

Young Caribbean men and the labour market: a comparison with other ethnic groups

It has long been known that people from ethnic minorities suffer disadvantage in employment, but recent work has shown a gap opening between different minority ethnic groups. Richard Berthoud, of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, used 11 years of the Labour Force Survey to focus intensely on the experiences of one group with an exceptionally high risk of unemployment – young Caribbean men. The analysis compares young Caribbean men with those from selected ethnic groups. The study found:

- f** Young Caribbean men were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as young white men. They also had lower earnings.
- f** Young Caribbean men's qualifications were not much worse than those of their white equivalents, though there were strong signs that they may be falling behind. Other minority groups were obtaining significantly *higher* qualifications than either whites or Caribbeans.
- f** Caribbean men were much less likely to be living with a partner or children than members of other ethnic groups, especially those of South Asian origin. Although 'unattached' men generally have poorer employment prospects than those with family commitments, this influence was no stronger for Caribbeans than for other groups.
- f** On average, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men were more likely to be unemployed than Caribbeans. But individual characteristics had less effect on the prospects of this group than on the others studied.
- f** The jobs and earnings of Indian men were very similar to those of white men.
- f** African men suffered severe disadvantage *in spite of* educational success: an African graduate was seven times more likely to be unemployed than a white graduate.
- f** The analysis revealed three broad groups:
 - whites and Indians, with a fairly consistent and relatively low risk of unemployment;
 - Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, with a consistently high risk of unemployment;
 - Caribbeans and Africans, with a high average risk of unemployment but very strong variation within the group depending on individual characteristics.

Britain's ethnic minorities have experienced disadvantage in employment for many years. But a gap has been opening between different minority groups. This study concentrates on the labour market experiences of young Caribbean men in comparison with men from other minority ethnic groups and with white men.

Social characteristics of different groups

Education and qualifications

Members of all minority ethnic groups were more likely to stay on at school after the minimum leaving age than white teenagers. The proportion remaining in education was outstandingly high among African men and women - nearly three times as many were still at college at the age of 20, compared with whites. Indians also had high staying-on rates. Among the younger members of the sample, Caribbeans were rather more likely to stay on at school after 16 than their white counterparts, but the difference was small, especially for boys, and had disappeared by the age of 20. Thus young Caribbean men were at least as likely to continue their studies as white men, and were not disadvantaged by high drop-out rates. But they were well behind some other minority groups in this respect.

However, comparing the qualifications achieved by those who stayed on at each stage, Caribbean men required half a year longer in the education system, on average, to achieve the same qualifications as white men. African and Indian men required a full additional year. Pakistani and Bangladeshi men had to

study two additional years to obtain their qualifications, compared with white men. Thus people from ethnic minorities might experience educational disadvantage in the sense of obtaining lower qualifications than they might have expected, given the investment they had put in.

Africans and Indians were nevertheless the best qualified ethnic groups. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were the least qualified. In some respects, Caribbeans were on a par with whites, but fewer had degrees than any other group. Fewer Caribbean than white men had A levels (see Figure 1). The trend suggested that the proportions of white and Caribbean men achieving A levels has been falling behind that of other ethnic minorities; and that young Caribbean men's prospects are especially bleak.

Home and family

As a preliminary to analysing young men's family position, the study looked at that of young women. Most South Asian young women were married, and many also had children. Hardly any South Asians were single mothers, compared with 10 per cent of white mothers, 25 per cent of African mothers and 50 per cent of Caribbean mothers. There was a strong trend over the years towards more white and Caribbean women becoming single mothers. Within the Caribbean community, those born or educated in Britain were most likely to be single mothers, rather than those who had migrated as adults.

More than half of young men from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds were married and had children; while more than half of African and Caribbean young men had neither a partner nor a child living with them. There was a strong trend over the years for an increasing number of young men to be 'unattached'.

