

## Coloured baby report should have been censored—claim

THE BIRTH rate among Britain's coloured community was shown by official statistics published today.

One birth in every 15 during 1975-76 was to parents of new Commonwealth or Pakistani ethnic origin, according to the figures issued by the Government's office of Population Censuses and Surveys, and there was only one death in every 100 in the same community.

This, along with the high rate of reproduction,

reflects its younger age structure, says the OPCS.

The total number of people in that part of the population was estimated to have reached almost 1,800,000 — roughly one person in every 30 — by the middle of last year.

This new peak represents about 3.3 per cent of the total home population, compared with 2.7 per cent in 1971-72, when the immigrant community under study stood at under 1,500,000.

Speaking to Independent

Radio News, the secretary of the Committee on UK Citizenship, Mr. Praful Patel, said the statistics should have been censored.

"I would like to see a selective use of the statistics, which are geared to producing positive aspects of the social action programme. If the figures are going to mean that they will probably help the racist cause, then I would have thought they should be censored."

Mr. Patel, in a further comment, said it was "offensive and insulting" to the minority community to be told there was a baby boom in Britain.

"There is no baby boom," he said. "What one must point out is that these figures can be twisted for the racists and the National Front and if stories appear talking about a baby boom

in Britain it just plays into the hands of these racist people."

Figures for the West Indians had been consistently dropping and he had been told by experts that the figures among the Asians were also dropping.

Mr. John Stokes, Conservative MP for Halesowen and Stourbridge, said in a statement that the latest figures underlined the necessity for the tightest immigration control immediately after the Conservatives are returned to office.

"The consequences of failing to control immigration now are too awful to contemplate," he went on.

★ A challenge to the philosophy of dispersing black people from deprived inner city areas is issued today in a report by the Community Relations Commission.

Articles like the one above illustrate the current interest about the "immigrant" community and also highlight the confusion which surrounds the use of statistics in this area.

The problems are of three types:

1. Misuse and misinterpretation of statistics
2. Problems of data collection and definition
3. The wider political and social implications.

The article above is quite a good example of "not telling the whole truth". It invites a conclusion that the birthrate of immigrants is very high whilst neglecting the partial explanation of this in terms of the young age structure of the immigrant community (i.e. age specific fertility rates are needed). Examples of this type of misuse and misinterpretation abound and will not be discussed further here.

More attention should be given to the other problems, that of data collection and before that a justification for collection of statistics on race at all. In an era which has produced Adolf Hitler, Apartheid and Immigration Control it is understandable that those within the immigrant community and others outside object to the collection of information on a racial basis. Some suggest that these statistics should be censored or not collected at all. A counter view to this is expressed in a report to the Home Secretary by the Advisory Committee on Race Relations Research (Ref. 5):

"There are a number of general reasons why up-to-date and accurate statistics concerning the position of racial minorities should be collected. First, they are a necessary though not of course a sufficient condition, for rational discussion and understanding of race relations. Second, without knowledge of the existing situation and more particularly of developing trends, there

can be no sound basis for the assessment and development of policy. Third, identification of needs, and thus the application of policy, is likely to be arbitrary if not impossible in the absence of good data.

Against this it can be argued that the collection of data on a racial basis is itself discriminatory and emphasises and perpetuates distinctions that might otherwise be ignored. However, when race affects social relations and the application of resources, as it patently does, statistics are an indispensable pre-requisite for policies aimed at improving race relations. We do not believe it is better to turn a blind eye".

If we accept that it is better not to turn a blind eye it is evident that the statistical eye is at present myopic and the images are blurred. For one thing it is often difficult when reading government statistical publications (ref. 3) to find an explicit statement of what the focus of interest is in the collection of data in this area. Government policy and public attention however (as it is reflected in the press) indicate this focus to be "coloured immigration" that is the immigration of coloured West Indians and Asians which began in the 1950's and was curtailed by the Immigration Acts of the 60's and 70's, and the children of those immigrants. Accepting this,<sup>1</sup> the definitions used in official sources are inadequate. The Census is the most important and best example of this inadequacy.

