and sociological debates that have tended to neglect rural perspectives (Moody, 1999; Dingwall, 1999). Instead, the task of

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<sup>1</sup> Further statistical breakdowns of the rural minority ethnic population are as yet unavailable following the introduction of DEFRA's new definition of rural.



conceptualising the term has been left largely to rural geographers who have adopted a range of different perspectives and foci in helping to shape our understanding (see, for example, Cherry, 1976; Lewis, 1979; Cloke, 1980; Robinson, 1992).

Among the most popular ways of viewing the rural has been to dichotomise ‘the rural’ and ‘the urban’, most commonly by drawing upon historical references to the polarisation of the two forms of place. Robinson (1992), for example, makes reference to the work of Ferdinand Tonnies (1887), who perceived rurality in its ideal sense (described by Tonnies as the *Gemeinschaft*) to be typified by features like kinship, locality, familiarity and understanding, whereas urban relations (referred to by Tonnies as the *Gesellschaft*) were characterised by alienation and depersonalisation (see also Donnermeyer, 2007). Similarly, Robinson uses the writings of Louis Wirth (1938) to highlight the negative characteristics attributed to urbanism by early social theorists:

*Wirth felt that urban relationships were impersonal, superficial and transitory. These social relations alienated individuals from their folk or rural backgrounds, destroying the sense of belonging to an integrated community and creating a state of ‘anomie’ or a sense of being lost in ‘the lonely crowd’ ... Without formalised controls he felt such societies would be unable to maintain any form of social order.*

(Robinson, 1992: 38)

Similar assertions have been made by sociologists working within the tradition of the Chicago school, for whom problems of crime and deviance have long been associated with the debilitating environmental conditions of the city. The oft-referred to work of Clifford Shaw and Henry Mckay, for example, has argued that juvenile offending is a product of the societal transformations that result from rapid urbanisation, and as such that young people born and brought up in disorganised urban neighbourhoods are especially vulnerable to deviant behaviour (Shaw and Mckay, 1972 cited in Hopkins Burke, 2001: 104). As a consequence, such entrenched and long-established beliefs about the fundamental differences between the two ‘polarities’ of space have given rise to the concept of a rural-urban continuum, where locations are viewed

along an imaginary continuum, with absolute rurality and absolute urbanity at opposite ends. Cloke (1977), for example, developed the idea of an index of rurality, based upon the multivariate analysis of multiple socio-economic indicators, which it was felt would provide insights into the characteristics considered to be indicative of rurality. In such an index, rurality was defined so as to embrace a series of distinct variables, including population, migration, land use and remoteness, which are measured to establish the extent to which an area is inclined towards the rural or urban pole.

However, several authors have criticised the simplistic implications of adopting such a mechanism for distinguishing what is rural. Hoggart (1990: 249), for instance, argues that despite the variety of indicators used in the delineation of places, schemes of categorisation such as the index of rurality naively rely upon unitary conceptions of geographical differentiation; similarly, Pahl (1968) warns that the simplicity inherent to a rural-urban continuum can give rise to widespread and mistaken generalisations which ignore the variety of changes between the two ‘poles’ of rural and urban. Consequently, a growing body of literature has emerged within the field of rural studies which has sought to move away from the mere dichotomisation of rural and urban, and which instead has encouraged a deeper understanding of their particular characteristics and dimensions.

While there will inevitably be varying interpretations of what these characteristics and dimensions should be, Cloke (1985: 4) has suggested that three main themes are evident within the numerous definitions of rurality. The first of these is a tendency to synonymise the ‘rural’ with anything non-urban in character, a tendency which Cloke suggests mistakenly implies that the rural environment lacks sufficient character to be worthy of study in its own right. A second theme running through much discourse on the subject (for example, Thorburn, 1971; Moss, 1978) is what Cloke refers to as a propensity to regard ‘user perception [as] ... the principal agent of rural-urban definition’. Arguably, this kind of definitional approach, whilst highlighting the subjectivity of rural conceptualisation, does relatively little to shed light upon the particular dynamics of rurality.

However, a further theme identified by Cloke acknowledges that positive definitions can in fact be attributed to rurality, and it is those definitions which he believes can be most helpful in shaping perceptions of what rurality is, as opposed to what rurality is



not or what it is perceived to be (op cit). Certainly, approaches which recognise rurality as a concept in its own right and which offer insights into the realities of rural life, will stave off calls from authors such as Hoggart (1990) to jettison the 'rural' as a specific and worthwhile object of study.

*To me, if we cannot agree what 'rural' is, this does not give us carte blanche to rely on 'convenient' definitions of it. Rather, it behoves us to abandon the category 'rural' as an analytical construct.*

(Hoggart, 1990: 246)

For Hoggart, simplistic assumptions about the nature of rurality have resulted in what he refers to as 'too much laxity in the treatment of rural areas in empirical analysis' (1990: 245). However, rather than reaching the seemingly pessimistic conclusion of 'doing away with the rural', others have sought to broaden the scope of enquiry within rural studies by acknowledging, and critiquing, the utility of alternative explanations of rurality. Among the most helpful accounts is Robinson's (1992) typology of socio-cultural, occupational and ecological definitions. Socio-cultural definitions refer to the perceived attitudinal and behavioural differences between people living in large and small settlements, which have helped to shape popular constructions of rurality and urbanity, while occupational definitions make even more explicit assumptions about the forms of occupation followed by rural dwellers (1992: 14). Ecological definitions, meanwhile, are seen by Robinson to build upon elements of the previous two definitions by viewing environmental characteristics (including the physical and man-made environment, population, values and social organisation) as pivotal to maintaining urban and rural distinctions.

The notion of space has also been regarded as a central concept in many explanations of rurality. Most commonly, this relates to the idea that attempts to conceptualise rurality must acknowledge the existence of a multiplicity of rural spaces, as opposed to one single space, where recognition is afforded to differing constructs of the rural (Mormont, 1990; Cloke and Milbourne, 1992; Little and Austin, 1996; Van Dam, Heins and Elbersen, 2002). Murdoch and Pratt (1997), for example, refer to the terms first used by Mol and Law (1994) to distinguish the spatial dimensions of rurality –

regions, networks and fluidity – to assist in their own explanations of the rural. For these authors, the term ‘region’ is synonymous with traditional approaches characterising rural discourse which merely (and mistakenly) emphasise the exclusivity of space by simplistically breaking areas down into neat divisions with fixed boundaries. Viewing the rural as a series of ‘networks’ on the other hand, at least acknowledges the socio-spatial relationships that may exist outside such fixed boundaries, although this approach does still have limitations:

*While the network approach is good at showing the contingency of power relations by documenting in detail how the powerful become powerful, it tells us nothing about those who lie outside the (power) networks. Those who lack resources, a voice, visibility, will continue to be neglected if we simply concentrate on powerful networks. Although network analysis helps in understanding how the rural becomes an exclusive, homogenous terrain it does not direct us towards those who fall into the gaps between the networks.*

(Murdoch and Pratt, 1997: 62-3)

Consequently, as Murdoch and Pratt go on to argue, conceptualisations of the rural may need to pay further regard to the ambiguities that are not recognised within references to ‘regions’ and ‘networks’. They therefore see a third form of space, ‘fluidity’, as being a more appropriate way to conceive rurality, where sufficient consideration can be given to the situational complexities that change over time and place.

Recognition of such complexities has helped to move debates about the nature of rurality beyond crude distinctions between the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’. Approaches that simply counterpose the two terms appear to have been rejected within contemporary rural discourse in favour of approaches that pay heed to what Murdoch and Day refer to as ‘the multiple rural realities which are lived by a whole host of varied groups and actors, many of whom are situated at some distance from dominant conceptions of rurality’ (1998: 187). This rather more progressive vision of rurality has been embraced by a range of leading authors (see, for example, Cloke and



Milbourne, 1992; Philo, 1992; Cloke and Little, 1997; Williams, 1999) who have adopted similar viewpoints in highlighting both the absence of a clear binary divide between urban and rural, and the stark differences within and between rural areas themselves. Consequently, a more informative framework in which to conceptualise rurality may be to adopt a stance perhaps best summarised by Lawrence (1997: 15):

*There is no a priori definition of the rural, but rather a constellation of made, unmade, and remade constructions of the experience of it.*

Conceiving of the rural as a continuum in the manner suggested above, where recognition is afforded to the variety of places and spaces that lie between the two polar types of rural and urban and to the influence of prevailing constructions of rurality, has helped to inform the present study. At one level such a position recognises the very broad extremes that are commonly used to distinguish the terms rural and urban: to use the words of Jones (1973: 4): ‘the open remote countryside generally used for agriculture on the one hand, and the large city, cosmopolitan complexes on the other’. At the same time, the physical and social inter-relation of different forms of space over time, together with the inevitable variety within the interpretations of different rural actors, suggest a need to study not only the particular characteristics of the rural, but perhaps more pertinently the particular characteristics that facilitate and perpetuate constructions of the rural. In essence then, an examination of ways in which rurality is constructed and deployed in certain contexts is likely to be more informative than the search for an overarching definition of rurality. As such, the rural case-study areas selected for the purposes of the present study were chosen not solely on the basis of their geographical and settlement profile meeting the criteria imposed by the official DEFRA classification of rurality, but also because of their divergent characteristics in terms of size, economy and demography. As we shall see in Chapter Three, conducting research in a variety of rural environments would, it was felt, facilitate a more meaningful understanding of experiences in different types of rural space and of the influence of the ‘constellation of constructions’ described by Lawrence (1997: 15) above.



## Romanticising rurality

In spite of the growing acceptance, at least within contemporary academic discourse, of the multiple lived realities of rurality, there still remain certain dominant and enduring images of the rural. While such images are likely to vary between countries (Van Dam *et al.*, 2002), many writers have observed a tendency within England to romanticise rurality by drawing parallels with problem-free ‘idyllic’ environments (Cloke and Milbourne, 1992; Little and Austin, 1996; Scutt and Bonnett, 1996; Cloke, 1997). Positive associations are seen to surround different aspects of rural lifestyle and landscape, thereby reinforcing nostalgic representations that refer to the distinctive, timeless and ultimately desirable qualities of the rural which provide a welcome escape from the hassles of modern day living. Such a conception is encapsulated in the oft-used term the ‘rural idyll’, which in the words of Cloke and Milbourne (1992: 359) ‘presents happy, healthy and problem-free images of rural life safely nestling with both a close social community and a contiguous natural environment’.

Consequently, the concept of a rural idyll has been described as a hegemonic social representation of rural space (Halfacree, 1993; Phillips, Fish and Agg, 2001), a key feature of which is the concept of ‘rural community’. For some (see, for example, Bauman, 1992; Murdoch and Day, 1998) the increasing globalisation of social life has led to a postmodern revival of interest in the idea of ‘community’, and despite the conceptual ambiguities associated with the term, its resonance with romanticised notions of the rural has long been recognised as an enduring and appealing image. As Francis and Henderson (1992: 19) suggest:

*There is no doubt that community, especially when prefixed by ‘rural’ is a powerful and emotive concept ... [it] includes notions of reciprocal human relationships, voluntary effort, interest in local affairs, neighbourliness: above all, the village is seen as a place where everybody knows and cares for each other.*

Once again, traditional stereotypes of harmony and consensus are central to the notion of rural community, which is seen to embody certain cultural characteristics such as a

tradition of collective self-help, conservatism and unity (Francis and Henderson, 1992: 22-4). As with simple rural-urban dichotomies, this notion of rural community has attracted criticism, most notably for perpetuating ambiguous, nostalgic, and ultimately exclusive, constructions of rurality (Philo, 1992; Murdoch and Day, 1998), although some (see, for example, Liepins, 2000) have argued for reconceptualisation, rather than rejection, of the notion so that it embraces the heterogeneity of rural life. Certainly, if one is to acknowledge the existence of the multiple realities of rurality, a logical consequence would be to reject the idea of a particular rural culture or way of life, as encapsulated within the arguably outdated notion of a singular rural community, in favour of an approach which recognises the diversity of rural *communities*. This will be discussed more fully shortly.

A further way in which the rural has been 'romanticised' over the years has been through direct comparison between the landscapes of city and countryside. As we have seen, dominant representations of the rural have tended to draw images of problem-free environments, but even when problems are acknowledged as existing within the rural sphere they are almost inevitably regarded as being less pronounced than in urban areas (Milbourne, 1997: 95). Some have suggested that the glorification of the rural in England was provoked largely by an anti-urban cultural transformation during the late nineteenth century resulting from the perceived political and economic crisis within urban society (Short, 1991; Scutt and Bonnett, 1996); similarly, the work of Rousseau, Durkheim, Weber and Marxist theorists has been influential in highlighting the dangers associated with the urbanisation of society such as the breakdown of social solidarity, the fragmentation of communal beliefs and the relationship between capitalist development and urban change. This suspicion of the 'urban' has remained a recurring theme in much popular and academic discourse. Murdoch and Marsden (1994) emphasise this point by referring to Raban's (1974) influential description of the city as 'a place of great uncertainty and instability where individuals may find extreme difficulty in achieving any real sense of security', and subsequently arguing that such descriptions of urban life have shaped people's desires to seek alternative forms of space (1994: 9).

By way of contrast, the rural has traditionally been presented as a sanctuary from the harsh realities of the urban world, a place which, as Scutt and Bonnett (1996: 2) envisage:

*‘ ... connotes a timeless, stable and enduring sanctuary from the city, detached from contemporary culture and firmly anchored in a mystical, if not mythical, vision of the past’.*

The ‘vision’ referred to in the preceding quotation again conjures up romanticised notions of rurality which serve simply to support stereotypes of rural life. Moreover, these are notions that perpetuate dualistic images about the two polarities of space, as discussed earlier, where the rural is seen to embrace a very different, and wholly preferable, set of values to the urban such as honesty, kinship, solidarity and paternalism (Little and Austin, 1996: 102). Within such a context the rural way of life can be a fundamentally attractive concept, particularly to upwardly mobile urban escapees whose means, lifestyles and opportunities are likely to enable them to ‘live the dream’ of a trouble-free rural existence (Stenson and Watt, 1999: 83).

A vivid illustration of this process can be found in television and radio broadcasting, where the romanticisation of rurality has long been a feature of programmes transmitted through the popular media in the UK. Bunce (1994), for example, has pointed to the ‘nostalgic veneer’ surrounding long-running shows such as *The Archers* and *All Creatures Great and Small* that depict a seemingly happier way of life and a greater sense of harmony (1994: 50-55), while Fish (2000) cites the work of Jones (1995) to explain the attraction of prime-time entertainment such as Yorkshire Television’s adaptation of H.E. Bates’ series of books *The Darling Buds of May*:

*The opening scene shows the taxman from London, the apotheosis of drab modernity come to call on the anarchic voluptuous Larkin Family, and what follows is his gradual seduction by the rural idyll into which he is slowly drawn, never to return to his office. The phenomenal success of this series will ensure that these particular visions of the rural – romantic freedom set in a picturesque village England – will be attractive to future programme designers.*

(Jones, 1995: 39 quoted in Fish, 2000: 17)



Such programmes clearly play a major role in disseminating the idea of a rural idyll to all sections of the general public; in addition, by perpetuating idyllic constructions of the countryside, programmers may well be positioning the rural experience as the antithesis of the urban experience (Fish, 2000: 19), thereby reinforcing dualistic images of the two forms of space. Consequently, public perceptions of rurality will inevitably be affected by the romanticised, not to say exclusionary, messages communicated through the popular media, to the extent where even the introduction of a non-white character into the fictional world of *The Archers* has been seen as a topic for debate and conjecture (Lawson, 2001).

### **Anglicising rurality**

A further dominant feature within popular constructions of rurality, certainly in this country, has been the extent to which the rural is seen to capture the very essence of Englishness, as is illustrated in the quotation below taken from Williamson's pre-World War Two text on national identity.

*So those aspects of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful that we, as Englishmen, are best able to see and those ideas we are best able to make our own and to which we can contribute, are those which have come to fruition in the English countryside and from the minds and characters of the best of our ancestors who lived in that countryside.*

(Williamson, 1939: 63)

Despite the widespread industrialisation and urbanisation that has affected the majority of the English population during the past century, the rural has nonetheless maintained a long-standing strong association with English national identity. When conceived in such a way, the rhetoric of rurality has the capacity to evoke powerful feelings of patriotism and nationalism characterised, for instance, by images of 'England's green and pleasant land' (Milbourne, 1997: 95) which serve to further reinforce dominant stereotypes. By drawing parallels between rural and national

identity, constructions of the rural have sought to highlight the ‘timeless’ and ‘quintessential’ national virtues that constitute a priceless part of the nation’s heritage (Sibley, 1997; Murdoch and Pratt, 1997). Such constructions have prevailed despite the growing recognition afforded to multiple conceptions of identity which cast doubt upon the relevance, and indeed the validity, of singular notions of nationalism. The seemingly cosy relationship between rurality and national identity is vividly illustrated in the following observation made by William Whitelaw, the former Home Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister during the Thatcher administration, when recounting his feelings on returning to his country home following a tour of the inner-city areas affected by the disorders of 1981<sup>2</sup>.

*When I got there I found my wife doing her best, as always, to appear encouraging and helpful at stressful moments. But I remember sitting out after supper on a beautiful hot summer evening, looking at the fields and trees of Burnham Beeches. It was a perfect, peaceful English scene. Was it really in the same vicinity as parts of London a few miles away which at that moment were full of troubles? Surely, I thought, this peaceful countryside represents more accurately the character and mood of the vast majority of the British people.*

(Whitelaw, 1989: 249 quoted in Rowe, 1998: 177)

As Rowe asserts, Whitelaw’s comments exemplify the oft-drawn associations between Englishness and the countryside, the basis for which stems from the alleged divergence in character between different forms of landscape. Similarly, the comments referred to at the start of this chapter from former Prime Minister John Major, who chose to interpret Orwell’s (1941) portrayal of Englishness in a rather different manner from which it was originally intended to describe his own vision of England, provide an even starker illustration of how notions of Englishness can be seen to correlate directly with mono-cultural, retrospective yet apparently comforting

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<sup>2</sup> The outbreak of unrest within parts of urban Britain during the early 1980s, characterised by the 1981 ‘disorders’ of Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side, was symptomatic of the breakdown in the relationship between the police and minority ethnic communities, and resulted in the establishment of an immediate inquiry and subsequent publication of the Scarman Report into the causes of the disorder.



images of rurality, while less nostalgic multi-dimensional and multi-cultural images are ignored. Rather tellingly, the one-dimensional description conveyed by Major did receive strong criticism from fellow Conservative party MP of the time Winston Churchill, grandson of the former Prime Minister of the same name, who felt that the failure to acknowledge the diverse make-up of present-day England was in fact illustrative of the government's perceived failure to deal with growing numbers of immigrants, rather than any other oversight:

*Mr Major seeks to reassure us with the old refrain 'There'll always be an England!' He promises us that, 50 years on from now, spinsters will still be cycling to church on Sunday morning. More like the Muezzin will be calling Allah's faithful to the high street mosque.*

(Churchill, 1993 cited in Rich, 1998: 105)

It is worth noting the extent to which the perceived 'Englishness' of the rural landscape has been used to champion the causes of various interest groups. For instance, through their analysis of various examples of contemporary popular literature, Scutt and Bonnett (1996: 25) suggest that the countryside remains the dominant image of England, and argue that this image is constructed through a set of myths that fuel essentially middle-class and white aspirations; indeed, such a contention is difficult to refute when viewed in light of the following rather audacious editorial opinion of *Country Life*, itself one of the texts included in Scutt and Bonnett's study: 'From the beginning *Country Life* has embodied a way of life that many people believe to be the most civilised in the world' (cited in Murdoch and Day, 1998: 191). Consequently, authors such as Sibley (1997) and Murdoch and Day (1998) have justifiably placed great emphasis upon the important symbolic role played by the English countryside in representing the hopes, values and prejudices of dominant social groups.

Political groups and institutions have certainly made use of popular anglicised notions of rurality to support their own arguments. Such notions have potentially broad appeal to all sides of the political spectrum: Robinson (1992), for example, observes that while those associated with the political Right can draw comfort from the rural

imagery of 'the country house, the church and traditional hierarchical rural society based on the squire, parson and a deferential labour force', those on the Left can eulogise over visions of 'rural folk society, the village community, rural crafts and the worthiness of farm labour' (1992: 13); indeed, in the tradition of William Morris's writings on rural arts and crafts during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rural scene has historically been a source of inspiration to intellectuals, artists and poets with leftist inclinations in their attempts to re-create an idyllic peasantry (Jones, 1973: 2). However, it is the political Right, and most commonly the Conservative party, that is seen to have the strongest associations with anglicised notions of rurality, as exemplified by the aforequoted comments of former leading Conservative politicians. Certainly it would seem that the peculiarly 'English' traits of the countryside enshrined within popular constructions of the rural fit broadly with a Conservative ideology that promotes the importance of maintaining the traditions of rural communities, and this has helped to perpetuate arguably mythical stereotypes about the nature of rurality (Francis and Henderson, 1992: 22).

Indeed, the potential of the rural to be utilised as a political pawn has not gone unnoticed by parties further to the right of the political spectrum. During the early 1990s prominent members of British far-right groups advocated the establishment of an autonomous white-only 'homeland' in rural parts of the country that would act as a stronghold for white supremacists throughout the land. This idea was perhaps best articulated by John Cato, himself a leading supremacist who had moved from London to a Lincolnshire village, writing in an irregular newsletter *Lebensraum*:

*Home, gone from the scum and slime that is the nigger saturated London, its outreaches and Britain's other major towns and cities. We do not need to concern ourselves with Blacks, Jews and communists. Or anything that they may fancy and do. Leave them to it. We are supposed to be Aryans, we should begin living as Aryans. As free spirits and men. Then we can reclaim our nation.*

(Cato, 1994 quoted in Lowles, 2001: 150)

While the creation of a rural ‘homeland’ never took shape in the manner envisaged by Cato and his followers, the rural arena has nonetheless maintained its sense of popularity amongst supporters of the far-right<sup>3</sup>, as illustrated in the following extract from the British National Party website:

*You can't help but notice the presence of new housing development all over the British countryside, destroying the character and in most cases the sense of community in the areas affected ... But has anyone stopped to consider where all these people who are moving into these developments come from, who they are and why they are there? ... [They are] people who see rural Britain as a refuge – a place to make a fresh start, away from the sordid, squalid towns and cities of Blair's new Babylon.*

(British National Party, 2002)

An example of how political and other interest groups have latched onto the ‘Englishness’ of rural areas in the relatively recent past can be seen in the pro-countryside demonstrations of 2002, which culminated in the ‘Liberty and Livelihood’ march held in London on 22 September of that year. Growing disenchantment with the alleged marginalisation of countryside issues from government policy is said to have led as many as 400,000 marchers to protest on the streets of London about a variety of causes of concern to rural inhabitants (Brockes, 2002). However, a particularly interesting feature of that march was the way in which dominant representations of rurality – those which commonly demonise the urban by romanticising or anglicising the rural – were somehow capable of transcending, and indeed uniting, the many and varied causes that had led to the march. Several commentators (Alibhai-Brown, 2002; Brockes, 2002) have pointed to the limited political, social and ethnic diversity of the marchers as an indicator of the exclusionary nature of rural life in this country, which reinforces the view that rurality is constructed to serve and maintain the interests of dominant groups. While these

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<sup>3</sup> The British National Party fielded a record 655 candidates at the May 2007 local elections, more than double the number who stood at the previous elections, following a campaign which specifically targeted rural areas containing large numbers of Eastern European in-migrants (Doward and Wander, 2007).



interests *per se* may in many instances be perfectly legitimate, the exclusion of those with other perhaps more neglected interests is not, as shall be discussed shortly.

### **The plurality of rurality**

Growing awareness of the social and spatial complexities of rural life has helped to cast doubt upon the relevance of traditional representations of the rural. Instead, attention has increasingly been focused on the extent to which such representations have been used as exclusionary devices to decide who does and does not belong in the English countryside (Cloke and Little, 1997). This is perhaps best articulated in Philo's (1992) description of the 'othering' process, where he sees the unwarranted focus upon the interests of powerful rural groups as resulting in the active exclusion of many different social groups from what he refers to as the zone of 'Sameness', a zone where mainstream values such as Englishness, whiteness, heterosexuality and middle-class occupancy are to be upheld. For Philo and other postmodernist writers who have explored the possibility of a more diverse rurality (see, for example, Sibley, 1997; Murdoch and Pratt, 1997; Cloke and Little, 1997), certain groups are ostracised from mainstream society on account of a variety of 'undesirable' social characteristics alien to conventional rural society. Consequently, the interests of rural 'others' run the grave risk of being marginalised within the apparent rural hegemonic condition (or what Scutt and Bonnett (1996: 8) neatly refer to as the 'cultural reservoir') that is central to idyllic, romanticised and anglicised constructions of the countryside.

Recent studies have sought to highlight the experiences of a range of 'other' rural voices. A large proportion have examined the concepts of poverty and class as definitive features in rural imagery used to disproportionately benefit the middle-class at the expense and exclusion of the working classes. As Cloke observes (1997: 267):

*In rural England, the overriding cultural logo is one of problem-freedom. Poverty is 'othered' within dominant social and cultural constructs of rurality and rural life. The othering of poverty acts as a cloak, which keeps material evidences and experiences well hidden ... To some extent 'poor' rural people will go along with the othering process, perhaps reflexively*

*seeking to place themselves in whatever way possible as belonging to a hegemonic idyll-ised rurality.*

The relative invisibility of the poor within favoured representations of the rural is clearly a prime example of 'othering' in the rural arena. Moreover, the 'othering' of the poor continues even as rural communities become increasingly transient. The portrayal of rural locations as typically affluent, middle-class areas of residence is seen as attractive both by established rural dwellers who seek to maintain this dominant ideology, and by new residents, themselves overwhelmingly middle class, who are seeking a particularly form of communal life which they believe exists in rural England; hence, the argument runs, once middle class incomers have begun to establish themselves in their new environments, they are sufficiently privileged to utilise political and cultural resources in actively moulding the shape of rural policy to perpetuate the dominant representations of rurality, thereby bolstering the exclusionary process (Murdoch and Day, 1998; Scutt and Bonnett, 1996). Consequently, while the role of the affluent and the mobile is assured within these dominant representations, others may find it necessary to subscribe to these representations in preference to further exposing their own marginalisation (Cloke, 1997: 261). This is ever more likely when one takes account of the multiple disadvantages that may be faced by marginalised rural groups who, it has been suggested, are rarely accepted by the majority population, are unlikely to possess the resources to attend meetings and are often ill-disposed to organise themselves collectively (Francis and Henderson, 1992: 33).

While many recent studies of rural life have used class as the central focus of their enquiry, several authors (for example, Agg and Phillips, 1998; Phillips *et al.*, 2001) have noted the influence of alternative characteristics on constructions of rurality. Gender relations, and in particular the exclusion of women from dominant rural discourse, is an area that is said to be indicative of the inequity of power relations in rural society. It has been argued that traditional notions of rurality are based upon particular interpretations of masculinity and femininity that trivialise the actual activities of women except where they are seen to relate to the provisioning and sustenance of the male-headed household (Little and Austin, 1996: 103). Similarly, Francis and Henderson (1992: 25), draw attention to the difficulties confronting



women in the rural, where they see women as being 'in a subordinate position to men, with little room given for self-expression, exercise of power or even equality of decision-making within the household'. Such authors, therefore, find it difficult to escape the conclusion that idyllic representations of the rural are instrumental in shaping patriarchal gender relations which operate to the detriment of women in the rural arena. Similar suggestions have also been made with reference to the social positioning of gay identities in the rural, where the 'othering' of gay communities has been seen as integral to the maintenance of traditional rural values (Kirkey and Forsyth, 2001).

As shall be explored more fully in the following chapters, a further recipient of the rural 'othering' process is the minority ethnic rural inhabitant. Dominant representations of the rural have been used to portray the English countryside as a predominantly 'white landscape' (see, for example Agyeman and Spooner, 1997; Chakraborti and Garland, 2003a) and the exclusion of minority ethnic groups from dominant rural imagery has arguably been intrinsic to the survival of the countryside as the visual foundation of Englishness (Scutt and Bonnett, 1996: 12). Indeed, where recognition is afforded to the existence of non-white groups in the countryside, this is portrayed in an almost inevitably negative light, as exemplified by the widely reported outrage amongst rural community groups surrounding government plans to build asylum seeker accommodation centres in rural areas (Travis, 2002). Not surprisingly then, the concerns of minority ethnic communities rarely feature in discussions of the rural, just as is the case with those of other social classes, other genders and other sexualities, thus allowing simplistic, singular and largely outdated constructions of rurality to prevail.

Consequently, a logical position to adopt when attempting to create a more complete understanding of the rural would be to acknowledge the pluralistic nature of rurality, and accordingly the present study has been designed to recognise this plurality by examining a divergent range of case study sites and the marginalisation of diversity within prevailing constructions of rural space. Dominant discourses have served to render particular features of rurality as invisible, to the extent where it is hard to disagree with Philo's (1992: 200) description of the average rural dweller as 'white and probably English, straight and somehow without sexuality, able in body and sound in mind, and devoid of any other quirks of (say) religious or political

affiliation'. Therefore, there remains a pressing need for research to fill the gaps of traditional academic enquiry by revealing the hidden voices of the rural, and thereby affording recognition to the plural geographies that have begun to displace singular notions of space (Keith and Pile, 1993: 32). By moving away from broad interpretations of the nature of rurality, which in themselves promote assumptions, singularity and conjecture, studies should instead be devoted to exploring specific features of the construction of rurality and giving expression to the diversity of rural space. In so doing, studies such as the present piece of research can help to develop a broader appreciation of the plurality of rurality which captures the views of traditionally 'invisible' rural groups.



## Chapter Two

### Understanding Racist Victimisation

As has been argued in the previous chapter, the rural landscape is an environment in which minority groups can be ostracised as a result of the predominant norms of ‘sameness’ that commonly define who ‘belongs’ to conventional rural society. Whereas popular constructions of the rural tend to portray an idyllic, romanticised imagery of country life, the situation may be altogether different for those ‘outsiders’ with more diverse characteristics that set them apart from Philo’s depiction of the average rural dweller as described earlier. As shall be discussed during the course of this thesis, the process of exclusion that often serves to isolate minorities from their rural communities can itself lead to different forms of direct and indirect victimisation; at the same time though, this process of victimisation is seldom recognised or acknowledged as such by rural communities or by rural agencies and policy-makers.

The reasons for this widespread neglect shall be explored later in the thesis. However before moving on to examine the particular features of rural racism and how these impact upon rural minority ethnic households, this chapter seeks to develop a broader understanding of victimisation, and specifically the problem of racist victimisation. By assessing the scope and increasingly wide-ranging dimensions of this problem, as well as the provisions that have been put in place to address the problem and their limitations, the chapter will draw attention to the realities and complexities that can be applied to studies that aim to establish a more informed understanding of victimisation in a rural context. As we shall see, the processes and patterns of victimisation discussed within this chapter have implications for our conceptual understanding of racism in both urban and rural settings, and as such the experience of victimisation *per se* is not significantly different in the rural than it is in the urban; rather, and as shall be evidenced more explicitly as the thesis develops, the distinctiveness of rural racism relates to the impact of this experience upon isolated households and the way in which the issues explored within this chapter have mistakenly been conceived as being relevant only to more ethnically diverse urban environments, thereby leaving the rural context relatively unexplored as a site of racist



victimisation. Consequently, in order to fully comprehend the significance of rural racism as experienced by minority ethnic households in the present study, it is important to first consider the contours and complexities of racist victimisation more broadly so that this can inform the research design alongside our conceptualisation of the rural as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **The rise to prominence of ‘the victim’**

Having spent years on the fringes of criminological and sociological debate, the concerns of victims of crime now form a central feature of academic and political discourse (Zedner, 2002; Goodey, 2005; Spalek, 2006). From being the forgotten actor in the criminal justice process as a result of the traditional offence- and offender-centred nature of the British system (Newburn, 2003), the victim has emerged as a focal point in attempts to establish the legitimacy of various aspects of crime legislation, policy and practice, most recently exemplified through both national and international recognition of the rights of victims and the rise in popularity of restorative justice. Although early studies of victimology were typified by a tendency to attach some degree of blame or responsibility to victims of crime through their reliance on notions of victim-precipitation and victim-proneness (see, for example, Von Hentig, 1948 and Wolfgang, 1958; for a fuller discussion see Walklate, 1989; Rock, 2002; Zedner, 2002), recent decades have seen the emergence of a more critical stance which has examined in greater depth the wider social and cultural context of victimisation.

One of the leading factors behind attempts to abandon academia’s preoccupation with offender-oriented studies was the development of victimisation surveys. Following the lead of studies conducted during the 1960s in the US, the late 1970s and 1980s witnessed the advent of victim surveys in the UK designed to reveal hitherto overlooked features of victimisation, or as Hough and Mayhew (1983: 1) put it in the first British Crime Survey: ‘factors predisposing people to victimisation; the impact of crime on victims; fear of crime; victims’ experiences of the police; other contacts with the police; and self-reported offending’. As a way of uncovering the so-called ‘dark figure’ of crime and overcoming difficulties associated with official statistics, national Home Office funded British Crime Surveys, together with more localised smaller-

scale victim surveys, have helped to establish a more victim-oriented crime agenda that has made significant inroads into identifying the needs of different types of victim (Zedner, 2002).

The needs of victims have also received increased levels of attention in recent decades as a result of their pivotal role in cross-party politics and political manifestos. Ever since victims of crime were explicitly prioritised by the Conservative 'law and order' response to rising crime rates and alleged 'soft', 'permissive' approaches to criminal justice during the 1970s, successive governments have taken up the cause of 'the victim' by calling for tougher penalties for offenders, with the present Labour administration showing itself to be just as inclined as previous establishments at maximising the political currency of victims through punitive rhetoric and soundbites. As Goodey (2005: 16) asserts, 'victims and potential victims, as the voting public, are the audience that Labour seeks to satisfy with its crime policies', and this desire to develop a more victim-centric appeal has unquestionably been a major factor behind the growth in initiatives undertaken on behalf of victims of crime (see Newburn, 2003: 224-256, *inter alia*, for an overview of contemporary developments). Whether the shift in political focus has actually led to the development of coherent governmental policy on crime victims, as opposed to merely being used as a 'vote-winning' tactic and to divert public gaze from other criminal justice policies or trends in crime, is a matter of some conjecture (Newburn, 2003: 226), but nonetheless the status (if not necessarily the specific needs) of the victim has received increased recognition as a result of this political prioritisation.

The victimisation of minority ethnic communities, as with other groups of victims, is a subject that had received little attention until the relatively recent past; indeed, the issue of whether people from specific ethnic backgrounds were more or less likely than white people to be involved in crime *as offenders* has traditionally been a greater source of popular and academic debate (Phillips and Bowling, 2002: 582). However, recognition of the rights of the diverse communities present in contemporary multicultural societies has raised questions over the extent to which difference is accepted or rejected within mainstream discourse (Parekh, 2000: 9), and has highlighted the importance of developing a more informed understanding of victimisation based on ethnic difference. Such an understanding is all the more important in view of the high-profile racist crimes, controversies over the policing of



minority ethnic groups and rising tensions between different communities in parts of the country that have served to bring the problem of racism in British society into the media spotlight during recent decades. While these problems have been more evident within the more diverse, urbanised environments of the UK, their relevance to the rural context should not be dismissed simply on the basis of the comparatively low numbers of minority ethnic households based in rural towns and villages: as we shall see, rural areas too are becoming increasingly diverse and increasingly susceptible to the kinds of problems associated with urban racism. As such, understanding the dimensions of racist victimisation and the way in which ethnic minorities are affected by, and protected from, this victimisation has salience for studies of rural racism, and the chapter now turns to consider these issues.

### **Ascertaining the scope of racist victimisation**

Attempts to define the scope of racist victimisation have been refined over the years, largely on account of changing interpretations of what this form of victimisation entails. The constantly evolving body of research on the topic has helped to widen our understanding by drawing attention to the many and varied factors that can give rise to racist victimisation. For instance, research has identified the impact of factors such as ‘cultural racism’ which Hesse (1993: 14) suggests has arisen as a result of growing concerns over the so-called ‘contamination’ of British identity; factors such as the ‘economic scapegoating’ which according to authors such as Sibbitt (1997) occurs when minority ethnic communities are targeted on the basis of their perceived preferential treatment or access to resources; and factors such as the unacknowledged shame and its transformation into fury which for Ray, Smith and Wastell (2003) can give rise to racist violence. In the context of the resentment of rural ‘otherness’ described in Chapter One, these factors are all likely to influence relationships between majority and minority ethnic rural households, and an awareness of such features of contemporary society is crucial in shaping an appreciation of the many and varied forms racist victimisation can take. Bowling (1999: 182-3) for example, refers to his discussions with caretakers at local authority housing estates to illustrate how some white people, rather than choosing to embrace diversity, can see themselves as ‘victims’ of the different cultural practices of minority ethnic groups, with the implications that these groups should either be segregated or else excluded if they are



unwilling to adopt mainstream cultural practices. Certainly, a broader understanding of different racisms is particularly pertinent in the present political and social context where ongoing debates over asylum and immigration policy, the merits of European integration and the erosion of 'British' identity continue to bear a dangerously nationalistic, and exclusively monocultural, resonance (Kundnani, 2007; Renton, 2003; Evans, 1996, Lunn, 1996).

A broad definition of what comprises a racist incident has been provided by Recommendation 12 of the Macpherson Report and has subsequently been adopted by the police and other criminal justice agencies. According to this definition, a racist incident 'is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person' (Macpherson, 1999). This definition acts as a refinement to that previously used by the police by giving primacy to the interpretation of the victim, as opposed to the judgement of the recording or investigating officer as was the case with the earlier definition<sup>4</sup> (Clancy, Hough, Aust and Kershaw, 2001). Racism itself is also defined in fairly broad terms in the Macpherson report as consisting of 'conduct or words or practices which disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin.' The relatively wide-ranging scope of such definitions is illustrated by the substantial number of racist incidents recorded each year by the police, which had grown to as high as 23,049 in 1999 as compared to 4,383 in 1985 from when such figures were first collected (Phillips and Bowling, 2002: 583). By 2005 the number of police-recorded racist incidents had risen significantly to 57,902, a rise of 7% from the previous year (Home Office, 2006). Whilst it cannot be said with any certainty which of a number of factors, such as a direct increase in racist crime, improved reporting and recording practices or the changes in definition of a racist incident following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, is more or less responsible for the overall growth in the number of recorded racist incidents, it is well documented that official statistics provide only partial insights into the extent and nature of racist crime. As such, alternative sources of information have been valuable in helping to establish a clearer picture of racist victimisation.

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<sup>4</sup> Prior to the Macpherson report, the police had relied on the following definition since 1985: 'A racial incident is any incident in which it appears to the reporting or investigating officer that the complaint involves an element of racial motivation, or any incident which includes an allegation of racial motivation made by any person'.

Successive sweeps of the British Crime Survey have facilitated a more detailed examination of the different dimensions of racist victimisation. The most recent estimates have suggested that the actual number of racially motivated incidents taking place in 2005 was approximately 179,000 (Home Office, 2006), a figure which puts the substantially lower number of racist incidents recorded by the police in that year (57,902, as noted above) in stark context. In this regard the British Crime Survey has been a useful tool not only in charting a more accurate picture of people's experiences and fear of racism, but also in helping to explain the relationship between racist harassment and other forms of victimisation; indeed, Fitzgerald and Hale (1996: 54) found that while only a relatively small proportion of offences against minority ethnic groups are instigated solely on the basis of ethnicity, a substantial number of such offences are likely to have an additional racist element attached to them. Moreover, not only are the most disadvantaged members of visible minority ethnic groups, at least in socio-economic terms, more likely than white people to be the victims of personal offences (*ibid*: 53; Zedner, 2002: 422), but ethnic minorities have also been found to be at greater risk of personal crime and to have a far greater overall fear of crime than white people (Salisbury and Upson, 2004).

### **Appreciating the wider dimensions of racist victimisation**

Findings such as those discussed above have gone some way towards highlighting the seriousness of racist crime and have illustrated some of the grave difficulties facing minority ethnic groups. However, despite the growing body of research on issues of racism and victimisation, much of this work has arguably failed to account for the particularities of the individual experience (Chakraborti, Garland and Spalek, 2004; Spalek, 2002; Gilroy, 1990). Instead, there has been a tendency to bracket together ethnic minorities as one seemingly homogeneous group for whom racism is a problem, thereby dismissing, or at best underplaying, the differences in experience and perception between the persons grouped together within such a framework, or for that matter persons typically excluded from such a framework. This can be the case even where attempts have been made to analyse victimisation by ethnicity, since the difficulty remains that the influence of various other factors, be they socio-demographic, religious or geographic, may not be sufficiently appreciated. As Bowling suggests (1999: 199), research has highlighted the many different



experiences of racism among various groups to the extent where it becomes impossible to speak of typical events, behaviours or experiences as such.

Consequently, attempts to quantify the scope of racist victimisation must be wary of assuming that the patterns and trends identified by a particular study are collectively applicable to all who fall under the umbrella of minority ethnic group 'membership', without acknowledging the differences in individual experiences. Gunaratnam (2003: 28-29) notes below how the research process itself can sometimes merely reproduce dominant conceptions of 'race' and ethnicity as a result of the common tendency to 'essentialise' the experiences and practices of individuals and groups into neat categories.

*A glance through journal articles concerned explicitly with 'race' and ethnicity – nearly always in relation to groups racialised as 'ethnic minorities' – provides numerous examples. There are articles that claim knowledge about 'the perceptions of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people', or 'the needs of the Chinese community', or 'the African experience' where the narratives/experiences of some individuals are used to represent all of those in the racial/ethnic category, erasing differences within the categories.*

Indeed, the postmodern feminist stance advocated by Walklate (2001) and Spalek (2002) may be particularly pertinent in this regard, which pays heed to the similarities that may exist between the victimisation of different groups whilst simultaneously acknowledging the specificity and diversity of people's experiences. Support for such a viewpoint has also come from authors such as Rowe (1998) and Solomos (1993) who have encouraged consideration of both the 'particularisms' of different contexts and the role of more general racialised discourse as a way of understanding racism. Certainly, an over-reliance upon fixed and undifferentiated ethnic or racial categories is likely to conceal ethnicities based upon national, regional, class or other identities (Bowling and Phillips, 2002: 33). This is especially pertinent when conceiving of racism in a rural context where sizable communities of shared ethnicity are unlikely to exist, and consequently particular attention must be directed towards analysing the



similarities in minority ethnic experiences of rural racism as well as the differences that accrue from ethnic, religious, class or regional distinctions.

Establishing the scope of racist victimisation is further complicated by the changing social and political context that shapes interactions between different communities in contemporary society. Interpretations of what can and should be classified as racist behaviour will inevitably broaden as our understanding develops of the ways in which different communities are affected by certain forms of behaviour, a vivid illustration of which has been evident within British society during recent years in the shape of religious intolerance. Whilst Britain has a long history of conflict between different religions, the specific issue of religiously motivated hatred, and more recently Islamophobia, has become a major concern for the study of race relations (Sharp, 2002: 80), which has intensified all the more following the fall-out from the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 in the US and July 7 2005 in the UK. While crimes committed on the basis of religious intolerance may commonly be regarded as synonymous with racist offending, research has drawn attention to the profound offence that results from crime targeted at religious practice and belief (McGhee, 2005; Sharp, 2002) and to the ability of its victims to establish clear differences between racial and religious discrimination (Weller, Feldman and Purdham, 2001). This was highlighted all too plainly several years ago in the case of a deceased Muslim woman whose body was found desecrated in a hospital mortuary through the deliberate placing of bacon rashers on her corpse, an act undoubtedly provoked through religious intolerance and yet one which the police did not immediately acknowledge as criminal (Dodd, 2003).

Examples such as these indicate the particular difficulties that confront Muslim communities who, blighted already by high levels of economic deprivation and intrusive anti-terrorist legislation (Bunting, 2004), have seen their presence and identity repeatedly challenged as a result of public misapprehension, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation. The extent to which the furore surrounding high-profile acts of Islamic terrorism has intensified these problems for British Muslims has been highlighted by McGhee (2005: 102), who observes that there was a four-fold increase in the number of racist attacks reported by British Muslims and other Asian, ostensibly 'Muslim-looking' groups in the UK during the months immediately after the September 11 attacks in New York, with Asians based in the



Tower Hamlets district of London experiencing a 75 per cent increase in attacks during the same period. Similarly, in the three weeks following the July 7 bombings police figures showed as much as a six-fold increase in the number of religiously motivated offences reported in London, the vast majority of which were directed against Muslim households and places of worship, while during the same three-week period over 1,200 suspected Islamophobic incidents were recorded by police forces across the UK (BBC, 2005; Dodd, 2005). Moreover, these difficulties are not confined solely to this country. Throughout Europe Muslim values have increasingly been called into question in recent years, with anti-Islamic feeling manifesting itself through widespread violence, mass demonstrations and reactionary governmental policy in places such as France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Scandinavia (Bremner, 2004). Clearly, Europe's 13-million strong Muslim population has borne the brunt of a process of demonisation that has heightened tensions and intensified religious and cultural divides.

In addition to the targeting of Muslim families and places of worship, recent times have seen other religious groups based in the UK face increasing intolerance as a result of global political events and reactions. The number of racist attacks on South Asians in general (and not just against Muslims) has risen steeply, prompting fears that anyone ostensibly 'looking Asian', for instance through wearing a turban, sporting a beard or simply by virtue of being 'dark-skinned', has become increasingly susceptible to the risk of physical assault or verbal abuse (Ratcliffe, 2004: 9). Jewish communities too appear to have experienced growing levels of resentment (Whine, 2003; Doward, 2005); indeed, figures released in February 2005 by the Community Security Trust (CST), a body that monitors levels of anti-semitism, revealed that the number of abusive or violent attacks on Jewish people in Britain had reached a record level, with the CST warning that the 'transfer of tensions' from the Middle East to Britain was fuelling the unprecedented levels of abuse (Jinman, 2005). Other forms of friction also suggest that religious intolerance should not be seen as a problem within the white British community exclusively. To cite one example, tensions amongst different British Asian communities, and most significantly the conflicts between Sikh and Muslim youths and Hindus and Muslims, have risen in recent times, to the extent where one Sikh faction, the Shere-e-Punjab grouping, have willingly co-operated with the British National Party to generate anti-Muslim propaganda (Kundnani, 2002).

Clearly then, studies of racist victimisation will be required to take into consideration this further dimension to difference if they are to reflect the realities of contemporary society. The significance of religious identity to large proportions of the UK's minority ethnic population was underlined by the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, which found that as many as 44 per cent of Black and 61 per cent of Asian respondents believed that religion was important to their own self-identity, as opposed to a corresponding figure of 17 per cent of White respondents (Attwood, Singh, Prime and Creasey, 2003). With the notion of religious affiliation being such a central, and in many instances *the defining*, feature of people's self-identity, the need to acknowledge aspects of religion, as well as broader issues of 'race' and ethnicity, becomes all the more important in studies of minority ethnic experiences, and this is an issue that will be addressed in the context of the present study.

An appreciation of the broader dimensions of racist victimisation is also necessary in recognising the experiences of groups who can often be overlooked in studies of racism, and this too is something that will be explored within the framework of the present study. The experiences of mixed-race families and relationships are a case in point, with what little research evidence there is suggesting that those from a mixed heritage background face a markedly higher risk of crime in comparison to all other groups (Salisbury and Upson, 2004)<sup>5</sup> and that white partners in mixed-race relationships face a real, but seldom recognised, risk of being the recipient of racist abuse (see, for example, Bowling, 1999, Garland, Spalek and Chakraborti, 2006). Studies have also tended to overlook the particular issues facing people of mixed heritage, whose ethnicity has been found to pose problems in terms of confusing perceptions of belonging and challenging apparently established boundaries of 'race', identity, custom and religion (Olumide, 2002; Tizard and Pheonix, 1993). As one interviewee in the author's own research for this study put it:

*I've often found if you're not black, then you're not accepted by that community. You have to be black or white, so I'm in the middle ... It's quite*

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<sup>5</sup> As Salisbury and Upson (2004: 2) acknowledge in their analysis of the 2003 British Crime Survey, people of mixed race form a younger group than all of the other specified ethnic groupings, but were still found to have a higher risk of victimisation even when age was accounted for.



