



Scottish Minority
Ethnic Women's
Network
(SMEWN)



Lets Break to Educate

A Series of Webinars

July - December 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction	04
- 2. Background & Context	05
- Webinars	
COVID-19 - What is the Information/Stories Telling Us?	06
Impact of Home Schooling on BME Families	08
BME Women in Employment	11
Black Lives Matter	16
- 3. Conclusion	19
- 4. Recommendations for SMEWN development.....	20

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017, supported by the Scottish Government Equality Unit, CEMVO Scotland organised a series of events to progress the development of the Scottish Ethnic Minority Women's Network.

SMEWN was officially launched in October 2019 by Christina McKelvie MSP, Minister for Equalities and Older People. The launch was attended by over 120 women, boosting the membership by 10% on the launch day itself.

Since then, the membership has increased by a further 20% and currently stands at 147. The Network Board continues to work hard to raise its social media presence.

SMEWN exists for Scottish women from all black minority ethnic backgrounds. Its purpose is to enable, empower, and help fulfil their aspirations whilst providing a safe space for women where they can access support, share ideas, collaborate, and discuss the issues that affect them.

SMEWN recognises itself as an equal partner in all aspects of Scottish life and provides a strong voice representing minority ethnic women in Scotland when engaging with Scottish Government and other key decision makers around policy, practice and issues affecting them.

SMEWN's vision is to provide a recognised platform for their inclusive participation across the political, social, and economic landscape of Scotland



2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

As a result of the recent pandemic the Scottish Minority Ethnic Women's Network Board, and with the support of CEMVO Scotland Race Equality Mainstreaming Officer, consulted with their members on the workplan.

The outcome of the consultation was to hold a series of webinars for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women across Scotland in 2020 entitled 'Lets Break to Educate' on the following topics:



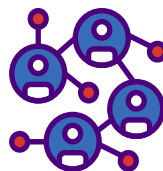
The aims of the webinars were to:



inform and engage Network members in current issues affecting them.



provide an opportunity in a protected space to have discussion and dialogue with peers in an open and transparent way.



connect with BME women across Scotland and to increase membership of SMEWN.



provide a written report at the completion of the webinars.

WEBINAR 1

July 2020

COVID-19 - What is the Information/Stories Telling Us?

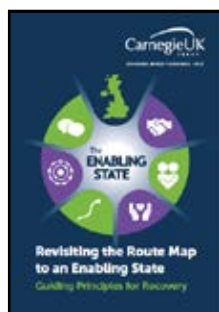
COVID-19 - What is the Information/Stories Telling Us? by Naira Dar, SMEWN's Chair. There were fifty-two participants and four speakers from Public Health Scotland.

The following links were circulated to all the Network members in advance:



Analysis of deaths involving coronavirus (COVID-19) in Scotland, by ethnic group - Data up to 14 June 2020

www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/covid19/ethnicity-deceased-covid-19-june20.pdf



Revisiting the Route Map to an Enabling State - Guiding Principles for Recovery

d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/07/08153724/LOW-RES-4614-CUKT-Guiding-Principles-for-Recovery-A5-1.pdf

Following on from the introduction and welcome by the Chair, each of the four guest speakers was asked to speak for 10 minutes to present:

- C19 ethnicity, mortality data.
- explain how the data was being used to inform policy and actions.
- the guiding principles for recovery.

Speakers

The first speaker Ryan Scott, Head of Statistics at National Records Scotland shared statistics from the ethnicity report (see pg.6), was followed by Elizabeth Oldcorn and Emma Doyle (Public Health Scotland).

Hannah Ormiston, Policy Officer from the Carnegie Trust introduced the route map (see pg.6).

The speakers provided updates and reflections generating many ideas, thoughts, and suggestions, and importantly the willingness by BME women to be involved in both national and local activities.

The webinar was then opened to the participants.

Manira Ahmed (SMEWN Board member) was the first to speak about her story of Covid19. Sharing her experiences and challenges of homeworking, home schooling and maintaining a schedule/routine whilst remaining positive during the uncertainty, she then asked members to highlight their 'stand out person' during these unprecedented times by writing into the Slido board.



