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OPCS Monitor PP1/82/1 (June 1982)

Sources of Statistics on ethnic minorities

Home Office (1982)

Success of Statistics on the ethnic minorities. New demographic data.

Ludi Simpson (1982)

Ethnic record keeping. Radical Statistics Group

Runnymede Trust & Radical Statistics Race Group (1980)

Britain's Black Population. Ch 7. Heinemann Educational Books

R Jowell (1982)

Views of the RSS and IoS on Racial/ethnic origin question in the Census

US Commission on Civil Rights (1978)

Social Indicators of equality for minorities and women

Dept of Employment Gazette (1981)

I would like to comment on the current sources of statistics on ethnic minorities produced by government departments as a user of these statistics, because since 1978 we have been trying to piece together the available data for the book Britain's Black Population (R Trust and Radstats Race Group 1980) and are currently revising these statistics for a second edition in 1983. We are aware therefore of both the difficulties with and limitations of the data. Whilst considerable progress has been made since the article in 1972 in Social Trends by Claus Moser when it was really rather difficult to distinguish between whether we were talking about immigrants or an ethnic minority population, considerable progress still needs to be made to improve the data. [At the outset I would like to say that we have always had useful and helpful cooperation with OPCS and they have always been most helpful in providing us with data].

I would like to talk with the political context of data collection because this cannot be divorced from the kind of information we collect or are interested in. I would then like to suggest improvements to the current data.

Political Context of Data Collection

Race issues have come to the fore in the last few years. Muggings, immigration control, inner city problems, all these have been linked rightly or wrongly with black people. Certain sections of the black community see themselves under siege as a result of this and the call for voluntary repatriation,

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more stringent interpretation of the 1971 Immigration Act and the new Nationality Act 1982. This cannot be separated from the call for more effective statistical monitoring by government. It is well known that surveys require the public confidence of participants otherwise the results will be invalid, if for example there are a large number of refusals. The black population has little reason to have confidence in government agencies because of the attack on their status in this country and the slow progress that has been made towards eliminating discrimination and disadvantage. Therefore I find that when the reason given for data collection is the elimination of racial disadvantage in this country the argument is far from convincing. Jewell says:

"To monitor the distribution of disadvantage and the policies designed to ^{investigate} it, data are needed on the progress of ethnic minority groups in housing, employment, education and other spheres of national life".

This is perfectly laudible, yet the progress towards these goals has been at a miserable rate even with the current data, which shows quite dramatically the inequalities between blacks and whites.

The question then becomes one of asking what are the reasons government wishes to collect ethnic minority data. The reasons can be seen in practice by what data is collected already and available. The best information is Immigration data from the Home Office control of immigration statistics and IPS, and the data on unemployment by ethnic origin. There is very little data on housing, education and particularly health, here we have to rely on small scale surveys conducted by researchers outside government. Why is this? It is because as Sir Derek Rayner in his report on the Government Statistical Services (1981) pointed out in relation to the Census, "statistics are collected for government business alone". And government business is immigration control, and monitoring and controlling unemployment. We note for example that the 1976 Race Relations Act did not itself place any obligations on central or local government to collect information on ethnic origin. This is not surprising but neither is it surprising that this cuts little ice in the black communities and places under threat the voluntary cooperation in surveys designed to collect ethnic minority data. If public confidence was restored in the use to which such data was put then the story might be different and I will return to this in relation to the US Commission on Civil Rights.

It really comes down to why the data is collected. In this respect the collection of data on health problems of ethnic minorities in Bradford, the higher incidence of infant mortality and certain congenital abnormalities is of course to be welcomed. The collection of data which is clearly seen to be necessary for monitoring disadvantage, inequality and discrimination is also to be welcomed. In some areas the justification for singling out ethnic minorities e.g. in crime statistics is totally unwelcome. (So is the misinterpretation and manipulation of statistics as was done by the Metropolitan Police in February 1982. But that is another story). In order to restore confidence before any collection of race data is implemented, there must be an explicit statement of what uses will be made of the data. This should not be only broad intentions such as "combatting racial discrimination" or "improving the service to ethnic minorities" it should include what tabulations will be collated, and what action is intended on the basis of the results. The confidentiality of survey data should also be considered. There remains therefore many unanswered questions in this whole area. We are not arguing against data collection but we are arguing selectively with strong arguments for certain statistics and indicators.

