



COVID 19 Community Consultation Report

Hyde BAMER Women's Training, Learning & Employment



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Introduction and Background

Diversity Matters North West Ltd (DMNW), is a local charity based in Hyde, working across Tameside with diverse ethnic communities. We are a user led, award winning, independent charity working to combat health inequalities, social exclusion and to promote community cohesion.

COVID19

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been hard for many people, it has raised many societal challenges that would have been unimaginable a short time ago, including:

- economic insecurity,
- lack of social interactions,
- increase in loneliness,
- lack of community cohesion & fears of safety,
- lack of trust in government,
- Negative impact on learning and employment prospects.

“The country is in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat”.
JRF UK Poverty Report 2020-2021¹

Since Public Health England’s report highlighting that ethnic minority communities are 4 times more likely to die from the virus than people from the White British community², several other studies have highlighted clear evidence on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on different population groups.³ In June 2020, a Runnymede report, highlighted that the overexposure to the virus was a huge factor as one-third of Black and ethnic minority groups (33%) work outside of their home, including 41% of Black African groups and 36% of Black Caribbean and Pakistani groups (compared to 27% of white groups). The report also identified that Bangladeshi and Black African people experienced significant income loss during the peak of the crisis, therefore, struggled to pay for essentials and bills⁴. The Fawcett Society’s report identified 42.9% of BAME women were in debt and nearly a quarter struggled to feed their children⁵. Women have disproportionately borne the brunt of childcare responsibilities and home-schooling whilst balancing any work commitments. In October 2020, TUC found that BAME women are twice as likely to be in low-paid work and occupations, which in turn exposed them to a high risk of COVID-19 infection⁶. A more recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the UK poverty landscape, highlighted that stark statistics that further widens the inequality gap between different ethnic groups. 53 in every 100-households, headed by someone from a Bangladeshi ethnicity, were living in poverty. In the coming wave of job losses, people of Bangladeshi heritage were identified as most at risk⁷. We know that 5.2% of Tameside’s and Glossop’s population is

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S44OH7qKwTQ>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/07/black-people-four-times-more-likely-to-die-from-covid-19-ons-finds>

³ Oak Survey Report 2020: A study into the economic, social and health impact of COVID-19 and related circumstances on the BAME community in Oldham

⁴ <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/employment-3/overexposed-and-underprotected-covid-19s-impact-on-bme-communities.html>

⁵ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=09b0ddb9-00bd-44f9-bf15-a893ec31d875>

⁶ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/bme-women-and-work>

⁷ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S44OH7qKwTQ>

unemployed and that, since the pandemic started, people between the ages of 25 -34 have seen a large surge in redundancies⁸.

In April 2020, we quickly identified the negative impact of the pandemic on people from different ethnic backgrounds who already face existing racial inequalities that puts them in a place of severe vulnerability, resulting in widening inequalities and disparities in co-morbidities. This was evident in the lack of emergency support accessed by ethnic minority groups in Tameside.

During the government lockdown, DMNW placed all face-to-face activities on hold and social distance measures were put in place. DMNW worked together with partners to explore different ways of working with the women and reaching out to people that struggled during this period.

Re-designing & Transforming Services

We heard many stories from people in the local community suffering with new hardships, we heard about their struggles of not having enough food to provide for their families, deteriorating health, increased loneliness, and isolation, feeling of uncertainty and increased anxiety levels. We saw grassroots charities and community groups ceasing to operate during the pandemic as sustainability was not possible. We knew that we needed to do more to tackle some of these challenges and work closely with our funders, commissioners, trustees, volunteers, and our partners to enable us to do this.

We transformed our own services to initiate remote working, reducing face to face interactions to contain the virus. We:

- conducted courtesy wellbeing calls to existing service users to inform people of local emergency crisis support and support accessing key services.
- worked closely with partners across sectors to address gaps in provisions such as culturally sensitive food offer, recruitment of bilingual volunteers into emergency support services,
- supported mutual aid support groups to engage with local people from different ethnic backgrounds.
- developed bilingual literatures and videos and disseminated in the local communities.
- engaged in conversations with statutory providers on equitable access of services and championed the voices of people that were not being heard, striving for change, at the very least, influencing local decision making.
- working with partners, we trialled online workshops via zoom.

