# Understanding the lived experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students' higher education participation decision

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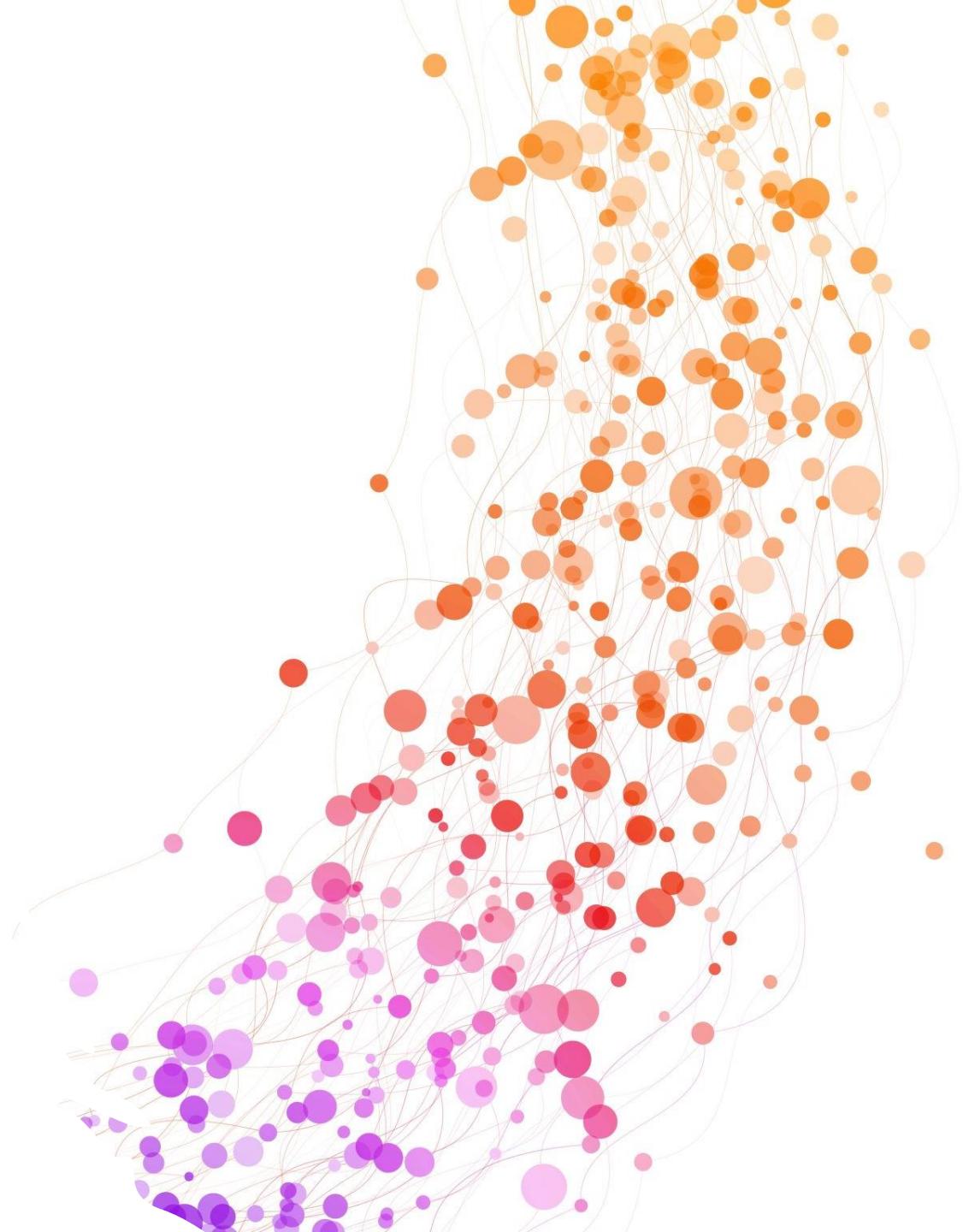
The HE participation decision

A decision-making process involves identifying a decision that needs to be made, considering possible courses of actions by collecting information, considering possible outcomes dependent on the possible actions, and then selecting a course of action (Ajzen, 1996; Mishra, 2014).

"All ethnic minority groups have much higher university participation: the rates for the **black**, Indian and **Pakistani/Bangladeshi** group are 57%, 72% and 53%, respectively, compared to 36% for the White British population" (Allen et al., 2016, pp. 6).

Decision to attend HE

Choice of HE institution

The HE participation decision

Choice of degree programme

Location of HE institution
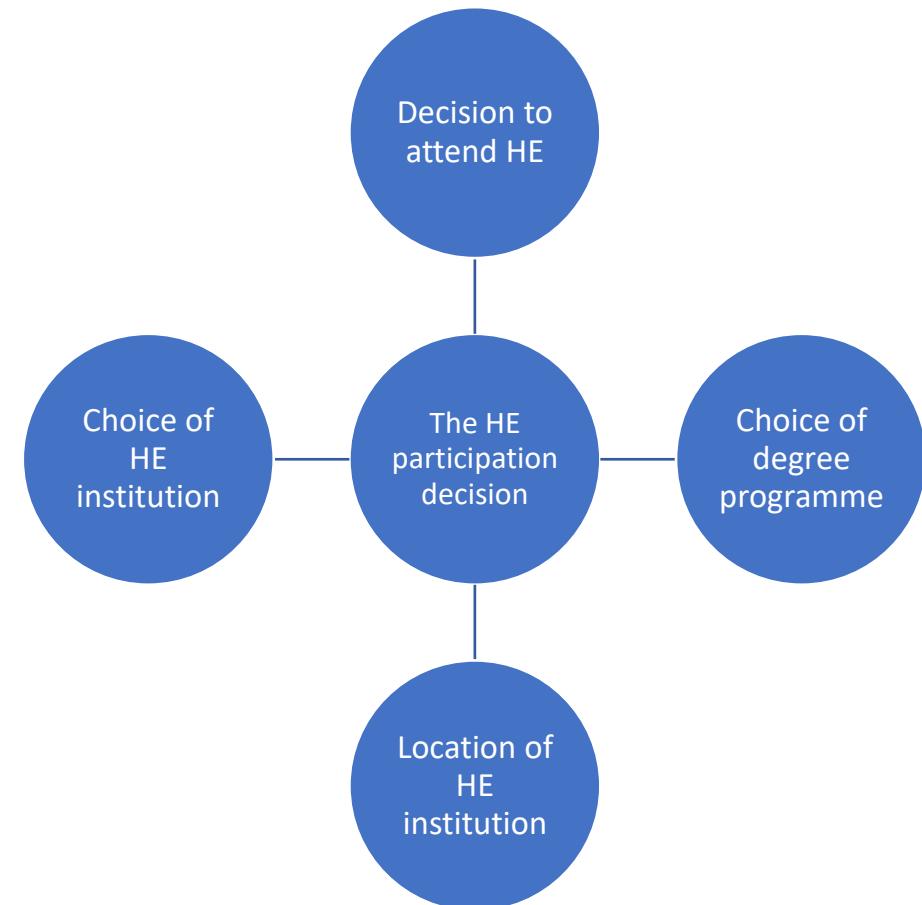
(Maskeen, et al., 2021)

- **England viewed as a temporary destination and then became a permanent home**
- **Increased pathways to access HE**
- **Role of culture and religion on the HE expectations of men and women (role modelling)**
- **Importance of role models for change**

"Mainly they came here to work and earn money so some then when they came originally, they thought we'll come to England, we'll earn money, and we'll go back and make their lives easier there" (Pakistani parent)

"My brother would completely just used to shut it down [university] and it's hard when you're in a family that shut it down because it's like okay I won't, just agree with it and I don't know it was just, I wanted to go but then I've not wanted to go and it's my own potential, my own self-confidence, so I think that really influenced it a lot" (Pakistani student)

"My dad said you're not allowed [to attend university] but in my religion like the prophet's wife she worked so I made that point to my dad" (Bangladeshi student)
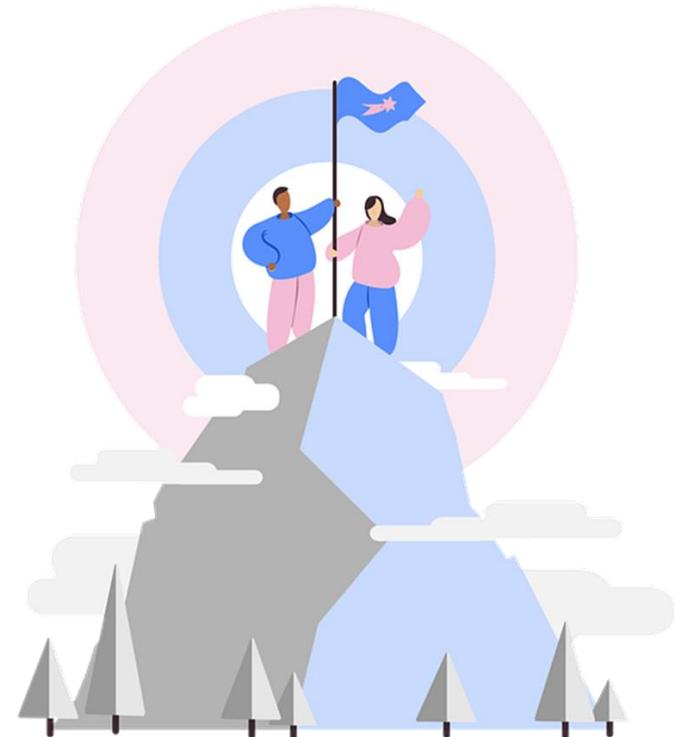
Choice of HE degree: Respect gained from attending HE and studying a professional degree

"If you want one thing and your family want one thing, someone's gonna have to compromise and sometimes it's you, sometimes it's your family but most times it's you" (Bangladeshi student)

"I think it does play a big part in it, generally our culture is big on reputation as a general rule it is big on reputation in lots of things, so it does have a massive impact, it does make a difference to be able to say, 'oh look my kids are doing well or my kids have got a brilliant career' and it looks good as well" (Bangladeshi parent)

"They expect us to be doctors but they've not really prepared us for that type of work like they don't give us extra help like tutoring so you can't expect stuff like that, they just say stuff but with no backup" (Pakistani student)

Self-expectation versus institutional biases

Table 5. Number of additional rejections from selecting courses per 100 average applications compared with comparable applications from white British candidates

	Academic	Academic + social
Pakistani	−8	−7
Bangladeshi	−6	−5
Black African	−5	−5
Other ethnic group	−4	−4
Other Asian	−4	−4
Black other	−4	−4
Indian	−2	−3
Black Caribbean	−3	−3
Mixed other	−2	NS
Mixed white and black African	NS	NS
White not British	−2	−2
Mixed white and black Caribbean	NS	NS
Mixed white and Asian	NS	NS
Chinese	−3	−3

(Noden et al., 2014)

"If I'm going to a White university, majority White, well most of them are, will there be racism and how will they help us, and there is a lot of fear in our school is the admission team racist because there's only a small minority in each university like the ethnic minorities, there's only a small percentage of them going to university and why is that, and there's the case of a lot of being scared to apply for top end universities and that's probably a reason why, there's a small percentage, like I think most working class or Bangladeshi or Pakistanis who are poor wouldn't apply to Cambridge or Oxford because they have this fear of racism… just plays a part in much ethnic minorities, and other people look at that fact saying there's only a small percentage I wouldn't fit in because there isn't enough people who are like me, I think it's a whole cycle" (Bangladeshi student)

Location and choice of HE: *Role of culture and religion*

"Our community or our families are bit more open now, they want their girls or daughters to go to uni, I still find the reluctancy of girls going away from home, I think they encourage boys but most of the boys have been local" (Pakistani parent)

"I think it's good in the current political climate as well, you know there is a lot of portrayal of Islamophobia in the media at the moment, where they think most Muslims are jihadists or wanting to commit acts of terror etcetera, but if they see young educated Muslims that are representing our community that are part of this culture, I think it would decrease Islamophobia and hopefully we will see less abuse just due to your religion being given to people especially you hear it, you see it in the newspapers which is quite concerning so this is the reason why I did not want my boy to go too far away from me because I didn't want him to go to a place where he may suffer abuse and I'm too far to get to him" (Bangladeshi parent)

"I don't actively look for it [lack of South Asian and Muslim diversity] but it comes to my mind that when I am at these places, it is very easily noticeable, when I am part of a small minority it is very easy to pick up on by just looking around and noticing that there is not many people who look like me. When I see stuff like that, the most prominent thing, I just feel uncomfortable, I feel like if I was to go to places like these, I'd be an outsider and that I wouldn't ever really fit in because there wouldn't be people from my background, so it can be quite off putting in that sense" (Pakistani student)

Recommendations

- Focus on the interplay of culture, religion and gender rather than focussing on ethnicity alone

- Exposure to academic role models

- Information sessions for parents and students
  - Highlight facilities to support students cultural and religious belief in the marketing materials
  - Collaborate with university societies such as Islamic Societies

- Training academic staff in understanding EDI purposes

- Work with schools to build self-efficacy and with students to make informed decisions

- Develop and/or redesign outreach activity to be more culturally and religiously inclusive