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Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women's Labour Market Participation

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Abstract

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It is well established that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women generally have lower rates of economic activity and higher rates of unemployment compared to other minority ethnic groups and also White women. For example, in 2001-5, levels of economic activity for women aged 19-60 (excluding full-time students) were 31% for Pakistani women and 21% for Bangladeshi women, by comparison with 78% for Black Caribbean women and 77% for White women. Although levels of economic activity are low, unemployment is also high amongst the economically active – 15% for Pakistani and 16% for Bangladeshi women in 2001-5 by comparison with 3.4% for White women for the same time period. The Equal Opportunities Commission has identified 'five employment gaps' which affect Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean women: 1) participation; 2) unemployment; 3) progression; 4) pay, and; 5) occupational segregation. In this paper we will focus on Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to address the first two of these issues – and also provide some insights into the others. We use a combination of national survey data and qualitative interviews.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women's Labour Market Participation

1. Introduction

It is well established that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women generally have lower rates of economic activity and higher rates of unemployment compared to other minority ethnic groups and also White women (Dale *et al*, 2006). For example, in 2001-5, levels of economic activity for women aged 19-60 (excluding full-time students) were 31% for Pakistani women and 21% for Bangladeshi women, by comparison with 78% for Black Caribbean women and 77% for White women (appendix table 1). Although levels of economic activity are low, unemployment is also high amongst the economically active – 15% for Pakistani and 16% for Bangladeshi women in 2001-5 by comparison with 3.4% for White women for the same time period (appendix table 1). The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC, 2007) has identified ‘five employment gaps’ which affect Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean women: 1) participation; 2) unemployment; 3) progression; 4) pay, and; 5) occupational segregation. In this paper we will focus on Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to address the first two of these issues – and also provide some insights into the others. We use a combination of national survey data and qualitative interviews.

1.1 Cultural and economic context

Before focussing on the immediate labour market position of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women we first need to locate these women in a broader historical and cultural context. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi population are relatively recent migrants to the UK, many coming from poor rural areas of Mirpur and Syllhet with few economic or educational resources. Men came to Britain in the early 1960s to take jobs that were not attractive to white men – often in the declining industrial areas of north-west England (Kalra, 2000). Women tended to come to Britain as dependents, from a culture where men were expected to be the bread-winners. First generation migrants, women in particular, generally had few qualifications and spoke little English (Modood, 1997). However, a growing generation of young people are UK-born (over 60 percent of 19-25 year old Pakistani and nearly 30 percent of 19-25 year old Bangladeshi people (Lindley et al, 2004)) and have therefore gained UK qualifications and do not face the language barriers

experienced by their parents. For women, in particular, we may expect to see considerable change between first and second generations, not only through greater access to education but also in the extent to which traditional cultural norms concerning women's roles may be changing. Published statistics often fail to distinguish differences between generations and between age-groups and therefore provide an undifferentiated picture that fails to capture the dynamics of this community. If policy solutions are to be correctly targeted we need to go beyond generalities and explore in more depth women's labour market position within different sub-groups of the population.

The paper is divided into sections, reflecting the key elements in labour market attainment and progression. We begin each section with a brief review of the relevant literature and then provide results from the quantitative and qualitative research.

Section 2 provides information on data sources and methods. Section 3 examines educational attainment with a particular focus on degree-level qualifications. Section 4 focuses on the factors which influence a woman's decision to enter the labour market, including the role of caring and the choices and constraints that women face. We also examine job choices made by women and the factors which are seen as influential. Section 5 addresses unemployment and section 6 over-education; the latter focussing on the extent to which women, especially graduates, are in jobs appropriate to their level of qualification. Section 7 discusses the potential of training schemes in overcoming labour market barriers and section 8 concludes by examining some policy responses that emerge from this research.

2. Data and methods

We use nationally representative data from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, complemented by targeted, qualitative interviews. Since 1992 the Quarterly LFS (QLFS) has conducted repeat interviews at each sampled address at three monthly intervals with the fifth interview taking place a year after the first. Each quarter, interviews are achieved at about 59,000 addresses with about 138,000 respondents. A response rate of about 77 percent was achieved for the first wave of the survey in 2002. All first interviews (with the exception of a very small sample located north of the Caledonian Canal) are carried out by face-to-face interview. Subsequent

interviews are carried out by telephone. We use data for England, Wales and Scotland for sweep 1 of each quarter, for all years from 1992-2005. Results are weighted to produce population estimates in line with the latest census. The QLFS collects family and demographic information on each member of the household. This allows us to identify information about a woman's partner and her children. The QLFS also asks extensive information on employment and qualifications that are consistent each year. In addition, questions on ethnicity, country of birth and year of arrival in the UK are asked. Whilst changes in question-wording have caused difficulty in comparisons over time for some ethnic groups this has been minimal for people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic origin. Where appropriate the analyses present comparisons for white women.

The statistical data is complemented by evidence from 18 in-depth interviews with Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Rochdale and Manchester (14 Pakistanis, 3 Bangladeshis and one Kashmiri). They were selected to cover different stages in the life cycle, different qualifications and differences in current positions in employment, including those on training schemes. Respondents were primarily recruited through voluntary organisations in Rochdale and Manchester and through the employment services. A summary profile of respondents is given in table 1 and more details in Appendix table 2. All interviews were recorded on tape and fully transcribed. The interviews covered questions on educational attainment, decisions about careers, seeking employment, actual employment experiences, family and community and general attitudes towards work. Questions about mothers' and fathers' education and work experience were also asked to help understand inter-generational differences.

Table 1 about here

As the objective was to understand the younger generation, the women selected for the study were either born in the UK or had spent most of their lives here. They had thus obtained the majority of their schooling here and were all fluent in English. Whereas language was a traditional obstacle to employment for early migrants, it can be eliminated as a barrier to employment for the women in this study. In addition, the 'tendency for foreign qualifications to be rewarded less' should be less of a problem in these women's experiences of seeking employment, career progression and work-life balance (Battu and Sloane, 2002).

The respondents were at different stages of their family and working lives. It is well established that 'life-stage' has a considerable impact on the labour market position of women, most obviously through childbearing and subsequent caring responsibilities. The women interviewed are not a representative sample of Bangladeshi or Pakistani women, either locally or nationally, but allow us to gain an enhanced understanding of the results of the statistical analysis reported in this paper. We sought information on educational and training experiences, work histories, opinions on 'work' and its importance in their lives, career aspirations, barriers to employment, community trends and generational changes.

Manchester and Rochdale both have a higher proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people in their population than England and Wales as a whole (Table 2).

TABLES 2 and 3 about here

Unemployment rates are much higher for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women than white men and women in Great Britain (table 3). This is also replicated at a local level in Manchester and Rochdale. Though Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations represent two distinct ethnic groups, for the purpose of this research we have considered them as having enough similarities to be analysed as one group. Their labour market experiences have a lot of similarity and therefore they are examined collectively.

3. Educational Background and Attainment

Young people from minority ethnic groups in general have higher rates of staying-on in full-time education post-16 than white young people (Drew *et al*, 1997; Leslie and Drinkwater, 1999; Connor *et al*, 2004). However, for Black and Chinese girls staying-on rates are higher than for Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi girls (Connor *et al*, 2004).

A commitment to continuing education is perhaps indicative of the desire of both parents and children to progress from the traditional employment sectors associated with early migrant labour and to carve new, improved positions for them in the labour market. It may also be a response to the perceived and real difficulties faced in obtaining good jobs,

involving what Leslie and Drinkwater (1999) have described as push (lower current opportunities) and pull (greater expected future benefits) factors of staying on in education. Conner et al (2004) found a desire to go to university particularly important for minority ethnic groups.

Appendix table 1 shows that, amongst 19-29 year olds in 2001-5, 19% of Pakistani women and 10% of Bangladeshi women were in full-time education by comparison with 15% of White women. For all other ethnic groups the percentage in fulltime education is higher, rising to 56% for Chinese women. However, entry into higher education is increasing more rapidly for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women than for any other ethnic group, although from a lower base (Dale et al, 2002). UCAS applications for 2004 and 2005 show a 16.5% increase for Asian women whereas for White women it is 7.7%. The overall increase in applications for all groups (male and female) is 7%.

Table 4 highlights differences in women's qualification levels by age and whether they were born or brought up in the UK. Amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women aged 21-34 who did not come to the UK until 16 or older, only 5% have degree level qualifications, compared with 20% for women aged 21-34 who were born or brought up in the UK. For the latter group (born or brought up in the UK) younger women (21-34) have increased their level of qualification by comparison with older women (35-49) and are not far behind white women of the same age-group. This increase in higher qualifications vis-à-vis white women is consistent with a rapid growth of entry to higher education.

From this evidence we may expect a marked increase in the number of well-qualified young women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin who will be entering the labour market in the near future. We may also expect that these women, who have been brought up and educated in the UK, will have very different aspirations and opportunities with respect to employment than their mothers. The interviews lent support to the presence of inter-generational differences in assumptions about women's role in the labour market. Several respondents recalled that their mothers had been unable to pursue educational or employment opportunities whilst interviews with older women, reported in Dale et al (2002), provide further examples of such differences.

The interview respondents were unanimous in the importance attached to educational attainment, particularly as a tool through which they could negotiate a better position in their working lives. Some respondents were keen to extend their current education – sometimes when their children were old enough to allow them to take on such a commitment. Others, who expressed a desire for more education, did not always have a great deal of knowledge or information about the range and availability of courses that could be accessed.

4. Economic activity

4.1 Economic activity: differences based on life-stage and educational level

Previous studies have confirmed that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with higher qualifications are more likely to be economically active as well as more confident about maintaining their position in the labour market after marriage than less well qualified women (Dale, *et al*, 2006). However, it is also well established that, whilst family commitments and caring responsibilities have a negative impact on levels of economic activity for all women, this is particularly marked for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

Table 5a, based on Labour Force Survey figures for 1992-2005 show how levels of economic activity for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women vary widely depending on individual circumstances. The table selects four key life-stages

- single women aged 19-34, with no children,
- partnered women aged 19-34, with no children,
- partnered women with youngest child under 5
- partnered women with youngest child 5-16

and, within each, provides the level of economic activity by qualification. A similar table for white women (table 5b) provides a comparison.

