

Consultation on the Ethnicity Strand of the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study

Response of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

Q1. What are the questions or issues under each of these 10 topic headings that are particularly relevant to the study of ethnicity, and/or the experience of (distinct) minority ethnic groups, and/or understanding diversity and differences between groups?

The addition of the word “distinct” in the question is very welcome, as our major concern about present data collection about ethnicity is that it in fact conceals the variety of distinct ethnic groups in the population.

There is no single factor identifiable as ‘ethnicity; instead there are a variety of factors that contribute to an individual’s sense of ‘identity’, including nationality, descent, race, religion, culture, and language, among others. These categories are not ethnic categories; at times they may overlap with ethnic identity, but they are not equivalent, and any one of them fails to reflect the character or diversity of ethnic groups in Britain. In order for the UKHLS to provide useful information in this complex and often sensitive area it must take all of these into account.

In the 2001 census the ‘ethnicity’ question asked about “cultural background”, but the available categories were a mix of geography, nationality and colour. This has been described by the Registrar General for Scotland as “irrational”, but they have been adopted by the majority of population surveys, with the result that much of the available data are meaningless or misleading.

The use of colour as an indicator of belonging to an ethnic minority is particularly problematic. The use of ‘white other’ has been the object of widespread criticism for concealing the presence of many non-visible minorities and for providing little in the way of useful information. For example, *Ethnicity Monitoring: Involvement Guidance for Partnerships on Monitoring Involvement* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, August 2004) concluded that ‘it may be necessary to undertake further data gathering where sizeable ‘White Other’ populations are concerned’ because ‘the category ‘White Other’ was used to cover a wide range of ethnic groups ... [and] does not, for instance, distinguish between people of Turkish or Cypriot origin.’

The use of ‘black’ as an identifying category has been widely censured on a number of grounds. Not only do Africans object strongly to having to identify themselves by colour, when Asians, for example, do not, but there are a great number of non-‘black’ minority communities in the UK (eg. Polish, Kurdish, Italian, Gypsy Travellers), and there are also many Asians, particularly Chinese, who do not identify with this term at all, or who use it only as convenient political shorthand.

When ‘black’ is used as if it were synonymous with ‘minority community’ all of these are excluded because they are not in any sense black. When ‘white’ is used as if it were synonymous with ‘the majority community’ these same communities are

excluded once again because they are not part of the majority community. This double exclusion is particularly divisive and alienating.

Moreover, some people regard being described by colour as offensive whilst others regard only one colour term ('black') as having political significance. Various recent publications have used the term 'black' to refer to

- i) all minority communities regardless of skin colour
- ii) all visible minority communities (based solely on skin colour)
- iii) minority communities that are neither 'white' nor 'brown'
- iv) minority communities that are neither 'white', 'Asian' nor 'Hispanic'.

That ambiguity is alone sufficient to vitiate the use of colour as a descriptor, since if the terms used in the question are not entirely unambiguous, respondents cannot be presumed to have understood the terms in the same way, and so their responses cannot be relied on in any respect whatever.

Concerns have been raised about the loss of comparability if changes are made to the ethnicity categories. However, comparing unintelligible data will not produce intelligible information, and, whilst longitudinal comparability is useful, it is more important that current and future classifications should be meaningful than that they should be unduly constrained by comparability with previous figures.

Standard of living measures

Poverty may be indirectly related to a wide variety of factors loosely related to ethnicity, such as language and literacy, attitudes to women working, etc. It is important to capture and map this information, and not conceal it behind broad and meaningless categories. A good example is the conflation of the various parts of the "Indian subcontinent", which conceals the very wide variation in, for example, education and economic activity between Indians and Bangladeshis.

Family, social networks and interactions, local contexts, social support, technology and social contracts

and

Attitudes and behaviours related to environmental issues

There are a large number of cultural or ethnic factors that have a bearing on these matters, including religion and other belief systems, which may in turn be related to national or geographic origin. To be of any value, any survey should seek to capture and map this diversity, not to conceal it behind broad categories that have little reality in the lives of individuals.

