

## **Powerless, poor and passed-over: black and minority ethnic women in the UK**

The corridors of power are still closed to black and minority ethnic (BME) women – and their exclusion shows at every level of society, a new report has found.

Research by the Fawcett Society has revealed the true extent to which BME women are almost entirely absent from the ranks of decision-makers in the UK.

There have only ever been two black female MPs (Diane Abbott and Oona King), there has never been an Asian female MP, there are no BME women police chief constables and there are no BME women judges in the House of Lords or Court of Appeal.

While their voices are not heard at the top, many BME women are struggling against multiple discrimination on grounds of their sex, race and/or religion. The report highlights massive inequalities in education, health, employment and pay, financial security, levels of political involvement and treatment by the criminal justice system. We found:

### **BME women in public life**

- Although BME women form about four per cent of the population, they make up just 0.3 per cent of MPs – there are only two female BME MPs.
- There are no BME women police chief constables and there are no BME women judges in the House of Lords or Court of Appeal.

### **Health**

- Babies born to immigrant Pakistani mothers are more than twice as likely to die in their first week as the babies of British-born mothers.
- Rates of suicide among young South Asian women are double that of the general population

### **Poverty and pay**

- Two fifths of Asian and black women live in poverty, twice the proportion of white women.
- On average, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women earn only 56 per cent of the average hourly wage of White men.

### **Criminal justice**

- A woman victim of domestic violence has on average 11 contacts with agencies before getting the help she needs - this rises to 17 if she is black

- Criminal prosecutions against African Caribbean women are the most likely to be discontinued, suggesting that charges are being inappropriately brought by the police, without sufficient evidence.

Dr Katherine Rake, Director of the Fawcett Society said: "The experiences of black and minority ethnic women has been all too easily overlooked, with the focus too often being on gender or race, but not both.

"Our report reveals the terrible impact that multiple discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion and or age can have on BME women, who continue to be excluded from positions of power.

"It is vital that the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) tackles issues of multiple discrimination as a priority."

The Fawcett Society report was launched last night (Weds February 16) at an event hosted by Channel 4 News presenter Samira Ahmed. Speakers included Pinky Lilani, Chair of the Asian Women of Achievement Awards and comedienne Angie LeMar.

## **Notes**

1. Fawcett is UK campaign for equality between women and men in the UK.
2. *Black and Minority Ethnic Women in the UK*, was published by the Fawcett Society on Wednesday February 16 2005.
3. The UK Government is planning to create a single body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) to deal with all six equality strands of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation as well as promoting human rights. This will replace existing bodies such as the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality.
4. The launch of the report was kindly sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland.
5. Relevant organisations – wanting a copy of the report should contact Yessica at [yessica@fawcettsociety.org.uk](mailto:yessica@fawcettsociety.org.uk)
6. Press wanting a copy of the report or more information should contact Jenny Westaway at [jenny@fawcettsociety.org.uk](mailto:jenny@fawcettsociety.org.uk) or call 020 7253 2598.
7. Individuals and other organisations can order a copy of the report by visiting the publications page of our website.