



WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO APPG INQUIRY ON HOW TO RECRUIT WOMEN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

November 2018

Introduction

1. Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNNUK) is a national Muslim women's organisation in Britain (www.mwnuk.co.uk) that has been advancing equality and connecting voices for change for the last 15 years. We are a small national charity (no. 1155092) that works to improve the social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls. Our membership also includes women of other faiths or of no faith and men who support our work. We find out about the experiences of Muslim women and girls through research and helpline enquiries. We identify policy and practice gaps and use this information to inform decision makers in government as well as informing our community campaigns at a grassroots level.
2. We also develop resources and train women so they are better aware of their rights. We have a separate website for our national helpline (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk) that provides advice and support on a range of issues including: domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, female genital mutilation, divorce, discrimination, mental health etc.
3. The impact of our work is particularly felt in reducing the vulnerability of Muslim women and girls, reducing the prejudice they face, and giving them greater access to rights and services – all of which allow them to contribute to society like any other citizen. We are also creating a critical mass of voices to influence change with more women being confident to challenge discriminatory practices within their communities and in society and to influence policy makers.
4. Although we work predominantly with Muslim/BAME women and girls and where relevant will focus on the experiences of young Muslim/BAME girls within our Evidence, the points we raise may equally apply to boys and non-Muslim/non-BAME children generally.

Evidence

5. As a national charity working with Muslim women, we naturally have much to say on both the general theme of how to recruit women for the 21st century and all the topics which have been discussed by the Women and Work APPG in its meetings. However

we are mindful of your guidance for the submission of evidence and will therefore be concentrating on what we consider to be the two key topics of particular significance to Muslim women in the UK; 'being doubly disadvantaged' and 'successful second careers'. Please note however that the points raised within our submission will nevertheless explicitly or implicitly link to other key topics discussed by the Women and Work APPG, such as 'getting women through the door' as well as the overall theme more generally.

6. We would also like to highlight that we have previously provided written evidence to other consultations which have been held on similar points of discussions and wish to refer you to the same as they may be useful in your considerations, particularly the case examples cited therein:
 - a. Written Evidence to Women and Equalities Inquiry on Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK (February 2016): http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/679379-Inquiry%20into%20discrimination%20and%20barriers%20in%20employment.pdf
 - b. Written Evidence to Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation & Public life (December 2016): http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/226429-Citizens%20Commission%20Inquiry%20on%20Islam,%20Participation%20and%20Public%20Life.pdf
 - c. Written Evidence to House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship & Civic engagement (September 2017): http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/191339-House%20of%20Lords%20Inquiry%20Citizenship.pdf
 - d. Written Evidence to GEO Consultation on returning to work after time out caring (October 2017): http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/137664-GEO%20Consultation%20on%20Returning%20to%20work%20after%20time%20out%20caring.pdf

Doubly disadvantaged?

7. We wish to make the point first of all that Muslim BAME women are not only doubly disadvantaged but triple disadvantaged when trying to enter into the workplace and whilst in employment – they face the penalty of not just being a woman, but also a BAME woman and a Muslim woman. And of course, the disadvantages only increase if we also take into account disabilities, sexuality, socio-economic factors and the like into account. Muslim and BAME women are simultaneously viewed as weak/submissive and disruptive/trouble-makers and both sets of stereotypes restrict their abilities to enter and remain in the workplace. Further assumptions are made about their possible commitment as employees – will they get married and leave and if so, is it worth hiring and training them? Will they come back after maternity leave and if they do, will they be able to focus and work as before? Is there any point in promoting them if they cannot do extra hours when required? Will they even be effective managers? Of course these sorts of assumptions are not limited to Muslim and BAME women only but it does appear from anecdotal evidence available to us that racial and anti-Muslim prejudices are a contributing factor to the treatment of Muslim and BAME women in the workplace.

