OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Tuesday 1 March 2022

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
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Tuesday 1 March 2022

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EQUALITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)
*Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con)
*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Mariam Ahmed (Amina—the Muslim Women's Resource Centre)
Farah Farzana (CEMVO Scotland)
Joy Lewis (AAI EmployAbility)
Sara Medel Jiménez (NASUWT Equality Advisory Group)
Trishna Singh OBE (Sikh Sanjog)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katrina Venters

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Tuesday 1 March 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Joe FitzPatrick): Good morning, and welcome to the sixth meeting in 2022 of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.

The first agenda item is a decision on whether to take in private item 3, which is consideration of the evidence that we will hear today. Do members agree to take that item in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Women's Unfair Responsibility for Unpaid Care and Domestic Work

10:00

The Convener: The next agenda item is to continue taking evidence on women's unfair responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. This virtual round-table session will have an intersectional focus on race. I welcome to the meeting Farah Farzana, race equality mainstreaming officer at CEMVO Scotland; Mariam Ahmed, chief executive officer at Amina—the Muslim Women's Resource Centre; Trishna Singh OBE, director of Sikh Sanjog; Joy Lewis, chief executive officer at AAI EmployAbility; and Sara Medel Jiménez, a member of the NASUWT equality advisory group. I refer members to papers 1 and 2.

As we have a number of witnesses, I ask members to indicate which witness they are initially directing their question to and then to open the floor to other witnesses for comments. I am keen for the session to be as free flowing as is possible in this virtual format so, if other witnesses wish to respond to a question or to follow up on a point made by another witness, they should please indicate that by typing R in the chat function on BlueJeans, and I will bring them in if time permits. If you are merely agreeing with what other members say, there is no need to intervene to say so. Members can also use the chat function on BlueJeans if they wish to intervene.

At the end of the session, if any of the witnesses feels that there are outstanding points that they wish to address, please follow that up in writing—the committee will take that evidence into account.

I invite each of our witnesses to make a short opening statement.

Farah Farzana (CEMVO Scotland): Good morning, and thank you very much for the opportunity to provide evidence on women's unfair responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. I am here on behalf of CEMVO Scotland, which is a national intermediary organisation and a strategic partner of the Scottish Government equality unit.

The aim of CEMVO Scotland is to build the capacity of the ethnic minority voluntary sector and its communities. We have a network of over 600 ethnic minority organisations throughout Scotland, through which we deliver a wide range of capacity-building support programmes. Our current programmes include providing social enterprise development support to ethnic minority groups and social entrepreneurs; providing race equality and human rights mainstreaming support to public,

statutory and third sector organisations; increasing ethnic minority representation on public boards; developing and supporting a Scottish national ethnic minority women's network for peer support and influencing social policy; developing and supporting an ethnic minority environmental network to engage in climate change policy; providing employability support to ethnic minority young people; and building organisational capacity in ethnic minority groups in and around the Glasgow region.

Through all our areas of work, we have an ample opportunity to continue to engage extensively with the ethnic minority sector and gather information on the needs and concerns of ethnic minority communities. In turn, that helps to inform our response to the development of national and local policies and to public consultations such as today's.

I am also a member of a charity called Al Masaar, which I co-founded with my sister back in 2014. We started because of a need for support for ethnic minority families in the Forth valley area. That was prior to my beginning with CEMVO. Prior to lockdown, I was heavily involved with supporting ethnic minority families, particularly mothers, with various responsibilities that they had to undertake. That included emotional and physical support. Obviously, it was peer-to-peer support and was about making sure that people felt comfortable and safe, especially for those with declining mental health.

Mariam Ahmed (Amina—the Muslim Women's Resource Centre): Good morning, and thank you so much for inviting me to the meeting. I am the chief executive of Amina, which is a Muslim and black and minority ethnic women's rights organisation. We are a leading grass-roots organisation and our specialist services aim to fill a gap in Scotland so that women can participate fully in society without fear of discrimination. We offer a range of services, from our national helpline for women in crisis to our befriending service, our employability guidance, our work on violence against women and on creative arts, as well as campaigning and financial inclusion and women's rights casework.

BME women remain the most vulnerable people in our society and experience multiple levels of discrimination. We find that racial inequality intersects with gender inequality. BME women still face additional barriers to accessing support from services and economic resources.

I would say that the work that women do remains undervalued. We support a lot of BME women who, before the pandemic, already did the lion's share of domestic chores, looked after the children and were unpaid carers but, with the pandemic and the restrictions, we have found that existing inequalities deepened. There were certain factors in that. Women faced more poverty and financial hardship. It affected their leisure time, and they struggled to cope. Many did not have wi-fi. A range of things happened, and Amina provided support for that. I look forward to providing a bit more evidence on that in today's hearing.

Trishna Singh OBE (Sikh Sanjog): Thank you very much for inviting us to speak at the committee. Sikh Sanjog has been running for 35 years, and we are the only Sikh family support charity in Scotland. Our focus has always been on linking Sikh women and other ethnic minority women to social, educational and employment opportunities. We have been bridging that gap for 35 years. From experience, we know that there are so many women from the Sikh community and other communities who are still just sitting on the fringes waiting to be able to access mainstream support, whether that be in employment or caring services. Not many of them access any of the carer support groups that are out there. We are bridging that gap and working with those women.

Over the years, we have developed into an organisation that provides holistic and intersectional services. We fill that gap between mainstream services and even policy makers. The Sikh community has not been visible in any large research projects or consultations that have been done over the past 10 years or so. It has been the role of Sikh Sanjog to make sure that those voices are heard. We know that, from a very young age, Sikh women have had a completely different upbringing compared with their white Scottish peers. Women are left to juggle the domestic life and work and the commitments of looking after and caring for people at home, whether it be children with disabilities or elderly family members. Although that is being raised now, we know that women have been living with those kinds of issues for well over 30 or 40 years.

I look forward to answering any questions.

Joy Lewis (AAI EmployAbility): Thank you for inviting me. I am pleased to be able to give evidence on behalf of Adopt an Intern, which is now trading as AAI EmployAbility. We started 12 years ago, promoting and facilitating paid internships. We now include a variety of inclusive recruitment services. As a social enterprise, we attract a large following of women returners and diversity in all its forms.

We also work with the Government, through grants, to support minority ethnic women into work. Our access to employers is key to the success of our programmes, as it ensures networking and the breaking down of perceived barriers on both sides. Since Covid, we have

delivered three such programmes, adapting them for our changed world.

It is known that unfair domestic and caring responsibilities are a result of societal norms. A study by the Fawcett Society confirmed that around three quarters of minority ethnic women reported doing the majority of the housework or childcare during lockdown.

Our minority ethnic audience tends to be highly qualified women who, through no fault of their own, feel undervalued and lack confidence. When the pandemic hit, they found themselves in a new country, with imperfect English and no support system and with children to be home schooled in a foreign language. Going out shopping held its own fears, with minority ethnic people more susceptible to Covid. Issues with digital access and no recourse to public funds all added to the nightmare for these women. Community support was not ready and when the third sector managed to reach out, there was no centralised channel—that is often their place of faith, but such places were closed.

We are not a research or umbrella organisation. The evidence that I present today is based on our experience of working closely with minority ethnic women on their employment journey. Right now, we are working with 60 women in the latest women returners project funded by the Government, the majority of whom have an honours or doctoral degree. Minority ethnic women in work were more likely to be furloughed and more likely to lose their jobs than white women. The loss of financial security and the feeling of being undervalued, both at work and home, were exacerbated by having nowhere to go for support and guidance. The extreme loss of confidence and self-belief that followed left them open to mental health issues. A downward spiral was created, which now must be reversed, not just because it is the right thing to do but because fundamentally Scotland needs this incredible talent.

