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HAROLD Rd. MISSION

THE RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES OF NEWHAM TEENAGERS

by

Greg Smith, Community Worker

As part of a wider study into social attitudes a group of 124 fifth formers in Newham schools were asked to complete an attitude questionnaire containing a number of items related to religious belief, practice and attitude. The items were in the form of statements with which the respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement. As the questionnaire was designed with the specialised intention of creating reliable attitude scales for comparing the religious attitudes of Asian and British youth many of the specific questions which would be of interest to Christians in Newham are not to be found in this questionnaire. However the results should be of some interest to all who are interested in communicating the Gospel to Newham's teenagers.

Some comments must first be made about the young people who filled in the questionnaire. The Sample was divided into groups of English boys (26), English girls (29), Asian boys (35) and Asian girls (34). All were pupils at Lister or Plashet school and were between 15 and 17 years old when the questionnaires were completed between November 1976 and January 1977. The Asians were about 60% Gujerati East African Hindus, 30% Punjabi Sikhs and 10% Bengali or Urdu Muslims or South Indians. The Asians also answered a further questionnaire with some items relating to religion which will also be presented. The results will be presented for each sex and race group in percentages of the total who replied to each question illustrated by a series of bar charts. The items will be grouped according to the components of religious attitude structure as discovered by factor analysis of this part of the questionnaire.

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Group One Items IA to IG

This group of items were found by factor analysis to be highly correlated together. This means that if an individual expresses strong agreement with one item in the group he is highly likely to express strong agreement with all the other items. We can therefore assume that all the statements share a common meaning. A glance at the statements show that all of them express a negative attitude towards religious things and people, a feeling that religion is not the thing for the modern person.

Looking at the graphs we can see that a common pattern from the different groups in the sample emerges. In every case girls come out more favourable to religion than boys and Asians are more favourable than the English.

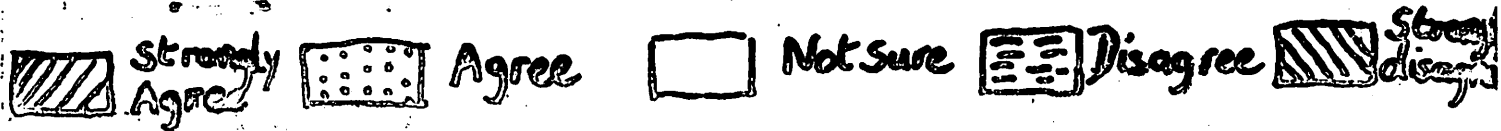
Taking each group separately

English boys The distribution shown by the graph shows two peaks in most cases indicating that English boys are either for or against religion. On the whole the two groups seem fairly balanced.

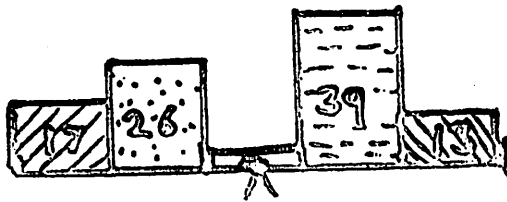
English girls The graphs for the English girls on this group of items show a fairly normal distribution peaking in the middle. The majority of the English girls would tend to disagree with these negative statements.

Asian boys Largely follow the pattern of English girls, any differences are probably insignificant.

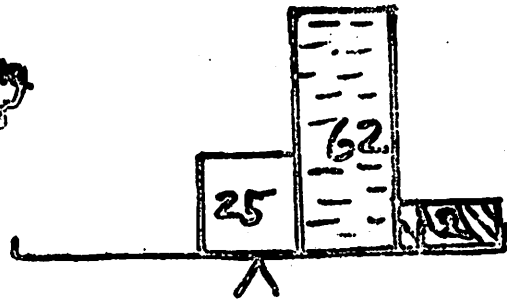
Asian girls The graphs for this group show that the Asian girls are very much in disagreement with this group of statements.



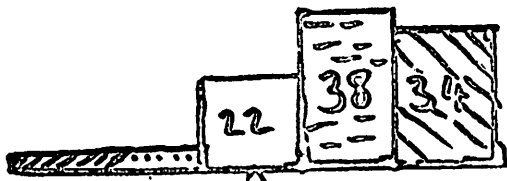
a) Eng boys



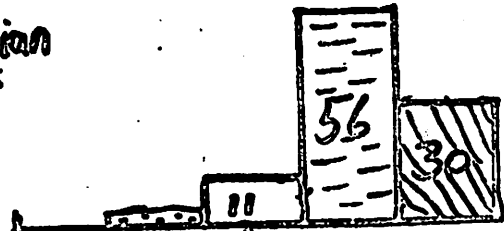
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys

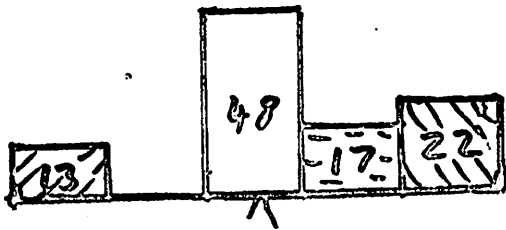


d) Asian girls

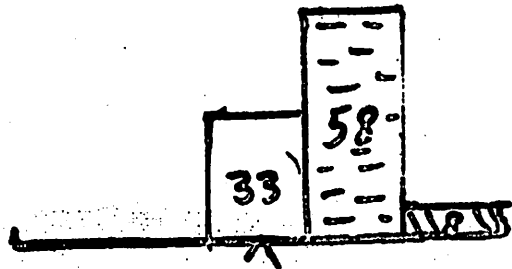


1 A) Religion is only For old women.

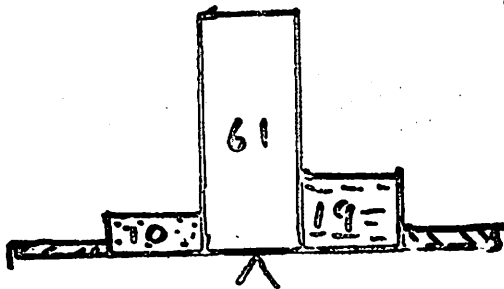
a) Eng boys



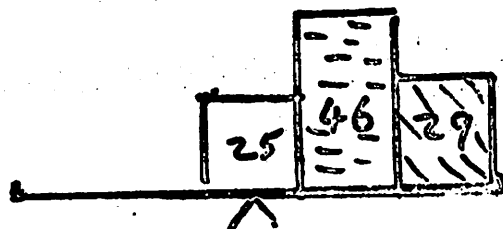
b) Eng girls








c) Asian boys



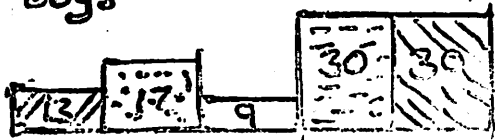
d) Asian girls



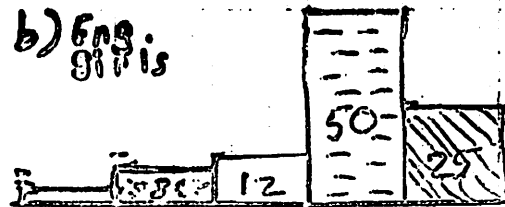
1 B) To be religious is a sign of weakness

 Strongly Agreed
  Agree
  Not Sure
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree

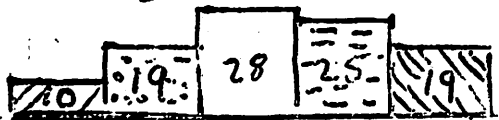
a) Eng. boys



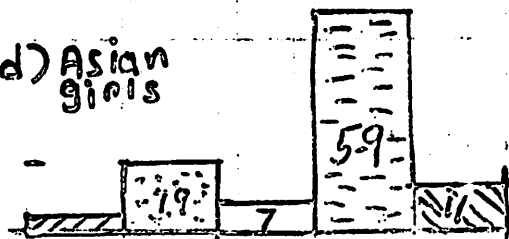
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys

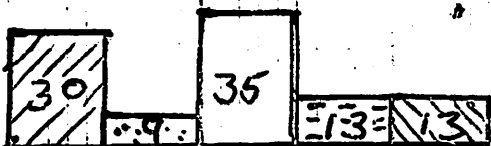


d) Asian girls

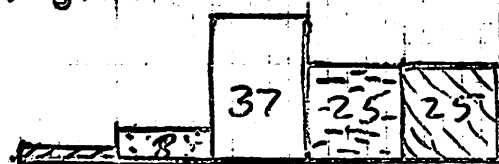


1c) IF you are religious you have to give up everything that is enjoyable

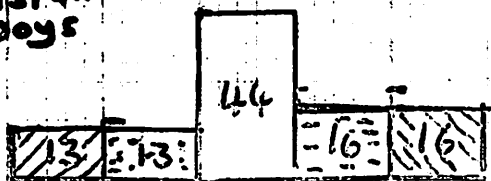
a) Eng. boys



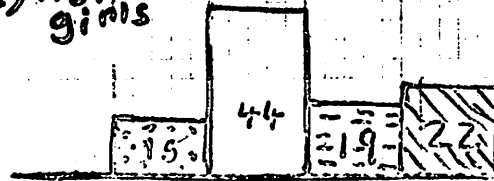
a) Eng. girls



b) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



1d) Science has proved that God doesn't exist.

Strongly Agreed

Agree

Not Sure

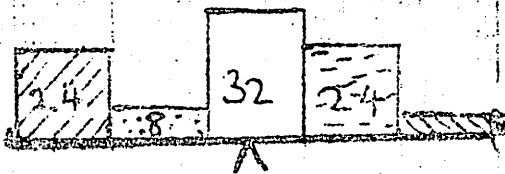
Disagree

Strongly Disagree

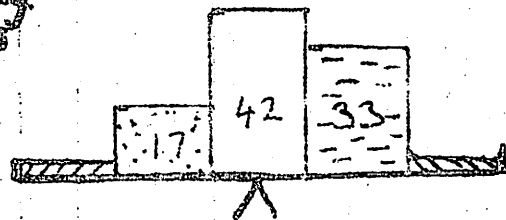
Strongly Disagree

Strongly Disagree

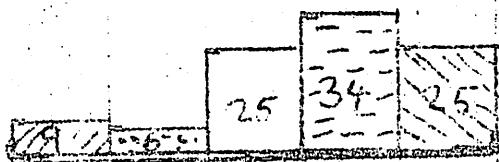
a) Eng boys



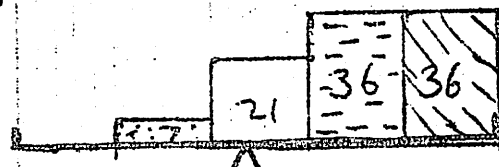
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys

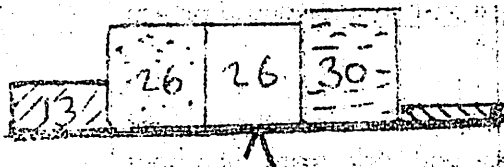


d) Asian girls

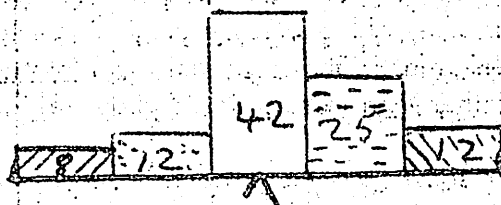


(E) I don't like religious people

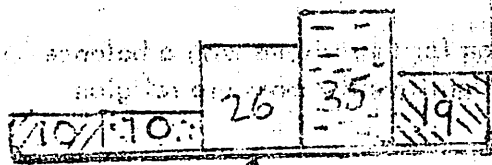
a) Eng boys



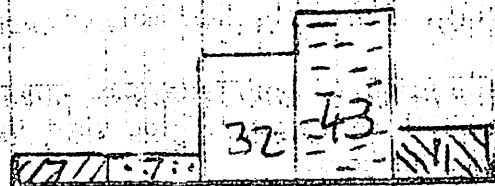
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



(F) Religion has no place in the modern world

Group Two Items 2A to 2F

This group of highly correlated items are partially the reverse of group one as they all express a positive attitude to religion. However they are slightly different in that they are much closer to actual personal belief and practice rather than mere attitude about religion.

In some ways the pattern is quite similar to group one with Asians showing more signs of being pro religion than English respondents and girls more than boys. But in this group the division on racial lines is extremely clear cut.

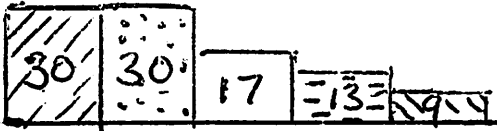
The English boys almost universally disagree with all these statements. The English girls on the whole disagree but a number are uncertain and their disagreement is not so strong as their male counterparts.

The Asians of both sexes show a normal distribution for these items with a balance overall on the pro religious side, the girls being significantly more pro religion than the boys.

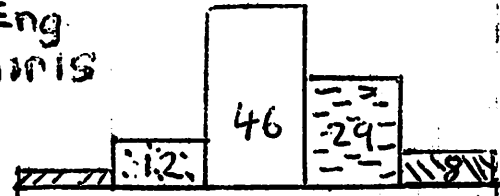
 Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Not Sure

 Disagree
  Strongly Disagree

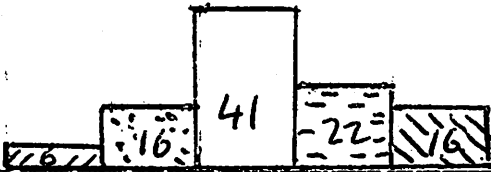
a) Eng. boys



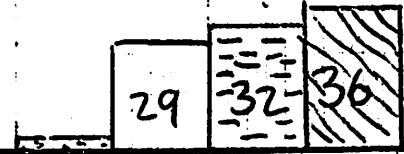
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys

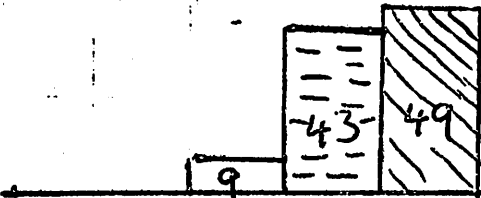


d) Asian girls

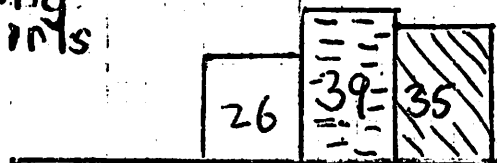


1G) Religion is just superstition.

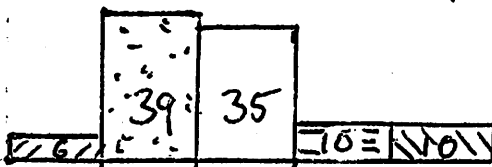
a) Eng. boys



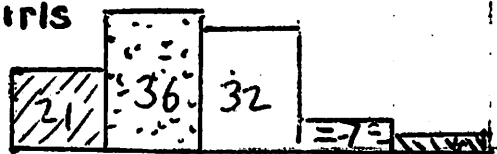
b) Eng. girls



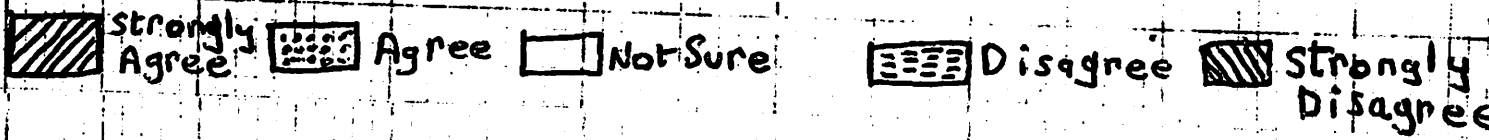
c) Asian boys



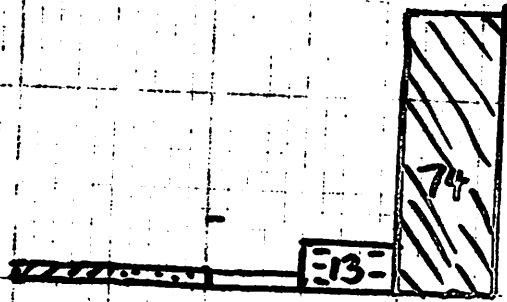
d) Asian girls



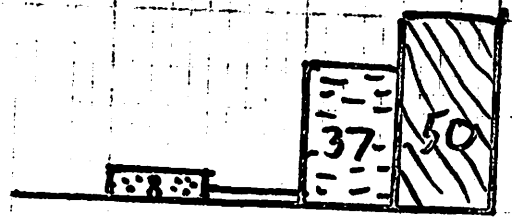
2A) Everyone ought to pray to God every day.



d) Eng. boys



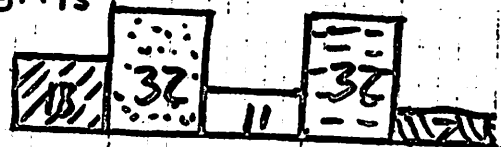
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys

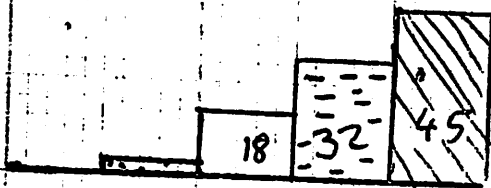


d) Asian girls

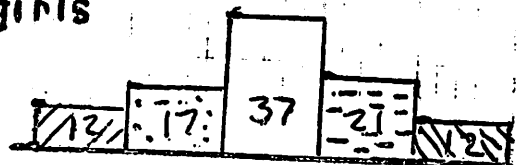


2B) I often go to church / mosque / temple.

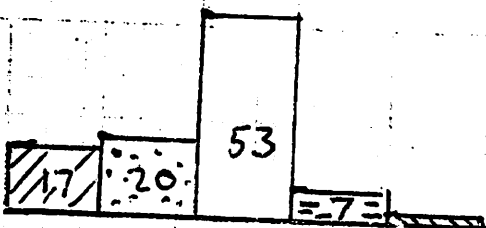
a) Eng. boys



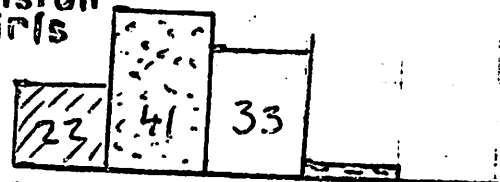
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys



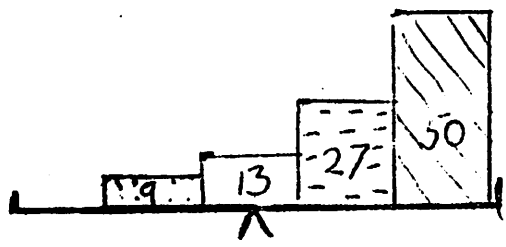
d) Asian girls



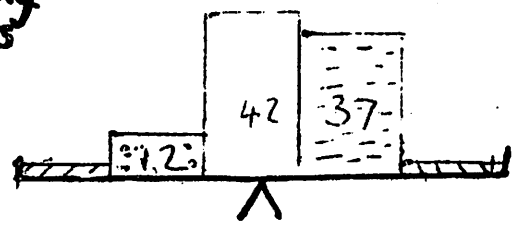
2C) I admire the saints of my religion.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Not Sure
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

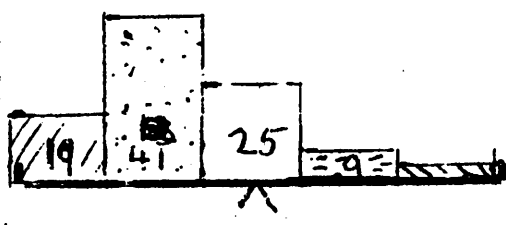
a) Eng boys



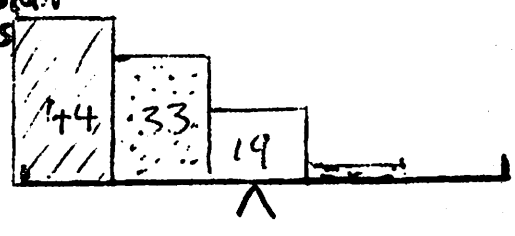
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys

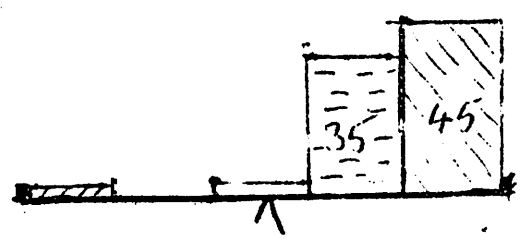


d) Asian girls

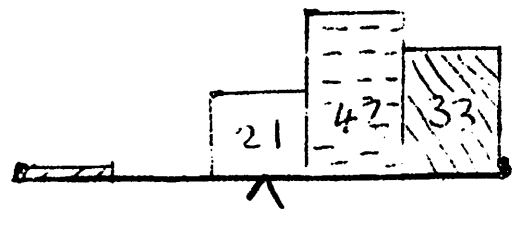


2D) I believe very strongly in my religion.

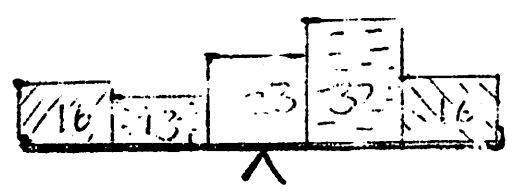
a) Eng. boys



b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys



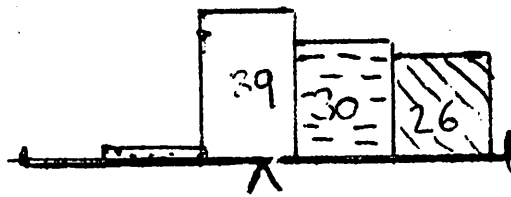
d) Asian girls



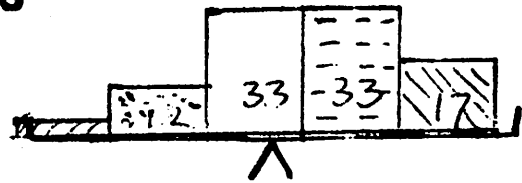
2E) If a person does not believe in God his life is empty.

 Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Not Sure
  Disagree
  Strongly Disagree

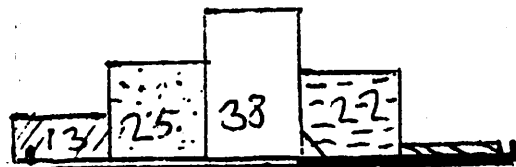
a) Eng. boys



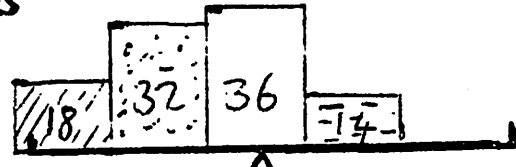
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys

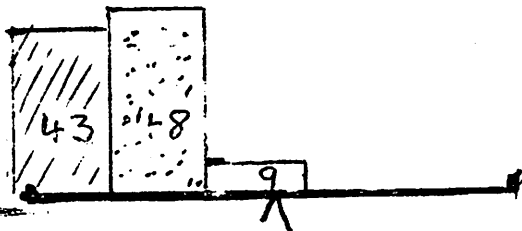


d) Asian girls

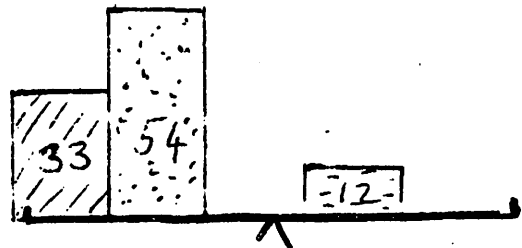


2F) The world would be a better place if more people practiced their religion.

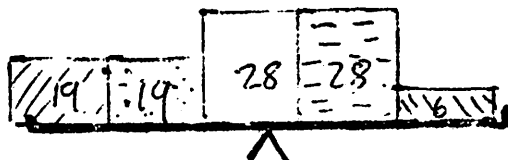
a) Eng. boys



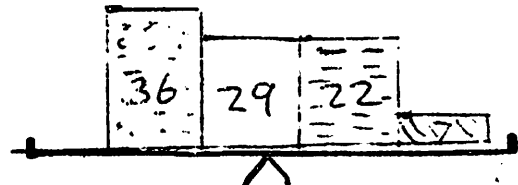
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



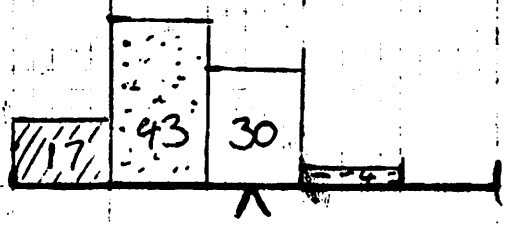
3A) You can lead a good life without being religious

L

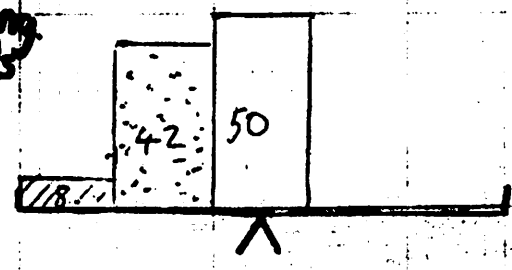
it

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Not sure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

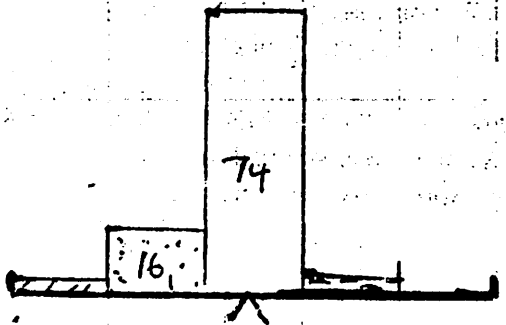
a) Eng boys



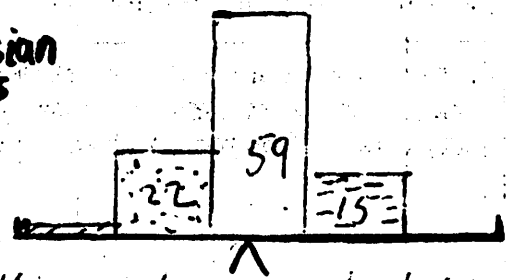
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys

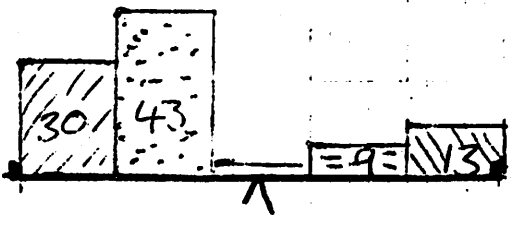


d) Asian girls

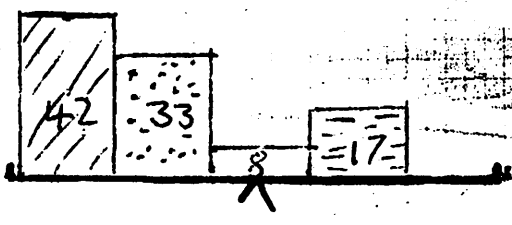


3B) Most Religious people don't practice what they preach

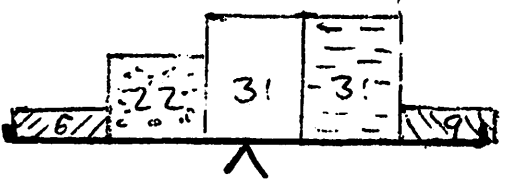
a) Eng boys



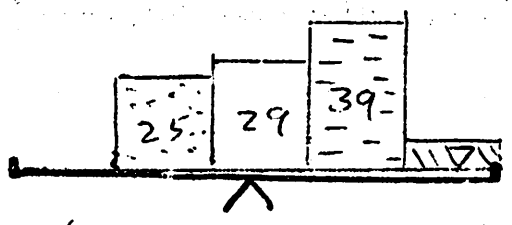
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



3C) Religious people are no better than anyone else.

Group Three Items 3A to 3D

These four items are highly correlated with each other and seem to share in common the idea that religion and ethical/moral behaviour are linked.

For English boys and girls the general opinion seems to be that religion makes little difference to people's behaviour. For the Asians there seems to be a wider spread of opinion on these items with a large number of Not Sures.

Other Items

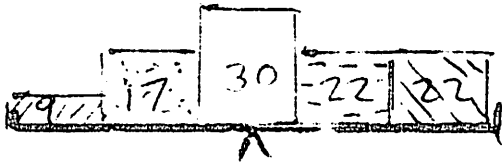
The rest of the items are not significantly grouped so will be discussed individually.

Item 4 'No one should try to make another person change his religion'

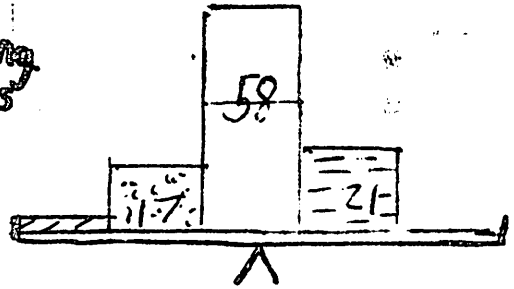
All groups are fairly solidly in agreement in the sentiment that no one should make another person change his religion.



