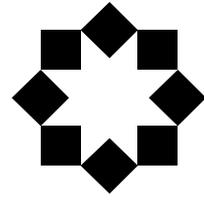


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MWRC

‘Muslim Women Talk’

**Experiences of Muslim Women in Scotland since the London
Bombings**

September 2005

Report Compiled by Maariyah Masud

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Muslim Women Talk Campaign

‘Muslim Women Talk’

The ‘Muslim Women Talk’ [MWT] Campaign was established and organised by a coalition of British Muslim Women in the aftermath of the London bombings. The campaign, which is supported by the Home Office, is aimed at including the voices of a broad section of women from the Muslim community.

The campaign’s broad aims and objectives are as follows;

1. To harness the social capital of Muslim women through public debate and channel their experiences and concerns through to government and other public bodies.
2. To identify the critical issues that Muslim women feel need to be tackled generally within Muslim communities and more specifically following the London bombings to alleviate the alienation and disengagement of young Muslims.
3. To encourage the participation of Muslim women in decision making forums such as central and local government, statutory sector, NGO's and other public bodies.
4. To showcase and develop work already being done by Muslim women in the voluntary sector and statutory bodies that supports the development of social infrastructures to strengthen families and build communities.
5. To promote policies and services that are culturally and faith sensitive.
6. To promote co-existence and social cohesion through dialogue and peaceful means.

Integral to the ‘Muslim Women Talk’ [MWT] Campaign is the provision of a platform for Muslim women to discuss the impact of the London bombings, and to input into possible solutions. In line with this commitment, several workshops have been organised across the UK. A report outlining key issues and recommendations under country headings is to be produced which will help to inform future strategies linked to the work of the Task Force and other key organisations as well as the communities.

The report that follows is a summary of key issues and recommendations specific to Scotland, arising from issues highlighted by Muslim Women in Scotland. The report has a specific focus on the experiences of Muslim Women in Scotland in relation to their experience after the London bombings in July 2005 and is reflected throughout the report.

The Scottish Context

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive awarded funding to Amina – The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre to organise the Muslim Women Talk events across Scotland. The events were designed to be participative; identify key issues; and provide opportunity for government officials and statutory bodies to network with a broad range of Muslim women including women from the grassroots whose voices are not often heard. The events were also designed to provide information to women regarding the Anti-Terrorist legislation and their rights and responsibilities with regard to this.

Four events were held between the 5th and 8th September 2005 in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Women from different ages, nationalities, and faiths participated. Three of these meetings were aimed primarily at women in the community, with the fourth being aimed at professional Muslim women and women working closely with Muslim women in the community. MP’s, MSP’s, Councillors, the Police, the Crown Office, the Scottish Executive Equalities Unit, Local Authority Officials, and relevant black and minority ethnic voluntary sector organisations were invited to attend all meetings in a listening capacity. Interpreters and crèche facilities were utilised at each event to maximise participation and in each of the

community events one workshop was held in Urdu/Punjabi. The Glasgow community event included women from diverse ethnic backgrounds whereas in Edinburgh they were primarily from the Indian sub continent, with some convert Muslims, and in Dundee primarily the Indian sub continent. This at least partly reflects the different population in these areas. In each workshop, while the majority of those attending were from the urban centre, some attendees were from areas that are more rural.

In addition to those attending, two spin off events took place, one in Edinburgh and one in Glasgow, with women who were unable to attend for a range of reasons. Shorter discussions were also held with women in Inverness, Fife, and Central Scotland. Their comments have also been incorporated in this document. The planned Inverness meeting did not take place as the women there, having initially welcomed the idea, later decided “there is no need and we do not want to attract undue attention at this time”.

The Report

The report is structured in two parts. The first part of the report includes an executive summary of the findings, and key recommendations arising from the analysis.

Section two is a detailed analysis of the findings. It aims to highlight the issues raised by participants throughout the workshops. This section of the report relies heavily on what women said in their own words. It is felt that this is necessary to express the nature of experiences and feelings of Muslim women in Scotland.

The report is structured under eight broad headings arising from the workshop discussions.

1. Harassment, Islamophobia and Racism
2. Community Relations
3. The Negative Effect of the Media
4. The Police and Procurator Fiscals Office and the Law
5. Practice, Perception and Adherence to Islam
6. Youth, Identity and International Politics
7. Civic and Political Engagement
8. Education

Executive Summary

Findings on Harassment, Islamophobia, and Racism

1. There is an increase in abuse and harassment since the London bombings, although this has anyway been higher since September the 11th 2001.
2. 'Islamophobic' abuse is on the rise, and is different from 'racist' abuse.
3. Most of the harassment and abuse is verbal or looks/glares as opposed to physical.
4. The Muslim community feel safer in Scotland compared with the South of England. Perceptions of safety vary across different parts of Scotland, and from person to person. Women reported feeling uneasy in mainly white areas, but the problem seemed to be more significant in Edinburgh and Glasgow than in Dundee
5. There is a difference in experiences between Muslim women from urban and rural areas. In rural areas, services are particularly failing and need to be tailored to meet the needs of the community.

Findings on Community Relations

1. Muslim women feel increased Islamophobia has led to an increased sense of isolation since the London bombings. This hampers the building of good community relations.
2. There is a feeling that the entire Muslim community is labelled as one homogenous group. Differences need to be recognised.
3. There is a need for more inter-community activities through which stereotypes can be addressed and to create opportunities for communities to get to know each other better.
4. A number of women acknowledged that the Muslim community needs to support initiatives which lead to better integration but this has to be a two way process.
5. There is a need to develop fully representative leadership and increase unity amongst the Muslim communities which will encourage engagement with institutions and civic bodies.
6. Becoming more confident in accessing people like MP's and Local Councillors was seen as a way that practical steps can be taken to 'be heard'.

Findings on the Negative Effect of the Media

1. The media portrayal of Islam is considered to have major responsibility for the mis-education of the mass public, as are some politicians.
2. The media is a catalyst in igniting aggression against the Muslim community, and consequently angering Muslim youth.
3. Reporting on 'fringe' or 'extreme' individuals and organisations from the Muslim community is an unjust portrayal of the Islamic faith and the British Muslim community.
4. A number of women felt one way to counteract negative media attention is for the Muslim community and individuals to make an effort to educate the wider community about Islam.
5. An increase in awareness of how to complain and having a more proactive approach to highlighting issues of concern regarding media reporting.
6. Media reporting is confusing the use and meaning of the term 'integration'.

Findings on engagement with the Police and Procurator Fiscals Office and the Law

1. It is acknowledged that compared to the South of England, Scotland is relatively peaceful and tolerant. While the police indicated that anti-terrorist legislation has not

- yet been used to arrest anyone in Scotland, there have been incidents where people have been stopped, held and searched.
2. Islamophobic and racist incidents are not reported because of fear of repercussions, belief that the police will not act, or an acceptance that racial and religious intolerance is a normal part of life.
 3. Some people may not report incidents because they want to avoid having to attend court and the perceived stress related to it.
 4. A number of women clearly defined that there is a difference between 'race' crimes and 'religiously intolerant' crimes. Any reported incidents should be recorded appropriately and tackled accordingly.
 5. There is a lack of awareness and knowledge about the police and justice services. Communities need to have easy access to information about how the services operate, and how they can utilise them most effectively.
 6. Awareness about anti-terrorism legislation was widely appreciated, and at the same time, it caused concern amongst the participants. There is a fear that the laws will create a deeper divide between the Muslim community and the police in particular.

Findings on the Practice, Perception, and Adherence of Islam

1. A number of women felt as though they were being forced to defend their faith. They were being made to feel ashamed about their faith because of the actions of a small minority. Women felt that they should not have to compromise on the practice of their faith in order to 'integrate' with the rest of society. For example, 'integration' may be perceived as not displaying visible markers of faith such as the headscarf.
2. There was an overwhelming feeling that the London bombers in that action were acting in a manner contrary to Islam, and that this needs to be reinforced to eradicate the negative perception of Islam.
3. It was widely felt that much of the community conform to 'cultural' practices which do not reflect the religion of Islam. They felt that the distinction between the two different aspects of practice needs to be understood.
4. The mix of cultural practices is tainting the Islamic faith and consequently the perception of Islam by the wider community.
5. Women felt that there needed to be an increased drive to understand Islam from within the Muslim community, especially amongst young British Muslims.
6. Some women indicated that the current environment of perceived hostility towards Islam, and the misuse of Islam to justify acts of terror had led to a reconsideration and reconfirming of their faith and identity.