Sara Medel Jiménez (NASUWT Equality Advisory Group): Good morning. Thank you for having me. [*Interruption*.] I am sorry; I am a teacher and you will probably hear my class leaving—very quietly, thank you.

I am a member of the NASUWT and of the Scottish Trades Union Congress black workers committee—[*Interruption*.] Thank you, class. Sorry, but this is a perfect example of what women have to do. We have to juggle everything—our children and other people's children. [*Interruption*.] Au revoir—bye bye, class.

I will start after they leave. I do not want to make them late for their next class.

The Convener: That is okay—just take some time. This is a good example. Props are always allowed.

Sara Medel Jiménez: It is an excellent example.

My life in lockdown was also an excellent example. My husband and I had a young child before lockdown started, and my maternity leave that I had saved so long for, to just have that time with my baby, was totally scrapped by lockdown. Many teachers were forced to come back to work earlier than we wanted to.

I have statistics from the big question survey, which is a survey that the NASUWT does. Women were far more likely than men to do more onsite teaching during lockdowns, with a figure of 60 per cent versus 50 per cent. Women were more likely to have received criticism from parents, with a figure of 30 per cent versus 26 per cent for their male counterparts. We are seen as a soft target sometimes, with 20 per cent of women compared to 15 per cent of men having received verbal abuse from parents. Women were also more likely to say that their workload had increased, with a figure of 60 per cent over 51 per cent.

Overall, women were seen as beings who can just take it all, but we cannot, because 88 per cent of female teachers versus 76 per cent of male teachers felt anxiety, and 59 per cent of women said that flexible working hours were impossible. My employer was happy to give me time for today's meeting, but of course other female colleagues were ill with Covid, and there was nowhere to put these children, unfortunately. Almost half—49 per cent—of women said that they were not aware of any policies or processes at their workplace that would help them to deal with the problem of increasing sexual harassment, from staff and pupils.

10:15

Through the STUC's black workers committee, I have become more aware of intersectionality. It is heart-breaking to see Muslim colleagues who are trying to climb the corporate ladder but who cannot do it because our environments are so male dominated. They just cannot go to the pub on a Friday afternoon and build those relationships. I have a small child and zero interest in football, and I sometimes feel like I cannot have a conversation with senior management, because it is male dominated, too.

There is just so much to do. I keep the faith—I really do—but sometimes, when you look at the evidence, you just do not know where to start.

The Convener: Thank you very much. The boys club is something that we all need to be very

alert to in daily life. Sometimes, it is not a deliberate thing, but you make a good point there.

I thank everyone for their comments. We will now move to questions from committee members and a bit of a discussion. Members will suggest who they want to hear from first, but if anybody wants to respond to a particular question, they should put an R in the chat function.

Maggie Chapman is first.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Good morning. Thank you for being with us—I appreciate that juggling various things is not easy. I appreciate the time that you have taken to give evidence to the committee.

I have a couple of questions about the disproportionate impact of Covid on women, and BAME women in particular, which has been reported in the media and which many of you have mentioned. I am interested in understanding the complexities of the issue, including how BAME women have experienced disproportionate susceptibility to Covid and disproportionate financial burdens.

I think that it was Mariam Ahmed who talked about digital poverty, a lack of digital connectivity and the knock-on consequences, so I will come to her first. Could you say a bit more about the personal experiences of some of the women you support whom Amina has worked with? What were those women's experiences of the lockdown and the restrictions that were placed on society as a whole from the point of view of their ability to maintain any kind of work-life balance and, importantly, the impact on their mental health?

I have another question, which I will ask after we have heard from Mariam.

Mariam Ahmed: Before the lockdown started, we were already on an unequal footing. BME women had already said that they were unequal in society, but what did their position look like once the pandemic started? BME women and the women we support have always done the lion's share of the work when it comes to household chores. Those traditional gender roles have always been there. Even if the woman goes out to work, she is still expected to come home and do all the housework. Home schooling was added to that. For a lot of women, the kids going to school was their chance to have a bit more leisure time, to do classes in English for speakers of other languages or to upskill themselves, but how can you do home schooling and upskill yourself?

What has been underestimated during the pandemic is the fact that a lot of women we support stay in extended-family households, which means that they have had not just their husband but their brother-in-law and mother-in-law working from home. Everyone has been working from home. Because they have been running the household—doing the cooking, the cleaning and the home schooling—they have had no time for themselves. We found that the women were really isolated and had no escapism and no time to upskill themselves; that outlet was simply not there. They were not able to say, "All right, I'm going to my class online now."

We also found that women were expected to work, but the digital inclusion aspect was overwhelming. Overnight, everything was digital. We were not allowed to visit women to show them how to log on, or even how to apply for universal credit. Sometimes, they did not have any wi-fi. With the universal credit systems, the message was, "You can just apply online—it's quicker," but that made things so inaccessible. People could not call about universal credit or use a benefits helpline, because everything was online. If you did not have wi-fi, that was an issue. We offered tablets to 30 women, but there was nobody to show them how to set them up. We were always facing those challenges.

We found that many women were experiencing a lot of financial difficulty. By December, we had received 321 calls during the pandemic from women who were experiencing financial difficulties. We also found that, although we are always dealing with women in crisis, many of the cases were much more complex than previously. A woman who had an abusive husband might have been staying with the perpetrator and their extended family while home schooling the kids. During lockdown, there was no outlet for women to phone Amina, to come to classes or to figure out how to escape an abusive relationship. There was a lot of that going on but, in relation to universal credit, the Department for Work and Pensions was still saying, "You need to look for a job." The jobs that women would be looking for would be part time, so their poverty would increase.

We also supported a lot of women whose husbands were undocumented and not declaring their work, who were unpaid or lower paid. Because their employers did not claim furlough, the income that had been coming in for those women suddenly stopped. When they applied for universal credit, they found that they simply did not have the skills that are needed for jobs. Those are the kinds of issues that we came across.

We set up a hardship fund. During the pandemic, we paid out more than £20,000 to women in crisis and women in poverty. That gives you a picture of what we were dealing with. There were issues with severe poverty and access to wi-fi and digital technology, such as iPads and tablets; it was very difficult. It was a challenging situation for services such as ours. Our staff

ended up doing a lot of unpaid work. We were going above and beyond, but we had to do those things in order to get women on a more equal footing.

Maggie Chapman: Thank you very much, Mariam. That was helpful and interesting. I am especially struck by your point about undocumented workers, all the added complexities of that situation and the cracks that they fall through anyway. When the pandemic is added to that, the difficulties are magnified and exacerbated.

Sara Medel Jiménez, you talked about women being seen as a soft touch. To what extent was that magnified during the pandemic? I see in the chat that a couple of other people want to come in, but I invite Sara to go first. Do you want to say a bit more about that, partly in answer to my original question but also on the soft target element that you spoke about in your opening comments?

Sara Medel Jiménez: Yes. I think that we are seen as a soft touch and a soft target. I have noticed—again, this is anecdotal evidence from other teachers of colour—that we are often seen as the people who can take on extra work. We call that the "black tax", whereby some colleagues who are white may be expected to do less and to do things that are more in line with our job descriptions, while teachers of colour are given extra work; that is even more the case with women.

There is also the cultural issue of the imbalance that still exists in the power structure between men and women. Men—especially men who are in positions of power—still expect women to take on more. Women are sometimes the ones who perpetuate the myth. They say, "I've had it hard. You think you have it hard, but I've had it way harder." I can give an example of that from a boys school where I used to work. Colleagues who had been there for 20 years, who had been treated terribly by their male counterparts decades ago, made a point of making our lives hard to see whether we were made of the right stuff.

In addition, I think that it is easier to tell off a female teacher than it is to tell off a male teacher, because male teachers will just say, "No—I disagree." I do not know whether it is to do with the way we are as women, in that we are genetically made to consider others, so we immediately take blame on ourselves. We think, "Maybe it's the way I'm doing things," but then we realise, "No, that's not the case." As you get older, you become more confident.

To go back to your initial question, a lot of the impact was to do with space poverty. If you were living in a city, there was no—[*Interruption*.]—the sofa, and my other half was working on the kitchen table, because our son was napping and neither of us could work from the other room.

There were also wi-fi difficulties, of course. If you had a big family and you suddenly had to go from two devices to five, how on earth could you do that? Often at home, even though my other half is very happy to cook and clean and everything else, when it comes to devices, I have to share my device with my son, because my other half is a bit too worried that something might happen to his device if my son plays with it. There are little things like that, as well as bigger things, such as the things that the other ladies said about the fact that the lion's share of the cooking, the cleaning and so on still falls predominantly on women.

Therefore, I think that we are seen as a soft or an easy target for being given extra work and for any kind of reprimand. As I said, I know anecdotally from other female teachers that we seem to do a lot more and to take on more when we should not. We are a unionised profession, and we should say, "That is not part of my job description. If you want me to do this as part of personal development, it should be a target," rather than just saying yes in the hope of climbing the corporate ladder.

Maggie Chapman: Thank you very much.

Convener, I have finished my questions, but I know that Farah Farzana, Trishna Singh and Joy Lewis want to come in. Is it okay if I bring Farah in?

The Convener: Yes.

Maggie Chapman: Farah, would you like to respond?

Farah Farzana: Yes. Thank you very much.

Following on from what my colleagues have said, this is a question that I have been nit-picking at, in order to get right to the root of understanding. We talk about gender roles within ethnic minority families. In preparation for today's committee, I asked colleagues and friends how they would describe the cultural barriers that ethnic minority women face and explain how their situation differs from that of non-ethnic minority women. An issue that should be taken into consideration is where we are coming from and why—as Mariam Ahmed said—ethnic minority women take on the lion's share of the work. That is pretty much the way that we have been brought up, generationally. That is our culture. We have the family hierarchy ingrained in us. We are brought up to serve our elders and to respect etiquette.

10:30

As women, we have traditionally been trained to serve others and to do domestic work. If, at any point, we do not fulfil those expectations, there will be an emotional backlash in the sense that we will be made to feel that we are not good enough or that we are ungrateful for things that we have been given. I know that that sounds really horrible, but the flipside of that is that, because we make an effort to have close family relations, we tend to be emotionally and physically reliant on one another, especially when it comes to the parent-child relationship. There is a need to depend on grandparents or aunts and uncles and to have that family support system. I am talking about a typical traditional format.

Someone who comes to Scotland without that family support system will be impacted in various ways. That includes being an unpaid carer. The notion of being an unpaid carer is still quite new and still seems very alien, because we are told that taking care of our families and our children is an obligation, not an option. It is something that we have to do. We just have to get on with it, and if we ever seek outside help, that is seen as a form of weakness.

Those are the kinds of pressures that exist within the family and household structure. Someone who is a single parent will still be expected to do absolutely everything, as well as taking on the role of father or the other spouse, on top of maintaining the hierarchy—and that is only in the family context. I have not even touched on the impact of community and society, because of the unrealistic expectations that we have of perfection. Those expectations are ingrained in ethnic minority girls at such a young age, and that has an impact on our self-confidence, our mental health and how we see ourselves. That is at the very root—the very foundation—of the cultural barriers that we are working so hard to overcome.

It is important to make those points to help you to understand what the barriers are. Basically, you need to put yourselves in our shoes in order to get a better understanding. In meeting you, as policy makers, it is a case of “nothing about us without us”. I am grateful for being here and being able to provide that insight. Thank you for the opportunity.

Maggie Chapman: Thank you very much for that, Farah. Trishna, you wanted to come in on this.

Trishna Singh: Yes, thank you. I completely agree with what both speakers have said so I will not go over that again.

One of the main things for me is that people need to understand that people such as Farah Farzana and organisations such as Amina are also talking about women who are second, third, fourth, even fifth generation, born and brought up in Scotland. Those women are mentally juggling two cultures, which has a huge impact on their mental health, especially when they know that they are part of the Scottish community. We are citizens of Scotland and yet all of those things are still going on underneath that layer.

Our organisation would maybe have had 25 to 30 women dropping by in a normal week, but once the pandemic hit, more than 100 women contacted us every week with a range of issues. For example, if someone had an autistic child at home, that child would have been able to go to playgroup or whatever previously and give the woman a bit of space. With everybody at home, the women did not have access to anybody.

Some of those women were also living with perpetrators of domestic violence and had no space to go out. The pandemic has brought everything out into the open. A lot of these things were happening and people were seeing and talking about them but nothing was being done.

Mainstream services are there for people from the white Scottish community. There is also a layer of third sector services for the white Scottish community, but every service that is there to bridge the gap for minority ethnic communities is in the voluntary sector or third sector. That needs to be addressed because, when it comes to employment and mental health issues, or as somebody said earlier, help with filling in forms for universal credit, a lot of minority ethnic women, even those for whom English is their first language, have never been online. Our outreach staff can be on the phone for three hours at a time helping somebody to fill in a universal credit form.

Covid has also raised many issues for education. Everybody was doing home schooling, but a lot of women in our communities left school when they were very young, and their homework was on a completely different level.

Joy Lewis highlighted the other side: highly educated women who were struggling for work. We have worked with a mix of women at the other end where women had just started to get their freedoms and money that was theirs that they could spend when they wanted to. That has all gone now because a lot of them worked in the low-paid sector, with jobs in home care, in shops or on zero-hours contracts. You can just imagine how it was when that little bit of freedom that they had was completely taken away by Covid. We do not know what that will look like now.

We have just produced the first ever research on Sikh women in Scotland. We launched it at Parliament in December. I will put a link to it in the chat and you will be able to get it on our website. Many issues cut across all BME communities, but

there are some areas in which people are just not visible.

Maggie Chapman: Thank you, Trishna, and thanks for that link. One of my colleagues will probably want to come in on that later. Joy Lewis, did you want to come in?

Joy Lewis: I look forward to talking about the employment aspects later.

It is wonderful to hear so many personal stories and first-hand knowledge. We also saw these problems on a project that we created from the Government's wellbeing fund. We found that cultural integration was nigh on impossible for those who were new to the country. Our most well-received advice for parents was about how they could maintain discipline with their child, and play with them as well as teach them without outside influence of any kind.

The programme that we developed focused on resilience and mindset, and we could not talk about much else. We did go on to talk about finances and employability, but we needed to look at family life, getting women stronger and giving them back a bit of confidence before we could talk about employability and go on to sort out their finances. Raising the women's resilience, with coaches who are trained in that, was key to enabling them to absorb further information.

Lack of confidence worsens when women cannot meet others who are in their situation, whether through lack of digital awareness or just not being able to go out and socialise. We have Facebook groups for our cohorts of minority ethnic women and they cite discussions with women who are in the same boat as extraordinarily impactful and helpful. Getting those women together so that they could hear that they were not the only ones in their unfortunate situation was key for us.

What we are left with is a lack of awareness of what the rules are for going back after long lockdowns. Many minority ethnic women who are looking for work that is commensurate with their skillsets now doubt whether they have the ability to get out there again. That is another mindset and confidence issue that needs to be addressed.

Maggie Chapman: Thanks for that, Joy. I will hand back to you, convener.

The Convener: I see that Sara Medel Jiménez is hoping to come back in. I do not have time to bring you back in just now, but do not hesitate to make your point later, Sara. Pam Duncan-Glancy is next.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the panel for their opening statements and for the testimonies that they have already given. I have been furiously trying to take notes as I have been listening. It has been very helpful. I also thank you for everything that you have done during the past couple of years. It has been a significantly more difficult two years for the people that you represent than for many of us in Scotland.

