



Black Women and Employment



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Black women and employment

Summary

This report uses official data to look at the position of black women in the labour market and the barriers they face to gaining employment and progressing in work. We show that this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed by measures that build on government initiatives on combating race and sex discrimination in employment.

- The facts reveal that black and minority ethnic women are more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive than any other group in the labour market.
- Black and minority ethnic women suffer from cultural stereotyping by employers that results in them having to take jobs at a lower skills level than they are qualified for.
- Even when they are in employment, black and minority ethnic women are disproportionately likely to be working in temporary jobs.

Introduction

In a world where stereotypes shape so much thinking, black women workers are too often seen through the distorting lenses of prejudices about race, gender and class. As this report shows, black and minority ethnic women workers are concentrated in low paid low-status jobs. At the same time, crude generalisations are often used to blame the workers themselves for this fact.

This report counters stereotypes with facts taken from publicly available sources. (All figures, unless otherwise stated, are Labour Force Survey data for Spring 2005, excluding people who did not answer the relevant question. Italics indicate a small number of respondents giving an answer and are therefore not particularly robust.)

Economic status

The first point we will look at is the economic status of women in different ethnic groups. In the table below we can see that white women are more likely to be employees than women from any other ethnic group, and more likely to be self-employed than any other group except Chinese women. They are less likely to be

unemployed, and less likely to be economically inactive. These are all factors that are very closely linked to disadvantage, poverty and exclusion.

The economic status of working age women (16 – 59) in different ethnic groups, Spring 2005

	Employee	Self-employed	Government employment & training programmes	Unpaid family worker	ILO unemployed	Economically inactive	Total
White	66.6%	5.0%	0.3%	0.3%	2.9%	25.0%	100%
Mixed	61.1%	2.8%	-	0.7%	7.5%	27.9%	100%
Asian or Asian British	42.1%	2.6%	0.2%	0.2%	4.8%	50.2%	100%
Black or Black British	53.6%	1.3%	0.7%	0.3%	5.4%	38.7%	100%
Chinese	49.3%	7.6%	-	-	3.2%	39.8%	100%
Other ethnic group	48.2%	4.4%	0.2%	-	5.3%	41.9%	100%

It also worth remembering that white men are more likely to be employed or self-employed than men from other ethnic groups and that, in most ethnic groups, men are more likely to be employed or self-employed than women:

Proportion working age men and women in different ethnic groups who are employed or self-employed, Spring 2005

	Men	Women
White	79.4%	71.6%
Mixed	62.1%	63.9%
Asian or Asian British	68.8%	44.7%
Black or Black British	65.8%	54.9%
Chinese	48.3%	56.9%
Other ethnic group	62.7%	52.6%

In discussions of this issue it is often suggested that, for one group – Pakistani and Bangladeshi women – exclusion from the labour market may, in a sense, be their own fault. It is suggested that, for religious or cultural reasons, married Muslim women exclude themselves from employment (or are discouraged from remaining in employment by their families or communities), especially when they have children.

Now, cultural factors could play a part in explaining Bangladeshi and Pakistani women's lower levels of labour market participation, but this is often assumed by people who have not considered the impact of prejudice and discrimination.

Important research for the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2005 found that Black women and employment ESAD/EERD 4 April 2006

when young women who described themselves as housewives were asked if they ‘would like to find paid work’ about a quarter from all groups said yes:

16 – 34 year old women who describe themselves as housewives and would like to find paid work¹

Ethnic group	Proportion who would like to find paid work
Bangladeshi	26%
Pakistani	25%
Black Caribbean	21%
White British	28%

The survey also found that, of younger women in work, the proportion who were so committed to their jobs that they were aiming for promotion was much the same for each group, as was the proportion who said that they would like to achieve senior management or professional positions at some point in their careers. Young Bangladeshi and Pakistani women were about as likely as young black Caribbean women to say that opportunities for progression were important for them when choosing a job – and significantly more likely to say this than young white British women.

In other words, cultural conditioning is unlikely to be the main story here. Like young black Caribbean women, young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were significantly more likely than young white British women to have had difficulty finding a job or to have had to take a take a job at a lower level than they were qualified for:

16 – 34 year old women employees and discrimination

Ethnic group	Often or sometimes had difficulty finding a job	Often took a job at a lower level than they were qualified for
Bangladeshi	49%	18%
Pakistani	56%	22%
Black Caribbean	54%	16%
White British	34%	6%

Indeed, cultural conditioning seems to be far more likely to be found in employers’ attitudes to young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women:

16 – 34 year old women workers and discrimination against religious dress

Ethnic group	Sometimes experienced negative attitudes for wearing religious dress	Often experienced negative attitudes for wearing religious dress
Bangladeshi	20%	14%

Pakistani	22%	7%
Black Caribbean	8%	4%
White British	4%	3%

16 – 34 year old women workers and assumptions about marriage/children

Ethnic group	Sometimes been asked about plans for marriage/children at interview	Often been asked about plans for marriage/children at interview
Bangladeshi	21%	8%
Pakistani	26%	13%
Black Caribbean	24%	10%
White British	14%	3%

Full-time and part-time employment

Full-time and part-time employment (in main job) for women in different ethnic groups, Spring 2005

	Full-time	Part-time
White	54.2%	45.8%
Mixed	62.0%	38.0%
Asian or Asian British	63.9%	36.1%
Black or Black British	67.5%	32.5%
Chinese	73.0%	27.0%
Other ethnic group	64.1%	35.9%

White women are more likely to have paid jobs than women from other ethnic groups, but less likely to have full-time jobs. In all ethnic groups men are more likely to work full-time than women:

Full-time and part-time employment (in main job) for men in different ethnic groups, Spring 2005

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
White	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%
Mixed	82.5%	17.5%	100.0%
Asian or Asian British	83.5%	16.5%	100.0%
Black or Black British	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%
Chinese	74.7%	25.3%	100.0%
Other ethnic group	80.3%	19.7%	100.0%

This rather suggests that full-time work is worth having, but that is not the whole picture. As a valuable article in Labour Market Trends pointed out:

“... full-time jobs are more likely than part-time jobs to involve professional careers, with occupational pensions and with higher pay. Part-time jobs, by comparison, are often very segregated by sex, provide flexibility to employers, and typically have few career prospects and a flatter relationship between earnings and age.”²

It is very difficult to sort out the different effects here. Part-time work is often low status, but many women in full-time jobs work extra hours to make up for low pay. Many women with children, on the other hand, prefer part-time work, but this in turn often reflects constrained choices resulting from factors like inadequate childcare provision.

Permanent and temporary work

Black and minority ethnic women are disproportionately likely to be working in temporary jobs. Here the differences between ethnic groups are far more important than the differences between the sexes:

Women’s permanent and temporary jobs, Spring 2005

	Permanent	Not permanent in some way
White	94.3%	5.7%
Mixed	90.6%	9.4%
Asian or Asian British	91.7%	8.3%
Black or Black British	90.6%	9.4%
Chinese	86.6%	13.4%
Other ethnic group	89.1%	10.9%

Men’s permanent and temporary jobs, Spring 2005

	Permanent	Not permanent in some way
White	95.2%	4.8%
Mixed	94.7%	5.3%
Asian or Asian British	92.0%	8.0%
Black or Black British	87.6%	12.4%
Chinese	90.7%	9.3%
Other ethnic group	83.0%	17.0%

When we look at the type of temporary work they undertake, we can see that White women and Asian and Asian British women are more likely to be working on a fixed-term contract, while Black and Black British women are more likely to be working for an agency, and there is a similar pattern for men:

Women’s not permanent jobs as a proportion of all employment, Spring 2005

	Seasonal work	Contract for fixed period fixed task	Agency temping	Casual work	Not permanent in some other way	All not permanent
White	0.25%	2.76%	0.79%	1.07%	0.80%	5.67%
Mixed	-	5.86%	0.46%	2.55%	0.50%	9.38%
Asian or Asian British	-	4.71%	1.91%	1.34%	0.26%	8.23%
Black or Black British	0.3%	3.05%	5.02%	0.62%	0.39%	9.38%
Chinese	-	7.94%	1.43%	2.93%	1.08%	13.38%
Other ethnic group	-	4.98%	3.05%	0.76%	2.09%	10.89%

