

CARING AND EARNING AMONG LOW-INCOME CARIBBEAN, PAKISTANI AND SOMALI PEOPLE

Low-income people from some ethnic minority groups experience particular challenges in balancing work and caring responsibilities. Existing policy does not respond effectively to this challenge, while employers need to do more to enable well-paid flexible working and eliminate discrimination in recruitment and progression.

Key points

- Discrimination is a key barrier preventing low-income ethnic minority people from balancing work and care. Good practice on reducing discrimination must be strengthened and expanded across public and private sector employers.
- Many Pakistani and Somali families are unaware of free childcare provision. Central and local government must better inform these communities of the availability and benefits of childcare.
- Benefit changes are likely to make it more difficult for low-income ethnic minorities to balance work and care. For example, 40 per cent of those affected by the benefit cap are ethnic minorities; if they move away from family they will lose a major source of childcare and caring support.
- There are not generic attitudes towards 'caring' within or across ethnic groups. Black Caribbean parents are most likely to take up formal childcare, but have concerns about formal care for older relatives. Somali and Pakistani parents were concerned about the cultural appropriateness of formal childcare, but did not feel the same about support for disabled children.
- As with the wider population, caring responsibilities were predominantly taken up by women. Gendered expectations remain a barrier to women's labour market participation.
- Increased demand for caring suggests there may be more jobs in future. There could be more targeted recruitment of and support for ethnic minority childminders and carers.
- Ethnic minorities are more likely to use informal caring, but policy does not adequately support this. Formal caring policy should also respond better to cultural needs of different groups to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

The research

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BACKGROUND

For most people, the two most important roles in life are caring for loved ones and working to earn a living. Over the past decades, more people have entered the labour market, while the proportion of those providing care has risen too. These developments create challenges for those seeking to 'balance' work and care, and are likely to continue given underlying demographic changes and developments in the labour market.

This research approaches this challenge from the perspective of poverty and ethnicity. That is, it considers how low-income Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali people experience work and care, including childcare and elder care. The aim is both to understand the experiences of these primarily low-income interviewees, and to identify policy and practice changes that could improve their lives. Three caring scenarios are considered: caring for children, caring for disabled children and caring for older people.

Access to employment

Almost every participant expressed concerns about access to the labour market and many mentioned discrimination. Employers and government could improve recruitment, retention and progression for ethnic minorities by building on existing good practice, highlighted in the recommendations below. Many participants highlighted concerns that are widely mentioned by carers generally, namely the difficulty of finding work that they can balance with their caring responsibilities. Although Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali participants had somewhat different experiences and views about how best they could balance work and care, recommendations from the research also reflect the general finding of significant demand for more flexible working and better part-time work.

Attitudes to caring

Another key finding is that ethnic minority people do not have generic attitudes to 'caring'. This relates to the role of cultural or religious preferences in attitudes to caring, and in particular to formal caring services. Among Pakistani and particularly Somali respondents, these considerations were important in explaining the low use of formal childcare services. This appears to be related to parental emphasis on transmitting cultural values and practices to their children. Some parents would be satisfied if such care was more culturally sensitive, or if some staff shared their cultural or religious values, though a significant minority preferred to be the primary carer for their child at least until secondary school. On the other hand, almost no parents felt that cultural or religious beliefs and practices were significant in caring for disabled children, where the overriding concern was that their children had appropriate care and support.

Cultural considerations also played a part in attitudes to caring for older relatives, especially where participants were asked about residential care homes. For Caribbean people, cultural concerns were more pressing in relation to caring for older relatives than for children. A number of recommendations therefore address ways that caring services might adapt culturally so that ethnic minorities can better access those services, and also how policy could better support caring within the family.

Awareness of services

Awareness or knowledge of services is as important as cultural preferences. Very few Pakistani and Somali respondents were aware of free childcare and they also were not always certain about the support available for their disabled children and older relatives. These findings inform recommendations on the theme of information and advice, including advice on benefits.

Benefit changes and Universal Credit

The government has not adequately assessed the impact of or explained the relevance of these changes to ethnic minorities, and this may result in them being worse off. This is because ethnic minorities are more likely to live in poverty, have higher rates of child poverty, and to live in London (and thus be affected by the benefit cap), and because some groups (including Caribbean and Somali) have higher rates of lone parent households. The research suggests a number of ways that policies could be improved, and where government needs to think harder to ensure that ethnic minorities are not further disadvantaged by these changes.

