

The BRAVE Mentoring Programme for Aspiring BAME Clinical Psychologists: The Experiences of a Mentee, Mentor and Equality Diversity and Inclusion Team.

This article discusses the introduction of the BRAVE Mentoring Programme for Aspiring BAME clinical psychologists. It aims to reflect the hopes of the programme facilitators (working as part of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Team), as well as the experience of a mentee and mentor participating in the programme.

Key words: equality* diversity*; mentorship*; professional development*

Introduction:

The BRAVE (Broadening Racial Access – Vision of Equity) mentorship scheme for aspiring clinical psychologists was developed and launched at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in February 2022, following the national recognition of the underrepresentation of ethnic minoritised groups within the Clinical Psychology workforce (Health Education England, 2021., British Psychological Society, 2015., Williams et al., 2006).

The name BRAVE was given to reflect and represent the courageous nature of aspiring clinical psychologists from Black Asian and Ethnic Minority backgrounds, who face systemic inequality and barriers to accessing the profession (Scior et al, 2016), and of those in the profession who seek fairness and positive change.

The heart of BRAVE is in its values of Empowerment, Diversification, Respect and Enhancing Potential. These values are linked to the wider values of the University of East Anglia (UEA) and are consistent with the NHS Five Year Forward View (Care Quality Commission, Public Health England, National Health Service, 2015), which commits to improving the experiences of ethnic minority groups accessing mental health care. BRAVE is supported by Health Education England (HEE) funding, associated with action plans to improve equity of access and inclusion for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Entrants to clinical psychology training. It is also in line with commitment statements made by the British Psychological Society (BPS), the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) and the HCPC on tackling the underrepresentation of ethnic minoritised groups and addressing inequality in the workforce.

The BRAVE mentoring scheme is one of many national mentorship schemes that have been set up across Clinical Psychology Doctorate (ClinPsyD) training programmes in the United Kingdom. BRAVE aims to support the personal and professional development of aspiring clinical psychologists from ethnic minority backgrounds towards their career goals. It is hoped that such positive action will lead to an increase in rates of ethnic minoritised applicants who successfully secure a place on a clinical psychology training course. In the long term, BRAVE aims to contribute to the rise of a more ethnically representative clinical psychology workforce across East Anglia and nationally.

The BRAVE scheme pairs mentees (psychology graduates, or final year undergraduate students, considering a career in clinical psychology) with mentors (qualified clinical psychologists from the East of England), for a minimum of six one-to-one mentoring sessions.

In the first year of the scheme 2022-2023, 40 Mentors and 40 Mentees were matched on the basis of shared values, salient identities, and personal and professional interests. We hope to increase the number of mentoring places available across the next two years.

Training and support offered to mentors and mentees

At the start of the programme all mentors for the BRAVE scheme attended bespoke training on mentoring. As well as an orientation to the programme and the role of a mentor in general, training also explicitly considered issues of race, identity, and difference in the mentoring relationship. Throughout the duration of the scheme mentors were also invited to attend voluntary peer supervision and reflective practice sessions on a quarterly basis. The purpose of these sessions was to support mentors to reflect on their experiences within the scheme and to consider any challenges that had arisen as part of this process. Through these sessions mentors were also supported to further develop their own cultural humility and their ability to hold conversations about racial difference in the mentoring relationship. The support provided for mentors through the scheme is consistent with research that suggests successful mentoring of minoritised ethnic groups is associated with the cultural competence of a mentor and the integration of multicultural model of mentoring (Chan et al., 2015).

Alongside individual mentoring, mentees were invited to attend a range of group workshops delivered by the UEA ClinPsyD programme team, and in collaboration with the ASPIRE mentoring scheme (University of Essex). The workshops were aimed at developing relevant skills and knowledge to the clinical psychology profession, whilst also allowing mentees to form networks and reflect on their personal and professional experiences and career goals. Workshops included sessions on interview skills, research methods and clinical skills. In addition, and at the request of the mentees, a series of reflective practice sessions were also developed and offered as part of the BRAVE Scheme. This began with a lecture on reflective practice and clinical psychology, aimed to develop knowledge of the subject area, and was followed by a series of five experiential reflective practice groups. The reflective practice groups were facilitated by trainee clinical psychologists on the UEA ClinPsyD and aimed to develop mentees reflective skills by supporting them to consider their own identity in relation to different areas of the profession. These were: being from a BAME background as an aspiring psychologist, the application process for doctoral training in clinical psychology, psychological assessments and formulation, psychological Interventions and being a reflective practitioner.

As we come towards the end of the first BRAVE mentoring cycle, we have held ending events for our mentors and mentees. We plan to formally evaluate the mentorship scheme and gain feedback to inform further development for 2023 and beyond. The development of BRAVE hasn't been without its challenges. One of the biggest hurdles encountered was the fundamental question of whose role is it to be a mentor, and the unexpected difficulty in recruiting mentors. In addition to demands and time constraints faced by many clinical psychologists practicing in the NHS, the feeling of apprehension and the need to get it right for mentees was shared amongst many clinical psychologists, leaving many wondering if they were the best fit or if they had the capacity to take on this added responsibility.