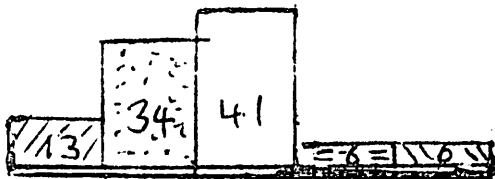
a) Eng boys



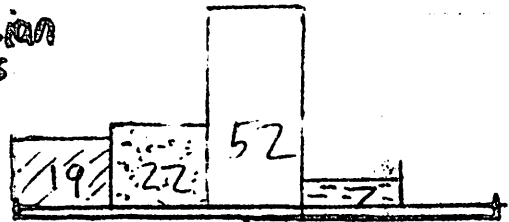
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys

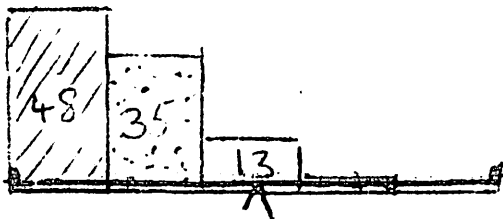


d) Asian girls

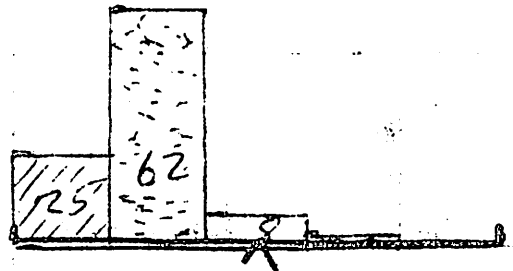


3d) The trouble with Britain is that people have turned from their religion.

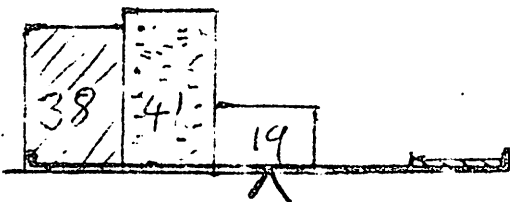
a) Eng boys



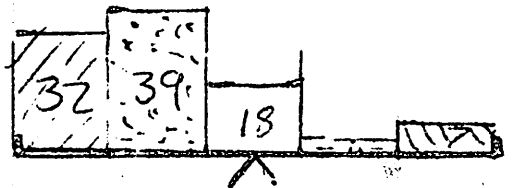
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



4) No one should try to make another person change his religion.

Item 5 'I would never marry someone of another religion'

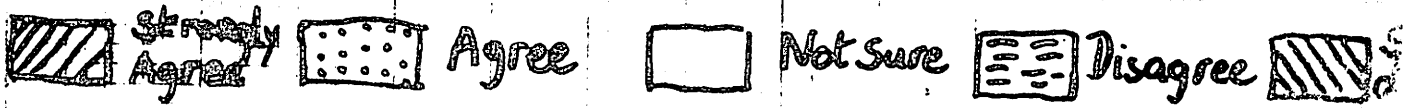
English boys and girls seem fairly happy or non committed about the idea of marrying outside their religion.

Asian boys show a fairly normal distribution with a fair number uncertain but the Asian girls (for whom we can assume both marriage and religion are important) are on the whole clearly against marrying outside their own faith.

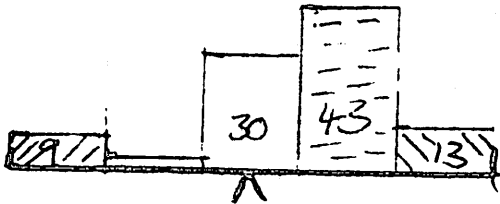
Item 6 'Religion is very important in the life of any country or people'

English girls and boys are both fairly clearly divided over the importance of religion to national life.

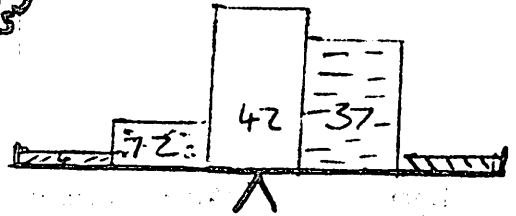
Asians of both sexes see quite strongly the importance of religion to society.



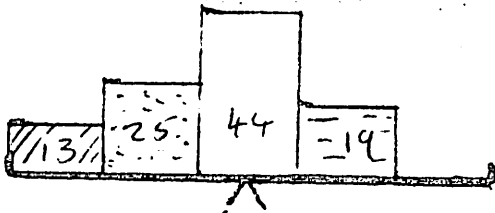
a) Eng. boys



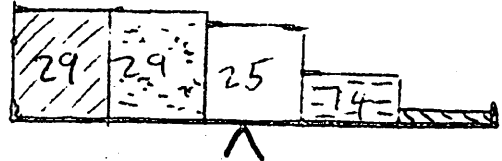
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys

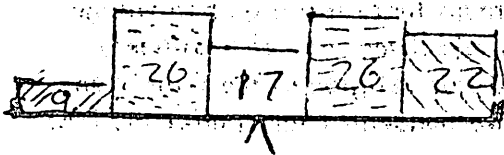


d) Asian girls

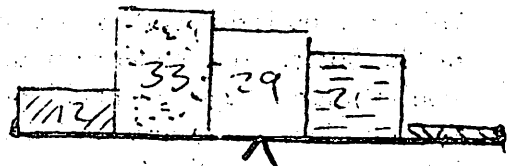


5) I would never marry someone of another religion

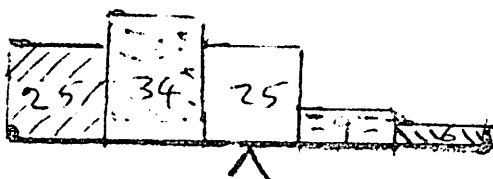
a) Eng. boys



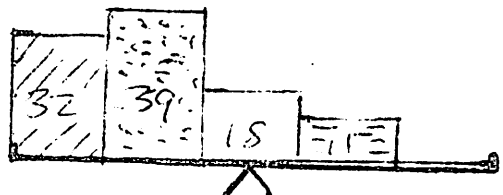
b) Eng. girls



c) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



6) Religion is very important in the life of any country or people.

Item 7 'All religions are the same'

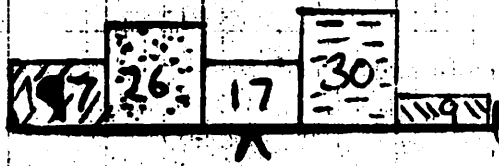
There seems to be little significant pattern about this item all groups showing a fair spread of opinion. This is probably the result of the vagueness of the statement and the fact that it could be interpreted in many different ways.

Item 8 'There is only one true religion'

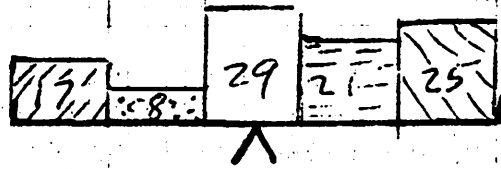
This item too is difficult to interpret. In all groups there is a high percentage of Not Sures. The tendency in all groups is to reject the idea of a uniquely true religion though this could mean there is no true religion or there are many true religions. It is suspected that the English respondents might prefer the first interpretation and the Asians the second.