My first question is about the financial security of the women that you support and the risk that women's unfair responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work could get worse during the budget process. Farah Farzana, Joy Lewis and Mariam Ahmed might want to answer. Has the ability to find paid work and an income been put seriously at risk during the pandemic? You have already touched on some of that. What is the current picture of the financial situations of the families that you represent?

Farah Farzana: The financial security of women who have children, for example, has pretty much been zero to none because their lives have revolved around childcare. If women in their gender role as the primary caretaker were relying on extended family or even friends to look after children, or after-school care and so on, all that support was removed because of lockdown restrictions and it was very difficult for women to find paid work.

Families who have no recourse to public funds do not have the option of furlough. How will a woman who is at home with children, with no access to public funds and for whom universal credit is not an option, provide for and support her family if, as is typical, the male is the breadwinner and either has to stop working or reduce working but does not have the option of furlough? Racial discrimination in the workplace causes people to leave their jobs, or they feel forced to leave. It has been difficult for such families to achieve financial security.

We know of certain cases where we have been trying to help some women fill out Scottish welfare fund applications, but the community has not rallied around to help and support. I am saying this from the grass-roots perspective of the work that I have been doing with our charity. We got funding to help women, but it was quite restrictive in what you could do with it. It could even affect something as simple as getting a gift card from Asda, which we did during the omicron lockdown, and it was very well received.

However, to find paid work that is flexible, not only do you have to juggle childcare, you have to juggle your own home life, the language barrier and knowledge to get access to information, as well as the competing attention of children or other family members, and caring responsibilities for other family members, whether it be parents who live with you or children with additional support needs. It has been very hard to find paid work, especially if you are a woman and self-employed.

For example, beauticians were one of the worst-affected services through lockdown.

10:45

The Convener: I see that Trishna Singh wants to come in.

Trishna Singh: Everything that has been said applies across the board to the vast majority of ethnic minority women. We know from our own experience that the biggest stigma is still around. Even though this pandemic has hit and people are at the end of their rope mentally and physically with trying to keep things going, there is a stigma that stops women from coming forward. That is the biggest thing that stops them doing so, and that needs to be acknowledged and recognised.

The evidence that we give might come across as anecdotal but, somewhere along the line, this situation that you hear about anecdotally needs to change. The research that we did for the "Sikh Women Speak" report was conducted because there was nothing about Sikh women at all in any manner or form in Scotland. That was a first step, and there needs to be more in-depth research on these areas, and it should be done across the board because it is not a one-size-fits-all situation. Some of the work that has been done by people such as Farah Faranza and CEMVO might be being done by us, too, but we will be doing it in a different way, because the needs of women in different communities are different, and their mental health is affected differently.

Some women have been doing the same thing for so long that they have internalised it and they think that it is normal. It is difficult to explain to someone that their situation is not normal and that they need to have a life and acknowledge that they are a human being as well. It is difficult to put that down on paper in a report, with statistics that show what is happening out there.

We meet women are now completely traumatised by the fact that they can no longer access the small job that they had. As was said before, if the man who was the main breadwinner is unemployed and at home, that makes it doubly worse for them. Even if they were able to get a job, the stigma of the woman working and the man not is still rife in the communities.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you. Joy Lewis, Mariam Ahmed and Sara Medel Jiménez want to come in. We will go to Joy next.

Joy Lewis: I am going to quote the Fawcett Society again. It conducted a study that showed that over a fifth of BME women—21 per cent—felt that they were unfairly selected for furlough because of their race, sex, age, disability or health condition. The figure for white women was just 1 per cent. Money was often an issue when a minority ethnic woman was put on furlough, clearly. Her contribution to the household became less important and her value came under scrutiny. There was definitely a gender imbalance in the perception of the value of work. Loss of employment opportunities led to the loss of financial security and an increase in low-value work—zero-hours contracts, for example—reinforced the decreased self-belief and confidence. We often heard people saying, "It's all I am worthy of. No one else wants me." That was horrible to hear.

Lower-value jobs lead to decreased confidence and it is a downward spiral. Many of our cohort of women had taken low-skilled jobs just to get some money in and we know they could do more than that. The pandemic has affected their decision-making capabilities and knocked their confidence, as I keep saying. There is fear about going for a job and concern that it will affect much-needed benefits. There is also a fear of taking something else on and not being able to cope with it. I have some thoughts on that but I will keep them for when we talk more about employment.

Mariam Ahmed: I do not want to reiterate the points that have already been made. One thing that I would say is that the issue of people having no recourse to public funds has had quite a big impact on women. My background is in violence against women, so that is the specialism that I have. Even as the chief executive, I am still doing domestic abuse casework. I have found that services improved for a lot of BME women with no recourse to public funds in the sense that a lot of local authorities automatically gave women hotels to stay in rather than questioning them and making them destitute. However, we found that women were given rooms in those hotels and just a basic food package—there was nothing else with that, so that was quite difficult.

When it comes to looking at employability and employability options, there are two groups of women. One group consists of women who are British born, understand the system and know how to apply for jobs. However, even people in that group encounter racial inequality and wonder whether they are getting passed up for a job because of their name or whatever. That kind of systemic racism is always quite difficult to prove.

We have supported a lot of women who are going for what we would call the low-paid jobs but, again, digital inclusion was a big issue. Even for warehouse jobs, people had to upload their CV and apply for the job online—everything, including payslips, was online. We had women who were managing to get a few of those low-paid jobs, but they were finding them difficult to maintain, and they did not know how to access their payslips or

how to access any of those systems. There was nobody to help with that isolation.

Another important issue is the fact that they needed part-time work. There are people on universal credit who have pressure on them to get a job as soon as possible or else they might be sanctioned. However, the type of employment that they are looking for is part-time work. The benefits system does not take into account the pressure that childcare places on women. That is what I wanted to say about that.

Sara Medel Jiménez: Once again, I want to reiterate everything from Joy Lewis, Mariam Ahmed, Farah Faranza, and Trishna Singh. I wanted to add two things in relation to employment, which has come up a lot.

A study from Close the Gap called "Still Not Visible" talked about how the cultures that we come from put service and family above most things. Unfortunately, that does not work to our favour when it comes to interviews. The situation, task, action, result—STAR—approach to interviews that is customary in Scotland and the UK benefits those who have grown up here, those who went to nursery here and started from a very young age to present and talk about and boast about their achievements. We are not educated that way and, unfortunately, that is why we miss out. In this study, it was interesting to see that feedback. Whenever we get feedback, especially the women, we get told that we do not have quite the right personality. Even though we might have the same skill set and similar experience as our white counterpart, we do not seem to sell ourselves as much. Of course, it is a vicious circle. The longer you stay out of employment, the longer it is to get back.

Another important thing that seems to be coming across through the STUC black workers committee is the Equalities Act 2010. The issue of a colour-blind approach sounds good in principle, because we are all equal, but the problem is—to go back to what everybody else has said—that does not acknowledge the nuances and does not treat everybody as they need to be treated. Another big issue is that of protected characteristics. If you ever feel like you are the victim of injustice at work and you do not have a union, it is hard to navigate the system to find out what to do. First you go to Google and it talks about an employment tribunal. How on earth do you arrange that without facing being fired and not having that income that you need?

Unfortunately, my knowledge of laws and Parliament is not good enough to explain this in detail but, at the moment, the burden of proof lies with the victim. Despite not having a job, despite not having the right conditions, despite having all these things to do at home, it still comes to us to fix the problem and provide evidence. A lot of that evidence is verbal. How do you prove things on that basis? How do we prove that somebody made some nasty comments or unfair comments in feedback? How do we prove that we did not get the job because people thought that, given our age, we are likely to have another kid soon? How do we prove that someone looked at us and said to themselves, "No, we do not want to give Sara that much responsibility because then we have to get maternity leave cover." We need to make that process easier. The law needs to change, just as the law for rape is changing.

