

Black & Minority Ethnic Women in the UK



Fawcett is the UK's campaign for equality between women and men.

Fawcett is the UK's campaign for equality between women and men. Our vision is of a society in which women and men are equal partners at home, at work and in public life. Fawcett campaigns for a world in which:

- **women share fully in decision making.** Today, only 18% of MPs and just 2% of Executive Directors of FTSE top 100 companies are women;
- **women live free from violence and the fear of violence.** One in four women experience domestic violence and although reported rape has trebled in the past 10 years, conviction rates are just 6%;
- **women have equal rights at work and receive fair pay and pensions.** Yet latest figures show a 20% pay gap and one in four single women pensioners living in poverty;
- **women get a fair deal regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or migration status.** There are just two Black women MPs, there has never been a woman MP of Asian origin, less than 40% of disabled women are in paid employment and Lesbian women are routinely discriminated against.

This publication is the first that Fawcett has produced focusing exclusively on the position of Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK. As an organisation, we recognise that we have fallen too readily into the trap of talking about women as if they were a homogenous group.

To achieve equality between women and men, Fawcett seeks to understand the particular experience of Black and Minority Ethnic women, diversity among Black and Minority Ethnic women as well as the commonality of experience among women of all ethnicities. This publication represents an important step on the road to addressing this agenda within our work.

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February 2005

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There are approximately 2.3 million Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK¹, making up just under 4% of the total population of the UK, and around 8% of women². Using a range of indicators ranging from educational attainment to labour market participation, from pension coverage to experience of the criminal justice system this report draws a picture of the contemporary social, economic and political status of Black and Minority Ethnic women. In so doing, this report is unique in bringing together the most recent available data on this 2.3 million strong population and reflecting on both commonalities in, and diversity of, the experience of BME women in the UK today.

Looking first at commonalities, one area where BME women as a whole share experience is the fact of facing discrimination on the grounds of both their gender and their ethnicity. In some areas, sexism and racism combine to create an intensity of discrimination that far exceeds the impact of any single strand. Our evidence on political representation, for example, shows how women from all Black and Minority Ethnic groups are almost totally excluded from positions of political power. In such cases, the labels “double” or “multiple” discrimination fail to do justice to the cumulative effect of gender and ethnicity. The report also reveals areas of commonality among women regardless of their ethnic background. Thus, while the size of the pay gap differs significantly among women of different ethnicities, women of all ethnic groups share

¹Hibbett, A., *Ethnic Minority Women in the UK*, Women and Equality Unit 2002. Available at http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/factsheets/ethnic_m_oct02.doc (All web addresses are correct as at January 2005)

²Using population figures from *Census 2001*, Office for National Statistics

Thinking continues to be hampered by lack of data which takes into account both ethnicity and gender: it is enormously frustrating that this remains the case.

the experience of being paid less than their male counterparts. Similarly, while the experience of motherhood and the responsibility for caring and domestic work differs considerably among women of different ethnicities, the impact of women's unpaid work is similar in exposing all women to a greater risk of poverty and undermining their financial security and independence.

But, to emphasise the commonality of experience among BME women, and the importance of gender in the experience of women of all ethnicities, should not detract from our understanding of the particularity and diversity of experience of women of different ethnicities. Much of the data presented in this report underlines the diverse experience of women who belong to different ethnic groups.

To take one example, employment rates vary considerably between ethnic groups and there is more similarity, for example, between the employment rates of Black Caribbean women and White women than there is between Black Caribbean and Pakistani women. And, we should not forget the considerable diversity that exists within particular ethnic groups; other aspects of individual identity such as age, class, sexual orientation and disability each have a profound and distinct impact on women's experiences.

Yet thinking among policy makers, academics, the media and among lobbyists and campaigners too often overlooks this diversity and falls into the trap of considering only the broader categories of 'women' or 'Black and Minority Ethnic people' both of which fail to comprehend fully the experience of BME women.

Thinking continues to be hampered by lack of data which takes into account both ethnicity and gender: it is enormously frustrating that this remains the case. As a result, this report is not and cannot be comprehensive and we point out gaps in evidence throughout the report. The lack of data is only part of the story, however. Effective policy making requires both evidence to make an issue visible and the political will to act upon the issue. It is hoped that this report will help at both levels, making visible the experience of BME women in the UK today and pointing out gaps in policy that need to be filled if Black and Minority Ethnic women are to achieve equality in the UK.

The report is divided into five sections each of which reflect one of Fawcett's campaign areas. We open the report with background information on demographics, migration, education,

health, religion and sexual orientation. Financial security and the labour market forms the focus of the next section, with data on pay, employment, poverty and pensions. The third section focuses on representation and participation in public life and the fourth on BME women's experience of the criminal justice system as victims, as accused or convicted of crime and as practitioners. Throughout the report we highlight case studies of organisations and individual women who are making a difference to the lives of BME women and who offer a model of how the interests of BME women might be better promoted in the future. In the report's conclusion, we draw together the implications of the data for policy-makers and for our understanding of the circumstances of particular groups of BME women.

Note on ethnic categorisations

The briefing does not attempt to provide a conclusive definition of ethnicity. Given the varying ways of defining and self-defining ethnicity by culture, language, colour, family's place of origin, etc, we recognise that ethnicity can be fluid, and defined differently in different contexts. The ethnic classifications used in this briefing are those of the source data, and therefore, although they are often those of the 2001 UK Census, there is not total consistency throughout the report. 'White' is used as an ethnic category throughout this report, but is used broadly as a comparator, without differentiation of minority White groups.

1 Background

Demographic and family structure

This section provides some basic, but important, data about the female BME population. An understanding of family structure is essential given that the characteristic of women's families influences the type of life women lead. We know, for instance, that women with young children are less likely to be in paid employment than childless women. How many children a woman has and whether or not she is married or has a partner is also associated with employment status and a range of other social and economic outcomes.³

Patterns of family structure vary quite considerably among different ethnic groups. Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian women are most likely to be married (in excess of 70% for those women aged 19 to 59) whereas women belonging to Black ethnic groups are least likely to be married (31% of Black Caribbean, 37% of

Black African, and 24% of 'Black Other' women are married). Levels of cohabitation have increased over the last decade amongst most ethnic groups; Bangladeshi and Pakistani women being notable exceptions to this trend. Black women are significantly more likely to be single than White, Indian, and Chinese women who are, in turn, more likely to be single than Bangladeshi and Pakistani women.⁴

As well as being most likely to be married, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women are most likely to have dependent children, and tend to have more of them than any other ethnic group.⁵ Almost one fifth (18%) of Bangladeshi women in the UK have three or more children under 16, as do 16% of Pakistani women, and nearly 10% of Black African women. For all other women, including White

women and Black Caribbean women the figure is 3% to 4%. Only 38% of Bangladeshi women and 48% of Pakistani women have no dependent children at all, compared to percentages in the fifties for Black women and in the high sixties for White, Indian, and Chinese women.

Whether or not these differing proportions will change over time remains to be seen: we should remember that BME women are currently on average younger than White women and, as such, may be more likely to have young children.⁶ This age difference between ethnic groups also means that BME women are less likely than White women to have elderly dependents.⁷

Black and mixed ethnicity women are particularly likely to be single mothers. More than half of Black and

- There are around 2.3 million Black and minority Ethnic women in the UK;¹ this is just under 4% of the total population, and about 8% of the female population.²
- Although the Black and Minority Ethnic population is on average younger than the general population, the number of BME elders is predicted to rise tenfold by 2030.
- More than half of Black and mixed ethnicity families are headed by a lone parent, usually a lone mother.
- Nearly 20% of Bangladeshi women have three or more dependent children, compared to only 4% of White women and 3% of Black Caribbean women.

mixed ethnicity families are headed by a lone parent, in comparison to less than a quarter of White families and just over one tenth of Asian families.⁸ And lone parents are likely to be women: nine out of ten single parents are single mothers⁹. Overall, Black African and Black Caribbean women in the UK are more than three times as likely to be lone mothers as any other group of women.¹⁰ Having on average more dependent children, and being more likely to be a lone parent necessarily has an impact for BME women in terms of caring responsibilities, income and patterns of employment.

The average age of Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK, in all ethnic groups, is lower than that of White women. Women and girls who identify as being of mixed ethnicity are the youngest group overall: half

are under 16¹¹ and their average age is just 19.¹² However BME groups are also the fastest-ageing, and the numbers of BME elders are set to rise dramatically over the next decade. By 2030, it is predicted that the number of BME elders will have risen tenfold.¹³ As women on average live longer, among the White population there are more women than men aged over 65. However, differing immigration patterns mean that this is not the case among BME groups: overall there are more BME men than women over 60. The gender imbalance is particularly marked in some groups: for instance, just one third of Bangladeshi people over 65 in the UK are women.¹⁴ But this overall trend is expected to be reversed in the near future, and older BME women are expected to outnumber older BME men.¹⁵

³Lindley, J., Dale, A., and Dex, S. 'Ethnic differences in women's demographic, family characteristics and economic activity profiles, 1992 to 2002', pp153-65 in *Labour Market Trends* April 2004, Office for National Statistics, 2004. Available at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour_market_trends/ethnic_differences.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dependent children are defined as being under the age of 16 and living at home. Percentages are for women aged 19-59.

⁶ Lindley et al. 2004

⁷ Mirza M. and Sheridan A., *Multiple identity and Access to Health: The Experience of Black and Minority Ethnic Women*, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003

⁸ *Labour Force Survey 2002*, Office for National Statistics

⁹ *Census 2001*, Office for National Statistics, 2003

¹⁰ Mirza and Sheridan 2003.

¹¹ *Census 2001*, Office for National Statistics

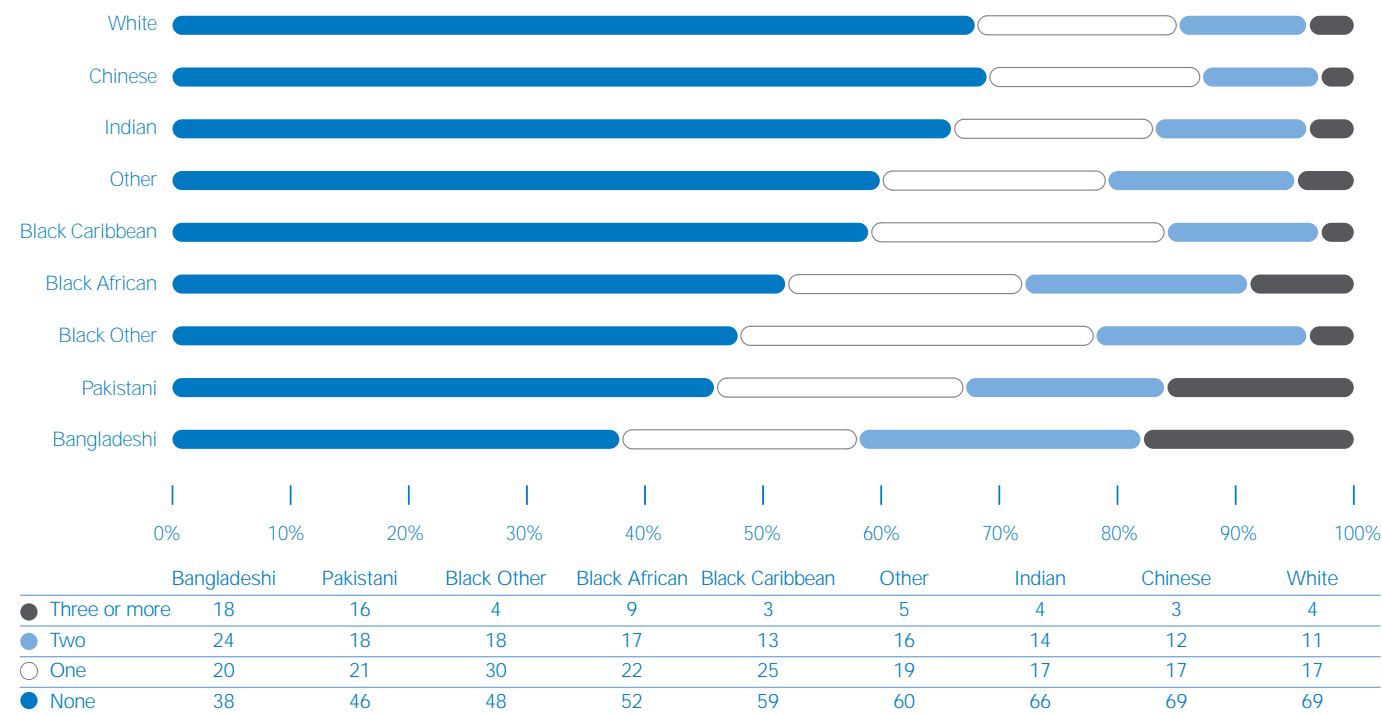
¹² *Labour Force Survey*, Office for National Statistics, 2002

¹³ Age Concern, press release, May 2003

¹⁴ *Census 2001*, Office for National Statistics

- Over 90% of those aged 19-24 who identify as Black Caribbean were born in the UK.
- Bangladeshi women are the least likely of all women to be UK-born.
- In 2001, less than one quarter of those claiming asylum in their own right were women; many other women claim as dependents.

Figure 1: Proportion of women by ethnic group and numbers of children*



*Women are those aged 19-59; children are dependent children under 16. Source: *Labour Force Survey*, cited in Lindley et al, *Ethnic differences in women's profiles*, ONS 2004

Migration

The proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic people in the UK who are immigrants varies hugely between different ethnic groups and different age groups. Across all ethnic groups, younger people are more likely to be UK-born than older people; in almost all ethnic groups more than 90% of those aged 45 and over were born outside the UK.¹⁶

In almost all age groups, those identifying as 'Other Black' and Black Caribbean are far more likely to be born in the UK than those who are Black African, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. When the two factors of age and ethnicity are combined, the extent of the variation in UK-born populations is such that over 90% of people aged 19-24 who identify as Black Caribbean are UK-born compared to less than 1% of Bangladeshi people aged 45 or over.¹⁷

Issues particularly affecting immigrants – such as public attitudes to immigration; immigration status and right of access to public goods and services; language acting as a barrier to services or employment; and high levels of racism directed towards immigrants and asylum seekers – are particularly likely to be experienced by older BME women and by Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African women. Racism is such that one third of newly arrived refugee women do not feel safe going out alone in the daytime.¹⁸ This racism towards immigrant communities combined with the currently very high levels of Islamophobia can create particularly hostile environments for Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslim women, especially as their dress – the hijab or jilbab, for instance – often marks them out.

¹⁵ Afshar, H., Franks, M., Maynard, M., Wray, S., *Gender, ethnicity and empowerment in later life*, Quality in Ageing Vol 3 Issue 1, 2002

¹⁶ Lindley et al. 2004. The exception is those identifying as 'Other Black' (as opposed to Black Caribbean or Black African) – unsurprisingly as this category encompasses 'Black British', meaning that by definition a large number of Black people born in Britain are likely to identify this way.

¹⁷ Lindley et al. 2004

¹⁸ Dumper, H., *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*, Refugee Action, 2002. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf>



- Indian girls achieve the highest GCSE grades of any group based on gender and ethnicity.
- Bangladeshi women are the most likely of all groups to have no educational qualifications at all: almost half have no qualifications.

Refugee women often experience greater isolation than refugee men as a result of cultural norms, increased caring responsibilities and greater language difficulties.¹⁹ The UK asylum system also takes a 'gender-blind' approach which can significantly disadvantage women seeking asylum, by making the asylum system more difficult for women to access, and by recognising as 'safe' many countries in which gender-specific forms of persecution – such as rape, female genital mutilation, forced marriage or trafficking – are rife.²⁰

The Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) was established in 2000 as part of Asylum Aid to highlight the institutionalised discrimination and gender blindness of the asylum process. When women claim asylum in the UK there is a lack of awareness by officials of how their gender has shaped their experience of persecution with the result that their genuine claims are at risk of failing. In addition, women are particularly badly affected by recent changes in legislation affecting refugees such as dispersal and new support arrangements. Isolation, poverty and lack of support in the UK add to these pressures.

The RWRP is the first project of its kind to specifically address all these issues. RWRP's work not only assists individual women with their claims, but it raises awareness and influences officials and policy-makers to take women's needs into account.

A significant change for refugee women in the UK has been the adoption of gender guidelines by the Immigration Appellate Authority in 2000 and by the Home Office in 2004. The RWRP would like to see the full implementation of these guidelines and the adoption of EU-wide gender guidelines.
Debra Singer, RWRP

Education

In the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* the Government recognised that inequality of educational attainment is a key factor in increasing the risk of children experiencing social exclusion later in life. The Government made a commitment to 'equality of opportunity and high standards for all'.²¹

Recently, there has been much emphasis placed on the 'gender gap' in education as girls' performance at GCSE level has surpassed that of boys. In the academic year 1999/2000, for example, 56% of girls, compared to only 45% of boys, achieved 5 or more grade A*– C GCSE passes.²² Commentators have cautioned that these stark figures hide a complexity that, if ignored, could lead to potentially unhelpful policy responses.²³ It should not be forgotten that boys' poorer performance is not consistent across subject areas, that

there is still a strong gender-divide in terms of young peoples' subject choices, that the relative gains made by girls at GCSE are sometimes reversed at A-level, and that girls still face additional barriers to fulfilling their potential.²⁴

Focussing on the 'gender gap' can also obscure the existence of a larger 'race gap'. It is true that in every ethnic group girls outperform boys, but there are great disparities between the performance of girls from different ethnic groups: about 40% of Black Caribbean girls achieve 5 or more A*– C GCSEs compared to nearly 80% of Chinese girls. Despite outperforming boys from the same ethnic group, Black Caribbean girls do worse at GCSE level than White boys, while Black African and Pakistani girls have similar performance levels to those of White boys. As a relatively high performing group, White girls

¹⁹ Briefing on Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Bill, Refugee Women's Resource Project & Asylum Aid, 2004

²⁰ Refugee Women's Asylum Project, 2004; Ceneda, S., *Women Asylum Seekers in the UK: a gender perspective*, Refugee Women's Asylum Project, Asylum Aid 2003. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP%20Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc>

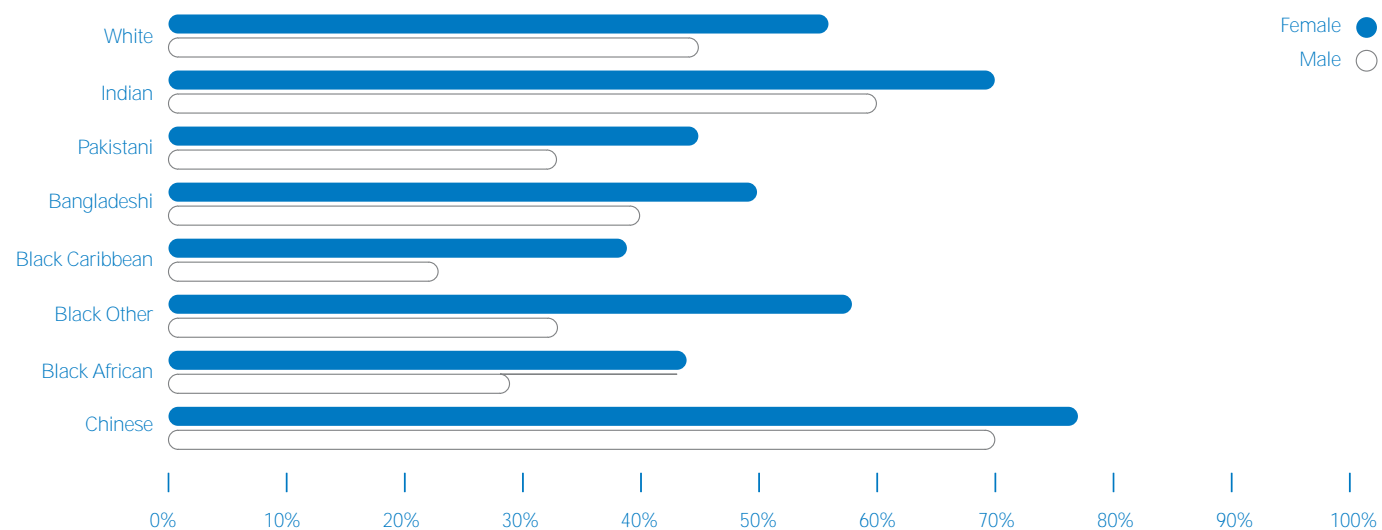
²¹ Forward by the then Secretary of State in *Excellence in Schools* DfEE 1997 p3, cited in Gillborn, D. and Mirza, H. *Educational Inequality: mapping race, class and gender*, Ofsted, 2000. Available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=447&type=pdf>

²² Dench, S., Aston, J., Evans, C., Meager, N., Williams, M., and Willison, R., *Key Indicators of Women's Position in Britain* DTI, 2002. Available at http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/weu_key_indicators.pdf

²³ See, for instance, Gillborn and Mirza 2000

²⁴ Ibid.

Figure 2: Proportion achieving five or more A*– C GCSEs, female and male



still fail to achieve the results attained by Indian and Chinese boys.²⁵

Uncovering the contributory factors to the differing levels of achievement of girls belonging to different ethnic groups is not straightforward. Educational researchers agree that social class is strongly associated with educational attainment.²⁶ For all ethnic groups, children who are eligible for free school meals (a proxy for socio-economic level) are significantly less likely to achieve 5 or more grade A*– C GCSE passes than children of the same ethnic group who are not eligible.²⁷ And ethnic minority families are more likely to live in areas of deprivation, meaning that much of the lower attainment of these groups can be attributed to socio-economic factors.²⁸ But class background and deprivation alone do not account for all of the educational differences between ethnic groups as the degree

of the ‘class gap’ varies between different ethnic groups, once again reminding us that treating Black and Minority Ethnic populations as a homogeneous group is an oversimplification. The disparity of attainment between different classes is actually most pronounced amongst White children,²⁹ while for Black African and Black Caribbean pupils the difference is much less marked.³⁰ This suggests that ‘while targeting class disadvantage is clearly necessary, in isolation such action may have only a limited effect in closing the gap between particular ethnic groups’.³¹

When focussing on the ‘race gap’ in educational attainment we must beware of associating particular ethnic groups with underachievement. While emphasising differences in attainment is much needed as part of an analysis of inequalities in educational

²⁵ Botcherby, S., and Hurrell, K., *Ethnic Minority Women and Men* Equal Opportunities Commission 2004. Available at http://www.eoc.org.uk/EOCeng/EOCcs/Research/ethnic_minority_women_and_men_briefing.pdf (additional tables available at http://www.eoc.org.uk/EOCeng/EOCcs/Research/ethnic_minority_women_and_men_tables.asp)