8. Moreover, the hurdles they face in wanting to enter the workplace are not limited to the external environment only. Muslim and BAME may be facing barriers within their own homes and communities which may restrict their ability to pursue employment. For example, misogynist and patriarchal attitudes may be at play where women are discouraged from working because they are expected to be 'homemakers' and are unable to exercise their right to choose to work (or even stay at home) as the choice is made for them. We are even aware of an instance where a woman was restricted from pursuing employment because according to her husband and his family, this would make it more likely that she would end up having an affair! There is a natural link between such attitudes and instances of domestic abuse, including financial abuse. It is therefore essential that the barriers women face to entering the workplace be tackled as a matter of urgency because by empowering women to exercise their choices and pursue employment/activities of their choosing, we will also be ultimately tackling domestic violence.

9. What is perhaps even more concerning is that, whilst some Muslim and BAME women are speaking up about their experiences of prejudice and discrimination faced within the workplace (whether during the recruitment stage or whilst in employment) – even if it is simply speaking to each other and to organisations like ours – many others appear to continue to be suffering silently. The prevalence of direct and indirect discrimination towards Muslim and BAME women continues to be under-reported and under-documented. In this regard we wish to refer you to some MWN Helpline statistics: In 2015 (the year in which our Helpline was launched) we had four cases on the issue of discrimination and islamophobia; in 2016, there were 15 cases and in 2017, we had 14 cases on these issues. These numbers are significantly lower than our top five issues (with for example, domestic abuse being an issue in 303 cases in 2017). Yet if we look at the use of our resources, we can see that our Discrimination & Hate Crime booklet (which provides information and advice on the issue) and was only published in November 2016, had been downloaded 46 times by the end of 2016 and was downloaded 378 times in 2017. We appreciate of course that this does not automatically mean that each individual downloading the booklet has been experiencing issues of discrimination (and appreciate that our booklet also includes information on hate crimes) but to us it suggests that many more individuals may be affected than what our own Helpline calls may suggest. This concern of ours is supplemented by other information and evidence made available to us through our contact with Muslim women, who continuously raise discrimination as a top issue affecting British Muslim women. This then exacerbates our concerns over the lack of reporting even further because if even the statistics of a national Muslim women's charity working on these specific issues is not reflective of the scale of the issue of discrimination across the country, just how many Muslim and BAME women (and individuals generally) are being held back from achieving their potential in their relevant fields due to discrimination? We feel it is high time that a dedicated inquiry is carried out on a large-scale and across all professions and sectors to find out the nature and scale of institutional discrimination; only then could steps be taken to truly tackle the root causes and eliminate the barriers which are hindering Muslim and BAME women (and women with disabilities, older women, single parents etc). This could be done through compulsory surveys, through roundtables and through engaging with communities on a grassroots level etc. MWNUK would be happy to assist in this regard.

10. For reference, our Discrimination & Hate Crime booklet can be viewed here: http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/Discrimination_and_Hate_Crime_21_factsheets.php
11. Our Helpline evaluations which provide further statistics are available here, as well as our MWN Helpline Dashboard which allows more detailed analysis of the information and statistics available: <http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/muslim-women-helpline-dashboard.php>
12. Simply hearing of such discriminatory practices can be disempowering and can have the effect of discouraging Muslim and BAME women from even applying, which is why it is vital to take concrete steps to address the barriers in place and empower women to exercise their rights. We feel that as well as taking steps to change workplace cultures, we should also focus on role-modelling and capacity building initiatives as not only will these encourage Muslim and BAME women but will also challenge stereotypes. Our #AndMuslim campaign which was launched in October 2016 and ran throughout 2017 highlighted successful British Muslim women from all walks of life. Our campaign promoted the diversity of the female Muslim community in Britain and celebrated their successes, achievements and contributions. Such campaigns both empower women internally and help change attitudes and cultures externally. We are also currently running the 'Doing Activism, Changing Society: Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic Women and Activism' programme in partnership with the University of Warwick (funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund and ERSC Impacting Funding). The aim of this programme is to capacity build women from BAME backgrounds to be more civic and politically active. We feel that funding and resources should be dedicated to similar initiatives to empower women. We also feel there is also a natural link to such initiatives and the topics of 'building the pipeline', 'occupational segregation' and 'getting women out the low-pay cycle'.

