

# **Celebrating our Cultures: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion with the South Asian Community**



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Description	This resource makes the case for mental promotion with black and minority ethnic communities in England. It sets out a framework for delivering local interventions and addressing the needs of black and minority ethnic communities within mental health promotion strategies being implemented in response to Standard 1 of the National Service Framework for Mental Health
Cross Ref	Making It Happen: A guide to delivering mental health promotion. Inside Outside: Improving Mental Health Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in England
Superseded Docs	
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Contact Details	John Scott NIMHE Blenheim House, West One Duncombe Street Leeds LS1 4PL 0113 254 3816 john.scott@doh.gsi.gov.uk
For Recipient's Use	

# Mental health promotion with the South Asian community

Nearly 6.4 million people make up the black and minority ethnic population in England (that is 1 in 8 of the whole population). The South Asian community is the largest ethnic minority group living in Britain, representing just over 4% of the population (2001 Census) and consists of four main groups of people – Indian (1.8%), Pakistani (1.3%), Bangladeshi (0.5%) and other Asian (0.4%). South Asian culture is very diverse, encompassing hundreds of languages and dialects, many religions, beliefs, people of different classes, histories and countries.

Disadvantage and discrimination characterise the experiences of many people from black and minority ethnic communities, especially in the area of health and health care. They experience poorer health, have reduced life expectancy and have greater problems accessing health services than the majority white population. For mental health, major concerns include disparities and inequalities in terms of rates of mental ill health, service experience and health outcome.

Standard One of the National Service Framework for Mental Health (Department of Health 1999) requires health and social services to:

- Promote mental health for all, working with individuals and communities
- Combat discrimination against individuals and groups with mental health problems, and promote their social inclusion.

There is a need for both universal mental health promotion programmes that are sensitive to the needs of the whole population, as well as specific mental health promotion interventions that work with and target particular black and minority ethnic groups.

## What is mental health?

Mental health means different things to different people. How we define mental health and mental illness is influenced by factors such as culture, background, values and belief systems and spirituality.

The following is one way of looking at mental health:

Mental health is about how we think and feel about ourselves and others and how we interpret the world around us. It affects our capacity to cope with change and major life events such as having a baby or experiencing bereavement; it affects our ability to communicate and to form and sustain relationships. Mental health is central to our overall health and well being.

### What is mental health promotion?

Mental health promotion involves any action to enhance the mental well being of individuals, families, organisations or communities. It is about strengthening protective factors for mental health and reducing risk factors for mental health problems. It is the responsibility of a wide range of people working in health and social care, schools, faith communities, voluntary and community groups, and those involved in initiatives such as social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and community strategies. It recognises that how people feel has a significant influence on health and is therefore essentially concerned with:

How individuals, families, organisations and communities think and feel

The factors which influence how we think and feel, individually and collectively

The impact that this has on overall health and well being

*(Department of Health 2001)*

Mental health promotion can increase the 'mental health literacy' and mental health awareness of individuals, organisations and communities, facilitating prevention and early detection and reducing the fear and stigma associated with mental illness. It can help promote social inclusion, facilitate tolerance and participation, reduce anxiety and enable people to have more control within their lives; and can contribute to improved physical and mental well being and reduce the risk of some mental health problems. For people experiencing mental health problems, mental health promotion can help improve services and enhance people's quality of life, as well as reducing relapse and assisting recovery. People from different black and minority ethnic groups will benefit from living in a community that understands them, values, supports and empowers them.

Mental health promotion can operate in three ways, and can be even more effective if these are combined:

- **Strengthening individuals**

Increasing emotional resilience by promoting self-esteem, life and coping skills (for example, communicating, negotiating, relationship and parenting skills) and enabling people from different black and minority ethnic populations to develop a positive cultural identity and thereby build their confidence and sense of worth.

- **Strengthening communities**

Increasing social support, social inclusion and participation, improving community safety, neighbourhood environments, promoting childcare and self-help networks, promoting mental health within schools and workplaces e.g. through anti-bullying strategies and race equality schemes, programmes to tackle racism within schools, workplaces and the wider community.

- **Reducing structural barriers to mental health**

Challenging stereotypes, discrimination and inequalities and reducing the political, social and economic barriers influencing the capacity of different black and minority ethnic groups to participate. Work to develop health and social services that support and promote mental health; ensure people have access to good quality health care; increase access to education, meaningful employment, training opportunities, housing, benefit entitlements and support for vulnerable people.

## Key mental health issues for the South Asian community

There is a great deal of diversity within any ethnic minority community, and each individual within an ethnic group is unique and different. Assumptions may be made that people have similar views, experiences or needs because they belong to a particular black or minority ethnic group. When planning mental health promotion, it is important to take into account other relevant issues for an individual such as gender, age, employment status, place of birth, experience of migration, family environment, sexuality, faith and to recognise the complexity of people's lives. However, there are some common issues affecting all black and minority ethnic groups and also some issues that affect some groups disproportionately.