This was a good ice breaker encouraging participants to start sharing their stories and engaging with the topic. Additionally, the speakers' presentations generated various questions with the following emerging themes:

- new census data,
- BME/Covid19 mortality rates
- engagement with EM communities less organised e.g., Sri Lankan and African communities
- access to information
- representation of BME issues on Scottish wide policy groups.

WEBINAR 2

August 2020

Impact of Home Schooling on BME Families

Impact of Home Schooling on BME Families was chaired by Naira Dar with seventeen participants. There were no invited speakers at this webinar as the aim was to allow conversation to be free flowing as women shared their lived experience.

Naira Dar opened the session by asking the following open-ended questions:

1

As we prepare for children to go back to school, how confident do you feel about the return to school?

2

What has been the impact of home schooling for you and your children during the pandemic and the challenges that it has brought?

Following on from these opening questions, the home-schooling webinar participants identified:

- The challenges of educating children at home for women of all ages whilst also working from home or having caring responsibilities.
- A couple of positive schooling experiences were evidenced, and these were of schools with smaller class sizes that were using zoom and phone - ins to tutor children with home working tasks set on a daily/weekly basis.
- The presence of a supportive husband or family member that was able to share the home-schooling duties taking the pressure off the mother somewhat.
- The fear expressed of returning to school for both children and parents and most feel 'unprepared' for what lies ahead.
- Mounting anxiety of children falling behind with lessons and not being able to 'catch up' as quickly as they might have before Covid19 and the impact of this long term.

There were varied experiences of home schooling, a few positive but in the main it was intense and challenging particularly if you were a single parent and have one or more children with additional needs.

The participants shared their individual experience of home schooling and most focussed on households with children in primary schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The issues that emerged from the general discussions with all participants are summarised here:

- Concerns were raised that there is a perceived lack of structure and inconsistency of practice in schools across Glasgow and Edinburgh.
- Participants from Glasgow and Edinburgh had found home schooling a challenge.
- Women who were also working from home found juggling home schooling and work extremely stressful. One participant had resorted to additional classes/tuition for her child. She recognised that although affordability was not an issue for her this was not the case for everyone.
- It was noted that children whose parents lived in separate households and were self-isolating or shielding were unable to be home schooled full time at the start or during the pandemic further impacting on their learning and attainment levels and parents are concerned that children may fall behind in education
- The additional negative impact of home schooling on carers who have no access to respite as services are now online.

One positive example:

- A participant, a civil servant, shared that there had been efforts to support their staff by adopting measures to help people with childcare and caring responsibilities e.g., 'no detriment policy' that will top up hours lost.

One participant who is a tutor was supporting her siblings with home schooling and she said that since lockdown teaching methods were adapted by education services so that they were online to support children to learn at home.

This raised several issues and concerns for parents and carers around digital exclusion with no access to digital resources and high-speed broadband.

- A non-parent with a partner employed as a youth worker shared that 'there are plenty of grants available for digital resources but not for broadband coverage and lots of households in deprived areas do not have broadband at home. Those households have to rely on data on the parents' phone which further excludes and impacts their education.'
- One participant shared that working in ethnic minority communities she clearly saw that, 'they're not engaged in online teachings and parents born out-with the UK are not confident to home school their children'. This was due to being unfamiliar with the school curriculum.
- Mostly everyone agreed that there was a lack of support for women/parents/carers, and this had led to inequalities creating a digital divide for 'hard to reach' communities and for those that do not have English as their main language.

Participants also shared other challenges that they faced:

- Children are fearful of 'returning to school, contracting Covid19 and bringing it back home' to their parents and siblings.
- Gaps in learning will be identified because of teachings not being standardised.
- A child attending a predominantly all white school raising concerns of ongoing racism in that school.
- The experience of starting a parent forum and teaching her children about equalities and anti-racism, speaking about struggling as a single EM parent, growing up in Scotland, and now with two children (one autistic) and the challenges she faces.
- More recently with resistance to Black Lives Matter (BLM) from white parents living in East Renfrewshire. Although the hashtag has caught most children's interest, it is not widely supported by the parents of children attending schools in East Renfrewshire.

