



Briefing for:	Children's Safeguarding Policy and Performance Panel
Title:	Ethnicity Analysis for Children Coming into Social Care
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The attached report is presented in response to a request from members of the Safeguarding Panel for more detail on the ethnic breakdown of children coming into and passing through the social care systems.
- 1.2 The report is self-explanatory and contains both detailed statistical breakdown and some analysis of the data.
- 1.3 The body of the report follows.

Children and Young People's Service

The ethnicity of children we are working with

Key Findings

1. White British and Irish children and children of Asian origins are significantly under-represented in the population of children referred to children and families. All other ethnic groups are over-represented. This may well reflect differences in economic circumstances.
2. There is no significant difference between the population of referred children, and the population of children undergoing initial assessment.
3. When compared with the referred population, Black and Black British children, Asian and Asian British children, and children of Other Ethnic



groups are less likely to become subject to child protection plans. Children of Mixed ethnic origins are significantly more likely to become subject to child protection plans.

4. Children of Mixed ethnic origin are also more likely to enter care than other groups. Children of Other White origins are less likely to enter care.
5. If one group is over-represented then statistically another group must be under-represented. It is not possible to say whether the over-representation causes the under-representation or vice versa.
6. These over- and under- representations to a large extent reflect patterns observed across the UK, though it appears that in Haringey the disparities are lower than elsewhere. National research has identified a number of possible causes, but no one simple answer for the existence of disparity, but differential application of thresholds is not thought to be a cause.

Background

This report has been prepared in response to a request from Members, who were interested in knowing more about how our services responded to children of differing ethnic backgrounds.

The methods used are described, and the results presented. There has been extensive national research, particularly in respect of the care population, which has revealed some common findings across England, but yielded little by way of explanation. This research informs the conclusion.

Data sources

Information about the ethnic origin of referred children is collected and retained on Frameworki. The information is held in 88 different categories, which “map” onto both the five “broad” and 16 “narrow” census categories. In any analysis there is a balance to be struck between choosing categories that adequately reflect children’s origins, and generating data that is meaningful. This report uses the broad census categories, but in recognition of the unusually high number of white children from backgrounds other than the UK found in Haringey, “other white” has been included as a category in its own right¹. Information was obtained about all children referred in the two years to 31 March 2009, all children undergoing Initial Assessment, and all children becoming subject to child protection plans in the same period. Information was also obtained about the care population at 31 March 2009.

The information about referrals and initial assessments showed that in over 13% of cases the ethnic origins of the child was not stated, and in further 10% of cases the data was simply not there. For the purposes of analysis it has been

¹ It would be possible to analyse the data by narrow census category, but for some of the populations (eg the care population) some of the numbers would be too low for conclusions to be drawn.



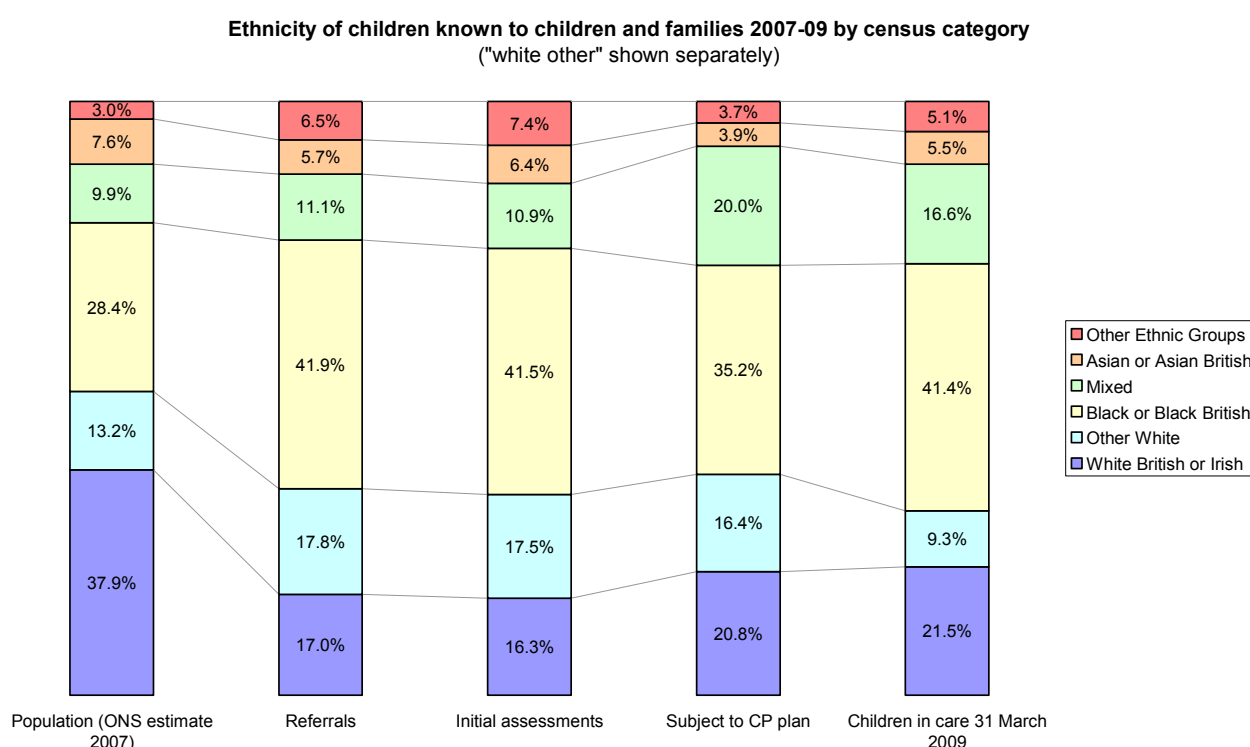
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assumed that the ethnicity of these children has the same distribution as that of children where there is data available. This may not be a valid assumption (if, for example, information about one particular ethnic group is consistently omitted), but it is the only basis on which to proceed.

