Social inclusion and exclusion: experiences of older South Asian women in the UK

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Overview of the presentation

1. Social capital, social exclusion, and inclusion
2. Methodological background to the study
3. Social inclusion and exclusion experiences of older South Asian women in the UK
4. Summary
Theorizing social capital; social inclusion and social exclusion

- Social ties and interpersonal relationships (Coleman, 1988)
- Culture, taste and inequality (Bourdieu, 1986)
- A vehicle for gaining different types of support from others (Boneham and Sixsmith, 2006; Mand, 2006; Gray, 2008).
Theorizing social capital: some problems

- Underlying lack of sensitivity to diversity and the effects of inequalities (Takhar, 2006)
- **Neglect of:**
  - Minority ethnic groups (Hallberg and Lund, 2005; Hope Cheong, 2006; Takhar, 2006)
  - Women (Lovell, 2000; Adkins, 2005; McLeod, 2005)
  - Older people (Boneham and Sixsmith, 2006; Walker and Hiller, 2007)
The activities women are able to participate in and their access to social relationships, may be constrained by the culturally located and gendered parameters of what is thought to be, and actually is possible for them (Wilson, 1978; Brah, 1996; Mirza, 1997; Wray, 2004).

Marginalisation and discrimination faced by older migrant women at different life stages often restricted their potential to build social relationships (Castles, 1993; Thiara, 1995; Mirza, 1997).
Methodological background to the study

- Located in the North of England
- Qualitative life–history interviews
- Eight women aged 60+
- Self-identified ethnic identity – Pakistani British, British citizen of Indian origin, Indian Sikh, Indian British, Muslim Pakistani
- Interpreter
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Migration, education and employment: ‘I wasn’t accepted here easily’

• The participants spoke of the marginalisation and discrimination they had experienced throughout their lives.

• The majority regarded being able to speak English as an important factor in enabling them to build relationships outside of the immediate community and to gain access to employment.
Early experiences

- (...) I was uneducated. I wasn’t literate in Urdu either. I just went to school for four years before India and Pakistan were made. Then we came to Pakistan and everything was destroyed here as well just like in India. Then I grew a little older and my brothers stopped me from going to school. I had so many dreams. (...) My heart used to wish that if only I had become a teacher (Rehana age 65+, Muslim Pakistani).
Early experiences

- Only couple of years (at school). On that time Pakistan and India is separate. I came from Pakistan I’m three and a half years old those days the local people is kidnapping the girls especially if they had a little jewellery or something like that, and taking and kill them all the time. Those days, my father is no like to send (to school). And is later is send me about two years that’s it. (…) But at that time because I’m a girl my father thinks is maybe more respected (…) (Jannah, age 60+, Pakistani British, Muslim).
Yeah I’m try to speak in English (...) I’m feeling I no speak good English. I’m working, working, try first time two three months go college, but go working, working, so no time (Rehana, age 65+, Muslim Pakistani).

How did you learn English? (Interviewer)

Just working in the shop I taught myself. Speaking and dealing with customers. I didn’t know any of the names of the things we sold in the shop. I used to write the names in Urdu and label things (Rehana, age 65+, Muslim Pakistani).
Employment

• Four of the participants had been employed in paid work regularly throughout their lives and spoke of the poor work conditions and/or the discrimination they had encountered in England.
But there is no facilities, no heater system. If we sewing the sun shine upstairs there too much heat in the brain sometimes cold (...) (Amneet, age 60+ Indian Sikh).

Yes in the beginning when we used to come home from work the English people outside the factory (...) The English people used to throw pieces of bread at us they would be stood eating sandwiches and theys throw bits of bread at us. Sometimes it hit our faces. We suffered a lot in this country (Rehana, age 65+, Pakistani Muslim)
Some of the participants spoke of meeting friends and family at faith organisations and the Healthy Living group.

The majority felt that they could not always seek personal support from them.

One of the main themes identified by the participants as a barrier to developing relationships with people in their existing social networks was a fear of hostility and gossip (from extended family and people who had migrated to England but knew or had links with the homeland village or town of the participant).
My seven children born here. Then my four children married, four children married, one young daughter and my husband. My big son is married and then the lady’s keeped my husband. My husband no live in my house. My husband no live in my house, other house is two children where my daughter-in-law she married my husband. And my husband is like forget it (his) life. My son is now in prison. (...) This time life is bad. First time life is very happy. And now my two son is going prison (Rabia, age 60, British Pakistani).
Upset the whole family is upset. The life in my legs has gone and I don’t know but I feel very hungry and I get the shakes. Because I can’t even tell anybody what’s happening because everybody round here is nosy. The thing is we haven’t told our relatives that this is what’s happened to us. Because here everybody pokes fun at other people’s problems (Rabia, age 60, British Pakistani).
Because when you’re living in a small community like this one then every one feels embarrassed and ashamed. Everywhere is these things. And they talking different way and one way is...they saying they feel sorry for us and afterward they saying...no control (they) is bad parents. Yeah always if there some people (and the) father is very, very, religious praying all the time always in the mosque, and they saying can’t control his (Jannah’s husband) children. (...) Sometime you trusting the people you trusting all the time, but they don’t like to listen (...) they talk different way behind your back (Jannah, age 60, Pakistani British).
Summary

• The stories of the women in this study challenge those theories of social capital that ignore the effects of contextually based power relations on social inclusion and exclusion, across the life course.

• One of the most important factors that influenced the participants’ access to social, economic, and cultural capital was their marginalised social position as migrant women.

• Another was their gendered position within the local community which often intersected with their social position outside of the local community to marginalise them further.
Summary

• A lack of education early on due to gender and class inequalities made it difficult for the majority of the participants to feel socially included in their place of birth and in England.

• The majority of participants were more likely to talk to neighbours and those outside of their immediate family and community, about their personal problems.

• The findings cast doubt on Putnam’s argument that ‘ethnic diversity is associated with less trust in neighbours’ (2007: 153).