*difficult, you find you don't belong when it comes to the black community or the white.*

Female of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire

As this quotation illustrates, people from such a background are potentially prone to a number of different platforms for prejudice on the basis of their 'mixed' heritage, thereby emphasising the need for studies to be sufficiently sensitive to the broader context of racist victimisation. As Tizard and Pheonix assert (1993: 158), people of mixed black and white parentage have, for centuries, been stigmatised as opposed to being seen as the fortunate beneficiaries of two diverse inheritances, and yet the ways in which this stigmatisation can operate have tended to be neglected by academics and policy-makers.

The experiences of groups such as Gypsies and Travellers have also remained largely obscured from mainstream enquiry. Though Gypsies have formally been recognised as a distinct ethnic group<sup>6</sup> as acknowledged by the Commission for Racial Equality (Clark, Morran and Lloyd, 1995), they themselves have been subjected to a considerable amount of restrictive legislation from as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century designed to control their presence and activities (Davis, 1997). Different groups of Travellers, meanwhile, whose very identities are often homogenised within the general category of 'Gypsy' despite the differences in ethnicity and cultural identity, have tended to be regarded with fear and suspicion rather than as 'normal' people living an alternative lifestyle to much of the population. In recent years Gypsy and Traveller groups have come under sustained attack from sections of the tabloid press, with, for instance, the Sun campaign against Traveller camps (and in particular their self-entitled 'War on Gipsy [sic] Free-For-All' and 'Stamp on the Camps' headlines of the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2005) being reported to the police and to the Press Complaints Commission by leaders of the British Committee on Romany Emancipation and the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition respectively for inciting racial hatred (Barkham, 2005). Indeed, Travellers have traditionally been the sole group in Britain to have their freedom of movement explicitly controlled by legislation, thereby

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<sup>6</sup> As upheld in the case of *Commission for Racial Equality v. Dutton* (1989) 2 WLR 17.



exacerbating their perceived and actual marginalisation from ‘conventional’ society (Kendall, 1997)<sup>7</sup>.

At the same time though, research has highlighted how abusive language and behaviour directed towards these groups is not always equated directly with racism *per se*, in the way that such acts towards other ‘recognised’ minority ethnic groups would be (James, 2006; Hester, 1999; Young, 1993). The failure to recognise prejudice directed towards ‘undesirable forms of whiteness’ for what it is can in many respects be traced to the relative ‘invisibility’ of white minority groups within the various collective terms used to refer to minority ethnic communities: for example, Aspinall (2002: 809-10) notes how a succession of recent government reports on issues of ‘race’ had typically failed to account for groups such as the Irish, Greeks, Turks and Cypriots, as well as people describing themselves as Travellers, Gypsies and Romanies. Again, distinctions between the racism experienced by ‘recognised’ and ‘invisible’ minority ethnic groups will be explored within the context of this particular piece of research, as it would seem that some groups can be the regular recipients of racist victimisation without even being afforded the status of ‘victim’.

This is all too evident in the case of asylum seekers. Despite hopes for a greater anti-racist consensus across society in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence report, the issue of asylum has provided a vivid illustration of, and in some ways has arguably reinforced other forms of, popular racism. Since the late 1990s press hysteria has generated headline upon headline warning against the supposed dangers of allowing asylum seekers to enter the country (Renton, 2003), which has triggered increasingly punitive government responses restricting the entry, freedom and public acceptance of the asylum seeker; indeed, the nature of pre-election debates over asylum and immigration issues during 2005 prompted fears of politicians once again ‘playing the race card’, with the government responding to accusations of ‘softness’ from Conservatives and other parties further to the political right by declaring its concerns over the extent to which continued abuses of the immigration system were testing the nation’s ‘hospitality’, and outlining proposals to drastically curb immigrants’ rights to settle (Hinsliff and Bright, 2005). Inevitably, the seemingly incessant political and

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<sup>7</sup> An illustration of the way in which punitive ‘anti-Traveller’ rhetoric can be used by politicians to appeal to the general public was provided in the pre-election plans drawn up by the Conservative Party in 2005, whose proposals included a seven-pronged plan designed to further restrict the rights of Travellers through the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998 (Sturcke, 2005).

media frenzy on the subject has helped to create an environment in which increasingly hostile and prejudicial sentiments are allowed to prosper. To some extent this may be attributable to the way in which the term 'immigration' itself tends to be conceived in a remarkably narrow, and misleading, fashion to focus attention on incoming migrants from the developing world (i.e. the 'bogus' 'dark-skinned' asylum seeker who has purportedly come over to exploit our welfare system), as opposed to those from the more Westernised, 'whiter' parts of the world (the Australian bar worker or American academic, for instance). Nonetheless, and somewhat surprisingly, the notion that Britain is a tolerant, 'anti-racist' society remains largely unchallenged within popular thought. Kundnani (2001: 50) uses the distinction between racism and xenophobia to suggest how such a situation has arisen:

*'... whereas racism denotes a social process of exclusion based on colour (or, latterly cultural) difference, xenophobia suggests a natural psychological reaction against 'strangers'. The first is an indictment of a social system, the second taken to be a normal part of human nature. Hence it appears that those who propound the view that 'too many are coming' are not racists to be cast out of the political mainstream – they are merely fearful of the impact that large numbers of new arrivals will have on the nation, and that is considered a legitimate political viewpoint. As such, xenophobia provides an alibi for racism, legitimating it by making it seem natural.'*

Therefore, through the guise of adopting a xenophobic, as opposed to overtly racist, stance towards groups such as asylum seekers, popular discourse can maintain the hegemonic state of affairs that perpetuates the 'othering', and in some instances criminalisation, of particular 'undesirables'. Not surprisingly, the considerable suffering experienced by asylum seekers that results from ongoing moral panics has tended to receive little mainstream public or political sympathy, a point starkly illustrated in the case of one Iranian Kurdish refugee who sewed up his own eyes, ears and lips in protest at a Home Office appeal against the decision to grant him asylum (Adams and Branigan, 2003), and yet it seems perverse, and arguably racist *per se*,



not to recognise this regular stigmatisation and demonisation as a form of racist victimisation. A broad and sufficiently inclusive conceptualisation of what such victimisation entails is therefore all the more important in the context of the present study to capture the experiences of those who can find themselves excluded from the narrow framework often employed in debates about racism.

### **Legal protection from racist victimisation**

Given the complex nature of racism and wide range of potential recipients of racist victimisation, the establishment of suitably robust legal protection is a pivotal way of demonstrating society's condemnation of racism and offering support to victims. The main impetus for recent legislative developments was the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, itself the third killing in a sequence of racist attacks committed in the area of south-east London<sup>8</sup>, and the subsequent inquiry and report into the circumstances which led to that murder. The Macpherson Report, published in 1999, was hailed as a watershed in British race relations, not least for placing the issue of racist crime high upon the agenda for criminal justice, political and other organisations by officially recognising the problem of 'institutional racism', for broadening the definition of a 'racist incident', and for supposedly leading the way for a more victim-oriented approach to dealing with racist incidents (Burney and Rose, 2002; Bridges, 2001).

Legal recognition for the seriousness of racist crime is evident in the changes introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which introduced a series of new 'racially aggravated' offences structured on the basis of existing offences of violence, criminal damage, public order and harassment. The definition of racial aggravation in section 28 of that Act essentially relates to hostility based upon ethnicity which the prosecution must show to have been present in the immediate context of the basic offence (Burney, 2002: 105), with the result being the imposition of substantially enhanced sentences if the aggravated element can be proved. Further post-Lawrence legislative protection against racism can be found in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which was designed to outlaw racist discrimination in all public bodies not covered by the Race Relations Act 1976 by obliging organisations to proactively work

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<sup>8</sup> The two high-profile racist murders to have occurred in south-east London prior to the death of Stephen Lawrence involved the killings of Rolan Adams in 1991 and Rohit Duggal in 1992.



towards eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity between persons of different ethnic groups, while the introduction of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 has made it unlawful for employees to be discriminated against on the grounds of religion or similar beliefs. Moreover, the racial aggravation provisions contained within the Crime and Disorder Act were further extended by section 39 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 to include religiously aggravated offences, thereby enabling courts to impose higher maximum penalties in instances where religious hostility is present within the context of the basic offence.

While the introduction of these sentence enhancement provisions went some way towards affording greater recognition to faith groups and to the concept of 'faith hate', the House of Lords' eleventh-hour rejection of incitement to religious hatred proposals contained within Clause 39 of the then Bill was perceived by many Muslim groups in particular to have offset any gains made through the establishment of religiously aggravated offences (McGhee, 2005). The importance of these proposals to British Muslims and other faith communities essentially resided in the absence of any alternative legal protection from incitement: although incitement of racial hatred is covered by section 17 of the Public Order Act 1986, protection against this form of incitement extends only to members of ethnic, and not faith groups. Officially, Sikhs and Jews are defined as ethnic groups and therefore protected by the 1986 legislation on account of their membership historically being drawn from just one distinct ethnic group, but other faith groups meanwhile, such as Muslims, are unable to use the racial hatred provisions to protect themselves against incitement as their membership is drawn from numerous ethnically and culturally diverse groups. Consequently, despite the rejection of Clause 39 the government continued to push for extended legislative protection against the incitement of religious hatred, and following a period of sustained pressure from opposition groups and two initial defeats in Parliament the government's provisions were finally accepted into law through the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. Although the government's initial proposals were watered down significantly as a result of House of Lords amendments and now cover only 'threatening' behaviour as opposed to incitement through 'abusive' or 'insulting' behaviour, the new incitement provisions even in their more limited guise give faith



communities added protection against attacks upon their religious identity (Chakraborti, 2007).

Undoubtedly, changes to the law such as those described above have signified the government's commendable desire to enshrine anti-racist principles within its legislative framework. However well intentioned these changes may have been though, there is evidence to suggest that some of the legislation may be not be having the effect that was originally intended. For instance, Burney (2002) has suggested that one of the major implications of the two-tier structure for demonstrating racial aggravation in the Crime and Disorder Act is its propensity to lead to guilty pleas for the basic offence, as opposed to establishing the added racist dimension evident in many crimes committed against members of minority ethnic groups. As she puts it, '... people will plead guilty to ordinary offences that they would probably have contested, for fear of a heavier sentence for a racist crime and of being labelled a 'racist'' (2002: 106). Further problems have been identified with that Act with regard to its wording and implementation. For example, section 28 defines racial aggravation essentially in terms of hostility based on ethnicity, and yet no attempt is made to explain what 'hostility' actually entails, thereby rendering the boundaries of unacceptable behaviour ambiguous, unless and until this can be firmly established by case law. Moreover, there appears to be some degree of inconsistency between the post-Macpherson working definition of racist incidents (defined as such if anyone perceives the act as racist) and the narrower range of offences that enter the ordinary crime record, with some commentators arguing that it might be somewhat naïve to expect all racist incidents to be treated in practice in the same manner as an 'official' crime (Burney and Rose, 2002: 108).

Nor have other governmental attempts to prioritise racism escaped criticism. For example, despite the widespread praise received for the Macpherson report's recognition of institutional racism, it has been suggested that such a focus has allowed individuals to hide their own culpable racist behaviour behind the collective failings of a particular organisation (Bridges, 2001: 62), an assertion that has been lent further credence through the continuing debates about racism in the police force sparked off by the 2003 BBC documentary 'The Secret Policeman' illustrating the racist practices of individual officers (Dodd, 2003; Ahmed and Bright, 2003). Meanwhile, the impact of the amended Race Relations Act was called into question by a Commission for

Racial Equality (CRE) report in 2003, which found that as many as one-third of Britain's public bodies had yet to implement their race equality obligations more than a year after the CRE were given the power to enforce the obligations introduced by that Act (CRE, 2003). Moreover, the Act itself has come under attack for being limited in scope, and in particular for exempting key areas of decision-making such as the administration of asylum policy (Bridges, 2001: 74).

Similarly, the government's concerted efforts to strengthen the law on religiously motivated offending and incitement to religious hatred may not have had the positive impact on relationships between the state and Muslim communities that may have been expected. However, dissatisfaction with levels of governmental support arguably centres not so much around any explicit weakness in the legislative protection introduced, but instead relates to the government's determined, and seemingly contradictory, efforts to combat the threat posed by Muslims to notions of shared citizenship and national security (Chakraborti, 2007; Burnett, 2004). Increasingly, the goodwill that may have resulted from the extension of protection against attacks upon religious identity has, according to a number of commentators (see, for example, Sivanandan, 2006; McGhee, 2005; Kundnani, 2002), been replaced by a sense of despair within the British Muslim communities with regards to the way in which their perceived threat has been seen to have greater political significance than the protection of their needs. Following the outbreaks of disorder in the north of England during the summer of 2001 and the terrorist attacks in the US that came soon afterwards, the government's sustained emphasis upon 'Britishness' and notions of common citizenship, together with its excessive mobilisation of the rhetoric of security and controversial anti-terrorism provisions, has continued to polarise Muslim and non-Muslim identities to the extent where many British Muslims have been left feeling over-policed and under-protected despite the changes to the law referred to above (Kundnani, 2007; Chakraborti, 2007).

Therefore, although a number of steps have been taken in recent years to address problems of racist victimisation by strengthening the available legal protection, the reality is that members of minority ethnic groups may actually conclude, quite legitimately in many respects, that they face no lesser risk of, and no greater protection from, alienation and victimisation than before (Bowling and Phillips, 2002: 110). As studies have shown, such groups face a greater risk of being the victim of



certain crimes, are more likely to perceive a racist dimension in the crimes that they experience and have concerns about the equitable operation of the criminal justice system (Chakraborti and Garland, 2003b; Bowling and Phillips, 2002; Clancy *et al.*, 2001), and these factors will inevitably undermine the potential impact of any legal protection against racism. However, as those studies have suggested, levels of legal protection will only improve in practical terms if the concerns of the intended beneficiaries are actually acknowledged. Phillips and Bowling (2003: 270), for example, refer to the evidence taken during the Stephen Lawrence inquiry to highlight the stark differences in perspectives of senior police officers on the one hand, who claimed that there was now increased public confidence in the police and a decrease in the number of racist incidents committed, and representatives from minority ethnic communities on the other hand, who made reference to their persistent experiences of victimisation, the weakness of police responses and oppressive policing. As those authors suggest, effective responses to racism can be developed only if the insights provided by minority ethnic communities themselves are made central to our understanding. With this in mind, the extent to which rural ethnic minority households feel adequately protected from racist victimisation will be explored within the context of the present study, as will their relationship with the police and other agencies responsible for enforcing this protection.

### **Acknowledging the process of racist victimisation**

Arguably, much of the difficulty surrounding the provision of legal protection stems from the continued reliance on ‘incidents’ as a means of distinguishing racist behaviour, which detaches the lived experience from its wider context of racism and racist exclusion (Bowling, 1999: 286). Such an incident-driven approach fails to appreciate the impact of racism on victims’ lives beyond the actual incident itself (Chahal, 2003: 1), and goes some way towards explaining why victims can feel unprotected despite apparent improvements in policy, as suggested by Bowling (1999: 285) in his analysis of violent racism.

*Becoming a victim of any crime – particularly one as complex as violent racism – does not occur in an instant or in a physical or ideological*

*vacuum. Victimisation – with the emphasis on the suffix ‘isation’ – denotes a dynamic process, occurring over time. It describes how an individual becomes a victim within a specific social, political, and historical context.*

Rather than working to the restrictive conception of a racist incident that is fixed in time and place, Bowling has advocated a similar stance to that proposed by Kelly (1987) in her research into women’s experiences of sexual violence, which sees victimisation as a continuum where the more commonplace forms of abuse can be connected with more extreme acts of violence (Bowling, 1999; Bowling and Phillips, 2002). This encourages recognition of the process of racism, where the broader and often prolonged impact of victimisation is acknowledged within the historical, political and social discourses and context in which such victimisation prevails. As a result, those subjected to racist victimisation will have greater confidence in the capabilities of the criminal justice agencies and other service providers to afford them suitable protection from the physical, financial and emotional consequences of victimisation than can often run beyond the individual incident itself.

Understanding the process, as opposed to simply the singular event, of racist victimisation requires an examination of the lived experiences of those affected, including the nature, extent and impact of racist behaviour, the broader context that gives rise to different forms of racism and the effectiveness of support provision for victims. In some respects a wider understanding has been developed amongst researchers and policy-makers: for example, Bowling (1999: 317) concludes his book on violent racism by suggesting that arguments about the prioritisation of the problem have been won with the emerging recognition amongst statutory and voluntary agencies that they have a role to play in developing proactive responses to racism. As we have seen, subsequent developments in recent years have served to bring issues of racism increasingly to the forefront of political and popular debate and research has helped to illustrate many of the difficulties, as well as some of the solutions, associated with racist victimisation.

However, as yet the rural dimension has been largely overlooked within attempts to formulate a more complete understanding of racist victimisation. As Barnor Hesse has maintained, ‘racism always seems to be with us, but not solely in the same places



where we traditionally look' (1993: 11). Certainly, such a sentiment seems particularly applicable to the rural arena where, as was suggested in the previous chapter, the voices of certain 'others' can often be neglected within the dominant cultures of mainstream rural society. Analysing the processes of victimisation as they occur in predominantly white rural towns and villages will be of much value in helping to uncover the nature, extent and impact of racism in rural environments, as will analysing the extent to which processes of normalisation are used both by victims and mainstream rural communities as a means of adjusting to or rationalising exclusionary behaviour. The traditional neglect of the rural as a scene for racism has unquestionably left a gap in our knowledge and understanding of the ways in which communities are affected by racism, and highlights the importance of locating racist victimisation within its wider geographical context.

Therefore, by identifying the broader, often unacknowledged dimensions of racist victimisation and the importance of developing responses which recognise these broader dimensions and the needs of the victims themselves, this chapter has sought to provide a deliberately wide conceptualisation of victimisation which can be applied to the rural context. In an environment such as the rural where different forms of racism can be overlooked by agencies unfamiliar with the problem, as shall be discussed later, researchers will need to move away from narrow, 'incident-driven' conceptions of victimisation if they are to be sufficiently cognisant of the various ways in which minority ethnic households can be affected by racist and exclusionary behaviour. Further considerations for researchers of rural racism will be discussed in the next chapter, which begins by highlighting the key concerns that have been identified by the existing, though limited, body of research on the subject before moving on to examine how studies such as the present piece of research can best be designed to investigate these concerns.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Devising an Appropriate Methodological Framework to Research Racist Victimisation in a Rural Context**

Previous chapters have shown how the very existence, let alone prevalence, of racism in rural parts of the UK has been largely unacknowledged in political and academic circles. As we have seen, idyllic [mis]conceptions of rurality, as well as the preoccupation amongst researchers for focusing upon environments with larger minority ethnic communities, has left the subject of rural racism as something of an unknown quantity, a problem whose nature, extent and impact remains for the most part marginalised from mainstream debate. Consequently, while the ensuing urban-centric discourse on ‘race’ issues has led to a range of developments in the context of challenging racist prejudice, the question of whether, and if so how, these developments can be applied to the rural has tended to be overlooked.

In recent years though, a growing number of reports have sought to draw greater attention to problems of racism in rural towns and villages, and this chapter shall outline the key themes that have emerged from these mainly small-scale and localised studies. Whilst not without their limitations, these reports have helped to widen the scope of enquiry into issues of ‘race’ and victimisation by describing some of the difficulties confronting rural minority ethnic households and the dearth of available support services. Using this existing research in conjunction with the previous discussions of rurality and racist victimisation as a framework for the present study, the chapter will then move on to consider methodological implications for researching issues of racism in rural communities. In the absence of any established methodological approach for investigating the various issues at the heart of this research study, considerable care was given to devising a suitably wide methodology that would take account of the complexities involved in the context of the present study, and this is discussed within the chapter as a way of setting the scene for the findings themselves.



## Breakthrough studies

The advent of Eric Jay's (1992) seminal report *Keep Them In Birmingham* helped to stimulate academic interest in the subject of rural racism, and is held up still today as a landmark study that broke new ground in challenging the long-established notion that racism was exclusively an 'urban' problem. Assigned by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) to undertake research in four counties based in south-west England (Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset), Jay sought to identify the particular difficulties experienced by minority ethnic households living and working in the region and the extent to which local authorities and other organisations could be said to be promoting racial equality and good race relations. His report painted a vivid picture of some of the hitherto undocumented difficulties facing minority ethnic groups, highlighting the increased isolation and vulnerability that such groups encounter in the rural as well as their widespread experiences of victimisation. He also found evidence of indifference, complacency, and at times hostility amongst local service providers for whom he concluded 'racial equality is evidently not part of the agenda' (1992: 43).

The importance of this report in drawing attention to the rural landscape as a site for further enquiry led to the commissioning of a number of subsequent studies based in particular rural localities across the country, and all have helped to expose the fallacies of the 'rural idyll' and its various associations. Derbyshire's (1994) Norfolk-based research, for example, noted widespread denial of the problem of racism amongst the county's white population, which for Derbyshire stemmed more from the lack of black and Asian people living there than from a belief in the harmonious relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds (1994: 67). Similarly, Nizhar's (1995) study of Shropshire helped to illustrate the ignorance that can exist amongst rural agency workers, one of whom in that study argued against the provision of specialised support services for minority ethnic groups on the basis that 'they [minority ethnic groups] should give up their identity and image and take on board white culture' (Nizhar, 1995: 35), while Dhalech (1999a) lamented the lack of recognition and acceptance of issues pertinent to rural race equality in his study of south-west England (1999a: 41).

Among the more recognised studies of the rural minority ethnic experience is de Lima's (2001) CRE-sponsored research *Needs Not Numbers*, which examined the

profile and perceptions of minority ethnic groups living in four rural areas of Scotland (Angus, the Highlands, North Ayrshire and the Western Isles). Many of her key findings mirrored those derived from other localised studies, with de Lima asserting that though her minority ethnic research participants undoubtedly shared similar problems to urban minority ethnic households, the major difference lay in the lack of infrastructure in the rural to deal with those problems (2001: 47). As the title of her report suggests, de Lima echoed the sentiments conveyed by Jay's (1992) study in condemning the prevalence of the 'no racism here' mentality that she felt existed amongst rural service providers, the basis of which was believed to stem from the common failure to acknowledge the needs, and not simply the numbers, of a particular community. As she puts it:

*The predominant assumption seemed to be that minority ethnic groups did not have any needs because they were small in number, 'invisible' and 'silent'. Either invisibility and silence were interpreted as 'not willing to integrate' and therefore wishing to be left alone, or implicitly culturally stereotyped assumptions were made that the minority ethnic groups relied on mutual support from within their own communities ... The fact that nearly half the respondents asked the researcher for assistance with problems demonstrates that the above assumptions are erroneous.*

(de Lima, 2001: 48).

Consequently, de Lima, as with other researchers who had begun to probe the rural arena (see, for example, Suzin, 1996; Kenny, 1997; Malcolm, 2000), urged policy-makers to improve levels of support for minority ethnic individuals and families living in smaller towns and villages; areas in which issues of prejudice, marginalisation and isolation had been shown to be very real and pressing problems. These research reports have all helped to demonstrate not only that the rural was home to a relatively small but nonetheless significant minority ethnic population (an important enough task in itself in view of the traditional portrayal of the rural as a 'white landscape', to coin Agyeman's (1989) description) but also that these populations have their own needs all too often overlooked by those responsible for



governing rural space and providing services. Moreover, the reports exposed the pervasiveness of racist attitudes amongst members of established white rural communities and the racist harassment experienced by minority ethnic households isolated within such communities.

This breakthrough body of research was clearly highly important in drawing attention to hitherto ignored issues; in fact, were it not for the Jay report (1992) and the ensuing impetus for examining aspects of rural life, the subject of rural racism may well have continued to be deemed superfluous to the academic agenda, at least perhaps until the advent of a high-profile Lawrence-type incident were to demand academic enquiry. Those researchers pushing for change therefore deserve credit for identifying and investigating problems irrespective of (and in fact because of) public and institutional ambivalence. At the same time though, the existing research is not without its limitations. Those studies discussed above, though worthy and original documents in their own right, were typically small-scale and localised in nature. While such an approach can undeniably be advantageous in helping to elicit information on *particular problems* facing *particular communities* in *particular localities*, the downside is that localised reports will rarely make an impact, or be perceived to bear relevance, outside of that locality. In addition, the majority of rural studies in this context have been conducted by and on behalf of locally-based organisations such as local authorities, citizens advice bureaux and police forces, with their findings commonly staying within the confines of regional practitioner networks and not filtering through to the wider academic world. As a result, these reports are likely to raise some degree of awareness but seldom outside the individual research area.

A related weakness of many of these localised studies lies in their inherently narrow scope. Dingwall and Moody (1999) have rightly highlighted the difficulties confronting researchers when it comes to obtaining funding for their studies of rural crime and disorder, which arise in their words ‘mainly because policy-makers want to target resources where the need is seen to be greatest and where the pay-off is likely to be most advantageous’ (1999: 2). Restricted, as many localised rural studies have been, by limited funding and the need to address issues from a particular angle, particularly if the research is agency-sponsored, such studies will inevitably be curtailed in their ability to examine problems comprehensively as certain aspects will be prioritised over others. Similarly, agency-sponsored research findings that uncover

weaknesses in various agency responses to racism may sometimes be kept ‘in-house’, therefore not actually reaching the public domain and again this serves to restrict the scope of such research. Clearly then, studies may have touched upon significant issues, but not explored them to the depth that enables broader patterns and trends to be identified.

Furthermore, and perhaps most worryingly, it could be argued that despite the findings of past studies, the situation in rural England is ostensibly little different from before: as the present study will illustrate, rural communities are often still largely intolerant and misinformed with regard to diversity issues; rural minority ethnic households are still victimised, many persistently; and rural-based agencies and policy-makers often remain unaware and unresponsive. Of course, these assertions are generalisations and the impact that past studies are likely to have made at a local level should not be understated. Nonetheless, it would be misguided to assume that significant headway has been made with regard to challenging racism in the rural on the basis of a handful of local research reports. This point was illustrated quite forcibly through comments expressed towards the end of 2004 by Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), who referred to the exclusion, as he saw it, of black and Asian people in the countryside as a form of ‘passive apartheid’ which he felt was continuing to make the rural a ‘no-go area’ for minority ethnic people (BBC, 2004). Consequently, while previous research reports may have made inroads locally and have offered suggestions that are equally applicable to the broader rural landscape, the reality is that the problem has yet to be regarded as significant, widespread or pressing by academics and policy-makers at a national level (despite Phillips’s comments referred to above) who instead continue to prioritise problems that show up more visibly.

What is more, the difficulties identified by researchers of rural racism are likely to be exacerbated as a result of the changing minority ethnic population living in rural England, a population that is known to have increased by as much as 100 per cent in the ten-year period following the 1991 Census (Magne, 2003). Increases to the overall rural population and to the rate of migration from urban to rural areas (Countryside Agency, 2004b) have resulted in a rural minority ethnic population that has expanded on the basis of factors such as increased mobility, higher incomes, more job opportunities and greater recreational use (Neal, 2002: 448). Consequently, as the



make-up of our smaller towns and villages continues to change over time, images of the English countryside's 'white landscape' will bear increasingly less resonance while studies of rural racism will carry even greater relevance.

### **Framing the present research study**

The issues highlighted by past studies discussed above, together with the ambiguities surrounding traditional notions of rurality and the need to widen our enquiries into racist victimisation (as outlined in previous chapters), suggest that the rural may be a fruitful, yet often overlooked, environment in which to investigate issues of racism, marginalisation and 'othering'. Despite the not unsubstantial body of research that has looked into these issues over the years, the fact remains that relatively little is known about the lived experiences of rural minority ethnic households. As such, fresh insights can be gleaned by drawing together and expanding upon the patterns and themes that have emerged from previous localised reports, and by applying these to a range of rural sites of enquiry through the conceptual framework of rurality and victimisation mapped out in earlier chapters.

Essentially, the present study has been designed to identify the processes and patterns of victimisation that can result in minority ethnic households being ostracised from mainstream rural communities (or to coin Philo's (1992) description referred to in Chapter One, the zone of 'Sameness'). As various authors have argued (see, for instance, Cloke and Little, 1997), researchers should not be deterred from studying the lives of those living beyond mainstream rural society, and this should involve some examination of the power relations among rural people and institutions which reinforce everyday experiences of marginalisation and which create the processes through which rural 'others' become marginalised. In line with the insights provided by academic studies of rural life, themselves conducted mainly by rural geographers, it shall be argued that within the domain of rural space lies a prevailing zone of 'Sameness' where mainstream values, whether they be values such as Englishness, whiteness, heterosexuality or middle-class occupancy, are regarded as the accepted norms of rural society. The 'insiders' that fall into this group form the established rural communities. However, largely exclusive to this 'insider' zone is a distinct zone of 'otherness', which contains those groups of peoples who find themselves ostracised

from conventional rural society on account of their perceived ‘undesirable’ social characteristics that run contrary to mainstream rural norms. Whilst it is acknowledged that there may be a range of factors that come into play when determining the status of rural actors in terms of their zonal membership and that ethnicity is but one feature of the rural insider/outsider debate (as discussed in more depth in Chapter One), it should be noted that the specific focus of the present study is to examine the positioning of minority ethnic households within this rural framework.

However, in considering the processes and patterns of victimisation that can result in minority ethnic households being ostracised from mainstream rural communities, a host of related issues must also come under scrutiny if we are to avoid painting an unnecessarily homogeneous, and inaccurate, picture. The nature of this victimisation must be explored with regards to assessing what are the various forms that it can take, whether it affects all minority ethnic groups in the same way, how persistent a problem it can be, and what sorts of implications it can have for the victim, be they physical, emotional or financial. A potential danger for any study of racist victimisation is the temptation to draw misleading and generalist conclusions about *all* ethnic minorities without recognising the differences that may apply to the experiences of different groups. Far from being a simple, homogeneous experience, the ‘othering’ process may differ markedly in terms of its nature, extent and impact depending on a range of factors, such as, for instance, the victim’s ethnicity or professional status, or the type of rural space involved. The sheer diversity of this process in terms of how it can operate differently at times depending on the *particular* minority group, the *particular* region and the *particular* kind of village, should not be understated, and this is something that the present study has been designed to acknowledge. However, whilst cognisant of the need to examine differences in perception and experience where they exist, the present study was also expected to identify commonalities between the different minority ethnic groups residing in rural space as a way of locating the broader patterns of prejudice that could affect anyone perceived to be ‘different’ on the basis of visible, cultural or religious factors.

Examining the position of minority ethnic households within the rural framework outlined above also requires consideration of the way in which they are perceived by rural ‘insiders’. Drawing on the notions of rurality discussed in Chapter One, the present study reflects upon the extent to which traditional conceptions of the rural

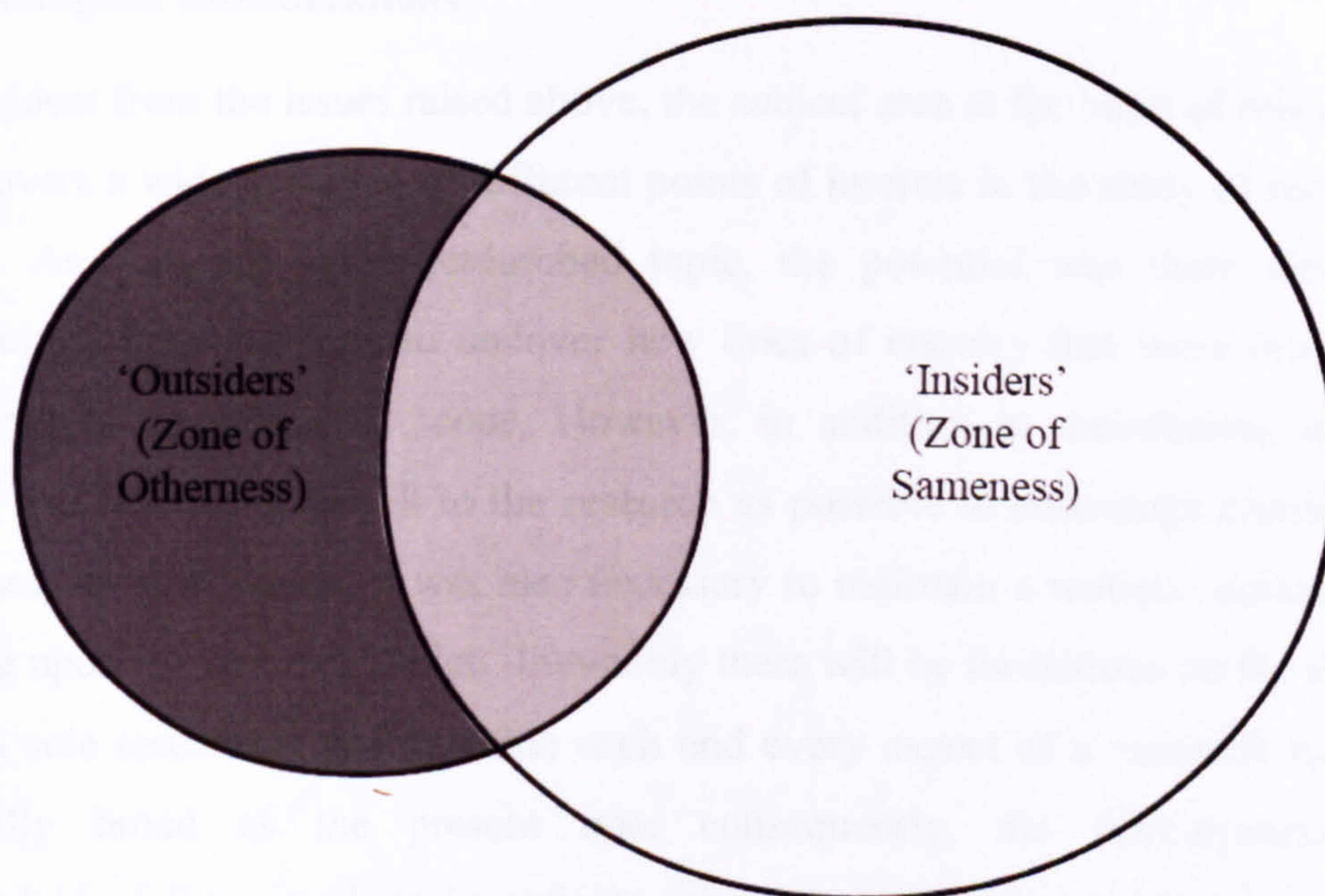


retain an influence within contemporary rural societies, and whether members of white rural communities feel that minority ethnic households form part of their established networks. Whilst victimisation, marginalisation and 'othering' may be features of life for some, or indeed many households, equally they may not be universal problems affecting everyone to the same extent.

If it is the case that not every minority ethnic household inevitably falls into a zone of 'otherness', then the features or characteristics that may make acceptance into mainstream rural communities more likely are worthy of investigation. Ensuring that research recognises the heterogeneity evident within the dynamics of rural community is extremely important if the assumptions and stereotypes associated with rurality and 'race' are to be challenged. As Ratcliffe (2004: 2) asserts, researchers should leave scope in their analysis for observing a more nuanced understanding of social position rather than simply suggesting that an individual is either excluded or is not. With this in mind, it may be that Figure 1 below paints an overly deterministic picture of contemporary rural life by grouping majority and minority ethnic households into a dichotomised binary framework of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Some may well fall into the intermediate 'intercept' category, which could conceivably include those who, for whatever reason, do not fall into either distinct grouping. Equally important is the need to examine whether 'insider' and 'outsider' status is a permanent condition for majority and minority ethnic households, or merely a transient affiliation that can change depending on individual factors or circumstances, such as the length of time spent in a particular town or village, the efforts made to 'fit in', or the levels of familiarity with 'difference' evident within a particular rural community.



Figure 1: Rural Community Membership: An Orthodox Dichotomised Framework of Insider/Outsider Status or a More Transient Condition?



A further factor that could affect the lived experiences of rural minority ethnic households is the availability of services and support from local agencies and organisations. Whilst such households are unlikely to be powerless or passive actors for whom victimisation is simply an inevitable outcome, the previous research conducted on this area, and referred to earlier in this chapter, has highlighted the need for greater support by illustrating both the isolation suffered by ethnic minorities in the countryside and the common neglect for their needs shown by rural-based agencies who tend instead to interpret their small numbers, 'invisibility' and 'silence' as a desire to be left alone, to paraphrase de Lima (2001: 48). Research that aims to identify the difficulties facing rural minority ethnic groups should therefore seek to examine their perceived needs and how successfully agencies are meeting those needs, as well as the levels of support that are available from agencies to assist victims of racialised 'othering'. Moreover, if we are to assume that the 'outsider' status referred to in Figure 1 is an over-generalisation that overlooks minorities' capacity to change status, so to speak, then the scope exists for rural studies to also examine the role that agencies can play in helping minority ethnic 'outsiders' become 'insiders'.



## **Methodological considerations**

As is evident from the issues raised above, the subject area at the heart of this research study covers a wide selection of different points of interest in the study of racism and rurality. As with any under-researched topic, the potential was there during the undertaking of the research to uncover new lines of enquiry that were initially not considered to be within its scope. However, in addition to maintaining as wide-ranging and flexible approach to the research as possible to encourage consideration of a broad range of issues, it was also necessary to maintain a realistic outlook when deciding upon the research design. Inevitably there will be limitations on the extent to which a sole researcher can examine each and every aspect of a research subject as potentially broad as the present one; consequently, the development of a methodological framework to investigate experiences of racist victimisation in the rural, whilst acknowledging and reflecting upon the influences of other pertinent issues relating to community, rurality, class and other such factors integral to rural studies, was a challenging, yet essential consideration at the outset of this study.

It was similarly important to develop a methodological framework that improved upon the scope of previous studies of rural racism. As discussed earlier, these localised studies have helped to draw some level of attention to the types of problems facing rural minority ethnic households but at the same time their broader impact has been restricted by the small-scale and narrow research designs employed by researchers. The methodological constraints of these past forays into rural racism highlight the need for a more rigorous approach, and in this regard a major limitation of past studies relates to their one-dimensional focus: for instance, de Lima's (2001) empirical research is based exclusively on interviews with a selection of minority ethnic households (supported, as she observes, by a handful of largely uncompleted questionnaire responses; Tyler's (2004) analysis of racialised discourse in a Midlands-based former coal-mining town focuses just on white community perceptions; while Dhalech (1999a and b) drew his conclusions solely from research conducted with agencies based in the south west of England. Similarly, even where researchers have sought to highlight issues from a broader range of perspectives, the significance of their findings may have been restricted by their relatively small sample sizes: the Jay report (1992), for example, has been extolled as a valuable breakthrough study but its

limited minority ethnic sample – 18 – has received surprisingly little scrutiny. As Jay himself acknowledges (1992: 10) his report is ‘far from being a complete study’, and the same can be said to apply to each of the studies that took their lead from the Jay report. The present piece of research has therefore been designed to provide a more comprehensive account of rural racism than has been possible through the limited methodologies of earlier work.

In framing the lines of enquiry of the research, emphasis was given to eliciting information from those occupying different positions within rural communities in order to provide as informed and full a picture as possible. Clearly, with issues of rural racism being pivotal to the overall rationale of the study, examining the perceptions and experiences of minority ethnic households from different backgrounds and locales was central to facilitating a greater understanding of how patterns of racist victimisation can operate in the rural. As potential targets of the ‘othering’ process, whether directly as recipients of racist abuse or violence, or indirectly through the more subtle forms of exclusionary behaviour, minority ethnic households based in rural towns and villages would prove to be rich sources of information with regards to sharing their views on rural life, levels of service provision and the nature, extent and impact of racism. By engaging directly with people who have had first-hand experience of being a rural ‘outsider’, it was envisaged that the research would actively take account of their histories, needs and suggestions.

However, in order to gain insights into the processes of ‘othering’ that can shape reactions to rural minorities, the research also sought to elicit the attitudes of established white rural communities. Investigating how the more established ‘insiders’ of rural society tend to perceive minority ethnic ‘outsiders’ would facilitate a greater understanding of how and why minority ethnic households can be ostracised from their wider rural communities, and of the extent to which traditional constructions of rurality bear an influence upon prevailing attitudes within these communities. In just the same way that minority ethnic households come from a range of different backgrounds and cultures, as opposed to constituting a simple homogeneous collective, members of white rural communities themselves will have their own diverse characteristics, and any understanding of ‘white’ perceptions would need to be informed by taking into account the views of a full range of rural voices.



Furthermore, as discussed above, studying the experiences of rural minority ethnic households should also involve consideration of the way in which their needs are met by rural-based agencies and service providers. Therefore, in addition to examining the views of both minority ethnic and white rural actors, the research also elicited the views of various stakeholders and policy-makers as a way of illustrating how minority ethnic households, and specifically how the issues that can blight their lives such as racism, isolation and marginalisation, are thought of by those responsible for developing policies and services to support them. As well as enabling such stakeholders and policy-makers to express their own opinions on the quality of available services, this phase of the research was designed to highlight potential areas for improvement in existing responses to racism by providing insights into the realities, as opposed to the rhetoric, of inter- and intra-agency working practice.

### *Selection of research sites*

As alluded to previously, the research was designed to transcend local issues particular to individual areas by looking at a broader range of rural environments, as opposed to focussing on one particular rural town or village; such an approach, it was felt, would help the research to identify both commonalities within and differences between the experiences of minority ethnic households in various types of rural space. With this in mind a case-study strategy was seen as constituting the most appropriate approach to the research, since this would enable data to be gathered from a variety of different rural sites whilst still granting the researcher the degree of selectivity necessary in a study of limited length and resources. As Yin (1994: 1) explains, ‘case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context’. This strategy, therefore, seemed ideal for the present study, whose primary aim, as outlined above, was to identify how processes of victimisation affect the lived experiences of rural minority ethnic households.

Careful consideration had to be given to selecting appropriate case-study sites: on the one hand, the research would need to cover a relatively broad cross-section of different rural locales in order to develop an understanding of the heterogeneity of

rural racism; at the same time, however, some degree of constraint upon the choice of sites would need to be exercised in order to allow the researcher sufficient time and opportunity to establish access to a diverse range of minority ethnic households, members of white communities and agency representatives. As a way of ascertaining whether support for the research would be forthcoming from rural stakeholders and policy-makers, letters, and where appropriate follow-up emails, were initially sent out to rural organisations and authorities across the country outlining the proposed research ideas, and in particular the potential benefits that the research could bring to organisations and authorities in terms of helping them to identify vulnerable groups and improve levels of service provision. These initial enquiries proved enormously beneficial in establishing contact with a number of supportive organisations and individuals, some of whom expressed a firm interest in backing the research with resources and access to key individuals. As Neal (2002) has argued when accounting for what she felt was a surprisingly receptive reaction from rural-based agencies to her research ideas, organisational willingness to participate in studies of rural racism may stem in part from the renewed post-Macpherson emphasis on tackling racism and the statutory duty imposed by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to address issues of race equality.

Consequently, the research material elicited for the purposes of this thesis was undertaken as part of a series of funded research projects conducted over a three-year period across three English counties: Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. The research in each county was commissioned separately by local organisations within each area eager to elicit a clearer understanding of the nature of racist victimisation in their locality<sup>9</sup>. In this regard therefore, the selection of research sites was based more upon expediency than any other overriding factor. Given that the funding bodies in each county were in a position to grant access to sources of information otherwise unavailable to the researcher, it was felt that the selection of these particular sites would provide far more substantial research material for the

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<sup>9</sup> The research conducted in Suffolk was funded predominantly by Suffolk County Council and by partner agencies such as Suffolk Constabulary, the Local Education Authority and local district councils. The Northamptonshire-based research was commissioned by the county's Eastern Area Multi-Agency Group Against Racial Attacks and Harassment (MAGRAH), and the research undertaken in Warwickshire was funded mostly by Warwickshire Police as well as partner agencies including Stratford District Council, Warwickshire Social Services and Warwickshire County Council Community Safety Department.



purposes of the thesis than would choosing alternative sites with limited access opportunities.

There are clear similarities between each of the counties selected for this study. All three contain significant areas within them which are predominantly rural and which contain low minority ethnic populations, while each of the selected rural locales is situated relatively close to a larger town or major city with a far higher minority ethnic presence<sup>10</sup>.

Figure 2: Location of research sites



However, the three counties have their own distinctive features, as discussed in more detail below, and their selection as focal points for the research helped to create a clearer understanding of the processes of racism in different forms of rural space. The research sites selected do not represent ‘typical’ rural territories from which universally applicable lessons about the dynamics of rural racism can be drawn; as

<sup>10</sup> In terms of geographical proximity, Suffolk Coastal is situated close to Ipswich; east Northamptonshire and Wellingborough are based near to Northampton and only slightly further from the city of Leicester; while north Warwickshire neighbours the towns of Nuneaton, Bedworth and Tamworth and together with Stratford-on-Avon is located in close proximity to the city of Birmingham.



highlighted in previous chapters, the complex nature of both rurality and racism render fruitless any attempt to draw definitive conclusions from a time- and resource-limited study. Rather, the sites were chosen partly on account of the differences between them and the insights that can be gleaned from analysing the contrasting, as well as complementary, features evident within them that contribute to a more informed appreciation of the problem. By focussing upon areas with distinct geographical characteristics (for example, coastal and in-land towns), varying levels of affluence or economic deprivation, and dissimilar minority ethnic populations, the study sought to explore pertinent issues in different contexts, whilst at the same time retaining the ability to draw parallels between areas all characterised by low numbers of minority ethnic households whose needs, experiences, and even existence have been largely overlooked by local authorities.

### *Location 1: Suffolk*

Suffolk is a county based in the south-east of England with a total population of 641,575 according to available Census data, spread across seven local authority districts. The largest town in the county is Ipswich, and this is where the largest proportion of minority ethnic households in the county is based (6,306, 32.8 per cent of Suffolk's total minority ethnic population). Though not itself a city, Ipswich is the most urbanised area within the county, and acts as the county's focal point in terms of high street shops, amenities, leisure facilities and community organisations.