Recommendations

Access to employment

- Data on ethnicity must be better collected among employers, including in the hiring, progression, disciplinary and redundancy processes, and segmented by seniority and wages.
- Employers should adopt policies to improve the representation of ethnic minorities in hiring and progression.
- Employers should support more flexible working. They should monitor how far they offer flexibility when employees request it and consider (unpaid) sabbaticals and longer leave policies.
- There should be more ESOL funding to improve employability among the many men and women who would like to work and improve their English.

Information and advice

- Ethnic minorities need better information on childcare options. Too many ethnic minority parents are not aware of free provision. Local authorities and health providers must better inform parents of the 15 free hours of early education for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.
- The cognitive and behavioural benefits of childcare should be better promoted. Ethnic minority parents highly value education, and would perhaps be more likely to take up childcare if they had better knowledge of its benefits.
- Public bodies and other relevant institutions (including employers and schools) should do more to combat discrimination and stigmatisation on grounds of disability. There is a need for sensitive work in some ethnic minority communities to raise awareness about disability, and also for targeted support to parents with disabled children where their social networks are less supportive.
- Ethnic minorities need greater awareness and knowledge of benefits, including Carer's Allowance, which is likely to have poor uptake among ethnic minorities.

Access to formal care services

- More ethnic minority women should be trained as childminders. If there was more ESOL funding, this training could be completed.
- Further research and practice is needed on improving the supply of childcare generally, and for sessional or irregular childcare hours in particular. This is particularly relevant for ethnic minority groups who often work irregular, night or weekend hours (e.g. in restaurants, hotels, or as taxi drivers).
- Care homes should provide care that better caters to the needs of ethnic minorities. This could include: ethnic-specific care homes; more training of care workers; more diverse television and cultural offerings; partnering with local restaurants to provide more diverse meals.
- Ethnic minority young people should be targeted for training to gain the skills to be carers, including foreign language skills. Given the low wages and poor progression routes in caring professions, and the already high concentration of ethnic minorities in these kinds of jobs, the

focus should be on skills that are transferable to other jobs, for example foreign languages or 'soft' interpersonal skills valued by a range of employers.

- For personalisation to be a reality, and for care markets to function effectively, more innovative solutions are needed. Smaller community-led providers should be encouraged to work together, so that people receive appropriate and personalised services.

Ensuring policy is fair to all

- Special Educational Needs Assessments should be checked to ensure they are adequately assessing and addressing needs in ethnic minority families. This will require further engagement with ethnic minority parents, and at times including a translator.
- Government should rethink Universal Credit so as not to worsen outcomes for ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups:
 - Government should reconsider its payment of Universal Credit to households only. Payment to the male head of household only will undermine women's independence, financial inclusion and reduce women's capacity to escape domestic violence. Ethnic minority women are particularly vulnerable to these changes, which may also increase the already high child poverty rates among ethnic minorities.
 - Government must monitor the effects of Universal Credit by ethnicity. In particular, they must monitor how many ethnic minority women move from economic inactivity into work, and how many families drop out of the welfare system entirely.
 - Government must introduce changes to ensure that Universal Credit does not disadvantage and make it harder to balance care and work for single parent families.
- Government should consider further and aim to counteract how changes in benefit policies – particularly the benefit cap and changes in how childcare is supported under Universal Credit – will affect childcare among ethnic minorities. For example, DWP has suggested 40 per cent of those affected by the benefit cap will be ethnic minorities, which may encourage them to move away from family members who currently provide childcare support and allow parents to work.

About the project

This study involved qualitative and quantitative research with low-income Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali people regarding their experiences and preferences in balancing work and care. The methods comprised a desk-based literature review, a 1200 person survey on informal care among ethnic minorities, 60 related interviews on informal caring, 42 interviews on childcare in these three communities (including 10 among families caring for a disabled child), and three 'expert' focus groups to test our findings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This summary is part of JRF's research and development programme. The views are those of the authors and not necessarily those of JRF.

The main report, **Balancing caring and earning for British Caribbean, Pakistani And Somali people** by Omar Khan, Akile Ahmet and Christina Victor, is available as a free download at www.jrf.org.uk

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