

Voice

of

DISCUSSIONS ON
CLASS, CASTE,
DRUGS AND GANGS

YOUTH-LED RESEARCH

Youth:



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Researchers from the Promoting Positive Diaspora Voices project

Background to the research

This research has been put together entirely by the young people involved in the ‘Promoting Positive Diaspora Voices’ project. The group consists of young people from Brierfield and Nelson (East Lancashire), Hayes (West London) and Normanton (Derby), who came together at a residential workshop to learn about research techniques and to discuss and agree on topics and an approach.

The young people then went back to their areas and undertook the research themselves, collating their results afterwards. At a final residential gathering, the group analysed the findings across the three research sites. Together, they authored the report you see here.

This report is the product of much dedication, interest and commitment by these young people. The document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of International Alert and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

Acknowledgements

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Partners





Contents

Introduction	4
Background	4
1. Class and caste - research findings	5
2. Drugs and gangs - research findings	8
3. Conclusions	12



Introduction

This research is part of the 'Promoting Positive Diaspora Voices' project – a three-year project (2011–2014) funded by the European Union. The project aims to support diaspora communities to raise public awareness within UK-based diaspora and wider communities of the structural causes of poverty and conflict in their countries of heritage. It seeks to build public support for peacebuilding and development processes within these regions.

International Alert and its local area project partners – Hayes YMCA and Y Care International, Lancashire Global Education Centre (LGEC), Marsden Heights Community College and Global Education Derby (GED) – have been supporting us to explore these issues from our perspectives as young people. We come from diaspora communities based in Brierfield and Nelson (East Lancashire), Hayes (West London) and Normanton (Derby).

For more information about the project, please visit <http://www.international-alert.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/europe/uk/projects/8178>.

Background

A group of 22 young people from three areas (Derby, Lancashire and West London) attended a residential-based workshop in April 2013. We came together to think and talk about issues that we were genuinely interested in doing research on. As well as talking about the issues, we discussed how we could do the research – looking at ways we could get the information and how easy or difficult it would be. We agreed that the best ways of collecting information were through surveys and group discussions. We then had to think about the questions we would ask our friends and other young people to find out how class and caste affects them and why people take illegal drugs.

After the residential workshop, we went back to our areas and undertook the research (fieldwork) from May to October 2013. The class and caste research topic also included a visit by eight members of the group to

Pakistan, where they explored the issue with young people and organisations. Those who went to Pakistan were then able to talk to the other group members involved in the research about their discussions with young people in Pakistan at the second residential gathering held in November 2014. This second workshop gave us the opportunity to discuss, agree on and write about our findings from the questionnaires and group discussions in our areas and also to explore what recommendations we could make. In addition, we thought about the headings and sections we could use for the report and discussed ideas for the front cover.

We learned a lot about how to conduct research and wanted to produce a report that our friends and other young people would be able to read and understand, and that was not too long.

The following two sections give an overview of our main research findings. We hope that you enjoy reading the research and find it interesting.

1 Class and caste – research findings

*“Class is more **what** you are, while caste is more **who** you are”*

– young researcher from Derby Positive Voices group

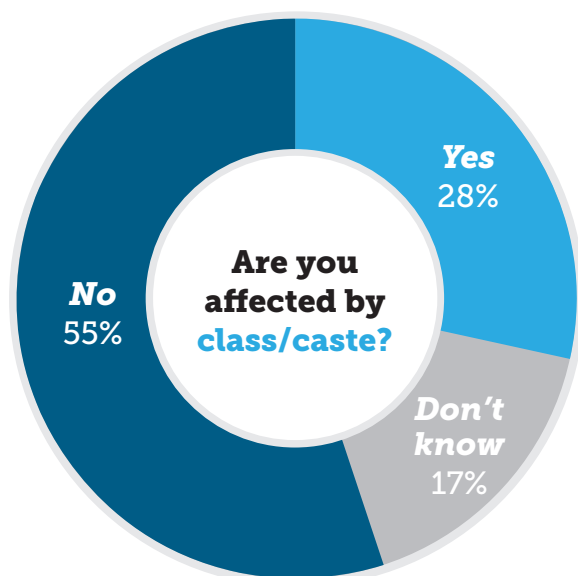
➔ What we wanted to know

In our research into caste and class, we wanted to discover how people are affected by class and caste systems and whether people are able to move out of their class or caste.