WEBINAR 3

September 2020

BME Women in Employment

BME Women in Employment, was Chaired by **Manira Ahmed** and **Aneela McKenna**, with twenty-seven participants and two speakers, Miriam Hussain (Young Women lead) and Ruth Boyle Policy & Parliamentary officer – Close the Gap (CTG)

Aneela introduced the first speaker, Miriam Hussain (Scottish Parliament Young Women Lead Programme).

Miriam spoke about her personal experience of growing up in Scotland and facing barriers to pursuing her choice of career due to lack of role models and expectations from her immediate family. Reflecting on her life journey Miriam stated that she had never shared a classroom with a fellow South Asian and this had a huge impact on her early years. Her current job (Sept 2020) does not meet her expectations/aspirations of employment and the lack of role models in acting prevented her from pursuing her dream profession of being an actress. She did not want to be the first in her family to be labelled as an actor/creative as this would not have been supported by the family. However, there was an increasing pressure from white counterparts that 'your Asianess' will get you the acting part which conflicted with Miriam's values making her feel like a 'fraud'.

Miriam went on to say that in her experience, career advisors are not influential but that family members had a bigger influence when it came to choosing a career and this is mirrored by the research findings that Miriam shared with the group.

An extract from recent research surveys and focus groups conducted by Young Women Lead in February 2020 is contained below.

(NB: The full research results will be published and made available from October 2020.)



Lack of role models/
mentors for young
BME women.



There is a need
for role models/
internships/visible
mentors from
education.



Need for visible
good practices
for employers and
employees



Family influences
are a major issue
in relation to
employment/career
choices.*

*This was not evident in the surveys and the reason for this could be that it is easier to share than record on a form.

In addition to the focus groups there were two surveys conducted on Employment: one for employers and one for employees.

The survey results revealed that:

Workplace Culture

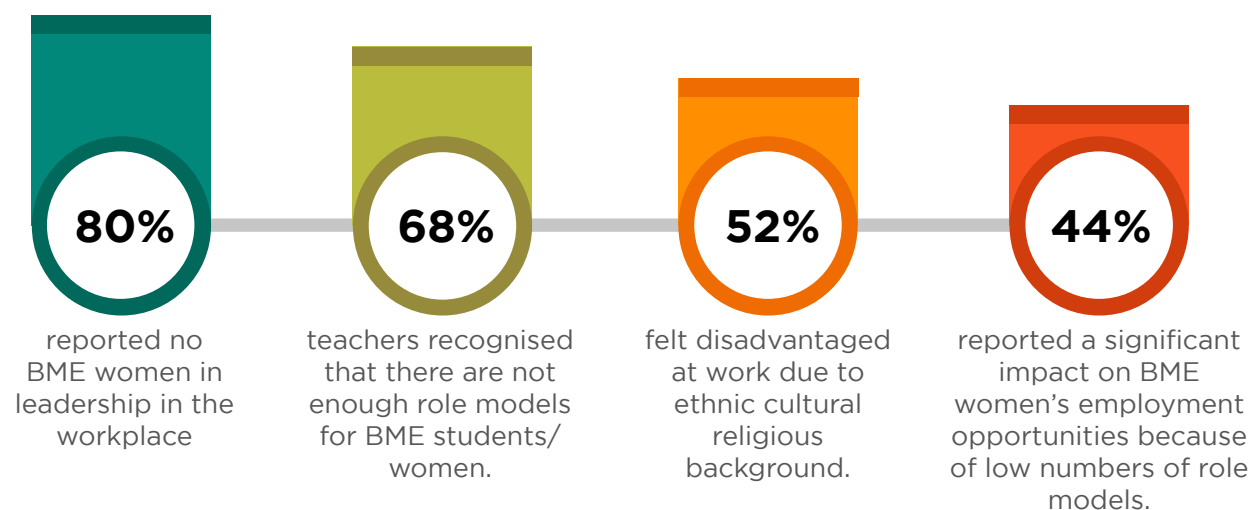
- BME women are unable to self-express in the workplace.
- It was reported that workplace culture needs to change.
- There is pressure to be a 'certain way' and 'whitewash' to fit in.