Online Engagements

During our online sessions we re-engaged with women seeking to develop their employability skills via online platform where we were able to offer a safe environment to discuss and understand what was happening during these unprecedented times for women from these communities. We learnt that, as a direct result of the pandemic, further barriers emerged which prevented women from the BAMER communities from engaging in activities that developed their future employability skills. With this knowledge, we felt that we needed to delve further into the impact of the pandemic to explore any emerging barriers and

⁸ <https://www.tameside.gov.uk/LeadersBlog/January-2021>

identify gaps that need to be addressed first to support these women to get back on track with their learning journeys.

Community Consultation

The aim of the consultation is to explore how COVID 19 had impacted on women from ethnic minority communities in Hyde, with a particular focus on training, learning and employability. A questionnaire was designed to help capture this information (Refer to Appendix 1). This report summarises the key findings of this community consultation, how the COVID 19 has had an impact on women, their learning journeys and highlights recommendations to tackle the challenges.

We hope that these findings will help provide more insight into improving services through removing barriers to participation, and how to tailor the community offer to meet the imminent needs of people, strengthening community relationships and enabling us to advocate on their behalf.

Methodology

A series of questions were designed, consisting of open and closed questions, and multiple-choice options, to make the questionnaire user friendly. This was the preferred method to adopt by the project team to help capture the data required given the current restrictions on social distancing.

We already knew from experience, working with marginalised communities who have multiple barriers to engagement, that questionnaires in the post or loaded on social media for people to complete, the response would be low. We adopted different strategies to diversify our engagement methods to help eliminate barriers to participation such as language, lack of IT literacy and access. We:

- Shared the questionnaire via emails with partners and volunteers to help support others to complete.
- Conducted phone calls to existing service users and people waiting to engage in activities on our waiting lists, offering trilingual language support in Hindi, Urdu, and Bangla.
- Identified local hubs where some level of engagement was still permitted (local faith centres - Masjid Al-Tawheed, situated in the centre of Hyde where the questionnaire was handed out by the tutors to the parents of the children in attendance at the afterschool classes).

The target audience for this sample consultation was women from BAMER backgrounds living in Hyde. The consultation took place and was conducted over a period of one month.

Findings

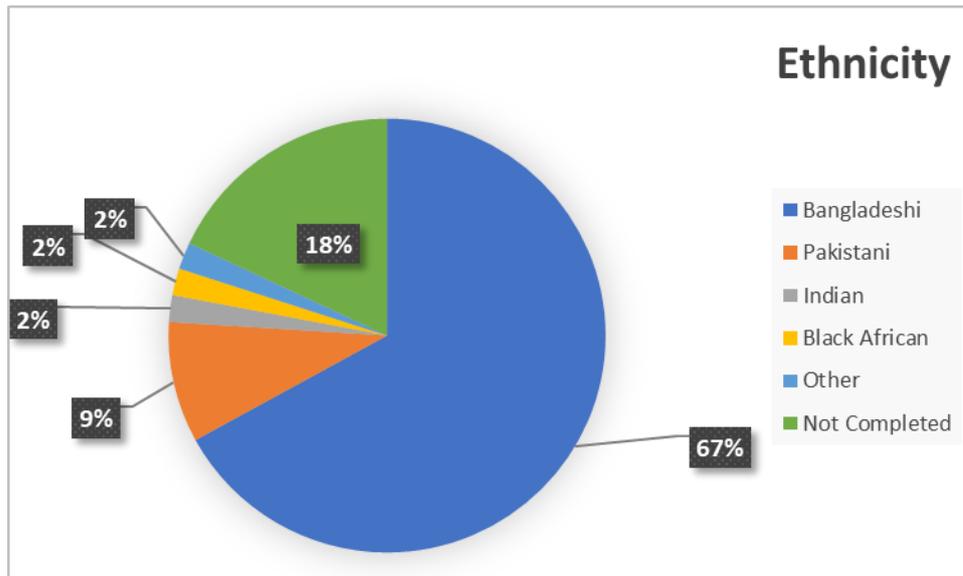
The consultation was completed by 58 women from a diverse range of backgrounds. These were conducted over the phone by tri-lingual staff, some of which were completed and dropped off at the local masjid (faith centre), where

staff arranged a suitable time with the masjid to collect the questionnaires for data analysis.