²⁶ See, for instance, Gillborn and Mirza

²⁷ Bhattacharya et al. 2003, G., Ison, L., and Blair, M., *Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: the evidence*, University of Birmingham and DfES, 2003, p11, citing National Pupil Database, GCSE results, 2002. Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RTP01-03.pdf>

²⁸ Bhattacharya et al, p21

²⁹ Bhattacharya et al. p11

³⁰ Gillborn and Mirza, p19

³¹ Gillborn and Mirza, p21

An alarming 40% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women of working age have no qualifications at all, compared to 17% of White women.

outcomes, this should not lead to 'a hierarchy of ethnic minorities based on assumptions of inherent ability'.³² Indeed, there is evidence that high levels of achievement are possible for children of all ethnicities. One group of researchers, for instance, found that for each of the main ethnic groups there is at least one Local Education Authority where that group is the highest attaining, and the proportion of children attaining good grades at GCSE has increased over time for all ethnic groups.³³

There is also a disparity among BME women of different ages. Like White women, younger BME women are better qualified than their elders. The number of BME women born between 1960 and 1979 who have no qualifications is less than half of that of BME women born between 1940 and 1959.³⁴ This suggests that adult education and training programmes may be helpful in tackling differences in educational attainment. An alarming 40% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women of working age have no qualifications at all, compared to 17% of White women.³⁵ Educational attainment is a major component of 'human capital' which is a key determinant of labour market success.³⁶

³² Bhattacharya et al., p7

³³ Gilborn, David and Heidi Safia, *Educational Inequality: Mapping Race, Class and Gender, A synthesis of research evidence*, Ofsted 2000. Available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=447&type=pdf>

³⁴ Fig 2.14, Strategy Unit 2003, *Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market: Final Report* Available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/ethnic%20minorities/report/02.htm#bk022>

³⁵ Fig 3 in Hibbett 2002

³⁶ ch 2, Strategy Unit, 2003

³⁷ *Sick of being excluded – the report of the race, health and social exclusion commission*, Association of London government, 2003, www.nhsdiversity.org.uk/Ethnicity/sic_exclud/sic_exclud.html

³⁸ Afshar et al., 2002

Health and health services

BME women and men are more likely to suffer from chronic ill-health, and to die prematurely, than White people.³⁷ In England, BME women are more likely to report their health as being bad or very bad than women overall: Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, in particular, are more than three times as likely to report health problems than the general population of women. Babies born to Pakistani mothers who were not themselves born in Britain are more than twice as likely to die in their first week as the babies of British-born mothers.³⁸

The Maya Centre

The Centre was founded 21 years ago by a small group of feminist psychotherapists who were concerned about the numbers of women in the psychiatric system and the increasing use of medication to address the whole spectrum of mental health difficulties. They wanted to raise awareness of women's mental health and alternatives to a medical model. It is estimated that, by 2020, depression will be second only to chronic heart disease as an international health burden. Women are twice as likely as men to be prescribed minor tranquillisers and two-thirds of hospital admissions for depression are women.

The Centre targets women living on benefits or very low incomes who have not completed degree-level education or benefited from prior counselling or psychotherapy. Almost 70% of the clients are from BME backgrounds. A free crèche is provided to all clients

and they can choose to see a therapist from the same ethnic background as themselves. Clients can receive counselling in English, Somali, Arabic or Turkish. The service both provides free long-term counselling of up to a year and raises awareness of women's mental health issues.

Despite greater recognition of diversity and inclusion at a strategic level, BME women are still marginalized and excluded. What is needed now is a change in public attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers and the growth of a network of service providers like the Maya Centre right across the country.

Celia Clarke, The Maya Centre

- BME people, both women and men, are more likely to suffer from chronic ill-health and to die prematurely than White people.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are most likely to report bad health.
- Young South Asian women are over-represented amongst suicides.
- Babies born to immigrant Pakistani mothers are more than twice as likely to die in their first week as the babies of British-born mothers.

There is also a greater gender difference between BME women and men than the general population of women and men with regard to health. Whereas in the total population of England men and women are equally likely to report health problems, Indian, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women are more likely to experience ill-health than men of the same ethnic group, and Bangladeshi women less so.³⁹

There are clear links between health problems and socio-economic disadvantage. The relative poverty and social exclusion of particular groups of BME women – particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi women – are therefore critical to an understanding of their health.

Stereotyping about racial groups by health professionals affect the care received by BME women with cultural differences, poor diet and caring responsibilities assumed to be at the root of health problems.⁴⁰ There is also evidence of discrimination in service provision: for instance, Black people with mental health problems are likely to stay longer as in-patients in psychiatric wards, and are more likely to be prescribed medication or electro-convulsive therapy instead of psychological treatment.⁴¹

There is currently a lack of nationwide data on Black and Minority Ethnic women with disabilities. Those BME women who do have disabilities can also experience differing levels of care. It has been reported, for instance, that lack of attention to the specific cultural needs of Asian disabled women means that these women are less likely to make use

of existing support services. The women are left feeling isolated and frustrated at their dependence on their families.⁴²

Young South Asian women are particularly at risk of committing suicide, accounting for a proportion of suicides almost double their proportion in the population.⁴³ The prevalence of suicide and self-harm among South Asian young women has also been reported by service providers.⁴⁴ The profile of young South Asian women who are admitted to hospital in suicide cases is different to that of others who attempt suicide: they are more likely to be married and less likely to have a previous diagnosis of mental health problems. It has been suggested that these women are likely to be experiencing problems which they do not feel able to discuss either within or outside the family.⁴⁵

Research with older BME women has identified health as the issue of most concern to them, meaning that accessible and appropriate health services are of particular importance for these women.⁴⁶ Gaps in the understanding of, and services for, BME elders are felt particularly acutely by older BME women who experience an increased risk of poverty, isolation and difficulties accessing information which mean that the care they receive in later life may not be appropriate to their needs.⁴⁷

³⁷ *The Health of Minority Ethnic Groups*, Health Survey for England 1999, Department of Health

³⁸ Afshar et al., 2002

³⁹ Carvel, J. *Move to end race bias in mental health care*, The Guardian, Wednesday January 12th 2005

⁴⁰ *User-defined outcomes of community care for Asian disabled people*, South Asian disabled young people and their families, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002

⁴¹ *Suicide and Minority Ethnic people*, National Electronic Library for Health, NHS, www.cebmh.net, 2004

⁴² Talk by Rita Rupal, Newham Asian Women's Project, 2003

⁴³ *Suicide and Minority Ethnic people*, National Electronic Library for Health, NHS, www.cebmh.net, 2004

⁴⁴ Afshar et al., 2002

⁴⁷ *Minority Elderly Care project*, Policy Research Institute of Ageing and Ethnicity, June 2001; *Ethnic Elders: Access, Equality*, Conference Report, Age Concern England, 2001

- Lesbian, bisexual and trans BME women can experience intensified or multiple discrimination, within and outside their communities.

- More than nine out of 10 Pakistani and Bangladeshi people in the UK identify as Muslim.
- Nearly three quarters of Black and Black British people in the UK identify as Christian.
- Mixed race and Chinese people are most likely to say they have no religion.

Sexual orientation

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people in certain Black and Minority Ethnic communities can experience increased stigma and discrimination, particularly where ethnicity intersects with religion. The stigma can both put lesbian, bisexual and trans (LBT) women under greater pressure, and make them less willing to identify publicly as LBT, making it harder for them to access services. Recent research has identified a need for specifically tailored support services for BME lesbians, as well as gay men, who are members of particular religious communities.⁴⁸ Some agencies are taking up this challenge, such as the Safra Project which provides support services designed specifically for Muslim lesbians.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Initial Findings*, Safra Project, January 2003; *A Minority Within A Minority: British Non-heterosexual Muslims*, Dr Andrew Yip, ESRC, April 2003

⁴⁹ The Safra Project, a resource for Muslim lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, was founded in October 2001. www.safraproject.org

Faith

Faith can intersect with ethnicity to form an important part of women's identities, and particular ethnic groups are often strongly identified with particular religions. For example, 92% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people in England and Wales are Muslim, compared to between 9% and 20% of most other Black and Minority Ethnic groups and less than 1% of White people. Three quarters of White people and nearly three quarters of Black or Black British people identify themselves as Christian, as well as more than half those of mixed ethnicity. Indian people have the most varied religious affiliations, with significant numbers identifying as

Hindu (45%), Sikh (29%) and Muslim (13%). More than ten per cent of Black and Black British, more than a quarter of mixed race people and more than half of Chinese people say that they have no religion.⁵⁰

While these figures are not broken down by gender, other research shows that similar proportions of men and women overall state that they have some religious affiliation. However, the same research shows that women are more likely than men to attend religious services, with 56% of women doing so, as opposed to 47% of men.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Census, April 2001, Office for National Statistics

⁵¹ British Social Attitudes Survey, National Centre for Social Research, 1999

2 Employment and financial security

- 65% of Black Caribbean women are in paid employment and full time employment rates among this group are higher than those of White women.
- 78% of Bangladeshi women and 65% of Pakistani women are currently outside the labour market.
- Estimates suggest that 50% of all homeworkers are BME women.

Employment

Rates of women's employment vary considerably between ethnic groups. Of all women, White women are most likely to be economically active with 71% in some kind of paid employment. Levels of employment among Black Caribbean women are closest to that of White women, with 65% of Caribbean women being economically active, and are actually higher in terms of full-time employment (45% of Black Caribbean women are employed full-time compared to only 38% of White women). Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are much less likely to be economically active, with only 28% and 16% respectively being in employment.⁵²

It is important to distinguish between full-time and part-time working as they are potentially very different types of employment. Full-time jobs are more likely to involve professional careers,

with occupational pensions and higher pay. In contrast, part-time jobs typically have few career prospects and a poorer pay progression.⁵³ The ability of women to choose to combine employment and childrearing is also an issue for consideration. The variability in working patterns of women of different ethnicities suggests the need for racial, as well as gender, mainstreaming in policy areas such as Work Life Balance. For instance, it is unclear whether the relatively high levels of full-time employment among Black Caribbean women⁵⁴ should be interpreted as successful access to child care and full-time jobs with prospects, or rather as a failure of Work Life Balance schemes to reach women from different ethnic groups.