Experience of a Mentee:

With courses devoting more resources to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, and mentoring conferring numerous established benefits (Clark et al., 2009), I was fascinated by

the idea of being involved in a formal mentorship programme for aspiring BAME clinical psychologists. While I was initially nervous to start the programme, perhaps due to a feeling of incompetence, the inevitable power dynamic between myself and the mentor, or the pedestal on which we place the role of clinical psychologist, the mentorship scheme so far has been defining and instrumental in my motivations to apply for training.

At a surface level, the mentoring has provided me with accelerated and directed support. Through the various workshops on topics from research methods to assessments and formulations, I have refreshed my knowledge and gained insight into new skills and topics relevant to training. Likewise, developing a relationship with a clinical psychologist has been critical in forming a realistic sense of the role and what the profession entails. These experiences have allowed me to reflect and consider my strengths and weaknesses, and how to highlight and address them in my journey.

Beyond this, I have found the BRAVE mentorship to be an empowering experience as an aspiring clinical psychologist. Applying to training is a monumental task and with the notion of 'imposter syndrome' common in psychology circles and more so in ethnic minorities (Bravata et al., 2020), coupled with the self and social pressure to succeed, I found it easy to feel under skilled and reluctant to apply. Perhaps I should wait until next year when I have gained the experience to get onto training. However, through exploring my story and experiences with my mentor, I have been offered acceptance, support, and encouragement which has allowed me to reframe my skills and experiences increasing my confidence and motivation in applying to training.

Finally, mentorship has offered me a space to reflect on myself and my positionality within Clinical Psychology. When reflecting on my initial nervousness and hesitancy to apply for training, I realised that as a BAME individual it is easy to feel like the outsider or the 'other' in psychology. While it feels that various other paths have an increasing representation of BAME populations (e.g. 45% of doctors and at least 32% of GPs in the United Kingdom are from minority groups; UK Government, 2020; General Medical Council, 2018), Psychology is a field that is still unrepresentative of the people it serves (Holt, 2020) resulting in a lack of role models, goals, and directions to aspire towards. However, engaging in the process, and the existence of the programme itself, with mentors willing and able to address the lack of representation, has led to a challenge to my sense of being the other, and has allowed me to develop a stronger sense of belonging to the profession and the role I play within it.

Experience of a Mentor:

My hopes for being involved in the programme mostly were around being able to do something which would make a meaningful difference to the diversity of the clinical psychology workforce (Turpin & Coleman, 2010). As a consultant clinical psychologist who has worked in the NHS for over 12 years, I was acutely aware that by the time I was aiming to recruit aspiring clinical psychologists (e.g. assistant psychologists/trainee clinical psychologists/newly qualified psychologist), there had already been too many barriers in place which meant that aspiring psychologists from a minority background had already had to navigate many more hurdles. I was keen to try to change the process from a point further 'upstream' in a psychologist's journey.

I was pleased to find the initial training for mentors and the reflective supervision offered by the BRAVE programme provided a robust process to understand the purpose of the scheme. It enabled me to really question my 'why' for taking part as well as providing me with a space to think about what a good outcome might look like for both me as mentor and the mentee who I worked with. It was also helpful to complete this as a group with other clinical psychologists who shared my motivations for participating in the programme.

Following the training, I was pleased to learn I had been matched with SR. We meet every 1-2 months, and our conversations vary from being quite action based (in thinking about what the next steps might be for him and for me), to reflective spaces where we can explore conversations like the direction that clinical psychology is heading towards as a profession, the additional challenges faced by aspiring clinical psychologists from minoritised backgrounds and interesting projects that SR had been involved in and how this might map on to the role. Although early on his clinical psychology career, SR has had an interesting range of experiences which I could see would really enrich our profession. I have learned a lot from him in terms of the additional barriers faced particularly by aspiring clinical psychologists from cultures where the profession remains relatively unknown. Having worked in a very ethnically and culturally diverse area in my last clinical job, I have really valued how this was reflected by the wider medical and nursing workforce. I am hopeful that the same can become true for the clinical psychology workforce in the future, and I am excited about the value this will bring to service users and their families, as well as to fellow clinical psychologists.

Conclusion and Hopes for the Programme:

Collectively, we have hopes for the BRAVE programme and other mentorship schemes to continue to be reflective of the needs of aspiring psychologists from ethnic minoritised backgrounds. We would also hope that the mentor role will be seen as an essential part of a clinical psychologist role, within the scope of their day-to-day work. To achieve this, it will be important to improve the workforce's cultural sensitivity and competency.

We also hope to see a continued increase in aspiring BAME clinical psychologists applying for training. Clinical psychology is changing and has space for everyone. We would call on all potential mentors at any stage of their career to engage with these programmes to ensure Psychology maintains space for everyone.

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