THE CHILD
SAFEGUARDING
PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL

“It’s Silent”: Race, racism and safeguarding children

Panel Briefing 4

March 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Race, racism, and racial bias have, in recent years, had increased prominence in serious case reviews and their 'successor' reviews, rapid reviews and local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs). These powerful social determinants of children's lives have been explicitly referenced or considered as factors influencing how professionals identify, acknowledge and intervene in the lives of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families when harm is present.

1.2 However, consideration of these issues is not new as is well evidenced in the inquiries and reviews following the deaths of Jasmine Beckford (London Borough of Brent, 1985) and Tyra Henry (London Borough of Lambeth, 1987) and subsequently in Lord Laming's report following the public inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (2003). The Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report highlighted the importance of considering the impact of racial bias and how this can undermine the effectiveness of public agencies to protect Black children. The report further shone a powerful light on how perceptions and assumptions about race, ethnicity and culture influenced professionals' responsiveness to Victoria, inhibiting their ability to address concerns about her welfare and safety (Laming, 2003).

1.3 Victoria's tragic death had a profound impact on the English safeguarding system and led to significant policy and practice reforms, including the enactment of the Children Act 2004. Twenty years later, the impact of racism and racial bias on child protection practice continues to be identified, questioned and raised as an issue (Bernard & Harris, 2018; Davis, 2019; Davis & Marsh, 2020; Davis, 2022; Jassell, 2022).

1.4 The Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review undertaken by City and Hackney Children's Safeguarding Partnership about Child Q (2022) brought another example of the urgency for safeguarding professionals to consider the extent to which racism reverberates across the safeguarding system and impedes our collective ability in how we safeguard children.

1.5 All those involved in safeguarding children, including the Panel, have a responsibility to address these issues and reflect on how effectively we invite challenge about practice. Considered and critical examination of these issues should be integral to all our work to protect and help children. Without robust analysis, we will not learn, change and improve how we safeguard and protect Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children.

1.6 In producing this report, the Panel has been very mindful that we have much learning and work to do to address this important aspect of safeguarding practice. It is important that the Panel, like other bodies, scrutinises carefully when and how race, racism and racial bias shapes and influences our decisions and practice.

The purpose and aim of this report

1.7 This thematic review examines the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on multi-agency practice where children have suffered serious harm or died. It includes findings from 40 rapid reviews and 14 LCSPRs involving children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds.

1.8 The Panel's own discussions and conversations with safeguarding practitioners and leaders, together with evidence from other reviews, framed and guided the key questions posed within this review, namely:

- what are the characteristics of the lives and needs of children and their families who are the focus of reviews?
- what is the learning about how agencies respond to their needs?
- have reviews focused on and identified these issues and wider learning, and if so, how?

1.9 This report highlights that some progress has been made in understanding how race, ethnicity and culture can inform practice responses to children and families. However, our analysis reveals too few examples of these issues being considered in any depth or specificity. This indicates that there is a need to surface and challenge why there is such systemic silence and reticence in addressing and confronting these issues. It is clear too that more work is urgently needed so that safeguarding leaders and practitioners consistently consider, understand and take account of children's identity and heritage.

1.10 This review indicates that there is an imperative need to secure changes in safeguarding practice and policy, including when undertaking learning reviews following serious incidents when children have died or been seriously harmed. It is essential that these changes are secured to protect children from harm, both inside and outside their families. Leaders have a pivotal role in addressing discrimination and bias, and in creating the climate and conditions that supports active, conscious and consistent anti-racist practice. This necessarily involves multi-agency leaders and practitioners recognising and confronting racism, biases, stereotypes and discriminatory practices so that the importance of these issues is recognised and addressed. Importantly, this involves naming and identifying racism as an issue when it occurs or has been a consideration.

1.11 Analysis of evidence considered within this review brings into question the quality of learning about race and racism within reviews. There is a need to consider the commissioning process, the formulation of terms of reference and how race and racism is discussed and explicitly named by independent authors and safeguarding panels.

1.12 Language is important and this analysis has highlighted the importance of critically scrutinising the use of terms like 'cultural competence' and 'adultification' to ensure they have meaningful application in the context of the life and experience of a specific child and family. It is important that terms like these are not used as superficial labels that can minimise, or obscure issues about racism and bias and mask their impact in safeguarding practice. We have included definitions for the language and terminology used within this report in Appendix A.

Learning from the Panel's work

1.13 The Panel's previous national and thematic reviews, together with our annual reports, have identified some key messages around the quality of learning emerging from reviews about the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on practice responses and decision-making. Themes within previous reports include:

- inconsistent recording of ethnicity within reviews, while recognising that this has improved over time (CSPRP, 2024a; CSPRP, 2024b)
- a lack of direct attention to, and analysis of, the impact of race, ethnicity, and culture on practice (CSPRP, 2022e; CSPRP, 2021; CSPRP, 2024b; CSPRP, 2024d)
- a failure to recognise or name racism, bias and wider systemic experiences of discrimination (CSPRP, 2024d)

1.14 Where practice learning has emerged from reviews, this has tended to focus on highlighting a reticence by professionals in discussing ethnicity with children and families directly (CSPRP, 2024b); inconsistent identification and response to child sexual abuse, differentiated by ethnicity group; the presence of adultification (CSPRP, 2024a; CSPRP, 2024d); and missed opportunities to exercise professional curiosity in response to injuries (CSPRP, 2024d).

1.15 Notwithstanding such learning, reviews continue to address race, ethnicity and culture in a limited and superficial way, with a general absence of attention to the presence of racism and bias in safeguarding practice. This must be of concern, raising questions about how and why, 20 years on from publication of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report, issues about race, racism and ethnicity remain so marginalised, understated and under-explored in safeguarding reviews. This report seeks to engage with some of these questions since they are so very crucial to improving professional practice with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children.

What needs to change?

1.16 This report suggests that there is a need for a sea change in how we address issues about race, culture and ethnicity in safeguarding practice. This is a vital pre-requisite of better protecting and helping Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children from harm both within their families and in the extrafamilial environment.

1.17 This conclusion is based on three important findings from this analysis. Firstly, the analysis has evidenced a prevailing and powerful silence in talking about race and racism. It is important to acknowledge that discussions about race and racism can, and will be, confronting and difficult. They are, however, very necessary. Racism is insidious, pervasive and deeply embedded in society. The recognition of racism and racial bias as a societal issue is a crucial step in reflecting on, and learning more about how Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children are safeguarded, helped and protected.

1.18 We want this report to prompt and provoke professional conversations about these silences. This is not simply to ask why there are such silences but, most crucially, to activate our safeguarding responsibilities to think about how we might need to work differently to address the myriad of ways in which race, racism and bias affect how we help and protect this group of children.

1.19 Secondly, leaders and practitioners need to develop their capacity to understand and use intersectional approaches to better address the safeguarding needs of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children (see Appendix D). A relatively novel concept in safeguarding practice and system, it can assist professionals to identify and consider better the effect of different and combined forms of oppression and disadvantage experienced by Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families (Bernard, 2022).

1.20 When talking about 'oppression', we are describing the force that allows, through the power of norms and systems, the unjust treatment or control of different groups of people, including children. Systemic and structural barriers relating to race and racism, but also those relating to gender and class, will shape and affect individual and collective experiences, resulting in disparities in education, healthcare, housing and employment outcomes (Davis, Allan & Hunter, 2024; Institute for Health Inequality, 2024).

1.21 An intersectional approach can foster richer curiosity and understanding both of individual children's lives and of safeguarding practice responses by taking account of how social identities related to race and racism, gender, poverty and class overlap and are woven together. It can help professionals better comprehend, consider and be more vigilant in their work with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families affected by different forms of oppression, discrimination and disadvantage.

1.22 Finally, the report seeks to increase system learning by sharing examples of good practice, as evidenced in learning reviews. It highlights some of the challenges and questioning taking place across safeguarding agencies. The Panel recognises the important work being undertaken in some safeguarding partnerships to address race and racism and to develop anti-racist practice approaches. This is important, however evidence from this analysis indicates that too often critical questions are avoided, evaded and sidestepped. This is not in the interests of children and families.

1.23 Children and families involved with safeguarding agencies will, in different ways, have direct and indirect experiences of racism, including through social exclusion, isolation, and communal, inter-generational and individual racial trauma (Bignall et al., 2022). It is vital therefore that the safeguarding system continually examines how these issues shape practice, decision-making processes, referral pathways, and importantly, the lived experiences of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families. Leaders have a crucial role to play in naming these issues and taking ownership of professional responsibilities to recognise and address race, racism and bias in safeguarding practice.

1.24 Reading this report may make some people feel uncomfortable. We encourage colleagues to lean into that discomfort, to understand the reasons behind it and not let it hinder or interfere with learning. Our responsibilities and focus as professionals must always be on protecting and safeguarding children from harm.

1.25 This report was undertaken on behalf of the Panel by Jahnine Davis and the VKPP Data Insights Team with support from the Panel member subgroup.[1]

1 The sub-group was chaired by Jahnine Davis, Panel member, who has extensive expertise in the issues considered in this thematic report. With support from other Panel members, Jenny Coles and Dale Simon, the sub-group have provided vital direction, guidance, and advice in the production of this report. Dr Debra Allnock and Sian Brown represented the DiT for this review.

2. Methodology

2.1 A qualitative, thematic analysis was conducted on a sample of 40 rapid reviews and 14 LCSPRs to explore themes related to race, ethnicity and culture, as well as the potential for racism and racial bias to have featured in practice reviews. Reviews were selected using a stratified random sampling approach, ensuring the inclusion of reviews involving children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage[2] backgrounds.[3]

2.2 This sample of rapid reviews and LCSPRs relates to incidents that took place between January 2022 and March 2024. The sample of serious incidents considered by LCSPRs were different to those considered within the sample of rapid reviews, except for one rapid review and LCSPR which had explored the same incident. Reviews were selected to ensure a range of socio-demographic characteristics and experience of contextual factors, such as children missing education, employment, or training, and children living in different types of family structures. Further details on the sample are provided in Appendix C.

2.3 A thematic qualitative analysis was undertaken on the sample of reviews. The analytical framework was informed by academic literature and the guidance and expertise of the Panel sub-group. There was a dual focus on the practice learning themes identified within reviews and on the approach taken by reviewers to identify learning. While race, racism and racial bias were key elements under exploration, related concepts such as ethnicity, culture and intersectionality also featured within our framework.

2 The sample of Mixed Heritage children reflects family compositions where at least one parent was Black or Asian, while the other parent was white.

3 The representation of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage groups within our sample was selected to align with the representation of these groups within the wider database, for the timeframe under consideration here. Please refer to Table 1 for a full breakdown. This database is maintained by the Data Insights Team on behalf of the Panel.

2.4 The key areas of focus within the framework included consideration of:

- the terms of reference and consideration of race/culture/ethnicity by the reviewer
- inequity in practice responses to children and families
- the child's voice and experiences captured by reviewers and practitioners, and how alternative communication methods were utilised
- recognition and understanding of risk and vulnerability, and provision of support
- intersectionality
- harmful practices and exploration of the meaning and relevance of religion and faith to children and families
- assumptions or biases within professional responses
- positive responses and missed opportunities identified within the review concerning race, ethnicity and culture by individual agencies and the multi-agency system
- the identification of learning points, with a specific focus on whether these were specific to race, ethnicity and/or culture
- the response letters provided by the Panel to safeguarding partnerships as these related to references to race, ethnicity, and culture

2.5 Further information regarding the analytical framework is included within Appendix D.

2.6 We held a roundtable event in October 2024 with a group of delegated safeguarding partners from different agencies and areas to explore the alignment of our findings with their practice observations and reflections. The roundtable event was particularly helpful in developing and framing the reflective questions included in this report. Further information regarding the reflective questions is available within Appendix E.

2.7 Several limitations to this research need to be highlighted. First, reviews provide, by their very nature, a deficit-based lens on multi-agency learning for improving safeguarding practice in that they follow on from a serious incident where a child has died or been seriously harmed. Additionally, rapid reviews are necessarily undertaken shortly after an incident has occurred, aiming to identify, collate and reflect on what has happened to establish quickly whether immediate safeguarding action is needed and to identify immediate learning.

2.8 As a result, rapid reviews often focus on immediately evident learning, including missed opportunities or shortfalls in practice; they are therefore less likely to highlight evidence about good practice. Although the Panel does sometimes see reference to what has been done well in multi-agency practice with a child and their family, this frequently lacks any depth or detail to support system learning.

2.9 Second, we did not set out to provide a comparative analysis of the learning from reviews relating to children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds compared to those about white children and families, or those from any other background. The focus here is on providing detailed exploration of the practices and experiences which are specific to children from non-white ethnic backgrounds. For a more comprehensive overview of practice responses to children from all ethnicity groups, please see the Panel's previous and latest annual reports (CSPRPa, CSPRPb, 2024).

2.10 While this thematic review broadly identifies some important learning about safeguarding practice with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and their families, we are very mindful that these children are not, and should not be seen as, a homogenous group. Individual children, and different ethnicity groups, will have unique daily life experiences and experience engagement with practitioners in many ways. To understand more clearly if, and where, disparities may exist, we undertook some limited comparative analysis to explore practice learning specific to each ethnicity group. This is discussed throughout the report, where relevant differences were apparent.

2.11 More detail on the methodology can be found in Appendix B.

3. About the children in focus

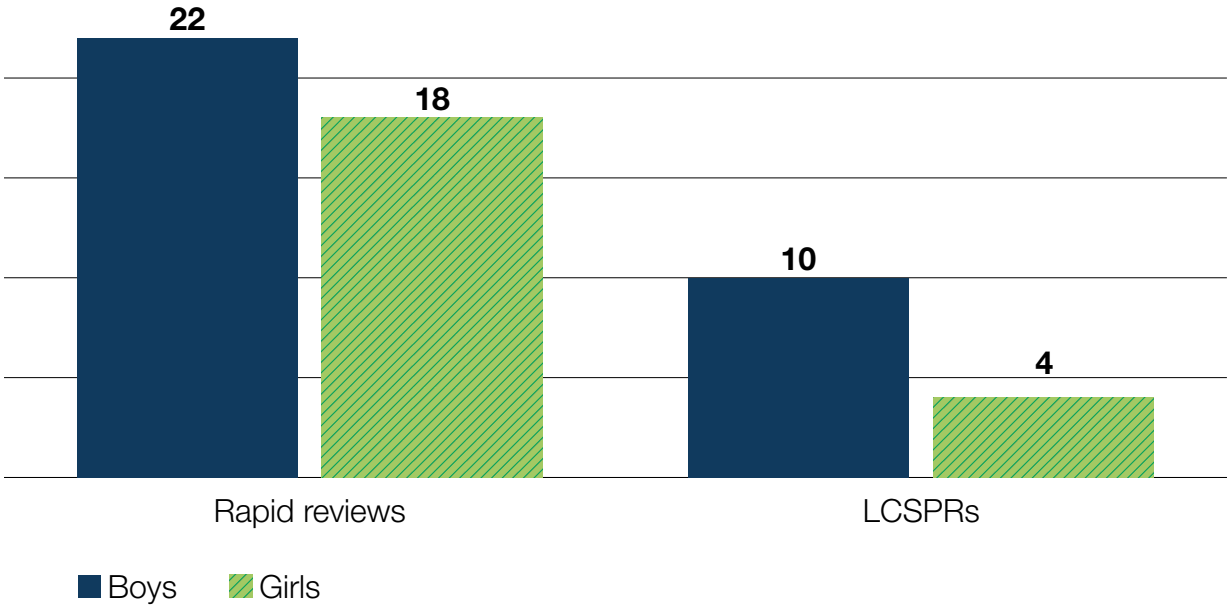
3.1 The selected sample of reviews concerned children and families from Black (15 reviews), Asian (14 reviews) and Mixed (25 reviews) Heritage backgrounds. Further detail of the breakdown by ethnicity group is provided in Table 1. This thematic review explored 54 reviews, which related to 53 children in focus, although an additional 21 children were mentioned in reviews (but were not the children in focus).