The findings below have been extracted from the data collated from the completed questionnaires, providing some insight into how the COVID 19 pandemic has impacted on the women from the BAMER communities in Tameside with a particular focus on training, learning and employability.

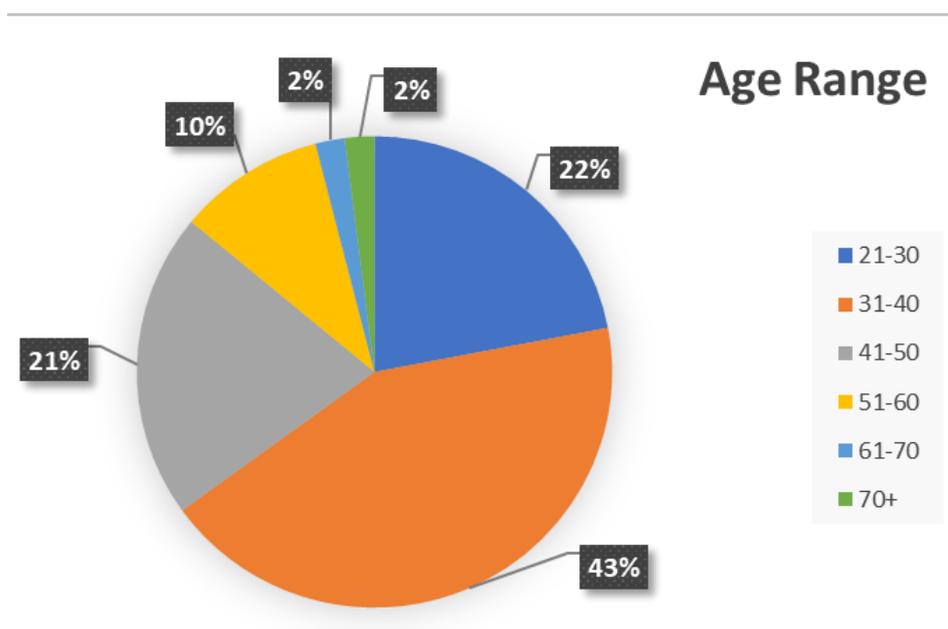
Demographics

The consultation found that 79% of the respondents were from central Hyde, SK14 postcode, rest varied across Tameside.



Graph 1: Ethnicity

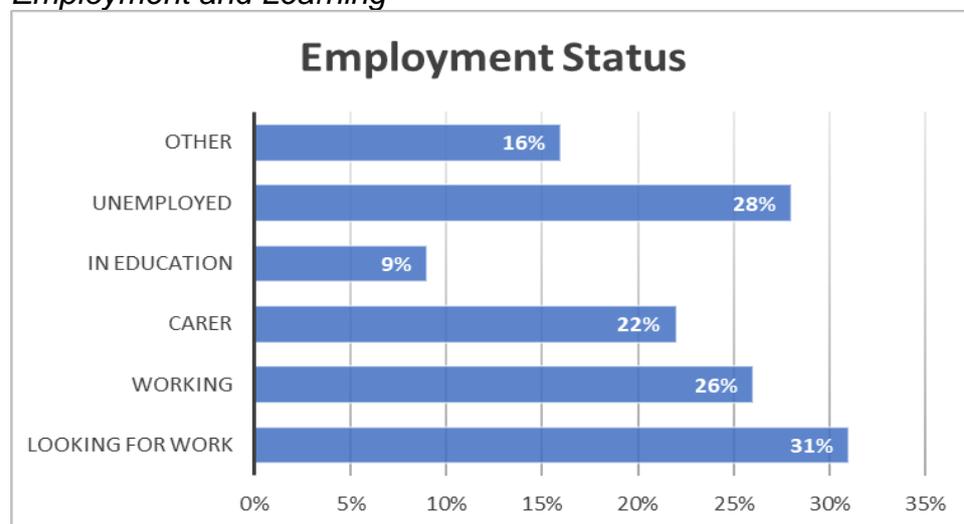
Women from Bangladeshi heritage were the largest ethnic group engaged, representing 67% of the participants in the consultation (Refer Graph 1 above). This is representative of the % of ethnic minority population residing in Hyde.