From table 5 it is apparent that single women aged 19-34 with degree-level qualifications have very high levels of economic activity – over 90% - and this is the case for both Pakistani and Bangladeshi and white women. However, levels of economic activity for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with lower or no qualifications are much lower than for white women. Amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women aged 19-34 with a partner

but no dependent children, levels of economic activity are lower than for their single counterparts. By contrast, one finds the opposite relationships for white women. Women with a partner and a child under 5 have the lowest levels of economic activity, although, again, the better qualified have higher levels of economic activity than the less qualified. Whilst this general pattern is apparent for both ethnic groups, for the better qualified, levels of economic activity are 30 percentage points lower for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women than for white women and the differential become much greater for women with no qualifications.

Tables 5a and 5b about here

The patterns shown in this table are important but do not provide explanations. We need to understand:

- why qualifications have such a strong positive impact for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women
- why marriage is associated with reduced levels of economic activity, even where there are no children
- why children have such a marked negative effect on women's levels of economic activity.

The qualitative interviews go some way towards helping to answer these questions.

4.2 The role of work and family

First, it is important to get a sense of how our interview respondents saw paid work and of the role it played in their lives.

Generally respondents felt that paid work played a significant role in their overall ambitions in life although there was variation in the extent to which women expressed a sense of total commitment. One woman with relatively low qualifications who was married with two children said:

Overall – I think...it's not really important – it's not like I 'have' to work. It's just that I 'want' to. It's one of those things that I've always wanted to do. I never wanted to work full-time in the first place, just part-time work. Plus meeting other

people, having responsibilities, just a little bit more. I think it boosts my confidence. It would be like I'm helping – just the idea of helping women or children, or just doing something.

(2) Pakistani, 28, NVQ2, married with two children

Several married women wanted to be in a position to take financial responsibility for their families. For example:

.. I suppose it's all to do with security, with me because when you get married – pay for your wedding, you have to build your life, get a house – basically all them things. That's what working is for, I guess. I suppose for your head as well, it'll be good – it's good to sort of work, socialise with others... Yeah – you'll go crazy if you're sat at home five days a week. (9) Pakistani graduate, 22, single

In recent decades we have tended to assume that paid employment is the norm for young women without family commitments. However, for some of our Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents it was evident that taking paid employment outside the home was not seen as the 'norm' and, even for single women, parents sometimes made it clear that they were happy to provide financial support for their daughters so they would not need to work (respondents 1 & 5). This lack of parental pressure also meant that women did not need to take 'any old job' if they felt it would have a negative impact on their CV, but could take more time to find a job related to a longer term career.

Women who were married – most of whom also had children – often explained that decisions about their employment were set in the family context of their husband, parents and parents-in-law. One respondent referred to the 'need to make sure it is alright with everyone' before taking a job. A husband's influence over whether a wife works was explained, with men from Pakistani typified as being more conservative. At the same time, however, one respondent (7) was keen to say that her husband from Pakistan was 'brilliant' in providing child-care although men from 'back home' were described in general terms as more likely to want their wives to 'sit at home'. Another respondent with no children, when asked if her husband opposed her working replied:

'No, he goes to work at 8.00 so I wake up with him, make his breakfast, pack his roti and then send him off to work then he picks me up from work at 5 and then we come home together I make his roti so he's happy and I'm happy.' (5) 28-year old Pakistani, married, no children, GNVQ

In summary, the interviews show that many women live in a context where working is not seen as the norm, especially when they are married and have children. Family pressures are influential – although by no means always negative. Although it is important to stress the range of views on employment, many women appeared to be working through negotiation rather than working as the norm.

An additional dimension related to the perceived appropriateness or suitability of employment – which may include the views not just of a woman's own family but also the wider community. So whilst parents were seen as being supportive overall, to some extent this depended on whether the actual choice of work was what they deemed appropriate and whether 'permission' was given to undertake it. For married women, this role and influence was often linked to the husband (and to a degree, to the in-laws).

4.3 Childcare and other family care

An important factor in understanding the labour market needs and choices of all women is the balance between paid work and child-care, particularly when children are young. Table 5 shows that levels of economic activity for women with a partner and children – particularly if the youngest is under 5 – are lower than other groups, but this is much more pronounced for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women than for white women.

The availability of satisfactory childcare is essential for all women with children who wish to take paid work. However, a number of studies (Brah and Shaw, 1992; SEDI, 2005; Hall et al, 2004; Ahmed *et al*, 2003) have all found that Asian women, and Muslim's in particular, prefer to use informal networks for child-care, particularly family members, rather than formal provision such as registered playgroups or nurseries. This may be explained by the importance Pakistani and Bangladeshi women attach to being at home to provide care and support for their own children (Dale et al. 2002) and thus

ensuring children learn the cultural values important to their family. It may also relate to the cost of childcare.

Amongst our interviewees, four who were working relied on their mothers or other family members (husband and sister-in-law) for childcare. Only one woman with children said she would consider formal, non-family childcare. If Pakistani and Bangladeshi women do not have access to formal child-care - either for reasons of cost or because of concerns that it does not meet cultural requirements – then it will clearly be harder for them to take paid work.