Figure 3: Suffolk research site



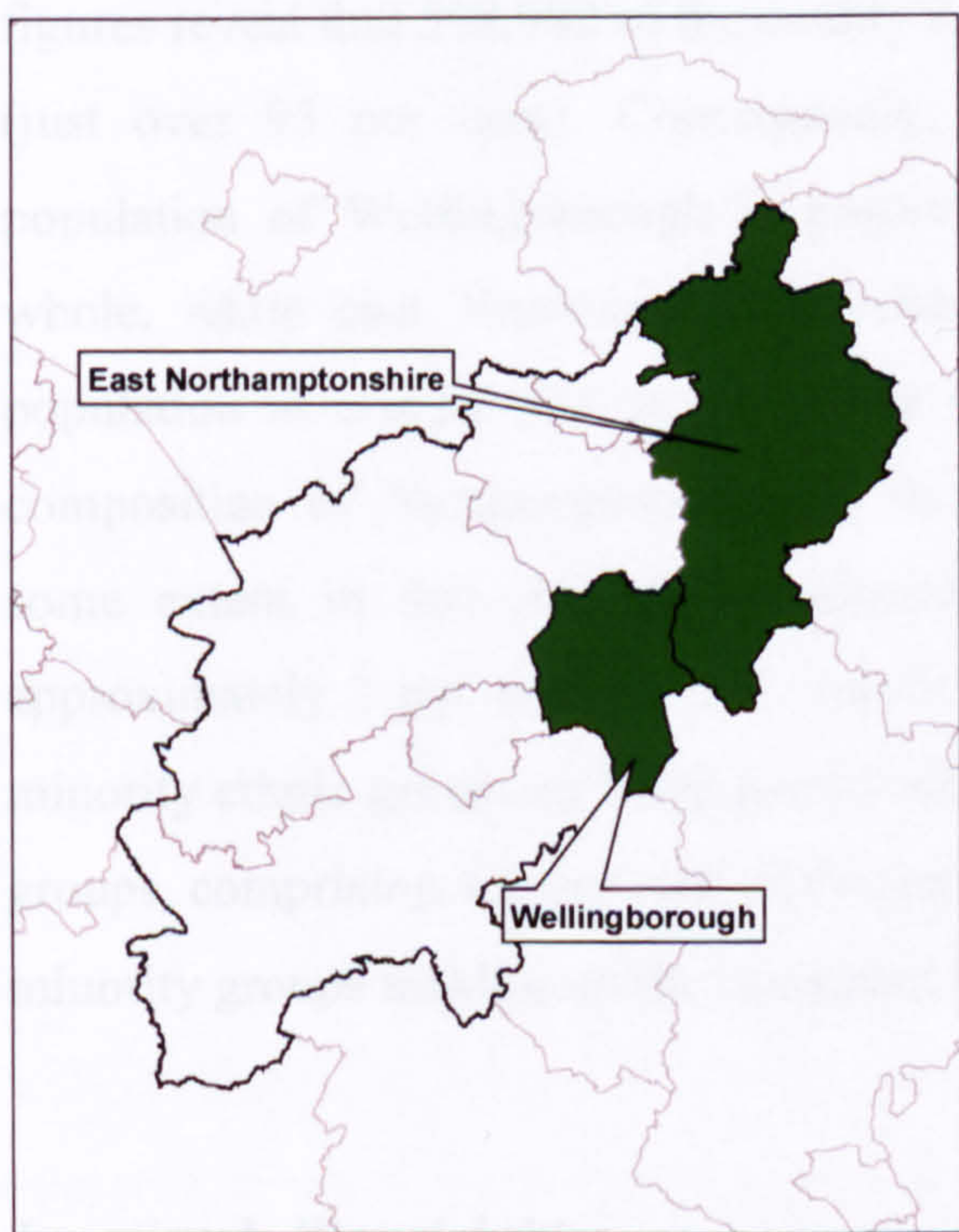
The research itself was concentrated on the district of Suffolk Coastal, an area located on the east coast consisting of numerous scattered small towns and villages. Of all the districts in the county, Suffolk Coastal has been designated as the county’s Rural Priority Area (RPA) by Suffolk County Council, and is seen as the area most in need of resources, regeneration and improved service provision, particularly within the more deprived wards based in the north of the district. The RPA’s principal towns, Felixstowe and Woodbridge, are situated in the south of the district, while other significant towns and suburban areas are Kesgrave and Martlesham, both located in the central part of Suffolk Coastal. The vast majority of the county is described as being rural in character and relies heavily on tourism which brings in spending power in the form of visitors and which has created employment through hotels, restaurants, transport and shops (Suffolk Coastal Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, 2005). According to available census data, Suffolk Coastal has a total minority ethnic population of 3,275 (3.0 per cent of the district’s overall population), with the largest minority ethnic groups in the district being black (including black African, black Caribbean and black other, 1.1 per cent (1,266 people)), Irish (0.8 per cent (819)) and south Asian (including Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, 0.2 per cent (226)).



**Location 2: Northamptonshire**

The county of Northamptonshire is situated in southern-central England and has a total population of 629,676 according to latest Census figures, spread across seven districts. As with Suffolk, the county does not contain an explicitly urban setting, although the county’s largest town Northampton has a more ‘urbanised’ feel to it than other parts of the county, for similar reasons to Ipswich. Following consultation with local authorities within the county, the wards of Wellingborough and east Northamptonshire were selected as research sites for the present study, a decision based primarily upon their ‘researchability’: both wards contained small, but growing numbers of minority ethnic households whose needs, perceptions and experiences had, as acknowledged by local stakeholders and policy-makers, been largely overlooked.

*Figure 4: Northamptonshire research sites*



According to the 2001 Census, the borough of Wellingborough has a population of 72,519, of whom 65,840 (approximately 90.0 per cent) are classed as white British. The largest minority ethnic groups within Wellingborough are drawn from the Asian and black communities, accounting for 4.4 per cent (3,241 people) and 2.5 per cent



(1,835) of the total population respectively. Mixed heritage groups then make up a further 1.8 per cent (1,357), with Chinese and other minority ethnic groups accounting for the remaining 0.2 per cent (131) and 0.1 per cent (102) of the population in turn.

In contrast, census figures show that the minority ethnic population of east Northamptonshire is significantly smaller than that of Wellingborough, with 75,218 (over 98 per cent) of the total population of 76,550 being white British. The remainder of the population is made up of different minority ethnic groups, with no single group accounting for as much as one per cent. East Northamptonshire differs from Wellingborough in that the largest minority ethnic group is mixed heritage (0.7 per cent (529)), followed by Asian (0.4 per cent (329)); black and Chinese groups account for approximately 0.3 per cent of the population each (199 and 161 people respectively), with the final 0.2 per cent of the population being accounted for by other minority ethnic groups.

When viewing the demographic profile of Northamptonshire as a whole, census figures reveal that 598,982 of the county's total population (629,676) are white British (just over 95 per cent). Consequently, it can be seen that the minority ethnic population of Wellingborough is proportionately higher than for the county as a whole, while east Northamptonshire has a proportionately lower minority ethnic population in comparison to the whole of Northamptonshire. However, the ethnic composition of Northamptonshire in its entirety does mirror Wellingborough's to some extent in that the largest minority ethnic group is Asian, accounting for approximately 2 per cent (12,512 people) of the entire population. The next largest minority ethnic groups in Northamptonshire as a whole are Black and mixed heritage groups, comprising 1.2 per cent of the population each, with Chinese and other ethnic minority groups making up the remaining 0.8 per cent.

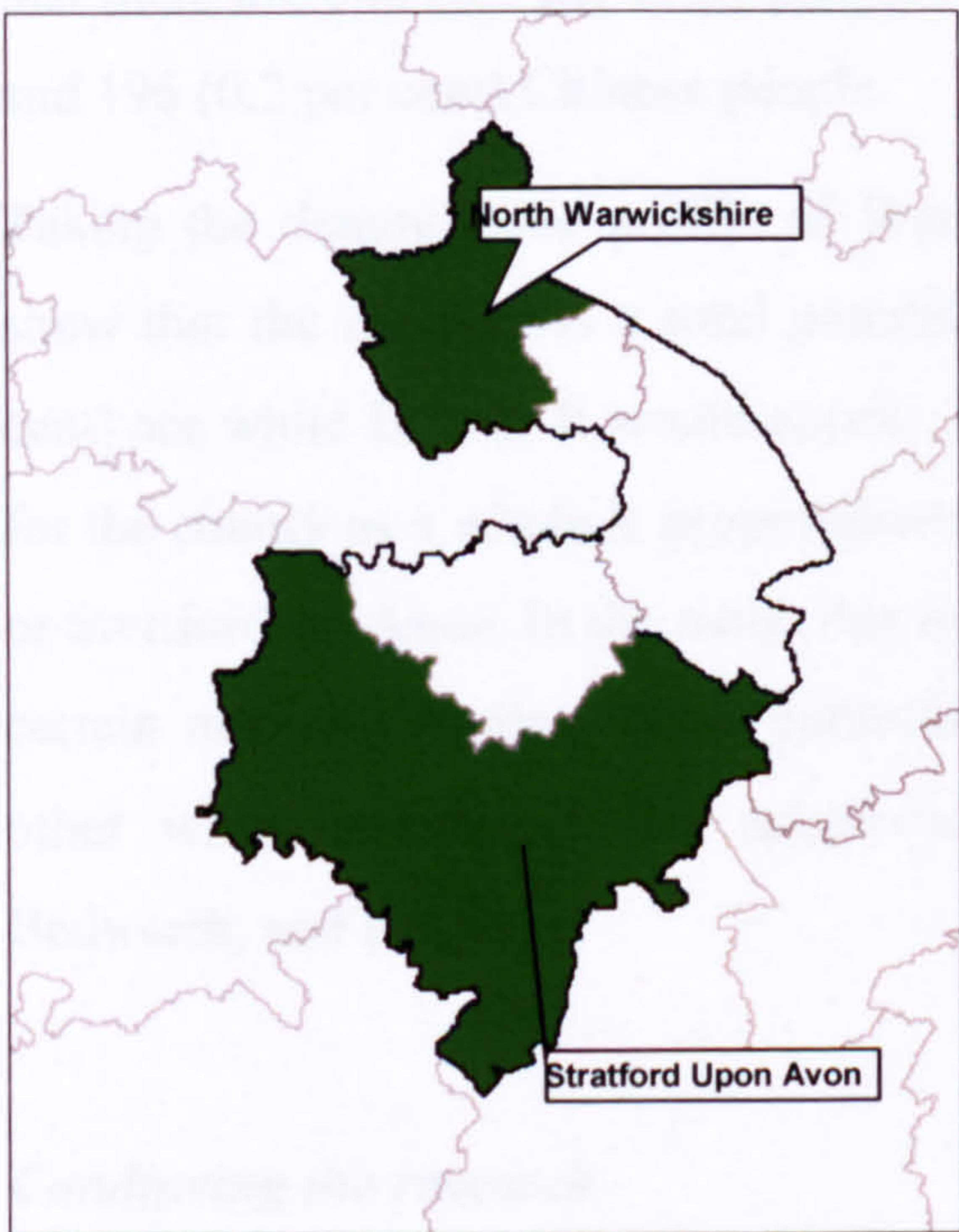
### ***Location 3: Warwickshire***

The third and final focal point of this study was the county of Warwickshire. Situated in the heart of England, the county is made up of five districts and has a total population of over half a million. Following consultation with senior figures within Warwickshire Police, the districts of north Warwickshire and Stratford-on-Avon were chosen as the research sites for that county, primarily on account of their differing



characteristics: these districts, situated in separate halves of the county, as illustrated by Figure 4, have quite dissimilar features, with the Stratford district renowned for being more affluent and appealing to tourists than its more northern counterpart (Marsh, 1996; Karim, 2002).

Figure 5: Warwickshire research sites



Latest Census data show that the district of north Warwickshire has a population of 61,859, of whom as many as 60,103 (97.2 per cent) are classed as white British. The district’s small minority ethnic population is relatively diverse in terms of its ethnic composition. The largest minority ethnic groups within north Warwickshire are drawn from the Irish and other white groups, accounting for 0.8 per cent (488 people) and 0.7 per cent (429) of the total population respectively. Other groups with a significant presence in the district include Indians who make up a further 0.4 per cent (236) and people of mixed heritage (0.5 per cent; 320).

Stratford-on-Avon has a larger total population (111,484 people), of whom 107,008 (96.0 per cent) are white British. Evidently, the number of minority ethnic inhabitants of this district is somewhat higher than in north Warwickshire (4,476 (4.0 per cent of the district’s total population) as opposed to 1,756 (2.8 per cent)), although



proportionally the minority ethnic populations of both districts remain significantly lower than the overall figure for England and Wales (13.0 per cent). Interestingly, the largest minority ethnic groups in Stratford-on-Avon by some way are the 'white other' and Irish groups (2,036 (1.8 per cent) and 978 (0.9 per cent)), suggesting that, as in north Warwickshire, the proportion of non-white households living in Stratford is relatively low. Of the more sizeable groups in this district, census figures indicate that there are 548 (0.5 per cent) people of mixed heritage, 282 (0.3 per cent) Indians and 196 (0.2 per cent) Chinese people.

Taking the demographic profile of Warwickshire in its entirety, the census figures show that the county has a total population of 505,860, of whom 469,307 (92.8 per cent) are white British. It would appear, therefore, that the minority ethnic population for the county as a whole is proportionately higher than for either north Warwickshire or Stratford-on-Avon. In the main, this is attributable to the relatively high presence of certain minority ethnic groups, particularly Indians and to a lesser extent Irish and other white groups, in the neighbouring districts of Warwick, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Rugby.

### *Conducting the research*

As outlined above, the research process itself consisted of a number of different strands, each of which, it was intended, could be replicated as far as possible within each of the research sites. In order to address the divergent range of issues at the heart of this particular study, quantitative and qualitative methods were combined: this, it was felt, would enable the research to collect measurable 'facts' about the target groups which could be analysed with a view to developing explanations about racialised 'othering', whilst simultaneously allowing for the multiple, subjective realities of different rural actors to be accounted for (Giddens, 1976; Clarke, 2001). Utilising a combination of approaches was seen as important as in themselves quantitative and qualitative methods have their individual limitations. For instance, quantitative techniques have been criticised for being insufficiently sensitive to explore difference, inconsistency and meaning and for having the capacity to provide only narrowly focused snapshots of behaviour, actions and perceptions (Stroh, 2000); at the same time though, proponents of quantitative studies can claim that their work



is undertaken from within a value-free framework, thereby enabling the researcher to pursue a more scientific and objective mode of enquiry than qualitative methods in isolation will allow to acquire knowledge that can be extrapolated to a wider population (Clarke, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Consequently, methodological pluralism, or cross-method triangulation (Hoyle, 2000), has become increasingly popular within criminological research as such a position acknowledges the role that different research techniques can play in uncovering various layers of social reality (Walklate, 2000). Numerous studies have highlighted the ways in which quantitative and qualitative research can compliment each other. Mhlanga (2000), for example, refers to the benefits of initially using quantitative methods to identify the influence of certain variables when measuring attitudes to crime and criminal justice and then more in-depth qualitative approaches to explain why such variables retain an influence; similarly, Bullock, Little and Millham (1995) and Walklate (2000) describe how qualitative techniques can be used to add greater depth to the findings of quantitative research in studies of social policy and victimisation, while Coleman and Moynihan (1996) and Noaks and Wincup (2004) point to the advantages of being able to draw from qualitative approaches when investigating issues that are difficult to research using quantitative methods alone.

Previous studies of 'race' and racism suggests that issues of racist victimisation fall under the category envisaged by those authors when referring to subjects that are not particularly conducive to quantitative research, and this factor has been influential in shaping the research design of the present study. Stanfield (1993: 13-14) describes some of the problems associated with quantitative studies of racism in the following terms:

*In the dominant quantitative mainstream, little attention is paid to well-institutionalised cultural biases in the construction of instruments, manipulation of secondary aggregate data, and construction of statistical tables and graphs. Raising such questions can prove to be a dangerous political business, especially given the fact that the growth of large-scale quantitative research that includes racial and ethnic variables is proving to*



*be a lucrative career path. But ... are they really explaining anything all that relevant outside the walls of their cosy offices and computer labs? For instance, can we really learn something about the complexity of ... a plural society when we drain the factor of subjective experiences of different populations?*

For Stanfield then, the political advantages attached to conducting quantitative research capable of generating 'measurable' statistics have resulted in a relative shortage of ethnic and racial studies that have sought to identify the kinds of complexities and subjectivities that are beyond the scope of large-scale surveys. Mindful of the limitations of the more positivist approaches to researching issues of racist victimisation, other authors have made equally pertinent criticisms of the role of quantitative methodologies in this context. Among the most notable is Bowling (1999) who argues that survey-based research is incapable of capturing the process of victimisation, as described in Chapter Two. While surveys can provide useful statistical context, Bowling notes that their tendency to present only static descriptions of racism fails to recognise the dynamic nature of victimisation and the wider social processes that give rise to this victimisation. As a result, sole reliance upon quantitative methods can result in researchers overlooking, or at best downplaying, important features of victimisation, including the relationship between victim and perpetrator, their relationships with the wider communities to whom they belong, and the effectiveness of agency responses. These sentiments have been echoed by a number of other researchers in this field: Webster (2007), for instance, criticises survey-based attempts to measure racism for their inability to model the complex processes and contexts of real-life experiences, whilst Piper and Piper (1999) suggest that the most valuable data in their study of relationships between the police and minority ethnic communities came from individual and group interviews where they could explore subtleties and complexities, and not from their questionnaire surveys (see also Bhopal, 2000; Bulmer and Solomos, 2004).

The present piece of research, therefore, has been designed to take account of these points by using both quantitative and qualitative methods to secure a holistic analysis. This ties in with the suggestions of Bowling (1999) who contends that such an approach is necessary to present a more nuanced account of the process, context,



incidence and impact of racist victimisation. Consequently, an important preliminary feature of the research was the undertaking of a postal questionnaire survey of minority ethnic households residing within the case study areas, which was designed to assess respondents' views on a range of issues relating to quality of life in the rural, including perceived problems in their local neighbourhood; levels of concern about, and experiences of, racist victimisation; reasons for reporting, or not reporting, racist incidents; and satisfaction with local agencies. The focus upon these kinds of issues when formulating the content of the questionnaire was informed largely by the research questions (discussed above), as it was felt that the responses provided by minority ethnic households would help to reveal something about the processes of victimisation that can operate to marginalise such households from mainstream rural communities. However, it was also felt that the selection of a broad range of issues relating to respondents' perceptions and experiences would elicit useful information, be it about the attributes, behaviour, attitudes or beliefs of rural minority ethnic households (Simmons, 2001: 90-92), that would inform the subsequent stages of the research study. Although questionnaires in themselves provide only limited information, and hence partial insights into people's perceptions and the *process* of victimisation (Bowling, 1999; Malcolm, 2000), it was felt that distributing questionnaires would at least facilitate the process of making contact with hard-to-hear and hard-to-reach households and help to indicate the types of key issues to be further explored during the qualitative phase of the research.

Accessing potential respondents via a questionnaire survey is in itself an inherently difficult process (see, for example, Simmons, 2001; Burton, 2000; Oppenheim, 1992) but is especially problematic in the context of this kind of research. The danger of questionnaire recipients feeling 'over-researched' can be a factor that restricts responses, as can language barriers, their concerns over the confidentiality of the research process, their willingness to spend time completing a survey, and their scepticism over the usefulness of the research. Perhaps the most obvious obstacle to accessing potential respondents for studies of this nature is the inherent difficulty of locating minority ethnic households in small towns and villages, where their numbers are low and their presence is not readily apparent. While various community forums, networks and organisations may exist in larger conurbations and provide a useful source of access for many studies of minority ethnic groups, this means of identifying



the whereabouts of potential respondents is rarely of use to researchers operating in more remote environments.

In order to access as large a sample as possible in each county, questionnaires were initially distributed through local agency workers who enjoy direct contact with minority ethnic groups. By virtue of their local knowledge and familiarity with diverse groups, these workers would prove to be valuable guide to the research; indeed, as Burningham and Thrush (2001: 186) maintain, local 'key' informants can play a pivotal role within the research process not only through providing assistance with site selection and methodological logistics, but also by highlighting the particular environmental concerns of disadvantaged communities within the context of a given locality. Though in no way a guaranteed method of securing responses, it was felt that this means of distribution would at least allow questionnaires to reach households known to live in the selected districts, whilst at the same time keeping with data protection regulations which prevent agencies from disclosing identities and contact details to third parties such as the researcher. Contact was established with an extensive range of statutory and voluntary agencies in each county, and questionnaires subsequently distributed through key individuals and stakeholders including race equality support officers; youth workers; representatives within councils for voluntary service; social services; citizens advice bureaux; Traveller education services; asylum and refugee groups; housing associations; police community relations officers; district and parish council officers; and Victim Support.

The majority of questionnaire respondents were accessed through this form of network sampling, and in the absence of any identifiable, 'ready-made' samples of rural minority ethnic households in the case-study areas this method proved to be the most feasible way of locating research participants (see also Lee, 1993). However, whilst advantageous in terms of its capacity to reveal networks of contacts to be studied, this sampling technique includes only those within a connected network (Arber, 2000) and therefore fails to cover those who will not have had contact with the key individuals and stakeholders referred to above. Accordingly, additional steps were taken to access potential respondents who may have remained unidentified by local gatekeepers, and this helped to broaden the sample at least to some extent. Leaflets were designed advertising the research and several hundred of these were left at various reception desks of local service providers within the case study areas.



Adverts were also placed in local newspapers inviting people to take part in the studies, and the researcher conducted ‘tours’ around the towns and villages of each site as a way of securing contact with local businesses, take-away and restaurant establishments and shoppers. Furthermore, the questionnaires distributed in each of the three counties were incentivised, with the cover sheets stating that every returned survey containing the contact details of the respondent would be entered into a random prize-draw whereby the winner would receive a cash prize<sup>11</sup>. Although the question of how best to access potential respondents was problematic, this was by no means the only concern relating to the design and distribution of questionnaires. The purpose of the research and the ethical implications of completing the survey were made clear in a covering letter attached to the questionnaire as a way of ensuring that respondents were fully informed about the auspices of the study (Bulmer, 2001). This included outlining how responses would be utilised, how the anonymity of individual respondents would be preserved, and how the research findings would be fed back to local authorities and service providers.

Deciding upon how best to frame the questions within each survey was also an important consideration, particularly bearing in mind the mixed profile of the target sample in terms of ethnicity, life experience and familiarity with the English language. At first it had been envisaged that the questionnaire would be translated into a variety of different languages to facilitate respondents’ understanding of the questions, but ultimately this proved to be unfeasible in each of the research sites due to the lack of available local translating services and the cost implications of utilising known members of minority ethnic communities as translators. Moreover, given the diverse make-up of each rural area’s minority ethnic population (as discussed above), it was felt by both the researcher and the funding agencies in each county that it would be impractical to translate the questionnaires into a variety of different languages, particularly as each research site contained relatively small numbers of different minority ethnic groups as opposed to housing one or two more dominant communities. Instead, questions were worded clearly and unambiguously so as to make them as easy to understand as possible, and drafts were subsequently checked, and where necessary amended, by local informants. The piloting of questionnaires

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<sup>11</sup> Questionnaire respondents were encouraged to leave their contact details in order to leave open the possibility of their taking part in a follow-up interview.



amongst a cross-section of respondents introduced to the researcher by local informants in each case study area also proved valuable in testing the appropriateness and robustness of questions. Following consultation with these informants, it was decided that in instances where respondents were likely to experience difficulties in understanding questions or formulating responses, questionnaires would be completed with the assistance of an appropriate adult: for instance, representatives from Traveller Education Services were on hand to provide support to members of the Traveller communities, while youth workers at a number of youth associations were able to assist their members. In all other cases, respondents would be expected to complete the questionnaire and to return in the pre-paid reply envelope provided with the questionnaire.

Response rates were relatively mixed across each of the sites. In Suffolk Coastal, 93 questionnaires were returned out of a total of 300, representing a response rate of 31 per cent; 70 questionnaires out of 311 were returned in the two Northamptonshire wards (response rate – 23 per cent); while 90 questionnaires out of a total of 625 were returned in the Warwickshire sites (response rate – 14 per cent). As expected, in terms of sheer numbers the proportion of respondents was fairly low in each county, and due to the inherent difficulties associated with accessing, distributing to and eliciting returns from these isolated minority ethnic households, the breakdown of respondents for each site did not provide an entirely accurate reflection of that county's actual minority ethnic population<sup>12</sup>. Not surprisingly therefore, and in line with the suggestions of Bowling (1999) and Webster (2007) referred to above, the analytical potential of the questionnaire data is limited with respect to their ability to convey a

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<sup>12</sup> Of the 93 respondents to the Suffolk survey, just under half (47 per cent, 43) were males and just over half females (53 per cent, 49). The majority of respondents were aged 39 or under (75 per cent, 70), whilst the largest ethnic group of respondents classified themselves as black (either black Caribbean, black African, and black other - 30 per cent, 28), followed by Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Asian other - 29 per cent, 27), mixed heritage (white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and Asian, and mixed other - 19 per cent, 10) and Chinese (13 per cent, 12).

Of the 70 respondents to the Northamptonshire survey, just under half (49 per cent, 34) were males, and just over half females (51 per cent, 36). The majority of respondents were aged 49 or under (83 per cent, 58) with the most common single age group being aged 19 or under (33 per cent, 23). The largest ethnic group classified themselves as Asian (37 per cent, 26), followed by black (21 per cent, 15) and mixed heritage (19 per cent, 13).

Of the 90 respondents to the Warwickshire survey, over half (61 per cent, 54 respondents) were males, while the majority of respondents were aged 49 or under (72 per cent, 64) with the most common single age group being aged 30 to 39 (21 per cent, 19). The largest ethnic group classified themselves as Indian (24 per cent, 21), followed by people of mixed heritage (19 per cent, 17), black (12 per cent, 11), Irish (12 per cent, 11), and Chinese (11 per cent, 10).



meaningful picture of the process of victimisation and should be treated with some degree of caution, as is made clear in subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, as a measure designed to provide useful supporting data to the more extensive qualitative elements of the research, and as an enabling device for the researcher to develop a feel for the types of issues affecting rural minority ethnic groups, the undertaking of the questionnaire surveys was undoubtedly a worthwhile exercise. Consequently, the main themes emerging from their analysis are referred to, and preceded with health warnings, where pertinent in the discussion of findings.

A further key component in the methodology adopted for each research site was the process of conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with minority ethnic households based in rural towns and villages. As Fielding and Thomas (2001: 125) acknowledge, interviews are commonly used to establish the variety of opinions concerning a particular topic and to uncover relevant dimensions of attitudes, and with this in mind sixty interviews were undertaken in total (twenty in each county) as a means of gaining a more informed understanding of quality of life issues, perceptions of service provision, and the nature and impact of racism from individuals and families who have first-hand experience of living as a minority in rural and isolated environments. The vast majority of interviewees were identified through their responses to the questionnaire surveys, as a number of respondents had expressed their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews and had left their contact details<sup>13</sup>. All were fairly evenly distributed in terms of gender, and included a broad cross-section of different minority ethnic groups in each area<sup>14</sup>. They also came from a variety of different towns and villages spread across the research sites, and from different age groups, ranging from schoolchildren to retired members of the community.

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<sup>13</sup> Additional assistance in securing access to interviewees in Suffolk Coastal came from Suffolk County Council's Racial Harassment Initiative, while Northamptonshire's Eastern Area Multi-Agency Group Against Racial Attacks and Harassment (MAGRAH) helped the researcher to establish contact with several interviewees in east Northamptonshire and Wellingborough.

<sup>14</sup> On account of the researcher's desire to ensure as diverse a representation of rural minority ethnic households as possible, the profile of interviewees in each county was relatively evenly distributed in terms of ethnicity. The research in each county included interviews with people from the following ethnicities: black Caribbean; Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese; black African; Irish; Iranian; mixed heritage; and Gypsy Traveller. In addition, the researcher interviewed an American family based in Suffolk, a Peruvian household based in Northamptonshire, and two Kosovan youths in Warwickshire.



A key feature of the research design centred around creating as open and inviting an interview situation as possible. Obviously the need to engage fully with the interviewee about their feelings and experiences was of paramount importance, and this becomes all the more difficult when the discussions are based upon a sensitive subject area such as victimisation, where interviewees can be guarded or defensive about the responses that they provide (see, for example, Hoyle, 2000; Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Garland *et al.*, 2006). Although the researcher initially anticipated that there would be some degree of reluctance amongst minority ethnic households to take part, all those approached provided their informed consent to an interview, particularly when it was made clear that the confidentiality of their responses would be safeguarded and that their identities would remain anonymous throughout the research process. In order to encourage interviewees to feel as comfortable as possible, the researcher ensured that each interview was conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee themselves (most commonly at the interviewee's home or place of work), and interviewees were assured that they could end the interview at any time. All interviewees consented to the interview being tape-recorded, and it was made clear that they could ask for the recorder to be switched off at any time should they wish to discuss any issue 'off the record'. Ethical considerations were all the more important when the research involved young people. In cases where the researcher wished to speak to people below the age of 16, permission to conduct an interview was sought both from the young people themselves and from their parents or guardian: on each occasion permission was granted, and the interview was conducted either individually at the young person's home (with the family present at the home but in an adjoining room) or where appropriate in the company of the young person's family.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with individuals from a selection of organisations that have some degree of responsibility for policy-making and service provision for local communities in the counties of Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. Assessing the perceptions of key stakeholders was regarded as an important feature of the research that would enable interviewees to express their own opinions on the quality of available services, whilst providing insights into the realities of inter-agency working practice. A total of 60 interviews were conducted during this phase of the research: 28 in Suffolk, 26 in Warwickshire



and six in Northamptonshire<sup>15</sup>. Each of the three counties had in place various multi-agency fora established specifically to develop strategic co-ordinated responses to racist incidents, as discussed in more detail later, and the researcher conducted interviews with these partner agencies, as well as with other organisations and service providers involved in combating racism. Interviewees included the following individuals and organisations based in the three counties: race equality support officers; the Police (including senior representatives and probationers); youth workers; social services; Victim Support; district and parish councils; social services; citizens advice bureaux; local education authorities; Traveller education services; councils for voluntary service; primary care trusts; asylum and refugee groups; housing associations; and local councillors. The fact that representatives from such a broad selection of different agencies consented to being interviewed was extremely beneficial to the research, and was undoubtedly one of the key advantages of undertaking the research on behalf of funding bodies in each of the three counties: as some of the interviewees admitted, their contribution to the research had been influenced by the encouragement offered (or as one or two put it, pressure exerted) by the funding bodies in each county.

The final strand to the methodology took the form of a set of focus groups and interviews with members of established white communities based in each of the selected rural sites. Long-term rural residents will almost inevitably have prevailing cultural and geographical imaginations of what rural life should be comprised of (Cloke, Goodwin and Milbourne, 1998), and as discussed previously, drawing out these constructions of rurality from the more established ‘insiders’ of rural society can provide valuable insights into how minority ethnic ‘outsiders’ are perceived and into the processes of exclusion that can work to marginalise minority ethnic households from their wider rural communities.

A total of ten focus groups and twelve interviews were conducted in total with white long-standing residents of the research sites, all arranged through contacts within local organisations and comprising of individuals of different ages, genders and fields of employment. The level of interaction generated from a focus group consisting of

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<sup>15</sup> Despite concerted efforts to engage a larger number of Northamptonshire-based organisations in this part of the research process, interviewees in that county were restricted to being representatives of the following five key agencies: the Police; Victim Support; Wellingborough District Racial Equality Council; Inclusion and Pupil Support; and the Housing Department of Wellingborough Borough Council.



between five to eight people known to each other was seen as a useful way of stimulating debate and discussion amongst people who might otherwise be reluctant to voice opinions on the subject matter in hand (Cronin, 2001; Morgan, 1988), and where possible group discussions were arranged with members of local community organisations, such as village round tables, youth centres<sup>16</sup> and church groups, at venues of their choosing. The group dynamic was especially important bearing in mind the sensitivity of the research subject: a number of those approached were initially reluctant to give their informed consent to the research for fear of ‘being misunderstood’ or ‘sounding racist’, but when the idea of a group discussion with their friends or neighbours was raised, they were more than happy to participate. However, it was also recognised that individuals can sometimes be denied the opportunity to convey their feelings in depth within the confines of a group discussion, particularly where conversations are dominated by one or more dominant individuals (Cronin, 2001: 175), and for that reason the focus groups were supplemented by individual interviews with people who preferred to share their thoughts on a one-to-one basis as opposed to within a group environment. As with the other strands of the qualitative research, all interviewees and focus group participants consented to their conversations being recorded<sup>17</sup>, and the material was subsequently transcribed and analysed by the researcher.

The process of transcribing the extensive amount of qualitative material elicited from discussions with minority ethnic households, agency representatives and white residents proved in itself to be an integral part of the analysis in terms of increasing my familiarity with the data and offering opportunities for reflection and identification of key themes (see also Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 129). Rather than relying upon a deductive approach to test preconceived theories, the analysis of this material took a largely grounded approach more usually associated with qualitative data (Gilbert, 2001; Stroh, 2000; Jupp, 1998) where themes were allowed to emerge from the various strands of data, thereby enabling theories about the nature of rurality and ‘othering’ to be generated, tested and refined during the analytical process. This grounded theory approach requires the researcher to adopt a reflexive stance towards

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<sup>16</sup> Youth workers in each of the research sites helped to facilitate focus groups held with members of youth forums.

<sup>17</sup> For the focus groups recording equipment was placed at both the front and back of each of the rooms used in order to generate a clear recording.



the data in order to generate theoretical explanations from the observations emanating from the qualitative material, and with this in mind the data was reviewed and coded to produce categories consistent with issues of thematic interest. However, while this process of induction enabled the research to develop an enhanced theoretical understanding of racialised 'othering' in the rural based upon observations procured during the various interviews and focus groups, the analysis also contained a deductive element in the sense that theories and explanations initially induced from the data were sometimes then re-tested against the qualitative material, and against conceptual contributions from the broader literature conceived as being potentially relevant to the present study. This adaptive framework, where inductive and deductive approaches are recognised as being open to each other's influence (Bottoms, 2000), acknowledges that the two traditionally distinct stances are in fact often intertwined and can be of value when seeking to create a more sophisticated understanding of problematic concepts (Gilbert, 2001). In the context of this particular piece of research, such an approach allowed for a more robust examination of the research aims and objectives offered earlier in this chapter and contributed to the development of the conceptual framework of 'insider-outsider' relationships outlined in the final chapter.

### *Researcher subjectivity*

Conducting research on a sensitive subject area such as racism, and doing so in remote and isolated geographical locations, is not without its difficulties. In addition to the by no means unique methodological dilemmas surrounding choice of research design, selection of sites, location of gatekeepers and so on (for a more extensive discussion of the methodological considerations facing researchers of 'race' and ethnicity, see Gunaratnam, 2003), using the rural as the backdrop to one's studies brings its own complications, particularly with regard to accessing respondents. Rural-based research will inevitably be constrained by logistical difficulties associated with conducting fieldwork with geographically dispersed populations (Moody, 1999: 24), and accordingly, as discussed above, considerable care was devoted to engaging as wide and diverse a range of research participants as possible, whether rural minority ethnic households, members of established white communities or those involved in policy-making and service provision.



However, a fascinating, though deeply problematic, feature of the research process centred around the dynamic of being a minority ethnic researcher operating in what are predominantly white territories. As Spalek (2005) observes, the degree to which one's self identity can influence the research process is an issue that should be taken more readily into consideration than tends to be the case, particularly as there may be aspects of the self linked to both the marginalised 'outsider' positions being researched and to the perpetuation of centres of power. For instance, after critically reflecting upon her study of Black Muslim women, Spalek (2005: 5) argues that though her gender helped to document the realities of women's lives in relation to men, her sampling techniques nevertheless unwittingly served to perpetuate dominant western misrepresentations of Islam, and this she attributes solely to her position of being a white 'western' researcher. This suggests, therefore, that certain aspects of a researcher's subjectivity can be of value in documenting 'outsider' perspectives, while other aspects can result in the misrepresentation of those perspectives, however subconsciously (see Garland *et al.*, 2006).

For this particular study, the author's own ethnicity could in some ways be seen to put him into a similar category to many of his research participants; after all, being a minority ethnic researcher looking into issues facing minority ethnic households puts one, at least in terms of ethnicity, in the advantageous position of sharing 'outsider' characteristics with one's research subjects. Shared ethnicity can be a particularly strong unifying factor in the relationship between researcher and participant, a point highlighted in Duneier's (2004) New York-based research on race and racism, where he found that the differences between himself and his interviewees with regards to social class, educational background and occupation were nowhere near as significant, or immediately apparent, as their racial differences. Certainly, during the course of the present study, a substantial number of minority ethnic interviewees conveyed their relief at being able to share their experiences with a fellow 'minority' (something that happens all too rarely in a rural, predominantly white environment) and several made clear that they would not have participated had the interviewer been white. However, simply being of 'minority ethnic status' does not afford the researcher any automatic rights of entry when it comes to accessing people of different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds (see, for instance, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), and the author found himself consistently questioning his status throughout the research



process. As a researcher of Indian descent, would it be any more legitimate for me to research people from, for instance, African Caribbean, Pakistani, Traveller or Eastern European communities than would be the case for a white British researcher? Similarly, would my minority ethnic status override my status as a heterosexual, urban-based male when it came to, say, interviewing gay minority ethnic women in the rural?

Ultimately, such questions, problematic and thought-provoking though they are and certainly an important part of the process of researcher self-reflection to which Garland *et al.* (2006) refer, should not be allowed to restrict the researcher's capacity to conduct research with diverse populations. Factors such as ethnicity, sexuality and social class will inevitably divide the identities and experiences of the researcher and research subject to some extent, and it would seem futile for any study to strive for some form of exact match in the profile of researcher and respondent, a point that Gunaratnam (2003: 85) makes when referring to the multiple influences that can affect the dynamics of relationships in this context.

*... The point is that matching for one social identity fails to take account of the dynamic interplay of social differences and identifications. So even when there is a shared language between researchers and research participants, other differences, such as class, can have a significant effect upon communication and the interpretation of meaning ...*

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study the researcher's own identity as a visible minority was an interesting feature of the research in allowing him the 'benefit' of experiencing first-hand the types of issues that can confront minority ethnic households based in predominantly white areas, albeit to a less protracted extent than those living in the rural on a more permanent basis. Although the demands of completing the research within a confined period of time for each funding body precluded the possibility of living in the various research sites for months on end, the researcher was able to observe the realities of rural life with his own eyes as a result of conducting rural-based research for a sustained number of years. By virtue of spending prolonged periods of time in rural locales, the researcher's own



ethnographic experiences of being a visible ‘outsider’ underpinned the process of conducting the research, and these will be referred to where relevant in the discussion of findings.

The researcher’s ethnicity was also a key, but this time prohibitive factor when it came to researching the white ‘insiders’ of rural community. In just the same way that shared minority ethnic status can be beneficial in building relationships between researcher and research subject, it was felt that the use of a supplementary white researcher to conduct interviews and focus groups with members of white rural communities would be a necessity in a study seeking to elicit open and unguarded opinions on sensitive issues. Certainly the chances of obtaining defensive, guarded or tokenistic responses would have been considerably higher were the author to have conducted the face-to-face research with white respondents, and for that reason an experienced white colleague was used to carry out this phase of the research<sup>18</sup>.

This chapter has sought to build upon earlier discussions of rurality and racist victimisation by developing a framework around which issues of racialised ‘othering’ in the rural can be examined. We have seen how the very notion of racism being a problem in rural environments has tended to be dismissed, or at best underplayed, by a body of literature that has focused instead on the problem in an urban context, although the relatively recent emergence of rural-based research reports has begun, albeit to a limited extent, to broaden traditional lines of enquiry to include areas containing less concentrated minority ethnic populations. Having outlined the thinking behind the construction of an appropriate methodology for researching the ‘othering’ of minority ethnic households in the rural, the thesis now moves on to discuss the findings of the present research study, looking first at the realities of rural life for such households and their sense of belonging within rural communities.

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<sup>18</sup> It should be stressed that the supplementary researcher was used simply to lead the interviews and to facilitate focus group discussions with white participants. All preparatory materials and schedules were devised by the author.



## Chapter Four

### **The Realities of Rural Community Life for Minority Ethnic Households: Perceptions of Belonging and Cultures of Exclusion**

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the rural community has proved to be an elusive and contentious concept over the years. Traditionally, ideas about the nature of rural communities have been heavily influenced by the work of authors such as Ferdinand Tonnies (1887), where the rural is seen to encapsulate the very essence of *gemeinschaft*, or community in its very ‘real’ sense (in direct contrast to the more impersonal, *gesellschaft* characteristics of the city). When conceived in such a manner, the rural has tended to be directly associated with the nostalgic imagery of the term ‘community’, a term which, as Bauman (2001: 2-3) notes, has an obvious and enduring appeal:

... It is easy to see why the word ‘community’ feels good. Who would not wish to live among friendly and well-wishing people whom one could trust and on whose words and deeds one could rely? For us in particular who happen to live in ruthless times, times of competition and one-upmanship, when people around seem to keep their cards close to their chests and few people seem to be in any hurry to help us ... the word ‘community’ sounds sweet. What that word evokes is everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting.

We saw in Chapter One how the notion of rural community has been central to ‘idyllicised’ constructions of rurality that have been used to perpetuate an impression of harmony, unity and consensus. However, more recent studies of rural life have challenged the more mechanistic typologies of the rural by drawing attention to the social and spatial complexities of rurality and the extent to which traditional representations have been used as exclusionary devices to decide who does and does not belong in the English countryside (Philo, 1992; Cloke and Little, 1997; Sibley, 1997; Murdoch and Day, 1998). In a similar vein, this chapter uses the findings of the



present study to analyse perceptions of belonging and cultures of exclusion in each of the case-study areas in rural Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. Drawing from the qualitative research conducted in each locality with members of established white communities and with minority ethnic households, the chapter examines notions of community and mechanisms of 'othering', and explores the dynamics of insider/outsider relationships by considering both sets of respondents' attitudes towards each other. This analysis begins with an examination of white 'insider' perceptions of rurality and of rural 'incomers' before moving on to consider minority ethnic households' sense of community and belonging in the rural. Through its consideration of such issues as these, this chapter documents the realities of rural community life as perceived and experienced by minority ethnic households, and this sets the context for subsequent chapters which go on to assess the problem of, and responses to, rural racism more specifically.

## **White 'insider' perceptions**

### ***Notions of rural community structure***

Images of rural life have, as discussed in earlier chapters, tended to be constructed within an idyllicised framework. Depictions of a seemingly homogeneous, white, middle-class, crime-free landscape have cultivated and reproduced mythological accounts of an English countryside characterised by the kinds of closely-knit communities that are both highly elusive to and keenly sought after by rural immigrants (see, for example, Agyeman and Spooner, 1997; Neal, 2002; Tyler, 2006). Nevertheless, the more problematic aspects of rurality have received increasing amounts of coverage in recent years. For instance, protracted debates surrounding the legality of fox hunting with hounds, ensuing Countryside Alliance protests and the furore surrounding the implications of foot and mouth disease across farms in the UK are all news stories which have, to use the words of Neal (2002: 443) 'pushed the English countryside to the fore of mainstream political policy and populist agendas'. Whilst the coverage of these issues has done little to challenge notions of culturally homogeneous rural communities – Neal and Agyeman (2006a: 105-6), for instance, argue with reference to the hunting debate that dissenting voices against the rural mainstream pro-hunting lobby are rarely heard within popular depictions which



reinforce images of a *typically rural* way of life with hunting at its core – these news stories have at least cast an element of doubt over the supposedly problem-free nature of rural life.

At the same time, Neal and Agyeman (2006a: 105) have drawn attention to what they describe as the ‘quieter crisis’, a series of less high-profile rural problems ranging from escalating house prices to a perceived shortage of community resources and local amenities, which have been picked up on by researchers and taken forward by sections of the media in an attempt to emphasise some of the immediate difficulties facing rural communities (see, for example, Commission for Rural Communities, 2007; Moss, 2006; Countryside Agency, 2003). This may include problems which are specifically rural in nature as well as those which may not be exclusive to the rural but which are likely to have a more pronounced impact upon rural communities in comparison to their more urban counterparts. For instance, Lawtey, Deane and Chamberlain (2001) have highlighted the dangers of what they refer to as exclusively rural crimes such as wildlife crime, farm- and equine-related offences and fly tipping, whilst also stressing the exaggerated impact of problems such as vehicle crime upon households living in isolated rural areas.

Moreover, just as in urban areas research has shown that rural communities’ fear of crime may often exceed the lived reality of their experiences. Meek (2005), for example, has raised concerns over the criminalisation of young people’s use of rural public space and the lower tolerance within rural communities (as compared with inner-city environments) of anti-social behaviour, while McWhirter (2005) has described the inconsistencies between rural police force accounts of low crime rates and an ever-growing sense of vulnerability to crime and under-policing amongst the rural public. Similarly, Yarwood (2006: 72-3) contrasts the low levels of crime concern reported by parish councillors in his study of policing in the West Mercia region with the high levels of concern evident within rural communities that arises as a result of what he refers to as a ‘moral panic reported by various media and rural organisations’; for Yarwood, rural fear of crime can be fuelled by persuasive, but unjustified, expressions of concern over a perceived lack of policing in the countryside made by influential groups such as the Countryside Alliance, the National Farmer’s Union and the Women’s Institute, thereby serving to increase rural communities’ anxieties over crime and incivilities.



These illustrations of some of the troublesome features of rural life help to paint a less sanitised picture of rurality, and suggest that the exclusively positive notions associated with ‘idyllicised’ constructions of rurality may not always be shared by rural households confronted by what they perceive to be very real and pressing problems. Moreover, the appeal of idyllic images of the rural to local communities may depend to some extent on the characteristics of the local environment. Although some expanses of the countryside may well fit with the rosy imagery of England’s ‘green and pleasant land’, equally there are areas much less green, much less pleasant and much more economically deprived, where perceptions of rural life may be altogether different.

These variations in expectation and perception were evident in the present study. During the series of interviews and focus groups conducted with members of white communities based in the case-study areas, respondents gave a rather mixed picture of rural life, with some people’s accounts differing quite markedly from idyllicised depictions. This was particularly the case in some of the more economically deprived towns and villages in Northamptonshire and north Warwickshire where respondents tended to dwell on the negative aspects of living in a small community, as illustrated in the following comments from young men living in east Northamptonshire.

*We sometimes get general small town random acts of violence. We’ve had a mate that’s been glassed in the pub and he’s been blinded in one eye. I’ve had my run ins with someone that’s tried to stab me, do you know what I mean, but I think that’s all part and parcel of it.*

*I wouldn’t say it’s close knit but I suppose cliquey and close knit is the same thing though isn’t it? Virtually everyone knows everyone. You might not know everyone but you will know somebody they know. You spend your whole life saying, ‘Bloody hell it’s a small world’.*

*It’s very different, there’s a lot more poverty, there’s a lot more underage sex, illegitimate children and that sort of thing. It’s just one of those places and it’s violent ... there’s going to be angry nutters.*



For these respondents, and many of the other men and women interviewed in these areas, their local communities were characterised by what was commonly perceived to be a ‘small town mentality’ where relative deprivation, a lack of resources and episodes of violence were all seen as regular features of life. However, whilst respondents in some of the poorer rural environments were predictably more vocal about the problems in their locality, expressions of frustration with regards to the negative aspects of living in a rural community were by no means confined to residents in those environments. Even in some of the more affluent parts of Suffolk Coastal and Stratford-on-Avon, many interviewees and focus groups participants were keen to draw attention to problems that they felt tended to be ‘swept under the carpet’ by an urban-biased national government and by local authorities preoccupied with promoting the tourist-friendly ‘positives’ of the countryside. In this respect, respondents’ concerns tended to mirror those associated with the ‘quieter crisis’ referred to above. Common to all of the areas studied in this research was the problem of a shortage of public transport which exacerbated feelings of isolation, and these feelings were compounded through the perceived absence of leisure services available to rural populations. Equally, many research participants felt that the closure of village halls and community centres had damaged people’s sense of community by removing places for residents to participate in social activities.

*There’s no community centres round by me at all, for people to get together and things, there’s nothing like that.*

Member of white youth focus group, north Warwickshire

This fragmentation of traditional notions of community was lamented by older participants in particular, and was felt by some to be a recent phenomenon, typified by a lack of willingness to engage in social activities such as street parties and local fetes. This practice of bemoaning the loss of community has been identified within the broader research literature on rurality, with Cloke *et al.* (1998), for instance, arguing that such perceptions are typical reactions to the processes of economic restructuring and societal recomposition that have been a feature of rural life since the 1970s (see also Yarwood, 2006; Milbourne, 1997). Other interviewees thought that the dearth of



local employment prospects had attributed to the loss of community feelings, as the practice of commuting had served to reduce opportunities for neighbours to interact with each other in ways that they would have done in previous generations.