➔ How we did the research

Our research into caste and class took place in Brierfield and Nelson in East Lancashire and in Derby.

In East Lancashire, 97 young people of predominantly Pakistani heritage were consulted using a questionnaire, and the quantitative data were then analysed. A series of face-to-face and telephone interviews were also undertaken with local councillors (all of Pakistani heritage) and the local MP. In Derby, 100 people of different ages and ethnicities were given questionnaires to obtain deeper qualitative data.



In addition, five of us from East Lancashire and three from Derby went to Pakistan in late October 2013. For our research, we interviewed young people, students and academics in Pakistan about their experiences and opinions on caste and class from their perspectives. This informed our discussions when we all came together again in Birmingham to merge and analyse our research findings.

Although we undertook our research in two different geographical areas, we were able to keep in touch with each other using social media. The questionnaire designed in East Lancashire was used in Derby as well.

➔ What we found

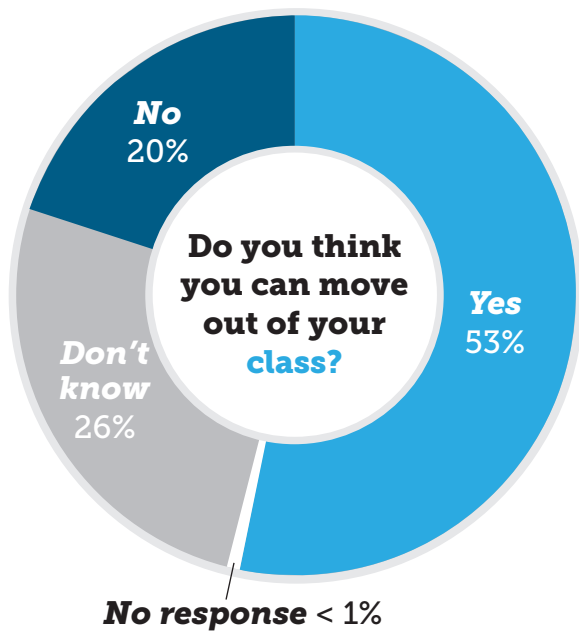
Class

From our research involving over 200 people of different ethnicities, we found that there are many definitions of the word 'class', with some people even branding it as 'indefinable'. Whilst being incredibly difficult to define, we found that class consists of many things – power, status, wealth, education and behaviour.

Overall, our respondents viewed class as being all about financial status, which also ties in with how educated people are. Education plays a large part in how people perceive you. In order to gain higher status – and thus be seen as of a higher class – people must try hard, as class is something to acquire.

The people we interviewed believe that there are also other factors that determine one’s class – in particular, *how* somebody lives and possibly even *where* somebody lives. How somebody lives determines their class, the respondents said, as upper class people, despite having wealth, also have good hygiene and respectable behaviour, whilst making sure that their home is clean and organised. Where somebody lives also creates different perceptions, as locations sometimes have their own reputations. For example, if a person is living in a council estate, they are regarded as lower or working class. This impression is made on just seeing someone in that area, without knowing how much money that person may have.

We asked our 200 respondents of different ethnicities whether people can move out of their class. The responses showed that over half (53%) believe that it is possible to move out of their class.



Most people believed that class is closely related to how much money people have and that this determines which class they belong to. Social mobility related to class is a lot less difficult to achieve than, for example, social mobility related to caste. We found that people’s job type creates perceptions in other people’s minds of what class they are – upper, middle or lower. For example, if a person of working class works hard and becomes

a doctor, they are seen as being upper-middle class now due to the fact that they have a good, steady wage and are of respectable status.

In the context of Asian Muslim communities, class is seen also to be changeable through marriage for women.

We came to the conclusion that the people of today’s generation can all potentially change their class, whereas around a hundred years ago, this was a completely different matter. In the past, for instance, if a child was born into a servant’s family, the child would become a servant too. No matter how much potential the child had, this would either not be recognised or acknowledged, as the child was of lower class, a servant’s child.

