

Written Evidence

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Executive Summary

- Discrimination is a reality for Muslim and wider minority ethnic communities in Scotland. Overt racism takes place but racial slurs, anti-immigration attitudes, religious intolerance and anti-Muslim sentiment are more common.
- Highly educated, qualified and skilled Muslim women are treated as 'foreigners', with 'native' British people given precedence throughout the recruitment process.
- Few Muslim women have faith or trust in existing mechanisms for reporting instances of discrimination.
- Employment segregation, a lack of professional networks, traditional Islamic dress and a lack of understanding/appreciation of Islamic rituals, practices and events are specific challenges which face Muslim communities in the workplace.
- A lack of systemic knowledge and awareness of how to access training and support is an issue. English language ability, low levels of confidence and self-esteem and a lack of relevant UK work experience are also highlighted as barriers to training and employment support.
- Mainstream service provision does not understand, appreciate or meet the specific needs of the Muslim community.
- There is a lack of recognition of overseas qualifications.
- There is no consistent approach in how employers accommodate the needs of Muslim employees.
- Foreign sounding names, islamophobia, negative stereotypes and misconceptions cumulatively act as barriers to the recruitment, retention and progression of Muslim employees.
- Cultural constraints and expectations are still a tangible issue for many.
- Few organisations specialise in in work support – assisting Muslim women to transition into higher paid jobs and access training opportunities.
- Distinct lack of awareness of successful employment initiatives that tackle barriers faced by Muslims.
- Quotas as a strategy to tackle workplace segregation and recruitment discrimination viewed with positivity.
- Holistic inclusive faith and culturally sensitive employability services are seen as vital by members of the Muslim community.

Introduction

Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre is Scotland's award winning, leading Muslim Women's organisation. Premised on empowerment of Muslim and Minority Ethnic women, Amina seeks to inspire women to fulfil their true potential and to participate fully in society without fear of discrimination or inequality.

We provide a range of services to Muslim women. We campaign against negative stereotypes and violence against women; provide counselling and befriending services; run a cultural and faith-sensitive Scotland-wide helpline; enable women to overcome social/economic barriers; develop their skills; build their capacity; and give a voice to influence public policy. In addition, we work with mainstream agencies and organisations to enhance their understanding of the Muslim community and of the barriers that prevent Muslim women from accessing their services. All our work is underpinned by the principles of community empowerment and participation.

Amina is committed to ensuring that Muslim and BME women have faith and culturally sensitive employability support and personal development opportunities; promoting English conversation classes, confidence building workshops, goal setting and tailored one to one support. Since July 2014, the employability project has engaged with upwards of 300 women; empowering them with knowledge, skills and techniques to overcome barriers to paid employment, volunteering, setting up one's own business, further education or social enterprise. Through this direct, responsive and holistic client engagement, we have amassed a range of anecdotal and qualitative evidence considering the barriers and discrimination faced by Muslims in employment and the workplace. This is combined with findings from focus groups in Dundee and Glasgow and an online survey of fifty seven respondents.

Amina is a conduit for the voices, concerns, thoughts and ideas of Scottish Muslim women. We believe it is imperative for our organisation to submit evidence; not only to heighten awareness of the magnitude of complex problems facing the communities we work with, but to provide a platform and mechanism for the voices of Scottish Muslim women to be included in discussion. Research and documented experiences of Scottish Muslim women are in scant supply; no organisation can claim to have a better understanding of the issues challenging our 'disadvantaged', 'marginalised' and diverse client group.

A. How prevalent are direct and indirect discrimination towards Muslims in the workplace?

Discrimination in the workplace towards Muslims is a reality – both direct and indirect. In a recent focus group of eight women, 100% of participants had

directly experienced, witnessed, or had family members whom had experienced instances of discrimination in the workplace. This corroborates with findings from the Scottish Equal Opportunities Committee (2016), who states that “despite 40 years of legislation, training initiatives and equality policies, the world of work is still not representative of the communities and people of Scotland”.¹

Recent research conducted by Newcastle, Edinburgh and St Andrews University discussed and distinguished between overt and covert racism.² Few participants had experience of overt racism; Scotland was found to be generally accepting of diversity. However, racial slurs, anti-immigration attitudes, religious intolerance and anti-Muslim sentiment were all cited as fairly common occurrences.