*We are a commuter belt and are not working together like we used to do in the old days, where you had housing that was built specifically for a factory or local industries, and to get to work you either walked or you cycled. Now people drive an hour and a half in the morning, and an hour and a half in the evening, to and fro from work. Once they are home, they are very isolated.*

White male, north Warwickshire

Observations such as these would *prima facie* suggest a perceived decline in the sense of community felt by white rural households living in the case-study areas. In many respects these feelings of community bondage, certainly in a nostalgic *gemeinschaft*-like context, did appear to be lacking in rural spaces characterised by the recognised problems of under-resourcing and impersonality. However, as will become clear below, it transpired that the white rural households taking part in the research *did* feel that a sense of community existed in their local neighbourhoods, albeit a sense of community that was often predicated upon feelings of hostility towards and wariness of rural in-migrants, who, it was felt, did not understand the way of doing things in the countryside.

*People moving here from the city would be used to a different lifestyle. Where I live you're basically stuck in the middle of some fields ... You often hear locals saying, 'Oh those city people, moving down here and disrespecting our ways'.*

Member of white youth focus group, north Warwickshire

While some believed that traditional ideas of community life had regrettably declined as a result of processes of social change, others felt they were still alive but were



threatened by the presence of those viewed as ‘outsiders’. Such a viewpoint ties in with the arguments of authors such as Bottoms (1994), Lacey and Zedner (1995) and Peay (1999) who have suggested that feelings of community have little to do with geographical boundaries but instead gain strength through the perception of an outside threat which strengthens community bonds and makes group membership more appealing. Similarly, Wilkinson (1986) argues that while the kinds of all-embracing solidarity associated with *gemeinschaft*-like communities are unlikely to exist in all but the remotest types of society, people can nonetheless often feel an accentuated sense of community when confronted by ‘unusual’ events or conditions. This suspicion of the ‘other’ was common to each of the regions examined in this research, and appeared to reinforce the sense of community shared by rural ‘insiders’ seemingly lacking in all other respects. It is this relationship between rural ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ that this chapter now considers.

### *Perceptions of the ‘other’*

Alongside some of the difficulties associated with the ‘quieter crisis’ of rural life referred to above lies the problem of the rising rural population. In its report *The State of the Countryside 2020*, the Countryside Agency (2003) notes that the population of rural England rose almost three times faster than in urban parts of the country between 1981 and 2000, and suggests that this trend of counter-urbanisation (urban to rural patterns of migration) seems likely to continue as more and more people seek an escape from the cities in search of an improved quality of life, with factors such as the increased fears over future terrorist attacks, the limited capacity of cities and the development of extra housing in the countryside making the rural ever more attractive. As a result, many of the previously assumed distinctions between rural and urban environments may have diminished as the rural takes on more of the characteristics of the urban (Murdoch and Day, 1998: 186), much to chagrin of those established rural households eager to see their communities retain their sense of tradition. Certainly, over the years rural geographers and sociologists have observed an overriding sense of dissatisfaction amongst settled rural communities with regards to this pattern of in-migration. Forsythe (1980), for instance, refers to the problems faced by ‘urban refugees’, as she calls them, who can find themselves disorientated by having no prescribed place in the communities to which they move and rejected



through their attempts to familiarise themselves with a rural way of life of which they have little knowledge or experience. Similarly, authors such as Philo (1992), Cloke (1997), and Sibley (1997) have all highlighted the resentment that can be shown towards rural newcomers by those seeking to protect their community from ‘dangerous outsiders’.

Within the context of the present study, although the researcher had anticipated at least some degree of wariness amongst respondents when it came to asking about their reservations towards ‘outsiders’, those taking part in interviews and focus groups were in fact remarkably candid about their true feelings. The distrust with which incomers into rural towns and villages are greeted was openly acknowledged by many of the long-term rural residents interviewed in each of the case-study areas, some of whom stated that this was an inevitable legacy of traditional rural-urban cultural divides with established rural communities tending only to accept ‘their own’.

*They [established white communities] even refer to people who have come from London to Suffolk as foreigners!*

White female, Suffolk Coastal

Accordingly, a common view was that communities in rural towns and villages tend to be conservative, tight-knit and apprehensive of those perceived to be ‘outsiders’. Interestingly however, some research participants were at pains to stress that those from minority ethnic backgrounds who moved into such locations were not treated any differently from white incomers: as the quotation above suggests, any new face may attract suspicion from established residents. The following comments taken from respondents in Warwickshire help to illustrate this point.

*Generally populations, particularly in the rural part of the district, tend to be historically well established, everybody knows everybody else, and there is a lot of resentment to people coming in from outside the district of whatever kind. So irrespective of race, colour, creed, national origins,*



*wealth, background, any of that, there is quite a resentment against people from outside coming in.*

White male, Stratford-on-Avon

*Most of England, historically, has been suspicious of foreigners, and it also applies to people who are, you know, short sighted, blonde, long-legged, you know all that sort of thing.*

White male, north Warwickshire

The latter observation is especially instructive as it seems to suggest that this expression of suspicion towards outsiders is somehow ‘natural’ and linked to what this respondent sees as the national characteristics of the English. Other interviewees suggested that gaining acceptance into village communities was to all intents and purposes unattainable, even for someone raised within the wider local region, as anyone not born and brought up in the village itself was considered an outsider.

*These old, established communities – if you’ve come from the outside, like the next village, you’re never regarded as an insider. That is the nub of the problem.*

District councillor, Stratford-on-Avon

These intense feelings of localism, whereby people from even the neighbouring village are classed as outsiders who ‘don’t belong’, were especially evident in Suffolk Coastal. Younger respondents in particular would recount a succession of stories relating to their rivalries with, and perceived superiority over, people from neighbouring towns and villages, who despite being from communities based barely a few miles away were commonly referred to in ways that set them apart from respondents’ own cultural identities through the use of terms such as ‘dodgy’ or ‘inbred’. As Cloke *et al.* (1998: 136-139) explain, such localised constructs of identity can operate alongside the more familiar national-level and regional-level constructs to



influence the expectations and behaviours of rural communities, whereby perceived localised differences between groups of neighbouring peoples can create cultural divides within regions.

As the research developed it soon became clear that the term 'outsider' was being used in varying ways by respondents to describe a number of different categories of people. On one level, as we have seen through some of the illustrations provided above, for some rural residents anyone born and bred outside of their particular local village or town can be classed as an outsider, at least initially. However, for the most part the term was used as a device to distinguish 'ordinary rural folk' from those perceived to be culturally different. As we have seen in previous chapters, unfamiliarity with cultural differences can be a common feature within rural environments, and whilst ignorance of, or prejudice towards, such differences was by no means universal within the context of the present study, there was an overriding sense of aversion expressed towards a range of groups who do not fit within the conventional rural norm.

Crucially, this did not extend solely to people from a minority ethnic background. An assortment of derogatory remarks were made about gay people in each of the case-study areas, with one Suffolk-based focus group of young men going so far as to suggest that 'gays would get lynched moving to this area', while another group based at a north Warwickshire round table felt that gay people simply 'wouldn't want to come somewhere like this, they don't really belong'. Similarly, poor people, single mothers and those perceived to be on council benefits were commonly regarded as undesirable outsiders by respondents in some of the more affluent towns and villages, who tended to see such people in an entirely negative light, either as 'troublemakers' or as people whose 'face doesn't fit'. Even working women were castigated by several respondents, albeit only a few both male and female, who felt that married women in the rural should strive to uphold traditional gender divisions of labour by raising a family and maintaining a home rather than seeking employment of their own. These examples of 'othering' on the basis of such unfamiliar, or what may more often than not be perceived to be inferior, characteristics support the findings of previous rural-based research that has drawn attention to exclusionary practices based on factors like sexuality, poverty and gender (see, for example, Kirkey and Forsythe, 2001; Milbourne, 1997; and Agg and Phillips, 1998), and are illustrative of the ways



in which rural communities can marginalise individuals and groups whom they regard as ‘culturally incompetent’ (to coin Cloke *et al.*’s (1998) description) in a rural setting.

### *White perceptions of minority ethnic ‘others’*

The findings described above show that people living in rural towns and villages can be ostracised on the basis of a range of different characteristics and that ethnicity is by no means the sole dividing line separating rural ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. At the same time though, the research conducted with white communities in each of the case-study areas offered support to Agyeman and Spooner’s (1997: 204) contention that whilst ‘all newcomers to villages, both white and those of colour, can be made to feel unwelcome ... some newcomers are made to feel more unwelcome than others’. Whilst white incomers would sometimes encounter suspicion, perhaps either on account of their ‘newness’ or their cultural differences, the research suggested that exclusionary processes tend to operate much more harshly and more immediately against minority ethnic incomers (and indeed against those who have lived in the area for some time but are still to be accepted) because of their more visibly ‘different’ characteristics. During the course of interviews and focus groups it became apparent that white rural households may often act differently towards those from visible minority ethnic groups when compared with white in-migrants, as their appearance was something that many villagers were not familiar with.

*In certain communities people will actually stand and openly stare at people just because they’ve got a different skin colour. And I don’t think that’s in a particularly antagonistic way, I think it’s just because people don’t have an understanding because they’re not exposed.*

Police Chief Inspector, Stratford-on-Avon

This lack of knowledge of, and indeed in some cases fascination with, those who look unconventional from what is regarded as the ‘norm’ is a feature of rural life that some researchers have in fact referred to as being a positive aspect of the minority ethnic



rural experience: Robinson and Gardner (2004; 2006), for example, have noted the tendency of several minority ethnic interviewees in their studies of mid-Wales to welcome the increased attention directed towards them on the basis of their colour, and argue that some individuals see their 'exoticism' as a benefit of moving to the rural. While this may be true for some rural in-migrants, in the context of this particular study none of the minority ethnic research participants felt especially enamoured at being stared at during the course of the daily activities, and in many instances this show of unfamiliarity would lead on to manifestations of racist abuse and intimidation (as shall be discussed in the following chapter). This lack of awareness with regards to people of different ethnicities was also evident in the awkward language and behaviour displayed in interviews and focus groups by those who were seemingly well-meaning with their intentions, but who lacked the experience of interacting with minority ethnic groups.

*I always think back to the very first, umm, ethnic girl that I had in a class, and no-one knew how to refer to her. We were sort of saying 'Well, it's, er, you know the one I mean, the little girl in the red cardigan'.*

White female schoolteacher, north Warwickshire

Some interviewees appeared to be extremely uncomfortable when discussing issues of 'race', racism and ethnicity, and were reluctant to even give credence to different ethnic classifications. For instance, one elderly white interviewee refused to recognise the term 'black' or other descriptive terms for ethnicity, and to illustrate this he rather interestingly chose to describe himself not as white, but as:

*... golden brown with spots really, a bit like that.*

White male, north Warwickshire

When asked to explain the reasoning behind his reluctance to use more traditional forms of ethnic classification, this interviewee rationalised his rejection of various terms of reference by stating that he 'couldn't be perceived as a racist if [he] didn't



use words like black or white'. Whether this explanation was rooted in a fear of what he later went on to describe as the 'modern disease of political correctness' or arose from his concerns not to appear overtly racist on tape, his discomfort when talking about relationships with minority ethnic incomers was evident throughout the interview and the topic of discussion had to be moved swiftly onto 'safer' territory. For the most part though, the white research participants were extremely open, not only when it came to acknowledging their lack of understanding of religious and ethnic diversity, but also when referring unashamedly to the prejudices that some of them had towards members of minority ethnic communities. Some of the focus groups held in Suffolk Coastal, each of which consisted of sets of friends born and brought up in those particular towns and villages, were especially instructive in providing insights into the way in which minority ethnic groups are regarded by members of established white communities. Even before the issue of different ethnic groups living in rural Suffolk had been raised with participants, a host of xenophobic comments based on biological, cultural and other forms of prejudice were made during the course of general conversation.

*Asians don't play football do they? They'll open a corner shop and they're relatively good at that.*

*I remember seeing on TV a guy from Africa who took up running when he was 28 and overweight. He took up running and won the New York marathon something like three years later. They were tracing it back through his ancestors and it was because his ancestors used to run after wildlife. It was genetic, it came through the genes, and that's why they have all the good runners.*

Although most of the participants referred to themselves as 'open-minded' and having 'nothing against coloured people', comments such as those above reflect the racialised attitudes and stereotypes that can be present within established white communities unfamiliar with cultural difference. It soon transpired that the majority of the participants resented, and in some ways feared, the presence of minority ethnic



communities living and working in rural Suffolk, and all were agreed that such a view was commonplace throughout rural communities.

*The majority [of local people] don't like strangers, do they? If they see a black person they ignore them. It's true – people are set in their ways here.*

*They [black people] are gonna stick out like a sore thumb aren't they? If you've grown up with white people and suddenly there's black or Asian people then you're gonna be a bit wary, aren't you?*

*I wouldn't necessarily approach an ethnic minority to talk to.*

Respondents throughout each of the case-study areas showed a similar degree of wariness towards the arrival of ethnic minorities in their local area. Interestingly one of the focus groups in east Northamptonshire spent a considerable amount of time discussing how their suspicion of minority ethnic groups, and in essence anyone looking ostensibly Asian, had palpably increased following the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 (as illustrated in the comments from participants quoted below), highlighting the impact that global events can have even in the more isolated, remote pockets of the rural (see, for example, Parris, 2005). As we have seen from the findings discussed thus far, fear of the unknown can clearly be a powerful influence within rural communities, and the very slim probability of an English rural town or village being the scene for a major terrorist incident was not enough to persuade some research participants that their community was not at risk from an act of Islamic terrorism. Moreover, news stories over recent years indicate that these types of fear in the rural are not confined merely to a suspicion of people from Asian communities: one reported incident in the county of Norfolk in 2004, for example, involved a white, non-Muslim male being forced to flee his home town on account of the Islamophobic abuse he received for supposedly looking like a 'terrorist' by virtue of the fact that he sported a beard (Ashworth, 2004).



*I'd say there's probably more antipathy towards Islam [since September 11], I think that's inevitable, but people worry.*

*If there was suddenly an Iranian or Islamic Centre, loads of guys lurking around on the streets looking menacing and selling drugs or preaching to a crowd at the same time outside the front doorstep, I think these people are more likely to cause me trouble than people born and bred here, do you know what I mean? But to be honest with you, we only really have shopkeepers here.*

This last comment was illustrative of the way in which respondents tended to reproduce what tended to be culturally essentialist representations of Asians within descriptions of their status within rural society. Whilst some of the younger respondents in each of the case study areas expressed some level of affinity with people from black communities on the basis of what was perceived to be their shared norms and values – indeed, several stressed that they counted black people as ‘one of us’ and had black friends – a much greater sense of trepidation seemed to surround the position of Asians on account of their more apparent cultural differences. Very few positive remarks were made about this particular set of minority ethnic groups, and where on the face of it some level of praise was afforded to the practices of Asian communities, whether it be in relation to their perceived hard working values, tendency to stick together or their firm belief systems, there appeared to be some coded criticism associated with the positive comments whereby these stereotypical depictions of their cultural differences served to reinforce the ‘othered’ status of Asians. This ties in with the suggestions of Tyler (2004), who found in her ethnographic study of white discourses on ‘race’ in a former Midlands mining town that essentialised stereotyping of Asian in-migrants was commonplace amongst members of the local communities whose accounts centred around recurring constructions of pre-determined and immovable differences between whites and Asians. This was very much the case within the present study, where respondents’ discussions of Asian people were almost entirely based upon formulaic lines of racialised thinking, and were sometimes tinged with overtly racist language.



*I don't know whether it's pandering to stereotypes but I would say on a Friday or Saturday night you hardly ever see any Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indians out. Maybe that's to do with lifestyles ... Is it the poor sad white man that spends all his money on booze and fags? From what I grasp, Muslims don't drink alcohol, maybe it's something to do with that.*

*The majority of, let's say, the Asian population, I think the vast majority breed amongst themselves.*

It should be noted that comments such as these appear at face value to be tinged with some degree of ambiguity. Even though their comments were based prominently upon racialised stereotypes, at one level it seemed as though these focus group participants in east Northamptonshire were in some ways grudgingly envious of the qualities that they were associating with Asian communities: namely what they saw as Asians' reluctance to fritter money on socialising, alcohol consumption and cigarettes, and their tendency to have relationships, or to raise families, with people from the same ethnic or religious background. When conceived in such a manner, it would seem that, superficially at least, such comments were racialised in a way that appears positive and that the insider-outsider distinction is not simply fixed in a binary hierarchical manner: one of those participants, for instance, claimed that he would have been a far richer man if he had been Asian because he would not have spent money on cigarettes and alcohol. Nevertheless, as suggested above and in line with Tyler's (2004) findings, these types of seemingly positive comments were mostly qualified with criticisms, either coded or explicit, based around recurring constructions of racialised differences, and whilst some of these differences may not have been seen in an exclusively negative light by white research participants, the presence of Asian people, and indeed minority ethnic households more broadly, was generally perceived to be an unwelcome development in each of the rural case study areas.

Further interviews and focus groups with white households in rural Suffolk offered additional support for the contention that feelings of hostility and resentment towards minority ethnic communities can be widespread amongst members of established



rural communities. For example, one interviewee spoke extensively of the difficulties faced by his sister during her relationship with an African Caribbean man when they both lived in a Suffolk coastal town. As a couple and as individuals they were often victims of intimidatory behaviour, most commonly regular verbal abuse and persistent staring during the course of their relationship, to the extent that neither felt comfortable walking together in the town. Numerous other illustrations of racist attitudes were provided, several of which can be seen below.

*I went to a pub once to watch the footy on Sky with a friend...and there was one bloke in there making the most overtly racist comments I've ever had to hear in my life. I think from memory he was a Liverpool fan, but basically he was a 'white' fan and he hated any blacks. Whenever a black player touched the ball, even a Liverpool player like Phil Babb or someone, he'd shout at the top of his voice: 'Fucking blacks, I can't entertain them, I can't entertain them'. What amazes me, and disappoints me, was the nodding that was going on.*

*When I was working in a sales room ... there was one bloke in his late fifties who had never been abroad in his life, very rarely went out of [his town]. He would get so excited if he saw a coloured person. I remember one occasion where a black woman walked into the sales room and he shouted, 'Dave, Dave look at that, look at that, you don't see many as black as that!' He got really excited about it... Another guy who I worked with who was also in his late fifties, he was open about his feelings towards minorities. 'I don't like blacks, they're not like me, they're not one of us'. He wouldn't have anything to do with them, he'd get me to serve them.*

Generally, a common perception shared by interviewees in rural Suffolk was that ethnic minorities did not form part of the established rural community structure and that prejudice towards them was rife, particularly amongst the older members of the community who, it was felt, 'like what they say and don't like what they don't know'. Similar suggestions were made by white respondents in villages and towns across



Northamptonshire, where it was felt that people from older generations were much more likely to hold racist beliefs than those of a younger age, who may at least have had some, albeit limited, contact with ethnic minorities at some stage of their lives.

*My dad had a cricket team, and as the years went on a lot of people left and were replaced by Asians. So they were playing on a sort of 50:50 split and by the end of it there was a 70:30 Asian to white split and the old timers didn't like that. I think they were more of the view that out of a team of eleven, maybe three can be Asian, black, whatever, but when there's a majority then there's something wrong. That's a pretty good example basically of village society really. You start to get uproar, I mean people didn't want to carry on [playing cricket].*

*If I nipped over to home and took a black girlfriend to my mum's, she [girlfriend] could be a lovely girl, but she [mother] would immediately be 'Hang on, what the fuck, get her out!!'*

*There was an Indian salesmen who came round and knocked at my gran's door and she sent my dad up to his room because she was like, 'God, you can't see that man'. That's how it was for him growing up.*

### ***Demonised 'others' and rural folk-devils***

Although white interviewees and focus group participants generally displayed a greater sense of unease over the presence of Asian households when compared to other minority ethnic groups in the rural, it is fair to say that most respondents tended by and large not to use overtly racist language when describing their attitudes towards ethnic minorities, as if sensitive to the fact that such language was unacceptable in contemporary society. However this 'guardedness', particularly evident in conversations about black or Asian populations, often seemed to diminish when respondents were discussing Travelling communities or asylum seekers, who appeared in many ways to be seen as 'acceptable' targets for abuse. The research



revealed a prevalence of stereotypes and preconceptions about Travellers, for example, that seemed to be based upon little more than hearsay or ‘accepted wisdom’, as the following comments from respondents in south Warwickshire and coastal Suffolk indicate.

*They used to hang around work and stuff and come in at night and nick all the computers. They’d planned the whole thing. There was quite a big problem with that.*

*They come round and chop your trees down. They’ll come round and offer to do a little bit of work, dig up some holes in your driveway, they’ll offer to fill ‘em in. If you say ‘OK then’ then they’ll come round, about twenty of them will turn up with a load of tarmac, and they’ll do the whole thing and they’ll demand about £3,000. If they don’t get it they’ll say ‘We know where you live and we’ll come round and have you and your family’. Never let a gypsy do any work for you.*

*We’re pretty tolerant here ... Obviously when you get a group of Travellers coming in the village, then you have to be careful about locking the back door.*

These kinds of sentiments were regularly expressed by respondents in each case-study area during conversations about Gypsy and New Age Travellers, and are symptomatic of the process of vilification that operates against Traveller communities within rural spaces (see, *inter alia*, Connolly, 2006; James, 2006; Hester, 1999; Acton, 1997). Research has highlighted the antipathy that sedantry communities have towards the unconventional and seemingly nomadic practices of the Travelling communities, a stance that has been intensified by the continued politicisation of Traveller identities, alarmist media narratives surrounding the legitimacy, or otherwise, of Gypsy and Traveller encampments, and ensuing anti-Traveller protests by rural communities opposed to their presence (Hinsliff, 2005; Barkham, 2004; Carter, 2003).



Consequently, the fact that prejudiced opinions towards these groups were expressed by participants within the present study is not altogether surprising, although the manner in which inflammatory and quite openly racist language was used so liberally in references to Traveller communities in nearly all of the various focus groups and interviews was revealing in itself. However, the particularly interesting feature of this racialised discourse lay in the way in which respondents rationalised their expressions of resentment. Whilst the vast majority of respondents were relatively honest in acknowledging that many of the comments that they made about the more recognised minority ethnic groups, such as African Caribbean or Asian communities, could be construed as racist, most were agreed in believing that their prejudices against Travellers were merely expressions of opinion or fact and not examples of racist beliefs. As one interviewee in Northamptonshire put it, when discussing her attitudes towards Travellers, ‘they’re white so how can that be racist?’

Distinctions between desirable and undesirable forms of whiteness (Neal, 2002) and these ideas of ‘acceptable prejudice’ were also evident in discussions about eastern European refugees and in particular asylum seekers living in the rural. Like Travellers, asylum seekers have been subjected to oppressive governmental policies as well as hostile, and at times overtly racist national press coverage for some years now, and these factors can have had a profound impact upon how they are perceived by rural communities whose opinions can often be based more on rumour and scaremongering than anything else, a fact acknowledged by several research participants.

*They [local residents] are quite hostile to asylum seekers but they’re taking most of their information from television and the newspapers, they’ve not actually had any experience of it at all ... people are always concerned about them and assume that any minute we’re going to be invaded by them.*

District councillor, Stratford-on-Avon

*There was a lot of scaremongering going around that there was going to be rapists and murderers moving in and all kinds.*



*My neighbour approached me the other week and he said 'Is it true that they are knocking down the school and building houses for asylum seekers?' and I said 'Mo, where have you heard that?' I mean you know how these rumours start, somebody says something and before you know it everyone believes it.*

Focus group participants, north Warwickshire

Interestingly, there did appear to be subtle but tangible differences in the way in which asylum seekers were perceived by respondents in the different case study areas. Although respondents' comments about this group were exclusively negative in their nature across all of the various towns and villages, it did appear that asylum seekers were seen as less of a direct 'problem' by communities within Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. In these counties, asylum seekers housed in nearby towns and villages were unsurprisingly perceived by those passing comment on the issue as 'undesirable' or as 'scroungers', but respondents rarely felt that their local communities were in any way at risk to the 'threat' posed by this unwanted group. Instead, people's observations on asylum tended to centre around the broader impact of the perceived influx of asylum seekers upon the country at large, and where respondents did express a more personalised opinion based upon their own experiences, these opinions tended to be expressed in relatively moderate terms. In Suffolk Coastal, however, respondents tended to present much more hostile accounts of asylum seekers and gave the impression of feeling considerably more threatened by their presence than those research participants living in the more central areas of the country. This resonates with the suggestions of Grillo (2005) whose research on asylum seeker protests on the English south coast highlights the high levels of anti-asylum and anti-immigration sentiment that exists amongst coastal communities distanced both geographically and emotionally from the diversity of larger towns and cities (see also Hubbard, 2005). Certainly, respondents in Suffolk showed little hesitation in criticising the arrival of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants within their local areas, and like their counterparts in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire they tended to base their prejudices against these groups on stereotypes derived from media reports and local rumour-mongering.



*There's an area which I've called 'Asylum Seekers Alley' because they're everywhere ... The general perception is scabbing off the state. I would say that was pretty widespread.*

*There's a feeling that there's too many of them [asylum seekers], particularly in places like here ... Someone I work with told me that she'd written to her MP last week telling him how disgraceful she thought it was. I said to her, 'Do you really feel that strongly about it?' and she said 'Yes I do, I think it's a disgrace. Asylum seekers are sponging off our NHS, our Education Service, our transport system'.*

*They [asylum seekers] escaped persecution when they got to France, why are they trying to swim across here? Why do we have to have them? Why don't they stay in France – it can't be that fucking bad, can it?*

In conjunction with the factor of geographical isolation, another possible explanation behind the pronounced fear of asylum that seemed to exist within Suffolk's coastal towns and villages relates to the influence of the British National Party (BNP). As discussed earlier in Chapter One, the BNP has launched a concerted campaign on 'race', immigration and asylum issues in rural England during recent years designed to tap into the concerns of white rural voters by emphasising the preservation of what it sees as the 'traditional' whiteness of the rural landscape, and at the time of the research the Party was in the process of mounting a high-profile operation in areas of Suffolk Coastal<sup>19</sup>. While none of the research participants in Suffolk claimed to be a supporter of the BNP, a number of the younger male respondents did acknowledge the attraction of a party that, in their words, 'doesn't go for political correctness' and 'tells it like it is'. Whilst the BNP appeared to have publicised itself quite prominently in several of Suffolk's towns and villages through the use of poster campaigns and leafleting, its presence was notably lower in the case-study areas within Warwickshire

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<sup>19</sup> The growing influence of the BNP in Suffolk was highlighted by its self-proclaimed victory of sorts in the Yoxford by-election of 2004, a Suffolk Coastal District Council contest, where despite finishing behind the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties the BNP won 15 per cent of the overall vote and almost twice as many votes as the Labour Party (Dines, 2004).



and Northamptonshire. Throughout the interviews and focus groups conducted with white rural residents in those counties there were no participants who felt that the party had gained any kind of a foothold or influence in the two research areas, and perhaps unsurprisingly nobody admitted to actually supporting the party. Nevertheless, there were a small number of participants in north and south Warwickshire who believed that the BNP had been active locally or had been producing some effective campaigning material, as indicated in the quotations below.

*What the BNP were saying was that this country needs to sort itself out first before letting asylum seekers in. Their leaflet was saying that it is nothing to do with race or ethnic stuff. How they worded it, they had a good point.*

Member of white youth focus group, north Warwickshire

*We know of the BNP activity in Stratford and Kenilworth, it's not a surprise there has been activity in those places because those places are affluent, predominantly white, they are going to be conservative, that is the way they are going to be.*

Community relations officer, Warwickshire Police

Moreover, despite respondents' outward lack of affiliation to the BNP, as we have seen many of the sentiments expressed in each case-study area about asylum seekers, Asian communities and other minority ethnic groups resonate with the racialised rhetoric of the BNP, and this underlines the appeal of this emotive discourse to those nostalgic for a more 'typically English' rural.

*I do believe that if you are in England, you have to respect our laws. You know, if you want to go about changing our laws then maybe you ought to go back to where you came, where what you do is the norm. I'm quite happy being English. And that's probably quite a widely held viewpoint here.*

White male, north Warwickshire



Many of the views cited in the discussion thus far also mirror the language of the BNP, which may be indicative of its influence even in areas where the party is without a strong visible presence. For instance, the research findings have pointed to a general expectation amongst some sections of white communities that minority ethnic households assimilate into local white customs and norms of behaviour, and this suggests that the customs of rural ‘outsiders’ are commonly conceived as being at odds with ways of life in the countryside. Given the resonance of these attitudes with the views of the BNP, it is in some ways surprising that the party has not been more successful in electoral terms within rural environments such as the case study areas. At one level though its relative lack of electoral success is unremarkable given that the BNP is widely considered to be a single-issue party: while people’s attitudes towards issues of ‘race’ and identity are obviously a key focus of this thesis, there may equally be a range of other concerns regarded as being beyond the natural domain of the BNP that affect rural communities’ voting patterns. Moreover, despite not gaining as many votes as may have been expected it could be argued that the BNP did wield considerable influence on the political landscape, as in all likelihood the anti-immigration stance and ‘tough on asylum’ policies developed by mainstream political parties in response to the BNP threat (see McGhee, 2005) may have been sufficient to ensure that the majority of voters were not lured away by that party. Certainly, the ‘anti-outsider’ sentiments expressed by many of the research participants referred to above do chime with those kinds of policies, and, as we have seen, seem to be rooted in the intense feelings of localism that shape boundaries of acceptance in the rural. This distrust of difference can manifest itself in expressions of hostility towards, and as we shall see harassment of, incomers, and especially those from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

### *The influence of ‘professional’ characteristics and social class*

Whilst the opinions expressed towards Traveller communities and asylum seekers were universally condemnatory across each of the sites of enquiry, the research also highlighted that certain groups of outsiders could be regarded in a more favourable light if they were seen to possess some of the more positive characteristics associated

with the conventional norms of rural society. This was especially evident in some of the more affluent rural case-study areas, and notably in parts of Stratford-upon-Avon where it seemed that minority ethnic rural households with a seemingly high-status professional occupation were more likely to gain acceptance into certain social circles, as the interviewees below observed.

*Most people from ethnic minority backgrounds in Stratford are professional people: they have got the money, they can buy the houses and they get accepted because they are of the same social standard, the same sort of education, so they are accepted.*

Community relations officer, Warwickshire Constabulary

*The ethnic minorities we have got are well-educated professionals, therefore they're not perceived as spongers on the state or anything like that. They're really part of the community.*

District councillor, Stratford-on-Avon

*I think because of the position my dad is in at the hospital, people sort of know him and he does quite a lot in the community, so we're ok.*

Female of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

As these comments suggest, boundaries of acceptance can vary for some minority ethnic incomers depending on their perceived class status or occupation. In particular those employed in medical, legal or teaching professions tended to be singled out by white research participants as 'acceptable' incomers, although tellingly it seemed as though this acceptance was reliant upon the values and norms of minority ethnic residents being compliant with those of white middle-class communities, something that was especially evident in the Stratford district. In a number of cases it appeared that as long as minority ethnic households conformed to certain standards of behaviour that were expected of them by white rural dwellers, and did not 'rock the boat', then they may be tolerated or even approved of within the mainstream



community. As we shall see later, some of the minority ethnic research participants in the more favoured occupations felt that they were accepted as part of the local community, and several criticised those ethnic minorities who do feel excluded in the rural for not working hard enough or doing enough to fit in with the values of conventional rural society. Indeed, this kind of sentiment resonates with the suggestions of Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, Britain's self-proclaimed 'only black farmer', whose much-publicised criticisms of what he sees as the particularly urban problem of political correctness, and calls for Britain's minority ethnic communities to 'break out from their urban ghettos', led to the commissioning of a Channel Four documentary devoted to his rural scholarship programme for minority ethnic youngsters from an inner-city background (Emmanuel-Jones, 2005; Byrnes, 2005).

Being viewed as a 'professional', or as 'middle class', can certainly be beneficial to minority ethnic incomers who might otherwise be described in similar terms to those used by respondents referred to above when alluding to what they perceived to be some of the more undesirable characteristics associated with ethnic minorities. However, as Tyler (2006: 136) points out, even though material wealth and the adoption of middle-class norms can acquire a sense of 'cultural capital' for minority ethnic incomers within the rural, this is not necessarily enough to 'substitute for a perceived lack of the tacit cultural knowledge about how to fit into the social networks of community life'. For Tyler, racialised discourses of acceptance reinforced immutable cultural differences between the white and Asian residents in her Leicestershire-based study, to the extent where even ostensibly positive comments from white people relating to Asians' high-status professions, choice of expensive cars and close-knit family-orientation were tinged with culturalist overtones acting as markers of difference. This also seemed to be the case in the present study.

*As long as you don't interfere in the local white community, as long as you don't cook your curries too spicy and it creates a bit of a smell inside the village then you are OK. But at the end of the day you and I know that there is still that 'them and us': you [the ethnic minority] will never be one of the 'us'.*

White male, north Warwickshire

Although white research participants generally spoke more favourably about those ethnic minorities with greater ‘cultural capital’, these discussions still had overtones of a ‘them and us’ mentality to them with ethnicity operating as an overarching dividing line in assessments of belonging, irrespective of any other desirable attributes those minorities might have. While their presence in the rural may on the face of it be more readily accepted or legitimised on their basis of their perceived respectability, these minority ethnic households were rarely described in ways that would suggest that they had attained true ‘insider’ status (Sibley, 1997), and as the above quotation suggests, there remains an unbridgeable gap between white and minority ethnic households that ultimately shapes this particular insider/outsider relationship. Having considered the white ‘insider’ perspective, this chapter now turns to examine minority ethnic ‘outsider’ households’ feelings of belonging within rural communities.

## **Minority ethnic ‘outsider’ perceptions**

### ***Sense of community and belonging***

During the course of the research undertaken with minority ethnic households across each of the various case-study areas, respondents tended to paint a predominantly morose picture of their experiences in the rural and of their relationships with members of their local town or village. Having said that, their accounts of rural life were by no means exclusively negative, and the series of interviews and focus groups were particularly instructive in bringing to light some of the perceived advantages of rural life. As noted previously, research on these issues can commonly fall into the trap of presenting a distorted version of rurality which depicts all minority ethnic incomers as having an entirely negative sense of community and belonging (see Robinson and Gardner, 2004; 2006) but such depictions tend to homogenise (often unwittingly) some people’s lived realities. In east Northamptonshire, for instance, several minority ethnic interviewees were keen to emphasise what they saw as the positive elements of living in that part of the county, namely the tranquil and pleasant surroundings in which they lived: certainly, for these individuals, the relative calm of rural Northamptonshire, compared with the perceived commotion of the cities from which they had moved, was a feature that was much appreciated. For those living in



Wellingborough town, the relatively high presence of minority ethnic groups in that area in comparison to other parts of the county was seen by some to be a factor that had helped them to feel part of a community, though several respondents still felt that steps needed to be taken to improve levels of acceptance and integration.

*In Wellingborough I find that it is multi-racial in a positive way and in a negative way, because in my place of work we have so many youngsters that hang around from an Asian background, black background, white background, but they still end up sticking in their different groups. It's still quite separated.*

Peruvian female, Wellingborough

*I wouldn't say there's a strong sense of community, but I can say at the moment there are no 'no-go zones' for anybody.*

African Caribbean male, Wellingborough

Aside from in Wellingborough, none of the research participants recounted an especially high minority ethnic presence in any of their local towns and villages. However, as Robinson and Gardner (2004) argue, some minority ethnic rural residents may in fact be more comfortable with feeling as though they visibly 'stand out' from the majority white population and may even welcome the 'exoticism' of their minority status. Whilst no-one in this study went as far as that, some did state that their visible and cultural differences rarely caused them a problem and that these differences did not affect their feelings of attachment to, or sense of community within, their local towns or villages, as the quotations below taken from respondents in north Warwickshire reveal.

*You feel far less congested here, it gives you a greater sense of community I suppose because of the smallness of the place, everyone knows everyone. There's a good sense of community.*

Indian male, north Warwickshire

*I didn't really notice it [being one of only two minority ethnic families in the town] to be honest for the majority of the time. I mean it was rarely pointed out and it rarely caused a problem.*

African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

*Things are good, I think because of the close ties that we have got with Birmingham, that might help with acceptance. There are certainly no specific key things in place to make me say 'Oh that's the reason why the area is so accepting' or anything like that, you know, but proximity to Birmingham must be a bit of a factor cos Birmingham is said to have quite good race relations because of their large communities.*

Male of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

The point made by this last interviewee relating to the proximity of his local town to the nearby city of Birmingham was echoed by a number of respondents living in Warwickshire. Similar arguments were presented by minority ethnic households in parts of Northamptonshire, where it was felt that the relative closeness of the more multicultural environments of Northampton, Nuneaton and (slightly further afield) Leicester had helped to foster some appreciation of diversity within the more remote rural areas of the county. That similar assertions were not forthcoming from interviewees in Suffolk Coastal is not altogether surprising: whilst Ipswich has a relatively diverse population in comparison to the rest of the county (see Chapter Three), the geographical isolation of Suffolk's coastal communities from major towns and cities was a factor mentioned both by white and minority ethnic respondents, and this is therefore likely to have impacted upon interviewees' sense of proximity to more multicultural environments.

However, the very fact that interviewees, albeit a minority, cited positive aspects about their sense of rural community, whether because the appreciation of diversity associated with a nearby town or city had spread to their local area or because they actually enjoyed living within a small, close-knit community, is a point worth noting



as it helps us to recognise that minority ethnic households will all have their own distinct individual experiences. Consequently, as Robinson and Gardner (2004) quite rightly assert, there is a need to guard against unwittingly stereotyping those households by assuming commonalities, whether positive or negative, in their lived experience of community attachment. That said, it is true to say that the majority of minority ethnic research participants in this study gave a more negative portrayal of their sense of belonging to their local community. In particular, a significant proportion spoke of the ‘cold’ reception that they received from white rural dwellers when they first moved into towns and villages across all three counties. Many initially felt very unwelcome, whilst some, as the quotation shows below, proactively tried to engage with their new neighbours, often with little or no success.

*When we arrived I wanted to go into the community and mix with people so I sent cards round to the neighbours saying that I am here, if you would like to come and visit us you'd be very welcome. Only one neighbour turned up.*

Iranian female, north Warwickshire

Similar kinds of experience were recounted across each of the case study areas, where many minority ethnic respondents conveyed a general sense of disillusionment with the way in which they had been ‘cold shouldered’ by neighbours and local residents, both initially and even after they had lived in their local area for some time. In some of the more remote parts of Suffolk, for instance, respondents’ sense of geographical isolation seemed in some ways to be compounded by their perceived social isolation from fellow members of their local town or village, thereby reinforcing their perceived outsider status.

*This family that we live next to would literally stand in front of the house talking to anybody that would walk by in the village and just constantly point towards our house, trying to instigate the whole village.*

White American female, Suffolk Coastal

*In general people in Suffolk do not seem friendly or approachable. For example, when we first moved out here, it was a cold snowy morning and our car wouldn't start so we had to push the car. There were people looking out the windows: nobody said, 'Can we give you a tow?' or anything. They just stood there and watched.*

Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

*My children can walk in Forest Heath and walk in Bury [St Edmunds], and in Bury they'll say hello. Nobody will say hello to any of them here, nobody.*

Pakistani Muslim female, Suffolk Coastal

As this last comment illustrates, some interviewees were keen to stress that the difficulties faced by minority ethnic communities living in the coastal district of Suffolk were worse than those faced by their counterparts in other parts of the county. This resonates with the suggestions of de Lima (2001) whose study of the Scottish Highlands highlighted that cultural and social isolation can be particularly problematic in geographically remote communities. For those interviewees living in the more remote villages and towns in Suffolk, the sheer distance from more major towns and cities reinforced rural communities' sense of attachment to their local area but at the same time exacerbated their own sense of alienation from the mainstream community, as local residents were more likely to be wary of those perceived to be an outsider, particularly those with more obviously different characteristics whether they be skin colour, accent or religious customs. However, the research highlighted that this was by no means a problem particular to Suffolk Coastal, as the factors cited by respondents as contributing to their perceived sense of detachment from the local communities in Suffolk Coastal – most commonly a general lack of 'friendliness', the paucity of fellow minority ethnic families, and ignorance or intolerance of cultural practices – were all mentioned as common problems faced by rural minority ethnic households living in other rural case study areas.



Indeed, concern about the absence of community spirit was commonplace among interviewees in east Northamptonshire and to a lesser extent Wellingborough, although as discussed above, several people did argue that a greater sense of community could be felt in Wellingborough as a result of the larger minority ethnic presence there. The comments that follow are illustrative of the types of statements made by interviewees in Northamptonshire, and as the third and fourth quotees suggest, feelings of alienation from their local communities were often attributed to the absence of visible minority ethnic groups living in the more rural parts of the county.

*I've lived in this area twenty years but I've never been happy here. In this house I don't feel safe, I really don't ... There just doesn't seem to be any community spirit.*

White British female with grandson of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

*There's no community spirit at all, people keep themselves to themselves.*

Schoolgirl of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire

*We moved to Wollaston because we loved the house when we saw it, but we were slightly hesitant because obviously moving to a village you are going to stand out a bit more. I find in some villages you go in and it's almost as though they've never seen a black person.*

African Caribbean female, east Northamptonshire

*I'm looked at like I'm a prostitute, I'm always getting funny looks ... I don't know of any other black people in this village. Actually I don't know one other black person round here whatsoever.*

Female of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire

As we can see, minority ethnic households can often associate what they see as an absence of community spirit with the low numbers of ethnic minorities living outside of urban areas, and this in turn is felt to impact upon the quality of relationships between rural minority ethnic groups and established white communities. Many interviewees felt that they lacked a true sense of belonging to their local community, arguing simply that their ‘face didn’t fit’ within the context of their immediate surroundings. This perception may have arisen from a number of factors, such as their experiences of hostility from neighbours or a lack of involvement with local organisations, and in a similar manner to Suffolk Coastal a number of stories were recounted during the course of discussions with minority ethnic households across Northamptonshire detailing the ways in which respondents had felt shunned, and at times deliberately ostracised, by local residents. Despite making concerted efforts to form part of the local community, which tended to include, for example, engaging neighbours in conversation and visiting the local pubs, interviewees’ attempts at integration had generally proved unsuccessful, thereby leading to suggestions that established rural communities tend only to accept ‘their own’. As discussed above, in many ways this process of marginalisation is equally applicable to any ‘outsider’ or incomer, but at the same time is arguably more pronounced for minority ethnic incomers on account of their more identifiable differences that set them apart immediately from the rural norm.

*It’s a cliquey town. I would go up the pub on my own and they’d make it clear that I’m not welcome. You walk through the door and the whole pub stares and looks at you ... Even the mums stick together: I used to go to playschool but not one of them mothers would speak to me, I’d just get blanked.*

*All I know is there are white people who’ve been born and bred here, they will never leave this village and they don’t intend to ever leave this village. These types of people are narrow-minded and they don’t want other people coming in.*

Female of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire



Similar suggestions were made too in north and south Warwickshire, and as the conversations developed with households across each of the three counties it soon became apparent that the alleged ‘wariness’ of outsiders exhibited (and indeed sometimes lauded) by white residents in rural and isolated settings can degenerate into distressing cases of abuse and harassment. This will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter. Interestingly though, what seems evident from many of the conversations with minority ethnic research participants is that the boundaries of acceptance within rural communities are drawn by their white populations, who are then free to redraw them at any given point in time. Accordingly, whether minority ethnic families ‘belong’ to rural villages and towns may be largely or wholly dependent upon the attitudes of white residents: it is very much a ‘one-way street’, to use the words of one interviewee. Minority ethnic households are expected to conform to patterns of village life and to subsume themselves into white rural cultures, as one white focus group participant, probably unwittingly, confirmed:

*I think we make people who want to join in very welcome.*

Member of white focus group, north Warwickshire

As was the case in rural Suffolk and Northamptonshire, the majority of minority ethnic research participants in north and south Warwickshire did feel uncomfortable in their surroundings and often felt excluded from traditional village life. Among the reasons put forward to explain these feelings of exclusion was a perception that much of the basis for rural community activity was centred around the church (which is quite clearly exclusionary for those from religions other than the Church of England); or that they were not made to feel welcome if they made efforts to join in with locally-based social activities or organisations (which could include, for instance, the local golf or bridge club, or reading groups); or that a large degree of social interaction took place in the local pub (which is especially problematic for those from non-drinking backgrounds or faiths). As one interviewee explained, this can be something of a ‘catch 22’ situation.

*It's bad that you have to go to the pub in order to mingle with the locals. By the same token if you don't, they are going to think you are strange and different and not want to talk to you anyway.*

*In one village nearby there is this really nice pub that does good food, and I remember me and my dad walked in once and it was, 'Oh there are Asian people in our pub, we don't serve curry here. Surely they don't want to eat white food here?'*

Female of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

### *Minority ethnic perceptions of 'otherness' and outsider status*

Comments such as the one above are illustrative of the dividing lines that seem to close off some forms of everyday rural life to minority ethnic households. We have seen already how these households can often feel alienated from other local residents and marginalised from what they perceive to be mainstream community activities, and countless other examples were provided by minority ethnic households when relating their experiences of rurality to the researcher. As was evident from the earlier part of this chapter, the distrust and suspicion with which these minority ethnic 'outsiders' feel they are greeted echoes the sentiments expressed by many of the white research participants, and this serves to underline the existence of what appears for many, though as we have seen not all, to be a barely penetrable 'insider-outsider' relationship in the rural.

A number of explanations were put forward by minority ethnic research participants to account for this state of affairs. Many believed that expressions of resentment or forms of exclusionary behaviour were symptomatic of feelings of insecurity amongst sections of rural white populations who feel threatened by incomers, and especially by those who may look different from what they regard as the 'norm' or have different religious or cultural practices.

*They feel or perceive other people as a threat and that is the easiest way for them to react, easiest way to gather the support of people around them.*



*It is an easy element for them to fire up, it is one of the things they can find to hide their own inadequacies, their insecurities.*

Indian male, north Warwickshire

*Stratford is an isolated area, we are isolated. Locals here don't like Brummie people coming here, don't like Coventry people coming here to destroy our town. 'They're coming here, destroying our town', that's what they [the locals] are saying. That's what I see.*

Egyptian male, Stratford-on-Avon

Whether over a period of time minority ethnic rural households can overcome the wariness with which they are met is open to debate, although the experience of the majority of research participants in this study suggests that it may be a very difficult task. As discussed earlier, *any* newcomer to rural towns and villages, irrespective of ethnicity, could potentially be classified as an outsider as a result of their newness to the area and local residents' fear of the 'stranger'. At the same time though, whilst white incomers may, after a length of time, feel that they have become part of their local communities (perhaps due to the fact that they can more easily participate in 'traditional' rural village activities), for minority ethnic incomers this process of gaining acceptance can be much more problematic. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties some felt that being accepted was by no means unattainable. One interviewee felt that it was a case of breaking down barriers by making white people feel more comfortable with those with unfamiliar or different characteristics.

*People get used to you, they meet you and talk to you and they get friendly, it is only scaredness you see. When the people are scared of each other, they don't talk to each other and things are a bit difficult.*

Indian male, north Warwickshire

For another Indian interviewee in a neighbouring village, having a good standard of spoken English was the key to helping minority ethnic residents establish

relationships with members of the local communities. As previous research has highlighted (see, for example, Magne, 2003) a poor command of spoken English can have a compounding impact on social isolation and can be a major factor behind people's inability to make connections in their local community.