Technical Problems

The collection of statistics on ethnic minorities has developed in a patchy and piecemeal way. This is neither a very controversial statement nor a particularly derogatory one. However the time has come to reappraise the situation and to suggest improvements. Let's list the broad areas (omitting other surveys e.g. PEP report)

Quality		
Immigration	***	Home Office. International Passenger Survey
Population Size	*	Population Census. (Birthplace Question)
Health		GHS?
Education		Discontinued 1973
Housing	*	NDHS
Employment	**	Unemployment. (Labour Force Survey)
Crime	*	Racial Attacks. British Crime Survey 1981

I Include a personal subjective indicator of the quality of data

The two major technical problems apparent at the present time are the sample size and classification of ethnic origin.

Classification of ethnic origin is not an insurmountable problem.

Whilst there are disagreements between us about what constitutes an ethnic group and how to define them, these technical shortcomings should not themselves disqualify from consideration the use of such questions (Jowell 1982). Country of Birth is not a particularly useful proxy and the sooner we get away from this the better. The use of convoluted technical expressions like New Commonwealth and Pakistani ethnic origin as used by OPCS would usefully be dropped in favour of less technically correct but easier descriptions like "black". A more important point is that the ethnic diversity of these groups should if possible be reflected in the groupings. My experiences in Bradford whilst making population forecasts based on ethnic origin made me realise that the family building patterns of a Hindu Sikh family or a Ugandan Asian family might be quite different from that of a Muslim family from Pakistan. The sooner we move to an acceptable grouping of ethnic minorities for statistical purposes the easier it will be to make comparisons between surveys.

A more serious technical problem is the sampling error introduced by using surveys in which ethnic minorities form only a part of the total. The black population of Britain is small, less than four per cent, and thus when statistics are produced as a by product of a larger survey on some completely different topic, the numbers may be too small to be reliable. In this category we have the

International Passenger Survey

General Household Survey

Labour Force Survey

National Dwelling and Housing Survey

In 1975 a sample of only West Indians was grossed to a figure of Very little can be deduced from such small samples. An obvious improvement in the surveys would be to increase the sample size but when the survey is large anyway and the data is primarily collected for other purposes e.g. the IPS is used to monitor tourist movements it is difficult to see how in practice the sample could be economically enlarged sufficiently to provide an adequate ethnic minority sample.

As a separate point it is important that the sample sizes are clearly stated in publications of such data, so that the user is aware of their limitations.

1986 Question on Ethnic Origin

The discussion of technical problems leads naturally to suggestions for improvement. Agreement needs to be reached on an acceptable ethnic origin question which leads to a classification which is reasonably acceptable. Then we can compare survey results more easily.* Secondly, the quality of the data needs to be improved by an increase, somehow, in the sample sizes of surveys in which ethnic minorities form a part, or better still ethnic minority surveys should be carried out in their own right. Otherwise little can be deduced from these surveys.

- underdevelopment of human skills through delayed enrollment, nonenrollment in secondary education, and nonparticipation in higher education;

- * At the moment comparison between surveys is often virtually impossible even for example with the TDS. It must be stressed that the TDS is not the best data.

- discrepancies in access to jobs, particularly those having greater-than-average stability, prestige, and monetary returns;
- inequality of income, relatively lower earnings for equal work, and diminished chances for salary and wage increases;
- a higher likelihood of being in poverty; and
- proportionately higher expenditures for housing, less desirable housing conditions, restricted freedom of choice in selecting locations in which to live, and greater difficulty in attaining homeownership.

