

Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee Women and Work Inquiry

Written Submission from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights May 2013

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) is a Scottish anti-racist organisation which works to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial justice across Scotland. CRER views employment inequality as a major contributor to the continuing disadvantages faced by Black and minority ethnic women; we therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Introduction

In this brief submission, information on the experiences of Black and minority ethnic women will be presented on four themes of relevance to the inquiry – barriers to employment, quality of employment, atypical employment and retaining employment.

Because the inquiry concerns employment, the focus here is on women with no legal impediment to work. However, it should be recognised that immigration and asylum status issues deprive many Black and minority ethnic women in Scotland of the opportunity to undertake paid work.

One common theme throughout this evidence is that no generic conclusions can be drawn about how work impacts Black and minority ethnic women; issues of intersectionality and specific barriers relating to each community mean that the picture is complex.

Barriers to employment

Discourse around barriers to employment for Black and minority ethnic women tends to focus broadly on improving access to English language training, childcare placements and Further or Higher education. This often misses the specific nuances of these issues and fails to take account of the impact of both personal and institutional discrimination.

Women for whom English is a second or other language (ESOL) can face a range of barriers depending on their level of spoken and written language proficiency, but these barriers also vary depending on their occupational skill

and experience¹. Women with low levels of English proficiency seeking entry level jobs face increasing barriers due to the move from manual to service sector based work in Scotland's economy; work requiring greater language skill. Lack of conversational English affects these women in both job application processes and in accessing employment services such as Jobcentre Plus. On the other hand, there are also women with good conversational English language skills who are limited in the work they can seek because the skilled or professional work in which they are qualified has technical language requirements which demand more advanced English language development. For many women, however, employer's perceptions of English skills (which may not reflect actual abilities) seem to be the major barrier².

For those who do require ESOL support, access to provision in Scotland is patchy, and can depend on geographical area. Issues such as caring responsibilities, shift working and lack of transport to the venue mean that women are often unable to take advantage of classes even where they are provided³.

The same can be said with regard to childcare placements, which are generally available only over certain hours of the day and can be costly in comparison to the often low paid work available. Research has suggested that concerns about cultural sensitivity are also a major barrier to accessing childcare for many women⁴.

Access to Further and Higher education is a complex issue for Black and minority ethnic women. Recent research by CRER⁵ looking specifically at UK resident students noted that, in Further Education, the rate of female participation in comparison to male was substantially higher for Chinese and mixed heritage students but substantially lower for Caribbean, Indian and Bangladeshi students. Women were also more likely to take up Further Education later in life and were slightly less likely to 'drop out' than men across all minority ethnic groups. However, across all post-school education, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese students in particular showed a clustering of male students in higher levels of qualification and of female students at lower levels.

This is likely to have an impact on the quality of women's future employment prospects, with a double disadvantage in that minority ethnic graduates (particularly from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds) do not experience

¹ Philomena de Lima et al. (2011) Community Consultation on Poverty and Ethnicity in Scotland. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2013) The State of the Nation 2013: Education. Glasgow: CRER

the same career benefits from Higher Education qualifications as white graduates⁶.

The issue of most concern to CRER, however, is the substantial body of evidence relating to discrimination in employment application processes. As previously mentioned, common discourse around BME women's barriers to work can concentrate on language and associated issues which are of great importance to the particular groups they affect but do not reflect the discrimination faced by BME women more widely, including those born and/or educated in the UK.

Education and capacity building cannot resolve the disadvantages faced by women in this regard, as detailed in a recent inquiry report by the UK Government All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community⁷. This report uncovered substantial evidence around direct race discrimination by employers, discrimination on the grounds of religious dress and discriminatory assumptions made about cultural norms in regard to caring responsibilities. Women reported 'whitening' their job applications by changing names, reluctantly changing their preferred mode of dress for a Westernised style and in some cases being told to do this by employers. One of the report's main findings was that Black and minority ethnic women were discriminated against "at every stage of the recruitment process."

In Scotland, this was echoed two Joseph Rowntree Trust funded research projects on poverty and ethnicity⁸, in which prejudice and racism were established as significant barriers to employment across all minority ethnic communities. In terms of name based discrimination, a study carried out for the Department for Work and Pensions in 2009 found that someone with a 'foreign' sounding name was 21% less likely to be invited for interview following a job application in Glasgow compared to an equally qualified person with a 'British' sounding name⁹. Forthcoming research from CRER will demonstrate that Public Sector job candidates from Black and minority ethnic communities in Scotland are twice as likely to be rejected at job interview stage than their white competitors¹⁰.

⁶ Blick et al (2007) *The Rules of the Game: Terrorism, Community and Human Rights* Democratic Audit Briefing Paper. York: Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust

⁷ Runnymede Trust (2012) *UK Government All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community report on Ethnic Minority Female Unemployment*. London: Runnymede Trust

⁸ Philomena de Lima et al. (2011), Gina Netto et al. (2011) *A Review of Poverty and Ethnicity in Scotland*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁹ Martin Wood et al (2009) *A test for racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British cities*. London: Department for Work and Pensions

¹⁰ Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2013) *The State of the Nation: Public Sector Employment* (forthcoming)

Quality of employment

Research has explored barriers to career progression for minority ethnic women in Scotland, along with low pay and occupational segregation as a more general race equality issue for both sexes¹¹.

