



## **Research Report Summary**

# **Ethnic Differences in Post-Higher Education Employment: A Study of Differences in Perceived Difficulties in Obtaining Jobs, Occupational Values, and Influences on Job Choice**

**John P. Charlton, Susan Taylor, Rob Ranyard & Claire Hewson**

**Department of Psychology & Life Sciences**

**University of Bolton**

This summary describes the first of three research reports resulting from a project funded by the European Social Fund and the University of Bolton which sought to investigate some basic psychological differences between ethnic minority and White ethnic majority people leaving UK higher education. One aim of the project was to contribute to an understanding of why ethnic minority graduates find it more difficult to obtain employment. The report summarised here deals with the analysis of a large data set concerning differences in perceived difficulties in obtaining a job, occupational values and influences on type of job targeted. A second report concerns graduates' job-seeking behaviours and their outcomes and details how some of the factors considered in the first report relate to these behaviours and outcomes. A third report is more qualitatively orientated than the first two and considers matters from the perspective of a small number of employers. In all three reports discussion of theoretical issues is limited, priority being given to the reporting of data.

The data considered in the report referred to here was obtained from a pool of 898 UK students graduating from 21 English and Welsh universities in 2004 and 2005 who, shortly before or after their graduation, completed questionnaires designed to elicit information about their demographic details, their perceptions of the extent to which people of their ethnicity would experience difficulties in obtaining jobs, their occupational values, and factors influencing the jobs that they were targeting or intended to target on finishing their courses.

Findings showed that, overall, irrespective of gender and socio-economic background, graduating students of both sexes perceived it as more difficult for females than males to acquire jobs, and those from ethnic minorities perceived greater difficulty than White students. However, more detailed analysis showed that graduating students from Black or from Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds perceived it as more difficult to obtain jobs than graduating White students, but that this was not the case for Indian students. The report concludes that the perceptions of graduating ethnic minority students reflect the reality whereby members of such groups are likely to find obtaining suitable jobs more difficult than White graduates. This raises the possibility that some members of ethnic minority groups may restrict their job-seeking to within their own ethnic community, this possibly having important personal and societal consequences since many job opportunities that ethnic minority job-seekers access via their social networks may have a disproportionate tendency to be relatively low status. It was also found that gender stereotyping of jobs still exists, with professional mainly non-person-centred jobs being seen as more difficult to obtain by women and more person-centred jobs being seen as more difficult to obtain by men, it being concluded that this is likely to contribute to the continuation of job segregation by gender.

With respect to occupational values, females and, to a lesser extent, ethnic minorities were shown to attach greater value to equality in the workplace. This implies that if employers wish to select from the full pool of graduate talent they should ensure that they have robust equal opportunities policies and that these are publicised in recruitment literature and during the recruitment process. Various gender and ethnic differences involving a number of other occupational values centring upon social concerns, stressfulness, and status and control were also identified.

The data concerning influences on choice of job targeted showed that, as would be expected, ethnic minority graduates' choices are more influenced by the experience of, or possibility of, discrimination than is the case for White graduates. The same is also true for White female graduates when compared with White male

graduates. These findings suggest that an important issue for employers who are seeking to redress ethnic or gender imbalances in their workforce is to ensure that their recruitment policies and working practices are neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory and that this is signalled to potential ethnic minority and female job applicants both prior to and during the recruitment process. These points are likely to be particularly important for employers in fields of employment which might be widely assumed by ethnic minorities and women to be traditionally more prone to engage in discriminatory practices.

The influence of friends, family and community on choice of job targeted was seen to be greater for ethnic minority graduates, which supported the idea that the relatively more individualist and collectivist cultures from which White British and non-White ethnic minority graduates respectively tend to come may influence career choices. The same interpretation can also be put on the fact that geographical constraints had a greater influence on the job choices of ethnic minority graduates, although this finding may also be linked to the relatively less favourable financial position of UK ethnic minorities. The latter interpretation was supported by the observation that ethnic minority students rated financial considerations as being more important in their choices than White students. Thus, with respect to the finding on geographical constraints, it is possible that, as a group, ethnic minority graduates may, for example, be less able to afford a car to commute or may feel less able to take on the financial burdens of relocation. Therefore, the report suggests that in seeking to redress ethnic imbalances in their staff, employers might wish to take into account the notion that financial incentives may have a differential impact across ethnic minority and majority groups.