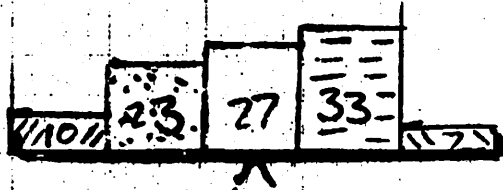
a) Eng boys



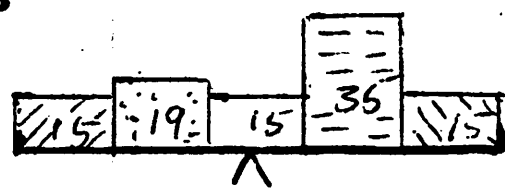
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys

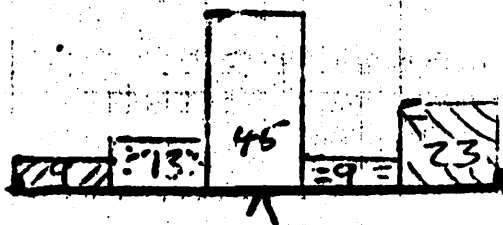


d) Asian girls

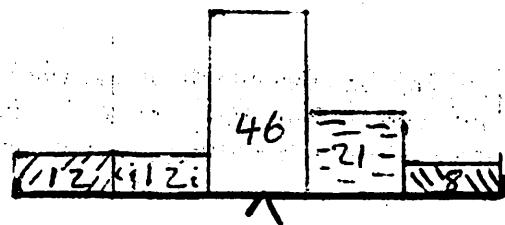


7) All religions are the same.

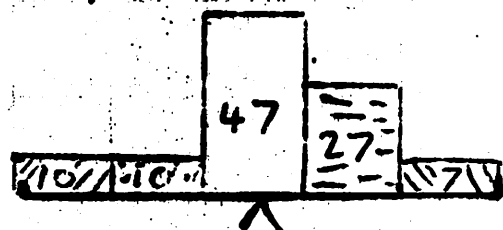
a) Eng boys



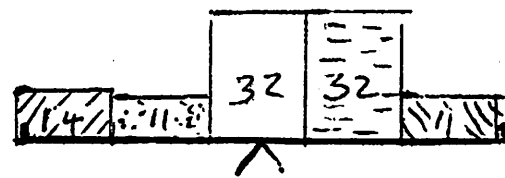
b) Eng girls



c) Asian boys



d) Asian girls



8) There is only one true religion.

Item 9

'Religion has no relevance to everyday life'

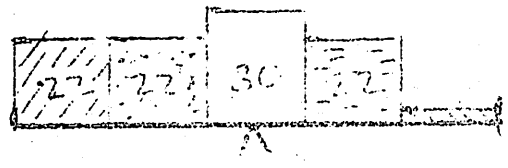
All groups show a high percentage of Not Sures probably because of the difficultly worded statement. But of those who do express a firm opinion on the statement the majority of English respondents see religion as having little relevance and the Asians (particularly girls) do see some relevance to everyday life.

Item 10

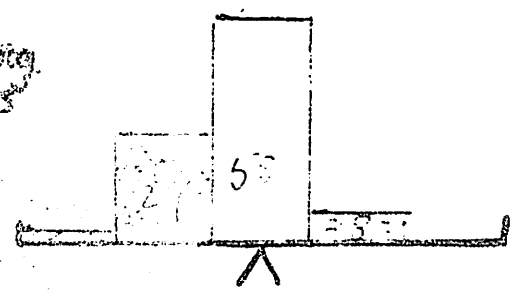
'You can't prove religion is true'

The English respondents on the whole agree that the truth of religion can't be proved. The graphs for Asian respondents show a fairly normal distribution except that a fairly large number of boys agree with the statement.

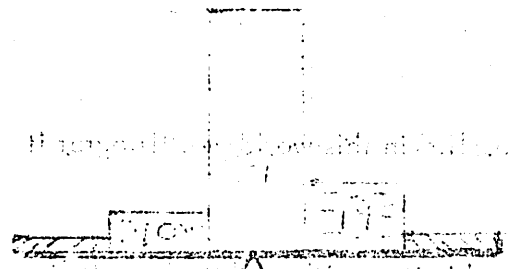
a) Eng. boys



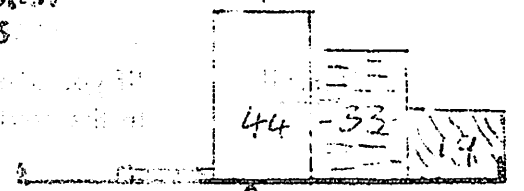
b) Eng. girls



a) Asian boys



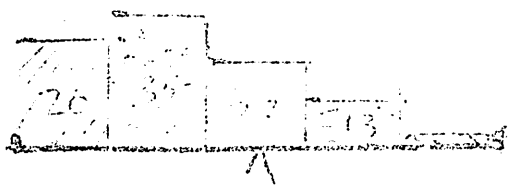
b) Asian girls



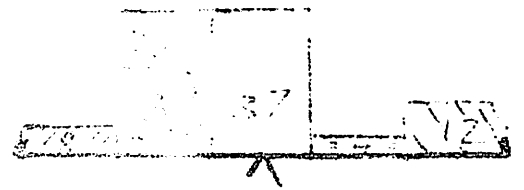
Religion: Islam is a guide to everyday life

Islam is a religion that guides the life of its followers in every aspect of their lives. It is a comprehensive way of life that covers all aspects of human existence. The Quran, the holy book of Islam, provides guidance on everything from personal conduct to social interactions. Muslims believe that following the teachings of Islam will lead them to a better life in this world and the next. The religion emphasizes the importance of prayer, charity, and honesty. It also teaches that all people are created equal and should be treated with respect and dignity. Islam is a religion of peace and harmony, and it has helped millions of people around the world to find meaning and purpose in their lives.

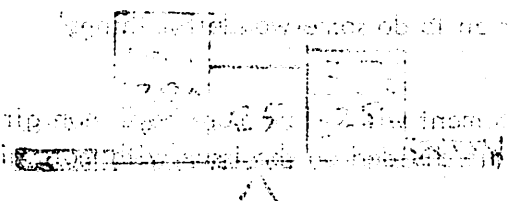
a) Eng. boys



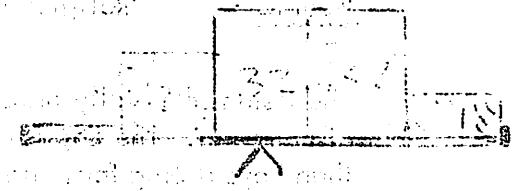
b) Eng. girls



a) Asian boys



b) Asian girls



Item 11






'If you don't lead a good life in this world you'll regret it in the next'

The Asians of both sexes are divided on this item with slightly less of them expressing fear of judgement than not. With the English respondents an absolute majority of boys disagree with the statement while a higher number of girls agree than disagree. The only reasonable explanation for this is that the statement is in some way a reflection of specifically "christian" thinking to which more girls than boys still subscribe.

