

HOW PLACE INFLUENCES EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

Ethnic minorities are concentrated in areas of high deprivation with relatively poor employment opportunities. In these areas, they do disproportionately worse in the labour market.

This research examined the influence of place on employment outcomes for ethnic minorities.

Key points

- Racism in education and employment varies by locality, contributing to differences in outcome by place.
- Knowledge of education and labour market systems, and how to negotiate them, affects employment outcomes. Social segregation and migration tend to reduce knowledge and negotiating ability, leading to differing employment outcomes by place.
- Whilst social segregation may provide support, it can also reduce employment performance, limiting social networks and inhibiting labour market knowledge. For some ethnic groups, segregation reinforces cultural norms of women's role as nurturer rather than breadwinner. Self-employment appeared to exacerbate social segregation, especially where labour was limited to family.
- There was some evidence that the relative size of ethnic minority groups in a locality might affect employment outcomes, with local policies likely to serve the largest ethnic minority group. This would contribute to differences in employment outcomes by place and should be explored further.
- The extent to which education policies support all groups to benefit equally from education and careers support varies with place and differences in outcomes by ethnicity and migrant history result.
- Providers of educational, careers and employment services need to reduce variations in access to services. Appropriate approaches may or may not be targeted at or tailored towards specific groups by ethnicity. However, it will be important to monitor by ethnicity how well key groups are served, particularly if the approach is not targeted.

The research

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BACKGROUND

This research explores how place influences employment outcomes for ethnic minorities. It analyses individual educational and employment histories, information on local provision and local employment structures. It examines the roles of culture, racism and class, and of familial, community and state support in affecting employment outcomes.

The findings are based on research in three locations (Glasgow, Leicester and Luton), focusing on three ethnic groups (African Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani).

Education and training prior to entering the labour market

Some key issues arose regarding how well schooling and continued education provided the foundation for decent employment. Parental background is a vital aspect; to a large extent; those with greater social capital were more able to ensure a better educational foundation. However, racism, cultural factors, parental knowledge and migration also played their part.

Racism and the impact of teachers' low expectations caused problems. This highlights the importance of continued policies to tackle racism.

The quality of education received is affected by parental understanding of, and interaction with, the school system, which can be restricted. This applies most strongly for migrants.

The quality of formal careers information, advice and guidance is widely criticised. This makes informal support important. However, the employment experience of informal advisers is key, which, given ethnic minorities' concentration in lower-level occupations, can be problematic.

Employment

Cultural differences relating to the role of women resulted in Pakistani women, and to a lesser degree, Indian women, being more likely than African Caribbean women to be economically inactive. There was evidence of culture restricting job choice and encouraging entry into lower-paid occupations for Pakistani women. This raises issues for action on poverty, when state policies largely encourage paid employment for all adults.

Access to formal employment advice and guidance was lacking. Greater and more effective provision is particularly important for ethnic groups with lower achievement in the labour market, who have less access to informal sources of information.

Volunteering can enhance employability and raise aspirations, enabling movement into employment and to better paid jobs. Some ethnic minorities (particularly Pakistanis and, to a lesser degree, Indians) report low participation in voluntary work. This may be, in part, because activities related to religion are not viewed as voluntary work. In which case, the activity is less likely to be used in job applications and so does not provide labour market advantage.

Adult education and training

There was substantial involvement in adult education and training amongst study participants. In part, this was to address underachievement at school and related career changes. The effectiveness of the various types of training varied, with courses for qualifications appearing most useful for employment progression.

Guidance and advice, other than from employers or colleagues, often seemed rudimentary and reliant on course providers.

The role of place

The Census 2011 for Luton and Leicester showed differing labour market outcomes by ethnicity between localities. (Census data for Glasgow was not available). Despite overall unemployment being similar in Leicester and Luton, African Caribbeans and Indians in Luton were less likely to be unemployed than those in Leicester. The opposite was true for the Pakistani group, which had better employment outcomes in Leicester than Luton.

