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Background

The report *"It's Silent: Race, racism and safeguarding children"* by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel explores the impact of race, ethnicity, and culture on multi-agency practice in cases where children have suffered serious harm or died. It includes findings from 40 rapid reviews and 14 Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews involving children from Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage backgrounds. The report highlights the increased prominence of race, racism, and racial bias in serious case reviews, referencing past inquiries like the deaths of Jasmine Beckford (1985), Tyra Henry (1987), and the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (2003). Race and racism remain largely unexplored in safeguarding reviews and there is a lack of attention to race, ethnicity and culture by practitioners. The report calls on all involved in safeguarding children to address these issues and reflect on how effectively they challenge practice.

2

Why it matters

The report identified that reviews do not consistently explore the ways in which race, ethnicity and culture may influence practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children. There was a very evident silence about racism and a hesitancy to name it and the ways that it can be manifested. This meant that the safeguarding needs of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families were too often rendered invisible in both practice and the system for learning from reviews. Understanding race, ethnicity and culture in safeguarding practice is essential for understanding the diverse experiences of children and families, addressing disproportionality, mitigating bias and stereotypes, building trust and promoting equity and inclusion.

3

Information

The report identifies that children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritages often possess a higher number of vulnerability factors (for example, experience of bullying, inadequate provision of food and internet access) than white children. Reviews identified several service barriers that impacted on engagement, including families' fear of engaging with professionals, experiences of racism in predominantly white communities, and language barriers. There is a need for services to challenge thinking about barriers and to consider their role and responsibilities in enabling more accessible and responsive services that better meet the needs of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children.

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Learning from the report includes Intersectionality, Invisibilisation & Adultification. The concept of 'invisibilisation' refers to the process by which certain individuals/groups are rendered invisible, and the subsequent obscuring of this invisibility (Herzog, 2017). The report highlighted a myriad of ways in which the race and ethnicity of children was not recognised, appropriately explored, or understood by practitioners or reviewers. Silence around race and racism results in practitioners not having a full understanding of the lived experiences of children and limits recognition of the child's vulnerability.

5

This review shines a powerful light on the ways in which children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds can be hyper-visible to services when engaging in behaviour considered to be harmful or suspicious, while highlighting the apparent invisibility of a child requiring protection.

An example of this dichotomy can be seen in relation to a child from a Black Caribbean background who was frequently stopped and searched by the police. The child had witnessed the murder of their friend and subsequently began wearing protective clothing; however, this was viewed by professionals as suspicious. The review further noted that the child themselves sustained injuries from a knife, however the child was viewed as a cause of harm as opposed to a victim.

6

What to do

There needs to be commitment and resolve to learn and work differently, including

- Increase focus on the voice of black, Asian and mixed heritage children in reviews
- Understanding of the vulnerabilities of black, Asian and mixed heritage children
- Understanding the meaning of community within the context of each child
- Recognition of service engagement barriers
- The role of faith and religion
- Creating the right conditions for open and safe reflection

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Questions to consider

1. As a practitioner, do you feel confident that you understand the impact of race, culture and ethnicity on the experiences of children and families?
 2. As a Safeguarding partnership, do we create conditions that empower practitioners to have conversations with children and families about race and identity?
 3. Do we have local strategies and approaches to addressing race, racism and racial bias in our work with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children?
 4. Do we have appropriate internal structures in place to support practitioners to recognise, discuss and challenge internal and institutional racism?
- Link to report:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-racism-and-safeguarding-children>