Graph 2: Age Range

The largest age range for the consultation was 31–40-year-olds at 43% and a further 21% of women were between the ages of 41-50, this is consistent with the wider work of DMNW. However, second largest age group was interestingly between the ages of 21–30-year-olds (22%). This correlates with national and local statistics on the impact of the pandemic on younger people and employment and learning opportunities. (Refer to Graph 2 above).

Employment and Learning



Graph 3: Employment Status

The consultation found that 31% of women were seeking some form of employment. This included those women who were already in work, they told us that they were striving to seek higher paid jobs, jobs that suited their skills set and/or permanent jobs, increased hours and better working conditions. This indicated that many women here found themselves in low -paid jobs with low job satisfaction. This correlated with findings by TUC, were they identified that women from BAME background were twice as likely to be in low-paid jobs.

“My English is not very good, so I don’t know what is happening, I am scared for my future.” (Respondent).

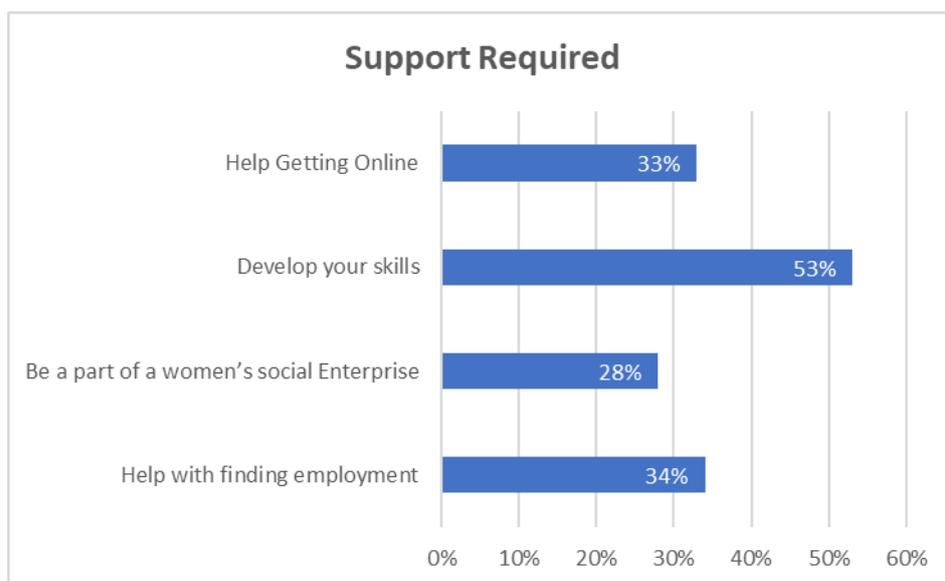
28% of women consulted were unemployed. Some women here told us that they wanted to enter the labour market but had low confidence in their ability to speak in English, lack of IT skills / access to IT equipment and low self-confidence. (Refer to Graph 3). In addition, some women said that seeking employment became a low priority for them, as they tried to adjust to a new way of living during the first COVID 19 lockdown and then the second. The pressures on them at home with extended family responsibilities did not allow the time or headspace to be thinking about employment readiness or embark on that path.

Opportunities

We asked women whether they felt that the COVID 19 health pandemic had limited access to employment and training opportunities, over 79% of the women said they felt it had. The added pressures at home meant that women had to stay at home to help home school children, look after extended members of their family, maintain household, therefore, put themselves forward for being

furloughed, put their own learning, and seeking for employment on hold as businesses closed and recruitment paused.