As part of my job I work with Police Scotland. For the first time ever, 11 of their BME officer applicants passed the assessment centre. They passed it because Police Scotland said, "We are doing it wrong. We need to do it right." Now they have got rid of this colour-blind approach and they have a positive action team that calls any applicant who is BME or has protected characteristics and asks them about their lives, what they are doing and why they are applying. Sometimes, they have to postpone applications but, for the first time, 11 out of 11 have come through.

I am hopeful that things can change. I love the fact that we are invited to give testimony to the Parliament. Of course, it is anecdotal evidence but, as Trishna Singh said, it needs to come to something solid soon, please.

The Convener: Thank you. I am not hearing Pam Duncan-Glancy, so I will now move on to Pam Gosal.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Sorry, convener. Would it be possible to have time to ask another question, or do you want to come back to me at the end?

The Convener: I will come back to you. We will hear from Pam Gosal next.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the panel for their opening statements and for sharing their personal experience and the work that they have done. Like my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy, I thank you for all the work that you have done for the BAME community and women both throughout Covid and before it.

We heard in response to our call for evidence—and we have heard this today as well—that the restrictions due to the pandemic put many women in a vulnerable position in terms of relying on their partner's income and in relation to interacting with support services. A Sikh Women's Aid report drew attention to specific characteristics of domestic violence in the BAME community. The ethnic minority national resilience network recommended investment in bespoke multilingual and multicultural mental health services. We heard

about the importance of that from Trishna Singh when she spoke about one size not fitting all.

In light of those findings, do you believe that there should be more investment in the third sector organisations that have specific capacity to reach out to BAME women who are subject to domestic violence, in order to provide bespoke services?

Farah Farzana: Thank you for that question. My background is in supporting women through lived experience or who have survived, and I have supported women who have experienced domestic violence during the pandemic.

I am trying to find the right way to articulate this. Money does not need to go into third sector organisations for those bespoke services. Money needs to be put into public services to provide for the basic human rights of any women who go through domestic violence. For example, we supported women through domestic violence during lockdown, and there needs to be more cultural awareness in front-line police officers. When we were in lockdown, police were the first point of contact in such situations, and the fact that they are not aware of the cultural difficulties speaks volumes. It is not just about the third sector; it is about public services.

11:00

In relation to mental health, which we have talked about, it should again be down to public services. Why should it be down to voluntary and third sector organisations to fill the gaps when the data and the evidence are there to show that this is a real problem? The fix is there. It will not be perfect, but it is a beginning. It should not be on the likes of me, for example—I also suffer from mental health issues—to support other women who are going through the same issues.

In short, it is not solely about the third sector organisations. Public services desperately need that training. A lot of the work that we are doing at CEMVO Scotland through the race equality mainstreaming programme is to instil that cultural awareness in those services from a leadership perspective. It comes down to what diversity we see when we look at public sector leaders. If we do not see that diversity, that empathy and sympathy will not be there, so equalities and especially the position of women who are in domestic violence situations will always be an arm's-length issue and not something that hits home.

My request to the committee today is that you look at how effective the implementation of race equality in front-line services has been and how that has been measured.

Trishna Singh: I do not want to repeat what Farah Farzana has said, but the issue about mainstreaming services and being inclusive is a journey that has been going on for a long time, hence our organisation and other organisations that work with BME communities still being around. We have been bridging the gap in relation to the cultural awareness of the staff of mental health services. We and others have been doing that for many years. The fact of the matter is that, if it is not embedded in the culture of those organisations, it does not happen. It happens as a piece of work and then people move on to the next piece of work. The groundwork that has been done with an organisation or service provider is not handed on.

There have been so many reports and consultations over the years, and some amazing pieces of work have been done over three-year periods to discuss the issues, ask what the barriers are and make recommendations, but nothing has changed. The pandemic has brought out that the disparity continues to be there. That will not change until the internal structures change.

There is a huge issue here that people need to acknowledge, and we need to move on it. It is about funding, because that is what it comes down to. We are a small organisation. If we do not have funding to bridge that gap or be able to provide cultural awareness to mainstream services, how will that happen? There needs to be real acknowledgment of how third sector BME organisations are funded and how they can help to mainstream.

I will give my opinion from my personal point of view. I was born and brought up here. I am 68 years old. We have been working in the voluntary sector for 35 years, but when we are spoken to or invited somewhere, we are still the add-on. We are never part of the mainstream. That really needs to be raised at the highest level. The organisations continue to be in the third sector and be funded by the third sector. Everybody is always scrambling and looking for the funding to continue their vital services.

There are so many different BME communities where the women have come with different issues. I am talking about the Sikh community, but there is the Muslim community and there are the South Asian women who have come from Vietnam, Thailand and places like that. Where do they go? I really think that there needs to be change at the highest levels.

Mariam Ahmed: As Trishna Singh said, funding is always a big issue. As BME organisations, we are pitted against one another. It really should not be like that.

From working in the violence against women sector for so long, we know that there are a few issues in Scotland. First, we are not adopting the by and for model when it comes to third-sector organisations. If we are supporting BME women, we should be an organisation by BME women. A lot of organisations have BME add-ons, but they do not have any BME women on their boards or in senior management. That is a massive issue in Scotland. If we are really looking at equalities, we have a lot of third sector, front-line organisations that provide services for BME women, but they really do not understand our experiences with intersectionality or all the issues that we face. It is almost like a theoretical way of supporting us, rather than a practical, grass-roots way.

When it comes to violence against women, we are still not there. We are so far behind in relation to England and Wales and supporting BME women who are experiencing violence. When I started at Amina, I had staff saying to me, "We are absolutely inundated with violence against women and domestic abuse." That was my specialism. We had to get funding from elsewhere to get a women's rights caseworker to support women with domestic abuse issues. That funding now comes to an end.

I have always said that supporting women who are experiencing domestic abuse, especially those with no recourse to public funds, requires a lot more time and resources. Organisations such as Amina and Sikh Sanjog do exactly the same amount of work as other organisations, but I argue that the work that we do takes twice as long to deliver. Despite that, our targets are the same and the funding that we get is the same. We need a lot more investment in organisations that provide specialist services.

We can have two women's rights organisations, such as Amina and Sikh Sanjog, because the work that we do is similar but different, but because of the women that we support, it is a lot more time intensive. That does not seem to be accounted for anywhere, especially when it comes to funding.

Pam Gosal: Thank you for your answers. I have a quick follow-up question on what Mariam Ahmed has just said. Your organisations do a lot of really good work. Are BAME women more comfortable coming to your organisations because you understand the culture and the family structure, rather than going to the many other third sector organisations that provide help for people who have mental health difficulties or are experiencing domestic abuse? Do they come along because they feel that you understand them more?

Mariam, you mentioned that they do not see people like us—I am going to be honest—on those boards, so they cannot relate. I have said that all my life. I could not see people like me in politics, so I totally understand what you are talking about. Is that why they come to you more?

Mariam Ahmed: I think that there is a sense that people do not need to explain as much if they go to a specialist service. For example, I am sure that Pam Gosal knows that people will say, "Oh, she's got the evil eye." It almost sounds like you are a bit insane for saying such things, but these are genuine issues in our community. If you were to try to explain spiritual abuse or black magic to people in an outside organisation, they would probably think, "What is this person on?" If you go to a specialist organisation, they just get it.

It is about having the option. Sometimes, we point women to specialist organisations because, again, we get it—we understand—and there is no need to explain and explain. Other normal, mainstream organisations have the understanding, but when they realise how time intensive a case is, we will take it. We know what we need to do for someone with no recourse to public funds or whatever. Organisations such as ours have almost built that in. We know that the work that we do is actually much harder. We definitely provide that bespoke service, but so do all BME organisations.