Findings on Youth, Identity, and International Politics

1. Young British born Muslims feel 'Scottish' or 'British' and do not feel that their faith should make them different from any other Scottish person.
2. The Muslim community in the UK is not one homogenous group. The generation of British born Muslims are now being forced to question their Scottish/British identity and are being associated with their parents' or even grandparents' home countries to which they have no link. This is causing young people to feel isolated from what is 'home' and a sense of belonging.
3. It is feared that the exclusion of young British Muslims is having an affect on their psyche, and may lead them to be more prone to extremism.
4. The daily experiences of religious and racist discrimination faced by Muslims have led them to accept it as a part of life. This is having an impact on the extent to which Muslim youth are integrating into the wider society.
5. Young British youth need religious leaders to whom they can relate. British born Imams need support and training.

6. The current Government stance on International politics is having a negative effect on Muslim youth (and all Muslims) who are feeling disenchanted by the Government.

Findings on Civic and Political Engagement

1. It is important to define the meaning of the term ‘civic’ engagement. It should be recognised that ‘engagement’ with civic and political processes occurs in the personal sphere of any given individual. Making women aware that even engaging with their local school e.g. through PTA, School board, volunteer classroom assistant is ‘civic’ engagement.
2. There is a need for more events where women are consulted on issues that affect them. Alongside this there needs to be more awareness amongst the community about how to engage with public authorities and vice versa.
3. Public Authority representatives recognise a gap in the consultation process and that they need to include a wider range of voices. Many of the women attending these events had never been involved in meetings involving professionals from the mainstream before and welcomed the opportunity.
4. Public Authorities need to identify root causes of problems before attempting to tackle them. It was recognised by Local Authorities that they might be approaching the community in the wrong way.
5. There is a lack of resources and support for Muslims in particular. Muslim women need to be specifically targeted and included.
6. Services need to be ‘faith’ sensitive as well as ‘culturally’ sensitive. There is a clear difference and distinction between the two approaches.
7. Perhaps key community organisations should be recruited and resourced to act as bridges between the grassroots community and Local Authorities

Findings on Education

1. There is a need for children to receive positive learning about multi-faith and multi-cultures through the school curriculum at all ages. Thus a multi-disciplinary approach to education should be adopted from as early as nursery education.
2. To cultivate a sense of belonging and responsibility citizenship classes in schools should be made compulsory.
3. There needs to be mainstream education about the Islamic faith, and funding support for such initiatives needs to be sought from Local Authority structures. It was recognised the Festival of Muslim Culture [2006] could be an excellent opportunity.
4. Although it was recognised that much of children’s education begins in the home and that parents are responsible, children also pick up negative education from the media, which plays out on the playground. There is a need to recognise that parents may feel just as powerless as do other people and may need support to combat this.
5. Local youth and voluntary groups have a key role to play in the cultivation of better education in the community. There should be partnership working in all communities.

Key Recommendations

Scottish Executive

1. A perspective that includes an understanding of Islamophobia should inform Equality Action Plans.
2. Training on Islamophobia should be delivered within an equality framework.
3. Monitoring of employment and service provision by faith in addition to ethnicity to identify exclusion / discrimination on faith grounds.
4. Encourage initiatives, which support the development and networking capacity of Muslim women across Scotland.
5. Support initiatives, which increase the knowledge/capacity of Muslim women, as to how they can engage with their local councillor and MP/MSP/civic society structures.
6. Increase understanding of how Islamophobia is experienced by the Muslim community in urban and rural settings and increase awareness amongst service providers of how this may manifest itself.
7. The One Scotland Many Cultures Campaign should be utilised to create dialogue between media professionals and the Muslim community to enable the construction of a better relationship. The Guardian Group of Newspapers in collaboration with the Barrow Cadbury Trust have held two successful meetings of this nature in London.
8. Recognition that any legislation particularly affecting Muslim communities needs to be sensitively handled so as to not increase alienation

Central Government

1. A perspective that includes an understanding of Islamophobia should inform Equality Action Plans.
2. Training on Islamophobia should be delivered within an equality framework.
3. Monitoring of employment and service provision by faith in addition to ethnicity to identify exclusion on faith grounds.
4. Develop mechanisms to ensure the experience of Muslim women from across the four nations, urban and rural, is included in national policy debates. The Community Cohesion Commission should evidence such diversity in its process of gathering information and investigations.
5. Ensure that equality legislation covers religious discrimination in goods and services as well as the workplace.
6. Create opportunities for Muslim women to have greater visibility in public spaces.
7. Recognition that foreign policy has contributed to the targeted attacks on London in July 2005.
8. Recognition that the way anti terrorist measures and any legislation particularly affecting Muslim communities needs to be sensitively handled so as to not increase alienation.
9. Develop mechanisms to decrease social exclusion and marginalisation of young people who are vulnerable and may be prone to adopt extreme perspectives.
10. The Scottish Police Force's approach to policing based on 'community co-operation' is a 'good practice model' to be utilised by Police Force's in England and Wales.
11. Whilst there is a need to explore and implement policies and legal tools for the security of the United Kingdom, this must be developed in a framework that protects the Human and Civil liberties of people.

Local Authorities

1. A perspective that includes an understanding of Islamophobia should inform Equality Action Plans.
2. Training on Islamophobia should be delivered within an equality framework.
3. Monitoring of employment and service provision by faith in addition to ethnicity to identify exclusion on faith grounds.
4. Council services are still under-marketed amongst the Muslim community. Participants were not aware of existing services, and how the council can support them in community initiatives, especially in funding community initiatives
5. There was recognition by Council representatives that a change needs to be made in the consultation process. The Muslim community is not one homogeneous group (e.g. young people and women may have different perspectives from older men), and so consultation should be sought across the spectrum, and not just through 'leaders' who are assumed to represent the community as a whole.
6. Positive effort needs to be made by government and statutory bodies at all levels to inform and include Muslim women in civic activity.
7. There needs to be increased awareness that there is a difference between 'culturally' sensitive and 'faith' sensitive services.
8. In areas with a small BME/ Muslim presence, more effort needs to be made to ensure that services recognise and respond to the needs of all members of the community.
9. Ensure that current initiatives such as Community Planning recognise the effects of Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslim communities and ensure proactive measures are included in both Planning, and Regeneration Outcome Agreements to ensure the involvement and the empowerment of the Muslim communities and all other disadvantaged communities.
10. The school curriculum needs to be developed to include the positive contribution that Islam and Muslims have made to our society.
11. Resources also need to be developed that inform young people of Islamophobia as a form of prejudice on par with other inequalities such as racism and anti-Semitism.
12. To create better community relations, in partnership with voluntary and community organisations support the development of local forums', social events where diverse communities can come together. For example the East Renfrewshire Faith Forum is engaged in different ways with different communities and the Local Authority and Glasgow City Council has recently appointed a faith liaison officer.
13. Such good practice models could be modified/replicated in other areas. Organisations such as Council's for Voluntary Sector, the Scottish Interfaith Council and BEMIS could help to locate and share good practice.
14. In partnership with other organisations, create opportunities for debates. For example, Islam Awareness Week includes different types of exhibitions; meetings and talks organised by volunteers. Local Authorities could develop activities during this week as well as publicise the events to its staff and members of the public to attend.

The Police & Procurator Fiscals Office

1. A perspective that includes an understanding of Islamophobia should inform Equality Action Plans.
2. Training on Islamophobia should be delivered within an equality framework.
3. Monitoring of employment and service provision by faith in addition to ethnicity to identify exclusion on faith grounds.

4. Effective measures need to be established in order to market and better inform of Police procedures to the Muslim community using simple plain language.
5. There was a lack of awareness of the role of the Procurator Fiscal Office. Measures need to be put into place in order to market and better inform of the role of the Procurator Fiscals Office using simple plain language.
6. The Police Force and Procurator Fiscal Office should link with community groups and organisations to ensure meaningful engagement with the community.
7. Tayside Police highlighted some good practice already in place. For example, youth and women's advisory subgroups. Police Forces across Scotland should collaborate to learn from existing good practice models.
8. There is a need to recognise the difference between 'racist' and 'Islamophobic' incidents.
9. Police Forces need to inculcate a sense of confidence amongst the community. In Glasgow confidence was tainted by an underplay on the extent to which police had knowledge about the experience on the ground of stop and search incidents.
10. The Tayside Procurator Fiscal expressed the need for a policy review, as most MWT participants wanted to report incidents without the repercussion of court procedures as happens in other forces to enable intelligence gathering.

Section 1

Harassment, Islamophobia, and Racism

Introduction

This section of the report will outline the experiences of increased harassment since the London bombings specifically and a rise in Islamophobia in general since September the 11th 2001. It will also highlight the difference felt by participants between racism and Islamophobic abuse.

Harassment since the London Bombings

It was widely acknowledged and appreciated that compared with other parts of the country, especially England, Scotland was a tolerant place. It was felt that the problems of harassment in England were much more severe and apparent compared to Scotland.

