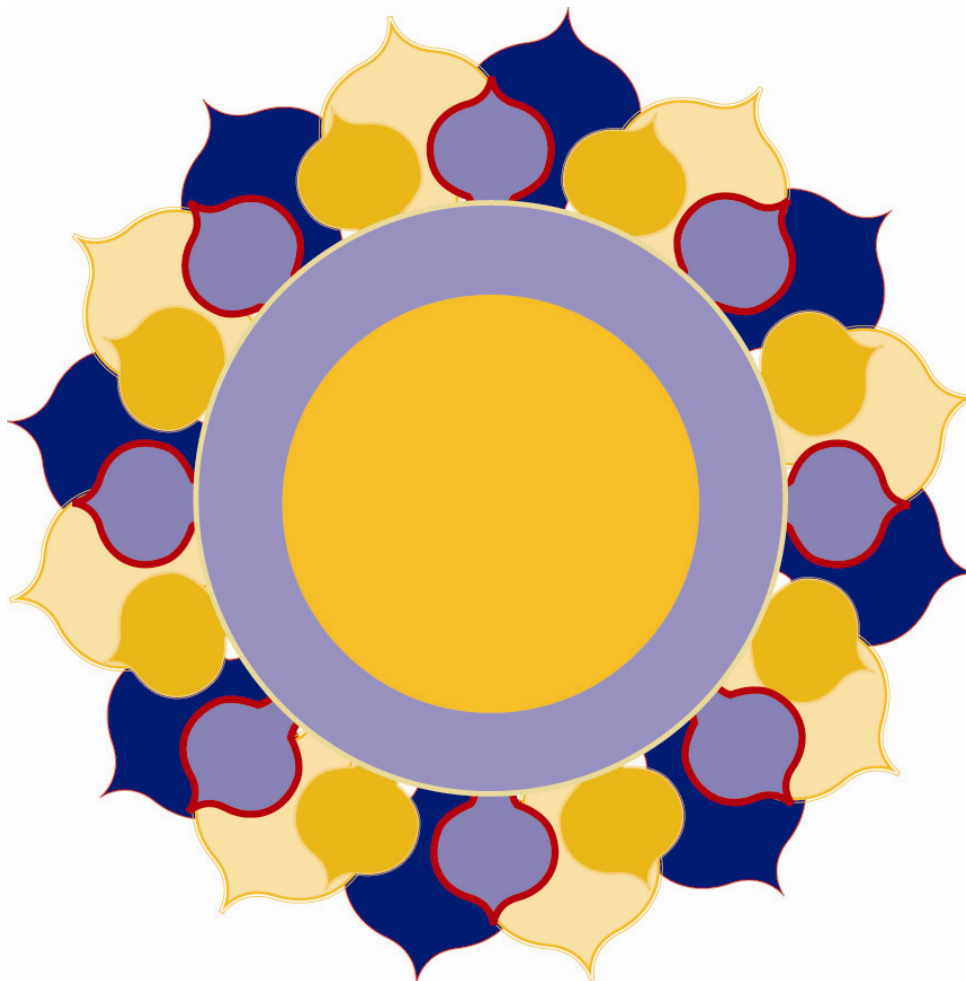


Recovery and people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities in Edinburgh

Summary Report from the Minority Ethnic Mental Health Project



**Outside the Box Development Support
May 2008**

About this report

This report has come from a project looking at the experiences of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Edinburgh.

It describes the points raised by people who are in touch with the Minority Mental Health Project and have used mental health services.

The project brings together 3 smaller projects, based at the NHS Lothian Minority Ethnic Mental Health Project, Men in Mind and Saheliya, which is a women's project. There will also be reports covering the other parts of the project.

About the people who took part

10 people asked to take part in this project. Most of the interviews were just with the person who used services. Two people wanted to have a joint meeting with their main carer – for one person this was his wife and for the other person it was his mother.

The people who took part included men and women and they covered a wide age range. They came from different ethnic communities. Some had lived in Scotland since childhood, while others had moved here as adults. Most had been in touch with mental health services for many years.

What people told us: What helps you keep well?

Many of the points raised around what keeps people well are similar to those raised by other people living in Scotland.

People also raised points that reflected their experience around their culture and around their experience of being a member of a minority community.

Most people mentioned the same things as keeping them well:

- their family and friends
- work or education
- having a structure to their day or week
- keeping well physically – and with it having good food
- having a nice place to live
- looking after themselves

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- having options and choices
- enough money, and help with money problems if this was an issue
- supportive GP and other support from mental health services
- their faith and contact with other people through places of worship
- ways to manage symptoms, including medication, relaxing and meditation
- exercise, fresh air
- opportunity to look towards the future
- having a balance between different aspects of life
- getting away from an anti-racist environment.

“Getting out of the house for coffee or to a library, meeting friends.”

“Thinking positive thoughts and caring for my daughter helps me feel good.”

What people told us: What does recovery mean to you?

There was one person who found the term recovery unhelpful because it reinforced the links with illness. Everyone else thought that recovery was a helpful concept and reflected their experience and their understanding of their health and well-being.

“I had never heard the recovery word. Today was the first time I heard it. I like it. It means recovering from mental health problems and from other difficult things that happen in your life.”

“Feeling able to cope – with my health and with the attitudes of other people when they are not welcoming.”

What people told us: How do your friends and family help you in your recovery, or to keep well?

People described how their family and friends helped them. Giving people opportunities to talk was the support that was mentioned most often. People also described practical ways in which family and friends help their recovery.

Some people talked about the ways in which it was difficult for family and friends to support them or offer more support.

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“Not focussing on illness but focussing on going forwards and enthusing me to continue to develop and grow. Helping me see all of me and not just the illness.”

“My whole family support has been very helpful. My Dad gives me hope. My Dad says that every day is not the same and he says do not give up, keep going. It gives me mental support. My Dad got me a business that helps me to build routine in my life.”

What people told us: What would help your friends or family, or other people you know, keep well?

People talked about what would help their family or other people in their community look after their own mental health and wellbeing.

“Looking after their selves - physical and mental health.”

“My family needs help to keep them going. My mum would appreciate some support as our community’s attitude is very negative towards mentally ill people.”

“Less responsibility. Too many people in our community, and probably other communities as well, take on a lot of responsibility – looking after their family, running a business, keeping in touch with family in Pakistan and spread far across the world. We don’t ask for help. Sometimes we need to say ‘no’ or ‘not just now’ for our own wellbeing. But that is not what we have learned.”

“More information for families about mental illness, in ways that ordinary people understand. I used to think it was just us who didn’t understand.”

What people told us: Contribution of wider community resources

We asked people if there was anything else they think would help people in BME communities living in this area in their recovery from mental health problems.

“Once a week I go to a session at a community drop-in centre which is for women. It is something to look forward to.”

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“More information about things like volunteering or activities that give you a chance to making a contribution or learn or just have fun.”

Sharing experience: messages for other people

Message for people living with mental health problems

“Mix with similar people so you feel you’re not alone, socialise.”

“Find out what makes you laugh and be happy.”

“Remember that it takes time to recover from an illness – mental illness and from a physical illness.”

Messages for friends and families, or for the wider BME communities

“My message is don’t be afraid of mental illness. Don’t deny that it happens in our community. Don’t put off asking for help.”

“We all need to spend time with our families and friends. My parents worked very hard when I was young and did not have much time to spend with their children. I didn’t get much love and affection from them. I think that is may be why I am not confident with people. I try to enjoy looking after my children now as I want them to be happy and confident in the future.”

“An anti-stigma campaign would be useful to change attitudes and increase understanding about mental health.”

Messages for mental health services which provide support

“Work out if people feel conscious of their race, is this a barrier for them? If so, what can you do to welcome them and help them feel more comfortable?”

“More people who listen, sympathetic ears.”

“It would make a big difference if there were people who take an interest in all of my life.”

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“This illness can come to anybody. The NHS needs to tell people about illness so they can understand. That will help recovery.”

What happens next

We will hold an event at which more people can feed in their experiences and give their ideas on what can help make things be better.

The report will be used in many different ways.

- The Minority Ethnic Mental Health Project and the other partner projects can draw on the points raised here as part of planning how they will continue to support people from BME communities who experience mental health problems.
- Mental health services can draw on the experiences of people from BME communities in Edinburgh to help them develop good services which work well for everyone.
- National bodies will be able to draw on the experiences and ideas here when developing work across Scotland in the future.

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