Successful Second Careers

13. The most significant barrier for women returning to work that is consistently cited is that of childcare, both in terms of cost and convenience. This is especially the case when women may be on low salaries to begin with and many women are finding that the vast majority of their salaries are going towards the cost of childcare. Many women can feel it is not worth returning to work if it simply means paying for someone else to look after their children. And when you consider the scenario where family members may already be unsupportive of a woman returning to work (for example in the case of women whose husband or other family members may feel she should be staying at home and looking after the children and household), this makes the situation all the more difficult. We must highlight that there appears to be a general presumption that Muslim and BAME women can rely on family for childcare support at all times but this is not always the case. They may not live in the same city as family for example, or may even be estranged from family (they may be a single parent who may have obtained a divorce by going against the wishes of the family). Two key steps need to be taken to address this situation for all women: salaries need to be higher, and childcare costs need to be lower.
14. We are aware that the government has introduced various measures which has gone towards somewhat reducing the burdens for some parents but much more needs to be done. Increasing the availability of free child care hours from 15 to 30 hours for

children aged three and above is a great measure but ignores the fact that this places a two year gap of paying for childcare costs of children between the ages of 1 and 3 which need to be met by working parents – and if you are a single parent the burden is even worse. We are also aware that the government meets a certain percentage of the costs of childcare if parents are in receipt of Universal Credit. However, this is capped at 85% of the costs and with a further limit that only £646.35 will be paid for one child. Where a single mother is paying for nursery at a rate of £66 a day (as is the case in one such example available to us), such government caps only go so much towards helping alleviate the burdens on working mothers. Moreover, consideration is not given to the fact that, especially for single parents, a lot of manoeuvring needs to be done in terms of dropping/picking up children from school/nursery and commuting to/from work. In the case of the single mother mentioned above, if she is late in picking up her child from nursery she is required to pay a penalty fee of £25 for that day and so she has to leave work on time and rely on public transport to be on time. This penalty fee is not taken into account in Universal Credit calculations. This is a relevant consideration not just from a financial perspective but from how she may be viewed by an employer (or even simply other members of her team); whilst she may be abiding by her work hours, she may not be viewed as favourably as the other colleague that stays even just 15 minutes longer than her to complete any tasks or help the team.

15. The earnings taper rate is also particularly unhelpful with many women feeling penalised for working (although we note that the recent Budget announcement stated that changes will be made to the work allowance which should make some difference). Our concern with Universal Credit generally is that arbitrary figures seem to have been decided about what an individual (and couples/parents) need in order to survive. Caps are placed on the level of childcare assistance available without taking into consideration how much childcare costs actually are for each parent, and similarly limits are placed on how much housing support can be received without any consideration of what the actual rent costs are for them. We do not understand why a limit is set on how much housing support can be received when these figures may not be reflective of the actual costs of renting in certain areas; why for example have a cap of £700 for housing support if in reality in that particular area you will not be able to actually rent a property for less than £850? When further deductions are made due to the earnings taper rate, this can mean that there is simply not enough money available to survive.
16. Again, we find it very strange that an arbitrary figure of 12%-16% appears to have been set as the statutory child maintenance sum without taking into consideration the actual costs associated with bringing up the child and the paying parents own earning capacity. 12% may be a fair sum if the paying parent is on a low salary themselves and/or the living costs are low (for example if there are no child care costs involved) and is also involved and also providing other forms of assistance in the child's upbringing. However we do not understand why a paying parent who may be earning in the region of £3500 a month before tax and has no involvement in the upbringing of the child is only required to pay 12% of their salary (£412.00 a month) as statutory child maintenance whilst the single parent is having to meet the costs of rent, childcare, utilities, food, clothing etc, and also has to put up with the Universal Credit limits on what they can even have as an allowance or as earnings. We also wish to point out that not everyone has the option of going to court for additional maintenance

sums (for example if there was no legal marriage involved, there would be no ancillary relief proceedings) and further that pursuing legal proceedings comes with its own set of costs and burdens.