Levels of unemployment also vary by ethnic group. White and Chinese women have the lowest levels of

unemployment, while Black women have the highest levels. It should be noted, however, that when these figures are expressed as a proportion of the economically active, Bangladeshi women have the highest rate of unemployment at around three times that of White women.⁵⁵ Apart from Indian women, women of all ethnic minorities are less likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts, and all, like men, have benefited from a more buoyant economy.⁵⁶

Levels of economic inactivity also vary considerably between different ethnic groups. White women are least likely to be studying full-time, while Chinese and Black African women are most likely to be full-time students. The proportion of Indian, White, and Black women who are not in the labour market (that is, not in paid employment, not actively seeking

work, nor studying full-time) ranges from 21% to 30%. This compares to a massive 65% and 78% for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women respectively.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly given these figures, the gender gap in rates of employment is greatest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and men.⁵⁸

Some explanation for the inactivity of older Pakistani and Bangladeshi women lies in their first generation immigrant status and lack of British qualifications and fluency in English (in excess of 80% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women over the age of 35 with no dependent children are economically inactive regardless of marital status).⁵⁹ It is not clear that the adult and basic skills education is fully reaching this group of women and enabling them to engage in the labour market if they so choose. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who have

dependent children also have very high levels of economic inactivity (around 80%, depending on the age of their youngest child). 42% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women under 35 who have a partner but no dependent children are also not involved in the labour market, compared to only 2% of Black Caribbean women and 4% of White women.⁶⁰

When asked the main reason for not being in the labour market, the majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women reply 'looking after the family or home'.⁶¹ It is clear that, generally, traditional gender roles are adhered to more closely by Pakistani and Bangladeshi women than women of other ethnicities and that affects women's choices with regard to their participation in the labour market. But, the experiences of young, UK educated Pakistani and Bangladeshi women differ from those of their

⁵² Lindley et al. 2004, p161

⁵³ Lindley et al. 2004, p160

⁵⁴ Lindley et al. 2004, p162

⁵⁵ Lindley et al. 2004, p161 and Hibbett 2002 section 2g

⁵⁶ Lindley et al. 2004, p161 and Hibbett 2002 section 2g

⁵⁷ Lindley et al. 2004, p161

⁵⁸ Hibbett 2002, section 2b

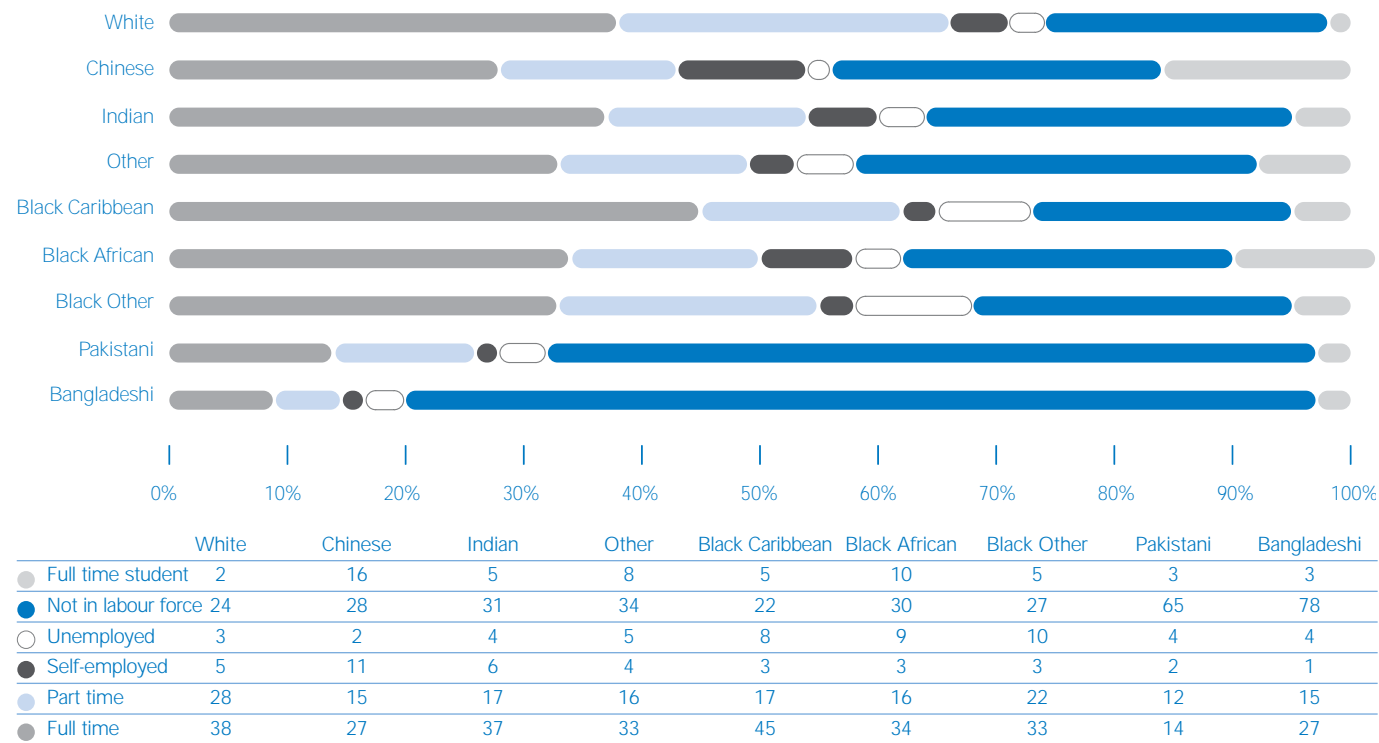
⁵⁹ Lindley et al. 2004, p162 and Dale, A., Fieldhouse, E., Shaheen, N., and Kalra, V., *The Labour Market Prospects for Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women* Work and Employment Society 16 (1), 2002, pp5-25 Abstract available at: http://wes.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/16/1/5_passim

⁶⁰ Lindley et al. 2004, p162

⁶¹ *Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey 2001/2*, Office for National Statistics

Stereotyping results in employers assuming, for example, that Muslim women are not able to work evenings or work with men, and may lead to questioning of a woman's ability to 'fit-in' or present an appropriate image to customers should they choose to wear the hijab.

Figure 3: Proportion of women aged 19 – 59 by economic activity and ethnic group, 2000 – 2002



mothers: while most young women retain a strong belief in the centrality of the family (and this includes husbands and relatives not just children), they also see paid work as a means to independence and self-esteem. Successive cohorts of UK born Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are now coming through the UK education system, including higher education; the number of first year students on degree-level courses has increased by a large percentage since the mid 1990s. This means that they will not face the barriers of language and a lack of qualifications in the same way as previous generations. Although raising a family is likely to have a major impact on these women's economic activities, there is some evidence suggesting that they may increasingly attempt to reconcile work and family by seeking part-time employment.⁶²

There is also evidence suggesting that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with the same level of qualifications as White women find it harder to get a job. This would contribute to high levels of unemployment, and possibly also economic inactivity as women are deterred from job seeking. This is one area where a lack of detailed information makes it hard to speak definitively, but initial survey data resonate with reports by Pakistani and Bangladeshi women that they are treated differently because of their race or ethnic identity. Stereotyping results in employers assuming, for example, that Muslim women are not able to work evenings or work with men, and may lead to questioning of a woman's ability to 'fit-in' or present an appropriate image to customers should they choose to wear the hijab.⁶³ This suggests that for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, the intersection

of racism and sexism operates as a specific barrier to employment.

BME women are over-represented in certain types of employment. Some estimates put the proportion of homeworkers who are BME women as high as 50%. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are particularly likely to be homeworkers and therefore most likely to be exposed to the often harsh realities of homeworking. Homeworking is typified by limited access to employment rights, such as sick leave, paid holidays, maternity pay or redundancy notice and compensation.

⁶² Dale et al. 2002, pp21 & p13

⁶³ Dale et al. 2002, p22



- Black Caribbean women have the highest average hourly pay rate of women earning £8.72 an hour.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi women earn the least of any women, on average less than £6 an hour.
- On average, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women earn only 56% of the average hourly wage of White men.

Pay

A lack of enforcement of employment law, and loss of employment when homeworkers, even acting as a collective, stand up for their rights, puts homeworkers in a very vulnerable position effectively outside of the legal and regulatory system.⁶⁴ Given the number of BME women who are either single parents or have large numbers of dependent children, access to appropriate, affordable and quality childcare is of particular significance. Yet BME women are less likely than White parents to access childcare, to be satisfied with the quality of childcare services, to find childcare that is culturally and religiously sensitive, or to find that there are sufficient childcare places.⁶⁵

The Asian Women of Achievement Awards

I started the AWA because I was acutely conscious of the fact that Asian women hardly ever received recognition – it was the men always in the limelight! It was important to publicise success – to provide role models – to break the stereotyping that was always applied to women from Asia.

The awards have been very, very successful in presenting a positive image of Asian women in the UK. The depth and variety of the achievements of Asian women is phenomenal and through the awards they are brought into the public sphere. It was only through the awards that people realized there was an Asian rapper, an Asian flamenco dancer and an Asian opera singer!

But all the recipients share the qualities of hard work, commitment, determination and positive energy. I hope the Awards will become synonymous with representing all that is special about Asian women. It should be the benchmark of excellence. BME women in the UK need to constantly work harder – we need to be inspired and inspire, provide role models, mentor younger people and set up good networking circles.

Pinky Lilani, Chair, Asian Women of Achievement Awards

⁶⁴ *Made at Home: British Homeworkers in global supply chains*, Oxfam Briefing Paper no. 63, Oxfam in association with the National Group on Homeworking and the TUC, 2004. Available at: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/trade/bp63_homeworkers.htm

⁶⁵ *Parents' Eye: Building a vision of equality and inclusion in childcare services*, Daycare Trust, 2003. Available at: http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod/fileman/files/ParentsEye_Report.pdf; Hall, K., Bance, J., Denton, N., *Diversity and difference: Minority ethnic mothers and childcare* WEU 2004. Available at www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/min_eth_childcare.pdf

The graph on page 24 shows the average hourly pay of women and men from different ethnic groups.⁶⁶ The figures include hourly wages for both full-time and part-time work. Women of every ethnicity experience a significant pay gap in relation to men from the same ethnicity. The pay gap is largest for Indian, Black African, White, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who earn just 72%, 74%, 77%, and 78% of men's hourly pay respectively. For BME women, except Indian women, this gap increases when their hourly wages are compared to those of White men as White men receive higher average hourly rates of pay than most BME men. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women earn only 56% of the hourly pay of White men. Black Caribbean women earn the highest hourly wage of £8.72 which constitutes 88% of Caribbean men's pay and 82% of White men's pay.⁶⁷ Homeworkers are

a severely disadvantaged group within the workforce, receiving an average of just £2.53 an hour.⁶⁸ A lack of clarity in employment law over whether homeworkers are self-employed or employees contributes to this with homeworkers frequently paid 'by the piece' rather than by the hour.

As separate figures for full-time and part-time workers are not available it is not possible to gain a complete understanding of the factors contributing to differences in hourly wages and pay gaps experienced by women of different ethnicities.⁶⁹ It has already been mentioned that part-time jobs tend not to pay as well as full-time positions.⁷⁰ This means, for instance, that the relatively high pay of Black Caribbean women may be a reflection of the fact that a greater proportion are employed on a full-time basis rather than indicating that Caribbean women command higher

⁶⁶ *Individual Incomes of Men and Women by Ethnicity*, Women and Equality Unit, DTI, 2004. Available at: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/IL_ethnicity_factsheets.pdf The data includes people working both full-time and part-time.