In addition to caring for children, the responsibility of caring for parents or parents-in-law with poor health may also place a constraint on women's ability to take paid work. National surveys have shown that Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in England tend to suffer poorer health than other ethnic groups (Sproston, 2006). Type 2 diabetes is particularly prevalent and poor levels of general health are higher for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women than for any other ethnic group (Sproston, 2006).

Whilst these surveys do not provide any evidence on who provides care, one interview respondent (interview 10) who had set up a support group for carers in Rochdale explained that Asian elders often expected their daughter or daughter-in-law to care for them and rejected outside assistance. In her experience this meant that young women – often second generation with educational qualifications – were restricted in their ability to take employment. Her support group worked to overcome these traditional assumptions about caring and to urge carers – almost all women - to ask social services for a carer's assessment and thus open up a route to obtaining external help and assistance. There are no figures available to quantify the extent to which caring for elders presents a barrier to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's labour market participation. However, one of our respondent's, whose mother was not in good health, felt under considerable pressure to stay and home and provide care:

“They said “Don't go too far, stay Close” and in a way, my mum – like, when I started the course and things are going good for me, I've got a placement here and everything, she says “You know, you can pack it in, if you like, you can just stay at home, you know, help

me out.” I was just thinking – I do help...I do help my mum out a lot but I want to get out the house, go explore the world, see stuff.’ (8) 17-year old doing a Modern apprenticeship

Table 5 shows that the level of a women’s qualification is strongly related to whether or not she is economically active, irrespective of whether she is married and has children. Earlier work (Dale et al, 2002) has argued that women with higher qualifications find it easier to work than less qualified women – in part because more opportunities are open to them but also because their education has given them more confidence to argue the case for paid work if they face family opposition. However, our interviews provide many examples of graduates showing great commitment to working but often struggling to find an appropriate job.

4.4 Finding the right job

Irrespective of level of qualification, respondents raised the issues of whether a job was ‘appropriate’ for South Asian Muslim women. This encompassed the respondent’s perception of which jobs she felt were suitable and which were not, and also the perceived perception of the potential employer. There were a few jobs that were seen by all respondents as ‘prohibited’ for Muslim women – for example, jobs which involved the sale of alcohol or working in venues such as night clubs. However, there were also examples of jobs where families disapproved: for example, one respondent cited care work in a home for the elderly while another referred to working nights. But the more important factors that respondents raised related to their own feeling of ‘fitting-in’ and to employers perceptions of them as potential employees.

One respondent drew a contrast between ‘White’ jobs and jobs that Pakistani or Bangladeshi women would feel comfortable undertaking. For example, she said; *I just felt so out of place, coz they were all English and they were all posh, and they were all like, their hair- they had their hair done first thing in the morning. I mean, the interview was at like, nine o’clock in the morning, and they looked like they’d just walked out of the hairdressers! You know, I was just like ...you know I just felt like really out of place, I knew that I didn’t have that job! (13) Bangladeshi, 30, married, 2 children, who wore a hijab with western clothes.*

Similarly, a school-leaver had been offered an interview as a receptionist at a hair salon and felt:

'I should not really be here.....I was too young and it's not the environment that I like – it was just posh' (8) 17 year old Pakistani, single

5. Unemployment

These quotes, above, not only reflect women's concerns about 'fitting in' but also relate to perceived discrimination by employers, both racial and sexual, and begin to address explanations of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's high levels of unemployment. Many (but not all) women in this and other studies (Dale, 2002) were sure that wearing traditional clothes (eg shalwar kameez) or religious clothing (eg a hijab or headscarf) had a very negative effect in job interviews. Whilst some women wore western clothes for an interview others wanted to be true to themselves and refused to make this compromise.

For example, one woman who wore Asian clothes (but not a headscarf) said:

'... as soon as I walk into an interview the first thing is that when they look at you, first of all it's the colour of your skin, then it's what you're dressed like' (5) Pakistani woman, 28, married, no children)

Generally, interviewees were conscious that factors such as wearing a headscarf would affect a potential employer's perception of them. They made a distinction between women who 'covered' (wore a headscarf or face veil) and those that did not, saying that the former would definitely experience greater difficulties in finding the job of their choice whilst being simply 'Asian' posed fewer barriers in the labour market. If a woman wore traditional Asian clothes then she may be perceived by an employer as unlikely to fit into a Western culture. If she wore a hijab she would be categorised as Muslim and thus subject to employers' stereotypes of what might mean.

Other women felt that they were themselves placing limitations on their choice of employment by wearing the *hijab* and *niqab*¹ and, in some cases, by expressing a preference of working in a women-only environment. For example one woman

¹ The *hijab* refers to the headscarf whilst the *niqab* to the face covering adopted by some Muslim women.

(respondent 2) who wanted to go back to care work in a hospital had decided to focus on childcare so that she would be less likely to meet men and would not, therefore, need to cover herself. A second respondent (3) explained that she was looking for work in a woman-only environment so she would not need to wear a niqab, but this clearly limited the kinds of jobs available to her.