“Our neighbours are good people, they are really friendly. Here in Scotland it’s not as bad, probably one out of a hundred people are bad” [Dundee]

“There’s a good network here...I feel safe in Dundee” [Dundee]

“I’m very lucky I have no problem with any person...” [Edinburgh]

“Compared to somewhere like England...places like Oldham, Yorkshire, London...Scotland is a very good place...there’s not that much racism” [Glasgow]

“Our neighbours are ok, they’re the same as they were.” [Edinburgh]

“I never had any serious problem. It’s just my neighbours; [they] don’t like black people or don’t like me, otherwise we did not have any problem after 9/11. Everything is still the same” [Edinburgh]

“We should nip it in the bud, while things are still OK” [Dundee]

Even although there was a positive feeling, a negative undertone emerged from the discussions. It was felt that there has been a marked increase in the harassment of Muslim’s in general and Muslim women specifically, especially if they are wearing the headscarf. Amina – The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre noted that there has been an increase in phone calls to complain about an increase in ‘stares’ and ‘glares’ simply because of the headscarf.

“I’ve been noticing a lot more stares and glares, and I know it is because of my *hijab* [headscarf]. You’re constantly wondering, what are they thinking about us?[referring to Muslim women]” [Dundee]

“Since the London bombings there’s been increased suspicious and hostile looks which can be quite frightening especially if you’re out by yourself” [Edinburgh]

“...Day to day activity, walking down the street you notice people staring at you. It makes you feel so insecure – what’s going through their heads? ...Especially when a bunch of young white guys stare or shout abuse, I feel more fear...” [Glasgow]

“It’s not the comments as much as the looks that bothers me...” [Glasgow]

“People judge us based on our looks. What are they thinking about us? Maybe they think there is something in our bags!” [Glasgow]

“...Public giving hostile looks to Muslims, especially those that wear Islamic clothes which makes Muslims feel uneasy” [Edinburgh]

“Muslim women are easily recognisable because of their headscarf...” [Glasgow]

“A *gora* [white person] smacked a woman on the head because she was wearing a *hijab* [headscarf], this made me so angry” [Glasgow]

“Headscarves in some people’s minds still represent women who are perhaps uneducated, backwards, oppressed by men” [Glasgow]

There was a general feeling amongst the women of feeling “insecure,” “unsafe” and feeling more “fear” than normal when going out. Some of the women in Glasgow, who were Scottish born reported that they were contemplating leaving the UK altogether because they felt unsafe and feared for the safety of their children. Although this feeling may exist in Scotland, it was noted that it is more evident in the South of England.

“I used to go to work by myself, but now I don’t feel safe.” [Glasgow]

“People didn’t used to look at us when we went shopping, but now they do. If you smile at them then it’s ok.” [Edinburgh]

“People used to be very friendly, that’s changed now. Before I could come and go as I wanted with my daughter, but now my husband won’t let me go alone, he says he’ll accompany me.” [Glasgow]

“Muslim women only stay in places where they feel safe” [Edinburgh]

“Since the London bombing I think [a] lot has changed. When I go shopping with my children people look at you like you’re from another planet. You don’t feel comfortable any more. When you buy something and you pay at the desk people give you a very grumpy look. Everybody is not the same. Some people are very nice too. But now if you want to look outside from your own window you feel that somebody might give you a strange look. People do call you names as well, but the kids are fine at school” [Edinburgh]

“In East Ayrshire the Muslim women are a small community, they don’t go to unfamiliar places because they are afraid of racism” [Glasgow]

It was also noted that children have been at the receiving end of a lot of the abuse and harassment. One woman spoke about how her son had been harassed and bullied by a local man. The constant barrage of abuse has caused the child to be disillusioned about his identity. The child walked out of his home with a toy pistol in order to vent his anger. The extent to which this is affecting children is not yet fully known.

It was mentioned several times that young boys who were named ‘*Osama*’ were being bullied and harassed in school. More than this, that ‘*Osama*’ had become a derogatory term in itself.

“Our children aren’t afraid, they say they can stand up for themselves.” [Dundee]

“There’s a big concern for children. They watch all the news. My son says we are not scared but we have to know what’s happening. We are not scared of death, when it’s time it’s time, but we need peace.” [Glasgow]

“Children are targeted more than adults for bag searches” [Edinburgh]

Most of the women reported an increase in verbal abuse. Comments such as “*What’s in your handbag*” and “*Taliban*” were mentioned frequently. However, most of the women felt powerless to do anything about it. Reporting to the police was not seen as a viable option due to “lack of confidence” or language barriers. Amina - The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre reports that this does not seem to be reducing e.g. in late September on a busy Sunday afternoon a group of young men were shouting Osama Bin Laden at a Muslim women shopper.

“A friend of mine was asked by a stranger in the bus to have her bag searched” [Glasgow]

“You’re instantly linked to terrorists; I was asked what religion I was. I hesitated to say what religion I was ‘cos [because] I knew I would be labelled” [Glasgow]

“...Then people might say they’re an Osama Bin Laden” [Glasgow]

“We have to make examples of unacceptable behaviour and even light-hearted lingo and jokes need to stop, just like the 70’s racist lingo had to be crushed.” [Edinburgh]

“Someone I know, she’s a Muslim but she doesn’t wear *hijab*, she’s just got an Asian, or even Spanish looking face...she went onto the bus with her young daughter. She went to put her bags in the holder and the bus driver told her she’s not allowed to...she thought it must be a new policy...but then she saw white people put their bags down and the driver said nothing...She said she felt so small and humiliated” [Glasgow]

“...There was an incident when two young Asian boys got onto a bus and they were carrying rucksacks, the bus driver asked them to get off...then the whole bus clapped...can you imagine what these boys must have felt?” [Glasgow]

The majority of the abuse is a direct result of physical markers of faith i.e. the head covering, a beard, dress, a foreign accent. The women recognised that communities who share the same skin colour or physical characteristics as the London bombers have been suffering.

“Indian people keep beards, so do our boys and we’re all the same colour and therefore they’re [Indians] concerned that an attack might happen on them.” [Dundee]

“Other communities are picked on because of same colour of skin.” [Edinburgh]

“Although Islamophobia has increased, other communities are experiencing the same impact because they look ‘Asian’ or ‘Arab’ – this is the compounding of racism, any excuse now for being racist.” [Glasgow]

“All communities are just as concerned as Muslims are about what is happening” [Glasgow]

Even although Scotland is relatively calm compared to other parts of the UK, there has been a definite increase in harassment and abuse since the London bombings and especially since September the 11th 2001 in America. At the same time, it is recognised that there is under-reporting, and so the reality and scale of the situation is considerably higher than official statistics show.

Urban vs. Rural

There was a difference cited between the experiences of Muslim women who are living in cities compared with those living in rural areas. In Glasgow where the Muslim population is significantly higher than elsewhere in Scotland, there was much more reporting of harassment and abuse, compared to smaller cities like Dundee. In comparison, more rural and isolated areas experienced more harassment. Therefore, there is a definite difference in experiences dependant on area.

“Police in rural not as well equipped with experience to deal with incidents...I come from a rural area and a swastika was painted on the side of my house...the police did nothing, blamed it on ‘just kids’...Scotland has had an upsurge in asylum seekers and refugees...the police need to be equipped to deal with situations...” [Edinburgh]

“I’ve come from the borders...there’s hardly any Muslim and Asian people there and the local council and services are just not equipped to deal with faith and culturally sensitive issues...” [Edinburgh]

It was also recognised that there is potential for increased abuse for asylum seekers and refugees because the majority of them are Muslim and might be subjected to Islamophobia as well as any other disadvantage they may already face.

Islamophobia vs. Racism

There is a recognised difference between racist and Islamophobic abuse. Women felt that they were being targeted not because of their skin colour, in some instances the women had white skin, but because they were ‘Muslim’. Many of the women felt that categorising Islamophobia as the same as racism is simply ignoring the fact that Islamophobia is a real problem that perhaps needs a different approach to solutions.

“I left work because a woman at my work blatantly says she doesn’t like Muslims”
[Glasgow]

“Racial harassment needs to be widened to religious intolerance. For example the One Scotland campaign – it should include pictures of women in *hijab* [headscarf]”
[Edinburgh]

“Islamophobia is more in the forefront; it’s on a different level altogether. It’s moved away from just being ‘racism’...the victims need to be protected...women and children much more in the forefront.” [Glasgow]

“According to the IHRC [Islamic Human Rights Commission] mainly white converts are suffering from Islamophobia. We are a white Scottish Muslim family, we are harassed and abuse is shouted at us...how can this be defined as ‘racism’ and put under the same banner? Islamophobia must be recognised as a separate from of religious intolerance.” [Edinburgh]

“Muslims and their religion have been given a bad name...there is a sweeping generalisation – all Muslims should not be labelled, this has to be reversed.”
[Glasgow]

“Islamophobia has always been there, it was inflamed during the Gulf War and now post 9/11 and 7/7. These are all excuses to justify Islamophobia. Britain’s involvement with war in other Muslim countries is directly linked to this.”
[Glasgow]

“We need to tackle Islamophobia locally and nationally – it’s all linked to wars”
[Glasgow]

“Government extremism leads to Muslim extremism.” [Glasgow]

“I just want to say, and I want it recorded that suicide bombers are not the creators of Islamophobia, they are the product of Islamophobia” [Glasgow]

“Phobias are increased by lack of knowledge” [Glasgow]

There is clearly a need for the recognition of Islamophobic harassment as separate from racial harassment. Women felt that race is no longer the issue, but that Islamophobia needs to be tackled more effectively.