⁶⁷ *Individual Incomes 2004*

⁶⁸ *Made at Home: British Homeworkers in global supply chains*, Oxfam Briefing Paper no. 63, Oxfam in association with the National Group on Homeworking and the TUC, 2004. Available at: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/trade/bp63_homeworkers.htm

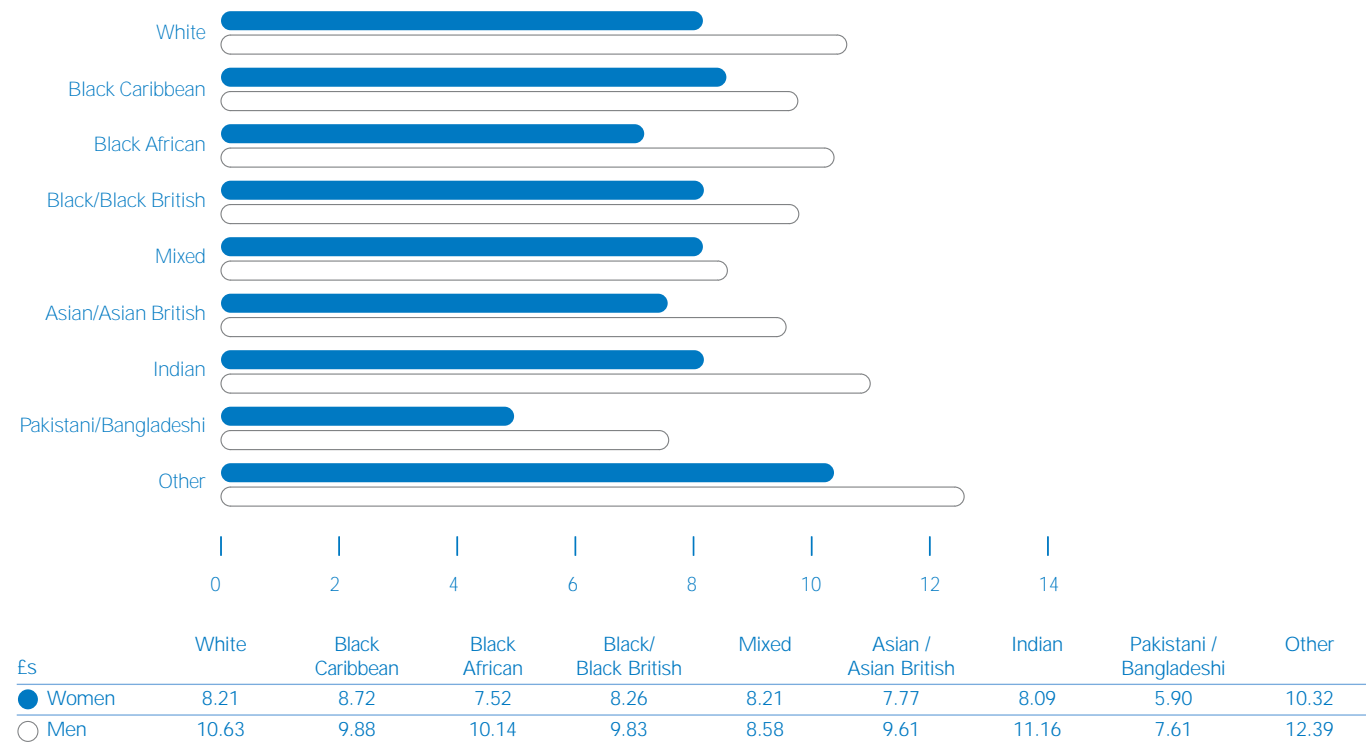
⁶⁹ Sample sizes are too small for Labour Force Survey hourly rate of pay data to be disaggregated by working patterns and ethnicity, and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, which can be used to calculate the gender-pay gap, does not collect information relating to ethnicity (personal communication with the Women and Equality Unit, January 2005).

⁷⁰ In 2003 women working part-time earned on average 88% of women working full-time. Manning, A. and Petrongolo, B., *The Part-Time Pay Penalty* Women and Equality Unit, 2004. Summary available at: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/part_time_paypenalty_rs.doc

⁷¹ See, for instance, Olsen, W. and Walby, S., *Modelling Gender Pay Gaps* Equal Opportunities Commission Working Paper Series No. 17, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004

⁷² Olsen, W. and Walby, S. 2004, p.v.

Figure 4: Average hourly pay of women and men from different ethnic groups (£s)



wages than women of different ethnicities in similar circumstances. Research is being undertaken to investigate what contributes to the gender pay gap, including the effect of part-time working, and the relative importance of these contributory factors.⁷¹ Women's lesser educational qualifications compared to men's contribute to their smaller pay packets (this accounts for 8% of the pay gap), as does their lack of full-time employment experience (19% of the gap), their greater part-time experience (3%), the greater amount of time taken out for childcare (14%), and the concentration of women in female-dominated professions (10%).⁷²

But these statistics relate to women in general: there is no ethnic breakdown. The variety of BME women's experiences in relation to education, family structure, and working patterns alone illustrates the potentially beneficial role that disaggregated data could play in informing policy aimed at closing the gender pay gap for all women.⁷³

⁷³ Botcherby and Hurrell complain that they found limited statistics by gender and ethnic group relating to pay (and education in Wales, subject choice pre-16, attainment and course choice in Further and Higher Education, choice of (Modern) Apprenticeships, income, pensions, and benefits) and request that producers of statistics commit to providing better information in this area. Botcherby and Hurrell, 2004, p13

- Almost two thirds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are living in poverty.
- Two fifths of Asian and Black women live in poverty, twice the proportion of White women.⁷⁴
- 53% of lone parent households are poor.⁷⁵

Poverty

Black and Minority Ethnic women experience considerably higher rates of poverty than White women in the UK. But the incidence of poverty varies considerably between different ethnic groups, and is greatest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, 64% of whom live in poverty.⁷⁶

The number of BME women living in poverty may be even higher than the figures suggest since current methods of measuring poverty by household mask the true extent of poverty among BME women. Poverty figures are based on household income and treat all individuals as equal recipients of money coming into the household. In reality, women often receive a smaller share of household income than men because of various factors, including who is the principal earner,

the division of caring responsibilities and patterns of financial management.⁷⁷

There are a number of intersecting factors contributing to women's poverty, which may help to explain BME women's particular vulnerability.

These include:

- lower pay;
- higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity;
- likelihood of being a single parent;
- likelihood of having a large family – this is particularly strong for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, and to a lesser extent Black African women.

⁷⁴ Written answer from Chris Pond to parliamentary question from Joan Ruddock, Hansard Column 1066W, 28th April 2004. 'Living in poverty' is defined as a household living on less than 60% of median income, after housing costs.

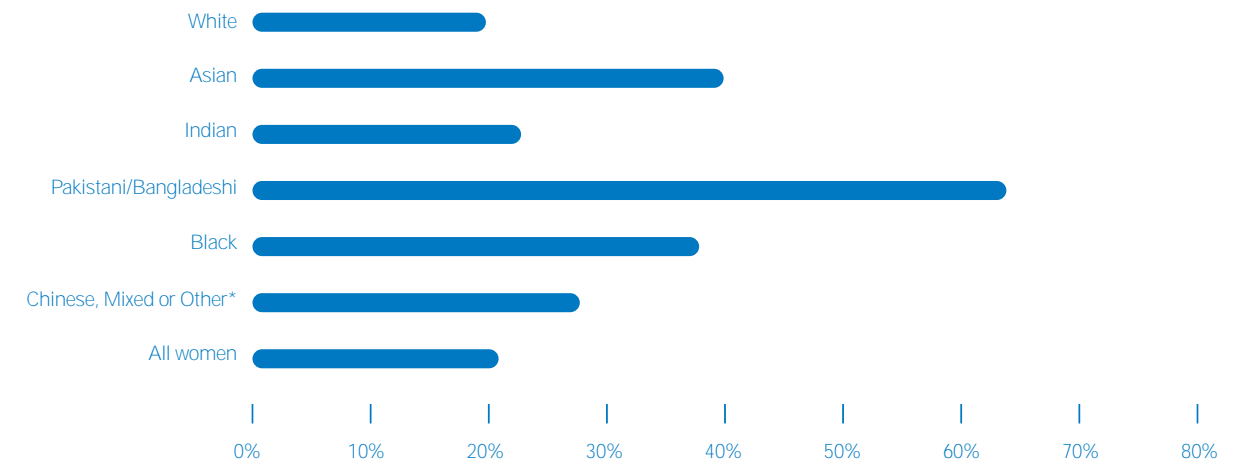
⁷⁵ *Households Below Average Income 1994/5-2001/2*, Department for Work and Pensions, 2003. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2001/contents.asp>

⁷⁶ Written answer from Chris Pond to parliamentary question from Joan Ruddock, 28th April 2004.

⁷⁷ Rake, K and Jayatilaka, G, *Home Truths*, Fawcett Society, 2002; Rosenblatt, G and Rake, K *Gender and Poverty Briefing*, Fawcett Society, 2003. Available at: http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/pov_000.pdf

The number of BME women living in poverty may be even higher than the figures suggest since current methods of measuring poverty by household mask the true extent of poverty among BME women.

Figure 5: Percentage of adult women living in poverty



* Figures for the 'Chinese, Mixed or Other' group are based on a small sample and should only be used as a guide

Pensions and savings

Black and Minority Ethnic women are particularly vulnerable to poverty in later life, because of a variety of factors involving pensions and savings.

All women experience a pension gap with men which is even greater than the pay gap. This is because women are not only paid less, but also work for fewer hours over fewer years.⁷⁹ BME women, who are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market, suffer an even greater gap in pension income: they receive less than men from their state pension, and are less likely than either men or White women to be covered by a private pension. But the extent of this disadvantage varies.

The pension gap is most acute for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women: only 8% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women of working age belong to an occupational pension scheme, compared to a third of White women and more than a third (35%) of White men. Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are also extremely disadvantaged, with a lower rate of private pension coverage than any group of men or women other than Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.⁸⁰ This too is worrying for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women given that nearly one in four of all women say that they are relying on their partner to provide for them in later life.⁸¹ Black women come closest to White women's levels of private pension coverage, with 28% having an occupational pension, compared to 25% of Black men.⁸²

Research has shown that BME women's disadvantage in private pension coverage goes further than differences in pay and employment patterns can explain alone.⁸³ This may be because of the type of employer which BME women tend to have: they may work in smaller private sector firms which are less likely to run occupational pension schemes. It may also be part of a wider pattern of financial exclusion, whereby households do not have any mainstream financial products, including pensions, bank accounts or insurance. Being without these products can in turn contribute to social exclusion and poverty.⁸⁴

- Only 8% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have an occupational pension and only 1% have a personal pension.⁷⁸
- BME women's comparatively poor pension coverage appears to fit into a wider pattern of financial exclusion among some BME communities.

