

Research Findings

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Chinese Action Research Project: household needs, public services and community organisations

Despite misguided perceptions that Chinese households are doing well in comparison to other ethnic minority communities, many urgent problems and issues remain hidden with little attention being paid by public services. This study, led by Ian Law working collaboratively with Chinese community organisations, examined housing, health and social care needs and the challenges that face both community groups and mainstream service providers.

1. **High levels of violence and deprivation are suffered by Chinese people in Britain.**
2. **The local Chinese population in Leeds is rapidly growing, particularly with the settlement of migrants from mainland China. Households are becoming smaller as traditional patterns of family support are declining.**
3. **Chinese households are both increasingly concentrated in inner city areas with others being isolated and scattered across all city wards.**
4. **Persistent poor housing conditions are generating strong demand for help and advice.**
5. **High levels of racist violence were identified with about 80% reporting problems. Domestic violence was also identified as an issue requiring urgent attention.**
6. **Poor physical and mental health, lack of attention to disability issues and problems in accessing health services were all identified as causes of concern. Over half of respondents said mental stress and lack of physical exercise were problematic.**
7. **Chinese elderly are increasingly in need of improved housing, social care and health service provision. Social Services were unknown by many in the Chinese community, and the urgent needs of many Chinese individuals were often unknown by service providers.**
8. **Improving support for single parents was identified as a further priority issue.**
9. **At school, racism and bullying of pupils and poor communication with parents was highlighted, together with high educational aspirations.**
10. **Community organisations identified the need to work together to both overcome their own exclusion and to realise significant improvements in the lives of Chinese families. This is to be achieved through building a collective agenda for action and campaigning around the issues identified in this study.**

1. High levels of violence and deprivation suffered by Chinese people in Britain

Nationally, Chinese people are more likely than other groups to:

- be subject to racial harassment and racially motivated property damage (16% of adults, this is higher than any other minority ethnic group)
- live in deprived areas
- live in households whose incomes are less than the national average (34% compared to 28% of white people)
- be unemployed (10% compared to 6% of white people)
- be unable to understand the language used by their doctor (33%)
- live in poorer quality, overcrowded housing conditions.

(Cabinet Office 2000, 2004)

Twenty years on, many problems affecting Chinese communities in Britain remain. The Home Affairs Committee report on the Chinese (17.1.1985) said,

'Lack of English, ignorance of their rights, cultural differences, scattered settlement and long unsocial hours together constitute a formidable barrier to full participation in British life' (para 27, 1985).

Chinese communities face a series of problems, which have gone unnoticed partly because, 'we are not a vocal community' (para, 1, 1985).

All these issues require urgent attention and this study is concerned to identify how these issues impact at a local level and what forms of intervention are particularly needed.

2. Rapidly growing population

The Chinese population of Leeds is a 'community of communities' covering three broad groups.

- an established community of households primarily from Hong Kong and the New Territories which is enumerated in the Census being about 3,500 people
- a large transient population of students from mainland China
- a more hidden group of illegal residents, refugees and asylum seekers roughly estimated at about 1-2,000
- China itself is a diverse nation with over forty ethnic minority groups identified

This study is particularly concerned with the needs of established Chinese households and issues affecting the more hidden group of migrants from mainland China. The needs of the rapidly increasing number of Chinese students in Leeds require attention and warrant further research.

The Chinese population is rapidly growing with a 67% increase from 1991 to 2001. This is the highest rate for any ethnic group, apart from Black Africans, and is a result of natural increase, intra-UK migration and international migration. Patterns of household formation are changing due to the decline of traditional patterns of family support, e.g. for the elderly.

3. Settlement: increasing concentration and increasing isolation

The settlement patterns of Chinese households portray two distinct features as the population grows: increasing concentration in the most deprived areas of Leeds and isolated, scattered dispersal outside the inner city with increases in most wards from 1981-2001 (Law et al. 1996, BMG 2004). Both these patterns are happening at the same time but they pose differing problems and challenges including poor physical housing conditions and detachment from community interaction.

4. Poor housing conditions and strong demand for advice

Mrs V is a single parent with arthritis and six children. She speaks little English and has difficulty in communicating with the Housing Department about repairs. She complains of damp in her house and is in fear of being rehoused in a worse area.

Our survey of 110 Chinese residents showed that about one third were living in housing in poor physical condition with multiple problems of general disrepair, leaking roofs and damp. About a fifth were overcrowded and living with inadequate cooking, toilet and bathroom facilities. Just under a half of this group wanted to move primarily because of poor conditions and expressed the need for help with meeting their housing requirements. Language problems lead to ignorance of housing rights and opportunities and there is a substantial demand for information and advice. This pattern has changed little since the late 1980's (Law 1990).

5. Racism, crime and isolation

Mr X has lived in Leeds with his family for twenty years. Over the last few years kids have thrown stones and excrement into their windows and doors, and fireworks threw their letter box. They have phoned the Police lots of times. This family was very disappointed when the police didn't turn up.

79% of Chinese adults surveyed reported experiencing varying forms of racist violence and harassment together with lack of confidence in agency responses. Also high levels of burglary, vandalism, car theft, street robbery were reported, with additional problems of threatening behaviour from gangs of youths, general neighbourhood nuisance, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Overall, 42% of Chinese people felt isolated where they lived. Many examples of the grave impact these problems were having on everyday life, e.g. health, were reported.

Mrs Y has face constant abuse from her husband since she arrived in the UK six years ago. After some time in a refuge she was moved into a council property where she remains with constant threats from her husband, increasing depression and little English.