There have been significant changes in Haringey's population since the last census. Office of National Statistics projections of the numbers of children aged under 15 living in Haringey in 2007 have therefore been used for comparison.

Findings

The following chart depicts what has been found:



The most immediately obvious feature is the difference between the proportion of White British and Irish in the population (nearly 38%) and the proportion of this group in the referred population (17%). Asian and Asian British children are also under-represented, though not to the same extent. All other groups are over-represented in the referral population. There is ample national evidence that children from more deprived backgrounds are more likely to be referred to social care services, and that children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are significantly more likely to be living in deprived circumstances, so this finding may simply reflect economics.

Reassuringly, there is no significant difference between the referred population and that of children becoming subject to initial assessment.

Children of mixed ethnic origins are significantly more likely to become subject to child protection plans, and also more likely to enter care. The finding that children of mixed ethnic origins are over-represented in the care population is



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well known nationally, and considerable energy has been expended in attempting to identify an explanation, with very limited success. Perhaps the best that can be said locally is that in this respect Haringey reflects the national picture.

The national picture and conclusions

The following table summarises recent national findings²:

Over- and under-representation of ethnic groups in child welfare compared to the population

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black
Children in Need	As expected	Over	Under	A lot over
Child Protection	As expected	Over	A lot under	As expected
Children in Care	As expected	A lot over	Under	A lot over

The findings of this research differ from those described here in that the effects of deprivation have been compensated for. Nevertheless it can be seen that there are some strong similarities between the national findings and what happens in Haringey. The chief difference appears to be that in Haringey children of Mixed ethnic origins are more likely to feature in the child protection population than they are in the population of children in care, whereas nationally the reverse is the case. Additionally the disparities in Haringey appear to be of a lesser degree than is found nationally (as an example on average a black child was three-and-a-half times as likely to be looked after as a white child, whereas in Haringey the ratio, which is unadjusted for the effects of deprivation, is two-and-a-half).

The recent report *Disproportionality in Child Welfare*, as well as describing the national picture, attempts to seek explanations for these disparities, but finds that:

“The literature reviewed suggested possible mechanisms for under- or over-representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare statistics, such as lack of access to appropriate support services; greater unwillingness in some cultures to report concerns about a child’s safety; and greater uncertainty among child welfare professionals about how to respond appropriately to the needs of minority ethnic families. There was little evidence to support the view that social workers and other child welfare professionals operate different thresholds for different ethnic groups in relation to offering services, or removing children from their parents’ care. Overall, the

² Charlie Owen and June Statham (2009). *Disproportionality in Child Welfare*. DCSF Research Report RR124



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research reviewed provided no simple answer to the question of why disproportionality and disparity exist.”

The report also notes wide variation between authorities. While there can be no grounds for complacency, the evidence in Haringey is that there is no difference in the threshold operated for initiating an initial assessment. It may well be that the disparities that exist reflect some of the other factors mentioned in the research.