

# BRITISH MUSLIMS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT

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SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION:  
ACROSS THE MUSLIM DIVIDE

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## FOREWORD

Discrimination against individuals and minorities forms the basis of much human rights work, yet increasingly we find public debates undermining the principles enshrined in recent years that would protect the weak, the marginalised and the victimised. Amongst those most vulnerable, all international instruments recognise minorities in nation states.

Rather than reflecting this principle, the British government's discourse relating to minorities and particularly Muslim minorities in the UK, has reflected the promotion of the public mood, itself exhibiting and fuelled by prejudicial attitudes. If Muslims are deemed a security threat, anti-terrorist laws and their operation must visibly reflect that. If Muslims are perceived to subjugate women, government ministers raise this idea on public platforms as a reason for Muslim exclusion. If Muslims are thought to exhibit failings, these become justifications for their differential treatment in a negative manner: police profiling, denial of the right to different dress codes, violent attacks and discrimination at school and at work.

This report examines how such discourses create a sustained atmosphere that eventually leads to the normalisation and increase of discrimination in everyday life, and even in the operation of new policy and the creation of new law. It uses data on discrimination gathered as part of the British Muslims' Expectations of the Government project, as well as interviews and case studies to highlight not only the rise and pervasiveness of discrimination against Muslims, but its varying and worrying nature. From sophisticated and subtle exclusion to violent attacks, discrimination is becoming part of the life landscape for Muslims in the UK.

Protecting minority group rights is not exceptional or antithetical to the rights of individuals or majority groups, yet the public debate that informs governmental policy portrays a basic tenet of human rights as exactly this. It is worth remembering that group rights became part of the lexicon of international rights speak in the wake of unimaginable genocide on European soil that started with societal discrimination, ultimately reflected in law, which justified itself on the difference of the minority it murdered en-masse from the majority.

This, and not uniformity to majority norms, is the very basis of universal citizenship – and the British government should take heed of its own citizens' concerns when they say that they expect that their protection is affected by the recognition of their differences in culture, belief and practice from the majority society they live with. Not to do so is a human rights issue in itself.

Islamic Human Rights Commission

## INTRODUCTION

Discrimination has always been a crucial issue for civilizations: wars have been fought as a result of it, empires and countries broken up and societies destroyed. In the recent modern era, discrimination against minorities has been a key political and moral issue, resulting in some of the worst human rights abuses and crimes against humanity, from the inter-war period, through to Nazi Germany and more recently in the Former Yugoslavia. The systematic institutionalization of discrimination through law and policy in Nazi Germany was the catalyst for the formulation of a body of declarations, treaties, charters and covenants at the heart of which was the institutionalisation of anti-discriminatory norms at an international level. The descent into genocide as a result of unchecked societal discrimination exemplifies why one of the four principles on which the United Nations was founded is that of non-discrimination. The UN charter of 1945 declares that its purposes include:

*‘...promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion’ (Article 1, UN Charter).*

Since then, rights and protection against discrimination for minorities have been codified in a panoply of treaties, conventions, declarations and other legal and pseudo-legal documents which have subsequently been incorporated into countries’ policies and laws to lesser and greater extents. These rights are often overlooked in popular discussions of citizenship, which use as their focus popular notions of equality. Both cosmopolitans and those of a more conservative leaning often characterize debates surrounding the integration of minorities in nation states as a process of either normative ‘catch-up’ on the part of an immigrant community, or blind affiliation with majority culture based on a simplistic idea of loyalty. This supposedly translates into an ‘equality’ of cultural norms and/or liberal values. Often based on assumptions of teleological normative supremacy evidenced through Enlightenment processes, particularly that of the rational individual as ideal citizen (Frost 1996, Brown 1993), this idea of ‘equality’ within a nation state framework in fact undermines the rights of minorities enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent conventions. Minority rights are richly embedded in the documentation both at the first generation level of civil and political rights and the second generation level of community rights. Individual rights to religious freedom, as well as the rights of cultures, including religiously defined cultures to the free and unfettered practice of their beliefs and way of life, are part of a profound and complex approach to rights that is being lost, partly as a result of political and civil society prioritization of civil and political rights (Matua 2004) - which is beyond the remit of this volume to discuss in fuller detail - and a clamorous public debate around the ‘integration of minorities’ and citizenship touched upon in the first volume of this series and reflected with specific reference to the rationalization of societal discrimination in this volume. In short, minority rights and protection from discrimination are argued to be the basis for ensuring equality and freedom from discrimination for all participants in society. Although often challenged in popular circles, this contention, it is argued is an essential part of the human rights processes of the last century.

The situation and conditions faced by Muslims as minorities show how little has been done and how far societies are from minimizing discrimination, let alone reaching the goal of eradication. As a religious minority, Muslim vulnerability became particularly obvious after the attacks of 9/11. Although there had been anti-Muslim discrimination well before this event, it worked as a catalyst for widespread discrimination in all aspects of social life.



In the social sphere - day to day life, schools, the workplace, legal processes - there is evidence of systematic discriminatory behaviour against Muslims. Although the number of assaults, abuse, harassment and ridicule towards Muslims increased dramatically, this increase, noticeably, does not correspond with the increase of complaints. The reasons for this are complex: on the one hand much discrimination is so subtle that there appears to be no remedy, so a victim sees no point in complaining; on the other hand, many discriminated Muslims have little faith in the police, legal system or other government agencies. In addition to this, historically some Muslim citizens have been noted for not pursuing complaints or even raising the issue of discrimination (Modood, et al. 1997).

Most discrimination studies about Muslims have primarily focused on their socio-economic disadvantage, for example in terms of labour, education, income and housing, rather than on general discrimination and implicit racism. A comparative study carried out by Lorraine Sheridan at the University of Leicester in 2002 among five religious groups is valuable in this area. It concludes:

*....Muslims were found to have not only the greatest risk of being victims of both implicit racism and general discrimination before September 11<sup>th</sup>, but also the highest increase in experiences of racism and discrimination since the events of that day, and, consequently, the greatest risk of being victims of both implicit racism and general discrimination after September 11<sup>th</sup>.*

That study, however, had a small sample group and the majority of respondents were from two English cities. The present study is broader in the sense that it is based on a national survey with a far larger sample (see Methodology section). Its focus looks specifically at the experience of Muslims, trying to capture their experience from within rather than looking at it from outside or comparing them with any other group. As Muslims in Britain are from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicities, and religiosity this study and project have attempted to capture this diversity. However this study does not attempt to explore socio-economic disadvantage or the social exclusion of Muslims, focusing instead on general discrimination at the social level.

For many Muslims, the experience of discrimination and hostility has become so commonplace that they tend to ignore it and not report it, either to appropriate agencies in order to seek a remedy or to monitoring organisations, or to third party and victim support schemes. This is a commonly heard experience by those working at the grassroots level and was a recurring theme throughout the research process. There is, however, a rich collection of recorded cases, as well as incidents reported by participants which shed light on the range of ongoing discriminatory behaviour experienced by Muslims. Through analysis of survey results, as well as a number of individual cases, this report looks at the causes, nature and extent of both perceived and actual general discrimination and racism against Muslims. Through theoretical discussion and empirical findings, it appears that both the attitude and outlook of the majority as evidenced in the press, by ordinary citizens and mainstream politicians regarding minority Muslims is deeply problematic. This problem is exacerbated when the minority members practice their faith visibly, feeding into a cycle of prejudicial perception amongst the majority. The report, in combination with surveys, interviews and case studies, indicates that general discrimination faced by Muslims in their everyday lives appears to have some relation to a deep rooted problem of prejudice and negative stereotypes which cannot be addressed solely through a number of protective laws. Rather a series of measures may be required.

The purpose of this study is to take forward existing work on Islamophobic and anti-Muslim discrimination in light of current events, in order to attract policy-makers' attention towards: firstly a 'community' perspective of actual and perceived discrimination, its causes and effects on individuals; secondly the need for continuous normative evaluation of policy and law (and the lack thereof) and a reconceptualization of what constitutes discrimination affecting Muslim communities in the UK in both subtle and blatant forms; and thirdly, the potential for developing effective policies through dialogue with those affected. This report also asked respondents about their views on how to eliminate discrimination from society which, in combination with a number of contributions from Muslim leaders and activists, offers a range of suggestions, in addition to our own recommendations, that need to be listened to seriously, taken on board and implemented by the Government. The articulation of British Muslims' expectations in this regard needs to be thought of as more than just a process in itself, but as part of a process urgently needed to address the polarisation of communities in the UK as perceived by its Muslim minorities as well as popular discourse, and worse still the potentiality for further institutionalisation of this discrimination.

## BACKGROUND: DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BRITISH MUSLIMS

Discrimination on the basis of religion is one with a long history and certainly a populist history told through cultural stories and histories from various cultures. One need only look at competing narrations regarding the Crusades between and within Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions (Ereira & Jones, 1994). Despite this history, ironically, the idea of religious motivation has not been brought to bear until relatively recently into discussions regarding the existence of discrimination based on religion in the UK. In both theory and particularly the discourses of civil society and government, discrimination issues have been viewed through the lens of race or ethnicity (Modood *et al.* 1997).

The ethnic heterogeneity of Muslims in Britain is wide. While the majority are from a South Asian background, many also hail from various Arab and Middle Eastern countries, Africa, Asia and Europe, not to mention an increasing number of white British Muslims and other minority British communities.<sup>1</sup> This ethnic diversity, particularly at the time of mass immigration in the 1960s and 1970s, had meaning in terms of the discrimination faced by Muslims in the UK and their struggle for equality in solidarity with non-Muslim communities of the same and different minority ethnicities. The substantial difference in language, culture and race has meant that practices of religion are also heterogeneous, and the Islamic orientation of Muslims can range from Anglicised Muslims who have been assimilated into British culture to Islamists whose ultimate aim is to establish an Islamic state (Ameli,

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In 2001 census, 74 percent of the UK Muslim population was of Asian ethnic background consisting of 43 percent Pakistani, 16 percent Bangladeshi, 8 percent Indian and 6 percent from other Asian ethnic background. Arab, Iranian, Turkish and a number of other ethnic groups which we mentioned in our survey are not captured in the census data. Many Muslims from these groups may have been captured under 'White Other' who account for 7 percent. There is also 4 percent under the 'White UK' category which we perhaps correspond to the 'White British' category of our survey (source Office of National Statistics, Focus on Religion, available at [www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compendia/for2004/FocusonReligion.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/for2004/FocusonReligion.pdf) (accessed 2 December 2004))

2002). Despite this diversity they identify themselves as Muslim as 'Islam continues to be the master signifier' for their lives (Ansari, 2002), and, as our recent study has shown, the perception has developed amongst the Muslim communities themselves that whilst there is no one Muslim community in the UK, there is now something that can be called a common Muslim experience in the UK, and that is a negative experience of discrimination (Ameli & Merali, 2004).

Muslim settlement in large numbers in Britain began during the last century, increasing during the late 1960s and 1970s, before declining due to strict immigration policies. Despite decreasing migration, the process of settlement continued in the 1980s and 1990s through the reuniting of families and the increase in the number of refugees (Ansari, 2002). While in their early days of settlement Muslims struggled for existence, this later became '*a struggle for equality*' as religious minority citizens. In this struggle Muslims find themselves encountering obstacles which relate to the observation of their beliefs and identities (Home Office, 2000).

Different histories of settlement, various economic and educational backgrounds and the diverse nature of religious practices, have given a uniqueness to every groups' experience of disadvantage and discrimination. Nevertheless, as a collective group they all suffer from a particular kind of racism, prejudice and discrimination. A striking example of this is the growth of a strong emphasis on Muslim identity amongst second and third generation Muslims in the UK and their support for (their various perceptions of) a transnational Muslim *Ummah*, which has become well known in academic circles and much vaunted in the media. There has been much made of this support in popular discourse, with pundits and columnists of various political ilks promoting this as the signifier of Muslims as fifth columnists (Phillips, 2001), despite studies seeing this support as compatible with citizenship in a British national context (see Ameli & Merali, 2004).

Whilst Muslims have achieved a presence across British society through participation in education, employment and all other sectors, concerns regarding the maintenance of their religious faith and practice have been compounded with concerns over increasing hostility and hatred. Whilst previous experiences of discrimination, particularly but not solely of first generation Muslims were characterised by a majority phobia based on economic anxiety, effectively that 'the Asians are taking over everything', hence the emergence of 'Paki bashing', at a later stage this discrimination has become more 'cultural', and its pattern of stereotyping characterised by Islamophobia and 'Muslim-bashing'.

Muslims as a collective group have been identified as irrational, primitive, cruel and evil through a long list of popular literary works, ranging from the cruder stereotyping of *The Satanic Verses* to the more subtle *Brick Lane*, as well as popular press and television. This goes hand in hand with the absence of a positive view of Islam and Muslims in educational curricula to create, perpetuate and reinforce stereotypical images of Muslims. Ignorant comments about Islam and Muslims have become part of the cultural and political climate to the extent that this is no longer the preserve of extreme elements like the British National Party and the far-right exemplified by politicians like Nick Griffin and Robert Kilroy-Silk. Mainstream figures across Europe have indulged in perhaps more sophisticated but nevertheless equally prejudicial processes. Dennis MacShane, Labour's Foreign Office minister, threatened British Muslims to choose between the 'British way' and the way of terrorists (Morning Star, 2003). More disturbingly, a leading religious figure, Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, attacked Islamic culture branding it 'authoritarian, inflexible and underachieving'

(Times, 2004). The blame for discrimination is often heaped upon the victims of discrimination, as we have seen in the popular context again with repetitive calls for Muslims to condemn terrorism. Lord Carey also criticized Muslim leaders for not condemning terrorists. The relentless repetition and assertion that Muslim leaders should do something against atrocities carried out in the name of religion has now turned into a part of 'commonsensical knowledge'. Previously Lady Thatcher's comment<sup>2</sup> that Muslim 'priests' had not done enough to condemn terrorism created uproar<sup>3</sup>. However the discordance created then has disappeared as the repetitive rhetoric of the need for condemnation has become a norm, indeed a staple of public discourse surrounding Muslim acceptance in and by British society.

Columnists and commentators also regularly problematise Islam and Muslims and repeatedly voice their idea that Islamism is a formidable problem (Buruma, 2002). When someone like Michel Houellebecq in France comments that Islam is 'the most stupid of all religions' and writes in his novel *Plateforme*: 'Every time I heard that a Palestinian terrorist, or a Palestinian child or a pregnant Palestinian woman had been gunned down in the Gaza strip, I felt a quiver of enthusiasm...' there are columnists who rise up to defend him and direct efforts to fight against what they perceive as the 'new phobia about Islamophobia' (Liddle, 2002). Both crude and sophisticated prejudices, according to Faisal Bodi, a Muslim columnist, are now 'fashionable in the more well-heeled social circles' (Bodi, 2004)

The results are unsurprising. The public mood rallies behind and welcomes prejudicial attitudes towards Muslims. When Robert Kilroy-Silk was suspended from the BBC for writing a racist anti-Arab article, newspapers rallied to his defence and *Daily Express* (2004), for which Kilroy-Silk wrote the offending column, claimed that 97 percent of callers to the paper, about 22,000 people, agreed with their contention that the BBC was too harsh with him. The public mood in another poll shows that the general British population is supportive of the way the government is handling the so called 'war on terror' (Guardian, 2004). Prejudice and hostility have become so pervasive that it is now suggested that 'Muslim' is a 'dirty word' (see Cohen, 2004), Islamophobia has become the 'new black' (Riddle, 2003) and Islam is 'replacing anti-Semitism as the principal Western statement of bigotry against *the*

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Baroness Thatcher said: 'The people who brought down those towers were Muslims, and Muslims must stand up and say that that is not the way of Islam... They must say that it was disgraceful. I have not heard enough condemnation from Muslim priests.' (*The Times* 'Thatcher speaks out on terror' J. McCue, J. Bale & P. Webster, 4 October 2001)

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Muslim leaders as well as conservative leaders criticized Lady Thatcher's comment. (see: *The Guardian*, Clergy row: Thatcher defiant over criticism of Muslim priests: Tory and Islam leaders round on comments, M. White and V. Dodd October 5, 2001) Then Tory leader Ian Duncan Smith was immediate to point out that Islam has nothing to do with terrorism; rather 'this is about people of evil and twisted intent who will use religion (*The Times*, Ex-leaders told to stay clear of Tory conference, A. Pierce, M. Kite and T. Baldwin, October 6, 2001). Even *The Sun* published a letter in which the writer wrote 'Clearly not on this planet or she (Thatcher) would have known that not a day has passed when Muslim leaders across the world have not condemned the atrocities as being against everything Islam stands for. It is time Lady Thatcher kept her mouth shut'. (*The Sun*, Dear Sun, Letters section, K. Thornley, October 10, 2001)

*Other*' (Dalrymple, 2004). Dalrymple captured the unreasonable prejudice and stereotype about Muslims in the British popular mind: 'The massacre of more than 7,000 Muslims at Srebrenica in 1995 never led to a stream of articles in the press about the violent tendencies of Christianity. Yet every act of al-Qaeda terrorism brings to the surface a great raft of criticism of Islam as a religion, and dark mutterings about the sympathies of British Muslims'.

However, this prejudice and hostility did not appear overnight; it has accumulated through a long process of mental construction about the 'otherness' of Muslims in the European mind through a tradition of negative representation of Arabs and Muslims. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, before the emergence of 'Orientalism', there were particular elements to Muslim categorisation of 'otherness'. Matar (1998), in the study of Islam and Muslims in Britain from 1558-1685, finds that during the peak of the Ottoman empire, Britons regarded Islam and Muslims as a threat from a weak British position. Inside Britain, 'the way that English dramatists, preachers, theologians and others confronted Islam and Muslims was by fabricating images about them - by arranging protagonists and geography in a manner that was disembodied from history and cultural surroundings' (Matar, 1998:20). The world of Islam was a world of externality. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century although England became tolerant and inclusive of Catholics, Orthodox and non-conformist Christians and Jews, Muslims remained alien, and different from all other alien groups as one which challenged the British empire, 'sunk British ships, captured and enslaved British mariners or threatened the economic welfare of the realm' (p.190).

Later, when the Europeans gained military and industrial power over Muslim countries, Western writers defined the Arabs and Muslims in a manner that Edward Said (1978) termed as the tradition of 'Orientalism'. This can be traced from the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this tradition Muslims are seen as monolithic 'others'. Prominent contemporary commentators like Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington and Anne Coulter exhibit the same reductionism of 'Islam to a religion of fanatical incitement' (Michael, 2003: 706). Orientalist ideas strengthen and legitimise the stereotype of Muslims as irrational, violent, uncouth and evil. 'Western' minds now view Islam and its followers as a threat from their superior position.

The Runnymede Trust's first study on Islamophobia also pointed to old orientalist 'closed views' of Islam, where the religion and its followers have been viewed as monolithic, primitive, inferior, barbaric and the enemy (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997). In its later report on Islamophobia (2001), it reiterated the existence of old-fashioned categorizations which led the majority to think that 'they are all the same'. The imagery invoked is that 'they' are totally different from 'us', with little or no sense of shared humanity, values and inspirations. While 'we' are good, civilised, wise, honest, kind and reasonable, 'they' are evil, crude, stupid, cruel, devious and irrational.

This thought of duality, polarization, negative stereotypes and hatred was expressed explicitly in a number of ways immediately after 9/11. Muslims around Britain were attacked (both verbally and physically), spat upon, abused and harassed. They were marginalised in social gatherings, looked down upon and ridiculed. Mosques and Muslim centres suffered attacks ranging from minor vandalism and graffiti to serious damage through arson and firebombs. A number of these attacks have been reported in the press, or by the IHRC and other Muslim organisations. In September 2001, immediately after 9/11, 'race hate' crime in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was up 72 percent compared with September 2000 (Muslim News, 2001). Similarly 206 incidents were reported to the Islamic Human Rights

Commission (IHRC) during the month after the attacks in the USA (IHRC, 2001). However, as noted, the Muslim experience of prejudice, racism and discrimination dates back before 2001.