Again, the biggest aspect for me is equalities. If someone is providing a BME service, that is absolutely brilliant, but they must make sure that they have BME women on their board or in senior management. Otherwise, they are not truly providing that service to our community with an equal footing.

The Convener: A few folk want to comment, but I will bring in Sara Medel Jiménez, as she has not contributed to this part of the debate. I apologise to the others who want to comment again, but we do not have time.

Sara Medel Jiménez: I will be quick. I totally agree with what Mariam Ahmed said. My BME pupils always tell me that, as she said, it is not that white people will not help us or understand what we are talking about. It just takes them longer to get there. Sometimes there is a language barrier, although we do not have to speak the same language. I sometimes find that, as people of colour, we know just from looking at one another that we have experienced certain things. We understand what the stamp on our passports means when it says, "No recourse to public funds", and we know what it feels like.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I thank the witnesses for joining us. Your answers have been overwhelmingly comprehensive. I have expanded my education on the subject this morning, so thank you for giving me that opportunity.

In September last year, the *British Medical Journal* published a study on minority ethnic women's access to, and lived experiences of, maternity care during the pandemic. The study includes information on their mental health and wellbeing. It says:

"There were four emergent themes including communication, interactions with healthcare professionals, racism and the effect of the pandemic, with further subthemes identified."

I want to home in on the communication aspect. The study says:

"Communication, or lack thereof, played a major role in participants' perceptions of whether they were receiving acceptable care. This consisted of routine or emergency interactions with midwives, obstetricians, general practitioners and health visitors ... Despite the high standard of English spoken, most participants felt that language barriers were the most common cause of miscommunication between themselves and healthcare professionals. They concurrently felt they themselves were more likely to make inappropriate decisions regarding their healthcare as a result of misinterpretation".

Is that situation reflected across society—not just in healthcare but in financial, social and educational settings and in other areas? How is progress being made in addressing the issue?

I ask Mariam Ahmed to answer first, please.

Mariam Ahmed: On access to health, it is interesting that the study says that communication was an issue even though there might not have been language barriers. Might the issue be about communication on our part or about healthcare professionals having preconceived judgments about BME women? A lot of BME women who go through maternity care might be spoken to or treated in a certain way, but when those women start speaking, they say, "Actually, I am British born. I know what I am speaking about."

A lot of BME women experience a lot of racism in the healthcare system, with questions about whether they are exaggerating or not understanding something when trying to access a service. The number of triage calls has been a big barrier for a lot of BME women, because they are asked to tell someone over the phone what is wrong with them. That creates a barrier for BME women.

When it comes to communication, especially by health services, from my experience of supporting so many BME women, a lot of women are not taken seriously. We have had to go to doctors' surgeries and to appointments with midwives and nurses to explain certain things. There is still a lot of discrimination against BME women in the healthcare system.

11:15

Trishna Singh: Everything that has been said so far is right, but I can give a personal example of what happened during the pandemic.

A pregnant woman was taken into hospital during lockdown, so she was not meant to have anybody with her. However, her doctor had explained that, given her health and because she was mentally unstable, she could be accompanied by her mother and husband. We went inside, and the receptionist was fine. The midwife then came out and stood in front of the pregnant lady in the wheelchair, who had her husband and mother next to her, supporting her. The midwife looked at the girl in the wheelchair and said to her, "Is she your mother or is she his mother, and does she know that she shouldn't be here?" I was so shocked and upset by this woman speaking like that. It was so personal.

I am sharing that story because I feel that people need to hear it. That was me with my daughter. That woman looked at me and referred to me as "she". I turned around and said to her, "She knows exactly what she is talking about. She is here because the doctor advised her to come here." That was right in the middle of the first lockdown. I was so shocked by it all. When I came out, I was literally shaking. I stood outside and thought to myself that, if that is how I am being treated—I consider myself to be an articulate person who understands everything—I hate to think what would happen to somebody with a mother who might have difficulty with English.

I find it really painful to admit this, but the discrimination in hospitals is terrible. It is a shame, because you do not want to tar everybody with the same brush, and the national health service front-line staff have done amazing work, but such situations are still happening.

We have talked about services. We had never heard of the perinatal team that is based in Livingston, but it supports pregnant women who have had mental health problems or are dealing with a mental health illness. That perinatal service has never worked with anybody from any ethnic community.

There are services out there, but people are not accessing them because they do not know about them or because they have not been referred to them by their doctor. I assume that, in a doctors' surgery, a mental health nurse or somebody else should be able to refer people to those perinatal teams. There are gaps, in that people are losing out on services because they do not know about them.

As we have said, the problem is not all down to language barriers. The vast majority of the women we deal with are first, second, third, fourth or fifth

generation and have been born and brought up here, but, sadly, the colour of your skin matters. When you walk in somewhere, some people take one look at you and think, "She cannae speak English." It is a sad state of affairs.

Karen Adam: Thank you. That was really heartfelt and enlightening, although it was sad to hear. Your answer expanded on the question about communication, and not just in relation to spoken English.

The Convener: Does Joy Lewis want to come in?

Joy Lewis: I thought that you had told us that there was little time to come back in, so I did not want to—

The Convener: I am just trying to keep some time for after each committee member has asked their questions, so—[*Inaudible*.]

Joy Lewis: I want to come back to the question of language, because we have noticed the issue, too. At AAI, we know our limitations. I have a very diverse team but, if we have a case involving a domestic abuse problem, we refer women to local, well-known, young and small organisations in the third sector. We have a list of them all, and we give that to the women. We trust you—I have to say that.

We have noticed that the language skills of our minority ethnic women who are looking for work have deteriorated throughout the pandemic. Such skills are key to their employment. Zoom is not helping. The women have not met many people lately. They have been in isolation, for all the reasons that we know about. Their mental health has deteriorated and, with that, their command of the English language. That has to be taken into consideration. We have noticed that, in the portals on Zoom, people take about four weeks to work through their shyness to talk, and then they participate. That has to be factored in.

Sara Medel Jiménez: I want to add another comment about healthcare on the back of what Trishna Singh said. From the work that I have been doing on a course on building racial literacy that is run by Education Scotland, and from the work of the STUC, we know that different BME communities are affected differently. Of course, the more you differ from the Scottish white standard, the more of a target you become, but there are also times when people speak to me loudly and slowly in case I do not understand what they say.

Some communities are affected much more than others, and that needs to be understood. People of colour suffer different types of discrimination. Language is, of course, one factor.

I want to share something. When the midwife registered my child, they did not want to register him as "Other"; they wanted to register him as "White". I am not white, and my partner is not white. He certainly does not look white. It felt almost like people thought, "You are a PhD student. You are a teacher. You are somehow not quite BME." It felt wrong; that is all that I can say.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I commend the witnesses for their the outstanding contributions this morning. The evidence session has been quite enlightening.

I want to go back to the issue of education, training and employment. You have made it quite clear that there is definitely a need to support women from ethnic minorities in building their confidence back after the pandemic. What do we need to do in the short and medium term to make that a reality? From what I am hearing today, it is quite obvious that we are failing women from that section of society.

There are many obstacles and barriers—indeed, you have talked about them already and we are aware of them from evidence that we have previously taken—but there has to be a way back for all communities. With regard to your community—the ethnic minority community—who are disadvantaged and are not progressing to what is required, what lessons can be learned to ensure that we actually go forward, not back? What I am hearing is that we are taking a backward step, confidence has been lost and individuals do not feel that they are worthy and are not able to progress into management roles or get opportunities. Perhaps we need a sea change and should try to make that happen.

Perhaps we can hear from Joy Lewis first, as she has vast experience of the sector, and then Mariam Ahmed. If others want to respond, I will be happy to hear from them.