Table 1. The representation of children from Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage ethnicity groups, broken down by review type

Ethnicity	Selected sample of rapid reviews (N)	Selected sample of LCSPRs (N)	Total (N)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	**16**	**9**	**25**
White and Black Caribbean	7	5	12
White and Black African	3	1	4
White and Asian	2	3	5
Any other Mixed/ Multiple ethnic group	4	0	4
Black/African/Caribbean/ Black British	**11**	**4**	**15**
African	4	1	5
Caribbean	4	1	5
Any other Black background	3	2	5
Asian/Asian British	**13**	**1**	**14**
Pakistani	5	0	5
Bangladeshi	4	0	4
Chinese	1	1	2
Indian	2	0	2
Any other Asian background	1	0	1

3.2 Within the rapid review sample (40 reviews), there was a relatively even sex-split between boys and girls, as detailed within Chart 1. There was a greater proportion of boys within the LCSPR sample (see Chart 1), which reflected the proportion of boys within the wider population of LCSPRs from which we drew our sample.

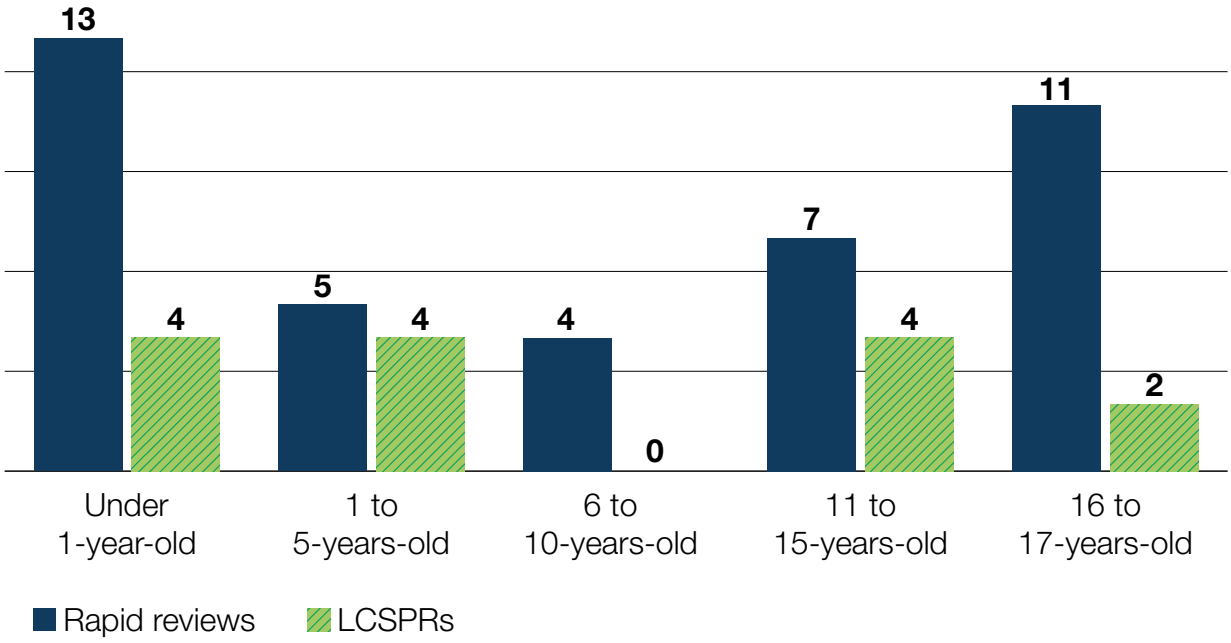
Chart 1. The representation of boys and girls within the sample, broken down by review type



3.3 Two reviews within the sample included children where their reported gender identity was different to their sex registered at birth. Furthermore, in an additional two reviews, the child in focus was reported to identify as LGBTQ+. However, we did observe a high level of missing data, and so it is possible that at least some of these characteristics were under-reported.

3.4 The ages of the children in focus ranged from 0 to 17 years (see Chart 2). There was a higher frequency of children under 1-year-old (17 reviews) and children aged 16 to 17-years-old (13 reviews), which was reflective of the age distribution of children within the wider population of rapid reviews and LCSPRs. This is in line with broader findings within the Panel's annual reports which suggest that babies and older children are particularly vulnerable to harm.

Chart 2. The ages of the children in focus within the selected sample, broken down by review type



3.5 The reviews sampled for this analysis importantly illustrate that many children who die or come to serious harm because of abuse and neglect have a range of additional, and sometimes complex, needs. Within 13 reviews, the child in focus was reported to have a disability; 11 reviews concerned neurodiverse children; and 14 reviews reported that the child in focus had a diagnosed and/or undiagnosed mental health condition.

3.6 The children in focus lived in different English regions, however, there was a higher frequency of children living in London (25 reviews; 51% of our sample) and Yorkshire and the Humber (7 reviews). The representation of London-based reviews within our sample is broadly representative of the representation within the wider sample of rapid reviews, with 44% of reviews concerning children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds submitted by London safeguarding partnerships.

3.7 Twenty-eight reviews in the sample related to the death of the child in focus. Several different likely causes of death were identified, with the most commonly reported being suicide (4 reviews), sudden unexplained death in infancy/sudden unexplained death in childhood (4 reviews), and fatal assault perpetrated by an individual unrelated to the child (4 reviews). All fatal assaults involved the stabbing of the child in focus. In 4 reviews, the cause of death was unclear at the time of the rapid review.

3.8 Twenty-six reviews involved serious harm to the child in focus. Non-fatal assaults were the most identified likely cause of harm (9 reviews). In 4 of these reviews, the harm was perpetrated by a family member, while in 5 of these reviews, the harm was perpetrated by an individual unrelated to the child.

3.9 A range of individuals were identified as the likely primary suspect of harm within the sample, illustrating that harm to children can be present both within and outside of the home. Most common were both parents/carers (10 reviews); the mother (10 reviews); or an individual that was known but unrelated to the child (8 reviews). In 20 reviews the child was being cared for by a sole parent/caregiver. Additionally, in 10 reviews the child was either missing education (4 reviews) or was identified as not in education, employment, or training (6 reviews).

3.10 More detail about the children in focus can be read in Appendix C.

4. How do reviews consider learning about race, racism and racial bias?

4.1 Race remains a largely unexplored factor in reviews concerning child death and significant harm. Historically, reviews of death and serious harm in England have not consistently reported the ethnicity of the child in focus and their families. Cowling & Garstang (2023) highlight this as a form of 'invisibilisation', whereby identity characteristics of minoritised groups are not acknowledged by those in authority.[4] Bernard & Harris (2018) and Bhatti-Sinclair & Price (2016), in their focused studies of serious case reviews, also highlighted the limited attention to race, ethnicity, culture, language and religion within reviews.

4.2 While there have been improvements over time in the inclusion and reporting of race and ethnicity in reviews since these earlier studies, we observed in our 2022 to 2023 Annual Report that this was not always translating into a thorough consideration of its impact on practice and decision-making (CSPRP, 2024a). This section of the report considers the practice of reviews in terms of their approaches to exploring the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families.

4.3 Reviews play a critical role in identifying, collating and distilling learning from serious incidents where children have died or been seriously harmed due to abuse or neglect. They are a key element in the architecture of the English safeguarding system, enabling reflection on how effectively agencies work together to help and protect children. This learning process seeks therefore to identify patterns in practice and areas for improvement. If aspects of practice, such as race and ethnicity are not addressed in reviews, there are likely to be corresponding limitations on the quality of learning and improvement. This, in turn, may have implications for children and families.

4 Invisibilisation is used in a variety of ways but can be defined broadly as the process by which certain groups or issues are rendered invisible or marginalised within society. This concept is often associated with oppressive practices such as racism, sexism, or ableism. These practices create 'zones of non-experience', effectively making the experiences and contributions of certain groups unseen or ignored (Herzog, 2017). https://indeterminacy.ac.uk/dictionary/invisibilisation

4.4 There are complexities that underpin rapid reviews and LCSPRs. While an individual lead author may be responsible for collating the learning and authoring the review report, there will usually also be a review panel established for each review, and safeguarding partners will have ultimate responsibility for the quality of the rapid reviews and LCSPRs. For this reason, when we refer to 'reviewer' in this report, we are not referring solely to the review lead author but rather to the constellation of individuals responsible for the production and sign-off of the report.

4.5 Before considering the general learning themes identified through this analysis, we present an example of an LCSPR that had explored the impact of race, culture and intersectionality on practice.

Case study 1

One LCSPR illustrates practice involving multiple children within a Black British family, of African heritage, who professionals believed were living under the sole care of their mother. This LCSPR not only identified some of the key practice themes identified as part of this analysis, but it also illustrates the challenges for reviewers in critically examining important learning for practice with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families.

The mother had experienced social care involvement in her own early life which was considered to have negatively influenced her perception of social care professionals as an adult. The family were living in difficult socio-economic circumstances and children's social care had had prior involvement with the child in focus' older siblings. Concerns were raised about the visibility of the children to professionals and the conditions of the home environment.

This LCSPR highlighted several important issues that are explored in further detail within this report, including:

Limited capture of the child's voice/experiences

Professionals lacked a clear understanding of the child's lived experiences and had limited direct contact with the children. When engagement did occur, this occurred in the presence of other family members and the children were not seen alone which resulted in professionals not understanding the full extent of neglect. Professionals were noted to experience significant difficulties facilitating service engagement with the mother and lacked the confidence to navigate service engagement barriers.

Evidence of stereotyping and bias

Professionals experienced difficulties challenging the mother's refusal to facilitate access to the children. The review referenced discussion with practitioners about the significance of the family's race with practitioners, including that the mother had been described as 'an articulate black woman' and seen to resist engaging with professionals. The language and description may be demonstrative of racial bias about, and blaming of the mother, taking focus away from what was happening to the children.

The review indicated that professional concern not to act oppressively may have meant professionals were particularly cautious when considering further intervention.

Framing of families

Framing service engagement in this way places the onus on parents themselves to facilitate engagement instead of locating responsibility within agencies to consider their own approaches in enabling engagement. The review primarily focuses on the challenges experienced by practitioners. Recommendations then focused on working with resistive parents. The review did not include any specific recommendations concerning race.

Limited holistic understanding of risk and vulnerability

Professionals lacked an understanding of the child's lived experiences and viewed incidents in isolation which limited their recognition of risk. While professionals had concerns, these were not clearly understood by individual professionals and across agencies.

Limited exploration of the child/family's cultural identity

The child and family's race and identity were not consistently considered within assessments or decision-making. There was also disparity among practitioners in terms of whether they considered the race of the family to be significant.

Outcome

Due to missed opportunities to see the children on their own, and challenges navigating and/or challenging the mother's refusal to facilitate access to the children, professionals did not have a clear sense of the concerns about the children and about the subsequent risk of harm.

Indeed, the review notes that practitioners sensed that "something was wrong", however they felt powerless to affect change for these children. Their focus was diverted to gaining access to the home rather than giving clear focus to what life was like for the children. This meant that the necessary professional support and intervention was not offered to the children and there were missed opportunities to safeguard and protect them.

Reflective questions for safeguarding partnerships

1. How do you ensure that practitioners and teams are equipped with the skills to navigate complex engagement barriers, as exemplified in the case study above?
2. Do you see examples where children and their families are framed in similar ways in your local area? How are narratives which can 'blame' parents and children for service engagement barriers, challenged and addressed?

4.6 The case study demonstrates that some reviews are seeking to explore matters of race within practice, including identifying, as this review did, specific learning points about race and bias. However, there were also clear opportunities to inquire more critically and in depth about how race and bias affected practice, acknowledging the complex circumstances within which practitioners work with families.

4.7 The Panel's analysis has highlighted that too often reviews miss opportunities for capturing the learning about the many ways that race and racial bias influence multi-agency practice. When such learning opportunities are missed, then this will not be carried through into clear review recommendations to highlight and specify the actions that need to be taken to better protect and help Black, Asian and Minority Heritage children.

4.8 We now explore key themes emerging from our analysis about approaches used in reviews to identify practice learning about race, ethnicity, and culture as this affects work with children and families.

Reviews are not consistently exploring the ways in which race, ethnicity and culture may influence practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children.

4.9 Our analysis has shown that reviews are not sufficiently or consistently exploring the different ways in which race, ethnicity and culture may feature in the lives of children and families, how this shapes their needs and, subsequently, how practice responds to these.

4.10 Most reviews (50) reported the child and family's ethnicity, but a small number of reviews (4 rapid reviews) did not.[5] Four LCSPRs included information regarding protected characteristics other than age and ethnicity, for example information about the child and family's religious identity, mental health diagnoses, sexual identity and/or information about disabilities. Ten rapid reviews provided a similar level of detail regarding protected characteristics.

4.11 When compared to earlier analyses of serious case reviews, which found high levels of missing ethnicity data (Sidebotham et al., 2016), such data is now much better evidenced in more recent rapid reviews and LCSPRs (see CSPRP, 2024a and CSPRP, 2024b). However, and consistent with previous Panel analysis of rapid reviews and LCSPRs (CSPRP, 2024a; CSPRP, 2024b), the lack of data concerning other aspects of the child and/or family's identity, such as the protected characteristics detailed above, significantly reduces the opportunity for reviewers to apply an intersectional lens within their analysis. This means that analysis within reviews lack a full understanding of the lives and circumstances of children and families who are from the most marginalised and vulnerable social groups (Cullen et al., 2021).

4.12 In some reviews (17), there was partial consideration of race, ethnicity and/or culture by reviewers.[6] In a similar way, as illustrated by the case study above, it was often the case that reviews raised surface-level attention to race or ethnicity but did not develop the analysis further. For example, one review noted that ethnicity had been inaccurately recorded by practitioners and highlighted the need for data to be accurate so that the right support could be provided and so that any inequities in service response could be addressed. However, the review did not consider the issues any further or explore, for example, whether the inaccuracy resulted in inequitable or inappropriate service provision and what impact this may have had on the child and/or their families.