6. Poor health, disability and problems in accessing services

About 20% of respondents reported generally poor health, with over half reporting stress/anxiety and lack of exercise. 20% of respondents and 10% of children had never used a dentist. Many Chinese people find health services very hard to use for a variety of reasons including language and communication problems, poor interpreter systems, the cultural incompetence of health professionals together with lack of knowledge. Disabilities amongst children were highlighted including deafness, learning disabilities and behavioural problems. Generally, disability was an issue which was rarely discussed and it has received very little attention in the Chinese community. There is an urgent need to work with Chinese families to promote health awareness, disability awareness and service take-up.

7. Social Services and the elderly

Social Services were unknown by many in the Chinese community. Where services had been used, support from social workers was often highly valued but meals on wheels, home care, aids and adaptations, social service nurseries, adoption and fostering and day centre provision was often rated as poor. Elderly respondents identified needs for help with personal care, taking medication, housework and shopping, and reported problems with mobility both inside and outside the home and personal safety. Greater effort is needed to bridge the divide between Chinese clients and mainstream services.

Mr Z is elderly and deaf. Although he lives with his family, he feels very isolated and lonely. Sometimes he doesn't want to live anymore and is very depressed. He has no idea what Social Services can provide.

Declining support for the traditional extended family is leading to increasing needs amongst the Chinese elderly for improvements in the provision of housing, social services, health services and benefits. Weak perceptions of citizenship rights, negative perceptions of service providers and lack of assistance, combined with neglect by public agencies is producing poor service take-up.

8. Lack of support for single parents

The Chinese Christian Church particularly highlighted problems that single parents were experiencing in the community including anger, depression, anxiety and loneliness. They proposed the establishment of a Chinese Family Centre to provide support, advice and counseling.

9. Racism and poor communication at school

There was a strong sense of educational urgency expressed by many Chinese parents with an emphasis being placed on achievement and access to higher education. But, many parents could not and did not communicate with school staff. Chinese children frequently reported bullying, racist abuse and physical violence experiences at school together with a sense of isolation.

10. Need for community organisations to work together

Chinese community groups have themselves identified the need for collective working and sharing of information and experiences. Despite many constraints, these organisations provide excellent services and have built up a wealth of knowledge of community needs. These organisations include the Chinese Women's Group, Chinese Community School, Chinese Community Centre, Wah Kwong Association, Chinese Advice Centre, Chinese Christian Church, Mandarin School and Advocacy Support.

Chinese individuals expressed strong support for Chinese community groups and often demanded greater opportunities for involvement and increased service provision. There is an urgent need to transform casework concerns into a collective agenda for action and campaigning to realise significant improvements in the lives of Chinese families. Much work still needs to be done to identify specific initiatives, available resources and ways of working that will enable these goals to be pursued. In addition, capacity building is needed within many of these organisations, together with the establishment of a new collective action group that will facilitate cooperation and present a coherent common voice.

General Recommendations

(More detailed recommendations will be given in the final report)

- Seek recognition from CRE, Home Office, Foreign Office and other relevant government departments of the persistence of high levels of violence and deprivation are suffered by Chinese people in Britain, and the lack of integration of Chinese people in British society.
- Report findings to other Chinese community organisations in the UK and organise an event to share experiences and initiatives, and to seek ways to establish regional and national cooperation.
- Leeds City Council should acknowledge that the local Chinese population in Leeds is rapidly growing, particularly with the settlement of migrants from mainland China and that their needs should be explicitly taken into account in the preparation of policy and strategy across all relevant departments and related agencies
- Local housing agencies should recognise that Chinese households are both increasingly concentrated in inner city areas with others being isolated and scattered across all city wards and that persistent poor housing conditions are generating strong demand for help and advice. They should therefore review the effectiveness of their provision of housing service in the light of the needs of this community and consider appropriate action to be taken.
- Local agencies concerned with hate crime and racist violence need to recognise that Chinese households suffer high levels of racist violence which, together with problems of high crime levels, domestic violence and social isolation, are having serious detrimental effects on everyday life. They should consider improving levels of reporting of such crime from this group and identifying ways in which support and responses can be improved.
- Local schools should recognise that racist bullying of Chinese children is prevalent and requires attention. Poor communication with Chinese parents was also highlighted as an issue that schools needed to address. High educational aspirations amongst Chinese families was common and review of the extent to which this has been realised should be carried out.
- Local health service providers should recognise that poor physical and mental health amongst Chinese adults and children together with problems in accessing health services is a cause for concern. They

should therefore review the effectiveness of their provision of health services in the light of the needs of this community and consider appropriate action to be taken.

- Social Services were unknown by many in the Chinese community, and the elderly are increasingly in need of improved housing, social care and health service provision. Improving support for single parents was identified as a further priority issue. Regular dialogue with Chinese community organisations to identify how improved services can be provided should be established.
- Community organisations identified the need to work together to realise significant improvements in the lives of Chinese families. This is to be achieved through building a collective agenda for action and campaigning around the issues identified in this study. Firstly, a cross-community Action Group should be established to lead in prioritising actions needed and in campaigning to achieve these goals. Three achievable objectives should be set by this group to improve the living conditions of Chinese people in the following areas: housing for the elderly, healthy living and alleviating racist violence.

About the Study

This work was commissioned by Chinese community groups as a follow-up to the local study carried out by Ian Law in 1990. This project was funded by Health Action Zone and Leeds City Council Equal Opportunities Unit and Social Services Department funding and was carried out by Dr. Ian Law in conjunction with Chinese community groups in Leeds. It included training activities, a survey of 110 individuals, focus group work and collation of a wide range of source material. The full report is published in December 2004 and is available free from Ian Law, Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, or e-mail i.g.law@leeds.ac.uk.