Some BME groups, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi households, are more likely to experience financial exclusion. Pakistani people are four times as likely as White people not to have a bank account, Bangladeshi people three times as likely, and Indians twice as likely.⁸⁵ Cultural factors – such as Islamic beliefs about receiving interest – may play a role in this exclusion. However, other barriers to accessing financial products include marketing failures, pricing, and the design of the services offered. Some poor families may also be refused access to such products.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Written answer from Malcolm Wicks to Vera Baird MP, 26th March 2004, Hansard Column 1128

⁷⁹ *Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement: a joint response on women and pensions from Age Concern and the Fawcett Society*, 2003

⁸⁰ Written answer from Malcolm Wicks to Vera Baird MP, Hansard Column 1128, 26th March 2004

⁸¹ *Pensions not a priority for women says new research*, Press Release, Age Concern England and Fawcett Society, 2003

⁸² Written answer from Malcolm Wicks to Vera Baird MP, Hansard Column 1128, 26th March 2004

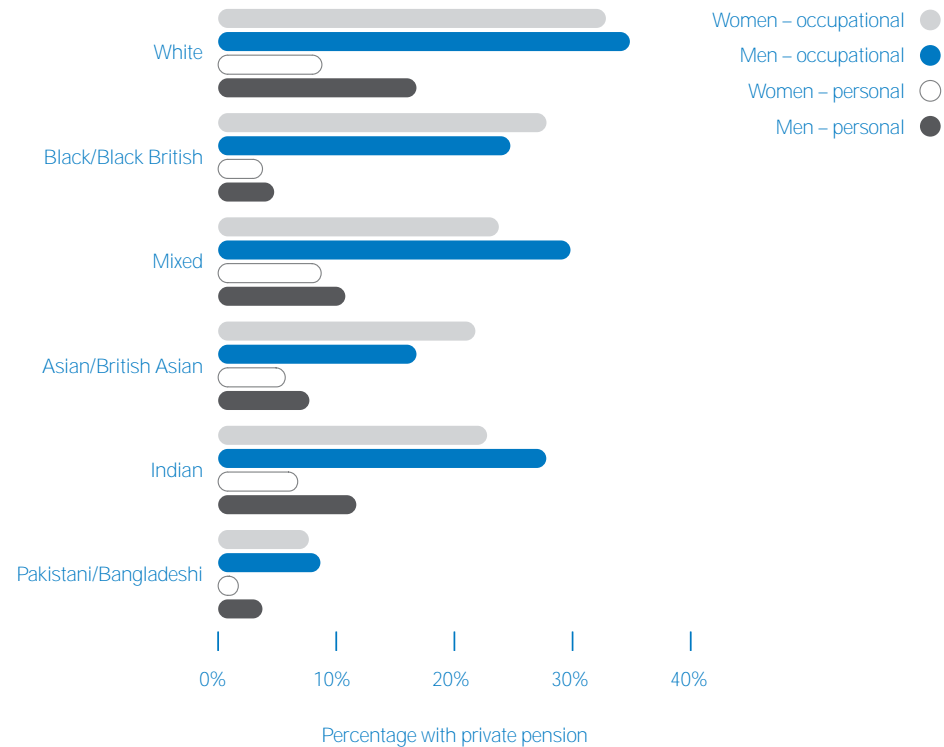
⁸³ Ginn, J., and Arber, S. *Pension Prospects of Minority Ethnic Groups: variation by gender and ethnicity*, British Journal of Sociology, 2001 52(3)

⁸⁴ *Understanding and combating 'financial exclusion'*, Findings, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999

⁸⁵ Sinclair, S., *Financial Exclusion – an introductory study*, Centre For Research into Socially Inclusive Services, 2001

⁸⁶ *Understanding and combating 'financial exclusion'*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation Findings, 1999

Figure 6: Percentage of adults with private pension ⁸⁷



Community Development Banking
 The Royal Bank of Scotland Group's Community Development Banking promotes wealth creation and enterprise in areas of market failure. This is done by working with a wide range of organisations pioneering market-led, sustainable approaches to regeneration. Virtually all of them are community based social enterprises and work with BME communities as part of their inclusive approach.

For example, we are working with a pioneering project in London's east end to offer the financially excluded access to affordable credit, The East End Microcredit Consortium (EEMC). This offers small loans to women, refugee groups, Black and Minority Ethnic groups and anyone who feels financially excluded in London's east end.

Borrowers are formed into lending groups of six people. Each group makes its own decisions about whether an individual is ready to borrow money. If an individual defaults on a loan the entire group is held responsible. The aim is to create strong common bonds between members of the group to encourage them to support one another in the development of their businesses. More than 150 businesses have been started in the last three years through this programme.

Tracy Betts, Royal Bank of Scotland

⁸⁷ Written answer from Malcolm Wicks to Vera Baird MP, Hansard Column 1128, 26th March 2004

4 Representation and participation in public life

Political representation

Black and Minority Ethnic women are severely under-represented in British politics. Women overall are under-represented, as are BME men, but the situation is particularly acute for BME women. There are only two BME women MPs at Westminster, just 0.3% of the total of 659 MPs. These two women, Diane Abbott and Oona King, are the only two Black women ever to have been elected to parliament. There has never been an Asian woman MP at Westminster. The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly do not have any BME women representatives.

There are more women in the House of Lords, but they still number only seven, making up just 1% of the total. In 2003, Baroness Valerie Amos became the first Black woman to be a cabinet minister, when she was appointed as Secretary of State for International Development. She is

now the Leader of the House of Lords, the first BME woman to hold this position. There is one BME woman UK MEP, out of a total of 87. There is a slightly higher proportion of BME women in local government than in central government, but still fewer than 2% of local councillors are BME women.

Black and Minority Ethnic women experience multiple barriers to being selected as a candidate for parliament: the sexism also experienced by White women, the racism also experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic men, and exclusion from political elites and networks, combined with the poor procedures which allow discrimination to have an impact on candidate selection.⁸⁸ Perhaps because of this more complicated picture, the positive measures which can be very successful in increasing representation of women overall are not particularly

successful at increasing the representation of BME women. For instance, all-women shortlists have produced very few BME women candidates, and in Wales, where positive measures have led to the Welsh Assembly being the first parliament in the world with an equal gender balance, there are no BME Assembly Members. The figures suggest the very high level of efforts the parties will need to sustain – including political education programmes among party members; review and improvement of selection procedures; attempts to engage with BME communities and support for potential candidates as well as use of positive measures – in order to return more BME women candidates.



Baroness Valerie Amos
I came to Britain from Guyana in the early 1960s and throughout my career I have been described as the 'first black woman to...' in many of my posts. Of course, I am proud to be the first black woman in a British Cabinet. However, I will be prouder still when there is an elected black woman in a similar job.

Discrimination is an experience common to most people from an ethnic minority and many women and I know that on occasion people have stereotyped me. Both my African and Caribbean heritage as well as my identity as a woman are important parts of who I am. Without them I would not have been able to do the jobs I have done in the way that I have done them.

Whilst I don't think that only black or Asian people understand the needs of minority ethnic communities or that male MPs cannot provide for their female

- Only two Black women have ever been elected to the House of Commons and there has never been an Asian woman MP at Westminster.
- Seven out of 668 peers in the House of Lords are BME women, including the Leader of the House of Lords.
- There are no BME representatives – women or men – in the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly.
- In 2001, 1.9% of local councillors were BME women.

constituents, I do believe that diversity in Parliament and local government is important both for individuals and for the quality of public life. Individuals deserve an equal opportunity to have their voices heard and to help improve their community and their country. The under-representation of BME women at all levels of government suggests that we do not have equal opportunities yet.

Throughout my career I have worked to promote development and greater gender and racial equality in Britain and internationally. There have been real improvements but not because they were pre-ordained. Rather people were willing to think new ideas, win support for the argument and manage change effectively. We have a shared responsibility to shape our time.

Baroness Valerie Amos,
Leader of the House of Lords

⁸⁸ *Conservative candidates – Where are the women?* Fawcett Society, 2003. Available at: <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/ConCan03.pdf>; *Liberal Democrat candidates – Where are the women?* Fawcett Society, 2004. Available at: <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/LDcan.pdf>; Shepherd-Robinson, L. and Lovenduski, J., *Women and candidate selection in British Political Parties* Fawcett Society, 2002; Ali, R. and O'Connell, C., *Our house? Race and representation in British politics*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2003

- In 2001, BME women made up less than 2% of public appointments to Non-Departmental Public Bodies (i.e. quangos).
- Black and Minority Ethnic women are as likely as White women, and more likely than BME men, to be members of a trade union.



Participation in public life

Many BME women are heavily involved with community, religious and non-governmental organisations. Reasons for involvement vary, but often include a desire to combat social exclusion, racism and injustice. Many BME women's organisations are dependent on local government for funding, and it is worrying that funding is very limited, particularly for Black migrant women's groups, and refugee women's groups.⁸⁹

Trade union membership among BME women is at the same level as among White women, and higher than for BME men: 28% of BME women are trade union members compared to 24% of BME men. One third of Black or Black British women are trade union members, making them the group most likely to belong to a union.⁹⁰

However, despite their involvement at a grassroots level and in organisations such as unions, BME women are still under-represented in public appointments. They make up less than 2% of appointments to Non-Departmental Public Bodies (i.e. quangos).⁹¹ This needs to be addressed if these bodies are ever to be truly representative of the communities they are intended to serve.

In relative terms, women, BME communities, and young people are all groups that are excluded from formal political and decision-making processes. This exclusion is intensified among those who belong to all of these three groups with the result that, for example, many young BME women feel particularly disempowered.⁹²

⁸⁹ Davies, S. and Cooke, V., *Why do Black Women Organise?*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002

⁹⁰ Bradley, H., Healy, G. and Mukherjee, N., *Voicing Double Disadvantage: the representation of ethnic minority women in trade unions*, 2002

⁹¹ Equal Opportunities Commission *Women and men in Britain: Public and political life*, EOC, March 2002.

⁹² Alsop, R., Clisby, S. and Craig, G., *Young, urban and female: young women and city regeneration*, YWCA, 2001

Wai Yin Chinese Women Society
The Wai Yin Chinese Women Society was started in 1998, the first Chinese women's society in Britain, by a group of Chinese women who felt that the views and needs of Chinese women were not being represented, and that women were discriminated against both by the British society and their own community and families; traditionally Chinese women have been regarded as inferior members of their families. Many were deprived of an education and as a result, their main duties were restricted to bearing and raising children. The Society encourages mutual help and unity within communities whilst raising individuals' self-confidence and access to resources. The individual needs may include language support, advocacy, health and social care, education, employment advice and immigration advice.

The greatest strength of the Wai Yin Chinese Women Society is their well qualified and committed staff. They are supported by the Chinese community in Manchester and the society has won several awards for its work, including the best services for Women in Manchester – category: education in 2003. However, more funding in the UK is needed to promote activities for Chinese women to be more assertive and shelter housing schemes for Chinese women are urgently needed.
 Lisa Mok, Wai Yin Chinese Women Society

- Indian people are the most likely to vote while Black Caribbean and Black African people are the least likely to vote.
- Black African communities have very low levels of voter registration.

Research suggests that low levels of BME representation in politics also has a significant adverse impact on voting turn-out.

Voting

There are difficulties in trying to work out levels of voter turn-out among BME women. Information about turn-out and participation for BME people is patchy, and the majority of available information is not broken down by gender. However, the figures that do exist show that turn-out varies considerably among different BME groups. Certain Asian communities, especially the Indian community, have the highest turn-out of all ethnic groups. This appears to be a dramatic change since the 1960s, but one that has remained consistent in recent elections.⁹³ Bangladeshi and Pakistani people, however, are less likely to vote than the White population. The people least likely to vote are those of Black Caribbean and African heritage.⁹⁴

Historically, women have been less likely to vote in elections than men; but in recent years this gap has narrowed, to an insignificant size in the 2001 general election, and may even have reversed in regional and local elections.⁹⁵ However, there is some evidence to suggest that a larger gender gap in voter turn-out remains among the Black and Asian populations,⁹⁶ which would mean that the lowest levels of voter turn-out are among some groups of BME women.

