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Equal Opportunities Commission

## Ethnicity and patterns of employment and care

Britain's ethnic minority communities are set to contribute 70 per cent of the growth in our working age population during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Almost 20 per cent of babies born in England and Wales in 2004 were born to ethnic minority parents.<sup>2</sup>

But are these changes leading to greater diversity in the working patterns and family lives of modern Britain? Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Commission investigated these complex and often contentious issues.

What we find is a considerable variety in the experiences of parents from different ethnic backgrounds. There is no single story about employment and caring within, or between, any of the ethnic groups of modern Britain. This data suggests we must be cautious about generalised analysis or identikit solutions. However it does reveal that ethnicity is a factor in the way we work and care and the choices available to us.

### Key findings

- Working parents from ethnic minority backgrounds have less access to maternity pay, paternity leave and flexible working options.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers are much less likely than those from other ethnic groups to be working during their pregnancy or to be in employment when their child is young.
- White and Indian mothers are most likely to be in a household where both parents are working (either full-time or part-time). Black mothers are the most likely to be lone parents.
- Fathers from some ethnic minority backgrounds tend to spend less time with their young children than other fathers.
- Ethnic differences in work and care are related to wider patterns of poverty; levels of skills and qualifications; discrimination; and family choices.

It is important to note that the data used in this study relate to a period prior to significant changes to maternity and paternity rights, first in 2003 and then subsequently in 2007. These include extensions to maternity leave and pay, the introduction of paid paternity leave and the right for parents of young children to request flexible working. Additionally, in 2004, the government launched its ten year childcare strategy with a number of measures to improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of childcare services.

These data are taken from the Millennium Cohort Survey, a longitudinal study following a national representative sample of babies born between September 2000 and December 2001. The MCS covers all four countries in the UK, but this analysis focuses on England, Scotland and Wales. The first data sweep was carried out when the baby was 9-10 months old and included 16,588 mothers and 11,935 fathers. The second sweep, undertaken at age three, includes follow-up information on 14,048 mothers and 9,747 fathers. The MCS over-represented families living in areas of high ethnic minority populations and disadvantaged areas to ensure that the sample size was sufficient to enable analysis by ethnic group. Data are weighted to represent the national profile of families across GB. Ethnic groups included in the study are, in decreasing order of sample size: White, Pakistani, Indian, Black African, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, Mixed and Other.

The full report, *Parental care and employment in early childhood – Working Paper Series No. 57*, by Shirley Dex and Kelly Ward, Institute of Education, can be downloaded from the Equal Opportunities Commission website at [http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/WP57\\_parental\\_care.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/WP57_parental_care.pdf)

## Do patterns of work vary between parents from different ethnic groups?

Patterns of working and family life vary considerably between parents from different ethnic minority groups.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were found to be far less likely to be in employment either prior to having a baby or during the early years of their child's life than Indian, white or black mothers.

Many white and Indian mothers worked either full-time or part-time, as well as having a male earner in the household. A similar proportion of Black Caribbean mothers were also in employment but a higher proportion were lone mothers.

Differing patterns of parental employment have major impacts on the government's ambition of ending child poverty. One in five poor children are from ethnic minority communities and rates of poverty among Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are more than double the rate among white children.<sup>3</sup>

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### **Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were least likely to be in paid work during pregnancy.**

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- Just 13 per cent of Bangladeshi and 21 per cent of Pakistani mothers were employed during their pregnancy, compared with approximately 70 per cent of white and Black Caribbean mothers.
- Employed Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were the most likely to report their job finished prior to the birth of their child (27 per cent), with Indian mothers least likely to report this (16 per cent). Why they left their job was unknown.

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### **White, Indian and black mothers were most likely to be in continuous employment: having a job during pregnancy, taking leave and then returning to work.**

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- Nearly 2 in 5 white, Indian and Black Caribbean mothers had a continuous employment pattern from pregnancy to when their child was 3. Fewer than 1 in 10 (7 per cent) of Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers reported this work pattern.
- Almost half of Pakistani (49 per cent) and 64 per cent of Bangladeshi mothers reported never having been employed.
- Despite their low overall employment rates, 38 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers who were employed during pregnancy returned to paid work quickly, within three months. This compared with 35 per cent of white and 28 per cent of Black Caribbean mothers.