Instances of discrimination cannot be homogenised. However, when asked to share their thoughts and opinions on the matter, one young person stated; “Cause people, lots of people, still pretend it’s not there and like, ‘oh it doesn’t exist, we’re in 2014’, but it does, it really does”.³ Job applications and interview processes are frequently referred to as one particular source of discontent for several women. Many believe that they have applied for jobs and were unsuccessful due to their faith, race or combination of the two. Retail in particular is highlighted as an industry where participants believed image, colour and religious symbolism are detrimental to securing a job. It was suggested that stores have a particular image and style they wish to portray. All too often, Muslim and other black and minority ethnic women are wrongly perceived to be contrary to such branding. During the focus group we heard of an incident where a young Asian woman was declined a store transfer because “she was Paki, and there was too many of them in the shop”.

One focus group participant asserted; “‘Native’ British people are given jobs over more qualified ‘foreigners’”. This is reflective of another anecdote offered by a staff member. She recounted her husband’s experience of recruitment for a leading supermarket. He had selected an Indian gentleman and two female Polish candidates to fill vacancies. Relaying this information to the personnel manager, he was confronted with “Do you think I want Muslims and Polish people working for me?” Focus group participants were not shocked by this attitude but saw it as reflective of an alarming trend, with serious implications.

B. How effective are current formal and informal remedies for cases involving discrimination against Muslims in the workplace?

¹ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/EOS042016R01Rev.pdf

² <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/youngpeople/outputs/finalreport/Faith,%20Ethnicity,%20Place%20final%20report.pdf>

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<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/youngpeople/outputs/finalreport/Faith,%20Ethnicity,%20Place%20final%20report.pdf>

Largely ineffective. There is a distinct lack of trust and worth attributed to current formal and informal remedies for matters of discrimination in the workplace. In a recent online survey, only 29% of respondents who had been the victim of discrimination in the workplace complained or reported the incident. When explored in a focus group, one participant stated; there is “No point in complaining. These people won't understand me. Even if they do, nothing is going to be done about it, so what's the point?” Faced with a costly and often lengthy tribunal process for a case with little tangible evidence, our participants felt that it was a waste of their time and energy. As a result they do not pursue complaints or grievances using formal and informal channels.

It is important to acknowledge, that community members are largely aware of the range of reporting channels available when one has experienced discrimination in the workplace. Fifty-five participants in an online survey were asked; if you felt you were the victim of discrimination in the workplace, who would you report it to? Respondents selected the following answers;

Reporting Options	Number of Respondents
Your line manager or supervisor	26 (47.27%)
Personnel Manager	7 (12.73%)
Director/Head of the organisation	7 (12.73%)
Friends and family	9 (16.36%)
ACAS, Citizen's Advice or Trade Union	3 (5.45%)
Employment Tribunal	1 (1.82%)
I would not report it	2 (3.64%)
Other – “I would report it to most of the above, only going to the tribunal stage if it wasn't dealt with appropriately”.	1 (1.82%)

In a focus group environment, many Muslim women alluded to feeling threatened and intimidated by the afore mentioned reporting channels. Several women alluded to the notion that it has become more acceptable, if not 'on trend' to be racist. Several comedians have recently been denounced for making a mockery of Islam. Celebrities, public figures and role models behaving in such a manner gives other people more courage to replicate that behaviour. As one participant stated, “He said it, I can say it too, and I what's more I can think it”.

C. What are the specific challenges facing Muslim women in employment and the workplace?

There are a variety of challenges confronting Muslim women. Employment segregation is one. Forty per cent of online survey respondents felt there were jobs that were unsuitable for Muslim communities. Hospitality, finance and the military service were stated as particularly problematic. Lack of diversity within the police force has also been the focus of media attention of late. ⁴ If an industry or sector has anti-Islamic practices or deals with 'haram' matters then Muslim women will gravitate away from these roles.

