

Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets

Ethnic Minority Women and Access to the Labour Market

Executive Summary

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Key findings

- In 2001, just over 2.1 million women of working age in England were from ethnic minority groups, unevenly spread across the country, with concentrations in some local labour markets.
- Some groups faced significant problems of unemployment, access to better quality jobs and clustering in particular occupations and industries – with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African women especially disadvantaged.
- Our study localities had populations of ethnic minority women which were very different, both in their size relative to the total population, in their ethnic composition, and in their age structure.
- In 2001, Bangladeshi and Black African women were very much more likely to be unemployed if they were born outside the UK.
- Indian and Pakistani women aged 25-59 were much more likely to be permanently sick or disabled in Leicester than in our other study localities.
- Among young women, the percentages of women looking after their home and family full-time were higher for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women than for other groups. However in Leicester, rates were above the national average for almost all groups, including young White women.
- Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of working age women who were graduates rose strongly. The trend was marked for Indian, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women aged 25-44.
- Having unpaid caring responsibilities which involve looking after an adult who is frail, ill or disabled, or a disabled child, is more common for women in some ethnic groups than in others.
- At the local level, there is strong evidence that labour markets are operating in ways which disadvantage some groups of ethnic minority women. The situation of Indian women in Leicester highlights this point.
- Many ethnic minority women have aspirations to enter or progress within the labour market, but these have often been frustrated. In our sample, this had affected the confidence and self-esteem of some women.
- Ethnic minority women emphasised the importance of English language skills and of understanding local employment practices. Many were frustrated and perplexed by their difficulties in trying to gain access to ESOL training.
- Some women felt the mainstream services responsible for assisting women into work did not listen to them properly, and did not recognise the abilities and experience they had to offer.
- Identifying support networks was especially difficult for those in rural locations, and for those who felt isolated for other reasons. There was a strongly articulated need for better and more accessible information about available services.
- Engaging in voluntary work had been an important source of support for some women, and had acted as a stepping-stone to education, training and paid employment.
- Racism, discrimination and harassment were common experiences. Women stressed that these had a long-term impact, often creating fears, anxieties and loss of confidence. Many spoke of encountering rejection and exclusion in their attempts to enter employment or progress at work.

Background

This study was designed to provide a statistical analysis of the labour market circumstances of ethnic minority women living in five localities, taking account of existing knowledge held by local agencies. It included detailed statistical analysis as well as qualitative work with small groups of local ethnic minority women in each locality, to gain enhanced understanding of:

- the achievements and aspirations of these groups of ethnic minority women
- mismatches between their skills and the employment opportunities available to them
- their support needs in accessing the labour market or in progressing within it

The research questions we explored in this study included:

- How large are the populations of women from ethnic minority communities in the localities, and what are their main characteristics relevant to employment and the labour market?
- What types of skills and qualifications do women from these different groups currently have, and how could their access to paid work be improved?
- What further types of support do women from the identified groups require in order to facilitate their access to employment and their progress in the workplace?
- What are the aspirations, hopes and experiences of the women identified with regard to labour force participation?

Five of the local authority partners in the *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets (GELLM)* research programme chose to take part in this study¹. They were:

- **The London Borough of Camden**
- **Leicester City Council**
- **Newcastle City Council**
- **The London Borough of Southwark**
- **Somerset County Council**

The Context for the Study

Existing research on this subject has only rarely examined ethnic minority women's labour market circumstances at the local level. The 2001 Census provided an opportunity to develop much more detailed analysis at this level.

¹ The detailed material on each locality is presented in the five Locality Reports of this study.

A range of national and local policy measures designed to tackle labour market disadvantage among ethnic minorities has been developed in recent years, and a major Equalities Review, put in place by the Prime Minister, was under way during the research.

Ethnic Minority Women in 5 Localities

In 2001, just over 2.1 million women of working age in England were from ethnic minority groups. The 'White Other' group² and the Indian group were numerically the largest of these.

Our study localities had populations of ethnic minority women which were very different, both in their size relative to the total population, in their particular ethnic composition, and in their age structure.

In our localities, around 80% of the 'White Other' female population had been born outside the UK. This was also the case for about 70% of Black African women, and around 50% of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean women, with some variations from place to place.

In 2001, Bangladeshi and Black African women were very much more likely to be unemployed if they were born outside the UK.

Indian and Pakistani women aged 25-59 were much more likely to be permanently sick or disabled in Leicester than in our other study localities.

Among young women, the percentages of women looking after their home and family full-time were much higher for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women than for other groups. However in Leicester, rates were well above the national average for almost all the groups studied.

Full-time employment rates among women aged 25-59 varied between the localities. In almost all cases, they were higher in our two London boroughs, most notably among Pakistani women.

Part-time employment rates among women aged 25-59 also varied by both locality and ethnicity. In the two London boroughs, these were low by national standards, but this was not the case for Pakistani women or for Black African women (numerically a very large group) resident in Southwark.

² The White Other group includes Romany Gypsies, Turkish Cypriots, people of Eastern European origin and people from other European countries, South Africa, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Even in the same locality, unemployment rates among the economically active population were much higher for some groups than for others - in the most extreme case, 6 times higher. This problem was also very marked among young women aged 16-24. This suggests that local labour markets are not operating fairly, especially for women in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups.

Between 1991 and 2001, data for England show that the proportion of working age women who were graduates rose very strongly. This increase was very marked for women aged 25-44 in the Indian, Pakistani and Black Caribbean groups.

Having demanding unpaid caring responsibilities which involve looking after an adult who is frail, ill or disabled, or a disabled child, is a more common experience for women in some ethnic groups than in others. The figures for Bangladeshi women are particularly striking for women of working age in Leicester and in the two London boroughs. Even when we look only at women in paid employment, Bangladeshi women were much more likely to have this type of unpaid caring responsibility, especially in Leicester.

The Local Labour Market Context for Ethnic Minority Women's Participation in the Labour Market

Recent national labour market trends have included significant job growth, with a net increase of 1.86 million jobs held by women between 1991 and 2002. Major female job losses in the manufacturing sector were strongly offset by job growth in other parts of the economy, with many new jobs in part-time employment.

These developments were experienced very differently in our 5 study localities, with job growth much stronger in the two London boroughs. By contrast, the cities of Leicester and Newcastle both experienced net losses of female full-time jobs.

In 2002, two-thirds of all female jobs in the two London boroughs were full-time positions, compared with only 42% in Somerset. This suggests that it will be considerably easier to find part-time employment in some places (such as in Somerset) than in others (for example in London).

The two London boroughs in our study had a much smaller share of female employment in public sector jobs than our other localities, with markedly more jobs in banking, finance and insurance. There were rather high levels of female employment in the distribution, hotels and

catering sector in Somerset, while in Leicester manufacturing was still very important, despite significant job losses, especially as a source of employment for the city's large Indian population.

At the local level, there is strong evidence that labour markets are operating in ways which disadvantage some groups of ethnic minority women. Evidence relating to the 24,000 Indian women of working age living in Leicester showed that:

- In Leicester, 34% of Indian women worked in the manufacturing sector, compared with 12% of White British women
- These Indian women were more strongly concentrated in process, plant and machine operative positions and elementary jobs than White British women or than Indian men
- Only 4% of Indian women, compared with 18% of White British women (and with 12% of Indian men) held better paid jobs in the sector, as managers, professionals, or technicians.

Experiences and Aspirations: Voices of ethnic minority women

The small, specially selected groups of ethnic minority women who attended the study's arts-based workshops in the five localities highlighted a number of important issues. These women were drawn from a variety of different backgrounds, and had a range of different experiences relating to education, training and employment. Their views are not representative of ethnic minority women, but the workshops drew attention to some important concerns raised by women whose voices are not always heard and listened to.

Many had aspirations to enter or progress within the labour market, but these had often been frustrated. This had affected the confidence and self-esteem of some women.

These ethnic minority women strongly emphasised the importance of English language skills and of understanding local employment practices, but had often found access to training courses, advice and guidance difficult. Many were frustrated and perplexed by their difficulties in trying to gain access to ESOL training.

Women with qualifications from outside the UK were often finding it hard to gain recognition of their skills and talents – and some had reluctantly become resigned to working below their potential in low level jobs.

Some women felt the mainstream services responsible for assisting women into work did not

listen to them properly, and did not recognise the abilities and experience they had to offer. Some women had very positive experiences of the support voluntary sector agencies provided to those seeking training and support in entering paid work, and for some this had enabled them to secure employment.

Identifying support networks was especially difficult for those in rural locations, and for those who felt isolated for other reasons. There was a strongly articulated need for better and more accessible information about available services. Women especially valued culturally and gender-sensitive support activities offered in local community-based organisations.

Engaging in voluntary work had been an important source of support for some women, and had acted as a stepping-stone to education, training and paid employment in some cases. The precarious funding of some voluntary agencies was the main barrier to further development of these opportunities.

Racism, discrimination and harassment were common experiences. Women stressed that these had a long-term impact, often creating fears, anxieties and loss of confidence. Many spoke of encountering rejection and exclusion in their attempts to enter employment or progress at work, and some spoke of ways in which their past experiences of racism also 'held them back'.

The women who attended the workshops came from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. These were important factors shaping their experiences of accessing the labour market. The women's accounts nevertheless showed that parental, family and cultural influences could be highly variable, even within the same ethnic group. This highlights the danger of making stereotyped assumptions about how any individual woman's family or personal circumstances and cultural background may affect her aspirations and experiences in relation to the labour market.

Copies of the full report
Ethnic Minority Women and Access to the Labour Market - Synthesis Report
can be obtained from www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi or
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About the GELLM project

This research was undertaken as part of the *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* (GELLM) research programme funded, between September 2003 and August 2006, by a core European Social Fund grant to Professor Sue Yeandle and her research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion*, Sheffield Hallam University.

The national partners supporting the GELLM research programme are the Equal Opportunities Commission and the TUC. The project's 12 local authority partners are: Birmingham City Council, the London Borough of Camden, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Leicester City Council, Newcastle City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Somerset County Council, the London Borough of Southwark, Thurrock Council, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council and West Sussex County Council. The North East Coalition of Employers has also provided financial resources via Newcastle City Council. The team is grateful for the support of these agencies, without which the project could not have been developed. The GELLM project engaged Professor Damian Grimshaw, Professor Ed Fieldhouse (both of Manchester University) and Professor Irene Hardill (Nottingham Trent University), as external academic advisers to the project team, and thanks them for their valuable advice and support.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our partners in the London Borough of Camden, Leicester City Council, Newcastle City Council, Somerset County Council, and the London Borough of Southwark for their support in developing this study. We are especially grateful to the ethnic minority women who participated in the study workshops, and to the community organisations which facilitated their involvement.

Published by Sheffield Hallam University © 2006
1 84387 231 5



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