All these factors will undoubtedly influence the chances of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women obtaining a job and will therefore contribute to the high levels of unemployment which they experience. National-level survey data (Appendix table 1) show that all women from minority ethnic groups have much higher levels of unemployment than white women, but levels are highest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. In 2001-5, unemployment was about 15% amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women aged 19-60 who were economically active. This compared with just over 3% for white women. Whilst some of this difference can be explained by differences in individual characteristics (age, level of qualifications, etc), even when these are taken into account, levels of unemployment remain around twice that for white women (Dale et al, 2007). Conner et al (2004) also show that Pakistani and Bangladeshi full-time degree graduates (men and women combined) had levels of unemployment in their first known destination which were about twice those for white young people (14%, 12% respectively compared with 6% for whites).

However, other factors also affected women once they were in employment. Whilst most respondents said that employers provided a place to pray (even MacDonald's) some experienced difficulties during Ramadan. For example, one young woman (8) wanted to go home at 3.30 to break her fast but was unsure how her boss would react to this whilst another (7) found white office colleagues insensitive, for example eating 'bacon butties' in front of her during her fast.

A further constraint was the need to observe family weddings and funerals. One respondent (5) explained that there was an expectation you would stay at home for 5-6 days following a death in the family and it was only possible to get compassionate leave from work for immediate relatives. All these examples illustrate the ways in which workplace cultural assumptions and expectations tend to centre around those of the white majority and make it hard for women from a different cultural background to feel

comfortable and to fit-in. Therefore finding the right job and fitting in are issues of great significance in relation to employment opportunities and experiences for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, especially when combined with discrimination by employers and organisations.

5.1 Lack of experience

The issue of experience was seen as paramount to the position and prospects of women in the labour market and a lack of experience was one of the most frequent reasons given by our respondents for failure to get a job. This applied to younger women who had never worked, as well as to respondents with higher qualifications for whom lack of relevant experience was seen as a barrier to getting an appropriate job. Linked to experience was knowledge and guidance relating to the labour market. This included knowledge about educational opportunities; available jobs and training schemes; guidance on how to apply for jobs and confidence about procedures once in employment. A number of women commented that this was not easily available and thus they were not aware of all the possibilities open to them for training, re-training and finding work. These findings are consistent with Yeandle et al (2006) who also found that minority ethnic women were disadvantaged in the labour market because of a lack of confidence, difficulties in accessing information, a lack of social and support networks as well as unpaid caring responsibilities.

6. Over-education and under-employment

One might expect that the labour market barriers discussed above would lead Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to take a job for which they were over-qualified. There is considerable research on the extent to which individuals are in jobs which match their educational qualifications, experience and skills and the extent to which they are over-educated (Chevalier, 2003; Chevalier and Lindley, 2006; Lindley and Lenton, 2006; Dex and Lindley, 2006). Over-education is usually measured by comparing the level of education required for a specific job with the level of education held, or, if this information is not available, using the average level of education for each occupation and comparing this with particular population sub-groups. Whilst there is considerable variation in the extent of over-education depending on the methods and the data source, levels of about 30 percent or more are widely reported in UK studies.

Generally levels of over-education exceed those of under-education, for ethnic minorities as well as the general population. Battu and Sloane (2004) found that only Indians, African Asians and the Chinese men and women were more likely to be over-educated than the White group, whilst Bangladeshi men and women were much less likely to be over-educated. Among women, Dex and Lindley (2006) found that Black African and Chinese women had much higher rates of over-education than White women but that Bangladeshi women were less likely to be over-educated than White women.

A number of studies based on graduates (in the population as a whole) also find high levels of over-education - for example, 38 percent of UK graduates leaving higher education in 1980 were over-educated in their first job and 30 percent were still over-educated six years later (Dolton and Vignoles, 2000). Chevalier and Lindley (2006) using a cohort of 1995 graduates found about 35 percent were not in 'graduate' jobs.

In this section we use data from the Labour Force Survey to establish the extent to which Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with degree level qualifications are in graduate level jobs. Degree-level qualifications are much less ambiguous than many other types of qualification and many minority ethnic women with this level of qualification will have been educated in the UK and will therefore have fluent English. In addition, an increasing portion of the population are obtaining degree-level qualifications (in 2005/6 the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) for 17-30 year olds was 43 percent, (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/> accessed 18.4.07).

Degree-level qualifications include: higher degrees, first degrees, teaching qualifications, nursing, HNC/HND, BTEC higher and NVQ levels 4 & 5. We have used a classification of graduate occupations designed by Elias and Purcell (2004) which allocates occupations coded to the Standard Classification of Occupations (SOC) to one of five different categories, 'traditional', 'modern', 'new', 'niche' and 'non-graduate' occupations, as defined below:

Traditional graduate occupations - for which a degree is usually a standard entry qualification (eg solicitors, doctors, scientists, lecturers, secondary school teachers)

Modern graduate occupations – these are represented by the newer occupations, eg senior managers in large organisations, IT professions

New graduate occupations which often require a degree, eg occupational therapists, quantity surveyors, medical radiographers, public relations officers and management accountants

Niche graduate occupations are those which form a boundary between graduate and non-graduate. Most of the jobs do not normally require a degree although many are judged to provide opportunities for degree-level skills, eg planning and quality control engineers, hotel and accommodation managers and nurses.