Those that felt opportunities were not limited, had the necessary skills, confidence, and qualifications to seek employment, this group also included those who were already in employment and had the necessary IT skills to do so. Interestingly, when we asked, generally, pre-pandemic, whether women felt there was enough opportunities for them to access and develop their skills and career prospects, 34% of women that answered this question said that there was not enough, if there were any, they were inaccessible due to time commitment, costs, eligibility criteria and lack of support from employers.

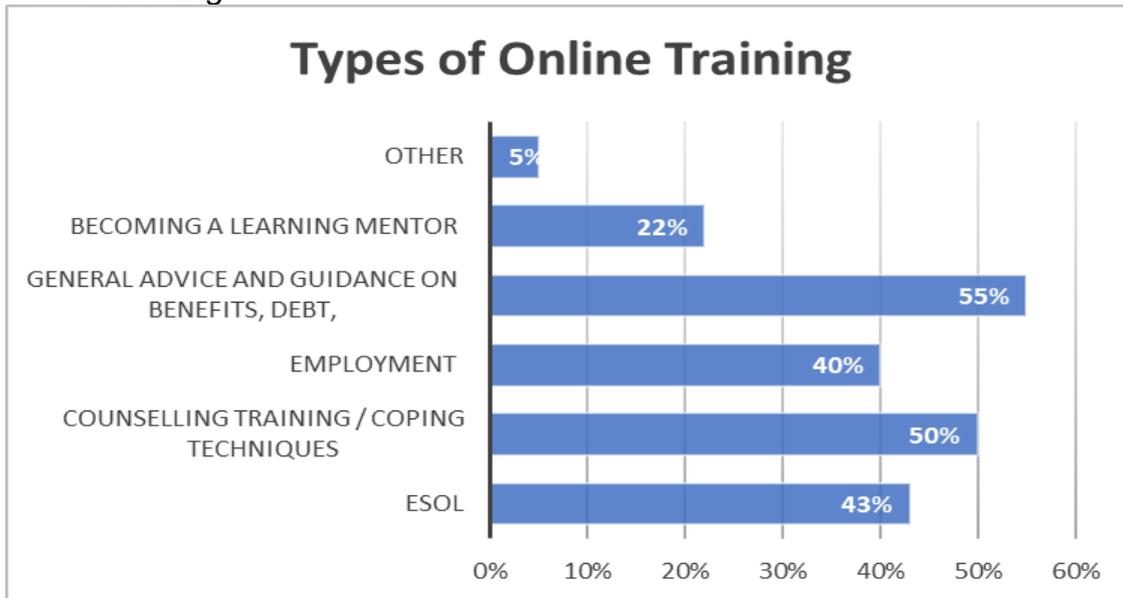


Graph 4: Support Required

Participants were asked if they needed help and support seeking employment and / or to develop skills such as, help with using IT (Refer to Graph 4). 53% of women told us they needed help and the opportunities to develop their skills and over 34% wanted more support with seeking suitable employment one a one-to-one level. Women told us that finding employment that suited their needs and lifestyle was difficult, therefore, getting on to the employment ladder became near impossible. We know that digital poverty and digital literacy has impacted on people living in deprived areas in Tameside, it is estimated that the level of digital poverty and literacy is approx. 13%. This consultation highlighted at least 22% were specifically seeking additional one-to-one, bilingual support in getting online, using applications such as Zoom so they can confidently engage and access.

28% of the women did express an interest to be part of a social enterprise venture, this correlates with findings where 28% of women that are unemployed but had several barriers that hindered their employability journeys. 62% of the women also told us that, once the government lockdown restrictions eases, they were willing to travel outside of their hometown to access training opportunities that will help them on their learning journeys. 52% also said they would travel to engage in other activities.