A positive recognition of this issue was reflected in a range of comments from service providers present at the meetings who indicated they would be re-looking at their policies on race to ensure that Islamophobia was being covered.

Section 2

Community Relations

Introduction

This section of the report will discuss the impact of the London bombings on relations between the Muslim community and the wider community. Secondly, it will also highlight the effect on community relations within the Muslim community.

Relations with the wider community

There was a feeling that the Muslim community is being isolated because of the London bombings. Women felt that the entire Muslim community is being viewed as ‘extremists’ and ‘terrorists’.

“We’re all people, we’ve all got hearts, but as soon as one thing goes wrong, people start pointing fingers” [Dundee]

“Cos [because] of a few bad people, everyone gets a bad name” [Dundee]

“The views of the wider community need to change, we are not all extremists” [Glasgow]

“The local community is bad...we need to get together as a community” [Dundee]

Women in every workshop felt that there was a lack in practical community relations. It was felt that although in some places like Dundee, there was generally a ‘feeling’ of good community spirit, there is a need for the community as a whole to get together to talk about issues and how to tackle them together to have the opportunity to get to know each other, and to dispel myths and stereotypes about each other.

“There needs to be more awareness for everyone through events like this, conferences, lectures and exhibitions...” [Dundee]

“We should have a day where the community at large are sharing each others perspectives. From far way they will see us as different, but when you sit and talk to them things are different” [Dundee]

“We need to set up local forums where issues are thrashed out and stereotypes are addressed” [Edinburgh]

“A lot of work needs to be done, but those people don’t take steps to come towards us either.” [Edinburgh]

“Multi-faith is very important, there should be multi-faith events.” [Edinburgh]

“We should treat our neighbours with kindness and when meeting with non-Muslims talk to them happily, politely and teach them our *Deen* (religion)” [Dundee]

“We have to create a society of peace. That Muslims are not bad. We must take that out of their minds and hearts” [Glasgow]

“Our responsibility [is] to teach people their bad thoughts being wrong. Don’t give people the chance to say anything bad” [Glasgow]

“We need to get together with women from different organisations...” [Glasgow]

Clearly a feeling of uneasiness exists, and women are openly welcoming opportunities to create a more positive community spirit. On the one hand, they feel as though they are being forced to isolate themselves due to negative perceptions, but the women are clearly searching

for a mutual platform through which to integrate better with the wider community. This came through as one of the strongest points in nearly all of the workshops.

The women fully recognised that there is a need for increased community activities through which communities can better understand and integrate with each other, and that this is a two-way process. The lack of presence of Muslim women in general community activities is a factor leading to isolation, but it also cultivates a negative perception in the community at large. For some women, the language barrier was one of the reasons for a lack of participation. On this point, a lot more work needs to be undertaken to ensure inclusive access for Muslim women.

“All these meetings that go on, we should invite others and go to their meetings also.” [Dundee]

“Very few Asian parents go to school meetings. There was a meeting about bullying in my children’s school and I was the only Asian woman there, the rest were all White. Our people don’t get involved in things like this.” [Glasgow]

“...Need to go out and speak to people so they know who you are and what you do, people will listen. We need to explain to people.” [Edinburgh]

“Muslims have to open up...we have to communicate with various institutions like the police. We need to get support and help, we have to fight for our rights and be able to relate to each other.” [Glasgow]

Relations within the Muslim Community

Alongside the recognition that a lot of work needs to be carried out between Muslims and other communities, the women also highlighted the impact divisions within the Muslim has had on relations with the wider community.

“When a *gora* [white person] comes to a mosque, we start saying, oh, look at that, *gora* coming into a mosque” [Dundee]

“There are too many divisions in the Muslim community” [Edinburgh]

“Mosques can’t even agree what day to have Eid...Muslims are too divided...too much rivalry amongst men. White people make fun of the fact we can’t even decide on when Eid is” [Glasgow]

“Our own leaders, *maulvis*’ don’t have a clue how to communicate with our kids” [Dundee]

“We have to unite our community...there are differences between refugees and asylum seekers. Muslims shift blame on to this community – they are seen as the problem and it’s complete nonsense. It’s the media hype and a reflection of the Home Office stance. There is no voice from that community. We have to have a united front – divisions lead to inter-community fermentation and this is what is blamed for terrorism” [Glasgow]

“Are we too sub-continent focused? We need to make more effort to incorporate all people” [Glasgow]

The overwhelming feeling that the Muslim community itself needs to become less exclusive was mentioned regularly. The question being asked by the women and agency participants, “*Who speaks for the Muslim community?*” was asked several times. The need for policy makers and agencies to include the voices of women and young people was consistently raised. It was recognised that the Muslim community needs to become a cog in the wheel to

enhance community relations, and ultimately the extent to which ‘positive integration’ is achieved. However, it is also important to understand that this does not imply that the Muslim community has one voice, rather that there is unity in diversity, and that this should be expressed more clearly.

Barriers to Interaction from a White Perspective

One of the issues highlighted by some of the non-Muslim participants was that they did not know how to approach issues with their Muslim colleagues and friends. One woman spoke of how her non-Muslim colleague wanted to attend the MWT event but did not feel comfortable enough to encourage her to come,

“A colleague of mine wanted to come today, but because she’s White and it said Muslim women only on the invite, I didn’t feel like I could encourage her to come. We need to have more mixed meetings.” [Glasgow]

During a workshop in Glasgow, a non-Muslim professional woman said that she likes to see facial expressions and so finds the *niqab* [face covering] difficult to deal with. Furthermore, some women in Dundee expressed that people might be ‘looking’ or ‘staring’ not because they are prejudiced, but because they are curious to ask questions, but probably do not feel comfortable in doing so. Other women and non-Muslim participants also expressed this feeling. This points to the fact that there is clear hesitation, but at the same a willingness to understand the Muslim community.

‘Integration’

The interpretation, meaning, and impact of the use of the word ‘integration’ was raised in different contexts. Whilst, the issue is discussed in the relevant sub-sections, it is important to note that the use and meaning of the term has broad implications for community relations. A woman in Glasgow clearly expressed that she felt the meaning of ‘integration’ is to change herself completely,

“What they are telling me is that in reality I won’t be accepted until I take my scarf off” [Glasgow]

Section 3

The Negative Effect of the Media

Introduction

This section of the report outlines the effect negative media attention is having on the Muslim community.

Negative Media

The effect of media reporting of Islam was blamed not only for the mis-education of the mass public, for the increase in aggression toward the Muslim community, but also for fuelling anger amongst the Muslim community, especially the youth.

“They’ve defamed Islam through the media” [Dundee]

“The media coverage is affecting children and their understanding of what’s happening in the world” [Dundee]

“I’m not gonnay [going to] stand there and let them put Muslims down...its down to them not understanding the media” [Glasgow]

“The media makes it more difficult to go about our day to day business – they are taking away a lot of the hard work done in community relations” [Glasgow]

“Our children are suffering a lot...I know of a young boy being called “Osama” by his peers. Kids pick up from the media!” [Edinburgh]

“We don’t see what’s happening within our community on TV. You see a child shot on TV randomly that makes you more angry. A woman getting beaten up in her home is awful and really bad, but it’s not the same as seeing these images on TV everyday.” [Glasgow]

The women believed that the media focus is on individuals and organisations from the Muslim community who are seen to be on the ‘fringes’ of Islam. It was felt that this misrepresentation of the Islamic faith created a sense of injustice against the entire Muslim community. They felt it was the root cause of the perception of Muslims as ‘terrorists’ and ‘extremists’.