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**When their child was 3, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were least likely to be in employment, with families most likely to rely on a sole male wage earner.**

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- 15 per cent of Pakistani and 18 per cent of Bangladeshi mothers were in paid employment when their child was 3 years old, compared to 64 per cent of Indian, 60 per cent of Black Caribbean, 57 per cent of white and 46 per cent of Black African mothers.
- White (37 per cent) and Indian (33 per cent) mothers were the most likely to live in a 'one and a half earner partnership', where the father worked full-time and the mother part-time.
- The majority of Pakistani (60 per cent) and Bangladeshi (51 per cent) mothers were in two-parent households where only the father was employed, compared with 11 per cent of Black Caribbean mothers.
- In contrast, 48 per cent of Black Caribbean mothers and 37 per cent of Black African mothers were lone parents when their child was 3. Although a majority of these mothers were not in employment, black mothers' employment rate far exceeded that of Bangladeshi and Pakistani mothers as noted above.

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**Differences in working patterns between mothers from different ethnic minority groups were closely linked to the likelihood of living on a low income.**

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- 47 per cent of Bangladeshi and 40 per cent of Pakistani families were living on a low income when the child was 3.<sup>4</sup> This was probably linked to their high incidence of being outside the labour market, plus the fact that in the majority of these households, only the father was employed with a higher than average likelihood of working part-time and/or on special shifts.
- 40 per cent of Black Caribbean families were also on a low income, directly linked to the high incidence of lone parenthood amongst this group. Overall, 88 per cent of lone parents who were not in employment were living on a low income. However, 41 per cent of Black Caribbean households were also classified as high income.
- High incomes were most common among families where both parents worked. 57 per cent of Indian and white families were in the high income category compared with around 17 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi families.

## Do patterns of taking leave and working flexibly vary between parents from different ethnic groups?

Beyond variations in overall employment patterns, this study found that parents from different ethnic backgrounds were not equally able to balance work and family life.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers who were in employment were least likely to get additional maternity pay, possibly linked to the type of job and sector in which they were working. Pakistani and Bangladeshi working fathers were least likely to take paternity leave, but most likely to work part time or do shift work.<sup>5</sup>

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### **Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers who were in paid employment were the least likely to receive supplementary maternity pay from their employers.**

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- 2 in 5 Pakistani and Bangladeshi working mothers received extra maternity pay from their employers in addition to their statutory entitlement compared with over half of white and black mothers.
- A lower proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi working mothers took between 7 and 10 months maternity leave: 7 per cent compared with 27 per cent of Indian mothers.
- Similarly, fewer Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers working before their baby was born returned to work for the same employer: half compared with nearly two-thirds of Indian and black mothers.

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### **Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers were the least likely to take leave around the birth of their child.<sup>6</sup>**

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- 53 per cent of Bangladeshi and 46 per cent of Pakistani employed fathers did *not* take any leave around the time of their child's birth. This compares to 20 per cent of white and 21 per cent of Black Caribbean fathers.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi employed fathers were also the least likely to take paternity leave in combination with another form of leave, such as annual or sick leave. These differences are probably largely related to employment status, occupation and individual choice.

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### **Fathers' use of flexible working arrangements<sup>7</sup> differed noticeably by ethnicity.**

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- Excluding part time and shift work, Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers who worked had lower access to flexible working arrangements. However, they were more than 4 times more likely than average to work part time (34 per cent compared with 8 per cent), and twice as likely to do shift work e.g. evenings (43 per cent compared with 21 per cent overall). Such working arrangements may not be a positive choice for these fathers, instead reflecting their limited employment opportunities and concentration in certain types of work.
- In contrast, working at or from home occasionally or all the time, and 9 day fortnights/4½ day working weeks were primarily used by Indian and white fathers who were employed.

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## **Black mothers who were working had the lowest level of access to flexible working arrangements.<sup>7</sup>**

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- Black African working mothers were the least likely to have been offered flexible working at the point when their child was 9 or 10 months old: 19 per cent reported not having access to such arrangements, compared to 5 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi and 7 per cent of white mothers.
- A lower proportion of Black Caribbean and Black African working mothers were employed part-time when their child was aged 9 to 10 months or 3 years, compared with mothers from other ethnic groups.
- 6 in 10 black mothers felt they spent enough time with their 9 or 10 month old child, compared to over 7 in 10 Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and white mothers, although this gap narrowed by the time the child was 3. Views towards the amount of time spent with their child were closely related to employment status: a higher proportion of mothers who worked full-time, compared with those who worked part-time or not at all, felt they did not spend enough time with their child.

## **Do patterns of childcare use and family time differ between parents of different ethnic groups?**

This study found variations in the way families from different ethnic groups cared for and spent time with their children.

Black and white mothers who were in work, were more likely to use formal childcare than Pakistani or Bangladeshi working mothers, who relied far more heavily on grandparent care.

The amount of time fathers spent with their children differed by ethnic background, with white fathers reporting most active involvement and Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers the least. Differences in the household division of labour and access to flexible working options may be important explanatory factors here.