In the introduction to this document it is pointed out that quite often in reports "statistical portraits" are typically created of ethnic minority groups and that these portraits can be both subjective and misleading. More systematic data collection and the calculation of key indicators would be a significant improvement on this and this they proceed to achieve for broad groupings e.g. American Indians, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Japanese Americans. There are scores of indicators identically presented to compare the inequality between groups and the progress between 1960, 1970 and 1976. The indicators include, for example,

Rates of delayed education (the percentage of students 15-17 years of age 2 or more years behind at school)

Unemployment (which for blacks is 2 x majority average)

Teenage Unemployment (7.5 x the majority average for blacks in 1976 although only 2.5 x the majority average in 1960)

Median earnings by years of school completed by ethnic group

Overcrowding in households

Percentage who pay 25 per cent or more of their income for housing.

It would be a considerable achievement if such indicators could be produced for Britain's Black Population. We are a long way from achieving this. For example we don't even have unemployment rates by ethnic groups because although we know the numbers unemployed we don't know the number of blacks in the work force. The graph here is the best I can do at the present time (Unemployment by ethnic group as a percentage of 1974 unemploy-

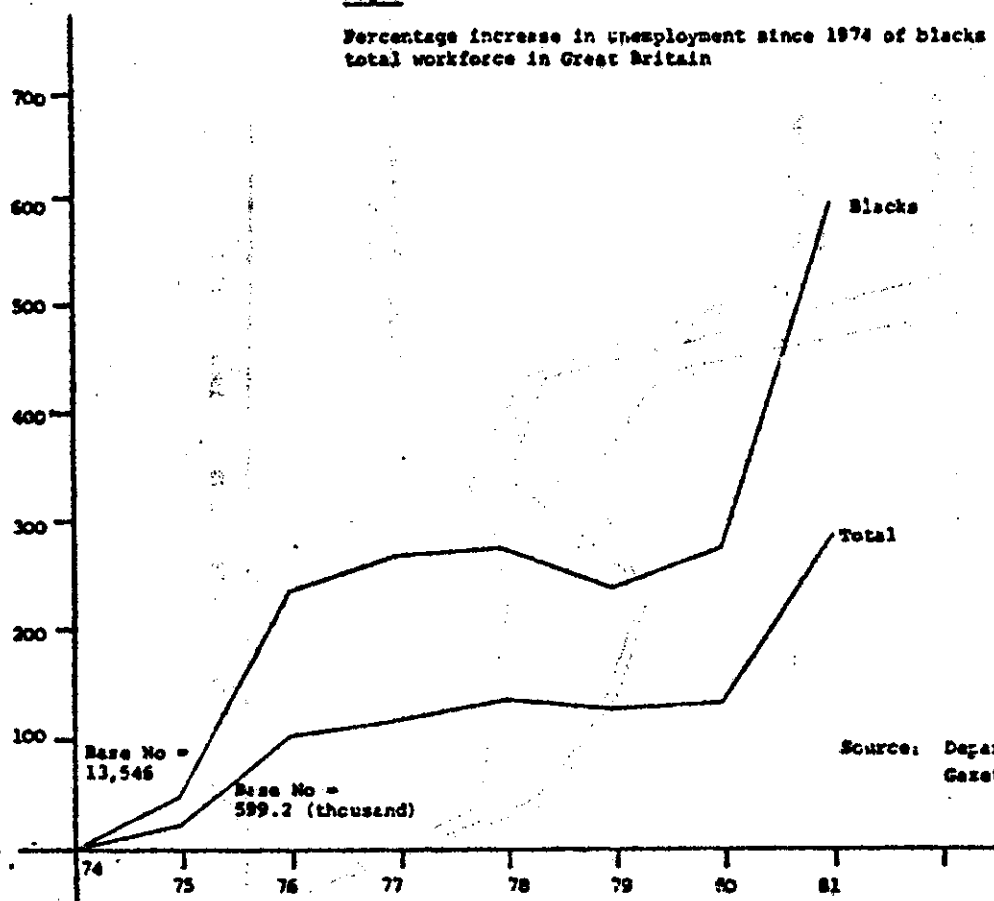
This shows the enormous rise in ethnic minority unemployment particularly for Asians and the equivalent graph by age shows even higher disparities between groups in the rise in unemployment, the young black population being the one that has risen the fastest. The American Experience is a good example of effective and comprehensive collation of data and careful interpretation of that data, and shows what can be achieved with a commitment to equal opportunity policies.