*If you can communicate effectively that tends to go along way. If you can't then that tends to hamper the whole thing, and then you are relying entirely on the good will of the other side, on the good nature of the other people. If you are able to communicate and are able to defend yourself that tends to speed up the process.*

Indian male, north Warwickshire

However, the choice of words used by the interviewee above may tell a different story from the one he intended. By acknowledging that the integration into the community of those with a lower standard of spoken English rested 'entirely on the good will of the other side', he suggested, perhaps inadvertently, that acceptance into village communities is often a one-way process, contingent on the inclinations of the white population (referred to in adversarial terms by this interviewee as the 'other side'). Equally striking is the interviewee's contention that effective communication skills enable minority ethnic residents to 'defend themselves', thereby underlining the confrontational nature of much of the 'lived experience' of village life for people from those groups.

The quotation above also flags up another important aspect of the 'process of acceptance' into rural communities for minority ethnic people: it would appear to be more a process of *assimilation*, rather than integration. Certainly from what both minority ethnic and white research participants suggested over the course of the present study, white rural communities often seem to expect minority ethnic households to adopt the pre-existing (and essentially white English) cultural, social and religious norms that characterise village life, whatever the implications of this may be. This pressure for ethnic minorities to abandon their own identities and to become indistinguishable from the rural mainstream has been noted by previous researchers (see, for instance, Jay, 1992; de Lima, 2001) who have found that



minority households often feel compelled to assimilate for fear of being excluded or harassed.

When viewed in such a way, it can be seen that the occupation of exclusive insider positions within rural society allows members of established white communities to determine who does and who doesn't belong. By virtue of being able to choose who to accept into this privileged domain, these insiders can establish and re-establish their own discrete communities by embracing associations with those with similarly favoured characteristics and distancing themselves from undesirable 'others' (Murdoch and Day, 1998). This process thereby serves to strengthen their own sense of attachment by reinforcing their secured position within the insider community, whilst at the same time weakening the sense of attachment felt by minority ethnic outsiders. Moreover, rural insider status may not necessarily be reserved for 'born and bred' residents of the local area. Trends of counter-urbanisation have led to growing numbers of people moving to rural environments from larger towns and cities, and as we have seen some white incomers may encounter varying degrees of suspicion on the basis of their association with a different geographical place. Nevertheless, it may also be the case that they assume some level of insider status because of their shared ethnicity, and in the case of self-professed 'refugees from multiculturalism' – those who have left urban areas to escape from the perceived multiculturalism of the cities – their shared resentment of the minority ethnic 'other' (Jay, 1992; Robinson and Gardner, 2006). As Jay (1992: 22) warned in his landmark study of rural racism in south-west England, the growing presence in the rural of these so-called refugees from multiculturalism, searching for a whiter landscape than can be found in the urban, will inevitably reinforce local prejudices against those from a minority ethnic background, and adds to the numbers of 'us' against 'them'.

On the face of it therefore, feelings of community amongst these insider populations of rural towns and villages can be forged along such lines as tradition, geographical boundaries and cultural and ethnic 'sameness', whereas minority ethnic outsiders in the rural are much less likely to feel a similar sense of community, chiefly because of their low numbers and alienation from their fellow residents. However, it may be that feelings of 'otherness' experienced by rural minority ethnic households can actually foster a sense of solidarity between minority ethnic individuals that may, in some ways, replace the sense of community that is lacking for many living in rural areas.

This may manifest itself in subtle ways, and indeed may not be applicable to those individuals and families who as we shall see in the next chapter can feel completely cut off within their local area, but it does offer a sense of shared kinship to some that is welcoming in an otherwise hostile environment, as one interviewee suggested.

*Earlier this week a teenage black guy just coming round the corner on his way down the lane, hood up, gloves on, just looking, so I gave him a nod. I think he is from the culture that ordinarily you don't make eye contact, but because I had made contact with him and he made contact with me his whole body language changed, and he nodded back and we carried on our way.*

African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

Ultimately though, collective feelings of solidarity based upon shared notions of cultural or minority ethnic status tended to be overshadowed in many cases by individual experiences of victimisation and this will be examined further in the next chapter. Thus far we have explored the dynamics of the relationship between established white communities and rural minority ethnic households from the point of view of both insider and outsider populations in each of the case study areas, and this has drawn attention to the racialised stereotypes and mechanisms of 'othering' that can impact upon ethnic minorities' sense of belonging to their local area. The following chapter takes this further by considering the ways in which these exclusionary processes translate into forms of racist harassment and abuse, and how the nature, extent and impact of this victimisation was described by minority ethnic research participants.



## Chapter Five

### Rural Racism as a Process: Identifying its Extent, Nature and Impact

The research findings considered in the previous chapter highlight ways in which rural minority ethnic households can feel marginalised by members of established white communities on the basis of their ‘outsider’ characteristics. Such feelings of marginalisation may often stem from a process of ‘othering’, whether through the form of racist stereotyping, intolerance or indifference, that impacts upon their sense of attachment to the local area. In many instances, although not inevitably, these exclusionary forms of behaviour will take the shape of different forms of racist harassment and abuse which are rarely recognised or acknowledged as such by members of rural communities, by rural agencies and policy-makers, and within academia itself. In part this is attributable to the ‘no problem here’ mentality that has traditionally held sway within rural environments, leading people to think that issues of ‘race’ and racism are confined solely to more urbanised locales containing larger minority ethnic populations (de Lima, 2001). The lack of attention given to problems of rural racism has also arisen from a common reluctance amongst academics and policy-makers to look beyond restrictive incident-driven conceptions of racism to the more subtle manifestations of racism that form a part of victims’ everyday activities and interactions (Kelly, 1987; Bowling, 1999; 2003).

The research conducted as part of the present study underlines the fallacy of both of these standpoints. Despite the relatively low numbers (when compared to the urban) both of rural minority ethnic households and of racist incidents that show up in officially recorded crime statistics, racism is very much a problem in rural environments and needs to be recognised as such if the distressing effects of victimisation are to be alleviated, as shall be discussed in due course. Moreover, experiences of rural racism can take a variety of different forms which may not be recognised as especially serious or even racist *per se* unless viewed in context as part of the broader processes of exclusion that form part of victims’ everyday lives. This chapter seeks to illustrate the seriousness of racist victimisation in the rural by outlining its extent, nature and impact as experienced by minority ethnic households in the various case-study areas within Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. Using the findings from questionnaire surveys of minority ethnic households as

quantifiable back-up to the interviews conducted with ethnic minorities based in each area, the chapter explores the ways and the frequency with which racism manifests itself in rural towns and villages and considers the consequences of rural racism for its victims. Before examining lived experiences of racism though, the chapter begins by looking at the extent to which concerns about racist victimisation influence feelings of satisfaction with quality of life in the rural.

### **Concerns about racist victimisation and other quality of life problems**

As we have seen from the research findings presented in the previous chapter, rural towns and villages can be intimidating places for minority ethnic households to reside in on account of various interrelated features, whether this be a culture of ‘othering’ from within the mainstream ‘insider’ communities, a perceived sense of not belonging, or an absence of peer group support. Not surprisingly, therefore, many minority ethnic respondents were keen to stress what they saw as the unforeseen drawbacks of living within a rural environment. During the course of interviews, for instance, a number of people expressed their surprise and disappointment at the general lack of friendliness shown by neighbours and other residents of the locality, particularly when compared with their previous experiences of urban living. These recollections give a rather different impression to the more familiar images of neighbourliness and community bondage conjured up by romanticised, but ultimately misleading, portrayals of rurality, as illustrated by the following comment taken from an interviewee in south Warwickshire.

*We know nobody and nobody knows us ... it's not a friendly kind of place. Even if it wasn't a friendly place, it would be nice if at least you can say hello to each other. When they [neighbours] are coming out of their houses, you would think they would say 'Hi' and 'Hello' and ask us how we are, but this is not the case ... Maybe it's because there is no Asian community round here, they are all whites.*

Indian female, Stratford-on-Avon



Upon examination of perceptions of quality of life in Warwickshire specifically, a number of concerns were found to have been expressed in responses to the questionnaire survey of minority ethnic households (see Table 1) where the most commonly cited problems affecting local neighbourhoods were the perceived lack of facilities for young people (37 per cent; 33), and rowdy youths (34 per cent; 31). Racist harassment was regarded as a problem by 28 per cent (25) of respondents<sup>20</sup>, as was crime. Only a relatively small proportion – 16 per cent (14) – believed that there were no problems in their local neighbourhood.

*Table 1: Problems cited by Warwickshire-based minority ethnic households<sup>21</sup>*

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Facilities for young people	33	37
Rowdy youths	31	34
Racist harassment	25	28
Crime	25	28
Rubbish/litter	22	24
Leisure facilities	17	19
Council services	14	16
Graffiti	12	13
Health services	9	10
Unemployment	7	8
Schools	6	7
Other <sup>22</sup>	6	7
Housing	5	6

The fact that a large proportion of these minority ethnic respondents felt that there were problems associated with living in their local areas is in itself not particularly surprising, nor especially unique to a rural sample, as most respondents to a community satisfaction survey would be expected to find fault with at least some

<sup>20</sup> When analysed by ethnicity, 50 per cent (5) of Chinese respondents in Warwickshire felt that racial harassment was a problem, compared to 43 per cent (10) of Asian, 18 per cent (2) of black, and 29 per cent (5) of mixed heritage respondents. As the numbers of respondents from different minority ethnic categories are so low, it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from an analysis by ethnicity.

<sup>21</sup> Respondents were asked whether each *separate* issue was a problem: hence the percentages do not add up to 100.

<sup>22</sup> The other problems cited were: 'no community spirit' (cited by two respondents); 'problem neighbours'; 'traffic/speed restrictions'; 'tourists'; and 'too many cars parked on both sides of the road' (all cited by one respondent respectively).

aspects of their quality of life even in the most idyllic of rural havens. However, the situation in Warwickshire is particularly interesting when respondents' concerns are analysed according to the district in which they reside. Of the respondents living within the north Warwickshire district, 68 per cent (19) expressed overall satisfaction about living in their local towns or villages, with 32 per cent (9) stating that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This is slightly different to the views expressed by Stratford-on-Avon residents, where as many as 89 per cent (41) of minority ethnic respondents living there felt satisfied. Clearly, this suggests that quality of life may be perceived to be higher by minority ethnic households living within the more affluent Stratford district as opposed to those based in north Warwickshire. When broken down to reveal the most commonly cited problems in either district, the questionnaire findings for the most part highlighted a similar pattern to that displayed in Table 1 above, as can be seen below.

*Table 2: Problems cited by Warwickshire-based minority ethnic households broken down by district<sup>23</sup>*

<i>Problem</i>	<i>North Warwickshire</i>	<i>Stratford- on-Avon</i>
Facilities for young people	39% (11)	39% (18)
Rowdy youths	39% (11)	37% (17)
Crime	39% (11)	20% (9)
Racist harassment	36% (10)	15% (7)
Graffiti	21% (6)	11% (5)
Leisure facilities	18% (5)	17% (8)
Rubbish/litter	18% (5)	33% (15)
Council services	11% (3)	22% (10)
Health services	11% (3)	13% (6)
Unemployment	11% (3)	9% (4)
Housing	7% (2)	4% (2)
Other	7% (2)	7% (3)
Schools	-	11% (5)

Despite some evident similarities, Table 2 also helps to illustrate variations in perception amongst respondents in each of the two districts. While a similar proportion of minority ethnic households from each district expressed concern about

<sup>23</sup> Respondents were asked whether each *separate* issue was a problem: consequently, and as with Table 1, the percentages do not add up to 100. Frequencies have been included in brackets after each percentage figure.



the problems of facilities for young people and rowdy youths, there are marked differences in particular over the way in which respondents view other social issues such as crime, racist harassment and graffiti. These particular issues appeared to cause higher levels of concern to households based in north Warwickshire than in Stratford-on-Avon, where a different set of perceived problems, namely rubbish and litter and to a lesser extent the quality of council services and local schools seemed to carry greater significance to minority ethnic residents.

Respondents in Suffolk and Northamptonshire presented a similar set of concerns to those expressed by the overall Warwickshire sample. The questionnaire survey indicated that the most commonly referred to problem in Suffolk Coastal was the provision of facilities for young people, which was cited by 36 per cent of those surveyed (see Table 3), followed by rubbish/litter (30 per cent), crime (28 per cent) and rowdy youths and unemployment (both 27 per cent). Racist harassment was seen as a problem by just over one-in-five (22 per cent) of minority ethnic households.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, and as shown in Table 4, the most commonly cited problems affecting minority ethnic households across the Northamptonshire case study areas were crime (50 per cent), and rowdy youths (46 per cent), while racist harassment was regarded as a problem by just over a third of respondents (36 per cent)<sup>25</sup>. Unlike in Warwickshire, only one respondent in Northamptonshire felt that there were no problems affecting their quality of life in their respective rural towns and villages, while no respondents at all in Suffolk believed that this was the case.

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<sup>24</sup> When analysed by ethnicity, 26 per cent (7) of Asian respondents in Suffolk Coastal felt that racial harassment was a problem, compared to 23 per cent (6) of black respondents, 18 per cent (2) of Chinese, 6 per cent (1) of mixed heritage and 50 per cent (2) of Traveller respondents. As these numbers are so low any inferences made from the results presented here are necessarily tentative.

<sup>25</sup> When analysed by ethnicity, 50 per cent (3) of Chinese respondents in Northamptonshire felt that racial harassment was a problem, compared to 46 per cent (12) of Asian, 33 per cent (5) of black, and 31 per cent of mixed heritage respondents. In line with the other case study areas, as the number of respondents in different minority ethnic categories is so low, any conclusions drawn from analysis by ethnicity should be treated with caution.

Table 3: Problems cited by Suffolk-based minority ethnic households<sup>26</sup>

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Facilities for young people	32	36
Rubbish/litter	26	29
Crime	25	28
Rowdy youths	24	27
Unemployment	24	27
Leisure facilities	20	23
Racist harassment	19	22
Graffiti	10	11
Housing	8	9
Other <sup>27</sup>	7	8
Health service	7	8
Council services	6	7
Schools	2	2

Table 4: Problems cited by Northamptonshire-based minority ethnic households

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Crime	34	50
Rowdy youths	32	46
Rubbish/litter	27	39
Racist harassment	25	36
Facilities for young people	14	20
Leisure facilities	13	19
Graffiti	12	17
Council services	10	15
Housing	6	9
Unemployment	5	7
Health services	5	7
Schools	5	7
Other <sup>28</sup>	3	3

Interestingly, when questionnaire respondents were asked specifically about racist harassment, 60 per cent (56) of respondents in Suffolk Coastal stated that they were ‘very concerned’ or ‘concerned’ about the issue, while as many as 81 per cent (56) of

<sup>26</sup> Again, respondents were asked whether each *separate* issue was a problem: hence the percentages in Tables 3 and 4 do not add up to 100.

<sup>27</sup> Other problems cited by Suffolk-based respondents included poor public transport; local government institutional racism; drug misuse; lighting; and parking conditions.

<sup>28</sup> The two other problems cited by respondents to the Northamptonshire survey were heroin usage and racist attitudes.



Northamptonshire's respondents gave a similar response<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, while Tables 3 and 4 suggest that racist harassment is perceived to be one of several pressing problems in respondents' local areas, the fact that such a high proportion of minority ethnic households, particularly those based in Northamptonshire, found it to be a cause for concern underlines the significance of rural racism to those susceptible to victimisation. A slightly lower proportion of respondents based in Warwickshire – just over half (52 per cent; 46) – expressed concern about being racially harassed, with 19 per cent (17) of those stating that they were very concerned. However, the figures are more revealing when considered according to respondents' area of residence. While 41 per cent (19) of minority ethnic households based in Stratford-on-Avon felt concerned about the problem of racist harassment, the corresponding proportion in north Warwickshire was substantially higher at 64 per cent (18). Again, this supports the contention made previously that problems such as racist harassment are perceived to be more significant by households across north Warwickshire than those in the more affluent district of Stratford-on-Avon. This may in part be attributable to the nature of the minority ethnic population in the Stratford district which contains a larger number of households with a seemingly high-status or outwardly respectable professional occupation: as we have seen in Chapter 4, certain groups of ethnic minorities, and especially those living in that particular district, are often regarded in a more favourable light within rural communities if they are seen to possess some of the more positive characteristics associated with the conventional norms of rural society, and consequently such groups may feel less susceptible to the threat of racist victimisation on account of what they see as their own 'cultural capital' (Tyler, 2006).

Of course, as we have seen in the previous chapter not everyone will have negative feelings towards their experiences of rural life, and some degree of caution must be struck when making generalisations about minority ethnic perceptions on the basis of questionnaire surveys of what were ultimately relatively small samples. Indeed, as

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<sup>29</sup> When the responses to the Suffolk survey are broken down by ethnicity, it is evident that Traveller respondents were most concerned about racial harassment, with 80.0 per cent (4) either 'very concerned' or 'concerned', followed by black respondents (68 per cent (19)), Asian (59 per cent (16)), Chinese (50 per cent (6)) and mixed heritage (44 per cent (8)). In Northamptonshire where the number of respondents is even lower, according to the three largest minority ethnic groups surveyed, 92 per cent (12) of mixed heritage respondents expressed concern about racial harassment, with the corresponding figures for Asian and black respondents being 77 per cent (20) and 67 per cent (10) respectively.

Bowling (2003: 62) has suggested when questioning the value of surveys attempting to quantify the nature and extent of racist harassment in a given local area, such surveys have a tendency to reduce the process of victimisation to what he refers to as 'a static and decontextualised snapshot', and this was certainly felt by the researcher to be a shortcoming of the questionnaire surveys utilised in the context of this particular research study whose findings, at least when viewed in isolation from the experiences described during interviews, tell only a partial story. Moreover, whilst the majority of questionnaire respondents expressed concern over the issue of racist harassment and listed a range of other problems that were felt to affect their quality of life in their local area, it should not be forgotten that a quite substantial number in each of the three counties felt unaffected by the threat of racism, and households based in the more affluent district of Stratford-on-Avon in particular appeared to be fairly satisfied with their quality of life.

However, although the findings elicited from the questionnaire survey are not without their limitations, they have been included, where appropriate, for several reasons. Although, as discussed in Chapter Three, the surveys were utilised as part of the research methodology primarily as a way of establishing contact with rural minority ethnic households, their findings do provide some degree of quantifiable support to the qualitative data generated from the series of focus groups and interviews conducted and as such they make for interesting reading. Equally though, the survey findings have been included not only to highlight their pertinent points, but also to draw attention to the shortcomings of prevalence surveys in conveying a full account of the process of victimisation: as has been argued consistently throughout this thesis, questionnaire findings will provide only limited insights into the lived experiences of racist victimisation when viewed in isolation, and it is only by analysing their implications in conjunction with the views expressed during focus groups and interviews that we can begin to appreciate the wider dimensions of the problem.

With this in mind, the more qualitative element to the research was extremely important in allowing the researcher to test out some of the questionnaire findings and to elicit a fuller understanding of minority ethnic households' attitudes towards life in the rural. At one level the interviews enabled these households to accentuate some of the more positive features of living in their local neighbourhood. A number of interviewees in each of the case-study areas made reference to the perceived



advantages of living in a smaller town or village, such as the ‘peace and quiet’ and relative sense of safety, as exemplified by the following comments taken from interviews in north Warwickshire.

*It's really very quiet round here, the only noise is from the cars and that's it. Sometimes it's bit boring but most of the time it's good. It is good sometimes to live in peace, there's nothing to bother you ... because in Birmingham say, you could get in trouble, the more people there are, the more trouble you get. Same in London, there's so many different people there. They don't know where you come from.*

Kosovan male, north Warwickshire

*I wanted a view where I could see countryside, big fields across the way ... My mum grew up in a rural setting in the Caribbean, and I wanted to give my daughters a sense of that ... it's a little isolated area that I can control to a certain degree. I know most of the faces in the village and if my daughter says she wants to go round to a friend's house I have a sense of security that she can walk down there and Mrs 'What's-her-name' will be watching.*

African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

These sorts of comments praising the relative tranquillity, attractiveness and safety of the rural, particularly when set against interviewees' previous experiences of urban life, were quite common in all of the research areas, and they resonate with the findings of a number of previous studies. For instance, past research conducted in the north Warwickshire district by Warwickshire County Council has drawn attention to the high levels of satisfaction expressed by the majority of minority ethnic residents with regards to their overall quality of life in the district (Karim, 2002), while research conducted elsewhere in the UK has consistently highlighted minority ethnic communities' appreciation and enjoyment of traditionally rural characteristics such as those referred to above (de Lima, 2001; Magne, 2003; Makda and Milthorp, 2005). Ultimately though, and as the findings outlined in the previous chapter have shown,

despite the clear benefits that rural life has to offer, most participants in the present study felt that their quality of life was adversely affected by their isolation from the white ‘insider’ communities. The general impression conveyed through interviews conducted with minority ethnic households in each county was a sense of disappointment with the lack of familiarity displayed within their localities towards people of different ethnicities, cultures or religion.

*When I came to Stratford, people respected you for how you are, who you are. They're not really interested if you are black, white, whatever. There are not many different cultures in Stratford, just English, white English people, so for these people I was different, they wanted to know me more. There was effort from the British people really ... But that was 22 years ago, it was completely different to now. During this time, these years, it's changed a lot. Because new children, new generations have come, and become really rebellious against foreigners, against everybody ... If I just came here new, I would not feel comfortable at all.*

Egyptian male, Stratford-on-Avon

*We wanted to buy a house and at that time they were building new houses here so we moved, which I don't think was the right idea. We should have bought a house either in Warwick or Leamington because there are a lot of ethnic minorities in Leamington and Warwick, there's hardly any here.*

Iranian female, Stratford-on-Avon

While some interviewees stressed that they tried not to allow this disappointment to adversely affect their daily lives, most felt that their quality of life had suffered as a result of their perceived marginalisation from the mainstream activities of rural communities and the resulting fear of racist abuse or harassment. Interestingly, a number of interviewees across the various case-study areas, all young or middle-aged males, were eager at first to make explicit their apparent ambivalence towards the risk of racist victimisation in all its forms, as illustrated by the following comment.



*My own personal view is if you are seen as a weakling then you get treated more like one ... It is a funny thing, racism: if you are perceived as someone who stands on your feet and looks after your problems, it seems to evaporate.*

Indian male, north Warwickshire

However, as the conversation with each of these interviewees started to develop, a different picture emerged whereby the men began to express their worries rather more lucidly when discussing their concerns for their families. For each, racism was clearly a factor that permeated much of their decision-making, and while this did not necessarily translate into fear, particularly with reference to the more everyday forms of racism, the perception that problems could present themselves at any given moment was cause for concern. Indeed, many other interviewees found this type of anxiety difficult to articulate, either because of an acute sense of embarrassment, or more commonly because of the inherent difficulty in putting into words their apprehension about being constantly looked upon as ‘different’, but it was clear from the qualitative research conducted in each of the case-study areas that concern about racist victimisation affected the quality of many households’ lives.

*The new problem seems to have arrived after this 9/11 incident in America. People get confused about our identity, whether he is a Sikh or he is a Muslim, and there is now always some bad feeling in the air.*

Indian male, Stratford-on-Avon

*I just feel there’s always [racial] tension here. I don’t feel comfortable walking down the street with my black boyfriend. Not comfortable at all. And I don’t take him into any of the pubs in the town, and he will not move here because he feels uncomfortable.*

*When one of my [black] friends became pregnant she moved out of Atherstone because she didn’t feel that she could comfortably live here and*

*bring her daughter up, she was fearful of her being the only black face in the class and the problems that can bring. And then there's another girl that I know who's a mutual friend of myself and that last person that I mentioned, who also moved to Tamworth when she became pregnant with a dual heritage child. So they, if you like, have escaped it and I don't blame them for that.*

White female partner of an African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

As is evident from comments such as these, the discomfort that many minority ethnic households may experience as a result of being one of few such households in a rural area can often give rise to apprehension over the threat of racist victimisation. Moreover, previous studies of minority ethnic experiences of crime and victimisation have highlighted that these communities' fear of ordinary crime is fundamentally shaped by their fear of racist victimisation (Bowling and Phillips, 2003; Clancy *et al.*, 2001; Kershaw, Budd, Kinshott, Mattinson, Mayhew and Myhill, 2000). This is reflected to some extent in the findings of the present study where a large proportion of minority ethnic households based in areas with relatively low rates of crime expressed high levels of concern over various forms of crime and incivility. As the research went on, it soon transpired that in many cases people's fear of racist victimisation was based not only upon their feelings of marginalisation from conventional rural society but upon earlier experiences of rural racism, and it is to an analysis of the extent, nature and impact of these experiences that the chapter now turns.

### **Extent of racist victimisation**

Conceiving of racism as a process, as has been argued previously, helps to promote recognition of the ongoing nature of racism in a way that events-oriented constructions of racism fail to account for, and this would certainly seem to be an appropriate way in which to view the experiences of racism recounted by participants in the present study. Throughout each of the case-study areas racist abuse and harassment were found to be recurring problems for most rural minority ethnic research participants. In line with the suggestions of authors such as Bowling (1999)



and Kelly (1987) most interviewees found it difficult to talk specifically about separate incidents of racist victimisation as this was seen as a problem that confronts them in a multiplicity of forms throughout their everyday lives.

*At least once a month something would have happened. He'd come up in front of my daughter shouting and bawling, 'effing and blinding. There'd have been L plates ripped off the bike or it would have been damaged.*

Irish male, Suffolk Coastal

*It never stops. You get more and more and more ... It's been going on for years.*

Pakistani Muslim female, Suffolk Coastal

*I had an incident once when England lost the world cup match a few years back against Argentina. I was sitting in a bar, somebody came up and poured drink on my head ... I said to him, 'I'm not Argentinean, I'm not South American or whatever, I'm an Egyptian man. I don't give a damn if England lose or win. I don't like football anyway'. He didn't care – I looked foreign.*

Egyptian male, Stratford-on-Avon

For these interviewees, and in fact for many of the other research participants, prejudice was simply a regular feature of living in communities unfamiliar with 'difference'; behaviour that in many ways they had grown accustomed to. Responses elicited from the questionnaire surveys conducted in each research area also lent support to these assertions. Although, and as has been stated previously, these questionnaire findings are based on relatively limited samples and consequently cannot provide a complete picture of minority ethnic experiences in the selected rural areas, they do give an indication of the extent to which households can fall victim to racist abuse and harassment in the rural. Each survey of rural minority ethnic

households drew attention to the regularity with which racist victimisation is experienced. In Suffolk Coastal 69 per cent (65) of respondents stated that they had been racially victimised whilst living in their locality, with 11 per cent of those (7) having suffered racist harassment on a daily basis, 10 per cent (6) on a weekly basis, and 32 per cent (20) monthly. Repeat victimisation would appear to be even more of a problem for respondents in Northamptonshire, with nearly half (43 per cent, 30) of all respondents having experienced racist victimisation on either a daily or weekly basis, and a further 14 per cent (10) experiencing it monthly.

In Warwickshire meanwhile, a slightly lower proportion of survey respondents (57 per cent, 50) had been racially harassed at some stage during their time in their local town or village, but as with the findings from the Warwickshire questionnaire survey described earlier in this chapter, a more revealing picture emerges when the findings are broken down by district. While slightly less than half of the respondents based in Stratford-on-Avon (49 per cent; 22) had been racially harassed whilst living in that district, a larger proportion (61 per cent; 17) had experienced harassment in north Warwickshire. Moreover, the questionnaire findings also indicated that households in the north of the county had experienced racism on a far more regular basis than those in the south. 33 per cent (7) of those who had been racially harassed in Stratford-on-Avon had experienced this harassment on either a daily or weekly basis, which in itself is a worryingly large proportion, but as many as 80 per cent (12) of those victimised in north Warwickshire had suffered racism at an equivalent frequency. Indeed, while 24 per cent (5) of victims in Stratford-on-Avon had experienced harassment on a monthly basis, 24 per cent (5) less than monthly, and 19 per cent (4) less than once a year, only three victims in north Warwickshire had not had to endure the problem on either a daily or weekly basis. Consequently, this particular set of findings suggests that, just as with levels of concern about racism, people's experiences of racist victimisation may vary depending on the characteristics of their locality, and more specifically the nature of the social and economic profile of their local environment (see Tyler, 2006; Robinson and Gardner, 2006).

A further noteworthy feature observed during the qualitative research was the potential of seasonal factors to influence the frequency of racist victimisation experienced by minority ethnic research participants. The extent to which levels of racism vary with the seasons has seldom been a feature of previous investigations,



although Chahal and Julienne (1999: 29) have suggested that the advent of the summer can lead to a pronounced increase in the numbers of racist incidents and a decrease in minority ethnic households' use of public space. Within the context of this research study, several interviewees living in the borough of Wellingborough in Northamptonshire stated that their fear of harassment and abuse was heightened during the summer months, most notably on account of the tendency of racist perpetrators to be more visible and active during this time of year. In Warwickshire too several interviewees across both districts argued that problems tended to escalate over the course of the summer, a perception that offers support to the contention that seasonal factors bear some influence on the frequency with which some minority ethnic households are victimised. Although this is an area that would require further research beyond that undertaken within this study to substantiate such a contention, this increased vulnerability during the summer, whether perceived or actual, appeared to exacerbate some people's sense of persecution, as the following comments illustrate.

*This trouble has lasted for the four and a half years we have been over here. After we complained to the police it calmed down for a while, for two or three months, but again it erupted. And this eruption is much more during the summer season because the days are longer, everyone wants to stay up until 11 o'clock or later ... constantly knocking on the door and running away, knocking on the door and running away. They even started throwing garbage into our garden.*

Indian male, Stratford-on-Avon

*It [racist abuse] is guaranteed to happen all through the summer, so as the light nights come back, they [the perpetrators] will start because they know I don't let him [grandson] out after dark ... it happens every day, I'd guarantee it. Out here or if he goes over to the park to play, they follow him over the park. He's even been playing in his back garden and we've had bricks come across.*

White British female with grandson of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

*It's not every single day, but it is when it comes to summer and he [the perpetrator] is drinking all the time, cos he's an old man, he sits at home all day long, he's got nothing better to do. He's got no friends, no one likes him ... he's basically got nothing better to do but just annoy the neighbours.*

White British female with children of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

The extent to which minority ethnic rural households can fall victim to racist harassment or abuse can also be influenced by global, national and local events. For instance, during the course of conversations with households in Suffolk Coastal there were suggestions that the frequency of racist victimisation does increase in some instances when race issues such as the protracted debates over the housing of asylum seekers reach the media spotlight, as was the case during the time of the research (see also Grillo, 2005; Hubbard, 2005). As discussed in the previous chapter, anti-asylum sentiment appeared to be particularly strong within the white communities of Suffolk Coastal, and a number of minority ethnic households in the region argued that their own victimisation had intensified as a result of the general ill-feeling (or 'anti-foreignness' as one interviewee put it) that had ensued from the extensive coverage devoted to asylum and immigration issues in the local and national press. In a similar vein, and as we have seen from some of the comments described thus far, a number of interviewees across each of the research areas felt that the public reaction to the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 in the US, and more recently 7 July 2005 in the UK, had left minority ethnic communities feeling even more vulnerable to racist attacks.

*I went to the fish and chip shop and there was a guy behind me. The news was on and he was pointing at me, I could see him in the reflection, he was saying, 'Kill 'em all, the bastards'.*

Iranian Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal



Interestingly, and in line with the suggestions of a number of other writers (see, for example, Parris, 2005; Tyler, 2004; Ashworth, 2005), the research highlighted that heightened fears over the threat of Islamic terrorism, and the ensuing growth in anti-Islamic sentiment, had created problems not only for Muslim households but also for people from other Asian backgrounds living in the case-study areas. Several Sikh and Hindu interviewees noted that they had experienced an increased and sustained level of what they took for mistakenly-directed Islamophobic abuse on the basis of their ostensibly 'Asian' characteristics such as skin colour, beard growth or the wearing of a turban, and this resonated with the researcher's own ethnographic experiences. Although no explicitly racist behaviour was directed at me personally during my prolonged stays in the research areas, there were numerous occasions where I felt all too aware of my own ethnicity in these predominantly white environments whether by virtue of being stared at persistently, being forced to wait an unnecessarily long time to be served in cafes, public houses and restaurants, or as happened on several occasions by seeing local residents go so far as to cross the street to avoid walking past me before crossing back when I was a 'safe' distance away. Though noticeable enough when conducting the research in Suffolk and Northamptonshire, this perception of feeling visibly 'different' was certainly more evident during the final phase of research conducted in Warwickshire where I decided to grow a beard as a way of gauging initial reactions from members of the white communities living in that county<sup>30</sup>. Fortunately I had the safety net of being merely a visitor to these areas, but this tangible sense of alienation gave me an indication of what life must be like for those living in rural towns and villages sporting any kind of visible characteristic so often associated with depictions of the 'archetypal Islamic terrorist', for whom the risk of racist victimisation in a predominantly white and apprehensive landscape may be all the greater.

### **Nature of racist victimisation**

We have seen how racist victimisation can be a persistent problem for many rural minority ethnic households, and the research findings across each of the case study areas revealed that this victimisation can take a variety of different forms (see Table 5

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<sup>30</sup> See Thind (2006) for an analysis of the way in which the adoption of beard growth can affect the way in which Asian men are policed and perceived by the general public and by the police and other authorities.

below). When asked to describe the nature of victimisation experienced in their local town or village, respondents to the questionnaire survey conducted in Suffolk suggested that the most common forms of racism were what are typically described as ‘low-level’ types of harassment or discriminatory behaviour. This includes verbal abuse or name calling, which was experienced by 82 per cent (53) of respondents who stated that they had suffered racist harassment in Suffolk Coastal; unnecessary or persistent staring, experienced by 40 per cent (26); and a sense of being avoided by people, which was cited by 23 per cent (15). Nonetheless, in addition to these types of problems, a relatively high proportion of those respondents who had suffered racism had experienced what would appear to be more serious forms of racist harassment such as actual or attempted damage to property (cited by 19 per cent (12) of respondents) and actual or attempted physical assault (14 per cent (9)).

*Table 5: Nature of racist harassment experienced by victims of rural racism<sup>31</sup>*

<i>Type of incident</i>	<i>Percentage (and frequency) of Suffolk victims</i>	<i>Percentage (and frequency) of N'thants victims</i>	<i>Percentage(and frequency) of Warwickshire victims</i>
Verbal abuse/name calling	82 (53)	79 (55)	80 (40)
Unnecessary/persistent staring	40 (26)	17 (12)	50 (25)
Being avoided by people	23 (15)	13 (9)	38 (19)
Actual/attempted property damage	19 (12)	29 (20)	38 (19)
Actual/attempted physical assault	14 (9)	33 (23)	36 (18)
Other <sup>32</sup>	8 (5)	1 (1)	4 (2)
Actual/attempted arson	1 (1)	6 (4)	1 (1)

The survey findings from Northamptonshire and Warwickshire reveal a similar picture of victimisation, to the extent that verbal abuse was by far the most common form of racism experienced by those who had been victimised whilst living in either

<sup>31</sup> Respondents may have experienced more than one form of racism during their time in their local town or village, and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100.

<sup>32</sup> Other types of racist experiences mentioned by questionnaire respondents included the receipt of racist literature; discrimination by local government and public authorities; discrimination by potential employers; being spat at; obstruction to property; and differential treatment in public places.



research area (79 per cent (55) and 80 per cent (40) respectively). However, in both counties it would appear that the more serious examples of racist harassment featured more prominently than in Suffolk. In Northamptonshire, as many as 33 per cent (23) had been victims of actual or attempted physical assault while a similarly high proportion (29 per cent (20)) had suffered actual or attempted property damage. The respective figures for Warwickshire are even higher: 36 per cent (18) had experienced actual or attempted physical assault and 38 per cent (19) actual or attempted damage to property.

Although on further analysis it transpired that there was little difference between the experiences recounted by respondents in Wellingborough and those in east Northamptonshire, there does seem to be some degree of variation in the experiences of households in north Warwickshire and Stratford-on-Avon when the figures are broken down by district. In north Warwickshire, verbal abuse had been experienced by an extremely high proportion of victimised respondents (88 per cent; 15), while to a lesser extent the problems of unnecessary or persistent staring and being avoided by people were also fairly commonplace (experienced by 41 per cent (7) and 24 per cent (4) of victims respectively). However, more serious or recognisable forms of racist victimisation – physical assault and damage to property – had both featured in the experiences of a similar proportion of victims (41 per cent (7)). In Stratford-on-Avon, the nature of victimisation appears to be a little different: while a predictably large proportion of victims based in that district had experienced verbal abuse (73 per cent, 16), the problems of being unnecessarily stared at and being avoided were experienced by a much higher proportion (59 per cent (13) and 55 per cent (12) respectively) than had suffered physical assault or property damage (14 per cent (3) and 23 per cent (5)). This therefore suggests that while racism is without doubt a serious issue in both districts, the problem may tend to manifest itself more overtly, and at times arguably more seriously, in north Warwickshire as opposed to in Stratford-on-Avon, where minority ethnic households are more likely to fall victim to the more covert, subtle forms of prejudice than they are to other forms of victimisation.

Interviews conducted with households across each county offered support for the contention that racism can be encountered in a wide variety of different forms and contexts, the nature of which often has its basis in the inherent fear and mistrust of the

‘other’. A number of quite shocking accounts of racist victimisation were uncovered over the course of the research which revealed a clear resentment of minority ethnic households on the part of the perpetrators, several illustrations of which are presented below.

*Last year a gang of young children, aged about 12 to 15, were walking around at night, it was dark, and they spat on me. Young boys. Because one boy started, the others followed, three or four people spat on my face ... then they walked off. I had shopping bags in my hands, both my hands were occupied and I couldn't do anything. I am aged 72 and I couldn't do much with the youngsters.*

Indian male, Stratford-on-Avon

*My car was an old classic so he [neighbour] slashed all the four tyres for no reason.*

Indian male, east Northamptonshire

*We had graffiti... 'Wogs Die', 'Pakis Out', 'Jews smell', 'Scum', 'Burn'. On the second incident which was ten days later it was a pot of paint. On the third occasion we has 'US Killers', 'Death', 'Get Out Pakis'.*

Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

Though alarming enough when taken in isolation, these examples of victimisation were made all the more harrowing by the fact that they were simply part of a continuum of racism experienced by rural minority ethnic households in all sorts of different private and social situations, some expressions of which would be more graphic and less latent than others. Indeed, as the interviews made clear, many forms of behaviour perceived to be racist by the victim may not be immediately recognisable to a third party as racist *per se*. This can be the case where prejudice is conveyed in a more subtle, less overt manner than that typically associated with racist actions, and



this again relates back to the importance of appreciating racist victimisation as a continuum that affects minority ethnic households in a whole variety of circumstances. The following quotations are just some of the many examples from the interviews conducted across each case-study area that help to illustrate this point.

*My dad would cook curries and the smell would leak from the air vent and she [next-door neighbour] would come out and spray air freshener. She'd do it really ostentatiously. She would come round onto our property, not over the fence, she would come round and stand by the air vent and spray air freshener because she said the smell of curry was tainting the air. You knew she couldn't smell it in her house obviously, but no, she couldn't have that.*

Female of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

*A friend of mine lives about 10 miles away from here, he bought a new car and the next day the car was all messed up, shit on it. I went down there, and the next-door girl came out and was laughing at the fun. 'Very funny, new car and somebody shit on it'.*

Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

*You can walk into a shop, and they quickly shut the till and become very nervous as you walk around. Their eyes follow you all around, you can feel them burning into your neck as you are walking ... As soon as you actually touch the door-handle the woman behind the counter stops everything and says, 'Can I help you?' before your body is actually in the door, which is another way of saying 'I really feel uncomfortable with you being in the shop, let me just find out what you need and if you don't need anything you can get out'.*

African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

*I went to a supermarket with my dad, and his English is not good. A lady was arguing with her husband and her husband came and stood behind us in the queue, and she said, I am not standing behind these monkeys ... She actually moved and went to queue somewhere else, and her husband went as well.*

Iranian female, Stratford-on-Avon

Certainly, interviews with minority ethnic individuals and families supported the findings from the questionnaire surveys in suggesting that the most commonly experienced forms of racism tend to take the shape of the so-called 'low-level' examples of victimisation. Instances of name-calling and intimidatory staring were recalled by a large number of interviewees, as were episodes of stone-throwing, 'knock-down ginger', neighbour disputes and racist graffiti, and for many of those households these types of experience had formed part of their day-to-day life in the rural and were seen as an inevitable feature of being visibly different in a predominantly white environment. To some extent many minority ethnic households can grow accustomed to being on the receiving end of these 'routine' examples of the 'othering' process referred to previously (see, for example, Chahal and Julienne, 1999).

At the same time though, such encounters, however regularly they feature in people's experience of the rural and however trivial they may appear in relation to other forms of more violent racism, still have the capacity to create considerable apprehension amongst potential victims. The findings from the Warwickshire questionnaire survey help to illustrate this point. When asked to describe the types of racist abuse or harassment that were of most concern to them, an even greater proportion of questionnaire respondents expressed concern about verbal abuse than they did about the threat of physical abuse (54 per cent (43) as opposed to 49 per cent (39))<sup>33</sup>. Similarly as many as 46 per cent (35) felt concerned about being unnecessarily or persistently stared at, and 36 per cent (27) feared being avoided on the basis of their ethnicity. These high levels of concern cast doubt over the legitimacy of referring to

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<sup>33</sup> As with other parts of each questionnaire, not all respondents completed this particular section; hence the percentages have been calculated as a proportion of how many people responded to each particular question, rather than as a proportion of the overall sample.



such forms of racism as minor or 'low-level' types of incident, as those descriptors often trivialise the physical and emotional impact of racist behaviour. As Chahal and Julienne (1999: 8) put it, 'the use of the term 'low-level' reduces the impact of what people experience on a regular basis and the terms they use to describe it. It is important to reflect accurately how people are describing events rather than imposing categories to facilitate the measurement of those events'. Even allegedly 'minor', non-criminal events such as being stared at can have a profound and lasting effect upon a minority ethnic individual living in a predominantly white area (see, for example, Magne, 2003; de Lima, 2001), and it is events like these that form a key part of the continuum of racialised 'othering' which ethnic minorities have to negotiate throughout their everyday routine interactions.

As the series of interviews in particular helped to reveal, it is not only ethnic minorities who can fall prey to these diverse forms of racialised 'othering'; white people too can be victimised in much the same way simply on the basis of their associations with someone from a minority ethnic background. White interviewees with minority ethnic friends, for instance, spoke of the latent, and sometimes overt, hostility they felt from some sections of the local white communities if they were seen to be mixing with people of a different ethnicity. This hostility manifested itself within a range of behaviours, from persistent staring through to actual physical violence, as the examples below, taken from focus groups in north Warwickshire with young white people, reveal.

*It took a Sikh friend of mine quite a few weeks before she'd actually go up to the town on her own, you know, to pop into the shops. I used to go with her and she used to mention how people were staring at us when we were together. She'd say 'Oh they're looking at us again, they can't work out why we are together.'*

*Verbal abuse basically. And physical abuse once ... at school one girl started pulling her hair and scratching ... people haven't really seen a black face round here before.*

*A mate was going out with this black girl ... and some kids started on him because he was with this black girl. They really beat him up ... he got a good old beating.*

These examples are indicative of the wariness of outsiders exhibited (and indeed sometimes lauded) by white residents in rural and isolated settings, as discussed in the previous chapter, which can degenerate into distressing cases of abuse and harassment. This was perhaps most evident in the case of white interviewees in mixed race relationships (see also Karim, 2002, de Lima, 2001), where the white partner would often directly receive abuse from local residents by virtue of their partner's ethnicity, or for what several of these interviewees saw as a perceived 'betrayal' of their white identity.

*Two local lads who knew me thought it would be really funny to knock on my back door with pillow cases on their head and shout 'Ku Klux Klan'. As it happened he [interviewee's black partner] wasn't there at the time but they thought it was hilarious to do that. They can't comprehend that what they're saying is not acceptable.*

*It's been passed on to me that I've been called a 'nigger shagger'. It's not been called it to my face but I know from a friend who's told me what people have said about me, that 'she only goes out with black men'.*

White female partner of an African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

*We were getting dog's mess thrown at the door, stones at the window, and then you stood at the door one night, didn't you, and they threw an egg at you. And I chased after them and they called me a 'Paki loving bitch' who needed shooting.*

White wife of Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal



For two interviewees based in Northamptonshire, it was argued that problems can be even more pronounced for mixed ethnicity families who have children. The prolonged and extensive nature of these families' victimisation drew attention to how experiences of racism can extend to broader familial networks, including for one household abuse directed towards the white grandmother of a young boy of mixed heritage. Moreover, the fact that problems had only started to emerge for these families after they had moved to their respective villages from nearby cities also highlighted the differences in perception between urban populations and rural communities less familiar with difference.

*I don't know whether he [a neighbour] actually hates black people or he just doesn't like the fact that they [black people] are living in this square ... he'll actually walk up to the kids, act like he's walking past them, and call them names. He's told them that they're spear chuckers and they're black so and so's, all kinds of things.*

White British female with children of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire

*He [grandson] suffers a lot of racist abuse, he's bullied and gets called a white wog, and I get told to go and have a baby my own colour and I've had windows put out. I've had rubbish thrown in the garden and stuff like that.*

*Last summer, he [grandson] was playing over here by the back door, next thing I heard an almighty scream - somebody's only lobbed a brick at him and hit him straight in the kidneys. He's been on the waiting list since to go in for a kidney scan ... all he was doing was playing in his own back garden.*

White British female with grandson of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

These examples are illustrative of young people's susceptibility to racist victimisation in the rural, whether in the home as was the case in the two accounts above, in school or in other forms of public space. As referred to previously, the concern that male

heads of households in particular felt with regard to experiencing racism was to a large degree brought on by their concern for their fellow family members, and especially for the safety and well-being of their children who may often be the indirect victims of racist abuse or, as we have seen, even be targeted directly themselves (Magne, 2003). Regrettably, at least on the basis of the evidence from interviews conducted for this study, it would seem that this concern is justified, as almost every interviewee's children, irrespective of their area of residence, had experienced some form of victimisation, most usually at their school or close to the school premises, and most commonly taking the form of name calling (see Malcolm, 2004 and Jay, 1992 for similar findings in other rural environments). As shall be discussed in the following chapter, this underlines the importance of challenging racism through the education system, especially in schools with few minority ethnic pupils where familiarity with 'other' ethnicities, cultures and religions may be especially low (Malcolm, 2004; Broadhurst and Wright, 2004). The following observations from parents and children in Stratford on Avon offer support for this contention and highlight the distressing nature of racist bullying.

*One girl of about 18 years old was just bullying her [interviewee's daughter] all the time, and at that time she was only seven ... Saying things like 'You can't use the slides, you can't do this, you lot are dirty people, go and take a bath'. Calling her all sorts of swear words, 'Paki', 'Nig-nog' ... She'd start crying and come back to the house, and they [the bullies] just followed her making all sorts of racial comments. That type of incident happened so many times.*

Indian female, Stratford-on-Avon

*One day I was walking down the road to meet my teacher and this boy said 'Have you got any fags?' and I said 'No'. Then his big brother tried to set my hair on fire with a lighter and then they pulled at my school bag and I fell down ... The boy who is my age said he was going to set his two dogs on me ... It was very scary.*

Indian schoolboy, Stratford-on-Avon



*My youngest, who was about eight years old then, I sent him to the village school and he had a very bad experience. He used to love school, but he used to come and say 'I don't want to go to school', and I would say 'Why?' They make fun of his hair, they say 'You haven't washed your hair because it is black', 'You have got wolves on your legs' because they are hairy legs. He would not do sports with shorts, he would wear long trousers ... One day my son came home with a bump on his forehead, he said they threw his shoe in the mud and he had to go and get his shoes, and then when he bent down to get his shoes they kicked his head. I thought, 'No, I am not going to put my son through this'.*

Iranian female, Stratford-on-Avon

Interestingly (and again an issue that will be analysed in greater depth during the next chapter), school representatives taking part in the research were all eager to either deny the existence of racism in their own school or to downplay its significance. For instance, one teacher at a Suffolk-based secondary school acknowledged that racist bullying could potentially be a problem in rural areas, but stressed that it occurred very rarely and exclusively took the form of verbal abuse involving only male pupils as perpetrators and victims.

