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Making the links - poverty, ethnicity and social networks

The project, led by Angus McCabe, looking at "Poverty, Ethnicity and Social Networks" is part of a major Joseph Rowntree Foundation programme focussing on the links between poverty and ethnicity across the UK (**http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/poverty-and-ethnicity (http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/poverty-and-ethnicity)**).

There is a growing interest in the role played by social networks in enhancing life opportunities and bringing about positive behaviour change. However, evidence is limited – particularly in terms of the nature and potential of social networks to tackle poverty within Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK.

This research project aims to develop a better understanding of how networks within and between diverse communities support or hinder people's capacity and opportunities to cope with and move away from poverty. In particular, the research will explore how different kinds of social relationships connect people from various ethnic communities beyond family, neighbours and friends who share similar backgrounds. The project seeks to explore how networks are maintained and how they are accessed. How do people, as individuals and communities, use networks to gain employment, to sustain businesses or obtain capital assets – all of which can be important in lifting people out of poverty, or conversely limiting ambitions and opportunities for advancement.
Further, what other factors come into play: educational achievement, access to affordable credit, housing circumstances, cultural attitudes and discrimination? How do these relate to social networks as a means of challenging inequalities and changing people's experience of poverty? Are there generational and gender differences in the characteristics of social networks and how they are used? And threading through these questions, what might be the role of new social media?

The overall aim of the research is to inform policy and practice so that agencies and communities can better understand and promote positive social networking as a means of enabling access to employment, resources and pathways out of poverty.

The research is being undertaken with diverse communities in Birmingham, Liverpool and Cumbria and will involve the active participation of those who have moved out of poverty, remain poor or at risk of poverty in understanding the role of social networks and developing recommendations to policy makers in this field. There will be a particular focus on Chinese, Polish, South East Asian and Somali groups - in long established communities as well as recent arrivals. The research will involve small to medium enterprises developed within these communities alongside seeking the views of employment/business advisors and other professionals working to address poverty within BME communities.

The project will report in June 2013 and is being undertaken by Angus McCabe, Third Sector Research Centre and Institute for Research into Superdiversity(IRiS) (University of Birmingham), Alison Gilchrist, Asif Afridi (IRiS & BRAP), Paul Kyprianou (Praxis CIC) and Kevin Harris (Local Level). The research will be guided by an advisory group and community partners in Birmingham, Liverpool and Cumbria.

Further information

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