Overall, people believed that they could move up (or down) in society, depending on their profession. Class and social mobility are closely related.

Caste

Linked to, and as with, class, we found that there are many definitions of ‘caste’ and many factors to consider.

For our respondents, caste is ‘something you’re brought up with’ and strongly linked to who you are and where you are from. Associated with ethnicity and family heritage, it is connected to your family’s ancestral jobs, a ‘way of recognition’. This can be seen as a label though, with some castes (higher castes) being considered more ‘popular’ than others.

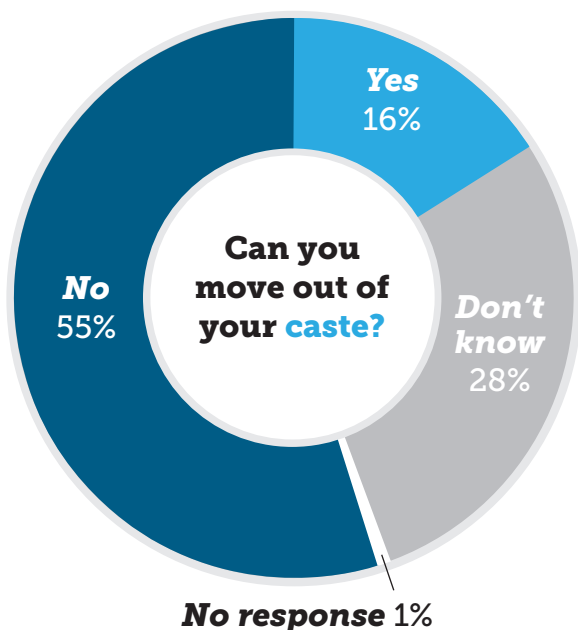
From our research in East Lancashire and Derby, we found that certain areas are dominated by particular castes. For example, Brierfield and Nelson are dominated by Gujars, Kashmiris and Rajas, and Derby by Jatts and Bhense.

Some people argued that the caste system is irrelevant. However, others had strong beliefs about the caste system and hoped to continue it throughout the generations. We learned that most people are not affected by caste, although some people think that it affects everybody, but not in a way that is obvious.

We observed that people know what caste they are, but do not know why it is important and what it relates to. A big influence, we discovered, is the way you are brought up within the caste system. Some families are very interested in and bound by it, finding it important as part of their heritage and their makeup. Some view caste as being linked to their ancestry through the male family line – indeed it was raised whether caste is ‘a male dominated thing’. Others feel that their peers have sparked their interest in caste/biraderi.

We found that caste will always matter to certain individuals. Our research showed that it matters more to older generations and that the higher castes observe the caste system more closely and strongly than lower castes. As one respondent confirmed: “Lower caste people care less about caste, whereas higher caste people care about it more.”

We asked whether you could move out of your caste. The respondents believed that a woman may be able to move out of her caste through marriage. It was found that when a man and a woman marry from different castes, the child can choose which caste they want to follow, although it is more likely that the child will follow the father’s caste.



Linked to our research into class, we wondered if, for Asian Muslim families, “class is the new caste”? Some respondents felt that subsequent generations will care less about caste/biraderi, asking the question: “will it matter in the next 10 years?”

Unlike social mobility related to class, the majority of respondents believed that people cannot move out of their caste.

➔ What we think

Our research into caste and class took place in Brierfield and Nelson in East Lancashire and in Derby, involving over 200 people of different ethnicities.

We found that there are many definitions of both ‘class’ and ‘caste’. Difficult to define, we found that class consists of many things – power, status, wealth, education and behaviour. Caste, on the other hand, is ‘something you’re brought up with’ and strongly linked to who you are and where you are from – your ethnicity and family heritage.

We asked in our research whether people can move out of their class and we discovered that over half of the respondents believe that it is possible to move out of their class. Class and social mobility are closely related. However, unlike class, the majority of respondents believed that people cannot move out of their caste and that it is generally fixed.

It was felt that a woman may be able to move out of her caste through marriage. Moreover, although any child from the marriage can choose which caste they want to follow, the child is more likely to follow the father’s caste.