*You will have bullying from a minority of children – usually when there's a bit of problem on the school bus. This is when these comments will come out, and they'll call them unpleasant names and so on. There's no physical abuse, it's all verbal ... We've had no reports where girls have been the victim or the perpetrator, it's always been males.*

Secondary school teacher, Suffolk Coastal

Taken at face value, such an assertion would seem to suggest that female schoolchildren are not subjected to the same levels of racist abuse as their male counterparts. However, this assumption is likely be overly simplistic and runs

contrary to the stories recounted by many of the families who took part in the present study where experiences of racist victimisation were found to be equally prevalent amongst girls as for boys, and included numerous examples of non-verbal abuse which again paints a different picture to that put forward by the school teacher above. It could be that her belief that most known racist incidents at school involve a male victim may reflect the way in which racism is most commonly identified in its more overt forms, with racist incidents perpetrated by or against females manifesting themselves in less obvious ways. In any case, the almost universal feeling amongst those parents interviewed was that their children, whether boys or girls, faced an equally high risk of being racially harassed. Most of these sets of parents felt that this was simply an unfortunate but unavoidable consequence of being a visible minority in a predominantly white community, while some felt that their children needed constant protection and were reluctant to leave them unsupervised at any time. As a consequence of the perceived and actual vulnerability of their children and other family members to the threat of racist attack, many minority ethnic interviewees felt that it was necessary to change their patterns of behaviour. This, and other reactions to the fear and experience of racist victimisation, shall now be considered in greater depth.

### **Impact of racist victimisation**

The nature of the abuse uncovered during the various phases of the research highlights the disturbing implications of racist victimisation in all of its various forms and manifestations, and, as noted above, raises questions about the legitimacy of the term 'low-level', oft-used to describe many *prima facie* less serious expressions of racist harassment. Judging by the way in which victims described their experiences of these types of harassment, it is debatable whether any form of racism can be appropriately described as 'low-level' since usage of the term infers a sense of relative unimportance that trivialises the impact that the experience can have on its victim. In reality, as the research findings have suggested, the damaging effects of even the more 'routine' everyday encounters with racism are often extremely difficult for any third party to fully appreciate.



However, whilst the experience of racist harassment may often be more harrowing than may initially be imagined, the process of victimisation is multi-faceted and can impact upon the victim in different ways, be it as Spalek (2006: 68) describes ‘psychologically, emotionally, behaviourally, financially and physically’. Not surprisingly therefore, interviews with minority ethnic households across each of the research case-study areas illustrated that victims can react to their experiences of racism in a series of ways (see also Magne, 2003; Makda and Milthorp, 2005). For instance, ‘letting it go’ or ‘turning a blind eye’ was regarded by many of the victims interviewed during the course of the research as the easiest, and certainly the least inflammatory, method of dealing with racist victimisation. For these interviewees, such a response would be preferable as a way of keeping the peace, placating aggressors or deterring future acts of racism. One restaurant owner based on the south-east coast of Suffolk, for example, explained that his staff had grown accustomed to receiving racist comments from customers, and as a result simply refrained from reacting because it was such a regular occurrence to which they saw little point in responding.

*They haven't been affected, they have just ignored it. They just let it go as the saying goes.*

Bangladeshi Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

Similar responses were given by many of the interviewees in Robinson and Gardner's (2006: 56) study of racism in rural Wales, where the authors found evidence of what they describe as a particular ‘rural mindset’ amongst some recipients of derogatory comments that excuses potentially racist behaviour as harmless or unintended. However, within the context of the present study not all victims of racist abuse reacted in such a way. Several victims across each research area revealed that their response to racist provocation and barracking had sometimes been more retaliatory than conciliatory. In such instances retaliation against the perpetrator had seemed the most proportionate or only available option as a means of self-defence, self-preservation or self-empowerment, even though this type of reaction would often leave the victim even worse off than before.

*He had a pop at me one day after verbally abusing me and apparently I should have just walked on by with my wife while he's effin' and blinding me, calling me an 'Irish bastard'. So when I stopped to ask him what his problem was he was stupid enough to take a swing, two or three times. So I retaliated, I hit him back once, that was it. Yet I was the one that ended up going to court, he got off with a caution.*

Irish male, Suffolk Coastal

*There's only so much that people take before they turn round and retaliate. It's just a case of defending myself. But trouble in the village was always my fault, you know. The fact is that these people were being racist to me, having fights with me and bits and pieces, but I get the blame.*

Female of mixed heritage, Suffolk Coastal

This latter interviewee neatly summarised the difference between the two common types of response when comparing the outcome of her own reaction to racism to that of her mother's.

*She [my mother] has got to be accepted into the community, and she thinks that by keeping quiet and just putting up with it is the best way. I get a bit frustrated, and I've got a bit of a big gob, and I can't help but say something ... I'm always in trouble.*

Female of mixed heritage, Suffolk Coastal

Observations such as these are indicative of the sense of frustration that commonly surrounds people's responses to racist victimisation. At one level recipients of racist abuse may be keen to challenge perpetrators directly as a means of resolving the problem, but at the same time they may feel powerless to do so, often because they perceive themselves to be on their own or 'fighting a losing battle', or, like the mother referred to in the quotation above, because they feel that keeping quiet is the only



feasible way of perhaps one day being accepted as part of the local community. However, as Bowling (1999: 216) found in his study of racist victimisation in east London, anger tends to be the most common reaction amongst victims of violent racism<sup>34</sup>, and this also appeared to be true of interviewees in this research, many of whom claimed that they would be prepared to stand up to perpetrators, or indeed to retaliate against their racist behaviour depending on the severity of the racist act. Interestingly the vast majority of interviewees who stated that they would use aggression, whether verbal or physical, to take matters into their own hands had said this only hypothetically: though many claimed to have felt like reacting aggressively towards perpetrators of racist harassment, or that they would do so if the harassment was serious enough, relatively few had in fact responded in such a manner. This position is exemplified by the following comment from an interviewee who was explaining how he would react were he or his family to be the victim of what he classed as a form of racist violence, namely some kind of physical attack or an act of property damage.

*I would not passively sit by and allow myself to be a victim without going out and roaming the streets and finding out who did it. The fact that you have not seen me on the news says I have not experienced it, [but] make no joke about it I would go and sort it out.*

African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

Irrespective of the type of racist abuse or harassment experienced, a common feeling noted by most of the minority ethnic interviewees was that of anxiety, which was said to derive from the fear of having to endure future victimisation as well as from the struggle to cope with the cycle of existing problems (see also Chahal and Julienne, 1999). It transpired that the distressing nature of their racist victimisation, together with the frequency with which these acts are committed, has increased these interviewees' sense of fear and paranoia, and in many cases this was found to have a very serious impact upon their quality of life in the rural. As the series of quotations

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<sup>34</sup> Spalek (2006: 74) too suggests that anger is a common response amongst victims of crime more broadly, particularly amongst male victims.

below help to illustrate, the process of victimisation experienced by minority ethnic households can often restrict the victim's freedom in terms of their willingness to allow themselves, or their families, to visit certain parts of their local area, or even to set foot outside their own house through fear of a racist attack (see Magne, 2003: 6.24-6.34; Chahal and Julienne, 1999: 33 for similar evidence of the kinds of avoidance and evasion strategies used by victims of racist harassment).

*Sometimes the whole of winter passes and I will not go outside, all my life is in between these four walls, I don't go out the house ... you're conscious of it all the time, it's something that's in your head all the time, that you might get a bit of bother.*

Indian male, east Northamptonshire

*It makes me feel paranoid; it turns me into some kind of recluse, because I never go out. I'm never doing anything or going anywhere.*

Iranian Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

*When you're scared, you can't walk alone. I've tried to do a little bit of walking, but I can't. You've got to change address, you be careful. You don't walk, you use a car.*

Pakistani Muslim female, Suffolk Coastal

Clearly for these individuals, and for many of the other households interviewed as part of the research in each area, the threat of ongoing or future racist victimisation had resulted in them feeling compelled to make quite significant changes to their lifestyle patterns in order to protect themselves and their families, changes which almost inevitably compounded their sense of isolation from their local communities. As we can see from the quotations above, some were afraid of stepping out of their own homes, certainly on foot, while several interviewees even went so far as to suggest that they often felt wary of inviting minority ethnic friends or members of



their extended family over to visit for fear of provoking further sustained racist abuse (see also Chahal and Julienne, 1999: 27). More often than not victims of rural racism will have had to experience some form of harassment on an almost continual basis and in a variety of different settings, whether at the workplace, in school, in local shops and amenities, or in their own street, and consequently the expressions of fear and paranoia from interviewees such as those referred to above are hardly surprising. Moreover, these experiences can sometimes impact upon people's health and overall well-being (Chahal and Julienne, 1999: 29), as two interviewees based in Suffolk Coastal suggested when describing their own feelings of depression that had arisen from their experiences of racist victimisation.

*I have heard about people going on antidepressants and I was laughing, but now I'm on antidepressants so why do I have to live like this?*

Iranian Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

*[I felt] quite depressed actually. It was embarrassing as well, it happened every night. I just wanted it to all go away really ... That's why I left that school.*

Romany Traveller schoolboy, Suffolk Coastal

The continual and pervasive threat of racism can be emotionally draining for the victim who feels, as a number of interviewees did, that there is nowhere that they can feel safe from the threat of racist victimisation. While most of the interviewees referred to above believed that they could at least protect themselves by confining themselves to their home as much as possible, in several instances people argued they were far from immune even in their own homes as this provided a sitting target to potential perpetrators. Magne (2003: 6.12) describes how in such instances 'the home (a place that most people take for granted as a daily retreat from the pressures of the outside world and a key source of personal sense of security) becomes a place of threat and anxiety', and this was most certainly the case for some interviewees in the present study where as a result of experiencing continued harassment at their homes,

families had even felt it necessary to alter their sleeping arrangements as a way of guarding against racially motivated attacks and keeping a closer eye on nocturnal activities outside the house.

*We've had teenagers throwing stones, muck on the door, shouting and running away ... we were mostly worried about petrol bombing ... I've been sleeping here [downstairs] since then, I always sleep down here.*

Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

*I used to sit here and my wife got up about 7 o'clock the next morning, that's when I went to bed.*

Irish male, Suffolk Coastal

*They [the perpetrators] will come here, they will sit the whole night outside making some racial abuse or they will just laugh at us. They will sit near our car, or sometimes sit on the car, and throw stones at our windows because we made a police complaint. One night they just pushed our car into the middle of the road: there was a knock on the door at 2 o'clock, and a policeman came and said 'Why did you park your car over there?'*

Indian male, Stratford-on-Avon

The unsympathetic response given by the police officer in the final example above, who, it transpired, refused to speak to the alleged perpetrators and instead encouraged the family to try harder to make friends with their neighbours, was symptomatic of how agencies and service providers can often fail to appreciate the scale of the problems experienced by rural minority ethnic households, and this is something that will be examined further in the next chapter. The need for greater support from local agencies and organisations was cited regularly in interviews across each of the case-study areas, particularly in interviews with those with young families who felt especially concerned about the vulnerability of their children. As the research highlighted, children can often be affected by racist abuse or harassment directed



towards other members of the family, or as we have seen above may even be targeted directly themselves, particularly as they are likely to be more regular and more visible users of the public space within the vicinity of their local environment such as parks, gardens and playgrounds (Chahal and Julienne, 1999: 25). This can create considerable apprehension on the part of both parent and child, as illustrated in the following observations from research participants in Northamptonshire.

*I worry about it a lot cos it gets me upset, it's more upsetting than anything.*

Schoolgirl of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire

*All the police say is that because the kids are under 16 they can't do anything, but surely there must be something they could do ... My son is really scared and when he had the problem with this boy bullying him, he even said: 'Mummy what if his parents come and attack Daddy in town?' Even now he's scared, if he wants to go to his Grandad's house a few doors down he will say 'Mummy can you watch me?' ... He used to like school but now he says he hates school.*

Indian female, Wellingborough

*He [grandson] has had a lot of trauma so this is one of the reasons he lives with me. We do suffer a lot and I personally feel like moving out of this area, because ... everything that's gone on in his little life, has all happened within Wellingborough.*

White British female with grandson of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

In some instances the impact of racist victimisation may appear more profound and wide-ranging for those concerned about the safety and well-being of their children and families. At the same time though, whilst having a family brings with it additional responsibilities in this sense, the stories recounted by a number of interviewees suggested that the family network can also provide a valuable and readily available

support structure to minority ethnic individuals in the rural who would otherwise be wholly isolated through the absence of peer-group and agency support. Certainly, on the basis of the disturbing, not to mention lonely, experiences described by single-person households taking part in the research it would seem that racism can be equally devastating for those who live alone. The following comment, taken from an interview with a white woman whose African Caribbean partner lived outside of the county, helps to convey the sense of isolation and despair that victims living on their own can feel.

*I try to challenge it wherever possible but I also feel at times that I just can't challenge it. I can't do it all on my own all the time. Do you know what I mean?*

White female partner of an African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

Ultimately, and as the research findings detailed in this chapter have shown, the experience of rural racism can be a persistent and upsetting problem which is likely to intensify any victim's feelings of vulnerability, whether they have a family or not. It is a problem which can take a number of different forms and guises, and which can manifest itself in a variety of social contexts at any given time, and it is the intangible, implicit, and in some senses 'unreportable' nature of this process of victimisation that compounds the difficulties experienced by rural minority ethnic households who form an especially susceptible target of the rural 'othering' process by virtue of their visibly or audibly 'different' features. The need for effective and sustainable levels of support from rural agencies, policy-makers and service providers is therefore all the more important in light of these ongoing difficulties, and indeed this is the focus of the next chapter. As we shall see, it is those very characteristics of the process of victimisation that makes rural racism such an incomprehensible, and in some ways invisible problem to organisations more attuned to measuring the scale of a problem according to the number of recognisable incidents that show up in recorded crime figures.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Responding to Racism in Rural Communities: Examining Policy, Practice and Minority Ethnic Perceptions**

The research findings discussed thus far have focused predominantly upon the relationship between white rural ‘insiders’ and minority ethnic ‘outsiders’ in each of the case study areas, and this has enabled the thesis to examine the complex nature of racist victimisation in the rural and the way in which it reinforces minority ethnic households’ sense of isolation, marginalisation and ‘otherness’. The analysis now turns to consider the effectiveness, or otherwise, of available support provision for actual or potential victims of rural racism. As noted previously, the prevailing ‘no problem here’ mentality identified by past research as being a common failing of local policy makers and service providers in the rural (see de Lima, 2001; Jay, 1992; Dhalech, 1999b) can delude local agencies into thinking that ‘race’ issues are simply issues that apply to urbanised environments, and such negligence is likely to intensify rural minority ethnic households’ feelings of isolation in the very areas where they lack alternative peer-group or community-based support mechanisms. Therefore, an integral part of the research strategy in each of the case study areas centred around identifying existing channels of support and ascertaining the views of individuals and organisations with a role to play in service provision to minority ethnic households.

Accessing the opinions of those responsible for delivering local services could have been problematic in a research study of this nature where respondents may potentially have felt ‘on trial’ for the quality of their work or for their awareness of race equality issues. As events transpired, the process of setting up interviews with relevant agency representatives was relatively straightforward by virtue of the fact that the research in each of the case study areas was funded collaboratively by a range of local organisations who were keen for the research to engage with issues of rural service delivery. Consequently, in each instance funding agencies facilitated contact with key policy-makers and representatives from relevant statutory and voluntary organisations, and where necessary encouraged these individuals to make themselves available for interview, whilst the researcher’s own familiarisation with the case study areas, which developed as a result of spending prolonged periods of time in each

county conducting the research, also helped to broaden the pool of agency interviewees. Ultimately, research participants taking part in these series of interviews were far less guarded than had been feared initially, in part because their identities were anonymised but also because the vast majority were eager to take advantage of the opportunity to express their opinions on a range of matters, whether this be the strengths or weaknesses of their organisational policy, the dynamics of local partnership working or perceived areas for improvement in working practice.

However, prior to reflecting upon their thoughts on these and other pertinent issues, this chapter first looks at the take-up of services amongst rural minority ethnic households living in the case study areas in terms of their willingness to make contact with local agencies and their reasons for reporting, or not reporting, experiences of rural racism. The chapter then turns to examine respondents' levels of satisfaction with existing service provision, noting in particular the factors that influence minority ethnic households' perceptions of organisational responses, before moving on to consider agency responses to rural racism in greater detail. Drawing from the views expressed by agency representatives in each area, the chapter analyses ways in which support is provided to rural minority ethnic households, and outlines the key features of existing service delivery, together with some of the major difficulties affecting agencies' capacity to deliver effective responses. Whilst the research did uncover examples of good practice which are discussed as appropriate, a number of serious problems were identified with regards to existing approaches to tackling rural racism. At the same time though, the process of highlighting these problems with agency responses enabled the research to identify workable improvements in each of the case study areas, and these are discussed within the final chapter.

### **Take-up of services amongst rural minority ethnic households**

As described in previous chapters, the ways in which members of minority ethnic groups living in small towns and villages can be affected by problems of racism makes it all the more important to ensure that victims feel suitably encouraged to report racist incidents as a means of alleviating isolation and obtaining support. However, the reluctance of minority ethnic groups to share their experiences with organisations is well documented (see, for example, Fitzgerald and Hale, 1996;



Bowling, 1999; Clancy *et al.*, 2001), and this was reflected to some extent in the opinions expressed by respondents across each of the case study areas. Some for instance, albeit a minority, stressed that no matter what the circumstance, they would be unwilling to contact agencies who could potentially offer support, on the basis of their belief that rural-based agencies consisted almost exclusively of white, middle-class workers, who, despite their best intentions, would be unable to fully understand the experiences and needs of minority ethnic communities.

*When you don't get really any help, what's the use of wasting your time?*

Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

*It is probably a really cynical view but I honestly think they [an agency] wouldn't care, it's just like, 'Well I am sorry that someone called you a Paki, I will log that as job number 142 and I will file it in your file, and next time you come down we will get the file out and log it as job 143, you have been called Paki twice'. I honestly believe that no one really honestly truly cares.*

Female interviewee of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

Interestingly though, almost all of the minority ethnic respondents stressed that they were not adverse *per se* to the principle of reporting racist incidents to the police; indeed, the majority stated that they would involve the police if they experienced anything particularly serious (a term which most commonly was seen to comprise incidents of physical assault or property damage). At the same time, all felt that more could be done to encourage victims to report experiences of racism to the police, as illustrated by the following suggestions from interviewees based in north Warwickshire.

*I know a lot of it could be spin and a lot of it could be media hype, but we are seeing a lot of negative publicity for the police and, you know, it has*

*got to have come from somewhere. If they have improved, I'd like to see the information. If they've got the statistics about the fact that they're improving then I think that would give people a bit more faith.*

Chinese male, north Warwickshire

*To convince me to report racial incidents I'd need to know they [the police] would definitely not treat me with suspicion at every opportunity. I would like to believe they would believe in what I am saying and also show a bit of compassion because perhaps they wouldn't understand what someone who has experienced a racial incident is going through, and how hurtful it is to be called names and how hurtful it is to have physical violence directed at you when you are doing nothing but being yourself. I think there is a lack of understanding definitely in the police force, especially around here because again there are not that many ethnic minorities who are in the police and I think that is a problem.*

Female interviewee of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

Though conscious of the need for the police to continue working towards developing their relationship with minority ethnic communities, some felt that the police's understanding of racism, and that of other local organisations, had improved considerably over the course of recent years, even in the more remote towns and villages, to the extent where they felt more reassured about reporting racist incidents in the rural.

*When we went to the police ten years ago to report stuff there was nothing, but nowadays a woman can't stand on my doorstep and get away with calling me a black bitch. That is what I need to know. I like that cos I am here on my own and in the end all you've got is the police and the councils to fall back on. If you're getting abuse it's nice to know now that they do take it seriously.*

Female interviewee of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire



However, the assertion put forward here, namely that victims can feel reassured in knowing that agencies will now take the reporting of a racist incident more seriously than in previous years, was refuted by the majority of interviewees across each county. Whilst many argued that they would ideally like to report each and every experience of racism, there still remained a range of inhibitory factors. It transpired that one of the largest barriers to reporting took the form of evidential requirements, the absence of which, it was felt, would result in the police and other agencies doing little to help.

*There are very few incidents that are reported ... I personally want to report every time I perceive something to be a racial incident, but there would be so much paper work ... Unless I have concrete evidence I will never report.*

African Caribbean male, Wellingborough

During the course of interviews it became clear that a lack of tangible or irrefutable evidence was a particular source of frustration when it came to reporting incidents of racism to the police. Those who had had no prior dealings with the police tended to feel that the police would dismiss, or at best fail to prioritise, their case in the absence of any compelling evidence, whilst almost every victim who had reported previously to the police referred to a certain level of proof expected by that agency which in many instances would be simply unattainable. Consequently, a high proportion of racist incidents will not come to the police's attention simply because the victim *assumes* that no action will be taken without what they regard as sufficient evidence. Moreover, a number of victims recounted negative experiences of having the validity of their evidence doubted by the police, and this had led them to question the purpose of reporting again in the future, as illustrated in the following observation.

*I had this incident where I was walking up the street to school and got pushed into a side alley and the bloke tried to assault me, that was really bad. I reported that and the police were just rubbish. I don't think they*

*believed me at all ... just the way they were with me: 'Well why were you walking down there?' It was a shortcut to get to school. 'Well why were you walking on your own?' I'd decided to go to town on my own to get a few bits and bobs. Basically they didn't believe me so I just thought that wasn't a very good experience ... Now I feel even with this whole new racial harassment awareness they're supposed to have, if something did happen to me now, I still probably wouldn't report it.*

Female interviewee of mixed heritage, north Warwickshire

A further reason behind people's reluctance to report racist incidents to the police was a belief that the police would fail to take the issue seriously (see also de Lima, 2001: 41). This was certainly believed to be the case with regard to the allegedly minor, 'low-level' types of incident referred to earlier, such as verbal abuse or persistent and unnecessary staring, the reporting of which was widely regarded amongst interviewees as being futile.

*If I told the police, I don't know what they'd do cos it might just sound like a silly thing to them, but to me it's not.*

Schoolgirl of mixed heritage, east Northamptonshire

However, the experiences of a number of households in each of the case study areas had led them to conclude that the police were seemingly incapable of taking any racist incident seriously, or at least in dealing with the incident in an appropriately sensitive manner. These victims felt that even where the police were confronted with indisputable evidence of racist harassment, they would often act in an offhand or patronising manner that demonstrated their inability to appreciate the significance of the situation. The disillusionment that can be felt with the police in this regard is perhaps best illustrated by the following comments from one interviewee who had spent many years trying to convince the police of the seriousness of racist harassment directed at her family.



*The policeman turned round to my father and said, 'If your daughter's lived in that house for thirteen years, and it's been going on for years why doesn't she just move? It can't be that bad or she'd have moved a long time ago.' That is what he told my father. That's a policeman!*

*The police say 'Does he [the perpetrator] actually come on to your grass?' and I say 'No, he walks slowly round looking through the window'. And they'll go 'Well, if he's not actually coming onto the property, we can't do anything about it'.*

White British female with children of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

Of course, the reluctance to report to the police may be attributable to wider factors than simply people's attitudes towards that particular agency. As Spalek (2006: 110) suggests, the more 'traditional' minority ethnic communities may sometimes be more reluctant to speak out about negative or traumatic events such as victimisation for fear of exacerbating the situation, and this was certainly the case for some of the older interviewees in this study who explained that they had grown accustomed to sharing problems within their own ethnic or religious community, and not with mainstream organisations. For some respondents however, the reluctance to report can stem from perceived problems within the police service which run deeper than the behaviour of individual officers. According to those respondents, there still remains a widespread reluctance amongst all minority ethnic communities to report racist incidents to the police, and this can often result from the misgivings many people continue to hold about the police's institutional response to racism. Despite changes that may have occurred within the police service in the aftermath of the Macpherson report (for an overview, see Bowling and Phillips, 2002; Rowe, 2007; 2004), many minority ethnic interviewees still appeared to share a profound mistrust of the police's commitment to tackling racism, and this will inevitably impact upon levels of reporting. In discussing this sense of mistrust, interviewees cited a number of concerns about the police, including historical evidence of police discrimination, a lack of accountability and a tendency to cover up or deny the existence of racism, as can be seen in these next observations.

*Most black people know the police is a racist creature. There is an overwhelming body of evidence that suggests that black people on the whole, particularly black males, are more likely to be stopped and searched for whatever reason. The mid 70s marked the beginning of the mistrust ... and we haven't moved on that much. There is still a lot of distrust from the different ethnic communities with regards to the police and that's based on experience.*

African Caribbean male, Wellingborough

*A black friend got attacked by a gang of youths, physically attacked. Punched, hit to the floor and his head started bleeding. There were a lot of them there, I was there with him, and then the police came. It was two lady police officers and they sat in the car and watched it all. They were too scared to get out of the car and I was asking them to get out of the car and they said, 'No there's too many, we're not getting out of the car, we need back-up'. Well, they [the perpetrators] dispersed after they'd damaged him. They'd cut him, they'd had a beating out of him and they dispersed. And nobody was arrested or taken away.*

White female partner of an African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

As can quite clearly be seen from the preceding discussion, opinions expressed during the course of conversations with minority ethnic households about the reporting of racist incidents centred predominantly on the police service. Although all were asked to comment on their willingness to report to a range of different organisations, observations on this subject were largely made with sole reference to the police. This in itself may be a wider issue that requires further consideration, in that it raises questions about minority ethnic households' utilisation, and arguably their awareness, of alternative agencies to whom racist incidents can be reported. However, and as shall be discussed shortly, it transpired that respondents in each of the case study areas were making some use of agencies other than the police when seeking support for their experiences of racist victimisation, and it is therefore likely that respondents simply had substantially more concerns about the reporting of racist incidents to the



police, whether borne from personal experience or from the reputation of that particular organisation.

Nevertheless, though the majority of opinions expressed in relation to take up of services centred around the police, interviewees did make reference to other organisations when discussing the issue of reporting. Contrary to some people's expectations, each county covered by the research does contain a range of support services that can be accessed by rural minority ethnic households, and the following comment illustrates how some of these services can be utilised in conjunction with the support available from the police.

*I would probably go to Victim Support and ask for advice from there; I would also probably go to the Citizens Advice Bureau and ask for advice from there, mainly as a signposting exercise so that they would direct me to the most appropriate person. Depending upon the degree of the severity of the crime I might even seek legal advice to know where I stand in terms of the law, what is the obligation of the police service and what I should expect as an ordinary citizen. So I don't think I would be helpless, there would be at least three avenues that I would go down, mainly for signposting.*

African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

Perhaps unsurprisingly however, a different impression was conveyed by interviewees less familiar with the role or existence of other agencies, and generally there appeared to be considerable reticence amongst households to report racist incidents to agencies other than the police, often because most interviewees were not aware of what organisations existed and how they could be of assistance. Consequently, many felt that reporting to an agency other than the police was a fairly futile exercise, as in their opinion such agencies lacked sufficient clout to resolve an issue as serious as racist victimisation.

*If I was going to report to someone, it would be the police. I can't really think of anybody else that I could go to really. Because if it was a racist incident I'd want something to be done about it.*

White female partner of an African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

*To be honest with you I'm not one for 'Let's hold hands' and I would never see myself as a victim of anything. I'm not that type.*

Irish male, Suffolk Coastal

*I don't want to perceive myself to be a victim ... we want to project our image in a positive manner, I should look decent to people, not like a victim. Victim Support is for those who are a victim, not me.*

Indian male, Wellingborough

The final two comments above were made with reference to Victim Support and are illustrative of some people's reluctance to bracket themselves as 'victims' *per se* by enlisting the help of agencies such as Victim Support, as they remain unconvinced about the capacity of these agencies to provide an appropriate response. This may go some way towards explaining why the police are referred to so frequently, and almost exclusively, when respondents were expressing their opinions about the reporting of racism: the police are traditionally regarded as official gatekeepers to justice and as such are seen as having sufficient authority to resolve racist issues. But while the overall picture suggests that the police are the most likely source of help that victims of rural racism are prepared to access, the concern remains that many racist incidents will continue to go undetected because of a lingering lack of faith amongst minority ethnic households in the quality of police responses, and in the potency of the support available from other organisations. As mentioned previously, the reluctance that some respondents felt with regards to sharing their accounts of racism with a third party may have stemmed from previous experiences of reporting, and with this in mind the chapter now turns to consider respondents' satisfaction, or otherwise, with the responses of local agencies to whom they had reported incidents of rural racism.



### **Satisfaction with service provision**

Gauging the feelings of those who have experienced service provision can be an insightful exercise when seeking to assess the effectiveness of agency responses in dealing with racist incidents. To some extent though the research was hampered in the extent to which it could investigate this particular issue, as few respondents had come into contact with any agency other than the police. Previous sweeps of the British Crime Survey have consistently highlighted lower levels of satisfaction with police performance amongst victims of racially motivated offences (Clancy *et al.*, 2001: 51), and as we have seen, research participants in this study were largely disparaging of the police, mainly on account of either their previous negative experiences or, more commonly, their negative impressions of that agency; indeed, more often than not the critical comments from interviewees about the police were based upon what they had heard about the police's handling of 'race' issues, and not what they had actually experienced themselves. This suggests that an important aspect of responding to racism lies in the way in which minority ethnic communities are made aware of the police's desire and capacity to meet their needs, so that public perceptions are based more on first-hand knowledge as opposed to second-hand conjecture (Chakraborti and Garland, 2003b).

Although several interviewees acknowledged that police officers may be working under practical, institutional or financial constraints that impact upon their ability to deal with racist incidents as effectively as they should, the majority were less willing to make concessions to the police service. A number of reasons were put forward by research participants across each case study area to explain their dissatisfaction with the standard of treatment from the police, as can be seen in the following series of observations.

*They [the police] made us feel, you know, 'There's nobody really hurt, go away, don't annoy us'. It made us feel, 'You're being a pain in the arse here'. And that annoyed us probably more than the racism, to be honest with you.*

Irish male, Suffolk Coastal

*I think the police should do something straight away cos I was always chasing the police myself after the incident. The officer said he'd come back, but I was ringing him up and leaving messages and he was either not there or he'd gone on a course, and there was nobody else who could help me.*

Indian female, Wellingborough

*My middle son, when he got beaten up, we had the police out about that, and they went round and had a word with this boy, and then they came back to us and said that apparently this boy has apologised in a letter. We never saw this letter, but apparently he had apologised in a letter for what he had done to my son, you know, it was a mistake and he was sorry. And that was it.*

Pakistani Muslim female, Suffolk Coastal

A number of interviewees were concerned that their dissatisfaction with police responses would be interpreted, and subsequently dismissed, by the researcher and by local agencies as a form of 'sounding off', but it is important to recognise that comments like those expressed above represent the genuine concerns of households directly affected by racism, and as such cannot be taken lightly. As can be seen in the quotations above, major factors behind victims' dissatisfaction with the police response that emerged during the course of the interviews included the length of time taken to respond to victims; unenthusiastic or unsympathetic reactions; a perceived lack of investigation or follow up; and a prioritisation of form-filling over direct communication or action.

Where minority ethnic households spoke favourably about the police, this tended to be in reference to the police's willingness to put them into contact with another appropriate agency as a way of accessing further support. This was most commonly the case in Suffolk Coastal, where a number of households, albeit still a minority, praised the police for their expressions of concern and committed stance, and in



particular for referring them immediately to Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative. As shall be discussed in more detail shortly, the Racial Harassment Initiative is an example of a scheme designed to enable Suffolk's minority ethnic communities to access support and advice from a service dedicated exclusively to addressing the needs of victims of racism (Jalota, 2004), and those research participants referred to the Initiative were all grateful to the police for putting them into contact with this agency.

*The policeman said that we should get in touch with the Racial Harassment Unit in Ipswich. If we would be interested they may be able to give you support, so we jumped at the chance. They also gave us ... something that goes under the phone, and if we had any more problems all we had to do was press a button and we would be directly linked to the police station. I was quite happy with that policeman, he was quite nice wasn't he? He was trying to put a stop to it.*

Iranian Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

Those Suffolk-based interviewees who had reported incidents to the Racial Harassment Initiative were without exception satisfied with the response received. This satisfaction stemmed from factors such as the swiftness of response and the determination shown by the Initiative in addressing specific problems and encouraging action from other agencies such as the police and local councils when it came to installing additional security measures such as security lighting. A further positive attribute of the Racial Harassment Initiative in the eyes of several families was its willingness to maintain regular contact and to keep victims fully informed at all times. This was regarded as extremely important by the vast majority of those interviewed as a way of reassuring victims that their problems are being taken seriously, and is something that was commonly said to be lacking in the responses of other agencies, most notably the police.

*He [the Racial Harassment Co-ordinator] kept in touch with us when he said he was going to do something, we had full confidence it was going to be done. We didn't have to worry about it, if he said he was going to get back to us, he did ... The police – we left messages and sometimes they never got back to us. We'd call again and again. And the council was awful.*

White American male, Suffolk Coastal

Although neither of the other two counties had an equivalent service to Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative, research participants in these areas did make positive comments about some of the agencies with whom they had come into contact. In Warwickshire for instance, the two race equality support officers based in north Warwickshire and Stratford-on-Avon respectively received a great deal of praise from interviewees who had accessed their services. In Northamptonshire too, the work of the local Race Equality Council was mentioned by several interviewees as a valuable source of support.

*Since he has started the Race Equality Officer work, that's made me feel more comfortable that there is somebody in authority who is looking at that issue. At least I feel that there is one person who's working on it and looking at it.*

White female partner of an African Caribbean male, north Warwickshire

*He [the Racial Equality Support Officer] did a lot, kept on contacting them, writing letters ... That was good for me because I thought at least somebody is recognising what I had felt, the boys had felt, and they were following it up. At least I felt there is somebody in this country that will back us up, there is at least one organisation.*

Iranian female, Stratford-on-Avon



*The Race Equality Council have been brilliant and have given lots of support, they used to phone me to see how things are ... When my son was getting bullied at school, I phoned the Race Equality Council and they called up Education to get them involved as well.*

Indian female, Wellingborough

As with those Suffolk-based interviewees highly satisfied with the support provided by the Racial Harassment Initiative, these assertions above confirmed the general impression conveyed throughout the research process: namely, that victims of racist crime would welcome assistance from *any* agency that demonstrates the willingness, expertise and commitment to help resolve their problems. A key problem, however, lies in the widespread lack of awareness that exists amongst minority ethnic households across the more rural and isolated parts of the county with regard to what support services might be available; indeed, despite the praise afforded to the services provided by Race Equality Councils and Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative, interviews across each of the case-study areas revealed that the majority of minority ethnic households had not accessed support from such agencies because they were simply unaware of their existence. Given the high levels of satisfaction amongst research participants with the response received from these organisations, particularly when set against the discontent expressed over the police response, it is regrettable that their services were accessed only by relatively few. Clearly Race Equality Councils and Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative have an important role to play, not only in the delivery of services to rural minority ethnic households, but equally in encouraging other organisations to be more proactive in their response to victims of racist harassment.

Across each of the case study areas, for example, a number of interviewees felt that local authorities had been slow to react to their problems, with particular concern expressed over the reluctance shown by district councils in finding alternative residence for those experiencing ongoing harassment. Whilst the majority of those in such a situation were determined to stay in their existing homes, most felt that the council had been unco-operative in meeting their requests to move, or at least in keeping them informed of progress and developments. This, it was believed,

unnecessarily increased victims' feelings of anxiety and isolation. Similarly, councils also came under fire from interviewees in Suffolk Coastal for failing to effectively punish families whose children were known to racially harass, or incite hostility against, members of minority ethnic communities. Such families, it was felt, should at the very least be threatened with eviction for failing to control their children. Consequently, in light of these kinds of perceived inadequacies interviewees felt that it would take a considerable amount of pressure from the Racial Harassment Initiative to encourage direct action from local authorities or indeed the police.

*[The Racial Harassment Co-ordinator] was the key to getting this whole situation addressed. If we hadn't had him, and if he didn't put the pressure on the council, nothing would have happened.*

White American male, Suffolk Coastal

*Not until [the Racial Harassment Co-ordinator] got on the case was anything done. And then, all of a sudden, they [the police] were doing their jobs ... Why did they not do anything until he came out there on the scene?*

Irish male, Suffolk Coastal

Similarly in Northamptonshire interviewees expressed their satisfaction not only with the intensive support provided by the Race Equality Council, but also with the endeavour shown by that agency in engaging other organisations who could be a further potential source of help. However, an especially interesting feature of some of the interviews conducted in that county was the way in which such engagement can be interpreted as both a strength and a weakness. While communication with other organisations is obviously a key component of effective multi-agency working, some victims may see consultation with or referrals to other agencies as a sign of powerlessness. This was certainly the case for several interviewees who were disappointed with what they saw as the Race Equality Council's inability to resolve issues themselves.



*We got the Racial Equality Council involved but they weren't really very helpful in any way. I think they're a bit of a toothless tiger.*

African Caribbean female, east Northamptonshire

*The Race Equality people have been nice ... they arrange meetings, they take notes and whatever, but still basically they're like Victim Support, they can't actually do anything about it. They haven't really got the power to do anything have they?*

White British female with children of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

The criticism of Victim Support referred to in the above quotation was shared by a number of other research participants who voiced frustration with elements of that agency's response. This organisation came in for a degree of criticism from several people who had used its services, in part for specific problems cited by interviewees affecting the perceived quality of response such as a shortage of available volunteers or the difficulty involved in getting hold of a worker over the telephone, factors equally problematic to Victim Support schemes in urban, as well as rural, areas (Spalek, 2006: 93). A more general limitation of this agency though was its perceived inability to effect significant change, as illustrated below.

*It's basically like just talking to a friend. This worker said 'Oh, I think it's disgusting that people in this day and age are still like that', but they [Victim Support] can't actually do something for you ... I understand maybe someone likes to sit down and be spoken to by them [Victim Support], they find it helps talking about it, but really and truly I've talked to so many people about this and nothing's been done. I'm just sick of it, do you get what I mean?*

White British female with children of mixed heritage, Wellingborough

However, as mentioned above with reference to the police, many of the criticisms afforded to Victim Support were based more on assumptions, or on what interviewees

had heard about that agency, as opposed to direct experiences, with relatively few research participants having come into contact with Victim Support. Indeed, this lack of engagement is consistent with the suggestions of Spalek (2006: 96) who argues that minority ethnic communities are generally much more reluctant to access Victim Support services than other groups: citing Victim Support (2003) statistics, she states that as few as 99 calls made to Victim Support's national telephone line during 2002/03 were made in relation to racist harassment out of a total of just under 19,000 calls. Nevertheless, in addition to highlighting the problem of low take-up amongst minority ethnic communities, past studies of the racial harassment services offered by Victim Support have in fact found consistently high levels of satisfaction amongst minority ethnic users of these services (Kimber and Cooper, 1991; Chahal, 2003). Whilst satisfaction levels were rather more mixed in the present study, it should be noted that some of those who had been referred to Victim Support felt that they had received a valuable service, as suggested below.

*Victim Support were helpful. It's not so much what the situation is, it's how the person that's the victim is supposed to cope, that's where Victim Support help. Just by giving me an alarm, I feel safe in coming back to work knowing that if I pull the thing, someone will know.*

Peruvian female, Wellingborough

In light of the feelings of isolation and helplessness expressed by many of the research participants in each case-study area, it would seem that many people who have fallen prey to racist victimisation could have benefited from the practical and emotional support that such an agency can provide. As Spalek (2006: 94) suggests, Victim Support services have grown considerably in size and scope over the years in order to cater for the needs of a broader range of victims including those subjected to racist crime; indeed, while one of the interviewees quoted above is mildly critical of Victim Support for being limited to the role of a 'friend', this in itself is a form of reassurance that many minority ethnic households, particularly those living in rural and isolated parts of the county, would otherwise have to do without. A number of interviewees



went further in suggesting that it was not merely a ‘friend’ of this nature that they were lacking, but a minority ethnic ‘friend’.

*There needs to be more people that I can speak to from a minority ethnic background.*

African male, Suffolk Coastal

*To be honest with you, on the first day that he [the Racial Harassment Co-ordinator] came, it was quite nice to talk to somebody who was from a similar ethnic background to ourselves, and just somebody to listen to us and say we understand what you are going through.*

Iranian Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

As suggested in past research (Magne, 2003; de Lima, 2001), minority ethnic households living in isolated, predominantly ‘white’ areas may prefer to be dealt with by a fellow member of a minority ethnic community. Whilst this in no way should be seen to infer that only members of minority ethnic communities themselves are able to understand and respond effectively to issues of racism, a common assertion amongst research participants in this study was that they would have welcomed the opportunity to engage with someone of shared minority ethnic status, even if their ethnicity was different to the research participant’s. Consequently, the relative lack of minority ethnic faces within local organisations may have affected levels of satisfaction with agency responses in each of the case-study areas. Like the interviewee quoted above, many of those who had come into contact with Suffolk’s Racial Harassment Initiative mentioned how pleased they had been to discover that the Racial Harassment Co-ordinator was from a minority ethnic background as they felt that their problems would be fully understood and taken seriously, and similar sentiments were expressed by interviewees who had met the minority ethnic Race Equality workers in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire. Ultimately though, whilst shared minority ethnic status can be a factor in making agency representatives, and the organisations themselves, more accessible to rural minority ethnic households, it is the quality of

service itself that dictates the effectiveness of agency responses to rural racism, and the chapter now turns to consider the ways in which organisations in each of the research case-study areas seek to address the needs of minority ethnic groups in the rural.

### **Agency responses to racist victimisation**

As previous studies of rural racism have highlighted (Jay, 1992; de Lima, 2001; Magne, 2003), ensuring that agencies deal with incidents of racist victimisation in an appropriately effective and sensitive manner is instrumental to increasing levels of trust and confidence amongst minority ethnic communities. However, this effectiveness and sensitivity is predicated not just on how these organisations deal with the immediate aftermath of a racist incident, but on a range of further factors, including agencies' awareness of the make-up of the local minority ethnic population, their understanding of the complexities of racist victimisation, and the way in which victims' needs are addressed following the immediate aftermath of an incident. Central to this process is the relationship between local organisations and rural minority ethnic households, as well as intra- and inter-agency working practices as shall be discussed shortly.

The research conducted across the respective case-study areas uncovered numerous examples of both good and poor practice with regards to the quality of agency responses to instances of racist victimisation, as we shall see. However, in general terms it would seem that responses were, perhaps not surprisingly, considerably stronger in those areas with services dedicated exclusively to tackling racist victimisation. As Jalota (2004) and Magne (2003) note, such services are in short supply and have been mainstreamed by local authorities in only a handful of areas across the UK, despite the benefits that they can offer; indeed, in his evaluation of selected racist harassment support projects Chahal (2003) identifies some of the key functions that can be performed by such projects, such as the undertaking of case work, multi-agency liaison and preventive work within the local community, and in so doing draws attention to the clear benefits of localised racist harassment support initiatives in offering victims a support mechanism and a sense of empowerment. While each county in the present study contained its own Race Equality Council to whom, in theory at least, issues of 'race' could be referred to both by members of the



public and by local organisations, Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative was the only agency within the case-study areas with direct responsibility for supporting victims of racist harassment, and as such was very much regarded as the lead agency in Suffolk when it came to addressing problems of rural racism. Based within Suffolk County Council's Community Safety Unit, the Racial Harassment Initiative was set up in the late 1990s through Single Regeneration Budget funding as a way of co-ordinating more sustainable responses to racism from agencies across the county and delivering dedicated services to the county's minority ethnic population (Jalota, 2004). The Initiative's direct response to victims can take a variety of forms, but the following observation from one of its workers offers a general summary of its role.

*Usually our main priority initially is to go out there and support them [the victim], see what's been happening. But also to set up some way of securing their property, like putting a community alarm in; or if a video to catch the perpetrators is required, a camera outside, get them installed. If the doors and so forth need securing we work then with housing, and ...we'll look at seeing if we can secure that property or see if there is anything extra needed, like window locks.*

Staff member, Racial Harassment Initiative, Suffolk

Clearly, the installation of 'target hardening' measures can be a positive step in helping the victim to feel more secure. However, there is a danger in over-reliance on such measures, and a wide body of criminological research has indicated that when used in isolation such situational crime prevention methods are not as successful in preventing crime as may be commonly perceived (Trasler, 1986; Wright and Logie, 1988; Hughes, 1998). Certainly, with regards to victims of racism such measures will often need to be utilised in conjunction with other initiatives, such as proactive police work and the provision of counselling services to victims. In the case of Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative therefore, it is of particular concern that its workers felt unqualified, and therefore unable, to provide these sorts of counselling services as they lack the necessary training and expertise, and this is one of a number of problematic features evident within existing agency responses that shall be addressed

more fully in due course. Nonetheless, irrespective of the nature of the problem reported or the type of support required, the research revealed that the Initiative's initial response to any instance of victimisation was to send out a letter to the victim outlining the kind of support available from the Initiative within the first 24 hours of receiving a report, and to make a follow up telephone call within 48 hours offering a personal visit from a caseworker to establish what the needs of the victim or family might be.

The research highlighted that when notified of racist incidents, a common response from many Suffolk-based agencies is to refer the victim to the Racial Harassment Initiative. One police inspector, for instance, spoke of the 'very detailed structure' in place at Suffolk Constabulary 'in terms of what is required to be done and who is required to be informed'; it later transpired that in practical terms, this amounted to little more than the investigating officer taking 'appropriate actions' and the inspector ensuring that the Racial Harassment Initiative was informed of all racist incidents. A similar response was found to be the norm with Ipswich and Suffolk's Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE), whose main service for victims of racist harassment, it transpired, was to make victims aware of the ways in different agencies may be able to offer help.

*If it is a housing problem and it is attacks with a racial element, the first question is, 'Have you contacted the Racial Harassment Initiative and what is being done? How are the police supporting you? How is the housing, the landlord, we need to find out who is the landlord. Is it a local authority or housing association? Have they also been supporting you? And if the answer is 'no', we will advise the person to get in touch with the Racial Harassment Initiative or in fact, often we will get in touch with the Racial Harassment Initiative first to try and see what sort of support and advice they can give exactly.*

Director of ISCRE, Suffolk

Such an approach can be extremely useful to the victim as a way of pointing them in the right direction and highlighting the range of available routes for further action. At



the same time though, agencies must take care to avoid giving victims the impression that their problems are simply being offloaded onto other organisations: for example, while an agency such as ISCRE that deals predominantly with issues of racial discrimination may be quite correct in referring victims of racist harassment to other appropriate agencies, an individual in need of help may not be able to see the distinction between the two forms of racism. Consequently, they may feel that responsibility is simply being passed from one organisation to another, and this was certainly a sentiment expressed by some of those who had come into contact with race equality workers in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire as well, as discussed above.

In the absence of an equivalent agency to Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative in either of the other two case-study counties, the police service appeared to play a significantly more prominent role in delivering services to victims of racist harassment or abuse. Northamptonshire Police have their own designated 'Racist Incident Officer' responsible for the co-ordination of agency action, and as soon as an incident is recorded as a crime that officer sends the victim an information pack containing advice and guidance on the range of available services. The research revealed that there is only one police officer to fulfil this role for an area covering the entire Wellingborough district and half of east Northamptonshire; a set-up which on the one hand can provide a continuity of service to the victim that is crucial in cases where the officer who initially deals with the incident cannot devote the time to the victim that they would like to, but one which can also create problems with workloads, as the following comments from the Racist Incident Officer suggest.

