

Ethnic minorities and mental health

If you belong to an ethnic minority group, you may face specific issues relating to your mental health. This information provides options for support and treatment to help with these issues. It is for adults who are 18 or over in England from an ethnic minority background. It's also for their loved ones and carers and anyone interested in this subject.

Key points:

- If you are from an ethnic minority background, you may experience different rates of mental illness than the white British population.
- Things like stigma and lack of culturally sensitive treatment can act as barriers to accessing mental health care.
- There are options available to help you with some of these barriers.
- There are options for help and support if you are having mental health issues.
- There are things you can do if you are not happy with your support or treatment.
- There are some organisations that provide mental health support or services specifically to people from an ethnic minority background. Rethink Mental Illness have specific services in some areas of the country. Please see the Useful contacts section for organisations that you might find helpful.

This factsheet covers:

1. What does belonging to an ethnic minority group mean?
2. Are rates of mental illness different for people from ethnic minority backgrounds?
3. What are the cultural barriers to mental health care?
4. What can I do to help tackle barriers to my mental health care?
5. What types of support are available to me?
6. What if I am not happy with my support or treatment?

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1. What does 'ethnic minorities' mean?

In this information 'ethnic minorities' refers to all ethnic groups except the White British group. This includes white minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups.¹

We have taken this definition from Gov.UK 'Writing about ethnicity': www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity

People from ethnic minorities make up about 18% of the population in England and Wales. This is according to the most recent Census.²

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2. Are rates of mental illness different for people from ethnic minority backgrounds?

Rates of mental illness for people from ethnic minority backgrounds are sometimes greater than for white British people.

Compared to white British people:^{3,4}

- Black women are more likely to experience a common mental illness, such as anxiety disorder or depression.
- Those belonging to mixed or multiple ethnic communities are an at-risk group for suicide.⁵
- Ethnic minority women are more likely to have mental health problems discovered after coming into contact with the criminal justice system.⁶
- Black men are 3 times more likely to experience psychosis.⁷
- Black people are over 5 times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act.⁸
- Refugees and asylum seekers are more likely to experience mental health issues like anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than the general population.⁹

But more white British people receive treatment for mental health issues than people from ethnic minority background. And they have better outcomes.¹⁰

The following 2-minute video explores the prevalence of schizophrenia and psychosis in the Black community. It has been produced by **Black Minds Matter UK** and Rethink Mental Illness: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7K17RUHJcWk

You can find more information about:

- Anxiety disorder
- Asylum seeker and refugee mental health
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Psychosis
- Suicidal thoughts - How to cope

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What can affect the mental health of people from ethnic minority communities?

The system can treat people from ethnic minority backgrounds unfairly. This can add to the reasons why there can be higher rates of mental illness for them. Examples are things like:¹¹

- inequalities in wealth and living standards,
- bias, discrimination and racism,
- stigma about mental health, and
- the criminal justice system.

People from ethnic minorities are more likely to access mental health services via the criminal justice system than white British people.¹²

Some groups sometimes have better mental health compared to white British people. For example, some studies show:¹³

- suicidal thoughts and self-harming behaviour are less common in Asian people than white British people, and
- that mental illness is less common among Chinese people than white British people.

But this may be because there is less reporting of mental illness, self-harm or suicidal thoughts amongst these communities.¹⁴

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3. What are the cultural barriers to mental health care?

People from ethnic minority backgrounds have the same right to access NHS mental health care as the rest of the population.

For NHS healthcare rights for asylum seekers and refugees, see our information on **Asylum seeker and refugee mental health** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

GPs, talking therapy services and secondary mental health services are there to help.

GP means 'general practitioner' doctor.

It may be that your GP thinks you would benefit from specialist help for your mental health. They might give you the option of being referred to a NHS secondary mental health service.

You can find more information about:

- GP's and your mental health
- Talking therapy
- NHS mental health teams

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

There may be cultural perceptions of mental illness that can act as a barrier to mental healthcare. There may also be certain perceptions of ethnic minority communities that create barriers for them.

Stigma and shame¹⁵

There might be stigma about mental health issues in some ethnic minority communities.

If you have a mental health issue, other people in your community might not understand what you are going through. And might not want to talk about it.

Only 3 in 10 people from ethnic minority communities feel comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings. This compares to around 6 out of 10 for the general population.¹⁶ This is according to the mental health charity Mind.