“Media coverage of extremist fringe groups does not help to portray Muslims in a good manner... The insensitive use of language and an ill-informed assumption that Islam’s teachings are extremists make the public wary of Muslims.” [Edinburgh]

“The media bombardment of feeling that all Muslims are terrorists...there is no longer talk about ‘multiculturalism’, it’s all about ‘integration’...but how far will this be taken? I mean are Muslims being asked to lose their identity?” [Glasgow]

“Majority of the responsibility for bridging the gap lies with the media...they control mass perception and the effect it has on the communities” [Glasgow]

“The Media is playing a very negative role. Why are there documentaries being made, and air time given to Muslims who are on the fringes like Omar Bakri. They don’t speak for normal Muslims; the government has to tone it down.” [Edinburgh]

“The news is always bad...it’s the media hype isn’t it. Good news never makes the media. Media has a social responsibility but instead the media seems to be inciting people” [Edinburgh]

“The media giving wrong messages and images...they show unconnected images. I’ll give you an example...they were showing children reading Qur’an in a *madrassa*

[school] in Pakistan...their rhythmic movement was described as them being 'brainwashed'...whereas the movement is linked to the rhythmic musical pronunciation of the Arabic language. The media is covering radical personalities like Omar Bakri who do not represent all of the Muslim community...they are encouraging negative attitudes and enhancing fear." [Glasgow]

"Media makes a big difference about how Muslims are portrayed." [Dundee]

"The media refers to rooting out 'terrorism within' this is so wrong. I don't know anyone who is a terrorist! Do they want us to root them out and hand them over? It won't change a thing" [Glasgow]

Positive engagement

The women believed that one of the ways to tackle the negative media hype was to positively engage with the media both as individuals and as a community. Not only this, but that the media and the government need to play a role in helping to eradicate the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims.

"We have to be more involved in [the] media to portray a more positive image of Islam and Muslims" [Dundee]

"We need to educate people about Islam so that the media is not the only source of information" [Edinburgh]

"...It doesn't help when the BBC go out of their way to make programmes like the Panorama programme where it tried to destroy the credibility of Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) which is one of the most important Muslim institutions in Britain" [Glasgow]

"Muslim people should write articles in local media about Islam. For example, the English interpretation of *Jihad* is holy war, but that is not the meaning of *Jihad*, *Jihad* means to struggle and that's at so many levels, it's a daily struggle we all do." [Glasgow]

"We need to talk more about issues affecting Muslims and how to channel people's voices in the correct way. I know Radio Ramadan will be covering issues relating to July 7th bombings. The government needs to assist and promote mainstream Muslim communication channels, i.e. radio stations, newspapers aimed at British Muslims, and television channels to talk and portray Islam in the correct light" [Glasgow]

"Be proactive and write to the newspapers and TV when you see something negative about Islam" [Glasgow]

"We need to use it [the media] for positive initiatives to counteract negative portrayal" [Edinburgh]

"We need to educate the public about Islam as there is a lack of understanding and ignorance. If their only education is these extreme voices, then what chance do we have in the future for good relations?" [Glasgow]

There is a definite sense that firstly, the media is biased against Islam; secondly, that the government and the media itself should take responsibility; thirdly, the Muslim community should make a concentrated effort to counteract the negative images and perception about Islam.

Section 4

The Police and Procurator Fiscals Office and the Law

Introduction

This section of the report outlines the perception of the justice system in Scotland, and its effect on relations with the community after the London bombings. This section will also highlight some of the reactions of the community on the anti terrorist laws passed by the government over the last few years.

Policing and Security after the London Bombings

In Scotland, no one has yet been arrested under the new Anti-Terrorist legislation. In general, the women felt quite happy with police performance, however, from the discussions across the workshops several key points emerged. Firstly, that the police will not have an accurate record of what is happening on the grassroots because incidents are not reported to the police.

“...People are afraid of repercussions if they report to the police” [Dundee]

“You should be able to report to the fiscal office and state you don’t want it taken any further” [Dundee]

“Women might not report because of language barriers” [Glasgow]

“There has to be a better relationship between the police and the community so as to avoid deepening the divide between them and the rest of the communities” [Edinburgh]

“Reporting may also make you feel vulnerable...there’s a danger of the situation escalating, it’s just like when people don’t report domestic violence or bullying...” [Dundee]

“The police tend to ‘brush’ people off” [Glasgow]

“If I was to report every incident I would be on the phone to you everyday...” [Edinburgh]

“Most people don’t report...what is the police really going to do. It puts people off” [Glasgow]

The main reasons for not reporting to the police were language barriers, a fear of repercussion, the perception that the police will not respond properly. Furthermore, several participants indicated that they believed there was “*no point*” as the police “*don’t do anything anyway.*” Moreover, several participants felt that verbal abuse because of their race or faith was “*a fact of life, so why bother!*”

Some participants also felt when the Procurator Fiscal Office gets involved they are forced to investigate further. In most cases, the women only wanted to report what happened without the matter taken further.

“Most people don’t report because they don’t want to go to court and the hassle involved with it” [Dundee]

“I felt more comfortable picking up the phone and calling the police, knowing they won’t come to my door” [Glasgow]

A few women related personal experiences of racist and religiously intolerant abuse. They felt strongly that the police did not handle their particular situations correctly. One woman related how white youth had been surrounding her house, throwing things and shouting

abuse. After a long ordeal with the police, she received the number of her community police officer, who she felt did a better job at reassuring her. Another woman said that the police started taking notice of her situation only after she approached her local MP for help.

“We pay our taxes for security...get your local MP’s involved if it comes to it, the polices job is to protect us” [Glasgow]

The police representatives were questioned several times by the participants about the nature of recording incidents. It was perceived that incidents, which were actually religiously intolerant, were recorded as ‘race’ crimes – there may be a dilution in the extent to which religiously intolerant abuse against Muslims is recorded.

“There is a difference between race and religion...the police have to record and deal with it” [Edinburgh]

“How do the police actually record crimes? Do they just record them under ‘race’ crimes, because religious intolerance is totally different from ‘race’...?” [Glasgow]

Furthermore, women were making a clear distinction between racist and Islamophobic crimes. One woman in particular cited that her family were white and Muslim; they were harassed and abused because of their faith.

“...We are a white Scottish Muslim family, we are harassed, and abuse is shouted at us...how can this be defined as ‘racism’ and put under the same banner? Islamophobia must be recognised as a separate from of religious intolerance.” [Edinburgh]

Another woman in Edinburgh cited that in all her life she had only received racist abuse twice in her life, but that after the London bombings she had experienced Islamophobic harassment. The simple fact being that increased harassment is a result of looking ‘Muslim’ as opposed to just the colour of skin.

Participants in Dundee were not aware, that there are two methods through which they can report incidents – ‘crime stoppers’ and the police control room. The former is anonymous reporting, which may actually appeal more to people, and may encourage people to record all forms of verbal and physical abuse. It was felt by the participants that the police’s attitude of prosecuting all racially motivated incidents is actually hindering the public from reporting incidents. Although the motivation for this, of being seen to be strong in stamping out racism, was appreciated.

“Services like crime stoppers needs to be advertised more widely” [Dundee]

“Perhaps reporting via another agency like a community group is better...so that you don’t have to go through the procurator fiscals office. This will help the police get a bigger picture of what’s actually happening out there...like drop in centres where the police is coming to the community...” [Dundee]

In general, the participants felt there was a lack of knowledge about the police service,

“It’s important to report incidents to the police, no matter how small you think it is...if you think it is racist then it is racist...” [Police - Edinburgh]

“People know what the attitude of the police is...they need to have knowledge about what will happen after reporting...people need to know this, will it be taken seriously? What will be the follow-up?” [Edinburgh]

“The police don’t tell us that we can complain about police, they need to tell us”
[Glasgow]

Evidently, there is a feeling that the community is not well informed about the services the police provide, and how they can utilise the service. Perhaps the police as a service needs to do a lot more community relations exercises, where they are listening to what the community is saying but also to raise awareness about the police service.

Anti Terrorist Legislation

Throughout all the workshops, an Advocate informed the participants about the anti terrorist legislation and how it affects them as individuals. They were informed about the practical meaning of the laws and their rights and responsibilities. It was recognised the Scottish legal system was somewhat different from England, and that the laws had not been executed as widely as in England. However, it was felt that it is essential for the community to be aware of laws that may affect them and their families, especially since the Muslim community is very mobile because of family/friend connections across the UK.

The participants in general welcomed the information, and engaged representatives from the police and procurator fiscals office. Both of these services assured the community that the community should not leave the workshops “afraid” since Scotland has not been known to enforce the laws. There was concern that an inaccurate perception of the laws may actually deepen the divide between the Muslim community and the police.

“People should not go away feeling afraid by the new laws, Scotland is not known to have had to enforce these laws...this might put up barriers further between the Muslim community...the perception of the police as being ‘bad people’...not helpful...having an agenda, which is simply not the case” [Police - Glasgow]

“I have to be honest; I am scared by the laws...what exactly entails wrong literature?” [Dundee]

“The stop to kill policy, how can that Brazilian man have been shot? I don’t understand why...” [Dundee]

“Law processes are needed to tackle real extremism” [Edinburgh]

“Some of the twelve point agenda points don’t make sense and are they going to work...if you get arrested and you’re not told why you have been arrested how do you challenge it?” [Dundee]

During one of the events in Glasgow, it emerged that there had clearly been instances where people had been stopped, searched, and even held. After receiving reassurance from the Strathclyde Police representative that in Glasgow there had been no cases, two women challenged him and related their personal experiences to the Strathclyde Police representative, after which the he Inspector admitted knowledge of bad practice in some cases. While the formal anti terrorist powers may not have been legally invoked, as explanations were not given to those detained, the community felt that this was related to anti terrorism legislation. As a result, many of the women aired a feeling of distrust with the police who they felt were not being fully candid.