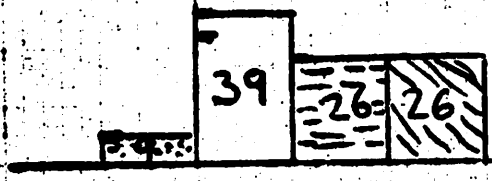
Item 12

'Religion has inspired men to do some wonderful things'

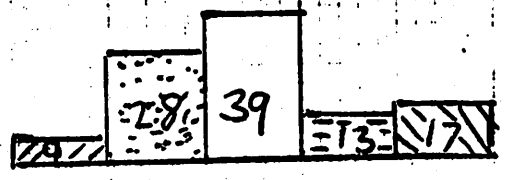
The Asians generally agree on this statement with a few more boys than girls disagreeing. The English respondents are divided on the issue with more girls than boys opting for neutrality.

 strongly agree
  agree
  not sure
  disagree
  strongly disagree

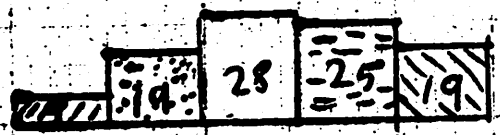
Newham boys



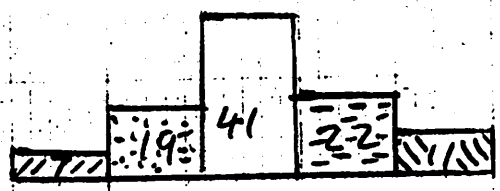
Newham girls



Asian boys

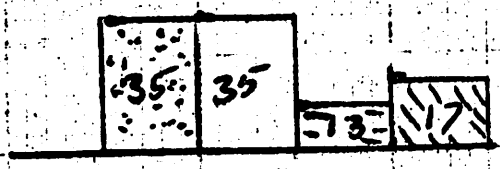


Asian girls

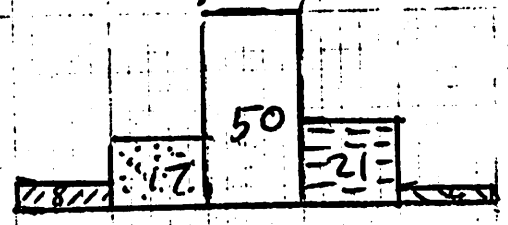


11) IF you don't lead a good life in this world you'll regret it in the next.

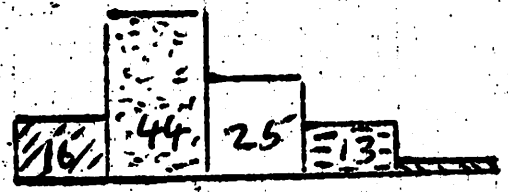
Newham boys



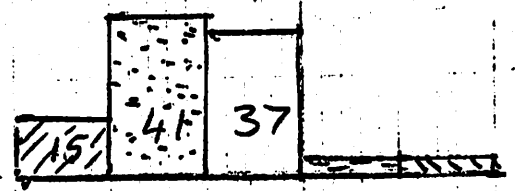
Newham girls



Asian boys



Asian girls



12) Religion has inspired men to do some wonderful things.

Other Attitude Factors

It is worth noting some of the results obtained from other sections of the attitude questionnaire as they do correlate with religious attitude.

Family

All groups express equally strong loyalty to or happiness within their own family but Asians express significantly more respect for the authority of the father in the family than do the English. Girls of both races think their parents more old fashioned than do boys.

Education

Asians are more favourable to education than the English. The Asians are very pro-education and the English more ambivalent. In both racial groups the girls are more favourable to education than boys are.

Cockney

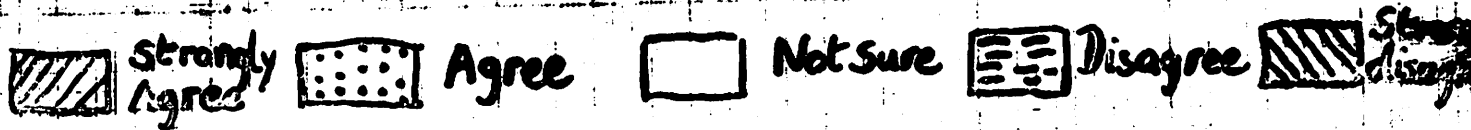
English respondents are quite loyal to Cockney. The Asians are more neutral towards it. However many English respondents are ambivalent towards it as they admit it is not the proper way to speak etc. and when they hear a Cockney speaker tend to stereotype him negatively.

Asian Attitudes

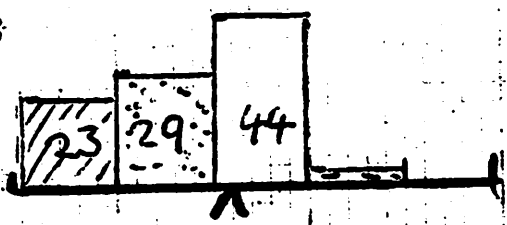
With the Asians there is evidence to show they have a very positive view of their own group and culture but little evidence of hostility to English people except from a minority of Asian boys.

There is a deep loyalty from Asians towards their traditional way of life and religion but a (growing) realisation that changes will have to be made in order to adapt to living in this country. Almost all the Asians for instance said they wanted to choose their own spouse.

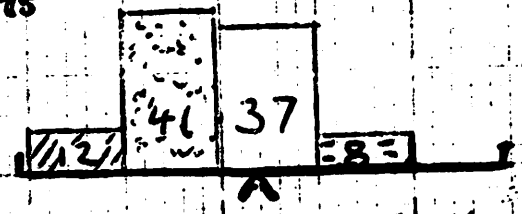
Attitudes to their own mother tongue reflect this pattern. The Asian youngsters express great loyalty towards their own language but in practice use English more than their own language with their own age group and in reading and writing. They also value English highly as the language needed for getting on in the world.