4.13 This is but one example of many reviews which provided only limited exploration of wider inequity or barriers, related to race, ethnicity or cultural factors, which may affect how children and families accessed services. Significantly, there was a silence on these issues in 12 LCSPRs and 27 rapid reviews, with only 14 reviews within our sample referencing inequity or service engagement barriers concerning race, ethnicity, or cultural factors.

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5 For these reviews, the ethnicity data for the child was taken from the Serious Incident Notification (SIN).

6 For 17 reviews, researchers assessed that the review had considered race, culture, ethnicity in part. For 14 reviews, researchers assessed that these factors had been considered more consistently.

4.14 While reviewers sometimes acknowledged that practitioners had not thoroughly considered the impact of race, ethnicity and/or culture in their practice, detailed exploration of these factors within reviews was also often absent. This could indicate that safeguarding partnerships who are responsible for commissioning reviews and considering the terms of reference for LCSPRs (in conjunction with reviewers) may not always understand and grasp the relevance of race, racism and racial bias and its impact on practice in the review decision-making process.

4.15 We also examined whether there were any discernible differences between groups of children in this sample in the ways in which reviews explored matters of race, ethnicity and/or culture. In incidents involving Asian children, reviews are both less likely to consider the impact of race, ethnicity and/or culture on the patterns of abuse and neglect experienced by children, and more likely to overlook this compared to incidents involving children from Black and Mixed Heritage backgrounds. This suggests, at least within this sample, that the impact of race, ethnicity and/or culture on practice was not explored as robustly for these children compared to Black and Mixed Heritage children.

4.16 While this evidence must be considered tentative given the small sample size, it is a potentially important finding in the context of the under-representation of Asian children in serious safeguarding incidents (CSPRP, 2024a). The findings from this thematic analysis would seem therefore to align with previous research which has identified an under-representation of Asian children on child protection plans, suggesting that these children are less frequently identified as at risk and requiring protection (Akilapa & Simkiss, 2012).

There is a silence in reviews on the role of racism – whether internalised/ interpersonal, institutional or structural in nature – in service and practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families.

4.17 None of the reviews in this sample tackled, questioned, or considered if, and to what extent, interpersonal, internalised, institutional or structural racism factored in service and practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families. We recognise that it is difficult to identify evidence that racism factored in practice responses solely through a documentary analysis of reviews. However, Firmin and colleagues (2021), in their research on safeguarding Black young men impacted by extrafamilial harm, found that practitioners also fail to recognise or 'name' racism, even when doing so in dialogue about practice.

4.18 We identified only one review in our sample that acknowledged that allegations or claims of racism had been made by families. However, the review appeared to miss the opportunity to fully investigate the veracity of the claims and give appropriate challenge to practice. In this review, family members had vocalised that they perceived practitioners to be racist. However, the review appeared to distance itself from any possibility of 'racism' by noting that practitioners had been mindful of the ethnicity of the family and acknowledged that practitioners can be distracted when accusations of racism are made. The review then concluded these accusations were groundless, but did not provide evidence about whether the claims had been investigated or provide any detail about how this judgement had been made.

4.19 This review raises questions for safeguarding partnerships, teams and authors about how racism is understood, recognised and investigated, including how services respond to children and families' allegations of racism.

4.20 Reviews must thoroughly examine the existence and various forms of racism. Racism exists in many aspects of society and within both public and private institutions. Consequently, safeguarding systems and practices are likely to reflect and exhibit racism in various ways. Safeguarding leaders and practitioners need to be aware of this throughout the review process. This means actively questioning, seeking evidence, and identifying assumptions and biases in practice. It also involves understanding how service delivery can show different forms of racism. Additionally, it requires diligently investigating concerns raised by children and families and gaining a deeper understanding of how racism manifests.

4.21 The nature and limitations of reviews means that we do not know what factors may lie behind the silences about the role of racism in reviews. Such silences can be viewed within the wider context of research, literature and scholarly debate which has identified a lack of confidence and/or reticence among white individuals to discuss issues concerning race and racism. DiAngelo (2018) suggests that it is 'white fragility' – or a defensiveness – that is triggered when white individuals, even those who consider themselves to be progressive, encounter racial stress. This can result in individuals turning away from honest dialogue about racism, focusing instead on their own feelings of victimisation rather than on the person or people of colour who have been interpersonally and/or systemically harmed. These kinds of responses by leaders and practitioners in the safeguarding system not only underserves the needs of children – but it also increases the dangers and risks to them.

While an exploration of racial bias, including adultification, was evident to a somewhat greater extent than the concept of racism within reviews, these were not recognised or considered as manifestations of racism.

4.22 As noted above, Firmin and colleagues' (2021) found that practitioners were unable to name racism in their discussions of practice. However, the researchers also found that practitioners were identifying examples of discrimination and racial bias within their discussions, but they either were not recognising these as manifestations of racism, or explicitly denying that they represented racism.

4.23 Similarly, we noted in this analysis that a small number of reviews (4) did identify or theorise about adultification as a bias, although did not specifically name this as a manifestation of racism. The Professional Inter-Adultification model introduced by Listen Up (2020) highlights how racism, discrimination and stereotypes – the preconditions for adultification – can shape the way children are framed by professionals. When professionals ascribe adult-like characteristics to Black children, they can be viewed as more responsible and culpable for their actions than white peers. This can erase the innate vulnerability of children and replace it with culpability and a blame narrative. This shift affects access to support and protection, and particularly impacts children from Black and Black Mixed Heritage backgrounds, as noted by Davis (2022) and highlighted within research evidence exploring child criminal exploitation (Action for Children, 2024).

4.24 In reviews involving Asian children, we did not find any specific mention of bias (racial or otherwise) within the professional response. However, some reviews contained assumptions within the reports. For instance, one review about a family of East Asian background suggested that there was a cultural stigma around mental health in such 'communities', which might have influenced the mother's willingness to seek support. While the review acknowledged this as a potential concern, it did not delve into how relevant or significant it was for this family. Generally, most reviews about Asian children lacked discussion on race, culture, or racial bias in the context of the practitioner response.

4.25 In reviews about Black children, there was some acknowledgement of the potential for bias to have influenced the practitioner response. For example, one reviewer expressed curiosity about the potential influence of practitioners' own biases in relation 'to the parents' race, culture, ability, and mental health status', however this was not explored in significant detail. Other reviews acknowledged 'potential' adultification bias and 2 reviews also noted perceptions from the child themselves that they experienced bias/ discrimination. Some reviews acknowledged missed opportunities to respond to a child/family's needs but did not consider how this could be linked to bias and discrimination. As with reviews involving Asian children, there was generally a lack of discussion about practitioner or systemic bias within the actual review.

4.26 We similarly observed some limited acknowledgement within reviews concerning Mixed Heritage children of the potential for bias to have influenced practitioner responses. Where present, this largely focused on the potential for adultification bias to have influenced the perceptions of children and families; this was noted in reviews about children from white and Black Caribbean, white and Asian, and other Mixed Heritage backgrounds.

4.27 We saw greater engagement with other forms of bias, such as bias about socio-economic status of the family, as opposed to racism. For example, one review noted that the socio-economic status of the family (a middle-class family), resulted in practitioners not considering that a family required support. There was also consideration of gender bias, for example as it related to childcare responsibilities. In contrast, racial bias, and its links to racism, was rarely considered in reviews. This could suggest a greater confidence or comfortability in identifying biases that are not explicitly related to race or racism. All those involved in safeguarding children, as leaders or practitioners, need to surface, consider and challenge how such biases shape practice and decision-making.

When safeguarding partnerships explicitly construct terms of reference and key lines of enquiry that focus on exploring the impact of race, ethnicity, racism or bias on practice, this positively impacts the reviewer's consideration of learning in reviews.

4.28 The Panel's guidance expects LCSPRs to include terms of reference (ToR), identifying key lines of enquiry derived from analysis and learning from the rapid reviews. These should be determined at the start of a local review and clearly specified in the final report (CSPRP guidance for safeguarding partners, 2022a). Rapid reviews, being initial assessments of serious incidents, do not require ToR but, if a decision is made that a rapid review should progress to an LCSPR, it should include initial key lines of enquiry for the LCSPR, acknowledging these may change during the review process.

4.29 We analysed whether, when ToRs were included in LCSPRs, they included any specific focus on race, ethnicity and culture. Of the 14 LCSPRs in the sample, 12 included ToRs or lines of enquiry. Of these, 5 included ToR that focused on race, ethnicity, culture or related concepts. Six did not. One LCSPR provided ToRs that were not clearly defined.

4.30 Ten of the 40 rapid reviews in our sample determined that an LCSPR would follow. While we did not include a full analysis of those LCSPRs that followed on from our sample of rapid reviews, we noted that only 3 of these 10 included clear key lines of enquiry about practice learning in relation to race, ethnicity and/or culture. This suggests that opportunities to consider relevant learning for Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children were not progressed further into the more in-depth work involved in LCSPRs.

4.31 In our sample of LCSPRs, when the ToRs focused on race, ethnicity, bias and related concepts, they primarily addressed professional considerations of intersectionality and the impact of culture and ethnicity on professional responses. For example, one review focused on the intersection of parental age differences, ethnicity and culture on how professionals responded to families.

4.32 We observed a positive relationship between the inclusion of a focus on race, culture and/or bias within the ToR and the consideration of this by the reviewer in terms of:

- its impacts on the child or on the patterns of abuse/neglect
- how practitioners responded to the child/family

The review process, and resulting reports, inconsistently feature the child's voice and/or experience. There were significant missed opportunities to include the child's own words within review reports.

4.33 There is longstanding evidence within statutory reviews that the views of children, and exploration of their wishes, is not appropriately explored or captured by practitioners (Bernard & Harris, 2018). This is also important practice in the review process, where Panel guidance asks partnerships to consider how children's voices and experiences will be heard and considered within a review. We recognise that it may not always be possible or appropriate to engage children and young people within the review process itself, however finding alternative means to convey a picture of the child, and their lived experiences, helps to centre them in the process.

4.34 Fourteen reviews, across Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage ethnicity groups, provided partial consideration to the child's experience within the review report. Examples of how these experiences were featured are provided in the box below. This information was often submitted by agencies and practitioners to inform the review. Some reviews also acknowledged there had been limited opportunities or efforts by practitioners to capture what life had been like for the child which limited the information that could be included within the review process itself. We had hoped to identify a quote from a child that could be used as a title for this report, but none of the reports in this sample provided any direct representation of children's voices related to race or ethnicity.

4.35 Six reviews within the sample did not consider the child's voice or experience within the meeting/report.[7] Although previous research on reviews by Bernard & Harris (2018) found that the voices of Black children are often overlooked within reports, a comparative analysis would need to be undertaken with other groups of children to understand whether this is a systemic issue across review processes or reflects a continued invisibilisation of Black children's voices and experiences.

7 Twenty reviews involving children under 3-years-old were excluded from this analysis due to their age.

Within the sample, we observed several ways in which reviewers attempted to capture the child's voice and experiences within the review (14 reviews) through:

- inclusion of information provided by practitioners who had engaged with the child. This usually took the form of descriptions, by practitioners, of the child, including what they liked, what their dreams or aspirations were, or what they were like as a child (a 'bubbly, smiling child')
- dedicated sections within the review which provided an outline of the child, including their likes, dislikes, wishes and lived experiences
- requests for the child, where appropriate, to contribute their voice directly to the review. However often children declined this request, resulting in the inclusion of the parental voice on the behalf of the child, with the child's permission. This included information regarding the child's experiences and significant events within the child's life

Key learning points and recommendations infrequently feature high quality and vital learning for practice with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children. We did not identify any clear examples of good practice concerning responses to race, ethnicity and/or culture in our sample of reviews.

4.36 Our analysis of key learning points and recommendations concerning practice responses to children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds demonstrate that these would mostly be relevant to many groups of children and did not have specific relevance to the needs and experiences of children and families from these ethnic backgrounds. Where reviews did explore the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on practice responses, this often did not carry through to the identification of specific learning points or recommendations for practice. This leads to an invisibilisation and denial of critical learning about the experiences of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families. Importantly, poor scrutiny of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding practice means that opportunities for improving practice may be missed.

4.37 Furthermore, where reviews highlighted specific learning points and recommendations for practice, these were not always sufficiently detailed to promote and act in response to vital learning for families from these ethnic backgrounds. For example, the need to develop practitioners 'cultural competence' emerged as a salient learning point in several reviews but there was minimal discussion about what this would mean in terms of changing and improving practice.

4.38 In several reviews, key learning and recommendations centred on promoting opportunities for professionals to consider and promote all aspects of a child's identity. Evidence suggested that reviews needed to go further and consider learning robustly, developing recommendations through an intersectional lens which takes account of all aspects of a child's identity. A small number of reviews emphasised the need to support practitioners to feel confident to have conversations with families about race and culture; this is a finding emphasised by Jassal (2022). The need for assessments to take account of race, culture and ethnicity was also sometimes emphasised. These are important issues but unfortunately there was a lack of detail and clarity about how these issues should be addressed in practice.

4.39 Finally, none of the reviews included recommendations that challenged and highlighted issues about the role and effects of racism and racial bias in safeguarding practice. This reflects the absence of reflection and challenge of these issues within the body of review reports.

Summary

4.40 This chapter focused on how reviewers acknowledged and explored issues pertaining to race, ethnicity and culture and their impact on practice with children and families. We observed limited instances where reviewers intentionally explored these dynamics. This seemed to be influenced by the ToR, underscoring the importance of providing clear lines of enquiry to support focused learning about these factors.

4.41 Most reviews lacked a detailed consideration of the implications of race, ethnicity and culture and how they intersect with other aspects of a child's identity. In some cases, there was narrow focus on key incidents without consideration of wider issues of bias and inequity in service provision. We also saw evidence that there may be differences in the attention given to race, ethnicity and culture among Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children which needs to be explored further. There was a notable absence of identifying and naming racism and racial bias by reviewers.

4.42 In several reviews, meaningful strategies were employed to ensure the child's voice and experience were represented. However, this was not consistent across the sample, and we saw several examples where the child's voice and experience were not featured or considered in the review report.

4.43 Finally, our analysis revealed a notable absence of key learning points and recommendations that focused on practice learning, improvement and innovative approaches to supporting and protecting children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds. Where reviews did identify specific learning points and recommendations, they frequently lacked the necessary detail and information to support actions to improve and enhance practice.

Reflective questions

4.44 This analysis has emphasised the crucial importance of considering issues related to race, racism and racial bias in reviews about Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children. Not doing so will compromise the quality of the review and of safeguarding practice. The reflective questions set out below seek to support better and more effective learning.

Questions for safeguarding partnerships

4.45 Safeguarding partners are required to undertake promptly a rapid review on all notified serious incidents. Rapid reviews should identify, collate and reflect on the facts about what has happened to a child as quickly as possible to establish whether there is any immediate action needed to ensure a child's safety and the potential for practice learning. We recognise that the quick turnaround time for submitting rapid review reports may increase the challenges for partnerships in thoroughly exploring race, racism and racial bias, but it is essential to consider the presence of these and whether there is vital learning that can be quickly identified.