Previous work by the EOC found that fathers from ethnic minority groups were less likely to feel confident about their capacity to care for their children and more likely to perceive their role in the family as being primarily about earning a wage.<sup>8</sup>

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## **Patterns of childcare use by working mothers differed between ethnic groups.**

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- Black Caribbean (39 per cent) and white (38 per cent) working mothers were the most likely to use formal childcare when their child was aged 9 to 10 months, compared to 14 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi working mothers.
- Over half of South Asian working mothers – Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi – used grandparent care (57 per cent) compared with 45 per cent of white mothers.

- 55 per cent of Black Caribbean mothers in employment paid for childcare compared to 18 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers who were in paid work.
- Black Caribbean working mothers were the least likely to use fathers to help with childcare responsibilities, reflecting their greater likelihood of being lone parents.

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### **Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers spent less time on daily activities with their young children than fathers from other ethnic backgrounds.**

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- Just over half (52 per cent) of white fathers reported reading with their child on a daily basis. This compares to 42 per cent of Indian, 39 per cent of black, 32 per cent of Bangladeshi and 31 per cent of Pakistani fathers.
- Around 9 in 10 white fathers reported putting their 3 year old child to bed at least once a week. 4 in 10 Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers reported that they put their young child to bed less often than once a week or not at all.
- 7 in 10 Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers felt they spent enough time with their 9 or 10 month old child, whereas a majority of white and other ethnic minority fathers did not feel this. However the gap between fathers of different ethnic backgrounds narrowed by the time their child was aged 3.

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### **Contact with, and support from, non-resident fathers differed by ethnicity.**

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- Where absent fathers were in contact with their 9 to 10 month old child, 4 out of 5 Black Caribbean mothers reported the father was very interested in his child, compared with two-thirds or fewer mothers from all ethnic groups.
- 2 out of 5 Black Caribbean lone mothers also reported the absent father had daily contact with his child, compared with less than a quarter of fathers where the mother was South Asian and 1 in 8 where she was Black African.
- Overall, 36 per cent of non-resident fathers paid maintenance for their 9 or 10 month old child. Black Caribbean lone mothers were twice as likely as Pakistani and Bangladeshi lone mothers to report that non-resident fathers paid maintenance (44 per cent compared with 21 per cent).

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### **General health and maternal depression.**

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- A higher proportion of Black Caribbean mothers than mothers from other ethnic groups who worked during pregnancy reported at least one health problem.
- Approximately one third of White and Black African mothers said that their general health was excellent when their child was 9 or 10 months compared with around 1 in 5 Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers.
- The highest rates of depression when their child was 9 to 10 month of age were amongst Pakistani and Indian mothers (around 20 per cent) with much lower rates amongst mothers in other ethnic groups.

## **So what are the lessons for policy makers?**

This research suggests that policy makers must avoid generalised strategies for supporting families from different ethnic backgrounds in the tough task of balancing

work and care. Policy solutions must be subtle and sophisticated, targeting the particular contexts and challenges facing different ethnic groups.

Significant variations exist in rates of mother employment, father employment, and working patterns between different ethnic groups. For example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers are less likely to be in paid work, tending to rely on a sole male earner. Across other ethnic groups the division of labour – in both paid and unpaid work – is remarkably heterogeneous. Take up of maternity leave and pay, paternity leave and formal childcare also vary accordingly.

Some of these differences are rooted in the socio-economic trends or qualification levels of Britain's different ethnic groups. Others, perhaps, can be traced to cultural preferences about working and caring. However there is also evidence of a real 'ethnic minority penalty' too.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are not only less likely to be in employment overall, those who *are* have less access to maternity support or options for flexible working. These can be self-reinforcing phenomena. A recent Equal Opportunities Commission report found that Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women with similar qualifications and aspirations for work as white women find it harder to get a job or to progress in their career.<sup>9</sup>

The relatively high numbers of Black mothers who are lone parents and not in paid work suggests access to affordable, high quality childcare is a key issue. Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers reported having the least access to certain flexible working options, although they were much more likely to be employed part time or on shift work.