*Officers can be, through the nature of our role, 'hit and run'. An officer will go there and victims want more time with that officer sometimes, and perhaps the officer can't do it and has to leave, and that can leave a victim sitting there, still upset.*

*The advantages are once it goes to them you have got continuity, you've got a Racist Incident Officer who's investigating it, but ... sometimes that Racist Incident Officer has to give the crimes back to the [original] officer dealing with it because of their workload. [Nevertheless] I think it works*

*quite well, and in a survey I carried out last year, I got very positive feedback.*<sup>35</sup>

Racist Incident Officer, Northamptonshire Police

The role of Race Equality Councils is significant in this context as the research in each area highlighted that one of that organisation's key responsibilities is to 'chase up' any agencies that should be offering assistance to victims. As an employee of Wellingborough District Race Equality Council stated:

*If anybody is really upset then I try to see them that day or the next day, and see them personally. If it's somebody just ringing up to report something and saying that they don't think one of the other agencies has been doing well enough, then I'll chase the other agencies and keep in contact by telephone to see that those other agencies have actually gone round and started doing something.*

Representative, Wellingborough District Race Equality Council

The danger with this system is that it relies upon the victim of a racist incident alerting their local Race Equality Council to the existence of a problem. If a victim is unaware of, or has little faith in, the services being offered by agencies then they are unlikely to contact the Race Equality Council, and therefore may 'slip through the net'. However, this is not a problem particular only to Race Equality Councils, but indeed to a much wider range of organisations who could potentially offer support to rural minority ethnic households. As we have seen, experiences of racist victimisation are substantially under-reported in the rural, most commonly because minority ethnic households are often unaware of local agencies' existence or have little faith in their ability to deliver an adequate response, and the slippage that accrues from such a situation was frequently cited by various organisations throughout the research as being a major source of frustration that was believed to hamper their ability to deliver

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<sup>35</sup> The officer here was referring to a satisfaction survey of victims of racist harassment, carried out by Northamptonshire Police in 2001/02, which revealed that 64 per cent of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the initial police response to the incident.



effective responses. The following quotations taken from interviewees representing local agencies in Suffolk Coastal are illustrative of the types of concerns expressed across each research site.

*Leiston hasn't had any problems regarding racist incidents if you look only at the numbers being reported, as I have been here five years and I haven't had one reporting. Yet we know there is a problem ... I can't understand why young children are not walking through the doors, young children of all ethnic groups - we are just not getting to them.*

Manager, Citizens Advice Bureau, Suffolk Coastal

*One of our commercial tenants has been subjected to probably a year of racially motivated incidents, but it was only actually last week that it was reported to us as landlords. The tenant hadn't come forward and said to us, 'Look I'm experiencing this, can you help me out?' He hadn't gone to the police and said, 'Can you help me out?' Or if he had, the police hadn't come to us as landlords and said, 'Can we help out?'*

District council policy officer, Suffolk Coastal

*I think this year I'm probably only up to about fifty [incidents of racial harassment] for the whole year. Not many. And a lot of the ones that I do have will be shopkeepers who get called names.*

Victim liaison officer, Suffolk Constabulary

*In the two years that ... I've worked here, I don't think we've had one self-referral for racist crime. Maybe it's because it's more hidden. Maybe, if you say, 'Oh that's happened to me, I don't want people to know about it'.*

Victim Support co-ordinator, Suffolk Coastal

It was found that slippage can also be extremely problematic within the education sector, not least because schools are largely self-governing institutions who, in the words of one Warwickshire-based Local Education Authority (LEA) representative, ‘can decide what guidance they do and don’t implement’. Interviews with LEA workers in each county revealed that whilst LEAs encourage schools to record all forms of racism as separate racist incidents and undertake a practice of collecting annual returns of the number of racist incidents at schools, there will inevitably be under-reporting where schools fail to explicitly follow guidance or where pupils fail to inform the school of their experiences of racist victimisation. Similarly, schools are offered guidance on how to respond to racist incidents and on ways to incorporate multicultural education into teaching, but the implementation of such guidance is ultimately decided upon by the individual school.

*In some schools they will say ‘We have a colour-blind approach here’, as though that’s something they should be patted on the back for. For us to say, ‘No, we need to acknowledge difference’, is quite hard.*

LEA representative, Warwickshire County Council

Consequently, there may be a tendency to under-estimate the extent of the problem in schools, particularly in rural towns and villages where the numbers of minority ethnic pupils are low and racism is not seen as an issue of significance. As Gaine (1995: 12) suggests, teachers may well be speaking the truth when they say they have never seen or heard pupils expressing racist attitudes, but at the same time this should not lead them to discount the possibility that racist incidents might be taking place without their knowledge.

*We don’t actually have any racism in this school which you will be encouraged to know.*

Deputy head teacher, high school, Suffolk Coastal



As discussed earlier, examples of this kind of ‘no racism here’ mentality are commonplace in rural environments where agency workers can often be swayed by the relative absence of racist incidents in their official figures into taking the figures at face value, and believing that episodes of racism simply ‘don’t happen’ in the rural (Dhalech, 1999a). Certainly, this was the impression conveyed during many, though not all, interviews with representatives from a wide variety of different agencies across each case-study area, including the education, health and housing sectors, as well as with local policy-makers such as local councillors, district council policy officers, and other local authority workers. For a worryingly high proportion of these interviewees, racism was not regarded as a problem because they had not come into contact with many (or in some instances, *any*) rural minority ethnic households, and this failure to identify the presence of, let alone the problems encountered by, such households would appear to be a major obstacle to the delivery of effective services (see also Magne, 2003).

*In our work one of the areas which we haven’t been able to make a lot of headway in is working with black and minority ethnic groups, because there aren’t any black and minority ethnic groups in Stratford district at all.*

Voluntary sector worker, Stratford-on-Avon

*In the Stratford district it has been extremely difficult working with BME families, particularly because we don’t know where they are. I have attempted to try work with other agencies, for example the voluntary agency under its umbrella of the Rural Voluntary Services Partnership, and unfortunately none of those agencies have any contacts or any users on their client books to be able to work with me in identifying BME individuals who live in the locality.*

Support worker, north Warwickshire

*There is a sizeable Polish population down in Stratford. I don't know what their needs are ... [and] I think the Chinese community, their needs are never addressed. And it's the same in north Warwickshire.*

Social Services representative, Stratford-on-Avon

However, problems associated with a 'no racism here' mentality may be rooted as much in collective, as well as individual, failings, as the fact that some agencies may have limited awareness of the extent and scope of rural racism to a large degree reflects upon the level of information sharing within and between various organisations in each county. Indeed, on the evidence of this research, many agencies would have benefited from the wider knowledge of other service providers in different areas of each county, as a means of learning more about the presence of local minority ethnic households, the scope and impact of racist victimisation and, in particular, as a way of providing a more informed response to victims. With this in mind the next section examines ways in which agencies interacted with each other in the respective case-study areas, and identifies some of key strengths and weaknesses of the partnership approaches adopted in each county.

### **Partnership working in practice**

Some of the key concerns referred to above by agency workers in each of the case-study areas, such as a shortage of resources, their limited experience of dealing with 'race' issues and an unfamiliarity with the needs of local minority ethnic households, suggest that partnership working is all the more essential in rural environments where agencies can come together to overcome individual limitations by sharing information, resources and good practice. Partnership working has been one of the major criminal justice policy initiatives of the current Labour administration – indeed, Hughes (2002: 129) refers to the expansion of such forms of governance as the *cult* of partnerships – and this has manifested itself most overtly in the establishment of crime and disorder reduction partnerships under the auspices of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. There are, of course, additional networks that operate outside of the statutory community safety partnerships, and in the context of the present research it was evident that networks designed to help agencies work collaboratively against racism



were established in each of the three counties. For instance, in Suffolk the Multi-Agency Forum Against Racial Harassment (MAFARH) was formed in 1997 as a way of encouraging statutory and voluntary agencies across the county to develop more informed responses to racism, while similarly in Northamptonshire the Eastern Area Multi-Agency Group Against Racial Attacks and Harassment (MAGRAH) was established in 1990 with the aim of providing effective multi-agency responses to racist incidents. Although those two counties contained respectively one main multi-agency forum responsible for driving these issues forward, it transpired that a wider range of networks had been set up in Warwickshire: in north Warwickshire, Partnerships Against Racism (PAR) was constituted in March 2004, and in Stratford-on-Avon there was also Communities Against Racism (CAR), re-launched in May 2003. In addition, and rather confusingly given that the same partners appeared to sit on these respective networks, the Stratford-on-Avon district was also home to the Stratford Against Racism multi-agency network (STAR), formerly known as the Stratford and District Race Equality Multi-Agency Partnership (SADREMAP).

At face value, the existence of these fora is encouraging, not least because it appeared to illustrate that the kinds of problems outlined in previous chapters were being taken seriously by agencies in their local areas. Certainly, partnership working, in theory at least, offers a range of well-publicised merits such as the co-ordination of effort and expertise, the pooling of resources, a problem-oriented premise and the adoption of a holistic approach (see, for example, Hughes, 2002; Phillips, 2002; Crawford, 1998a and b; Harrison, Mann, Murphy, Taylor and Thompson, 2003), all of which were seen as being extremely beneficial to many of the agency workers interviewed across the case-study areas in helping them to address the needs of minority ethnic households.

*We do work very well with the other agencies; on our partnership group we have representatives from youth offending, probation, health and the police, to name just a few, but we try and work with all the agencies.*

District council policy officer, Suffolk Coastal

*The information flow is quite good within the organisation [MAGRAH] ... We get a lot of information from the other key players, which then binds the*

*whole thing, because housing issues may also be education issues and social services issues, so we get a clearer picture of what potentially is going on.*

Representative, Wellingborough Borough Council housing department

*Everyone is there, everyone puts in 110 per cent and both the projects, CAR and SADREMAP, fulfil that which they were created for very well.*

Community relations officer, Warwickshire Constabulary

However, in addition to the positive comments expressed about the advantageous features of partnership working, interviews with agency workers from a range of organisations in each county also revealed some degree of dissatisfaction, frustration and confusion surrounding various aspects of the running of these networks. In part, some of the more problematic elements of partnership working in this sense may stem from what Crawford (1998a and b) describes as a common failure to distinguish conceptually between *multi-agency* relations and *inter-agency* relations. For Crawford (1998b: 214), multi-agency partnerships ‘involve the coming together of various agencies ... without this significantly affecting or transforming the work that they do’, whereas inter-agency partnerships ‘interpenetrate and thus affect normal internal working practices of the agencies. They entail some degree of fusion and melding of relations between agencies’. Under this distinction therefore, partners within a multi-agency framework will remain distinct and their core tasks unaltered as any multi-agency work becomes grafted onto their existing duties; inter-agency work, on the other hand, is likely to change the nature of mainstream service delivery within partner organisations through the establishment of new structures or patterns of working within and between agencies. While in practice, as Crawford acknowledges, the vast majority of initiatives lie somewhere between these two polar types, the two terms can often mistakenly be used inter-changeably with little thought given to the differences in expectation that accrue from these distinct modes of partnership, and it is the lack of conceptual clarity over the roles and responsibilities of participating agencies that can create tensions within partnership structures.



Such tensions were evident in each of the networks running in the three counties, with the commonly-cited confusion over the specific remit of the various fora often giving rise to feelings of a lack of ownership or involvement on the part of certain agencies who it was felt could be playing a more active role. The problem of unequal participation in partnership initiatives more generally has been discussed by authors such as Hough and Tilley (1998) and Harrison *et al.* (2003), who also identify a range of other common difficulties with agency networks cited by interviewees from various organisations in this study, including political wrangling over funding and other resources; a lack of a shared ideal; a misunderstanding of aims and objectives; the dominance of one or two powerful bodies over other partners; problems of accountability and division of responsibilities; mutual suspicion between some partners; lack of clarity over partners' roles; poor communication, and lack of leadership. The following comments from interviews conducted in Northamptonshire help to illustrate some of the key concerns raised by interviewees in relation to partnership working.

*I think it [commitment] is strong from some agencies, but not as strong from others ... Strong from the police, Victim Support and IPS [Inclusion and Pupil Support], and the Borough Council and City Council. Not as strong as it once was, but patchy from social care and health ... and we don't often see someone from the Crown Prosecution Service, for example.*

Representative, Inclusion and Pupil Support, east Northamptonshire

*If you see how many are signed up to MAGRAH I think it's about fifteen, sixteen agencies, but the majority, the bulk of the work's done by two, and a third one in terms of projects, so that's poor ... In terms of projects and what we take forward, I put police and the Racial Equality Council by far at the top, and then you have the local authority and Victim Support. I'm not saying the rest don't do the work – they turn up to all meetings – I'm saying if you looked at workload and what's been taken forward in terms of racist incidents, it will be them.*

Racist Incident Officer, Northamptonshire Police

As the latter quotation infers, it is not solely the presence of agencies at meetings that can make a crucial difference to partnership work, but also their active involvement. On numerous occasions, interviewees expressed their frustration with the tokenistic attitude displayed by some of their colleagues during partnership meetings, as highlighted in this next observation.

*I was fairly horrified when talking to more than one senior area education officer when I was told to take a book along to MAGRAH because they're really boring meetings ... There's no point in people attending meetings concerning racism because someone's told them they've got to be there. They've got to be committed.*

Representative, Inclusion and Pupil Support, east Northamptonshire

With regard to the effectiveness of Suffolk's multi-agency approach, staff at the Racial Harassment Initiative believed that things were generally moving in the right direction, although again certain factors detracted from the effectiveness of that county's partnership network. Specifically, it was felt that MAFARH was a rather weak forum that in practice fails to proactively seek change, with features such as an absence of clear aims, a shortage of regular attendees from key agencies across the county and poor management all seen as major flaws within that particular forum. For other interviewees though, the problems affecting partnership work in the context of tackling issues of 'race' were less to do with structural factors, and more commonly associated with practical limitations. Many felt that one of the major benefits of partnership working lay in the fact that they could involve other organisations in the delivery of services where appropriate, but practical difficulties, such as a shortage of time, will often regulate the effectiveness of such working. This was perceived to be a significant and irresolvable problem by nearly all of those interviewed across the three counties.



*That's the drawback of multi-agency work, that it's a bit slow, the process, isn't it? You've got to check diaries with everybody and see if you can meet up.*

Staff member, Racial Harassment Initiative, Suffolk

Nevertheless, some of the more practical shortcomings of partnership work were perceived to be by no means irresolvable even if a solution had yet to be found. A consistent complaint from interviewees in each area related to the reluctance shown by some agencies to share information, good practice or relevant data with other partner organisations. This lack of openness was attributed by some to petty rivalries, personal politics or levels of mistrust that can exist between different organisations unaccustomed to working collaboratively, and this can clearly be a major obstacle to the development of effective partnership responses. Not everyone believed that their local partnership network had been blighted by these kinds of problems, and the following comment from a representative within Warwickshire Police is illustrative of the more positive impressions sometimes conveyed by more senior personnel keen to highlight the benefits of partnership working in terms of agency networking and information sharing.

*I think on the whole, we do have a number of joint-funded posts, we have two specifically for race that are joint-funded and that's Borough District Council, County Council and the Police. So that shows that we can actually all sit down together and say, here we are and this is what we're doing. There's an Equality Officers group that meets in the county and that's quite a good source of information sharing.*

Diversity co-ordinator, Warwickshire Police

However, an alternative view on partnership working in that locality was expressed by a race equality support officer, who was concerned about the recording and sharing of racist incident data, which he felt was crucial to the effectiveness of multi-agency interventions in racist harassment cases. This Officer explained that he regularly experienced difficulty in obtaining racist incident data from some agencies, whilst

others were not willing to divulge this type of information to partners. Similar sentiments were expressed by a Police Inspector at Suffolk Constabulary.

*The other agencies need to be more open in terms of their information sharing ... I don't know how proactive they're being.*

Inspector, Suffolk Constabulary

For this inspector, proactivity would require a much greater degree of information sharing and a willingness to seek out other agencies for advice. This latter feature in particular was perceived to be rarely practised by Suffolk-based agencies, with the exception of the Racial Harassment Initiative, and it is this reluctance to openly interact that can prevent some agencies from offering a fully informed service to victims. Conversely, some agencies may be keen to interact with other partners as a way of learning more about the needs of minority ethnic households, but find that the procedure is not working as effectively as it could, as suggested by one housing association team leader who explained the difficulty that he had experienced in learning from agencies who may have more practical knowledge of issues such as racist harassment. Although existing policy documents and literature were referred to, it was felt that housing associations' responses would benefit significantly from greater interaction with organisations on existing multi-agency forums as a means of learning good practice and establishing full awareness of important issues, and yet these organisations had, with several notable exceptions, been unwilling to interact.

As in Suffolk, where it was felt by nearly everyone interviewed that the co-ordinator of the Racial Harassment Initiative had a pivotal role to play in maintaining and driving forward relationships between agencies, the creation and funding of two race equality support officer posts in Warwickshire was cited by a number of interviewees in that county as a positive example of joined-up working.

*They [race equality support officers] have both provided services for areas that were non-existent. They've certainly been very effective for the district councils responsible for those rural communities with minimal numbers of*



*people in BME communities in advising them and beginning mechanisms to actually allow things to start happening, and keying in with some members of BME communities.*

Diversity co-ordinator, Warwickshire Police

Interestingly, however, the race equality support officers themselves outlined some concerns with the way that partnership working had actually hindered the effectiveness of agency responses to racism. One of the main perceived problems, for instance, related to the way in which agencies were not involving partners early on enough in cases of racist harassment.

*But that [multi-agency liaison] doesn't happen until a particular agency has reached an end or they can't do anything and then they think, 'Oh well, phone the police, the police might be able help'; or 'Oh why don't you phone the race equality support officer, he should be able to do something with this'.*

Race equality support officer, north Warwickshire

*The cases I get referred to by the police are mainly during the latter stages of the police investigations being carried out or when the investigations have been carried out, whether they are going for a prosecution or whether the CPS has advised them that there is no case to answer, and that they are unable to prosecute.*

Race equality support officer, Stratford-on-Avon

Another frustration cited by the race equality support officers was a lack of effort from partner agencies who may 'talk a good game' but who do not follow their words with meaningful action. This particular point, mentioned also by the co-ordinator of Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative and the Racist Incident Officer at Northamptonshire Police, supported contentions made during the course of a number of interviews both with agency representatives and with minority ethnic households, that partnership networks can sometimes be little more than forums for talk, rather

than action, if implemented without due care and consideration (see also Jalota, 2004; Crawford, 1998a). These kinds of concerns, centring around partners' stated willingness to work in partnership not always being matched in practice, or their reluctance to change existing policies, again suggest a lack of real commitment on the behalf of some organisations which in many instances may stem from the institutional 'no racism here' mentality referred to previously that results in agencies downplaying the significance of racist victimisation in predominantly white environments. Moreover, this lack of commitment was seen to be a problem not only for *inter*-agency engagement but for *intra*-agency working too. Magne (2003) has drawn attention to the lack of internal clarity that often exists within rural-based organisations with regards to race equality procedures and practice, and this problem was evident in each of the case-study areas, with some interviewees, for example, unable to recall whether any in-house policy documents or guidelines existed on issues of 'race' and diversity, whilst others admitted to not knowing their contents. Similarly, discussions with a number of rural agency workers highlighted varying degrees of ignorance with regards to the work of colleagues within their own organisation, and as the following comments from a member of staff at Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative suggest, the effectiveness of partnership approaches can often be shaped by the extent to which information and good practice filters through organisations beyond the senior management level.

*Senior management level think that's OK, everything's working, we've got everything in place, that's how it should be. You don't always get it from the ground level, they're not always going to respond to you that way because it perhaps hasn't filtered through ... Senior management right at the top think everything's put in place, we've got all these policies, but they don't always work in reality.*

Staff member, Racial Harassment Initiative, Suffolk

### **Further difficulties associated with agency responses**

In addition to the problematic aspects affecting the operation of partnership initiatives in each county, a range of other difficulties were identified during the course of



interviews conducted in the various case-study areas which detracted from the support provided to rural minority ethnic households. Time pressures and financial constraints, for instance, seemed to be viewed as universal problems that restrict the extent of inter-agency co-operation and the quality of service provided.

*We're all under-resourced and overstretched.*

District council policy officer, Suffolk Coastal

Related to this was the commonly cited concern of a shortage of human resources to meet the demands of the organisation's workload and to address the needs of rural minority ethnic households. For example, in the opinion of one co-ordinator based in Suffolk Coastal, Victim Support as an organisation tends to be over-reliant on a relatively small number of volunteers, all of whom need their own transport to access victims in rural towns and villages; consequently, as became apparent through conversations with staff at that particular branch of Victim Support, much of the co-ordinator's time is consumed through seeking new volunteers from the local communities. This perception was shared by Victim Support workers elsewhere, and indeed by staff from other organisations, who believed that much of the good work that could potentially be done by their organisation to promote awareness of their services was severely constrained by the limited number of available volunteers.

*There's not enough volunteers and people sometimes have to walk out of the office because they're not getting seen, there's nothing we can do about that.*

Manager, Citizens Advice Bureau, Suffolk Coastal

*We never have enough volunteers ... we try and make contact with people, especially if they can't come and visit in person or live somewhere else and they have no telephone ... but we just can't reach them.*

Representative, Victim Support, east Northamptonshire

In many instances, it transpired that this common lack of resources will force most, if not all, agencies into difficult decisions over the prioritisation of cases. This can be particularly troubling for those who are responsible for providing county-wide services where the practical difficulties surrounding the allocation of resources to the more remote towns and villages often dictate that services are delivered to more densely populated areas, as is neatly summarised by the following observer.

*My brief, when I first started, was to cover the whole of Suffolk. But because the workers have only a part time role, how far you can travel and actually tackle cases further afield is debatable ... What's the solution? Obviously, because of resources you try to tackle an area where there's a concentration of the target group, but then again, it's those people that are further afield that need more of your support.*

Community education worker, Suffolk Coastal

Clearly, then, an issue such as rural racism presents a considerable challenge to organisations in such a situation: not only may there be widespread reticence to devote resources to problems occurring in geographically remote areas, but this reticence may be exacerbated by the fact that issues of racist victimisation are not widely recognised as significant in rural environments. As a number of interviewees were keen to stress, in the current 'performance management' climate there is an emphasis upon hitting targets rather than dealing with more qualitative problems, and this creates practical difficulties when it comes to allocating scarce resources to problems that do not show up greatly in official crime statistics (see also Crawford, 1998b: 216-17). Both statutory and non-statutory agencies in the rural also obviously lack funds and resources to throw at issues – Williams (1999: 173), for instance, pertinently observes that the low levels of government funding available to rural organisations include no weightings with respect to higher transport and other associated costs – and it is therefore somewhat inevitable that a number of interviewees referred to the shortage of available resources as a major obstacle to service delivery. At the same time though, conversations with agency representatives



across each county highlighted that an organisational failure to address problems of rural racism can result as much from a refusal to prioritise 'race' issues as it does from the more practical constraints of a lack of financial or human resources. As one district council employee suggested, the demographic nature of rural areas with their low numbers of minority ethnic residents and the scattered nature of small, and what he felt are often predominantly conservative towns and villages, means that there may be an almost in-built reticence amongst agency workers to get involved in combating an issue such as racism which is not widely regarded as any sort of a problem by the vast majority of local residents. Consequently, for some the benefits of helping a relatively small number of minority ethnic people may be outweighed politically by the negative reaction of the majority white population who may resent resources being diverted towards such a numerically insignificant population.

*Within our resident community, partly relating back to the low numbers of people from a BME background and partly because of the particular nature of rural communities, very small and conservative, there is a lot of resistance to getting involved in any kind of support for minority groups.*

*The difficulty of course is it's a number game. For members, if there is resistance and that means losing votes, the numbers you gain are small, the numbers you lose are larger: it's not a profitable trade-off.*

District council policy officer, Stratford-on-Avon

The issue of prioritising 'race' issues was taken up by one Inspector at Suffolk Constabulary, who felt that service providers such as Police Victim Liaison Officers and Victim Support workers should make personal visits to victims wherever possible before resorting to telephone calls as a means of offering support. In her opinion, this was not happening as much as it should because of the difficulties surrounding prioritisation, and not, as commonly argued, because of a lack of resources.

*I don't think it's funding, I think it's priorities and people knowing what their role is ... Now for a Victim Liaison Officer, who's pushing them the*

*hardest? Is it the person who looks after domestic violence and is it their domestic violence victims who are possibly easier to deal with than their racist incident victims in that there are no language issues? Domestic violence victims are maybe very grateful for the support and not challenging of the work you're doing. If you come to me as a victim of a racist incident, you may be angry at me because I'm white, I maybe haven't given you the support you want etc, etc.*

Inspector, Suffolk Constabulary

As suggested in the quotation above, victims of racist incidents may present more of a challenge to agency workers in some respects than the victims of other types of offence, and with this in mind the quality of training offered to such workers to enable them to recognise and deal with racist incidents and their impact is extremely important. As the wider literature on police diversity training has indicated (see, for example, Rowe and Garland, 2007; Rowe, 2004; Garland and Rowe, 2003), the provision of such training varies widely in terms of scope, content and effectiveness, and comments expressed during the course of interviews in each of the rural case-study areas suggested that a number of agency workers would have benefited from further training on a range of areas, and in particular on issues such as cultural awareness and recognising racist incidents (see also Magne, 2003). Rather worryingly the research highlighted that a number of key actors involved in partnerships to tackle racism in each county, including most notably the Racist Incident Officer at Northamptonshire Police, had not actually received any form of specific training on 'race' issues.

*I've never actually been on a formalised training course on how to deal with racist incidents; it's much more of my own reading up on it, learning from others.*

Racist Incident Officer, Northamptonshire Police



It is therefore of some concern that some of the 'gatekeepers' in the provision of services to minority ethnic households may have received inadequate training, or in several instances no designated training whatsoever. However, during an interview with a Victim Support worker in Suffolk Coastal it soon became apparent why a relatively high proportion of agency workers seemed to feel so ill at ease when discussing the subject of 'race' and how to address the needs of minority ethnic households. As noted previously, only a relatively low proportion of Victim Support's workload is made up of racist harassment cases, and this particular worker acknowledged that Victim Support volunteers would be more inclined to attend training seminars and workshops on racist harassment if this was a priority area within their caseload.

*For us that [domestic violence] is a bigger proportion of our work and, therefore, we would attend those other seminars and forums more readily because it's more of an issue for us. I think if racial harassment, if we checked on all those linkages, if our racial figures went up, we're much more likely to attend those things which would try and help us in that area. That's not saying we don't think it's important, we do, but there's a limit to what you can do.*

Victim Support co-ordinator, Suffolk Coastal

At face value, this is a reasonable and realistic point in that limited resources naturally dictate the way in which organisations prioritise their responsibilities. However, the disturbing inference for the 'invisible' victims of racist harassment and abuse in the rural is that the problem will need *to be seen* to get worse (at least in terms of the numbers of recorded racist incidents) before it is perceived to be a significant problem requiring greater attention from statutory agencies and those dependent on their information. At present the response of organisations such as Victim Support is constrained to the extent that it depends largely upon the communication of information from the police, which, as we have seen, is widely perceived to be an unreliable source.

With this in mind, one of the strategies taken forward in recent times by organisations within each of the case-study areas has been a policy of third-party reporting. Such a strategy, whereby victims of racist incidents are encouraged to report their experiences in a more 'neutral' and less adversarial environment than can often be associated with a police station, was practised in each of the three counties in recognition of the fact that racist incidents are significantly under-reported, and many interviewees were hopeful that this kind of scheme would lead to an increase in reporting amongst those who would not ordinarily share their experiences with the police and other organisations. At the time of the research, third-party reporting in each county had been operating for only a relatively short period of time, and tended to be utilised by means of a self-completion reporting form which could be filled in at a variety of public buildings, including libraries, citizens' advice bureaux and health centres<sup>36</sup>. However, for whatever reason (and it may be, for instance, a lack of publicity or a shortage of confidence in the agencies where the reporting centres were based), it was suggested that third party reporting centres had not really worked in the way that it was hoped that they would, as intimated by the following interviewees based in Warwickshire.

*And we found they just didn't work. Members of the minority groups just didn't seem to want to go to these centres. They were set up and we thought they were all in good places in all honesty, within voluntary organisations, council houses, but no, it just didn't seem to work.*

Representative, Victim Support, north Warwickshire

*The fact of the matter is that in the last year, when they've done the figures, there has been a minimal usage of any of the reporting centres.*

Diversity co-ordinator, Warwickshire Police

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<sup>36</sup> Third-party reporting schemes have since grown in sophistication in each of the three counties, with online reporting forms and dedicated racist incident telephone hotlines now available to victims.



During the course of interviews with rural minority ethnic households it became apparent that very few were aware of the existence of such strategies, and this ties in with the broader problem identified within the research of how organisations involve or communicate with people from a minority ethnic background. As we have seen, a common sentiment expressed by minority ethnic households was a perceived sense of isolation from the rest of their rural community, and at times it was felt that local organisations could make much more of a concerted effort to involve minority ethnic households in their work as a way of drawing attention to existing services and alleviating these households' sense of isolation.

*I personally think I'm part and parcel of this community. But the community don't think that. They or any of their organisations, other departments, or any other organisation, haven't contacted me ... I've been living in this town for such a long time. We have no information or no contact whatsoever.*

Pakistani Muslim male, Suffolk Coastal

Indeed, when outlining what she considered to be the main obstacle to service delivery, a conclusion drawn by an Inspector at Suffolk Constabulary was that whilst close inter-agency relationships were pivotal to the development of informed responses to racist harassment, perhaps the most crucial, but often overlooked factor within such a strategy was communication with minority ethnic communities themselves. This is consistent with the suggestions of writers such as Jay (1992), Pugh (2004) and Yarwood (2005) who argue that a more personalised approach to rural service provision can lead to a greater sense of involvement amongst targeted service users and increased credibility on the part of agency workers. Perhaps mindful of their obligations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 many of those agency representatives interviewed during the course of this study argued that their organisation consulted widely with minority ethnic populations in their localities; nevertheless, this Inspector's point was acknowledged by a number of other interviewees who felt that even with the existing levels of resourcing their

organisations could develop improved links with the diverse populations present in their local communities.

*I think we could generally do with becoming a bit more aware of our communities; we should be aware of key target areas, or households, which tend to come under attack.*

Representative, Wellingborough Borough Council housing department

*Wherever we hold them [community forum meetings] we never seem to get very good attendance from minorities.*

Representative, Inclusion and Pupil Support, east Northamptonshire

The reasons behind the low involvement of minority ethnic groups in agency initiatives may reside in a failure amongst the agencies themselves to engage effectively with minority ethnic households; certainly, whilst local authorities and some other organisations may have conducted their own local surveys to find out more about the local minority ethnic population, most agencies' reluctance to develop more personalised means of contact is likely to result in a shortage of information on the needs and preferences of minority ethnic groups and can encourage a tendency to homogenise these groups without accounting for important differences in perception (Dhalech, 1999b; Pugh, 2004). Their low involvement may also reflect scepticism on the part of those households themselves that local agencies will actually respond to their needs. There may be a number of other explanations, as put forward during interviews, such as a lack of knowledge of how to access agencies or, more worryingly, a perception that agency meetings are 'white dominated' and would not offer anything of real assistance to minority ethnic communities. Another important issue raised by several interviewees was that the same individuals or organisations tend to be repeatedly used by different agencies for consultation purposes, creating a sense of 'battle weariness' that may make these people reluctant to participate in the future. This problem is especially acute in rural areas where the numbers of minority ethnic households are comparatively small anyway.



*I'm very conscious that community organisations have had huge demands placed on them because all public agencies are now going to them for consultation help, and I think in the rural area there are big capacity issues.*

LEA representative, Warwickshire County Council

Similarly, a related issue mentioned by agency interviewees centred around the ethical dilemma of assuming that 'community representatives' do in fact represent the views of the rest of their populations. As has been argued in other contexts (Innes, 2006; Chakraborti, 2007), organisations can often over-rely upon the notion of community representatives or opinion formers as a way of accessing the views of those whom these individuals purportedly represent without giving adequate thought to engaging with a wider selection of minority ethnic individuals, or indeed with a broader range of groups, whether these be asylum seekers, Traveller communities or migrant workers, who may be in most need of support and yet of whose needs little may be known (Dhillon, 2006). The dangers inherent to this process of over-reliance were acknowledged by interviewees in the present study, albeit a small minority.

*In fact what they [community representatives] do do, they speak for the very narrow section of that community that they actually belong to, whereas young people, or people within that various community, they don't speak for those at all and they don't represent their views to an adequate level.*

Police Chief Inspector, Stratford-on-Avon

*I live in a village and I would be mortified if anybody didn't want to come and ask me a question but thought that the Parish councillor could say what my view would be, treat me as some kind of homologous blob because I happen to live in that village.*

Diversity co-ordinator, Warwickshire Police

On numerous occasions it was argued by both minority ethnic interviewees and by agency workers that the employment of greater numbers of minority ethnic staff would help organisations to appear more accessible, and to therefore engage more easily, with rural minority ethnic households. Certainly, the key drivers of anti-racist work in the three counties – whether these be caseworkers at Suffolk’s Racial Harassment Initiative or Race Equality workers in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire – were all from a minority ethnic background, and whilst each believed that their ethnicity was advantageous in the context of helping them to engage with minority ethnic households on the basis of their shared ‘visibly different’ characteristics, they also voiced concerns over the extent to which these characteristics resulted in their being over-relied upon by colleagues or partner agencies to initiate action or to resolve problems (see also Dhalech, 1999b). For instance, one Suffolk-based Community Education worker whose ethnicity was Chinese felt that her role, and duties therewith, had been compromised by other agencies relying upon her Chinese language skills and knowledge of that community, resulting in her extra-contractual workload increasing. For her, and for many of those interviewed during the course of the research, a larger minority ethnic staff-base would help organisations to engage more effectively with diverse communities and would also encourage these predominantly white organisations to recognise cultural, ethnic and religious difference more readily. Although many felt that the recruitment of a more ethnically diverse workforce was a near impossibility in practical terms due to the concentration of minority ethnic communities in more urbanised environments, several interviewees referred to the growing numbers of ethnic minorities moving to the rural as a source of hope and recognised the need for greater minority ethnic representation in their organisations irrespective of the difficulties involved.

*It takes a deep and clear understanding of workers to understand the impact of racism and I think that’s exceptionally difficult in a predominantly white community. Because I think it’s very easy for all organisations to think that it’s only a one-off incident and there’s bigger things to be worried about.*

Manager, Connexions, Suffolk Coastal



Such an observation chimes with the sentiments expressed by a substantial proportion of minority ethnic households who, as discussed above, felt that the almost exclusively white composition of the local agency workforce meant that many workers may be unable to appreciate the difficulties faced by minority ethnic communities and as a result may provide an inadequate or ineffective response. Consequently, the current make-up of rural agencies may influence the way in which problems of racist victimisation are perceived both by service providers and by service users, and when taken in conjunction with the problems identified earlier in this chapter with regards to service delivery, partnership working, under-resourcing and tokenism amongst other factors, it would be easy to adopt an extremely pessimistic outlook about the effectiveness of agency responses to rural racism. However, in addition to the difficulties discussed in this chapter, the research did identify scope for making workable and feasible improvements to organisational policy and practice in each research area that would have a real impact in terms of improving agency responses, and this will be considered in the next chapter. This final chapter reflects upon some of the key points arising from the research with regards to rural minority ethnic households' sense of (un)belonging to their local communities, their experiences of 'othering' and racist victimisation, and their perceptions of service delivery, and seeks to synthesise these findings with the issues raised by agency workers in an attempt to locate possible areas for change.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This thesis has sought to present an unsanitised account of the realities of rurality as experienced by minority ethnic households living in towns and villages across Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. The attitudes of white rural residents have been assessed in an analysis of notions of community, identity and ‘otherness’, and the perceptions of minority ethnic groups have been examined to identify their feelings about rural life, fear of racist harassment and experiences of victimisation. In addition, the research has investigated the way in which policy makers and service providers respond to the needs of minority ethnic groups living in rural environments. This chapter takes stock of the key themes to have emerged from the research in each county, and reviews the main implications of this research before discussing ways in which the problem of racist victimisation in the rural can be addressed more effectively both in the case study areas themselves and within academic and policy-making circles more broadly. In addition to illustrating ways in which the research has influenced rural diversity policies, this chapter outlines the methodological and conceptual contribution made by this doctoral study that has provided innovation beyond that provided by earlier studies in terms of conceptualising the experience of racialised ‘othering’ in rural environments.

#### **The diversity of rural space**

As we have seen, both through past studies of rurality and through the testimonies of research participants in this particular study, clichéd representations of the countryside – representations which, as Neal (2002: 443) suggests, evoke desirable imagery such as ‘rolling green fields, winding lanes, cream teas, chocolate box villages’ – have been central to the production of idyllic, unproblematic constructions of rural England. These can serve to privilege particular identities and values whilst masking the concerns, experiences and needs of rural ‘others’. Such representations are problematic, not only because they reinforce stereotypes of cultural sameness at the expense of those with ‘different’ characteristics, but also because they paint a broad brush ‘picture-postcard’ depiction of rural environments that may be a far from



accurate portrayal of many economically deprived towns and villages<sup>37</sup>. Increasingly rural environments contain communities that are plurally constituted, and over-generalised depictions of the rural as static sites of affluence and conservative values will inevitably mask the social exclusion and political differences that are present in rural areas (Neal and Agyeman, 2006b).

That rural England is home to different kinds of rural environment, whether culturally, demographically or economically, is a seemingly obvious assertion, and yet all too often sweeping generalisations are made with regards to the homogeneity of rural space as a result of the persuasiveness of idyllic constructions. In a similar vein, the increasing ethnic diversity of the rural population during recent years, which has resulted from a range of factors including increased mobility, higher incomes amongst some minority ethnic groups and a growing migrant workforce (Magne, 2003; Neal, 2002), can often be overlooked as a result of the enduring appeal of exclusive, anglocentric representations. Such narrow representations leave little room for minority ethnic 'others', and when their presence is recognised it is commonly regarded in intrusive terms by those keen to preserve the 'quintessentially English' features of the rural. The 'othering' of ethnic difference can even be seen as a source of celebration in some quarters, as illustrated by the events of November 2003 in the village of Firle in Sussex where the crowning event of the villagers' annual bonfire celebrations took the shape of the burning of a mock Gypsy caravan to symbolise the purging of Gypsy Travellers from the village. As Holloway documents (2007: 10-11):

*'The caravan bore the number plate P1 KEY (pikey being a derogatory term for Gypsy Travellers) and the motto 'Do As You Likey Driveways Ltd – guaranteed to rip you off' ... The caravan was drawn through the village, and the crowd encouraged to shout 'burn them, burn them' by a local councillor dressed in religious garb, before it was set alight in a blaze of fireworks.'*

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<sup>37</sup> For example, some of the non-idyllic characteristics of seaside towns and villages have recently been highlighted following an investigation by a House of Commons Local Government Committee who have urged the government to take action to improve the economies and quality of life of coastal communities blighted by isolation and deprivation (BBC, 2007).

Aside from isolated shouts of complaint from several onlookers, this ‘purging’ of the undesirable ‘other’ was met with widespread jubilation from those gathered on the streets of Firle to witness the celebrations, and it was only when friends of a local woman complained to the local media three days later that the event came to wider public attention (Townsend, 2003). Not surprisingly, condemnation came from a broad cross-section of the national media and from the Commission for Racial Equality (Shaikh, 2003, Gill, 2003; Monbiot, 2003) culminating in the initial arrest of twelve members of the Firle Bonfire Society on charges of inciting racial hatred. Ultimately though, the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to pursue the prosecution of these individuals much to the delight of the majority of Firle’s residents aggrieved with the perceived intrusion into local affairs (see Holloway, 2007 for a more detailed account).

These kinds of public celebrations involving the denigration of minority ethnic ‘others’ are relatively extreme and would appear to be more the exception than the rule. At the same time though, they are by no means restricted to Firle, nor is the ensuing resentment of outside interference expressed by locals bemused and outraged by accusations of racism directed towards the practice of local customs. Smith’s (1993) study of community opposition to the removal of golliwog costumes from local schoolchildren taking part in a country pageant in rural Scotland highlights the importance of Britain’s colonial past, and with that the reproduction of racist imagery, within some rural communities, and this is given further weight by the furore over recent years surrounding the bi-annual ‘Darkie Day’ celebrations held in the Cornish fishing port of Padstow. In what is thought to be a throwback to the presence of slaves on the Padstow quayside during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, residents continue to celebrate the long-established tradition in the region of blackening their faces, donning ‘Afro’ wigs and performing minstrel songs whilst parading through the town. As with the Firle ‘celebrations’ recent protests have raised questions as to whether incitement to racial hatred charges should be brought against the local organisers, but in 2005, again as in Firle, the Crown Prosecution Service decided against prosecution, and the organisers have since agreed to change the event’s name to Mummers Day. Nevertheless, the festivities have attracted sustained controversy, as signified by the tabling of an early day motion in the House of Commons by Labour MP Diane Abbott calling for the



abolition of the event and the continued resentment expressed by Padstownians towards the unwanted intrusion into local affairs from outside sources (Marre, 2006).

Examples such as these highlight the way in which the differentiation of the minority ethnic 'other' can be conceived within some rural communities not as a source of embarrassment but rather as a source of pride and celebration, which is then reinforced by the negative and unwelcome criticisms from 'outsiders'. While these kinds of overt 'celebrations' were not evident in any of the areas researched in the present study, the thesis has drawn attention to the widespread retention of racist stereotypes and the explicit or implicit demonisation of different ethnicities in each of the case study areas, and this will clearly impact upon rural minority ethnic households' sense of belonging to their community of place. Indeed, and as discussed in Chapter Three, the emotive appeal of constructions of the rural as white space has prompted Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, to go so far as to describe the exclusion of ethnic minorities in the countryside as a form of passive apartheid (BBC, 2004). Though the use of such terminology has attracted criticism both from rural communities and from anti-racist campaigners (Jack, 2004; Smith, 2004), this welcome recognition of a rural minority ethnic presence from such a prominent figure, albeit clumsily worded and belated, may help to draw wider attention to diversity issues in rural environments.

### **The vulnerability of minority ethnic 'others' in rural environments**

The enduring strength of romanticised notions of rural homogeneity, and the corresponding demonisation of the rural 'other', inevitably has implications for people from minority ethnic backgrounds whose visible, cultural or audible differences immediately set them apart from the prevailing norm of sameness (Philo, 1992). Clearly many such households may feel a heightened sense of vulnerability to victimisation as a result of these differences, but before examining this vulnerability in more depth, one first needs to acknowledge the complexity of the terms 'minority ethnic' and 'victimisation'. As discussed in Chapter Two, there has been a tendency within academic studies of 'race' and ethnicity to utilise broad 'catch-all' ethnic classifications such as 'Black', 'Asian', 'BME', or indeed the term adopted within this thesis 'minority ethnic', without allowing sufficient recognition for the distinct



experiences and perceptions of specific communities which can often be subsumed within these umbrella categorisations (Garland *et al.*, 2006). As we have seen, this can include faith communities, white minority groups or simply those who do not fit conveniently into a particular ethnic category such as people of mixed heritage or couples who are in a mixed race relationship. As far as possible this study has sought to develop a wide-ranging conception of the term ‘minority ethnic’ within its analytical framework in order to capture the voices of groups who find themselves overlooked or marginalised from debates on ‘race’ and racism.

At the same time, we have seen how people’s vulnerability to racist victimisation can often be underplayed as a result of a continued reliance on ‘incidents’ as a means of distinguishing racist behaviour, a practice which detaches the lived experience from its broader context of racism and racist exclusion and which consequently fails to grasp the wider impact of racism beyond the actual incident itself (Chahal, 2003; Bowling, 1999). In sharp contrast to the picture painted by narrow incident-driven conceptions of victimisation, in reality racism can affect people in a variety of ways, not all of which will be immediately identifiable as racist *per se*, or particularly significant individually, but when considered together can be seen to form a continuum of victimisation. When conceived in such a manner we can then begin to recognise the process of racism, where the broader impact of victimisation is acknowledged within the historical, political and social context in which such victimisation prevails, and the importance of developing responses which account for these broader dimensions and the needs of victims.

Adopting a wider understanding of the process of racist victimisation, and of those susceptible to this process, is arguably all the more important when conducting studies of racism in rural environments where communities of shared minority identity are unlikely to exist and where unfamiliarity with difference (whether cultural, religious or ethnic) is commonplace. In Chapter Three we saw how, despite the emergence of localised studies contesting the idyllicised white landscape of the rural and the increasing numbers of ethnic minorities moving to rural towns and villages, the problem of rural racism remains relatively unexplored when compared with the sheer weight of research conducted in more urbanised environments and has yet to be regarded as especially significant amongst academics and policy-makers at a national level. Therefore, developing an understanding of the lived experiences of rurality and



victimisation amongst the diverse range of groups that form part of the rural minority ethnic population is all the more important in light of the urban-centric focus of past research and the consequent masking of racialised 'othering'. To address such an oversight, this particular study was designed to provide fresh insights into the ways in which, first the 'othering' process can shape insider/outsider relations within the countryside; secondly, how the process of victimisation affects minority ethnic households' experiences of the rural; and thirdly how agencies and policy-makers provide support to these vulnerable households and address the problem of rural racism. Using a range of rural sites within Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire as the research case-study areas, the study employed similar methods in each county to investigate these points of enquiry and to generate a substantial body of findings, the key themes from which will now be recalled.

### **Assessing the scale of the problem**

The analysis began in Chapter Four with an examination of white 'insider' perceptions of rurality, community and of rural minority ethnic 'incomers'. Interviews and focus groups conducted with white residents highlighted that perceptions of cultural homogeneity, and a rejection of cultural 'otherness', were commonplace within each of the research case study areas, and these feelings seemed to be reinforced by the evocative 'traditional' imagery associated with the English countryside and narrowly constructed notions of community. Whilst some degree of fragmentation could be identified with regards to people's belief in the modern-day currency of these archetypal *gemeinschaft*-like constructions of rurality and community, particularly in some of the more economically deprived towns and villages within the three counties, the research also illustrated that most white rural households felt that a sense of community nevertheless still existed in their local neighbourhoods, albeit one that was often predicated upon shared feelings of resentment towards rural in-migrants. Suspicion of the rural 'other' featured prominently during conversations with white research participants, and was aired in terms which suggested that feelings of community gain strength through the formation of an outside threat which strengthens community bonds and renders group membership more appealing (see also Bottoms, 1994; Lacey and Zedner, 1995; Peay 1999; Bauman, 2001).

Moreover, it transpired that while some white incomers to the research case study areas may encounter suspicion from established communities on the basis of their 'newness' or association with a different geographical place, at the same time they may assume some level of insider status because of their shared ethnicity, and commonly their shared mistrust of the minority ethnic 'other'. Consequently, on the evidence of this study it is the minority ethnic outsider who poses the most tangible threat to the cultural homogeneity of the rural, and who most commonly, and most explicitly, bears the brunt of the 'othering' process. This ties in with the suggestions of Neal and Agyeman (2006b: 245) who argue that:

*... mainly white areas do have problems of racism and exhibit patterns of racialised exclusion and racial violence. These processes and practices excavate ideas of biological difference and fetishise the visible as markers of undesirability and non-belonging. These processes and practices also excavate and work with cultural difference as a marker of undesirability and non-belonging.*

Although boundaries of acceptance may vary for some minority ethnic households depending on their perceived class status, earning capacity or occupation, the perceived respectability of those ethnic minorities with greater 'cultural capital' was rarely enough to fully legitimise their presence according to comments expressed by white interviewees in this study: ethnicity operated as an overarching, and in most cases a seemingly unbridgeable dividing line in assessments of belonging, irrespective of any other desirable attributes those minorities might have. Interestingly, when the focus of Chapter Four turned to a consideration of minority ethnic perceptions of community attachment, it became evident that the boundaries of acceptance within rural communities are drawn by their white populations, who, it would seem, are then free to redraw them at any given point in time. Accordingly, minority ethnic households' sense of belonging to the rural may to all intents and purposes be dependent upon the attitudes of established white residents who can establish and re-establish their own exclusive communities by choosing who to accept into this privileged domain and by distancing themselves from undesirable 'others'. This



process thereby serves to strengthen their own sense of attachment by reinforcing their secured insider position, whilst at the same time weakening the sense of attachment felt by minority ethnic outsiders.