a) Asian boys

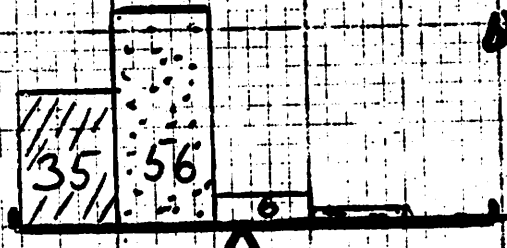


b) Asian girls

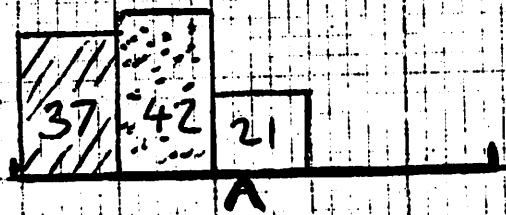


13) Asian people behave better than British people

a) Asian boys

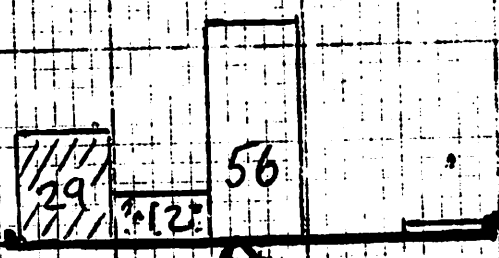


b) Asian girls

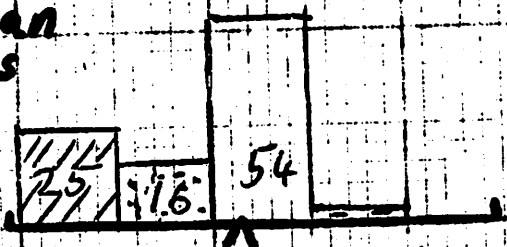


14) We must try to keep our religion

a) Asian boys

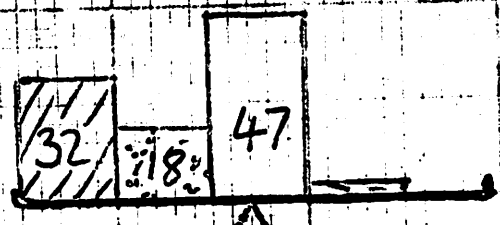


b) Asian girls

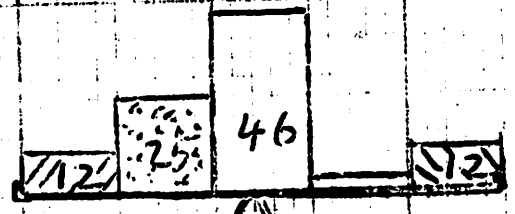


15) My religion is better than Christianity






a) Asian boys



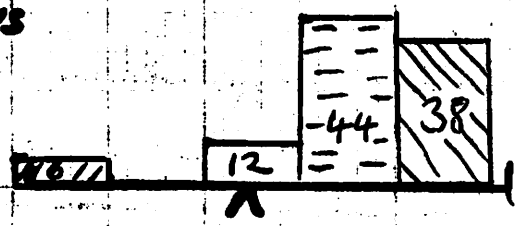
b) Asian girls



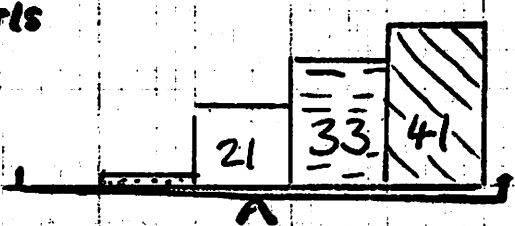
16) Hinduism is something to be proud of

 Strongly Agree
  Agree
  Not Sure
  Disagree
  Strongly disagree

a) Asian boys

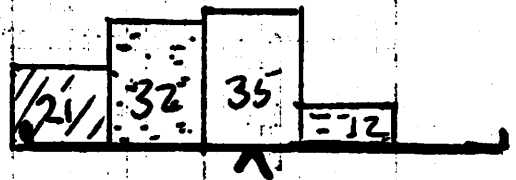


b) Asian girls

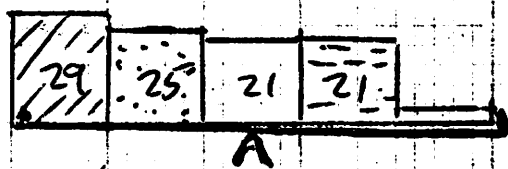


17) It doesn't matter if Asians lose their religion

a) Asian boys

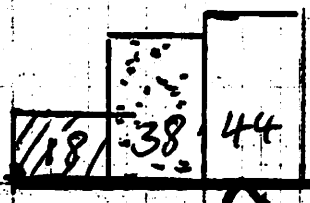


b) Asian girls

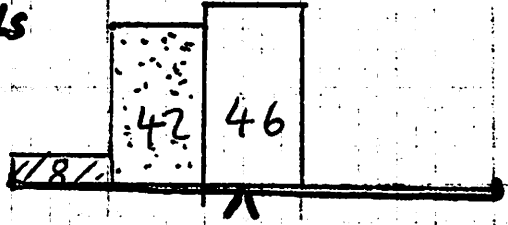


18) We should not bother which religion or caste a person is.

a) Asian boys

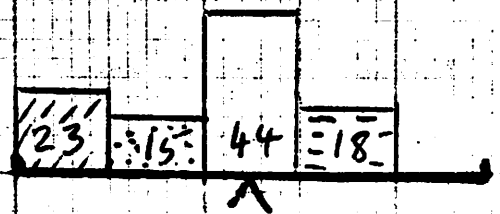


b) Asian girls

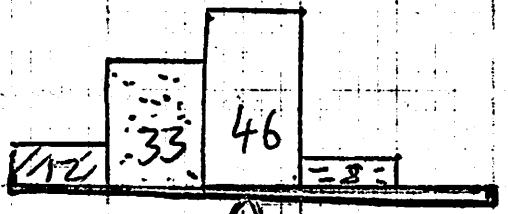


19) Hinduism teaches us a lot of good things.

a) Asian boys



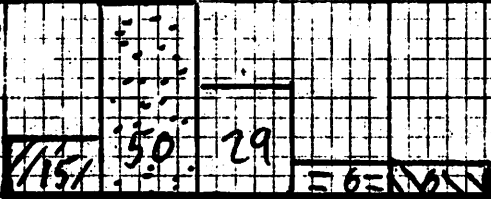
b) Asian girls



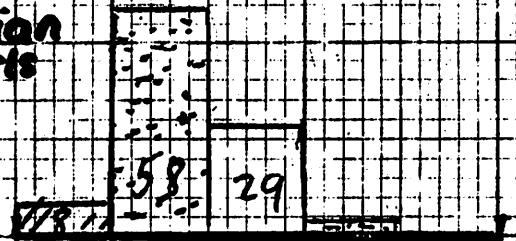
20) Christians shouldn't try to convert Asians



a) Asian boys



b) Asian girls

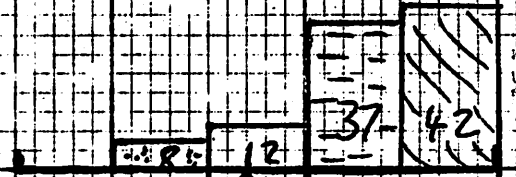


21) Most Christians are good people

a) Asian boys



b) Asian girls



22) Our religion is only for ignorant village people.

Items 13 to 22

These items refer specifically to aspects of Asian religions and were answered only by the Asian respondents. Looking at the graphs we see there is scarcely any significant difference between the sexes. It may be possible to detect a slight difference on items concerned with Hinduism and this may be accounted for in terms of the bias in favour of Hindus in the male sample. All these items clearly show that there is a strong loyalty expressed by Asian young people towards their traditional religion.

Looking at the attitude survey overall there is some evidence to suggest that there is a small minority of Asians (particularly boys) who are not so enthusiastic about their faith. But there is no doubt that in comparison with their English counterparts Asian young people are very pro religion in their attitudes. This is confirmed by wider surveys (Between two Cultures CRC 1976) but how well these attitudes correspond to deeply held feelings or behaviour is hard to tell.

SUMMARY

The findings of this paper clearly show that there is a vast difference in religious attitudes between the races. English respondents can be characterised as largely anti religious and Asians as loyal to their family's religion. In both races girls tend to be more religious than boys. This bears out well known facts about religious practice and belief in the respective cultures.

One gap in the findings is that very few Roman Catholic children were involved since the vast majority of these will be educated at Catholic rather than Local Authority schools.

It seems quite obvious that the biggest influence on a young person's attitude to religion is the culture or family background in which he or she is brought up. For the English child the influences of school, mass media and peer group probably work together to encourage a non-religious or anti religious attitude. For the Asian young person on the other hand it seems that the influence of the family and religious community he grows up in still has considerable effect in preventing a drift into secularism. How long this can be maintained is an open question. It is possible that rejection by British society may force young Asians back to their own cultural ghetto in which case they would be likely to remain loyal to their religions. But there are many integrative forces which might push them to reject their religions.

Overall the picture is a challenging one for the Christian church in Newham. This small survey shows that the majority of young people English or Asian are alienated from Christianity, and though this is no fresh news to those working in the area it emphasises the need for a massive new commitment to prayer, care and evangelism.