“I’m sure what you are saying is right [directed at Chief Constable], but there’s obviously something wrong. My husband was stopped at Glasgow Airport...he’s a frequent flyer because of his business. This was September last year...he was not allowed to tell me where he was. I was waiting for him outside, and at the time I was heavily pregnant...they kept him for a several hours. They took away his mobile and his laptop; they downloaded everything from his computer. He wasn’t given any

reason why he was stopped and searched...he didn't take the matter any further because there's no point, it's only diverting attention on to yourself...I don't believe this is an isolated incident" [Glasgow]

"One of my friends...her husband was stopped at Central Station just a few weeks ago. She recently got married, her husband is from abroad. They [referring to the police] took him away and searched his bags, they were asking him questions. He wasn't told why he was being searched, and he wasn't allowed to tell his wife where he was..." [Glasgow]

Others spoke outside the panel discussion of people they knew that had been stopped and searched in Glasgow. All these instances took place at Glasgow Airport or at the Central Station. The persons stopped were Muslim males and in all of the instances, they were not informed of the reason they were stopped and searched.

It is evident that there is at least a perception that there has been an increase in stop and search incidents since September the 11th and the London bombings. Informal discussions amongst the women revealed that many of them knew of, or were directly linked to such cases.

[Note: on further investigation after the MWT events the Strathclyde Police representative learnt that the anti terrorism unit had in fact detained people under a different part of the anti terrorism legislation although no arrests were made]

Section 5

The Practice, Perception, and Adherence of Islam

Introduction

This section of the report seeks to outline some of the key issues related to the impact of recent events on the practice and perception of the Islamic faith. It will also highlight issues related to the perceived notion of ‘integration’.

‘Defending’ the Faith

One of the main issues arising from all the workshops was that women felt they were obliged to defend their faith to non-Muslims with whom they interact. This was because they are directly asked questions about Islam and its link to terrorism, because they felt it is the only way to counteract ‘stares’ or because they felt it was a duty to clear the faith of any negative attachments. Underlying all of these points was a feeling of reproach – that somehow they as adherents of the Islamic faith are being held responsible for the extreme actions of a select few, who did not actually act within the tenets of faith.

“If someone from the Muslim community does something bad, the entire community is blamed and told to sort itself out” [Dundee]

“There is no need to feel guilty, live your life as normal, and counteract the negative perceptions” [Glasgow]

“We should not ‘disown’ members of our own community. There are fundamentalists in all communities. By doing so, we are being ‘divided’. We acknowledge that we do not agree with it but do not disown them” [Glasgow]

“I am confident and aware but I felt people looking at me and I felt defensive...we are all tarred with the same brush” [Glasgow]

“Feel confident about your faith and communicate the truth...” [Glasgow]

“People should be encouraged to report as a ‘community member’ rather than as a ‘Muslim’. Don’t make Muslims feel ashamed of being Muslim...we have to emphasise the human level...when did the Catholic people ever have to defend their faith? [referring to the IRA] You never saw Catholic priests coming on TV and apologising...so why are Muslims expected to...I didn’t like it, the fact that all the Muslim leaders came on TV and had to defend Islam” [Glasgow]

“They [referring to wider community] don’t understand that Islam is peace, we have to tell them” [Dundee]

“Each individual has to become a true Muslim in his attitude toward the non-Muslims. We have to have good communication with our neighbours...don’t be defensive because that confirms that you are wrong” [Glasgow]

‘Integration’

Further, the issue about the exact meaning of ‘integration’, and to what extent it has an effect on the practice of Islam and its identity. One woman felt strongly that the use of the term ‘integration’ is tainted with generalisation of the Muslim community.

Others felt that Muslims are being forced to change their behaviour after the London bombings, to avoid being labelled a ‘terrorist’. Simple things like, what dress to wear or what kind of bag to carry. Whilst some felt it was necessary to be aware and make changes, others felt it was unnecessary and unjust.

“In current times we have to be more vigilant...the police have a job to do...”
[Glasgow]

“One of my friends, he was running late for his bus so he was running to catch it. He told me that half way through running he stopped, ‘cos [because] he’s a young Asian guy who looks obviously Muslim, and he was running in the Kings Cross area...he had to think twice about what something as simple and innocent as running for a bus can do” [Edinburgh]

“I was in London a couple of weeks ago and I just happen to have packed my clothes in a rucksack...I thought to myself what a stupid thing to do...I should have been more careful...” [Dundee]

After making this statement, another participant responded by saying,

“You’ve hit the nail right on the head! Why should you have to change your behaviour...there is something wrong with that, you only thought about that because you’re visibly a Muslim...” [Dundee]

The Perception of Islam

There are further feelings that the perception is having a twofold effect. Firstly, on Islam itself as a religion;

“Islam is peaceful. Islam is all about love and respect for one another. Islam has not taught you to look at everyone in a bad way or kill anyone” [Dundee]

“Suicide is *haram* [forbidden] in our religion” [Edinburgh]

“...People have to understand that the suicide bombers don’t represent Islam”
[Glasgow]

Secondly, how the public views Muslims, and especially Muslim women.

“People at my work have pity for Muslim women wearing *hijab*, they think we’re forced to wear it...a lot of people have this perception” [Glasgow]

“The definition of ‘normal’ is that you should not ‘look’ like a Muslim...this is isolation from the community. Islam has to be normalised without making it a taboo issue” [Glasgow]

It is evident that women have felt and noticed changes in behaviour toward them and Muslims in general. Many felt saddened that the London bombers have become stereotypes for what is meant to be ‘Muslim’. The women felt like they did not relate to the bombers in the practice of their faith. Some felt they could understand some of the reasons why the bombers opted for such an extreme action, but that they did not condone it because it goes against everything that Islam stands for.

Islam and Culture

The women highlighted that a difference existed between cultural practices, which are dependent on which part of the world their roots lie with, and Islamic practices. It was felt that a lot more Islamic education needs to be fostered amongst the community, especially for the benefit of the youth. Further that, this was essential to eradicate negative misconceptions about Islam, most of which arise from negative cultural practices.

“We emphasise on the wrong things...traditions more than religion” [Dundee]

“Our culture is clashing with Islam and corrupting everything” [Edinburgh]

“Our people from abroad know about their culture, but don’t have the right education about Islam.” [Edinburgh]

“Before blaming others we have to look at ourselves. We teach our children more traditions and not enough religion, this is wrong” [Glasgow]

“7/7 and 9/11 shows that we don’t follow Islam as a religion and we follow Asian traditions more” [Glasgow]

There has been a clear recognition from the women that Islam is becoming increasingly difficult to practice. More than this, that because of the negative perception of Islam, adhering to its principles is becoming difficult, as they are being forced to defend and explain their faith. Further that a backdrop of cultural baggage is causing more confusion amongst the community and outside the Muslim community.

Section 6

Youth, Identity, and International Politics

Introduction

This section of the report will outline some of the issues related to Muslim youth and identity, and the dangers of isolation and marginalisation from British society.

Muslim Youth and Identity

One of the realisations arising from the workshops was the fact that Muslim youth have an established idea of their identity as ‘Scottish Muslims’. Although some highlighted the difficulty young people face in marrying multi-identities together, others believed that much of today’s generation have a strong idea of who they are.

“Some people stay here and say this is not our country...that our country is Pakistan – wherever we are from, for our kids this is their country” [Edinburgh]

“I was born and brought up in Glasgow; I don’t feel any less Scottish as the next person. Just as there is no difference between being Christian and Scottish, I don’t see how an issue is made out of being Muslim and Scottish...I may look different but that genetic, it’s not my fault” [Glasgow]

“I think today’s generation have a pretty good grip on who they are. Compared to the last generations a lot of kids nowadays don’t adhere to a lot of the culture from back home...they have created their own British Muslim culture” [Edinburgh]

“When they tell us to get out, or go back where you came from what am I meant to say? This is home...” [Edinburgh]

“We are British citizens and we are giving as much to the community as any other member” [Glasgow]

“Where do Muslims go? Most of us are British/Scottish – this is home!” [Glasgow]

There emerged a clear sense that the notion of ‘identity’ is linked to the British/Scottish culture. However, a sense of urgency was communicated in addressing the growing problem of the isolation of young people due to the increased pressure on them to identify and conform to different notions of identity.

Isolation

It was identified that there are differences in the generations and that there exists a variety of different views within the community. Hence, defining identity is dependant on which category the individual relates to.