Non-graduate occupations - all other jobs not covered by the graduate categories

This classification provides a clear gradient in terms of the requirement for a graduate qualification. For example, amongst female LFS respondents in 2001-5, 91 percent of those in traditional graduate occupations held a degree-level qualification compared with only 44 percent in niche graduate occupations. We expect there to be ethnic differences in the distribution of women across these categories which may be based on preferences for particular kinds of occupations (eg solicitors, doctors versus management accountants or nurses). However, niche occupations (for example, personal assistant, office manager) may be taken by those who are finding it hardest to obtain graduate-level work.

Table 6 shows the occupational distribution of women with degree-level qualifications who are in employment, using the four groups of graduate occupations and also non-graduate occupations. Because of the small number of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with degree-level qualifications we have combined data for 1992-2005. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with degree-level qualifications are over-represented in ‘traditional’ graduate occupations and under-represented in ‘niche’ occupations, by comparison with their White counterparts. Inspection of the occupations in these categories (not reported here) shows that 40% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with degree-level qualifications in ‘traditional’ graduate occupations are medical practitioners or pharmacists, and that secondary school teaching is also important. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with higher qualifications are under-represented in niche occupations – largely explained because they are less likely than white women to be in nursing. However, executive level civil service posts and financial and accounting technicians are other examples of occupations in the ‘niche’ graduate category.

Overall, nearly a quarter of white women with degree-level qualifications are not in a graduate level job. However, this is significantly higher for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women (36 percent). There is, however, considerable similarity in the occupations held by women from both ethnic groups. Clerical jobs in the civil service, local government, accounts and wages, and general office work predominate for both. However, these clerical non-graduate jobs are also found in the graduate 'niche' category, but at higher levels. An unanswered question from these survey data is why graduate-level Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are not accessing these higher level jobs. Whilst our interviews with Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduate women, suggest that they may take clerical work in order to gain experience or get a foothold on the career ladder if they have difficulty getting 'graduate' level jobs, the survey data indicate that they are not successful in moving into graduate-level jobs. Further analysis of interview data helps to explain this.

Of the six Pakistani graduates interviewed, only two were working in graduate-level jobs; two were on graduate training schemes; two were in non-graduate jobs - one working as a part-time sales assistant and the other in a call centre. The sales-assistant (12), now in her early thirties, had graduated in Business Administration from a new university and had spent 7-8 months applying for jobs without success. Rejection letters typically referred to her lack of experience. She then took a full-time job as a sales-assistant but found it increasingly hard to continue with making applications for other jobs. The store where she worked had a graduate scheme aimed at providing training for management and, although she applied for this, she was not accepted. Now, married with children, she was still working part-time as a sales assistant for the same store

The graduate working in a call centre (9) had a degree in social sciences and felt that she was not qualified for any of the IT-related or administrative jobs that were advertised and now regretted she had not followed her mother's advice and taken a vocational course. She wanted to find some kind of community work and had tried applying for voluntary work in a number of community organisations in order to gain experience but had not been successful and did not know where to find information about different council/government training schemes. Both these women exemplified graduates who felt frustrated and defeated by the labour market and could see no clear pathway into a more appropriate job.

However, two other women with higher-level qualifications (1, 4) who had found themselves unable to progress in their jobs had joined a locally-based Intermediate Labour Market scheme² that was providing the experience and the job opportunities that they had not had before. Both felt that they were receiving the help and advice needed in furthering their careers. Both women were single and still living with parents and therefore, because of this support, were able to take a traineeship on low wages.

Another respondent (7), with a GNVQ in Business studies (equivalent to an A level) had wanted to continue to university but had had to get a job in order to demonstrate that she and her husband, who was coming from Pakistan, would be able to support themselves after marriage. She had worked in a supermarket for five years and then went on to work in a bank processing centre but was now undertaking an ILM traineeship to become a Housing Manager. Aspects of the ILM schemes that seemed to appeal to the women were that it was targeted at ethnic minorities; that it led to a specific qualification; that it was available locally; and that it provided the structure and support for moving into a graduate-level job.

Three other young women were taking 3-year modern apprenticeships (8, 15, 16). These provided payment whilst training, work experience, NVQ2 qualifications and also support for moving into a paid job at the end. The women interviewed were all training for administrative posts and provided very positive accounts of their experiences.

7. The Potential Role of Training Schemes

Both the kinds of training schemes discussed above provided direct access to employers and thus offered a means of matching skills to labour market demands. The role of training schemes is of significance to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women for a number of reasons. Firstly they open up careers in new occupations, such as housing, and therefore help women move away from traditional employment sectors. In addition, some provide opportunities for women in mainly 'female-only' work environments, such as teaching

² Oldham & Rochdale provide Intermediate Labour Market placements, providing transitional employment for locally-recruited unemployed people so that they can gain the skills and experience to help them find sustainable employment. Participants on the ILM scheme have access to individual support from a full-time support worker as well as a counselling service and one-to-one job search skills development.

assistants or childcare. They also provide opportunities at different stages in the life course, which is especially important for women likely to take an extended break for childcare. Finally, through the prospect of training and gaining work experience, training schemes will help to combat the effect of discrimination in the labour market.

