

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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A qualitative interview study into the distinct experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students in deciding to attend higher education

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**Research Domain:** Access and widening participation (AWP)

### **Abstract:**

This paper will explore the experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students and parents in making the decision to attend higher education (HE). It has become routine practice for many when examining participation rates to amalgamate Pakistani and Bangladeshi students thus leading to an inflation of their participation rates in HE. This combining of Pakistani and Bangladeshi may also mask barriers that are specific to these populations individually. This paper will provide an account of the distinct experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people and their parents. Semi-structured interviews were completed with 23 Pakistani and Bangladeshi FE students aged 16-18 years and 20 Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents with children in FE. The data is being analysed using thematic analysis and preliminary findings indicate that several factors influence the decision to attend HE, including cultural values dictating gender roles, parental experiences in the labour market and religious ideologies.

### **Paper: Background**

Participation in HE for students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups has been increasing and now BAME students are more likely to participate in HE than White British students (Allen, Parameshwaran, and Thomson, 2016). However, the UK government's goal of a 20% increase in HE participation of BAME groups by 2020 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015), is unlikely to be achieved (Mian and Richards, 2016). This is likely impacted by the lack of attention of widening participation policies on the interplay of disadvantages experienced by BAME groups (Khambhaita and Bhopal, 2015).

Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups are some of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in the UK with

over 60% of living in poverty and are more likely to leave school without any qualifications (Modood, 2006). Research examining, HE participation rates have amalgamated Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups thus masking the participation rates of the individual groups in HE (Allen, Parameshwaran, and Thomson, 2016). Moreover, when analysed separately Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups are some of the most underrepresented groups in UK HE institutions (Race for Opportunity, 2010). Thus, the literature is failing to capture the potential differences between these two groups and their decision to participate in HE. Therefore, this paper will provide a distinct account into the experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups decision to attend HE separately.

## **Methods**

### **Design**

A qualitative design using semi-structured individual interviews to understand how participants experience of HE in an inductive manner. Research ethics approval was granted by the School of Social and Health Science Committee at Leeds Trinity University (SSHS-2018-013).

### **Sample**

Participants were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling methods. The student sample consisted of 13 young British Pakistanis (seven male and six female) and ten young British Bangladeshis (five male and five female) aged 16-18 years who were currently studying A Levels or equivalent. The parent sample consisted of 10 British Pakistanis (five male and five female) and 10 British Bangladeshis (four male and five female) with children aged 16-18 years who were currently studying A Levels or equivalent. The interviews lasted on average 32 minutes.

### **Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule was developed from previous research and a systematic review that was simultaneously being conducted. The questions were structured around the university decision, experiences, family as well as culture and religion and prompts used to ensure participants had freedom to explain their experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with all participant given pseudonyms. Thematic analysis is currently be carried out to summarise the data and will follow the six stages of analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): (i) familiarising yourself with your data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes and (vi) producing the report (Braun and Clarkes, 2006). Stages one to three were conducted independently by two researchers. This will be followed by themes being agreed (stage four and five) and write up (stage six). When searching for themes the experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi will be analysed separately.

### **Results**

Data is currently being analysed but preliminary findings indicate that cultural values, parental experiences and religion influence the decision to attend HE. The experience of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis will be analysed to identify any similarities and difference between the groups and

presented at the conference.

*Cultural values* were shown to influence gender roles but there was a notion of times changing with more females allowed to attend HE.

*“Well I think it was the brave girls that originally fought with their parents to go and study and originally it was seen as taboo but now when they've seen that their families are stable, the girls have done well for themselves, they aren't doing all the things that they thought that girls might be doing and you know it's probably helped everyone sort of mentally be like it's okay, it's not as bad as we thought”.* – Pakistani Parent

Participants discussed their decision to attend HE was to increase their career prospects and to not experience the *hardships in the labour market* that their parents report having.

*“...personally my grandad he worked in a factory and that made me want to do better than him rather than me being in the same job that's underpaid and stuff”.* – Pakistani student

The support offered by parents regarding their child's decision to attend HE influenced their decision. One such example was the choice of HE institution and their knowledge of the University as well as the suitability of the location.

*“My mum she was like about the university that I picked, she doesn't know much about it so she was like that's not the greatest of unis and then my dad was like it's not in Bradford so that's gonna be a problem even though it's just in Leeds and so he was very, very stressed out with then started to make it a negative feeling for me about going to uni like start stressing me out, like my dad's stressed out and my mum wasn't that excited too so it then started to become a negative feeling going to uni”.* – Pakistani student

A Bangladeshi parent discussed how *religion* encouraged gaining knowledge, and how it influenced the choice of degree. However, aspects of religion such as debt was seen to hinder participation.

*“As Muslims, religion does encourage you to work hard, work for a portion of this life, increase your knowledge in something, especially in things that can benefit the community, for example medicine is the most obvious because you're helping people who are sick, religion would encourage you to pursue a field which would allow you to do that, there are maybe the more extreme Muslims or hard line Muslims who might say that there is interest in these student loans so maybe if you're poor, it's best to leave the university or try to save up and go later and that is another opinion of course”.* – Bangladeshi parent

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