“Muslims are not a homogeneous group. There are differences in first, second and third generations, and asylum seekers, but they are all Muslims” [Glasgow]

“We have to realise that there are different issues and needs...it’s the grandmother vs. the young women. There’s differences in language, culture and belief, it’s all different...this has to be recognised” [Glasgow]

The overall feeling was that young people are facing a dichotomy – on one hand they feel like they are sure of who they are, and on the other hand they are constantly being associated with the country and culture of their parents and grandparents. This sets the foundation for feelings of isolation and confusion. This state of feeling non-belonging to what is seen as ‘home’ is where the fear lies. Women expressed the need for support for their children and a fear of the repercussions their children have to face because of the current climate.

“Young British Muslims are told to go home; they are going through an identity crisis – the terrorist pick on this” [Dundee]

“There’s alienation of young Scottish people. How do you get support for the kids that are left out? Most people accept being made to feel different a part of life, this has to change. They need support and help. There is a gap of information for young people. It’s different when you’re an adult, how do you get your information if you’re a fourteen year old boy?” [Glasgow]

“When someone swears at us, as older people we walk by and say it is OK. But our kids as young Scots say no that’s not on and they start swearing back” [Dundee]

“I fear that the current climate is affecting the psyche and mindset of Muslim individuals, especially the youth” [Glasgow]

“It is more difficult for them [referring to young Muslims] to deal with the backlash because of the fact they have a Scottish and Muslim identity” [Edinburgh]

“Something that came out of the riots in Bradford and Oldham was that young Muslims are living these ‘parallel’ lives...what is the real extent of community interaction?...The government’s talking about integration it’s the new buzz word, they’ve moved on from ‘multi-culturalism’. I’m not so sure it’s such a good thing. The government did nothing when the youth in Oldham and Burnley were lashing out...why did they not listen to them?” [Glasgow]

It was also noted that Muslim and Asian youth tend to socialise more with other young Asian and Muslim children. This was seen to be a negative thing, but also that it was inevitable with a lack of mainstream service provision tailored to access that group.

“There’s no youth centre where young Muslim youth would go to participate. There is nothing apart from DIWC [Dundee International Women’s Centre] for young girls” [Dundee]

“BME young people in general achieve just as much as other communities but they suffer from more anxiety and depression” [Glasgow]

“Young people are friendly with the community but they mainly have friends from an Asian background” [Glasgow]

“...They may feel excluded because some aspects of the British way of life especially alcohol clashes with their faith” [Edinburgh]

“Well they have no support; they form their own groups and only have each other to support them.” [Glasgow]

“We need to find underlying reasons...it’s the only way to find a solution” [Glasgow]

One woman highlighted that in any case it may actually be easier for younger Muslims to find ways of integrating and dealing with racism and Islamophobia. It is the generation that has a language and cultural barrier who are more prone to stigmatisation.

“It easier for young people to find mechanisms and avenues to integrate. Other generations are more vulnerable to Islamophobia/racism...they don’t know how to deal with it; young people are more cohesive. How do we integrate these people? We have to involve via different avenues” [Glasgow]

What emerged from the workshops was a clear picture that the generation of Muslim youth need to be given positive attention. They are in a unique position where not only do they relate to Britain as home, but they also relate to their Muslim identity. Confirming both

identities and providing avenues for the youth to integrate better into the infrastructure of mainstream society is essential for the future of Islam in the British context. Some women felt that the sense of non-belonging felt by Muslim youth may be a catalyst for them to be drawn to extreme ideologies.

Another important issue raised was the role of mosques and community leaders in the development of Muslim youth. It was felt that mosques might not be as inclusive of young people as they should be because of a language barrier between mosque leaders /imams and the youth. Women felt that mosques and leaders need to provide tailored services and that they require training in order to achieve this.

“*Maulvis*’ from back home don’t have a clue about our children. They should know about children’s schooling and the way things work here” [Dundee]

“The mosques don’t actually help, they make it worse! Our kids don’t want to go there because they can’t relate to the people that run them” [Glasgow]

Muslim Youth and International Politics

Most of the women felt that there was a strong link between the London bombings and Britain’s Foreign Policy. Muslim youth are feeling angry and disenchanted by the government’s policies abroad. Furthermore the “*Younger generation are being brainwashed*” into carrying out bombings, which are fuelled by international politics.

“When people see what’s happening in the world they get angry and it was a reaction. It’s wrong to kill innocent people, but you have to understand some of the reasons behind why it happened” [Glasgow]

“Young people are angry, when they hear so many dreadful stories about what’s happening in the world...all of this only fuels their anger” [Dundee]

“People are angry, especially Muslim youth, when you see images of young people and Muslims being bombed they get angry and people who don’t have very strong faith react like this” [Edinburgh]

“We don’t know what was going on in their [the London bombers] minds, probably to hit back and Bush and Blair. They don’t know the impact on the community and their own families” [Glasgow]

“No-one wants to bomb themselves and leave their families! Why do they do it? They must feel so powerless and full of frustration” [Glasgow]

“Suicide bombers are acting out of desperation because of Iraq. They have created problems in Britain that were foreign” [Glasgow]

Some felt that the lack of depth and value in reporting incidents abroad also has an effect on the perception of Britain’s role in world conflicts.

“Britain’s role in Iraq is also terrorism...its injustice and racism against Muslims” [Glasgow]

“After 9/11 I felt that the Americans were playing a ‘tit-for-tat’ game, and now after 7/7 it is the exact same” [Glasgow]

“Some deaths and lives cannot be more worth than others” [Glasgow]

“We have to hurt for everyone. People pick up on this you know, is our blood cheaper?” [Glasgow]

“Fifty to five hundred people die in Iraq daily, when is this ever reported? It’s these things that anger people...” [Glasgow]

A clear correlation was drawn between the disenchantment and anger of Muslim youth toward Britain and the government’s stance on conflicts around the world, and especially Iraq. Some of the women thought that this was the primary reasoning behind the attacks in London.

Section 7

Civic and Political Engagement

Introduction

This section of the report will outline some of the gaps in the civic and political participation of women, and how these issues can be addressed.

Defining Civic and Political Engagement

One of the key elements in approaching how to involve Muslim women in the civic process is to understand and define the nature of ‘civic’ engagement.

There is a key distinction to be made between political and civic engagement in the realm of structures and institutions, and in engagement within the individual framework. The former implies that one has to fully engage with political structures and understand political jargon. However, it is important to realise that for most people engagement occurs in the personal realm of what is important to any individual and any given time.

This can encapsulate all aspects of daily working from education, care, or work. Thus, Local Authorities need to pitch their approach at the appropriate level in order to draw in as many women as possible. It also needs to be recognised that women are capable of more than what is demanded of them. Most women want to know how to engage their Local Authorities to make changes in those structures that affect their daily lives. The task for Local Authorities is to capitalise on this willingness and market their approach better.

Awareness and Knowledge of Service Provision

Women felt strongly that there needs to be more events where women are consulted on issues that affect them, but also that they need more awareness about consultation processes. However, consultation must lead to change where appropriate, and feedback is essential as otherwise it leads to disillusionment and “consultation fatigue”. This is where the Local Authority representatives agreed that there is a gap in the process and that they need to do more to involve a wide range of opinions and voices from the community. For example, as a service provider, the council should aim to be anti-discriminatory. It has a role in community planning and to encourage active participation. It is also a source of funding provision for voluntary groups, and as a policy, it must distribute this money strategically. This message was reiterated to participating women, who welcomed more information about engaging their Local Councils.

“This event is good, a step forward. If the police and local authority sit and talk to us they would realise that we don’t sit at home and plot to kill everyone...we should have a meeting like this every month” [Glasgow]

“We are not aware of facilities for boys and girls...” [Dundee]

“We need more stuff for our youth; can we speak to the council about youth work?” [Dundee]

“It’s difficult to access resources where people can complain” [Glasgow]

“Institutions need to be publicised and what they do, how services can be accessed” [Glasgow]

“The government has to take a lot more initiatives; they are the cause of a lot of the problems” [Glasgow]

“We need services that are equipped to deal with Muslim women...” [Edinburgh]

“There is a language and communication barrier which needs to be overcome” [Glasgow]

“Resources are not available, they need to be tailored, and targeted...differences in the community have to be recognised” [Glasgow]

“We need a lot more community meetings and events” [Dundee]

“Engagement is done in the wrong way...leads to exclusion which is something negative” [Glasgow]

“We don’t know where to get help apart from the police who are no good anyway” [Glasgow]

“We need sympathetic social workers and other service providers they need to make themselves known” [Glasgow]

A participant from the Borders Region of Scotland expressed that the council in her area were not equipped to deal with Muslim and Asian peoples needs,

“I’ve come from the borders...there’s hardly any Muslim and Asian people there and the local council and services are just not equipped to deal with faith and culturally sensitive issues...” [Edinburgh]

Another women related that she along with other colleagues are in the process of establishing a community centre to act as a two way portal of information for Muslims and non-Muslims in Edinburgh,

“...In the process of establishing a community centre where the Muslim community can come and access information and make them more aware, as well as being a portal for non-Muslim outreach and a service for them to access information about the Muslim community” [Edinburgh]

Women also affirmed to the council representatives that engaging in the Muslim community requires accessing every aspect of the community, which in general is very diverse.

