

8th April 2021

MEDIA STATEMENT

MWNUK RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES

The findings of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED), published in its report of 31st March 2021, are at best disappointing and at worst irresponsible, invalidating as they do the history and everyday experiences of people from racialised minority communities.

Several organisations and academics whose work is about eradicating disadvantage and discrimination based on race (and other social characteristics) have pointed to the significant research gaps contained in the CRED Report and denounced the Commission for not addressing the failures of public institutions in protecting the rights and interests of people from racialised minority communities.

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) adds to these voices in stating that many of the key contentions of the (CRED) report are flawed as they contradict solid bodies of scientific evidence, established by experienced practitioners and academics who have researched and written about racism and discrimination in Britain over many years. We note that none of the members of CRED have expertise in race and ethnic relations *per se*.

The report contends that race is no longer a structural factor in Britain today which determines (in)equality of opportunity and outcome for those from racialised minorities. It concludes that structures and institutions are not racist but that family instability and breakdown (especially in Black Caribbean families) and culture and a reluctance to integrate (particularly in South Asian families) combined with class factors provide an explanatory framework for racism and discrimination. This misrecognition of racism feels like a betrayal to people from racialised minority communities of whom 84% believe they live in a society where racism exists and impacts on their lives (YouGov, 26 June 2020)¹. Moreover, the Report goes out of its way to argue that the racism perceived by this overwhelming majority is subjective and that when one considers specific instances of discrimination "those numbers [saying that racism exists] often shrink" (p.45).

The misrecognition of racism and discrimination is also revelatory of the flimsiness of the evidence upon which the report builds its claims, of the methods by which evidence has been gathered and of its failure to engage seriously with questions raised and recommendations made in previous reviews which highlight racial disadvantage and discrimination in public institutions (e.g. Lammy Report of 2017 on inequalities in the Criminal Justice System; Angiolini Report of 2018 on deaths in Custody; Williams Report of 2018 of the Home Office's failures relating to the Windrush Scandal; the Macgregor-Smith review of 2017 on workplace inequalities) and in scientific research carried out by prominent academics (e.g. the work on ethnic and racial disparities in health and healthcare outcomes by Professors James Nazroo and Raj Bhopal and Dr Gwenetta Curry among others; or that

¹ The CRED report concedes that a majority (69%) of those from racialised minority communities say there is "at least a fair amount of [racial] tension" while 20% say "say there is a great deal" (p.45).

on racial and ethnic disparities in education by scholars such as Professors Heidi Mirza, David Gillborn, Kalwant Bhopal to name only a few).

Evidence of the impacts of structural racism - or that expressed as “institutional racism” – is abundant. The last decade of economic austerity and the current Covid-19 pandemic have only furthered and sharply exposed inequalities of race and structural racism and it is worth pointing to such evidence *again and again and again*. For example:

- Black people are 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people.
- The proportion of young offenders from racialised minority communities increased from 25% to 41% despite the overall decrease in young offender numbers and the fact that such communities represent only 14% of the UK population.
- 227 women from racialised minorities are sent to prison for every 100 white women.
- 8% of black people are unemployed compared with 4% of white people.
- Black Caribbean pupils are 5 times more likely to be excluded from school in some areas of England than any other groups.
- UK schools have recorded over 60,000 incidents of racism in the past five years.
- There is a 13% attainment gap between black and white students in Higher Education.
- The mortality risk from Covid-19 among those from racialised minority communities is twice that of white patients (after accounting for confounding factors such as age, sex, income, education, housing tenure and area deprivation).
- Young black mothers are four times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts.
- The National Audit Office estimates that as many as 500,000 people could be affected by the Windrush scandal in terms of struggling to document their immigration status.

The above represent a mere handful of examples of racial and ethnic variations and disparities in the areas of criminal justice, employment, health, education and immigration. The decisions taken by public authorities and agents in these sectors of public life and related policy areas impact negatively on individuals and their families from racialised minority communities not born in the UK or who do not have British national origins or white ethnicity. Such decisions do not represent the prejudices of a few “rotten apples” in the system. And they cannot simplistically be attributed to family breakdown **or** the reluctance to integrate **or** because people from racialised minority communities do not want to help themselves do better through poor lifestyle choices, **or** because they prefer to rely on others or the state **or** due to overriding class factors. All of these factors may come into play, but the CRED report fails entirely to examine if, why or how they form part of a “collective failure of [organisations] to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin” (Macpherson Report 1999).

The CRED Report’s denial of the importance of structural racism in disadvantaging people from racialised minorities pairs up with its denunciation of the idea of “white privilege” (p.27, p.36) and the argument that the white working class is also disadvantaged (p.7) and particularly so in education. In denouncing the idea of white privilege the Commission chooses to misunderstand that white privilege means you don’t have to worry about racism; that “having white privilege doesn’t make your life easy, but understanding it can make you realise why some people’s lives are harder than they should be” (John Amaechi, former NBA basketball player and New York Times best-selling author). And in arguing that white working class children do worse at school than those from

racialised minority communities, the CRED Report pits the white working class (which is not homogeneous) against people from racialised minority communities. Yet class is not the preserve of white communities, it cuts across all of society and all ethnic groups.

Finally, after denying the existence of structural racism expressed in our public institutions, in denouncing concepts such as “white privilege” and in arguing that white people can be more disadvantaged due to their class than people of racialised minorities because of their race and ethnic background, the report tinkers around with solutions such as countering calls for a decolonised curriculum (construed as a simple emptying of syllabuses of teachings about remarkable or notorious white men and women rather than offering alternative viewpoints and histories underpinned by respect for the equal place of racialised minorities in British and European history) (p.8); or doing away with the label “BAME” (p.14, p.26); or advising young people that they are not served well by movements such as Black Lives Matter whose “protests have increased racial tension” and that it is better to engage with the centre ground of politics in other ways (p.27). The commissioners also exhort young people to recognise that slavery was not just about “profit and suffering but how culturally African people transformed themselves into a re-modelled African/Britain” (p.8) – much of this will apparently happen through adopting the “Making of Modern Britain” teaching resource. Here the Commission demonstrates a deliberate ignorance of history that is not focused on Britain’s interests and the fact that young people are not comfortable with histories dominated by powerful white men.

Given all of the above, MWNUK’s view is that the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has failed to take racism seriously as a determinant of racial and ethnic disadvantage and discrimination; that its recommendations which emerge from a superficial analysis of racism will do little to address the very real everyday inequalities faced by people from racialised minority communities; that it has, in the words of Baroness Doreen Lawrence pushed “the fight against racism back 20 years or more”.

MWNUK calls on the government to conduct a comprehensive audit of all recommendations arising from recent reviews of racism and racial disparities (see above) in our public services which refer to systems and structures producing racial inequalities. We call on the government to act on those recommendations which propose ways in which such systems and structures may be changed or replaced. This, we feel, would signal a step forward in acknowledging that structural racism exists, that it impacts negatively on people from racialised minority communities and that Britain has some way to go before it can see itself as a model of race relations to be followed by others.

Ends

Additional Information

- 1) For further media comments, contact MWNUK on contact@mw nuk.co.uk or 0121 2369000.
- 2) Muslim Women's Network UK (www.mw nuk.co.uk) is a national leading charity promoting social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls.