

Chapter 5 ISOLATION & BELONGING

Themes in this chapter

- Multiple isolation index
- Relationships and support within the Black and Minority Ethnic population
- Membership of organisations
- Participation in community life
- English Language issues
- Inclusive measures

Introduction: Isolation & belonging – factors in cohesion and exclusion

In this chapter we look at the multiple, compounding layers of isolation affecting Black and Minority Ethnic people living rurally. We consider how this affects individuals' ability to take part in community life and become members of organisations, bringing for them a sense of social stability and inclusion and providing the means to contribute their skills to local welfare. We also consider how the issues of isolation and belonging affect social cohesion in terms of race relations.

Indices of isolation – an analysis of multiple layers of isolation linked to rural ethnicity.

A key question for the research was the extent to which isolation impacts on rural Black and Minority Ethnic people. Key elements of this question were:

- Do we have minority 'communities' centred on particular areas?
- How rurally do people live – in towns or in rural, remote parishes?
- Do people live alone, co-ethnically, or as Mixed Heritage families?
- What access do people have to co-ethnic and co-lingual support?
- In what way do people keep in touch with cultural roots?
- What part do individuals play in community life?
- What organisations do people participate in?
- What reactions to their ethnic identity do individuals experience from others in their local communities?
- What language barriers are there?
- What access do people have to advice and support?

The first part of the analysis in this chapter describes key factors contributing to isolation. The responses to the research questions above and the patterns arising from a research process based on naturalistic inquiry (see chapter 2 for details of methodology) have emerged as indices of isolation. Those indices are set out in Table 5.1 below. The relevance of these indices as factors having a bearing on ethnicity, is noted in the Table. The indices do not mean that if a person has a minority ethnic identity they will experience each of the indices de facto. What the factors do mean if they are experienced however, is that they have a directly linked, compounding effect on a person's isolation as a minority ethnic member of society.

The results from our sample show that many people do experience these isolating factors. Table 5.2 shows the degree to which each person experiences multiple layers of isolation. The average score is 4.3 layers of isolation, the most frequent score being 5 for women and 3 for men, and the highest isolation score being 10. The indices do not include a score for ethnicity in itself – in this way the index does not presume that isolation is an unavoidable aspect of minority ethnicity. The scores show however, that for all but 4 of our participants, isolating factors are in play, and for 150 of our 170 participants, multiple layers of isolation apply.

Table 5.1: Indices of isolation - key statistics from our sample

Indices of Minority Ethnic Rural Isolation (14 indicators)	Relevance as an isolating factor bearing on ethnicity - notes:	% of people (Total is 170 unless 'n' stated otherwise)	
		%	'n' =
English language ability	English language skills are a function of place of birth and parentage.		
Poor		20 %	160
Negative experiences of life in Devon	Negative experiences arising from racial prejudice/ discrimination and from culture shock, (compounding sense of isolation.)		
People who have had experience of racism in Devon		73%	153
People who found the experience of settling into their rural community difficult		52%	93
Rurality	Isolation from other BME people partially a function of rural demography (see Census 2001 analysis, chapter 3.)		
People who live in a village/ hamlet/ in a remote locality.		31%	
Friendship and family	Ability to source support a function of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● proximity of co-ethnic family and friends ● ability to find co-ethnic friends ● ability to establish local friendship cross-culturally ● ability to share negative experiences with a partner 		
People who don't have any co-ethnic friends in the same District		61%	108
People who don't have any non-co-ethnic friends in the same District		37%	108
People who do not have any co-ethnic family living in Devon (other than partner or children at home)		76%	127
People with low awareness of presence of other minorities locally or in Devon		15%	128

People living with no other adults (of whom 13 were women – including 8 single mothers – 5 were men)		12%	153
Participation in community life	Participation in community organisations an indicator of acceptance in community, access to social networks and support, and individual confidence levels.		
People who do not participate in the local community		35%	86
People who are not members of any organisation		41%	81
People who do not attend a place of worship in Devon but have a faith identity		29%	110
Women and elderly	Evaluation of sense of ethnic identity and consequent impact on relationships and needs, in greater state of flux among young people and those growing old. Gender and Ethnicity intersect to increase the isolation of women (see Comment below).		
Under 20 or over 60		17%	
Women		52%	

Notes on construction of the analysis.

The data was analysed to find out how many indices of isolation were experienced by each of the participants, illustrating the multiple layers of exclusion that Black and Minority Ethnic people encounter. This analysis is shown in the table below. A rating of 1 was applied to each person's score for each indicator experienced. Since there were some participants for whom not all the data relevant to isolation was available (see 'n' sample size above and see chapter 2 for participant types), the figures shown below are a minimum, and in practice, higher levels of isolation may well be the case.

Gender issues and social isolation.

A rating score of 1 was also applied to all women. It can be argued that gender impacts on women from all cultures to varying degrees, and need not be necessarily applied to an analysis of Minority Ethnic isolation. However, this argument is

robustly discounted in international development work where gender, disability, and sexuality are given specific attention in relation to the cultural impact upon a person’s experience of these statuses. The argument is also debated in the national context, where ethnicity and culture is ever more complex in contemporary diverse society. What may be true for a woman of one culture may not be true for a woman of another (ref. CRE Fact sheet *Ethnic Minority Women*). However, research such as NCVO’s *Staring at Invisible Women* makes the case that ‘race and gender intersect in a rural context’ and that ‘women’s needs and situations are distinct from men’s in that they tend to have major responsibility for caring within the family, less mobility, and less access to family and other resources’.

Table 5.2 below indicates that even when a weighting score for women is removed, women are more likely to experience higher multiple levels of social isolation than men. The research also indicated that in our sample, women were twice as likely to be unemployed or working below their skills level than men (see chapter 7), and were more likely than men, to have no resource to information and support apart from family and friends. Concerns were also noted from participant data and from Health Professionals about levels of isolation experienced by many immigrant women who had come to the UK to be with their partners. (Two thirds of our female participants were born overseas. See chapter 3 for reasons for coming to UK.) On balance, we felt that it was relevant to weight women’s isolation score with an additional point.

Table 5.2

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Av
A. Frequency overall (= B+C)	4	16	15	32	27	26	19	14	9	7	1	0	0	0	0	4.3
B. Frequency in men & for sex not stated	4	16	9	17	11	8	8	2	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	3.5
C. Frequency in women (weighted)	0	0	6	15	16	18	11	12	5	5	1	0	0	0	0	5.1
D. Frequency in women Score unweighted	0	6	15	16	18	11	12	5	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	4.1
E. = D – B	4	- 10	6	-1	6	3	4	3	1	-1	0	0	0	0	0	

There are 6 themes which feature in the isolation index in Table 5.1 above:

1. Language issues
2. Negative experiences of life in Devon
3. Rurality
4. Friendship and family support
5. Level of participation in community life
6. Women and the elderly person.

Negative experience of life in Devon is examined in chapters 6,7,8,and 9 (looking at experience of discrimination and prejudice), and issues of rurality and family support are covered in chapter 3 (looking at demography). Gender and age profiles are summarised in chapter 2.

Issues of language, friendship, rurality and participation in community life are explored in further detail within this chapter on isolation and belonging.

Relationships and support within the Minority Ethnic population

In this section we explore some key factors affecting Minority Ethnic relationships in rural areas, including:

- Demography
- Co-ethnic relationships (same ethnic identity) and Inter-minority-ethnic relationships (relationships between people of different Minority Ethnic identities).
- Networking
- Co-lingual support

Demography

In chapter 3 the Census data shows that the majority of Devon’s Black and Minority Ethnic population live in the rural Districts – i.e. outside Exeter.

Table 5.3

Black & Minority Ethnic population	Devon	Rural Districts combined	Exeter	Exeter & Torbay
Incl. European & Irish. Number	21,346	15,403	5,865	9,990
%	100%	72%	28%	N/a

Excl. European & Irish	7,961	5,260	2,644	4,265
%	100%	66%	33%	N/a

Even when the figures of Torbay (a separate Unitary Authority to Devon County) are combined with Devon to give an urban picture, the figures show that the majority of the population are based in the rural Districts. This remains true whether Europeans and Irish people are included in the Minority Ethnic figures, or not.

The Census figures also show that the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population is distributed across all the rural region.

Table 5.4

BME District distribution	Incl. European & Irish	% of Devon BME population	Excl. European & Irish	% of Devon BME population
Teignbridge	3314	16	1210	15
East Devon	3125	15	891	11
South Hams	2415	11	745	9
North Devon	2126	10	840	11
Mid Devon	1696	8	551	7
Torridge	1403	7	584	7
West Devon	1324	6	440	6

The consequence of the distribution of the majority of the Black and Minority Ethnic population around the rural Districts - Devon being one of the largest counties in the UK - is that people are dispersed from one another over large distances.

Chapter 3 describes the demography of the sample of people who live or work in the 7 rural Districts of Devon and sets out an analysis of the data provided by the 2001 Census. It demonstrates that there are not ‘communities’ of Black and Minority Ethnic people living in co-ethnic clusters, and that due to the extent of diversity of place of birth, most Minority Ethnic people have little in common with one another in terms of ethnic identity.

Social Relationships: Co and Inter Minority Ethnic.

As a consequence of the above, it is inherently difficult for Black and Minority Ethnic people to find co-ethnic peers outside of the family and establish social relationships. The diversity of the rural Minority Ethnic population, and the absence of co-ethnic clusters of people, has the effect of reducing the overall visibility of rural diversity. Recognition of diversity must result instead from the acknowledgment of individuals' ethnic identity. This renders the Minority Ethnic person still vulnerable to encounters of racism from prejudiced individuals, but less visible to co-ethnic peers who look out at a society that has no discernable markers of Minority Ethnic presence. So it is difficult for people to find peers co-ethnically or indeed of other Minority Ethnicities, and the desire to look can be thwarted for some by the assumption that there's nothing to look for.

Some quotes from the participants illustrate the effects:

Feeling alone as a minority

- ☞ *One of the bad things about life in Devon is there are hardly any minority like me in the area.*
- ☞ *Even in Plymouth Black people don't get together. Your first problem is to find people in rural areas. You could wait for hours at a rural supermarket before a Black person turns up. There are several Black families for e.g. in Liskeard but they don't know about each other. This is because people are generally not welcomed so they keep their heads down and therefore don't find each other.*
- ☞ *I look out for people but don't know any one. [Didn't know about other Asian/British couple in the village].*
- ☞ *None - don't know any. I was shocked and very excited to hear from your project there was another Mixed race family in the village.*

Several of the participants described other factors that impede the searching out or building of social relationships with Minority Ethnic peers. The reasons given included:

- Preference not to focus on co-ethnic relationships
- Lack of things in common with people of other Minority Ethnicities, except minority status

- Difficulty of meeting people without sense of obligation to get involved with them or their families
- Concern about having to take on other people's burdens
- Concern not to be perceived as showing favouritism in the workplace
- Reserve about catching a stranger's attention or introducing oneself
- Reluctance to talk with non-family about home life
- Reluctance to intrude on other people's privacy
- Inter-ethnic prejudice and White peer pressure
- Intra-ethnic tensions and differences in attitude towards race and identity
- Fear of becoming more vulnerable to discrimination by revealing non-visible ethnic identity.
- Restrictions placed on some women

We found that whilst 64% of our 170 participants had described knowledge of or acquaintance with other Black and Minority Ethnic individuals in Devon, this had only translated into local co-ethnic friendships described by 24% of the participants. And 59% of the 34 participants whose English skills were described as 'poor', either stated they had no co-ethnic friends or had left their response to that question blank.

Friendship among minorities

- *I don't socialise with other Indians - just because I see them doesn't mean we become friends. I'm just concerned with doing my job.*
- A Black African participant explained reservations about striking up relationships with minority ethnic customers – *'I don't have special customers – that's where trouble starts, it's best to treat everyone the same'*.
- *I feel that the Turkish woman we know is desperate to introduce us to all the Turkish people she knows - it's not quite our scene. It would be easier to meet people through a network setting because there'd be less obligation to get involved with people.*

- ☞ *I don't see these women socially, except work social occasions. Their kids are a bit rowdy - it's not good for my son. Also their husbands are like mine – very forthright biased views. If I could meet the women without the husbands and their kids, it would be OK!*
- ☞ *[Pakistani participant] Bengali are people very closed- they only want to talk to other Bengalis. My Bengali friend won't talk about home life to me. We see each other at the shop. She has no other friends. She's Muslim. We have a shop so we're more aware of the range of ethnicities. I met my Bengali friend in the shop. I couldn't easily have gone up to her in the street. Most Asian people don't want to catch my eye.*
- ☞ *There are some Travellers but no-one likes them because they insult everyone and think they're hard.*
- ☞ *Mother: There's an Iranian mother of kids at my daughter's school. She latched onto me when she saw I had Mixed race kids. But when she appeared my kids started having trouble..... he was beaten up everyday at school.....*
- ☞ *Son: When I was 10 an Iranian boy called me nigger. So I gave him a nose bleed. He set his big brother on me and assaulted me and my sister. I kicked him in the balls. I went mad with anger. Since then people aren't racist. I taped one of the Iranian kids having a go at me. I was then able to prove to his Mum what he was doing.*
- ☞ *I've got another Black friend who was adopted by a white woman who had no other kids. She doesn't mix with White people because people put her down and so she doesn't put herself in the best of situations which is a vicious circle. People mix me up with her and make comments about me thinking I'm my friend. People think Black people are all the same. I tried to help my friend but she throws it all back in my face. She has 3 kids but isn't helping herself. She and another Black girl I know feel there is a big Black community, but Black people have a lot of problems with one another in Exeter. I met one other Black person in my last village and we got in really well. The girls I know in Exeter think the Black community should be helping each other but they're all getting at each other. I don't want to be part of it. I'm worried about being sucked into a group*

that has a lot of tension around it and attracting bad publicity - for example two of the women I know shouting at each other in the shops. Black people have real chips on their shoulders about identity and how the Black community should relate internally and externally. One of the girls said I'm an 'evil emotional satanist'. I feel they claim they know things about each other when they don't. I haven't got a clue who the 'Black community' of Exeter is but these girls expect me to be a spokesperson for the community. They're trying to drag me into it.

- ☞ *My wife tried to help the [other Asian] women do other activities but they weren't interested, so my wife stopped because it felt like intruding.*
- ☞ *Lots of people keep their heads down and don't want to be identified as a Jew. Most people I know are struggling but don't want to make that public...many people don't feel safe to be identified as Jewish.*
- ☞ *[Asian Male] Many Asian women feel like prisoners in Britain. It's not like Bangladesh. Their husbands don't let them have any freedom.*
- ☞ *I don't see these [other Chinese] women socially, except work social occasions. Their kids are a bit rowdy - it's not good for my son. Also their [White] husbands are like mine - very forthright biased views. If I could meet the women without the husbands and their kids, it would be OK!*

Networking

Some people did however describe attempts to bring Black and Minority Ethnic people together. A number of participants described how introductions had been facilitated for them by the following:

- Health visitors and midwives
- Classes in English as an Additional Language for adults
- Mosques in Exeter, southern Devon and North Devon
- The Devon & Exeter Racial Equality Council
- An informal network of Brazillian friends and a Portuguese language teacher

- Indian Restaurateurs.

We also spoke to some of the people who have organised informal networks and events about their experience of doing so. Some described the difficulties in extending Exeter or regionally-based outreach into rural areas.

The Black Networking Group is a group that has its origins in a gathering of Black professionals in the Social Services Department. A member described how it was still striving to determine the extent of rural race issues and had spent much of its energy making the case for support and action in the Southwest as a region beyond Bristol, let alone in the rural hinterland. The membership was described as coming largely from the urban areas, and the difficulties in recruiting a wide membership was cited as a key problem in expanding the capacity of the organisation:

☞ *There's a funding paradox: The statutory sector says there's loads of funds but no Black and Minority Ethnic groups to take it up. The voluntary BME sector (like us) says it can't find any funds. It's partly because the BME sector needs help in bid writing and because Management Committees are usually not diverse enough because of lack of numbers.*

Members of the Sikh community and Islamic Centre for the South West described the problems of knowing where members of their faith community were in rural areas, and difficulties in keeping close contact with known members. In chapter 9 we look at participants' views about practicing their faith and the limitations on the distances people will travel to attend a place of worship.

The issue of distances that people will travel to access a service is a phenomenon that is understood well in Devon and illustrated with Devon based research on 'Travel To Work' areas and 'Natural Communities', which are both smaller than District sizes (ref. Devon County Council). Hence, where networking does spontaneously take place, it tends to happen in clustered areas rather than across Devon, and relies on locally based organisers. This is evident in the separate development of Muslim communities in Exeter, Torbay and northern Devon, and in Jewish activities centred on both mid and southern Devon.

Successful networking that has occurred in rural Devon, tends to be based on gathering for events - social and religious. As one participant put it:

☞ *The boys are always able to make eye contact or say hello to Black people they see. I'm also able to open conversation with Black people - but it's easier if I can offer something - like an event they'll be interested in.*

Events attracting sizeable numbers up to 100 people were described by members of the Jewish and Asian communities in mid and northern Devon. Adverts in University premises, and publicity through faith networks and word of mouth were helpful in attracting interest. One participant however described how public advertising can be personally hazardous, especially if the contact details are for a private, rather than organisational address:

☞ *We set up a [group] and put an ad in a free magazine. We got lots of abuse over the phone organised by the National Front. It was really nasty. We got phone calls all day and night. It was through the post and people driving by the door.*

Another participant described the results that can successfully be achieved through networking, but the limitations on the extent of informal word of mouth outreach.

☞ *2 years ago I nursed a Muslim guy and got chatting. He said that every year the Indian community have a function with food and music - they hire a hall and so on and the Indian shopkeepers and doctors are there. It's brilliant. At the Divali festival we all meet up around that time. It's so nice. 30 or 40 people come. Most people at the yearly function are consultants and professional people - one is a tax officer. It was organised by one of the doctor's wives this year. Last year a shop owner did it. We all pay for tickets. We also did it for Eid this year. I arrived in North Devon in 1985, but I only got to know other minority ethnic people because I nursed the man who invited me to the function [2000]. These networks depend on chance.*

Nationally, Trade Unions have been instrumental in supporting the networking and self-organisation of Black and Minority Ethnic members. In the course of this research, we approached a number of Unions to see if we could reach out to Black and Minority Ethnic members in this region. The Unions we approached had no county-based Black and Minority Ethnic member groups, and less than a handful of Black and Minority Ethnic members from Devon attending regional meetings. The problem for

Unions was one of identifying members through ethnicity monitoring. The nature of the problem was described variously as:

- lack of ethnicity monitoring and record keeping (ERKM) systems in place
- low response to ERKM initiatives
- low engagement of stewards as advocates of ERKM processes and as recruiters of Black and Minority Ethnic members
- general problems with recruitment

A Black Trade Union member described part of the problem:

☞ *If ERKM is not recorded when members originally applied, it's very difficult to get the info. Some don't want to respond to the update info and some don't want to answer the ERKM registration box. The constitution says that each branch should have a Black members self-organised group if they wish to have one. But there is no data to catalyse such a group.....There was a poor response [to invitation that was extended to set up a Union Black members group] as generally people don't contact us unless there's a problem we can address!*

Overall, only 15 of the 170 research participants were members of race or ethnicity-related organisations/ initiatives and only 3 were Trade Union members.

By contrast, when we asked people what would help to promote cultural diversity and good race relations, 31 people made suggestions relating to facilitation of networks and events, as the best way forward. This recommendation ranked second in the participants' list of next steps for cultural diversity work in Devon. Detail about this and a summary of existing network activity is described in chapter 12.

The difficulties in the way of spontaneous networking described so far in this chapter – are:

- rural distances
- diversity of minority ethnic demography
- absence of communities as markers on the demographic landscape
- lack of things in common to catalyse relationships

- diffidence about formation of relationships and the consequences of seeking out peer relationships
- absence of rurally based Black and Minority Ethnic sector infrastructure
- ERKM difficulties

These implications suggest that the need for community based outreach – following the model of this research - and facilitated networking, is evident as an important counterbalance to the isolation indices described at the beginning of this chapter. The way in which participants felt this work should be set in place is also described in chapter 12.

Membership of organisations and participation in community life

The extent to which Minority Ethnic people are networked into wider community life is also a factor determining the experience of isolation or belonging.

Table 5.5 People who said they:	Yes	No (or left the space in the questionnaire blank)	Sample size*
Are members of organizations	35%	65%	134
Participate in community life	41%	59%	134

* Information not available regarding complainant aid cases.

This analysis demonstrates that a significant part of our sample and, by indication, of the Black and Minority Ethnic population, feel detached, marginalised or excluded from society. Given the absence of peer structures and opportunity for minority ethnic friendship described above, the ability to develop links within a person’s local community is important, not only as a matter of social cohesion, but in order to overcome personal isolation and the knock-on effects that can result (loneliness, detachment from information and access to services etc.).

Moreover, the lack of participation in community life and structures represents the failure of society to both embrace diversity or to value the skills and potential within the Black and Minority Ethnic population.

Those who are involved in community life and organisations contribute to a great breadth of social life and welfare. The table below sets out the group-based activities that the participants were involved in:

Table 5.6

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arts/ leisure: Arts Society; Canoeing clubs; Football club; Golf Clubs; Keep fit club; Line dancing; Skittles Club; Surfing Club; Yoga Club
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Business/ Professional: Professional Institute; Professional Federation; Institute of Advanced Motoring; Tropical Agriculture Association; Business Association; Business Forum; Tourism Association; Hotelier’s Group; Chamber of Commerce; Trade Unions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Race & ethnicity related: Black Networking Group; Chinese School; Chinese Society; Racial Equality Council; Devon & Cornwall Refugee Support Council; Polish Eagles Club
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community: Community Association; Britain in Bloom; Community Development Trusts; Friend of a General Practice; Wives Group; Village Hall; Social Services organised groups; Hospital Volunteers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Political: Liberal clubs; Local Council; Stop The War Campaign; European Movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education: Parents Associations; School Clubs organiser; School Governor; Girl Guides
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advice Agencies: CABx; Victim Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Faith: Church committee; Islamic Centre for the South West
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agency Forums: Race Priority Action Teams; Public Body advisory panels; Agency and Regeneration advisory panels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Charitable/ fund raising: Hope UK; Overseas Aid Charities; Soroptemists; Lions Clubs

Other forms of leisure not necessarily involving membership were also described. 14 people said they use local pubs and restaurants, and a further 76 described leisure activities involving a huge range of sports and outdoor pursuits, entertainment at casinos, the theatre and cinema, and interests in bird-watching, skittles and bridge (a total of 68% of people had leisure interests – ‘n’ = 134). 12 people were unhappy about the lack of activities available in the more remote rural areas.

Most participants' descriptions of the way in which they participate in community life was based on the above memberships. However, people also described ways in which they become part of community life:

Table 5.7

Sport	Football teams and coaching; basket ball; cycling; walking; jogging; swimming; badminton; golf; dance; running a pony club.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ <i>Visiting pubs and chatting to people we meet.</i> ☞ <i>Talking to our customers, talking to our neighbours.</i> ☞ <i>We live in a cul-de-sac and used to have get-togethers, tea parties and a tenant's committee. But this finished in the last 3 years because some of the members fell out. I play skittles every week and go to the pubs... Our sons are very popular in the community and are always out. The phone is always ringing for them. They're friends with everyone in the town. They go to the local pub and watch football matches and play snooker.</i> <p>Taking part in community barbecues; pub quizzes and games; coffee mornings.</p>
Village & market town life.	<p>Attending Parish Council meetings; getting involved in local initiatives and community planning; regeneration initiatives; using local shops and post offices; attending Church services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ <i>Hectic participation in community life – church, choir, gardening club.</i> ☞ <i>[Young person] I'm on the committee about the park in the village. We were given a piece of land by people doing a housing development but it's not very big. The committee wants it to be for the whole village not just the kids and wants to put in a gazebo and football and swings. The committee is a sub-committee of the parish council. The local shop keeper said I had to be on the committee. I represent my age group with one other friend. It's a nice community -everyone knows each other and are friendly.</i> ☞ <i>Unfortunately I don't participate much in the Village I live in, as both my husband and I work, but I do try and participate in fund raising for the school where my</i>

	<i>children attend. I mainly spend time with my family, going for walks around the village and participating in my children's activities and socialising.</i>
Education & youth	Several people described their contribution to the community as volunteer youth workers, fundraising for schools.
Care work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ <i>I do hospital visiting - for all people. I picked this up from my Dad in Tanzania who visited people in Hospital.</i> <p>Baby sitting; caring for the elderly.</p>
Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ <i>I assist with any problems individuals may have, audit local accounts of community groups. I try and keep work and social activity separate, although I can assist people with a lot of info - or where they can find info.</i>
Voluntary	<p>Charity shop volunteers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ <i>I did voluntary work with a charity shop in town for 7 years – so I got to know people. I can walk down the street and people know me.</i> ☛ <i>My wife has also done translation for the local community linking Charity.</i>
Fund raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ <i>The company sponsors local clubs.</i> ☛ <i>I get involved in fundraising activities for the village, for example the roof for the church or the village hall in the neighbouring village.</i> ☛ <i>We - as my business partners - raise money for charity and like to do anything that helps the community.</i>
Work & business.	<p>Many people saw their business or work as a means of contributing to community life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ <i>[Show woman] Fairs!</i> ☛ <i>I work for a voluntary sector transport charity so I know lots of people - I feel part of the community.</i> ☛ <i>My work partner and I are like social workers - lots of people have problems and talk to us at the market. Lots of older people need someone to talk to - there are lots of lonely people and people with learning disabilities. People feel better because they're being listened to. I'm not involved in the community - I was brought up like that. 'We look after ourselves and we don't attack other</i>

people ' - it's a famous saying.

☞ *I provide a restaurant takeaway which serves good food to people.*

☞ *I meet people through the business. I'm not involved in other groups.*

☞ *[Via youth-work] – I'm too busy with this to be involved in other activities.*

We also spoke to 4 clergy members/ leaders of different faiths, who also expressed their participation in community life in terms of their work.

Participants also provided a number of indications about the things that can prevent or impede participation in local groups and activities. In summary, those pointers include:

- Lack of participation in democratic structures.
- Dislike of committees/ bureaucracy.
- Experiences in other cultural settings leading to generally preconceived reservations about participating in organisations.
- Exclusion by virtue of village life being intertwined with Church life.
- Lack of time.
- Negative experiences of settling into the community, including racism, and the impact on feeling at home in the community.
- Shyness and fear of cultural and linguistic problems.

Some of the participants' comments help to illustrate these factors:

☞ *Voter apathy is another problem – people think Parish Councils are like church council on the Vicar of Dibley. But District Councils have all the power – power needs devolution to parish/town councils if they are to be effective. Minorities need more encouragement to get involved in democratic structures. This happens more in big cities where Black and Ethnic Minority people are accepted and higher profile.*

☞ *I haven't joined any Parties at all. [Chinese]*

☞ *I don't like committees - lots of waffle and no action. I prefer concrete things to do.*

☞ *I know about the local arts society but I didn't join because I would be*

under them - no more me.

- *My life is work and home - I tend to be a home person. It's the same for my husband too. We tend not to socialise.*
- *There are lots of local activities based around the church - the local Guilds-women, the Mother's Union, the Women's Institute, but I can't join because I'm Jewish.*
- *No time to socialise.*
- *No. Too busy running the restaurant.*
- *There's no time to be involved in the community – I would like to but have 2 jobs (to pay off the student loan and because of low wages).*
- *I'm not involved in other activities. I work 12 hour shifts and I'm too tired to do anything else except look after our daughter.*
- *I haven't got involved in village life because work has kept us busy. I joined the karate club but got hassled by young lads on the way to training sessions. We'll probably get to know more parents through toddlers groups. I'd like to get the village involved in a community environment project. But it will take a while.*
- *Asians 'are backwards in coming forwards', but this is because memories of Enoch Powell etc stick in people's minds.*
- *Black people are very suspicious of any approaches to them because of isolation.*
- *Devon's beautiful, but there's nothing here- you can't live on a view. It's a total desert. When my children are here on holiday I wouldn't have a single person to ring for help or a cup of sugar. It's not for want of trying. I've joined the U3A - utterly useless - nobody ever spoke to us. It was very cliquey. I would love to play bridge - I've joined 2 or 3 groups but people are always standoffish and rude.*
- *I can't get involved in the community because I'm not confident - I'm shy- and because of language and I'm worried about offending people. I'm very easy going but I don't want to hurt people [ref. worries about making social faux pas because of cultural differences on 'polite' behaviour]. I don't want to be more social. I want to stay at home. I like to invite people here for food and I like to entertain.*
- *People in restaurants don't get involved in the community. Even in Hong Kong. Even in Hong Kong they don't get involved in campaigns. Don't care about politics or maybe scared. For many people the worst thing about life here is that there is no time - they are too busy*

working 10am till 12 midnight 7 days a week. They don't even have time to play golf. Their leisure is TV and video and horse racing - they go to the betting shop. Lots of people gamble in Hong Kong. Restaurant people have family in London. The restaurant people in town say hello to each other but they are competitors so they don't get to know each other. Also they're all busy. Lots of young people want to get out of the restaurant trade because of the long hours. They only do this if they do well at school.

- ☞ *When I decided to stay in the UK I didn't realise the difficulty of getting to know English people - you invite them into your home but they don't invite you back. I also feel that the real locals are also feeling discriminated against by incomers like retired colonels and so on. One of the worst things about Devon is the 'them and us' attitude of the 'Colonel' incomers and the conflict it produces in communities. Recent incomers try and pull rank over me.*
- ☞ *To settle in is to have a job I like to do. It's if I can talk to everyone and have made friends with local people - becoming part of the community. I feel settled in town but I didn't in the villages. People in the villages are not so open minded. So I didn't get involved in things.*
- ☞ *I feel it took many years to be accepted into the community as one of the few brown faces around here! I had to work hard to be accepted and felt a lack of confidence about myself. People are friendly once they know and trust you. My definition of feeling at home is: Having a good support network, local people being friendly, being involved. It took 7 years to feel this way.*
- ☞ *Parochial attitudes one of the bad things about living here. They're not very welcoming to an outsider and especially a foreign one. My definition of feeling at home is feeling very comfortable and welcome - I still don't feel this way after 25 years!*
- ☞ *My definition of being at home is not worrying about the windows being smashed in at night - I still don't feel at home.*

Levels of ability in English language: a factor in isolation ?

Assessing language capabilities is a subjective business unless measured against standardized tests. However, the majority of the participants were known to the researcher or to case-workers who could add observation notes to participants' own description of their language skills. The written

questionnaire responses also provided a means of assessing language skills (since most of the responses were narrative).

The description ‘good’ usually indicated the ability to be able to hold extensive conversations on a range of issues. ‘Poor’ tended to describe participants who struggled severely with reading and writing and with making themselves understood except for within limited social conversation or vocabulary sets, or spoke no English.

The participant data shows that for those people who do not have a strong command of English, language can be a factor in causing isolation and impeding connections into the local community.

Table 5.8

People who were isolated by poor ability to communicate in English and stated that they:	No. of people	% of total no. of people whose standard of English was described as ‘poor’.
Did not participate in community life (or left that section of questionnaire blank)	22	69%
Were not members of organisations (or left that section of the questionnaire blank)	19	60%
Did not have any non-co-ethnic friends (or left that section of the questionnaire blank)	24	75%

Conversely, these figures also indicate that a significant portion of people whose English was described as poor, do manage to participate in some community activity.

Whilst the participant data confirms that poor English does have a compounding impact on social isolation, it also demonstrates that the majority of our participant sample did in fact have good English speaking abilities. This result should be contrasted with other key data in chapter 4 - for example, the fact that the great majority of our sample were born overseas, and English is spoken as a first language by just a small minority of the participants.

Table 5.9

'n' = 170	1st	fluent	good	Poor	Unknown	Accent (where known)
No.	6	79	42	32	9	(58)
%	4	46	25	19	5	(34)

The data indicates that the majority of participants had fluent or good English skills. The data also suggested that accents figured in the way English was spoken across the range of competencies - several fluent speakers spoke with accented English.

A range of outreach methods was used during the research to engage the participation of English as an Additional Language (EAL) speakers (see chapter 2). Of these, successful outreach routes included:

- contacting Further and Higher Education institutions that recruit from overseas
- working through the County EAL Adult Education Co-ordinators
- sending out translated questionnaires to foreign food restaurants
- enlisting the help of a Chinese Housing Association providing a scheme for Chinese elderly including those who had moved from rural Devon.

However, the full gamut of language skills was found across nearly all our participant sources.

When we examined the experience of people whose English language skills were described as 'poor', the analysis in the following table emerged:

Table 5.10

Isolation Index Score	Frequency for whole sample	Frequency among people with English described as 'poor'.
0	4	
1	16	
2	15	3
3	32	8
4	27	6
5	26	7
6	19	3
7	14	3

Notes:
The portion of our sample who spoke poor English had a multiple-isolation-score profile roughly similar to the distribution across the whole sample. Their average score was just over 1.5 points higher

8	9	1	than the total sample individual average (of which one point is accounted for in the 'poor English language ability' score).
9	7	1	
10	1		
11	0		
12	0		
13	0		
14	0		
Average	4.3	5.8	

So we identified that, for those with difficulties in speaking English, the multiple isolation score is amplified only marginally above the average, but that most of these participants experienced at least two layers of isolation in addition to language difficulties.

This suggests that whilst information support such as interpretation, translated materials and in particular, English language tuition is an important and valuable measure in addressing isolation experienced by people whose English language skills are limited, the other factors that bring about isolation need to be addressed simultaneously. (See below).

With respect to provision of written and translated information, the experience of conducting the research threw up some interesting points. Advice picked up from members of the foreign food industry, from the Devon & Cornwall Chinese Association and Tung Sing Housing Association flagged up that that many of the people with whom they work:

- a) won't pay much attention to written information and
- b) sometimes struggle to read it, not only in English but also in a mother tongue.

We certainly found that it was only the minority of the respondents (33%, excluding case-work related data) who participated in response to written information. Moreover, significant effort had been invested in contacting most of these participants individually on the phone or in person before distributing questionnaires, to explain the research purpose and build interest. Also, questionnaires were translated into Bengali and Chinese and made available to all participants potentially familiar with those languages. However, only 2 people used this facility and responded in their mother tongue. Whilst some others did use translated questionnaires, they chose to write their responses in English. The majority of the participants chose to participate in person, rather than to make a written response.


A number of reasons for the reluctance to engage with written material were suggested:

- Speaking, writing, reading and understanding are distinct skills in all languages and competency in one does not necessarily correlate to the other.
- People who speak several languages may well speak well in one language, and write better in another or sometimes not at all.
- Immigrants who have lived in Britain for a long time may well have lost some country of origin language skills and strengthened in English competency.
- Many people who have limited English skills may not have had access to English as an Additional Language education.
- Reference to written material may not be a strong cultural norm for many immigrant families in the way that paper based information is a function of daily consumerism in the UK.
- Written information may be perceived as coming from an authority and regarded with suspicion.
- Many people are too busy to read written information that they have not solicited.
- In Britain - a country awash with written media - it can be difficult for people who do not speak English as a first language, to scan and pick out relevant information.
- People feel more confident to engage with people they know through a face to face relationship rather than through written media.

As a consequence, translated information is likely to be useful mostly when it is information to which an individual has been sign-posted as relevant, and when the provider is sure that a person has reading and writing skills in the translated language. Sign-posting through oral communication therefore becomes a key issue. There is a heavy predominance in British culture to make services and choice available through written information. This in itself can be a barrier, affecting in particular people who have limited English skills (especially elderly immigrants, recent immigrants working in low pay employment e.g factories, restaurants, and women who have come from overseas to live with UK based partners), some members

of the Travelling community, and those with limited literacy skills in their first language.

To reach these people, a change in information culture is needed, based on providing different communication routes. A key to this is to have networks designed to reach out to isolated people, through which information can be communicated orally. Another key measure is to emphasize to public servants in the community that provision of interpreters and extra help in coping with written material is needed.

 [Asian participant] *I have some Asian Mozambican employees - their father doesn't speak any English and they don't speak much - they speak Portuguese. They have a housing problem. I help people fill in forms - they're horrendous especially for people who don't speak good English. They should be easy to fill in like passport forms. Agencies need too much information and it's too complicated - people get them every 6 months!*

Further issues relating to language and communication are covered in chapter 8 that looks at education for adults and children for whom English is an additional language. Further recommendations about access to information and services are also made directly by the participants in chapter 12.

Summary: isolating factors, inclusion measures.

There were 6 themes contained within the isolation index in this chapter, all of which correspond with social inclusion measures, summarised in Table 5.11 below. For more detail on the way in which participants recommended that these measures should be addressed, see chapter 12.

Table 5.11

	Theme	Measures
1	Language	<p>Change in information culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information sharing based on rural outreach Black and Minority Ethnic networks ● Provision of one to one support by public administrators ● Sign-posting to appropriately provided translated

		<p>materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provision of interpreters where needed (without inappropriate reliance on family members) ● Better understanding of language needs ● Recognition that translated material is not the 'be all and end all' of outreach to the Black and Minority Ethnic population.
2	Negative experiences of life in Devon	<p>Counter racism measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Race equality and cultural awareness staff training ● Public awareness raising ● Opportunities for deconstruction of stereotypes and building of one-to-one relationships
3	Rurality	<p>Rural outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commitment on the part of agencies and inclusion initiatives to extend work into rural areas. ● Means by which people can engage with agencies safely – e.g. through rural networks.
4	Friendship and family	<p>Peer support/ networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased opportunities for Black and Minority Ethnic people to establish co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic social relationships.
5	Participation in community life	<p>Membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Efforts on the parts of community organisations to make their activities welcoming towards Black and Minority Ethnic people.
6	Women and Elderly	<p>Multiple Minority Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally appropriate initiatives that reach out specifically to women and elderly people.

This handbook and supporting tools ✂ can be accessed at www.DevonREC.org