A lack of professional networks was highlighted by the Equal Opportunities Committee as a potential barrier for ethnic minority women in employment and the workplace⁵. Muslim women may not have the same level of interaction with influential players, particularly if they are male employees in positions of seniority.

Many of the Muslim women we engage with wear the hijab, niqab, chador, jilbabs or abayas. As a result, they can be visually differentiated from native indigenous Scottish communities with ease. Religious clothing and symbolism has long been associated with the negative stereotypes, prejudice and misconceptions which plague Islam and its followers. The veil in particular has been a source of controversy – with concerns cited regarding identity of the wearer, inability to read facial expressions and security implications.

Islamic rituals, practices and events can also be a challenge for Muslim women in employment and the workplace. For those who pray five times a day, there is a need for wudu/washing facilities and a quiet prayer space. Ramadhan, the month of religious fasting (whereby no food, drink, smoking or sexual activity is permitted during daylight hours) reportedly has an adverse impact on productivity and economic output. ⁶ The celebrations of Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha do not have fixed dates. They are dependent on the sighting of the moon in Saudi Arabia, as a result, booking annual leave for the celebrations can be problematic and needs to be altered at short notice. Many employers do not appreciate these matters of faith and cultural sensitivity, resulting in many Muslimahs feeling marginalised within the work environment.

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/22/police-forces-ethnic-makeup-population-figures>

⁵ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/EOS042016R01Rev.pdf

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2015/jul/03/cost-ramadan-counted-muslim-fasting-month>

D. What barriers to accessing training and employment support exist for Muslims?

There are a range of barriers for Muslims in accessing training and employment support. A recent consultation conducted by Amina highlighted a strong lack of awareness in how to access training, support, jobs and opportunities. Once systemic knowledge was acquired, there were concerns/additional barriers relating to English language, low levels of confidence and self-esteem and a lack of relevant UK work experience.

Focus group participants highlighted and discussed issues surrounding mainstream employability service provision, namely they were not meeting the needs of Muslim and ethnic minority women due to a real understanding/appreciation of cultural issues inhibiting progression to positive destinations. A lack of recognition/familiarity of overseas qualifications was also identified as a tangible barrier.

One participant shared her experience of engaging with the local job centre. She stated; "I want to tell my experience. I went to Job Centre, and there was a man. I tell him, my English not good. I ask him how do you see the jobs? He said, ok there are the computers, go there and check. Somehow I managed to see the jobs, and ok I am interested in this job, a chef job. He said, ok there is a number, call. I called him, I couldn't hear properly what the man was saying. I couldn't understand him, but he said no sorry, that's all we can do. I cannot do anything more than this so you have to. After that I stopped. I didn't go back".

E. How effectively are employers accommodating the needs of Muslim employees?

There is no consistent approach in how employers accommodate the needs of Muslim employees. Irrespective of legislation, training and examples of best practice, it appears that specific individuals are responsible for accommodating the needs and practices of their staff members. Some employers do this very well. Others do not. For it to be done successfully, an appreciation for matters of faith and culture is required. Having a more diverse workforce, with an increased number of ethnic minority people in senior positions could improve/encourage better adaptations and accommodations.

F. What are the barriers to recruitment, retention and progression for Muslim employees in professional and managerial roles?

There are a range of barriers to recruitment, retention and progression for Muslim employees in professional and managerial roles. Dr Nabil Khattab at Bristol University recently reported that; "Muslim women were up to 65 per cent

less likely to be employed than white Christian counterparts".⁷ He continued to state; "They are perceived as disloyal and as a threat rather than just as a disadvantaged minority," he added. "Within this climate, many employers will be discouraged from employing qualified Muslims, especially if there are others from their own groups or others from less threatening groups who can fill these jobs."