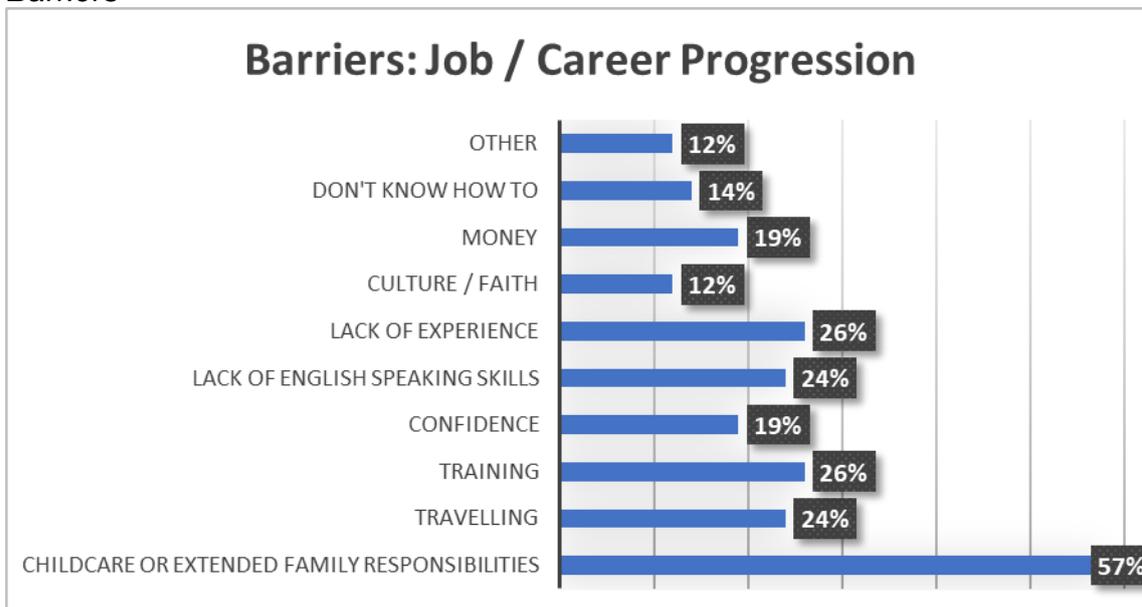
Online Training



Graph 5: Types of online training

With the current pandemic, women knew that there are limited engagement activities available and that majority of them will be offered on online platforms. We asked, if they were to or could engage online, what types of training and or opportunities would be of interest, given some of the challenges that the pandemic has brought to our doors. Over 55% of the women said that they required general advice and guidance on benefits and debts as many women have struggled with loss of income / jobs and therefore, a rise in debt. This, with the added responsibilities at home, has had a negative impact on women's mental health and overall wellbeing, feeling of stress and anxiety increased along with feeling of being demotivated, as such, over 50% of women wanted to access online training focusing on counselling and / or coping techniques. Other online opportunities women said they were happy to engage with included ESOL (43%) and online employment readiness training (40%). (Refer to Graph 5 above).

Barriers



Graph 6: Barriers

57% women responded that due to childcare and extended family responsibilities they are not able to progress in their careers or embark on employment, making it the main barriers for women to get into the employment market. Women told us they required a great deal of flexibility as they tend to manage the household daily. One of the main reasons they accessed training, learning and activities at DMWN was that childcare costs were covered, any activities delivered would be during term time, sessions would be spread across few weeks which made it manageable, the localised offer meant that there were not any travel costs or time accrued and lastly, having very little eligibility criteria, for many women, enabled them to safely access and focus on their learning journeys early without the feeling of their family relations being compromised.

Traditionally, the male figures in the household are the 'bread winners', so a higher priority is given to them to stay in employment whilst the females adopt the default role of a 'housewife', tending to and caring for the whole family. During the pandemic, this responsibility increased, the households were buzzing with all the children being at home with no respite for the parents. Women, once again, defaulted to their role of being a housewife, where. Women that were in work, put themselves forwards for reduced hours or going on furlough. This also meant, privacy and space were limited or non-existent, therefore, women found that, even if they wanted to get help, learn, grow, and develop, they could not.

“I’s feeling overwhelmed, we had to change things so quickly, my husband couldn’t work, we had no income, I felt low, but I had no choice but to carry on and look after my family, we were lost, didn’t know where to go for help, it was scary!” (Respondent).