Prior to 1971 the only data relating to race in the Census was information on individuals' birthplace (with classifications into Old Commonwealth:- Canada, New Zealand & Australia and New Commonwealth - the rest of the Commonwealth). This led to difficulties because there is not a one to one correspondence between place of birth and ethnic/racial group. Problems arose with East African Asians and the White Indians (e.g. children of British Army personnel who served in India). More important numerically are the children of everseas born immigrants who were born in the UK. By a birthplace criteria they are indistinguishable from the White population.

This is unsatisfactory if we accept that the focus of interest is "Colour". For the 1971 Census a question on parents' birthplace was also included in order to identify the new Black British<sup>2</sup>. This according to Moser (Ref. 1) 1972 rested on the assumption that "the population of New Commonwealth Ethnic Origin in 1971 still comprised mainly persons with parents who had been born overseas". He adds that this was seen as the "most convenient and least objectionable way of collecting statistics about coloured persons". In many ways this was an unsatisfactory and inaccurate method of identifying the coloured population, not least because data on grandparents' birthplace would be needed by the 1981 Census if this method were continued.

For the 1981 Census an alternative to the birthplace criteria, based on ethnic/racial groupings, is currently being researched by OPCS. An acceptable alternative in the statistical, social, anthropological and political sense will not be easy to find. In the US Census, 1970, individuals were expected to classify themselves as White, Negro or Black, Indian (American), Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean and other. A similar self classification may be used here in the U.K. It is hoped by OPCS that the terminology adopted will be used elsewhere so that comparable statistics can be collected.

In summary, the growth of ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom since the 1950s is a good case study of the need for statistics for social policy. (see Ref. 4) Given the increasing importance accorded to racial issues in the media and by government, the collection of adequate data has lagged well behind the political and social realities. Adequate data collection is obviously only a starting point, more resources need to be given to research, and research of the right kind, both inside and outside government departments. Improvements in data collection however would at least provide a sound basis for reasonable debate and counter the widespread misuse and distortion of statistics in this area.

Footnotes

1. Since only 36 per cent of immigrants arriving between 1964 and 1973 were born in the New Commonwealth it may be that this interest is misdirected (Ref. 2)
2. These are entitled "New Commonwealth Ethnic Origin". Parents birthplace is used to estimate the population of New Commonwealth ethnic origin by adding to the New Commonwealth born population those whose parents were born in the New Commonwealth and taking out those whose parents were born in the United Kingdom. Children of mixed marriages are also included. Birthplace data for this was analysed by a subjective inspection of names from 1% of Census returns for certain minority groups. (see Ref. 3)

REFERENCES

1. Statistics about immigrants - Objectives, Sources, Methods and Problems  
C. Moser, Director of CSO  
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2. Migrants entering and leaving the United Kingdom 1964-74  
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3. Country of Birth and Colour 1971-74  
Immigrant Statistics Unit OPCS  
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4. Race Class and the State  
A. Sivandan  
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5. Race Relations' Research  
A report to the Home Secretary by the Advisory Committee on Race Relations  
Research HMSO - 1975

The Purpose of the article above is to pinpoint some of the problems in the area of race statistics. Our current thoughts are that the section on this in the proposed "Workers Handbook of Statistics" would include the political context and the problems of definition but also analysis of these statistics, with examples, and a critique of claims by various political groups.

We would value comments and suggestions on

1. Specific examples of misuses
2. Specific references on sources or review articles
3. Alternatives to the above suggestions.

The following is an outline

1. Introduction - Immigration to United Kingdom since 1900, the current focus of government and public interest i.e. coloured immigrants, putting this in the context of the past and other countries, relation of statistics to social policy.
2. Official Sources - Population, Employment, Migration, Health, Crime, Education  
A brief description of the sources and where to find them.
3. The current picture and trends - Graphs, Tables, descriptive statistics and indications.
4. Fakes and Claims - Population statistics are widely misrepresented and birth-rates emphasised whilst the continuing net out migration from the United Kingdom overlooked. By the selective use of statistics links are often made between immigrants and poor housing, overcrowding, use of social services, etc. Critical case studies of the claims from certain groups (e.g. National Front)

## The fear of overcrowding

English translations of this article, which appeared in RADSTATS 10 are available from the editors (for those, like us, whose French finished at '0' level or even before).