Joy Lewis: Some of the Government's employability funding has been and remains too prescriptive for the reality of these women's situations. We have had PhD graduates doing low-paid cleaning work, for example, or even providing catering services from home, which is amazing and shows great initiative. However, by taking such initiative in difficult times, they were not eligible to join an employment programme aimed at getting women exactly like them back into work, because they were deemed to be in employment. Even if they were working two hours a week, they were not allowed to join that programme, which suited exactly what they needed.

That confused women, who felt let down by us and by the Government. We saw motivated, qualified women, who had been passed over before, now ineligible for Government support

programmes, because they had done what they needed to do to survive. The Government has confirmed that there are other initiatives that they could benefit from, but we have heard from the women that those initiatives do not help them get a job commensurate with their skills level, which is what they want. We would like underemployment to be taken seriously and treated similarly to unemployment.

Alexander Stewart: Thank you.

Joy Lewis: I can go on—I have a couple of other points to make.

Alexander Stewart: Please do.

Joy Lewis: Minority ethnic women have qualifications and, in particular, those returning to work should not be forgotten in this journey. They can be quickly and affordably helped into work, thereby reducing Government statistics. They have skills—they just need to know how to present them with confidence.

As a result, there should be less focus on their training, but, at the moment, we are being told to concentrate on upskilling and training. For us, the main thing is language training where it is needed, but we want more on breaking down the barriers that employers, in particular, are putting up and which prevent these women entering the workforce. We are putting too much focus on the issue being the women—it is not. Most of it is about employers and those barriers.

Whenever we do a programme, whether it be for women or employers, we always include both so that they can hear and learn from each other. It has to be organic between them. We know from experience of mixing these two parties together frequently over the years that it is a match made in heaven, because they teach each other.

Jobs commensurate to the skills level are the key here. With our personal intervention and introductions, we are able to place those who are furthest from the market because of language difficulties by highlighting to employers that these women have the skills. We say to them, “Just look at their skills. That’s all that matters. Don’t look at where they got their degree from, don’t look at their name, just look at the skills because we know you need them.” The more employers we talk to, the more women we are getting into work.

Women from non-Commonwealth countries who have gained a science, technology, engineering and mathematics—or STEM—or allied health professional degree in, say, medicine, dentistry or engineering might not be familiar with the professional registration standards in the United Kingdom. They are not aware that they can contact the relevant professional membership body or organisation to get guidance on how to practise their profession successfully in the UK. They might also be confused about the difference between a trade union and a professional standards organisation.

Given the shortage of certain skills in the UK, the Government needs to work with the professional membership bodies to establish a clear pathway for assisting professional minority ethnic women trained overseas to practise their profession legally in the UK. The cost of taking exams to practise certain professions is also quite high, which can be a deterrent, but such highly trained women would also benefit from funding and mentoring from respected professional bodies.

In our present programme, we have dentists, teachers and doctors, and we are struggling to help them requalify. One of my team took the initiative to talk to a senior Indian female dentist in her practice in Scotland about the two dentists on the programme, and she said that they were crying out for dentists. She was aware that the Government website was difficult to navigate. She said that what we at AAI were doing was a great initiative, and she insisted that the dental profession needed to meet these women to help them through the complicated process of requalification. Indeed, she offered to go straight to the General Dental Council to get the matter sorted and said that she would speak to our cohort personally so that they got the best access to information and mentorship. She felt that that was the best way of getting them into meaningful employment that equalled their qualifications and skill sets. Clear access to support for these professions will ensure that highly qualified talent does not have to resort to precarious work to bring in money for the family.

11:30

Alexander Stewart: Thank you very much indeed for that good and in-depth answer. Mariam, do you wish to respond?

Mariam Ahmed: We need to invest in more employability programmes. Amina has an employability programme that helps women put together CVs, take ESOL classes, get employability skills and whatever else is needed, including volunteering opportunities, but we are always struggling with funding and the constant demand that comes in.

I would really welcome employers having the sort of targeted recruitment that Police Scotland has carried out; there was also targeted recruitment for teaching assistants. We have been looking at BME religious communities, and we have gone to them and said, “We are looking for more BME women to become teaching

assistants." That kind of targeted recruitment helped last year in getting more BME women to consider that as a profession and apply.

Moreover, organisations need to have accountability when it comes to highly qualified and highly skilled jobs. Is anyone in their senior management BME? Do they have any BME people on their boards? Again, if we were to do that sort of analysis of Scotland, we would find the number of BME women's rights organisations that do not have any brown or black women on their boards or senior management teams to be an absolute issue, especially when they are running BME-specific projects. As I have said, organisations need to have accountability; there needs to be targeted recruitment; and we need more investment in specialist BME organisations to deliver employability programmes.

Alexander Stewart: Trishna Singh, did you want to come in?

Trishna Singh: I would just add that, having run employability programmes for more than 25 years now and having worked in partnership with the local jobcentres, we know that that one-to-one support, which helps women get access to employment, helps with filling in forms and gives them the confidence to go for an interview, is important. Just referring them to the jobcentres and saying, "You have to go there" does not work, and we have the evidence to prove it. In the past, we have had funding to bridge that gap between the jobcentres and the women and to get them to the stage where they are able to apply for jobs. More funding needs to be put into these things.

As has been said before, until that gap is closed by mainstreaming, which does not look like it will happen in the near future, people need to start acknowledging that the services that we are providing on the ground for the women from these BME communities are vital. Without them, you will never have a diverse workforce. If you look at both sides of the scale—if you look at this from Joy's end and from our end—you will see a huge gap. Somewhere along the line, that needs to be acknowledged and taken on board by the powers that be.

Alexander Stewart: I think that Farah Farzana wanted to come in, too.

Farah Farzana: I have been taking notes, so I will not reiterate what my colleagues have been saying.

With regard to training, women and employment, in our race for human rights programme at CEMVO Scotland, we work with clients on exactly those issues. The programme itself is about getting more ethnic minorities into employment, although I know that the specific scope of this discussion is about getting ethnic minority women into employment.

As well as positive action measures and employability programmes, what we can take forward from this pandemic is the number of transferable skills that ethnic minority women have gained. They have, for example, become negotiators—by, for example, having to manage family members or children fighting at home—and home educators. We should encourage people to see the skills that we have had to learn at home as transferable ones.

I just want to quickly home in on a particular issue. The first thing that we ask any client that we support is: "What does your data look like?" That is an issue in itself; we still have inadequate measures for collecting data on ethnic minority women in Scotland, and that desperately needs to be looked at. When we do deep-dive sessions, we see the barriers that prevent ethnic minority women from applying for certain jobs, whether it be the need for a certain skill set, racial discrimination and so on. Most likely it is because of racial discrimination, but we work on all of these things.

Now that we are sitting with MSPs at this committee meeting, I have to say that it is important that we hold public services and public leaders to account in following through on the public sector equality duty. I look to you, again, as policy makers to ensure that, when it comes to collecting data and fulfilling public sector equality duties, you look at what is happening on the front line. Without the data or the evidence, it is hard to advocate for what is actually needed.

We know what is needed, because we have lived it, but that evidence is required to translate these things into policy and positive action measures. With the disparity in the trust between leadership and the front line with regard to, for example, disclosure rates, it is hard to find out what the needs are and what gaps need to be filled, and I hope that the committee will look into that, too. I should say that CEMVO Scotland supports both ethnic minority women and men into employment in its different programmes and projects.

Alexander Stewart: Thank you very much. That covers my questions, convener.

The Convener: Thank you. I call Pam Gosal.

Pam Gosal: That is fine, convener. I mixed both my questions into one when I asked about one size not fitting all.

The Convener: Does Pam Duncan-Glancy want to come in now?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Yes, please—that would be helpful.