Lindley *et al* (2006) examine two issues which may be addressed by training schemes. The first is the low level of employment amongst women with no or few qualifications and the second is the unexplained racial discriminatory component which may still exist in the labour market experiences of ethnic minority women. In both cases, the completion of training schemes may provide a way to reduce the skills and qualifications gap, whilst positive discrimination on certain schemes (such as the Housing ILM which targets unemployed ethnic minorities) will enable those with proportionately higher rates of unemployment/economic inactivity, for example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, to enter the labour market. This is important because Lindley *et al* (2006) show that *qualifications* have played an increasingly important role, over time, in predicting women's employment. Training initiatives leading to recognised qualifications, perhaps even at degree level, will therefore help reduce the polarisation in the employment experiences of women with high and low level qualifications.

The take-up of training schemes in diverse areas of employment signals a shift away from the professions stereotypically perceived by South Asian families as being 'worthy', such as doctor or lawyer, and places greater emphasis on being able to pursue any career that involves stability and prospects. It also demonstrates the wider choice and opportunity available to women now entering the labour market, both immediately after leaving school (and sometimes as a compensation for lower educational attainment) and re-entering after a career break. Lack of work experience, often exacerbated by low/no qualifications, is an obvious and often insurmountable barrier to employment. However, government sponsored training schemes provide both on-the-job training and structured avenues into the labour market, enabling women to obtain both recognised qualifications as well as the experience that is required in the labour market. For those women who acknowledge they themselves may have placed limitations on their employment opportunities (for example by wanting to work in a female-only environment), training schemes offer the possibility of gaining qualifications and training in areas that suit their needs such as childcare or teaching.

For women with a weak position in relation to the labour market, promotion of opportunity through these schemes may lead to increased rates of economic activity. This may be achieved more effectively through schemes that are targeting those with higher rates of unemployment, such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, using schemes such as the Path ILM. In addition schemes that provide childcare should help increase the rates of women returning to work after childbearing. Special attention needs to be paid to the pathways back into work for women who have taken a career break for family formation, especially as Pakistani and Bangladeshi women levels of economic activity tend to be very low after childbearing (Dale et al, 2006). The need for more government-sponsored training programmes and access schemes targeted towards disadvantaged groups such as South Asian women was also stressed by Ahmad *et al* (2003:35)

However, there is also scope to increase opportunity through general schemes by ensuring they are promoted widely and that they are seen as reliable avenues to obtaining qualifications, experience and ultimately employment with good prospects.

8. Conclusions

There appear to be particular barriers or limitations placed on Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's participation in the labour market. These relate not only to finding an appropriate jobs but also to balancing work with their other roles and responsibilities. Childcare in particular presents a real barrier to their involvement in education, training and employment - a finding from many different studies and one which informs recommendations of the EOC *Moving on up* report (2007).

Perceptions and attitudes of potential employers are undoubtedly significant influences on the labour market position and prospects of Bangladeshi and Pakistani women – and are amplified when they are viewed as 'Muslim' women. Respondents in this study were unanimous in their belief that wearing a headscarf or face veil posed major barriers to finding a job.

Respondents wanted employers to have a better understanding of their religious or cultural needs, particularly where these could be easily accommodated, for example by

replacing tea breaks with short breaks for prayer or allowing women to wear appropriate yet religiously adequate clothing. In general women seemed to be striking a pragmatic and realistic balance between their employment aspirations and their religious/cultural practices, understanding that they themselves had to make some allowances whilst also expecting that employers should be flexible enough to cater for their basic needs. This will be an important balance to attain if women from South Asian (and mainly Muslim in this case) backgrounds are to increase their participation in the labour market. This has been recognised in other work; ‘it would appear that not only do religious factors sometimes play a role in determining whether certain women enter the labour market, but also, for those that do, their relative success may be dependent upon the ability of their working environment to accommodate them’ (Ahmad, *et al*, 2003, p 34).

Guidance and knowledge of the labour market, including the different opportunities available; training schemes; support mechanisms; employment rights, and; caring provisions, are also necessary for increasing participation levels of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Whilst agencies (eg Connexions) are available to provide advice to younger women, something for older or more experienced women seeking work and training is also necessary and one of the ‘Challenges for the Future’ identified by the EOC report was to ‘improve careers advice and work experience at school and for adult women’. Women are not only moving away from the ‘traditional’ jobs associated with the first generation of migrants but are also broadening their range of occupations from those often seen as desirable, primarily, medicine and law. However, there still remains scope for improved information and advisory services that would enable women to fully appreciate the options available to them. This would impact on their ability to identify the right job at the right level and help overcome the problem of unemployment as well as underemployment.

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Table 1. Profile of Interviewees

Qualifications	Employed	Unemployed*	Scheme	Total
Graduate	4	-	1	5
A Level/NVQ 3	4	-	2	6
GCSE or below	-	4	3	7
Total	8	4	6	18

* All unemployed women were looking for work.

Table 2. Ethnicity as a percentage of resident population in each group

	Manchester	Rochdale	E & W
White	81.0	88.6	91.3
Pakistani	5.9	7.7	1.4
Bangladeshi	0.9	1.3	0.5

Source: Census 2001

Table 3. Unemployment rates by ethnicity, percentage

	GB	Manchester	Rochdale
Pakistani men	14	13.6	13.4
Bangladeshi men	18	12.1	15.2
White men	5	10.3	6.5
Pakistani women	17	15.4	14.5
Bangladeshi women	n/d	14.1	15.7
White women	4	5.6	4.2

Source: ONS, 2002/3

Table 4 Level of qualification for Pakistani and Bangladeshi and white women by age and whether UK Born and brought up

Pakistani and Bangladeshi						
<i>Not UK born/brought up</i>	Degree	A level	O level	Other	None	Total N
21-34	4.6	3.2	5.4	31.1	55.6	1,470
35-49	3.7	1.9	2.6	24.2	67.6	1,574
<i>UK born/brought up</i>						
21-34	20.5	16.2	27.6	11.4	25.3	1,380
35-49	17.1	11.7	21.4	10.7	26.9	291
White: UK born/brought up						
21-34	24.6	18.5	32.4	11.5	13.0	134,568
35-49	23.7	14.0	26.0	13.0	23.3	155,110

QLFS, weighted, women aged 19-60, excluding FT students

Table 5a: Level of economic activity for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women by life-stage and qualification

Lifestage	degree	A Level	O Level	Other	None
No partner, no dependent children & age<35	93.4	91.7	81.6	74.1	46.4
Partner, no dependent children & age<35	85.9	80.5	72.6	44.8	26.7
Partner, youngest child 0-4	54.6	42.8	28.4	11.2	6.0
Partner, youngest child 5-15	72.0	65.7	54.4	29.9	9.0

QLFS, weighted, women aged 19-60, excluding FT students

Table 5b: Level of economic activity for White women by life-stage and qualification

Lifestage	Degree	A Level	O Level	Other	None
No partner, no dependent children & age<35	98.1	96.8	95.6	91.9	69.5
Partner, no dependent children & age<35	98.7	96.7	96.1	91.7	83.7
Partner, youngest child 0-4	76.3	64.9	62.1	53.0	39.4
Partner, youngest child 5-15	90.3	83.9	84.2	80.0	65.2

QLFS, weighted, women aged 19-60, excluding FT students

Table 6: Occupational distribution of women with degree-level qualification by ethnic group,

Ethnic group (row %)	Trad grad	Modern grad	New grad	Niche grad	Non- grad	Total N unweighted
White	17.5	19.9	11.7	26.7	24.1	74,459
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	23.1	15.8	11.0	14.2	35.9	306

QLFS, weighted, women aged 19-60, excludes FT students

Appendix table 1 Economic activity by ethnic group for 2001-5

(cols 1 and 2 omit FT students)

Ethnic group	% economically active Aged 19-60	Of those active: % unemployed	Total N in sample Aged 19-60	% FT student aged 19-29	N 19-20
White	76.5	03.4	127,835	14.8	23,706
Black Caribbean	77.5	07.9	1,353	29.1	208
Black African	66.1	12.2	1,181	35.7	282
Black Other	77.1	13.3	482	24.0	167
Indian	69.9	05.7	2,465	24.5	545
Pakistani	31.1	14.8	1,549	18.7	513
Bangladeshi	20.8	15.6	560	09.7	236
Chinese	68.8	05.3	479	55.8	103
Other	76.5	08.7	2,272	28.4	557

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey, England, Wales and Scotland, weighted

Appendix table 2

Interviewee Profile

	Age	Status	Area	Ethnicity	Qualifications	Details
1	26	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	Graduate	On ILM training scheme
2	28	Married, children	Manchester	Pakistani	NVQ2	Looking for work
3	21	Married, children	Manchester	Pakistani	GCSE	Looking for work
4	26	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	Graduate	On Housing Officer training scheme
5	28	Married, no children	Rochdale	Kashmiri	GNVQ	Moving jobs, has worked all the time
	19	Single	Rochdale	Bangladeshi	A Level	Left training scheme; looking for work
7	23	Married, children	Rochdale	Pakistani	GNVQ	ILM Housing Officer training scheme
8	17	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	GCSEs	Modern Apprenticeship scheme
9	22	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	Graduate	Working for call centre, looking for 'proper' job
10	28	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	Graduate	Manager at Resources centre
11	32	Married, children	Manchester	Pakistani	None	Never worked; looking for work
12	33	Married, children	Rochdale	Pakistani	Graduate	P/T sales assistant; looking for other work
13	30	Married, children	Manchester	Bangladeshi	GNVQ L3	Just back at work after break for 2 nd child.
14	25	Married, children	Rochdale	Pakistani	Graduate	Teacher
15	18	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	GCSEs	On Rathbone training for Admin
16	18	Single	Rochdale	Pakistani	GCSEs	On Rathbone training for Admin
17	20	Single	Manchester	Pakistani	College	Temping
18	27	Married, children	Rochdale	Bangladeshi	NVQ	Looking to return to work after break for family/children