Missing People's response:

We really welcome the Police Race Action Plan. We think the aims are strong and, if delivered, could transform policing in the UK into a fairer, more effective service that would better inspire trust within Black communities.

We also welcome the inclusion of *'improving police response and effectiveness in supporting missing persons from Black communities'* as a key aim. This issue has not been given enough focus. MissingBlackPeople.com and Black Lives Matter UK have both highlighted the reduced exposure for Black missing persons appeals compared to white missing persons appeals. In addition, our consultation[1] with people of colour who have reported a loved one missing has shown a vital need for changes to practice.

However, we believe that the proposed actions relating to missing persons are somewhat unclear, and that we do not yet have a good enough understanding of the issue to identify effective solutions.

In relation to the response for Black missing people there are two key issues that we think any work should consider: the disproportionate number of Black people who are reported missing;[2] and the discrimination that some Black people who go missing, or report a loved one missing, face.[3] These two issues are distinct. They should be explored in relation to each other, but it is important that they are each given separate focus.

We don't fully understand yet why Black people are disproportionately likely to be reported missing. The increased risks[4] of mental health issues and lack of access to appropriate treatment experienced by Black communities; the over-representation of Black children in the care system; and experiences of systemic racism may all be drivers but there are significant gaps in research. Without this understanding we can't effectively address the drivers or provide targeted support. We therefore suggest that the NPCC and College of Policing fund research to explore why that over-representation exists and any factors that are more likely to be experienced by, or are unique to, Black communities.

We also need better data collection on missing and ethnicity. Currently the information only tells us that across total incidents, Black people are disproportionately likely to go missing. We don't know any further demographic information, for example any patterns across different age groups or genders; we don't know how many of those incidents are repeat missing; we don't know whether there are any variations in the length of time missing; or the outcomes of missing episodes for people of different ethnicities. Without this data we will continue to struggle to identify a more effective response. More in-depth data collection should be carried out as soon as possible, and following that annually to monitor any trends and patterns.

Commitment two of the Race Action Plan states that: Policing will adopt an 'explain or reform' approach to address the negative impact and outcomes experienced by Black people. We would urge caution with this approach as the issues surrounding discrimination are hugely complex. We have seen that analysis of police data as the only source to understand or explain discrimination can be problematic. Data recording itself can be biased and often incomplete – for example Black people

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[1] https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/experiences-of-racial-discrimination
[2] 2019-20 UKMPU Statistics Report Final
[3] https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/37077_EMEA-Brochure_Pro-Bono-Missing-People-V3.pdf
[4] https://blog.geographydirections.com/2020/07/09/missing-black-lives/

may be less likely to have a "vulnerability flag" on their record, meaning that any data analysis will show that Black people are less likely to be vulnerable, despite our concerns that this actually indicates issues in identifying risk for the community due to potential bias. Any explanation should be evidence-based, should include qualitative experiences of Black people, should reflect the complexity of varied experiences, and shouldn't rely solely on data. Any explanations should also acknowledge any underlying systemic issues or drivers that may contribute to the issue, not just symptoms or how those issues present.

We have provided some feedback to the proposed actions below:

4. Improve the police response and effectiveness in supporting missing persons from Black communities.

To achieve this ambition:

- *where they arise, the NPCC and the College will review IOPC recommendations on how police officers react and interact with Black people and their families who are reported as missing from home*
  - This is positive. We would suggest an annual review by the IoPC, College of Policing and NPCC of all recommendations related to Black missing people, including reviewing their implementation. This should be published to ensure accountability.

- *the NPCC and the College, working alongside the NBPA and Black communities, will review current APP, training and CPD to ensure that staff have the knowledge, understanding and awareness to recognise and intervene where a Black person is reported missing*
  - To ensure meaningful change we need to understand how the police are currently responding to Black missing people. Currently very little research has been carried out to understand any inequities in the response. We think analysis of existing data, alongside consultation with people with lived experience, is vital to understanding where any gaps are and what may need to change in guidance and training.

  - A review carried out by Missing People of one police force's data has shown that Black children and adults were less likely to have markers for exploitation or mental health associated with their missing incident. There is no indication that Black communities are less likely to experience these risks, in fact there is evidence that they are at higher risk,[5] so we suspect that this may be due to failures in identifying these risks for those communities. It is possible that this links to the phenomenon of Adultification[6] or to failures in identifying and providing appropriate support to Black people who are struggling with their mental health.[7]
    In light of this we think wider research needs to be carried out to identify whether this happens in other force areas, and to challenge any bias or failures to identify risks for Black communities.

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[5] https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/b/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-communities /
https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/11/20/where-are-the-black-girls-in-our-services-studies-and-statistics-on-csa/
[6] https://listenupresearch.org/what-we-do/research-publications/boys-to-men-the-cost-of-adultification-in-safeguarding-responses-to-black-boys/
[7] https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/mental-health-report-v5-2.pdf

- Despite the need for more information to develop future improvements in this area, the sometimes lengthy process of research should not slow changes in practice that are needed now. Most officers responding to missing incidents will have received little or no training[8] on effective responses to missing persons, and are even less likely to have received any that includes information about discrimination in the missing response. Future training, and changes to APP, need to ensure that forces are effectively identifying risks facing missing children and adults; to understand experiences and barriers unique to Black communities; to understand the role of families in identifying risk and safeguarding their missing person; to provide unbiased, person-centred responses; and to provide effective support to Black missing people.
  Missing People, in partnership with a discrimination-specialist organisation, could work with the College of Policing to develop training and resources for police forces.

- *forces will work alongside their local BPA, Race Equality Network and external partners to review local policies, guidance and training delivery, to ensure that police personnel have the knowledge, understanding and awareness to deliver the most appropriate care to missing people from the Black community*
  - We support this. Consultation and co-development with Black communities and Black-led organisations will be vital to any effective changes in policies and practice.

  - Changes to policy, guidance and training should be incorporated in the response to missing people across the local safeguarding partnership. The response to missing is not solely a police-response and different statutory agencies must work in partnership, often with shared protocols and processes. Therefore any effective changes will need to sit across that partnership.

  - The NPCC should carry out an annual review, with information provided by each police force on actions taken in engaging with those partners to ensure that this work is being prioritised.

- *the NPCC will seek the support of the APCC to identify a more effective public safety response to identifying and improving the service given to Black people who go missing and their families*
  - We don't understand what a 'more effective public safety response' means in this context.

In addition we would recommend that the NPCC holds an annual meeting on the missing persons element of this plan to review progress against all recommendations.

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[8] https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/en/publications/impact-of-police-cuts-on-missing-person-investigations