Men's not permanent jobs as a proportion of all employment, Spring 2005

	Seasonal work	Contract for fixed period fixed task	Agency temping	Casual work	Not permanent in some other way	All not permanent
White	0.25%	2.16%	1.04%	0.84%	0.50%	4.78%
Mixed	-	3.34%	1.12%	0.81%	-	5.27%
Asian or Asian British	0.30%	4.28%	1.02%	1.58%	0.86%	8.04%
Black or Black British	0.53%	3.16%	5.08%	2.25%	1.40%	12.43%
Chinese	-	4.98%	-	4.23%	-	9.21%
Other ethnic group	1.14%	6.66%	2.66%	5.76%	0.80%	17.01%

Homeworking

Homeworking statistics can be misleading, in that taken at their face value, they seem to show that men are more likely than women to work from home. This is because men are far more likely to use their homes as a base for work (and this in turn may be related to the fact that men are more likely than women to be self-employed.).

Women are more likely than men to be homeworkers as the term is usually understood, and the LFS indicates that white women and Asian and Asian British women are more likely than women from other ethnic groups – though the data for other groups are not particularly reliable, so we should be cautious about drawing conclusions from this.

Whether mainly work from home, women, Spring 2005

A: Own home	B: Same grounds or	C: Different places with home as a	D: All home working (A+ B +	E: Separate from home
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		building	base	C)	
White	3.6%	0.7%	3.8%	8.1%	91.9%
Mixed	1.1%	0.6%	5.1%	6.8%	93.2%
Asian or Asian British	3.2%	1.2%	1.5%	6.0%	94.0%
Black or Black British	0.7%	0.2%	3.5%	4.4%	95.6%
Chinese	1.6%	2.2%	-	3.8%	96.2%
Other ethnic group	3.1%	0.3%	6.3%	9.7%	90.3%

Whether mainly work from home, men, Spring 2005

	A: Own home	B: Same grounds or building	C: Different places with home as a base	D: All home working (A+ B + C)	E: Separate from home
White	1.8%	1.2%	12.6%	15.7%	84.3%
Mixed	3.8%	-	8.3%	12.1%	87.9%
Asian or Asian British	1.7%	0.7%	6.2%	8.6%	91.4%
Black or Black British	0.6%	1.0%	9.7%	11.2%	88.8%
Chinese	-	3.0%	1.2%	4.2%	95.8%
Other ethnic group	1.6%	0.2%	4.8%	6.6%	93.4%

Industries

Women workers generally are concentrated in the public sector and shops, hotels and restaurants:

Industry sectors in main job by sex, percentages, 2005

	Male	Female
Agriculture & fishing	69.3	30.7
Energy & water	77.3	22.7
Manufacturing	74.7	25.3
Construction	85.1	14.9
Distribution hotels & restaurants	46.6	53.4
Transport & communication	73.8	26.2
Banking finance & insurance etc	52.0	48.0
Public admin educ & health	29.5	70.5

Other services	47.2	52.8
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Note: excludes those working outside the UK

There is also a distinct pattern for ethnic minority workers, who are concentrated in shops, hotels and restaurants, transport and communications and banking, finance and insurance:

Industry sectors in main job by ethnic group, percentages, 2005

	White	BME
Agriculture & fishing	98.6	1.4
Energy & water	94.8	5.2
Manufacturing	94.6	5.4
Construction	96.9	3.1
Distribution hotels & restaurants	90.9	9.1
Transport & communication	91.4	8.6
Banking finance & insurance etc	91.6	8.4
Public admin educ & health	92.6	7.4
Other services	94.3	5.7

This produces different patterns for women in different ethnic groups. Black and Black British women are more likely to work in the public sector than any men or women from any other ethnic group. Chinese women are more likely to work in the public sector than any other industry, but this greater likelihood is less marked than it is for women from any other ethnic group:

The industries worked in by women in different ethnic groups, Spring 2005

	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese	Other ethnic group
Agriculture & fishing	0.5%	-	0.1%	-	-	0.8%
Energy & water	0.5%	-	0.8%	0.4%	-	0.3%
Manufacturing	7.4%	5.9%	7.7%	4.0%	7.4%	4.7%
Construction	1.7%	2.0%	1.2%	1.1%	-	1.3%
Distribution hotels & restaurants	21.8%	28.9%	24.2%	16.1%	24.9%	20.9%
Transport & communication	3.5%	5.9%	6.0%	5.3%	2.8%	7.3%
Banking finance & insurance etc	14.5%	13.3%	16.0%	16.1%	21.4%	14.4%
Public admin educ & health	44.6%	39.6%	41.3%	52.2%	36.1%	45.6%
Other services	5.5%	4.3%	2.6%	4.8%	7.4%	4.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Women make up a majority of public sector workers, but they are a minority of all women workers (though not in the case of black and Black British workers). Black and Black British and White women are more likely than women from other ethnic groups to work in the public sector; but here the key difference is between men and women, rather than between ethnic groups – in all ethnic groups women are more likely than men to work in the public sector:

Women working in the public and private sectors by ethnic group, Spring 2005

	Private	Public	Total
White	63.2%	36.8%	100.0%
Mixed	67.0%	33.0%	100.0%
Asian or Asian British	65.6%	34.4%	100.0%
Black or Black British	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Chinese	66.5%	33.5%	100.0%
Other ethnic group	68.8%	31.2%	100.0%

Men working in the public and private sectors by ethnic group, Spring 2005

	Private	Public	Total
White	80.6%	19.4%	100.0%
Mixed	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Asian or Asian British	82.3%	17.7%	100.0%
Black or Black British	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%
Chinese	78.5%	21.5%	100.0%
Other ethnic group	77.2%	22.8%	100.0%

The government’s civil service statistics do not provide a breakdown by gender, but we do know that ethnic minority workers are over-represented in the lower grades of the civil service and under represented in the higher grades. The ethnic gradient is clear:

Ethnic minority staff as a percentage of all staff whose ethnic origin is know, by responsibility level, 20043

Responsibility level	Percentage ethnic minority
SCS level	3.3%
Grades 6/7	4.9%
SEO/HEO	5.8%
EO	8.9%
AO/AA	9.7%
Unknown	2.4%
All non-industrial staff	8.3%
Industrial staff	2.7%

Occupations

The final element in this picture is the occupational distribution of black and minority ethnic women. White women are more likely to be working as managers/senior officials and in administrative and secretarial jobs, but also more likely to be working in elementary positions. White men, interestingly, are also more likely than other men to work as managers/senior officials, and also in skilled trades – and are less likely to work in elementary occupations than men from other ethnic groups.

The occupations of women in different ethnic groups, Spring 2005

	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese	Other ethnic group
Managers and Senior Officials	10.3%	5.4%	7.8%	7.9%	12.2%	7.1%
Professional occupations	11.4%	13.0%	14.2%	10.3%	19.5%	11.1%
Associate Professional and Technical	14.2%	21.8%	15.9%	21.1%	14.7%	19.7%
Administrative and Secretarial	23.0%	16.9%	20.2%	17.7%	17.8%	18.7%
Skilled Trades Occupations	1.5%	0.4%	1.2%	1.9%	2.9%	1.2%
Personal Service Occupations	13.7%	12.1%	10.8%	18.3%	9.0%	13.4%
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	12.2%	15.4%	15.9%	11.1%	11.6%	11.1%
Process Plant and Machine Operatives	2.1%	1.1%	4.0%	1.7%	-	1.1%
Elementary Occupations	11.5%	13.9%	10.0%	10.1%	12.3%	16.7%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The occupations of men in different ethnic groups, Spring 2005

	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese	Other ethnic group
Managers and Senior Officials	19.0%	12.1%	13.1%	9.2%	17.9%	14.9%
Professional occupations	13.3%	17.8%	19.3%	13.5%	28.4%	17.8%
Associate Professional	13.1%	13.6%	10.0%	13.2%	4.9%	14.4%

and Technical						
Administrative and Secretarial	5.1%	9.0%	8.7%	6.3%	7.8%	5.4%
Skilled Trades Occupations	16.0%	10.7%	10.6%	11.2%	14.0%	8.5%
Personal Service Occupations	2.6%	2.5%	1.7%	5.1%	-%	6.2%
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	5.0%	12.8%	10.3%	7.6%	4.2%	5.8%
Process Plant and Machine Operatives	13.0%	6.9%	10.5%	10.6%	3.3%	12.0%
Elementary Occupations	12.8%	14.6%	15.7%	23.3%	19.5%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Pay

The question any trades unionist will want to ask is ‘what does all this mean for pay?’ A comparison of full-time pay carried out by the EOC indicated that, in 2003/4:

- White men earned £11.48 an hour on average
- White women earned £9.58 an hour on average
- Ethnic minority men earned £10.60 an hour on average
- Ethnic minority women on average earned £9.72 an hour.

In other words there was a gender pay gap of 17% for white people and 8% for ethnic minority people.⁴

Conclusions

The TUC initially highlighted the barriers facing black women in employment and trade unions in 1987 and whilst welcoming the positive changes that have led to more access for black women in the labour market and initiatives from trade unions to identify and tackle the problems that they face, believes that much more needs to be done.

The TUC is concerned that black women are still concentrated in low paid jobs in public services, retail and other service sectors and face major barriers to gaining both full and part time employment. This report highlights the negative effects of the cultural stereotyping that is often used to explain low levels of economic activity among women in some black communities. It is clear that there are still managers who faced with a black woman will stereotype them into the type of work that they think they should be doing or that they think them capable of doing. Black women will form a substantial number of new workers coming into the labour market in the next ten years.

The TUC believes that through racial and gender discrimination black women face a double disadvantage in accessing and participating in the labour market. The TUC believes that there is a need for concerted and co-ordinated action by government and also by trade unions through collective bargaining to eliminate race and sex discrimination in the labour market and in society, through legislative and community based initiatives.

Establishing collective bargaining on equality is key if the double discrimination faced by black women in the labour market is to be defeated. The organisation and recruitment of black women is vital if future progress is to be made in addressing the problems that black women face in the workplace and in encouraging increased participation in the trade union movement.

The TUC are continuing to campaign for the establishment of union equality representatives who would have a statutory role to help deal with issues of inequality in the workplace and encouraging trade unions and employers to make use of collective bargaining to develop clear action plans to tackle the institutional barriers that affect black women and to establish targets, with clear time limits to achieve fair representation of black women at all levels in the workplace.

The TUC welcomes the initiatives that the Government is taking through the work of the Ethnic Minority and Employment Taskforce in response to the Prime Minister's pledge to work towards removing discriminatory barriers faced by black workers in the labour market by 2014. We also welcome the substantial contribution made by the Women and Work Commission in highlighting the areas where Government needs to improve opportunities for women in training, work and workplace practice. The measures that will come from these initiatives will play an important part in achieving the Government's goal of improving economic activity amongst black women.

The TUC believes that the Government needs to build on these initiatives in order to remove the discriminatory barriers faced by black women in the labour market and believes that more needs to be done to combat the high levels of occupational segregation and stereotyping of the skills, abilities and aspirations of black women and to speed up the pace of change. We are therefore calling for the following:

- The Government to use public procurement as a lever to improve the employment of black women in different areas of the labour market by explicitly including the promotion of race equality in contract criteria to boost training, apprenticeships and skills levels for black women and ensuring that promotion of race equality forms part of the value for money consideration for all government contracts.
- The Government to introduce extra measures to require employers to ensure equality of access to workplace training for black women. Central to this should be the extension of the positive duties in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to the private and voluntary sector. The TUC believes that effective and transparent monitoring of black women by employers will help improve their position in the labour market.
- The introduction of national monitoring of the Government's Childcare Strategy as it relates to black communities to ensure that there is a positive

impact for black women and increased investment in childcare provision to ensure black women have access to affordable childcare.

- The Government to clarify the question of employment status especially as it applies to home working in order to ensure that black women working that work in this sector are able to claim their full statutory rights and to improve enforcement of the National Minimum Wage to ensure that black women are not exploited and underpaid.
- The Government to improve funding and access to free English for Speaker of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, and for the removal of the three-year ban on accessing ESOL courses for non-EU migrant workers.

Notes

¹ Women at Work survey, taken from the EOC website, www.eoc.org.uk, on 17 March 2006.

² “Ethnic differences in women’s demographic, family characteristics and economic activity profiles, 1992 to 2002”, Joanne Lindley and Angela Dale, *Labour Market Trends*, August 2004, p 160.

³ *Civil Service Statistics 2004*, Cabinet Office, table H, accessed at www.civilservice.gov.uk on 31 March 2006.

⁴ *Ethnic Minority Women and Men*, Sue Botcherby and Karen Hurrell, EOC, 2004, accessed from www.eoc.org.uk, on 17 March 2006.