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More black women at work have degrees than white women – yet still face discrimination

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The Ipsos MORI survey commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) found that people's attitudes towards black and minority ethnic women at work were out of touch reality.

Whilst 53 per cent of respondents thought that white women in work were more likely to have a degree, information from the 2001 Census shows that only 24 per cent of white British women at work have a degree, compared with 52 per cent of Black African women, 32 per cent of African Caribbean women, 35 per cent of Pakistani women, 30 per cent of Bangladeshi women and 38 per cent of Indian women.

But despite being better qualified than their white counterparts, black women face greater levels of discrimination at work and face barriers to career progression that operate in the workplace. Employment Minister Caroline Flint said:

*Jenny Watson,
Chair of the
EOC*

“These reports show that times are changing and that women from all backgrounds want to work in a way that suits them.

People can't afford to make snap judgements about the many women from ethnic minorities who are keen and able to work. If they do, they'll miss out on a growing pool of untapped talent that many employers are already waking up to.”

The study found that unemployment among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women was blamed on cultural and religious barriers (37 per cent), but a separate study on women from these groups found that this is not the case. Difficulties in finding suitable childcare and flexible working arrangements act as the biggest barrier to work for ethnic minority women, in the same way as they do for women in general. Research from the EOC's own report looking at ethnic minority women at work found that 90 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi 16 year old girls said their parents supported their choice to combine a career with their family

responsibilities. Jenny Watson, Chair of the EOC, said:

" While many pin the cause of Black and Asian women's employment gap on culture and lack of skills, the evidence, particularly for younger women, is pointing to something very different. There is a generation of increasingly well qualified and ambitious young women, the vast majority of whom tell us their families support their choices to balance a career with a family."

Closing the Gaps' is an Ipsos MORI survey based on a sample of 1,031 British adults aged 15+ interviewed face-to-face on the Ipsos MORI omnibus between 13-17 September 2007. Data are weighted to reflect the profile of British adults. 'Moving on up? Ethnic minority women at work, the final report resulting from the EOC's two year investigation looking into the participation, pay and progression of ethnic minority women, was released in March 2007.

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