4.46 Where Rapid reviews progress to an LCSPR, conditions must be enabled to allow practitioners to discuss openly and safely their practice. It is essential to recognise how these conversations may be difficult and challenging; leaders therefore have a responsibility for supporting the right conditions in which there can be meaningful dialogue and consideration of the issues.

1. When commissioning reviews involving a Black, Asian, or Mixed Heritage child, what expectations do you hold for the review panel (in the case of rapid reviews) and for lead review authors (in the case of LCSPRs) and how is this communicated and benchmarked? When selecting a reviewer, do you consider their expertise in matters of race, racism and racial bias?
2. To what extent do you start – at the point of producing rapid reviews and commissioning LCSPRs – from the position that children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds will have experienced racism in their lives, regardless of whether they themselves recognise it or not? Starting from this position can enable more thoughtful consideration of their experiences within the safeguarding system.
3. How do you create the conditions in which the rapid review panel and the LCSPR lead review author feel confident to explore issues concerning race, culture and ethnicity robustly and to identify and challenge racism when it occurs in practice?
4. How are you assured that a focus on the impact of race, ethnicity and culture, on practice is embedded within the rapid review process and within ToR for LCSPRs? Do you have a quality assurance process in place to ensure the review has appropriately challenged practice responses where racism and racial bias are present?
5. How open are you, and what processes do you have in place, to respond to challenges from the review panel or independent review author about practice that reflects racist or biased approaches?

Questions for reviewers

4.47 We appreciate that once a rapid review, and particularly an LCSPR, is submitted to the Panel, it is likely to have gone through various iterations. We also understand that independent authors of LCSPRs must navigate multiple dynamics to extract the best learning from a review. This includes maintaining a positive relationship with the safeguarding partnership while potentially identifying gaps, silences and issues within practice, such as racism and related biases. Additionally, the quality of rapid reviews and LCSPRs depends on the author having the insight, confidence and permission to scrutinise issues related to race, culture and ethnicity.

4.48 The following questions are intended to aid thinking about how you equip yourself to undertake reviews which involve children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds.

1. Do you feel confident that you have the necessary skills and experience to author reviews where race, culture and/or ethnicity is a factor? Do you have the knowledge and skills to critically examine practice responses that may be rooted in racism and racial bias?
2. When reviews involve children and families from diverse racial or cultural backgrounds, how do you ensure this is robustly explored and considered within the report or meeting?
3. How confident are you in identifying evidence of racism and racial bias demonstrated by practitioners? How confident are you in raising this with review panels and safeguarding partnerships, and that you will be listened to?

5. Learning for practice in responding to children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds

5.1 The previous chapter explored how effectively reviews themselves apply a lens to the learning which specifically focuses on the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on multi-agency safeguarding practice responses. This chapter provides an overview of the practice learning that can be gleaned from reviews about Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and their families. We have identified in successive annual reports that practice learning about safeguarding this group in children tends to be superficial with limited insights emerging (CSPRP, 2022b; CSPRP, 2024a). Similarly, within this review, we saw inconsistent attention to these factors; and where there was attention to these, this lacked depth and detail, or did not translate into key learning points or recommendations.

5.2 When looking at practice responses discussed within reviews, we similarly observed that practitioners do not often possess a clear understanding of the child's daily life and lived experience, affecting their comprehensive understanding of risk. Practitioners may also lack knowledge and insight of the ways in which race, ethnicity and/or culture – and the intersection of these with other aspects of children's identities – were significant in their responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children.

5.3 Our analysis identified examples where the impact of growing up in dual heritage (for example, Mixed Black Caribbean and white) households was not explored or considered for children. There were also missed opportunities to consider the impact of, and service engagement barriers for, children and families relocating to the UK. There were examples too where there was evidence that different identities (for example, ethnicity, gender identity and neurodiversity) were not explored or understood. This was compounded by practice which did not always effectively incorporate the child's voice or experiences, resulting in practitioners' lacking a good understanding of children's vulnerabilities and risks of harm.

Practitioners' understanding of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children's lived experiences was incomplete. Consequently, they held poor understanding of children's vulnerabilities and risks.

Recognition of race, ethnicity and culture

5.4 Understanding race, ethnicity and culture in safeguarding practice is essential for understanding diverse experiences, addressing disproportionality, mitigating bias and stereotypes, building trust and promoting empowerment and inclusion. In this sample of reviews, we found that explicit recognition of race, ethnicity and culture by practitioners, and attempts to understand the significance of these in practice with children and families, were limited. This limitation stems in part from review processes which do not explore and discuss these issues, however, the description of practice itself suggests a lack of attention to race, ethnicity and culture by practitioners.

The role of faith and religion

5.5 While previous research, and this current thematic analysis, has identified a positive trend towards increased reporting of ethnicity within reviews, other important aspects of children's identities, such as faith, were often missing in our sample. It was therefore challenging to determine the significance of these other facets of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children's lives. Sometimes there was passing reference to religion or other cultural factors, but detail was significantly limited. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to identify or extract any related learning.

5.6 It is possible, in some instances, that the child/family's religion was not deemed by the partnership or lead reviewer to be important to the incident, or to the practice with the family. However, our analysis suggests that there is potential to take a more critical perspective. For example, within our sample we noted one review which highlighted a potential conflict between the child's gender identity and their religious identity, however the review missed significant opportunities to fully consider the impact of this for the child.

5.7 Similarly, when considering potentially harmful practices related to faith or beliefs, reviews sometimes hinted at harmful practices but failed to offer further detail. For example, one review mentioned that a child reported to a practitioner that someone had performed 'black magic' on them, but this issue was not further explored in any detail within the review. Evidence from this sample of reviews suggests that there is an underdeveloped understanding of the role and importance of faith and religion, and about potentially harmful practices related to belief.

Intersectional perspectives

5.8 Intersectional approaches taken by practitioners are short in evidence, despite our analysis showing clear potential for these to be considered. In just over half of the reviews, practitioners did not appear to consider the identity of the children and/or their family. Furthermore, where reviews did acknowledge different parts of a child's identity, for example their ethnicity, mental health status and/or religious identity, these were generally considered in isolation (18 reviews). We did not observe significant evidence where the intersection of identities (as highlighted within case study 2) was explored in any detail. Relatedly, while we observed use of the term 'intersectionality' on a few occasions within review reports, often no evidence was provided to illuminate how this was understood by practitioners or how this had been practically applied.

5.9 The lack of robust consideration of intersectionality in reviews is concerning. Understanding intersectionality can provide a powerful framework and tool to support practitioners to better comprehend the lived experiences of children and families from Black and other minoritised ethnic groups (Practice Supervisors, 2020), including in addressing the adultification of Black children (Davis, 2019).

5.10 In a small number of reviews (8 reviews), there was evidence that practitioners had applied an intersectional lens, primarily in terms of exploring service engagement and access to services. For example, we saw incidents where practitioners recognised the challenges for parents in implementing safety strategies for children due to their ethnicity, socio-economic status and sole parenting status. A small number of reviews also reflected on the potential for these considerations regarding intersectionality to influence, or bias, the professional's interpretation of the child/family's behaviour and the subsequent professional response.

5.11 While consideration of intersectionality was limited in the overall sample of reviews, where this theory was applied, it was primarily in relation to Black and Mixed Heritage children. We did not see intersectionality considered as frequently in reviews involving children from Asian ethnic backgrounds. The reasons for this disparity are unclear.

Case study 2

A male child of mixed heritage (white and Asian) and Muslim faith was admitted to hospital following a life-threatening health crisis. The child, who is neurodiverse, was under the care of his mother, who had relocated to a ‘less culturally diverse’ area, due to domestic abuse concerns. The review indicated that the child might have experienced social isolation as a result.

At the time of the incident, the child was not enrolled at school and presented with ‘behavioural difficulties’. The review found that professionals concentrated more on the behaviour itself rather than investigating its underlying cause.

The review also highlighted biases among professionals, including adultification where the child was seen as responsible for administering his own medication and appearing ‘larger is stature’. Both the child and his mother were described as ‘un-cooperative’ and ‘hard to engage’. Although, his mother reported feeling unsupported by professionals and believed she was left to manage her child’s behaviour and medical condition alone.

There were missed opportunities both within the review and in practice to consider the interaction of the child’s racial and cultural background, his gender, neurodiversity, living in a household where domestic abuse featured – how it impacted him, and how it informed professional perceptions. The child’s social isolation, stemming from racial and cultural differences in their new area, and lack of school attendance, was also not adequately addressed.

Separately, there was a lack of exploration of how the mothers’ needs were considered. It is unclear within the review as to whether the mother shared the same religion or faith as her child, and if, and to what extent, that impacted service responses.

Recognition of service engagement barriers

5.12 Fourteen reviews were noted to identify and acknowledge service barriers for children and families, with reference to race, ethnicity, and/or culture. Examples are shared in the box below.

Reviewers identified several service barriers that impacted on professionals' engagement with children and families, including:

- racialised trauma from previous professional interactions, exemplified in our sample of reviews as a fear of engaging with professionals due to over-policing of young Black boys
- experiences of racism in predominantly white communities
- language barriers limiting parental understanding when English is not their first language
- cultural perceptions that seeking support indicates an inability to cope
- bias in the form of adultification, influencing practitioners' responses to children

5.13 A small number of reviews (3) also focused on the barriers experienced by white British practitioners when engaging with families, especially when required to challenge families, as evident in case study 1, or when there were allegations of racism by family members. However, as noted in the case example, critical analysis and understanding of the role of racial bias, and its connection to racism, was poor. Two of these cases involved Black children, and the third involved a Black Mixed Heritage child. Ali et al., (2021) observed similar barriers for practitioners, evidencing a fear among practitioners that challenging parents or taking certain actions might be perceived as racist. The NSPCC (2022) warns that this approach can obscure safeguarding concerns, leaving children vulnerable to harm.

5.14 There is a need for services, and partnerships, to turn thinking about barriers to engaging with families on its head and to consider instead their role and responsibilities in enabling more accessible and responsive services that better meet the needs of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children. Not doing so risks distorting practice and is not in the best interests of children. For example, within this sample, barriers to engagement resulted in missed opportunities to understand the relationships of adults to the children resulting in children being exposed to unsafe adults and individuals. In other instances, there was unclear understanding of risks and concerns among practitioners, resulting in a lack of support and intervention, Similarly, a lack of professional curiosity about the ability of parents to meet children's needs led to the needs of the parents overshadowing those of their children.

5.15 These issues are reflected in case study 3 below which highlights a lack of confidence among white British practitioners to question the identity of adults within a child's life. The issues highlighted may well speak to wider issues about practitioners' knowledge and perceptions of extended family structures within Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage households.

Case study 3

One of the LCSPRs highlighted difficulties practitioners encountered in exploring the relationships of multiple adults to the children in focus when there are different family structures in place that may not be well understood. For example, in this case, practitioners struggled when children and families used terms such as 'auntie' and 'uncle' for non-relatives. The reviewer highlighted that, at the learning event, practitioners debated the need for professionals to verify the identity of these individuals.

In this case, the child in focus was cared for by one such individual under a fostering arrangement, but practitioners did not verify the individual's identity due to an assumed familial relationship. The review raised concerns that this assumption prevented practitioners from fully understanding the potential risk to the child and from appropriately assessing the suitability of the placement.

Children's voices and experiences

5.16 Researchers have highlighted the importance of listening to the child's voice, or where this is not possible, understanding the experiences of children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds (Jassal, 2020; Davis, Allan, & Hunter, 2024). It is important to note that, where the term 'child's voice' is used in this report, we acknowledge that this goes beyond the spoken words of children and incorporates the child's actions, behaviour and other forms of non-verbal communication that children may use to express their experiences and feelings. Analyses of reviews and inspection reports have consistently identified evidence that the voice of the child is not always centralised within practice; sometimes because of systemic issues such as time pressures, high workloads and staff turnover (Allnock et al., 2020; Ofsted, 2011).

5.17 Without clearly listening to the child's voice and experiences, there is the risk that the uniqueness and individuality of each child is lost and that their individual lived experience is not appropriately considered. Previous research and review evidence has demonstrated challenges in hearing the voices of children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds, particularly when these children have additional learning needs or communication difficulties (CSPRP, 2022c). This finding is similarly reflected within this report.

5.18 In nearly half of the reviews in this thematic analysis, practitioners had fully or partially sought the child's voice and experience, aiming to understand what their lives were like. Practitioners captured and conveyed children's voices and experiences through speaking to them about their wishes, feelings and ambitions. We also identified reviews where there had been missed opportunities to hear and take account of the voice and experiences of the child. A range of barriers to engagement and communication were cited in reviews, as indicated in the box below.

Seven reviews explicitly noted that the child's voice and wishes had not been heard by practitioners. This was attributed to an absence of or limited direct professional contact prior to the incident or missed opportunities by practitioners to engage with the child.

Eleven reviews highlighted several barriers to hearing the child's voice and wishes, including:

- fear of disclosure, with some children instructed by parents not to disclose their true experiences or fearing disclosure due to potential retribution
- parental narratives dominating professional contact and a lack of professional curiosity to verify these narratives
- challenges in multi-child households, where professional focus on one sibling reduced attention on the other children
- communication difficulties, particularly when children were unable to verbally communicate with professionals

5.19 In some reviews, we identified the potential for language barriers to feature in practice involving Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families who had migrated to the United Kingdom from abroad, and for whom English may not be their first language. Despite some relevant cases in our sample, there was no information provided on the presence of language barriers for children, which presents challenges in learning about effective and/or innovative approaches to facilitate children's voices.

5.20 A small number of reviews acknowledged language barriers for parents and noted the use of interpreters, however, often family members were used instead of registered interpreters. In some cases, this was requested by the family so that registered interpreters had been offered but declined by parents. In one review, it was unclear whether an alternative offer had been made. Another review reported that a family member was used due to the lack of availability of a registered interpreter; while in another case, the review mentioned that a parent had requested an interpreter, but this request was not met. The use of interpreters was observed most frequently in reviews involving children and families from Asian ethnic backgrounds, however 2 reviews involved children from Black Mixed Heritage ethnic backgrounds. Our present findings are reflective of previous work by Chand (2005) who noted specific issues concerning the use of interpreters for Asian families.

5.21 Where reviews noted the use of interpreters, practitioners acknowledged several national issues, including:

- the lack of availability of registered interpreters, particularly for specific languages
- challenges using language lines due to poor connection quality, which limited understanding of the interpretation provided

5.22 Some reviews (9) also noted diagnoses, such as autism spectrum condition, that could result in communication difficulties and hinder professionals' abilities to hear the voice of the child. Reviews however often provided little detail on whether the child experienced these difficulties. In a similar way to language barriers, it was difficult to determine if the absence of information was due to communication barriers not being present for these children or, instead resulted from missed opportunities to identify and address them.