Long before 9/11, a new type of racism had become evident in British social life. Apart from some Muslim organizations (UKACIA), sociologists (Modood, 1992) argued that anti-Muslim prejudice was a central and growing strand of racism. The Commission for Racial Equality along with other organizations found that the existing anti-discrimination laws could not effectively protect ethno-religious minorities (CRE, 1991) and asked the Home Secretary to revise anti-discrimination laws (Runnymede Trust, 1996:11-12). The Fourth Policy Studies Institute (PSI) report asserted that the emergence of new forms of prejudice and discrimination were more likely to be against ethnic minorities of Muslim faith. According to the report, minority people believed that most prejudice is directed at Asians and/or Muslims (Modood, *et al.* 1997:133-4). Indeed, the rise of an anti-Muslim prejudice with the past racial discrimination 'marks one of the biggest challenges to racial egalitarians in Britain today' (Modood, 1998:70).

Noting the significance of discrimination based on the grounds of religion, the Home Office conducted research to assess the evidence of discrimination, both actual and perceived. While in the interim report it mentioned that 'Muslims, in particular, feel the specificity of their experience is not adequately addressed' (Home Office, 2000:23), in the final report it found that a consistently higher level of unfair treatment was reported by Muslim organizations. The majority of them reported that their members experienced discrimination almost in all aspects of social life (Weller *et al.*, 2001).

It has been believed among many Muslims that a lack of recognition of religious categorization by law in Britain has brought further discrimination against them. Only limited legal protection for some Muslims is available through the Race Relations Act and the Human Rights Act (HRA). The Race Relations Act 1976, through the development of case law (see *Mandla v Dowell Lee* etc) covers Sikhs, Jews and to a lesser extent Rastafarians. This however has created an anomaly in law, where anti-discrimination legislation itself discriminates against minorities. The Human Rights Act 1998 (effective 2000), which effectively brings the European Convention on Human Rights into legal force in the UK, does not iron out these anomalies and the promise of ECHR remedies has remained elusive. The HRA has come under recent criticism (Butler, 2004) for being either irrelevant or unhelpful to voluntary organisations working with marginalized and excluded communities. The introduction of legislation by the British government in December 2003, in order to comply with an EU Directive, prohibiting religious discrimination in employment has been welcomed by Muslim organizations as a positive step although their concerns remain as other areas are not covered yet.

There is a growing acknowledgement that Muslims do experience discrimination in their every day life. A study by Lorraine Sheridan (2002) of the University of Leicester found that general discrimination against Muslims is higher than against any other faith group. Numerous press reports confirm her findings.<sup>4</sup> The Commission for Racial Equality (2004) is now demand-

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An ordinary scan of national and local news sources by IHRC from the beginning of January 2004 to 14 October 2004 found that 289 reports about discrimination have been published. Among them 70 were physical violence, 51 were about psychological pressure, 30 were verbal and written abuse and 17 were about criminal damage.



ing a Single Equality Act which will protect all ethnic and religious minority groups against discrimination and unfair treatment.

Whilst progressive moves in legislation are needed to address the now recognised phenomenon of religious discrimination, and to iron out the anomalies of the law that exist regarding minority protection, law in itself is not enough. Most discrimination, particularly that of a subtle nature, cannot be addressed only through legislation. If a group remains socially undesirable, what can the law do? Muslims are perceived at best as social pariahs and at worst as fifth columnists and are subject to common suspicion, fear and anger. In this situation, even if legislation is introduced to protect a minority group, it is liable to be counter productive. The attempt in 2001 to outlaw incitement to religious hatred is a case in point. An extra clause in what was then the Anti-Terrorism, Crime & Security Bill 2001, proposed to outlaw incitement to religious hatred but was rejected by the House of Lords. Aside from equating religious minority (particularly Muslim minority) issues with anti-terrorist efforts in the public psyche, the proposal resulted in a media backlash which prompted 'leaks' to media circles that this clause, if enacted, would be used firstly against certain Muslim personalities. A review of prosecutions since the enactment of laws against incitement to racial hatred reveal that the first prosecution was against a black activist Michael X, and a disproportionate amount of subsequent prosecutions were against people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds (IHRC, 2002).

As law is subject to interpretation, it is unlikely to be effective against discrimination unless the common perception and general attitude towards Islam and Muslims change. Hence the starting point of understanding the nature of discrimination against Muslims in Britain is to explore problems such as prejudice, stereotypes and general discrimination.

## WHAT DISCRIMINATION MEANS

The literature exploring prejudice and discrimination directed towards minority groups is vast (Allport, 1954; Anderson & Klatzky, 1987; Fiske, 1998). Simpson and Yinger (1985:21) defined prejudice as 'an emotional, rigid attitude toward a group of people. They may be a group only in the mind of the prejudiced person; that is, he categorises them together, although they may have little similarity or interaction'. Allport (1954:9) defined prejudice as 'an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group'. Ashmore (1970:253) defined it as 'a negative attitude toward a socially defined group and toward any person perceived to be a member of that group'.

While prejudice is an attitude, discrimination is selectively unjustified negative behaviour toward members of the target group. According to Allport (1954:51), discrimination involves denying 'individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish'. It should be noted that prejudice and stereotype do not necessarily lead to discrimination and there may be other causes of discrimination other than prejudice. Nevertheless, they are usually closely related and 'probably most frequently they are mutually reinforcing' (Simpson and Yinger, 1985:23).

To be specific, discrimination in the context of social interaction is an unjustified negative behaviour toward members of a target group (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986:3) and the differential treatment of the individual based on her/his group-membership (Jones, 1986:289). The United Nations has a quite straight forward understanding of discrimination. Its Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

(1952:490) characterises discrimination as denying the rights of ‘non-dominant groups in a population which possess and wishes to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics.’

The occurrence of discrimination on multiple grounds is commonplace. Although this work deals primarily with anti-Muslim discrimination, there are intersections between and overlaps of religion, ethnicity, race, gender, class and other factors.

Discrimination can be classified into two grand types: **subjective** and **objective**.

Acts of subjective discrimination are those which are ambiguous, covert and subtle. They ‘involve treatment that is of borderline acceptability.....and the behaviour in question may be subject to alternative explanations’ (Conrada *et al.* 2000:137). Many institutional forms of discrimination (e.g., hiring practices) come under this category and perpetrators try to offer alternative explanations. Subjective discrimination does not overtly affect people’s lives but accumulatively disrupts peace of mind and undermines life satisfaction. In most cases such acts are so subtle that the discriminated person may feel unable to seek legal remedy.

On the other hand, objective discrimination is highly visible. Vandalism, assault and other visible backlash incidents which, for example, occurred in the aftermath of 9/11, are objective. They had an immediate effect on victims’ minds and lives. Victims may be able seek legal remedy but not proceed because of ‘cost-benefit considerations’. The hassle of legal procedure discourages victims from seeking remedy. Even if they seek legal remedy they may again be discriminated against subjectively. The institutions like the police, the court which generally operate according to social facts and realities may again unintentionally discriminate against them.

There are several theories about the origin and diffusion of racism and hatred towards minorities. Three main theoretical approaches are **power theory** (Giles & Hertz, 1994), **phenomenology theory** (Wimmer, 1997) and **cultural symbolic theory** (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1986). While the first relates mainly to the socioeconomic status of individuals, the second attributes these phenomena to a society which experiences deep-gripping crises resulting in xenophobic postures. The third pertains to cultural identity, and holds that animosity towards the other is not a consequence of economic competition between rival groups or related to attributes of society gripped in crisis, but can be explained largely as consequence of the negative prejudice of the majority toward minority groups. It arises because of perceived group differences in morals, values, norms, standards, beliefs and attitudes which may be a product of ‘early political and value socialization’ (McConahay, 1982: 692).

Racism, independent of economic rivalry, has been found to be an important factor in a study carried out in Louisville, USA (McConahay, 1982). Legge (1996), in his study of anti-foreign sentiment in Germany, found that symbolic explanations in the form of racism and prejudice, are the primary sources of anti-foreign sentiment, not economic competition or political self interest. Wimmer’s (1997) approach of ‘functionalism’ suggests that cultural differences among people could be responsible for tension, racism and hatred. According to this thesis the majority perceive a sense of ‘cultural incompatibility’ about minorities which lead to anxiety and threat. As a result, majorities (in-group members) dislike minorities (out-group members).



This trend can be explored in theories of intercultural relations. One of the theories in this area, the **schema theory**, explains the issue in depth. Nishida (1999:755) describes schemas as ‘generalized collections of knowledge of past experiences which are organized into related knowledge groups and are used to guide our behaviours in familiar situations’. It has been found that people’s behaviour is deeply related to what they store in their memory. Hudson (1990) demonstrated how schemas are stored in long-term memory and used in the real world. People develop schemas by their direct and indirect experience over time. They interact and gather information about other cultures from a variety of sources ranging from the media to talking to people. ‘As we encounter more of these similar situations, or as we talk more often about the information, the schemas become more organized, abstract, and compact’ (Nishida, 1999:756). After becoming organized and compact they become part of our attitude and behaviour. Our actions and behaviour follow the schemas or cognitive structures formed over time. One of the schemas is negative stereotyping about people of different cultures. As a result we could:

- Overestimate differences between groups.
- Underestimate differences between individuals within a social group.
- Distort reality.
- Become hostile towards and discriminate against a group.

Although these categories overlap, they offer insight to the diverse nature of social discrimination

### **Overestimating differences**

Prejudice and stereotypes are built upon social categorization. We place others into ingroups (‘us’) and outgroups (‘them’) (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Turner & Oakes, 1989). This emphasis on difference, creates positive associations with the ingroup and negative associations with the outgroup (Tajfel, 1981). Therefore, when we over-estimate differences, we see the ‘other’ as inferior, primitive, violent, irrational and oppressive, but deem ‘us’ to be good, superior, progressive, rational and compassionate. It should be noted that discrimination does not always stem from seeing ‘us’ as good and ‘others’ bad. Rather it can be motivated solely by outgroup antagonism without any ingroup loyalty or attachment (Brewer, 1999).

### **Underestimating differences**

Stereotypes ignore distinguishing features of an individual by assuming that all individuals who are perceived to belong to a social group, share the same characteristics. All definitions of prejudice emphasize that a prejudiced person:

- imagines and ‘categorizes’ a group ‘although they may have little similarity or interaction’ (Simpson and Yinger 1985);
- makes ‘faulty and inflexible generalization’ among group members (Allport, 1954);
- has a negative attitude towards a person, ‘perceiving’ that person to be a member of a ‘socially defined group’ (Ashmore, 1970).

Similarly this generalization leads a prejudiced person to behave in a particular way to the perceived group members.

### **Distorting reality**

Prejudice involves misjudgement. As a result of overestimating and underestimating differences, a distorted reality is created about people of different cultures. According to Simpson and Yinger (1985:21) the central criterion of prejudice is a strong and inflexible attitude that distorts perception and judgement. As a result of prejudice, facts become blurred and the person sees the ‘other’ differently.

## Hostility and discrimination

Prejudice and stereotype provide the basis of discrimination against a target group. A recent study in the United States about prejudice and discrimination towards Arabs found that highly prejudiced individuals discriminated against Arabs, while less prejudiced individuals did not discriminate against Arabs (Bushman & Bonacci, 2004). It has also been noted that when there is normative pressure to be non-prejudicial from the government and civil rights organizations 'prejudiced individuals may use less visible forms of discrimination' (Bushman & Bonacci, 2004: 757). This means that discrimination remains subjective and subtle.

Subjective and objective discrimination can be further classified into more diverse categories, ranging from mild ridicule to harsh and violent assault. Contrada *et al* (2000) identified five forms of discrimination:

- (a) *verbal rejection*: insult, slurs;
- (b) *avoidance* : shunning;
- (c) *devaluation*: actions that express negative evaluations;
- (d) *inequality-exclusion*: denial of equal treatment or access;
- (e) *threat-aggression*: actual or threatened harm.

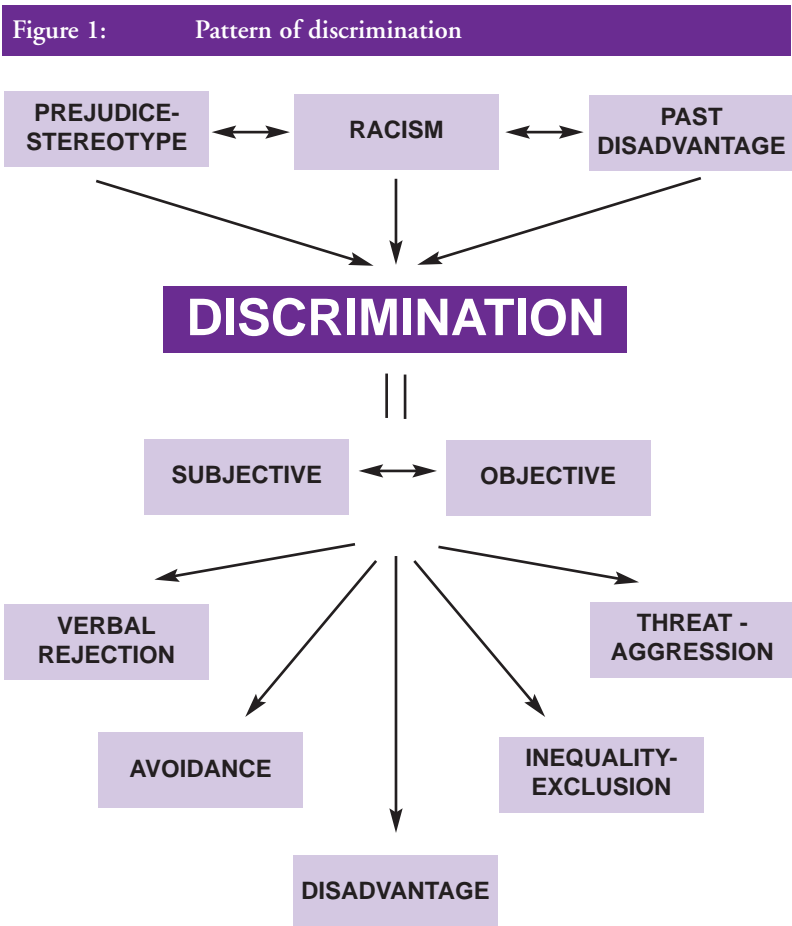


Figure 1 illustrates the pattern of discrimination. It shows that prejudice, racism and past disadvantage are important factors while interaction leads to social discrimination. Discrimination can be classified as subjective and objective which again has five patterns ranging from verbal abuse to violent physical assault.

## RESPONDING TO AND COPING WITH DISCRIMINATION

There has been increasing focus on how members of minority groups who are victims of prejudice and discrimination cope with hostility and discrimination (Hyers and Swim 1998; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). Three types of coping have been identified.

### ■ Reaction

A discriminated person may react emotionally with anger. This individual anger may spread among other members of the group who feel similarly in terms of identity and treatment, which in accumulation may result in outburst. This violent eruption can disrupt social peace and further disintegrate social cohesion.

### ■ Disengagement

In response to negative behaviour, discriminated persons may feel stigmatized and avoid voluntary interaction with the dominant group. This is particularly so in situations where interactions may have negative consequences (Cohen & Swim, 1995, Pines; 1999). This disengagement may result in greater social exclusion which further perpetuates stereotypes and thus discrimination.

### ■ Challenge

Discriminated persons may challenge negative behaviour and put extra effort into preventing prejudice and discrimination. They may focus on attaining positive outcomes and success in spite of prejudice, by seeking out additional opportunities (Oyserman & Swim, 2001:5). They try to become competent, overcome negative stereotypes and even attempt to educate others.

While groups who have been discriminated against respond to negative behaviour and try to cope with it in various ways, it is the responsibility of the dominant group to take steps in order to eliminate prejudice and minimize discrimination. Dominant group members' active participation in a range of strategies can reduce hostility, anxiety and concern prevailing in society and offer opportunities for furthering and bettering relations between members of the minority and the majority based on respect.

While the strategies of exhortation, anti-prejudice propagation, contact and education have long been stressed in works on prejudice and discrimination, (see, Simpson and Yinger, 1985) the contact strategy has particularly been emphasized in intercultural relations as an effective measure to eliminate prejudice and subsequent hostility. As the feelings of threat, fear and hostility emerge from the nature of inter-group contact (Esses, Haddock & Zanna, 1993), it has been suggested that contact that is cooperative, equal status, individualized, voluntary, and positive improves inter-group relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1986; Stephan, 1987). Among these strategies, Simpson and Yinger expressed optimism that education strategies, particularly with children, can be effective in preventing or reducing prejudices. Besides these measures, a number of strategies involving structural change have also been emphasized. Termed as 'changing situations' (Simpson & Yinger, 1985), these include changing the law and administrative procedures, and encouraging organizations opposing discrimination, ranging from public agencies to civil rights and protest movements. A measure may be general or aimed specifically at some aspect of discrimination. Regardless of whether they are general or specific, the measures should be a series of acts involving various sections of the dominant group.

Given the above potentialities for anti-prejudice/discrimination strategies offered by intercultural communication theories in particular, this study

looks at ways of developing systemic measures that can address prejudice and discrimination through active policy and legislative change. In this context it is of deep concern to note that anti-prejudice discourse vis a vis Muslims in the UK is increasingly placing the onus of change on Muslims rather than on society as a whole, led by government. Increasingly, anti-discrimination against Muslims is being expressed and conditionalised in terms of Muslims as the perceived 'outgroup' trying to counteract distorted reality through the fulfilment of conditions set by a prejudiced majority discourse as precursors to Muslim social acceptability. Effectively the 'outgroup' (Muslims) must counter the charges of 'otherness', disloyalty, and implicit threat levelled against them by the 'ingroup' (British majority) by accepting distorted realities as essential truths about themselves as a perceived homogenous group. This pattern summarises the processes in which Muslim leaders' have been asked to condemn terrorism at a time when they 'have done little else since 9/11' (Dalrymple, 2004). Now part of the general consensus, the onus for acceptability is placed on Muslims and not on agencies and government. The idea has become an accepted 'truth' to the extent that the Chair of the CRE, whilst recognising the distortion, suggests that Muslims need to do this as the only way of obviating prejudice levelled at them as a practical measure. At the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Trevor Phillips (2004) stated:

‘...though I know it is irritating to many of you, and feels unjust that you have to do this time and again, it remains important for mainstream Muslim leaders to point out that British Muslims have no time for terrorism, and call on anyone who practices it in the name of Islam to cease.’<sup>5</sup>

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The CRE chair continues: ‘It remains crucial for Muslim leaders to remind the rest of us that true Islam does not compel young women to travel thousands of miles to be given away by their families to men they do not know and to whom they do not want to be married. It remains vital for Muslim leadership to denounce those who claim that they have a cultural right to impose circumcision on young women’. Why should Muslim leaders go on denouncing every act perpetrated by Muslims, even if they have done so in the name of their religion? In the face of atrocities committed by Hindu extremists in India or Christian extremists in Serbia in the name of their respective religions, Hindu and Christian leaders in Britain were never urged to denounce such acts by government officials. Such pressure on Muslim leaders to denounce implies that Islam as a religion must at least bear some responsibility for those abhorrent acts mentioned, and it effectively contradicts the notion of Muslim diversity. As Muslim leaders do not take responsibility for the actions, for instance of Ms. Faria Alam, a Bangladeshi Muslim female who had a relationship with the England football coach, they cannot be forced to take responsibility for some Muslims who force their daughters into marriage without their consent.

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE GROUP

According to the 2001 census, there are approximately 1.6 million Muslims in Britain, constituting about 3 percent of the population<sup>6</sup>. Muslims are also the largest minority faith group; although their number is not reflected in their socio-political strength. Muslims are seriously disadvantaged in relation to employment (Bunglawala, 2004; O'Beirne, 2004), education (O'Beirne, 2004) and housing (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 2004). Muslims of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, who constitute about 60 percent of Muslims, are particularly affected by serious poverty and disadvantage (Modood *et al.*, 1997). Muslims disproportionately live in the most deprived urban areas and are highly concentrated spatially. It means that 'the inter-faith and inter-ethnic interactions are often of a confrontational nature, resulting from fear and mistrust of the "other side"' (EUMAP, 2005:13).