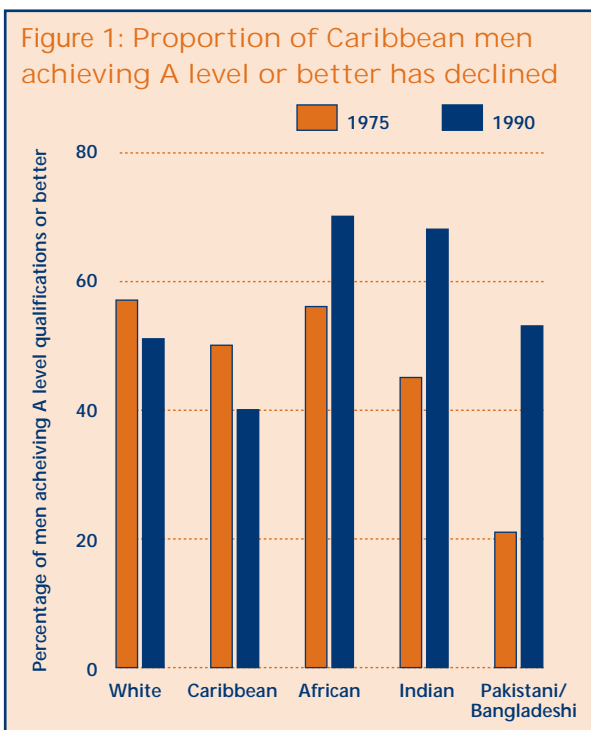
Caribbean men were much more likely than any other group to be in a mixed-ethnic relationship. Half of Caribbean men who were born in Britain and who lived with a partner were living with a white partner. The equivalent figure for Caribbean women was one-third. Both figures have been increasing over the years. But whereas Caribbean women's choice of a white partner was quite strongly related to their own educational qualifications, this was not the case among men. As a result, there were roughly equal numbers of men and women graduates in mixed relationships; but far more unqualified Caribbean men than unqualified women had adopted that family form.

Experience in the labour market

Unemployment

Only one in eight white men in their 20s were unemployed. But the proportion was as high as one in three among young African men. Ethnic groups

Figure 1: Proportion of Caribbean men achieving A level or better has declined



divided in two, with Indians' unemployment rate only a little higher than whites', while Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis experienced almost as much unemployment as Africans.

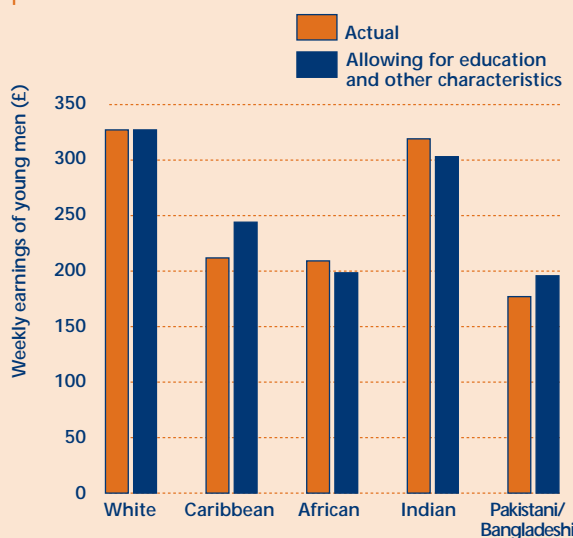
Age

In all ethnic groups, unemployment was much higher among teenage men and declined steadily with age until a slight upturn after age 40. More than 40 per cent of 16- and 17-year-olds from minority ethnic groups were unemployed, compared with only 18 per cent of whites. High teenage unemployment rates were closely associated with the lack of qualifications obtained by early leavers, though the chance of unqualified men being in work did improve slightly over the years after they left school.

Migration

The study used multivariate analysis techniques to identify the effects of a series of factors, disentangling the potential overlaps between them. Thus, for example, comparison between migrants and non-migrants has taken account of the fact that in any ethnic group, migrants tended to be older than those who had been born in Britain. Among Caribbean young men (in their 20s and 30s) those who had been born and/or educated in Britain were more likely to be unemployed than (the small number of) those who had migrated at the age of 16 or later. This was true only of Caribbeans. Among Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, migrants had higher unemployment rates. In other ethnic groups, migrants and non-migrants were very similar.

Figure 2: Caribbean, African and Pakistani/Bangladeshi young men have less earning power than white or Indian men



Based on multivariate analysis of men aged 20 to 39. Weekly earnings include zero earnings of those who were unemployed

The effect of qualifications

Young men's educational qualifications had a substantial effect on their risk of unemployment. Caribbean men were always nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts with similar qualifications. But graduate members of the other minority groups were more disadvantaged (relative to white graduates) than those with lesser qualifications (relative to less qualified whites).