Community

5.23 Understanding a child's wider community can help make sense of children's day-to-day lives but, we saw limited discussion around or attention to community contexts in reviews. Where the term community was used, this was often not clearly defined and so the concept remains ambiguous in the context of these reviews. It was largely used as a 'catch-all' term to describe the locality within which children lived and moved around. Considering 'community' more thoughtfully may help to surface ways in which children's spaces and networks can be protective or dangerous, helping to highlight more targeted and better learning. The concept of 'community' can be used in different ways and with different meanings; it can, for example be used to refer to people connected to a specific locality and geography, or to social groups organised around common characteristics such as religion, ethnicity and sexual identity.

5.24 Discussion surrounding a child's community, however, tended to relate to older children whose harm was linked to extrafamilial contexts. Firmin's (2020) work on contextual safeguarding provides a helpful context within which to understand the manifestation of extrafamilial harm, identifying the community as a space of both protection and harm for children.

5.25 Some reviews identified the community as a specific risk factor for the child in focus, due to known gang activity and youth violence within the area, which was considered to leave children at risk of violence and harm. A small number of reviews also spoke about the perceived need of children to protect themselves within their community. For example, one review concerning a Black Caribbean boy identified that the child felt unsafe within the community and did not consider the police would appropriately protect them. The child in this case engaged in self-protective activities, with the reviewer commenting that the child had to engage in decisions to avoid the police or avoid the gangs within their area as both were perceived to present a risk.

5.26 We also observed limited commentary within reviews which highlighted the challenges children can experience feeling integrated and connected to peers within their neighbourhood. This appeared to be particularly notable for children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds growing up, and accessing services, in predominantly white communities. A small number of reviews attributed this to the potential for children and their families to experience racism and discrimination.

5.27 While significantly limited within the sample, we did observe some acknowledgement of the potential for the community to provide safe spaces and protection for children. One review, for example, identified that the child in focus developed positive relationships with youth workers and found trusted spaces within their living environment where they felt safe and were able to share their experiences.

5.28 To better understand the role of 'community' in safeguarding children and young people, it is important that reviews unpick the meaning of community within the specific contexts of children who are the focus of reviews.

Understanding of vulnerabilities and risks of harm

5.29 Given the inconsistent attention to understanding children's lived experiences in this sample, it is unsurprising that practitioners' understanding of vulnerabilities and risks to children was similarly incomplete. This is concerning when considering research evidence that shows 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 (Pickett et al., 2022). In those reviews where there was limited insight into children's daily lives and lived experiences, we also saw inadequate understanding about risk of harm across different agencies and professionals. Incidents were often viewed in isolation, and agencies lacked full knowledge about known risk of harm factors.

5.30 Seven reviews noted no prior concerns about the child, either due to a lack of professional contact or because no issues were identified despite contact with professionals and agencies. In 19 reviews, risk had been at least partially recognised, but this had not translated into a professional response. This included examples where children had made disclosures which were not appropriately responded to or followed up by practitioners. This was observed across all Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage ethnicity groups; however, we observed several cases about girls from Asian and Mixed Asian Heritages who had made disclosures about sexual abuse, but these appeared either to have been dismissed as untrue or not carefully followed up. Reviews did not offer any explanations to help illuminate these findings.

5.31 It is of interest that in all reviews concerning Asian children, practitioners' understanding of risk to and vulnerability of the child was incomplete. For these children, reviews noted that the potential impact and risk of parental mental health was not understood in the context of risk to the child. While issues with recognising the impact and risk of parental mental health issues featured for a broad range of children in the Panel's recent annual report (CSPRP, 2024b), Humphry et al.'s (1999) work more than 25 years ago identified this as a specific issue in practice with Asian families. In some reviews relating to Asian children and families, we saw a lack of full understanding of the family dynamics and of the child's lived experience, whether this was due to the invisibility of adults within the child's life or because of a lack of or limited professional contact.

5.32 We saw similar themes about parental mental health and lack of good understanding about family dynamics within reviews involving children from Black and Mixed Heritages. However, we observed a limited number of reviews (8) where risk/vulnerability was appropriately recognised for the child. This was most evident in cases involving child criminal exploitation/or gang activity which most frequently featured children from Black backgrounds. For these children, reviews noted that professionals recognised the signs of exploitation and had made efforts to safeguard these children, however the success of these efforts was variable, limiting how well children were protected. While caution needs to be exercised when interpreting these findings, it is possible that this suggests that risk is more consistently recognised for Black and Mixed Heritage children, than it is for Asian children. Further analysis is needed about whether this is indeed the case, why and how practice may need to change.

Lack of detail and critical reflection in reviews obscures the role of race, racism and racial bias in practice.

5.33 Earlier in this chapter we identified that practitioners did not fully understand the risk and vulnerabilities of children and young people from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage families. This was often underpinned by safeguarding practice that did not pay sufficient attention to race, ethnicity and culture, and other important aspects of children's identities. We highlighted evidence of emerging learning about the voice and experiences of the child which, when combined with limited attention to race, ethnicity and culture, illustrates how risks and vulnerabilities can be obscured and not well understood by practitioners. In this section, we examine the extent to which racism and racial bias features within, or is identified by, reviews and which may underpin or shape these findings.

A silence on racism and racial bias

5.34 In the previous chapter, we considered the silence on racism and racial bias by reviewers themselves and how this is discussed within reviews. Similarly, we saw a silence on the presence of racism and racial bias in the practice evidence submitted and included within reviews. We did not observe specific naming or use of the term 'racism', however, as evidenced within the previous section, a small number of reviews (4) did identify or theorise about the adultification of the child in focus. All the reviews within the sample which identified adultification bias involved children from Black and Black Mixed Heritage backgrounds. The box below details the ways in which adultification featured.

How adultification features

- the physical appearance of one child, linked to his race and ethnicity, led him to be viewed as older than his biological age and consequently treated as an adult by the police
- an emphasis on a child as a cause of harm as opposed to a victim of criminal behaviour
- significant responsibility placed on a child for decision-making, as practitioners viewed her as older than her age, thereby perceiving she was more responsible for, and understanding of, the consequences of her decisions

5.35 While the reviews themselves do not always consider the interaction between the child's ethnicity and the professional response, it is possible that this was a feature of decision-making. For example, it is notable that one review concerned the seclusion of a child and a high-level of staffing (3:1) within a medical setting. It is important to consider this issue within the wider context of research which has evidenced longer hospital admissions for individuals from Black ethnic backgrounds than from white individuals in the UK (Devonport et al., 2023) and increased use of restraint and seclusion for African American children compared with white children (Roy et al., 2021). This should prompt consideration about what factors may influence decision making in situations like these when children from Black ethnic backgrounds are placed in secure environments.

5.36 Other forms of racial bias appeared in one review concerning an Asian child, where the review identified that practitioners had made assumptions about the mother's ability to speak English, resulting in the mother's request to be seen by a native-speaking professional being ignored.

5.37 A small number of reviews further identified that significant expectations had been placed on parents, including an expectation to safeguard children against risk, despite parents themselves being fearful and/or vulnerable. This was observed in reviews involving children from Black, Asian and Black Mixed Heritage ethnic backgrounds. We also saw examples where practitioners placed expectations on sole parents to meet the needs of children with complex needs or significant disabilities with little support provided. Such observations may be reflective of wider racial biases and perceptions of the emotional resilience and caregiving behaviours of the 'strong Black woman' (Castelini & White, 2022; Collins, 1990).

5.38 Where reviews had identified or theorised about the potential for bias or assumptions in practitioner responses, reviewers emphasised the need for reflective supervision and critical challenge to address these assumptions. This is important, reinforcing the vital importance of leaders creating the practice conditions in which practitioners are expected to reflect openly on their practice assumptions and ways of 'seeing' children and families.

Invisibilisation

5.39 As previously identified, the concept of invisibilisation has been linked to racism and racial bias, referring to the process by which certain individuals or groups are rendered invisible, and the subsequent obscuring of this invisibility (Herzog, 2017). Previously published literature has also highlighted the dichotomy through which the vulnerability of children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds can be invisible while these children are also hyper-visible to services when they are involved in causing harm or involved in violence (Transforming Society, 2022).

5.40 The first way in which invisibility featured within reviews relates to the silence around race and racism which we have drawn attention to throughout this report. We have seen the myriad ways in which the race and ethnicity of children was not recognised, appropriately explored, or understood by practitioners or indeed within review reports themselves. We have noted how this can result in practitioners not having a full understanding of the lived experiences of children and limit their recognition of the child's vulnerability. Subsequently, the risks to children, particularly the unique risks that may be experienced by children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds, were often rendered invisible.

5.41 The second way in which invisibility appeared within reviews concerns the ways in which risk and vulnerability was considered by practitioners. For example, in more than half of the reviews within the sample, we found children invisibilised by a tunnel vision focus on other siblings within the family. We also saw a lack of responsiveness to, and engagement with, family members who had access to or caring responsibilities for the child. The underlying reasons for this were, however, not always clear and reviews did not clearly link this invisibility to the child's ethnicity. As previously highlighted, we also observed service engagement barriers for children and families and missed opportunities for services to be responsive to the individualised needs of children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds.

5.42 The third way in which invisibility manifested within reviews relates to the ways in which children may be both 'hyper-visible' and invisible at the same time. An example of this dichotomy can be seen in relation to a child from a Black Caribbean background who was noted to have been 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. 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.

5.43 In the remaining reviews, we did not observe evidence of invisibilisation, either due to a lack of detail within the review or because risks were recognised, and needs were appropriately met.

5.44 The Panel's previous work has highlighted the phenomenon of the invisibilisation of children, families and other adults in the lives of children (CSPRP, 2021; CSPRP, 2024a). It is critical that all those involved in safeguarding children develop our collective understanding about how race, ethnicity and culture may influence the invisibilisation of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and families, identifying some of its practice implications.

Summary

5.45 This chapter explored practice responses to children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds. Mirroring findings described in the previous chapter, our thematic analysis identified a notable silence in practice discourses about race, culture, racism and bias. A limited number of reviews did note adultification, although none of these considered this to be a form of racism. This manifested in different ways, resulting in children being seen as responsible for decision-making and older than their biological age. In so doing, practice obstructed the recognition of vulnerabilities and risks of harm for these children.

5.46 In significant and diverse ways, we observed a lack of understanding about children's lived experiences, including missed opportunities to consider the multiple intersecting identities of children and how this may influence their risk, vulnerability and engagement with services. Reflection on the community as a place of risk, and safety, for children was also rarely explored.

5.47 We sought also to explore practice responses to facilitate effective communication with children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds. Overall, we did not observe significant adaption of communication to meet the diverse needs of children but often no detail was provided about the practice approaches taken. It was therefore often unclear whether the children in focus did not require adaptions to communication approaches, or whether children had communication needs which were not recognised and/or addressed by practitioners.

Reflective questions for practitioners and safeguarding leaders

5.48 Detailed considerations about race, culture and ethnicity are key to identifying and acting on effective learning in rapid reviews and LCSPRs. It is equally essential that recognition of, and attention to these factors is at the heart of multi-agency safeguarding practice.

5.49 Individual practitioners and leaders will be on their own individual journey of understanding and acting in relation to race, racism and racial bias. Everyone will have their own experiences of making sense and addressing these issues; this may affect their confidence in identifying and confronting matters relating to race, racism and racial bias. We all have a professional responsibility to take ownership of developing our own confidence and capacity to address these important issues effectively. We will also need good support and challenge from our teams and leaders so that these issues are explored together and within environments where critical discussions are welcomed and normalised.

5.50 The questions below are intended to prompt consideration of your own practice (either as a practitioner or as a leader) when engaging children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds, and to help consider what support you may need.

1. As a practitioner, how can you feel empowered to have conversations with children and families about race and identity, particularly when you are working with individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to your own? As a safeguarding partnership, how can you create the conditions that empower practitioners to do this effectively?
2. As a practitioner, how confident are you that, when engaging with children, you consider all aspects of their identity and how these may intersect to influence risk and vulnerability? If you don't feel confident, why might this be the case? As a safeguarding partnership, how can you instil confidence and skill in practitioners to do this effectively?
3. As a practitioner, do you feel confident that you understand the impact of race, culture and ethnicity on children and families, and on their experiences? If you don't, what may explain a lack of confidence in this area? How do you explore this with children and families and create opportunities and spaces for them to discuss its impact?
4. How do you ensure you are self-reflective about your own biases when working with children and families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds? How is this supported on an individual level, and within teams? As a safeguarding partnership, how do you reassure yourselves that your teams are providing reflective spaces for practitioners to explore these issues?
5. How can you be supported to effectively respond to the diverse communication needs for children and families, particularly when considering national issues concerning the availability and accessibility of interpreters and interpretation services? As a safeguarding partnership, how are you responding to these national issues and building capacity to effectively communicate with children and families?
6. As a safeguarding partnership, are you reassured that appropriate internal structures are in place to support practitioners to recognise, discuss and challenge internal and institutional racism? How confident would you feel, as an individual, to name and challenge racism?

6. Panel support to partnerships

6.1 The Panel has a role in providing feedback and advice to safeguarding partnerships. This is crucial in helping to ensure that children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds receive the help and protection they need, that this is equitable and of a consistent quality. The Panel seeks to review and reflect on our own biases, on how we consider learning from reviews and, generally, how well we support safeguarding partnerships in this important aspect of practice. As part of this thematic analysis therefore, we examined the feedback and advice we provided to partnerships in this sample to take stock of the consistency with which we recognise and acknowledge good practice or identify the potential for improvements in practice with children and families from these communities.

Panel letters inconsistently acknowledged or advised partnerships about the presence or absence of practice learning in reviews related to race, ethnicity and/or culture.

6.2 Within the selected sample, there were slightly more response letters[8] from the Panel that did not comment on partnerships' attention to race, ethnicity and/or culture, compared to those that did (28 letters and 22 letters, respectively).[9] When broken down by reporting year and review type, we observed a slightly higher frequency of letters commenting on this within the reporting year 2022 to 2023 (8 did, 12 did not), compared to the year 2023 to 2024 (12 did, 15 did not). We also saw a greater propensity for Panel letters to refer to this in response to LCSPRs, compared to rapid reviews.

8 Following the submission of a rapid review or LCSPR from a safeguarding partnership, the Panel provide a response letter which comments on the quality of the review. For RRs, the letter will also state the Panel's position on the recommendation of whether a LCSPR is required.

9 Four of the reviews within the sample did not have an associated letter.

6.3 In 4 letters, the Panel provided positive praise and encouragement to partnerships who had explored or attempted to explore the impact of race, culture and/or ethnicity on practice within the review. Additionally, several letters acknowledged the learning and recommendations made in relation to race, culture and/or ethnicity, and requested more information regarding the planned activity of safeguarding partnerships. However, several letters encouraged partnerships to consider the ethnicity of the child and family in more detail. One letter expressly noted disappointment that the partnership had not considered race, culture and/or ethnicity.

