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Review: Black and minority ethnic people are more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act 1983—no clear evidence why

**QUESTION**

**Question:** Compared with White people, how frequently are people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups detained under the Mental Health Act 1983?

**Outcomes:** Rates of compulsory detention under the Mental Health Act.

**METHODS**

**Design:** Systematic review with meta-analysis.

**Data sources:** MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, PsycINFO, ASSIA, SIGLE, HMIC, Web of Science, Cochrane database and the National Research Register; 1984 to April 2005. CD-ROM for the British National Bibliography was also searched for relevant literature.

**Study selection and analysis:** English language studies relating to compulsory detention under the Mental Health Act 1983 and including terms related to mental illness or forensic psychiatry, and with inclusion of ≥2 ethnic groups (any non-White). Odds of compulsory detention of people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups compared with White groups were combined using a fixed effects meta-analysis. Meta-regression was then used to explore reasons for heterogeneity between studies. It was based on subgroup analyses according to episode (first, second, etc), patient type (for example, civil or forensic), study quality, and year of publication. The authors then narratively discuss the possible theories for the difference in detention rates.

**MAIN RESULTS**

Forty nine studies met the inclusion criteria and 19 were included in the meta-analysis. Most were cross-sectional studies with 53% including <120 patients; 71% of studies were conducted in London. BME groups were more likely to be detained under the mental health act than Whites (OR 3.35, 95% CI 3.05 to 3.73; p < 0.0001). Separate analysis by ethnic group found that Blacks were detained more frequently than Whites or Asians (OR for Black vs White: 3.83, 95% CI 3.42 to 4.29; OR Black vs Asian: 2.25, 95% CI 1.72 to 2.94). By detention type, more BME groups than White were detained for non-forensic reasons (OR 4.03, 95% CI 3.37 to 4.81; p < 0.0001) than for forensic reasons (OR 2.29, 95% CI 1.50 to 3.50; p < 0.0001), and more BME people with first episode illness were detained compared to Whites. Higher quality studies showed less of a difference between Black and White detention rates, although there was no effect of study quality on comparisons of total BME population with Whites. Similarly, the difference in risk decreased with more recent publication dates (and there was a link between recent publication date and study quality). In 51% of studies, racial labelling, discrimination and stereotyping were the most frequently discussed reasons for greater detention rates among BME groups; 26% of studies discussed dissatisfaction and negative perceptions of psychiatric services; and 22% each to higher rates of psychosis amongst BME groups, and to greater perception of violence. The researchers conclude that there is no primary evidence to confirm the effects of any of these factors on the difference in detention rates.

**CONCLUSIONS**

There is an excess in rates of psychiatric detention of Black Minority Ethnic people compared with Whites. However there is no reliable explanation for this difference.

**ABSTRACTED FROM**


Notes: The underlying studies used in the meta-analysis were of questionable quality. Researchers report that “few studies were hypothesis-driven and only 39% stated inclusion and exclusion criteria”. Meta-regression revealed a significant effect of study quality on the differences in risk between ethnic groups.

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