Different ways of understanding mental health

Mental health is understood in different ways across cultures.¹⁷

While some people explain mental health using science and medicine, others turn to religion or spiritual traditions.¹⁸

In some cultures, mental health might not be widely discussed or understood.

Some communities may see it as a spiritual matter. For example, people might think people with mental health issues need to pray more.

Because of this, people may not get properly diagnosed or may avoid going to a doctor for help.

Distrust in healthcare providers

People from ethnic minority backgrounds can have different experiences of the mental health system compared to white British people.

Some ethnic minority groups are less satisfied with their experiences of the NHS, GP and hospital services. That is compared to the rest of the population.¹⁹

You might visit a doctor or therapist for mental health help. But you may be made to feel judged, dismissed, or treated unfairly because of your background. You may start to lose trust in the healthcare system.

A healthcare professional might ignore your concerns or assume things about you based on stereotypes. You may be made to feel unwelcome and unsupported.

Over time, this can make people afraid to seek help again or stop going to appointments altogether.

If trust is broken, you may choose to handle your challenges alone instead of risking further discrimination. Or being made to feel like your problems are not taken seriously.

Cultural misunderstandings and bias

Mental health services in the UK are mostly designed to work the same way for everyone. But this does not always fit the needs of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Some ethnic minority groups have unique ways of understanding and dealing with mental health. But these are not always considered in standard treatment plans.

For example, in some cultures, people express distress differently. What might be seen as a symptom of a mental health condition in one culture, could be a normal way of coping in another.

If doctors and therapists do not understand these differences, they might:

- misdiagnose someone, or
- give them treatment that does not work for them.

Also, some communities prefer to talk about mental health in a more private or spiritual way, rather than using traditional therapy. They may turn to their community members,

such as religious leaders, for guidance. If mental health services do not offer options that respect these beliefs, you may be made to feel uncomfortable or misunderstood. This could make you less likely to seek help.

Black people may face unfair treatment when seeking mental health care. Professionals or others might wrongly assume that Black people are dangerous or difficult, instead of recognising their challenges.

This stereotype can be intentional or based on unconscious bias, often because of misleading portrayals in the media. They might not even realise they hold this belief. These unfair ideas can lead to people not getting the right help or being treated differently.

This can lead to misdiagnosis, lack of proper support, or even avoidance of care altogether.

Lack of understanding of how racism impacts mental health

Some healthcare professionals may not fully understand what racism or discrimination feels like. Because they have not personally experienced it.

This can make it harder for them to recognise when a patient is affected by racism or how it impacts their mental health.

For example, you might say you are anxious or depressed because of the discrimination you have faced. Your doctor might not have experienced racism. So, they might not take it as seriously or fully understand how deeply it affects your well-being.

This lack of understanding can mean patients are made to feel dismissed, unheard, or unsupported. This makes them less likely to seek help in the future.

Language barriers

People who do not speak English fluently may find it hard to explain their mental health problems to doctors or therapists. They might be made to feel frustrated when they cannot fully express their emotions.

If healthcare professionals do not speak their language, it can lead to misunderstandings. This can make it harder for them to get the right diagnosis or treatment.

You might have to rely on family members or friends to translate. This might make you feel uncomfortable. Especially if you do not want to share personal feelings or information with relatives or friends.

Without proper translation, you might avoid seeking help altogether. This is because you are made to feel it is too difficult or stressful.

What is intersectionality?

Your identity can be made up of different parts, like your ethnic background, gender, age, and religious beliefs.

Intersectionality means how different parts of your identity combine to affect how you are treated or experience life. This can include unfair treatment.

For example, you might be a Black woman seeking mental health support. You might face challenges related to both racial and gender discrimination. This could affect the type of care you receive.

If you also have a physical disability, this could add another layer of difficulty to your experience.

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4. What can I do to help tackle barriers to my mental health care?

Many people from ethnic minority backgrounds have positive experiences of mental health care, which leads to recovery. But getting the right mental health care and support can sometimes be difficult.

Mental health services should meet the needs of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. But as we saw in [section 3](#), there can be issues.

We know that it is up to mental health services to change to get things right. But if you are nervous about seeking help, there are things you can do to try to make it feel easier and more positive.

Speak to someone you can trust

Speaking to someone you trust can be the first step to getting the help you need. This may be a family member, friend, or healthcare professional.

You might be uncomfortable about speaking to someone in person. You can write a letter, send an email, or text them to explain how you are feeling.

Taking this first step might make you more comfortable about seeing your GP or other mental health services.

Take a friend or relative to your appointment

You can take a person you trust, like a friend or relative, to an appointment with you.

They can support you, and it might ease any anxiety you have about the appointment. The person can speak on your behalf if you want them to.

Ask for a healthcare professional who is from an ethnic minority background

You might find it easier to talk to a healthcare professional who shares a similar background. This might help you feel more comfortable and understood, and less likely to be judged.

It might make it easier to talk openly about how you are feeling if you know that a professional has some shared cultural experiences. It can also help to overcome cultural and language barriers.

You have the right to see any GP in your surgery.²⁰ So, if there is a GP who is from a similar background to you, you can see them. The practice website might have information about the GPs who work there. Or you can tell the staff what you are looking for, to see if they can meet your request.

GP surgeries and other mental health services do not have to provide a professional who is from a specific background. But you can always ask, and they should try their best to meet your request.

You can find more information about **GPs and mental health** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Tell your healthcare professional about your culture and background

You can tell healthcare professionals how your culture and background are relevant to your mental health problems. This could help to create a better understanding between you.

It might help to shape your care and treatment in a way you prefer.

For example, you could:

- ask for therapy that respects your beliefs,
- talk about traditional healing methods that matter to you, or
- share any challenges you face because of your cultural background.

Ask for an interpreter

The NHS must communicate with you and give you information in a way you understand.²¹

If English is not your first language, you can ask for an interpreter to join your appointment. This helps to make sure you can say what you need to and understand everything your healthcare professional tells you.

Interpreting is a free service, and your GP practice or mental health team will arrange it for you.²²

It is best to ask for an interpreter when you make your appointment, so they have enough time to arrange it.

You can also ask a trusted person to interpret for you, if you want to.

Where can I get more information about getting an NHS interpreter?

You can read more about getting an NHS interpreter on the **Healthwatch** website: www.healthwatch.co.uk/advice-and-information/2022-05-19/does-nhs-provide-interpreter

Do you have a translation function on your website?

There is an accessibility function on our website at www.rethink.org called **Recite**.

On the desktop site, click on the icon in the top right-hand corner next to **'Donate.'**

On the mobile site, scroll right and click on the **'Turn on accessibility'** icon.

The Recite function allows you to:

- **translate the text** into many different languages, and
- hear the text **read aloud**, in over 100 languages.

You can watch a 2-minute video about Recite here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQOUlgvqQQs

Where can I get translations of mental health information?

We have translated information on **Suicide - Coping with loss** into 10 languages. You can access them here: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-our-advice-service/accessible-advice

The **Royal College of Psychiatrists** has Translations of mental health information:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/translations

Cumbria Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Trust has translated health information:

www.cntw.nhs.uk/resource-library

Educate others

You can educate others in your community about mental health issues. This can help to reduce stigma.

You can use our advice and information webpages and factsheets to do this. We have over 130 advice and information webpages on lots of different aspects of mental health.

You can access them at www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/browse-all-topics.

What is the Mental Health UK training and consultancy team?

'Community' can also include your workplace.

You can get support from Mental Health UK's training and consultancy team. They can offer effective training packages on mental health.

You can find out more about the team at: <https://mentalhealth-uk.org/training-and-consultancy>.

Learn to spot the signs of mental health issues in others

Recognising red flags in mental health is crucial, especially if loved ones are not open about how they are feeling. The following can be signs of mental health issues:

- sudden mood changes,
- shifts in behaviour or energy levels,
- frequent comments like "I'm just tired"
- Sleep problems
- Headaches or muscle aches
- Digestive issues, like nausea, constipation, or diarrhoea
- Sweating or feeling dizzy
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Menstrual changes in women

Understand your rights under the Equality Act

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is illegal for a service provider to discriminate against people because of their race. This includes direct and indirect discrimination.²³

The NHS, and any other organisation that offers services, is a service provider.

We have used the term 'race' here because that is the term used in the Equality Act 2010.²⁴

The NHS constitution says you have the right not to be unlawfully discriminated against when using their services.²⁵

What can I do if I experience discrimination?

If you think you have been discriminated against, you can get free expert advice on what you can do from **Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)**. Please see the Useful contacts section for their details.

You can also complain directly to the service you are having issues with.

You can read more about race discrimination and the Equality Act on the **Equality and Human Rights Commission** website:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/race-discrimination

You can find more information about:

- Discrimination and mental health, and
- Complaining about the NHS and social services

at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

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5. What types of support are available to me?

