

The Colour of Madness: Exploring BAME Mental Health in the UK

Edited by Samara Linton and Rianna Walcott
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This book provides a rich collection of stories, poems and artwork by 58 contributors, all from BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) backgrounds. It is a well-documented text which can be raw, uncomfortable and thought-provoking. It provides profound insight into the disproportionate inequalities that BAME communities often face in both societal and mental health professional settings. In my experience, racism, prejudice and cultural discrimination undeniably exist in the UK, and if you add 'diagnosis of mental illness' into the mix, this increases the associated stigma.

The editors of this book explained that they chose not to 'police the terms and descriptors', in order to allow the authors the freedom to define themselves – a freedom that is often denied to certain marginalised groups. The layout of the book caught my attention. The centre of the book contains artwork and short poems by contributors which capture the stigma, shame and trauma they experienced, the challenges they faced while using mental health services, and their celebration of their recovery.


The first half of the book focuses on BAME individuals who bravely share experiences such as having an episode of severe mental illness or psychological distress, and use a plethora of terms to describe their own thoughts and behaviours as in-patients of mental health hospitals. They talk about disempowerment, lack of trust, social exclusion and lack of political influence. There is an acknowledgement that a person of colour is more likely be misdiagnosed with a mental health disorder, based not only on their ethnicity but also on their sexual orientation, cultural differences and language.

The second half is written by those who were providing services – psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists or researchers from BAME backgrounds – who describe the challenges they faced during their childhood and at their current workplace. The authors describe the experience of trauma, shame, and public discrimination based on their cultural background which led to the deterioration of their mental health. At the end of this unique book, each of the 58 contributors shares a mini-biography, detailing their ethnic background and the experiences that led them to being involved with mental healthcare. I think this is what brings us emotionally closer to the authors who fearlessly shared their stories. The editor's foreword echoes this: *See me. Hear me. Hold me.*

Initially, I found the book difficult to follow. The chapters were divided into colours of the visible light spectrum, and I was trying to make the connection. Are the colours of the spectrum representative of the patients' mood? Does the red chapter mean the patients are angry or psychotic? Does the blue chapter mean they are depressed or suicidal? However, I began to appreciate how deeply personal and sensitive the book is, and how it engages the reader. I hope this book will

encourage immense changes to our practice and, subsequently, building better relationships with our patients and the public.

This book should be read by all trainees and seniors. Although it might make the reader feel uncomfortable, it will help them to build inclusive therapeutic relationships with patients from all ethnic backgrounds and improve the practical accessibility of mental healthcare.

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