Earlier on, a comment was made about the unpaid work of people—[*Inaudible*.] That particularly struck me, because I can see how you will have had to put in considerably more hours of support. What do you think the solution to that is? Do you think that the people and organisations that you work with are getting enough financial support to recruit the number of staff who are needed to address some of the problems that you have raised?

The Convener: Do you want to direct that question at somebody?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I did not write down the name of the person who made that comment early on. If the person who said that remembers that they said it, maybe they could come back on it. Otherwise, maybe Mariam Ahmed or Farah Farzana could answer the question.

The Convener: Mariam Ahmed is nodding.

Mariam Ahmed: Do we ever feel that we have enough funding for staff? That probably applies to all third sector organisations. We are always fighting for funding. We have a cocktail of funding, which is always a dangerous situation to be in, but that needs to be done.

In my time at Amina, I have had to be more realistic about our targets and to go back to funders and say, for example, "Look, we know that you want us to support 12 women. That might not look like a lot, but look at the amount of time and resources that that will take."

There has definitely been a burnout of staff—all organisations have said that. For me, it has been about speaking to my staff and supporting them, whether through external counselling or extra team meetings. I have always been in advocacy and women's rights, so I get it. We should be a listening ear for our own staff and understand how difficult things are.

I keep going back to the fact that BME organisations need extra investment, especially in looking at inequalities. However, when we apply for violence against women funds or equality and human rights funds, we bid for exactly the same money, and that intersectionality is not taken into account. Maybe the same amount of work that we were going to deliver will be needed, but we will need two workers rather than one. Unfortunately, reflecting that is still not built into our funding streams, but I am sure that that is the same for all the colleagues on this call.

Trishna Singh: All of that funding is vital for our organisations. We applied to the equality and human rights fund and did not get anything, although we were the only Sikh family support charity in the whole of Scotland that supported women from the Sikh community. Because of the loss of that funding, we lost our outreach worker, who was reaching out to more than 100 people a week. We now have to wait until the next round of funding before we can employ somebody. That does not mean that the referrals have stopped. The referrals have started to come in, and I have to pick them up.

When we apply for funding for a fundamental aspect of the work that we do, there is a real misunderstanding and mismatch somewhere. We do not get anything, and we then have to look elsewhere for that funding. That defies the imagination. We think, "Why do we always have to fight for funding? Does nobody appreciate the work that we do? Is it not acknowledged at some level? Is it really just an add-on? Do people think that we are there and will do it?"

Mainstream organisations are funded by statutory services. Why is no single BME organisation under the statutory umbrella, whether that is for social work, health and social care, children's services or anything like that? That is a question rather than an answer. I know that we are looking for solutions, but the solutions are there. We are delivering the solutions, but they are not being acknowledged in the right way. If they were, we would not be looking for funding to keep us going. We have the solutions, and we are delivering them. All the organisations are doing that.

Farah Farzana: On solutions to support the recovery, if only money were the solution to all our problems, that would be an easy fix. From looking at the circumstances that we are in with finances, the budget and the economy, Covid and the lockdown have definitely taught us that it is time to work smarter, not harder.

The Scottish Government has acknowledged the fact that there is institutionalised racism in Scotland. If people with lived experience, including professional experience, were brought into more leadership positions and there was that diversity in the workforce, that would trickle down. We know that there is a gap between white and non-white applicants in the employment market. A lot of groundwork needs to be done in supporting the recovery.

The training and upskilling need to be flexible. A positive to take away from being in lockdown was the flexibility of working from home. People could work from home and not have to worry as much about who would look after the children. That involves less financial responsibility, but it takes its emotional toll. I have felt like banging my head off the wall when my children have been in the background and they have come into a meeting that I have been in. However, if it were not for the flexibility in working in my role, I probably would not be in employment at the moment. Prior to

working with CEMVO Scotland, I worked part time on an as-and-when basis. That is something to take positively. We need to promote hybrid working and the options and possibilities that there are now in the digital, connected economy.

11:45

Another positive from being in lockdown is the awareness of mental health. Prior to the lockdown, it was hard to explain why I had to leave my job because of mental health issues—I suffered extreme paranoia and anxiety. I could not leave the house, for example. Going into lockdown was a blessing in disguise, because there was no longer the pressure to leave home. It also meant that other people were more willing to understand what I was going through and were therefore able to accommodate and facilitate that.

Going forward, those things need to remain as they are. We need to remember that mental health comes first and the humanisation of people.

I have seen in the chat bar that racial discrimination against ethnic minorities not just in the workplace but within society is within the remit of everyone here to act on.

Joy Lewis: There are no quick fixes, but there are, I hope, some easy solutions. I would love to see a workplace that accepts—if not embraces—diversity. Such long-term goals need to be striven for.

Childcare has not been mentioned much today. Women who want to work need childcare. A more holistic approach to training and employment guidance that takes into consideration the importance of the need for improved resilience is needed.

We have touched on flexibility before, but it is misunderstood by employers. They do not understand what flexibility means for minority ethnic women and how important it is to fit around their culture and their needs. More education for employers is needed to ensure that, where possible, they offer hybrid or remote working, which is much more accessible for everyone. One good thing that has come out of the pandemic is that remote working will now give minority ethnic women who want to work more access to jobs. They can work from home with children on their laps—and they will do that. We have one person who works full time. She has two children, and she manages around their needs.

We know that gender and race are issues, and we know that they have been compounded for minority ethnic women by the pandemic. Whatever is done, we must be careful that support and resources go to the most affected.

Sara Medel Jiménez: I could not agree more with everything that has been said. I thank everybody for reiterating things.

On employment, I want to add something about the teaching profession and General Teaching Council for Scotland standards. A lot of qualified teachers in other countries find it exceedingly hard to qualify in the UK. Scotland has a target to meet by 2030. To ensure that that happens, we need to accept 300 teachers from diverse backgrounds into teacher education programmes every year. They are not sticking with the profession—they are not staying. A lot of that is to do with the hostile environment.

If there is an easier way to ensure that BME workers in Scotland know their rights and if we can shift the burden of proof a little bit, employers will have to be more aware of what is right and wrong. Racism is institutionalised, but it is also man made. It can be reversed with a lot of work. I hope and have faith that that will happen, perhaps not for my generation but for generations that will follow us.

Thank you again for having us here.

The Convener: Pam Gosal has a last, quick question.

Pam Gosal: Sara Medel Jiménez talked about working harder than her white female and white male colleagues. I have talked to a lot of BAME women and read a lot of the books. Sometimes we feel that we need to work harder for our position in society, and there is guilt. We feel that we need to work to be noticed. Was that the reason for that, or was that more about the employer pushing you to work differently from other colleagues? I think that I have put that right.

Sara Medel Jiménez: I think that it was both. There is pressure in thinking, “I’ve had a baby, but it does not matter: I will still do this and that. I’ll go over and beyond to prove that my male counterparts will not get some advantage over me when it comes to a promoted post.” A lot of that is self-imposed pressure that comes from the culture, but there are times when I am given extra work, and I think, “Why am I given extra work?”

I remember coming back from a weekend when I was ill. An email had been sent to my entire department that asked who could supervise a mini dissertation that pupils had to do. Nobody answered. When I came back, I opened my email, and that landed on my desk. There were 12 people there. Why me? I fought that and did not have to do it in the end. When staff need to be disciplined, women often get emails that say, or little comments such as, “You didn’t do it quite right.” That is targeted. I am not saying that it is conscious, but it is there.

The Convener: Men in particular always need to be mindful of the last point that Sara Medel Jiménez made, because sometimes discrimination is not conscious, but that does not make it okay.

I hugely thank everyone for coming to the meeting and giving us a little bit more of your time than you had agreed to. The session has been really helpful.

We will now move into private session.

11:53

Meeting continued in private until 12:30.

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