Q: Is there a higher prevalence of mental distress within Black and minority ethnic communities?

Ethnic origin has only recently begun to be recorded in official statistics, including hospital episode statistics and figures for detentions under the Mental Health Act. According to the ONS administrative problems mean that these figures are not yet reliable. However, much existing research shows that certain groups, notably African Caribbean and Irish people, are over represented within psychiatric hospitals.

The Mental Health Task Force Project showed that African Caribbean males were over-represented amongst those formally detained at in-patient units and were more likely to be ‘taken to a place of safety’ under the Mental Health Act 1983. It was also shown that they were up to three times more likely to be sectioned than their white counterparts. In addition, the high numbers of African Caribbean people being diagnosed with schizophrenia is well documented in the research. One report states that African Caribbean men have 4.3 times, and women 3.9 times the rate for white people for first admission with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Psychiatrist Suman Fernando states that young African Caribbean men are up to ten times more likely to be sectioned than their white counterparts.

Of all groups, Irish people living in Britain have the highest rates of admission to psychiatric hospitals. They are more than twice as likely to be hospitalised for mental distress than their native-born counterparts.

The findings for mental health problems in Asian people are not consistent. Some studies show higher hospital admission rates for this group than for the British born white population. However, the balance of evidence from hospital admission rates, GP consultation rates and community surveys, suggests that Asian people have rates of psychiatric morbidity equal to or lower than the white indigenous population.

Accurate statistics relating to Chinese and Vietnamese communities are not currently available."

Mind Information Unit Mental Health Statistics 6 – The Social Context of Mental Distress (Mind Publications, 2001)

Source: www.mind.org.uk (9/18/01 – no longer on site)