26% reported that due to lack of training and work experience they are also not able to progress in their careers or get on to the employment ladder. 24% also reported, language and travel as a barrier. The lack of confidence and the 'know how' of using public transport, put them off in the past from taking any learning opportunities beyond their hometown.

Those that said lack of English-speaking skills was a barrier for them also highlighted that they were already at a disadvantage, as they could not identify the opportunities available, the information just did not get to them, so they missed out or were not able to seek the help and support they required. Often services were not equipped with the right support for them in relation to language support, culturally sensitivity and showed very little compassion. This often led to people not re-engaging, leaving a negative experience and a lack of trust with statutory services. Language barrier was a huge area of concern for many women, even if it was not a barrier for them, they knew many other women faced this challenge and therefore, result in inability to access opportunities, activities, services.

Anything else?

Majority of the respondents told us, once the pandemic is over, they want to re-engage in face-to-face activities, they were willing to travel to seek support for employment readiness.

Women were asked whether they required any additional support, 27% of the women said their wellbeing was a concern, they struggled day to day with stress, low motivation, and low confidence. This was consistent with the feedback given around wanting support with counselling and coping techniques.

32% of the women said they really missed the social activities and would like to see more opportunities for this once the government lockdown restriction eases. Although, they were happy to engage online or once they are able to, women were still apprehensive as, given the new barriers that have emerged from the pandemic, the lack of privacy, low confidence and motivation, space, access to IT, it will be a bigger mountain to climb.

A large emphasis was placed on accessible training and employment opportunities, something that was tailored around their needs which normally prevents them from engaging, for example, classes during school hours, offering women only space, therefore, being culturally sensitive and language support. 57% of the women said having childcare and / or extended family responsibilities was a huge factor for women not entering the education and employment market (Refer to Graph 6).

Limitations

It is important to note that this consultation has had its limitations. These included:

- Respondents not completing all the questions.
- Majority of people who had completed this consultation were existing service users of DMNW.
- Sample size was limited due to the government lockdown restrictions.
- Time was of essence, therefore, limited. We needed to gather the local intelligence quickly so then we could better plan future activities, start negotiations with funders and commissioners early and start to implement the findings from this report.
- Majority of the women who completed the consultation were of Bangladeshi origin (although we did target this group). Given more time and ease of the lockdown restrictions, we would like to expand this consultation to other women from diverse ethnic backgrounds to feed into this report.
- Due to the limited experience of using online engagements tools such as survey monkey or Microsoft forms, we were not able to reach those who did have the IT skills to complete the form electronically.

Conclusion

The pandemic has had a negative impact on women from an ethnic background living in Hyde with regards to their learning and employability journeys. Women told us that although they wanted to enter the labour market, the pandemic has hindered their progression. Those that said lack of English-speaking skills was a barrier for them also highlighted that they were already at a disadvantage, the pandemic presented them with additional barriers. This has now resulted in women not prioritising their own learning journeys to employment, where those that did work, put themselves forward to reduce hours of work, end employment

or taken furlough so they are able to support their family at home, adopting their default role of a housewife.

“We really miss the centre and want to come back, doing training, developing our skills and just seeing the staff and other volunteers”.
(Respondent).

However, women did tell us that they are keen to re-engage and re-start their journeys when the pandemic allowed. Women said that their preferred choice of engagement was face-to-face, and that majority of the respondents said they were happy to travel outside of Hyde to seek further training or employment related activities.

Consistent with our wider work, we found that most of the respondents to this consultation were from a Bangladeshi heritage and between the ages of 31-40. Interestingly we also found that the second largest respondents were aged 21-30 (22%), although this group did not have language barriers, opportunities for learning and employment were few and far between which impacted on their development and readiness for future employment. This finding also relates back to the local TMBC leaders briefing, which highlighted that people between the ages of 25-34 have seen a surge in redundancies throughout the pandemic⁹.

Face to face engagements

Women in general told us the missed face-to-face interactions and engagement with DMNW. This was the preference to re-engaging with learning and employability opportunities as DMNW provided a safe space for women to socialise, learn, and develop long lasting friendships, something online engagements did not provide. Although, those that did work some hours said that they were only available to engage via online opportunities, evenings, and weekends.