The general feeling amongst focus group participants was that a Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian or Arab sounding name clearly marked you out as different from everyone else. As such, foreign sounding names are a barrier to recruitment and progression in the workplace. In today's socio-political climate where Islamophobic rhetoric is clearly manifested, the group felt it was increasingly difficult to overcome the stereotypes and misconceptions of Muslim women portrayed in the mainstream media.

One participant commented; "If you look at me, I don't think I fit my name." She recounted a personal experience of arriving at an interview, and the interviewer verbally stating "Oh, I didn't expect you to look like that". Focus group members echoed such experiences. One member contributed; "How many people have seen my name and not invited me to interview?" Another highlighted her personal experience in regularly passing the telephone interview stage, then when invited to attend a formal face to face interview was confronted with comments such as "Oh you look different from how you sounded" and "Where is it that you actually originate from?".

According to recent national research, Muslim women are congregated in unskilled, low paid jobs. Cultural constraints may be one reason for this. In one of the focus groups an attendee expressed; "The main problem as well is that you want to work, to live another life, but you have duties toward your children, towards your house, toward your husband so it's like a big equation with lots of x, y and z and you have to solve the problem all by yourself". There are few agencies and organisations who specialise in supporting transitions into higher paid, higher grade employment. Open, inclusive and publicised access to in work training is also an issue that requires attention.

G. What initiatives have been successful in tackling barriers to employment faced by Muslims?

When this question was asked in a recent focus group, nobody knew of any successful initiatives, other than the project Employability Project and support we offer at Amina MWRC. Participants were unaware of measures to tackle workplace discrimination and segregation, however, when quotas were discussed as a potential mechanism to ensure a diverse workforce, the idea was met with positivity. One participant stated; "The government should have some sort of policy were big employers should have a certain percentage of

⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-muslims-face-worst-job-discrimination-of-any-minority-group-9893211.html>

diversity in their staffing. Obviously they should have the right skills for the job and not just for ticking a box. Employers should be more accountable for diversity.”

There was consensus amongst the focus group participants that projects such as the one offered at Amina were vital to addressing issues of confidence and low self-belief. The faith and cultural sensitivity offered during the inhouse employability programme was not matched elsewhere. One woman stated; “The jobcentre have provisions, but could they not have something more specific for BME women for work experience or the classes that they send you too”.

Amina aims to be truly inclusive for Muslim and ethnic minority women. As a result, we offer childcare and travel expenditure for clients, thereby empowering and enabling all women, irrespective of their financial situation to participate. Staff provide a holistic, personal service tailored to the needs of the specific individual. Our client group value this approach and wish other services, agencies and organisations adopted a similar model.

Recommendations

- UK Parliament works with public and third sector employers to tackle under-representation of ethnic minorities.
- UK Parliament should promote better training for all staff on discrimination and workplace practices of the Muslim community.
- We recommend that overseas qualifications are given greater recognition. More support and information is made readily accessible to those seeking clarification on the worth of qualifications from abroad.
- UK Parliament consult with Muslim and minority ethnic communities to explore alternative mechanisms for reporting discriminations. Grassroots involvement and information in multiple languages is essential.
- UK Parliament invests funding in professional networking/mentoring events for Muslim women.
- We recommend a programme of training for employers on Islamic practices, events and the needs of Muslim employees. Designed and delivered by members of the Muslim community.
- We recommend greater investment in English language provision at a range of levels and abilities.
- Greater opportunities to gain work experience for members of ethnic minority communities.
- UK Parliament to work with mainstream organisations to enhance the understanding of the faith and culturally sensitive needs of the Muslim community. Designed and delivered by Muslims.
- Greater investment in employability services that provide an aftercare/in work programme to support the transition of Muslim women into higher paid jobs and training opportunities.

- We recommend that the UK Government works with employment services to develop gender specific employability schemes, ensuring that targeted support is available for Muslim and ethnic minority women.
- UK parliament promotes employment initiatives such as positive action to ensure greater representation of the Muslim community.
- UK parliament promotes and invests in third sector organisations who can provide holistic and inclusive faith and culturally sensitive employability support in a community setting.