You may be able to get support from:

- The NHS
- Private healthcare professionals
- Support groups
- Charities

You might also be able to get help from an advocate if you need help to get your voice heard.

If you are experiencing mental health issues you can get help and treatment through the NHS. You can get help from:

- your GP,
- your local NHS talking therapies service, and
- specialist NHS mental health teams, if appropriate.

How can my GP help me?

You can visit your GP to get help for your symptoms. GPs can provide treatment and advice for mental health problems and offer ongoing support.

Your GP can:

- offer you suitable medication,
- refer you to talking therapy or explain how you can refer yourself,
- give you advice on things like sleep, exercise and wellbeing, and
- refer you to a specialist NHS mental health services.

You can find more information about **GPs and mental health** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

Can I get talking therapy from a charity or private therapist?

You can get free talking therapy on the NHS.

You might be able to get talking therapy from a local charity. For more information see 'How can I find services outside of the NHS?' below.

You might be able to see a therapist from the same background as you.

You might be able to see a therapist from the same background as you by getting private therapy. Private therapy is not funded by the NHS, so you must pay for it yourself. Or you may have cover through an insurance policy.

We always advise that you find a therapist who is a member of a professional body such as:

- British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists
- UK Council for Psychotherapy

The **Black, African and Asian Therapy Network** has therapists from Black, African, Asian and Caribbean Heritage. You can find their details in the Useful contacts section.

You can also search for private therapists in your local area on the following websites:

- **British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists:** www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists
- **UK Council for Psychotherapy:** www.psychotherapy.org.uk

You can find more information about **Talking therapies** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

How can I find services outside of the NHS?

There might be local charities, support groups and online support forums for people from ethnic minority backgrounds, or specific ethnic groups. You might be able to speak to others who are experiencing similar problems.

Please see the Useful contacts section for organisations that you might find helpful.

You can search for local organisations on the internet, or you might find them on your local council's website. You can find your local council's website from this link:
www.gov.uk/find-local-council

You can search for local mental health advisers and organisations on the following link:
<https://advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk>. Select 'mental health' from the drop-down list and put in your post code.

Your local branch of the mental health charity **Mind** might know of suitable organisations and support in your local area. You can find your local Mind branch by using this link:
www.mind.org.uk/information-support/local-minds.

You will be able to find suitable mental health services from the **Hub of Hope** website.
<https://hubofhope.co.uk>

Get an advocate

You might be able to get help from an advocate if:

- you want support getting help from mental health services, or if
- you need help communicating with them.

There are different types of advocates depending on your circumstances and what you need.

Advocates can help you understand your rights and help you access services. They can talk to people on your behalf or help you to speak for yourself.

Advocates are independent of the NHS and they are usually free of charge.

Can I get an advocate if I am detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act?

If you are really unwell with a mental health issue, you can be detained in hospital, even if you do not agree to it.

This can happen under the Mental Health Act. It is sometimes known as being 'sectioned.'

If this happens you have the right to be supported by an independent mental health advocate (IMHA). They can tell you your rights and support you.

You can find more information about **Advocacy for mental health – Making your voice heard** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy. It includes information on how to find an advocate.

Getting help in a mental health crisis

Being in crisis means that your mental health is very bad, so you might need urgent support and treatment.

If you need urgent help, you can contact **NHS 111 for urgent mental health support**. You can call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-mental-health-symptoms.

You will need to answer some questions. They will refer you to an appropriate service or tell you what to do next.

For other options for support, see the **Get help now** link, at the top of every webpage at www.rethink.org.

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6. What if I am not happy with my support or treatment?

If you are not happy with your support or treatment, you can:

- talk to your doctor about your care and treatment options,
- ask for a second opinion,
- get an advocate to help you speak to your doctor,
- contact your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service, or
- make a complaint.

You can find out more about:

- Second opinions - About your mental health diagnosis or treatment,
- Advocacy for mental health - Making your voice heard, and
- Complaining about the NHS or social services

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

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A note on terminology

We do not use the terms 'BAME', 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic', 'BME', or 'Black and minority ethnic' in this information. This is in line with Government advice, which you can read here: www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity

We do not generally refer to 'race' in this factsheet, in line with Government advice. But we recognise that 'race' is a 'protected characteristic' as defined under the Equality Act 2010.

