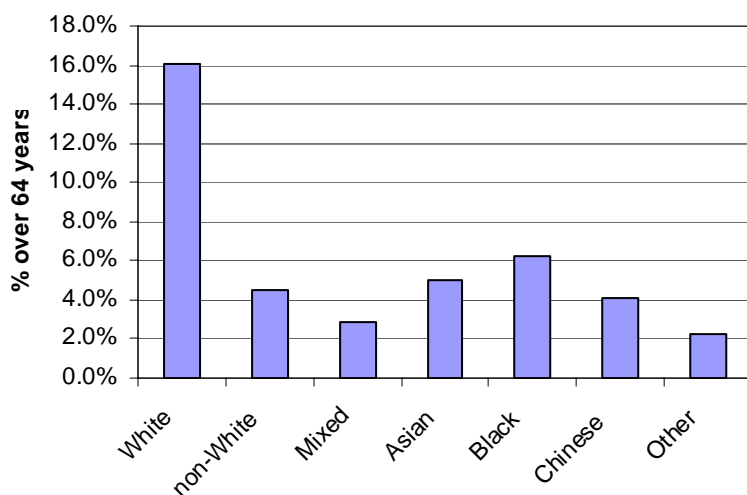


8.0 Older People

Very little data is available on BME elders, particularly at a regional level. Reasons for the lack of information on this 'hard to reach' group include difficulty finding them, contacting them, language barriers and the fact that they are perhaps less likely to access certain services. Another reason is because they are so few in number.

Figure 8.1 % of the population aged 65 and over in the Eastern Region by ethnic group

Source: Census 2001, S101



As figure 8.1 illustrates, compared to the White groups where just over 16% of the population is over 64 years of age, there are very low proportions of older adults among non-White ethnic groups (4.5%)

Within the Mixed group who, as discussed in Section 3 have a very young age structure, only

2.8% of people are aged over 64. Even fewer adults are of pensionable age within the Other Ethnic Groups (2.3%). The Chinese group has the next lowest proportion of older adults (4.1%), whilst 5% of those in Asian groups are in this age group. Even in the Black population, which has the highest proportion of older adults of any BME group, this age group accounts for just 6.2% of the overall population.

Table 8.2 Number and % of the population aged over 64 by ethnic group and area

Source: Census 2001, S101

	White (%)	non-White (%)	Mixed (%)	Asian (%)	Black (%)	Chinese (%)	Other (%)
East	874,747 16.1%	11,865 4.5%	1,633 2.8%	6,063 5.0%	3,010 6.2%	831 4.1%	328 2.3%
Beds	52,368 14.7%	1,192 4.7%	84 1.7%	636 4.7%	422 8.5%	36 2.9%	14 1.7%
Cambs	81,078 15.3%	714 3.2%	131 2.3%	309 4.2%	135 4.2%	91 2.5%	48 1.9%
Essex	217,023 17.0%	1,819 4.8%	404 3.6%	771 5.9%	345 5.6%	218 4.8%	81 2.8%
Herts	153,508 15.6%	2,929 4.5%	354 2.5%	1,663 5.4%	644 5.4%	189 3.7%	79 2.3%
Norfolk	159,050 17.6%	551 4.6%	184 3.8%	165 5.8%	96 6.1%	67 4.8%	39 2.7%
Suffolk	121,737 15.1%	929 5.0%	202 2.9%	210 5.4%	407 9.4%	70 4.6%	40 2.4%
Peterborough	21,349 15.2%	765 4.8%	45 2.0%	482 4.4%	190 9.9%	36 6.7%	12 2.7%
Luton	19,810 14.9%	2,305 4.5%	114 2.4%	1,472 4.4%	669 5.7%	39 3.6%	11 1.8%
Southend	30,390 19.8%	339 5.0%	72 4.1%	155 5.7%	40 3.6%	57 7.1%	15 3.8%
Thurrock	18,427 13.5%	249 3.7%	27 2.0%	168 5.9%	37 2.2%	17 3.1%	0 0.0%

The key finding from Table 8.2 is that not only are there small proportions of BME elders in the Eastern Region, there are also very small numbers. There is more than 70 times the number of White people aged over 65 than the combined number of people of the same age in all non-White groups. The fewest numbers of elderly people are found within the Other Ethnic Groups, where there are only 328 within the

Eastern Region. The highest numbers are found within the Asian groups, and these are concentrated in Hertfordshire and Luton. Overall the highest numbers of BME elders are living in Bedfordshire (1,192), Essex (1,819), Luton (2,305) and Hertfordshire (2,929).

It appears therefore that while we must be prepared for the BME population to age (certain estimates predict a tenfold increase in BME elders by 2030⁹), at this point there does not appear to be a need for specific services targeted towards this group. As time goes on, culturally appropriate services for older people may become necessary and the situation should be monitored closely.

Monitoring itself is problematic when assessing the needs and characteristics of BME elders in that ethnic monitoring is still poor in many services in the health and social care sectors. An additional issue is implementing sufficient training for staff in key services to allow them to feel confident in dealing with BME elders and to fully understand issues surrounding people in these groups, such as the impact of discrimination. There is some evidence that staff in the Eastern Region, do not feel confident in their abilities in this area, with a recent survey reporting that few staff felt *very confident* responding to people who do not speak English or for whom English is not a first language – the majority of staff felt *quite confident*.¹⁰

A report by Patel (1999) stresses the importance of the inclusion of old people as part of a given ethnic group rather than addressing them as an entirely separate group. She suggests that research into BME groups should be 'age-blind'. A further recommendation from the report is that BME elders should have facilities to meet in groups in order to mitigate their sense of isolation. A number of such groups do exist within the Eastern Region, but it is hard to know how well used they are by their intended clients.

Clearly, further work in this area is necessary, and will become more important as the BME populations age. A regional review of BME elders is planned by MENTER and Age Concern, England.

⁹ Patel, 1999

¹⁰ After Wells, S (2005) Ethnicity and Culture Audit