## Key mental health issues for the South Asian community

### General:

Racism  
Stigma  
Language barriers  
Cultural beliefs and practices

### Social risk factors:

Poverty  
Unemployment  
Low levels of education (Bangladeshi)  
Loneliness and isolation (women)

### Health:

Alcohol misuse (men)  
High suicide rates and self harm (women)  
Low reported rates of depression/affective disorders (Bangladeshi)

### Service issues:

Lack of knowledge of services (elderly)  
Delay seeking help

## Suggested action points to help you develop a model for engaging with South Asian communities on mental health promotion

### Consult and work in partnership

- Design and deliver mental health promotion programmes in partnership with people from South Asian communities and community organisations that work with them
- Consult effectively and ensure community involvement and ownership in planning, implementing and evaluating mental health promotion interventions
- Build partnerships between the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector and the statutory sector, and identify adequate and sustained funding for local groups so they can be partners in developing and delivering mental health promotion

### **Raise awareness**

- Raise awareness about mental health issues, mental health services and how to access them, and build the mental health literacy of the South Asian population
- Develop mental health promotion materials specifically designed for South Asian people
- Work with opinion formers and South Asian community organisations, and provide mental health promotion interventions within accessible community venues including youth centres, schools, leisure facilities, faith organisations and local businesses
- Enable South Asian people to develop a positive cultural identity and build their confidence and sense of worth

### **Challenge discrimination**

- Challenge racism, health inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes both within services and the wider community
- Promote employment opportunities for both those who do and do not currently use mental health services

### **Train**

- Provide training for a wide range of workers, including anti-discrimination, cultural awareness and the use of interpreters, to improve the way people experience services
- Provide support, training and information for carers and families to increase their knowledge and understanding about positive mental health, mental illness, symptoms, mental health services, and empower them to promote their own mental health and well being and that of the person they care for

### **Promote mental health within services**

- Encourage recruitment of staff whose ethnicity reflects the communities they serve
- Work towards developing culturally sensitive services that, for example, provide bi-lingual workers, a room designated for prayer and other religious activity, female-only wards, culturally acceptable food
- Provide information within primary care about effective and accessible sources of support within the voluntary and community sector such as self help groups
- Raise awareness about the important role of spiritual and religious beliefs for some mental health service users
- Consult with South Asian service users to ensure that services are meeting their needs
- Involve South Asian voluntary and community groups in helping plan and provide support following discharge
- Provide accessible information about the services and treatment on offer, including side effects of medication and the availability of complimentary therapies and integrate non-medical and social models of care
- Ensure physical health needs are met and provide regular health checks and promotion information
- Provide advocacy and avoid using family members as interpreters.

### **Examples of mental health promotion initiatives with the South Asian community**

- **Himmat**

Himmat is one of a number of projects that make up the Healthy Living initiative in Oldham. It focuses on primary prevention and does not explicitly emphasise mental health because of the stigma attached. The project aims to empower local South Asian women through a befriending and advocacy service to reduce social isolation and improve access to services.

Self help groups and support networks are developed, and women are recruited to become befrienders and offer support to other women. Training in mental health awareness takes place in the community.

For further information: [shazian@oldham.nhs.uk](mailto:shazian@oldham.nhs.uk)

- **Longsight/ Moss Side Community Project**

The project offers practical and emotional support to older Asian people and their carers, taking a holistic and integrated approach to assessing service users' health and social care needs. It helps build confidence, self belief and self esteem through a personal development programme and provides an opportunity to develop skills and interests through participation in physical activity and discussions on stress and healthy eating, and to provide access to training and jobs. The project also works with service providers to improve the availability of culturally and religiously appropriate services.

For further information: [lmcp@btconnect.com](mailto:lmcp@btconnect.com)

- **Vishvas Project (South Asian Counselling and Resource Centre)**

This is a culturally sensitive and accessible mental health service offering information, support, counselling and advice to the South Asian community. It recognises the diversities in the community and offers counselling in different Asian languages.

For further information: [aferoze@cio.org.uk](mailto:aferoze@cio.org.uk)

## Finding out more

NIMHE have published a resource 'Celebrating our Cultures – mental health promotion with black and minority ethnic communities' which provides more information and highlights 30 initiatives that are taking place across England working with different communities and in different settings (see [www.nimhe.org.uk](http://www.nimhe.org.uk))

## Contact details of groups for South Asian communities in your locality

You can use this space to add details of useful local contacts/ community groups and other relevant information:











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