## Policy recommendations

### ➡ **Maternity and paternity support.**

The MCS surveys found wide variations by ethnicity in parents' access to maternity and paternity pay and leave. Statutory maternity leave and pay entitlements have increased since the surveys were undertaken, and employed fathers now have the right to take statutory paid paternity leave. However, the low level of statutory pay may continue to be a barrier, especially for ethnic minority mothers and fathers on low incomes as their employers are less likely to top up the rate. To promote employment and to make sure all mothers and fathers benefit from quality time with their new baby, we want to see:

- Specific steps to inform mothers and fathers from ethnic minority backgrounds about their rights to maternity and paternity leave and pay, including information made available in a range of languages and formats.
- An active campaign to encourage more ethnic minority fathers to take paternity leave.
- Greater financial support to enable low paid mothers and fathers to take their full entitlement to paid maternity and paternity leave.
- Entitlement for paternity leave and pay extended to self-employed fathers, particularly benefiting Indian and Pakistani fathers who are more likely than fathers in other ethnic groups to be self-employed.

- Rapid implementation of Government proposals to extend paid maternity leave to one year, and the implementation of additional paternity leave so that mothers and fathers can choose who takes leave between 6 and 12 months.

### ➡ **Flexible working**

Different ethnic groups currently experience varying degrees of access to and use of flexible working arrangements. Yet flexible options can be critical in assisting parents to balance their home and work responsibilities. We want to see:

- Steps taken to promote a wide range of flexible working options across different occupations – to fit in with the different patterns of working and caring in families from different ethnic groups.
- The right to request flexible working extended to all employees to provoke a fundamental shift in British working culture across the labour market.
- Public campaigns to raise awareness, in all communities, of the benefits for child well-being and development of fathers being actively involved in the care of their children.

### ➡ **Employment and skills**

Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers are far less likely to be in employment than Indian, white or black mothers. Rates of poverty amongst Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are double the rate for white children. We want to see:

- A tax and benefits system which supports working parents and does not penalise different family patterns.
- Promotion of careers advice and guidance along with routes into education and training for women in their 20s and 30s who may wish to enter employment for the first time when their children reach school age. This would be of particular benefit to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.
- Welfare to work policies and programmes to look at the whole family context, providing job search support to both partners in an unemployed couple, backed up by childcare support and wider availability of flexible work.

### ➡ **Access to services**

Mothers' employment and patterns of work vary by ethnicity, and are connected to the quality, availability and affordability of childcare. Maternal and paternal depression rates vary by ethnicity, and can adversely affect child outcomes. There is a positive connection between father involvement and child development – but in some ethnic groups, fathers are less involved when their child is very young. We want to see:

- Affordable, accessible childcare which recognises the specific needs of different ethnic communities and is actively promoted within them.
- Wider employment of men and women from ethnic minority backgrounds in children's and family services to make these services more accessible to all communities.
- Early diagnosis and treatment for ethnic minority mothers and fathers with depression to reduce the negative impact of parental depression upon children's development.



- Recognition by health, education and childcare services of the need to involve and consult with ethnic minority mothers and fathers about matters relating to the development and well-being of their child.

### ➡ **Lone parents**

There is a wide variation in patterns of lone parenthood between ethnic groups. The involvement of non-resident fathers in their children's lives also varies by ethnicity.

We want to see:

- Access to relationship support for ethnic minority mothers and fathers to improve relationships between the parents and contribute to children's longer term emotional and economic well-being.

### ➡ **Research and information**

To ensure that public policy keeps pace with the changing nature of British society, we need:

- More sophisticated research and information about the growing diversity of ethnic communities in Britain, reflecting recent patterns of migration.
- To take a gendered perspective in any research and statistical analysis so that differences and similarities between women and men both within and between different ethnic groups, are apparent.

***The EOC acknowledges the contribution of Graeme Cooke and Lauren Edwards to this text.***

<sup>1</sup> Rees, P. and Parsons, J. (2006) *Socio-demographic scenarios for children*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2005) *Birth Statistics 2004*. Series FM1 Number 3.

<sup>3</sup> Harker, L. (2006) *Delivering on child poverty: what would it take? A Report for the Department for Work and Pensions*. Available at: [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Income was defined as: Low, up to £11,000 per year; Medium, between £11,001 and £22,000 per year; High, greater than £22,001 per year.

<sup>5</sup> In this study "flexible working" was defined as any of the following: part-time working; job-sharing; flexible working hours; working at home occasionally or all the time; special shifts; nine-day fortnights or four and a half day working weeks; or term-time only contracts.

<sup>6</sup> This study took place before the introduction of paid paternity leave in 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Flexible working arrangements include: part-time working, job-sharing, flexible working hours, working at or from home occasionally, working at or from home all the time, special shifts (e.g. evenings, school hours), 9-day fortnights/4.5 day working week, school term contracts.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, M., Vinter, L. and Young, V. (2005) *Dads and their babies: leave arrangements in the first year*. Working Paper Series No. 37. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.

<sup>9</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission (2007) *Moving on up? Report of the EOC's investigation into Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women and work*. Available at: [www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk)