



ANISSA^{UK}

**barriers to
employment for
women from ethnic
minority communities**





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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“... if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.”

(Thatcher, M, 1975, as cited in Microsoft Office & Bookshelf, 1995)

This research proposal has been supported by B-EQUAL which is a project part funded by the European Social Fund and is in partnership with Bradford JobCentre Plus to look at ways in which to eliminate barriers to employment for women from ethnic minority communities. There are a number of initiatives that have been funded in Bradford to deal with issues of unemployment and various perspectives have emerged to identify areas where they are particular disadvantages. One of the key points is the barriers Asian women face in employment, therefore, the area this particular study will look into will be related to barriers within employment.

Even though the research is addressing barriers in employment for South Asian women, for some South Asian Women it must be understood not gaining employment was not a necessity but a choice. It also has to be understood in the context of this report that for many south Asian women, like women from other communities, gaining employment was not seen as a priority, and made the decision to stay at home, a choice they make freely. For some of the women who had education, experience or the opportunities to work, chose not to do so.



CHAPTER TWO

AIMS

Through this research project it is hoped that we will discover connections between the different aspects of South Asian women's lives and their experiences within employment and the wider environment, the environment which affects their employment opportunities.

The aim of the research was to find out: -

- Whether social class can affect life chances?
- If ethnic minority women experience difficulties within in the work arena or from outside the working environment?
- If education makes a difference to job opportunities?
- Did they believe that they had experienced discrimination or were overlooked for promotion due to either gender or ethnicity?

The aim of the research is to collect as much information as (many interviews as) possible in the given time and within the resource constraints.



CHAPTER THREE

BRADFORD – HISTORY & MIGRATION

“I met a traveller from an antique land”

(Shelley, P, B, as cited in Leeson, E, 1987, p 332)

The city of Bradford had been the centre of the wool trade since the 18th century and until recently, wool dominated the local economy, even the engineering and chemical industries were associated with the wool trade by supplying the needs of the textile industry. Throughout the 19th century it was mainly a working class city structured around a low wage economy. The global impact of the wool trade also had its roots in the Colonies, emphasis on importing wool and reprocessing it for export, these contacts persisted into the mid- twentieth century.

Through the interaction of labour and migration we saw the movement of people from many different countries; different cultures and religious groups came and settled in Bradford. The Irish and Germans migrated to the city prior to the Second World War, followed by the Poles, Ukrainians and the Italians in the 1940s. The 1950s and 1960s saw the arrivals from the Indian sub-continent, the Commonwealth, the South Asians. The migration of South Asians according to Anwar can be further explained in terms of colonial links and political freedom. Once a tradition of migration was formed then this would act as a social force drawing people into migrating even if migrating was not economically necessary.

The different patterns of migration reflect the dispersal in employment opportunities. In the 1950s and the 1960s both Indian men and women came to Britain along with a few Pakistani single men. Due to the introduction of new legislation to restrict the entry of people from entering Britain, there was an influx



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of people coming into Britain to 'beat the ban'. These people often came as single men and were later joined by mothers, wives and children. The East African Asians came under very different circumstances. Due to conflicts within Uganda the African Asians were forced to flee the oppressive regime of the military leader Ide Amin, during the 1970's. According to Brah (1992), who draws our attention to the difference between the South Asians? Those from India often came from the independent proprietor peasant class, while those from East Africa were mainly from middle class families.

Different push and pull factors, reasons behind these people migrating came into existence during the migration. Push factors apply to all migrants in different ways. The biggest push factor was due to the dislocation caused by the partition of 1947 and the building of the Mangla dam in the 1960's, taking this into consideration it is estimated that 50 per cent of Pakistanis in Britain are from Azad Kashmir and most of these are from one particular district of Mirpur. Even so the Mirpuris provided a niche in the engineering rooms of the British merchant navy. The acute shortage of labour after the Second World War two meant that those already within the chain of migration were able to call members of their families to join them in the UK.

South Asian is a term used to describe people from the Indian sub-continent, people from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. All these people are referred to as Asians, which is a mistake. People who have come over from Kenya or Uganda are also called Asians due to the colour of their skin. The East African Asians are twice migrants, originally migrating from India and working then settling in East Africa, to then being forced (in many cases) to migrate again, this time to Britain.

The majority of South Asian women came as wives and daughters, and usually came after the men folk. These women were dependent on their husbands and



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fathers, which leads to the continuing male dominance of these men and the continuing dependency that the women showed. This was further encouraged through the British immigration laws, which have constructed women as 'dependants' Bhavnani (1994) refers to how the immigration laws have the effect of *"reinforcing their position as household workers..."* (Ibid, 1994, p.23). What became clear was the strong patriarchal society that these people were accustomed and to which they continued to adhere. Cultural and religious ties strengthened the patriarchal way of life and a new era of revivalism of one's religion became another way of maintaining traditional cultural beliefs, and using religion as a tool to maintain these values (Anwar, S, 1999).



CHAPTER FOUR

ASIAN WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT, WOMEN FROM THE COMMUNITIES

“It is always an impertinence for a man to claim to write about a community of men, whether his own or another. He cannot avoid talking about them as if they were objects under a microscope, and this denies them their subjectivity and dignity. Further, he cannot avoid making general observations about them, and that involves denying them their uniqueness. Such general observations again have an air of unreality about them. While they might describe some members of a society accurately, they never fit all.

(Parekh, as cited in Murphy, D, 1985, p. 3)

Britain is an increasingly ethnically diverse society. Around one in every ten people is from an ethnic minority background. On average people from the ethnic minorities are more youthful, this means that the proportion of the total working population from ethnic minorities will rise over time.

Wilson (1978) wrote ‘*Finding a voice*’, one of the earlier accounts of the lives and experiences of South Asian women in Britain. Looking at South Asian women, one is able to see how this group faces inequalities. In general researchers ignore these women; if reference has been made to them it is usually as an afterthought. The experiences of women in employment, the oppressive and



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racist behavior experienced can be interpreted as alienating. Asian women are some of the worst off workers within Britain, according to Wilson. The impact on the South Asian women on migrating was a shock in more than one way. Immigrant workers having the, poorest and lowest status in every social sphere. Low incomes, insecurity, bad housing, social problems; problems which were characteristics of nineteenth century European proletariat Anwar, S, (1999). This in turn classifies these workers as a separate class, a new sub-proletariat and within this regime Asian women had to adapt.

“we may therefore speak of two strata within the working class; the indigenous workers, with generally better conditions and the feeling of no longer being right at the bottom of society, form the higher stratum. The immigrants, who are the most underprivileged and exploited group of society, form the lower stratum.

(Castles and Kosack, 1985, p. 477)

The lack of adequate information of South Asian women in employment has been the idea of culture imposing restrictions on these women, without realizing cultures are not static but forever changing and developing within the environment they develop in. Many changes have taken place, some for the better moving from a poor environment to a financially sound environment. Helping the South Asian to gain status and a stronger identity within their own communities. However, they still have maintained their cultural ties and the growth of religious awareness, not in one particular religious group but across all religions.

The experience of the South Asian women within the labour market is distinct to that of their white counterparts, as it is from both black and white men. However, there are differences within the different groups, *“Factors such as race, class, age...”* (Bhavnani, 1994, p. viii).



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To gain a better understanding of the dialogues amongst policy developers it is important to look at the fundamental changes that are prevalent in South Asian families.

Women from the communities

There were a number of key factors that we had to take into consideration, such as those women that worked from home, (home workers) from the current research carried out by the Inland Revenue there is a large percentage of South Asian women that work from home who were and still are in many circumstances unaware of the law on minimum wage. The minimum wage stands at £4.10 an hour. According to the law the following groups must get minimum wage e.g. agency workers, home workers, piece workers, commission workers, disabled workers and workers from outside the UK. (Department of trade & Industry 2002).

For many women they were unaware of the law and as a result received much less, which in turn left them feeling unable to challenge their employers because it was an unaccounted income as no tax or national insurance was paid. These women felt they did not earn the threshold to make a declaration of income or were unaware of the employment law or their rights. Many of the women worked as machinists, supplying the middle man with the goods to sell onto bigger stores. Other women stuffed envelopes and Christmas boxes. The working condition for these women at home often meant the whole household would get involved. If the work was not completed they didn't get paid, if mistakes were made the cost was deducted from their wage. In one case we came across a woman who received pound for every five hundred envelopes filled. For the home workers there was a great lack of understanding on issues such as working condition, insurance and rights. This was reflected in the price war the big stores have over goods made by these women (*Discussion with women Groups in the Girdlington area, Bradford 2005*)



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We looked at the different make up of women from the different communities and were able to break down the different communities that the women came from.

- Women from India (Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, and other groups)
- Women from Pakistan (Muslim, Patans and others)
- Women from Bangladeshi (Syhelti and other)

We consulted with employers in the district especially those from statutory bodies such as the police, education, local authorities and private employers. The group met initially, and discussed how each organisation was combating the inequalities within its workforces; especially those working towards targeting disadvantaged communities. However to reach those women that are on the peripheral of the job market, the finding reflected the current political climate and the vision of equality for which many of the women who were consulted felt they were far removed from the reality of equalities due to gender, ethnicity, age and languages barriers. Some of the areas of the research that could have been developed subsequently received less time.



CHAPTER FIVE

WHY BOTHER WITH EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The race Relation Act 1976 and Race Relation (Amendment) Act 2000 does not offer any guarantee on issues of equality, the Code of practice entwined with positive duties has allowed for it again to redressed the issues of equality and how we can achieves our goal. However the introduction of positive duties for the public sector alone in the Race Relations (Amendment Act) 2000 has implications for the issues of equality to move further into the area where boundaries which on the onset where created to house the needs of the while male able bodies is now being challenged.

Commission for Racial Equality (2001)

Demographic changes have shown a reduction in the number of young people during the 1990s from the white communities, while there was an increase in the number of young people from minority ethnic groups in many major cities. This has lead to many companies recognising that a more diverse workforce mean a larger pool of available skills, such as more than one way to resolve a problem and also having the range of management styles or solutions to problems can be diverse as well. Yet, on the other hand we see *meritocracy*, which is often viewed as an ideal module of recognising and promoting people for their skills and abilities and their contribution to the organisations success. For many Asian women felt they were often overlooked for promotion in favour of none Asian worker.

Even though the current recession has masked skill shortage, still nothing productive has been introduced to reduce the barriers to employment. People



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from minority ethnic communities are proportionately more likely to live in deprived areas than other communities. It has been highlighted by the Social Exclusion Unit that 70% of people from ethnic minorities live in the 88 most deprived neighbourhoods in Britain. They are more likely to be from larger households on lower incomes and coming into contact with the following: -

- Direct and indirect institutional racism:
- Poor access to services and information, or unsuitable services
- Difficulty arising from difference in culture, religion and language



CHAPTER SIX

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

“Dialectic, as such, explains nothing, proves nothing, predicts nothing, and causes nothing to happen. Rather, dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world. As part of this, it includes how to organize a reality viewed in this manner for purposes of study and how to present the the results of what one finds to others, most of whom do not think dialectically.”

(Ollman, 1993, p.10)

The following chapter will look at the methods undertaken to carry out the methodology used.

Much research has been carried out to gain a better understanding of Asian women and their participation in the labour market. The study we carried out has used both quantitative and qualitative information. At the initial stage we call on specific groups and those individuals whom were involved in some capacity in either working with South Asian women or offering guidance in careers and employment.

We sent out a hundred questionnaires of which seventy were completed and returned by the women form the South Asian communities. Along with the questionnaires we also had informal semi-structured group meetings, where discussions would take place providing more in-depth information. Campbell and Fiske (1959) have been referred to as advocating the use of multiple research methods, often referred to as multi-method, convergent methodology as well as



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triangulation. The use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, *“in the validation process to ensure that the variance reflected that of the trait and not of the method”*. (Jick, 1983, p. 136). Resulting in the use of two or more methods of enquiry provides a more valid response, if the results from the different models show similar findings (Anwar, S, 1999). The women we aim to question and interview were those from the communities which were deemed hard to reach.

The analysis begins with establishing contributing factors associated with the labour market such as age, education attainment, and marital status including the economic activity of their partners, number and age of dependant children. , Also incorporating the needs of the extended families such as the elder members that may need care. The survey also included whether the women we questioned reached their education attainment in this country or from abroad, and whether they were able to carry on with their goals and careers. With our own knowledge we were able to reach those women that don't have the opportunities to take part in research, due to the mere fact living in communities whereby they are constricted by the structure of their environment. The lives of ethnic minority women are part of social processes that are subject to contradictions and mediations.

As with every method of data collection questionnaires have their advantages and disadvantages. The questionnaire can be seen as a list of pre-set questions. This method of research can provide a large number of respondents as opposed to the qualitative method. The use of the questionnaire in this situation was simply to ascertain the ages, educational background and other simple questions,



CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS

*“Condemned to Hope’s delusive mine,
As on we toil from day to day,
By sudden blasts, or slow decline,
Our social comforts drop away.”*

(Johnson, S, as cited in Leeson, E, 1987, p 240)

Findings – it was felt that the socio economics level of an advance country like the UK didn’t really translate into better employment opportunities of Asian women to gain better employment on the same par as their white counter parts

The findings from the research project ‘Asian Women and Barriers to Employment’ are as follows. To reach the women that are on the peripheral of the job market, the finding reflected the current political climate and the vision of equality for which many of the women were consulted felt were often far removed form most areas of employment or any initiative to promote equality in the employment market. Within the findings quotes given by the women themselves have been used and are in bold to provide a clearer picture of their experiences and a more precise argument to this project.

What must be looked at are certain issues that hadn’t really been addressed being a first generation or a second-generation migrant may affect the response to questions asked in the interviews. First generation migrants can be seen as the first migrants from South Asia, while second-generation migrants are those South Asians who are born in Britain yet their parents are from South Asia. The length of time an individual has lived in Britain can also influence the response to



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questions, as might the age of the respondent. As referred to earlier East African Asians are twice migrants, migrating once to East Africa then migrating once again. One could easily be mistaken by believing that all South Asians consist of one homogenous group of people, however this would be a mistake (Anwar, S, 1999).

The questionnaires were completed by a random selection of women, women who are seen as difficult to reach. Women working in the shops, or just walking to the park, it would have been quite simple to have gone into any community centre and have the forms completed, but after a long hard thought we decided to target those women who were unlikely to be asked to complete a questionnaire. The age of the women ranged from under 16 to over 50, a large selection of women of differing ages.

For some the questionnaires had to be completed for them because of the lack of English which was a foreign language and there was a shortage of English language classes. 40 of the women's mother tongue was Urdu, Punjabi, Pushto or Hinko, just some of the languages spoken in Pakistan. 20 were of Indian origin, 9 Bangladeshi and 1 other, each having their own mother tongue, so for many of the women who did not have a good command of the English language. This was a common problem with several of the women who felt if they were to learn the language then they would be in a better position in finding gain employment.

Asking the women about their marital status? The answers given were 30 of the women were single, 18 married while 3 were separated and 15 divorced, the remaining 4 were widowed. This was an important question, believing that the answers could have a knock on effect with some of the other questions. The question 'Where do you live?' was such an example. 29 women answered alone or as a single parent, 15 with their husbands or partner and 20 of the women



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lived with the extended family while 5 answered other. **“Some women believe the structure of Asian families often means the girls are restricted in their movements and the boys have more freedom, however for a lot of the women its felt that these boys don’t have that much freedom either”**. For some of the women **“they felt they were always pre-judged”** and how the **“image that people have of Asian women is that of an oppressive woman with very little control in their lives”**.

Education is generally believed to be important in gaining employment, the better qualified you are the better prospects will be available to you. Educational qualifications the group of women gained ranged from a NVQ to 2 women gaining a doctorate, a wide selection of qualification. Even so ‘for some women having the right qualifications still meant that some of the respondents were unable to find a job’. **“Some went as far as to state they felt racism and sexism were the key factors in why they were unable to gain employment to match their education”**. Another woman said how assumptions were made about Asians and how they were typecast. Level of discrimination which was the hardest barriers they found difficult to deal with as one woman that echoed the voice of many. **“There are hardly any promotional opportunities for Asian women to get into better paid jobs,”** said one of the women.

