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Last Updated: Tuesday, 12 June 2007, 23:33 GMT 00:33 UK

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## Jury racism dismissed by research

**Racially-mixed juries in England and Wales do not discriminate against black and Asian defendants, a study suggests.**



The Stephen Lawrence inquiry raised fears over institutional racism

Researchers recreated a real trial but varied the ethnicity of defendants to test juries for prejudice.

Some jurors were more lenient towards a defendant of the same ethnic background in jury-room deliberations, the government-backed study found.

But race did not impact on the verdict of mixed-race juries - not enough is known about all-white juries, it said.

Ministers ordered research into jury attitudes amid fears of institutional racism raised by the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Research into juries in the UK is difficult because of a ban on probing what goes on in the deliberation room.

In 2001 Lord Justice Auld suggested ethnic minorities were under-represented on juries and that steps could be taken to rebalance them in cases where race was an important factor.

**“ In their own individual ways, jurors appeared to be particularly sensitive to the position of a black person in a criminal court ”**

Professor Cheryl Thomas

But in a four-year study published by the Ministry of Justice, researchers say they were able to debunk a series of myths, including who was called to serve and the decisions they took.

### Juries monitored

Researchers looked at the verdicts of almost 16,000 real jurors in Reading, London and Manchester and monitored who was being called to serve.

In the third part of the study, they recreated an actual case - but varied the race of the defendant to see if it affected decision-making.

The simulated case was filmed in a real court with real

### MYTHS 'BUSTED'

- Minorities under-represented on juries
  - Minorities do not want to go on juries
  - Middle-classes duck out of service
  - Widespread avoidance of service
- Source: Jury study, Ministry of

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lawyers and judge using evidence from the original prosecution.

Source: Jury study, Ministry of Justice

Some 27 juries, all of whom had served in real cases, watched the case and then considered verdicts. All of the juries were drawn from one crown court in London.

The study found the verdicts of racially-mixed juries did not discriminate against defendants based on their race. But in certain cases, the race of the defendant did have an impact on the votes of individual jurors.

Some jurors demonstrated "same race leniency" - but personal prejudices did not affect the final verdict that would have been delivered in court.

Report author Professor Cheryl Thomas said this contrast between some individual attitudes and collective decision underlined the importance of having 12 people consider a case.

"Jury verdicts are the result of the process of group consensus and it appears the dynamics of these racially mixed juries helped to ensure that any individual jury biases were not allowed to dictate the verdicts of these juries," she said.

"In their own individual ways, BME [ethnic minority] and white jurors serving on these racially mixed juries appeared to be particularly sensitive to the position of a black person in a criminal court, either as a defendant or victim.

"What remains to be answered is whether all-white juries, which decide a large proportion of jury cases in this country, also do not discriminate against defendants based on race."

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