Among Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, young men who had spent longer obtaining their particular level of qualifications than they 'should' have done had higher rates of unemployment than those who had obtained equivalent qualifications more quickly.

Vulnerability to the economic climate

Annual variations in the overall rate of unemployment affected Caribbeans and Africans more than whites. Indians' unemployment tracked whites' rates quite closely, but Pakistanis' and Bangladeshis' risk of being out of work varied much less over the economic cycle (remaining consistently high). Regional unemployment rates also had much less impact on Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

Household circumstances

Young men who did not live with either a partner or children had relatively high unemployment rates, especially if they lived alone. In most ethnic groups, the risk was lowest for those who had a partner but no children. These variations (calculated after controlling for factors such as age and education) were widest among white men, and were no stronger for Caribbeans than for other minorities. The rate of unemployment among Caribbean men with partners was the same, whether the partner was white or black.

Overview

The two variables which appeared to have the most influence on a young man's job prospects were his education and the broader impact of the economic climate. The former was strongest for whites and weakest for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis; the latter was strongest for Caribbeans and Africans and weakest (again) for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. The analysis suggested three broad groups:

- whites and Indians, with unemployment risks which were fairly consistent and relatively low;
- Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, with unemployment risks which were consistently high;
- Caribbeans and Africans, whose unemployment rates varied very strongly according to individual circumstances and characteristics. These groups were polarised: although their average risk of

unemployment was high, some men – those with degrees, living with partners (but without children), living in a prosperous region, living in a time of economic boom - were not especially disadvantaged, while others – those with no qualifications, living alone, living in a depressed region, and in a time of economic slump - faced an exceptionally high risk.

Differences in earning power

Data on the salaries and wages of those in work suggested that young white and Indian men had better-paid jobs than other ethnic groups, followed by Caribbeans and Africans and then by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

In order to summarise the variations between ethnic groups, an estimate was made of each young man's current earnings, assuming he was earning the rate per hour for his ethnic group and occupation if he had a job, and zero if he was unemployed. The average can be interpreted as the overall earning power of a group, taking account of the risk of unemployment as well as the level of earnings. According to this overall measure, young Indian men were in almost exactly the same position as their white counterparts (see Figure 2). Young Caribbean and African men were close to each other, with an earning power less than two-thirds that of whites. Young Pakistani and Bangladeshi men had not much more than half of whites' earning power.

Africans' employment disadvantage was mainly attributable to lack of work, with a small component attributable to below-average earnings in jobs. Caribbeans' disadvantage was largely due to lack of work, with components also associated with occupation and with earnings. Pakistanis' and Bangladeshis' disadvantage was partly caused by lack of work, plus a small occupational handicap, but they were much more affected than other groups by low rates of pay.

Part of Caribbeans' disadvantage could be explained by lower levels of education (compared with whites) and by other characteristics, such as family structure and geographical location. However, young Caribbean men were still worse off than whites, even after taking account of these factors (see Figure 2). Pakistanis and Bangladeshis had the lowest levels of educational qualification, and this also partly explained their low earning power. Africans and Indians, though, had a better educational record than whites, and the measure of their disadvantage in employment actually increased after allowance had been made for the composition of these groups. In

fact, Africans had the lowest earning power of all, relative to what they might have expected.

About the study

The group under study represents a very small proportion of the population, and it was necessary to combine data from a series of 11 years of the Labour Force Survey. This provides information about 2,780 Caribbean men aged between 16 and 39, interviewed between 1985 and 1995. Data on earnings were derived from the Family Resources Survey. 'Caribbean' has been defined as the combination of the Census categories black-Caribbean and 'black other' on the grounds that most of the latter group's parents were of Caribbean origin. The sample of Africans has, however, been kept separate.

How to get further information

The full report, **Young Caribbean men and the labour market: A comparison with other ethnic groups** by Richard Berthoud, is published for the Foundation by YPS (1 899987 84 3, price £14.95 plus £2 p&p) as part of the Work and Opportunity series.