

## **Guidelines for conducting research amongst different ethnic groups**

### **Introduction**

The Ethnic Research Network aims to raise the profile of ethnic minority research. It also helps facilitate best practice for those engaging with ethnic minority audiences via research. Of course, not every research project necessarily has to include a sample of ethnic minorities, but we encourage companies and organisations to consider exploring the views of different ethnic groups in the course of their work. These guidelines provide tips and advice for those interested in researching these communities.

### **Why is it important to research ethnic minority communities?**

There are several reasons for researching ethnic minority communities:

- Inclusion and representation – ethnic minorities made up 8% of the UK population in the 2001 Census. In London, 29% of residents were from an ethnic minority background in 2001. These proportions are predicted to increase in the future, given that the ethnic minority population is growing faster than the white population. As a result, equality and diversity will become increasingly important issues for businesses and organisations, who will need to connect with the needs of an increasingly multi racial society.
- Commercial reasons – it is estimated that ethnic minorities in the UK have a spending power between £12-15 billion annually (source: RFO 2001). On a household basis, African Asians (e.g. Ugandan Asians), the Chinese and Indians in the UK have average incomes higher than the white population (source: the London Research Centre/Policy Studies Institute). Thus, it makes commercial sense for marketers to seek to engage with ethnic minority audiences
- Staying ahead of trends – ethnic minorities have a younger age profile than the general population and are a driving force within urban youth culture, influencing trends in music and fashion and helping define the hippest, trendiest brands. For those companies that want to be at the cutting edge of modern youth culture, ethnic minority communities are a key target
- Cultural differences – whether or not they are British-born, consumers from ethnic minority backgrounds may well retain some cultural influences from their (or their family's) country of origin. These influences may impact household decision-making, buying and consumption patterns, product usage and so on.
- Communication and language issues – given that some ethnic minorities do not have English as a first language, some projects may have to investigate the media and communication channels most appropriate for those with limited or no English.
- Race and discrimination – clearly, people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds are likely to have different perspectives on these issues and different experiences to recount.

### **Issues to consider when choosing a research supplier**

Researching ethnic minorities should be seen as a specialism, in the same way as some suppliers specialise in social, financial services or advertising research. Therefore, when commissioning this type of research, many suppliers will not have the experience or relevant expertise to reach ethnic minority audiences effectively. Some key questions to ask prospective suppliers are:

- What past experience does the supplier have in this field? Which specific ethnic minority communities have been included in past projects?
- Who will actually do the interviews/moderate the focus groups? If freelancers are to be used, ask to meet them – they should attend the briefing meeting and the presentation.
- Is the supplier able to provide bilingual moderators for non-English speaking respondents? And are female moderators available for interviews with older ethnic minority women (likely to be of particular importance when interviewing Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese female elders).
- Who will write the presentation/report? If freelancers are to be used, will they have input?
- How will the recruitment be carried out? Who will recruit and what is their background?
- Will translated transcripts be made available?
- For quantitative projects, how will the sampling be done? What does the supplier recommend to ensure that the sample is representative? Is the supplier able to interview non-English speakers on a quantitative basis?
- Telephone interviewing, postal questionnaires, internet surveys are not wholly appropriate methodologies for use among ethnic minority respondents. This is for reasons of:
  - Difficulty Sampling
  - Literacy levels among older people.

See below for more details.

## 1. Project Planning

- (a) Researchers should be aware that within some ethnic groups there is a low level of awareness of market research. Researchers should prepare detailed information detailing the purpose (and any consequences) of a research project to assuage respondent concerns. Issues to be considered include:
  - Purpose of the research
  - Confidentiality of responses
  - Name of the client
  - Any potential re-contact including quality control checks
  - The value of taking part in the research i.e. any specific benefits or outcomes for the individual or their community.
- (b) At the planning stage researchers should consider the best way to ascertain ethnicity from respondents. Researchers should consider the purpose of the research when selecting an approach. For example:
  - Pre-description – this technique is useful when research has to fit into an existing monitoring scheme (such as for local authorities).
  - Self-description – this technique may reveal more than offering standard ethnic classifications.
- (c) Researchers may also consider asking additional questions linked to ethnicity which may build a fuller picture of the background of respondents. For example:
  - Which country did you or your parents originate from?

- What is your religious background if any?
- What languages do you speak apart from English?
- What is your main spoken language?
- What is the main language spoken at home?

## 2. Recruitment

- (a) Avoid religious holidays, please refer to the SHAP website at:  
[http://www.bradford.gov.uk/art/religious\\_festivals/pdf/ReligiousFest2004.pdf](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/art/religious_festivals/pdf/ReligiousFest2004.pdf)
- (b) Make sure there is effective pre-survey publicity that will alert the community of interest to the research. Ask tenant reps, community leaders and groups to advocate the research and to handout explanatory letters or leaflets on the research. If the research is for a public facing organisation such as Council, retailer etc, is also useful to alert all front-line staff of the timing of the study as they can advocate the research and reassure residents who have been sent a survey/interviewed that it is bona fide.
- (c) In certain ethnic communities gaining access to respondents may be particularly difficult. Researchers should consider in such circumstances to recruit opinion leaders from the community e.g. approach the management of the local temple or mosque or contact an appropriate person in a local association. However researchers should always be aware that community leaders might not always be representative and that some may have an agenda which could influence access to respondents.
- (d) Finding ethnic minority communities can be difficult, as a pointer there are some broad locations which can be used:
  - Africans – the vast majority live in London, particularly South East London (Peckham and Deptford). Smaller populations live in Birmingham and Manchester
  - Somalis – Streatham.
  - Arabs – Edgware Road locality
  - Bangladeshi – East London and Camden
  - Black Caribbeans – London (Brent, Hackney, Lambeth and Lewisham), Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Derby, Bristol
  - Chinese – Manchester, London, Newcastle, Birmingham and Liverpool
  - Pakistani Muslims – Slough, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Dewsbury, Bolton
  - Jewish – North London (particularly Stamford Hill)
  - Sikh – Southall, Hounslow/West London, Slough, Ilford, Gravesend, Leeds, Birmingham
  - Hindus – similar to Sikh areas plus Leicester, Harrow, Wembley (Gujarati Hindus)
- (e) There are some specific issues relating to the recruitment of particular ethnic groups which should be considered:
  - Recruitment of respondents from the Indian sub-continent:
    - ⇒ Female respondents who have agreed to attend a group/depth may subsequently not be allowed to attend by elders (generally male) in their household. Reminder calls should be made ASAP, so the drop out rate can be detected early. In some cases, the group may have to be recruited all over again.
    - ⇒ Possible need for same sex interviewing/reallocation of interviews by gender.

- ⇒ Some respondents may wish to bring other members of their family with them to act as chaperone. The extra people in the group can affect dynamics, so be prepared to book a separate room in which they can congregate.
- Recruitment of Black African and Black Caribbean respondents:
  - ⇒ Start times of groups may not always be adhered to. To allow for this, it would be best to invite respondents for 6.00pm for a 6.30pm start (advise the moderator that not even everybody may be gathered by 6.30pm).
  - ⇒ It is advisable not to mix respondents who are originally from neighbouring countries or countries that used to be part of one country (may apply to some African respondents). This is because there may be varying ethnic divisions.
- Recruitment of individuals that work in catering trades:
  - ⇒ Many first generation individuals from the Chinese and Pakistani communities still work in the catering trade and consequently work unsociable hours. They may not be able to take part in interviews during normal interviewer times. Other strategies may need to be used to achieve interviews e.g. interviewers getting permission to interview at Sunday language school for Chinese people.

### **3. Data Collection**

#### **General**

- a) Researchers should consider using interviewers that are able to speak the same language as the respondents. Translators are a possible alternative but researchers should be careful of using family members, as this will tend to introduce bias. It is recommended that when translators are required, the researchers arrange for a translator prior to the data collection and the translator accompanies the interviewer for the interview process.
- b) If you must use family members for help, make sure that show-cards are bi-lingual - this is because some family members (particularly second and third generation) may only be able to read English even though they speak another language fluently.
- c) Researchers should also consider alternative ways of communicating with non-English speaking respondents e.g. pre-recorded materials linked to CAPI equipment.
- d) Possible need for same sex interviewing/reallocation of interviews by gender.

#### **Self-completion**

- (a) Researchers should be aware that self-completion questionnaires sent to certain ethnic groups could result in lower response rates. The reasons for this range from lack of understanding of research, suspicion of the purpose, language, and poor literacy etc. Usual solutions to these problems, such as sending tailored covering letters, tend to not address these issues.
- (b) If you have to use a postal methodology, please enclose a translated sheet that allows respondents to request the information in another language.

- (c) Researchers should be aware that when respondents who have literacy or language barriers complete self-completion questionnaires, it is possible that the respondents may have enlisted the assistance of family and friends. Therefore the responses may not necessarily reflect the views of the targeted respondents.
- (d) If materials are translated please make sure the translations are checked properly for sense and if possible, piloted. Too often, translations have been literal or just plain wrong.

### **Telephone**

- (a) Researchers should consider the subject matter of a research project before using the telephone approach e.g. researching older Muslims on sensitive subjects should be done face-to-face and not on the telephone.
- (b) It is possible to conduct research about ethnicity by telephone using random sampling but the standard approach of asking a filter question on ethnicity at the beginning is likely to be met with hostility and will result in low response rates. An alternative is to ask ethnicity questions at the end of a survey and only use the questionnaires from the respondents who meet the demographic requirements. However, this will result in a high percentage of wastage and cost.

### **Qualitative**

- (a) Some researchers and clients believe that it is important for moderators and respondents to be from the same, or similar, ethnic backgrounds (so called 'ethnic matching'). There can be advantages to this, including a better understanding of the cultural background and community norms, and a greater sensitivity to issues such as body language or tone of voice.
- (b) There will be some instances where ethnic matching will hinder research e.g. addressing culturally controversial or sensitive topics. In these instances the researcher should consider a moderator who is an 'outsider' and who can play the role of the professional stranger.

As a guide it is advisable to consider ethnic matching for the following types of respondents:

- Young black men
  - Non-English speakers
  - Older members of the Chinese community
- (c) Researchers should also consider gender matching moderators and respondents e.g. researching Bangladeshi or Asian housewives should be conducted by a female.
  - (d) When selecting respondents for qualitative research, researchers should consider the make-up of qualitative groups e.g. in terms of gender, age, cultural background etc. There will be instances where separation should be considered. For example, separate gender groups are preferable for Muslims when conducting research with older respondents or researching sensitive subjects.
  - (e) Be aware of different languages and dialects spoken within communities. For example, some Chinese speak Cantonese, other Mandarin. Similarly, in many south Asian communities, there is a formal written language which is different from the spoken language (e.g. Sylheti vs Bengali, Punjabi vs Urdu). In terms of Black Africans, there are numerous different mother-tongues and it is best to check that everyone can speak English or French or a common African language.

- (f) Researchers should also consider separating groups when mixing communities might result in a degree of inconsistency in the research results or result in tensions and disruptions because of cultural conflicts.
- (g) Researchers should ensure that the research environment is suitable for different ethnic communities. For example:
  - Refreshments or products supplied for taste testing should be selected, prepared and presented in a manner suitable for the respondents e.g. kosher food should only be handled by a Jewish person, for Muslims, refreshments should be Halal and no alcohol should be served.
  - Venues should be suitable e.g. pub rooms are not be used for researching Muslims.
  - Be aware of running groups at prayer time – either avoid or provide a break for prayer and a suitable prayer space. To show consideration, provide prayer mats, towels for washing before prayer.
- (h) Certain communities will treat recordings with suspicion. All audio/visual recording must be clearly explained to respondents prior to, and at the beginning of a group.

#### **Incentives**

- (a) Researchers should consider piloting incentives prior to a research project to ensure that the incentives offered are appropriate for the respondents.
- (b) Provide crèche facilities if possible for groups with women or actively offer baby-sitting money on top of the incentives.

#### **4. Reporting**

- (a) If community leaders and groups have aided researchers in the completion of a project, researchers might consider sharing some of the results with the local community. This approach is particularly recommended if the research is likely to have a direct impact on an ethnic group in a specific area e.g. local authority research.

#### **Useful Organisations and Websites**

- **MRS Ethnic Research Network** - [www.mrs.org.uk/networking/ern/ethnicres.htm](http://www.mrs.org.uk/networking/ern/ethnicres.htm)
- **SHAP religious calendar** - [http://www.bradford.gov.uk/art/religious\\_festivals/pdf/ReligiousFest2004.pdf](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/art/religious_festivals/pdf/ReligiousFest2004.pdf)