Miriam had felt pressurised in the workplace to set up BME Networks as there was a lack of people of colour in leadership roles/positions to take on this responsibility. This made her feel less able to sustain long term employment as it was proving difficult to imagine or aspire to a senior position when there were no women of colour to lead you. She added that:

- Most workplaces do not support that aspect of development (i.e., lack of people of colour in leadership roles/positions) in BME women.
- Employees are looking for a more personal, individual approach so that they can be 'themselves' in the workplace.
- They would like an empowering not disempowering culture.

Culture censorship/identity

Research showed culture censorship and identity as huge themes for BME young women. They didn't feel they were heard or that they could be 'themselves'.



In contrast the employer survey results revealed

- Employers are generally satisfied with their BME policies/action plans. However, this was not shared by the employees.
- Employers also felt that inclusion plans/ unconscious bias training in place and networks were fit for purpose.

Miriam felt that this was not the case, as they represented a bare minimum, tick box exercise. There are plans in place but nothing specific for BME women.

The full research results will be published and made available from Scottish Parliament website in October 2020.

The second speaker was introduced as **Ruth Boyle Policy & Parliamentary officer – Close the Gap (CTG)**

Ruth's presentation focused on the report 'Still not Visible' research conducted by CTG and launched in February 2019. The report examines black and ethnic minority women's experiences of employment in Scotland. Ruth outlined the methodology used for the research and pointed out that the limitations mainly due to the limited sample sizes, so not all views are represented and the lack of disaggregated findings by race/ethnicity/religious group.

Ruth stressed the importance of an intersectional approach to research. This report was aligned with previous research, highlighting the lack of change for BME women in the last 10 years.

Close The Gap research findings show:

47% reported experiences of racism, discrimination, racial bias, and prejudice exist when applying for jobs.

41% at interview stage

Reports of lack of transparency, lack of meaningful feedback and perceived discriminatory responses to having a 'foreign sounding name'

49% BME women were overlooked for a development opportunity when in the workplace

Workplace Culture

72% experienced experiences of racism, discrimination, racial prejudice and/or bias at work on a day to day basis

42% experienced bullying, harassment, or victimisation. Microaggressions and everyday racism and sexism e.g., colleagues calling them by another name that was easier to remember and pronounce.

Confidence in employer reporting mechanisms

52% who had experienced racism/discrimination/harassment reported to their employer

23% were satisfied at how the complaint was handled.

Findings showed that employers demonstrated poor understanding of good equalities practice and were complacent without monitoring effectiveness of existing practice.

CTG are planning to produce guidance for employers with clear recommendations that will be solution focussed shaped by BME women and lived experience.

Ruth was clear that a lot of work still must be done, and guidance will be available by the end of 2020. She concluded with feedback from research participants.

- Lack of action from employers
- Well evidenced and established issues
- No accountability mechanisms
- Lack of transparency and trust
- Lack of leadership and prioritisation

Aneela thanked the participants and invited questions/comments and observations from the audience.

Questions raised covered:

- 'What are the outcomes/actions to take forward following the research?'
- 'Should we work with existing 5/6 women's businesses to make sure they align with all employers so that employees get what they need? e.g., mentorship/ change of workplace culture?'
- 'How can we support CTG to engage employers with the findings especially from a public sector duty point of view and get the information out?'
- 'How can we make the evidence work?'

Suggestions included:

- Attaching an employment target for BME women recruitment
- Staff training for Skills Development Scotland staff and career advisers in colleges and Universities so that they are aware of the issues raised here.

Additional observations included:

- Staff in one participant's organisation felt empowered when talking collectively about issues that affect them.
- There is isolation among BME women and a lack of willingness to open for fear of reprisals
- There is a lack of meaningful change without leadership buy in.

Overall, it was felt that change in the workplace is still very much needed to improve BME women's experience of workplace culture.

- although research conducted by Close the Gap and others has not really changed BME women's experiences in the workplace.
- Issues of identity, lack of positive role models, racist and discriminatory practices still exist even though women of colour are 'protected' by equality laws.