This is the direction in which government statistics on ethnic minorities in the UK should be moving.

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Fig 2.

Percentage increase in unemployment since 1974 of blacks and total workforce in Great Britain



Source: Department of Employment
Gazette 1981 Vol (3)

Fig. 2 Percentage increase in unemployment since 1975 of blacks in the age groups 16-17, 18-24 and 25+

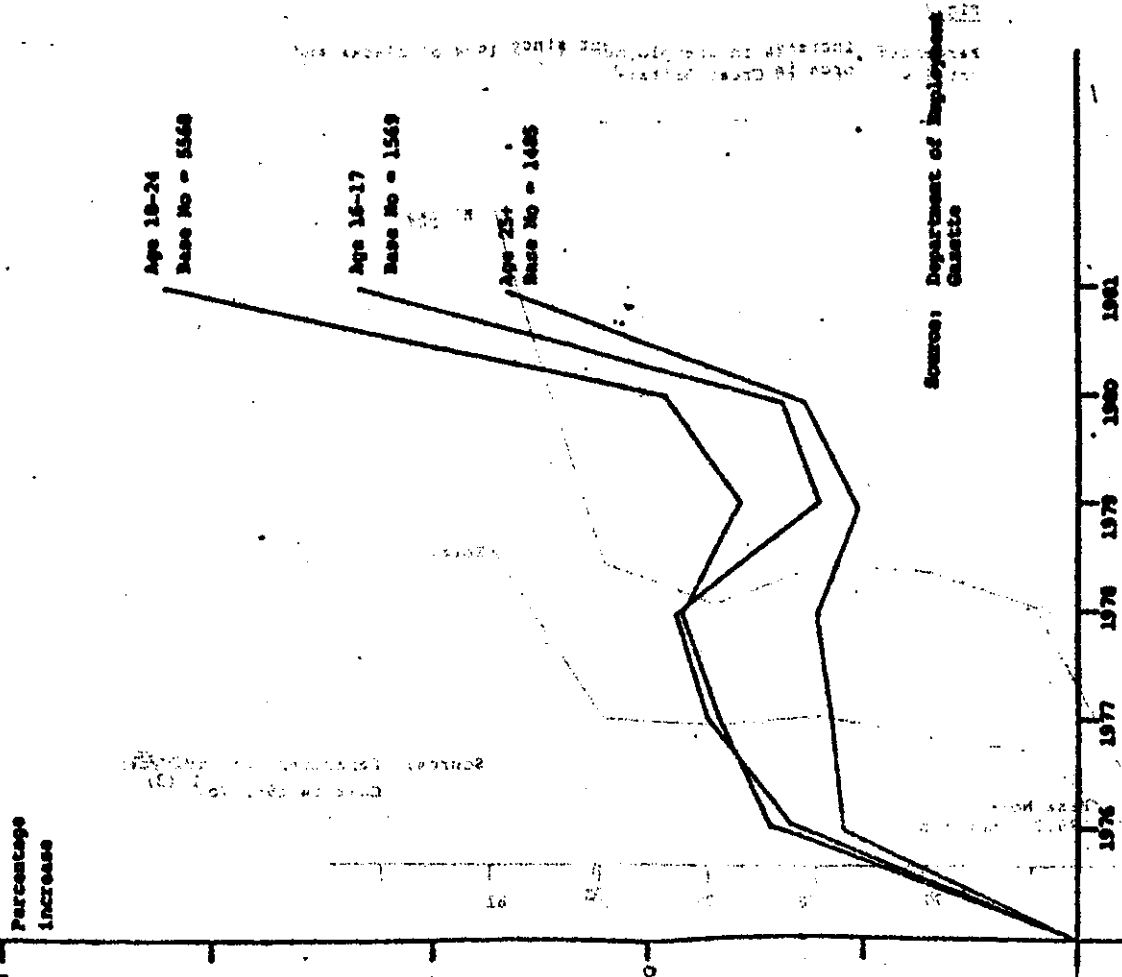


Fig. 10

Percentage increase in unemployment since 1974 for West Indians, Indians, Pakistan, Bangladesh, other