From our research, caste appears to matter more to older generations, and the higher castes observe the caste system more closely and strongly than lower castes. Some people question whether future generations will care about caste/biraderi.

2 Drugs and gangs – research findings



What we wanted to know

We wanted to know how young people who are born outside the UK or those whose families are from abroad are affected and perceive issues related to drugs and gangs. We felt that these two issues are connected and can particularly affect these young people.



How we did the research

Our Drugs and Gangs group compiled a short questionnaire containing five questions. We then spoke to young people at Marsden Heights Community College (Nelson), to people on the streets in Normanton (Derby) and to those who use the YMCA or were around Hayes (West London).

All groups primarily spoke to young people. In Brierfield and Nelson, we spoke to teenagers mainly, whereas in Derby it was a big mix of ages, including some younger people (aged 11–14). In London, most of the young people were older (aged 16–25). In total, we spoke to around 200 people.



What we found

In this section, we will outline what we found from our survey.

Definition of drugs

We asked everyone we spoke to about their understanding of ‘drugs’. People could give any response they wanted to.

The most common response across all three areas was that drugs are related to illegality and that

they are “illegal substances”. The second most common response was that they are related to something that is harmful and/or addictive. The focus was on what was harmful to someone’s body rather than other types of harm. A smaller but significant number of replies focused on legal medicine as drugs.

We think this suggests that young people view ‘drugs’ as only things that are illegal and do not include other potentially harmful substances.

Young people’s experience of drug dealing

Overall, just under a half of all young people we spoke to believe that drug dealing takes place in their local community (see Table 1). Young people in Nelson and London were more likely to believe that there is drug dealing in their area, with over half of the people interviewed agreeing that it occurs in their area.

About one third of the young people we interviewed in Derby said they ‘do not know’ about drug dealing in their area, compared with only around one in five in Nelson and London.

We suspect that part of the reason why Nelson has a higher percentage of young people who believe there is drug dealing in their area is due to the fact that it is a very close-knit community. The young people we spoke to in this area were aged 11–16, mainly of the same heritage and all socialised together. This may mean that they talk more to one another about potential drug dealing than the young people who are older in Derby and London, most of whom did not know one another. In other words, this does not mean that there is necessarily more drug dealing in Nelson, but that more people in Nelson may think there is as they talk to one another more.

Table 1: Is there any drug dealing in your area?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Derby	36.0%	28.0%	36.0%	100%
London	53.0%	24.0%	23.0%	100%
Nelson	59.0%	19.0%	22.0%	100%
Average	49.3%	23.7%	27.0%	100%

Definition of gangs

We asked everyone to tell us what they thought a 'gang' was. People could give any response they wanted to.

By far, the most common response was related to groups with a negative set of ways. Across all three areas, most young people described 'gangs' in negative terms – such as “a large group of negative people”, “a bad group of people” or “evil people out of control”.

The second most common form of response concerned things that gangs do – their behaviours. This included terms like being “anti-social” and even “aggressive people” or those who are “violent”.

A smaller group of people used more neutral terms. The focus was less judgemental and more about the collection of people. They described a gang as any group of friends, especially teenagers or groups of people who meet or hang out for different purposes.

Young people's experience of gangs in their area

There was a very mixed picture when we asked young people whether there are gangs in their area. Nearly half of the young people we spoke to believed there are gangs in their area (see Table 2). Just a quarter thought that there are no gangs in their area, whilst a further quarter did not know. In total, this means that a slim majority of people said they are not affected by gangs.

In London and Derby, nearly two out of five people believed that there are gangs in their area. We feel, however, that the question was framed in a way that may have made some respondents scared to tell the truth and just say “I don't know”.

A much higher percentage of respondents in Nelson agreed that there are gangs in their area. We think that this is partly because Nelson is a small town and, as everyone knows everyone else, it is more likely for them to know if there are any gangs in their area. Also, in Nelson there are more people from the same culture who are friends or family. However, in London there are lots of different ethnic groups and people are more separate. This could be the reason why less people said “yes”, as people from one group may only know about gangs within that group.

It is important to remember that the results also depend on how people define gangs, and this might vary between people and different communities.