This report is based on a questionnaire survey, qualitative interviews and case studies. The rationale for engaging a combination of quantitative, qualitative and case studies lies in an epistemological pursuit best articulated through complementariness. The quantitative questionnaire was part of a major survey carried out by the IHRC and reported in the first volume of British Muslims' Expectations of the Government series, 'Dual Citizenship: Islamic, British or both?' (Ameli & Merali, 2004). Since a detailed description about participants and their demography has been offered in that report, here we will be brief. The total number of quantitative responses came to 1125, with some 800 being collated by hand, and the rest through a widely publicised on-line facility, over a three-week period. The majority of them are male (64%), with slightly over one-third female (36%). They are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including South Asian, mixed, Turkish, Iranian, Afro-Caribbean and English, and the level of their religiosity and identification with Islam is also diverse, ranging from devout practitioners to cultural and secular Muslims. About 90 percent of the participants are British citizens and more than half of them (55%) are born in Britain.

About 43 percent of the respondents are employed, while the rest of the participants fall into the categories of the unemployed, self-employed and students. The sample group includes respondents from England, Scotland and Wales; approximately half (47%) of them live in London. In the qualitative section we have 40 respondents who are predominantly from London but also from other cities.

It is pertinent to note (and in light of the quantitative findings, highly significant) that some respondents may not have understood discrimination as broadly as academic definitions imply. Abusive behaviour and social shunning are types of discrimination not always understood by respondents as examples of discrimination.

Qualitative interviews help us to examine the deeper layers of people's experience of social discrimination objectively and subjectively which are useful in understanding the diverse nature of actual and perceived discrimination affecting Muslims in Britain.. We also examined their expectations of the

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Although according to the census Muslims are 1.6 million (see: [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compedia/for2004/FocusnReligion.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compedia/for2004/FocusnReligion.pdf)), Ansari suggests 2 million as being more realistic since it is thought that 'a significant number of 'undocumented' and asylum seeking Muslims remain unaccounted for'. (see: H. Ansari, *The infidel within: Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London, Hurst, 2004, p.172, fn.12)

government in eliminating social discrimination systematically and structurally from the society.

The cases mentioned are predominantly dealt by the IHRC or reported to the IHRC by victims. All victims' names bar three have been changed in order to protect their identity. The cases of Shabina Begum, Abdul Kadir Mustaqim and Yassir Abdelmoutalib are already in the public domain.

The case studies do not purport to be representative, nor can they be easily generalized. They show trends and the extent of discrimination Muslims in Britain suffer in their everyday life. The combination of the national survey, qualitative interviews and the case studies shed light on our understanding of the extent of discrimination Muslims face in British society.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### THE RISE AND RISE OF ANTI-MUSLIM DISCRIMINATION

Although anti-Muslim discrimination existed long before 9/11, the events of that day prompted a sudden upsurge of harassment, abuse and discrimination. In retrospect, we can see discrimination against Muslims predating that event, and indeed rising steadily (IHRC, 2000). Arguably the violent and accelerated backlash after 9/11 in the UK is unsurprising and inevitable as it has been argued that long-running negative attitudes and prejudice can suddenly manifest themselves with strong 'intensity according to the specific historical situation of the peoples involved' (Cox, 1959: 318).

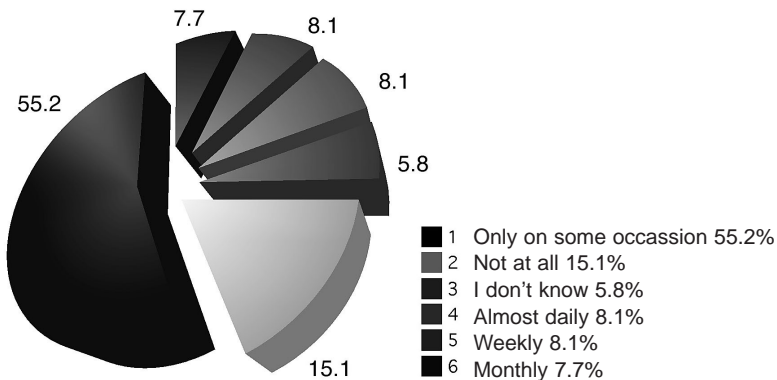
The present survey (figure 2) shows that about 80 percent of respondents have somehow experienced discrimination because they were Muslim<sup>7</sup>. While the majority (55%) have come across discrimination on some occasions, 91 respondents (8%) said they experience discrimination everyday. The same number of people have said that they experience discrimination on a weekly basis. Only 170 respondents (15%) said they have not experienced any discrimination because of their religious affiliation.

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The result is similar to the findings of a recent survey which shows that 80 percent of Muslim respondents reported being subjected to Islamophobia. A survey carried out by the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) in association with Al-Khoei Foundation and the Muslim College found that since 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, 80 percent of Muslim respondents reported being subjected to Islamophobia, 68 percent felt they had been perceived and treated differently and 32 percent reported being subjected to discrimination at UK airports. It was based on questionnaires sent out to Muslim schools, Mosques, Islamic societies, NGOs and members of the community with a sample of over 200 questions asking on how they had been affected by Islamophobia. *Counter-Terrorism Powers: Reconciling Security and Liberty in an Open Society: Discussion Paper- A Muslim Response*, London, FAIR, 2004

Figure 2: Have you experienced any discrimination in Britain?



The rise is enormous in comparison to earlier surveys. The IHRC survey in 1999 shows that only 35 percent of respondents reported discrimination; in 2000 this had risen to 45 percent.

The comparatively lower percentage as stand alone figures of discrimination in the years before 2001 does not necessarily mean that the actual level of discrimination in those years was significantly lower. In the reporting of discrimination generally two factors are involved: firstly, an awareness of the issue; and secondly, a receptive climate in which to express opinion.

Awareness about discrimination is crucial because ‘discrimination is often covert and it is therefore difficult for individuals to know whether they have been discriminated against’ (Pilkington, 2003:44). The stealth of such discrimination is sometimes not understood or causes doubt and confusion in the minds of those discriminated against. For example:

- If students are not allowed to wear hijab in school, is this discrimination?
- If Muslims are disproportionately stopped and searched as suspected terrorists, is this discrimination?
- If they are subjected to nasty looks, is this discrimination?
- If they were verbally abused, is this discrimination?
- If one is not promoted because s/he does not socialize, is this discrimination?
- If a group of people are systematically pushed towards low level jobs, is this discrimination?

Our experience, and that of other researchers and activists, is that many Muslims are often not aware that these are all forms of discrimination.

Even if they are aware, some Muslims have been shown to accept such discrimination without challenging it. As Modood *et al.* (1997: 132) found ‘Bangladeshis, despite being the most disadvantaged, reported very little discrimination’. Back in the 1990s discrimination towards Muslims was not an issue which had been recognized in the public domain. When such an issue remains unrecognized, very few from the minority would dare to report that they experienced such discrimination. Over the years, as more literature has been published on religious discrimination, the issue has become better recognised. In addition, events like the riots in Bradford and other northern towns in the summer of 2001, and the 9/11 backlash, prompted the media and politicians to focus on Muslims’ conditions in Britain. As the climate has become more receptive, more Muslims tend to report discrimination.



## HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION IN BRITAIN?

When participants were asked: 'As a Muslim, have you experienced discrimination because of your faith?' their responses were diverse. Many report that they have not been discriminated against because of their faith. Some others report occasional incidents; some others tell about subjective and subtle discrimination; some describe minor incidents; others still report major incidents and others recount frequent negative treatment.

Yes. Since I wear hijab in school people think I'm stupid. In work I face less discrimination, although the initial assumption about me was 'I'm incompetent'.

(Female, 21, London)

Customer at work made comments like- 'how many Kalashnikovs have you got under your clothes'. But the Manager did help out and speak to the customer.

(Female, 28, London)

Yes, from teachers at my children's school. I think it is the responsibility of both the school and the Muslim community who in my opinion needs to be a bit more assertive and open with them.

(Female, 34, Todmorden)

I'm a dispensing optician and wear hijab. In the past I haven't experienced discrimination. Since moving to a firm that deals with largely high middle-class to upper middle class clientele my experience of discrimination started. But fortunately my non-Muslim colleague is supportive to me and whenever a customer comes into the shop and informs him that they do not want to be served by a Muslim, he replies that he does not want to serve them either. Similar incidents happen, every couple of weeks.

(Female, 25, London)

Very rarely, it comes as various comments which may be direct or indirect, political in nature or sometimes out of ignorance.

(Female, 24, London)

Not much, once I have been called 'bin Laden' and at other time 'Paki'.

(Male, 30, Nottingham)

I can't say I have been discriminated against. But I feel there are some problems.

(Male, 34, Southampton)

All the time. Racism has a part to play in Britain, British on the whole are having a good share of it.

(Female, 65, Birmingham)

Yes but then I think Britain as whole practices social discrimination.

(Male, 38, Burnham-on-Crouch)



Many times. Once on a bus, bus driver was very rude, spoke rudely hurrying me up but polite to everyone else.

(Female, 22, London)

Only minor incidents (I guess) when at college – more racial than religious discrimination. Also, the rare remark on the street from yobs. I feel that the sensationalist media has a large share of the responsibility for creating a general racist/Islamophobic feeling in society. Only too eager to conjure up unsound conspiracy theories to unwitting audiences, journalists rarely (if ever) back-track in public when it has become apparent that their stories were empty speculation.

(Male, 21, Bolton)

Occasionally yes.

(Male, 52, London)

Yes, in previous employment I was often asked ignorant questions - i.e 'Is that skirt part of your religion?' 'Is that diamond part of your religion?' When I was out on the street a woman made comments: 'why don't you go back home, go bomb your own country' and the woman made threatening fist gestures'

(Female, 27, London)

Not that much (as I live in a multi-cultural area) but often there are areas and people that are racist and prejudice for no right. Perhaps the media are responsible in a sense because they often portray Muslims wrongly. There are also political parties (such as the BNP) who also create unwanted tension and problems in society.

(Male, 17, London)

## DIFFERENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

Prejudice because of perceived 'cultural incompatibility' is mentioned in many cases. In response to our question, a number of respondents described unfair treatment they received because they were obviously practicing Muslims.

'I wear hijab and jilbaab (ankle length apron or overcoat). Generally people are really dismissive towards me; they think I'm uneducated and backward, in the tone of language, even though I am a medical student. It's frustrating. People are generally ruder with me compared to my sister who does not wear hijab.

'Experiences include people swearing at me as they walk past, when standing at a platform people from opposite platform shouting and laughing which is embarrassing. When on the underground people who stare continuously (non-stop!!) to make you feel uncomfortable until it's either your stop or their stop to get off the train.

'Have been followed at station. Egg thrown at me and my sisters.'

(Female, 22, London)



This shows that among Muslims, those who obviously practice their religion appear more alien to the dominant group, as they may perceive them to be different in morals, values, norms, standards, beliefs and attitudes. The racial prejudice of the past seems to have been replaced by antagonism towards Muslims as people of faith. Experiences related by some white British converts to Islam shows that despite having almost all commonalities with the dominant group members they are perceived as alien and ‘enemy’. Their skin colour, ethnicity and culture do not come to their aid. One respondent says she has been treated as if she is a ‘traitor’. She described one of her experiences:

I was in a Charity shop in Shepherd’s Bush with my friend’s eight year old child looking at the clothes when a woman started swearing at the child. At first I didn’t realise she was talking to us. When I looked up she said: ‘What are you f\*\*\*ing looking at, I’ll punch you in the f\*\*\*ing face, you f\*\*\*ing foreigner, why don’t you f\*\*k off back to your own country?’ I told her that I was English and I had been here my whole life. She walked away and the other women present there sympathised with us saying, ‘Don’t worry, not everyone is like that.’ Then she came back and started again saying, ‘You may be English, but you married a f\*\*\*ing Muslim.’ We left the shop distressed.<sup>8</sup> (2003)

Table 1 illustrates the relationship between religiosity and discrimination. It shows that there is a meaningful relationship between religiosity and discrimination. Among the respondents those who are practicing Muslims are more discriminated against than those who are non-practicing. While experience of discrimination among highly practicing Muslims (87%) and practicing Muslims (84%) is over eighty percent, among secular Muslims (74%) and cultural Muslims (75%) the percentage is comparatively lower. The difference is evident when we look at those who have never experienced discrimination. While 26 percent of secular and 23 percent of cultural Muslims

**Table 1: The level of religiosity and experience of discrimination in Britain.**

	I don't know	Almost daily	Weekly	Monthly	Only on some occasion	Not at all	TOTAL
I don't know	52 71.2%	1 1.4%	2 2.7%	2 2.7%	13 17.8%	3 4.1%	73 100.0%
Highly practicing Muslim	2 1.1%	21 12.0%	25 14.3%	10 5.7%	96 54.9%	21 12.0%	175 100.0%
Practicing Muslim	10 1.4%	61 8.3%	53 7.2%	60 8.1%	445 60.2%	110 14.9%	739 100.0%
Secular Muslim	0 .0%	4 5.0%	5 6.3%	9 11.3%	41 51.3%	21 26.3%	80 100.0%
Cultural Muslim	1 1.9%	4 7.5%	6 11.3%	6 11.3%	24 45.3%	12 22.6%	53 100.0%
Don't care about Islamic values at all	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 40.0%	3 60.0%	5 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b> <b>5.8%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>87</b> <b>7.7%</b>	<b>621</b> <b>55.2%</b>	<b>170</b> <b>15.1%</b>	<b>1125</b> <b>100.0%</b>

<sup>8</sup>

The victim is married to a White English convert.

never experienced discrimination, among highly practicing and practicing Muslims the figures for those who never experienced discrimination is 12 percent and 15 percent respectively.

When a prejudiced person overestimates differences, facts are distorted and this leads to hostility and racism. Any person resembling a Muslim is perceived as a fanatic or a terrorist. Indeed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 many Sikhs in the UK and US reported being attacked on the mistaken presumption that they were Muslim, with attackers mistaking the Sikh turban as an identifier of a Muslim based on pictures of Osama bin Laden. As one 34 years old male from Bradford says:

‘I regularly get the cold shoulder and get dirty looks because of my appearance- I have a beard, wear a hat and *jubba* (ankle length robe). At one firm I got the sack, a third party told me afterwards they thought I was a fanatic and I had to be careful what I said. Now I’m self employed. Yesterday I helped an old lady, opened the door for her at the doctor’s surgery and everyone looked surprised that a Muslim bearded man would help out an old lady even though that is what Islam is all about.’

Responses indicate that being avoided or looked down on have become everyday, normal experiences for Muslims. Whilst this has significant implications for social cohesion and the psychological and other effects on members of the minority group, relentless stereotyping and negative profiling may lead to even graver consequences. The following case shows an extreme example of hatred against a perceived ‘evil’ created and sustained over a long time in the popular imagination.

## HANDICAPPED FOR LIFE

Yassir was a bright student who had just finished his post graduate degree successfully and was about to start his PhD. He was full of life and popular among his friends and family. One morning dressed in traditional Arab clothes, when Yassir was on his way to the London Central mosque for Friday prayers four men, three of whom were in their teens attacked him.

First Yassir was verbally abused, called ‘Bin Laden’ several times and spat on by the youth on the bus. When he got off the bus they followed him and assaulted him. Using a Council sweeper’s brush which had been left unattended, they severely beat Yassir until he was unconscious. A local shopkeeper rushed to rescue the severely injured Yassir but another man grabbed him to prevent him assisting. For many days Yassir was in a coma. He eventually came out of the coma but is now paralyzed on the left side of his body and almost blind. Doctors have said that Yassir will require nursing care for the rest of his life. Yassir’s dreams to finish his studies have been shattered and his family are devastated. Only the three teenagers were charged, and despite initially being flagged as a religiously motivated attack, when charges were brought against the youths, religious motivation was not cited. Two of the youths denied being part of the attacks and were acquitted. One will be sentenced on December 20. (June-December 2004)





### ‘SEVERAL LIKE YOU A MONTH...’

Safia, 35, was having chicken and chips in a fast food restaurant in North West London while her husband was shopping nearby. Suddenly a man came by her muttering ‘why’, ‘why should it happen’, having noticed Safia who was wearing jilbaab and scarf. He grabbed her from her neck and started hitting her. Safia started screaming and tried to loosen the man’s grip. A policeman who was walking past noticed the attack, came in and intervened. But as the attacker was quite strong he couldn’t cope with him alone. Whilst the police officer was struggling to stop the attacker, Safia’s husband came back. Both of them fought hard to stop the attacker and eventually overcame him. The attacker was charged with affray – a public order offence.

Traumatized, Safia, who was hurt on her face was immediately taken to hospital. The nurse who was treating Safia’s bruises was sympathetic saying, ‘You have to take off this scarf. Every month we get several cases like you who come for treatment.’

The attack on Safia changed her life. Her physical wounds were treated but her mental scarring was more severe. Now she is too scared to walk alone and feels she could get attacked at anytime. Safia and her husband decided to move their residence to another area which may perhaps make her feel safer. (October, 2004)

Yassir and Safia’s horrific experiences are not isolated incidents but rather those which stereotyped Muslim men and women face in the world of post 9/11. Although not of the same intensity, other cases predating 9/11 evidence a deeply ingrained negative imagination about Muslims which is used by attackers to legitimize their behaviour.



One day in 2000, Sharifah got on a bus to go home from work. She felt someone pulling at her Hijab from the back. She turned around to see a black teenage schoolgirl tugging at her scarf. The schoolgirl and her friend then started to insult her in conversation with each other in Jamaican patwa. Sharifa, who was also of Jamaican origin, understood and spoke back to them, at which point both girls looked visibly shocked and moved to another part of the bus.

A number of cases exemplify the newness of this discrimination in which perceived values form the basis of exaggerated or overestimated perceptions of difference. Conventional understandings of ethnic minority relations in Britain have been reshaped as hostile behaviour occurs against members of the same ethnicity. Several case studies show that Muslims have been discriminated against by people of the same ethnicity. A female Londoner of Asian background wrote about her experience:

Just on the weekend, my sister, my cousin and I were travelling on the train. My sister (20) wears the *nikab* (face covering which leaves the eyes exposed), but my cousin (23) wears no hijab at all. As we were getting off the train, an Asian man called out to us 'bin Laden'. We were very offended. I couldn't bear this insult. I told him that was not funny and asked him if he now felt clever and pleased with himself, at which point he looked rather embarrassed and ignored us.

It appears that much discrimination happens to practicing Muslims because they appear different and visually comply with existing stereotypes. A 23 year old female Londoner similarly wrote of her recent experience:

I was on a bus, reading a book entitled 'Progressive Muslims: on Justice, Gender and Pluralism'. Three passengers sitting near me, a white and two black guys saw the title of my book and started laughing about it. The white man said: 'Look at her, look at the book she is reading. I shouldn't have got on this bus; she might drop a bomb or something!' (2004)

## THE SUBJECTIVITY OF DISCRIMINATION

Employment provides an arena where subjective discrimination against Muslims often emerges and forms a substantial part of the cases brought to the IHRC's attention. Subjective discrimination in this area can include denial of a job to discrimination in the work place. As this female Londoner mentions in the employment sector, much discrimination is ambiguous, unobservable and often subject to alternative explanations which allows them to minimize the personal experience of discrimination (Contrada *et al.*, 2000).

'I can't say for sure that I have been discriminated against, but I feel it has been difficult to get a job maybe because of the way I dress i.e. hijab & jilbaab' (Female, 26, London)

Various surveys indicate discrimination against Muslims in employment. A recent report from the Office for National Statistics (2004) revealed that Muslims have the highest unemployment rate of any religious category. Among males in 2003/4, Muslim unemployment was 14 percent, compared with 4 percent among Christians. Among women it was 15 per cent, almost four times the rate for Christian women. Muslims aged 16 to 24 had the highest unemployment rates of all at 22 percent, compared with Christians of the same age whose unemployment rate ran at 11 percent. Although among older Muslims the percentage of employed was more than younger Muslims, when compared with other faith groups, they stand at a lower position. For example, Muslims aged 25 to 34 years were more than three times as likely as Christians of the same age to be unemployed – 14 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

A BBC Radio Five Live survey, in which fictitious CVs with traditional White, Black African and Muslim names were sent to 50 randomly chosen firms, found that those with Muslim names were least likely to be given an interview (BBC, 2004a). While the above indicates the extent of disadvantage Muslims face getting into the job market, there is evidence that once they get a job they are also likely to face discrimination.

'Yes, I face discrimination. Initially when I first started wearing hijab. In my interview for a job at a high street retailer I was not yet wearing the hijab but when I started the job I had started wearing the hijab. The floor manager did not like it. He felt it did not suit the image of the store and made other excuses. Another manager was sympathetic and knew it was discrimination. At another high street footwear shop I trained for two days. During the training they were very positive-said I was good at the job but asked if I had to wear the head covering I said yes- I then did not hear from them again.'

(Female, 23, London)

The following incident is a typical example of discrimination at work place:



### **NO FUSS PLEASE!**

Faria was a doctor at a hospital in London. She had been bullied by her supervisor from the beginning of her work. It continued to the point that Faria had been ridiculed for her hijab in front of a group of staff, including nurses and patients. She decided to resolve the issue 'in house' by complaining to the authority and accepting a written apology from the supervisor. But soon it emerged that the issue was not resolved and her complaints had upset a few senior doctors. They were retaliating. They started shunning Faria and made her feel alone and powerless. It was manifested in the way the seniors constructed Faria's duty rota. The way her duty rota was made left her seriously isolated. Most of the time she had to work alone without any senior registrar to cover her – a measure which compromised patient care. When Faria again complained, her seniors brought various excuses and argued that it was not religious discrimination. But as Faria was convinced she stood steadfast and continued her struggle against their discrimination. Ultimately, her complaints were upheld and some compensation was granted with the conditions that no publicity or fuss arises from it. (2003)

In hospital, another instance of discrimination has been reported by Zafirah, a nurse. Her supervising colleague, also from an ethnic minority background made acerbic comments about her religion and embarked on an open campaign of vilification of Zafirah based on her religious identity. This included bragging to other colleagues that she would not have any Muslims working on her team and that she would ensure that Zafirah was discredited and removed from her post at the trust. Various forms of harassment continued, and Zafirah took up a grievance procedure against her supervisor. This resulted in almost three years of procedure through which time, Zafirah was repeatedly let down, often refused by various solicitors who claimed that this was an impossible case to win as there were no laws to protect against religious discrimination. Eventually Zafirah's complaints were upheld. (2001 – 2004)

A number of our respondents also reported a high level of discrimination in employment. One 30 year old female Londoner wrote:

‘As a Muslim I am currently going through a lot of problems with discrimination at work and have been asked to stop praying where I used to do. It also involves lack of promotion, training, bullying, harassment, intimidation, picked upon etc.’

Table 2 shows that respondents who are unemployed report experiencing discrimination less than those who are working in the public or private sector. 75 percent of unemployed respondents reported experiencing discrimination, compared to 84 percent of respondents employed in the public sector and 81 percent of those employed in the private sector.

**Table 2: Employment status and experience of discrimination among Muslims in Britain.**

	I don't know	Almost daily	Weekly	Monthly	Only on some occasion	Not at all	TOTAL
I don't know	34 7.1%	30 6.3%	38 8.0%	36 7.5%	253 53.0%	86 18.0%	477 100.0%
Public sector	10 3.3%	32 10.6%	22 7.3%	26 8.6%	174 57.4%	39 12.9%	303 100.0%
Private sector	21 6.1%	29 8.4%	31 9.0%	25 7.2%	194 56.2%	45 13.0%	345 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65 5.8%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>87 7.7%</b>	<b>621 55.2%</b>	<b>170 15.1%</b>	<b>1125 100.0%</b>

Table 3 looks at the relationship between experiencing discrimination, frequency of such experiences and economic activity. It suggests that employed respondents are more likely to report discrimination than not only the unemployed, but students and even the retired. Some 85 percent of employed respondents reported discrimination, whilst among students 74 percent reported discrimination.

**Table 3: Economic activity and experience of discrimination among Muslims in Britain.**

	I don't know	Almost daily	Weekly	Monthly	Only on some occasion	Not at all	TOTAL
No answer	14 24.1%	5 8.6%	1 1.7%	5 8.6%	25 43.1%	8 13.8%	58 100.0%
Employed	8 1.7%	43 8.9%	40 8.3%	35 7.3%	290 60.3%	65 13.5%	481 100.0%
Self-employed	10 7.4%	19 14.1%	8 5.9%	11 8.1%	73 54.1%	14 10.4%	135 100.0%
Unemployed	6 5.8%	2 1.9%	16 15.5%	12 11.7%	50 48.5%	17 16.5%	103 100.0%
Retired	3 6.5%	4 8.7%	1 2.2%	0 .0%	27 58.7%	11 23.9%	46 100.0%
Student	24 7.9%	18 6.0%	25 8.3%	24 7.9%	156 51.7%	55 18.2%	302 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65 5.8%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>87 7.7%</b>	<b>621 55.2%</b>	<b>170 15.1%</b>	<b>1125 100.0%</b>

This supports recent research carried out in Wales where it has been found that workers from ethnic minorities have experienced five times more workplace bullying and discrimination than white co-workers. It also found that less than 10 percent took up official grievance routes (BBC, 2004b). In most cases, discrimination comes from senior staff, which makes it difficult for victims to complain for fear of retaliation or negative outcomes. The following case shows that although the victim was highly placed he became a victim and for fear of losing his job he compromised.



## COMPROMISE

Among the Muslim community Dr. Azad held a respectable position as he was among few highly placed Muslim doctors in the NHS. The administrators structured his working rota in a way which made him unable to attend the Jumma prayer. Azad requested a change to his Friday afternoon session to some other time but no attention was given to his request. His seniors in the department used to keep changing his work plan without his agreement or consultation with him. Dr. Azad was refused annual leave to look after his children when his wife had to travel abroad to attend her mother's funeral. The management made rules that if he took annual leave for his religious festival, he should work over Christmas in lieu of that.

Dr. Azad put up with all these harassments to keep his job and maintain the peace of mind of his family. Despite fulfilling all criterions he was not given promotion for a long period. He was promoted only when he eventually agreed to a lower salary scale and more work. But regular bullying and harassment continued. Dr. Azad's seniors tried to force him to do the work that was not part of his contract. When he declined they accused him of breach of the contract and took disciplinary action. Dr. Azad won the disciplinary hearing as he had enough evidence in his support. Frustrated at the situation he complained to the Trust, which held a grievance hearing. Again it had been proved that Dr. Azad was a victim of maladministration, bullying and racial discrimination. But in spite of the verdict, the harassment did not stop and even increased. His seniors became vindictive and tried to find any excuse to blame him. Dr. Azad's trade union, BMA, always stood by his side and his local MP and Racial Equality Council are sympathetic to him. But they were unable to help Dr. Azad against the subtle discrimination he was facing. Ultimately Dr. Azad feared losing his job and position, and stopped complaining about the way he was being treated. (1999/2000, Midlands)



Many service sector jobs particularly those of banking and finance seem to be inherently discriminatory, as seniors expect certain practices like socializing or going to the bar, which make it difficult for Muslims to keep their jobs or get promotion. A Muslim working at a bank in the city says, 'If I don't go to the bar with my client my manager would get annoyed and I would lose my job'.

As Muslims enter into more diverse jobs, there are more possibilities of being discriminated against. 'For a precondition of the encounters in which the discrimination may occur is competition for the same jobs, and that assumes some commonality in qualifications, skill levels and employment experience. As ethnic minorities become more effective competitors for more prized jobs and professions, the salience of the issue of discrimination may, ironically, increase' (Modood *et al.*, 1997:132).

## THE 'DOUBLE PENALTY' OF DISCRIMINATION

The phrase 'double penalty' can be used to characterize the additive and adverse effects of multiple factors. Generally it could be used in two ways: firstly, when conflating two indicators or signifiers of social exclusion and discrimination, such as ethnicity and gender (Tang, 1997) or religion and ethnicity (EUMAP, 2005); and secondly when describing processes of discrimination, for example where a victim of a hate crime reports it to the police and experiences further discrimination at the hands of the police.

The following section uses this terminology in the first instance to look at the prevalence of double penalty discrimination in the experiences and perception of British Muslims, where they have sought remedies and found further prejudice and instances of discrimination. In the second section it will look at the relationships between religious affiliation and other factors vis a vis the quantitative findings of our survey and how they shed further light on the issue of religious affiliation and discrimination. It also looks at exceptions and connotations that require further sustained research in light of the experiences of the first section and the putative findings of the second.

## EXPERIENCING DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION

It appears that since 9/11 incidents of overt discrimination have increased and became widespread. A catalogue of 'typical' incidents, from being shouted at on the street, and called 'Terrorist' or 'Osama!' to Muslim women in hijab being spat at, are now common experiences being related by Muslims. Attacks on Muslim centres, including several where pig heads were thrown onto mosque grounds, and the daubing of inciting graffiti, e.g. 'Avenge USA, Kill Muslims' in South Shields, have become part of daily life. This has prompted community organisations (IHRC, 2001b, 2003) and even some police forces to issue guidance for security measures for the Muslim community like the Metropolitan Police did in 2004, particularly after crisis events such as the murder of British hostage, Ken Bigley in Iraq in 2004.

However there is growing evidence which suggests that once victims complain about the discrimination they receive, they become subject to further discrimination.



## ATTACK ON JUBILEE LINE

One year ago on a Friday afternoon Zahra, 23, was traveling on London underground. The carriage was packed with passengers and there were female Asians as well but Zahra was the only one who wore a headscarf. As the train entered Wembley Park station, all of a sudden a man approached her and punched her in her face and broke her nose. Nobody came to her rescue and the attacker, taking his time, easily got off the train. Without delay, Zahra complained to the police. The police started its investigation in a sluggish way. But as they refused to recognize the attack as religiously motivated Zahra felt distressed. Her distress only increased as she realized that despite recognizing the attacker through CCTV footage they made no serious attempt to apprehend the attacker. As Zahra continued following up the case eventually the police asked her to come along with them on Friday to the station so that she could attempt to identify the attacker! Zahra spent that whole Friday evening standing at the station but did not find the attacker. The police investigation was closed. (2003 – 2004)

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Intisar took her toddler to the park and queued for the swings. As she put her son on, an older man poked her son in the stomach with his walking stick and told Intisar ‘to F\*\*k off back to your country!’ He then put another child, which turned out to be his grandchild into the swing. Intisar’s son was in tears from the attack, and Intisar was shaken and distressed. She decided to call the police and they arrested the man for assault. However the police encouraged Intisar to drop the complaint against the man, despite there being a witness to the incident, stating that it was her word against his, and he had stated that he could not be racist as his grandchild was ‘mixed race’. Intisar asked the police what had happened to the witness, and the officer dealing with complaint said he was unaware there was one, even though she had been interviewed by officers on the day of the incident. Intisar refused to drop the complaint, but the CPS decided not to prosecute as there was no evidence. Intisar asked the police again about the witness, and they responded that they had lost her details and could not contact her. (2004)

This double penalty, where a victim of objective discrimination looks for a remedy but instead finds subjective discrimination naturally lead to distrust of the government and majority society. This distrust amongst the Muslim community appears to be very high, with the majority of Muslims in our survey believing that the government and society do not respect them (Ameli & Merali, 2004).

Where subjective discrimination has been experienced, victims may be able to minimize its psychological impact even if such discrimination is frequent. They may attribute negative outcomes to personal factors and blame the quality of their own performance (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Victims may normalize these experiences as a way of coping with discrimination. As one

33 year old female respondent states, 'There was a time after September 11<sup>th</sup> that all the name calling and bad looks were upsetting, now it's just normal. It's our life; we have to get on with it.'

Whilst this has other negative connotations and outcomes, arguably the effects of infrequent or even single acts of objective discrimination leave lasting impressions on victims and acutely affect their lives. A female victim of assault by a number of girls whilst travelling on the underground says, 'Now when I travel in tube I never read books or magazines. I keep my eyes open and look around all the time. I have constant fear in my mind when I'll get attacked again'

### 21ST BIRTHDAY



It was the day before Sofia's 21st birthday. She was walking with her friend who does not wear hijab near her university in east London. Suddenly a man appeared from behind them and started swearing. He then spat on her and got onto a bus. Safia was stunned and didn't know what to do. Something like this had never happened in her life.

She was devastated and her birthday celebrations were ruined. The next day she informed the police. After a couple of days she got a letter from the police which stated that they would try to find the person using CCTV footage of the locality. However they also stated that since she had washed her headscarf she had lost the key DNA evidence. After that letter the police did not contact her. A while later Sofia encountered the man on several occasions and every time he smiled at her in a way that she describes as 'evil', making her more distressed. Sofia feels powerless and understands that she can expect very little help from the police, having called them several times and not been able to speak with an officer assigned to her case. (2004)

Police authorities have been identified by many respondents as perpetrators of further discrimination who discourage victims from complaining and seeking remedies. However, other public bodies and officials are also accused of discriminatory behaviour. Airports are one of the points where Muslims regularly face negative behaviour. An increasing number of Muslims report harassment and hostility from airport staff.

'I was returning from a three month trip to Bangladesh with my dad. In Heathrow after the immigration officer stamped our passports when we were about to leave another officer stopped us and started to inspect our passports again. He looked at my face and the photo and commented in a disrespectful manner: 'You don't match with this photo.' I was shocked and angry. I said: 'What do you mean?' He went on: 'The photo is different from you'. I was about to shout at him but my dad calmed me down. After some argument he allowed us to go.'

(Male, 24, Southampton)



## BRITISH MUSLIMS AT HEATHROW

Amirah wears a headscarf and her husband Ahmad wears beard. They along with their four children were returning from a trip to the Middle East. The youngest two children needed to be held all the time. At passport inspection at Heathrow the lady in front of Amirah presented a US passport to the female officer at the desk. Not only the female officer but her male colleague who was patrolling the area near her desk were friendly to her. Instead of directing her to the non-EU and British citizen's queue (which was very long), they directed her to get a landing card from another desk and return to the British citizen's queue where they would inspect her passport quickly.

When it came to Amirah and Ahmad's turn the officer's attitude totally changed. Amirah was holding the hand of her 3 year old and dragging a trolley, so Ahmad who was carrying their five month old baby in one arm and had a laptop computer over his shoulder presented the family's passports for inspection. As the female officer inspected one of the older children's passports a spare passport photograph fell out. She then admonished Ahmad for putting it there. Not taking much notice of her harsh tone, Ahmad replied she was right and he would find a better place for it when his hands were free. He put the photo back in the passport and turned to leave, when the female officer began aggressively lecturing him about the spare photograph and how he would lose it and he should not put it back in the passport, in an extraordinarily abusive manner. Both Amirah and Ahmad were upset as were the younger children who had caught her anger. Amirah asked the female officer for her name, and asked for the complaints procedure. The female officer then stopped talking to them and started checking other people's passports. Amirah stayed and asked her again. She continued to ignore Amirah. After several times of asking in a rude manner the officer said, 'Ask my manager.' Amirah asked the male colleague where to find the manager and he shrugged his shoulders.

Amirah and Ahmad did not take up the complaint as they were both busy and felt they would get little sympathy from her superiors. They could see not understand why the officers at Heathrow had helped an American go through the wrong lane at passport control and then attacked them for no reason. (2003)

A recent survey found that 32 percent of Muslim respondents reported being subjected to discrimination at airports.<sup>9</sup> The introduction of new and increasingly powerful anti-terrorist laws has seen discrimination extend beyond general rude behaviour, harassment and shouting but also increasingly includes interrogation on suspicion of terrorism.

<sup>9</sup>

The FAIR survey reported in Counter-Terrorism Powers: Reconciling Security and Liberty in an Open Society: Discussion Paper- A Muslim Response, London, FAIR, 2004, p.22.

The following story is typical harassment Muslims face at the hands of airport staff and security services operating a system of Muslim profiling.



### ‘A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY’

Abdullah was going on holiday to Pakistan after several years. His wife and three daughters, aged eight, seven and four, were accompanying him. This holiday going to be a memorable event as Abdullah's younger brother was getting married. The children were particularly happy thinking of all the fun they were going to have in the wedding. At Heathrow airport, after going through all the security checks and luggage screening, when they were just 30 minutes away from boarding the flight, some security officers appeared and apprehended Abdullah. They separated him from his wife and children and guided him into a room.

Abdullah's wife and three children were left panicking. They were so frightened and terrified that they started crying. They were not even allowed to have a glass of water let alone any consolation. This humiliating event happened in front of other passengers some of whom had travelled with them from Luton.

Abdullah was interrogated for three hours. He was asked which mosque he attended in Luton and if he had been to London, Birmingham or Manchester. It emerged that the interrogators believed he had something suspicious in a small blue kitbag belonging to one of his children which actually had only some spare clothes for the long flight.

For Abdullah it was the worst ordeal he ever had. Whenever he recalls the event he can not hold back his tears: 'I was very, very scared... I was so frightened, I just didn't know what was happening. There was absolutely no reason for them to stop me, I know nothing about terrorism'. (March, 2004)

### THE (IN)SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER

Past research has suggested that the experience of discrimination amongst Muslims is significantly affected by gender, with women and particularly younger women bearing the brunt of anti-Muslim hostility and discrimination. In 2000, pan-European research led ECRI, as part of its recommendations on the treatment of Muslims in Europe, to conclude that Muslim women were doubly discriminated against in the European milieu, first as a result of Islamophobia and then as a result of sexism that conflates their Islamic identity with a lower status than non-Muslim women. This was borne out by the IHRC's quantitative surveys of 1999 and 2000. In the first survey of 1999, 49 percent of females and 25 percent of males reported discrimination; in 2000, the percentage of females reporting discrimination was 51 percent and among male 36 percent. It was assumed, and seemed to be borne by cases reported that Muslim women are more easily recognisable than Muslim men. However our latest research (Table 4) shows that gender has lost its significance for discrimination. While 80 percent of female reported discrimination, among males 78 percent reported discrimination. One

probable reason is the increase of harassment by security forces towards Muslim looking men in recent times.

**Table 4: Gender and experience of discrimination in Britain.**

	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Almost daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Only on some occasion</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Female	20 5.0%	31 7.7%	35 8.7%	39 9.7%	217 54.1%	59 14.7%	401 100.0%
Male	45 6.2%	60 8.3%	56 7.7%	48 6.6%	404 55.8%	111 15.3%	724 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b> <b>5.8%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>87</b> <b>7.7%</b>	<b>621</b> <b>55.2%</b>	<b>170</b> <b>15.1%</b>	<b>1125</b> <b>100.0%</b>

Discrimination Muslim males face from the police and the criminal justice system are now commonplace. According to the Home Office (2004) there has been a 302 percent rise in stops and searches of Asians. Additionally there have been rises in stops and searches of other ethnicities, and from cases reported to the IHRC, it is clear that Muslims from various ethnicities have been stopped and searched, particularly when they have been dressed in a recognisably Muslim manner. As statistics are collated along ethnic categorisations and not religious categories it is difficult to state with any certainty how many of the people stopped and searched are Muslim. However the assumption that they are disproportionately Muslim has not been challenged. Additionally, the arrest, detention and subsequent release without charge of some 600 Muslims since 2001 has heightened the awareness of discrimination amongst Muslim men. This combination could account for the greater number of male respondents who reported discrimination.

The pervasiveness and random discriminatory nature of these measures is exemplified in the experiences of not only ordinary Muslims but also well known Muslims who have been stopped and questioned. Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham has twice been detained and questioned at airports. A leading Muslim scholar in Britain, Shaykh Suleman Motala, has been detained for hours at Heathrow causing him to miss his flight to Mecca for pilgrimage. Interrogations routinely involve questions about one's religious beliefs, what mosques one visits and whether one has any association with "jihadi" groups<sup>10</sup>. Some stops and interrogations have become violent, with minor mistakes made by Muslims being used as a reason for a disproportionate show of force from police.

<sup>10</sup>

Yassir Abdelmoutalib's family and friends have been asked questions such as following: Which mosque does he attend? How many times a day does he go to the mosque? Does he often change his mobile? Does he keep his appointments when he makes them? Is he deeply interested in Islam? What type of books does he read? Would he travel to other mosques around the UK to listen to specific speakers?



### **'I WILL BLOW YOUR HEAD OFF'**

Omar was stopped by the police in London for a minor road traffic offence. Arrangements were made for his friends and other relatives to collect the car. Abdullah who is clean-shaven along with three of his other friends collected the car. On their journey back from collecting the car, they were stopped by armed police officers who pointed guns to their heads. Abusive, racist and vulgar language was directed at them: "F\*\*king Pakis, if you look at me, I will blow your head off."

Abdullah and his friends were taken to the police station, strip-searched, and detained in custody for 36 hours and eventually released without charge. No interviews took place in relation to them. The following day, Abdullah was taking his 10 year old son to a shop in order to purchase some toys. On his way back, the car was surrounded by armed police officers and guns were placed not only at Abdullah's head but at his 10 year old son's head as well. Abusive and racist language was directed against Abdullah. Furthermore, the police officers made threats to Abdullah that they would blow his son's head off. Subsequently, it was realised that there was an error made by the police in that previously they had failed to remove the vehicle registration from their database. (2003)

In this case the victim complained to the Police Complaints Authorities, which changed to Independent Police Complaints Commission. Normally victims of discrimination tend not to complain. If the perpetrator is a police officer then the chances of complaining are even less. In this case the victim was brave enough to complain but no result lead him to become frustrated by the whole system. In another case, Abdul Kadir Mustaqim, the son of a prominent Muslim leader was stopped on the basis of (an unfounded) traffic offence and then handcuffed and manhandled for allegedly calling the police officer a racist. He was detained overnight at the police station and charged with disorderly behaviour and possession of a lock-knife. The latter charge was dropped when the prosecution conceded that in fact the knife they found was a legitimate pocket-knife. The IPCC is currently investigating the matter as Abdul Kadir states he was beaten and abused whilst in custody. The disproportionate use of force by police officers against Muslims is not a new phenomenon.

Harun was a takeaway owner in Merseyside. An argument broke out with the police regarding ticketing his car parked outside his shop. An ordinary protest led to his harassment and arrest. While Harun was arguing that ticketing his car was not fair, he was threatened with arrest. Within minutes six officers arrived to his shop. While one woman officer sprayed some sort of gas on his face, several other male officers held his arms back and put his face to the floor. They bundled him in the car and took him to the police station. Whilst in police custody, he did not receive proper medication and the court convicted him on three charges. Harun, who did not have eye complaints, developed eyesight problems and pain. Harun has lost all faith in the police. (1998)



Although in the past such treatment may have seemed exceptional, the introduction of new legislation like the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, have not only made such incidents more common but part of the procedural operation of law, where the perceived threat posed by Muslims rationalizes the aggressive and violent treatment they receive in both law enforcement and public psyches. In an environment where 'Muslim' is a 'dirty word' and has become synonymous with 'suspicion and terror', the law enforcement authorities or justice system are not only unable to protect Muslims but become a tool of further oppression. When the public has been conditioned and negatively 'schematized' about Muslims, they are supportive of the way state institutions deal with Muslims in the name of 'war on terror'. This negative schematization has been manifested in the rationalization of the ongoing harassment and abuse towards Muslims. The oft-cited justification by senior police figures that the operation of discriminatory stops and searches are justified in that they restore public confidence as the police are seen to be doing something to combat the perceived terrorist threat, only further serves to perpetuate a fallacious conflation between Muslims and terrorism. IHRC's criticism of disproportionately high stops and searches of Muslims in the national press (Shadjareh, 2004) drew hate mail. One letter was characteristic: 'What else do you expect? When Muslims are doing terrorism should the police go for Jews instead?'

In an environment where discrimination against Muslims by police and law enforcement officials is perceived to be justified and supported by the majority in society, rather than carried out by a minority of rogue officers, the likelihood of victims of discrimination coming forward to report such instances will clearly be low. In the absence of a requirement that religious affiliation be marked in statistics relating to stops and searches by the police, the Independent Police Complaints Commission has called for victims to report such instances to them. However its operation as part of a wider societal infrastructure in which Muslims have little trust does not augur well for this exercise.

It is noticeable that by its own admission there has been no corresponding rise in the number of complaints to the IPCC in correspondence to the rise of stop and search and other harassments (Eastern Eye, 2004).

The importance of these experiences must not be underrated. They give actual meaning to the findings of our first report that the majority of Muslim surveyed did not feel respected by government or majority society, and in turn did not feel recognized as equal citizens (Ameli & Merali 2004, 30-31). The interview responses showed that nationwide, Muslims felt that majority society perceived them to be a threat and differentiated against them on that basis. These experiences depict the feelings of respondents that not only are they not recognised, but that they are actively discriminated against.

Whilst anti-terrorist policing is undertaken on the pretext of rooting out those who would violently tear at societal cohesion in the UK (a rhetoric employed by many police and political figures when they state that Muslims too would be the victims of any terrorist attack in the UK), the discriminatory practices employed, set in the context of an increasingly hostile media and public discourse surrounding Muslim loyalty, seems set to undermine the very requirements for a common sense of citizenship i.e. mutual respect and recognition required to facilitate a common sense of belonging (Parekh, 1999)



## ECONOMIC POWER AND EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

Table 5 shows that those with low incomes report comparatively more discrimination (84%) than middle and high income groups. Similarly the frequency of discrimination experienced by the lower income group is higher than that of the middle and high income groups. It is possible and it may indicate that those who live in the poorer and disadvantaged localities experience more racism and discrimination.

**Table 5: Income group and experience of discrimination in Britain.**

	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Almost daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Only on some occasion</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Lower class	13 4.3%	32 10.7%	33 11.0%	30 10.0%	157 52.3%	35 11.7%	300 100.0%
Middle class	48 6.1%	54 6.9%	56 7.2%	54 6.9%	442 56.4%	129 16.5%	783 100.0%
Upper class	4 9.5%	5 11.9%	2 4.8%	3 7.1%	22 52.4%	6 14.3%	42 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b> <b>5.8%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>87</b> <b>7.7%</b>	<b>621</b> <b>55.2%</b>	<b>170</b> <b>15.1%</b>	<b>1125</b> <b>100.0%</b>

## RELIGIOSITY AND DISCRIMINATION

In addition to the finding in Table 1, where respondents' self-perceived religiosity showed those who consider themselves more observant facing a higher level of discrimination, Table 5 shows that there is a relationship between belief in hijab and discrimination. The question regarding the importance of hijab was posed to both men and women and is not an indicator of how many women within the survey wear hijab, but how important hijab is seen as a religious belief to Muslims participating. That belief has (often pejorative) resonance in majority societies as an indicator of Muslim religiosity (e.g. Toynbee, 2001). Belief in certain religious practices and their importance and actual observance do not go hand in hand, and Table 5 provides insights into the experiences of discrimination on the basis of belief rather than practice.

Those with a strong belief in hijab tend to report more frequent discrimination than those who do not strongly believe in hijab. Amongst those who think that the hijab is one of the most important values 26 percent reported discrimination at least every month. Those who believe that it is a very important value reported discrimination in similar proportions with 27 percent also reporting discrimination at least every month. But as the importance of hijab declines, the reported frequency of discrimination also drops. Only one person of those who thinks hijab is not important reported discrimination on a monthly basis and of those who think it has a cultural value only six of them reported discrimination at least every month.

**Table 6: Relationship between opinion on Hijab and experience of discrimination.**

	I don't know	Almost daily	Weekly	Monthly	Only on some occasion	Not at all	TOTAL
I don't know	27 69.2%	3 7.7%	3 7.7%	0 .0%	5 12.8%	1 2.6%	39 100.0%
It is one of the most important values	23 4.4%	44 8.3%	45 8.5%	47 8.9%	293 55.5%	76 14.4%	528 100.0%
It is a very important religious value	6 1.6%	36 9.5%	38 10.1%	28 7.4%	217 57.4%	53 14.0%	378 100.0%
It is a relatively important religious value	8 6.6%	5 4.1%	4 3.3%	9 7.4%	73 60.3%	22 18.2%	121 100.0%
It is not really an important religious value	1 3.8%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 3.8%	15 57.7%	9 34.6%	26 100.0%
It is only a cultural value	0 .0%	3 9.1%	1 3.0%	2 6.1%	18 54.5%	9 27.3%	33 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b> <b>5.8%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>87</b> <b>7.7%</b>	<b>621</b> <b>55.2%</b>	<b>170</b> <b>15.1%</b>	<b>1125</b> <b>100.0%</b>

Although less practicing women or women who do not wear hijab may be assumed to come across less negative behaviour, case studies have shown that they do come across hostility when their faith comes to attention.



Fawziya visited her doctor's surgery for ongoing medical treatment. She was seen by one of the GPs who was himself from an ethnic minority background. He asked her immediately where she was from. She replied, giving her country of origin. He then responded aggressively, 'You are a Muslim aren't you?' Fawziyah does not wear Hijab and asked why he thought so. He pointed out her pendant stating the word 'God' in Arabic. He proceeded to tell her that 'Christianity was best' and gave her a card for a pastor also from her ethnic background, and suggested she visit. He proceeded not to give her the treatment she required. (2004)

Our case studies indicate that an increasing number of women wearing hijab report discrimination, harassment and abuse. It appears that the general attitude towards them has become negative as there is a noticeable rise of hatred, assault, nasty looks, insults and slurs towards Muslim looking women. Even children have been reported to have behaved violently towards women wearing hijab. This alarming development indicates that anti-Muslim prejudice has become socially acceptable to the extent that children have been inculcated with a sense of what (a) a 'Muslim' looks like, and (b) that a Muslim inherently has no commonality with them, thus legitimatizing or even

encouraging them to behave negatively towards members of the minority group. Again this indicates that there are no social spaces where these children have been given a positive view about Islam and Muslims, including in schools and in the family.

When I first started wearing hijab some kids on the street tried to take off my hijab.

(Female, 23, London)

Once I was walking down a busy road in my area (Ilford), a school bus of young Caucasian boys (prob age 10-13) in their mini bus coming back from some sort of sports match, started shouting and swearing through the windows as they drive past, people around me were laughing, it was very embarrassing.

(Female, 22, London)

A 20 year old female from North Manchester painfully said: 'I have been abused several times. If I explain all of them I don't think I will be able to finish'. Then she described two recent incidents:

On one occasion I was coming home from college in my car when a gang of five men threw dirt of the floor towards me. I was stopped at the lights and my window was open so it fell on me. I was furious and angry, they even called me paki!!

On another occasion I was coming home from the airport and a man drove up behind my car in the tower car parks and kept honking at me. Because I was driving safely and taking my car out of the car park in a proper manner he got restless. Although I don't think it was my driving after the verbal abuses he shouted at me at the check out. He started shouting 'go back to your country you f\*\*\*\*\* Arab'. My mother was with me and her face went white with fear. But I could not take it and got angry and shouted back 'go back to the trash can you white trash'. By that time a security guard appeared a few distance away, the abusive man must have seen him and he quickly drove off. I wanted to complain to the security guard but my mother discouraged me as she just wanted to go home and was filled with fear. The security guard did not look helpful as he was giving us dirty looks and didn't ask if there was something wrong.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND DISCRIMINATION**

Table 7 shows the relationship between place of residence and discrimination. Respondents from more segregated areas or areas with a small Muslim population reported more discrimination than Muslims from areas which are more multicultural. This is clear in the comparison of five cities. While respondents from London report comparatively less (76%), respondents from Luton (91%), Bradford (86%), Gloucester (85%) and Swansea (81%) report more discrimination.<sup>11</sup> It is particularly noticeable that respondents

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In Swansea just over 1% of the population are Muslim, about half of whom hail from South Asia., In Gloucester the Muslim population is just over 2%. In Luton, Muslims make up about 15% of the population, with some two thirds of that figure hailing from Pakistani origin and about a quarter of Bengali origin.

from Bradford, reported the highest frequency of discrimination (52%) over a month (daily, weekly & monthly) while respondents from London, a city with a much more diverse and less segregated Muslim population, for instance, reported far less (21%) over the same period of time.

**Table 7: Relationship between place of residence and experience of discrimination.**

	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Almost daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Only on some occasion</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Swansea	0 .0%	1 6.3%	3 18.8%	0 .0%	9 56.3%	3 18.3%	16 100.0%
London	38 7.2%	38 7.2%	34 6.4%	37 7.0%	297 56.0%	86 16.2%	530 100.0%
Birmingham	6 10.0%	7 11.7%	7 11.7%	5 8.3%	28 46.7%	7 11.7%	60 100.0%
Manchester	0 .0%	1 2.7%	3 8.1%	1 2.7%	23 62.2%	9 24.3%	37 100.0%
Bradford	2 3.4%	10 17.2%	12 20.7%	8 13.8%	20 34.5%	6 10.3%	58 100.0%
Glasgow	1 3.1%	1 3.1%	3 9.4%	5 15.6%	18 56.3%	4 12.5%	32 100.0%
Newcastle	3 12.0%	4 16.0%	2 8.0%	1 4.0%	12 48.0%	3 12.0%	25 100.0%
Cardiff	1 5.6%	1 5.6%	0 .0%	2 11.1%	10 55.6%	4 22.2%	18 100.0%
Oldham	3 21.4%	1 7.1%	0 .0%	2 14.3%	8 57.1%	0 .0%	14 100.0%
Other	7 3.2%	17 7.8%	23 10.6%	20 9.2%	114 52.5%	36 16.6%	217 100.0%
Coventry	0 .0%	1 9.1%	0 .0%	2 18.2%	6 54.5%	2 18.2%	11 100.0%
Gloucester	2 4.9%	4 9.8%	3 7.3%	1 2.4%	27 65.9%	4 9.8%	41 100.0%
Slough	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	27 96.4%	1 3.6%	28 100.0%
Peterborough	2 7.4%	4 14.8%	1 3.7%	1 3.7%	15 55.6%	4 14.8%	27 100.0%
Luton	0 .0%	1 9.1%	0 .0%	2 18.2%	7 63.6%	1 9.1%	11 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b> <b>5.8%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>91</b> <b>8.1%</b>	<b>87</b> <b>7.7%</b>	<b>621</b> <b>55.2%</b>	<b>170</b> <b>15.1%</b>	<b>1125</b> <b>100.0%</b>

## ETHNICITY AND DISCRIMINATION

The impact of ethnicity on disadvantage and discrimination is deeply significant and has been examined in previous research where the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Britain were found to be the most disadvantaged groups (Modood *et al*, 1997), and that an overlap of ethnicity and religious identity can be found in the socio-economic discrimination of the Muslim community in Britain (Modood, 1998).

Table 8, illustrating the relationship between ethnicity and discrimination, sheds some further light on it. The proportion of reported discrimination from respondents of Pakistani background is higher (82%) than respondents from other ethnicities. The frequency of discrimination is also higher among them. In comparison with Iranians, for example, the double penalty of ethnicity and religion becomes noticeable. While 13 percent of Iranians reported discrimination over the period of a month, more than twice as many Pakistanis (29%) reported discrimination over the same period of time. Darker skin colour appears to have impact bringing about another form of double penalty. However these results cannot be extrapolated and a wider study of Muslims of different ethnicities needs to be conducted to assess this impact not in isolation but also as part of a multi-dimensional study on the impact of different variables in the experience and perception of discrimination by British Muslims.

**Table 8: Ethnic group and Muslim experience of discrimination in Britain.**

	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Almost daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Only on some occasion</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Pakistani	9 2.4%	32 8.4%	41 10.8%	39 10.2%	202 53.0%	58 15.2%	381 100.0%
Indian	25 9.3%	17 6.3%	22 8.2%	19 7.1%	149 55.6%	36 13.4%	268 100.0%
Bangladeshi	10 10.6%	8 8.5%	8 8.5%	5 5.3%	52 55.3%	11 11.7%	94 100.0%
Arab	7 8.0%	3 3.4%	3 3.4%	7 8.0%	52 59.1%	16 18.2%	88 100.0%
Afro-Caribbean	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	7 70.0%	0 .0%	10 100.0%
White British	2 5.0%	5 12.5%	1 2.5%	4 10.0%	25 62.5%	3 7.5%	40 100.0%
Turkish	0 .0%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	0 .0%	8 72.7%	1 9.1%	11 100.0%
Iranian	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 6.7%	1 6.7%	11 73.3%	2 13.3%	15 100.0%
Mixed	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 8.6%	3 8.6%	21 60.0%	8 22.9%	35 100.0%
Other	10 5.7%	23 13.2%	10 5.7%	9 5.2%	89 51.1%	33 19.0%	174 100.0%
East African Asian	1 11.1%	1 11.1%	0 .0%	0 .0%	5 55.6%	2 22.2%	11 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65 5.8%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>87 7.7%</b>	<b>621 55.2%</b>	<b>170 15.1%</b>	<b>1125 100.0%</b>

These survey results threw up an extraordinary exception to the presumption that darker skin colour affects levels of discrimination, in that white British Muslims reported the highest level of discrimination. An overwhelming 88 percent of these reported discrimination. From case studies and interviews, it seems that many white converts feel that they are perceived as 'traitors' to the dominant group (something reflected in interview responses from converts from different ethnicities in reference to their ethnic community group). The higher figure could also reflect a greater sensitivity to differential treatment or both.

A 52 year old English female from London wrote:

On a Sunday I was shopping at a supermarket with my Muslim friend. It was crowded. As we had less than ten items we put our items in one trolley and proceeded to the 10 or less items' checkout. As we have been waiting in the queue the person behind told us we should go to another checkout. I explained that we only put two persons' shopping item in our trolley. Then people behind started to become abusive. One woman told me 'F\*\* off to your own country'. Another shouted 'F\*\* foreigner'. When the check out girl informed us and them that we are entitled to use this checkout, they stopped shouting, but then started to stare and mumble. As we were leaving the store an old man came up behind us and tried to push his trolley into us but was too feeble to do so. So he called us 'F\*\*king b\*\*\*\*\*ds...' I later complained to the store manager. Though he was sympathetic he informed me that he was unable to stop the customers being abusive or racial.

## ASSESSING THE RELIGION FACTOR

'Double penalty' analyses that look at ethnicity and religion or gender and religion can shed some light on the impact of religious affiliation on the experience of discrimination. Religion impacts on discrimination at different levels. Hate attacks are part of objective discrimination which is easier for respondents to identify and for policy-makers to understand. The foregoing has highlighted some of the points of contact between Muslims and wider society where such discrimination has come into play. It has been argued that some laws and the implementation of some laws are in fact discriminatory, but there are also, as the next section demonstrates, more subtle forms of social discrimination evidenced through the interpretation of law and policy by officials which perpetuate distorted realities in the public psyche.

## DENIAL OF DIFFERENTIATED RIGHTS THROUGH INTERPRETATION

*'Protection of minorities is the protection of non-dominant groups which, while wishing in general for equality of treatment with the majority, wish for a measure of differential treatment in order to preserve basic characteristics'* (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1947)

The fight to preserve basic characteristics can be seen as a day-to-day reality for Muslim victims of discrimination, particularly so in recent debates regarding school uniform. Whilst prevailing public discourses have charged Muslims who wish to wear clothing they feel is Islamically mandated, as anathemas to equality, early conceptions of human rights in the last century, based on the legacy of inter-war Europe, Nazi Germany and the beginnings of post-colonial nationhood, codified the protection of minority rights. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1947) emphasized differentiated measures between members of the minority group and the rest of the population as a way of ensuring equality. This has resonance in the potentiality for multicultural citizenship through inter-cultural communication between the majority and minorities based on recognition of the normative value of differential treatment. The lack of discussion of these concepts in public debates exposes a somewhat superficial concern with human rights vis a vis minority issues on the part of government. Whilst majorities may be held to the charge of being inherently discriminatory by minorities, the role of government, through intercommunication with minorities, is to facilitate rather than enforce inclusive citizenship that reflects the acceptance of difference as a form of equality.

Whilst this issue currently affects Muslims, other religious groups have also had this experience in the UK, making the current furore over school uniform in particular even more anomalous when set against the background of race relations laws that have recognised the right and necessity of other religious minorities to be different. This section evaluates these principles using the specific example of dress codes based on case studies and recent public debates.

School uniform policy has long been a problem for a minority with a different requirement of dress, and has been identified as institutional or indirect discrimination against minority groups (see Pilkington, 2003:46-47). The issue initially arose as a consequence of the prohibition of a male Sikh pupil from wearing a turban. This was resolved by the House of Lords in *Mandla v Dowell Lee*, 1983, and it is now unlawful for a school to discriminate against a pupil in this way. However there are no procedural guarantees regarding hijab, although there have been tribunal cases where Muslim employees have been found to have been unfairly dismissed on the basis of their hijab. There are, however, cases reported where hijab and jilbaab have been banned for Muslim girls at schools, and that Muslim boys have also been prohibited from wearing beards.

### BEARD ROW AT SCHOOL



Ali was a 5th grade student at a boy's school in Surrey. When he turned 16, his beard became the centre of a row with his new school. Although Ali fulfilled all criterions to get into the Sixth form of the school, he was denied entry because of his beard.

'The School's rules prohibit the wearing of beards by pupils', the school wrote to his father. The head master said that unless he shaved his 'facial hair' the school would not accept him. When Ali insisted on wearing his beard and his father explained the Islamic duty for having a beard to the school, the school changed its position saying that he had been excluded 'on behavioural grounds'. It further accused Ali for having 'a series of disciplinary problems'!

Ali's father then appealed to the school governors. But the board of governors also supported the headmaster's decision. Ali's father, who was adamant that wearing a beard is obligatory for Muslim men, appealed to the governors.

After a lengthy process of correspondence and bringing evidence and representatives, at last Ali won. The school admitted that it was wrong not allowing a Muslim pupil to wear a beard. However Ali, whose study was disrupted in this row decided not to take up a place in that school anymore. (1998)

Table 9 illustrates the relationship between education and discrimination. It does not suggest a significant relationship between the level of education and the degree of discrimination except that those who are not educated to GCSE level appear less likely to report discrimination. About 29 percent of these respondents reported that they have not experienced discrimination, compared with 14 percent of respondents holding postgraduate degrees or PhDs.

	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Almost daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Only on some occasion</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Below GCSE	7 16.7%	5 11.9%	1 2.4%	2 4.8%	15 35.7%	12 28.6%	42 100.0%
GCSE or equivalent	19 9.0%	8 3.8%	19 9.0%	22 10.4%	117 55.5%	26 12.3%	211 100.0%
A Level or equivalent	12 5.0%	24 10.0%	17 7.1%	15 6.2%	131 54.4%	42 17.4%	241 100.0%
Undergraduate	12 3.6%	30 9.0%	27 8.1%	33 9.9%	181 54.4%	50 15.0%	333 100.0%
Postgraduate	13 4.8%	23 8.6%	25 9.3%	13 4.8%	159 59.1%	36 13.4%	269 100.0%
PhD	2 6.9%	1 3.4%	2 6.9%	2 6.9%	18 62.1%	4 13.8%	29 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65 5.8%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>87 7.7%</b>	<b>621 55.2%</b>	<b>170 15.1%</b>	<b>1125 100.0%</b>

It should be noted that our respondents' age starts from 15 and thus may not give a fair picture of many of those who are in secondary schools. Table 10 illustrates the relationship between age and discrimination. It suggests no significant relation between age and discrimination, except that those of 50 and above report the lowest incidence of discrimination over a month (13%).

	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Almost daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Only on some occasion</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
15-19	16 8.6%	13 7.0%	11 5.9%	19 10.3%	99 53.5%	27 14.6%	186 100.0%
20-24	13 4.9%	19 7.1%	24 9.0%	25 9.3%	135 50.4%	52 19.4%	268 100.0%
25-29	4 2.1%	18 9.3%	19 9.8%	17 8.8%	111 57.2%	25 12.9%	194 100.0%
30-34	5 3.6%	11 7.9%	19 13.7%	8 5.8%	76 54.7%	20 14.4%	139 100.0%
35-39	4 4.8%	7 8.4%	10 12.0%	4 4.8%	47 56.6%	11 13.3%	83 100.0%
40-44	3 3.8%	10 12.5%	4 5.0%	6 7.5%	51 63.8%	6 7.5%	80 100.0%
45-49	2 4.3%	3 6.4%	2 4.3%	4 8.5%	32 68.1%	4 8.5%	47 100.0%
50 and above	18 14.0%	10 7.8%	2 1.6%	4 3.1%	70 54.3%	25 19.4%	129 100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65 5.8%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>91 8.1%</b>	<b>87 7.7%</b>	<b>621 55.2%</b>	<b>170 15.1%</b>	<b>1125 100.0%</b>



It may suggest that discrimination happens regardless of age and those who are older may be less sensitive to discrimination. This concurs with our previous study (2000), in that over 50s also reported significantly less discrimination than. However in those surveys, those aged under 35 had a much higher experience of discrimination. In 2004 this seems to have averaged out across the age ranges and runs at staggeringly high figures throughout.

An increasingly narrow conception of equality is being employed in interpretations that reflect a highly ideological conception of cosmopolitan citizenship that demands the primacy of the individual as the only rights holder in a society where uniformity to a liberal norm provides the basis for a fully constituted citizen. The inherent defects of such conceptions of the individual are beyond the remit of this paper, but as referred to, highlight the operation of prejudice through interpretation that runs counter to human rights tradition. To this end Muslims in the UK have variously found themselves denied, particularly in schools, the right to wear dress which is obligatory according to their religion.

### **Moving house to wear scarf**

Shahnaz was the only girl wearing a headscarf in her school. She had been bullied and taunted about her dress code and religion. On several occasions boys pulled her scarf off in the school playground and she came home crying and upset. Although the school authority took action against the boys, the overall environment was unpleasant and kept Shahnaz and her parents stressed. They decided to move Shahnaz to an all girls school. But the headmaster of the girls school refused Shahnaz a place because she wanted to wear a headscarf. In an interview with other prospective parents the headmaster said: 'We don't allow students to wear headscarves because we believe normal children are happy children.' Shahnaz's parents contacted the local authority. But the local authority supported the headmaster's view. In the end Shahnaz's parents had to move out of the locality to find a school which allows Shahnaz to wear a headscarf. (Surrey, 2000)

In most cases the schools' arguments are based on their 'uniform policy' and 'health and safety issues'. When parents and pupils argue that their hijab does not contradict either of these, schools often end the whole discussion by offering a 'choice' to students to either comply with their wishes or find another school.

### **No headscarf even outside school!**

Zakia, a student at a private girls school in Croydon, started to wear the headscarf when she turned 11, whilst travelling to and from the school. The headmistress, noticing her wearing the headscarf outside school premises, warned her and also wrote to her parents not to repeat it again. Zakia's parents explained the Islamic requirements for hijab and asked permission to allow their daughter to wear it only when she is out of the school premises. But the headmistress refused permission, with no specific reason given, other than it was against the school tradition. 'Girls do not wear headscarves at ... school. It is not part of our custom and we do not permit it either inside or outside school,' the headmistress wrote to her parents.

Zakia's parents informed the chairman of the school asking him to intervene. But he referred the matter back to the headmistress, sup-

porting her views. The distressed parents continued writing letters and lobbying. But they wrangled unsuccessfully for three years. The school's policy changed only when a new headmistress joined in 2000. (1997)

Preventing Muslim pupils from wearing hijab, refusing to facilitate their fulfilment of their religious obligations and refusing to consider their religious sensitivities have far-reaching influences on wider society and also among pupils. The problematisation of Muslim dress and requirements by schools incline pupils to observe Muslim peers as aliens who are not accepted at an institutional level. They become easily subject to bullying and abusive comments from other pupils and rude behaviour from some tutors.



### 'GO TO ARABIC SCHOOL'

Afia's daughters go to a state school in London. The eldest, Shazia, aged 12, has been bullied since June 2003. She was the target of verbal abuse and threats. After Afia's patience ran out she complained. The school took action and made the boys apologize. Afia was relieved thinking that the disturbance had ended. But it did not take a long time for the incidents to recur and things became even worse than before.

The boys not only targeted Shazia at school; they targeted her outside and even threw stones at her house. This escalated to a violent attack where the boys followed her into a girl's toilet and hit her on her face and kicked her legs, resulting in her having cuts on her lips and bruises on her legs.

This time when Shazia's mum tried to resolve this by complaining to the school she was discouraged and the head teacher turned her away saying that the boys had apologized.

Whilst this process was ongoing and Afia was struggling with her eldest daughter's harassment, her younger daughters were subjected to derogatory comments from their tutors. Her younger daughters who wanted to be excused from singing and dancing classes were told by their teacher: 'If you don't like it then go to an Arabic school'. (2004).

After much lobbying and struggle from parents, students and Muslim organizations, there has been improvement in many schools in terms of allowing Muslim students to wear headscarves. But the problem of wearing hijab has persisted in different ways. Many Muslims believe that the requirements for hijab involve the wearing of long flowing tunics known as jilbaab or occasionally burka as well as a headscarf. To this end, other options including the traditional South Asian dress, *salwar kameez* (tunic and trouser), do not fulfil this requirement. The jilbaab affair in the UK in the last year has highlighted again the anomalous nature of debates and interpreted policy surrounding Muslims in the UK. Whereas questions are not raised regarding different degrees of religious dress worn by, for example, practising Jewish boys whose dress codes are covered by the Race Relations Act, schools, boards of governors and local education authorities have employed interpretative

strategies in the definition of what is or is not 'correct' or 'compliant' Islamic dress, regardless of the belief system of individuals or collective groups of Muslims. Whilst appearing to promote or value limited difference or to suggest a spectre of compromise in the public arena between the majority and minority practices, this strategy sustains and fuels anti-hijab prejudice in wider society.

## Expelled for Jilbaab

Samina, 16, recently moved to Manchester with her family. She took admission to the sixth form of a comprehensive girls school in the city. In the interview selection procedure, no questions were raised about her wearing the traditional Muslim dress consisting of a scarf and long over coat (jilbaab) to her ankles. But as she started attending school, the headmistress objected to her dress saying that it did not look 'business like', stating that her clothing had to consist of 'two separate pieces of clothing'. Samina and her parents tried to resolve the dispute meeting the headmistress informally. They suggested that Samina would remove her overcoat (jilbaab) in lessons where there were only females present and put it back on where she was taught by a male. But the headmistress was adamant and said that the only thing she could do was take the jilbaab off just before she came to school.

Samina and her parents talked to various authorities including the Education Department to resolve the issue. But their efforts were to no avail. The headmistress expelled her from the school. (2001)

This is similar to the case of Shabina Begum of Denbigh High School in Luton. She was sent home from school for wearing a jilbaab. She was 13 when, in September 2002, she was sent home from school in Luton for wearing a jilbaab. In 2004, at the age of 15, she tried to come back to school with the same dress. But the school again denied her. Shabina went to the High Court but the court on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2004 ruled against the wearing of the full Islamic dress.

## THE VERDICT AND PREJUDICE: THE CASE OF SHABINA

Shabina's case is an example that demonstrates that minority rights cannot be a subject of popular consensus or left to so-called 'common sense'. A review of newspaper writings on Shabina's case indicates the extent of prejudice and hostility towards practicing Muslims, not only in schools but also in wider society. A review of arguments and comments against Shabina and her dress can offer some clues as to why hijab- and particularly jilbaab-wearing females are regularly abused, insulted and physically attacked. It illustrates the rationale of the dominant group which has almost reached a consensus that hijab/jilbaab/*burka* (loose garment which covers entire body and face) is not a form of dress to be respected and those who insist on wearing them do not deserve dignity.

A search of national newspapers from 16<sup>th</sup> June 2004 until 25<sup>th</sup> November 2004 returned 48 news pieces, columns and articles referring to Shabina Begum. In most comments she and her hijab have been synonymous with stupidity, irrationality, intolerance, evil and lack of culture. Most commentators from celebrities to ordinary readers, and even some Muslims hailed the court's decision in not allowing her to wear jilbaab and vilified her claim as unreasonable and evil. It appears that Shabina's jilbaab has become another tool to further intensify prejudice and hostility towards those who insist on

practicing their religious belief. It is noticeable that all those who vilified Shabina made reference or deferred to some sort of 'commonsensical' argument like 'uniform policy' and health and safety which are based on earlier previous cultural prejudices.

Ulrika Jonsson (2004), a popular television celebrity, wrote:

'If there is a dress code - and I think there should be one - it must apply to everyone. [...] Of course we must be sensitive to people's beliefs and traditions, and be flexible in catering for them, but *the line really has to be drawn*<sup>14</sup> somewhere. Many Muslim girls feel the need to wear a headscarf and cover their legs and arms. Fair enough, but beyond that are we really obliged to allow everyone to dress differently? Suppose a pupil's religion required them to go topless, or to carry a dangerous weapon into school...we would challenge that, and rightly. This is not about racism or religious prejudice.'

The need for *drawing a line* has been asserted by a number of writers who apart from congratulating the court for its ruling expressed their deep anger against jilbaab. Janice Spencer (2004) a regular columnist of *The Times* wrote: 'Until Mr. Justice Bennett's ruling this week that Denbigh High School in Luton was not discriminating against 15- year-old Shabina Begum by forbidding her to wear the jilbaab, no-one was prepared to *draw a line*.' Then the columnist continues to vilify wearing hijab arguing that it is a symbol of oppression and burka, specifically, is nothing more than the 'dress of slaves':

'The jilbaab is not about religious faith, it is about culture, a particular, repressive culture which denies women employment, education, and equality under the law. It is a cloak of invisibility which means that women's rights can be ignored, their dissent go unheard. The jilbaab and the burka are deliberate physical impediments to free movement, comfort, and the right even to look fully at the world. The burka does not, by the twisted logic of fundamentalism, engender male respect: women in countries which enforce the veil are not the most revered, they are the most subjugated on Earth. The burka is the garb of the slave.'

Some liberal Muslim writers labelled the practice of wearing hijab as backward and in their view synonymous with repression and backwardness. *The Sunday Times* published an article written by Mona Bauwens (2004) who believes that hijab is mainly a tool to control women and for the most part, the wearing of hijab is hypocrisy:

'I am delighted that the Muslim schoolgirl Shabina Begum has lost her battle to wear the jilbaab to school. As an Arab Muslim woman brought up in this country, I was angry that Shabina demanded to wear the strict head-to-toe gown to school because wearing the school's uniform was "eroding her human rights". To me, her demand was a flagrant abuse of the human rights this country has given her, and I feel strongly that Shabina should show more respect for life in Britain.'

Then she expresses her alarm on seeing an increasing number of women choosing to wear hijab.

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Emphasize is by author.

'I am worried because there seems to be a very strong revival in traditional Muslim women's dress in Britain. As a child growing up here, it was extremely rare to see Muslim women in this country who were fully covered up, but recently I've seen a huge increase in the number of women who are fully covered on any high street.'

Another celebrity Helen Chamberlain (2004) takes another approach, suggesting that hijab is a hindrance to a female's physical exercise. She then questions the suitability of hijab on school premises:

'What I want to know is what on earth happens at PE time? Hey, I might not know much about any religion but I do know that exercise is one of the most important things and can help you live longer and healthier no matter what you believe in!'

Shabina's case has become an opportunity among those who wanted to vilify Muslims. Suzanne Moore (2004), another writer at *The Mail on Sunday*, commenting on the jilbaab row wrote:

'There is no uniform at my daughter's school but the pupils are not allowed to wear hoods and caps. It could indicate gang membership or act as a disguise.[...] If clothes symbolise one's allegiance to a gang, what bigger gangs are there than the religious ones?'

She then continues praising Turkey in its handling of hijab and goes on explaining that wearing hijab bears dreadful physical consequences. She then urges the psychologists to investigate the mental consequences of wearing hijab.

'Do psychologists ever say anything original or worthwhile?'

Nevertheless, the writer acknowledges her deep rooted prejudice about Islamic dress codes. If a Muslim female wear hijab, regardless of her education, knowledge and achievements, for the writer it is impossible to look at her respectfully:

'On Panorama last week, some Muslim women explained why they choose to veil themselves. They were articulate, thoughtful and challenging but still when I see a fully veiled woman it is almost impossible for me to think, 'Here is an honoured woman.' Quite the opposite.'

Later, *The Sunday Times* published an article about Carmen Bin Laden, the former sister in law of Osama bin Laden, who expressed her delight that Shabina lost her case and says that she finds it impossible to understand girls such as Shabina Begum and why they insist on wearing hijab. This is typical of other *Times* writers: "I have a feeling it's trying to use our tolerance to impose their intolerance on us" (Driscoll, 2004)

None of the columnists, from right or left, could sympathize with Shabina, who wanted to keep her piety and continue education, or consider that their failure to understand might say more about their own prejudices than about the issue of hijab.

In addition to columnists, letter writers hurled their venom against her.

A letter writer in *The Sun* wrote: 'I think Muslim schoolgirl Shabina Begum is bang out of order and should remember that, in this Christian country, she has equal rights at her school - but she does not have special rights' (Abalain, 2004).

Another wrote in *Daily Star*: ‘Why should she be allowed to wear something different from other Muslim girls - such a dangerous garment as well, especially in science lessons’ (Grant, 2004).

In the *Daily Express* one reader wrote: ‘If she really wants to wear a jilbaab, perhaps she should go and live in Saudi Arabia. She’ll get treated as a second-class citizen all the time, but will be able to cover up entirely’ (Hudson, 2004).

Another wrote in *The Sun*: ‘Teenager Shabina Begum should not be allowed to try and dictate school uniform policy. School is an institution for education, not a place to express religious beliefs’ (Wilson, 2004).

Immediately after the court ruling *The Sun* (2004) ran a poll and found that 84 percent of 6,275 people who participated voted that she should wear the school uniform.

Many Muslims perceive the prohibition of jilbaab at schools as a worrying development from legal authorities. While the Sikh turban issue has long been resolved, there is a continuing wrangling over hijab.

This worry came to reality when in Tower Hamlets, which contains the largest concentration of Muslims in London, several schools suddenly instructed their pupils not to wear jilbaab after Shabina Begum’s case. Many girls at those schools had been wearing jilbaab for years with no problem and these new instructions left them in distress (Euro Bangla, 2004). The row between pupils, parents and the community on one side, and schools and the Local Education Authority on the other side, continued for over a month. After several pupils stopped going to school (Sunday Times, 2004), the resentment spread out among local Bengali Muslims and the issue got into the national press (Independent, 2004; Evening Standard, 2004) The schools subsequently backed down (Muslim News, 2004). A local journalist who has been following the event says: ‘Although the schools are no longer insisting on pupils leaving aside their jilbaabs, the damage has been done. Pupils got the message that jilbaab is unwelcome and most girls stopped wearing jilbaab’. Considering that the ban on jilbaab had been lifted, this could only be an example of the effects of informal discrimination.

Whilst this situation appears, at the time of writing, seems have been resolved, the suddenness of the ban post-Shabina Begum’s case is a worrying indicator of latent prejudices.

Muslims had expectations that the Human Rights Act would help them gain their rights in education, employment and in other services. However interpretations of these laws have left Muslims disappointed, confused and distressed.

The policies and rulings over wearing hijab show that when negative stereotypes are widespread, facts become blurred, tenets of human rights and UN conventions end up being interpreted according to ‘commonsense’, which is all too often a euphemism for prejudice, and ultimately discriminatory judgments prevail. Ultimately the legal system and its officers and office bearers do not exist in a vacuum, and prevailing discourses impact on interpretative processes. They are also influenced by present social circumstances and ongoing discourse. In hijab cases, for example, it has been noticed that the nearly unanimous tone of society was to welcome the courts’ decision ignoring a basic tenet of human rights, ‘differential treatment’ for a minority group.

When human rights principles are interpreted according to existing social beliefs, often based on distorted realities or even complete fallacies, seeking redress from discrimination becomes a futile exercise. Where discrimination is subjective, it can be so subtle as to make it impossible to prove in a court of law. 'Cost-benefit' considerations also impact on decisions as to whether or not to seek remedies, and is particularly relevant in education where going to court can mean years of uncertainty, coupled with the burden of litigation being placed on the shoulders of a child or very young person. As a result, victims effectively agree to be abused, harassed and discriminated against. A Muslim who has been denied a job at a chain fast food shop in London because of his beard says: 'I know they discriminated against me but what can I do? It's a hassle to go around and complain. It's more painful to go through a legal battle than put up with this discrimination'.

In addition to this when victims complain of discrimination, employers tend to bring in counter allegations to disparage the person or bring in other reasons which are sometimes difficult to disprove in court.



Ms. Yasmin's case is a typical one. She was working at a Mental Health Trust in London. From the early days of her working there, she was subjected to derogatory remarks about her dress, practice and belief. Her line-manager and other members of the staff regularly made fun of her dress, mentioning it was 'ghoul-like'. She had also been referred to as 'primitive' for refusing to shake hands with men. Yasmin's boss commented that her way of life was 'boring and outdated' and suggested she go for a swim.

On one occasion, when a fellow Muslim wearing similar dress joined Yasmin for a work placement, various derogatory comments were passed. Her line manager said: 'People are going to be frightened. This is going to cause problems around the issue of extremism'.

Another staff commented: 'This is not a Muslim organization'. Some others expressed their fears about a Muslim 'take over', 'Islamic fundamentalism' and 'terrorism'.

Empty bacon crisp packets were often found left on Yasmin's desk.

When Yasmin could not take any more of this behaviour and formally complained, her harassment took another twist. Hate letters were written to some of the Trust employees and Yasmin was accused of sending them and suspended whilst she was on sick-leave because of stress. The whole episode caused her enormous grief, and she decided to end the issue by accepting an out-of-court settlement (1997).

In this situation the Employment Act 2003, prohibiting *inter alia* religious discrimination, has been a step forward, and has been welcomed by Muslim groups. However, as it has been mentioned, as long as the wider social environment remains hostile, legal measures may prove counterproductive. Muslims will not be encouraged to seek remedy while they fear a negative outcome or further vilification. One respondent suggested the improvement of third party reporting structures to obviate this negativity.



‘I think there should be procedures in place such as a 3rd person you can complain to. Phone lines against discrimination from where we can get immediate advice ’

( Female, 23, London)

The respondent’s suggestion echoes calls by Muslim organisations for the effective recording and acknowledgement of religiously motivated discrimination and attacks. Not only do third party reporting structures work within the framework of ethnicity, but social space where discrimination is understood and challenged is still resistant to the idea that adherents to religions, and Muslims in particular, can be subjected to discrimination on the basis of their religion. Unless appropriate spaces are opened, Muslims will not be able to relate their experiences in an environment of recognition and trust. Only governmental structures can provide the impetus for recognising religious motivation in discrimination. This recognition and investment across government and in civil society structures needs to be mirrored in awareness-raising across communities as to the moral imperative for minority rights and what this entails. Currently, attempts to facilitate minority protection is seen by the majority as anti-egalitarian and a way of conferring favours on minorities above and beyond those enjoyed by what the majority. Without this effort, popular conceptions of equality will drive policy and the operation of law in a manner that will polarise British society.

## CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION: EXPECTATIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Most cases show that when discrimination occurs, there are three types of result: reaction, disengagement, and challenge. Many Muslims take the third approach; instead of reacting forcefully or shying away, they challenge negative behaviour and try to educate and change others. They want to live in a peaceful society based on justice and equal treatment. As one Male, 28, from Bradford says:

‘In order to eliminate both objective and subjective social discrimination, the Government should work for social cohesion involving not only different government agencies but also with Muslims at grass root level. Muslims want to have respect and fair treatment like all other citizens’.

In many cases victims strive hard and undergo further discrimination but do not stop until they get a positive result. Ms. Faria, a doctor at a London hospital, is a good example, who risked her career by fighting back, and finally won and after several months of strife and struggle.

This approach is stronger among the younger generations of Muslims, as indicated in the comments of the harassed 20-year-old female from Manchester, who wrote expressing her strong resolution and hope:



People seem to look down on you, but I defiantly respond. Because I feel if a person does not respond they seem to think you are weak and you agree with the way they treat you. I just hope some one publishes these abuses, which will make people like me aware that there is some one else in your shoes and you can do something about it.



Challenges Muslim youths throw back at perpetrators are often brave. A 23 years old female Londoner after receiving a slur, turned against the perpetrator and took him on: 'I told him that was not funny and asked him if he now felt clever and pleased with himself, at which point he looked rather embarrassed and ignored us.'

She also wrote: 'The problem is not only that hijabis and nikabis receive these kind of insults, but that these people do not know how to react when they get a response back. The trouble is that they do not know how to justify their opinions, which they are entitled to, but this just creates the impression that they are uninformed, and choose to be so.'

Although it is sad that many young Muslims face abusive name calling, it may be an encouraging sign that they challenge and respond with courage and also with wit. A South Asian male, who is in his twenties, says:

'Once I was shouted at 'Oi Paki!' I turned around went close to him and said: 'Please call me correctly if you want. I'm not Pakistani. I'm Bengali. We had a long war against Pakistan.' The guy was totally lost hearing my reaction and went hurriedly away out my sight.'

One female in her twenties, who wears jilbaab and was mistreated several times, describes: 'In London underground it happened twice to me. While I was waiting for train a guy shouted to me 'bin Laden'! I looked at his eyes and told him: You are wrong it's *binte Laden* not bin Laden. The guy was shocked and took his head to another direction and walked away from me.' Despite this tendency to challenge their attackers, and demand their rights, Muslims seem to receive little sympathy from the authorities. The police's insensitive approach, the absence of legal protective measures, and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes through government policies fuelled by the popular media do not leave much space for Muslims to achieve respect from wider society and the recognition needed to foster a common sense of belonging.

All these issues have been raised by the respondents when they were asked

'What do you expect the British government to do to eliminate social discrimination in Britain?'

Raise cultural awareness, invest in and support organisations dealing with cross-cultural dialogue, inject money into poor areas, provide guidelines to media as to how race issues should be/not be approached.

(Male, 29, Croydon)

## Change the Law

A number of respondents emphasized the need to change existing race relations laws which do not regard Muslims as a minority group entitled to protection and urged for harsher, more exemplary actions against those who use abusive language. They also want the government to scrap the Anti-Terrorism Crime & Security Act 2001 which they believe has been designed specifically to target Muslims.

## Education and Contact

A number of respondents recognize ignorance about Islam and Muslims as the primary reason for discrimination. They emphasise that the Government should take steps to educate people about Islam and its followers. In some cases lack of information or distorted imaginings about Muslims' can easily

be misinterpreted as evidence of problems and made the basis for maltreatment.



Selina, a social worker and now a Muslim, recounts many incidents of Islamophobia across the social service because of ignorance about Islam.

On one case (before she became a Muslim), she was told by her superior to visit a case where a Muslim woman, whose husband was in hospital with a broken leg was close to a nervous breakdown. Selina was instructed to start the procedure which would allow social services to take the children of this family into care. Upon visiting the woman, Selina found to her surprise that apart from being naturally stressed about various problems that the loss of income after her husband's hospitalization brings with it, and the imminent discharge of her husband to their flat several floors up in a council estate where the lifts were frequently out of order, there was nothing to suggest that she was on the verge of a breakdown.

On further examining the case notes, Selina found that this analysis had been made by her colleague on the basis that the woman prayed regularly and this was a sign of extreme of anxiety. Selina set about helping to arrange for housing benefit to be paid to the woman whilst her husband was out of work, as well as other benefits available to them. She was also able to assist with their housing problems. Had she not gone that day, this family's children would have been put into care on the basis of their mother performing daily ritual prayers. (1996)

In Muslim belief, believers are required to perform at least five daily prayers. This is a common practice in households where there are practicing Muslims. Similar ignorance about Islamic faith and Muslim practices caused discrimination among another social service team. Hannah, from London describes her ordeal with a social service team.

### **Insha'Allah & Social Services**

Hannah was subject to a social services assessment regarding her parenting skills. As part of the assessment, social workers asked Hannah about her aspirations for her children and in particular her aspirations for her teenage daughter as opposed to her sons, as they were concerned that due to her Muslim culture she may discriminate between them. Hannah was told that her daughter was a bright student at school and was asked whether she would like her to go to university. Hannah replied, 'Insha'Allah'. Insha'Allah is an Arabic term that translates to 'God-willing' and is frequently used by Muslims when expressing a positive desire. This statement was interpreted as meaning that Hannah cares little for her daughter's future because she wants to leave it all up to God, rather than encourage her herself. After a long effort the cultural connotations of Insha'Allah were eventually successfully conveyed to the social services team. (2003)

Had this incident not come to outside attention and a challenge not been made, Hannah and her family could have been assessed and dealt with on the basis of pre-conceived stereotypes that were 'validated' on the basis of a cultural misunderstanding during the interview.

Apart from educating the majority about Islam and Muslims, some respondents also stressed that greater contact between Muslims and dominant group members would, in their view, eliminate prejudice and stereotypes regarding practicing Muslims.

I think ignorance is the main reason for discrimination. Educate general public on discrimination. Tell them why it's happening against Muslim and tell its bad sides.

(Female, 24, London)

Education through schooling

(Male, 24, Southampton)

Ignorant groups will always discriminate. Government should educate kids from schools.

(Female, 24, London)

Greater interaction among Muslims and non Muslims are needed. The government and private organizations should have a strategy of taking more Muslims. This will automatically remove many misconception about Muslims. For example, in the Library where I work, I'm the only person who is Muslim. My colleagues had misconception about Islam. After I described them about Islam many of them now appreciate the religion and very friendly to me.

(Male, 32, Nottingham)

I feel London has improved because of being multicultural. The Government should continue on path they are doing. Companies and agencies needs to take certain amount of people from ethnic groups.

(Female, 21, London)

The Government needs to educate people about what Islam is. Maybe monitor the media who fuel negative perceptions.

(Female, 24, London)

Respondents emphasized that education about Islam and Muslims should start from schools so those negative stereotypes do not accumulate in children's minds. As a 24 year female Londoner says 'Government should educate kids from schools'.

## Change attitudes

A number of respondents emphasized that the government should question and change its own attitudes, as well as encourage changes in societal attitudes. They insist that the first step should be not seeing Muslims as the 'other' but rather that Muslims should be seen as part of 'us' with a focus on commonalities.



Change the language they use. Instead of making it a 'them' versus 'us' issue, maybe call us British Muslims and make us feel part of society -not alienate us . We want the same things they want.

(Female, 25, Birmingham)

Well we can take action against people for objective discrimination right? As long as we have proof. But can we really do anything against subjective discrimination since they are very difficult to prove? I'm not sure social discrimination can be eliminated unless people's education, even within their own homes, can be changed and media affects can be reduced by applying more rules as to how they address certain groups etc... for example at the moment they can easily label Islam as terrorism, although Islam has nothing to do with the actions of for example Al Qaeda.

(Female, 20, London)

It's through the British government that all this discrimination has occurred, with their hype of terrorism and their use of the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' etc... target the media and their portrayal of Muslims. I don't really expect the government to do much in reality though, get rid of David Blunkett perhaps?

(Female, 22, Ilford)

Stereotypes post Sep 11th need to be changed. Change the Anti Terrorism Act.

(Female, 26, London)

British government needs to make the public aware through media, television, radio and internet. Also in parliament, communities and inter-faith groups, people should be educated. Tougher laws should be implemented along with imprisonment and heavy fines. Steps should be taken seriously where indirect discrimination is involved. No clemency towards abusive, bullying and harassing behaviour. Regarding the dress code of Islam, it should be made clear that it is not the hijab or scarf you look at but the abilities of a person and not their dress or colour. Furthermore, it should be brought in people's attention referring to Bibi Mariam's statue which indicates covering for a woman should be her pride and not be discriminated while working or seeking jobs.

(Female, 30, London)

There is a real need to treat Muslims as part of the society. Don't alienate them. Don't alienate any group

(Male, 37, Sussex)

Changing attitudes involves a range of measures. In addition to education, contact and making people aware about Islam, respondents emphasize that senior public figures should change their views about Muslims and refrain from hyping the fear of 'terrorism', and should themselves learn more about Islam. In order to change attitudes towards Muslim women who wear hijab, the rationale for wearing the hijab needs to be explained and publicised, even though there is little evidence of a willingness to understand in the writings of some newspaper columnists. One respondent from London referred to

statues of the Virgin Mother Mary (Bibi Mariam) indicating that ‘covering for a woman should be her pride and not be discriminated while working or seeking jobs’.

## Check the Media

Many respondents resent the actions of a section of the media in portraying Muslims in a sensational way which reinforces existing prejudice and hostility against Muslims.

Combat Islamophobia, don't paint all Muslims with the same brush. Talk to Muslims and stop propagating negative images of Islam.

(Male, 34, Bradford)

Media should offer proper information on Islam and Muslims. Why they are putting all the crap programmes on TV.

(Female, 22, London)

The media needs to be more balanced instead of victimizing all Muslims.

(Female, 21, Herts)

Change race laws and stop negative portrayal of Muslims in the media.

(Male, 25, London)

The media are playing an important role. Rather than spreading harmony, it's spreading the messages of hatred. They should talk about Muslims in a more respectful manner.

(Female, 45, Kent)

People are quick to blame Muslims for every bad thing. Terms like terrorism and Islam used interchangeably.

(Female, 28, London)



The routine juxtaposition of Islam with terrorism has caused great concern among respondents. Many believe the media is partly responsible for the current hostile atmosphere against Islam and Muslims, and wish the Government could ask the media not to generalize. As one 37-year-old male from Bradford urged ‘don't paint all Muslims with the same brush’. Another respondent, a 28-year-old female Londoner, wants the Government to take the initiative so that the ‘terms terrorism and Islam’ are not ‘used interchangeably’.

## COMMENTS FROM MUSLIM COMMUNITY FIGURES

We asked Muslim activists, leaders and community workers what they believed were the causes of social discrimination against Muslims and who has responsibility for tackling this issue. The following are the responses.

### **TAHIRAH AZARPAY, COMMUNITY ACTIVIST, BIRMINGHAM**

Discrimination against Muslims can be seen at every level of society. Sometimes it is blatant; however my experience is that the bulk of discrimination is acted out in a very subtle way, often born of ignorance, carelessness and a lack of concern for the feelings of others. This has several effects. Firstly, since it is subtle, one might wonder if it had occurred at all; and secondly, this low intensity discrimination is often hard to prove and hence the victim has either to continue to suffer in silence or retreat from the situation. This can have a devastating impact, for example the loss of a job, not accessing essential health care, isolation, depression, or a youngster becoming disengaged from the education system or even his/her family and community.

The media is responsible in a very big way for maligning the Muslim community. Politicians and political parties have also played a fundamental role, for historical political and religious reasons, in creating tensions, both domestically and abroad, that have given rise to increased attacks against Muslims and overt discrimination. These great and powerful institutions have proved unwilling or incapable of observing even their own codes of conduct and policies in terms of anti-discriminatory practice.

Some Muslims argue that we are partly responsible for the negative attitudes that others have towards us. For example whilst we claim to be the best 'Ummah' some sections of our community have become synonymous with tax, benefit and housing fraud, with the drug and gun trade, and with prostitution and unkempt streets. Muslim interracial violence, and even the way we dress, is criticised etc. Whilst one can argue about the veracity of such claims, they do not legitimise, in a civil society, discriminatory practise in any shape or form. Crime must be dealt with within the remit of the law. One only needs to look back to Germany's Nazi era, or the scandalous social programmes implemented against some disadvantaged sections of American society, to see similar language used to justify the committing of crimes against humanity.

Whilst we must quite rightly make a real effort in dealing with the inadequacies of our own individual and communal behaviour, we must also refrain from equating discrimination as a justified response to anti-social behaviour. Such behaviour is not only unrepresentative of the vast majority of Muslims but is also not confined to Muslim communities. Rather, it is characteristic of disenfranchised communities across the board, particularly in a social and political context where moral and spiritual values and strong community ties are lacking.

**DR. ABDUL BARI,**  
**DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL, MUSLIM COUNCIL**  
**OF BRITAIN**

Discrimination against Muslims across British society stems from a number of elements.

Ignorance about Islam and Muslims plays the major role. Coupled with it is the sad historical legacy of prejudice and dislike of Islam. Unfortunately, the negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam by a section of the media reinforces Islamophobia.

Muslims themselves are not completely blameless; they generally are not proactive in reaching out to the wider society.

In this situation the responsibility lies with the government, the political establishment, religious and civil institutions in the national and local levels and also on Muslims.

It is encouraging that the government has decided to outlaw discrimination on the basis of religion. Now it is a matter of implementation. The media needs to play a positive role in creating community harmony and the police service has a major role in alleviating fear from the Muslim community. It is important that the school curriculum comes out of its Eurocentric approach.

**CHOWDHURY MUEEN-UDDIN,**  
**DEPUTY DIRECTOR, ISLAMIC FOUNDATION,**  
**LEICESTER, UK**

Social discrimination against Muslims stems primarily from wide-spread prejudice in the wider society and powerlessness of the Muslims. Ignorance breeds such prejudice because ignorance is darkness; this is why the pre-Islamic society is called the age of *Jabiliyya*. Muslims lack the power and control to undo this cycle of ignorance and prejudice. Both Muslims and society as a whole have a responsibility to address this issue. Muslims should take pro-active measures to secure whatever power and control is attainable and then project a true and positive image of themselves. Society on the other hand has the greater and weightier responsibility to make such power available to the victims of the discrimination – in this case Muslims – and make a serious effort to know in order to conquer prejudice.’

**MUSLEH FARADHI,**  
**CENTRAL PRESIDENT, ISLAMIC FORUM EUROPE**

Social discrimination against Muslims is primarily caused at two levels – the position the community has been given in society, and the misconceptions that arise due to misunderstanding resulting through world events.

The facts: about a third of the children living in workless households are Muslim. It is also not untypical to find serious health problems among people living in overcrowded accommodation. Similarly, three-quarters of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in households receiving less than the national average wage and 54% of them are in homes that are on income support. Unemployment for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men is high, and the average earnings of Muslim men are 68% of those of non-Muslims.

The government compounds this by failing to act positively, despite positive statements from Ministers, such as “Mosques play an important role in community cohesion and civil renewal” and “Expression of religious freedom is a core British belief.” The government has done little to discharge its responsibilities under international law to protect its Muslim citizens from discrimination, vilification, harassment, and deprivation. Anti-terrorism legislation has served to polarise the community further.

Muslims must play a role in debunking the myths that prevail, and engage actively and positively in society. In this way, the government should provide the platforms to take on board suggestions and actively implement them.

The government needs to endeavour to regain trust, for example when Muslims are tried, it is widely felt that justice is not done. Projects will also need to be assessed to check for equal Muslim representation, for example in the New Deal. More programmes to deal with specific problems are needed, for example regarding employment. Finally a recent report stated that the state sector was failing Muslim children. The Government needs to do something specifically to target the under-achievement and set up some dialogue in this regard.

**ROMANA MAJID,**  
**MUSLIM YOUTH ACTIVIST, LONDON**

Social discrimination with regards to the Muslim community has included experiences ranging from slow or unhelpful retail service and verbal abuse from the public, to denial of employment and hate crime; and this is just the external manifestation.

Information available to the wider public about either Islam or Muslims comes from a limited number of sources, including the media, politicians and aspiring politicians and other related organisations. It is these groups who are either responsible for the causes of social discrimination, either by contributing to its production or not taking responsibility to counter it.

Many, including Muslims themselves, have argued that they are partially responsible for the negative perception of Muslims because they have not played a big enough role in trying to redress the balance of ignorance about Islam and Muslims. However, the Muslim community is very diverse and holds differing opinions, and as yet there is no single representative voice. Nor is the Muslim community organised, trained or resourced to deal effectively with the challenges put to them. With this in mind, any expectations of collective Muslim response should be viewed in perspective.

In contrast, the groups and individuals that are guilty of creating and reproducing prejudicial information for public consumption clearly have the means to end immediately the propagation of inaccurate, negative and discriminatory information.



**DR SIBTAIN PANJWANI,**  
**HEAD OF THE CENTRE OF ISLAMIC COMMUNITY**  
**DEVELOPMENT AT AL-MAHDI INSTITUTE,**  
**BIRMINGHAM**

British Muslims represent a diverse population on the basis of their ethnicity, language and culture. Like other Britons, they act and respond in a variety of ways to accommodate to institutions and changes in British life. They try to play a constructive role within the British milieu. Necessarily therefore, a response to the issue of social discrimination will be varied, a fact that sometimes escapes the pundits.

Social discrimination against Muslims has many levels, from the local to global. However, what underpins these events is policy, from government, press and parties, and how this policy influences the public, i.e. the usage of information. If information is incorrect or biased, the public, whose access is limited to the information institutions provide, will naturally be influenced against and disinclined towards Muslims.

The 'older' generation accepted social discrimination philosophically, the 'younger' wish to understand and confront it. Increasing the level of awareness and education or participating in protests are prime examples. But when this so-called 'radical' reaction is portrayed as 'Islamic fundamentalism' that is irrational and violent, one is not surprised at the conclusion drawn by academics that Muslims are at the greatest risk of being victims of both implicit racism and general discrimination.

British Muslims must stand up to all types of discrimination and injustices for all - Muslim or not. To build a just and safe society, the starting point is that all citizens must be treated equally in practice. The law must make a statement and the state apparatus must be seen to apply it. Equally, all citizens must bear their responsibility to value diversity and respect cultural differences. If only the overwhelmingly positive voice of British Muslims is heard with increasing regularity by those who can receive it.

**RUHUL TARAFDER,**  
**1990 TRUST, LONDON**

The main causes of social discrimination against Muslims in the UK today are as a consequence of governmental policy often resulting from Institutional Islamophobia.

The failure to accept Muslim concerns before the summer disturbances in 2001 was a clear example of the lack of understanding between the government and Muslim communities. The excessive policing, failures in protecting communities under attack and unfair sentencing resulted in perpetuating alienation, polarisation and discrimination towards Muslims. Instead of acknowledging the role played by racism, the BNP, media, policing and institutional racism, the government chose to blame young Muslims.

The wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, under the pretext of a 'war on terror,' have further led to the legitimisation and creation of a climate of social discrimination against Muslims. There has been a massive increase in racist attacks, Islamophobia, use of stop and search laws, terror legislation, internment of Muslims in Guantanamo and Belmarsh etc, resulting in marginalising, demonising, victimising and criminalising of Muslim communities.

In my view, it is primarily the government that has the responsibility for combating institutional Islamophobia, and this can only happen if there is first an honest internal examination of itself, which can then lead to accountability.

Additionally, it is important for Muslims to speak out against injustice and oppression by providing a united clear and unequivocal position against any policies or misinformation espoused by the government, media etc that can lead to social discrimination and force accountability, demand constitutional rights and protection under the law.

**OMAR WILLIAMS,  
RAHMA (RACIAL ATTACKS AND HARASSMENT  
MONITORING ASSOCIATION), SWANSEA**

The task of tackling social discrimination against Muslims is the task of all who wish to see Britain remain, a 'cohesive' society. Nothing poses a greater threat to this than the current demonisation of a section of our society. Responsibility for bringing about an end to discrimination against Muslims exists at the European, National Government, local authority and NGO levels.

Those bodies that should be the natural standard bearers of the struggle against anti-Muslim discrimination are those well-established in the race relations 'industry'. Many lacked the grassroots links with Muslim communities to respond adequately to the post 9/11 aftermath; many never acknowledged the discrimination against Muslims prior to this, and even now many cannot think about these problems outside of the framework of 'race and ethnicity'. The Government must realise that Islamophobes are 'available in all colours', just as Muslim are equally diverse racially. Indeed people with highly prejudiced views about Muslims can be encountered in some of the very bodies established to bring about equality.

Mainstream bodies such as the police who should be gathering information about Muslim discrimination do not seem to be doing so. For example, the CPS and the police talk in terms of 'racially and religiously motivated crime' and mention these both in their publications, yet the police (at least in the part of the UK in which we operate) still appear to be monitoring only 'racially motivated crimes', which deprives us of valuable statistics.

On the one hand we turn to the police when we suffer religiously motivated crime and who we look to for deterrents and protection; on the other hand we perceive them to be used increasingly as an oppressive tool for a political agenda the effect of which discourages community engagement with the police and results in massive under-reporting of hate crime.

Long term, we need Muslim representation at all levels, especially the senior and policy shaping, decision-making level posts within the Government, police and any other sphere in mainstream society where decisions taken have a direct impact on the lives of people living in Britain. What we don't need from the mainstream are any more half-measures or quick fixes or empty gestures; no more tokenistic appointments, no more lip service.

## **MAJED AL ZEER,**

**DIRECTOR, PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE, LONDON**

A combination of factors are responsible for social discrimination against Muslims. These include ignorance, racism, xenophobia, and religious bigotry. By our erroneous insular tendencies and victimhood psychology Muslims have also unwittingly contributed to the growth of this social ill.

This is a problem that must be addressed through concerted action by all members of society, Muslims and non-Muslims. It is a burden that lies even more directly on the shoulders of those who shape and influence public opinion namely; politicians, media practitioners, teachers, university lecturers, religious and civic leadership.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

This report, based on a national survey in Britain, interviews and a plethora of cases shows the extent and the nature of discrimination Muslims face in their everyday life across British society. Their experience of discrimination is vast ranging from hostile behaviour to abuse, assault and alienation.

As the experiences of discrimination vary in terms of nature, they also vary in terms of frequency. Many Muslims report discrimination on a daily, weekly and monthly basis whereas most report occasional discrimination. In our analyses of the interviews and case studies, similar variation is available as a number of victims recognize with utter shock that for the first time s/he has come across discrimination where s/he never expected to suffer it.

Without suggesting immediate causal-effect relationships between prejudice and discrimination, it has been argued that prejudice and negative stereotyping against Muslims which have built up over a long period of time through the perception of 'otherness' and the knowledge gathering process are central to understanding the causes of the widespread subjective and objective discrimination experienced by Muslims. Negative stereotyping and racism are further compounded by popular literature, the media and the political climate which encourage, rationalize and give legitimacy to discrimination.

Most of the time, prejudice and discrimination are mutually reinforcing; as has been discussed, inflexible generalization, negative attitudes and perceived incompatibility lead to disliking, hostility and negative behaviour. This situation is primarily due to cultural, political and value socialization arising from a deep-grounded negative perception about Muslims' differences in morals, values, norms, standards, beliefs and attitudes.

Similarly, from the perspective of intercultural communications, it has been suggested that discrimination towards Muslims as a minority group starts from negative schemas developed through a long process of interaction and knowledge collection about Muslims from a variety of easy-to-access sources ranging from direct contact to media depictions. Over time, these schemas become part of the dominant group members' views and attitudes. As a result, members of the ingroup misunderstand differences between Muslims, either by over-estimating them or under-estimating them, which in turn distort the facts and lead them to be hostile, rude and exclude members of the minority and even occasionally perpetrate violent attacks against that minority.

There is no exception in perpetrating discrimination; young and old, rich and poor, power holders and powerless, blacks, whites and Asians, all appear to have become active players in the process. Similarly, victims of discrimination are also from diverse backgrounds irrespective of their age, education, colour, ethnicity, gender and earnings. It does appear, however, that those who are more practicing report greater discrimination, and are victims of more negative behaviour, than those who are non-practicing. Those who are employed also report more discrimination, which suggests the prevalence of discrimination in workplaces. Among ethnicities, Muslims of South Asian backgrounds report greater discrimination than those with fairer skin colour, reinforcing earlier findings of the overlapping of religion and ethnicity. However, white British Muslims are exceptions to this rule as they report discrimination more than any other ethnicity.

It has been illustrated in a number of cases that even institutions responsible for protecting the public and rendering justice, actually perpetrated injustice and oppression. Obviously, as the majority have become conditioned through a long process of knowledge gathering and political and cultural 'value socialization', based predominantly on perceiving Muslims as the 'other', evil, primitive, irrational, uncouth and so on, negative behaviour from institutions is not surprising. In this situation, Muslims' efforts at confronting prejudice and discrimination are unlikely to work. In the case of condemning terrorism, for example, Muslim leaders' efforts to dispel the myth that Islam breeds terrorism and convince society that Muslims are ordinary human beings like the followers of other religions with heterogeneous orientations, a few of whom could resort to violence in particular circumstances, seem to be futile. The deep-rooted problem of schematic knowledge becomes evident in the case of Shabina Begum, in which the court, press and public response was synchronized with the existing stereotype and public hostility towards those who wear jilbaab. Similarly, repeated demands that Muslims condemn terrorism show the strength of popular imagination at all levels of society, regardless of their intellectual and religious affiliation. It suggests the old idea that with repetition and through consensus a myth can become accepted as a fact and become part of 'common sense.'

Thus, the first step to fight prejudice and stereotype leading to discrimination is not only to come out of the vicious circle of overestimating and/or underestimating differences between the majority (ingroup) and Muslims (outgroup), but also among the members of the Muslim community. It requires strong dismissal of the characterisation of Muslims as a homogeneous group. This can be attained through incorporating measures in the learning process of children, enhancing contact and dialogue, and a comprehensive campaign to make all citizens aware that anti-Muslim stereotyping is abhorrent. The focus should be on changing the attitudes of people, a part of which includes bringing in new legislation. New or amended laws that are cognisant of the existence of religiously-motivated hatred and discrimination will clearly help address the problem, but only as part of a wider impetus from government, opinion makers, intellectuals, politicians, writers, celebrities and media personalities to dispel prejudice and racism against Muslims. Without this broader context, legislation will not be effective.

The danger of systematic discrimination against a large section of the community should be recognized across social and political institutions, in particular the mass media which plays an important role in symbolizing violence and phobia. Furthermore, social discrimination against the minority is a means of social fragmentation and can damage national solidarity and identity. In 1945, Louis Wirth recognized that negative treatment against minority groups results in great cost to the whole of society. Discrimination slowly erodes social cohesion and can lead to catastrophe. He wrote: 'As long as

minorities suffer from discrimination and the denial of civil liberties, the dominant group also is not free' (p. 368). The dominant group's freedom, peace and liberties will be overshadowed by fear, tension and distrust. The shocking extent of discrimination revealed by the study should be taken as a warning of a phenomenon with the potential to further disrupt the peace of the society unless it is checked and mutual trust and respect between the majority and the minority restored.

It is important to realize that if a minority group with an enormous attachment to the diaspora community and religious community experiences ongoing discrimination, this can either create a muted group marginalized within their own group, which reduces their social and political participation as well as contribution in British society; or it can create serious religious or ethnic resistance. Additionally the unchecked rationalization of discrimination against the minority in both practice and the operation of law, leads to increasingly discriminatory policies and legislation which ultimately can justify violence against minorities at the systemic level. In all these cases British multicultural society as a whole is the victim.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

Government and policy makers need to seriously take on board the issue of stereotyping as a cause of discrimination which has been well discussed and rehearsed at a theoretical level here and in other research work. From the responses received, it is clear that Muslims in the UK feel themselves to be the victims of prevailing stereotypes of being anti-modern, fanatical, prejudiced and possible fifth columnists. Muslims as a community in the UK and Muslims as individuals feel that they are viewed with suspicion and derision of systemic proportions, and this will not change unless stereotypes are tackled at institutional levels. The onus for this change lies with government, for without the will of the state and the threat of pecuniary penalties from the state in the absence of institutional change, no amount of 'stereotype busting' activities from Muslims, be they awareness weeks, endless condemnations of terrorism, film festivals or open mosque days will lead to change.

### EDUCATION

Addressing negative perceptions at the level of primary and secondary education seems an obvious and important first step in this process. As it has been discussed throughout the report, negative stereotypes build up through a long process of knowledge gathering; systematic learning at a young age is the starting point of the knowledge gathering process. Children's educational curricula have a long term effect on perceiving Muslims negatively. Although the negative perception and prejudice are gradually compounded through other factors, such as media, family and popular literature, in the course of time, the material children study and learn at schools sow the first seeds of prejudice and negative stereotypes. This learning subconsciously rationalizes the crudeness and primitiveness of Muslims and gives psychological legitimacy to hostility and discrimination against Muslims.

Just as there has been an ongoing process of the scrutiny and revision of textbook contents regarding ethnicity and gender, the portrayal of religions and their adherents also needs to be urgently reviewed. Therefore, it is crucial to take on a positive approach towards Islam and Muslims in the educational curriculum, not simply as part of religious or social and personal studies.

Appreciating Islam and Muslims' contribution to world civilization gives children a better understanding of their Muslim neighbours and their culture, and is the best guard against prejudice and negative behaviour.

The content of citizenship classes also needs to be urgently evaluated in light of the findings of this report and the series in general. The question of why certain citizens feel excluded from society and denied equal rights needs to be addressed as part of a programme that aims to foster civic values and affiliation.

Indeed in both contemporary and historical contexts, there is a lack of promotion of role models. Where British sports stars, for example, are Muslim, their ethnicity rather than their religion is usually invoked as part of their British identity. Often such figures have a measure of religiosity that impacts through discipline or dedication on their achievement, yet such values are excluded from civic discussion. Such values are universal and the fact that they can be shown to have some reference in Islam and a British Muslim context can go some way to dispelling myths about Muslims, particularly observant Muslims.

### **ANTI-PREJUDICE CAMPAIGNS**

A nationwide campaign to explain the causes and consequences of prejudice against Muslims should be launched. Such a campaign would have two main purposes. The first is to raise awareness among all citizens - from people on the streets to policy makers - about anti-Islamic and Muslim prejudices.

Such a campaign needs to clearly address the issue of 'othering' Muslims - stigmatising them in the eyes of the majority. It should clearly state that Muslims, particularly practising Muslims, should not be looked at as 'others'; it should emphasise that they are similar to followers of all other religions, who could be diverse or heterogeneous, have emotions and feelings, act and react like all other human beings. It should identify the stereotypes about Muslims that are often found among ordinary people, and dispel them one by one. It should particularly clarify why some Muslim males wear beards and some females wear headscarves, jilbaabs or niqabs.

The other purpose is to make the practice of discrimination an abhorrent act to everyone's conscience. Disgust at Islamophobic discrimination should become part of common sense and all forms of Islamophobia should automatically be rejected as unacceptable. Whilst this has been achieved with regard to ethnicity and gender, religion has not been addressed as a basis of discrimination. Trends in popular culture have also moved towards promoting gender equality and racial harmony, for example the various storylines addressing these issues in BBC flagship programmes like *Eastenders*, which fulfil part of the BBC's charter to both entertain and educate. Indeed media figures and corporations have often taken on board causes to promote, for example changed attitudes towards sexuality. Yet religion remains, indeed has become more, pathologised in popular culture.

It is of particular importance that the discourse generated by such campaigns does not invoke the idea of a constituency of 'good Muslims' who should be tolerated or who exemplify values that can be 'accommodated' by wider society. There is a tendency with rights talk vis a vis minorities to attach conditions to rights, such as changes in views, practices or politics, which are not required from other citizens or even minorities. It is essential that all calls for rights call for equal rights, and that these rights apply across the board of society without differentiating between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims'. Such discourses, when promoted at political levels also have the tendency to take

on the form of negotiations between community organizations and the government. Such negotiations then narrow channels of communication between government and a section of the community and the concerns and suffering of a large section of the community never reach the Government.

In this campaign media, public and private institutions, and civic rights groups should be involved.

## **CHANGING LAW**

It took many years to recognize that discrimination has a religious component and as yet, it is not covered by any legislation. Indeed successive governments have been responsible for perpetuating discrimination through anti-discrimination laws which themselves discriminate. The Race Relations Act does not cover Muslims, although some other religious minorities, such as Jews and Sikhs, are covered to some extent. The Human Rights Act, although in force since 2000, is an acknowledged irrelevance to voluntary organisations working with disadvantaged and excluded groups in the UK. Although it is typical of the government officials to offer nice speeches, they have little impact since there is no legislative direction. Introducing law can be effective in dealing with objective discrimination. Just as ethnicity has to be factored into service delivery requirements, so too do religious requirements and sensibilities. The Government, in addition to introducing appropriate legislation, should monitor whether the law is properly implemented by responsible bodies.

In addition to the immediate effect of minimizing objective discrimination, in the long run the new law would also help to protect Muslims from subtle and subjective discrimination, as legal directives are effective in shaping and influencing general attitudes of right and wrong.

## **GREATER CONTACT**

Mutual contact has long been recognized as an effective way to overcome fear, anxiety and misunderstanding about culturally and religiously different groups. Being in touch with Muslims can dispel prejudice and minimize negative behaviour. But, as has been emphasised, quantity of contact is not as important as quality of contact. This is particularly true in areas such as Bradford where different communities often live in isolation of each other. That means contact should be of equal status, individualized, voluntary and positive. This entails a wide range of programmes including ensuring Muslim representation across the society, so that all sections of the society, from intellectuals to media personalities, can have individualized, voluntary and positive interaction with them. It may require a specific policy in employment to ensure Muslim representation and grant them inclusion in the mainstream society. Our data also suggests that practicing Muslims are more likely to be discriminated against. Greater emphasis should be placed on having positive interaction with practicing Muslims.

Such interaction needs to celebrate diversity rather than undermine it. The idea of socializing Muslims into the mainstream has been mooted in liberal circles and this has the effect of promoting the idea that Muslim practices are foreign idiosyncrasies which will dissipate given the passing of time, if Muslims are allowed to be players within the mainstream.

## **PUT THE ISSUE ON THE AGENDA**

Government should take the initiative and encourage public agencies, civil rights groups and movements to include the issue of Islamophobia and anti-



Muslim prejudice at the top of their agenda. It should help them to hold regular seminars, talks and symposiums focusing on anti-Muslim discrimination and organize events to create a systematic awareness among government officials and rights activists. Occasional discussions and campaigns would not be effective, as the nature of discrimination is that it is deep-rooted in people's attitudes and behaviour. The pervasiveness and urgency of the problem should be brought to the notice of all political parties and press, and their help should be sought as the issue is related to the whole society's peace, stability and cohesion. The issue needs to be accepted by all major political groups and should not be a subject of politics.

### **HIGH VISIBILITY GOVERNMENTAL ACTION**

All of the above require determined action from the Government. This action however needs to be seen to be done, both as a reassurance to the Muslim communities that its need and experiences have been understood and their status recognised. However, it is also important for government to take a moral stance and to encourage others within mainstream society to counter prejudice.

The government needs to take on specific examples of prejudice within its own ranks. Comments regarding Islam and Muslims that can be classified as Islamophobic have been made by government ministers and high officials. Government needs to crack down on those who make such comments. Free speech cannot be used as an excuse for the promotion of hatred from any individual, let alone at ministerial level, and action should be taken without hesitation to sanction those who make them. It should be as abhorrent as making comments about the Jewish community and Judaism. The stigma attached to anti-Semitism and the recognition of it as a social ill came about through sustained work at both governmental and civil society levels and yet such a societal evil has not been eradicated. As shows of support and evidence of taking a moral lead, government ministers have, for example, visited synagogues that have been attacked. Similar gestures towards the Muslim community are vital in the fight against prejudice and hatred.





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