The question of 'what can be done differently for women of colour?' is a prominent one but before that can be answered employers and policy makers should acknowledge the following:

- BME experience differences in the workplace as they face discrimination/prejudice/judgements and are stereotyped
- Discrimination/racism prevents BME women from progressing into senior roles
- BME women are not recognised for transferable/additional skills or talents

WEBINAR 4

October 2020

Black Lives Matter

Manira Ahmed (Board member) opened the session and welcomed everyone, including two speakers. After housekeeping Manira then handed over to Tina Yu (Board member) who introduced the speakers before handing over to Selma Rahman (Board member) to Chair the session.

The invited speakers were:



Zarina Ahmed
Climate Change and
Environmentalism



Annie George
Edinburgh-based writer, theatre
maker and occasional filmmaker

Zarina Ahmed began by sharing her experience of being a UK born citizen who from an early age experienced racism that was overt and direct. 30 years later racism is still rife even though there is zero tolerance in place. A shared example was an incident more than a decade ago when Zarina was at a hustings meeting. The main speaker/organiser of the event asked why 'your kind don't like to grow'.

Zarina was confused as she did not know if the question directed at her was because of her gender, ethnicity, or accent as she is not originally from Glasgow. This caused others in the room to react with sharp intakes of breath at the directness of the question that had clear racist intent.

Zarina went on to say that in her opinion equality is still missing from everyday life, even though a lot of work has been done e.g., environmental activities to actively include ethnic minorities and for visibility to take place.

The perception Zarina is fighting to change is that 'Ethnic minorities aren't interested in climate change' as she has been working with 150 projects across Scotland.

Participants shared some thoughts on the issue of Black Lives Matter and how it affected them individually.

- BLM is difficult but also useful at the same time.
- This is due to differing starting points when stories and experiences are shared.
- Even though people of colour may have academic qualifications they remain invisible.
- Mixed emotions and questioning whether after so long has race really progressed to a point where true equality has been achieved.

A member of the Chinese community shared that there has been an increase in racially targeted attacks because of Covid19, resulting in the community feeling that they were being held 'responsible' for the outbreak.

This has caused fear and anxiety amongst community members during lockdown in particular leading to isolation and fear of violence.

Experiences of life in Scotland and violent racist acts against family members growing up in Scotland were shared as ongoing, and although not uncommon it is still painful to hear.

It was remarked that:

- BLM had thrown up issues for women of colour who are visible and not so visible.
- Nonvisible BME also feel targeted by overt and discreet racism because of their multi-racial identities and then begin to question their identity in relation to intersectionality. (NB. intersectionality as a stand-alone issue was not mentioned.)
- Individuals with multiple bi-racial identities and mixed ethnicities make it difficult to feel like you belong in society.
- BLM has elevated this further and finding safe places to talk about the intricacies of identity with white friends means that it does not happen leading to an increased sense of isolation.

Broadening out discussion led to the issue of the pressure on 3rd and 4th generation black and ethnic minority individuals to assimilate and 'fit in' with the indigenous population. This was experienced particularly at community level in areas of Glasgow where multi generations of indigenous community live, further highlighting that even with laws and commitments towards integration, segregation amongst minority communities is commonplace.

This was not always perceived as a negative, but just a necessary part of growing up, living, working, and surviving in majority white indigenous areas where black and ethnic minority are still met with some resistance to be included and accepted, particularly if they only come into the area to work and live elsewhere.

A further sharing was the habit of 'adopting' a new name of British origin to replace the 'difficult' South Asian name that would be difficult to pronounce and remember. The story though shared in good humour resonated with others who have had similar experiences re identity.

Identity and belonging are issues that affect all people of colour and when political figures acknowledge this it validates the issue e.g., Barak Obama. Members felt that there is a 'fluidity of identity'. One member felt that the 'issue of belonging' stems from first generation South Asians' who came to the UK as economic migrants but had no intentions to settle and as a result no issue with belonging.