It should be noted that voter turn-out figures may be distorted by the fact that they do not take into account those people who are not registered to vote. It is estimated that numbers of unregistered voters may be as high as 15% amongst some groups. People of Black African heritage have very low rates of registration, meaning that their voter turn-out is even lower than the figures suggest. Registration rates for Indian communities, on the other hand, are as high as, or higher than for the White population.⁹⁷

Electoral Commission research suggests that low levels of BME representation in politics also has a significant adverse impact on voting turn-out, alongside factors shared with White communities, such as alienation from the political process, dissatisfaction with the political parties, and a lack of interest in politics at this level.⁹⁸ A separate study by the Electoral Commission finds similar results by gender: the presence of a female candidate has a positive impact on women's likelihood to vote (while having no impact on men's participation) and increases women's sense of the effectiveness of the political system.⁹⁹

⁹³ *Voter Engagement among Black and Minority Ethnic communities*, Electoral Commission, 2002

⁹⁴ Ali, R. and O'Connell, C. *Our house? Race and representation in British politics* Institute for Public Policy Research, 2003

⁹⁵ *Gender and Political Participation*, Electoral Commission, 2004

⁹⁶ *Voter Engagement among Black and Minority Ethnic communities*, Electoral Commission, 2002

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Gender and Political Participation*, Electoral Commission, 2004

5 Experiences of the criminal justice system¹⁰⁰

There are serious problems with the way BME women are treated throughout the criminal justice system which has been criticized for being institutionally racist and sexist. Indeed, statutory agencies themselves have owned up to internal failings and many organisations and individuals are making real efforts to address these issues. A Commission for Racial Equality report on the response by public bodies to the positive duty to promote race equality found that the criminal justice sector "was among those prominent in setting time-related outcome targets, including those relating to public confidence and community relations."¹⁰¹

However, despite attempts in many areas to address problems of racism and sexism there is little awareness of the impact of multiple discrimination and the cross-cutting issues that affect BME women. This is exacerbated by the lack of data on BME women. For example, under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the Home Office produces annual statistics on race and gender but there is little meaningful data on BME women in either of these publications.

¹⁰⁰ Statistics in this section refer to England and Wales.

¹⁰¹ Commission for Racial Equality, *Towards Racial Equality: An evaluation of the public duty to promote race equality and good race relations in England and Wales 2002*, Commission for Racial Equality, 2003

- A woman experiencing domestic violence contacts agencies 11 times before getting the help she needs and this rises to 17 for black women.¹⁰²
- It is estimated that around 1000 British Asian girls a year are forced into marriage against their will.¹⁰³
- Discriminatory attitudes and lack of cultural awareness can prevent agencies from dealing effectively with violence against BME women.

Victims

Little is known about Black and Minority Ethnic women's experiences as victims of crime, especially gender-based crimes of violence including rape and sexual assault, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour killings and trafficking. The 'invisibility' of these forms of violence from research and public debate raises very serious concerns about how criminal justice, health and other agencies respond to women victims of crime.

Evidence to Fawcett's year-long *Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System*¹⁰⁴ indicates that there is a belief that the criminal justice system is white, male and middle-class and is thus off-putting to female victims of crime, particularly BME women.

Violence against women has historically been poorly treated in the criminal justice system and women from some minority communities may have particular reason to fear or distrust the authorities. For BME women this may stem from earlier experiences of racism against themselves and/or the perpetrator. One woman who was experiencing domestic violence at the time she spoke to the Commission said, "My ex-partner is Jamaican and the way the police deal with him makes it worse. They bring ten officers for one guy because he is Jamaican and that makes him kick off."

Women from some communities face particular barriers in accessing help, for example where their first language is not English or where they access services through a male relative.

¹⁰² Shaw, S, *Domestic Violence and Black and Minority Communities*, 2004, Available at <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/gpvca07b.ppt#7>

¹⁰³ CEDAW Thematic Shadow Report *Violence Against Women in the UK*, 2003

¹⁰⁴ Fawcett Society, *Women and the criminal justice system: A Report of the Fawcett Society's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System*, March 2004

An Asian woman who experienced domestic violence from her husband told the Commission, *“I visited the GP on a few occasions when I was injured, but my husband always attended with me. The GP, who was an Asian friend of the family, did not pick up on the violence.”*

Women who do not have access to the police for whatever reason are left vulnerable. For example, asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants, who will be unfamiliar with our justice system, can be reluctant to contact the police because of negative experiences of the police in their country of origin. Women whose immigration status is insecure are particularly vulnerable to abuse as they are likely to be very fearful of accessing authorities.

When women do access help, services may not be provided in an appropriate way on account of discrimination or lack of cultural awareness. Southall Black Sisters, an organisation which works with Asian and African-Caribbean women experiencing gender-based violence, told the Commission, *“Whilst there has been some progress on domestic violence...we remain concerned and disappointed that little progress has been made more broadly in relation to Black and Minority women.”*

There has been widespread concern about the level of racially-motivated crimes against BME people in the UK and there is a clear need for more research on the impact on BME women in particular.

Women accused and convicted of crimes

Women from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, who are at particular risk of poverty and who face a combination of sexism and racism in their lives, are over represented in the criminal justice system. However, as before, there is very little information available about their experiences as studies on race and the criminal justice system has tended to focus on male defendants and offenders. Moreover, the available evidence on BME women often fails to make a clear distinction between the needs and circumstances of British BME women and foreign national women.

- In 2002, BME women made up less than 8% of the total female population but 29% of the female prison population
- One fifth of all female prisoners are foreign nationals, and the vast majority are BME women.
- More than one third of Black women rate the race relations in prison as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’.

In 2002, Black and Minority Ethnic women made up less than 8% of the total female population of the UK, but accounted for close to 30% of the female prison population. The majority of the BME women in prison are Black women, who made up 24% of the total female prison population while Asians and Chinese and other minority ethnic groups accounted for 1% and 5% respectively.¹⁰⁵

Race relations in the criminal justice system remain a serious problem for BME women offenders. In a recent survey, more than one third of the Black women prisoners included rated the race relations in prison in general as ‘poor / very poor’, and only 18% of them were satisfied with the advice given about money and benefits once they were released from prison, compared with 38% of the White women surveyed.¹⁰⁶

A review of the decision-making process in the criminal justice system commissioned by the Crown Prosecution Service also found that cases involving African Caribbean women are most likely to be discontinued, suggesting that “charges are being inappropriately brought by the police, without sufficient evidence or the prospect of obtaining that evidence”.¹⁰⁷

Black British women are over-represented in the prison population, making up 11.6% of all women in prison, compared to only 2% of all British women.¹⁰⁸ According to the Home Office the proportion of Black British females serving sentences for drug offences is 46% in compared to 26% for white females and 18% for Black British men.

¹⁰⁵ Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System, Home Office, 2003

¹⁰⁶ *Women Beyond Bars – a positive agenda for women prisoners’ resettlement*, NACRO, 2001

¹⁰⁷ *Race for Justice: a review of CPS decision making for possible bias at each stage of the prosecution process*, The Gus John Partnership Ltd, 2003

¹⁰⁸ *Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System*, Home Office, 2002

Poor treatment of foreign national women has a spill-over effect on the treatment of Black British women who often find themselves treated as if they too are foreign nationals.

Foreign national BME women merit special attention. They account for the largest proportionate rise in the female prison population in the last five years and represent a fifth of the female prison population.¹⁰⁹ Almost 60% of this group are Jamaican women who have been convicted of drug offences. Research has shown that poverty, violence and coercion have contributed heavily to the offending patterns of foreign national women prisoners. The majority of these are first time offenders and also lone parents.¹¹⁰

Foreign nationals are likely to experience particular cultural problems in prison, exacerbated by the fact that they are often held for long sentences at a great distance from their families. Foreign national women are now being clustered in four prisons, a policy which could provide an opportunity for training of staff to address cultural differences; but it is important that these prisons do not become 'ghettoised'.¹¹¹ Poor treatment of foreign national women has a spill-over effect on the treatment of Black British women who often find themselves treated as if they too are foreign nationals.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *A bitter pill to swallow – the sentencing of foreign national drug couriers*, Rethinking Crime and Punishment, 2003

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Interim Report on Women and Offending*, Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System, Fawcett Society, 2003

¹¹² Beverly Thompson, Race and Diversity Adviser to HM Prison Service, in a speech to Fawcett Society seminar, 2004

Women in Prison

Women in Prison (WIP) was established in 1983 as a support and campaign group for women prisoners. It was one of the first organisations to give women prisoners a voice and it spearheaded several important campaigns. Today, WIP runs a Youth Resettlement service and an education project, which provides advice and guidance, funding for distance learning course fees and other education or employment related items and continuous support for learners in prison and on release.

Considering the concentration of BME communities in cities, BME female prisoners are particularly likely to suffer from the sparse distribution of women's prisons which separates them from family and community: British BME women prisoners receive fewer visits than white prisoners. BME women prisoners report verbal abuse, the sense that they are perceived to be 'difficult' and consciousness of being passed over for different opportunities. This sort of discrimination chimes with the experience of WIP's black and mixed race staff who have been mistaken for prisoners by officers. This has never happened to a white member of WIP's staff.

In general, WIP doesn't think prison can ever meet the needs of BME women, but there are models out there of how things could be done differently. Scotland is leading the way with the 218 Project in Glasgow, a residential and day service commissioned by the Scottish Executive to address the root causes of women's offending and to divert women from custody. We would like to see England follow this example and invest in similar services.

Cathy Stancer, Women in Prison

- There are no BME women Chief Constables. Chief Constable Pat Gallan is the most senior BME woman in the police service and the first to reach this level.
- There are no BME women judges in the House of Lords or Court of Appeal.
- In 2004, Linda Dobbs became the first BME woman ever to be appointed to the High Court.

Practitioners

There are increasing numbers of BME women working in the criminal justice system but they are significantly under-represented in senior positions. Fawcett's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System found that a 'glass ceiling' operates for women across the system, and this is particularly so for BME women who face multiple discrimination.

There are around 215,000 staff working in the police service in England and Wales, around two-thirds of whom are police officers. Women represent a quarter of all police officers, 4.5% of whom are from a Black and Minority Ethnic Group.¹¹³ BME women in the police service can experience particularly pernicious forms of discrimination and sexual stereotyping.¹¹⁴ Their treatment within the police and other criminal justice

agencies can have an impact on the way that services are delivered to the community. A joint report by the Women's National Commission and Thames Valley Police states, "*The harassment and discrimination faced by women and ethnic minorities has attracted criticism, and it has been suggested that these attitudes and behaviours may be carried over into the way the police engage with their local communities. Cultural changes within the police organisations have been shown to have an impact on the way they interact with the police.*"¹¹⁵

It is hoped that the better gender and race balance among Special Constables and Community Support Officers will filter through to the officer ranks. Schemes, such as the High Potential Development Scheme, are assisting many talented women in

being promoted but particular consideration needs to be given to how such schemes can help BME women in the police service.

The Probation Service has, on the whole, a far more representative workforce than other criminal justice sectors. In 2002 around 10% of female staff were from a BME group, although there is the same problem of clustering in lower paid, lower status positions.¹¹⁶ The new National Offender Management Service, which brings together the Prison and Probation Services, will be closely watched for how it delivers on equality – both to service users and to employees. Of ten Regional Offender Managers, one is a BME woman.

The majority of new entrants to the legal profession are women and around 11% of women solicitors come from minority ethnic groups compared with 6% of men.¹¹⁷ There are around 9,600 self-employed barristers of whom around 2600 are women. There are around 360 BME women barristers – just under 4% of the total number.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Police Service Strength 13/04. Available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk

¹¹⁴ See www.bawp.org

¹¹⁵ Women's National Commission and Thames Valley Police, *Seen but not heard – women's experience of the police* (London, Women's National Commission, March 2002)

¹¹⁶ Home Office, *Probation Statistics England and Wales 2002*

¹¹⁷ The Law Society, *Women Solicitors, Fact Sheets Information Series Statistics for England and Wales, 2003*

¹¹⁸ See www.barcouncil.org.uk



Crown Prosecution Service
Law Scholarship Scheme

The Law Scholarship Scheme was set up in June 2003, sponsored by the Solicitor General, Harriet Harman QC MP. The scheme sponsors a range of qualifications at different career and education stages, providing career development opportunities for administrative staff from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Selection focuses more on potential and life skills than on previous educational attainment. There are regular reviews of participant's progress and there is an annual awards ceremony, last year presented by Cherie Booth QC and Harriet Harman.