Young people working on the findings and conclusions of their research

Table 2: Are there gangs in your area?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Derby	38.0%	28.0%	34.0%	100%
London	42.0%	29.0%	29.0%	100%
Nelson	66.0%	20.0%	14.0%	100%
Average	48.6%	25.7%	25.7%	100%

Young people's views on safety in their community

According to our survey, the majority (69%) of young people feel safe in their area (see Table 3). Young people in Derby feel safest, followed by London and then Nelson. Around one in five people in Nelson and London do not feel safe in their areas.

We were surprised that 15% of young people did not know if they feel safe or not. We think that there may be lots of reasons for this: for example, people may not want to answer the question; or they may be afraid to answer the question honestly.

Or they may not understand the language we used. We also recognise that it could be that they just do not know.

There were similar results for those who said that they do not feel safe (16%) or do not know (15%). These percentages were slightly higher in Nelson. One possible reason for this is that in Derby and London, there are more people around, more police can be seen and there is more CCTV. This might make people feel safer. In more rural areas like Nelson, there is less of this and nothing is being done. However, we cannot be too sure from these results if this is actually the case.

Table 3: Do you feel safe in your area?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Derby	79%	8%	13%	100%
London	68%	18%	14%	100%
Nelson	61%	22%	17%	100%
Average	69%	16%	15%	100%

What we think

Among the most interesting result from our research is that whilst most areas say they have gangs, the majority of young people report that they are not affected by gangs themselves. Similarly, most people feel safe in their area, even though a majority report that there is drug dealing in their area. We think this probably means that most of the respondents do not feel affected by drugs themselves.

Some young people may feel they have a good understanding of drugs, but in reality this may not be as good as they think. Likewise, we all have different understandings of gangs and drugs, and this may affect whether people report that drugs or gangs are an issue in their area.

We also believe that gangs may sometimes make people feel safe. Even if there are gangs, some young people may perceive this as a good thing, feeling that the gang protects and helps them.

We did our research in three quite different areas and we believe that this may have affected the results. In Nelson, the community is very tight knit; people know one another, so this affects their views.



Young people discussing the research with support from workers

In Derby, where we spoke to people in an area called Normanton, it is a bit like Nelson/Brierfield but much bigger. London is very different. In the area where we spoke to people (Hayes in West London), there is more ethnic diversity. This may mean that people do not mix with each other as much and that they do not share news (such as whether drug dealing is going on). We also spoke to people who were new arrivals to the UK, so they may not know yet about gangs or drugs in their area.

3 Conclusions

Causes and solutions

As a group, we have thought a lot about what the root causes of drug use and gang involvement among diaspora young people might be. Overall, we believe that a significant factor is whether or not people get family support. People may also be stressed (for example, worried about their immigration status) or poor and might turn to drugs as an escape. Generally, we feel that peer pressure and boredom (not having something to do) could make a difference.

We believe that there are a number of things that could help to tackle drug use, including:

- Providing more things for young people to do, especially during the summer months, for example summer camps;
- Providing ongoing outreach with youth workers so that everyone knows about such services;
- Improving drugs education and not only ensuring that it starts at a young age, but that it is relevant to different groups;
- Raising awareness of drugs and gangs among parents – for those who live with their parents, this could be an important addition to what they learn in school and from youth workers;
- Raising awareness of these issues through religious leaders in mosques, churches, temples, etc.;
- Providing more job opportunities for young people, such as apprenticeships and mentoring.



Reflections on the research

We enjoyed carrying out this research. Overall, we found the drugs research most difficult to do, as people were afraid to be honest. Even though we made the questionnaire anonymous, it was difficult to overcome this. Some people did not want to give their age and we respected their choice; however, this meant that we could not always see if there were any trends by age.

We had to consider if it was safe to talk to 'drug dealers', especially among the London group. We decided that while some people may have known a drug dealer, it would be difficult to interview them safely. We found it easy to talk to local councillors and we met some in Nelson. We also tried to talk to people who did not speak English, especially in London, where lots of people are new to the UK. Unfortunately, this was quite difficult, so we could not really include their views on this occasion.