HOW COMMUNITY INCLUSION PRACTICES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SOUTH ASIAN OLDER PEOPLE'S (AGED 65+) SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

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This study aimed to investigate the social inclusion of South Asian older people, aged 65+, in the United Kingdom . It explored whether intergenerational practices could help the social integration of this social group.

Social inclusion is defined as the process of enhancing the conditions in which people participate in society [11,12]. Social inclusion enables individuals to take part in society and it can particularly help people, who are at risk of feeling lonely and being socially excluded [11,13]. Hence, the aim is to improve the abilities and opportunities of the disadvantaged, based on their identity and diverse needs [11,12, 14]. Additionally, human interactions are vital for maintaining good physical, spiritual and mental health [15, 16]. Moreover, social inclusion is paramount for individuals regardless of their age, gender, social status, location and ethnicity [17; 18;19].

It has been highlighted that social inclusion requires appropriate resources and services, which should be differentiated according to the physical, mental, and cultural needs of specific social groups. These needs are also ethnic and age-related [20, 21]. Nonetheless, older people's needs are often not met, and the necessary resources may not be available, which can lead to social exclusion [11]. Social exclusion is the person's inability to be involved in society, community, and events [11, 13, 19]. Social isolation is defined as a lack of social and familial contacts and access to the services required [22,23]. Additionally, social inclusion is a dynamic process across the life course, impacting the lives of various generations [11, 24].

Index Terms: social *inclusion, loneliness, isolation, older people, intergenerational, South Asian.*

INTRODUCTION

Social inclusion is a process that helps people to participate in society, regardless of their demographic differences. It can assist individuals and groups, which are more likely to be at risk of loneliness and social exclusion, to have the opportunity and appropriate resources to be included within society [4].

Social exclusion is when individuals or certain groups are separated from society due tovarious factors, such as discrimination or lack of resources, lack of understanding of the cultural needs of diverse communities; ill health; lack of transportation; insufficient income; inadequate provision of community inclusion initiatives [2, 3, 26].

The number of individuals, aged 65 and over, has increased to 11 million in England and is predicted to increase in the next 10 years [5]. This age group is more likely to be affected by social exclusion due to different factors, including loneliness, ageism, complex communication technology and/ or poverty [6, 26].

Social isolation can lead to loneliness and vice versa and these issues may occur simultaneously. There is an increase in the number of individuals in the United Kingdom (UK), who feel lonely most of the time [25,27,28]. Social interactions are crucial for the physical and mental health of different types of ethnic groups, social status, genders, disability, religions, or age [1].

The primary element of this study will focus on Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi South Asians, aged 65 and over.

There has been an increase in the representatives of this ethnicity within the Black Country, West Midlands [29].

These ethnicities are more likely to experience barriers to social integration, such as cultural differences, language barriers, poverty and a lack of opportunities and information [7,8].

Asians, including South Asians, are 9.3% of the UK population and studies

highlight that they can be at a higher risk of social isolation [29, 30]. The 2021 Census showed that the Asian British population in England and Wales increased to 5.5 million (figure 1) [29,30]. Additionally, the results indicated that London (20.7%) and the West Midlands (13.3%) had the highest percentage of this ethnicity [30,31]. Furthermore, 24%-50% of individuals born in Pakistan, China, the Caribbean and Africa felt lonely in the UK [20; 32,33]. Therefore, this research will focus on the West Midlands due to the higher number of Asian people in this area.
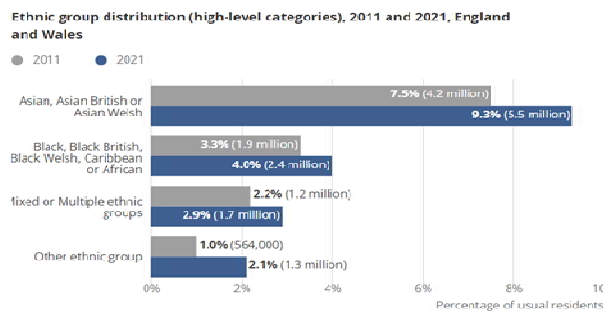
Figure 1 [29]

Intergenerational practices involve different age groups, aiming to increase the social integration of individuals, who are at risk of social exclusion and loneliness [9,10].

The researcher conducted a study for their Master's Degree in 2016, exploring the views and experiences of people, aged 60+, and young people, aged 18-24 in relation to the social inclusion of these age groups (Figure 2). This project has been expanded by investigating the social integration of South Asian individuals in the Black Country (West Midlands) and how this can be enhanced through intergenerational practices to reduce their isolation and loneliness. Additionally, the current study will examine the barriers to social interactions among South Asian people and the impact on their quality of life, considering their cultural needs. The primary research will recruit South Asian individuals (aged 65+) and professionals, who provide community services to ascertain opportunities for intergenerational initiatives, involving diverse communities.

Figure 2. Participants' views on social inclusion and age groups. Image created by researcher.

Methodology

The project will conduct both secondary and primary research. The literature review will explore the factors, contributing to the social isolation of South Asian individuals (aged 65+) within the Black Country, West Midlands. The primary research will incorporate semi-structured interviews with older South Asian people. Moreover, a survey will be conducted with respondents (aged 18-64) and professionals involved in community services.

A mixed methods approach will be used: semi-structured interviews with older South Asian individuals in the West Midlands, United Kingdom. In addition to this, online surveys with individuals aged 18-64 and professionals, will be carried out. Finally, an intergenerational workshop with South Asian adults (65+) and young people will be organised.

This study will investigate social inclusion amongst South Asian older people, aged 65+, in the Black Country (West Midlands, United Kingdom).

Secondary research
- To identify the key factors affecting older adults' social inclusion.
- To evaluate the social inclusion initiatives for older South Asian people in the UK.

Primary research
- To examine the views of South Asian older people in the West Midlands regarding their social inclusion.
- To examine professionals' views on older South Asian social inclusion.
- To evaluate if intergenerational practices can promote social inclusion of South Asians in the West Midlands.
- To establish adults' (aged 18-64) views on intergenerational activities with older individuals (aged 65+).

Results

Results from the literature review indicate that older South Asian individuals are experiencing significant social isolation in the UK due to insufficient and ongoing social inclusion practices. However, evidence suggests that they can benefit from intergenerational approaches. Thus, they reported an enhanced well-being, sense of belonging and confidence. Therefore, it is crucial to expand such intergenerational practices to improve South Asians' (65+) social inclusion.

This is an ongoing active project; therefore, results are still being formulated for various elements of the project. However, it would be a great opportunity to share up-to-date knowledge about this phenomenon and provide an opportunity for attendees to complete elements of this research project to get their views and experiences.

Conclusion

To gain an understanding of social inclusion opportunities amongst South Asian older people (aged 65+). This research will enable the researcher to establish a further understanding, of gaps in knowledge and practice regarding this phenomenon - in particular intergenerational practices.

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