The number of BME participants in the scheme nearly doubled between 2003 and 2004, and over half of scholars in 2003 were women. One of the key

objectives of the CPS is to be representative of the community in order to gain community confidence and so it is hoped that the number of BME scholars will continue to rise.

The scheme has been very successful already, improving morale within the CPS and winning awards, including a Personnel Today award last year. Already, a number of scholars have qualified as lawyers who were previously very experienced paralegal or administrative staff and so have a particularly wide understanding of the legal system. Plans for the future include extending the scheme across the criminal justice system as a model of good practice and keeping the scheme growing. Shelagh O'Leary, Crown Prosecution Service

Image taken from the CPS Law Scholarship Scheme brochure
Photograph © David Leahy



Mrs Justice Dobbs

In the early days of my legal career, I found that the main obstacles I faced as a BME female lawyer were the perceptions of clients and instructing solicitors. You had to show you were better than the others to gain their confidence. Now, many changes are taking place to improve the position of BME women in the criminal justice system and there are an increasing number working in the legal system. Additionally there are several support groups for them. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are not enough working at the top – it will happen.

The Bar Race Relations Committee has an important role to play in encouraging young BME women to start a career in law. Working with the Law Society, members regularly attend career events to encourage school leavers and university students from BME backgrounds to consider pursuing a career in the law. I would like to see more people having the confidence to apply for positions. For this to be achieved, those in government, the legal professions, Civil Service and other organisations need to work hard to identify, encourage and support suitable candidates.

Linda Dobbs

The current system for appointing senior judges is widely perceived as outdated. In the Government's own words, the system has produced a judiciary that is "overwhelming white, male and from a narrow social and educational background."¹¹⁹ Despite erroneous claims that this is because women and BME people have only relatively recently been working in the legal profession the Commission for Judicial Appointments rejects the "notion that 'trickle up' of women and ethnic minority practitioners from the lower ranks of the profession will redress the lack of diversity in the judiciary."¹²⁰

The Commission for Judicial Appointments found serious flaws with the judicial appointments system, in particular the meaning of 'merit' and the consultation process. It found bias against women and ethnic minority

A more diverse judiciary would add to the overall calibre of judicial decision making by bringing wider range of experiences and perspectives to the bench.

candidates. Today, there is only one BME woman in the High Court, and none in the Court of Appeal or the House of Lords.

Professor Hazel Genn's empirical research on attitudes to the legal system, *Paths to Justice*, showed that lack of representation has an adverse effect on public confidence in the system. In this large-scale survey, 66% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'most judges are out of touch with ordinary people's lives'. Professor Genn concluded that "although the public regard the courts as important, there is some lack of confidence in the fairness of hearings, a believe that the courts serve the interests of the wealthy, and that the judiciary are remote and out of touch."¹²¹

The Constitutional Reform Bill, currently before Parliament, establishes a Judicial Appointments Commission and one of its prime tasks will be to prioritise diversity in creating a system for recruiting judges. Fawcett's Commission found that a more diverse judiciary would add to the overall calibre of judicial decision making by bringing wider range of experiences and perspectives to the bench.

As a probation officer told the Commission, "The criminal justice system should reflect the society which it serves in terms of personnel working within it. All groups within society, particularly minority groups, are then likely to have more confidence in the system being fair to them and understanding of their experience."

¹²⁰ See www.dca.gov.uk

¹²¹ See Commission for Judicial Appointments

¹²² Genn, H., *Paths to Justice: What People Think and Do about Going to Law* Oxford, 1999

6 Conclusion

Our ambition in this report was to draw a picture of the lives of BME women in the UK today. The picture that emerges is a highly varied one, suggesting that our understanding of the lives of Black and Minority Ethnic women needs to be much further refined to comprehend the diversity within and among different ethnic groups. While the data with which we worked were far from complete – and this proved extremely frustrating at points – they were sufficient to pinpoint continued disadvantage and discrimination experienced by BME women in the UK today. On more or less all the indicators of financial security, participation in public life and experiences of the criminal justice system, BME women fared worse than men of the same ethnicity and both White women and men. There are, nevertheless, some notable exceptions to this. For example,

girls' educational attainment is greater than boys' of all ethnicities and it is interesting to note that the failure of education to deliver to Black boys is one that has attracted significant media attention and policy debate. However, as the education section emphasises, such headlines fail to do justice to continuing differences in educational attainment among older generations of the BME population, as well as persistent gender divide in subject choice which continue to present barriers to girls and women fulfilling their full potential.

The analysis also points to areas of particular, and in some cases very pressing, policy concern. On a wide range of indicators, a particularly stark picture emerges of the disadvantage experienced by Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and this pattern of disadvantage is so consistent, and

extreme in parts, that it merits special attention. Low rates of formal labour market participation, a large pay gap for those in employment and large family size combine to create one of the highest risks of poverty and social exclusion; almost two-thirds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women currently live in poverty. And, without serious policy reform, as this population ages low levels of pension coverage will combine with lifetime experience to create a highly disadvantaged group of older women in the future.

In policy terms, the report flags the need to examine the effectiveness of basic skills education in reaching older Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, benefits and services that properly support large families and, given high levels of reported ill health, the appropriateness of other services

The very low levels of representation of BME women in formal structures of political power is a matter of serious concern. The voices of BME women are simply not being heard loudly or strongly enough in the current political debate.

in delivering to the needs of these women. But, given the depth and the complexity of the issues facing Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, this list of policy considerations is likely only to be superficial. There is clearly a pressing need for a cross-cutting review of evidence from which to develop robust policy recommendations that would serve to deliver real improvements in the lives of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

Looking more thematically, while engagement in and rewards from the labour market vary considerably among different ethnic groups, the experience of a gender pay gap is common to all women but is overlaid with a race pay gap of varying proportions. This suggests the need to understand better the interplay between sexism and racism in the labour market, an understanding

which might also throw light on the higher levels of unemployment experienced by some BME women. Access to affordable, high quality and appropriate childcare services is also of major concern across the board. If the data on the labour market allowed for a deeper analysis, it would undoubtedly raise issues of the occupational clustering of BME women in low paid employment, as well as in casualised and less protected parts of the labour market, and the way in which Black and Minority Ethnic women's work is particularly undervalued.

The review of the criminal justice system raised the question of whether institutional racism and institutional sexism come together in very particular ways within the criminal justice system. There are serious questions about the overall

effectiveness of current approaches to violence against women, and the failure of services to reach BME women. The serious over-representation of Black women, both British born and foreign national, in prison finds inverse form in the acute under-representation of BME women at senior levels right across the criminal justice system. Both factors place strain on the credibility of the system and its ability to deliver justice to all sections of society regardless of sex or ethnicity.

Finally, while the individuals and organisations featured as case studies throughout the publication show the active role BME women are playing in public life and in shaping the policy agenda, the very low levels of representation of BME women in formal structures of political power is a matter of serious concern.

Put simply, the experience of racism can be quite different for women and men and equally the experience of sexism can be different for women of different ethnic groups and neither gender nor race alone fully capture the experience of BME women.

The voices of BME women are simply not being heard loudly or strongly enough in the current political debate. Actively addressing this under-representation would be one way of re-engaging BME women voters and restoring their faith in the political process.

The complexity of disadvantage faced by BME women requires an integrated and enforceable approach to promoting equality in public institutions and services and in the operation of private markets. To do this effectively, we need an understanding of equality that moves beyond analysing whether identity is more profoundly affected by gender or race, to an understanding of how individuals' unique and complex identities shape their life chances, social, economic and political status.

Put simply, the experience of racism can be quite different for women and men and equally the experience of sexism can be different for women of different ethnic groups and neither gender nor race alone fully capture the experience of BME women.

The proposed new Commission on Equality and Human Rights offers a mechanism for pursuing such a joint approach and the fact that the Government has promised that the duty on public bodies to promote race equality is soon to be joined by a duty to promote gender equality gives cause for optimism. However, it is essential both that the new body tackles issues of multiple discrimination as a priority and that these duties work effectively, and jointly, to ensure that public services promote equality for Black and

Minority Ethnic women. This would mean, for example, that issues of gender and ethnicity are understood and tackled together when designing adult education programmes that effectively reach Pakistani and Bangladeshi women or that mental health services are designed with the needs of BME women firmly in mind and that childcare services are flexible to the different requirements and needs of BME parents. In the longer term, there will be an increasingly compelling need for a general duty to promote equality in public services which works to ensure that all women's and men's needs are met in ways sensitive to all aspects of their differing identities.

Adequate data and analysis will be a fundamental underpinning of any new approach to equality which

properly understands multiple discrimination. We need data and analysis that breaks with the current, and limiting, approach of analysing the causes of ethnic disadvantage separately from those of gender disadvantage. Our understanding of BME women's lives is still hampered by, for example, the very limited information we have on BME women's experience of violence, disability, sexual orientation, voting patterns and political engagement or of how the intersection of sexism and racism affect the differential pay gaps experienced. There is also a paucity of data for Chinese women on almost all measures.

Looking to the future, there are issues that this report has not been able to cover but that will become of increasing concern. For example,

our understanding of gender and ethnicity will need to take into account the impact of new patterns of migration (including from the EU accession nations) and population trends, such as the growing mixed ethnicity population. Further, the gender aspects of issues affecting the Gypsy and Traveller population have barely been considered. It is essential that our data collection and analysis techniques stay up to date to capture these changes.

The Government recently set out its vision of "*a fairer and more prosperous Britain where discrimination simply has no place*"¹²² This report suggests that to ensure this laudable ambition is realised requires a significant deepening in our understanding of how gender discrimination and race discrimination come together to shape

the lives of BME women in the UK today. More important still, it requires the political will to make change happen. This requires BME women to be fully represented in decision making, their voices heard throughout the policy making process and their needs met appropriately and sensitively. It also requires us all to work for the eradication of sexism and racism. Only then will BME women enjoy fair and equal opportunities within the UK.

¹²² Fairness for All: A New Commission for Equality and Human Rights, May 2004, Cm 6185 <http://www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/files/publication-1193.pdf>



Fawcett is the UK's campaign for equality between women and men. Our vision of a society in which women and men are equal partners at home, at work and in public life. Fawcett works on a wide range of topics of importance to UK women, making it the most informed and authoritative advocate for women's issues in the UK.

Recent campaigning successes include:

- A radical change in the Government's approach to gender equality through the introduction of a new gender duty on public authorities;
- Establishing an equalities coalition to ensure that issues of multiple discrimination inform new equalities legislation;
- The reform of rape law and commitment to more specialist services for women who are the victims of sexual violence;
- A change in the law allowing political parties to use positive measures, such as all-women shortlists, to increase the representation of women;

- Raising the profile of women's voting intentions through new MORI research so as to place women's concerns at the heart of the political agenda.

Our roots in the 19th Century campaign for the vote tell us that there is often a long and difficult struggle to secure women's rights and it is this persistent, informed and pragmatic campaigning spirit that we aim to replicate in our work today as we strive to create change in women's lives.

Fawcett is a small organisation; we do not have an endowment or regular source of income. We raise all of our money year on year and rely on the support of individuals like you. Please support Fawcett by setting up a regular donation on our website www.fawcettsociety.org.uk and help to build a stronger UK campaign for equality between women and men.

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