“There is no one answer and voice to get answers and to make a change...” [Glasgow]

“Mosques, youth, women groups all give different perspectives. We need to be satisfied with engagement with different people” [Glasgow]

Council representatives equally recognised that they need to engage the community more constructively,

“Are we engaging meaningfully...Difficult to know who represents the community, who speaks for the grassroots? Differences in needs, spread of opinions and ideas...Differences in women, people who follow the religion and those who don’t...we have to build up trust, and have confidence in the consultation process. We have to know that we are making an informed assessment otherwise how can we be really sure? We need to know how to reach the community and get a hold of information” [Glasgow]

“Historically have we done enough? We are not hearing all the perspectives, probably just an established view” [Glasgow]

“Service provision needs to be altered we are not going round all communities...all views will be different” [Edinburgh]

“It’s important to identify the needs of all age groups” [Glasgow]

“We have to have an assessment of the root problems before providing solutions” [Glasgow]

What also emerged from the exchange in dialogue was that many of the women were not aware of services already in place that target BME communities. Further, the women made a distinction between culturally sensitive and ‘faith’ sensitive services. They advocated that Local Authorities need to bear this difference in mind when consulting and designing services. They also suggested that perhaps one of the ways of bridging the gap between the community and the Local Authority was to have community organisations act as bridges to services and information provision.

Services Specific to Women

Women believed that their Local Authorities need to bear in mind the difference in accessing and involving Muslim women. They felt that most women lack confidence in approaching services or even in attending meetings such as this one.

“Problem is getting Muslim women out of their homes to come together. Most women’s groups that take place are quite closed and don’t feel comfortable going to these groups. In these groups we don’t integrate we just stick to the same people we know” [Edinburgh]

“Women don’t know who to contact and what to do. We lack confidence and we stay behind our door. We have to know and fight for our rights” [Glasgow]

“Our women don’t speak up, we need this” [Glasgow]

Others felt that Muslim women were marginalised, and that the government needs to make more of an effort to include them in the political processes where they can contribute toward making a change.

“There is marginalisation of women; we need an open space for all women” [Glasgow]

One woman questioned,

“When Tony Blair invited people to meet after 7/7, he only invited community leaders and men. They say Muslim men oppress Muslim women and control them, why then did Tony Blair do the same thing? Why didn’t they give Muslim women a chance?” [Glasgow]

There is a clear sense that women not only want to engage in the political and civic processes, but that they feel the gap in provision for accessing such processes. They believed, as did Local Authority representatives that a lot more work needs to be done to involve Muslim women and provide them with opportunities.

Section 8

Education

Introduction

This section of the report outlines the concerns raised by women with regard to gaps in the education system, and how this is having a direct impact of the community.

Education in Schools

One of the issues highlighted by every workshop was the need for multi-faceted education laterally across the education system. It was felt that this was the foundation through which children learn and develop ideas. Although parents were seen to play a role in the education of their children, a lot more emphasis was placed on the education system.

“Maybe have religion [Islam] taught as part of the national curriculum, taught by a Muslim” [Dundee]

“We should have citizenship classes for children in schools...raise awareness of responsibilities and also to develop a sense of belonging” [Dundee]

“We need a multi-disciplinary approach to education...I mean from nursery upward, kids that young learn so much” [Edinburgh]

“Teachers should tell pupils about equality, and that we are all the same” [Glasgow]

“We need education at all levels...children as young as six and seven are shouting abuse” [Edinburgh]

“Schools need to play a great role in educating about religion and culture” [Glasgow]

“School has to take initiatives to portray a positive image of Islam and the issues need to be raised sensitively” [Edinburgh]

“Education should start pre-school” [Glasgow]

“Each school should have a community police officer” [Glasgow]

“There should be focus on the commonality between all the faiths” [Glasgow]

It should be noted that it was widely felt that education in schools has to incorporate children of all age groups. Further, that it is important not only to teach Islam correctly, but that all religions and cultures need to be taught comprehensively.

The Role of Service Provision in Education

The women felt that services and local groups need to play a role in disseminating information about Islam and different faiths. As well as this, that funding provision should be sought from Local Authorities and other relevant funding bodies for initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and education.

“We need funds from places like the council and lottery to fund education initiatives” [Dundee]

“Local youth groups and voluntary organisations also need to play a role in education and service provision” [Dundee]

“There should be individual and collective partnership working in all communities...but we need the resources for this” [Glasgow]

“We need to know who the key players are in the community who can make a real change” [Glasgow]

Some women felt that a lot more support is needed especially for women with a language barrier,

“I’ve come from Pakistan and faced a great deal of problems. I couldn’t speak English when I first got here, but I had to educate myself.” [Glasgow]

“There’s no support for people who have come from abroad. We did it ourselves, we had to educate ourselves.” [Edinburgh]

“A friend of mine was telling me her children say she can’t help teach them and help with school work because she doesn’t know English.” [Glasgow]

“Every mother wants the best for her children, but they need support too.” [Glasgow]

Other women felt that existing services needed only to be slightly changed to make them effective and accessible to the Muslim community,

“Some service provision just needs ‘tweaking’ rather than separate service provision...for example swimming. Muslims are not different totally; they just need a few ‘tweaks’ in service provision” [Glasgow]

“The majority of Muslim children go to the mosque after school...why not partner such specific needs with other leisure activities” [Glasgow]

“Services may have been developed that are in opposition to Islamic values...like a hierarchical system does not exist in Islam, there’s not one leader. We need to get to know Islam and its culture and then educate people” [Glasgow]

Existing positive initiatives were highlighted such as the upcoming Festival of Muslim Culture [2006]. It was felt that this was an excellent opportunity for Local Authorities to get involved and fund initiatives aimed at positive education of Islam. The Glasgow City Council appointment of an interfaith liaison officer was also mentioned as a practical step taken by the council to promote better relations amongst faith groups. One woman mentioned that the production of a Handbook on asylum seekers and refugee for the National Union of Journalists was a good example of how information can be disseminated to the media and other important institutions, and that perhaps something similar on Islam would be useful.

Education in the Wider Community

It was highlighted that positive education also needs to be reinforced across the wider community. Women felt that a change in the public knowledge and perception of Islam would be a catalyst for change in other areas.

“Educate more people about different religions and cultures. We’re just normal people, doing normal work, we’re not bombers... Give training to organisations about Muslim women and their needs, for example providing time for prayer.” [Dundee]

“Education of the community as a whole has to happen so they don’t tolerate bad behaviour” [Edinburgh]

“There is a definite need for more mainstream Islamic teaching...lack of education or incorrect information leads to assumptions being made about the Muslim community” [Glasgow]

Women also felt that Scotland as a whole is a diverse place and that this fact should be celebrated and reinforced. Further, that talking about, and expressing ideas about religion should be normalised,

“Teach and celebrate Scotland’s diversity” [Edinburgh]

“What does faith mean in peoples lives in a balance way...” [Glasgow]

“People don’t know how to deal with extremism, we have to talk about it and learn how to cope with it...” [Glasgow]

“There is a reluctance...people don’t say they have a religion” [Glasgow]

“There is deep spirituality in Scotland” [Glasgow]

“We should promote faith being a good aspect of life as opposed to being something negative” [Edinburgh]

“Debate is healthy whether or not faith is seen as a good thing or not” [Glasgow]

Overall, there were clear indications that apart from education in schools, through local initiatives a lot more work needs to happen in partnership with communities to increase awareness of Islam and religion in general. The women felt that this would help towards a more tolerant society.

Education within the Muslim Community

The participants’ felt that along with education in schools and local community initiatives, correct Islamic teachings needs to start from within the home, and the Muslim community. Although, it was highlighted that at times parents do not have full control over their children, and hence it was equally as difficult for them to give the kind of education they would like.

“We need to have an active role in our children’s lives” [Dundee]

“...Need to educate children, not just go to learn Arabic but give them basic knowledge of Islam as well” [Dundee]

“Parents should have awareness about what children are doing, where they are going and who they are associating with.” [Glasgow]

“Muslims need to build better relationships with their kids and also educate themselves” [Glasgow]

“...A lot of information is picked up in the home, so more education is needed here...also have to realise that parents don’t have full control over their children, they pick up a lot of things from the playground also” [Edinburgh]

It is evident that there is a feeling that education is missing on various levels of society, from basic education in the home, to the school curriculum and community initiatives. Clearly, there is a need for all stakeholders to engage with each other to develop a positive action plan to try to fill in some of the gaps mentioned above.