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Useful Contacts

The Empowerment Group

Is a charity that understands the cultural importance of Black therapists supporting their communities. They offer heavily subsidised online one to one counselling sessions for Black individuals in the UK aged 18+. Also, they offer training services for groups and individuals of all backgrounds.

Online contact form: www.theempowermentgroup.co.uk/contactus

Website: www.theempowermentgroup.co.uk

BAATN The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network

Home of the largest community of Counsellors and Psychotherapists of Black, African, Asian and Caribbean Heritage in the UK.

Email: administrator@baatn.org.uk

Website: www.baatn.org.uk

Black Minds Matter UK

The aim of Black Minds Matter is to ensure that Black people in the UK can access mental health support. The organisation does this by helping Black people and families across the nation to find professional mental health services, in addition to raising money to help cover the cost of such services.

Online enquiry form: www.blackmindsmatteruk.com/connect

Website: www.blackmindsmatteruk.com

Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)

This organisation gives practical advice and information about the Equality Act 2010 and discrimination.

Phone: 0808 800 0082



Address: FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521
Email: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask
Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Equality and Human Rights Commission

This organisation provides information about discrimination and the Equality Act

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Language Line Solutions

Language Line Solutions is an organisation that can provide translation and interpretation services over the phone to organisations and services.

Phone: 0800 169 2879
Email: enquiries@languageline.co.uk
Website: www.languageline.com/uk

Maudsley Charity – Usemi Racial Trauma Clinic - Lambeth and Southwark

Usemi is an online clinic that helps people of color who've faced racism and mental health struggles like psychosis. It offers therapy, support groups, and creative activities to help them heal.

Website: <https://maudsleycharity.org/case-studies/usemi-racial-trauma-clinic>

Mind: Young Black Men

This is a programme through which works specifically with young Black men aged between 11 and 30 years old.

Phone: 0300 123 3393
Email: equality@mind.org.uk
Website: www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/equality-and-human-rights/young-black-men

Naz

a sexual health charity working to address sexual health inequalities in Black, Brown and Global Majority and LGBTQ+ communities.

Email: info@naz.org.uk

Phone: 0208 741 1879

Website: www.naz.org.uk

On Your Side

A UK-wide support and reporting service for anyone in the UK who identifies as East and Southeast Asian, who has experienced racism or any forms of hate.

Website: www.onyoursideuk.org

Local services

Rethink Mental Illness Sahayak BME service – Gravesend

The service provides a wide range of support to people from BME communities in Kent. The service is available to those in Gravesend, Dartford, Medway and Swanley.

Phone: 01474 364837

Address: 4-5 High street, Gravesend, Kent, DA11 0BQ.

Email: sahayak@rethink.org

Website: <https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services/community-support/rethink-sahayak-bme-service-gravesend>

Rethink Mental Illness Bristol Ethnic Inclusion Service

The Bristol Ethnic Inclusion Service partners with Bristol Community Support Services to provide responsive mental health support tailored to the needs of individuals from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Phone: 07436 246 182

Address: St. Paul's Settlement, First Floor, 74-80 City Road, Bristol, BS2 8UH.

Email: bristolBME@rethink.org

Website: www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services/community-support/bristol-ethnic-inclusion-service-part-of-bristol-community-support-services

Other Rethink Mental Illness services

You can search for Rethink Mental Illness services in your area on our website at www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services

Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN)

CAHN is a Black-led organisation set up to address the wider social determinants to reduce health inequalities for people of Caribbean & African in the Greater Manchester area.

Phone: 07853 556 591

Address: Transformation Community Resource Centre, Richmond House, 11 Richmond Grove, Longsight, M13 0LN.

Email: info@cahn.org.uk

Website: www.cahn.org.uk/

Black Thrive

Based in Lambeth, South London, Black Thrive is an organisation dedicated to combating the inequality and injustices experienced by Black people in mental health services.

Email: hello@blackthrive.org

Website: www.lambethandsouthwarkmind.org.uk/directory/black-thrive/

Sharing Voices Bradford

Sharing Voices delivers a range of range of services for individuals from Black and ethnic minority communities dealing with mental distress.

Phone: 01274 73 11 66

Address: 10 Mornington Villas, Bradford, BD8 7HB.

Email: info@sharingvoices.org.uk

Website: www.sharingvoices.net

Did this help?

We would love to know if this information helped you or if you found any issues with this page. You can email us at feedback@rethink.org

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