For some women who felt pressures from home were affecting their education and employment prospects, expecting to find work near home, in a school or a doctor’s surgery having to **“work within the school in their area working as dinner ladies or class room assistance.”** Other pressures were often from extended families, when the woman was **“expected to be at the beck and call of the family”**.

Again this question leads to other questions being asked. For instance about their education attainments From the 61 women who had gained some form of



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educational qualifications 18 of these said they had gained their qualifications from outside of Britain. The encouragement or lack of encouragement received as well as advice given at schools and opportunities that were available to these women were criticised. Writers such as Bhavanani (1994) have criticised the teachers and careers services for their lack of guidance that had been given to these women, when at school. “Pakistani girls were marginalised because we were stereotyped, thinking all Pakistani girls get married at 16”. Along with teachers parents too must be criticised for their lack of participation in their daughters’ education. Several women felt the **“parents didn’t encourage the female member enough, and yet encouragement was always given to the boys according to our participants”**. For some of the younger women employment was not encouraged and if the women did work then parents preferred the women to work near home and **“not much time for personal or career development due to family pressure to get married”**. Research carried out by the Cathie Marsh Centre For Census and Survey Research Manchester (2000) through their ‘Future of work Programme’ highlighted the increase and uptake of higher **qualifications amongst young South Asian women and particularly those of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi women (Dale et al, 2000)**. Even so the research was also able to show that those with the higher qualifications have higher rates of unemployment than unqualified women, from the white and Indian communities.

Job satisfaction was and is an important factor for these women, for some a job was a job, while for others there was no satisfaction; **“Racism is about employing your own kind and that is what happens”** when working with some agencies the white women would get a permanent job with the contracted firm, whereby the Asian women were kept on the agencies temporary list, which also meant they didn’t get sick pay or holiday pay. One example was when a woman told us that she was always on time did her work, but never got a permanent job yet a white woman who worked with her was always late, took long breaks and



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was interviewed and given the job, when the Asian woman asked why she was not given the job after the interview she was told she was not a suitable candidate, this led to feelings of not being involved in the decision making process. As one woman told us **“It was even felt that employers would judge the women and decide on their capabilities without really consulting with the women, always happened to the Asian women”**. The lack of promotion meant there was no or very little satisfaction in the job **“some found their job not challenging enough”**, one woman felt there was a **“lack of opportunity for training or a better paid job”**. The lack of satisfaction and often the lack of money that went with the job left some of the women needing to get another job, a second job often consisted of working from home either sewing or selling items like jewellery. However, there were those who **“found their job satisfactory but didn’t like the people or the environment they worked in”**. Since 7/11 people are more aware of Islam, but for the wrong reasons, unfortunately some of the women had felt **“religion was one of the barriers,... It was felt that there was a strong element of Islamaphobia”**. In one case a young woman who worked for a solicitors firm in Yorkshire and, when she decided that she wanted to wear the hijab, the correct definition for covering the woman’s entire body (Abdulsalam, 1998), this was frowned upon by her employers and after a few months she was asked to leave on the account that **“it made the clients feel uneasy”**, this was four years before September 11th. She never pursued the issue by taking legal action against her employers; she just didn’t know what she could do.

Childcare is a problem for many women irrelevant of ethnicity. Childcare was often taken for granted by many young mothers from South Asian families, and for some of them they felt this was the onus not to work too far from home, **“this was due to the fact that most working places were too far to travel childcare was a problem”**. Many view Asian families living with the extended family but that has drastically changed as more and more families are moving out of the



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extended families and into independent living as separate units. Once, what was the norm with large families living together where in-laws, their sons and their wives and children would live together, for security and peace of mind, Where the son and his wife would look after 'his' parents and the grandparents would look after the grandchildren, **"The displacement of families' loyalties was seen as another hindrance, in barriers to employment."** the extended family appears to be fast fading out

The other issues the research highlighted were the issues of a spouse coming to the UK to join their partners. For some of the women who spoke of having to deal with trying to balance the independence of working with the needs of the spouse these **"women felt more confident and yet for some the men the change in gender role was difficult to cope with, such as when a spouse male came from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, and having to acknowledge the wife working and has more confidence since she has lived most of her life, and yet his role becomes confused since in the structure of most families it's the male who works and not the wife"**

For the 6 women who chose not to work and who were not looking for employment believed that staying at home had its own rewards and were content with their lives.