Subsequent chapters also highlighted that many minority ethnic households based in the case study areas felt that their quality of life in the rural had been severely affected by their perceived marginalisation from the conventional activities of rural communities and an unremitting fear of racist abuse or harassment. The discomfort that many such households may have experienced as a result of being one of only few minorities in their town or village often gave rise to apprehension over the threat of racist victimisation. As the interviews in each county revealed, this would appear to be a very real, and not imagined threat; indeed, the exclusionary forms of behaviour expressed towards the minority ethnic research participants in this study commonly took the shape of different forms of racist harassment and abuse whose impact, it seems, is seldom fully recognised by other members of local communities or by rural agencies and policy-makers. In part this may be due to the complex patterns and processes of racist victimisation in the rural. In terms of its frequency, racist abuse and harassment was found to be a recurring problem for the majority of rural minority ethnic research participants, many of whom found it difficult to talk specifically about separate incidents of racist victimisation as it was seen to be an ongoing problem that affected their routine activities and everyday interactions (see also Bowling, 1999; Kelly, 1987). Repeat victimisation was therefore commonplace in each of the case study areas, and the research illustrated that the extent to which minority ethnic rural households can fall victim to racist harassment or abuse can be influenced by seasonal factors, by global, national and local events, and by the characteristics of their locality, and more specifically the nature of the social and economic profile of their local environment (Tyler, 2006; Robinson and Gardner, 2006).

In addition, the research findings across each of the case study areas revealed that this victimisation can take a variety of different forms. In general terms experiences of racism tended to take the shape of the so-called 'low-level' examples of victimisation: instances of name-calling and intimidatory staring were frequently referred to by minority ethnic rural households, as were episodes of stone-throwing, 'knock-down ginger', neighbour disputes and racist graffiti, and we saw that these types of experiences had featured prominently in many households' day-to-day routines in the

rural and were regarded as an inevitable consequence of being visibly different in a predominantly white environment. As well as discussing these forms of abuse and harassment, a number of research participants in each county provided a series of quite shocking accounts of racially-motivated victimisation involving, for instance, attempted and actual physical attacks, severe damage to property and attempted petrol bombing.

Harrowing enough when taken in isolation, these examples of victimisation were all the more distressing by virtue of the fact that they were rarely one-off incidents, but instead part of a broader continuum of racism experienced by rural minority ethnic households in all sorts of different private and social situations and at any given time, some expressions of which would be more graphic and less latent than others. On the evidence of this study, it is this cumulative ‘drip-drip’ effect, and not simply the isolated experience of violent racism, that is the most significant cause for concern amongst rural minority ethnic households. At the same time though, this continuum can often be overlooked, for as the research consistently highlighted, many forms of behaviour perceived to be racist by the victim may not be immediately recognisable to or conceived by a third party as racist *per se*. This can be the case where prejudice is conveyed in a more subtle, less overt manner than that typically associated with racist actions, suggesting that it is the intangible, implicit, and in some senses ‘unreportable’ nature of this process of victimisation that exacerbates the problem facing rural minorities.

With this in mind, the research findings called into question the legitimacy of using the term ‘low-level’ to describe *prima facie* less serious expressions of racist harassment or abuse, as the term infers a sense of relative unimportance that trivialises the impact that the experience can have on its victim. The multi-faceted process of victimisation can impact upon the victim in a variety of corrosive ways, be it as Spalek (2006: 68) describes ‘psychologically, emotionally, behaviourally, financially and physically’, all of which applied to research participants in this study. The research also highlighted that victims can react to their experiences of racism in a series of ways, with some for instance admitting to ‘letting it go’ or ‘turning a blind eye’ because they saw this as the easiest, and certainly the least inflammatory, method of dealing with racist victimisation. Others, meanwhile, suggested that they would prefer to stand up to perpetrators, or indeed to retaliate against their racist behaviour



depending on the severity of the racist act. Moreover, irrespective of the type of racist abuse or harassment experienced, minority ethnic research participants commonly referred to their sense of perpetual anxiety, which was found to derive from the fear of future victimisation as well as from the struggle to cope with the cycle of existing problems

In light of these ongoing difficulties, the need for sustainable levels of support from rural agencies, policy-makers and service providers is therefore all the more important, but as we saw in Chapter Six the research identified a series of serious problems hampering the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms. Among the most worrying findings in this regard related to the low take-up of services amongst minority ethnic research participants. For example, some based their unwillingness to access support on their belief that rural-based agencies consisted almost exclusively of white, middle-class workers, who would be unable to fully understand the experiences and needs of minority ethnic communities. In this context the majority of criticisms were directed towards the police service: those who had not had any prior dealings with the police tended to feel that the police would dismiss, or at best fail to prioritise, their case in the absence of any compelling evidence, whilst most victims of racism who had reported incidents previously to the police argued that they had since felt reluctant to report because of the seemingly unattainable level of proof expected by investigating officers. Furthermore, even when the police were confronted with indisputable evidence of racist harassment the experiences of a number of households in each of the case study areas had led them to conclude that the police were seemingly incapable of taking any racist incident seriously, or at least dealing with the incident in an appropriately sensitive manner, because they would often act in an offhand or patronising manner which signified their inability to appreciate the significance of the situation. Although some positive comments were expressed during the course of the research with regard to agencies other than the police, and particularly Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative, a substantial number of research participants were not aware of what organisations existed in their locality and how they could be of assistance. In any case many felt that reporting to an agency other than the police was a relatively futile exercise, as such agencies were seen as lacking sufficient clout to resolve an issue as serious as racist victimisation.



Alongside the problems identified with the take-up of services, the research findings drew attention to the general, though not universal, feelings of dissatisfaction shared by victims of racist harassment and abuse with the quality of support offered by agencies to whom they had reported racist incidents. Again, the majority of disparaging comments were reserved for the police services in each county, whose responses were criticised for a range of reasons, including the length of time officers had taken to respond to victims, unenthusiastic or unsympathetic reactions, a perceived lack of investigation or follow up, and a prioritisation of form-filling over direct communication or action. Other organisations came under fire for their ineffective responses, most notably local authorities and Victim Support, although staff at Suffolk's Racial Harassment Initiative and Race Equality workers in the other two counties were generally referred to in much more positive terms. This was most ostensibly for their willingness to maintain regular contact and to keep victims fully informed at all times, a form of reassurance that was commonly said to be lacking in the responses of other agencies, particularly the police.

Chapter Six also examined the availability and effectiveness of services from the perspective of those working for key agencies within Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. While evidence of good practice was present in each of the three counties and has been highlighted within that chapter, the research identified a series of more problematic features inherent within existing service delivery which, it could be argued, are serving to worsen, rather than alleviate, the difficulties faced by rural minority ethnic households. Most worryingly, it would seem that a 'no racism here' mentality is still commonplace across a wide variety of different agencies, including amongst those working in the criminal justice, education, health and housing sectors and amongst local policy-makers such as local councillors, district council policy officers and other local authority workers, where agency workers can often be swayed by the relative absence of both racist incidents and significant minority ethnic populations in their official figures into taking the figures at face value, and believing that racism simply 'isn't a rural problem'. For a worryingly high proportion of interviewees working within these key positions, racism was not regarded as a significant problem in the rural because they had not come into contact with many, or indeed *any* minority ethnic households, and this individual and collective failure to identify the presence of, let alone the problems encountered by, such households is a



major obstacle to the delivery of effective services. So too are the more specific problems that can blight agency responses to racism, whether these be the difficulties with partnership working, the lack of intra-organisational communication, the under-resourcing, the lack of relevant training, the tokenistic attitudes displayed by policy-makers or any of the other numerous difficulties referred to in Chapter Six. These inevitably undermine and detract from the more positive features of agency working that were evidenced in each of the case study areas, and underline the scale of the problems facing rural minority ethnic households.

### **Moving forwards**

In line with the research framework outlined in Chapter Three, we have been able to distinguish the processes and patterns of victimisation that can result in minority ethnic households being ostracised from Philo's (1992) zone of rural 'sameness' and to assess the levels of support available from agencies to assist victims of racialised 'othering'. As the preceding discussion would suggest, the wealth of problems identified during the course of the research paint a rather bleak picture with respect to the difficulties experienced by rural minorities and the lack of recognition afforded to rural racism by local agencies. At the same time though, the research has been valuable not only in drawing attention to these problems but also in illustrating ways whereby we can move on from the 'no problem here' mentality that has marginalised issues of rural racism from academic and political debate. Certainly, at a local level the very process of conducting research into these issues helped to shift greater focus onto racist victimisation in each county which in itself was a major breakthrough. By virtue of taking part in the research, statutory and voluntary organisations across each case-study area demonstrated a commendable willingness to acknowledge and engage with the problem, and this should be seen as a positive step towards promoting greater recognition of the marginalisation of rural minority ethnic households. Moreover, a number of agencies identified scope for making feasible improvements to organisational policy and practice that would have a sustainable impact in terms of improving their responses to rural racism.

For instance, one area for improvement acknowledged by a number of research participants in each county related to the ineffectiveness of the mechanisms in place to

encourage victims of racist incidents to report their experiences. This suggests that some organisations, albeit a minority, recognised the need to address the problem of under-reporting, as illustrated in the following observation.

*I've spoken to several Americans that live near me, and they feel quite conscious that they are actually a guest in the country because they're on a short term, say one, two, three year, posting. And they don't like to get embroiled in arguments with English nationals ... so they almost suffer in silence. So there probably are a lot of cases of racially motivated incidents, not of a huge severity, but still stuff that people shouldn't have to put up with anywhere, that doesn't get reported to us. So we can say no, we don't have any racial incidents, because none get reported.*

District council policy officer, Suffolk Coastal

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, there may be numerous reasons behind the under-reporting of racist incidents in the rural, and therefore persuading victims to report more frequently is a far from straightforward task, particularly when it comes to the more commonplace forms of abuse and harassment referred to by the policy officer above. Nonetheless, while most agency interviewees felt that there was little that could be done to resolve this problem (if indeed they recognised the problem to start with), some believed that this unsatisfactory situation demanded improved organisational responses that encouraged victims to come forward, and to this end suggested a number of practical ways in which the problem of under-reporting could be addressed. In Warwickshire, for example, representatives from the police service suggested that greater use of the *True Vision* self-reporting information pack would encourage more victims to share their experiences with service providers. At the time of the research, this pack, developed jointly in 2004 by Warwickshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and West Mercia police services, had two versions, one for racially and religiously aggravated offences and another for homophobic and transphobic offences, and it was envisaged that packs could be distributed in a number of places accessible to the public, including libraries, schools and colleges. The idea behind their conception was that a victim would be able to utilise information contained



within the pack to gain an understanding of what they have been through and how to obtain support, and they would also be able to complete a self-reporting incident form enclosed within the pack, or to go online to <http://www.report-it.org.uk/> and report their experience there<sup>38</sup>.

Linked to this was the suggestion offered by a number of agency representatives in each county, namely the increased use of third-party reporting. Notwithstanding some of the difficulties associated with the practical implementation of third-party reporting schemes discussed in the previous chapter, these kinds of ideas, if properly developed and promoted, are likely to generate at least some level of improvement with regards to reporting rates, as they have the capacity to highlight potential sources of support and to encourage victims to report in a familiar, non-adversarial setting, both of which were high upon the wish-list of minority ethnic research participants in this study. Another idea put forward in Suffolk and Northamptonshire to address the problem of under-reporting was the provision of a dedicated phone-line for victims of racist harassment or abuse, the rationale behind which being that victims who are often reluctant to draw attention to themselves by reporting racist incidents in person may welcome the opportunity to obtain confidential telephonic advice, information or assistance, at least initially before deciding whether they would benefit from face-to-face contact from a service provider. Although agencies may presently be contactable over the telephone, the creation of a separate helpline designed exclusively for victims of racism – or a ‘Childline equivalent’ as one Peruvian interviewee in Wellingborough put it – was considered a necessity by a number of interviewees.

A range of other practical suggestions were offered during the course of the research relating to ways in which organisations could make relatively straightforward improvements to existing service delivery. For instance, the perceived lack of formalised training, identified as a common problem in the previous chapter, could be resolved according to some agency representatives not just through rolling out diversity training programmes and encouraging staff members to attend, but through monitoring the take-up, delivery and content of the training and following up this training at regular intervals. As senior officials acknowledged, the problems tend to

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<sup>38</sup> Since completion of the research, the True Visions scheme has been implemented by a range of police forces across England and Wales, and has been expanded to include information on, and to encourage the reporting of, all forms of officially recognised hate crime as defined by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, 2005).

arise not from a shortage of resources for training, which are more often than not readily available in most organisations, but from a common reluctance in rural environments to prioritise diversity training, to monitor staff attendance and to ensure that the benefits of this training are carried into working practice. Clearly, overcoming these problems requires the commitment of senior figures within organisations, and a number of interviewees expressed the hope that the process of conducting research into issues of racist victimisation would in itself promote the importance of effective diversity training. For some, this training needs to be delivered not only to the obvious ‘key players’ involved in service delivery but also to those who can escape the training needs radar despite the important role they might play in dealing with rural minorities. This point is expressed below in the context of education, where it was felt that the relatively simple task of extending existing levels of training to cover those in the front line of contact with pupils outside of the classroom would be beneficial.

*We found that the vast majority, 98 per cent of incidents, took place outside of the classroom, lunchtimes and before and after school. And that was interesting because most of our training goes into training teachers, Head Teachers and Governors but not midday supervisors who are often the first people at the point of an incident happening. We need a course for midday supervisors about recognising harassment, including racial harassment.*

LEA representative, Warwickshire County Council

A further suggestion put forward in each county was for more outreach work to be undertaken with rural minority ethnic households. Although for most organisations this would require additional funding and resources, and was therefore dismissed by many interviewees as an unrealistic aspiration, one police representative in Stratford-on-Avon noted that this kind of work had been extremely effective in other contexts.

*So we were very lucky to secure some funding from the government to start up the STOP project [domestic violence multi-agency initiative] which is a Stratford outreach project where effectively outreach workers went out into the rural communities and made it known what services were available and*



*provided the support in the locale to not only identify but to support people who were actually going through this horrific process. Now the uptake of that service was phenomenal.*

Police Chief Inspector, Stratford-on-Avon

The need for greater outreach work was widely recognised by agencies across each case-study area and echoed by minority ethnic research participants, and if similar schemes to the one referred to above could be implemented to publicise the services available for victims of racism, an increase in the take-up of services similar to that for Stratford's domestic violence outreach project would be likely. Though this kind of outreach work would be dependent on successful grant capture, it is important, as the Chief Inspector argued, that agencies should not simply discount such ideas without at least seeking such funding given the potential benefits available to victims in need of greater support. Even without extra resources to support outreach schemes, agency staff in each county acknowledged that much more could be done to encourage greater take-up of services through the improved marketing and publicity of existing sources of support, whether through leafleting, local advertising or publicising services online.

These are just some of the ways in which agencies can begin to proactively take action to respond more effectively to issues of racist victimisation in the rural, something which as Pugh (2004: 178) asserts is no longer a matter of personal or professional discretion but a statutory duty for public sector workers as a result of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. One of the more heartening elements to the research was to see (admittedly a relatively small proportion of) staff members of varying responsibility at different organisations across each county trying to identify ways of making practical improvements to existing service delivery; indeed, as well as those suggestions mentioned above, research participants raised a number of other ideas, including nominating designated individuals within every organisation who would have responsibility for responding to issues of racist victimisation and for liaising with other agencies; making improvements to existing recording mechanisms; improving the documentation of race equality policies and procedures to ensure that their message spreads to all staff members and not solely senior personnel; organising

events to celebrate the importance of diversity within the local communities; introducing more school-based initiatives and youth projects focused around diversity issues; and providing transport for isolated minority ethnic households to nearby city-based cultural and religious community groups. Moreover, since the time of the research a number of these suggested improvements have actually been implemented by local authorities in each area, illustrating the practical impact that the research has had on each of the localities not only in highlighting problems associated with rural racism, but in encouraging agencies to take ownership of the issue by recognising flaws inherent within existing policy and practice and developing improved and sustainable responses.

As well as advocating enhanced awareness at a local level of issues affecting minority ethnic households within the three counties around which this particular study centred, the research has also proved to be a valuable exercise in calling for a wider appreciation of rural racism within academic and policy-making circles more generally. In the time following the completion of the research, the author has been invited to contribute articles and deliver papers on rural racism to organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality, the BBC, the Home Office and even to magazine for the homeless *The Big Issue*<sup>39</sup>, something which would have been inconceivable only a few years ago and which provides confirmation of the rising, if somewhat belated, national interest in these traditionally overlooked problems. Similarly, Holloway (2007) has argued that the preoccupation in the media coverage of the events in Firle referred to above with accusations of racialised ‘othering’ has meant that rural racism became front page news at least for a short while, thereby challenging the conventional image of the countryside as a locale unaffected by debates on ‘race relations’. With this rising interest will come, it is hoped, a growth in the quantity and quality of academic research conducted into rural ‘otherness’, and particularly minority ethnic ‘otherness’, in order that more can be learned about the nature, extent and impact of rural racism in different contexts and environments. The local authorities responsible for commissioning the research conducted in each county

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<sup>39</sup> The author was invited along with Jon Garland to give a briefing paper on rural racism to the Commission for Racial Equality on 09/03/05. He appeared as a guest expert to speak about rural racism on Radio 4’s Thinking Allowed programme, hosted by Laurie Taylor, on 20/09/06 and in a similar capacity contributed to a piece published in *The Big Issue* on 01/11/04. Key themes emerging from the Suffolk-based research were included on the Home Office’s Crime Reduction website at <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/racial10.htm>



should be commended for their willingness to engage with the problem of rural racism and to open themselves up to criticism, and whether such a stance will become the norm for rural authorities, or merely just wishful thinking on the part of the author, will become apparent in future years.

However, it is not just on the merits of its policy implications that this study should be judged. Valuable though these recommendations for rural agencies and service providers may be, the research has also made an important contribution to academic scholarship in terms of its methodological implications for studies of rurality and racist victimisation. The complexities inherent to these two notions are evident from the discussion in earlier chapters which underlined the value of adopting a sufficiently nuanced conceptualisation of both terms in order to capture their true meaning. Conceiving of the rural in a narrow sense geographically, or in an idyllicised sense conceptually, overlooks the realities of rurality in terms of the nature of rural space, the characteristics which influence popular classifications of what constitutes ‘the rural’ and the experiences of those on the margins of ‘traditional’ rural life. As such, this particular piece of research deliberately sought to take account of these realities by using a broad range of rural environments as its focal points and by documenting experiences in those environments from the perspective of different rural actors. This in itself is a significant step forward from previous studies of rural racism which, as we saw in Chapter Three, have tended to adopt a restricted stance with respect to their choice of research site and range of rural voice accessed.

Similarly, we have also seen that much of the scope and significance of rural racism can be underplayed through incident-driven conceptions of racism and the corresponding failure to view victimisation as a dynamic process, and this too was factored into the research design of the present study. By examining experiences of racism in their broader social context through the combination of research methods utilised, the study has been able to explore not only the extent to which rural minority ethnic households fall victim to racist abuse and harassment but also the nature and impact of this victimisation. Consequently, and as highlighted in the findings chapters, we have been able to observe the similarities between urban and rural racism in terms of the types of victimisation encountered, and also the distinctions between the two with respect to the harrowing impact of so-called ‘low-level’ forms of victimisation upon isolated rural minority ethnic households lacking the peer-group

and institutional support of their urban counterparts, and the intangible, implicit, and in some senses 'unreportable' nature of the process of victimisation that intensifies the cumulative 'drip-drip' effect of racism upon rural minorities.

Although the research design and framework adopted by the present study has been a step forward from earlier work on rural racism and has helped to establish a more complete understanding of racist victimisation in the rural, the thesis has also drawn attention to areas deserving of further attention. In the same way as past studies of rural racism have sought to build on the foundations laid by Jay's (1992) *Keep Them in Birmingham* report by becoming increasingly cognisant of gaps left uncovered by previous researchers, this particular piece of research too has left areas un- or under-explored which will need to be filled by future studies. Given the evolving nature of contemporary debates on rurality and 'race', studies of this nature should ideally be conceived as having the capacity to inform subsequent research, rather than providing any kind of definitive model. Similarly, policies and procedures introduced to address the difficulties faced by rural minority ethnic residents or visitors will need to be re-examined and reconfigured at regular intervals. We have seen how the process of victimisation is neither fixed nor static in nature; so too should responses to victimisation be seen as evolving as opposed to being set in stone, and policy-makers and service providers must constantly review the effectiveness of their responses in light of the changing political and macro- and micro-economic factors within a particular locality, the changing needs of the local communities, the changing recreational usage of the countryside amongst ethnic minorities and the changing composition of the rural minority ethnic population. As Cloke and Little (1997: 273) argue when warning against rigid interpretations of marginality:

*The negotiation and renegotiation of the other in relation to the self means that the experience of marginality cannot be seen as fixed either within or between groups of people or across time and space. So, in crude terms, different people may be excluded from mainstream society at different times in different places and in different social and economic circumstances.*



The gaze of future research could also be extended more broadly in both a geographical sense and in a methodological sense. The sites of enquiry in this particular study have included English coastal towns and villages as well as rural parts of more centrally located counties, and the findings generated from similar studies conducted in different types of rural locales, whether in other English regions or in different parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, could provide deeper insights into how racism varies between places and into the influence of regional and national identity on the 'othering' process. Devolution has offered increased opportunity to revisit the centrality of place, and we have seen moves to broaden our understanding of rural identity formation through, for instance, de Lima's (2001) Scottish based research, Robinson and Gardner's (2004) study of mid-Wales, and Connolly's (2006) research into racialised identities in Northern Ireland. These studies have all made valuable contributions in highlighting the distinctiveness of rural place and space and how this can shape experiences of racism, but at the same time these studies have been constrained to some extent by their narrow methodologies, and consequent limited analysis of the interaction between different actors within the process of community formation in this context – white 'insider' populations, minority ethnic 'outsiders' and local agencies – which is something that should be addressed in future research agendas.

Future investigations could also delve deeper than the present study has into the specific difficulties faced by groups whose voices are rarely heard in academic and political 'race' discourse. This includes asylum seekers as well as Gypsy and New Age Traveller communities, whose experiences of the rural have been documented more explicitly in recent years to highlight the manifestation of prejudice towards undesirable forms of whiteness (see, for example, Hubbard, 2005; Bhopal, 2006; Hetherington, 2006) but rarely in a fashion that facilitates consideration of their interplay with other rural outsiders, or comparison of their experiences with those of other minorities in a particular locality. Furthermore, recent years have seen greater numbers of eastern European migrants and seasonal workers from other parts of the world add significantly to the UK's rural minority ethnic population to the extent where the number of migrant workers based in rural areas has risen by as much as 200 per cent in the last years (Commission for Rural Communities, 2007), and their experiences too should be accounted for.

In such a way, it is hoped that rural-based studies of this nature can be developed and augmented in future years as a way of addressing the reality, and not the mythology of rural life for minority ethnic households. At the very least, this thesis illustrates the fallacy of overlooking the rural as a legitimate site of enquiry for studies of racism; as Cloke and Little (1997: 277) have outlined in their studies of rural 'otherness', dominant constructions of rurality not only mask the presence of those who are 'different' but marginalise them from the mainstream by presenting them in an almost exclusively negative or sinister fashion. Certainly, the research findings discussed on previous pages go some way towards highlighting the complexities of the rural insider-outsider relationship through the context of ethnicity, and the way in which this process of identity formation shapes minority ethnic experiences of racist victimisation. Just as importantly, however, researchers must avoid becoming fixated with the negative experiences of rural minority ethnic households without paying sufficient heed to positive accounts and counter-narratives. Such a focus, according to Williams (2007) and Robinson and Gardner (2004), can depict the minority ethnic actor as little more than a passive recipient, whose negotiation of the 'othering' process may be overlooked or muffled in an attempt to highlight issues of victimisation.

This clearly has important implications for our conceptual understanding of the orthodox 'insider-outsider' framework referred to in Chapter Three, and arguably this is where the thesis provides most innovation in terms of conceptualising the experience of racism in rural environments. In addition to challenging idyllicised constructions of rural space by highlighting the 'othering' of rural minority ethnic households, the research has cast doubt over the validity of simply grouping the rural ethnic majority and minority populations into a fixed dichotomised framework by illustrating the role that agencies can play in helping minority ethnic 'outsiders' to become 'insiders', at least to some degree. Even if rural minority ethnic households remain susceptible to the processes of 'othering' that result in their perceived and actual marginalisation from mainstream community activities, the various steps outlined above that agencies can take to counter problems of rural racism, allied to the increasing diversification of rural space, suggest that the presence of ethnic minorities may, rather sooner than later, be more readily accepted within rural towns and villages. As Williams (2007: 746) contends:



*To date, the construction of 'the ethnic' [emphasis in original] in the rural/race binary is proscribed by the tendency to reify their 'outsider' status for analytical purpose to the neglect of the ways in which the boundary insider/outsider is subject to permutation, shifts and changes. These boundaries are neither eternal nor fixed, but extremely variable, politically, socially and culturally ... New ethnicities and changing perceptions of nation and national identity are all factors that disturb constructions of the rural. What is it to be 'of the place' and not a migrant to it? In what ways are these peoples shaping and reshaping these spaces?*

Certainly, it is not entirely fanciful to hope that the zones of 'sameness' and 'otherness' used to distinguish rural insiders and outsiders on the lines of ethnicity will have less resonance than has been the case up to now, and with this in mind future studies of 'race' in the rural should be encouraged to recognise these zones not as fixed or exclusive categories to which rural actors should be allocated, but instead as more extreme points of a spectrum of belonging. There are spatial and temporal dimensions to the process of 'othering' which can result in rural minority ethnic households being 'othered' in certain respects, at certain times and in certain places whilst being largely accepted by their neighbours, schoolmates and colleagues in other contexts. Similarly, and as we have seen throughout the research, a myriad of factors aside from just ethnicity *per se* can shape reactions to ethnic minorities in the rural, whether these be an individual's perceived social class, their length of stay in a particular town or village, the presence of other more demonised groups in the same environment, or communities' responses to media coverage of asylum, immigration, terrorism and other related issues.

Consequently, the status of the 'other' may not be a permanent affiliation for all rural minority ethnic households, but instead is likely to be a more transient condition that is contingent to some extent upon individual circumstances and particular environments, and future studies should be cognisant of the need to look deeper into this 'othering' process. That said, a more nuanced understanding of this process will only develop once we first fully acknowledge the problem of rural racism and fallacy

of the rural idyll: as this thesis has posited, rural agencies, policy-makers and academia more broadly remain largely unfamiliar with the dimensions of the first issue and transfixed by the appeal of the second. As such, the scale of the problems identified on these pages suggest that there is a long way to go before our nostalgic preoccupation with the rural's 'white landscape', and the exclusivity associated with such an unhealthy and injudicious preoccupation, can be completely put to one side.



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## **Appendix One**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Minority Ethnic Households<sup>40</sup>**

- How would you define your ethnicity?
- How long have you lived in your local area?
- Where else have you lived?
- What was it like growing up here?
- As you were growing up did you face any problems on account of your ethnic or religious identity? What about at school?
- Have you ever lived outside of this town/village?
- What, if anything, did you think might be different about living somewhere like here as opposed to in a more major town or city?
- Is this a friendly place to live? Do you think there is a sense of community?
- How comfortable do you feel when it comes to interacting with your neighbours/colleagues/schoolmates?
- As someone who has lived in mainly white areas, do you feel that you have been able to retain your own cultural identity? Have you felt obliged to fit in?
- Do you worry about being the victim of racism in your local area?
- Have you ever experienced any form of racism whilst living here? What happened?
- How often do you experience racial harassment?

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<sup>40</sup> As noted in the discussion of research methods, the interviews conducted for the purposes of this research were all semi-structured and tailored to meet the specific requirements of each particular interview. Consequently, this interview schedule, together with those in Appendices Two and Three, were merely guides for the respective sets of interviews and should not be seen as an exhaustive or restrictive list of all questions asked.



- Where has this harassment occurred?
- Does racial harassment affect your day-to-day living, and if so in what ways?
- How does this affect your family?
- Have you reported any incidents to the police? If so, which ones?
- If yes, were you satisfied with the response of the police? Give reasons.
- If no, why did you not report the incident to the police?
- Have you ever discussed your experiences of racism with any other organisations? How did they respond?
- If you were to experience any form of racism in the future, would you report it? To whom? Which types of incident? What would encourage you to report?

## **Appendix Two**

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Group Schedule for Long-Term White Rural Residents**

- For what length of time have you lived here?
- Have you lived elsewhere?
- What is it like as a place to live?
- What are the positive/negative features of living in a rural area such as this?
- Do you worry about crime or anti-social behaviour? Any particular types?
- What are the neighbouring towns/villages like?
- Are there any particular characteristics that set this area apart from neighbouring towns/cities?
- Is it a closely-knit community?
- Is there a notable minority ethnic presence? Has this changed over the years?
- What are relations like between white people and minority ethnic households? Have they improved/worsened over the years?
- Are there any particular ethnic or religious groups towards whom ill-feeling is directed? Why is this the case? How does this ill-feeling play out?
- Do you know if the BNP is active in your area? What do you think of the BNP?
- What are your views on issues of immigration/asylum?
- What are your views on Traveller communities?



## **Appendix Three**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Agency Representatives**

- Can you tell me about your organisation and your role within the organisation?
- How large a geographical area do you cover?
- How are racist incidents referred to you?
- How do you respond to reported incidents of racist victimisation?
- What types of cases do you deal with in general?
- How many incidents approximately have been reported this year?
- How do you prioritise cases?
- How are high priority cases tackled?
- How do you respond to victims who have experienced so-called ‘low-level’ experiences of racism?
- What do you think are the benefits of your own role?
- What strategies are in place within your organisation to address issues of racism?
- Have you received any specific training to help you deal with issues of ‘race’?
- How effective is this training? Are there any areas which could be improved or on which you would like to receive further training?
- Do you have sufficient resources to address issues of racist victimisation?
- Do you liaise with other agencies, and to what extent?
- What is your relationship like with other agencies?

- Do any multi-agency forums exist in your area which are specifically designed to address issues of 'race'?
- Who are the key local agencies involved in partnerships designed to address issues of 'race'?
- What do you think of the multi-agency approach to tackling racism?
- How does this approach work in practice?
- What is your opinion on your agency's, and other agencies', general response to victims of racist harassment?
- Do you work directly with any specific minority ethnic organisations?
- How do you make contact with minority ethnic households?
- Are you aware of any services that are designed to cater for the needs of rural minority ethnic households?
- Do you feel that local minority ethnic households are aware of the services available to them?
- Are there any 'hidden' groups whom you would like to establish greater contact with?
- What kind of improvements would you like to see when it comes to responding to racist victimisation/minority ethnic households?
- What, if anything, needs to be done to improve the existing level of service provision afforded to victims of racist harassment?



Appendix Four

Questionnaire Survey of Minority Ethnic Households  
Based in Suffolk

Many of the following questions will refer to the term ‘racial harassment’. By this we mean any form of insult, threat, violence, damage to or theft of property, or any attempt to do any of these things which was racially motivated. By racially motivated we mean an act directed at you because of your ethnicity.

1. What do you feel are the three greatest problems in your local neighbourhood? Please tick only three boxes.

Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	Racial harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rubbish/litter	<input type="checkbox"/>	Council services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leisure facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rowdy youths	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

.....

There are no problems in  
my local neighbourhood ☐

2. How concerned are you about racial harassment in your neighbourhood?

Very concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not concerned at all	<input type="checkbox"/>

3a. Have you ever been racially harassed?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If ‘No’, please go to question 9.

**3b. If ‘Yes’, how often have you been racially harassed?**

- Daily ☐
- Weekly ☐
- Monthly ☐
- Once a year ☐
- Very rarely ☐

*For the most serious incident of racial harassmment you experienced:*

**3c. What was the nature of the incident? (Tick as many boxes as you need to describe what happened).**

- |  |                          |                                      |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Verbal abuse/name calling              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unnecessary staring                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Actual or attempted damage to property | <input type="checkbox"/> | Actual or attempted physical assault | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People avoiding you                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Actual or attempted arson            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state)                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |                                      |                          |
| .....                                  |                          |                                      |                          |

**3d. Where did it happen?**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| At work                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In the street                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At a shop                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At a leisure venue (eg at a pub, cinema etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On council premises                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On health service premises                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On school premises                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At home                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

.....



4a. Did you report the incident to the police?

Yes ☐ No ☐ *If 'No', please go to question 5a.*

4b. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of the police?

- Very satisfied ☐
- Satisfied ☐
- Dissatisfied ☐
- Very dissatisfied ☐

Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

4c. If you did not report the incident to the police, please tick reason(s):

- Previous bad experiences of the police ☐
- No confidence that the police would investigate the incident properly ☐
- Fear of what might happen to you or your family☐
- Did not feel it was a police matter ☐
- Other (please state) ☐

.....

**5a. Did you report the incident to the Racial Harassment Initiative, Suffolk County Council?**

Yes ☐ No ☐ *If 'No', please go to question 6a.*

**5b. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of the Racial Harassment Initiative?**

Very satisfied ☐

**Satisfied** ☐

**Dissatisfied** ☐

Very dissatisfied ☐

**Please give reasons for your answer.**

.....

.....

.....

**5c. If you did not report the incident to the Racial Harassment Initiative, please tick reason(s):**

**Not aware of the Racial Harassment Initiative** ☐

**Did not feel the Racial Harassment Initiative would provide an effective response** ☐

**Previous bad experiences of the Racial Harassment Initiative** ☐

**Other (please state)**

.....



6a. Did you report the incident to the Ipswich and District Victim Support?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'No', please go to question 7a.

6b. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of the Ipswich and District Victim Support?

- Very satisfied ☐
- Satisfied ☐
- Dissatisfied ☐
- Very dissatisfied ☐

Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

6c. If you did not report the incident to the Ipswich and District Victim Support, please tick reason(s):

- Not aware of the Ipswich and District Victim Support ☐
- Did not feel the Ipswich and District Victim Support would provide an effective response ☐
- Previous bad experiences of Ipswich and District Victim Support ☐
- Other (please state)

.....

**7a.** Did you report the incident to the Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE)?

Yes    ☐        No        ☐ *If 'No', please go to question 8a.*

**7b.** If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of ISCRE?

- Very satisfied        ☐
- Satisfied             ☐
- Dissatisfied         ☐
- Very dissatisfied    ☐

Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

**7c.** If you did not report the incident to ISCRE, please tick reason(s):

- Not aware of ISCRE        ☐
- Did not feel ISCRE would provide an effective response ☐
- Previous bad experiences of ISCRE        ☐
- Other (please state)

.....



8a. Did you report the incident to the Multi-Agency Forum Against Racial Harassment (MAFARH)?

Yes ☐ No ☐ *If 'No', please go to question 9.*

8b. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of MAFARH?

- Very satisfied ☐
- Satisfied ☐
- Dissatisfied ☐
- Very dissatisfied ☐

Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

8c. If you did not report the incident to MAFARH, please tick reason(s):

- Not aware of MAFARH ☐
- Did not feel MAFARH would provide an effective response ☐
- Previous bad experiences of MAFARH ☐
- Other (please state)

.....

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

*Please state the following:*

**9. Age:**

19 or under ☐    20-29 ☐    30-39 ☐    40-49 ☐    50-59 ☐    60 or over ☐

**10. Gender:**

Male ☐              Female ☐

**11. What is your ethnic group (as defined in the 2001 Census)?**

White British ☐

White Irish ☐

Any other White background (please state) ☐

.....

White and Black Caribbean ☐

White and Black African ☐

White and Asian ☐

Any other Mixed background (please state) ☐

.....

Asian or Asian British Indian ☐

Asian or Asian British Pakistani ☐

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi ☐

Any other Asian background (please state) ☐

.....

Black or Black British Caribbean ☐

Black or Black British African ☐

Any other Black background (please state) ☐

.....

Chinese ☐

Other ethnic group (please state) ☐

.....



**12. Employment status:**

Employed full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Retired	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employed part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	Full-time carer	<input type="checkbox"/>

**13. Housing tenure:**

Owner occupier	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local authority rented	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing association	<input type="checkbox"/>
Privately rented	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....

If you would be willing to speak to the research team at greater length then please leave your contact details below.

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Tel.** .....

**Email** .....

**Thank you very much for your co-operation & time**

Appendix Five

Questionnaire Survey of Minority Ethnic Households  
Based in Northamptonshire

Many of the following questions will refer to the term ‘racial harassment’. By this we mean any form of insult, threat, violence, damage to or theft of property, or any attempt to do any of these things which was racially motivated. By racially motivated we mean an act directed at you because of your ethnicity.

1. What do you feel are the three greatest problems in your local neighbourhood? Please tick only three boxes.

Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	Racial harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rubbish/litter	<input type="checkbox"/>	Council services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leisure facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rowdy youths	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

.....

There are no problems in  
my local neighbourhood ☐

2. How concerned are you about racial harassment in your neighbourhood?

Very concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not concerned at all	<input type="checkbox"/>

3a. Have you been racially harassed in the last twelve months?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If ‘No’, please go to question 10.



3b. If ‘Yes’, how often have you been racially harassed?

- Daily ☐
- Weekly ☐
- Monthly ☐
- Once in the last year ☐
- Very rarely ☐

*For the most serious incident of racial harassment you experienced in the last twelve months:*

3c. What was the nature of the incident? (Tick as many boxes as you need to describe what happened).

- |  |                          |                                      |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Verbal abuse/name calling              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unnecessary staring                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Actual or attempted damage to property | <input type="checkbox"/> | Actual or attempted physical assault | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People avoiding you                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Actual or attempted arson            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state)                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |                                      |                          |
| .....                                  |                          |                                      |                          |

3d. Where did it happen?

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| At work                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In the street                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At a shop                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At a leisure venue (eg at a pub, cinema etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On council premises                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On health service premises                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On school premises                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At home                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| .....  |                          |

4a. Did you report the incident to the police?

- Yes ☐ No ☐ *If ‘No’, please go to question 5a.*

**4b. If ‘Yes’, how satisfied were you with the response of the police with regard to:**

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Initial contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding of victim’s needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Any other comments about the police’s response**

.....

.....

.....

**4c. If you did not report the incident to the police, please tick reason(s):**

Previous bad experiences of the police ☐

No confidence that the police would investigate the incident properly ☐

Fear of what might happen to you or your family☐

Did not feel it was a police matter ☐

Concerned that the police are a racist organisation ☐

Concerned that the police would not understand my situation ☐

Other (please state) ☐

.....



5a. Did you report the incident to your local Racial Equality Council?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'No', please go to question 6a.

5b. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of your local Racial Equality Council with regard to:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Initial contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding of victim's needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any other comments about your local Racial Equality Council's response

.....

.....

.....

5c. If you did not report the incident to the your local Racial Equality Council, please tick reason(s):

- Not aware of your local Racial Equality Council ☐
- Did not feel your local Racial Equality Council would provide an effective response ☐
- Previous bad experiences of your local Racial Equality Council ☐
- Other (please state)
- .....

6a. For those living in rented accommodation, did you report the incident to your landlord or your local council?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'No', please go to question 7a.

6b. If 'Yes', please specify to whom you reported the incident:

Landlord ☐ Local council ☐

6c. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of your landlord or your local council with regard to:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Initial contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding of victim's needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any other comments about your landlord or your local council's response

.....

.....

.....

6d. If you did not report the incident to your landlord or your local council, please tick reason(s):

Not aware that racist incidents could be reported to my landlord or local council ☐

Did not feel my landlord or local council would provide an effective response ☐

Previous bad experiences of reporting an incident to my landlord or local council ☐

Other (please state)

.....



**7a.** Did you report the incident to Pupil Inclusion and Support?

Yes    ☐        No        ☐ *If 'No', please go to question 8a.*

**7b.** If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of Pupil Inclusion and Support with regard to:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Initial contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding of victim's needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any other comments about Pupil Inclusion and Support's response

.....

.....

.....

**7c.** If you did **not** report the incident to Pupil Inclusion and Support, please tick reason(s):

- Not aware of Pupil Inclusion and Support                    ☐
- Did not feel Pupil Inclusion and Support would provide an effective response                    ☐
- Previous bad experiences of Pupil Inclusion and Support ☐
- Other (please state)

.....

8a. Did you have contact with Victim Support?  
Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'No', please go to question 10.

8b. If 'Yes', how satisfied were you with the response of Victim Support with regard to:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Initial contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding of victim's needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any other comments about Victim Support's response  
.....  
.....  
.....

8c. If you did not have contact with Victim Support, please tick reason(s):

- Not aware of Victim Support ☐
- Did not feel Victim Support would provide an effective response ☐
- Was not referred to Victim Support ☐
- Previous bad experiences of Victim Support ☐
- Other (please state)  
.....

9. Would you be encouraged to report racist incidents if you could pick-up and complete a reporting form locally e.g. from a post office, shop, library etc?  
Yes ☐ No ☐



**FURTHER INFORMATION**

*Please state the following:*

**10. Age:**

19 or under ☐    20-29 ☐    30-39 ☐    40-49 ☐    50-59 ☐    60 or over ☐

**11. Gender:**

Male ☐              Female ☐

**12. What is your ethnic group (as defined in the 2001 Census)?**

- White British ☐
- White Irish ☐
- Any other White background (please state) ☐  
.....
- White and Black Caribbean ☐
- White and Black African ☐
- White and Asian ☐
- Any other Mixed background (please state) ☐  
.....
- Asian or Asian British Indian ☐
- Asian or Asian British Pakistani ☐
- Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi ☐
- Any other Asian background (please state) ☐  
.....
- Black or Black British Caribbean ☐
- Black or Black British African ☐
- Any other Black background (please state) ☐  
.....
- Chinese ☐
- Other ethnic group (please state) ☐  
.....

**13. Employment status:**

Employed full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Retired	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employed part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	Full-time carer	<input type="checkbox"/>

**14. Housing tenure:**

Owner occupier	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local authority rented	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing association	<input type="checkbox"/>
Privately rented	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	

If you would be willing to speak to the research team at greater length then please leave your contact details below.

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.....

**Tel.** .....

**Email** .....

**Thank you very much for your co-operation & time**



Appendix Six

Questionnaire Survey of Minority Ethnic Households  
Based in Warwickshire

Many of the following questions will refer to the term ‘racial harassment’. By this we mean any form of insult, threat, violence, damage to or theft of property, or any attempt to do any of these things which was racially motivated. By racially motivated we mean an act directed at you because of your ethnicity.

1. Which village or town do you currently live in?  
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2. How satisfied do you feel about living in this village or town?

- Very satisfied ☐
- Satisfied ☐
- Dissatisfied ☐
- Very dissatisfied ☐

3. What do you feel are the three greatest problems in your local neighbourhood? Please tick only three boxes.

- |                      |                          |                   |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Crime                | <input type="checkbox"/> | Racial harassment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rubbish/litter       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Council services  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unemployment         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Health services   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Housing conditions   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Schools           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Youth facilities     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Graffiti          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leisure facilities   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rowdy youths      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state) | <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |                          |
| .....                |                          |                   |                          |

There are no problems in my local neighbourhood ☐

4a. How concerned are you about racial harassment in your neighbourhood?

- Very concerned ☐
- Concerned ☐
- Not concerned ☐
- Not concerned at all ☐

4b. How concerned are you about being the victim of the following types of racism?

	Very concerned	Concerned	Not concerned	Not concerned at all
Verbal abuse/name calling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unnecessary staring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual or attempted damage to property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual or attempted physical assault	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People avoiding you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual or attempted arson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....				

5a. Have you been racially harassed whilst living in Warwickshire?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'No', please go to question 9.

5b. If 'Yes', how often have you been racially harassed during this period?

- Daily ☐
- Weekly ☐
- Monthly ☐
- Less than monthly ☐
- Once a year ☐
- Less than once a year ☐



6. Which, if any, of the following types of racism have you experienced during your time living in Warwickshire? (Please tick as many boxes as apply).

Verbal abuse/name calling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unnecessary staring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual or attempted damage to property	<input type="checkbox"/>	Actual or attempted physical assault	<input type="checkbox"/>
People avoiding you	<input type="checkbox"/>	Actual or attempted arson	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
.....			

7a. Have you ever reported any racist incidents to the police?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'No', please go to question 7d.

7b. If 'Yes', which of the following types of racism have you reported to the police? (Please tick as many boxes as apply).

Verbal abuse/name calling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unnecessary staring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual or attempted damage to property	<input type="checkbox"/>	Actual or attempted physical assault	<input type="checkbox"/>
People avoiding you	<input type="checkbox"/>	Actual or attempted arson	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
.....			

7c. If ‘Yes’, how satisfied have you been with the response of the police with regard to the following aspects of their service:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Initial contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handling of incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding of victim’s needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any other comments about the police’s response

.....

.....

7d. If there have been racist incidents that you have not reported to the police, please tick reason(s) why:

- Previous bad experiences of the police ☐
- No confidence that the police would investigate the incident properly ☐
- Fear of what might happen to you or your family☐
- Did not feel it was a police matter ☐
- Other (please state) ☐

.....



**8a. Would you ever report a racist incident to the following organisations?**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Victim Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial Equality Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizens Advice Bureau	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Against Racism (CAR) Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partnership Against Racism (PAR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....

**8b. During your time in Warwickshire, have you ever reported a racist incident to the following organisations?**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Victim Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial Equality Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizens Advice Bureau	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Against Racism (CAR) Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partnership Against Racism (PAR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....

**8c.** There may be reasons why you would report racist incidents to some organisations and not others. Please tick the boxes below that match your views of the organisations listed.

	Victim Support	Racial Equality Council	Citizens Advice Bureau	Community Against Racism Project	Partnership Against Racism
I am not aware that this organisation deals with racist incidents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not confident that this organisation would provide me with enough help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have had previous bad experiences of reporting racist incidents to this organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have not heard of this organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would prefer to report a racist incident to this organisation rather than the police	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe this organisation would treat me fairly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**9.** Would you be encouraged to report racist incidents if you could pick-up and complete a reporting form locally e.g. from a post office, shop, library etc?

Yes ☐ No ☐

**10a.** Do you think there needs to be a community association or group for ethnic minorities based in your local area?

Yes ☐ No ☐

**10b.** Are you involved in a community association or group for ethnic minorities?

Yes ☐ No ☐

**10c.** If ‘Yes’, what associations or groups are you involved in?

.....



**FURTHER INFORMATION**

*Please state the following:*

**11. Age:**

19 or under ☐    20-29 ☐    30-39 ☐    40-49 ☐    50-59 ☐    60 or over ☐

**12. Gender:**

Male ☐              Female ☐

**13. What is your ethnic group (as defined in the 2001 Census)?**

White British ☐

White Irish ☐

Any other White background (please state) ☐

.....

White and Black Caribbean ☐

White and Black African ☐

White and Asian ☐

Any other Mixed background (*please state*) ☐

.....

Asian or Asian British Indian ☐

Asian or Asian British Pakistani ☐

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi ☐

Any other Asian background (please state) ☐

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Black or Black British Caribbean ☐

Black or Black British African ☐

Any other Black background (please state) ☐

.....

Chinese ☐

Other ethnic group (please state) ☐

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**If you would be willing to speak to the research team at greater length, *and in complete confidence*, then please leave your contact details below.**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Tel.** .....

**Email** .....

**Thank you very much for your help**