



Solicitors
Regulation
Authority

Consumer research study 2008

Experiences of black and minority ethnic people using
solicitors in England and Wales

June 2009

1. Introduction

1.1 The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is the independent regulator of more than 100,000 solicitors in England and Wales. Our primary purpose is to protect consumers by ensuring that solicitors meet high standards of conduct, and that appropriate action is taken where risks are identified.

1.2 We regulate in the public interest and, as such, aim to engage with the public to understand the concerns and experiences of people using legal services.

1.3 In order to identify how we can achieve this and improve confidence for people in using legal services, we commissioned a research study in August 2007. This study provided information on consumer attitudes around the provision of legal services and on the SRA as a regulator, and also explored consumer's knowledge of referral arrangements. The research involved an omnibus survey of almost 1,000 adults in England and Wales, and a series of focus groups.

1.4 The results of this research can be found [here](#).

1.5 Eighteen months on, the SRA commissioned a follow-up research study, to act as a benchmark for some of the findings of the 2007 research study by seeking the views by telephone of 1,000 adults in England and Wales; however this follow-up study also introduced additional questions to explore further into the public's experiences when using solicitors, focusing specifically on the experiences of 500 people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and the experiences of 250 disabled people.

1.6 This report summarizes the key findings of the research study relating to the experiences of black and minority ethnic people in accessing legal services.

2. Experiences of black and minority ethnic people in England and Wales using solicitors

What legal services are used by BME people?

- 28% of BME people in England and Wales have used a solicitor in the past five years. This compares to 41% of the general public in England and Wales having used a solicitor in the same period.
- The most commonly used legal services for BME people are property transactions (also known as conveyancing). The second are services related to personal injury.
- Just 3% of BME people use solicitors for wills and probate services. This is low in comparison with the wider population of England and Wales, where 14% of people use these services.

What qualities do BME people look for in their solicitor?

- Nearly a third (31%) of BME people feel it is important for their solicitor to be capable of communicating with them in a particular language.
- This rises to 54% for BME people using legal aid to fund their legal services, compared to 22% for those paying privately.
- The actual ethnicity of solicitors used by BME people is less significant, with 81% believing it unimportant for their solicitor to be the same ethnicity as them. However, more than half feel it important for their solicitor to be capable of understanding the importance of cultural sensitivities, such as religion or belief.
- 71% of BME people believe it is important for their solicitor to have an office in their local neighbourhood. This rises to 83% for those using legal aid solicitors.

Are BME people happy with the service they receive from solicitors?

- 82% of BME people who used a solicitor recently are satisfied with the service they received.
- 93% of BME people agree that their solicitor communicated with them clearly, and in such a way that they could understand all costs and the standards of service they would be receiving.

Are BME people aware of what to do if things go wrong?

- 49% of BME people feel they do not know which organisation they would go to in order to complain about a solicitor, if they needed to.
- Of those that did know, the most popular organisation to approach first of all is a local Citizens Advice office.

What types of information and support do BME people access when choosing a solicitor?

- 34% of BME people use the internet as their primary method of searching for a solicitor.
- BME people are more likely than the general public to search out information on their solicitor's background before using them. They are also more likely to ask their friends and family for information about particular solicitors.
- 56% of BME people express interest in attending public awareness events on using solicitors and, overall, demonstrate a high appetite for information on solicitors and the services they offer.

How do BME people feel about using alternative providers such as supermarkets and banks for their legal services?

- BME people are very positive towards the idea of buying legal services from a 'non-traditional' provider such as a supermarket chain

and are more likely than the general population to find this an attractive and easy way of accessing legal services.

3. Further information

3.1 The full research report, along with summary documents, are available from the SRA's website – www.sra.org.uk/consumer-research.

3.2 If you want to discuss any of the findings of the research, please get in touch using the following details:

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