Illicit and risky behaviour

Visibility – and therefore vulnerability to become a victim of hate crime – is not a matter of skin colour alone; there are many factors that make minorities noticeable – i.e. visible. These include dress, the public use of a language other than English,

accent, and culturally specific practices such as eating kosher or halal, or interrupting other activities for regular prayers, as well as skin-colour. It is evident that many Jewish people suffer from discrimination and racism as a result of their visibility and the Council's role in combating these is enhanced by access to reliable statistical information. (A recent study has indicated that Jewish people are four times more likely than Muslims to be the victim of a "faith hate" attack - see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/12/17/nislam117.xml>)

In addition, ethnic descriptions of the perpetrator by the victim or a witness are unreliable, and certainly not as reliable or precise as self-ascription. A victim may therefore describe him- or her-self as "Indian", but be unable to describe the perpetrator more precisely than "Asian" – and if he or she does so, that may not be reliable in the absence of other evidence such as dress. This gives rise to the paradoxical situation that a witness's description of an attack as racist must be accepted, although his or her description of the "races" of the parties might not.

Lifestyle, social, political, religious and other participation, identity and related practices, dimensions of life satisfaction/happiness

it is evident from the 2001 census that more people regard themselves as being of any particular religion than attend a place of worship. This is particularly true of the Jewish religion since many people consider themselves ethnically Jewish despite the fact that they do not affiliate to a synagogue, and it may also be increasingly true of the next generation of other faiths. This view of Judaism is supported by the fact that Jewish people benefit from the protection of the Race Relations Act.

There is also empirical evidence for the importance of this from the last Canadian census, in which respondents were able to identify themselves as 'Jewish' in response to both the religion and the ethnicity questions. The data showed that the number identifying in **either** of these ways was 27.6% more than those identifying themselves Jewish by religion alone. As these individuals continue to call on communal welfare and social facilities, full and accurate statistics are required to enable effective planning of service provision and these will not be available unless all respondents are given the option of identifying themselves as Jewish in the broadest sense.

Terminology is also important. The 2001 question in Scotland was "What faith do you belong to?" which discouraged positive responses from those who do not "belong" in any active way such as paying a subscription. The English question "What is your faith?" is therefore preferable.

Psychological attributes, cognitive abilities and behaviour
and
Preferences, beliefs, attitudes and expectations

As with social and environmental matters, there are a large number of cultural or ethnic factors that have a bearing on these, including religion and other belief systems, which may in turn be related to national or geographic origin. To be of any value, any survey should seek to capture and map this diversity, not to conceal it behind broad categories that individuals would not recognise as applying to themselves.

Health outcomes and health-related behaviour
and
Education, human capital and work

Britain is not a homogenous society and service providers such as the NHS, Local Councils and Education Authorities are obliged by law to make adequate provision for the needs of everyone, whatever their religion or ethnic descent. To do this effectively they need to know the size and geographic distribution of communities in order to allocate resources appropriately.

Individual faith and ethnic communities also provide services for their members and the Jewish community is particularly active in this regard. In addition to providing for people's religious and spiritual needs, the UK Jewish community provides care services for children, for the elderly and for those with a disability; educational services for people of all ages; sporting and social activities and a range of other provisions.

Individual faith and ethnic communities may not have the resources adequately to collect the necessary data themselves. For example, the only means by which the Jewish community can gather information is through synagogue membership figures or by extrapolation from level of demand for other communal services such as burial. It is self-evident that the former will not include people who are less religiously committed or who do not have a synagogue nearby, perhaps because they live in a rural area, and that the latter provide no guide to the level of demand for different communal services such as primary education. Figures collected in this way cannot provide information necessary for effective planning of service provision.

Initial conditions, life history

Many people with a religious upbringing or from a particular ethnic background undoubtedly prefer culturally specific services even if they no longer practice the religion, so, to support effective service planning and provision, it is vital that questions are posed in a format that enables ethnic and religious identity to be accurately identified. We are aware of several recent incidences when the lack of information has led to a failure of appropriate service provision.

Q2. Which of your questions or issues do you consider the most important? And why?

The related issues of identifying and describing ethnicity are clearly the most important. Unless these are accurate and meaningful all other data, whether about lifestyle, education, economic status or anything else, are meaningless.

Q3. Which of the 10 overarching topics would you prioritise if questionnaire space meant they could not all be covered at once?

In order to lay a firm foundation for future surveys, topic 5, which includes identity, should be given priority over the other nine areas.

Q5. Are there any questions (or topic areas) that you think should NOT be asked? And if so, why?

For the reasons stated above, no question should be asked that requires respondents to identify themselves by colour or in any other way which any group or respondents may find offensive.

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.