The quality of education and of careers support varies across areas, so outcomes for ethnic minorities (as well as for the ethnic majority) will vary. However, for ethnic minorities, particularly migrants, there was evidence that knowledge of and interaction with the education system and knowledge of career options may be particularly limited.

The extent to which education policies support all ethnic groups and migrants and non-migrants to benefit equally from education and careers support will vary. Moreover, ethnic minorities' knowledge may also vary by locality. The evidence suggested that knowledge was likely to be least amongst migrants, but that it was also likely to be lower the greater the degree of social segregation. It also suggested that self-employment might contribute to social segregation and limitations on knowledge.

Segregation

Segregation was found to have an impact on employment performance, limiting the effectiveness of social networks and reinforcing cultural norms of women's role as nurturer rather than as breadwinner for some ethnic groups. It would be useful to examine segregation and employment performance for each Asian group separately using the 2011 Census to explore these issues more robustly.

The research suggested that segregation was greater for migrants, particularly Pakistanis, and, to a lesser extent, East African Asians. Respondents described their migrant parents as being socially segregated both by culture and by self-employment, reducing parents' ability to support their children's education and career development. Self-employment appeared to exacerbate social segregation, especially where labour was limited to family.

The ethnic composition of the local population

For one case study area, Luton, the influence of London on labour market performance for ethnic minorities was important, with London offering a less 'racialised' labour market environment and workplaces. Whilst it is understandable that employment in London may be less 'racialised' than many places, it is less clear why this should not also be the case for Luton, since 45 per cent of the population in Luton are from black and minority ethnic groups. This issue was reported by African Caribbeans in Luton only, so it may be that it is more common for some groups (or for some groups in some areas). If so, the relative size of ethnic groups may be important; African Caribbeans comprise only four per cent of the population in Luton.

Migration

For any ethnic group, differences in labour market performance by place may be partly due to the extent to which migration is continuing, renewing the numbers unfamiliar with the labour market.

Policy implications

The research highlighted issues of long-standing concern relating to ethnicity and employment and examined how these might be affected by place. Racism and class underlie the issues identified. Developing policy suggestions to tackle these is beyond this study. Instead approaches for more discrete policies are suggested.

Working with people from ethnic minorities

Policies and provision need to be developed by and with people from ethnic minorities. Otherwise, differences between ethnic groups and the impact of policies by ethnicity are liable to be ignored. Involvement may be through joint working or consultation with community groups, employees and others.

Local authorities

The needs of smaller ethnic minority groups may be overlooked due to the patchiness of local authorities' monitoring of service recipients by ethnicity. Local authorities must have good knowledge of ethnic minority groups and whether there are differences in needs. The 2011 Census provides basic quantitative data. This should be supplemented with knowledge of culture, experiences and needs.

Improving knowledge of the labour market and educational systems

The research identified variation in knowledge of the educational and labour market systems. This is related to class as much as ethnicity, although it is most severe for migrants. Lack of knowledge reduces employment performance and reinforces social immobility. Schools, local authorities, careers service providers, the DWP and other providers of employment and educational support need to recognise and reduce these variations in knowledge. It will be important to monitor by ethnicity how well key groups are served, particularly if the approach is not targeted.

Employers played a key role in providing careers guidance and training for some employees. Their involvement in mentoring schemes and wider information schemes would be particularly useful.

Conclusion

Many of the themes identified in this study are relevant across the UK and to members of all ethnic groups, including the white majority. Poor labour market performance and poverty is pervasive, but ethnic minorities are caught up in it to a greater degree due to racism and discrimination. Generic social mobility policies need to be improved, with a better understanding of the role of ethnicity. Targeted interventions and mainstream services need to become more effective, in part by addressing the specific needs of local communities.

About the project

The study was based on case studies in three areas (Leicester, Glasgow or Luton) and three ethnic groups (African Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani). As far as possible, the Indian group was focussed on East African Asians. The findings are based on qualitative data on individuals' education and employment, information about the local areas gathered in 2013 from stakeholders and published data.

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, **How place influences employment outcomes for ethnic minorities**, is available as a free download at www.jrf.org.uk

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