Barriers to employment were the key issue of this research proposal but asking the women what they felt were the barriers within their own situations resulted in a varied response. The few quotes that have been used in the findings can all relate to barriers that were, have and still are experiencing. Ageism, racism and particularly the stereotyping of Asian women was seen as one of the focal points of most of the women that completed the questionnaires.



CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways;
the point, however, is to change it.”*

(Marx, as cited in Microsoft Office & Bookshelf, 1995)

Achieving our aims

There are many reasons why Asian women face barriers in the employment market, one of the key points that came across was the lack of training, skill enhancement courses available in their local areas. The employment market contributes to the feeling of isolation, marginalised and unsupported or even discouraged due to the fact they don't have any formal education or training.

Whether social class can affect life chances? A majority of the respondents or their parents migrated to the UK in the 60s and 70s, most of the families came from poor rural communities with little or no qualification, which put them at the bottom of the social scale of employment in the UK, for many of the women in our research the majority inspired to better educate themselves and therefore would be able to improve the lives of their children's for a better future.

For the majority of women their experiences within the work arena left little doubt that racism and sexism were prevalent in their work environment with very little being done to make any difference. For others it was hard getting a job and once in employment it was even harder to deal with the ignorance and intolerance they experienced.



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Education would have made a difference but for some of the women we spoke to left school at 15 or 16 to get married, unable to complete their education or training. For those wanting to return to employment after marriage realised they didn't have the relevant skills needed, and due to family and childcare commitments were unable to pursue training or gain further and relevant qualifications therefore took jobs which didn't inspire them.

Lack of promotional opportunities directly related to their race and gender, but most felt it was the race issues that prevented them from gaining better employment or promotions.

It's the antidote of life that becomes data when researched, in conclusion to the report and to the comments given by the women themselves that tells us we have a long way to go. The fact that so little resources are made available to meet the needs of South Asian women. Resources such as basic employment rights training in community centres and schools and in their languages. For others, women wanted to develop their language and writing skills, and confidence training.

Childcare, the culture of putting your baby into a nursery so you can work, or go to college or university was not even a concept ten years ago, due to the very nature of Asian families, for them it was a collective way to nurture children. It is only recently that South Asian mothers have started using nurseries as a mechanism to work or gain further qualifications. The issue of equality for most people goes beyond skin colour, language spoken and your sex.



Recommendations

- Well co-ordinated response to the needs through strategic coordinated partnerships between local organisations, and to work towards identifying the needs of Asian women and the barriers they face when trying to gain employment.
- Well developed training on issues of employment rights and relating matters.
- Further investments into training and employment opportunities within communities
- High quality of centres and courses with crèche facilities
- Further training in basic computer and English language skills
- To develop mentoring and placement action plan for those wanting to return to work
- Long term funding programme would help to meet realistic goals instead of challenging them to succeed 'against the odds'
- Differentiate and acknowledge the social class structure within the South Asian communities.



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Links

CCSR, Ethnic Differences in Employment Patterns: Gender & Generational Change
www.ccsr.ac.uk/research/ethnic.htm

Cabinet-Office, Ethnic Minorities in the Labour Market www.strategy.gov.uk

Home-Office, Religious Discrimination in England & Wales www.homeoffice.gov.uk

ONS, Office of National Statistics www.statistics.gov.uk

DfES, Department for Education & Skills www.dfes.gov.uk

CRE, Commission of Racial Equality www.cre.gov.uk

EOC, Equal Opportunities Commission www.eoc.org.uk

CASAS, Centre of Applied South Asian Studies www.art.man.ac.uk/CASAS/

SEDI, Social Enterprise Development Initiative <http://www.sedi.org.uk/>



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