6.4 We (the Panel) know that we have more work to do in the light of the findings above. The Panel has, through some of our earlier national and thematic reviews, addressed the need for practitioners to reflect and unpack biases and assumptions that may impact on how they perceive, assess and respond to risks of harm to a child, including those that relate to culture, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (CSPRP, 2022d). Our national review 'Myth of Invisible Men' indicated that the impact of ethnicity and culture on parenting was not explicitly considered or evidenced in local learning reviews (CSPRP, 2021).

6.5 Our recent national review on child sexual abuse in the family environment (CSPRP, 2024d) similarly identified that relatively few reviews had taken race, ethnicity and culture into account when considering responses to children. It concluded that while over a quarter of the children in focus in the reviews were from Black and other minoritised communities, in just 13 (out of 136 reviews) was there any specific reference to children's race, ethnicity or culture. None recognised the impact of racism, including bias and wider systematic experiences of discrimination. As a result, minimal learning emerged other than highlighting how practice is falling short and about the need for this issue to be more effectively addressed. Our annual reports have highlighted similar themes (CSPRP, 2024a; CSPRP, 2024b).

6.6 Panel guidance (CSPR, 2022a) emphasises the importance of considering in reviews the impact of race, culture, faith and ethnicity on both the lives of children and on multi-agency safeguarding practice responses. Despite this, successive reviews and annual reports suggest that Panel guidance may not go far enough in enabling practitioners, reviewers and leaders to consider and explore these issues meaningfully in rapid reviews and LCSPRs. The Panel is therefore considering through its current practice guidance review how we might strengthen the advice and support we offer safeguarding partnerships.[10]

10 Of relevance also is that Panel has commissioned Research in Practice, the University of East Anglia and VKPP to undertake work about learning from safeguarding reviews. This work is on-going and a report will be published in 2025; this will include specific consideration about how equity, equality, diversity and inclusion issues are addressed in reviews.

6.7 The Panel also needs to be clearer and more specific in its response letters to safeguarding partnerships following their submission of a rapid review or LCSPR. We need to highlight better expectations of reviewers and local review panels for identifying and progressing learning that considers the specific impact of race, ethnicity, and culture on practice and what has happened to children. The Panel also needs to provide feedback, when appropriate, about how learning might be carried through and translated into recommendations and actions to address these issues. This thematic analysis has also highlighted wider issues about the importance of consistency in Panel letters and which we will also continue to address.

6.8 Finally, the Panel will be considering how best we can maximise the dissemination and sharing of learning from this report, including through webinars and other events to encourage and prompt discussion across the multi-agency safeguarding system.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 This thematic analysis sought to understand the extent to which race, ethnicity and culture impact:

- on practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children
- on how race, racism and racial bias featured within learning reviews

7.2 The overarching aim of this work was to identify and analyse how these issues are seen and addressed to identify both good or emerging practice, and areas for learning and improvement in multi-agency safeguarding practice.

7.3 We found limited attention to race, ethnicity and culture in reviews and practice; as a result, reflection on practice lacked necessary critical analysis, depth, and detail. This in turn meant that identifying learning and good practice was challenging. Most worryingly, 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. We must, and want to, understand better the nature of the silences which surround discussion of these issues. As evident in this analysis, this involves developing better recognition of the national, local, professional and individual drivers and contexts that may underpin such silences.

7.4 The Panel recognise and acknowledge that discussions about race and racism can be confronting and difficult. They are nonetheless necessary and fundamental to our ability to safeguard children of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds from different forms of harm. Evidence presented in this thematic review reinforces the need for critical and urgent examination of how race and racism influence practices and decision-making, and the safeguarding of this group of children. At present there are too many missed opportunities in practice and in our system of learning about incidents when children have been seriously harmed or died. This can leave children vulnerable, at risk of harm, and without the support and protection that they need.

7.5 This thematic review was based on 54 local reviews. The Panel's wider work and evidence gained through national and thematic reviews and annual reports supports many of the findings presented here. That said, we know that analysis of written review reports cannot alone answer the questions raised here. Nor can it explain and evidence the underpinning reasons for the silences and other patterns observed in this analysis.

7.6 The Panel knows that some safeguarding partnerships are actively considering and reflecting on how issues about race, racism and racial bias affect local policy and practice. We want this report to contribute to local and national discussions, building collective knowledge and understanding. There needs to be firm commitment and resolve to learn and work differently; it will also mean that we are much more challenging of our practice, and of how services are designed and delivered. This is essential if we are to ensure that Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children are safeguarded and receive the help and support they need to thrive and have happy and safe lives.

7.7 It is clear from this thematic review that more work is needed to explore the reasoning for silences in discussions about race within learning reviews and within wider safeguarding practice. For its part, the Panel are considering how it can best drive work forward to enable better learning and improvements in how race, racism and racial bias shape and influence multi-agency safeguarding practice.

Overarching recommendations

7.8 Safeguarding partners are asked to consider this report, and the reflective questions contained within it. We recommend that partnerships carefully evaluate current partnership work in this area and identify what further development is needed in learning reviews, and multi-agency safeguarding practice, to address and respond to issues of race, racism and racial bias.

Review process recommendations for safeguarding partnerships

1. Consider what expectations you have for the review panel where reviews concern Black, Asian, or Mixed Heritage children, particularly in terms of their expertise in considering the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on practice responses.
2. The commissioning process should start from the position that children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds will have experienced racism in their lives. Starting from this position can enable more thoughtful consideration of their experiences within the safeguarding system.
3. Create the conditions in which the rapid review panel and LCSPR lead reviewer will feel confident to explore issues concerning race, culture, and ethnicity robustly, and to identify and challenge racism when it occurs in practice.
4. Consider how to embed, and quality assure, a focus on the impact of race, ethnicity and culture, on practice within the rapid reviews process and within ToR for LCSPRs.
5. Reflect on your own partnership practice and processes for responding to challenges from the review panel or independent review author about practice that reflects racist or biased approaches.

Safeguarding practice recommendations for safeguarding partnerships

1. Safeguarding partnerships should create conditions that empower practitioners to have conversations with children and families about race and identity, building skill and confidence. This includes ensuring there are safe opportunities for self-reflection within teams and in supervision to enable them to acknowledge their own biases.
2. Safeguarding partnerships to review their local strategies and approach to addressing race, racism and racial bias in their work with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children, giving specific account to local multi-agency practice, and the design and commissioning of services (including but not limited to translation services).
3. Safeguarding partnerships should ensure appropriate internal structures are in place to support practitioners to recognise, discuss and challenge internal and institutional racism.

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Appendix A: Definitions

Term	Definition
Race	Race is recognised as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. The Act defines 'race' as including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins. Race is a categorisation that is based mainly on physical attributes and biogenetic traits of individuals, assigning people to a specific race simply by having similar appearances or skin colour (for example, Black or white). (Law Society, 2023). We recognise this term to be a social construct rooted in colonisation and empire building, closely linked to the justification of differential treatment of human beings (Bhavani, Mizra and Metoo, 2005; Equity in the Center, n.d.). In the context of this report, this relates to differential treatment of children and/or their families within and by the safeguarding system.
Ethnicity	Race and ethnicity are commonly used interchangeably. Although there is some overlap, they do not hold the same meaning. Ethnicity is broader than race and has usually been used to refer to long shared cultural experiences, religious practices, traditions, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins (for example, African-Caribbean, Indian, Irish). Ethnicity can be seen as a more positive identity than one forged from the shared negative experiences of racism. (Law Society, 2023).

Term	Definition
Racism	Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalised. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Harper Browne and O'Connor present a socio-ecological model of racism, highlighting four forms of racism. These include: 1. Systemic/societal racism which they define as historical and currently macro-level ideology, values, laws, policies, and practices that create and sustain differential access to power, privilege, opportunity and resources, within and across resources and that result in inequitable outcomes. 2. Institutional/community racism defined as discriminatory policies, procedures and practices in organisations and community contexts that create, result in, and sustain differential access to power, privilege, opportunity and resources. 3. Interpersonal/relational racism referring to verbal and non-verbal prejudiced and discriminatory interactions between individuals. 4. Intrapersonal/individual racism defined as negative racialised ideas, feelings and attitudes.
Culture	A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviours and styles of communication (Equity in Center, n.d.).
Racial bias	Racial bias refers to the primarily unconscious thoughts, preconceptions, or experiences that cause people to think and act in prejudiced ways. The difference between racism and racial bias is that racism is based on a system of beliefs that always privileges one group of people above another, while racial bias refers to a constellation of associations and stereotypes that unconsciously impact our behaviour (see Morehouse & Banaji, 2024). Although, as a Panel, we acknowledge that racial bias can also be both unconscious and conscious.

Term	Definition
Intersectionality	Originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to highlight the combined experiences of discrimination Black women experienced in the workplace, intersectionality is often discussed as a theory, methodology, paradigm, lens or framework. It recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism (UN Women, 2022).
Oppression	When talking about 'oppression', we are describing the force that allows, through the power of norms and systems, the unjust treatment or control of different groups of people, including children.
Racial/racialised trauma	Racial trauma is defined as the cumulative impact of race-based traumatic experiences at individual, institutional and systemic levels (Cénat, 2022).
Harmful practice	The National FGM Centre (2024) defines harmful practices as "persistent practices and behaviours that are grounded on discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other grounds, as well as multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination that often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering". This definition informed our determination of whether the practices detailed within the sample of reviews could be considered harmful practice.

Term	Definition
Adultification	Adultification refers to the concept that "notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias… the impact results in children's rights being either diminished or not upheld" (Listen Up, 2020). This was later extended upon to explicitly reference its impact on Black children: "A persistent and ongoing act of dehumanisation, which explicitly impacts Black children, and influences how they are safeguarded and protected. This form of bias spans pre-birth and remains on a continuum to adulthood. Where at this juncture it becomes absorbed within the normative negative racialised experiences many Black adults encounter throughout their life course… race and racism remain the central tenant in which this bias operates" (Davis, 2022).
Silence	We use the term 'silence' to refer to the absence, in reviews, of engagement with, or consideration of, practice learning relating to the ways in which race, racism, racial bias and other related concepts may have impacted on service and practice responses to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children and/or their families. We acknowledge that our insight into the entire process of conducting and publishing reviews is limited, given our analytical focus is only on the review report. This necessarily means we cannot know why the silences we observed in some reviews persist. However, we shine a light on these silences to promote dialogue around the ways in which practice – of both producing reviews and direct work with children and families – ignores, implicitly or intentionally, the significance of race, racism, and racial bias in the learning process and consequently the experiences of the children and families impacted by it.
Racial trauma	Defined as the cumulative impact of race-based traumatic experiences at individual, institutional and systemic levels (Cénat, 2022).
Voice of the child	The term refers to "the real involvement of children in expressing their views, opinions, and experiences. It includes both verbal and nonverbal communication and goes beyond simply seeking their views to actively including them in decision-making processes" (NSPCC, 2024).

Appendix B: Methodology

Qualitative, thematic analysis was conducted on a sample of 40 rapid reviews and 14 local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs) to explore themes related to race, racism, culture, ethnicity and bias within reviews. Reviews were selected using a stratified random sampling approach, with those involving children and families from Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage backgrounds included within the final sample. The representation of these ethnicity groups within the sample is broadly reflective of the representation within the wider database, for the time frame under consideration here. This database is maintained by the Data Insights Team on behalf of the Panel.

This sample of rapid reviews and LCSPRs relates to incidents that took place between January 2022 and March 2024. Overall, the sample of LCSPRs was not connected to the sample of rapid reviews, except for one rapid review and LCSPR which explored the same incident.

Reviews were selected to ensure a range of socio-demographic characteristics and experience of contextual factors, such as children missing education, employment, or training, and children living in different family structures. Further details on this sample are provided in Appendix C.

The qualitative analytical framework was developed using academic literature and was informed by the guidance and expertise of the Panel sub-group. There was a dual focus on the practice learning identified within reviews and an exploration of the approach taken by reviewers to consider the learning.

It is important to note that the analysis does not compare the learning from reviews relating to children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds to the learning identified in reviews concerning white children and families. Therefore, it is not possible to comment on whether some of the issues identified in this sample would also be relevant to white children and families.

To ensure rigour in the analytical approach, the researchers tested the analytical framework on a small sample of reviews to ensure clarity of interpretation across the variables. Following successful testing and refinement of the framework, reviews were randomly assigned to two researchers to conduct the coding and analysis. Tests of inter-coder agreement were conducted at key points within the analysis, with good agreement observed between coders. Second-level analysis was then conducted to explore learning specific to individual ethnicity groups. Frequency analysis was conducted to explore the coding across all the variables. These values were then calculated to generate a percentage relative to the sample size for that ethnicity group, due to variation in the sample sizes for the three ethnicity groups represented within our sample. To explore this further, coding for each ethnicity group was reviewed in isolation, with key themes extracted.

Appendix C: Sample characteristics

Table C1. The sample of rapid reviews (RRs) and LCSPRs, broken down by reporting year

Reporting year	Number of RRs	Number of LCSPRs*
2021-2022	3	0
2022-2023	20	2
2023-2024	17	12
Total	**40**	**14**

*Note: For LCSPRs, the dates provided are the date the LCSPR was received by the panel; the date provided on the report; or the date the panel meeting was held due to variation in the reporting of dates within LCSPR reports.

Table C2. The representation of children from Mixed/Multiple ethnicity groups within the selected sample, compared to the wider sample of Black, Asian and Mixed heritage backgrounds children within the database, broken down by review type

Ethnicity	Selected sample of RRs (N)	% of selected sample of RRs	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in RR database	Selected sample of LCSPRs (N)	% of selected sample of LCSPRS	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in LCSPR database
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	**16**	**40%**	**50%**	**9**	**64%**	**56%**
White and Black Caribbean	7	18%	21%	5	36%	31%
White and Black African	3	8%	6%	1	7%	9%
White and Asian	2	5%	8%	3	21%	19%
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	4	10%	15%	0	0%	6%

*Note: percentages have been rounded to whole numbers, and thus may not add up to 100%.

Table C3. The representation of children from Asian ethnicity groups within the selected sample, compared to the wider sample of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children within the database, broken down by review type

Ethnicity	Selected sample of RRs (N)	% of selected sample of RRs	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in RR database	Selected sample of LCSPRs (N)	% of selected sample of LCSPRS	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in LCSPR database
Asian/Asian British	**13**	**33%**	**20%**	**1**	**7%**	**9%**
Pakistani	5	13%	7%	0	0%	3%
Bangladeshi	4	10%	6%	0	0%	0%
Chinese	1	2%	1%	1	7%	3%
Indian	2	5%	3%	0	0%	3%
Any other Asian background	1	2%	2%	0	0%	0%

*Note: percentages have been rounded to whole numbers, and thus may not add up to 100%.

Table C4. The representation of children from Black ethnicity groups within the selected sample, compared to the wider sample of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children within the database, broken down by review type

Ethnicity	Selected sample of RRs (N)	% of selected sample of RRs	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in RR database	Selected sample of LCSPRs (N)	% of selected sample of LCSPRS	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in LCSPR database
Black/African/ Caribbean/ Black British	**11**	**27%**	**30%**	**4**	**29%**	**22%**
African	4	10%	9%	1	7%	6%
Caribbean	4	10%	6%	1	7%	9%
Any other Black background	3	8%	15%	2	14%	6%

*Note: percentages have been rounded to whole numbers, and thus may not add up to 100%.

Table C5. The sex of the children within the selected sample, compared to the sex of the wider sample of Black, Asian and Mixed/Multiple ethnicity children within the database, broken down by review type

Sex	Selected sample of RRs (N)	% of selected sample of RRs	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in RR database	Selected sample of LCSPRs (N)	% of selected sample of LCSPRS	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in LCSPR database
Male	22	55%	61%	10	71%	60%
Female	18	45%	39%	4	29%	41%

*Note: percentages have been rounded to whole numbers, and thus may not add up to 100%.

Table C6. The age-groups of the children within the selected sample, compared to the age-groups of the wider sample of Black, Asian and Mixed heritage children within the database, broken down by review type

Age group	Selected sample of RRs (N)	% of selected sample of RRs	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in RR database	Selected sample of LCSPRs (N)	% of selected sample of LCSPRS	% of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children in LCSPR database
Under 1	13	33%	28%	4	29%	31%
1-5 years	5	13%	15%	4	29%	31%
6-10 years	4	10%	8%	0	0%	0%
11-15 years	7	18%	19%	4	29%	25%
16-17 years	11	28%	30%	2	14%	13%

*Note: percentages have been rounded to whole numbers, and thus may not add up to 100%.

Chart C1. The disability status of children within the selected sample

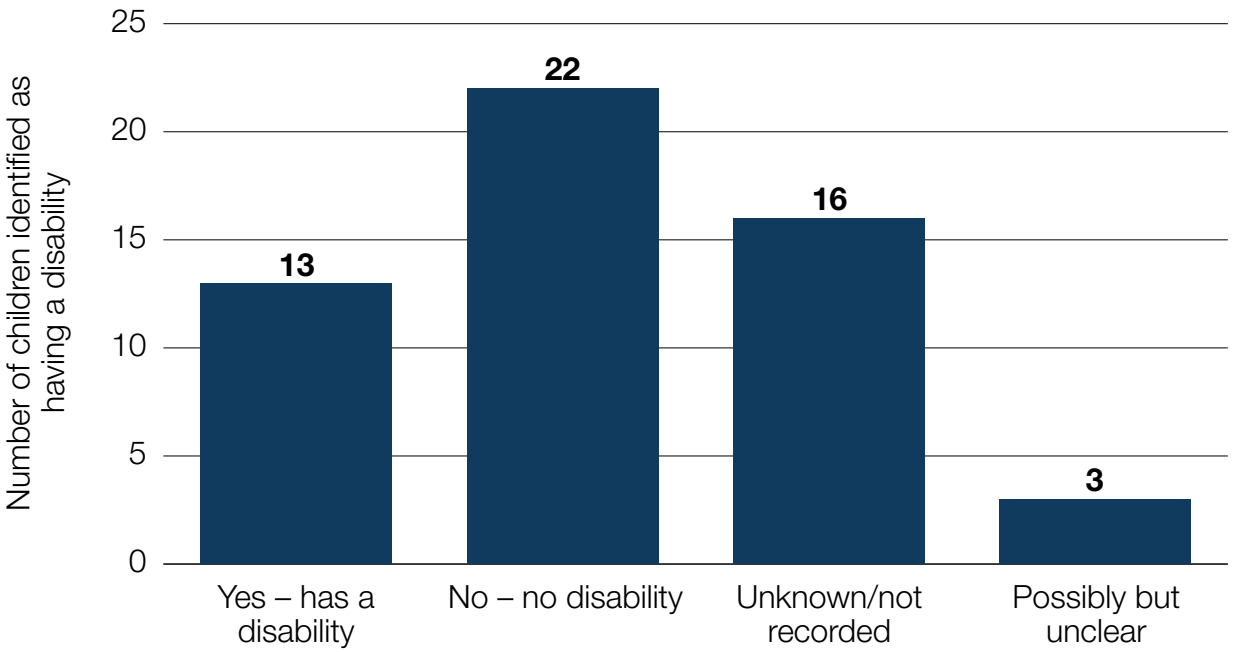


Chart C2. The number of children identified as being neurodiverse within the selected sample

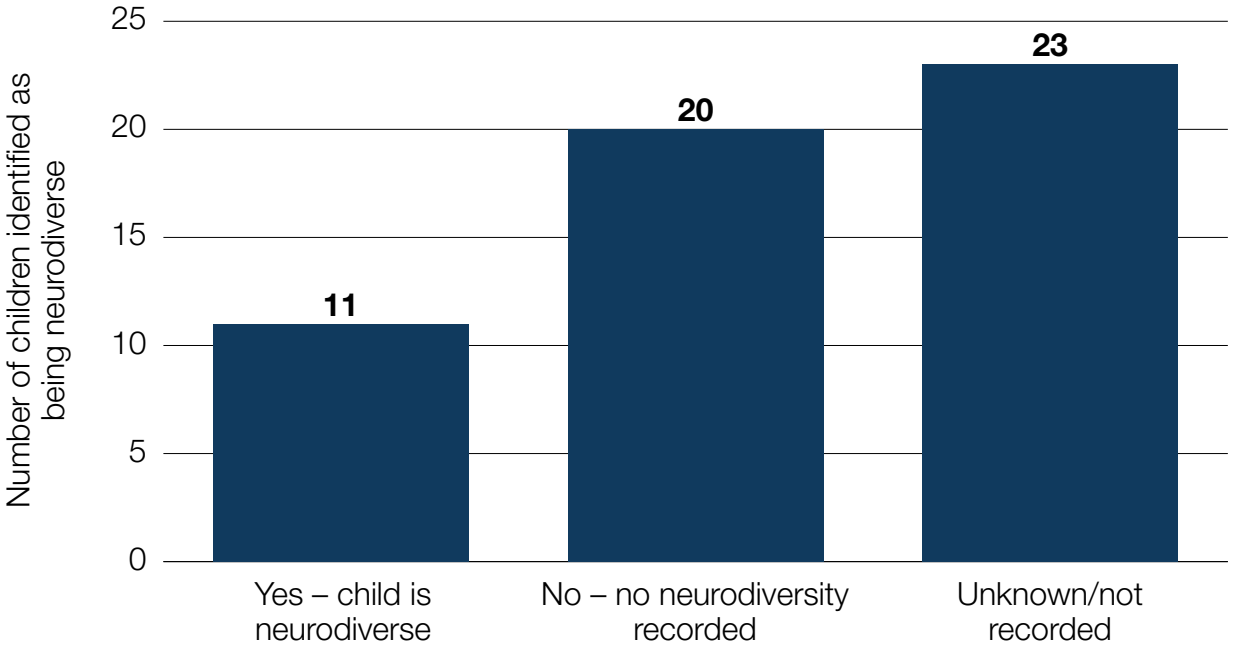


Chart C3. The number of children identified as having a mental health condition, within the selected sample

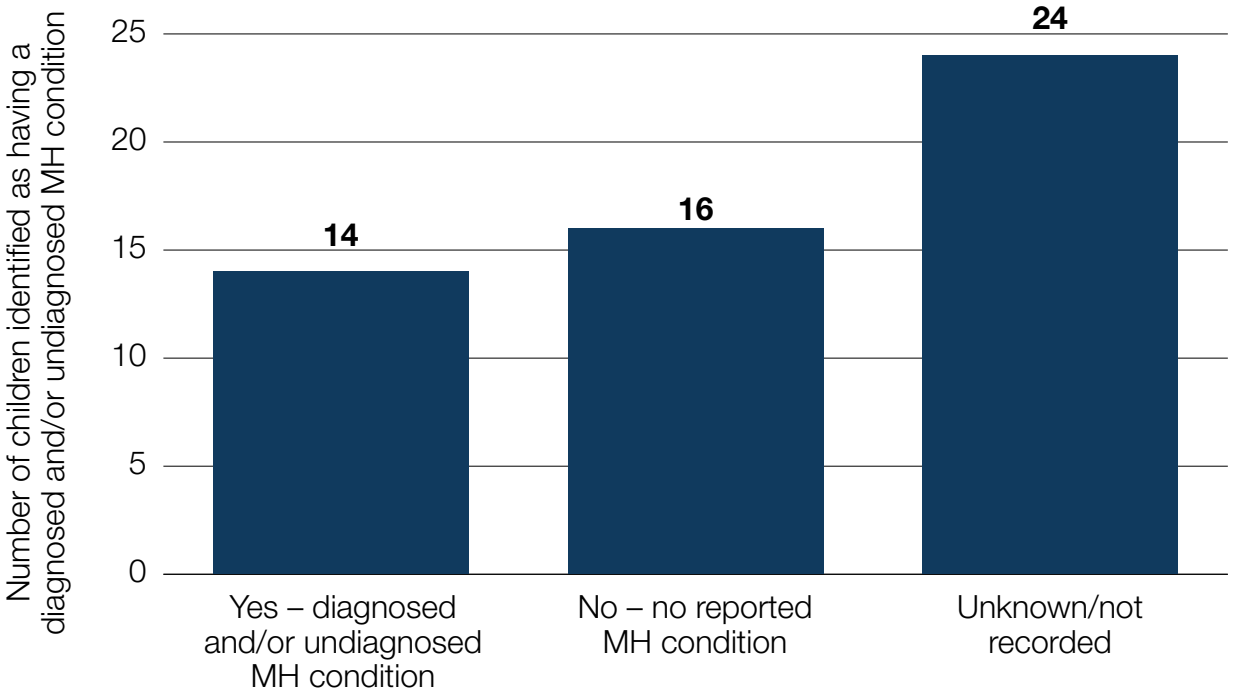


Chart C4. The sexual identity of children within the selected sample

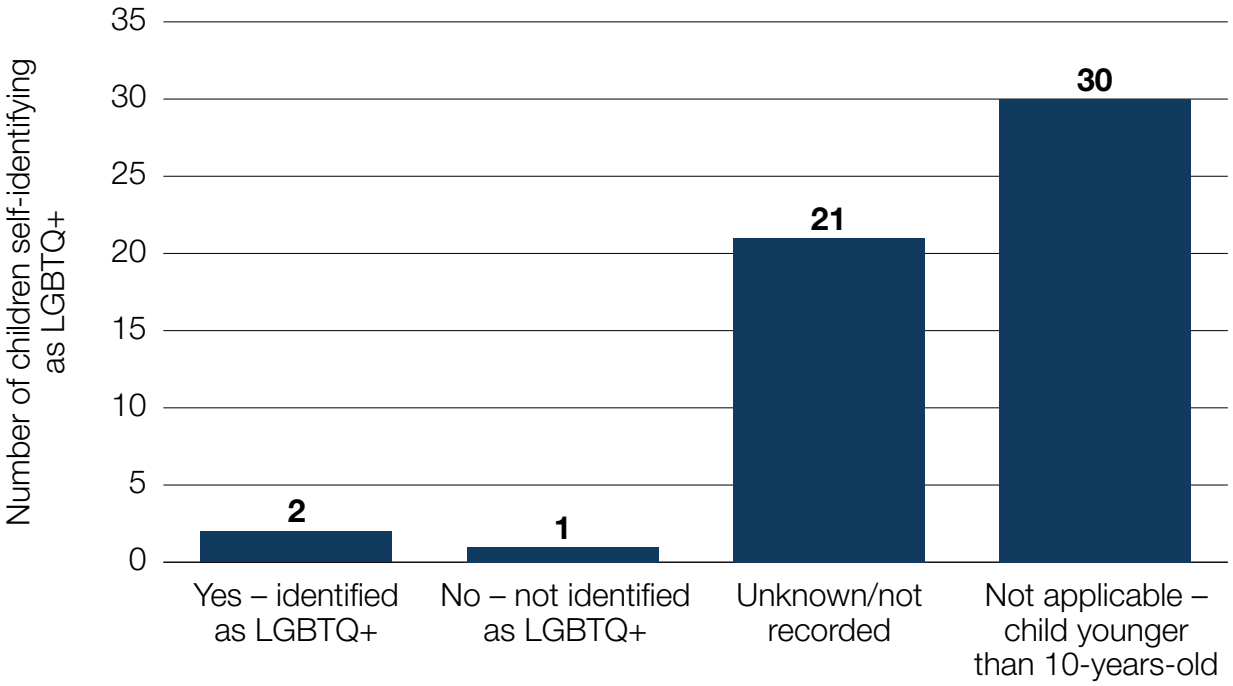


Table C7. The nature of harm within the selected sample, broken down by review type

	RR	LCSPR	Total
Death	**23**	**5**	**28**
Related to abuse/neglect	19	4	23
Not related to abuse/neglect	3	1	4
Unknown	1	0	1
Serious harm	**17**	**9**	**26**
Related to abuse/neglect	15	9	24
Not related to abuse/neglect	2	0	2

Table C8. The cause of death/serious harm identified within the review, broken down by review type

	RR	LCSPR	Total
Death	**23**	**5**	**28**
Accident/injury	1	1	2
Child homicide – Extrafamilial	2	0	2
Death from extreme neglect	2	0	2
Fatal assault – Extrafamilial	3	1	4
Fatal assault – Intrafamilial	2	0	2
Medical	1	0	1
Overt child homicide by primary caregiver	2	1	3
Suicide	3	1	4
Unclear	4	0	4
Unexplained SUDI/SUDC	3	1	4
Serious harm	**17**	**9**	**26**
Child sexual abuse – Extrafamilial	1	1	2
Child sexual abuse – Intrafamilial	1	0	1
Medical cause	0	1	1
Non-fatal assault – Extrafamilial	4	1	5
Non-fatal assault – Intra-familial	3	1	4
Non-fatal neglect	1	1	2
Other non-fatal incident	4	1	5
Severe, persistent, child cruelty	1	3	4
Unclear	2	0	2

Table C9. A breakdown of the likely primary suspect of harm, broken down by ethnicity group

	Mixed/ Multiple ethnic background	% of ethnicity group	Asian/ Asian British	% of ethnicity group	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	% of ethnicity group
Both parents/ carers	4	16%	4	29%	2	13%
Child/young person themselves	2	8%	1	7%	1	7%
Father	2	8%	2	14%	0	0%
Mother	4	16%	2	14%	4	27%
Known but unrelated	4	16%	0	0%	4	27%
Mother's partner/ parental figure	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%
None	4	16%	2	14%	0	0%
Other relation/ carer	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%
Stranger	3	12%	1	7%	2	13%
Unclear/ under investigation	0	0%	2	14%	1	7%
Unknown/ not recorded	0	0%	0	0%	1	7%
Total	25	100%	14	100%	15	100%

*Note: percentages have been rounded to whole numbers, and thus may not add up to 100%.

Chart C5. The number of children cared for by a sole parent within the selected sample

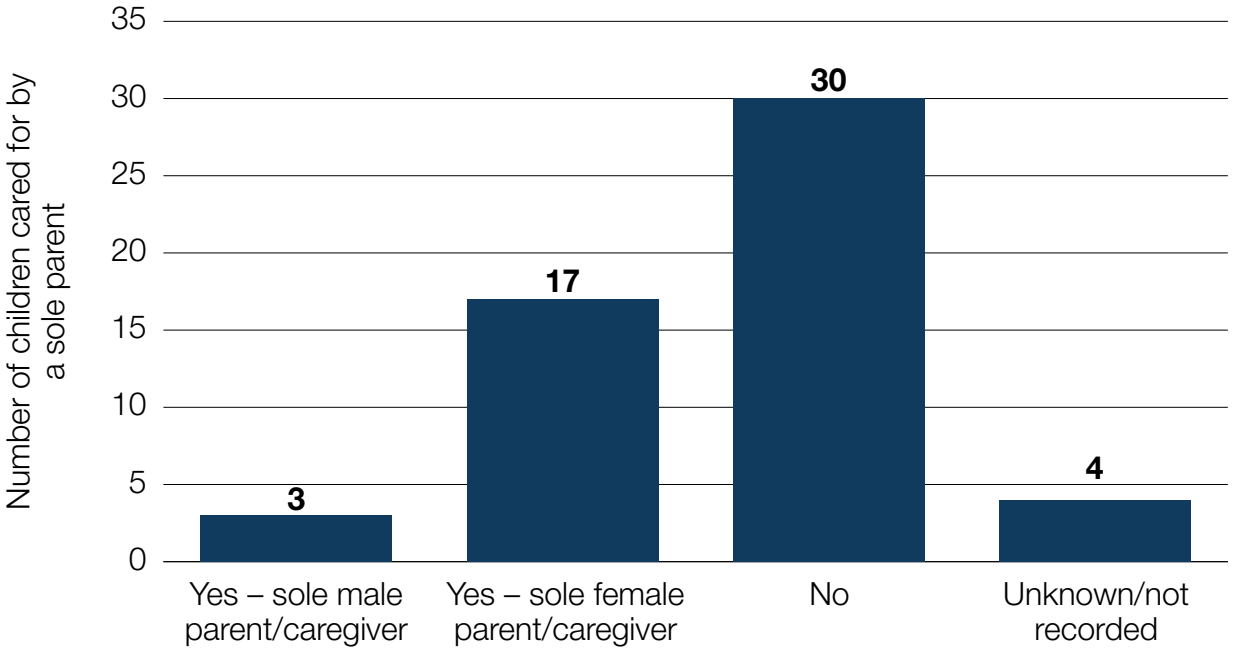


Chart C6. The number of children missing education (under 16-years-old) within the selected sample

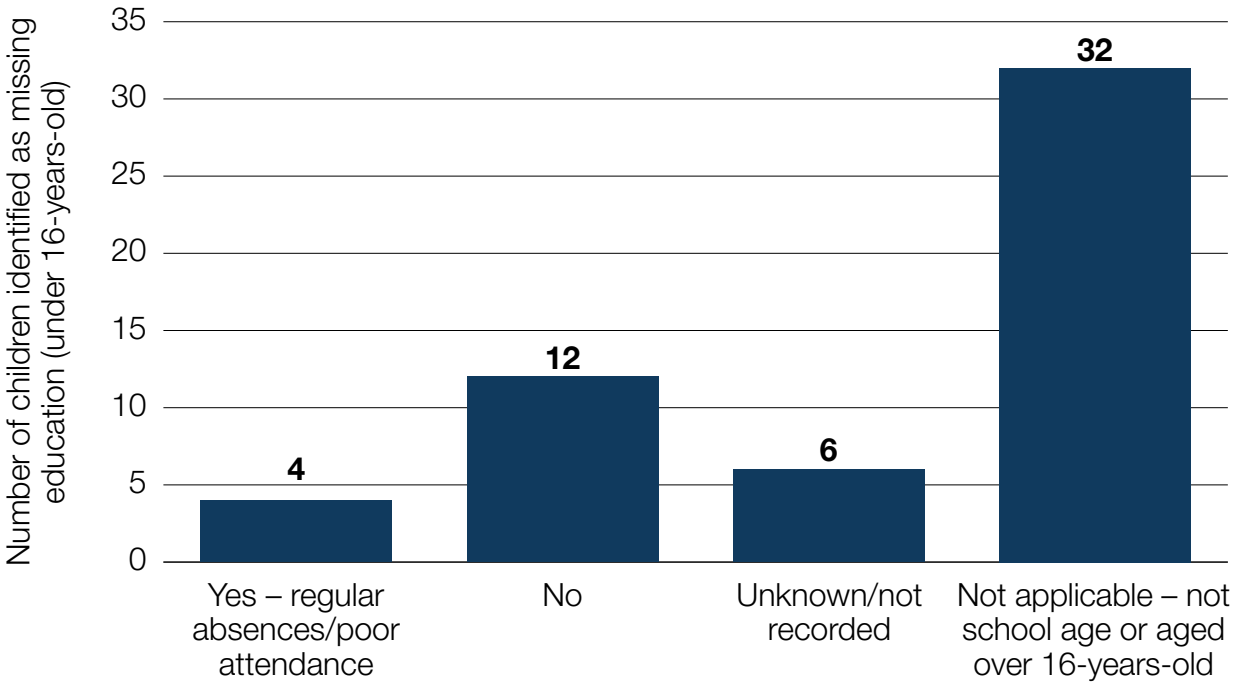
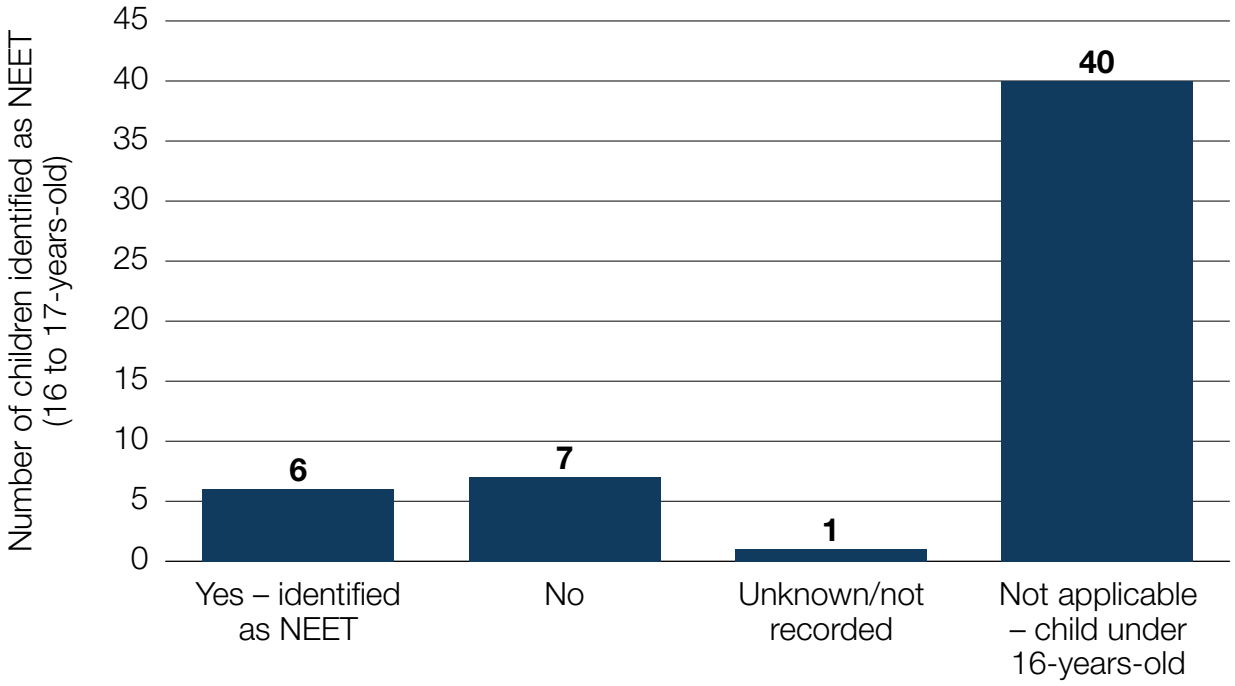


Chart C7. The number of children not in education, employment, or training (NEET) (children aged 16 to 17-years-old) within the selected sample



Appendix D: Analytical framework

The specific questions and areas of focus which were included in the analytical framework are detailed below.

- Does the Terms of Reference include any specific focus/questions related to race/culture/bias, including racism?
- Does the review(er) consider culture/race/ethnicity in terms of its impacts on the child(ren) or the patterns of abuse and neglect? If so, how?
- Does the review(er) consider wider implications of inequity that are/may be systemic in nature?
- Does the review(er) consider race/culture/bias in terms of how practitioners responded to child/family, when these issues were acknowledged? For example: where biases/assumptions/racism is recognised, does the review consider what might be needed to challenge these perspectives held by professionals?
- Was child's voice considered in the rapid review meeting?
- Does the review include relevant race, culture, religion or other inequality-related information (inclusion of relevant protected characteristics)?
- Is there evidence that professionals knew and understood what life was like for the children in their care?
- Is there evidence that the child's wishes and feelings had been sought?
- Is there evidence the child was spoken to alone (if relevant)?
- Where relevant, is there evidence practitioners utilised alternative means of communication to engage effectively with children who may be unable to speak English (for example by utilising pictures or simple questioning)?
- Are there any themes/issues relating to interpreters/use of interpreters evident? (Will not be relevant in all cases). Or did professionals utilise a neighbour/family member (including another child) etc. as an interpreter? (Here there could be considerations about whether language barriers prevented child's voice from being heard – including inadequate resources; or where decisions were made to use someone in the community – has this been justified?)
- Was risk to/vulnerability of the child understood?
- Is there evidence that children and their families were ignored/dismissed by practitioners (invisibilisation)?

- Is there evidence that children were seen as having more autonomy over their behaviour and thus were more culpable for their behaviours. And/or is there evidence that children and their families were considered more responsible for managing their behaviour?
- Where a child has offended, were safeguarding needs also considered? Was there evidence of the 'child first approach'?
- Had the child/family been offered early help support? Had this been taken up?
- Is there any evidence of professional language and framing in discussions and decision-making that demonstrates evidence of assumptions/ biases present?
- Have inequalities and these combined experiences of oppression (intersectionality), been explored by reviewers or is there evidence these were explored by practitioners and leaders where relevant?
- Was there evidence of harmful practices (FGM/C, faith-based abuse, spiritual abuse etc.) within the review? Where relevant, is there evidence these practices were appropriately identified and responded to?
- Is racism highlighted by reviewers as potentially motivating professionals' responses? Is there evidence of racism that has not been identified and challenged by the reviewer?
- Is there evidence that a lower threshold 'of concern and intervention' may have been applied (a 'cultural deficit')? In other words, is there any evidence that professionals ignored the need to intervene because of cultural assumptions/ anxieties? Or alternately, rapidly intervened for this reason?
- Were issues of immigration status present within the review. For example, individuals with no recourse to public funds? Where relevant, are immigration issues explored thoroughly in terms of the possibility of this being a risk factor for the children?
- Is religion or are other cultural features (such as trans-generational trauma) recorded, or mentioned within SiN, rapid review, or LCSPR?
- Is religion or are other cultural features mentioned as being significant to the case?
- Where relevant, is there evidence that practitioners examined the role of religious beliefs or other cultural features in framing the familial environment for the children involved?
- Is there evidence that professionals made assumptions about the role of religion within Black/Asian/Mixed Heritage households?
- Positive responses and missed opportunities for agencies individually (education, health, social care, police, other agencies) and for multi-agency working.
- Does the review identify any specific learning points/recommendations related to race/ethnicity/culture? If yes, please provide details.
- Does the letter from the Panel refer to race/ethnicity/culture?

Appendix E: Reflective questions

Questions for safeguarding partnerships

1. When commissioning reviews involving a Black, Asian or Mixed Heritage child, what expectations do you hold for the review panel (in the case of rapid reviews) and for lead review authors (in the case of LCSPRs) and how is this communicated and benchmarked? When selecting a reviewer, do you consider their expertise in matters of race, racism and racial bias?
2. To what extent do you start – at the point of producing rapid reviews and commissioning LCSPRs – from the position that children and families from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds will have experienced racism in their lives, regardless of whether they themselves recognise it or not? Starting from this position can enable more thoughtful consideration of their experiences within the safeguarding system.
3. How do you create the conditions in which the rapid review panel and the LCSPR lead review author feel confident to explore issues concerning race, culture and ethnicity robustly and to identify and challenge racism when it occurs in practice?
4. How are you assured that a focus on the impact of race, ethnicity, and culture, on practice is embedded within the rapid review process and within terms of reference for LCSPRs? Do you have a quality assurance process in place to ensure the review has appropriately challenged practice responses where racism and racial bias are present?
5. How open are you, and what processes do you have in place, to respond to challenges from the review panel or independent review author about practice that reflects racist or biased approaches?

Questions for reviewers

1. Do you feel confident that you have the necessary skills and experience to author reviews where race, culture and/or ethnicity is a factor? Do you have the knowledge and skills to critically examine practice responses that may be rooted in racism and racial bias?
2. When reviews involve children and families from diverse racial or cultural backgrounds, how do you ensure this is robustly explored and considered within the report or meeting?

3. How confident are you in identifying evidence of racism and racial bias demonstrated by practitioners? How confident are you in raising this with review panels and safeguarding partnerships, and that you will be listened to?

Questions for practitioners and safeguarding leaders

1. As a practitioner, how can you feel empowered to have conversations with children and families about race and identity, particularly when you are working with individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to your own? As a safeguarding partnership, how can you create the conditions that empower practitioners to do this effectively?
2. As a practitioner, how confident are you that, when engaging with children, you consider all aspects of their identity and how these may intersect to influence risk and vulnerability? If you don't feel confident, why might this be the case? As a safeguarding partnership, how can you instill confidence and skill in practitioners to do this effectively?
3. As a practitioner, do you feel confident that you understand the impact of race, culture and ethnicity on children and families, and on their experiences? If you don't, what may explain a lack of confidence in this area? How do you explore this with children and families and create opportunities and spaces for them to discuss its impact?
4. How do you ensure you are self-reflective about your own biases when working with children and families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds? How is this supported on an individual level and within teams? As a safeguarding partnership, how do you reassure yourselves that your teams are providing reflective spaces for practitioners to explore these issues?
5. How can you be supported to effectively respond to the diverse communication needs for children and families, particularly when considering national issues concerning the availability and accessibility of interpreters and interpretation services? As a safeguarding partnership, how are you responding to these national issues and building capacity to effectively communicate with children and families?
6. As a safeguarding partnership, are you reassured that appropriate internal structures are in place to support practitioners to recognise, discuss and challenge internal and institutional racism? How confident would you feel, as an individual, to name and challenge racism?