Barriers to engagement

Language and lack of IT literacy was a major factor that all women touched on when having the one-to-one telephone conversation, out of concern for themselves or for other women they knew of. As well as existing barriers, further barriers emerged as a direct result of the pandemic where accessing information for services was a huge challenge due to numerous factors including:

- *Childcare:* was a major barrier that women saw that hindered them from developing or embarking on their journey to employment. Outside of DMNW, there are little opportunities to access, as none have been able to support with their needs. With childcare provisions shut or only taking in children of key workers, this service was inaccessible, therefore, further removed women from engagement.
- *Lack of privacy and space at home:* has created additional barriers for those already struggling to engage and access services. 57% of women that we spoke to, raised this as an additional challenge. Women said they tend to live in multiple occupancy households, with extended family

⁹ <https://www.tameside.gov.uk/LeadersBlog/January-2021>

members. During the lockdown, space was limited, therefore, privacy became an issue.

- *Digital Inclusion and Lack of English proficiency:* This was another area of focus from the women. 33% of women said they needed help getting online, specifically around using Zoom, some also stipulated not having the resources to do so. However, others did have the access and use of IT, but did not have the confidence to do so. They identified that more one-to-one support with language support could help them to get online and engage with people and services.
- *Language:*
 - *Lack of culturally appropriate, accessible opportunities and information:* This went beyond the opportunities for employment. The pandemic presented multiple challenges for families regarding loss of income, debt and rising in poor mental health. When trying to access help and support, people did not know who to turn to or what was available for them. Communications between key services and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds has been poor to say the least and vital information did not reach them through the traditional channels of communication. As the pandemic hit, all communications resorted online, disengaging those who could not use this medium.
 - *Advice and guidance / support:* 55% of the women told us that they needed support to get access to general advice and guidance on benefit and debt. Language support was a huge factor, where people could not get through door to access the support services they needed.
- *Mental Health Impact:* The consultation also highlighted need to access help and support for increase in the lack of motivation, low confidence and generally poor mental health and wellbeing. There was also a fear of re-engaging back into society after 9months of social isolation due to the pandemic and the governments' social distancing guidelines.

Recommendations & Next Steps

The new challenges that have emerged from this consultation as a result of the pandemic has created more barriers to engagement for women from these communities. We are aware we will not be able to eliminate them all, therefore, focusing on what is realistic and achievable will be our best way forward.

Key themes that have been identified from the consultation process where we need to focus our efforts on are:

1. Maintain our current offer relating to, childcare, travel expense, localised offer, minimum eligibility criteria, cultural sensitivity – *THIS WORKS!*
2. Considered a blended offer of face to face and online training to reach a wider audience, including evening and weekend opportunities.
3. Digital access: Supporting women to become confident getting online.
4. Language: Supporting access to information and services where language is a barrier.
5. Opportunities: Lack of appropriate employment readiness opportunities
6. Culturally sensitive mental health and wellbeing support

Given the feedback and learning from this consultation we will explore the following:

- Ensure any work that builds in childcare costs and we maintain our localised delivery.
- Working with local partners we will support women to get online using zoom and WhatsApp. These two platforms have been identified by people the easiest to use and that they have heard of.
- Recruit peer learning mentors to aid with the additional support required.
- Explore recruitment of access support workers to aid women to access the support and service they require.
- Explore review of the project's communications: focus on having more literature in dual languages around training and employment (written and verbal).
- Work with partners to source in culturally sensitive wellbeing workshops to help with wellbeing and confidence levels.
- Explore delivering a blended offer where some can take place face to face and some online allowing for continual use of IT skills, government lockdown restrictions permitting.
- Work with partner organisation to advocate the voices of women, ensuring services around training, employment and wellbeing will be more inclusive, culturally sensitive and tailored to meet the needs of women from a diverse ethnic background in Tameside – striving for systemic, long - term change.
- Once the government lockdown restrictions ease, we will explore a second community consultation to reach and engage a wider audience, utilising Microsoft forms.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Data Analysis



5b.

CommyQairSep2020!