17. Moreover, we do not understand why a receiving parent who is forced to go through the Child Maintenance Service to obtain child maintenance from the other parent is required to pay a fee for doing so; it may only be £4 a week but this is still a sum that could assist the single parent in making ends meet. We appreciate that circumstances vary in the case of each individual and it may be that it is the paying parent that has no other option but to seek assistance from the Child Maintenance Service for various reasons but our point stands that there is no consideration of the individual needs and circumstances that may be involved and arbitrary rules and figures seem to be at play which are hindering rather than helping.
18. Moreover, if returning to work is only cost-effective for a woman after her child turns 3, then that means some women may be out of work for 3 years purely due to economic factors (rather than out of choice) and such a gap may even impact on their confidence to return at all. Thus we also need to see an increase in return-to-work programmes across all professions and sectors, and positive and successful examples of such schemes need to be actively highlighted.
19. A further point we wish to make is linked to the topic of 'getting women through the door' and 'building the pipeline' and that relates to the costs of attending interviews in the first place. Women can be restricted by a lack of childcare or transport costs (which will be addressed once they have an employment offer in place) and may feel discouraged from applying for a job because they feel they will be unable to attend the interview. It may be useful for employers to take these into account and indicate in advertisements whether there is scope to arrange interviews to a date convenient to both interviewer and interviewee (rather than having set dates) or whether they would be willing to consider an initial interview by way of skype etc.
20. Relocation allowances may also be a relevant consideration for women who may be trying to escape an abusive situation for example; relocation allowances tend to only be available for what may be deemed high-tier positions and not for those that are most likely to be lower-paid. We also feel consideration needs to be given to providing subsidies for other costs such as train and bus fares. We also wish to make the point that those who work full time have the option of purchasing season tickets which may reduce their commuting costs slightly but those who work part time (e.g. three days a week) generally do not benefit from any such costs-saving measures and we would like to see initiatives introduced so that part time workers are not penalised by the costs of commuting.
21. Lack of true flexible working opportunities are a further issue and a number of women feel restricted in the jobs they are able to apply for as they can only work during school hours for example. There is a natural link to the topics of 'occupational segregation' and 'getting women out the low-pay cycle' in this regard. We feel employers across all sectors should be encouraged to provide the same, by highlighting the benefits – such as potentially less overheads if more staff are working from home, more hours covered if staff are allowed to leave early to pick up children from school/nursery and work from home in the evenings to make up the hour etc, better output due to job

satisfaction etc. We also feel that morale can be increased by having more child-friendly events for working parents so that they do not have to consistently choose between socialising with colleagues and networking, and spending time with their children.

22. We also feel that to truly address the 'motherhood penalty', we need to have a dramatic change in workplace culture and ask exactly where are the fathers? Whilst of course we appreciate that fathers are involved in the upbringing of their children in many ways and not all circumstances are the same, we feel that the onus tends to remain on women to juggle work and family life and men assisting is regarded as a bonus that women should be grateful for. We feel this is especially the case in Muslim and BAME communities. Such women generally take on the responsibility of dropping off/picking up children from school/nursery, leaving work early if the child is sick, completing household chores after work etc and we feel that this is almost an expected culture even in workplaces. To change that we urge employers to ask the questions of fathers who seem to come to work on time all the time, who have no issues staying late to carry on working or who are able to regularly socialise with work colleagues and friends and who never need time off for childcare duties – despite perhaps having a new-born child at home or children of school age. We do not suggest that we start to 'judge' fathers (because as we said, all circumstances are different), but we do feel that questions need to be raised to change attitudes generally – because if having a child at home seems to be having no impact on the father, then chances are that it is having a heavy impact on the mother.

Final Comments

23. As a point of clarification, we must explain that where our comments and examples have been limited to Muslim and BAME girls, this is due to the nature of our organisation and its work. As a national Muslim women's charity our work predominantly deals with Muslim and BAME women and girls albeit we also work with individuals of other faiths and are therefore also aware of issues of relevance to other faith and non-faith communities. We are also aware that some of the issues experienced by Muslim and BAME women and girls can also be experienced by non-Muslim, non-BAME women and girls, as well as men and boys. In turn we wish to clarify that where we make any recommendations, we do so on behalf of all those within wider society who may be affected and who may benefit from such recommendations.
24. MWNUK would like to express its willingness to assist through research, training, support, information or advice or any other means on the issues discussed.
25. We would like to thank the Women and Work APPG for holding this Consultation and thank you for providing us with the opportunity to give Evidence. We hope it proves to be useful in your considerations.

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**On behalf of Muslim Women's Network UK,
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