For Eastern and Central European communities, Roma communities and refugees, low pay is a particular concern. There is also evidence of exploitation by informal 'employment agents' or gangmasters within some of these communities (for example in Glasgow's Slovak Roma community¹²). High levels of employment in the wholesale and retail, and hotel and restaurant sectors have been identified in Asian communities and semi-skilled or unskilled work in A8 migrant communities. Generally, however, A8 migrants are more likely to be in work and Pakistanis and Bangladeshi women more likely not to work.

Self-employment is high among the visible minority ethnic communities and Gypsy/Traveller communities but low among A8 communities.

Forthcoming census data may provide valuable information about employment for BME women in Scotland. At present, the range of data collected through other sources does not allow for sufficient analysis of data relating to race and gender together.

Within Public Authorities, the Scottish Specific Public Sector Equality Duties require some attention to collection of employment data on these Protected Characteristics individually. It is hoped that, as practice in compliance with the Duties develops over time, Public Authorities may choose to take a best practice approach to equality data disaggregation around intersectional issues in areas such as recruitment, development, retention, equal pay and occupational segregation.

Atypical employment

Self-employment in Black and minority ethnic communities is prevalent and links to family business ownership, which anecdotally may provide informal work for women in the family. CRER is also aware of home working as a source of employment, particularly within local South Asian communities where women may have their own business interests in, for example, dress making or catering. Home working projects may also be informally carried out by women to support businesses owned by family, friends or other community members.

¹¹ Gina Netto et al. (2011)

¹² Poole and Adamson (2008) Situation of the Roma Community in Govanhill, Glasgow. UWS/Oxfam.

Retaining employment

Black and minority ethnic women may face additional challenges in retaining employment. In some communities, through personal choice or family expectations, there may be an increased incidence of women giving up paid work in order to fulfil a caring remit (although the interplay between culture, caring and employment has not been well researched in Scotland¹³, and UK data showing 80% unemployment for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women but only 35% overall not wanting paid work suggests this common view should be treated with caution¹⁴).

In other cases however, this may become necessary as a combination of disadvantages make retaining work impractical, for example someone without extended family / informal support nearby may lose their main source of support with childcare, whether through bereavement or family breakdown, and be unable to access professional provision due to cultural or income related barriers. This can be worsened by the tendency of employers in Scotland to lack understanding of the interactions of race and gender issues which can impact women's lives¹⁵. Research with Muslim women in Scotland has highlighted their desire to work and the impact of barriers on maintaining this¹⁶.

Conclusion

Research shows clear barriers to employment for women from Black and minority ethnic communities. However, underlying each of these barriers is the core problem of racial discrimination. In many cases where language barriers are raised, it is employers' perception of language ability and women's confidence to use the English they have, rather than a complete lack of English proficiency, which is the issue. Lack of culturally appropriate childcare is often raised as opposed to lack of childcare places. Most damning of all are the numerous studies showing direct racial discrimination; simply having a minority ethnic name can result in rejection for employment.

¹³ Gina Netto et al. (2011)

¹⁴ Guy Palmer (2011) *Work and Ethnicity*. London: Poverty.org.uk

¹⁵ Gina Netto et al. (2011)

¹⁶ El-Nakla et al (2007) *Muslim Women's Voices*; Report presenting the findings of a Scotland-wide listening exercise conducted with Muslims. Glasgow: Muslim Women's Resource Centre.

Seven years ago, the Equal Opportunities Commission published research¹⁷ into the employment experiences of visible minority ethnic women in Scotland. The report concluded that:

- *Minority ethnic women have high aspirations but their potential is not being harnessed*
- *They face institutional discrimination which works in complex and subtle ways to prevent minority ethnic women from participation and progression in the Scottish labour market. This can be overt, for example racist or sexist language to women staff members or covert, where the discrimination may not be intentional but still has an adverse/disproportionate impact. For example lack of provision for flexible working, or prayer spaces.*
- *Childcare that is accessible, affordable, local and culturally appropriate is essential.*
- *Minority ethnic women do not always receive adequate training and support when seeking work.*

There is little to no evidence that these barriers have been reduced for Black and minority ethnic women since publication of the report. This may be linked to a lack of action around its recommendations, which included improvements in the evidence base on BME women's employment, challenging cultural assumptions, working with employers and employment services to tackle barriers around recruitment and progression.

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights therefore hopes that, in its conclusions, the Equal Opportunities Committee's Women and Work Inquiry will identify the need for the Scottish Government to take robust action to challenge the barriers which prevent BME women from accessing, retaining and moving ahead in employment.

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¹⁷ EOC Scotland (2006) Moving On Up? Visible Ethnic Minority Women at Work. Glasgow: Equal Opportunities Commission.