However South Asian generations born in the UK feel that they do belong as part of their birth right and are entitled to the same equality of opportunity as the indigenous community. They are prepared to challenge when this is not the case.

Following general discussion, the Chair introduced the second session and speaker Annie George Edinburgh-based writer, theatre maker and occasional filmmaker.

Annie has an Indian background and was raised in 70's and 80's multicultural London where all non-whites were called Black. To escape the racism and bullying she turned to the stage as she felt she was safe there. During her early years in theatre Annie received roles according

to her 'type' as in she was always typecast due to her ethnicity and not as she thought, her cockney accent. 30 years later Annie settled in Edinburgh, but she was forced to leave Scotland where she described Scottish Theatre as 'unapologetically white'. Even though the demography in Scotland was changing and diversifying, nothing was going to change for her. She then travelled south where she set up theatre in 2005 for characters with parts that were central to scripts and not just token gestures.

However, Annie felt that the key questions that remain are:

- Where does the power lie to change the state of affairs?
- Who holds power?

Her message is to keep demanding, resisting, and telling our stories because if we do not tell them then someone else will and they will be lost in translation. Annie's fears that 'things will return to factory settings' even though we have the BLM movement. Being subjected to racism and racist behaviours is becoming the norm for so many people of colour instead of being eradicated. In Annie's words the 'incompetence of Trump's form of dangerous fascism is evidence of this'. Annie concluded with the following quote that resonated with all the were present

... 'story is everything and everything is story therefore silence too tells a story'.

This led to the general discussion covering the value of our 'stories, lives, lived experiences, and place'

At the close, it was noted that this webinar concluded the series of four, with a note of thanks to the speakers and participants present and to those who had participated earlier.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the webinar series 'Let's Break to Educate' has proven to be a success with audience feedback polls after each webinar evidencing this and with an increase in membership from under 100 to 147 since the start of the webinar series in July 2020.



**A total of 107
women attended all
four webinars**



**Eight invited
speakers**

Feedback received after each event confirmed that:

- Participants had been informed of current issues affecting them
- Participants had been enabled to participate in the Webinars
- Participants had been provided an opportunity in a protected space to have discussion and dialogue with like-minded women.

More generally it was noted that:

- Each webinar resulted in lively, engaging, and interactive sessions with BME women actively participating.
- There were returners, participating in more than one webinar.
- The webinars were 'needed' and 'welcomed' by BME women who were enabled to share lived experiences.
- The webinars allowed BME women to express their views and share ideas in a mutually supportive environment during unprecedented times such as brought about by Covid 19.
- BME women have been severely impacted by the pandemic causing 'confusion', 'uncertainty', 'fear', 'isolation' and feeling 'homogenised'.
- BME women evidenced a willingness and commitment to complying with guidance on keeping safe.
- SMEWN social media has received tweets and feedback congratulations for running informative and engaging sessions.
- SMEWN has subsequently engaged with national organisations including #AllOurRightsInLaw in consultation for a Human Rights Law in Scotland. It has proved difficult to understand the true picture in relation BME women and 'affected rates' as there is no reliable data available.
- Membership has increased by a further 20% and currently stands at 147.
- The Network Board has worked hard to raise its social media presence. The digital footprint has increased exponentially.
- The Network continues to connect through Twitter and Facebook, alongside the extensive reach of our influencers.
- The Network remains determined to grow its online presence and support a positive impact through multiple platforms.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SMEWN DEVELOPMENT

It is clear from feedback that the webinar series has proved successful and so an obvious recommendation would be to continue with webinars on topics that the SMEWN members agree on for the next year (2021) as part of the workplan and activities.

Potential topics already mooted include:



Civic Participation



Youth Participation



Health and wellbeing
including women's,
mental and sexual
health



Housing



Lack of available and
affordable childcare



Home working

If you would like to become a member of SMEWN or to make contact with SMEWN then please contact: SMEWN@outlook.com



@SMEWN1

#SMEWN



**Scottish Minority
Ethnic Women's
Network
(SMEWN)**



CEMVO Scotland
95-107 Lancefield Street, Glasgow G1 8HX

Tel: 0141 423 23258
www.cemvoscotland.org.uk